Lesson Proper for Week 2

What is Agile project management?

Agile project management is an iterative approach to **project management** which allows you to break large projects down into more manageable tasks tackled in short iterations or **sprints**. This enables your team to adapt to change quickly and deliver work fast.

As the name suggests, the Agile project management allows teams to be better equipped to quickly change direction and focus. Software companies and **marketing agencies** are especially aware of the tendency for changes to happen from week-to-week. The Agile methodology allows teams to re-evaluate the work they are doing and adjust in given increments to make sure that as the work and customer landscape changes, the focus also changes for the team.

If you're new to the Agile project management, it might look at first like a complex and difficult-to-manage system. But, whether you realize it or not, you're already doing many of the things Agile requires. With a few tweaks, you'll be on your way to shorter development cycles and smaller, more frequent product releases.

Who uses Agile project management?

Originally created for software development, Agile is quickly being adapted by more than just IT teams. Marketers, universities, the military, and even the automotive industry are also looking at the Agile methodology and other Agile frameworks to deliver innovative products in uncertain environments. Many organizations can benefit from Agile project management, and it's simple to set up and utilize.

In the software world, when a decision to build or further develop an existing technology is made, the end product may be hard to define. Agile allows for that ambiguity because of its flexibility to change direction on a project as work moves into the future.

Key components of Agile project management

User stories

Put simply, a **user story** is a high-level definition of a work request. It contains just enough information so the team can produce a reasonable estimate of the effort required to accomplish the request. This short, simple description is written from the user's perspective and focuses on outlining what your client wants (their goals) and why.

Sprints

Sprints are a short iteration, usually between one to three weeks to complete, where teams work on tasks determined in the **sprint planning meeting**. As you move forward, the idea is to continuously repeat these sprints until your product is feature ready. Once the sprint is over, you review the product see what is and isn't working, make adjustments, and begin another sprint to improve the product or service.

Stand-up meetings

Daily stand-up meetings (under 10 minutes), also known as "daily Scrum meetings," are a great way to ensure everyone is on track and informed. These daily interactions are known as "stand up" because the participants are required to stay standing, helping to keep the meetings short and to the point.

Agile board

An Agile board helps your team track the progress of your project. This can be a whiteboard with sticky notes, a simplified **Kanban board**, or a function within your project management software.

Backlog

As project requests are added through your intake system, they become outstanding stories in the backlog. During Agile planning sessions, your team will **estimate story points** to each task. During sprint planning, stories in the backlog are moved into the sprint to be completed during the iteration. Managing your backlog is a vital role for project managers in an Agile environment.

Agile team roles

Different Agile methodologies may require specific team roles to adhere to the framework, or may not require any specified roles. Though individual Agile implementation may not require all of these roles, here are a few common roles that you may find:

- **Scrum Master.** The Scrum Master ensures that each sprint stays on track and helps to remove or resolve any issues or challenges that may come up. They are the team's advocate.
- **Project owner.** The role of the project owner is to define the goals of each sprint, manage and prioritize the team backlog, and be the voice of the customer or internal stakeholder.
- **Team members.** The people on this team are the ones who execute the work in each sprint. These teams, usually of three to seven people, can be composed of different specialties and strengths, or they can be teams of people with the same job roles.
- **Stakeholders.** This is an informational role only. The **stakeholders** should be kept up-to-date on the product and sprint goals, have the opportunity to **review and approve** work during a sprint, and provide feedback during the sprint retrospective.

Each Agile methodology has its own unique list of team members and roles, and while the titles may change, there are a few universal role characteristics that most **Agile team structures** should have:

1. **T-shaped:** A valuable Agile team member has a wide breadth of basic knowledge about their subject but also deep knowledge, experience, and ability in one (or more) specific areas.

2. **Cross-functional:** Cross-functional Agile team members have skills outside their traditional areas. They might know some basic graphic design principles and data analysis or even some HTML/CSS.

3. **Adaptable:** They know how to be diverse with their skills. No matter what the environment is, their output remains consistent.

4. **Curious:** Part of optimizing and becoming more efficient is asking the right questions and challenging the way things have always been when it's appropriate.

5. **Entrepreneurial:** An Agile team member is one that doesn't wait to be told what to do. They're ready to fill in and develop campaigns whenever they see a need.

6. **Team-oriented:** Team players prioritize the success of the team over their own personal glory. If everyone is delivering on time and syncing well together, they see that as a win.

7. **Committed to excellence:** One of the key benefits of Agile projects is delivering quality work, faster. Team members who are committed to excellence don't settle for average. They're not hung up on perfection, but they're dedicated to always producing their best work.

What are the 6 steps in the Agile methodology?

The goal of Agile is to produce shorter development cycles and more frequent product releases **than traditional waterfall project management**. This shorter time frame enables project teams to react to changes in the client's needs more effectively.

As we said before, you can use a few different Agile project management frameworks—**Scrum** and **Kanban** are two of the most common. But each Agile methodology will follow the same basic process, which includes:

1. Project planning

Like with any project, before beginning your team should understand the end goal, the value to the organization or client, and how it can be achieved.

You can **develop a project scope** here, but remember, the purpose of using Agile project management is to be able to address changes and additions to the project easily, so the project scope shouldn't be seen as unchangeable.

2. Product roadmap creation

A roadmap is a breakdown of the features that will make up the final product. This is a crucial component of the planning stage of Agile, because your team will build these individual features during each sprint.

At this point, you will also develop a product backlog, which is a list of all the features and deliverables that will make up the final product. When you plan sprints later on, your team will pull tasks from this backlog.

3. Release planning

In traditional **waterfall project management**, there is one implementation date that comes after an entire project has been developed. When using an Agile project management, however, your project uses shorter development cycles (called **sprints**) with features released at the end of each cycle.

Before kicking off the project, you'll have to make a high-level plan for feature releases and at the beginning of each sprint, then you'll revisit and reassess the release plan for that feature.

4. Sprint planning

Before each sprint begins, the stakeholders need to hold a **sprint planning meeting** to determine what will be accomplished by each person during that sprint, how it will be achieved, and assess the task load. It's important to share the load evenly among team members so they can accomplish their assigned tasks during the sprint.

You'll also need to **visually document your workflow** for team transparency, shared understanding within the team, and identifying and removing bottlenecks.

5. Daily stand-ups

To help your team accomplish their tasks during each sprint and assess whether any changes need to be made, hold short **daily stand-up meetings**. During these meetings, each team member will briefly talk about what they accomplished the day before and what they will be working on that day.

These daily meetings should be only 15 minutes long. They aren't meant to be extended problem-solving sessions or a chance to talk about general news items. Some teams will even hold these meetings standing up to keep it brief.

6. Sprint review and retrospective

After the end of each sprint, your team will hold two meetings. First is holding a sprint review with the project stakeholders to show them the finished product. This is an important part of keeping open communication with stakeholders. An in-person or video conference meeting allows both groups to build a relationship and discuss product issues that arise.

Second, you will have a sprint retrospective meeting with your stakeholders to discuss what went well during the sprint, what could have been improved, whether the task load was too heavy or too light for each member, and what was accomplished during the sprint.

If your team is new to Agile project management, don't skip this meeting. It helps you gauge how much your team can tackle during each sprint and the most efficient sprint length for future projects.

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