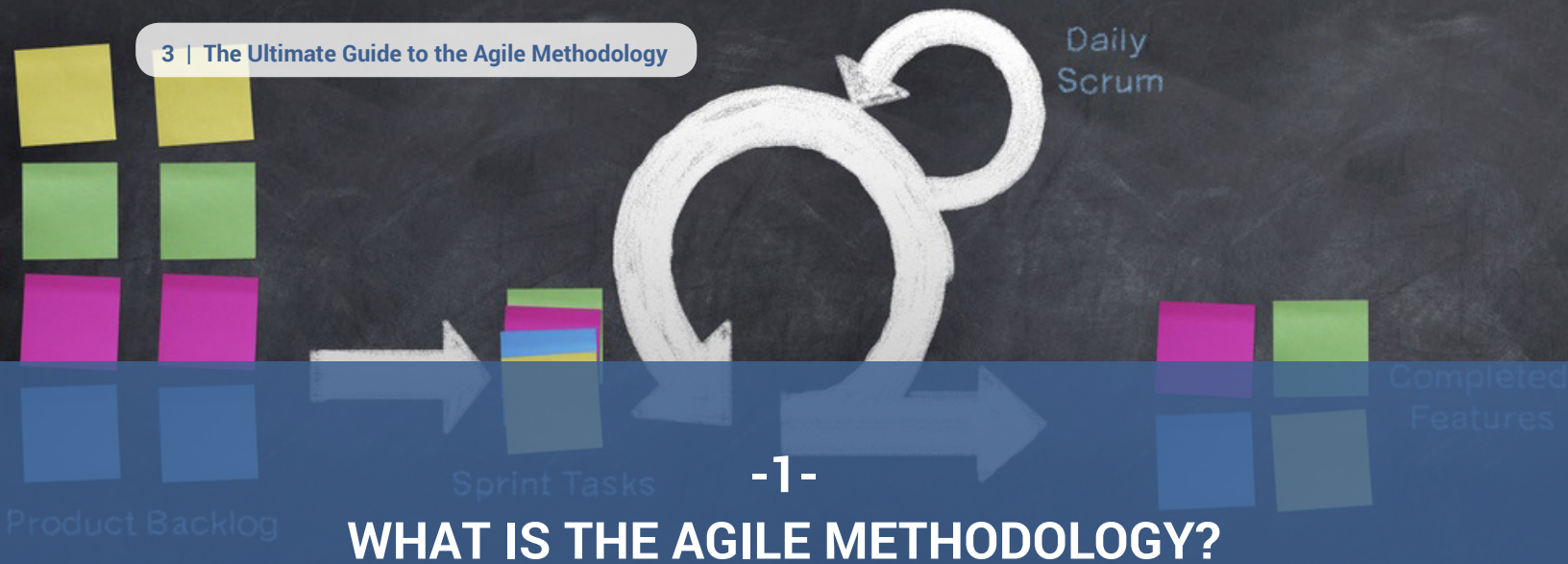# The Ultimate Guide to the Agile Methodology

Have you heard a lot about **Agile Methodologies**, but you're unsure how to leverage these skills to improve both your professional future and your project success? Learn how adopting Agile principles and earning your PMI Agile Certified Practitioner (PMI-ACP)® can take your project management skills to the next level.

Table of Contents

-1-
WHAT IS THE AGILE METHODOLOGY?

While you may have heard much about **Agile Methodology** and you may have even worked on projects based on these methods, to earn your Agile certification, you need a comprehensive understanding of what this methodology entails.

Agile Methodology was first outlined in the **Agile Manifesto**, way back in 2001. Since then, this approach to project planning and execution has spread. Initially designed for the software development industry, Agile principles are now being adopted into other sectors, too. So, what does Agile mean exactly? It's a strategy based on adapting to change, prompt delivery, and continuous improvements. And, it addresses many of the problems that PMP® credential holders face when it comes to successful planning and implementation.

Often, when you're on course with a project, it can be difficult to suddenly change direction, adjusting plans based on changes in circumstance or client direction. With Agile, you're planning in short increments, frequently reassessing and readjusting tasks, allowing your team to adapt quickly to any developments.

The foundation of Agile is based on four values as outlined in the Agile Manifesto:

- "Individuals and interactions are valued over processes and tools
- Working software are valued over comprehensive documentation
- Customer collaboration are valued over contract negotiation
- Responding to change are valued over following a plan"

What does Agile Methodology look like in practice? Each project is broken down into manageable tasks. Instead of delivering an entire project by a single due date, pieces of the project are completed incrementally over the course of two to four-week cycles (also known as sprints or iterations).

By working in these short sprints, the client is seeing and providing feedback on projects as they develop, ensuring the end product is in alignment with their vision and goals. The team collaborates directly with the customer as the project progresses. Each team member estimates the amount of time and work their tasks will take, and those estimates are the foundation for the Sprint. So, for example, if you were managing a twenty-page website design project, and the designer estimated that each page would take eight hours of work to complete, you could plan for ten pages to be completed in a two-week (or a ten business days) sprint.

The **Agile Methodology** does not end with the completed project. The end of each sprint is marked by a retrospective team meeting. In these sessions, team members answer two important questions: "What did we do well?" and "How can we improve?" The lessons learned from each sprint are then applied to future sprints, improving the process each time and minimizing impediments.

-2-
WHAT ARE THE 12 PRINCIPLES OF AGILE?

To better understand what Agile Methodologies mean and how they relate to project management, explore the 12 key principles as outlined in the **Agile Manifesto**:

- "Our highest priority is to satisfy the customer through early and continuous delivery of valuable software.
- Welcome changing requirements, even late in development. Agile processes harness change for the customer's competitive advantage.
- Deliver working software frequently, from a couple of weeks to a couple of months, with a preference to the shorter timescale.
- Business people and developers must work together daily throughout the project.
- Build projects around motivated individuals. Give them the environment and support they need, and trust them to get the job done.
- The most efficient and effective method of conveying information to and within a development team is face-to-face conversation.
- Working software is the primary measure of progress.
- Agile processes promote sustainable development. The sponsors, developers, and users should be able to maintain a constant pace indefinitely.
- Continuous attention to technical excellence and good design enhances agility.
- Simplicity--the art of maximizing the amount of work not done--is essential.
- The best architectures, requirements, and designs emerge from self-organizing teams.
- At regular intervals, the team reflects on how to become more effective, then tunes and adjusts its behavior accordingly."

- 3 -
WHY CHOOSE THE AGILE APPROACH?

When there are so many other approaches to project management, why should Agile principles be the ones you adopt? The benefits of Agile Methodology are numerous, both for the project team and the client. Let's look at a few.

Diminished Risk

With Agile training, project managers are able to deliver value to their clients earlier in the implementation process. Generally, with traditional project management approaches, the client doesn't reap any benefits from a project until it is completely finished.

Think of it as an office building that's being constructed, but no one is permitted to move in until the entire building is complete. With Agile principles, tasks are being completed incrementally. In the same office building scenario, once an office space is completed, the tenant can move in, while construction continues on the other spaces. This reduces risk of client dissatisfaction, as the client sees a return on their investment each step of the way.

High Product Quality

Among the benefits of Agile Methodologies is an improvement in overall product quality. Because projects are developed in incremental sprints, improvements are layered on the foundational tasks. In software development, this means the basic builds are accomplished and then in subsequent sprints, that foundation is improved and expanded. As these improvements are made, builds are frequently checked for quality assurance.

The retrospectives at the end of each sprint also play a vital role in quality improvements. In these meetings, problems are identified and solutions are offered. These lessons are applied to the next sprint, and lessons from that sprint are applied to the next, and so on. Thus, each sprint becomes more efficient and delivers better results than the last.

Higher Customer Satisfaction

Agile principles play a role in improving working relationships with clients. Because you can deliver better product outcomes at a faster rate, clients are more likely to be satisfied with your work. And because you're delivering regular completed aspects of the project to the client, they are able to see progress as it is made. Customers are better engaged in the process and you can work feedback easily into your project development.

Enhanced Project Control

If you've worked in project management for any time at all, you've probably noticed that it's difficult to always have a 360-degree view of you projects, what's being accomplished, and what impediments your team members are facing. With Agile principles, project control becomes much easier.

When using **Agile methods**, teams engage in daily sprint meetings in which individual team members provide updates on what they are working on, when they anticipate completing that task, and whether or not any impediments are standing in the way of completing the task on time.

Faster ROI

In connection with reduced risk is a rapid and high return on your clients' investment in the project you're working on. With each completed task, the value of a partnership with your team increases. Functional products are ready after a few iterations, allowing clients to easily gauge end-user creation, and allowing you to gauge client reaction.

-4-
WHAT IS THE PMI-ACP CERTIFICATION?

The PMI Agile Certified Practitioner (PMI-ACP)® credential is the leading Agile certification. This demonstrates to employers and clients alike that you have been adequately trained and tested in Agile Methodologies, and you can be trusted to successfully manage projects using these principles.

As Agile becomes more and more popular in the project management space, the certification truly sets PMI-ACP credential holders apart from other project managers, allowing you to leverage this certification for promotions or higher pay.

Is the PMI-ACP Certification the Only One I Can Earn?

If you want to add Agile Methodologies to your list of professional skills, earning your PMI-ACP credential isn't the only way to accomplish this. There are other ways to learn these skills, including the two following training courses:

- **Agile Fundamentals Training** – This course provides participants with a knowledge of the fundamental principles and practices of Agile. It covers the basics for anyone who wants a general understanding of Agile. However, this is not an official certification.

- **Scrum Master Training** – Scrum is one of the most commonly used software programs for teams to manage their Agile projects and sprints. Many project managers learn the ins and outs of this software to successfully manage creative teams as they work through sprints. These project owners are known as the Scrum Master and essentially manage the entire process. Because Scrum is only one way to manage Agile teams, this training course isn't for everyone. While the participants will gain a better understanding of how to use Scrum, this is not an official certification, either.

Though both of these training courses are beneficial and can help you improve the outcomes of your Agile projects, they are no substitute for the PMI-ACP certification.

-5-
HOW DO I KNOW IF I AM READY TO TAKE THE PMI-ACP EXAM?

Similar to earning the PMP certification, there are a few eligibility requirements you need to meet before you are qualified to sit for the exam. These requirements are broken down into three categories:

- **General Project Experience** – You must complete 2,000 hours working on project teams within the last five years. (Having an active Project Management Professional (PMP)® or Program Management Professional (PgMP)® certification will satisfy this requirement)
- **Agile Project Experience** – You must attain 1,500 hours working as a member of Agile project teams or using Agile Methodologies. (These hours are in addition to the 2,000 hours required in General Project Experience and must be earned within the last three years)
- **Training in Agile Practices** – You must earn 21 contact hours in Agile practices.

Once you've met these requirements, it's time to take the exam!

-6-
HOW DO I EARN CONTACT HOURS IN AGILE PRACTICES?

Earning 21 contact hours in Agile practices requires more than just test preparation to pass the exam. These contact hours help you develop skills essential to thrive in your career as a PMI-ACP credential holder. As you're searching for courses to help you fulfill this requirement, look for **ones that cover the following topics:**

- **Agile Foundation**
  Agile Foundation Introduction
  Agile Development Overview
  When is Agile Appropriate
  Agile Manifesto

- **Agile Fundamentals**
  Project Charter
  Product Roadmap
  Product Backlog
  Minimally Marketable Feature (MMF)
  Value-Based Prioritization
  Product Backlog Grooming
  User Stories
  Personas
  Story Maps
  Epics
  Themes

- **Agile Methodologies**
  Methodologies Introduction
  Scrum Introduction
  Sprint Planning Meeting
  Sprint Goal
  Modeling
  Sprint Backlog
  Daily Scrum Meeting
  Sprint Review Meeting
  Retrospective
  Scrum of Scrums
  The Scrum Team
  Extreme Programming (XP)
  Lean Software Development

- **Agile Communications**
  Agile Foundation Introduction
  Communications Management
  Colocation/Distributed Teams
  Team Space
  Osmotic Communications
  Agile Tooling
  Information Radiators
  Task/Kanban Board
  Work in Progress (WIP) Limits
  Cumulative Flow Diagram
  Sprint Burndown Chart
  Release Burnup Chart

- **Agile Metrics**
  Agile Earned Value Management (Agile EVM)
  Test Driven Development (TDD)
  Unit Testing
  Acceptance Testing
  Frequent Verification and Validation
  Escaped Defects
  Risk-Adjusted Backlog
  Risk Burn-Down Chart

- **Agile Estimating**
  Relative Sizing
  Story Points
  Wideband Delphi Technique
  Planning Poker
  Consensus Building
  Velocity
  Cycle Time

- **Agile Leadership**
  Leadership Theories
  Knowledge Sharing
  Active Listening
  Brainstorming
  Emotional Intelligence
  Conflict Resolution
  Negotiation
  Stakeholder Management
  Coaching and Mentoring

- **Agile Contracts and Accounting Principles**
  Value Based Analysis
  Burn Rate
  Compliance

These are all **fundamental skills and topics** to cover if you want to be an effective PMI-ACP credential holder. With the right course, you'll cover all the fundamentals necessary to build a solid foundation for a successful career. It's crucial that you don't compromise when it comes to earning your contact hours since these are skill you'll be using daily as a PMI-ACP certification holder. Partnering with the right training course provider is a necessity.

-7-
WHAT ARE MY PMI-ACP CERTIFICATION TRAINING OPTIONS?

In addition to finding a **training course** that covers all the topics listed above, you also need to ensure the course is a convenient fit for your lifestyle. Here are some of the common delivery methods for Agile certification training courses.

- **In-Person Courses –** These instructor-led courses closely align with traditional learning methods. In addition to in-person instruction, you will also receive digital training materials for supplemental learning outside the classroom.

- **Virtual Boot Camp –** Virtual boot camps usually entail a few days of intense e-learning led by a live instructor. In these courses, you will also receive digital training materials to help you prepare for the exam.

- **On-Demand Video Courses –** If you want a more flexible learning environment, on-demand video courses could be the best fit for your schedule. These courses allow you to view instructional videos in your free time, in addition to having access to supplemental training materials, community forums, and practice exams.

- **In-House Course –** When companies have a large number of employees pursuing the PMI-ACP certification, they may consider hosting an **in-house training course**. This is convenient for employees and yields a high return on Agile Methodologies for the companies that support employees in this endeavor. This course generally takes about two days.

-8-
HOW MUCH DOES THE PMI-ACP CERTIFICATION EXAM COST?

Registering for the PMI-ACP certification exam can seem costly, but it's important to view it as an investment in your career. And with all the new opportunities that come with the additional certification, you're sure to reap a high return on that investment.

It's important to note that having a PMI membership reduces the cost of taking the exam. This membership costs $139 each year, but the cost is offset by the benefits of the membership.

The Costs of the PMI-ACP Certification Exam

- **First Exam Attempt**
  Member - $435
  Non-member - $495

- **Reexamination**
  Member - $335
  Non-member - $395

- **CCR Certification Renewal***
  Member - $60
  Non-member - $150

*For more information on renewal, see the "How Do I Maintain My PMI-ACP Credential?" section below.

As you prepare to take the PMI-ACP exam, remember to budget for exam fees.

-9-
I THINK I'M READY TO TAKE THE EXAM – NOW WHAT?

Have you **met the requirements for taking the exam**? If so, congratulations! You're ready to apply for the exam.

The first step in the application process is to **create an account with the Project Management Institute**. Once you've begun an online application, you will be unable to cancel the process. The application does not need to be completed in a single session. You can work on it, save your updates, and return to it later. The application will remain open for 90 days.

Once you've completed your application, processing usually takes about five business days. After your application has been approved, you have one year from your application approval date to take the exam. If you do not take the exam within a year, you have to start the entire application process over.

Remember: you only have three chances to take and pass the exam during the eligibility period. So, ensure that you are adequately prepared before you start the application process.

-10-
WHAT IF I AM AUDITED?

While you may be worried about simply passing the exam, you should also be concerned with an additional possible outcome – an audit. PMI wants to protect the integrity of the exam, therefore anyone can be audited to ensure they've met the exam requirements. Here are a few important facts you should know about the audit process:

1. Those who are subject to an audit are selected at random, and can even be chosen after the candidate has passed the exam.
2. If you fail an audit, you are not entitled to a refund of the exam fee.
3. If you are selected for an audit, you will be notified by email prior to payment of the certification fee.
4. Those who are selected for an audit will be required to supply the following documentation:
   - Signatures from individuals who supervised or managed you on the projected listed in the experience verification section of your application
   - Copies of any relevant certificates
   - Proof of registration from the training institute for each Agile-related course listed on your application
5. You have 90 days to submit the audit materials once you have received notification.
6. It should take between five and seven business days for PMI to review your audit materials.

-11-
WHAT SHOULD I KNOW ABOUT THE EXAM BEFORE I TAKE IT?

The best way to feel comfortable about the PMI-ACP exam before you take it is to know how it is structured. You'll walk into the exam knowing what to expect, so keep these facts about the exam in mind.

- The PMI-ACP certification exam is developed based on the PMI-ACP Examination Content Outline, which details the topics (or domains) that will be covered.
- You have three hours to complete the exam:
  - The PMI-ACP exam consists of 120 multiple-choice questions.
  - Of the 120 questions on the exam, 20 are considered pretest questions. These do not impact your score, and are used as a way to test the validity of future questions.
  - There is no particular order for the rest of the questions, and all questions are placed randomly throughout the exam.

- The allocation of questions are outlined below, with the corresponding percentages for each section:
  - **Domain I: Agile Principles and Mindset –** 16% (9 tasks)

    Have you successfully adopted Agile principles as they relate to your team and project organization?
  - **Domain II: Value-Driven Delivery –** 20% (4 subdomains - 14 tasks)

    Are you able to deliver frequent results through high-value increments based on stakeholder priorities? Are the stakeholders providing feedback, and is this feedback to integrated into future processes?
  - **Domain III: Stakeholder Engagement –** 17% (3 subdomains - 9 tasks)

    How are you able to engage current and future stakeholders, aligning with their expectations, while still balancing the needs of your team and the demands of the budget?
  - **Domain IV: Team Performance –** 16% (3 subdomains - 9 tasks)

    Can you create an environment that promotes healthy collaboration among team members? Are team members able to work independently, meet goals, and support the process?
  - **Domain V: Adaptive Planning –** 12% (3 subdomains - 10 tasks)

    Are you able to produce and maintain a plan that easily adapts to changes based on goals, values, risks, feedback, and more?
  - **Domain VI: Problem Detection and Resolution –** 10% (5 tasks)

    Can you identify problems, impediments, and risks, addressing each in an organized and prioritized fashion? How will you resolve these issues so they do not occur again?
  - **Domain VII. Continuous Improvement (Product, Process, People) –** 9% (6 tasks)

    What steps will you take to continuously improve the product, process, and team?

-12-
HOW DO I MAINTAIN MY PMI-ACP CREDENTIAL?

Although you may have successfully earned your PMI-ACP, this isn't the end of your journey. To maintain your certification, you must meet a few requirements. These Continuing Certification Requirements are crucial to ensuring you are up-to-date on the latest **Agile Methodology** developments. They promote continuous learning and improvement of your skills.

Instead of viewing the CCR Program as an inconvenience, view it as an opportunity to learn more and hone your talents. It also helps to maintain the integrity of the certification as it can be assumed that everyone who holds the certification is a proven expert in the Agile approach to project management.

What are the Continuing Certification Requirements?

All PMI-ACP certification holders are required to earn Professional Development Units (PDUs) to maintain their certification. What are PDUs? These are units used to measure learning and professional development activities. As a rule, one PDU is equivalent to one hour of learning or development.

PDUs can be earned two ways – education and giving back to the profession. Education usually refers to **training courses**, while giving back to your profession can apply to a number of activities, from giving speeches to volunteering your Agile project management skills to teaching others.

For PMI-ACP credential holders, you are required to earn 30 PDUs every three years, a cycle that starts the day you earn your certification. A minimum of 18 PDUs must come from education and a maximum of 12 from giving back to your industry.

Earning your Agile certification can open numerous doors, both for you and the teams you lead. If you're considering pursuing the PMI-ACP certification, the first step you should take is to find the right training course for your needs. With excellent preparation, you're on your way to earning your PMI-ACP credential.

Project Management Academy helps students and businesses go through the Agile certification process every day. Are you ready to start the journey?

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