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Best Practices

LISTEN IN AND KEEP UP

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I've written several times about the importance of listening. It is clear, even this early in 2021, that the skill is even more important, now. Many of our clients are experiencing resurgence of demand. They've also figured out ways to deal with constraints delivered by COVID-19. Big, successful companies have the resources to figure things out. They've done it many times in adapting to change. Adaptations that arose from 2020 are many. In order to serve our clients well and execute successful projects on their behalf, we need to know about those adaptations.

We've adopted several, formal techniques to facilitate listening - to learn about the objectives and constraints that drive a successful project. Many we've adapted from well-formed agile techniques. We are quite rigorous in applying them to each project.

- **Inception Activities.** Several authors at Clientek have written on this topic. Craig Vosper writes about Objectives & Decomposition. Jesse LaDousa wrote The

Definition of Success. These ideas are encapsulated in a formal project activity we call an Inception Sprint. We spend this time doing lots of listening for objectives, constraints, and our client's definition of success.

- **Feedback.** Craig also wrote about Active Feedback and Jesse about Change. It is crucial that we genuinely understand what our client needs and that they similarly understand what we plan to do. Change will happen and it will have impacts on the project as a whole. It is important that the impacts are made obvious. We use several, formalized tools to manage this. The two most important are the Release Plan and daily coordination meetings.
- **Sprint Summary.** Even within just one sprint, of two weeks, change occurs, problems show up, and adaptations are made. Not every sprint, one hopes, but it happens. We use a formalized document called a Sprint Summary to document the course of the sprint.

What was originally planned, what changed and why, impacts to the Release Plan, and a summary of what was completed.

- **Retrospectives.** Another technique defined by agile practices; this is key to adapting to change within your projects. Using information in the Release Plan, Sprint Summary, and notes written into the backlog, the work is inspected, and changes/improvements are proposed. This formal meeting is not necessary for every sprint, but a well-run team will know when it should be done.

These concepts are simple and, for the most part, obvious. Once discussed, just about anyone would say “sounds like a good idea”. To take the next step, formalize them. Write your “plan for planning” and stick to it. Change it when you need to just like you change items within a project. But write it down, tell everyone about it, and follow it.

This year, there will be lots of adaptation running around. Start with a solid plan to keep up!

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