

EBOOK

# 3 PI Planning Problems That Ruin Workflows

...And Products



# Why does all the methodical planning we do still add up to a chaotic scramble to the finish line? Why aren't we catching project-impacting problems in the early stages, and repeating the same mistakes?

This resource will explore the **three most common PI Planning challenges** and aims to give you actionable advice to help you avoid them.

## 1 Inaccurate estimation and planning

Inaccurate estimates and rushed planning will cause problems that impact the increment starting from Day #1.

This can take the form of making overly ambitious commitments, or other missteps early on, that cause inaccurate story point estimates.

The harder (or longer hours) your team works to deliver on time could mean cutting corners, spilled stories, and compromised deadlines, not to mention a plethora of issues when the dust finally settles.



How does this happen? And why does it seemingly happen so often? The most common causes include:

- Aggressive deadlines trying to rush something to market.
- Optimistic estimates rather than realistic ones.
- Not fully appreciating project scope.
- Missed dependencies that keep the team from moving forward, i.e. “We can’t do X until Y is done.”
- Estimating story points based on perceived value (not time required).

Any one of these issues can throw off your estimates. Sadly, most projects will experience more than one challenge impacting their estimation.



#### SOLUTION

Honestly, we could fill an entire whitepaper with tips and strategies on effective PI planning (and even suggest smart estimation tools!). However, we would like to suggest [holding better retrospectives](#) instead.

The best way to ensure the next sprint runs more smoothly is to hold more transparent and open retrospectives, where your team can safely say, “We simply planned too many features.”

It may surprise you that the most common problem affecting your increment isn’t finger-pointing and blame around poor planning. It’s more likely your team is *getting along too well*.

A team that is too polite and resigned during crucial feedback and learning sessions can lead to worse problems. Teams tackling PI Planning are just as susceptible to social dynamics that just don’t benefit teams. Phenomena like groupthink lead to unchallenged assumptions, while something as innocuous as being polite, and staying silent, might limit helpful conversation during planning. If you can eliminate these common issues in our retrospectives, your next project increment will be a real improvement.

## 2

## Tools that don't encourage communication & transparency

Your PI Planning session is supposed to be a productive and dynamic 2-3 day event where teammates contribute ideas and set this sprint up for success. But in far too many cases, engagement levels drop off significantly midway through Day 1, and things deteriorate into one person talking and running the meeting while others tune in and out.



Why does this happen? Did we not prepare enough? Is 3 days too long? Do PI planning sessions simply not work for our team?

There's an excellent chance that your planning and meeting tools are the problem. They might be fine for presentations, but PI planning should not be a presentation. It should be a collaboration.

Most project managers and scrum masters struggle with meeting equity; they have trouble ensuring remote team members 'have a seat at the table' when they're not physically in the room. Technical limitations can kill the vibrant collaboration you're looking for and the collaboration this sprint needs.

At the same time, you try to set your team up for success by choosing the best tools available, whether that's Jira, Azure, Rally, or others. However, we don't have to tell you that those tools have limitations that can cap your success before the increment has even started.

Most notably, **these tools aren't as visual as you may need for PI Planning**. They can't easily provide visibility into cross-team dependencies during planning, unless you use a whiteboard of some kind.

But even if your whiteboard is virtual, you still need to flip between tools to update things, which can be tiring and cause errors.

## ✓ SOLUTION

You need a PI Planning tool that encourages collaboration instead of hindering it. You also need a tool that was purpose-built for agile teams to truly collaborate in the early stages, and maintain a consistent level of **visibility into cross-team dependencies** throughout the entire sprint.

When it comes to bringing in a visual sprint planning tool, it's crucial to make it known that you're not bringing in a tool to replace the backlog. The backlog remains the source of truth while a visual PI Planning tool enhances the experience.

At the same time, the only way to truly address the dreaded fear of double and triple entry is to choose a tool with [bi-directional integration](#). Simply put, if a change is made in the new tool, the backlog in Jira is automatically updated. If a change is made in Jira, the view in your new tool is updated.

This completely eliminates the need for multiple entries, or the need to switch from one tool to another during your ceremony. ↘



See in action by signing up for a no-obligation demo now!

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### 3 Stakeholder misalignment

Depending on your project's needs, multiple stakeholders may be present at (or want to know the outcome of) your PI Planning ceremony. Some of the more non-technical stakeholders may lack awareness of how long it takes to build a specific feature, causing problems down the line.

It's always a struggle to find common ground when there are so many competing priorities and power dynamics at play on an agile team. When it comes to the PI itself, some stakeholders may express frustration because they don't have access to data or project progress. They simply want to know a rough percentage of completion so far, but that's not possible because:

- A. An accurate percentage of completion isn't really possible because of the nature of agile — the goalposts are often moving.
- B. They may not be agile-savvy or have regular access to the backlog tool, so looking at a Jira backlog in list view doesn't mean anything to them.

#### ✓ SOLUTION

While it may not be necessary for everyone in your organization to attend PI Planning or have access to all your project management tools, agreement on project KPI and transparency around project progress should be a given.

Using a visual solution like a [virtual whiteboard or visual collaboration space](#) allows everyone to see everything and contribute. Risks can be managed, and you can course-correct quickly when needed.

If everything is visually represented, non-technical stakeholders don't need a Jira certification diploma to understand what they're looking at. They don't even need a Jira login, for that matter.

## Deliver projects smoother than ever

Now that you've identified three PI Planning problems that derail your projects, let's recap the key takeaways:

- Unrealistic estimates and lack of alignment into project scope at the outset cause issues bound to affect the increment that follows.
- Highly-adopted project management tools might not be visual enough to effectively plan and estimate story points.
- Openly discussing errors made in the previous sprint can improve planning and managing resources.
- Using the right tools can, and will, enhance your existing workflows.
- Visual PI Planning tools can bridge the gap between technical and non-technical stakeholders at all stages of the development process.

Go forth and achieve agile excellence. Here are some resources to get you started:

Sign up for a [free trial](#) of Stormboard and discover the difference a visual PI Planning solution can make.

[SIGN UP](#)

Put these tips into action to enhance your next PI Planning ceremony. Share this eBook with your team.





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