Ascent Advisor

Adopting Agile Mindset to Getting Projects Done

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Key Point

Agile is a time-bound, iterative approach to getting projects done incrementally from the start. Agile provides opportunities to assess the direction of a project throughout the development lifecycle. The Agile approach increases reliability, flexibility, quality and speed.

Agile is a time-bound, iterative approach to getting projects done incrementally from the start. Agile projects evolve through collaboration of people working as a team across functions. Agile teams focus on delivering project milestones within short cycles. The Agile approach increases reliability, flexibility, quality and speed.

The Agile methodology is an alternative to traditional project management. Traditional projects are managed through sequential phases such as requirements, design, development, testing and deployment. From start to finish, the entire project cycle may take 6 to 12 months, with frequent compromises on customer requirements, scope, quality, costs and schedules.

Typically, projects are planned with limited understanding of the full scope. Customer requirements evolve as the prototypes are tested. Changes in expectations as the work has started results in expensive changes during latter stages. Changes during development are seen as an obstacle to staying on schedule. The time assigned for quality assurance usually gets crunched at the end, causing quality compromises. Projects managed using traditional approaches tend to go over budget, schedule and design requirements.

Agile teams work towards a common goal—to get great products done.

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The Agile approach provides an answer to these common challenges. Instead of trying to contain change, Agile projects account for the dynamic nature of projects in iterative cycles. Instead of trying to capture all the requirements upfront, Agile projects design as they go. Instead of waiting for a finish product to test, testing defines quality from the start which informs development on how to build the product. Instead of relying on hand-offs between functions, cross-functional people work as a team through the project.

In traditional project management the scope drives the budget and the schedule. A change in scope results in a change in costs and schedules. Agile projects box the schedule in set cycles and flex the scope. The idea is that great products evolve from good prototypes. Getting a working product done is better than getting it done to perfection.

Agile techniques have been widely adopted by technology companies developing software. By now, the Agile approach has gained acceptance across multiple industries that find useful applications of Agile principles to many types of projects.

Agile implementations vary based on the nature of the project, the amount of change required, the resources available to complete projects, and the size of the project teams.

Agile provides opportunities to assess the direction of a project throughout the development lifecycle. This is achieved through regular and short work cycles, known as sprints. At the end of each sprint, the project team delivers a potentially shippable product milestone—a working prototype. By focusing on completing project milestones within sprints, teams make rapid, incremental improvements that evolve into the finish product on time and within budget.

Joining an Agile team is a lot like working in a startup. People pitch in and do whatever it takes to make the project successful—regardless of title or role. People still have core competencies, and they generally stick to what they do best, but roles tend to blur as analysts, designers, programmers, content developers, and testers work towards a common goal—to get a great product done.

	Agile Execution	Traditional Project Mgmt.
Project Complexity	Disciplines interact in creative ways to incrementally develop innovative products	Disciplines follow operating procedures to produce according to specifications
Amount of Change	Customer requirements tend to evolve as the product is designed and developed	Customer requirements are fully specified upfront with minimal or no changes afterwards
Time & Resources	High need to use resources efficiently, contain costs and meet project deadlines	High tolerance for delays, able to enforce change orders and extend use of resources
Deliverables	Project teams deliver incremental outputs in short cycles that evolve into the finished project	Project teams work through set phases to complete the entire project all at once