

# BEING AGILE WITH AGILE

An iterative approach like agile has certain rules. But the beauty is that flexibility is built into the structure.

BY JESSE FEWELL, CST, PMI-ACP, PMP, CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

**I**f you've tried using agile approaches and it's not going well, it might be time to break out of the box. While agile provides many fixes for project problems, it still requires a project manager's discerning eye to sift between rules and principles. Take a look at these three situations where a project might fare better by bending some agile rules.

## PECULIARITIES VS. PRINCIPLES

When working in change management, details are very important. People crave details. To navigate the transition from the old to the new, project managers wisely make checklists, policies and guidelines. However, when using agile to guide these details, keep in mind that it's just that: a guide. For instance:

- If you hear, "Agile says 9 a.m. is the best time for the daily standup," know that is only one possible way to encourage consistent, reliable daily interactions.
- If you hear, "Agile says all requirements must be expressed as user stories," know that is one of several ways to represent the customer.
- If you hear, "Agile says we deliver an increment to operations every month," know that is but one particular project's approach to delivering business value early and often.

Every agile technique is designed to have a fixed principle with room for customization and flexibility. Adapt agile so it works best for the project at hand.

## NO NEED TO WAIT

Spending valuable time figuring out the perfect way to roll out agile could wind up costing you the competitive advantage, as other organizations are

willing to get a head start on projects. A key benefit of agile is that projects can begin with a less-than-complete plan. For example:

- Instead of waiting for a dedicated facility, ask if some of the project setup can be performed remotely.
- Instead of waiting for the project team to be fully staffed, assess whether the current team members can begin working on certain tasks.
- Instead of crafting every requirement at the very beginning, prioritize, assign and work on the high-level capabilities first, then develop the remaining tasks as time goes on.

Agile author Jim Highsmith probably said it best. When asked for advice about how to stop having consistently late projects, he replied, "Start them sooner." The longer you wait for everything to be just right, the later your project delivery may be.

## ALWAYS BE PREPARED

Starting a project aggressively also means being ready to solve issues as the team executes the project. Use each issue as an opportunity to find a solution that improves the project process. For example:

- If the product owner is too busy to engage in the project, ask him or her to authorize an analyst to manage stakeholders and offer tactical guidance as needed.
- If an expert on the team is needed across several projects, a solution might be training one person from each project to assist him or her.
- If team members are located across several time zones, limit meetings to fixed "collaboration hours," which will help work get prioritized and focused.

Being rigid with agile could undermine all the benefits you're trying to get. Remember that remaining flexible—and tailoring agile to the project's needs—can help move things forward. **PM**

**Starting a project aggressively also means being ready to solve issues as the team executes the project.**



Jesse Fewell, CST, PMI-ACP, PMP, is a founder of the PMI Agile Community of Practice and participated on the core team of the *Software Extension to the PMBOK® Guide*. He can be reached at email@jessefewell.com.

This material has been reproduced with the permission of the copyright owner. Unauthorized reproduction of this material is strictly prohibited. For permission to reproduce this material, please contact PMI.