

PROJECT MANAGEMENT

PRINCE2 v Agile:

For complex projects to be successful, effective project management disciplines are essential. However, within Social Housing, project management methodology and its use has proved hit and miss. Some organisations have embraced it whilst others, although aware of the need to use it, struggle to formally embed this within their culture and processes.

So why is this? If you ask what project methodology someone uses, the responses can be “it’s our own” or “it’s a flavour of PRINCE, but not the whole thing”. This could mean that they have some standard templates and one licence for MSPProject!

Sometimes it feels that project management methodology is a little like Health and Safety. We know we have to do it, but it is sometimes not that exciting with lots of paperwork to complete. However, unlike Health and Safety, it is not mandatory or driven by legislation and yet we spend millions of pounds on implementing systems and solutions, which rely on the ability to deliver successful projects. Currently, there is particular importance as it is key to the successful delivery of digital transformation, which is at the forefront of many organisations’ agendas.

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PRINCE2 has been around for more than 20 years and has recently undergone a review of the method, examination and registration process. The reason for this is that it hasn’t been updated since 2009 and the other may well be a response to the growing interest in Agile project management methodology.

Agile is seen by some, to be a leaner process than PRINCE2 or indeed the traditional ‘Waterfall’ approach to delivery. Again, some people say, “our organisation is too small to adopt PRINCE2, therefore, we are going to use Agile”. But this is often said, without fully understanding how to tailor PRINCE2 or an awareness of what Agile is. It may be something they have read about or is in their corporate plan, which states that the business needs to be more Agile, but this is often not the same thing.

So, is it a straight choice between PRINCE2 and Agile when choosing your methodology to implement a project or when you are setting up a Project Management Office (PMO)? The quick answer to this, of course, is no.

However, let’s first review where Agile came from and how it works.

Agile

The Agile manifesto was created in the US in 2001, so its older than some may think. However, it is only in recent years that people have been able to obtain a qualification in it. Agile was developed within the software industry as a way of moving away from the traditional 'Waterfall' approach to delivering new solutions or upgrades to the market.

The Waterfall method

The Waterfall approach, which is not PRINCE2, was created in the 1970s to develop large software systems, where a process was required to capture requirements, design, code and test before being released into the live environment. Back in the 70s, software wasn't widely accessible to office workers and where it was, it was probably only used by those who looked like lecturers from the Open University, when it was on BBC2 back in the day.

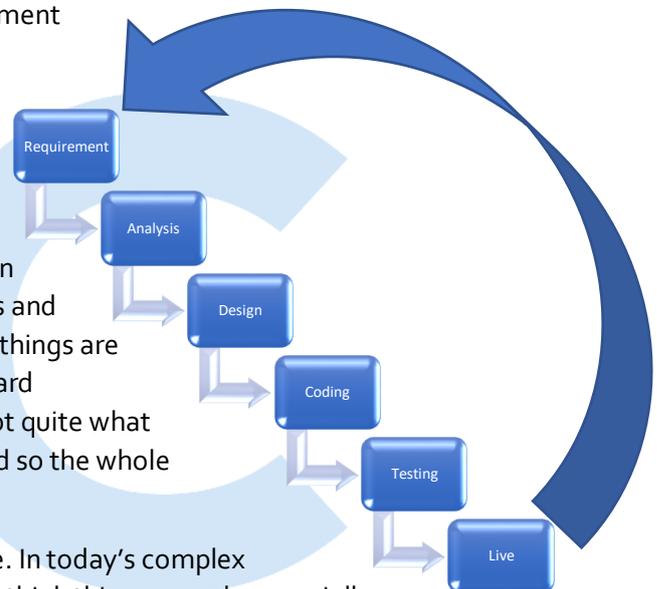
Waterfall relies on a systematic process of development milestones (see diagram right).

The issue found with Waterfall, and it's a problem which still exists today, is that the requirements are either not fully captured or they are misunderstood at the beginning of the process. Once the development process begins, there is then very little contact with the client to review progress and check this against the requirements to ensure that things are on track. In addition, how many times have you heard someone say when they finally get delivery, "It's not quite what we wanted" or "Can you also now include this?" and so the whole process can have to start again.

So, Agile was developed in order to break this cycle. In today's complex technological world, it is even more important to rethink this approach, especially where customers, internal departments, executive teams and boards often want things delivered more quickly than ever before.

Agile requires a change in the mindset of leadership and its approach to projects. Whenever project plans are presented to heads of service, the first thing they will probably do is look for the go live date at the bottom of the Gantt project chart within the project initiation document (PID). On many occasions, they already have a date/month in mind, often April as it's the beginning of a new financial year and it's not Christmas or the summer holidays! This instantly puts pressure on the project as how many projects managers have all the requirements, scope and resources nailed at the initiation stage?

What you normally have, is only enough information to start. The term used for this is Horizon Planning... only plan for as far as you can see with confidence.



The Agile process begins like most projects with defining the requirements, which is always the most difficult part. "How can I specify what I want unless you can tell me what you can do?" The answer to this is to specify requirements against a 'MoSCoW' rating: -

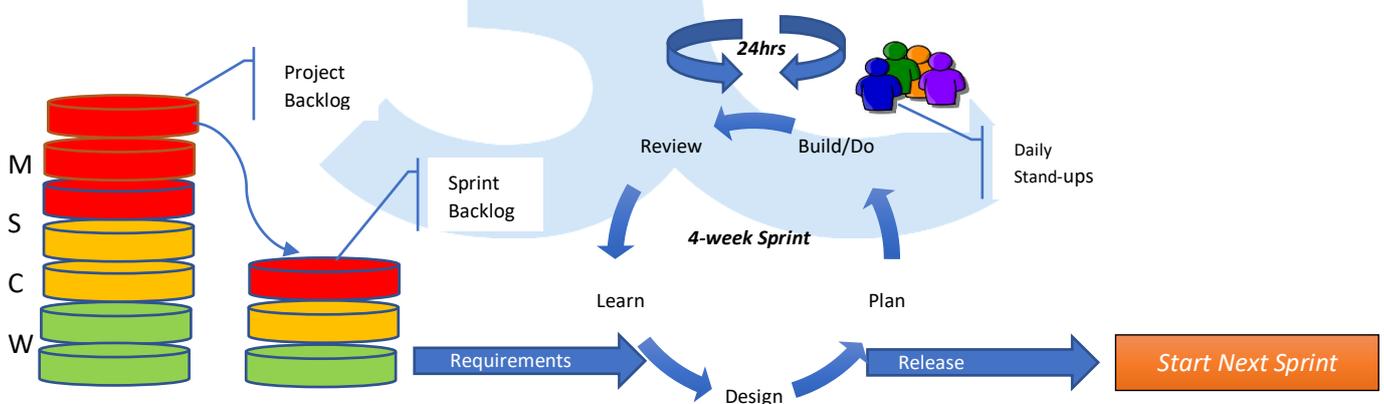
- M - Must have this requirement to meet the business needs
- S - Should have this requirement if possible, but project success does not rely on it
- C - Could have this requirement if it does not affect anything else on the project
- W - Would like to have this requirement later, but delivery won't be this time

Another Agile method is storyboarding. This captures user requirements by identifying who they are, what they do and why and then turning this into a requirement specification.

Once this is complete and signed off by the client, the requirements are stacked into a backlog. The "Must haves" are the priority for the project team to deliver. However, the rule is that this should not represent more than 60% of the overall requirements.

The key to Agile are the 'sprints' or iterations. Unlike PRINCE2 which has stages, sprints have a relatively swift timeframe, as opposed to PRINCE2 stages which are often milestone based over longer periods of time. The sprints are usually no more than four weeks in duration.

The diagram below illustrates the sprint process:



The steps are as follows:

- Project Backlog - Identify the requirements and prioritise these with a MoSCoW rating.
- Working closely with the client, agree the requirements to be developed in the first sprint.
- Prioritise these into order using the MoSCoW rating again.
- The sprint then begins going through a number of stages.
- To manage progress, the project team, along with the client, meet for daily 'stand-up' meetings that are often called 'Scrums'. The objective of the stand-up is to establish what has been completed, what is to be done and identify whether there is anything blocking progress.

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- As with any complex project, the likelihood is that problems will occur and it may be that all the requirements will not be delivered in the sprint. Unlike PRINCE2, the concept of Agile is to agree with the client to adjust the scope to cater for this as the time is fixed.
- Once the sprint is complete and reviewed, the concept is to sign off the sprint and move this to production (live). With some developments and implementations this is not always possible as it has dependencies on future developments. However, the initial development should not require any further amendments going forward.
- Following the sign off, the process starts all over again.

So why is this so different from PRINCE2, apart from the fact that a sprint is a fixed 4-week development period and the project team meet every day?

It is true, to state, that many believe that PRINCE2 is Agile as it follows a similar format:

PRINCE2	AGILE
Senior User	Client/Customer Role
Product Descriptions	Requirements Backlog
Lessons Learnt	Review and Learn
Project Team and Meetings	Project Team stand-ups or Scrum
Managed Stages	Sprints/iterations

In fact, AXELOS, who own the rights to PRINCE2, believe the Agile concept can live within the PRINCE2 framework and have, therefore, developed a course and certification in 'PRINCE2 Agile'. This may partly be AXELOS's reaction to those who believe that PRINCE2 is too complex and rigid to be adopted within their organisation and therefore less people taking the Prince Foundation and Practitioner courses.

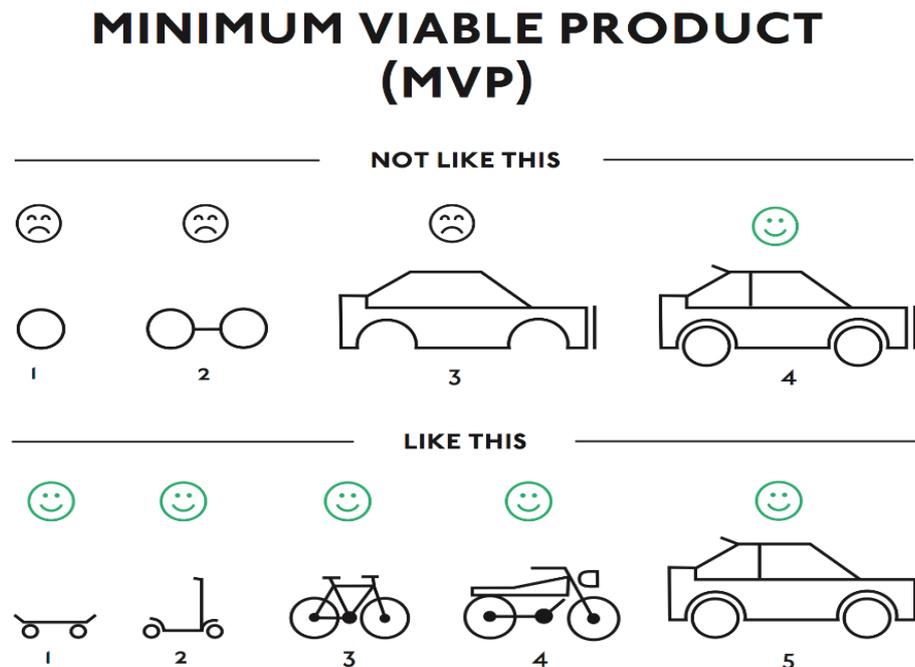
The better approach is to take the best from both methodologies. Within the new release of PRINCE2 there is much more of a focus on the principle of tailoring. Therefore, it doesn't have to be as prescriptive as some would believe. As a result, PRINCE2 can provide the tailored framework and core documentation which should always be required for any important project:

Agile does not dispense with the need for project documentation, this is a myth.

PRINCE2 Project Control Stages	Key Actions
Set-up	Business Case, Mandate, initial timescales, risks
Initiation	PID, Estimated timescale, summary Plan, resources and Governance, define requirements.
Delivery	Delivered through Agile; Detail requirements – Project backlog, initiate first sprint, fail fast, review, earn, go again.
Closure	Review Objectives, project deliverables and all the lessons learnt. Move into operational Business As Usual.

It is a myth that Agile dispenses with the need for project documentation. However, during the delivery it can remove the need to have ad-hoc documents such as checkpoint reports, as it prescribes to having far more face-to-face communication with the client and other members of the project team.

In addition, Agile works on the principle of initially delivering a Minimum Viable Product (MVP). The concept of this is to get a component of the requirement live or completed as soon as possible, as opposed to waiting until everything is complete. A simple way of illustrating this is the diagram below:



This again is a culture change within the business and is all about managing expectations. If you wait until everything is complete, projects that take a long time to deliver can lose their relevance within the minds of users, customers and managers. However, when delivering a MVP, communication becomes key to ensuring that people understand what will be delivered in the short-term as well as the long-term objectives of the project. Failure to do this will only result in disappointment and often a reaction of "Is that it!"

Get it right and the Agile approach will help to ensure that you do not over design the product by adding features and functionality that later do not get used.

Project management methodology is a reflection of the culture within an organisation. Executive teams and boards need to have faith in those delivering projects, giving them the responsibility to scope, resource and deliver projects in the most effective way, tailoring project management methodology to best ensure success. Agile project management methodology is now considered the best way of achieving this. As someone once said, "It is better to do something properly once and get it right, than to have to do it twice".



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