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AGILE PROJECT DELIVERY

A THOUGHT LEADER'S PANEL



Panellists: Ben Maffin, Simon Knaggs, Marc Nevins, and Sean Cowan.

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INTRODUCTION



WITH THANKS TO OUR PANELLISTS



Ben Maffin



Marc Nevins



Sean Cowan




Simon Knaggs

Maxwell Bond is a recruitment consultancy, specialising in technology and digital recruitment across the UK, helping companies from FTSE 100's to SME's. Since their inception in 2016, Maxwell Bond and its team of experienced and people-oriented consultants have always put people first. This includes providing exceptional delivery on recruitment, as well as giving back to the community by hosting training and learning opportunities through events and webinars.

Agile Project Delivery was a webinar hosted on Thursday 7th May, by Senior Consultant Riana Butler and led by panelists Ben Maffin, Simon Knaggs, Marc Nevins, and Sean Cowan. You can read the highlights in the following whitepaper. Alternatively you can now rewatch the whole webinar on our YouTube channel by clicking the icon below.





REMOTE TEAM MANAGEMENT

Remote working and team management has inevitably caused a shift in workplace dynamics and communication. This has brought both welcome changes as well as new challenges for leaders and teams.

Many people are enjoying a better work-life balance, and are taking advantage of being able to spend more time with their household families. This is aided by the removal of daily commutes and working from home.

However, with childcare pressures, health anxieties, and complications with collaborative projects being made remote, employees could be facing increased stress.

**"Look after your teams.
Empower them so that they
can deliver"**

- Sean Cowan

These unprecedented working methods are new to everyone, and have demanded adaptation, flexibility, and open-mindedness, especially for leaders who are now managing their teams remotely. The responsibility of managing team morale and wellbeing remains with team leaders, now with the added complication of physical distance and isolation.

BIGGEST CHALLENGES

What are the biggest challenges in remote team management?

EFFECTIVE SUPPORT

Remotely, it becomes harder to track human behaviour or to gauge people's mood and emotional wellbeing. Therefore, knowing when to step in with additional support can be difficult. It's important to schedule one-to-one video calls with team members and have conversations that aren't purely work-focused.

WORK LIFE BALANCE

With people potentially working at different times, the line between work and life can become increasingly blurred. It's important that team members feel comfortable switching off from work once they have finished their day, whatever time that is.

INTERACTION

Some people might rely on work for social interaction with others, so it's important to regularly check in with everyone for work and non-work conversations.

THINGS TO ENFORCE TO SUPPORT HEALTHY WORK-LIFE BALANCE

REGULAR BREAKS

It's important that employees take adequate breaks, where they can stop thinking about work for 5-10 minutes to grab a coffee and refresh.

SWITCHING OFF

'The line between work and leisure time begins to merge as people work different hours, and as their home space becomes their work space as well. It's important to encourage employees to switch off when their working day is over.

'It's important for managers to lead by example here. For instance - stop responding to non-urgent emails after a certain point in the day. Employees will see expectations in your actions as much as what you say.

TRUST YOUR TEAMS

'Over-communication becomes important to make up for a lack of non-verbal signals (facial expressions, body language etc.) but managers and employees should not see this as needing to justify how they spend all their time.

CHECKING IN

Some employees will cope with remote working better than others. It's important that leaders frequently check in with team members, preferably using video calls, to talk about non-work related topics and to check wellbeing.

GETTING THE BALANCE RIGHT

ACHIEVING A HEALTHY WORK LIFE BALANCE

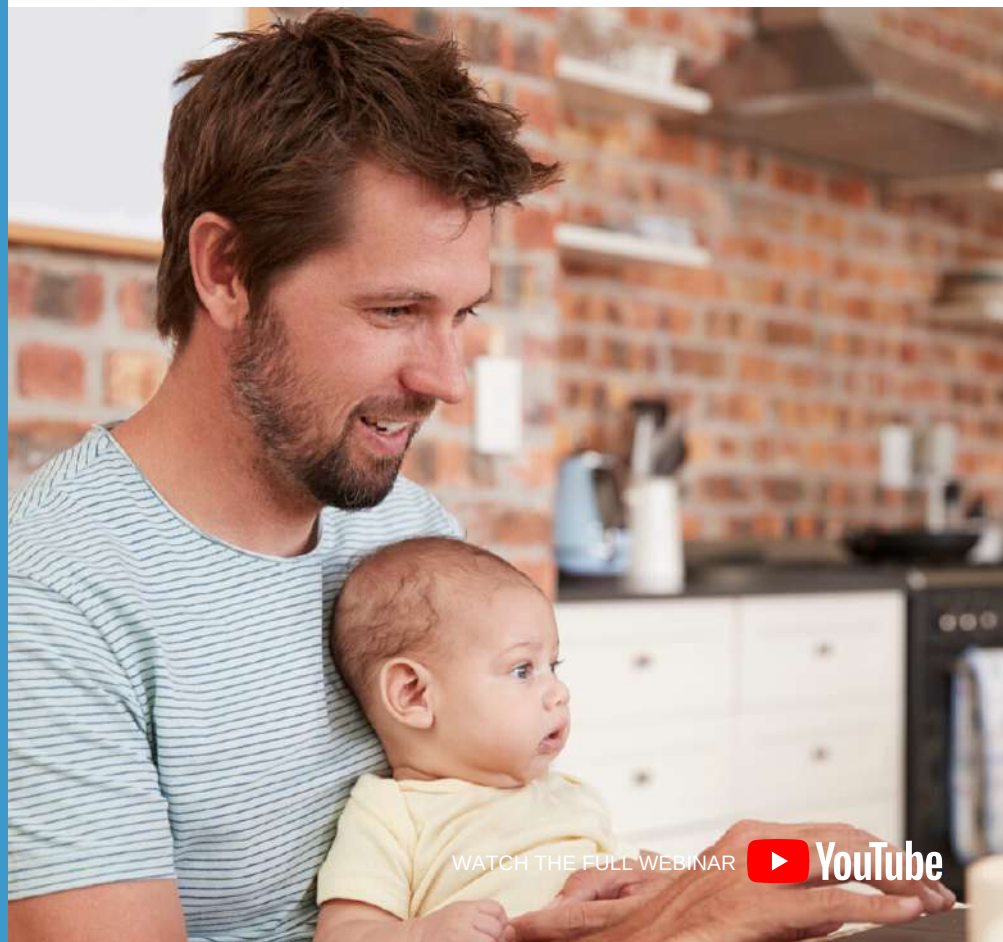
Remote working often encourages workers to feel like they need to work extra hours and over-perform to prove that they are working effectively. People start to refrain from taking regular breaks, from taking their full lunch hour, or finishing work on time. This inevitably leads to burnout, and their work productivity and quality is likely to dip.

In order to deliver value and quality work, workers must be adequately rested and be taking short breaks regularly throughout the day. A burned out worker is no good to anybody.

Whilst working remotely allows many people to self-manage their time, leaders should encourage them to take time for their wellbeing.

"Communication is really important. That includes talking to people about non-work matters"

- Marc Nevins



WATCH THE FULL WEBINAR



MAINTAINING COMMUNITY

HOW DO YOU MAINTAIN EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT
REMOTELY?

Unlike in the office where you can have social conversations when grabbing a coffee, or going on a lunch break, working remotely isolates people from each other physically. This can mean that the workplace sense of community can drop as a result of reduced face to face engagement.

It becomes harder for leaders to identify when someone is struggling, particularly in calls which are audio only. Agile is rooted within osmotic communication and human interaction, and Scrum traditionally relies on face to face interaction for planning, discussion, and collaboration.

Therefore, it is essential to use technology to our advantage. Instead of sending an email, give the intended recipient a five minute call to run through things instead. This saves time, encourages social interaction, and allows you to go through any pain points or issues.

In group meetings, also encourage team members to speak honestly and openly about any questions or issues that they have. This mimics how you would then handle problems within a physical workspace.

**"Technology is your
friend. It enables
communication and
creates presence and
awareness"**

- Sean Cowan

Simon Knaggs pointed out that in some scenarios there is no substitution for face to face engagement. Therefore, when restrictions are lifted, it's likely that there will be a requirement for risk-balancing and management when bringing people together physically.

AGILE IN A REMOTE WORKING WORLD

Project delivery needn't suffer during remote working as the principles of agile and scrum remain the same. Where problems emerge is in scenarios where the agile approach has not been properly implemented. This demonstrates a lack of understanding of what agile is, which can be problematic. However, if fully implemented the ability to deliver, albeit remotely, should not be impacted.

What can become challenging is keeping teams motivated as the foundations of project delivery can become very process driven, when under normal circumstances a people-first approach is key to agile delivery.

Delivery itself however, is still very much achievable. Leaders should continue to maintain a disciplined approach to Scrums, especially with less mature teams, and should continue to focus on the value stream of their work.

SETTING UP AGILE TEAMS REMOTELY

Our panelists reached a consensus on three main points to cover when setting up agile teams. Panelist Ben Maffin explains that these points of focus don't change whether you are setting up a team remotely or not.

Firstly you must establish why you are doing it and have clear and justifiable reasons for doing so.

You must always be the leader, setting an example and encouraging hard work and punctuality across your team, whilst also being supportive and motivational.

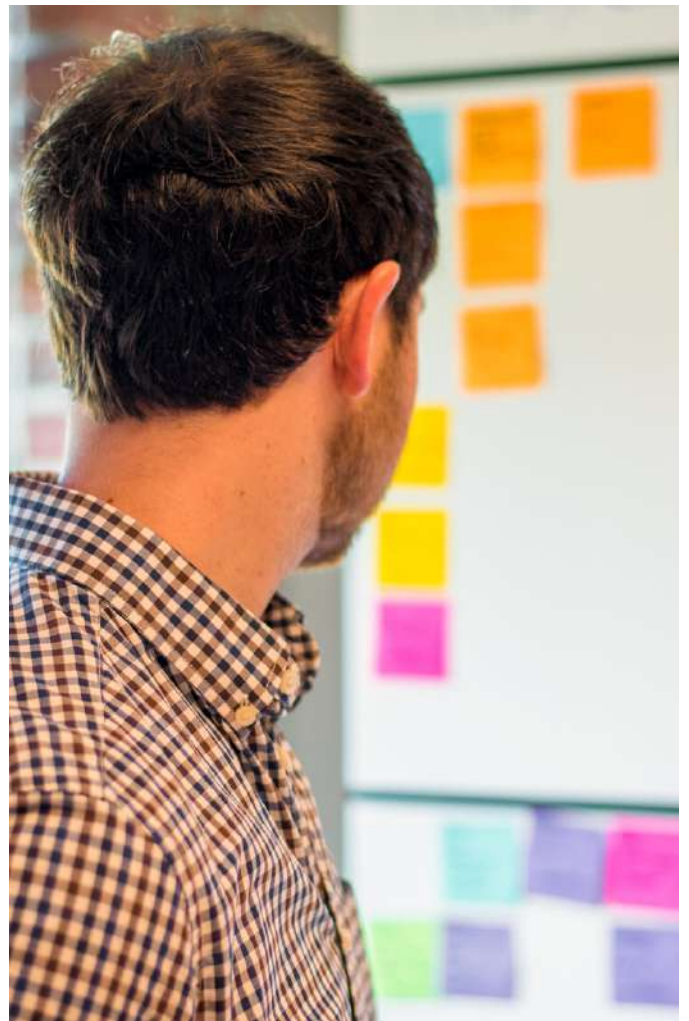
Ensure you have a Product Owner who is involved across all aspects of the project delivery. As the key decision maker, they should be included consistently so they can monitor progress deliver all decisions to the Scrum teams, even if that decision is inputted from somewhere else.

Additionally, Ben Maffin and Simon Knaggs expressed the importance of starting small, with one team in the business on one project, and then replicating throughout the organisation. Maffin further encouraged people to persevere if it doesn't quite work the first time.

Leaders should also keep instilling core principles and values within their teams, and can then allow them to develop their own processes around this. Then, by ensuring that everything is documented for traceability, this introduces a balance between independence and accountability. Daily retrospectives can also support this.

Panelist Marc Nevins also suggested that conducting sprint reviews and sending recordings of these to stakeholders is a useful way to maintain communication, transparency, and accountability.

Bringing team leaders together from across the wider business can also help to keep all business goals aligned, whilst enabling discussion of solutions to common blockers and issues. This is known as the "Scrum of Scrums". These delivery coordination meetings allow teams within the business to stay connected and aware of what everybody is working on.



AGILE AND WATERFALL

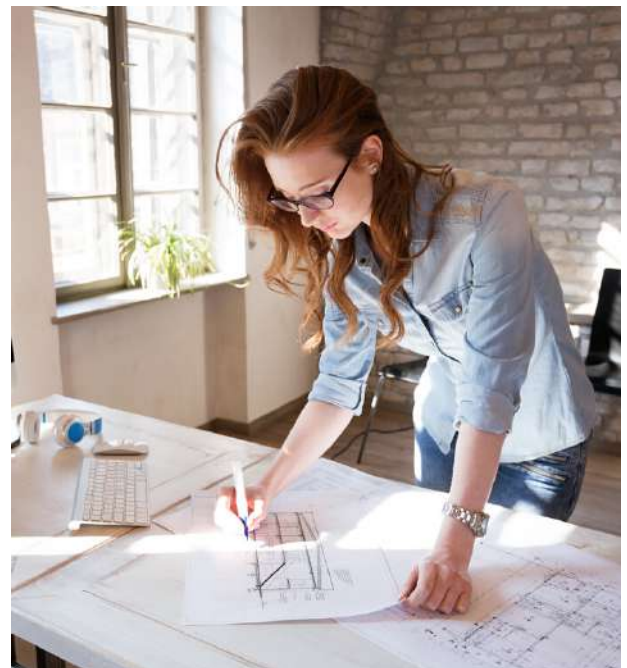
Agile is a popular method of delivery, but it doesn't work in every situation. This naturally led to the final question of our webinar, asked by David O'Hagan, Head of Delivery at Stagecoach, "Is agile ever used as a sole delivery method, or is it always within a waterfall wrapper?"

Agile is not always the best delivery approach. Repetitive exercises with clearly defined outputs, such as moving data to a new platform, do not require agile. Agile is about embracing and accommodating change, so if you can guarantee at the start of a project that nothing is that project is going to change, there is no need for agile. Using Scrums works most effectively where something is being built for functionality and where quality is paramount.

If a project is taking more than four weeks, change is likely, which requires an agile approach and flexibility. This also reinforces the importance of a Product Owner who can mediate the customer relationship and monitor feedback to ensure the right outcome is delivered. This then further prompted discussion around Project versus Product Managers, a topic we will be exploring in a future webinar.

Agile is exploratory, which is great for delivery, and allows teams to identify and solve issues quickly. However, it can also cause a reporting disconnect as it can be challenging to communicate the process to top level employees in a way that they will understand. This is often further complicated by some organisations not fully understanding what agile project delivery is or how it works.

In some respects, it can be useful to incorporate a certain level of reporting and a waterfall approach into certain project deliveries. Marc Nevins explains that he creates a fortnightly PowerPoint presentation which covers performance, sprint goals, blockers, and whether they delivered on what they had planned for. Once this has been seen and responded to by those in senior positions, it is then passed back through the team so that they feel valued and recognised.



"I'm an advocate for both Agile and Waterfall, tempered with connection to the board and keeping them engaged"

- Marc Nevins



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