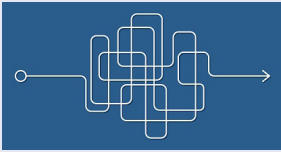


Agility Utility: Secrets to Fast Research with Lasting Impact



If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together – African Proverb

This often-quoted African proverb is profound and often true: with one exception, Agile research. In our opinion, in Agile research, teamwork and collaboration are the central component in making the project run swiftly AND have a far-reaching or lasting impact for brands.

The Agile movement is an approach born in the software sector, where trends and innovations are so fast-moving that companies can't afford to miss the window to launch a product and be first-to-market. So, instead of the traditional four-to-six-month marketing cycle (sequential idea generation; development; refinement; testing; and launch) software companies work with a more iterative project management approach.

They recognise that it is unrealistic to get their products 'right the first time', so instead streamline the development process to a 'sprint' lasting only a few weeks: launching a "minimum viable product" to the marketplace, then learning from real-time customer feedback and augmenting the offering 'live': repeating this process as many times as is necessary to optimise the product.

Many pharmaceutical companies are recognising the value of this approach. Both in speed (a leaner, more nimble approach to develop marketing communications); and in its ability to meet real-time customer needs (learning and iterating based on customer feedback right away rather than after a delay). But to support this shift, the traditional market research approach also needs to change.

Although it can sound like a big departure from the work we have known, the move to Agile research doesn't really require reinventing the wheel, but simply careful project design around two critical success factors: **partnership** and **process**, right from the start to ensure that the research can go both, **fast** and **far**.

Let's start with the **partnership**. Collaborative partnerships are critical to project success, and a successful Agile market research approach typically incorporates the following three factors to deliver fast and far research:

1. Long-term agency and client partnerships, rather than stand-alone project partnerships

- **Fast:** this saves time in on-boarding and briefing; multiple projects can be run concurrently; and centralised KPIs and research material structures can be agreed upon at the outset.
- **Far:** the agency is up to speed on product strategy and project aims, better able to contextualise findings; learnings are easily transferable from one project to the next and findings are reduced to core essential learnings; 'off the cuff' requests can be accommodated more effectively.

2. Multidisciplinary expertise: collaboration with in-house or consultant experts in behaviour, technology, user experience, or design

- **Fast:** experts 'speak the same language' across the entire research chain, reducing miscommunications and streamlining deliverables to fit unique models (e.g. user journeys, RAG maps, heuristic identification).

- **Far:** the number of iterations is reduced by the right expertise at all points in the process; recommendations have been stress-tested through multiple analytical lenses.
- ## 3. Participant collaboration: working closely and directly with respondents and keeping them engaged over the long term
- **Fast:** recruitment of participants at outset to generate ready panels and/or online communities; reduced need for retrospective analysis due to methodologies with participant interaction.
 - **Far:** greater 'customer generated' content and recommendations are delivered, prized by senior stakeholders.

Moving on to consider the **process**: the speed of Agile research requires careful planning, particularly with regards to where **compromises** are acceptable or not throughout the project cycle...

1. Methodology selection

- **Compromise:** on answering the 'why?' behind the findings we observe. The Agile movement is based on behavioural methodologies like observation, eye tracking, digital tracing, social media listening, and developer groups, which aim to capture 'what' people do and how to meet their needs, rather than capturing the deeper drivers of behaviour.
- **No compromise:** on accessing the reality, ensuring responses reflect accurate representation and the nature of true use.

2. Fieldwork and analysis

- **Compromise:** on waiting for the full sample as analysis and feedback happen 'live' throughout the process and small samples are the norm. The beauty of Agile is to deliver little but frequently, avoiding the element of "surprise" at the end.
- **No compromise:** on the thinking and insight to make sure findings are not lacking depth.

3. Results

- **Compromise:** on PowerPoint! Traditional report writing is abandoned in favour of delivering dashboards, backroom workshops, email summaries, infographics, sketches or videos.
- **No compromise:** on record keeping, as it's still critical to benchmark and track KPIs, record customer learnings and collate results on a central resource hub.

To summarise, though agility may conjure ideas of 'going alone', being aligned and 'going together' whilst keeping these considerations top of mind throughout the partnership, can help both client and agency successfully align with Agile product development approaches – without limiting the integrity and impact of critical customer feedback in the process.

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