

Agile, Waterfall - Wait its WaterGile! (Trademark it!)

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How Agile Product Management has evolved in the last few years

An interesting thing has been happening in the market, and it's not just that everything is moving to the Cloud, or that Facebook is about to go IPO, it's the very real, and very concrete adoption of agile methodologies across the software industry. Originally a concept that gave birth to the [Agile Manifesto](#) (I know I can't believe I'm referencing Wikipedia), Agile has really taken over as a concept everyone strives for, but rarely achieves. Why is that?

From a corporate stand point, many of the other processes at a company, like fiscal budget planning, employee performance reviews, and marketing campaigns, go through yearly planning and longer cycles. Can you imagine if you "iterated" on your performance review weekly, with a full day spent reviewing your objectives and decided what to focus on the next week? But wait – maybe that's not such a bad way of approaching it, it provides quicker feedback from your manager and peers and keeps you completely aligned. And that is the heart of the issue, people just aren't sure how much better that faster iteration is for everyone, they have this fuzzy feeling that there's value to be had, but it's hard to draw a line in the sand to say just how much.

- Most companies and product managers I've spoken to strongly believe in agile, specifically in the following:
 - Responding to customers' needs quickly.
 - Outpacing their competition.
 - Spending less time negotiating with engineering and more time coding.
 - Bringing more innovation to the market.
 - Spending less money "keeping the lights on" (unless it's a huge margin product, I'm working on a blog post on that topic, stay tuned!)

Yes waterfall processes exist everywhere, either hindering teams or worse, forcing them down a path of least resistance on a journey they know is not as efficient. But is Agile really the cure? Forcing an Agile process from development into a waterfall-oriented company is doomed to fail – and really tick off a lot of people.

Hence the term I've coined: "WaterGile".

Every time I've mentioned this word, I get a resounding "that's my world!" – followed by hearty laughs and a few silent tears. And it really does reflect what's going on in the industry today. Agile development teams are islands within larger engineering organizations, product owners are popping up everywhere, and eyes (or heads) are rolling when people say "we're trying to move to be more agile".

The one thing I have to say on this is don't despair, if you aren't using sprints, iterations and backlogs, you still might be achieving the core values of agile, which is collaboration, customer feedback and responding to change. Just starting to write epics and stories? Good for you! But if you're not, good for you too! Understand that Agile works well when it fits within an organization, sometimes that's a longer process than you'd imagine, and often there will always be waterfall-type cross-functional dependencies.

But react to the market, have a mechanism to collaborate with customers, have something in place to make decisions based on that market data, and get those requirements to engineering with the context they need.

Are you WaterGile? Love to hear about!

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