

INTRO TO AGILE WITH SCRUM: 4 TIPS FOR GETTING STARTED



Scrum is a framework used to apply the Agile [Software Development Lifecycle \(SDLC\) methodology](#). Scrum provides a guideline for groups of people working collectively toward solving complex problems. These problems may constitute a project in software development, hardware development and many other forms of development assignments. The framework is focused on using creativity, communication and collaboration to reach project goals with higher productivity and lower waste. The Scrum framework is simple, lightweight and applicable to a variety of project types. Mastering the framework can transform your organization's product development capabilities. However, Scrum is difficult to master and requires close adherence to the guidelines defining the Scrum framework.

Scrum was found on the basis of process control theory and asserts that decisions should be made based on knowledge that comes from experience of performing the tasks and controlling the inherent risks through an iterative process. Each repetition of the workflow incrementally improves the predictability of the outcome, reduces the risks and optimizes collective productivity of the team.

Organizations adopting Scrum should therefore understand the three fundamental pillars of the process control theory that was used in devising the Scrum methodology:

Transparency: Clear visibility of the processes involved to yield a specific outcome. Every responsible individual should have adequate understanding of significant aspects of the processes. This understanding should be based on a standardized system employed to perform every process.

For instance, team members communicating in the same language, same definition of the timeline and intended outcome.

Inspection: Evaluate the progress of the iterative processes to identify undesirable variance from pre-defined or intended goals. The inspections can be carried out by skilled individuals who may not be a part of the project team, at a frequency that doesn't interrupt regular project progress.

Adaptation: If the inspection identifies changes that are necessary to reduce the undesirable variances, then the process should be adaptable to accommodate the required changes. The adaptation should be streamlined, performed soon after identification of the requirement and yet not disrupt the entire project management plan.

With this strategy into consideration, the following four tips can help you get started with Scrum framework implementation for your project management goals:

1. Know Your Scrum

Scrum is not just about having a daily meeting over the project progress. The individuals involved in the team must develop adequate knowledge of Scrum, understand the roles, events and artifacts constituting the framework. If only a few individuals from the team have actually read Scrum guidelines, the rest of the team should be trained on the methodologies and best practices employed for the unique project management application. To help develop a general understanding, the Scrum framework is condensed as follows:

- A prioritized wish list of the task is created known as Product Backlog.
- A piece of this task list is selected and executed as part of a Sprint Backlog.
- The team aims to complete the task in a specific time window while accounting for the progress in regular daily meetings.
- The goal of this Sprint is to ensure that a tangible, shippable development feature or product is to be released.
- Once completed, the team reviews the progress, identifies the variances, adapts the process to accommodate the necessary changes and applies the sprint to the next Product Backlog item.
- This process is repeated until the larger project goal is achieved, such as developing the entire product within the intended deadline and budgetary conditions.

2. Understand Roles and Team Development

There are several ways to develop a team and the reasons for team member selection should align with the goals and requirements of the Scrum framework. Small organizations may have limited options for team selection whereas large enterprises may have several competencies and skills available to contribute toward those goals. Known team building models such as the [Tuckman model](#) can be used to start a successful new Scrum Team. The model involves the following stages to help achieve this goal:

- Forming: Understanding the purpose, opportunities and challenges associated with the group development.
- Storming: Learning about each other, expressing opinions and possibly leading to conflicts and differences.
- Norming: resolving the co-operation issues and gaining the ambition of working toward the

collective goals.

- Performing: Translating the motivation for collaboration into collective works. Competence, autonomy and decision-making become critical at this point.

It's important for the Scrum Teams to identify the stage at which they begin the Scrum Sprints and make appropriate decisions accordingly. It may be suitable to reach a certain level of maturity as per the Tuckman's model prior to working on the tasks autonomously.

3. Welcome Experimentation

The Scrum process inherently evolves across every Sprint as necessary. There are no hard and fast rules for many aspects of Scrum. For instance, a Sprint can run for two weeks, or more, or less. The priority for choosing work items from the Product and Sprint Backlog can vary as the project progresses. Less successful Sprints can be revisited and marked as an attempt instead of a failure. Since communication is a critical element of the Scrum framework, the choice of words and mindset used in communication can impact team motivation and the ability of individuals to satisfactorily work with their team members. Adaptability of the Scrum project should reflect in the flexibility of the team members in handling diverse situations, some of which may not always be perceived as the most suitable path by every member of the team. Only by experimentation can every team member truly gain the knowledge necessary to evaluate different pathways and pursue the best approach for future Sprints.

4. Help Execute a Collective Vision

Despite the flexibility and adaptability of Scrum teams and projects, members should consistently follow the vision of the Scrum Team. The task for leadership, or Scrum Master, is to ensure the communication and behavior of the team facilitate the execution of the project goals productively. Particularly during the Norming phase of the group development, team leaders may need to involve themselves in resolving team related issues and ensure that every team decision is directed toward productively fulfilling the goals of the Scrum Sprint. At the same time, the input of Scrum Master should not be entirely authoritative but provide a global direction toward a collective vision that every team member can own and use to guide their individual and collective decisions.