



Monarch Media, Inc., Toolkit

# Successful Agile Project Management

By Danielle Howarth

The approach you take to managing a project can make or break it. Agile methods have grown increasingly popular as a proven approach to successful project management. Here are some common questions we get about how to effectively manage a project using the Agile approach.

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*“Our market is evolving so quickly we HAVE to take an agile approach to keep up.”*

*-- Audrey Epsey, Autodesk*

## Cool Ideas:


There is no single right plan.

Have you heard of the Marshmallow Challenge by Tom Wujec? If you haven't seen this [TedTalk](#) yet, it's a must!

One of the most successful participants in this challenge was a group of recent Kindergarten graduates. Why was that? They just started building. They didn't spend 17 out of the 18 minutes figuring out roles and making a defined plan. They followed an 'iterative process' so that with each version they got instant feedback on what was working – or not working. Through play and prototyping, they built their structure.

## Q: When should I use an Agile approach?

**A:** When your scope is somewhat undefined, your timeline is aggressive, and there is really no wiggle room for endless addendums, it's time to consider a different method than a traditional waterfall approach to product/project management.

 **TIP** With time constraints and conflicting priorities, we don't always have the luxury of planning out every detail. It's so easy to get caught up in wanting all the answers before you dive into a project; but the first real trick when working on an Agile project is to just get started.

The benefit of an Agile approach is the short cycle of a sprint. You can prioritize again and again, reprioritize – give and take. If you're not 100% sure what your end-user will value the most, all you need to do to find that out is to just get started – get something out there that enables you to start collecting feedback from your users to determine the direction of the next sprint.

*“Working together on an Agile project isn’t really a process; it’s a culture. What we need from you is your availability and willingness to be active participants in this collaborative culture – because the success of your project is contingent on it.”*

*-- Danielle Howarth,  
Senior Project Leader,  
Monarch Media, Inc.*


*“Individuals and interactions over processes and tools.”*

*-- The Agile Manifesto,  
Beck et al., 2001*

**Q: What can I expect from you? (And what will you need from me?)**

**A:** Communication is always important – but frequent communication is even more important when working in Agile. Agile is based on a culture of collaboration – with your learners, your stakeholders, your developers, and within your internal team. **Clear and frequent communication** is essential for gathering changes and feedback and making sure everyone is on the same page.

You can expect us to work together daily with you throughout the life of your project – planning ahead for frequent check-ins during all phases of the project and welcoming change requirements even if they are late in the development cycle. This includes implementing an easy-to-use project site to facilitate this collaboration that enables visibility across all members and instant notifications on all changes.

 **TIP** Communication is a two-way street with a common goal – to work together and do what it takes to ensure a project is a success. Willingness counts, but attitude is also important.

*“We plan regular meetings to facilitate information sharing and make space for the give-and-take conversations that need to happen regarding functionalities and budget impacts.”*

*-- Corrina Dilloughery  
Account Manager*

## Definition: Sprint


A “sprint” is how an Agile process is structured. Each sprint consists of:

- Product Backlog
- Sprint Backlog
- Sprint (2-4 weeks)
- Scrum (every 24 hrs)
- Potentially Shippable Product
- Sprint Review

**Q:** This feels risky. How do you guarantee we'll stay in budget?

**A:** We have yet to come across anyone with an unlimited budget! So if you have a fixed budget, and we're working in an Agile framework, then each sprints conversation will address resources as well as features.

For example, we may need to take something away (or move it to the next sprint) if you want to add something that wasn't in the original plan.

 **TIP** Prioritizing functionalities, and reprioritizing with each sprint, helps everyone stay focused – and stay in budget.

Of course, it's also a good idea to build 'contingency' into your budget so we have room to address things that come up without having to drop other things.

*“This doesn’t come easy to everyone. You have to be willing to let go of early assumptions and head in a new direction when new information comes forward!”*

*-- Claire Schneeberger,  
CIO, Monarch Media,  
Inc.*


### Stats:

92% of respondents said implementing agile improved their ability to manage changing priorities.

VersionOne, Inc. (2014). 8th Annual State of Agile Survey. Retrieved from <http://www.versionone.com/pdf/2013-state-of-agile-survey.pdf>

**Q: This feels squishy. What if things go off track?**

**A:** This nimble approach means you are more like to end up “on track”. It’s really what being Agile is all about! Each sprint review is an opportunity to review the results and either continue down that track, or head in another direction. Because with each iteration, it’s an opportunity to gather feedback that influences future iterations – moving quickly to shift directions by being flexible and adapting. Embrace change. Agile projects may be unpredictable, but they are also very exciting if you have the right skills & tools!

 **TIP** When you’re navigating an Agile project, you need to plan to re-plan. Accept and expect changes in requirements.

Whether you are a small company or a major corporate player, it’s important to keep up and evolve with your end-user. Technology is advancing month-to-month and there is a huge demand for eLearning opportunities. Being **flexible and adaptable** results in up-to-the-minute powerful eLearning experiences.