How the School for Agile Coaches and Scrum Masters provides a Guided Immersive Learning Experience, Preparing Students for Success in Scrum Master Jobs

Szkoła
Agile Coachów
i Scrum Masterów

The Organization
The School for Agile Coaches and Scrum Masters offers is a 12-month guided, immersive learning development program containing 13 learning blocks.

The School for Agile Coaches and Scrum Masters was created and is run by Brass Willow, a consulting and training organization in Poland. Brass Willow is a Scrum.org Partner providing training and consulting services. The school was first sketched as a concept in 2014, but due to high travel costs for students and the frequency of meetings, the business model was unsustainable. In 2021, when companies learned that remote work can be as productive as office work, the program was launched as an online offering.

How did the School for Agile Coaches and Scrum Masters come about?

After speaking with many people working in Agile, Kate Hobler, Founder of Brass Willow and Scrum.org Professional Scrum Trainer™, observed that Scrum Masters and agile coaches were often not viewed as professionals, but instead as "team nannies" with low levels of Scrum mastery. To address this issue head-on and help rectify it, Hobler and Brass Willow created the School for Agile Coaches and Scrum Masters in Poland. This school is aimed toward two groups: Scrum Masters and agile coaches just moving into their roles; and Scrum Masters and agile coaches with no more than two years of experience.

Developing the Curriculum

The school's offering is a 12-month guided, immersive learning development program containing 13 blocks. The learning experience utilizes material from the Scrum.org Applying Professional Scrum™ (APS) and the ProfessionalScrum Master™ II (PSM II) training courses as well as some Kanban training materials.

Each cohort has a team of instructors involved in the learning experience:

Teachers - The teachers provide a variety of different perspectives for a diverse learning experience: Professional Scrum Trainers, trainers from other organizations and psychologists who explore how and why humans behave the ways they do.

Mentor(s) - Mentors create a bond with students and build a relationship with them. Each student is assigned a mentor they work with to help guide their learning, provide feedback and give advice.

Each learning cohort begins with the APS training course to ensure everyone is on the same page in terms of how to apply Scrum as they learn. APS is a hands-on, activity-based course in which students experience how Professional Scrum and the Scrum framework can help improve their ability to deliver value compared to traditional methods. Following APS, the cohort dives deep into communication and the psychology around it. Psychologists work with the students on running exercises in their everyday lives (both work-related and personal) and their assigned mentor provides feedback and coaching based on how they perform on the exercises. Other key areas they explore include:

- How to give feedback
- Facilitation skills
- Overview of agile frameworks and scaling frameworks
- Market trends
- How to support your Product Owner and organization in a transformation

The learning experience at The School for Agile Coaches and Scrum Masters consists of assignments that the students apply in their personal lives and day-to-day work combined with mentoring and training. Some of the assignments are group-based where students work together to build something, others focus on individual practice of key concepts and skills in the context of the student's work or personal environment. The program is designed for software developers but can easily be adapted to suit other types of work.

During their time at the school students focus on building a product to help Scrum Masters. They work with a Product Owner (one of the mentors) who guides them through the development, while the students themselves largely decide what form the product will be.

For example, in the second cohort of the school students created a LinkedIn profile sharing various content to help new Scrum Masters. They would share content ranging from vision and mission to other types of content including summaries of conferences they attended.

The profile they created is here:
https://www.linkedin.com/company/przestrzen-scrum-mastera/

13 Guided Learning Blocks
All of the learning blocks for the school are outlined below:

Module I – Supporting the Scrum Team

Block I – Working with people
The first block is facilitated by a clinical psychologist and a doctor of psychology. They review how people communicate and what students should pay attention to their own communication, so that they can start giving, receiving and facilitating good feedback.

Sample assignment:
Give feedback to one person and collect your findings to discuss with your mentor.

Block II – APS training class
The goal of this block is to bring all students to the same level of knowledge. The students usually come from varying proficiency levels. Following this class, the students are able to obtain the Professional Scrum Master I certification (after passing the PSM I certification test).

Sample assignment:
Observe Scrum or agile practices in places outside of a Scrum Team (at school, work, with your children etc.), collect your findings and choose

an action to take within your day-to-day work designed to increase effectiveness and professionalism. Discuss findings and ideas with your mentor before taking action at work. Debrief the results

Block III – Working with conflict

The goal of this block is to understand how people differ and people we argue. The class is facilitated by a licensed mediator, who not only shares stories from their practice, but also shows and practices the mediation process with students.

Sample assignment:

Describe a conflict you have witnessed, evaluate it in its type and severity and collect your findings to discuss with your mentor. With your new insights, prepare for how you will engage when conflict comes up within your team(s).

Block IV – Tools for team collaboration

This block focuses on team dynamics, stages of development, roles and techniques for building a team using coaching practices.This is facilitated by a coach and a psychologist.

Sample assignment:

An assessment of team development stage - after being granted the team's permission, observe its work during Scrum events to assess the level of teamwork. Determine the next best-action to take to support the team's effectiveness and professionalism. Discuss the plan with your mentor and debrief results after taking action.

Block V – Technology for Scrum Masters

The goal of this block is to help students understand what software development work is, what it feels like to do this type of work and how to support Developers in their daily work. Students learn the basics of

coding, and students experienced in coding help their beginner colleagues. All of these elements are tied together when they learn how the software development life cycle works.

Sample assignment:

Analyze your favorite app or tooling used at work. Facilitate a discussion with those you work with to evaluate how complex it would be to develop. Explore ideas for how this awareness can better equip you (and your team(s)) for navigating the complexity of your own work, identify improvements and action items where appropriate. Discuss with a mentor.

Module II – Supporting the Product Owner

Block VI – certified class – Kanban System Design training class
This block expands the knowledge of Scrum Masters beyond Scrum and into Kanban. With an experienced trainer, Scrum Masters learn when and how to apply flow principles in their daily work.

Sample assignment:

Observe a flow system in an open setting (for example, in a coffee shop chain where you can observe the whole process) and note elements of that system to discuss with your mentor and select an action that will enable you to increase flow in your day-to-day work. After taking action, debrief with your mentor.

Block VII – Working with the product
The goal of this block is to learn the whole process of how a product is built – starting from conception, through the Product Vision and up to building and maintaining a Product Backlog.

Sample assignment:

Develop a set of tools for your Product Owner to support for product ideation and work with your PO on using them

Block VIII – Planning and requirements

The goal of this block is to understand how a Product Owner works with the Product Backlog and how a Scrum Master can support them.

Sample assignment:

Analyze data from a Product Backlog to show relative estimation compared to the no estimates approach and explore differences with another student during a group mentoring session. Pay close attention to decisions you can make based on outcome and share ones you have made or plan on making.

Block IX – Technological product basis

The goal of this block is to expand knowledge on technology and quality. Students learn about types of testing and how types of development impact product delivery.

Sample assignment:

Inspect your team's Definition of Done (DoD) and another team's DoD in a group mentoring session. Form an opinion on what value these DoDs bring and recommend steps on changing them to increase return on value. Possibly consult with your Product Owner and Developers and verify your findings in another group mentoring session.

Module III – Supporting the Organization

Block X – Organizational culture

This block is aimed at understanding that there can be various organizational cultures and individuals can have preferences for some

and not others. Students learn models and ways of assessing organizational culture.

Sample assignment:
Assess the main value system of your organization based on Laloux's system or Spiral Dynamics to understand what your organization may need to focus on to deliver value (if that step is before them) or to improve value delivery (if they already deliver value).

Block XI – Transforming various types of organizations
This block focuses on different ways an organization can be assessed. The cohort looks at real cases of organizational assessment and learns about multiple tools and when to use them.

Sample assignment:
Use one of the assessment methods to assess your current organization. Work with a mentor to find steps on how to apply your findings with your Scrum Team and its environment. After taking action, debrief learning with your mentor.

Block XII – Scaling: methods and approaches
This block summarizes different ways of scaling agility and what it really means. It looks at Nexus, LeSS, SAFe, Spotify, and many others. This block explores what to do and what not to do when it comes to scaling.

Sample assignment:
If you're not working in a scaled organization as a Scrum Master, then find any scaled organization (it may be another student's organization or a case study proposed by the class facilitator) and find the worst possible scaled solution for them. Discuss why it's the worst with your mentor.

If you're working in a scaled organization, devise the worst scaling solution for your organization. Discuss risks with a mentor. Observe if any elements are being enacted and work towards changing decisions leading into negative outcomes.

Block XIII - PSM II training class

PSM II allows for more in-depth knowledge and experience exchange among Scrum Masters. Students dive deeper in applying the knowledge they gained during the whole school experience. Since the majority of students already work as Scrum Masters at this point, they exchange a lot of experiences in the group.

Once the cohort completes the 13 learning blocks, they have a finishing assignment, which is to collectively write a book about their learnings. Each student writes a chapter on a topic covered in the course and includes personal and practical advice-focused observations, such as practical advice for working in tough situations or how to get a Scrum Master job without a lot of experience.

After students graduate from the program, they keep the materials to refer back to in the future. This program is open both to the public and for private engagements. A total of 36 students have gone through or are currently enrolled in the program. Cohort sizes range from 10-15 people.

Results and What's Next

The second full cohort of this program is almost complete and the third one is midway to completion. At the beginning of their cohort, students and mentors create competency matrices to assess their skills. They revisit these at the end of the school year to assess their progress.

The average self-assessment in the beginning of the program was barely above 0.5 in a scale from 0 to 4. After completing the program students' skill levels grew to over 1.9 on average. The self-assessment is performed on 97 skills aligned with Scrum Masters' needs including advanced topics.

These skills fall into the following competency categories:

- Agile-Lean Practitioner
- Teaching & Mentoring
- Professional Coaching and Facilitating
- Technical Mastery
- Business Mastery
- Transformation Mastery

Out of the first cohort, every student who wanted to become a Scrum Master was able to get a Scrum Master job. (11 out of 11). The second cohort had difficult market conditions as they started to look for a job in the beginning of 2023 yet 10 out of 12 people who wanted to be Scrum Masters did get jobs.

Below are some quotes from students who completed the program:

1. When I started the school, I worked in a company with traditional values and introducing agile was not easy. Now, in my new job as a Scrum Master, I feel that I have an impact on what I do, I have a goal and I work with people, not beside them. - **Zuza**

2. The school showed me that Scrum Masters can really make a difference, it's just a matter of time. It also allowed me to get my dream job as a Scrum Master. Now I see the work, the processes in the

company, the teams differently. I began to see what it takes to affect improvement in an organization. After school, I know that the organization can be changed. I already know that it is possible, although it takes time and effort, that it is a process, also dependent on the support of the team. Before, I did not believe in this. Now I consciously want to use it. - **Dominik**

3. The school has made me stronger and more confident. The school also solidified my vision and values. It gave me the experience of teamwork and a sense of community and support in solving problems and sharing knowledge. After the training,I know who I am, what I do and I know what I want to do. Learning in the same group for the entire session is a very important part of the school. In fact, after a year of taking classes together, we have formed a "pack" of industry friends. Watching and participating in this group process, getting to know each other and building bonds influenced how we work together until now. - **Małgosia**

Videos in polish:
1. <u>Student E1 Zuzanna Linderman - Największe Take Aways z Szkoły ACiSM</u>
2. <u>Jak dostałem pracę jako SM - Student E2 Marcin Tyrol</u>
3. <u>Studentka E1 Zuzanna Lindermann - Czego się nauczysz</u>
4. <u>Szkoła nowych możliwości - Student E1 Dominik Poważa</u>
5. <u>Szkoła co zmienia życie - Studentka E1 Zuzanna Lidermann</u>

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Brass Willow