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Whitepaper

# Sizing Up the Agile Project Management (AgPM) Space

*An Intellyx Profiler™ Buyer's Guide*

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## Agile development practices are nothing new.

Practically every company is operating some level of in-house software development function these days. Developers generally experience higher job satisfaction when working in an Agile shop, so agile methodology has moved from the domain of leading-class companies into mainstream adoption.

Early Agile developers were resistant to the idea that you could buy software to 'start doing Agile' because the methodology is about people collaborating, not the tools they use. Still, agile teams needed systems of record for collaboration, feature or story creation, planning and development artifacts. Often, managers cobbled these necessary functions together from existing support tracking tools, wikis, spreadsheets and Project documents – or with whiteboards and sticky notes.

Newer project management and work process tools arose, either focused on Agile specifically, or far broader in scope to cover all IT delivery functions. Success and adoption varied widely. We're still far from done with optimization at this stage.

Enter a new class of products for **Agile Project Management (AgPM)**, solutions ready for the future of SaaS and cloud-based application delivery, for managing multiple stories, tasks and possibly widely distributed teams in order to accelerate software design and delivery.

This brief Intellyx Profiler<sup>™</sup> will simply address some of the key challenges and feature considerations in play when sizing and selecting an Agile Project Management solution.



# Agile in any form: AgPM minimum requirements

The minimum requirements of an AgPM solution should be limited in scope to what Agile project teams need, to avoid confusion with much broader enterprise application delivery, deployment, and IT management tool suites.

## The AgPM system shall:

- Provide a shared team site or board for creating and tracking the progress of Agile stories and projects
- Allow timelines, priorities and resources to be assigned for development work as iterations or tasks
- Provide interaction or integration with repositories of development artifacts (code, documentation, packages) as a system of record
- Allow timely system notifications and alerts, and provide relevant communication between team members (in the communication channels of choice - email, Slack, Google Chat, etc.)
- Provide metrics or analytics to assess team performance (with the goal of improving it, hopefully!)

Note how the above seems to leave many software delivery functions off the table - for instance test suites and APM (application performance management), or Configuration Management - which may describe assets, or tasks of the work to be done, rather than the function of the AgPM system itself.

AgPM does not necessarily dictate CI/CD or DevOps practices and tool chains, but it should support their progression alongside the level of maturity of the organization. Nor should the project management tool dictate that the company deliver mobile-first apps in SaaS form, with a Cloud-Native paradigm. Desktop, mainframe and even blockchain dev teams could all draw benefits from an AgPM solution.

At the end of the day, there's still a need to design, code, test and ship better software, faster, whether coding in Java, C#, Clojure, Rust or RPC. If the code assets



can be stored in a repository, they should be fair game for AgPM solutions to manage the people checking them in.

What's most important here is finding a solution, or a set of related solutions, that fits your team's style, so everyone can work together efficiently.

## Seven Style Criteria to scorecard in selecting an AgPM solution

Why is it hard to agree upon a shared solution for Agile Development, if the methodology itself is practically par for the course? It turns out there are several factors that make such a decision a little more difficult than other spaces.

Consider the importance of these seven AgPM solution criteria as you compare solutions against your own team's needs. We'll later scorecard these criteria on a 1-to-5 point scale, 1 being lowest priority and 5 being highest.

- **Organization (O):** How much organizational control is needed? Are team members rather autonomous, and therefore making them follow a rigorous plan is like herding cats? Or, are they more hierarchical, with management layers, and team leads perhaps waiting for clear direction? As your organization evolves it may also expect development performance to feed into overall corporate performance and governance goals with higher levels of scrutiny.
- **Velocity (V):** Everyone says they need to go faster, but how do you balance speed with risk? How much hands-on time should developers spend per task or interaction, or iteration with the AgPM tool? This priority encompasses ease-of-use (recognition time and number of clicks needed), additional compliance audits or test times, and literal app performance (UI responsiveness and data trip times).
- **Scale (S):** Agility at large scale isn't simple. Does the solution need to support one tiger team, or 100? How many workstreams, how much data needs to be brought forward? Is the AgPM solution supporting a pure software development or product play, or managing development atop an enterprise portfolio of existing apps and technology?



- **Adoption (A):** Ease-of-adoption by team users across systems and form factors is critical to allow cross-team collaboration. Do you need to self-start, and how much training is acceptable? Without ease-of-adoption you may suffer being held back by the least agile link' in your delivery chain.
- **Integration (I):** How does the solution interact with your existing code and test artifacts and repositories, preferred communication channels, security and governance processes? A large org may need to ingest data from and integrate with many technologies, whereas an early-stage small team has more green-field leeway at first. Still, might the solution 'lock out' later integration with other tools of choice if you adopt?
- **Cost (C):** If bottom-line per-user price is important for getting started (cost of entry), what are additional purchasing considerations (or total cost of ownership) if the team scales, or if activity scales? Account for any additional maintenance fees, training or implementation costs when assessing your cost sensitivity.
- **Reputation (R):** How important is certified support to success? Are teams natural do-it-yourselfers, or do they demand expanded services and training from the vendor? Are there special compliance, regional location, or security requirements for the solution?



# Sizing the solution: Three team profiles

## How big is your team?

Team profiles will impact priorities every time. A small startup team designing net-new apps has very different needs than a mid-sized organization seeking to rapidly add new software and service capabilities, which also differs from a large team building atop an expansive estate of data centers and cloud services.

Let's not equate team size with the company's actual size though, as many large enterprises create small autonomous Innovation Center teams, and some mid-sized companies are very IT-intensive and have large teams.

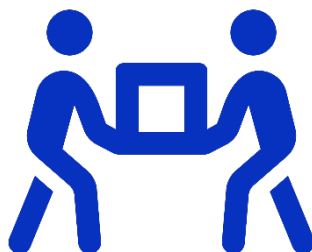
For the purposes of this paper, 'Team Size' refers to the number of fellow development or IT delivery team members the project manager might interact with on a regular basis through an AgPM solution, including other parallel or partner teams.

## Three Team Size Profiles



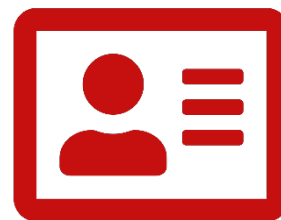
### Small

(1-10 developers)



### Medium

(10-250)



### Large

(250+)




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## Small team (1-10 developers) profile

**Small teams** are generally very self-sufficient and have few

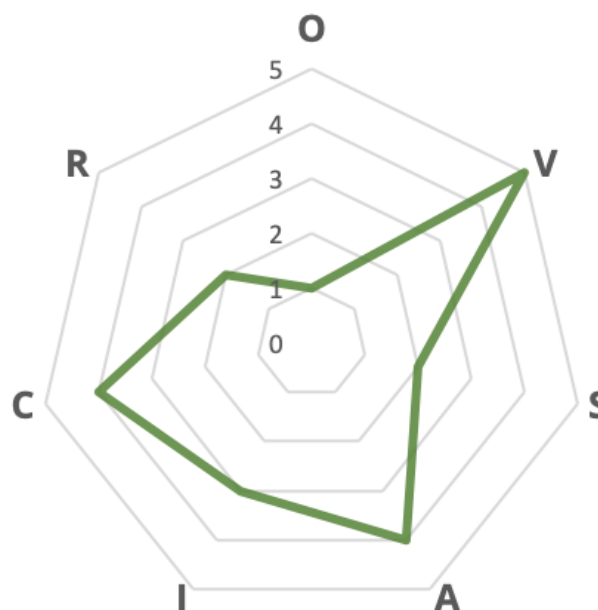
Organizational (1), Scale (2) and Integration (2) constraints to changing or starting on a new AgPM solution. No need for an overabundance of management reports here. Time-to-release is everything.

Most critical for small teams: Velocity (5) and ease of Adoption (4). With everyone likely wearing multiple hats, an AgPM tool will help keep the small team focused on completing tasks and iterations for trial-balloon customer functional releases, perhaps with a little less emphasis on tracking overall PM or development org efficiency.

Cost (4) of entry is a big deal in most small teams with tight budgets, so free trials, open source tool readiness, and low introductory sized team pricing are always appreciated here. Reputation (2) isn't as important to the small team beyond the success testimony of peer companies, in a DIY culture the primary concern is how well the solution accelerates development in practice.

**Sample vendors** in the small team space include GitHub Projects for repository and issues, Task Management tools like Asana or Basecamp, or easy Scrum and Kanban tools such as Trello, ScrumDo, Microsoft Planner and other MS Office tools. AgPM solution vendor Clubhouse even offers the startup enticement of zero-cost pricing for small teams.

### Small Team Profile




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## Medium team (10-250 developers) profile

The medium-sized team is growing its capabilities at warp-speed Velocity

(4), but is generally in the greatest need for Organizational (5) alignment around work.

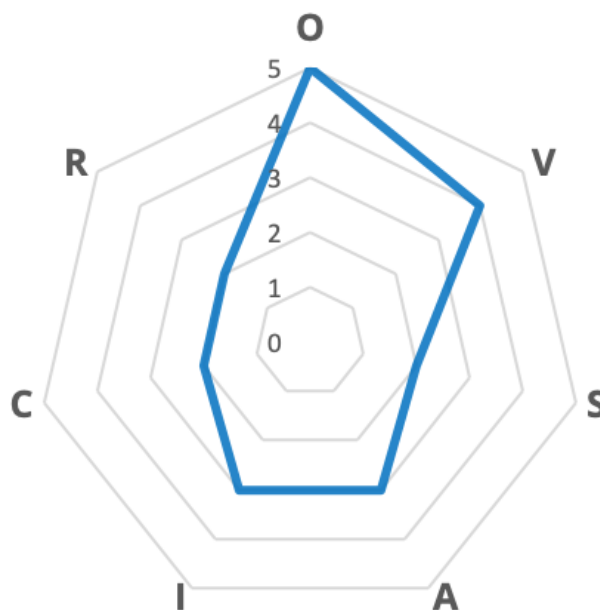
This organization emphasis may seem more like a Large team requirement, but medium-sized teams have the most to lose by moving down the wrong design path for very long, so keeping everyone aligned on fast, customer-driven iterations that will contribute to successful product epics is critical.

Integration (3) and Adoption (3) are also growing in importance, as projects become more complex. Project managers want one view of the truth for all developer activities, with tighter ties to repositories and version control.

Reputation (2), Scale (2), and Cost (2) are important but not usually deciding factors for medium teams, who expect to make some investment in project tooling to manage valuable development time. Still, mid-size companies do need to look out for potential price 'gotchas' or service cost creep based on increasing usage. They expect responsive online support and a good knowledgebase behind the AgPM solution.

**Sample vendors** for Medium Team profiles offer more strongly purpose-built services and tools for software development project tracking and communication, and include [Clubhouse](#), GitLab and Pivotal Tracker.

### Medium Team Profile






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## Large (250+ developers) team profile

Effective development project management takes on board-level importance in the Large team.

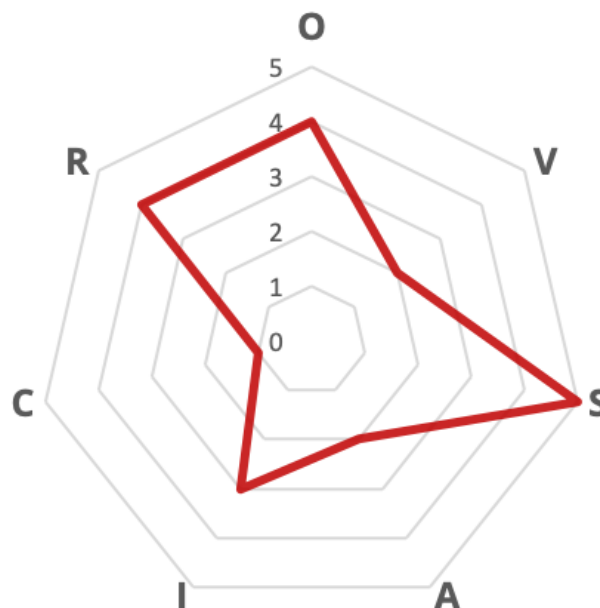
Organizational (4) strength at Scale (5) requires enterprise-grade Integration (3) across ITSM, ITOM, and existing legacy technology, enforcing process across business silos if the solution is going to move the needle for overall team productivity

Reputation (4) is also crucial as large teams usually demand SLAs, dedicated support, failsafes and risk mitigation, adherence to standards and compliance-ready auditability from their PM solutions.

Successful Adoption (2) and Velocity (2) are still important end results for larger enterprise teams, but large teams can usually invest in professional education and set incentives to promote usage. Large teams often manage multi-dimensional projects in terms of “Value Stream Management” and measure the overall organization’s value delivered back to the company. Cost (1) is a factor for ROI calculation but not a leading selection criteria.

**Sample vendors** for Large team profiles include extensive suites from Atlassian JIRA, Broadcom (CA Rally), CollabNet VersionOne, IBM Rational, Microsoft, and others. Some mid-sized users of Clubhouse AgPM software have scaled into Large profile teams as well.

### Large Team Profile





## The Intellyx Take

Beyond the act of coding itself, developers and project managers will likely spend a great deal of their work time interacting with, or responding to, whatever Agile Project Management solution the company selects.

An agile team isn't defined by the tools it uses, nor even by its size. An agile team is defined by the quality of its collaboration, and the speed at which people can get things done.

Still, failing to select an AgPM tool can leave teams subject to managing projects with regular officeware by default – spreadsheets, documents and calendars. Not a palatable option.

Think about your current and future needs, then consider the unique style criteria of your development team before choosing wisely, because one size does not fit all in this arena.

## About the Author

Jason “JE” English is Principal Analyst and CMO at [Intellyx](https://intellyx.com). He is focused on covering how agile collaboration between customers, partners and employees accelerates innovation.

He led marketing efforts for the development, testing and virtualization software company ITKO, from its bootstrap startup days, through a successful acquisition by CA in 2011. JE co-authored the book [Service Virtualization: Reality is Overrated](#) to capture the then-novel practice of test environment simulation for Agile development, and more than 60 thousand copies are in circulation today.



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