

Traditional vs Agile Project Management Method: Which One s Right for Your Project?

By Sandeep Kashyap (adapted version)

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In recent years, agile has taken the world of project management and software development by storm. Everyone seems to be talking about this [project management methodology](#). The business world is changing rapidly and that's why businesses are looking for processes, approaches, and methodologies that could help them run a business without any glitches. While there are tens of different project management approaches, but the final choice should be made keeping the nature of the business and its requirements in mind. Out of all the methods, traditional (waterfall) and agile methodologies are often pitted against each other.

What is Traditional Project Management?

Traditional [project management](#) is an established methodology where projects are run in a sequential cycle. It follows a fixed sequence: initiation, planning, execution, monitoring, and closure. The traditional project management approach puts special emphasis on linear processes, documentation, upfront planning, and prioritization. As per the traditional method, time and budget are variable and requirements are fixed due to which it often faces budget and timeline issues. For every step, there are tools and techniques defined by the standard methodology PMBOK® which are followed by project managers.

Interestingly, it also includes other methodologies such as [PRINCE2](#) which is followed by various organizations under UK government and private companies like Vodafone, Siemens and others. It is also called the waterfall model.

Benefits of traditional methodology

- Clearly defined objectives
- Controllable processes
- Clear documentation
- More accountability

What is Agile Project Management?

While agile is a general approach used for software development, it relies heavily on teamwork, [collaboration](#), time boxing tasks, and the flexibility to respond to change as quickly as possible.

The agile manifesto has four important values:

1. More focus on individuals and interactions than processes and tools
2. Working software is more important than comprehensive documentation
3. Customer collaboration is more vital than negotiation
4. The process should respond to change rather than blindly following a plan

Benefits of agile project management

- Flexible prioritization
- Early and predictable delivery
- Predictable costs and schedules
- Improves quality
- More transparency

Agile follows an iterative process where projects are divided into sprints of the shorter span. Unlike the traditional approach, less time is spent on upfront planning and prioritization as agile is more flexible in terms of changes and developments in the specification.

Difference between traditional and agile project methodology

The table down below shows the major differences between the traditional and agile project methodology.

Characteristics	Agile approach	Traditional approach
Organizational structure	Iterative	Linear
Scale of projects	Small and medium scale	Large-scale
User requirements	Interactive input	Clearly defined before implementation
Involvement of clients	High	Low
Development model	Evolutionary delivery	Life cycle
Customer involvement	Customers are involved from the time work is being performed	Customers get involved early in the project but not once the execution has started
Escalation management	When problems occur, the entire team works together to resolve it	Escalation to managers when problem arise
Model preference	Agile model favors adaption	Traditional model favors anticipation
Product or process	Less focus on formal and directive processes	More serious about processes than the product
Test documentation	Comprehensive test planning	Tests are planned one sprint at a time
Effort estimation	Scrum master facilitates and the team does the estimation	Project manager provides estimates and gets approval from PO for the entire project
Reviews and approvals	Reviews are done after each iteration	Excessive reviews and approvals by leaders

Why is Agile preferred not traditional PM approach?

Many developers and project managers prefer to use the agile methodology for a variety of reasons. Some of them are discussed below:

More flexibility

When it comes to making changes in the product or a process, agile methodology is much more flexible than the waterfall methodology. While working, if team members feel that there is a need to experiment and try something different as planned, the agile methodology easily allows them to do so. The best thing about this methodology is that it focuses more on the product than following a rigid structure. Unlike the traditional approach, agile methodology isn't linear or follows a top-down approach. So, any last-minute changes can be accommodated in the process without affecting the end-result and disrupting the project schedule.

Transparency

In agile methodology, everything is out there and transparent. The clients and decision makers are actively involved from the initiation, planning, review, and in the testing part of a product. Whereas in the traditional approach, the project manager is holding reins of the project, thus others don't get to make the major decisions.

The agile methodology facilitates team members to view the progress right from the start to the end. This level of transparency plays a significant role to constitute a healthy work environment.

Ownership and accountability

One of the striking differences in both project management approaches is the level of ownership and accountability that each provides to team members. In traditional project management, a [project manager](#) is the person of the ship which means that the entire ownership belongs to him/her.

Customers are also involved during the planning phase but their involvement ends there and then as soon as the execution starts.

In the agile methodology, every team member shares ownership of the project. Each one of them plays an active role to complete the sprint within the estimated time. Unlike traditional project management, everyone involved in the project can easily see view the progress from the beginning to an end.

Scope for feedback

In the traditional approach, every single process is clearly defined and planned from the beginning of the project. The project has to be completed within the estimated time and budget. So, any big change or feedback that might push the deadline is skipped. Whereas agile management allows constant feedback that is helpful in providing better output.

Due to high acceptance for feedback in [agile methodology](#), it has become the first choice for many project managers and software developers. They can respond to customer requests as customers get to validate each iteration that enables them to deliver a high-quality product or service within the delivery time.

How to choose the correct approach?

In reality, there is no 'one-size-fits-all' methodology suitable for every project or organization. The choice to implement a methodology largely depends on factors such as the nature of the project, size, resources involved among others.

Most of the times, smart project managers decide which methodology to adopt during the beginning or initiation of the project. He takes the final call in agreement with other project sponsors and people involved in the project planning process. Below down are some factors you can take into consideration while choosing the right methodology for your project.

- Take a look at the project requirements. Are the requirements clear? If project requirements are unclear or tend to change, choose the agile methodology. And, the traditional methodology fits best to a situation where the requirements are clearly defined and well understood from the first go.
- Consider the technology involved in the project. The traditional project management methodology is more appropriate if no new technology or tools are involved. Agile methodology, being more flexible than the former allows more space for more experimentation with the new technology.
- Is the project prone to unwanted risks and threats? Considering the rigid nature of the traditional methodology, it's not advisable to go this methodology. However, risks can be addressed sooner in the agile approach, it seems like a better option in terms of risk management.

- Another important factor is the availability of resources. The traditional approach works best with big and complex teams and projects. Whereas an agile team usually consists of a limited number of experienced team members.
- The criticality of an end product depends a lot on the nature of the chosen project management methodology. As the traditional method involves a documentation, it is very much suitable for critical products as compared to the [agile project management](#) methodology.