



The Difference Between a Project Manager and a Scrum Master

What is a Scrum Master?

Before diving into the differences between a Project Manager (PM) and Scrum Master (SM), let's discuss what a Scrum Master is and what they are responsible for. The Scrum Guide written by Ken Schwaber and Jeff Sutherland states that the Scrum Master is:

responsible for promoting and supporting Scrum as defined in the Scrum Guide. Scrum Masters do this by helping everyone understand Scrum theory, practices, rules, and values.

The Scrum Master is a servant-leader for the Scrum Team. The Scrum Master helps those outside the Scrum Team understand which of their interactions with the Scrum Team are helpful and which aren't. The Scrum Master helps everyone change these interactions to maximize the value created by the Scrum Team.

The Scrum Guide then goes on to explain how the Scrum Master can be of service to the Product Owner, the Development Team, and to the Organization. Most of this bulletized list starts out with facilitating, coaching, or helping, implying that the Scrum Master does a lot of influencing and not much directing. The list of how the Scrum Master can be of service, becomes their job responsibilities which can be described in the short list below:

- Masters of Scrum: The Scrum Master must know the Scrum Guide like the back of their hand and be able to articulate Agile processes and the tradeoffs between different tools and techniques within the Agile realm.
- Coach: The Scrum Master must create positive change by providing feedback, asking open ended questions, and providing direction and encouragement.
- Protect: The Scrum Master must protect the team from external influences that may disrupt the team's process and impact that efficiency.
- Facilitate: With the reliance on strict timeboxes, the Scrum Master, must ensure that Scrum Events, previously called ceremonies, are effective and allow for all individuals on the team to participate, collaborate, and be heard. Poorly facilitated events lead to poor team performance.

- Servant Leaders: We have an entire course dedicated to Servant Leadership. In short, Servant Leadership is putting the team, the PO, and the organization above all else, including yourself as the Scrum Master. It means taking care of their needs.

- Help the team remove impediments: While most say it is the Scrum Master's responsibility to remove impediments, I feel it is important to make the distinction that the Scrum Master as a coach helps the team remove impediments. This follows the saying "You give someone a fish and feed them for a day or You can teach someone how to fish and feed them for a lifetime"

- Coach the Product Owner: Helping the Product Owner effectively manage the product, teaching them how to plan in an empirical environment, how to maximize value, and communicate with the Development Team.

- Challenge the Organization: Simply put, this is leading the Scrum adoption within the organization and causing organizational level changes that improve the team's productivity.

The Scrum Master is key to successful agile adoption. It is probably the most misunderstood position, and the most challenging to master!

What is a Project Manager?

I assume most of us know what a Project Manager is, but for the sake of clarity and common understanding a Project Manager is the person responsible for leading a project from its inception to completion, to include planning, execution and managing the people, resources, and scope of the project.

What is the Difference between a Project Manager and a Scrum Master?

Theoretically, the difference is fundamentally simple! The project manager's focus is on the project, managing the timeline, resources, and scope in order to meet business requirements whereas the scrum master's focus is on the Scrum Team and its team members, helping them achieve their full potential. The intent is that each Scrum Team is self-organizing, determining what tasks must be done, how, when, they will accomplish those tasks, negating the need for a project manager to tell the team what and how to do it.

The application of this is fundamentally challenging, just as Scrum is a relatively simple framework to understand, but very challenging to employ, the same is true of transitioning from project managers to scrum masters! It sounds so simple, stop commanding and controlling and start serving the team. At the individual level this might be easy (not really, but that is another article). At the organizational level, many challenges start to arise, the most common being we continue to treat Scrum Masters as Project Managers, holding them responsible for the project, which then in turn causes them to drive the project, not improve the team. This is the essence of Agile and the difference between these two roles, the Scrum Master's focus on team success which will in turn drive project success versus the Project Manager driving the project.

PROJECT MANAGER AND SCRUM MASTER –THE DIFFERENCES



How do I get this project done?

- Manages the budget
- Reports to business leaders on project progress
- Focuses on project completion
- Allocates tasks
- Prioritizes features
- Manages risk
- Coordinates with other dependent teams



How can I help make the team better and improve performance?

- Serves the team where needed
- Removes impediments that hinder progress or team maturation
- Coaches the product owner
- Facilitates Scrum Events – Collaboration
- Monitors and improves team dynamics

How do I Become a Successful Scrum Master?

The most important thing to remember when starting down the path of becoming a Scrum Master, regardless of previous background is that Agile and Scrum are fundamentally different than the traditional way of doing business. It requires behavioral and philosophical changes to be instilled at the individual and organizational level. What I am trying to say here is that taking a two- or three-day course is not going to make you a Scrum Master or change your behavior to the degree required to be successful. Everyone must understand there is a maturation process that Scrum Masters usually follow. It starts off with the Scrum Dude or Dudette, progresses through Scrum Mom or Dad, and continues on to the Jedi of Scrum Masters.



- Schedule Meetings
- Team Admin
- Daily 3 questions
- List impediments
- Retro hangouts



- Moderate meetings
- Protect the team
- Diagnose & Decide
- Directly remove impediments
- Team interface
- Assign tasks
- Tie-breaker
- Maintain harmony
- The Boss
- Focus on velocity and delivery dates



- Facilitate meetings
- Grow the team, progressively delegates
- Help the team find root causes and develop strategies
- Make the team responsible & accountable
- Teach the team to collaborate with themselves and the company
- Encourage the team to be proactive
- Point out problems worth discussing
- Facilitate positive/constructive conflict
- Team Gardener
- Care about motivation (team and individual level)
- Focus on long-term learning and growing, innovation, research, improvement
- Agile evangelist; Change agent

Picture and explanation by – Angel Medinilla

You can see that as the Scrum Master matures, they worry less about the project and concentrate more on coaching the team to success.

Below are some tips for success and anti-patterns or traps to avoid for newly minted Scrum Masters. A quick review of them should demonstrate that a 2- or 3-day Scrum Master class is not enough.

SCRUM MASTER SUCCESS AND ANTI PATTERNS



Anti-Patterns

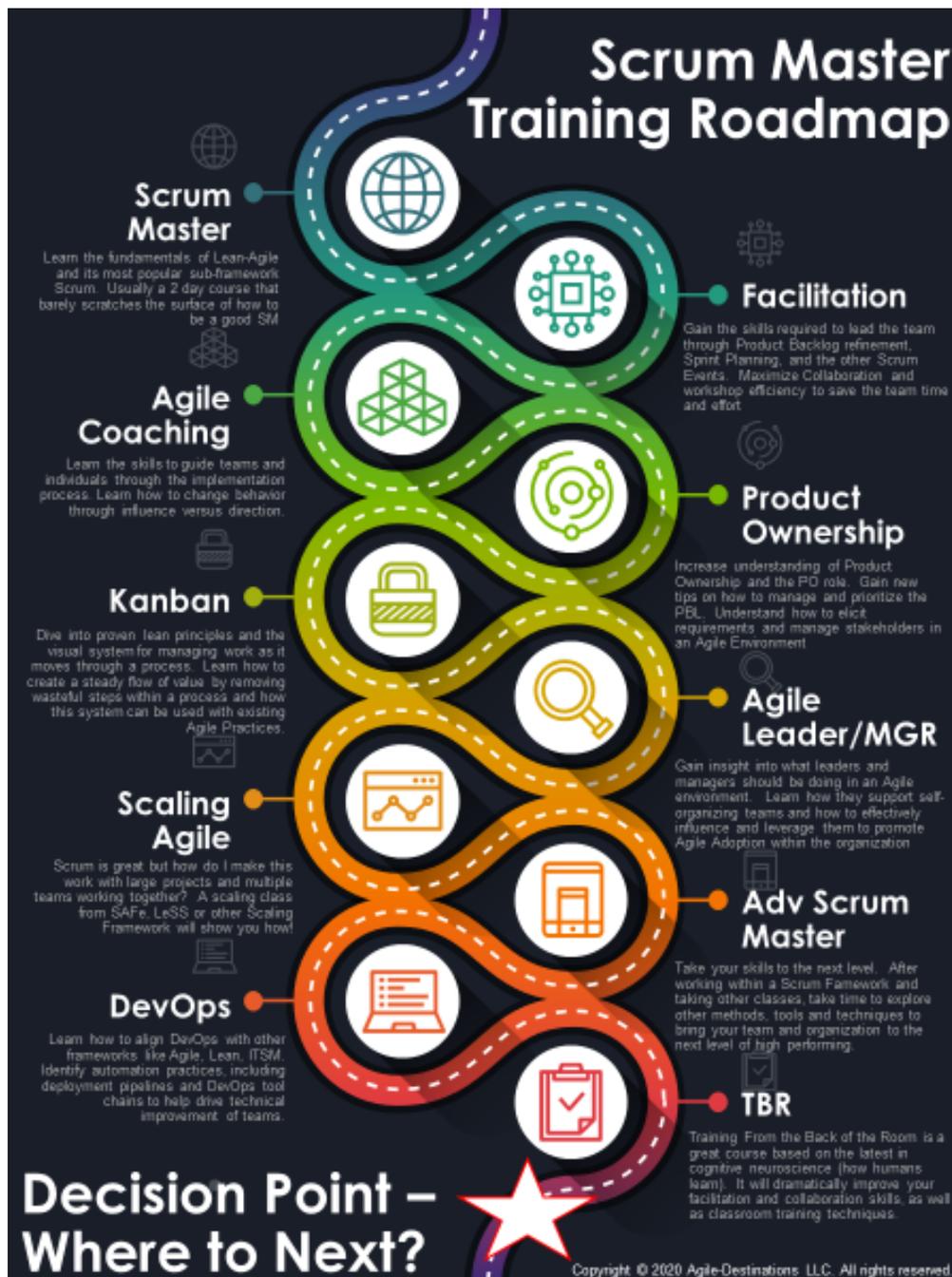
- Learning only from experience
- Driving Results
- Discouraging failure and experimentation
- Setting up competition between teams or team members
- Separating roles
- Performance reviews

Success Patterns

- Know the Scrum Guide backwards and forwards
- OWN the framework
- Know options and tool sets
- Know, contribute to, and challenge the playbook
- Understand and articulate tradeoffs
- Be able to mentor and apprentice others

As you can see Scrum Masters need to be very broad skilled with deep knowledge and ability in coaching facilitating, and product management. This is why we recommend Scrum Masters and organizations develop and follow a learning roadmap such as our Agile-Destinations Scrum Master Learning and Certification roadmap below.

When looking at the roadmap, we have to remember that every step is not required. Think of it as choose your own adventure, keeping in mind your ultimate destination. While you may not get to that exact spot, the journey will take you where you need to go.



Scrum Master Frequently Asked Questions.

After teaching various Agile courses all over the world for the past 5 years, I have gathered a few of the most frequently asked questions concerning the Scrum Master and Project Manager in an Agile environment. Some of these FAQ's require a solid understanding of the organizational context you are in to give you a specific answer. Other FAQs in this list have a variety of options and considerations that they deserve their own article. The intent here is to demonstrate that the Scrum Guide and a couple

days of Agile training is not enough. Change Agents within organizations need to think through and discuss many of these questions that have numerous Human Resources implications and then more importantly communicate the results of those discussions throughout. For the sake of this article's brevity I have kept answers relatively simple and short.

1. What is the difference between a Scrum Master and the Project Manager?

Please re-read this article. If you are still struggling with this feel free to set up a personal coaching session with me.

2. The Scrum Guide does not mention the project manager role. Do project managers disappear and get replaced by Scrum Masters?

I do not believe that Project Managers will become extinct. I believe there will always be a place for Project Managers, maybe not in the numbers most organizations have now, but there will always be a need for a professional to manage the budget, risks, stakeholders, external dependencies, and the many other things outside of the Scrum Teams purview, especially on larger, multi-team projects.

3. Which certification is best for a Scrum Master?

See my article on Agile and Scrum Certifications: Good for Training Individuals, Less So For Corporations located at <https://The value of agile certifications.pdf>.

4. What is a good career path for Scrum Masters?

This depends largely on long term individual desires and goals. A typical path might be:

- Start off as a Scrum Master for 1-3 teams
- Followed by a Scrum Master for a large project or product. In the Scaled Agile Framework (SAFe) this is referred to as a Release Train Engineer (RTE)
- Team Coach focusing on coaching other Scrum Masters and Product Owners improve their teams.
- Enterprise Coach – Working with organizations to guide their Agile adoptions.

5. Shared or Dedicated – How many teams can they work with?

I am a fan of dedicated Scrum Masters, since Scrum Masters are in the people business it is important, they know the people and can focus on their specific circumstances to get the team to high performing. Shared resources consistently become over utilized, result in bottlenecks, and generally slow the overall process down through no fault of their own.

6. Does a Scrum Master have to have development experience or be technical in any way?

No, I've seen many organizations mandate that Scrum Masters have development experience, only to back off that requirement later in their adoption. Usually it is because they have realized the Development teams have the technical expertise, what they are lacking is the soft skills, facilitation, coaching, and servant leadership that will bring the team to a high level of performance.

7. Who should the Scrum Master Report too?

This is one of those questions that has a number of options each with their pros and cons that have to be weighed based on the organizational culture and leadership within the organization. Understand that how we measure Scrum Master success and who they report to will impact the behaviors of the Scrum Master and heavily influence organizational Agile adoption.

8. What metrics should we use to measure Scrum Master success?

This is a challenging question and will be different for every organization. Books have been written on this topic. In general, I am a big fan of asking the Scrum Masters of the organization how they would like to get measured. This starts a conversation between the Scrum Masters and organizational leadership, allowing me to coach them through the cause and effects of each suggested metric using a causal loop diagram. If the group believes the metric will drive the right behavior, we keep it. If the group determines that is driving inappropriate behavior, it is removed from the list.

9. Can the Scrum Master and Product Owner be the same person?

Simply put, NO! I've seen people try it, but it never works out well.

10. Can the Scrum Master be a part of the development team or can the development team rotate Scrum Master duties from Sprint to Sprint?

The simple answer is NO! With that said I've seen one team alternate SM duty between two different developers on the team. They acted in concert with each other, much like co-captains of a sports team. This team was the exception and not the norm.

The Bottom Line

Agile transformation requires leadership, discipline and new way of thinking. Scrum Masters are the change agents within the organization that bring this leadership and discipline to guide the desired behavioral changes. The basic theory can be learned through a book or self-learning, but the possibilities and the realization of those possibilities are generated through

the exploration of ideas during discussions with peers and change agents in a facilitated course or workgroup. Don't become the impediment that slows your teams down. Learn Agile, be Agile, lead Agile!

Contact Agile Destinations to learn more about how we can help you develop your organization's Scrum Masters and lead your organization through its Agile Transformation.

Next Steps

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About Agile Destinations

Founded in 2014 on the core belief that leaders and organizations strive to continuously improve their processes, wow their customers, and streamline production and operations in an ever increasingly demanding world. Agile Destinations specializes in designing custom training, coaching, and consulting engagements to help leaders and their organizations adopt a culture of continuous improvement and implement a pragmatic Agile approach that achieves synergistic effects throughout the entire organization.