Legaltech® news

🖨 Click to print or Select '**Print**' in your browser menu to print this document.

Page printed from: *https://www.law.com/legaltechnews/2022/03/24/applying-an-agile-approach-in-the-legal-technology-sector/*

Applying an Agile Approach in the Legal Technology Sector

Fundamentally, organizations need technology to evolve. Going through an agile transformation facilitates this evolution by starting with the people first, and then moving onto the processes to make them more flexible.

By **George Tsounis, Stretto and Peter Erubami, Agile Sentinel** | March 24, 2022

Credit: ipopba/Adobe Stock

The COVID-19 pandemic and other recent events have increased the need for the legal industry to adapt quickly to remain competitive in an ever-changing business and legal climate. An agile transformation will shift an organization towards embracing an innovative approach to transparency, shared ownership, accountability and consistent improvement. In addition, legal technology organizations can benefit from building their own culture with the adoption of agile values and principles while tailoring technical practices to improve the collaboration of technology teams, business groups, and end-users.

What is an Agile Approach to Product Development?

An agile approach to product delivery is based on a set statement of values, principles, and practices for iterative and incremental delivery of value. It enables a deeper conversation between the business and technology teams that ultimately will benefit the end-user because it is guided by their needs and preferences obtained through constant feedback. By going through an agile transformation, technology and business teams can change the mindset and culture of an organization so that team members embrace new ways of working and achieve greater collaboration and trust.

Traditionally, technology organizations have followed the "waterfall" model of software delivery, which is based on rigid, sequential phase-gate approach. It starts with an extensive documentation process that produces a detailed set of requirements. Each functional group works in silos to complete assigned work before passing it on to the next team. When everything is done, the software is tested and handed over to the customer.

The waterfall methodology often does not deliver what the customer wants, runs late and over budget because team members are siloed, working on individual requirements, and not testing the technology with the end-user along the way. It assumes that all necessary features are known at the beginning of the development cycle because it forces teams to concretize ideas through extensive upfront planning and documentation. In addition, it can lead to waste by building features that customers no longer need by the time they are released.

An agile approach also provides the ability to take on "bite-size" projects, learn from them and refine the process at every step, rather than only tackling large-scale projects. Features are added incrementally from the start of the project, instead of trying to deliver them all at once near the end.

How Can an Agile Approach Be Applied in the Legal Services Sector?

Today's legal technology providers are facing more challenges than ever in meeting the needs of the legal services sector. Many law firms have traditionally relied on desktop software and working in a traditional office setting. The work-from-home requirements of the COVID-19 era transformed the landscape with remote working, creating the need for new, rapidly-evolving technology solutions that support the legal process and profession.

Time is money and this is especially true within the legal services sector. The ability to provide data in real-time is not only a convenience, but also a cost-saving measure. An agile approach enables solutions that not only can provide real-time access to data, but also continually improve systems so that when fixes and upgrades are needed, they can be done more quickly and efficiently.

Within the bankruptcy services sector specifically, there are tremendous efficiencies that are being realized using agile practices. For example, a software provider that offers technology solutions for filing bankruptcy cases can continually add new features and functionality using an agile approach so that attorneys can file cases more quickly, and ultimately be more productive and profitable. The input from users can be continually assessed and applied to enhance the technology.

Challenges and Strategies to Adopting an Agile Approach

Some organizations may struggle to make the transition to an agile approach. Certain management styles that focus on a top-down approach and linear predictability can force technology teams into a "waterfall" mode. Resistance to change can also present barriers. To address these challenges, technology teams can take the following steps to make the leap to an agile transformation methodology.

Get Trained and Share Knowledge: To help ease concerns and hesitations about taking a new approach, technology leadership can help educate their colleagues and management about the principles behind an agile approach and the benefits it offers. It's critical to establish a thorough understanding of agile methodologies not only among company leadership but also the technology team. Leverage an agile coach and invest in high quality training from certified trainers.

Find The Approach That Fits the Team: It's important to assess the size of the team and specific requirements to determine how best to incorporate agile transformation into the workflow. The needs and opportunities for a smaller organization and team will likely look very different from a large enterprise with multiple projects and initiatives. Use established agile frameworks such as Scrum, Kanban, SAFe, and LESS.

Be Flexible: Flexibility is a key premise of an agile methodology, so it's important to also embrace this mindset when evaluating how best to apply agile practices to the needs of the team and company. Start small and adapt the approach along the way based on learnings.

Have a Customer-Centric Mindset: Co-create products and solutions with customers. Have a deep understanding and empathy of the customer's paint points. Empower teams to test with customers, apply learnings and keep iterating until the customer's paint points are addressed.

An agile approach has potential to support legal technology teams in tackling today's most pressing challenges. Fundamentally, organizations need technology to evolve. Going through an agile transformation facilitates this evolution by starting with the people first, and then moving onto the processes to make them more flexible. In doing so, the technology is there to support the process which ultimately translates to bringing new benefits to the end-user.

George Tsounis is chief technology officer at Stretto (https://www.stretto.com/), a bankruptcy services and technology firm serving the corporate and consumer bankruptcy sectors, as well as professional fiduciaries. George brings more than 25 years of substantive B2B technology expertise and a long track record of achieving significant results through the creation and execution of strategic technology development.

Peter Erubami is founder of Agile Sentinel (https://agilesentinel.com) and offers training and consultancy services that help organizations mature their teams in agile and effectively scale their technology programs. As an enterprise agile coach, Peter works with technology and business executives at leading companies to refine software development processes and methodologies.