

AH≡AD

The Role of Agility in Digital Transformation



In today's business world, speed is king. The ability to produce high-quality digital products at a rapid pace is the key to better efficiency, more revenue, and happier customers. In other words, accelerated innovation has become a business requirement – not an option.

Organizations that innovate faster are more likely to remain competitive and thrive in the increasingly digital economy. However, as enterprises adopt more modern applications to make things happen more quickly, they are often presented with a whole new set of challenges. Here, we'll explore some of those obstacles and map out a strategy for overcoming them by embracing agility across the organization.



Common Challenges of Accelerated Innovation

One of the key challenges that many organizations face is a **lack of alignment**. So many organizations still place heavy emphasis on hierarchical org charts and operate with the assumption that those higher in the ranks should be the ones who have a clearer understanding of strategy and direction. Meanwhile, those lower on the chart are viewed as the “doers” – they don’t need to understand the big picture; they just need tasks and requirements to go execute. This leads to many unintentional problems—most notably that the “doers” don’t really understand the business context of the work they are doing. Therefore, they often don’t understand why certain work is prioritized over other items that they may perceive as being more interesting or worthwhile. From this comes tension, lack of an understanding of measures of success, and many activities being driven by assumptions rather than clear hypotheses or empirical data.

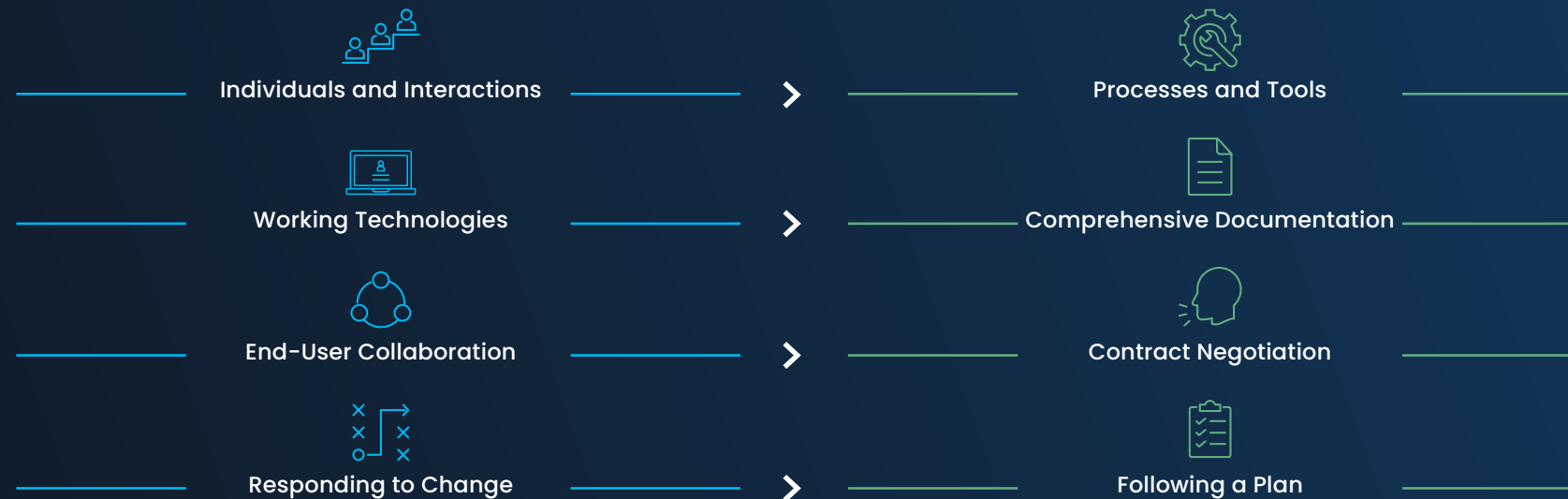
Ultimately, this brings about a **lack of accountability**. The “doers” are viewed as less important than the work and adopt the mindset of just ‘getting stuff done,’ even if it takes working nights and weekends to make it happen. Work then stagnates, and waterfall processes take precedence to give the illusion that the “doers” are working on the right things and delivering value that drives the organization forward.

As many who have had hands-on technical roles can attest, this creates a mentality of **project over product**. As long as we deliver *something* that addresses as many requirements as possible—on time and on budget—then surely, we have delivered the right thing. No need to pay attention to any measures or KPIs, or figure out whether those requirements we gathered months or perhaps years ago are still valid.

Embracing an Agility Transformation

In order for an organization to truly follow through with their digital transformation, they must also embrace agility transformation. The two go hand-in-hand, and one cannot exist without the other.

Agile is often mistaken as a particular framework, such as scrum or SAFe. Therefore, it may better serve organizations to use the term agility rather than just agile. True business agility is the prioritization of these core values across people, processes, and tools within all levels an organization:



In order to effectively progress on the journey toward digital transformation, an organization must fundamentally embrace individuals and interactions, working technologies, end-user collaboration, and responding to change OVER processes and tools, comprehensive documentation, contract negotiation, and rigidly following a plan. This is not to say that anything on the right isn't needed or doesn't have value, but they are less vital and shouldn't be implemented at the expense of the items on the left.

Barriers to Successful Transformation

There are some common root causes for why organizations fall on their transformation journeys. This is certainly not an exhaustive list, but it covers many of the most frequent barriers that we see, no matter the industry. It is important to note that many of these barriers are caused by a lack of business agility – not necessarily a lack of agile practices.



Software delivery is too slow, creating a perception that IT is a barrier to innovation.



IT can be difficult to do business with. Business peers want simple and easy-to-consume services.



Inflexibility to meet changing business demands due to legacy technical debt.



There's very little transparency into the business impact and general performance of IT.



Innovation must be funded by savings from operations, which are difficult to find.



Siloed org structures, talent shortages, and lack of change management strategies hurt transformation efforts.



Cost overruns and security holes are rampant when moving to the cloud.



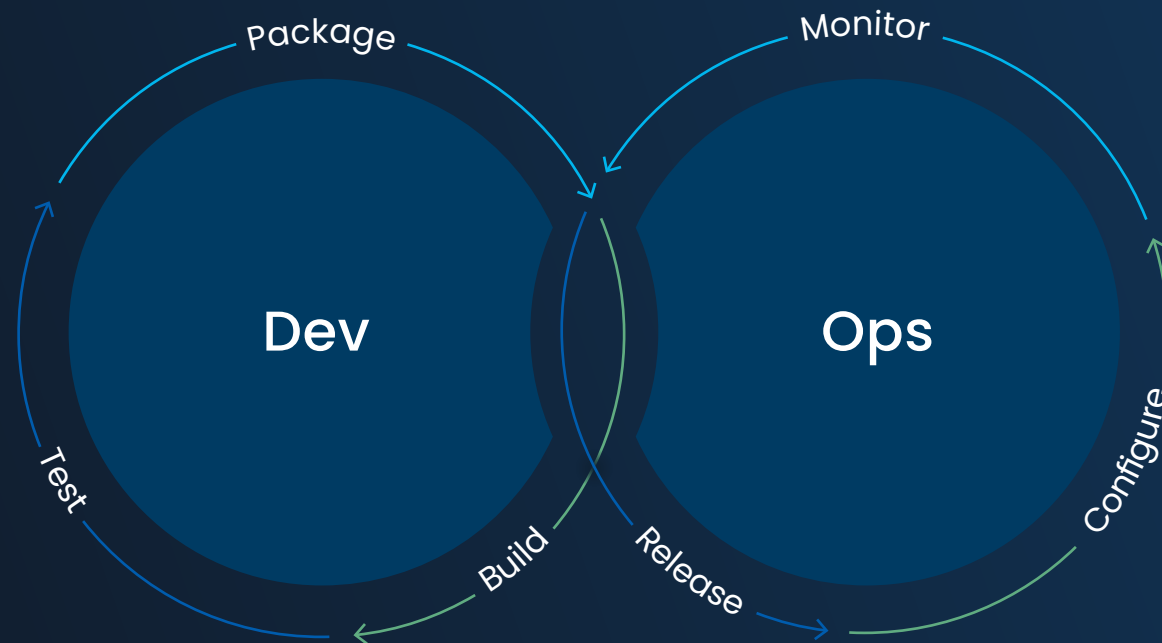
Security threats and compliance requirements continue to outpace IT's ability to respond.

So, why do most organizations refuse to change? In a nutshell, because they view agility as a delivery methodology rather than a fundamental culture and practice transformation for IT.

DevSecOps Requires Strong Agile Practices

DevSecOps processes and tools with defined org-wide standards and guardrails are certainly necessary, but don't give us the full picture. They must be utilized in tandem with agile individuals and interactions.

This can be illustrated using a famous quote by IT executive Christopher Little: "DevSecOps isn't about automation, just as astronomy isn't about telescopes." DevSecOps generally needs automation, but also requires cultural norms and architectures that allow for the shared goals to be achieved throughout the IT value stream.



AHEAD Agility Philosophy

So, how do we think about this at AHEAD?

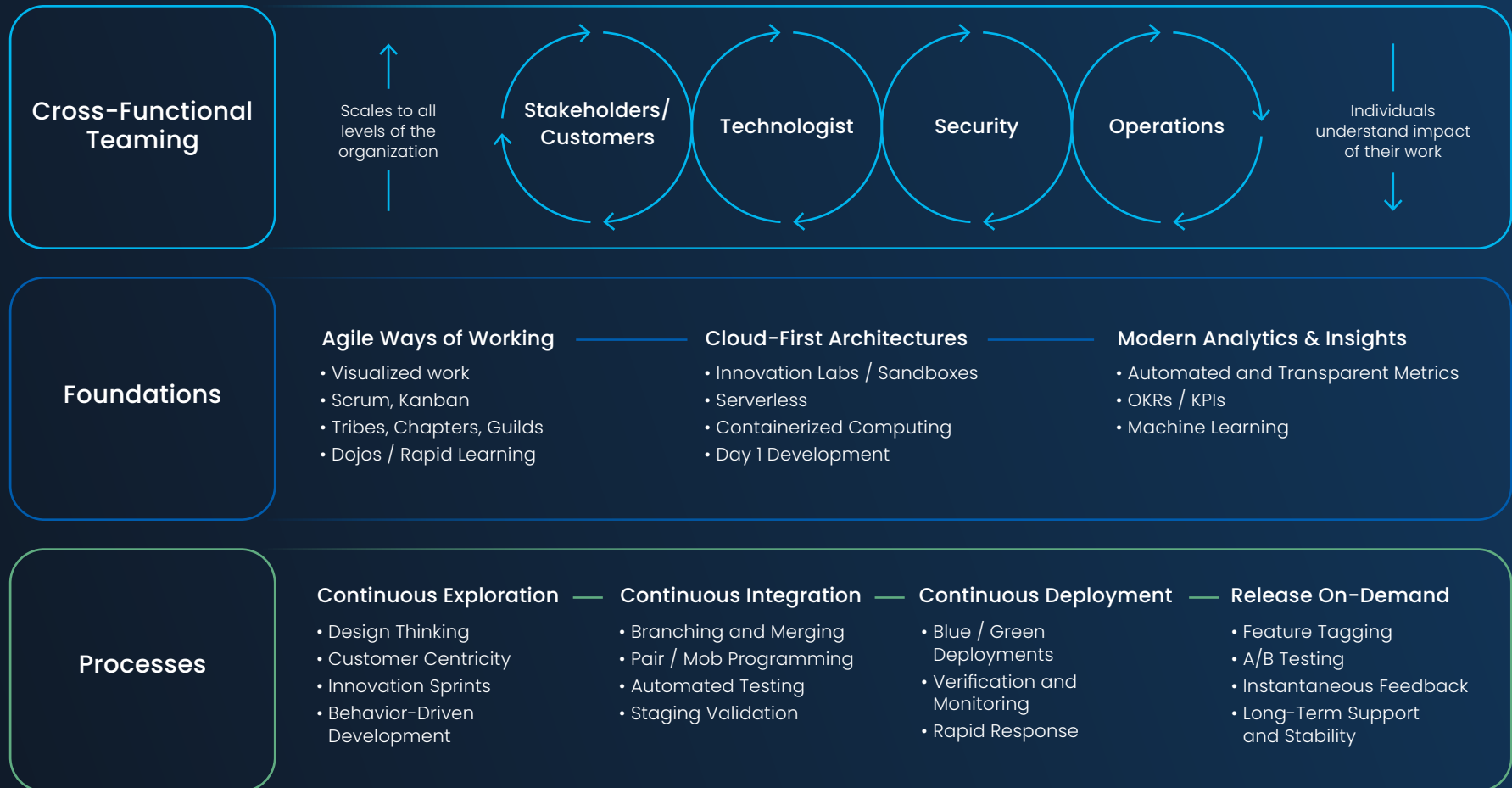
For starters, true business agility requires cross-functional teaming. Put simply, business stakeholders must be willing to roll up their sleeves and work with the aforementioned “doers” on a daily basis. Business and technology must be on the same side of the table, focused on delivering the best possible outcomes to those that are actually utilizing IT. We refer to these as internal and external customers.

In order for this to work effectively, three foundations are required. The first is **agile ways of working**, which most organizations have some sort of practice in place to address. But agile isn't the only foundation. Organizations must think about flexible **architectures**, leveraging either public or private cloud operation models. They must also be focused on **modern analytics and insights**. The most critical component here being objectives and key results tied to actual business value delivery – not just a mechanism to force arbitrary deliverable deadlines.

From an execution perspective, true agility transformation can only be achieved by adopting a culture and a mindset of continuous exploration, integration, deployment, and the ability to release on-demand.



AHEAD Agility Philosophy



AHEAD Maturity Assessment

What we often find is that no organization is ever starting their transformation journey completely from square one. This is especially true from the perspective of agile ways of working and DevSecOps. For example, agile has been around for quite some time now—the original Manifesto was published in 2002. For this reason, we adopt a meet you where you are mentality, leveraging any existing good practices that an organization may have rather than insisting that they start from scratch.

However, what we do frequently see are very disjointed or siloed transformation efforts. Often, agile transformations are attempted without a consideration for DevSecOps practices. It is even more rare to see this tied to an overarching cloud strategy driven by an actual rigor around measuring business impacts with real-time data and analytics.

With this in mind, we assess the maturity of our customers' people, processes, and tools by answering key questions across four categories that help provide a clear vision of an organization's agility journey:



AHEAD Maturity Assessment

Agile Ways of Working

- How well are the Agile values and principles adopted?
- Is work aligned to business priorities and objectives?
- Are individuals enabled and empowered by the business?

DevSecOps

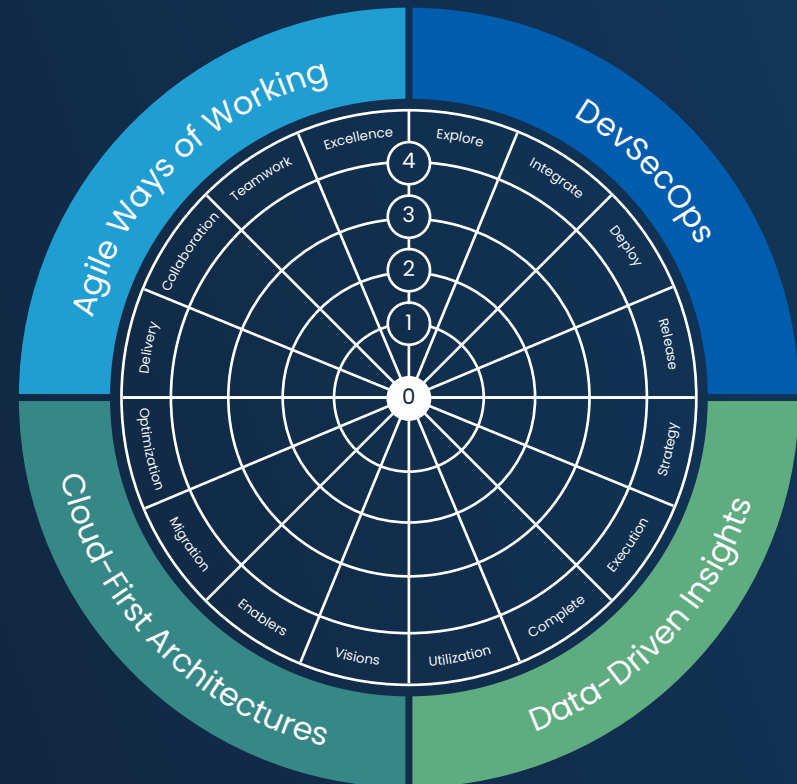
- Is technology aligned with iterative development and delivery?
- Are low-value add activities automated to avoid human error?
- Is the mindset shift from projects to products happening?

Data-Driven Insights

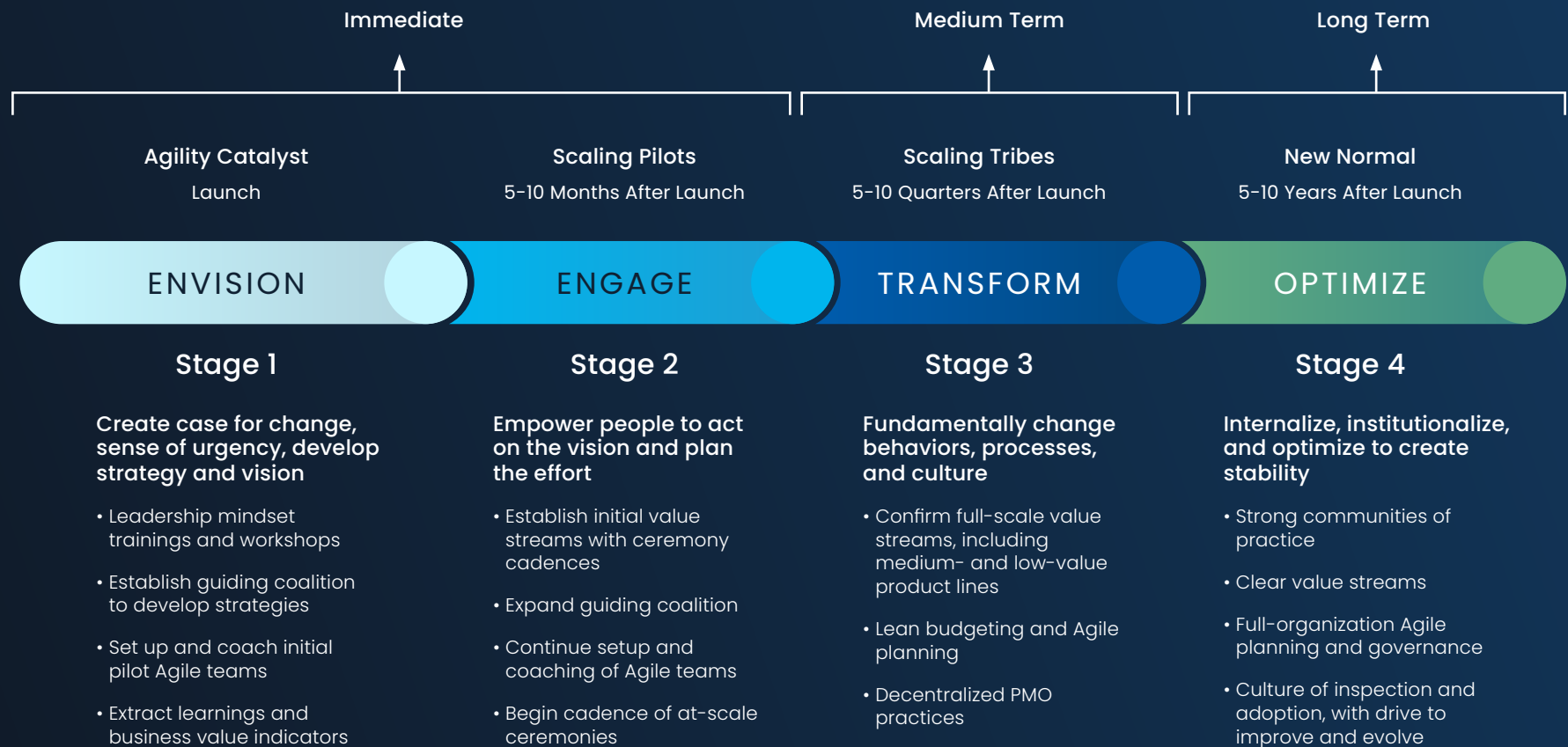
- Are prioritization decisions made using existing, empirical data?
- Are analytics and ML leveraged to better predict delivery and outcomes?
- Do individuals at all levels have access to all business-driving data?

Cloud-First Architectures

- Are modern, flexible architectures used over monolithic, legacy systems?
- Does governance allow for the use of innovative, next-generation services?
- Is the cloud accessible and configurable by decentralized, self-organizing teams?



Mapping Strategy to Execution



Mapping Strategy to Execution

So, how does an organization get started and how can AHEAD help? First, it is important to understand that transformation is difficult. Processes and org structures are going to have to fundamentally change – people will be in different roles, and some days will certainly be better than others. Expect that true maturity isn't going to be realized for 5-10 years. This is normal, but it's also not an excuse to put off getting started.

Often, organizations find themselves in what is called 'analysis paralysis.' They spend so much time planning their perfect transformation and tying every step of the way to phases of their digital strategy. However, no transformation is predictable, and it's going to take many turns that are unexpected, but also extremely enlightening and worthwhile.

For this reason, AHEAD created the DevOps Agility Catalyst. This accelerator—which provides a framework for designing business-tailored DevOps solutions—helps organizations create a case for change and a sense of urgency. The focus then shifts to setting up initial pilot teams utilizing customer-centric practices as well as measurable OKRs and KPIs with the intention of extracting learnings and indicators that the transformation is underway.

The organization will learn a lot during the Agility Catalyst. By the end of it, organizations that we've worked with find themselves already building momentum on their transformation journey.



2022 AHEAD SPRING summit

For a deeper dive into agility transformation and the modern applications that help enable it, watch the [on-demand sessions](#) from the 2022 AHEAD Spring Summit or reach out to our team today.

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