

Working as an Agile ESCWA

Roles, Work Cycles and Meetings



Shared Prosperity Dignified Life





Shared Prosperity **Dignified Life**



VISION

ESCWA, an innovative catalyst for a stable, just and flourishing Arab region

MISSION

Committed to the 2030 Agenda, ESCWA's passionate team produces innovative knowledge, fosters regional consensus and delivers transformational policy advice. Together, we work for a sustainable future for all.



1 Working as an Agile ESCWA

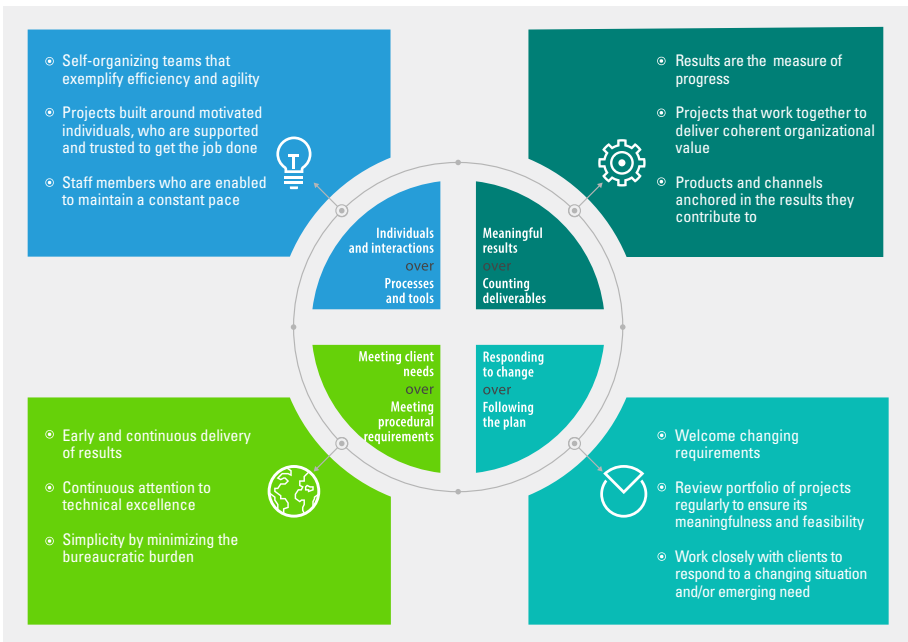
The new way of working at the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) is built on self-organized teams, empowered to make quick decisions on the day-to-day implementation of projects, allowing for faster responsiveness to change.

The Agile approach to project management uses incremental,

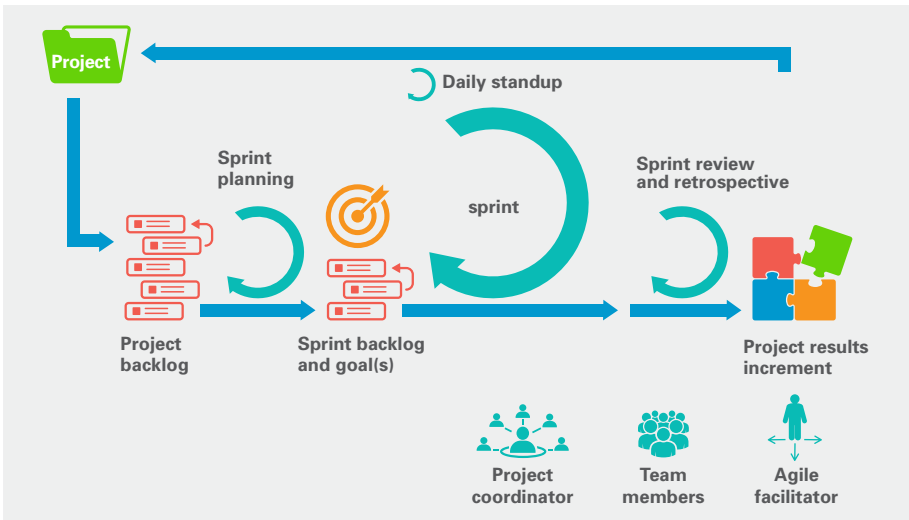
iterative work cycles, known as sprints.

Each work cycle is intended to be short, easily manageable, and generally completed within a couple of weeks. This results in small incremental achievements, with each work cycle building on previous accomplishments and incorporating lessons learned.

A. Agile: new way of working at ESCWA



B. Agile way of working: key concepts and definitions



Team

A group of maximum nine individuals working on a project, who collectively develop the project's task list (backlog) and break it down into (initially) two-to-three week sprints

Sprint

(Initially) a two-to-three week time period for which work goals are set for the team, and according to which tasks are distributed among team members

Team standup

A 15-minute meeting to present progress made in previous days and work planned for upcoming days, so as to identify challenges, opportunities for collaboration, and progress against the sprint goals

Kanban

A visual representation of the project and sprint goals and task list (backlog), divided into to-do, ongoing and completed (ta-da) categories

Sprint goals: x, y, z

To-do (backlog)	Ongoing	Completed (ta-da)
Task 1		Task 1
Task 2	Task 2	
Task 3	Task 3	
Task 4		

Planning meeting

First meeting to kick off a sprint, which aims to identify sprint goal(s), targeting the highest priority tasks in the project backlog to produce a sprint backlog, turning broader targets of the project backlog into clearly defined items the team commits to delivering during the sprint

Review meeting

Meeting focused on evaluating the results of the team's work at the end of each sprint. This includes the extent to which the team completed items on the sprint backlog, and achieved the sprint goals. It clarifies

the project results increment and leads to a revised project backlog

Retrospective

Another meeting at the end of each sprint, focused on evaluating processes (including impediments) and team dynamics: how did we work? how did we work together? what went well? what can be improved? It leads to a list of actionable items to improve the way the team works together

Usually, the review meeting and retrospective are held back-to-back, and should be scheduled for no more than 2 hours.

2 Agile Roles at ESCWA

Agile project management at ESCWA divides responsibilities among the project coordinator, the agile facilitator and all team members. Everybody shares responsibility for the project quality management.

A. Project coordinator

The project coordinator has the clearest idea why a project should exist, and what its products/channels should look like to achieve maximal effectiveness and value for clients. They should understand the needs of the clients, be in contact with them, show them progress as necessary, listen to their feedback, and understand what they want next.

They are the most authoritative resource to the team for answering questions on the products/channels, and milestones to be achieved. They are responsible for coordinating the project, creating the project backlog (a list of prioritized work to undertake), generating sprint backlogs with the team (a list of components that the team commits to deliver during a work cycle), and ensuring that all items in the backlogs are clear.

They are available to the team and are empowered to make decisions about the project. They must ensure progress against the project's foreseen results. They represent the team in key results area (KeyRA) meetings and liaise with the cluster leader.

Project coordinator's main responsibilities: achieving the project goals, maximizing the value of products/channels delivered to clients and balancing competing priorities.



The project coordinator is responsible for ensuring that the team delivers cutting-edge knowledge and added policy value to clients, and avoid products/channels that are repetitive knowledge, insignificant policy measures, and immaterial capacity-building.

B. Team member

Staff members are organized in project teams. A team consists of up

to nine cross-functional individuals working collaboratively to achieve the

same project results, whatever their job titles and functions are. A cross-functional team comprises individuals who together have all the different skills needed to implement the project and achieve its foreseen results.

Team members develop, together with the project coordinator, the project's task list (the project backlog). They break it down into smaller tasks for two-to-three week sprints and decide which person should work on what tasks. They estimate the time needed to accomplish each task.

Teams are empowered to take quick decisions on the day-to-day implementation of projects, allowing for faster responsiveness to change. In this sense, the team itself assumes

project management roles when determining how to best achieve project goals (as established by the project coordinator).

What is Agile? This new way of working emphasizes that task assignments and day-to-day project decisions are made by the team.



Well-functioning Agile teams are focused on the same goals. When one person falls behind, someone else immediately jumps in to help. Team members have pride in their work and want to improve how they work together. Most importantly, they have healthy conflicts (since they trust each other, they are not afraid to debate).

C. Agile facilitator

Agile facilitators serve as the team's coach. They help team members work together in the most effective manner possible, guiding them towards self-organization and cross-functionality. The Agile facilitator helps people understand and better apply the Agile way of working. They create an environment where raising

impediments to progress can occur. They collaborate with the project coordinator and liaise with relevant stakeholders to ensure that team members have everything they need to deliver value. They perform typical project management duties such as tracking progress, and keep the team focused on the sprint goals.



Impediments

Something will only become an impediment when it exceeds the self-organizing capabilities of the team. Examples of possible impediments include issues with technical tools, lack of specific skills in the team, lack of availability or indecision of the project coordinator, undue pressure from stakeholders, conflict between team members, and unimportant meetings that team members have to attend, among other things.

Respecting the self-organizing capabilities of the team, the agile facilitator should encourage the team to think of options to solve problems. For instance, a team member may be eager to learn required skills that are lacking. Or the team can have an intense discussion and go through healthy conflict and debate. Impediments are therefore defined as those problems that, when resolved, improve the chances that the team can solve similar problems on their own the next time they occur.

The agile facilitator is the custodian of the Agile approach. They ensure that the three critical team meetings (sprint planning, sprint review and sprint retrospective) are held in a timely manner and that team members are prepared for these meetings. They schedule meetings according to the length of a sprint, facilitate meetings and discussions, and

manage time appropriately during meetings to make sure that everyone participates, and that each meeting ends with concrete take-aways.

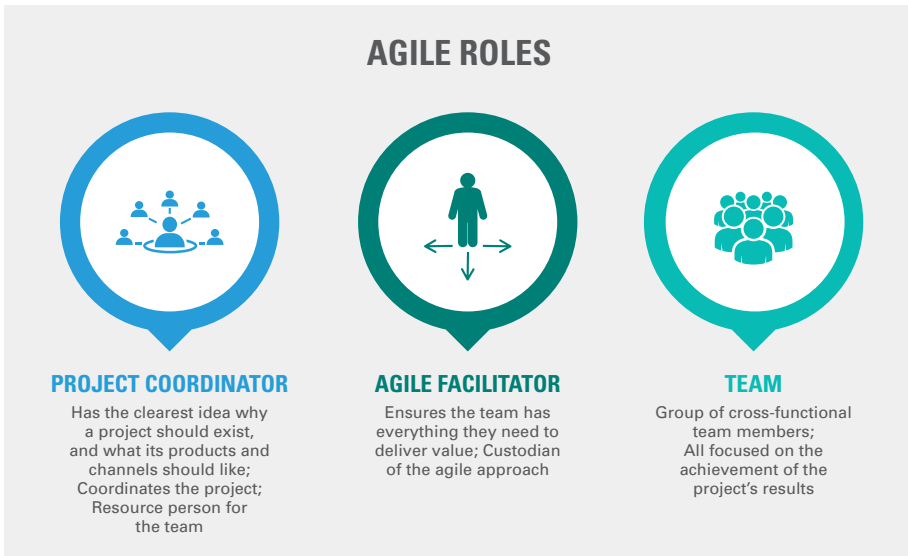
The agile facilitator is an expert on the Agile process and on using it to encourage a team to perform at its highest level.

D. Self-organized teams

Self-organization is a fundamental concept in Agile project management. However, it does not mean that individual team members can do whatever they want. Teams self-organize around their projects and the related components/tasks, within the regulations and rules put in place by ESCWA. In parallel, senior management commits to approving appropriate projects and removing impediments to self-organization.

This approach is based on the belief the fewer constraints or controls put on a team, the better; thus ensuring that people's behaviour is guided by interaction between independent agents.

Having self-organized teams leads to increased trust and shared responsibility and accountability, which facilitates more productive and effective work.



3 Agile Work

Cycles and Tools

A. Sprint

A sprint is a two-to-three week time period for which work goals are set by the team, and according to which tasks are distributed among team members. Each sprint produces a specific and defined increment towards achieving the overall result of the project.

B. Planning meeting

A planning meeting is the first meeting that initiates a sprint. Its purpose is to identify sprint goals, which form the specific increment that the sprint will produce towards achieving the overall result of the project. During this meeting, the project coordinator and the team discuss the highest priority components from the project backlog, and agree on which ones need to be addressed first. They produce a sprint backlog, which translates the prioritized broader components of the project backlog into clearly defined and coherent tasks that the team commits to accomplish during the sprint.

Every team member should walk away from the meeting with a solid understanding of what is expected of them, and the priority issues to work on in the upcoming sprint.

- > **Input:** project backlog comprising components prioritized by the project coordinator
- > **Process:** review and select components (and related tasks) for the sprint
- > **Deliverables and activities:** sprint backlog comprising tasks to be completed by the team during the sprint



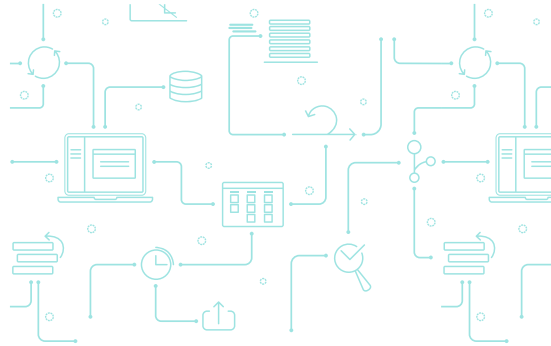
Project backlog

An emerging list of prioritized components on which the team will need to work to achieve the overall result of the project. It is not static given that new information will be discovered during the implementation of the project. Higher priority components are placed at the top of the list and are more detailed.



Sprint backlog

A subset of the project backlog that the team has decided to work on for a sprint. Tasks and steps can be added to the backlog during the sprint.



C. Kanban

A visual board or Kanban (a Japanese word meaning 'signboard') is a workflow management tool designed to help the team visualize its work, maximize efficiency and be agile. The simplest Kanban board may start with three columns: 'To do', 'Ongoing' and 'Completed'. When constructed and properly managed, it serves as a real-time information repository, highlighting bottlenecks and supporting collaboration. It is focused on getting things done.

To visualize team processes with a Kanban board, a table with columns should be drawn. Each column on the board represents a step in the workflow during a sprint. Each Kanban card represents a task a team member has committed to work on. During the sprint, the team will start working on task x and pull it from the 'To do' column to the 'Ongoing'. When the task is completed, the Team moves it to 'Completed'. This way it is easy to see who is working on what, track progress and spot challenges.

Sprint goals: x, y, z

Completed (ta-da)	Ongoing	To-do (backlog)
Task 1		Task 1
	Task 2	Task 2
	Task 3	Task 3
		Task 4

In practice, using a Kanban board helps the team to:

- Visualize common goals and work progress, thus improving its ability to make decisions that will move project implementation in a positive direction
- Manage the workflow, leading team members to focus on managing work processes instead of micro-managing people
- Limit 'work in progress' and therefore ensure that a manageable number of tasks are 'ongoing' at the same time
- Improve collaboration through a shared understanding of issues that need to be overcome, as everyone is on the same page and is more responsive

D. Team standup

The team standup is a 15-minute recurrent team synchronization meeting. Team members present progress made in the days before, and the work they will be doing in the coming days. They identify challenges, opportunities for collaboration, and progress against sprint components and goals. They

are aimed at increasing collaboration (e.g. avoiding situations where two people are working on the same task, or where nobody is working on an important task) and energizing teamwork. The meetings are usually held in front of a Kanban board and are an opportunity to review the sprint backlog and reprioritize tasks.

Three standard questions for team members during a standup

01 What did I do yesterday/in the previous days to help the team meet the sprint goals?

02 What will I do today/in the coming days to help the team meet the sprint goals?

03 Do I see any impediments that prevent me/the team from meeting the sprint goals?

Standup meetings are led by the agile facilitator, who ensures that everyone participates. They are typically held in the same location, and at the same time each day/every few days.

Standup meetings are strictly time-boxed to 15 minutes, and all team members should stand during the meeting. This keeps the discussion brisk but relevant.



Standup meetings help people feel energized by hearing what their colleagues are doing, and ensure some mistakes are avoided as everyone can talk once a day/every few days as a group. It is up to the team to decide on

their frequency. These periodic meetings can be held on a daily basis or every few days, according to the composition of the team and the scope of their project. All teams should meet at least twice a week.

E. Review meeting

The review meeting focuses on evaluating the results of the team's work at the end of each sprint. This includes the extent to which the team has completed tasks on the sprint backlog and achieved the sprint goals. The aim is to provide feedback and drive continuous improvement. Team members look at challenges, potential solutions,

necessary project adjustments, among other issues. The review meeting clarifies the project results increment, and can lead to a revised project backlog. Review meetings are an opportunity for all to celebrate progress, look at ways forward, and convey an honest sense of accomplishment and collaborative involvement.

F. Retrospective

The retrospective is another meeting at the end of each sprint, focused on evaluating processes (including impediments) and team dynamics: How did we work? How did we work together? What went well? What can be improved? It leads to a list of actionable items

to improve the way the team works together.

While the review meeting looks at how to improve work results, the retrospective meeting looks at how to improve team processes. They are complementary but different in nature.

4 Planning Meeting

A. Planning meeting in focus

The planning meeting is the first meeting to kick off a sprint. It is attended by the project coordinator, the agile facilitator and the entire team.



Setting sprint goals:

The project coordinator describes the highest priority components from the project backlog, and the team asks questions for clarification. A sprint goal is written and agreed upon by all. It is a shared and explicit definition of success for the sprint.



Creating a sprint backlog:

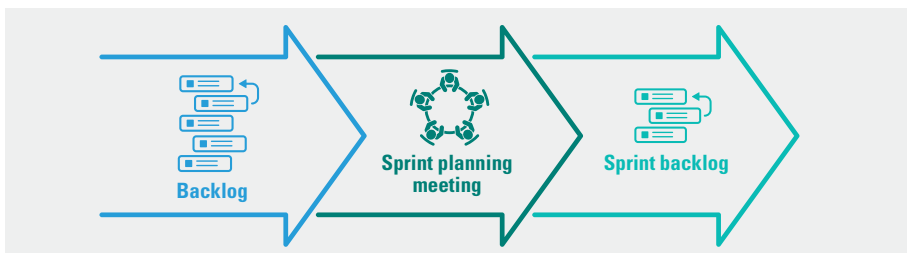
High-level components of the project backlog are turned into more detailed tasks that will be put in the sprint backlog. Those clearly defined tasks should help the team focus their efforts on the right jobs. The process is supported by the agile facilitator.

The planning meeting is important to focus execution, minimize surprises, and ensure incremental results towards the project's final deliverables.

Tip: Watch this short video to get a better understanding of what a planning meeting is:
<https://www.mountaingoatsoftware.com/agile/scrum/meetings/sprint-planning-meeting>

B. Running a planning meeting in four steps

Step one: introduction



The project coordinator reviews the project backlog taking into account what was discussed during the review meeting, and provides clarifications and contextual updates to ensure that all team members are on the same page and have the broader context fresh in their minds. The project coordinator should ensure that the most important components are listed at the top of the project backlog, that they are clear and fully formed, and are given time

estimates (how long the team will need to complete them). The agile facilitator also presents any relevant action items that came from the retrospective meeting.

Tip: The agile facilitator and team members may find items that do not have enough detail to be implemented and/or that need more contextual information from the project coordinator. They should ensure such gaps are filled!

Step two: what?

The project coordinator presents ideas for the next sprint. They propose a main goal, looking at priority components from the project backlog. As a starting point, the project coordinator may talk about two priority components in the project backlog at each planning meeting.

Tip: Know your capacity! The team should take into account public holidays, personal leave, and office and team-wide events. At the beginning of each planning meeting, briefly talk about everyone's schedule for the duration of the sprint.

The project coordinator then lets the team decide on the sprint duration, considers options, and sets and agrees the sprint goals – the first output of the planning meeting. The

project coordinator also reviews the amount of work the team believes it can complete during the sprint.

Tip: A sprint goal is a short, one- or two-sentence description of what the team plans to achieve during the sprint. It is written collaboratively by the team and the project coordinator.

Tip: The success of the sprint will later be assessed during the review meeting against the sprint goal, rather than against each specific item selected from the project backlog.

Tip: Visualize! 'Imagine we are done – What does it look like?' Discuss your vision of success: What do you see/hear? Who is there? Who does what?

Step three: how?

A technical discussion on necessary steps to deliver the work that has been selected. The team should turn high-level components of the project backlog into a set of more detailed tasks to add to the sprint backlog.

Tip: Review the components and describe what work is required to complete each one – breaking down larger components into more manageable parts (sub-tasks) makes it easier to estimate the time needed to complete the task. The project coordinator and agile facilitator should keep track of the total time, and ensure that it aligns with the team's capacity. However, some capacity should be left unutilized to cover contingencies.

The focus here is to understand how the work is going to be completed, with the agile facilitator supporting conversation among the team. It is important that everyone is heard so that the team feels a sense of ownership of the plan.

The sprint backlog is the other output of the planning meeting. It is a list of the project backlog components that the team commits to delivering, plus the list of related

tasks. Each task on the sprint backlog should be estimated in terms of time/priority and assigned to team members. The sprint backlog will be the team's action plan for the sprint. Team members should feel comfortable with it. If necessary, the sprint goal can be revisited at the end of the process that results in the sprint backlog.

Tip: The team should consider questions such as:

- *Is there new contextual information to review?*
- *Are any specialist skill sets required/people the team needs to involve?*
- *What tasks are required to complete this component?*
- *Are there any dependencies between components?*
- *Is the component's estimate still valid? Does the team agree on it?*

If the team identifies unique components as they break down work, promote those tasks to fully independent components.

Tip: The project coordinator and the agile facilitator should create a dashboard to visualize the team's progress towards the sprint goal (Kanban).

Step four: conclusion

At the end of the planning meeting, it is good practice to seek verbal approval from everyone in the room about what the team is committing to delivering at the end of the sprint. Moreover, the agile facilitator should ensure that each team member has at least one task to start on and that nobody is duplicating.

It is important to remember that things can – and will – change during the sprint. Teams cannot be expected to create a perfect sprint plan. They should select the right set of project backlog components to work on. Not too many, and not too few. This takes practice.

C. Ensuring a successful planning meeting

Prepare!

The project coordinator needs to be prepared for the planning meeting. The work done outside of the meeting is as important as the work done at the meeting. If the project backlog refinement is not successfully completed prior to the meeting, the process will be long and unproductive. It is essential for the team to hear details from the project coordinator about the upcoming project components, so they can understand what they will be tackling next. One way for the project coordinator to get ready is to prepare client-oriented stories to clarify the scope of project components (e.g. as [client], I want to [desired action] so that [desired benefit]). This results in time saved during the planning meeting, since less time is needed

to familiarize the team with the aim of the work, and more time is spent on breaking down the work and estimating the tasks required. It also avoids team confusion resulting from an unclear vision provided by the project coordinator.

Listen!

The project coordinator needs to trust the team to arrive at their own decisions (if not, there is a risk that the group behaviour will become one of avoidance rather than one of commitment). Team members should also listen to each other – this is a team effort!

Respect!

The project coordinator is responsible for the 'why'. They should

focus on working with stakeholders/clients to determine the 'why' and then communicate that to the team during the planning meeting.

The team is responsible for the 'how' (work implementation decisions, tasking, estimates). In the end, respect what the other side is saying – let them focus on what they are accountable for and success will follow.

Delegate!

Empower all team members to enter their own tasks in the Kanban: as a member of a team, you can easily feel overwhelmed. Sometimes there is too much work. There is amazing freedom in using a Kanban to relieve that pressure. You will be able to instantaneously take weight off your shoulders and shift it amongst your teammates.

Avoid people having feelings such as:

- > I do not want to spend time on this/ it takes too long
- > Components are ambiguous: I do not understand them/I do not see the value

- > It does not involve me, so why do I have to be here?
- > I do not know how to estimate how long it will take to complete a task

Tip: The project coordinator is not directing, managing or controlling. They are cultivating the team's ownership and autonomy. The sprint plan belongs to the team. The project coordinator should let the team find their way. The group will be committed to the plan because they made it.

Tip: Everyone should be present and invested, and ask questions to clarify unclear points in a safe way (team members are allowed not to know everything). Thus it is key to encourage people to interact with each other. The project coordinator should resist the urge to demand and direct, rather than encourage and empower. The Team Dynamics Group can provide support.

Additional resources

<https://thedigitalprojectmanager.com/sprint-planning-meeting/>

5 Review Meeting

A. Review meeting in focus

The review meeting is focused on evaluating the results of the team's work during the sprint (product increment) – in other words, how the team dealt with the sprint backlog, and how they progressed towards the sprint

goal. The meeting should be kept informal and positive, with an intent to recognize accomplishments and celebrate successes.

Focus on the value delivered

B. Why should a team hold review meetings?

The sprint review is a critical moment to assess what has been achieved during the sprint, learn from experience, and adapt for the upcoming sprint. It is:

- > An opportunity for all team members to assess what has been achieved
- > An important moment to gather feedback and insights, which is crucial for iteration and to avoid repeating mistakes
- > A meeting, which means it is a participatory assessment

Using the feedback acquired during the meeting, the project coordinator is able to better tailor the project backlog to continuously fulfil everyone's goals. The insights and feedback given by the team can be just as crucial as the finished backlog components at this stage.



The review meeting is the team's chance to regularly inspect and adapt the deliverables produced to ensure the highest quality.

C. Review meetings in three steps

The project coordinator is responsible for running and managing the process. The success

of a review meeting hinges on the substantive conversations held. Everyone needs to understand that

this meeting greatly determines the quality of the next sprint.

1. Team members should present their work, discuss, and gather insights and feedback from other team members and the project coordinator.
2. The project coordinator and team members declare which tasks and components are done and which are not, and why (review of sprint results). The sprint backlog is cleared accordingly. Team members should answer any questions related to the sprint's increment.
3. The project coordinator, team members and other relevant stakeholders update the status of the project, add new components and/or cancel components on the project backlog, and go through reprioritization. After changes are agreed, it is important to review all timelines, budgets and other anticipated events that could affect the project.

Team unity

While team members may focus on different functions during a sprint, the team needs to align on a shared vision. Without this, what person A sees as a top priority might not align with the priorities of persons B and C.

Storytelling

A quality sprint review tells a tale. It is important for the project coordinator to do more than communicate information; they need to communicate excitement! The sprint story should come alive, leaving team members feeling a sense of accomplishment and involvement. Completed backlog components should connect in a cohesive storyline that feeds into the project's overall result, allowing the team to align their goals and visions for the project.

6 Retrospective Meeting

A. Retrospective meetings in focus

The retrospective meeting is usually held at the end of each sprint. It provides a safe space for the team to reflect on and discuss what happened in the iteration, and identify actions for improvement

going forward in a positive and constructive way.

Focus on the process and on team dynamics

B. Principles and aim of retrospective meetings

Agile teams at ESCWA are self-organized, which means that they have the power to change the way they work, discuss what happened, learn and decide what to do.

During a retrospective meeting, team members will focus on what can be improved in terms of

ways of working, processes, and team dynamics by answering the following questions:

- > How did we work?
- > How did we work together?
- > What went well?
- > What can be improved?

A typical sprint retrospective model

What worked well?

What could be improved?

What will we commit to do in the next sprint?

Team members make actionable commitments

It is advisable for teams to adopt a few basic rules when holding their retrospective meetings, creating a safe space and ensuring constructive discussions. The following points can be included in such rules:

- > Be kind and supportive
- > Be active, engaged, and actively listen to others
- > Remember that everyone's experience is valid
- > What is said here stays here (safeness factor)
- > Express your thoughts as wishes (no accusations/complaints)
- > Do not make it personal, do not take it personally
- > Embrace an improvement mindset
- > Park long discussions in a designated parking lot



Tip: A basic principle for retrospective meetings:

Regardless of what we discover, we must understand and truly believe that everyone did the best job they could, given what was known at the time, their skills and abilities, the resources available, and the situation at hand.

The agile facilitator should always remind team members to avoid accusations.

Remind people to express thoughts as: 'I wish...'

C. Structure of a retrospective meeting

The agile facilitator is responsible for running and managing the retrospective meeting. The success of a retrospective hinges on ensuring that everybody contributes to the discussion, and that actionable points are agreed upon at the end of the meeting.

It is important to note that there is no one-size-fits-all retrospective meeting structure. The agile facilitator needs

to customize different aspects of the retrospective meeting's agenda to adjust to the situation. For instance, the retrospective following the closure of a year-long project will be different in nature to the first retrospective meeting of a new team.

However, it is important to keep the retrospective engaging and productive over time. People tend to adapt to new

habits quickly, and after a few sprints with the same kind of retrospective meetings, team participation and the overall energy level that people bring to the meeting may start to drop. This is why it is important to continuously challenge the team to think of solutions in new and interesting ways.

Retrospective meeting agendas usually include the following four steps: set the stage; gather data/

insights; decide what to do; and wrap-up.

Tip: Designing the perfect agile retrospective meeting agenda is about providing a balance between structure and freedom. Agile facilitators are responsible for controlling the flow of events to generate insights and action points, while at the same time ensuring a spontaneous flow of ideas.



Step one: set the stage (check in)

The agile facilitator welcomes everyone to the retrospective meeting and establishes/recalls the above-mentioned rules of engagement. They emphasize that people need to embrace a positive spirit of continuous improvement and share whatever they think will help the team improve.

The agile facilitator uses the first few minutes of the retrospective to

establish an open and informal tone where people can feel comfortable bringing up ideas. It is important to set a tone that makes team members feel like their presence is important. This step can include a review of agreed actions from previous retrospective meetings, to get everyone thinking analytically about processes and team dynamics.

Tip: For teams that are just starting to work together, an icebreaker can serve as an excellent start for retrospective meetings.

Tip: For established teams, icebreakers can also help team members to settle in the meeting and recognize where everyone stands – remembering that everyone is coming to the meeting from different places, mentally and physically.

The agile facilitator establishes the goals for the retrospective, to keep team members focused on providing the right kind of feedback later in the meeting.

Tip: As the team progresses into later sprints, the agile facilitator may wish to have retrospectives

that focus on one or two specific areas for improvement.

Examples of possible facilitation techniques for the agile facilitator:

- > Ask all team members a question such as: if you were to think about the last sprint as a language, which one would it be, and why?
- > Ask every team member to summarize in one word how they feel about the last sprint and the team, to write that word on a Post-it and to place the Post-it on the wall, visible to all. Ask each person to explain their chosen word.

Tip: If problems are identified, ask the team what actions could be taken to solve the problems as a team.

Step two: gather insights/data

The goal is for the team to collect specific types of ideas and observations about their processes along the lines of:

- > What are we doing well?
- > What are we not doing well?
- > What have we learned?
- > What should we do differently next time?
- > What is our biggest impediment?
- > What still puzzles us?

The agile facilitator can use different exercises to frame the discussion and offer ways to gather critical information about how the team is doing or where they see problems.

Tip: You will find a number of ideas for retro exercises here: The agile facilitator will compile team members' observations about the sprint, and pay attention to recurring themes, patterns and issues that may be interconnected.

During these activities, the agile facilitators should be alert for uneven participation. Is anyone trying to monopolize the conversation? Give everybody a chance to speak up. It is important to keep the floor open for ideas from every perspective.

Tip: Consider using some of these retrospective questions to get a team thinking outside the box. It builds a complete picture of team morale, key results and lessons learned, and of any

roadblocks from previous sprints that may be hindering progress.

- 1. What is keeping us awake at night?*
- 2. What advice would you give your younger self?*
- 3. How well did we achieve our action items?*
- 4. What do we expect of each other? What is expected of the team? To learn more about these questions, see <https://usefyi.com/retrospective-ideas/>*

Step three: decide what to do (data prioritization)

Once the ideas have been collected, the team should brainstorm solutions and develop a plan to bring change on a limited number of prioritized ideas.

Tip: For prioritization, the agile facilitator can use virtual currency. It can be anything. The important point is to make sure that everyone has the same/right amount. People spend their currency on the items they want to discuss (gathered in the previous step).

The team needs time to discuss the high priority issues and make decisions. Once everyone understands the issue, the agile facilitator should ask: 'Is this something we are going to mitigate/fix or not?' If not, discuss why not. Then, move on to the next issue.

Once a list of actionable items is developed, or the time has expired, it is time to close the retrospective.

Step four: close the retrospective (check out)

To close the retrospective, the agile facilitator should make a meeting summary with a few takeaways:

- > What did we learn?
- > Where do we want to go?

They should then reiterate the adopted action items (including clear steps, owners, and deadlines), and thank people for contributing.

7 To Go Further

To go further, you can have a look at the following comprehensive introduction to Agile in a series of videos covering Agile roles and meetings: <https://www.mountaingoatsoftware.com/exclusive/scrum-foundations>

A. Why adopt agile ways of working?

Why should ESCWA teams adopt an Agile framework to organize their work? Some key considerations guide this decision (please refer to the documents entitled 'New Way of Working at ESCWA' and 'A Brief Guide to ESCWA Reform'), in addition to some aspects referred to in the original Agile Manifesto, including the following:

- > Willingness to have **people interact** over using processes

and tools to achieve overall project results

- > Willingness to have **people respond to change** by continuously planning and learning as they implement projects
- > Willingness to have **people focus on delivery** (achieving the project's results) over emphasizing documentation

B. Key values agile teams should live by

The ESCWA Agile new way of working is easy to learn. However, living by its values every day at work may require changing many habits. What are those values, and how to adhere to them?

Tip: Print out the values and make them visible in your workspace!

- > **FOCUS** on your project/ deliverables: make sure you reduce competing priorities! The risk is to

start many things and never finish any of them. Minimize distractions and maximize focus. Having a good agile facilitator is vital in helping your team focus on its work

- > Show **OPENNESS** to new ideas/ perspectives/innovative thinking: when you have discussions in your team, use 'Yes, and...!' instead of 'Yes, but...!'. Make sure you remove the fear that new ideas will be shut

down, or the fear of failure. Project coordinators and agile facilitators should allow teams to fail and learn from their mistakes. Have the courage to step out of the way you have always worked

- > **RESPECT** ideas and opinions: without respect, team members will most probably close down.

Make sure your team space is safe for everybody. Good teams disagree and argue. However, when they disagree, they argue respectfully

- > Team members should show **COMMITMENT** to each other and be accountable for what they say they will do

C. Agile project management responsibilities

The below table summarizes the project management responsibilities in the ESCWA Agile new way of working:

Activity	Owner	Responsibility
Manage the project vision and design	Project coordinator	<p>Establish and communicate the project vision (among the team, within ESCWA)</p> <p>Create the initial project backlog (establishing expectations against which progress is measured and a set of understandings from which collaboration, delivery and adaptation arise)</p>
<p>Monitor the achievement of milestones</p> <p>Manage the budget</p>	Project coordinator	<p>Update/refine the project backlog</p> <p>Prioritize project components and tasks</p> <p>Release funds and monitor expenditure</p>
Plan and implement sprints	Team	<p>During each sprint, the team selects high-level components of the project backlog and converts them into more detailed/explicit tasks on a sprint backlog</p> <p>The team self-organizes, manages its own work and commitments</p>

D. Self-organizing teams

Manage the process	Agile facilitator	<p>Organize the sprint planning meeting, review meeting and retrospective</p> <p>Hold the team standups</p> <p>Remove obstacles to progress, deal with organizational dysfunctionality, and act as a coach to the team</p>
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A self-organizing team has the autonomy to choose how best to accomplish its work, rather than being directed by others outside the team.

Self-organization means a degree of operational independence. Cluster leaders/ESCWA leadership contribute to formulating a challenge for the team in the form of a vision or a result, and the team determines how they will respond to that challenge, including by establishing a workplan and corresponding project backlog.

Self-organized teams will be given assistance in the form of guidance and support. Management establishes agreed upon checkpoints and milestones, avoiding the kind of rigid control that impairs creativity and spontaneity.

Cluster leaders can influence how a team self-organizes by, in consultation with its project coordinator, changing the team's size and composition, altering the scope/nature of its work, modifying decision-making styles (involving the agile facilitator

in this decision), encouraging communication with other teams, and encouraging learning.

Role of agile facilitators

Consider the following scenario: One team member is making all key decisions in the team – this is how the team has self-organized. No one in the team is able to resolve the control imposed by that staff member.

As an agile facilitator, you recognize that this behaviour impedes the team improvement as a group. What are your options to solve this challenge?

- > Discuss the situation with the project coordinator
- > Seek the support of the Agile Centre for Excellence team
- > Seek support from other agile facilitators in the meetings of ESCWA agile facilitators

You would then implement changes through soft interventions, including games or exercises that address the challenge.

Only if such efforts are not conducive to positive change within the team should you approach the 'controlling staff member', and only after consultation with the Team Dynamics Group.

As an agile facilitator, you should not become a default conflict negotiator within the team. The team may then expect you to continue doing so, which would not be healthy for team dynamics.

Thinking about the Agile principles of subtle command and influence, you could also try to change the team's dynamics by asking someone with

the right experience and background to attend key team meetings and attempt to challenge the 'controlling staff member'.

No matter the specific problem, if a team has self-organized in a way that does not help it deliver quality work, it is the agile facilitator's responsibility to find a way to change the status quo, so that the team adjusts and hopefully reorganizes in a more productive way.

More information on this issue is available at www.mountaingoatsoftware.com/presentations/leading-a-self-organizing-team

E. Reinforcing team dynamics: role of the Team Dynamics Group

Since the main objective of ESCWA reform is to encourage cross-functional work in and between teams, and foster change in managing performance and work by delivering results through projects, staff members and managers alike may need guidance and support to handle this major shift.

The Team Dynamics Group (TDG) will facilitate the transition, support efforts to achieve self-organization and assist staff members in establishing healthy team dynamics. It focuses on delivering support in terms of awareness, capacity-building and conflict prevention.

Awareness and capacity-building activities are intended to enhance communication among staff members and nurture team working skills. Under this pillar, the TDG will undertake the following:

- > Raise awareness on how to work effectively in teams
- > Deliver capacity-building activities on teamwork
- > Provide support to teams as they transition to the new way of working at ESCWA

Conflict-prevention activities are intended to support dialogue among

staff members and build/maintain healthy working relationships in teams. Under this pillar, the TDG will undertake the following:

- > Receive requests for support with utmost confidentiality

- > Assign a team of two-to-three members to work on each request (any preference expressed by the requestor will be taken into consideration to form the support team)

F. Agile Centre for Excellence

The Agile Centre for Excellence (ACE) provides technical support to teams during the transition to Agile working modalities, and enhances agile values at ESCWA. It supports ESCWA change management by developing processes, workflows, tools and portals in response to the organization's vision for change and business needs. It also offers capacity-building activities to institutionalize Agile working methods across the organization.

The ACE team drives the visionary and strategic processes. It manages the broader portfolio Kanban system, and ensures that a coherent set of metrics and monitoring systems are put in place to support cluster leaders, key result areas coordinators, project coordinators and team members in the achievement of their project goals.

ACE is not an instrument of governance or compliance. Instead, it contributes to developing mechanisms to promote transparency in system health and

helps ESCWA become more relevant, which includes spotting internal excellence and promoting it. ACE services the entire organization and supports both change management and capacity-building efforts.

Change management

- > Developing the change implementation plan, managing the transformation backlog and establishing the metrics for that process
- > Monitoring and assessing the effectiveness of the Agile business model and reporting on progress in implementing Agile at ESCWA, including through the presentation of internal case studies
- > Ensuring continuous improvement in the business model
- > Benchmarking and connecting with the external Agile community
- > Facilitating results-based management practices for all projects and helping define and launch an Agile culture

- > Extending Agile practices to other areas of ESCWA, in addition to clusters

Capacity-building

- > Providing coaching, delivering or sourcing training for cluster leaders, project coordinators, agile facilitators and team members on agile principles, roles and tools

- > Promoting organizational learning on how to use Agile techniques for project management, fostering Agile communities of practice and promoting continuing Agile education
- > Supporting agile facilitators in the day-to-day application of Agile principles and tools

