Agile Project Management for Executives

Learn to how to blend Agile and traditional project management to
make Agile work for your business

Popular Stereotypes and Misconceptions

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There are many stereotypes and misconceptions that exist about both Agile and traditional plan-driven project management
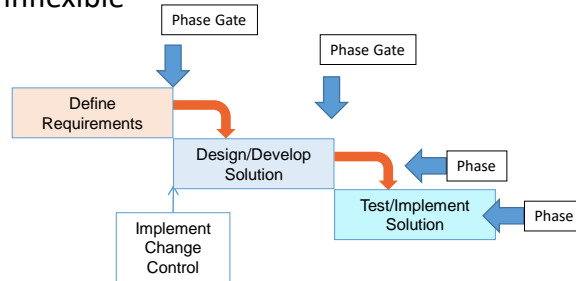
In this lesson, I want to go over some popular stereotypes and misconceptions that exist about both Agile and traditional plan-driven project management. These stereotypes and misconceptions have caused a lot of confusion can have a big impact on the successful implementation of an Agile migration.

Project Management Stereotypes and Misconceptions

Project managers are rigid and inflexible

Phase Gate

Phase Gate

Define Requirements

Design/Develop Solution

Phase

Test/Implement Solution

Phase

Implement Change Control

Project managers only know how to manage by the "waterfall" methodology

Business Impact:	• Need to decide how important cost and schedule management of projects is versus being adaptable and develop an approach that balances those two objectives in the right proportions

3

Here are a few examples of project management stereotypes:

There are two related stereotypes that project managers are **rigid and inflexible and only know how to manage by the Waterfall methodology**. These stereotypes have some reality behind them. For many years, project managers have been held accountable for managing the costs and schedules of projects and we all know that in order to meet cost and schedule goals, you have to control the scope of the project. That, in turn, requires a disciplined approach to managing changes where changes become the exception rather than the norm.

The emphasis on managing costs and schedules for a long time has required accurately defining the requirements upfront which leads to extensive use of "Waterfall-style" methodologies that are based on trying to define the project requirements in detail upfront before the project starts. The emphasis on cost and schedule management is a significant reason why that approach continues to be used today.

However, an over-emphasis on control and on managing costs and schedules may be stifling adaptivity in your business

The implication for business managers is that the project management approach should be aligned with your overall business strategy and a very important factor in that is how adaptive you want your business to be. Businesses need to decide how important cost and schedule management of projects is versus being adaptable and develop an approach that balances those two objectives in the right proportions.

This is not a binary choice and it is very possible to define a hybrid process if necessary to provide an appropriate balance of predictability and control and adaptivity.

Project Management Stereotypes and Misconceptions

Project managers are very "command-and-control" oriented

Project managers cannot adapt to an agile environment

Business Impact:	• Changing these stereotypes may require a rethinking the role of a project manager in the business and changing how accountability for the success or failure of projects is managed

4

Another stereotype is that project managers are Very "**Command-and-Control Oriented**". There is some reality behind that. Project managers are noted for getting results and sometimes that means being assertive and somewhat directive to set goals and manage the performance of project teams and sometimes that's necessary.
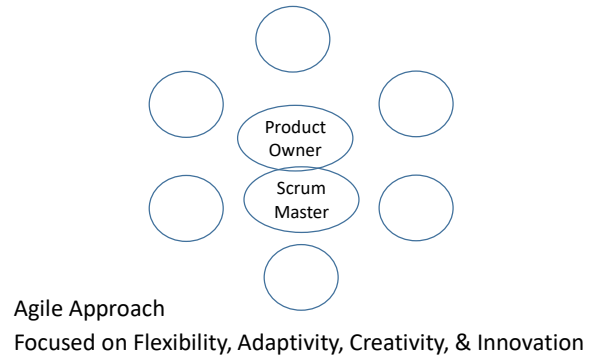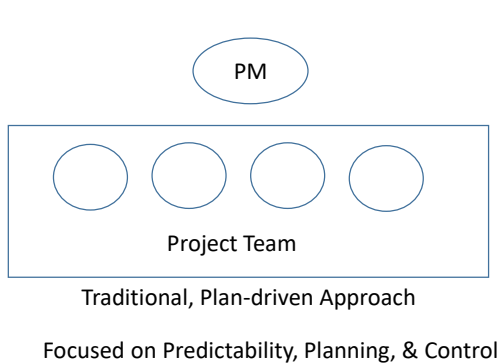
Many times that behavior is expected of a project manager by the businesses that they operate in. For example, if a project team is underperforming, the Project Manager is the one often held responsible and is expected to take corrective action to get the project on track.

A related stereotype is that project managers are just not adaptive and cannot adapt to an agile environment. I don't believe that stereotype is correct but it can require a significant shift in thinking for a project manager to make that adaptation. A good project manager knows that you have to adapt the project management approach to fit the problem rather than force-fitting every problem or project to a single approach.

It should be apparent that many of these stereotypes are a function of the environment that project managers operate in and are influenced by the expectations the businesses have of project managers. To create an environment that is more conducive to adaptation, many businesses may need to rethink the role that a project manager plays in their business environment and how accountability for the success or failure of projects is managed. An Agile approach that puts more emphasis on providing business value requires a different way of managing accountability for projects. In many cases this may require shifting more emphasis to the business for accountability for projects.

Agile Stereotypes and Misconceptions

There is no project management required for an Agile project

PM

Project Team

Traditional, Plan-driven Approach

Focused on Predictability, Planning, & Control

Product Owner

Scrum Master

Agile Approach

Focused on Flexibility, Adaptivity, Creativity, & Innovation

Business Impact:
- Need to determine what style of project management is most consistent with the business management approach for the company and how it integrates

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The first stereotype about Agile is that there is no project management required for an agile project

Although there may be no one with the title of "Project Manager" in an Agile project at the team level, there is plenty of project management going on. It's just a different kind of project management and the project management functions are distributed over a number of different people on the team rather than being held by one particular individual called a "Project Manager".

The implication for businesses is the need to determine what style of project management is most consistent with the business management approach for the company and how it integrates. This is a choice between predictability and control on the one hand and flexibility and adaptivity on the other hand.

Popular Stereotypes and Misconceptions (cont.)

Agile projects are totally unplanned

Agile projects do not use any process and are uncontrolled

| Business Impact:	• Adopting a more adaptive model for projects that is based on more adaptive, rolling-wave planning approach may require rethinking other levels of management to develop a consistent overall approach

Two related agile stereotypes are that agile projects are totally unplanned and agile projects do not use any process and are uncontrolled. There is actually a lot of planning going on - It's just a different kind of "just-in-time" planning spread out through the project rather than being done heavily or totally upfront and most Agile projects use Scrum which is a very well-defined process. It's a different kind of process – it is much more empirical and adaptive rather than being rigid and prescriptive but it is a well-defined process. It is also not difficult to apply whatever level of control you want to an Agile project.

The implication for businesses is that adopting a more adaptive model for projects that is based on more adaptive, rolling-wave planning approach may require rethinking other levels of management to develop a consistent overall approach. It may not make sense to use a more adaptive approach at the project level if the higher levels of business planning and management are not consistent with that approach.

Summary of Recommendations

Many of these stereotype and misconceptions about Agile result from seeing "Agile" as the polar opposite of "Waterfall"
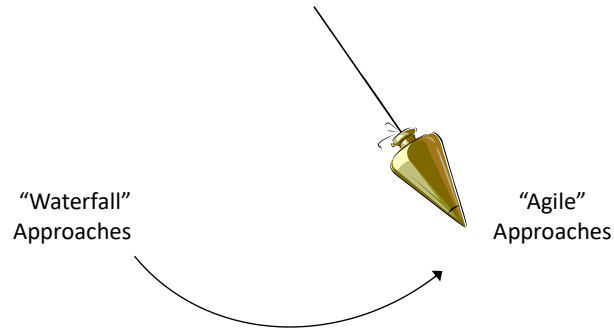
"Waterfall"
Approaches
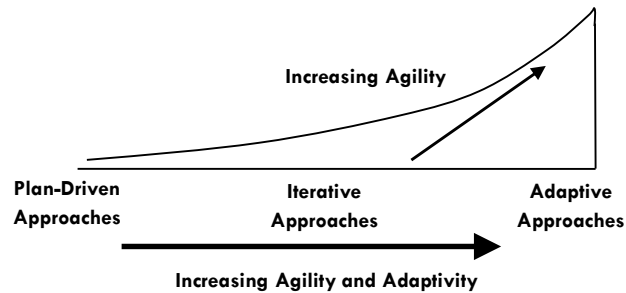
"Agile"
Approaches

7

Many of these stereotypes and misconceptions are a direct result of seeing Agile as the polar opposite of Waterfall

Summary of Recommendations

Overcoming these stereotypes requires:

Learning to see Agile in a new perspective, and

Learning how to develop an adaptive approach that blends Agile and plan-driven practices in the right proportions to fit your business

Increasing Agility

| Plan-Driven Approaches | Iterative Approaches | Adaptive Approaches |

Increasing Agility and Adaptivity

Overcoming these stereotypes requires:

- First seeing Agile in a new perspective. Instead of seeing it as competitive with Waterfall, we should view those two alternatives as complementary to each other

- And instead of seeing those two alternatives as binary and mutually exclusive choices, we should learn how to develop an adaptive approach that blends both Agile and plan-driven practices in the right proportions to fit the situation

The key message is that you don't have to force-fit your business to some arbitrary model if it doesn't fit. A better approach is to go in the other direction and fit the approach to the business

Summary of Recommendations

Many businesses are stuck in a paradigm that is heavily based on a traditional project management model that requires re-thinking

Define a strategy for how adaptive You want your business to be	What is the appropriate balance of emphasis on business value versus cost and schedule management?
Define roles and responsibilities For implementing the strategy	• How will accountability be managed? • What is the Business Role? • What is the Project Management Role?
Define the process model to support the strategy	• How will the process work? • How does it fit with other management processes?

Key Recommendations:
- Design an overall approach that is appropriate for your business rather than force-fitting your business to some arbitrary model

9

Many businesses are stuck in a paradigm that is heavily based on a traditional project management model that requires re-thinking. Here's what may need to be done:

First, define a strategy for how adaptive you want your business to be. What is the appropriate balance of emphasis on business value versus cost and schedule management? That strategy needs to be based on what makes sense for your business as well as how important becoming more Agile is. Becoming Agile for the sake of just becoming agile is not necessarily an appropriate goal for all businesses.

Second, define the roles and responsibilities for implementing the strategy. How will accountability be managed? What is the business role in the process and what is the project management role.? A shift in emphasis from cost and schedule management towards more emphasis on business value may mean that the business side of the organization has to play a greater role in managing accountability for projects and they may or may not be well-prepared to take on that role.

Finally, define the process model to support the strategy. How will the process work? And How does it fit with other management processes?

The key recommendations are: Take the time to design an overall approach that is appropriate for your business rather than force-fitting your business to some arbitrary model

Jumping into an agile process without thinking through the overall implications can be just as bad as being stuck in an old and outdated traditional plan-driven model

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We're going to talk about some of these decisions and their impact in the next lesson.

NEXT LECTURE…
WHAT'S REALLY DIFFERENT ABOUT
AGILE PROJECT MANAGEMENT AND
WHAT'S THE IMPACT?

11

In the next lecture, we're going to talk about what's really different about Agile Project Management so that you can understand the potential impact it will have on your organization.

Thanks for taking the time to do this lecture and I'll look forward to working with you in the rest of the course.