Agile Methods

What is Agile project management?

Agile project management is a process for managing a project that involves constant collaboration and working in iterations. It works off the basis that a project can be continuously improved upon throughout its life cycle and adapt to changes quickly.

What are the benefits of using Agile methodology?

Agile is one of the most popular approaches to project management because it is flexible, it is adaptable to changes and it encourages customer feedback.

Many teams embrace the Agile approach for the following reasons:

- Rapid progress: By effectively reducing the time it takes to complete various stages of a project, teams can elicit feedback in real time and produce working prototypes or demos throughout the process
- Customer and stakeholder alignment: Through focusing on customer concerns and stakeholder feedback, the Agile team is well positioned to produce results that satisfy the right people
- Continuous improvement: As an iterative approach, Agile project management allows teams to chip away at tasks until they reach the best end result

Types of Agile methodologies

Agile project management is not a singular framework but an umbrella term that includes a wide range of methodologies, including Scrum, Kanban, Extreme Programming (XP), and the Adaptive Project Framework (APF).

- Scrum: It is ideal for projects with rapidly changing requirements, using short sprints.
- Kanban: It visualizes project progress and is great for tasks requiring steady output.
- Lean: It streamlines processes, eliminating waste for customer value.
- Extreme Programming (XP): It enhances software quality and responsiveness to customer satisfaction.
- Adaptive Project Framework (APF): Works well for projects with unclear details, as it adapts to constantly evolving client needs.

How to implement Agile methodology into projects

1. Choose the right Agile framework

Your first priority is to select the right Agile framework for your team.

- Scrum: Principle-based project management
- Kanban: Visual workflows and processes
- Scrumban: Hybrid of Scrum and Kanban
- XP: Customer-focused product development

- APF: Versatile teamwork

2. Assemble your Agile team

An Agile team isn't like any ordinary team.

If you want to find success with any of the Agile methodologies, you need to build a team with clear roles and responsibilities and a culture of collaboration.

What are some of the responsibilities of an Agile team?

Self-organization: One of the cornerstones of an Agile team is the ability to self-organize. In Agile project management, the onus is on individual team members and teams to take initiative and organize themselves in a way that will lead to the highest output.

Cross-functional collaboration: Going hand in hand with the need for self-organization is the Agile demand for cross-functional collaboration. Agile teams have to relay information across departments and be able to work closely with a range of colleagues.

Iteration planning: Specific to Agile project management, iteration planning requires team members to outline the scope of individual sprints according to the product backlog.

3. Plan the project

Now that you've selected one of the Agile methods and assembled your A-team, it's time to plan out your project.

Meticulous planning is one of the secret ingredients of successful Agile project management.

From the outset, you need to spend time clearly defining your project goals and scope. This will prevent unexpected setbacks and allow you to break down each portion of the project into manageable sprints (if you're using Scrum).

You might also draw up a product backlog during the planning phase, which is most common in software development projects. The product backlog allows you to assign a priority level to your tasks so everyone on the team knows what they should focus on.

4. Manage stakeholder expectations

Before you get your project underway, it's important to check in with any key stakeholders to make sure you factor in their feedback.

Depending on the level of their involvement, your project stakeholders may then want to be kept in the loop throughout the process or at least receive regular updates. Creating feedback loops eases any uncertainty on the stakeholder end and allows you to stay open to change should it be necessary at any stage of the process.

5. Measure success

Measuring project success is key to making meaningful progress with your Agile methodology of choice.

By paying attention to what worked and what didn't during the project management process, you can extract key lessons to apply to future Agile projects.

There are various ways to effectively track progress and measure success with Agile projects:

- Daily standups: Brief meetings to discuss obstacles and find solutions
- Sprint reviews: Informal sit-down meetings to present work and solicit team feedback
- Retrospectives: Reflections on past work to inspire and influence future progress