Liftoff: Starting New Projects on a Trajectory Toward Success

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Liftoff – it’s the unexplored, often ignored, Agile software development project practice. Liftoff gives impetus to your projects in a way that starts the project team, and the business, on the trajectory to success. Project sponsors, product managers, and product owners use these critical meetings to inform, inspire, and align the people who do the work with the definition of the work to be done.

As the first act of the flight, a rocket launch requires an entire set of systems to successfully lift the vehicle into orbit – not just the vehicle itself, but all the systems needed for smoothly moving off the ground into space. Likewise, your project needs its entire set of supporting systems in place to begin a successful journey to high performance, hyper-productivity, and high value delivery.

In this talk, Diana Larsen explores ways to accomplish Liftoff, including the vital step of chartering the project. She’ll share real-life stories of how others have effectively started their projects; a variety of team activities to fuel your Liftoff; and a framework for effective, “just enough” Agile chartering.

Drawing on 20+ years of experience working with technical professionals, Diana Larsen takes a pragmatic approach to consulting with leaders and teams to promote workplaces where innovation, inspiration, and imagination flourish.

As partner and senior consultant with FutureWorks Consulting, Diana Larsen sparks the creation of workplaces where productive teams display resilience in times of change and focus on frequent delivery of high value software customers want and use. She leads system-wide groups in collaborative thinking and planning for agile adoptions, project kick-offs, chartering, and retrospectives. Diana coaches managers and leaders on their role in a changing workplace and presents workshops on topics related to agile transitions and teams. She also directs the Agile Adoption program of the Agile Alliance and serves on the Agile Alliance Board of Directors. Diana co-authored Agile Retrospectives: Making Good Teams Great!
Liftoff
Starting New Projects on the Trajectory toward Success

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PNSQC 2011

Success = High Value Delivery
What the customer wants and values
That creates value for the business
That the customer will accept & exchange value for
In a timeframe that suits the customers’ needs
Easily maintainable and supportable after deployment
In a way that leaves team members ready and eager to work on the next deliverable

Form Working Groups
What do you do to help project teams get off to a good start?

Start with a Booster
Project Kick-Off Workshop

“At PSE, the software development division of Siemens AG Austria, we have realized significant benefits by providing carefully designed facilitated rituals at the beginning and at the end of projects, called kick-off workshops and project retrospectives respectively. The high return-on-investment for the time spent is unchallenged and confirmed by the regular feedback of developers, project leaders, and managers. They attest a positive influence of these rituals on many subjects such as team cooperation, process effectiveness, quality assurance, know-how sharing, reliability of estimations, and so on. This helps to improve the development cycle and increases the financial success of our projects.”

Frowin Fatjak (PSE, Siemens AG Österreich),
“Kick-off Workshops and Project Retrospectives: A Good Learning Software Organization Practice”
Wissensmanagement (LNCS Volume) 2005

“The term kick-off designates an internal workshop at the beginning of a project or at the start of a project phase. A kick-off at PSE usually lasts for 1-2 days.

Features:
Whole Team participates and contributes
Agenda with variety of activities, presentations by different people, & moderated discussions
Higher awareness of and attention to risks

Success Factors:
Facilitator/Leader contracting
Establishing Trust
Whole Team involvement
Recording Minutes (digital camera)
Offsite Location”
Boot Camp Example

Provide an Accelerated Start
Plan to Promote Team Forming

Provide structure, information, and support
Draft an Agile Charter
Focus on the “do-able”
Define “done”
Identify roles and responsibilities
Initiate iteration retrospectives
Acknowledge feelings of newness or confusion
Manage participation so everyone has a voice
Set a tone of openness and trust

Project Liftoff Activities

Collaborative Chartering
Kick-Off Workshops
Iteration 0
Boot Camps
Retrospective & FutureSpective
Open Space
Which of these have you tried?

Agile Chartering
Chartering the Product Team

Inspiration & Meaning

Purpose

Create an alliance

Alignment

Understand fit with organization

Context

Liftoff - Agile Chartering Model © 2011 Diana Larsen & Ainsley Nies, all rights reserved

Living Charter = Chartering
“TinCans” Purpose

* **Vision**  TinCans makes long distance collaboration easier by eliminating the bottlenecks of previous desktop sharing tools. TinCans is full of the small touches that customers find joy in using, and is known for collaboration, simplicity and high quality. With the creation of TinCans, we deliver our first entrepreneurial product. The successful launch of TinCans establishes us as a strong competitor in the collaboration tools marketplace.

* **Mission**  TinCans is a freeform sandbox that fulfills multiple purposes, such as: project management, working in pairs & subgroups, project tracking, distributed retrospectives, and more. TinCans helps teams collaborate over long distance, and enables the productive team dynamics that occur when teams gather around a table and use index cards to brainstorm, prioritize, and reflect. Collaboration, simplicity, and high quality take precedence over breadth of features, and we focus on polishing existing features to a high gloss before adding new ones.

* **Mission Tests**  We will deploy TinCans in multiple stages with increasing measures of success at each stage:
  * By Q2 2009, we will demonstrate a proof-of-concept at a major Agile event garnering a positive response from Agile experts for its simplicity and high quality.
  * By Q3 2009, we will make a TinCans beta available for free use and within 6 months at least 10 teams will use it on a regular basis for real-world projects.
  * By Q2 2010, TinCan will convert to SaaS and gross at least $10K in the first 3 months.
  * By Q2 2011, we will rely on TinCans for our income and the revenues will meet our monthly minimum income requirements.
“Racoon Rescue Website Project” Purpose

**Product Vision** Racoon Rescue enables residents, outdoor enthusiasts, and local communities to live in harmony with regional native wildlife and preserves wildlife habitat for future generations. Its website attracts volunteers and donations that sustain this critical work.

**Project Mission** The Racoon Rescue Website project provides a way to disseminate information about RR; attract and register volunteers and supporters; and receive donations.

**Mission Tests** We will deploy the RR website in multiple stages with measures of success at each stage:
* By Q4 2011, the site will have processed 20 troublefree donations.
* By Q1 2012, the pool of volunteer registered through the website will increase by 25%.
* By Q1 2012 RR brochure requests increase by 50%, either through mailing triggered by website registrations or reports that website influenced the request.
What's your current project purpose?

MISSION

To provide the Northwest industrial market with tools and collaborative opportunities to support the incorporation of efficient energy management practices into the normal course of their business.

Examples of these tools and opportunities include:
- Best business practices
- Systems improvement
- Training
- Partnerships with trade allies
- Demonstrations
- Coordination with utility, public and other programs
Core Team - Cross-functional group with a common purpose.

Working Agreements - Operational Guidelines

Values & Principles - Beliefs & Ideals about Work

“Tin Cans” Alignment

* Values & Principles -
  * Openness: Openness is not an end in itself, but a means to an end. We encourage everyone to speak up on topics that concern them or the team as a whole.
  * Outcome-Focus: We evaluate work products not the author.
  * Feedback: Because we want the highest quality working relationships, we encourage, welcome, and seek effective feedback. We give feedback with caring and respect.
  * Innovation: We encourage each other to try new ideas. We regard mistakes not as failure, but as experiments on the road to success.


* Working Agreements -
  As a team, we believe we work best when:
  We define “done” for our products as “ready to be accepted and used by our customer.
  We hold planning meetings before and retrospectives after each iteration and release.
  We value curiosity; therefore, we listen and we encourage each other to express ideas.
  We seek opportunities for continuous learning and sharing knowledge.
  We find ways to make our production work fun for the whole team.
“Racoon Rescue Website Project” Purpose

★ Values & Principles We value:
  Sustainability - Make decisions with the long term in mind.
  Relationships - Give and expect respect; all living beings together create a living planet.
  Beauty - Seek the highest quality and beauty in all we do.
  Transparency - Share information freely.
  Courage - Speak up when something needs to change.

★ Core Team Website team members include: product owner, graphic designer, copy writer,
  volunteer coordinator, user experience specialist, web programmer, database programmer, and
  tester. We will reach out to others for expertise in database administration, security, financial
  transactions, etc.

★ Working Agreements We work together best when:
  * Every team member completes work as agreed and let’s the team know if anything gets in the way
    of completing a task.
  * For us, “done” means designed, coded, re-factored, passed unit & acceptance tests, integrated, ready
    for deployment to internal server, and accepted by the product owner.
  * We hold brief daily meetings at a time when everyone can attend, and we all show up in person or
    by call in.
Sample Working Agreements for Cultivating Trust

We agree to assume positive intent and give generous interpretations to actions or words we don’t understand, then we seek clarity from one another.

We keep our agreements or, if we can’t, we advise teammates of problems as soon as possible.

We cast no “silent vetos.” We speak up if we disagree.

We seek and offer feedback on the impact of our actions, inactions, and interactions.
What’s one working agreement that would help your team work better together?

Boundaries & Interactions - Seeing the Systems

Committed Resources - Organization Support

Prospective Analysis - Initial Projections
Example: Boundaries & Interactions for Writing a Book (Liftoff)

Project boundaries included:
scope (content, book writing may include related articles)
timeboxes (4-6 day pair writing blocks)
project boundary objects (see right)
limits of authority (each author must agree in advance to public statements about the work)
“Tin Cans” Context

* **Boundaries & Interactions** Tin Cans boundaries include scope, timeboxes (1 week iterations, 2 month releases to internal production), project boundary objects (see below) project community members’ relative responsibilities, and limits of authority (purchasing up to $10K, recruit 1 additional programmer, all decisions about work hours within a 40-hour week, ).

* **Committed Resources** Tin Cans sponsors agree to provide a facilities budget for creating an open work area, including two build servers, and access to industry analysts and reports for our market. Core Team members may schedule 4 hours per week to work on personal projects.

* **Prospective Analysis** We’ve identified a moderate probability, high negative impact risk others may be building a similar product and beat us to the market. Mitigate by prioritizing “first to market” in feature and release decisions.
**Activity: Identifying Boundaries & Interactions**

- In groups of 3 or 4, review the purpose of the Racoon Rescue Website Project.
- Identify and discuss the significant boundaries of the project.
- Identify members of the project community.
- Create a context map.
- Label exchanges between team and the project community parties.

**“Racoon Rescue Website Project” Purpose**

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**Example: More “Book Writing” Context**

- **Committed Resources**
  Co-located time together – min. ~1 week / quarter & min. 2 phone check-ins/mo.
  Alternate travel to visit each other - at least two trips per year
  Split printing & shipping $ as they come up
  Each will buy on our own any book purchased for research that we want to keep

- **Prospective Analysis**
Activity: Creating a Prospective Analysis

• In groups of 3 or 4, review the purpose of the Racoon Rescue Website Project.

• Using sticky notes, in 3 minutes brainstorm at least a dozen conditions that may affect the project in the next 3-4 months.

• Create a graph at your table, and place each sticky note according to its impact and likelihood.

• Discuss the patterns you see.

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Debrief

What difference would it make to understand more about project context from the beginning?
What one thing will you take back for your teams?

Coming Soon!

Liftoff: Launching Agile Teams and Projects Toward Success
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