

Insights into an Agile Adventure with Offshore Partners

Agile 2008 – Mark Summers

This Presentation

- An Experience Report on Distributed Agile from the perspective of the teams coach
- What you will take away
 - Learning's on how to run various Agile meetings across a distributed team
 - Key challenges that you need to address before you start
 - Importance of investing in People

CampusSoft

- Mainly providing services to the UK public sector

- Education

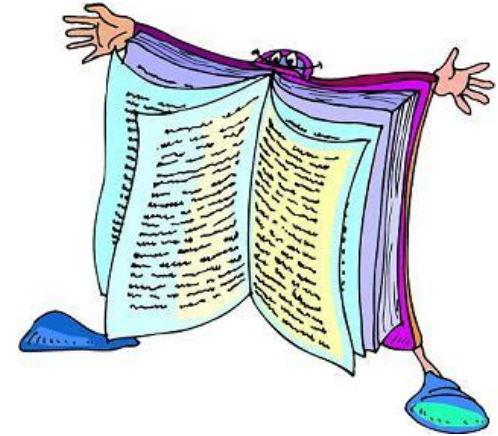
- Health

- Local Government

- Housing

- Regeneration

- Created by the acquisition of many smaller companies
- 2000 members of staff
- Based in 8 regional offices around the UK



About Me – Mark Summers

- Campus Soft

- Worked for Campus Soft for 7 years
- Worked directly with offshore partners for 4 of those years
- Developer, team lead and eventually ScrumMaster
- Led the transition to Agile, working across teams and gaining support from management

- Conchango

- Joined Conchango in 2007 as an Agile Coach
- I work internally coaching/training/mentoring Conchango teams
- I also work externally with clients
- Regularly work with teams spread across multiple time zones

Why Outsourcing?

- **Flexible resources**, it was seen as desirable to have the ability to easily expand and contract the number of resources, based on the amount of work currently in the program.
- **Skills available**, we had good people locally but it was always difficult to recruit the right people with the right skills to supplement those we already had. However India with its plethora of skilled IT professionals appeared to solve this problem.
- **Cost savings**, the cost of having resources offshore was more cost effective than local resources.
- **Professionalism**, a CMM level 5 partner such as the one we chose appeared to offer the controlled environment that would allow us to produce software to a predictable standard.

Offshoring – Before Agile

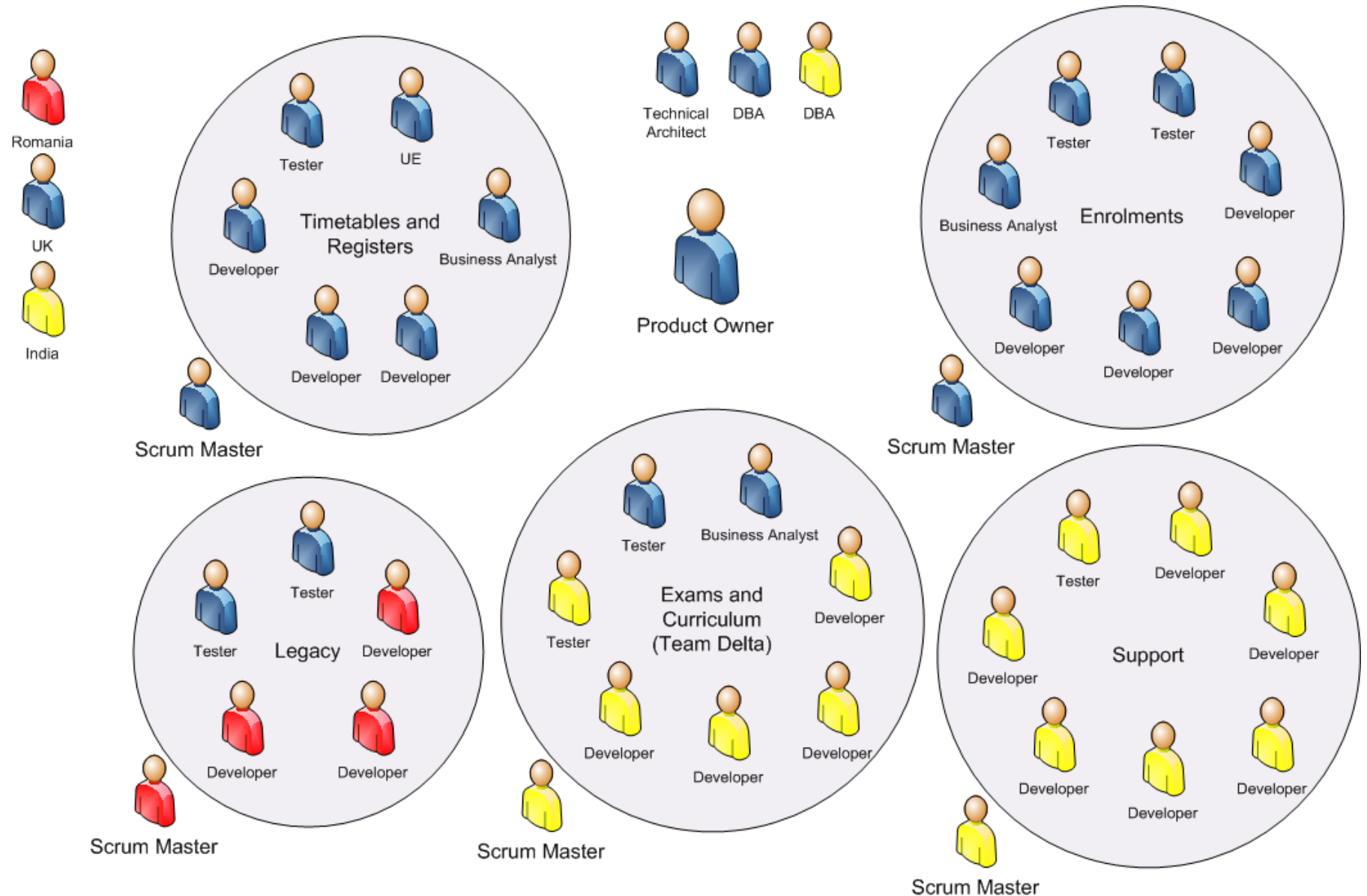
- Specify and Build (Over the wall)
 - Started small, with dedicated support and it worked ok
 - Simple Requirements and technology that was well understood
 - However, started to struggle when we scaled and used new technology

- Onshore developers supporting offshore developers
 - Didn't go completely off-track, but
 - Reduced collaboration between the onshore people
 - Most productive people now coordinating development
 - Going very slow
 - Quality not very high
 - Morale low

Why Agile?

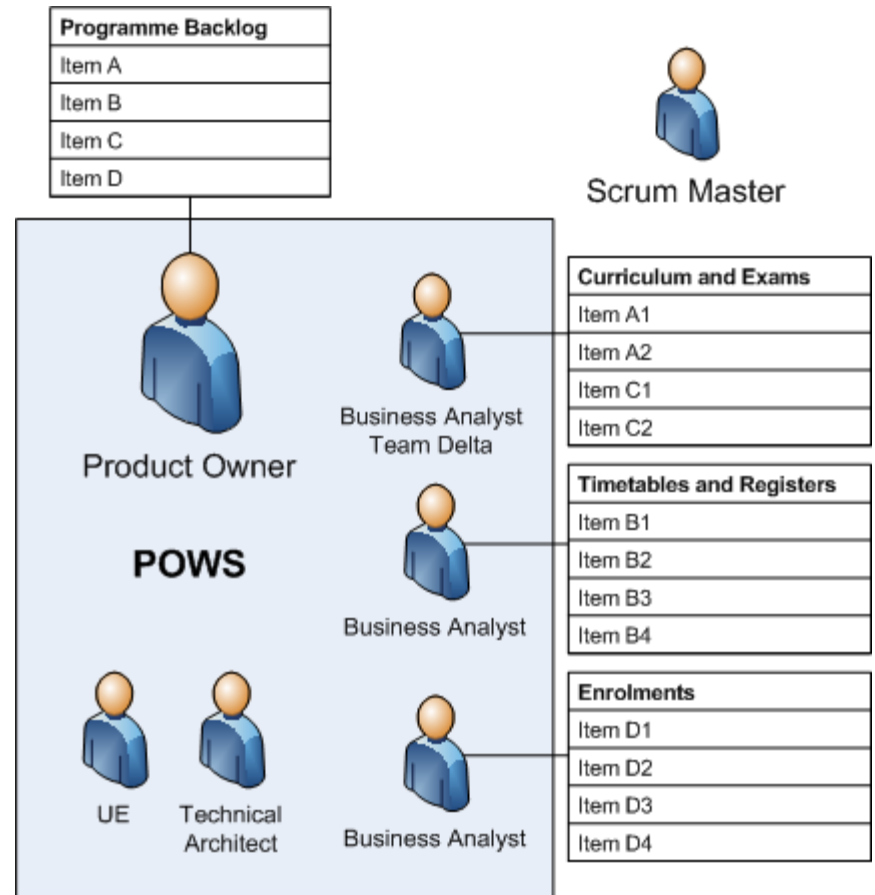
Inspect
and
Adapt

The Team



The Product Backlog

- Started simple with small enhancements
- User Stories forced people to have conversations
- The team worked the Product Backlog to ensure that it was good enough for Planning
- Share the vision
- POWS (Product Owner Weekly Scrum)



Planning

- Preparation

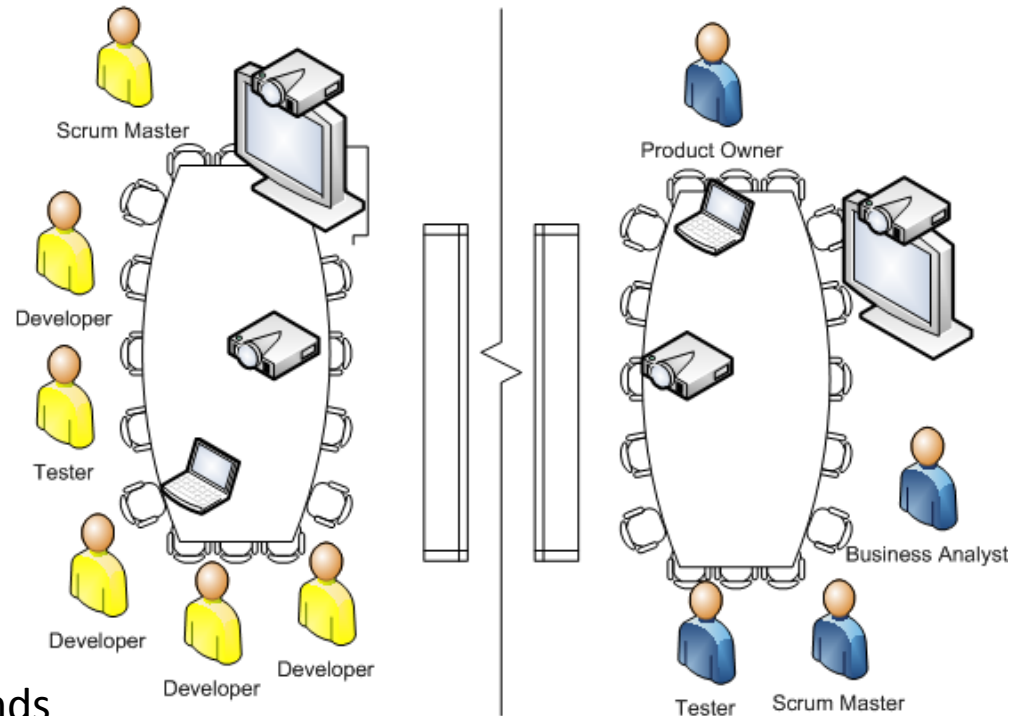
- Room booked and setup
- Test connections before the start
- Product Owner and Backlog

- Collaboration

- Early Sprints, facilitator at both ends
- Planning poker gets people talking
- Make it feel like one meeting room

- Tools

- Software to share each others desktops, projected onto a wall
- Video conferencing, really enhanced the quality of communication



Other Meetings

- Daily Stand-up

- Sharing of desktop to discuss features
- Tool used to manage the Sprint Backlog
- Skype used to have the conversation, quick to start, easy for others to join

- Sprint Review

- Meeting room at both ends, with Skype phones or conference call
- Shared desktop projected onto the wall

- Sprint Retrospective

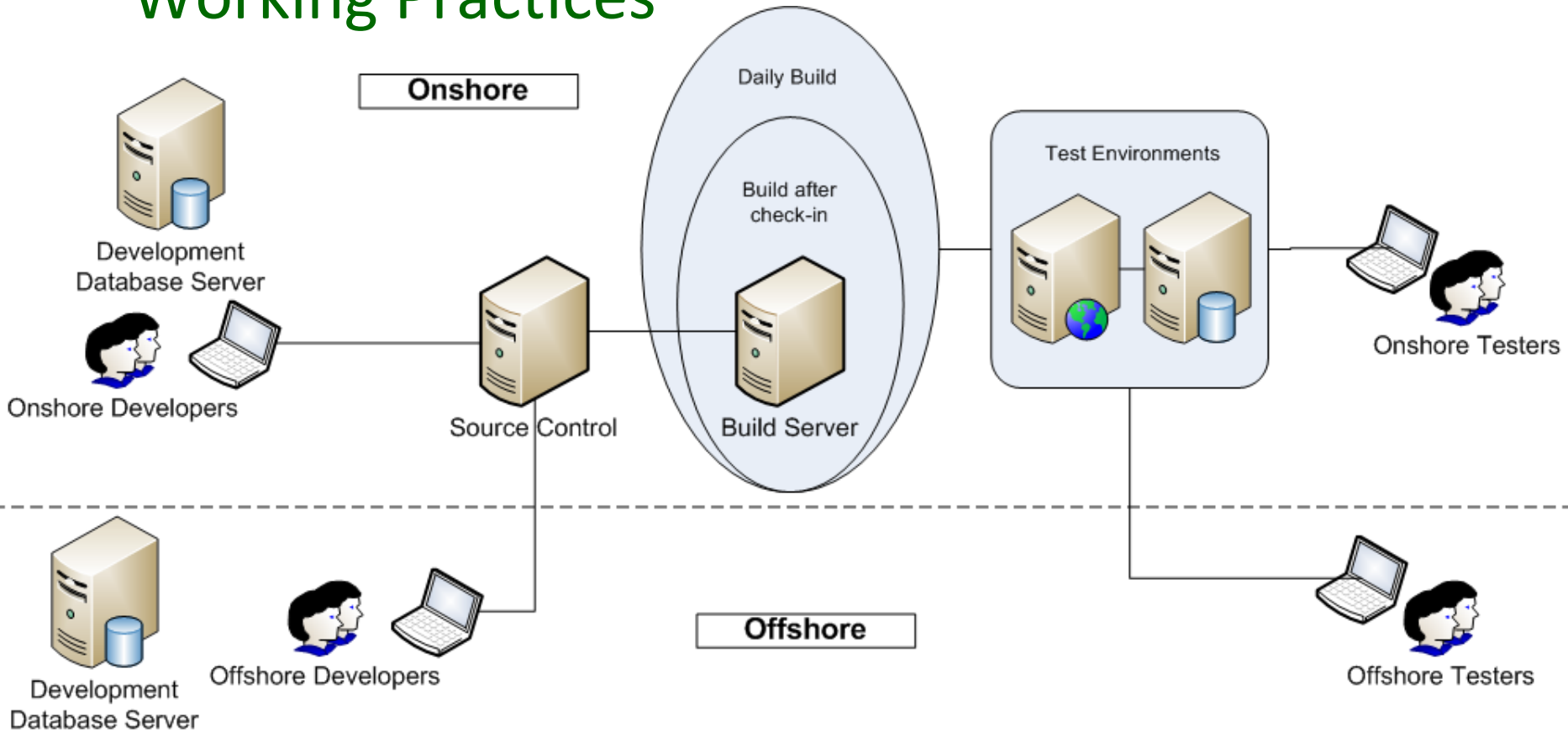
- Shared learning's across teams, but only conducted local retrospectives

Communication and Interactions

(What we found)

- Don't let onshore members of the team be a communication channel to the rest of the organisation, let them be enablers
- Need to get as close to face to face communication as possible
 - Have the right tools to support this
 - Remove any barriers to effective communication
 - Offshore people onshore at the start of development
- Don't let the team limit their interaction to the scheduled meetings
 - Encourage ad-hoc interaction and not always about work
 - Communicate often don't store up problems
- There will be an increased cost of exchanging ideas in terms of time and energy, therefore keep things simple as possible
- Different time zones, mean team members are not always available

Working Practices



•Consistent Working Practices

- Same development tools
- Same development environments
- Mirror environments

- Enough bandwidth
- Single repository for code
- Continuous integration onshore

Culture

- There is a difference in culture from UK, near-shore (Romania) and offshore (India)
 - UK and Romania were fairly similar, they were used to working collaboratively
 - UK and India, very different Indian team members were used to following a plan
- Where we struggled
 - It was difficult to get the Indian members of the team to enter into constructive arguments
 - Lack of understanding of the domain
 - Turnover of staff, so just as people started to get it they would leave

So what else should you do?



- Onshore/offshore rotation

- All onshore kick start

- Establish shared vision, work arrangements, consistent practices

- Build trust between the team members

- Offshore teams regularly rotated onshore for a single sprint

- Onshore teams rotate offshore

- Keep it simple

- Start with simple requirements for the offshore team and build from there

- Inspect and adapt to optimise communication

- Keep architecture and design as simple as possible to meet the business need

- Integrate regularly

- Synchronisation more important as teams are distributed

- Work in small increments

What shouldn't you do?



- Activity-based teams offshore
 - e.g. programming team, testing team
 - Misses cost savings of cross-functional teams

- All testing offshore
 - Testers lack business context
 - Detect exceptions but miss more wide-reaching design errors
 - Can be fixed with onshore point tester

- Shape-shifting teams
 - Is about building a close working relationship
 - Changing team composition is highly disruptive
 - If you change team members, do it gradually

Where the Journey Took Us



- Onshore teams were productive and a lot happier
- Offshore teams were able to build the right thing, and they were able to organise themselves to do it
- Quality across all teams was improved, defects in production were cut in half
- We had communities, sharing knowledge across teams

What you can do now

- It was still possible to conduct the Scrum meetings, however
 - More preparation is required
 - You need good tools to support what you are doing

- The key challenges we faced were:
 - Communication
 - Working practices
 - Shared vision
 - Culture

- Address these challenges as early as you can and never stop trying to improve

- Build a relationship with your offshore partners based on trust, and work to break down barriers

Questions?

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