

BEST PRACTICES

Lean Initiatives

Consider these 10 practices gleaned from managing software projects.

Green is the red-hot trend in legal IT right now, but so is corporate social responsibility or CSR. And it's only logical: In our troubled economy, it makes sense to own up to our responsibilities in general.

The idea behind CSR is for organizations to consider the interests of society by taking responsibility for the impact of their activities on everyone, from customer to employees, shareholders and even the environment. Doesn't it make sense, then, to clean up our act when it comes to project management and everyday efficiency?

Consider those initiatives that lead companies to better citizenship – ideas that foster a better sense of employee morale and client satisfaction. The following concepts, provided by Larry Port of Rocket Matter, are project management techniques in the software development arena and best practices that can be applied to daily routines in your organization to release your inner CSR.

1 HOLD A DAILY STANDUP

Every morning our team meets for 15 minutes. We stand up, which helps keep the meeting short. Each person on the team, whether they're responsible for finances, sales or engineering, shares the following: 1. What they worked on yesterday. 2. What they're doing today. 3. What is standing in their way.

BENEFIT: YOU QUICKLY GET A SENSE OF WHO'S MAKING AN IMPACT, WHO'S NOT, AND WHAT OBSTACLES ARE IMPACTING BUSINESS.

2 EMBRACE A FLAT HIERARCHY

Google famously has a maximum two levels of management between any employee and the top executive. This way, the pecking order is avoided as much as possible.

BENEFIT: A FLAT HIERARCHY ENCOURAGES ACCOUNTABILITY, A FREE-FLOW OF IDEAS AND CANDOR, WHICH ULTIMATELY PREVENTS MISTAKES AND ALLOWS EMPLOYEES TO VOICE CRITICAL BUSINESS IDEAS.

3 GO PAPERLESS

Though an increasing number of law firms are moving in this direction, many still have considerable filing processes. Paperless is common in the software industry, and electronic document storage is favored over printouts of documentation.

BENEFIT: LESS TIME IS SPENT FILING, FORMATTING AND RETRIEVING INFORMATION. ALSO, LESS MONEY IS SPENT ON PAPER, PRINTERS, FAX MACHINES AND TONER.

4 STANDARDIZE REPEATABLE PROCESSES

Software production has many tasks that are often repeated, such as configuring servers or responding to support tickets. These processes are standardized, so they are done the same way each time.

BENEFIT: NO TIME AND ENERGY IS WASTED REINVENTING PROCESSES. FEWER ERRORS OCCUR AND THERE'S LESS CONFUSION AMONG EMPLOYEES ABOUT HOW THEY SHOULD PERFORM CERTAIN TASKS.

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5 USE ONLINE COLLABORATION TOOLS

From project management to CRM systems, software companies can manage operations from any location via online tools. Such systems are now available to law firms. They allow users to share client and matter information, communicate messages and exchange notes from any location.

BENEFIT: THE WHOLE TEAM CAN COMMUNICATE AND WORK EASILY FROM DIVERSE LOCATIONS.

6 REGULARLY CONDUCT CODE (OR DOCUMENT) REVIEWS

Senior software engineers often meet with junior engineers to discuss their work in a process called a “code review.” The goal is mentorship and increased consistency. Legal documents could be reviewed in a similar fashion.

BENEFIT: LESS TIME IS SPENT CORRECTING WORK OF LESS-EXPERIENCED EMPLOYEES. IN TURN, THEY PRODUCE HIGHER QUALITY, LESS ERROR-PRONE WORK.

7 CONSIDER WHAT TO START, STOP, AND CONTINUE

Every two weeks or so, Agile software companies conduct a 30-minute meeting. The team answers the following questions: “What should we start doing? What should we stop doing? What should we continue doing?”

BENEFIT: BUSINESS PROCESSES ARE CONTINUALLY IMPROVED, RESULTING IN INCREASED EFFICIENCY AND FEWER MISTAKES.

8 ENCOURAGE QUESTIONS (EVEN IF THEY’RE “STUPID”)

When someone makes a mistake in software development, the results can be catastrophic. For this reason, it’s critical that no misunderstandings exist when an engineer is writing code. Individuals are encouraged to ask any question for clarification.

BENEFIT: COMMUNICATIVE OPENNESS SAVES TIME AND AVOIDS MISTAKES. EMERGENCIES CAN BE PREEMPTED.

9 GET ACQUAINTED WITH INTERNET MARKETING

Consumers increasingly search the Web to find answers. In software marketing, search engine optimization (SEO) and online marketing is often a primary distribution channel.

BENEFIT: A FIRM’S INCREASED ONLINE PRESENCE CREATES A LARGE AND INEXPENSIVE DISTRIBUTION CHANNEL WITH STRONG RETURN ON INVESTMENT.

10 GET A FOOSBALL TABLE

Like law, software development can be a stressful and mentally challenging environment. Occasional breaks and fun are encouraged.

BENEFIT: PLAY PROMOTES TEAM BUILDING, RECHARGES BATTERIES, BOOSTS MORALE AND FOSTERS CREATIVITY. IT ALSO KEEPS EMPLOYEES HAPPY, WHICH IS THE CORNERSTONE TO ANY SUCCESSFUL COMPANY. ILTA



Larry Port is a founding partner and chief software architect for Rocket Matter, an online legal practice management and time and billing application for small to mid-sized law firms. Rocket Matter, launched in February 2008, is a Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) application, providing increased security, business continuity, decreased technology infrastructure and maintenance, and improved return on investment for law firm information technology expenses. He can be reached at larry@rocketmatter.com.