



Agile Processes in Telecom Sales Teams

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Introduction

As the first and the leading Agility services company in Turkey, we are proud to assist over 100 IT teams and very excited to explore Agile processes in non-IT teams. This white paper summarizes one sales team's Scrum transition.

The company reviewed is one of the largest GSM operators in Middle East and East Europe region. With over 2000 employees, they provide innovative value added services to over 8 million customers.

The company focused on revenue growth while keeping the EBITDA and EBIT at certain levels for its competency in the market. Those highly challenging objectives and financial goals pushed the sales department to segment its sales channels, especially the enterprise channel according to the revenue potential of the customers. Consequently a new sales channel called the Large Enterprise founded in order to boost the mid segment of the enterprise sales.

Founding a new department for sales came with many challenges. First and the far most was the chaotic environment; while sales is an activity itself has many unknowns which constitute a level of complexity period, being a new department, the functional structure of the company was leveraging the level of predictability and planning.

The main forces that created this volatile environment were:

- Focus on sales as a highly dependent activity (dependent on customers, competitor's new products and services, marketing, procurement and weather conditions etc.),
- Creation of the new segment and new department,
- New employees,
- The functional business units that has to work together to achieve the expected results whereas the business units had different KPI's and goals only for their domain areas not for the sales as a whole which was a risk for creating a sales oriented cross functional team

The Company contacted us for their Non-IT teams to go Agile, starting with the sales teams. We were very glad to see that Agile transition was not only being implemented into It department. This was also very exciting because there are actually very few well known examples of Non-IT Agile applications at the global scale.



The experience shared in this paper includes the introduction and use of the Agile processes, mainly utilizing the Scrum framework, for controlling the chaos, increasing the sales with less bureaucracy, enhance learning and coordination of sales teams.

Keywords: Scrum in Sales, Agile Project Management, Scrum in Non-IT, Organizational Agile Transformation

I. Setup

Team Forming

The first thing to do was forming a team of people to Scrum. The sales people were having difficult times with the Sales Support department and Activation department. However, the team should include those people as well, as a cross-functional business team is necessary.

Many meetings were held with people from different departments to have the right team members single focused on the sales team.

After the process the new reformed team was able to accomplish at least 70% of their responsibilities on their own.

Roles

The Scrum Team had 6 people including a Scrum Master joining from a completely different organization, who managed the Agility process throughout the company.

The Product Owner was the Manager of the sales employees. That was a risk for the Scrum team as a Scrum team should manage and organize themselves and tasks.

Training

After the team was formed, training process began. The team had formal Agile & Scrum training to transition into a new state of thinking and working. All the roles in the team participated in training including the high level managers and executives who were necessary at the training because if the management does not understand the dynamics and the mechanics of Scrum, they might harm the self-organization, accountability and collective ownership of the team.

Team Norms

The cross-functional Sales Team shared the same workspace with a designated area for their Sprint Backlog, Impediment List, Burn down Charts and Retrospective Results.

The Scrum Team decided to run weekly Sprints and Daily Scrums in the morning with very strict late-box rules.

The Product Backlog was decided to be the CRM tool that the sales department was using before going Agile. Team members used to have monthly and quarterly goals to achieve individually, but this approach was a risk for being a team, so the sum of the individual's goals were decided to be the team's goal for the Sprints. The Team was accountable for the Sprint plan to reach the goals.



Since estimating the workload that the team committed to weekly was depended on the customer and external conditions, they chose not to. The value and the contract renewal dates were sufficient inputs for prioritizing the work.

The main performance criteria for the team was customer acquisition, calculating the number of visits to the customers and retention of the current customers.

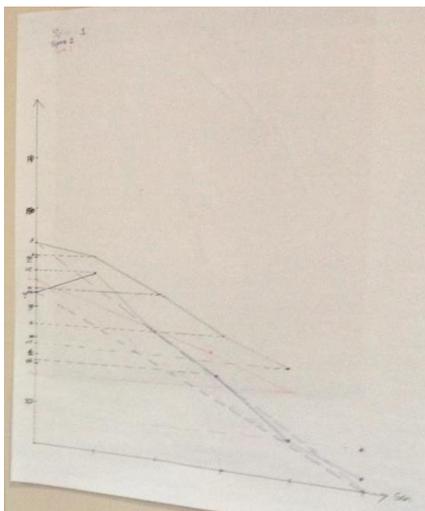
A Definition of Done was rendered according to the type of work that the team was doing. It was a mixture of Definition of Done and Acceptance Criteria which compared to an IT team, are separate concepts. So instead there were 3 types of DoD (Definition of Done) for each objective; acquisition, visits and retention.

II. Implementing Scrum

After the training and setup, the Sales Scrum Team started Sprinting. Daily meetings were the heartbeat of this activity which involved morning planning then going into the field to visit the current and potential customers.

As the team was cross-functional, all of the Team members were trying to help each other even if the need was not in his/her expertise period. An example the people who were responsible for activating the customer lines were trying to call the potential customers on behalf of the field people. This was a great help to the field people who were spending many of their time in the field and working with customers.

The Team shared the same working area which also help the team to resolve the issues very quickly within the support functions.



The team was monitoring their progress towards goals and their weekly processes with a Sprint Review and Retrospective meetings. The Retrospective meetings were promising great Kaizen opportunities. Although process improvement was usually being given from the upper management throughout the company, the Sales Scrum Team was instead coming up with many weak points and solution alternatives for their internal processes.

Instead of the Product Owner pushing the Team hard to sell, the dynamic shifted to make the goals very visible by keeping track of them on the board and sales burn-down charts. Also the team was encouraged to check the weekly goals every day during the standup meetings.

Prioritization was being done by the Product Owner to maximize the sales and to satisfy the unexpected needs of the customers which were very hard to predict early.

Although the company culture was formed around traditional management behaviors, the Scrum Master was blocking the Product Owner from managing the team members individually. This was big difference as compared to the old way of doing work.

After the second month of utilizing Scrum framework, the sales team improved their sales revenue by 65%. The main reasons behind the success were;

- Focusing on sales and empowering the team to decide and execute,
- Weekly, daily and constantly plans to reduce complexity and overhead,
- Orientation of new people into the process with the regular meetings,
- Collaboration on improving the process.

The management was very happy with the results and enforced the other Sales team to go Agile. Also Agile and Scrum were being heard throughout the company with the success of the sales team which increased the demand to implement Agile and Scrum. As a result, we ended up with a lot more to do within the company.

III. Issues & Challenges

The Sales team itself faced with many internal and organizational impediments.

The team as a whole didn't have a KPI for team accomplishment. The team members were judged according to their individual performances. Teaching people how to work as teams at the beginning gave them energy for a while but having different KPI's and targets were obstacles for the team to stay as a team on the long term. The Scrum Master had meetings both with the upper management and HR department to resolve the team KPI problem. This issue is signed as to be resolved organizationally in the mid-term.

The organization was very dynamic; it was hard to adhere to the plan being done at the beginning of the Sprint. This seemed like an organizational issue and addressed to the upper management level as the upper management was often the source of disturbance. Currently the Scrum Masters are dealing with this issue locally by reminding the negative effects of disturbances to the efficiency, to the upper management.

The Scrum Master was trying to keep the team self-organized but people that had different levels within the team were having cooperation issues with each other. This seemed like a cultural problem. The issue is one of the hardest kind to be resolved as it's related to the individual benefits of many people who has high statuses in the company. Change Leaders are working on a better medium for the team members to cooperate.

The pressure coming from upper management was causing the Product Owner to push the team members and that was damaging transparency both inside the team and the organization. Scrum Master was responsible for dealing with transparency issues so she had meetings with the upper management and told the management that Scrum would be harmful if it is applied without transparency. The transparency created by Scrum, used as a tool to judge the team or individuals rather than as a tool to deal with complexity, would again harm transparency and the implementation of Scrum.

IV. Next Steps

Scrum implementation by the Sales team and its success were a huge step for the organization and they saw how effective it could be for the entire organization, especially for the issues which required cross-functionality and complexity management.

Scrum has been spreading throughout the organization for a year and many cross-functional business teams evolved. Customer Care, Marketing, CXO level management, HR Recruitment, and HR Program management were the departments from where the people joined into the cross-functional business Agility teams. Those teams are using Scrum both for project management and as a way of managing daily work.

The need for another organization called the Studio to assist the teams evolved as the number of the teams increased, which might be described in another paper.

About Ahmet

Ahmet is the Co-Founder of ACM, helping organizations through their Agile transitions. Ahmet helps organizations adopt Scrum and other Agile processes in the right way by teaching the fundamentals to all levels in the organizations as a certified trainer, coaching teams and designing the organizational principles-practices-tools for enterprise Agility.

Contributing to many software development and organizational Agile transformation projects in middle and large scale enterprises, Ahmet's expertise on management and framework design directed him to create high quality solutions and best practices within the fundamental principles of Agile processes. He has been coaching and consulting companies with a combination of extensive know-how and experience on both the process and practices side of Agile. Ahmet is also the Co-Founder of the pioneer Agile association, www.agileturkey.org in the Middle-East and East-Europe region.

About ACM

As the first and leading provider in Agility services in Turkey, ACM assists numerous local and international companies to become further adaptable. ACM collaborates with public and private sector companies of all sizes to help them; be more value driven, deliver their services or products faster, manage changing demands, reduce costs, increase productivity, bring their creativity out and be more innovative through it's training, coaching, consulting, and outsourcing services.

So far, ACM guided over 100 Agile teams mainly within IT, and also in marketing, sales, customer care, C-level management and cross-functional business units. Over 4.000 professionals from more than 200 companies across 10 industries have been trained in ACM's courses. Furthermore, ACM provides Agile team and team member outsourcing services such as Scrum Team, Software Developer, Scrum Master, Product Owner, and other numerous capabilities.

For more information:

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Youtube: www.youtube.com/ACMAgileLabs

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About Scrum.org

Scrum.org leads the evolution and maturity of Scrum to improve the profession of software development, up to the level of the enterprise agility of organizations.

Scrum.org strives to provide all of the tools and resources needed by Scrum practitioners and experts in agility to deliver value using Scrum. Scrum.org maintains the Scrum Guide in 30 languages. Scrum.org provides Scrum assessments to allow people to evaluate themselves and improve, hosts community forums and webcasts to foster discussion and knowledge transfer, and defines industry-leading Scrum training for practitioners at all levels. All these are part of the overall view of Scrum.org on enterprise agility as covered by the [Agility Path framework](#).