

The Daily Stand-up

While preparing for the upcoming [IRM UK Business Change & Transformation Conference](#) (sorry for the shameless self-promotion), I spoke with some people around my organization about an agile practice called the daily stand-up (or is it standup?). Mostly, we just call it “a stand-up.” In fact, not all of the teams in our organization even do them daily.

What is a Stand-up?

The idea behind a stand-up is to promote the agile principle of “people and communication over process and tools.” One could argue that stand-ups are a process, but one clearly designed to encourage people to just talk to each other. The format is simple:

1. Get together for a quick ceremony. Before the pandemic, sitting down was optional, now, unless you have a standing desk at home, you probably need to sit down to be in front of your camera.
2. Each person takes a turn reporting
 - a. What they’re working on
 - b. What they plan to do next
 - c. Any other personal news that the team needs to know (e.g. time off)
 - d. Any blockers that are preventing them from making progress
3. Normally, there is no #3 in a traditional stand-up. However, it is not uncommon for someone to raise a topic during their individual report-out that sparks some conversation. We try to restrict these digressions during stand-up. Therefore, we will put these topics in a “parking lot” or, as one of my predecessors named it, “a slouch” (get it -- stand up, then slouch).

What’s the Value?

The reality of the individual reports in these little sessions, which generally last under 15 minutes (and when done by the book can be done in under five minutes), is that they rarely provide value for everyone on the team all the time. However, they almost always

provide some value for some members of the team. This is the point, by making sure that everyone on the team knows exactly what everyone else is up to, issues and dependencies can be exposed and support for one another can be rendered.

The need for this has been amplified by the increased number of people who are now working remotely. Fewer impromptu conversations are taking place in collaboration spaces, so the stand-up communication is all the more important. Bringing the team together once per day strengthens the connections, exposes collaboration opportunities, and builds awareness of progress towards shared goals and objectives.

Variations on a Theme

Stand-ups are not status meetings. The idea is to just state a brief description of the work you are doing, not explain where you are in that process or provide additional details. Sometimes, people default into the “status update” mode. As an Agile Coach facilitating the stand-up, I will cut them off. Not everyone on the team will want to hear that level of detail and it just adds time to the ceremony. The concept here is that even if you are not interested in a good portion of what you are hearing, it’s brief enough to remember and doesn’t take up much of your time. Sometimes, information that didn’t seem valuable in the moment, comes in handy later. That’s the point.

Do you need to do daily stand-ups daily? I suppose if that’s what you call them. Some teams in my organization that are not involved with software development do weekly stand-ups. While this doesn’t seem frequent enough to me, it seems to be working for them.

Some teams add other components to the stand-up. On one of my teams, we triage new work that has come into our backlog to decide how it should be prioritized. All of my teams do some sort of sprint goal check-in during our stand-up.

We generally ask team members to provide a confidence score from 0-5, with zero meaning we have no chance of hitting the goal, to five meaning a surefire win. As the sprint progresses, if the confidence starts to go down, it will prompt a post-stand-up conversation (or slouch) about how we can help each other improve our odds of success. This has proven very valuable.

There are no hard and fast rules about stand-up other than this meeting should be very short. Topics that will need more time are deferred until after the ceremony when only

those who need to be involved with the issue at hand will be needed. Since we started using video conferencing, it is not uncommon for a few people to remain connected after stand-up is over to dive into a topic that was raised.

We also have some teams that collaborate closely with other teams and we will have a representative from the “other” team at each stand-up, such that we maintain cross-team awareness. Whatever keeps the team connected and aligned is worth considering for your stand-up...as long as you can keep it brief.

Be open to broadening the team for Continuous Improvement.

AUTHOR

Tom Bellinson

Mr. Bellinson has been working in information technology positions for over 30 years. His diverse background has allowed him to gain intimate working knowledge in technical, marketing, sales and executive roles. Most recently, Mr. Bellinson finds himself serving as an Agile Coach for ITHAKA, a global online research service. From 2008 to 2011 Bellinson worked with at risk businesses in Michigan through a State funded program which was administered by the University of Michigan. Prior to working for the University of Michigan, Mr. Bellinson served as Vice President of an ERP software company, an independent business and IT consultant, as chief information officer of an automotive engineering services company and as founder and President of a systems integration firm that was a pioneer in Internet services marketplace. Bellinson holds a degree in Communications with a Minor in Management from Oakland University in Rochester, MI and has a variety of technical certifications including APICS CPIM and CSCP.

