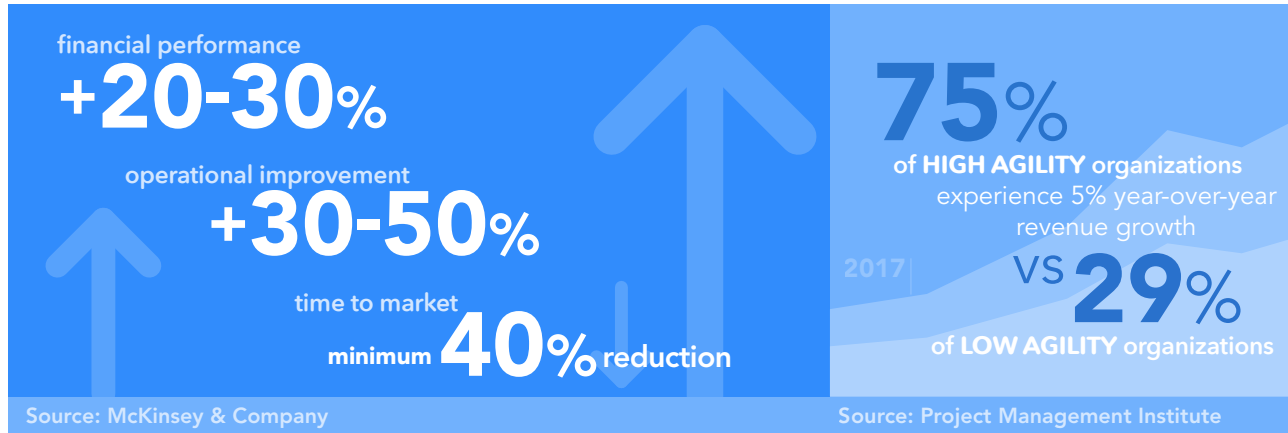


Agile Program Management: Making Work Connected and Visible



In recent years, we've heard countless stories showcasing the value that organizations are seeing with Agile transformation.

Agile Organizations



But the impact that Agile transformation can have on an organization runs far deeper than operational and financial improvements. What makes Agile “stick” is the cultural shift that occurs when companies begin to rewire the way things are done. Disparate departments become cross-functional teams. Processes are streamlined. Funding practices are aligned with the way teams plan and work. Voices are elevated. Continuous improvement becomes the norm. Change and conflict are viewed as healthy and productive.

These positive cultural shifts are felt from the beginning of the value stream to the end: in Agile organizations, employee engagement has been shown to increase by twenty to thirty points. Customer satisfaction increases as well, by ten to thirty points.

<https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/enterprise-agility-buzz-or-business-impact>

<https://www.pmi.org/about/press-media/press-releases/pmi-2017-pulse-of-the-profession-in-depth-reports-organizational-agility>





Challenges Facing Agile Organizations

Of course, these massive improvements do not always come easily. There are many challenges facing organizations undergoing Agile transformation. Most of these can be summarized under the umbrella of existing organizational structures and systems failing to meet the needs of Agile teams. These challenges can include:

- Coordinating teams of teams across projects, larger initiatives, programs, products, and value streams
- Utilizing different work styles and Agile methodologies (ex. some teams using Scrum while others use Kanban)
- Aligning different cadences and delivery schedules (ex. Sprints of various lengths)
- Supporting different tools or the same tool with different configurations (ex. Some teams using Atlassian Jira and others using another team tool or teams using Jira with different workflows, fields, and custom fields)
- Managing complex dependencies, risks, and other conflicts across many teams
- Funding practices not aligned with the operations of the Agile teams

Managing Challenges with Agile Program Management

Agile Program Management is a term used to describe the way Agile teams of teams inside an organization plan, launch, and execute initiatives in a complex, iterative environment. Agile Program Management gives Agile teams a way to visualize, plan, coordinate, and deliver their organization's biggest initiatives quickly, effectively, and with clear visibility into the value delivered.

WHY AGILE PROGRAM MANAGEMENT?

When an Agile initiative grows within an organization, a disconnect tends to emerge between the way Agile teams form and operate, and the way projects are traditionally funded and executed in organizations. In order to scale Agile successfully, there needs to be a better (more Agile) way to manage the work of interrelated teams.

Program management is a term commonly used to describe [the management of multiple interrelated projects](#) with intersecting goals, requirements, and outcomes. Program management is typically done by the Project Management Office (PMO), which is responsible for understanding financials and investment returns, assessing risk, and project delivery timelines to make sure that work is delivered on time and on budget.

In many organizations, the work of the PMO is centered around "checking boxes." In other words, making sure that plans are implemented as agreed to by all stakeholders. Success is defined as the *ability to execute as planned*. The problem with this approach to program management is that by focusing on execution, teams are systematically incentivized not to focus on what really matters: creating value.

In Agile, this is flipped on its head. Value creation and delivery are the main objectives. Teams are centered and aligned around delivering

value. Some of the functional concepts of traditional program management remain, but the core philosophy changes. Success is defined as the *ability to deliver things that matter* – otherwise known as customer satisfaction.

You can probably see how a disconnect might start to emerge, if the PMO is defining success one way, and Agile teams are defining it differently.

While these additional teams may increase velocity and "output," value delivery will not necessarily be created at the pace expected. This is because teams need to come together to plan and coordinate work in a more cohesive manner, typically forming a team of teams, or Agile Release Train (ART).

This "teams of teams" (ART) structure is the backbone of scaling Agile. It is a collection of stable and persistent Agile teams that coordinate, plan, and manage their work on the same delivery cadence.

Organizing in this way allows the teams on the trains to work toward a common goal more easily. And it allows leadership to more easily organize and understand how strategic commitments are deconstructed (i.e. broken into smaller pieces of work) and handled across many teams at one time.

Agile Program Management Functions

Effective Agile program management provides the appropriate structure and discipline necessary to enable:

- Consistent planning processes
- Alignment of work to objectives
- Prioritization and allocation of work by value streams and associated teams of teams (ARTs)
- Effective dependency management, including visualization of interrelated work
- Data-driven capacity planning and management
- Effective management of risks, roadblocks, and other delivery conflicts
- The use of Lean/Agile metrics to continuously improve value delivery

We'll share more on each of these key functions in this ebook.





PLANNING: QUARTERLY AND PI PLANNING

A key element to the success with Agile transformation is the alignment of planning practices with the way Agile teams operate. More specifically, re-aligning planning practices to support the organizational and functional structures of teams of teams or ARTs.

When organized into Agile Release Trains, high-performing Agile teams can realize their full potential: consistently and sustainably delivering value to the end users of their respective value streams. In order to maximize their potential, these ARTs require planning and funding processes that align with the way Agile teams work.

In Agile Program Management:

The cadence is shared

Teams of teams plan and deliver work on the same schedule, in increments that are typically eight to twelve weeks in length. (In SAFe®, these are called Program Increments, or PIs.) If a project or feature is not planned into the current PI, it is not started until the teams are able to plan again.

Value increments are delivered in two-week “sprints”

Many Agile organizations choose to divide Program Increments into shorter cycles (most commonly, two-week sprints) to maximize focus and flexibility within each Program Increment. These are called system increments.

Teams are synchronized

All teams within ARTs are synchronized to the same PI length and operate on the same schedule (with common start/end dates and durations). This ensures teams are able to truly plan and coordinate their work together.

The train has a known velocity and capacity

Using historical data for reference, Agile Release Trains can reliably estimate how much work can be delivered in a single PI and plan their workloads accordingly. This also helps associated value streams better predict value delivery for the business.

ALIGNING WORK TO OBJECTIVES

Another key function of Agile Program Management is aligning work to strategic objectives across all value streams. Many Agile organizations choose to use OKRs as a framework for planning and implementing their strategic goals.

The acronym OKRs stands for '[Objectives and Key Results](#)'. Objectives are the big-picture goals to be achieved. They answer the question, "What are we trying to accomplish?" Key Results are specific, measurable ways of tracking progress toward that Objective. They answer the question, "How will we know if we are achieving that goal?"

Within Key Results, are Initiatives, which describe the specific work that it will take to achieve the Key Results. They answer the question, "What will we do to get there?"

The OKR framework is especially helpful in Agile Program Management, as it provides a systematic way for teams to orient themselves around big-picture strategic goals while working autonomously toward specific Key Results.

PRIORITIZING AND ALLOCATING WORK

Another challenge facing Agile organizations lies in creating systems to prioritize and allocate work across teams of teams. Once Objectives and Key Results are identified, how do you make sure that everything that needs to be done to achieve those OKRs is going to get done?

It's very difficult to maintain visibility into work across an organization, especially when teams within the organization are using different tools to track and manage their work.

Kanban, specifically, the use of an [enterprise Kanban tool](#), can be invaluable for helping organizations visualize, prioritize, allocate, and execute work. Rather than forcing all teams to adhere to a single workflow management tool, enterprise Kanban tools can integrate with the tools teams are already using, and synthesize vital contextual and status information into a shared view.

By connecting related work across various Kanban boards, and creating hierarchies of boards to enable visibility at every level, leaders can maintain visibility into how work is prioritized and allocated without forcing teams to abandon the tools they enjoy using.





DEPENDENCY MANAGEMENT

Dependencies are the relationships between work that determine the order in which the work items (features, stories, tasks) must be completed by Agile teams. Dependency management is the process of actively analyzing, measuring, and working to minimize the disruption caused by intra-team and/or cross-team dependencies.

Agile Program Management enables better dependency management by giving organizations the visibility, flexibility, and agility to see, analyze, and mitigate the risk of their dependencies.

A natural question to ask is, “Should dependencies exist at all?” If dependencies reduce agility, shouldn’t Agile organizations do away with them entirely?

Conceptually, yes – the ideal Agile organization would be organized into completely self-sufficient, self-sustaining, cross-functional Agile teams. These teams would be able to consistently deliver value from start to finish without any external dependencies. However, this isn’t realistic.

There is value to be gained from collaborating with other teams, functions, and individuals within the organization; most projects, even those most Agile in design, include some dependencies, within the team itself at the very least.

Ultimately, Agile teams need checks and balances (dependencies) to ensure they put forth the best possible solution. Effective Agile Program Management enables organizations to practice effective dependency management by:

- Organizing into cross-functional Agile teams, effectively “designing out” unnecessary dependencies
- Using [dependency mapping](#) to gain a better understanding of the dependencies between systems, processes, and teams
- [Practicing continuous improvement](#) to eliminate unnecessary dependencies
- Analyzing necessary dependencies to predict how they will affect deliverability
- Creating better systems for dependency management that mitigate the disruption they cause

Delivering more predictably is a goal of any Agile organization, and it cannot be achieved without a better way for identifying, visualizing, and managing dependencies.

Visualizing connections between related work, and taking the time to assess the impact these dependencies will have, is critical for helping teams unlock greater levels of agility, by:

- Improving work sequencing to prevent roadblocks and reduce process waste
- Improving the flow of work, reducing context switching at every level
- Helping teams set more realistic expectations with internal and external stakeholders
- Reducing process variability, therefore increasing predictability
- Practicing more effective capacity planning and prioritization within, between, and across teams
- Improving cycle and lead times



CAPACITY PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT

Planning and delivering work in increments provides Agile organizations with a systematic way of tracking how efficiently teams can deliver work in a fixed period of time. With each PI, organizations collect more data to inform future capacity planning and management.

This is another area in which enterprise Kanban and Agile Program Management go hand-in-hand. Visualizing work across multiple teams in an enterprise Kanban tool is not only helpful for prioritizing and allocating work, but also enabling more effective dependency management. It arms organizations with real-time, actionable insights into how teams are performing, which can directly inform more accurate capacity planning and management.

REPORTING

Success with Agile Program Management relies on effective data collection and reporting - but not just on business metrics. Agile teams rely on Lean and Agile metrics, which measure performance and effectiveness to deliver more effectively, drive continuous improvement, and sustain their Agile programs.

Unlike business metrics, which help a business assess how well it is meeting the market need, Lean and Agile metrics help teams quantify their value delivery: how efficiently and effectively they are planning and executing work, and how are they improving the flow of value?

Another key difference is that while business metrics are typically measured and reported on an organization-wide level, Lean and Agile metrics are meant to be collected, analyzed, and leveraged by the teams and ARTs doing the work. Rather than providing accountability from the top-down, Lean and Agile metrics motivate teams and release trains intrinsically by offering actionable insights based on real performance data.



MANAGING RISKS AND OTHER CONFLICTS

One of the primary functions of Agile Program Management, and Agile as a whole, is to mitigate many of the risks that are associated with managing large-scale initiatives:

- Long-term planning requires extensive resources and is often inaccurate
- An overreliance on estimation leaves organizations unable to deliver predictably

Agile Program Management helps to mitigate these risks by enabling greater flexibility and agility at every level and throughout every functional area within the organization. With greater visibility and context into the status of various initiatives, leaders can make decisions about how to pivot, and teams can adjust plans accordingly without sacrificing visibility.

ENABLING CROSS-TEAM VISIBILITY

What's missing from traditional program management practices is visibility throughout every step of a team's process, from planning to execution. When organizations are structured into functional departments, instead of cross-functional teams, valuable information about work context and status gets lost. There is no single source of truth where anyone can look to see how work is progressing.

By restructuring departments into cross-functional teams of teams, and then encouraging coordination between these teams from planning to execution, Agile Program Management unlocks greater levels of collaboration and visibility between functional areas in the organization.



Scaling Frameworks

Many organizations have had great success evolving their processes, teams, and cultures using frameworks designed for scaling Agile across their organizations. The Scaled Agile Framework® (SAFe®) is the most widely recognized enterprise Agile framework, but there are several others, including Disciplined Agile (DA), Large-Scale Scrum (LeSS), the Spotify model and others.

Agile Program Management isn't something meant to replace these scaling frameworks, but rather, to sustain the work done through them. What's true of any Agile scaling framework is that it requires the thoughtful use of technology to bring it to life.

Connecting It All

The benefits of practicing Agile at scale are enviable – but the path to getting there is not without challenges. In order to scale Agile successfully, organizations need a solution to effectively practice Agile Program Management, and aid with the visualization and connection of how strategy translates into value delivery. Leveraging an Agile Program Management solution that utilizes Kanban can add the structure, visibility, and accountability necessary to practice successful Agile at scale.

PLANVIEW'S AGILE PROGRAM MANAGEMENT SOLUTION

Whether you want to coordinate and facilitate Program Increment (PI) or Quarterly planning, launch and manage teams of teams or Agile Release Trains (ARTs), and/or connect and consolidate disparate Agile teams, Planview's Agile Program Management solution brings everything together inside highly configurable program boards. Give your Agile teams a way to visualize, plan, coordinate, and deliver your organization's biggest initiatives quickly, effectively, and with clear insight into the value delivered.

To learn more about the Planview solution for Agile Program Management, watch a product demo:
[Planview.info/APM-demo-on-demand](https://planview.info/APM-demo-on-demand)