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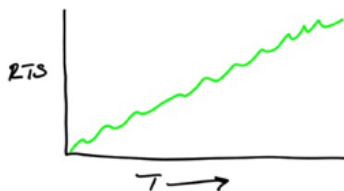
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Successful Projects through Agile Project Management

NANCY NEE

AGILE PROJECT



Both traditional and agile project ³ retweet delivery embody similar principles and practices that aim to deliver measurable results. Traditional project delivery can be described as a “waterfall” approach, which presumes that the requirements, expectations, duration, activities and outcomes of projects can be predicted accurately and planned in a sequence before any actual development activity takes place.

In contrast with traditional project methods, agile methods emphasize the incremental delivery of working products or prototypes for client

evaluation and optimization. While so-called “predictive” project management methods assume that the entire set of requirements and activities can be forecast 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. Each iteration delivers a working product or prototype, and the response to that product or prototype serves as crucial input into the succeeding iterations.

Delivering “customer value” is a key aspect of agile project delivery. 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). Agile theory assumes that changes, improvements and additional features will be incorporated throughout the product development life cycle, and that change, rather than perceived as a failing of the process, is seen as an opportunity to improve the product and make it more fit for its use and business purpose.

Key Challenges for Implementation

The migration from traditional product development and project management methods to agile methods requires substantive changes in the manner in which certain functions, such as gathering user requirements, deriving a project schedule, engineering the product, managing the team and measuring progress, are performed. The variations between traditional and agile methodologies indicate that “organizations must rethink their goals and reconfigure their human, managerial, and technology components in order to successfully adopt agile methodologies” (Nerur et al., 75). Companies wishing to adopt agile development and project management frameworks must overcome the following key challenges:

Project Portfolio Management

Agile approaches are best suited for innovative, exploratory/experimental projects such as new software systems with requirements emerging as development proceeds or new product development efforts for a quick-moving marketplace like consumer electronics. Project portfolio management (PPM) is a criteria-based decision making model for allocating scarce organizational resources to the most critical programs and projects. Where traditional projects may be funded using a well-worn forecasting process, a company calendar (e.g., fiscal quarter or year), or project milestones, agile projects may have to be funded iteratively based upon their deliverables and changing requirements. Many organizations have difficulty managing a bifurcated project portfolio.

Organizational Structures and Cultures

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Moving to an agile framework is also an exercise in cultural migration. Depending on the geographic location, the business (i.e., products and services delivered), and the organizational structures and culture, some firms will make the journey from traditional methods to agile methods in an enthusiastic and seamless fashion, others will display considerable resistance to the agile ideas, and yet others are simply a poor fit for these approaches. For example, highly regulated industries that require extensive bureaucracies, intricate processes or detailed documentation will probably lack tolerance for the lean, nimble, artifact-light approach that agile advocates. The challenges in migrating from a traditional environment to an agile environment involve resistance and objections that may occur at three levels:

Management Level

Executive and senior management commitment and support is critical for adopting agile. Key management concerns that must be addressed include:

Predictability. Traditional managers like to work within predictable environments that allow them to outline detailed requirements, plan a complete project, forecast the budget and manage resources. Agile keeps their focus on the delivery of value to the customer.

Extensive Time Commitment. Managers must be prepared to accept and sponsor the intensive level of collaboration and involvement that agile methods require. They may have to forgo written status reports in exchange for the daily stand-up meeting.

Resources Management. Instead of being task managers, they must be ready to trust their project teams to be self-directed and to tolerate a bit more resource risk as they discover which team members are prepared to take the leap to agile approaches.

Risk Management. Managers must prepare to accept the reality of project uncertainty, risk and cost and abstain from arbitrary schedules and budgets.

Metrics and Measurements. Managers have to accept that the traditional ideas of success and failure will be transformed in an agile environment. Success will not be measured by compliance to plan or strict change control, but by the outputs delivered by the project teams.

The Team Level

Teams that harbor misconceptions that agile teams don't plan, can't estimate, don't document and can't scale can be significant impediments to any agile migration. A central tenet of the agile movement is the requirement for highly skilled developers. Since agile teams are expected to be small, self-governing and self-regulated, there is a high expectation in regard to the personal attributes of team members. They should enjoy the special challenges of working in an agile environment, be prepared to forego personal recognition in favor of team accomplishment and enjoy working in a highly transparent environment in which their work products, creativity and diligence are visible to their teammates and customers.

The Stakeholder/Customer Level

The trepidations that customers and stakeholders express include the fear that scope will lurch out of control. They will lose the traditional signposts of progress on which they have come to rely, and estimates of time and cost will not be available to help them allocate budget and staff. They also convey unique concerns, such as the agile requirement for intense collaboration and constant availability, and its affect on their own workload. Sales and management teams may express concerns about "account management" as customer representatives are integrated into agile teams.

Project versus Project Leader Manager

The traditional project manager (PM) who manages the triple constraints (scope, time and resources) through the use of a project plan will need to change his/her approach to managing the agile team. The successful agile PM must migrate from management to leadership, from monitoring compliance to enabling self-direction, and from acting as a foreman to becoming a facilitator of creativity and innovation.

Distributed Resources and Virtual Teams

A key concern of organizations that wish to adopt agile is the question of dispersed and virtual teams in agile environments. Communication, collaboration and customer interaction are key tenets of agility and many of the agile methods require attendance at a daily session. Therefore, the ability to form and manage teams across multiple geographies and times zones through the use of video, collaboration tools or other virtual techniques is critical to the success of agile

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projects. Additionally, teams in which PMs and developers are working on many projects at once add to these concerns.

Adopting the Agile Project Management Framework

To adopt agile project management, companies must take an iterative (or an agile) approach to introduce the framework within their organizations. They must become familiar with agile frameworks, assess their current capabilities to adopt agile project management, develop and implement short-term and long-term initiatives, and adopt the framework over a period of time.

Learn about Agile Project Management

Before launching the "transformation to agile" project, it is important for key executives, senior managers and project managers/leaders to learn about agile frameworks, the *Agile Manifesto*, and the lexicon that surrounds agile. Learning can be achieved by taking courses, by reading books and publications, and referring to web resources, such as the Agile Alliance and the Project Management Institute (PMI®). Just as agile is an iterative approach, learning should also be performed iteratively to reinforce the adoption of agile project management.

Assess Organizational Readiness

"Are we ready to execute an agile project?" is a question that can be answered by conducting "Strengths and Weaknesses" and "Organizational Readiness" assessments. The organization needs to identify and evaluate the various organizational forces in place that may help or hinder its transition to agile project management. Executives and senior managers need to determine:

- Degree to which the organization values innovation and creativity over organizational stability
- Degree to which the organization can make independent, product-related decisions without consulting other organizations
- The organization's willingness to work with uncertainty
- The organization's ability to allocate resources full time to one project rather than assign to multiple projects
- The organization's ability to understand and embrace multiple approaches to documenting and measuring project progress
- Degree to which the organization is able to partner with their customers

Assess the Project Portfolio

As previously mentioned, agile approaches are best suited for innovative, "never-been-done" projects. They are not the best fit for repetitive, well-documented, low-variability, low-uncertainty, and production-style projects. Executives, senior managers, and project managers/leaders review the project portfolio and divide it into two discrete portfolios by determining which projects are best suited for agile project management and which are suited for traditional project management frameworks.

Assess Project Manager (PM) Readiness

"Are the PMs ready to execute agile projects?" is a question that can be answered by conducting a "Project Manager Readiness" assessment. Executives, business managers, and all project managers need to determine:

- Degree to which the project manager focuses on the customer rather than on following standard project management procedures
- Degree to which the project manager values innovation and practical processes over sticking with the plan
- Degree to which the project manager is comfortable with an uncertain and changing environment
- Project manager's skill and commitment to sharing information as needed with all stakeholders
- Project manager's level of commitment to the team and the willingness to promote team collaboration
- Project manager's ability to motivate the team, delegate, and then get out of the way

Assess the Project Team Readiness

"Are the project teams ready to function within agile project management?" is a question that can be answered by conducting a "Team Readiness" assessment for each team member. Executives, business managers and the PMs need to determine:

- Team members' ability to make independent decisions

- Team members' commitment and capability to collaborate and work as a group
- Degree to which the team members can communicate in person
- Degree to which the stakeholder is willing and able to become a team member
- Team members' ability to problem solve and come up with new ideas
- Team members' knowledge and experience with the application area and the tools for creating the project result

Analyze Existing Product Development and Project Management Methodologies

The organization's culture, structure and methodologies will determine the effort required to transition to agile project management. Therefore, it is important for executives, business managers and PMs to clearly understand:

- Which existing processes, tools and templates for executing projects can be applied to the agile project management framework?
- How will jettisoning certain processes and structure impact the business?
- How much effort and investment in time and resources will be required to develop new tools, templates and processes?
- Will the metrics and measurement techniques to determine project success (or failure) need to change?
- Will reporting methods be different for agile versus traditional projects?
- How will stakeholders and customers react to the change?
- How will the existing culture and organizational structure be impacted by agile project management?

Organic Implementation: One Small Project and One Team

Once the company makes the decision to give agile project management a try, it is critical not to turn the implementation into a "big bang" project. Instead the company should select a small project from its "innovative projects portfolio" and build a team to execute the project. This will require assigning the right PM and the most experienced team members to the project. Once the team has been formed, it goes through formal training to learn about agile and led by the PM with the help of the project sponsor(s), executes the project in an iterative manner using agile methodologies.

The Future is Here

Although the agile movement was the "brain child" of the software development and IT world, it has grown and evolved over the past several years. There is no question that today agile project management can be, and has been, applied successfully to a broad range of projects. Users and stakeholders have benefited from the agile project management approach — one in which the end user and the project team are partnered in a collaborative effort focused on the project vision and the end result.

Don't forget to leave your comments below

Nancy Nee, PMP, CBAP, CSM, Executive Director, Project Management & Business Analysis Programs, ESI International, is a recognized expert in Agile PM and SCRUM. She has almost two decades of PM and BA experience in the healthcare, information technology, financial services and energy industries. Visit <http://www.esi-intl.com>.

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