



THE SMARTER WAY

Large US insurance company
substantially increases productivity
using the Essential Unified Process

A highly mature US insurance provider uses the Essential Unified Process (EssUP) to dramatically increase their software development agility and capacity with a 30% productivity improvement. The iterative and team essential practices were tailored to meet specific organizational needs, piloted with a few teams, and rolled-out on a broad scale to the organization.

Business need >

As in all industries, insurance providers compete by being able to provide more value, added services and to quickly respond to market needs. For this particular insurance provider, the need was even more compelling due to extreme competitor marketing and targeting of their existing customer base. The need was to strike back through improved capacity to quickly respond to market needs and to deliver competitive services over the Internet.

Solution >

This organization already knew what EssUP practices they needed to implement to be able to improve agility, time-to-market and productivity: the Iterative and Team essentials.

In fact, being a very mature organization, they had previously already successfully explored these practices using a mentor-heavy and fairly ad-hoc approach. They needed to move beyond these early successes to a scalable approach for implementing these practices, but without changing all the existing practices. They were looking for a solution that would scale within an organization with well-defined process while at the same time not change everything.

This is where the separation of practices in the Essential Unified Process together with minimalist process documentation for the Iterative and Team essentials proved to be a robust but still light-weight approach for scaling up. In fact, the Essential Unified Process provided a sufficiently described practice that integrated well in the organization's existing project life cycle – in contrast to the more mentor-heavy and ad-hoc approaches explored earlier.

Benefits >

From the previous exploratory implementation of collocated, dedicated and iterative project teams, the organization measured a 30% productivity improvement. It was these benefits that were desired on a broader scale from a systematic roll-out of iterative and team practices.

We are great but still need to improve >

A sign of any mature organization is that they know that they are good but that they always need to improve. This was strikingly the case with this particular organization. Knowing that they already delivered most projects on-time and with the desired features, they still wanted to go beyond that towards higher levels of excellence. The key emphasis for the transformation of the IT organization was time-to-market. Since product and use-case essentials were mostly in place, the key practices desired were the iterative essentials and the team essentials.

“How do we scale our early pilots to the whole organization?”

“How can we scale our early exploratory successes with iterative” was the question the program manager asked IJI. In response, IJI demonstrated how the iterative essentials practice would allow for an agile, light-weight approach to iterative development in a way that would both integrate into their existing project life cycle model (their phases) and that would not require them to change their requirements, architecture and testing processes.

Together with representatives from their different process owners, different alternatives were explored to best apply the Essential Unified Process to fit their existing organizational culture.

Customizing the practices, training and mentoring >

In the chosen approach we started out from the existing EssUP assets in terms of cards, guidelines, training curriculum and templates. The templates were tailored to be integrated into existing project planning templates. The standard guidelines were used as a source for preparing a guideline that was handed to all collocated teams.

We then developed workshop guidelines and created a performance-oriented training curriculum that was optimal to the teams. The performance-oriented training curriculum consisted of two days of training that would equip the teams to perform iterative development with a minimal set of mentoring. The learning objectives were defined in terms of skills or capacities that the learners would exhibit after the training and the subsequent mentoring.

Piloting the EssUP Iterative and Team practices >

Using the tailored guidelines and training curriculum, the practices were then piloted with a few teams during their first iteration(s). The success of each training class was assessed against the performance-oriented learning objectives set up for the class. These pilots and the assessments provided opportunity to further tailor and improve training curriculum, mentoring strategies, templates, and other material.

Since the first pilot teams were able to successfully plan, execute and assess the first iteration while maintaining stakeholder involvement, we concluded that the roll-out risks were low enough to move to an organization roll-out of the practices.

Rolling out new practices is “business as usual”

Again, we were struck by the maturity of this organization as they embarked on the organization-wide roll-out. Being in a mode of constant improvements, the organization simply defined the roll-out of the new practices as a project with the appropriate stakeholders, sponsors, asset owners and core team. In this, project objectives were defined, risks were assessed, the roll-out was planned, and roll-out execution initiated.

The roll-out then commenced with a two-day class and two days of mentoring, to bring one additional team each week up in speed with iterative and team practices. At the same time the organization invested substantially in establishing suitable team working areas, where teams could be collocated and seated with desks facing each other – where each team made up a separate “island” in the office landscape and had their own dedicated workshop room to use.

At this point we trained local resources to provide the training and mentoring and we phased out having seen the roll-out initiated. The plan was thus to bring one more 5-15 people team up in speed in iterative and team practices each week.

With these instalments in place our client has taken yet another important step to maintain their leadership in the insurance industry - by constantly improving their practices to be best in class using IJI’s practice approach.

Iterative development >

IJI provides mentoring and training to management and development teams to enable an iterative development approach to be adopted. Each iteration produces a new release of the software that is demonstrated to the project stakeholders. This results in a rapid convergence on the correct business solution. A test-driven approach supported by a continuous-integration environment ensures that production quality code is continuously evolved and verified, resulting in very high quality code being released for final testing and deployment.

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Ivar Jacobson International

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