ANALYST BRIEF
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Organizations dealing with the complexities of flexible work, dynamic competitive pressures, and economic volatility can benefit from the adoption of adaptive planning automation and prioritization with effective process and organizational support.

Optimizing Business Agility with Adaptive Planning and Effective Prioritization

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Introduction

Flexible work models demand collaboration and effective automation to help manage complexity and drive business innovation. The ability to prioritize planning and resources is also vital to meet the demands of flexible work amid staffing constraints and competitive, geopolitical, and economic volatility. Staffing concerns are a top risk factor for technologies and budgets over the next 12 months, according to IDC's June 2024 *Future Enterprise Resiliency and Spending Survey, Wave 6.* Dynamic competitive pressures to deliver initiatives rapidly with high-quality demand visibility into what teams are doing and how they are executing. Organizations can then effectively adjust and leverage constrained resources for adaptive, optimized execution.

Organizations use a range of products to get work done and these are often not well coordinated with one another. Understanding how time is spent and what type of team effort is contributing to key business initiatives — rather than irrelevant projects — is challenging. Training an automated system on current and evolving work data to better manage capacity planning can help with staffing and the ability to improve and optimize execution to target strategic business priorities. Adaptive, agile approaches to planning combined with visibility into how and where teams spend their time can enable organizations to respond more dynamically to changing competitive and technology pressures. IDC observes increased adoption of value-centric approaches to project execution in that context. We also see opportunities with AI and generative AI (GenAI) to leverage work automation data and make it actionable, assuming that governance and effective guardrails exist.

This Analyst Brief will consider current and evolving opportunities to utilize collaborative work automation and agile planning along with the underlying process and organizational changes needed to spur broader adoption.

AT A GLANCE

WHAT'S IMPORTANT

Improved employee productivity and operational efficiency are top areas of focus for business outcomes with emerging AI adoption along with staffing concerns and supply chain challenges. Governance is key.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Assess the organization's current process adaptability and automation portfolio to understand gaps that need to be addressed.
- Evaluate providers both on their ability to support change and on their ability to provide tools that enable access to prioritized capabilities including project and portfolio management, resource management and time tracking, strategic portfolio management, usability, and governance.

Situation Overview and Trends

Successful organizations are those that are able to execute business initiatives rapidly amid changing competitive and economic conditions. Yet many businesses are challenged by ad hoc approaches to project planning, rigid processes, poor collaboration, and resource constraints. IDC research also indicates that companies use many types of automation tools to manage tasks, time, resources, and work. Companies need visibility — across disparate systems — into the work being done and the time spent on specific initiatives to better allocate and augment resources and needed skills.

Lack of automation is seen as a core barrier to executing well, according to IDC survey research, along with inappropriate use of existing automation including a lack of consistent adoption, high costs, and usability obstacles. The ability to automate effectively for project and portfolio management (PPM) is therefore a key goal for organizations. This point is underscored by the fact that staffing and labor shortages are top areas of concern for businesses in 2025, driving the necessity to prioritize effectively with adaptive planning, resource management, and visibility into changing stakeholder and business demands.

Key areas of opportunity to improve employee productivity include data analytics and project management tools, collaborative work management (CWM), and AI and GenAI assistants to help surface actionable work trends, insights, and patterns to improve execution. AI and GenAI can enable the transformation of work with time and productivity savings, faster decision-making, workflow integration, predictive analytics, and proactive data leverage (with effective governance being key).

Top areas of investment to improve productivity include intelligent digital workspaces (IDWs) to get access to people, tools, and needed data; collaboration and communication tools; workplace modernization; and space management for hybrid, flexible work, according to IDC's March 2024 *Future Enterprise Resiliency and Spending Survey, Wave 3.* In that context, agile and value-centric approaches enable adaptability to changing demands and technology to support proactive teaming. The ability to better measure value outcomes as well as to assess and improve future execution is growing. IDC sees increasing adoption of value stream management (VSM) and value-centric planning. In 2024, 74.6% of organizations were expanding, using, or piloting the use of VSM, a 23% increase over the prior year (see *DevOps Practices, Perceptions, and Tooling Survey, 2024: Automation, Observability, GenAI, and Purchasing Trends*, IDC #US52321924, June 2024). VSM looks across steps in the software delivery process from idea to production as a value stream. VSM follows value progression, identifying silos, bottlenecks, and other inefficiencies in value flow as it moves toward delivery. Given economic and geopolitical volatility, resource constraints, and competitive pressures, gaining an understanding of where organizations need to improve the flow and measurement of value were identified as top benefit areas in the survey. Other key advantages include scaling DevOps, tracking efficiency trends and the software development life cycle, and better mapping to business strategy.

We increasingly see leverage of VSM and use of adaptive agile approaches in both business and DevOps environments as companies seek to identify, prioritize, drive, and assess value throughout their initiatives and to better coordinate with one another.

Benefits: Shifting to Adaptive Planning and Collaboration

Adaptive planning and automation give businesses the flexibility to innovate and respond more rapidly to changing competitive, business, compliance, and technology pressures and to take advantage of emerging opportunities.

Productivity benefits to improve business execution include the ability to collaborate easily, gain visibility, and prioritize delivering more quickly on strategic initiatives, saving time and costs.

Prioritizing to focus on targeted areas of execution can enable optimized innovation. Leveraging intuitive products with ease of on ramp and contextualized use can support user access for more consistent, systemic adoption. AI and GenAI can help to surface actionable context with data visibility, identification of anomalies, and visibility into needed areas of focus, resources, time, risk, and value. Having a strategy that builds in appropriate governance by design remains key to effective and successful AI and GenAI adoption as the technology continues to evolve.

There are other benefits to adaptive planning. Enabling effective, agile collaboration and prioritized execution with limited resources can help drive business responsiveness and competitive position. Leveraging data from documentation systems and making that available to project automation tools benefit teams by providing needed context to improve execution. Increasing efficiency to save time for business stakeholders and developers can cut costs and enable teams to focus their efforts on creative efforts or strategic business initiatives.

Considerations

Humans change existing process approaches and workflow with great reluctance; one of the biggest barriers to the adoption of agile planning and work automation is rigidity and getting people to transition to consistent use.

Process change is challenging and necessitates mentoring, pilot teams with committed leaders to lead the way, and a successful transition to more systemic adoption of automation accompanied by agile planning processes. External support can help, provided it leads to the independent evolution of the organization.

A crowded market for project and portfolio management as well as collaborative work management makes it challenging to parse the differences. Effective integration strategies are necessary when multiple products are in use.

AI, ML, and GenAI demand governance, which is still evolving and underemphasized by providers. Automation providers must establish and lead with a unified AI governance model that addresses technical, ethical, societal, and compliance concerns. Proactive AI governance by design enables a faster AI service launch at lower risk.

Conclusion

To take full advantage of collaborative work automation and agile planning, organizations should do the following:

- Assess existing workflow and processes, staff readiness to shift, and current use of automation tools for planning and collaboration as well as portfolio gaps
- Evaluate alternatives for automation, considering usability, needs for strategic planning, resource management, process, program and portfolio management, and judicious incorporation of AI/GenAI and ML with effective AI governance models
- Partner effectively to transition to adaptive, value-centric, and agile planning processes in conjunction with core existing applications in order to enable automation and systemic adoption as well as to drive business innovation

About the Analyst



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Melinda-Carol Ballou serves as research director for IDC's Application Life-Cycle Management (ALM) program. In this role, Ms. Ballou provides thought leadership, expert opinion, and analysis through comprehensive research on end-to-end application life-cycle management — from requirements to quality, testing, change, continuous release, process, and project and portfolio management (PPM) with a focus on agile DevOps software life-cycle strategies.

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