



How to apply Agile practices with your team or business area

Since 2001, when Agile values and principles were formalised in the [Agile Manifesto](#), Agile has become the standard process for software development. [Studies](#) show that about a third of all software projects use some form of Agile methodology.

Though Agile was created with software in mind, non-IT teams have begun adopting Agile principles, or elements of it, finding that employing an Agile mindset and using Agile practices can help their team or business get more done, make their customers happier, and make their teams more collaborative.

What is Agile?

Before describing how non-IT teams have used Agile practices successfully in their teams and businesses, what is Agile exactly.

The Agile Manifesto came from a group of developers wanting to write software better, and the Agile movement has been generally taken over as a project management approach.

The Agile Manifesto spells out 4 Values:

1. **Individuals and interactions over processes and tools** (Or: Getting people to [self-organise](#) and talk to each other about what they're working on. No one likes to be micromanaged!)
2. **Working software over comprehensive documentation** (Or: Getting stuff done is better than talking or writing about getting stuff done. When you get something done and show it to people, you can see what's working and what's not.)
3. **Customer collaboration over contract negotiation** (Or: Stay in touch with your customers. Give them what they want and need, or you may run out of contracts to sign.)
4. **Responding to change over following a plan** (Or: Things change. Let's be flexible!)

There are many Agile practices which can be adopted within Agile values. But, some key practices most Agile approaches share include:

- Creating a list (or backlog) of prioritised (and deprioritised) work
- Writing "tickets" that describe all the units of work necessary to accomplish the items in the backlog
- Displaying public boards so the team — and stakeholders — can track progress
- Planning out the work to be done in a sprint, or a set period of time (usually 2-4 weeks)
- Holding daily 5-10 minute standup meetings where the team checks in on progress and discusses challenges

- Doing retrospective meetings when the "sprint" is over to discuss what went well, what went wrong, and what could be improved

Agile success stories from non-software teams

Try out some of these ideas in your own area

1. How creating a "backlog" helped a learning team prioritise and communicate with stakeholders

Marney Andes is Director of Learning and Development for [Air Methods](#), an emergency air transport company. The company has about 4,500 employees and 2,000 medical crew. Andes and her team are tasked with creating or managing the strategy for creating learning for the organisation.

Andes says when she first came to Air Methods, stakeholders (and even her own team) didn't have an understanding of how long it would take to create the learning needed.

Andes and her team started using the Agile practice of keeping a prioritised backlog in a public [Trello](#) board. The board lists training requests, training currently being built, and more. When stakeholders' requests are added to the board, Andes and her team give the request a green or red code; green means they can currently take the project on, and red means it goes into the backlog. This is visible and can be accessed by stakeholders.

Every month, the group of stakeholders meets to prioritise the backlog by voting democratically on what gets pushed to the top.

Andes says using the Agile practice of the prioritised backlog helps *"communicate expectations to the business about why and how we are doing things the way we are. They see what learning the other teams are doing"*

2. How a recruiting team used a Kanban board to be more efficient

William Kammersell (Agile coach) shares how a recruiting team in one of his clients used Agile practices to streamline the way they handled candidate phone screens.

"A recruiting team can't predict candidate outcomes," says Kammersell. *"Recruiting can have a pretty standard process flow from start to finish. However, there are factors on a daily basis that can rapidly change the flow."*

Because of the irregular nature of recruiting, the team needed to be flexible and efficient, while also maintaining transparency among their team and stakeholders. Otherwise a recruiter might get bogged down in the work, causing candidates to drop out, managers to become impatient, or the costs to rise significantly.

Kammersell worked with the team to use the Kanban board practice of the Kanban Agile framework. The team displayed the work they had on their plate on a public, physical board for the team and other stakeholders to see.

Kammersell says displaying a Kanban board helped team members understand when another team member was overloaded. *"Traditionally, people don't really share what they're working on and people might not know how they can help each other,"* says Kammersell. *"Things take longer that way."*



Start using Agile practices with your team or business

Before teams take the step to apply Agile, they need to ask why they want to use it. What problems does your team or business area have that an Agile mindset and practices might help solve?

Maybe your team or colleagues struggle with duplicating each other's efforts. Try keeping a daily standup: a 5-10 minute meeting in which everyone shares what he or she did since yesterday, is planning to do today, and finds is blocking his or her progress. Tip: have everyone actually stand during the meeting to keep it short.

Maybe the members of your team don't feel trusted or empowered to do what needs to be done to meet goals. Try creating a backlog of work to be completed during a particular period (try 2-4 weeks) and allowing the team to come up with the plan for accomplishing the work.

Maybe your business area can't seem to understand how to give the students or customers the product they want. Try delivering the smallest, most valuable thing as soon as possible to a small group of customers. Get feedback on it, improve the product, then repeat. Involve them in the process from the start!