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The Dream Team Nightmare

Boost Team Productivity Using Agile Techniques

The Dream Team

NIGHTMARE

Boost Team
Productivity
Using Agile
Techniques

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To Snow Dragon

For making dreams come true

Greed and Gluttony

On your way over to the team space, Patrick asks you how the team's situation compares to those of other teams with whom you've worked. You assure him that it isn't at all unusual.

"Every team follows a cycle, much like the four seasons," you say. "At present, the team's between autumn and winter. This means that they've been doing the same things the same way for a while and are now stuck in a rut. Yesterday, we made that rut visible, along with all the other problems we face."

Patrick tells you that the current situation is reminiscent of the extenuating circumstances that made the team try agile in the first place. The company was in dire straits at the time, which forced the team members, and the whole company, to rethink the way they built and delivered their software.

Back in the early days, enthused by the large amount of seed funding, the business came up with a deluge of ideas that simply kept growing. Many of the ideas were excellent, which meant that the business wanted to implement them all at once.

"Therein lies the way to madness," says Patrick, shaking his head at the memory of those days. He compares it with being ravenous at a buffet, attempting to eat everything in sight all at the same time. "Most people's brains would short-circuit before they could get indigestion. We blew a circuit and just kept gorging."

Tip of the Iceberg

Patrick is concerned that those days are coming back. The Dream Team's underdelivery of product features in the past three months has provided a reason for the management team to rethink its software development strategy, with talk of near-shoring and far-shoring options as the company looks to move into the global market. What's more, the rapidly ballooning backlog is creating more and more pressure on an already underperforming team.

Patrick confides in you. "Many of the Dream Team members set out on the start-up journey with us. I think many of them still believe in the product, even though people like Jason may have lost sight of that. I'm prepared to make tough decisions when it comes to preserving what we've achieved so far."

Patrick continues. "What concerns me most is that changing the way IT works will not be enough. Transforming the way we work with the business is when the real challenge begins."

Team View

When you reach the team space, Ben stands up to greet you both.

You ask Ben to walk Patrick through the process and output of yesterday's project retrospective. Ben glosses over the confrontation between you and Jason that nearly stopped the retrospective from happening at all.

He begins by presenting the top five problems according to the team. He is able to do this because after the retrospective, when everyone got back to the team space, Roger led a team-voting exercise to identify what everyone thought were the top five problems.

Continue with the adventure .

Grave Problems

Ben explains Roger's approach for determining how many votes everyone got. "According to mathematical theory, to guarantee you get a prioritized list, you take the total number of items and then divide by three," he says.

Ben continues. "In the Dream Team's case, since 15 problems divided by 3 is 5, everyone got five votes to cast. If someone preferred a particular option above all the others, they could cast all their votes for that option."

You're familiar with this formula and find it effective. You smile because it's the first instance of self-organization by the Dream Team since your arrival.

Ben shows you and Patrick the list of improvement actions for the top five problems without going into too much detail about each sticky note. Ben understands that, as a senior manager, Patrick's only interested in seeing the big picture.

The Dream Team's top five problems are these:

1. The details of the requirements are unclear.

2. The product owner is not available to answer questions when needed.

3. The team consistently fails to deliver the stories that are planned for a sprint.

4. More time is spent on fixing defects than on implementing stories.

5. More time is spent on analyzing stories than on implementing them during a sprint.

Do you:

- hear what Patrick thinks about the problems on page 10, or
- get a different perspective on page ??

Chance

Patrick is a good listener, but he seems quieter than usual. After a long pause, he says, "Last night, I watched a webinar called 'Scaling Agile Adoption.' The presenter quoted many statistics. The one that struck me most is that, according to the presenter, only 26 percent of a development team's effort contributes to a project's success. The rest comes down to people and managerial approach."

Patrick continues. "The speaker said the problems with software projects have never been about technology; they've always been about people. Regardless of how accurate his statistics are, that's the same conclusion I've come to after my twenty years in software development."

"That's been my experience too," says Ben. He goes on to explain how this morning he sorted out the actions into two lists, side by side, one column for what the team could do on its own and another that requires the management's help.

"Of course I'll do this exercise again with the team, but I wanted to get an idea of what we could do right away to make things better," Ben says. He adds, "Jim's presence has helped bring the team together. Maybe not all of us, but the majority of us. We want to stay together and deliver the project."

Patrick takes a picture of the two lists of actions to take away with him. He then says to Ben, "You do your bit as a team, and we'll do our best to help as management. We all want to make this work."

Time's up with Patrick. He shakes hands and thanks you both for doing a good job.

Continue with the adventure .

Desperate Remedies

When Patrick's gone, Ben says he's got something important to tell you.

"I overheard Patrick telling one of the managers last week that Love Inc. has a number of choices when it comes to the future of software development. They can choose to out-source IT entirely or address the challenges we have one by one, beginning with the Dream Team," Ben says.

According to Ben, management can either keep the team together as is or split the team up and redistribute the people across other teams. Or they could disband all existing teams and shuffle people around in the hope that a change in team members would be enough to reinvigorate everyone and give the organization a morale boost.

"Whichever choice they pick, it won't count for much unless they address the root cause of all the problems," says Ben.

"In my opinion, the rift between the business and IT has become a chasm. It may be too late to build a bridge to meet each other halfway," he continues.

"One more thing," says Ben. "Patrick said yesterday that he's prepared to wait until after hearing your recommendation before deciding what to do with the team. Whatever management decides to do next with the Dream Team will set a precedent for the entire IT department going forward," says Ben.