

MARK MITTLEMAN – USPS

Q: Your Agile implementation timeline seemed extraordinarily long, why did it take years to begin implementation?

A: We actually started at the end of the first year. We wanted to ensure we implemented this correctly so we obtained the services of a supplier who had extensive experience implementing Agile at the enterprise level and they assisted us with the journey. The first year was assessing and updating all our policies, processes and procedures, educating our staff about Agile and the implementation strategy, selecting a couple projects at each of our Solution Centers (development centers), re-assessing what we just accomplished and then rolling Agile out throughout IT. There was lots of initial resistance (expected normal resistance / fear of change), so we needed to get buy-in and felt proving / demonstrating Agile works with projects was the best approach.

Q: Do you have a change record per sprint or they are grouped together in one change record to be released in prod at a defined time

A: With Scrumban the answer is often yes because typically a sprint becomes a release to production, often to fix a defect (logged through a help-desk ticket) already entered into our problem tracking system. Plus, we have strong processes & policies in place at the USPS to ensure that changes in the Production environment (as well as the Customer Acceptance Testing environment) are all done through change records. But for our bigger efforts where Scrum is being used with multiple sprints, we do not move the sprints to production until all sprints have been completed and we have performed a system end to end regression test and a customer acceptance test. In general, the high degree of integration among our systems necessitates that.

Q: How does Change Management fit into this Agile process? Is a Change Advisory Board gathered to review and approve an application release after it has passed automated testing and before it gets to Release Management to be deployed?

A: Yes, just as we did under waterfall, we do maintain change management boards, focused on any changes that impact scope, cost or schedule changes. For submitted changes that do not impact scope, cost, or schedule, these can be approved by the product owner and documented in our VersionOne Agile support tool, as part of the sprints.

Q: Also, how well does your Agile process align with PMBOK?

A: Many of the core processes, including cost and risk management, align quite well as both waterfall and agile treat them in a similar fashion. Where they differ is the way the whole backlog, estimation (use of story points), self-managed / self-organizing teams, and sprint processes are different and must be managed differently regarding process, tools and reports. Agile gives the project manager more opportunity daily to monitor progress and issues. The PMI organization acknowledges this and now has a PMI certification for Agile project managers.

Q: The biggest difference from waterfall to agile

A: Agile drives a much different way of working in and across teams. Agile requires the product owner (customer) be involved throughout the project, especially during development, to validate continuously during each sprint that what is being developed is meeting the business requirements. In addition, self-

organized and self-motivating teams are a different way of working and trusting. The third significant difference is project transparency – which is driven on daily basis using quantifiable measures with Agile.

Q: What CM tool is used to generate a system of record of the change/release that need to be deployed?

A: Within the IT organization we recently replaced our Remedy System with ServiceNow for creating code release requests for approval and promotion to production. In fact, ServiceNow is used for change requests, problems and incidents. Once approvals have been obtained, the code is moved by those with authority based on roles and segregation of duties. ServiceNow is our 'system of record' for the change request / approval, but the code itself is actually held in our Subversion code repository.

Q: How has USPS incorporated ITIL with Agile?

A: ITIL has been incorporated indirectly, but not formally. By indirectly I mean we have incorporated Agile in many of our IT service processes and our IT methodology, processes, policies and standards. Formally "no", because we did not step back and look at all the ITIL processes within all the IT service offerings, as we were very focused on the product owner and the development teams during the huge enterprise rollout. We have recently engaged our other IT service groups and are working together to ensure we develop customer-friendly, efficient and cost-optimized processes.