

The Three “F”s to Instilling Success Habits within Agile Scrum Teams: *Foundation, Familiarity and Fundamentals.*

Brian Vanderjack, PMP, MBA, CSM
Mabel Menard, MS, MA, MBA/HRM, ABD

The test to tell if you have an issue with Agile Scrum Ceremonies (where Ceremonies are re-occurring Agile Scrum meetings) is people not showing up, showing up late or meetings that wonder off topic. If these behaviors are plaguing your Ceremonies the this article can help as it is intended to assist Agile Scrum-Scrum Masters at instilling in Team Members desired habits for Ceremonies and to maintain these desired behaviors. By using the three “F”s as a guide, Ceremonies are by far more likely to have team members show up, start on time, and stay on topic. These three F’s are Foundation, Familiarity and Fundamentals. We find that poor behaviors learned from other team efforts can mar non-Agile efforts and are ready to take control of team member’s minds. It is as if poor behaviors, like not being ready at meeting time or trying to derail a Ceremony, are lurking in the team member’s sub-conscious waiting to manifest themselves. If your Ceremonies are focused on the core reasons for holding the Ceremonies, as defined by Agile Scrum, you are more likely to avoid undesirable behaviors.

For instance, if you are holding a daily standup, adhere to the “Foundation” as indicated by Agile Scrum tenants. The best example is the Daily Standup agenda which is to quickly go to each team member and have them indicate: *what did you do yesterday, what are you doing today, and what are your impediments to success, if any?* The major issue with these Ceremonies, especially in the Daily Standup is digressing from the stated purpose.

Specifically, the development part of the team will often try to use the Daily Standup for problem solving. This is easily rectified by scheduling a 15 minute “Issues Ceremony” (intended to be a new additional Agile Ceremony) immediately following Daily Standups. The idea, as the name implies is to simply look at each active issue on an issues log and discuss each item quickly. If there is a need for more time to be invested into a topic than can be addressed at a 15 minute time-boxed Ceremony, a new meeting is to be scheduled to burrow into details. We have seen this idea of an issue-Ceremony being scheduled immediately after the Daily Standup work wonders. This is because all participants know that any issue they want to discuss will be given an opportunity for discussion.

By following a format for each Ceremony, these meetings will take on a “Familiarity,” or rhythm. This cadence takes advantage of the “mere-exposure” effect where “conscious exposure (to stimuli) leads to increased liking of those stimuli.” (de Zilva, Vu, Newell, & Pearson, 2013) In this case exposure to a pattern of behaviors consistent with Agile Scrum’s definition of Ceremonies. As for how to achieve this; always start meetings the same way, a standard roll call can be an excellent way to accomplish this. Also, simply state the name of the Ceremony. Then follow the agenda in the intended Agile Scrum fashion. As a final way to increase the like-factor of the Ceremony, wrap it up the same way every time. An example of ending a meeting the same way was on the old police television show *Hill Street Blues* when the chief would end morning briefing by saying “Be careful out there.” People

tend to remember what is at the beginning and end of an event, so, in summary, it is very important to start and end Ceremonies the same way every time.

Finally, a significant contributor to the success of Ceremonies is to have the “Fundamentals” addressed. The idea is to provide a latticework where workers are more likely to stay on task. In support, S., Kremer, M., & Mullainathan, S. state “that workplace arrangements can mitigate these problems, thereby raising labor productivity.” The major issue meeting facilitators encounter according to Lencioni, (p.235) is to use each meeting to try to solve all team related issues. Make a clear delineation between what the purpose is for each meeting regularly to avoid the mistake that Lencioni points out. Make the effort to be a gate-keeper and always keep the correct flow of conversation moving. If an issue is too demanding to address during a Ceremony, schedule an additional breakout meeting. And, most importantly, respect people’s time by starting and ending on time. What we have had very good luck with is to plan regularly recurring meeting months in advance to efficiently mark out time on participant’s calendars.

As originally stated, the key way to tell if you have an issue with Ceremonies is people not showing up, Ceremonies wandering off topic, or participants showing up late. If these behaviors are plaguing your Ceremonies, it is my hope that the three “F”s of Ceremonies are implemented and used for all Ceremonies where the three F’s stand for Foundation, Familiarity, and Fundamentals. This is working for us, and we hope you have similar positive results.

-References-

Kaur, S., Kremer, M., & Mullainathan, S. (2010). Self-Control and the Development of Work Arrangements. *American Economic Review*, 100(2), pp. 624-628.

Lencioni, Patrick (2004) *DEATH by Meeting: A leadership fable about solving the most painful problem in business*: San Francisco, CA-USA: Jossey-Bass/A Wiley Imprint.

de Zilva, D., Vu, L., Newell, B. R., & Pearson, J. (2013). Exposure is not enough: suppressing stimuli from awareness can abolish the mere exposure effect. *PLoS One*, 8(10), e77726. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0077726

About the Authors



Brian Vanderjack, PMP, MBA, CSM

Illinois, USA



Brian Vanderjack holds an MBA, granted with Distinction from DePaul University, a PMP, and a CSM certification. He is the Principal Trainer at PMHighway LLC and his new book “The Agile Edge: *Managing Projects Effectively Using Agile Scrum*” is available on AMAZON.COM (you can find the book at <http://amzn.to/1KmR2XB>). He has also published several articles on Agile and project management & team leadership that were international journals. In addition he is a/an:

- Award winning full time ScrumMaster at one of the largest IT departments in the world.
- Agile Trainer on many occasions at AT&T and at PMCentersUSA (PMCentersUSA is a former winner of vendor of the year from PMI).
- Successful leader in advancing Agile Scrum having led an effort to create on-demand ScrumMaster Training. Over 1,000 people have taken this training to date.
- Regular speaker at IBM, AT&T and PMI Chapters on Agile Scrum and Project Management topics, to audiences measured in the hundreds.
- Seasoned public speaker having provided lively seminars at The Wisconsin Business Analysts Association (WIBADD), IEEE, AT&T, Abbott Labs, Northrup Grumman, University of Phoenix, University of Chicago, Northwestern University, Abbott labs etc.
- Award winning instructor working as a faculty member for the University of Phoenix
- Member of toastmasters, where he has held the position of “Area Governor” and winner of approximately 2 dozen awards for public speaking

Mr. Vanderjack lives Downers Grove, in a suburb of Chicago with his wife, two sons (when they are not in school or traveling somewhere) and a retired show dog/Wheaton Terrier, named Finley. Finley, sadly, was kicked out of the competition circuit early in his competition career due to goofing off too much; like the time he did a back flip during the final judging rounds. The breeder seemed quite happy to give him to us (smile).

Brian loves to meet new people by traveling to new locations to provide seminars and courses on Leadership, Agile Scrum, Project Management, Persuasion, Conflict, Risk, and Presentation Skills for the Professional Work Environment. He has over 1,000 LinkedIn

endorsements for leadership and similar, and can be reached at Brian@PMHighway.com.



Mabel Menard

Illinois, USA



Mabel Menard has been the Campus College Chair for the College of Social Sciences at the University of Phoenix in Chicago since October 2012, overseeing the Colleges of Humanities & Sciences, Health Sciences Professions, and Security & Criminal Justice plus the Bachelor's in Human Services, Criminal Justice Administration, and Health Administration programs. In addition, she acts as a special projects consultant for a social service agency and an HR consultant for a law firm on an as-needed basis. In her spare time, she mentors Asian-American professionals and international students. She is also a mentor and facilitator for the OCA Mentoring Asian-American Professionals program and a mentor and the Social Media Coordinator for the University of the People Mentorship Program.

Ms Menard received her Bachelor of Arts cum laude in Social Science and Master of Science in Clinical Psychology from Radford University, Radford, Virginia. She holds a Master of Arts degree in Clinical Psychology from, and was a Psy.D. candidate (ABD) at, The Chicago School of Professional Psychology, Chicago, Illinois. She also received her MBA in Human Resources Management from the University of Phoenix and has been pursuing her Ph.D. in Organizational Leadership with a concentration in Health and Human Services.

Ms Menard's management experience includes retail, acoustics engineering consulting firm, and psychiatric rehabilitation programs. She also has extensive research and quality assurance experience, having been involved in the design of and data collection for various research and quality assurance projects. Her HR experience includes writing, reviewing, and updating personnel and operational policies and advising affiliates on HR best practices.

Ms Menard's clinical experience includes psychiatric rehabilitation services, student counseling, and court-ordered psychological evaluations and therapy. She also has extensive teaching experience both domestically and internationally. She became a faculty member of University of Phoenix, Chicago campus, in January 2009, teaching courses in Criminal Justice Research, Management, Business Research, Psychology, and Human Services.