

# Pivot Software

## Now centred on Scrum



*“For any company undertaking Scrum training, it’s really crucial to have the coaching afterwards”*

### THE ISSUE

For quite some time, Pivot Software Director Carl Street had been interested in introducing Scrum to his development process – but with outsourced developers and other priorities, it was put on hold. So when the Canterbury Development Corporation (CDC) announced a Scrum training programme with the Ministry of Business Innovation and Employment’s High Performance Working Initiative, Pivot Software was quick off the mark. “It coincided with us starting to build our own in-house team” explains Carl. “It was excellent timing. I was also really keen to get the other two directors involved in the training so they could see how Scrum works and the positive changes we could make.” Fellow Director Philippa Youngman needed little encouragement to take part. “It didn’t feel that we had good process around development priorities or estimating development time which put everyone under pressure. Defining business requirements tended to be quite a verbal process between myself and Carl. This would then go into a development process that wasn’t visible to the business at all. Often when the finished product was presented, it was probably what we asked for, but wasn’t what we wanted at all.”

### KEY RESULTS

- + Involve everyone from the top of the company down in the training so everyone understands what Scrum is
- + Realise that it is not a fix for everything now, but a process of continuous improvement
- + Over time, your product quality and speed of development will improve exponentially
- + Scrum is not easy and does make everyone feel grumpy at times. You have to keep a flexible mindset and be prepared for change
- + If you make a mistake, then you only have made a mistake for two weeks (one sprint). Likewise, if you hit a winner, you can embed that into the way you do things going forward
- + It is great knowing there is a wider community that can give you support as Scrum won’t work perfectly from day one

*“Scrum gives us the opportunity to use some tried and true methods, but still have that entrepreneurial style”*

## THE SOLUTION

Three directors and the entire development team signed up to undertake Clarus' (Clarus was acquired by Assurity in December 2012) Scrum 2+2+2 programme of two days' training, followed by two weeks' coaching and two weeks' mentoring, all under the CDC-supported programme. "The actual training was excellent" says Carl. "However, it would have been easy not to recall exactly what we had to do. Having Bruce there every other day during our first sprint was hugely beneficial. He would watch us as we ran the stand ups and various Scrum meetings and then give us feedback

afterwards as to how we could improve. He also took a few sessions himself so we could understand the right way of approaching the various Scrum components."

"We were very fortunate that the entire development team, as well as Project Owner and design-type roles were all involved in the training" continues Philippa.

"It was an incredibly positive experience and meant that we didn't have to do a sales pitch. Everyone was immediately on board and we could move into a Scrum framework quite literally the next week."

## THE RESULTS

"We were quite lucky that we had the basis of some of the processes in place to support Scrum, but we initially found the number of meetings unnatural" she says. "We weren't used to the discipline of having very structured meetings at set times. Now there is no more rocking up five minutes late wondering what it's about." However, Philippa reports that this ultimately drew all of the Pivot people into the process and the team is working a lot more closely together. "We celebrate more. We are on a real roll as we know what is happening when and we are much more in control."

The experience also changed the focus on when development occurred, as Carl explains: "By the time the development team get to the "about to do this" stage, we have had a great deal more discussion with the Product Owner and much more of an understanding as to what they want. The team as a whole gets involved in designing the development so it is well-defined before we ever start coding."

The Product Owners now work very closely with both Pivot Software's clients and the development team to have those critical conversations in balancing what

they have got on with what needs to be done.

"The continual focus on the backlog priority enables timely conversations internally and with our clients on when updates to the product are likely to go live" says Carl. "This ensures that a culture of 'no surprises' is realised. The Scrum process ensures that this happens naturally because of the process."

Both Carl and Philippa believe that what they are delivering is a better quality product. "In a recent product re-development, we touched 70 percent of our product code" says Carl. "We dedicated two solid sprints to planning and when the updated code became live, not a single issue was experienced by our customers. This was a real testament to the rigours of the Scrum framework, ensuring that we tested all the way through the development process."

Scrum is permeating into other areas of Pivot Software's business and, while Carl describes it more as a 'rolling maul' than a Scrum in comparison to how the developers use it, they are optimistic of being able to gain the same kind of benefits across customer services and other business areas.

*Clarus was acquired by Assurity in December 2012.*