



Before You Begin an Agile Project: 5 Steps You Can Take Now To Foster Success

Overwhelmed or unsure of what you need to do to prepare for an Agile project? Information technology projects can be very challenging to begin with, and adopting a new framework can be daunting. Organizations that prepare well have a greater chance of success. Treinen has a long track record of helping our customers succeed with their IT projects, several of which use Agile processes. Here are some of our recommendations to help you prepare and succeed in your next Agile IT project.

1. Understand your goals

Why? While many things can and should be flexible in an Agile project, your goals should remain unchanged. Understanding what you intend to accomplish is core to designing and ordering your product backlog and knowing when your product is ready for delivery to users. This knowledge also reduces uncertainty and drives decisions as the team makes adjustments during the course of the project.

How? Start with a project charter that outlines the purpose of the project and the players who will use and build the system. Don't over plan. Know just enough to get started and to guide you, but don't waste time and resources trying to define things you just don't know right now. Plan for the plan to change.

2. Describe your business using the language of IT

Why? Organizations often have their own jargon and ways of communicating. New project resources have much to learn when they come aboard. Providing information to technical staff in terms and formats familiar to them will help improve communication and reduce orientation time. Documenting your business in this way will help your team build a shared understanding.

How? Work on articulating your business in ways that IT teams will understand. Some of the best ways to describe your business for an Agile project are with use cases and business process diagrams that help you convey complex development efforts that cross multiple sprints. Capture an appropriate level of detail by describing how the business will operate within the new IT solution.

3. Examine your organization's data

Why? Data cleanup and migration work often contains hidden complexity that can take time to resolve. Data is migrated to the new solution at the end of the project, so getting a head start on data organization and cleanup will help to mitigate risks to your project's schedule. Understanding the scope of your data migration work will help the team accurately estimate the size of the work to be done and how best to break that up over the course of the project.

How? Think about the data you will need to migrate to the new IT solution. Take the opportunity to revisit the information that is important to your organization, reviewing the data elements your current systems capture. Are there redundancies and inconsistencies? Do you have any data quality issues? Develop a plan to address these issues as well as your agency's data retention and sensitive data policies. Finally, begin archiving expired data even before the project begins.

4. Decide to buy or build

Why? A clear understanding of the options available to you will guide procurement or custom development. Knowing what you need will help you evaluate the options you discover and how each will respond to inevitable change in an Agile project. This decision will also drive your budget and help manage what is expected with the new system.

How? Determine if a Commercial Off the Shelf (COTS) solution is suitable for your business. A COTS solution might be a good fit if you need the new system to support standard business processes. A custom-built IT solution is more appropriate if your business processes are unique or evolving. If new and existing systems will need to "talk to each other," begin thinking about how to integrate them. Talk to peer agencies both inside and outside the state to learn what they've considered and done. Enlist help from the state [Office of the Chief Information Officer](#) or your agency's Enterprise Architecture team for guidance.

5. Prepare for organizational change

Why? New IT solutions can disrupt "business as usual" in a good way, though change can be hard on your people. With so much focus on technology, the "people side" of an IT project can get overlooked. When this happens, the successful adoption of the new IT solution is at risk. Understanding and communicating how people will do their jobs differently is important to articulating the needs within a new solution.

How? Strive to understand as early as possible which of your staff members will feel the impact. Identify how their jobs will be different. Develop a plan to incorporate strong and consistent communication, and outline how you will receive feedback from your users after each sprint to ensure development is on track. Proactively provide your staff with the resources they require to modify their skills set to be successful in the new paradigm.

Treinen can help you prepare for your next Agile project

Implementing these five steps now will help your people and business be ready to succeed using Agile for your next project. Treinen has the experience and approach to help every step of the way.

Our consultants have an average 11 years of experience, mostly on IT projects. We have the technical expertise but also the business know-how to ensure you and your customers are satisfied with your solution for years to come. Contact us today to find out how we can help you achieve your business objectives.