



AGILE FOR SAP® SOLUTIONS

AGILE AND SAP® PROJECTS: FINDING THE FIT

In a constantly changing business environment, enterprise systems and agile approaches are powerful allies. Enterprise systems play a pivotal role in keeping organizations competitive in an increasingly digital, data-driven landscape, and agile approaches to software development promise rapid delivery of useable, relevant solutions. Despite this shared suitability for the digital world, marrying enterprise systems projects and agile has proved to be challenging.

The broad reach and complexity of enterprise system solutions might, at face value, seem out of step with the iterative approach that characterizes agile. While it is true that there are additional challenges to manage when applying agile to enterprise system implementations, it is nevertheless possible to benefit from the same advantages enjoyed by less complex programs.

WHAT DOES AGILE DEVELOPMENT MEAN?

An agile approach provides an alternative to the traditional waterfall software development cycle. Whereas in a classic development model, months of activity and effort can be spent perfecting the design before moving forward to the build stage and then onward to testing and deployment, an agile approach consists of several iterative cycles. During these cycles, a scrum team addresses a small piece of the project requirements at a time and works through design, build and test phases during a two- to three-week sprint. To begin with, the key functionalities are determined and then developed further or rejected in each sprint based on customer or user feedback. At the end of the cycle, the solution is ready to deploy. Instead of having to wait to see the result until the end of the entire development, the customer or user is involved at every step and can benefit from the new functionality immediately.

WHY AGILE?

Digitalization has instilled an expectation to benefit quickly from the latest innovations and the onus is on enterprises to satisfy customers' demands without delay. The drive to iterate new digital solutions faster is also being felt in the system development lifecycle according to industry analyst Forrester¹. Gartner concurs, stating that through 2020, 50% of IT services market growth will be directly connected to digital technologies². Agile methods and practices in systems development are designed to satisfy this desire for speed by allowing nimble and incremental improvements over time, that are better aligned to user expectations. Adopting an agile approach provides organizations with the means to adapt rapidly to market and environmental changes in productive and cost-effective ways that bring multiple benefits:

EARLY AND INCREMENTAL VALUE

An agile approach equips organizations with the tools, processes, and a mindset to deliver value quickly and as often as reasonably possible. It enables the constant, real-time, roll-out of software, promoting confidence, and allowing business users to draw value early from working components, before the solution is complete.

QUALITY AND RELIABILITY

With an agile approach, there is less risk of delayed timelines because the delivery is managed sprint by sprint, with clear visibility as to what is committed for that sprint. The iterative nature of an agile project provides the flexibility to identify, integrate and/or re-prioritize missed or incomplete requirements during

the project. In addition, the ongoing feedback loop allows the delivery team and the recipient of the solution to align on expectations, reducing the risk of disappointment later in the delivery cycle. Working software is validated by the business at regular intervals and frequent integration and "shift-left" testing methods break down silos and drive early defect detection.

CUSTOMER-CENTRICITY

An agile approach keeps business and software delivery teams aligned and equally involved in the development process, promoting communication and partnership and generating a sense of shared ownership. This, together with the delivery of an end-product that meets expectations, results in increased business adoption and satisfaction.

INCREASED EFFICIENCY

Agile enables teams to deliver with efficiency – by focusing on providing what is required first and directing efforts towards continuous improvement throughout the project. Iterative development identifies defects and risks earlier in the process, enabling them to be fixed at lower cost. Agile projects are delivered in smaller increments, providing the opportunity for business users to see the emerging product, respond to it, and tweak it as they go. Delivering early and getting feedback reduces the risk of building the wrong product or missing a deadline because issues are identified too late in the process.

¹ DevOps Heat Map 2017, Landscape: The Modern Service Delivery Playbook, May11, 2017.

² Gartner: Market Trends: Application Service Providers Must Innovate to Deliver More Value Rapidly in a Digital World, 28 February 2017

GETTING AGILE RIGHT FOR SAP PROJECTS

Given the size, complexity, and interdependencies of SAP projects, they yield a specific set of challenges when operating under an agile framework. To overcome these challenges, delivery and client teams will need to align up front on what aspects of agile delivery they can commit to, and adapt the classic agile model accordingly. The following success factors for an agile approach to SAP projects are based on over 600 agile-based client engagements, and the collective experience of our more than 47,000-strong team of SAP practitioners:

START WITH A BASELINE SYSTEM

Compared to other projects, SAP projects require more upfront preparation before sprinting can begin. Key dependencies, for example, need to be called out before starting. In addition, the baseline configuration of an SAP system – the basis from which sprints can start – is much more robust than for typical agile endeavors. The baseline build provides the architectural runway required for the agile SAP program and enables the sprint teams to start delivering user stories related to SAP system functionality.

DO THE GROUNDWORK

Accenture SAP programs that are delivered via an agile model, commonly begin with preparation and blueprinting phases, culminating in the baseline build of the system. Agile frameworks typically include only light preparation and blueprinting phases, but our experience implementing SAP software has indicated that time set aside at the outset to define ways of working, undertake any training required, align on key design decisions and dependencies, set up the SAP environment and enhance

the business case is invaluable. This is especially true when the planned release has significant new functionality, SAP is new for the client, strategic decisions for the program are open, or to-be processes have critical dependencies.

MAKE KEY DESIGN DECISIONS UPFRONT

In any program, there are key decisions to be made between possible design approaches. SAP projects, depending on existing architectures or project scope, often present many options for how to solve foundational solution decisions.

If an agile approach is to be adopted, it is critical that the key decisions are taken in advance of the sprints starting. These decisions might be related to driving global standards, defining the scope for reporting and analytics, the future end-user experience or transition strategy or defining the ownership strategy and processes for data elements. Thinking about these big topics up-front gives the business time to decide on the direction it would like to take. It also avoids taking up precious time during sprint cycles to confirm the solution further down the road.

MANAGE THE COMPLEXITY

Some business processes in an SAP system are extremely complex and will take significantly longer than a single sprint to design and build. Added to this, the list of functionalities that the business deems necessary can be extremely lengthy. It is critical to the success of the program that this list is not only comprehensive and up to date with shifting business priorities and technical capabilities, but that it is distilled down to manageable and organized chunks of work for the scrum teams.

When the choice between different functional or technical approaches is not clear, where feasibility or risk needs to be established, or new technologies and possible dependencies need to be explored, spikes are an essential tool to guide the configuration of out-of-the-box SAP functionality to the specific requirements of the project. Early and ongoing dialogue between the business and the scrum teams is key to organizing tasks and keeping the program on track. It is at the beginning of the initiative that most of the system requirements will be established, enabling the team to foresee any issues in advance, and plan how to navigate around them.

NURTURE THE RIGHT MINDSET AND OPERATIONAL CULTURE

For an agile approach to SAP projects to be successful, the transition of the organization to an agile mindset for incremental, evolutionary, organic style growth is imperative. It is important to have agile-conversant people across the board. This requires upfront investment in change management training and significant top-down commitment to the change from leaders who are dedicated to seeing it through.

ALLOW FLEXIBILITY IN BUDGETS AND TIMELINES

Budgeting an agile SAP project can take client teams out of their comfort zone and demand a willingness to accept some uncertainty in how long the end result will take to deliver and what the cost will be. Client teams are not generally used to being flexible in regard to timelines and budgets and this needs to be managed to avoid tensions. To allow for scope adjustments as the project progresses, and the resources required to deliver a quality, user-centric product, agile programs work best when the budget is focussed around funding resources for a certain amount of time, rather than project scope and functionality. In reality, compromises will usually need to be reached between the fixed go live date and budget imposed by the business, and the priorities of the agile delivery team.

ARE YOU READY?

An agile approach to software development enables organizations to deliver relevant solutions fast. SAP implementations - despite their complexity - can benefit from agile principles, providing certain criteria are met.

An agile approach makes demands on the whole organization. A commitment to providing the tools and training to encourage the right mindset, enabling ongoing dialogue and permitting a degree of flexibility in timelines,

resourcing and budgets is crucial. Preparation is key and due attention must be given to developing a baseline system, reaching conclusions on key design decisions before embarking on sprints and using the right tools to break down the intricacies of the system into agile-friendly chunks.

FOR MORE INFO

KATHERINE MCQUIN

katherine.c.mcquin@accenture.com

ASHLEY RUSSELL

ashley.m.russell@accenture.com

NICHOLAS BECHTHOLD

nicholas.bechthold@accenture.com

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