Secret Escapes – using Plandek's insight to drive Agile engineering excellence in a growing development team

"Plandek's Agile BI platform provides a range of metrics that track our progress towards engineering excellence…"

"The improved visibility that Plandek provides helps us reduce delivery risk – it provides a new level of actionable insight to help teams become more effective over time. It is a key enabler on our journey towards Agile engineering excellence."

Eirik Pettersen, CTO Secret Escapes

The context at Secret Escapes

Secret Escapes is one of the UK's biggest success stories in the crowded travel/holiday aggregation market.

The London-based firm has raised over £100m since it launched in 2011 and achieved full year group profitability in 2018. Secret Escapes has grown very rapidly both organically and by acquisition, most recently by acquiring the Slevomat Group in late 2017. Its success is built on a compelling and differentiated consumer proposition, underpinned by an excellent technology platform.

Eirik's team is therefore a key enabler of the future success of the business and it has seen significant growth in recent years. The team employs Agile principles with multidisciplinary teams and while the largest office is in London, there are additional teams located in other cities across Europe.

As the development team has matured, Eirik is increasingly focused on the ability to deliver high quality technology outcomes in an Agile manner - whilst optimising team productivity and predictability. To do this the team need a set of Agile development metrics to calibrate, track and manage success. Plandek was selected as the BI platform to provide these metrics.

The Plandek Agile BI and analytics platform

Plandek is a BI and analytics platform (dashboard) that provides total visibility and so drives better Agile software delivery outcomes:
- Plandek is a SaaS BI tool. It mines the data history from development teams' toolsets (e.g. Jira, Git) to reveal, track and manage metrics (right down to the team and individual level), that are highly predictive of successful Agile project outcomes
- Plandek serves real-time insights on a dashboard used at all levels within the technology organisation (from Team Leaders to the CTO)
- These metrics are often not visible or accurate with current toolsets

1

- Plandek is easy to implement and requires no integration effort client-side. All that is needed is read-only log-ins to Jira/Git etc and the Plandek team undertake the necessary configuration. So new clients go live in a matter of days
- Plandek works with clients to embed Plandek usage and to drive sustainable improvements in teams' performance, via a structured and metrics-driven Continuous Improvement methodology
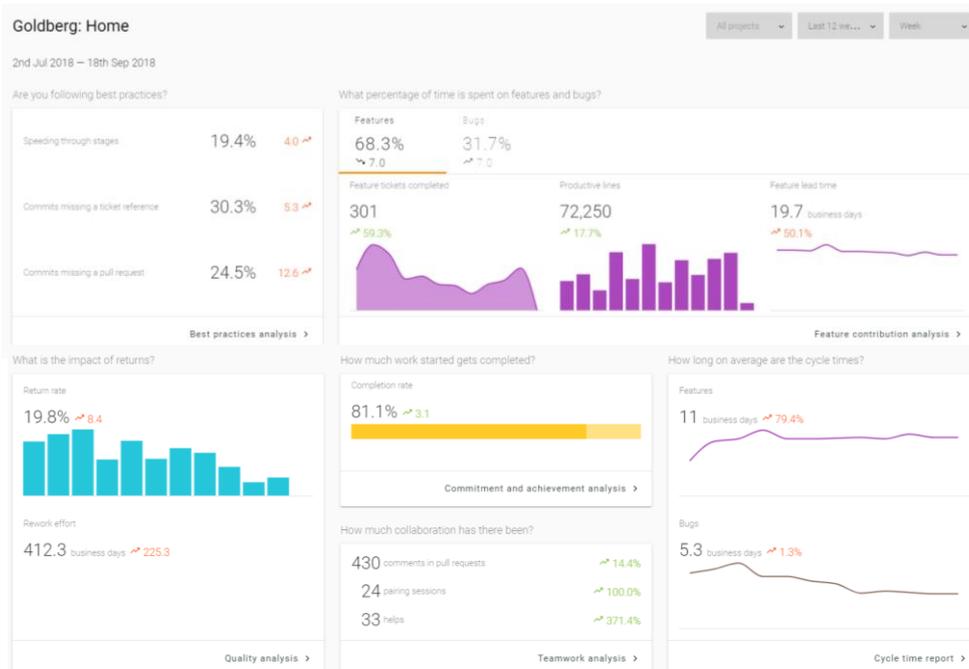
Plandek is built around the six key levers that data analytics have shown to be highly predictive of Agile team productivity and predictability. All six are actively managed using the Plandek tool.

These are represented below.

1. Agile process, tool and workflow accuracy

"Process hygiene" – e.g. track Jira misuse - where it is preventing a clear view of process efficiency across teams

2. Sprint discipline and accuracy

Sprint Completion – track sprint completion, average WIP queues/FTE etc

3. Productive time developing new features

Proportion of time spent and efficiency of writing new features

4. Time spent fixing bugs, returns

Proportion of time spent and efficiency of effort fixing bugs and returns

5. Quality and Return Rates

6. Teamwork and consistent team management

Quant metrics of collaboration and Agile behaviours

- **Track progress towards Agile engineering excellence**
- **Continuous Improvement** of **productivity** and **delivery timing accuracy** (across all teams and locations)
- **Reduction in delivery risk**

As an example, Plandek's project summary screen tracks progress against a basket of metrics organised around the six key levers (as per below).

Plandek: example summary screen (dummy data, not taken from Secret Escapes)

Plandek was engaged by Eirik in Q3 2018 and was implemented across the Secret Escapes development team. The SE team use Jira (as a workflow management team and time tracker)

2

and Git Hub as a code repository. Plandek was integrated with both tools and was rolled-out in November 2018.

Using Plandek to drive engineering excellence at Secret Escapes

The Plandek Customer Success team worked closely with the engineering and delivery teams at Secret Escapes to implement Plandek and normalise its usage within the existing Agile methodology at Secret Escapes.

The implementation process followed three simple steps:

1. **Pre-rollout configuration of Plandek:** this was undertaken by the Plandek technical team and co-ordinated with the Secret Escapes team to ensure that Plandek has been correctly integrated, and is showing accurate data across all teams

2. **Plandek kick off and training:** the Plandek Customer Success team worked closely with their Secret Escapes partners to engage the teams and train them on the use of Plandek. The real value of Plandek is realised when the actionable insight is used by Team Leaders, Scrum Masters and those involved in delivery

3. **Using Plandek to underpin Continuous Improvement at Secret Escapes:** once teams are familiar with the tool, Team Leaders can set targets for improvement within their teams, using Plandek to track change and celebrate success. Plandek's "balanced scorecard" of meaningful metrics ensures that this effort is focused on metrics that determine improvement in productivity and timing accuracy.

Following these three simple steps, Plandek has quickly become a valuable tool to help the Secret Escapes engineering team deliver to the ever more intense expectations of the business. It gives the senior technology management team a helicopter view of critical Agile metrics across all teams – and it gives Team Leaders a new level of insight to manage the process of software development.

Plandek constantly shows potential bottle-necks and areas for investigation. It is used judiciously by the teams themselves to effectively manage. Care is taken that the metrics are not taken out-of-context by those external to the teams.

The impact of Plandek at Secret Escapes

"The greatly improved visibility that Plandek provides helps us reduce delivery risk – it provides a new level of actionable insight to help teams improve their efficiency over time. It is a key enabler on our journey towards Agile engineering excellence."

Eirik Pettersen, Secret Escapes CTO

The Secret Escapes development team already understood the importance of meaningful metrics to drive their relentless pursuit of engineering excellence. They recognised that excellence is only achieved by constant improvement – and constant improvement requires the ability to track progress. The key is finding the metrics that are meaningful and trusted by the teams. And this is where Plandek has really helped.

A Continuous Improvement process is already underway working alongside the Plandek Customer Success team. Initial focus has been on:

- **Agile best practices** – simple disciplines that improve visibility of potential bottlenecks and areas for improvement
- **Sprint completion** – providing a greater level of understanding and insight to further improve Sprint planning and accuracy, which is the building block of more predictable outcomes

Eirik concludes:

"It is early days with Plandek, but it is already making an important contribution to our collective effort to constantly improve our already world-class Agile engineering capability at Secret Escapes."