

Do your Agile Projects Need More Process?

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Some might think adopting Agile means throwing processes out the window given the Agile Manifesto, which values individuals and interactions over processes and tools. However, current research finds that the two can coexist and even significantly improve performance when applied together. The CMMI Institute just published a whitepaper about the benefits some companies realized when combining the Capability Maturity Model Integration (CMMI) with Agile. According to the article, “Agility: It rhymes with stability”, in the December 2015 edition of *McKinsey Quarterly*:

“...truly agile organizations, paradoxically, learn to be both stable (resilient, reliable, and efficient) and dynamic (fast, nimble, and adaptive). To master this paradox, companies must design structures, governance arrangements, and processes with a relatively unchanging set of core elements—a fixed backbone.”

McKinsey also reports organizations mastering speed and stability were more likely to have a high organizational health score and strong financial performance.

These signs indicate your Agile projects might benefit from more process infrastructure:

- Time spent maintaining old code negatively affects work on new features
- Cannot repeat the exceptional results of one team or expand it to others
- Your contract is not Agile (e.g., you need to produce a lot of documentation with your code) or the customer needs more details about the development team’s activities
- You have a lot of stakeholders or need to coordinate with a lot of other teams
- The team is not sure how it is doing or where the bottlenecks are
- Team members are not getting the training they need
- Failure to foresee or deal with unplanned events
- Retrospective suggestions never get implemented; best practices are not shared throughout the organization.
- The team continues to debate best practices, methodology, or process frameworks at the expense of delivering working code

To address these issues and others, consider incorporating more formal process into your Agile operations by:

1. Establishing organizational policies and a core set of standard processes that promote Agile values while allowing for some tailoring.
2. Creating (and maintaining) a document that describes team behaviors, expectations, and day-to-day operations. The document, which might identify the team’s mission, length of sprints/iterations, definition of done, story estimation process, and success metrics, should be concise and easy to read. It will help onboard team members and Product Owners, and explain how you operate to external stakeholders. It can also help duplicate a team’s success on other projects in the organization.
3. Tracking risks, which are adverse events that might happen. Describe them, develop mitigation strategies and contingency plans, maintain them in a document, discuss them with stakeholders, and execute the contingencies if the risks become a reality.
4. Selecting [metrics](#), collecting measurements, analyzing them, and adjusting team operations as needed.

5. Conducting peer-reviews of work products (e.g., code reviews, documentation reviews, etc.).
6. Capturing and reviewing retrospective feedback (e.g., suggestions and lessons learned). Track those suggestions the team wants to incorporate into future sprints/iterations.
7. Starting a Scrum of Scrums meeting to improve coordination and quarterly management reviews to maintain support from senior leaders.
8. Establishing a group (e.g., software engineering or process management group) to manage a backlog of process improvement suggestions made during retrospectives, maintaining process documentation and work product templates for new teams and team members, conducting process audits, and calculating/publishing team performance indicators (e.g., velocity).

Adopting some or all of these process elements can help you unleash the powerful synergy of Agile and process. As always, experiment and adjust your Agile-process balance to make sure the stability you add helps and not hinders.

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About the Author: Mike McEwen (PMP, CSM) is a servant-leader who forms amazing teams and helps them deliver award-winning technology solutions to commercial, non-profit, and government customers.