



## Agile (+)

**Agile** - a more nimble, iterative approach to getting things done

**( + )** - the military symbol for reinforced; to strengthen or support

### Introduction

Gaining a technological edge is a strategic necessity in our increasingly digital world. This is especially true for the U.S. government. Not only is their “IT workforce drain a ‘creeping’ crisis bigger than Y2K<sup>1</sup>,” according to former United States Chief Information Officer (CIO) Tony Scott, but the prevalent ‘waterfall’ management process is not keeping pace with the digital demands of Americans, either. **Citizens have new needs and expectations from government - outmoded IT processes need to transform and adapt to the Digital Age.** This potential crisis is in fact a tremendous opportunity for government to not only replenish their ranks with forward-thinking technical professionals (developers, technical architects, and user experience, to name a few), but empower an untapped crop of Agile personnel to lead them.

### Why Scrum?

With its demonstrated success over the past quarter-century in the private sector, Agile is increasingly sought after by federal agencies. Scrum, a subset of Agile and “the leading agile development methodology,” is a productivity and value-delivery multiplier “used by Fortune 500 companies around the world,” according to the ScrumAlliance.org. (For a primer on Scrum, see my previous point-of-view paper, Transform with Scrum<sup>2</sup>.) Private companies from tech to health

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.fedscoop.com/scott-says-workforce-drain-bigger-problem-y2k/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.onpointcorp.com/transform-with-scrum-an-onpoint-point-of-view/>

care have adopted Scrum to deliver value on complex IT projects via continuous improvement, *and* make their management and delivery processes more efficient - converting capital into fatter and faster profits. Now one of the fastest growing 'management' frameworks in business today, Scrum is well-positioned to transform the government IT space.

Agile is already a part of the Department of Defense (DOD) CIO's 10-Point Plan for IT Modernization, but there is a shortage of successful practitioners ready to 'enable Agile IT' and 'strengthen IT governance' with a ready, Agile force. **Today's transitioning military personnel can fill the Scrum leadership gap that is in high demand.**

### **Why Veterans?**

With their leadership training, management experience, real-world collaboration and decision making skills, many vets already have much in common with Agile doctrines. For instance, military personnel rely on small, co-located teams working in parallel to get things done. Missions are broken down into the smallest assignments so that eventually everyone knows what she must do for mission accomplishment. Scrum teams are organized in a similar manner to promote a bias for action, an innovative environment, and quicker problem-solving.

**Training tech-savvy, results-oriented veterans in Agile principles is the optimum intersection for strengthening the federal environment IT space and giving many transitioning veterans purpose, employment, and commercially significant training and experience.** Doing so would put a premium on more efficient and value-based delivery (also a benefit to tax payers), and give vets a marketable, professional competency to harness in society.

Another Agile trait attributed to the military is the **OODA loop** – Observe, Orient, Decide, Act (repeat). First used by military pilots to maintain constant situational awareness, the OODA loop is still taught to small-unit leaders as an approach to remain hyper-vigilant in a dynamic battlespace.

Similarly, Scrum follows the principle of constant **Inspection and Adaptation** to rapidly respond to change and **deliver value**, a necessity in today's competitive digital economy.

Although it fluctuates year to year, there are upwards of 200,000 U.S. service members returning to civilian life each year<sup>3</sup>. Within this group is a talented pool of individuals who offer relevant skillsets ideally suited to the Agile marketplace.

It's clear why government wants to go Agile. According to the *11<sup>th</sup> Annual State of Agile Report*, the top benefits for adopting this iterative approach to getting things done are **accelerated delivery, better project visibility, improved team productivity, and management of changing priorities**. Government is often slow to adopt new technologies and ways to operate, but there are now numerous case studies of Scrum implementation for government leaders to follow to minimize risk. Large organizations that have successfully adopted Agile include Ericsson, the international telecommunications giant, with over 100 small teams using Agile<sup>4</sup>; the music sharing site, Spotify; Barclays, the international bank; and a little company named, Microsoft.

What began as a software development method has grown to a variety of industries. And according to the latest *State of Agile Report*, 60% of these organizations are still maturing in their Agile capability. But since government makes up only 5% of all the organizations that consider themselves Agile, they will be competing with these maturing organizations to recruit, retain, and train the same pool of Agile resources. By offering familiar federal benefits from the vets' time in service (affordable insurance, pension, GI Bill, etc.), government could be an attractive employer to vets wanting to continue their service as an Agile civilian. Doing so would strengthen and support a weakening IT infrastructure with a force multiplier of productivity and value delivery.

## **Agile Reinforced**

All successful companies want the same thing – to deliver value to their customers, have productive and happy employees, and to continually improve. Agile is designed for all of these, with many more documented benefits. But perhaps the best thing about Agile is that it generally

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.jpmorganchase.com/corporate/news/stories/gen-odierno.htm>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.forbes.com/sites/stevedenning/2016/11/26/can-big-organizations-be-agile/#2a671fdc38e7>

results in higher team morale. According to the Harvard Business Review<sup>5</sup>, employees on Agile projects are usually much happier compared with the ‘old school’ waterfall method, due to the time-boxed, value-based and flexible team-empowering approach.

Similarly, in a recent report highlighting the 5 qualities that make up the most high-performing teams<sup>6</sup> - **dependability, structure and clarity (i.e., focus on mission), meaning, impact, and an innovative approach to solving unique problems** - are also qualities arguably cultivated in an Agile environment. Smart, motivated military vets are a capable resource pool who stand ready to solve the problem of too few Scrum practitioners and foster a new culture in government emphasizing high performing teams.

## The Benefits

Government will have to make their salaries more competitive if they’re to attract the best and brightest. Although the purpose-filled work of government could be an attractive benefit to

In Agile parlance, a ‘Scrum Master’ employs Agile methods to lead teams, solve problems, and get things done.

A ‘Product Owner’ ensures the right product gets built, so they make sure everyone understands the project’s vision.

some, others vets will rightfully seek fair compensation for this in-demand skill. A quick job search of open ‘Agile’ positions turns up over 70,000 results - and nearly all offer salaries over \$80,000. The average salary for an *Agile Certified Scrum Master* is \$87,157<sup>7</sup>. Depending on your location, these salaries are often over \$100,000. An *Agile Product Owner* averages \$101,166 per year<sup>8</sup>.

Although there are now over 125,000 people with Professional Scrum certifications<sup>9</sup>, there’s clearly a widening gap as Scrum is being adopted by more and more companies. So, there is

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<sup>5</sup> <https://hbr.org/2016/05/embracing-agile>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.inc.com/michael-schneider/google-thought-they-knew-how-to-create-the-perfect.html?cid=cp01002fastco>

<sup>7</sup> [https://www.payscale.com/research/US/Job=Certified\\_Scrummaster\\_\(CSM\)/Salary](https://www.payscale.com/research/US/Job=Certified_Scrummaster_(CSM)/Salary)

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.indeed.com/salaries/Product-Owner-Salaries?from=serpsalaryblock>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.scrum.org/certification-list>

tremendous opportunity for innovative government leaders to get ahead of this rising trend. Injecting government with a skilled force of Agile veterans could be the great disruption necessary to ensure a competitive technological advantage in our digital era.

Although 98% of respondents in the recent *State of Agile* report said they achieved success from their Agile project, it isn't a perfect management cure-all. Scrum works best in small teams, and government of course doesn't operate as a small, nimble organization. Implementing Scrum within larger companies faces several complexities due to its inherent qualities that are harder to implement within larger group dynamics, though it is possible to scale Scrum (see the Scaled Agile Framework, SAFe<sup>10</sup>.)

There are also complex problems when it comes to improving the government acquisition lifecycle, budget allocation, and the general resistance to change inside the Beltway that could derail the creation of federal Scrum teams. And there have been other management and efficiency trends that have enticed government agencies with similar promises of quicker, more effective delivery. Even Waterfall, when applied to the right type of project, can be an optimum project management method. But with its emphasis on capturing data to improve performance and the increasing amount of qualitative and quantitative evidence touting its strengths, Agile demonstrates exceptional potential if appropriately harnessed – and led – in government.

### **How Vets can get Agile (i.e., What Government should look for)**

Most (52%) Agile projects base their success on whether or not they have an effective Agile coach, according to the latest *State of Agile* report. So how can vets 'get Agile'? There are several reputable certifications vets could pursue to position themselves as Scrum leaders. These include:

- *Certified Scrum Master* from ScrumAlliance.com
- *Certified Product Owner* from ScrumAlliance.com

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<sup>10</sup> <http://www.scaledagileframework.com/>

- *Professional Scrum Master* from Scrum.org
- *Professional Scrum Product Owner* from Scrum.org
- *Agile Certified Practitioner* from PMI.org
- See more from ScrumStudy.com

Perhaps with the government's unique IT needs, a new, tailored certification can be created to facilitate a Scrum-Government career track. The real strength of Scrum will also be realized once its leaders go through enough projects, or iterations, to refine their skills and ultimately increase their velocity – or value delivery – for pressing public-sector problems. Another benefit of Agile is that it encourages experienced practitioners to customize agile practices (over time) to increase velocity (or operating efficiency) and best suit the needs of the team.

Success like this attracts attention, and the federal government is finally taking the initial steps to catch up. The impending crisis of an IT workforce drain should be the catalyst to unite IT modernization efforts with large-scale Scrum training for interested and well-suited transitioning military personnel. Agile is a part of the digital transformation disrupting the world today and has tremendous growth potential in both the public and private sectors. Although the fundamentals will always remain the same, Agile leaders are needed to serve the continually evolving IT needs of our federal government. Vets are well-suited to help usher in this necessary and worthwhile change.

## **Contact Us**

To transform your agency to better meet the needs of your workforce and the citizen experience, you'll need proven change agents. OnPoint supports Scrum, Agile, Scaled Agile Framework (or SAFe), and lean projects with the federal government, all with an emphasis on ensuring secure digital experiences.

OnPoint Consulting, Inc (OnPoint) is the national security arm of Sapient Consulting, delivering secure IT infrastructure, enterprise systems and solutions for the U.S. federal government. Our specialized strategy, cyber and technology capabilities are changing the way our clients improve

performance, effectively deliver results and manage risk. OnPoint holds ISO 9001:2008, ISO 20000-1:2011, ISO 27001:2013 certifications and a CMMI Maturity Level 3 rating.

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