ATLASSIAN

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The Uber Stream

Combating task loneliness in software teams

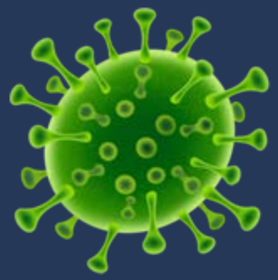
ALEX GISBY | PRINCIPAL DEVELOPER, ATLAS | @ALEXGISBY

Jay Wennington; Unsplash

Serving Instructions

Very thin.
Lots of butter.

Task loneliness



LONELINESS IS

ISOLATION FROM SUPPORT.

Task loneliness

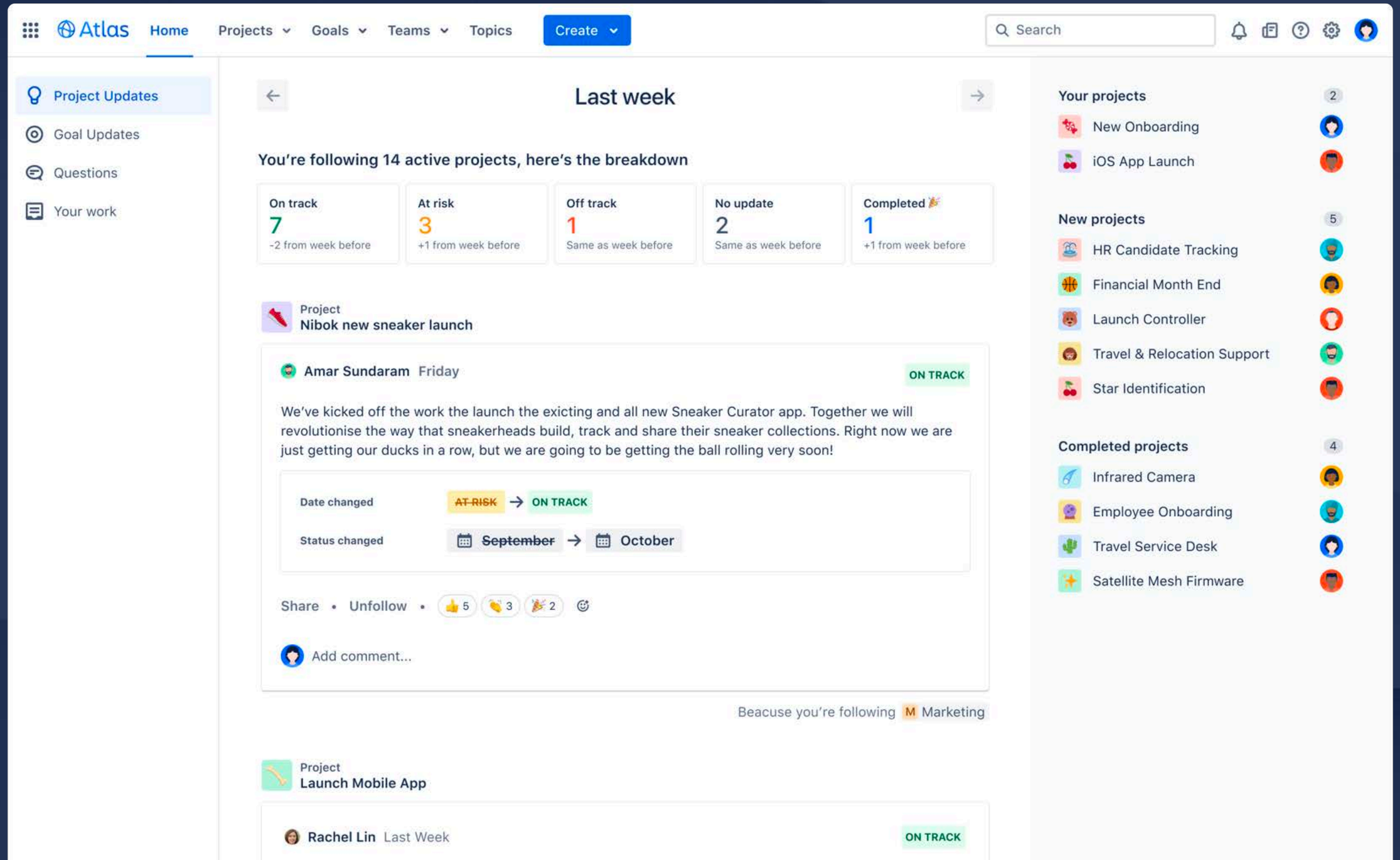
> My work feels isolated from the rest of the team.

> It’s really hard to get help, because no one else has the context on what I’m doing.

> I don’t have any visibility on what my teammates are doing.

Task loneliness

Atlas


Atlas
Home
Projects
Goals
Teams
Topics
Create
Search
Project Updates
Goal Updates
Questions
Your work
Last week
You're following 14 active projects, here's the breakdown
On track
7
-2 from week before
At risk
3
+1 from week before
Off track
1
Same as week before
No update
2
Same as week before
Completed
1
+1 from week before
Project
Nibok new sneaker launch
Amar Sundaram Friday
ON TRACK
We've kicked off the work the launch the exicting and all new Sneaker Curator app. Together we will revolutionise the way that sneakerheads build, track and share their sneaker collections. Right now we are just getting our ducks in a row, but we are going to be getting the ball rolling very soon!
Date changed
AT RISK
ON TRACK
Status changed
September
October
Share • Unfollow •
5
3
2
Add comment...
Beacuse you're following M Marketing
Project
Launch Mobile App
Rachel Lin Last Week
ON TRACK
Your projects 2
New Onboarding
iOS App Launch
New projects 5
HR Candidate Tracking
Financial Month End
Launch Controller
Travel & Relocation Support
Star Identification
Completed projects 4
Infrared Camera
Employee Onboarding
Travel Service Desk
Satellite Mesh Firmware

Atlas

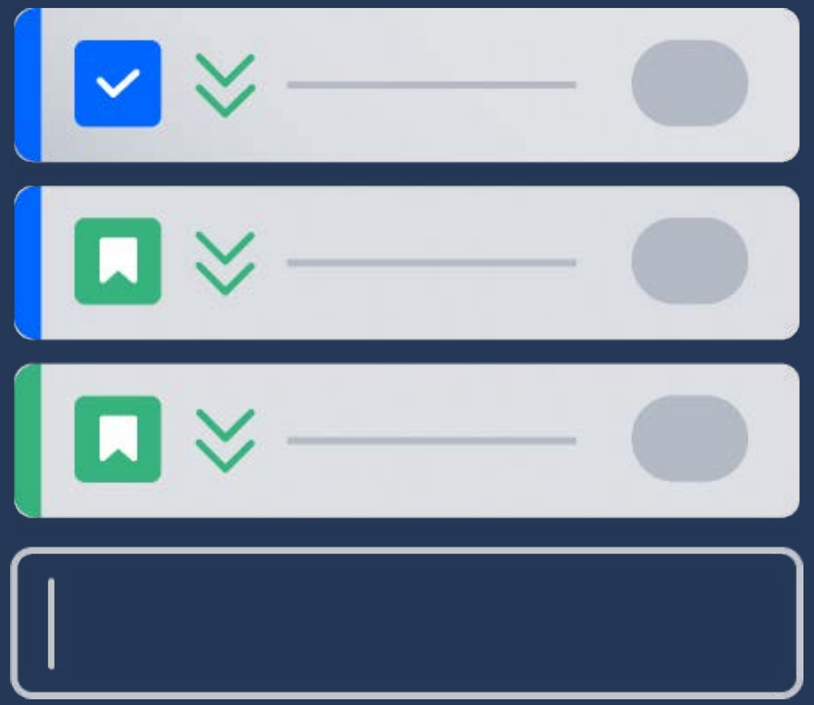
Projects
Communicate on work in flight

Goals
Track how work ladders up into high-level objectives

People and teams
Understand who works on what and where those people sit within your organization

Gratitude and culture
Share good vibes with kudos to people and teams

www.atlassian.com/atlas



Move fast

in many directions

Jay Wennington; Unsplash

A TYPICAL ATLAS PROJECT TEAM

Feature Lead (Eng)

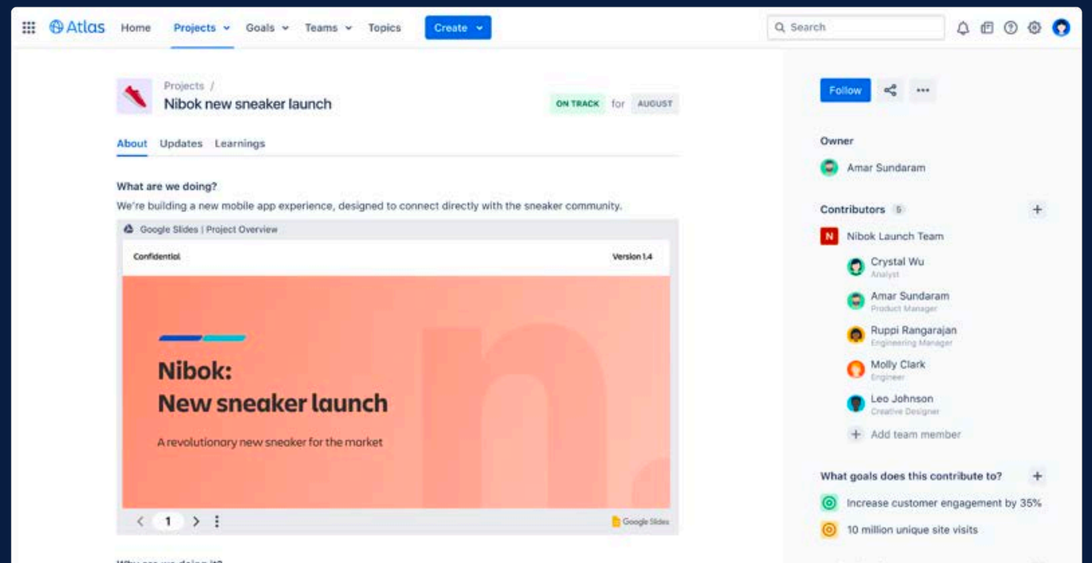
Design

Product Manager

Product Marketing

Developer

Developer



Sprint goal

* TC-3173: Don't send the goal update reminder to goal owners with no followers (tadpole?) (Cap - In Progress?)
* TC-3071: Add empty state for the Questions feed

In-Flight Epics

1. P&T - Reporting Lines: Follow team notifications FF for Atlassian, RL filter to goal directory, merge race condition fix + total report counts, start "made for you" filters (Ell, Gabby)

2. P&T - Kudos M2: wiring up kudos back-end into profile cards, add give kudos button, copy front-end component over into status ui for carousel (Fry, Christina, Sabby)

3. Learnings: unblock front-end pipeline, then shipit (Nathan, Elaine)

4. Ops Readiness: start training for the team, PIR for sev3 (Roger [!disturbed], Kim)

5. Product Rename: MS teams app rename (Oscar)

6. Editions: TCS transformer investigation, Billing Admin started, UM-to-roles mapping done (Gisby, Cap, Jimmy)

7. P&G: Work-tracking links in Projects: Trying flexible UI links, getting code reviews (Ash)

Potential Risks / Curveballs
* HOT-98735: partner teams / dependencies may still be heavily impacted by

7 streams of work

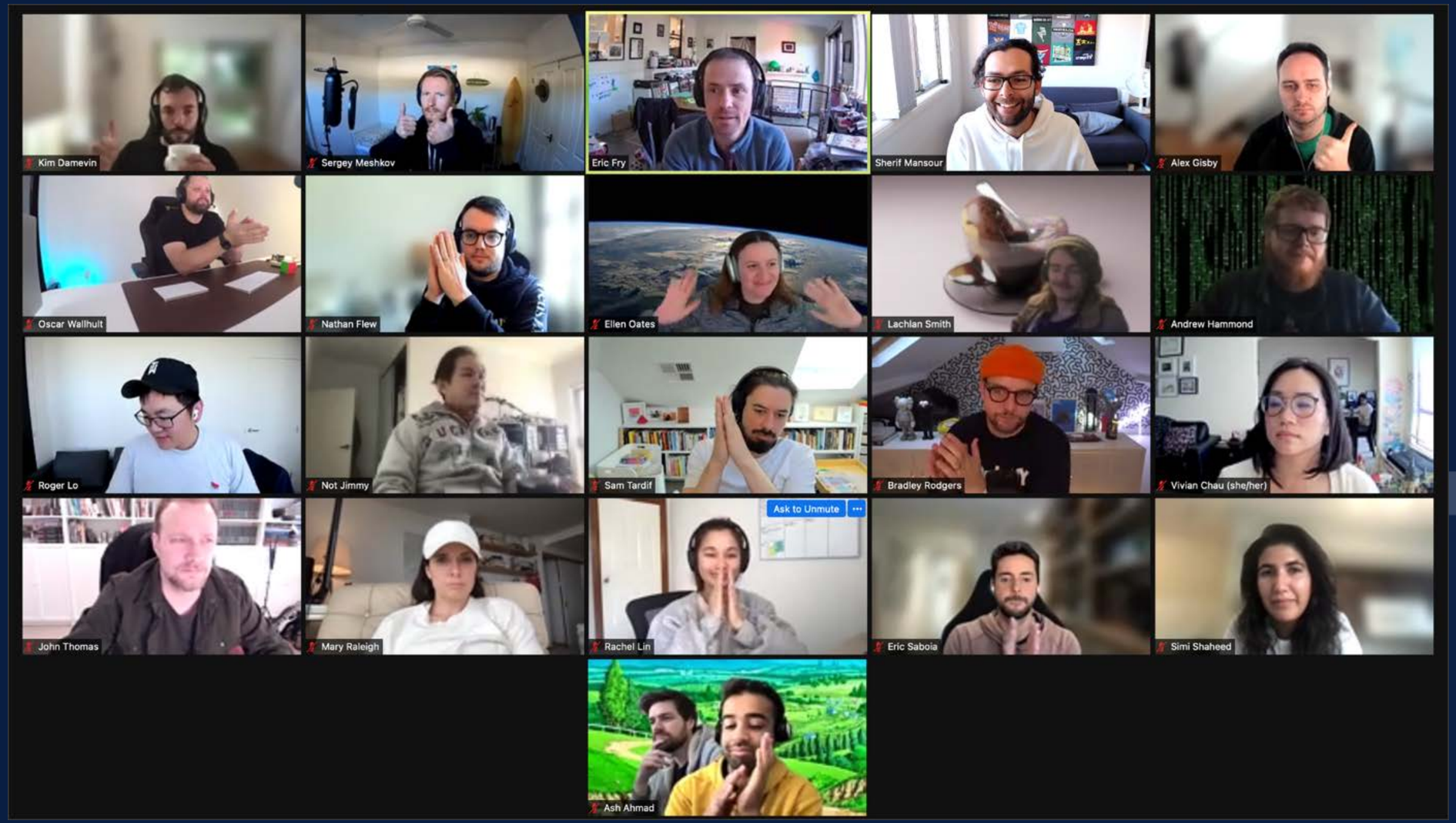
at the same time

“

I feel isolated from the rest of the team.

A RECURRING PROBLEM

REMOTE-FIRST



ISOLATED WORLDS OF WORK

Project: ATLAS-254

Project: ATLAS-224

Project: ATLAS-67

👏

Task loneliness

Small, fragile teams

It’s very easy to be left alone in the path of the tiger.

Context cost

There are few (if any) people to provide guidance, rubber-ducking, or reassurance.

Easily blocked

Narrow work streams make small blockages into total stoppages.

The Uber Stream

CURRENT

NEXT?

?

Corleto Peanut Butter; Unsplash

ONE SINGLE TEAM, MULTIPLE PROJECTS

Feature Lead

Design

Engineer

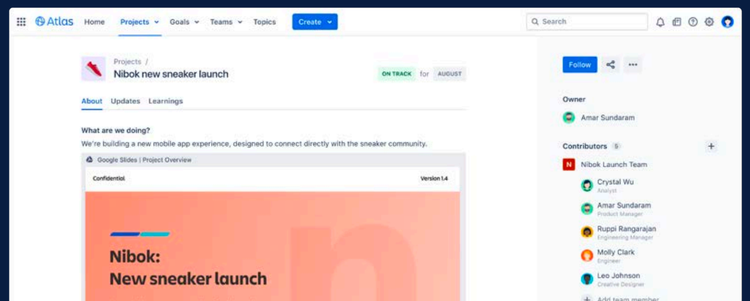
Engineer

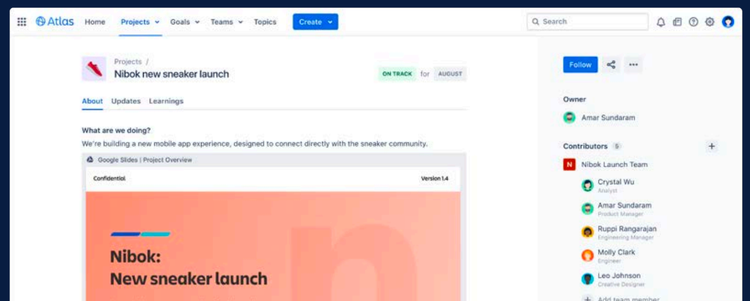
Engineer

Engineer

Product Manager

Product Marketing





It’s May 2022

General availability projects

Roles & permissions

Editions

Private projects

Roles and permissions

Give Atlas a proper permissions system

Editions

Support three tiers of functionality, two of them paid

Private projects

Add visibility controls to projects

Roles and permissions

Give Atlas a proper permissions system

Editions

Support three tiers of functionality, two of them paid

Private projects

Add visibility controls to projects

Roles and permissions

Give Atlas a proper permissions system

Editions

Support three tiers of functionality, two of them paid

Private projects

Add visibility controls to projects

Let’s give this Uber Stream thing a go.

OBJECTIVE 1

Beat the loneliness

OBJECTIVE 2

Ship GA

A song of Vegemite and peanut butter

How did we go about it?

1. Team structure

THE UBER STREAM

Alex (Gisby)
Feature Lead

Simi
Designer

Roger
Engineer

Vaish
Engineer

Jimmy
Engineer

Alex (Morgan)
Engineer

Anish
Product Manager

John
Engineering Manager

Rachel
Product Manager

ATLAS-17070
Atlas Roles and Permissions

ATLAS-14180
Atlas Paid Editions: In-product work

ATLAS-15538
Private projects

Engineering plans

Well-defined deliverables

What you're doing, and how you know it's done

I know what I'm doing.

Context for all

Everyone knows every deliverable

I know how to help.

What's first? What's next?

Delivery sequence diagram so everyone knows what's ahead

I know what else is happening.

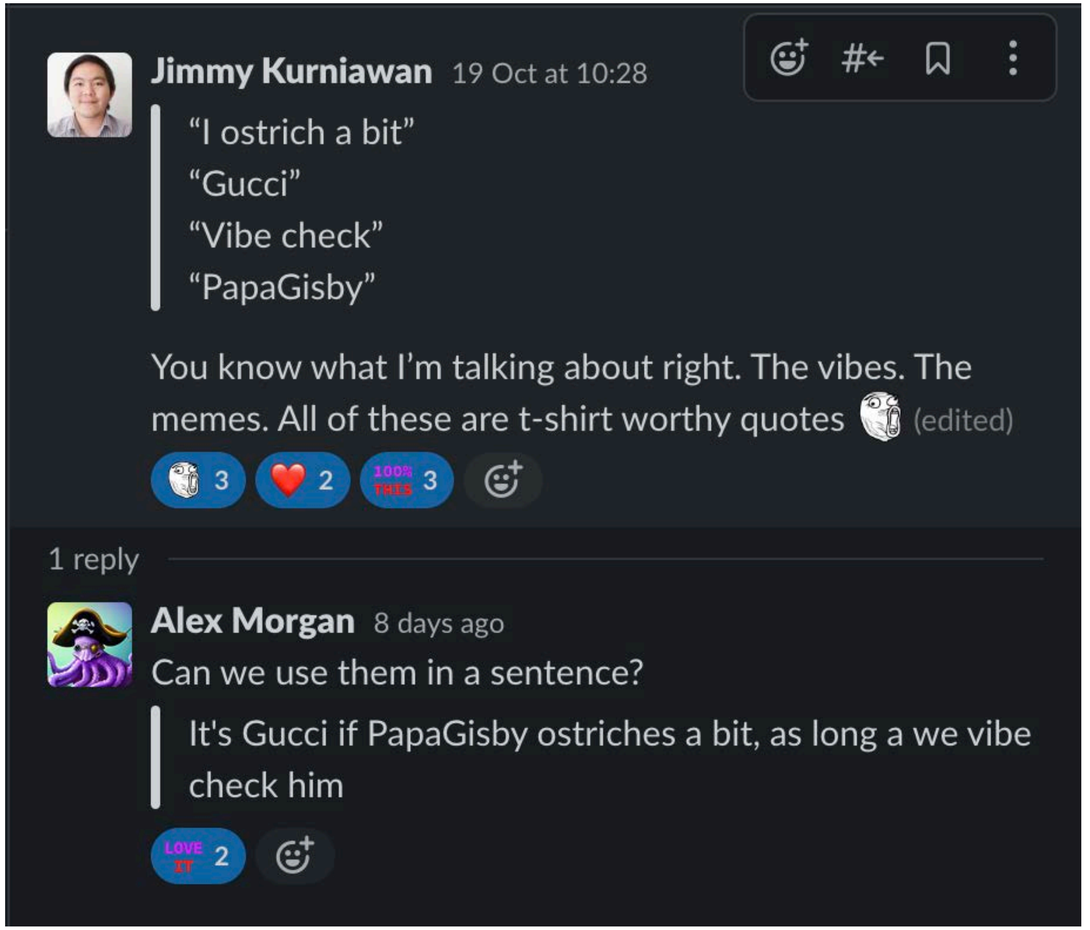
CORE PRINCIPLE

Everyone can flex.
Go where you're needed.

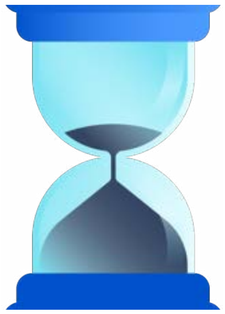
2. Communication rituals

COMMS – SLACK – PROJECT CHANNEL

- Open project channel
- Emphasis on honest, fun comms
- Nothing in DM – all in the channel



Two main communication cadences



Daily

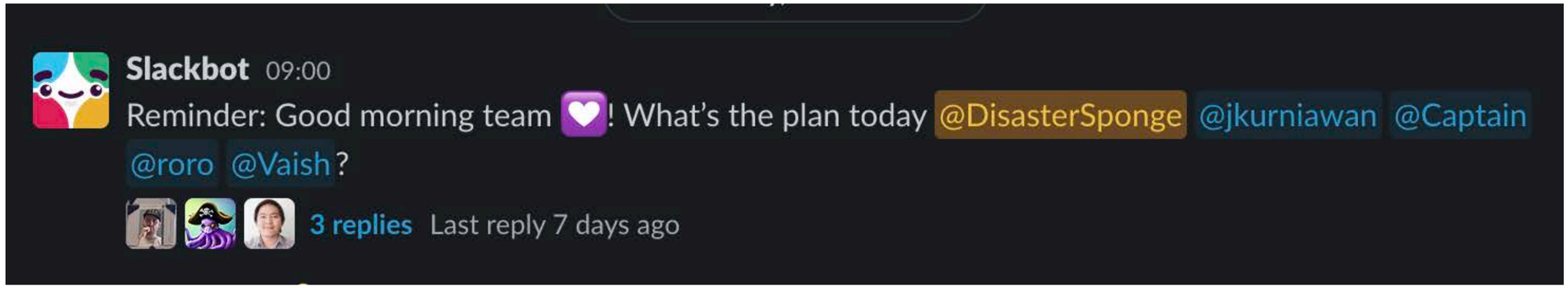
Async Slack standup

Weekly

Friday Atlas project update

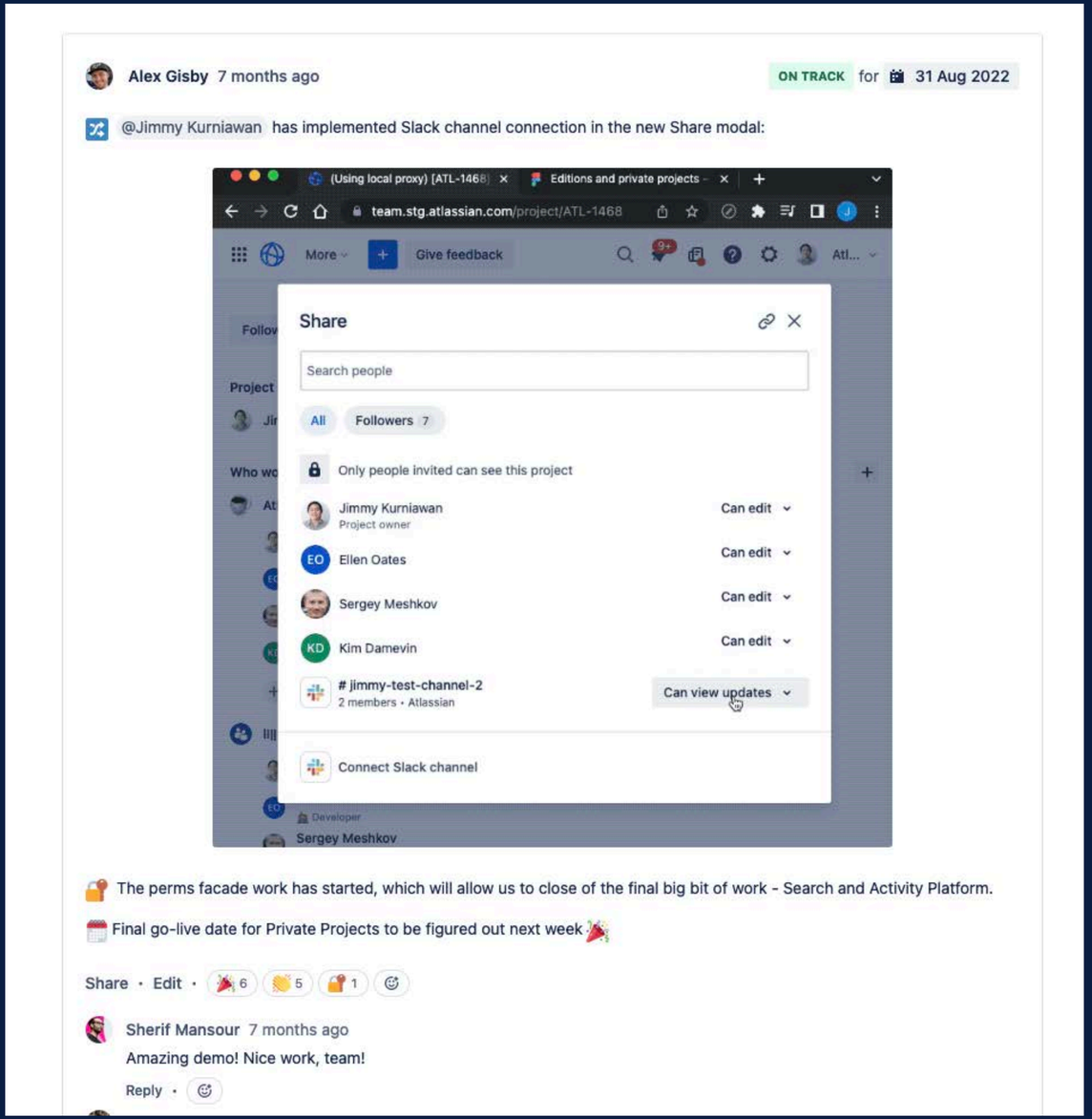
COMMS – SLACK – DAILY STANDUP

Keep it simple.



COMMS – ATLAS – WEEKLY ATLAS PROJECT UPDATE

- Emphasize demos
- Emphasize contributors
- End the update with goal for next week



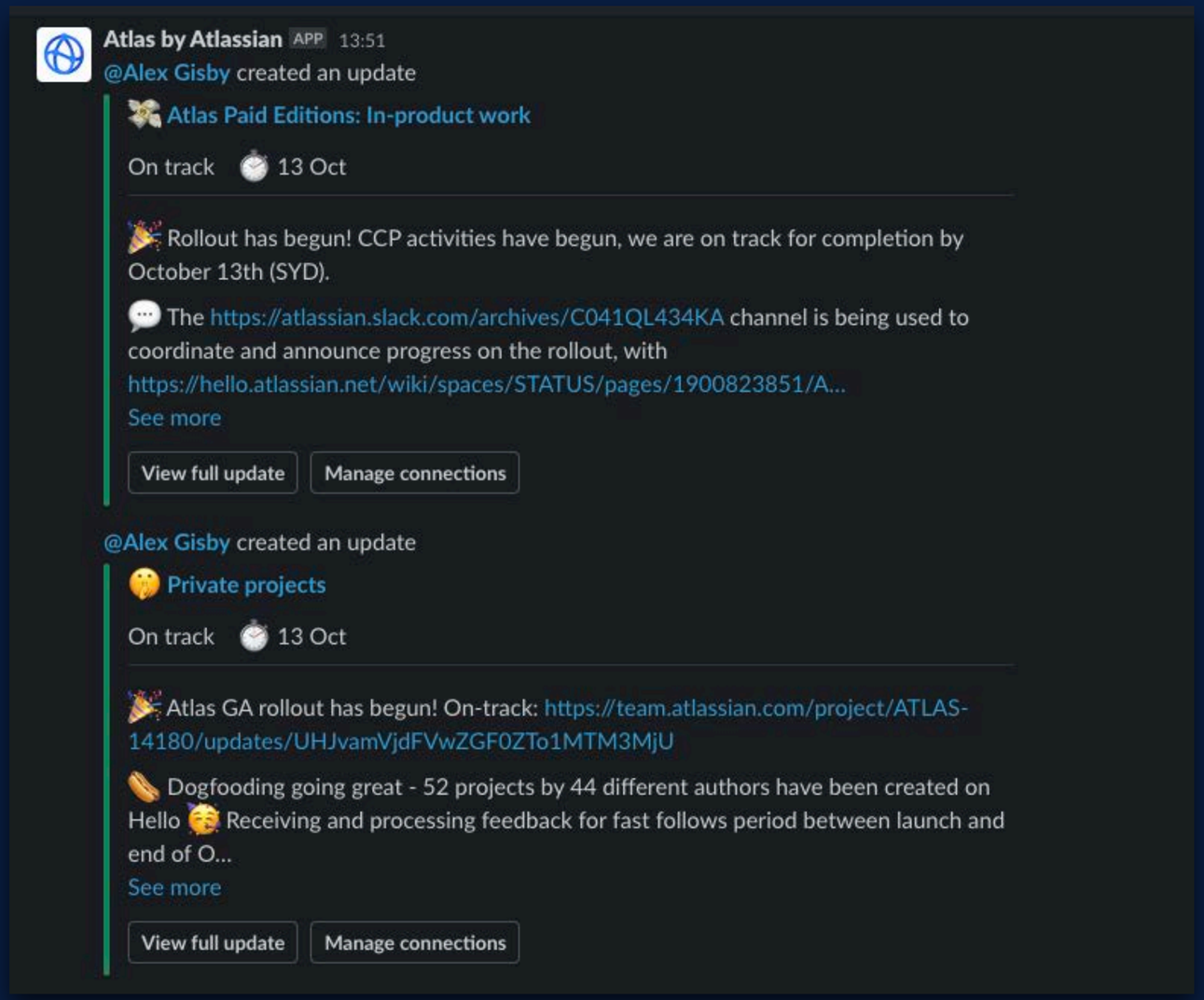
DIGITAL SESSION

Simplifying the complex art of communicating between teams

Rachel Lin

COMMS – WEEKLY – ATLAS TICKET UPDATE

Status automatically shared to relevant Slack channels and stakeholders, thanks to Atlas!



CORE PRINCIPLE

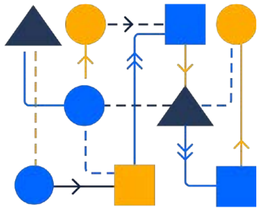
Keep comms open to keep context flowing

3. Vibe check

The vibe check

Team vibe

How’s everyone doing?



User experience vibe

Does what we’re building still make sense?

Delivery vibe

What’s left – any dragons?

Vibe check: team vibe

How are you?

How are you feeling about the project?

> 100% confidence that we can deliver things on our side.
> 5% confidence that things will work end-to-end.

> I’m worried about whether the devs feel supported or that I’m involved enough.

> I’ve been MIA so not really across what else has been going on, glad to realign in this session.

Vibe check: UX vibe

How do you feel about what we're building?

Are there gaps in the experience that we need to call out?

> How do we manage rollouts across the different teams?

> Feels like we need a consolidated list of email notification scenarios across product.

> How do we handle experiences for users who *cannot* upgrade to standard/paid?

Vibe check: delivery vibe

What's done? What's left?

And what could go wrong?

Big hairy deliverable	Progress so far	Vibe	Notes/Comments
Roles and Permissions ⚒️ Atlas Editions Engineering	**Done:** • Permission / Edition gate frontend component done 🎉 • New roles and perms system is real and on prod 🎉 • Workspace settings are now admin gated 🎉 • Projects are using new perms on prod 🎉 **Todo:** • TQL / List queries MEDIUM • Role grants (for Private Projects share modal) MEDIUM • Permissions facade sanity checks SMALL ⚠️ • Roll out permissions system to other entities LARGE ⏏️ **Scope missed from Eng Plan:** • TQL / list query integration. Yes, Gisby forgot about TQL 🤦 **Scope Creep:**	**Uppers** - things we feel good about • ... **Downers** - things we're feeling bad/worried about • ... 🚨 **Imminent Catastrophes** - what's about to hit the fan? • Slack message from Roger Lo in #atlas-perms - Perms facade does not appear to be working as expected. May require work in permissions service MEDIUM	

Vibe check: vibe check

How did the vibe check go?

Chapter 4: Vibe check vibe

Okay, so having done the other chapters, how are you feeling now?

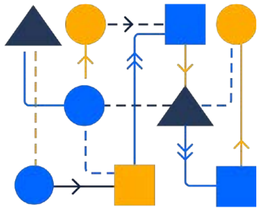
No accountability or anything, just smash emoji into this table:

Emoji feeling storm goes here:

The vibe check

Team vibe

How’s everyone doing?



User experience vibe

Does what we’re building still make sense?

Delivery vibe

What’s left – any dragons?

CORE PRINCIPLE

Projects run on people, people run on feelings.

Your team-mates are here with you.

Task loneliness

Small, fragile teams

It’s very easy to be left alone in the path of the tiger.

Communication, vibe check

Context cost

There are few (if any) people to provide guidance, rubber-ducking, or reassurance.

Team structure, comms

Easily blocked

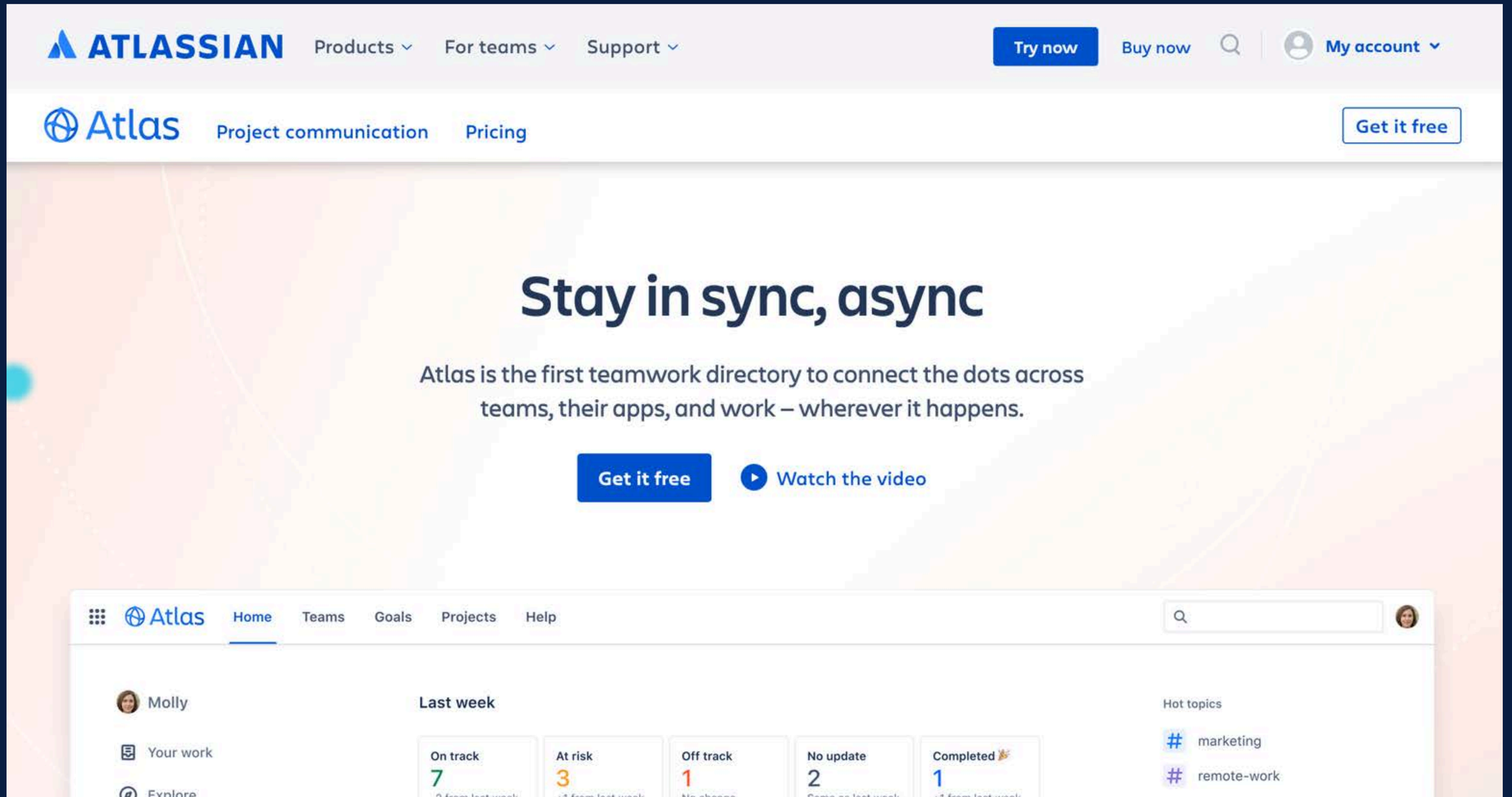
Narrow work streams make small blockages into total stoppages.

Team structure, vibe check

Time passes...

Akshay Nanavat; Unsplash

WE SHIPPED!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Pricing
Get it free
Stay in sync, async
Atlas is the first teamwork directory to connect the dots across teams, their apps, and work – wherever it happens.
Get it free
Watch the video
Atlas
Home
Teams
Goals
Projects
Help
Molly
Your work
Explore
Last week
On track
7
At risk
3
Off track
1
No update
2
Completed
1
Hot topics
marketing
remote-work

“

Huh, that was a bit boring, wasn’t it?

ATLAS HEAD OF ENG RE: ROLLOUT

OBJECTIVE 1

Beat the loneliness

OBJECTIVE 2

Ship GA

Task loneliness

Retro time!

Good stuff

- A really great sense of camaraderie from being an uber stream | The team felt like a team | Team vibes were ✨Immaculate✨ --- Why good vibes? First long running project, actually had a team structure. Feeling sad that it's coming to an end. Early tone set - getting alignment early to deal with the stuff that came down river. Highly skilled team, self starting, pragmatic. not needing hand holding. Team built shared language, terms, memes, jokes, shitposts. (4 votes)

- [ ] Long running projects - take the time to get the vibe right before heading into the work
- [ ] Analyse why this worked more deeply
- [ ] Vibe check helped, mid-point checkins for long running projects
- [ ] Solid pre-work phase allowed us to hit ground running. This is in tension with the shaping product decisions vibe

- Scope creep was kept to an absolute minimum (3 votes)
- Designer that's keen to work with limitations, suggest alternatives and spar with devs | Simi doing all the design for this stream! (3 votes)
- Ejectors and being ok to eject stuff | Coming back to ejectors after the mythical "post GA" (3 votes)
- Two PMs could have been a nightmare, it was actually a dream | Two PM stream worked great. Moaaarr of this! | PMs that actually cares about the product (2 votes)
- Vibe Check and Final Approach rituals helped a lot (2 votes)
- GISBY - the leadership, the innovation in our rituals, the coordination and dedication. Wow. | Feature lead that actually cares about roll out ;) (2 votes)
- Friday status update meetings really helped to track our progress (1 vote)
- Having 3 streams of work meant some variety was still available in the work we picked up, which was nice for a long running stream (1 vote)
- Anish spent a lot of time wrangling other teams, making things just flow in our stream | Basically none of the stress from other team/above got down to me as an engineer, so I could focus on the work, was very chill (1 vote)
- Our team channel was always vibing...we collectively sparred on many a thing, made sensible tradeoffs quickly and kept everyone in the loop. (1 vote)
- Engineers that are super keen for quality, ship fast and fix bugs as they come up | Devs are amazing (1 vote)
- Pre-work done by Product + Design was gold standard, really helped Eng hit the ground running (0 votes)
- The stream didn't feel like a slog despite being months long (0 votes)
- We're experimenting with our upgrade flows to optimise for learning (0 votes)
- Work breakdown felt about right (0 votes)
- Bold change to the Share/Followers/Apps UX because we wanted to get the experience right (0 votes)
- The uber stream structure has proven to be very effective. It has surprised me how well this has all gone :) (0 votes)
- Async standup | Slack standup felt good (0 votes)

Ideas for next time

- More regular retros / check ins? (1 vote)
- More uber streams for complex projects? (1 vote)
- Having an "anchor" person per sub-epic could be nice? A domain expert that really knows all the context (0 votes)

Bad stuff

- We were pulled in to work on other surfaces like Adminhub and multiple folks (not just PMs) were pulled into managing stakeholders, sharing context with other teams, etc...taking time away from their core work --- The stream succeeded in handling this, but they probably shouldn't have had to. We understood who to talk to, but no reciprocation; they'd just slam everyone. We didn't have the clout expected for a new product launch with certain teams. We managed this without COMMIT tickets, but missing context and urgency. Roro hot take: not a bad thing to get pulled into other teams. Context is hard to share - shitstorms can trigger urgency and focus. The issue was more lack of ownership - we were happy to do the work but needed the team to actually own the rollout/work. (5 votes)

- [ ] Big project kickoff - roles and responsibilites play

- It was quite confusing to know points of contact for the platform upgrade journeys (4 votes)
- Private projects was somewhat isolating (3 votes)
  --
  Three streams of work, Vaish had to go solo for a while waiting for us to catch up.
  There was opportunity to put more people onto the Share modal.
  Related to Jimmy's point from previous - bouncing around. Vaish is elite and knew what she was doing - Jimmy needed to be putting out fires with BAC. Vaish did wonder if she was doing the right thing. Does it take active choice to support, mentor and interact - push + pull.
  Counter - Cap working on TCS relatively solo - but cos he was new to BE, was forced to keep coming asking questions.
  Vaish: wording slightly off - from engineering perspective wondered about capability; could this be done better with more people. Didn't feel lonely.
  Rachel - two PMs with a core split, things flowed smoothly but when chatting about Editions, Rachel deferred entirely to Anish. Was that a good or bad thing? Is two PMs a good thing?

- I don't think this particularly fixed the silos problem (2 votes)
- Gisby lost track a bit of how to keep the stream busy in the final phases whilst we waited for everyone else to sort stuff out | When we reached the sort of grab-bag of bits to do at the end I felt more adrift/solo than the rest of the epic --- This contributed to isolation feelings. The team is usually used to working in low-touch, but having worked in high touch, did this cause a culture shift. (2 votes)

- [ ] A missing ritual here - more formal ejector scope to address the lulls

- I'm gonna miss you all :((1 vote)
- Generally not-great experience working with commerce (1 vote)
- Rollout was dumped on us and was a lot of work. Where were PGM? (1 vote)
- Feels bad that we can't customise the emails sent by platform (1 vote)
- hacky testing for editions before editions were shipped (0 votes)

Raw feedback

- Jimmy: We're talking raw feedback right? I think the build up, anticipation, delays, etc are causing my anxiety to spike more than usual. I was quite demotivated at the end, not really caring about uberstream or Atlas in general. --- Atlas is usually ship fast; this ran counter to that and can be demoralising. Not a lot of closure. Upsell modal was the first and last thing to go, took months. (2 votes)
- Thanks Gisby for shielding us from all the bad things comin our way. Uber stream was a stress free experience (2 votes)
- I worry that running something like an Uber stream requires a lot of project management skills that people don't have/want. (2 votes)
- Because I was so sheltered from the external pressures/pain points I didn't really feel like I had a solid grasp of the larger context that was going on outside the stream (2 votes)
- Putting a newbie on the most long running isolated thing (TCS) was great for making it less lonesome since I had to be coming back to the team for teaching/help anyway (1 vote)
- Rethinking a permissions model is difficult and our customer feedback suggests we haven't got it 100% right yet. I expect small tweaks will still happen - maybe there could've been some permissions stuff tested with customers earlier. (0 votes)
- How was it having 5 engineers? Which good things/bad things were a result of this? (1000 votes)
  --
  Cap: lot easier to cover for each other (Gisby +1).
  Jimmy: 👍 to above
  Vaish: agree - eyes everywhere and saw things coming and mitigate.
  Anish: focus on user (product engineering) - taking decisions on user facing stuff, made PM life easier.
  Roger: Gisby?
  Gisby: More devs=more speed so hard to stay ahead of the devs with engineering plans. First few weeks felt super close to too much load on the FL to get everything ready to work on. Potentially a cause of things slipping a bit toward the end of the proj as rollout + FL work both ramped up.
  5%3 != 0 so at least one stream always stuck with one dev. Potentially may cause issues in future but was survivable this time. Should FL be coding? Gisby did heapz, would have gone insane if hadn't. Only got away with writing code by being solo on the stream before the other engineers turned up. So got FL work out earlier, making space during the epic to be able to also do some code

Retro:

What went well?

> [There was] a really great sense of camaraderie from being an Uber Stream.

> The early tone set got us alignment early to deal with the challenges that came later.

> Team built a shared language of terms, memes, jokes, shitposts.

> Having three streams of work meant some variety was still available in the work we picked up, which was nice for a long-running stream.

Retro:

What could have been better?

> Private projects [were] somewhat isolating (Vaish had to go solo for a while, waiting for us to catch up). From an engineering perspective, [I] wondered about capacity; could this be done better with more people to help her out?

Task loneliness

Small, fragile teams

It’s very easy to be left alone in the path of the tiger.

Context cost

There were few (if any) people to provide guidance, rubber-ducking, or reassurance.

Easily blocked

Narrow work streams make small blockages into total stoppages.

Core learnings

More people, more flex

Help and support can come from multiple directions.

Team culture is everything

Shared experience, culture, jokes, terms, and support saved the day. Repeatedly.

Core learnings

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Epilogue

Atlas, six months later...

SMALL, CLOSE TEAMS WITH A CLEAR FOCUS ARE THE BEST TYPE OF TEAMS.

In fact, that’s exactly what we’ve learned.

Atlas today

Team Geodesy

Team Globetrotters

Team Cosmography

PREVIOUSLY

NOW

ATLASSIAN