

Scrum Master Role is Easy!!

When I was coaching at Coaches Clinic at San Diego Global Scrum Gathering in April 2017, one of the attendees who stopped by was there with her Scrum Master husband. She expressed a desire to become a Scrum Master too and wanted some guidance to navigate the organization and transition from QAE to Scrum Master.

Every action or decision usually has a motivation or inspiration. So I asked her what her motivation was? Her answer was intriguing, "It is because Scrum Master job is easy."

Having been a Scrum Master for several years and having led 4 large and many small Agile transformations, I have come to appreciate the Scrum Master role more than anything else. Depending on the organizational setup, organizational maturity and Scrum maturity the Scrum Master role can be very challenging. Even if organization is conducive of Scrum, the role is challenging.

My very first reaction to her comment was surprise, followed by defensiveness, followed by a need to find more about her understanding of the role, as well as her current organizational setup. I am sure she saw the element of surprise on my face, but I managed to hide the rest of the emotional thought-process, and asked, "Why do you think the job is easy?"

"In QA, I am always at the tail-end trying to get some testing done in a short amount of time. There is a lot of pressure and I have to keep learning new things continuously. I want an easy job, when I am not always working hard and learning. As a Scrum Master all you have to do is schedule meetings, take and send meeting minutes, ask everyone for a status, create beautiful charts for your management...."

I get impatient when people think other jobs are easier than theirs, and interrupted her, "Have you read the Scrum Guide?" "Yes." "What does it say about Scrum Master?" It says, "Schedule meetings, train, coach....," she responded. "Do you remember anything about being a 'servant-leader'?" "Yes, you serve the team and you lead the team," she responded. "Servant-leadership means that you lead the team by serving the team. You have no direct authority. You remove impediments for your team - big and small, help the team move faster, and thus you serve the team. Have you read anything about protecting the team?" "I don't remember." "It is a key responsibility of a Scrum Master to protect the team. It is not an easy job. Especially, when it comes to protecting the team from management and stakeholders. It is a very challenging role. It can also get stressful at times."

At this point her husband stepped in, "That's exactly what I have been telling her. It is not an easy job." After some additional coaching and a recommendation to read more about Scrum Master role and get a CSM certification and then determine if she still wants to be a Scrum Master, she left.

But this conversation got me thinking. In many organizations, Scrum Master role is just that - schedule



meeting, create reports, update status, and track progress. It is yet another version of incapacitated Project Manager's role. The reasons for that are very deep rooted. Scrum has found its way primarily in software. In most of the software start-ups, a role like Project managers, Build Engineers, Scrum Masters, are considered an overhead. The founder typically is the Product Owner, and sometimes even the developer. In mid-to-large organizations, it is a mixed bag, especially for Scrum. In some cases, Developers want to try Scrum in some cases, it is management. There are very few organizations who completely and successfully embrace Scrum by changing the mind-set and culture. So the general trends are very different and do not take advantage of what each Scrum role has to offer. This is not just limited to roles but also about Scrum events and artifacts. I have to admit that more and more organizations are now able to change and successfully adopt Scrum as compared to five years ago. However, there are industry-wide deep-rooted beliefs about any non-Developer role being an overhead, or any role that is not directly contributing to code as dispensable.

Opening up this blog to welcome in more thoughts on this.