# You're Not Doing Agile – You're doing Waterfall-Scrum

Many companies today like to say 'we're doing Agile!'. I am working with one right now and it's great fun. But the truth is, most are just doing 'Waterfall – Scrum'.

## How Can You Tell?

So, if someone says they are doing Agile, how do you tell if they really are?

Fortunately it is very simple. When they begin development do they have a full set of requirements?

If so, they're not doing Agile.

The idea behind Agile is that everything unfolds iteratively with each sprint, and you can't know the full set of requirements until you are done.

Oh, I know. Your users may swear up and down that they have completely specified the requirements up front. But any experienced systems analyst knows that what users initially want is usually just a first approximation. Complete requirements are only known after you have worked through a number of sprints, reviewed things with users on an almost daily basis, and really come to grips with what the issues are and what they need.

## Waterfall

Waterfall is about figuring out what your requirements are, your total requirements, and then building a development plan to fit those requirements. It doesn't dig the idea that as we build the application our (IT and the business) understanding of it will grow and we will get a better idea of what we want to accomplish. No, we know everything up front. Cause we're smart.

Please, show me a medium to large company that does not want to know exactly what will be done and how much it will cost before it is started and I will eat my computer.  Overwhelmingly, organizations insist on a 'design document' or three, laying out exactly what is going down, before any money is going to be committed to the project. And you better follow that document. Otherwise you need a change order and a good reason to explain to management why things are now different from what you said they would be. You promised, dude!

And that is just not Agile. Agile says that requirements will be unearthed layer by layer, like an anthropologic dig, as we go through the development and review process.

And while that seems kind of high hat to some people, that is how real, accurate software development should be done. It's a learning process. It's iterative. It gains strength from what went before.


Srum

Scrum is intimately tied in with Agile, even though the two really don't have that much in common. And because of that, you can very easily implement Scrum without Agile.

All you have to do is set up sprints for your development group. Then do your sprint retrospectives and sprint assignments and it is all sprint-ty. And everyone says 'we is doin' agile' but really you are not. It is better than doing just straight Waterfall. I suppose. Doing sprints at least focus's your development group and they feel a need to complete what is in the sprint within the constrained time, rather than just letting it stretch out forever.

But it's not iterative, it's not Agile. Bet you dollars to donuts that your sprints do not involve the iterative development of a function. They consist of stories where the 'story' is to completely develop an element of code. You finish and it is done, not going back to do anymore on it. Time to move on to something else. That is linear development, not iterative.


So What Can You Do?

Actually, probably not much. The Lords of Project Management promise a seamless structure that does not allow anything to fall through the cracks or to be missed. That's an impossible goal for any process, of course, but the lure to most companies is irresistible. Agile promises nothing and asks you to have a pretty hefty amount of faith in your staff. Never said this was going to be one of those feel good pieces. Unless you like Waterfall-Scrum, that is.

But if you do have some flexibility in your situation, and you are doing Agile or Scrum – ask yourself 'Am I really doing Agile, or am I just whistling Dixie?' Not everyone is cut out to do Agile. It's strange you know, counterintuitive. It's for those people who are out there, the wide eyed start up types. You know – crazy people – who end up being billionaires who hang with Hollywood sorts. Do you really want to get into all that funky stuff?