THE Intersect GROUP

WHAT IS AGILE?

There is much of value written about Agile available on the web but be warned ...

… if you're interested in Agile and you want clarity on what the term represents, searching the web for answers might not be your best approach. Much of the information on the web can lead you off the path to clarity and down a rabbit hole. What follows is a brief overview of Agile that lays the groundwork for additional information and insights.

FIRST, A SHORT HISTORY LESSON

By the turn of the millenium software experts had experimented with a variety of alternative approaches to software development in response to the industry standard "waterfall" approach, which was cumbersome and required substantial documentation. In February 2001 a group got together in Snowbird Utah to discuss their various "lightweight methods." They landed on the term "Agile" and the "Manifesto for Agile Software Development" was the product of that meeting.

At its core, the 68-word manifesto summarizes a set of values:

- Individuals and interactions over processes and tools

- Working software over comprehensive documentation

- Customer collaboration over contract negotiation

- Responding to change over following a plan.

The manifesto was followed up with twelve principles of software development that put more meat on the bones of the Agile skeleton.

When properly adopted, Agile methodologies have proven their value for software development and across the entire organization. However, over the years the concept of Agile has been hijacked by some to offer rigid methodologies that in many cases reflect little of the original founders' thinking. Meanwhile, some people participate in Agile Holy Wars and are determined to hunt down any approach that is "fake" by their definition of "Agile." That's one reason it's important to understand what Agile represents.

AGILE METHODS AND PRACTICES
sometimes a source of confusion

While any way of working that is consistent with the Manifesto and the 12 principles can be called "Agile", a number of methods, frameworks, and practices have become common. A partial list of such Agile methods includes:

- Scrum

- Kanban

- XP (Extreme Programming)

Each of these is worthy of its own paper, but for now, it's enough to know that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to embracing Agile or the tools that help foster its adoption. What works for one organization might not for another. Many factors determine how Agile can be most valuable to a specific organization.

Regardless of the practice, agile methodologies lead to both better predictability and the ability to respond to the need to change - two goals which appear to be at odds with each other. They also lead to happier workers and customers and faster value delivery.

IS THE RATE OF ADOPTION OF AGILE
still growing, declining, or stagnating?

Agile's penetration of the market is one measure of its health, and indications are that it's doing well. The Project Management Institute's annual Pulse of the Profession survey of project management practitioners, senior executives, and project management office (PMO) directors covers a range of industries.

In 2018, according to PMI's survey of the more than 5,000 respondents, 46% of organizations use or have used an Agile or hybrid Agile approach over the last 12 months. A Hewlett Packard online survey of 601 development and IT professionals conducted that same year found that two-thirds of respondents described their company as either "pure Agile" or "leaning towards Agile". Additionally, a survey conducted by Stack Overflow, also in 2018, found that 85.9% of 101,592 international software developers use Agile in their work.

These results indicate that Agile is vibrant and that organizations and developers value the benefits associated with embracing Agile.

THAT'S NOT TO SAY THAT ADOPTING AGILE IS NOT WITHOUT CHALLENGES

Given the confusion and misperceptions surrounding Agile, it should come as no surprise that organizations that perceive Agile as a specific set of practices rather than a way of working often don't realize its full value. Organizations can stumble when they...

- Think of Agile as only applying to IT. This approach can limit its effectiveness as the non-IT business operations can benefit from Agile's focus on people, collaboration, and flexibility.

- Attempt to scale Agile either further across IT or in other areas of the business before truly understanding the degree of change required and have a plan to manage/address change.

- Rely on simple classroom education to change the organization.

- Overlook adopting Agile for their non-IT such as contracting, HR, and finance.

- Don't update legacy infrastructure and architecture to support their Agile efforts.

- Discount how this new way of working will lead to new roles, job titles, and job definitions.

- Rely on consultants who have pre-packaged frameworks or preconceptions about how Agile should be embraced and do not work with your organization to apply them to your context.

With Agile,
KNOWLEDGE IS POWER

The more one understands about Agile, the more one appreciates its potential value and is able to gain insight into its applicability not only to IT, but across the organization. In a series of articles we'll be offering more information about Agile that we hope you find useful and informative. Stay tuned.

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