

# Implementing Scrum

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Scrum is one of the biggest trends in Information Technology today. While the individual project results have been impressive, the ability of Scrum to transform entire organizations has been suspect at best. In fact, the authors of Scrum texts have offered decidedly little outside the notion of the Scrum of Scrums until recently with the release of several works on Agile Portfolio Management. Program managers and project management office (PMO) leaders have consistently voiced consternation with the governance problems not addressed by the Scrum framework. These issues are really not with Scrum, they represent governance issues that can be solved to produce both better individual project results and better overall organizational performance.

Scrum, like all methodologies or frameworks that make up the Agile family comply with the four core values and 12 governing principles found in the Agile Manifesto. However, truly understanding why Scrum works is actually much simpler and is based on the disciplines of leadership and performance measurement that authors of Scrum books have only recently began to examine. Scrum succeeds on individual projects because it focuses on three elements:

1. **Emphasizing people over process and rote steps.** Since the 1970s much has been written about servant leadership, and the 1990s saw the introduction of the concepts of emotional intelligence. These concepts focus on the differences between people and an emphasis on leadership more than management. The key of good leadership according to these theories is the leader's ability to elevate his or her people. Scrum does this by creating a basic adaptable framework that de-emphasizes hierarchical organizational structures and emphasizes small teams solving real problems together in a self-governing structure.
2. **Chunking project work into the smallest, most manageable components possible.** Estimating project tasks or deliverables has always been problematic. The real issue is that estimating and managing large items is significantly more difficult and less accurate than smaller items. Asking how long it will take to build an engine is much more difficult than asking how long it will take to change an oil filter. Scrum takes this notion to the logical conclusion. Tasks are broken into ½ or full day lengths and deliverables are broken into lengths of a single sprint.
3. **Creating an environment that is open with simple, quantitative measures of progress.** Scrum offers three simple tracking questions at daily intervals:
  - a. What did you do yesterday?
  - b. What are you going to accomplish today?
  - c. What impediments do you have?

The system works because the team has real, physical, and tangible representations of progress and the team is held accountable on a daily basis to each other. This is the old adage that if you tell me how you are going to measure me and I'll tell you how I'm going to perform.

These philosophies and concepts are significant improvements over older management techniques and methodologies. However, Scrum assumes each resource is assigned to one, and only one project. Each team is also six members plus or minus three. Teams are not assigned to operational efforts. Unfortunately, the real world often does not follow these rules. Organizational leaders often struggle to limit resources to only one effort or to prioritize projects. Additionally, often project work is interrupted by operational efforts. Most organizations

simply do not have the resources to have dedicated project teams. In the real world, the concept of Scrum often breaks down. This is not a flaw with Scrum. It is a governance problem.

The key to Scrum success is more than just doing Scrum well. It requires a strong governance model. This means several things. So here are some recommendations to help you succeed.

1. Senior leaders must ensure the organization has a consistent strategy with quantifiable core objectives that is understood by the entire organization and constantly reinforced.
2. Senior leaders must have a governance organ that evaluates perspective initiatives against all current and future work with an eye toward rank ordering all the work. No two projects can have the same ranking or score, but it is acceptable to have bands.
3. The organization should be able to segregate work between operational and project work whenever possible. When operational work interrupts project efforts, the team must notify the governance committee and schedules must be adjusted. "Just get it all done." Should not represent more than 5% to 10% of all efforts.
4. The governance committee must provide each team with a quantifiable, objective measure of success for each project and then hold the team accountable to meet your success criteria.
5. Every project team must develop a deliverable or feature-based Work Breakdown Structure, Story Map or Feature Breakdown Structure. It is also important to know that these three are the same thing when done correctly.
6. The organization needs to have a process in place to align projects with the best methodology to achieve success and constantly reinforce the concept that there is no such thing as a perfect methodology. Each methodology (Scrum, waterfall, spiral or other) presents its own risks and rewards. Alignment is the key.
7. Portfolio performance must be aggregated and reported to the most senior level of the organization. There must be a consistent framework of quantifiable measurement across all projects.