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SCRUM MASTER

WHAT IS A SCRUM MASTER?

The Scrum Master is a role in Scrum – an Agile Framework for optimising the delivering products. In most organisations, when someone is given responsibility they are concurrently given the authority necessary for success. Scrum Masters are in a different situation.

A Scrum Master's responsibility lies with the team's adoption of Scrum, practice of it, and using it to continuously improve collaboration, quality and productivity. They are not, however, accountable for the success of delivery. The success of the product lies with the Product Owner. Some organisations refer to the Scrum Master as the Iteration Manager or Delivery Manger, however, this is actioned as support for the iteration and delivery, not as traditional command-and-control of that function.

Expectations of Scrum Masters

Support the Scrum Team
- Promote continuous learning
- Promote, support and enable continuous improvement
- Create repeatable patterns to promote re-use and improved repeatability
- Support the development and delivery of the product, whether it's through the Product Owner or the team developing the product itself.

Focus on continuous improvement
- Continuous learning to drive delivery improvement
- Use simple metrics to measure improvement – velocity, lead time and cycle time

Promote and develop an agile mindset
- Train and coach the team, stakeholders and management
- Support decision-making processes
- Encourage agile mindset
- Build knowledge of and experience with agility in individuals and teams
- Reinforce the behaviour of agile values – commitment, courage, focus, openness.

Key areas of responsibility

Support the whole Scrum Team

- Facilitate Scrum events of inspection and adaption – Sprint Planning, Daily Scrum ("Stand-up"), Sprint Review, Retrospective, and Backlog Refinement – in a way that results in transparency, collaboration, and improved productivity.
- Promote Scrum values – commitment, courage, focus, openness and respect. When these are embodied and lived by the whole Scrum Team (which includes the Product Owner), the Scrum pillars of transparency, inspection and adaption come to life and build trust for everyone.
- Coach the Scrum Team in self-organisation and cross-functionality.
- Help the Scrum Team to deliver high-value products as defined in the "Definition of Done".
- Help the Scrum Team engage with key technical and design subject matter experts to deliver high-value products that align with the product's vision, particularly when at scale.
- Remove impediments that slow down or block the Scrum Team's progress.
- Help the Scrum Team stay on-track with delivery and stay focussed.
- Minimise outside influence from distracting the Scrum Team from their delivery commitments.
- Use simple metrics – velocity, lead time and cycle time – to help provide transparency of the Scrum Team's progress toward their Sprint Goal, the adverse impacts of unplanned work on Sprint Goals and the progress of continuous improvement in productivity.
- Help the Scrum Team make effective use of tools to provide collaborative digital workspaces and transparency of work irrespective of their physical location.

Support the Product Owner

- Find techniques to help the Product Owner effectively manage the Product Backlog.
- Help the Product Owner understand the need for clear and concise Product Backlog items ("Stories").
- Help the Product Owner understand product planning
- Help the Product Owner know how to arrange the Product Backlog to maximise the delivery of value.
- Help the Product Owner engage with key business subject matter experts to deliver high-value products that align with the product's standards and vision.
- Help the Product Owner to engage with stakeholders to demonstrate the Scrum Team's delivery of high-value products.

Support other Teams when at Scale

- Support the Scrum Team's contribution and involvement in cross-team planning events.
- Support the Scrum Team, Product Owner, Chief Product Owner (Product Manager) and Chief Scrum Master understand the dependencies between teams' collaborative delivery of high-value products.
- Produce and maintain training material for technical staff with the Chief Scrum Master.
- Participate in "Scrum of Scrums" to remove impediments that slow down or block the delivery of other teams.
- Contribute to Communities of Practice.
- Ensure the Team adheres to Scrum and the chosen scaling frameworks.
- Work with other Scrum Masters and the Chief Scrum Master to increase the effectiveness of Scrum and teams at scale.

Support Stakeholders

- Cause change that increases the productivity of the Scrum Team so they can deliver more to stakeholders with higher quality, less effort and less waste.
- Help stakeholders understand and enact Scrum and empirical product development.
- Help stakeholders work within Scrum's cadence and exploit the inspect/adapt framework to make the most effective use of opportunities for change that improve the clients' experience.
- Help stakeholders and the Product Owner contribute their knowledge to the Scrum Team to increase the effectiveness of planning and delivery.

Key Outcomes

- Whole Scrum Team – Product Owner and Team – is happy and productive.
- The Development Team's work is sustainable, and so highly predictable in terms of the amount of work that can be completed in a Sprint.
- The Development Team's work is transparent – anyone who wants to understand the status of work can easily see where it is up to and if there are any risks that will impede the team's delivery.
- The Team remains focussed and no one jeopardises the team's goals for the Sprint by dropping unplanned work on them.
- The Product Owner understands the capacity of the Team and can forecast what can be delivered when by looking at the Product Backlog, the size of the items in the Product Backlog, and the rate of delivery of those items Sprint to Sprint.
- The Team's productivity continually improves – 200-400% improvement is easy to achieve when the Scrum Team stays focussed and is disciplined with their use of Scrum

Key Considerations

- Many of the Scrum Team's issues are likely to be due to human interaction and have little to do with the work itself. The key is to manage conflict and understand that 90% of interpersonal issues can't be resolved, only managed[1].
- Be aware that all teams take time to understand how to work effectively together. This is why you want to minimise changes to the team membership – as soon as you change its makeup, the team will go through the whole Forming, Storming, Norming stages[2] all over again before they reach a sustainable and predictable output.
- Start preparation for the next Sprint approximately ½ way through the current Sprint. The Scrum Master should be supporting the Development Team to engage with their Product Owner, and making use of Backlog Refinement time, to start to get up to speed with upcoming Features – constraints, scope, dependencies, risks, assumptions and the confidence with those assumptions.
- Story Mapping the experience of a User through the activities they will do to achieve an outcome helps align the team's work (their "Stories") with end-users needs in a very user-centred way.
- Scrum's origins come from Lean manufacturing. Good Scrum is good Lean and Kanban. Visualising work using Kanban, constraining work in-progress, optimising the flow of work, making the policies between columns explicit, and improving collaboratively using scientific methods (e.g. Toyota Kata and the Theory of Constraints) can be key to identifying and removing waste in Scrum Teams.
- Because Scrum's origins come from Lean, the work of high-performing Scrum Teams is very user-centred. Consider embedding people with excellent client-experience or user-experience capability in the team to help it think and work in this way. Good Scrum, with its high levels of transparency and customer collaboration, should also mean a good client-experience.

Common obstacles to avoid

- A Scrum Master isn't a Team Lead or a Manager. A Scrum Master takes on this responsibility without assuming any of the power that might be useful in achieving in it. A Scrum Master's role is similar to that of an orchestra conductor. Both must provide real-time guidance and leadership to a talented collection of individuals who come together to create something that no one of them could create alone.
- A Scrum Master isn't the team's secretary. Just because they facilitate key Scrum events doesn't mean they are there as the team's servant.
- Scrum is easy to do, but hard to master. It takes a team about three months of working together to learn how best to work together as a team over a group of individuals.

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1 Gottman, J. M (1999) The seven principles for making relationships work.

2 Tuckman, B. W. (1965) Developmental sequences in small groups. Psychological Bulletin. 63 (6): 384-399.

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- Don't change what you don't understand. 40% of agile initiatives fail not because of lack of training but because of lack of experience[3]. Gain experience with the basics of Scrum and working with the team first, then add patterns or processes on top of the framework.
- Rather than reporting on velocity, instead report on the percentage of work complete. E.g. if the team's velocity is 100 story points and they finish 90, then report that they completed 90% of the work forecast for the Sprint. Similarly, report on the percentage of improvement in velocity. E.g. when the team increases its velocity from 50 to 75, report that they've increased their productivity by 50%.
- When the team does its Backlog Refinement, Stories will become more granular and it's likely that the size of the Backlog in Story Points will also increase. Rather than report that the scope has increased, instead report that the team's knowledge of what is required of them to deliver the scope of work has improved, which decreases the risk of failure to deliver. Report also that the consequence will mean it will take, for example, 2-3 more Sprints to deliver the same outcome.

Key Tools to Use

Kanban

- Visualise work in-progress
- Limit the amount of work the team does at once
- Optimise the flow of work for the team
- Identify and remove blockers and impediments to delivery of products

Sprint Burn Down

- Compare the optimal rate of delivery to the actual rate of delivery
- Use Story Points over time or the number of Stories

Cycle Time

- Put a 'dot' on the Story for each day it is "in-progress"
- Compare the number of dots to the "size" (e.g. S, M, L) at Retrospective
- Are the estimates of size similar in cycle time?
- Learn the relationship between cycle time, WIP and size.

Lean

- Identify and remove waste
- Measure Lead Time and Cycle Time
- Lean Leadership

Toyota Kata

- Hypothesis driven improvement
- Set goals toward a future state
- Assess achievements and learnings
- Adjust goals

Deming Cycle (P-D-C-A)

- Continuously assess plans
- Be active in embedding behaviours that underpin improvement

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3 VersionOne (2016) State of Agile Survey.

Contact us

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ZXM helps government and corporates to improve their digital business' products and services by using Agile, Lean and UX methods.

The company's core values are simplicity, agility, collaboration and sustainability – values that underpin their elegant solutions. This focus on business value and users over just technology change is one of the reasons ZXM is a leading brand in delivery of agile services in this digital age. Matthew Hodgson says "We don't do *easy*. We make easy *happen* through hard work, continuous improvement, and deep collaboration with our clients and their stakeholders".

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