AGILE PROJECT MANAGEMENT AND SCRUM

A QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE FOR THE SEASONED PROJECT MANAGER

WHEN WOULD WE USE AGILE VS TRADITIONAL PROJECT MANAGEMENT?

Traditional project management, also called waterfall, works very well when the customer needs are well defined, standards to follow are clear, and changes are not expected. As an example, building a highway, a bridge, or a commercial ship. These projects have their share of complexity in terms of planning, nevertheless the project scope is executed as planned.

Agile project management is more appropriate in an evolving market where customers dictate the requirements, such as a new car model, an accounting software, an app, web or mobile based services. Changes will be frequent as customers see prototypes, mock-ups. And even once the products or services are released, customers will ask for new releases with additional changes.

Agile can be used for long term projects where it is known that customer needs will evolve. A few examples are Online investment banking, cruise ships, aircrafts, cities (please read about smart cities), higher education, surgical equipment to name a few. Please note that all the given examples are based on real life agile applications, not on fantasy.

WHAT IS THE MAIN DIFFERENCE IN TERMS OF RESPONSE TIME AND TIME TO MARKET?

Agile aims at delivering a minimum viable product or service out in the market when customers require it and then deliver updates, as customer needs evolve. Think about a smartphone apps or its camera.

In traditional or waterfall project management, the goal is set, and delivery time is planned to achieve one roll out. Think about a new subway or train line.

DOES AGILE REQUIRE MORE MONEY THAN TRADITIONAL PROJECT MANAGEMENT?

Overall, the first release of an Agile product or service will cost as much or less, as the focus is kept on the must haves, the key customer requirements. The difference is observed for the next product or service generations. The Agile techniques force the project team to develop a basic platform or foundation, like a web infrastructure, or a car dashboard structure. Next releases of the product or service become cheaper than if they were managed in the traditional way. Two very well know examples of this cost reduction are the Ubisoft video games and General Electric's X aircraft engine series.

WHAT IS AGILE AND WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SCRUM AND AGILE

Agile comprises the principles related to the iterative product and service delivery. There are many Agile project management methods using this principle of development cycles. There are 12 common key principles amongst all methods.

1. Customer satisfaction is always the highest priority and is achieved through rapid and continuous delivery.
2. Changing environments are embraced at any stage of the process to provide the customer with a competitive advantage.
3. A product or service is delivered with higher frequency and based on the required frequency.
4. Customers, stakeholders and developers collaborate closely on a daily basis.
5. All stakeholders and team members remain motivated for optimal project outcomes, while teams are provided with all the necessary tools and support and are trusted to accomplish project goals.
6. Face-to-face meetings are deemed the most efficient and effective format for project success. Procedures and documentation are not a must.
7. A final working product or service is the ultimate measure of success.
8. Sustainable development is accomplished through agile processes whereby development teams and stakeholders can maintain a constant and ongoing pace.
9. Agility is enhanced through a continuous focus on technical excellence and proper design.
10. Simplicity is an essential element.
11. Self-organizing teams are most likely to develop the best architectures and designs and to meet requirements.
12. Regular intervals are used by teams to improve efficiency through fine-tuning behaviors.

There are many known Agile methodologies: Dynamic System Development Model, (DSDM), Extreme Programming (XP), Crystal Methods, Adaptive software development (ASD), and SCRUM. SCRUM is by far the most popular methodology due to is applicability and simplicity. Yet it can be used to manage very complex projects.

Thus, what is particular about SCRUM? Scrum is an agile process that allows us to focus on delivering the highest business value in the shortest time. It allows us to rapidly and repeatedly inspect an actual working product, service, or software (every two weeks to one month). Each one of these periods is called a sprint. This means that every two weeks to a month anyone can see a real working solution and decide to release it as is or continue to enhance it for another sprint.