

Debunking Common Agile Myths

We explore some inaccurate ideas about Agile implementation.

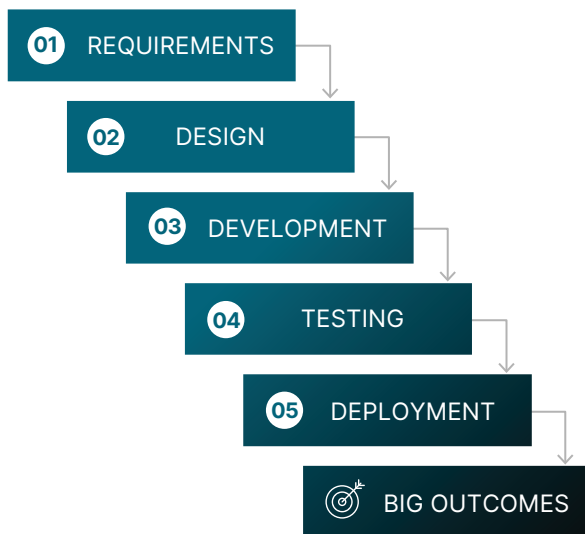


Your organization decided to implement Agile because of its proven advantages, but months—or even years—into your implementation, you’re realizing few, if any, benefits. Is Agile just not the right fit? Unlikely. Research conducted by an Agile software producer across 160,000 projects found that Agile could cut time to market in half¹. If Agile isn’t working for your organization, it’s important to ask: Are you *doing* Agile or are you *being* Agile?

If your organization is *doing* Agile, you may be following an Agile framework such as Scrum, Kanban, or Scaled Agile Framework (SAFe®)—but just having a sprint schedule and going through the Agile ceremonies, such as retrospectives and stand-up meetings, does *not* mean you *are* Agile. While these ceremonies and structures are often useful for Agile development, they are not sufficient to have an Agile organization.

So, what does it mean, then, to *be* Agile? It means you approach development in a truly iterative fashion and work in close collaboration with customers to build a solution that solves real problems. Foundationally, this means having an Agile mindset wherein the organization upholds the four core Agile values and twelve Agile principles at all levels. This mindset, combined with Agile processes and structures, will produce the benefits of Agile. But an organization cannot truly *be* agile without the Agile mindset. That’s because *being* Agile does not simply apply to development teams. *Being Agile is an organization-wide effort.*

Waterfall



Agile



¹ The Impact of Agile Quantified.' Broadcom Software. Accessed March 16, 2023. <https://docs.broadcom.com/doc/the-impact-of-agile-quantified>

Here is a look at three common Agile myths, and how they could be holding your team back from fully realizing the benefits of Agile.

Myth #1: We are working in sprints, so we have implemented Agile.

While sprints are a typical practice when implementing Agile development in Scrum, simply conducting daily stand-ups, backlog refinement, and sprint retrospectives does not capture the essence of agility. If you have implemented two-week sprints around your waterfall development, but have changed nothing about your requirements, development, or release practices, you aren't following Agile.

To know if you're implementing Agile methodology correctly, check to see if you are doing the following:

- Do you meet regularly with your end users (or proxies) to understand whether your solution is solving the actual problem and/or meeting the needs of stakeholders? Do you adjust your development based on the feedback you receive?
- Do you create a shippable functionality or release after each sprint that your end users can test and react to? Are you using sprint goals to align the team to a common purpose?
- Are you regularly identifying areas to improve, whether it's process-, technology-, or product-related?
- Do you have processes, tools, and technology at the level needed to support your Agile development practices (e.g., Agile PMO, DevSecOps, Test Automation)?

If the answer to any of these is no, you may not be operating as an Agile organization. Instead of merely implementing the processes in the Agile framework, you should understand and actively integrate the principles that serve as the foundation for the actions that will help your organization achieve agility via comprehensive Agile project management.

Myth #2: Our Product Owner can serve as the Scrum Master or Agile Coach.

Eliminating Agile-specific roles on your teams or in your organization might seem like an easy way to save money. In fact, in some organizations where Agile practices are very mature, doing so may be possible. However, a coach or guide is crucial to help accelerate your Agile adoption journey and avoid pitfalls that can derail an Agile transformation.

Organizations that don't have Agile Coaches or Scrum Masters might encounter these common problems:

- Continuing to adhere to centralized decision-making, resulting in bottlenecks.
- Not including the development team in context-building conversations with customers.
- Slicing stories horizontally.
- Not using cross-functional teams.

When a team has worked a particular way for a long time, they often need support to change how they operate. That is the role of a Scrum Master or Agile Coach. They're able to point out blind spots that can prevent a team or organization from reaching its full potential.

Guidehouse can fill this vital coaching role by conducting Agile assessments that help organizations understand where they are in the Agile maturity spectrum, identify the gaps in the people, processes, and/or technologies supporting your Agile transformation, and create a targeted roadmap to improvement including informal coaching and more formal certification trainings.

Myth #3: Customers don't need to attend Sprint Demos.

Real customer feedback drives the direction of the product and validates the solution you're building as one that solves your customers' problems. It's crucial to talk to the people who are actually going to use the software to get the feedback you need to improve it.

In some circumstances, it's not possible to get direct feedback from the customer. In these cases, you need a proxy who has a clear understanding of your customer. However, since the quality of the product can only be as good as the proxy's understanding of the customer, this person should be chosen carefully and have a holistic grasp of the problems you're solving for.

Other potential benefits of customers attending sprint demos include increased transparency and trust-building.

Whether your organization is navigating the myriad of Agile frameworks (Scrum, Kanban), scaling your Agile implementation (SAFe, Large Scale Scrum, etc.), or ensuring that you are achieving agility instead of going through the motions, it is imperative to have a guide who brings the lessons learned from prior implementations to enhance the framework's adoption process. Agile implementations should be based on proven Agile principles, with processes and actions that are tailored to your situation and engage the entire organization.

Guidehouse has a proven track record of helping clients implement Agile transformations of varying sizes and scopes. We can conduct assessments and evaluations of your current Agile implementation to create a roadmap and training program to help you get to your desired destination.

Guidehouse has professionals who have worked at the forefront of leading large-scale technology modernization initiatives. Our Agile Transformation experts are certified Agile professionals with experience as Product Owners, Agile Coaches, Scrum Masters, Release Train Engineers, SAFe Practice Consultants, and more. Our comprehensive expertise across many Agile frameworks enables us to deliver rapid, reliable results.



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