



# Is Your Organization Agile-Ready?

## Part 1: Four Formidable Questions

Lately I've been getting questions from Agile seminar participants about how to apply Scrum to "real life," as though these methods are "good in theory, but not at my company!" Some organizations may not be ready to adopt agile methods completely, so I encourage students to take an organizational readiness self-assessment to see if Agile in general and Scrum in particular is right for them. The questions on the self-assessment can be used to begin conversations as a way to raise issues that need to be resolved in organizations thinking about adopting Scrum.

### **Will your organization provide a dedicated product owner for each scrum team?**

A key role on a Scrum effort is the product owner (PO). This is the role that represents the business community, particularly the project sponsor (sometimes called business owner or the Stakeholder), and therefore is tasked with answering the business questions and making the business decisions.

by:

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## Is Your Organization Agile-Ready? (cont.)

This is the go-to person for the requirements, for answers to the team's questions about the features and functions that the business wants out of the end product. This is also the role that prioritizes the items on the product backlog. It seems to me that in the heat of the iteration or sprint, the team needs immediate access to the person making the business decisions.

In order to complete the sprint in a short time-frame, such as two weeks, the team cannot wait for the PO to get back to them at their convenience. They cannot wait for the PO to check with other SMEs to come to consensus. The team needs immediate answers. Having a dedicated PO is critical to the success of a scrum team.

### **Will your organization provide dedicated team members?**

Many organizations allocate resources to multiple projects. I often get the question "do the team members ever work on multiple projects in Agile?" When I answer that in order to complete sprints every few weeks, it is necessary to have dedicated resources, I often get pushback. "Everyone at my organization," I'm told, "has to work on multiple projects." In some organizations the motto is "we've always done it that way" but we want you to do it faster, which we're going to call Agile. But you need to continue to do things the old way.

There are huge advantages to having a dedicated team, such as time wasted trying to keep track of where we left off another project or dealing with team dynamics that are wildly different from one team to another. It is hard to create a self-organizing team when members float from one team to another. And team members who have been part of a high-performing, self-initiating, and self-motivated team, all of whom do whatever is needed to get the job done, rarely want to return to a more traditional team. This is particularly true when they have to jump back and forth between the two.

### **Does your organization support time boxing each iteration?**

One of the most frequent questions I get asked is "are Agile time boxes fixed," going on to explain that at their company the powers that be keep adding features that extend the number of days in the sprint. In these organizations the time boxes become fluid and it's hard to plan what can get done during the sprint. In order for a team to establish its velocity, that is, how many user stories can get completed during a sprint, it is necessary to have a fixed number of days in each sprint. Organizations insisting on throwing additional features and extending the current sprint may not be ready to take full advantage of Agile projects.

### **Does your organizational culture support just-in-time requirements?**

Some project managers are directly involved in these requirements activities, and some are not. In either case, we have found that it is not uncommon for project managers to underestimate the complexity of business analysis work including elicitation and modeling. We think it important for project managers to understand the risk of not taking the time to use models to elicit requirements.

Regardless of the role doing the work (project manager, business analyst, designer, developer, or whomever), and regardless of the project approach (Waterfall or Agile), the work needs to get done. It might get done by the development team during each iteration on an Agile project, or it might get done during the business analysis phase(s) or a more traditional project, but details of the end product are necessary in order to provide a product that will work for the stakeholders and be one that they want to use. In all cases, this work takes time and needs to be accounted for as the project manager plans the project.

### **So how do PMs justify taking time to model requirements?**

Organizations that have a one-process fits all set of business analysis processes might not be ready for an Agile environment, particularly when those processes have proven burdensome for some projects. I have worked with clients who have proudly showed me their new requirements process. Some of these companies do not differentiate between project types, approaches, and final product, so that the processes for developing software are the same as for new processes, and new product development, marketing campaigns, new bridges, etc., and processes for large projects are the same as for small ones. On the flip side, teams often struggle when organizations don't recognize the importance of requirements, or the role of the business analyst, or why we need any requirements processes at all. In these companies, doing just-in-time requirements means moving straight to design.

Just-in-time requirements mean that requirements for upcoming sprints are defined completely before the beginning current sprint. One clear advantage is that when requirements are "groomed" or defined before each sprint, time is not wasted during the sprint trying to figure out what each user story means. The PO does not need to take time away from the Team to meet separately with other subject matter experts (SMEs) to uncover needs and expectations. That work has already been completed. As I've mentioned in past blogs, who is better to groom the backlog than the BA.

Next, we'll explore other questions that organizations can use to help them decide whether they are ready to make the necessary commitment to ensure the success of agile adoption.

## Part 2: Three Thorny Questions

Part 1 was the first in a series about organizational readiness—ready, that is, to provide resources necessary to succeed in an agile environment. We asked these four questions on our Agile organizational readiness checklist:

1. Will your organization provide a dedicated product owner for each scrum team?
2. Will your organization provide dedicated team members?
3. Does your organization support time boxing each iteration?
4. Does your organizational culture support just-in-time requirements?

In Part 2, we're going to look at Agile organizational readiness from the perspective of false expectations for some organizations that have decided to implement Agile methods.

### **Does your organization support “cowboy” development?**

Some organizations adopt what they call an “agile methodology” as an excuse to eliminate discipline, commitment, and ownership. They have the mistaken belief that a lack of discipline equates to getting the work completed sooner. In some organizations senior leadership decides to adopt “Agile” without understanding what it entails and the commitment that is required to make it work effectively. The term “Agile” becomes an excuse for adopting a chaotic, free-for-all environment. Management in these organizations can boast that they're “doing Agile,” but might not be aware of the frustration such a chaotic environment causes the team.

### **Does your organization expect that eliminating the role of the BA will eliminate documentation?**

I have heard organizational leaders say something to the effect of “we're going Agile so we no longer need a business analyst” or “don't put a BA on this Agile project. BAs will just produce a mountain of unnecessary documentation.” They see business analysis as unnecessary work and the BA as a role whose only goal is to produce a massive requirements specification at the end of one long business analysis phase.

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In reality, the business analyst is a kind of management consultant, someone who acts “as a liaison among stakeholders... to recommend solutions that enable organizations to reach their goals” (BABOK Guide® Version 2.0. As wonderfully articulated by Kevin Brennan of the IIBA, organizations which undertake Agile projects still need help understanding their underlying their business problems and figuring out the best ways to solve them. They still need projects to help them solve those problems. And they still need a role that will focus on the requirements of the end product (solution), ensuring that the end result of the project provides the expected business value.

In other words, the role of the BA is not to produce documentation, but to help ensure that the end product and its associated requirements help the organization reach its goals. In that capacity, every BA is obligated to produce documentation as appropriate to the project at hand.

### Does your organization have realistic expectations of the Scrum Master?

- Does your organization expect the *technical team “leader?”* to be the Scrum Master, providing technical expertise and direction to the delivery team? Having any formal lead role on the Scrum project is problematic. When teams are truly self-organizing as ideally they are on Scrum teams, leaders emerge, rather than being designated.

In addition, any time that the Scrum Master spends focused on the technical aspects of the project and directing the delivery team is time not being spent on facilitating, removing roadblocks, calculating the resource capacity and burn down rate, and generally doing the work that Scrum Masters need to do. There is a reason why on some Agile projects the role is called “coach,” not leader. Finally, the Scrum Master who works as the technical lead is at risk of providing a more a technical rather than a business solution.

- Does your organization expect the *Product Owner* to be the Scrum Master? The Product Owner (PO) is a critical role on an Agile project. It represents the business, making the business decisions required to move forward developing the end product. Last month we addressed the importance of having organizational commitment for a full-time PO because it is a full-time position. When the Scrum Master is doing PO work, the Scrum Master work is not getting done. And the decisions made run the risk of ignoring important technical considerations.

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- Does your organization expect the Scrum Master to play other roles such as *business analyst*? I attended a presentation recently promoting the idea of BA as Scrum Master. The central theme of the presentation was that because both Scrum Masters and business analysts are facilitators, the BA is in the best position to be the Scrum Master. I found the premise intriguing and well-intentioned, but misguided. The facilitation that is required of a Scrum Master is different from that of a BA.

The former focuses on facilitating the team and its ceremonies, the latter facilitating requirements workshops among subject matter experts. And there is vastly more to both roles. It's almost like saying that because an insurance agent, a bank teller, and a city ombudsman all interface with customers, that one could easily step into any of the other roles.

- Does your organization expect the Scrum Master to play *multiple roles*? All but the smallest Agile projects deserve full-time Scrum Masters. Organizations which believe that they can get by “on the cheap” by combining roles on Agile projects may well suffer disappointment in the results that get produced. As on any other project, each will suffer.

There are many more areas that we could cover, but we'll leave it for now in the hopes that you'll add your own ideas and experiences to the topic. Your comments can be posted [here](#).

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