



How to pick and mix methods to succeed in challenging environments

24/06/2019 Competition in the automotive sector is quite heavy. So, to develop completely new concepts beyond automotive and to stand out from the market, Porsche Digital likes to break new ground.

At the beginning of January, I had an unusual idea on my desk: a product that should enable customers to individualize the design of their vehicles. All my colleagues, who had already seen the idea, were thrilled. That's why we were eager to launch the service very soon — this season, to be exact. Roughly six months to go from the initial sketch to the Minimum Viable Product (MVP), first available product version. That's where I came in: With conventional industry methods and in a conservative environment, such a project would not be realizable in this short time. But with my support as an Enterprise Agile Coach, it could. So, today I'd like to take you with me on this exciting journey.

Take your time, especially when you don't have much

Firstly, I put together a small, cross-functional team that would overcome the boundaries of the established approaches. This was essential in order to be able to complete the project in the given time. It was also important to get to know the individual team members from different disciplines as well as possible — who are these people and what skills do they have?

The next step: The product owners thoroughly studied the challenges ahead to understand them properly, analyze the problems and choose the right approach. In general, I attach great importance to taking a moment at the beginning of each project and not running blind on it. This always pays off, especially when time is short.

The requirements of this project crystallized quickly: The project team has to be fast, concentrated and creative, but it can only rely on limited personnel resources. And then there is the deadline. The trick was to organize the work in a way that the project could be implemented within the specifications.

Together, we decided to concentrate on the most important parts of the value chain. We only wanted to tackle the parts of the value chain where our team could provide a unique service, the remaining tasks were assigned to highly qualified partners — that drastically reduced the quantity of work. This approach is not unprecedented, but relatively rare. We are courageous. But with reason.

Fixed time quota, common place of work, minimalist structures

From the end of January on, the team met two days a week. Everyone only worked with a certain percentage of their time in this team, but we managed to find these time islands together. This is very important in volatile projects: we have to be able to work directly with each other — otherwise, we only produce waste heat, but no progress.

Spacial proximity also played an important role: a team needs a common place to discuss and visualize ideas. We found this place in an open workspace at Porsche Digital — without further ado, we grabbed a corner and declared it a project area.

The team then designed a product pilot that was tested with real customers. The mission: In the good lean startup tradition, we had to find out whether there was a real need for our product in our target group. From the reactions of the target group we deduced which approaches should be developed further — and which not. This preparatory work enabled us to learn quickly in terms of content and methodology and to continue the work in a targeted manner.

Clear goals — maximum freedom of action

I gave the team maximum self-responsibility from day one. In the work process, we only agreed on short-term goals, but not more. This meant that the team constantly set goals together, such as: "Delivery object XY must be ready by the end of next week", but did not define the details and the route to get there. As soon as we had agreed on goals together, each member or subteam was allowed to work self-determinedly and was given the greatest possible leeway in their work.

Rituals such as daily stand-ups are important in agile work. To reduce such rituals to the bare essentials, the team decided to hold a single meeting a week in which various rituals were integrated — everything else was taken out of the toolbox at short notice if needed. Outside the weekly meeting, we remained in constant communication at all levels so that the common goal remained present.

This kind of cooperation is totally exciting for me. We work undogmatically with a mix of methods and different frameworks, renounce all possible conventions — and make rapid progress. That's how it works!

Stay tuned to read more about the project — I'll be happy to share our further experiences.

Info

A guest article by Miguel May, Enterprise Agile Coach. He advises in particular in specialist areas of companies such as Product Owner, Chief Product Owner, Line Managers, Management Board and external Business Stakeholders. Coaching for Scrum Master (Scrum) and Delivery Manager (Kanban). Support in the context of agile and digital transformations, innovation projects, the introduction of agile methods such as Scrum and Kanban, crisis management during stagnant introductions of agile methods, development of lean startup areas. This article was first published as an interview for "AGILE POWER GUIDE (Handelsblatt Fachmedien 2019)". For more details, get in touch with us on Twitter (Porsche Digital Lab Berlin, Porsche Digital), Instagram (Porsche Digital Lab Berlin, Porsche Digital) and LinkedIn (Porsche Digital Lab Berlin, Porsche Digital).

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Daniela Rathe

Director Politics and Society
+49 (0) 170 / 911 2434
daniela.rathe@porsche.de

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