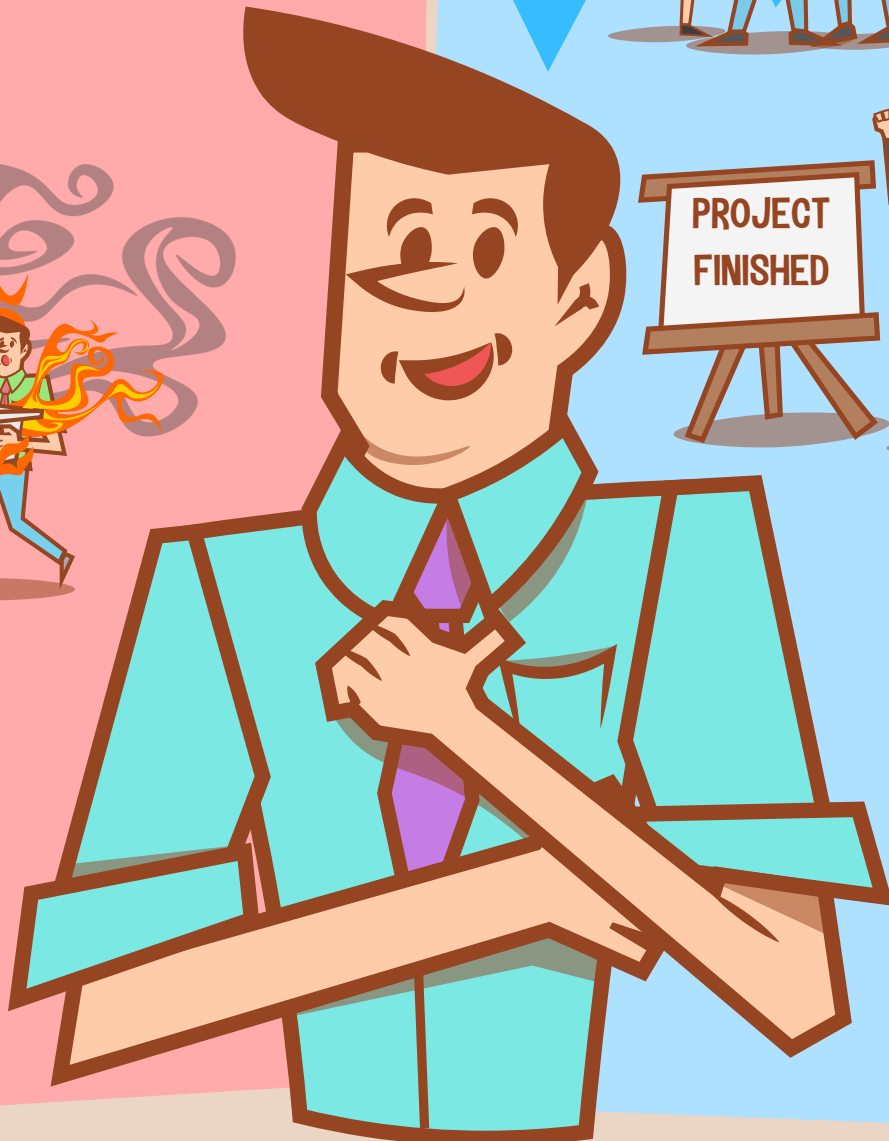
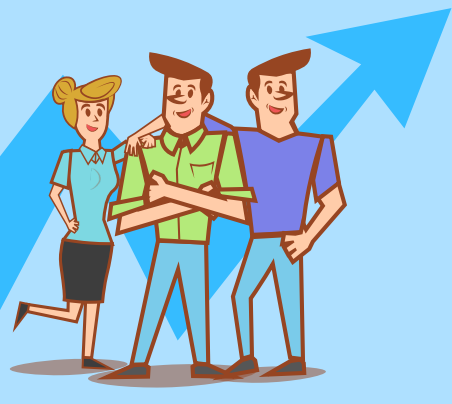


AGILE APPROACH TO PROJECT MANAGEMENT IN YOUTH ORGANIZATIONS

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1. Introduction



The key goal of this guide is to provide youth organizations with the correct set of tools, methods, principles, values, and mindset that, together, form a framework for the effective management of teams and, above all, youth projects focused on non-formal education. Our target audience is, therefore, youth organizations, educators, facilitators, volunteers, and young people who would like to learn how to become more effective at achieving educational goals and consistently deliver results while thriving in a changing, complex environment. In particular, we explain how to tackle complexity, embrace change, handle uncertainty, and provide results that stakeholders expect. Furthermore, in this guide, we give you a concise overview of the Agile philosophy – a methodology that has already revolutionized software development and, later, IT project management. We will explain why the Agile approach to project management has proven so transformative and why, more than 40 years later, it continues to evolve and is adopted by firms across industries, universities, and NGOs.

This book is intended for anyone who would like to learn more about agile project management frameworks (such as Scrum, Kanban, and Agile PM) and, more importantly, the best practices and guidelines that can be applied to virtually any complex activity you plan to engage in. We advise that you use this guide in the way that best suits the particular needs of your project and organization. Each organization is different, and one size will not fit all your needs. Remember, it is not uncommon for organizations to have a hybrid environment where traditional scheduling and project management techniques coexist with agile methods. However, we are confident that using what's best in Agile will almost certainly help in delivering better educational outcomes for all stakeholders.

Introduction

The transition toward Agile requires a reevaluation of core values, shifting from an emphasis on following a plan to one on responding to change. This is particularly relevant in non-formal education, where the lack of a fixed formal curriculum provides the “freedom” necessary for true learner-centered activities. In particular, an Agile approach to non-formal education helps both educators and youth focus on the practical applications of knowledge, collaboration, and co-creation to deliver tangible outcomes and proactively adapt to new information. This ideological shift allows non-formal education providers to bridge the gap between academic theory and industry expectations, fostering essential skills such as teamwork, problem-solving, and adaptability. Agile frameworks facilitate deeper community engagement, transforming beneficiaries into “co-creators”. Involving stakeholders such as youth and community leaders in “backlog grooming”—the process of prioritizing work items based on actual circumstances and cultural dynamics—ensures that NGO proposals and programs are “grounded in reality” and resonate with the target audience. Furthermore, Agile makes youth more aware that they are also responsible for their learning. Making learning visible through visual management tools to track goals and feedback means educators focus less on day-to-day micro-management of the learning process and more on mentoring. This leads to higher satisfaction and lower turnover, driven by meaningful work and shared ownership.

In this guide, we will use many terms specific to Agile methodologies, such as backlogs, user stories, sprints, and timeboxing, which may sound unfamiliar or even bizarre to many. Please do not feel discouraged. Under those opaque terms lie simple, easy-to-apply concepts which will help you achieve your goals. Some of you will probably realize that you have already been employing some Agile techniques without even realizing it. In such a case, the guide will provide you with more context and lead you to additional educational resources that can elevate your project management skills to an entirely new level.

While this guide explores many general aspects of the Agile philosophy, our primary focus is on its practical application in non-formal education settings, as well as the unique challenges and opportunities it presents. In particular, we explore how Agile can be applied to non-formal education activities by providing real-life examples and applications. In this guide, we explore in more detail the youth projects our organizations have conducted, which rely heavily on Agile techniques. This is intended to give you even more confidence in applying Agile thinking in your own projects and managing your own teams. To better link the Agile approach to non-formal education needs, we begin with a short introduction to the challenges and opportunities of non-formal youth education.

2. The unique context of non-formal education and Agile philosophy



2.1 The challenges and benefits of non-formal education

Before we explore the Agile philosophy, let us outline the challenges that non-formal education faces. Only then will we be able to better understand the benefits of Agile in overcoming them. While non-formal education (NFE), strongly supported by programs such as Erasmus+, offers unparalleled flexibility and learner-centered approaches, its distinct characteristics also create specific pedagogical, operational, and systemic hurdles. First, the flexibility at the core of NFE enables educational programs to be highly responsive and tailored to specific learning outcomes and the unique needs of youth. However, this flexibility introduces a challenge to maintain consistency and focus. In particular, knowledge sharing must follow a logical pattern. Increase in one's competencies evolves in a stepwise manner. As a result, excessive flexibility and a lack of focus on the goal may adversely affect the quality and relevance of non-formal education activities. Further, without standardized content or universally adopted teaching methodologies, guaranteeing uniform quality across different NFE projects becomes difficult. This situation can lead to a "quality assurance vacuum," where external stakeholders, including policymakers and potential employers, may lack confidence in the effectiveness and consistency of NFE outcomes. This perception, in turn, hinders broader recognition and validation of skills acquired through NFE, perpetuating a cycle in which the value of these crucial learning experiences is underestimated.

The unique context of non-formal education and Agile philosophy

NFE is not unaffected by **significant operational challenges**. First, non-formal education programs are often constrained by limited and inconsistent resources, which are typically obtained through donations, grants, or volunteer efforts. This financial scarcity may directly translate into tangible operational deficiencies, including poor infrastructure, insufficient learning materials, and an inability to deliver educational services consistently. Without a stable, sufficient funding stream, NFE initiatives struggle to expand their reach, maintain program quality, and effectively meet the diverse needs of their target learners. To gain the trust of funding organizations, NGOs may choose to communicate how they have adopted agile practices into their processes, emphasizing **flexibility and adaptability while maintaining a clear focus** on achieving goals, all grounded in a sound educational foundation.

Second, the involvement of multiple organizations or entities in managing NFE programs often leads to **parallel reporting structures** and a significant **risk of duplication of activities**. These overlapping roles and fragmented communication channels can create confusion, impede effective decision-making, and delay the implementation of new initiatives or the resolution of ongoing issues. Such inefficiencies not only waste precious resources but also complicate efforts to coordinate and scale impactful programs, ultimately hindering the overall success and reach of NFE efforts. Agile methodologies such as AgilePM or ScaledAgile provide **ready-to-use frameworks that help in streamlining complex projects**.

Third, youth projects must also contend with psychological and social barriers to engagement. Adolescence is marked by heightened self-consciousness and a fear of appearing foolish, especially in social learning environments. Young people may be reluctant to admit ignorance, make mistakes, or ask questions in front of peers or critical adults, which can stifle active participation. In this respect, Agile approaches place strong emphasis on facilitation, coaching, respect, and team effort. In particular, effective NFE facilitators must create a safe learning environment where mistakes are normalized and valued as part of the learning process. This requires adults to be tolerant of ignorance, patient with errors, sensitive to struggle, and supportive in their evaluations. Without such an environment, the voluntary nature of NFE can lead to disengagement, as youth may withdraw rather than face perceived social risks. Further, youth populations are inherently diverse, encompassing a wide range of developmental stages and individual needs, including physical, social, emotional, and cognitive variations. NFE projects face the challenge of designing programs that are flexible and adaptable enough to cater to this spectrum. For instance, younger adolescents may have shorter attention spans and benefit from hands-on, sensory-engaging activities focused on process rather than product. As older youth move toward abstract thinking, they require opportunities for group activities, independence, and challenges that foster competence and self-concept. Designing activities that lead to tangible results, therefore, improves awareness of educational progress and enhances confidence in one's skills.

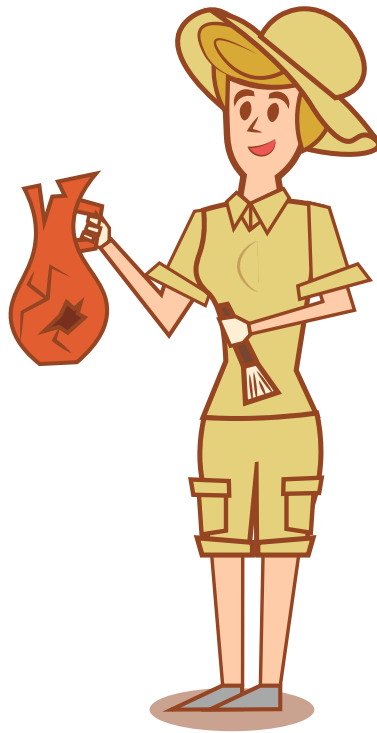
ORGANIZE YOUR MANAGEMENT

Our analysis reveals that the challenges briefly outlined above are not isolated but frequently exacerbate one another, creating a complex ecosystem of barriers. For instance, a lack of societal recognition can deter essential funding, thereby compromising the ability to attract, train, and retain qualified staff. Addressing these intricate issues requires concerted efforts across policy development, innovative program design, and robust stakeholder collaboration, which, in our opinion, is critical to fully unlocking NFE's profound potential to enhance holistic youth development and active citizenship. In our guide, we will explain how Agile approaches can mitigate many challenges posed by NFE. We strongly believe that Agile methodologies and best practices can be very effective in improving the benefits of NFE.

Informal education significantly impacts participants' personal development by offering unique opportunities often beyond the scope of traditional education. It's available throughout life, enabling continuous learning and growth, thereby aligning with the concept of lifelong learning. The latest advancements in Information Technology, Artificial Intelligence, and biosciences, coupled with their growing convergence, are described by many as the beginning of the most profound technological shift, or, as some claim, revolution, in human history. We are confident that these developments will send ripple effects and sweeping changes across virtually all areas of human activity. People will have to adapt by quickly gaining new competencies. This is an excellent opportunity for non-formal education systems, which, by definition, are more adaptable to changing educational needs. Consequently, NGOs focused on NFE can play a pivotal role in the coming years. Furthermore, non-formal education provides a "second chance" for young people who have dropped out of formal education or are in difficult life situations, helping them reintegrate into society. Through step-by-step project implementation and even small successes, participants build self-confidence and self-worth. When young people are at the center of their own educational process and pursue their interests, they feel engaged, which leads to strong motivation to learn. Informal education also emphasizes "learning by doing" and engagement with specific situations, fostering the practical development of skills.

NON-FORMAL EDUCATION IS DEVELOPING

3. History of Agile management



Agile methodologies have fundamentally reshaped modern project management and software development, moving beyond the rigid confines of traditional approaches. In this section, we trace the evolution of Agile, from its origins as a necessary response to the inefficiencies of conventional project management to its current mature stage. The maturity of the Agile approach is evident in its high adoption rate among companies and organizations, as well as in the many frameworks developed since its inception. In our guide, we place a central emphasis on explaining how various Agile frameworks uniquely empower teams and strategically manage projects, offering distinct benefits tailored to organizational needs. The core strength of Agile lies in its profound adaptability, which fosters collaboration, rapid delivery, and continuous improvement, whether the objective is to optimize internal team dynamics or to oversee complex project lifecycles. Agile is an iterative and adaptive approach to project management that prioritizes responding to change and delivering value frequently through collaboration. Agile recognizes that to accomplish project goals and provide value, results need to be delivered incrementally to receive regular, constructive feedback. This approach easily accommodates changes in project scope and introduces formal prioritization techniques to offer the most value within the available time. These characteristics, as we explain further, are highly relevant to the field of non-formal education.

Agile Project Management (APM)

has emerged as a widely popular subject in both business and academic circles, particularly since the publication of the so-called **Agile Manifesto**. The Agile Manifesto is a foundational document for Agile practices, outlining four core values and twelve supporting principles. We will be returning to the Agile Manifesto many times in this guide, exploring Agile principles in detail and explaining their relevance to non-formal education.



The Agile concept originated in the late 1990s, when software development teams began exploring new working methods to enhance software development processes, focusing on continuous and incremental approaches built on adaptability, individual and group autonomy, modularity, and self-organization. By the early 2000s, 17 professionals published the “Agile Manifesto” to define fundamental values and principles for improving software development. Over the subsequent two decades, APM solidified its position, extending beyond its origins in Information Technology (IT) to become a well-established and widely adopted practice across sectors.


APM represents a significant paradigm shift from the previously dominant “Waterfall”¹ approach, which relied heavily on detailed specifications, extensive upfront planning, comprehensive documentation, and a pursuit of “immaculate” process execution. In contrast, Agile methods use minimal documentation, promoting flexibility and responsiveness to change while requiring less planning effort and offering greater adaptability than traditional management. Agile project management is characterized by collaborative teamwork, the need for multidisciplinary skills, pluralistic decision-making, and the use of small teams. This contrasts with traditional management’s focus on individual work, specialized skills, managerial decision-making, and larger teams. While the “Waterfall” model demonstrated efficacy in predictable environments where requirements were stable and well-defined from the outset, it proved significantly ill-suited for the inherent complexities and dynamic nature of software projects. Such projects are frequently characterized by rapidly changing requirements, the critical need for continuous customer feedback, and an imperative for iterative development. Unintuitive as it may sound, youth projects focusing on non-formal education share many of the characteristics of software projects. The complex nature of youth projects stems from the high diversity of the teams involved. The diversity (cultural, educational, and social) is something we welcome in non-formal education projects; however, it adds a layer of complexity, reflected in varied requirements, cultural sensitivities, and often changing expectations. Highly dynamic environments also characterize youth projects focusing on non-formal education. To maintain high engagement and focus, a prerequisite to any effective educational activity, working methods ought to be adapted frequently. The varied levels of preexisting knowledge and skills among youth groups require that the program be adjusted to achieve the best possible educational outcomes.




History of Agile management

The inflexibility of traditional project management models left little room for significant course corrections once a project was underway. Specifically, in dynamic domains like software development or, as we explained, youth projects, where stakeholders' needs evolve, and environmental conditions shift, a rigid, upfront-planning methodology inevitably results in substantial rework, low-quality outcomes, delays, and ultimately stakeholder dissatisfaction. The **"costly and time-consuming"** changes are a direct consequence of this rigidity, as any deviation necessitates disruptive return to previous stages. This reveals a core tension: traditional models are built for certainty, while modern projects frequently operate under conditions of uncertainty.



 Following the Agile Manifesto's release, the Agile approach evolved into a well-defined set of methods, tools, and techniques aimed at improving project performance by fostering what we call "agility." This fundamentally involves the ability to quickly plan for change and ensure active customer, or in our case, participant, involvement. The four core values articulated in the Agile Manifesto are: "Individuals and their interactions over processes and tools," "Working software over comprehensive documentation," "Customer collaboration over contract negotiations," and "Responding to changes over following a plan." The significance of the Manifesto lies in its ability to provide a concise, shared philosophy and, crucially, to coin the term "Agile" itself. This act unified the diverse, independently emerging approaches into a cohesive movement. This paradigm shift, moving the focus from strict adherence to upfront plans and exhaustive documentation toward valuing human collaboration, delivered functional value and responsiveness to evolving circumstances, fundamentally altering the trajectory of project management. The four core values of the Agile Manifesto directly challenge the foundational assumptions of the Waterfall model. The emphasis on "responding to change over following a plan" directly addresses Waterfall's inherent inflexibility. Similarly, "customer collaboration over contract negotiation" explicitly counters Waterfall's tendency to exclude the client until late stages of a project. Furthermore, "working software over comprehensive documentation" de-emphasizes the heavy, upfront documentation that often characterized traditional methods.

The highest priority in Agile is to  satisfy the customer through the early and continuous delivery of valuable software, or in our case, tangible educational results. The popularity of APM is attributed to its potential to optimize project team operational capacity through short cycles and its positive influence on teamwork dynamics. Many practitioners and academics believe that implementing this approach enhances project productivity and efficiency. Agile principles also prioritize continuous learning, collaboration, and flexibility, emphasizing adaptability to turbulent markets.

4. Agile approach in youth projects



In this section, we will dive deeper into specific Agile frameworks and best practices, explaining their distinctive characteristics. Our key goal, however, is to emphasize their relevance to the field of non-formal education. In the first two subsections, we will focus on **Scrum** and **Kanban**, and on their combination, called **Scrumban**. Then, we will focus on the Lean approach to Agile project management. Finally, in the last two subsections, we will explore the potential of **ScaledAgile** and **Agile PM** for managing large, organization-wide projects.

4.1 Agile for managing small-scale projects and teams

4.1.1 SCRUM

SCRUM initially developed for software development in the 1990s, has evolved into a lightweight framework that helps people, teams, and organizations generate value through adaptive solutions for complex problems. While it has its roots in digital product development, its application has spread to many fields characterized by complex work, including hardware development, marketing programs, sales initiatives, and even project management in NGOs, education, or event planning. Unlike rigid processes, Scrum is a framework that allows organizations to uniquely tailor it to their needs while remaining true to its core principles.

4.1.1.1 Applying SCRUM to complex challenges in Non-Formal Education

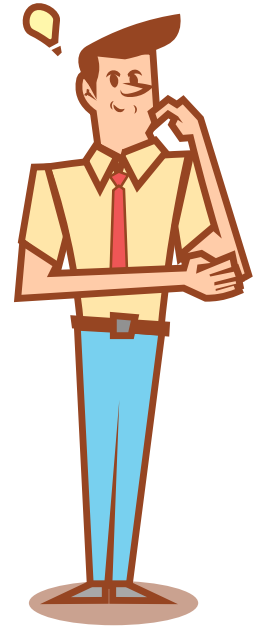
The effective use of Scrum relies on people becoming more proficient in applying five values:

Commitment, Focus, Openness, Respect, and Courage.

These values provide direction to the Scrum Team in their work, actions, and behavior, reinforcing Scrum's empirical pillars: transparency, inspection, and adaptation, which build trust. Let's now explore in more detail the five values of Scrum and its relevance to non-formal education projects. Scrum is founded on empiricism and Lean thinking, taking a pragmatic, efficient approach to problem-solving and value delivery. In essence, empiricism holds that knowledge comes from experience and that decisions are based on observation. To achieve this goal, Scrum uses an iterative, incremental approach to optimize predictability and control risk. The three pillars of empiricism are Transparency, Inspection, and Adaptation.

Focus

The primary focus is the work of the Sprint to make the best possible progress toward specific goals. In NFE projects, a team should concentrate on one key workshop module within a given Sprint, rather than spreading itself across multiple initiatives simultaneously. This approach improves self-management and the coherence of actions. As a result, we mitigate the risk of diluted quality and scope that stems from a lack of a rigid curriculum.

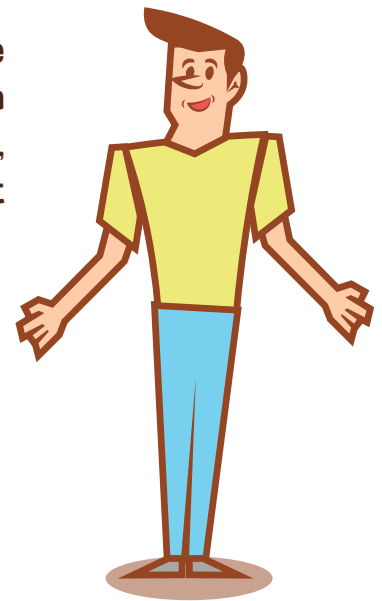


Youth Project Application

During a youth exchange, the focus is on the project's specific learning objectives, as defined in the Erasmus+ application. Participants and facilitators focus on a particular theme, such as environmental sustainability, throughout the project, which helps them achieve a deeper understanding.

Openness

The Scrum Team and its stakeholders are open about the work and the challenges. In a youth project, this means openly sharing information about progress, problems (e.g., resource constraints or difficulties reaching the target group), and delays, which is crucial for rapid adaptation and building trust.



Youth Project Application

Participants are encouraged to share their feedback openly during daily reflections and workshops. The facilitators and organizers must also be open to this feedback and transparent about the project's progress and any challenges that arise, such as logistical issues. Open communication and cooperation are vital in transnational projects.

Respect

Scrum Team members respect each other as capable, independent people and are respected by those they work with. In NFE projects, where finding and retaining qualified staff can be challenging, mutual respect supports collaboration and helps overcome issues such as conflicts or differences in experience.

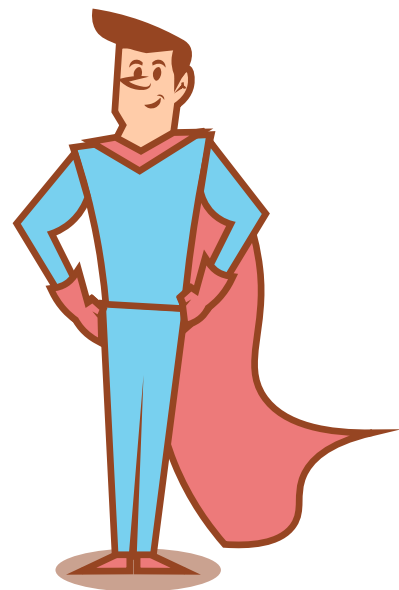


Youth Project Application

Respect for diverse perspectives is a fundamental principle of a youth exchange. Participants and facilitators must respect each other's cultural backgrounds, opinions, and contributions. The Erasmus+ Program Guide emphasizes shared EU values such as respect for human dignity, equality, and the fight against discrimination, which are crucial to this principle.

Courage

Scrum Team members dare to do the right thing and tackle tough problems. This can mean the courage to challenge the status quo, such as abandoning traditional planning methods in favor of more adaptive ones, even when it's painful for the organization. In NFE projects, this courage can lead to experimenting with innovative discovery-based teaching methods or openly identifying and removing organizational barriers.

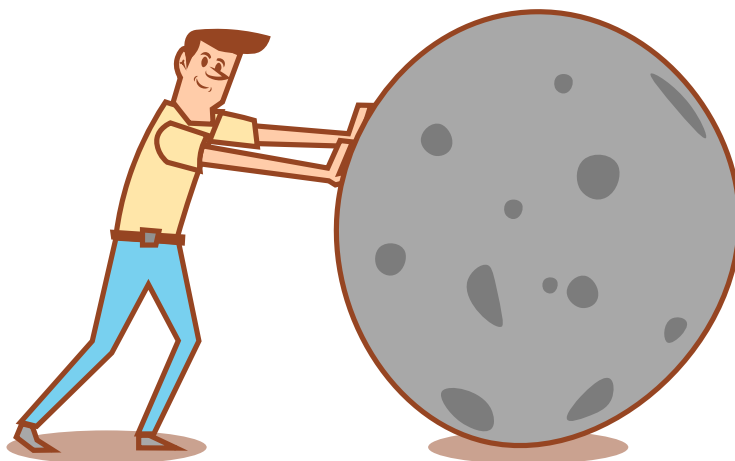


Youth Project Application

On the one hand, youth participants are encouraged to step outside their comfort zones, share their opinions, and engage in difficult discussions about topics such as climate change and misinformation. On the other hand, facilitators dare to admit when an activity is not working and to adapt the plan, rather than sticking to a rigid schedule.

Commitment

The Scrum Team commits to achieving its goals and supporting one another. In non-formal education projects, the team's collective commitment to the Sprint goal — e.g., completing a design for the workshop module on ecological awareness — helps overcome the challenge of inconsistent participation often found in non-formal education (NFE) by fostering shared responsibility.



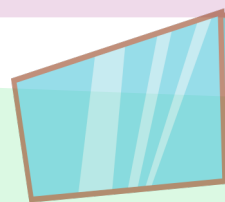
Youth Project Application

Youth participants and facilitators commit to their roles and to working together to achieve the project's educational objectives. This commitment is fostered through active participation in all phases of the activities, from planning to evaluation.

Scrum is founded on empiricism and Lean thinking, taking a pragmatic, efficient approach to problem-solving and value delivery. In essence, empiricism holds that knowledge comes from experience and that decisions are based on observation. To achieve this goal, Scrum uses an iterative, incremental approach to optimize predictability and control risk. The three pillars of empiricism are

Transparency, Inspection, and Adaptation.

Transparency



The process and the work must be visible to those performing the work and those receiving the work. In NFE projects, open communication on a Scrum Board² shows progress in organizing a youth event, identifies material shortages, and helps resolve issues like data scarcity and ineffective progress monitoring.

Youth Project Application

The project's goals, daily schedule (Sprint Backlog), and the progress of the activities are made visible to everyone, for instance, on a shared whiteboard or a digital platform. This includes the learning objectives and the criteria for success. The Erasmus+ Program Guide itself emphasizes transparency and quality.

Inspection



Scrum artifacts and progress toward agreed-upon goals must be inspected frequently and diligently to detect potentially undesirable variances or problems. In NFE, regular meetings (e.g., the Sprint Review) allow for evaluating the effectiveness of activities and the quality of delivered educational materials.

Youth Project Application

Regular check-ins, such as the Daily Scrum (or daily reflection), allow the youth participants and facilitators to inspect their progress and the effectiveness of the activities. During these sessions, they can ask questions like: "Are we on track to meet our learning goals?" or "Is the current activity engaging?" The Youthpass process, which documents learning outcomes, is another form of inspection, allowing participants to reflect on and identify what they have learned

Adaptation



If any aspect of a process falls outside acceptable limits or the resulting product is unacceptable, the process or the deliverables being produced must be adjusted. In youth projects, for example, after a preliminary workshop (inspection), the team might find that the method is ineffective (a deviation) and must adapt it immediately to minimize further deviation. A lack of adaptation, when people are not empowered or self-organizing, hinders this process.

Youth Project Application

If a daily reflection reveals that an activity is not working or that participants are not engaged, the facilitators can adapt the plan for the next day. This flexibility is crucial in a non-formal education setting. This aligns with the Erasmus+ priority of providing flexible, learner-centered opportunities. The Scrum Retrospective is a perfect example of this, where the team plans for improvements in future activities.

The agile approach incorporates lean thinking. Lean thinking means focusing on reducing waste and concentrating on what is essential. In Scrum, this means delivering value early and often. The goal is to eliminate "waste," defined as any activity that consumes resources without adding value for the customer or service. In the context of NFE, the focus should be on activities that directly contribute to the learning objectives. To respond to this imperative, Scrum uses an iterative and incremental approach to optimize predictability and control risk.

Iterative This means the team can “get it wrong before they get it right.” In an NFE project, a team might develop an initial set of workshop goals and learning objectives, identify non-formal education methods and tools, gather feedback, and then iteratively refine and improve them.

Incremental Involves building the product piece by piece, with each completed increment adding to the previous ones. The Scrum Team is responsible for creating a valuable, useful Increment each Sprint. In NFE, instead of waiting months for an entire educational program, the team delivers finished, tested, and usable educational modules each Sprint. This enables faster feedback, reduces risk, and provides value to beneficiaries sooner.

ITERATIVE

INCREMENTAL

1. initial idea:
workshop goals



2. draft methods
and tools



3. refine and
improve



MAKE IT EXIST FIRST,
THEN MAKE IT PERFECT



1

INCREMENT 1 DELIVERED



E.g. Core Educational Module

2

INCREMENT 2 DELIVERED



E.g. Assessment Tools

3

INCREMENT 3 DELIVERED



E.g. Advanced Activities

4

FINAL PROGRAM COMPLETE



BUILDING PIECE BY PIECE



4.1.1.2 Agile project lifecycle in Scrum

SPRINT IS THE BASIS

Scrum is a simple framework that first requires the Product Owner (we explore the roles in Scrum further in the guide) to order work into a Product Backlog, and second requires the Scrum Team to turn a selection of that work into a valuable Increment during a Sprint. Thirdly, the Scrum Team and stakeholders inspect the results and adapt for the next Sprint. This cycle repeats until all deliverables are completed. The heart of Scrum is the Sprint—a fixed-length event of one month or less. Working in Sprints leads to consistency and increases the team's focus on achieving specific goals. A new Sprint starts immediately after the previous Sprint concludes. All the work necessary to achieve the Product Goal, including Sprint Planning, Daily Scrums, Sprint Review, and Sprint Retrospective, happens within Sprints. In NFE projects, the fixed length of Sprints (e.g., two weeks) provides a regular work rhythm and fixed checkpoints for inspection and adaptation. This process, as a consequence, helps manage the unpredictability typical of non-formal education projects.

The main Scrum events within a Sprint are:

SPRINT PLANNING

Kicks off the Sprint. The entire Scrum Team collaborates to define the Sprint Goal and select items from the Product Backlog to be completed during the Sprint, creating the Sprint Backlog. In an NFE project, the team, in agreement with the Product Owner (e.g., program leader/coordinator), plans which priority workshops or educational materials will be completed in the upcoming Sprint. This helps address resource scarcity by enabling the team to focus on the most critical activities.

The first day of the exchange could be dedicated to "Sprint Planning." The Project Owner (Project Coordinator) presents the overall project goals, and the team (youth participants and facilitators) discusses and selects the specific activities and learning objectives for the week. This ensures the youth have a say in their learning process.

DAILY SCRUM

A 15-minute meeting held daily to inspect progress toward the Sprint Goal and adapt the plan for the upcoming day. In NFE, the team meets daily to discuss what they did, what they plan to do, and any impediments they encounter. This improves communication, promotes quick decision-making, and helps identify obstacles, such as limited access to key resources. Jeff Sutherland, a “father” of Scrum, emphasizes that it’s “fifteen minutes for the team to quickly figure out how to move toward victory—that is, completing the Sprint.”

The Daily Meeting (Daily Scrum) is ideally suited for youth non-formal education projects. Its primary goal is to establish a culture of cooperation and ensure continuous and clear communication within the team. Daily status meetings, being short and structured, allow young people to track progress toward the agreed objective and learn to accept change as inevitable.

**Youth
Project
Application**

SPRINT REVIEW

Occurs at the end of the Sprint. The Scrum Team and stakeholders inspect the Increment and adapt the Product Backlog. The team demonstrates what is “Done”. In NFE, the team might present a newly developed workshop module or a pilot educational session to beneficiaries and stakeholders (e.g., NGO representatives and youth work coordinators). This transparency and the opportunity for quick feedback help measure and validate value, even for difficult-to-quantify “soft” skills. Finally, those results are described and/or presented in the report that is provided to the funding organization, e.g., the National Agency of the Erasmus+ program.

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**Youth
Project
Application**

SPRINT RETROSPECTIVE

Occurs after the Sprint Review for the Scrum Team to inspect itself and its process and identify improvements for the next Sprint. In NFE, the team might discuss what went well and what could be improved in their way of working, e.g., how better to manage adaptation to the voluntary nature of youth participation. As previously mentioned, the “father” of the Scrum method, Jeff Sutherland, considers this “one of the most important and least appreciated practices” and a key element of continuous improvement (kaizen).

After the project, the organizers and youth participants could have a final evaluation meeting to discuss “What went well?” “What could be improved?”, and “What did we learn from this experience that can be applied to future projects?” This evaluation process may incorporate a range of engaging tools and techniques. The overall evaluation aligns with the Erasmus+ requirement for evaluating the project’s different phases and outcomes. From NGOs’ perspective, evaluation results are essential for understanding what went well and, even more importantly, which aspects require improvement.

**Youth
Project
Application**

Every Sprint concludes with an Increment, which is the sum of all Product Backlog items completed during a Sprint and previous Sprints. The Increment must be “Done,” meaning it meets the agreed-upon Definition of Done. In NFE projects, this means that, for example, an educational module is not only developed but also tested, verified, and ready for implementation, even if it’s not yet the entire program.

Youth Project Equivalent

The tangible and intangible outcomes of the youth exchange, such as new skills, knowledge, personal development, tangible results of youth work, and a final product. The Increment can include a range of things, from a new collaborative skill learned by a participant to a final result created during the exchange – anything from a youth policy change proposal to theater performances. The Youthpass certificate is a key tool for formally recognizing these outcomes.

In Scrum, requirements are handled differently from those in traditional projects. Instead of detailed upfront planning, the focus is on progressively elaborating requirements over time.

— Product Backlog —

This is an emergent, ordered list of what is needed to improve the product. It is the single source of work for the Scrum Team. In NFE projects, the Product Backlog might contain ideas for new workshops, materials, improvements to existing programs, technical tasks related to an online platform, or a list of workshops and educational activities planned for the youth project.

— Characteristics of a good Product Backlog (DEEP):

Detailed appropriately Items the team will work on soon are smaller and more detailed; those further out are larger and less detailed.

Emergent The Product Backlog continuously evolves as new information emerges.

Estimated Each item has an estimated size, which helps with planning.

Prioritized/Ordered Items are ordered (most often by priority) so the team constantly works on the most valuable ones.

— Product Backlog Refinement (Grooming)

This is an ongoing activity of writing and detailing, estimating, and prioritizing Product Backlog items. In NFE projects, the team and Product Owner can meet regularly to refine new initiatives, estimate their effort, and set priorities based on changing youth needs.

Example of Product Backlog in Youth Project: This list is created by the Project Coordinator (Product Owner) together with Scrum Team (facilitator, youth, etc.) based on the project's objectives and the Erasmus+ Program Guide. It would be a dynamic list that is continuously refined.

Examples of Sprint Backlog (or Daily Schedule/Activity Plan): This could be the daily plan that the facilitators and youth participants co-create or adapt during the "Sprint Planning" session. It includes specific workshops, topics, and tasks to be completed each day.

– User Stories –

Although Scrum does not mandate a format, many teams represent Product Backlog items in the form of so-called User Stories. Specifically, they describe value for a user or customer in the format: “As a [role], I want [action], so that [value].”

– INVEST

User Stories should be Independent, Negotiable, Valuable, Estimable, Small, and Testable. These criteria help ensure the quality and usability of the Stories.

Examples of “User Stories” in the context of youth projects:

As a young participant from a rural area

I want to attend a digital storytelling workshop to learn new skills and share my community’s story with a broader audience.

Application: This story helps the project team focus on providing specific, practical digital skills that address a real need for a particular type of participant.

As a facilitator

I want a clear project schedule so I can effectively guide the group and ensure we cover all planned topics.

Application: This story highlights a need for transparent and well-organized project management, ensuring that the activities are delivered smoothly.

As a partner organization

I want to see the participants’ final presentations so that I can share the project’s results with my local community and attract new participants for future projects.

Application: This story emphasizes the importance of dissemination and visibility, a key aspect of Erasmus+ projects.

– Definition of Ready –

A set of conditions that must be met before a Product Backlog item is considered ready for acceptance into a Sprint. In NFE projects, the definition of ready for a new educational module might include: clearly defined educational objectives, an identified target audience, a preliminary content outline, and an effort estimate. This ensures the team has sufficient information to start work, minimizing ambiguity.

Example of a Definition of Ready for a Workshop

Before a workshop on a topic such as “Combating Misinformation” is included in the daily schedule for the youth exchange, it could be evaluated against the following criteria:

Learning objectives are clearly defined

The specific learning outcomes for the workshop are articulated (e.g., “Participants will be able to identify at least three types of misinformation”).

All necessary materials, including handouts, digital resources, and equipment (projector, internet access), are ready and tested.

Materials are prepared

Facilitation plan is in place

The step-by-step plan for the workshop, including the duration of each segment and the methodology (e.g., group discussion, hands-on activity, role-playing), has been designed.

The workshop’s contribution to the overall project theme and the Erasmus+ horizontal priorities is understood and documented.

Connection to the broader project goals is established

Accessibility needs are considered

Any specific participant needs, such as language support or physical accessibility, have been addressed.

The time allocated for the workshop is realistic and fits within the daily schedule.

Estimated time is realistic

– Definition of Done –

This is a checklist of work types the team must complete by the end of the Sprint before declaring their work potentially shippable. In the NFE context, "Done" for a workshop might include: an approved script, prepared educational materials, conducted pilot tests, collected feedback, and completed implementation. Such a definition ensures consistent quality and allows verification of tangible results. Sutherland emphasizes that "done" means "a complete, deliverable product that the customer can use".

A Definition of Done for a youth exchange project would be a checklist of all completed activities and project outcomes that must be met. This ensures that the project team and participants are working toward the same goal.

The hierarchy of requirements in Agile

LEVEL 1

Vision and Epics (The Strategy)

Vision To equip youth with sound entrepreneurial competencies combined with high-tech marketing skills while deepening ecological responsibility to create sustainable e-businesses.

Epics (Large Themes)

- 1 **E-Business Creation** From the "Tycoon" business simulation to a full Business Plan and business model design.
- 2 **Digital Marketing Tech** Mastering E-commerce tools, SEO, Google Ads, and AI tools to support marketing efforts.
- 3 **Eco-Education Series** Daily modules on ecology in fashion, home, transport, and workplace.

LEVEL 2

Product Backlog (The Requirements List)

Definition The prioritized list of all "User Stories" needed to complete the project. In our case the user stories are represented by interactive workshops related to the digital marketing.

Project Specifics (User Stories)

- 1 "As an entrepreneur, I want to learn how to use SEO, to drive more traffic to my business online".
- 2 "As an entrepreneur, I want to learn how to use e-commerce platform, to sell my products online".
- 3 "As an entrepreneur, I want to use the SCAMPER method to innovate my business idea so it stands out".
- 4 "As a marketer, I want to understand the 'Hook Model' (by Nir Eyal) to design habit-forming products".
- 5 "As a marketer, I want to understand the 'Hook Model' (by Nir Eyal) to design habit-forming products".

LEVEL 3

Sprint Backlog (The Daily Action Plan)

Definition Specific technical tasks selected for a single timeframe (e.g., the "My First E-Campaign" Workshop on Day 5 in 7 DAY long Youth Exchange).

Project Specifics (Tasks for Day 5/6)

- Task 1** Generate a company logo using AI tools based on specific criteria.
- Task 2** Set up a free XYZ CRM account and configure the landing page.
- Task 3** Write one blog post optimized for SEO using a Large Language Model (LLM).
- Task 4** Film raw footage for the promo video using smartphones.
- Task 5** Edit the video adding subtitles and music for the final presentation.

LEVEL 4

Increment and definition of Done (The Final Output)

Definition The potentially "shippable" result produced by the end of the exchange.

Project Specifics (The "Shippable" Product)

Increment: A polished Pitch Deck and Promotional Video presented to 100 external guests via Zoom.

Definition of Done (DoD):

Business Plan: Financial, Operational, and Marketing plans are documented.

Validation: The idea was tested against survey data from real respondents.

Visuals: A professional logo and video exist.

Feedback: The pitch has received feedback from the external audience via e-surveys.

4.1.1.3 Roles in the Scrum Team

The fundamental unit of Scrum is a small Scrum Team consisting of a Scrum Master, a Product Owner, and Developers. Within a Scrum Team, there are no sub-teams or hierarchies, making it a cohesive unit of professionals focused on one objective—the Product Goal. Scrum Teams are also characterized by their cross-functional and self-managing nature. Below, we explore the key roles of Scrum Team members in more detail:

PRODUCT OWNER



Responsible for defining and prioritizing the product backlog (a list of features) to maximize the value of the product. In the youth project, the Product Owner role may be filled out by the **Project Coordinator** responsible for the overall vision and strategic direction of the youth exchange.

PRODUCT OWNER

Responsible for maximizing the value of the product delivered by the Scrum Team. This is the “single voice” of the stakeholder community, defining what needs to be done and in what order. In NFE projects, the Product Owner might be the educational program director or a community leader. They are responsible for understanding the needs of youth, the community, and funding organizations; translating those needs into prioritized Product Backlog items; and ensuring the team delivers the most valuable solutions. Sutherland emphasizes that the Product Owner is responsible for value and must be deeply connected to the client.

Youth Project Equivalent

In the youth project, this role might be filled by the Project Coordinator at the applicant organization. They are responsible for the overall vision and strategic direction of the youth exchange.

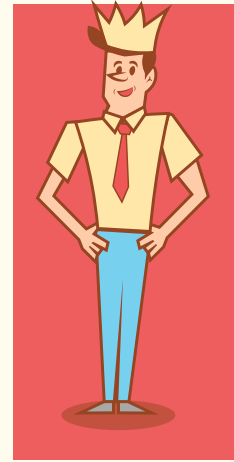
Responsibilities might include:

- Defining the project’s overall educational goals and themes.
- Prioritizing learning objectives and activities (the “Product Backlog”) based on youth needs and Erasmus+ program priorities.
- Ensuring the project aligns with Erasmus+ objectives, for example, by promoting active citizenship and developing vital competencies.

SCRUM MASTER

Responsible for the proper implementation of Scrum processes as defined in the Scrum Guide. In particular, the Scrum Master helps everyone understand Scrum theory and practice within the Scrum Team and, more broadly, across the organization. The Scrum Master serves the Scrum Team, the Product Owner, and the organization. They act as a coach, remove impediments, and ensure all Scrum events are productive. In an NFE project, the Scrum Master might be a project coordinator or a facilitator who helps the team self-organize, ensures meetings are effective, and removes obstacles (e.g., bureaucratic or resource-related) that slow progress.

SCRUM MASTER



A servant-leader who coaches the team on Scrum principles, removes impediments, and facilitates Scrum events to help the team work effectively.

In the non-formal education setting, this role might be a combination of the Facilitator, Lead Trainer, and the Youth Work Coordinator.

Youth Project Equivalent

This role may combine the responsibilities of the Facilitator, Lead Trainer, and Youth Work Coordinator. The role is responsible for the smooth running of the non-formal educational activities.

Responsibilities might include:

- Coaching youth participants (the "Development Team") on the project's methodology and helping them understand the learning process.
- Facilitating all Scrum events, such as daily stand-ups and review meetings.
- Helping the team overcome challenges, such as language barriers or group dynamics issues, to ensure a productive and inclusive environment.

DEVELOPERS



A cross-functional group of professionals who are responsible for building the product increment. In the non-formal education setting, these are the youth participants themselves.

DEVELOPERS

These are the people on the Scrum Team committed to creating every aspect of a usable Increment each Sprint. Their specific skills may vary by the domain of work, but they are always responsible for creating the Sprint plan (the Sprint Backlog), ensuring quality by adhering to a Definition of Done, adapting their plan daily toward the Sprint Goal, and holding each other accountable as professionals. In NFE projects, Developers are all team members who perform the work—e.g., education methodologists, content creators, graphic designers, logistics personnel, youth and IT specialists. They are self-organizing, meaning they decide internally who does what and when.

Youth Project Equivalent

The Youth Participants themselves. They are the core of the project, responsible for their own learning and for co-creating the project's outcomes.

Responsibilities might include:

- Actively participating in workshops and discussions.
- Creating tangible "deliverables" or "increments", such as a social media campaign, a presentation, or a short film, that address the project's theme.
- Collaborating with other participants to learn and solve problems together.


4.1.2 Kanban


Kanban is a **workflow management methodology** that helps visualize work, limit Work In Progress (WIP), and maximize efficiency. It originated in the Toyota Production System (Lean Manufacturing). As we will explain, Kanban shares many characteristics with Scrum. Over time, a new project management method, Scrumban, was proposed, combining elements of Scrum and Kanban. It utilizes the structure and roles of Scrum (e.g., sprints, planning, reviews) and the visualization and workflow control of Kanban (e.g., Kanban board, work-in-progress limits). There are a few key Kanban principles:

- **Visualize the work:** Using a Kanban board (physical or digital) to show all tasks and their current status (e.g., "To Do," "In Progress," "Done").

Youth Project Application: A physical or digital Kanban board can be used to visualize the project's activities and their status.

 **"To Do":** This column would include all the planned workshops, activities, and tasks for the youth exchange, as outlined in the project's detailed schedule.

 **"In Progress":** This column would show the activities currently being worked on by facilitators and participants on a given day.

 **"Done":** This column would record all completed activities and workshops, providing a sense of accomplishment and visible progress.

Limit Work In Progress (WIP)

Setting limits on the number of tasks that can be in "in progress" status at the same time, which prevents overload and improves flow.

4.1.2 Kanban

Youth Project Application:

Setting limits on the number of tasks that can be in “in progress” status at the same time, which prevents overload and improves flow.

1. Visualization and Setting Limits

Creating the Kanban Board: The team (participants and facilitators) creates a physical or digital board to visualize the workflow. A typical flow may include columns: To Do, In Progress/Doing, and Done, as described in the previous “Youth Project Application” section.

Defining WIP: Work in Progress (WIP) is work that has been started but not yet completed. A WIP limit is a constraint applied to a workflow stage to prevent bottlenecks.

Determining the Limit Value: In Kanban, a WIP limit can be applied to the entire system, one lane, a specific column (work status), or a person.

- **Personal WIP Limits:** To avoid overloading individual participants, a common recommendation is a maximum of three items in progress per person, or more often, a maximum of two tasks per person (ATL/WIP limit). This limit is appropriate when there is a risk that a specific person is constantly overloaded.
- **Team/Column Limits (Process Stage WIP Limits):** This can be a threshold, such as twice the number of team members as the maximum group limit. For example, if the youth team has five people, the WIP limit for the “In Progress” column might be 10 (or less, if we want to maintain capacity reserve – slack).

2. Establishing Limits is Critical: Imposing a WIP limit is **essential** for successful Kanban implementation and, as such, is **non-negotiable**. Setting a limit is the best starting point, and the team should adjust it as experience grows. It is recommended that the team itself establish its own WIP limits.

3. Managing Flow When the Limit is Reached

4.1.2 Kanban

In a youth project where work is organized in Timeboxes, reaching the WIP limit is an opportunity, not a problem. It means the system is working as intended:

1. **Stop Starting New Work:** When the WIP limit for a column (e.g., "In Progress") is reached, the team stops starting new work from the "To Do" column.
2. **Focus on Finishing (Start Finishing):** All participants must direct their efforts toward completing the tasks already started. Work should only be pulled into the system when capacity is available.
3. **Team Help:** If a team member is blocked and cannot take on a new task because the WIP limit has been reached, they should help another teammate (Help a teammate) or work on removing the blocker.
4. **Daily Inspection:** Daily meetings (e.g., Daily Stand-ups within the Timebox) are the ideal time to monitor progress, visualize tasks, identify stuck tasks (those that have been in the in-process column for too long), and reorganize work.

Thanks to constant WIP limits, the youth team is forced to address blocks and problems immediately rather than defer them, as is typical in approaches with unlimited WIP. Ultimately, strict WIP limits force the Project Manager/Scrum Master or facilitator to unblock tasks as quickly as possible.

Manage flow: Focusing on the smooth progression of tasks through stages and identifying and eliminating "bottlenecks."

Youth Project Application: The project team would regularly review the Kanban board to manage the flow of activities.

- **Identifying Bottlenecks:** If a workshop consistently remains in the "In Progress" column and does not move to "Done," the team should identify the cause. It might be a lack of materials, a complex topic, or ineffective facilitation.
- **Definition of Done (DoD):** A DoD can be created to define when an activity is truly finished. This might include a youth feedback session, a debriefing with facilitators, or the finalization of a deliverable. These policies ensure a high-quality standard, which is a key requirement of the Erasmus+ program.

4.1.2 Kanban

Make policies explicit: Establishing clear rules for how work is done, e.g., criteria for task completion.

Youth Project Application: The project team can establish clear policies for the youth exchange.

DEFINITION OF READY

DOR

Definition of Ready (DoR): As previously discussed, a clear DoR can define what an activity needs to have (e.g., materials prepared, learning objectives defined) before it can be moved from the "To Do" column to "In Progress."

DEFINITION OF DONE

DOD

Definition of Done (DoD): A DoD can be created to define when an activity is truly finished. This might include a youth feedback session, a debriefing with facilitators, or the finalization of a deliverable. These policies ensure a high-quality standard, which is a key requirement of the Erasmus+ program.

IMPLEMENT FEEDBACK LOOPS

Regular meetings (e.g., daily stand-ups, reviews, retrospectives) to review progress and implement improvements.

Youth Project Application: Feedback loops should be naturally integrated into youth exchanges.

Daily Stand-ups: A short daily meeting with facilitators and youth participants can serve as a feedback loop to check on progress and identify issues.

Sprint Reviews: At the end of a project, a final presentation or evaluation session can be used to gather feedback from stakeholders on the outcomes of the exchange.

Post-Project Feedback: The final report from the project, along with feedback from participants via surveys, acts as a long-term feedback loop for the project.



4.1.2 Kanban

Improve collaboratively, evolve experimentally: Approaching changes as a series of small experiments, based on data and collaboration.

Youth Project Application: This principle is a natural fit for youth projects, which are inherently about learning and growth.

Collaborative Improvement: During a daily debrief, facilitators and youth participants can suggest ways to improve the project’s methodology.

Evolving Experimentally: The team can try new non-formal education methods or technologies (e.g., a new app for group work) and then evaluate their effectiveness. This approach, which encourages learning and experimentation, aligns perfectly with the Erasmus+ program’s goals of personal and professional development.

To Do Backlog 	In Progress Doing 	Done Completed 
<p>Setup CRM:</p> <p>Configure the landing page and customer segmentation module.</p>	<p>Analyze Survey Data:</p> <p>Use Google Cloud Natural Language for sentiment analysis of open-ended questions.</p>	<p>E-business Tycoon:</p> <p>Complete the 2.5-hour simulation to learn basic e-business concepts.</p>
<p>AI Logo Design:</p> <p>Generate a company logo using AI tools based on specified criteria.</p>	<p>Modify Business Model Canvas:</p> <p>Update the BMC value propositions based on survey results.</p>	<p>SCAMPER Session:</p> <p>Apply the 7 modification techniques (Substitute, Combine, etc.) to the initial business idea.</p>
<p>Write Blog Post:</p> <p>Create SEO-optimized content using Large Language Models (LLM).</p>	<p>Visualize Data:</p> <p>Create charts/graphs showing mean and standard deviation of factors impacting on purchase decisions.</p>	<p>Define Target Group:</p> <p>Determine the customer segment and value proposition.</p>

Kanban principles align perfectly with the spirit and goals of the Erasmus+ Program, especially in non-formal education projects that promote flexibility, cooperation, and adaptation to changing needs. The evolving technology landscape, the rise of Artificial Intelligence, and the growing scope of its applications directly impact the competencies of “tomorrow” and accelerate the pace at which those needs will change over time. In the following subchapters, we explore the key principles of Kanban in more detail.

4.1.3.1 Work Visualization and Transparency in Kanban

A Kanban board (physical or digital) provides complete transparency into project progress. In non-formal education projects, especially in Cooperation Partnerships or educational mobilities, where partners from different countries and backgrounds are involved, a visual representation of tasks on a board facilitates collaboration and communication. This aligns with the program's general aim to empower individuals with additional key competencies and to support transnational and international cooperation. Participants, including those with fewer opportunities, can easily see what is happening in the project, thereby promoting inclusion and diversity. Everyone can identify where support is needed and see the progress and contributions of all team members.

Planning activities, including preparatory visits, can be visualized on a Kanban board, which aligns with the requirements for detailed planning and scheduling.

Kanban, as a "lighter agile approach," emphasizes continuous process improvement. In Erasmus+ projects that support innovative practices and optimize implementation and monitoring, Kanban helps manage workflow, identify "bottlenecks" and eliminate waste. This is particularly important in projects with limited budgets and timelines, where specific educational goals must be achieved.

By limiting Work In Progress (WIP), the team can focus on completing tasks before starting new ones, thereby increasing productivity and shortening delivery time. Improved flow can contribute to more sustainable resource use, aligning with the Erasmus+ environmental sustainability priority.

4.1.3.2 Continuous improvement and adaptation



Erasmus+ emphasizes iterative, incremental solution delivery and the embrace of change. Kanban supports this through regular reviews and adaptations. Non-formal education (NFE) projects play a crucial role in youth development and the empowerment of civil society, offering flexible, participant-centered approaches to learning. Education-related priorities are hard to grasp at early stages, especially when groups are highly diverse in age and background. Kanban, with its strong emphasis on evolution rather than revolution, starting from the current state and building upon it through continuous improvement, is highly relevant in this respect. In particular, this approach is crucial in NFE environments, where participants' needs can change and flexibility is essential.

4.1.3.2 Continuous improvement and adaptation

The Kanban methodology, with its core principles and practices, offers practical solutions to many of NFE's project challenges, enhancing the flexibility, transparency, and efficiency of educational projects. A key challenge in NFE projects is maintaining overall program coherence and high quality without a rigid curriculum. Hidden work and a lack of transparency in overall project management are also problems. As we mentioned, Kanban, with its focus on work visualization (Kanban boards), introduces transparency. This, in turn, should lead to increased communication and collaboration. Participants, including those with fewer opportunities, can easily see what is happening in the project. This, in turn, promotes inclusion and diversity. Consequently, everyone can identify where support is needed and see the progress and contributions of all team members, which together support a shared sense of responsibility.

A Kanban board shows the team's workflow, making it easier to communicate status and work context. Regular meetings (e.g., daily Kanban stand-ups) and metrics (such as lead time, throughput, WIP, and blockers) provide continuous feedback. This allows teams to quickly resolve issues, adjust work plans, and experiment with improvements, which is critical for managing risk and uncertainty. Further, establishing clear rules for how work is done, e.g., criteria for task completion ("definition of done"), reduces misunderstandings and supports quality assessment.

4.1.3.3 Managing flow and operational efficiency

NFE projects often face resource constraints, inefficiencies, and bottlenecks and delays. Therefore, efficient resource use is paramount. Demonstrating value for money in non-formal education is essential. In this context, Kanban  improves efficiency  by limiting Work in Progress (WIP), managing the flow of tasks, and adopting a "pull" rather than "push" approach. First, limiting the number of tasks in a given status at any time prevents overload and improves flow, increasing productivity and reducing delivery time. Second, flow management supports a more balanced use of resources, which is crucial in NFE projects. Third, Kanban pulls work through the system only when capacity exists, unlike "push" systems, which can lead to overload and slowdown. As a result, this enables more fluid work management and prevents tasks from accumulating, which is particularly important in projects with limited budgets and durations. Focusing on a limited number of tasks is generally considered a productive approach, reducing burnout, increasing engagement, and, consequently, leading to higher quality.

4.1.3 Scrum & Kanban in Non-Formal Education: Overcoming challenges and increasing benefits

In this section, we focus on the key potential contributions of Scrum and Kanban to the field of non-formal education projects. In addition, we emphasize the advantages of applying Scrum and Kanban to NGOs' day-to-day operations. We should underline that Scrum, which originated in IT, has proven to be a practical approach in many other fields. The Scrum methodology has been applied to a wide range of projects, including the FBI system expansion, car manufacturing, laundry management, classroom teaching, wedding planning, and even in the public sector (introducing policy changes) and NGOs. Professor Hirotaka Takeuchi from Harvard Business School, a co-author of the timeless Harvard Business Review article "The New New Product Development Game," which inspired the development of the Scrum framework, emphasizes that Scrum is a way of life, not just a trendy work approach.

Youth projects that use non-formal education (NFE) tools and methods face unique challenges that Scrum can help address.

— **Adapting to Voluntary Nature:** NFE requires continuous engagement and flexible approaches, often leading to inconsistent participation. Scrum, with its iterative and adaptive nature, allows for rapid adjustment of non-formal education methods and content to changing needs and participant engagement levels, e.g., through regular feedback collection.

— **Maintaining Consistency Without a Rigid Curriculum:** The risk of divergence in quality is high in NFE. Specifically, the lack of uniformity in content across different NFE programs, or even within various iterations of the same program, can lead to disparities in the quality and scope of education provided to youngsters. Despite this inherent flexibility, NFE projects still require careful planning and structuring to achieve expected educational results. For example, sessions must link logically to one another, ensuring that young people acquire meaningful knowledge and skills in a step-by-step progression. This is why the Scrum approach can offer significant benefits to any NGO focused on NFE programs. First, its consistent Sprint rhythm and Definition of Done ensure that each delivered Increment (e.g., an educational module/workshop) meets defined quality standards. Second, the Product Owner (e.g., program leader/coordinator) maintains a consistent vision for the program. This helps anchor the project to the program's key learning objectives and goals.

Resource Scarcity & Inefficiency: NFE projects often suffer from a shortage of infrastructure, materials, and duplicated efforts. Lean Thinking in Scrum focuses on eliminating waste and concentrating on priorities. Sprint Planning with a clearly defined Sprint Goal helps the team focus limited resources on the most essential and valuable activities.

Staffing Challenges: Difficulties in recruiting, burnout, and low pay are issues in NFE. Scrum, by promoting self-organizing teams and competence development, can improve team morale and their adaptability. The Scrum Master, as a coach and impediment remover, can support team development and well-being. Values such as Respect and Openness foster a healthy work environment.

Data Scarcity & Ineffective Monitoring: This limits understanding of program impact and hinders decision-making. Transparency in Scrum and Kanban, work visualization (e.g., on a Scrum board and Burndown Charts), and regular inspections (Daily Scrum, Sprint Review) provide continuous visibility into progress and work status, generating data for informed decisions.

Quantifying Qualitative Outcomes: Measuring "soft" skills and long-term social contributions is challenging in NFE. Scrum, by delivering "Done" and potentially demonstrable Increments in each Sprint, allows for tangible evidence of progress. For example, the effectiveness of a new soft skills assessment tool can be demonstrated, or how "working policy changes" impact beneficiaries can be shown. Feedback from Sprint Reviews provides validation of value from stakeholders.

Neither Scrum nor Kanban is a panacea or a magic cure for all the challenges that NFE programs and NGOs face. Scrum requires breaking old habits, discipline, and the courage to solve the problems that it reveals. However, through consistent implementation, non-formal projects can increase their effectiveness, adaptability, transparency, and value, leading to a real, measurable impact on society.

4.2.1 Large Scale Scrum

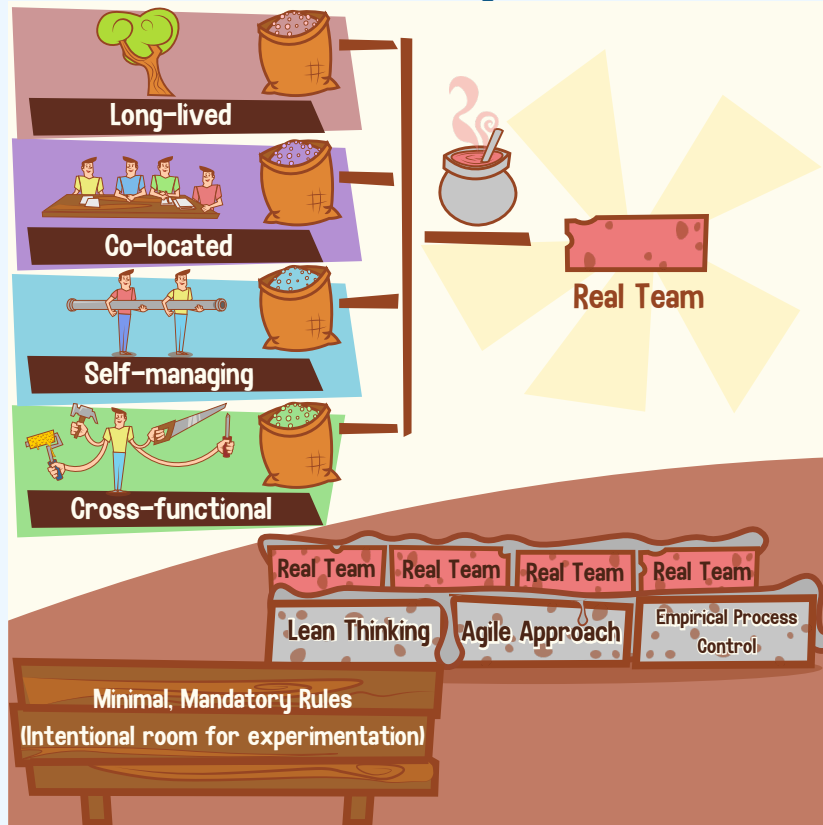
The history of Large-Scale Scrum (LeSS) is deeply rooted in the challenges of scaling Scrum in large organizations while preserving its core principles in complex environments. In essence, LeSS (Large-Scale Scrum) was introduced as a way to scale Scrum in the most straightforward manner, rather than as a new, improved version of Scrum. The main goal of LeSS is to apply the principles, purpose, and elegance of Scrum to large, product-focused teams. The original Scrum focuses on managing projects for a single team. This approach, however, has limitations in larger projects, where more teams must be involved. In 2005, Bas Vodde and Craig Larman began working together at Nokia Siemens Networks, where they combined their experiences to create the LeSS Framework. Since then, LeSS has been applied to product groups ranging from 2 teams to 2500 people in product companies (such as telecom vendors), project-based companies (such as Valtech), and internal products (such as JP Morgan).

LeSS was designed to show how to handle large-scale, complex development, enabling self-managing teams to manage vast, international operations of great technical complexity in a scalable way without sacrificing flexibility. Traditional, hierarchical bureaucracies, though once effective, became insufficient in the face of globalization, knowledge work, and the emergence of new technologies (particularly the Internet) that increased complexity and accelerated change. In essence, LeSS shows "how to cope with immense complexity by creating simplicity". However, instead of asking "How can we apply Agile at scale in our complex, hierarchical bureaucracy?", LeSS asks "How can we simplify the organization, and be Agile?" The goal of LeSS is to achieve the same balance between abstract principles and traditional practices such as Scrum, but for larger product/project groups. Specifically, LeSS adds a bit more concrete structure to Scrum, while maintaining its transparency and emphasizing the inspect-adapt cycle so that groups can continuously improve their own ways of working.

The principles of Large-Scale Scrum

The principles of Large-Scale Scrum (LeSS) are a set of minimal, mandatory rules that form the foundation of this framework. They are not rigid, universal solutions, but rather a starting point for initiating empirical process control and focusing on the whole product. LeSS principles are intentionally incomplete, leaving room for situational learning and continuous experimentation. This reflects lean thinking, a conceptual idea that emphasizes waste reduction and focusing on the most important things, and an agile approach. LeSS posits that the organization should be built using real teams as the basic organizational building block. Furthermore, each team should be self-managing, cross-functional, co-located, and long-lived. A team should possess all the necessary skills to create a shippable product. Co-location (i.e., working in the same room) fosters trust and fast communication, even though this condition is becoming hard to achieve these days. Team longevity allows for continuous improvement of shared working methods and further bolsters mutual trust among team members.

The principles of Large-Scale Scrum



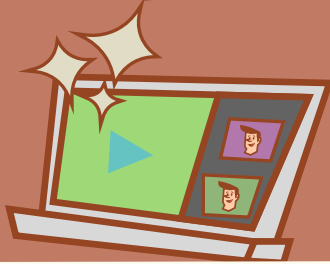
Life-cycle and key roles in LeSS

In LeSS, most teams are “customer-focused” feature teams. Feature teams work on complete functionalities that deliver value to the customer, rather than focusing on technical components. This simplifies planning and eliminates dependencies between teams, as each feature is the responsibility of a single team from start to finish. Although LeSS emphasizes the importance of feature teams, the need to form a so-called component team may also arise. Component teams focus on developing a component or subsystem used only to create part of a customer feature. The introduction of component teams introduces several challenges, including asynchronous dependencies that become structural and systemic impediments. Consequently, in LeSS, most teams should be feature teams, as component teams hinder the flow of value. In particular, they can cause delays and coordination problems. In the following sections, we will explore additional team types present in the so-called LeSS Huge (intended for projects with more than eight teams).

Life-cycle and key roles in LeSS

Deliverables of Youth Exchange on Digital Marketing

Preferred: Cross-Functional Startup Teams



Complete, Pitch-Ready Business Prototype

Production

Tech

Strategy



Team A



Team B



Team C

Avoided: Skill Silos (Component Teams)



Planners

The IT team builds a website that doesn't match the business plan because they didn't talk

Disconnect



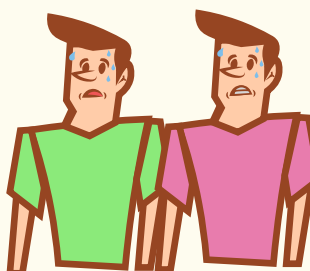
Artists

The Artists can't film the product demo because the IT team hasn't finished the website yet

Bottleneck

IT

Panic before the Zoom Debate

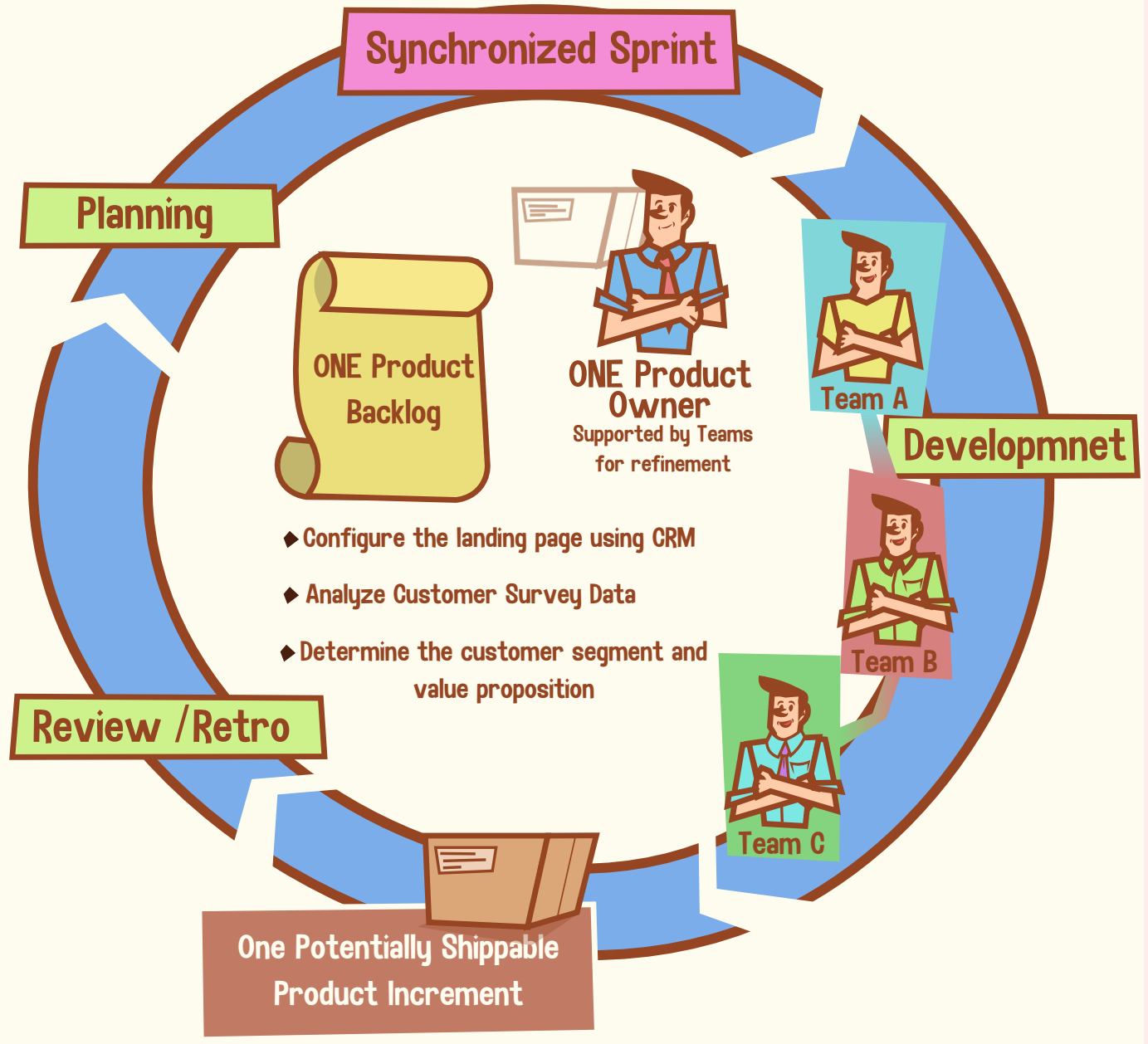


Fragmented Experience: 'Planners' never learn AI tools; 'Artists' never understand the business model. Handoffs cause delays and confusion

The lifecycle in Large-Scale Scrum (LeSS) extends and scales the basic Scrum lifecycle. LeSS applies Scrum principles, goals, and elements to multiple teams working on a single product, striving for the greatest possible simplicity. It is not a new, improved version of Scrum but a way to apply it at scale, helping address immense complexity by creating simplicity. Similar to Scrum, LeSS is based on short, fixed time-boxes called Sprints. The Sprint length, ranging from 2 to 4 weeks, is standard across all teams working on a given product. This allows for quick feedback from users and other stakeholders. As in Scrum, each Sprint aims to deliver a potentially shippable product increment.

Life-cycle and key roles in LeSS

The LeSS Lifecycle and The "One Product" Rule



Life-cycle and key roles in LeSS

The LeSS framework assumes that Scrum masters work full-time and serve up to 3 teams. They are fully responsible for ensuring proper adoption of LeSS. Specifically, they focus on the Teams, Product Owner, organization, and development practices, not just one team, but the overall organizational system. They serve as educators and coaches, helping the entire organization adopt Scrum. In LeSS, managers are optional, but if they exist, their role is likely to change. Their focus shifts from managing day-to-day product work to improving the product development system's value-delivery capability. They accomplish this by following practices such as "Go See", encouraging "Stop & Fix", and "experiments over conformance". This means that managers spend time in "gembu" (the place of real work) to understand problems and support teams in solving them, rather than issuing orders. It is important to emphasize that, for the new product group, the LeSS structure should be clearly established from the start. Furthermore, for the larger organization beyond the product group, organizations should adopt LeSS evolutionarily by using "Go and See" to create an organization where experimentation and improvement are the norm.

Youth Project Application (LeSS Life-cycle):

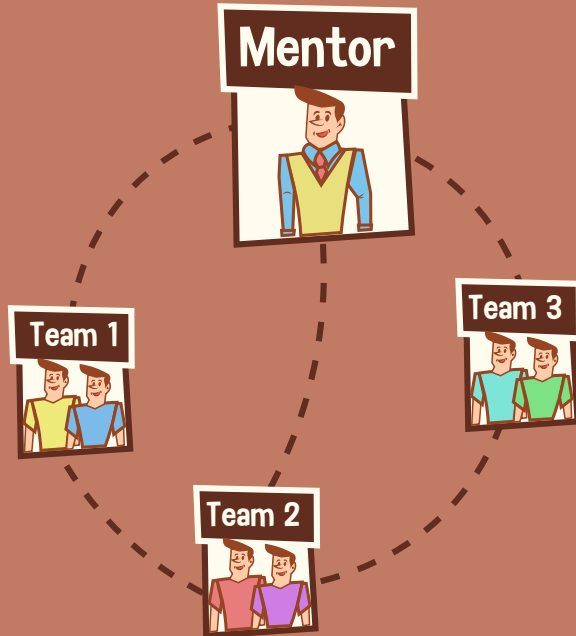
In a youth exchange project managed using LeSS principles, the following roles would be defined:

- **Product Owner:** This is the individual responsible for the overall vision and educational goals of the youth exchange. They work with representatives from all participating NGOs and youth teams to create a single, prioritized backlog.
- **Product Backlog:** This backlog could include items such as "Design a workshop on environmental sustainability," "Organize a cultural evening," and "Develop a project output (e.g., a short film or a report)." The Product Owner ensures the project remains focused on the most valuable outcomes for youth participants.
- **Scrum Teams:** The youth participants and their mentors would be organized into cross-functional, self-managing teams. Each team would have a mix of skills and be capable of completing a "shippable" part of the project. For example, one team might focus on the "green" aspects of the exchange, while another focuses on "digital skills". Each team would hold its own Daily Scrum to coordinate its work.
- **Scrum Masters:** Experienced youth workers or project leaders would serve as full-time Scrum Masters, coaching up to three teams. Their role would be to ensure proper adoption of the LeSS framework and help the teams, the Product Owner, and the entire organization function effectively. They would act as educators and coaches rather than managers.

Life-cycle and key roles in LeSS

LeSS Roles Reimagined

THE FULL TIME SCRUM MASTER



Serves up to 3 teams full-time. Focuses on the organization and development practices, not just single teams.

THE EVOLVING MANAGER



Shift from day-to-day product management to improving the value-delivery capability of the system.

In the LeSS framework, we have just one Product Owner and one Product Backlog for the complete shippable product. This is a key principle that supports whole-product focus, system optimization, and organizational agility. This contrasts with an approach in which each team has its own backlog, leading to local optimizations and a loss of global perspective. Furthermore, the Product Owner shouldn't work alone on Product Backlog refinement. Quite the opposite, they are supported by multiple Teams that work directly with customers/users and other stakeholders. This means delegating most of the tasks related to clarifying requirements directly to the teams.

Life-cycle and key roles in LeSS

The Product Owner handles the prioritization (ordering) of items in the Product Backlog. However, further clarification is conducted to the greatest extent possible directly between the Teams, the customer, users, and other stakeholders. This eliminates "middlemen" and speeds up the flow of information. The product definition should be as broad and end-user/customer-centric as practical. Broader definitions are preferred because they lead to better prioritization, easier resolution of dependencies, avoidance of duplicate functionality, and a simpler organization. In LeSS, we have a single Definition of Done (DoD) for the whole product, common across all teams. However, each team can have its own stronger Definition of Done by expanding the common one. The goal is to improve the Definition of Done so that it results in a shippable product each Sprint (or even more frequently), providing tangible value. It follows that the DoD is a critical management tool for driving organizational change, as the stronger the DoD, the greater the need for structural changes (e.g., eliminating separate testing groups). To sum up, in LeSS, there is one product-level Sprint, not a different Sprint for each Team. Furthermore, each Team starts and ends the Sprint at the same time, and each Sprint results in an integrated whole product. In the following section, we elaborate further on the Sprint planning process.

In LeSS, sprint planning is conducted in two sessions. **First, Sprint Planning One (SP1)** is common to all teams, where the Product Owner and Team Representatives tentatively select the items each team will work on. Teams also identify opportunities for collaboration and clarify final questions. **Second, Sprint Planning Two (SP2)** is usually conducted separately for each team and serves as the basis for detailed design and Sprint Backlog creation. **Multi-team SP2 is held in a shared space for closely related items.** In addition to having its own Sprint Backlog, each team has its own Daily Scrum. Cross-team coordination is determined by the teams, with an emphasis on decentralized, informal coordination over centralized coordination.

Life-cycle and key roles in LeSS

Youth Project Application (LeSS Project Lifecycle and Collaboration):

Consider an Erasmus+ project that aims to educate youth on a specific subject through non-formal education. The project involves NGOs from several European countries.

- 1. Preparation:** The NGOs collaboratively define the project's subject and goals, aligning them with Erasmus+ priorities. A single Product Owner is selected. Youth participants are engaged in designing the educational activities and workshops from the very beginning.
- 2. Product Backlog:** The Product Owner, with input from the youth teams, creates a backlog with items like:
 - PBI-01: Create a digital campaign about climate change.
 - PBI-02: Organize a panel discussion with local policymakers.
 - PBI-03: Produce a short video documentary.
 - PBI-04: Host a cultural food festival.
- 3. Sprints:** The project is organized into Sprints. In each Sprint, teams select items to work on, such as PBI-01 and PBI-04.
- 4. Integration:** At the end of each Sprint, all teams present their completed work in a single Sprint Review attended by all participants and stakeholders. This ensures that the progress is transparent and that the project is delivering a tangible "shippable product increment" (e.g., a draft of the digital campaign or a plan for the food festival).
- 5. Adaptation:** The project concludes with an Overall Retrospective, where the teams and stakeholders discuss what went well, what could be improved, and plan for future projects. The lessons learned are used to enhance the project's sustainability and future impact.

This LeSS application makes the youth exchange more flexible and responsive to participants' interests and needs while maintaining a clear, unified direction and ensuring that all teams work toward the same goal.

Coordination, integration, and communication in LeSS

The “Just Talk” approach in Large–Scale Scrum (LeSS) is critical for coordinating and integrating work across multiple teams in large product groups. Unlike traditional, centralized, formal dependency management, LeSS promotes decentralized, informal communication and entrusts coordination to the teams themselves. Traditional organizations often rely on formal coordination methods, such as “Scrum of Scrums” meetings (which LeSS usually discourages unless truly effective), leading to delays. The challenge at scale is not choosing a coordination method but recognizing the need for coordination and identifying who to talk to. “Just Talk” removes bureaucratic barriers and encourages immediate communication. It also aligns with the Agile Manifesto’s principle of valuing individuals and interactions over processes and tools.

Informal communication networks are key to effective coordination and continuous improvement in LeSS. LeSS promotes various inter–team meetings that facilitate knowledge sharing and coordination. These are categorized as multi–team meetings (involving members from at least two teams) and overall meetings (involving representatives from all teams or all members). There are several types of meetings in LeSS, such.

- **Multi–Team Product Backlog Refinement (PBR):** Teams collectively refine upcoming items from the Product Backlog, split large items, and estimate them, thereby increasing shared understanding and flexibility.
- **Multi–Team Sprint Planning Two:** Teams with shared tasks can plan and design together before diverging for individual planning sessions.
- **Multi–Team Design Workshop:** Deep dives into collaborative design.
- **Overall Retrospective:** A meeting to discuss inter–team and systemic issues and plan improvement experiments.

Coordination, integration, and communication in LeSS

Rotating representatives at these meetings is essential to broaden perspectives and strengthen diverse team members' skills. To meet this goal, the LeSS framework introduced several new roles whose key focus is information exchange between teams. Here, we will focus only on the most relevant from the perspective of NFE projects and NFE products. First, we should mention 'travelers'. These are experienced experts who temporarily move between teams for the duration of a Sprint. Their primary purpose is to share specialized knowledge and skills, as well as to build informal connections and information flow between teams, which is especially valuable in large, distributed groups. It's essential that this is their decision and that teams welcome them voluntarily. Second, there are scouts, team members (but not a Scrum Master), who visit other teams to learn something specific, and then share this knowledge with their own team. It's a quick way to gather information and identify who to "just talk" to. In addition to introducing new roles, whose main aim is to ensure proper information exchange, LeSS promotes a self-organizing meeting technique called "Open Spaces". It is often used in LeSS for learning, coordination, and broader discussions. Participants create the agenda for sessions on current "burning" topics, and the "Law of Two Feet" dictates that if you're not learning or contributing, you should move elsewhere. They are used, for example, for regular meetings to coordinate and understand, for the Overall Retrospective, and for community-of-practice gatherings.

Communication techniques and approaches in LeSS align closely with the framework's core principles. Continuous, high-bandwidth communication and immediate coordination enable rapid inspection and adaptation of both the product and its development. In particular, teams learn through experience rather than predefined, rigid processes. "Just Talk," open meetings, and shared spaces improve transparency, build trust, and reduce "surprises." Furthermore, when teams coordinate directly and are aware of each other's work, it becomes easier to maintain a whole-product perspective and avoid local optimizations.

LeSS encourages understanding the organization as a system. Coordination problems are often symptoms of systemic issues (e.g., silos), not a lack of the "right" coordination technique. The preference for decentralized coordination stems from the belief that centralized, prescriptive methods can hinder empirical process control and teams' ownership of processes

Coordination, integration, and communication in Less

Youth Project Application: Coordination, integration, and communication in Less

In an Erasmus+ youth exchange project, the LeSS framework's emphasis on decentralized coordination, communication, and collaboration can be directly applied to enhance the experience and outcomes. This approach moves away from traditional top-down management and empowers youth participants to manage their work and learn through an organic, dynamic process.

Here are some youth exchange application proposals that incorporate LeSS coordination and communication principles:

1. Multi-Team Product Backlog Refinement (PBR)

Instead of a single project manager dictating all tasks, a Multi-Team PBR session brings together representatives from all youth teams to collectively refine upcoming tasks from a shared backlog. For example, a digital storytelling project might include a backlog item such as "Produce a short documentary on local traditions." Teams would split this into smaller, more manageable tasks, such as "Write the script," "Conduct interviews," "Film and edit footage," and "Translate subtitles." This process ensures a shared understanding of the goals and increases flexibility, as teams can volunteer for tasks that align with their skills and interests. This is an excellent way to apply the "Just Talk" approach, fostering transparency and trust from the project's onset.

2. "Travelers" and "Scouts" for Inter-Team Learning

Youth exchange projects often involve teams with specialized knowledge. The LeSS concepts of "travelers" and "scouts" can facilitate knowledge exchange. A youth team member, acting as a "scout," could visit another team to learn a specific skill, such as video editing or interview techniques, and then bring that knowledge back to their own team. Similarly, an experienced youth worker or a guest expert could serve as a "traveler," temporarily joining different teams for a Sprint to share expertise and build informal connections, which is particularly valuable in a large, distributed group. This approach fosters continuous improvement of working methods and strengthens mutual trust among participants.

Coordination, integration, and communication in Less

3. Open Space Technology for Overall Retrospectives

To address inter-team and systemic issues, youth exchange applications can propose using Open Spaces as a self-organizing meeting format. In an Overall Retrospective, all participants would gather to create an agenda around "burning" topics they want to discuss. For example, if several teams are struggling with communication or a shared tool, they can form a group to discuss and plan improvement experiments. This empowers participants to take ownership of their processes and fosters a culture of continuous learning and adaptation. The "Law of Two Feet"—the principle that if you're not learning or contributing, you should move elsewhere—encourages active engagement and ensures that everyone's time is used productively.

4. Continuous Integration and Decentralized Coordination

The project would be centered around a single, integrated product—for example, the overall outcome of the youth exchange—with all teams working towards its completion. Instead of a "Scrum of Scrums," which LeSS often discourages, the project would rely on decentralized, informal coordination. Teams would be encouraged to coordinate and integrate their work directly with one another, for instance, by using a shared online space or a physical "gemba" (the place of real work). This "Just Talk" approach fosters continuous, high-bandwidth communication, enabling rapid inspection and adaptation of the product and its construction. This helps to minimize "surprises" and ensures a cohesive final product, such as a multi-chapter documentary or a series of blog posts, with all parts contributing to the whole. By incorporating these LeSS-inspired coordination and communication methods, youth projects can offer a more transparent, collaborative, and empowering experience for all participants, in line with the principles of non-formal education.

LeSS Huge

The LeSS framework recognizes that very large projects require a different organizational structure to be effective. For this reason, an extension of LeSS, LeSS Huge, has been proposed. Specifically, it is designed for very large product groups, comprising eight or more teams. This approach is necessary when a single Product Owner can no longer **effectively manage** the entire product or a **very extensive Product Backlog**. Although LeSS Huge retains a single, overall Product Backlog and a single overarching Product Owner, it introduces an additional layer of scaling: **Requirement Areas**. The Requirement Area is a crucial element of the LeSS Huge framework and is defined as a large, logical grouping of Product Backlog Items that are closely related to the **customer**. In other words, these are key areas of customer interest within a given product. For example, in a securities trading product, Requirement Areas could be “transaction processing,” “asset management,” or “new market rollout.” LeSS Huge has been introduced to address problems at a large scale, such as overly large, unmanageable Product Backlogs. This results in a **lack of focus for teams** that too often change their area of work or cover too broad a scope.

Each Requirement Area has its **Area Product Owner**, who specializes in that area and focuses on their portion of the Product Backlog. The main Product Owner and the Area Product Owners form the **Product Owner Team**. In both frameworks (LeSS and LeSS Huge), there is a **single Sprint at the product level**, and all teams strive for continuous integration within this Sprint, culminating in a single potentially shippable Product Increment. In addition, teams across different Requirement Areas strive to integrate their work into the whole product continuously. Although each Requirement Area operates like a smaller implementation of the LeSS framework, all these implementations run in parallel within a single overarching Sprint. This can be summarized as a **“LeSS stack”**. From the perspective of a team in a given area, Sprint events (such as Sprint Planning) appear similar to those in a smaller LeSS.

Due to its significantly larger scale and associated risks, **LeSS Huge requires an evolutionary, incremental adoption approach**. It **often begins by implementing a single Requirement Area**. Furthermore, the complexity of LeSS-Huge projects mandates frequent synchronization among **Product Owners and Product Area Owners**. In particular, before Sprint Planning, they ensure teams are working on the most valuable items, and after the Sprint Review, they enable further product-level adaptations. In LeSS Huge, product-level Sprint Reviews are not mandatory for every Sprint, though they are possible. Instead, each Requirement Area conducts its own Sprint Review and Overall Retrospective, in accordance with the principles of the smaller LeSS framework.

LeSS Huge

Applying LeSS Huge to Large-Scale Youth Exchanges:

Youth project example: "Sustainable Futures" Project: Collaborative Urban Design

This large-scale youth exchange would bring together numerous teams to design and prototype sustainable solutions for urban environments. The project's complexity and broad scope would require a LeSS Huge structure.

Product and Product Owner

The project's product is a comprehensive urban design blueprint, including physical models and digital simulations. An overarching Product Owner would manage the single product backlog and the overall vision.

Requirement Areas

To manage the large number of teams, the product backlog would be divided into thematic Requirement Areas, each with a dedicated Area Product Owner:

- "Green Mobility Solutions": Focusing on designs for bike-sharing schemes, public transportation innovations, and pedestrian zones.
- "Waste Management & Circular Economy": Concentrating on prototypes for innovative recycling systems and local composting initiatives.
- "Community Spaces & Green Areas": Dedicated to designing parks, urban gardens, and public gathering spaces.

Team Synchronization

The Area Product Owners would frequently synchronize with each other and the CPO to ensure all teams remain aligned with the central project vision. For instance, a change in the "Green Mobility" area's design might impact the layout of a park being developed in the "Community Spaces" area. The CPO and Area Product Owners would ensure these interdependencies are managed effectively.

Adoption Strategy

The project would adopt an incremental approach, beginning with a small number of teams focused on a single Requirement Area to test the framework before scaling up to all teams and areas. This mitigates risk and allows the organization to learn and adapt the LeSS Huge model as the project progresses.

LeSS and LeSS Huge in youth projects – further considerations

As we previously mentioned, the LeSS (Large-Scale Scrum) framework applies Scrum to larger, multi-team environments, and LeSS Huge is an extension for even larger products. A strategic partnership project involving multiple groups of young people and several partner organizations is an ideal setting for this framework. It maintains Scrum's collaborative, iterative nature while coordinating across multiple teams.

Below are some examples of LeSS for managing youth projects.



Single Product Backlog

In LeSS, there is one Product Backlog for the entire product.

Youth Project Application: The complete list of planned workshops, activities, and learning objectives for the youth exchange would constitute the Single Project Backlog. This ensures that all teams work toward a unified vision. The Project Coordinator from the lead organization would serve as the Product Owner, responsible for managing the backlog and prioritizing activities based on the project's educational goals.



Cross-Functional Teams

LeSS uses multiple cross-functional teams that work directly with the Product Owner.

Youth Project Application: Youth participants from different countries could be organized into these cross-functional teams. Each team would be responsible for working on a specific theme or creating a particular deliverable (e.g., a short film, a social media campaign, a public awareness poster) during the exchange or a longer-duration project. This structure supports a collaborative and diverse learning environment.



One Sprint

All teams work on the same Sprint for a set period of time.

Youth Project Application: The entire youth exchange, typically a fixed seven-day duration, would function as a single Sprint. All teams would work simultaneously to achieve the project's goals within this time frame.

LeSS and LeSS Huge in youth projects – further considerations

4 Scaled Scrum Events

LeSS adapts Scrum events to a larger scale to ensure coordination and collaboration.

As we previously mentioned, the LeSS (Large-Scale Scrum) framework is a way to apply Scrum to larger, multi-team environments, and **LeSS Huge** is an **extension for even larger products and projects**. NGOs across Europe have ample opportunities to collaborate with partner organizations **on large-scale initiatives** that can last many years. A good example is cooperation partnership projects (within the Erasmus+ program). They may involve multiple groups of young people and several partner organizations. Furthermore, the deliverables and products may take a complex form. Consequently, such projects provide an ideal setting for the LeSS or LeSS Huge framework. It allows the collaborative, iterative nature of Scrum to be maintained while coordinating across multiple teams. Let's dive deeper into the benefits of LeSS for such complex youth projects.

Single Product Backlog

The complete list of planned **workshops, activities, tasks, conferences, meetings**, and other items for the partnership **would form a Single Project Backlog**. This ensures that all teams work toward a **unified, shared vision**. The Project Coordinator from the lead organization would serve as the Product Owner, responsible for managing the backlog and prioritizing activities in line with the project's key goals.

Cross-Functional Teams

Groups of young people and NGO representatives, such as youth educators (NFE), project coordinators, and others, from different countries could be organized into these cross-functional teams. Each team would be responsible for working on a specific theme or creating a particular deliverable (e.g., a film, a social media campaign, e-guides, research initiatives, or a conference) during a longer-duration project. This structure supports a collaborative and diverse learning environment.

LeSS and LeSS Huge in youth projects – further considerations

Scaled Scrum Events

Sprint Planning Part 1

The joint definition of the Sprint Goals for the entire project. The Product Owner (PO) presents priority items from the Single Project Backlog. The teams discuss how these items (e.g., preparing three workshops, developing one film, and gathering feedback) will contribute to the common goal.

Sprint Planning Part 2

Each team (for example, Team A, B, and C) selects items from the Project Backlog they intend to complete and creates a detailed plan of work (Sprint Backlog). They must also ensure their selections do not conflict with other teams' plans.

Execution and Daily Synchronization

Event	Duration (Timebox)	Goal and Activities
Daily Scrum (Separately)	Max. 15 minutes (daily)	Each team (A, B, C) meets separately to review progress toward the Sprint Goals and adapt to their plans for the next 24 hours.
Coordination Meeting (Scrum of Scrums)	15–30 minutes (as needed)	Ensuring coordination among teams. Team representatives (e.g., one from A, B, and C) meet to discuss dependencies, blockers, and potential duplication of work.
Backlog Refinement	During the Sprint	Teams collaboratively refine Project Backlog items for future Sprints with the PO – ensuring they are clear, understandable, and estimated.




LeSS and LeSS Huge in youth projects – further considerations

Inspection and Adaptation

All teams meet together to inspect the entire Increment of work.

Event	Duration (Timebox)	Goal and Activities
Sprint Review (All-Teams)	Max. 4 hours	Goal: Present the Increment (completed workshops, finished materials, and a preliminary film) to all stakeholders (other partners, youth leaders, and beneficiaries). Teams gather feedback. Based on what has been completed, the PO updates the Single Project Backlog.
Sprint Retrospective	Max. 3 hours	Divided into two parts: Team Retrospective and Overall Retrospective.
Team Retrospective (Separately)	1 hour	Each team (Team A, B, C) reflects on how they can improve their internal processes, tools, and collaboration.
Overall Retrospective (All-Teams)	2 hours	Goal: Focusing on inter-team collaboration, project architecture, and the relationship with the Product Owner /Scrum Master. Team representatives (or all members) identify friction points and create concrete, shared action items for the next Sprint.

Key LeSS Principles in this Context

- 
One Backlog, One PO: This is the key to maintaining a shared vision. The Project Coordinator (PO) must be constantly available and dedicated to prioritization to ensure that Teams A, B, and C do not work on low-value items.
- 
Definition of Done (DoD): The teams must have a shared, strict Definition of Done (e.g., "Report verified by two partners and approved by the PO," "Film rendered and published on YouTube channel") to ensure the Increment is consistent and truly ready for use.
- 
Knowledge Sharing: Thanks to cross-functional teams and joint Daily Scrums (Scrum of Scrums), we minimize the risk of young people from one country not knowing what their colleagues from another are doing.

4.2.2 Scaled Agile framework

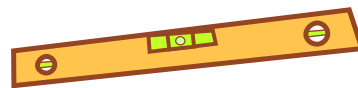
The Scaled Agile Framework (SAFe) was created by Dean Leffingwell, an experienced software executive and consultant. Leffingwell, along with Drew Jemilo, founded Scaled Agile, Inc. in 2011 to develop and disseminate the framework. SAFe is designed to address the challenges of applying agile methodologies to large, complex enterprise-level projects. It draws on three primary bodies of knowledge: agile software development, lean product development, and systems thinking. This guide is based on the SAFe 5.0, but a newer version has already been published. Key updates in the latest version of SAFe have been highlighted.

The first version of SAFe was released in 2011 and was initially known as "The Agile Enterprise Big Picture". Since then, the framework has evolved through several versions, each incorporating continuous improvements based on practitioner feedback. At its core, the framework provides a structured approach to scaling agile practices across an organization, promoting alignment, collaboration, and delivery across many teams. Today, SAFe is one of the most widely adopted frameworks for scaling agile practices in large organizations across industries such as software development, IT, manufacturing, healthcare, and finance. We will explore how its values, tenets, processes, and tools can be applied in the world of NGOs, including international non-formal education projects, NGOs focused on providing educational products, and NGO collaboration. In the next section, we will begin with SAFe's key values and principles.

SAFe Foundations: Values, Mindset, and Principles

The Scaled Agile Framework (SAFe) is built on four fundamental values that contribute to its effectiveness: Alignment, Built-in Quality, Transparency, and Program Execution. According to SAFe, if an enterprise or any organization, for that matter, successfully implements these four values, it can expect many positive results. Let's take a closer look at those four key values:

Alignment



It is essential for responding to rapidly changing organizational realities, turbulent competitive forces, and geographically dispersed teams. SAFe supports alignment through:

- Portfolio Vision, Strategic Themes, and Portfolio Epics that communicate the organization's strategy,
- Continuous Program Increment (PI) planning and synchronization that translate strategy into execution,
- The use of metrics that provide visibility into and monitoring of strategic goals,

4.2.2 Scaled Agile framework

- Cadence (or rhythm) of work and synchronization that ensure alignment is maintained or drifts within reasonable economic and time boundaries,
- A declaration that alignment does not imply or encourage a “command and control” approach, but rather provides a foundation where organizational goals and outcomes are a constant priority.

Alignment

Understanding the Alignment value in the context of youth exchanges:

Alignment ensures that all teams work toward the same strategic objectives, which is essential for large, multi-team projects. SAFe achieves this through:

- ◆ **A Shared Vision:** The entire youth exchange project should have a clear, overarching theme, such as “Promoting a Green Europe.” All activities, workshops, and deliverables should directly support this theme.
- ◆ **Strategic Planning:** Instead of traditional top-down control, SAFe uses continuous planning to translate the project’s vision into actionable steps. For instance, participating NGOs would collaboratively plan “Program Increments” (PIs), which in this context could be a series of interconnected workshops or a project week, ensuring all youth teams are synchronized and aligned on the same priorities.
- ◆ **Objective Metrics:** The project would use metrics to monitor progress toward strategic goals, providing visibility and ensuring the project remains on track within a defined time frame.

Built-in Quality

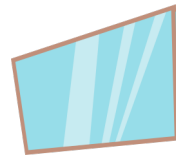
Quality is an indispensable element of SAFe. SAFe promotes built-in quality at every stage of software and systems development through practices such as Continuous Integration (CI), design for testability, automated testing, refactoring, collective code ownership, design verification, and pairing work. Built-in quality should also be a key goal in any non-formal education project. For example, the quality of workshops and other educational activities should be designed to achieve specific objectives. The components of those activities should be testable with respect to educational value and their ability to meet educational goals.

Understanding Built-in Quality in the Context of Youth Exchanges:

Built-in quality means quality is an essential part of every stage of the project. For a youth exchange, this involves:

- ◆ **Continuous Improvement:** The quality of workshops and other educational activities should be continuously assessed and refined to meet specific educational objectives. Feedback loops from participants would be used to “test” each activity’s educational value and ensure it meets its goals before it is considered complete.
 - ◆ **Shared Ownership:** All teams and individuals involved would share responsibility for the quality of the outcome. This value would discourage a last-minute “check” for quality and instead embed it into every task. For example, each youth team would be responsible for the quality of their own workshop or presentation, using peer review and self-assessment to ensure high standards.
-

Transparency



In the SAFe framework, facts are always “friendly.” Everyone must be aware of the project’s true state. SAFe supports transparency through:

- Building trust and providing the freedom and safety for individuals and teams to innovate, experiment, and even fail.
- Providing objective evidence of working systems.
- Ensuring that everyone can understand team and program velocity and WIP, and that strategy and execution capability are aligned.
- Reducing waste.

Transparency

Understanding transparency in the context of youth exchanges:

Transparency means creating an environment where everyone has a clear view of the project’s actual status. This is fostered by:

Understanding transparency in the context of youth exchanges:

Transparency means creating an environment where everyone has a clear view of the project's actual status. This is fostered by:

- ◆ **Open Information:** All relevant project information, such as progress updates, challenges encountered, and performance metrics, would be openly shared among all participating NGOs and youth teams. This builds trust and provides a safe environment for teams to experiment and learn from mistakes.
 - ◆ **Objective Evidence:** Transparency is supported by providing "objective evidence of working systems." This could mean making the outcomes of all workshops, such as reports, videos, or presentations, readily available to all participants and stakeholders. This practice also helps reduce waste by highlighting what's working and what's not.
-

Program Execution

No other element of SAFe matters if teams are unable to execute work and continuously deliver value. SAFe places intense emphasis on working systems and resulting business outcomes. The ability to deliver value through value streams depends on the capability of the so-called Agile Release Trains (ARTs) – a virtual structure of teams in Agile programs, which we describe in more detail in subsequent sections.

Program Execution

Understanding Program execution value in the context of youth exchanges:

Program execution focuses on delivering consistent value and tangible results rather than simply completing tasks.

- ◆ **Value Streams:** The entire youth exchange can be viewed as a "value stream," with the value being the non-formal education and personal development delivered to participants. The "Agile Release Train" (ART) concept, described as a virtual team of teams, can be applied to the collaboration among youth groups and NGOs to deliver this value.
 - ◆ **Lean-Agile Mindset:** The execution of the project is guided by a Lean-Agile mindset, emphasizing delivering value in the shortest sustainable time. It encourages proactive leadership from project managers and youth workers to remove impediments and facilitate continuous improvement throughout the entire project. The foundation of this approach is respect for people, flow, innovation, and relentless improvement.
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4.2.2 Scaled Agile framework

SAFe is built on several paradigms in modern systems and software engineering, including Lean thinking, systems thinking, product development flow, and Agile development. The Lean-Agile Mindset is essential for supporting Lean and Agile development at the enterprise scale. It includes the “House of Lean” and the “Agile Manifesto”.



Its “roof” represents the goal of delivering Value in the shortest sustainable lead time. The “pillars” support this goal through Respect for People and Culture, Flow, Innovation, and Relentless Improvement. Lean-Agile Leadership forms the foundation for everything else.



Agile Manifesto: SAFe is built on the skills, abilities, and capabilities of Agile Teams and their leaders. The Agile Manifesto, which we introduced earlier in this guide, provides a unified value system that brought Agile methods into mainstream development. It emphasizes delivering valuable software early and continuously, accepting changing requirements, delivering software frequently and incrementally, daily collaboration between business and developers, building projects around motivated individuals, and continuous attention to technical excellence.

In the Lean-Agile approach, management is expected to **lead teams, embrace Lean values, be competent in core practices, proactively eliminate impediments, and actively participate in driving organizational change and facilitating relentless improvement.**

SAFe practices are grounded in nine fundamental principles that have evolved from Agile principles and methods, Lean product development, systems thinking, and observations of successful enterprises. These immutable, foundational truths and economic foundations drive roles and practices, making SAFe effective. Additionally, in the newer version of SAFe (6.0), a 10th principle has emerged: “Organize around value.” Below, we list the foundational principles and explain them in more detail by illustrating potential NFE applications, using youth-oriented projects as an example.

SAFe Principle

Youth exchange applications

1 Take an economic view

In a youth exchange, taking an economic view means making decisions that deliver the greatest value for the available budget and time. This isn't just about monetary cost but also about optimizing educational and social impact. For example, a project might choose a lower-cost, more sustainable travel option (green travel) over a more expensive one if it offers a better learning experience in environmental sustainability.

2 Apply systems thinking

The Solution and the Enterprise/Organization are systems, and optimizing a component does not optimize the entire system. Youth exchanges involve many interconnected parts, from individual participants to partner organizations and the project's overall goals. Applying systems thinking means recognizing that improving a single part in isolation, such as a single workshop, won't necessarily improve the entire project. The focus should be on optimizing the flow of value through the whole system. For example, a project should not only focus on the content of a workshop but also on how its outcomes are integrated into the overall project deliverables and how they benefit participants' long-term development.

3 Assume variability; preserve options

This includes a set-based approach to explore multiple design options and accelerate learning. Youth exchange projects often face unpredictable events, such as changes in participant availability or unexpected logistical challenges. This principle encourages flexibility and the exploration of multiple options before committing to a single choice. For example, instead of locking into one set of workshop topics, the project could develop a few alternative content plans. This allows the project to adapt quickly to the interests and needs of youth participants, ensuring a more engaging and practical learning experience.

4 Build incrementally with fast, integrated learning cycles

Development cannot proceed faster than the slowest learning loop. This principle promotes a continuous cycle of planning, execution, and feedback. A long-term project should be broken down into smaller, manageable "sprints" or learning cycles. For a youth exchange, this could mean designing the seven-day event as a series of short, integrated learning cycles, each day building on the previous one. This allows for quick feedback and adjustments, preventing the entire project from being derailed by a single slow or ineffective component.

5 Base milestones on objective evaluation of working systems

Instead of basing progress on theoretical plans, milestones should be tied to tangible, verifiable results. For a youth exchange, a milestone shouldn't be "complete the workshop on civic engagement" but rather "design a plan to increase civic engagement in rural areas" or "produce a social media campaign on a civic issue." This approach ensures the project consistently delivers value that can be objectively measured and evaluated. These milestones can be tied to the project's outputs, which are then disseminated to a broader audience.

SAFe Principle

Youth exchange applications

Visualize and limit WIP, reduce batch sizes, and manage queue lengths

This principle focuses on managing workflow to prevent bottlenecks. In a youth exchange or a partnership project, "work in progress" (WIP) could refer to the number of tasks a team is currently handling. To apply this, teams should visualize their work on a board (physical or digital), limit the number of tasks they actively work on, and break down large tasks into smaller ones. This prevents any single team or individual from becoming a bottleneck, ensuring a smoother flow of activities and information.

Apply cadence, synchronize with cross-domain planning

Cadence and synchronization turn unpredictable events into predictable ones by establishing a regular rhythm for activities and planning. For a partnership project, this could involve a weekly schedule (cadence) for meetings and workshops that all participating NGOs and youth teams follow. This routine would be supported by cross-domain planning, in which all teams synchronize their efforts, for example, by coordinating workshops and logistics to avoid conflicts.

Unlock the intrinsic motivation of knowledge workers

Both youth participants and youth workers are "knowledge workers," and their motivation is key to the project's success. To unlock their intrinsic motivation, the project should provide:

- **Autonomy:** Allow teams to decide how to approach their tasks within the project's overall goals.
- **Mastery:** Offer opportunities for participants and staff to develop new skills, such as public speaking or digital media creation.

Purpose: Ensure all participants understand how their work contributes to the project's overall vision and the Erasmus+ program's priorities.

Decentralize decision-making

SAFe encourages empowering those closest to the work to make local decisions, leading to faster, more effective outcomes. In a youth exchange, for example, this means giving youth teams autonomy to decide on their own workshops or project deliverables. The overall direction and budget would be managed centrally, while day-to-day decisions would be left to the teams on the ground, enabling them to respond quickly to participants' needs.

Organize around value

This is the tenth SAFe principle, which emphasizes organizing the entire project around delivering value. For a youth exchange, this means organizing teams and activities not by country or partner organization, but around the specific value streams they deliver. For example, teams could be organized around themes such as "Digital Campaigning" or "Intercultural Dialogue," ensuring that every activity directly contributes to a tangible, valuable outcome.

4.2.2 Scaled Agile framework

These principles aim to synthesize knowledge and insights from hundreds of implementations into a single framework — a system of integrated, proven practices that have significantly improved employee engagement, time-to-market, solution quality, and team productivity.

Organizational levels and key roles in SAFe

In this section, we dive deeper into the SAFe framework by exploring its organizational levels and key roles. SAFe provides three organizational levels, optionally four, and a foundation. We explore those levels below.

1. Foundation Layer

Contains core elements that support development, such as the aforementioned Core Values, Lean-Agile Mindset, Lean-Agile Principles, and Lean-Agile Leadership.

The **Foundation Layer** of SAFe, with its core elements such as the Lean-Agile Mindset and Principles, can be directly applied to managing youth exchanges or any NFE youth projects. Furthermore, we believe that the Foundation Layer can serve as the backbone of all NGO operations.

Lean-Agile Leaders: The ultimate responsibility for enterprise success and for any significant changes in how work is done rests with existing managers, leaders, and executives. Lean-Agile Leaders are lifelong learners and teachers who understand and embrace Lean and Agile principles and practices, and who teach them to others. They must lead change, inspire and align the mission, minimize constraints, and decentralize decision-making.

Communities of Practice (CoPs): Informal groups of team members and other experts who share practical, functional knowledge across one or more relevant domains. They foster a culture of continuous learning and innovation.

Communities of Practice (CoPs) can be established as informal groups of team members and experts. For youth projects, these could be groups of youth workers and facilitators who share knowledge on topics such as intercultural learning, conflict resolution, or digital tools for non-formal education. This fosters a culture of continuous learning and innovation within the project.

2. Team Level: SAFe

is based on Agile Teams, each responsible for defining, building, and testing stories from their backlog. These teams use Scrum or Kanban, supplemented by quality practices, to deliver value through a series of synchronized, fixed-length iterations.

SAFe is built on Agile Teams, and in the context of a youth exchange, these would be the youth groups themselves, possibly with their mentors and facilitators. These teams are responsible for defining, building, and testing their activities, or "stories," from a backlog. They can use Scrum or Kanban to deliver value in a series of synchronized, fixed-length "sprints" or activity periods.

| Scrum Team Roles

Product Owner (PO): Responsible for what will be developed and in what order. Maintains and communicates a clear vision of what the Scrum Team aims to achieve. Participates in sprint and Product Increment planning, refines the backlog, manages priorities, and provides acceptance criteria. They determine when specific items will be built (within the team's capacity and aligned with the objectives) and ensure the team understands how to build them effectively to meet the requirements.

Product Owner (PO): This role, crucial for determining what gets developed and in what order, could be filled by a lead youth worker or an NGO representative. The PO would be responsible for maintaining and communicating a clear project vision, such as "a sustainable urban gardening project." They would refine the backlog of activities (e.g., "host a workshop on composting," "build a raised garden bed") and manage priorities.

Scrum Master (SM): Helps everyone involved understand and embrace Scrum values, principles, and practices. Acts as a coach, providing process leadership and helping the Scrum Team and the rest of the organization develop their own high-performing Scrum approach. Responsible for protecting the team from external interference and removing impediments. Does not have the authority to impose control over the team.

Scrum Master (SM): A Scrum Master serves as a coach for the youth team, helping everyone understand and embrace the project's values and practices. They would remove impediments, such as logistical problems or communication barriers, and protect the team from external interference. This person would not impose control but would empower the team to self-organize.

| Development Team

Responsible for determining how to deliver what the Product Owner has requested. This self-organizing, cross-functional team defines, builds, tests, and delivers product increments.

Development Team: The youth participants and their mentors form the Development Team, responsible for determining how to deliver the activities requested by the Product Owner. They are self-organizing and cross-functional, with the skills to define, build, and deliver the project's outcomes, such as a completed workshop or a community garden increment.

3. Program Level

SAFe teams are organized into a virtual program structure called an Agile Release Train (ART). Each ART is a long-lived, self-organizing team of 5 to 12 Agile Teams, along with other stakeholders, that collectively plans, commits, executes, inspects, adapts, and delivers solutions. ARTs deliver value incrementally in Program Increments (PIs) lasting 8 to 12 weeks.

| Release Train Engineer (RTE)

Serves as the chief Scrum Master for the ART. This role facilitates ART events, removes impediments, and supports the ART in delivering value.

Release Train Engineer (RTE): This individual would serve as the chief Scrum Master for the entire youth project. Responsibilities would include facilitating planning events for all teams, removing large-scale impediments, and ensuring the ART delivers value incrementally through "Program Increments" (PIs), which could be 8- to 12-week phases of the project.

| Product Manager (PM)

Owns, defines, and prioritizes the Program Backlog.

Product Management (PM): The PM owns, defines, and prioritizes the overall project backlog, ensuring that all teams are working on tasks aligned with the main educational goals.

| System Architect/Engineer

Responsible for defining and supporting the shared technical and design architecture for the ART.

4.2.2 Scaled Agile framework

This role is responsible for defining and supporting the common technical and design architecture for the ART. For a youth project, this could involve **determining the shared digital platforms and tools used by all teams for communication, project management, and content creation**. For example, ensuring all teams can effectively use a shared online whiteboard for collaborative design or a specific virtual learning tool for blended activities.

System architects ensure a cohesive, functional technical environment across the entire project.

| Business Owners

Key ART stakeholders ultimately responsible for the ART's business outcomes. They assign business value to Product Increment Objectives. They typically represent senior management, executives, or key stakeholders with significant financial and business responsibility. They ultimately define what the business or organization needs and why it's crucial from a strategic and economic perspective.

Business Owners: In an NGO context, these are key stakeholders, such as NGO directors or representatives of funding bodies. They are ultimately responsible for the project's outcomes and assign value to each Program Increment's objectives, defining what the business (the NGO) needs and why it is strategically vital.

4. Value Stream Level

This level is optional and supports enterprises facing the most significant systemic challenges, building large-scale, multidisciplinary software and cyber-physical systems. It requires additional constructs, artifacts, and coordination.

Value Stream Level: This level helps manage systemic challenges in building large-scale, multidisciplinary projects. It ensures that all ARTs (or youth exchange projects) deliver value as part of a cohesive, broader effort.

ARTs deliver value in SAFe, each implementing part or all of a value stream.

5. Portfolio Level

This is the highest level in SAFe. Each SAFe portfolio encompasses the value streams, people, and processes required to fund and manage the products, services, and solutions that support the overall business strategy. At this level, **Strategic Themes are defined, Lean Portfolio Management is executed, Epics are managed, and Epic Owners are designated**.

Portfolio Level: This is the highest level at which an organization's overall strategy is defined and managed. It involves determining the long-term vision for all youth projects, allocating funding, and managing large initiatives ("Epics").

| Lean Portfolio Management (LPM)

The LPM function manages the SAFe portfolio, ensuring three key collaborations: strategy and investment funding, agile portfolio operations, and Lean governance. It shifts from projects to products and reduces constraints.

| Epic Owners

Responsible for managing and promoting Epics, large initiatives, through the portfolio Kanban system to implementation.

Epic Owner would manage and promote these large initiatives through a portfolio system, from initial idea to implementation.

SAFe provides a comprehensive and robust framework for managing even the most complex, organization-wide projects. However, to be effective, SAFe requires proper adoption by an organization. This cannot be accomplished without an organization-wide transformation. Based on hundreds of implementations, the Scaled Agile organization recommends a three-step approach. First, organizations should train their Lean-Agile Change Agents. Second, executives, managers, and leaders should become familiar with the SAFe framework. Finally, organizations should follow up with team training and the launch of ARTs. In the next section, we turn to Agile PM.

4.2.3 Agile PM

In this section, we focus on another agile approach — Agile PM — that can be applied to both small and large projects across various business domains. AgilePM (Agile Project Management) is a structured approach to project management, widely recognized as an international standard for organizing agile projects. It is based on the Agile Business Consortium's Agile Project Framework, which is rooted in the Dynamic Systems Development Method (DSDM). DSDM is the oldest established agile approach to project management, formally originating in 1995. It was created in the early 1990s in response to the need for better management of software development projects, which often failed to meet planned time and budget constraints, and whose final products did not meet users' actual needs. Over time, the framework has been applied to new domains, including marketing, construction, finance, and others. In the following subsections, we focus on the values, principles, roles, and project life cycle of the Agile PM framework.

Key values and principles of Agile PM

The foundation of the AgilePM approach is its philosophy (values) and a set of eight principles that guide the project team. AgilePM is based on a general work style characterized by flexibility and strong collaboration with the client throughout the project. This ensures that the final solution meets the client's needs. This approach is a philosophy and a way of thinking, encompassing flexibility, agility, adaptability, incremental delivery, iterative cycles, fast and constant feedback, and engagement.

Key aspects of the AgilePM philosophy include:

- Maximizing product value.
- Focus on value delivery, rather than a rigidly defined product.
- Continuous and close collaboration with the client and end users.
- Deferring decisions about details as late as possible, avoiding "big design up front" (BDUF) in favor of "Enough Design Up Front" (EDUF).
- Acceptance that change is inevitable and constitutes an integral part of the project.

AgilePM, like other agile approaches, draws from the original Manifesto for Agile Software Development, which values:

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

The AgilePM philosophy is achieved when all stakeholders understand and subscribe to the business vision and goals, are empowered to make decisions within their area of competence, and collaborate to deliver a business solution that is fit for purpose, within the agreed timescale, in line with business priorities, recognizing that understanding of the solution evolves over time and that change is inevitable.

4.2.3 Agile PM

AgilePM introduced a special Project Approach Questionnaire (PAQ) that assesses the team's understanding and acceptance of roles, responsibilities, and the principles of the agile approach. Its results indicate the extent to which the Instrumental Success Factors have been met, the project's level of risk, and the actions needed to manage those risks.

The AgilePM principles are the guidelines the project team should follow. There are eight of them. Violating any of these principles undermines the philosophy and introduces risk to the project. Applying all principles together enables organizations to deliver solutions of the highest value collaboratively.

Here are the 8 AgilePM principles:

1. Focus on the business need

The Project Manager (PM) ensures that team members understand true business priorities by correctly applying MoSCoW prioritization.

- ▣ Continuous business sponsorship and engagement are ensured.
- ▣ Delivery of the Minimum Usable Subset (MUST) of requirements is guaranteed.
- ▣ At all times in the project, one should be vigilant of the changing business environment to build the right and necessary solution.

In youth projects, this translates to focusing on the "youth need" or "participant need." Projects should aim to enhance youth competencies in necessary fields aligned with Erasmus+ priorities outlined in the Erasmus+ Programme Guide, such as digital skills, environmental awareness, and civic engagement. Engaging youth in the preparation and design of educational activities from the early stages ensures their needs and interests are met.

2. Deliver on time

- ▣ The PM ensures the use of timeboxes, focus on business priorities, and meeting deadlines.
- ▣ Trust is built through predictable delivery.
- ▣ Timeboxes should never be extended; instead, a smaller scope is delivered.

Youth projects often have strict deadlines. AgilePM's emphasis on Timeboxing—working in short, fixed-length periods (e.g., 2–4 weeks)—can help manage project phases, such as activity preparation, participant selection, and workshop delivery, ensuring they are completed within the grant period.

3. Collaborate

- The PM ensures involvement of the right stakeholders at the right time.
- Proactive involvement of business representatives is encouraged, and a culture of team unity is built.
- Thanks to collaboration and exchange of experience, activities are carried out better and faster.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) from various European countries typically organize youth projects, collaborating to define subject areas and goals. AgilePM promotes strong collaboration, which is crucial for transnational partnerships in Erasmus+ projects. This ensures effective coordination, shared understanding, and active involvement of all partners and stakeholders, including youth participants, throughout all stages of project implementation.

4. Never compromise quality

- The PM ensures that the quality level is agreed upon at the beginning of the project, ensuring that quality does not become a variable.
- Testing takes place early, continuously, and to an appropriate level.
- Delivering a solution that is not entirely satisfactory to the client (which would be a compromise) should not happen in an agile approach.

The Erasmus+ program emphasizes high-quality, inclusive education and training. AgilePM's continuous testing and focus on product delivery can be adapted to ensure the quality of non-formal education activities and learning outcomes in youth projects. This includes ensuring that activities are accessible to diverse participants, especially those with fewer opportunities.

5. Build Incrementally from firm foundations

- The PM ensures that appropriate analysis and enough design up front (EDUF) are performed to create strong foundations.
- With each delivered increment, priorities are formally re-evaluated, and the ongoing project viability is informally re-evaluated.
- Every increment (especially the first) serves as a foundation for further solution development.

4.2.3 Agile PM

Youth projects can start with a clear understanding of the overall project goals and then develop educational activities and workshops incrementally. AgilePM's iterative development approach allows for continuous refinement and adaptation based on feedback from youth and partners, ensuring the project evolves to meet emerging needs.

6. Develop Iteratively

- The PM ensures the use of business feedback in each iteration.
- Change is accepted because the right solution will not evolve without it.
- Iterations are short development cycles that end with quality verification, leading to frequent feedback and quick identification of errors ("fail fast").

Youth exchanges typically last seven days. Within this timeframe, educational activities can be structured in iterative cycles, with daily stand-ups or reflection sessions to gather feedback and make immediate adjustments to workshops and learning methods.

7. Communicate continuously and clearly

- The PM ensures the full use of DSDM practices, such as workshops, modeling, timeboxes, and daily stand-ups.
- Activities and results are visible, and documentation is concise and timely (created only when it adds value).
- In the agile approach, communication is continuous, for example, through mandatory status meetings and Demos.

Effective communication is vital in international youth projects because of cultural and linguistic differences. AgilePM's emphasis on continuous, clear communication through workshops and daily meetings can foster better understanding among participants and organizers.

8. Demonstrate control

- The PM ensures that plans and progress are visible to all.
- Progress is measured by focusing on product delivery, not on completed activities.
- An appropriate level of formalism is used for tracking and reporting.
- Every person performing tasks is obliged to report status on an ongoing basis, and transparency is maintained in the project.

AgilePM offers a structured approach to project management. For youth projects, this could include transparent planning, visible progress tracking, and adherence to Erasmus+ quality standards and guidelines, including those on participant safety, ethical conduct, and respect for EU values. Project plans and progress should be visible to all, with a focus on delivering educational outcomes.

Roles in Agile PM

In AgilePM, roles are clearly defined, and one person can fulfill several roles, while multi-person teams may handle more complex roles. The fundamental principle is that development team members jointly provide estimates of the work.

Roles in AgilePM are divided into levels and areas of interest:

1 Project Level Roles

these are individuals empowered to make decisions at the overall project level:

Business Sponsor: The highest-level business role. It is the project advocate, responsible for the Business Case and the project budget. The position holds a sufficiently high position within the organization to resolve business issues and make financial decisions.

Business Sponsor in Youth Projects

The person who provides the project's funding and champions it. They have ultimate authority for the project and ensure it aligns with strategic objectives.

In youth projects, this role is typically filled by a senior representative of the applicant organization (e.g., an NGO director or head of the youth department) or a key decision-maker within the partnering organizations.

Responsibilities in Youth Projects:

Securing funding (e.g., an Erasmus+ grant).

- Ensuring the project's goals align with the organization's mission and the Erasmus+ Programme's strategic priorities (e.g., inclusion, digital transformation, the environment, democratic life).
- Maintaining the overall vision and strategic direction of the youth exchange.
- Removing high-level impediments and advocating for the project within and outside the organization.

Business Visionary: A single person actively involved in providing a clear vision and strategic direction for the project.

Business Visionary (or Lead Educator/Youth Work Coordinator):

Provides the project's high-level vision and objectives, ensuring that deliverables meet overall business needs. They maintain the solution's coherence.

In youth projects, this role could be the Lead Educator, Main Trainer, or Youth Work Coordinator, who is deeply involved in the pedagogical and content design of the youth exchange.

Responsibilities in Youth Projects:

Articulating the core educational objectives and themes of the youth exchange.

- Ensuring the content and methodology align with non-formal education principles.
- Translating Erasmus+ priorities into tangible learning outcomes for participants.
- Guiding the design of workshops and activities to fulfill the project's educational vision.

Technical coordinator: The Technical Coordinator is the project's technical authority and is responsible for providing the technical vision. They ensure that the project is technically cohesive and meets agreed standards. They are also responsible for ensuring that technical and solution roles work consistently.

Technical Coordinator

AgilePM Role: Manages the technical aspects of the project. Ensures the technical solution is delivered and integrated effectively.

Youth Project Perspective: for example, IT and Communications Coordinator or Platform Manager.

Responsibilities in Youth Projects:

- Managing the project's digital presence (e.g., website, social media, online collaboration tools such as Google Drive or Miro).
- Organizing and managing technical equipment for workshops (e.g., projectors, laptops, audio systems).
- Ensuring the project complies with data protection regulations, particularly regarding participant data.
- Providing technical support to partners and participants, especially for online preparatory meetings or during the exchange.

Project Manager: Provides overall agile leadership, adopting a facilitative management style for empowered Solution Development Teams. Focuses on managing the work environment where the solution evolves and coordinates all general aspects of project management, leaving detailed planning to the team. This role, however, is not involved in the Pre-project phase.

Project Manager:

Manages the overall project, ensuring it adheres to the chosen framework (AgilePM), manages risks, and facilitates communication across all stakeholders. They are responsible for delivering the project's products within agreed tolerances.

In youth projects, this role could be fulfilled by the Project Coordinator from the applicant organization.

Responsibilities in Youth Projects:

- Overall coordination of the transnational partnership.
- Managing the project timeline and budget (as per the Erasmus+ grant agreement).
- Ensuring adherence to Erasmus+ quality standards and program rules.
- Facilitating team meetings and communication among partners.
- Handling administrative tasks, reporting, and documentation required by the funding body.
- Risk management (e.g., participant safety, logistical issues).

2 Solution Development Team Roles

these are individuals working directly in Timeboxes and delivering the solution:

Business Ambassador: A key business representative within the Solution Development Team, acting as a true "Ambassador". The main decision-maker within the Timeboxes is being implemented. Responsible for daily communication between the project and the business. Provides daily details of requirements. The main business decision-maker to ensure that the Evolving Solution meets its purpose for fulfilling business needs.

Business Ambassador (or Partner Representative/Local Coordinator):

- Represents the organization's interests within the project, ensuring requirements are understood and validated. They act as a conduit between the project team and the wider community.
- In Youth Projects, representatives may come from each partner organization involved in the transnational youth exchange. This also includes local coordinators responsible for participant selection and preparation in their respective countries.

Responsibilities in Youth Projects may include:

- Ensuring the project effectively addresses the needs and interests of youth in their specific region or country.
- Facilitating communication and collaboration between their local youth groups and the broader project team.
- Providing input on cultural nuances and youth-specific challenges.
- Supporting participant selection, preparation (intercultural, linguistic, risk-prevention), and follow-up activities.

Team Leader/Scrum Master: Coordinates the work of their team. Escalates problems to the Project Manager if they arise. Acts as a servant leader for the Solution Development Team, ensuring the team functions as a whole and achieves its goals. Plans and coordinates detailed aspects of product delivery. Ideally should be chosen by co-workers.

Team Leader (or Workshop Leader/Activity Leader/Group Leader):

Leads the Solution Development Team, ensuring the team is motivated and focused on delivering increments. They facilitate daily activities and help resolve team-level issues.

Youth Project Equivalent: Activity Facilitators, Workshop Leaders, or Group Leaders who are directly working with youth participants during the exchange.

Responsibilities in Youth Projects may include:

- Directly guiding and facilitating learning activities and workshops.
- Encouraging youth participation and engagement.
- Addressing immediate participant needs and conflicts.
- Collecting youth feedback during daily reflection sessions.
- Reporting progress and challenges to the Project Manager.

Solution Developer/Developer: The person who performs tasks. In the IT world, for example, a programmer.

Solution Developer (or Youth Participants / Co-creators):

Designs, builds, and tests the solution increments.

Youth Project Equivalent: The Youth Participants themselves! In the context of non-formal education and youth empowerment, youth are not just recipients but active co-creators of their learning experiences and project outcomes.

Responsibilities in Youth Projects:

- Active participation in workshops and discussions.
- Contributing ideas and solutions to challenges presented.
- Creating "deliverables" (e.g., presentations, campaigns, digital products, art pieces) as part of the learning process.
- Providing feedback on the activities and learning methods.
- Reflecting on their learning outcomes (e.g., for Youthpass).

Solution Tester: Solution Tester is empowered and fully integrated with the Solution Development Team. Their primary duty is to perform testing in accordance with the agreed strategy, which involves verifying the Solution Developer's work.

Solution Tester (or Peer Evaluator/Feedback Provider):

Tests the solution increments to ensure they meet quality criteria and business needs.

Youth Project Equivalent: This role can be fulfilled by youth participants who provide peer feedback, youth workers who observe activities, and partners who evaluate sessions.

Responsibilities in Youth Projects:

- Youth provide constructive feedback on activities, content, and group dynamics.
- Youth workers/facilitators observe participant engagement and learning, adjusting activities as needed.
- Partners periodically review the quality and effectiveness of workshops and educational materials.

Business Analyst: Fully integrated with the Solution Development Team. Supports communication between the business and the Solution Development Team. Facilitates relationships between business and technical roles. Ensures that relevant and appropriate decisions regarding the Evolving Solution are made on an ongoing basis. Makes a significant contribution to the creation and prioritization of requirements.

Business Analyst:

Gathers, analyzes, and documents requirements, serving as a bridge between the business and the technical team.

In youth projects, this role could be combined with the Business Visionary or Project Manager*. It could also be a dedicated Needs Assessor or Curriculum Developer (especially in larger projects).

Responsibilities in Youth Projects:

- Conducting needs assessments with target youth to inform project content.
- Translating broad Erasmus+ objectives into specific learning outcomes and activity designs.
- Ensuring that the educational content is relevant, engaging, and age-appropriate.

* Agile frameworks, including AgilePM, are designed to be flexible. The AgilePM framework emphasizes that while roles are defined, their practical implementation should be pragmatic and adapted to the specific organizational context and project scale. In smaller teams, individuals often fulfill multiple roles. Many project management resources and real-world case studies for smaller organizations highlight the necessity of role consolidation due to limited human resources. This appears particularly accurate in the context of youth projects.

3 Supporting Roles:

Technical Advisor/Solution Advisor: Provides specialized technical input to the project, advising on operational management, support, and maintenance of the solution.

AgilePM Role: An expert who provides technical guidance and support to the development team on a specific aspect of the solution. They may be consulted on an ad-hoc basis.

Youth Project Equivalent: Subject Matter Expert (SME) or Pedagogical Advisor.

Responsibilities in Youth Projects:

- This role is often filled by a consultant who is an expert in the project's theme (e.g., a climate scientist for an environmental project, a journalist for a media literacy project).
- They provide specialized knowledge to help design the educational content and activities.
- They can deliver a specific workshop or lecture to enrich participants' learning.
- They serve as a resource for the project team to ensure the educational information shared is accurate and up-to-date.

Workshop Facilitator: Responsible for planning, organizing, and managing the workshop process, independent of its outcome. Their task is to lead the workshop so that its participants achieve the meeting's objective.

AgilePM Role: Facilitates workshops and meetings, ensuring they are productive and lead to clear outcomes.

Youth Project Equivalent: Workshop Facilitator or Group Leader.

4.2.3 Agile PM

Responsibilities in Youth Projects:

- Directly guiding and facilitating learning activities and workshops for youth.
- Using nonformal education methods to engage participants.
- Ensuring a safe, inclusive environment where all participants can contribute.
- Encouraging participation, managing group dynamics, and helping youth achieve each session's learning outcomes.
- This role is often filled by a certified youth worker or trainer with specific expertise in the project's topic.

DSDM Coach/Agile Coach/ Mentor: Helps teams with limited experience optimally utilize the agile approach within the organizational context; should be an expert with practical experience, preferably certified.

AgilePM Role: An expert in the AgilePM framework who coaches the project team on its principles, practices, and techniques. They ensure the project adheres to the framework and help resolve process-related issues.

Youth Project Equivalent: This is a highly specialized role that, in the context of a youth project, could be combined with the Project Manager role. However, in youth projects, a dedicated DSDM Coach is rare due to resource constraints.

Responsibilities in Youth Projects:

- They would ensure the team follows a structured, iterative process.
- They would mentor the project team on using tools such as Timeboxes, Daily Stand-ups, and MoSCoW prioritization to manage the project effectively.
- A senior Youth Work Trainer might also perform this role, coaching other facilitators on agile-inspired pedagogical approaches and project management within their own activities.

Agile PM Project Lifecycle (DSDM Process)

AgilePM is based on iterative, incremental solution delivery. Projects are planned in solution increments, each divided into Timeboxes. The final Timebox in each planned increment is the solution deployment. DSDM is used to construct a project lifecycle and can be configured for scalability and formality.

The AgilePM project lifecycle includes the following phases:

Pre-project Phase:

This phase aims to ensure that only the right projects are initiated and organized appropriately, in line with clearly defined objectives. Additionally, it involves verifying the project's alignment with company goals and strategy, and assessing its feasibility in the business environment (legal, tax,

The AgilePM project lifecycle includes the following phases:

Pre-project Phase:

This phase aims to ensure that only the right projects are initiated and organized appropriately, in line with clearly defined objectives. Additionally, it involves verifying the project's alignment with company goals and strategy, and assessing its feasibility in the business environment (legal, tax, social, etc.). The Project Manager is not involved in this phase.

AgilePM Objective: Establish the initial business case and determine the project's viability.

Youth Project Application: This is the ideation and strategic alignment phase.

Brainstorming: Partner organizations identify a common issue or topic relevant to young people (e.g., environmental challenges, the digital skills gap, combating misinformation).

Strategic Alignment: The project idea aligns with the current priorities and objectives of the Erasmus+ Programme Guide (e.g., Inclusion and Diversity, Green Erasmus, Digital Transformation).

Needs Assessment: Partners conduct a preliminary needs assessment to understand the specific challenges and interests of their target youth groups.

Feasibility Check: Partners assess the potential to secure funding and identify suitable collaborating organizations. This phase culminates in a decision to proceed with developing a complete Erasmus+ grant application.

Feasibility Phase:

During this stage, a general Prioritized Requirements List (PRL) is created. At the end of this phase, the Project Manager should present the results to the sponsor, who will then decide whether to continue financing the project. In this phase, the project's profitability is assessed, and the conclusions and calculations of profitability indicators are recorded in the Business Justification.

AgilePM Objective: To determine whether a project is viable and worth pursuing. This phase involves conducting an initial, high-level analysis to assess whether the proposed project is technically, economically, and operationally feasible. It is a rapid assessment to avoid wasting resources on projects unlikely to succeed.

- Youth Project Application: In a youth exchange, the Feasibility Phase is a critical checkpoint before the time-consuming process of writing a complete Erasmus+ grant application begins. It's often a more detailed step within the broader Pre-Project Phase.

4.2.3 Agile PM

- **Strategic Feasibility:** The project idea is tested against the Erasmus+ Programme Guide's strategic priorities. The partners would ask: "Does our project on 'digital creativity' align with the Erasmus+ objectives for Digital Transformation and social inclusion?"
- **Organizational Feasibility:** The team assesses whether the partner organizations have the capacity and resources to carry out the project. This includes checking whether partners have the necessary expertise in the project topic, a network of youth to engage, and the administrative capacity to manage a grant.
- **Financial Feasibility:** A quick check is performed to determine whether the project's budget (e.g., travel, accommodation, activity costs) can be reasonably covered by the potential Erasmus+ grant. They would reference the program guide's funding rules to estimate costs per participant and travel distance.
- **Risk Assessment:** The partners would identify high-level risks, such as difficulty recruiting participants, potential language barriers, or geopolitical instability in a partner country.
- **Outcome:** This phase concludes with a clear decision: either "Go" (proceed to the Foundations Phase and write the application) or "No-Go" (revise the idea or abandon it). An adverse outcome at this stage saves significant time and effort that would otherwise be spent on an unviable project.

Foundations Phase:

Establishes a fundamental understanding of the project's business purpose, the potential solution, and how the solution's development and delivery will be managed. Details of requirements and how they should be achieved are deferred to the Evolutionary Development phase of the project. The goal of the Foundations phase is to define the scope of work and how, by whom, when, and where this work will be performed. **At the end of this phase, time, cost, and quality are fixed.** The PRL becomes the baseline version, defining the project's scope. The Management Approach Definition (MAD) is also defined, specifying the approach to organization, planning, stakeholder engagement, and progress demonstration. A Delivery Plan is created, presenting the general schedule of Project Increments and Timeboxes for at least the first Increment. At the end of this phase, the Project Manager presents the prepared outcome to the sponsor.

AgilePM Objective: Define the project's scope, high-level plan, and the overall description of deliverables and results. This phase ensures all stakeholders have a shared understanding of the project's goals.

Youth Project Application: This is the detailed planning phase.

- **Consortium Agreement:** Partner organizations formalize their collaboration and define roles and responsibilities.
- **Project Plan Development:** The project coordinator, with input from partners, develops a detailed work plan that includes activity schedules, budget allocations, and a timeline.
- **Educational Framework:** The pedagogical approach, learning objectives, and methods of non-formal education are defined and documented.
- **Quality Assurance:** The project's quality standards and evaluation methods (e.g., participant feedback forms, Youthpass) are established.

Evolutionary Development Phase:

The purpose of this phase is to evolve the solution. It requires applying key practices such as Iterative Development, Timeboxing, MoSCoW prioritization, Modeling, and Facilitated Workshops. Working in Timeboxes (usually 2–4 weeks), the Solution Development Team creates Solution Increments by iteratively exploring requirements and continuously testing as progress is made. Plans and progress should be visible to all, and progress is measured by focusing on product delivery rather than completed activities. A Timebox Plan is created for a shorter planning horizon (usually 2–4 weeks) and is more detailed. It is updated during each Daily Stand-up. The solution should be thoroughly tested and potentially deployable at the end of each Timebox.

AgilePM Objective: Develop the solution iteratively and incrementally, focusing on delivering a series of prioritized increments.

Youth Project Application: This is the core implementation and delivery phase that follows grant approval.

- **Iterative Design:** The project team (Project Manager, Workshop Facilitators) iteratively designs the workshops and educational materials. Each "iteration" may focus on a specific theme or learning objective.
- **Participant Preparation:** This includes a series of "increments" such as online pre-project meetings, language support (e.g., the OLS platform), and intercultural preparation for youth participants.

- **Delivery of Activities:** The youth exchange itself consists of time-boxed activities (e.g., Daily Stand-ups, workshops, field trips). Each day can be seen as an iteration in which specific educational goals are pursued, and feedback is gathered through daily reflections. The Youthpass process, which documents learning outcomes, is also a key part of this phase.
- **Continuous Feedback:** The project team continuously gathers feedback from participants and partners to adapt and refine project content in real time, in line with Agile's emphasis on flexibility.

Deployment Phase:

The objective of this phase is to transition the baselined Evolving Solution into operational use. The deployed release may be the final solution or a component of it. The project is formally closed after the last release.

AgilePM Objective: Transition the developed solution into operational use.

Youth Project Application: This concludes the main activity and marks the initial dissemination of results.

- **Finalization:** All project activities (e.g., the final workshop, closing ceremony) are completed.
- **Learning Outcome Recognition:** Youthpass certificates are prepared and issued to participants to recognize their learning formally.
- **Dissemination and Visibility:** Initial results and deliverables created by the youth (e.g., videos, social media campaigns, project reports) are shared with the broader community and stakeholders as outlined in the dissemination plan of the Erasmus+ application. This includes creating a project website or a social media page for long-term visibility.

Post-project Phase:

At this point, after project completion, the business verifies whether the planned business benefits have actually materialized.

Throughout the project lifecycle, AgilePM emphasizes flexibility, strong customer collaboration, ensuring the final solution meets customer needs, and deferring decisions as late as possible. It recognizes that change is inevitable and integral to the project, as understanding of the solution grows over time. Communication is continuous and precise, for example, through workshops, modeling, Timeboxes, and Daily Stand-ups.

AgilePM Objective: Evaluate the project's success and determine whether the planned benefits have been realized.

Youth Project Application: This is the final evaluation and reporting phase.

- **Final Report:** The Project Manager submits the final reports to the National Agency in accordance with the Erasmus+ grant agreement.
- **Impact Evaluation:** The project team, with input from partners, evaluates the project's long-term impact on participants, organizations, and local communities.
- **Dissemination Activities:** The final dissemination plan continues, ensuring that the project's results and best practices are shared with other youth workers and organizations to promote future collaboration and project development.

4.2.4 Agile frameworks for larger projects in Non-Formal Education: Overcoming challenges and increasing Benefits

Agile approaches such as Large-Scale Scrum (LeSS), the Scaled Agile Framework (SAFe), and AgilePM offer significant benefits for youth projects in non-formal education (NFE). These frameworks help projects address unique challenges and strengthen their positive impact on youth development. Their flexibility and ability to respond quickly to change make them well suited to the dynamic environment of NFE. Below, we briefly summarize the benefits of agile frameworks for non-formal education initiatives.

Turning Challenges into Strengths

Inconsistent Attendance

Dynamic Flexibility

The Agile Edge

Short Sprints / Timeboxes allow facilitators to “assume variability.”
If an activity isn’t engaging, you pivot in days, not months

SAFe Principle

“Preserve options” by having alternative content plans ready.

Passive Participation

Youth Empowerment

The Agile Edge

Youth are not just participants; they are **Solution Developers (AgilePM)** or **Self-Organizing Teams (SAFe)**.

The Benefit

Decentralized decision-making unlocks intrinsic motivation. Youth decide how to do the work, leading to higher ownership.

Hard to Measure

Tangible Value

The Agile Edge

We stop measuring “hours spent” and start measuring “Potentially Shippable Increments.”

Concrete Outcomes

Media campaigns, short films, presentations or digital tools produced every Sprint serve as objective evidence for Youthpass and impact reports.

Increased Flexibility and Responsiveness to Change

Agile frameworks, including LeSS, SAFe, and AgilePM, prioritize flexibility and rapid responses to changing conditions. In an NFE context, this means projects can adapt dynamically to participants’ evolving needs and interests, which is key to engagement. Additionally, NFE relies on voluntary participation, which can lead to inconsistent attendance and challenges in maintaining a cohesive learning environment. SAFe principle of “assume variability; preserve options” supports the development of alternative content plans and quick adaptation to youth needs, ensuring a more engaging and effective educational experience. Short feedback cycles (Sprints/Timeboxes) enable rapid adjustments if activities aren’t engaging participants.

2 Strong Focus on the Participant

Agile approaches focus on maximizing value for the client or end user. In youth projects, this means the project is youth-centric, and educational goals are jointly set and prioritized to deliver the most valuable outcomes for participants. NFE requires continuous engagement and flexibility. Agile helps overcome participation barriers and adapt to the diverse developmental needs of youth. Below, we highlight how each of the previously described Agile frameworks strengthens youth-centric approaches:

- LeSS emphasizes the importance of customer-centric feature teams and a single Product Owner with one Product Backlog for the entire product, ensuring a holistic focus on youth needs and system optimization. The Product Owner, supported by the teams, delegates most of the tasks related to clarifying requirements directly to the teams, which speeds up the flow of information.
- SAFe promotes a customer-centric approach with Design Thinking, which in NFE means actively involving youth in the design process for activities and workshops from the very beginning.
- AgilePM focuses on maximizing product value and close, continuous collaboration with the client and end-users. In youth projects, this means focusing on "youth needs," ensuring that educational activities are aligned with Erasmus+ priorities and enhance youth competencies.

3 Continuous Feedback and Adaptation

Frameworks are based on short, fixed cycles (Sprints/Timeboxes) that allow for rapid user and stakeholder feedback. The project concludes with an Overall Retrospective, where teams and stakeholders discuss what went well, what could be improved, and plan future actions. Continuous feedback allows for ongoing adjustments to project content.

- SAFe promotes continuous improvement in the quality of workshops and educational activities through participant feedback loops. Incremental building with fast, integrated learning cycles enables quick feedback and adjustments, preventing a slow or ineffective component from dooming the entire project.
- AgilePM recognizes that change is inevitable and integral to a project. In the Evolutionary Development phase, development teams work in Timeboxes, iteratively exploring requirements and continuously testing progress. Constantly gathering feedback from participants and partners enables real-time adaptation and improvement of project content. This approach can be applied in youth projects through daily debriefing or reflection sessions.

4 Increased Collaboration and Communication

Agile frameworks like LeSS promote decentralized and informal communication channels, such as the “Just Talk” approach. In youth projects, this means encouraging direct, informal communication among youth teams, building trust, and accelerating the flow of information. Open communication facilitates early problem detection.

- LeSS introduces roles like “travelers” and “scouts,” which facilitate the exchange of specialized knowledge and the building of informal connections between teams, which is especially valuable in large, distributed groups.
- SAFe emphasizes transparency by openly sharing project information, which builds trust and a safe environment for experimentation and learning from mistakes.
- AgilePM promotes strong collaboration, which is crucial for transnational partnerships in Erasmus+ projects. It emphasizes continuous, clear communication through workshops, daily meetings, and visible results, which is particularly important in international youth projects, given cultural and language differences.

5 Youth Empowerment and Autonomy

Agile frameworks rely on self-organizing, cross-functional, and long-lived teams. Youth participants and their mentors are organized into self-organizing teams with a mix of skills, capable of completing a “shippable” part of the project. This strengthens a sense of responsibility and ownership. Allowing youth to decide on their work increases engagement, facilitates overcoming participation barriers, and enables adaptation to diverse needs.

- SAFe emphasizes the principle of “Unlock the intrinsic motivation of knowledge workers,” based on autonomy, mastery, and purpose. In youth projects, this means allowing teams to make decisions about their tasks, offering opportunities to develop new skills, and ensuring all participants understand how their work contributes to the larger project vision. Decentralizing decision-making empowers those closest to the work to make better local decisions, leading to faster, more effective results.
- AgilePM treats youth participants as “Solution Developers” or co-creators, actively involved in designing, building, and testing increments of the solution. They are active co-creators of their own educational experience and project outcomes, contributing ideas and solutions.

6 Focus on Delivering Tangible Value and Outcomes

Agile aims to deliver a potentially shippable increment of the product at the end of each Sprint. Progress is measured by tangible, verifiable results, not just theoretical plans. Agile provides concrete evidence of acquired skills, thereby reducing the challenges of non-formal education related to the lack of formal/social recognition and the difficulty of proving value.

- LeSS requires the presentation of completed work in a single Sprint Review, ensuring transparency and the delivery of a tangible "product increment."
- SAFe places an intense emphasis on working systems and resulting business outcomes, focusing on the continuous delivery of value. Milestones are based on the objective evaluation of working systems, which, in youth projects, means producing concrete results such as media campaigns, videos, or presentations.
- AgilePM emphasizes the principle of "Demonstrate control" by measuring progress by focusing on product delivery rather than completed activities. This means projects focus on concrete educational outcomes that can be objectively measured and evaluated.

7 Effective Management of Complexity in Large Projects

LeSS and SAFe are designed to scale Agile practices in large, complex environments. Scalable frameworks help with more effective resource utilization and coordination, thus reducing challenges related to insufficient and inconsistent funding and management inefficiency

- LeSS Huge (for more than eight teams) introduces Requirement Areas to manage a large, logical group of Product Backlog items, allowing for effective management of an extensive Product Backlog and maintaining focus for teams. In large youth exchanges, such as a "Sustainable Cities" project, areas could be divided into "Green Mobility Solutions" or "Waste Management."
- SAFe addresses the challenges of applying Agile methodologies to large, complex projects at the enterprise level. Structured organizational levels (Team, Program, Value Stream, Portfolio) and roles such as Release Train Engineer (RTE) and Product Management (PM) enable scaling Agile practices and promote alignment, collaboration, and value delivery across a large number of teams. This allows for the management of complex transnational partnerships in Erasmus+ projects.

8 Fostering Workforce Development and Professionalization

Agile frameworks promote roles such as Scrum Masters/Team Leaders as coaches and facilitators, supporting team development and removing obstacles. Agile supports skill development and collaboration, which can help professionalize NFE staff and address the shortage of trained educators and recruitment challenges.

- Lean-Agile Leaders (SAFe) are individuals who understand and implement Lean and Agile principles, teaching them to others, which is key for leading changes in how work is done in NFE.
- Communities of Practice (CoPs) (SAFe) can be formed as informal groups of youth and experts who share knowledge, fostering a culture of continuous learning and innovation in the NFE sector.

9 Streamlining Assessment and Impact Measurement

Agile focuses on delivering working increments and objective evidence. Agile makes it easier to monitor progress and prove impact, thus overcoming one of the NFE challenges related to the lack of data and difficulty quantifying qualitative outcomes:

- Visualizing Work in Progress (WIP) and continuously assessing progress through daily meetings and reviews helps with effective monitoring and identifying areas for improvement.
- Focusing on "products" (tangible outcomes) (e.g., digital campaigns, short films, presentations) rather than just activities makes it easier to measure and document progress and skills gained. The Youthpass process, which documents learning outcomes, is a key element of this phase within AgilePM.

AgilePM

Rigorous
Results



Treating youth as “Solution Developers” and focusing on tangible outcomes for Youthpass/Erasmus+.

SAFe

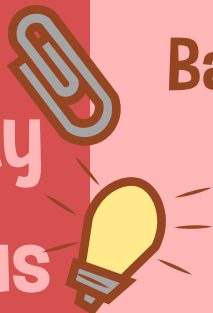
Strategic
Alignment



Using “Design Thinking” and “Release Trains” to coordinate large, complex international partnerships.

LeSS

Simplicity
and Focus



One Product Owner and one Backlog for the whole project to ensure a holistic youth-centric vision.

In summary, applying Agile approaches in NFE youth projects—whether it’s LeSS, SAFe, or AgilePM—leads to more effective management, greater participant engagement, and better alignment of outcomes with the real needs of young people. By focusing on flexibility, collaboration, continuous feedback, and value, these projects become more innovative and adaptive, with a greater impact on youth development and the achievement of educational goals.

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