

2021 05 17 Agile working in libraries

Who is the RIGHT STAFF? How do we get the RIGHT PEOPLE to be interested in working in libraries?

- Recruit from non-traditional sources and fields of expertise.

You said that you create impact What kind of impact and How do you measure it? Do you have special evaluation tools?

- Impact is in the eye of the beholder. We use or have special tools dependent on the subject

How does hierarchical structure and goals fit together with agile? And how do we change hierarchical structured organisations in agile organisations

- The honest answer is: you need a bit of both. Structure as well as decentralized decision making. It is not one or the other, but both.
- The agile teams must be able to decide who does what and when. The management level can specify and prioritize certain strategic topics (e.g. Kanban portfolio). Team and management level should clarify in dialog who makes which decisions (strategy vs. management of implementation).

It is a possibility to start with agile (Scrum, Kanban etc.) in a few places: IT, operations, customer service, product development.... Support from the top is essential in any case. The agile teams really need to be empowered by the organization. If agile teams achieve good results for their product or service and are happier with the new methodology than before, they should communicate that in-house and promote it. Above all, they need to address the mindset of their colleagues. A true agile transformation in the organization is only achieved when the classic areas (e.g., in the library) have also been agilized.

In Germany we need more feedback culture within our library teams, with our partners and customers

- How you do this: start asking questions.
- Scrum emphasizes the role of customers / stakeholders. From the stakeholders come the requirements that the team implements. The results are shown to the stakeholders, and the stakeholders can comment on them. Adjustments can be made based on the feedback in the following sprints. Ideally, team and stakeholders enter into a fairly close relationship of trust.

Also our STAFF has to start mirroring the diversity of our patronship.

- Yes, this means you should change your hiring policies.

And we need to establish a culture in which mistakes are dealt with constructively

- Oh yes. This determines if you are in a learning organization or not.
- Absolutely! Scrum explains that the interaction of individuals is immensely important. A reasonable error culture is important in agile methods and conforms to the empirical

approach and the "human image". Things are transparent, they are reviewed and adjusted if necessary (3 empirical pillars in Scrum). In this way, the product or process becomes better. Mistakes are allowed to be made. Ideally, they are found as early as possible. An open error culture should ensure that errors are not covered up. This harms the product, the corporate climate and the customers.

Question for Gert: You say we should not reinvent the wheel. Are there collections of reusable ideas on the net or elsewhere? There are many general information. For example: many libraries seem to be newly built and move, but are there problem solvers, which are down to the real world like excel-sheets for calculations of shelves?

- There are some platforms in the Netherlands that offer peer-to-peer information sharing, such as Biebtobieb. And yes they are handy. However, I believe however that information sharing is not enough. We should also offer more formula-based solutions which are then rolled out across the network and customised for local use. They will cost money for inception and development, but save money across the sector as a whole.

So if one person is missing, the team cannot develop? because each function lies with one person only?

- A good team compensates for, or finds, someone who can fill such gaps. On the whole try to create a bit of redundancy on important topics for functions.
- Developers are expected to be cross-functional and T-shaped, meaning they have in-depth specialties but a general broad skill set. Ideally, developers can handle all tasks in the sprint. If so, one developer can be on vacation, for example, and the others can take over. If there are several Scrum Masters in an institution, another Scrum Master could also step in to support the team if necessary. The product owner can also prepare the product backlog or the next sprints before longer planned absences and discuss with the developers what they can test and conclude on their own.

In scrum the team does everything by itself - is it a contradiction to what we just heard to not invent everything again by yourself but take patterns or solutions from others?

- This would be a management role, to alert people to such developments.
- No, this is not a contradiction. The agile team adheres to good practices from all possible areas (Scrum Guide, agile management, DevOps, coding standards...). What is meant here is that teams ideally have all the skills needed to create value for the product or service. If the team members can internally solve most of the problems themselves and work together on the solution at each stage, the goal is reached faster.

Aren't you a paradise bird in the traditional hierarchical institutional environment?

- We're not paradise birds. We struggle just as much as everybody else. And no, we don't do a lot of things entirely by the book.
- There are two teams at TIB that rely on Scrum and a mixture of Scrum and Kanban. I don't think we are that much of a paradise bird anymore. We have had Sprint Reviews at TIB for 4 years

now, where a large number of stakeholders from our own institution come. So it's not that special anymore. And I think it's also good if you can communicate that Agile is not a very special witchcraft. Anyone can do it. You just have to want to do it.

How do you set year-targets + budget for an agile team?

- Well, you still have management to some degree even if you have autonomous teams.
- You can create roadmaps with strategic topics or release plans for features and roughly calculate how many sprints the team needs for the implementation based on the team velocity. You could then determine how expensive it is to keep the team working (salary costs etc.) for that number of sprints.

On what levels do you implement Agile teams? Do you think a marketing & communication team can work with Scrum?

- It depends. For routine tasks there is little need for Scrum.
- There are many suggestions in the literature and on the Internet for which management practice fits best. This is important because otherwise you treat a product or service with a totally wrong method. For example, a standard distinction is to use Scrum for complex problems where requirements and solutions are more unknown than known. This is often the case in research or software development. For problems where requirements and solutions are more known than unknown, one could use Kanban. This is often the case in the service domain. In cases where requirements and solution approaches are clear, you can often get further with traditional management. In the case of a marketing and communications team, I would first see if Kanban is not the better solution. Kanban has significantly fewer hurdles and is less disruptive than Scrum.

Question for Sven Strobel: What kind of responsibility does this imply for you regarding budgeting? Are you empowered to make the decision by yourself

- I don't have to worry about budgeting as a PO. We have been assigned resources in the form of employees for the team. And that's it. But the role of the PO can be interpreted very differently, very narrowly or very broadly, so that he can decide virtually everything - including budgeting. There is, for example, the following video on this topic:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=djSNC1ayw>

What about the resources you need for your work? Who decides about the provision of those (from the central budget of the institution)?

- Good one. It would still be management from allocated innovation budgets the team can use. No budget means the team is stranded and strapped for resources.
- Management had to agree that a certain number of people would be assembled for the Scrum Team. So there had to be an okay for these resources with the associated personnel costs. On top of that, we still have an external service provider who is paid from departmental funds. Since the Scrum Team has been put together, we try to implement everything ourselves and no longer outsource anything.

Backlog is based on long-term plans - how ensure development + innovation in backlog (who determines backlog/demands)?

- The team, normally but it would talk to management doing so.
- All kinds of items can be found in the backlog: bugs, smaller features, improvements, major strategic requirements. It is primarily the task of the product owner to weight everything in such a way that it is the best for the product. This of course includes the implementation of major strategic issues, but also the incorporation of innovative features. It's the mix that makes it. The product owner should always leave some room in a sprint for less strategic topics or experiments.

How do you prevent, that colleagues who are not part of the SCRUM team, feel left out?

- Regular informative sessions. Updates, news messaging.
- This is always a big issue after the transition to Scrum. The most important thing is communication. Here, the Scrum Master in particular, but also the rest of the team, should communicate to colleagues and stakeholders how Scrum works, why the structures are now different and what the ideas and advantages behind it are. Especially in the beginning you have to do this very often, otherwise people will quickly feel excluded. But to be honest, you won't be able to completely eliminate this feeling for some people. It's just the nature of things that when you put a team together, there are people inside and outside the team.

How do you accommodate the spirit & requirements of agile (everybody takes responsibility) within the restrictive payment structure of German public service (where most employees are simply not allowed to take broader responsibility, or we'd have to pay them better, which we may not do), esp. when your team includes people with different formal qualification levels? Have you found a practical way to tackle this at TIB?

- It's true, the compensation system is totally geared towards classic hierarchies. If you have so and so many people with such and such a pay grade in your line team, you get so and so much money. There is no model for agile at libraries because it is simply too new. But perhaps libraries will change here in the next few years if an agile transformation were to move forward. We just took it very pragmatically: We wanted to work in a completely different way, namely in an agile way, and left the issue of payment completely out of the equation.

Can the whole staff of one institution be assigned to scrum teams? How does the assignment take place?

- One would have to consider in which areas Scrum makes sense as a framework at all - for which products and services. Is it possible to cut teams that are no larger than 10 people? Can the teams work as independently of each other as possible? There are also frameworks that deal with scaling of Scrum (e.g. LeSS, Nexus, SAFe). Certainly not all areas will be able to work with Scrum. However, it is in many cases a good idea to empower teams, reduce hierarchies, remove as much of the middle management as possible, and rely on decentralization.

Where do you see the differences between democratic worker management (classical leftist concept) and agile management?

- Agile by its nature offers a degree of freedom to fulfil a given challenge, but within bounds. It is not a worker's collective. There is still a managerial framework within which it operates.
- Scrum says that there are no hierarchies within the team, only different responsibilities (roles). And these roles are relatively clear: the developers design a plan as to how to implement the requirements; the product owner prioritizes the requirements and determines what can be released; the Scrum master helps the team and the organization to become more efficient. But of course, as far as a single responsibility is concerned, there is no majority vote. Just one example: The product owner can decide all by him/herself what will be implemented in the next sprint. S/He is the only one in the entire organization who is allowed to cancel a Sprint. However, it is also clear that a team will no longer support the decisions of a product owner if s/he runs "amok". Therefore, it is wise to always ensure a balance in the team and to explain your decision well. This applies to all roles. The dynamics within a Scrum team and the Scrum team vis-à-vis superiors and stakeholders are enormously exciting in any case.

Is a "developer" an IT-person? sounds like it.

- Scrum comes from the area of software development. That's why developers have always been "equated" with software developers for a long time. The Scrum Guide has changed a lot in this respect in recent years and has been formulated more and more broadly for all kinds of products and services. It is now explicitly pointed out again and again that developers are all those who develop the product or service: these can be software developers, but also marketing people, designers, usability experts or whatever.

You mentioned in your presentation the community „Agilität in Bibliotheken“. Is there a mailing list? Where can we find more information about this?

- The community's main platform is a slack channel. Please send an e-mail to sven.strobel@tib.eu or beat.mattmann@unibas.ch to get an invite. We are people working at libraries in Germany, Austria and Switzerland who share and discuss agile topics in a video conference once a month.

The topic is very much a new thing for me. I really wish to have the opportunity to learn more about the Agile concept.

- The lucky thing for you is, much of this material is open and available on the Web.
- Link to Agile Manifesto: <https://agilemanifesto.org/>
- Link to Scrum Guide: https://www.scrum.org/resources/scrum-guide?gclid=CjwKCAjwy42FBhB2EiwAJY0yQutHN4YV3rLVeo9FzYtJbUaTR_V9WrLd-ap-2ONWnx4t4RXKcdEtzRoCbPMQAvD_BwE
- There are countless literature and blog articles on the internet. If you are looking for something on the internet, you will quickly find it. I am a very big fan of the Scrum Guide - the officially defined framework by Sutherland and Schwaber. It is very lightweight. The core text is about 10 pages. Of course, it is also very condensed and deep.

Is it absolutely crucial to separate the roles of product owner and team or may it also be viable that the whole team sets up the product requirements and the product roadmap, especially for very small teams?

- Yes, it is absolutely necessary to fill the three roles with different people in Scrum. In a positive sense, there is a certain tension between the three roles, which is absolutely intentional and often leads to better results. Scrum is a lightweight but quite rigorous framework. However, there are other agile methodologies and frameworks that do not prescribe so many roles and may be more suitable for very small teams. I would definitely recommend Kanban, which does not strictly prescribe roles.

I think every worker have unused personal skills in the regular work. This scrum teams enables the teammates to use these "hidden skills". The challenge is to find out which unactive skills your employees have and in how to active them.

- Yes.
- Ideally, developers have very broad skill sets so that they can potentially handle all tasks that arise in the sprint. In addition, they may of course have certain specific skills. An agile keyword that is often mentioned in that context is "T-shaped people".

Library people are interested in learning but not in change necessarily

I agree with xxx. But working in a school I find librarians even more innovative and ready for changes than educators in schools.

- Schools are notoriously conservative to change their ways. I find more innovative power in libraries out of necessity these days.
- It's also been my experience that some people at libraries don't immediately cheer when it comes to change. Maybe we're a little more conservative. But there are people at every institution who want to change something - especially when the pressure of suffering with old management is great. Ideally, you can start with just a few collaborators. The good thing is that agile frameworks tend to require only small teams to get started, rather than the whole institution.

Library employees must be first of all empowered to make this transition to Agile work environment and paradigm

- Yes, it is good to start with agile methods at one point and get the backing from the top when it comes to putting together an agile team, for example. You have to convince and show that agile is not just a buzzword, but can actually be a good solution for complex problems in a rapidly changing business world. Stay persistent!