# 6
Actionable Tips to
Improve Sprint Planning in Scrum

coMakeIT

Scrum, as an agile approach to manage software projects, has gained huge importance among software organizations. Everyone in the industry is talking about it, and especially about the myriad benefits it offers. However, there are a number of software companies who are aware of Scrum and know how it can improve efficiency, but don't know properly how to implement in their software development process. If implemented accurately, Scrum is an effective way of managing software development projects.

PRODUCT BACKLOG   PLANNING   BACKLOG   DAILY SPRINT PLANNING   PRODUCT INCREMENT
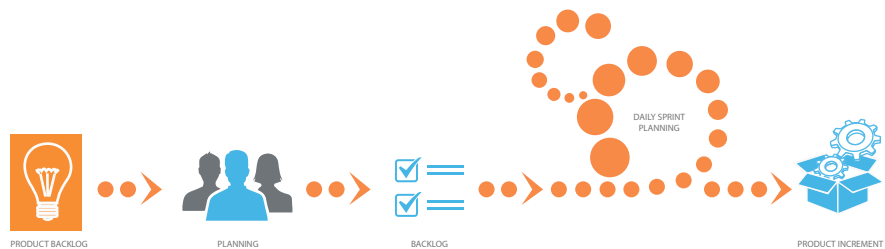
But how does Scrum work? The Scrum methodology is implemented through a series of Sprints. To put it in simple words, a Sprint is an integral part of any Scrum based process, without which the methodology loses importance. Effective Sprint planning is vital for any Scrum project's success. However, many consider it to be hardest part in Scrum. In this ebook, we have shared few actionable tips which will guide you and your team to improve Sprint planning in Scrum.

How do you plan a Sprint?

Sprint generally begins with defining a product backlog and doing effort estimation. At the end of each Sprint, the Scrum Master reviews the progress and identifies action areas for the next Sprint. It's the Scrum Master's responsibility to see that the list of tasks specified in the product backlog is accomplished before the product is released. The Scrum Master in consultation with the product owner, who maintains the list of backlog, plans and decides on the duration of Sprint.

Following are some of the critical steps in implementing a Sprint:

- *It begins with the product owner prioritizing the backlog list.*

- *The development team and stakeholders meet to decide which backlog should be accomplished in the next sprint and what would be the deliverables.*

- *The development team identifies the items of priority from the list for completion.*

- *The team obtains all details about the high priority task from the stakeholders.*

- *The time required to complete the amount of work is specified by the team.*

- *Once the time to complete the work has been defined, the team finalizes the Sprint goal.*

- *Certain backlog items may be broken down and selected as Sprint backlog.*

- *The team cannot add new items to the Sprint until the next Sprint.*

Building a Sprint team

The Scrum Master plays a crucial role in building and motivating a Sprint team, which is generally a self-organized team consisting not more than 5-7 members. If the Scrum Master feels there is any need to induct more members in the team depending on the backlog to be completed, he/she breaks it into more than one Sprint and creates small teams.

Following are the characteristics of a Sprint team:

- *The Sprint team generally works in timeframes of 25-30 days.*

- *A Sprint team is assigned to take up analysis, design, coding and testing of the software.*

- *The Scrum Master can introduce team members with expertise in certain domains to work in a part-time basis.*

- *The team though is free to make decisions, is bound to work within the constraints of the company's standards and guidelines.*

- *The Sprint team can end the Sprint abruptly, if it feels the Sprint goal cannot be achieved due to lack of authority to perform things, or wrong assumptions made during planning.*

6 Actionable tips to improve Sprint planning

While Sprint planning meeting is a vital part of Scrum, many software professionals still consider it to be one of the complex parts in Scrum. This is actually not the case! The ultimate goal of Sprint planning is to predict the amount of work the team can accomplish in a period of time. Therefore it is obvious that methodical and accurate planning, combined with full support and commitment from every team member is essential to make a Sprint planning successful. We have listed below few tips which have been gathered from actual software projects to help you and your team to plan next Sprint meeting efficiently.

1 Introduce a break in between

If we go by Scrum principles, a meeting will have 8-9 hours of timebox for a 30 day long Sprint. However, long duration meetings are generally unproductive, as the team members get exhausted. In order to motivate the team, the Scrum Master should introduce a break in the middle of two meetings. The break period could be in the lunch time. The first part of the meeting could be of 4 hours, followed by lunch, and then carrying out the remaining part of the meeting in another 4 hours.

2 Make it easy for developers

You have to consider the fact that developers and programmers like code better than documentation. Therefore you can make their life easier by organizing planning meeting at the beginning of a week (Monday or Tuesday). By doing this, the team can easily remember the product owner's briefing about the product backlog items discussed in the first part of the meeting, and thus can avoid the tedious process of documenting it.

3 Ensure active participation from the team

A Sprint meeting only becomes a success, if there is active participation from the entire team. The entire team should feel motivated and committed to the goal. The team should not feel distracted and participate whole heartedly during the meeting. Scrum teams often introduce a mobile box, where all team members keep their mobile phones, preferably on vibration mode, to stay away from distraction.

4 Estimate each product backlog

The Scrum Master should ask the team to create the tasks together for each product backlog item, identified for the Sprint. This would encourage the team to analyse and estimate the effort required for each task. The exercise enables the team to comprehend the size of each product backlog item in the current sprint. The programmers in the team should write each task in their own words to ensure that each and everyone understands each item during the sprint.

5 Focus on team collaboration

The Scrum Master shouldn't plan for optimal utilisation of resources, or try to be over efficient with each team member's time. Rather, he/she should plan for team collaboration. Ideally, the plan would be to work at one story a time as a team, so that the whole team gets the opportunity to work together and learn from each other. If the team learns more, they will feel positive about the work they are doing and this would benefit the Sprint planning as a whole.

6 Maximise team effort

Once the meeting is over, and the team gets estimates for the tasks, they must be saved on a repository, such as Excel or the Microsoft Team System. By doing this, the team can avoid losing the tasks and maximize their work during the meeting.

Proper Sprint planning is essential for any Scrum team to ensure that the product launch will be on time. The Sprint team should be really motivated and committed towards the planning effort and to complete the backlog. Typically, a healthy dynamic should evolve where the development team tries to excel at achieving Sprint goals and building great products, and only then the sole objective of Scrum is achieved.

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