Assurance guidance for Agile delivery

The purpose of this guidance is to support agencies in applying good practice assurance to Agile delivery, typically as part of a digital transformation programme or project. This guidance sits under the All-of-Government Portfolio, Programme and Project Assurance Framework[1] and should be viewed as an extension to that framework, which outlines the principles of good assurance.

Agile is commonly used in software development, but we believe the guidance can be applied broadly to 'Agile delivery' that includes both IT and non-IT related delivery. Likewise, the guidance is intended to be methodology agnostic.

Benefits of Agile delivery

Agile approaches are focused on the creation and delivery of value incrementally. For example, working software is frequently released to customers to realise benefits.

Agile teams have fast learning and adapt cycles to continually improve their performance and to closely

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1   https://www.digital.govt.nz/standards-and-guidance/ governance/system-assurance/all-of-government-portfolio- programme-and-project-assurance-framework/

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engage with the actual users and customers of the product so that quality can be built in and tested during development.

The team should be continuously delivering 'just enough' to achieve the business need and to be able to respond quickly to change while still having delivered benefits to the customer.

What's different about Agile Assurance?

The outcomes for Agile assurance are no different to those for traditional assurance approaches, i.e. providing stakeholders with confidence that the expected investment outcomes and benefits will be achieved.

However, Agile is more self-assuring than Waterfall (linear or sequential approaches to software development). This means that assurance is part of the delivery process, with risk management embedded into day-to-day operations and governance arrangements.

Key differences include:

- Day-to-day management of workflow shifts from being Project Manager led to being delegated to self-organising teams.
- Definition of Done (DoD) is the key measure of quality and the focus shifts to building in quality during delivery rather than testing for quality at the end.
- At the governance level, a shift in focus from conformance to plan, to one of appropriately responding to near-real time quantitative performance information.
- Prioritisation of scope items as a key indicator of effective risk mitigation and governance engagement.
- Oversight functions (e.g. EPMOs, Security & Risk) are proactively engaged early in delivery and on an ongoing basis.
- A shift in the timing and duration of reviews, to shorter, more frequent reviews.

Developing your assurance approach

> "When starting to develop your assurance approach, it is important to remember that the principles of good assurance still apply."

The following key considerations, based on the principles of good assurance, will help inform early assurance thinking for an Agile delivery approach:

- Plan early for Agile assurance reviews and not just during delivery.
- Consider the extent to which the DoD includes assurance related activities.
- Consider the extent to which shorter, more frequent assurance reviews are needed to provide ongoing assurance over governance, risk management and delivery.
- Consider the extent to which assurance reviews need to support key decision points.
- Develop a 'tool box' of scope items that can be tailored to specific areas of Agile delivery in order to provide valuable insights that can be actioned quickly.
- Build in assurance activities that observe Agile ceremonies.
- Ensure there are mechanisms built in to regularly review the assurance plan e.g. every three months.
- Use an integrated assurance plan to ensure that all stakeholder needs are met and that assurance activities are coordinated.
- Ensure third party assurance providers have practical Agile delivery experience.

Download a copy of the full guidance document here: digital.govt.nz/assurance-guidance-for-agile-delivery

Contact

the System Assurance team for queries, advice and guidance at systemassurance@dia.govt.nz.

Areas to probe with Agile assurance

During programme or project start up	During programme or project delivery	Release and handover to Operations

During programme or project start up

- Is there a clear rationale of choosing Agile as the most appropriate delivery method for this programme or project?
- Is the related strategy compelling and does the problem/value statement have enough detail for Agile teams to begin planning?
- Has the programme or project been split into smaller chunks to deliver benefits early and to mitigate key risks?
- Do key programme or project roles have experience in practical Agile delivery
- Is governance appropriately calibrated to provide enough direction while letting teams 'get on and deliver'?
- Is there agreement of what an *acceptable* on-time delivery looks like (a Minimal Viable Product or MVP)?
- Does governance reporting include up-to-date performance information?

> Assurance provides confidence that the investment is set up to succeed

During programme or project delivery

- Is the programme or project delivering working software regularly and is it enabling realisation of benefits?
- Is there evidence that the Backlog is updated and prioritised by key stakeholders on an ongoing basis?
- Does the programme or project have a Release Plan that shows how the capabilities or features in the Product Roadmap will be delivered?
- Is there alignment between the budget planned for the Product Roadmap and the forecast costs of the Release Plan(s)?
- Do all deliverables have an effective DoD that is well understood at all levels and sets a minimum quality requirement?
- Are processes in place to seek feedback early and often? Is Backlog prioritisation clearly influenced by user feedback and progress to date?
- Are governance meetings aligned to programme or project delivery cycles?
- Is there close engagement between the Senior Responsible Owner, Product Owner and delivery team(s), evidenced by attendance at planning and review sessions?
- Are key stakeholders fully engaged in the definition of scope, prioritisation of features and review of outputs?

> Assurance provides confidence that delivery is well managed

Release and handover to Operations

Expected Multiple times during an Agile programme or project.

- For each production release during programme or project delivery, has the DoD been met for:
  - Compliance work, e.g. Certification and Accreditation.
  - Business readiness, including user guides and training of end users.
  - Operational support readiness, e.g. production support is in place and has appropriate documentation?
- Where the programme or project will be supporting both production and working on future release(s), is the resource plan and schedule for future releases realistic?
- For the final production release, is the Backlog appropriately refined and ready to hand over to business as usual?

> Assurance provides confidence that the business is prepared to accept the change (people, process, systems)