Ahh, it's fall. Not only does it bring the return of great, cooler weather but it also brings [American] football. And when there are football games, there are articles about football in newspapers and magazines. I, of course, know that Scrum's history is rooted in rugby rather than American football, but a football article I read this morning struck me as having a particular relevance to agile and Scrum development.

The article was about Nick Saban, coach of last year's college champion Alabama team. The article was about his process for winning championships; he's won three. One thing I found particularly relevant is that he holds a weekly "What If" meeting. During the What If Meeting, head coach Saban and his assistants pose and answer various what-if questions: What if the other team does this? What if the other team does that? What if our player's knee injury hasn't improved and he can't play?

I find this relevant to agile and Scrum projects because too few of those teams do any form of risk management. The Alabama football coaching staff's What If meeting is their form of risk management. I think it could be an appropriate level of risk management for many agile projects.

Many agile teams have completely eliminated explicit risk management. And for some projects, this is fine. The short timeboxes and focus on remaining constantly in a shippable state work wonders to eliminate a huge percentage of potential risks on development projects. However, there are still plenty of risks that could derail our projects. Even a lightweight approach to risk management--such as asking What If as part of sprint planning--could be a wise addition on many projects.

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About the Author

Mike Cohn specializes in helping companies adopt and improve their use of agile processes and techniques to build extremely high-performance teams. He is the author of User Stories Applied for Agile Software Development, Agile Estimating and Planning, and Succeeding with Agile as well as the Better User Stories video course. Mike is a founding member of the Agile Alliance and Scrum Alliance and can be reached at hello@mountaingoatsoftware.com. If you want to succeed with agile, you can also have Mike email you a short tip each week.