

FACILITATING PROFESSIONAL SCRUM TEAMS


IMPROVE TEAM ALIGNMENT, EFFECTIVENESS, AND OUTCOMES



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The Professional Scrum Series by  **Scrum.org**

This book expertly removes the ambiguity of facilitation and highlights the value an influential facilitator adds to a team's effectiveness through relatable stories, practical advice, and techniques to try. I would highly recommend this book to anyone, including management, working in product development, regardless of their use of Scrum.

—*Nic Easton, Product Development Coach and Consultant*

Brilliantly blends practice and theory. Real-life Scrum scenarios throughout the book paint a clear picture of how to put facilitation principles, skills, and techniques into action to overcome common Scrum challenges. Visualize what it looks like to guide people from not-so-effective collaboration toward greater creativity, responsibility, alignment, and improved outcomes.

—*Stephanie Ockerman, Founder of Agile Socks LLC and co-author of the book Mastering Professional Scrum*

Working with Scrum teams? Then buy this book! It's packed with advice and real-life examples to support your desired goals. The stories shared by the experienced authors resonated with me, and I loved the practical facilitation ideas. I will be returning to this book again and again.

—*Caroline Stacey, Scrum Master and Agile Coach*

The authors' insights into Scrum facilitation are transformative. Drawing from my own Agile expertise and teaching at Harvard, I can attest to the book's profound value. It's a must-read for anyone striving for high-performance teams. Kudos for this enlightening guide!

—*Richard Kasperowski, CTO, Agile Expert, and Harvard University Instructor*

This book is a must-have for anyone working with Scrum teams. Packed with practical tips, relatable scenarios, and a sprinkle of humor, it offers invaluable guidance to not only boost your Scrum team's success but also turn up the dial on effective facilitation on every-day scenarios. Kudos to the authors for sharing their expertise and compelling insights.

—*Saniya Khalil, Product Owner*

Without a Product Goal, the Sprint Planning event is more challenging to facilitate because the direction that a Scrum Team should be going in is unclear.

We discuss facilitating creation of the Product Goal in more detail in Chapter 1.

TAKE A GOAL-ORIENTED APPROACH

Many Scrum Teams have trouble crafting a Sprint Goal when they attempt to retrofit it around a set of Product Backlog items they selected for the Sprint. When crafting goals in this way, success is tied to completing the forecasted Product Backlog items and the Sprint Goal is almost meaningless.

The alternative is to facilitate the conversation by taking a goal-oriented approach and starting with the “why.” The Product Owner shares their objective for the Sprint, explaining why it would be valuable. The Scrum Team collaboratively crafts a Sprint Goal while discussing the work for the Sprint. During Sprint Planning, the Scrum Team can continually revise the Sprint Goal and the selected Product Backlog items as it creates its plan for the Sprint, but centering on the Sprint Goal and how it will take a step toward the Product Goal helps the Scrum Team focus on doing the next most valuable thing.

This is not to say that every item on the Sprint Backlog must contribute to the Sprint Goal. It is likely that the Scrum Team has other valuable work it can do that does not directly relate to this Sprint Goal. Examples include improvement actions from the Sprint Retrospective, small fixes, and learning something new in the product’s technology space. Or the Scrum Team might just have capacity to work on other valuable Product Backlog items during the Sprint in addition to those that help the team meet the Sprint Goal.

ENCOURAGE PULL, DON’T PUSH

Developers select the work for the Sprint. Good facilitation of the Sprint Planning event supports the Developers in deciding what they think they can do. A facilitator should challenge any kind of pushy behavior in Sprint

Planning. This might come from the Product Owner pushing a pre-decided list of Product Backlog items that they have planned for the Developers to do in the Sprint. This often happens when a bigger plan involving a Sprint-by-Sprint roadmap exists over the long term. Such an approach is counterintuitive to the empirical approach of Scrum and requires education. Push might also come from within the group of Developers, such as when there is an optimistic and dominant personality, or an anxious developer is worried that not enough work is getting delivered, and feels pressure to accept more Product Backlog items into the Sprint.

In both cases, the job of facilitation is to protect the team from these push actions. It involves empowering the Developers to self-manage and select the work for the Sprint by themselves in a way that involves everybody so they can arrive at a decision that everyone is comfortable with.

LEAVE SPACE FOR THE DEVELOPERS TO PLAN

A facilitator of Sprint Planning should allow space for the Developers to plan how to conduct the work. Sprint Planning is more than crafting the Sprint Goal and identifying the Product Backlog items to work on in the Sprint. It should also include time for the Developers to create an actionable plan that they can act upon as soon as Sprint Planning is over.

This may include the Developers decomposing Product Backlog items into subtasks and discussing in more detail what they will do. It could even involve discussion among the Developers in which they are sketching ideas, drawing diagrams, and doing whatever else they need to do to think through their plan. The Developers can do this during the Sprint, but it should be perfectly fine for them to do this in Sprint Planning as long as it supports them in creating their plan of action.

The Developers are solving complex problems, which often necessitates the creativity, innovation, and diversity of perspectives of the whole Scrum Team. Combining facilitation techniques that allow divergence of thought and convergence to decisions for the way ahead helps to maximize the chances of success.

DO JUST ENOUGH PLANNING

Sprint Planning is timeboxed to eight hours or less. It may be tempting for Scrum Teams to fill this timebox and investigate every nuance of the Product Backlog items that have been selected for the Sprint to come up with the perfect plan. A facilitator can steer the Scrum Team to do just enough planning to make a start. The team must still craft and articulate a Sprint Goal that everyone understands to be able to create an initial plan.

The sooner the Developers start the development work of the Sprint, the better. They will discover false assumptions about what is feasible, and uncover complexity by starting the work instead of trying to plan for every eventuality in the Sprint Planning event.

CONCLUSION

Sprint Planning kicks off the Sprint with the team members coming together to consider the latest product Increment, their capacity, and what they have learned from their stakeholders from the Sprint Review and refinement to select a Sprint Goal. They also consider what work they think they can achieve at a minimum to pursue that goal. As long as that Sprint Goal is relevant, it serves as the North Star, a focus that guides the Developers when making decisions about that Sprint.

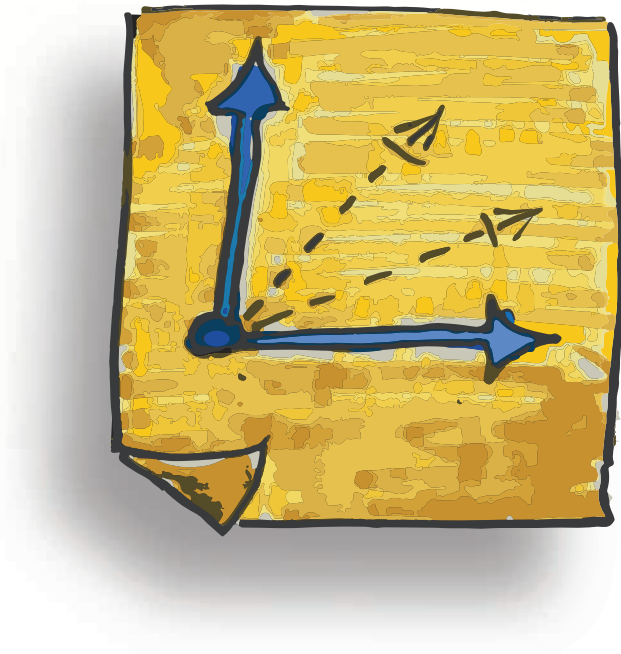
Developers deciding what can be Done in a Sprint is a control mechanism that enables a Scrum Team to learn more quickly and more frequently about value. But it is hard. A Scrum Team can get lost during and after Sprint Planning for multiple reasons:

- Unable to create a single valuable Sprint Goal
- Unequal representation of ideas and voices during planning
- Overcommitting to work
- Lack of clarity on the plan

How the Scrum Team manages its Sprint Planning event largely affects the tone of the Sprint and the team's ability to collaborate in it. As a facilitator, your objective is to make sure the Scrum Team collaboratively develops and shares an understanding of its initial plan of action for the Sprint. That includes ensuring that the relevant feedback and input from the previous Sprint Review and Retrospective is brought forward into Sprint Planning. To get to that point, you will likely need to rely on the facilitation principles of participative and process for effective facilitation.

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FACILITATING THE 3 DAILY SCRUM



Synchronizing in a timebox of 15 minutes.
