

COMMON DIFFICULTIES WITH JIRA

Issues that Jira users have and how to overcome them.

Jira is an organizational software extremely popularized by Agile systems in the last few years. While there are many benefits to using Jira, such as its ability to maintain a teams' organization and provide real-time updates of where each group is in terms of the stories that are being worked on, the tool is certainly not without flaws that should likely be tweaked and remedied to allow your team to function as strongly as possible.

Ironically, one of the principal issues most people seem to have is that Jira provides the ability for its users to do everything remotely, getting away from the core person-to-person fundamental tenet of Agile. With the ability to view everyone's task on a board and leave comments on tasks as well as having the ability to virtually hand tasks off to another person, it would seem like the whole purpose of Agile was, to an extent, diminished if not almost destroyed. Agile is meant to bring people closer together; it allows for there to be direct communication between each group such as people in testing to communicate to those configuring the tasks. This is one of the biggest Jira remedies you will need to implement. Continue to have daily stand-ups (DSU) and practice core Agile methodology; this is something that should never be replaced by software. Whether you have them in-person, in a conference room, or by phone, each group can continue to give each other updates about how they are performing, what they are currently working on, and if they have any blockers. Daily stand-ups are a great time to be able to communicate with each other, taking the time to thoroughly go through what each group's agenda is and attempting to resolve any problems that may arise not only stays true to the Agile system, but maintains the human interaction which is central to Agile.

Another primary complaint is that Jira tends to be labeled as a "one size fits all" type of software. When you first get Jira, typically only the basic project management features are made available, and extremely useful plugins and features that the community and Atlassian have developed are unavailable. Having to add plugins means that as a company you are going to need to spend additional money to get these plugins that are on top of the monthly subscription that you are already paying. While some can cost a fair amount of money, most of them are a one-time purchase; however, it should be noted that some plugins can only hold a certain number of users, and the more users you have, the more expensive it can get. For many big companies this may be a non-issue; however, for smaller and some medium-sized companies, it can make a difference and you may have to be more selective on what plugins you get. Still, they are valuable to consider and could help your team perform at optimal levels. A few keys to consider are timesheet tracker, custom sheet tracker for your Jira report, and subtask manager, which can be very useful when you have a task you want to complete but need another task to be completed before that gets done.

The last main issue is that Jira may appear quite overwhelming and at times, quite difficult to use if you are a first-time user. For example, if you are looking for a story that you created previously, you have to go into a search bar which can be difficult to navigate. Fortunately, Jira took notice of this and made a "basic" search bar which you should use instead. There are several other complex parts of Jira which can be overwhelming and at times daunting. It is during those times that it is highly recommended to ask others who have more experience than you for help. If there are none, or no one knows, then that is when you need to do some research. The FAQ on the Jira website is a good place to start, or to Jira forums which can have a lot of end-user information for you. If all else fails, search it online. You will likely not be the only person asking questions about this complex piece of software.

Jira can be a very useful piece of software, and one that can make your Agile team much more fluid and organized, although it is not without its flaws. Don't be afraid to customize the tool as much as you can so you and your team can get the most out of it.



This TIP was written by Trexin Analyst, Santiago Velasquez. Santiago welcomes comments and discussion on this topic and can be reached at santiago.velasquez@trexin.com.
