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The Great ScrumMaster

#ScrumMasterWay

Zuzana Šochová

Foreword by ***Linda Rising***

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#ScrumMasterWay

Zuzana Šochová

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For all ScrumMasters, Agile coaches, and leaders

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FOREWORD

Zuzana Šochová—Zuzi—is the author of a new book on the #ScrumMasterWay. She is also the heart and soul of the Agile Prague Conference, which is where I had the great fortune to meet her several years ago. A beautiful lady in a beautiful city. As its name suggests, this is a guidebook along the path, the way, for ScrumMasters and Agile coaches.

The book covers a lot. You'll find thumbnail sketches of many valuable approaches as well as useful examples based on hard-earned real experience. This makes this a good reference for techniques after you have been through the book.

Zuzi reads a lot. Her talks are entertaining and informative as she brings what she has read to the attention of the rest of the community. Zuzi also has the Agile mindset, and her message is to encourage readers to be the same. Take small steps, and even when discouraged, keep moving forward. This sounds a lot like the recommendations in *Fearless Change* and *More Fearless Change*! As I am deeply interested in change, I echo the approach Zuzi takes. Instead of the grand plans most organizations have for overnight upheaval and a deadline—"We will be agile by the end of 2016"—successful change is built around small steps and learning. In *Fearless Change*, we describe a "Learning Cycle." Take a small step. Stop. Make time for reflection and learning. Based on small

successes, take the next small step. Of course, we'd like to reach a tipping point, when the change takes on a life of its own and things begin to be easier, but we can't count on that! The best approach is based on small experiments.

You will love the sketches in Zuzi's book! Research shows we learn from images. In fact, words themselves are recognized by the brain as images. Zuzi's imaginative drawings are the perfect addition to the material.

The book offers a chance for reflection and evaluation of strengths and areas that need improvement—this is perhaps the most important part of the book. We know it's difficult to understand ourselves. Without some planned time-outs, we have no hope of improvement. It won't happen by accident. Research has shown that just a few minutes each day looking back on what worked well and what should be improved can show real benefit over time.

I really like her discussion of the Cynefin framework. We need a better understanding of Dave Snowden's work. In Agile development we are dealing with complex adaptive systems. That means we can't know in advance the effect of even a small change to our organizations, our teams, or ourselves. We can only test and then stop to reflect and based on our observation make plans for the next small change. It's delusional to believe that we can plan every activity over a long timeline of years for any effort.

I think you'll enjoy this easy-to-read, informative little book. I know I did.

—Linda Rising
Coauthor, with Mary Lynn Manns, of
Fearless Change and *More Fearless Change*

PREFACE

I'm Zuzi, your new friend and mentor. Relax and listen to what I'm going to tell you. You can trust me. Ten years ago, when I joined my first Scrum team as a developer, I didn't like it much. It was an awkward way of working, I thought. I was just as resistant as most of my current clients who are at the beginning of their Agile journeys. It was something new and different. And however hard our Agile coaches tried to explain it, I didn't really get it. Six months later I was appointed to the ScrumMaster role. Lacking any other experience than as a team leader and developer, I ended up being a "Scrum team assistant" and a bit later a "Scrum team mom." It took me a long time to realize why Scrum is so powerful and that it is all about the ability to enhance self-organization.

Only then did I realize that we were all missing a good explanation of the ScrumMaster role. Later, I described it using the #ScrumMasterWay concept that I'm going to share with you in this book, and which finally gave ScrumMasters the answer to their most common question: "What will the ScrumMaster do once the team is self-organized?"

After coaching many ScrumMasters at companies and teaching a lot of CSM classes, I can say that an answer like "Move to another team," "Do nothing," or "There will always be some work needed" is not good enough. ScrumMasters are lost in the same way I was lost at that time.

It has never been so easy to become a great ScrumMaster, so let me invite you on the journey and you can learn from my experience and mistakes. This book is the best starting point to embrace the ScrumMaster role. I hope you will enjoy reading it and will find it useful and easy to apply in your work and that you will become a great ScrumMaster too.

WHO SHOULD READ THIS BOOK

This book is a guidebook for all ScrumMasters, Agile coaches, and leaders who want to transform their organizations. It's intended to give you a reference to general concepts every ScrumMaster should understand and point you toward resources that may help you in resolving difficult situations. It was designed as a slim, illustrated book that you can read during the weekend and won't get you lost in too much heavy stuff. However, it is supposed to be your starting point in searching for help or ideas on where to go next. On top of that, it's full of practical examples of how to apply each concept.

Note that the book does not explain Scrum rules and principles but assumes that you already understand Agile and Scrum and have some experience as a ScrumMaster.

HOW TO READ THIS BOOK

The book is divided into eight chapters which, step by step, create awareness and understanding of the great ScrumMaster's role.

In Chapter 1, "The ScrumMaster's Role and Responsibilities," we go through the basic responsibilities of the ScrumMaster.

In Chapter 2, "The State of Mind Model," I introduce the model that helps ScrumMasters decide which approach they will take to address day-to-day situations.

In Chapter 3, "#ScrumMasterWay," the #ScrumMasterWay concept is introduced to address the complexity of the role, the need to build a group of ScrumMasters, and through that create an Agile organization.

In Chapter 4, "Metaskills and Competences," we talk about what enables you to become a great ScrumMaster.

Chapter 5, "Building Teams," covers the theory of building teams, including practical examples relevant to the Agile environment.

Chapter 6, "Implementing Change," addresses the implementation and dynamics of change.

In Chapter 7, "The ScrumMaster's Toolbox," you will find a description of different tools you can use in your work as a ScrumMaster.

Chapter 8, "I Believe . . .," wraps things up.

The book provides a wider definition of the ScrumMaster's role than is usually described. It introduces the #ScrumMasterWay concept to define the three levels of operation of a great ScrumMaster. Being ScrumMaster is like playing in an adventure game. You pick up some tools along the way, and you don't necessarily understand how to use them at the beginning. Sometimes you need to be creative and try different approaches, taking some crazy steps. From time to time you might feel desperate and on the brink of quitting. But then you realize there is another way to approach the situation and make it work, like in those adventure games where you need to spot a tiny crack in the wall to open a secret door or apply the usual tools in a very different way.

Even if the examples might not fit your exact situation and the framework described might not feel appropriate during your first try, give it a second or third chance. Be creative and adapt these examples. Believe that it will work and, eventually, you will become a great ScrumMaster.

Register your copy of *The Great ScrumMaster* at informit.com for convenient access to downloads, updates, and corrections as they become available. To start the registration process, go to informit.com/register and log in or create an account. Enter the product ISBN (9780134657110) and click Submit. Once the process is complete, you will find any available bonus content under "Registered Products."

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Special thanks to my family for their support; without them I would not have been able to finish this book. Thanks to Arnošt Štěpánek for his honest feedback and the way he challenged me to rewrite some parts of the book. Thanks to ScrumMasters Hana Farkaš and Jiří Zámečník for their final review. Finally, I want to thank all the Scrum teams and ScrumMasters I coached during my Agile journey for their inspiration.

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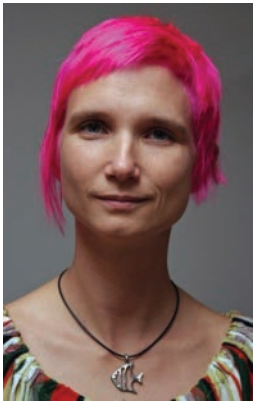
ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Zuzana Šochová, Agile Coach and Certified Scrum Trainer (CST), has over 15 years of experience in the IT industry. She led one of the very first Agile international projects in the Czech Republic, focusing on distributed Scrum teams, working in different time zones between Europe and the United States. Now she is a leading expert on Agile and Scrum practices in both start-ups and big corporations. She has experience with Agile adoption in telco, finance, health care, automotive, mobile, and high-tech software companies. She's been helping companies with Agile and Scrum across Europe, India, Southeast Asia, and the United States.

She has worked in various positions, starting as a software developer for life- and mission-critical systems, continuing as a ScrumMaster and director of engineering. She has been working as an independent Agile coach and trainer since 2010, specializing in organizational and team coaching, facilitations, and culture change using Agile and Scrum.

Zuzi is a well-known international speaker. She is a founder of the Czech Agile Community which organizes the annual Agile

Prague Conference. She is a Certified Scrum Trainer with Scrum Alliance. She received her MBA from Sheffield Hallam University (Great Britain) and her master's in computer science and computer graphics from the Czech Technical University. She coauthored the book *Agile Methods Project Management* (Computer Press, 2014), written in the Czech language.

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Book page: greatscrummaster.com

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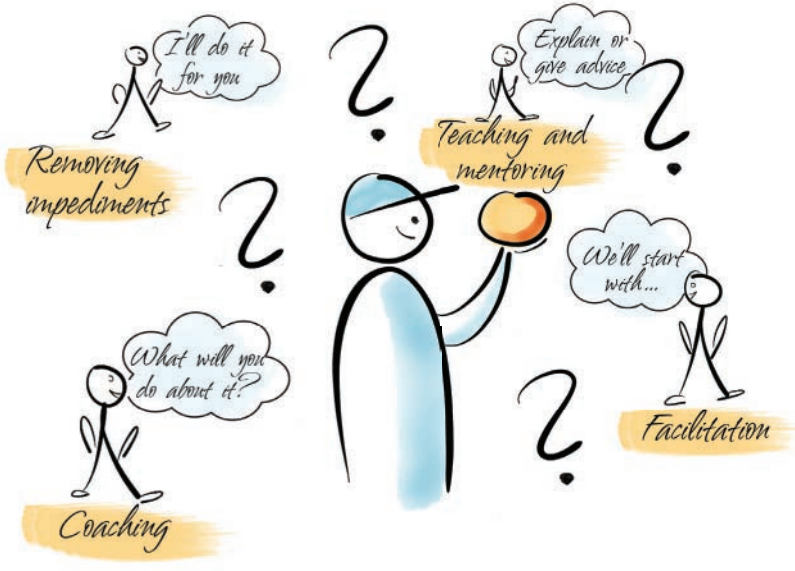
THE STATE OF MIND MODEL

The ScrumMaster should adjust her approach according to the state of the team and the status of the company's Agile adoption. There is a useful model that can help the ScrumMaster decide which approach to take. It's called the ScrumMaster State of Mind [3], and it includes four core approaches:



- Teaching and mentoring
- Removing impediments
- Facilitation
- Coaching

I will describe them individually in the following pages.

Based on the maturity of the team and the fact that every team has different needs, the ScrumMaster will apply some approaches more frequently than others. Although all of them are useful at every team development stage, ScrumMasters should focus on the approach that helps them reach their current aim and supports the ultimate goal of enhancing self-organization.

After I describe the model, I'll give you a few examples, from real situations, of how the ScrumMaster State of Mind model can be useful.

TEACHING AND MENTORING

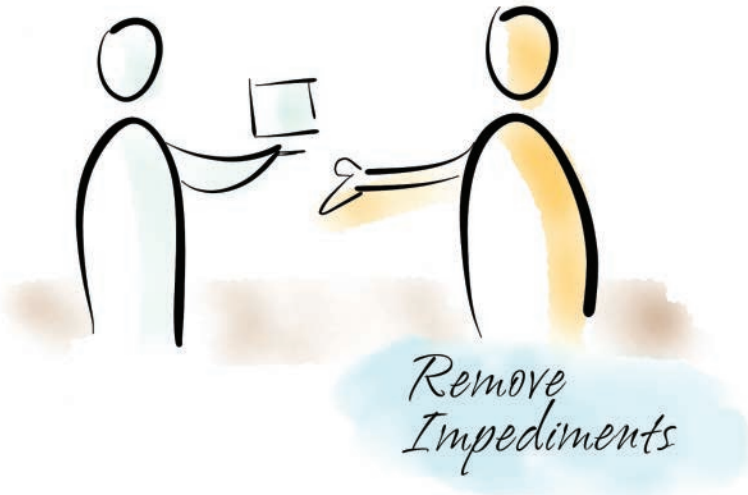
The teaching and mentoring approach is about sharing experiences of Scrum and Agile in general and using one's own experience to suggest additional practices and methods. At the beginning of Agile transformation, ScrumMasters have to explain the Agile and Scrum approach over and over again, because mentioning it once may not be enough for teams to understand why it is being implemented and how it should work. When the team has matured, it's more about experiences and suggestions for new practices than teaching, but it's still an important part of the ScrumMaster's job.

REMOVING IMPEDIMENTS

A great ScrumMaster should start each day with a question: "What can I do to make it easier for my team to perform their work?" One way of helping them is to remove impediments so they can work efficiently.

However, ScrumMaster is not just any administrative position, and so the way to remove impediments is to delegate responsibility, activities, and ownership to the team so they can solve problems by themselves. Unless the ScrumMaster gives the team the opportunity to take over these tasks, she ends up as their "smother" who is so loving and caring that her "kids" are low-confidence grown-ups, dependent on her even in their thirties.

So, should the ScrumMaster remove impediments? Yes, but in a way that supports the team in finding a solution. The ScrumMaster can start by explaining what self-organization is and why it is such an important part of Scrum and continue with coaching and facilitation.



FACILITATION

Facilitation means making sure that team meetings run smoothly and that communication flows in an efficient way. Therefore, every meeting or conversation should have a clearly defined goal, deliverables, and an idea of what the expected result looks like. The facilitation rule says you should never interfere with the content of the discussion or the solution itself. You only drive the discussion flow.

Remember

- Facilitation makes communication more efficient.
- Define a goal, deliverables, and expected results.

COACHING

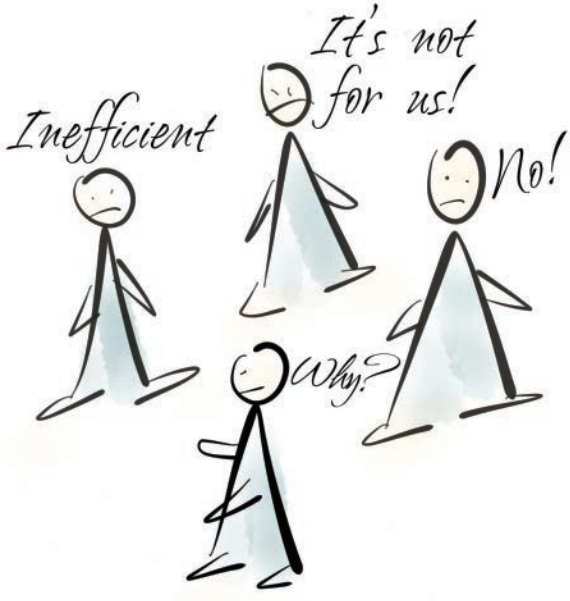
Coaching is probably one of the most important skills the great ScrumMaster must have. It requires a lot of practice and experience, but once you master it, it's incredibly powerful. In Scrum, coaching focuses not only on an individual's personal growth, but also on team self-organization, responsibility, and ownership.

Remember

- Coaching is more powerful than explaining, sharing experiences, or giving advice.
- The goal is not to be fast in the short term but to improve in the long term.

EXAMPLE: STARTING AGILE

The team is at the beginning of the transformation. They've just passed Scrum training, but they still don't understand what it is really about. They complain that Scrum is not the right method for them.



The right approach here is to explain all over again (and repeatedly) why you do Scrum, what you expect from such change, and how individual Scrum meetings and artifacts work together. In order to be successful, team members have to understand the dynamics and principles behind Scrum. If the ScrumMaster only facilitates, most likely this will not happen fast enough. If the ScrumMaster coaches, the team will be lost, as they haven't a clue how to improve their Standup, for example.

EXAMPLE: IMPEDIMENTS

The team is taking over responsibility, but they face loads of problems.

The easiest way is to take over and remove those impediments for them. But wait. How does that approach lead to the goal of the ScrumMaster building a self-organized team? It doesn't. So the ScrumMaster has to take the slower and more painful approach for the sake of the team and coach them to realize they can handle most of the impediments by themselves. If the ScrumMaster doesn't do this, she ends up as team secretary very quickly, and the team becomes a low-confidence group that always waits for someone else to fix things. Proper facilitation of meetings and discussion helps as well.

EXAMPLE: STUCK

The team has been working in a Scrum environment for a long time. They may not be a good "Scrum team," but they are fine with how they are.

The optimal approach here would be coaching. Coaching techniques reveal opportunities for improvement to the team and also let the team members see their problems first. If the ScrumMaster starts with teaching and explaining, the team will most likely not accept it and reply that, as a self-organized team, they will decide how they work. The ScrumMaster is not there to tell them what to do. In some cases they refuse to accept such a ScrumMaster, and she has to leave eventually.

EXAMPLE: RESPONSIBILITY

The team is quite good; they mostly self-organize. The ScrumMaster remembers that her facilitation skills were a necessary aspect of their success. That's how the ScrumMaster improved their cooperation. That's how she made them efficient.

Nonetheless, it's the right time to move on and change the approach. All ScrumMasters should do is step back and let the team run the meeting. Don't stay in the middle, don't start it, and don't indicate who's next. Just be there, ready for facilitation with a lighter touch. Give them space and trust them. They will make it. If the discussion goes in the wrong direction, coach them so they identify the problem and adjust accordingly. Note that you are not disappearing at this time; you are still present, carefully listening, aware of what's going on, and ready to help if needed.

EXERCISE: STATE OF MIND—NOW

Go through all the approaches of the ScrumMaster State of Mind model and think about situations where taking this approach could be useful and also where it would be inappropriate.

Teaching, mentoring:

Removing impediments:

Facilitation:

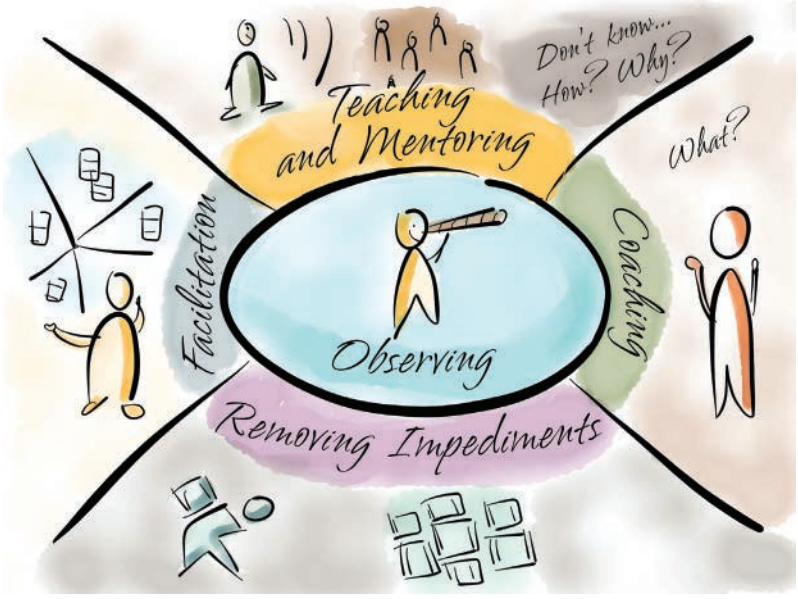
Coaching:

Which approach is the most comfortable for you as a ScrumMaster and why?

- □ Teaching, mentoring, sharing experience, giving advice
- □ Removing impediments
- □ Facilitation
- □ Coaching

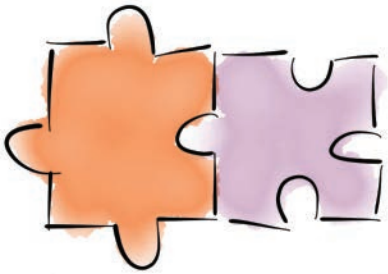
THE MISSING PIECE OF THE PUZZLE

Although all the approaches of the ScrumMaster State of Mind model are important during your journey to becoming a great ScrumMaster, one very important item is still missing—*observation*. If you take the opportunity to be quiet and let the team take over an activity, you can continue to observe them for another minute before you teach them or explain how they should do something, facilitate their conversation, coach them to decide themselves, or try to fix the problem yourself by removing impediments. If you resist the urge to solve every issue as quickly as possible so the team can get back to work again, you will be much closer to the goal of having a self-organized team.



Therefore, the ScrumMaster State of Mind model is very important, because it forces you to step back to the role of observer and decide which approach you are going to take and why. There is truth to the adage that listening is one of the most important aspects of communication and decision making.

When you imagine how listening could have improved the outcome while you were teaching, facilitating, coaching, and removing impediments, you will find some situations where you would have decided things differently if you had practiced this model.



Remember

- Observing, listening, and not interfering are the most important aspects of a great ScrumMaster's job.
- Any action, such as coaching, facilitation, teaching, or removing impediments, can wait until it's clear which approach is the best choice.

EXERCISE: STATE OF MIND—THE FUTURE

Is there any approach you would like to use more often? Why?

- □ Teaching, mentoring, sharing experiences, giving advice
- □ Removing impediments
- □ Facilitation
- □ Coaching
- □ Observation

Why?

_____

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