



Adobe Workfront



Six challenges agencies face and how we can help solve them.



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Introduction.

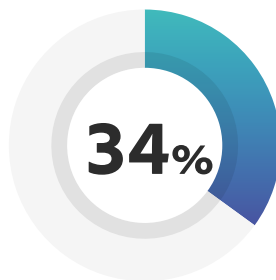
David is like you. He works at a busy agency managing projects and coordinating creative, account, and executive team members. He craves order and efficiency but can never quite get everything under control. He struggles continually with planning and tracking multiple projects, allocating resources, delivering excellent work, and getting the visibility he needs to optimise his team's billable hours and meet executive and client expectations.

Sound familiar?

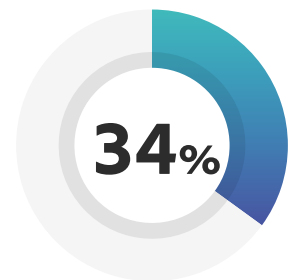
The problems David faces are the same problems most agency project managers face—your work is complex, you have multiple teams and multiple projects to manage, and your profit margins are tight. And in an increasingly competitive environment, operational efficiency is critical to success. Add to this, the effects of a global pandemic increasing remote working and the need to produce work even faster, has only made these industry challenges that much more difficult to get right.

To help you, this eBook details six challenges agencies face when managing projects and provides useful solutions you can put into practice today. Keep reading to learn how to tackle:

1. Disorganised work requests
2. Resource optimisation chaos
3. Communication breakdowns
4. Inconsistent work methodologies
5. Unhappy clients
6. Piles of disconnected tools



of ad agencies say that communication and teamwork is the biggest challenge posed by remote working.¹



said productivity was the biggest challenge.¹

CHALLENGE 1

Chaotic briefs and work requests.

When new projects or ad-hoc requests come at you and your team in a scattered, disorderly manner, emails, instant messages, mobile phone chats, and in office conversations, to name a few, it's not surprising that you can't keep track of them all. And it's often made more difficult by the fact that you don't have standardised processes in place to handle work requests, so you end up starting from scratch every time—even when it's a type of project you've done a dozen times or more.

In an attempt to make sure you know about all work requests and the status of ongoing projects, you've increased team status meetings to three times a week, begun sending more emails, tracked details on complicated spreadsheets, and increased communication tools to get "better visibility" into who's working on what and where it is in the process. But it's not helping much.

“ Creativity is about freedom, but freedom cannot be unlimited or unrestrained. It must be tempered with discipline.

Frederico Fanti

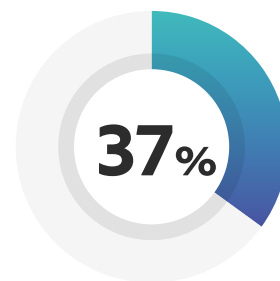
Associate Creative Director
at Young & Rubicam Moscow

With more than a third (37%) of professionals consider unnecessary meetings to be the biggest cost to their organisation,² and the average worker spending up to 5 hours a day checking email,³ adding more meetings and emails to your team's day may be dragging productivity down even further.

A disorganised system for project requests and workflows creates chaos in other areas, too. When you lack clarity about how projects should be assigned or visibility into their progress, you can't:

- Effectively estimate time, resources, or budget
- See when projects are getting behind schedule
- Provide accurate status updates to executives or clients

The result is missed deadlines, overburdened resources, and unhappy clients.



More than a third of professionals consider unnecessary meetings the biggest cost to their organisation.

CHALLENGE 1: SOLUTION

Automate and structure the process.

Stop holding excessive meetings or ping-ponging them on messaging apps to gather updates. Instead, standardise your project workflow processes and enjoy the kind of visibility you get on a cloudless day.

The Adobe Workfront solution will help you achieve a project workflow that makes sense for your organisation. In the meantime, here's some tips:



Require all requests—planned and ad-hoc—to be submitted the same way. Use an email alias like request@yourcompany.com, an online form, or an integrated work request tool—whatever system works best for your team. The important thing is to make sure that all requests—whether new projects or ad-hoc requests—are submitted the same way every time. No 'can you just' allowed.

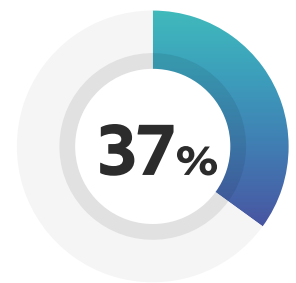


Track all work in a central location. Whether you use a virtual private network (VPN), a shared drive, or a cloud-based tool, make sure all work and project tasks are tracked in one location with anywhere, anytime team access. That way, everyone can easily provide real-time updates, see new requests, and prioritise work according to business value.



Use templates for repeatable work. Templates standardise repeatable processes and improve productivity. Create templates for common project types such as website rebranding or email marketing campaigns. Outline all the steps to create a description for each step and include time estimates and skillsets needed.

When you can see all the work being requested, how long it will take, who is doing it, where it is in the process, and have a template to streamline it all—it's much easier to quickly and accurately provide project estimates, prioritise projects according to their strategic value, keep clients and executives in the loop, ensure consistency and quality control, plan your resources effectively, and meet your deadlines.



of agencies cited 'scope-creep' as a significant problem in their organisation.⁴

CHALLENGE 2

Resource planning challenges.

Your agency just landed a large campaign . Erica is your best creative for the job. Too bad she's already booked to the max on three other projects. There's a freelancer who has availability, but you don't really know him or his skillset, so you're not comfortable putting him on such a critical project. It's all a big jigsaw puzzle, but you feel like you're missing half the pieces (or half the resources) you need.

Unfortunately, that's not your only problem—everywhere you turn, team members are juggling ad-hoc requests and last-minute changes that delay other critical projects or require putting in extra hours. Frustration and burnout are high, and good talent is constantly walking out the door—looking for a better work-life balance.

You're not the only one struggling to optimise your resources:

- Turnover at agencies is high, an average of 29.8% in the UK compared to 15% in other industries.⁵
- 75% of adults believe they are not “living up to their creative potential” and are “under pressure to be productive rather than creative at work.”⁶
- Employee morale during the COVID-19 period is one of the biggest challenges faced by creative agencies.⁷
- Incorrect or ineffective resource allocation is one of the biggest reasons businesses perform badly.⁸

But finding ways to protect resources from being overworked while maximising their utilisation rates is critical to success. Poor resource allocation can strain available resources, cause missed deadlines, and hinder your team's ability to create happy customers.



CHALLENGE 2: SOLUTION

Structure your resource management processes.

1. **Keep an up-to-date database on all your resources and their capacity.** When you consistently track all your resources' skills, capabilities, and job experience, you can confidently assign the right resource to the right job. And, when you can see at a glance how much work is already on their plate, you can do a better job of making sure you aren't overburdening or under-utilising resources.
2. **Assign your resources to tasks, not projects.** Allocating resources to specific tasks rather than projects breaks the work into bite-sized pieces that make it easier to correctly forecast resources and spread out the workload to maximise available skill sets.
3. **Track your team's billable and non-billable time.** You must have historical data to make accurate time estimates, and this includes billable and non-billable hours. Knowing how much time is being spent on billable tasks certainly helps with capacity planning, but so does understanding approximately how much time your resources spend on non-billable work, such as checking email, attending agency-related meetings, and other administrative work.

It may be necessary to adjust your agency process, so you don't overburden your team with tasks that add little value. To track time, use a tool that's simple and accessible, such as a cloud-based or mobile option that allows team members to log their time from any location.

You'll find that it's much easier to allocate the right resources to the right job when you have insight into how long each task will take, how much time your team has in their week to do it, and who is best suited to take on the work. The result will be happier resources, improved productivity, and on-time and on-budget projects.



CHALLENGE 3

Communication breakdowns between silos.

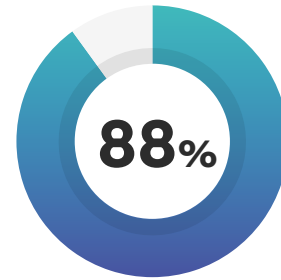
88% of remote workers face inconsistent leadership and miscommunications with other team members.⁹ This isn't surprising. Project managers hold numerous meetings trying to get everyone on the same page, but the meetings often veer off track. Feedback and reviews are haphazardly passed along through sticky notes or word of mouth, leading to confusion and unnecessary rework. Or, conversations take place outside the context of the project or task to which they are relevant, so half the team has no idea what's going on.

As with most agencies, email is likely your team's primary communication method. But just because "everybody's doing it" doesn't mean it's the best way. With email, what's waiting in the overflowing inbox is siloed—locked up in personal accounts. And even if your team shares emails, they may accidentally leave essential stakeholders, including clients, off the thread. It's also difficult for recipients to figure out which of the seven attached documents is the most recent version.

Overall, email can end up being a giant time-suck. The average worker receives 126 emails per day and takes approximately 20 minutes to refocus after being distracted by email.¹⁰ 42% of agency owners and directors say time management is the biggest challenge their agency will face this year.¹¹

Meetings aren't any better for communication. Every year, 24 billion hours will be wasted in pointless meetings¹² and 37% of employees believe that their organisation's most significant cost is unnecessary meetings.¹³

Video conferencing calls are just another meeting in disguise—hard to schedule, people are often late to join or can't quite hear each other—and so in the end, everyone just resorts back to email or face-to-face meetings. The impact of using disconnected communication channels—such as emails, meetings, and phone calls—is significant. Communication is a critical part of employee engagement, which in turn promotes better performance, employee retention and wellbeing.¹⁴



of remote workers face miscommunication with other team members.



The average worker receives 126 emails per day.



It takes approximately 20 minutes to refocus after being distracted.

CHALLENGE 3: SOLUTION

Centralise communications.

Open, accessible communication and collaboration among team members, managers, and clients is critical for agency success and innovation.

Implement these tips to close your team's communication gaps and increase collaboration:

1. **Communicate within the context of the work.** Whether it's a client presentation or comments during the review of an asset, keep all communications with the related work. The ability to view all feedback at once in context enhances communication and enables collaboration, which speeds productivity and reduces confusion or reworks. It also helps with version control—no more digging through 17 emails to find the right version of a document or who said what. Be sure to have a look at the Workfront and Adobe integration as an industry leading solution for this.
2. **Keep all communication in a central location.** It's crucial that you create a central communication location that provides accessible and transparent communication up, down, and across the agency. Whether it's a cloud-based tool built for team collaboration or an online spreadsheet, make sure your agency has a way to track communication in real-time and grant team members anywhere, anytime access.
3. **Try a social approach.** A social media approach with date stamped comment threads allows you to collaborate in a central location, provides anywhere, anytime access, and keeps all communications connected to the work. Implementing a social approach to project communication can enhance transparency and visibility enabling smarter, quicker and more efficient collaboration.¹⁵

Real-time communication that happens in the context of work gives you immediate knowledge of issues so you can jump in and get things back on track. Plus, it gives you the data you need to update clients without spending hours hounding your team for information.



Workfront was built for this exact purpose. Be sure to [get in touch](#) and get a demo of exactly how it works.

“ Ineffective communications is the primary contributor to project failure one-third of the time and had a negative impact on project success more than half the time.¹⁶ ”



CHALLENGE 4

Mixed work methodologies.

The traditional Waterfall method of project management, where you plan first and then deploy all at once, has been the cornerstone of agency project management for more than half a century. Yet, like many agencies, you're interested in trying a more Agile approach to project management. With 53% of agile marketing adopters say that it has improved their effectiveness, and 84% of Agile marketers said their agility was either extremely or somewhat important to dealing with the volatility of the pandemic year,¹⁷ you know that to remain competitive, your agency must also adopt Agile.

But despite all the excitement and buzz around Agile marketing, you've discovered it's a challenge to implement, especially when some projects require a mixed methodology approach. For example, your web development team may work in Agile, but your creative team will probably still use a traditional, Waterfall methodology for project management. The challenge is in finding ways to blend these two methods so that when multiple teams are working together in different methodologies, everyone is still speaking the same language in order to understand how the project is trending.

Being able to work effectively with mixed methodologies is critical to increasing your agency's overall success. In an increasingly competitive environment, agencies that are capable of managing mixed methodologies well will be able to reduce costs, improve delivery rates and create happier customers.¹⁸

We're not only seeing higher Agile adoption, but we also find more marketers are enjoying the key benefits of agility.¹⁹

“ We find it's best to start small and scale—testing, learning, and building on success with a carefully chosen team who then go on to be the advocates and role models as you scale. A growth mindset really helps—attitude trumps aptitude every time.²⁰

Zoe Merchant

Managing Director at B2B Agile Marketing Consultancy, Bright

CHALLENGE 4: SOLUTION

Find a peaceful co-existence.

Ultimately, traditional and Agile project management have similar goals—to provide the best possible product for the client, effectively lead the team, and deliver measurable business results. Instead of abandoning Agile methods when it seems too complicated, here are some tips to help your teams work in Agile while creating room for traditional approaches where needed:



Use a hybrid approach. Let teams work in an Agile manner when it is the most effective and efficient way to handle certain project aspects. Use a more traditional approach for areas of the project that need long-term or sequential planning. Make sure to define the methodology for each task or project stage and communicate the process to the team.

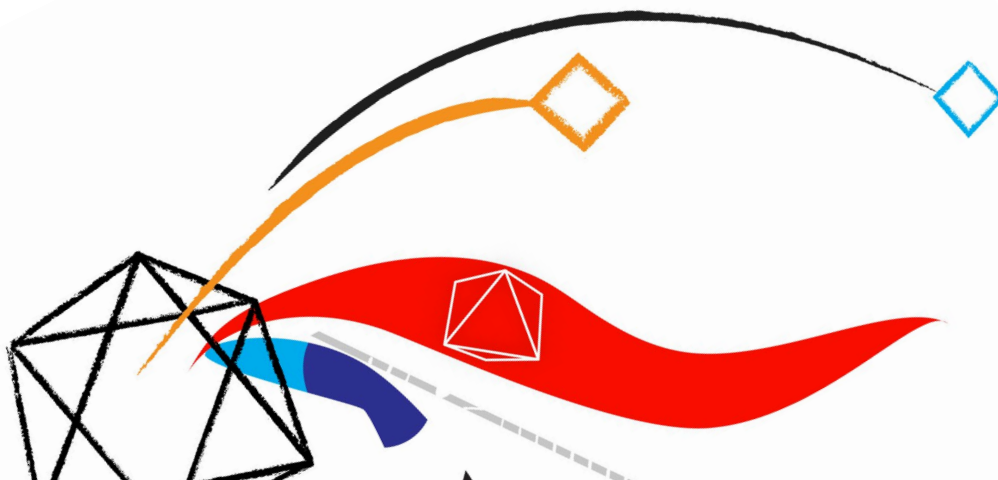


Translate key metrics. Executives and clients are most concerned about scope, budget, and deadlines, so you need to be able to communicate this information to them in their language. Convert story point-based estimates to planned hours so they can see the costs; convert stories to tasks so they know the scope, and convert iteration or sprint dates to project phases so they know the deadlines.



Find a tool that can track your work in both methodologies. The ability to plan, execute, and measure work in both an Agile and a Waterfall framework from a single source of data makes it simple to assign and complete tasks quickly and still be able to gather information into reports that clients understand. It also improves communication and collaboration when there are multiple teams working in different methodologies on the same project.

When approached in a thoughtful and practical manner, working with mixed work management methodologies can allow your agency to take advantage of the best of both worlds.



CHALLENGE 5

Unsatisfied clients.

Clients are an agency's bread and butter, and keeping them in love with your agency is all part of the job description. Unfortunately, it's becoming increasingly difficult for agencies to keep clients happy. 84% of clients with a weaker or more vulnerable relationship with their agency mentioned client service issues as the main reason.²¹

This is troubling news, especially when studies have shown that acquiring new clients is five times more expensive than keeping an existing customer.²²

While there are several reasons clients choose to leave an agency, frustration over project delays, inaccurate budgets or time estimates, and other project management related issues are frequently a major source of tension. Bringing customer expectations in alignment with the reality of what your team can do is no easy task, but is necessary to cultivate happy, repeat clients.

Data from the 10-year period to 2020 shows that while functional areas are still critical to team performance, behaviour metrics like trust, challenge, communication and resilience are increasingly important in helping build strong, productive relationships. As well as managing client expectations, getting a handle on the project management process can elevate your agency to a strategic partner and an extension of a brands' team.²³

“ [COVID-19] made us realize some of the old stuff, the silos and bureaucracies [weren't working]. What were we doing? Why did we have so many status meetings?²⁴

Lindsay Pattison

Global Chief Client Officer of WPP

CHALLENGE 5: SOLUTION

Professional campaign and expectation management.

Poorly managed workflow processes quickly result in project delays and blown budgets. They can also strain relationships with clients and reduce your team's credibility and perceived value both internally and externally. To repair this situation, you need to track the timeline and budget status in real-time. Here's how:

1. **Collect real-time data on your team's work.** It's important to collect useful data the right way. Find a tool with an intuitive user interface and anywhere, anytime access so your team can update in real-time. Set clear expectations that relevant project data, such as time spent per task—including billable and non-billable—be entered as it happens. With accurate information at your fingertips, you'll be better able to estimate future projects' timelines and budgets so that the commitments you make to clients are realistic.
2. **Collect time granularly.** Team members need to track time by task, not overall projects. Breaking it down into a smaller chunk allows project managers to better estimate project budgets based on the tasks involved. Tracking by tasks also allows instant insight into whether each portion of the project is being completed in the expected time, making it easier to spot issues and risks. You will also be able to demonstrate to clients exactly what has been done on the project so far and justify billed hours if necessary.
3. **Provide clients with frequent status updates.** Use a tool to collect data that allows you to provide clients with frequent reporting of the project timeline without too much effort on your part. When clients have easy-to-understand data and up-to-date information about their project's status, they gain confidence that the project is well-managed and that timelines and budgets are on track.

Real-time data collection is the only way to ensure your data is correct—and that you have the insight you need into timelines and costs. Delivering relevant and timely status updates to clients keeps them in the loop and ensures that their expectations are aligned with what is happening on the project.

“ Infrastructure Matters. Working with a supportive team is important. In my agency, we have a great production and operations management system in place. That, to me, is vital to a smoothly running agency.²⁵

Naidoo, Kassie

"Taming the Chaos of Marketing Agency Life", Mighty Guides, 2018

CHALLENGE 6

Multiple disconnected tools.

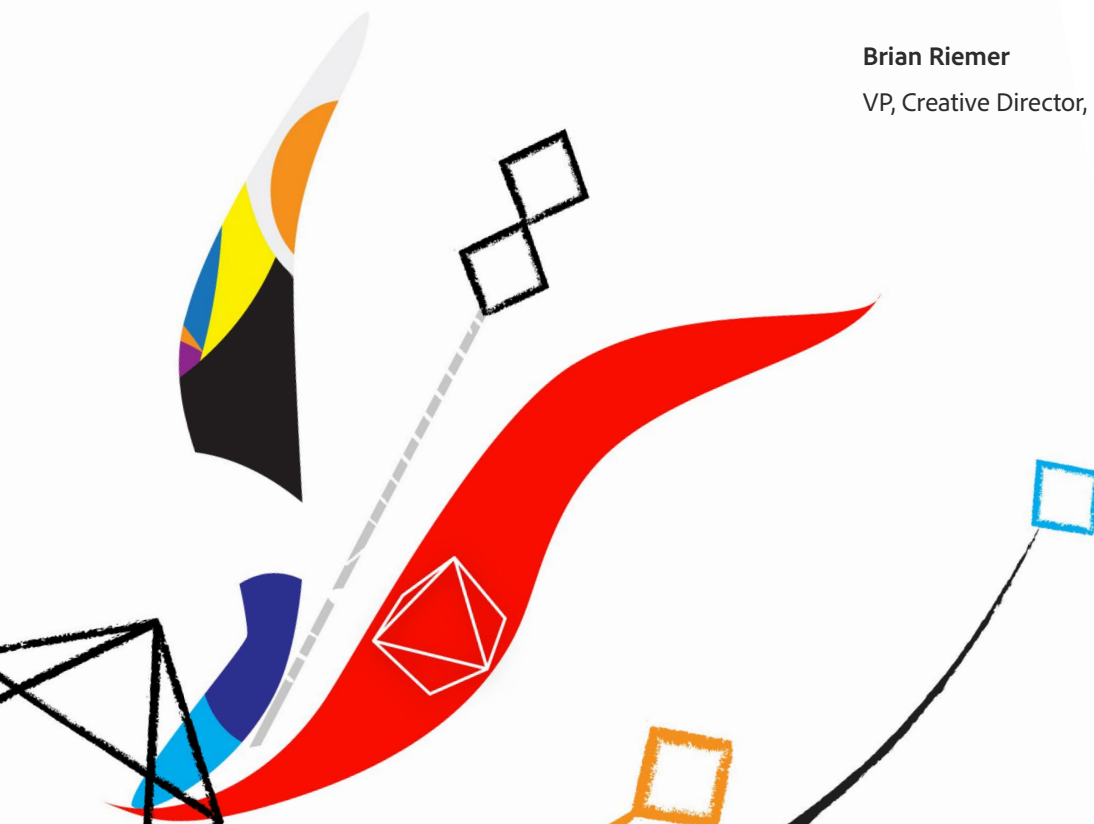
Email, spreadsheets, time trackers, resource allocation, digital asset management, review and approval tools—you name it and your team is using it. You aren't the only one. The average knowledge worker is using up to 28 different cloud apps.²⁶ All these tools may be great on their own, but using too many tools can quickly reduce productivity. Between social networks, personal and professional email, phone calls, and collaboration tools, the average digital worker is distracted every 6 minutes.²⁷ And these distractions are costly. According to the European Parliament Think Tank, it takes on average 25 minutes to resume a task after a distraction.²⁸

Most agencies have legitimate needs for multiple tools, but using too many creates complexity, frustration, and errors. When tools aren't integrated, collaboration becomes cumbersome with near-constant manual updates that can easily lead to errors or outdated information. You can successfully mitigate most of those issues when the tools your agency uses are integrated to automatically update key project information and keep data consolidated. Choosing tools that are easy to integrate will not only save time and improve productivity but will help to pinpoint issues and spot trends in real-time.

“Some people thrive on chaos. I don't. Chaos is distracting, and it's not conducive to creating the best work. In my experience, chaos comes down from management; unfortunately, all too often dysfunction becomes the function. In many places, chaos has become the norm.”²⁹

Brian Riemer

VP, Creative Director, Saatchi & Saatchi



CHALLENGE 6: SOLUTION

Consolidate tools and maximise their usage.

Using one tool to do five tasks is always going to be better than using five tools to do one task. The trick is finding the one tool that can do it all. When evaluating solutions, consider whether a tool can:

- Track all work requests (both project and ad-hoc)
- Track time by resource and by task
- Standardise processes through templates
- Connect communication and collaboration to related work
- Provide easy prioritisation (and re-prioritisation) of work
- Automatically flag projects that are at risk
- Track the progress of the project through its entire lifecycle
- Provide real-time updates
- Generate easy-to-read reports for clients
- Give team members anywhere, anytime access
- Use APIs to integrate other systems such as Adobe creative tools or a CRM

A single, comprehensive tool should be able to provide global visibility into all work processes, improve resource optimisation, facilitate real-time collaboration, run accurate, up-to-date reports, and more.

“ I have three strategies to managing chaos. First, it's essential that you have a process, but that process must be flexible because different projects have different constraints. Every project, no matter what it is or what schedule it has, must have the same Milestones.³⁰

Brian Riemer

VP, Creative Director, Saatchi & Saatchi

Conquer work chaos with Adobe Workfront.

Now that you know how to recognise and avoid the most common agency inefficiencies, all you have to do is make a plan and put it into action. Embracing a more holistic work management approach, like Workfront, will help you:

- Streamline work requests
- Optimise resources
- Improve communications
- Manage multiple work methodologies
- Keep clients happy
- Gain visibility

Get in touch with us today and let us help you overcome the industry challenges and make your agency thrive.

[Get in touch](#)



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