

Three Levels of Scrum Adoption

All too often I see teams that have adopted the form of Scrum, but have missed the essence. It is quite possible to have an ordered backlog, 2 week sprints, sprint planning meetings, daily scrums, retrospectives, etc. and still not be agile. One common way to have the form of Scrum without the essence is to treat Scrum as a series of mini waterfalls, with code thrown over the cubical wall on day eight and all testing relegated to designated team members at the end of the sprint. Worse yet, the teams could decide to perform testing one sprint out of phase with development. Another very common pitfall is to have different Scrum team members reporting to different line managers. Some of these issues are bigger impediments than others. As I have worked with different organization using Scrum, in my mind they seem to fall into one of three categories based on the maturity of their level of adoption of Scrum.

At level one, which is by far the easiest level to attain; **the team adopts the roles, rules and artifacts of Scrum**: daily standups, sprints, product owner, ordered backlog, etc. The sad thing is that teams often mistakenly think that this level of adoption of Scrum is all there is, and that once they have learned to play by the rules of Scrum, they are truly agile. This is a bit like thinking that once you have mastered the rules of chess you are a chess master. A team can fully adopt the form of Scrum without achieving true collaboration, transparency, or a Keizen mindset. A characteristic of being stuck at this level is the attitude that once the team has mastered the form of Scrum, a ScrumMaster is no longer needed. After all, anyone can update the burndown chart and facilitate a few meetings, that is not a full time job, right?

The second level of Scrum maturity comes with **the team and team members adopting agile and lean values and principles**. Now the focus in on things like

- Sustainable pace
- True cross-functional collaboration
- Technical excellence
- Fixing problems as they occur, to get quality right the first time
- Finding how to achieve the productivity of enabling specifications within an empirical process
- The PO, ScrumMaster and Development team gelling into a single unified Scrum team,
- Continuous improvement
- Value to the client by building truly exciting products

At this level, team members willingly share their knowledge and cross-train each other. The team has good domain knowledge and helps the PO define and create a truly exciting product. The team is acutely aware of impediments, both internal to the team and external to it and is continuously working on resolving them. At this level, everyone realizes that both the PO and the ScrumMaster are full time roles. The daily scrum meetings are seen as valuable co-ordination meetings. If the team has gotten past fear and command and control, the PO and ScrumMaster might even participate in and report their activities during the daily Scrum.

The third level of Scrum maturity requires the **organization to enable teams to become fully self-organizing, self-managing, hyper-productive, Scrum teams**. At his level the organization makes the kinds of changes detailed in “The Leaders Guide to Radical Management.” The focus now changes from:

- Short term profits → delighting customers

- Preoccupation with internal efficiencies → continuous value stream for end users
- Command and control → enabling and self organizing
- Contracts → Collaboration
- Rules → common sense
- Silos → complete teams
- Fantasy → Reality
- Plodding → excitement

This means things like:

- No individual team member metrics
- Phase based activity metrics are replaced by product metrics
- No individual performance reviews
- Teams are truly self-managing. Team members report to the team.
- The focus changes from people and detail process management to product and portfolio management
- Command and control structures are morphed into enablers. For example if the project management office (PMO) stays around, it becomes the Agile Enablement Center.
- No treating new product development as a manufacturing activity
- Estimates are not treated as commitments.

Unfortunately, this third level of maturity is kind of like world peace. There are too many impediments for it to occur on a large scale in existing organizations. Just like we can have regional peace, organizational Scrum can and has happened in divisions of large companies and even entire smaller companies, especially start-ups. But in the same way that world peace is impeded by

- hatreds, fears, and mistrusts that are centuries old
- existing power structures that would be threatened
- huge changes to economic structures
- philosophical and religious differences, etc.

The corporate adoption of Scrum is impeded by

- fear and mistrust
- existing power structures that would be threatened
- huge changes to economic structures
- philosophical differences about how to manage people and the role of organizations, etc.

I don't claim any rigor or theoretical basis for the three levels of maturity introduced above. I simply use them as a practical mechanism to help Scrum adoption agents prepare for the reality that some transformations will be easy, some harder, yet with more benefit, and that the most important will face

very stiff opposition. I also use these three levels to get teams to realize that there is more to Scrum than rules, roles, and artifacts.