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Agile Vs. Traditional Project Planning

We have received many calls and emails lately from people wanting to learn more about the differences between Traditional Project Management and Agile Project Management. Over the coming months, we are going to take a look into a few of the differences, beginning with the way projects are planned.

Deciding on an appropriate planning methodology for your project is important. According to Mike Cohn, “A good plan is one that stakeholders find sufficiently reliable that they can use it as the basis for making decisions.” Good planning processes will reduce risk and uncertainty, support better decision making for all stakeholders, establish trust, and convey information.

There are two types of planning methodologies. Predictive Planning is used by Traditional Project Management. Adaptive Planning is used by Agile Project Management.

Predictive Planning details the plan for the entire project, fixes the plan based on the number of iterations, how long they are, and what will be accomplished in each, and breaks the plan down into milestones and activities with fixed due dates. This style of planning focuses on having the entire plan detailed and then baselined for measuring performance in the project. The project plan is set with an actual due date and the goal is to control the entire plan throughout its duration.

In Adaptive Planning, there is no detailed plan for the entire project. There is no fixed plan of how many iterations, how long they will be, or what will happen in each. Iterations are adjustable and versatile. The plan will evolve iteration by iteration and is connected to the value it brings to the customer.

Planning in Agile Project Management is focused more on the executing than on the plan. It encourages change and, therefore, results in plans that can be easily changed. Instead of making all the plans before the project begins, planning is spread throughout the entire project.

Traditional Project Management works very well for some projects, but there are many instances where you should use Agile Project Management instead. Let’s look at a few instances where Traditional Project Management fails to benefit the project.

Planning is by activity rather than deliverable

Customers receive no value from the completion of activities; deliverables are the unit of customer value. Activity-based plans often lead to projects that overrun their schedules.

*We have no limits--
we create them in our mind.
Bud Labranche
Motivational speaker & writer*

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Deliverables are not developed by priority, but by the schedule

Work described by the plan is not prioritized by its value to the end users and customers. Oftentimes, end users only see the final product once it's complete. Some projects (especially IT related projects) require end user involvement throughout the project to ensure that conflicts will be taken care of before the project is finished.

Failure to acknowledge uncertainty

Traditional Project Management assumes that the initial requirements analysis led to a complete and perfect specification of the product and that the customer will not change his mind. We all know that the initial project requirements very rarely turn out to be the final requirements. In Agile Project Management, customers are given the flexibility to add/modify/delete any requirements up until the team actually starts working on it. Customers are also given the opportunity to prioritize the requirements.

While there are pros and cons to each type of project management methodology, you must consider all aspects of your project before determining which is best for your particular situation.

Some information taken from Excel with Ease: PMI Agile Certified Practitioner by S. Chandramouli & Saikat Dutt

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THE MATHIS GROUP, INC
DR. KEITH MATHIS

106 Lakeview Woods

Eureka, MO 63025

800-224-3731

636/938-5292 voice/fax

keith@themathisgroup.com

wanda@themathisgroup.com

www.themathisgroup.com

www.pmexpertlive.com

www.trainthegov.com

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