

QSR International Does the Research on Agile



CLIENT PROFILE

Industry: Software

Company: QSR International

Employees: 200

BUSINESS

QSR International is the market leader in qualitative research software, with over 1.5 million users in 150 countries. Headquartered in Melbourne, Australia, the company provides powerful tools for public, academic and commercial researchers working in diverse fields, from the social sciences, forensics and criminology to market research and management studies.

CHALLENGE

To continue pushing the limits of software in the qualitative research industry, QSR International needed a more responsive, adaptable approach to software development—one that could support experimentation without sacrificing predictability and quality.

SOLUTION

CA Agile Central Unlimited Edition and SAFe® training services from CA Agile consultants.

BENEFIT

Reduced user-reported defects by 680 percent. Gained greater focus and clarity. Improved planning and estimating. Increased collaboration and sense of ownership.

Uncertainty (and Opportunity) Ahead

As a leading qualitative research software provider, QSR International stays ahead by focusing on product innovation and customer value. But there is uncertainty in the innovation process, says Adam Long, the company's CTO.

"We are pioneering new technology in qualitative research—things no one else has done. In many cases, we're building things customers don't yet know they need," Long explains.

For Long's R&D team, based in Melbourne, Australia, the accelerating pace of innovation became a catalyst for change. The team had been using Rational Unified Process (RUP) and Microsoft® Team Foundation Server (TFS) for a decade, delivering functionality on a predictable schedule. In recent years, however, some releases left QSR International wondering if it had truly delivered the highest-value features as early as possible.

Long elaborates, "We would over-deliver on some features while leaving out items of potentially greater value. With such large iterations and long cycles, our prioritization was off, and we weren't getting the benefit of early feedback."

The R&D team needed a more experimental approach—a way to deliver the right thing in the right way, especially when treading new ground. "We need to see and take advantage of opportunities that no one has even articulated, much less developed," says Long.

If At First You Don't Succeed ...

In 2013, the organization decided to embrace agile and spent the next year stuck between two different methodologies. Though they adopted a shorter delivery cadence, many practices remained the same. Functional teams stayed largely intact. Existing tools were unsuited to support agile at the scale of multiple teams and programs. And the functional-based organizational structure strained under the pressures of growth.

That's when Long decided to double down. Acting on advice from a third-party consultant, the R&D department made the decision to implement SAFe and adopt CA Agile Central. The initiative has given QSR International a new level of visibility into R&D work, helping the R&D teams tie product strategy to execution.

The organization also underwent SAFe training with CA Agile consultants and reorganized into cross-functional teams in the early months of the transformation, quickly spinning up quarterly planning sessions.

“[CA Agile Central] was the only solution that could support all levels of planning effectively, from portfolio to program to the project teams.”

Adam Long

CTO, QSR International

One Year In: Happy Teams

At the initiative's one-year anniversary in 2015, Long distributed a survey to R&D staff to gauge the teams' satisfaction levels and found that morale had improved substantially. It showed that people believe the department now has greater focus and clarity. The teams are getting better at planning and estimating, and they're collecting—and acting on—customer feedback more frequently.

"People are seeing significant improvements in communication and feel a greater sense of ownership," the CTO comments. "And team members have a better understanding of the overall delivery process, so they value the different roles more."

Plus, the R&D department appreciates its partnership with CA Technologies. As Long says, "I haven't seen another company handle quarterly updates as effectively as [CA]. We get visibility into what's new this quarter and what's coming, which is very important for us as a software company. The relationship really resonates with our team."

"[CA Agile Central] is now a key part of our infrastructure, and it is instrumental in supporting our PSI planning."

Adam Long

CTO, QSR International

Agile Works Where Waterfall Falls Down

QSR International has also seen a boost in software quality—a benefit Long did not expect. After all, the waterfall approach seemed to be working in terms of predictability and quality, if not in delivery speed and adaptability.

“Quality wasn’t an issue at first,” Long remembers. “But now we realize that we had room for improvement.”

In fact, the number of defects reported by users through HockeyApp has fallen by 680 percent. Overall support cases have diminished as well. He attributes the quality improvements to the creation of cross-functional teams, the early involvement of testing, earlier feedback from customers, reduction of work in progress, and greater visibility into work.

Just as important, with increased visibility through agile practices and CA Agile Central, Long can make critical decisions earlier with greater confidence, spotting business opportunities and moving quickly to take advantage of them. That means the R&D teams can focus on building the right thing, with capabilities that delight customers and move the industry forward.



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As of July 2015, Rally Software was acquired by CA Technologies.

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