# There's Agile and there's Agile, understand the difference!

Everyone wants to 'go Agile' but far too many organisations seem to think 'agile' is simply a different way of doing the work of a project that will miraculously achieve major efficiencies. For an Agile approach to achieve its promise, the upper echelons of the organisation need to become agile aware and adapt the way projects are initiated, funded and governed so that the project team can optimise their use of Agile processes to create value[1]. After all, one size does not fit every situation even in an agile world – different focuses are needed depending on the objectives of the project.

The focus of this article is to identify the differences in management approach needed to maximise the value of an Agile approach to creating value in different situations.

For the purposes of this post, the concept of 'Agile' can be defined as producing an output needed by a client using a series of relatively short timeboxed iterations[2], increments, or sprints (called 'sprint' for convenience); where the work to be accomplished in each sprint is sized to be relatively consistent (eg, can be accomplished by a team in two weeks), and what is to be done in each sprint is determined during the lead-up to starting on that next sprint. This definition is deliberately vague because different Agile methodologies have different terminology and approaches but all focus on teams delivering working to create useful outputs in small 'chunks' that have value, and then starting on the next part of the work

**There are three very different environments where an 'Agile' approach to delivery can add value:**

1. **Maintenance and Enhancement.** In many maintenance environments focused on maintaining and improving an existing facility, the application of agile concepts without the need for *project management* overheads can be very beneficial. Techniques including small focused teams, short *sprints*, backlog prioritisation and management, and burn down reporting can show how much maintenance work is facing the teams, the team efficiencies, and the overall backlog trend[3]. Agile does not need to be embedded in a program or project to be effective. In this situation the finance and resources (ie, the Agile teams) are the fixed constraints; the organisation's budgeting procedure fund a predetermined level of staffing on an annual basis. The management variable is the amount of work accomplished each month and dealing with new and emerging maintenance issues and minor enhancements in a timely manner based on some effective form of prioritisation.

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1. For more on *managing agile* see: https://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/PDF_Papers/P109_Thoughts_on_Agile.pdf

2. *Agile 'timeboxing' focuses on time* – each sprint finishes at its designated 'time', and working code is released. If work is incomplete on some aspects of the sprints overall work, these are added into the backlog and addressed in a later sprint. For more on timeboxing see:
https://mosaicprojects.com.au/WhitePapers/WP1020_Time_Boxing.pdf

3. See *De-Projectizing IT Maintenance*:
https://mosaicprojects.com.au/Mag_Articles/N010_De-Projectising_IT_Maintenance.pdf

2. **Fixed Scope Projects**. In some projects, particularly those set up to meet contractual or legal obligations the scope of work is fixed (or at least subject to formal change control) and the management variables are firstly the efficiency of the teams in accomplishing the work, and secondly the cost consequences (fixed scope usually means fixed price). In this environment, with adaptation, a whole range of standard project management processes such as earned value can be applied to the oversight of project work, used for management reporting, and of course project control[4]. The agile teams still function in the traditional agile way, sizing the amount of work included in each sprint, producing usable outputs in short time intervals, and progressively building towards the completed project. The management challenge is achieving the specified scope within the contracted (or approved) time and cost parameters.

3. **Vision fulfilment**. Other projects don't have a defined scope, rather the client has a vision of what the outcome should achieve, frequently framed in terms of business improvements. In this situation the project is on a journey in partnership with client to optimise the delivery of as much of the vision as is 'sensible'. The management variables for this type of project include scope, cost, and time. Decisions are needed of which are the parameters are more important either as an overall consideration or on an element by element view of the various components within the project.

   a. Some projects will have time to market as a key criteria, possibly with scope as the second most important factor and to a large extent how much it costs to achieve the necessary scope within the deadline will be a consequence rather than the control. The primary management challenge is delivering the scope required to implement the 'vision' within the time constraint as efficiently as possible.

   b. Other projects have the quality of the vision as their primary drive and the management challenge is to achieve all of the vision for the optimum time and cost outcomes – decisions on how much and how long can vary depending on progress towards achieving the 'vision'. Obviously, there must be some cost time constraints and a key conversation with a client has to be around the value proposition[5] of still achieving their vision based on cost information to date, with the possibility of adapting the vision based on learned experience as the project proceeds.

   c. For some other projects the available funds are limited, the challenge for management is to achieve as much of the vision as possible within the defined funding limit, frequently with time as an additional limitation imposed by the funding cycle or the market. To maximise value the client needs to be fully engaged in the decision-making process around scope inclusions, deferrals, and exclusions.

The challenge for project professionals planning to use an adaptive agile approach for the delivery of their project is firstly making sure the project is suitable for an agile approach (many projects are not); and then understanding which of the three primary categories outlined above apply and if you're working in the third option of *vision fulfilment*, which of the three sub-categories is most relevant. That's the easy bit!

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4   See more on **controlling Agile**: https://mosaicprojects.com.au/PDF_Papers/P205-Controlling_Agile.pdf

5   For more on **the value proposition** see:
    https://mosaicprojects.com.au/WhitePapers/WP1023_Benefits_and_Value.pdf
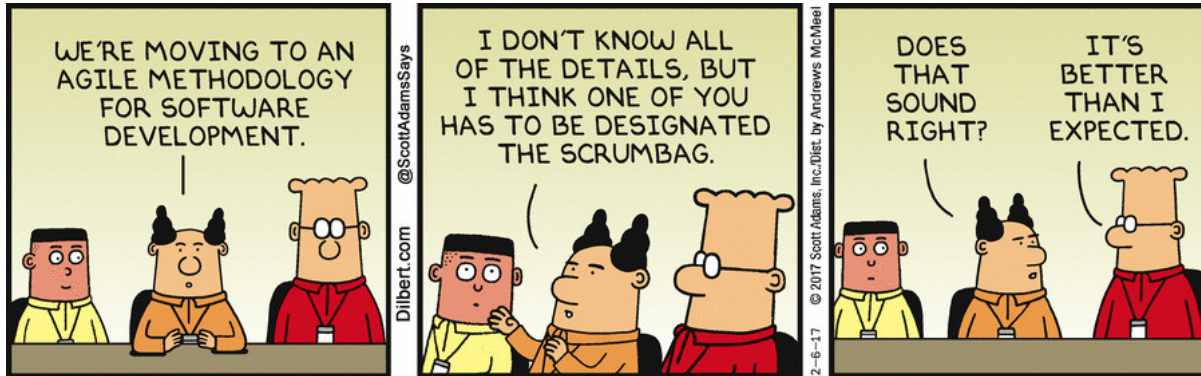
Once you understand Agile, and the framework you are operating within, the real challenge is making sure your clients and other senior stakeholders also understand that an agile approach to project delivery requires very different governance and decision-making processes from them[6]. Organisation agility starts at the top by setting the right challenges for the agile teams within the right funding model. Then using appropriate assurance functions to make sure the Agile teams are delivering what's needed to create value – old fashioned budgeting processes are unlikely to be appropriate.

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6   See more on *governing agile*: https://mosaicprojects.com.au/PDF_Papers/P177_Governing_Agile.pdf