Surviving a Series of Unfortunate Events
Building Trust and Making Agile Work in the DoD

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Agenda
You
Level Set
Stay or Go
Data
What to Do
How to Implement Agile
Making the Shift
Success
Who is:
- Federal employee
- Government contractor
- Something else

What roles are represented.
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- Agile coach, consultant, and Certified Scrum Trainer.
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- 14 years of agile / lean experience.
Learn from real life experiences...

...so you can improve your situation.

All accounts are based on actual events...

...specifics are modified to maintain privacy.
Have you ever been involved in a government project where things were not going as planned?
Have you ever been involved in a situation where a client didn’t trust a contractor?

If you answered yes, you will likely benefit from this session.

If you answered no, we will not be offended if you leave.
Why do contractors and government clients sometimes have conflict?
We were government contractors supporting the US DoD.

$32,000,000 total award.
Team of 40.

The environment was heavyweight and plan driven.
ISSUES

What’s Wanted

What We Were Delivering

ISSUES
Dueling contractors.

Behind schedule.
ISSUES

Over budget.

ISSUES

Re-baselined twice.
Our client wanted us gone.

Then I was handed the mantle...
WHAT TO DO

People

Process

Technology

People
No trust.
No relationship.

Technical solution was not feasible.
The sustainment cost was estimated to be millions of dollars.
Process was heavyweight, milestone, phase gate driven. It didn’t allow for change?

Which area would you focus on?
- People
- Process
- Technology
We believed that an agile process could create a close partnership and allow us to address the technical issues.
Use an agile process adoption as an enabler to build relationships, grow trust, and to make other changes possible.

But...
Our customer didn’t know what agile was and it was a risky change.

So why go agile?
Things were so bad that a significant change was both possible and necessary.

The best time to go agile is when things are really bad and everyone knows it.
We knew we wanted to be agile, but we didn’t know where to start.
How should we begin our agile transformation?

With a three day training event focusing on the fundamentals of being agile.
Early in an agile adoption, educate involved parties on what it means to “be” agile.

**Question**

Who should we invite to the training?

- Our staff
- Our staff plus key supporters from the government
- Our staff plus key supporters and critics from the government
Why would we invite critics to the training event?

We needed to hear what our critics had to say.
Make critics part of the improvement effort so their energies are focused on positive change.

We believed that contentious issues would come up during the training event.
How should we handle contentious issues raised during training?

We openly discussed project issues.
We demonstrated a willingness to accept responsibility and take action to address issues.

Admitting to mistakes is the first step in addressing them.
The training started to build trust.

The training started to change mindsets.
For the first time ever, we started to collaborate.

Being together in an open, fun, honest training environment, is a start to building a relationship.
But...

What do you think our customer discussed internally the day after training?
Most likely...

We can’t change what we have been doing for years!

A picture of SETR...
SETR is a heavyweight, milestone, phase gate driven process.

Here is a description of SETR...

- Define customer needs and required functionality
- Plan the project
- Document the requirements
  - Validate and baseline requirements
- Develop the design based on the requirements
  - Validate that design meets all requirements and is baselined
- Produce the item based on the design
- Perform system validation
  - Ensure all requirements met and the required functionality performs as expected

It was hard to make the shift.
How do we get past long-established approaches?

Willingness to make concessions.
Requirements were still handed to us upfront.

We still needed to have documentation accepted.
We still had to go through the SETR Milestone Phase Gates.

We still had a three month testing phase at the end of the project performed by someone from another area.
That doesn’t sound agile!

We had a Sprint Review every other week.

As a result, the milestone reviews went from two days to a half day.
Early in a transformation layer agile ceremonies on top of existing processes to shorten the feedback loop.

The agile ceremonies helped but...

...our most significant change had something to do with one particular role.
What was the significant role change was?

The Government appointed and empowered a Product Owner to make decisions.
The Product Owner attended our Daily Standup almost every day.

The Product Owner got to see reality, warts and all.
The Product Owner was available to provide feedback and make rapid decisions.

Having the Product Owner greatly enhanced our ability to make tradeoffs and course corrections.
Have an empowered government Product Owner, who understands their role, participate actively.

We had a change in working relationship with our user community.
How did we change our working relationship with the user community?

Actual end users participated actively in our story grooming and Sprint Review Sessions.
We turned a lot of their feedback into actual user stories that were implemented and reviewed at the end of the Sprint.

For the first time, end users were able to directly influence the software that was built.
What Was Asked For

What We Were Delivering

What Was Valuable

What We Were Delivering
Get users deeply involved in the development process so you can deliver what is valuable instead of what you initially planned.
## Our CPARs Improved Dramatically

Contractor Performance Assessment Report (CPAR)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area of Evaluation</th>
<th>Year 1 (Pre-Agile)</th>
<th>Year 2 (Post-Agile)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Technical Quality of Product</td>
<td>Marginal</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Software Engineering</td>
<td>Marginal</td>
<td>Very Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Product Assurance</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
<td>Very Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schedule</td>
<td>Marginal</td>
<td>Very Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost Control</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
<td>Very Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management Responsiveness</td>
<td>Marginal</td>
<td>Very Good</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We delivered what users needed instead of what was planned.
Our group became a collaborative team.

We were in sync with the other contractor.
In the first year of transitioning to agile we reduced high priority defects by 84%.

In first year of transitioning to agile we reduced overall cost 24%.
The government became agile champions.

The government replaced linear phase gate reviews with iterative agile technical reviews.
The government adopted an agile mindset.

“*The most impressive turn around that I have seen in my career*”

Navy Milestone Decision Authority (MDA)
Don’t Waste a Crisis
Educate on Being Agile
Layer Agile On
Be Patient
Empower the Government PO
Engage End Users
Focus on Value
And...

...most Importantly
Trust
The End

CONTACT US

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