Large European Financial Institution Credits IT Transformation to Ivar Jacobson International

Dramatic improvements in release to acceptance testing times from one and half years to three months.

Re-energized staff working effectively together as a team.

Reorganized and simplified way of working which reduced administrative effort and ensured the team was focussed on program goals and objectives.

More open and agile environment with less configuration/change management issues providing more speed and control of work.

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Introduction

A commitment to data accuracy and integrity requires a highly computerized environment to support the timely production of commercial and individual credit reports. A large trusted European credit information agency which is owned by many of the large European banks needed to ensure it maintained its market leading position and its quality service delivery to clients. To do so, the European credit information agency undertook a modernization initiative to move their IT applications to a new architecture. Its existing mainframe system, applications and services had become both too inflexible and costly as the organization planned to offer new services and customized solutions. Employees that were trained and extremely knowledgeable on the mainframe system were nearing retirement age. This leading credit agency knew they were facing a knowledge management problem. A new IT modernization program was imperative.

The Introduction of a Modernization Program

The goal of the program was to de-commission the existing mainframe based technology/systems and move over to new technology that would:

- improve flexibility and security
- reduce complexity and time to market
- enhance cost-effectiveness for building and enhancing IT components
- enable the introduction of web based applications and services.

Introducing a Proven Approach

As the modernization program took off, its project and system teams were positive and worked together to ask questions, communicate across their various areas, teams and roles. A lot of code and other outputs were produced. However, as the program gained steam its complex structure coupled with technology challenges began to slow down the teams. These issues needed to be resolved to make the program the success the company wanted.

"IT modernization was an extremely valuable and important project for us," said the CIO. "When we began to see some problems with delivery we began to research third party consulting firms that could help us. We chose IJI because of their breadth of experience in delivering agile projects but with very well defined practices that have been proven to work at many large enterprises."

With help from IJI's senior consultants, IJI assessed, presented and then helped the team address some key areas for improvement. These included:

- Simplification of the program structure
- Revising the requirement architecture, design and coding approach to allow incremental functional deliveries
- Revising the team structure including responsibilities, accountabilities and authority
- Reinvigoration of standard configuration and change management practices
- Communication
- Operational issues with insufficient allotted resources and technology skill improvement
- Changing the organization's approach to knowledge management

Creating a Working Party

Virtual Working Parties (VWP) is a concept that was introduced to the organization to help them to better plan and resource throughout their iterations – a way to address key "non system" work that had been neglected or not planned or resourced. Although these 'non system' work items appeared inconsequential, in reality they were causing problems for the project.

Project team members were asked to volunteer to help resolve critical issues and once the issue was resolved; the VWP was disbanded or reconfigured with new members. The only stable member of the working party was the leader so that continuity and knowledge management were maintained.

The Virtual Working Party resolved key issues in the development and test environments as well as configuration and change management issues. In addition, the VWP concept increased morale and empowered staff to take action and get involved.

The Power of Use Cases and Iterative Practices

Creating a separation between the project and the product conceptually and tying them together with the backlog items and making them reference-able and traceable to objectives on the iteration plans resulted in much better day to day control of work, workload and configuration management. Technical staff now had more control and authority for their work while ensuring that the work aligned to the project goals and objectives. At the same time, management and sponsors now had the ability to see how the development work related to their business and project goals and objectives.

Project Team Simplification

The original program had become a bit overwhelming from an administrative point of view. The per sub-component structure of the technical teams had led to the creation of two discrete systems rather than an integrated solution. IJI recommended that the program be simplified into a single project with the feature teams, all working together on a single small release to acceptance testing every three months.

"When we engaged with IJI, they had committed to helping us deliver a release to acceptance test in three months. Something we had not previously accomplished," said the CIO. "IJI not only met that target but its Use Case Essentials and Iterative Essentials practices gave us much better day to day control of the project which helped us to ensure our work aligned with the program goals and objectives and also improved our visibility with senior management and sponsors."

IJI worked with the organization to restructure the program to a simpler, flatter structure. This change provided a reduced management overhead and facilitated quicker decisions as well as reinforcing a team mindset between developer and sponsor-stakeholder groups. Additionally the simplification gave the team a single iteration plan so everyone was focussed on the same goals and theme.

Standardizing on a Document Repository

Document control and management is a critical component of good software development. The customer did have environments in place for proper versioning, configuration management and change control; however IJI recommended some changes to help them improve in this area and to ensure versioning was always correct and proper change controls were always in place.

Conclusion

Increasingly, outside forces are pushing on many organizations to strategize and implement IT modernization programs. These complex projects provide opportunities for smart organizations to respond to the challenge of moving into a more modern environment by embracing and adapting to a truly agile business world.

"Since the restart we have been able to continuously keep up the delivery date with desired quality and functionality. The way-of-working has been a major part in our success so far and we see increased performance in our productivity and control," said the CIO.

The customer's IT modernization program team recognized the importance of working in an agile way that was tied to proven and well defined practices. By working with trusted partner Ivar Jacobson International, they were able to dramatically improve release to acceptance test times while also delivering predictably, improving stakeholder satisfaction and increasing employee morale and satisfaction.

Sweden
+46 8 515 10 174
info-se@ivarjacobson.com

The Netherlands
+31(0) 20 654 1878
info-nl@ivarjacobson.com

Asia
+8610 82486030
info-asia@ivarjacobson.com

UK
+44 (0)20 7025 8070
info-uk@ivarjacobson.com

Americas
1 703 338 5421
info-usa@ivarjacobson.com

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About Ivar Jacobson International

Ivar Jacobson International is a global services company that helps software organizations transform and improve the way in which they develop software solutions as well as guide them in meeting the expectations of the business. **www.ivarjacobson.com**

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