

Biomedical Institute Discovers Cure for Development Ills

The Challenge

A biomedical research institute's Scrum and XP adoption had stalled. The organization's clients—a complex network of internal subject matter experts, external institutes and government agencies—were increasingly frustrated with late delivery and quality problems. Teams struggled to navigate conflicting project options. New projects loomed, while late ones lingered.

The Solution

EBG facilitated a self-assessment workshop. The team discovered that while it had spent a great deal of energy on some XP and Scrum practices, it had failed to bring subject matter experts and customers into the process. This disconnect had resulted in rework, late deliveries, and internal discord.

EBG re-launched a pilot team using release and sprint planning workshops. EBG helped to establish a regular cadence for refining the backlog, thereby reducing sprint planning time and increasing team velocity. EBG worked with the software engineers and testers on acceptance test and requirements elicitation, while also coaching the leadership team on collaboration, product roadmapping and release planning. Some specific activities included:

- Adapt Kanban to meld with Scrum
- Define precise test specifications
- Conduct ongoing retrospectives
- Use structured conversations to discover features and stories
- Identify and deliver “just enough” documentation

The Results

The engineering organization more than doubled its velocity while decreasing defects through automation and more focused functional tests. Planning and estimating became more efficient, the predictability of delivered work increased significantly, and the team was able to deliver more for each release. Multiple partner institutes lauded the organization's release planning and collaboration practices as “best in class.”

“...The [workshops] engaged our stakeholders [making them] an integral part of the project team. ... We had been struggling with how to write user stories. With [EBG's] guidance, we ... were able to use them as an effective tool. By ... partnering with our customers to identify the highest value features, we were able to deliver a very successful initial release.” – Engineering Manager