

# *Waterfall*

*How management teams in the Middle East should think about CRM transformation*

A practical guide to agile delivery, business value focus, and the mindset shifts that separate successful CRM programmes from costly, delayed ones.

# Why most CRM projects in this region still *fall short*

CRM transformation is one of the most strategically significant investments a business can make. Yet across the Middle East, too many of these programmes end up over budget, behind schedule, and — most painfully — failing to deliver the business value that justified the investment in the first place.

The root cause is rarely the technology. It is rarely the people. It is the methodology — specifically, a waterfall mindset that treats a CRM project like a construction contract: design everything upfront, build it, and hand it over.

This guide sets out how management teams and their implementation partners should think differently — and what that looks like in practice at Sirocco.

## 01 THE WATERFALL TRAP

---

## Why waterfall feels safe — *and why it isn't*

Waterfall project management has an intuitive appeal, particularly for senior leadership teams. Define everything upfront. Agree a fixed scope, a fixed budget, and a fixed timeline. Deliver. Measure whether you got what you asked for.

It feels like accountability. It feels like control. In reality, for a complex CRM programme, it is neither.

The challenge is this: no management team — no matter how experienced — can fully define their CRM requirements on day one. Business priorities shift. Market conditions change. As users begin working with early builds, they discover what they actually need. As the implementation partner digs into the data and processes, they uncover things nobody anticipated.

*Every waterfall CRM project generates change requests — not because someone failed to plan, but because learning happens during delivery.*

These change requests are not a sign of failure. They are a natural consequence of discovery. But in a waterfall model, each change request is a friction event: it requires renegotiation, budget amendments, timeline revisions, and a difficult conversation about who bears the cost.

The result? Management teams are incentivised to resist changes even when those changes would make the project more valuable. Scope rigidity becomes a substitute for sound governance. And at the end of a 12-month programme, the business receives something that was defined a year ago, in a market that has moved on.

DIMENSION	WATERFALL	AGILE (SIROCCO)
Business value delivered during project	× Low	✓ High — every sprint
Ability to adapt to changing requirements	× Very low	✓ Very high
Stakeholder visibility & involvement	× Start & end only	✓ Every 2 weeks
Risk of outdated scope at go-live	× High	✓ Low
Budget friction when requirements change	× High	✓ Low
Time to first business value	× Late	✓ Early

DIMENSION	WATERFALL	AGILE
SCOPE	× 100% defined before work begins	✓ Business values fixed; scope refined as you learn
SUCCESS MEASURE	× On time, on budget, to spec	✓ Business value delivered throughout
CHANGE	× Change requests — friction & renegotiation	✓ Backlog reprioritisation — standard operating procedure
STAKEHOLDERS	× Engaged at start and sign-off	✓ Involved every sprint, every demo
DELIVERY	× Single event at project close	✓ Incremental value throughout the programme
BUDGET CHANGES	× Required whenever requirements evolve	✓ Reprioritise within the same budget

## Agile is not a lack of *discipline*

A common misconception among leadership teams is that agile means "we figure it out as we go." It does not. It means being disciplined about the right things — and flexible about the details.

At the start of an agile CRM programme, management and the implementation partner do not define the exhaustive list of features to be built. What they define — with rigour — are the business value streams: the core outcomes the business needs to achieve. These might include improving sales pipeline visibility, reducing lead response times, improving customer retention rates, or enabling cross-sell across business units.

These value streams become the fixed compass points of the project. Every feature, every user story, every hour of development effort is evaluated against them. If a piece of work cannot be traced back to a specific business value, it should not be on the roadmap.

#### SIROCCO PRINCIPLE

Every item of work — every feature, every user story, every configuration decision — must be explicitly tied to a defined business value. If we cannot articulate why we are doing something, we should not be doing it.

The details of how those values are delivered — which specific screens, which fields, which integrations, which automations — are worked out collaboratively as the project progresses. This is not vagueness. It is a deliberate acknowledgment that the team will know more in month three than they did in month one, and that the delivery plan should reflect that growing knowledge.

**70%**

of waterfall CRM projects experience significant scope changes mid-delivery

**2x**

more likely to deliver on budget with iterative, value-driven approaches

**40%**

of features defined on day one are rarely or never used by end users

03

SIROCCO'S DELIVERY MODEL

## How Sirocco *delivers*

At Sirocco, we structure every CRM programme around a consistent rhythm that gives management teams predictability without sacrificing adaptability.

### 8-week increments

The top-level unit of delivery is the 8-week increment. Each increment has a clear set of intended outcomes, agreed with the business before it begins. These outcomes map directly to the business value streams identified at programme start. At the end of each increment, the business should be able to see, use, and in many cases start benefiting from what has been delivered.

### 2-week sprints

Within each increment, work is organised into 2-week sprints (also called iterations). Each sprint begins with a planning session and ends with a sprint demo — a live demonstration to business stakeholders of what has been built in those two weeks.

This demo cadence is not a formality. It is the primary mechanism for maintaining alignment between the technical team and the business. Stakeholders see real, working software — not PowerPoint slides or wireframes. They can interact with it, ask questions, and flag concerns before those concerns become expensive fixes.

<b>SPRINT 01</b> <b>Plan &amp; Build</b> Weeks 1-2	<b>DEMO</b> <b>Stakeholder Review</b> End wk 2	<b>SPRINT 02</b> <b>Plan &amp; Build</b> Weeks 3-4	<b>DEMO</b> <b>Stakeholder Review</b> End wk 4	<b>SPRINT 03</b> <b>Plan &amp; Build</b> Weeks 5-6	<b>SPRINT 04</b> <b>Plan &amp; Build</b> Weeks 7-8	<b>REVIEW</b> <b>Increment Demo &amp; Retro</b> End wk 8
--	--	--	--	--	--	--

## The product owner

Sitting at the centre of this delivery model is the product owner — a role that functions similarly to a project manager, but with a fundamentally different focus. Where a traditional project manager manages time and budget, the product owner manages business value.

They ensure that the backlog reflects current business priorities, facilitate the daily collaboration between the technical team and business stakeholders, and make prioritisation decisions in real time. In Sirocco's model, the product owner maintains daily contact with business stakeholders — keeping the project aligned to real business needs rather than a requirements document written months ago.

## Measure *value delivered, not scope completed*

This is perhaps the most important mindset shift required of management teams. In a waterfall model, the primary success measure is simple: did we deliver what we said we would, on time and on budget?

This sounds reasonable. But it measures process compliance, not business impact. A project can deliver 100% of its defined scope on time and on budget — and still fail to move the business forward in any meaningful way.

In an agile programme, the primary question is different: are we delivering the business outcomes we set out to achieve?

*At the end of a 12-month fixed-scope project, you risk delivering something that is already outdated. The Middle East's pace of business demands a better way.*

For management teams in the Middle East — where market conditions move quickly, where new regulations, partnerships, and competitive dynamics can emerge rapidly — this distinction is critical. A 12-month fixed-scope CRM programme carries a real risk of arriving at go-live with a system designed for a business context that no longer fully exists.

Agile delivery, structured around business value, is inherently more resilient to this risk. Because priorities are reviewed and reset at every increment — and sometimes every sprint — the programme continuously adjusts to the business as it actually is, not as it was when the contract was signed.

## The backlog: your *living roadmap*

In agile delivery, the backlog is the complete, prioritised list of work that could potentially be delivered in the programme. It is not a fixed list. It grows, shrinks, and is continuously re-ordered as the business learns and its context changes.

When new requirements emerge during the project — and they always will — the product owner works with business stakeholders to estimate the effort involved and add the item to the backlog. The team then makes a collective decision: is this new item important enough to displace something previously agreed? Or does it justify an expansion of the programme budget?

### KEY DIFFERENCE FROM WATERFALL

In a waterfall model, new requirements generate change requests — formal renegotiations that create friction and delay. In an agile model, they generate backlog items — inputs to an ongoing prioritisation conversation. One is an exception process. The other is standard operating procedure.

## Reprioritisation vs. additional budget

In most cases, the right response to new requirements is reprioritisation — moving the new item up the backlog while deferring something of lower value. The budget remains unchanged. The programme simply delivers different things.

In some cases, the new requirement is sufficiently important that it justifies additional investment. That is a legitimate and straightforward conversation: here is the item, here is the effort estimate, here is the business case. The management team decides. There are no surprises, no blame, no lengthy change control processes.

## What the best management teams *do differently*

---

## **Define outcomes, not outputs**

Start by articulating the business results you want — not the features you think you need. "Increase sales team productivity by 20%" is a better starting point than "we need a mobile app."

---

02

## **Appoint an empowered business product owner**

The single most important decision you will make. This person needs seniority, business credibility, and the authority to make prioritisation decisions. Don't assign it to someone who needs to escalate every call.

---

03

## **Attend the sprint demos**

Senior leadership visibility at demos signals that the project matters. It also gives you a regular, unfiltered view of what is actually being built — before issues compound into programme risks.

---

04

## **Protect the cadence**

Sprint rhythms and demo dates should be treated as fixed commitments. In the Middle East, where Ramadan, national holidays, and leadership travel can fragment project focus, proactive planning around the calendar is essential.

---

05

## **Invest in change management from day one**

CRM adoption fails when users are not prepared. Communication, training, and stakeholder engagement should run in parallel with technical delivery from the very first sprint — not bolted on at the end.

---

06

## **Hold your partner accountable to value, not features**

In governance conversations, ask: what business value did we deliver this increment? Not: how many user stories did we close? One is a business conversation. The other is a status report.

---

07

## **Plan for the Middle East business calendar**

Savvy management teams build a programme calendar that accounts for Ramadan, Eid periods, National Day holidays, and reduced summer activity. Agile's short sprint cycles absorb these naturally — but only if planned for.

## Treat data migration as a first-class workstream

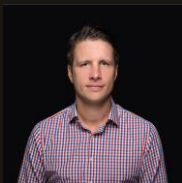
Data migration is consistently underestimated in Middle East CRM projects. It should have its own dedicated workstream, sprint activities, and quality gates — not an afterthought in the final increment.

## Additional best practices

01. Establish clear programme governance before kick-off — including who has the authority to approve backlog reprioritisation and who signs off on budget adjustments.
02. Localise your business value framework. What drives value in a GCC business is not always what drives value elsewhere — consider relationship-driven sales cycles, Arabic language requirements, and multi-entity business structures.
03. Require value traceability. Every sprint deliverable should reference the business value stream it serves. This keeps both sides focused on what matters.
04. Plan for integration complexity early. CRM programmes in the Middle East frequently involve ERP integrations, legacy billing systems, and government-linked platforms (e.g. VAT, Bayanat). These carry the highest risk and should be addressed from sprint one.
05. Measure adoption, not just delivery. Track user login rates, data quality, and process compliance alongside functional delivery throughout the programme.

### READY TO RUN YOUR CRM PROGRAMME DIFFERENTLY?

Sirocco Group partners with management teams across the Middle East to deliver CRM transformations that are agile, value-driven, and built for the realities of this market.



AUTHOR

**Niklas Wikström**

Sirocco Group

[niklas.wikstrom@siroccogroup.com](mailto:niklas.wikstrom@siroccogroup.com)