

## Encourage & Fire

Many times, I get into conversation of “Where not to use Scrum.” There seems a common belief and some level of agreement amongst Scrum practitioners about where not to use Scrum from product perspective – Scrum is best suited when “Certainty is High and Agreement is Low” or when “Certainty is low and Agreement is High”. If both Certainty and Agreement are High (Defined process) or if both are Low (Chaos), Scrum may not be a good choice. I agree with this and also believe that Scrum can bring the team into a more manageable place from a chaotic place of Low Certainty and Low Agreement.

About 3-4 months ago, I was talking to my professional friend Sam, which got me thinking if there were other indicators of “Where not to use Scrum.” We were at a coffee shop, catching up on what we were doing, what we were learning, where were we headed professionally, what was exciting.

“I am in a very interesting place. I have learnt when not to use Scrum from a very different perspective,” he smiled as he said that.

I figured he was not happy with where he was and what he was doing, but a positive person that he was, he was seeing a learning opportunity even in an adverse situation. “I am sorry to hear that Sam, let me know if there is anything I can do.”

“Actually, this might be an interesting Blog for you to write,” He responded and continued, “Here is the challenge. I am working in a group of about 100+ people. The management team of 7-8, has mastered the art of hierarchical management. While they say the right things, the moment one individual starts getting a lot of appreciation across multiple teams, the management team starts demoralizing that person, to keep him/her ‘in check.’ There is complacency in the organization and while their ways of working do not bring them success, they continue to work that way.”

“Wow,” I exclaimed, “I thought these were a thing of the past.”

Sam quickly added, “Not so much. Hierarchy is well and alive. The complacency is so in-built within the management team as well as their ‘favorites’ that anyone who tries to improve the process, suggests a different way of doing things, suggests automation, wants to bring more efficiency, soon becomes an eye sore.”

“I am sure the team will not survive for long. The industry is changing too rapidly for such behaviors to foster. If they do not change, their products will suffer, and they will lose their market share,” I said with concern and surety.



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“That is another problem. The head of this group has learnt to play the budgeting game as well, and manages to maintain the budget allocation year-over-year, by placing blame on other groups within the organization.”

Sam continued after sipping his coffee, “Now think about me going in there and trying to make the organization Agile and implement Scrum. Do you think Scrum should be used here? While I am doing my best, I know it will not happen unless there is a cultural change across all levels. Till such time I will not get anywhere, since they will not encourage me and they will not fire me. They will not encourage me, because they don’t want to change. They will not fire me, because they want to show, that they are open to change.”

I am now blogging about this conversation, with Sam’s permission, since he has moved to a team that is culturally more conducive to Scrum. My coffee with Sam that day was very enlightening. If the culture of the group is so opposed to change, new ways of doing things, is hierarchical, believes in punishment for ‘bad behavior’, then it is far from adopting Scrum. Such groups may use Scrum terminology, even pretend to have empowered Scrum roles, hold Scrum meetings, create Scrum artifacts, but they will never benefit from it, and it will be Scrum for name-sake. The underlying reason is something I am very passionate about – Scrum Values. Scrum Values are about culture of the organization, are about mind-set change, about how people should change when they adopt Scrum – they should be Open-minded, they should be open to change, they should be focused, they should be committed to the success of the team and of the product, they should be courageous and they should respect each other. Without these values and realization of these values, Scrum adoption might end up being a lifeless collection of Scrum-terminology, as with Sam’s previous group.

Thoughts?

