

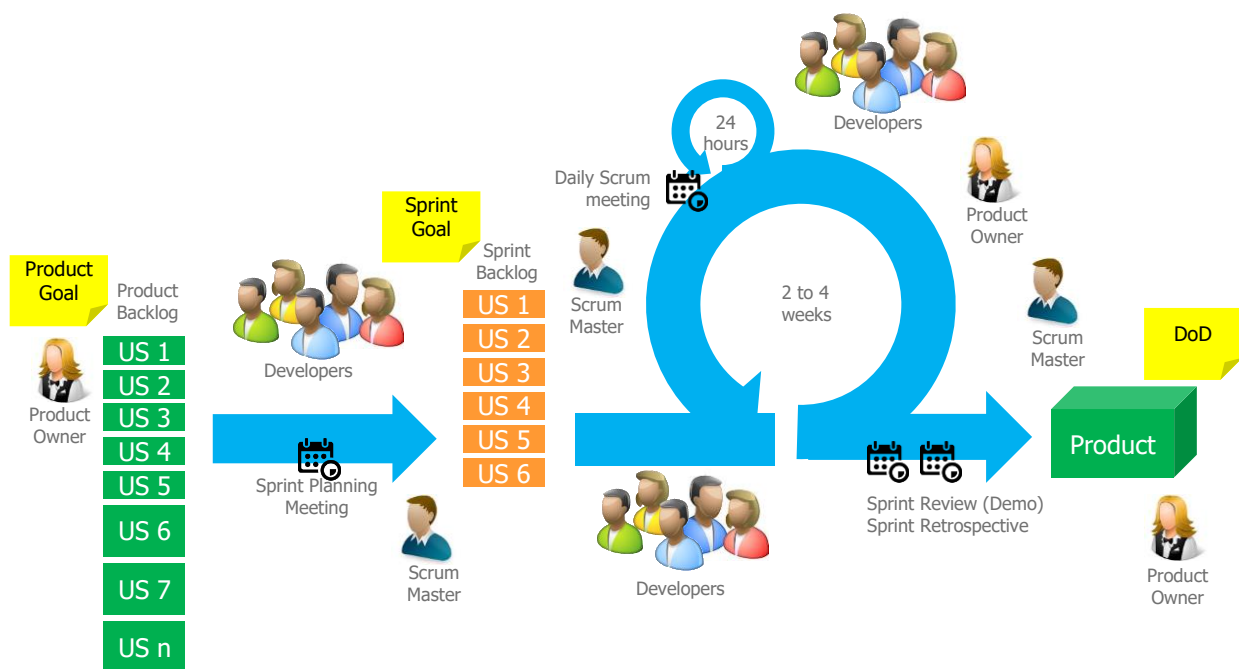
Sensemaking in the Agile Forest¹

What is Scrum?²

Henny Portman

Introduction

Scrum³, developed in 1995 by Ken Schwaber and Jeff Sutherland, is one of the most widely used agile frameworks worldwide for developing and maintaining products and services. This way of working helps you to respond flexibly to a dynamic environment and still unclear wishes and requirements about a product or service to be delivered. By keeping the focus on the greatest added value for the customer and receiving regular feedback on delivered partial results, the team steadily achieves the required results.



¹ This is the second article in a series by Henny Portman, one of the world’s leading authorities on “agile”. Based in The Netherlands, Henny coined the term “agile forest” in 2019 to describe the many agile frameworks that have emerged over the last 20 years. This series is intended to help readers better understand agile concept, navigate through the ‘underbrush’ and more successfully apply whichever framework is selected for their projects.

² How to cite this article: Portman, H. (2022). What is Scrum? Sensemaking in the Agile Forest series, PM World Journal, Vol. XI, Issue II, February.

³ The Scrum Guide: <https://scrumguides.org/scrum-guide.html#scrum-theory>

Easy to describe, challenging to apply

Scrum is based on empiricism and lean thinking. Empiricism states that knowledge comes mainly or entirely from experience. Decisions are made based on observations. Lean thinking is about reducing waste and therefore focuses on the essentials.

Scrum is easy to describe, but applying it is not. It requires a lot of discipline, experience, and coaching. Working according to Scrum is based on transparency, inspect what is made and adapt the deliverable as a result; this also provides opportunities to evaluate and continuously improve your own working method as a team.

- **Transparency.** The process and work must be visible to both those who perform the work and those who receive it. Transparency enables inspection.
- **Inspection.** The product and sprint backlog and the televised product must be assessed regularly. This also applies to the progress in relation to the agreed goals so that deviations can be identified early on. Inspection allows for adaptation.
- **Adjustment.** If the product to be delivered is not satisfactory, adjustments must be made. Adjustments must also be made if the process that is followed deviates too much from expectations. Think for example of the estimation of how much work a team can realize in a sprint. A team must have the space and authority and be given the time to adapt.

Scrum values

Successful use of Scrum and implementing changes requires all those involved to endorse and act upon the five Scrum values. The five Scrum values are:

- **Commitment:** each member commits⁴ personally to achieving the Sprint Goal set by the entire team during Sprint Planning. Each member commits to the team: to quality, to cooperation and to continuous learning and adjustment.
- **Focus:** each team member is focused on his/her own work and the common team result.
- **Openness:** the team members, but also the stakeholders, agree that they will always be open about the work, and any difficulties they encounter in the work.
- **Respect:** all members of the team respect each other and see each other as capable and independent.
- **Courage:** all team members have the courage to do what is necessary to achieve the team result, to speak out if they encounter difficulties or need help.

The fable of the Chicken and the Pig is used to illustrate the differing levels of commitment from stakeholders involved in a project. The basic fable runs:

A Pig and a Chicken are walking down the road.

The Chicken says: *"Hey Pig, I was thinking we should open a restaurant!"*

Pig replies: *"Hm, maybe, what would we call it?"*

The Chicken responds: *"How about 'ham-n-eggs'?"*

The Pig thinks for a moment and says: *"No thanks. I'd be committed, but you'd only be involved."*

The framework describes 3 roles, 4 events and 3 artefacts (including commitments), which are explained below.

Fixed teams

In Scrum, you work as much as possible with existing, fixed teams. The advantage of this is that the teams can get used to each other and you do not lose time getting to know each other. You bring the work to the team. This is different from project management, which often involves a temporary team that has been put together especially for the work. Incidentally, Scrum is not a project management method; you do not encounter any process steps to start or finish a project. And it does not involve setting up a project organization and steering committee only to dissolve them later.

Roles

The self-organizing multidisciplinary Scrum team has three roles:

- one **Product Owner** who is responsible for maximizing the value of the product.
- **developers** who make every aspect of a usable increment.
- one **Scrum Master** who is responsible for the effectiveness of the Scrum team by helping both the Scrum team and the organization understand and apply Scrum.

⁴ The fable of the Chicken and the Pig: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Chicken_and_the_Pig

The Scrum team consists of a maximum of 10 people. As for the size of the team, Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos firmly believes in his 'Two pizza rule': *if two pizzas can't feed the whole group then the team is too big.*

Events

The **sprint** is the central, overarching event within Scrum. These sprints are the 'heartbeat' and have a fixed duration of up to one month in which the value-creating increment is created and maintained. In a sprint, the sprint planning, the daily scrum, the sprint review, and the sprint retrospective take place. During the:

- **sprint planning**, the sprint backlog is created.
- **daily scrum**, the inspection takes place to determine what is needed to achieve the sprint goal.
- **sprint review**, the delivered increment is evaluated to determine future adjustments.
- **sprint retrospective**, ways to improve and plan for the quality and effectiveness of individuals, interactions, processes, tools, and the definition of done are sought.

The Scrum Guide does not know **backlog refinement** as a separate time-boxed event. However, there are several variants of Scrum where this is seen as a separate event. During the backlog refinement, backlog items (user stories) on the backlog are further considered and possibly explained or divided or split into smaller, more manageable, more estimable backlog items (user stories).

Artefacts

The artefacts represent 'work' or 'value'. Scrum recognizes the artefacts product backlog, sprint backlog and increment. In the product goal, sprint goal and definition of done respectively, the scrum team describes what they are committed to:

- The **product backlog** is a living, prioritized list of backlog items or user stories to shape or improve the product. User Stories were first defined within eXtreme Programming (XP) and are often described in the following form: "As a < type of user >, I want < goal > so that < reason >"
- The **sprint backlog** contains the sprint goal (why), the selected product backlog items for the sprint (what) and the plan for delivering the increment (how).
- An **increment** (product) is a concrete step to get closer to the product goal.

The **team board**, which is not mentioned in The Scrum Guide, is the product of ensuring transparency by showing:

- what the team is doing
- where the team stands
- what impediments the team is currently facing.

Sensemaking in the Agile Forest series

This article is part of a series of articles called *Sensemaking in the Agile Forest*. This series⁵ consists of the following parts:

- What is Agile?⁶
- What is Scrum?
- Is Agile always better?
- The ideal Product Owner
- The ideal Scrum Master
- Is an agile team always autonomous?
- What do iterative and incremental mean in Agile?
- The Minimum Viable Product (MVP) unraveled
- Prioritizing in an agile team (MoSCoW, WSJF)
- Multitasking task switching or monotasking
- Being predictable as an agile team (story points, velocity, t-shirt sizing, flying fingers)
- Self-managing or self-organizing agile teams
- Slicing user stories
- Agile management products (burn-down and burn-up charts)
- Agile user testing (cohorts, A/B testing)
- The Kanban board (WIP-limit, cumulative flow diagram)
- Culture makes or breaks your agile transformation
- Getting started as an agile team (a pilot)
- The evolution of agile frameworks
- ?

Please let me know if you would like to add specific agile topics to this series.

⁵ This series is based on a number of short blogs I made for Forsa Advies, a project management training organization in the Netherlands (<https://www.forsa-advies.nl>).

⁶ Portman, H. (2022). What is Agile? Sensemaking in the Agile Forest series, PM World Journal, Vol. XI, Issue I, January. <https://pmworldlibrary.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/pmwj113-Jan2022-Portman-what-is-agile-sensemaking-in-the-agile-forest-series-article1.pdf>

About the Author



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Henny Portman, owner of Portman PM[O] Consultancy and was partner of HWP Consulting, has 40 years of experience in the project management domain. He was the project management office (PMO) thought leader within NN Group and responsible for the introduction and application of the PMO methodologies (portfolio, program, and project management) across Europe and Asia. He trains, coaches, and directs (senior) programme, project and portfolio managers and project sponsors at all levels, and has built several professional (PM(O)) communities.

Henny Portman is/was accredited in a variety of qualifications, including P3O, PRINCE2, MSP, MoP, PRINCE2 Agile, AgilePM, AgilePgM and AgileSHIFT trainer and an SPC4 SAFe consultant and trainer. He is a P3M3 trainer and assessor and PMO Value Ring Certified Consultant (PMO Global Alliance). On behalf of IPMA, he assesses mega and large projects for the IPMA Project Excellence Award. In addition to this, he is an international speaker, author of many articles and books in the PM(O) field, and an active blogger (hennyportman.wordpress.com/).

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