

CSM Practicing Certification Renewal Assessment

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1. Describe one project on which you have used Scrum over the last twelve months. Describe: Purpose - what business goal was the project intended to deliver?

The team is one of several that are completely revamping their internet service offerings to better provide a seamless view to their financial customers. Competitor's products had driven their customer base to complain loudly about the inefficiencies they now found in this company. The project was tasked with providing a portal into the different financial applications, and creating an efficient and easy to use experience that would keep existing customers happy, bring lost customers back, and entice new customers to join.

Length - what was the duration of the project?

The project is expected to be completed by the end of this calendar year. It is an 18-month project.

Cost - what were the budgeted and actual costs?

Unknown – I did not have authorization into the budget views.

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

Customers had to sign in for each financial activity, which could be quite annoying if several different types of transactions needed to be completed. Having a single point of entry, a consistent look and feel, and data sharing across the applications will make the user experience a much more pleasant one. While no attempt has been made yet to measure the customer satisfaction benefit, the team has received very positive feedback on the product from their focus groups. (They have completed four sprints, and the initial release was greeted with "finally!", "thank you!", "wow, this is so much nicer!" and other such comments.)

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

The team I was a part of consisted of 8 people. There are five additional teams of anywhere from 6 to 18 people on the overall project. Each is responsible for a particular area of functionality (an application). The initial team, which kicked off one to two sprints ahead of the other teams (staggered enterprise roll-out of Scrum), is establishing the architecture as they go, and the other teams "plug in" to the infrastructure.

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?

The team I was dedicated to is indeed cross-functional and very much self-organizing today, although it took a little while to break down some of the communication barriers that were simply a part of the large corporate culture. They are split across two locations, with the bulk of the team located in the main office. These folks do not share the same space in the main office, but their cubes are all located on the same floor. The other facility is on the other side of the same city; their new Scrum Master alternates her physical presence at each every few days.

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

As a consultant for Rally, we met with the executives of the division several times to review the benefits of the methodology and discuss the best method for introducing it to the teams. I worked with the initial pilot team, and served as a temporary ScrumMaster until they were able to hire

their own. Rally trained the teams on the Scrum principles and practices via workshops, facilitation, interactive exercises, and then finally the formal Certified Scrum Master training for their project leads and managers.

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

We maintained two reporting tracks – the traditional reporting that the executives and administrators were used to receiving, and the more agile reports that consisted of the burndown charts, the sprint summaries, and the backlog updates. Unfortunately this practice of reporting progress in two different formats continues, and this is not expected to change for several more months.

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

The biggest change was having a dedicated cross-functional team. Executive management is committed to this fortunately, and was immediately able to see the benefits of reducing the distractions a typical time-sliced team experiences. The team works very well together and has fully embraced the Scrum practices. The sprint review has been something they all look forward to because they know that it signals another opportunity to ease pain points and to recognize their accomplishments. Other issues remain at the corporate level however – integrating Scrum into the rest of the organization is a particularly thorny issue that first must address politics, culture, and financial and legal concerns before headway can be made.

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?

The company has an abundance of middle managers that are very document-intensive. No clear appropriate ScrumMaster emerged, so I served the role temporarily to help them get started. They recently hired an experienced CSM, who is continuing to mentor their team leads and brand-new certified ScrumMasters (previously Project Managers).

The Product Owner role was taken on by the Product Manager, who slipped into the role with ease. Additional training was provided to business analysts, so that they can serve in the product owner role on other teams.

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

Good engineering practices already existed, but they had to be stepped up to meet the continuous delivery schedule of Scrum. One practice that is lacking is automated testing, but they are aware that this is the next big obstacle they must tackle.

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

The last week of the sprint is dedicated to hardening. No new features are allowed to be started during this period, and all features that were committed to are expected to be complete. Hardening focuses on system testing, performance tuning, integration issues, training, and the slide back into the waterfall for transference to production.

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

The customers are expressing their satisfaction now, and that translated into great success. The speed of delivery has delighted management; they plan to continue the enterprise roll-out of the methodology.

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?

The team members were trained on the methodology, were assisted during their initial adoption

period, and have continued to become more and more “pure” as time progresses. The sprint reviews are key to this adoption, as is experienced ScrumMaster guidance. The teams still have to integrate waterfall-type activities, such as moving code to Production (an external department that is not agile) – however, I do not view this accommodation of their waterfall colleagues as modifying Scrum. These production requirements are simply part of the backlog, planned for the last sprint.

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

Accuracy has improved as a result of their experience, and as a result of the culture change. Estimating is now an enjoyable activity without fear of punishment if they are wrong. Once accuracy’s importance was diminished in favor of accurately identifying the top three features that needed to be worked, the focus shifted enough to allow for the thoughtful discussions that in turn benefit estimate precision.

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

Experience and discussion and sprint reviews help the team to better meet their commitments in each sprint.

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?

This is a work in progress for the team. Currently they track number of stories committed to vs. accepted, number of test cases for each, number of defects logged in the sprint, expected velocity vs. observed velocity, burndown rate, and, for the old reporting they still need to do: actuals, time, and percent complete in factors of four (25%, 50%, 75%, 100%).

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

Enterprise adoption of Scrum, focusing not on the tactical aspects of piloting teams and obtaining facilities, but instead on the cultural, financial, and legal concerns that the corporation has to address.

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