Making Agile work for Design

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March 15, 2023

Hello!

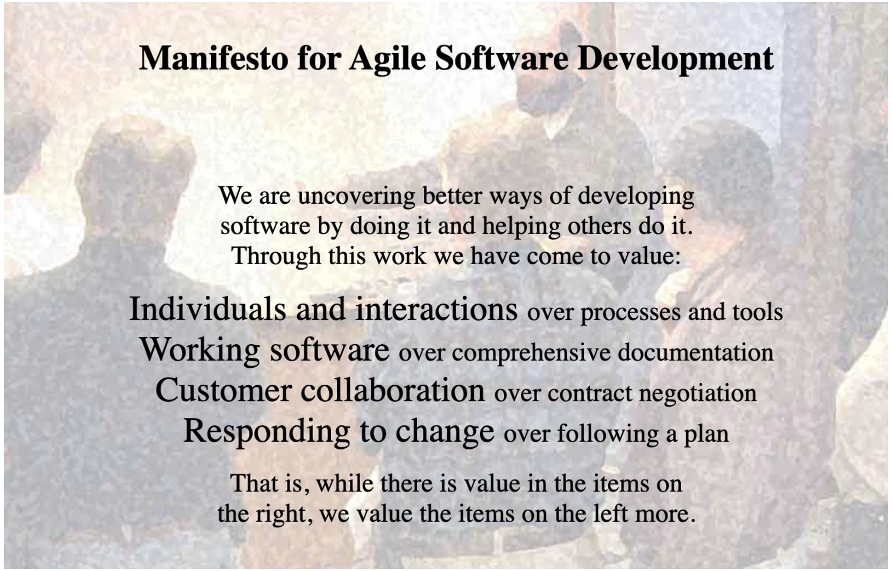
I became interested in Agile when it first showed up as disruptive process in the industry. Most design-centric perspectives were one size fits all and didn't fit my team.

So, I interviewed design folks and wrote a book about what I learned in 2012.

Since then, I've continued to listen and lean, and experienced Agile in many different environments and been a part of the transition to Agile practices at several organizations..

Let’s begin at the beginning...

- In Feb. 2001, the Agile Manifesto was created.
- It was a direct response to Waterfall practices.
- Scrum and Extreme Programming already existed, but weren’t widely adopted yet.
- Kanban and Lean were adapted to fit Agile
- SAFe evolved to serve enterprise companies interested in Agile practices.



Manifesto for Agile Software Development

We are uncovering better ways of developing
software by doing it and helping others do it.
Through this work we have come to value:

Individuals and interactions over processes and tools
Working software over comprehensive documentation
Customer collaboration over contract negotiation
Responding to change over following a plan

That is, while there is value in the items on
the right, we value the items on the left more.

agilemanifesto.org

First principle

Our highest priority is to **satisfy the customer** through early and continuous delivery of **valuable software**

The focus on customer satisfaction and valuable software should resonate with every designer.

The idea of continuous delivery speaks to iteration, also at the core of every successful design effort.

Principle 2

Welcome changing requirements, even late in development. Agile processes **harness change for the customer's competitive advantage**

More commitment to change based on data, feedback from customers - all in the interest of meeting the needs of the customer and with the idea that your tool can be part of their advantage.

Sure, they might not mean front end design, but I'll still take this one. Understanding the problem you are solving and continually checking to make sure your design does that does speed agility, but it won't feel like it at first.

Principle 9

Continuous attention to technical excellence and **good design enhances agility.**

A few things to note

- Most Agile practices are specific to a company and/or team.
- Often, there is no training done to educate the team on practices.
  - OR, the engineering team receives training but not other partner teams.
- **The role of design is typically undefined.**

You have the ~~burden~~ FREEDOM to define Agile for the Design team.

Begin by assessing the current situation

- What process is the team using? What training have they had?
- What is the distribution of the team?
- Where are the communication challenges?
- What do you want and need from the other functional areas?
- What do they want and need from UX?

…Translate these into requirements

Treat this like a design problem - you ARE designing a process

Do your research

- Stakeholders are the customers here - interview your main partners about what they want and need.
- Find out how they do/do not want product design fitting into their process.
- The designers also have critical requirements, so check in with them.
- Do sales and marketing have a stake? Customer support?
- Educate yourself about the Agile process your organization is using.

Things to consider

Who will define the work & populate the backlog?

Product Management

- When PM writes the epics, it documents the conversation between you - helps create shared understanding.
- Serves to create a lightweight contract between the two groups
- Are there roadmap items that can be converted to epics easily?

UX

- UX writes their own user stories and reviews them with the other functional areas during planning and grooming
- These conversations are more organic when UX shares a backlog with their Engineering team.

Grooming and planning

- Can be a single event, or two separate meetings - let your workload and your audience determine that
- Setting the expectations around what work is being done and creating a shared understanding of the scope and activities are critical to success
- Prioritization is critical. Re-prioritization over time is VERY critical.

Should we have “sprints”?

Probably.

If there is any kind of complexity to your situation - timezones, multiple scrum teams, multiple designers, not being co-located - this will be a useful technique.

Creates clear expectation around when UX work will be finished, and provides insight into a process that can often be mysterious to other teams.

(tip - 3 weeks tends to be the sweet spot for sprint length)

Sprint considerations

Sprint dynamics

- UX can be part of the dev sprint OR have their own separate sprints.
- Working within a dev sprint works best if there is a single designer supporting a single team.
- Having a separate UX sprint (aka parallel sprints) allows for a dedicated UX backlog

Sprint length

- Even if you choose independent sprints, it is best if the cadence matches the engineering sprints
- It can be useful to offset by a few days to avoid collision of planning/grooming/kickoff events

Research & Design deliverables

- Research CAN be done within an Agile framework. Both Discovery work and Usability Testing are can fit in.
  - Spikes
  - Dedicated Sprints
- You may find that you can work in lower fidelity for longer - if Agile actually is supporting closer collaboration.

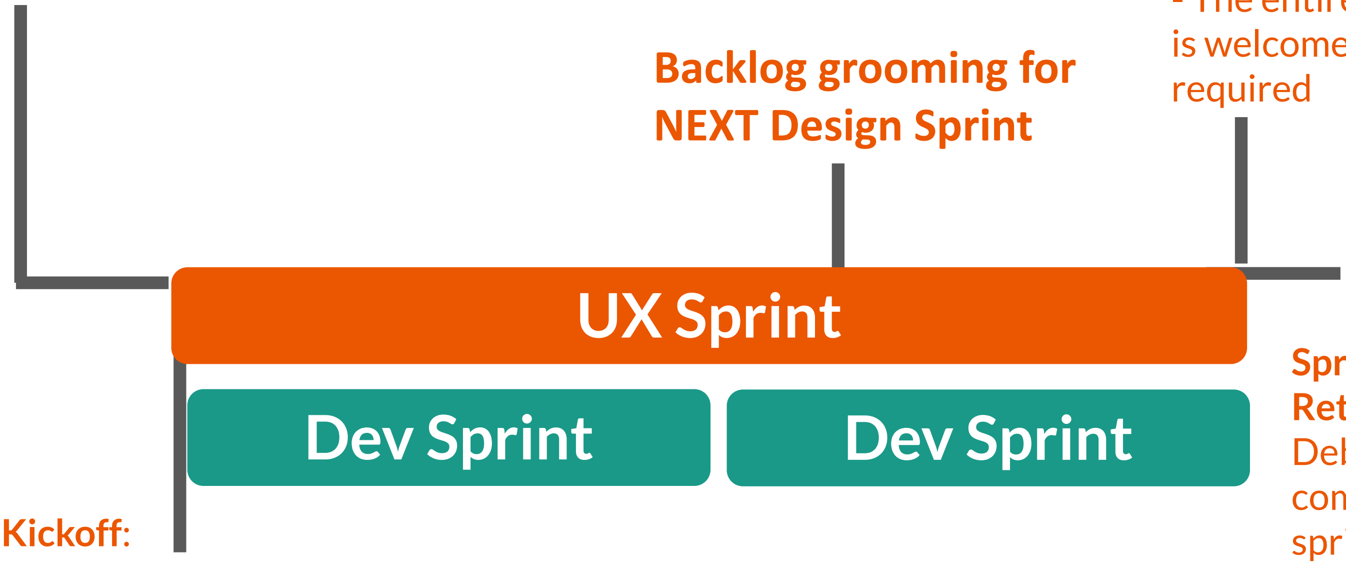
Document. Communicate. Do it again.

- Make a picture.
- Review it, discuss it, get public buy-in from stakeholders.
- Publish the process.
- **Re-visit during retrospectives** or hold routine reviews with stakeholders.
- Adjust as needed.

Backlog grooming:
The **Product Managers** and **UX** will review the priority and granularity of tickets. Architects are welcome, but not required.

Backlog grooming for NEXT Design Sprint

Sprint Review:
- A final formal review of the design with the **PM** and **Architects**
- The entire **product team** is welcome, but is not required



UX Sprint

Dev Sprint

Dev Sprint

Sprint Kickoff:
A brief meeting where we review the groomed items and identify the work that the **UX** team will commit to for the sprint.
This meeting includes **PM** and **Architects**.

Sprint Retrospective:
Debrief after completion of the sprint with **UX, PM, Architects**

Questions?
Or, even better, share your story!