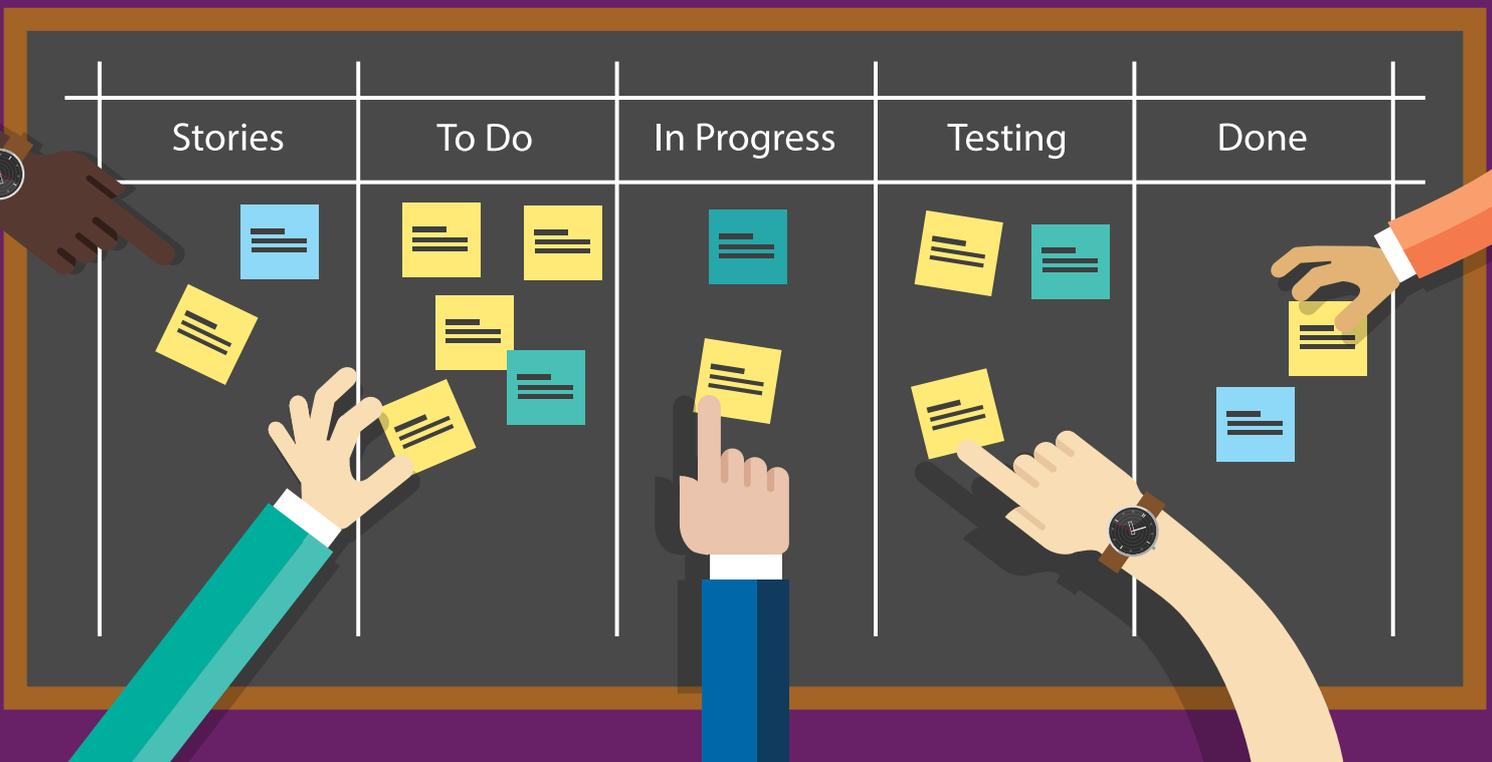


How to Adopt Agile

Agile is more than a buzz word. It can be a remedy – but only if it's methodology is right for your organisation. **Matt Barry**, Chief Operating Officer at Host Europe Group, reveals how to make that judgement and where its adoption can go wrong





Among its many promises, the agile working methodology offers improved creativity, productivity, flexibility and speed. That's if you can get it to work. While the approach is tried, tested and approved by many, it must be properly adopted for it to work. We ask **Matt Barry**, Chief Operating Officer at Host Europe Group to give his advice on getting it right.

Matt has first-hand experience of the shift from traditional waterfall methodologies in product development to agile approaches. His first involvement was in a corporate 'start-up' environment where the approach fostered quick, creative developments with ground-breaking new technology.

Most recently, **Matt** implemented agile at Host Europe Group (HEG), Europe's largest privately owned web hosting company. He found it an effective solution to overcome organisational barriers between geographies, offices and cultures, and enable the HEG developers to become a global team.

Now, we handover to **Matt** for his 9 tips on adopting agile:

1. Decide if Agile is Really for You

Agile has become extremely fashionable in corporate business strategy as a way of dealing with today's world of competition and constant change, driven by digital technology. While there is widespread interest in agile across many industries, it should be recognised that the approach is not right for everyone.

It works well in industries with fast moving deadlines that focus on innovation and quick development of unique competitive advantages. However, in highly-regulated

industries or ones that require many checks and balances for consistency and accuracy, a more traditional setup may be better.

Leading in agile also has its challenges – sometimes top management find it hard to give up deadlines and well-defined initiatives or surrender decision-making to their team.

The key to success is to take an honest look at your reasons for employing agile and your capacity to deliver that change.

2. Assess Your Team and Structure

The ideal approach is to start the implementation with at least a few key people with agile experience, and a team that is ready to give – and be given – more autonomy. The trick here is to pick leaders with the right soft skills to guide a team; hierarchical authority alone will not work.

Some roles theoretically transition well to an agile approach; such as turning project managers into scrummasters – yet, such moves often fail because of a reliance on old styles of task delivery.

Leaders need to be both a visionary and a team player, plus have a willingness to learn, change and adapt. It's what agile is all about!

3. Move Aside and Let Teams Flourish

Leading an agile team requires serious adjustment to management style. Teams should be presented with problems and given context, and then left alone to come up with solutions.

For the best results, keep teams together and on task. There's no better setup than the scrum framework. It works well when the contract of a development cycle is not broken. Don't add more work mid >

GLOSSARY OF AGILE TERMS:

- **Development cycle:** The period spent planning, creating, testing and deploying an information system. Also known as a sprint when employing the scrum framework for agile development.
- **Scrum:** An agile development team framework whereby teams deliver incremental updates at the end of a development cycle with a predetermined timeframe (typically biweekly).
- **Scrummaster:** As the scrum's facilitator, the scrummaster is accountable for removing impediments for the team and ensures that the agreed processes and ceremonies are effective.
- **Ceremonies:** A ceremony is a meeting between agile team members, the most common of which are:

Sprint planning: Done at the beginning of the sprint providing details of the work that needs to get done

The daily-stand up: A light, quick and informative meeting to outline what everyone on the team is doing

Sprint review: Showcases the teams' work

The retrospective: A time to review, plot creative solutions and plan future actions.



sprint, and ensure the teams are not confused by unrelated issues or attempts to suddenly shift the strategy.

Leaders should clearly figure out their role in meetings and be clear about which to attend. In agile, meetings are called ceremonies. My advice is to only attend the relevant ones, such as review meetings, and stay out of ceremonies that shouldn't include leadership, such as team retrospectives.

4. Collaborate To Get Buy-In

To make such a radical shift, it's important to set time aside for the team to get an understanding of the approach and ask questions. Changes like this work best when people are treated as an important part of the process, rather than forcing a new way of working. Without adequate buy-in the process will be fragmented, with tasks performed only for show.

No matter how great your team or process, nothing will be achieved without the right vision. It should encompass all of your customer knowledge, data analysis, business acumen, industry experience, competitive assessments, skills and capabilities. Once you've found your vision repeat it loud, proud and often.

5. Start With Minimal Details

It's best to get started with a minimal framework, such as the teams, roles, schedules and ceremonies. Be adaptable in your approach – start with a general outline and improve it through iterative changes until the teams are working well together. At the beginning it's more about following the proper form and getting into good habits early on.

6. Don't Expect Immediate Results

Such disruption to the team will inevitably lower productivity. That's okay. After several cycles and with proper coaching, productivity will start to increase and the teams will thrive. Failure should be not just tolerated but expected – as long as the focus is on how to improve next time. Clearly define your criteria for success and check in after every cycle.

7. Establish an Agile Working Group

As you continue to make agile work for you and your organisation, put together a regular group to discuss results and highlight problems.

This group should be a diverse and a representative mix of all key team assignments – development leads, product owners, scrummasters and business stakeholders, plus people from a mix of cultural backgrounds.

8. Don't Forget About User Experience

Agile methodologies work best when the experience is all about the end user. Never discount the power of a talented professional in user experience (UX).

Indeed, invest in a whole user experience team – one that excels at interaction and visual design, content and user research. Poaching one of your own marketing designers or engineers won't cut it. While they may be able to build a technically sound product, service or platform, without UX professionals to provide an interaction that is visually stunning and intuitive, you're dead in the water.

9. Celebrate Good Times (Come on!)

One of the major tenets of agile methodologies is that you can see results quickly and change course. Use your review ceremonies to celebrate and acknowledge the hard work and dedication put into each cycle. When it comes time for a major release, be sure the teams can celebrate together. Buy them lunch, trophies, or allow for a night out.

When regular releases start to become the norm, it is easy to overlook all the hard work and take it for granted. ■



Matt Barry
COO, Hosting
Host Europe Group

Matt is COO for Mass Hosting at Host Europe Group (HEG) and has end-to-end product responsibility for HEG's Mass Hosting products.

He joined the business in 2014 as Vice President for Product Management and was tasked with creating group products that sit across HEG's various brands, including 123-reg, Heart Internet and Host Europe.

Prior to HEG, Matt spent over four years at Comcast, based in Philadelphia. He was hired in 2009 as a Product Manager in the newly-formed group, Comcast Converged Products, where he was tasked with rebuilding the cable experience from the ground-up.

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