

What is DSDM and the 8 principles

 Agile

 Knowledge Base

Introduction to DSDM

DSDM is often seen as agile's best kept secret as it has been in existence for over twenty years as various flavours of agile have come and gone. It is now prospering as agile comes of age. This is due to organisations needing more rigour and control when running agile in situations where the 'ideal agile environment' doesn't really exist.

DSDM is an agile method that addresses the needs of both simple product development where teams are likely to be co-located, and more complex project situations, which may involve several teams that may be distributed and may even be in different countries and time zones.

What is DSDM?

DSDM is a framework that is made up of eight principles, a lifecycle and products, roles and responsibilities and several best practice techniques. These underpin and support a philosophy of delivering strategically aligned business benefits as early as possible to give an organisation the best possible return on investment (ROI).

DSDM used to stand for 'Dynamic Systems Development Method' but as the method became widely used in areas that were not solely for I.T. and 'systems development' it was decided to drop the acronym. DSDM does not stand for anything anymore although the strapline of 'Driving Strategy, Delivering More' often appears.

DSDM's heritage along with most of agile is founded in I.T. but over the last decade the agile arena has moved on and agile is no longer seen as the preserve of I.T. although, unlike DSDM, many agile concepts and approaches are only focussed on I.T.

In 2007 a significant update was made to the DSDM approach. This version was called DSDM Atern. The term 'Atern' was formed from the name of the Artic Tern. This bird has a reputation for being highly collaborative and could travel huge distances. This was seen as a good metaphor for the rebranding of the DSDM method.

In 2014 another upgrade to the method took place and it was decided to revert back to calling the method DSDM as this was the brand name that everyone recognised and the term 'Atern' had caused some confusion.

DSDM in more detail

DSDM has been developed to address common problems faced by projects such as late delivery, cost overruns or the final deliverable not being completely fit for purpose.

DSDM addresses these problems by creating an agile environment which is collaborative and flexible, yet remaining focused on hitting deadlines and maintaining the appropriate level of quality and rigour.

DSDM involves all stakeholders such as the business representatives throughout an iterative and incremental lifecycle.

All personnel involved in a project are given clear roles and responsibilities and work together in timeboxes to ensure the project is kept on schedule.

DSDM strikes the balance between performing a lot of 'up-front' design and performing none. DSDM believes in doing 'enough design up-front' in order to reduce risk yet still allow for the inevitability of change.

DSDM is particularly good at being used with other approaches. Two prominent examples of this are using DSDM with PRINCE2 which enables PRINCE2 to be easily run with an agile setting and running DSDM with Scrum which enables Scrum to be scaled up to run on more than just product development.

The Eight Principles of DSDM

DSDM has eight principles. They represent an ethos, a culture, a way of working. The principles are actively managed at all times because if a principle becomes compromised it represents a risk to the successful execution and completion of a project.

The eight Principles of DSDM are as follows:

1. Focus on the business need
2. Deliver on time
3. Collaborate
4. Never compromise quality
5. Build incrementally from firm foundations
6. Develop iteratively
7. Communicate continuously and clearly
8. Demonstrate control

Source URL (modified on 05/30/2018 - 19:41): <https://agilekrc.com/resource/168/what-dsdm-and-8-principles>

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