

How agile is your supplier?

Ten questions to ask your software supplier to test if they can meet your need for agility

There is a well-known approach for assessing suppliers for outsourced development work, but as organisations increasingly look for more flexibility from their software suppliers, the ability to deliver using a more agile approach is often constrained by the off-shoring and outsourced arrangements already in place.

Is your software supplier saying they can meet your demands for more agility? How do you know if they really mean it?

If you're looking to become more Agile here are ten questions that you can use to see if your suppliers can keep up with your aspirations.

1) How often will we have contact with the developers and testers who are working on the solutions?

Just following an 'Agile method' doesn't deliver agility. The key benefit of discovering rework early requires regular communication and feedback between you and your suppliers' team. If they are not on site, ask how this interaction will take place.

2) How will your team engage with our customer base?

If your solution is for internal users, what approach has your supplier suggested to gain their requirements and feedback? This has to be directly to the team – not a 'business engagement' resource.

3) What team sizes are you planning to use?

Many suppliers use large teams to develop code – but developing the right code is key, and small teams tend to deliver higher quality solutions with reduced communication overhead.

4) Who will be present on site? And when?

Getting representatives on site is not the best way to ensure your requirements are getting to the individuals who are building your solution. Getting access to those designing and writing your software is key to reducing misunderstandings.

5) Can you provide us with examples of your velocity?

Velocity is a key measure of team productivity – get your supplier to tell you their typical velocity and you can compare effectiveness between suppliers – if they won't tell, or don't understand the question, then go with someone who will.

6) Are you willing to offer a discount if your velocity dips below an agreed level?

Drive your supplier to be more effective in an Agile environment - focus on team effectiveness rather than typical development SLAs which drive the wrong behaviour.



7) What processes and tools are you using to manage changing requirements?

Every supplier implements a change management process – but does it suit the likely level of change you are expecting? In environments where change is likely traditional change management processes result in significant overhead and additional cost to you.

8) How will you transfer knowledge into my teams?

How will the system knowledge come back into your internal teams? Many suppliers will work as joint client-supplier teams, but not all see this as a benefit – knowledge transfer happens over time, not at the end of a project.

9) What percentage of your developers and testers understand my business?

The team may be technically skilled but do they really understand the requirements they are working to? A real in-depth understanding of your business needs means the team will save time getting the solution built rather than spend time understanding your business from first principles.

10) How is your approach going to fit into our governance structure?

Many organisations use a governance structure based on a traditional waterfall project model. If your supplier is suggesting an alternative Agile model how will this work with your existing approval, reporting and finance processes?

Notice that there are no questions around method, development tools or technical experience. That is because you will already know what to ask, and these are not the areas that will have a big impact on the ability to deliver in a more flexible and Agile way. Focus on the above areas and you will quickly find out if your supplier can really deliver agility or is merely talking the latest jargon.

At Wisereach we have a team of experienced supplier managers who understand both traditional outsourcing models and models that encourage the right Agile behaviours. We can help you from reviewing your supplier proposals or existing contracts through to helping you set the right SLAs to drive good Agile behaviours.

If you would like talk about how your supplier is planning to deliver the agility you need then please contact peter.weare@wisereach.co.uk for a no obligation discussion.