Bsc In Computing Project Management

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This assignment will offer a critique of the chapter on Agile Management in Clifford et al (2014) Project Management: the managerial process. It will provide an overview of the chapter in agile management and discuss how the authors take or treat the subject. The assignment will then reflect on the statements made in the work and identify the strength and the weaknesses of their arguments. The essay will then compare and contrasted Clifford et al (2014) views on agile management with other authorities in the field of agile management.

According to Clifford et al (2014) the new economy and especially the ICT sector needs a new way to organize project. It is a form of project management that has emerged as a response to the challenges of managing projects with loosely defined scopes and elevated levels of uncertainty (Clifford et al, 2014, p. 605). Agile Project Management involves according to a Clifford et al ‘Instead of attempting to plan the entire project up front’, Agile PM relies on an exploratory approach. Agile PM is a methodology that is an innovative approach to project management and they argue that it is especially suited to the ICT sector. They argue that the traditional project management approach is not suitable for the ICT sector. This is because projects in this area are ‘unstable’ or more unpredictable than traditional ones. In the ICT sector, there is a need for innovation, in this area only those strategies and products that are innovative can succeed. Therefore, the Agile approach is so much more effective when in comes to PM than traditional method. The old-fashioned way of PM relies on coming up with a plan and they rigidly following it and this is not suitable for the nature of the ICT sector and its requirements for innovation. There are many in the literature on PM in ICT that believe that Agile is well suited to the ICT sector. Agile PM according to Clifford et al ‘ideal for exploratory projects in which requirements need to be discovered and modern technology tested. It focuses on active collaboration between the project team and customer representatives’ (p. 602, 2017). It is very important that at every stage of the Agile PM method that the developments in the cycles are tested and that they conform to what the client states and their changing needs.

Clifford et al (2014) then goes on to explain what is Agile. They believe that Agile is a methodology that relied on an incremental approach. That is, it proceeded incrementally- the PM will proceed in discrete stage and tackle one issues at a time. This is very different from traditional PM where the entire plan is set out from the start. The Agile approach in one that seeks to deal with the project in stages and does not try and pre-determine the approach to be taken for the entire project. Instead the authors believe ‘that, breaking projects into small functional pieces, and adapting to changing requirements’ is the best approach to projects such as programming. This is what allows Agile (PM) to be Agile and to take into account changing requirements and situations. This it is argued allows the team involved in a project to be more flexible and to respond to any changes that may occur during the life-time of the project. This is argued by Clifford et al (2014) means that a ICT project that uses this method will be able to adapt to any changes such as the customer changing the specs for a project. Another essential element in the chapter on Agile (PM) is that it takes an iterative approach. The iterative approach is a series of cycles. They are cycles that seek to improve the product or service. This means that in an ICT project that the team would break down what is to be done and they would work on one part at a time. They would see what is it that works in a project, what needs to be changed, what needs to be done and how can any improvement be measured. In this way, the elements in the project are developed to a very high standard. Clifford et al do not illustrate the iterative cycle very well even though it is critical to Agile PM. The Agile method according to the chapter can be broken down into cycles or ‘time boxes’ (Clifford et al, 2014, p. 604). These are time frames that allow a stage of a project to be finished by the iterative cycle approach. Every time frame or cycle should deliver some item or element in a project that meets the goals of the project. One of the interesting things about Agile is that all of those involved in the project are stakeholders. The PM process is one that is open to innovative ideas and revision based on the feedback of the stakeholders, this is also argued for in other research on the subject (Boehm, Turner, 2005: Sarker, 2009). The stakeholders is anyone who has some input into the project or are impacted by it. Perhaps the most important stakeholders in an ICT project management process. The clients unlike the traditional PM strategy is not simply presented with the finished product at the end of the process. Instead in the Agile methodology they are involved in all the stages of the project and this can lead to better outcomes. The Agile approach is one that is very flexible and open to change especially during the iteration cycles. According to Clifford et al ‘each new cycle subsumes the work of the past’ (2014, p 174). This can lead to continuous improvement and this can lead to superior outcomes. This system of cycles would involve the continuous checking and approval. According to Clifton et al (2014) this can lead to the detection of problems early in the project. This can prevent problems and weaknesses in the project.

The chapter also recognizes that Agile ‘is not one set strategy, but rather a group of strategies intended to react to the difficulties of erratic activities’. The chapter presents some of the best known Agile (PM) and these include :

‘’Scrum RUP (Rational Unified Process) Extreme Programming (XP) Crystal Clear Agile Modelling Dynamic Systems Development Method (DSDM) and Lean Development Rapid Product Development (RPD)’’ (Clifford et al, 2014, p. 605).

Clifton et al (2014) argues that these systems have the same characteristics and that they all involve 1) customer-centric or focused 2) iterative cycles 3) experimentation 4) Testing and measurement 5) continuous improvement 6) team involvement and all inputs are welcomed.

These features are broadly like other theories on Agile (PM). This can be seen in The Agile Manifesto (Fowler and Highsmith 2001) claims that Agile values:

● People and relations over processes and tools.

● Working software over documentation. This can encourage experimentation

● Customer collaboration over contract negotiation.

● Responding to change rather than following a plan (Boehm, Turner, 2005: Sarker, 2009).

What is clear from both Clifford et al approach (2014) and others is that by using this approach that a development team can respond to changes and above all be more creative and this leads to more innovation.

Clifford et al (2014) focus on the Agile strategy known as "Scrum”. This is not because they believe that it is inherently better than the other forms of Agile but that it best represented the central concerns of the system.

Scrum and other Agile techniques should ideally be finished by a small group. This small group should be open to innovative ideas. They develop the product in stages and this is a process known as ‘scaling’. Clifford et al believe that the scrum process should be seen as a challenge. The project should be seen not a piece of work but a challenge and a problem to be solved and this is also the point made by (Conforto and Amaral,.2008). This approach can lead to better outcomes and deliver better results for the client. The scrum process needs to be conducted in a way that encourages all stakeholders to participate and to allow them all to have their say. The scrum needs to be conducted in a certain spirit and one that encourages all to participate and where all can work as a team. The scrum method like every other Agile PM is one that need the collaboration of all those involved. It involves all the stakeholders becoming collaborators and they need to work together. Communication is very important for this form of PM. People will need to be able to provide feedback and be allowed to express their opinions and other writers agree with this (McAvoy, Butler, 2009). Only in this way can Agile methods such as scrum be effective. There needs to be regular updates at scrum daily and weekly meetings. Clifford et al believe that leadership is very important in Agile. It is not the typical form of leadership and that it encourages people to see themselves as stakeholders and to question and challenge the cycle of iterations. The scrum leader or master should be a person that encourages exploration and investigation. .Leadership of agile teams needs to be approached in the right way. This is because Agile it is to be effective and to promote the necessary level of innovation they need to be facilitators and they should be able to help the development team to work in a way that solves the problem and meets the needs of the customers. Clifford et al (2014) show that in order for an agile PM to be successful that the following roles need to be filled. Development team is one that should have an elevated level of autonomy and this is also the opinion of Conforto and Amaral (2008).

Product Owner This person acts on behalf of customers to represent their interests and they are the ‘champion’ of the customer’s needs by constantly reminding the team of the clients requirements (Conforto and Amaral,.2008).

Development Team, The team is responsible for the product and have different skill sets. There are no set roles or titles and people take responsibilities for an area or areas. The team is able to organize itself and they decide how things can get done. This will lead to innovation

Scrum Master (Project Manager) They are the leader and they facilitate the Product Owner and Development Team and help to resolve any barriers to the goals and deliverables. The PM or scrum master is not the manager or the owner they should be seen as the facilitator.

Clifford et al (2014) seem to show that simply following the Agile (PM) will lead to success. However, Sarker (2006) argues that the process will have to be adapted by the development team and the PM leader as the method is never a perfect fit. In Clifford et al (2014) there is a lot of emphasis on process and system. According to some sources Agile is about attitude less than method. The chapter in Clifford et al, seems to suggest that simply adopting the method will lead to success. In fact, there are several factors that need to be considered when developing the agile system. Boehm and Turner (2003) and Sarker and Sarker (2009), argue that traditional criteria in PM need to be taken into account of especially about time, cost, scope and quality, or else the project could fail.

Clifford does not deal with the culture of the organization and that the Agile PM method can only succeed in businesses that have a certain culture. There is evidence that shows that this type of PM methodology works best in a non-hierarchal management system. Agile can work best when the company is open to change and allows their customers a great deal of freedom. An organization that encourages people to work as a collective usually can implement Agile more efficiently. Papadopoulos (2015) agrees with this by claiming that flat structure works best as it avoids red-tape and top-down management. Then another issue that is not discussed by Clifford et al in their chapter is the nature of the team structure. The literature argues that a team work in one area and is co-located rather than distributed. Agile is believed to work best when teams are co-located. Clifford et al (2014) seems to be arguing that Agile and the set of practices covered by it are rather formal. They do not emphasis that Agile team members are more on informal methods of learning than more formal ones, as on-the-job learning is very important to this method to the agile attitude and practices. Clifford et al (2014) fails to recognize that many aspects of Agile are similar to traditional PM or aspects of it such as those that are outlined in BABCOK handbook on PM. There are real similarities between Agile and this PM practice. For example, in the BABOK methodology the various stakeholders in the company should be invited to take part in the brainstorming session. The brainstorming session should be used to provide more views on the issues (Sanghera , 2006). The session should be conducted in a friendly manner and this will encourage everyone to participate and to provide clever ideas. The brainstorming session should be overseen by a person who will ask questions and make sure that all the ideas are noted and used in the process of continuous improvement (Sanghera, 2006). The facilitator will help to focus the group on issues facing the project such as technical aspects. (BABOK, 2015). This would seem to suggest that Clifford et al (2014) claims for the uniqueness of Agile are not correct.

To conclude, the Agile method is now very popular and it is very important in the ICT sector. It is a way of securing success in an area that can be very uncertain. The Agile approach is one where people can work as a team and share their ideas as to how to reach the goals of the project. Agile is different to the traditional way of doing PM. It relies on collaboration and communications to achieve better results. The members of the development team need to interact with the customer and the client’s needs are expected to be integrated into the project. This method of project management is well-suited to ICT because it is very flexible and very innovative. Agile depends on doing things incrementally and in cycles and not following any pre-conceived plan. The management style for this type of management should be one that encourages innovative thinking. Constant thinking and change management is very important. However, Clifford et al (2014) fails to show that there are certain similarities between Agile and the traditional way of doing things. The Agile approach still need to rely on things such as scope and time and that it may not be a clever idea to let the team do everything without some sort of management. Another weakness in Clifford et al (2014) is that they do not analyse enough the nature of leadership in Agile and that it is only suitable for certain types of organizations, especially those that are non-hierarchical.

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