

Introducing Agility in Libraries

Morgan M. Stoddard, Director of Research Services
George Washington University Libraries & Academic Innovation

Introduction

As an organization, George Washington University Libraries and Academic Innovation recently decided to incorporate Agile principles into the way we work to help us better meet users' needs and further strategic priorities. To give staff the opportunity to learn Agile, a number of cross-functional, collection development teams were created so we could both practice using an Agile framework and help achieve organizational goals related to improving collection stewardship.

What is Agile?

Agile is a "set of methods and methodologies that help . . . team[s] to think more effectively, work more efficiently, and make better decisions" (Stellman & Greene, Learning Agile). It is a way of working that was originally created by the software development community but can be used by a range of organizations. There are multiple Agile methods or frameworks, such as Scrum. Agile work relies on a series of core principles that emphasize transparency, trust, communication, and embracing change:

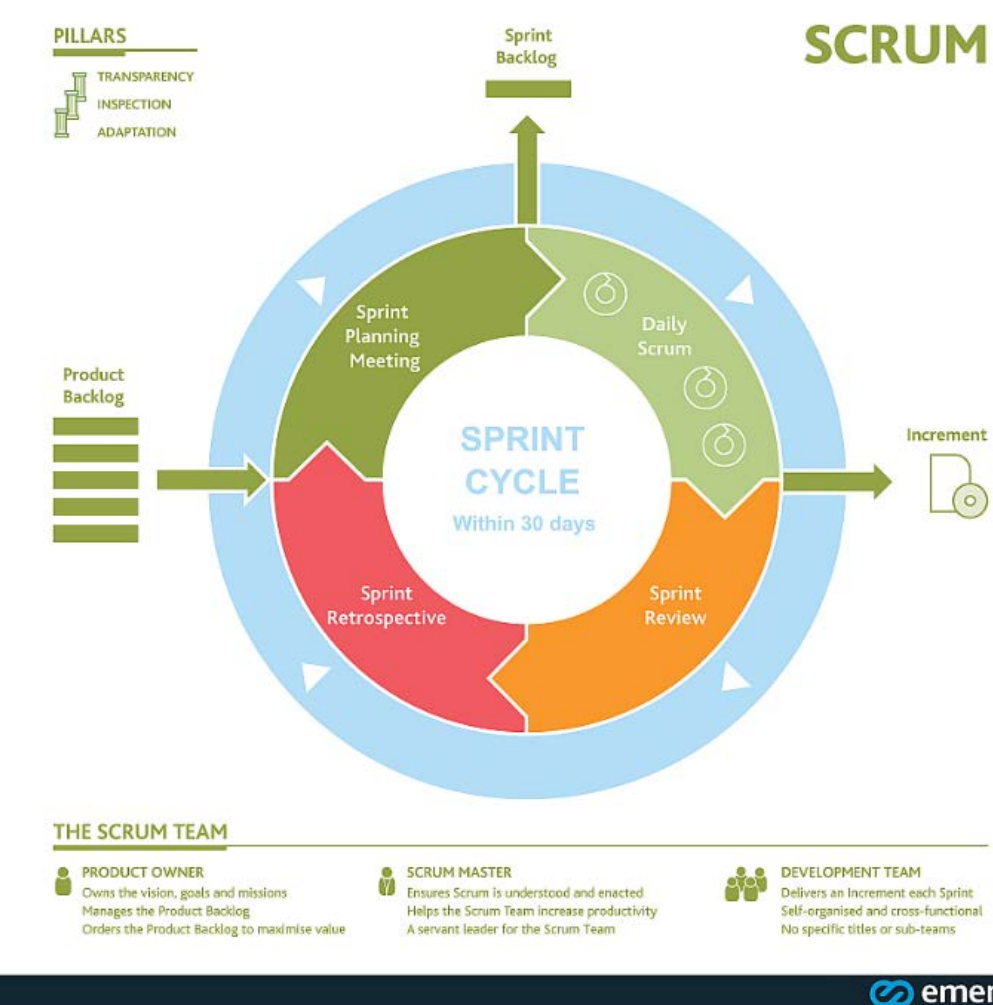


Incorporating Agile Practice

We identified a several key areas in which we wanted to improve our collection development processes and decided that a cross-functional, team-based approach was the best way to achieve our goals.



We organized into five Scrum teams focusing on a different area of collection development (e.g., demand-driven acquisitions) and used Agile principles and a version of Scrum to complete the work. Teams received basic training to help them get started. Certified Scrum Masters led a training session for Product Owners (team leads) and another session for all team members on the fundamentals of Agile and Scrum.



Teams were given a set of basic expectations for how they would incorporate Agile into their work and a preliminary project charter. They were then empowered to self-organize and figure out how to work together in an Agile fashion and complete the work over the course of a year.

Outcomes

In addition to helping us achieve our goal to improve our collection development processes, this work provided a substantive opportunity to learn Scrum and increase the agility of our organization. Teams gained experience using a variety of Agile tools and processes, such as team agreements, task boards, and stakeholder reviews, to ensure that work was prioritized and goals were met. Additionally, teams now have an Agile mindset as a result of this work. For example, one well-known tenet in Agile is the concept of working iteratively and sharing work in progress in order to get feedback and course correct quickly if needed. This is sometimes referred to as "failing fast and small."



Team members were able to experience the benefits of this approach and adopt it in future work. As one team member stated during our collective reflection at the end of the year, "Don't be afraid of failure! We can make improvements and move the needle incrementally."

Lessons Learned

Incorporating Agile principles and adopting a framework like Scrum can be challenging. We learned a few lessons over the course of this initiative on how to help teams succeed as they navigate this entirely new way of working:

- Provide both introductory and ongoing **training**
- Create regular opportunities for **reflection**
- Consider getting an **agile coach** to support the teams
- **Communicate** openly and frequently
- Recognize and celebrate **success**

Image Credits

Visual Agile Manifesto, <http://www.lynncazaly.com.au/the-visual-agile-manifesto/>
Scrum Diagram, <http://www.emern.com/blog/learning/scrum-the-diagram/>
Fail & Win, <https://plus.google.com/+Australianpropertyforum/posts/LtZgdHD9zNY>