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Elekta Radiates with Faster Innovative Solutions

ELEKTA

Client Profile
Industry: Advanced Medical Equipment
Company: Elekta
Employees: 3,400+
Revenue: $1.3B

Business

Headquartered in Stockholm, Sweden, Elekta provides clinical solutions for treating cancer and brain disorders, developing sophisticated technologies that help improve, prolong, and save patients' lives.

Challenge

Need to integrate systems across 35 software and hardware teams to deliver best-in-class treatment solutions. A lack of alignment between engineering and business leading to high Work in Process (WIP) and low quality.

Solution

Rally® (formerly Agile Central)

Benefit

Enhanced software quality with an increased delivery predictability from the teams. Trust and alignment across the organization formed from enhanced, data-driven decisions.

Behind the Curtain of Advanced Cancer Treatment

In the past 20 years, Elekta has achieved measured growth through nearly a dozen acquisitions, pulling new radiotherapy, brachytherapy, and magnetoencephalography technologies into the fold. To deliver the full benefit of these sophisticated devices to providers and patients, Elekta must tie them together into integrated solutions—an immense and complex undertaking that can be further complicated by regulatory compliance.

Yet Elekta continues to bring innovative cancer treatment solutions to the people who need them. The company's success, particularly against the backdrop of a dramatically changing industry, can be traced in large part to an enterprise scale agile transformation at the portfolio management level. By introducing new ways of thinking about the work, the transformation is helping Elekta get to market faster with higher quality and predictability for customers.

Diagnosis: High WIP, Low Throughput

Elekta's engineering and product organization had reached a crossroads. Traditional waterfall methods were creating a fundamental mismatch between capacity and demand, holding the delivery teams back and stretching them thin.

"We were trying to deliver four times the amount of work we had capacity for. We didn't have any data to prove it, however, and senior leadership continued to push toward their desired roadmap."

Dee Miller
Head of the agile office, Elekta

Simply put, engineering teams were hamstrung by competing priorities and too much WIP. Much of the roadmap came from sales commitments already made to customers, giving little leeway for the teams to prioritize the work based on business value.

Plus, new work came in without an understanding of the impact it would have on teams and their WIP. As a result, teams often missed deadlines and struggled with quality, creating an atmosphere of disappointment and distrust.

Breaking out of the negative cycle meant something had to change.

Redefining Organizational Health

Elekta launched an agile transformation, moving from a predominantly waterfall environment to the Scaled Agile Framework (SAFe) and launching a single agile release train within a few months. The group had ambitious goals:

- Gain a clear understanding of true capacity
- Align work with business priorities
- Reshape a command-and-control culture
- Restore trust between engineering and the business
- Create a more rewarding work environment for employees

The PMO and the agile office at Elekta started by defining the portfolio backlog and aligning the work to the company's existing investment themes. This first step allowed product managers to tackle the challenging give-and-take process of prioritizing epics based on business value.

"We're pioneering new ways of thinking about how we get to market earlier. For one thing, we're limiting WIP at the portfolio level to ensure we deliver on our most important commitments."

Dee Miller
Head of the agile office, Elekta

By this time, the engineering organization had shifted into cross-functional teams of varying sizes, with the ideal team comprising five developers, two quality engineers one scrum master and one product owner—all aligned under one release train. The organization was then in a good position to quantify demand and capacity for midrange and long-term planning at the portfolio level. All the group needed was a tool specifically suited to running agile at scale.

A Healthier Planning Process

Elekta selected the Rally platform to support its enterprise agile transformation and became an early adopter of the Portfolio Manager capability. With the advanced planning capabilities, Elekta was able to work against a three-year planning horizon, spinning up scenarios based on different growth assumptions.

> **"The scenarios we built on the Rally platform were immensely helpful in explaining to decision makers how much work we could deliver. The cut-line analysis enabled us to show the impact of funding levels on the same backlog."**

Micah Schwanitz
Senior Program Manager, Elekta

With this data-driven portfolio planning approach, the PMO put the agile transformation on solid footing and convinced leadership to make important changes in how the work is funded, flowed to teams, and delivered.

The changes have required a mindset shift, especially for a PMO accustomed to defining and documenting requirements from top to bottom. Perhaps counterintuitively, Elekta has found that a "directionally correct" plan turns out to be more reliable than one that is rigidly scoped. And it's faster, allowing Elekta to spend less time on documentation and more time on execution.

"It takes us only a few weeks to pull together a plan that is roughly right, whereas a waterfall planning process could take three months," says Schwanitz. "And the plan is more reliable, so we're better at sticking to customer timelines."

With visibility from the Portfolio Capacity Planning in Rally, Elekta leaders have recognized the imbalance between demand and capacity. They've started to take decisive action to limit WIP, making decisions about what to work on (and what not to) and communicating priorities across the organization.

Stronger with Enterprise Scale Agile

Two years into its agile transformation, Elekta is reaping the benefits of enterprise scale agile. Software quality increased almost immediately. Predictability has come into focus gradually and continues to improve. Organizational silos are dissolving. And the business now has rich data on performance and speed, which makes it easier to spot and resolve problems.

"The momentum of our transformation grows with each success. This journey is leading Elekta to better software agility."

Micah Schwanitz
Senior Program Manager, Elekta

By matching capacity to demand in a data-driven manner, the product and engineering teams are also delivering real value to the business as a whole—engendering greater predictability and trust among all departments, from product to sales and marketing. The cultural changes have also made a positive impact on morale, giving team members a greater sense of satisfaction in the business value they deliver.

"The PMO has been asked to continue to develop and institutionalize this kind of discipline within the organization," says Miller. "One year after feeling broken, the PMO is excited, providing value and growing."

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As of November 2018, CA Technologies was acquired by Broadcom Inc.

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