

## 02 - Cricket Team as an Example of Cross Functional Team

### Cricket Teams as a Model for Cross-Functional Scrum Teams



In my previous article, [Importance of Cross-Functional Teams](#), we explored the initial steps of envisioning your teams as **their own startups by structuring them as cross-functional units**. Today, let's take that analogy further by analyzing how a cricket team, much like other

sports teams, is organized and structured as a cross-functional team with **highly cross skilled team players**. This comparison can help us understand the benefits of cross-functional teams over skill-based structuring.

Cricket teams and scrum teams, despite their differences, serve as prime examples of how cross-functional collaboration can lead to success. Understanding the similarities between these groups sheds light on the importance of diverse roles, strong leadership, and cohesive teamwork. This article delves into the parallels between a cricket team and a scrum team, emphasizing the benefits of cross-functional teams and how they can be more effective than skill-based teams.

## Skills and Roles in a Cricket Team

A cricket team is composed of individuals with specialized skills in batting, bowling, fielding, and wicketkeeping. Each role has its own sub-specialties:

- **Batting:** Openers, middle-order batsmen, and finishers.
- **Bowling:** Fast bowlers, spin bowlers, and specialist bowlers.
- **Fielding:** Close-in fielders, outfielders with strong throwing arms, and agile catchers.

These roles are integrated into a cohesive unit where each player's unique skills contribute to the team's overall performance. This structure is inherently cross-functional, ensuring that all necessary skills are represented and utilized effectively according to the situation.

## The Cross-Functional Nature of Cricket Teams

Imagine if cricket teams were organized purely by skill-based groups. Batters, bowlers, and fielders would each have their own managers, monitoring and optimizing performance within their silos. While this might improve individual performance metrics, it would likely lead to disjointed team dynamics, lack of coordination, and an absence of a unified strategy.

In contrast, the cross-functional nature of cricket teams allows for:

- **Better Coordination:** Players with different skills work together, understanding each other's strengths and weaknesses.
- **Adaptability:** Teams can dynamically adjust their strategies based on the match situation, leveraging the diverse skill sets available.
- **Unified Leadership:** A single captain (akin to a scrum master) can guide the team, making decisions that benefit the team as a whole rather than individual skill groups.

## The Role of the Captain (Scrum Master)

The captain of a cricket team plays a crucial role, similar to that of a scrum master in a scrum team. Both are responsible for:

- **Motivation:** Inspiring and energizing the team, keeping morale high even in challenging situations.
- **Strategy:** Developing and communicating the game plan, ensuring everyone understands their role and the team's objectives.
- **Discipline:** Maintaining order and focus, ensuring that players adhere to the team's standards and values.
- **Adaptation:** Making real-time decisions and adjustments based on the evolving circumstances of the match or project.

The effectiveness of a captain or scrum master can significantly influence the team's performance. Their ability to foster collaboration, resolve conflicts, and drive the team towards common goals is paramount.

## Cross-Functional Teams vs. Skill-Based Teams

In a business context, especially in agile frameworks, the distinction between cross-functional and skill-based teams is critical:

### Cross-Functional Teams:

- Include members with diverse skills needed to complete the entire project.
- Foster better communication and collaboration.
- Enable faster problem-solving and innovation.
- Provide a holistic view of the project, leading to better decision-making.

### Skill-Based Teams:

- Composed of specialists in a single domain.
- Can lead to silos and communication barriers.
- May struggle with coordination and adaptability.
- Often rely on external dependencies, slowing down progress.

By mirroring the structure of a cricket team, where diverse skills are brought together under unified leadership, organizations can create agile teams that are more adaptable, innovative, and efficient.

## Importance of Team Interaction and Organization

Effective interaction and organization within the team are crucial for success. This involves:

- **Regular Communication:** Daily stand-ups, sprint planning, and retrospectives ensure that everyone is aligned and informed.
- **Role Clarity:** Clearly defined roles and responsibilities help prevent overlap and confusion.
- **Collaboration Tools:** Utilizing tools that facilitate collaboration, such as task boards, communication platforms, and project management software.
- **Continuous Improvement:** Regularly reflecting on performance and making adjustments to improve team dynamics and outcomes.

## Challenges of Establishing Cross-Functional Teams

When organizations are small, operating with fewer engineers, they naturally function like cross-functional units. However, as products grow and more functionalities are added, organizations tend to shift towards a departmental structure, creating silos in product management, development, QA, DevOps, support, and services. This shift can lead to fragmented teams, each with their own metrics and goals, losing sight of the overall customer experience.

Reverting to cross-functional teams requires strategic planning and may involve restructuring the organization and even refactor product architecture. For instance, adopting a microservices architecture can help break down monolithic applications, allowing teams to own and deploy independent services. Even without changing the technical architecture, organizations can still form cross-functional units with clear scopes and responsibilities.

## Conclusion

The example of a cricket team illustrates how cross-functional teams are inherently structured for better performance compared to skill-based teams. Cross-functional scrum teams operate with higher control and freedom, are more empowered, and can learn from customer experiences.

Such teams, guided by strong leadership and effective collaboration, are better equipped to navigate challenges and achieve success. By embracing the principles of cross-functional teamwork, organizations can foster a more dynamic, efficient, and fulfilling work environment, ultimately leading to better outcomes and a thriving organization.

In our next article, we will explore the challenges of creating cross-functional teams, such as defining scope and responsibilities, and determining the ideal team size for effective cross-functional collaboration. We will discuss concepts of teams with I-shaped individuals vs. T-shaped and X-shaped individuals, and why a certain amount of cross-skilling within the team is essential for it to operate effectively and become a high-performing team.

We'd love to hear from you! What are your experiences with cross-functional teams? Have you encountered any challenges or successes in implementing such structures in your organization? Share your thoughts and join the discussion in the comments below.