The Scrum Pocket Guide Provides All Scrum Basics and Conveys the Core of Agile

By Cornelius Dufft

July 18, 2018

SCRUM – A POCKET GUIDE
A Smart Travel Companion
By Gunther Verheyen
Illustrated, 110 pp. Published 2013, Van Haren Publishing, Zaltbommel, Netherlands

SUMMARY

The book provides key Agile and Scrum facts as well as the 'heartbeat' of Scrum. In four chapters and 85 pages, the author introduces the Agile paradigm (as opposed to the industrial paradigm) and positions Lean to Agile. He describes the Scrum framework and its players, rules, events, artifacts, and principles. Contrasting 'ground rules' of the game with 'tactics to play the game', Gunther gives advice how to best perform Scrum. With an outlook on the future state of Scrum, the author expresses high hopes that Agile and Scrum become the new norm. The annex contains Scrum vocabulary and definitions, references, and info about the author and about scrum.org.

Gunther is an authority in the area of Scrum. There is probably no more trusted and concise book on the topic. What makes the book unique to me is Gunther's personal touch: Putting the people in the center. It conveys key facts about Scrum and also includes a personal, professional perspective on the subject.

I give *5 stars* for the book. It is a *must read* for readers new to Scrum. Also for experts I can *highly recommend* reading the book.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The Author Gunther Verheyen graduated in 1992 in Industrial Engineering. In 2003 he started working with eXtreme Programming and Scrum. Since then, he helped several organizations, big and small, to realize agility by adopting the Scrum framework. He gives talks at conferences and is one of the senior contributors at scrum.org. He describes himself as "Independent Scrum Caretaker. Humaniser. Connector …" (https://twitter.com/Ullizee as of 2018-06-17).

CONTENT SUMMARY

Chaper 1 "The Agile Paradigm" (24 pages) describes agile in a high-over way:

Part 1.1 "To Shift or Not to Shift" contrasts the Agile paradigm with the industrial paradigm. Gunther cites research about the inherent flaws of "traditional" software development. In contrast to the industrial paradigm, the Agile paradigm fully respects the *creative* nature of the work and the intelligence of the software *developers*. The author shows that Agile projects in most cases are more successful than traditional projects. Gradual steps, however, from the industrial to the Agile paradigm mostly fail and retain the old thinking in its dominant position. Here the Scrum framework helps. The author describes Scrum as one and the most prominent tangible way to enter the state of agility.

Part 1.2 "The Origins of Agile" summarizes the history of Agile, including the fact that Scrum was introduced in the early 1990s, well before the term "Agile" was coined with the Agile Manifesto 2001.

Part 1.3 "Definition of Agile" spells out the key characteristics as
- People driven (along with the focus on collaboration and a truly sustainable pace);
- Facilitation (referring to servant-leadership);
- Iterative-incremental process (to focus on value creation and early learning);
- Measuring success (with valuable, working software as the primary measure);
- Change (as a source for innovation and improvement, change to become "natural" instead of disruptive).

Part 1.4 "The Iterative-Incremental Continuum" on the one hand explains how an iterative, time-boxed approach with small-scoped, but frequent analysis, design, coding, and test/integration steps enables teams to focus, to learn early and still deliver. On the other hand it shows how this approach minimizes risk while maximizing value in a much more robust way than in the industrial paradigm. Soft factors like "focus", "value", and "early and continuous learning" drive the business. Thereby Gunther states that this approach can and should go beyond IT departments to transform the whole organization.

In Part 1.5 "Agility Can't Be Planned", Gunther takes away the hope to "plan and roll-out" an agile transformation like any other project in the industrial paradigm – and rightfully so. As it is about culture and an open learning process, the author states: *"Agility can't be planned; Agility can't be dictated; Agility has no end-state."*

Part 1.6 "Combining Agile and Lean" describes major aspects of Lean including the "House" of the Lean principles: People, Kaizen, Lean Thinking. Key Lean concepts are introduced like "waste", "Kanban", "inventory", "Work in Progress" and "flow", and a possible blending with Agile is described. The message is: Lean and Agile are different, but they fit together and they stem from the same sources.

Chapter 2 "Scrum" (40 pages) is the main chapter describing the Scrum basics, both the formal and the material ones.

Part 2.1 "The House of Scrum" describes Scrum as a warm, welcoming place for all, an enabler-environment for collaboration, a truly humanized place of work.

Part 2.2 "Scrum, What's in a Name" shows Scrum as the heartbeat, the soul of agile. Gunther takes the reader to a journey back in the history of the name, leading to the importance of people (again).

The Title of part 2.3 "Is That a Gorilla I See Over There" refers to Geoffrey Moore's 'Technology Adoption Life Cycle' model and states that Scrum is the dominating agile framework/model for software development. The author cites research showing that Agile and specifically Scrum is becoming more and more the new normal in the software development business (and increasingly beyond).

Part 2.4 explains that Scrum is a "Framework, Not Methodology": *"The framework of Scrum sets the bounded environments for action, and leaves it to the people to take action, decide on the best possible action within those boundaries."* This openness within simple boundaries is the secret why Scrum is the most successful agile framework.

Part 2.5 "Playing the Game" is the most comprehensive subchapter. It introduces the notion of a Scrum game board to highlight the fact that Scrum has only a few, yet strict rules, which allow freedom while playing.
- Players and their artifacts:
  - Product Owner brings the business into the game, owns the Product Backlog.

- Development Team self-organizes to undertake all work to deliver valuable Increments, creates and maintains the Sprint Backlog and gives a forecast. It honors the 'definition of Done' and engineering standards.
  - Scrum Master facilitates by teaching, coaching, mentoring the Scrum Team and the organization, including removing Impediments.
- Time/Events:
  - Sprint Planning: max. 8 hours, the Development Team provides a forecast and a Sprint Backlog;
  - Daily Scrum: max. 15 minutes, the Development Team inspects and adapts, i.e. (re-)plans the next work;
  - Sprint Review: max. 4 hours, the Scrum Team and stakeholders inspect the outcome of the sprint for functional fitness and fitness to release, and to align priorities via an updated Product Backlog;
  - Sprint Retrospective: max. 3 hours, the Scrum Team inspects the 'process' 360-degree of the Sprint.
    "Scrum only knows Sprints, and the goal of each Sprint is to deliver a piece of working software, an Increment of the product. Working software is considered the only measure of progress."
- Tracking progress: In Scrum, visualization of progress is mandated, but without requiring a specific form. The author discusses common formats like burn-down chart, burn-up chart, cumulative flow charts etc.
- 'Definition of Done' and 'Engineering Standards', owned by the Development team, are key to coding quality and valuable, working software before each iteration ends.

The content is in line with The Scrum Guide (scrum.org, 2017), and provides an integrated, brief, and comprehensive perspective about how to combine the elements based on the Scrum rules.

Part 2.6 "Core Principles of Scrum" elaborates on some basics that are prerequisite to Scrum.
Shared visual workspace:
- Shared visual workspace: *"A shared visual workspace optimizes transparency and reduces the length of information exchange dramatically."* Also, the concept of information radiators is introduced for items that readily display information relevant to the Scrum Team.
- Self-organization: The author elaborates on the concept of self-organization, refers to research and application, and gives lively examples. Self-organization, he states, is nothing to be introduced – it is to be allowed to simply happen (of course, within the boundaries of the Scrum rules). The motivational trinity of 'self-directiveness', 'Mastery' and 'Purpose' make up the drive for human motivation in Scrum.
- Empirical process control: The author explains open loop and closed loop process control. The closed loop model and the frequent, early learning which comes with it are key to Scrum. Empiricism is the most important approach and Gunther explains why and how.

Part 2.7 "The Scrum Values" discusses – last but not least – the attitude which drives Scrum:
- Commitment – is not a hard-coded plan, but full-hearted, personal dedication;
- Focus – "on the smallest thing that might possibly work";
- Openness – and a fundamental buy-in into empiricism and continuous learning;
- Respect – for all elements, rules, and players in Scrum;
- Courage – to stick with the rules and to do the right thing right.

While other publications simply list and explain the values, Gunther conveys their real meaning in the context of Scrum, relates them to each other, and thereby develops the essential Scrum *attitude.*

Chapter 3 "Tactics for a Purpose" (14 pages) shows some common implementation techniques of Scrum. While chapter 2 prescribed the fixed rules of the game, chapter 3 offers some well-established, though optional playing tactics.

- Part 3.1 "Visualizing Progress". In the beginning, the use of burn-down charts was mandatory in Scrum. This has changed. Scrum requires some progress visualization, but not in a prescribed format. The Development Team chooses which format works best for them.
- Part 3.2 "The Daily Scrum Question" highlights that it is not about formally running down new 'agile' routines, but to keep the focus, every day in a fresh manner. The common questions (Done? Planned? Impediments?) are just a possible clue to do so.
- Part 3.3 "Product Backlog Refinement" is not a prescribed event or process. The Scrum Team decides how to refine the Product Backlog to make it ready for a future Sprint Planning. Gunther offers insight about why and how to achieve this.
- Part 3.4 "User Stories" is an eXtreme Programming term, which may (or may not) be used in Scrum.
- Part 3.5 "Planning Poker" is introduced as one good sizing tactic besides others.
- Part 3.6 "Sprint Length" helps to understand the topic and gives input how to set the individual optimal sprint length.
- Part 3.7 "Scaling Scrum" is a longer subchapter in which the author introduces "Serial Scrum", "Multiple Scrum Teams", and "Multiple Products".

Chapter 4 "The Future Stare of Scrum" (10 pages) gives an outlook.

Part 4.1 "Yes, We Do Scrum. And…" highlights the unique mix of small, strict rules and a myriad of smart implementations, encouraging to keep Scrum fresh every day.

Part 4.2 "The Power of the Possible Product" discusses Product Management aspects and the vital role of the Product Owner specifically. They must be truly responsible for the product value to align all parties in an organization. Sometimes it is more valuable to not build a product/a feature, hence the title of the chapter.

Part 4.3 "The Upstream Adoption of Scrum" predicts that Scrum will be and must be adopted by more and more departments in an organization to fully support agile development.
"The future state of Scrum will no longer be called 'Scrum'. What we now call Scrum will have become the norm, as the new paradigm for the software industry has taken over and organizations have re-invented themselves around it."

MY PERSONAL VIEW ON THE BOOK

First, Gunther's book fulfills the promise to *guide* the reader in Scrum. A good guide is a person who has travelled the locations extensively that he describes. A guide wants to ease the travel of follow-on travelers. In this sense, Gunther offers advice and literally gives a helping hand. The subtitle "A Smart Travel Companion" fully holds its promise.

For me, the fundamental publication on Scrum is "The Scrum Guide" (2017), in which Ken Schwaber and Jeff Sutherland list and describe what makes up the Scrum basic rules: *"Scrum is a framework for developing, delivering, and sustaining complex products. This Guide contains the definition of Scrum. This definition consists of Scrum's roles, events, artifacts, and the rules that bind them together."* In an apodictic style the founders define Scrum. Compared to "The Scrum Guide", "Scrum – A Pocket Guide" rather tells stories and searches a dialogue with the reader. The topics described relate to one another very well. Their underlying theme is to *live* the Scrum values. The author shows empathy. I had the feeling, Gunther cares for the reader as well as caring for the persons involved in Scrum. Gunther's book not only conveys Scrum facts; the author expresses his personal perspectives on the topic. – To learn about Scrum, the "Scrum Guide" is a publication you *must* read and memorize. "Scrum – A Pocket Guide" is a book you will *want* to read and to take to your heart.

Compared to other Scrum publications, which offer a much more extensive view on different aspects or report specific exemplary scenarios, Gunther's book is special in its conciseness. Mostly it only states what needs to be stated from a general perspective. Examples are added only where needed. To understand the meaning, the readers must rethink what they read. By that, readers will develop their own Scrum thinking. And isn't this what Scrum is, to think and work out the solution yourself instead of accepting pre-approved concepts? In that way, the book does not only provide information, it guides and teaches Scrum. It helps the readers to travel the Scrum landscape on their own.

To me, the values section (Part 2.7) was specifically interesting. To give an example, the notion of the Scrum value 'Commitment' was new to me. It is not a "hard-coded plan", but the dedication the team takes to the work. Consequently, the Development Team does not log-in and formally commit the Sprint Backlog, but it gives a 'forecast'. (Gunther published a newer version of "The Scrum Values (International Version)" June 2018 https://guntherverheyen.com/2018/06/14/the-scrum-values-international-versions-june-2018/)

When reading I had many sudden insights. E.g. I was mentally planning an agile transformation in 'old-style', when realizing in chapter 1.5 that "Agility Can't Be Planned". There is no traditional change management plan with an Agile transformation. (There probably is change management in Agile transformations which may include knowledge from 'old-style' change management. But I expect these 'old-style' parts to be recycled in a true agile, people-oriented, open approach.) Another example: When reading about "The Scrum Daily Questions" (part 3.2) I realized how often my teams and I got stuck in the mere mechanics of Scrum. The Scrum Daily questions, however, are not a formalism but an inspection and adaption opportunity to stay alert and focus on the work to do. The author again focusses on the Scrum Values and on the importance of *people* getting work done in a self-organized manner. This was confirmed in the 2017 update to the Scrum Guide, in which the 3 questions have been described as optional rather than mandatory, as it was before.

Throughout the whole book, the author balances the more formal aspects of Scrum rules with the fabric of real, lively Scrum work. To me the book conveys how it feels to work the Scrum style.

After reading the book I had the opportunity to meet the author on the ScrumDay 2018 conference (2018, June 12-13, Filderstadt/Stuttgart, Germany). In his keynote presentation about "Humanizing the Workplace – A Scrum Caretaker's Tales for Coaches, Leaders and Agilists Alike" he put people at the center – like he does in his book.

REFERENCES

Beck, K., & Sutherland, J. (2017). *The Scrum Guide – The Definitive Guide to Scrum: The Rules of the Game.* (https://www.scrum.org/resources/scrum-guide).

Moore, G (1999). *Crossing the Chasm, Marketing and Selling Technology Products to Mainstream Customers (second edition).* Wiley. Cited according to G. Verheyen.