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Scrum of Scrums

Programme Management

For the Agile Scrum Master,

Product Owner, Stakeholder and Development Team

By

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Introduction

How do we scale scrum?

The scrum framework brings structure and order to a project in a chaotic, fast-paced environment. It delivers a shippable increment of the product after each sprint and allows a business to increase return on investment through prioritisation. As long as the scrum rules are carried out as its creators intended the results are phenomenal and business value is realised. However what happens when the business requires greater output, many related projects to be synchronised to a deadline or a co-ordinated technical solution? This is where the Scrum-of-scrums technique comes into its own.

The Scrum of scrums is a method of co-ordinating teams and is used to grow and synchronise the scrum framework within a company to huge scale. As a scrum master I have used this technique to great effect in order to keep complex inter-related projects in sync. I have also noticed many “dos and don’ts” that I will share with you. When you have read this book, you will fully understand:

- What the scrum of scrum technique is
- How it will benefit you and your organisation
- Learning and tips from an industry expert that you can apply to your everyday work

1. The Challenge - Scaling Scrum

The challenge in scaling scrum across an organisation lies within the scrum rule that a team should typically have less than ten members. While this is a guideline and there is no substitute for common sense, teams should definitely be “lean, mean productive machines”.

The challenge gets interesting when the business stakeholders wake up one morning and say “I want to

deliver quicker, let's put another thirty people on the project". Or if they say "we need this delivered in three months and there are three other dependant teams you need to deliver this with." Breaking the news that you want to limit the team to ten members would seem to limit the ability of the business to deliver.

The scrum of scrums technique helps in these very situations, but before I explain how it works it is important to understand that scrum of scrums relies on all the original rules of scrum being carried out correctly, especially product backlog management and ordering/prioritisation of the backlog. For this reason, the product owner's role is key to the whole process and this should be discussed with the product owner(s) and stakeholders involved before embarking on a scrum of scrums mission in your organisation. Continue reading and you will see why this is so important.

2. What is Scrum of Scrums?

The scrum of scrums is a meeting held to co-ordinate a set of inter-related scrum teams. The power and ability to scale is in the fact that one representative from each related team attends the scrum of scrums meeting. By doing this an organisation can co-ordinate hundreds of people on different teams.

The Scrum of Scrums Model

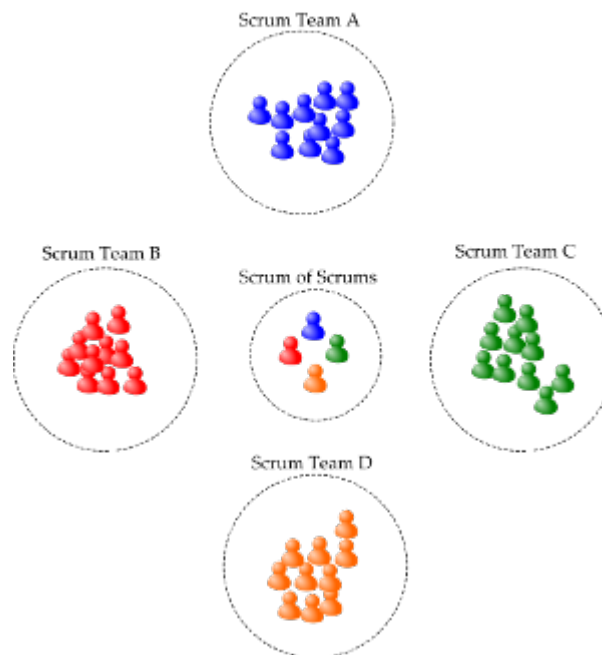


image credit to toolsforagile.com

The illustration shows four related scrum teams. From each team, a representative has been picked to attend the meeting. The representatives are shown sharing knowledge in the centre of the illustration.

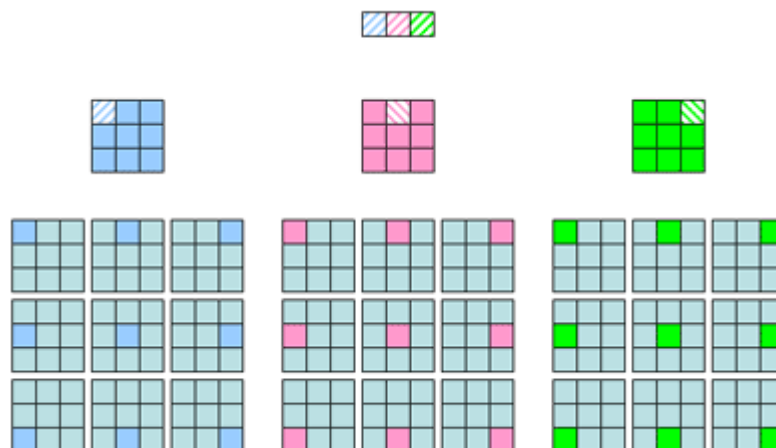


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Once the number of members in the scrum of scrums becomes too large a representative from that meeting can join another scrum of scrums meeting and the process can continue.

In this meeting, one way of co-ordinating is for the host to ask four questions. The questions are:

1. What have you accomplished since the last meeting in line with the sprint goal
2. What do you aim to accomplish before the next meeting in line with the sprint goal
3. Are there any impediments/blockers in your way in line with the sprint goal
4. Are you about to do anything that could create a blocker/impediment to the project

The first three questions aim to highlight progress, draw attention to targets and surface any issues that need to be addressed to keep the project on track. The last question stems from the fact that related projects can often unknowingly create problems for each other. For example, in the technology world, one team may deploy code that means vastly more testing for another team.

The meetings can be scheduled to be as frequent as needed and are usually anywhere from daily to bi-weekly. It purely depends on the needs of the programme.