

Unconventional Leadership: Harnessing Flat and Self-Organizing Teams

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What is flat & self-organizing

- Context driven (organization, department, unit, team)
- Flat is almost straight line (CEO, Head of Department, Team lead)
- Self-organizing/-managing is a team culture supported by the organization
- Self-managing, meaning they (scrum team) internally decide who does what, when, and how. (Scrum Guide)
- People and values are the highest priority
- Competent people with right mindset supported by professional tooling



Common reasons for failure

- Poor management - no supporting values and actions
 - * We are flat organization and we pay bonuses by individual performance
 - * We do not need any management - we self-organize
 - * My door is always open - never initiates the talks
- Not understanding the organizational context
 - *All our teams are self-organizing/-managing they do what they want to do - revenue?
 - *We value all our people the same: juniors, seniors and executives
- Not understanding Scrum guide!

There must be boundaries!



There was a journey...



2019



Phase I – Scrum implementation - 2019

First half of 2019

- Bottom up - Scrum on team level*
- Structurally flat (Team leads, Scrum Masters, developers, QAs)
- Architectural roundtable, Steering committee, impact meeting, Scrum Master as a hat, project gates, individual goals, internal billing
- Management board almost approved Scrum as a official way of working (we should have actually let them do it. It would have made our job easier 😊)

Second half of 2019

- People and relationships over processes and tools (Experienced SM vs TL)
- Rising competence level for all roles
- Software quality standards (clean code, automated testing, commit history, ...)

*Scrum makes visible the relative efficacy of current management, environment, and work techniques, so that improvements can be made. (Scrum guide)



Phase II – Flat organization: something is wrong – 2020

- All department members directly reporting to Head of Department
- Belief: Scrum Master is not a manager (no empowerment) - still stuck in servant-leader concept - facilitating and not participating
- Missing - “The Scrum Master is accountable for the Scrum Team’s effectiveness” as “true leader” of the team (Scrum Guide)
- No accountability led to attitude problems
- Some teams are affected negatively but some not
- Pseudo events to attend!



Unexpected negative phenomena

- Sub-team among Scrum Masters
- Value conflict (mostly respect) and ...
- Provoked conflicts inside of organisation
- Damage to Agile movement and ideas

Phase III - Scrum Master almost equals as manager – 2021 – 2022

- Researching Scrum Guide and different stories about flat organization
- Scrum Masters are **true leaders** who serve the Scrum Team and the larger organization. (Scrum Guide)
- The Scrum framework is purposefully incomplete... (Scrum Guide)
- Scrum is not a management framework
- All Scrum Masters were assigned their teams
- Accountability for team development, team goals, 1:1, team performance reviews
- Moving away from individual performance to team performance



Phase IV - Scrum master equals as True Leader – 2023

- Steps forward to full accountability for Scrum Masters (added accountability for recruiting)
- Sub-team did not align
- Scrum Guide has to be acknowledged among all Scrum Masters
- It is not fulfilling process steps it's about understanding values
- Conflict in values is possibly dead end



Phase V - Engineering managers – 2024

- Full accountability of Scrum Teams (goals, salaries, 1:1, results and recruiting)
- Flat department to flat teams (distributed bottleneck)
- Scrum Master is a role in Scrum framework not a position
- Team leader needs to have Scrum Master role
- Development towards collective intelligence



Phase V sub-episode - scientific research and cooperation

Research topic: Collective intelligence (CI).

Description: CI is the shared intelligence of a group that helps people work together efficiently, solve complex problems, achieve common goals, and create value.

Our hypothesis:

- The higher the team's CI, the higher the team's efficiency and ability to solve various complex problems.
- CI is measurable and developable.

Target: Research our teams to measure CI and find out methods to increase it. To do it continuously.

Contact with researchers team was successful. We had agreements and readiness for co-operation.

Research stopped temporarily due to budget freeze and organizational changes.



Why we started this?

“Scrum is built upon by the collective intelligence of the people using it.”

Scrum Guide 2020.



Can Flat&Self-Organizing work - yes

- Principles based on context of flat (team, department, organization)
- Organization mandates the correct roles - no escalations to management
- Core values must be important to everyone including management all levels (trust, respect, openness, courage, commitment)
- Agreement on the way of working (Framework of your context)
- Agreement on quality standards

“Organization structures and processes does not do the work. People do the work.”



Thank you!

