

# How to Create an Agile Working Agreement (with Sample)



A functional working agreement is critical for a self-organizing, productive agile team. This collaborative, living document helps teams build trust, establish flow, and easily resolve conflicts.

Here, we lay out how to create a working agreement and provide a sample working agreement that we created for our remote team.

## What is a Working Agreement?

A working agreement in agile is a set of guidelines created by the team to establish expectations the team has for one another. The working agreement has many names, including the “Code of Conduct,” “Ways of Working,” “Team Norms,” and “Team Constitution.”

The Working Agreement serves as a reminder of agreed-upon norms for team members to collaborate and communicate. It is usually created when a new team is formed or when onboarding new team members.

## Characteristics of an Effective Working Agreement

- **Public and visible.** The working agreement should always be visible to the team so that it can be referred to easily.

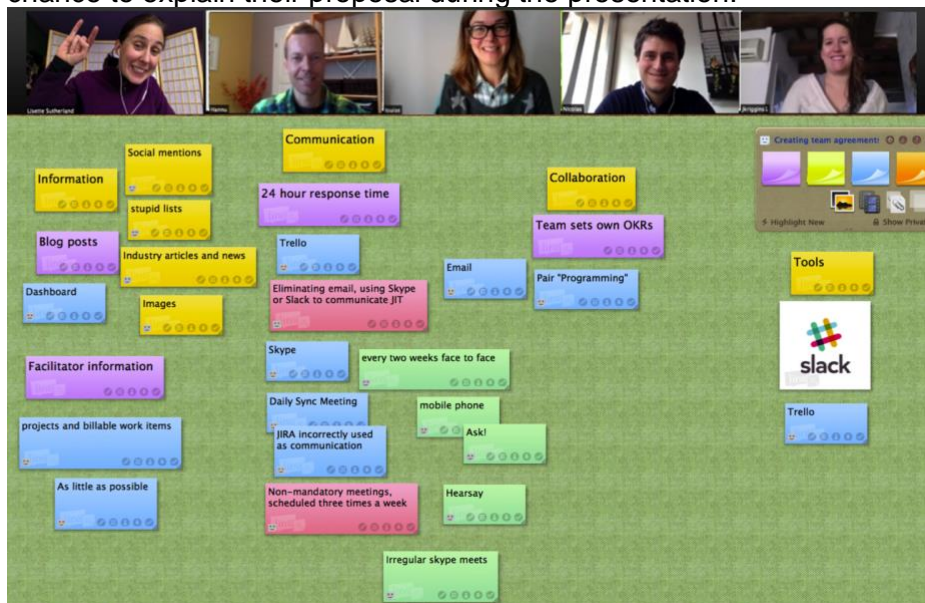
- **Malleable.** The working agreement should be reviewed frequently and can be updated as new cases come up. For instance, during COVID-19 when we had to adjust to a remote working arrangement, we modified our working agreement to accommodate new remote working rules.
- **Concise.** The number of items in the working agreement should be limited to only the most important so that the team can recall it easily.
- **Collaborative.** Each team member should participate in creating and accepting the items in the working agreement.
- **Enforced.** If an item in the working agreement is violated, the team should hold each other accountable and point it out.

## Creating an Agile Working Agreement

The Working Agreement is formed during a meeting with the team, Scrum Master, and Product Owner. To get the team onboard with the working agreement and drive home its importance, it helps to break it into pre-set categories. For instance, when we were establishing our remote working agreement, we broke it down into the following categories: Communication, Sprint and Meeting Cadences, Timeboxes, Team Values, Artifacts, and Future topics to discuss.

At first, team members will write on post-it notes some ideas for what they think should go in the working agreement. The scrum master can present some prompts to help facilitate ideas, such as “How should we resolve conflicts?” and “What guidelines would help establish expectations for each other when there’s an approaching deadline?”

The team will have some time to write down their ideas. The scrum master should instruct the team to write proposals that are self-explanatory at first sight. Each team member will have a chance to explain their proposal during the presentation.



Source: Lisette Sutherland, Collaboration Superpowers

Next comes the voting and discussion. Each team member will take turns to present and explain one of their ideas. The rest of the team will have a chance to ask questions about the proposal.

The team will then vote all at the same time using the hand signals below:



**Thumb up** means: Yes, I like it AND I believe I will be capable of honouring it.



**Thumb down** means: No, I believe this would be bad for us as a team – or – No, I don't believe I'm capable of honouring this at all.



**Thumb sideways** means: Sure, if there are no thumbs down, I will accept this being in our Working Agreement. I would however like to share a thought or concern.



**Closed fist** means: This specific principle doesn't apply to me or my work, so I abstain. I will let the others decide. I'm okay with their decision and will respect it.

(from [Crisp's Blog](#))

If there are no thumbs down for that proposal, the scrum master can move the post-it to the Working Agreement section of the board.

If there is a thumb down, then the team should have a discussion to see if there is a way to tweak the proposal so that everyone is happy with it. However, if the discussion goes on for longer than the timebox allows, the proposal should be put in the Maybe Later section to be discussed at a future Retrospective.

The team will continue to present, vote and discuss until the timebox is up. Once the working agreement is complete, the scrum master can read each of the items and prompt the team to establish a home for the working agreement, such as a physical or digital Kanban board.

## Sample Working Agreement for a Remote Agile Team (Updated for COVID-19)

The beauty of agile is the ability to adapt to unexpected situations. That was the case with Coronavirus, which forced our team to work from home. Remote working brought up new scenarios that we had to accommodate into our working agreement, which is why we drafted up an amended Remote Working Agreement for COVID-19.

While most of the items like our team values and communication rules stayed the same, we had to make adjustments to the working agreement like core hours and timeboxes. Below is our FunRetro Kanban board with our special remote working agreement. Feel free to take a look and adopt any items for your own team's working agreement!

