

Principles for Building a  
**World-Class  
Agile Research  
Program**

Since their inception decades ago, traditional market research methods have provided brands with valuable market insights. Over months or years, companies translate these data into new or improved products and services they hope will resonate with customers, based on their original findings. But traditional research methods can no longer keep up with the dynamic nature of modern consumer demands.

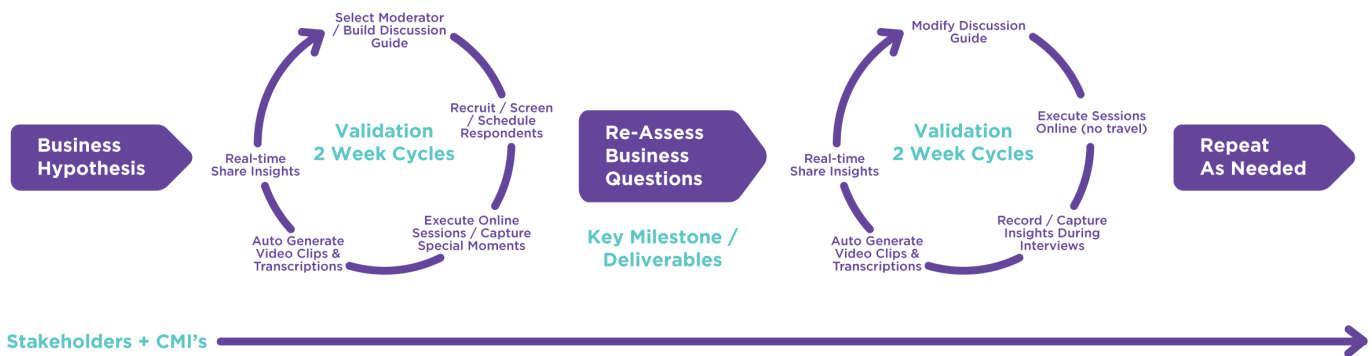
“Consumers are switching brands at unprecedented rates: The crisis has prompted a surge of new activities, with an astonishing 75 percent of US consumers trying a new shopping behavior [driving] a shattering of brand loyalties.”

**McKinsey & Company**

“The great consumer shift: Ten charts that show how US shopping behavior is changing,” August 4, 2020

The traditional principles of consumer research — with its long release cycles, phased development, heavy upfront design, and anticipated results — cannot keep pace with these changes, nor can they achieve the depth global B2C marketers need to remain competitive in this shifting landscape. Indeed, even before the COVID-19 crisis, an unprecedented shift to digital environments has introduced consumers to a greater variety of products and services unavailable to them only a few years ago.

## Agile Market Research Process



Agile Market Research Gets You Into Market Sooner  
with More Consumer Conversation Cycles



# Leading Insights Teams Take a Cue from Agile Software Development

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Fortunately, a new breed of on-demand research methods — agile qualitative research, which draws its principles from agile software development — already provides faster, deeper consumer insights at scale, for greater understanding and actionability across the enterprise.

Instead of following a linear, predetermined path, agile research focuses on conducting research in short “sprints” with stakeholders involved, allowing for more informed adaptation between iterations and greater familiarity among team members as the effort continues. The agile approach resembles a common iteration approach to research, but with more structure—namely, the involvement of non-research team stakeholders in the continuous process.

By inserting stakeholders into research cycles early and often, decision-makers can both contribute to and gain insights from the research process in real time. They can more quickly and confidently act upon those insights in terms of product and service development as well.

CX, UX, and insights teams that use the Discuss.io platform for agile research, for example, often release new products a full fiscal quarter early, crushing their year-over-year expectations. As we will find, much of the technology that supports agile research can be automated, including data collection, collaboration, and project management.

# Origins and Development of the Agile Research Process

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To understand the superiority of the Agile process, we must reflect on where Agile came from and why it represents such a stark difference from traditional market research and product development methods. Brands have long stood by traditional, static market research approaches, often due to familiarity or discomfort with change. Whether they realize it or not, this has created substantial pain points in the research process, namely:

- **Lack of clarity around requirements**

Insights teams are uncertain about how to direct the next phase of the research process, leading to 'analysis paralysis.'

- **Changing requirements that offset existing results**

Stakeholders impose new requirements on research teams, which leads to greater costs from changes and often problems with the product development phase.

- **Research takes too long**

Processes that take only two weeks using Agile methods take up to eight weeks using traditional research; those initiatives take longer when the requirements change while in progress.



- **Poor stakeholder visibility**

The actual product decision-makers can't impact or understand the research process sufficiently while in progress, leading to inadequate results.

An agile research approach solves these problems, allowing brands to run multi-wave projects in real time to quickly gain feedback at key milestones while in progress. The key is adopting agile software development values and applying them to research processes, namely by:

- responding to change intelligently and dynamically rather than simply following a plan
- prioritizing individuals and interactions over processes and tools
- bringing collaboration closer to research touch points rather than in silos and hierarchies
- implementing multiple, rapid iterations instead of singular, extended projects
- prioritizing numerous small experiences over a few large studies

## Nine Agile Principles You Can Apply to Your Research Efforts

- ① Satisfy the Customer
- ② Welcome Change
- ③ Deliver Frequently
- ④ Work as a Team
- ⑤ Maintain Pace
- ⑥ Excel at Quality
- ⑦ Keep it Simple
- ⑧ Evolve Designs
- ⑨ Reflect Regularly



# How Discuss.io Supports the Agile Process

Discuss.io, for example, provides both researchers and stakeholders with dedicated places to pause, incorporate feedback, and iterate new phases at the end of each sprint. Rather than one comprehensive analysis at the end of the research process, stakeholders and insights teams can adapt their approach through value-added techniques and features, including:

- **Adopting a programmatic approach to consumer insights.**  
Discuss.io helps researchers and stakeholders develop programs for customer closeness. They define and assemble the team, technologies, training, processes, strategy and vision required to enable consumer conversations throughout the organization and across all relevant customer, buying, and product lifecycles.
- **Starting sessions quickly with purpose-built tools.**  
Researchers avoid logistics issues and delays by forgoing generic, clunky communication tools designed for other purposes. Discuss.io's entire live video platform is purpose-built for interviewing customers—individually or in groups—to yield valuable qualitative insights.
- **Improving storytelling, accelerating insights-sharing across the organization.**  
Conversations using Discuss.io remove barriers to sharing actionable insights and increase customer closeness across the organization. Share specific moments in interviews, video clip highlights, deep analysis, or live sessions themselves with stakeholders as they take part in the ongoing research development process. Video bookmarking integrated with discussion guides and full text search make finding and sharing “just right” insights simple.
- **Leveraging research support from our teams.**  
Discuss.io's team can become an extension to your own, ensuring you always have an expert to step up when you need one. Our combination of platform technology and services means we meet you “where you are.” Whether you are a DIY organization in need of some service support — like moderation, recruiting, or human translation — or a small team that needs a full suite of research services, we've got you covered.
- **Utilizing all these tools in a single platform built from day one to be integrated and easy to use.**  
Discuss.io provides capabilities that support all stages of the research process:
  - pre-session activities such as recruiting, screening, discussion guide development, and tech checks
  - during interview session features like “Save Moment” (in video), discussion guide interactivity, and support for multiple moderation, observer, and translation roles
  - post-session tools like AI-driven transcription, video editing, and full project search.

Teams can leverage knowledge from each wave to build upon their findings and then integrate insight into the business decision making process with each subsequent iteration for better results. Discuss.io also captures the value of in-person qualitative research in a dedicated online environment, reducing hard costs and increasing efficiencies associated with each individual interaction — one more way digital tools facilitate a more agile approach to research.



# The Three Main Benefits of Agile Research

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We've discussed briefly how agile improves research and how dedicated digital tools can enhance these efforts. But online video tools designed for these efforts can do even more to drive value in terms of product development and customer satisfaction goals:

- **Affordability.** Dedicated video platforms bring the value of in-person interactions online for greater volume and engagement across distances at a fraction of traditional research costs.
- **Actionability.** Digital tools facilitate improved the capturing, sharing, and analyzing of insights from qualitative research, contributing to collaborative processes that characterize agile methods.
- **Accessibility.** Advanced knowledge capture and user functions (e.g., spectating modes, virtual meeting rooms) seamlessly involve a broad range of stakeholders in agile research efforts.

In addition to live participation, researchers can share saved moments and video clips — even entire session recordings — with stakeholders. Researchers can easily provide stakeholders with full access to all their process details and findings as well.

This high “accessibility” applies to the consumer recruitment process as well. In addition to simplifying pathways from global recruitment to consumer engagement, researchers often identify super users who provide especially robust and valuable feedback early in the process. Researchers can easily re-engage these super users later through the platform for deeper insights.

## Two Agile Use Cases

Teams that use Discuss.io to these ends often claim they reduce their time-to-market by as much as one full fiscal quarter as a result of these benefits. They cite their ability to include stakeholders in the process as among the most helpful. As a result, they can easily adapt their work to meet business needs and accelerate their research timelines.

### Use Case #1: A New Protein Drink from an Atypical Brand

In a recent partnership, Discuss.io supported Clorox in their effort to test consumer appeal for a new protein drink the company considered releasing under a Clorox sub-brand. The company did a single sprint every two weeks, analyzed the results, and conducted another sprint in the third week.

The company's stakeholders participated in observing these groups and debriefing with them every time. Their involvement in this continuous process allowed the research team to modify their questions with each iteration, helping them arrive at the insights they needed sooner. Ultimately, stakeholders were connected for the full cycle of development — from concept development, to message testing, to packaging and website design.

## Use Case #2: Testing Brand Familiarity Across Geographies

A well-known and respected global brand sought to understand the differences in their brand's emotional impact on consumers in different countries. Discuss.io quickly launched sessions in multiple countries, enabling researchers to quickly connect company decision-makers to the results.

Consumers responded from China, the U.S., the U.K., and other countries. Senior executives benefited from direct insights from consumers, delivered with ease and at scale. Key stakeholders also contributed to research questions with each iteration in this case.

## Getting Started with Your Agile Research Approach

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With just three or four days of recruiting and two-week agile research sprints using digital tools, you can employ a modern qualitative research process that drives incredible value for some of the world's leading consumer brands. This agile approach allows insights and innovation teams to collaborate and incorporate consumer feedback into product development cycles, capturing valuable insights in just two weeks with processes that might take up to eight weeks using traditional methods.

Start a conversation today that could drive unprecedented value for your brand initiatives.

**Contact an agile research expert at [Discuss.io](#) or book a free demo today.**



