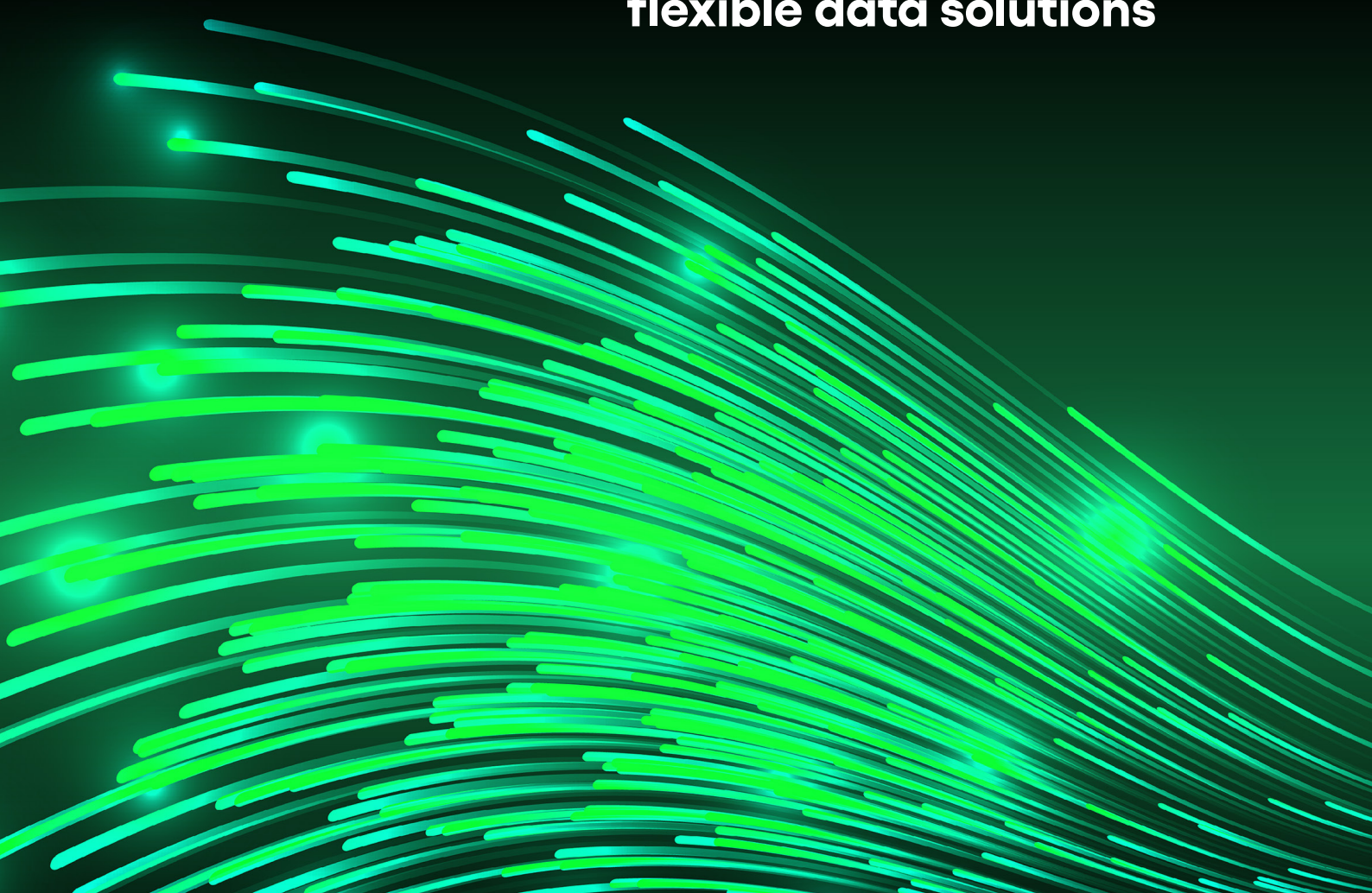


Stick or Twist?

An agile guide to
choosing faster, more
flexible data solutions



Data quality projects need to be fast and flexible.

So why do many system implementations still rely on slow, rigid delivery methods that reduce organisations' opportunities with data?

While agile delivery methods are widely accepted as the best approach to deliver data quality projects, countless leading data solutions providers still deliver using their traditional 'waterfall' or sequential deliveries. These long-term, inflexible project lifecycles occupy a significant investment at the start of the project, while withholding any tangible return – and data related, strategic improvements – until project completion, usually two to three years in the future.

Thanks to such wide-spread usage of traditional waterfall delivery in the data and software market, these inflexible solutions have traditionally been the 'status-quo'. Organisations have come to accept that data quality solutions (particularly those that implement bespoke or tailor-made data management platforms) are large, complex, time consuming and difficult to deliver.

Yet this is the antithesis of what data quality solutions should be. Data is about real-time insights, instant reactions, fast automation: any data quality system implementation should reflect this, regardless of whether you are a large corporate or a disruptive start-up.

The problem with traditional delivery:

The business evolves, but the data project does not: the resulting data quality classifications, processes and technology framework doesn't align with the business' new objectives.

Technical problems aren't identified quickly, causing project delays and ongoing inefficiencies after delivery.

It takes a long time to see any data improvements or ROI, making it difficult for CIOs, CDOs and data leads to use data with confidence and to communicate data value to stakeholders.

The business falls behind competitors and market trends, missing valuable data opportunities thanks to stagnant, poor quality data.

They should be fast, flexible, easy to manage, and generate a measurable return.

Agile delivery methods offer all of these benefits, and more. So why are businesses still finding themselves tied into lengthy, fixed data quality projects that aren't guided by agile methodology, damaging their data strategy and setting them behind their competitors?

In this guide, we look at the key differences between a traditional waterfall delivery and data quality projects that incorporate agile delivery methodology, to help you decide:

Should you stick with the status quo – traditional sequential methodologies, designed for heavy, long term data quality delivery?

Or should you twist to incorporate agile delivery methods – making it easier to respond, adapt and evolve with good quality data?

Stick with waterfall, or twist to agile?

Understanding the difference.

A traditional waterfall delivery method is structured and sequential. Data quality – including definitions, processes, and technology – is delivered in one final package.

Once one phase of development is completed successfully, the team moves on to the next step, continuing this process until the project is complete: through planning, design, build and testing.

The project is managed by a System Implementation (SI) development team, who deliver the completed project at the end of its lifecycle, with little input from your organisation along the way.

These waterfall models were popularised by the construction industry, as they provide a clear step-by-step process to eventually build a solid, long-standing structure: it's essentially a method of stacking one 'brick' (or project phase) on top of another until the structure is complete.

Data, however, is not solid. It's not consistent. Data is changeable, and as such, needs an agile approach to manage it successfully.

Agile delivery is an incremental, sprint-based approach. Data quality improvements are delivered continuously throughout the project.

It separates the project development lifecycle into a series of shorter 'sprints', each moving towards your commercial data objective.

It's a more flexible approach to data quality implementation, that allows developers to evolve and adapt data quality processes, definitions and technologies at each phase to keep the project in-line with your business' ever-changing data quality goals.

Rather than one phase of delivery leading into the next, each 'sprint' includes its own build, test and delivery. This means that development teams are able to show tangible data quality improvements being integrated at every step of the journey.

Agile delivery methods are also client-focused: your team are involved at every stage and maintain visibility over project development. By choosing a project delivery that incorporates agile methodology, it makes it much easier for you to witness ongoing progress, benefit from ever-improving data quality, and work with development teams to shape solutions as your data needs change.

Now that you understand the core differences to each approach, let's look at how your data quality project could differ depending on whether you decide to stick with a traditional approach or twist to agile delivery methods.

Vision.

STICKS?

Stick with data system implementors that take a set data quality goal and deliver it in full at the end of the project timeframe: often a staggering two to three years after signing.

The issue with this approach is that things change. Some aspects of your organisation's data quality definitions, and the technology you need to manage them, can move rapidly as the market, customer behaviour and competitor offerings change around you. What constitutes as 'relevant' data, for instance, could be very different if you decide you need a 360° customer view, compared to a more product-led data strategy.

As a result, that initial data quality vision can become redundant – or less valuable – by time the project has been delivered.

Rigid data solutions that deliver fixed, long-term data quality goals...

Twist to agile deliveries that are guided by a more holistic data vision, working towards your data quality goals while maintaining flexibility to adapt your data processes and technologies to changing demands, opportunities and, in some cases, problems as they arise.

By building and testing incrementally, you have the opportunity to work with developers to shift the project's direction, change your approach to data quality and accommodate new data goals: whether it's a new method of monetising your data or a necessary change to your data management framework.

...Agile data quality delivery methods that adapt to your vision.

TWISTS?

Progress.

STICKS?

Stick with data quality solutions being delivered in full at the end of the project, with no visible progress until completion. After the initial investment and planning phase, you have little visibility over the project until it's delivered – again, this can be a full 2-3 years after the project began.

It's not only frustrating, but risky: with little control over how the project is developing, or insight into the progress being made, you are more likely to encounter problems and disappointments after delivery, particularly if your data quality needs have changed.

It also prevents your organisation from benefitting from ongoing data quality improvements throughout that 2-3 year period, leaving you more susceptible to data mistakes.

Data quality solutions delivered in-full, with limited visibility and adaptability...

Twist to agile deliveries that make progress visible, and measurable. Each sprint offers you a 'slice of the pie' – a tangible data quality development or benefit that contributes to the end goal.

This not only gives a better insight into your data solution investment, but allows for greater input, pushing data quality forward in a way that always aligns with your data objectives. It also enables you to benefit from gradual improvements to data quality throughout the development lifecycle, delivering more accurate data insights and actions earlier in the project timeframe.

...Data solutions that deliver continuous progress with flexibility.

TWISTS?

Speed.

STICKS?

Stick with full end-to-end delivery, where traditional waterfall or sequential methods can be faster. But they feel much slower.

With traditional sequential methods, your organisation won't be able to see any data quality results until the project crosses the finish line. That's often a two-to-three year wait for any return on investment – or even any visible progress towards your end goal.

Organisations often find that this is too much, too late: the initial investment, combined with the lengthy wait, prevents them from reacting and responding to opportunities with good quality data, leading to lost revenue.

One rigid data quality solution, delivered by the lorry-load...

Twist to breaking the data quality project down into 'sprints' – each with their own build, test and deliver cycle. Agile delivery methods result in faster delivery of tangible results that relate to your current commercial needs.

For instance, if your long-term goal is to implement a 360° customer data platform, you will start to see smaller, measurable data quality developments throughout the process, ranging from infrastructural changes, like data governance initiatives, to data management platform implementation.

This flexible approach gives a much faster return on investment, improves data quality over time, and enables quick reactions to data trends and technologies.

...Agile data solutions delivered by the basketful, as and when you need them.

TWISTS?

Testing.

STICKS?

Stick with plan, build, then test: traditional sequential deliveries still adopted by many developers that stick to a clearly delineated format, with all testing occurring in the penultimate phase of the project. It's easier for the development team to deliver, but much harder for your team to manage in the long-run.

The risk with this method is that it makes identifying and fixing problems more difficult, more expensive and more prone to ongoing issues. Fundamental errors that have been worked into the build, for instance, become almost impossible to change, and can result in reduced performance upon project delivery.

Data quality solutions that are only tested after the build is complete...

Twist to agile delivery methods that build testing into each project sprint to reduce or eradicate bugs upon delivery.

Every phase of the project is tested in independence, cutting (or even eliminating) the number of problems and issues that arise during the final testing phase. This method results in less long-term issues for your team, and a fully-functioning data quality solution at point of delivery.

...Agile delivery methods with built-in testing and resolution at every step.

!TWIST?

Evolve & adapt.

STICKS?

Stick with traditional waterfall deliveries that are not built for adaptability.

In construction, where these methods originated, there is little need to evolve and adapt. You wouldn't pick up a house and move it half-way through the build, or dismantle the materials to build something different.

Yet data is not construction. It's fast. It's flexible. If you want to benefit from it, you need to be able to evolve your solutions to adapt to your data demands. Over the course of two years (the average waterfall data delivery timescale) your relationship with data, the solutions you need from data, and your business' definition of 'good quality data', are likely to change dramatically. Your data quality systems and processes need to change with them.

Fixed data quality solutions that aren't designed for flexibility...

Twist to agile data quality delivery methods that are designed to evolve and adapt. By adopting a sprint delivery method, each phase of development is contained within short, sharp time frames of two weeks. Each sprint works towards small, achievable data quality goals that allow you to review the project's progress – and ongoing relevancy – regularly.

This allows you to pivot your data quality solutions whenever you need to, whether it's to explore new technology-led data-driven opportunities or to address unforeseen commercial problems that have arisen along the way (for instance, a change in your business direction, or an unexpected shift in the market, that has altered your data quality classifications or the tools you need to manage them).

...Agile delivery methods that move and adjust with your business.

TWISTS?

STICK.



Traditional project delivery methods aren't built with data quality projects in mind. With 'data quality' delivered as one final package, rather than an ongoing process, they tie up a significant initial investment that makes it difficult to react quickly and confidently with data – and easy to miss valuable revenue-generating data opportunities in the short-term.

OR TWIST.

Data quality projects that incorporate agile delivery methods enable your organisation to constantly adapt and evolve your data solutions, pivoting your approach as and when you need to. With incremental progress delivered, and tested, at each sprint, you can start benefitting from improved data quality soon after launch, for a speedier return on investment, more measurable results, fewer technical problems on delivery and more visible progress.

Ready to twist to a faster and more flexible method of delivery on your data quality project?

CONTACT US NOW

Or call us on 0190 801 0618
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