Agile explained for PRINCE2® Practitioners

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Introduction

This article is for existing Project Managers who are using PRINCE2® to help them manage their projects but are hearing a lot about Agile methods and want a quick guide to the world of Agile.

It feels as if everyone in project management is moving towards Agile project management these days. This is evidenced by the growth of Agile Project Management qualifications provided by PMI®, BCS and the DSDM Consortium.

As someone who has managed projects using PRINCE2® and AgilePM® I thought it might be helpful to outline the differences between the two from the perspective of the Project Manager.

Is it important for me to know about AgilePM®?

As a professional Project Manager it is important for you to know about AgilePM®. The project management discipline has been moving fast in the last couple of years, with the recognition that a traditional approach, where the requirements are defined in detail up front isn't as relevant as it once was.

The underlying reason for this is a combination of:

• How quickly things need to change (no time for detailed analysis)
• How much of our project work is integrated with other things that we cannot always identify (unintended consequences)

However many requirements we gather, they will only tell part of the story. New technology is moving faster than users can understand it, so asking for a list of features and functions that they want/need in a project doesn't include a whole load of opportunities that they didn't know existed.

Are requirements not important in an Agile project?

Agile is not dismissing the need for requirements gathering, talking to users, understanding their business problems. In fact, understanding business need is a core principle of AgilePM®. However, Agile includes requirements gathering throughout the entire project lifecycle. The idea behind AgilePM® is that the team create some of the work then invite their users to give feedback and it is from this feedback that more requirements are uncovered.

As a Project Manager, this has had a big impact on my work. I don't start a project with a shopping list of features and functions that must be included. There are some high level ideas and some ideas about what to build first but nothing like the level of detail I used to get when I was running a PRINCE2® project. This impacts my planning. I used to create a detailed Gantt chart, taking a lot of pride in my ability to identify all of the

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AgilePM

• Focus on the business value
• Deliver on time
• Collaborate
• Never compromise quality
• Build incrementally from firm foundations
• Deliver iteratively
• Communicate continuously and clearly
• Demonstrate control

activities needed to create each of the requirements and then sequence into a logical order based on their interdependencies.

In AgilePM® I create a Delivery Plan which is a very high level timetable of when outputs are going to be delivered. You can see for yourself in this diagram just how little detail there is in a Delivery Plan compared to a Project Gantt Chart.
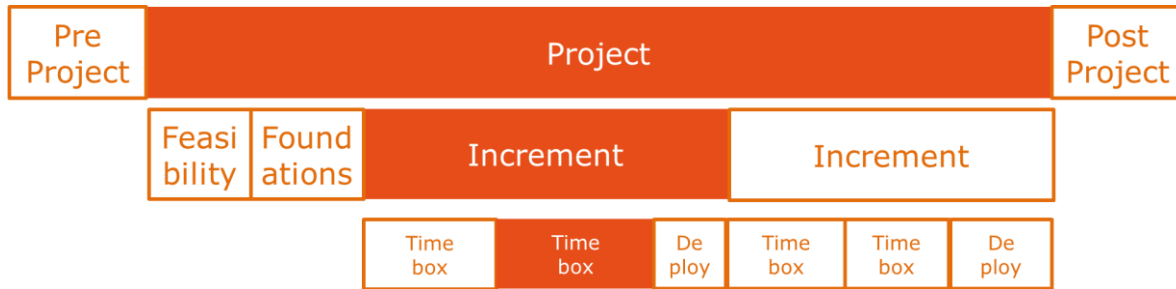
Delivery Plan showing the project divided into two increments, and each increment divided into timeboxes (sprints), with each increment ending with a deployment of project outputs to users.

In AgilePM® I need a different skill set. I need to be able to take a 'helicopter' view of the expected end result of the project and the problems that it is supposed to solve. I use this understanding to divide the project into big chunks (called increments) with the expectation that at the end of each increment there will be a delivery of some of the project outputs to our customers. It is a really different skill looking at the end of the project and working out how to break it into smaller, usable chunks that can be added to increment after increment.

How does this work in practice?

The best example I can give you is the delivery of a new website, when I need to work out what pages can go live first, and what pages we can then deliver, followed by the next set of pages. So I might decide that the team should work on the static pages first so that the customer can at least see a live website early in the project. Then I can ask the team to work on the e-commerce functionality next and then in the final increment to do the work to improve the operation of the website.

My responsibility has changed from a logical sequencing of all the work to identifying what we can give the customer so they can get started using the project deliverables and how quickly in the lifecycle of the project I can do this.

Detailed planning

The detailed planning is no longer my responsibility. Working out all of the activities needed to create the project outputs and working out in which order they should be done has passed to the project team, which makes sense as they are the ones actually doing the work. Personally I feel a lot better about this as I was always uncomfortable putting in expected completion dates into a Work Package for work that I would have no involvement in completing, especially as I am an optimist so I was always putting the team under pressure with hard to achieve deadlines.

However, I will not lie and say it is easy to stand back. The Delivery Plan enables me to confirm the priorities for the team, but I have to rely on the team to work out the specifics of how this will become a reality. It is great if the team come together as an effective unit, but I have to work out with every agile team I work with how I am going to keep myself informed of enough detail to report progress to senior stakeholders without interfering in the day to day running of the team.

Managing the team

There is a lot of talk in Agile about team empowerment and the need for the team to be treated as the specialists that they are, without micro-management from the Project Manager. In my experience I ask a lot more questions and I spend a lot more time coaching team members and transferring my skills than I ever have before. This is a big contrast to using PRINCE2® where the emphasis is on my role to explain in detail what work is needed using the Work Package template. I think I can sum up the differences between the two styles of working by saying that PRINCE2® is about issuing instructions and Agile is about asking questions!

I am no longer sure that Project Manager is the right title for what I do in an Agile world. I think that I am more of a leader, facilitator and encourager than someone who closely manages the work.

Collaboration not competition

Another fundamental difference in using AgilePM® compared to PRINCE2® is that projects are collaborative and not 'them and us'. In a PRINCE2® project part of my job was to use my skill to calculate, based on all of the requirements, how long the project would take and how much it would cost. So in an AgilePM® project I take my direction from those paying and sponsoring the project, who allocate the time allowed based on when they need to be up and running and using the project deliverables. It is my job to work out how to divide that time into increments and what to deliver in each increment to give the greatest value to the users.

I think this power is most easily demonstrated in the way that many Agile projects record requirements as User Stories, where the format is:

"As a (specify role), I need (specify requirement), so that I can (specify business need)."

This really captures the specific needs of specific users but makes sure these requirements are not ideas without foundation. Every requirement has to be able to state what business problem or business opportunity it will address by saying '*so that I can …..*'

Networking is a key skill

Another aspect of this collaboration is the need to ensure that the project team are collaborating with the right people. This means that all aspects of user need are included. I find myself networking with users and potential users much more as an Agile Project Manager. My job is to deliver the greatest business value and make sure the team prioritise their work to deliver this value as early as possible. I cannot do this unless I really understand the business issues, and not just from an internal customer point of view. I need to understand the regulatory

perspective, what our customers are saying, what other competitors are doing and what the trends in our industry are generally so that I can debate possible ideas and challenge the requirements from the internal users.

Facilitation skills

I mentioned earlier that I ask more questions as an Agile Project Manager. As a result the importance of great facilitation skills has never been more important. I need to facilitate discussions between the project team and their users, the developers and testers and business analysts, between myself and the users. The main aim is to constantly generate feedback so that as a project we are listening and taking action based on what our users say. I thought it was interesting recently when I worked with a team to identify how many workshops we wanted to have with the users and other stakeholders and identified 18 different types of workshop. This really shows that nothing that I do is really my own work! I am just translating the ideas of others into workable project outputs.

Project Manager becomes Change Manager

One of the most important things that I facilitate is the identification and planning of the implementation activities by the users, so that they are really ready to start using the project outputs as soon as they are delivered to them. Agile projects deliver to users as early and as frequently as possible throughout the project, there is no 'big bang' go-live at the end of the project. This changes things for the recipients of the project outputs as they have to be ready which can involve training, changing their procedures, assigning staff to new responsibilities and notifying external customers and other stakeholders of changes to how they work.
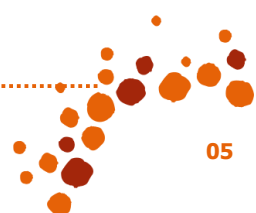
These implementation activities are too important to be left to chance, so as well as ensuring the project delivers via the project team, my responsibilities as Project Manager have widened to ensure that users are doing the preparation they need to do. This means that in my opinion an Agile Project Manager is part Project Manager and part Change Manager. I am lucky that I have a lot of experience in managing change, but if this is not an area where you are confident then I recommend you build your skills in this area. Part of the problem is that many users are not that familiar with managing change either but there is no choice. AgilePM® assumes that users are capable of changing how they work not only once but regularly as new outputs are provided by the Project Team.

If you found this paper useful, you can continue your reading with:
 'Creating an Agile Environment' http://agilechangemanagement.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/ebook-republished-on-creating-an-agile-environment-Kindle-edition-v32.pdf
And
'What does it take to become Agile?' http://agilechangemanagement.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Adopting-agile-is-a-cultural-change1.pdf

Melanie Franklin has a track record of excellence in project, programme and portfolio planning and delivery. In recent years she has focused on helping organisations move from waterfall to agile project management approaches in response to the increasing need to deliver projects on a shorter timescale.

Creating agile environments has grown in importance in recent years, and many executives are driving this adoption as they become aware of the benefits of agile thinking in responding to fast moving changes in the international business environment.

She is a respected author of 8 text books about project and change management. Her most recent book, 'Agile Change Management' proposed an approach to managing change initiatives that apply the principles of agile project management. This ensures that while the exact deliverables from a change initiative can evolve in response to customer, regulator and market demand, project deadlines are still respected.

Melanie believes in authentic leadership, therefore, as well as using her training skills to develop the skills and knowledge of attendees on her courses, she also ensures she attends training to build her own skill set. Melanie is an accredited trainer in AgilePM and is a Certified Scrum Master and LeanKanban Practitioner. She is also an accredited trainer in Change Management, an examiner for the APMG Change Management Foundation and Practitioner qualifications and the Co-Chair of the Change Management Institute UK.

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