A life insurance company

Releasing a new product line 11 months early with an agile development methodology

Overview

The need
This company needed to launch a new product line, including a new web portal, within 18 months; to meet the deadline, it decided to shift from waterfall to agile development.

The solution
The company adopted a DevOps approach, supported by IBM Analytics solutions—transforming its organization from 100 percent waterfall development to 75 percent agile development.

The benefit
The company increased productivity by 1,600 percent, enabling it to release an important new product line 11 months ahead of schedule.

Embracing agile development to meet tight deadlines

To keep up with marketplace needs, this leading life insurance company aimed to increase its life insurance sales in the United States by 260 percent. To help achieve the goal, the company made an agreement with a large distribution company. Under the agreement, the organization would begin offering its life insurance products to the distribution company's more than 130 member firms and their customers.

As part of the agreement, the insurer needed to launch a new product line, including a new web portal, within just 18 months. Meeting the deadline posed a tough challenge, and the company decided to shift from waterfall to agile development to accelerate its development processes.

Creating an agile software factory

Working with small development teams of five to ten people, the company used software factory principles, agile methods and a DevOps approach supported by IBM® Rational® software to transform its organization from 100 percent waterfall development to 75 percent agile development. The software factory entails five key steps: examining the product backlog, carving out a release backlog, creating a release sprint plan, executing the sprints and validating each release.

Within seven months, the company converted 75 percent of its 8,000 employees and consultants to the new agile methods, gaining insight into development operations that was previously not possible. "By using the DevOps approach, we have complete transparency across projects and sprints. And it all comes from one centralized system of truth," says the company's IT director.
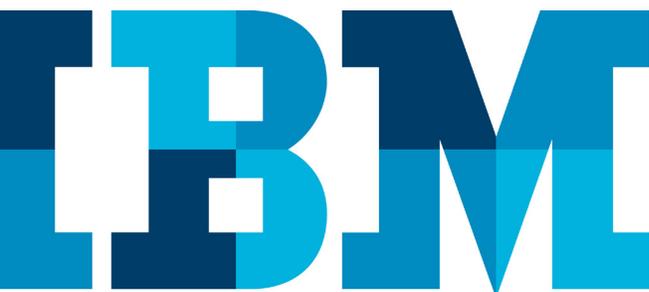
The company used the DevOps approach to optimize the entire software delivery lifecycle. After each team identifies what it will be delivering for the month, it works to deliver continuously in two-week sprints.

Improving productivity by 1,600 percent

Within just seven months, the company converted 75 percent of its 8,000 employees and consultants to the new agile methods. By adopting the agile approach, the organization completed and released its new product line and the web portal needed to fulfill its agreement with the distribution company in just seven months—11 months ahead of the original 18-month plan. Better still, the solution has helped improve code quality. The company's IT director comments: "We've never missed a release, and we're always delivering value to our customer."

In addition, the solution enabled additional life insurance premiums that increased revenue by USD2.8 million per month, as well as the development of a business and IT aligned strategic roadmap that led to the execution of a USD26 million portfolio of deliverables.

What's more, the new methodology provides a level of insight into development operations that was previously not possible. "By using the DevOps approach, we have complete transparency across projects and sprints," concludes the IT director. "And it all comes from one centralized system of truth. Transparency to stakeholders, to product owners and to the team where they can all benefit from that transparency."

Solution components

Software
- IBM® Rational® Asset Manager
- IBM Rational Build Forge®
- IBM DOORS® Next Generation
- IBM Rational Team Concert™

IBM Business Partner
- Island Training Solutions, Inc.

About IBM Analytics

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