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Scrum at Scale: The End of One-Size-Fits-All Scaling

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Post-webinar Q&A

Answers from Alex Brown:

1. How does Scrum at Scale go beyond basic-level planning?

   A: This is probably a broader topic than a quick Q&A, but one example of a very high-end planning practice I have helped companies implement is to quickly calculate business value for each major feature. This allows them to order the backlog by expected return on investment, and burn down expected dollars as well as points.

2. Do you think Scrum at Scale requires the role of a Project Manager?

   A: Scrum at Scale does not explicitly require a project manager role, and I have seen many companies successfully scale their operations without a dedicated Project Manager. The Project Manager is, however, one practice that can work with Scrum At Scale to support the Prioritization, Backlog Decomposition, Release Planning, and Release Management modules

3. How does Scrum at Scale compare with Nexus and Nexus+ from Scrum, Inc.?

   A: I am not familiar with this methodology. However, given that I initially developed Scrum at Scale while working with the team at Scrum Inc., I would hazard to guess that they are very similar…though I am sure their thinking has continued to evolve in the same way mine has.

4. Can you also compare Scum at Scale with DAD?

   A: I generally think of DAD as an inventory of scaling practices. (though I confess it is some time since I last checked in on it) In that sense, it works as one "pattern library" of potential practices that could be used to meet module definitions.

5. If an organization is being "managed" with PMI practices, how can the Product Owner cycle work around, with, or in spite of project management principles?

A: This is quite a broad question and probably beyond the scope of quick Q&A. It is an interesting question, though, and I am happy to discuss as a follow-up.

6. I think it will also help to explain the difference between what people think of as "Enterprise Scrum" and what is typically considered "Scrum Scaling". Most people do think they are two different things [as do I]

   A: Good point. “Enterprise Scrum” as defined by Mike Beedle combines elements of all three of the growth dimensions we discussed at the beginning of the webinar: scale, distribution, and saturation into an organization that has Scrum permeate the whole organization. Great concepts, but I find it easier to manage the transition by dividing and incrementally conquering each dimension.

7. Why is this framework called a Modular Framework?

   A: We call it a modular framework because it is composed of individual independent functional modules with defined “contracts” between the modules that govern how they interact. Like good modular software architecture, designing in modules allows much more flexibility to grow and update without needing to refactor the architecture.

8. How does the modular approach bring clarity of end delivery dates? How does it fit in with continuous delivery?

   A: Modularity itself doesn’t improve these topics, but the “Release Planning” module is responsible for maintaining clarity on the current status and burn down of planned work. (if you are using a fixed deadline delivery practice) Similarly, continuous delivery and integration and practices associated with the “Team-level process” and “Release management” modules.

9. Where can I read more about the modules and their implementation?

   A: The materials from this webinar, plus a workbook used in the class I teach on this topic are available for download at www.Reconstrategy.com. Also keep an eye out there and on my LinkedIn page for planned posts on this topic and companies that are using it. Also, a few older webinars that go into more detail on specific modules are available at the Scrum Inc. website. The downside of eschewing a major commercial approach (see Q23) is that it slows the dissemination of published material. ;-)

10. What about backlog creation? Shouldn’t it be present in the arrow between strategic vision and team level process?

A: Backlog creation and maintenance is a product of three different modules that cover the major required activities: Prioritization, Refinement, and Planning. The reason there is a mini-iteration loop around these three modules is because they must be tightly integrated to deliver an effective backlog.

11. How and where are the PSI's across teams pulled together?

    A: Integrating, final testing, and delivery of the Potentially Shippable Increments (PSI) produced by each individual team is considered part of the "Release Management" module.

12. Where do engineering practices akin to XP fit into this framework?

    A: XP and other engineering practices tend to be more specific to software development (though they do have corollaries in other creative domains) So like using XP practices with team-level Scrum, we would consider them team norms that have explicitly not been required by this framework. However, an organizational decision to use them consistently across teams would fall under "Cross team coordination."

13. My organization follows Scrum with Less implemented throughout. Our client works on a MSP model. They wish to move towards LESS and Agile. Please could you advise on the starting point?

    A: I would be happy to, but that decision is going to be very specific to the operating model, context, competitive environment, and current status of your agile implementation, so it is probably best covered in a separate conversation.

14. Are there established "pattern libraries" available for review?

    A: Unfortunately, there is not yet one centralized pattern library. DAD has aspects of a pattern library; I have been capturing and cataloguing patterns; and you can easily mine other scaling methodologies for their implied patterns. I am hoping to create a resource like this soon, so if anyone is interested in getting involved, please let me know.

15. Can you comment on LeSS - Large Scale Scrum?

    A: Listen to the discussion in the webinar of this question.

16. Thinking aloud: so we could have teams not using Scrum too in this framework?

    A: Yes. You can have multiple different patterns for “Team level process” at the same time, though you might need to “wrap” these practices in other activities that ensure they meet the module inputs and outputs so they connect with other modules that touch “Team level Process,” such as “Release Planning”, “Release Management” and “Cross Team coordination.”

17. How would the framework adapt to Kanban teams rather than Scrum?

    A: You could substitute Kanban for Scrum as the “Team level process” practice and the other modules would still work. Kanban teams tend not to emphasize “Prioritization” or “Release planning,” but you can still choose to use these modules with Kanban teams.

18. How is Scrum at Scale work with other proposed methodologies like SAFe especially when SAFe talks about Agile Release Trains?

    A: Listen to the discussion about this in the webinar. This was covered there.

19. Can you please give examples where SAFe might not be useful?

    A: Potentially a long and nuanced discussion. At a high level, SAFe tends to limit companies as they move towards higher levels of agile saturation because: 1) it does not change the traditional management/leadership elements of the organization; 2) The release train can be too slow and cumbersome for companies that are capable of moving faster; and 3) it lacks an explicit feedback loop for using customer/market feedback to refine the organization’s strategy.

20. In an elevator conversation (i.e. 30 seconds or less), how would you define Scrum of Scale?

    A: Scrum at Scale is a deliberately-minimalist framework to help companies talk about and implement agile practices across many teams in a way that is uniquely tailored to their organizational context.

21. As part of release planning in Scrum at Scale, does scope-based vs. date-based release play into the strategic vision at all? At my company we are always at odds during planning as to whether we are going to be scope based, date based, both (?!?!) or something in between.

    A: Yes. Deadline driven, Release train, and value accumulation are the three most common practices for the “Release management” module, and they also affect how the organization plans its releases. This should be an explicit decision based on the organization's context, current capabilities, and vision.

22. Do you provide any certification for your methodology similar to SAFe and LeSS?

    A: I have been deliberately trying to avoid the more "commercial" aspects of other scaling methodologies since I believe they distort what ought be an open conversation about what WE as a community need to do to be successful with Scrum in large organizations. It also strikes me as hypocritical to offer specific certification in a framework whose central principle is that we should constantly experiment to find what works best in our unique context. That said, for people who like collecting certifications, the Scrum at Scale framework meets the criteria for the Scrum Alliance's "Scaling Scrum Fundamentals" Added Qualifications, and I am hoping to have the class I teach approved for this certification soon. Other CSTs are also welcome to use the framework and curriculum in their training. The ultimate goal is to improve the level of conversation about scaling.

23. As you brought up the "Tension" subject, in my perspective "Scrum of Scrums" seems to be an "I/ we don't have time for that meeting - to - sending the weakest link, just to attend". So either way, it appears to become a hassle. What are your recommendations?

    A: Scrum-of-Scrums is one very common practice as part of the "Cross Team Coordination" module. It sounds like teams don't feel like this practice is adding much value for them at the moment…hence the under-resourcing. I would experiment with a different cross-team coordination practice or just eliminate Scrum-of-Scrums and see if people miss it. (and it surfaces again as an impediment)

24. How do we learn more about this modular approach?

    A: Please see question 9 regarding other reading options. I also teach one and two-day classes that go into much more depth on the modules and different practices to meet them. Historically, these have been private classes for an individual company so we can dig deeply into their specific context, but I will be experimenting with public classes soon. Stay tuned.

25. How can I best monitor and present the progress status of a large Agile project without resorting to a MS Project plan of hundreds of lines?

    A: The framework supports a number of different reporting styles, but personally I have always been a fan of using team backlogs to maintain transparency about what each team is working on, and a stacked burndown across teams to forecast when specific functionality is expected to be delivered. Since they are linked to the team's actual tools, they require no additional effort to maintain.

26. How could a product owner role be applied in a sales business unit? Similar application as your statement that the CEO's product is the company?

    A: We have implemented Scrum in sales organizations before. We created a user story for moving each lead through each step of the sales process, and the whole team was collectively responsible for completing as much backlog as possible in each Sprint. In this world, the PO is responsible for defining the stories, and prioritizing the most valuable lead/step combinations to pursue next. (Usually with input from the team)

27. How can you have short iterations if teams are still organized as waterfall? The cycles are necessarily longer

    A: The iteration cadence does tend to be longer for "waterfall" teams and requires explicit intermediate deadlines (which they often miss) for the waterfall teams to deliver inputs needed by the agile teams.

28. Why are customers/users not an integral part of the framework but are outside the circle?

    A: The customer shown on the module diagram <u>is</u> an integral part of the process…they are the end destination of everything the system is designed to deliver. That said, the customer icon is <u>not</u> the only place where the customer can be involved in a scaled Scrum. I have worked with many companies that directly involve customers in most of the modules of the Product Owner Cycle. This might or might not make sense for you given your organization's context.

29. The Agile Manifesto & Principles specifically mentions software just often enough to provide an excuse for people outside of software development to avoid Agile or Scrum. The Marketing Agile Manifesto & Principles extends the concepts to knowledge work. Can things like this help extend Agile across organizations?

    A: This was discussed in the webinar. Please listen to the discussion on this question in the webinar.

30. Do you have to deploy all the modules in the framework at once or can the modules be deployed sequentially?

    A: No, that is the beauty of a modular approach. You can prioritize which modules are the most valuable to deploy first and start with those and work sequentially. You can even try several iterations of one important module before moving on to another.

31. Scrum boards seem to be related to the development team (tester and development), but should this also include the tasks for the BA?

    A: This can be a much more involved question because I have seen BAs used in many different ways in Scrum. (member of team, part of PO team, shared resource across teams, no BA) Happy to follow-up offline.

32. Are there any core components that should be adhered to or is it truly "anything" goes in terms of setting up practices within scrum at scale?

    A: The one core requirement (more of an inherent truth) is that an organization has some practice for each of the modules, even if that is “what we are doing now” or “ad hoc.” Other than that, the objective is to experiment. Some practices will unambiguously work well and others won’t. I don’t believe it is intellectually honest to decide on “cookie cutter” rules that must apply in new work contexts we can’t possibly foresee at this point.

33. What about individual contributors?

    A: I suppose you could use “Individual contributor” as one practice in the “team level process” and still benefit from the other modules designed to support teams of contributors. Another way to think of it is as a Scrum team of one.

34. Can you elaborate how you can use more sequential planning similar to Waterfall and deliver a project using Agile Scrum to realize benefits of Agile?

    A: In most contexts I have seen, if you plan sequentially and don’t revisit your planning on a regular cadence, you can’t realize the full learning and adaptability benefits of agile. In practice, improving planning and backlog refinement tends to follow pretty quickly as priorities for an agile team process.

35. For organizations that are in transition from a traditional PPM approach, what process/steps would your recommend to focus during their incremental maturity?

    A: Again, this is a very context specific question. Happy to follow-up offline.

36. Scenario-based strategy is an old concept. What does it have to do with scaling scrum?

A: Scenario-based planning has been around for 15+ years, in the same way Scrum has been around for more than 2 decades, but it forms the basic foundation of hypothesis-driven strategy, including as defined in Lean Startup. Yet despite how eloquently Eric Reese presents the case for hypothesis-driven strategy, it is still often overlooked by the agile community. Given the majority of webinar attendees worried about a disconnect between organizational leadership and teams and felt the Product Ownership Cycle needs significant improvement, it seems there is value to revisiting “old” concepts to see what they can teach us about how to improve