Manifesto for Enterprise Agility: What It Means for Project Managers

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In an era defined by volatility, reinvention has become a survival skill, not a luxury. The *Manifesto for Enterprise Agility*, a collaborative initiative from the Project Management Institute (PMI) and Agile Alliance, marks a strategic evolution in how organisations respond to disruption. It moves beyond Agile as a delivery method and reframes it as a systemic leadership mindset for navigating complexity at scale.

For project managers, the Manifesto is more than an ideological statement – it's a call to reframe project delivery within the broader fabric of enterprise agility. Here's what it says, why it matters, and how project leaders can apply its lessons.

Why Enterprise Agility Matters Now

PMI's global C-suite research shows that 93% of executives believe they must rethink business models every five years; nearly two-thirds are doing so every two years or faster. Yet while 85% consider enterprise agility critical, 65% admit their organisations have implemented it only in part – or not at all .

Enterprise agility isn't about chasing speed for its own sake. It's about sustaining purpose-led adaptability under pressure: redirecting resources, making decisions quickly, and keeping strategy actionable when circumstances shift.

For project professionals, this means embedding agility not just within delivery teams, but into planning, funding, governance, and leadership conversations. It's about aligning execution with a system built to

learn, sense, and respond.

Four Values of Enterprise Agility

The Manifesto distils agility into four values. Each reframes a conventional management reflex into a mindset fit for uncertainty:

1. **Clear Purpose Realised Through Adaptive Plans**
   Project managers are often wired to manage against fixed timelines and scope. But in agile enterprises, clarity of purpose trumps rigid planning. Strategic anchors matter more than Gantt charts. Leaders must create alignment around the "why" and give teams freedom to adjust the "how" .

2. **Shared Enterprise Outcomes Over Functional Optimisation**
   Optimising departments at the expense of the whole organisation creates friction. Agility demands cross-functional collaboration and long-term value creation. Project managers should shift from local success metrics to broader business impact, linking project KPIs to enterprise outcomes .

3. **Continuous Reinvention Over Preservation**
   Rather than preserving structures or routines, agile organisations reward experimentation and challenge the status quo. For project managers, this means replacing "lessons learned" sessions with continuous feedback loops—and embracing the idea that no process is sacred.

4. **Human-Centricity Amidst Change**
   Agility isn't just structural—it's cultural. Change-weary teams need psychological safety, autonomy, and trust. Project leaders should model this by leading with empathy, building adaptive capacity, and enabling learning across roles .

Nine Principles to Operationalise Agility

The Manifesto outlines nine enterprise agility principles, structured around three domains: leadership behaviour, organisational design, and execution. For project managers, these offer a practical roadmap:

1. **Create Clarity of Purpose and Align on Outcomes**
   Anchor your team in the bigger picture. Whether launching a product or shifting operations, ensure the project purpose is visible, and link daily activities to enterprise-level outcomes .

2. **Govern with Guardrails, Not Gatekeepers**
   Replace bottlenecks with guiding principles. Governance should enable—not delay—decision-making. Use frameworks and boundaries that empower teams to act autonomously within strategic intent.

3. **Move Authority Closer to Value**

Push decision-making to where the information lives: customer interfaces, project teams, field operations. Project managers should advocate for this decentralisation to unlock speed and responsiveness .

4. **Expand Agility Across Partners and Ecosystems**

Agility doesn't stop at your organisation's edge. Work closely with suppliers, partners, and regulators. Use shared planning tools and open feedback to build mutual responsiveness across value chains .

5. **Fund Purpose, Not Activity**

Instead of fixed budgets tied to predefined outputs, funding should follow strategic intent. Project managers should be ready to pitch for funding in phases and pivot resources based on learning and value realised.

6. **Deliver Value Frequently and Make Work Visible**

Agile delivery thrives on short feedback loops and transparency. Make progress visible to stakeholders at all levels. Highlight risks and dependencies early—not just in reports, but in shared dashboards or collaborative sessions .

7. **Embrace Technology and Distributed Talent**

Remote teams, AI, and real-time data are here to stay. Project managers must use tech not just for efficiency, but for empowerment—whether that's collaborative platforms, predictive tools, or asynchronous workflows.

8. **Design for Adaptability, Not Just Efficiency**

Efficiency often rewards repeatability; agility rewards modularity. Build teams and workflows that can reconfigure quickly, shift focus, or absorb change without collapse.

9. **Sense Early, Learn Quickly, Act with Confidence**

This is the agility loop in practice. Project managers must develop sensing mechanisms—customer feedback, performance data, market scans—and act decisively on them. Shortening the gap between observation and action is essential for relevance .

Applying the Manifesto: A Guide for Project Leaders

Project managers are uniquely positioned to drive enterprise agility—if they broaden their lens. Here's how:

- **Lead with Purpose**: Make the "why" of your project explicit and recurring. Reference it in retrospectives, status updates, and conflict resolution.
- **Challenge Functional Silos**: Collaborate beyond your vertical. Share learnings across projects. Seek input from operations, HR, finance, and frontline staff.
- **Model Adaptability**: Be the first to test, learn, and adjust. Replace perfectionism with progress. Let your team see you change course when data demands it.

- **Enable Psychological Safety**: Encourage open disagreement, admit uncertainty, and recognise effort even when outcomes fall short.
- **Treat Agility as a System**: Don't limit it to stand-ups or sprints. Think across the lifecycle—how funding is secured, how teams are structured, how success is measured.

Why This Matters

As Pierre Le Manh, PMI CEO, puts it: "Enterprise agility is the capacity to adapt at scale without losing coherence." It's not about discarding strategy, but making it actionable under pressure. The Manifesto offers project managers a blueprint not for methods, but for mindset—a mindset that sees change as continuous, leadership as shared, and value as co-created across the organisation."

Greg Beato, co-author of Superagency
"Twenty-five years after the Manifesto for Agile Software Development presented a new way to think about software development, it's time to apply similar thinking to enterprises as a whole, not just to projects or products. Just as the Agile Manifesto was a response to a major change in technological conditions driven by the internet, the growth in both physical and digital networks around the world compels enterprises to incorporate and deploy agility to their entire organizational systems, including leadership, operating models, execution governance, and culture."

Kevin Nolan, CEO of GE Appliances
"Today's business landscape demands rapid adaptation and greater agility. Agile organizations adapt faster and take the lead, while those not embracing agility risk falling behind as collaboration becomes essential in a dynamic environment."

Sagar Kochhar, former CEO and co-founder of Rebel Foods
"Enterprise agility is less about frameworks and more about leadership courage – the courage to reset the vision, dismantle legacy assumptions, and trust teams to execute within systems designed for speed. This Manifesto captures a critical truth: enterprise agility is not a transformation initiative, but a leadership mindset required to continuously reinvent vision, structure, and execution in a volatile world."

In today's operating environment, agility is not a competitive edge. It's a prerequisite.