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INTEGRATING AGILE METHODS INTO DIGITAL DA'WAH ECOSYSTEMS: EVIDENCE FROM AN AI-ENABLED QUR'AN LEARNING PLATFORM

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Abstract

The rapid advancement of digital technology has pushed Islamic outreach organizations to adopt more adaptive and responsive project management approaches. This study aims to examine how Agile Project Management is implemented within Qara'a Indonesia, a digital da'wah startup that develops an AI-driven Qur'an learning application, and to analyze how these practices support project effectiveness. A descriptive qualitative design was employed, using in-depth interviews, observation of digital activities, and internal documentation to collect data. The data were analyzed through reduction, presentation, and conclusion drawing, supported by source triangulation. The findings reveal that Qara'a applies core Agile principles through a distributed organizational structure, the classification of tasks into major and minor categories, priority setting based on workload, and coordination using digital tools such as Discord, Google Docs, and Notion. Short iterations, flexibility toward shifting market needs, intensive cross-division collaboration, and weekly evaluations demonstrate strong alignment with Agile elements such as sprints, continuous updates, and retrospectives. These practices enhance execution speed, maintain focus on key priorities, and accelerate feature development. The study provides important practical implications for strengthening innovation sustainability within technology-based da'wah services. Its novelty lies in offering one of the first analyses of Agile implementation in the context of a digital da'wah startup a domain that remains underexplored in existing literature.

Keywords: *Agile Project Management, project management, startup teknologi, Qara'a Indonesia.*

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INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of digital technology has significantly transformed the ways in which religious information is accessed and delivered, including practices of Qur'anic learning. Digital platforms have enabled Islamic outreach to reach users more quickly, widely, and efficiently, making them an increasingly strategic tool for religious institutions seeking to respond to shifting patterns of user engagement in the modern era (Nay et al., 2025). Consequently, digital da'wah services must demonstrate high adaptability to maintain their relevance amid continuous changes in user needs and expectations.

Within this evolving technological landscape, Qara'a Indonesia represents a notable example of a digital da'wah startup that integrates artificial intelligence into Qur'an learning services. As its user base continues to expand, the organization faces growing pressure to adopt a more structured and reliable project management approach to ensure the sustained delivery of innovative features and high-quality services (Safitri, 2025). These challenges are further intensified by the inherent characteristics of technology-driven startups, which operate in fast-paced environments that demand rapid decision-making and responsiveness to technological advancements as well as dynamic user preferences.

At a broader level, digital startups commonly encounter issues such as rapidly changing market demands, the need for continuous innovation cycles, and coordination complexities across internal divisions. These challenges highlight the limitations of conventional project management models, which often lack the flexibility required to effectively manage the volatility and speed of digital business processes (Kawengian, 2024). As a result, startup environments particularly those involved in digital religious services require management approaches that support iterative development, real-time adjustment, and close cross-team collaboration.

Agile Project Management emerges as a framework well-suited to these conditions, offering a flexible and iterative methodology that emphasizes collaboration, transparency, and continuous evaluation. Prior research indicates that Agile methodologies can increase development efficiency and improve responsiveness to emerging technical and market requirements, particularly in digital application environments (Amajuoyi et al., 2024). These

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characteristics suggest that Agile practices have strong potential to enhance the operational effectiveness of project management at Qara'a Indonesia.

Despite these promising indications, scholarly exploration of Agile implementation within the specific context of digital da'wah startups remains scarce. This is notable given the growing reliance on technology-based Islamic learning platforms and the increasing demand for structured yet adaptive management systems in this sector (Hakim, 2025). The absence of focused research creates a theoretical and practical gap, signaling the need for a deeper examination of how project management is currently organized in Qara'a and how Agile principles may be integrated to improve its performance.

In response to this gap, the present study seeks to analyze the current project management practices at Qara'a Indonesia and to explore the extent to which Agile Project Management can be effectively implemented to strengthen the organization's capacity for innovation, collaboration, and adaptive decision-making.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research approach with a descriptive design. The research was conducted at Qara'a Indonesia, a digital da'wah startup that develops an artificial-intelligence-based Qur'an learning application. Data collection took place in January 2025, enabling an in-depth exploration of how project management practices are implemented in the organization's operational activities.

Both primary and secondary data sources were used. Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews using a purposive sampling technique, in which participants were selected based on predetermined criteria relevant to strategic roles in project management. The primary informant in this study was the Chief Operating Officer (COO) of Qara'a Indonesia, who oversees cross-division coordination and day-to-day operational processes. In addition to interviews, the researchers conducted observations of Qara'a's digital activities, including its official website, Instagram account, and internal communication platforms such as Discord, which serves as the main coordination tool for the team. Secondary data were collected from internal documents and publicly available materials related to Qara'a's operations.

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Data collection techniques included interviews, observation, and documentation. The interview guide was structured in a semi-structured format, allowing flexibility in probing the informant while maintaining focus on key topics. The questions addressed aspects such as organizational structure, task assignment flows, coordination mechanisms, prioritization processes, operational challenges, and the feasibility of applying Agile Project Management within Qara'a's working environment.

RESULT

Organizational Structure and Decision-Making Dynamics

The findings from the in-depth interview with Qara'a Indonesia's Chief Operating Officer (COO) reveal that the startup operates with a streamlined organizational structure consisting of a CEO, COO, finance division, and several core operational divisions, including engineering, product development, customer service/sales, marketing, partnership, and muhafiz. Each division is supervised by a manager who oversees several staff members.

Decision-making processes generally begin at the divisional level, where managers conduct initial assessments of tasks or feature proposals before elevating them to the COO for further consideration. Strategic issues or decisions with broader impact are subsequently discussed with the CEO. In contrast, routine or minor decisions typically fall under the authority of the COO or respective divisional managers. This tiered system supports agile responsiveness while maintaining managerial oversight.

Task Categorization and Workflow Processes

The COO explained that Qara'a adopts a task-based project management approach. Tasks are classified into two categories major and minor based on workload estimates, urgency, and complexity. This classification is performed collaboratively by the COO, lead engineer, and lead product specialist.

Minor tasks are generally assigned directly to engineers for immediate execution. Major tasks, however, require more extensive investigation, planning, and occasionally involve multiple divisions. The number of weekly tasks fluctuates according to operational needs,

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usually ranging from two to five tasks per week. This task categorization system provides Qara'a with a flexible structure for prioritization and resource allocation, reflecting key principles of Agile Project Management.

Coordination Mechanisms and Communication Tools

The study also documents changes in Qara'a's coordination practices over time. Initially, the team implemented daily scrum meetings; however, consistent with evolving team dynamics and workflow realities, the method was later deemed less effective. The current coordination system consists of weekly divisional meetings lasting 30–60 minutes, supplemented by cross-division meetings when a task requires collaboration between departments such as product and engineering.

Daily informal communication is common among team members working in the same physical space, while the muhafiz division operating remotely adopts a hybrid system. For communication and task documentation, Discord serves as the primary platform. The transition from WhatsApp to Discord was made to avoid message overlap and improve task tracking through structured threads. Additional digital tools include Google Docs for detailed briefs, Notion for test-case documentation, and Theme Art software for UI/UX design workflows.

Challenges in Managing Priorities and Workload

A recurring challenge identified in the research concerns time management and task prioritization. The COO described situations in which new tasks emerge unexpectedly, often disrupting the team's focus and memory of existing tasks. To mitigate this issue, Qara'a has adopted a rule that tasks nearing completion must be finalized before new, even more urgent tasks are pursued. This mechanism aims to preserve workflow stability while managing sudden changes an inherent characteristic of fast-growing digital startups.

Adoption and Evolution of Agile Practices

Findings indicate that Qara'a has implemented Agile principles since its early development. Practices such as weekly sprints, rapid product research cycles, intensive internal

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communication, and adaptability to shifting market demands are embedded in the team's workflow. Initially, Qara'a employed formal Agile frameworks such as Scrum and Kanban, including daily stand-up meetings. However, as the organization expanded, these frameworks were adapted to better fit the company's culture and operational realities.

The COO highlighted that the team's adaptability supported by young team members with vocational and technical backgrounds contributes significantly to the effective application of Agile practices. One notable example of Agile-driven responsiveness was Qara'a's strategic pivot between 2018 and 2021, shifting from a general Qur'an application toward a specialized Qur'an learning platform based on emerging user needs. This pivot demonstrates Agile's core value of prioritizing user-centric changes over rigid long-term planning.

Overall, the results show that Qara'a's project management system reflects a practical form of Agile implementation, though not always explicitly defined through formal terminology. The combination of rapid task cycles, adaptive decision-making, digital coordination tools, and cross-functional collaboration forms an operational environment strongly aligned with Agile principles. These findings suggest that Agile is embedded not only in Qara'a's processes but also in its organizational mindset, supporting continuous innovation and responsive development.

DISCUSS

Natural Alignment of Qara'a's Work Practices with Core Agile Principles

The evidence indicates that Qara'a's operational behavior closely mirrors the foundational principles of Agile Project Management, even though the startup does not formally adopt Agile terminology or frameworks. This natural emergence of agility is consistent with patterns identified in digital entrepreneurship research, showing that startups operating in dynamic and uncertain environments instinctively adopt rapid iteration and adaptive decision-making to maintain competitiveness (Ghezzi & Cavallo, 2020; Wang et al., 2022; Mero et al., 2022). Qara'a's ability to sense changing market needs and adjust workflows accordingly reflects the strategic agility described in early-stage business model innovation studies, where fast experimentation and responsiveness to external signals become central to survival and

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innovation.

Furthermore, Qara'a's lean organizational structure characterized by minimal hierarchy and high functional interaction strengthens its capability for swift coordination and autonomous problem-solving. Such structural features have been widely associated with Agile-favorable environments, as they facilitate cross-functional collaboration and empower teams to make rapid decisions without bureaucratic delays (Ghezzi & Cavallo, 2020; Chukwunweike & Aro, 2024; Furoidah, 2023). The emergence of Agile practices within Qara'a's workflow, such as informal backlog prioritization, iterative cycles, and continuous feedback loops, mirrors findings from prior studies showing that many startups embrace Agile informally. These practices typically arise not from deliberate methodological adoption but as organic responses to resource constraints, uncertainty, and the need for operational efficiency (Pantiuchina et al., 2017; Furoidah, 2023; Mero et al., 2022).

In addition, Qara'a's extensive use of digital collaboration tools further enhances its agility by enabling transparency, immediate communication, and distributed coordination. Research demonstrates that digital platforms strengthen Agile environments by facilitating real-time knowledge sharing, supporting continuous feedback, and reducing dependency on formal meetings (Chukwunweike & Aro, 2024; Mero et al., 2022). These technological affordances allow Agile behaviors to flourish even without formal frameworks, reinforcing the broader conclusion that Agile is fundamentally a mindset and cultural orientation rather than a rigid methodological system. Qara'a's case thus confirms that Agile can manifest naturally when contextual factors environmental uncertainty, lean structure, and digital tool integration collectively support iterative, responsive, and collaborative work practices.

Task Prioritization and Iterative Cycles as Evidence of Embedded Agility

Qara'a's approach to categorizing tasks into major and minor groups demonstrates a practical form of backlog prioritization that closely parallels Agile principles, even though the terminology used differs from formal Agile frameworks. In Agile environments, backlog structuring and prioritization are core mechanisms for ensuring that the most valuable tasks are addressed first while maintaining workflow clarity (Chathuranga et al., 2023; Hidalgo, 2019).

ISSN 2775-1554 (online)

This resemblance suggests that Qara'a's system born from operational needs rather than methodological adherence has naturally evolved toward Agile-like prioritization. Moreover, the emphasis placed on urgency and workload estimation reflects practices commonly observed in Agile teams, where backlog grooming ensures tasks remain manageable and aligned with shifting project goals (Mood & Sanjay-Mood, 2024; Amajuoyi et al., 2024).

Beyond prioritization, Qara'a's rule of completing tasks nearing finalization before switching to new ones mirrors the discipline of maintaining focus within sprint boundaries. Agile methodologies stress limiting context switching and completing work in short, iterative cycles to preserve efficiency and reduce workflow fragmentation (Hidalgo, 2019; Chathuranga et al., 2023). By ensuring that nearly finished tasks are concluded before introducing new priorities, Qara'a effectively applies the core rationale of sprint discipline without formally using sprint terminology. This approach aligns with research showing that iteration-based task completion supports predictability, minimizes bottlenecks, and enhances product quality through incremental progress (Mood & Sanjay-Mood, 2024).

Qara'a's engineering workflow further reinforces its alignment with Agile practice through its iterative review process. In Agile development, cycles of producing small increments followed by rapid review and refinement enable continuous learning and adaptation (Hidalgo, 2019; Mergel, 2023). Qara'a applies this principle by encouraging engineers to deliver work in stages, promoting ongoing feedback loops that resemble the iterative development cycle embedded in Scrum and other Agile methods. This iterative review mechanism corresponds with scholarly insights emphasizing the importance of continuous refinement and collaborative evaluation in promoting innovation and improving deliverable quality (Amajuoyi et al., 2024; Chathuranga et al., 2023).

Taken together, these practices indicate that Agile at Qara'a operates not as a prescribed methodology but as an ingrained organizational mindset. Literature consistently highlights that many organizations adapt Agile principles informally, adjusting structures, terminology, and cadence to fit their specific cultural and operational contexts (Edison et al., 2022; Cao et al., 2009; Hron & Obwegeser, 2021). Qara'a's case illustrates this pattern clearly: its workflows embody Agile's underlying logic iteration, prioritization, and continuous review even without

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conforming to formal Agile procedures. This reinforces the broader view that Agile's true strength lies in its adaptability, and that organizations can successfully operationalize Agile values without rigidly following standardized frameworks.

Agile Coordination Evolution: Contextual Adaptation and Challenges at Qara'a

The evolution of Qara'a's coordination mechanisms—from daily scrum meetings to weekly division-based discussions illustrates how Agile practices can be adapted flexibly to meet contextual needs. Rather than strictly adhering to the formal Scrum model, Qara'a modifies its coordination frequency in response to changes in team workload, organizational demands, and resource constraints. This approach aligns with longitudinal research showing that Agile coordination evolves over time and must be continuously recalibrated to reflect internal and external dynamics (Berntzen et al., 2023; Dingsøyr et al., 2022; Masood et al., 2021). These studies emphasize that Agile effectiveness increases when organizations allow coordination practices to emerge organically rather than imposing rigid routines.

Qara'a's adoption of digital tools such as Discord with threaded conversations for task-based discussions and other collaboration platforms reinforces Agile's emphasis on transparency and rapid communication. Research on distributed and hybrid Agile teams highlights that digital tools like Slack and similar platforms enhance team awareness, support informal interactions, and reduce dependence on formal meetings (Stray & Moe, 2020; Lane et al., 2023). These technologies facilitate asynchronous coordination, enabling teams to maintain Agile communication flows even across physical or temporal distance (Ekechi et al., 2024). Thus, Qara'a's tool ecosystem serves as a foundational enabler of Agile collaboration, allowing flexible, continuous, and context-responsive coordination.

Table 1. Practical Implications of Agile Coordination Adaptation

Adaptation Aspect	Practical Implications	References
Meeting Frequency Adjustment	Coordination tailored to team needs rather than rigid rules	Berntzen et al., 2023; Dingsøyr et al., 2022; Masood et al., 2021
Use of Digital Tools	Improved transparency,	Ekechi et al., 2024; Stray &

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Adaptation Aspect	Practical Implications	References
	awareness, and collaborative flow	Moe, 2020; Lane et al., 2023
Clarification of Agile Roles	Strengthens focus, supports priority management	Kadenic et al., 2022; Wiesche, 2021; Shastri et al., 2021
Backlog Management Formalization	Increases predictability and reduces cognitive load	Wiesche, 2021; Kadenic et al., 2022; Masood et al., 2021

Despite the advantages of adaptive coordination, Qara'a faces challenges common in digital startups, including frequent task interruptions and shifting priorities. The literature shows that such interruptions can significantly disrupt team focus and degrade productivity, especially in Agile settings where continuous flow is essential (Wiesche, 2021). These patterns point to the need for clearer role delineation particularly the Product Owner, who oversees prioritization, and the Scrum Master, who shields the team from excessive disruptions (Kadenic et al., 2022; Shastri et al., 2021). Strengthening these roles could help Qara'a maintain alignment, reduce coordination overhead, and manage emergent tasks without compromising ongoing work.

Qara'a's evolving coordination practices reflect the broader Agile principle that adaptation is more valuable than mechanical compliance. Studies consistently show that Agile thrives when its practices are contextualized rather than replicated verbatim (Berntzen et al., 2023; Masood et al., 2021). While Qara'a already benefits from flexible coordination supported by collaborative technologies, the challenges it faces highlight the importance of formalizing backlog structures and clarifying Agile roles to maintain team stability. By integrating more structured sprint cycles and reinforcing role responsibilities, Qara'a can enhance its ability to manage interruptions, stabilize priorities, and fully realize the advantages of Agile coordination in a dynamic digital startup environment.

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CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Qara'a Indonesia has implemented Agile Project Management principles in a substantive and context-driven manner, even without formally adopting a specific Agile framework. The findings reveal that the organization's workflow—characterized by task categorization, iterative development cycles, adaptive decision-making, and the use of digital coordination tools aligns closely with fundamental Agile practices. These features have enabled Qara'a to enhance the speed of execution, improve cross-team collaboration, and maintain flexibility in responding to evolving user needs and market dynamics.

The implications of this research highlight the potential for digital da'wah startups to strengthen innovation and operational effectiveness through structured yet adaptable project management approaches. For Qara'a, formalizing certain Agile components, such as systematic backlog documentation, defined sprint cycles, and regular retrospective sessions, may further improve workflow stability and support long-term scalability. At a broader level, this study contributes to the emerging discourse on Agile implementation within religious technology initiatives a domain that remains largely underexplored despite its growing relevance.

However, the research is not without limitations. The study relies primarily on qualitative data obtained from a single key informant, which may not fully capture the diversity of perspectives within the organization. Additionally, the scope is limited to internal operational processes and does not assess user-side outcomes or comparative performance across other digital startups. Future research could adopt a multi-informant or mixed-methods approach, examine user experience impacts, or conduct comparative analyses to provide a more comprehensive understanding of Agile adoption in digital religious platforms.

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