

Understanding and implementing Agile

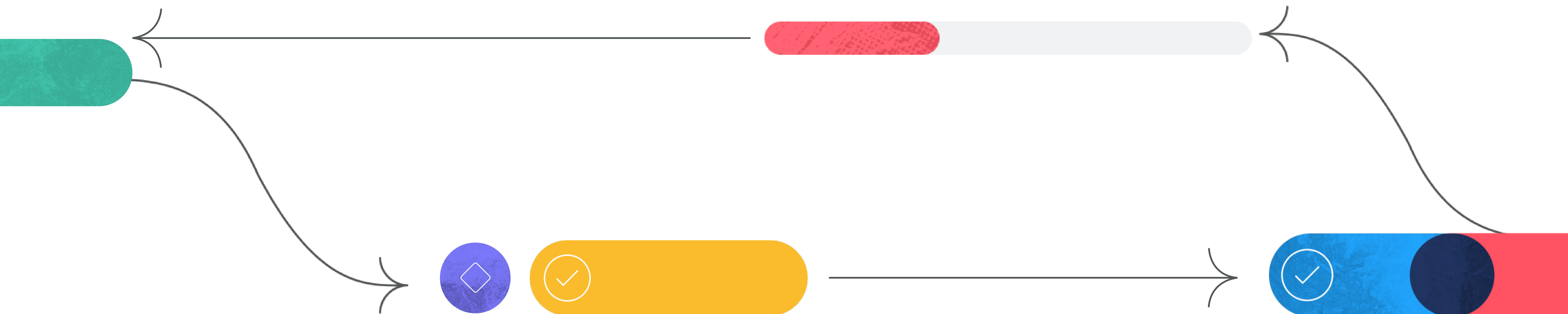


Table of contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Foreword: The Agile age | 03 |
| Understanding Agile | 04 |
| Making Agile a reality: implementation and management | 06 |
| How to level up Agile with Asana | 09 |
| Conclusion | 13 |

Foreword: Agile Age

Organisations across the globe are redefining what efficient, productive, and rewarding work means. Previous assumptions about the sanctity of the office, email, and 9-5 working patterns have been upended.

With work being reset, how can you embrace change and help your team achieve more?

Rethinking project management—how you plan, organise, and manage your team’s work from start to finish—can have a dramatic impact on driving overall business outcomes.

Since the early 20th century, when Henry Gantt, the “father of planning” created the—you guessed it—Gantt chart—countless project management methodologies have been created. However, in testament to the lasting value of Gantt’s original vision, his charts remain a staple of business and many work methodologies today.

Agile Methodologies are an approach to project management that break work into small interdisciplinary teams with coherent goals to work toward. They offer a potential alternative to the phased approach, with work instead built on iteration, collaboration, and continuous testing. Those who embrace Agile methods can manage curveballs, are nimble in the face of change, and are able to rapidly build competitive advantages.

The commonly used phased approach to work management (also known as “waterfall”) breaks work into distinct steps completed in a clear order. It sounds sensible, and if your project is small it might do the trick. But work is complex today. In an age of disruption and digital transformation, businesses often need to go beyond both Gantt charts and the phased approach.

But how can businesses implement Agile project management? (Short answer: More easily than you think). What, in fact, does Agile even mean? (Short answer: Perhaps not what you think). And is it only relevant for startups and software developers? (Short answer: No).

According to Harvard Business Review’s analysis, Agile can result in higher productivity, boosted morale, faster time to market, and lower risks.¹ Within certain teams and businesses, and when properly understood and implemented, Agile methodologies can transform work.

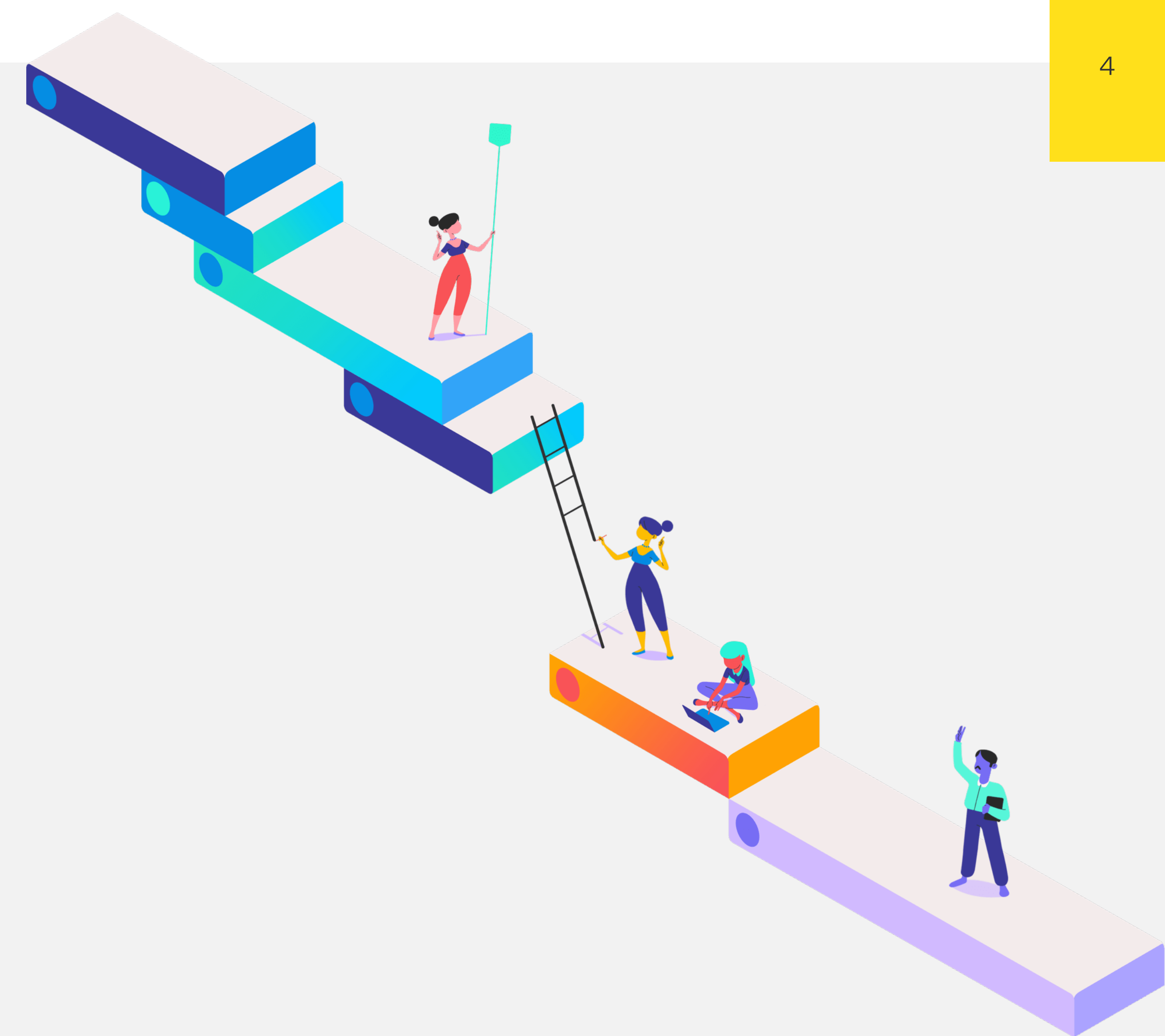
In the following chapters, you’ll discover what it means to be Agile, whether it’s right for you and your team, and how your organisation can change habits to thrive in the future.

¹. <https://hbr.org/2018/05/agile-at-scale>

Understanding Agile

Agility and flexibility are often discussed together. Too often, though, broad discussions can confuse distinct methodologies and practices. When flexibility and agility are merely used as buzzwords, it's easy to misunderstand how and where they add value.

The nuts-and-bolts responsibility of implementing flexible and Agile practices usually falls on leads and managers seeking to make their teams more nimble. For those implementers, understanding the nuances of flexibility and Agile methods is key.



AGILITY'S COUSIN: FLEXIBILITY

Flexibility is about greater choice around how and when you work. It's usually associated with benefits such as improved work-life balance, the ability to undertake asynchronous working, and enabling workers to attend to other responsibilities like caring or parenting without impacting their job.

Flexibility is essential in the post-COVID age (87% of workers aged 25-43 expect input on flexible working moving forward²) and it helps to create a more inclusive and diverse workforce. Further, flexibility can be an important addition to Agile methodologies. However, it alone does not create a nimble workplace.



Confronted with a large, complex problem, they break it into modules, develop solutions to each component through rapid prototyping and tight feedback loops, and integrate the solutions into a coherent whole.

— *Harvard Business Review on Agile teams*

GETTING TO GRIPS WITH AGILE

Members of small, interdisciplinary Agile teams are empowered to freely innovate in how they reach their goals (rather than being directly led), and often collaborate together at different times from different locations.

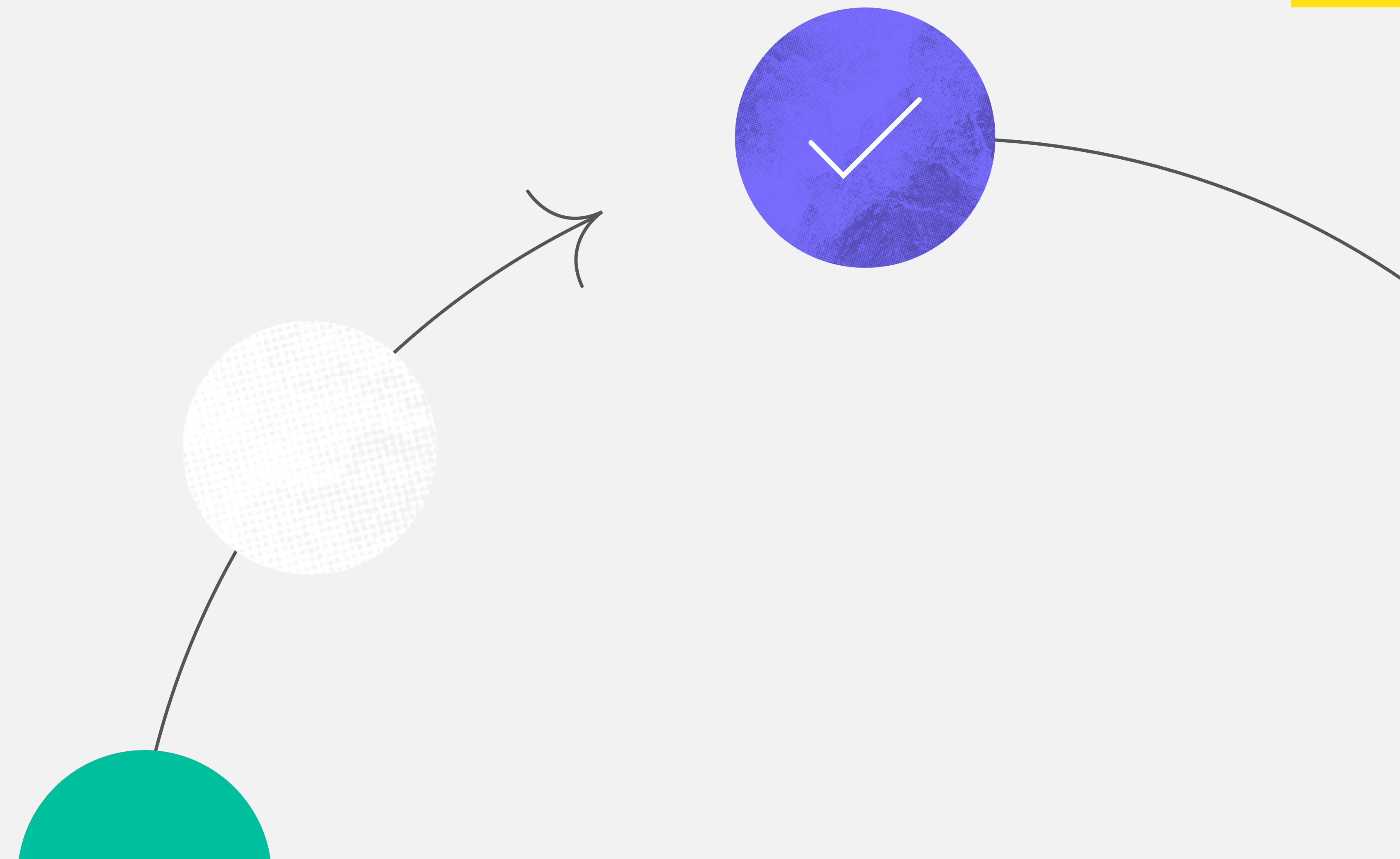
Most importantly, though, Agile approaches are focused on iteration. Agile teams don't expect perfection immediately. They want something more subtle: ongoing innovation. Teams rapidly create a solution that simply works (often known as the MVP or minimum viable product) and then iterate on it, returning and working through each stage of work again in a loop (each of these loops is often called a "sprint"). This continuous improvement is the heart of Agile Methodologies and boosts innovation, while ensuring there's always a solution ready to launch.

This approach also requires a mindset shift toward success. Agile workers are focused on outcomes like growth, profitability or quality leads, rather than inputs or outputs, like the number of hours worked, amount of content developed, or time spent in meetings. In simple terms, there's a focus on quality over quantity.

Agile working contrasts with "command-and-control" top-down leadership (itself an outdated holdover from way-back in the factories of the Industrial Revolution). For many, Agile working might sound like a great alternative to current work practices. But once you've got to grips with what Agile means, how do you start implementing it?

² <https://uk.finance.yahoo.com/news/coronavirus-nine-in-10-millennials-expect-flexible-working-going-forward-154758466.html?>

Making Agile a reality: implementation and management

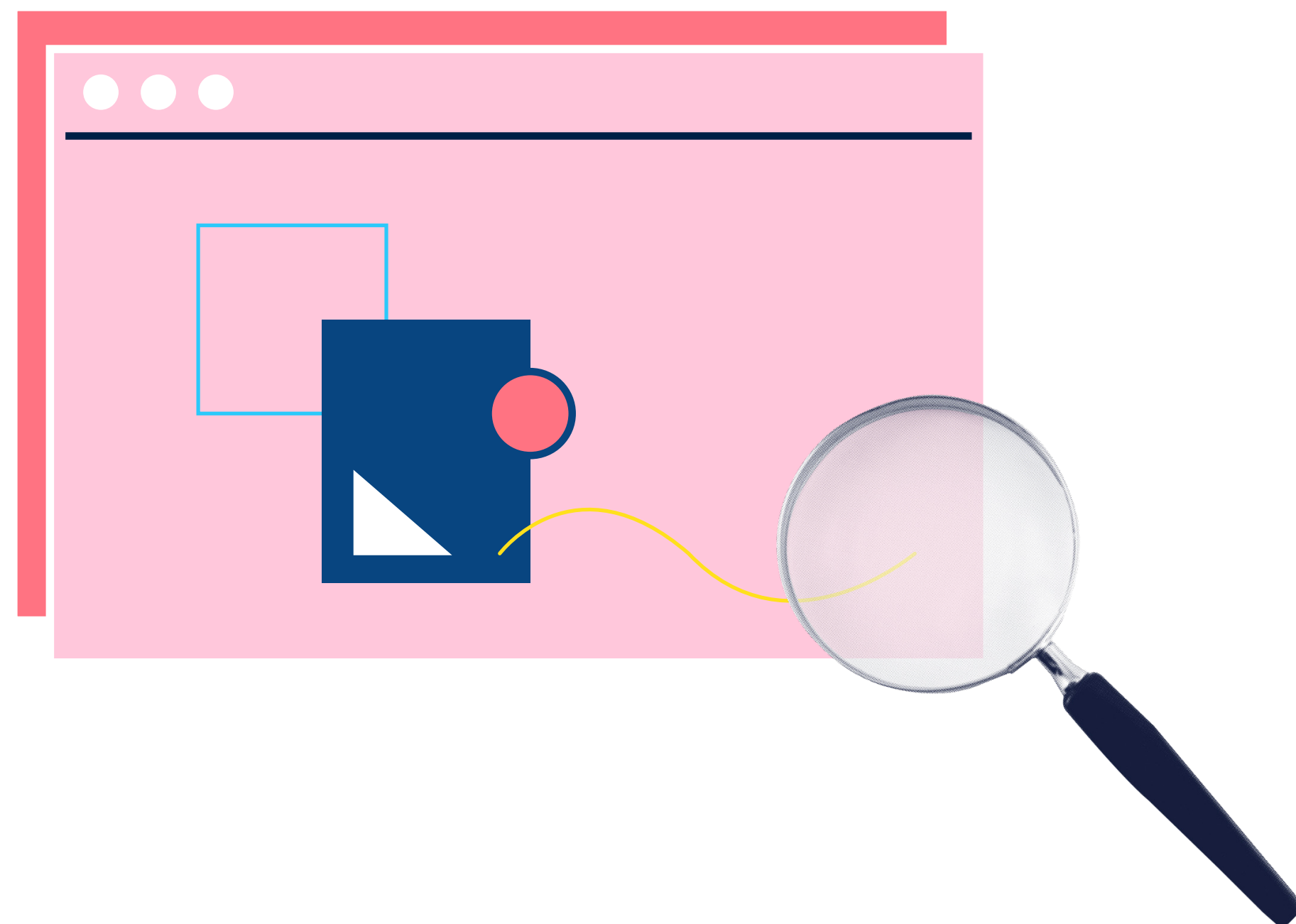


IDENTIFY FUNCTIONS THAT WILL BENEFIT FROM AGILE

First off, Agile isn't suited to every process or every job function. Agile is just one of many approaches to work management, rather than a silver-bullet for success. It's important for teams and businesses to experiment and find the right approach for them.

Agile gained traction first amongst tech teams in the 1990s. Software developers in particular wanted a faster way to problem solve, develop, test, and launch code. Today, teams beyond the IT department stand to benefit, but there are still some areas where its impact will be limited.

The most value will be added in teams focused on creative work, product improvement, refining services or developing new business models. Marketers, product dev teams, HR professionals and many more can benefit. However, regular, inflexible processes are less suited to Agile, for example maintenance work or accounting.



RESIST TOP-DOWN APPROACHES

Agile working is about empowering the team, so top-down attempts to implement it are counterintuitive. Senior execs, however, can lead by example. Agile leadership focuses on vision over delegation. Meanwhile, at the team level, project leads are important, and should guide on where to focus efforts, but not tell teams how to achieve the intended results.

PUT CLARITY OF MISSION AT THE HEART OF MANAGEMENT

While on paper Agile sounds great, it's also natural to feel it could be a little anarchic. If everyone's left to do their thing, how do you make sure projects stay on track?

It's important to remember that giving teams more autonomy in securing results doesn't mean a business loses control over its mission. It's still down to leadership to set strategic goals and priorities, Agile methods are simply a potential route to achieving them more effectively.

What's more, it's no coincidence that Agile first gained popularity amongst the tech-savvy. Technology can play an important role in keeping Agile projects running seamlessly with teams aligned on tasks and how they ladder-up to overall missions.



Agile in action: Hudl's marketing success

Hudl provides performance analysis software to more than 4.3 million coaches, athletes, trainers, and sports analysts around the world. The marketing and design team collaborates across the whole organisation, and as its projects grew, it had to move fast and look beyond its fragmented mix of spreadsheets and legacy project management tools.

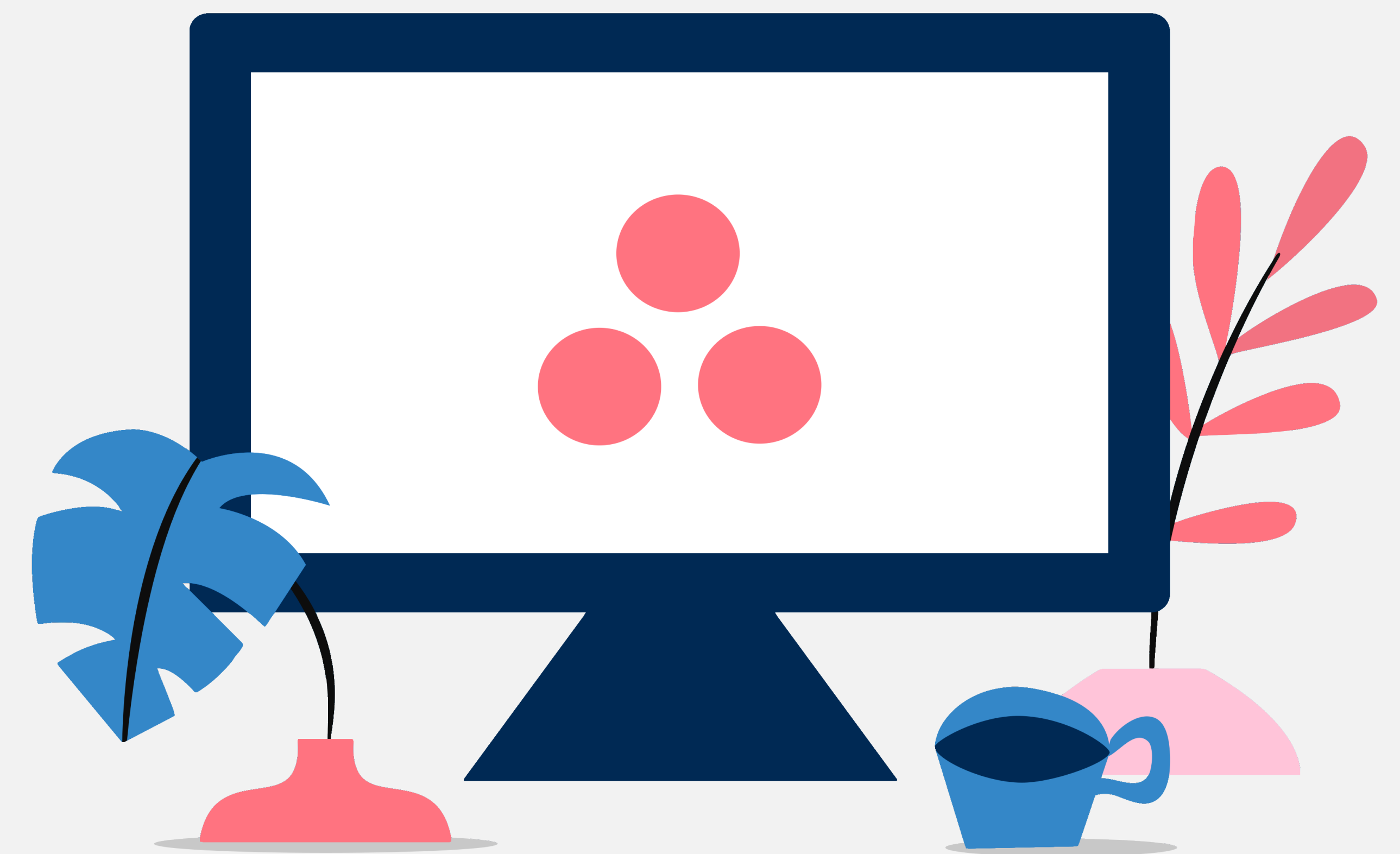
Embracing Agile methodologies and Asana's features like Workload and task dependencies gave Hudl's teams more visibility of work, while streamlining projects. Today, Hudl runs all marketing and creative work, including web development and Agile sprint projects, in Asana. The team can keep track of sprints, give everyone transparent access to tasks and approvals, and collect data to help optimise future work. Not only has Agile and Asana driven greater productivity, but the team also reports higher levels of confidence and engagement.

Hudl's continued cutting-edge campaigns are just one example of what an all-star team with an Agile approach and the right tech can achieve.

Ready to try Agile?

Talk to us: <https://asana.com/sales?language=en>

How to level up Agile with Asana



While there are wall-to-wall Agile companies, it's likely that you'll want to focus on Agile approaches within specific teams, or to roll it out gradually, to see if it's the right fit.

As you go further into your Agile journey you'll discover there are many takes on the Agile recipe. Here we focus on one of the most common forms, which incorporates all the key tenets of Agile we've discussed so far. It's known as "Scrum". But remember, Agile is all about iteration, so don't feel bound to one approach—keep testing, innovating, and ultimately improving how you work.

Choosing a work management tool that can be adapted and customised for different types of Agile or non-Agile work processes can keep all teams aligned—without adding unnecessary complexity to an Agile-transformation. Asana helps you to plan, organise, and manage Agile projects in a way that's as flexible and collaborative as your team, and it's ready to adapt as you figure out the right approach. Here's how Asana can help you move to Agile working.

THE SCRUM-TO-ASANA POCKET-DICTIONARY

When you first get started with Agile it can sound like a different language, but the concepts translate directly into actions you can take in Asana. With our guide to Scrum you'll be fluent in no time.

● AGILE SCRUM

A Acceptance criteria

B Backlog

E Epic

F Feature

S Size
Sprint
Story

T Task
Time to finish

● IN ASANA

Include information in a task's description

Create a backlog project

Create a project portfolio

Create one project per feature

Use a drop-down custom field to indicate size
Create a sprint planning project
Add in tasks in your feature's project

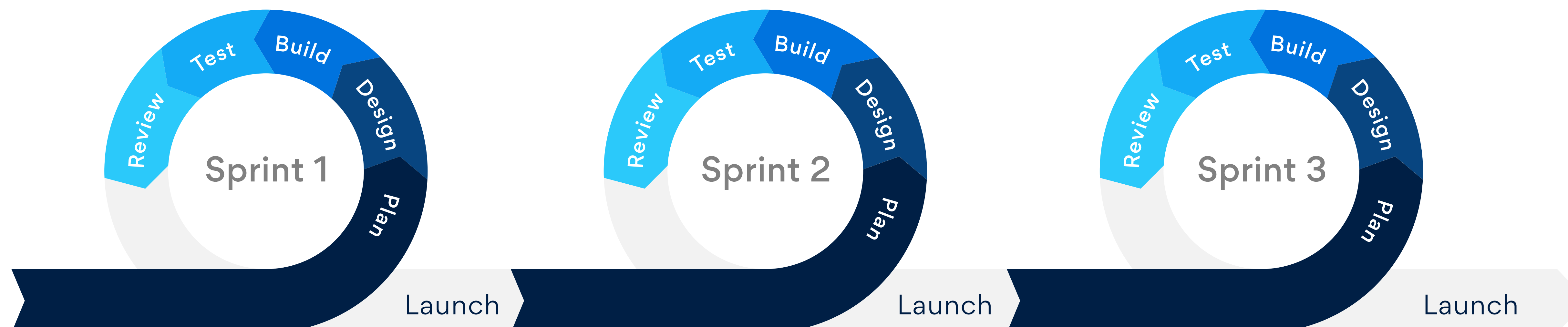
Add subtasks to your Asana story task
Use numeric custom fields

1. PLAN AND ROADMAP

Asana can break down your overall mission (or epic in Agile terminology) into smaller pieces. Big launches for example, can be split out into smaller projects, tasks and subtasks which can be transparently divided up between the team and given clear, ongoing status updates. Asana also offers [templates for Agile sprints](#)—the short time-boxed periods of work toward a set goal, the loops of which can form the key stepping-stones taking you toward your mission/epic.

2. TRACK PROGRESS AND STREAMLINE PROCESSES

As a single source of truth, Asana can keep Agile projects from turning into a long to-do list without clear owners or updates. Instead, Asana is a flexible space in which plans can be tracked, reviewed, iterated on, and updated as new innovations take place during the Agile process. **Portfolios** can keep track of all your sprint projects in one place and **Workload** offers a visual guide to your team’s capacity, all in real time. Additionally, **Rules** can automate regular requests saving valuable time. For example, software company GoSpotCheck saves dozens of steps on every Agile sprint by having customer requests automatically added to Asana projects. On a more granular level, for unexpected hitches and glitches, Asana’s priority settings make it clear at a glance whether a task is mission-critical or a nice-to-have.



3. COORDINATE AND ALIGN WITH TEAMMATES

With sprints in motion, there may be subsequent meetings to determine project scope, plans, timings and more. Beyond kick-off meetings, stand-up meetings are also used for regular pulse-checks to iron out priorities or quickly brainstorm. Agile is an efficient way to work, so it's important each of these meetings are focused and action oriented. Asana can be used to create meeting tasks with agendas, action items, relevant docs to read and more—[we even have a helpful template to get you started](#).



4. CONDUCT RETROSPECTIVES

Learning and iteration are at the heart of Agile. Once an individual sprint or a full epic are complete, you'll want to take stock, identify challenges, and be ready to level-up for next time. Using Asana, you can get clear actionable insights during retrospectives. It's simple to see what's been accomplished, and which tasks might be left outstanding, while Asana's progress view and dashboard will give you customisable data-driven overviews with clean visualisations on everything from budgets to deadlines.

All this can be used to provide an ultra-clear update to the rest of the business—because now you're an Agile-master, it's time to iterate on innovations, streamline sprints and showcase the value Agile adds by creating a more nimble, resilient, and effective workplace.

Conclusion

Agile can be a powerful way to shift your team towards more streamlined processes, driven by meaningful outcomes. For many waiting to take the plunge, as wider fundamental changes to work are taking place, now might be the time to experiment with Agile and see if it works for your business. When the mindset (and jargon) is demystified, Agile has the potential to contribute to a more nimble and effective workplace, and with the help from work management platforms like Asana, it's never been simpler to try. As the world around us is transforming, maybe the way you work should too.





If you want to learn how you can use Asana
to set up and drive your Agile workflow,
talk to us today.

