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Changing Perception

PART 3: PREDICTABILITY

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As we continue to refine our estimating technique and approach (discussed in [last week's article](#)), it naturally leads us into the next discussion topic that can greatly increase the positive perception of your company: predictability. Another sore spot among many organizations is that the IT department is simply not predictable. Requests go into a black hole, no one knows when they will be done, and even if they do receive a target date it is rarely ever hit.

With a little effort and increased transparency, it's easy to create more stable predictability for your teams. This minor effort will go a long way in rebuilding the reputation of IT within the organization. Additionally, organizational perception aside, a predictable team offers many benefits for the planning and delivery of successful projects.

The first step towards reliable predictability, especially for new teams, is to closely track velocity sprint over sprint. Monitor your over or under commitment for each sprint

to see how closely you are matching the story points you commit to. Have very honest retrospectives and discuss as a team why you missed the commitment. Then, make small adjustments to the next sprint to see if you can remedy the situation. If you target 20 points in a sprint and end up delivering 24, don't commit to 30 the next sprint. Maybe commit to 20 again and see where you land. If you hit somewhere around 24 again in the next sprint (and sprint after), then consider changing your velocity.

Remember that a single sprint does not create a pattern. We must make small, incremental changes only after we can establish some sort of baseline. In order to establish that baseline we must be patient and deliberate in our movements.

The other major component of this process is to provide transparency in what the team is doing. Again, be deliberate in your communications surrounding the plan, the outcome,

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and any adjustments you intend to make. Resist outside influences that demand you to simply “go faster” or “commit to more” each sprint. The team needs to determine their ideal velocity first. Then and only then can you begin discussing options to deliver faster.

Lastly, don’t forget to account for predictable velocity changes like holidays & vacations. In organizations where sprint dates are not moved, we must decrease the sprint commitments to account for these absences. These changes must roll up into the overall release plan and be discussed with the stakeholders at the earliest available time.

As you nail down your team’s velocity it becomes increasingly easy to predict delivery of features and releases. Long-term planning can be done with much higher accuracy which will, in turn, delight your business and begin to shift the perception back in the positive direction.

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