

SCRUM AS CLASSIC TEAMWORK

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Rapid advances in the categorization of knowledge establish new baselines of understanding, compressing traditions of prior thought practice to footnotes— useful in elaborating new contemporary truths with historical texture. Each advance in the evolution of archived human memory must create a currently received unitary wisdom. Data management has evolved through discontinuous steps: from oral to written transmission; from manual to mechanical writing; and from mechanical writing to digital sequencing. Each new iteration demands the compression of historically developed complexity into bullet points of contemporary received wisdom (Bowker, 2005, p.26).

Featured in Microsoft’s “best practices” project management series, “Scrum”, exemplifies this intellectual evolution in practical application (Schwaber, 2004; Schwaber 2007). Scrum stands as a prescriptive management tool in scrupulous alignment with group psychology and team management research over the last fifty years. Yet, Scrum, both in its singular “Sprint” application, and in its complex, organizational forms, appears as the software developers’ immaculately received wisdom: an effective, prescriptive truth, emergent fully formed as a tool of enlightened IT design. No literature or research

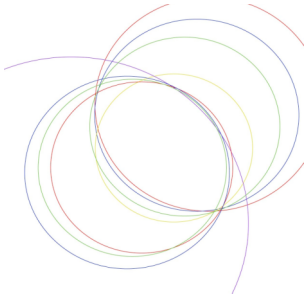


tradition is cited. The naïve Scrum Master might have no idea of how and why the design works. It just does.

Organizational behavior, group process, and human psychology, recede into the intellectual mists under the ascendancy of software development and the business imperative of delivering “functionality”, the attainment of a production goal. The thing of it is, Scrum is a sleek team consultation model, reliant on the group process. It is a parsimonious and elegant management tool. Scrum is an excellent and eloquent jumping off place for descriptive consideration of what happens when people work together in high performance teams.

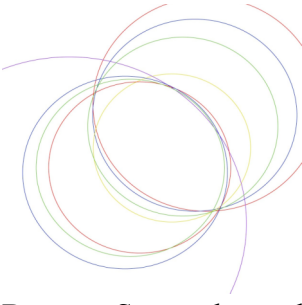
I. Scrum Appeal

Scrum is an optimistic, can-do methodology that proceeds along the tracks of orderly, rule-based steps (Schwaber, 2005, p.133-139). Its primary caveat, “do not change Scrum” (Schwaber,2007,p.7) in one authoritative command, hopes to eliminate the complexity, uncertainty, and risk within organizational strategic management (Miller and Friesen, 1980 ; Mintzberg, 1989). Despite Scrum’s parallel to Oz’s warning not to look behind the curtain, what Scrum prescribes is appealing: a team-based problem solving process of continuous improvement with the capability of expansion either through successive projects for one team and/or a matrix of linked project teams.



Scrum's hidden complexity is in the nature of its iterative process. At the simplest level, quality assessment remains within the domain of the work team responsible for tangible product delivery. Improvement within Scrum is always fixed upon time-limited ("time-boxed") product delivery, measurable by clear metrics. Like the US Army's classic, "After Action Review", which debriefs operations along the lines of 1) intended goal, 2) achievement of objective, and 3) adaptation of goal based in process learning, Scrum's fulcrum is the work team's daily group review of individual team members': 1) completed action since last review; 2) anticipated action before next review; and 3) obstacles encountered in task performance (Collison and Parcell, 2004). Scrum's basic rule demands reflection, the cardinal psychological concept in learning from experience.

However, like Oz's command to Dorothy, much of Scrum's efficacy happens while one isn't looking. Because Scrum's tightly managed limits of interpersonal engagement are focused on collaborative production, each new opportunity for engagement provides a thickening platform for the development of team cohesion and trust. Not only does the Scrum team member have over 30 collaborative meetings with colleagues through a singular "Sprint"; but through multiple iterative cycles, also has much broad experience of colleagues' particular strengths and weaknesses. Team knowledge of how and what each specialist does best is a strength emergent through disciplined focus on task delivery over problem-solving cycles of different lengths.



Because Scrum demands that the team remain clear and unmuddled in its consensus, from meeting to meeting, the methodology addresses the problems within groups, of emergent subgroup discontent and group inability to absorb and utilize information.

Effectively, Scrum provides team members the opportunity for continuous recognition of colleagues' competencies, capabilities, and integrity. Relationship management among team members, however constrained by formal rules, is the second cardinal dimension of Scrum. And in development of realistic expectations of others' "deliverables" across multiple task iterations within the work team, Scrum is an orderly vehicle for the development of: openness, trust, cohesion, collaboration, and communication in team relations. The development of these implicit processes may account for Scrum users' great enthusiasm for the method, especially in cross-cultural virtual teamwork (Forte, 2008).

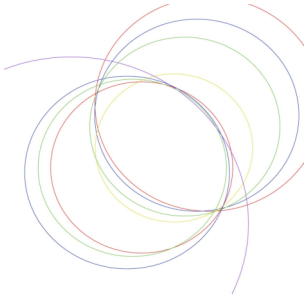
Building on reflection and relationship management, Scrum's third cardinal principle is the certainty of resistance, or the guaranteed ongoing presence of obstacles. Problems and problem-solving are of course, the touchstones of productive work, with collaborative teamwork the linkage from problem solution to the next iteration of adaptation-- the next problem. Scrum sidesteps discussion of the complexity and obduracy of resistance --- both resistance to business related organizational change (Kotter (1996), Hackman (2002)) and resistance to psychological process between and



within individuals and groups (Freud (1913-1915), , Bion, (2000), Reich (1972) Kilberg (2002)). Because Scrum is tightly rule-based—paralleling the specification of parameters within software design-- process resistance emerges only as the necessary ongoing difficulty of obstacles to task performance. Scrum doesn't pull punches. It demands its own accountability through passage of the pragmatic test, the necessity of making a difference. Scrum puts its external stakeholders on notice, " Your use of Scrum will expose every reason why your enterprise has trouble building products. Scrum will keep exposing the problems until they are fixed."(Schweber, 2007, p.3).

II. The Implicitly Prepared Team

Let's consider Scrum's operating assumptions. Its three cardinal principles include: (1) rigorous dedication to the cognitive acts of individual and collaborative reflection within the team or group; (2) the development of team members' clear expectations of colleagues' participatory forms and competencies, through multiple team interactions; and (3) the necessary work of recognizing and overcoming obstacles emergent in the development of complex products and organizations. To these must be added the continuous nature of the team process, progressively refining the problem-solving efficacy of task performance. Scrum is coached by a facilitator, who aids the group both in the maintenance of the team's integrity through strict cross-boundary rules,



and the provision of team resources, as needed. Effectively, Scrum's rules insure that coached, self-directed high-performance teams work over discrete timelines, with high task clarity, boundary and role differentiation. Actions are clarified in real time as the team strives for goals consensually agreed to both by internal and external stakeholders, and represented by productivity markers.

Scrum is a flexible team methodology that specifies a facilitation structure complete with purpose, subtask distribution, goals, and productivity markers. It further facilitates ease of team interaction through provision of information and structural resources, as well as the removal of obstacles. Inclusive here, is the rule-based enforcement of communication boundaries between team-members and organizational stakeholders. Through group coaching and facilitation, Scrum methodology also optimizes personal and team skill development (Hackman (2002); Hackman and Wageman(2005)).

While Scrum appears to materialize as project management, from the ether of IT development, its algorithm is clearly driven by the managerial and team process development book. Scrum is an effective and clear model for unpacking the cardinal elements of team building. In its orderly, rule-driven, principled capability, Scrum is anything but the colloquial sense of "scrum" as rugby's "milling crowd" (Oxford, 2002). Rather, the term was first adapted as a metaphor, from an article by Takeuchi and Nonaka in the Harvard Business Review in 1986, referring to the holistic action of an entire team

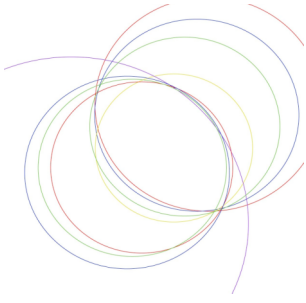


going the entire distance, together. This “rugby” idea is attributed to a Honda project leader named Hiroo Watanabe who said, “I’m always telling the team members that our work is not a relay race, in which my work starts here and yours there. Everyone should run all the way from start to finish, Like rugby, all of us should run together, pass the ball left and right and reach the goal as a united body.” (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995, p. 78). Ultimately, what the group process of Scrum seeks to formalize is the ineffable “ba” of knowledge creation, in which implicit, unconscious knowing by the group, is made conscious for productive use (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995; Nonaka and Konno, 1998). This, after all, is what has been called in another discipline, “making the unconscious, conscious.”



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