How project management turned into a Scrum

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By Lisa Pollack

The performance gap between the newer Agile ways of working and more traditional styles of top-down, plan-driven project management is huge.

The most commonly used old approach, Waterfall, has a success rate of just eleven percent. A successful project is defined as one completed in a reasonable period, within budget and to the satisfaction of users.

Waterfall involves a lengthy process of gathering and documenting all aspects of the new product. The documents are passed through assorted departments to be signed off.

In 1986 two professors, Hirotaka Takeuchi and Ikujiro Nonaka, wrote a paper in the *Harvard Business Review* which declared that 'the old, sequential approach to developing new products simply won't get the job done'. The 'relay race' wasn't working – this is where departments completed their part of a task and then handed over the project to the next department. Instead, they recommended that people from different parts of a company work together like a team in sport.

Jeff Sutherland and Ken Schwaber are the co-creators of Scrum, an Agile approach to project management. According to research, projects that use Scrum or other Agile approaches have a thirty-nine percent success rate.

The term *Agile* came from seventeen software engineers who got together to write down their ideas in a ski resort in Utah in 2001. They highlighted the need for close collaboration with customers and responsiveness to change. Sometimes it could take months between the start of a project and product delivery. Instead, they suggested that teams from different departments worked on the product together for short periods. The aim was to be able to quickly show the unfinished product to the customer, who could make suggestions. The team would use the comments to improve the product for the next stage.

Scrum calls its development cycles 'sprints'. These often last less than a month. Instead of detailed requirements, there are very brief descriptions of what a user wants from a feature and why. This information can be shown on Post-it notes arranged on a board in columns labelled *To do*, *In progress* and *Done*.

There are daily 'stand-up' meetings where members give updates, including any obstacles others might help with. There are also planning meetings before a sprint, and 'retrospectives' afterwards to discuss process improvements for the next sprint.

An example of a company which uses Scrum is DPS Dental, a small dental lab in Iowa. Kristine Van Cleve, the lab's president, says it was difficult at first. 'We have pockets of resistance,' she says. 'Some don't like to collaborate. They like to be the stars.' With the focus on the team, there is less room for individual heroics and rewards. Nonetheless, Ms Van Cleve thinks Scrum will be useful for her business.

LIVEWORKSHEETS

2A Complete the diagrams about the project management process with *Agile* or *Waterfall*.

1 _____ : **each department works in sequence**

department 1 completes part of task and sends product/documents to department 2
↓
department 2 completes task and sends to department 3
↓
send final product to customer

2 _____ : **teams from various departments work together**

daily update meeting
↓
develop first stage in period of less than one month
↓
send latest version of product to customer
↓
customer gives feedback
↓
work on product continues
↓
daily update meetings
↓
send to customer again

B **Read the article again and answer the questions.**

1 Which project management method was used first?

_____

2 Which method does the article suggest is more successful? What factual information helped you to decide on your answer?

_____

3 Which method takes less time between the start of making a product and when it is delivered to the customer?

3 Complete the table with the words in the box.

budget	collaborate	done	individual	progress	retrospectives	stand-up	users

A successful Waterfall project is completed: • in a reasonable time period. • within [1] _____ . • to the satisfaction of [2] _____ .	Scrum stages on Post-it notes: • To do • In [3] _____ • [4] _____
Three types of Scrum/Agile meeting: • [5] _____ • planning (before Sprint) • [6] _____	Reasons some team members resist: • they don't like to [7] _____ • they like to be the stars • less room for [8] _____ heroics and rewards

LIVEWORKSHEETS

4 Match the words from the article (1–5) with their definitions (a–e).

1 signed off	**a** things that make progress difficult
2 top-down	**b** make something better
3 obstacles	**c** manager says what to do and team follows orders
4 improve	**d** work closely together
5 collaboration	**e** officially approved

5 Complete the summary with words from Exercise 4.

Some company managers prefer a [1]_____ approach to project management, where team members take orders from the project leader and give progress reports at each stage of the project. With this method, every stage of a project needs to be [2]_____ as each department completes their part of a task. More modern methods of project management encourage regular meetings that help the group to discuss their work on the project and explain any [3]_____ that could delay deadlines. Rather than wait for a finished product, the teams work in [4]_____ with customers and clients. They share the work while it is in progress and discuss developments with the client and use their feedback to [5]_____ the product before it is finalised.

6 Explain the meaning of the following words/phrases from the article:

a reasonable period
a lengthy process
declare
a sequential approach
the relay race
hand over sth to sb
responsiveness
a brief description
have pockets of resistance

LIVEWORKSHEETS