: Do agile processes have phases or steps?

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Some methods classified as agile do use the phases or steps terminology. The "phases" are not however discreet, rather phases in agile processes are overlapping and some are iterative in each sprint or iteration. Many developers learned the Systems Development Life Cycle (SDLC) phases and some find it convenient to use that terminology. Scott Ambler (2012) discusses a number of agile system development life cycle models. Scrum primarily emphasizes the construction life cycle. A broader view begins with the 1) Concept Phase: Pre-Project Planning, followed by 2) Inception/Warm Up: Project Initiation, 3) Construction Iterations, 4) Transition: The "End Game", and finally, 5) Production and 6) Retirement. A wide range of activities overlap these phases.

Agile processes are organized in a manner that fits the project and team perceptions and needs. Agile is an iterative approach where a team delivers work in small, but meaningful, increments.

Agile projects are often managed in five stages, called the Agile Life Cycle. According to Parziale (2017), the stages are 1) Envision, 2) Speculate, 3) Explore, 4) Adapt, and 5) Close. These stages are not discrete, overlap can occur in iterations. Briefly, the steps have outcomes.

During the Envision stage, you and your customer will determine what it is you are trying to build.

The Speculate phase is where team members develop a dynamic backlog of the workload,

In the Explore phase, agile team members explore various alternatives to implement and fulfill the requirements of a project. This stage focuses on how to complete and implement features for every defined iteration.

The Adapt and Review phase is when developers compare results on features outlined during the Explore section with the plans first defined during the Speculate phase.

The Close phase occurs after the final project iteration has been completed. Close is the project handover, the client signs off and a broad retrospective on what was learned throughout the project

that can be applied for future engagements.

A well known Agile Project Management Framework was proposed by Jim Highsmith (2004) in his book, Agile project management – creating innovative products. Highsmith defines the APM framework as a series of steps that take a project from an initial vision of a product to the final delivery of the product. There are five different phases in the Agile Project Management framework that occur in project development. The ordered phases of the APM framework are:

1. Envision

2. Speculate

3. Explore

4. Adapt

5. Close

The envision phase is the initial phase of project management within an APM framework. In general, after approval of a business case, the agile key members are involved in the envision phase where they collaborate to create the 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.

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.

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.

According to McGannon, Explore "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.

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.

The Close phase in agile project management concludes the project in an ordered manner capturing the project’s key lessons. Every project needs to end and that's what project close and completion is all about in the final phase of the project life cycle. The goal of a project is to deliver what you promised and hopefully to exceed expectations. By delivering everything you said you would, you make sure that all stakeholders are satisfied and that all acceptance criteria have been met. When stakeholders are satisfied, the project ends.

So phases or steps are part of agile processes, but agile coaches, project managers, and other leaders in an organization need to figure out what approach and steps work best for each organization. A manufacturing organization may produce better results with Kanban, a retail chain may want a modified Scrum, a pharmaceutical company may implement a phased approach with iterations.

Different environments and circumstances require various agile dances.

References

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