

Consultancy and Professional Practice

W6: Implementation

Planning & Control

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The Planning Paradox

Too little planning
Chaos

Too much planning
Paralysis

The answer isn't just a middle ground. It's a **different kind** of planning:

- Plan for **learning and iteration**, not just execution
- Focus on *process*: who decides what, how we respond to surprises
- Build a **navigation system**, not turn-by-turn directions



Directions fail when the road is closed. A navigation system **recalculates**.

Tame vs. Wicked Problems

Tame Problems

- Clear problem definition
- Agreed success criteria
- Known solution pathway

Examples: payroll migration, data platform rollout, standardised processes

Wicked Problems

- Problem definition is contested
- Stakeholders disagree on success
- Solving it changes the problem

Examples: culture change, team collaboration, customer relationships

⚠ Most organisational change is **wicked**, yet organisations reach for project management tools designed for **tame** problems.

Based on Edmonstone (2010), drawing on Rittel & Webber (1973)

“Clumsy” Solutions for Wicked Problems

The term sounds pejorative, but it's not.

“Elegant”

Clean, logical, complete. Assumes the problem is well-defined

“Clumsy” ✓

Exploratory, incremental, adaptive. Accommodates multiple perspectives

In practice: shorter planning horizons, frequent checkpoints, genuine decision points, agile methods



Four Illusions of Change

Complexity theory highlights four persistent illusions in change management:

Manageability

“If we just plan well enough, we can manage this.”

Change is more complex than any plan can capture.

Control

“We can control the outcome.”

Market shifts, leadership changes, politics: all beyond anyone’s control.

Linearity

“Change proceeds in neat steps.”

Reality loops back, jumps forward, detours sideways.

Predictability

“We can forecast what will happen.”

“Best practice” doesn’t transfer mechanically between contexts.



The response: plan with **humility**. Build in sensing mechanisms. Develop capability for improvisation within the plan’s intent.



The Consultant's Role in Planning

Consultant-led

Hands-off

For most change implementations, the sweet spot is **facilitation**:

- Consultant brings methodology and asks good questions
- Client team provides knowledge and **owns the output**

 If the consultant creates the plan, the client doesn't learn how to plan.
Facilitate the planning.

Close Control

Even adaptive approaches need close control. It serves three functions:

- **Monitoring**: things stay roughly on track
- **Early warning**: spotting problems before they escalate
- **Quick response**: enabling rapid adjustments

This requires:

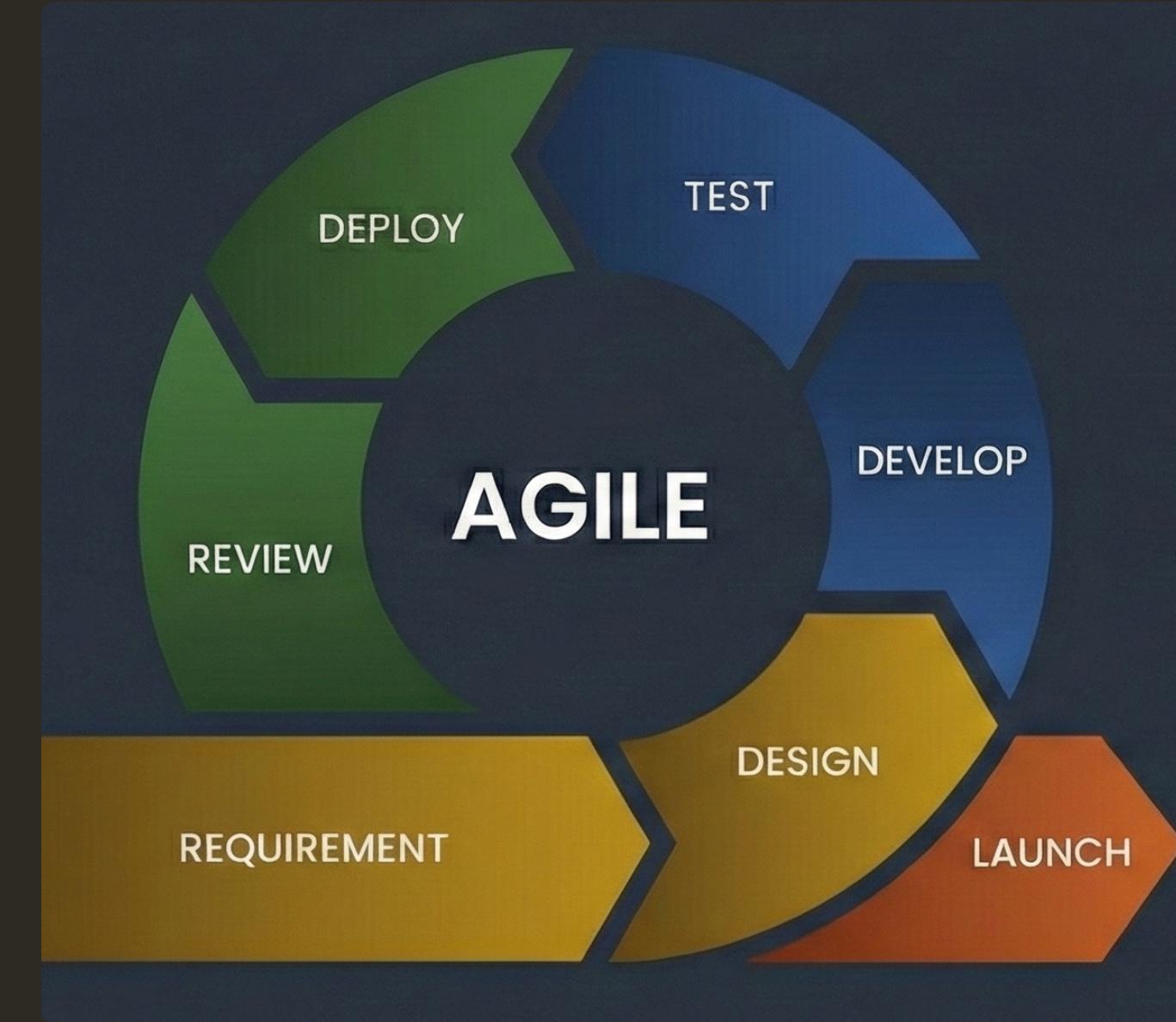
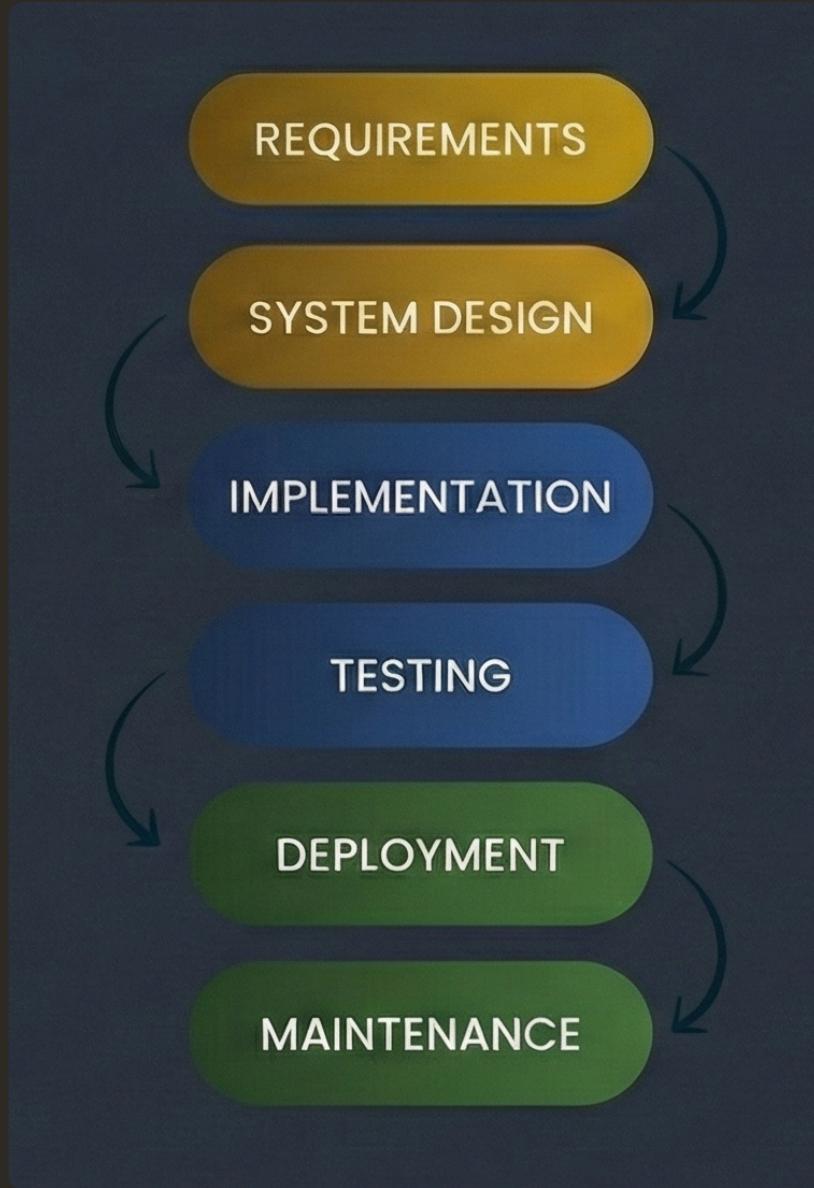
- **Tracking**: regular progress reviews against milestones and KPIs
- **Clear governance**: ownership within the client organisation, not just the consultant
- **Status reporting**: keeping stakeholders informed with honest updates

⚠ Without close control, you find yourself **managing blame** rather than managing change.

O'Mahoney & Markham (2013)

An Alternative: Agile Approaches

The traditional consulting model follows a linear sequence—but what if the problem is wicked?



 Think about a change initiative that clashed with reality. What, if anything, allowed it to adapt? What prevented successful adaptation?

→ COMING UP NEXT

Setting the right targets and managing expectations.