

Clarasys: Born agile by taking groups seriously

– *We did not build Clarasys. The people who work here built Clarasys and made it what it is –*

Claudia Meyer-Scott, founding Director, Clarasys

Introduction: the Clarasys recession

In March 2015 London-based management consultancy Clarasys numbered around 45 employees and the time seemed right to scale up the business exponentially. A couple of confirmed client projects looked almost certain to turn into long-term engagements, with a significant number of consultant roles guaranteed for perhaps 12 months. Co-founder Claudia Meyer-Scott remembers:

Based on previous experience, we had a good feeling about the upcoming quarters and the projects with our existing clients. It looked like we would/could grow the teams, as well as win some more work.¹

From inception in 2011, Clarasys had committed to an agile, group-based business model that was unusually ambitious in scope. Determined to forego the traditional consultancy model that relied heavily on top-down organisational hierarchy – reflected in continuing use of waterfall development methodology on client projects – Clarasys would dispense with formal hierarchy to the extent possible, using agile principles and working autonomously in self-organised groups, with “no dictatorship”.²

Although it had grown rapidly since 2011, the company was still in start-up phase and usually took on a maximum two experienced hires a month, or recruited graduates and no experienced hires, but had started to become unbalanced in terms of experience. Claudia and her fellow co-founders, Matt Cheung and Chris Hamilton, realised they needed “to add some more experienced (and expensive) people to ensure our more junior people still had enough role models and mentors to learn from”³ so, given the prevailing positive business sentiment, they recruited five experienced consultants – “partly because they happened to become available and their experience was such that we did not want to miss out on them”⁴ – and three graduates, pretty much in one intake.

All the new consultants, experienced and graduate alike, would have to be trained in “the Clarasys way” by other consultants taking time out of their ‘billable’ work, so overheads

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