

What is your role in the organisation with respect to XFT Picnic?

I am the SM, been so for 2 years.

...and what are you main responsibilities?

Mainly making sure that the team works in accordance with the agile way of working. Right now were using Scrum, but that can change for the next sprint or next work package that we get. So mostly that, and then it is not defined as a percentage so I can use 100% of a day as a ScM if I feel that I need that, otherwise I try to be a software developer as much as I or team member. So that is also my role.

...and have you worked here before the transition to agile started?

I worked in a different project but that was right in the beginning when I started work here. They threw me in as a team leader for an established team that was working on an old project. So it was lot of coordination meetings and all of that right of the bat with no experience in what they were talking about in these meetings. There weren't even talking English as in for several concerns so I had that experience as well with a lot of projects.

What you do know in the agile context, what is its main objective?

The main objective of the SM is... I think to get the teams to work, to perform as good as they can. They use to say to work as efficiently as possible but I am getting to be allergic against efficiency. Since you're always sprinting you should have time to relax as well. If they can produce more then I am happy if I changed the way of working. I feel like that's my main responsibility within the team so that the people in team can produce as much as possible.

How are the roles responsibilities defined?

There is some description of my role but I have not read it. I only read the Scrum guide. I'm the only one in the team who hasn't done the ScM course, the Agile course Ericsson offers, and I'm a ScM. I just read the description and then I have a lot of books at home about Agile. That is where I draw my inspiration the definition of leadership and all of that.

Do you think that the application of SMs differs among the company, that everyone has his own interpretation of a SM? Is that good?

I think you have to, the old role was team leader and you were responsible in a much greater sense. You had a responsibility for a project. Now we do not have that, we have the management 3.0. I think it has changed. What was the question again?

If the role of SM is applied differently among all teams and if that's good or bad or if it should only be whatever the team needs?

I think it should be whatever the team needs for that specific domain, that area. Because it differs so greatly so great at Ericsson even in this department. I think it should be very up to the team, what the need. Then I understand the downwards perspective from Thomas or Henrics perspective. It might be better to have a general description of what an SM should do. I think they call it team master in the community of practise we have. Where we exchange ideas.

Do you think there are parts of the organisational structure which hinder agility in any way?

Yes, I think that the teams have gone through the transformation but an agile transformation affects all of the organisation and that has not gone that far if you go up to project managers. They OPOs are working very hard but I still feel that the PMs and Section or LMs have a few steps more to travel to be able to facilitate the agile way of working fully. Teams are as agile as they can be, but they are in the organisation so they are affected by the outside and we can not change that. I think it is a hindrance. Maybe later but we have a new project and an old project and there is some friction between them. That is the source of the problem?

Can you give any more concrete example where there are problems? Is it you have to wait for decisions to be made?

Yeah... You work with the software, agile and lean specify that work in a certain way. Like you should be able to deliver all the time. That is not the case, sometimes it is delivery stop. It is also says that the master should only be one place where the source code is stored and where it gets delivered from. That is not the case either because it is, we have an old way of working with tracks. So we say that this version of the software is track something like this and then you take a branch and go out. But then you do not know which track to deliver to sometimes, and you might have to deliver to places what is not in line with what the recommend us in the way of working. The source code is one thing and I think it is the prioritisation of stories of work packages. There is not only one backlog there are several. I have not looked into that but they might have done it according to "you produce backlog per product" and in that case that is good. But it seems that there are a lot of friction between old and new projects and the resources. So this is a G1 or G2 problem, who should work on it. Instead of just saying something is wrong, let's fix it, let's work we do not work on one single thing. We work... there is some friction there. Either you work G1 or G2. So trouble reports and source code management are two concerns.

Which roles are part of you communication environment?

I would say the team members of course, then OPO, then PG, then SM and other OPOs. Other ScMs through the COE. Project manager Niklas as well.

...and what are the topics you communicate with them about. You don't have to describe all of them just the most important ones?

Status updates for the PM, he wants to know where we are at times and if we have any problems. Technical problems when we can not build, then I have to talk to the people that can help me. Either the CI or the software support team is called, they're called infrastructure team before. I am also in contact with them when there is a problem. Planning is the OPO, also way of working I discuss with Monica. Maybe we will change how we work or how we the strategy for grooming and all that. I also talk to Mats Ericsson who is the agile change agent, since I am organising this team exhibition. So there is that, what else.

What are the exceptions of your daily communication?

The exceptions, things that do not happen to often...

... things that bother you and might affect your way of working negatively.

The most frustrating thing communication wise is not knowing who to contact when something happens in my environment. When my tool freezes or I can not build and I do not know who to talk to. Finding that out or getting help with certain areas could be frustrating as well. I would say, hopefully it is supposed to be an exception when your working environment is not up and running as it should be up and running all the time. I think that is problematic. Trouble reports, there is a team who is working with the trouble reports. They might come and ask me stuff about my domain. They need to know which traces to configure to be able to read, to figure out what the software does. That could be something that is unplanned what interrupts me and my work.

..and how often does that happen?

One a week I would say, something like that.

So within your communication environment do you think there is someone you is too central, who aggregates too many responsibilities?

Erm, ermmmm, I would say maybe not a role like that but sort of a void of responsibility for certain things. Those things are demands put on the XFTs that the teams can not within reason handle. One particular issue would be CI of that environment of nodes and that configuration that needs to be up and running. If that environment of installing is changed we cannot fix the environment we should not spend time on it but it is sort of demanded of us. We are expected at least. That could be one of the issues.

So you come back circling around responsibilities not knowing who to talk to do you have any idea on how to solve it or how to address it in a way?

I think the, there are several things that could be done. This is the problem with agile: we have a very large company and its written for smaller companies with a single product and that does not translate well with this environment. I would say that communication should be natural. You need something, you have a common interest and you work in the same area. We have a good example in the team exhibition: all the teams produce a couple of A3 within information of what they are doing and then you move around and you talk to them. And if you are not interested in what they are talking then you don't spend time with them and you spend time on what you are really interested in. I think that is a much more natural way of communicating and that would be very good. Now we have these CoP that are sometimes run by the LMs and it is more of you have to present something at this meeting because this meeting is being called to. The purpose of it is for itself, it is validating itself. We have a meeting, we must do something, instead of looking for the reason of the meeting. The LMs, maybe to call that responsibility to get that working but it has not been left to the teams or the PGs or OPOs to have that sort of CoP with natural communication. And also the PMs they continue with the reports once a week or every other week, you have a 5-10 min. slot where you have to hold a presentation and say what you have been doing the last spring and then you have to sit there for 2 hours listening to other teams who have done something but you are not interested perhaps, or interested in 5-10 minutes of that 2 hours, and that is not a natural way of communication. I think that should be on a much more lower level, the teams, the developers and should be facilitated by the LMs and the OPOs. Giving hints, not conducting the CoPs and making sure everybody talks to them just indicating that you work in the same area almost as that team and that team, or going to be working in the same area for 1 sprint, and you should discuss how you want to, how do you influence each other. I'd like to see that sort of communication, not forced on top with a static, should very natural, should be coming in just when you have something to say.

Do you feel that in the organisational structure is supportive towards agile?

I heard examples of other departments that have stopped with the agile transformation, but as I said before I feel that the teams are every agile, very on board. But there are some people how do not realise the benefits perhaps, or it might impact their work too much so they don't want to go through that transformation. I think that could be PMs, PMs and OPOs (maybe less so OPOs) they need to try and talk to their managers and their bosses to negate the question that is always coming up when there is work to be done: is it from this bag of money of this bag of money, is it G1 or is it G2 doing the pre-development... It is different bags of money and when you have that you are not free to through the organisational restructuring you need to do. So I think that's a problem on higher level, we are trying.

Lets go back to communication environment: Talk around the information and feedback sharing among you other organisational structures and around you I mean you towards the structures and the structure towards you. How efficient to you think it is?

I... the work packages and the work plan is always or has always been not communicated down towards us in the team. So its only on the OPO level. The PGs are not that good in describing what their vision is and what the teams are working on right now. They do send out an email out each work on what teams are working on. It feels that on a general level it could be much more natural. Either you have a presentation on where they are and you can ask them questions. That might bring up the whole package I think. There is not a lot of information on that and there is also very little information coming from the COPs. We have a design COP, a verification COP, a system COP and a team master. I think there could be some more... Information from these towards back to the teams on what has been what has been going on there is almost non existent I would say. You have to attend all of those meetings, and they are not a natural way of communicating. You cannot select yourself on what information you want. You are constantly bombarded with stuff that you do not appreciate or is not relevant for your work. You have a different point of view, form a PM when he calls that meeting he has a status from all the teams but that team does not care at all what this team does, so the benefit is only for the PM. Mostly, I think that is waste so I sometimes I don't go there.

That is honest...

Yeah, you also have several project meetings, I don't attend them either cause they discuss things that are not relevant for my sprint or my team and then I think it is waste. So I would say OPO, PG and PM, their focus is not information to help the teams in that sense but I feel that the OPOs are working very very hard and they might not have the time at to present the backlog or in which, what is most important.

Do you see any way it could be improved?

It is always the natural element and I think that if they were on the team exhibition as a team and presenting what they do and how they work, they would get a lot of feedback and the information could be assimilated between teams.

Can you talk a bit more about information sharing from your team?

I think we are quite bad at that as well. We should have... They have in Finland, they have one screen for each team where they present their current status, what they are working on. We do not have that and that would be nice to have. To present and maybe to have, talking about the team exhibition again, if we have that more frequently, if we have that after each sprint as in another department where we stole the idea from. There we have a more natural way to share the sprints, so maybe a team exhibition after each sprint. But then we do not have synced sprints and that could be a problem perhaps. So I would like to have more of that. We do have communication, we have a PG and an OPO that sits directly with us so all the information of the morning meetings and during the day, so it gets to them really quick and the PM is always around. You just have to call him or get down the hallway and get him. He is always walking around...

...he is hard ot catch...

Yes good luck. So I feel we could be better at communicating upwards and I think we should look into that a bit more. We have a wiki but nobody looks at that and its not updated as much.

so when you distinguish information flow between a downwards and upwards and a direction between the teams it should most likely be asynchronous and natural. It seems like downwards kinda works and upwards is something the team should improve on?

I think downwards is a bit hard as well and is not optimal and could be improved. We could definitely improve of what we are doing. I don't know if the OPOs and the PMs are interested in exactly where we are right now within a WP. Maybe more when will we close it, because they only look at WP level. So maybe they are not interested on what information we have. So downwards is - I do not know - I do not think we have to focus on that right now. I do not feel like it is something we should prioritize. That might be something that is quite interesting as well. I am just simplifying the world around me. Maybe they do not need to know. Downwards, I would like to see a bit more focus on where we will be in three months or half a year or one month. Right now we have this is the situation right now and that is it. That is... franchising it is called in Swedish. It is, they are not looking forward, they have the head to the ground, not to the ground but towards the ground. So its, you are not part of the overall plan, you do not know what is gonna happen. We were quite fortunate we worked very hard with our OPO role able to see forward three or four sprints to have stories ready for that. Right now we have a nine month goal that we can help develop the work packages, the work on for that. That is, I won't say unique but not heard of that much.

Lets talk about work of the XFT: During a sprint how can normal work flow be interrupted?

Either by a trouble report, a TR, that a team outside needs help with, or that we have, that's within our project, within our product so to say. It could be our things as well but that is up to the PM and the OPO. They have to discuss that and decide on what kind of information or assignments to bring to us. Apart from the TR it could be that the CI is not working. So that the test environment has either discovered something that is wrong or it needs to analyse something...

Can you elaborate on different effects they have on the XFT?

Suppose you are in the morning meeting and you put your magnet on a task and you say that you will be finished until tomorrow. And then someone come and say that this is broken or I need your help, then you are not on that post-it anymore then you are up on the unplanned but that is usually communicated to the team so that they can perhaps jump in if it really important to make sure that that post-it is done. So that is one of the things that we have and that effects our velocity of course. And that person who looks into or answers that question or looks into that problem might need to ask someone else in a team so help and then they have two people working on that. We had weeks where we had three problems that we had to work on that and work has stopped on the planned work. So that is when we talked about setup like a Kanban approach so at most one or two problems would be planned at most. But now our OPO has been guarding us pretty well and our PM as well so we didn't have much unplanned.

Can you give an example of an exceptional unproductive sprint?

...oh really? Yes, I have an archive with a lot of burn down charts. They are just flat like 3 points of 20.

Do they have a common pattern, a common reasoning?

Yeah its unplanned unforeseen work, maybe TR. We did CI a lot to get it up and running and that took a lot of time. So it is mostly that... Oh, one big issue is the nodes. It is really amazing that we can not install the nodes ourselves our customers do that in the 1000s each day and we can not get two nodes up and running sitting there. So that has taken a lot of time and that, if you need a node and you are dependent on the nodes and you run a command and you need the traces, your work stops and that's what we have not gotten help with and we still do not know how to do that. We did know it, for when the environment was different but now it is really hard. So that is one of the issues that can hinder a sprint, many prints cause we try to get it up and running and then something fails and you do not know and you have to start over. So that is one issue that is... A lot of burn down charts go straight down, no burn down from that. Maybe I could look at that quickly later? So you could use that later...

...and can you contrast that with a productive sprint?

Yes, well defined packages and an undisturbed team and sort of a commonality in the work packages that we sometimes a common factor. Maybe one domain, now we have different domains we work in. We do not feel a sense of unity or single purpose within the team. So single purpose within the team, no disturbance and a well defined packages. I asked the team what motivates you and they answered progress, be able to complete something everyday, to make sure that you visualise progress, moving post-its. That is a productive sprint.

Where do you position yourself in regards to decision making within the agile context

Decision making in what area?

Do you have any room left at times to decide things by yourself do you get backlog stories assigned by the OPOs which have room for decision alternatives to be taken. Is it then you who can pick one or is it mostly discussed within the team?

Usually work packages have gone through an analysis on a system level before it gets to us, so it is defined on a black box level and we get to chose how to implement that, how to work with it. So I would say it is well defined, there might still be surprises. To the question previously, when you have unforeseen dependencies and then you get surprises in a work package. That really screws up a sprint.

Should the team then maybe be involved to look into the black box earlier? Not the black box the handed down in a take or die approach?

I think the problems that we have had... it is a new platform that we work on so there might be unforeseen dependencies but it feels like the planning is not... you have the anatomy of a plan where things depend on each other, work packages or functionality and you have work packages defined for that. And also not always, we have started work packages that have dependencies to interfaces that has not been created yet. Then you are supposed to develop towards an interface which has not been finished yet, so that is something wrong with the planning and I think that is hard for us to be involved in as a team. I like it now when we have something, we can have input into the work packages that are in the backlog. We can define them and we have a pretty clear goal in 9 months what the functionality we have to fulfil and have, and then we can just try to divide the work. So we were part of the study before the WPs get here. They do ask us and we look into the white box and up to the black box and say this would be a good way of working or a good solution for the problem. So we are asked but I have not been part of those studies, it is mostly Jonas and Krister who is part of that but it goes around us once and come back. Cause on a system level they don't know all the details who needs to be checked just to say if it is feasible at all to do this in that way a solution for a functionality. So I do not think we could be, should be a part more than we are but sometimes it is, there you miss on the complexity and you do not know exactly how the impact of the work package might be.

So let talk about your communication circle: is it different from the XFT or any other organisational structure it communicates with?

Like the other team members or other XFTs?

...only your XFT!

I feel that I have a bit more outwards communication as a SM you should fix impediments and create a smooth drive for the team. So maybe I have some more outside communication towards CI or something like that and test and tools and those kind of issues. I usually am the first to apply for access for something or have access and act just to be able that someone in the team has that and try it and present it to the team. So I usually get asked quite a lot like how do you work with this tool. So I would say I have more focused on that and for the others in the time it depends on the tasks. If the task also needs communication they would just talk to that person or setup a meeting and talk. So I would say it all depends on the task and I think we have quite diverse tasks so that communication is very mixed if you look at a yearly basis. Some communication comes to systematisation and a bit more technology in a sense of software or the system the real product, then it is Krister or Jonas as they have most experience within that domain. So they have more communication with system continuous analysis and the studies that are before the WPs so they are part of that.

Do you see any major mismatches between how your XFT works and the organisational structure?

Not more than if we are trying to be agile and the organisation is not prepared for that. I would say that is a promise. Like source code management so one example would be the stay green initiative. First we have to go green and then we have stay green and that is how the tests are going and that you always should stay green and that might hinder us. Cause it might be a faulty test environment and then you spend a day at looking at why it is not building for me but is building there: oh it is the environment. So we have been more and more been ignoring the stay green and that is usually not our fault.

How do you think that could be improved?

I do not think you should focus on the status of the tests. I think you should focus on the test environment or the ability to test for the team: who quickly can I test my changes on this configuration or on this environment. And if that takes a really long time for me that should be most focused on, not if it is red somewhere here in that specific system in that specific environment. Or the coverage has been lowered by the coverage by 0.001% and that is not even joking. I had problems like, where the coverage has decreased by a 100th of a % and I had to write a test case and that test case is not even good. So instead of that, focus on the ability to test cause that is flow for me, that is agile for me. To not to hold the production because it is red right there just hold the production because there it takes 7 hours to run the test cause it should run in one hour or 10 minutes. That should be something you shouldn't stop the Toyota production. So that is my view. If I am moving away, just keep track of me.

Do we have anything more? Maybe one last thing... If you had to give specific occasions on which the XFT has to reach out of its normally communication environment so you have mentioned the CI are there recurring ones where you have to reach out? Or is it a very closed environment you communicate in? Cause you always say changes define on who you talk to and what you work on, so there is no...

Yes, well, it depends on what we are working on. It is such a large product we are working in a large area. It is still divided into those who do the analysis on a system level, the pre studies before there is a WP at all and those are in Kista and in different areas and they might change, they might quit work and they might get new responsibilities and they have a backlog as well so the priorities are different for them sometimes. It depends on that it gives us some diversity who we talk to in that area and then we get problems in the environment we can not solve. Like being able to run installation scripts on nodes. We know how to install the node using a certain environment if it works for us in a certain environment and then we need to talk to those people, that is Kista. Or maybe we should try to install nodes as we do here on the CI here and then we talk to someone else and then we have an interface towards another load module or maybe there is something, a problem there from the CI and then we have to talk to that person who is working in that domain. So, it is very diverse, yeah...

Fair enough...

It's very hard, you can not say a specific time when we need to interact or to go outside the time. It is not that specific. I think it is normal to talk to different people at different times related to the task at hand. It might be more or less unplanned because we got the unplanned work or someone has shouted it is red and you have to talk to someone you did not know or that person might not be available as in the case with the nodes that environment is not supported anymore. Those persons we have had contact with so we need to talk to call Linköping, who should I talk to. I do not know.

Are there any other things that we did not cover that bother you?

No, one thing is the natural way of communication as I define it and how I know I would define it. Less of a project leader setup with status meetings every week and synchronisation meetings every morning. It should be more natural, I think that really promotes good communication and information you want to have access to that you want to learn about I think is something that would really improve communication.