



AGILE MANAGEMENT APPROACH TO REMOTE TEAMS



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“Agile project management is ideal for dynamic environments, and its success is driven by an adaptive approach towards solutions development.”

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Today’s business world is complex and dynamic. Management teams constantly face constant changes in requirements, in addition to budget constraints and demanding stakeholder expectations. Organizations are looking for options to do more with less — fewer resources, including reduced budgets. Therefore, it’s essential for any prospective solution provider to provide clients with options that are focused on optimizing every aspect of business, including project management.



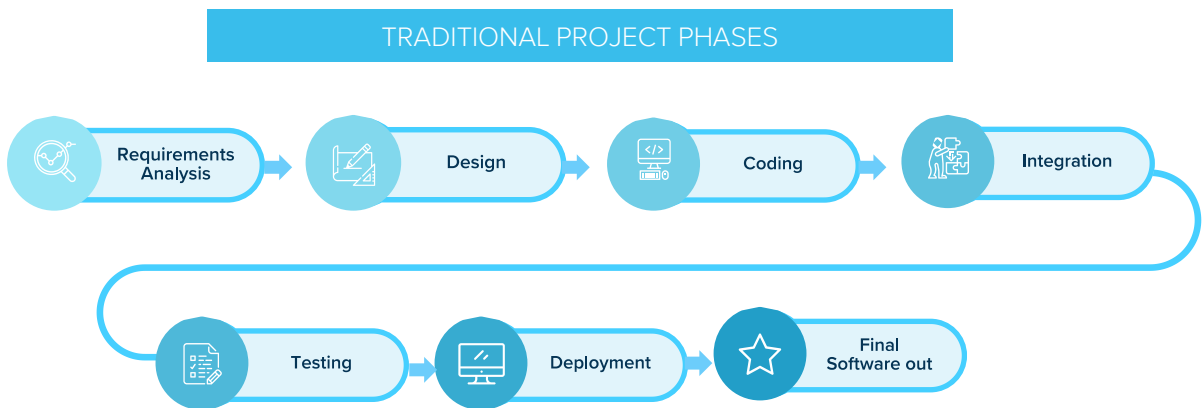
Traditional project management is deliverable-driven; in other words, it shoulders that circumstances affecting the project are predictable. Agile project management, oppositely, operates well in a dynamic and adaptive environment. Agile project management is a highly iterative and incremental process in which constant communication between the customer (end user / client stakeholders) and the project team, which includes functions of project management and business analysis, is an inherent and critical element to success.

Another business challenge is the availability of responsible, and proven subject matter experts for today’s complex challenges. Hence, it is indispensable to consider the use of geographically dispersed resources in order to ensure quality delivery of solutions, by utilizing remote communication tools for project success. This whitepaper highlights an approach for adopting the agile project management framework, within a remote communications context.

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Introduction

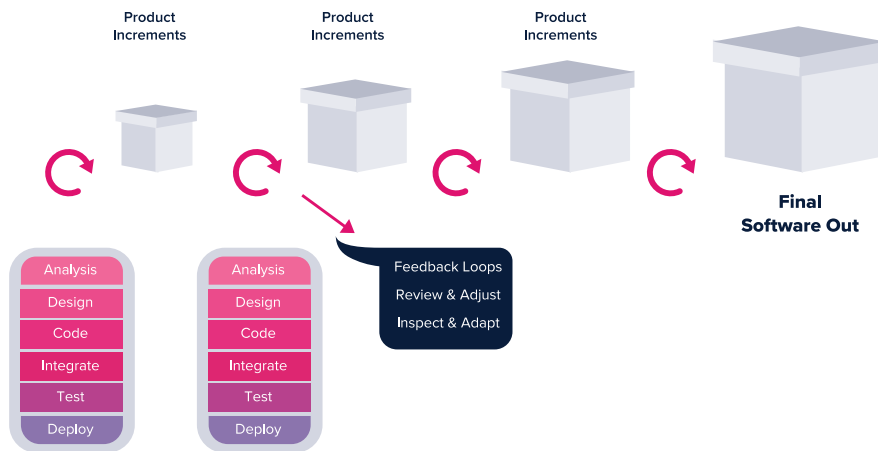
One similarity between traditional and agile project delivery is to complete activities that deliver measurable results. Traditional project management can be described as a “waterfall” or “top-down” approach, which presumes that requirements, expectations, activity durations, and expected outcomes of projects can be predicted precisely and planned in a sequence before executing any activity. As a result, it is common to hear case study scenarios where clients typically have difficulty in articulating all project requirements during initiation phases yet undergo project activities that force to produce a comprehensive requirements document for sign-off by the users before development can initiate. A frequent result of this scenario is an extensive and sometimes cumbersome time investment in change management activities.



In contrast, and according to Sanjiv Augustine, agile project management “is a way of managing projects to deliver customer value via adaptive planning, rapid feedback, continuous improvement and intense human interaction and collaboration”. Delivering “customer value” is a key aspect of agile project management. Agile project management is conducted through the collaboration of a small, co-located team that usually consists of the customer/end user, a project manager, a business analyst (or the role of business analysis) and specialist(s). Specialists could include system developers, subject matter experts, and/or resources with specific knowledge required for project success.

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What is Agile Project Management?



Jim Highsmith, one of the originators of the Agile Manifesto and a recognized expert in agile approaches, has defined agility in project management by the following statements: “Agility is the ability to both create and respond to change in order to profit in a turbulent business environment,” and “Agility is the ability to balance flexibility and stability”.

In contrast with traditional project methods, agile efforts focus on the incremental delivery of working products or prototypes for client evaluation and optimization. While traditional project management adopts the premise that the entire set of requirements and activities can be forecasted at the beginning of the project, agile methods combine all the elements of product development, such as requirements, analysis, design, development and testing — in brief, regular iterations delivering a working product in each iteration, which in turn may serve as inputs into future iterations.

Agile theory suggests that changes, and additional features will be integrated throughout the product development life cycle, and that changes are opportunities to improve the product and make it more fit for its use and to be in conformance with the business purpose and stakeholder expectations.



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Agile Manifesto



The Agile Manifesto, written by a group of advocates of iterative and incremental development methods, is the foundation document of the agile movement, and, in combination with a set of **12 agile principles**, sets forth the underlying philosophical concepts of agile project management. The manifesto is included here to enable the reader to understand that the “Go Agile” service’s objectives are to help transition an organization from its current projects delivery approach to one that is compatible with the principles outlined in the manifesto. (Agile Manifesto).

“We are uncovering better ways of developing products by doing it and helping others to do it. Through this work we have come to value:

1. Individuals and interactions over processes and tools
2. Working products over comprehensive documentation
3. Customer collaboration over contract negotiation
4. Responding to change over following a plan

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- Agile Manifesto -

12 AGILE PRINCIPLES

“Our highest priority is to satisfy the customer through early and continuous delivery of valuable products.

Changing requirements should be welcomed, even late in development. Agile processes harness change for the customer’s competitive advantage.

The delivery of working products should be frequently, from a couple of weeks to a couple of months, with a preference to the shorter timescale.

Business people and developers must work together daily throughout the project.

Projects should be built around motivated individuals. Give these individuals the environment and support they need, and trust them to get the job done.

The most efficient and effective method of conveying information to and within a development team is face-to-face conversation.

Working products is the primary measure of progress.

Agile processes promote sustainable development. The sponsors, developers, and users should be able to maintain a constant pace indefinitely.

Continuous attention to technical excellence and good design enhances agility.

Simplicity — the art of maximizing the amount of work not done — is essential.

The best architectures, requirements, and designs emerge from self-organizing teams.

At regular intervals, the team reflects on how to become more effective, then tunes and adjusts its behavior accordingly.”
(www.agilemanifesto.org)

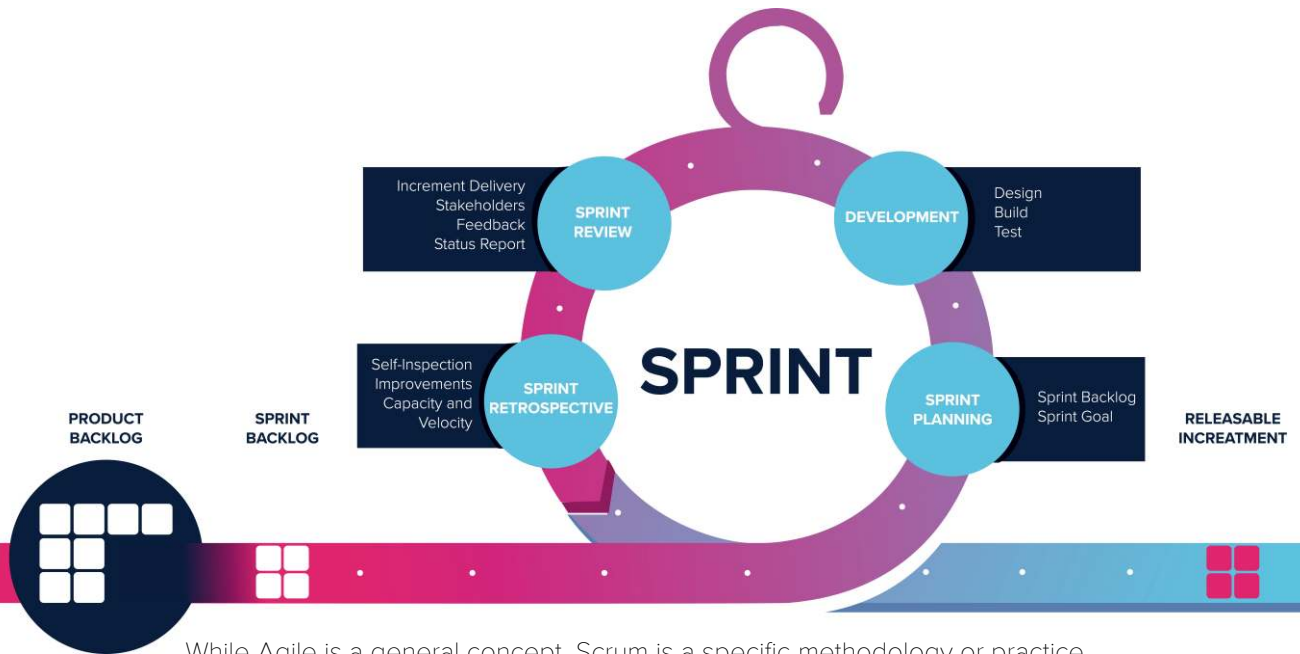
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In a nutshell, what is Agile?

- Disciplined project management approach
- No precise definition, rather a set of Principle & Practices base on Agile Manifesto
- Focused on delivering business value and welcomes change
- Agile is a general concept, Scrum, XP, etc., are specific implementations of Agile
- Structured around an incremental framework
 - frequent delivery & continuous feedback loops
- Empirical process with frequent inspections and adaptation cycles that minimize waste
- Allows to accommodate rapid product changes
- Frequent releases in short development cycles (iteration, time-boxing etc.)
- Minimum requirement/specification upfront, and test documentation
- Values self-organizing, self-managing, cross-functional teams that make and meet commitments
- Engineering practices that rapidly delivery high quality software



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While Agile is a general concept, Scrum is a specific methodology or practice manifestation of agile. Some key characteristics of Scrum are:

- A framework within which people can address complex problems, while productively and creatively delivering product of highest possible value.
- Scrum is light weight, simple to understand
- The greatest potential benefit of Scrum is for complex work involving knowledge creation, and collaboration, such as new product development.
- The Scrum framework consists of Scrum Teams and their associated roles, events, artifacts, and rules. Each component within the framework serves a specific purpose and is essential to Scrum's success and usage.
- Specific strategies for using the Scrum framework vary. The rules of Scrum bind together the events, roles, and artifacts, governing the relationships and interaction between them.
- It is a most common Agile method
- Teams are responsible for creating and adapting their processes within this framework
- Scrum uses fixed-length iterations, called sprints, which are typically two weeks or thirty days long
- Scrum attempts to build a potentially shippable (properly tested) product increments every iteration

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Remote Teams

By definition, projects are temporary by nature. Hence project teams are also temporary. On certain occasions, team resources are geographically dispersed and co-location is not an option. Thankfully, due to advances in communication technologies, remote interactions are no longer a barrier to project success.

Some key tools for remote communications include the following:



Some issues in the past with remote communications are not necessarily related to technology. For example, different time zones for participants, intermittent internet and/or telephone connections, and keeping medium to large groups focused on agenda item.

These issues, however, are managed and controlled with appropriate planning and coordination efforts.



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Solution to Managing Agile Remote Teams

As mentioned earlier, a key component to agile teams is their ability and agility to communicate dynamically. But at the same time, resource availability may require remote team member interaction.

Some agile practitioners will recommend to reorganize existing organizational structures or arrange for distant resources to co-locate at a given location. But from a business and cost effectiveness perspective, these alternatives are not viable.

Below are some key elements or actions that can be considered to maintain agile approach effectiveness with remote communications:



Remote communications do not need to be faceless:

Video conferencing tools, even those on mobile devices, allow for a variant of face-to-face interaction

Name agile diplomats

If one small group within a project team is remote, internal communications may continue from a pure agile practice, while a selected team member is the communication liaison with other participants. This is common when a hybrid project management approach exists, and it is recommended when senior client stakeholders are not familiar with agile practices.

Collaboration tools

A key to success in all projects is collaboration. Hence, project leaders need to facilitate appropriate working environments that facilitate multidirectional communications.

Cloud computing or online communication tools are great for remote team interaction:

- They allow for a central repository of project documentation
- With certain tools teams can submit, review, and decision over documents, codes, reports, etc., with integrated workflow configurations. (Example: Jira, Trello, Microsoft SharePoint, TFS, etc.)

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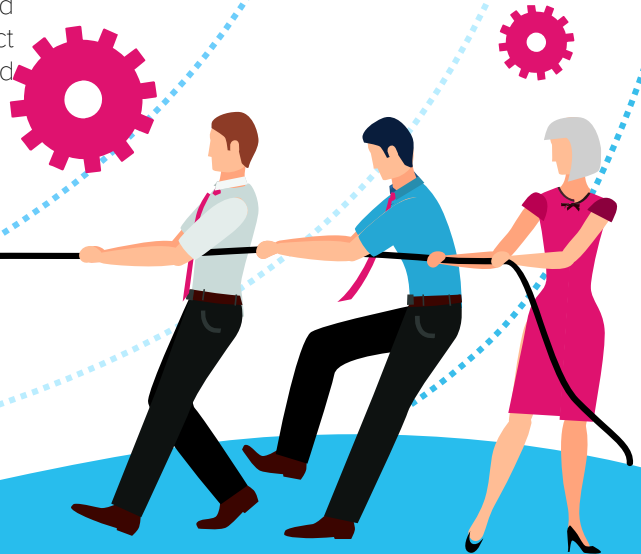
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Scheduling a 30-minute free consultation is the first step to achieve your goals.

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