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Exploring the Agile divide:
Aligning values with reality

2024

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Executive summary

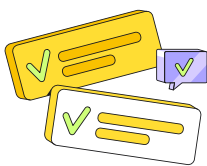Agile is falling short, but you can bridge the gap.

When Agile was popularized in the 2000s, the methodology held a lot of promise, with its focus on people over tooling. But today's landscape — with advancing technology, distributed teams communicating across the world, and rising customer expectations — is making what was once a mechanism for innovation feel like quite the opposite.

So, we surveyed more than 1,200 Agile practitioners and leaders of Agile teams around the world to address the question:

> **Does the lived experience of Agile today match its original values and principles?**
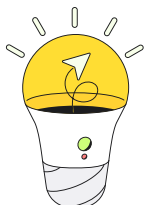
Here, we'll explore how Agile methodologies are playing out in organizations today. We'll cover the challenges that Agile organizations are facing and provide data-driven ways for leaders and their teams to move forward and innovate together.

Key learnings

Practicing vs. preaching Agile:
Teams and leaders have differing perspectives on the efficacy of Agile methodologies, and it's creating friction across the board.

The current state of Agile practices:
This disconnect between practitioners and leaders, along with rigid frameworks and complex tools, are the top challenges that Agile teams are facing today.

The future of Agile:
Agile isn't doomed to fail. Teams that are willing to adjust their approach still stand to benefit.

Aligning Agile values with reality

When the Agile methodology was introduced in the early 2000s, it seemed like the perfect foil to the popular (yet prescriptive and limiting) Waterfall approach. With an emphasis on collaboration, embracing change, and continuously delivering value, Agile's four key values were a refreshing change of pace:
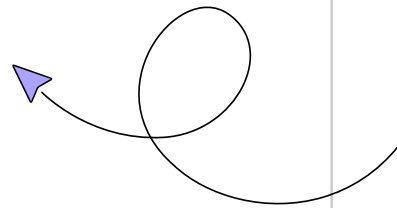
1. Individuals and interactions over processes and tools

2. Working software over comprehensive documentation

3. Customer collaboration over contract negotiation

4. Responding to change over following a plan

But today's working world is different. With rapid technological advancements, distributed teams, and rising customer expectations, we're left wondering if the lived experience of Agile today matches its original values and principles.
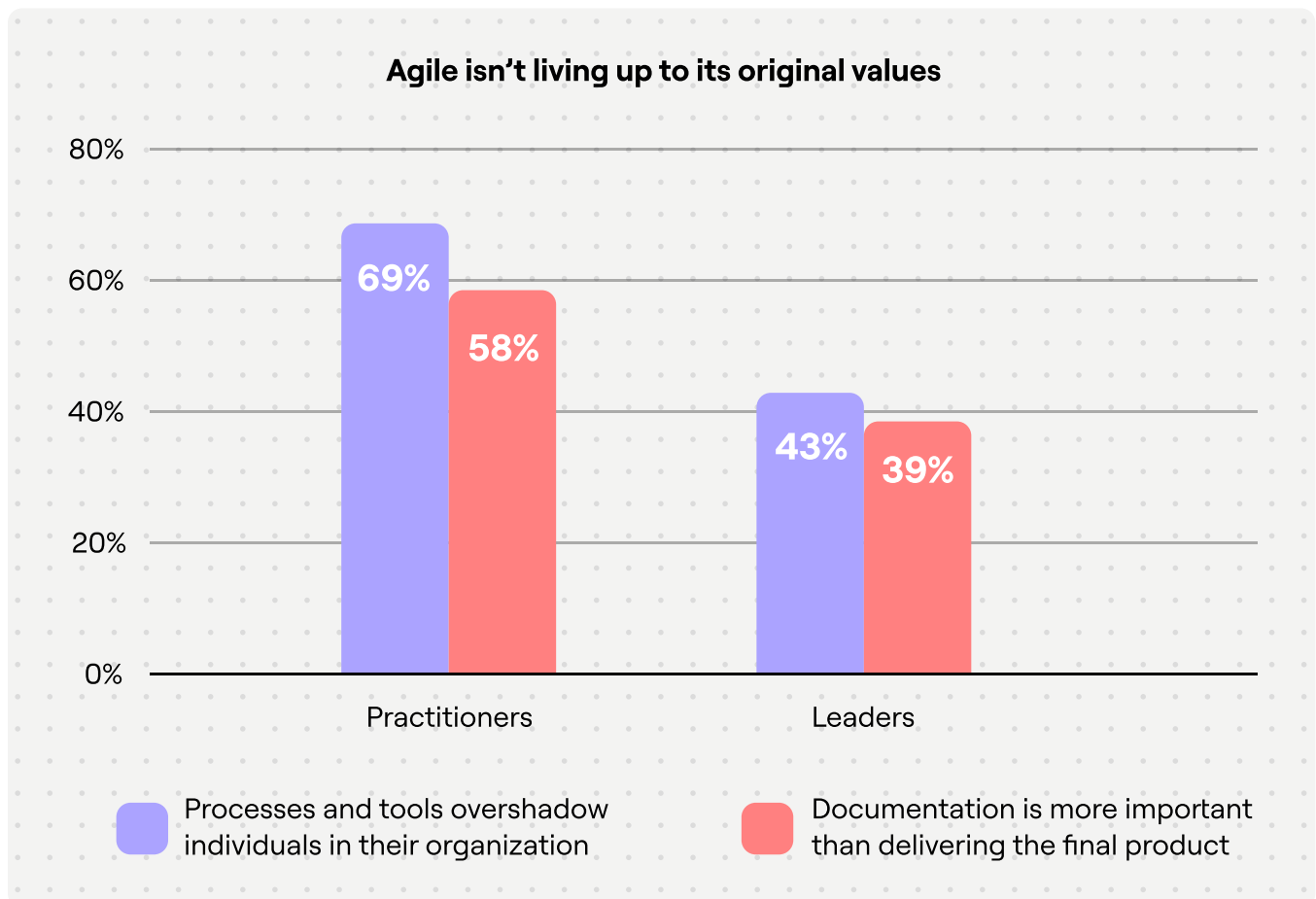
In the spirit of Agile and continuous improvement, we surveyed more than 1,200 Agile practitioners and leaders around the world in the hopes of answering this big question.

Read on to discover where Agile stands today, the areas where teams are experiencing friction, and how we can move forward and innovate together — bringing the best of Agile along.

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The current state of Agile practices

The survey data made one point abundantly clear: Agile practitioners say that they're not experiencing Agile's core values and principles in their day-to-day work.

While practitioners don't see Agile principles playing out on their real-world teams, their leaders, who are further removed from the everyday functions and workflows, have a more optimistic view of the current state of Agile:

Agile isn't living up to its original values

	Practitioners	Leaders
Processes and tools overshadow individuals in their organization	69%	43%
Documentation is more important than delivering the final product	58%	39%

There is a significant gap between leaders and practitioners' perceptions of Agile's efficacy.

That's a big problem. Decision-makers assume the system is working — so they stick with it, unintentionally leading their teams to use processes that are not only slowing them down but causing frustration. In other studies, we've learned that this type of environment can lead to burnout, attrition, and, ultimately, an organization where innovation simply can't thrive. In a sense, the methodology intended to improve innovation is actually sabotaging it.
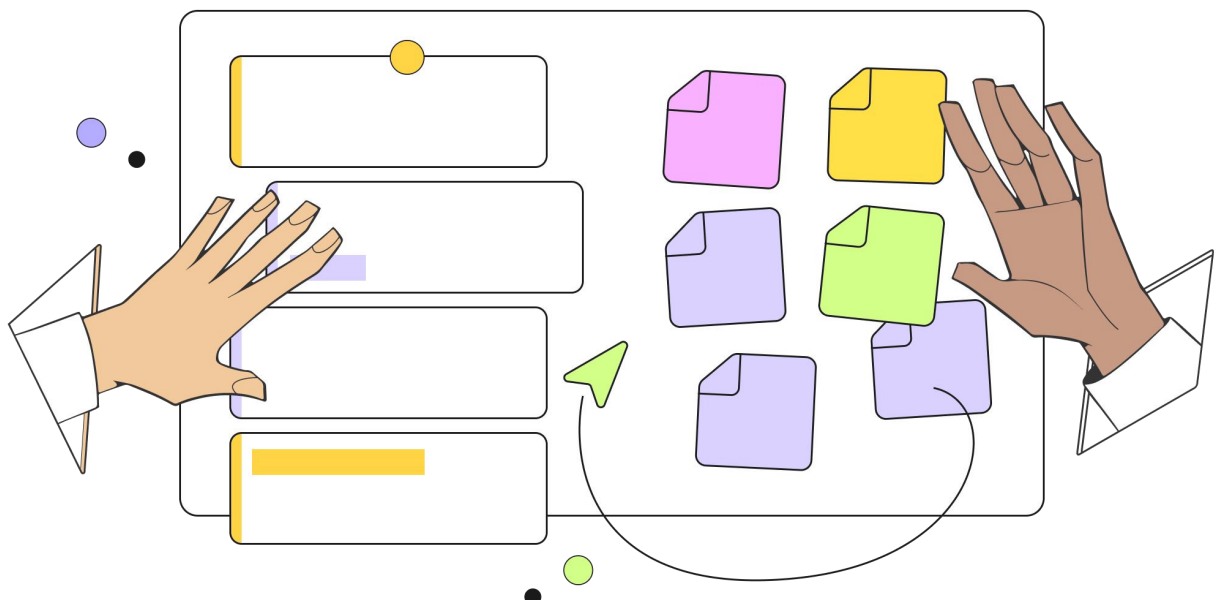
Top challenges facing Agile today

So, why aren't practitioners seeing Agile fulfill its promise? While the methodology originally promoted people, collaboration, and flexibility, our survey revealed that in practice, it's lost touch with those human-centric principles.

"Now, we just have a process without talking to people.
And people are getting demotivated."

Tech Lead, *IT consulting industry*

Agile practitioners are increasingly seeing the methodology prioritize processes over people. Consistency over collaboration and creativity. Frameworks over flexibility. Administration over team autonomy. What was meant to be a malleable approach fails to flex to the way teams work today.

There are a few contributing factors to this misalignment. Let's take a closer look at the three main reasons why the current state of Agile doesn't live up to its original vision.

1. Rigid frameworks limit adaptability

Agile practitioners primarily chose these words to describe the reality of following Agile frameworks today: **rigid and restrictive**. The framework feels set in stone without leaving any room for fresh thoughts and new approaches. More than **two-thirds of Agile practitioners** always or often:

Find their Agile frameworks too complex

Feel pressured to comply with Agile practices even when they don't seem to add value

Feel their teams prioritize processes over achieving product goals

Agile practitioners feel their frameworks are failing them

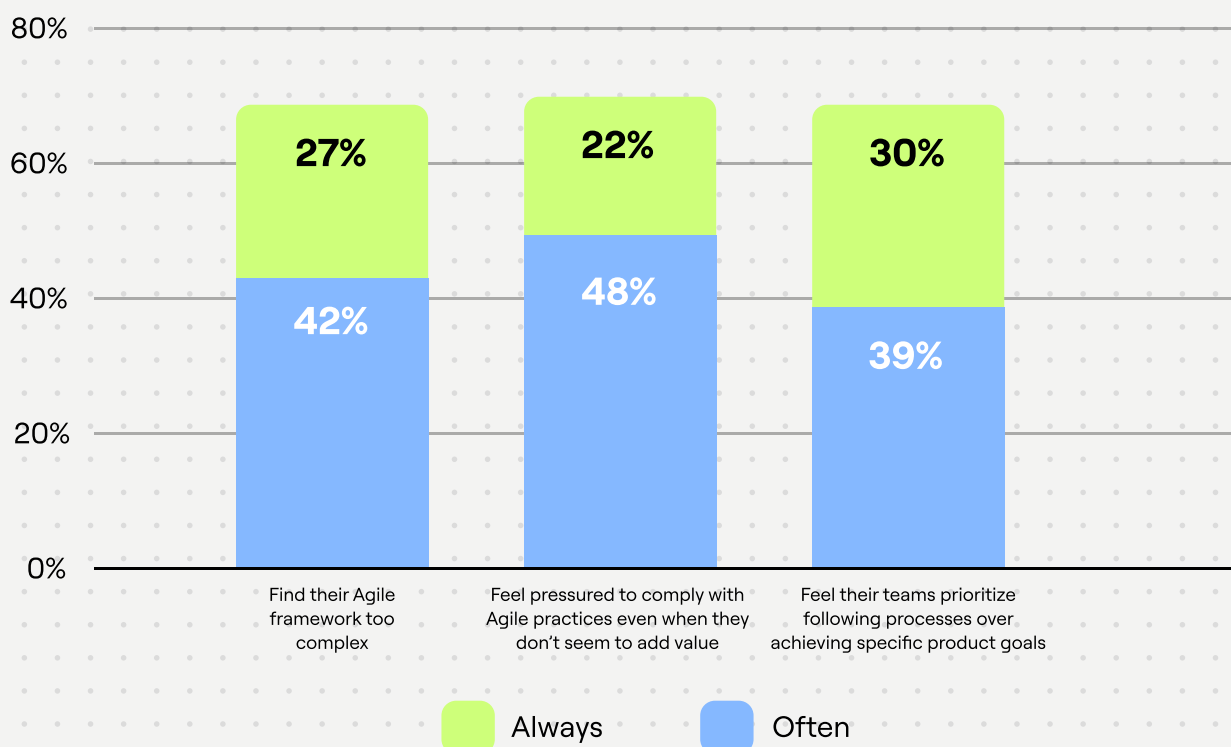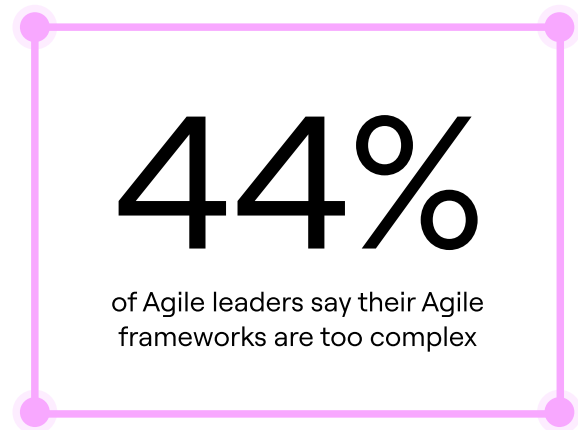| | 27% | 22% | 30% |
| | 42% | 48% | 39% |
| | Find their Agile framework too complex | Feel pressured to comply with Agile practices even when they don't seem to add value | Feel their teams prioritize following processes over achieving specific product goals |

Legend: ■ Always ■ Often

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These sentiments are in direct conflict with Agile values — and if you think about them in practice, it means that people are doing work each day that feels both too complicated and not valuable enough to contribute to any meaningful goal. Like running on a hamster wheel to nowhere.

While practitioners are the ones really feeling the discrepancy between what Agile should be and what it actually is, leaders are picking up on this frustration, too — albeit, to a lesser extent. Compared to more than two-thirds of practitioners, **less than half of leaders** say their Agile frameworks are too complex (44%) or that they feel pressured to comply with Agile practices.

44%

of Agile leaders say their Agile frameworks are too complex

While they're experiencing it to differing degrees, both practitioners and leaders feel stuck with an Agile methodology rather than supported by it. Of course, this discrepancy is meaningful. Leaders can be far enough removed from the daily work and implementation of the methodology that these challenges seem like minor sticking points. But to the team, these issues can feel more like major (and frustrating) roadblocks to delivering their best work. And because these groups aren't aligned on their hurdles, it can be even more difficult to align on a solution.

2. Complex and inflexible tools slow teams down

The beauty of Agile is that, ideally, it should help teams prioritize people and interactions over tooling. But today, tools have gotten so complex and inflexible that people are having a hard time doing their jobs.

Agile tool complexity was a top pain point cited by both groups of respondents, including:

68%
of practitioners

47%
of leaders

Forty-seven percent of practitioners also said that Agile tools aren't flexible enough to support their preferred working methods. If Agile is supposed to help teams be more lowercase-agile and adaptable, the current practices aren't working.
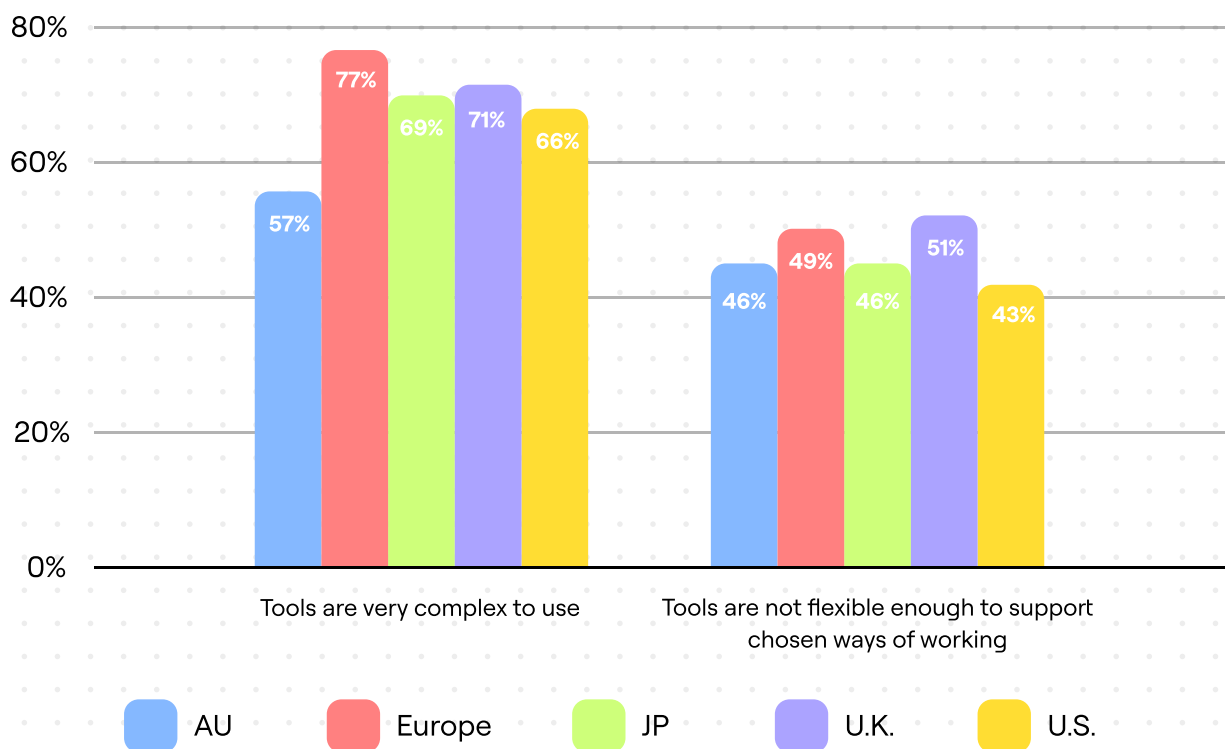
![Miro logo]

"If you want to change sprint scope during the sprint, Jira will ask you several times, 'Are you sure you want to do that?' like scope change is some kind of bug. But it's not a bug. It's a feature of Agile."
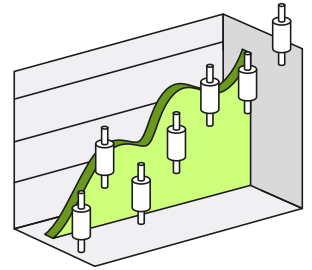
Dave Ross, *Chief Agile Evangelist at Miro*

Frustration with inflexible tools is a universal experience for practitioners. Across every market surveyed, respondents identified **complex** and **inflexible** tools as their top two technology-centric pain points. Teams are left spending more time maneuvering between and updating tools and less time producing and delivering high-quality work.

Agile tools cause frustration for practitioners globally

	Tools are very complex to use	Tools are not flexible enough to support chosen ways of working
AU	57%	46%
Europe	77%	49%
JP	69%	46%
U.K.	71%	51%
U.S.	66%	43%

Legend: AU, Europe, JP, U.K., U.S.

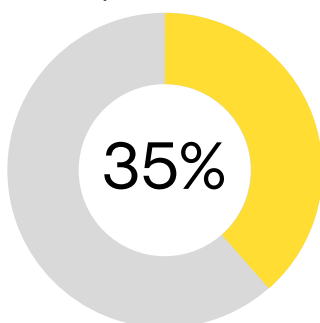## 3. Leaders and teams aren't aligned on their biggest challenges

While leaders try to embrace and facilitate Agile within their organizations, they may be unintentionally hindering progress and creating unnecessary friction. Take a look at the discrepancy in responses between Agile practitioners and leaders:

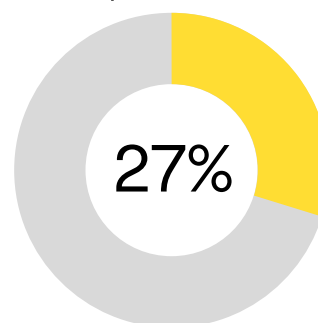|	Practitioners	Leaders
Leadership creates a supportive environment for working on the development of new products or services	**64%** say they don't	**69%** say they do
Leadership trusts teams to get the job done	**54%** say they don't	**77%** say they do
Day-to-day decisions demonstrate that tools and processes are a top priority over people	**69%** agree	**55%** disagree

Additionally, an alarming **70%** of practitioners say that the Agile setup in their organization does not make them feel empowered to make decisions and move quickly — a disconnect that is the widest between practitioners and leaders in the U.S. followed by those in the U.K.

To what extent do you agree that "leadership creates a supportive environment for developing a new product or service"?
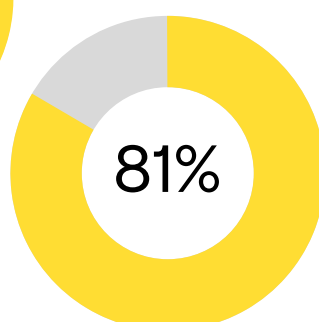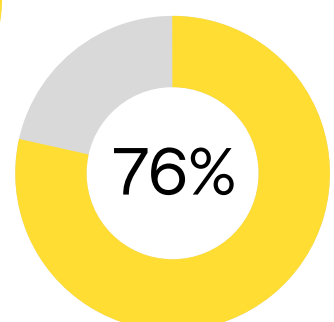
U.S. practitioners

35%

U.S. leaders

81%

U.K. practitioners
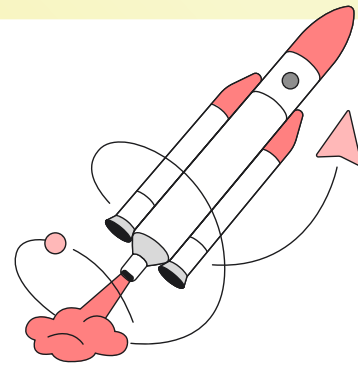
27%

U.K. leaders

76%

![miro](miro logo)

That's evidence that many organizations have entirely lost the original principles upon which Agile was founded. Think about the meaning of the word "agile" itself: the ability to move quickly and easily. It's flexible, nimble, and responsive.

But, in practice, workers are experiencing the exact opposite. They're bogged down with bottlenecks and bureaucracy that make it challenging — if not entirely impossible — to reap the many benefits of the original methodology.

Of course, there is no blame game here. It's important to note that the world has changed since the Agile Manifesto was written. From the age of remote work to the rise of AI, inflation, the pandemic, and ever-evolving consumer demand, leaders are constantly managing unprecedented times. It can be easy for anyone to get stuck in a pattern and rely on methodologies that once worked wonders, while ignoring the warning signs that their efficacy is waning. What's more, it can be really difficult to change when the success of your whole organization is on the line. But that doesn't mean that good, meaningful change can't happen.

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What the future holds for the Agile methodology

Though it might seem that respondents (especially practitioners) are feeling defeated about Agile's implementation and its future, the survey still reveals an encouragingly positive outlook:

61% of practitioners **&** **65%** of leaders are optimistic and excited about Agile expanding beyond the software and tech industries

In fact, only **22%** of practitioners and **17%** of leaders are concerned that Agile roles and practices will become devalued.

Three major themes have them particularly encouraged:

1 Artificial intelligence (AI):

Practitioners (**67%**) and leaders (**79%**) cited AI as the top most exciting contribution to the future of Agile. That optimism is particularly high in the U.S. where **83%** of practitioners and **89%** of leaders cited it as the top future development.
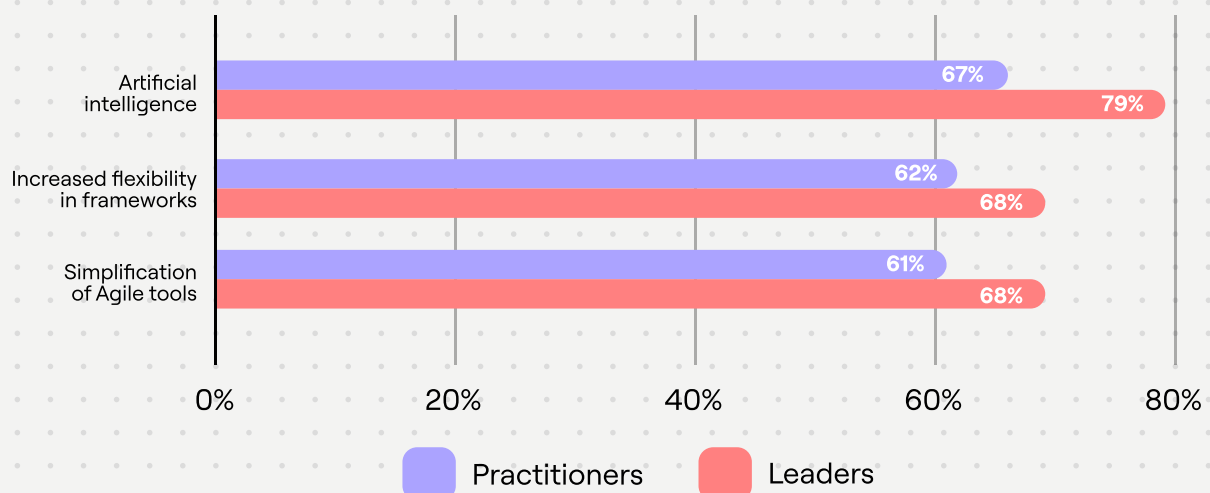
2 Increased flexibility in frameworks:

62% of practitioners and **68%** of leaders pointed to "*Agile evolving beyond frameworks*" as an exciting potential development for Agile, making it the second most cited answer.

3 Simplification of Agile tools:

Finally, "*tools that are more focused on team engagement*" was the third most positive potential development, cited by **61%** of practitioners and **68%** of leaders.

Which Agile trends are you most excited and optimistic about?

Trend	Practitioners	Leaders
Artificial intelligence	67%	79%
Increased flexibility in frameworks	62%	68%
Simplification of Agile tools	61%	68%

Practitioners Leaders

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By and large, people remain hopeful about the future of Agile and aren't looking to give up on it as a practice.

Instead, they recognize that as the way we work continues to evolve, the methodology must evolve along with it. Fortunately, this is one area where the continued advancement of AI offers a huge opportunity to shape the future of the methodology.

How AI can impact Agile practices

AI is already transforming businesses and entire industries, and respondents largely agree that Agile won't be immune to the impacts of AI. Only **18%** of respondents think AI won't affect Agile.

Indeed, most practitioners and leaders are excited about AI, with only **14%** concerned about it disrupting their work.

So, where do they see AI making the biggest changes?

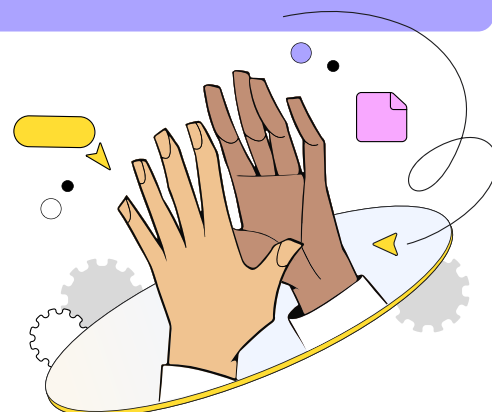Enhancing decision-making with data-driven insights

Reducing manual, low-value, and repetitive tasks

Streamlining workflows

Improving team collaboration and communication

Filling in knowledge and functional gaps in a team

Ideally, by reducing busy work and making workflows more efficient, AI will help teams implement Agile practices as they were meant to be — and deliver high-value projects faster, too. The less time and energy teams need to spend on tedious work means the more energy they can put toward innovation. That's good news.

![Miro logo]

Agile practitioners and leaders predict that AI will help automate and streamline tasks, but also fill the role of a strategic partner — providing rich data, meaningful insights, and thoughtful predictions to help businesses make faster and smarter decisions.

When asked, "How do you think AI will influence Agile in the next 1-3 years?," practitioners globally shared the same three predictions — enhance decision-making with data-driven insights, reduce manual, repetitive tasks, and streamline workflows. And yet, their top-most prediction varied by location:

Europe and the U.K.

Reducing manual, low-value, and repetitive tasks

Australia, Japan, and the United States

Enhancing decision-making with data-driven insights

Some reports indicate that Europe and the U.K. have been slightly slower to adopt AI, which could explain why they haven't quite jumped from using AI for rote tasks to leveraging it for deeper and higher-level thinking.

Practitioners and leaders have a strong sense of what's ahead in terms of AI's role in Agile. But they don't just have predictions — they also have preferred possibilities. If they had their way in steering AI, they'd like to see a mix of the following strategic and tactical capabilities:
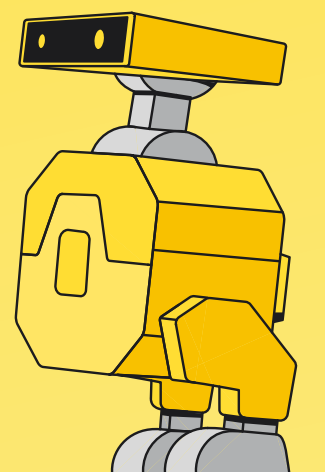
Predictive analytics for project timelines

AI-driven scenario planning and simulations

Automated sprint planning

Real-time status updates

Automated issue tracking and resolution

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Aligning Agile ideals with real-world implementation

While Agile's tenets of flexibility and collaboration sound promising on paper, teams face real challenges in practice. They find themselves tangled in processes, tools, and team cultures that seem to undermine or even directly contradict Agile's core values.

The truth is that Agile is still a powerful methodology. But our data shows it needs a refresh for the modern working world. Fortunately, one of Agile's key values is about responding to change — and it's time to apply that value to the methodology itself.

Methodology

Miro partnered with an independent research agency for a brand-blind survey of 750 Agile practitioners and 500 product and Tech leaders in Australia, Europe, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United states in June - July 2024. All respondents belong to or lead teams that develop new products or services and all participate in or manage teams that run Agile practices.

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