Agile project management is a modern solution that provides for greater flexibility within the realm of project management. It uses life cycles that are composed of several iterations or incremental steps toward the completion of a project. Although this method of project management is typically used in the software development world it is moving its way into becoming a popular project management staple. However, many traditional project managers and team members are wary of this new method because of what appears to be a lack of documentation and planning. However, this is not the case and Agile methods do include many forms of documentation and planning but they are very different from the traditional Gantt charts and project manuals.

There are documentation and planning happening throughout each cycle within the Agile project management methodology. The initial goal of agile is to create shorter development cycles and more frequent product releases. The shorter time frame enables the team to react and respond to the user and client needs effectively and flexibly. However, with any project before the team can begin the end goal needs to be understood. The product owner’s value, the user’s value, and how it will be achieved all must be known. Otherwise, known as the project’s scope, this can be developed but should not be viewed as unchangeable due to Agile flexibility. Within this first step in the cycle, the documentation that will be initially developed includes the vision statement, the high-level backlog or feature list, product roadmap, press release, as well as an elevator pitch. All of these are known as artifacts and include written documentation and planning.

Within the Agile method user stories are gathered and created in order to create the (low-level, specifics) product backlog. These user stories are documented on cards and are gathered through user or customer workshops. These user stories are then placed into the product backlog as features to complete. This also includes all of the technical work, investigation, and the fixing of defects that need to be completed on these features. All of which is documented for the team members to use to plan each sprint or cycle. The product backlog also gets groomed meaning that extra work goes into adding details, prioritizing, and estimating how long the team thinks features will take to complete (assigning story points). The team also determines how many features they believe they can complete within a sprint (velocity). All of which is documented for the team to use throughout the process.

Once these are processes are planned and documented sprints or cycles (1 calendar month) are ready to commence. Each sprint gets planned first. A sprint goal is determined or the highest priority items on the product backlog are selected to be completed. The velocity determines how many of these prioritized items selected to be completed. Next, a sprint Task Board is created along with a daily burn down chart. The Task Board displays throughout the sprint whether tasks are not started, in process, or completed. The daily burndown chart shows the number of story points completed at the end of each day in a graphical form. Both being examples of documentation and planning. When the sprint is ending a sprint review and sprint retrospective are completed. The sprint review allows everyone with input to the product development effort and opportunity to inspect and adapt what has been completed thus far. It is time to ask questions, make suggestions, and discuss the best course of action to move forward given the current situation. The product owner and stakeholders are involved as well as the users or customers through another round of workshops. With the sprint retrospective, the Agile team examines the processes used to produce the product thus far and determines what worked well, what did not work well, and what opportunities to do things differently are available. Which yet again not only helps for planning the next sprint cycle but also is documented.

Although the Agile project management methodology is different than that of tradition or waterfall project management it still provides planning and documentation. The planning and documentation, however, is spread out of the course of the project to ensure flexibility for the product and with a lot of transparent open face-to-face meetings rather than through a specs document or a Gantt chart. Agile project management may be new however, it is designed to be ready for and embrace change.