

GASPing About the Product Backlog

by Mike Cohn • 80 Comments

I've been wondering lately if Scrum is on the verge of getting a new standard meeting—the Backlog Grooming Meeting, which is a meeting an increasing number of teams are doing each sprint to make sure the [product backlog](#) is prepared and ready for the start of the next sprint.



To see why a Backlog Grooming Meeting may be a few years away from becoming a Generally Accepted Scrum Practice, or what I call a GASP, let's revisit the early 2000s.

Back then, Scrum didn't have a formal [Sprint Retrospective Meeting](#). Prevailing wisdom at the time was, in fact, fairly opposed to such a meeting. The logic was that a good Scrum team should be always on the lookout for opportunities to improve; they should not defer opportunities to discuss improvement to the end of a sprint.

That argument was a very good one. However, what was happening on teams was that day-to-day urgencies took precedence and opportunities to improve often went either unnoticed or unacted upon. And so what most teams eventually realized was that of course we should improve any time we notice an opportunity, but at a minimum each team should set aside a dedicated time each sprint for doing so—and thus the retrospective became a standard part of

Scrum. This was helped along tremendously by the great book, [Agile Retrospectives: Making Good Teams Great](#), by Esther Derby and Diana Larsen.

I've had more CSM course attendees recently asking questions about a Backlog Grooming Meeting as though it were a GASP. Many are surprised when I tell them that not every Scrum team has such a meeting each sprint. I still don't advocate every team conduct a Backlog Grooming Meeting each sprint—as with the early arguments against retrospectives, I'd prefer backlog grooming to happen in a more continuous, as-needed way—but so many teams are successfully using a Backlog Grooming Meeting, arguments against it may be on their last gasps.

Share what you think below. Will a Product Backlog Grooming meeting become so common it becomes a Generally Accepted Scrum Practice (GASP)?

Posted: March 14, 2012

Tagged: product backlog, sprinting, backlog, daily scrum, continuous improvement
