SNAPSHOT

Agile

Think big by
keeping it small

BCS CONSULTING

Expect **Excellence**

What is Agile

Agile is a software development methodology designed as an alternative to linear delivery methods such as Waterfall.

With Agile (more specifically for the present context, Scrum, which is often the preferred form of Agile), software and other business needs are developed by delivering smaller, discrete pieces of functionality regularly through 'sprints' (which is Scrum terminology) that can be reviewed quickly and easily by end-users. This allows for direct feedback during the development process, enabling the solution to be tweaked and improved on the go. The final solution can then adapt to the changing needs of users, meaning they are more likely to be satisfied.

Why Agile?

The Financial services industry is changing rapidly due to increased competition, changing customer demands and new regulations meaning that Banks, Asset Managers and Insurers must have the ability to adapt faster than ever before. This comes alongside tighter budgets and an increasing scrutiny of value delivered for money spent which can create stressful work environments.

Agile addresses these challenges by constantly reviewing whether value is being delivered as part of its process and upgrading solutions based on customer feedback in order to stay competitive.

The main goal of sprints is to regularly (every 2 to 4 weeks) review the backlog and prioritise items which deliver the most value by completing them first. This creates flexibility which allows companies to change direction relatively easily and quickly. Nevertheless, this constant prioritisation takes effort and time and might not always be suited for a project. To reap the benefits of Agile, one must be ready to invest time and effort in regular prioritisation exercises.

Another benefit of working in an Agile way is the motivational environment it creates for the team. In Agile, the delivery team is self-organised and assesses the effort required to deliver features, with individuals deciding for themselves which items they will complete from a prioritised list. Sprint retrospectives also take place regularly to improve the way the team works.

Motivated teams make happy employees, who are more productive therefore increasing the value of the work delivered.

What is the BCS view on Agile development?

At BCS, we believe that by adopting Agile as a new way of working, it will help increase competitiveness through responding to changes in customers' needs and embracing the availability of new technologies. But adopting Agile requires a big shift in ways of working and this shift is a considerable investment of time and effort both for business and technology teams.

Historically, business and technology have seemed to be on opposite sides, however the company can only reap the benefits of Agile if both teams "become one" and work alongside each other to achieve the same goals. Deeply rooted mindsets will need to be changed and such change must be driven from senior leadership in order to succeed.

The move to Agile will also bring to light weaknesses on both sides, from business teams who don't know what value they are delivering through their own requirements to key skills lacking in technology teams. There is a need to view these findings as a testimony to increased transparency and the opportunity to address these underlying issues. Moving away from a blame culture to understanding that everyone benefits from doing the right thing will not be an easy task but will pay off if addressed.

Alongside a major cultural shift, implementing Agile also requires day-to-day spliting of activities and ways of working to be reviewed:

- **Responsibility:** Managing iterative delivery requires teams to have the autonomy to make decisions on what to deliver based on the priority provided by the solution owner. This conflicts with the traditional way of working where responsibility for decision making lies with the management team

- **Cross-team interaction:** Agile projects require frequent communication between business users and developers. Users need to evaluate sprint deliverables regularly, explain requirements and define unambiguous, testable acceptance criteria

- **Milestone Management:** Tracking a portfolio of change in a traditional project management environment is done through tracking high-level, static milestones. Due to the nature of Agile, there is no "Delivery Complete" milestone, but a series of iterations of the solution with targeted deployment dates as the focus point is a product and not a project

- **Scrum Values first:** A successful Agile project requires a team of disciplined individuals to build a solution whilst documenting how the solution works (rather than comprehensive design documentation). The team is expected to be self-reflective and self-challenging, ensuring that time estimates are accurate. These qualities are reflected in the scrum values (Courage, Focus, Openness, Commitment and Respect)

At BCS, we help clients to overcome these challenges by guiding all levels of an organisation through the transition to this new way of working and by leveraging our expertise in delivery to embed sustainable change across the organisation.

Who should you speak to about Agile?

If you wish to know more about Agile and how we can help your organisation harness it's power to bring about effective change, please contact:
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