

Executive Summary

Agile Project Management – Part 1-3

The first half of Mark C. Layton's and Steven J. Ostermiller's book Agile Project Management from the For Dummies series covers the core concepts of the agile approach to project management and software development as well as compares and contrasts those concepts against the older waterfall approach. These first parts also cover the primary points of the agile manifesto, agile principles, and platinum principles, as well as what they mean and examples of how they might be applied to a project. Lastly, this half of the book breaks down the main implementations of the agile approach: lean, scrum, and extreme programming, and dives into the core steps of the scrum approach.

Part 1 of the book starts with a brief history of modern project management, including the waterfall approach used in early government computer projects, and how those approaches were appropriate for the time but no longer offer benefits to modern software development. This section introduces the Agile Manifesto, a short series of four core values shared among many project managers that were codified in the early 2000's, as well as the twelve Agile Principles which provide practical guidance to project managers attempting to execute a project in an agile manner. The section then goes on to compare and contrast the agile approach and waterfall approach, and provides examples of why the agile approach is generally more suitable for modern software and product development due to its focus on more stakeholder interaction, informed planning, and quick iteration.

Part 2 of the book discusses techniques used to make agile teams more successful and details the three main implementations of the agile methodology: lean, scrum, and extreme programming. The three main agile approaches all build upon the same foundation of a less prescriptive and more grassroots and just-in-time project that benefits from the most informed and up-to-date information when planning and implementing features. This section also establishes some values, roles, and changes to the work environment that have a track record of improving project performance, including simple things such as collocation of team members to improve communication.

O'Connor, Jake

Part 3 of the book breaks down the standard approach to agile project management into its component parts, from high level planning stages to the minimum day-by-day meetings and ceremonies. Most agile projects start with the minimum possible planning, creating a vision and roadmap for the product as well as the rough corresponding requirements. From that point agile teams, including the developers, scrum master/producer, and product owner, should have all they need to break down the requirements from the product vision and user stories into bite-sized pieces of work that can actually be completed in a timely manner. Those hunks of work, generally referred to as tasks or stories, are then organized by relative priority and slotted into 1-4 week-long cycles called sprints that help to organize, analyze, and predict work. This section also discusses the common agile sprint ceremonies: planning, which is exactly what it sounds like; scrum, a short, daily wherein team members communicate their active work and any issues that need to be resolved; sprint review, a meeting where teams demonstrate and celebrate the work achieved during a sprint; and sprint retrospective, a meeting where the agile team self-reflects in order to make future sprints more effective.

Overall, the first half of this book is a great introduction to agile projects. The book does a good job of detailing why waterfall is generally ill-suited for modern project management, especially for software development projects, and how the agile approach is used to combat each of those problems. The examples provided are generally relatable, informative, and include full descriptions. One negative takeaway I have from the first half the book is that it doesn't always maintain a good balance between being prescriptive on specific agile procedures and actually adhering to the agile tenet that all project teams are slightly different and any process that inhibits performance should be bucked. Still, I would highly recommend this book so far to anyone interested in project management on an agile team or even for an outsider that just wants to know why people keep using the term 'scrum'.

References

Layton, M. C., & Ostermiller, S. J. (2017). *Agile project management*. Hoboken, NJ: For Dummies®, a Wiley brand.