Agile Steps to Impress Your Client with Killer Demos!

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with
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As I was learning the fine art of being an IT (Information Technology) Scrum Master, one of the ceremonies that most intrigued me, as a professional speaker on Agile topics, was the Agile Demo. The "Demo" is an Agile ceremony (a non-agile person would refer to a ceremony as a “meeting”) where the Scrum Team presents their work to the Product Owner (business representative), and asks for approval. I would get myself invited to various Demos, as an observer at my day-time-IT-job, and what I would sometimes witness was an embarrassing break in the flow of the Demo.

What I sometimes saw were presenters who did not know exactly how they were going to present their work products to the Product Owner. They would then spend a few minutes, during the time slotted for the Demo, discussing (in front of the Product Owner) the best way to demonstrate something. Then, they would try the newly identified method, and see if it worked; on the fly. To me this behavior is an image destroyer and can be most definitely avoided. The bottom line is the Product Owner likely can impact who is on the Scrum Team, and who leads it, based on their perception of the individuals during these types of ceremonies!

As the Product Owner typically is the stakeholder who has control over funding, one would do well to manage Product Owner perceptions. The reality is a Product Owner can’t help but judge team effectiveness, based on Demos. To explain, Demos are when the Product Owner first views the work product, and determines if the current team can be trusted to be successful. Therefore Demos are a great time for a Scrum Master to show off their Scrum Team as being highly capable, organized, and hungry for victories. This is the time for the Scrum Team to “show up” and shape the image of the team with the Product Owner. That is, it is well worth investing some time planning for, and managing the presentation of your Demos. My recommendation is to use the same care as you would plan out your iterations or releases. By doing this you can seize a great opportunity, to grow the Product Owner’s positive impression, and more importantly the ongoing support, of the Product Owner.

After adding Chuck Sprague to my team as a partner, the idea of improving Demos really began to take shape. The outcome of our efforts is found below. Our hope is to make adopting and working in an Agile framework just that much easier. Please note the words here are intended for Scrum Masters. They represent opinions, and in no way represent the processes or policies of any company. The information here is presented as use-at-your-own-risk. Finally, the information below is based on an assumption that the reader has a fundamental understanding of Agile Scrum.

Well Before Your Demo

Please find below some advice on planning for and laying the infrastructure for your Demos:

- Ensure acceptance criteria, as shared by the Product Owner, are a part of User Stories, and injected into test scripts. Not only do these acceptance criteria act as an input into creating test scripts, they also further help to describe to the development team (in addition to the actual User Stories) what the client has in mind for the eventual completed work product.

- Recognize that since Agile User Stories that have the top priority are done first, the need for having professional level Demos is greatest for the first iteration. That is, the first features that the Product Owner will see during an early Demo will have the highest perceived business value, and thus get the most attention. Even if you are in a position where time is scarce, it is especially important to carve out ample time to effectively present the first few Demos.

- Here are a few of the actions you can take if a User Story looks like ***it will not be ready*** for a Demo:

  - Move the unfinished User Story to the next iteration, or, release
  - Postpone deployment
  - Create a mock result to demonstrate to the client what the team has in mind

  Please note that it is likely better to show what you have (assuming something is presentable) than sharing nothing. That way at least an exchange of ideas and concepts can take place at the Demo. Also if you need to defer committed work, one would do well to effectively manage the political consequences; which can be unpleasant.

- Establish a cut off time so that if something is not ready for a Demo, the work products associated with unfinished User Stories review can be dropped from an upcoming Demo. Please see the above comment about managing the political ramifications about not delivering a committed item. One way to blunt political fallout is to have a written plan on how to ensure the incomplete User Story will be addressed in the near future.

- If it is the first iteration, we recommend not scheduling a Demo. This is because we believe the first iteration tends to be an orientation to the content of the first release, or waiting for other teams (that our Scrum Team is dependent on) to finalize what they are doing.

Days Before Your Demo

A few days before the scheduled Demo is to happen, here are a few tips to follow just before the Demo with the Product Owner:

- Agreed upon acceptance criteria should be the benchmark by which success is measured for work products. By doing this:
    - You will let the Product Owner know you have listened to their needs
    - Sent a signal that you very much support the concept of acceptance criteria, and that they are critical to success

  By focusing attention on the Acceptance Criteria, it becomes more likely that, while in construction that acceptance criteria will be looked at as a design supplement. That is, acceptance criteria are a great way to further understand what the Product Owner is expecting.

- Be sure to let the Product Owner know, in writing, a few days in advance of the demo, what will be Demo'ed. And for items that the Product Owner was expecting, that won't be ready, have an additional communication, or a meeting, to set (or reset) expectations for those delayed User Stories. That is, a Demo is a time to share what is done. It is not a time to get into conversations as to what is unexpectedly not complete. A Demo should be a time for the Scrum team to shine!

- Be sure Scrum Team created test cases are documented in the User Stories, or linked to them, are created and approved by people who did not do the coding, as well as those who did. These test cases:
    - Are to satisfy all expectations of the Product Owner, as stated acceptance criteria (known in other circles as business criteria)
    - Anything that needs to be tested from a technical perspective, as indicated by the people working on the deliverable (known in other circles as technical criteria)
    - Anything identified as noteworthy by Scrum Team members
    - Items that have been identified as troublesome and learned about through active Scrum Master participation in Scrum-Of-Scrum meetings

  Where it makes sense, additional test cases that the Scrum team invents can become part of the Demo too.

- We strongly recommend having a formal step by step dry run of what will be presented. Who is sharing what and when they will present it should be a part of the pre-Demo. This should be a huge help in making the actual Demo run smoother. A side effect is it gives a milestone for developers to target for completion, and to demonstrate their skills to their team.

- Provide an agenda of what User Stories are to be presented and in what order, before the Demo.

- Agree within the Scrum Team, what the Scrum Master should do to keep the Demo moving if something does not work as expected. It is also recommended that the Scrum Master plans the Demo out to the point that interruptions in the flow, if any, just appear to be part of the plan.

During the Demo:

- The Scrum Master should act as an emcee, introducing each member of the Scrum Team who has something to present.

- Those Pigs (an Agile term for active, invested, Scrum Team Members) who did contribute to the work product being Demo'ed, but did not have a chance to present their efforts, should be called out and thanked for their contribution to the content of the Iteration.

- All Chickens (virtual contributors) and Pigs both should be invited to the Demo. This is essential as when Scrum teams excel, they do so as close knit team. Allowing attendance, even as an observer will educate stakeholders what the Product Owner expects, and provide a team building opportunity.

- If something fails during a Demo, capture the issue on a log, that all can see. Then after the Demo, create a defect. Share the new defect list, soon after the Demo, with the Product Owner to ensure they know that your team is taking ownership of defects found during the Demo. The Product Owner can then help you to put a priority on the defect during a future Backlog Grooming Ceremony.

- Use the Demo to point out any special accommodations the Scrum team made to accommodate the Product Owner's wishes. Also consider pointing out any challenges the team made to overcome impediments. This can foster even better working relations with the stakeholder, as the Scrum team will be better positioned to be viewed as supportive.

After the Demo

- During your Retrospective, be sure to ask the Product Owner for feedback on your most recent Demo: what went right, what needs improvement, etc. Then inject what you learn into Demos going forward.

- Soon after the Demo, all User Stories the Product Owner has approved during the Demo should be marked as approved, by the Product Owner. The Scrum Master should monitor this and ensure it happens.

Summary

As indicated previously, it is well worth investing some time planning for, and, managing your Demos. Often some really good work goes unnoticed if the Demo is sloppily done and the image of the Scrum Team can be tarnished. Our recommendation is to use the same care as you would plan out your iterations or releases. The bottom line is the Demo is not just a chance to prove software works, but also to provide Product Owners a look at the capabilities of the Scrum Team. It does not take a lot of time to do this, and it can result in a much more favorable impression with the Product Owner when the team looks like they are organized, capable, and committed to delivering business value.

About the Authors

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Brian is blessed to have a wonderful wife, named Terri, and two sons Matt & Marc. Matt, just finished his criminal justice degree at Western Illinois University®. Matt composes music, on his PC, in his free time. Marc, our English major at Illinois State University®, is currently away studying in England. We also have a long haired Wheaton Terrier (Finley) who regularly awakens us at 4 AM because he is board and wants to play outside. Brian's passion is providing people the skills they need to be better at delivering what their employers need. And, by being even more valuable, the expectation is they will provide longer service to their home organization.

Brian is honored to have been: appointed Scum Master at AT&T®* for the award-winning MyCSP App, point of sale information support application (top-ten design award, ***worldwide***, by the Neilson Norman Group® 2013), MBA with distinction (DePaul®), faculty of the year (University of Phoenix®), Excellence in Project Management Award (AT&T®), and often published (in PMWorldToday® & PMWorldJournal®).

Brian has taught PMP® certification classes for DeVry®/Becker® and AT&T®, he has also taught Agile at AT&T® and for the PMI® Chicago land chapter (Professional Development Day). He also teaches Project Management for the University of California – Irvine®, and University of Phoenix®. Brian has taught or spoken at many other venues like Microsoft® and Northwestern Kellogg Graduate School of Business®. He has provided seminars & keynotes on leadership at AT&T®, Toastmasters®, several PMI® chapters, and Abbott Labs®.

For further background about how Brian continues to drive toward fulfilling his mission, find his 44 written recommendations and hundreds of "referrals" on LinkedIn at www.linkedin.com/in/brianvanderjack/ . Brian offers face-to-face PMP certification training on Saturdays. If your organization, or PMI® Chapter, is interested, reach out to Brian at BrianVanderjack@Gmail.com (no-pass = tuition refund, but conditions apply).

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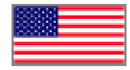

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USA

Charles Sprague is currently Principal/Owner at Strategic People Leadership, a Human Resources and Leadership Development company located in the Chicagoland area. He has personally provided training in conflict management, power and influence for universities, PMI, and companies like IBM and AT&T.

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Charles Sprague is affiliated with University of Phoenix as a Lead Faculty/Area Chair in Management. He teaches courses on organizational development, strategy, critical thinking, performance management, ethics as well as conflict and negotiations. Overall he has taught at the university level for over 20 years and has over 25 years of expertise in organizational development, training, and human resources. Charles can be contacted at charlessprague@comcast.net