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Company Challenges

Hoover's had historically used a waterfall development process, with business analysts enumerating requirements and tasks in 100+ page documents that were handed over to the development team for execution. In the Spring of 2008, the IT team was facing several challenges, including the need to reduce costs through the elimination of redundant infrastructure and upgrade their information delivery system to accommodate a greater number of users. To confront these challenges, Hoover's needed to make significant architectural changes, including shifting their entire code base from PHP to Java.

Start Small and Demonstrate Success

It was at this critical juncture that Hoover's brought in Mamie Jones as their new VP of Technology. Mamie was a strong proponent for adopting an Agile development approach, and she knew that the most effective way to accomplish this was in an incremental fashion. She began by hand-picking a team that expressed interest in piloting the company's Agile development effort. The plan was to start small and demonstrate some early success so other teams would be able to leverage the pilot team's success.

Mamie describes the situation. "Historically, our IT department had challenges delivering on time, and what was delivered was considered OK – not great, not bad – just OK. When I joined the team, we were already committed to a date for a massive rewrite of our architecture – and it was just a few months away."

No one thought they could do it. However, the pilot team did meet the deadline, specifically because they were able to adjust the scope of the project and they worked closely with the business owners during each iteration. As a result, the initial pilot was considered a huge success.

Mamie explains, "As we went through iteration after iteration, we would say 'here is the velocity we are showing, it looks like we are not going to get this all in by October, so what do you really need by that date?' Meeting the release date was an enormous accomplishment for the technology organization, but I also have to give credit to our business owners for embracing the collaborative approach."

Rally Chosen for its Integrations and Extensibility

As the transformation gained momentum, the teams began researching collaboration tools to support their Agile development efforts. Some evaluated Basecamp, others reviewed Sharepoint and another group wanted to use Wikis. Mamie knew that a



Company and Industry

- Hoover's is a global leader in compiling and distributing proprietary business information that can be accessed through the Internet, data feeds, wireless devices and co-branding agreements.

Development Environment

- IT Department with over 100 people distributed among multiple project teams
- Transitioning entire code base from PHP to Java

Challenges

- Improve the development team's ability to meet delivery dates
- Cut costs by eliminating redundant infrastructure
- Upgrade information delivery system to accommodate a greater number of users

Solution

- Started with pilot project to demonstrate early Agile success
- Leveraged executive support to cultivate a collaborative/Agile culture across the entire development organization
- Selected a partner (Rally) with proven success in helping development teams implement large-scale Agile transformations

Results

- Across-the-board productivity increase of 20%
- Greater transparency and vastly improved cross-departmental communication
- Building products right the first time around and delivering them on-time

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piecemeal approach would not work. Hoover's needed a common platform with a central dashboard where everyone could see the backlog, monitor tasks, gauge velocity and view reports. And, it was critically important that the selected tool integrate with HP Quality Center, D&B's corporate standard for quality assurance.

Patrick O'Malley, a consultant with Pariveda Solutions, was a key player on the initial pilot team responsible for implementing the new architecture. He was familiar with Rally, and suggested that it would be a perfect fit for Hoover's environment. The team's first task was to import the data they had already generated into Rally. Patrick explains,

"It was fairly straightforward to import the data from our existing tools into Rally. We then set up the Eclipse and HP Quality Center integrations – and we even created some Mashups. Whenever we ran into issues or had any questions, Rally was there to help out. They were great."

Rally's Toolset and Training Accelerate the Transition to Agile

With Rally on board as a key partner in the rollout of their Agile practices, Hoover's began hiring ScrumMasters and expanded their training initiatives by sending many of their developers to Rally's Certified ScrumMaster training. As more teams switched over to Agile, Hoover's took advantage of Rally's "one-stop shop" for tools and training, with project teams attending several of Rally's training programs, such as workshops for "Introduction to Agile Teams" and "Agile Test and Engineering Practices".

Naveen Sundararajan, Lead Technology PMO at Hoover's, describes his team's experience learning to use Rally. "Typically, you get trained on a process and then begin using the tool. But in our case, the Rally tool was intuitive enough that people got the gist of the Agile process just by using the tool. And, the use of the tool actually helped drive our Agile adoption."

The real key to Hoover's Agile adoption has been support from the executive level. Mamie Jones explains, "Agile is about changing your company culture. It is a methodology that puts transparency and collaboration at the center of your organization. At Hoover's we have 100% executive support. Our business teams are totally committed to Agile. They get excited because now they can actually monitor the status of their projects and they know what capabilities they are going to get and when they are going to get them."

"Rally Helped Us Burn Down the Silo Walls"

Often developers, business analysts, and other teams within a development organization become silo-ed because of the nature of their work. This was also the case at Hoover's prior to the Agile and Rally implementation.

Erik Holland, Manager, Business Analysts at Hoover's, comments, "Before using Rally, we were very silo-ed and most groups did not know what other groups were working on. I think the biggest benefit of adopting Rally has been the teamwork. We have people from very different teams - QA, Development, User Interface and Business Analysts, all working together to solve problems – and actually having fun. We have really burned down the walls between these groups. And the result is that we are building the right things – the first time around."

"Our partnership with Rally has been great. The tool is an absolute must. But, just as importantly, Rally has provided the people and the training that we needed to be successful."

Mamie Jones
VP of Technology
Hoover's

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“Rally is at the Middle of Everything”

Rally has become the cornerstone for Hoover’s Agile practices.

Naveen explains, “The key reason we went with Rally is because it is an integrated Agile lifecycle management tool. Rally supports test cases, project management, requirements, features, tasks, and reporting - all in one tool – and it has been great for each of those tasks. Plus, integrating with the tools we already had in place was critical. We are currently integrating with Salesforce, HP Quality Center, Subversion and Anthill, and we now have our roadmap for an integrated toolset, with Rally at the middle of everything.”

In the twelve months since Hoover’s made the decision to go Agile, the benefits have been significant.

Naveen elaborates, “I would say that overall productivity has improved by 20% since we have adopted Rally’s tools. But what is probably more significant is that we have a much better idea of the executive sponsor’s vision on any given development project. The process of building and prioritizing the backlog has given us a much clearer vision of what the product should be. ”

Rally’s tool has been a key component in helping Hoover’s make the transition to Agile smooth. Mamie concludes, “Our partnership with Rally has been great. The tool is an absolute must. But, just as importantly, Rally has provided the people and the training that we needed to be successful. And, as we continue to improve our Agile practices, we look forward to working with Rally to help drive future releases of the product.”

About Rally

Rally is the leader in Agile application lifecycle management (ALM) dedicated to making leaner development organizations that respond faster to changing customer needs. According to a study by QSM Associates, teams that rely on Rally’s Agile lifecycle management products and services are 50% faster to market and 25% more productive than industry averages. Rally’s products were honored with four consecutive Jolt Awards (the software industry’s equivalent of the Oscar® award) in 2006, 2007, 2008 and 2009. The company’s end-to-end solutions for Agile development also include Agile University, the largest source for Agile training, and Agile Commons, the largest collaborative Web 2.0 community dedicated to advancing software agility.



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