IMPROVING TEAM PERFORMANCE THROUGH BETTER PROCESSES AND RESOURCES

Background:

A software development team in a mid-sized tech company was consistently failing to meet its sprint goals. Despite having talented developers and supportive management, the team was plagued by missed deadlines, incomplete tasks, and sub-optimal delivery.

Problem Statement:

A software development team in a mid-sized tech company was consistently failing to meet its sprint goals. Despite having talented developers and supportive management, the team was plagued by missed deadlines, incomplete tasks, and sub-optimal delivery.

Root Cause Analysis (RCA):

Upon closer investigation, the following issues were identified as primary reasons for the team's underperformance:

1. Unclear and Incomplete Ticket Requirements: The tasks or user stories assigned to developers often lacked clarity, leading to confusion and misalignment.

2. Underestimated Tickets: Often, the time and resources allocated for tasks were grossly underestimated, leading to sprint spillovers.

3. Lack of Domain Knowledge: The team had insufficient knowledge about the specific domain, leading to delays and mistakes.

Solution:

1. Ticket Grooming:

To address the issues of unclear requirements and task underestimation, it was decided to involve developers more actively in the ticket grooming process during sprint planning. This change offered several benefits:

- Clearer Understanding: When developers participated in the grooming process, they gained a better comprehension of the tasks, minimizing ambiguities.
- Accurate Estimates: With their technical input, developers could provide more precise time and resource estimates.
- Early Issue Spotting: Potential technical hiccups were identified early, ensuring timely solutions.
- Faster Decisions: With developers' technical feedback, the team could make quicker decisions.
- Less Rework: Early clarity reduced the chances of revisiting and fixing mistakes at later stages.
- Efficient Sprint Start: The improved understanding ensured that the team hit the ground running at the start of each sprint.

2. Incorporating a Business Analyst:

To further enhance clarity in ticket requirements, a business analyst (BA) was introduced to the team. The BA brought several advantages:

- Requirements Clarification: BAs excel at obtaining, analyzing, and refining requirements. Their inclusion guaranteed that user stories were not only clear but also aligned with business objectives.
- User-Centric Focus: With a BA on board, the user or customer perspective was always at the forefront. This ensured that the team's output was consistently aligned with user needs.

3. Experienced Team Lead:

Recognizing the importance of domain knowledge and experience, the company decided to onboard a tenured team lead. A seasoned team lead could:

- Quick Answers: Experienced team leads could swiftly address the concerns and questions of the development team, enhancing efficiency.
- Domain Expertise: Their domain knowledge reduced the learning curve for the entire team, ensuring smoother operations.

Outcome:

Post-implementation of these solutions, the team saw a significant uptick in performance. They started meeting, and in some sprints, even exceeding expectations. There was a noticeable reduction in ticket spillovers and rework, leading to more efficient sprints and happier stakeholders.

Conclusion:

By recognizing and addressing the root causes of performance issues, teams can significantly improve their productivity. In this case, integrating developers into ticket grooming, introducing a business analyst, and leveraging the expertise of an experienced team lead proved to be game-changers.

Legend:
- Delta Team Planned
- Delta Team Delivered

Chart data:
- Sprint 3: Planned 80, Delivered 40
- Sprint 4: Planned 84, Delivered 60
- Sprint 5: Planned 90, Delivered 86