Scrum more than just a project design method - a bridge to organisational development

It is not because it is difficult that we do not dare, but because we do not dare, it is difficult.

(Seneca)

Especially in the current times, it is difficult to think about promising processes that have a lasting, positive influence on the successful achievement of results in companies. For this reason, I would like to take the "Scrum" process out of the context of information technology (development).

After decades of successful use in complex project situations, Scrum is much more than an IT development approach. In my opinion, Scrum can be used as a procedural approach to complex issues in almost any area of business where the aim is to achieve usable results. At the same time, it is a helpful method of targeted organisational development.

What is Scrum?

Scrum emerged a good three decades ago from the desire to optimise IT developments and to enable those involved to carry out more autonomous and targeted development work.

Here I ask the Scrum founders and Scrum professionals for their indulgence in the context of my abbreviated presentation.

For those interested, I recommend the publications of Scrum Inc. in particular the Scrum Guide (authors: Jeff Sutherland/Ken Schwaber) for a more in-depth look at the process.

A key component of the Scrum process is breaking down complex project requirements into workable and realisable tasks that build on each other. The team manages (organises) itself (self-management/self-organisation) in order to produce a usable result from the jointly defined task corridor.

What roles are there in Scrum?

The autonomously operating Scrum team is supported by the Scrum Master or Product Owner, who, in accordance with their roles, guide the team towards personal responsibility and self-management, maintain contact with the client (stakeholders), define the tasks with the team and represent them to the stakeholders.

Skizze Scrum Verfahren / Rollen
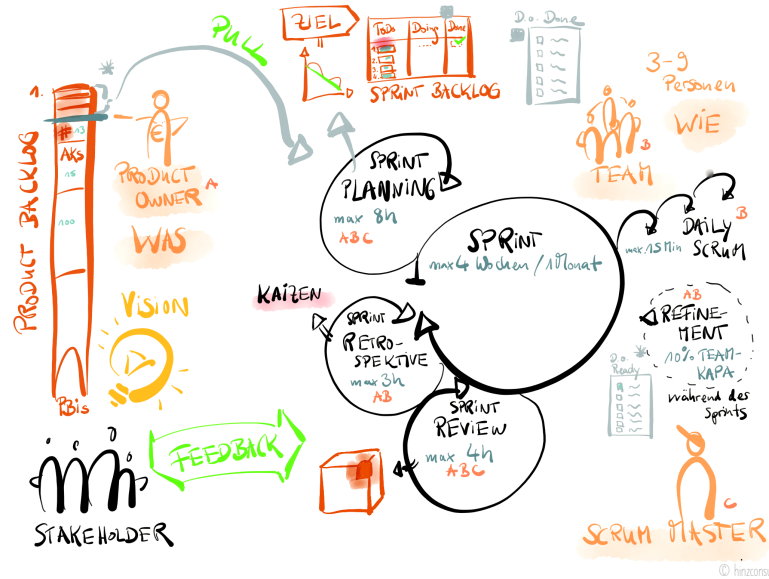
(Outline of Scrum process/roles)

The sketch shows the roles and their essential interactions, as well as the individual tools that play a role in the formal structure of Scrum.

What is the aim of the approach?

Put simply, the aim of the Scrum iterations (sprints) is to achieve the most usable, least error-prone result possible at the end of each iteration.

In principle, this partial result (assumption that a complex task/complex project scenario delivers several partial results) should be usable autonomously and can be used in the overall context of the course of the project. The duration of the iterations (maximum 4 weeks) serves to reduce complexity and, due to the coordination and roles integrated into the process, a permanent learning and improvement process as well as a phase-related acceptance of results by the participants takes place.

This creates transparency, strengthens personal responsibility and achieves a high level of identification with the task.

Why can this technological approach be used in every area of operation?

All complex project tasks in companies, regardless of the environment, have one thing in common - a growing lack of transparency.

This is often due to the constantly and rapidly changing requirements of the market, the operating environment, technologies or social demands.

This is currently clearly recognisable due to the high volatility of the adjustments caused by coronavirus. As a result, market access, employee availability, process chains, financial issues, etc. are changing extremely quickly. All of these points are exacerbated by uncertainty, existential fears and abstruse theories that influence society.

In addition to these volatile requirements, there are also the longer-term, but unfortunately also insufficiently predictable influences of political changes, climatic requirements or personal sensitivities.

Project essays must be able to react to all these influencing factors, broken down to the operational cosmos. Traditional ways of thinking quickly reach their limits in complex situations.

Agile processes (e.g. Scrum) offer the greatest possible flexibility to react thanks to the willingness to learn and adapt implemented in the process.

The structuring and decomposition of complexity enable better planning, as the iterations last long enough to achieve results. At the same time, however, the inherent learning approach enables appropriate corrections and improvements.

All projects that can be described as complex are subject to the dilemma of losing effectiveness in the course of time without the necessary adjustments due to rigid, inflexible planning and, in the worst case, not achieving the set goal.

Analyses show that this is often due to a lack of transparency, a lack of willingness to change and personal overload.

It does not matter whether it is a classic IT development, a product development, a complex contract design, a market penetration, a process change, commercial, technical or specialised issues.

At the end of all project approaches, there is a desired result (goal) that is to be achieved.

Scrum, as an agile process approach, offers a portfolio that contributes to achieving this goal and at the same time gives those involved the opportunity to work more responsibly, deliver more transparent results and realise this in a manageable time frame.

From an operational point of view, this leads to a more efficient way of working, more satisfied employees whose level of identification with the company increases, faster and more productive results and therefore better marketability.

It is precisely now that active consideration should be given to setting up projects with agile processes in mind.

This is particularly important as it can also take account of the aspects of the flexible workplace through "mobile office" approaches and the current work situation.

It can also be assumed that employees are currently very open to new approaches and are certainly happy to support them.

This is therefore also a good opportunity for successful long-term organisational development.

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