Agile Program Management
Success through effective teaming
Predictability, visibility and flexibility to achieve results

Organizations are constantly seeking new and more effective ways to increase success rates of their transformational programs. Constant technological innovations, shortening solution lifespan and ever-changing market dynamics and regulatory environments add layers of difficulty to managing these complex programs. Furthermore, ineffective business and IT integration remains an issue, and the inability of businesses to see real-time evolution of their solutions continues to impact program success.

While traditional program management focuses on managing time, cost, quality and scope, Agile management’s goal is to enable the program’s ability to meet constituent needs and provide business value efficiently and effectively. This paper discusses how Agile Program Management can be used to manage real-life complex transformations by being more flexible to changing requirements, producing a workable product every few weeks and providing business an opportunity to integrate with IT on a daily basis. Agile management disperses a multi-year complex program into shorter iterations, thereby enabling business to see their vision evolve into a tangible product and provide them with the opportunity to make adjustments if requirements aren’t being met.

“Teaming is important, but rarely successfully achieved. Often, disciplines only view things from their own unique perspective (i.e., What do I need and when do I need it?). Successful teaming requires consistent, active and positive participation of all required disciplines and results in shifting the focus away from merely completing work to including gaining agreement. Every discipline matters and Agile Program Management provides the framework needed for inclusiveness.”

– Mike Giese, Partner
Ernst & Young LLP
EY Assurance Services
Agile Program Management – a success enabler

“Clients cannot articulate what they want until they see a visual representation of their product. Agile Program Management not only supports increased business and IT collaboration, but it also makes IT more open to changing business requirements by eliminating the costly overheads of process and documentation and focusing on business values and effective delivery principles.”

— Chris Martin, Director
EY Global IT Services

### Key terms

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tr>
<td>Sprint</td>
<td>A basic unit/iteration of development</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scrum</td>
<td>An underlying framework for Agile that includes a cross-functional team of resources in a one- to four-week development cycle (sprint)</td>
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<td>Delivery</td>
<td>Focuses on delivering a software component or working functionality after a sprint</td>
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<td>Product backlog</td>
<td>A consolidated list of user stories, tasks or issues considered for completion within a future sprint</td>
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<td>Product owner</td>
<td>A lead who guides the vision and conveys it to the scrum team</td>
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<td>Burn down</td>
<td>A graphical depiction of how many task hours are remaining</td>
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Agile methodology life cycles is an effective and successful alternative to traditional system development lifecycles, such as waterfall, iterative or prototyping. A conventional program manager with a million lines of project plan is replaced by a team of product owners and scrum masters who own and run the program with a backlog and release plan. A program manager can focus on managing integration and dependencies with other areas and does not need to spend time on routine change management of scope, cost and timeline.

Consequently, does Agile eliminate the need for a project plan? What does a program or project manager do in an Agile program?

Let’s answer some of these questions and discuss what role a program manager plays in the following key phases of Agile delivery:

- **Planning an Agile program** – Program managers focus on providing oversight of teams, rather than a record-keeper of tasks and activities. With more teams and the fast pace of development communication, integration and coordination within the teams and with other supporting groups becomes more critical. Program managers contribute and support release planning, sprint planning and management of product backlog.

- **Running an Agile program** – Requires managing multiple scrum teams in a fast-paced environment. This necessitates a high degree of operational effectiveness and continuous monitoring to maintain consistency of output and alignment of release goals in order to achieve the overall product vision.

- **Tracking and reporting in Agile** – Requires frequent reporting and quick resolution on impediments affecting sprint progress to provide more predictability in future sprints. Capture the right data in the beginning to understand trends and produce meaningful insights and statistics later.

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“*Business can provide real-time feedback on requirements and help manage the scope without impacting the release timeline. It allows the project manager to focus on managing real program risks and issues, rather than managing day-to-day scope change discussions.*”

– Chris Martin, Director EY Global IT Services
Planning an Agile program

While the Agile methodology is becoming more prevalent in software development, it is still very new to most organizations. Many organizational structures are built around a “waterfall” program management mentality, which includes regulations and reporting structures built to support this methodology. Introducing the Agile methodology doesn’t just mean applying it strictly to the development at hand, but building a new outlook on development, reporting, stage gates and expectations overall.

Define your delivery model

A large, complex program and a new development methodology can be difficult without a clearly defined program delivery model. Focus on these areas to successfully define your model:

- Define team structures and accountability
- Confirm solution delivery approach
- Focus for each organization
- Key deliverables and activities
- Program interaction

Organize your team

Organizations may try and use a traditional team structure when new to Agile, but many quickly realize their structure must be altered to align with a fast-paced development environment and be able to report frequently and resolve issues quickly. To do this, many make the move to a “scrum” team structure, which supports the program model and creates a dedicated (day-to-day) partnership with the business and IT teams.

Plan, but be flexible

As with any endeavor, planning reduces risk and increases the probability of success. Agile is no different. However, the differentiator is the need to balance integration, dependencies and requirements during solution delivery. To do this, there needs to be a clear understanding of how things should be planned and managed at the individual, team and program level. The Agile environment will not allow an organization to plan and manage the program entirely through a project plan and be successful. To maintain that high degree of operational effectiveness, consider the following:

- Integration and dependencies – Along with release dates, integration and dependencies are the scope of the project, and these must be managed closely. It is preferred to manage these through a high-level project plan. Often, all program workstreams, with the exclusion of development and testing, will be focused on the project plan.
Running an Agile program

Team execution

There is not a one-size-fits-all or perfect template for managing Agile delivery. You approach your program model and provide the ability to manage a complex environment focused on delivery, support and integration with other key initiatives (internal groups should align with you on this). The program manager is responsible for running the operating committee and make certain the core concept team is aligned with other dependent groups, such as infrastructure, architecture and deployment. The following are examples of internal groups that would support delivery:

- **Operating committee (OC)** – Provides overall strategy and direction and, particularly, approves and manages the release plan and prioritization of the product backlog.

- **Core concept team (CCT)** – Reviews technical feasibility and maintains the program velocity, which includes release alignment, review of user stories, grooming of the product backlog and discovery and gathering of information.

- **Scrum teams** – Focuses on delivery and validation and get direction from the operating committee and core concept team.

“Rightly operationalizing various teams in Agile is very important. The core concept team empowers the client to decide when and how functionality is released. The operating committee allows chief product owners to make strategic decisions and safeguard the program is delivered successfully. The program manager’s role is important in defining teams and running meetings to make certain all is aligned.”

— Chris Martin, Director
EY Global IT Services
Create a delivery life cycle

Agile provides the underlying guiding principles, and managers need to define a detailed methodology using these principles to bring clarity in the grooming, delivery and validation process and also set a common definition of “done” for each of these processes. The heartbeat of a program being delivered through an Agile solution is the delivery and validation of development from one sprint to the next. These are some of the important parts of defining the Agile delivery life cycle:

- **Definition of “done”** — Set up a very well-defined acceptance criteria for all the phases to bring clarity and consistency in the understanding of “done” for each phase and team.

- **Implement a tool** — Core activities should be managed through an Agile life cycle management (ALM) tool, which allows for planning, estimation and backlog grooming.

- **Sprint planning** — Occurs on the first day of the sprint, with the focus on reviewing story completeness and story point estimates, as well as aligning capacity. Program managers should also be facilitating release workshops, bridging differences and helping to manage risks and issues.
Tracking and reporting in Agile

Know how and what you want to report

What leadership wants to know as part of the status of the program and how they want to see it, drives the process of tracking, managing and reporting on programs. A good Agile reporting process requires continuous monitoring and fact-based reporting to provide transparency and support decisions to adjust team structures, technical direction and overall release goals. As your program develops its reporting, think about these focus areas:

- **Project plan vs. backlog** – Focus on burn down of hours as compared to percentage of tasks complete.
- **Start with basic reporting to planned vs. actual commitments** – Move your reporting process to more metrics-based improvements (velocity trends, defect trends and root cause analysis, and adding inflation points) once you mature (e.g., after four to five sprints).
- **Track and report story points and feature counts** – Overall product release commitment is based on capacity estimated in terms of points.
- **Monitor attrition, churn rate and onboarding** – Any resource impact during or before a sprint impacts the delivery capacity and immediate releases.
Set your cadence

Without a clearly defined reporting process, the program will find itself battling a number of issues. These issues could include lack of insight into available capacity, difficulty in measuring and tracking velocity, inability to compare planned vs. actual commitments, inadequate data to track feature vs. technical stories and the inability to track alignment of stories with releases, just to name a few. To resolve some of these very issues and mitigate the risk of inconsistent reporting, the following are successful examples of a comprehensive reporting cadence focusing on daily, weekly, day-10 and end-of-sprint reporting:

- **Daily** – A daily intelligence report displaying the daily burn down, sprint progress and key impediments for scrum teams.
- **Weekly** – A status report displaying tracked high-level milestones from the project plan and dependencies.
- **Day 10** – A report showing progress via red, amber or green (R, A or G) of the sprint, as of day 10, in the weekly status report.
- **End-of-sprint reporting** – A report showing release and overall burn down of features, as compared to a planned burn down. Should also be facilitating release workshops, bridging differences and helping manage risks and issues.

“Stakeholders and management see transparency as important to maintaining an understanding of the status of a project. This requires more than descriptive words, as true transparency comes through in the detailed tracking of and reporting on status. The things that are most important to achieve are the need to be planned for, tracked and reported on.”

— Mike Giese, Partner
Ernst & Young LLP
EY Assurance Services
“Project success is rarely measured by the achievement of any one particular component. Rather, project success is typically thought of as the successful completion of all components. We need to stop thinking about whether we got what we individually needed and when we individually needed it. Instead, we should focus on getting the project what it needs, when it needs it. Agile Program Management facilitates this by focusing on all the right attributes and integration.”

— Mike Giese, Partner
Ernst & Young LLP
EY Assurance Services

Bringing it all together

There isn’t one set approach or answer for successful Agile delivery or program management, but there are some constant themes that are helpful:

► Yes, Agile needs a project plan, but the focus should be on high-level milestones. Don’t try to manage sprint activities through a project scheduling tool.

► Have frequent reporting (don’t stress over the percentage completed) and focus on burn down hours and planned vs. actual committed story counts and story numbers.

► Manage program-level risks and issues separately, don’t force sprint-/scrum-level issues to be managed at the program level. Remember, a sprint is a two- to three-week cycle and issues/impediments need to be resolved within 24-36 hours.

► While estimating capacity, consider maturity of the scrum team. All teams take four to six sprints to produce consistent and predictable output.

► Include supporting teams like infrastructure, enterprise architecture, deployment, shared services, etc. in scrum teams. Being part of a sprint delivery process, they will better understand the need for a quick turnaround time, and it helps to better estimate the scrum team’s capacity to support these external teams.

► Use a mature Agile life cycle management (ALM) tool that everyone can access, provides end-to-end visibility into the backlog process, aligns features with releases and has the ability to generate reports and dashboards.

While Agile helps program managers to focus on other critical aspects of delivery – rather than only dealing with the ever-confusing discussion of percentage complete and constant conflicts between IT and business about changing scope – it presents other unique challenges, as well. It requires conventional program managers to shed their fears of a program failing due to a lack of a detailed project plan with thousands of tasks and activities, or not having stacks of documentation to support delivery and validation. Agile requires program managers to manage multiple scrum teams in a fast-paced environment, which needs a high degree of operational effectiveness and continuous monitoring to maintain consistency of output and alignment of release goals in order to achieve the overall product vision. And, as EY’s Chris Martin says, “It produces something on time and always.”
About the author

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