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The challenges of Scrum Master training in a virtual classroom

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Scrum.org is an organization that was created in 2009 by Ken Schwaber, co-creator of the Scrum framework, with the aim of improving professionalism in software development. This organization is formed by 330 Professional Scrum Trainers (PSTs) around the world. These trainers need to prove their experience using Scrum, obtaining high scores (above 90%) in certifications, interviews and training. PSTs are licensed to teach courses that follow a standard, with the same learning objectives in all countries.

I am one of the PSTs licensed to teach the Professional Scrum Master (PSM) course. The Scrum Master is the role of Scrum that ensures that the framework is followed correctly, he also removes the impediments of the team and teaches them self-organization. The demand for the course is high due to the amount of opportunities in the job market. But, to teach the course I had to travel to Brazil, as I have been living in New Zealand since 2017. The demand in Brazil is greater than in New Zealand because the culture in the companies are not yet agile.

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Before the COVID-19 pandemic, courses could only be offered in person, as Scrum.org believed that this was the best way for learning, since the trainer could read students' body language, stay focused and have more engagement during the two consecutive days of the course.

During the pandemic, Scrum.org made an exception for online courses over a three-month period. This created the opportunity for me to teach the Professional Scrum Master course online for Brazilians.

To obtain PSM I certification, for example, the student

needs to score more than 85% correct in the test that contains 80 questions and a maximum period of one hour. As a result, Scrum.org created the Live Virtual Classroom (LVC) model, where the trainer remains on-line the entire time with the

students, and it is not allowed to record any part of their training.

During that time, Scrum.org noted that the percentage of students who passed the tests remained at an acceptable number. Unlike the face-to-face course that has to be taught on two consecutive days, totalling 16

The Scrum Master ensures that the framework is followed correctly.



hours; the online course can be divided into several days, which do not have to be consecutive. I chose the 3-day format with 4 hours on the first day and 6 hours on the two consecutive days. I tried other formats with more days and less time, but the one adopted was the one that worked best, because it reduces the breakdown of content and the student has less external interruptions and the probability of not participating on any of the days because of an urgency.

The time zone between New Zealand and Brazil is 13 hours. Courses usually start at 6 pm on Friday in Brazil, and at 9 am on Saturday in New Zealand. On the other two days (Saturday and Sunday) the course in Brazil starts at 3 pm and ends at 9 pm. In New Zealand it starts at 6 am and ends at 12 am on Sunday and Monday.

Scrum.org works in community and a lot of knowledge and experience is shared between trainers. In addition, there is a guide for trainers on how to teach the course. Course tools and format can be customized, but the trainer needs to keep the original slide deck.

The tool used for the class is the Zoom, which has the functionality to breakout in rooms with smaller groups, allowing the trainer to apply the same teaching techniques as the classroom course. When teaching the Scrum.org course, I use the techniques from the book *Teaching from the back of the room* that makes the student teaching a certain content to the class. This helps the student to retain the knowledge and generates a rich discussion on the topics, causing the knowledge to emerge by the students.

The first time I taught the LVC course, students took approximately six hours to feel in a safe environment, where they could make mistakes and ask questions. Early in the course, we created a contract that established that there was no bad question; that all information shared in the course is confidential and that

making mistakes is not a problem. In the face-to-face course, we also created this contract, but right after two hours of course, students already communicate and share knowledge.

In face-to-face training, I spend less time on icebreaker activities than in LVC. For example, at LVC, I ask the student to create and present a slide that describes him personally and professionally. Usually, students post their favourite photos, their Scrum experience, their courses, and their place of origin. This allows students to get to know each other better.

Scrum.org works in community.

To create an environment of trust between the students, two weeks before the course, I send an email with information about the tools that will be used, I make my information available, and I also create a group in the messaging tool

(WhatsApp), where I answer any questions related to technology or some research that students want to do before the course. During the course, this group serves as backup in case of internet failures, tool failures, delays, or unexpected events. As it is an online course, I realized that the delays are much less common than in the face-to-face course.

To help the student stay focused, the class has 10-minute breaks every hour. This makes the student to get up from the chair, move around, have a coffee, make a call. Maintaining this rhythm reduces student fatigue. In face-to-face training, there are only 2 coffee breaks and lunch. These breaks in the classroom are important moments for students, as they talk, exchange experiences and create networks of contacts. In the LVC course, moments of conversations unrelated to the course are minor or non-existent.

The percentage of students who pass the exam is almost the same. Above 60%, in person and at LVC. The data from the LVC course is still new and most students have tried the exam only once. The student has two



opportunities, or attempts, to take the PSM I test. The first must be done within 14 days and the other can be done at any time, without an expiration date.

A great benefit for LVC student is that he can participate in the course from anywhere in Brazil, reducing the cost of travel. I also have no expenses with travel, training and food, reducing the time of administration of these details.

All classroom exercises are done on flip charts. At the end of the course, I take a photo of each flip chart and make it available to students in digital format. In the LVC course, students use the Jamboard tool and can copy the results, which reduces handwriting problems or bad quality resolution of the photos from the flip chart.

The configuration of the place where the course is taught is also important. I use a room, with good lighting, with no decoration items in the background and with white walls, so that the student does not lose focus on what I am teaching. The computer must be connected to the internet by cable to avoid failures and the webcam must have a good quality and microphone. I use two monitors, one to share my slides and the other to be able to see students and observe body language during training. I also use an iPad as a whiteboard through the Jamboard app to draw or explain topics.

Focus is one of the five values of Scrum and to help students experiencing this value, I only use Zoom's text messages to share the links of each chapter on the Jamboard board. When the student has a question that is not related to the subject that I am teaching, I ask him to add the question in another Jamboard board I call parking lot. As the student does not send a message in the chat, the notification doesn't disturb other students. After class breaks, I answer each question. When I realize that the doubts are no longer related to Scrum and become consulting questions for a specific problem of the student's company, I answer the question in another video conference. In face-to-face training, students usually stay up to an hour or more after the end of the course asking questions about problems they have in their companies. This is a problem because I need to dismantle the room and equipment until a certain time.

I also had the experience of teaching the course with another trainer. While I concentrated on the content, the other trainer took care of the settings. This made the course more dynamic because we took turns teaching and helping with the setup. Students had the benefit of learning Scrum from trainers with different experiences and more real examples.

Scrum.org continuously adapting to the online course with learning from the PST community and students' feedback. I am already preparing to teach two other LVC courses from other trainers thanks to the opportunity that arose from attending online training instead of having to travel to another country.

The COVID-19 pandemic caused many companies, including Scrum.org, to rethink the way they work and deliver their products responding to changes by applying agile concepts, such as inspection and adaptation.



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This article is a result of the author's ascertainment and analysis, without compulsorily reflecting CEST's opinion.