IMPLEMENTING SCRUM

GUIDE

PART 4 of 5: OVERCOMING COMMON HURDLES

axosoft

OVERCOMING COMMON HURDLES IN IMPLEMENTING SCRUM

As with any large, organizational change, implementing Scrum will have its challenges. While there may be some issues that are specific to your organization, plenty more are consistent across all transformations. That's why it's important to understand the common challenges, common causes, and common solutions.

Issue 1: You haven't clearly identified the problems you want to solve.

In some cases, adopting organizations have fundamental issues Scrum can't fix. Most often these obstacles manifest as software delivery-related problems, but the root cause can lie elsewhere.

In these situations, Scrum will still help highlight bottle-necks and process roadblocks, but teams that want to be successful must find their core dysfunctions and resolve them first. Remember: Crap in, crap out. If you start with a fractured company, you won't get the results you want with Scrum.

The Solution: Try to identify any underlying problems before adopting Scrum. This will clarify the organization's focus and prime your team to tackle these obstacles with Scrum. During the training process you should also make it clear that Scrum is not going to fix things, in fact, it will probably expose more issues.

Issue 2: You have unrealistic expectations.

Your team isn't looking for a new process because of circumstances that were created overnight, so don't expect resolutions overnight either. Though it's natural to seek immediate affirmation, try not to skip crucial, inter-mediary steps in an attempt to create faster results. After all, the primary goal of implementation should be constant development and learning that reinforces key Scrum concepts. That being said, organizations that learn the fastest, adapt the fastest; and create their own market advantage.

The Solution: Know what you're in for. Teams must over-come a significant learning curve when they begin the transition, so make sure to set reasonable expectations up-front for your team, your execs, and even yourself.

To do this, try discussing your situation with other busi-nesses that have successfully implemented Scrum, and consult your Scrum coach regularly. Then, allow your team to learn this new way of working by providing the time and space necessary to adopt foreign processes.

UNREALISTIC

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DON'T EXPECT TO GET THE RESULTS YOU WANT WITHOUT PUTTING IN THE WORK.

Issue 3: You lack a definitive strategy and vision.

The Scrum framework will not help your organization achieve its goals if you don't have a clear vision or strategy. Without those crucial components to guide the team, your adoption attempt will be an exercise in frustration and probably deemed a failure.

The Solution: Determine your vision and strategy beforehand. These two elements are essential to the success of your Scrum implementation because they remind the team why they're making these changes, what the long-term goals are, and how to judge their success.
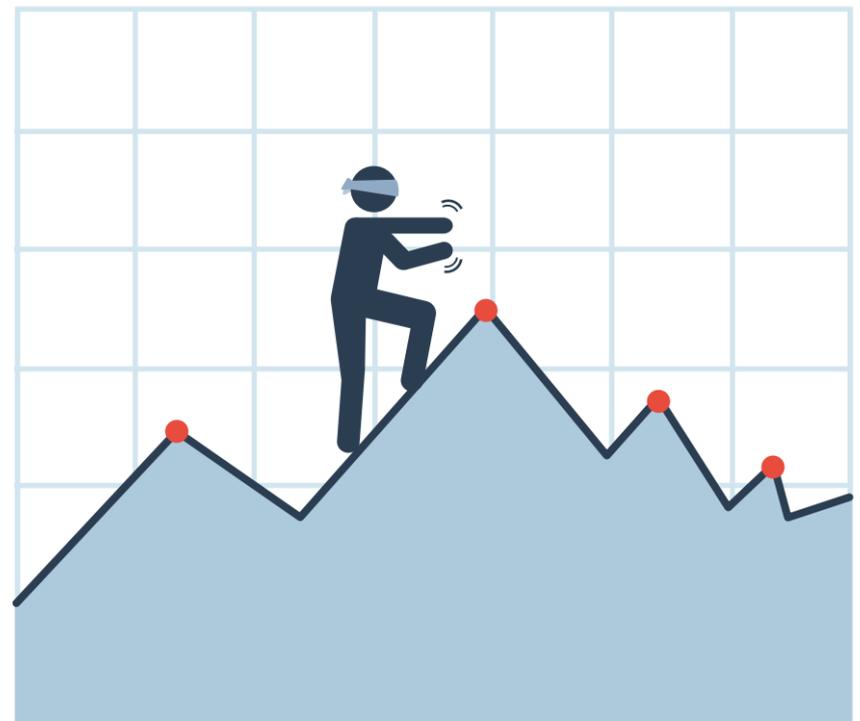
Issue 4: Your leadership isn't supportive.

Maybe executive management can't justify an investment in "some new project management trend." Perhaps they don't want to upheave the existing structure. No matter the reason, it's hard to get people excited about the sweeping changes Scrum requires. Despite the difficulties, this will be a necessary fight for teams that are passionate about making agile a part of their organization.

The Solution: Instead of framing Scrum as a process change, frame it as a culture change. Executives are more likely to become Scrum evangelists when it's tied to an initiative they usually champion. Fostering the necessary leadership support will take time and generate a number of ongoing discussions, but it's at the core of a smooth transition.

Issue 5: You're not willing to change.

It's easy for companies to slip back into old ways when process philosophies have been treated like a flavor-of-the-month, and teams see few results. These frustrations can make organizations reticent for change, but in the technology industry stagnation means extinction.

The Solution: You wouldn't be considering Scrum if change wasn't needed; and improvement is, inherently, change. In order to improve, you have to be willing to change. If you are not willing to change, then you can't improve. Accepting this truth will go a long way when your team hits roadblocks and issues come up.
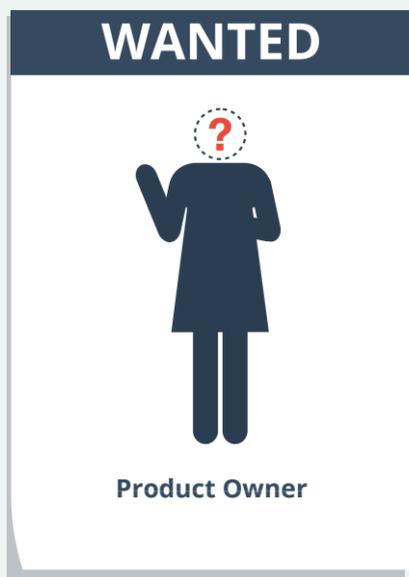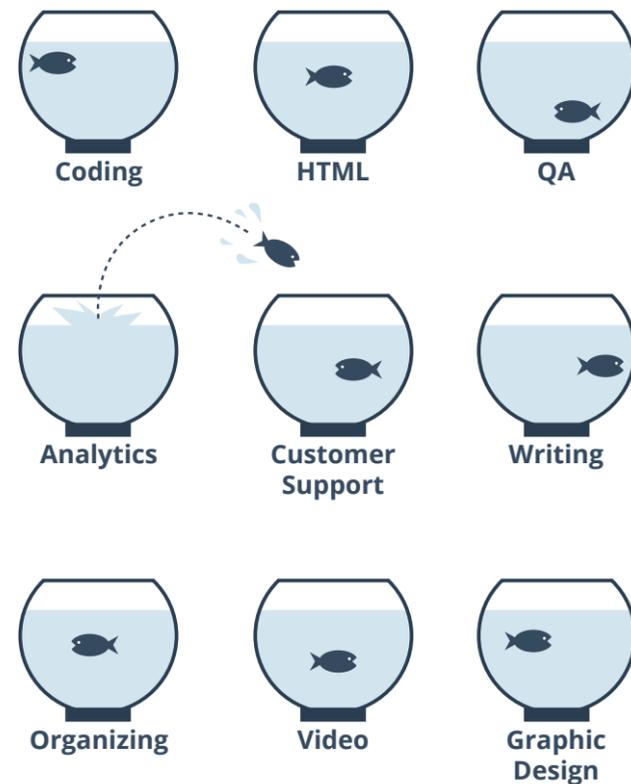
Issue 6: Your teams are siloed, and don't want to work cross-functionally.

Everyone has pride in their area of expertise, and no one wants to go back to the drawing board to learn "unnecessary" skills. Even so, Scrum adoption relies heavily on cross-functionality, and this is a mental obstacle that your team will have to overcome.

The Solution: It all comes down to how your team communicates. If communication is based on hand-offs and documentation, there will be ongoing productivity issues; but teams that work cooperatively (even with members who still have a deep area of expertise) as a cross-functional unit, increase throughput.

That's why you need to highlight the way cross-functional teams eliminate roadblocks when they help each other with tasks outside their job descriptions. Feel free to showcase companies that have successfully implemented Scrum, and emphasize team members who became more valuable assets to the organization as they learned additional skills. You can also use cross-training as an inexpensive form of professional development and risk mitigation.

Coding **HTML** **QA**

Analytics **Customer Support** **Writing**

Organizing **Video** **Graphic Design**

WANTED

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Product Owner

Issue 7: There's no product owner.

The product owner is arguably the most important role in the Scrum framework. However, many companies see Scrum as a software development methodology and fail to incorporate business elements into the process— a mistake that can cause serious problems. If your team lacks this critical role, the gap will prevent a successful adoption.

The Solution: Choose a product owner. Your product owner is a project's key stakeholder and he or she will be in charge of communicating the product vision to the team. This person is also responsible for prioritizing the team's workload, so stakeholder value is always at the forefront.

Issue 8: You have no patience.

This goes back to #2 on our list. Expectations manage patience, so if you want it done NOW, your expectations are out of whack. Be honest here: If you became accustomed to past projects taking longer than they should, why would you expect Scrum to be an instant cure? When your projects start finishing on time it will be new and exciting, but you've got to give the process time to work.

The Solution: Invest in the resources to have your team properly trained, so they can adapt more quickly. Even the most successful and aggressive companies have about a one-year learning curve before they've fully adopted Scrum. Organizations that expect drastic change overnight can also expect to be disappointed. Patience is a necessary ingredient for a successful transition.

Issue 9: You want to do it all yourself.

We all know it's tough to learn something new without guidance, so why do companies often introduce this transformational framework without investing in training resources? Too many unfortunate project managers have been asked to begin the Scrum transition only armed with Google results and forum posts.

The Solution: The most successful Scrum adoption combines training, coaching, and a relentless pursuit of improvement (kaizen). Untrained teams can struggle with adoption for years before finally giving up or accepting lackluster results. On the other hand, plenty of transformations have been kick-started in a few months thanks to a small cadre of on-site coaches who interact with the whole team.

Help your leadership understand that hiring a coach isn't failure. Instead, it lets your team get an outsider's viewpoint and discover your blind spots. After all, "it takes a village," and you *shouldn't* try to implement Scrum on your own.
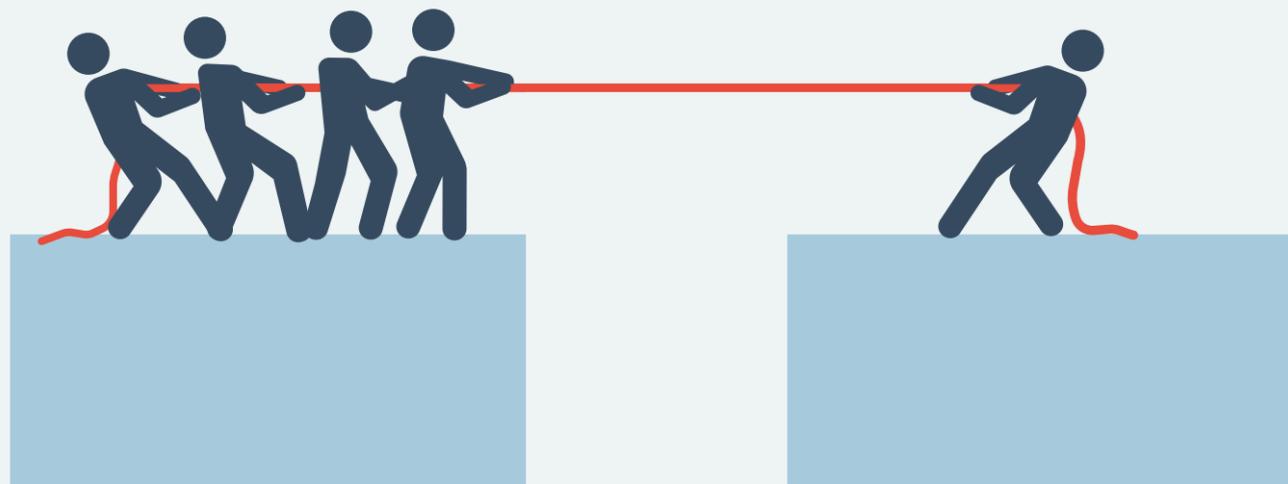
HERE ARE SOME TAKEAWAYS

#1- Figure out where your company's problems lie *before* adopting Scrum.

#2- Set reasonable expectations up-front for your team, your execs, and yourself.

#3- Determine your vision and strategy beforehand to remind the team why they're making these changes.

#4- Help your team learn this new work style by providing the time and space necessary to adopt foreign processes.

#5- Frame Scrum as a "culture shift" to make evangelists of the executive team.

#6- Accept that you and your team will need to change in order to improve.

#7- Choose a product owner who can prioritize the team's workload, so stakeholder value is always at the forefront.

#8- Invest the resources to have your team properly trained, and be patient with the process.

#9- Enlist help and don't try to go it alone!