



Designing agile IT-based solutions

Designing IT-based solutions that are right for you



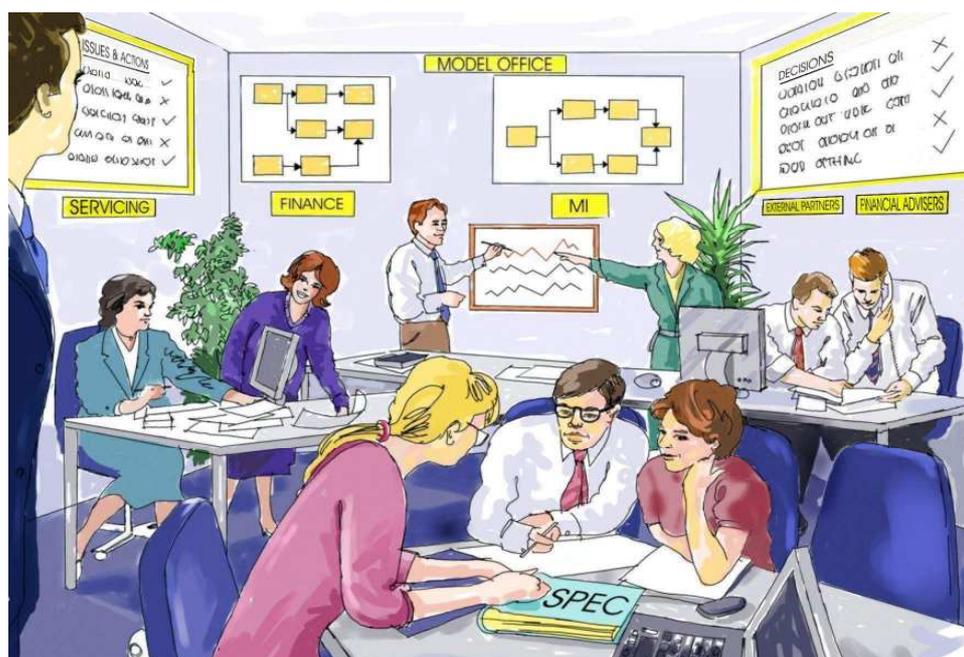
- How effectively do IT and the business work together on your projects?
- Does the IT workstream often struggle to work with their internal business clients to deliver a solution quickly and to a high standard?
- Do you find:
 - large, dry documentation being “thrown over the wall”?
 - lack of understanding by IT of the real business needs?
 - limited agility by IT to respond to changes?
 - a poor relationship between IT and the business?

This paper describes a technique known as “Agile Design” which can help address these issues during project design.

What is Agile Design?

Agile Design is based around an interactive and integrated working environment that simulates real-life solutions during design. By using realistic business scenarios and IT prototypes, it brings alive the solution for all parties, increasing the chances of delivering a design that really works.

The Agile Design process can be thought of as the “glue” between the project and the business, covering IT development, stakeholder communications and business processes.



What are the benefits of Agile Design?

The benefits of Agile Design include:

- A design which maximises business benefits given the constraints – creative problem-solving
- Increased understanding by all parties of others' perspectives – better relationships
- Enthusiasm and commitment at all levels in the organisation – project and business
- An effective body of advocates - managers and users who have participated in and contributed to the design
- Significantly streamlined project documentation
- Limited requests for changes to design after build has started - smooth User Acceptance Test

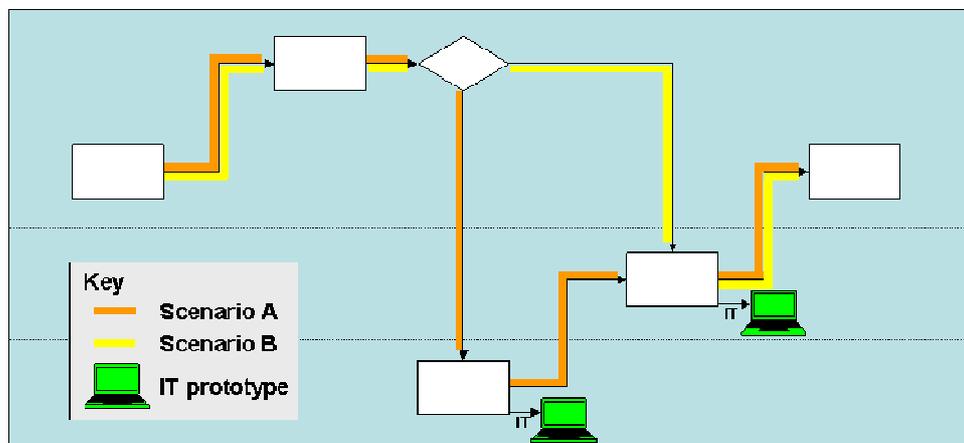
The Agile Design process is complementary to any existing project management or development methodologies within the organisation.

How does it work?

The Agile Design process validates a draft process design by walking through a series of realistic business scenarios.

Where the business scenario triggers the use of a new or changed IT system, the participants "play" with a prototype to validate whether it does the job effectively at that point in the process.

Crucially, all relevant parties need to participate in each Agile Design session – both from the project and from the business. This is because there will inevitably be conflicts between what different business areas want, and with what the project is able to deliver. These conflicts should be raised transparently and resolved in open forum when all parties are face to face.



What do you need to get right in Agile Design?

To generate the full benefits of Agile Design, you need to get the following right:

- **Preparation:** Agile Design is about validation and creative problem-solving – it is not about blue-skies brainstorming. The quality of the draft process flows and IT prototype will have a direct bearing on the quality of the sessions and therefore on the final design.
- **Facilitation:** legitimate conflict will occur during Agile Design sessions, and this needs a strong facilitator who ensures that all parties have their say, but who steers the group towards closing in on a solution that all can live with. All this, while at the same time encouraging innovative thinking and keeping a focus on the overall business benefits.
- **Participants:** the participants must have detailed knowledge of the business and technical areas under discussion, so that the session is well informed and produces the right results. This minimises the amount of follow-ups of each session, so achieving the full benefits of creative face-to-face engagement.
- **Empowerment:** the participants must be empowered to take binding decisions (subject to final ratification eg by Legal or Compliance). This avoids the design going around the houses afterwards, and minimises the overhead of future change requests. Full support of line management – both in public and in private - is crucial to making this work.

Links

[Getting to Yes](#) – Chapter 3 deals with negotiating based on interests not positions, an important element which can help Agile Design generate creative solutions.

Will it work for you?

If you would like to discuss whether Agile Design could help your organisation deliver better designs, contact Ian Hadden of Root Six (UK) Consulting for an initial conversation.