Deliver work in agile sprints: the playbook

Example: a chain of 40 hardware stores in Monterrey, Mexico, switching its online ordering project from a nine-month plan to two-week sprints. All six stages, from the guided tour.

The playbook at a glance

1. What do customers value, and where does work wait?
   Parts on site before noon, so the crew isn't left waiting matters to most customers and gets nothing in the plan, which spends a big part on **product photos** and **customer reviews**
2. What should we build first?
   A walking skeleton of 14 stories, end to end across 5 activities
3. Who decides what, and what counts as done?
   Three accountabilities filled, and a 4-part Definition of Done
4. What happens in each sprint, and how long does it take?
   Sprint 3 fits: 48 of about 52.5 person-days, with one Sprint Goal
5. What happens to requests that arrive mid-sprint?
   Only 6 of 64 requests need to interrupt the sprint
6. How do you know it is working?
   4 measures, each with an owner and a target

STAGE 1 OF 6

What do customers value, and where does work wait?

Stage 1 diagnosis

Parts on site before noon, so the crew isn't left waiting matters to most customers and gets nothing in the plan, which spends a big part on **product photos** and **customer reviews**

Value, in one sentence: **"The right parts on site before noon, at a time contractors can trust"**

What customers value most: **Parts on site before noon, so the crew isn't left waiting** (11 of 12); **knowing the part is in stock before ordering** (10 of 12); **a delivery time they can plan the day around** (9 of 12).

Against today's plan: **Product photos** and **customer reviews** take a big part of the plan, though few customers asked for them. **Parts on site before noon, so the crew isn't left waiting** and **a delivery time they can plan the day around** matter to half or more of the customers, and the plan has none of them.

Reordering a past order, from request to release: **47 days: 39 waiting, 8 worked on (17% of the time).**

The longest wait: **Tested, with everything else in the release:** 12 days, held for a batch or release.

Batches: **16 of the 39 waiting days were work held until a set was ready to hand on.**

What this may mean

The plan and what customers value point different ways. Sprints would deliver the wrong things sooner, so the order of the work has to change first.

Investigate next

In stage 2, map the work in the order a customer meets it, and pick the walking skeleton: the fewest features that let a customer get from one end of it to the other.

Days are calendar days, waiting and worked together, so the total is how long a customer waited for the feature.

The other three lean principles, flow, pull and perfection, are what sprints deliver: small pieces moving without batches, work started only when there is room for it, and a retrospective that changes one thing each time.

What customers value

VALUE

"The right parts on site before noon, at a time contractors can trust" Online ordering with same-day delivery, for building contractors and homeowners

WHAT THEY VALUE	CUSTOMERS WHO SAID IT	SHARE OF TODAY'S PLAN
Parts on site before noon, so the crew isn't left waiting Customers want it; the plan has none	11 of 12	None of it
Knowing the part is in stock before ordering	10 of 12	Some of it
A delivery time they can plan the day around Customers want it; the plan has none	9 of 12	None of it
Reordering a past order in a few clicks	6 of 12	Some of it
Account credit for contractors	5 of 12	Some of it
Product photos The plan spends on it; few customers asked	2 of 12	**A big part of it**
Customer reviews The plan spends on it; few customers asked	1 of 12	**A big part of it**

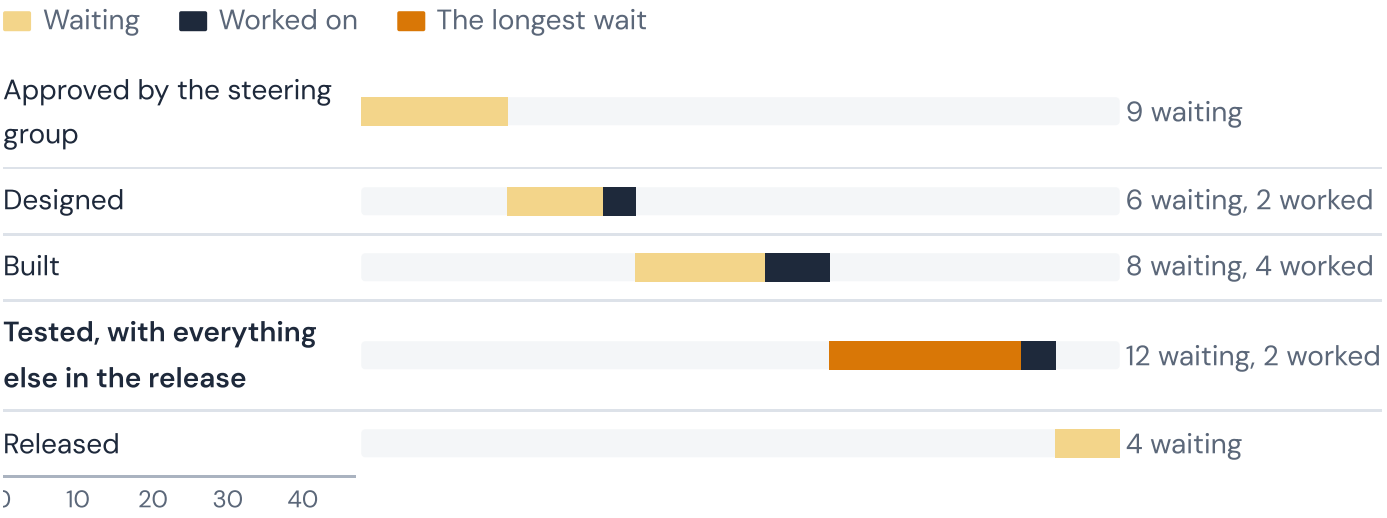
Flagged: a big part of the plan that a quarter or fewer of the customers asked for, and lines half or more asked for that the plan has none of.

Where reordering a past order spent its time

47
days from request to release

39
days waiting, 83% of the time

8
days worked on, 17% of the time



STEP	DAYS WAITING	DAYS WORKED	WHY IT WAITED
Approved by the steering group	9	–	A meeting or approval
Designed	6	2	People busy with other work
Built	8	4	People busy with other work
Tested, with everything else in the release	12	2	Held for a batch or release
Released	4	–	Held for a batch or release
Total: 47 days	**39**	**8**	

The highlighted step held it longest: a batch, work held until a set was ready.

The five lean principles

✓ **1. Value**	Defined by 12 customers: “The right parts on site before noon, at a time contractors can trust”
✓ **2. Value stream**	Followed: Reordering a past order, 47 days, 17% of it worked on.
– **3. Flow**	Stages 2 and 4: small slices released every sprint, instead of batches.
– **4. Pull**	Stage 4: each sprint takes on only what fits.
– **5. Perfection**	Each retrospective changes one thing; every quarter, follow one piece of work again, as here.

DECISION POINT

Build around what customers value

The plan spends most on product photos and customer reviews, which few customers asked for. Customers care most about parts on site before noon, so the crew isn't left waiting. Stage 2 reorders the work around value.

STAGE 2 OF 6

What should we build first?

Stage 2 diagnosis

A walking skeleton of 14 stories, end to end across 5 activities

The backbone: **5 activities, in the order a customer meets them.**

The walking skeleton: **14 stories: a customer can get from one end to the other.**

The next release: **12 stories.**

Later: **34 stories, ordered behind them.**

What this may mean

A customer can get from one end to the other in the first release, with one option where there will later be many. It should feel slightly inadequate: what people learn from using it usually changes the later slices.

Investigate next

In stage 3, name who orders this backlog and can say no to requests, and write down what counts as done.

Read the map left to right for the customer's journey, and top to bottom for the order. A release counts everything in the releases before it, and an activity marked as already working counts as covered.

The order of the stories within each release is the backlog's order: the team takes them from the top in each sprint.

The backlog as a story map

Activities run across the top, in the order a user does them. Read left to right for the journey, top to bottom for the order.

	1 Find the part	2 Check it is in stock	3 Order and pay	4 Choose a delivery time	5 Receive it on site
Walking skeleton (live after sprint 3) End to end	Search by name Search by product code Product page with price and pack size	Stock at the nearest store Nearest store worked out from the site address	Basket Card payment only Order confirmation by email Store staff see new orders to pick	One morning delivery window Site address and a contact phone	A text message when the van leaves Driver's list of the day's drops Mark as delivered, with a photo
Next release End to end	Filters by size and material Recently ordered parts	Stock across all 40 stores Hold the stock while paying	Account credit for contractors Reorder a past order Monthly invoice for a contractor account	Hourly delivery windows Same-day cut-off shown before paying	Live tracking Report a missing or wrong part Site directions for the driver
Later	Search suggestions as you type Contractor price lists Product photos Customer reviews Compare two products Related products Bulk price breaks shown Product videos Wish lists Price match request Saved searches Site in English as well as Spanish Mobile app Newsletter sign-up	Alert when a part is back in stock Click and collect at the store	Approval of large orders by the site manager Quote requests for large orders Saved site addresses Pay on delivery Several buyers on one account Discount codes Split payment across two cards Order history export Gift cards Loyalty points Live chat	Evening delivery Weekend delivery Delivery fee by distance Choose the van size	Returns booked online Rate the driver Delivery to a gate code

What each release lets a customer do

- **Walking skeleton (live after sprint 3):** 14 stories, for find the part, check it is in stock, order and pay, choose a delivery time, receive it on site. A customer can get from one end to the other.
- **Next release:** 12 stories, for find the part, check it is in stock, order and pay, choose a delivery time, receive it on site. A customer can get from one end to the other.
- **Later:** 34 stories, for find the part, check it is in stock, order and pay, choose a delivery time, receive it on site. Ordered behind the rest.

The backlog, in order

The walking skeleton first, then the next release, then the rest. Each sprint takes stories from the top.

Walking skeleton (live after sprint 3): 14 stories

ORDER	USER STORY	ACTIVITY
1	**Search by name**	Find the part
2	**Search by product code**	Find the part
3	**Product page with price and pack size**	Find the part
4	**Stock at the nearest store**	Check it is in stock
5	**Nearest store worked out from the site address**	Check it is in stock
6	**Basket**	Order and pay
7	**Card payment only**	Order and pay
8	**Order confirmation by email**	Order and pay
9	**Store staff see new orders to pick**	Order and pay
10	**One morning delivery window**	Choose a delivery time
11	**Site address and a contact phone**	Choose a delivery time
12	**A text message when the van leaves**	Receive it on site
13	**Driver's list of the day's drops**	Receive it on site
14	**Mark as delivered, with a photo**	Receive it on site

Next release: 12 stories

ORDER	USER STORY	ACTIVITY
15	Stock across all 40 stores	Check it is in stock
16	Account credit for contractors	Order and pay
17	Hourly delivery windows	Choose a delivery time
18	Live tracking	Receive it on site
19	Reorder a past order	Order and pay
20	Filters by size and material	Find the part
21	Same-day cut-off shown before paying	Choose a delivery time
22	Hold the stock while paying	Check it is in stock
23	Monthly invoice for a contractor account	Order and pay
24	Report a missing or wrong part	Receive it on site
25	Recently ordered parts	Find the part
26	Site directions for the driver	Receive it on site

▼ Later: 34 stories, in order

ORDER	USER STORY	ACTIVITY
27	Evening delivery	Choose a delivery time
28	Approval of large orders by the site manager	Order and pay
29	Quote requests for large orders	Order and pay
30	Alert when a part is back in stock	Check it is in stock
31	Saved site addresses	Order and pay
32	Weekend delivery	Choose a delivery time
33	Search suggestions as you type	Find the part
34	Pay on delivery	Order and pay
35	Returns booked online	Receive it on site
36	Contractor price lists	Find the part
37	Delivery fee by distance	Choose a delivery time
38	Several buyers on one account	Order and pay
39	Product photos	Find the part
40	Customer reviews	Find the part
41	Compare two products	Find the part
42	Click and collect at the store	Check it is in stock
43	Choose the van size	Choose a delivery time
44	Related products	Find the part
45	Bulk price breaks shown	Find the part
46	Discount codes	Order and pay
47	Rate the driver	Receive it on site
48	Split payment across two cards	Order and pay
49	Product videos	Find the part
50	Wish lists	Find the part
51	Order history export	Order and pay
52	Price match request	Find the part
53	Gift cards	Order and pay
54	Delivery to a gate code	Receive it on site
55	Saved searches	Find the part
56	Loyalty points	Order and pay
57	Site in English as well as Spanish	Find the part
58	Live chat	Order and pay
59	Mobile app	Find the part
60	Newsletter sign-up	Find the part

DECISION POINT

Take the backlog to stage 3

A customer can get from one end to the other in the first release, with 14 stories. It should feel slightly inadequate: what people learn from using it shapes the rest.

STAGE 3 OF 6

Who decides what, and what counts as done?

Stage 3 diagnosis

Three accountabilities filled, and a 4-part Definition of Done

Product Owner: **The e-commerce manager, one person, who can turn down requests, in writing. The people who send requests have been told.**

Scrum Master: **The tester, with about half their time.**

Developers: **7 people, in 3 roles.**

Product Goal: **“Contractors order online and get parts on site before noon”**

Definition of Done: **4 items; finished means checked or tested, in customers' hands, explained.**

What this may mean

The authority over the backlog is settled and done means usable. Stage 4 turns this into a fixed rhythm.

Investigate next

In stage 4, set the sprint length and the five events, and plan the first sprint with one Sprint Goal.

Scrum has three accountabilities, three artifacts and five events. Since 2020 each artifact carries a commitment: the Product Backlog its Product Goal, the Sprint Backlog its Sprint Goal, and the Increment its Definition of Done.

In Scrum, the designer and tester count as Developers too: everyone doing the work.

The Scrum team

KIND	PART	WHAT IT IS FOR	YOUR TEAM
Accountability	**Product Owner**	The product's value, and the order of the backlog	The e-commerce manager, with authority to turn down requests, in writing
Accountability	**Scrum Master**	The team's effectiveness, and removing what blocks it	The tester, with about half their time
Accountability	**Developers**	A usable piece of product every sprint	5 developers, 1 designer, 1 tester (7 people)
Artifact	**Product Backlog, with its Product Goal**	One longer-term aim the backlog is ordered against	“Contractors order online and get parts on site before noon”
Artifact	**Sprint Backlog, with its Sprint Goal**	One reason this sprint is worth running	Set at each Sprint Planning, in stage 4
Artifact	**Increment, with its Definition of Done**	What finished means	Reviewed by a second developer; Tested on a phone; Live at one store; Help page updated

What the Definition of Done covers

✓ **Checked or tested**	Reviewed by a second developer; Tested on a phone
✓ **In customers' hands**	Live at one store
✓ **Explained**	Help page updated

DECISION POINT

Take the team to stage 4

The authority over the backlog is settled and done means usable.

STAGE 4 OF 6

What happens in each sprint, and how long does it take?

Stage 4 diagnosis

Sprint 3 fits: 48 of about 52.5 person-days, with one Sprint Goal

Before you rely on this

- No time kept for urgent work yet. Stage 5 works out how much, from the requests that arrive.

The rhythm: **2-week sprints: Sprint Planning up to about 4 hours, the Sprint Review 2 hours, the Retrospective 1.5 hours, and the Daily Scrum 15 minutes.**

Capacity: **About 52.5 person-days for user stories, from 7 people, once leave, the events and refinement are taken out.**

Sprint 3: **6 stories, 48 person-days (91% of capacity).**

Sprint Goal: **“Contractors near two pilot stores can order, pay and choose the morning delivery”**

Sprint Goals met: **1 of the last 2 sprints.**

Sprint Planning took: **5, then 2.5 hours, against a timebox of about 4 hours.**

Last sprint: **5 of 6 stories finished, 44 person-days.**

What this may mean

The plan fits the team's time and has one reason behind it. Hold the events to their timeboxes: they are ceilings, not targets.

Investigate next

Run the sprint. In stage 5, log the requests that arrive mid-sprint, so only real emergencies break it.

Timeboxes are scaled from the Scrum Guide's, which are given for a one-month sprint: Sprint Planning up to 8 hours, the Review 4, the Retrospective 3. The Daily Scrum is 15 minutes whatever the length.

Capacity counts working days, takes out leave, each person's time in the events, about a tenth for refinement and any share kept for urgent work. After a sprint or two, what the team finished is the better guide.

The sprint at a glance

52.5	**48**	**44**

person-days the team can give to stories	planned, in 6 stories	finished in sprint 2

The events

EVENT	TIMEBOX	WHEN	WHAT IT IS FOR
Sprint Planning	Up to about 4 hours	Day 1, Mon 15 Feb	Why this sprint is worth running (the Sprint Goal), which stories, and how
Daily Scrum	15 minutes	Every morning	The Developers replan the day against the Sprint Goal
Refinement (not an event)	*About a tenth of the team's time*	*Day 6, Mon 22 Feb, and as needed*	*Next sprint's stories made small and clear enough to plan*
Sprint Review	Up to about 2 hours	Day 10, Fri 26 Feb	Customers and stakeholders use what was built; the backlog changes
Sprint Retrospective	Up to about 1.5 hours	Day 10, Fri 26 Feb	One change to how the team works, tried next sprint
The Sprint	Two weeks	Mon 15 Feb to Fri 26 Feb	A usable Increment, and the Sprint Goal met

Sprint 3's plan

SPRINT GOAL

"Contractors near two pilot stores can order, pay and choose the morning delivery"

ORDER	USER STORY	ACTIVITY	PERSON-DAYS
1	**Store staff see new orders to pick**	Order and pay	9
2	**One morning delivery window**	Choose a delivery time	8
3	**Site address and a contact phone**	Choose a delivery time	7
4	**A text message when the van leaves**	Receive it on site	9
5	**Driver's list of the day's drops**	Receive it on site	8
6	**Mark as delivered, with a photo**	Receive it on site	7
Total, of about 52.5 person-days			48

How each sprint went

SPRINT	SPRINT GOAL	MET	FINISHED	PLANNING TOOK	RETROSPECTIVE CHANGE
1	**Contractors can find a part and see its price**	No	3 of 6 (21 person-days)	5 hours	Split stories smaller before planning
2	**A contractor can check stock, fill a basket and pay by card**	Yes	5 of 6 (44 person-days)	2.5 hours	Refinement twice a week, an hour each

Sprint Goals met: 1 of 2. Sprint Planning's timebox: about 4 hours.

DECISION POINT

Run sprint 3

The plan fits and has one reason behind it. In stage 5, log the requests that arrive mid-sprint.

STAGE 5 OF 6

What happens to requests that arrive mid-sprint?

Stage 5 diagnosis

Only 6 of 64 requests need to interrupt the sprint

Before you rely on this

- Many requests go elsewhere. If most are the same question, a short answer the senders can find themselves, such as a status page, saves both sides.

The log: **64 requests in 14 days.**

Do (urgent and important): **6 (9%): the only kind that interrupts the sprint.**

Schedule (important, not urgent): **21 (33%): into the backlog, for the Product Owner to order.**

Delegate (urgent, not important): **29 (45%): answered outside the team.**

Delete (neither): **8 (13%): stopped.**

Senior senders: **2 of their 13 requests landed in Do (15%), against 4 of 51 from everyone else (8%).**

Kept for urgent work: **About 14% of each sprint: one person on duty in a team of 7.**

What this may mean

Each kind of request has a rule, and only the Do quadrant reaches the team mid-sprint. The sprint can keep its goal.

Investigate next

Keep about 14% of each sprint free for the Do requests in stage 4, and in stage 6 choose the measures that show whether the switch is working.

The matrix is for interruptions, not for ordering the backlog: important requests that can wait go to the Product Owner, who orders them with everything else.

Kept for urgent work: the on-duty person's share of their time, divided by the team's size, as a share of each sprint.

The matrix

	URGENT It can't wait until next sprint	NOT URGENT It can wait
IMPORTANT It matters if never done	**Do** **6** 9% of requests **Fixed now by one developer, a different one each week. The only kind that interrupts the sprint.** – Delivery slots all showing full – Checkout fails on phones – Order confirmation emails not sending and 3 more	**Schedule** **21** 33% of requests **Into the backlog, for the Product Owner to order.** – Return a wrong part online – Invoices with the site name on them – Price list per contractor and 18 more
NOT IMPORTANT Nobody would miss it	**Delegate** **29** 45% of requests **Answered by the stores' support desk.** – "When will my store go live?" ×21 – Customer asking about an invoice – Can we refund a delivery fee? and 6 more	**Delete** **8** 13% of requests **Stopped, and the sender told.** – Colors to match the store signs exactly – Rename "Basket" to "Cart" and back – A weekly report nobody opened and 5 more

Kept for urgent work

14% of each sprint kept free for urgent work	**6** urgent requests in 14 days

Who asked

Senior people

2 of 13 in Do (15%)

Everyone else

4 of 51 in Do (8%)

Seniority isn't deciding the sort: both groups land in Do at similar rates.

Every request

▼ **Do: 6 requests**

REQUEST	WHO SENT IT
Delivery slots all showing full	Regional director (senior)
Checkout fails on phones	Store manager
Order confirmation emails not sending	Store manager
Online orders not reaching the Apodaca store	Store manager
Wrong prices online for cement	Regional director (senior)
Card payments declined at checkout	Store manager

▼ Schedule: 21 requests

REQUEST	WHO SENT IT
Return a wrong part online	Store manager
Invoices with the site name on them	Store manager
Price list per contractor	Store manager
Several buyers on one contractor account	Store manager
Show stock at every store	Regional director (senior)
Evening delivery window	Regional director (senior)
A photo when the order is dropped off	Store manager
Bulk discount for 50 bags or more	Regional director (senior)
Weekend delivery	Regional director (senior)
Order from a phone with one hand	Store manager
Reorder a past order	Store manager
Quote requests for large orders	Regional director (senior)
Track the van	Regional director (senior)
A new product category: garden and outdoor	Regional director (senior)
Search by product code from the paper catalog	Store manager
Spanish product names checked	Store manager
Saved site addresses for contractors	Store manager
Delivery to a gate code	Store manager
Approval of large orders by the site manager	Store manager
Account credit for regular contractors	Regional director (senior)
Pick-up at the store counter	Store manager

▼ Delegate: 29 requests

REQUEST	WHO SENT IT
"When will my store go live?"	Store manager, store 1
"When will my store go live?"	Store manager, store 8
Customer asking about an invoice	Store manager
"When will my store go live?"	Store manager, store 15
"When will my store go live?"	Store manager, store 3
"When will my store go live?"	Store manager, store 10
Can we refund a delivery fee?	Store manager
"When will my store go live?"	Store manager, store 17
"When will my store go live?"	Store manager, store 5
How do I reset a customer's password?	Store manager
"When will my store go live?"	Store manager, store 12
"When will my store go live?"	Store manager, store 19
"When will my store go live?"	Store manager, store 7
Printer at the counter not printing orders	Store manager
"When will my store go live?"	Store manager, store 14
"When will my store go live?"	Store manager, store 21
"When will my store go live?"	Store manager, store 2
"When will my store go live?"	Store manager, store 9
Where do I see today's online orders?	Store manager
"When will my store go live?"	Store manager, store 16
"When will my store go live?"	Store manager, store 4
Wrong address on an order	Store manager
"When will my store go live?"	Store manager, store 11
A customer wants to pay in cash	Store manager
"When will my store go live?"	Store manager, store 18
"When will my store go live?"	Store manager, store 6
Can a customer change the delivery time?	Store manager
"When will my store go live?"	Store manager, store 13
"When will my store go live?"	Store manager, store 20

▼ **Delete: 8 requests**

REQUEST	WHO SENT IT
Colors to match the store signs exactly	Regional director (senior)
Rename "Basket" to "Cart" and back	Store manager
A weekly report nobody opened	Regional director (senior)
Daily email of every order to every manager	Store manager
A banner for a sale that ended	Store manager
A second copy of the monthly sales export	Store manager
A pop-up asking for a newsletter sign-up	Regional director (senior)
Move the logo two pixels left	Store manager

DECISION POINT

Protect the sprint, and go to stage 6

Only the Do quadrant reaches the team mid-sprint; keep about 14% of each sprint free for it. Tell the senders where each kind of request now goes.

STAGE 6 OF 6

How do you know it is working?

Stage 6 diagnosis

4 measures, each with an owner and a target

The measures: **4 measures.**

By type: **1 key performance indicator, 2 performance indicators, 1 result indicator.**

What they count: **2 on what customers get, 2 on how work flows.**

Reviewed: **Every month, against targets for 6 months ahead.**

What this may mean

Each measure has a type, an owner who can move it and a target, and the set covers what customers get. Reviewed every month, it shows whether the switch is working.

Investigate next

Book the first review now, and each quarter trace one recent feature from request to release again, as in stage 1.

The four types: a key result indicator shows how the business did overall, for the board; a result indicator what several teams produced between them; a performance indicator what one team can be held to; a key performance indicator one of the few measures that move everything else.

Velocity stays useful inside the team: the Sprint Planning Tool records what each sprint finished, for the next plan.

The measures

MEASURE	TYPE	OWNER	START	TARGET, IN 6 MONTHS	CHECK
Orders on site before noon What customers get	Key performance indicator	Head of logistics	–	90%	Ready
Days from request to release How work flows	Performance indicator	The Scrum Master	47	15	Ready
Sprint Goals met, last six sprints How work flows	Performance indicator	The Developers	–	5 of 6	Ready
Online orders a week What customers get	Result indicator	The Product Owner	0	500	Ready

The four types

1 **Key result indicator**

How the business did overall; for the board

None of yours

2 **Result indicator**

What several teams produced between them

Online orders a week

3 **Performance indicator**

What one team can be held to

Days from request to release; Sprint Goals met, last six sprints

4 **Key performance indicator**

The few measures that move everything else

Orders on site before noon

When to look

- **Every month:** each owner reports their measure against its target; the Sprint Review is a good place for it.
- **By May 2027:** compare every measure with its target, and drop any that changed no decision.
- **Every quarter:** trace one recent feature from request to release with the Lean Principles tool, as in stage 1, and compare the days with the start.

DECISION POINT

Ready to review

Book the first review now, and compare with the targets by May 2027.

Made with the free Agile Project Management Tool at whichframework.org/tools/agile-project-management-tool.html: all six stages of the "Deliver work in agile sprints" playbook. Figures are from your data; the diagnosis describes what such patterns often point to, not proven causes.