

Scrum

Jeff Sutherland, 2014, 248 pgs

1. The first thing you do when you are implementing Scrum is to create a backlog. The backlog consists of all the steps required to achieve the ultimate objective, a product creation roadmap expressed in the form of 'stories'. e.g., for a home automation project, one of the stories could be “As a home owner, I want to open the door only for those people who I want to come in.”
2. The importance of the story format is to incorporate the needs of the consumer. Along with the what of the task, the 'who is it for' and 'why is it required' also emerges when expressed in the story format. Essentially a story expresses the specific job to be done. The collection of stories that serves to achieve an overall objective is referred to as an epic.
3. A story becomes one only when it meets the INVEST criteria - Independent (complete on its own, not dependent on another story), Valuable (delivers value to customer), Estimable (you have to be able to size the story in terms of points to represent the effort required), Small (cannot be broken down further) and Testable (there is a test by which you know it is complete; is there a definition of done that all agree to?).
4. Estimability refers to the number of points you will assign to the story. The number of points are assigned as per the fibonacci sequence via the 'planning poker' method, i.e., cards with fibonacci numbers to represent points, drawn at the same time, and if all are within two cards of each other, then the points are averaged. Points should represent some measure of effort to execute the story, such as number of days or hours.
5. The Product Owner should now prioritize the backlog. What are the 20% of stories that account for 80% of value? i.e., what stories when executed will have the maximum business impact, most important to the customer, can make the most money and is the easiest to do. Start executing the most valuable features first, and you will get valuable feedback and what really matters to the consumer. You will be surprised that a feature that you thought was important was actually not a very desirable feature for most consumers.
6. Pick a team, ideally between 3-9 people, comprising all the skillsets required to execute the stories. Productivity difference between team is of a magnitude considerably higher than the productivity difference between individuals. The right team can change the world! Sutherland cites an instance of 2000x difference between teams but only a 10x difference in productivity between individuals.
7. Now, plan the sprint. Sprints are always a fixed amount of time that is less than a month; typically 1-2 weeks. The sprint's goals (what stories will get executed) are agreed between the team, the Scrum Master and the Product

Owner together. Once the sprint goals are agreed to, then they cannot be changed. The team then works autonomously to execute the stories. The number of points of stories executed in each sprint is the team's velocity. Ideally the velocity should increase with each sprint.

8. On the morning of each day of the sprint, the Scrum Master asks each of the team members, the following 3 questions - What did you do yesterday to help the team achieve the sprint? What will you do today to help the team achieve the sprint? What obstacles are getting in the team's way? That's it. The entire meeting is stand up and takes only 15 mins.
9. The stand up meeting works because the greater the communication saturation - the more everyone knows everything - the faster is the team. An enemy of communication saturation is specialization. Ideally team members should drop their functional hats, as they tend to hoard specific knowledge to protect their functional roles.
10. Make work visible. The most common way is to set up a large whiteboard and divide it into 3 sections - to do, doing and done. Move sticky notes - each representing a story - from one section to the other as you wrap up the story. Burndown charts (x axis represents time and y-axis the points left to wrap the sprint) are another way.
11. Following the sprint, the team showcases what they have accomplished via a Sprint Review or Demo. Anyone can come; only what meets the definition of done is showcased. Then the team sits to do a Sprint Retrospective. What went right? What didn't? What could be done to speed up velocity? By the end of the meeting, they agree on one process improvement (called the Kaizen) along with its acceptance tests, that they will make a top priority and implement in the following sprint.