

# Interview of IT Professional Transcript

## Assignment 2 – Group A2#2

Interview conducted by Paul Baird and guest speaker is Phil Stainthorpe.

Paul:

Recording Phillip. Are you happy with this meeting being recorded?

Phillip:

I am, thanks.

Paul:

Excellent. This is Phillip Stanthorpe everybody. He is a scrum master with Chubb insurance. He's been in the industry for how long Phil?

Phillip:

Uh, since 2002, so 18 years.

Paul:

Long time. Prior to that he was pretty much everything, he's Superman. He was a pilot. He's everything. I've got 13 questions for you Phil. Should be 20 or 30 minutes if you have the time. Do you want to give us a quick intro before the questions kick off?

Phillip:

Yeah, so my name is Phil Stainthorpe. I've been working in IT for 18 years. I did have a sabbatical as a pilot for a little while. I went to University, Tulsa University and did a Bachelor of IT. And then got a great job at the end of '02 as a developer and sort of worked my way through the industry doing various different roles and landing in my current role, which is a scrum master. Lots of different domains, so insurance, banking, government, agriculture, airlines, aviation. So lots of different industries which has been interesting. I do enjoy IT. It's quite a quite a variety of work that you can be exposed to.

Paul:

Also, I've got a lot of personal questions, but we'll just stick with the assignment questions. I might give you a few at the end.

Phillip:

Yep.

Paul:

I'm gonna kick off if you're happy to.

Phillip:

For sure.

Paul:

Question one, okay? What exactly do you do? So the title of your role and just your daily tasks.

Phillip:

Okay, so my current title is Scrum Master. Now synonyms for that you might hear are Delivery Manager, IT Agile Project Manager, things like that. But my current title is Scrum Master. So my daily tasks, I have two teams. They've got about 6 people, mix of developers, QA or testers and Business Analysts; delivering two projects for an insurance company called Chubb Insurance. During the day we'll have typical day, say last Thursday, or Friday we have a daily meeting. They're called stand-ups. We have them every morning, and then throughout the day I'll interact with both teams. I try to sit close to them. I've got both teams sitting in the same pod as me. So my job is very interesting in that I'm there just to make sure that they are as efficient as possible. So my outputs are more what they do. So I don't wear headphones during the day, I'm always listening to conversations. If I hear someone is being blocked, I jump up. You know I try and sort it out. Try and help them to sort it out. So, yeah; my daily job is really just to make sure that the teams are working as efficiently as possible. They're not impeded and that they can deliver the solution as effectively as they can basically.

Paul:

That's an excellent response. That's along response, that is great.

Phillip:

Sorry.

Paul:

Thanks very much, that's very interesting. Okay, so that gave us a little insight as to the industry or at least the way that your workplace is structured, but can you tell us more about the industry? So, your role in the workplace, your role relative to the industry and your workplace relative to the industry as well.

Phillip:

Yeah, so the insurance industry specifically or IT?

Paul:

Just the industry with an IT spin I guess. 0

Phillip:

Yep, so insurance is a multi-billion-dollar industry worldwide, and I guess there's different ways that we sell insurance and IT is a big part of it. So we all can get insurance through all these online portals, and they're called aggregators basically, and that's a big sort of change in the insurance industry in the last sort of 5-10 years. Most people buy insurance, not necessarily directly through an insurance company, but it may well be through these aggregators that are starting to sort of proliferate, like iSelect and things like that. So interacting with them has been a big change. There is a lot of performance implications which has changed from an IT perspective. You've gotta be so careful about that. So your systems need to be able to connect with their systems and the people that return the results as fastest are a lot of the time at the top of the search. That's changed a lot in the industry. We're no longer really just thinking about how we have our own website. It's how we link up with those aggregators. For me also, I worked with a lot with B to C sort of B to B. So we would sell insurance through brokers and again they have their own aggregator, believe it or not. So they go through a very similar thing to iSelect. So that's changed a lot.

Paul:

That's interesting. Is it difficult organizing the way that you communicate with each aggregator? Do they share the same data? Is it all fed the same way? Is that a big part of your work, trying to organize that communication channel?

Phillip:

Yeah, exactly, it definitely is. They're not super flexible, they sort of have a lot more power in the relationship because we want to be on their platform. They'd like us on their platform, but it's more important for us to be there

because that's a big avenue to sell. So we need to make sure we interact with them. And yeah, how our solutions set up and that can vary.

Paul:

Your IT staff needs to be pretty flexible with dealing with different lines of communications and platforms from all the aggregators.

Phillip:

Yeah, so we provide them sort of I guess the schemers and things like that for the different endpoint that the guys need to connect to. Sometimes it's nice and easy. It's not as nice and easy as say the real estate industry. I've never worked in real estate but my understanding is their IT is really much simpler. There's a predefined sort of set of APIs that everyone uses and it just sort of throws out the data. It's not the same in insurance yet, it's not as standardized. So yeah, there's a lot of work in that and that's been changed in recent years.

Paul:

That's a huge industry. That's good. Great answer, thank you very much. Next one, what other kinds of work do you have to do other than what you've explained just earlier?

Phillip:

Yeah, so this is a big thing I guess in IT, really good than the assignment covers it. It's that a lot of people do things, sometimes that's additional to their role, sometimes it's completely different. They get hired for A and are doing B, and I've done that quite a lot in my current role. I certainly do whatever was hired to do which is run two scrum teams and help them to deliver as efficiently as possible. But on top of that I have other jobs that I need to do. It's about filling gaps and I guess in IT you do that a lot, especially if you're a contractor. So maybe I should have mentioned that earlier, I'm a contractor, so I get paid a day rate. I don't get annual leave and move around a bit more, but you are really expected just to get the job done. So I am a Release Manager for my team, which means for my actual department so not just my two teams. So I have to make sure we align to the organizational change management policies and procedures. So I have put all sorts of processes in place to make sure that we all do that. I'm also the Operations Manager for our production environment. So all the bugs and defects come through for the entire department. I worked triage, assigned to the right team, get more information. I don't do it all. I do a lot of it, but I also delegate that to other

people in the group. But they are the two big roles as well as sort of Scrum Master, I'm the Release Manager and the Operations Manager. So it's hectic.

Paul:

They're both big roles like yeah you'd need to sell one of those roles as the actual full time position, but by the sounds of it they're just secondary duties for you.

Phillip:

That's right, and it's hard to fit in. It's hard work, it's tiring.

Paul:

Yeah, it sounds like a lot. Well, thank you. Okay, who are all the different people that you might interact with at work? This is a broad question, so we'll keep that to like a day-to-day style. So who are the types of people that you interact with over the course of a day for a project, or a week, or something like that.

Phillip:

Yeah, so typical week I obviously interact with my team, so that's the developers, testers, business analysts. My two teams also have a business facing person called Product Owner. So I meet with those two every day, we talk very frequently. They're sort of defining requirements and making sure that it's being built how they'd like it, so they interact with me, they interact with the team. I obviously interact frequently with my I guess manager and his manager. So I guess they're more about sort of managing expectations. This would be almost on a daily basis, making sure they are aware of any overruns, things that are taking a bit longer. Maybe my teams blocked on something and I need to sort of escalate that up because I don't have the clout to make it move and to fix it. In a typical week at this current role, I actually catch up with the CIO of the group. I'm kind of lucky that he knows that when he talks to me, he gets the truth. I sort of have a one on one with him, so that's my manager's manager's manager; so I keep him in the loop. Then it'll be talking, if it's a release week I talk to the operations team about how we're going to do the release. That's usually a very fiery conversation because they always usually always late or something like that, or we haven't ticked a box or done a document for them. Who else would I talk to? The change management team, make sure we're on the agenda to talk about the change management meeting and then it'll be I guess either just teams in the

department making sure they're ready for any release that's coming up and any other dependencies.

Paul:

OK, so do you interact often with people outside of your organization with like let's say clients. Did that happen from your position much at all?

Phillip:

No, because we're internal. With an internal IT function, we're not a consultancy or anything like that. I don't interact with users of our system, so my product owner does that. That's their role, it's not necessarily mine. Mine's more about the delivery function.

Paul:

So we'll just expand on that one real quick. Would you say that IT people often in situations where they are communicating either indirectly or one on one with people like you did with CEO positions and then people in much lower positions because of the type of work they're performing in their workplace? For example, if you were just the receptionist of, let's say any kind of shop front or organization; you deal with a limited window of people i.e. the clients, and then maybe you report to one or two in the office. But it sounds like you report or deal with staff from a much higher and lower range in your workplace.

Phillip:

Yes, so my role can have that so that can be one of the benefits, I guess. Sometimes negatives in that you might get shut down from the CIO. But certainly in my role that is part of it, and it helps you, it helps the role. If I need something moved and then I have my team as a blocker, having that access to the CIO definitely makes things unblocked very quickly. I do find say, developers and testers and business analysts and at that level have very, very little interaction with people above them, which I think is a real shame. I would love to see them have more interaction with the CIO and get in front of them and sort of have more ownership of what they're delivering. I do find their kind of obfuscated a lot from that, and so when they do things well or when they do things poorly, they don't see that as much.

Paul:

Okay that was awesome. I'll add that as an expanded question. Okay, you kind of touched on this already. This is, please tell us about your interactions with other IT professionals. So you've really covered that, but that last point

you shared regarding the particular team members having limited interactions, your interactions with your workplace stuff seems to be extremely broad. But what about your interactions with the IT professionals? So the guys doing the coding, the guys managing the IT parts of the project? That kind of interaction.

Phillip:

Yeah, so in my role that's really what I do every day. Within my team as my defined role, as the advertised role, that's what I mainly should be doing, and I do. I interact with them frequently. In that sort of release manager role I talk with a lot of people outside of my team like IT professionals in the infrastructure team and the operations team. So I get to speak to them quite a lot. You do find a certain, like here we have guilds and so developers will ever develop a guild and so they'll have a weekly or fortnightly catch up with the rest of the developers and they share ideas and things like that, and experiences and lessons learnt; and the testers do the same with the testing guild. Same with the business analyst, so there is ways. I mean, that's kind of called the Spotify model where they sort of have different ways of slicing teams to sort of cross pollinate ideas and keep those connections and sort of internal networking going. And we do that to a certain extent here.

Paul:

Yep, okay. So are you hands on with those IT professionals sometimes? Or is it all through your own portals and project infrastructure?

Phillip:

Yeah, so most of my team is basically with me in the office. With Covid we're not always in the office, but they were. Usually we have, for the last year we've been all sitting here.

Paul:

In your line of work most of your IT professional interactions are of physical nature.

Phillip:

Yeah.

Paul:

Like work on the PC with them if you have to, and connect to them if you have to.

Phillip:

Yeah, yeah, exactly.

Paul:

Okay, really good. You've already answered this next question. It says what about your interactions with clients and investors? You covered that with clients, but any difference with investors?

Phillip:

No, no difference.

Paul:

That's fine. We'll skip across that then. That was kind of covered. What aspects of your work do you spend most time on? And then expand a little bit. So probably like, you spoke about heaps about your tasks. So just tell me the task that probably requires the most of your time. Would that be the components of being the Scrum Master?

Phillip:

Yeah, the Scrum Master role, so working closely with my team. I sit with him most of the time. So definitely sitting with them, helping them through a problem. A lot of times people solve a bug just by having you sit there. I probably have given them an idea and give them a chance to soundboard, use me as a sounding board I suppose, answer questions about priority, answer questions if the product owners not there. If I know, sort of how to how to help them synthesize a requirement that might be in one of the user stories that they are delivering. It's general, I seem to in a lot of my roles, just sort of be the person that everyone comes and asks, has questions to help them refine something or just to get a better idea of how something should be done, which is nice. So you seem to be the focal point for a lot of teams. Not always my current role. I seem to get asked questions from all the different teams. I guess it's bit tiring if you've been here long enough, you kind of get to know all that information that should be documented, but how do you document everything that someone knows? So I spend a lot of time answering questions of not necessarily super technical, but maybe where something is or who should I talk to about this? That's kind of what I spend most of my time doing.

Paul:

Yeah, easy. That's a good one. What aspects of your work do you find most challenging?

Phillip:

Communicating. Communicating upwards plans and managing expectations of what they mean and what they are based on. So with Agile delivery that we



sort of do here at Chubb, they kind of want the best of both worlds. They don't want to spend a lot of time to defining requirements and getting things agreed to in advance, but at the same time they want to have a plan that's reliable and that you can sort of basically start writing promotional material to the public on. Which is not possible early in the process. It's probably the most the most difficult part of my job is that, it's trying to really get that across. Yes, here's our plan, but this plan will keep evolving as we start to know more.

Paul:

So simply you're saying that the aspects you find most challenging is communicating and agreeing up and down the chain of command. Would that be?

Phillip:

Yeah, even just, mainly the communicating. So communicating because the message gets lost at a certain level. So you might tell whoever wanted the estimate that, "Hey, this is based on what we know now as we start delivering and we get our cadence, and we understand how our team works and how much we can deliver we'll certainly know more about how reasonable this is to deliver. But this is a baseline that we can start sort of reporting against and manage expectations". But then as soon as that goes to the next level up or the next level above that, that message can sometimes get lost, and then all of a sudden that becomes a deadline that everyone thinks it was always the plan to hit. So that's the most challenging thing, it's trying to communicate that this is predicated on very little information, and that's good, because we don't know a lot. We don't know what we don't know, so we just start building what we know. There's the right way to do it but that message can get lost, especially with maybe older school things.

Paul:

That's a good thing to know because even in the world of IT where you have so many avenues of communication and you use the platform Agile, and all forms of communication within it if I'm correct.

Phillip:

It's very transparent. Yeah.

Paul:

Yeah, so even in non-IT industries it sounds like what's most challenging is very similar. Which hasn't been fixed on my computer. Thank you. Okay,

almost wrapped up with a few left. Can you share an example of the work that you do that best captures the essence of the IT industry.

Phillip:

I guess, uh example with essence the IT industry. So I feel like what I want to say is yes, it's the IT industry, it's always changing. I guess yeah, so I guess an example for me is probably what I do, in that I've got a number of different roles. I started off just as a Scrum Master and as we evolved I had to pick up another role. So probably that for me, if someone doesn't know a lot about IT and wants to know what is the essence of it, I would say that it changes constantly. I wasn't always the Scrum Master. Before that I was a Business Analyst. Before that I was a C++ and C# Developer. Before that I was C, and you just keep changing and you keep evolving and so the essence of IT is that it's constantly changing. So you just can't sit still and stand still and expect to keep up with it. So as a job that's how I roll I suppose. I don't just expect to just do what I did when I started.

Paul:

It sounds like yourself, your team, and your company as a whole is flexible in that for the same reasons that you're just explaining that the industry changes so much that you have to use your IT skills and knowledge and move with those changes.

Phillip:

Yeah, exactly, yeah.

Paul:

Good, that's great. Okay, few left Phil, almost done mate. It's raining outside so I don't think we're going anywhere.

Phillip:

I got lunch at my desk.

Paul:

Okay, so you already answered this earlier. The question is how long have you been in the position or industry? But an extension to that is you said 18 years in the industry?

Phillip:

Yes I started IT in 2002.

Paul:

Okay, and how long in the position, and is that typical of the kind of position that you hold? And do you feel comfortable there or do you feel like moving?

Phillip:

Yeah, so yes 18 years in IT. I've been in this position nearly a year and a half. As I said I'm a contractor. So when you're a contractor it's very different obviously, as a perm you get paid a day rate as I said. You don't get annual leave, you don't get sick leave. As a contractor, you do tend to move around probably every year. Benefit of being a contractor is that you don't need to get involved in politics, but you do find and I'm finding here that long you are at a place that the more involved you do get.

Paul:

So would you say the time frame that you've been there is typical of the role?

Phillip:

Yes, so I'd say now a year to a year and a half would be probably about as long as most people would spend in a role as a contractor. As a perm, it's probably quite different. You might stay there 10 years.

Paul:

Do you find the people in your role are moving into permanent positions or moving out of those positions because of the pressures?

Phillip:

Yes, that's a good question, I'm not sure. I don't deal with a lot of people, like in my role there's usually only two or three and me at most at an organization, and they seem to be a mix of perm and contractor. The last place I worked there was another perm in my role and he was talking to me about maybe going and being a contractor.

Paul:

That's great, thank you. Another one, what pathways led you to where you are? So you did explain your studies and the few jobs you had in between. A lot of them sound very different.

Phillip:

Yeah.

Paul:

But what was the exact pathway that led you to do the role that you're in now?

Because it obviously doesn't seem like a role that's, let's say, a year 10 student would be aspiring to find. Because like, just honestly wouldn't know the role existed. So how did you get to where you are?

Phillip:

Yeah, and so this is a great question. No one would ever think to do this role, and I didn't know this role existed. And to be honest it probably didn't exist when I was at university. So when I was at uni, I didn't really know what to do. Picked IT, became a developer, grad developer at a government agency in Canberra and I did that for six years; didn't mind it. Then I spent a year and a half working in a very operational team. It was really exciting. They moved us to Melbourne. They looked after us really well and it was a really exciting environment. First time I'd ever worked in this sort of environment where you really had to use time critically, and so you make some changes. If there was a bug and you have to release it really quickly because you had a thousand temporary staff that if they couldn't use this system, they were sitting idle which is really expensive. So that was a year and a half secondment. Then I went back to normal IT and I found that I just couldn't do it because the deadline was a year away. There was no motivation to work hard because my goal was 12 months down the track to deliver some system or something and I was really disillusioned. I thought I didn't like IT and so I left, I became a pilot. I did that for five years and for one reason or another came back to IT. Worked with Qantas IT and they had just started their journey to become more of an Agile development, delivery sort of house and using Scrum and Kanban and processes like that. This is really the first time that I sort of seen Agile and heard it because I've been out of the industry for five years which is when it's sort of really started to take flight and become a bit more mainstream. Then I realized that's what I was missing, so I didn't hate IT. I just didn't like the fact that a goal was 12 months away and no one does. When you read more about Agile delivery, you realize that's one of the things that demotivates people's long-term goals. You need short term goals. So all these Agile delivery you start, I started realize hang on, this is what I was missing. I really actually do like IT, I really do. It's really exciting now. Then that's when I sort of got back into it and sort of found this role as a Scrum Master and it sounds like a really awful role, so I tell my wife it's a Delivery Manager because it sounds much more normal. That's what you are and you're working in this environment that really aligns to the human psyche and it is intrinsically motivational, because it just works. It works how we work as human beings, and so that's how I got here. I sort of, I guess you fall into it. I keep thinking I'm

just lucky that I had those experiences, but it's about, I guess change and you just keep working and you eventually find something that fits and works for you. Yeah, that's how I got here now and I haven't left and I don't want to.

Paul:

That's really cool. The last one, very similar, is what skills do you have? This could have been prior to university, prior to finishing school; skills and interests. And did they help you get to where you are?

Phillip:

Yeah so.

Paul:

What was kind of on a more personal level rather than just 'I went to uni' level?

Phillip:

Yeah, no I'm thinking. So the ones that really helped me in my current role, I got when I was working at a pub after I'd started my first job in Canberra. I was very quiet and a very shy person and then I started working at a pub as a second job for one reason or another. That made me, I guess come out of my shell and made me more confident. I can speak to people more. Yeah, more comfortable in all sorts of different situations with different people, and that's helped me immensely. I'd say that's my number one skill is I can talk to people, I guess I can empathize with people, all sorts of people. I can talk to CIO or I can go out and work with the cleaners of an airplane and chat with them about certain things, not that there any less important than the CIO, but maybe on the amount they get paid certainly is.

Paul:

The same example you could say you could easily conversed with the CEO and then sit down and converse in a very different human manner to a programmer, who's deep into text.

Phillip:

Yeah, super different way of thinking. They're much more analytical and you definitely talk to them very differently. That's probably the number one skill I picked up and that was from not working in IT.

Paul:

That's such a great take-away from an interview like this, it's that the IT industry is not just stereotypical nerds and IT geeks that you see in movies

and cartoons, but it's people who have those skills and can still communicate and discuss and empathize and speak across all different levels of education and hierarchal positions in an organization.

Phillip:

Yeah, and that goes for anyone or any job you doing. Like if you're a developer that has people skills you know and you can really relate to people and talk and listen; you know that just take you so far you'll be so successful. Especially if you love developing as well and solving problems. It's just so key I think.

Paul:

So, IT industry means an IT degree but don't lose your people skills.

Phillip:

That's right.

Paul:

Thank you very much, man. Well, I won't take you any longer because I told you 30 minutes and that's pretty much bang-on. That's awesome. Thank you very much. Do you have any questions for us?

Phillip:

Uh, how are you going to use this? What are you going to do with it?

Paul:

I should have told you this at the start.

Phillip:

You probably did, I probably wasn't listening, sorry.

Paul:

So this is on teams. This is just going to be saved in our teams drive and link for our assignment markers to watch. We're going to be transcoding this or transcribing this into a PDF report. It's just a small part of a larger group assignment that we have for our first subject of this degree being introduction to Information Technology.

Phillip:

Nice, so that's exciting.

Paul:

I'm just in the group, so this is just my task to interview yourself. Then we're compiling this and a whole bunch of other stuff into a big group assignment.

Phillip:

Yeah great. Oh that's exciting, awesome.

Paul:

But just to keep your mind at ease, it won't be publicly available.

Phillip:

Yeah, just don't tell my boss that I'm thinking about moving.

Paul:

Haha yeah, I won't. Thanks Phil.

Phillip:

Awesome, thanks Paul.

Paul:

See you buddy.

Phillip:

See you mate, bye.