Scrum.org | *W*hitepapers

The 8 Stances of a Scrum Master

Barry Overeem – *100% Scrum Master*

Table of Contents

The 8 Stances of a Scrum Master

According to the Scrum Guide the Scrum Master is responsible for ensuring Scrum is understood and enacted. Scrum Masters do this by ensuring that the Scrum Team adheres to Scrum theory, practices, and rules.

The Scrum Master is a servant-leader for the Scrum Team. The Scrum Master helps those outside the Scrum Team understand which of their interactions with the Scrum Team are helpful and which aren't. The Scrum Master helps everyone change these interactions to maximize the value created by the Scrum Team.

The role of a Scrum Master is one of many stances and great diversity. A great Scrum Master is aware of them and knows when and how to apply them, depending on situation and context. All with the purpose of helping people understand the spirit of Scrum.

```
1. Servant Leader                              5. Mentor
      2. Coach        The 8 Stances of a Scrum Master    6. Manager
3. Facilitator                                 7. Impediment Remover
      4. Teacher                               8. Change Agent
```

The Scrum Master Acts as a:

- **A Servant Leader** whose focus is on the needs of the team members and the people they provide value to (the customer) with the goal of achieving results in line with the organization's values, principles, and business objectives.

- **A Facilitator** by setting the stage and providing clear boundaries in which the team can collaborate.

- **A Coach** coaching the individual with a focus on mindset and behavior, the team in continuous improvement and the organization in truly collaborating with the Scrum team.

- **A Manager** responsible for managing impediments, eliminate waste, managing the process, managing the team's health, managing the boundaries of self-organization, and managing the culture.

- **A Mentor** that transfers Agile knowledge and experience to the team.

- **A Teacher** to ensure Scrum and other relevant methods are understood and enacted.

- **An Impediment Remover** solving blocking issues to the team's progress, taking into account the self-organizing capabilities of the Development Team.

- **A Change Agent** to enable a culture in which Scrum Teams can flourish.

This white paper contains my personal experiences acting as a Scrum Master. Besides these experiences I've added my findings while studying books, articles and videos. I've also added the most common misunderstandings of the Scrum Master role and why I've changed my title from Agile Coach to **100% Scrum Master**. The reasons behind this change describe my motivation for writing this white paper. I hope you enjoy the result!
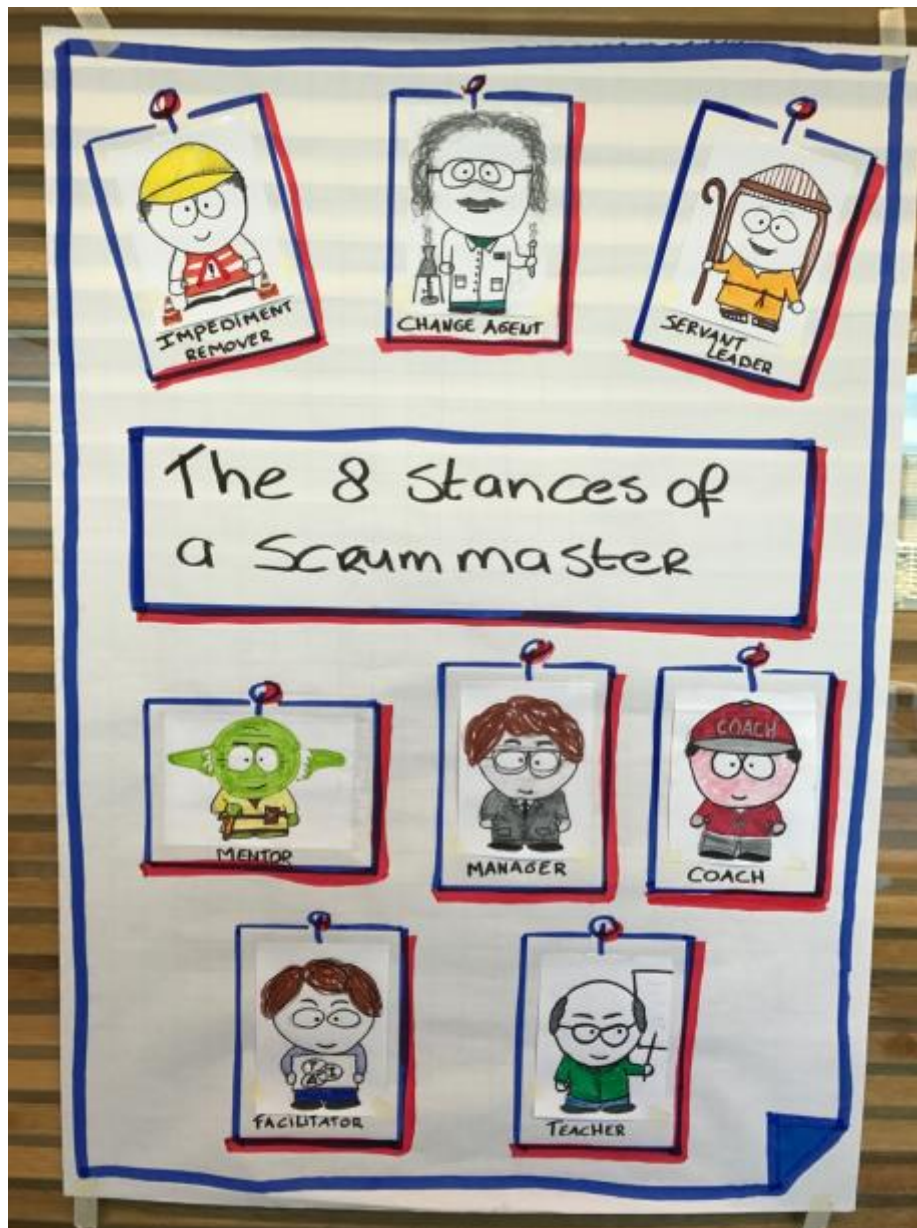
The 8 Misunderstood Stances of a Scrum Master

Although the preferred 8 stances of a Scrum Master might seem like common sense, they are certainly not common practice. All too often the Scrum Master role is misunderstood, and considered as someone acting as…

- **A Scribe.** Taking notes during Scrum events. Writing down the entire Sprint plan, daily plan, refinement discussions and Retrospective commitments. I've actually experienced a customer that expected the "Scrum Master" to act as a scribe for 4 hours per week…

- **A Secretary.** Planning all the Scrum events in everyone's agenda. Responsible for keeping the teams' schedule with holidays and days off up-to-date.

- **The Scrum Police.** Rigorously following the rules of Scrum without any empathy for the team's current situation and context. If you're not acting according to the Scrum Guide you're doing it wrong. Period.

- **The Team Boss.** The so-called "servant-leader", but actually just the boss of the team. The boss who hires and fires. The boss who decides if someone deserves a salary increase.

- **The Admin.** If you need a change in JIRA, TFS or any other tool: the Scrum Master is your friend. He (or she) knows every workflow by heart.

- **The Chairman.** Every morning the team provides a status update to the chairman of the Daily Scrum. This offers the Scrum Master the necessary information to write the daily status report to his/her superiors.

- **A Super Hero.** It's a bird. It's a plane. It's the Super Scrum Master!!! Solving all your impediments before it actually even was an impediment. The hero is addicted to the adrenaline of solving "problems." It's not about the team, it's about increasing his status as a hero.

- **The Coffee Clerk.** There's nothing wrong with getting coffee for your team members. This is very collegial. But if you're main purpose during the day is providing the team with coffee… then you're missing the point of being a Scrum Master.

As mentioned earlier, this white paper contains my personal experiences as a Scrum Master. The misunderstood stances are a good example. **For quite some time I've fulfilled the Scrum Master role acting as the Scrum police, team boss, super hero, etc.** That wasn't my most successful period. Although I claimed to be promoting self-organization, I wasn't giving the team any opportunity to really achieve it. I was just acting as a project manager & team boss and gave myself the title, "Scrum Master."

By asking for feedback, learning from other Scrum Masters, and reading probably "all" the books about Scrum, I slowly improved myself. Writing the blog posts about the preferred 8 stances was also part of this journey.

It's my personal mission to create a better understanding of the Scrum Master role. **I don't condemn the described misunderstandings.** I do want to offer a different perspective and invite people to re-imagine the Scrum Master role.
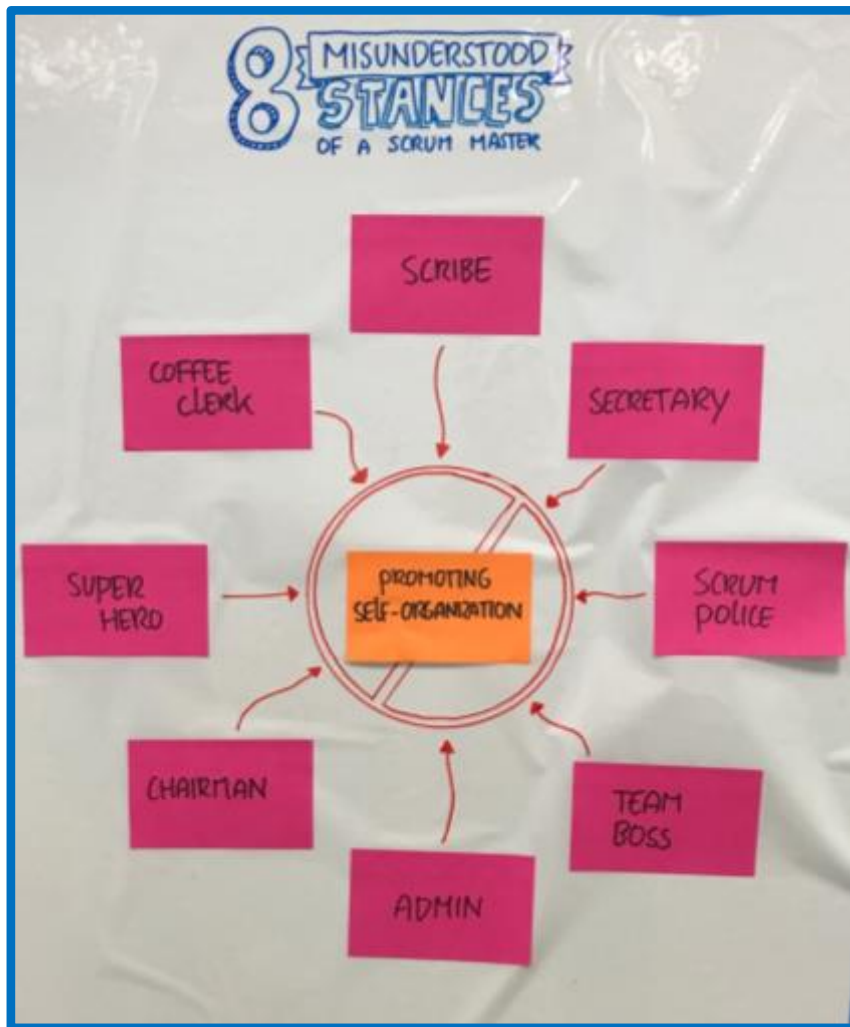
From 50% Agile Coach to 100% Scrum Master

Taking my personal mission into account, I needed to make an important change. If I want to create a better understanding of the Scrum Master role, I need to lead by example. Therefore, I decided to remove "Agile Coach" from my social media profiles, and replace it with "Scrum Master." **100% Scrum Master.** Although it seems like a small change, it raised quite some concern when I suggested it:

- "You should stick with Agile Coach. As a freelancer, that's **a far more popular job title.**"

- "No, don't change it to Scrum Master, **you'll get paid less!**"

- "Why don't you call yourself **Scrum Guru**? Agile Transformation Coach? Enterprise Change Agent?"

- "At least call yourself a **Senior Scrum Master** or **Chief Scrum Master!**"

- "**All the cool stuff is done by Agile Coaches**; as a Scrum Master you're stuck within your Scrum Team."

- "**Scrum is a hype**, it can all be over within a year!"

But really, don't call yourself a Scrum Master, your career as a freelancer will be doomed!

I will be honest; these concerns did give me some thought. Except the last one. If Scrum is a hype, then it's a hype that turned 21 recently. That's a pretty old hype. It should be possible to stick around for another 21 years. At that time, Scrum will be 42, and it will officially become the answer **to the ultimate question of life, the universe, and everything.** :-)

Best case, the prediction of Gunther Verheyen will become reality:

"The future state of Scrum will no longer be called "Scrum." What we now call Scrum will have become the norm, as the new paradigm for the software industry has taken over and organizations have re-invented themselves around it."

So why did I change my title from Agile Coach to Scrum Master? Let me try to explain it by using the values of Scrum.

Commitment

I want to deal with my personal frustration of the **misunderstandings of the Scrum Master role** as described in the previous chapter. I want to commit myself to helping individuals, teams and organizations improve their ability to deliver valuable products. I want to commit myself to creating environments where teamwork, collaboration and fun can flourish. I believe the Scrum Master is a key player in creating these environments. I want to contribute by not only providing Scrum Master courses, but also fulfilling the role myself. Lead by example. **Practice what you preach.** Eat your own dog food, etc. That's the commitment I'm trying to live up to.

Focus

I believe in focus. Create a compelling vision for yourself, translate it into tangible goals and focus on achieving them. That's what works best for me. Positioning myself as an Agile Coach didn't feel like focus. It felt like an empty shell. Every organization seems to be packed with Agile Coaches. Although I'm surely not against Agile Coaches, **I just don't consider myself an Agile Coach.** An Agile Coach should have sound knowledge of and experience with Kanban, XP, Lean and all the different scaling methods and frameworks.

Although I can pretend to be an Agile Coach, I'm not. I'm a Scrum Master. **I want to be part of a Scrum Team.** As a Scrum Master, I'm interested in other frameworks and methods. As a Scrum Master, I can offer organizations my opinion on these areas. But if a different approach suits an organization better, I'll bring them in contact with someone else who's got more experience in that area.

My focus will be fulfilling the role of Scrum Master. As a Scrum Master, I coach Development Teams, Product Owners, and Organizations. As a freelance Scrum Master, I try to be redundant. Therefore, I

will also coach other Scrum Masters. Hereby trying to ensure a sustainable use of the Scrum framework.

As a Scrum Master, I'll try to be a servant-leader, facilitator, coach, conflict navigator, manager, mentor, teacher, impediment remover, and change agent. Everything with the purpose of helping people understand **the spirit of Scrum.** Only with true focus I believe it's possible to live up to the possibilities of all the different stances of the Scrum Master role.

Courage

True commitment and focus is only possible by showing courage. **Courage to say 'no.'** You need courage to really choose. I choose to position myself as a Scrum Master. Therefore, I say no to the Agile Coach role. **The common denominator in everything I do is Scrum.** I'll mostly write about Scrum, speak at Scrum events and provide Scrum trainings. I will be an active contributor to the Scrum community. Of course, I will search for inspiration at other Agile events like XP Days, everything with the goal of fulfilling the Scrum Master role better.

Respect

By being authentic, I try to respect everyone I interact with. Respect others by showing them who you really are. Be open, authentic and have integrity. As Geoff Watts puts it:

"A huge element of respect comes from having integrity. Integrity involves honesty, consistency, reliability and a strong moral code."

During my time at Prowareness (an Agile consultancy organization in the Netherlands), I once got awarded as 'Employee with the highest integrity.' Taking this description of integrity into account is something to be proud of. My goal is not to win 'integrity awards.' **My goal is to be authentic.** Always.

This is precisely what made me change my role description from Agile Coach to Scrum Master. As a Scrum Master, I feel I am being authentic. Although the difference between both roles might feel fuzzy to some, it just doesn't feel right calling myself an Agile Coach.

Choosing to be a Scrum Master is also a way to show respect to my customers. **I can offer them an average Agile Coach or a good Scrum Master. I choose the latter.**

Openness

For me, openness and transparency are self-evident. I'm transparent as a person: what you see is what you get. I'm also transparent with what I do. I will provide openness by sharing all my insights, mistakes and lessons learned as a Scrum Master. Not only the stuff that went well, but also the stuff I've done wrong. Sharing these experiences will be done by writing, speaking and training.

Closing

So from now on, I will position myself as a Scrum Master. A 100% dedicated Scrum Master. I will fulfil this role as long as it enables me being authentic. Offering others an authentic version of myself with high integrity, is the least I can do…

1. The Scrum Master as a Servant Leader

Servant-leadership is fully in line with the Scrum values of courage, openness, respect, focus and commitment. It's the backbone of the Scrum Master role and therefore the most obvious one to describe first. In this part, I'll describe what servant-leadership is about, the connection with the Agile manifesto and how the Scrum Master acts as a servant-leader.

What is Servant-Leadership?

Servant-Leadership is a philosophy and a set of practices that enrich the lives of individuals, to build better organizations, and ultimately create a more just and caring world. It's a transformational approach to life and work that has the potential for creating positive change throughout our society. Servant-leadership focuses on collaboration, trust, empathy and the usage of power ethically.

Servant-leadership is about:

- Serving others, not yourself
- Not leading by title
- Leadership that endures
- Helping people develop and perform as highly as possible
- Selfless management of team members
- Promoting genuine team ownership
- Harnessing the collective power of a team

What is a Servant-Leader?

Robert K. Greenleaf, the originator of the term servant-leadership, describes a servant-leader as: "The servant-leader is servant first. It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. The best test is: do those served grow as persons: do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves

to become servants? And, what is the effect on the least privileged in society; will they benefit, or, at least, not be further deprived?[1]"

The servant-leader's objective is to enhance and increase teamwork and personal involvement. They create a participative environment, empowering 'employees' by sharing power and decision-making[2].

A servant-leader:

- Focuses on building a foundation of trust
- Stimulates empowerment and transparency
- Encourages collaborative engagements
- Is an un-blocker and empathetic person able to truly listen
- Shows ethical and caring behaviour, putting others' needs first
- Is humble, knowledgeable, positive, social and situationally aware

The Agile Manifesto and Servant-Leadership

The characteristics of servant-leadership can also be found within the Agile Manifesto[3]. The values 'individuals and interactions over processes and tools' and 'customer collaboration over contract negotiation' clearly emphasize the focus on collaborative engagements, serving others (the team members) and not yourself and boosting team performance by supporting individual growth.

Principles of the Agile Manifesto that also characterize servant-leadership are:

- "Build projects around motivated individuals. Give them the environment and support they need, and trust them to get the job done."

- "Business people & developers must work together daily throughout the project."

The Scrum Master as a Servant-Leader

The Scrum Guide describes the Scrum Master as the servant-leader for the Scrum Team. A Scrum Master is not master of the team, but a master at encouraging, enabling, and energizing people to gel as a team and realize their full potential[4]. A Scrum Master is a servant-leader whose focus is on the needs of the team members and those they serve (the customer), with the goal of achieving results in line with the organization's values, principles, and business objectives[5].

The Scrum Master leads by example, by respect, and by the ability to influence the organization for the Scrum Team and its effectiveness. The Scrum Master should also lead by values, by courage and commitment, but also by stubbornness. Stubborn by having strong beliefs and the intention to change the organization.

As a servant-leader, the Scrum Master is responsible for:

- Setting up Scrum as a servant process, not a commanding process[6]

---

[1] Greenleaf, Robert K. *Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness*
[2] http://adaptagility.co.uk/scrum-master-the-servant-leader
[3] http://www.agilemanifesto.org/
[4] Watts, Geoff. *Scrum Mastery: From Good to Great Servant Leadership*
[5] http://www.infoq.com/articles/leadership-challenge
[6] Verheyen, Gunther. *Scrum: A Pocket Guide*

- Guiding the Development Team towards self-organization
- Leading the team through healthy conflict and debate
- Teaching, coaching and mentoring the organization and team in adopting and using Scrum
- Shielding the team from disturbance and external threats
- Helping the team make visible, remove and prevent impediments
- Encouraging, supporting and enabling the team to reach their full potential and abilities
- Creating transparency by radiating information via e.g. the Product Backlog and Sprint Backlog, Daily Scrum, reviews and a visible workspace
- Ensuring a collaborative culture exists within the team

Closing

Servant-leadership proves to be the backbone of the Scrum Master role. Its philosophy and practices increase teamwork and create an environment in which individual growth can flourish and endure. As a servant-leader the Scrum Master can help the team act upon the Scrum values of courage, openness, respect, focus and commitment and realize their full potential.

2. The Scrum Master as a Coach

This chapter is about the Scrum Master as a coach. The Scrum Master is often considered a coach for the team, helping the team do the best work they can to reach the sprint goal. In this chapter I'll describe what coaching is about, and share the three perspective as Scrum Master can use when acting as a coach.

What is Coaching?

There are a lot of good definitions available that describe coaching. My ultimate definition is: "Coaching is unblocking a person's potential to maximize their own performance. It is helping people to learn rather than teach them[7]."

Other good definitions are:

- "The ultimate goal of coaching is to help the client understand themselves better so that they can find to make the most of their potential[8]."

- "Effective coaching is guiding without prescribing[9]."

- "The art of facilitating the performance, learning and development of another[10]."

- "Coaching closes the gap between thinking about doing and actually doing[11]."

---

[7] Sir John Whitmore
[8] Watts, Geoff, and Kim Morgan. *The Coach's Casebook: Mastering the Twelve Traits That Trap Us*
[9] http://www.agile42.com/en/blog/2014/04/15/effective-agile-coaching/
[10] Downey, Myles. *Effective Coaching*
[11] Martin, Curly. *The Life Coaching Handbook*

What is Effective Coaching?

Via Portia Tung's website, *Selfish Programming*, I came across "The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Coaches[12]." A Scrum Master can use these habits to check if she/he is doing coaching in a way the chances of success will be the highest. The habits she describes are:

- **Lead by example.** This means living by the values and principles they espouse as well as applying the tools and techniques they know to themselves and to their work.

- **Begin with the end in mind.** A coach works backwards from the goal to figure out the most effective and efficient way of getting from A to B.

- **Set a sustainable pace.** A coach stays calm when others around them lose their heads.

- **Think with your head and feel with your heart.** A coach balances thinking and feeling. They apply logical thinking as well as empathy when solving problems.

- **Pull, not push.** A coach waits and is always ready when someone asks for help. A coach creates and offers learning opportunities instead of thrusting their ideas, advice and views onto others.

- **Talk less, listen more.** A coach postpones judgement on what they hear and lets others talk while they listen with care.

- **Flow like a stream.** A coach is patient, pragmatic and present.

The Scrum Master as a Coach

To describe the Scrum Master as a coach three different perspectives can be used: the individual, the team and the organization. Coaching the individual with a focus on mindset and behavior, the team in continuous improvement and the organization in truly collaborating with the Scrum teams. Do take this quote by Lyssa Adkins into account: "Coaching is not about giving advice, but about supporting people to come up with their own solutions. If you ask the right questions, they always will."

Coaching the Individual
- Explain the desired mindset and behaviour, help individuals see new perspectives and possibilities
- Influence the individual team members to use Scrum well
- Help each person take the next step on his or her agile journey[13]

Coaching the Team
- Stimulate a mindset of continuous improvement, create a learning culture
- Support the team in problem solving and conflict resolution
- Coach the team to develop "to the point that members learn how to best learn from one another"
- Change the attitude, mindset and behaviour that restrict the team from doing Scrum well

---

[12] http://www.selfishprogramming.com/2013/12/18/the-7-habits-of-highly-effective-coaches-2/
[13] Adkins, Lisa. *Coaching Agile Teams*

- Coach the team in giving each other open and honest feedback

Coaching the Organization

- Help the organization achieve astonishing results by delivering high quality, valuable products
- Coach the entire organization in doing product management with a focus on continuously adding business value
- Support and encourage collaboration and cooperation with the Scrum Teams

Closing

By doing some research, I've created a brief description of the Scrum Master as a coach. Besides sharing the most common definitions of 'coaching,' this chapter contains the three perspectives you can use to describe the Scrum Master as a coach. Coaching the **individual** with a focus on mindset and behaviour, the **team** in continuous improvement and the **organization** in truly collaborating with the Scrum Teams.

3. The Scrum Master as a Facilitator

This chapter describes the Scrum Master as a facilitator. The Scrum Master serves as a facilitator to both the Product Owner and the Development Team. I'll describe the definition of a facilitator, the misunderstanding and the characteristics of a great facilitator.
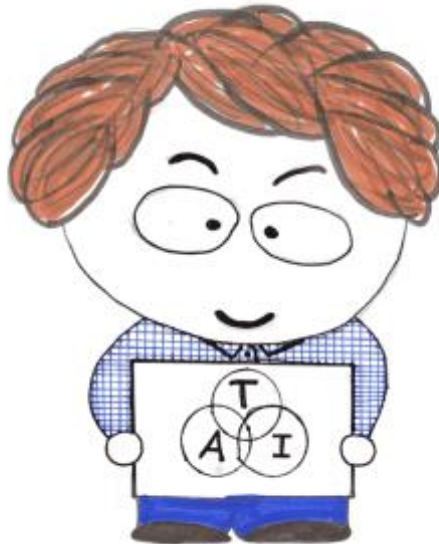
What is a Facilitator?

"Someone who helps a group of people understand their common objectives and assists them to plan how to achieve these objectives; in doing so, the facilitator remains 'neutral,' meaning he/she doesn't take a particular position in the discussion[14]*."*

Key elements of this definition (and other available definitions) are:

- Help and enable others in achieving their objectives
- Be 'content neutral', not taking sides
- Support everyone to do their best thinking and practices
- Promote collaboration and try to achieve synergy
- Provide charismatic authority

The Misunderstanding

Quite often, when I ask people to describe the Scrum Master as a facilitator, the only answer I get is that the Scrum Master facilitates the Scrum events. Sure, the Scrum Master is responsible for the Scrum process and should support the team in optimizing their process.

The Scrum events are an important part of the Scrum process, and although the Scrum Master isn't obligated to attend all the Scrum events personally, he should ensure:

---

[14] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Facilitator

- That the **Sprint** is used as a time-box during which a 'done', usable and releasable increment is created

- That the **Daily Scrum** is used for daily inspection of the team's progress toward the Sprint Goal

- That the **Sprint Planning** meeting is used as an event for the team to discuss, plan and agree on a forecast for the Product Backlog Items they are confident they can complete in order to support the goals and strategy of the Product Owner

- That the **Sprint Review** is used for a demonstration and inspection of the developed increment and adaptation of the Product Backlog if needed

- That the **Sprint Retrospective** is used as an event during which the team inspects and adapts their practices and processes to improve key issues that are impeding the team's progress

The biggest misunderstanding is that facilitating the Scrum events is the only thing a Scrum Master should do as a facilitator. A great Scrum Master, however, understands that facilitation can be far more powerful…

How Facilitation Within Scrum Was Really Meant

As described in the definition of a facilitator, this is someone who helps a group of people understand and achieve their objectives by promoting collaboration, optimizing the process and creating synergy within the team. Given this context, facilitation encompasses far more than only hosting the Scrum events.

In his book "Scrum Mastery," Geoff Watts describes facilitation as the underpinning skill and behaviour of the Scrum Master. "*At all times Scrum Masters are of service to the goals of the team, the Product Owner and the organization. And, if those goals conflict, they think of the long-term implications and the messages any compromise will send.*"

A Scrum Master should:

- Facilitate relationships, collaboration and communication both within the team and the team's environment
- Facilitate the Scrum process and the continuous improvement of the process
- Facilitate the integration of the Scrum Team into the entire organization
- Facilitate the Scrum events to be purposeful and effective
- Facilitate the team in achieving their (personal) objectives

Lyssa Adkins offers a good description in her book "Coaching Agile Teams".

"*A Scrum Master should facilitate by creating a 'container' for the team to fill up with their ideas and innovations. The container, often a set of agenda questions or some other lightweight (and flexible) structure, gives the team just enough of a frame to stay on their purpose and promotes an environment for richer interaction, a place where fantastic ideas can be heard. The coach creates the container; the team creates the content.*"

Characteristics of a Great Facilitator

So, a Scrum Master should facilitate by setting the stage and providing clear boundaries in which the team can collaborate to discuss their ideas.

Other characteristics of a great facilitator are:

- Designs and leads a meeting with the responsibility to help the team reach its goals and objectives[15]
- Asks powerful questions to provide new insights and perspectives
- Listens to understand instead of listening to act[16]
- Creates a strong team instead of creating strong individuals
- Helps things to happen instead of making things happen
- Knows how to use light-touch facilitation

What Great Facilitation of the Scrum Events Looks Like

Every Scrum event has a specific purpose that answers the question "Why do we do this meeting, anyway?" A great facilitator should ensure the goal of every event is clear, a lightweight structure is offered and the team achieves the purpose of the event. The earlier described goals of the Scrum events are still relevant, but via great facilitation the Scrum Master succeeds in getting more value out of every event.

Characteristics of well-facilitated Scrum events are:

- The **Daily Scrum** contains an atmosphere where healthy peer pressure occurs on delivery quality, commitment and addressing impediments.

- The **Sprint Planning** is all about collaboration between the Product Owner and the Development Team and has a strong focus on delivering business value. All team members understand the work and jointly agree to achieve the Sprint Goal.

- The **Sprint Review** is an energizing event in which the Scrum Team, sponsors and stakeholders together inspect the product increment and backlog. But also retrospect their collaboration and how this can be improved. They act as one team with the same purpose, there are no barriers between 'client' and 'supplier'.

- The **Sprint Retrospective** takes place in a safe atmosphere in which 'the elephant in the room' is addressed, discussed and turned into actionable improvements that the team members agree upon realizing in the next Sprint.

Closing

Summarized, great facilitation is about:

- Serving the team without being their servant
- Helping the team make decisions and reach consensus that sticks

---

[15] http://nomad8.com/training/scrum-master-facilitation-skills/
[16] https://tcagley.wordpress.com/2014/03/10/scrum-master-facilitator-or-enabler/

- Addressing difficult attitudes, dysfunctional behaviours and unproductive attitudes that keep meetings from achieving their outcomes[17]
- Being a keen observer
- Stepping back as soon as you can support their continuous self-organization
- Knowing when to interrupt the team
- Helping the team get quality interactions
- Delivering questions and challenges

Mastering these facilitation skills requires time, practice and continuous introspection and improvement. But taking the possible results of great facilitation into account, it's definitely worth the effort!

---

[17] http://www.agilecoachinginstitute.com/the-agile-facilitator/

4. The Scrum Master as a Teacher

This chapter is about the Scrum Master as a teacher. I'll describe the definition of a teacher, the theoretical viewpoint and some practical examples of what a Scrum Master should teach.
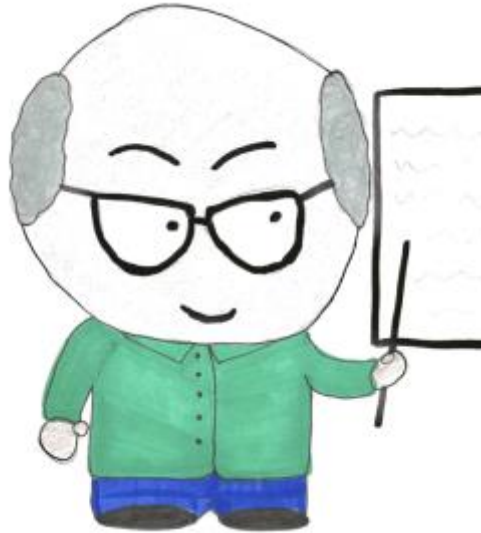
What is a Teacher?

The most straightforward definition I've found is: *"Someone who helps others learn new things."* Teaching is about imparting knowledge or skills and instructing someone as to how to do something.

Some nice quotes about teaching are:

- *"The art of teaching is the art of assisting discovery."* – Mark van Doren

- *"I never teach my pupils; I only attempt to provide the conditions in which they can learn."* – Albert Einstein

- *"A good teacher can inspire hope, ignite the imagination, and instil a love of learning."* – Brad Henry

The Scrum Master as a Teacher

According to the Scrum Guide, the Scrum Master is responsible for ensuring Scrum is understood and enacted. Scrum Masters do this by ensuring the Scrum Team adheres to Scrum theory, practices and rules. They guide the team back to Agile practices and principles when they stray. With teaching, the primary focus for the Scrum Master is the Development Team and Product Owner. But the Scrum Master should also ensure Scrum is understood by everyone else involved with the Scrum Team.

So What Could a Scrum Master Teach?

1. **Teach Agile during the team start-up.** In the first week with a new team I always bring the team back to the heart of Agile and Scrum. I learn them about the why & what of the Agile mindset, Scrum framework, XP and Kanban. Although some team members might have quite a lot of Agile experience, it's about getting on the same page. Explaining the Agile manifesto and emphasize that product development is based on assumptions: the customer knows what he wants, the

developers know how to build it and nothing will change along the way. In reality the customer discovers what he wants, the developers discover how to build it and things change along the way.

2. **Teach the core of Scrum.** Using Scrum can be compared with playing chess. You either play it by the rules, or you don't. Scrum and chess don't fail or succeed. They are either played, or they're not. Those who play both games and keep practicing may become very good at playing the games. In the case of chess, they may become Grand Masters. In the case of Scrum, they may become very good development organizations, cherished by their customers, loved by their users, and feared by their competitors[18]. Some teams start using Scrum leaving out some of the parts of the framework. For example, doing a 'daily' standup twice a week, mixing up the different roles, and skipping the retrospective. If the team thinks this is wise to do, that is ok, but the Scrum Master should teach them the consequences and emphasize that they are not doing Scrum.

3. **Teach the differences between Scrum and good practices.** Nowadays, a lot of good practices have become strongly intertwined with the core of Scrum. Teaching the team the differences is useful. Examples of good practices are using story points, doing the Daily Scrum standing or using a burn down chart for tracking visual progress. All good practices, but not mandatory considering the core of Scrum.

4. **Teach the team about creating a shared identity.** The team should be aware of the prerequisites of teamwork. What does it take to be a team? What does it mean to be a team? I sometimes ask the team to share some personal experiences they've had with the teams they've been part of. What was the worst team and why? What was the best team and why? A powerful exercise to create a shared identity is setting up a team manifesto.

5. **Teach the team about the importance of the product vision.** This is also the part where the Product Owner comes along. Probably the team was created with a purpose, e.g. to build a new product. It's crucial the team knows and understands the vision the Product Owner has with his/her product. The team can only make the right decisions if they understand the purpose of the product. A clear vision basically acts as a lighthouse for the Development team, necessary in difficult times.

6. **Teach the team about self-organization.** As the Agile Manifesto says "the best architectures, requirements, and designs emerge from self-organizing teams." A self-organizing team is a group of motivated individuals, who work together toward a goal, have the ability and authority to take decisions and readily adapt to changing demands. A Scrum Master, as the promoter of Scrum and self-organization, should consider how to help a team work out their problems themselves and offer any tools, trainings and insights on how to best do this[19].

7. **Teach the roles of the Scrum Team.** Ask the team to expect that the people around them will completely fulfil their role. Anything less is an impediment[20]. Teach them how the three roles complement and interact each other. The Product Owner wants to build the right thing, the

---

[18] https://kenschwaber.wordpress.com/2011/04/07/scrum-fails/
[19] Verheyen, Gunther. *Scrum: A Pocket Guide*
[20] Adkins, Lisa. *Coaching Agile Teams*

Development team wants to build it right and the Scrum Master wants to build it fast. A great team knows how to balance these different interests.

8. **Teach the team about impediments.** In Scrum, an impediment is anything that keeps the team from being productive. It's the job the Scrum Master to ensure impediments are being removed. The Scrum Master only removes impediments that exceed the self-organizing capabilities of the Development Team. Otherwise it's not really an impediment, just a problem the team needs to fix by themselves.

9. **Teach the team about visualizing progress.** Transparency is one of the pillars of Scrum. It is crucial for inspection, adaptation and self-organization. Therefore, the need for visualizing progress is also obvious, without it, self-correction is quite difficult to achieve. It is up to the Development Team to choose what to visualize and how. Visualizing the Product- and Sprint Backlog is a good practice I definitely encourage. Other practices for visualizing progress or improve collaboration are burn-down charts, setting up a board with impediments and improvements, showing the availability of the team members or creating a Sprint calendar that shows all the events and meetings.

10. **Teach the Product Owner about backlog management.** The Scrum Master should teach the Product Owner how to create a Product Backlog, how to order it based on priority, value, risk and dependencies and how to involve the entire team with managing the backlog.

11. **Teach the organization about Scrum.** The Scrum framework can be quite disruptive for some organizations. It causes changes that some people might find difficult to cope with. Explaining the purpose of Scrum and the need for some changes is important to create mutual understanding and build a foundation that ensures the changes truly stick.

12. **Teach the team to have fun!** Don't take it all too seriously. Having fun helps to cope with difficult situations, strengthens collaboration and build a healthy team spirit. Therefore, ensure having fun is part of a team's daily routine.

Closing

This chapter contains some examples of what a Scrum Master could teach the Development Team, Product Owner and organization. The most important lesson I've learned is: don't try to teach the team everything upfront, give them the opportunity to fail and learn from their own mistakes. Remember: mistakes are the portals of discovery[21].

---

[21] James Joyce

5. The Scrum Master as a Mentor

This chapter is about the Scrum Master as a mentor. I'll describe the definition of a mentor, coaching versus mentoring, and the Shu-Ha-Ri way of thinking.

What is a Mentor?

The most straightforward definition I've found is: *"A mentor is a wise and trusted counsellor or teacher."*

Some nice quotes about mentoring are:

- *"We make a living by what we get, we make a life by what we give."* – Winston Churchill

- *Getting the most out of life isn't about how much you keep for yourself but how much you pour into others*." – David Stoddard

- *"Be the mentor you wish you had*."

Coaching Versus Mentoring

"Coaching is unlocking a person's potential to maximize their own performance. It is helping people to learn rather than teaching them[22]." It is helping someone to see new perspectives and possibilities. For coaching, being a subject matter expert isn't necessary; it may even be a pitfall. For mentoring however, having in depth knowledge is important.

Coaching Agile teams takes on the combination of coaching and mentoring. You are coaching to help someone reach for the next goal in their life; you are also sharing your Agile experiences and ideas as you mentor them, guiding them to use Agile well. In this way coaching and mentoring are entwined with each other. Combined they provide a powerful combination.

"Mentoring transfers your Agile knowledge and experience to the team as that specific knowledge becomes relevant to what's happening with them. Each side - coaching and mentoring - is useful and can be powerful on its own. Together, they are a winning combination for helping people adopt Agile

---

[22] Sir John Whitmore

and use it well. The context of Agile makes you a mentor; the focus on team performance makes you a coach. Both parts of the equation come together to make Agile come alive and bring it within their grasp[23]."

Shu-Ha-Ri

In the context of mentoring, the concept of Shu-Ha-Ri is also relevant to mention. Shu-Ha-Ri is a way of thinking about how you learn a technique. It describes the progression of training or learning. The name comes from the Japanese martial arts, and Alistair Cockburn introduced it as a way of thinking about learning techniques and methodologies for software development[24]. When learning something new, everyone goes through these three stages. Ultimately, it should result in the student surpassing the master (the mentor), both in knowledge and skill.

Shu – Follow the Rule

In this first stage, the student follows the teachings of the master precisely. The rules are followed until they are really understood. The Scrum Master will mostly act as a teacher. As a teacher he shares knowledge or skills and instructs someone as how to do something. Examples are teaching the core of Scrum and explaining the purpose of the different roles, artifacts and events.

Ha – Break the Rule

In this stage the student starts to reflect on the rules, looking for exceptions and 'breaking' the rules[25]. He understands and can use the basic practices and now starts to learn the underlying related principles. He also starts learning from other masters and integrates that learning into his practice. As a **coach**, the Scrum Master will offer the student seeing new perspectives and possibilities. They will coach them taking the next step in their Agile journey.

Ri – Be the Rule

During the Ri stage the rules are forgotten as the student has developed mastery, and grasped the essence and underlying principles. The student isn't learning from other people anymore, but from his own practice, he has become the new rule. In the Agile context, the student truly understands all the principles and knows when to use a certain practice given the context of the situation. As an **advisor or mentor**, the Scrum Master can act as a counsellor and give advice whenever the student asks for it.

As a Scrum Master it's useful to be aware of the Shu-Ha-Ri stages. Every team member can be on a different level, and this will continuously change. Therefore, the Scrum Master should change his style as well from teaching to coaching to advising to match the teams Shu-Ha-Ri stage.

Closing

The Scrum Master certainly is not always the appropriate mentor for every team member. As mentioned before a mentor has in depth knowledge and experience of a certain topic. It might be that another team member happens to be the ideal mentor or someone from outside the team. A great Scrum Master has a keen eye for potential student-mentor relationships and knows how to establish them. All with the intention to build a great team and help individuals flourish in their personal growth.

---

[23] Adkins, Lisa. *Coaching Agile Teams*
[24] http://martinfowler.com/bliki/ShuHaRi.html
[25] https://www.scrumalliance.org/community/articles/2011/may/scrum-from-student-to-master

6. The Scrum Master as a Manager

This chapter is about the Scrum Master as a manager. I will describe the different between management and the manager, horizontal and vertical management, and the responsibilities of the Scrum Master as a manager.

What is a Manager?

The most straightforward definition I've found is: *"A manager is an individual who is in charge of a certain group of tasks, or a certain subset of a company."*

Some nice quotes about the manager are:

- *"In managers, look for people who can get things done through other people. The most important thing for a good manager is that the people on his team feel like he or she has integrity."* – Sam Wyly

- *"A manager is an assistant to his men.*" – Thoman J. Watson

- *"No matter whether there are manager or not, everyone should feel responsible for management.*" – Jurgen Appelo

- *"Done right, management is the act of serving and supporting everyone's natural awesomeness.*" – Woody Zuill

Management Versus Manager

There is a difference between "Management" and "Manager". **Management is an activity; the manager is a role.** Management as an activity will always be present within organizations. Otherwise, organizations will always have managers executing these activities. The difference with traditional organizations is the way management is done. Within Agile organizations management as an activity is done **'horizontal'**, instead of the **'vertical'** approach traditional organizations use with specific management positions.

Organizations that apply 'vertical' management have individuals compete for promotion. Managers assign tasks. Managers assess performance. Communication is top-down. The purpose is making money for the shareholders. 'Horizontal' management exists with the purpose of delighting their customers. Making money is the result, not the goal of the activities. It supports enabling over control, stimulates innovation and focuses on horizontal communication[26].

Agile Embraces Horizontal Management

Organizations that embrace Agile apply horizontal management. Within these organizations, the teams manage themselves. They make their own decisions about their work and manage the execution. Team members have a strong drive to cooperate, and know that unless all succeed in their part, none will succeed in the whole. The team shares a common purpose through release-, sprint- and team goals. Keywords are trust, transparency, open communication, collaboration, ownership, learning and collective commitment[27].

When you compare horizontal management to a Scrum team, they can be viewed as a team full of managers. The Development Team manages their work. The Product Owner manages the product vision, roadmap and return-on-investment. The Scrum Master manages the process and impediments that exceeds the team's ability of self-organization.

The Scrum Master as a Manager

So, yes, within the Agile context, the Scrum Master is also a manager. As a manager, the Scrum Master is responsible for:

- **Managing impediments, eliminating waste.** Removing impediments that limit the efficiency and progress of a Development Team in areas that are beyond the reach of self-organization of a Development Team.

- **Managing the process.** Support the team in optimizing their process. Facilitating teams. Keep the Scrum events to purposeful and effective. Ensure that people, teams, and the organization realize the highest benefits from using Scrum.

- **Managing the team's health.** Create a trusting environment with quality interactions between the team members and support the team in achieving their (personal) objectives.

- **Managing the boundaries of self-organization.** A Scrum Master manages the boundaries that Scrum provides to augment self-organization; time boxing to limit risk, focused efforts, cross-functional collaboration, releasable results, validated learning[28].

- **Managing the culture.** Making room for failure. Managing the cultural change necessary to give the teams the opportunity to flourish.

Closing

Management continues to be an important activity for organizations, and the role of the manager is still valid and valuable. However, a crucial indicator of management in Agile organizations is the fact

---

[26] http://www.forbes.com/sites/stevedenning/2015/01/26/why-do-managers-hate-agile/
[27] Moreira, Mario. *Being Agile*
[28] http://guntherverheyen.com/2014/11/26/scrum-master-a-manager/

it's done 'horizontal', instead of the vertical management execution in traditional organizations. In horizontal organizations, teams manage themselves. In this environment, the Scrum Master can be considered the wise leader that engages people through organizational purpose and vision. By identifying wasteful activities, eliminating waste, removing impediments, and managing the maximization of Scrum, he optimizes the value of management to the organization.

And as Jurgen Appelo puts it, **"Management is too important to leave to the managers, management is everyone's job**[29]**."**

P.S., Gunther Verheyen did a great job describing the Scrum Master as a manager[30]*. For sure, this was a source of inspiration for this chapter.*

---

[29] Appelo, Jurgen. *#Workout*
[30] http://guntherverheyen.com/2014/11/26/scrum-master-a-manager/

7. The Scrum Master as an Impediment Remover

This chapter is about the Scrum Master as an impediment remover. I will describe the most common definitions and examples of an impediment, the Scrum Master as an impediment remover and tactics to deal with impediments.

What is an Impediment?

By doing a bit of research, I've found quite a few good definitions:

- *"An impediment in Scrum is a factor that blocks the Development Team in its creation of a valuable piece of software in a Sprint, or that restricts the team in achieving its intrinsic level of progress[31]."*

- *"Problems that go beyond the self-organization of the Development Team."*

- *"An event that impedes any of the developers from working to their anticipated Sprint capacity[32]."*

Some nice quotes about impediments are:

- *"A good Scrum Master creates an environment where raising impediments can occur. A great Scrum Master creates an environment where creativity can occur[33]."*

- *"A good Scrum Master will push for permission to remove impediments to team productivity. A great Scrum Master will be prepared to ask for forgiveness."*

Examples of Possible Impediments

Now that you've read the most common definitions of an impediment, you probably want some tangible examples. Therefore, you'll find some examples of possible impediments below:

---

[31] Verheyen, Gunther. *Scrum: A Pocket Guide*
[32] Goldstein, Ilan. *Scrum Shortcuts without Cutting Corners: Agile Tactics, Tools & Tips*
[33] Watts, Geoff. *Scrum Mastery: From Good to Great Servant Leadership*

- Illness of team members
- Unforeseen and undesired changes in team composition
- Issues with the tooling of the Development Team
- Scarcity of skills
- Lots of technical debt
- Problems with suppliers
- Unavailability of the Product Owner
- Undesired pressure from management
- Conflict between team members
- Lots of unimportant meetings the Development Team has to attend
- Restrictions to the team environment
- An indecisive Product Owner

The Scrum Master as an Impediment Remover

According to the Scrum Guide, one of the Scrum Master services to the Development Team is removing impediments to the Development Team's progress. As a servant leader, the Scrum Master guides the Development Team towards self-organization and cross-functionality. The Scrum Master encourages, supports and enables the team to reach their full potential and abilities.

To achieve all this, the Scrum Master should make conscious decisions about removing impediments. Questions to consider are:

- Is it really an impediment or is it something the Development Team can resolve themselves?
- Do we actually need to remove this impediment?
- What is the real problem here?

It is important to realize that the given examples of possible impediments do not have to be impediments. Something will only become an impediment when it exceeds the self-organizing capabilities of the team.

Scarcity of skills might be become an impediment, but trust the self-organizing character of the Development Team to think of other options themselves. Maybe a team member is eager to learn the desired skills and sees this as a great opportunity. In addition, a conflict between team members doesn't have to be an impediment. Let them have an intense discussion with each other. It is up to the Scrum Master to lead the team through healthy conflict and debate. Eventually this will lead to an even stronger team.

A Scrum Master should create an environment where the Development Team feels safe to raise impediments. Respecting the self-organizing capabilities of the team, the Scrum Master should encourage the team in trying to solve their own problems. Even better, preventing something to become an impediment at all.

Tactics For Removing Impediments

Removing impediments can be a challenge. Below I've shared some tactics and ideas that a Scrum Master can consider when facing impediments.

- **Don't wait until the Daily Scrum to raise an impediment!** Sure, one of the suggested Daily Scrum questions is "Do I see any impediment that prevents me or the Development Team from meeting the Sprint Goal?" However, that doesn't mean that the Development Team can only discuss impediments during the Daily Scrum.

- **Use a Sprint Goal.** A clear Sprint Goal is a useful instrument to determine if something is truly an impediment. If something prevents the team from achieving the Sprint Goal, then it is definitely an impediment.

- **Understand the difference between 'blocks' and 'impediments.'** A block affects only a single task, whereas an impediment acts like a parachute, slowing down overall progress. Quite often, the Development Team can fix 'blocks' themselves whereas impediments need to be fixed by the Scrum Master[34].

- **Improve transparency by using an 'Impediment Board.'** This can be a simple flip-over where the impediments are visualized. Add some swimming lanes like 'to do', 'in progress', 'done' and the status is transparent for everyone. Of course you can also add the impediments to the existing Scrum board. Visualizing the status and increasing the transparency hereby is the most important.

- **Keep track of fixed impediments.** This will provide great input for the Sprint Review and Sprint Retrospective.

- **Understand the organization.** A Scrum Master should understand the organization's culture. He should understand how things are done in the organization. By choosing the right approach, difficult impediments can be tackled easier.

- **Be brave and creative in removing impediments.** Be prepared to ask for forgiveness afterwards when you need to take bold decisions to ensure the Development Teams productivity.

- **Collaborate with the Product Owner.** Quite often impediments will be related to product management and collaboration with stakeholders and suppliers. The Product Owner is a key player on this area. Therefore, ensure a healthy relationship with the Product Owner.

- **Stop spending time and effort on solving the wrong problem.** With impediments, Scrum Masters need to resist the desire to fix it, solve it and offer solutions. They should focus on the real problem, not the first problem. Ask questions to understand the situation. Check if it is really an impediment or a learning opportunity for the Development Team.

Closing

By doing some research and thinking of my own, I have created a brief description of the Scrum Master as an Impediment Remover. Given the amount of available material, it's clearly an important part of the Scrum Masters role. My main lesson learned is to respect the self-organizing capabilities of the Development Team. Considering every minor issue an impediment that needs to be resolved by the

---

[34] Goldstein, Ilan. *Scrum Shortcuts without Cutting Corners: Agile Tactics, Tools & Tips*

Scrum Master, does not help the Development Team grow as a whole. It is about continuously finding the right balance between preventing or fighting a fire.

8. The Scrum Master as a Change Agent

This chapter is about the Scrum Master as a Change Agent. I will describe the most common definitions, the characteristics of a Scrum-friendly culture, and the Scrum Master as a Change Agent.

What is a Change Agent?

Some good definitions about a change agent are:

- *"A person who helps an organization transform itself by focusing on organizational effectiveness, improvement and development[35]."*

- *"People who act as catalysts for change[36]."*

- Within the context of Scrum, Geoff Watts describes the role of the Scrum Master as a change agent as: *"A good Scrum Master helps a Scrum Team survive in an organization's culture. A great Scrum Master helps change the culture so Scrum Teams can thrive[37]."*

Characteristics of a Scrum-Friendly Culture

The short answer to describe the characteristics of a Scrum-friendly culture is to refer to the Agile manifesto. Although I acknowledge these values and principles as valid characteristics, I also consider a Scrum-friendly culture to be an environment that:

- **Values team success** over individual success

- Stimulates team members to hold themselves and others **accountable**

- Promotes **continuous improvement** and **experimentation**

- Appreciates everyone for their **unique talents and skills**

---

[35] http://study.com/academy/lesson/change-agent-definition-role-quiz.html
[36] http://georgecouros.ca/blog/archives/3615
[37] Watts, Geoff. *Scrum Mastery: From Good to Great Servant Leadership*

- **Values behavior** over achievements

- Puts the **customer at the center** of its operations

- Considers the act of **planning** more **useful** than the actual plan

- Supports **stable team composition** over a longer period to increase performance

- Invites and **inspires employees** to get the most out of themselves

- Thrives on self-discipline where **trust and ownership** is given to employees

- Helps employees succeed by **giving support, trust and guidance**

- Replaces temporary, comprehensive documentation with **face-to-face communication**

- **Values products** instead of projects

- Delivers business value by small, co-located, cross-functional and **self-organizing teams**

The Scrum Master as a Change Agent

To enable a culture in which Scrum teams can flourish, the Scrum Master should act as a change agent. The Scrum Master helps creating an environment that allows the spirit of Scrum to thrive. The Scrum Guide defines this part of the Scrum Master role as serving the organization in:

- Leading and coaching the organization in its Scrum adoption
- Planning Scrum implementations within the organization
- Helping employees and stakeholders understand and enact Scrum and empirical product development
- Causing change that increases the productivity of the Scrum Team
- Working with other Scrum Masters to increase the effectiveness of the application of Scrum in the organization[38]

Closing

As a change agent, the truly great Scrum Masters become visible. These are Scrum Masters that know how to shift the status quo and help create a more suitable environment. They know when to be disruptive and when to be careful. They understand organizational changes can take a longer period of time. However, their willingness to change acts as a catalysis to drive the organization forward. The strength of Scrum is making bottlenecks and problems visible, great Scrum Masters create support within the organization to truly resolve these dysfunctions. Everything with the ultimate goal of creating a culture in which Scrum teams can thrive!

---

[38] http://www.scrumguides.org

Summary

As mentioned before, it is my personal mission to create a better understanding of the Scrum Master role. By writing this white paper, I wanted to share my view on this awesome position. The Scrum Master has the potential of being a valuable asset for every organization. To optimize its contribution, the Scrum Master should act as a:

- **Servant Leader** whose focus is on the needs of the team members and those they serve (the customer), with the goal of achieving results in line with the organization's values, principles, and business objectives.

- **Facilitator** by setting the stage and providing clear boundaries in which the team can collaborate.

- **Coach** coaching the individual with a focus on mindset and behaviour, the team in continuous improvement and the organization in truly collaborating with the Scrum Team.

- **Manager** responsible for managing impediments, eliminating waste, managing the process, managing the team's health, managing the boundaries of self-organization, and managing the culture.

- **Mentor** that transfers Agile knowledge and experience to the team.

- **Teacher** to ensure Scrum and other relevant methods are understood and enacted.

- **Impediment Remover** solving blocking issues to the team's progress taking into account the self-organizing capabilities of the Development Team.

- **Change Agent** to enable a culture in which Scrum Teams can flourish.

In this white paper, I've shared my personal experiences acting as a Scrum Master. I've also added the most common misunderstandings of the Scrum Master role and why I've changed my title from Agile Coach to **100% Scrum Master.** I hope you have enjoyed reading it and it helped create a better understanding of the Scrum Master role.

Learn More

Since I published the first edition of this white paper in 2016 it triggered quite some response in the Scrum community. I got asked as a trainer, workshop facilitator and public speaker. This encouraged me to improve the white paper, create new training material and re-think what I wrote earlier. Together with the Scrum community, I want to share lessons learned and collaboratively create a better understanding of the Scrum Master role.

Opportunities for collaboration and learning are:

- **1 on 1 conversations** (simply contact me via email, LinkedIn, Twitter)

- **Presentations** that trigger you to re-imagine the Scrum Master by learning of the 8 different stances and increase the chance of successful Scrum Mastery.

- **2 – 4 hour workshops** in which you really experience the potential of the Scrum Master role in a unique way

- The Scrum.org **Professional Scrum Master** training. A 2-day course where you'll learn how to use Scrum to optimize value, productivity and the total cost of ownership of software products. Tools are provided to enable you to relate to behavioural shifts, work with people and teams, coaching and facilitation techniques, and addressing the organization.

- The **Scrum Master Advanced** 2-day training that we've created to discuss the Scrum Master role in more detail. By using the 8 Stances of a Scrum Master as a foundation, we'll explore the possibilities to optimize the potential of the Scrum Master role.

If you're interested in any of these opportunities for collaboration, contact me at **info@barryovereem.com**

About Me

Barry is a **freelance Scrum Master** and **Professional Scrum Trainer** at Scrum.org. he is an active member of the Scrum community and shares his insights and knowledge by speaking at conferences, facilitating workshops and writing blog posts.

As a Scrum Master, Barry has a focus on **creating successful teams** with strong skills in self-organization and cross-functionality, and a drive for continuous improvement. Barry **supports Product Owners** in visualizing progress, creating a transparent Product Backlog and maximizing the value of the product. He **helps organizations** in making Scrum successful by supporting management in changing processes, procedures, culture and behaviour.

Due to his strong focus on the principles of Agile and the values of Scrum, Barry ensures **the spirit of Scrum** is truly understood.

Want to collaborate? Contact me at **info@barryovereem.com**

www.linkedin.com/in/barryovereem/

@Barryovereem