



Practical Guide

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MICHAEL CARRIER



'AGILE' OR 'ADAPTIVE' MANAGEMENT

Implementing aid projects in complex environments

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This lesson-sharing study was carried out by Groupe URD. Founded in 1993, Groupe URD is an independent think tank that specialises in analysing practices and developing policies for the humanitarian sector. Our multi-disciplinary expertise, based on continual field visits to crisis and post-crisis contexts, provides us with insight into the functioning of the sector as a whole. We believe in sharing knowledge and collective learning, and we help aid actors to improve the quality of their programmes.

THE AUTHOR

Michael Carrier is a Researcher, Evaluator and Trainer. He is Groupe URD's Quality and Accountability Advisor

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DISCLAIMER

The opinions expressed in this report are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union Delegation.

This document does not provide 'new recipes', but rather aims to bring together existing good practice to provide a complete, coherent approach to managing an aid project in a complex context.

This document aims to provide practitioners with concrete ways to implement agile aid projects. It will be regularly updated based on Groupe URD's experience and feedback from users. Please send your feedback and/or suggestions to: mcarrier@urd.org

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	4
UNDERSTANDING AGILE OR ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT	6
WHAT IS AGILE OR ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT?	6
Definition	6
Specific characteristics	6
Complex Environments	7
WHY IS IT AN IMPORTANT ISSUE TODAY?	8
Evolving aid projects	8
External Influences	9
Agile or adaptive management Initiatives	11
WHERE CAN I LEARN MORE?	13
Theory, definitions	13
Case studies	14
Online resources	15
IMPLEMENTING AGILE OR ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT	16
CREATING AN 'AGILE' ENVIRONMENT	16
The agile individual	16
The Agile team	17
The agile Organisation	17
The agile Sector	18
BUILDING AN 'AGILE' APPROACH – GOAL, DESIGN, AND LAUNCH	21
Mobilising	21
The goal	22
Planning	23
Organising	25
IMPLEMENTING AN 'AGILE' PROJECT – IMPLEMENTATION, MONITORING AND CLOSURE	26
Testing	27
Learning	29
Adapting	32
Communicating	33

INTRODUCTION

Why read this guide? Who is it for? What sources were used for this guide? How should it be used?

Why read this guide?

'Traditional' project management methods are not always appropriate when the operational context or the project itself is too complex to be able to plan everything in advance. In these conditions, the implementation of the aid project and its contribution to improving living conditions depend in part on the ability of people and organisations to be 'agile', that is to say, to adapt to changes and respond effectively to uncertainties¹.

'Agile' or 'adaptive management' is not new. We all constantly adjust to how our environment evolves and aid projects have always been flexible: the most visible example of this being how projects adjust when security conditions deteriorate (strategic partnerships, remote management, etc.). Nevertheless, being agile is a challenge for people and organisations who implement aid projects:

- As has been shown by the global COVID-19 health crisis, instability is not limited to certain operational contexts; it is global. An agile response is not only necessary in the field but at every level of an operation (field, country and HQ), and at every level of relations between key stakeholders (populations, authorities, civil society, operators, donors, etc.).
- Adaptive management is not easy to put into practice and requires a certain amount of know-how. Anticipation; flexibility; communication; cooperation and inter-dependence; taking a step back to identify 'weak signals'; making decisions at the right time and at the right level...: none of these aspects is new to aid projects, but they are often implemented in an incomplete or separate manner.

This document does not provide 'new recipes', but rather aims to bring together existing good practice to provide a complete, coherent approach to managing an aid project in a complex environment. It attempts to answer the following questions:

What is 'agile' or 'adaptive' management?

How should it be put into practice?

What sources were used for this guide?

This guide follows on from Groupe URD's 2018 Autumn School on Humanitarian Aid on the theme of 'Agility, quality and accountability in complex and protracted crisis contexts'².

It draws on extensive work by the English-speaking aid sector on this topic, where there have been a whole series of experiments and debates related to adaptive management, as well as initiatives in the French-speaking aid sector, which often have not been formalised. It also draws on literature from the business sector, which has been developing the notion of agile management for some time.

This Guide was produced in connection with the KEY programme ('Key' means 'to stand up' in the Songhay language). This programme is funded by the European Union and is being implemented in Mali between 2016 and

¹ HEM 2018 – Adaptive management and programming: the humanitarian perspective – Alice Olbrecht

² For more information: <https://www.urd.org/en/event/uah-2018/>

2020 by 5 consortiums of NGOs³. As a learning partner, Groupe URD has put in place a series of tools to help make the programme more agile and facilitated a training course in Bamako in January 2020 on agile management of aid in unstable and insecure contexts. This guide updates the key messages from the course based on the questions, ideas and experiences of the participants. It aims to translate agile management concepts into practical steps for aid projects in complex environments.

Who is this guide for?

This guide is primarily aimed at people and organisations who implement or fund aid projects in complex and/or unpredictable contexts. It is specifically aimed at aid practitioners at the following levels:

- Field level – those responsible for implementing activities: Heads of Project and practitioners who supervise activities in complex or unstable areas;
- Country level – those in charge of managing, monitoring or funding operations: donor representatives, Heads of Mission, Coordinators, Consortium Focal Points, etc.;
- HQ level – those in charge of remote management, and monitoring and supporting operations: donor representatives, Heads of Regional Desks, M&E Focal Points, etc.

How should this guide be used?

The guide has 2 sections:

1. UNDERSTANDING AGILE OR ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT – *What is agile or adaptive management? Why is it an important issue today? Where can I find out more about it?*

This section is aimed at people who want to know where the concept of agile or adaptive management comes from, what it means, and where to find out (even) more about this subject.

2. IMPLEMENTING AGILE OR ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT – *Creating an 'agile' environment. Designing and implementing an 'agile' project.*

This section is aimed at people who want concrete information about practices and tools that can help to put agile or adaptive management into practice in the field.

³ For more information: <https://www.urd.org/en/project/observatory-in-mali-2018-2021/>

UNDERSTANDING AGILE OR ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT

What is agile or adaptive management? Why is it an important issue today? Where can I find out more about it?

WHAT IS AGILE OR ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT?

DEFINITION

Agile or “adaptive management (...) is a **structured, iterative process of robust decision making** in the face of **uncertainty**” (Wikipedia⁴). It is “the ability of an organisation to **adjust and respond** effectively to **dynamics and uncertainty**” (ALNAP, adapted from Friedman et al., 2016; Aagaard, 2012)⁵. It is “an intentional approach to **making decisions and adjustments** in response to **new information and changes in context**.”⁶ (USAID).

As shown in the examples above, definitions of agile or adaptive management use these terms:

Structured, iterative process...
... of decision-making and adjustments...
... in response to uncertainty.

“In response to uncertainty”

Agile or adaptive management is appropriate in complex and/or unpredictable situations where operational objectives or methods can change significantly. It increases contextual monitoring and focuses more on managing staff who are faced with unpredictable situations.

Decision-making and adjustments

The objective of agile or adaptive management is to be able to make the right decision and adjust an operation at the right time. Governance issues are therefore central to agile management: who decides to make an adjustment, at what level, and in relation to what subject?

A structured, iterative process

Agile or adaptive management does not mean just doing what we feel like doing: on the contrary, it requires a more rigid structure than regular project management methods. This structure should make it possible to anticipate risks and increase the capacity to adapt to unpredictable events by applying an iterative (repetitive) process of short cycles that allow us to try, learn and adjust as quickly as possible.

SPECIFIC CHARACTERISTICS

Key components

Agile or adaptive management is defined differently depending on the author or the organisation, but it almost always includes the following components:

- **Accepted uncertainty about what will (or will not) work to meet the given challenge(s).** Any intervention can change during its implementation, but agile or adaptive management recognises this explicitly and admits that solutions are not known in advance.
- **Priority given to ‘why’ (changes), and less to ‘how’ (activities and resources).** Agile or adaptive management defines the goal of the project more precisely – the expected changes – and gives more flexibility in the use of

⁴ Wise, 2006, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adaptive_management

⁵ HEM 2018 - *Adaptive management and programming: the humanitarian perspective – Alice Olbrecht*

⁶ *An intentional approach to making decisions and adjustments in response to new information and changes in context - USAID - ADS 201.6* <https://usaidelearninglab.org/qrg/adaptive-management>

resources and the choice of activities. What is important is not to carry out the activities that were planned, but to achieve the goal with the resources available. The most important question is not, "did we do what we said we would do?", but rather, "did we do what was necessary to achieve the objective of the project?"

- **Short cycles and iterative decision-making.** In order to be able to adapt rapidly, agile or adaptive management involves short and repetitive cycles in which results are analysed and adjustments made based on what has been learned.
- **Continuous and rapid learning.** As it is not possible to know everything in a complex situation, agile or adaptive management learns through trial and error, by testing approaches and adapting them rapidly⁷.
- **A particular focus on human relations.** Agile or adaptive management places human beings at the centre of processes because, the more complex a situation is, the more important people's skills, motivation and know-how are.

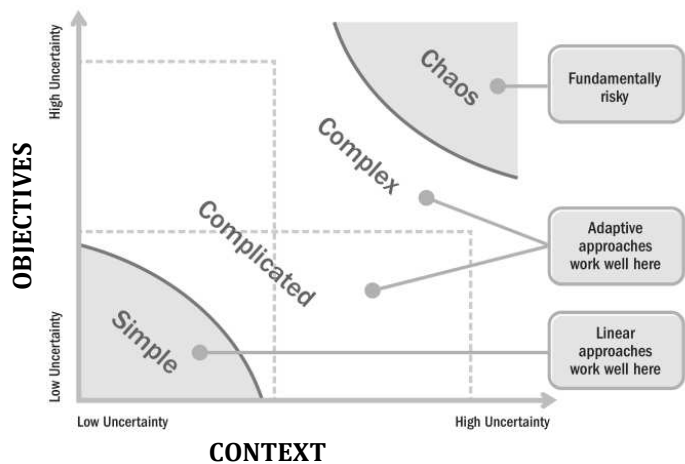
Differences

'Traditional' project management	'Agile' project management
"We propose this solution to meet our objective"	"Solutions are not known in advance"
"Let us try to plan as much as possible at the beginning"	"Let us plan little by little throughout the project"
"We are going to try to stick to the plan, and adjust it if necessary"	"The plan will change, maybe even completely"
"Monitoring the activities and the cost of the project is the priority, while the impacts come second"	"Monitoring the impacts of the project is the priority, while the activities and the cost come second"
"We learn lessons for future interventions at the end of the project"	"We learn lessons throughout the project, for this and future interventions"
"We must try to succeed in everything"	"We cannot succeed in everything. Failures are part of projects"

COMPLEX ENVIRONMENTS

Agile management is not always appropriate. As shown in the diagram below⁸, the level of complexity of an intervention depends on two criteria: 1. the degree of uncertainty in relation to the external context (e.g. instability) and/or the internal context (e.g. operating in a consortium); 2. the degree of uncertainty in relation to the objectives of the intervention.

The more we know about a context and what we need in order to achieve the objectives that have been fixed, the more linear the implementation of a project can be⁹. In contrast, agile management may be more appropriate for a project in an unstable context and/or if the overall objective is difficult to describe. However, so that a situation does not go from being complex to chaotic, the project needs to be in control of at least one variable of uncertainty: the context or the objectives¹⁰.



⁷ Learning to make a difference Christian Aid Ireland's adaptive programme management in governance, gender, peace building and human rights, ODI, Sept 2018, p. 8.

⁸ Adapted from the Agile Practice Guide, Project Management Institute (PMI) & Agile Alliance, 2017, figure 2.5 uncertainty and complexity model inspired by Stacey model, p. 14.

⁹ Adaptive management: What it means for CSOs, M. O' Donnell, BOND, 2016, p. 11.

¹⁰ Agile Practice Guide, Project Management Institute (PMI) & Agile Alliance, 2017, p. 29.

To summarise:

- Simple intervention = where the organisation is in control of the objectives and the context;
- Complicated or complex intervention, where the objectives OR the context are uncertain;
- Chaotic intervention, where the objectives AND the context are uncertain.

WHY IS IT AN IMPORTANT ISSUE TODAY?

EVOLVING AID PROJECTS

Agility or adaptive management is not a new concept in the aid sector. As early as 1983, Dennis Rondinelli¹¹ highlighted numerous problems related to the uncertainty of development work and recommended more iterative or adaptive approaches that make room for gradual learning.¹² However, it is only recently that these ideas have been promoted to allow people and organisations to cope better with the growing instability of operational contexts and the growing level of complexity of the international aid sector.

Adapting aid to crises

Development projects are increasingly implemented in unstable and insecure contexts. Emergency relief projects, on the other hand, may meet certain needs, such as providing immediate assistance to save lives, but they are often not adapted to complex, long-term crises.¹³ Agility – or adaptive management – is becoming more common as crises become more protracted and as a mixture of humanitarian and development practices are applied in fragile contexts. Given the predictable dangers and constant uncertainty of crisis contexts, it is a permanent challenge to ensure that an aid project is meeting needs, that it remains relevant and that it causes the least negative effects possible. These questions concern both humanitarian and development actors who increasingly work together in protracted crisis contexts on multi-year programmes that aim to build resilience.

In addition to its long-term social and economic impact, the global health crisis related to COVID-19, and the lockdown measures imposed on populations, have forced aid practitioners to adapt their management and cooperation methods. The ease with which these adjustments have been made has depended on the nature of the projects, the intervention areas and the capacity of practitioners to 'be agile'. These changes have also had a major influence on the quality of interventions, their impacts, and the role of stakeholders.

The growing complexity of the aid system

Never in the history of the aid sector have budgets been so high, contexts so unstable, and procedures for funding and accountability so cumbersome and complicated. Documents with many different formats, complicated processes to modify contracts, and the duplication of audit and evaluation procedures all limit the ability to adapt interventions¹⁴. These constraints are all the more significant because they are based on an approach that "conceives good performance as that which is predicted, measured and monitored, through clear plans such as a logical framework."¹⁵ without really recognising that intervention contexts can be complex and unpredictable. "The creeping rigidity arising from pre-defined, short-term solutions and

The systems used—both externally with donors and internally—for strategy, performance monitoring, accountability and risk management have evolved in ways that restrict the range of options that humanitarians have at their disposal in a dynamic environment, and make it harder to implement changes in a timely and efficient manner. HEM 2018 - Adaptive management and programming: the humanitarian perspective – Alice Olbrecht

¹¹ *Development Projects as Policy Experiments: an adaptive approach to development administration*, 2nd ed, Rondinelli, D. A. (1993) Routledge, London and New York

¹² <https://antylles.com/2016/05/17/adaptive-management/What-is-adaptive-management/> May 17, 2016 By Dr Gregory J Wilson

¹³ HEM 2018 - Adaptive management and programming: the humanitarian perspective - Alice Olbrecht

¹⁴ François Grünewald - HEM Agility, quality and accountability, Groupe URD - 2019

¹⁵ HEM 2018 - Adaptive management and programming: the humanitarian perspective – Alice Olbrecht

predictable performance management prevents humanitarian agencies from adapting when contexts, crises or needs change over time."¹⁶ There is, nevertheless, some hope that it is possible to make progress and manage what is known as well as what is uncertain: 'crisis modifiers' can be used when a situation deteriorates, and the increased presence of certain donors in the field can help to support change. In any case, we no longer have a choice: there are more and more calls to reform the aid sector. The World Humanitarian Summit in 2016 underlined the need for a 'New Way of Working' which "frames the work of development and humanitarian actors, along with national and local counter-parts, in support of collective outcomes that reduce risk and vulnerability".¹⁷

EXTERNAL INFLUENCES

Adaptive management of natural resources¹⁸

The concept of the adaptive management of natural resources emerged at the end of the 1970s. Several texts published between 1978 and 1995¹⁹ established its key ingredients: the importance of design and experimentation, the crucial role of learning based on experience, the iterative link between knowledge and action, the integration and legitimacy of knowledge from different sources and the need for reactive institutions.

The concept of adaptive management was then applied to a whole series of sectors (agriculture, water resources, fishing, etc.) in different socio-political contexts (Australia, Canada, Europe, South-East Asia, South Africa and the United States). As can be seen from the diagram opposite, it was integrated into several institutional policies, such as the National Forest Management Act (NFMA) in the United States.²⁰ These different experiences provided the following lessons which could be useful for aid projects:

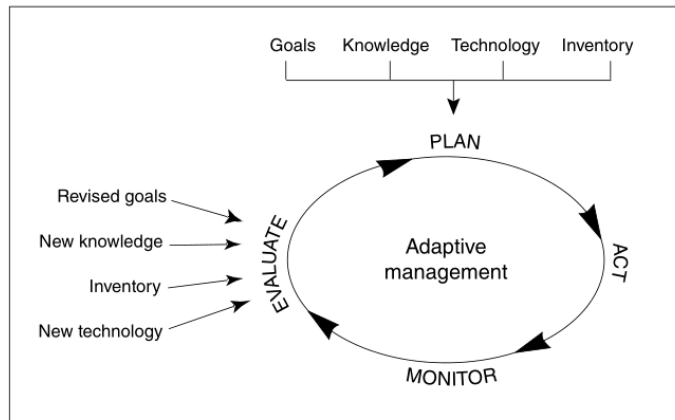


Figure 2—The adaptive management cycle (USDA USDI 1994: E-14).

1. Though the concept of agile management is widely recognised as a model for managing resources in at-risk and uncertain conditions, it is, above all, an ideal rather than an established reality: "adaptive (agile) management is more of an abstraction than an acceptable enterprise, and institutions still do not allow managers to risk failure."²¹
2. Experimentation is at the heart of agile management, thus it involves hypotheses, controls and replication.
3. Agile management is socio-political by nature. Its effective implementation requires the active participation and the support of all partners and stakeholders.
4. An agile management approach is based on the recognition and acceptance of risk and uncertainty.
5. Learning is an essential result of the agile management process.
6. A variety of institutional obstacles hinder the effective implementation of agile management. These include legal and political constraints (such as the endangered species act), socio-psychological obstacles (such as risk aversion, Miller 1999), and techno-scientific constraints (for example, the absence of adequate baseline assessments or surveillance protocols)²²

¹⁶ HEM 2018 - *Adaptive management and programming: the humanitarian perspective* – Alice Obrecht

¹⁷ (OCHA, 2017b)

¹⁸ From: *Adaptive Management of Natural Resources: Theory, Concepts, and Management Institutions*, United States Department of Agriculture, George H. Stankey, Roger N. Clark, Bernard T. Bormann, 2005.

¹⁹ See: *Adaptive Environmental Assessment and Management* (Holling, 1978), *Adaptive Management of Renewable Resources* (Walters 1986), *Compass and Gyroscope : Integrating Science and Politics for the Environment* (Lee 1993), et *Barriers and Bridges to the Renewal of Ecosystems and Institutions* (Gunderson et al. 1995a)

²⁰ See: *Forest Service Handbook 1909_12 chapter 20*

²¹ (Johnson et Herring (1999 : 361).

²² (Stankey et al. 2003a).

7. In order to embrace agile management, strategies are needed to move from a command and control system to one that is based on learning, collaboration and integrated management.

Software development²³

The concept of 'agility' was established – in the world of software development – due to the need to restore common sense. Meeting a need in a coherent manner had become of secondary importance compared to meeting the terms of increasingly complicated and restrictive contracts. People had begun to talk about resources and man-days as others talk about kilos of potatoes.

It was in this context that 17 people involved in using 'alternative' project management methods got together in 2001 to create what is known today as the Agile Manifesto²⁴, an extremely succinct document that re-establishes the foundations for the proper management of a software development project. This manifesto serves as the common denominator for what are referred to today as 'agile methodologies'. These are methods for steering and carrying out projects that aim to include the users as much as possible and be as reactive as possible to their demands. This is achieved by means of short and adaptive cycles ('iterations') that allow expected deliverables to be conceptualised and carried out progressively or 'incrementally'.

This 'agile manifesto' is organised around 4 values that can help to guide an agile approach:

1. Individuals and their interactions over standards, processes and tools.
2. Concrete and relevant products or services over comprehensive documentation and reporting.
3. Collaboration with the different stakeholders over contract negotiation.
4. Responding to change over following the plan.

These values are given a practical dimension in the form of 12 principles that determine how staff operate and interact and are applied throughout the

duration of a project. Taken together, these values and principles constitute the foundations of an agile culture and encourage a mind-set that is favourable to agility²⁵.



Figure 1 - Source - <https://pritamsen.wordpress.com/2014/04/14/agile-manifesto/>

Today, agile management is a key concept in consulting firms and other service companies. All large firms have begun transformation projects and many other sectors other than information systems have begun to embrace agile management. This desire to be more 'agile' has also spread to humanitarian and development organisations who are taking inspiration from businesses in order to increase their effectiveness and flexibility.

²³ Extract from the article An "Agile Manifesto" for humanitarian and development projects, Medhi Terbeche, Michael Carrier, HEM n°20, 2018, Groupe URD. For more information: https://www.urd.org/fr/revue_humanitaires/pour-un-manifeste-agile-des-projets-daide-humanitaire-et-de-cooperation-au-developpement/

²⁴ For more information about the Manifesto for Agile Software Development, see: <https://agilemanifesto.org/>

²⁵ Articles / coaching & management > L'agilité dans les organisations > [https://www.ekilium.fr/blog-coaching/entreprises-liberees-et-agilite-organisations/la-culture-agile-quest-ce-que-cest/La culture agile qu'est-ce que c'est ?](https://www.ekilium.fr/blog-coaching/entreprises-liberees-et-agilite-organisations/la-culture-agile-quest-ce-que-cest/La%20culture%20agile%20qu'est-ce%20que%20c'est%20?)

AGILE OR ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT INITIATIVES²⁶

In recent years, a large number of initiatives have been implemented in the aid sector, providing new methods for managing interventions that are more adapted to the reality on the ground, that are more flexible, and that are capable of producing results in complex and unstable environments. Each of these initiatives is directly or indirectly linked to the notion of agile or adaptive management and has therefore increased the visibility of the concept in debates about the quality of aid projects.

Important – The following list of initiatives is not exhaustive and a variety of actors have been involved in their development, making it impossible to provide all the details for each of them. These examples nevertheless give an idea of the kind of initiatives underway and the key actors involved.

Operators

All organisations who implement aid projects are either directly or indirectly impacted by 'agile' methods, but a number of them have been particularly active in testing and sharing lessons learned, such as:

ADAPT (Analysis Driven Agile Programming Techniques) – This project has allowed Mercy Corps and the International Rescue Committee (IRC) to test and learn from agile/adaptive management approaches in six complex and unpredictable contexts. The project focuses on three key questions: 1. What does agile management look like in practice? 2. What impact can it have on programmes? 3. How can it best be nurtured? For more information: <https://www.mercycorps.org/research-resources/adaptive-management-case-studies>

Bond 'Adaptive Development' Working Group - Bond is a British platform of international development organisations. In 2015-2016, with support from DFID, it organised a learning series exploring the implications of integrating agile/adaptive approaches into international aid projects and produced a publication in 2016 entitled *Adaptive management: what it means for CSOs*²⁷. A Working Group continues to operate to share experiences, interesting research and lessons, and to provide information about upcoming events.

For more information: <https://www.bond.org.uk/groups/adaptive-development>

Donors

Different 'agile' funding methods have been tested to help make projects more flexible. Some funding now includes an option to fund risks to help cope with crises, such as 'crisis modifiers' which can be used if a situation deteriorates²⁸. Other funding is conditional – payment by results. This supports agile management, combining flexibility with regard to the implementation of activities and greater responsibility with regard to results.

The following three initiatives are the most notable within the donor community:

Global Delivery Initiative (GDI) - Collaboration between different organisations from the aid sector and the private sector (led by the World Bank) in order to prepare and know what to do to overcome challenges and unexpected problems throughout aid interventions.

For more information: <http://www.globaldeliveryinitiative.org/>

Smart Rules (DFID) – Established in 2014, the Smart Rules provide the operating framework for the Department for International Development's (DFID's) programmes, with an accent on adapting systems and organisational

²⁶ For more information about agile initiatives in the aid sector, go to: <https://oxfamblogs.org/fp2p/where-have-we-got-to-on-adaptive-learning-thinking-and-working-politically-doing-development-differently-etc-getting-beyond-the-peoples-front-of-judea/>

²⁷ https://www.bond.org.uk/sites/default/files/resource-documents/adaptive_management_-_what_it_means_for_csos_0.pdf

²⁸ For more information about 'crisis modifiers', go to: *Crisis modifiers a solution for a more flexible development - humanitarian system?*, *Evaluative learning for resilience Lessons from the BRACED experience in the Sahel*, Katie Peters and Florence Pichon, ODI

processes to agile/adaptive management. A number of DFID programmes and envelopes have functioned in this way, including the economic empowerment of women in Mozambique or the country strategy in Nepal.

For more information: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dfid-smart-rules-better-programme-delivery>

Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting (CLA) (USAID) – USAID's Collaborating, Learning and Adapting framework aims to operationalise agile/adaptive management in international development by describing a specific way to design, implement, adapt and evaluate programmes. Part of this framework consists of sharing tools and resources, such as the learning lab, with partners.

For more information: <https://usaidlearninglab.org/qrg/adaptive-management>

Research centres

The majority of aid sector research centres have been active in providing information and building capacity in relation to agile management. The three following organisations have been particularly active on this issue:

ALNAP – How can programmes adapt their response in the face of continual change and uncertainty? How can donors enable flexible funding to ensure organisations can adapt quickly? ALNAP's adaptiveness research project looks at the approaches that can help agencies more effectively respond to the shifting waves of need.

For more information: <https://www.alnap.org/our-topics/flexibility>

ODI – The Global Learning for Adaptive Management (GLAM) initiative, funded by the Department for International Development (DFID) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), is a globally networked learning alliance that aims to actively identify, operationalise and promote rigorous evidence-based approaches to adaptive management. The GLAM initiative is implemented by a consortium, which is led by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI), with the Institute of Development Studies of the University of Sussex (IDS), Oxfam, International Rescue Committee (IRC), Oxford Policy Management (OPM), Social Impact and ThoughtWorks.

For more information: <https://www.odi.org/our-work/adaptive-development>

Groupe URD²⁹ - Agility: a topic Groupe URD has been promoting for twenty years

Having been involved in these debates since our creation in 1993, Groupe URD began a number of operations at the end of the 90s with the aim of making it easier to learn in real time and adapt programmes. Following Hurricane Mitch, which hit Central America in 1998, it carried out a series of evaluations that included discussion exercises with field actors. Processes of this kind became known as 'Iterative Evaluations with Mini Seminars' (IEMS). It then developed and implemented this methodology in several contexts: Afghanistan, Kosovo, the 2004 tsunami (8 field visits over a period from 3 months to 4 years after the tsunami), Mali (12 field visits between 2012 and 2018), Haiti (15 field visits from 3 weeks to five years after the earthquake), Nepal (7 field visits from 3 months to 3 years after the earthquake). Then, due to requests for close monitoring and 'coaching' between field visits, and also to enhance the effectiveness of evaluations and improve practices in real time, it began to set up Observatories. Three were opened: in Afghanistan, Chad and then Haiti, with the aim of bringing learning closer to field actors. Today, in 2020, is involved in two processes to help promote agility: one as part of the RESILAC project in the Lake Chad region, and the other in support of the Key Programme in Mali, which combines IEMS, scenario planning and operational research.

²⁹ Extract from: *HEM, Agility, quality and accountability, Groupe URD – 2019.*

For more information:

- <https://www.urd.org/en/theme/quality-accountability/>
- <https://www.urd.org/en/project/observatory-in-mali-2018-2021/>
- <https://www.urd.org/en/project/resilac-economic-and-socially-inclusive-recovery-in-lake-chad/>

WHERE CAN I LEARN MORE?

To focus on the main issues, while remaining as practical as possible, this section provides a short list of resources on agile management. If you would like more references, you can consult:

- The Bibliography section of Issue 20 of Humanitarian Aid on the Move, 'Agility, quality and accountability', published in 2019 and written by Cécile Le Grix, Groupe URD's Archivist. <https://www.urd.org/en/review-hem/bibliography-on-adaptive-management-in-aid-responses/>
- *Making humanitarian response more flexible: Bibliography*, Alice Obrecht, ALNAP Background Paper, ALNAP, ODI, 2018.
<https://www.alnap.org/system/files/content/resource/files/main/ALNAP%20Making%20humanitarian%20response%20more%20flexible%20biblio.pdf>

THEORY, DEFINITIONS

Managing complexity – Adaptive management at Mercy Corps, Mercy Corps, 2015

This 9-page document explains why adaptive management is important, what it is, and the four elements that underpin it: culture, people and skills, tools and systems, and a favourable environment.

<https://www.mercycorps.org/research-resources/managing-complexity-adaptive-management>

Adaptive management: What it means for CSOs, M. O'Donnell, BOND, 2016.

Agile management is characterised by a flexible approach involving testing, monitoring, getting feedback and making adjustments if necessary. It is an alternative to more linear and mechanistic approaches. This introductory document is intended for managers and leaders in civil society organisations and funders who are not yet immersed in the issue. It provides insight into what adaptive management is, when and why it may be appropriate, and what may be required for organisations to adopt adaptive approaches.

<https://www.alnap.org/help-library/adaptive-management-what-it-means-for-csos>

Making humanitarian response more flexible: challenges and questions, A. Obrecht, S. Bourne, ALNAP Background Paper, ALNAP, ODI, 2018.

Humanitarian actors have been responding to highly dynamic and unstable situations for decades. If anyone should be able to adapt to changes on the ground, it is humanitarian organisations. So, why is this so difficult? To answer this question, this information paper describes the situations that lead humanitarian organisations to try to change their ways of functioning and the issues that they have to deal with as a consequence. The authors present studies carried out outside the humanitarian sector on flexibility and adaptive capabilities, to help humanitarian organisations improve their capacity to respond to dynamics and uncertainty. They conclude with a summary of the state of evidence on adaptive approaches.

https://www.alnap.org/system/files/content/resource/files/main/ALNAPpaper%20Making%20humanitarian%20response%20more%20flexible_1.pdf

The Agile Manifesto, Agile Alliance, 2001.

The Agile Manifesto was drawn up in 2001 by the Agile Alliance on the basis of 12 principles that give priority to individuals and their interaction over processes and tools, working software over comprehensive documentation, customer collaboration over contract negotiation, and responding to change over following a plan.

<https://www.alnap.org/system/files/content/resource/files/main/Agile-Manifesto-Color.pdf>

Agile Practice Guide, Project Management Institute (PMI) & Agile Alliance, 2017

This guide is the product of collaboration between the Project Management Institute (PMI) and the Agile Alliance. The writing team included volunteers from both organisations, with expert input from a large number of professionals and leaders with a variety of profiles, convictions and cultures. The objective of this guide is to provide project teams with tools, recommendations and understanding of agile techniques in order to help them achieve better results.

<https://www.pmi.org/pmbok-guide-standards/practice-guides/agile>

Humanitarian aid on the move, special issue 'Agility, Quality and Accountability', Groupe URD, 2019

On 2-4 October 2018, around thirty participants gathered at the Autumn School on Humanitarian Aid at Groupe URD's headquarters to discuss the concept of 'agility', the issues that it raises, and its application in the international aid sector. This special issue of Humanitarian Aid on the Move, with articles by some of the speakers and participants at the Autumn School, presents some of the ideas that emerged, and the different facets of what is becoming an essential characteristic of teams, projects and organisations within the sector.

https://www.urd.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/HEM20_EN_Web.pdf

CASE STUDIES

Adapting Aid - Lessons from six case studies, Mercy Corps, IRC, 2016.

In 2015, IRC and Mercy Corps got together to launch the ADAPT programme (*Analysis Driven Agile Programming Techniques*) with the aim of working together on agile management in the humanitarian sector. Three main questions dominated the programme: What does agile management look like in practice? What impact can it have? What is the best way to maintain it? Case studies were conducted in different contexts (Uganda, Syria, Niger, Sierra Leone, Liberia and Myanmar) and helped to share ideas about how agile management can improve the effectiveness and impact of aid. This report summarises the results of the studies. The ADAPT partnership now wants to institutionalise adaptive management within IRC and Mercy Corps, but also wants to influence the sector due to the results of this project.

https://www.mercycorps.org.uk/sites/default/files/Mercy_Corps_ADAPT_Adapting_aid_report_with_case_studies.7.2.1.16.pdf

To read the different case studies:

<https://www.mercycorps.org.uk/research/adaptive-management-case-studies>

Learning to make a difference: Christian Aid Ireland's adaptive programme management in governance, gender, peace building and human rights, David Booth & al., Christian Aid Ireland, ODI, Irish Aid, September 2018.

This paper is the product of a multi-year collaboration between ODI and the core team of Christian Aid Ireland to assess the relevance of adaptive or trial-and-error approaches to the field of governance, peace building and human rights. The authors refer to the programme being implemented by Christian Aid Ireland in seven countries affected by conflict, violence or political instability – Angola, Colombia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Sierra Leone and Zimbabwe. It is a five-year programme based on partnerships with local organisations who work with marginalised people. It aims to help them realise their rights, improve their security and address gender inequalities. The report explains what is involved in moving towards the adaptive

management of programmes, describes the lessons learned from the first year and looks at implications for implementation in the coming years. The authors state that in order to make the most of the transition to adaptive management, new work methods and their underlying principles will need to be more rooted in organisational practices and cultures.

<https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/resource-documents/12387.pdf>

Dynamic gridlock: Adaptive Humanitarian Action in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Alice Obrecht, ALNAP Country Study, ALNAP, ODI, 2018.

DRC has been the scene of a humanitarian crisis for more than 20 years, and embodies both the reasons why flexibility and the capacity to adapt are so important for the future of humanitarian action, and the reasons why these two qualities are so difficult to obtain. Humanitarians there work in an environment that is constantly evolving where numerous small- to medium-scale, complex crises take place each week in different parts of this vast country. This Country Study looks at examples of flexible humanitarian programming in a protracted crisis context and analyses the obstacles to flexibility and the main reasons why there is a need for change.

https://www.alnap.org/system/files/content/resource/files/main/alnap-2018-adaptiveness-DRC-case-study_1.pdf

Crisis modifiers: A solution for a more flexible development-humanitarian system? Katie Peters, Florence Pichon, BRACED, ODI, November 2017.

In 2015, DFID linked a humanitarian fund Providing Humanitarian Assistance for Sahel Emergencies (PHASE) to the multi-year Building Resilience to Climate Extremes and Disasters (BRACED) programme. This fund makes it possible to be more flexible in relation to risks. This report presents the results of this crisis modifier, showing that they can be a solution for a more flexible aid system if they are accompanied by a fundamental change in the way development actors design their programmes and react to predictable risks.

<https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/resource-documents/11861.pdf>

ONLINE RESOURCES

More information about agile management and related tools can be found online:

- ODI (Overseas Development Institute) - <https://www.odi.org/our-work/adaptive-development>
- Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting (CLA) (USAID) - <https://usaidlearninglab.org/qrg/adaptive-management>
- ALNAP - <https://www.alnap.org/our-topics/flexibility>
- Groupe URD - <https://www.urd.org/en/theme/quality-accountability/>
- Oxfam Blog - <https://oxfamblogs.org/fp2p/tag/adaptive-management/>

IMPLEMENTING AGILE OR ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT

Creating an 'agile' environment. Designing and implementing an 'agile' project.

In contrast to the IT sector, where agility is an empirical and pragmatic approach that is sometimes pushed to the extreme, in relation to aid projects, agile management is understood more to be a general approach than a specific method.³⁰ As a result, there is a lot of theoretical discussion about the concept of agile management but little in the way of concrete recommendations and tools to help practitioners put it into practice. This section therefore outlines possible steps and presents existing tools to help practitioners implement agile management in complex situations.

Creating an 'agile' environment

Because agile or adaptive management is not only a technical question, and because all internal and external actors are interdependent, the first step consists of creating or reinforcing an 'agile' environment before the aid project begins.

THE AGILE INDIVIDUAL

We are not all equal in relation to agility. Each person reacts differently faced with the uncertainty and repeated change that are the daily lot of agile management. It is therefore necessary to identify people who are adapted to 'agile' interventions. How do you build an agile team? What skills are needed to implement an agile intervention?³¹ How do you increase general competencies that are conducive to 'agility', such as trust, relationships and critical thinking?³²

"Agility is a perpetual search for balance between an active dimension (doing and proving that one knows what to do), a reactive dimension (being opportunistic in dealing with the changes observed) and a proactive dimension (value creation). At each moment, it is necessary to recognise each situation and to adopt the right behavior. Agility is therefore not a stable and definitive state, but a propensity, an aptitude, and a general framework that needs to be maintained and constantly nurtured."

Agileom - <https://agileom.fr/agilite/>

Certain types of behaviour and attitude can help to implement agile management, such as:³³

- **The capacity to anticipate:** being agile means being able to think about potential scenarios, and anticipating a plan B, C, etc.
- **Curiosity.** Agility comes more naturally to someone who has a particular interest in knowing if their work is achieving the results that they have set and who tends to think in an action-oriented way.
- **Communication and listening skills.** Listening and transparent communication are essential to establish a culture of openness and exchange.

³⁰ Adaptive management: What it means for CSOs, M. O' Donnell, BOND, 2016

³¹ Adaptive management: What it means for CSOs, M. O' Donnell, BOND, 2016 p. 12

³² HEM 2018 - Adaptive management and programming: the humanitarian perspective – Alice Olbrecht

³³ USAID - <https://usalearninglab.org/qrg/adaptive-management>

- **Critical thinking.**

Adjustments need to be based on data and evidence, and not on opinions. Those in charge of agile management need to

be capable of examining, understanding and using information critically in order to make decisions and take action based on these decisions.

- **Being comfortable with uncertainty and change.** Agile managers need to be comfortable with uncertainty and change and need to have the humility to admit what they do not know and when things have not gone as planned.

"There are those who can work with ambiguity and those who are frozen by it. Some people need the route map, and others want to throw away the map and say 'let's go and see where the sea takes us.'"

PERL staffer, Nigeria, in Oxfam -/what-have-we-learned-from-a-close-look-at-3-dfid-adaptive-management-programmes/

Recruiting people with these qualities and investing in their development will mean that staff are prepared to "develop their personal agility, and they have the necessary curiosity, sensitivity and perspective to accept change and use it as a tool to create and innovate".³⁴

THE AGILE TEAM

The changes and uncertainty involved in agile management can have a significant impact on individuals and teams. It is therefore important to reinforce human relations by ensuring that they remain a priority in relation to an intervention's implementation and control processes. How can open communication be encouraged within a team? How can trust be reinforced between the members of a team or an organisation?

"A group of passengers in a bus is not a team. They can become one if the bus breaks down" (Jean-Paul Sartre). In a complex situation, the question is not whether the bus is going to break down – it will – but rather whether the people involved will be sufficiently mobilised and willing to work together to continue the journey.

Embracing agility begins at the individual level, but the following step is collective.³⁵ An 'agile' team should be capable of responding and adapting to complexity. In order to do this, they need to be able to share relevant information – even failures – and make decisions. This means delegating decision-making as close as possible to the intervention, accepting mistakes, encouraging a culture of measured risk, raising awareness about the notion of value creation, encouraging free, critical and respectful discussion, as well as changing the role of the project manager.

Many project managers are used to being at the centre of project coordination, monitoring and presenting the state of the team to the rest of the organisation. However, for projects where there are major changes, they are too complex to be managed by a single person. In an agile project, project managers are no longer at the centre; instead they serve the team and the top management. The term servant-leader is often used in agile teams because these project managers need to shift from 'managing coordination' to 'facilitating collaboration'. Above all, they are judged on their ability to make others better.³⁶

THE AGILE ORGANISATION

Making adaptation possible is as much, if not more, a cultural challenge as it is a technical challenge within an

³⁴ <https://www.ekilium.fr/blog-coaching/entreprises-liberees-et-agilite-organisations/la-culture-agile-quest-ce-que-cest/> La culture agile qu'est-ce que c'est ?

³⁵ <https://www.ekilium.fr/blog-coaching/entreprises-liberees-et-agilite-organisations/la-culture-agile-quest-ce-que-cest/> La culture agile qu'est-ce que c'est ?

³⁶ Agile Practice Guide, PMI & Agile Alliance, p. 52

organisation³⁷. The main aspects of an adaptive organisational culture are the following³⁸: accepting uncertainty and an appropriate level of risk; encouraging and giving priority to reflection and learning; open communication; and encouraging flexibility. How do the leaders of an organisation help to create an environment that is conducive to learning and adaptation? How are 'agile' qualities such as 'curiosity' promoted? How is responsible risk-taking recognised in performance monitoring mechanisms?

An organisation needs to be able to combine the desire to engage in agility and a mind-set that helps to establish an agile culture. In order to establish agile/adaptive management without any major obstacles and encourage an agile culture at every level of an organisation, a number of operational values are necessary, such as flexibility, transparency, trust, good relations and coherence³⁹. This may imply significant changes in some organisations, which shows how important it is not to underestimate the challenge of using agile management for an organisation⁴⁰.

Organisational systems, processes and tools thus play a key role in reinforcing... or hampering agile initiatives. Many organisations "fail to adapt due to funding restrictions, or to confusion over what level of change donors are willing to tolerate in a programme that is underway".⁴¹ Others are faced with the limits of internal support services, such as finance, human resources, logistics and the supply chain, that are unable to adjust to modifications in the intervention⁴². In order to implement agile management, it is necessary to: reinforce communication and collaboration between different functional areas such as operations, monitoring mechanisms and financial management; use rigorous monitoring and feedback mechanisms; clarify the way that changes in plans and interventions can be conducted; and delegate decision-making more widely to those closest to the intervention.⁴³

Steering an agile programme therefore requires specific managerial competencies whereby fostering, supporting and stimulating critical thinking and the capacity to adapt among a group of individuals and stakeholders is more important than the capacity to implement specifications in compliance with procedures.

"Adaptation is arguably an issue (like innovation) where the emphasis needs to be on how to enable or facilitate or foster it, rather than on how to do it."
Adaptive management: What it means for CSOs, M. O'Donnell, BOND, 2016

THE AGILE SECTOR

Implementing agile management implies changes in our way of managing an intervention on three levels:

- **Management methods** – How can we promote strategic reflection that helps to "identify necessary changes"? How do we constantly aim to improve ourselves, encourage the flexible implementation of interventions and minimise obstacles to changes?
- **Cooperation with stakeholders** – How do we ensure that stakeholders participate sufficiently, that we work collaboratively with other ongoing projects and facilitate decision-making at the different levels of an organisation?
- **Human relations** – How do we encourage an agile way of being, reinforce human aspects of processes and encourage flexibility among members of an organisation?

³⁷ *Adaptive management: What it means for CSOs, M. O' Donnell, BOND, 2016*

³⁸ *Adaptive management: What it means for CSOs, M. O' Donnell, BOND, 2016 p. 16*

³⁹ <https://www.ekilium.fr/blog-coaching/entreprises-liberees-et-agilite-organisations/la-culture-agile-quest-ce-que-cest/>

⁴⁰ <https://www.bond.org.uk/news/2015/10/adaptive-organisations-what-does-it-take>

⁴¹ HEM 2018 – *Adaptive Management and Programming: the humanitarian perspective* – Alice Obrecht

⁴² *Adaptive management: What it means for CSOs, M. O' Donnell, BOND, 2016, CSO, p. 16 4.5 Supportive financial and planning systems Informal feedback from CSO staff during PPA Learning Group and Bond events on adaptation suggest that internal financial, procurement and grant management systems can be a major barrier to working adaptively.*

⁴³ <https://www.bond.org.uk/news/2015/10/adaptive-organisations-what-does-it-take>

Some teams, and even some organisations, have managed to implement agile management initiatives, but for these experiences to be used in all complex situations, there needs to be a profound change in the aid system. In particular, funding, planning and assessment systems need to allow changes to be made to interventions and budgets⁴⁴.

Donors have an essential role in this reform because the behaviour of operators is influenced a great deal by their sources of funding. Donor demands and processes should encourage agility. This implies:⁴⁵

- That donors give greater decision-making power to their staff who are the closest to project implementation;
- That funding instruments are adapted to the complexity of a situation and/or the strategic objectives;
- That validation processes should be simplified and rationalised for requests to modify budgets (flexibility of roles and/or use of the main budgetary lines), activities (for example, general logical frameworks, limited demands in terms of the details of activities, etc.) and results frameworks (for example, by adding a start-up phase after which more precise results can be specified) ;
- That selection criteria for proposals should include the capacity of an organisation to adjust at different points of the intervention;
- That monitoring and learning mechanisms should be sufficiently funded in budgets;
- That frameworks for monitoring results should be adapted so that they recognise 'successes' of complex interventions more, by looking, for example, at the contribution to change, rather than results that can only be attributed to a single intervention;
- That contracts should include 'crisis modifiers', that is to say, adjustment mechanisms in case there is a crisis that allow budgetary allocations to be modified or supplementary funds to be supplied without modifying the grant agreement;
- That we should accept uncertainty at the beginning of a project about the results that could be achieved, with the possibility, for example, of establishing more precise objectives and indicators during the launch phase.

Centralised command and control systems, 'the culture of fear of making mistakes', delegations of authority, grant and contract management approaches, and of course the "bench strength" of senior and mid-level leadership, are just some of the many organizational "levers" that need to be adjusted to give donors and their implementing partners the capacity for AM and ultimately make them accountable for change and getting maximum value out of every dollar spent.
Dr Gregory J Wilson, What is adaptive management?



Tools

'Agile' self-evaluation

The enthusiasm for agile management that has grown in the aid sector has led to the re-labelling of existing projects as 'agile'. Though some effectively are, many others only use the vocabulary of agility, which is spreading faster than actual agile practice.⁴⁶

Below is a model of 'agile practices for aid projects' which can be used to self-evaluate agile practices. The model was tested for the first time in January 2020 during a training workshop carried out in connection with the KEY programme. It is organised around 3 families and 9 categories:

⁴⁴ Adaptive management: What it means for CSOs, M. O' Donnell, BOND, 2016

⁴⁵ Adaptive management: What it means for CSOs, M. O' Donnell, BOND, 2016

⁴⁶ Oxfam - <https://oxfamblogs.org/wp2p/what-have-we-learned-from-a-close-look-at-3-dfid-adaptive-management-programmes/>

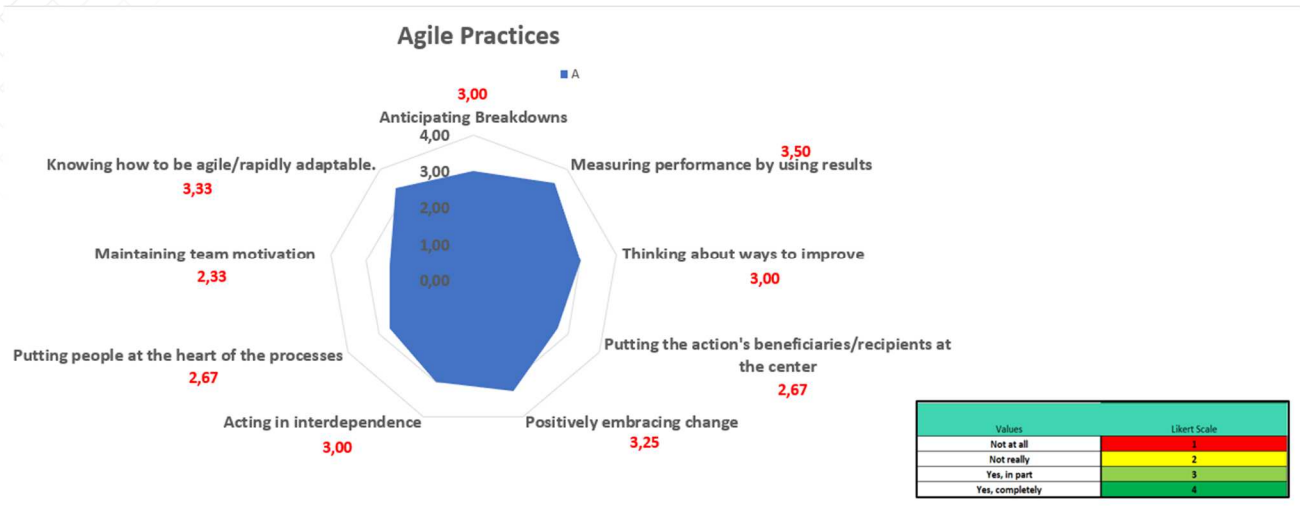
Management – Doing	Collective – Cooperating	The human factor – Being
1. Anticipating problems	4. Placing beneficiaries at the centre	7. Placing the human factor at the heart of processes
2. Measuring performance in terms of results	5. Working interdependently	8. Maintaining team motivation
3. Thinking about how to improve	6. Welcoming change	9. Being agile

For each of these categories, participants are asked if the different phrases given correspond completely, partially, not very much or not at all to existing practices, and to justify their answer.

As shown in the table opposite, each answer is associated with a value of between 1 and 4. The overall results were then obtained by calculating the average value for the results for each category.

Values	Likert Scale
Not at all	1
Not really	2
Yes, in part	3
Yes, completely	4

In order to make it easier to use this self-evaluation, and obtain visual results (see below), an Excel tool was developed to be tested. The instructions for using it are in the 'introduction' tab.



You can download this tool on Groupe URD website:

<https://www.urd.org/en/publication/agile-or-adaptive-management-toolbox-2020/>

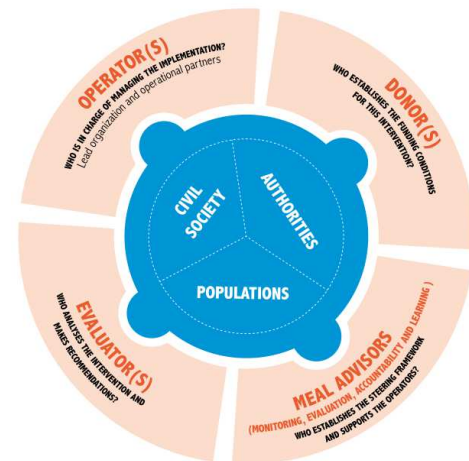
Building an 'agile' approach – goal, design, and launch

MOBILISING

Being agile does not mean making decisions and acting alone. Every interruption or modification has an impact on all the stakeholders in an aid project: the target population, the authorities, civil society, operators and funding agencies in a given zone or operational sector. In a complex situation where there will be a lot of adjustments, agile management is faced with the challenges of ensuring that these stakeholders participate sufficiently, of carrying out the project inter-dependently with other ongoing projects and of facilitating decision-making at the different levels of an organisation.

Participation

An agile intervention cannot be carried out without the active participation of the different stakeholders involved. How do we involve local communities and actors who are best placed to identify the changes and measures to be adopted in their context? How do we ensure that the population, the authorities and donors have sufficient understanding of the risks and uncertainties related to the intervention? And above all, how do we encourage the active participation of all these stakeholders in order to mitigate risks and reduce resistance to change? Active participation also implies establishing two-way communication channels with all these stakeholders so that they know about the activities implemented and understand the changes made. How do we identify and take into account the doubts and questions of the different stakeholders in a complex situation? How do we ensure that the different groups directly or indirectly affected by a project understand the adjustments? How do we mobilise the necessary resources and time so that monitoring mechanisms have a real capacity to communicate about the information gathered and the decisions made?



2 Source - Quality & Accountability COMPASS Guide

Agile management is not possible without interaction with the stakeholders involved in the intervention. A good level of participation requires that each actor involved understands and supports the intervention, and the potential adjustments that will be necessary. In intervention zones where there is a high level of insecurity, communities and local authorities can play a vital mediation role between armed groups and aid organisations if they have been involved from the beginning of the project and recognise its added value.

Agile and local recruitment

Recruiting people who are able to react to changes is not enough. It is also necessary to recruit locally because agile management needs local networks, precise knowledge of the context, and significant personal investment to function.⁴⁷ When a person makes contact with a community, they often do so initially in their own name, and then later in the name of the organisation that they work for. This situation brings two types of risks: 1 Measures need to be taken to ensure that local members of a team are neutral (e.g. by comparing different sources of information). 2. These people's situation also should be taken into account when decisions are made because each decision made by the organisation can have major consequences for their personal lives.

⁴⁷ *Adaptive management: What it means for CSOs*, M. O' Donnell, BOND, 2016, p. 8.

Cooperation and interdependence

Agile management implies a continuous, high level of investment in networking and discussion with different stakeholders. Information and ideas need to circulate freely between stakeholders to reinforce trust and increase mutual understanding. More frequent communication between an operator and a donor can, for example, improve the capacity to modify budgets and results.⁴⁸

More generally, whether it concerns simple relations between the donor and the implementing agency, or more complex partnerships with a number of actors, it is important to try to harmonise the behaviour, the risk-taking capacity and the flexibility of the processes of all the actors concerned in order to be able to adopt an agile management approach⁴⁹.



Tools

A Guide to Hiring Adaptive Employees - USAID learning lab – This tool can help you increase your chances of selecting staff members skilled in adaptive management. It will help answer the questions: Which competencies should I recruit for in order to hire more adaptive employees? Which desired qualifications should I incorporate into position descriptions to attract adaptive employees? Which interview questions should I ask to screen for adaptive employee competencies?

<https://usaidlearninglab.org/library/hiring-adaptive-employees>

THE GOAL

Staying on course

If you go somewhere without knowing precisely why, there is a good chance that you will get lost on the way or that you will not arrive on time. So that this does not happen in a complex situation, an agile team needs to be able to identify the goal of an intervention as precisely as possible in order to be able to stay on course during periods of turbulence.

To do this, it is important to be able to answer the following questions⁵⁰ :

- Why are we taking part in this aid project?
- Who benefits from it, and how?
- What does 'completed' mean for this project?

Key actors

Faced with a complex situation, an aid project cannot be implemented without a precise understanding of the opinions and actions of the other stakeholders. What are the issues at stake for the different stakeholders in relation to our intervention? What other interventions are taking place and how can we create synergy with them, or even ask them for help if an adjustment implies that a different kind of expertise is needed? Do my partners have the same capacity to take risks as me and the same level of flexibility?⁵¹ How can we establish networks and reinforce collaborative approaches?

Clearly identifying the goal of an intervention can also help each member of a team and all the stakeholders to

⁴⁸ *Adaptive management: What it means for CSOs*, M. O' Donnell, BOND, 2016, p. 10.

⁴⁹ *Adaptive management: What it means for CSOs*, M. O' Donnell, BOND, 2016.

⁵⁰ *Agile Practice Guide*, Project Management Institute (PMI) & Agile Alliance, 2017, p. 63.

⁵¹ *Adaptive management: What it means for CSOs*, M. O' Donnell, BOND, 2016 p. 25

situate their actions, and the issues that they face, within a general and collective vision. Agile management needs to have detailed understanding of the intervention's stakeholders and the power issues at stake in order to be able to make the right decisions with the right people.



Tools

A change-oriented approach (or theory of change) – A good change-oriented approach is a means of testing verifiable hypotheses about what might 'work' in a complex environment.⁵²

F3E's PRISME project toolbox is aimed at those who want to begin implementing change-oriented approaches, whether to plan a change-oriented project or to monitor and evaluate the changes that their project has contributed to.

<https://f3e.asso.fr/boite-a-outils/>

IPAL: Developing a theory of change. A guide to developing a theory of change as a framework for inclusive dialogue, learning and accountability for social impact. <http://www.mspguide.org/resource/ipal-developing-theory-change-guide-developing-theory-change-framework-inclusive-dialogue-0>

Impact mapping – This tool (adapted to an aid project) helps to highlight the critical paths or key points to validate hypotheses. Knowing where we want to go, and which direction to take, in order to know as quickly as possible that it is the right path.

<https://pablopernot.fr/2017/02/cartographie-strategie-impact-mapping/>

<https://gojko.net/news/2016/05/09/open-impact-mapping.html>

<https://github.com/impactmapping>

Net-Map – This mapping tool helps you to understand, visualise, discuss and improve situations in which numerous different actors influence results. By mapping influence networks, individuals and groups can clarify their own vision of a situation, encourage discussion and develop a strategic approach to their activities in networks. This tool helps to establish what actors are involved in a given network, how they are linked, their influence and their objectives.

<https://netmap.wordpress.com/about/>

PLANNING

If "no plan survives first contact with the enemy" (Field Marshal Helmuth Carl Bernard von Moltke), then why and how should flexible intervention plans be developed, knowing that they are going to change?

Essential

Even though the intervention plan is going to change, the planning process is essential to anticipate these changes and involve the stakeholders who will drive these adjustments.

"The plan is nothing, planning is everything".
Dwight David Eisenhower

Progressive

Identifying problems and analysing possible responses is still necessary in agile management, but it is used to develop a plan that is flexible, progressive and as local as possible:

- **Flexible** – Agile planning is based on hypotheses rather than statements about how changes are going to take place. It also often includes testing of different approaches to confirm which ones work best in a specific

⁵² *Adaptive management: What it means for CSOs, M. O' Donnell, BOND, 2016 p. 8*

context.⁵³

- **Progressive** – Agile teams do not plan everything at once. On the contrary, they apply shorter planning cycles than usual to maintain and adapt strategic orientation. They plan a little, deliver, learn, and then plan again a little further along in a continuous cycle. Agile planning “uses a compass rather than a GPS”. Rather than define a specific path to reach a goal, agile planning identifies intermediate results ('milestones'), and organises planning cycles around these milestones.
- **Local** – Because the local context is crucially important in complex situations, agile planning fully recognises the importance of local actors' understanding of local dynamics.

Risk management

It is crucial that a detailed analysis of risks should be carried out in complex situations, with a view to establishing an anticipatory strategy. The aim should be to identify changes that could happen in the intervention context ('grey rhinos') and how to respond to each potential change. The identification of risks is constant in agile management: it is a daily task that is integrated into all aspects of the project, which therefore has to be constantly updated.

Black Swans and Grey Rhinos: Aid and the Challenges of Agility

The literature on risks includes a range of coloured animals to describe some of its concepts, and two of these are relevant to the issue of agility: the grey rhino and the black swan. The grey rhino is more or less certain to charge if you annoy it; it is therefore a certain and predictable risk, in the face of which you can take preventive action. (...) 'Black Swan' refers to an unpredictable event, of low probability (referred to as a 'rare event' in probability theory), which, if it takes place, can have potentially very serious consequences.

François Grünewald – HEM Agility, Quality and Accountability, Groupe URD - 2019

However, not everything can be anticipated. An 'adaptation strategy' also needs to be developed by reinforcing the capacity to react to 'surprises' that cannot be anticipated ('black swans'⁵⁴).

Negotiation

Recognising from the start that the intervention framework will have to change to adapt to how the situation evolves also means that a strong negotiation capacity is needed. How can projects be made more flexible by negotiating financial and reporting conditions that are adapted to the frequent changes in the context? How do we ensure that people have genuine negotiation skills to deal with uncertain situations?

Whether for the anticipation or the adaptation strategy, strong negotiation skills are needed to implement responses that are feasible and accepted by the different stakeholders involved in an intervention. Amongst other things, this implies that the relationship between operators and donors, which has considerable influence over the level of flexibility that is possible, should be reconsidered. A negotiation needs to take place before an intervention to establish levels of flexibility for financial and reporting procedures in relation to frequent changes in the context: what is the maximum level of flexibility between budget lines? Is it possible to include different types of intervention (new activities, changing intervention zones, etc.) without having to amend the contract if a change is made? How can 'development' activities be transformed into 'emergency relief' projects if there is a crisis? Etc.

⁵³ *Adaptive management: What it means for CSOs, M. O' Donnell, BOND, 2016 p. 8*

⁵⁴ *Pour plus d'informations sur la notion de « cygne noir », voir François Grünewald, Cygnes noirs et Courbe de Pareto, 2014, HEM - http://www.urd.org/fr/revue_humanitaires/cygnets-noirs-et-principe-de-pareto-se-preparer-a-l'imprevisible/*



Tools

Scenario planning – Projects need to be agile when operating in sensitive zones where a lot can happen to affect the implementation. Scenario planning can help a project continually adapt to changes in the context.

<https://www.urd.org/en/publication/multi-scenario-planning-in-north-nigeria-fao-2016/>

Agile roadmap – This tool (to be adapted for an aid project) provides a strategic overview of the direction of the product/service in the medium and long term. It guides the direction of your product and defines expectations within the organisation.

<https://www.smartsheet.com/free-product-roadmap-templates-smartsheet>

User story mapping – This tool (to be adapted to an aid project) allows the project to be split up into small sections which make sense in order to quickly learn and benefit from the implementation as early as possible.

<https://manifesto.co.uk/user-story-mapping/>

Risk management / Understanding – The link below provides a summary of the main issues at stake in managing risks.

<https://www.pmi.org/learning/library/risk-analysis-project-management-7070>

Negotiation – This resource from FAO is useful to learn about negotiation techniques.

<http://www.fao.org/3/a-ai052e.pdf>

<http://www.fao.org/3/a-ai052e.pdf>

ORGANISING

Working in a team

When faced with a complex situation, an agile team needs to define how to work together. The aim should be to clarify the following points⁵⁵ :

- The values of the team, such as “a sustainable work rate and fixed hours”;
- Work agreements, such as what is meant by ‘work completed’;
- Basic rules, such as for speaking in meetings;
- Group rules, such as how to manage the length of meetings.

In ‘agile’ project management methodologies in the private sector, these rules are accompanied by regular ‘collective events’ between members of a team. Without going as far as to copy all the meetings suggested, which can be very time-consuming, it can be very useful to include certain practices in team meetings, such as:⁵⁶

- **The retrospective** – This allows the team to analyse, improve and adapt the intervention. It involves observing qualitative data (people’s feelings) and quantitative data (measures), and using this data to find the causes of the difficulties identified, design counter measures and establish action plans.
- **The backlog** – The backlog is the prioritised list of all the work that a team has to do, presented in the form of expected outputs, or ‘stories’. This makes it possible to establish an anticipated sequence of outputs over time, and to re-plan it depending on the progress made by the team.
- **Daily standups** – Teams organise ‘daily standups’ or daily meet-ups of 15 minutes maximum in order to

⁵⁵ *Agile Practice Guide, Project Management Institute (PMI) & Agile Alliance, 2017, p. 63.*

⁵⁶ *Agile Practice Guide, Project Management Institute (PMI) & Agile Alliance, 2017, p. 65*

exchange, identify problems and ensure that work is carried out smoothly within the team. During this type of exchange, each person will answer questions such as, 'What did I finish yesterday?', 'What do I plan to finish today?', and 'What obstacles (risks or problems) do I have to deal with?'

Governance

Placing emphasis on changes during an operation has significant implications for stakeholders because each actor has the capacity to facilitate or block a change that has been decided. An 'authorisation environment' therefore needs to be put in place in which modifications can be made when justified.⁵⁷

This means clarifying levels of decision-making and flexibility between stakeholder categories and levels. For example:

- Allowing changes to be made to budgets, plans and objectives, when justified.
- Establishing a 'tolerance' level for decision-making as close to the ground as possible: what decisions, at what level? For adjustment measures to genuinely be implemented, decisions should be made by staff 'in the field', if possible. Delegating decisions to field staff nevertheless implies: 1. Continuous analysis of staff capacity, and 2. Supporting staff so that they feel they are able to take on this responsibility.
- Hold people responsible for what they have done, without focusing on whether they did exactly what they said they would do at the beginning of the operation, or whether they did it as they said they would.⁵⁸

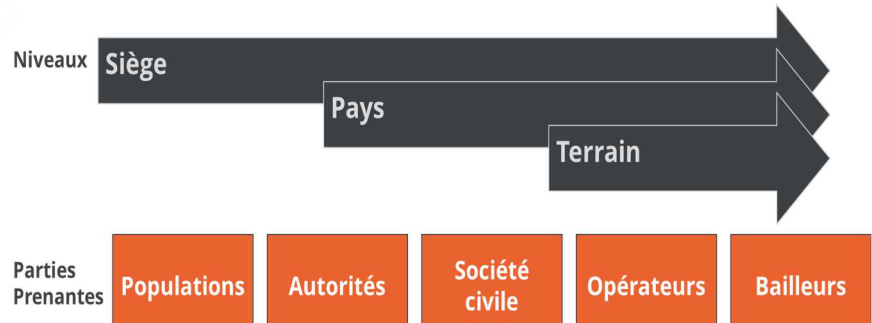


Schéma 2: Source - URD



Tools

Agile Project Charter – An Agile Project Charter fits into a single page. It is made up of three sections: the mission (the reason that the project exists), the vision (what will be done in the project), and success criteria (how the team should define a completed project).

<https://www.smartsheet.com/file/ic-agile-project-charter-template-8561xlsx>

Agile Team Working Agreement – An Agile Team Working Agreement is a document that is written and created by the members of a team themselves to provide a direction to follow and clarify interactions within the team during the project.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GxEC9aCi2QY>

Implementing an 'agile' project – implementation, monitoring and closure

Organisations can have difficulty adapting to changes and new information, particularly at the beginning and end of a crisis: how should we react proactively when needs increase or decrease drastically?⁵⁹ During the

⁵⁷ Adaptive management: What it means for CSOs, M. O' Donnell, BOND, 2016 p. 8

⁵⁸ Adaptive management: What it means for CSOs, M. O' Donnell, BOND, 2016 p. 8

⁵⁹ HEM 2018 – Adaptive management and programming: the humanitarian perspective – Alice Obrecht

implementation of an aid project, the different stakeholders involved have specific mandates that might limit their capacity to adapt. If the priority population in a specific operational area no longer corresponds to an operator's mandate or funding guidelines, is it still possible to adapt?

If an organisation does not specialise in the type of operation that has become the most relevant for the population (e.g. agricultural assistance), how should it adapt?⁶⁰ If an organisation is committed to providing assistance to a certain population group, how does it justify any changes that it makes, or stopping its project?

TESTING

Experimentation

An agile operation tries to adjust to uncertainty by testing one or more possibilities and by modifying its approach depending on the results of the experimentation. The experimentation can take two forms. It can be sequential, which involves testing an approach and then either modifying or changing it. Or it can be simultaneous, with several generally short and rapid experiments being carried out at the same time, in order to see which one, or which combination, works best; this is subsequently pursued and the others are stopped.⁶¹

Prioritisation

When implementing projects in complex contexts, there is a constant need to prioritise in order to choose the best path to follow. This prioritisation can take place on several levels, whether to classify the different steps of a project in terms of their importance, in order to deal with the most urgent ones first; or to modify the target groups of an operation or the type of changes that are expected; or to revise the way that an activity is implemented or a complete operation.

In agile management, priorities are established throughout the operation, as the context, needs and resources evolve.

The prioritisation of activities should at least be based on a clear overall objective and a target (or expected change) for each of the main activities. The term 'backlog' is used in agile methods to describe the prioritised list of all the work to be done by a team. This list is often presented in the form of a table divided into three sections: 'to do', 'in progress' and 'complete'. It is updated at the beginning of each new short planning cycle.

"What is important is seldom urgent, and what is urgent is seldom important"
Dwight David Eisenhower.

Different criteria can be used to prioritise activities:⁶²

- **Criticality** – Is the task critical in order to complete the project? What happens if it cannot be carried out?
- **Immediate implementation** – Can the task be implemented immediately or does it have any prerequisites? If a task requires several activities to be completed before it can start to be implemented, it will not be a priority.
- **Expected outcome** – Will the completion of this task really help to move the project forward? Is it a prerequisite for other activities?
- **Risk** – How likely is it that an activity will have negative impacts on the project if it is badly designed or implemented?
- **Impact** – What effect will an activity have if it is implemented (or not implemented) in relation to achieving the main objective?

⁶⁰ *Learning to make a difference Christian Aid Ireland's adaptive programme management in governance, gender, peace building and human rights*, ODI, Sept 2018, p. 9-10.

⁶¹ *Adaptive management: What it means for CSOs*, M. O' Donnell, BOND, 2016, p. 8

⁶² <https://www.nutcache.com/fr/blog/comment-prioriser/>

- **Understanding** – Is the expected added value of the activity clear or does it need to be clarified further?

Accessibility

Operating in complex contexts often involves dealing with accessibility issues in operational areas. In order to protect staff in increasingly unstable contexts, aid organisations have limited movement and have invested in specific operational methods, including activities to increase acceptance, and the implementation of remote management. These two activities are often implemented when an organisation has no other choice despite the fact that they usually require anticipation, major investment and time to succeed. They share several key factors of 'good' agile management: activities that are accepted by the local community; recruitment, training and maintenance of staff; reinforcement of local actors' roles; detailed knowledge of the context and flexible approaches.

An '**acceptance** approach' to security "attempts to negate a threat through building relationships with local communities and relevant stakeholders in the operational area, and obtaining their acceptance and consent for the organisation's presence and its work."⁶³ Different factors can reinforce an organisation's capacity to take action in complex contexts⁶⁴, such as:

- The relevance and quality of their operations;
- Constant consultation mechanisms and the creation of strategic partnerships at the local level;
- The capacity to monitor the level of acceptance;
- Ownership of the project by local communities in the operational area;
- The recruitment of staff and local partners who are representative of socio-cultural diversity in the operational area, and reinforcement of their capacities.

For a long time, **remote management** was considered to be a temporary measure, but with the increasing stability in many countries, it has become an unavoidable, long-term feature of numerous operations.⁶⁵ There are different forms and degrees of remote management that involve different forms of decision-making and implementation⁶⁶ :

	Decision-making process	Project implementation
Remote control	The majority of decisions are made by international managers who have been transferred to a safer environment. Limited delegation of decision-making	National/local staff
Remote management	Temporary and partial delegation of authority and responsibility to national staff after other staff members have been resettled in a safer environment. It is understood that decision-making will return to 'normal' once security problems have been resolved.	National/local staff, national/local organisations, or local sub-contractors
Remote support/oversight	Long-term strategy to transfer decision-making and authority to national/local actors, while financial and strategic oversight is maintained remotely.	National/local staff, national/local partner organisations, or local

⁶³ Van Brabant, K. (2010). *Operational Security Management in Violent Environments. Good Practice Review (New edition) 8*. London, UK: Humanitarian Policy Network (HPN)/Overseas Development Institute (ODI)

⁶⁴ For more information, see: *Delivering aid in highly insecure environments - a critical review of the literature, 2007 - 2012, Humanitarian Outcomes, Lisa Schreter and Adele Harmer, 2013, p. 18.*

⁶⁵ *Remote management of projects in fragile states, Siân Herbert, GSDRC helpdesk report, 2013.*

⁶⁶ *Remote management of projects in fragile states, Siân Herbert, GSDRC helpdesk report*

		subcontractors
Remote partnerships	Significant transfer of authority to local actors.	National/local partner organisation or subcontractor.
Source – Extract from <i>Remote management of projects in fragile states</i> , Siân Herbert, GSDRC helpdesk report, Adapted from Hansen, 2008: 5; Oxfam International & Merlin, 2009 ; Stoddard <i>et al.</i> , 2010.		



Tools

Backlog – This tool (to be adapted for aid projects) is a list of priority activities to be carried out during the next short cycle of the operation. At the end of the cycle, the list should be finalised (no one should add or remove any tasks at this stage).

<https://www.smartsheet.com/file/ic-agile-sprint-backlog-template-burndown-chart-8561xlsx>

Prioritisation of activities – The two most commonly used prioritisation techniques are: MOSCOW and the Eisenhower matrix. See the link below for more information.

<https://www.clearlyagileinc.com/agile-blog/agile-prioritization-matrix>

Learning from failure – An example can be found at the following link:

<https://www.admittingfailure.org/failure/james-ayers-2/>

LEARNING

In order to be able to adjust one or more operations in complex contexts at the right time requires a learning method that constantly looks for ways to improve, encourages the flexible implementation of operations and minimises obstacles to modification.⁶⁷ Agile teams need to learn permanently and use what they learn to constantly adjust their project.⁶⁸ To do this, they need to adapt their Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning mechanisms at different levels.

Monitoring – Taking action in an 'agile' manner implies prioritising performance based on results, rather than monitoring the means implemented to achieve these results. Certain donors have adopted this approach and apply 'results-based funding', whereby they are more flexible about operational methods and more demanding about what is achieved.⁶⁹ How can monitoring mechanisms be revised to make them 'change-oriented' so that they can question the solutions that are proposed to achieve these changes? How should the different, evolving expectations of stakeholders in an unstable context be taken into account?

⁶⁷ USAID - <https://usaidlearninglab.org/qrg/adaptive-management> *The ability to adapt requires an environment that promotes intentional learning and flexible project and activity design, minimises the obstacles to modifying programming, and creates incentives for managing adaptively.*

⁶⁸ *How Adaptive Management is challenging the monitoring and evaluation of complex programmes* 18th May, 2018 By Nigel Simister <https://www.intrac.org/adaptive-management-challenging-monitoring-evaluation-complex-programmes/>

⁶⁹ HEM 2018 - *Gestion et programmation adaptatives : la perspective humanitaire*

More generally, a culture of continuous learning and improvement needs to be established to encourage staff to constantly think about how to get better. This change in culture implies that every actor in the intervention chain has the capacity to take risks and accept failure. How do we accept that an error is possible, or even probable, because the need to take action justifies this possibility? How do we encourage the timely recognition of failure so that an operation can be adjusted and people's priority needs can be met more effectively?

"Adaptation has to occur in response to learning and feedback – it is not chaotic improvisation."
Adaptive management: What it means for CSOs, M. O'Donnell, BOND, 2016

Supporting (continuous) decision-making during implementation

Focusing more on the initial assessment phase helps to improve understanding of the context, needs and resources, but does not always lead to better design and more relevant projects in complex and unstable contexts.⁷⁰ This additional focus at the start is not enough: information needs to be collected, analysed and used throughout the operation, in short and regular cycles. Monitoring and evaluation also need to be fully integrated into planning and learning in order to test, analyse and re-plan during the project.

Flexible and empirical measures

A more enlightened approach that remains linear will not always be relevant⁷¹. Agile management requires evolving Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning mechanisms. Though agile management can help to adjust a project in a complex context, it requires flexible information management mechanisms, that is to say, mechanisms that are capable of finding and sharing priority information even if this has changed since the beginning of the project.



Schéma 3: Source - <https://zenkit.com/en/blog/keep-track-of-your-scrum-project-with-a-burndown-chart/>

Agile management gives priority to empirical measurements over predictive measurements. What the team has achieved is measured rather than what it planned to achieve.⁷² In the private sector, agile management focuses on the 'burndown chart' (see opposite), that is to say the comparative monitoring of what is planned compared to what is achieved from the list of project outputs.

⁷⁰ Adaptive management: What it means for CSOs, M. O' Donnell, BOND, 2016, p. 10.

⁷¹ Adaptive management: What it means for CSOs, M. O' Donnell, BOND, 2016, p. 10.

⁷² Agile Practice Guide, Project Management Institute (PMI) & Agile Alliance, 2017.

Identifying the relations between cause and effect

In agile management, evaluation is still important, but the methods used need to be adapted. Traditional mid-term or end of project evaluations are replaced by iterative evaluations based on short learning cycles.⁷³ Certain evaluation approaches, such as randomised control trials, are not appropriate in a situation where it is not always possible to collect data for control groups and to maintain constant variables⁷⁴. As such, it may be more relevant to use approaches that do not have pre-established indicators such as 'outcome harvesting'.

Remote M&E

In many complex contexts, monitoring and evaluation are carried out remotely. Very often this involves the use of 'non-traditional' methods involving external organisations or individuals – 'third party monitoring' – or the establishment of independent beneficiary feedback systems.⁷⁵

Focus on higher-level outcomes

Because course corrections are the norm rather than the exception, there is little point in holding NGOs that are implementing complex programmes accountable for pre-defined activities or outputs.

Instead, accountability to donors or funders needs to focus on higher-level outcomes / impact (...) or on how well a programme learns and adapts in pursuit of its goals.

<https://www.intrac.org/adaptive-management-challenging-monitoring-evaluation-complex-programmes/>



Tools

Outcome mapping – Approaches that support (continuous) decision-making during implementation by highlighting changes in behaviour by the people or organisations targeted by the project.

www.outcomemapping.ca

Sentinel indicators – see, for example, the sentinel indicators from the COMPASS toolbox

<https://www.urd.org/en/news/a-series-of-tools-to-improve-your-organisations-internal-functioning-and-project-management/>

Iterative evaluations with feedback sessions (EIMS) - <https://www.urd.org/en/activity/evaluations/>

Outcome harvesting, Most significant change – These approaches are used to collect, interpret and analyse changes.

https://www.betterevaluation.org/en/plan/approach/outcome_harvesting

<https://www.betterevaluation.org/en/search/site/most%20significant%20change>

Lesson sharing – Guidance and examples are available on the ALNAP website-

<https://www.alnap.org/help-library/lessons-papers-a-methods-note>

Strategy Testing (ST) – A monitoring system established by 'Asia Foundation' specifically for complex development problems based on an agile approach.

<https://asiafoundation.org/resources/pdfs/AnInnovativeApproachtoMonitoringHighlyFlexibleAidPrograms.pdf>

⁷³ For more information, see: Rogers, P (2017). [Does evaluation need to be done differently to support adaptive management?](#) *Better Evaluation*

⁷⁴ <https://www.odi.org/blogs/10588-monitoring-and-evaluation-five-reality-checks-adaptive-management> *Monitoring and evaluation: five reality checks for adaptive management* 14 December 2017 [Tiina Pasanen](#)

⁷⁵ *Delivering aid in highly insecure environments - a critical review of the literature, 2007 - 2012, Humanitarian Outcomes*, Lisa Schreter and Adele Harmer, 2013, p. 32

ADAPTING

Different levels of decision-making

During a comparative study of three 'agile' case studies, Oxfam highlighted three decision-making levels for an agile approach:

1. 'Adaptive delivery' which corresponds to the daily work of operational teams in the field. These teams continuously navigate through a fog of constantly changing conditions and power dynamics.
2. 'Adaptive programming' is a slower and more structured process which is generally in the hands of the 'country' management team.
3. 'Adaptive governance' is usually the responsibility of donor representatives in charge of funding the operation and monitoring its development. They have to deal with pressure from their hierarchy to achieve results and they have to ensure that the funded organisation is accountable for the way donors' money is spent, and at the same time, they have to maintain the strategic room for manoeuvre that is central to an agile approach.

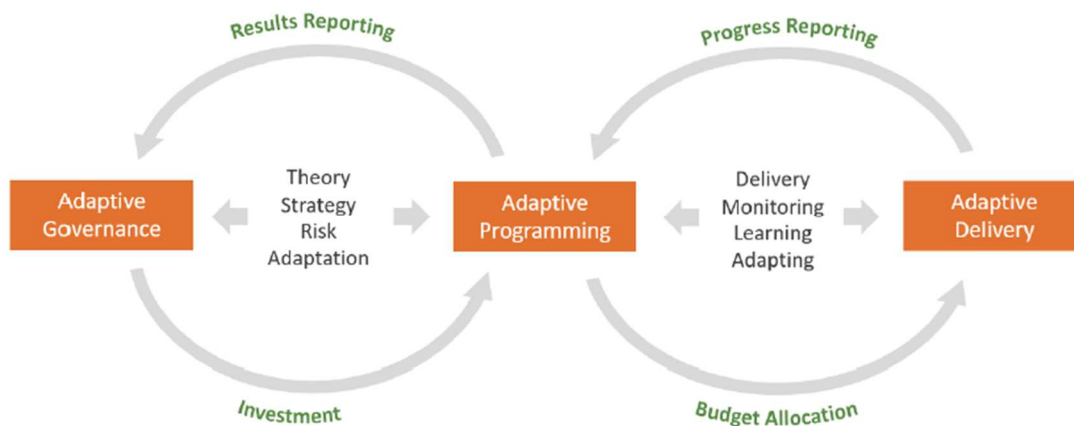


Figure 4 Source - Oxfam - *The Adaptive Management Life Cycle – The interplay between adaptive governance, adaptive programming and adaptive delivery*

The relationship between these three levels is constantly evolving and can be complicated: in agile management, *responsibility for decision-making is delegated to staff as close to implementation of work as possible, recognising that those close to the intervention are thought to have the best knowledge of circumstances*⁷⁶. This implies that decision making has to be adjusted depending on existing capacities, while responsibility for these decisions needs to be taken at every level.

Different decision-making dimensions⁷⁷

Decisions about adjustments can generally be split into two categories that do not have the same impact, and consequently are not made at the same level: tactical and strategic adjustments:

- **Tactical** – Modifying operational issues (e.g. opening hours of clinics, or location of wells).
- **Strategic** – More in-depth corrections that have a bearing on the relevance of the project results, the target group or the location.

⁷⁶ *Adaptive management: What it means for CSOs*, M. O' Donnell, BOND, 2016, p. 26.

⁷⁷ *Adaptive management: What it means for CSOs*, M. O' Donnell, BOND, 2016, p. 8.

The decision-making process

Agility brings new challenges for operators and donors: it is a question of making the right decisions at the right time despite the fact that the information available is often incomplete. Forty years ago, Robert Chambers developed the principle of 'optimal ignorance', or the idea of what needs to be known to make a decision. Agile management requires that we clarify the 'level of optimal ignorance' at each level of the organisation: what framework can be put in place to delegate decision making in a responsible manner as close to the implementation of work as possible? How do we promote brave decisions in the face of uncertainty? How do we combine the uncertainty of operations in complex contexts with tax-payers' and donors' expectation that they will see clear and tangible results?

In complex contexts, evidence is often incomplete, contradictory or contested. Situations can be very different depending on the point of view of the stakeholder, and there is a risk that those with most power (or those that make the most noise) will manipulate the decision-making process.⁷⁸ Organisations therefore need to ensure that different points of view are taken into account, while at the same time accepting that there will be some risk. Agility is based on an empirical form of decision making. All decisions are based on two premises⁷⁹: 1. Knowledge comes from experience, and 2. Decisions are made based on what is known.



Tools

Knowing When to Adapt - A Decision Tree – USAID learning lab – This guide can help to decide the best way to resolve a problem during the implementation of an operation.

<https://usaidealarninglab.org/library/known-when-adapt-decision-tree>

COMMUNICATING

Making the right decisions at the right time is not enough. These decisions also need to be understood and accepted by internal and external actors.

Internal communication⁸⁰

Decisions will have consequences for the staff implementing a project, and also for support staff (finance, logistics, etc.). Some of these decisions may require adjustments to be made to procedures that are most often designed for a stable and predictable context. Support staff therefore need to be involved as early as possible and all decisions need to be clearly explained internally. Close collaboration with the implementation staff can help to improve understanding of the possible level of flexibility, to find creative solutions if necessary, and to transform these solutions into appropriate and realistic actions.

External communication⁸¹

All changes need to be explained to the different stakeholders by means of active communication. Possible adjustments need to be prepared and communicated in advance. Certain changes can modify an operation significantly: if assistance to a population group has to stop and the initial commitments of the project are compromised, their participation is absolutely essential so that this radical decision is understood.

It is always essential to build and maintain strong relations in order to establish trust between the different

⁷⁸ <https://www.intrac.org/adaptive-management-challenging-monitoring-evaluation-complex-programmes/>

How Adaptive Management is challenging the monitoring and evaluation of complex programmes
18th May, 2018 By Nigel Simister

⁷⁹ <https://gaiagile.com/2019/01/03/lindispensable-etape-de-priorisation/>

⁸⁰ *Adaptive management: What it means for CSOs*, M. O' Donnell, BOND, 2016, p. 9.

⁸¹ <https://oxfamblogs.org/fp2p/what-have-we-learned-from-a-close-look-at-3-dfid-adaptive-management-programmes/>

stakeholders, particularly in an unstable context that can create a lot of tension. The importance of communication should not be underestimated: it requires time, energy... and endurance, because it needs to be constant; there should be no hesitation in starting from scratch with the arrival of each new individual or organisation.

'Agile' or 'adaptive' management



Siège du Groupe URD
La Fontaine des Marins
26170 Plaisians – France
Tel : +33 (0)4 75 28 29 35

urd@urd.org

www.urd.org

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