What is agile?

Agile working is about bringing people, processes, connectivity and technology, time and place together to find the most appropriate and effective way of working to carry out a particular task. It is working within guidelines (of the task) but without boundaries (of how you achieve it).

An Agile Organization is one that can quickly respond to changes. The 'agile organization' focuses on the customer. A highly agile organization reacts successfully to the emergence of new competitors, rapid advancements in technology and sudden shifts in overall market conditions.

4 principles of an agile organization:

1. Individuals and Interactions Over Processes and Tools
2. Working Solutions Over Comprehensive Documentation
3. Customer Collaboration Over Contract Negotiation
4. Responding to Change Over Following a Plan

1. Individuals and Interactions Over Processes and Tools

The first value in the Agile Manifesto is "Individuals and interactions over processes and tools. "Valuing people over processes or tools is easy to understand because it is the people who respond to business needs and drive the development process. If the process or the tools drive development, the team is less responsive to change and less likely to meet customer needs. Communication is an example of the difference between valuing individuals over processes. In the case of individuals, communication is fluid and happens when a need arises. In the case of a process, communication is scheduled and requires specific content.

2. Working Solutions Over Comprehensive Documentation

Historically, enormous amounts of time were spent on documenting the product for development and ultimate delivery. The list was extensive and was a cause for the long delays in development. Agile does not eliminate documentation, but it streamlines it in a form that gives the developer what is needed to do the work without being slowed down by the nitty-gritty. Agile documents requirements as user stories, which are sufficient for a software developer to begin the task of building a new function. The Agile Manifesto values documentation, but it values working software more.

3. Customer Collaboration Over Contract Negotiation

Negotiation is the period in which details of delivery work and in which details may be renegotiated along the way. With development models such as Waterfall, customers negotiate the requirements for the product, often in great detail, prior to any work starting. This means the customer was involved before development began and after it was completed, but not during the process. The Agile Manifesto describes a customer who is engaged and collaborates throughout the development process. This makes it far easier for development to meet the customer's needs. Agile methods may also include the customer at intervals for periodic demos, but a project could just also have an end-user as a daily part of the team and attending all meetings, ensuring the product meets the business needs of the customer.

4. Responding to Change Over Following a Plan

Traditional software development regarded change as an expense, so it was to be avoided. The intention was to develop detailed, elaborate plans, with a defined set of features and with everything, generally, having as high a priority as everything else, and with a large number of dependencies on delivering in a certain order so that the team can work on the next piece of the puzzle. With Agile, the shortness of an iteration means priorities can be shifted from iteration to iteration and new features can be added into the next iteration. Agile's view is that changes always improve a project; changes provide additional value.