Scrum Teams, Changes, and Peacefully Navigating Those Waters

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Change is inevitable, but is, at times, considered to be a hindrance to productivity. With scrum, however, the mindset may be more favorable towards changes – at least, in relation to work – as change is the essence of scrum; it is the aspect that assists scrum in being so productive and potent in contributing to success.

However, changes in a scrum team's work are one matter, but changes in the team, itself, often instill panic, even amongst experienced scrum team members. As difficult as it might seem, changes in scrum team composition are manageable, and they can be managed peacefully, as well.

Change in Scrum Teams

A potential change that could befall a scrum team is the elimination of a team member. Such a change is realistic and even inevitable over the course of a scrum team's life, in light of market conditions. Given the close proximity of scrum teams, the elimination of a team member has consequences on the work in progress, along with the entire team's dynamics. Suddenly, the velocity that had been calculated does not apply and the sprint's tasks that had been manageable become overwhelming in the absence of that team member. Another change can occur after the first – the addition of a new team

member. With these changes, members must re-adjust to the work and dynamics quickly, while attempts must be made to minimize damage.

Don’t Panic! How to Handle Changes

The important thing is to not panic. Chaos will ensue if the change is not managed tactfully. To minimize damage, it is the Scrum Master’s responsibility to navigate the team through the change. After the change has occurred, the Scrum Master should note what team members found to work in their previous team, and what they would like to continue, and change, with the current team going forth. The Scrum Master should spend one-on-one time with each team member, as well, in order to assess whether there are issues or any hindrances to productivity, in light of the changes.

After the exit of a team member, there is the possibility that a new person will enter the team. To assist in minimizing the damage of the first change – the exit – measures should be taken to avoid adding a new member until the sprint is complete, or if a new person is to be added, the second change should be handled cautiously. The goal is to avoid disruption to the existing team as much as possible.

If a new member arrives to replace one that left or additional team members are added without any prior change, it may be a good idea to wait to onboard the new members together, instead of gradually introducing each one to the team. A simultaneous onboarding of new members will minimize the costs associated with training them and acquainting them to the existing team’s dynamics. If enough new members are introduced, new team formations is an option, in which the teams would consist of old and new members. The Scrum Master should also make sure that the new member becomes well-situated with the rest of the team. This is essential to creating a new, positive team dynamic, which will benefit the team’s productivity.

Changes in scrum teams are inevitable, but as with anything related to scrum, the most important approach is to take heed of the change and quickly – and cautiously – adapt to it. Given the right approach, as detailed above, scrum teams can mitigate any damage that results from changes in team composition, and do so successfully, with little effect on the project being worked on.