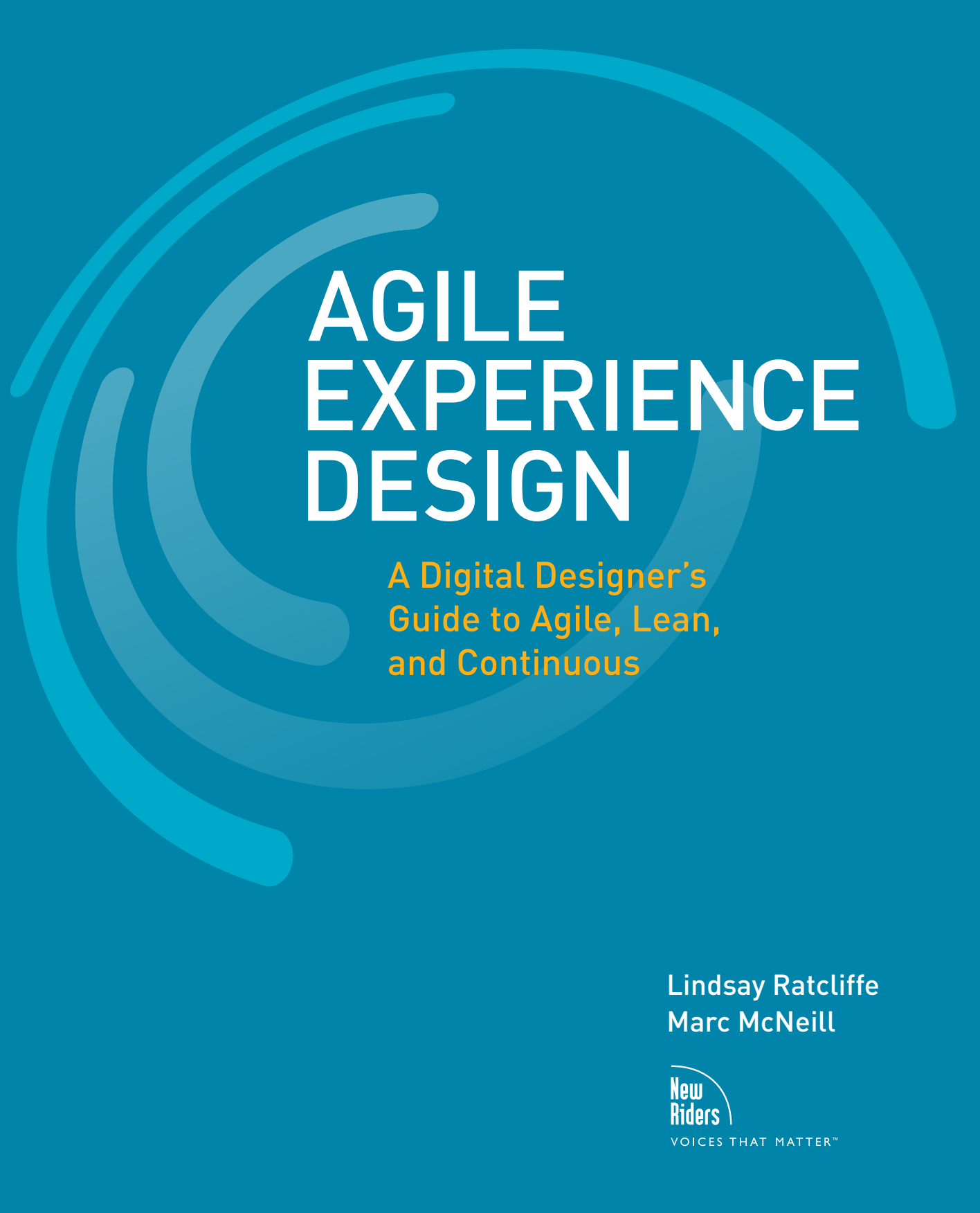


# AGILE EXPERIENCE DESIGN

A Digital Designer's  
Guide to Agile, Lean,  
and Continuous

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New  
Riders

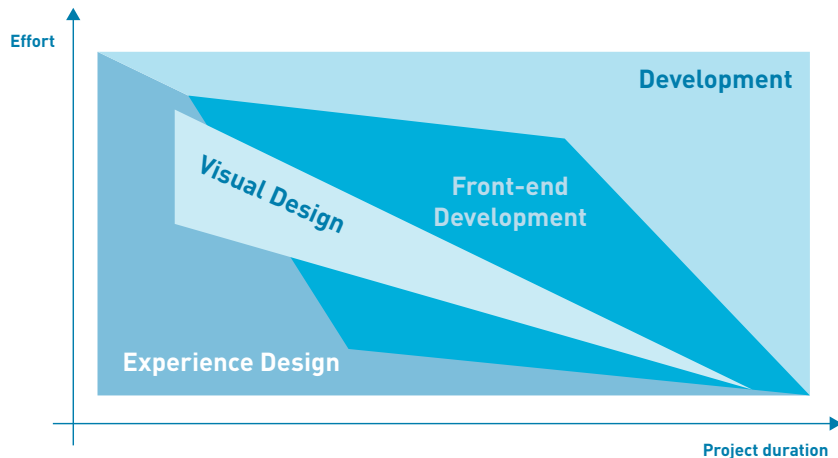
VOICES THAT MATTER™

More importantly, you'll need to help them understand that design is no longer all done up front. This may well be one of the biggest challenges for the designers: working out how to create a design vision and then letting the design vision emerge throughout the development process.

## SUPPLY AND DEMAND

Once you've determined what kind of designers you need, you need to think about when to get them involved and for what duration. As a general rule, you'll probably need more design involvement at the beginning of the project than you will at the end. This is not to be confused with big, up-front design. The difference is that there will be a finite number of design challenges on any project, and once the solutions for the design patterns have been established, the details can be applied by the business analysts and developers as the user stories are played out (4.8).

**4.8**  
Experience design  
involvement on an  
agile project.



Ideally, the lead experience designer should be on the project from the start, especially where customer experience is critical to success. However, you probably won't need to introduce some of the other design resources until later on. Visual designers may not need to get involved until the general experience design direction has been set. Equally, front-end developers may not be needed until after some of the initial visual design work. Although the front-end developers

can start the HTML structure in advance of any CSS and visual presentation layer work, and they can also help test design concepts in presentation layer code, so it can be fruitful having front-end developers around earlier.

## WHEN YOU NEED TO BRING IN DESIGN HELP

Cross-functional teams are all well and good, but what do you do when you're lacking capability in a particular functional area that is essential? As with all projects you have to beg, borrow, steal, or buy it. However, agile is such a different way of working that it can be difficult to plug people and resources into the process. Most of the agile project pains we hear about involve agile teams having to work with service providers who are not agile. Incompatible methods and processes can create a world of hurt for everyone.

If there's no design capability within the project team and you need to outsource it, choose a design organisation or individual who is flexible. It doesn't matter if they don't have agile project experience, but they must be willing to work on-site with the project team, collaborate to develop the design throughout the process, and produce design artefacts that are lightweight and facilitate conversation, rather than rely on heavy documentation. Determining the design credentials of your design supplier is essential, but you also need to consider the process and cultural fit. Here are some things to consider:

- Talk to the designers/design manager before they start on the project to get an understanding of how they like to work.
- Ask them if they are willing to collocate; if not, think very hard about whether they are the right supplier.
- Ask if they intend to work on your project full time, and if not, how they will ensure their availability during critical decision-making points.
- Ask about their experience collaborating with business stakeholders and developers throughout the process. If they have no experience, probe deeper about their willingness to collaborate.

Don't be convinced by suppliers who tell you that they need to work at their offices because they have the kit and the support they need. No matter how great the intent at the start of the project, the relationship will break down over time. Designers who work off-site tend to want to produce pixel-perfect designs



before revealing anything. No matter how quick they are, it's still wasted effort producing pixel-perfect designs if they are wrong. It is much more efficient to work in a low-fidelity way to start with and to get frequent feedback about work in progress so that the designer can adjust and adapt as he goes. Also, it takes much longer and much more effort to send an e-mail with attachments and words to explain the design intent than to have a quick face-to-face conversation.

The same can be said when you source design capability from within your organisation. You really need the designers to collocate with the project team for the duration of their involvement. If you get any resistance, remind them that you're not asking them to make a permanent move away from their department. Most designers understand the benefits within a very short period of time.

## MANAGING DESIGN AND DESIGNERS: TIPS FOR DESIGNERS ON AN AGILE PROJECT

Agile project managers are not the taskmasters and shepherds that other project managers need to be; they are more like leaders. Agile projects are much more self-directed and agile teams are self-organising. An agile project manager does not need to assign tasks to team members because they can do that for themselves when they are ready to work on the next thing. Instead, the role of the project manager on an agile project is to:

- Inspire and motivate the team and to help them focus on the project vision.
- Remove blockers or anything that is impeding the progress of the project.
- Ensure that communication is free-flowing.
- Promote the use of the agile principles, tools, and techniques.

As a designer, the project manager should become your new best friend because he can help you communicate to the rest of the team about the value of design and how it affects the success of the project. But before he can do this, he needs to understand the value, the activities, and the effort required, and you need to help him with this. Get to know your project manager and understand what experience he has had in managing agile projects with a design component.

**If you're new to agile and the PM has experience managing design on agile projects,** talk to him about his previous projects to understand where design activities fit in and how to work collaboratively with analysts and developers.

**If you're new to agile and the PM has no experience managing design on an agile project,** talk to the PM about what you aim to achieve with design and how you have worked previously. With his agile experience and your design experience, you should be able to come up with a plan that will work for you both. You'll have to adjust and adapt; try to be flexible and think creatively about the design process. Remember, you don't have to compromise on design quality because you're changing your approach. The more you can help him understand about design and what you need, the more he can help you and help the rest of the team help you.

**If you're experienced in design on agile projects but the PM is not,** then simply help him understand what has worked well in the past and what did not work well. Tell him about some of the problems you had that blocked your progress so that he knows what to look out for. If the project manager is aware of potential issues like this he can make it happen, which takes some of the pressure off you.

**If both you and the PM have experience with design on an agile project,** then happy days. Well almost—it's still worthwhile having a conversation and making sure that you have matching expectations because, as we've mentioned, there is no one-size-fits-all agile process. Compare notes about what worked well in the past, what you would like to keep doing, and what that caused problems.

**TIP**

Ask the PM to help get content from outside providers to populate a design. This helps everyone.

## DESIGN ACTIVITIES TO BUILD INTO THE PLAN

These are design-orientated activities that you may wish to build into the project process and planned for:

- **Regular end-customer feedback** is about engaging with end customers to find out what's not working in the design so that designs can be adjusted before they are developed. Techniques range from "guerrilla testing" to formal lab-based testing, and the time and effort increase accordingly. Ideally, feedback should happen as frequently as possible, such as once an iteration for one to two cycles, or multiple times an iteration where the iterations are longer.

- **Regular feedback from business stakeholders** who may or may not be directly involved in the project team. This gives everyone who has a stake in the design the opportunity to give input and feedback about the designs. These meetings will likely need to happen once or twice within an iteration.
- **Frequent interaction with developers** to ensure that the design ideas are feasible and also to get input about what the technology can do to enhance the designs. These need not be formal meetings but the conversations need to happen frequently.
- **Frequent interaction with business analysts (BAs)** to ensure that the designs cover all the user stories and that the user stories describe the full extent of the design. Again, this is not a formal session, but conversations need to happen regularly—multiple times a day.
- **Interaction with QAs** on the project to make sure that the tests reflect important interaction, visual design, and usability criteria too.
- **Cross-functional conversations** can encompass all the points listed above. When BAs, designers, and developers all need to have conversations with the business, it makes sense to have these conversations once and have cross-functional input. Discuss with a representative from each functional area to find out the most efficient way of discussing areas of common ground.

## IN SUMMARY

In this chapter, we looked at the agile experience design project process and how design and designers fit in. We looked at what this means for designers who are new to agile, and for agile project managers who are new to design.

## COMING NEXT

Now that you have a high-level understanding of the agile process, we're going to look at the specific activities you need to do to get ready to start.



PART TWO

HOW TO DESIGN  
COMPELLING  
EXPERIENCES  
AND DELIVER  
THEM—QUICKLY