

Why Agile Won't Work in Many Shops

I am not, by nature, an optimist.

I'm a realist. Although some people say pessimist. But I think in today's world the two terms are more synonymous than contradictory. So forgive me if this seems negative. It's not, just honest.

Today, everyone wants to go Agile. Why?

Because Agile is seen as the way that you can shorten your project times and save a ton of money. I actually saw a book purporting to be about Agile that claimed it could cut project times in half.

Not true, of course, and a complete misstatement about what Agile is about, but in today's world 'misstatement' is the new 'fact'.

But the real problem is – saying you want to go Agile is not the same as actually doing it correctly and most organizations have several big problems that make truly going Agile difficult.

First, there is the matter of 'faith'. Most medium and big organizations just don't have much of it.

And maybe that is not the right way to put it. Many organizations may have 'faith', they just don't have the right type.

Agile faith is centered on the fact that 'people will find the way' rather than 'methodologies will light the way'.

Agile believes that you can start with a team of good people (why would you have bad or mediocre people?) and thru a continuous stream of interactions, they will develop an effective solution to whatever problem is being worked on.

Many companies just don't have that kind of faith available. They need several documents written up before anything happens. Without that, they just don't feel comfortable. And without the ability to bypass that and start developing, you don't have Agile.

Second, most organizations require a 'roadmap'.

I guess this is related to the whole faith issue but it's sort of different.

Maybe the difference is that this is audit related. Many organizations, especially big ones need one or more written documents to show that there is a 'roadmap' of where they are going. It is sort of proof that due diligence was done in terms of this project.

So Waterfall makes the development of those documents the priority.

What is important to note is that Agile is not against the idea of a roadmap, it just puts the emphasis on building something tangible as more important.

Third, the 'we will get down the road and have nothing' feeling.

Finally, many organizations are very concerned about coming up completely empty on their investment in a project.

In short, they worry that they will get six months into a project and decide there is no value in it, and have to cancel it. General their logic is that with Waterfall that won't happen because we have created documents up front and so know what we are going to be getting. If it isn't worth it, they would stop early on. With Agile, you might not know for six months if it is going to work out or not.

Actually, that is a valid concern, but the source of the danger is reversed.

With Waterfall, you will indeed have your document showing what you will deliver. But my experience is that generally there are several of these and with the approvals required, you may very well get six months down the road and not even be finished with this process. Plus, since people do not pay full attention to a written document, even after you have agreement there is no guarantee that people will be happy or even understand the final product. It would be easy to get six months into a Waterfall project and come up snake eyes.

With Agile, you start producing something tangible for the customer to look at immediately and so you know right away if you are off target and you need to pull the plug. Agile is not coding without planning, it is coding co-mingled with planning.

There are probably other reasons why many shops that talk Agile won't really do it. But those are my top three. And that's plenty.

Want more info on Agile? Or Waterfall? Or how **SCS** can help your company with it's project management issues? [Cool](#).