



The Distributed Agile e-Book

Practicing Agile principles on distributed teams



“As the largest pureplay Agile consultancy with offices on both US coasts and in India, SolutionsIQ is constantly striving to balance effective face-to-face communication and widely distributed teams. To stay true to the Agile principles, we rely on highbandwidth communication tools to facilitate communication, get work done and share information both with our own people and our clients.”

- Roxi Ozollins, Director of Marketing,
SolutionsIQ

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Author's note



The foundational elements of the Agile Manifesto traditionally place a strong focus on proximity and co-location of individuals within a team. It's assumed that an Agile team will have a big room, covered in post-it notes, scattered with laptops and the remnants of a nice person's donation of bagels to the morning standup.

In addition to huddling together in here every morning to kick things off at standup, the team also congregates here to sweat through planning sessions, argue about User Story sizes, bond over Retrospective realizations, and scarf down pizza during a lively end-of-Sprint demo. It's home base for the team, a familiar place that is nearly impossible to recreate without being co-located.

“Flexibility and agility are core Sococo values we are not willing to compromise. So unwilling, in fact, that we decided to analyze the fundamental issues around being a distributed Agile team, and solve them with our own software.”

There's nothing in the Agile manifesto that explicitly specifies that people must be located in the same physical space, though it is heavily implied. The way we see it, Agile actually defines a set of behaviors to which a software development team agrees to adhere over the course of developing a software product. Of course, these behaviors are easier and more natural to develop when working with people physically in the same room.

This is where Sococo comes in. Another tool for communication? Not quite. More like a place where people connect. We solve what's missing - by helping to surface and support the specific Agile behaviors that distributed teams may not realize are missing.

Sococo is a best-in-class teamwork solution developed by Agile developers for Agile developers. Give it a try - we think your distributed team will love it.



Mandy Ross
Certified ScrumMaster, Sococo

Sococo's vision

“To establish **human connection** as the foundation for transforming the future of work for the benefit of customers, employees and companies alike.”



Connection is powerful. Neuroscientists have proven that human connection enhances attention, helps build trust in others and reduces fear and worry. When placing people over process, trust is the primary element that Agile teams require to succeed.



We all have deeply felt human needs to be recognized for our contribution, to belong, to have some control over our work, and to do work that is meaningful. When we work in an environment that supports these areas, we thrive. This is when we put our hearts and souls into what we do.

Connection plays a critical role in improving individual performance. People who are more connected with their colleagues perform better than those who don't.

In a well-connected environment, people are more open, they share more and they want to help their colleagues. This increased level of cooperation promotes creativity, innovation and enhanced productivity. This is the foundation for Agile and helps enable the following desired Agile behaviors to take place:

- **To self organize**

- > impromptu code reviews with team lead
- > testing and troubleshooting without setting up a meeting
- > understanding casually where people are in the progress of their actions

- **To simplify**

- > starting and ending ceremonies on time
- > respecting time boxes
- > removing impediments without a lot of chasing or email

- **To respond to change**

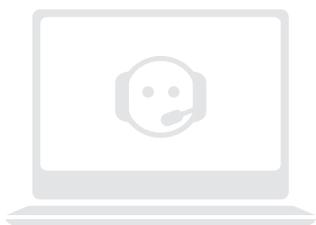
- > dropping in on the product owner to discuss a user story informally
- > ability to transition demo feedback into planning input



Sococo was founded and designed with the **Agile Manifesto and Principles** at its heart. It was and always has been our philosophy towards software development. We believe distributed teams also deserve to flourish in this same manner.



Sococo and the Agile Manifesto



We are always developing better ways of creating software by bringing the Agile Manifesto to life through the Sococo platform. Many of our customers have benefited like we have done and we hope many, many more will do so in the future.

The Agile Manifesto

We are uncovering better ways of developing software by doing it and helping others do it. Through this work we have come to value:

- **Individuals and interactions over processes and tools**
- **Working software over comprehensive documentation**
- **Customer collaboration over contract negotiation**
- **Responding to change over following a plan**

That is, while there is value in the items on the right, we value the items on the left more.

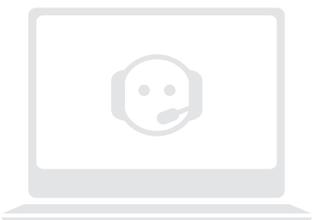
How Agile is built into the Sococo DNA:

we value	over	by
Individuals and interactions	Processes and tools	Providing visually rich communication
Working software	Comprehensive documentation	Connecting teams together directly
Customer collaboration	Contract negotiation	Enabling easy, instant access
Responding to change	Following a plan	Facilitating spontaneous interactions

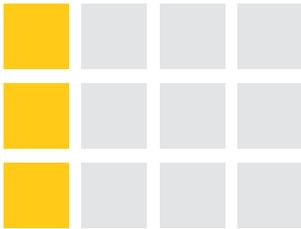
Our customers have shown that Sococo delivers real, tangible Agile team value and places it right at the heart of how software development teams work.

“I am a big advocate of this principle-centered approach because it feeds the culture of distributed teams. Sococo speaks directly to the anthropology of work, why people come together in the first place and what they’re hoping to achieve.”

- Elinor Slomba,
Agile Coach, Arts Interstices



How Sococo fulfills the 12 Principles of the Agile Manifesto



12 PRINCIPLES
OF THE AGILE
MANIFESTO

1. Our highest priority is to satisfy the customer through early and continuous delivery of valuable software

Connecting customers to developers in a meaningful review and feedback cycle is the secret sauce of high performing Agile teams. With dispersed teams, the burden is on them to facilitate these interactions in a frictionless environment. Single-click entry, seamless audio and video, and instant sharing of multiple screens is about as good as it gets for sharing your work with the customer, no matter where they sit.

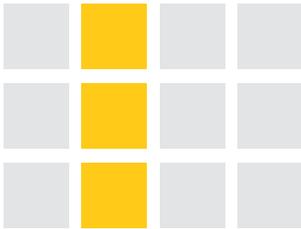
2. Welcome changing requirements, even late in development – Agile processes harness change for the customer’s competitive advantage

In distributed environments, staying engaged with the customer has similar challenges to staying engaged with your co-workers. Giving your customers an instant level of accessibility keeps their feedback frequent and fresh. They can visit using a Guest Access link when you want to invite them for a demo, or you can make them a space member so they can drop in whenever they want. Either way, they can participate in a much more nuanced way.

3. Deliver working software frequently – from a couple of weeks to a couple of months – with a preference to the shorter timescale

The strong Agile team knows that working software is very different than final software. Working software provides the optimal medium for product evaluation, and elicits much more meaningful input than a slide presentation or diagram describing what **will** be done ever could.

Impromptu demos between developers or QA analysts are powerful examples of what remote teams can do when the team's availability status is always front and center.



12 PRINCIPLES
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4. Business people and developers must work together daily throughout the project

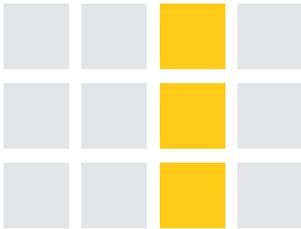
Business and development must put cross-functional effort into cross-pollinating information and ideas. That's tough even in a co-located environment. When the ability to engage with each other can be done in an informed and natural way using avatar cues and availability indicators, this removes the friction from the distributed element of this critical relationship.

5. Build projects around motivated individuals – give them the environment and support they need, and trust them to get the job done

The Agile workplace is where your team comes together. To flourish, they need to connect naturally, directly, and spontaneously with each other. Only an always-on, real-time overview of the team can provide that when your team is not physically co-located. Removing the requirement of co-location will dramatically increase a team's ability to acquire the best talent and find just the right person to fill that missing spot on the team.

6. The most efficient and effective method of conveying information to and within a development team is face-to-face conversation

A video chat connection isn't all you need for truly face-to-face communication on a team – it's not that simple. To achieve that level of connection, people need to be able to be impulsive and spontaneous in their ability to have those conversations. Interactions such as **Get** and **Knock** are designed specifically to facilitate this type of communication.



12 PRINCIPLES
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7. Working software is the primary measure of progress

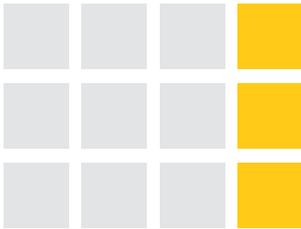
Software working for one person does not mean it is working for everyone. Meeting the Definition of Done requires a team with a high degree of trust and the ability to seamlessly collaborate. Removing friction resulting from a remote team setup is the only way to build team trust and honesty that results in high performance. Developers can pop into a room and instantly share screens to problem solve, collaborate, and bounce ideas off of one another.

8. Agile processes promote sustainable development – the sponsors, developers, and users should be able to maintain a constant pace indefinitely

Without the capacity to establish an observable rhythm, the team can't create patterns that result in a consistently followed pace. Distributed Agile teams need the ability to know where people are, what they are doing, and when they are accessible. Avatars provide an always on, always visible overview of how the team is working, and this plays a big part in how the team can maintain their groove.

9. Continuous attention to technical excellence and good design enhances agility

A state of excellence is not a badge that is worn or a certificate that is framed on a wall – it's a commitment to a team keeping itself accountable for its goals, and continually working together to achieve them. Trusting relationships are at the heart of this, and relationships are built on interactions with others. People build friendships more naturally when they have a more rich sensory experience where not only can they see and hear each other, they also understand the context of that person's experience.



**12 PRINCIPLES
OF THE AGILE
MANIFESTO**

10. Simplicity – the art of maximizing the amount of work not done – is essential

Determining what’s absolutely critical to completing stories and meeting sprint goals requires a sense of project heartbeat and a very clear sense of purpose on the team. It’s never easy to make hard decisions about what makes the cut and what just isn’t crucial to meet the definition of done. The Product Owner needs to be empowered to get input and make decisions on the fly. Seeing the team on the map instantly allows the PO to make complex decisions informed by the right people at the right time.

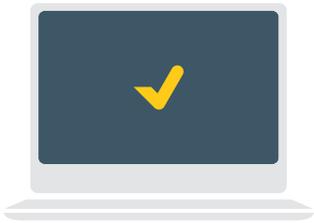
11. The best architectures, requirements, and designs emerge from self-organizing teams

The ability to immediately act upon the desire to communicate with others and operate at a high level of trust is at the heart of self-organization. Empowering individuals is only part of the equation on a distributed team - giving them the tools to do so is what really makes this happen in a meaningful way. It’s not simple, either. Many behavioral cues are lost in this environment, so a solid set of carefully selected tools will impact the team’s capacity to manage this gap. When they are pulled all together in a single place where inspiration can be quickly captured in an impromptu setting, magic happens.

12. At regular intervals, the team reflects on how to become more effective, then tunes and adjusts its behavior accordingly

Retrospective ceremonies are a big challenge on distributed teams - engagement is opaque, yet all team members need to be heard, understood and have their contribution acknowledged and processed. This is a much more multifaceted and subtle communication model than a faceless phone line, a video chat or an app on a shared screen can deliver. The subtlety in taking turns talking, managing interruptions, backchannel idea sharing, and contributing in your team’s toolset is only possible in Sococo.

Do's and don'ts checklist



- **DO** identify the tools you need to communicate and connect with your team.
- **DON'T** ignore tools simply to adhere to the emphasis on interactions over tools.



- **DO** invest in tools and a communication protocol to keep the team able to interact spontaneously.
- **DON'T** rely on scheduled meetings as your only form of online communication.

- **DO** invest in a great facilitator skilled in developing enthusiastic participation within distributed teams.
- **DON'T** allow participation in ceremonies to be dominated by one person, or avoided by others.

- **DO** create frequent opportunities for the business and software to interact online and share thoughts on the product.
- **DON'T** allow the distributed nature of your team isolate the software team from the business side of the house.

- **DO** establish proactive software design and code review habits within the team.
- **DON'T** slack off on great coding practices because it takes a little more effort to track people down.

- **DO** the setup legwork ahead of time to ensure participation in reviews is frictionless for all participants.
- **DON'T** let the cross functional team's physical location become an hindrance for rich, interactive demos.

- **DO** be willing to turn on cameras, and put yourself out there to really be present with the team.
- **DON'T** get lazy with interaction, even if you have been on the team a long time.



Sharing success



Want to share your experiences practicing Agile on your distributed team? We'd love for you to:

- Write a case study
- Write a blog
- Join us on a webinar

We would be delighted to promote and share what you have achieved with your agile software development colleagues

What's next? To learn more...

Visit us online at sococo.com, email us at info@sococo.com, call us at +1 (650) 265-7013 or find us at:

