

# The Anatomy Of An Excellent Scrum Team

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Scrum is a proven framework for product success in organizations, but becoming a truly Agile organization requires much more than just rote implementation of methods and processes. People play a critical role in ensuring the success of projects by meeting aggressive deadlines and stepping up to complex demands. Each individual spearheading a Scrum Team holds one of three main roles:

- **Product Owner**—holds the vision for the product and determines what value to deliver
- **ScrumMaster**—helps the team best use Scrum to build the product and helps to grow a great team
- **Development Team**—builds the product and determines how to deliver value

Here's how each of these roles contributes to a product's success, the challenges encountered along the way, and the personality traits that drive effective solutions.

## Product Owner: The Product Value Evangelist

On a practical level, a Product Owner is responsible for defining the product vision, setting priorities to deliver the highest value and determining what project deliverables are important to a wide variety of stakeholders.

But in today's fast-paced, highly competitive world, a Product Owner must also be a visionary—someone who sits at the wheel of the car and determines which way to go.

Fluctuating needs and ongoing feedback can change the direction of a project. For this reason, a Product Owner must also be a good communicator. Not only does this involve the Product Owner explaining changing priorities and their varying impacts on different product teams, it also means listening to stakeholders and carefully managing their expectations.

Unfortunately, many organizations continue to treat Product Owners as glorified go-betweens—people who simply facilitate conversations between the team and management. But it's a mistake to treat a Product Owner as a proxy. Rather, a Product Owner must be allowed to make critical decisions, no matter how unpopular.

Not everyone is built for the role of Product Owner. Courage is essential. After all, creating a vision for a product and determining a direction forward requires making choices that may encounter dissent, and persevering in the overall interest of maximizing value—both of the product, and for the customer.

Product Owners must also be highly self-disciplined. It can be tempting to try to control the work of others. Experienced Product Owners know not to try to manage the Scrum Team's activities.

### **ScrumMaster: The Protector Extraordinaire**

The ScrumMaster helps the Scrum Team perform at its highest level. This can be accomplished several ways. First, he or she acts as the protector of the team, making sure that everyone on the project, especially the development Scrum Team members, can focus on their work without any distractions, such as stakeholder requests that divide employees' focus.

The second way a ScrumMaster helps is by teaching or guiding the team on how to use Scrum to deliver a valuable product. An expert on how Scrum works, he or she must help everyone stay within the Scrum framework and facilitate proper application of Scrum. The ScrumMaster should support all team members in using Scrum effectively.

Despite these contributions, some people devalue the role of a ScrumMaster, since ScrumMasters are not involved in making the actual product. Yet the ScrumMaster does have a product: his or her team. The role of the ScrumMaster is to help that team perform at its best. This doesn't, however, involve the ScrumMaster telling team members what they have to do, dictating how they must stay on schedule and serving as a rote taskmaster. Instead, the ScrumMaster's role involves meeting team members where they are, with their individual strengths, and helping them deploy those strengths in achieving a shared objective. Therefore, this role requires someone who is willing to have tough

conversations and to abandon his or her own agenda for the sake of project success.

### **Development Team: The Collaboration-Friendly Collective**

The Development Team is an autonomous collective—a cross-functional team that includes all the roles required to complete a project. From architects and testers to developers and designers, these self-organizing groups are accountable for delivering chunks of working product or software in frequent, iterative increments.

The Product Owner and the priorities he or she sets are what determine the specific features that team members work on at any given time. And while the Agile mindset guides the product's execution, the Scrum process structures the way teams work. Everything else, however, is up to the team to manage, with the ScrumMaster providing as much—or as little—guidance as necessary.

For example, Development Team members can take a feature from a prioritized product backlog and collaboratively decide how to develop the solution. This level of autonomy encourages strong bonds among team members and helps to create a positive working environment and creative solutions.

But that's not all. By placing team members with the most expertise closest to a complex project and customers, organizations can react quickly to changing circumstances. In fact, Development Teams can deliver enormous value in a month or less by learning quickly without feeling overworked for a rapid return on investment.

However, because of the self-organizing nature of a Scrum Team, members must be willing to share ownership of the work. Desirable traits include an eagerness to collaborate, technical excellence, attention to detail and adaptability.

Together, these parts of a Scrum Team complement one another and work synergistically, enabling organizations to move beyond rigid, top-down (traditional “Waterfall”-style) management, and toward more iterative Scrum.