

The SocialTalent Guide To Agile



Introduction

Welcome to The SocialTalent Guide To Agile. By the end of this short guide, we hope that you'll have a comprehensive understanding of agile practices, as well as a greater appreciation for the style itself. Recently we have seen agile methodologies creep into other areas of the business, not just software development.

It has had a hugely beneficial impact- even in the recruitment industry. This guide will provide you with an overview of the foundations of agile and then an example of how one company transformed the way they recruit by experimenting with agile sourcing.

So, let's get started!



What is Agile?

Agile is a system of working that essentially replaces more traditional 'waterfall' project management. In a 'waterfall' structure, processes are sequentially divided, with each relying on the last in order to begin.

Process one must be signed off before process two can begin, and so on. This method can cause problems with getting projects from one stage to another, contributing to time management issues and potentially stalling time sensitive projects.

Agile is a set of values and principles that serve as a solid foundation for decision making within teams. It was originally developed by a group of software engineers who were tired of poorly managed projects (on a ski trip!). It is not a rulebook, or a rigid set of practices, but rather it is a solid foundation for building a more flexible working environment.



The Agile Values and Principles

The Agile Manifesto encompasses the agile values, which are a set of principles which lay the groundwork for a successful agile team. The main agile values are;

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



Agile in Practice

Once you have a good knowledge and understanding of the values and principles of agile methodologies you can start thinking about which is the best way for you to start implementing agile with your team.

Some practices will suit different teams better than others and it's important to understand that you can test and change the process until you find the one that works for you.

The two most common agile frameworks are **Scrum** and **Kanban**. While there are a few more like lean software development and extreme programming, these two methods are best suited to work outside of software development.

Scrum

The scrum methodology is probably the most popular and commonly used of the agile practices. Scrum involves isolating two-week periods called 'sprints'. Sprints are sequential periods of time, with one immediately following the other. Before a two-week sprint begins, the team will have a sprint planning meeting to decide on the tasks and projects they will focus on during that period.

Holding the team accountable to the process is the 'scrum master' – not the manager of the team, but a team-member whose responsibility it is to ensure the team stays on track and abides by the agile values and principles.

The team will choose tasks from their backlog, a long list of tasks which works as a to-do list. During the sprint planning meeting, the team will select the most important / time sensitive tasks from the backlog to focus on during the next sprint. Once the tasks are selected, the team will commit to completing these tasks, and only these tasks, during that two-week period. The tasks are then organised by their priority, as well as how much time they will take to complete. The tasks will each have an owner, responsible for ensuring the task is completed within the sprint timeframe.



The tasks are then organised by their priority, as well as how much time they will take to complete. The tasks will each have an owner, responsible for ensuring the task is completed within the sprint timeframe. Finally, each task is assigned a point value which corresponds to the size or difficulty of a task. 90 to 100 points per sprint is usually a reasonable amount, and the scrum master will be experienced in understanding the point value of tasks. Tasks are assigned using the Fibonacci sequence (1 2 3 5 8 13 21...) as opposed to the value increasing one number at a time. It's easier to decide if a task is a 5 or an 8, for example, than to decide between 5 and 6. This makes the decision making process easier on the scrum master.

Once the sprint is in place, all tasks are either 'to-do', 'in progress', or 'done', giving visibility to management on how the workflow is coming along.

Kanban

In a lot of ways, Kanban is very similar to Scrum, but there are some notable differences.

Kanban doesn't involve a two-week sprint. Work is continuous with no blocks of time dedicated to specific tasks. Instead of a scrum master, an Agile Coach will oversee the tasks of the team. The agile coach decides on the amount of tasks, or points, that a team can carry at a given time, and assigns these individually. Once a task is complete, a new task of similar weight can be taken on by the team or individual, ensuring that the team doesn't end up with too much on their plate at a time.

Like in scrum, tasks will be organised into 'to-do', 'in progress', and 'done'. When a task is completed, another task from the backlog will replace it in the 'in progress queue' depending on its size and priority.

Understanding the way your team works best is essential before deciding on which practices to use from the Agile theory. Production teams might work perfectly in a scrum system, whereas marketing teams who often face ad-hoc requests might benefit from the flexibility of the Kanban system.





Software

If you have decided that your team works best in an Agile fashion then it may be time to consider implementing a software that compliments your new way of working. As always, there can be budget limitations to which level of technology you can afford. Here are a few suggestions for ways you can support your agile practices no matter what level of budget you have.

DIY

There's no reason you can't start practising agile straight away with some cheap resources. Some post-it notes and a white board are all you need to create your own Kanban board. Of course this is quite limited but it serves as a great visual representation of what your team is working on.

Free

There are some great paid tools out there that also offer freemium versions that can be ideal for teams starting their Agile journey. **Trello** is a project management that has a free option available. **Asana** also provides a free service that has great functionality and could be the ideal way to ease your team into Agile working.

Google Docs and Excel sheets can also be a great starting point for tracking your team's progress before deciding to pay for a SaaS product. It can take some time to set everything up but it gives you much better visibility over your workflow and your outputs.

If this feels like the right option for you then you can start by exploring free resources like this [Kanban board template](#) or this [Scrum board](#).

Upmarket (Paid)

Jira is the most popular Agile software on the market and offers complete support for all your team's Agile needs. It's customisable and can support huge workflows and has excellent reporting features.

Wrike is another example of a newer but equally impressive project management software. It's incredibly user friendly and gives in depth view into what your team is working on at any time.





Avoiding Pitfalls

External Stakeholders

Once your team starts to get used to working in this new way, it can be easy to feel closed off from the rest of the business. Working on an agile team can feel like a secret club — nobody else understands it. While this can be useful for camaraderie and productivity within the team, external stakeholders can really throw a spanner in the works when they're not on board with the new way of working. Autocratic stakeholders can want things done now, and might find it difficult to understand why they need to wait for the next sprint.

How to solve:

Try allowing a certain amount of points each week for ad hoc requests. If the sprint goes off without a hitch, and you have this time to spare, you can take something from the backlog and get ahead on the next sprint. Hint: it is the experience of the SocialTalent marketing team that not setting aside time for ad hoc requests will lead to trouble. You've been warned!

Team Work

When a team agrees on a list of tasks, and then assigns a deadline to complete them — the pressure, it would seem, is on. It is easy for team members to view the sprint as something they can pass or fail, when really the sprint is more of an opportunity to balance workload, and recalibrate when it doesn't work. This fear of failure can hold back members of teams, meaning that they are less likely to open up about what worked and what didn't. This can be a real blocker, especially in the early days of a team's agile workflow.

How to solve:

The scrum master needs to present this new way of working in the right light from day one. Don't think of sprints as something your team passes and fails, wins and loses, but rather as opportunities to understand the limits of an individual's workflow, as well as the best way of working for the whole team. This method is supposed to support you and your team — not make you feel guilty for an incomplete sprint. Hint: anything not complete in one sprint can be moved to the next one, it happens all the time and your team shouldn't ever feel guilty for it!





Managers

As agile working generally means moving away from autocracies and micromanaging, there may certainly be some resistance from managers themselves. They might feel that implementing agile will undercut the value that they bring to the team. After all, once a team takes control of their workflow, what else is there for a manager to do?

Well, we know that managers are more than task dividers. They are mentors, project holders, and supporters of their teams. Managers, in an agile workflow team, will spend less time micromanaging and more time managing. Good for both team and team leader.

How to solve:

There's nothing managers need more than more hours in the day. Break down how much time will be saved by adopting this methodology, and bring up projects and ideas that they have had sitting on the table for months. Show them that this way of working doesn't remove them from the table, but that it makes sure they only need to come to the table for the important stuff — leaving the day to day management of tasks to the team and scrum master.



When Recruitment meets Agile

Now you understand the word agile, perhaps you've worked on a team that has used it. Here's an example of how it applies to the recruitment industry.

At the most recent **SoSu event** in London we caught up with Natalie and Mark from **ThoughtWorks** to talk through the ins and outs of agile sourcing and how they make it work across their global team.

The Who

ThoughtWorks is a software consultancy company that has grown from a small group in Chicago to a business with a global presence in 14 countries. Over the last 18 months they have built a sourcing team from scratch supporting the strategic needs of the business.

The What

ThoughtWorks has been using an agile method throughout their entire business. The ThoughtWorks developers **pair program** and the whole company works in this collaborative fashion. This familiarity allowed Mark and Natalie to get creative and test the methodology within their recruitment process.

The team had dabbled in paired sourcing- two sourcers working on the same role, but had never attempted to translate the whole recruitment process into an agile way of working.

So armed with some pre-existing knowledge and a sense of curiosity the team began to test how they could make recruitment agile. “We spoke one of our business analysts and asked them to sit with us and tell us what we need to do ... the biggest reason why **not** do it because it sounds fun and it’s the right thing to do” Natalies says.

“We spent hours storyboarding our entire process, asking where our blockers are? Where do we keep having the same problems? The next day we got the whole team together and had massive ideation session about what the ideal process going to look like, what’s going to work”

The team listed out what they wanted to achieve from this process:

- More focus
- Identify blockers
- Scalability
- Structure
- Improved visibility
- Client feedback

Involving the whole team allowed them to create a new process that was ready to test.



The How

So how does a marriage between agile and recruitment work? Two features of agile that are most well-known and easy to implement are daily stand-ups (check-ins) and sprints (work divided into weekly blocks).

The ThoughtWorks team check in with each other at the same time every day for 15-20mins to discuss what they're working on and any potential blockers. As a remote team, this helps unify them and concentrate their efforts and improve transparency.

The sprints help them work through every role they aim to fill:



This sprint structure helps manage hiring manager expectations. After they receive their long list of 100 candidates on week 1 (25 candidates every day), the hiring manager provides feedback to aid the process. This allows the team to work on multiple roles at any time, every role will go through the same four-week sprint process.

Week 1 Candidate ID Calibration Long List	Week 2 Outreach
Week 3 Outreach follow up Phone Screens	Week 4 Phone Screens Reporting



Swourcing and Paired Sourcing

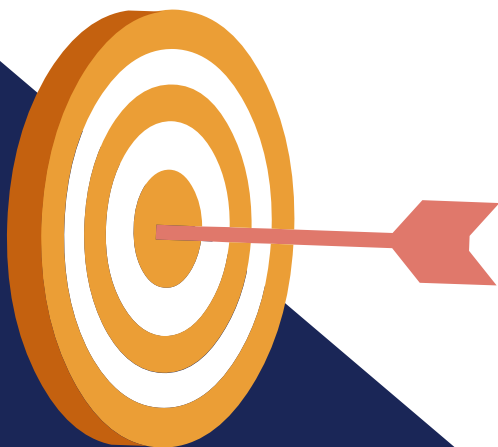
The team also adopted some new ways that would make recruiting more collaborative. It allows a team to **strategically map their sourcing efforts**. Paired sourcing means two people can work on the same role and provide feedback to each other- the team try and do this at least once a week.

“We pair source we’re far better and more accurate with quality than when we don’t. We introduced what we call ‘swourcing’ so in agile you have something called swarming where all of us get together and work on one story together. So we’re doing the same thing with the job. Everyone sources the same role and we source at the same time we get to 100 candidates within a day. Everyone puts in 25 people and it’s quick and it’s easy and it’s fun”.

At any time the team can have roles in any of the four states of the sprint. Sharing the work this way has helped the team identify their own weaknesses and strengths. Weaknesses can be identified as bottlenecks and worked on so they no longer hold up the process. Strengths can be shared and taught to other team members so they can workshop each other and become more productive. What a dream team eh!?

The Benefits

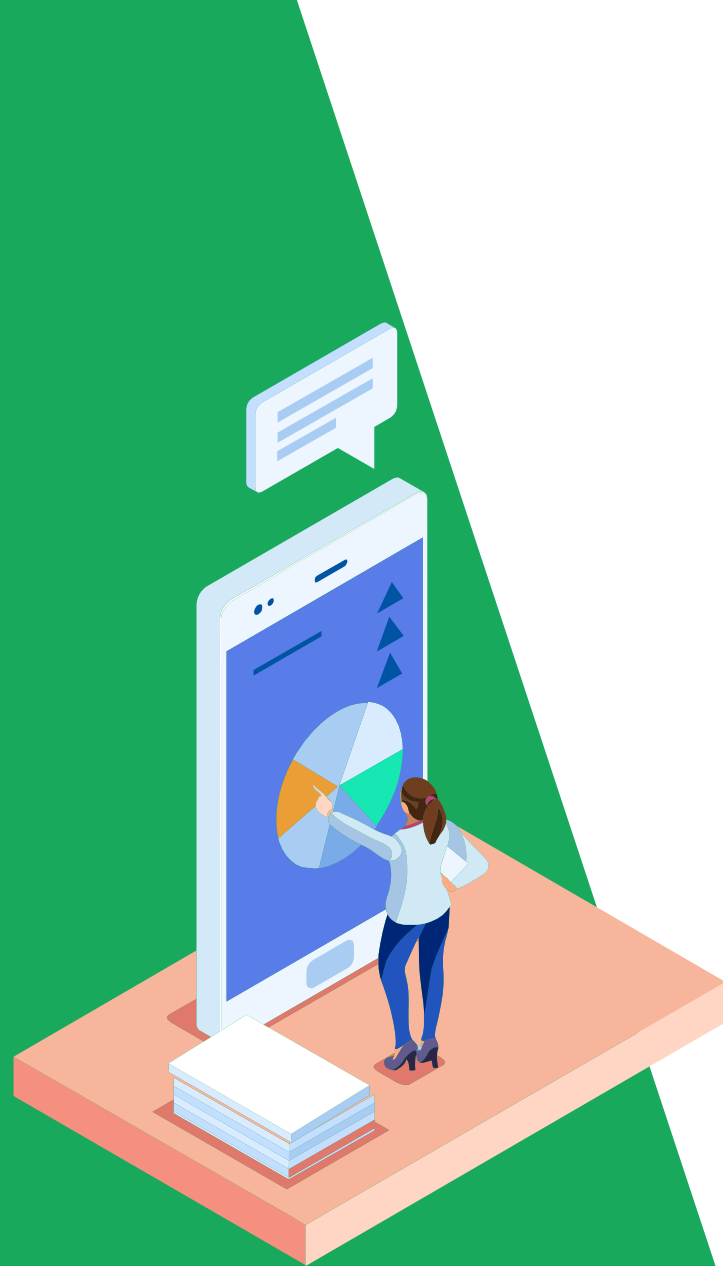
Thanks to this venture into agile **sourcing** the team has become more accountable to each other. Projects are moving along at a faster pace and transparency across the team and with hiring managers has improved vastly. The team has learned to play to their strengths and have built a model that can scale with their team and the ThoughtWorks company as a whole.



How can I start agile sourcing?

The ThoughtWorks team have created a truly amazing process. They kindly shared their top agile tips to help you get started.

- **Start with a plan**, reiview your company as a whole and take your unique needs into consideration
- **Map your process**, identifying key blockers
- **Shatter the silos**, break down these barriers to create crossdepartment collaboration
- **Experiment**, start small and slow, build from firm foundations
- **Go Visual**, use workshops, kanban or trello boards
- **Collect Actuals**, you cannot control what you cannot measure
- **Look backwards to go forwards**, learn your lessons - both good ans bad



Conclusion

Adopting an agile way of working can certainly take some time to get used to, but the rewards can be astounding. More productivity, clearer objectives, flexible schedules - what's not to love! To dive in to this topic even deeper, make sure to check out our exclusive agile training for recruiters on the SocialTalent platform.

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