

# De-Projectising IT Maintenance

Not everything in IT needs to be a project – by de-projectizing maintenance work major improvements in delivery are possible.

In particular, the ‘Scrum’ variant of Agile offer the interesting option to de-projectize a lot of IT maintenance work in much the same way a large amount of physical maintenance work in industrial plants is undertaken by a team of ‘maintainers’ working through a backlog of prioritized issues. Where an IT shop uses stable teams, ‘scrum’ to plan work on a monthly basis and ‘sprints’ to deliver weekly improvements; the situation is totally focused on routine operations. Stable teams working on dozens of minor objectives selected on the basis of an organization wide prioritization is the antithesis of a project. Projects are delivered by temporary teams assembled to work on the unique project deliverable (as described in the Project Charter) and then reassigned to other work as the project closes down.

The potential for substantial improvements in customer satisfaction that can be achieved by removing the ‘project overhead’ and using the flexibility of Scrum to focus on immediate priorities should offer a useful maintenance methodology for many IT applications provided the appropriate disciplines of documentation, etc are maintained.

These underlying principles would be very familiar to the maintenance managers of most large facilities. A stable crew of maintenance workers, familiar with the plant look after the prioritized day-to-day maintenance issues and install minor improvements. This routine working environment only gives way to ‘project management’ when a major outage or change is required. Probably the major difference is traditional maintenance management tends to sit inside a functional organizational structure whereas ‘Agile IT maintenance’ seems to operate best in a matrix/collaborative environment.

In one sense this is a ‘back-to-the-future’ development, recognizing IT as an enabler to achieve business success in the same way a well maintained plant is essential to a manufacturing businesses success. And whilst both the IT infrastructure and the ‘plant infrastructure’ need routine maintenance and upgrading; there is a key difference. The enhancement of an IT infrastructure involves far more creativity and offers far more opportunity than plant maintenance. Combine this with the idea of actively involving the users in the development process encourages synergistic improvements.

Whilst this is definitely not ‘project management’ as we know it; there is definitely an emerging practice that has enormous potential to improve the day-to-day operations of many organizations with a large IT infrastructure. I believe the ‘Agile debate’<sup>1</sup> needs to expand to recognize there are places where traditional project management works best, places where a project can use variants of Agile to optimize the project delivery process, and importantly places where project management is an unnecessary overhead.

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<sup>1</sup> For an overview of Agile see our discussion paper; **Thoughts on Agile:** [http://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/PDF\\_Papers/P109\\_Thoughts\\_on\\_Agile.pdf](http://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/PDF_Papers/P109_Thoughts_on_Agile.pdf)

