

The founding principles of Scrum

In this reading, you will learn to define the characteristics of Scrum as we review what makes Scrum different from other frameworks.

Although **Scrum** was first used to describe Agile content in 1986 in the Harvard Business Review, the term originates from the internationally loved sport, rugby. In rugby, a “scrum” involves players huddling closely together with their heads down while trying to gain possession of the ball. Then, the players work together in order to achieve their shared goal: to get the ball across the line and score!



The original Harvard Business Review paper, written by Hirotaka Takeuchi and Ikujiro Nonaka and titled *The New New Product Development Game*, introduces Scrum in the chapter “Moving the Scrum downfield.” Throughout the paper, the authors continue to point out which characteristics of a team help to move the Scrum downfield. Those are:

- **Built-in instability:** In the Scrum world, teams are given the freedom to achieve important outcomes with “challenging requirements.” Takeuchi and Nonaka explain that this gives teams “an element of tension” necessary to “carry out a project of strategic importance to the company.”
- **Self-organizing teams:** Scrum Teams were intended to operate like their own start-up, with a unique order that lacks true hierarchy. These teams are considered self-organizing when they exhibit autonomy, continuous growth, and collaboration.

- **Overlapping development phases:** Individuals on a Scrum Team must “work toward synchronizing their pace to meet deadlines.” At some point throughout the process, each individual’s pace starts to overlap with others, and eventually, a collective pace is formed within the team.
- **Multi-learning:** Scrum is a framework that relies heavily on trial and error. Scrum Team members also aim to stay up-to-date with changing market conditions and can then respond quickly to those conditions.
- **Subtle control:** As we mentioned, Scrum Teams are self-organizing and operate like a start-up, but that doesn’t mean there is no structure at all. By creating checkpoints throughout the project to analyze team interactions and progress, Scrum Teams maintain control without hindering creativity.
- **Organizational transfer of learning:** On Scrum Teams, everyone is encouraged to learn skills that may be new to them as they support other team members.

The authors’ main point was that “each element, by itself, does not bring about speed and flexibility. But taken as a whole, the characteristics can produce a powerful new set of dynamics that will make a difference.” Though these concepts were first introduced in 1986, they still remain remarkably true for Scrum Teams today.