

CSM Practicing Certification Renewal Assessment

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date: September 2005

Scrum depends on the inspect and adapt mechanisms of process control to manage the complexity of projects. For inspection to work, everyone must know what is being made visible. To implement the Scrum process, such regulating mechanisms as defined roles, involvement versus commitment, time-boxes, and regular cycles are used.

1. Describe one project on which you have used Scrum over the last twelve months.
Describe:

The projects I work on these days are slightly different from the projects I worked on when pioneering. Where Argo was a project (25 mio dollar, stand alone and successful) I now get involved in product development, started in more traditional ways and in need of help – with process, often with people issues, always with quality and delivery problems.

- Purpose - what business goal was the project intended to deliver?

In my biggest project the goal was to deliver a system to support administration of 600 schools, including pay-roll, workflow management, scheduling...

In the current environment the goal for my projects is usually to help teams deliver some quality in a timeframe that is still acceptable, be it not the original plan.
The teams often come from waterfall environment, or did some experimentation with some agile method.

- Length - what was the duration of the project?

My intervention is usually a couple of months 3 to 6.

- Cost - what were the budgeted and actual costs?

When I started the last project in a telecom company product launch had been postponed several times and budget was double planned. 30 people working for 12 months, and putting in another 6 months.

- Value - what were the projected benefits and actual (if measured) actual benefits?

This project was about saving the customers for future products, hardware..., not any more about making money from the product.

- Size - how many people were on the project team(s), how were they organized into teams?

About 30 in 2 locations in the US and one in India

- Teams - were the teams cross-functional and self-organizing? Were the teams collocated in an open space? Were the teams physically separated within one location, or located in more than one physical location?

They were somewhat crossfunctional – but no customer.
Their former experience had testers working in isolation from the developers.
Same for help text writers...

I started the project and started working with just developers and testers. I organized workshops – could be called retrospectives – where we got to the “bottom of quality” problems. The teams themselves saw the need of inviting other functions – product management, field support, sales... Thus we started working in cross-functional way and self-organizing

- Initiation - how was the project initiated? How was the team trained to use the Scrum process?

My intervention as crisis consultant. In this case training on the job, In other projects I start with training in scrum practices. Depends on the context and the budget. I encourage people to take training (but avoid that one of them takes the master role).

- Reporting - how did you report progress to management and the customers?

Demo after sprint.

And a lot of lobbying on my side.

I use techniques from System Dynamics (in cooperation with MIT PhD student) to show the benefits of agile development, focus on quality and early detection of problems by continuous integration and test driven development.

- Change - what difficulties were surfaced by Scrum that had to be resolved? How were these resolved?

On most of my teams it is considered very difficult to keep “current engineering” out during a sprint. Those tasks are not planned for and tend to take over a lot of the developers and testers time.

I encourage them to make a separate “burn-up” chart that indicates time spent on those tasks. And in future sprints they take those distractions into account when planning. In parallel I work with management to change their behavior.

- Management - what was the previous role of the ScrumMaster? Who took on the role of Product Owner? To what degree were they successful in fulfilling their roles?

Project manager for part of the tasks (and many other tasks) and technical lead for the estimation part.

Product owner is called the “sponsor” – unfortunately he tends to work via a program manager and is not directly involved with the teams – unless things start to go wrong. That is when I came in.

- Engineering - what software engineering practices or environment had to be changed?

Mostly testing. No unit testing automated. No acceptance test automation.

Introduced some pair programming practices too (but limited)

Regular standup meetings, regular sprint reviews

- Stabilization - for how long did the software have to be stabilized before it could be released? How did you structure this stabilization process?

This was a stabilization release in the first place. We needed another 6 months to get the product out – and this time with agreement of developers that they could trust and guarantee quality.

The stabilization process and all of the efforts were structured around short feedback cycles and above all creation of safety. So I did some work on what I consider true empowerment (Virginia Satir five freedoms) and organized some special workshops to surface problems, fears... using some of my own retrospective techniques (with stories, and “goofie” dolls....)

- Success - to what degree was the project successful? To what degree was the Scrum process instrumental in the success of the project?

We limited the damage and have now teams ready to do some real work.

From a very depressed group we ended with a group that believes it is possible to deliver good product without doing too much overtime...

To me the core of scrum is (and will always be) visibility and building of trust. If it is that, it was the reason we turned the project.

- Scrum Process - to what degree was the Scrum process implemented "out of the box?" To what degree did you have to modify the Scrum process for this project? For each modification, how did you formulate the modification so that the basic inspect/adapt mechanisms continued to function? What parts of Scrum couldn't be implemented, or failed, and why?

I am constantly adapting, adopting, renaming...

I use the inspect, adapt using retrospectives, getting feedback... using inspect, adapt on our own practices. Trust and visibility.

We had to be flexible on team constitution at first – see missing product owner.

I decided that it was more important that we moved into empowerment in this environment than to be rigid about the constitution of the group. It was very rewarding to see groups "that were not on speaking terms" come up with the need to invite each other to participate into "lets look at the process" meetings. The group actually build the Scrum approach, rather than me as a researcher installing it because it is in the book.

2. How do you cause the accuracy of Product Backlog estimates to improve? To what degree does their accuracy matter?

3 point estimates and using the planning game – in many variants (planning poker, big groups start with...). Spikes to work out performance issues that were going to take a lot longer than expected.

3. How do you cause the accuracy of what a team commits to for a Sprint to what the team actually delivers?

Trust, dialogue.

My whole approach these days is focused on creating an environment where it is safe to speak up, to not know, to be afraid ... and then to do something to solve the problems together.

In an environment like that there is less need to bluff, to lie or to forge the estimates into something different because "the business needs it"

4. What metrics do you use to track the development process? Which metrics have been changed, removed, or newly implemented as a result of using Scrum?

The usual burndown charts and scrum charts.

I do add a "risk assessment chart" on a scale 1 – 10 what is the perceived risk from each group's perspective for a number of risk areas. This should go down and did go down.

5. What type of training, resources, or tools would best help you successfully employ Scrum in the future?

People workshops internal. Implement scrum with our team – workshop.

And Project Leadership in the Weinberg sense.

Training on how to use scrum for large, multiple release product development – with the system

dynamics in support (I can deliver some of that to the scrum group).
Intend to look into QFD (I use it now, but not in a systematic way) to support the process to prioritize product and release backlog, link into stories, ... then changing the house and linking stories with supporting progress metrics and process (when demanded by the company) making sure that inconsistencies and overhead are clear (and make it clear an option to spend time on extra process is a business choice – with the business responsible if time is wasted)

1. (Optional) Scrum and Extreme Programming are sometimes used together. What must be considered when this is done?

Terminology – beware of confusion.

I am more into using Lean (both Poppendieck and the original Reinertsen) – waste, feedback, learning and learning...

I consider it very fruitful.