



What is Agile?



Until recently, 'agile' is something you would rarely hear outside the realm of software development. Agile was the software development industry's best kept secret for the better part of a decade; made by software developers to replace inefficient development methods that plagued the industry. Thanks, in part, to the [Learning Consortium](#), Agile is now being quickly adopted by all manner of organizations with great success.

In short, Agile is an umbrella term that encompasses a range of practices and methods, some of the most well-known including Scrum and Kanban. Agile can also be thought of as a 'mindset'. To learn more consider attending one of these [Agile Project Management courses](#).

Agile Principles and Values

Agile is based on 4 core values and 12 principles. These are summarized in the [Agile Manifesto](#), the document from which Agile derives its' name.

While Agile has been adapted by various industries to better respond to the unique challenges they face, these core values and principles are immutable. Without them, Agile simply doesn't work.

While they seem self-explanatory, keep in mind that at the time the Agile Manifesto was created, the values therein were a huge departure from project management norms and tradition.

The 4 values of Agile are:

1. A focus on individuals and interactions over processes and tools;
2. An emphasis on working software over comprehensive documentation;
3. Prioritizing customer collaboration over contract negotiation;
4. Responding to change over following a plan.

The 4 Agile values create a foundation upon which Agile methods, practices and techniques are based. The purpose of the 12 Agile Principles are to refine and help guide the project development process. In other words, those organizations that employ agile project management methods, by default, adhere to agile values. They're built into the very fiber of agile project management methods.

Agile principles however, are (for the most part) those ideas that cannot be reinforced by methodology. As such, agile project development teams should always refer to these principles to ensure that their work is in keeping with the agile mindset.

The 12 Agile Principles are:

1. Satisfying customers through early and continuous delivery of valuable work.
2. Breaking big work down into smaller tasks that can be completed quickly.
3. Recognizing that the best work emerges from self-organized teams.
4. Providing motivated individuals with the environment and support they need and trusting them to get the job done.
5. Creating processes that promote sustainable efforts.
6. Maintaining a constant pace for completed work.
7. Welcoming changing requirements, even late in a project.
8. Assembling the project team and business owners on a daily basis throughout the project.
9. Having the team reflect at regular intervals on how to become more effective, then tuning and adjusting behavior accordingly.
10. Measuring progress by the amount of completed work.

11. Continually seeking excellence.
12. Harnessing change for a competitive advantage.

Agile in contemporary business models

Contemporary agile methods are varied. Choosing the right agile methods and moving organizations towards greater 'agility' is no easy task.

Prevailing corporate thinking conceives of businesses and organizations as being, by default, perfectly suited to contemporary markets and consumers by virtue of them simply existing (as opposed to their competitors which at some point, failed).

Agile however, recognizes that the future of an organization depends on its' ability to innovate and add value through optimal decision-making. Agile sees organizations as living, breathing entities that are in a state of constant uncertainty.

The success of agile methods depends on cooperation. The ability of agile teams to work effectively depends largely on the level of autonomy they are granted. To this end, Agile aims to supplant top-down management methods. It recognizes that open interaction is more valuable than top-down directives.

When done right, agile product development teams have the freedom to work as they see fit, exploring how to deliver more value to customers without constant interference by management.

This not only gives individual team members more purpose and direction in their work but can also result in generous returns to the organization itself.

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