Agile meets ITIL
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A common question in Service Management circles recently asks “How do we demonstrate the real value of Service Management without it just seeming like bureaucracy?” To address this iCore has been researching the use of Agile methods to bring the stuffy ITIL processes to life for customers. This article explores how Agile relates to the well established comfort zones of Service Management frameworks such as Six Sigma and ITIL.

What is ‘Agile’?
Agile is a methodology most likely to be employed in the strategy or higher level design phases during the lifecycle of a project. Although it is here that it is most highly visible and recognised in the industry with the associated project management exams, certifications, and professional bodies, it is also relevant further below these strategic levels.

It is important to recognise that Agile techniques are not just reserved for use at a low level coding stage or as a project checkpoint method; as a methodology Agile has grown well beyond its humble origins in the software development world. Agile techniques and methods can and should be adopted at different levels of an IT operation, and at different stages of the service lifecycle to obtain maximum business benefit.

‘Agile’ Service Management
As already stated, many organisations are already using Agile techniques and methods in day to day project management, and iCore’s research indicates that Agile is also being utilised in operations, however this is not branded as Agile per se. Indeed, the phrase Agile Service Management is thought by many to be an oxymoron, however if we think of real world examples it becomes apparent they can co-exist. If your service managers, incident and problem teams meet up early every morning to discuss the previous day’s issues then they are conducting a Stand-Up meeting in Agile parlance.

If we take the key Service Management discipline of continual service improvement as an example, the benefits of the Agile approach can be understood more clearly. Picture a service improvement or review meeting being held with Agile in mind; the meetings will be short and regular, and business involvement is encouraged alongside the IT teams, which will of course ensure that any pain points will be brought to the table and any limitations must be understood by both sides. The collaboration is regular and tends to be face to face, there is a reduced need for phone and email traffic exchanges and both sides are up to speed on the latest progress of service improvement activity. The improvements will be heavily prioritised according to business objectives, and accountability is assigned to action the improvement; little time is wasted on duplication of effort; resource is not deployed on less business critical issues. Once a critical issue is identified and agreed, the next iteration or meeting will analyse the improvement options and identify the appropriate solutions. These can then be implemented and the overall time taken will be dramatically reduced compared to having less frequent, structured Service Reviews.

In a Major Incident Review meeting, much time can be used up discussing technical issues and focusing on who was to blame. Agile methodology removes this burden and focuses
solely on how the team can quickly respond to the business requirements around restoration of normal service. The establishment of the root cause of outages in the organisation will be improved by establishing small, business focused, fast acting working groups to target areas causing most pain to the business. Agile techniques also lend themselves to several of the common root-cause analysis methods, such as the Pareto (80/20) principle and the analysis of pain value experienced within the business. These tie in well with the Agile ethos of tackling the most important issues in the quickest manner to derive maximum benefits.

Business processing requirements change quickly and how IT responds is an ongoing challenge. Rather than an Agile approach clashing with Service Management and Governance principles of control and risk mitigation, Agile can be used in the change management process to ensure fast, reliable and appropriate assessment of change and implementation, making the process more efficient, and an inefficient change process will very quickly be revealed if you apply Agile.

Now let’s turn to the CMDB dilemma; a tough nut to crack! Using an Agile project approach to defining, building and establishing the CMDB and the subsequent processes for introducing, updating and disposing of CIs, will make the impossible seem possible. The ultimate objective is broken down into more manageable pieces and value is derived from the delivery of a useful section of the CMDB in a realistic timescale.

**Are you ready to be ‘Agile’?**

Indeed, iCore believes any process in place in an organisation could be subject to adopting and adapting Agile techniques. It is not about recreating processes, rather making them work more efficiently on an operational level by changing behaviours and working practices of the people involved. Service Management processes must be subject to continual improvement, and the Agile approach to process development means that processes would be kept up to date and fit for purpose by those involved. It seems a logical and sensible approach that the relevant core processes are identified in order of importance to the business and implemented within timescales that make a positive difference to the business as quickly as possible.

Agile methods may not work well within every organisation, and the suggestion would be that the techniques should be applied only where they are most relevant, just like other Service Management frameworks. Daily face to face meetings for example might not fit in with geographical limitations, or the structure and culture may not lend itself to this collaborative approach. Indeed many individuals and teams may not be able to dedicate the resource required for this approach. Regular involvement with the business can often lead to a situation where no real end goal is achieved and those involved lose momentum.

Service Management frameworks are often seen as cumbersome or bureaucratic obstacles, and perhaps the development of more Agile Service Management is more in line with the current themes of running the organisation in a lean, efficient manner.

Agile principles applied to any Service Management process can add value as they have a shared objective; to consistently deliver valuable service to the business. This is fundamental to ITIL, CMMI, Six Sigma and all other Service Management frameworks. If this is kept in mind throughout the IT organisation, including senior management, day to day
efficient operation and of course continual improvement of the service provided, then the resulting service will be much more closely aligned to the business and consistently deliver value.

**Don’t ask ‘Why?’ Ask ‘How?’**

iCore take the principles of Agile™ into all of our Service Management engagements, whether those are process design, interim management or service improvement. We have also applied the principles to our standard ITIL v3 process models to indicate where Agile™ methods will add value and demonstrate the benefits of a structured service management approach.

iCore’s new Agile SIP Workshop will help you and your organisation rapidly identify the important issues that need to be addressed urgently.

To find out how iCore can help you achieve financial benefits from service management please contact iCore by calling +44 (0) 207 464 8883 or visit [www.icore-ltd.com](http://www.icore-ltd.com)