**What Is Agile? And When to Use It**

*Agile is an approach to project management that leans heavily on short time frames, adaptability, and iteration.*

**What is Agile?**

Agile is an approach to project management that centers around incremental and iterative steps to completing projects. The incremental parts of a project are carried out in short-term development cycles. The approach prioritizes quick delivery, adapting to change, and collaboration rather than top-down management and following a set plan.

In Agile processes, there is constant feedback, allowing for team members to adjust to challenges as they arise, and stakeholders an opportunity to communicate consistently. Though originally created for software development, the Agile approach is now widely used in executing many different types of projects and in running organizations.

Contrast this with more traditional forms of project management. Traditional project management generally progresses linearly through planning, designing, implementation, and closing stages. One stage must be complete before moving to the next one.

***So what’s Agile methodology?*** *Agile is technically not a methodology by itself, but rather a mindset for approaching how projects get done. It's not considered a methodology because Agile doesn't specify which tools and processes should be used.**Agile is, however, the umbrella term for many types of management methodologies. Scrum, Kanban, and Extreme Programming (XP) are each considered different Agile methodologies.*

**When should you use Agile project management?**

The tenets of **Agile**—adaptability, iteration, continuous delivery, and short time frames, among others—make it a project management style that’s better suited for ongoing projects and projects where certain details aren’t known from the outset. That means if a project doesn’t have clear constraints, timelines, or available resources, it’s a good candidate for an Agile approach.

For example, designing and launching a new product might push a team against several unforeseen challenges. Having an Agile approach can mean the project already has the methodology in place to test products as often as needed, iterate quickly, and communicate changes with stakeholders.

**Traditional project management** approaches like Waterfall can be easier to plan out and progress easier to measure. This can make projects that have clearly demarcated constraints (like a strict budget or timeline), or projects where teams are expected to work independently of stakeholders better suited for traditional approaches.

**Industries that use Agile methods**

Agile grew from the minds of a group of software development project managers. Since then, it has continued to be popular in software development, but has expanded to many other industries as well. These include finance, IT, business, fashion, biotechnology, and even construction—among many others.

**Using both Agile methods and Waterfall methods**

Not all projects fit neatly into one category or the other. For the projects that might benefit from elements of both a traditional approach and iterative approach, an Agile-Waterfall hybrid approach can make sense. This could mean, for example, that planning and design are done in Waterfall, but development is carried out in short development cycles, Agile-style.

**Agile methodologies and frameworks**

There are several Agile methodologies and frameworks, each with its own pros and cons. Some are hybrids of multiple methodologies. Scrum is by far the most commonly used Agile methodology; Digital.ai found that 66 percent of Agile adopters used Scrum, with the next most-used methodology being ScrumBan, at 9 percent.

Popular Agile methodologies include:

* Scrum
* Kanban
* Lean
* Crystal
* Extreme Programming (XP)
* Feature-Driven Development (FDD)
* Domain-Driven Design (DDD)
* Dynamic Systems Development Method (DSDM)
* ScrumBan
* Agile-Waterfall/Hybrid Agile
* Scrum XP Hybrid

**Agile values and principles**

Agile project management was established on four values and twelve principles. These values and principles are rooted in the Agile Manifesto, which was created in 2001 by seventeen managers of software development. Much of the philosophy that underpins the Agile Manifesto came about in reaction to what people perceived as the bottlenecks of software development processes at the time.

**Agile Values**

**Individuals and interactions over processes and tools:**While tools and processes are important, the Agile Manifesto prioritizes the people behind them. Having the right people in place and empowering them to interact smoothly with each other can lead to successes that tools by themselves won’t be able to.

**Working software over comprehensive documentation:**The creators of Agile believed that it was more important to get stuff done than get bogged down in the planning and documentation stages.

**Customer collaboration over contract negotiation:**Instead of siloing stakeholders off from the project, Agile aims to maintain contact with them throughout the creation process.

**Responding to change over following a plan:**Following a plan that doesn’t make sense to follow anymore can be counterproductive. Adaptation is central to the Agile philosophy.

The twelve principles define early and frequent delivery, simplicity, constant feedback, the collaboration of interested parties, and individual support, among other principles, as the pillars of Agile project management.