Transforming Agile Nay-Sayers Into Enthusiasts

written by Manoj Khanna | September 17, 2014



Agile is increasingly mentioned as the go-to method for product development, and given the coverage on agile, it appears that there is a consensus that agile is at least viewed in a neutral light, if not favorably. Despite this, there *are* adamant nay-sayers against agile. For those who are attempting to transition their teams into embracing agile, it can be difficult if a team member is resistant towards agile. This post serves to provide insight into the criticism that some may have towards agile, in order to assist those seeking to convert agile nay-sayers into enthusiasts. For those who hold an unfavorable view of agile, this post will detail the potential of using agile with customer insights to transform products, along with the top agile practices to adopt in order to maximize a product's reception.**Main Criticism Against Agile***Lack of Structure*

A common criticism against agile is the lack of structure, especially in comparison to traditional methods such as waterfall. Indeed, agile is more open-ended and it embraces changes. That is not to be mistaken with chaos, though. Critics may misinterpret the lack of structure to lead to team members working on any number of tasks that may be irrelevant, and that progress cannot be achieved efficiently. Agile, in its lack of linearity and openness to quick changes, induces the opposite effect. It enables more progress to be attained during development, as multiple rounds of testing enable

product features' issues to emerge quickly and to be addressed immediately, resulting in a more complete product.

Rushes Into Development

Some may view the multiple cycles involved in agile to be a "rush" and that it undermines thorough and successful product development. Agile cycles consist of the stages of more traditional methods, but less time is spent on each stage within each sprint. This "rush" into the next stage is precisely what enables agile product development to incorporate so much user feedback into the process – and this incorporation of feedback results in a better product.

"Agile Fever"

Another main criticism against agile is the apparent "agile fever" that is sweeping across businesses and industries in the attempt to benefit from this method. This criticism is not unwarranted, for as is true with anything, too much of a good thing can be detrimental. With agile, it is important not to rush into implementing it merely because everyone else appears to be doing so; it is vital to thoroughly understand agile before adopting it, and even upon adoption it, the process should be tailored to each business individually.

Using Agile With Customer Insights to Transform Products

Agile, contrary to the main criticisms that exist, is an efficient method to transform products into ones that are well-received by the targeted customers. Each sprint in agile product development provides the opportunity to glean and incorporate user feedback into the next sprint. Not only is user feedback allowed to be a major factor in the product's development, but agile also provides ample opportunity for product issues to emerge and to be addressed on the spot, before the final product is released. Under agile, the product is completed multiple times and assessed as such, allowing for it to be enhanced a number of times more than if another

method were used.

Each sprint in agile product development can be viewed as a trial run, wherein user assessment is gleaned and addressed accordingly. Had the product been developed under a method other than agile, user assessment would not be obtained until the final product was released – by which time it would be more costly to fix the issues and to incorporate what users want and need from the product; the product's reception and success would suffer accordingly.

Top Agile Practices to Adopt

To maximize the potential held by agile product development and customer insights, it is important to emphasize the adoption of certain agile practices, namely continuous integration and design review. Continuous integration of feedback results from, and fuels, constant effort to glean feedback on and enhance the developing product. This is vital in creating a more successful final product that matches or surpasses user expectations. Design review, the other top agile practice to adopt in order to maximize integration of customer insights into the final product, enables teams to review design stories with consideration of the latest product feedback; it poses the opportunity to plan further work on the product with the feedback in mind.

There will continue to exist agile nay-sayers who will not embrace agile, despite the lack of evidence for some of the main criticisms against agile. For those who are swayed by the potential held by agile to incorporate user feedback into the creation of successful products, there exists ample information for them to begin their agile journey.

{image courtesy: flickr/JD Hancock }