SCRUM MASTERY: FROM HERDING CATS TO BUILDING HIGH-PERFORMING TEAMS

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HERDING CATS

Scrum Masters: ever feel like you’re “herding cats” instead of building high performing teams?

Chances are this may be related to the *sheer number* of teams you’re working with.
INCREASING RESPONSIBILITY

With each additional team, we would imagine the Scrum Master’s workload to increase, namely:

• *Facilitating* team-level events
• *Contributing* to ART Sync meetings
• *Working* with each PO (backlog, prioritization)
• *Maintaining flow* (WIP limits, swarming, “done”)

This is what we *typically* expect from the Scrum Master role.

*EXCEPT I left a couple items out ..*
I FORGOT TO MENTION

• Resolving teams *impediments*
• *Alignment* with other teams/stakeholders
• *Buffer* against external forces
• Supporting *Built-in Quality* and DoD
• Leading *relentless improvement*
• COACHING the team

Notice how the overhead increases *logarithmically* with each additional team (see next slide)
THE PROBLEM OF SCALE

Scrum Master/Project Manager Curve

- Scrum Activities
- Project Management Activities

Scrum Master Role | Project Manager Role

servant-leader | herding cats

“gray area”

Overhead

# of Teams
If, on average, just half of your teams report an impediment in their standups then you are running down 1-4 issues per day. What are the chances of resolving 4 issues within a day?

How about **alignment**? What if you need your team to get on the same page with Team 2, which happens to reside in a different location/time zone? And if Team 3 has a similar issue?

And what about **external forces**? What if Product is pushing for scope creep on Team 5 and a Business stakeholder is demanding fixed delivery dates on Team 3, whilst a VP is trying to sneak a side project into Team 2? Do you have the time to run interference for these three teams simultaneously? What if this were happening to all eight teams?
Where do you cross the line from Scrum Master to Project manager?

I believe it’s somewhere around 3 to 4 teams.

This is the “gray area”.
RING A BELL?

If this is your situation, then you’ve probably left the realm of Scrum Master and crossed over to Project Management except it’s at the speed and discipline of Scrum.

You may be running from meeting to meeting and sending a lot of frantic “action item” emails for those impediments (forget face-to-face resolution)

Worse, you may even be sending such emails during your other scrum meetings

If you’re honest at this point, you’re barely keeping your head above water.
A Scrum Master should be a Servant Leader and Coach. That means:

- Empathizing with the team’s challenges
- Actively assisting the team
- Coaching the team in situ
- Building a high-performing team

How can these be done if the coach is always “busy”?\"
THE SOLUTION

Raise up more scrum masters
  • Solicit qualified people in your organization
    • Meanwhile, socialize need for more positions
  • Train and nurture them in their new roles
  • Buddy them up with seasoned SM’s

Develop an internal coaching practice and elicit support from management.

It’s worth it to you and the entire agile transformation
THANK YOU!
What I Do
• Help organizations achieve business agility
• Develop high-performing teams

My Experience
• Industry: 25+ years building enterprise software
• Agile: 18 years of agile experience

Industry Roles
• Director of Software Development
• Product Manager
• Scrum Master
• Software Developer
• Project Manager

Companies
• From Fortune 1000 to Fortune 10
• Entertainment, Avionics, Retail, Financial, Insurance, Medical, Manufacturing