

: *What is an agile framework for projects?*

Daniel J. Power

Editor, DSSResources.com

An agile framework or methodology guides teams in an iterative and incremental delivery of a project goal, a defined "product". A modern agile framework supports the entire lifecycle of a project, from initiation to close. Jim Highsmith (2004) proposed an Agile Project Management (APM) Framework. Schwaber and Beedle (2002) and Schwaber (2004) proposed an agile software development framework with Scrum. Scrum values include a commitment to success, courage to undertake challenges, a focus on creating value and excellent work, openness about concerns and processes, and respect for other team members. An agile framework is a guide to action.

Smaller scope, discrete projects related to analytics, decision support, and digital transformation are especially suited to agile development. Large scale enterprise projects benefit from creating discrete tasks completed by agile teams. Project-oriented organizations benefit from an agile culture. According to McGannon (2018), "Agile project management allows you to produce smaller deliverables more frequently and efficiently, making it an excellent choice for teams that work in product development, programming, business analysis, and other collaborative areas. But it's a fragile process that requires the right scope, goals, and management."

Using an agile framework assumes team members have an agile mindset. Attitudes and culture must support an agile working environment. People should encourage and support mutual respect, collaboration, continuous improvement and learning cycles, pride in ownership, a focus on delivering value, and must have the ability to adapt to change. Teamwork starts with respecting teammates. Overall, the purpose of using agile project management is to respond to changes and additions to a project quickly.

Highsmith (2004) prescribes his APM framework as a series of steps that take a project from an initial vision to the final delivery of an outcome or "product". The ordered phases of the APM framework are:

1. Envision,
2. Speculate,
3. Explore,
4. Adapt, and
5. Close.

Envision Phase:

The envision phase is the initial phase of project management within an APM framework. In general,

: *What is an agile framework for projects?*

after approval of a business case, the agile key members are involved in the envision phase where they collaborate to create a compelling vision for a project. The Envision phase identifies a client's/customer's vision of the project, decides the key capabilities required in the project, sets the business objectives of the project, identifies the quality objectives of the project, and identifies the right participants and stakeholders of the project and plans how the team will deliver the project.

Speculate Phase:

In the Speculate phase, the product vision is translated into a backlog of requirements. In this phase, the overall approach to meet the requirements is planned and a high level release plan for the product is presented. There are two key activities in the Speculate phase: 1) The team must come up with at least an initial understanding of the requirements for the project. Each feature will be further broken down into one or more "user stories" for the team to discuss and estimate. The requirements also have to be prioritized so that the team knows in what order to start working on them; and 2) The second task is to determine a high level milestone based plan based upon how long it would take to create those features. This planning happens at multiple levels such as release level, wave level and iteration level.

Explore Phase:

According to McGannon, "this is the phase most people get excited about. ... We now get to produce the product." As the name suggests, in this phase agile team members explore various alternatives to implement and fulfill the requirements of a project. In this phase, work deliveries and testing take place. Here, the product vision needs to be transformed to a release plan and then to the respective iteration plan. The team works in an iterative manner in the explore phase that means, they take a sub-set of the product's features or stories and accept them into a plan for an iteration. Then the team will proceed to work on the development of the stories. This phase goes hand-in-hand with the adapt phase, where the team learns from the experiences during development and the feedback from the customer. This is the phase where you produce the product.

Adapt Phase:

In the adapt phase, the agile team reviews the results of execution, the current situation, performance of the team against the plan and adapts as per the requirements. Adaptation can be changing the approach to project, changing the process, changing the environment, changing the project's objectives and so on to meet the requirements of the customer/client. Taking feedback, acknowledging it and adapting to the situation based on the feedback is the major work task in this phase.

Close Phase:

This is the last phase in an agile project management framework. Close is the process of finalizing all activities. For example, providing final deliverables to the client/customer, delivering documentation, archiving project materials, releasing staff and equipment for other projects, and

: *What is an agile framework for projects?*

informing stakeholders of the completion of the project. The Close Phase concludes a project in an ordered manner capturing the project's key lessons or lessons learned.

Agile project management produces small, discrete deliverables more frequently and more efficiently. Using an agile framework is especially appropriate for teams working in business analytics, product development, software development, and other tasks that benefit from collaboration. Agile provides the best results for narrow-scope projects with defined goals in organizations with collaborative management.

Using a dance metaphor, Agile is a set of related dances. Agile is an umbrella term for multiple iterative and incremental approaches. One sees similarities and differences. Agile dance frameworks include Scrum, Crystal, Dynamic Systems Development Method, Kanban, Extreme programming (XP), and Feature-Driven Development (FDD). Each of these agile dances is important to study and learn from. Agile is the guiding project philosophy and the Scrum framework, Crystal, XP, etc. are the specific rules and directions used day to day by a team.

Ken Schwaber and Jeff Sutherland explain Scrum in **The Scrum Guide™** (2017). They state in an End Note "Scrum's roles, artifacts, events, and rules are immutable and although implementing only parts of Scrum is possible, the result is not Scrum. Scrum exists only in its entirety and functions well as a container for other techniques, methodologies, and practices." For this reason, people should be Agile rather than Scrum purists.

Schwaber and others refer to Agile and Scrum as frameworks and not methodologies because the word methodology seems too prescriptive. According to Sliger (2011), Scrum simply provides a structure for delivery, but does not tell you how to do specific practices, leaving that to the team to determine." A client begins a new project with a vision or desire, a statement of the project outcome. An agile framework provides a sophisticated Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) approach to managing the project. Develop a plan to test a change (Plan), carry out the test (Do), observe and learn from the consequences (Study), and determine what modifications should be made, what did you conclude from this cycle? (Act). Agile and the PDSA cycle encourage and promote continuous, incremental improvement to reach the desired outcome. Modern organizations need both an agile framework for work and rigorous project management.

All of the agile frameworks and methods are linked to the Agile Manifesto and 12 core agile principles. Understanding and adhering to the guidance of the manifesto and principles makes a person, a team, even an organization more agile. Agile is **not** a specific process, a tool, or term. Agile is a mindset.

References

Agile Certification Training: Agile Project Management Framework

Highsmith, J., *Agile Project Management: Creating Innovative Products*, Addison-Wesley, 2004.

McGannon, B., "Agile Project Management Foundations," Lynda.com

Power, D. J., "Do agile processes have phases or steps?" DSSResources, 2020 at URL <http://dssresources.com/faq/index.php?action=artikel&id=506>

Sliger, M. (2011). Agile project management with Scrum. Paper presented at PMI® Global Congress 2011—North America, Dallas, TX. Newtown Square, PA: Project Management Institute at URL <https://www.pmi.org/learning/library/agile-project-management-scrum-6269>

Schwaber, K. (2004). *Agile project management with Scrum*. Redmond, WA: Microsoft Press.

Schwaber, K., & Beedle, M. (2001). *Agile software development using Scrum*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Schwaber, K. and J. Sutherland (2017), "The Scrum Guide," Scrum.Org and ScrumInc at URL <http://www.scrumguides.org/index.html>.

Takeuchi, H., & Nonaka, I. (1986, January-February). The new new product development game. *Harvard Business Review*, [Reprint 86116].

: *What is an agile framework for projects?*

Workfront Blog, "The Beginners' Guide to Agile Project Management Methodology," at URL <https://www.workfront.com/blog/the-beginners-guide-to-agile-project-management-methodology>.

Author: Daniel Power

Last update: 2020-02-06 04:46