



Agile: No surprises

Erik van Eeden

Agile means flexible. But that seems so non-committed: Are we supposed to give the project participants or a bunch of system developers carte blanche? If we keep the project in tight control, we will stay within time-bounds and budget, but usually we do not deliver what we should have or what the customer needs.

The Waterfall method (dividing the project in subsequent parts) has been around for a while, and applying that method gives obvious grip, decision and transition points. Is this wrong? The answer is: No, Waterfall remains a good method, but the product the customer wants to be developed has to be clear up front.

Often customers are not clear on a new product, they have an idea and that idea develops gradually.

The Agile method is in line with this: flexibility in functionality. This is the difference between Agile and Waterfall. With Agile securing time and budget gives certainty. Agile puts flexibility in functionality by dividing it in little parts and prioritizing them. Not once, but continuously prioritizing and changing the parts not developed yet is done by the customer in liege with the stakeholders. This assures that the final product (although not clear at the beginning) is what is wanted/wished for: No surprises.

The Agile method can be used outside system development, and especially where the target/product cannot be clearly defined up front, all projects can benefit.

Those involved with Agile all need a new mindset: letting go of the idea of clear functionality, a clear target. Giving the developers more freedom feels kind of weird at first... but delivering more satisfaction and better value of the result makes it worthwhile.

In the Scrum method the translation of the functionality into developing software is done by the Scrum team members who are accountable for this (self-organized teams). They have the freedom (Yes, Agile) to choose the methods and techniques they think fit best within the boundaries of time and budget.

Like any method, Scrum has its own terminology, way of working and roles. You have to know these before putting it into practice, so everyone is on the same page and speaks the same 'language'.

About the author

Erik van Eeden was a developer for ten years at one of the founders of the Waterfall method SDM. Now he is a convinced Scrum adept and already helped dozens of companies to implement Scrum successfully within their organization. Erik is an independent trainer and consultant.