Plandek

Using Plandek to track and drive technology delivery and **transform communication with key stakeholders**

Case Study

TalkTalk   Plandek

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About Plandek

Plandek is an intelligent analytics platform that helps software engineering teams deliver value faster and more predictably.

Celebrated by Gartner and Forrester as a 'leading global vendor', Plandek mines data from delivery teams' toolsets and gives them the opportunity to optimise their delivery process using both intelligent insights and predictive analytics.

Co-founded in 2017 by Dan Lee (founder of Globrix) and Charlie Ponsonby (founder of Simplifydigital), Plandek is based in London and currently services the UK, Europe, the Middle East and North America.

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1. Summary of the Plandek use case at TalkTalk

TalkTalk is one of the UK's largest providers of consumer and business broadband with over 4.2 million customers.

It relies on a large software delivery team of several hundred distributed software engineers to deliver a wide range of projects and features which are strategically critical for the business.

Plandek was adopted with the joint sponsorship of the CTO and CEO to track and drive the effectiveness of the delivery team – and crucially to help the CEO and C-Suite stakeholders better understand the effectiveness of the technology team on which they rely so heavily.

As such, the TalkTalk leadership team has taken time to understand the key metrics within Plandek and these are reported within the Board KPI pack to give a 'balanced scorecard' review of TalkTalk's technology delivery capability - alongside the KPIs reviewed for all other areas of the business (e.g. finance, operations, sales, marketing etc).

Within technology, Phil Haslam the TalkTalk CTO uses Plandek to define and track a set of 'North Star' metrics that define 'what good looks like' for TalkTalk technology delivery. These metrics underpin a data-led culture of continuous improvement sponsored by Phil and led by managers and Team Leads across the TalkTalk delivery organisation.

1.1 Plandek – proposition summary

Plandek is an analytics platform to help software delivery teams track and drive the delivery of valuable software, faster and more predictably. Plandek provides dashboards and analytical tools used across the delivery organisation:

1. 'North Star' dashboards for technology leadership to set direction, track Agile DevOps effectiveness and report meaningful metrics to C-Suite stakeholders.

2. Management dashboards of 'determinant metrics' to enable delivery, engineering and product managers to engage their teams and track and drive delivery improvement over time.

3. LiveView intelligent analytics to enable teams to identify blockers in real-time and identify and diagnose delivery issues to make their job easier and accelerate the delivery of value.

Plandek works by mining data from delivery teams' DevOps toolsets (such as issue tracking, code repos, CI/CD tools and ITSM tools) to provide actionable and intelligent insight across the end-to-end software delivery process.

2. Implementing Plandek at TalkTalk

Plandek's Customer Success team take a very active role in helping clients set up Plandek and drive business benefit from the new level of insight that is surfaced for the first time.

2.1 The Plandek Xcelerate framework – Key Plandek Differentiator

The CS team bring with them the Plandek Xcelerate framework to help clients define the metrics that matter for them ('North Star' metrics) and help teams continuously improve over time around a shared set of goals.

The Xcelerate methodology recognises that the top-down imposition of metrics on Agile teams is neither desirable nor effective. Instead, data-driven software delivery is only effective when everyone shares the same goals and metrics - from individual engineers to the CEO.

Plandek Xcelerate Framework
Plandek
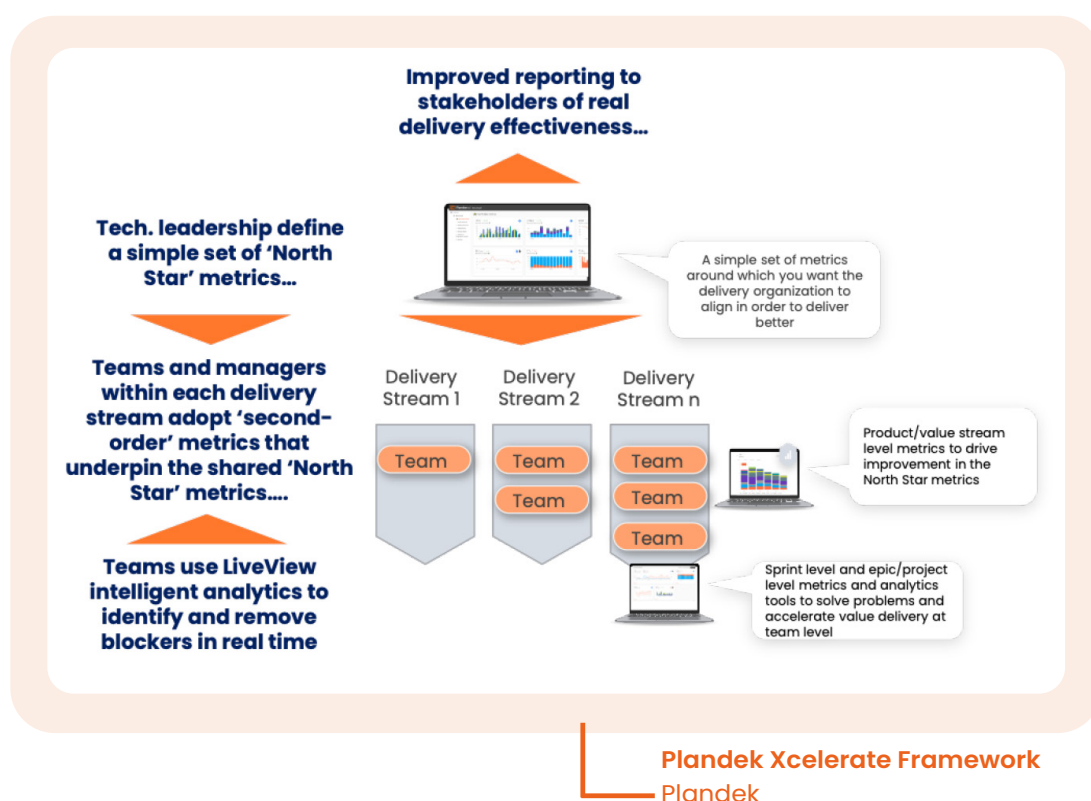
Plandek provides teams with sprint-level, real-time analytics to help them solve problems and accelerate value delivery – as well as dashboards for use at more aggregated levels by managers and leadership.

As Demaine Ward, Scrum & Agile Practice Lead at TalkTalk comments: "Plandek really helps us drive change, led by the teams themselves. Technology leadership set the direction and can track improvement at an aggregate level, but the real power of Plandek lies in its analytical insight for hardworking teams."

Tristia Harrison the TalkTalk Group CEO has been a key sponsor of the Plandek implementation from the outset. She recognized that technology delivery and the integrated role all areas of the business need to play in its successful delivery, was not well understood at C-Suite level. The lack of understandable KPIs to share with senior stakeholders, addressing key pain points, delivery efficiency and ultimately on time delivery were a major contributor to employee dissatisfaction and the protracted delivery of business critical outcomes.

She championed Plandek along with Phil (TalkTalk's CTO) to underpin a culture of continuous improvement within technology delivery - and crucially also, to provide understandable metrics (KPIs) to improve communication, understanding and trust between technology delivery and TalkTalk's internal stakeholders.

"The TalkTalk Board is highly data-driven. We require KPIs from all areas of the business to manage effectively.

Technology delivery was an area that lacked a 'balanced scorecard' of metrics to share with the C-suite.

Plandek provides those metrics whilst also enabling the delivery team (from squad level upwards) to optimise around the metrics that I care about. As such it is tremendously powerful."

Tristia Harrison
CEO TalkTalk Group

2.2 **Plandek set up at TalkTalk – Key Plandek differentiator**

Plandek is a SaaS based, analytics-only solution that is extremely easy to set-up. There is no setup charge for clients. The team at TalkTalk used Plandek's simple set-up process available via the Plandek website, enabling them to connect issue tracking, code repos and pipelines in a matter of minutes, with the Plandek CS team there to help every step of the way.

2.3 Educating stakeholders and defining the 'North Star' metrics – Key Plandek Differentiator

At the outset the Plandek CS team sat down with senior stakeholders, including the Chairman of TalkTalk, Sir Charles Dunstone and Tristia Harrison the CEO to help them better understand the sort of metrics that can be applied to track and drive the effectiveness of Agile software delivery teams at scale.

In addition, a lot of time was spent with Phil Haslam, TalkTalk's CTO to select a simple set of 'North Star' metrics that Phil felt best represents what good looks like across TalkTalk's delivery capability. As Phil comments, "The implementation of Plandek gave us the opportunity to revisit our Agile DevOps objectives and the metrics most suitable to measure success over time – the DORA metrics were a useful start point, but we went further."

	North Star metric	Relevance
Efficacy	Lead Time to Value	Key measure of time taken to deliver an increment of value. Logical correlation with NPS.
	Deployment Frequency	Frequency with which new releases are deployed to production. Known correlation with NPS.
	Escaped Defects	Customer-facing defects. Logical correlation with NPS.
	Sprint Target Completion	Key measure of team dependability and hence predictability of value delivery. Logical correlation with NPS.
	Mean Time to Restore	Customer-facing service metric. Logical correlation with NPS.
Strategic Alignment	Completed Tickets by Key Workstream	Shows that effort is focused on strategic priorities.
	Value Creation / Technical Debt	Proportion of effort spent building new features vs. fixing things.

Common North Star Metrics
Plandek

Phil and his team drew heavily from the list above and viewed success in terms of answering two questions:

1. Is our technology team focused on our highest priority/value creating initiatives? i.e. is it aligned to our strategic goals?

2. And if so, is our technology team delivering as effectively as possible?

The metrics are surfaced in customisable dashboards within Plandek created for Phil and his key direct reports. The data export functionality enabled the metrics and graphics to be shared with the Board as part of the monthly reporting process.
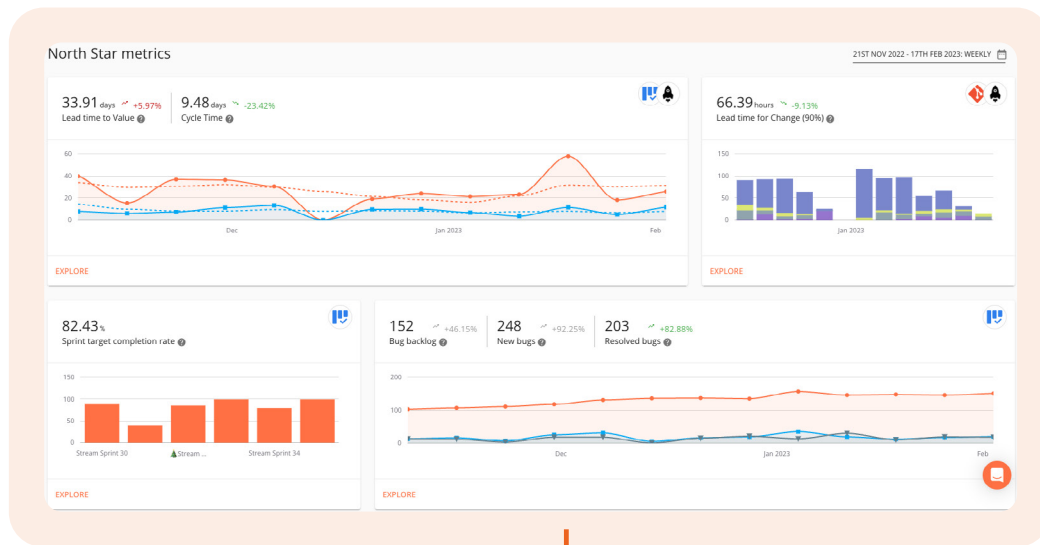
North Star Metrics Dashboard
Plandek Platform

"Effective technology delivery is a key strategic differentiator for our business..

"Plandek enables me to track and drive delivery effectiveness - putting intelligent insight in the hands of my teams and enabling me to communicate success better with my stakeholders."

Phil Haslam
CEO TalkTalk

2.4 Implementation champions

The Plandek CS team work closely with Demaine Ward, TalkTalk's Scrum / Agile Practice Lead to engage delivery managers, engineering managers and others and help them setup customised Plandek dashboards that relate to their particular area of responsibility (or 'workspace' within Plandek).

In addition, Plandek enables managers to select pre-configured 'Xcelerator' dashboards to address particular challenges such as reducing lead time; improving sprint accuracy; improving quality or increasing deployment frequency.
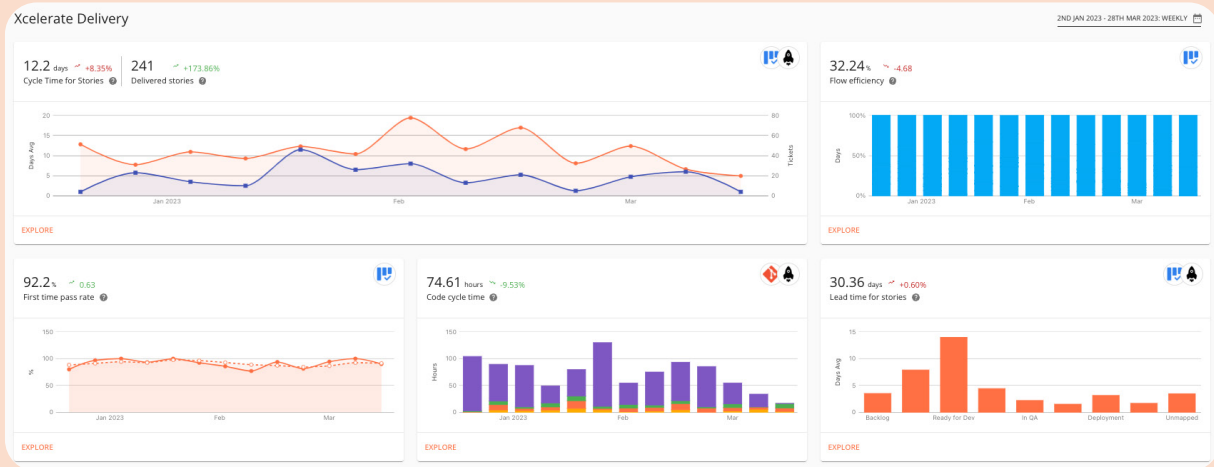
Xcelerate Delivery Dashboard
Plandek Platform

2.5 Team engagement – Key Plandek Differentiator

Plandek's core belief is that data-driven delivery will never drive real business value unless it is 'loved by teams and relied on by managers' – by this we mean it should be a 'bottom-up meets top-down' process which completely engages teams, so that the entire delivery organisation buys into improving shared goals and metrics.

In contrast, top-down metrics implementation/value tracking is unlikely to achieve its stated goals. Teams understandably resent it and feel it contrary to the spirit of Agile.

As such they will not trust the metrics (especially if they are unflattering), so metrics lose their power to inspire. They may also become inaccurate as they do not reflect the idiosyncrasies of team workflows.

Plandek has a range of dashboards and intelligent analytics designed for team use – to help them deliver their immediate delivery goals (e.g. within a sprint).

Plandek's LiveView feature is available for Atlassian (Jira) customers and applies intelligent algorithms to identify anomalous tickets in real time, to flag these to Team Leads for review. For example, these 'action items' might be tickets that have remained in a status longer than normal, have a higher degree of complexity than normal or have been added after a sprint has started.

In addition, Plandek has a range of metrics and dashboards for scrum and Kanban teams to help deliver better on a daily basis. As TalkTalk runs Microsoft ADO, they are unable to access LiveView but have adopted many other team-level dashboards. A typical example is shown in the figure below.

Team Delivery Dashboard
Plandek Platform
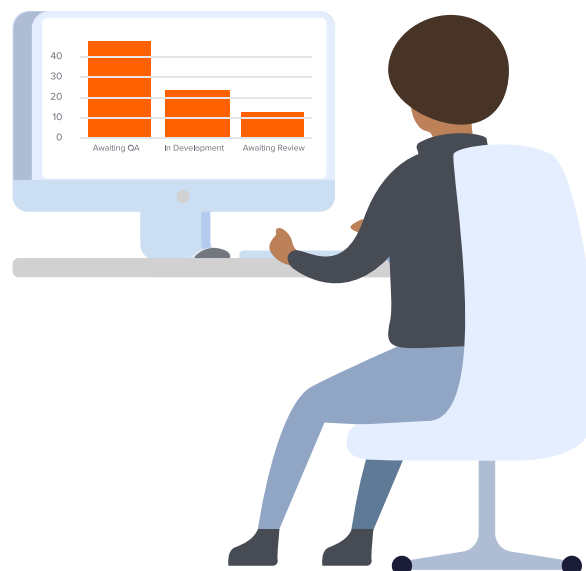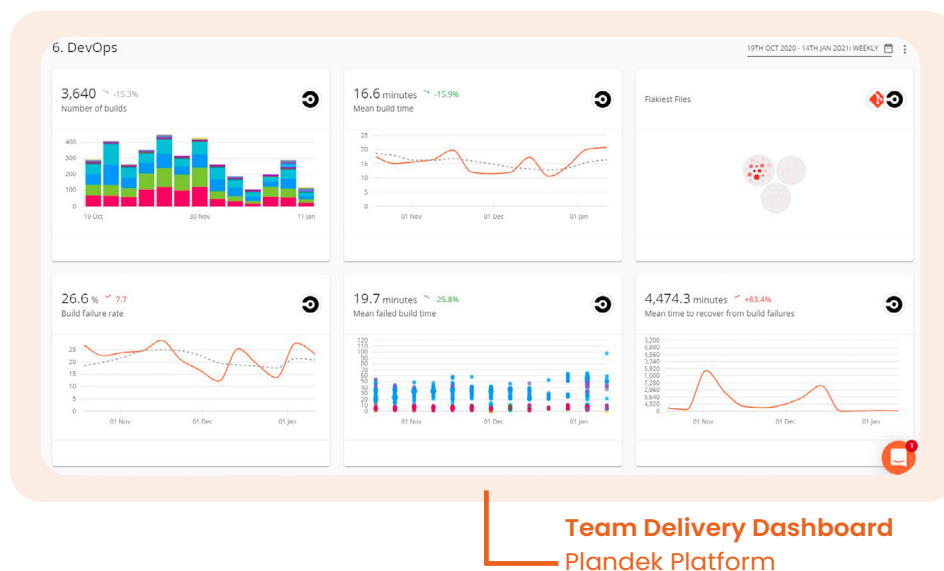
3. **Tracking success** – the impact of the Plandek implementation at TalkTalk

Plandek helps TalkTalk accelerate value delivery in key ways:

1. It opens up 'the black box' of technology delivery for C-Suite stakeholders so, for the first time, they receive understandable KPIs that provide a balanced scorecard of delivery effectiveness, thereby greatly improve communication and trust between the TalkTalk delivery team and its internal customers.

2. It ensures that the delivery capability is aligned around the key strategic (value creating) priorities of the business.

3. It provides a set of metrics that is shared and understood from scrum teams upwards, so that everyone within tech delivery is focused on driving improvement over time – and there is a set of KPIs that are understood within technology and between technology and internal stakeholders.

4. It enables the technology team to clearly track and manage the allocation of resource between 'the things that really matter' like R&D (development of new roadmap features), relative to less productive effort such as technical debt and unplanned work.

5. It is designed to be 'loved by teams and relied on by managers' – so that the teams themselves (upon which the ROI of tech delivery ultimately depends) become data-driven and track and drive the determinant metrics that drive improvement in the higher level KPIs that determine delivery ROI (such as Lead Time to Value and Deployment Frequency). This is crucial in ensuring that it is not imposed 'top-down' on technology teams and it is adopted on a long-term basis to drive value

It therefore can deliver demonstrable improvement in the metrics that drive value delivery such as:

1. **Deployment Frequency** of new features – up to 400% increase.

2. **Time to Value** (the time taken to deliver an increment of software) – up to 55% reduction.

3. **Sprint Accuracy** (the key determinant of delivering new features in a predictable way) up to 80% improvement.

4. **Escaped Defects** to ensure that software quality actually improves whilst velocity is increased – up to 54% reduction in escaped defects.

Contact Plandek

Want to learn more about Plandek?

Sign up for a free account today to explore the platform or **book a custom demo** with our team.

Or go to Plandek's Resources page to learn more about how you can utilise the power of metrics, Value Stream Management and end-to-end visibility.