



# Lifting Agile practice for a world-leading university

## Victoria University Agile Accelerator Case Study

An institution on a mission to become a world-leading capital city university needs their core applications keeping pace with change.

By targeting key opportunities for improvement, making pragmatic decisions and taking practical actions, the Victoria Applications Group have lifted their adoption of Agile to the next level.

The team are taking advantage of the opportunities offered by Agile. The business is better engaged and understands the importance of prioritisation, making sure the highest value work gets done. This and a new drive to deliver value Sprint after Sprint means the University's core applications can keep pace with changing expectations and new possibilities.



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This is a longer process. It's not just, 'OK, we've spent three months, we're Agile now.' It is a long journey. It's something that you have to stay on top of.

— Des Kelly, Applications Analysis Manager, Victoria University

## Adopting Agile

Part of the University's Information Technology Services team, the Applications Group are responsible for the development and management of the University's core applications.

When the Group made the move to Agile in 2016 their aims included:

- creating an empowered and engaged team
- improving their ability to respond to change
- increasing efficiency
- getting more involvement from the business.





## Encountering challenges

While the impetus for the change came within the team, not everyone was on board and the move was greeted with scepticism from some stakeholders and managers.

To resolve this, and make sure that they achieved their aims, they had scheduled a review once the transformation was bedded in.

“We were clearly aware of some things that we were coming up short on,” says Applications Analysis Manager Des Kelly. “We’d done our own internal survey.”

“People found the shift to Agile to be more challenging than had been expected.”

## Independent expertise needed

Des realised they needed both an objective perspective and external expertise so he engaged Boost to conduct a review.

“We thought, ‘this needs an independent imprimatur on it,’” he says. “Also, you bring in the expertise of a group that’s obviously totally involved in Agile.”

This review would:

- check that the move to Agile had delivered value
- identify future improvements.



## Engaging the team in the review process

Des gave the results of the survey to the reviewer, who then:

- interviewed each team in the Applications Group
- observed their Scrum events
- interviewed a selection of team members, stakeholders and managers
- inspected the team setup and roles
- studied team artifacts
- investigated working processes.

To make sure the review was truly independent and transparent, and to continue empowering the team, Des arranged for the team interviews to take place without managers.

“This meant they weren’t going to feel constrained or anything,” he says.

The team welcomed the opportunity to contribute.

“They saw it as a way to get their points across, to make sure their points were picked and responded to,” says Des.

## A plan of action to enhance Agile adoption

The review identified key opportunities for improvement and provided a plan of action to implement them.

As a result they have a greater drive to deliver, better business engagement and prioritisation, and are growing the capability of the whole Scrum team.

“We are becoming more and more focused on the need to be pushing stuff through,” says Des.

“We’ve also got much more of a clear involvement for the business in decision-making,” he says.

“It gives us that ability to respond to change and priorities but to do it in an honest, open way.”

The team is becoming more cross-functional, opening up stories to a wider range of solutions and increasing the likelihood of completion within a Sprint.

And Des is also able to focus less on managing people and more on helping them deliver more value to the University.

“My role has changed hugely,” he says. “I wouldn’t want to go back to anything other than this.”



## Learning that mindset matters

To get the most from Agile you need to focus on the Agile mindset. It's about being Agile not doing Agile. You can be pragmatic about the process, but have to lock in the principles.

“You can always negotiate around the details of the process that you're following, but the principles, you hang on to them until the bitter end,” Des says.

This means you need to keep reviewing and improving your practice.

## Lifting Agile to new levels

The team are now behind Agile, committed and empowered.

“There's a high level of comfort with working under Agile,” says Des.

This high level of comfort, with its associated increase in work satisfaction, makes it easier to retain skilled staff, all the more important following the investment in the move to Agile.

With the business better engaged and the team pushing to deliver value every Sprint, the University's core applications can keep pace with changing expectations and new possibilities.

The world never stands still, so neither can a world-leading university.

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Boost's input has been invaluable and helped us avoid, or at least deal with, many of the challenges we encountered during our transition to Agile.

— Des Kelly, Applications Analysis Manager, Victoria University

