

Agile collaboration in the age of remote work

Never before have remote teams existed at the unprecedented scale seen today. This new reality of an entirely dispersed workforce threatens one of the most important principles of an Agile approach: collaboration.

A *recent survey by Lucid* revealed that 75% of employees felt team collaboration has suffered the most since transitioning to remote work. The loss of teamwork and cooperation has even dramatically impacted business activities; almost half of C-suite respondents reported that their company was forced to delay major launches, campaigns or initiatives as a result of this massive shift to remote work.

Two *Agile Principles* specifically reference the importance of collaboration:

- the need for daily contact between business people and developers (#4), and

- the superiority of face-to-face communication (#6).

This frequent and “high-bandwidth” interaction is critical to fostering engagement, innovation and connection across teams. When collaboration breaks down between individuals, within teams or across an enterprise, the result is clearly negative.

How can technology executives respond to the hit collaboration has taken from the unprecedented scale of remote work? And how can Agile teams adapt their

practices and tools to support human interaction and effectively work together, whether in real time or asynchronously?

Leveraging virtual whiteboards to drive collaboration

Virtual whiteboards support collaboration by providing a space for Agile teams to engage together both visually and verbally in real time. Combined with video conferencing, online whiteboards can enhance team interactions. At the same time, visuals help organise complex processes and strategies that would otherwise be difficult to manage.

When teams aren't colocated, the shared virtual space acts as a single source of truth to reference throughout sprints or long-term projects, allowing teams to stay aligned.

Virtual whiteboards provide remote collaborators all the benefits of a physical whiteboard, as well as advantages that are not possible in a traditional conference room. There are no physical limits on participants joining a brainstorming session, and sticky notes on the board aren't accidentally erased or thrown out. Manipulating and analysing ideas can be automated, making it easier for teams to move into action. Every team member contributes simultaneously, therefore everyone's ideas are considered in the larger discussion.

Particularly valuable to Agile teams is the capability of virtual whiteboards to provide both a big picture overview and, alongside, tactical action items. At its core, Agile relies on self-organised teams working closely with business leaders to best deliver results rapidly and efficiently. While this approach results in well-documented increases in productivity, it also opens up the possibility for teams to lose sight of the big picture as they focus on the iteration. Teams using virtual whiteboards can apply the power of visuals to clarify high-level plans and strategies, enabling dispersed teams to stay on track and react appropriately when changes to strategy, processes or initiatives occur.

Facilitating collaboration in the next normal

As Agile teams continue to search for remote work solutions to foster collaboration, maintaining open communication channels and interactions between teams is essential. That's where facilitation plays a vital role.

By leveraging virtual whiteboards, leaders can move teams away from the risk of groupthink toward the inclusion of diverse perspectives. For example, when group collaboration begins as a discussion, some participants may not speak up as actively or frequently, resulting in unique ideas and experience being excluded as they were never shared. Instead, facilitators can leverage structured brainstorming to increase the likelihood that all participants will have an equal opportunity to provide input. This can be done by providing time and space for individual ideation, to then be followed by group processes.

Agile team interactions at sprint planning, daily standups and more, can easily transfer to the virtual world, particularly as organisations invest in solutions such as virtual whiteboards that foster engagement, collaboration and productivity.

And when teams return to the office, these applications, combined with careful planning and deliberate facilitation, can enhance Agile practices, reduce distractions and bolster a team's communication and execution.

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