

How to Define an Approach on Your Next Project?



Photo 1. Confused on selection (Photo taken from iStock website)

Have you ever found yourself stuck, trying to choose the ideal methodology to implement on your projects? Don't worry; you're not alone; you need to use some lighthouses for your voyage.

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One of the main dilemmas in choosing a project management methodology is to determine whether you should go ahead with the waterfall approach or with any of those agile approaches under an agile umbrella.

For new practitioners, a brief introduction to approaches might be useful. In the waterfall approach, project phases follow each other, and requirements for the project are defined beforehand in order to launch a project. In agile approaches, instead, you don't have requirements that are too precise, but in most cases, it is just an idea. There are many agile approaches to select from: Scrum, Kanban, Scrumban, Iterative, Extreme Programming, Lean Startup, Disciplined Agile, and a few more. As you can see, Scrum is the most common one to use. However, you, as project manager and project team, shall be tailors to select the best project management approach.

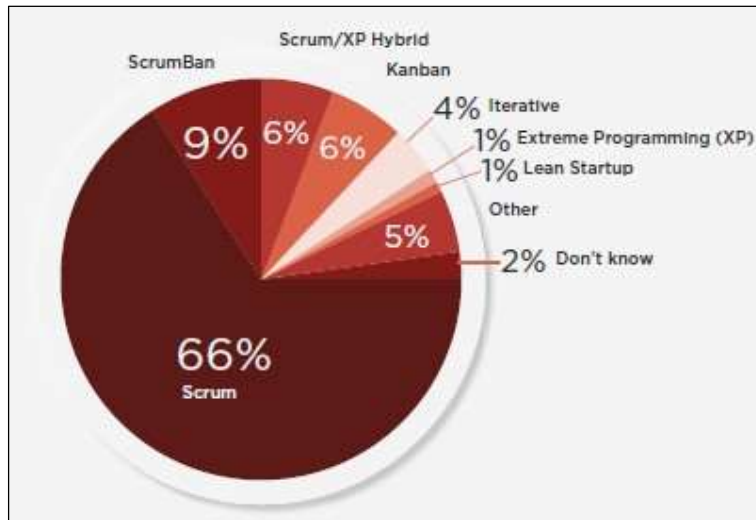


Photo 2. Agile approaches rate of use (Photo taken from 1Eth State of Agile Report by digital.ai)

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Let's return to our selection lighthouse; a helpful tool comes to the stage: Stacey Matrix. Have you ever run into it?

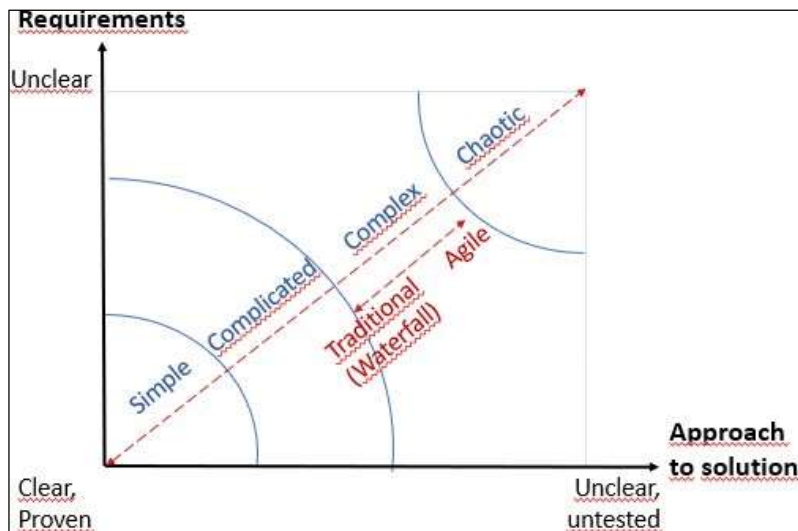


Photo 2. Illustration of Stacey Matrix

This is a matrix where you can decide your approach considering the clearness level of your requirements versus the solution approach, whether proven or untested.

A project can be classified as “simple” if,

- requirements from your stakeholders are defined and crystal clear,
- you have skilled project teams with previous experience with projects,
- you have custom templates for project deliverables and best practices from lessons learned,
- known and proven methods available at every step of the project and/or at least have almost clear steps,

Therefore, you can choose the waterfall approach. Examples using this approach might be building a bridge, erecting a monument, or planning a birthday.

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Your project falls into the "complicated" category if,

- there is a range of variables for the project team to clarify,
- requirements from your customer are not too clear, and you need to spend time on business analysis to clarify business needs.

Therefore, you can choose either the waterfall approach or the waterfall plus iterative cycles (for example, for requirement clarification). Kanban board can also be applied to regulate process workflow with complicated projects. Examples of using this approach can be service management for an IT application or a project in which you are not experienced within your industry.

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You gather with the project team at the beginning of the project and feel like project activities might get “complex” once,

- You can't foresee and anticipate every step of your project phases, but you can define the way at regular intervals (this is called rolling wave planning)
- It is hard to prepare a project schedule and follow up,
- A review of the project schedule shall be made in short intervals,

- There are many risks.

Complex projects are appropriate to apply agile umbrella frameworks. Examples of this approach can be a project from your expertise, such as implementing an emerging digital transformation technology or creating a new product for your direct customers.

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Lastly, a project can be classified as “chaotic” once,

- You only have the idea of the project,
- Your stakeholders have different views about the content of the project,
- You start experimenting on day 1.

With these kinds of projects, I would advise starting with “Design Thinking” and then deciding how to proceed. Examples of this approach include innovation projects with many unknowns for the project manager and the team.

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Which project management approaches have you practiced?

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References

<https://www.iapm.net/en/blog/stacey-matrix/>

<https://digital.ai/catalyst-blog/15th-state-of-agile-report-agile-leads-the-way-through-the-pandemic-and-digital/>