

TURN UP THE DIAL ON AGILE IMPLEMENTATION BY AVOIDING THESE PITFALLS

Leading an Agile transition may be one of the most challenging, but essential tasks organizations can take on to ensure it will thrive in today's fast-paced environment.

As Financial Services firms continue to digitally transform their business, process, and technology, leveraging "Agile" methodology to deliver on outcomes has become a norm, if not, a default approach.

When done correctly, an Agile methodology through its iterative planning nature and feedback loop, allows teams to continuously align the delivered business needs with desired business outcomes. The methodology can be highly effective in helping organizations respond to an ever-evolving landscape facing next generation customer demands and intense competition.

Yet, the Agile framework does not translate the same way in every business or situation. What may work well for one organization does not necessarily fit for another. In particular, the Agile framework can be challenging in a traditional financial services environment. When legacy processes are deeply embedded within the organization it can cause particularly slow adoption of new processes. The establishment of the system itself can often be tainted from the onset—with organizations or individual teams failing to identify pitfalls and challenges in the process.



71%

In fact, almost three-quarters (71%) of organizations report using Agile approaches sometimes, often, or always according to the [Project Management Institute](#).

In this article we deep dive into each of the pitfalls as well as the key workarounds, considerations, and questions to continuously ask to avoid these situations.

- 01** Not Engaging All the Necessary Stakeholders
- 02** Choosing the Wrong Impact Projects
- 03** Underestimating the Change Management
- 04** Not committing to the process or leveraging Agile for the wrong projects
- 05** Incorrectly Designing your Agile Delivery Teams

01 NOT ENGAGING ALL THE NECESSARY STAKEHOLDERS

Too often Agile gets introduced into a line of business or horizontal without the right participants across all of technology and business stakeholders identified and engaged. There should be a clear identification of the players and roles across the lines of business (front office to back office) and from technology to operations team (front to back). Each stakeholder group may have their own set of concerns to address and securing buy-in from the start with help clear the path to success.

Some key questions to ask include:



- Is the business ready to get involved in prioritizing and backlog building?
- Are all the roles, groups, etc. identified and are any team changes needed?
- Changes in decision making and team empowerment
- Can Vendor relationship be further leveraged?
- Do you have a communications strategy? The role of the user should be emphasized, including the need to build new means to channel user feedback into the process
- Have you accepted an increase in change request but also factored in re-work as expecting part of planned velocity
- Create a plan from the start to ensure you have the right team in place to help move the project forward in the most effective way.

02 CHOOSING THE WRONG IMPACT PROJECTS

Depending on the maturity of the financial services organization around Agile methodology, it is highly important to choose the right impact projects especially if the organization is in the early days of adoption and adjustment. The change needs to be on a real project or people will reject any success as insignificant. The ability to see results quickly (especially in the early days) is important and people need to see changes on real projects.

Some key aspects to consider include:



- Real business need
- High visibility – A project needs to be noticeable and high impact /relevance to the business
- In case of some software deliverables, how will you assess the effort required at the beginning of the software development life cycle?
- Creating a plan to build awareness of successes
- Projects with a high likelihood of user engagement and material input as well as a discrete dev team that allows for cultural changes to be made efficiently
- A tight feedback loop allows the organization to build muscle memory around integrated user involvement
- Areas of process that are better understood (e.g., where there is ample business architecture coverage) allow a shared understand of the limitations and business goals – setting up for success

Ensure you choose a project that is not only right-sized but has a concrete business need is a key to success. Once a project is chosen, diligent project management is mandatory. This is applicable if you have a small team or a large one. The right approach to project management will give you the flexibility to choose what is right for the project, so that you can successfully deliver.



03 UNDERESTIMATING THE CHANGE MANAGEMENT

For teams that have heritage process and traditional delivery, a collaborative and increased level of team planning, and decision-making can be a significant and often uncomfortable change. As an example, project leaders still carry significant responsibility, but their role and relationship with the team may be different. The iterative nature also involves communication (good and bad) which can be a struggle to adopt.

Consider the timing of the change

Evaluate the necessary change management and clearly communicate any changes of incentive and/or metrics of success

Set appropriate sprints/ iterations and feature prioritization are effective ways of ensuring the best possible delivery

Consider the Dependencies – ensuring that there's adequate planning around the various stakeholders and function and making sure there is a vision, alignment, and communication

Identify and encourage 'champions' or evangelists for the process, enthusiasm and understanding is required from every part of the process

Think about dynamics. Switching to an Agile approach changes how the members interact and can be different to traditional/ what one is used to. (i.e., perceived less documentation and more change requests) The user community needs to be engaged throughout

Clearly communicate any changes of incentive and/or metrics of success

Celebrate successes and deliberately introduce handling of changes of direction, rebrand 'failure'

Change can be difficult, ensuring the right level of transparency, the right timing and enlisting ambassadors will help the project move smoothly.



04 NOT COMMITTING TO THE PROCESS OR LEVERAGING AGILE FOR THE WRONG PROJECTS

Teams within Financial services organization often translate using Agile methodology as simply a way to deliver software faster or “digital.” The “Agile” process as equated as simply embarking on daily stand ups, sprint breakdown, and building user stories. However, if the team fails to fully “commit” to Agile, it will not be effective.

- Avoid using Agile during rigid scope requirement – the iterative nature in benefit, teams should avoid it when scope is static
- Understand the time and commitment – Often the team highly underestimate the level of collaboration and communication. This involves many face-to-face conversations and close cooperation. Daily standups, open sharing of progress and for prompt testing and sign off on each phase/sprint are a necessity as part of the iteration
- Weigh your options—Not every project will be Agile, it is worth understanding how they will co-exist with Waterfall projects: In planning, execution, and aftermath
- Ensure feedback is available—It is not always feasible to engage user feedback or to produce MVP releases (for commercial or technical reason), the absence of these will make the benefit of Agile less concrete and apparent

Again, planning is key. Ensure you have a clear plan and follow through to get the most out of this process.

05 INCORRECTLY DESIGNING YOUR AGILE DELIVERY TEAMS

60%

Over 60% of respondents in one study blamed the clash between their business’s culture and [Agile’s business philosophy](#) on failed implementation according to [VersionOne](#).

Consequently, design is an important part of the process and it needs to be led from the top of the organization and with the right executive sponsorship. Avoiding a silo approach is highly critical to success. Instead,

- Design of your squad and fleets – consider the driver for the design and is it appropriate
- Team dynamics will change and needs to be embraced. Leadership of the scrums, input from the teams, delegation of authority to the team members, flattening of the development team/structure all need to be willing to be accepted.
- Scaled Agile – technology teams less enterprise function – guide rails get forgotten and asked later
- Traditional delivery concepts such as Business Requirement Documents (BRD) are replaced with Story Boards, etc. This can be a major shift for many people with heritage systems and organizations

Carefully evaluating and constructing a team and ensuring the right level of sponsorship will be a critical factor to success.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Agile software development is not a one size fit model and should be tailored to the organization. Additionally, the journey and roadmap should be broken down into smaller steps as opposed to applying all lessons simultaneously. If done correctly, the benefits of Agile software development are far reaching. Financial Services organizations can not only significantly reduce the overall risk associated with business deliverable, product, and software development; they more efficiently complete projects that will help them be more competitive. Avoiding pitfalls and having a solid plan is critical to ensure a successful endeavor. Read this case study on how we helped one organization improve upon their Agile processes and reach out to the RP team to learn more.

MEET THE TEAM



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WHAT IS AGILE METHODOLOGY?

Originally a software development methodology, Agile project management encompasses a collection of methodologies that are commonly used to deliver complex projects due to its adaptiveness. It aims to be clear and measurable by using six main “deliverables” to track progress and create the product. Two of the most common Agile methodologies are Scrum and Kanban. Programming. One of the important components of an Agile project include delivering tested outcomes in short iterations and involving internal customers during each iteration to hone the project.

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