

Should Scrum Teams Include a Stretch Goal In Their Sprints?

by Mike Cohn • 37 Comments

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There are, of course, a variety of ways to go about planning a sprint. I've written previously about [velocity-driven sprint planning](#) and [capacity-driven sprint planning](#) and [my preference](#). But regardless of which approach a team takes to sprint planning, there is also the question of how full to fill the sprint.

Some teams prefer to leave plenty of excess capacity in each sprint, perhaps so there is time for emergent needs or experimentation. Other teams prefer to fill the sprint to the best of their ability to forecast their capacity.

Still other teams like to take on a "stretch goal" each sprint, which is kind of a product backlog item that is not quite in the sprint, but is one the team hopes to complete if the sprint goes well.

In this post, I'd like to share my thoughts on bringing a stretch goal into a sprint.

This is one of those things that needs to be left entirely up to the team. It should not be up to the ScrumMaster or the product owner, but up to the team. Some teams do extremely well with a stretch goal. Other teams do not.

It really depends on how the team views the stretch goal.

For example, I feel stretch goals are like a crushing weight. I feel like I need to complete them. When I set a goal, I almost always achieve it. I have a hard time distinguishing between what I call a "normal goal" and stretch goal. I don't think this is good, but it's who I am. But, I'm not the only one who does this.

If a team included me and perhaps a couple of others like me, we would probably not do well

with a stretch goal. The stretch goal would likely be in our minds and possibly even affect our ability to finish all of the main work of the sprint.

Other people—those unlike me—have what I'll call a more mature attitude toward stretch goals. They can look at it as it's intended. They can think, "OK, great if we get to it but no big deal if not." Teams comprising mostly people like that will probably do quite well with a stretch goal.

So: Should your team have a stretch goal in their sprints?

This really has to be up to the team. Unless I'm on the team. Then the answer is no.

Does Your Team Use Stretch Goals?

What do you do? Does your team use stretch goals? Does it help? Please share your thoughts in the comments below.

Posted: February 9, 2016

Tagged: sprinting, teams, sprint planning, self organizing teams, stretch goal
