



## **Scrum Master Checklist**

Scrum Masters have a high degree of responsibility over the direction of projects. This handy checklist can keep Scrum Masters both new and old on track. Perhaps more important, it can serve as a roadmap for other individuals participating in the Scrum framework—this bird’s-eye view look at the role of Scrum Master ties each of the process participants together and helps demonstrate their individual roles.

### **Checking In on Your Product Owner & Product Backlog**

Your Product Owner will work closely with stakeholders and the Development Team to ensure that the path of the project adjusts as needed. Additionally, Product Owners own the Product Backlog and ensure that it is an information radiator.

#### **The Product Backlog**

**Is the Product Backlog up-to-date?**

In order for the Product Backlog to be an information radiator, it must reflect the most current information and progress. Ask yourself:

- » *Is the Product Backlog prioritized?*
- » *Does the Product Backlog represent current progress?*
- » *Are the requirements/desires of all stakeholders represented?*

**Is the Product Backlog manageable?**

Is the Product Backlog a manageable size? Ask yourself:

- » *Is the Product Backlog choked up with unnecessary items?*
- » *Are there any priority requirements that could be translated into user stories?*

**Is the Product Backlog the most effective information radiator it can be?**

Being up-to-date is one aspect of a well-managed Product Backlog, but visibility and other information radiance efforts can enhance the Backlog’s effectiveness. Ask yourself:

- » *Is the Product Backlog visible to all team members?*
- » *Is the Product Backlog visible to all stakeholders?*
- » *What opportunities exist for you as Scrum Master to increase the effectiveness of information radiance with regard to the Product Backlog?*

*For example: Are communication and access crystal clear with the current form of information conveyance? What impediments exist? Could a different presentation increase effectiveness? What printouts, charts, or other visual displays are the best fit?*

## Product Owner

### Is your Product Owner taking steps to avoid [technical debt](#)?

Technical debt is the cost in resources that refactoring requires. Some technical debt is unavoidable, and may even be desirable, but accumulating technical debt that cannot be repaid can spell disaster.

### Has your Product Owner organized the Product Backlog items appropriately?

The Product Backlog, while an asset to the entire team and a central component of a Scrum project, falls under the direct purview of the Product Owner. Ask yourself:

- » *Have the items in the Product Backlog been organized appropriately based on their priority?*
- » *Have the items in the Product Backlog been organized appropriately based on their release group?*

### Does the plan for the current Sprint need correction?

Working with your Product Owner, look at the plan for the current Sprint. Compared to the Burndown Chart, does the plan for the current Sprint require refinement or adjustment? Ask yourself:

- » *Is the Burndown Chart accurate and up-to-date?*
- » *Does the Burndown Chart reflect the pace and state of the current Sprint?*

### Did your Product Owner bring the release plan up-to-date after the last Sprint Review Meeting?

With the close of every Sprint, new information comes to light regarding release groups and Product Backlog priorities. Changes in these areas will impact the release plan.

## Checking In on Your Development Team

Scrum projects revolve around the cross-trained Development Team, which is small, focused, and responsible for completing items from the Product Backlog. It is the role of the Scrum Master to coach, encourage, and guide the Development Team through each Sprint as well as the Scrum process as a whole.

## Team Focus & Productivity

### Is your team in a state of flow?

Team members that are in a state of flow are more effective, more productive, and better motivated. Ask yourself:

- » *Are the members of my Development Team passionate about the work being completed for the current Sprint, or are they in and out of focus?*
- » *Are Development Team members participating and collaborating, or are individuals working alone?*
- » *Do team members volunteer for tasks?*
- » *If there is not flow within the team, what are the impediments to a state of flow?*

### Is the team still focused on Sprint goals midway through the current Sprint?

A loss of focus midway through the Sprint can jeopardize goal completion. Ask yourself:

- » *Is it necessary to conduct a mid-Sprint checkup? This checkup reviews the acceptance criteria of Product Backlog items committed for the current Sprint.*
- » *Are there impediments to the Development Team's achieving a state of flow?*
- » *Does the Development Team have access to the information they need to succeed in the current Sprint?*

## **Is the Development Team working together?**

The need for team members to leave their job titles at the door and work closely with one another presents challenges that can become impediments to goal completion. Ask yourself:

- » *Do team members like each other? Do they generally get along?*
- » *Do team members celebrate each other's successes?*
- » *Do team members respect one another? Do they hold each other accountable to high standards?*
- » *Do team members challenge each other to grow?*

## **Are there open channels of communication between team members?**

No highly collaborative work environment can be successful without clear and open channels of communication. Ask yourself:

- » *Are there issues or opportunities that are becoming impediments because the team is not discussing them?*
- » *Why are these challenges getting swept under the rug? Are they not being discussed due to discomfort?*

## **Enabling Team Success**

### **Is the Sprint task board current and up-to-date?**

The Sprint task board is a key enabler of the team's success during a Sprint, but only if it is kept current and reflects the actual progress of the team. Ask yourself:

- » *Is the task board up-to-date?*
- » *Does the task board reflect the team's actual workload?*

***For example:** Be wary of tasks that are larger than one day's work, or tasks that are being done but are not on the board or that have not been disclosed to the team. A Sprint can only be successful if team members are fully committed to the tasks that have been committed to that Sprint from the Product Backlog.*

### **Are the artifacts that enable team self-management visible to all the members of the team?**

If it seems like this is a recurring theme, that is correct. Artifacts such as the Project Backlog, Sprint task board, and Sprint Burndown Chart must be accessible and convenient for team members if they are to provide any value. To be used to their fullest effect, these artifacts must also be protected from outside influence. Ask yourself:

- » *Are there any individuals or parties who have access to the team's self-management artifacts who do not explicitly need access?*
- » *Is access by other parties interfering with the team's ability to work transparently and effectively?*

### **How many formats and locations for Sprint Retrospective Meetings have you tried?**

Sprint Retrospective Meetings can be delicate affairs. To keep the team motivated, focused, and comfortable with sharing, try a variety of formats and locations for your Sprint Retrospective Meetings.

### **How is technical debt being handled through Product Backlog items?**

Taking on technical debt is a reality for many Scrum Masters aiming to deliver working code on time. Without a plan to repay this debt, refactoring needs further down the road can wreak havoc on delivery and release plans.

## Glossary

A few of the key terms from this checklist defined and expanded upon.

### Flow

A state of flow exists when a team has clear goals, expectations, and rules. These guidelines help produce a structured environment where team members are set up for success but are not constrained by bureaucratic impediments.

A main focus of the Scrum framework—and Agile project management as a whole—is the idea that job descriptions are left at the door and that the team is focused on collaborative success. The Scrum environment exists to facilitate this success, but policies and procedures that are too restrictive are inimical to this goal.

In an ideal flow state, the team works as one. It is the next level of productivity, concentration, and focus. A Development Team that is “flowing” has a merger of action and awareness and can rely on individual team members like a hand can rely on its fingers.

Every team Scrum Master (and team leaders of all stripes) rightly see a flowing team as the pinnacle of efficiency. But how does a state of flow come about? Flow depends on individual team members and the chemistry of the team, but there are a few things that any Scrum Master can do to lay the groundwork for a state of flow.

- » Provide direct and immediate feedback. Successes are celebrated by all team members and failures are treated with respect and candor.
- » Ensure that tasks are a balance between ability level and challenge. This is already somewhat a function of the Scrum framework, as Development Team members can select their own tasks from the Sprint task board (tasks are not assigned).
- » Provide a sense of personal control and accountability to each team member. This accountability is to the team first, and to the project second.
- » Flow is achieved when team members no longer see the labor as work. Action becomes effortless, and the completion of tasks becomes a reward in its own right.

### Information Radiator

Information radiator is a general term used to describe any chart, graph, visual aid, or information tool that has the function of promoting transparency and enabling success. Sometimes referred to as BVCs or “Big Visible Charts,” information radiators must be kept up-to-date, must reflect the current state of the project, and must be accessible by all team members—but not by individuals or parties who may impede focus and flow.

Examples of common Scrum information radiators include the Sprint task board, the Burndown Chart, and the Project Backlog.