Case Discussion

Read "Blue Cloud Gets Agile," and prepare answers to the following questions:

1. What was the trigger event that led Shel Skinner to adopt Agile?
2. What is your evaluation of the change implementation steps followed by Skinner?
3. What behavioral changes, if any, does Agile require of employees?
4. How do you account for such widely varied responses to Agile among Blue Cloud employees?
5. What should Skinner do now?

Blue Cloud Gets Agile

After attending a conference on a new methodology for software development known as Agile, Shel Skinner, CEO of Blue Cloud Development, a small software development company located in Mountain View, California, hired consultants to introduce the methodology.

At its core, Agile emphasized multiple iterations and short time frames. Created by a group of software developers, the Agile Manifesto (2001) declared:

We are uncovering better ways of developing software by doing it and helping others do it.

Through this work we have come to value:

- Individuals and interactions over processes and tools
- Working software over comprehensive documentation
- Customer collaboration over contract negotiation
- Responding to change over following a plan

That is, while there is value in the items on the right, we value the items on the left more

In addition, Agile held 12 principles:

1. Our highest priority is to satisfy the customer through early and continuous delivery of valuable software.

2. Welcome changing requirements, even late in development. Agile processes harness change for the customer's competitive advantage.
3. Deliver working software frequently, from a couple of weeks to a couple of months, with a preference to the shorter timescale.
4. Business people and developers must work together daily throughout the project.
5. Build projects around motivated individuals. Give them the environment and support they need, and trust them to get the job done.
6. The most efficient and effective method of conveying information to and within a development team is face-to-face conversation.
7. Working software is the primary measure of progress.
8. Agile processes promote sustainable development. The sponsors, developers, and users should be able to maintain a constant pace indefinitely.
9. Continuous attention to technical excellence and good design enhances agility.
10. Simplicity—the art of maximizing the amount of work not done—is essential.
11. The best architectures, requirements, and designs emerge from self-organizing teams.
12. At regular intervals, the team reflects on how to become more effective, then tunes and adjusts its behavior accordingly.

"These principles spoke to me on a very fundamental level," said Skinner. "These folks were saying out loud for what I'd been thinking most of my career."

Blue Cloud's traditional developmental cycle emphasized a deliberate sequence of development, with verification (testing and debugging) often occurring after a year's worth of work. "Why waste a year to find out whether our product is working," Skinner wondered. No more alpha and beta testing of new software: "Our new motto around here is, 'Release early, release often!' "

What appealed to Skinner was Agile's emphasis on teamwork, collaboration, and monthly releases. Cross-functional development teams held a daily "scrum" to ensure that all members were fully onboard with the progress and that all questions and concerns were raised in a timely manner. Skinner provided a description of the Scrum:[25]

Scrum is an agile method for project management developed by Ken Schwaber. Its goal is to dramatically improve productivity in teams previously paralyzed by heavier, process-laden methodologies. Its intended use is for management of software development projects as well as a wrapper to other software development methodologies such as Extreme Programming.

Scrum is characterized by:

- A living backlog of prioritized work to be done.
- Completion of a largely fixed set of backlog items in a series of short iterations or sprints.
- A brief daily meeting (called a scrum), at which progress is explained, upcoming work is described, and obstacles are raised.
- A brief planning session in which the backlog items for the sprint will be defined.
- A brief heartbeat retrospective, at which all team members reflect about the past sprint.

Scrum is facilitated by a scrum master, whose primary job is to remove impediments to the ability of the team to deliver the sprint goal. The scrum master is not the leader of the team (as they are self-organizing) but acts as a productivity buffer between the team and any destabilizing influences.

Scrum enables the creation of self-organizing teams by encouraging verbal communication across all team members and across all disciplines that are involved in the project. A key principle of scrum is its recognition that fundamentally empirical challenges cannot be addressed successfully in a traditional "process control" manner. As such, scrum adopts an empirical approach—accepting that the problem cannot be fully understood or defined, focusing instead on maximizing the team's ability to respond in an agile manner to emerging challenges.

By bringing together business people, developers, customers' representatives, and other concerned parties in a disciplined, face-to-face encounter, Agile methodology was intended to simultaneously increase efficiency and improve quality.

After a year of applying Agile, Skinner asked his engineers to evaluate the effort. "Wonderful," said some, "what's new?" asked others, and "this is a definite step in the wrong direction," complained a few. Skinner remained unsure about whether to continue with the Agile methodology or look for a new approach to software development.