What is a Scrum Master? Roles and responsibilities explained

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The Scrum Master is accountable for the Scrum Team’s effectiveness. That is how the 2020 Scrum Guide puts it, and it is broader than "runs the meetings". A good Scrum Master helps the team, the Product Owner and the wider organisation use Scrum well, and removes what slows the team down.

TL;DR The short version

- The 2020 Scrum Guide makes the Scrum Master accountable for the Scrum Team's effectiveness, which is more than running meetings.
- They serve the Developers, the Product Owner and the organisation, and remove what slows the team down.
- They are not the team's manager or secretary; facilitation and coaching are the core skills.

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Who the Scrum Master serves

- **The Developers:** coaching self-management, helping them focus on increments that meet the Definition of Done, and getting impediments removed.
- **The Product Owner:** helping with Product Goal definition, backlog management techniques and clear backlog items.
- **The organisation:** leading Scrum adoption, helping stakeholders understand an empirical approach, and removing barriers between stakeholders and the team.

What a Scrum Master is not

- Not the team’s manager. They do not assign work or write performance reviews.
- Not a secretary who only books rooms and takes notes.
- Not the person who decides what to build. That is the Product Owner.
- Not the person accountable for the estimates. The Developers own their plan.

A typical week

- Facilitating Sprint Planning, the Review and the Retrospective when the team needs it, and making sure they happen and stay within their timebox.

- Following up on impediments raised at the Daily Scrum: a blocked environment, a missing decision, a dependency on another team.
- Coaching the Product Owner on splitting and ordering backlog items.
- Working with other Scrum Masters and managers on problems no single team can fix.
- Watching for patterns: carried-over work, rising cycle time, quiet team members.

Skills that matter

- Facilitation: getting a decision from a room without imposing one.
- Coaching: asking questions that let the team find its own answer.
- Enough technical understanding to see when "blocked" means a build pipeline, a test environment or a design problem.
- Patience with organisational change, and the nerve to name a problem out loud.

Further reading

See Scrum events explained, Scrum Master vs Product Owner and how to become a Scrum Master.

> Related credential: Agile Delivery Practitioner. Explore the exam facts and syllabus.

Sources and further reading

1. Schwaber, K. and Sutherland, J. (2020). The Scrum Guide. scrumguides.org.
2. IICTP. TPBOK, Engineering Governance & Agile Delivery. iictp.org/standards/tpbok.

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