

# : *What is agile project management?*

Daniel J. Power

and Ciara Heavin

Applying agile values and principles to managing a project is commonly identified as Agile Project Management (APM). Using an agile approach gained momentum after a group of software development practitioners (Beck et al., 2001) published a "Manifesto for Agile Software Development". APM is an iterative, value-driven approach to delivering a project. Sanchez et al (2019) refer to this as the "Agilification" of project management.

Agile project management is a repetition of a process that involves breaking down a project into smaller, more manageable chunks to better deliver a successful project and create value. APM emphasizes methods and processes that prioritize action and feedback over planning and control (Schmitz, 2018). Managing a project based upon agile principles involves continual collaboration with stakeholders and continuous improvement and iteration at every stage.

Let's look at the context. Management is a general term for a process that involves directing and monitoring a group of people or an entire organization to reach a goal. Typically, the role of a manager is to efficiently and effectively deploy, direct and coordinate human resources, financial resources, technological resources, and other resources. Project management is also a broad, general term. Managing a project involves applying knowledge, skills, tools, and techniques to guide project activities that are intended to meet the project requirements.

Project managers initiate, plan, monitor, and close the work of a team to achieve specific goals and meet specific success criteria. The primary challenge of a project manager is to achieve all of the project goals within the given constraints. Managing most projects involves finding a balance between the three constraints of scope, cost, and time to achieve a high-quality outcome. It is broadly understood that due to the complexity of managing some projects, increasing the availability of one's resources, especially in the form of adding people, may actually have an adverse effect on the quality of the outcome. Adding staff may actually make a late project later. This effect is sometimes referred to as the mythical man-month phenomenon, cf., Brooks (1975).

Agile project management has increased in popularity over the years as managers try to overcome the many complex issues associated with more traditional project management approaches. In comparison, APM seems simple and intuitive. Drumond (2020), a marketing strategist for agile tools vendor Atlassian, explains a narrow software view that "Agile project management is an iterative approach to managing software development projects that focuses on continuous releases and incorporating customer feedback with every iteration." A broader view of Agile project management focuses on the governance and control needed to deliver any complex projects, cf., Barnes (2017).

## : *What is agile project management?*

The Association for Project Management (APM) resources page states "Agile project management is an iterative approach to delivering a project throughout its life cycle. ... Agile project management focuses on delivering maximum value against business priorities in the time and budget allowed, especially when the drive to deliver is greater than the risk. ... One of the aims of an agile or iterative approach is to release benefits throughout the process rather than only at the end."

The TechTarget Essential Guide explains that "Agile Project Management (APM) is an iterative approach to planning and guiding project processes. Just as in Agile Software Development, an Agile project is completed in small sections. ... Insights gained from the critique of an iteration are used to determine what the next step should be in the project."

workfront (2018), a project management software company, in its beginners' guide explains "Agile project management is a modern, flexible approach to project management. It allows you to break large projects down into more manageable tasks, which are tackled in short iterations or sprints. This enables your team to adapt to change quickly and deliver work fast."

According to the Project Management Institute (PMI), more than 70% of organizations have incorporated an Agile approach, and Agile projects are 28% more successful than traditional projects, cf., Conrad (2019). PMI (2017) reports "an actively engaged executive sponsor is the top driver of projects meeting their original goals and business intent."

In the QuickStart Business Productivity Blog, Ali (2018) identifies 5 companies that successfully implemented Agile Scrum project management including 3M, IBM, ANZ, Google, and Spotify. IBM witnessed improvements in metrics such as on-time delivery, defect backlog, customer satisfaction, maintenance and innovation, cf., Brown (2013).

Agile project management is a flexible and iterative approach used to manage small and large projects. It is a human-centric approach, where work is organized in small chunks delivered incrementally by a collaborative, self-organizing team. Multiple teams may work on a single project. For some bureaucratic organizations and certain types of high-risk innovation projects, a pure APM approach may not be viable. A more pragmatic solution may require a balance between the stability offered by a more traditional bureaucratic planning approach and the flexibility associated with an agile approach. The adoption of a hybrid project management approach may be an appropriate solution for high-risk projects.

# : *What is agile project management?*

## References

Ali, S., "How Agile Scrum Training Transformed these 5 Companies," QuickStart Business Productivity, May 04, 2018, at URL <https://www.quickstart.com/blog/how-agile-scrum-training-transformed-these-5-companies/>

Author Unknown, "What is agile project management?" Association for Project Management, <https://www.apm.org.uk/resources/find-a-resource/agile-project-management/>

Barnes, P., "Introduction to Agile Project Management, Part 1," TDAN February 1, 2017 at URL <https://tdan.com/introduction-to-agile-project-management-part-1/20937>

Beck, K., M. Beedle, A. Van Bennekum, A. Cockburn, W. Cunningham, M. Fowler, J. Grenning, J. Highsmith, A. Hunt, R. Jeffries, J. Kern, B. Marick, R.C. Martin, S. Mellor, K. Schwaber, J. Sutherland, D. Thomas, "The Manifesto for Agile Software Development (2001), available at URL <http://agilemanifesto.org>.

Brooks, F., *The Mythical Man-Month*, Boston: Addison-Wesley, 1975.

Brown, A. W., *Enterprise Software Delivery: Bringing Agility and Efficiency to the Global Software Supply Chain*, Upper Saddle River, NJ: Addison-Wesley, 2013.

Drumond, C., "Agile Project Management," Atlassian Agile Coach, 2020, at URL <https://www.atlassian.com/agile/project-management>.

Conrad, A., "What Exactly Is Agile? A Definition of Agile Project Management," Capterra, November 18, 2019 at URL <https://blog.capterra.com/definition-of-agile-project-management/>

Project Management Institute (PMI), "Pulse of the Profession®," 2017 at URL <https://www.pmi.org/-/media/pmi/documents/public/pdf/learning/thought-leadership/pulse/pulse-of-th>

## : *What is agile project management?*

e-profession-2017.pdf.

Sanchez, F., E. Bonjour, J. Micaëlli, and D. Monticolo, "A Step for Improving the Transition Between Traditional Project Management to Agile Project Management Using a Project Management Maturity Model," *Journal of Modern Project Management*, May-Aug 2019, Vol. 7, Issue 1, pp. 102-119, at URL <https://www.journalmodernpm.com/index.php/jmpm/article/view/455>.

Schmitz, K., "A Three Cohort Study of Role-Play Instruction for Agile Project Management," *Journal of Information Systems Education*, Spring 2018, Vol. 29 Issue 2, pp. 93-103 at URL <https://aisel.aisnet.org/jise/vol29/iss2/5/>.

TechTarget, "Agile Project Management," *Essential Guide: CIO guide to project management basics, DevOps and Agile* at URL <https://searchcio.techtarget.com/definition/Agile-project-management>

workfront staff, "The Beginners' Guide to Agile Project Management Methodology," *Workfront*, May 7, 2018 at URL <https://www.workfront.com/blog/the-beginners-guide-to-agile-project-management-methodology>

Author: Daniel Power  
Last update: 2020-03-15 11:12