What is your role in the organization?

Software developer. I have been working here for three years.

Now you are a software developer, what are you key responsibilities, what are the main tasks you are dealing with?

Mainly development, test. The responsibilities has been the same since I started.

In the agile context, how do you see your role, what is it's main objective, what are the tasks you should be concerned with?

I used to work here before the agile transformation so to say. There I think the organization wasn't agile but the teams were agile in some way. They did Scrum and followed that, so it was sprints, backlogs and things, but it was internal to the teams so everything that went external took a lot of time, any impediment that was external to the team. But right now it feels that the organization in a bigger picture is moving towards more agile way, so things take shorter time, if you ask for things I guess. That's the difference. Before you had to probably wait for a while to get responses, because something was not done and it wasn't planned and you had to wait probably 6 months or something to get something in that will make our things work and stuff like that. That is kind of shortened. I can't give real examples but I've seen like, sometimes you send out a mail to other teams when you have impediments or to other organizations and then you wait for a while, like we are not planning this until next quarter. Right now it's we are not planning this after next sprint or two sprints, which have made shorter cycles [???]. There you see differences, I think. But that's more external to the team.

Can you think of other reasons why the feedback is faster now? Apart from shorter cycles?

I think the way we plan things in the backlog is more flexible now. Before it was planned on 6 month basis, but right now you look at the sprint and what is the highest priority [???]. If you communicate more to the PG or the OPOs of the other teams, you can somehow get in the task, the impediment that should be done from the other teams, you can push it more [??????]

Now that the organization is agile, do you think that maybe parts of it are not compatible with agile way of working?

Sometimes I think yes because sometimes I think we get a lot of feedback. I mean this is the other side of getting work from other teams, sometimes you have your own sprint plan and you have your backlog groomed for the next week's sprint and you have someone trying to push in things. That's exactly the opposite side that I saw a little bit a while ago. But then you have some definite plan [???] or the next three weeks in front of your three sprints and it kind of damages your view because teams are comfortable with what you have planned but how it is in the next month so to say. And it suddenly just disrupts when you get unplanned, sometimes you get different areas, because we are working in XFTs and you have persons with specific roles and if everyone in that specific role works on different unplanned works then the sprint kind of… You have to cancel the sprint. That affects, I think.

What could be a reason for the unplanned thing getting pushed into the sprint?

It's usually thing that you probably have delivered before, that ended up as a TR, or things like you have your deliveries to customers and stuff like that, and then the customers can report a TR. But that's something every team has to handle probably. But if you have a task coming in from externally, there are things that you need to get done like in 2 days time and short notice. Those affect the burn down of the sprints. I mean you can not skip that if you are working agile probably, but sometimes it has been way too much. For example, this sprint we didn't have any unplanned work, but that is probably we haven't delivered code for the last. Because we were working on documentation a little bit so we haven't delivered that much code so we haven't done that much planned work. I think it's somehow related to that. So if you are delivering code more you might end up getting more unplanned work, but that I think is the problem with planning, I guess, within the team. I can speculate more but I don't know.

Can you think of the roles you communicate most frequently and intense with during your work?

I think it's mostly with PGs and other developers. And usually when you get unplanned work it's communicating more with the developers once you to do the work that should be done. But it's mostly the developers in other teams and then it's PG if I were to rank that.

Does it mean unexpected work is also delegated towards you whenever somebody else finds a problem that you have to solve it for him?

Sometimes, yes.

Why?

– Because usually unplanned work comes from like something in the test, auto test failing or something like that, because of the delivery and you have to correct in then and there so it doesn't become red, the automatic environment where we test things. Then it's an emergency thing you have to take care of really soon, as soon as you get the information so to say.

What can be other things that interrupt sprints except for unplanned work?

Other than that, I don't think there is. There are like impediments in stories but I think the team plans that in the story points so to say. «Oh I guess this might be a hinder» so you might add a little of uncertainty points. That happens because you are always dependent on something else externally. So, communication wise it's PG and other developers outside. Internal as well, I mean we communicate all the time, the team members, but it's usually external developers as well.

What events can cause more communication than usual?

Sometimes we have WPs that have dependancies and then probably when you analyze, if you are grooming your backlogs, you look into the stories and you see «Ok, there might be an impediment that could be solved from that team» or they might be working on it, and then you communicate like «We're trying to look into this, what's the status?». Because you have dependent WPs, you can not do this before that, this before that, these are building blocks…So you have interdependencies and whenever you take a new VP you kind of talk before hand, like how much the other team might do, how much they will be done, how much we plan in, so we can get our part of the work package done.

How well known are these dependancies before you get a WP, between the WPs?

The formal way is to do a handshake, official handshake document that you send around. If you know that it's a team just by you – you just go by and take it informally. So you can have both ways of communication, both informal and formal. If a team is sitting in Kista then you probably send a handshake document and everyone fills in their own part, because they identify those. I think the PGs do that a bit as well, they are not responsible but they somehow maintain those dependency documents, if there are some.

When you discover dependencies, do you manage to solve them between the teams or you have to involve someone else.

It's usually solved between the teams and then if there wis a major change the you take up with system teams in Kista. But usually we try to solve it within teams.

Is this formal communication way more time consuming than informal one when you sit next to another team?

– It's hard to say. The formal one is usually a document where you fill in your comment or your view on a thing, like «Ok, maybe this feature will affect you in this way». It should be the same. But if you do take up a personal contact then it's easier

to communicate with the next time you need information. Personally, I'd say I prefer informal, like you go around and talk, than trying to send mails to a person that you probably see and say «Hi» to. But it's a personal thing, otherwise I think it's better to have a document in some way, but informal is a better way I think personally.

Is that a natural way of solving a problem for you or do you sometimes delegate it to someone?

Yeah, it's usually you find something and then you go and talk I guess.

So there there is no like a spokesperson for the team?

It depends. I guess, sometimes it's delegated to the Scrum Master, like when someone wants me to solve something that's huge, that might affect the sprint in a very bad way, then you actually delegate, «Ok, you should probably talk to the Scrum Master» and try to see if he can plan it in and he can affect the OPO and take it in the next sprint or two sprints in front, but otherwise you kind of, at least you give like an hour or half an hour before if you start to talk to someone to get information. That's the initial way of probably communicating, then if you see that it's big work then you delegate it to the Scrum Master or the PG or. Because you don't want to be caught up in unplanned work which is not counted in.

Are all these dependancies known upfront, before the sprint? Or do some come up within a sprint?

Sometimes it's the planning I guess which decides. If you have solved the WP dependencies then you probably know when you plan, it's easier to plan. But if you don't know and you have – I think we have a terminology called «IV stories» [???] where it's like «I» for independence, «V» is for verifiable, so it's like an acronym that you use to see if the story is plannable in the next sprint. Usually it's the first thing, the «I» part, that is the hardest to get out, the rest is kind of ok, it's testable, it's – what's it called… I don't remember all of the acronym – but usually the interdependency or independent stories that have been a problem, because you have a lot of teams working in the same area or being affected. Then you actually have to take the communication channels between these.

If you take information sharing and feedback sharing in general, not only about dependancies, between your teams and other organizational structures, not only XFTs but also management and that kind of stuff, how well do you think it's functioning? Stepwise: take management.

It depends. We usually take up the major impediment when it comes to lab equipment and stuff like that. I don't know, it depends on the type of impediment. Usually we have contact with management all the time, almost everyday I guess somehow, a coffee in the morning or. I mean, the status is always being updated back and forth, but whenever we have impediments that we need to lift up to the management – we do that and it has been working pretty well. Sometimes, because, I mean, during the agile transformation we knew that some organizations are not there yet, we knew that. So if you take the impediment up to the management, it will take a while because we know where it will go or what organization will take it in, and we know that they are not in the same pace when it comes to the transformation and maybe they are not working agile yet. And then it becomes like, Ok we know that it will take a lot of time. Usually it feels like the impediment is not being taken, its' not being prioritized for management, but in the long run it's actually the other organization where it has landed, it's taking most of the time to resolve that. Otherwise with management it's working pretty well. They check up on us and they know the status on all the sprints for every team, so it feels good.

How do you describe the between teams communication, how do you share the information, what do you share?

In one of the projects, I think that's the main project now, where most of the teams are working at here in the department, we have like a sprint demo where [???] because all of the teams' sprints are kind of synchronized, when it starts and ends, so you have like a big demo event where you share what you did with last sprint and how did the backlog look, what was done and you do a demo about what was basically done in the last three weeks or two weeks. That is kind of a good thing because you share information and I think if other teams what to know more you can obviously go to that person in that team. Information wise that gives a lot to I think all of the teams. Because you kind of know where the other team is working at and if you find some problems. Because we are always interdependent, not always but most of the times. So it's kind of easier to find the information when you actually know what other teams are working on, I think it is clear to us. But sometimes, you usually miss the sprint's demo because some teams haven't done, they don't have demo material, then you kind of miss what

they were doing the last sprint. It's like a missed information, that you don't know what's happening, but otherwise I think that demo thing works pretty well. Then we have like a quarterly team exhibition, I think it was done only once, but the time we had it, I think it was more looking in to the work packages people were working with because you have sprints have small work stories which is part of a bigger WP so I mean if you look at the sprint demos you actually present a small story from big WP and if you are not connected to a WP in any way then you kind of miss a bigger picture. But with the team exhibition we present on a WP level so you know exactly what feature or what kind of work the other team is doing. That has helped a lot. It has been only once but we are planning to do it more often. That will help as well to spread the knowledge of what the other teams are doing.

Would you like to see any other ways of teams spreading the knowledge, apart from meetings and exhibitions?

There are sync meetings as well, I think to plan on a bigger picture, which WPs we prioritize and stuff like that, and then there is a mail newsletter, so you have a newsletter that you send out to PGs and do that weekly I think. At least all PGs here sit together and do a newsletter. And you have OPOs reporting to the management how we do that this week. I think the information spreads ok, but sometimes some information is actually lost within the team but I don't know. It seems like that but I can not know why or I can not explain why it happens. I think the channels are correct, but it's an individual effort that needs to be there to spread the information. I lost the track of the question. Sometimes it feels like over information, because you have a lot of newsletters coming in and you have a lot of demos and then you have your own work. It feels like it's lot of things [???] compared to a lot of efficient work done compared to the information you get in. It depends, sometimes it's more, sometimes it's less, I depends on, I guess, a WP itself, if it's a well known one or if it's a not known one, if it's the comfort zone of the XFT or not. There have been WPs that were kind of outside our domain, the domain we work with and there it was like hunting for information, kind of «ok, we miss a lot of information here and we can't find the communication channels to reach out to people on the other side, like interfaces we might need when we try to develop an API or APIs to use». We know that it's there but then we can not find the information. When we are in our comfort zone, we know exactly who to contact. But I think that is one of the things that could be done better: to know who to contact, like per WP. Because sometimes it's hard to find information, but sometimes it's an overflow. I guess it depends on the kind of work you are doing as well, if it's a known work within the organization then it is easier to find, because you know the person who might be working with it, but if it's a completely new thing then you kind of have to hunt for it, which kind of feels that you are on an island sitting alone basically. Recently the teams put up their own Wiki pages and put up status updates, but finding the links to wiki pages is hard as well. So as long if you have some information from somewhere you could probably end up finding it, but the initial part is kind of hard. You usually mail it out basically to a bigger mail group and someone just shouts out «Here I am, I'm kind of busy with this so you can bother me for a while».

So it depends upon how well you know your work, the WP you are working on, how well it connects the information.

Yeah.

How do you decide what information to share? What is relevant for everyone to know?

That's a tricky question I think. Usually since we do the sprint demos, we put up those presentations online on the wiki pages, where you can see the history of the things we have done the demos. So if anyone thinks «Yeah, I might have heard this from the demo they could probably search it up on those slides that we make. All the teams combine the slides they show on sprint demos and put them up together on a wiki. From there you can kind of find information, you can find the team that was working on it… I lost the question again. Recently we made some changes on our wiki pages, I think it wasn't updated for a while, because we knew that we were working with some parts that we didn't work with before so we updated. I think the team decides basically per story, like should we need to update anything on documentation or should we need to update anything on the information that is external for other teams, then we should publish this information on a wiki or not. The is usually some checks based on stories. But I mean the links are always put up, as soon as we create a document we kind of put it up on the wiki so it's easier for the team internally to find it. Anyone who has a team wiki page can go in and search for information there if they want to try to find out.

How about your communication with OPO?

Depends. I think it has mostly been when it comes to putting in stories, trying to know how the backlog looks for the next 3 sprints. It's more planning meetings where you have chances to talk to the OPO. Other than that, it's usually like I want some improvement story, maybe I implemented something and I want to make it better so I want to write a tory for that and have it in in the next sprint because it is a good thing to do it and we have probably 2 points on extra. That's one of the times when

we talk with an OPO and then it's usually communication like when to deliver, when to not deliver, information like that. Planning usually is the communication.

How well do you think feedback is considered by OPOs? If you have such a case when you want to improve something for the greater good, does that usually work?

I think it depends on a team as well. You could put it in the backlog and if the team feels this should be done as soon as possible, I think the OPO agrees usually. Delivering better quality is always a priority, the number 1 priority. It gets planned most of the times. It could be 2 or 3 sprints later but still it gets planned, you don't feel disappointed.

Have you ever been in contact with any PO higher in the chain, say APO or a TPO even?

No. I has always been the local OPO or [??????] OPO. But we have had presentations with higher OPOs and then it's bigger picture when you plan, when you kind of look into the WP to be delivered the next release and the features that are coming out next year and stuff like that. Those happen I think quarterly, I guess twice per year. I don't remember. But we meet them so to say in a bigger meeting.

Does this communication help you in any way, does it influence your work? Would you like to seem ore or less of this communication?

You get a bigger picture I think, because your own OPO is planning 3 sprints ahead and then you have a bigger picture of what would be done in the entire software release. I mean if you want some kind of information you can contact the APO because he or she will obviously know who is doing the WP or the feature and where it has been implemented and stuff. In my work I haven't encountered that, like I need information on that feature, but I think if you need that I think it is easer to create a channel of communication towards the APOs.

So that can easily be established, you can just contact them without going through the OPO?

No, no. Send a mail out.

Back to sprint work. Can you describe any sprint that was really productive? Story-wise, communication-wise, everything went smoothly. What would be a perfect sprint?

Given the team that I work in, the perfect sprint would be to actually complete all work we plan in, we've been struggling a bit with that. I think it is mostly because of some unplanned work we get, but I don't think that it is that, it is something with the stories itself, maybe the definition of done could have been better, could spend more time on task planning. That would be a perfect sprint to complete all the points we take in. To burn down to zero so to say.

On the contrast, any really bad sprint stands out?

– I don't think so. You learn something at the end of every sprint and that's what we focus on when we are done with the sprint. Even if we did do badly, we kind of try to mitigate it in some way, try to say what was bad. I think the retrospective helps a lot. But I don't think there has been a sprint that actually really stood out, I mean we have never cancelled a sprint. Yet. It's very important to do the retrospectives even if you had a really bad sprint.

How does having so much responsibilities as team affect you? Too many or want more?

Since we are XFTs, I think it is defined that you shouldn't have a very specific role, you should be able to broaden your horizons so to say. It depends on a person, where he wants to focus. There have been sprints where I was completely taken for verifying the stories, some implementations, and that is not my comfort zone. It could be, but I need some work, I like the

developing and testing. And verification is on probably hardware, you run software on hardware and try to verify it. That area I've been lacking a bit. Since the requirements and the XFTs are as followed, which we got, [???] so we try to learn, I mean we kind of count like ok, if I'm doing this job or if I take this task, it might take a bit of a time. The complexity is the story point so it shouldn't affect the burn down. It might take a longer time to take out the complexity. Yu leaner and it helps in the long run I think.

Do you feel you can focus on your strength and the parts you want to work on or are you influenced by external things that kind of happen at times and you need to shift your focus towards them to mitigate them?

It depends on the priority, on planned things that come in. Right now I think the task that I do is usually more in my comfort zone so to say. I think that's what everyone else does, they try to be in their comfort zone then take little steps towards those areas where they lack. I don't think there have been so much distractions so to say.

Improvements of working environment, ways of working?

Most people complain about the development environment, that it takes a lot of time to build and test and stuff like that. It is true, it takes a while to deliver code, to go through all verifications. Would be nice to have it automated, when you don't need to care about the delivery, you don't need to sit there until it tests everything. That is one thing that the organization itself is trying to fix, to lessen the time you need to deliver code. As a developer I can reflect on the environment always. So, build and test environment, at least for me it takes a while to build and deliver code. It could be done better.

Agile-wise?

I said that before, I think. The retrospectives are very important, they give a lot. It doesn't matter if it's a failed sprint, if it's a bad sprint, if it's a good sprint, as long as you reflect on the retrospectives what you did good and what you did bad. Take the bad and plan how to fix it, make the fixes regular habits to avoid the things that you did bad in the sprint. That's the thing all of the teams that are working agile need to do more and more or should focus the most at the end of every sprint.

And everything that is said in the retrospectives is usually improved upon also.

I think so. In our team we do it as action points, we come with the most prioritized thing, so we vote in the retrospective what we need to work with in the long run and then we put on action points, ok we need to work better in this area because we see that we have [??????] what do we need to do? We try to put that in our daily work; we have action points on your white board, it's a reminder, that you need to focus on this because it has been bad. It's very important in agile, at least in Scrum, that you do retrospectives very good. Because that points out planning problems and other problems so to say.

Line management vs agile branch - how well are they integrated?

I will probably look at this this way… Even if they have their own, I don't know if they have their own way of working or how are they working, but they look into our impediments, from the lines we get team coaches, which is kind of a fluffy word, but I've seen examples where they have actually taken out the impediments for us, they have coached us when we had problems regarding the agile ways. So they are our contact persons who we can go to when we had a very bad sprint and get help from them or when you kind of see that, ok this is a failed sprint we need to do some session with someone just to complain, so we get that support. The coaches that we get are from the line management, so they are aware of the things, they can lift it up and the management is always aware of the things that we complain about all the time. Sometimes you miss the information, but that's probably the way the channels, they way people communicate, kind of miss out the details or the detailed are missed out, but at least the point in made upwards, the management.

Is this what you expect or do you want something else?

From my side I think it is usually the XFTs that make an effort to update, to send information, but it has been less from the line management to inquire, do inquiries on how it is going, are there any impediments. So it is usually one-directional, it's very seldom that it is two-directional so to say, the communication. I would probably prefer to get a mail sometime with «How is it going, what is happening? What's the status of the sprint?». Sure they are busy, they have meetings and stuff like that, we understand that. So it should be more two-directional so to say instead of one-directional, that XFT always uplifts things to the management. That way I think it could be better at least on my side.

As far as we know you didn't have a team coach these past weeks…

Yeah we didn't, but we had a person form management, that we could actually talk to. We haven't done that, but we didn't have a team coach on paper, but we could anyhow take it to other coaches around here and get help, that was there always.

So it did't affect the situation in any way?

Somehow it did. Somehow we felt like, should we go and talk or should we not, should we try to solve it ourselves, I think it's more of a personal thing, the team. I don't know how to explain it, we could have done it but we didn't in the long run. Other than that I think if we had a dedicated coach then it's easier to take the problems.

Take DM, PO, PgM, in what way do they affect the team?

– PgM the most, I think. They are the ones pushing WPs to the XFTs. They are the ones who hold the keys to what should be done or what should be taken into planning, they sync with the OPOs that we are aware of. If we have major change in the planning in the next 2 sprints or something then we get informed to OPO, because she gets informed to the product manager. It that sense we are kind of aware of how the next 2 sprints look like, what we might run into. I think line management is more on the person development, it focuses not on the development per se, but on individual performances and things. Different types of communication to those roles so to say.

Do they have different interests at times, that cause conflict for you?

We have had some experience with that, but we usually try to channel that through the OPO or scrum master, I think it's usually channeled via scrum master first, then it's channeled towards OPO. I think the OPO tries to solve it for the team, at least it has been like that.

What were those experiences?

It could be two different projects that run in parallel, in the same sprint you can have WPs from two different projects that you pick stories in from. We have 2 WPs and you take 1 story from this WP and the other story from the other WP. Sometimes it's like you need to do more in this one, but it was upland for. In that sense I think it is sent through the project manager, that you need to do this more, and they try to expand the stories so to say, that it has been [????], but then you take that and probably [???] this question back to the OPO, that we have to deliver here and there, so we can not do it at the moment, so it moved towards OPO, the question and handling of questions so to say.

That works well?

It has worked well. We haven't had something like ok, cancel all the stories on that and continue with this, because it has been prioritized more. We haven't had that problem yet. I think it has worked pretty well, the OPO solves the issues.

Anything else to mention that bothers you?

– No.