

# A Scrum Master's Handbook

## Introduction

A Scrum Master is an essential role in an Agile team who helps keep Agility intact within. In this Blog, we aim to explain who a Scrum Master is? What are the roles and responsibilities of an SM and what are the traits he/she should possess with a brief guide for a SM in a sprint.



## Who is a Scrum Master?

Scrum Master is a person who ensures teams are following scrum guidelines effectively. A Scrum master is accountable for educating teams on scrum, roles and ceremonies and also helps teams practice them by constant coaching, hand holding and training.

A SM, is a servant leader, who enables teams to make best use of their skillset to deliver value to the customer . SMs are facilitators that act as a coach to the team with respect to Scrum and its framework. Scrum masters are servant leaders who resolve dependencies for the team and promote clean collaboration between the development team and the product teams.

## Roles and Responsibilities of a SM:

Now that we have a fair idea of who a Scrum Master is, let's look at what are the responsibilities of a SM in an Agile Team. SM's responsibilities include,

- Facilitation of Sprint ceremonies like Sprint Planning, DSM, Reviews , Retro and Refinement
- Resolving or helping teams resolve blockers
- Training and mentoring teams on Scrum and its practices
- Helps teams realize and deliver maximum value to the customer
- Define and help PO user stories and maintain product backlog
- Help team derive DOR and DOD and adhere to it
- Coach teams on becoming Self organizing and cross functional
- Block external pressure to the team
- Facilitation of collaboration between teams and external stakeholders if need be
- Remove barriers between teams and stakeholders with effective communication
- Define and ensure reporting is in place
- One on Ones with team members to check for team's morale for effective team development

## Not a SM's responsibilities :

Scrum Master is a widely misused role in the agile world and often in practical scenarios, Scrum masters are used for literally everything in the project. This mainly comes with a direct mapping of Project Managers or any conventional PM roles to Scrum masters. Here are a few pointers which clearly should not or is not a responsibility of a SM

- **Team Inspector** - It is not SM's accountability to ensure sprint goals are achieved. Scrum master is not a person who micromanages the team's activity.

- **Team's Secretary** - Scrum master should facilitate the scrum ceremonies, it is not that teams can ask SMs to help them with everything.
- **Team's Babysitter** - Allocation of tasks and micromanaging is not a Scrum master's responsibility.
- **Team's Decision Maker** - Taking Decisions unilaterally without consulting the team or on behalf of the team.
- Enforcing processes on teams without understanding the needs.
- Billing and Budget management.

## Traits Of a good SM :

While we now understand who a Scrum master is and what are his / her responsibilities. It is also important to understand what a Scrum Master's mindset should be. Here are 8 important traits of a good Scrum master which covers what to do and what not to do -

- **Clear and effective communication** - Avoid being your team's SPOC, this creates a bottleneck and will delay decision making capabilities of your team. A more effective approach is to align yourself towards encouraging your team to communicate across the org and letting them self manage their communication. Do not assume your team's problems/concerns and take a unanimous decision. Your decision might not help your team. It's important to discuss your team's concerns, issues and collectively make decisions. This strongly promotes self sustainability in your team.
- **Agile Influencer over dictatorship** - It is of little help to impose agile practices which are not working for your team. A more nuanced approach is to share situational/contextual recommendations and suggestions inspired by agile practices, revisiting them whenever your team needs a genuine change in process.
- **Supervising of team over Managing** - Micromanaging your team puts unwanted pressure on your development team and will cause a burnout. It is much better to trust your team and enable/ empower them to self manage and complete their work on time.
- **Data Driven Mindset** - The best scrum masters understand why a team is not delivering to potential. Control charts, delivery graphs, velocity charts, issue lists, and other data tells them where things need to improve. These can be

subtle pieces of information that the team may not comprehend in retrospectives but should. The best SM not only learns how to improve based on data, but shares this knowledge with the team. Sending numerous reports which no one looks at, just for the sake of compliance or org demands, does not help your team and also takes up your bandwidth. It is much better to identify and onboard the team on minimal reports which helps analyze the areas of improvements and actually add value.

- **Alignment towards the Product and Domain** - Scrum Masters are people who help teams resolve blockers and dependencies. SMs must have a fair hold on the purpose of why the product is being built, what the stakeholders need, what the customers or consumers need to be able to help teams better deliver the product and also help POs write effective backlog items. To be able to manage the Dependencies, to suggest improvements, to help teams deliver value and ensure business needs are met, SMs must have a fair idea of the product and domain they are working with.

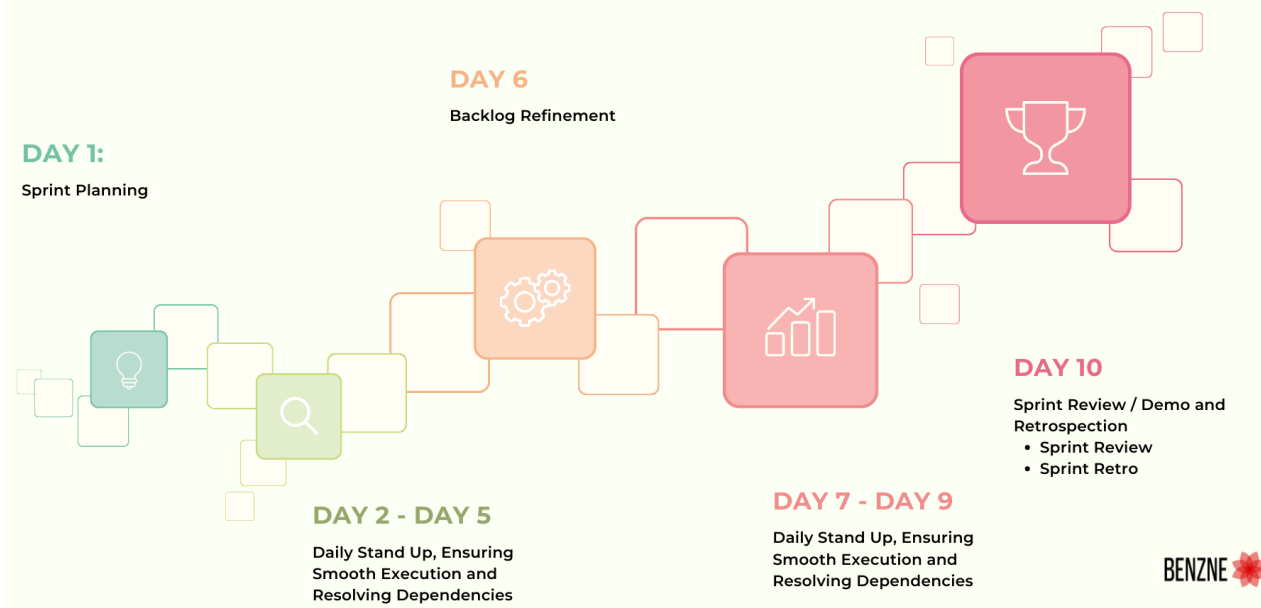
## SM's Journey In a Sprint:

Having established traits and responsibilities of a SM, let's see an ideal SM's journey in a sprint of 2 weeks is. This section aims at explaining the activities of a SM in all the ceremonies of a sprint.

### Day 1 - Sprint Planning

- Ensure invites are sent to the team
- Ensure stories meet the DOR
- Ensure stories are well defined and prioritized in the backlog by the PO
- Plan the capacity of the team for the sprint
- Stop team from overcommitting
- Update boards with appropriate sub tasks
- Start sprint in the tool

# SM's Journey In A Sprint



## Day 2 to Day 5 - Daily Stand Up, Ensuring Smooth Execution and Resolving Dependencies

- Send out invites for the Daily Huddles
- Host and facilitate Daily Stand up meetings
- Check and project the progress to the team
- Help teams to resolve blockers and dependencies
- Monitor team's execution and provide appropriate feedback
- Help the PO prepare for the next sprint with detailing, prioritization of the stories
- Ensure cards are up to date on the board
- Help team collaborate on external teams if need be

## Day 6 - Backlog Refinement

- Ensure invites are sent to the team members
- Set the context and the agenda
- Help PO fill the next sprint bucket with team's capacity
- Mark dependencies in the tool

## Day 7 to Day 9 - Daily Stand Up, Ensuring Smooth Execution and Resolving Dependencies

- Help PO Start clarifying the doubts which couldn't be answered in the grooming meeting
- Help resolving blockers marked in the stories for next sprint. Start working on dependencies ( Ex: Get designs , documents attached in the story )
- Facilitate DSMs , understand the progress , Ensure cards are up to date on the board
- Be available for the team to help solve dependencies and give them direction
- Help team collaborate on external teams if need be

## Day 10 - Sprint Review / Demo and Retrospection

### Sprint Review

- Ensure invites are sent to the team and stakeholders
- Ensure the boards are up to date with precise updates
- Help team validate if the stories have met the acceptance criteria and DOD
- Take consensus from the PO about the story closure
- Collate feedback in the tool
- Provide a report of the current sprint and the project dashboards ( Reporting )

### Sprint Retro

- Ensure invites are sent to the team
- Validate the improvements made from previous sprints
- Facilitate sprint retrospective
- Collect action items / improvement points for the next sprint

## Conclusion

Scrum Mastership is a very important aspect of an Agile project and is also one of the widely misunderstood concepts. It often gets mixed with the traditional Project Management role. So it is essential for the Scrum Master aspirants to understand, digest the role and then take it up to make justice for an Agile team.

Hope this blog helps you understand the SM role, responsibilities, traits and then an ideal sprint journey.. With this, our blog on “A Scrum master’s Handbook” comes to an end.

Please reach out to us at “[consult@benzne.com](mailto:consult@benzne.com)” for any feedback , suggestions or questions.