When AI Becomes a Team Member: Jeff Sutherland on the Future of Scrum[1]

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How does artificial intelligence change the way agile teams work when AI agents no longer merely assist but take on tasks independently? At the third PM Summit NRW in Bochum, Scrum co-creator Dr. Jeff Sutherland painted a far-reaching picture of how humans and machines will work together in the future. His central argument: AI will not make Scrum obsolete. On the contrary, clear priorities, verifiable results, and a consistent focus on value will matter more than ever.

At the close of the third PM Summit NRW on September 18, 2026, Sutherland shared experiences from companies where AI agents already operate largely on their own. His goal goes well beyond today's widespread use of chatbots and AI assistants. In his vision, AI should become a regular member of the Scrum team: agents draw from the same backlog as human developers, take on tasks, and deliver results that can then be reviewed.

Sutherland links this vision to ambitious productivity goals. For every story point completed through human work, he envisions ten more being completed by autonomous AI agents. In his own companies and in teams he works with, he is therefore testing methods to track work done by people, work done autonomously by AI, and work done jointly by people and AI as separate categories. What matters, he argues, is not how quickly a task is performed, but whether it has actually been completed in full and makes a verifiable contribution.

That does not mean, Sutherland explicitly argues, that AI will make human teams redundant. Rather, he sees the technology as an amplifier of human capabilities. Teams must learn to structure tasks so agents can handle them independently. At the same time, people must be able to judge which work is worth doing in the first place. That skill in particular could significantly increase a team's value: the person in greatest demand in the future will not be the one who completes as many tasks as possible alone, but the one who can bring human and machine capabilities together productively.

The Product Owner plays a key role here. Speed alone does not create economic value. In the discussion following his talk, Sutherland emphasized that value must be built into the backlog from the outset. The Product Owner must make sure it prioritizes tasks that,

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for example, increase revenue or profitability or strengthen the organization's market position. Story points and AI token consumption are not, in themselves, measures of value. What matters is the outcome for the organization.

The role of the Scrum Master is also changing, in Sutherland's view. As agents increasingly handle tasks autonomously, designing workflows and removing obstacles become even more central. When AI substantially accelerates individual steps, bottlenecks that were previously less visible come into focus: Is the backlog sufficiently prepared? Are requirements clearly defined? Can decisions be made quickly? And can completed work actually be put to use without lengthy approval processes?

This is especially clear in quality assurance. Sutherland reported that human reviews quickly became a bottleneck in his experiments. If a person has to check every result produced by an agent, much of AI's speed advantage may disappear. His teams therefore use independent AI systems to review the output of other agents. If requirements have not been met, the task automatically goes back for further work. Humans also conduct spot checks and step in when they detect systematic errors.

That gives a classic Scrum tool renewed importance: the Definition of Done. In Sutherland's view, it needs to be defined clearly enough that machines, as well as people, can determine whether a task is truly complete. This means more than having written code or produced a document. The result must work and be verified and, where applicable, already be in production. Errors discovered afterward can then be incorporated into the verification rules – allowing quality control to improve continuously.

To illustrate how far this approach can go, Sutherland pointed to the IT infrastructure at his own companies. According to his account, AI agents monitor roughly two dozen servers there, perform updates, detect problems, and resolve a large share of incidents on their own. An alert is generated only when a problem genuinely requires human intervention. In this context, Sutherland speaks of "self-healing systems" – systems that learn from errors and continually improve their ability to monitor themselves.

In Sutherland's assessment, however, technical capability alone is not enough. A major problem in many organizations is that they simply transfer existing human workflows to AI. That may accelerate individual tasks, but it does not necessarily change the overall process. Organizations that want to realize the potential of autonomous agents need to rethink their workflows. Tasks must be clearly defined, suitable for machine execution, and verifiable. At the same time, organizations must be able to approve and deploy results much faster.

Sutherland's message therefore extends beyond development teams. Executives, too, must prepare for an organization that works faster and needs decisions just as quickly. If

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AI agents complete tasks in a short time but then wait for approvals or decisions, the bottleneck merely shifts to the next level of management. Introducing AI thus becomes a matter of organizational development: technology, processes, roles, and decision-making paths must be considered together.

For Sutherland, this is also an argument for Scrum's future. He rejects the claim that the framework will become obsolete in the age of autonomous AI. Agents, in particular, need clear priorities, transparent work items, explicit quality criteria, and regular reviews. His message from Bochum was therefore less a prediction of a fully automated world of work than a challenge to companies and project teams: Those who want AI to make them more productive must do more than adopt new technology. They must learn to organize work so humans and machines create measurable value together.

Author's note: This article was originally prepared in the German language, after which AI tools were use to translate the story and assist with structure, grammar and punctuation. All details are in the author's own words.

About the Author

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Sebastian Wieschowski is an editor at the German Project Management Association (GPM), the national member association of the International Project Management Association (IPMA) in Germany. He is responsible for developing GPM's media relations and serves on the editorial board of PM Aktuell, a quarterly magazine distributed to more than 6,500 GPM members as well as external stakeholders.

Born in 1985 in northern Germany, Wieschowski developed an early fascination with journalism. His formal education began with active contributions to school and local newspapers. He later completed journalistic training at the Cologne Journalism School for Politics and Economics, earned a Master Level Diploma from the School of Journalism at Eichstaett University, and undertook professional training at a regional newspaper publisher. He also holds a postgraduate M.Sc. degree in Public Health from Hannover Medical School.

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In addition to his freelance journalism for national and international outlets, including major German media such as DIE ZEIT, Wieschowski has held senior communications roles since 2012. He first worked as press officer for a private university specializing in social work, then for a psychiatric hospital, and later for an industrial company. In September 2024, he joined GPM's Marketing and Public Relations department, where he focuses on strengthening the visibility and public relevance of project management through editorial formats such as storytelling.

Alongside his professional career, Sebastian Wieschowski is also active as a freelance author in his lifelong passion, numismatics. He writes for both German- and English-language specialist publications, and his work has been recognized three times by the Numismatic Literary Guild, a writers' association based in the USA.

Sebastian is a reporter at heart and enjoys discovering inspiring stories and meet people from around the world, a goal that is particularly easy to pursue in the field of project management. He can be contacted at s.wieschowski@gpm-ipma.de.

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