

LRN TRANSITIONS TO SCRUM TO DELIVER MORE VALUE WITH ITS "SCRUM LOADED" INITIATIVE

SOFTWARE PRODUCT IS DELIVERED 150% MORE FREQUENTLY USING SCRUM

SEPTEMBER 2019

CASE STUDY



THE COMPANY

The Company

Since 1994, LRN has helped 15 million people in 700 companies worldwide navigate complex legal and regulatory environments and foster ethical cultures. LRN's combination of practical tools, education, and strategic advisement helps companies translate their values into concrete practices and leadership behaviors that create sustainable, competitive advantage. In partnership with LRN, companies need not choose between living principles and maximizing profits, or between enhancing reputation and growing revenue: both are a product of principled performance.

Their offerings mitigate the risk of costly ethical lapses and compliance failures, while building trust and earning the company a reputation for lawful and ethical conduct. LRN is the trusted long-term partnership to more than 400 client companies, including some of the most respected and successful businesses in the world, have enabled us to create an active and growing community with a common interest. Together they acquire and disseminate proven strategic and tactical insights and develop solutions based on real-world experiences. They are headquartered in New York, with their Technology development and support center located in Mumbai, India.



The Challenge

Three years ago, the software development organization at LRN followed a waterfall approach, along with some Scrum. Overall the teams were very inconsistent in their use of the Scrum framework. The teams were running the Scrum Events with a lot of inconsistency and did not have a regular cadence for releasing “Done” Increments. The teams each consisted of an off-site Product Owner, an off-site project manager, on-site developers and an on-site Business Analyst.

Quality testing was managed separately by a set of quality assurance developers, who were part of a separate organization within LRN, as was the UI team. The Product Owner would share the long-term product map, providing details of its usage, revenue, and expenses with the team via the project manager.

The above separation of teams gave an advantage to a few teams to drive the feature development at their individual pace and quality. However, when the product feature was ready, it was handed over to the quality team for review, after which, it would be returned to the Development Team. Therefore, in most cases, the teams did not have a regular cadence of releases. Sunil Bheda, Chief Product Officer, and the new leadership team at LRN wanted to introduce changes to become more agile, aligning more with the LRN philosophy.

The leadership team wanted to release software more frequently with higher quality to delight LRN customers, build teams to expand the scale of development, have a better collaborative strategy for inter-dependent products, and a method of measuring value.

Research confirmed their belief that Scrum was the best way forward. The first step was to present the teams with a value proposition, train them on Scrum, trust them to take it forward,

allow them to make mistakes, and coach them. They called this initiative, “Scrum-Loaded”.

Prior to Scrum, the following scenarios occurred:

- Each team had different Sprint lengths, ranging from three to six weeks
- Each team had ad-hoc release schedules, ranging from four to eight weeks
- Scrum was really a mini waterfall process
- Scrum Events were run inconsistently
- The Definition of “Done” was defined by only a few teams
- Emphasis was on lengthy documentation of requirements
- Products utilized vulnerable libraries compromising security

The Solution

A presentation deck to introduce Scrum was prepared and socialized with relevant team members, which included the leadership team. The feedback was split – a few teams wanted to try it, a few others mentioned that we were already doing some of it, so why change, and a few others wanted more information. Prior to this new way of doing things, the six teams were under the direction of project managers, who helped drive the projects by supervising all the tasks of the project -- planning, allocation, communication and execution. This approach put too much on the project managers and presented a point of potential failure.

The leadership team, including the Chief Product Officer, stood behind the implementation of the new framework, which helped push the “Scrum-Loaded” initiative forward. A change of culture was necessary, as well as imbibing the Scrum Values to achieve transparency, identifying what was not working, learn from it and adapt to it. ➤

As part of this, they had their teams go through Scrum training.

“To bring about the cultural change, we realized it would not be possible to merely define the roles and present a PowerPoint,” said Ravindra Kirpane, Global Technology Leader. “We knew nothing would change unless the entire team self-organized and took ownership of the process.”

They identified a few key parameters to focus on and to make the change incremental toward an ideal use of Scrum:

- Scrum Team per product
- Define Sprint length
- The project managers to become Scrum Masters – 1 per Scrum Team
- Focus on getting to “Done”
- Follow the Scrum Events properly
- Measure value
- Empower the Product Owner

The idea was to completely focus on these items and be meticulous about its implementation, analyzing each item, identifying the gaps, defining solutions and working with the teams.

One Scrum Team Per Product

They needed to improve collaboration between the cross-functional teams. At LRN, the Quality and UI teams were physically and organizationally a separate unit from the development organization. This translated into having dispersed ownership of getting work done. Each team had a separate vision of what the goal was for the Product Backlog Item and this contributed toward delayed delivery and/or lower quality.

Working with the leaders of the Quality and UI teams, the development organization assembled

into teams that included representation from each vertical. In a few cases, they had to have one person to support multiple teams. The change began to have a positive effect on meeting the Sprint Goal, increment delivery and improved ownership. Each of the six Scrum Teams consisted of nine team members or less.

“The efficiency increased in the delivery of the software systems.”

- Parag Pathak, Sr. Developer

“There is an enhanced co-ownership of the item being worked on by the entire Scrum Team.”

- Bhavin Gala, Solution Architect

Define Sprint Length

The heart of Scrum is a Sprint, a defined time box of 30 days or less, during which a “Done” usable and potentially shippable product increment is created by the Scrum Team. The sketch process that existed prior to Scrum-Loaded did not dictate the length of the Sprint for many teams. The team adjusted the length of the Sprint based on the perceived work in the Sprint Backlog.

To produce higher quality work, the teams designated a defined length for a Sprint, which would remain constant over time. After having a few discussions with the teams, the choices left were between two and four weeks.

A decision of a two-week Sprint length allowed teams to focus on small but concise goals, to recover from failures quickly and most importantly, allowed the Product Owner to evaluate produced software and adjust course, if necessary. ➤

“This has allowed us to go to production more frequently with better quality.”

- Hari Nair, Quality Analyst

“Our partner gets to review and provide feedback on new features and enhancements almost every 15 days.”

- Kishore Ohal, Technical Lead

Project Managers Become Scrum Masters - 1 Per Scrum Team

What they discovered was that there were many product teams and each team was led by a project manager, who directed the team, assigned work, managed releases, defined the work breakdown, defined the scope and estimated the deliverable time. This then became a point of failure for the team as project managers had too much on their plate to work on.

Scrum defines the role of a Scrum Master to be one of a servant leader rather than a manager. They decided to prepare in-house talent for this role and make the transition. Project managers who were inclined to become Scrum Masters were asked to undergo training and get certified. The Scrum Masters take steps to adhere to the Scrum Guide, and work with the teams and individuals, coaching, teaching and guiding them to inspect and adapt from how they work within the Sprint and from the previous Sprint. They also encourage teams to agree on Sprint Goals collectively and deliver based on them.

“We are now more focused toward achievement of Sprint Goals.”

- Prasad Shetty, Scrum Master

Focus on “Done”

All members of the Scrum Teams needed a common understanding of what “Done” meant for a Product Backlog Item to be finished during

a Sprint. The teams began to include a Definition of Done with each Product Backlog Item.

The Definition of “Done” includes things like product specific checks, security vulnerability checks, and device specific checks. The team now works to produce software that adheres to this list and is contributing to creating quality deliverables with no new security vulnerability.

“We are now able to release enhancements more frequently in the software. Having regularly scheduled smaller releases gives us the ability to deliver (end user) requested features shortly after they request them. This helps improve partner adoption and retention on products.”

- Melissa Gentry, Product Owner

“Code review and vulnerability assessments being part of the Definition of “Done”, produce secure and robust applications.”

- Pravin Baviskar, Global Leader Information Security

Utilize Scrum Events

Next, the teams began to use all of the Scrum Events consistently and implemented their Product Backlog and Sprint Backlog using Jira for their Scrum board, which promoted transparency and collaboration across teams, as well as transparency for the stakeholders.

Side benefits of the above implementation are that key information is being shared to all the stakeholders and encourages participation by each colleague in the events. Colleagues began identifying solutions and making strides as teams to complete what was discussed in the Sprint Planning meeting.

“The Retrospectives for each Sprint are held regularly, and the teams continue to bring their learnings into the next Sprint,” said ➤

Ravindra Kirpane, Global Technology Leader. “We understand that we will not be successful in every Sprint, but we strive to reduce the gaps as we keep moving forward.”

Measure the Deliverables

One question the teams had was, “How do we measure meaningful work?” They knew measurement drove success, which in turn drives the morale of the team and further improves adaptation of the process. They introduced measurements, such as percent complete at the end of the Sprint with a burn-down chart. As they progressed, they realized that the key indicator was the **value delivered to the business**.

The Product Owner started using T-Shirt sizing to determine the value delivered to the business from each completed Increment. The results confirmed their intuition that Scrum was yielding significant improvements in the value delivered to the business.

Empowering the Product Owner

A refined Product Backlog that would deliver value to the business is one of the key ingredients in Scrum. The Product Owner now made the decisions pertaining to the Product Backlog. This responsibility comes with the Product Owner gaining the respect of the team members. They found that when mutual respect was developed, it encouraged the team to transparently present the challenges in achieving the delivery.

Results

By focusing on key parameters of the Scrum Guide and working to meticulously implement Scrum in a consistent and persistent manner, LRN was able to ignite cultural change. Turning the dial of cultural change incrementally toward alignment of agile process helped them fine tune the efficiency of their organization.

“For us, the journey has been an incredible opportunity of learning, adapting and emerging to get to a level wherein, we now see a significant improvement in number of deployments, stability of deliverables, quality of the good and increased delivered business value,” said Gaurang Vora, RTE (Program Manager).

The number of deployments has risen from a couple to about five to ten per Sprint. In 2018, the teams had 448 deployments while practicing Scrum. LRN is also now delivering Increments of software 150% more frequently than they were before Scrum. The business value delivered has also increased by 200% year over year. The “Scrum-Loaded” initiative has given the organization a focus on delivering increments of product each Sprint. In addition, they have not introduced any new security vulnerabilities in the past year.

“While we have good accomplishments, we also acknowledge that this is not the end of things, it is the start of a new phase,” said Gaurang Vora. “We have learned quite a few things from our experiences, and we continue to implement these learnings in our ongoing use of Scrum. Previously what could have been a huge task of delivery, is now easily delivered in Increments.” ♦

About Scrum.org

Based on the principles of Scrum and the Agile Manifesto, Scrum.org provides comprehensive training, assessments, and certifications to *improve the profession of software delivery*.

Throughout the world, our solutions and community of Professional Scrum Trainers empower people and organizations to achieve agility through Scrum.

Ken Schwaber, the co-creator of Scrum, founded Scrum.org in 2009 as a global organization, dedicating himself to improving the profession of software delivery by reducing the gaps so the work and work products are dependable.

Authors

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