

# Scrum Master Article

from [www.ScaledAgileFramework.com](http://www.ScaledAgileFramework.com)

*“Good leaders must first become good servants.”*  
—Robert K. Greenleaf

SAFe *Scrum Masters* are servant leaders and coaches for an Agile team. They help educate the team in Scrum, eXtreme Programming, Kanban and SAFe, ensuring that the agreed Agile process is being followed. They also help remove impediments, and foster an environment for high-performing team dynamics, continuous flow, and relentless improvement.

Although the Scrum Master role is based largely on standard Scrum, Agile Teams—even those teams that are applying Kanban—establish this role to help the team meet its goals and coordinate activities with other teams. The Scrum Master role is assumed by a team member who has a primary responsibility to help the self-organizing, self-managing team achieve its goals. Scrum Masters do this by teaching and coaching ScrumXP and SAFe, implementing and supporting SAFe principles and practices, and identifying and eliminating impediments to facilitate flow.

SAFe Agile Teams can fine-tune their process from a continuum of methods, picking the best practices from Scrum, Kanban, XP, and more. Scrum Masters have the knowledge and skills needed to leverage the most effective aspects of all the evolving methods, suited to the team’s interests, aptitude’s and local context.

## Details

The Scrum Master role is a special role for an Agile Team member who spends much of her time helping other team members communicate, coordinate, and cooperate; generally, this person assists the team in meeting their delivery goals. The Scrum Master is a servant leader who helps teams self-organize, self-manage, and deliver via effective Agile practices. The Scrum Master supports and coaches the practices, principles and mindset of SAFe and other process rules the team has agreed to. The Scrum Master also helps the team coordinate with other teams on the Agile Release Train and communicates status to management as needed.

## Responsibilities on the Team

The effective SAFe Scrum Master is a team-based servant leader who:

- **Exhibits Lean-Agile leadership.** Exhibits the behaviors of a Lean-Agile Leader with a Lean-Agile mindset. Helps the team embrace SAFe Core Values, adopt and apply SAFe Principles, and implement SAFe practices.
- **Supports the rules.** The rules of the team process, be it ScrumXP or Kanban, are lightweight, but they are rules nonetheless, and the Scrum Master is responsible for reinforcing them. These include the rules of Scrum, Built-in Quality practices, WIP limits, and any other process rules the team has agreed to.
- **Facilitates the team's progress toward the goal.** The Scrum Master is trained as a team facilitator and is constantly engaged in challenging the old norms of development, while keeping the team focused on the goals of the Iteration. Helps the team achieve in areas including quality, predictability, flow, and velocity. Helps the team focus on daily and Iteration Goals in the context of current PI Objectives.
- **Leads the team's efforts in relentless improvement.** Helps the team improve and take responsibility for their actions. Facilitates the team retrospective. Teaches problem-solving and helps the team become better problem-solvers for themselves.
- **Facilitates meetings.** Facilitates all team meetings, including the daily stand-up, Iteration Planning, Team Demo, and Iteration Retrospective.
- **Supports the Product Owner.** The Product Owner has a special responsibility on the team. The Scrum Master supports the Product Owner in their efforts to manage the Team Backlog and guide the team while and facilitates a healthy intra-team dynamic with respect to priorities and scope.
- **Eliminates impediments.** Many blocking issues will be beyond the team's authority or will require support from other teams. The Scrum Master actively addresses these issues so that the team can remain focused on achieving the objectives of the iteration.
- **Promotes SAFe quality practices.** SAFe provides guidance to assist the teams in constantly improving the quality of their deliverables and meeting the Definition of Done; the Scrum Master helps foster the culture of technical discipline and craftsmanship that is the hallmark of effective Agile Teams. Fosters and supports relevant Communities of Practice.

- **Builds a high-performing team.** Focuses on ever-improving team dynamics and performance. Helps the team manage intrapersonal conflicts, challenges, and opportunities for growth. Escalates people problems to management where necessary, but only after internal processes have failed to achieve the objective. Helps individuals and teams through personnel changes.
- **Protects and communicates.** Communicates with management and outside stakeholders. Helps protect the team from uncontrolled injection of work.
- **Promote Continuous Delivery and other technical practices.** The Scrum Master helps the team improve on their journey towards continuous delivery, which includes technical practices that promote Continuous Integration, Continuous Deployment, and designing the solution for Release on Demand.

## Responsibilities on the Train

The Scrum Master helps coordinate inter-team cooperation and helps the team operate as an effective "team on the train."

- **Coordinates with other teams.** The Scrum Master is typically the representative in the Scrum of Scrums meeting, and he passes information from that meeting back to the team. (See the Program Increment article for more details.) Often coordinates with the System Team, and Shared Services. It is important to note, however, that the responsibility for inter-team coordination cannot be delegated entirely to the Scrum Master; every team member shares responsibility in that regard.
- **Promote DevOps culture and tools.** The Scrum Master promotes the ideas of DevOps, starting with a culture of shared responsibility and communication with operations.
- **Facilitates preparation and readiness for ART events.** Assists the team in preparation for ART activities, including PI Planning, System Demos, and the Inspect and Adapt workshop.
- **Supports estimating.** Guides the team in establishing normalized estimating and helps the team and the ART estimate larger Features and Capabilities.

## Sourcing the Role

The Scrum Master can be a part-time or full-time role, depending on the size of the team, the context, and other responsibilities. However, at Enterprise scale, it can be a challenge to “sell” the need for a full-time Scrum Master for each Agile Team. After all, if the enterprise is organizing 100 new Agile Teams, it probably isn’t economically or politically practical to take 100 full-time development team members and assign them to these new duties—duties that don’t include

development or testing. Nor is it economically viable to hire a full- or half-time consultant for each team to help them learn and master the new methods. That could kill the transformation before it even gets started, and before the teams have had a chance to prove the value of the role.

Therefore, SAFe takes a pragmatic approach and assumes, in general, that the Scrum Master is a part-time role assumed by a member SAFe Agile Team. During initial SAFe adoption, however, the role may be more intensive; at this stage the organization may find it beneficial to use SAFe Program Consultant (SPCs), who are either internal or external, to coach the teams while they become experienced in SAFe.

---

## Learn More

[1] [www.scrumalliance.org](http://www.scrumalliance.org).

[2] Leffingwell, Dean. Agile Software Requirements: Lean Requirements Practices for Teams, Programs, and the Enterprise. Addison-Wesley, 2011.