What is Sprint Planning?

At the beginning of a Sprint, the Scrum Team meets to create a shared understanding of

Why the Sprint is valuable,

What they might get Done this Sprint, and

How they plan to get the work Done.

By answering these questions, the Scrum Team defines the Sprint Goal, creates a Sprint forecast, and the Developers create a plan to create Increments that meet the Definition of Done and achieve the Sprint Goal.

Important factors for strong Sprint Planning outcomes

The outcomes of Sprint Planning depend a lot on the degree of shared understanding of the Sprint Goal, the Sprint forecast and the plan, the factors informing these elements, and of course, the degree of commitment to the Sprint Goal.

Here are some important factors to reach strong Sprint Planning outcomes:

The Product Owner is able to explain how the Sprint could best contribute to the Product Goal. As a result, the Scrum Team can gain a shared understanding of the value and goal of the Sprint and commit to doing their best, individually and collectively, to reach that goal.

All Scrum Team members know the state of the current Increment. Their product has a strong Definition of Done helping them have a clear understanding of the work they need to do in order to create a new stable version of their product (the Increment).

The Product Backlog is in good shape, for example, the Product Backlog is clearly ordered, the Product Backlog Items represent value instead of work and enough Product Backlog Items are ready. As a result,

the Scrum Team has a clear understanding of these Product Backlog Items and can focus on the Sprint Goal, the Sprint forecast and their plan.

The Scrum Team knows their past performance and current capacity. As a result, they have confidence in their forecast and feel they all really want to commit to the Sprint Goal.

If needed, the Developers invited other people to Sprint Planning to help them understand some areas of the work they need to do. As a result, they feel they created a good plan to start with, which in turn increases their confidence in the Sprint forecast and commitment to the Sprint Goal.

The Scrum Team also created a plan for the improvement item(s) from their last Sprint Retrospective. As a result, they will likely improve their team effectiveness.

Without these factors, the outcomes of Sprint Planning will likely be poor: No clear Sprint Goal or weak commitment to it, little confidence in the Sprint forecast and plan, and an undone product that adds little value and hurts the trust in the Scrum Team.

Facilitating strong Sprint Planning outcomes

Here's what you can do to facilitate strong Sprint Planning outcomes before, during and towards the end of Sprint Planning.

"Facilitating Sprint Planning starts well before the Sprint Planning event!"

Things you as a Product Owner or Scrum Master can do before Sprint Planning

"The Product Owner ensures that attendees are prepared to discuss the most important Product Backlog items and how they map to the Product Goal." (Scrum Guide

As the Product Owner you can facilitate Sprint Planning by preparing yourself and your team. As the Scrum Master, you can help your Product Owner do it:

Be ready to communicate the Product Goal (even if you have communicated it before). On our Scrum Teams, we almost always start Sprint Planning by reminding ourselves of and talking about the Product Goal.

Be ready to explain how the Sprint could increase the value of the product. Here's a powerful question you can use to prepare: "We will create a new stable version of the product (Increment). What will users be able to do with that Increment that they can't do with the current version today?"

The answer to that question could be a suggestion of the Sprint Goal. That question might also lead you and the Scrum Team into Product Backlog Refinement, so that you have the right Product Backlog Items ready for the Sprint. To articulate a Sprint Goal, you can use this pattern: "In this Sprint, we will create a new version of our product that will help users to …"

Ask the Scrum Team how they think this Sprint Goal relates to the Product Goal. This is important so that everyone understands the "big picture".

Things you as a Developer, Product Owner or Scrum Master can do before Sprint Planning:

"The Scrum Team may also invite other people to attend Sprint Planning to provide advice." (Scrum Guide)

The Product Owner ensures that attendees are prepared to discuss the most important Product Backlog items and how they map to the Product Goal.

Have a look at the Product Backlog to see if there are Product Backlog Items for which you might need to get help from other people during Sprint Planning. If so, ask them to join your Sprint Planning. They might help you understand the work and effort of getting a Product Backlog Item Done or coordinate a dependency with them.

Help the Scrum Team do Product Backlog Refinement before Sprint Planning, so that enough Product Backlog Items are ready to forecast during Sprint Planning.

Do you need to adapt the Definition of Done for your product? If so, do it before Sprint Planning. This is usually a good time as the Definition of Done will inform you about the amount of work to create an Increment which might impact the Sprint Goal and the Sprint forecast.

Things the Developers, Product Owner and Scrum Master can do during Sprint Planning:

Create transparency about the capacity of the Scrum Team during the Sprint. You can ask, "What's the effective time we have to work on the Sprint Goal and the Increment, considering vacation plans and any other foreseeable absences?". Many of our Scrum Teams use a calendar or a simple spreadsheet to make their capacity transparent. That helps them when defining the Sprint Goal and creating the Sprint forecast.

Start with the Product Goal and how the Sprint could help create progress towards it. As a result of that, discuss and define the Sprint Goal. The Product Owner might suggest a Sprint Goal (see previous tips).

Have the Definition of Done with you. Make sure everyone understands it, as it will inform the amount of work the Developers need to do to create a new Increment.

Gain a better understanding of how much of the Product Backlog you might be able to forecast for the Sprint, e.g., by looking at your velocity in past Sprints (e.g., the number of Done Product Backlog Items). If you are about to forecast a lot more or less Product Backlog Items than you have completed (Done) in previous Sprints, ask yourselves: "How is this Sprint different from previous Sprints so that we think we can forecast x Product Backlog items more / less?"

Make clear to yourselves that your forecast is just that – a forecast. Like a weather forecast you think this is what will most likely happen, but things might turn out differently. Remember that a Scrum Team does not commit to complete the Sprint forecast. A Scrum Team commits to doing their best, individually and collectively, to work as a team and reach the Sprint Goal under the given circumstances.

Help the Developers to create their plan together about how they intend to create Done Increments and achieve the Sprint Goal. They can use the Definition of Done to understand the quality they need to

create. They can make their plan visible by creating tasks for every Product Backlog Item that will get the item Done and lead to a new Done Increment.

Towards the end of Sprint Planning, you can ask yourselves: Now that we have defined our Sprint Goal, created our Sprint forecast and the Developer's plan, how do we feel about this? Is the Sprint Goal realistic? Will the Sprint forecast lead to the Sprint Goal? Is our plan good enough to start? What else do we need to talk about before we end Sprint Planning