Does DAD Knows Best, Is it Okay to do LeSS or Just Be SAFe?
Adapting Scaling Agile Practices into the Enterprise

Aashish Vaidya
PNSQC October 20 2014
Twitter: @aashishvaidya LinkedIn: www.linkedin.com/pub/aashish-vaidya/2/13/168/
ABOUT YOU
Your Org and Scaling Agile

- Thinking about it
- In the Middle of it
- Past the Transition
- Just Curious

Simple show of hands...
Is your organization thinking of scaling agile?
In the middle of the transition?
Past the transition?
You are just curious?
If your organization is practicing agile, how many teams do you have?
0-5?
6-20?
20+?
Anyone formally using any agile scaling frameworks?
DAD?
LeSS?
SAFe?
MAXOS?
Some combo?
ABOUT CAMBIA
Cambia

• Mainline Business – Regulated Health Insurance
• Operates in 4 states: Oregon, Washington, Idaho and Utah
• Not-for-profit, tax-paying organization
• Fourth year into our agile transition
• PNSQC 2012 – we reported on our team level practices and our transition efforts
About Cambia Teams

• 40+ active agile teams in software delivery
• Smattering of infrastructure and business-focused teams are also practicing agile
• Majority of teams use Scrum
• Some teams use Kanban
• Organized as component (primarily) and not necessarily feature teams
• Most of our teams are distributed
SCALING PRACTICES
We are still traditional in the way we approach business case development and we go through annualized budgeting process. For all strategic portfolio-projects, we plan in quarters, and we try to achieve partial program realization through this process. However, there is a fair amount of variation. Some projects have to plan for releases, frequently than a quarter. Many portfolio-projects may plan 1 or 2 releases in a year.
Little bit of a detailed view from the previous high level slide. Many projects and teams are involved in quarterly pre-planning process. All our teams are on same quarterly and sprint planning cadence, we will talk about this in next couple of slides. We have 3-week sprint schedule and we plan for a coordinated project/program releases.
Quarterly Planning Meeting has gone through many changes since we started over 3 years ago. In its current form, these are the typical activities we cover during a whole day planning session.

1. Teams and PO conduct quarterly pre-planning exercise before the quarterly planning meeting.

2. Team representatives (usually PO, SM and a tech lead) attend the quarterly planning meeting. Teams meet, discuss and coordinate work between them. Based on these conversations, they may re-order their backlogs, identify new work, coordinate systems integrations, user acceptance testing and plan for coordinated release per project.

3. Teams identify questions, impediments or issues affecting their ability in committing to an achievable quarterly plan. This includes planning any hardening sprints for project deliverables.

4. Teams report out their confidence level.

5. Projects based on teams’ report out, collate and report out their confidence at a project level.

Typical of this process is identification of owners on action items that were identified
for post-planning activities.

Team representative debrief their teams on the outcome of the quarterly planning meeting.

SAFe uses a similar Release Planning meeting every quarter as a scaling technique. LeSS has a slightly different practice which is called a Pre-Sprint Backlog meeting.
So let’s talk about why we have adopted enterprise-wide synchronized sprint schedule. Our agile teams are primarily component rather than feature teams. So in order to achieve some sort of end-to-end business value, we usually need a handful of teams. So we need to account for ways to address dependencies and alignment. Synchronized Sprint Schedule is one way to do it. The synchronized sprint helps with planning, especially, when teams have dependencies. One other benefit of synchronized schedule is that it helps in budgeting. It gives us predictability when we try to co-locate many of our distributed teams for face-to-face sprint planning meetings. We haven’t been able to do much of that lately due to budget constraints, however, we still get key people on each of our teams for a co-located quarterly meeting as was mentioned earlier. This is key scaling practice in SAFe and LeSS.
After having a mid-horizon plan achieved through quarterly planning meeting, and an additional synchronization point through synchronized sprint schedule, we need a way to coordinate and collaborate during the sprint. We do this through the Scrum of Scrums meetings.

There are generally three types of Scrum of Scrum meetings:
1) Project level Scrum of Scrums 2) Testing specific Scrum of Scrums and 3) Organizational level Scrum of Scrums

Scrum of Scrum is another scaling technique used in SAFe and LeSS.
Quick definitions – Community of Practice (CoP) is generally “a group of people who share a craft or profession”. Center of Excellence (CoE) refers to “team, a shared facility or an entity that provides leadership, evangelization, best practices, research, support and/or training for a focus area”.

At Cambia, we have blended these two approaches into what we call Best Practices Exchange. The BPE is a CoP, but deploys a volunteer, part-time core team that helps organize the CoPs. The activity level of each CoPs ebbs and flows with its core members’ involvement as well the community at large. And yes, delivery pressures does mean that sometimes the activities of the CoPs take a back seat (unfortunately).

Community of Practice is an important scaling practice, which is useful even for smaller agile adoption and implementation. LeSS, explicitly calls for use of CoPs. SAFe doesn’t directly specify the needs of CoPs. However, many agilists including Mike Cohn recommend this technique. Henrik Kniberg has documented team structure and CoPs at Spotify that is quite similar to what is used at Cambia.

Additional information on the Communities of Practice was outlined in the 2012 PNSQC paper.

*definition of CoP and CoE are from wikipedia
CHALLENGES
The front-end funnel of defining and onboarding project is still traditional at Cambia. Budgeting process is done at an annual level.

This creates project onboarding bottlenecks generally in Q1 of each calendar year.

In the middle of the PDLC process, teams have hit a regular cadence and have project delivery flow. However, user-acceptance and deployment process tend to still follow traditional process.
At Cambia, at any given time, there are 20-25 active projects. This includes projects onboarding or are in flight overlaying on top of 40+ teams and the complexity that goes with it.

The Quarterly Planning process isn’t product increment focused. So planning and deployment product increment is still a big challenge for our teams as well as projects. Many team members feel disconnected from the overall vision, roadmap and mid-horizon planning and are focused on sprint-to-sprint execution only. This is because the Quarterly Planning process is done with select team members, only. This hampers us from moving from a flow to a Pull mechanisms per Lean.
Due to project complexity, myriad of software platforms, and preponderance on Scrum and Kanban process practices, there is a slow uptick on adapting engineering or XP oriented practices such as Continuous Integration, Continuous Coordinated Delivery, robust automated testing regiment, Test Driven Development.
Dedicated Product Owners, Product Management

• Some teams still don’t have a single voice as a Product Owner
• Some teams don’t have full-time Product Owner
• Some POs may be SMEs in one particular business area, but not others
• POs may not be empowered to represent other business domains
• Lack of Cohesive Product Management Approach
Let Me Leave You With....

• Understand the benefits and shortcomings of scaling frameworks
• Only adopt scaling frameworks if it fits your context
• When in doubt, refer to agile values and principles (don’t make complex even more complicated)
• True agility and innovation comes from real transformation
• Trust your engaged employees
SCALING FRAMEWORKS
Disciplined Agile Delivery (DAD)

- Agile/Basic Lifecycle
Disciplined Agile Delivery (DAD)

• Advanced Lean Lifecycle
Disciplined Agile Delivery (DAD)

- Continuous Delivery Lifecycle
Disciplined Agile Delivery (DAD)

• Exploratory Lifecycle
Large Scale Scrum

- Framework-1 (up to ten teams)
Large Scale Scrum

• Framework-2 (up to ten teams)
SAFe v2.5
Version 3.0
Q&A
References


References

- Additional Reference: