

SCRUM - non cooperative team members [closed]

Asked 16 years, 3 months ago Modified 10 years, 6 months ago

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19



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Closed 9 years ago.

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What do you do if members of your team are not cooperative during scrum meetings? They either provide a very high level definition of what they are currently working on, ("working on feature x"), or go into extremely irrelevant details, **in spite of being well educated in SCRUM methodology**. This causes the scrum meeting to be ineffective and boring.

As a scrum master, what are your techniques to getting the best out of people during the meeting?

Edited to add:

What technique do you use to stop someone who is talking too much, without being offensive?

What technique do you use to encourage someone to provide a more detailed answer?

How do you react when you find yourself being the only one who listens, while other team members just sit there and maybe even fall asleep?

scrum

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edited Sep 18, 2008 at 10:58

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asked Sep 16, 2008 at 10:29



Tipa Shel Or

411 ● 1 ● 5 ● 11

Would you mind posting back later, to tell us what you did and if it helped? Thanks! – [onnodb](#) Oct 18, 2008 at 4:29

15 Answers

Sorted by:

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First of all... make sure folks are standing up... and not even leaning on the wall or a desk.

15



At a high level, I would say that, whenever you face issues on the team, the best response is to *ask the team* for solutions. However, here are some of the techniques I've used for the issues you're facing.

Talks too much

- have him/her stand on one leg
- have him/her hold the scrum "speaking" token in an outstretched hand while they speak.
- Add a flip chart to the scrum to list tabled issues... when someone gets longwinded on a topic that is not scrum-meeting-worthy, interrupt and say "Hey - great point. I'm not sure everyone needs to discuss this, how 'bout if we park this for a follow-up discussion?" A key to making this successful is to actually follow-up afterwards and get the side conversation scheduled. Alternatively, the speaker may just say "Not necessary... I'll be working with Joe this afternoon on this" or something like that, which accomplishes the goal of reducing the windedness without the need to schedule the follow-up.

Need more detail. Is this for the scrum master's benefit or the team's?

- wait until afterwards to ask the individual more detailed questions. If you think the team also needs to know them, coach the team member by conveying (in your after-scrum questioning) that "this is the sort

of thing that I think Joe Smith would be helped in hearing from you, what do you think?"

Team doesn't listen.

- Ask them on an individual basis. "Sally, I noticed that you don't seem to be getting much out of the Scrum. How can we adjust it to make it valuable for you?".
- Post questions to others during the scrum. Like if Sally says "I integrated with Bob's code yesterday", ask Bob "how'd that go?" (I'd use this sparingly... to guard against scrums taking too long).
- I've found that sometimes team members tend towards old habits by looking at the scrum master or project manager when they speak. When this happens alot, I alter my gaze to look away, which almost forces the speaker to gain eye contact with other members of the team, which may help the other members of the team to pay attention.

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answered Oct 18, 2008 at 4:14

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[Adrian Wible](#)

1,684 ● 1 ● 13 ● 20

+1 eye contact point is very useful! – [sixtyfootersdude](#) Jun 23, 2010 at 17:11



If time management is your problem. Get a timer and have someone buzz when you run out of time. Make sure tasks are broken down to an adequate level of granularity

10



- any task should be anywhere between 4 hours to 2 days.. max 3 days. Anything above that break it down further before people sign up to do it.



I think the three questions are:



- What did you do yesterday?
- What are you going to do today?
- What obstacles do you see in your path?

Granular tasks (post iteration planning) should cater to bullets 1 and 2. The third actually depends on environmental conditions. The timer should over time subconsciously jolt the members into thinking about their problems and framing short sentences. Focus on concrete obstacles instead of explaining why or preconditions or whatever. If you are talking to a single person for over 5 mins about something that only is of relevance to both of you.. stop, make a note (have a talk later at their desk) and move on.

*Update: Also make sure everyone understands that 'rehearsing' before the Scrum meeting would save everyone's time. **Think** about what you would like to convey instead of just walking into the stand-up.*

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edited Sep 16, 2008 at 11:08

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answered Sep 16, 2008 at 10:43



Gishu

137k ● 47 ● 226 ● 311



6



They should be saying what they achieved not what they worked on, and if they achieved nothing then what stopped them achieving.

The questions that are asked could be phrased differently

1. What have I completed since the last meeting?
2. What will I complete before the next meeting?
3. What is in my way (impediments)?

also it is important that the meeting is not the team reporting to the scrum master, but the team keeping in check with each other. If people are talking straight at you the scrum master there are techniques to move the focus. Make sure you don't look at the speaker, or even move back so the sight line changes and they are forced to look at team mates as they talk. Do it subtle though :)

EDIT:

I cribbed that from

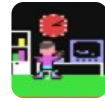
<http://www.implementingscrum.com/2007/04/02/work-naked/>

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answered Sep 16, 2008 at 10:43



Loofer

6,969 ● 9 ● 65 ● 106

I like the rephrasing of the original questions, to ask about what was completed. Makes for a more focused answer.

thanks. – [Tipa Shel Or](#) Sep 17, 2008 at 12:33



4



How do you react when you find yourself being the only one who listens, while other team members just **sit** there and maybe even fall asleep?

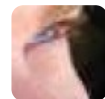


Hmm, are you actually having stand-up meetings? It may sound hokey, but aside from making it harder for people to fall asleep, it also helps foster the feeling of a quick huddle to rather than a leisurely meeting.

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answered Sep 16, 2008 at 11:47



Kief

4,483 ● 4 ● 28 ● 21

I can agree no more – [Iman Rosstin](#) May 1, 2018 at 19:09



2

One thing that I have seen lead to an improvement is the use of a "talking stick" (we actually use a soft ball). It provides some additional focus on who is currently



speaking, and makes the transition to another person more obvious.



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answered Sep 16, 2008 at 13:40

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[Ilja Preuß](#)

2,421 ● 17 ● 15

+ 1 Great suggestion! We tried something similar with a softball. It really works and makes it fun! – [sjt](#) Sep 26, 2010 at 3:12



2



How do you react when you find yourself being the only one who listens, while other team members just sit there and maybe even fall asleep?



If I have already heard what the others have said I would ask a question of someone who is not paying attention about how it this might affect what they are working on. Very school teacher like, however it is enough so that they respond and engage with the meeting again.

I also agree with [Kief](#)

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edited May 23, 2017 at 12:00

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[Community](#) Bot

1 ● 1

answered Sep 16, 2008 at 13:46



roo

7,196 ● 9 ● 42 ● 45



for your team to participate they have to see value in it, not just do it because you told them to.

2

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answered Apr 22, 2009 at 20:27



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Dustin Getz

21.7k ● 15 ● 86 ● 132



2 That's interesting and true. But it's a vicious cycle - ineffective meeting->less value->ineffective meeting...etc How would you break the cycle? – [Tipa Shel Or](#) May 12, 2009 at 19:21



The Scrum is a standup meeting, and the concept of a talking stick is an excellent point.

1



The key here is not that you have one or a few uncooperative team members, but is IMO, a more fundamental problem: the scrum team is supposed to be self managed, and the scrum meeting is to keep the **team** informed. If the other team members are not asking for clarifications and calling out the uncooperative members, then a re-education on scrum needs to happen.



Remember, the scrum master is not being reported to, s/he is just the person who removes blockages to the process. This does include facilitating the scrum meeting,

but the team does have a responsibility to understand and demand clarification independent of the scrum master.

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answered Sep 18, 2008 at 1:00

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steve_mtl

960 ● 4 ● 12 ● 18

Thanks. I'm well aware of the fact that the SCRUM is auto controlled by the entire team. My question is what do you do if your team members, even though being well educated about scrum, just *don't* do it. – Tipa Shel Or Sep 18, 2008 at 10:30



Ask for the specific details you need. People won't be aware of stuff you are interested in.

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Also try to put forth some guidelines for better and effective presentation before the meeting.



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answered Sep 16, 2008 at 10:32

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Niyaz

54.8k ● 56 ● 152 ● 183



Talk to them outside the scrum meeting and tell them how others may perceive their way of presenting what they are currently working on. I assume they are not deliberately non cooperative, but just not accustomed to the exact level of detail scrum meetings should have.

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You may also ask them how much information they expect from others during the meeting.



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answered Sep 16, 2008 at 10:47

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Erwin

672 ● 6 ● 13



0



By "scrum meeting", are you referring to the daily "stand up" meeting? If so, I believe those are usually timeboxed at about 15-20 minutes. So divide that time equally among everyone, and once someone uses up all their time, they can't talk. It might be harsh, but I believe that's how it's supposed to go down.



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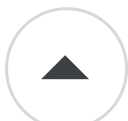
answered Sep 16, 2008 at 11:44

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Thomas Owens

116k ● 99 ● 317 ● 436



0



Scrum is a bottom up process, so in principle every team member should support the process.

How is the team put together? By organizational tradition or because of a common goal?



Not everybody buy into the Scrum idea, and we should respect that. Perhaps the best for all is that these members are not part of the Scrum team?

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answered Sep 18, 2008 at 8:00

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Asgeir S. Nilsen

1,137 ● 9 ● 13



0



Some people just don't understand what is required. You can try to guide the conversation by using some key phrases.

If someone is giving too much detail then you can try to cut them off with a "What else". This will hint that they are done on that point. Or you can try the "OK, can we discuss that offline" type direction.

For people who don't buy into it, ask them questions about what they did and what they are going to do.

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answered Sep 18, 2008 at 11:10

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Xetius

46.6k ● 25 ● 91 ● 124



0



For the sake of argument, let's say someone really has something they need to tell the team and it is going to take some time. Do you have an appropriate place, time or method (email, other type of meeting, lunch time) to do this? Just interrupt the person and let them know the stand up meeting isn't the place.

Also, what problems during development does this create? If there is an error because of lack of communication, people need to be confronted on why they don't mention these things during the standup.

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answered Oct 11, 2009 at 1:01

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JeffO

8,035 ● 3 ● 45 ● 54



0



- You can plan a maximum average time to explain what you did and what you gonna do.
- About the people that are not willing to speak too much, I guess is responsibility of the scrum master to encourage that people to be a little bit more clear about his tasks.
- If still people dont share what they´re doing a radical solution is use a canvas board where there people of the team have to move the task that they´re doing to his respective area(In development, ready to validation, in code review). Then you can know for sure in which task is he working.
- After every daily meeting remember to ask for impediments or whatever kind of issue, sometimes people don't remember to say in his time or don't want share their issues.

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answered Jun 12, 2014 at 7:02

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paul

13.4k ● 24 ● 98 ● 167



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