

The Sprint Planning Meeting

by Richard “Dick” Carlson



Sprint Planning Meeting

Abstract

The Sprint Planning Meeting is a time-boxed session when the Scrum team gets together to agree on a sprint's goal (or goals) and determine what subset of the product backlog it can complete and deliver during the next sprint. During this session, a sprint backlog is created to assist the team acquire confidence that it can commit selected product backlog items into the next sprint with a high degree of confidence.

Purpose

The purpose of the Sprint Planning Meeting is to determine the goal or goals and functionality for the next sprint. The Sprint Planning Meeting is attended by the Product Owner, Scrum Master, and the entire Scrum Team. Customers, users, management, and other key stakeholders can be invited for the purpose of providing business domain or technology domain information and advice, but should be dismissed after the transfer of such information has been realized. The meeting is a negotiation session between the Product Owner and the Team about what must be completed and implemented during the next sprint or iteration.

Sprint Planning

During the Sprint Planning Meeting, the team determines their capacity, which is a combination of their availability and amount of work they feel they can complete during the sprint. The Product Owner and team must agree to the meaning of "Done" for each of the product backlog items selected for the sprint. The definition of "Done" provides the Product Owner and team with confidence knowing that there is an agreement of what determines when an item is complete and ready for delivery or integration with other components of the product. Thus, there is less likelihood of there being a deficiency or deficiencies in the product.

Collectively, the Scrum team and the Product Owner define a sprint's goal or set of goals. The sprint's goals are short descriptions of what the sprint will attempt to achieve. The success of the sprint will be assessed later during the Sprint Review Meeting against the sprint's goals, rather than against each specific item selected from the product backlog. In some cases there will be negotiation with the Product Owner, but it will always be up to the team to determine how much they can commit to completing selected items.

It is important that the Product Owner prepare the product backlog prior to this meeting. The absence of the Product Owner at this meeting can be disastrous. However, a seasoned and capable Scrum Master should be able to construct or prepare an adequate product backlog prior to the meeting and stand in for the absent Product Owner. The team can make suggestions and negotiate, but the decision of what amount of the product backlog constitutes the sprint is the responsibility of the Product Owner and stakeholders during the meeting.

The Sprint Planning Meeting consists of two separate segments. At the first meeting, the team meets with the Product Owner, management, and users to determine what functionality must be

Agile & Lean Educational Associates

built during the next sprint. This segment should be time-boxed at 4 hours to allow the team sufficient time to analyze the product backlog. Additional analyses can be performed during the sprint, as appropriate. It is important that product backlog items targeted for the next sprint be decomposed adequately to be able to be completed. During this session of sprint planning the Product Owner describes the highest priority features to the team. The Product Owner does not have to describe every item being tracked on the product backlog. Depending on the size of the backlog and the speed of the team, it may be sufficient to describe only the highest priority items, saving the discussion of lower priority items for the next Sprint Planning Meeting.

During the second segment, which starts immediately following the first segment, the team works by itself to determine how it will build the functionality into a product's development increment during the next sprint. The second planning segment is time-boxed at 4 hours to ensure that all sprint planning will be completed, thus allowing the team to start work. Although the team should work on its own during this part of the Sprint Planning Meeting, the Product Owner must be available to the team in the event the team has questions about the product backlog items selected for the sprint. It is up to the team to determine how the selected product backlog items will be built into an increment of potentially shippable product functionality. No one else is allowed to interrupt or do anything but observe or answer questions the team may have in seeking further information. The team asks enough questions during this meeting so that they can select and commit to items selected for the sprint after which the team works on their own to decompose selected product backlog items into quantifiable tasks. Typically, the team will provide guidance when they start to get further into the backlog list than they know could be done in the next sprint. Output of the second sprint planning session should include a list (sprint backlog) of tasks, task estimates, and the team's self-starting ability on the work of developing the functionality. The tasks will not be a complete list of tasks for the sprint, but will comprise enough work it must complete to reflect mutual commitment on the part of all team members and carry them through the first several days of the sprint. As work progresses, the team will devise additional tasks needed to complete committed product backlog items.

In my extensive Scrum project experience, the Sprint Planning Meeting can last 4 to 8 hours, depending on the sprint's length and complexity of the work to be completed. For example, the amount of work a team selects may take up to 4-hours of negotiation and commitment, and the decomposition of selected work into tasks can take another 4-hours. The amount of time allocated for the Sprint Planning Meeting can vary each sprint depending on the aforementioned factors. The Scrum Master facilitates this meeting and should be able to regulate the meeting's momentum to ensure it starts and ends on time. Sprint planning should not extend into another day as doing so reduces the team's time-to-build period.

During the Sprint Planning Meeting, the team determines their capacity, which is a combination of their availability and amount of work they feel they can complete during the sprint, also known as *velocity*. The Product Owner and team must agree to the meaning of "Done" for each of the product backlog items selected for the sprint. The definition of "Done" provides the Product Owner and team with confidence knowing the item is complete and ready for delivery or integration with other components of the product.

Agile & Lean Educational Associates

Collectively, the Scrum team and the Product Owner define a sprint's goal or set of goals. Sprint goals are short descriptions of what the sprint will attempt to achieve. The success of the sprint will be assessed during the Sprint Review Meeting against the sprint's goals, rather than against each specific item selected from the product backlog. In some cases there will be a negotiation with the Product Owner, but it always will be up to the team to determine how much they can commit to completing the selected items.

Conclusion

The Sprint Planning Meeting is a working session by the team that includes the Product Owner, stakeholders, management, users, and customers.

The meeting is time-boxed at 8 hours and is conducted in two 4-hour segments that decide what to commit for the next sprint and how it will be built.

The team also determines through collaboration with the Product Owner how they will know when they are "Done," and decide on a goal or a set of sprint goals. The team will also determine their capacity to commit to the sprint and estimate their potential velocity or what they feel they can complete during the sprint.

About the Author

Dick Carlson has an extensive engineering background that includes many years of practical knowledge and hands-on experience in the implementation and deployment of Agile, Lean, and Scrum values and principles in communications-electronics engineering, software engineering, and systems engineering within the aerospace, DoD, IT, and industry domains. He has developed and actively conducted comprehensive training courses for Scrum teams, Scrum Masters, Product Owners, project/program managers, customers, executives, organizational leaders, and others interested in learning how to implement and deploy Agile, Lean, and Scrum.

Recently retired from Boeing, Dick has been an active transformational leader for many small and large Agile projects, and frequently shares his experiences of successful Agile implementation at conferences, workshops and symposia. He regularly counsels executives and leaders on the benefits of using Agile, actively coach's teams on Scrum and Lean-Agile Project Management fundamentals, and then follows up with mentoring activities to ensure successful project implementation.

Mr. Carlson has a Bachelor of Science degree from the University of Maryland, and is a Certified Scrum Professional, Certified Scrum Master, and Certified Scrum Product Owner, and holds a Lean-Agile Project Management certification. Dick has presented Agile topics at Software Technology Conferences every year since 2010.