

5 tips for finally adopting agile project management in 2021

Agile business practices may have gotten their start with software development, but they certainly didn't stay relegated to that department for long. Having noticed the benefits that agile approaches bring to coding projects, operations and IT began applying the same thinking to other areas of the organisation, while non-software companies are likewise starting to adopt agile for their own business use cases.

Temps de lecture : minute

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By now, fully 87% of organisations surveyed by Gartner use some form of agile for software development, and a significant number are applying it to other areas. From my perspective, agile business management in general, and agile project management in particular, are among the biggest game changers for busy startup founders and enterprise leaders.

These executives are always looking for more order, but without compromising on their organisations' abilities to make changes on the fly. The data says that approximately 83% of executives see agile frameworks as beneficial for making their businesses more flexible in responding to consumer and market changes, helping them go to market faster with new products and making them more competitive, while 68% report that agile has improved their bottom lines.

With the momentum building up across the business universe, it's clear that 2021 should be the year you join the agile movement with agile project management, whatever your product. Here are five tips for making it happen.

1. Spearhead a culture shift to the agile mindset

Agile isn't just another tactic – making it work requires significant culture change throughout the entire organisation. Executives agree that the culture shift is the hardest part of moving to agile, with Gartner finding that 47% placed among their top three challenges. Some 18% said it's their number one challenge, topping the list.

It's not an unexpected result. Change is always hard, but the move to agile requires everyone to accept more failures and more whole-team accountability, and with so much delegation, people in leadership positions need to sacrifice a measure of authority.

Essentially, the entire organisation is forced to move away from the tradition of the “planning fallacy,” as Pieter Verbaarschott, one of the original creators of agile thinking, terms it. “Part of this planning fallacy, as I will call it, is the belief that there has to be The One Plan,” Verbaarschott writes.

“The planning fallacy, together with the separation of ‘plan makers’ (management) vs ‘plan executors’ (factory workers, software developers) established a culture where management’s plans are infallible,” he continues. Indeed, greater team trust requires cultivating a sense of the collective.

What's more, from what I've seen, agile only works when it's adopted by choice – it can't be forced on anyone – so it's not surprising that supporters of agile practices need to work hard to pitch their benefits to both managers and employees to secure their buy-in.

2. Establish a collaboration stack that supports agile practices

Agile rests on breaking projects down into discrete tasks and collaborating on them concurrently, as opposed to the old waterfall method, for example. So encouraging collaboration within and between teams is an important first step.

The software you use can make a big difference as well, and not all platforms are the same. “Team collaboration is a crucial component of agile management,” points out Neil Patel, in [his guide to agile tools](#). “You want to make sure the software you’re considering comes out-of-the-box with collaboration tools.”

At the same time, agile aims to increase transparency within the organisation, so seek tools that enable visibility in planning and evaluation. Choosing project management tools that make it easy to divide projects into multiple tasks, view them all in a single glance, adjust the order of priorities, and more sets you up well for agile success.

3. Improve cross-organisation communication

Success with agile requires high levels of communication throughout the entire organisation.

It's crucial to remove silos between teams, providing accessible platforms that enable smooth brainstorming, feedback and sharing in real time in a single location.

Enabling friction-free communication also requires establishing consistent processes and practices across all teams, so that all your employees speak the same “language” and can enjoy streamlined cross-team and cross-departmental feedback.

4. Rethink your team structures

Agile teams need to possess three characteristics: to be fixed, diverse and coordinated. When teams are fixed, they get to know each other better so that they can work together more efficiently. “Members need time to work together and learn their strengths and weaknesses, their turnaround time, and any other important information that is needed to make informed decisions when planning.” notes Zach McDowell, a senior product manager for Planview.

The beauty of agile rests on plenty of feedback, and that in turn relies on diverse teams that share differing opinions. If your teams are too homogenous, they’re liable to lack any opposing voices that would probe for weaknesses, make new suggestions and bring fresh points of view that breed innovation.

Finally, coordinated teams are those with excellent communication, as mentioned above, rather than all in the same place — far from it, with so many of us working from disparate locations nowadays.

5. Choose an agile methodology

Today there are over 10 different agile methodologies. While you can use more than one agile approach in your organisation, applying different ones to different use cases, it’s best to start with one.

Scrum is the leading approach, chosen by 90% of executives in the Gartner study, while Kanban is a distant second at 68%. Scrum involves

using team discussion to prioritise tasks in the backlog; Kanban is a very visual agile approach; and others, like Crystal and Dynamic Systems Development Method (DSDM), involve significant input from end users from the get-go.

Some are better suited for specific circumstances, like software development, while some are best for larger teams, and others for smaller ones. So make your selection according to your needs.

Agile project management is within your grasp

Agile project management can be transformative for all areas of business, but implementing it can be challenging.

By improving communication, redesigning teams, selecting your preferred agile methodology, establishing the right tools and practices, and leading a culture shift, you're taking the first steps towards success with agile project management.

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