

The Addison Wesley Signature Series



ESSENTIAL SCRUM

A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO THE
MOST POPULAR AGILE PROCESS

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Forewords by Mike Cohn and Ron Jeffries

A MIKE COHN SIGNATURE
BOOK
Mike Cohn

Praise for *Essential Scrum*

“Agile coaches, you’re gonna be happy with this book. Kenny Rubin has created an indispensable resource for us. Do you have a manager who just doesn’t ‘get it’? Hand them this book and ask them to flip to Chapter 3 for a complete explanation of how Scrum is less risky than plan-driven management. It’s written just for them—in management-speak. Want to help the team come to a common understanding of Scrum? The visual icon language used throughout this book will help you help them. These are just two ways this book can aid you to coach Scrum teams. Use it well.”

—Lyssa Adkins, Coach of Agile Coaches, Agile Coaching Institute; author, *Coaching Agile Teams*

“One of the best, most comprehensive descriptions of the core Scrum framework out there! *Essential Scrum* is for anyone—new to or experienced with Scrum—who’s interested in the most important aspects of the process. Kenny does an excellent job of distilling the key tenets of the Scrum framework into a simple format with compelling visuals. As a Scrum coach for many teams, I continually reference the material for new ways to help teams that are learning and practicing the framework. I’ve seen Scrum continually misinterpreted and poorly implemented by big companies and tool vendors for more than ten years. Reading this book will help you get back to the basics and focus on what’s important.”

—Joe Balistreri, Process Development Manager, Rockwell Automation

“Corporate IT leadership, which has been slow to embrace agile methods, would benefit immensely from giving a copy of this book to all of their project and delivery managers. Kenny Rubin has laid out in this book all the pragmatic business case and process materials needed for any corporate IT shop to successfully implement Scrum.”

—John F. Bauer III, veteran of technical solution delivery in large corporate IT shops

“Kenny’s extensive experience as a consultant, trainer, and past managing director of the Scrum Alliance is evident in this book. Along with providing the basics and introduction to Scrum, this book addresses the questions of masses—what happens to project managers? *Essential Scrum* helps us understand the big picture and guides how organization leaders can support and be involved with their Scrum teams for successful agile transformations.”

—Sameer S. Bendre, CSM, PMP, Senior Consultant, 3i Infotech Inc.

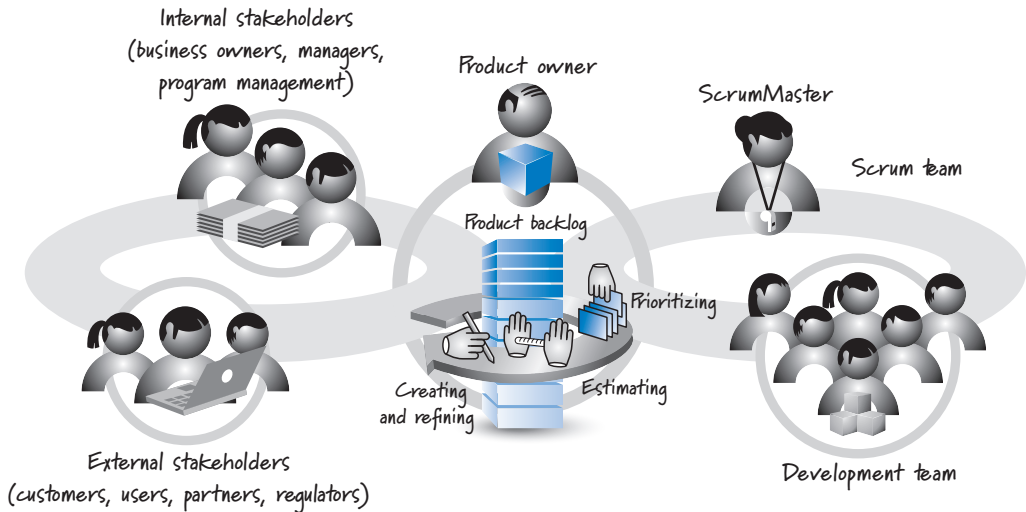


FIGURE 6.7 Grooming is a collaborative effort.

in miscommunications and handoffs. Such collaborative efforts also go a long way toward bridging the historical gap between the business people and the technical people.

Stakeholders should allocate a sufficient amount of time to grooming based on the nature of the organization and the type of project. As a general rule, the development team should allocate up to 10% of its time each sprint to assisting the product owner with grooming activities. The team will use this time to help create or review emergent product backlog items as well as progressively refine larger items into smaller items. The team will also estimate the size of product backlog items and help the product owner prioritize them based on technical dependencies and resource constraints.

When Does Grooming Take Place?

The Scrum framework only indicates that grooming needs to happen; it doesn't specify *when* it should happen. So when does grooming actually take place?

Using sequential development, we try to capture a complete and detailed description of the requirements up front, so little or no requirements grooming is scheduled after the requirements have been approved. In many organizations these baselined requirements may be changed only via a separate change control process, which is discontinuous to the primary development flow (see Figure 6.8).

As such, grooming during sequential development is an exceptional, unplanned, outside-of-primary-flow activity that we invoke only if we need to, making it disruptive to the fast flow of delivered business value.

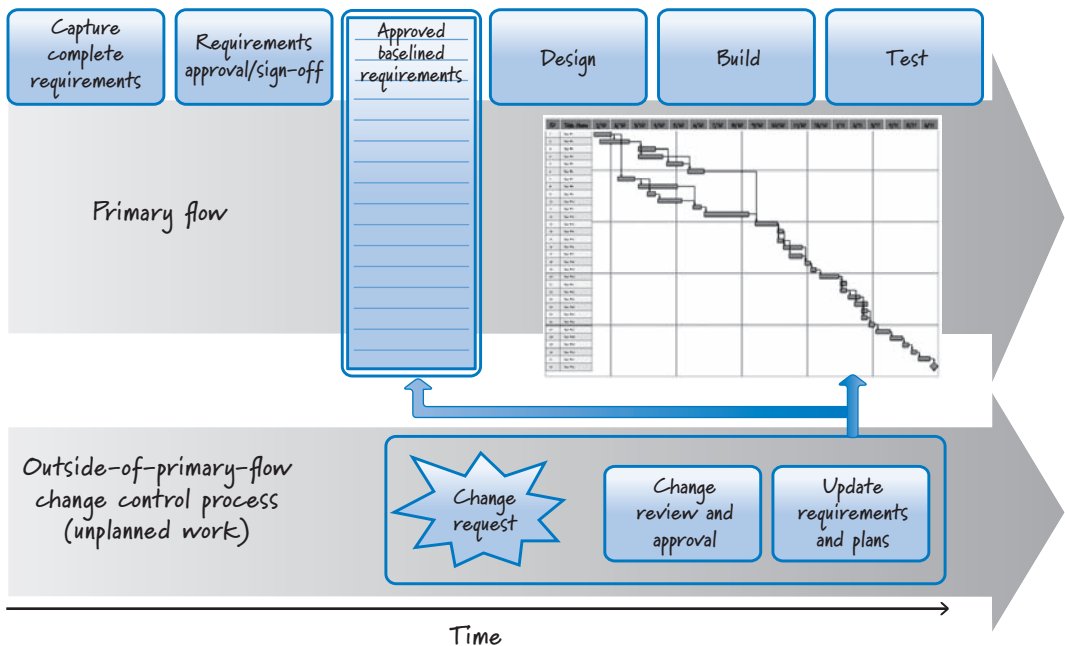


FIGURE 6.8 Outside-of-primary-flow grooming with sequential projects

Using Scrum, we assume an uncertain environment and therefore must be prepared to constantly inspect and adapt. We expect the product backlog to evolve constantly rather than being locked down early and changed only through a secondary process for handling exceptional, undesirable occurrences. As a result, we must ensure that our grooming activities are an essential, intrinsic part of how we manage our work.

Figure 6.9 illustrates the various times when grooming might be performed.

Initial grooming occurs as part of the release-planning activity (see Chapter 18 for details). During product development, the product owner meets with the stakeholders at whatever frequency makes sense to perform ongoing grooming.

When working with the development team, the product owner might schedule either a weekly or a once-a-sprint grooming workshop during sprint execution. Doing so ensures that grooming occurs on a regular schedule and enables the team to account for that time during sprint planning. It also reduces the waste of trying to schedule ad hoc meetings (for example, determining when people are available, finding available space, and so on).

Sometimes teams prefer to spread out the grooming across the sprint, rather than block out a predetermined period of time. They take a bit of time after their daily scrums to do some incremental grooming. This grooming doesn't have to include all of the team members. For example, after a daily scrum the product owner might ask for help refining a large story. Team members who are knowledgeable and interested

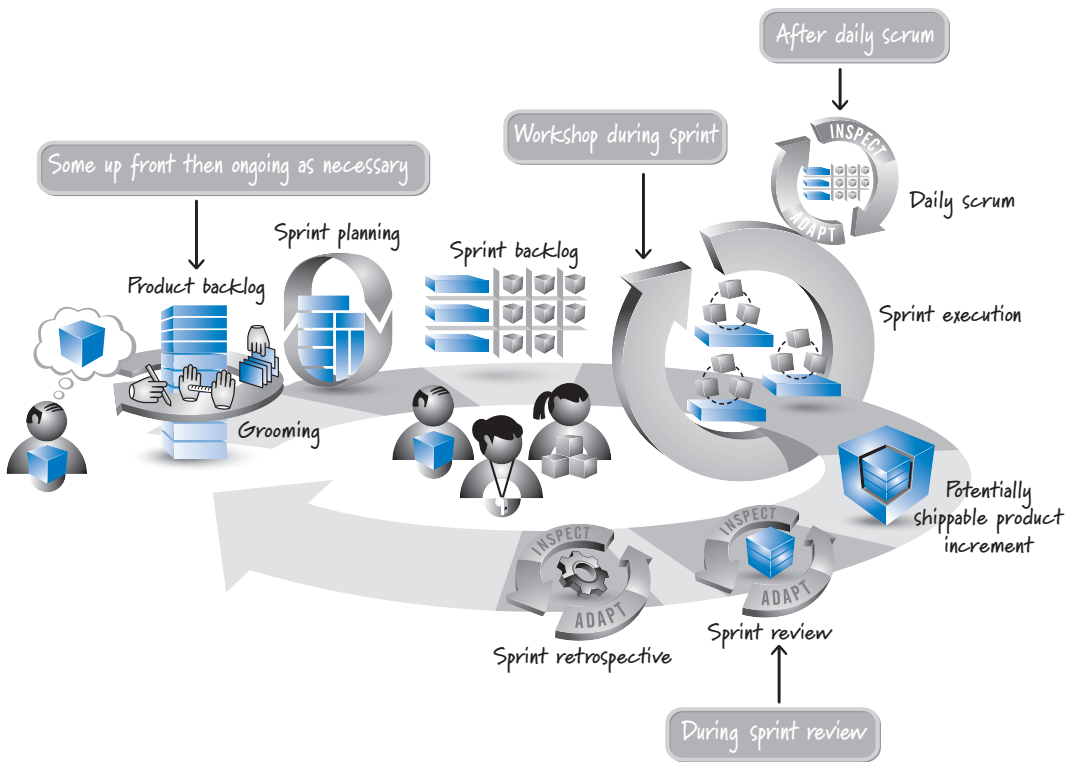


FIGURE 6.9 When grooming happens

stick around and assist the product owner. The next time, different team members might assist.

Even if teams have regularly scheduled workshops or take some time each day to look at the backlog, most teams find that they naturally do some grooming as part of the sprint review. As everyone involved gains a better understanding of where the product is and where it is going, new PBIs are often created or existing PBIs are reprioritized, or deleted if they are no longer needed.

When the grooming happens is less important than making sure it is well integrated into the Scrum development flow, to ensure flexible and fast delivery of business value.

Definition of Ready

Grooming the product backlog should ensure that items at the top of the backlog are ready to be moved into a sprint so that the development team can confidently commit and complete them by the end of a sprint.

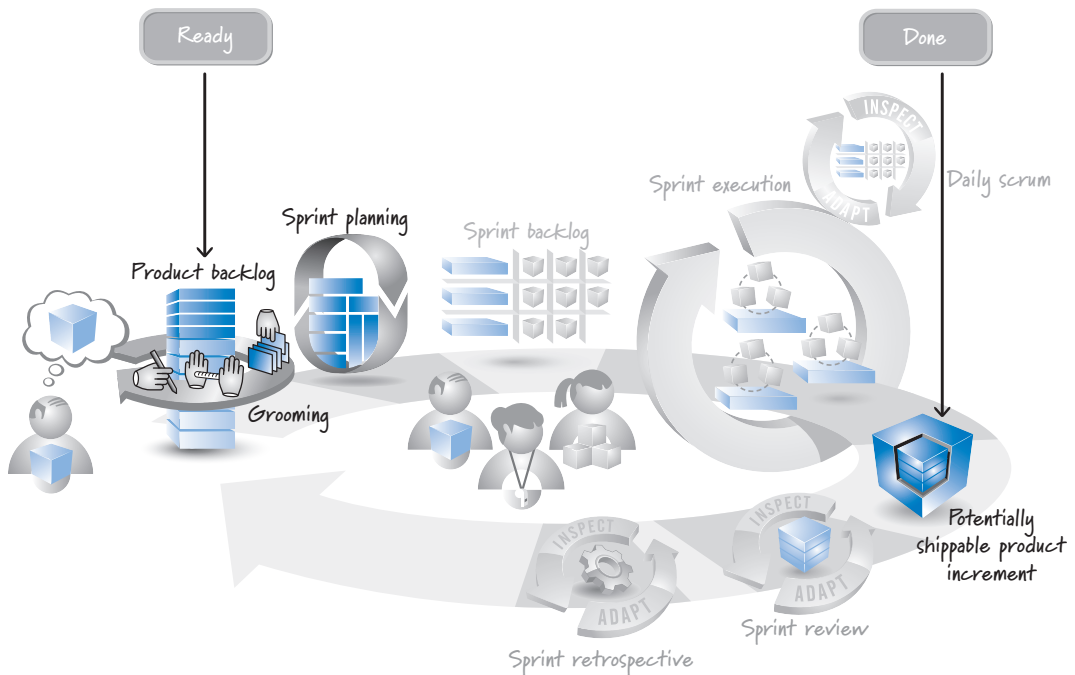


FIGURE 6.10 Definition of ready

Some Scrum teams formalize this idea by establishing a **definition of ready**. You can think of the definition of ready and the definition of done (see Chapter 4) as two states of product backlog items during a sprint cycle (see Figure 6.10).

Both the definition of done and the definition of ready are checklists of the work that must be completed before a product backlog item can be considered to be in the respective state. An example of a definition-of-ready checklist for product backlog items is given in Table 6.2.

TABLE 6.2 Example Definition-of-Ready Checklist

Definition of Ready	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Business value is clearly articulated.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Details are sufficiently understood by the development team so it can make an informed decision as to whether it can complete the PBI.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Dependencies are identified and no external dependencies would block the PBI from being completed.

continues

TABLE 6.2 Example Definition-of-Ready Checklist (*Continued*)

Definition of Ready	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Team is staffed appropriately to complete the PBI.
<input type="checkbox"/>	The PBI is estimated and small enough to comfortably be completed in one sprint.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Acceptance criteria are clear and testable.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Performance criteria, if any, are defined and testable.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Scrum team understands how to demonstrate the PBI at the sprint review.

A strong definition of ready will substantially improve the Scrum team’s chance of successfully meeting its sprint goal.

Flow Management

The product backlog is a crucial tool that enables the Scrum team to achieve fast, flexible value-delivery flow in the presence of uncertainty. Uncertainty cannot be eliminated from product development. We must assume that a stream of economically important information will be constantly arriving and that we need to organize and manage the work (manage the product backlog) so that this information can be processed in a rapid, cost-effective way while maintaining good flow. Let’s examine the role of the product backlog in supporting good release flow and sprint flow.

Release Flow Management

The product backlog must be groomed in a way that supports ongoing release planning (the flow of features within a release). As illustrated in Figure 6.5, a release can be visualized as a line through the product backlog. All of the PBIs above the release line are targeted to be in that release; the items below the line are not.

I have found it useful to actually partition the product backlog using two lines for each release, as illustrated in Figure 6.11.

These two lines partition the backlog into three areas: *must have*, *nice to have*, and *won’t have*. The **must-have features** represent the items that we simply must have in the upcoming release or else we don’t have a viable customer release. The **nice-to-have features** represent items we are targeting for the next release and would like to include. If, however, we run short of time or other resources, we could drop nice-to-have features and still be able to ship a viable product. The **won’t-have features** are items that we’re declaring won’t be included in the current release. The second line,

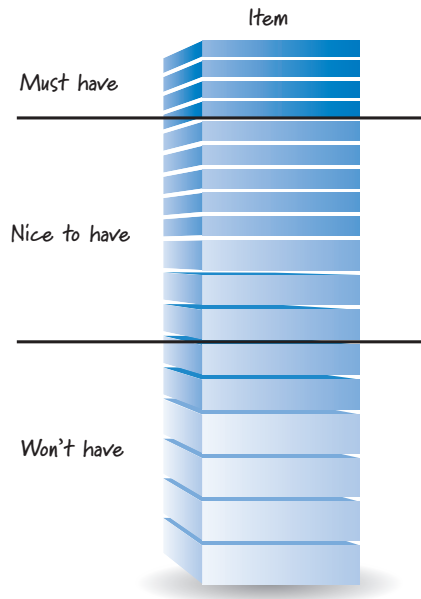


FIGURE 6.11 Release-level view of the product backlog

the one that separates the won't-have items from the others, is the same as the Release 1 line shown in Figure 6.5.

Maintaining the backlog in this fashion helps us better perform ongoing release planning, as I will discuss in Chapter 18.

Sprint Flow Management

Product backlog grooming is essential for effective sprint planning and the resulting flow of features into a sprint. If the product backlog has been detailed appropriately, the items at the top of the backlog should be clearly described and testable.

When grooming for good sprint flow, it is helpful to view the product backlog as a pipeline of requirements that are flowing into sprints to be designed, built, and tested by the team (see Figure 6.12).

In this figure we see that larger, less-well-understood requirements are being inserted into the pipeline. As they progress through the pipeline and move closer to the time when they will flow out to be worked on, they are progressively refined through the grooming activity. At the right side of the pipeline is the team. By the time an item flows out of the pipeline, it must be ready—detailed enough that the team can understand it and be comfortable delivering it during a sprint.