**The Simplification Officers**

# The Simplified Scrum Guide

**The principle based guide to Simplified Scrum**
**The Heart of the Game for Product Development**

**December 2020**

# Purpose of The Simplified Scrum Guide

**Scrum** is a framework for developing, delivering, and sustaining complex products. First developed and used in (software) product development, it has expanded into numerous other domains, not in the least because the world around us is growing more complex every day.

We have been **applying** principle-based Scrum since the late 1990's. We started with a two-pager on Scrum which we accidentally found. Later we used the Scrum Guide by Schwaber and Sutherland.

In our experience we tended to **focus** on the core principles only and beyond that preferred having (some) freedom on the (best/good) practices and experimentation to apply within product development.

With the publication of the 2020 version of the Scrum Guide, we found that it could use a version that aligns more with our experience in the field. So with all due respect for the Scrum Guide, we have – in technical terms – "forked" from it with the aim of providing our view on a hands-on approach to applying Scrum. We call our view Simplified Scrum.

Simplified Scrum is still Scrum, but - well - simplified. The bigger differences in perspective are:
- *We remove as much practices as possible in order to leave room for experimentation*
- *We re-introduce the Development Team concept and abandon the Scrum Team concept, elevating Team to a central element within the framework and its empiricism.*
- *We limit the focus towards product development context to avoid overcomplicating things*
- *We have a slightly higher focus to customers rather than on (other) stakeholders*

We have tried to indicate the deviations from the Scrum Guide with italic text.

This guide contains a definition of Scrum, its values, the team, the events and the artefacts. We look at these all from the perspective of Simplified Scrum.

Each element of the framework serves a specific purpose that is essential to the overall value and results realized with Scrum. Changing the core design or ignoring the principles behind certain elements, from the Simplified Scrum perspective (a) covers up problems and (b) limits the agility of uncovering better ways within Scrum, potentially rendering it useless.

As Scrum is being applied, patterns, processes, and insights that fit the framework as described in the Scrum Guide or in this document, may be discovered, applied and devised. However, their description is beyond the purpose of this guide, exactly because they are context sensitive and differ widely between Scrum uses. We chose to stick to the skeleton of the framework for the purposes of this guide. Experiences and experiments with the framework vary widely and are described elsewhere. We encourage sharing such experiences, especially within the field they were applied. And even beyond that they may prove to be interesting case studies and provide valuable insights.

We want to give a big shout out to Ken Schwaber and Jeff Sutherland for their great work on the original Scrum Guide (in its different versions) and bringing this magnificent framework to the world.

*The Simplification Officers, December 2020*

# Simplified Scrum Definition

Simplified Scrum is a lightweight framework that helps people, teams and organizations generate value through adaptive solutions for complex *products. Simplified Scrum increases the lightweight nature of the framework.*

In a nutshell, Simplified Scrum requires a Scrum Master to foster an environment where:
1. *A Product Owner ensures a possible future of the product is transparent within the Product Backlog.*
2. *The Team collaborates on delivering a high(er) level of transparency on a Product Increment during the Sprint.*
3. *The Team, Product Owner and the customers inspect the results and adjust for the next Sprint.*
4. Repeat

Simplified Scrum is simple. Try it as is and determine if its philosophy, theory and structure help to achieve goals and create value. The *Simplified Scrum Guide* is purposefully incomplete, only defining the parts required to implement *the Heart of Simplified Scrum.* Rather than provide people with detailed instructions, the rules of the *Simplified Scrum Guide* their relationships and interactions.

Various processes, techniques, methods *and experiments* can be employed within the framework. Simplified Scrum wraps around existing practices or renders them unnecessary. Simplified Scrum makes visible the relative efficacy of current management, environment, and work techniques, so that improvements can be made.

*(entire chapter based on the Scrum Definition chapter in the 2020 Scrum Guides)*

# The Heart of Simplified Scrum

*Scrum - from the Simplified Scrum perspective - is founded on empiricism and agility*. **Empiricism** asserts that knowledge comes from experience and making decisions based on what is observed. ***Agility*** *increases the capability to deal with variations, changes and learning in a way that respects people and fosters collaboration.*

Simplified Scrum employs an iterative, incremental approach to optimize *for **shared learning**.* Simplified Scrum engages groups of people who collectively have all the skills and expertise to do the work and share or acquire such skills as needed.

Scrum combines four formal events for inspection and adaptation within a containing event, the Sprint. These events work because they implement the empirical pillars of transparency, inspection, and adaptation. *For simplicity we'll call this "Learning" within the context of Simplified Scrum.*

*(entire chapter based on the Scrum Theory chapter in the 2020 Scrum Guides)*

## Transparency

The emergent process and work must be visible to those performing the work as well as those receiving the work. With Scrum, important decisions are based on the perceived state of its three formal artifacts. Artifacts that have low transparency can lead to decisions that diminish value and increase risk.

Transparency enables inspection. Inspection without transparency is misleading and wasteful.

*(entire chapter based on the Transparency chapter in the [2020 Scrum Guides](#))*

# Inspection

*The Scrum artifacts must be inspected frequently* and diligently to detect potentially undesirable variances or problems. To help with inspection, Simplified Scrum provides cadence in the form of its five events.

Inspection enables adaptation. Inspection without adaptation is considered pointless. Simplified Scrum events are designed to provoke change *and learning*.

*(entire chapter based on the Inspection chapter in the [2020 Scrum Guides](#))*

# Adaptation

*If any aspect deviates outside acceptable limits* or if the resulting product is unacceptable, the process being applied or the materials being produced must be adjusted. The adjustments must be made as soon as possible to minimize further deviation.

Adaptation becomes more difficult when the people involved are not empowered or self-managing. *All involved, in and around the Simplified Scrum, are (a) expected, able and empowered to adapt the moment they learn anything new through inspection.*

*(entire chapter based on the Adaptation chapter in the [2020 Scrum Guides](#))*

# Simplified Scrum Values

Successful use of (Simplified) Scrum depends on people becoming more proficient in living five values:

### *Committed,* Focus, Openness, Respect, and Courage

*All involved people, in and around the Simplified Scrum, commit to do their utmost best to achieve the best possible progress and impact,* and to supporting each other. *All involved* are open about the work and the challenges. *All involved* respect each other to be capable, independent people, and are respected as such by the people with whom they work. *All involved* have the courage to do the right thing, to work on tough problems.

These values give direction to *all involved* with regard to their work, actions, and behavior. The decisions that are made, the steps taken, and the way Simplified Scrum is used should reinforce these values, not diminish or undermine them. *All involved* learn and explore the values as they work with the Simplified Scrum events and artifacts. When these values are embodied by *all involved,* the empirical pillars of transparency, inspection, and adaptation come to life building trust.

*(entire chapter based on the Scrum Values chapter in the [2020 Scrum Guides](#))*

# Team

*The Team consists of professionals who are* **committed** *to creating and sustaining any aspect of a usable, highly transparent Product Increment each Sprint.* Only members of the *Team* create *and sustain the Product* Increment. *Other elements in the Simplified Scrum Guide are there to support the Team in doing a great job and enabling the Heart of Simplified Scrum.*

*Teams* are **structured** and **empowered** by the organization to organize and manage their own work. The resulting synergy optimizes the Team's overall efficiency and effectiveness.

Teams have the following characteristics:
- They are **self-managing**. No one (not even the Scrum Master) tells the team how to *generate high transparency on a Product Increment and do their work*;
- Teams are **cross-functional**, with all the skills as a team necessary *to create and sustain a highly transparent Product Increment*;
- Individual *Team* members may have specialized skills and areas of focus, but accountability belongs to the *Team* as a whole;
- *Teams* **share** *their learning and absorb related changes each day*; and,
- *Teams have continuous* **attention** *to technical excellence and good design which enhances agility (*[Agile Manifesto](#)*).*

*Team members are committed to the Team and its collaboration with the Product Owner and Scrum Masters. Being a Team member is a full time job, members participating in multiple Teams will prevent the entire Team from growing towards a highly effective state.*

*(entire chapter based on the Development Team chapter in the* [2017 Scrum Guides](#)*)*

## Team size

**The optimal *Team* size** is small enough to remain nimble and large enough to complete significant work within a Sprint. Large *Teams* generate too much complexity for an empirical process to be useful. *To remove complexity the Team size is minimized as much as possible taking into account the cognitive constraints of people to acquire a multitude of skills needed to get the work done. The Product Owner and Scrum Master jobs are not included within the Team. Smaller teams are preferred over larger teams, when implicit and structural teams within Team arise one should make this explicit by reducing its formal Team size. The right sized team will increase its member interdependence and the possibility of having shared mental models and increased transactive memory towards effective learning practices.*

*(entire chapter based on the Development Team Size chapter in the* [2017 Scrum Guides](#)*)*

# Product Owner

The Product Owner *is a fulltime job and* is accountable for **maximizing the value of the product** resulting from the work of the *Teams*. How this is done vary widely across organizations, *Teams*, and individuals. *It is their job to understand their customer base and market very well and have an external focus in order to build the right things. Teams have a rather internal focus to build things right, and a Scrum Master helps them to build the right things right.*

The Product Owner is also accountable for effective **Product Backlog management**,
- *Which leads to a high level of transparency and understanding on a possible future; and,*
- *Which provides a high level of focus to the Teams and customers involved in delivering, and learning, what most valuable is at that moment in time.*

The Product Owner may do the above work, *or have the Teams do it*. Regardless, the Product Owner remains accountable.

For the Product Owner to succeed, the entire organization must respect their decisions. These decisions are *visible in the content and focus within the Product Backlog, and through the transparency of the Product Increment* at the Sprint Review. Those wanting to change the Product Backlog can do so by trying to convince the Product Owner.

*(entire chapter based on the Product Owner chapter in the 2020 Scrum Guides)*

# Scrum Master

The Scrum Master *is a full time job and* is accountable for establishing *(Simplified) Scrum* as defined in this *Guide. Being committed to Simplified Scrum's inherent nudge at* **continuous experimentation and learning**. They do this by helping everyone *in- and outside the organization* understand (Simplified) Scrum.

The Scrum Master is accountable for the *overall* effectiveness *of (Simplified) Scrum within the context of the organization and its customers.* They do this by enabling *all involved* to improve *their* practices, within the *(Simplified) Scrum Guide*.

Scrum Masters are *facilitative and servant leaders for the larger organization*.

The Scrum Masters *lead* in several ways, including:
- *Mentoring and coaching all involved to flourish within Simplified Scrum and its* **learning heart***;*
- *Helping all involved on creating a* **high level of transparency** *on the Simplified Scrum artifacts;*
- *Facilitate growth in effectiveness of related learning events (***inspect + adapt***);*
- Ensuring that all Simplified Scrum events take place and are **positive, productive**, and kept within the timebox.

*(entire chapter based on the Product Owner chapter in the 2020 Scrum Guides)*

# Simplified Scrum Events

The Sprint is a container for all other events. Each event in Simplified Scrum is a formal opportunity to inspect and adapt Simplified Scrum artifacts. These events are specifically designed to enable the transparency required. Failure to operate any events as prescribed results in lost opportunities to inspect and adapt *(learn).* Events are used in Simplified Scrum to create regularity and to minimize the need for meetings not defined in Simplified Scrum. Optimally, all events are held at the same time and place to reduce complexity.

*(entire chapter based on the Scrum Events chapter in the 2020 Scrum Guides)*

# The Sprint

Sprints are the heartbeat of (Simplified) Scrum, where ideas are turned into value.

They are **fixed length** events of one month or less to create consistency. A new Sprint starts immediately after the conclusion of the previous Sprint. *All the other events,* Sprint Planning, Daily Scrums, Sprint Review and Sprint Retrospectives, happen **within** Sprints.

*Sprints ensure **learning** at least at the pace of the heartbeat in place. When a Sprint is too long the acquired learning will possibly bring too much rework,* complexity may rise, and risk may increase*. As a result all involved will have a tendency to overly structure and analyse incoming work trying to avoid the learning required to build the right things right.* Shorter Sprints can be employed to generate more learning cycles and limit risk of cost and effort to a smaller time frame. Each Sprint may be considered a short *and significant impactful experiment towards learning more how to maximize value in the future, next Sprint.* In complex environments, what will happen is unknown. Only what has already happened may be used for forward-looking decision making.

*(entire chapter based on the Sprint chapter in the [2020 Scrum Guides](#))*

# Sprint Planning

Sprint Planning initiates the Sprint by *zooming in and focussing on the most significant impact the Teams want to achieve in relation to the Product Owner's wish. Selecting the related items from the Product Backlog and zooming in on those to generate an initial high level of transparency of the work to engage in within the Sprint. The outcome is created by the collaborative work of the entire Team with support of their Product Owner, and is called the Sprint Backlog.* The Team may also invite other people to attend Sprint Planning to provide advice.

*The **question** to ask here is "Does this result provide the highest level of transparency possible for us to truly collaborate and share our learnings on a day-to-day basis?". If not, experiment and uncover better ways by doing and helping others do it.*

*After Sprint Planning the Teams and Product Owner are **aligned** on the impact of, the why, this Sprint is valuable to their customers. Teams have an initial idea of what and how to achieve this and created a basis for daily, shared Team learning.*

Sprint Planning is **timeboxed** to *about* eight hours for a one-month Sprint. For shorter Sprints, the event is usually shorter.

*(entire chapter based on the Sprint Planning chapter in the [2020 Scrum Guides](#))*

# Daily Scrum

The purpose of the Daily Scrum is *to **share the learnings acquired** and adapt the Sprint Backlog as necessary*, *adding more details to foster collaboration, removing details that became obsolete and redirecting towards the significant impact set forward. The purpose is to absorb the learning on the work level. A high level of transparency on all the ongoing activities and shared details of the things to accomplish improves Team collaboration and self-management.*

Daily Scrums improve communications, identify impediments, promote quick decision-making, and consequently eliminate the need for other meetings.

The Daily Scrum is not the only time the Team is allowed to adjust their plan. *Team members often collaborate throughout the day, more detailed discussions on their challenges, adapting and changing their Sprint Backlog accordingly. The Daily Scrum is a more formal event to share the learning from their collaboration to the entire Team.*

The Daily Scrum is a **15-minute** event for the *Team*. To reduce complexity, it is held at the same time and place every working day of the Sprint.

*(entire chapter based on the Daily Scrum chapter in the [2020 Scrum Guides](#))*

# Sprint Review

The purpose of the Sprint Review is to inspect the outcome of the Sprint and determine future adaptations. *One could say the purpose is to absorb the **learning on product level**.*

During the event, *all involved* review what was **accomplished** in the Sprint and what has changed in their environment. Based on this *transparent* information, attendees collaborate on what to do next. The Product Backlog may also be adjusted to meet new opportunities. The Sprint Review is a working session and *all involved* should avoid limiting it to a presentation.

The Sprint Review is the second to last event of the Sprint and is **timeboxed** to *about* four hours for a one-month Sprint. For shorter Sprints, the event is usually shorter.

*(entire chapter based on the Sprint Review chapter in the [2020 Scrum Guides](#))*

# Sprint Retrospective

The purpose of the Sprint Retrospective is *to absorb **learning on the level of collaboration** within the Team and its larger organization. Continuously looking for new experiments to uncover better ways to increase quality and effectiveness.*

*The Team **challenges** itself and possibly others to continuously learn and find better ways to collaborate and generate qualitative impact towards their customers. The Scrum Master helps to bring the right level of transparency to the Teams to support the Team having a focus on the most impactful domain to engage in. Experiments resulting from the Sprint Retrospective are added to the Sprint Backlog as they contribute to a higher level of transparency on the ongoing activities of the Teams within their Sprint.*

Although experiments and improvements may be implemented at any time, the Sprint Retrospective provides a forma opportunity to focus on inspection and adaptation. *(copy from [2017 Scrum Guides](#))*

The Sprint Retrospective concludes the Sprint. It is **timeboxed** to *about* three hours for a one-month Sprint. For shorter Sprints, the event is usually shorter.

*(entire chapter based on the Sprint Retrospective chapter in the [2020 Scrum Guides](#))*

# Simplified Scrum Artifacts

Simplified Scrum's artifacts represent work or value. They are designed to maximize transparency of key information. Thus, everyone inspecting them has the same basis for adaptation *(learning)*.

*One could keep asking the* **question** *"is this the highest level of transparency we can provide within <artifact name>?". If not, experiment and uncover better ways by doing and helping others do it.*

*(entire chapter based on the Scrum Artifacts chapter in the [2020 Scrum Guides](#))*

## Product Backlog

*The Product Backlog provides the highest level of* **transparency on the possible future of the product.**

*Only near term implementations and experimentation have a higher level of transparency and thus details available.* They usually acquire this degree of transparency after refining activities *(= clarification)* by the Teams and their customers. Refinement *is an ongoing activity to add details* about a possible approach to generate impact to customers and within the market. Refinement activities do take into account the transparency given within the Product Backlog and the learnings achieved in previous Sprints.

*The Product Backlog is continuously being adapted according to the learning achieved by delivering a working product into the market. Validating assumptions and hypotheses along the way.*

*Multiple Teams often work together on the same product. One Product Backlog is used to describe the possible future of the product. One Product Owner is accountable to maximize the product value and drive focus through that single Product Backlog.*

*(entire chapter based on the Product Backlog chapter in the [2020 Scrum Guides](#))*

## Sprint Backlog

*The Sprint Backlog provides the highest level of* **transparency on the ongoing work within the Sprint.**

The Sprint Backlog provides transparency by and for the *Team*. It is a highly visible, real-time picture of the work *the Team is engaged in. Being committed to provide an impactful change towards their customers and market.* Consequently, the Sprint Backlog is updated throughout the Sprint as more is learned. It should have enough detail that the Team can inspect, *adapt and learn how to self-manage and collaborate to drive impact forward.*

*To reduce complexity and coordination overhead, a single Sprint Backlog is owned by a single Team. Even when multiple Teams collaborate on a single Product Backlog.*

*(entire chapter based on the Sprint Backlog chapter in the [2020 Scrum Guides](#))*

## Product Increment

*A Product Increment provides the highest level of* **transparency on "what is" from a product perspective.**

Each Product Increment is additive to all prior increments and thoroughly *integrated within the product.* Multiple increments may be created within a Sprint, the sum of the increments is used at the Sprint Review thus supporting empiricism. However, a Product Increment may be delivered to *customers* prior to the end of the Sprint. *Low technical quality of a Product Increment will lead to a low level of transparency and less effective learning.*
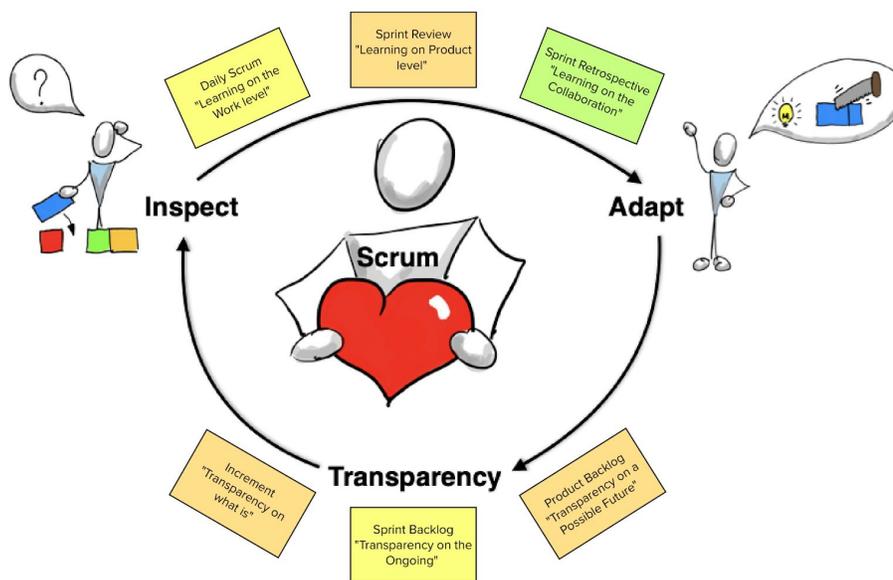
*(entire chapter based on the Increment chapter in the 2020 Scrum Guides)*

# End Note

Simplified Scrum is free and offered in this *guide. The Simplified Scrum framework,* as outlined herein, is immutable. While implementing only parts is possible, the result is not *Simplified* Scrum. *Simplified* Scrum exists only in its entirety and functions well as a container for other techniques, methodologies, and practices. *As such enabling all to uncover better ways and help others to do it (Agile Manifesto).*

*(entire chapter based on the End Note chapter in the 2020 Scrum Guides)*

# Graphic representation