The Fundamentals of Agile Methodology
In project management, teams generally work under one of two design philosophies: the traditional approach or the Agile methodology.

The traditional approach to project management is built around the idea of a project unfolding in sequence. Project parameters are specified in advance, leaving the project to proceed linearly.

Agile is an approach which encourages flexibility. In Agile, the idea of following a set, preordained project sequence is deferred in favor of an incremental approach. While Agile projects have an overall goal and are organized, the structure is deliberately kept loose.

Agile teams complete projects in demonstrable segments called sprints. After each sprint, the project in its current state is shown to the customer, who then provides feedback to the Agile teams. This is done so that changes can be made to the project before the final deadline. Agile’s focus on flexibility and the ability to change a project already in progress is what separates it from other processes and gives it a place in modern project management.
When to Use Agile

Agile generally is the preferred method when a client does not have a strong sense of what the final deliverable should look like. This may be because of personal indecision or because of an industry that experiences frequent change. In either case, Agile can provide room to think things through and adapt without the need to plan everything ahead of time.

In terms of work styles, Agile is built around input and collaboration, and can be implemented for teams who desire the freedom to offer input and suggestions.

If the above conditions are met, Agile can be used without fear of inherent cons. Projects with many moving parts and client indecision can benefit with the adaptable approach of Agile. When implemented in the right situation, Agile can be an excellent tool in the project manager's toolkit.
Why to Implement Agile

Agile is an approach that emphasizes flexibility, adaptation and team collaboration when applied to business processes, project management, process improvement and others industries. Traditionally, the methodology had been effectively used by software development teams, because it allowed them to send working prototypes to clients more quickly.

However, Agile’s adaptable process and opportunity for potential benefits has allowed it to expand beyond the technical sector. Non-technical companies are now beginning to realize that Agile workflows can be used in a variety of project types and business processes.

A 2015 VersionOne Agile-development survey provides a glimpse of the reasons why Agile should be implemented. In a consumer market increasingly focused on change and flexibility, the highest amount (59%) of survey respondents stated they adopted Agile to help improve product delivery speeds.

Agile-led projects help change the way leadership looks at requirements and team structure.
Other popular reasons for adopting Agile were to better handle changes in priorities or client demands and to increase team productivity. Agile is an approach designed to incorporate changes, welcome team and client feedback and adjust focus accordingly. According to the study, teams generally responded well to this way of thinking, and reported higher morale and increased focus.

The VersionOne survey also gives some indication about the benefits of Agile. Among the survey respondents pooled, 87% said Agile improved their ability to manage unforeseen changes or alterations to project workflows. The goals of better team productivity and morale were also met, with 84% reporting positive gains in these areas. For project visibility and transparency, 82% noted improvements.

As the Agile workflow is built around frequent input by team members and clients, each interested party can gain a clear sense of where the project is at a particular moment.
Examples of Agile in Marketing

Marketing professionals are one business group that is finding the collaboration and communication built into Agile to be particularly beneficial. Today's business climate is generally built around speed. With the tremendous sharing of ideas and rapid product development and sharing permitted by the Internet, businesses who wish to remain competitive must learn to keep up with the latest trends.

Marketers can use Agile to keep campaigns current and responsive to multiple inputs. If a client has an idea or suggestion on a new advertising tactic that may work for their product, Agile marketing teams can quickly and effectively respond. To succeed in a high-paced marketing environment, Agile is increasingly proving crucial.
The United States government has continually sought to increase its IT spending to improve productivity, decrease bureaucratic overlap and safeguard sensitive information from rising cyber-attacks. Here, as with the private sector, Agile is proving to be a highly effective way to get software to market.

In particular, cybersecurity typically requires software solutions that are constantly being updated to the most current version. Cyber attackers can be very difficult to track, and governments and organizations wishing to protect themselves must tread carefully. Agile allows governments to work closely with development teams to ensure software packages can be used to counter modern cyber threats. If an issue or attack is discovered after development, Agile is built to accommodate it. The government just needs to inform the Agile team of new requirements, and then give the team the resources to meet the challenge head-on.

Whether in the government or private sector, Agile methodology can be used in cases where managers wish to deliver projects as quickly as possible while simultaneously making room for client input and changes in requirements. Speed and flexibility reign supreme in modern business. With Agile, organizations can keep pace.
In recent years, project managers and businesses seeking greater responsiveness and flexibility have found a natural home in the Agile approach. Agile, a methodology (and as some would argue, a mindset) that stresses shorter development cycles, greater communication and collaboration and the ability to address changes, is an approach that is now successfully being used beyond IT development.

The methodology can be useful for many types of projects. The flexibility inherent in the approach allows it to meet client demands that can change over time. It also encourages visibility, allowing the client to see how the project is unfolding during each step of the process, rather than only at the end. Agile is also a collaborative discipline where everyone can offer input, providing a friendly, often teamwork-based atmosphere.

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Ability to meet changing priorities: One of the benefits of the methodology is its ability to respond to changes after a project has started. As priorities shift, or new features are requested, the adaptability of Agile allows team members to respond without returning to the drawing board.

Faster time to market: Many businesses may adopt Agile because they prefer the idea of getting projects out as quickly as possible. While it is true that Agile projects may sometimes face greater overall timeframes, it is also true that the methodology tends to focus on getting functioning deliverables out as quickly as possible. This way, clients can begin to use their products, and therefore gain income, before all features are fully implemented.

Reduced risk: In traditional methodology processes, there can be risks that the final product may not meet client expectations or contain a potentially significant undetected flaw. Agile addresses both of these concerns by incorporating client expectations at multiple stages and, therefore, increasing the chances that any flaws will be detected and remedied.

Increased productivity: Many organizations that have started using Agile have reported significant increases in team productivity. While the reasons for this are open to debate, the consensus seems to be that workers enjoy the ability to give input and have their feedback recognized. Agile’s collaborative nature can help keep employees feel appreciated and respected, which, in turn, typically leads to higher engagement, productivity and morale.
Overall Benefits for Adopting Agile (cont.)

**Enhanced predictability:** While Agile may seem to be inherently unpredictable, in practice, it tends to be just the opposite. As teams become more accustomed to working with Agile, they tend to develop a clear sense of how the project is going to unfold (even with some anticipated changes). Trained Agile teams can respond to inevitable changes quickly and effectively.

**Greater visibility:** With Agile, a client does not have to wait to see how the project is developing. Rather, frequent status updates are part of the approach. At any stage of the project, participating parties have a clear sense of how things are progressing.

**Improved quality:** Quality can be somewhat subjective, but in many projects, it can be understood as the degree to which a project meets or exceeds a client's expectations. In Agile, client expectations are given strong emphasis. As each sprint concludes and clients are brought in to give feedback, what emerges is often a final project that clients have had tailored to their own needs, greatly increasing overall satisfaction and project quality.
Learning and adopting the Agile approach can be a significant benefit to businesses that prioritize project flexibility. Implementing Agile can provide a proven methodology to businesses who seek to work more closely with clients and deliver projects that fully meet expectations.

Offered with a new student experience and led by industry-recognized expert faculty, Villanova University’s 100% online Certificate in Agile Management focuses on Agile Methodology processes for business and information technology.

For more information on the three-course certificate, visit VillanovaU.com or call 855-300-1473 to speak with one of our student enrollment representatives.