

The Scrum Master

# PLAYBOOK

BY STOERD NIJLAND + EVELIEN ACUN-ROOS

**CREATIVITY IS NOT SOME POSSESSION OF SOME SPECIAL TALENT.**

**IT'S ABOUT THE WILLINGNESS TO *PLAY*.**

**- JOHN CLEESE**

## The Scrum Master Playbook

Most books are for reading, but this book is for playing.

ISBN: 9789083301303

Title: "The Scrum Master Playbook"

**First Edition | © 2023 Sjoerd Nijland | AGNC | Serious Scrum.**

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced in any form or means without permission from the author.

Images from Freepik Company S.L.

Typeset in Shree Devanagari 714, Permanent Marker and Chalkduster

**Published by:**

AGNC | Serious Scrum | 58970037

Xebia Academy B.V. | 81049145

**With thanks to:**

*Evelien Acun-Roos* for co-authoring

*Mathijs van Weerd* for support and direction

*Harry Vleesch Dubois* for support and direction

*Olaf Walther* for support in editing and design

*Vijay Slager* for photography

*Sharon Bowman* for testimonial

# The Scrum Master Playbook

We created this Playbook to make work more enjoyable and teams more effective. By mastering the Scrum Master Playbook, you'll unlock the true potential of yourself and your team. The impossible becomes possible.

Escape those mind-numbing conclaves and death-by-powerpoint by facilitating plays. Playing is serious business, and we can trust the neuroscience on this.

Did you know that playing:

- relieves stress,
- improves brain function,
- boosts energy,
- stimulates creativity,
- deepens connections with others,
- builds trust,
- channels conflict positively and constructively,
- heals emotional wounds,
- and increases happiness!

We are confident that our plays will have the same outcomes for you!

We've also observed many *toxic* games being played at work. Here are some examples:

- A game of hide-and-peek with the Product Owner;
- A game of whack-a-mole, except the moles are your coworkers and the mallets are your boss's mood swings;
- A game of chess, except the pawns are expendable and the king is a complete idiot;
- A game of dodgeball, except the balls are your stakeholders' unreasonable demands and you can't get out of the way;
- A game of musical chairs, except there's only one chair and everyone is fighting for it;
- A game of tag, except you're always "it".

However, the plays in this Playbook will help you foster a creative, collaborative, and psychologically safe environment. This Playbook is packed with ridiculous tricks and absurd strategies to make your Scrum a wild success. Just remember to keep a straight face when your stakeholders ask you what the heck you're up to.

- **STOERD + EVELIEN**



Part One:  
Playfulness

\* Evelien Acun-Roos \*

## Join the Dance!

When Sjoerd asked me to team up with him, I did not have to think twice. I have already walked the "Road 2 Mastery", a learning journey for Scrum Masters, amazed by its content, creativity, and material. It is my honor to contribute. Over the past years, I learned so much about facilitating, training, and playing. This as an excellent opportunity to learn.

I have been teaching and training for a long time. I have also been a dance teacher for over 20 years now, so I'm experienced in conveying the message (or dance steps). The kids in our class start dancing at the age of three, and my oldest student is going on 30. I know how to set up and run a class successfully. We start with a warming-up, and then we do some exercises and improvise to get more Agile, so that we can dance more fluently. After that, we practice the now familiar dances and add new moves.

**Learning how to dance is a playful incremental process.** With younger kids, we play musical games (teaching them some basic principles, terms, or each other's names). The older ones perform more demanding challenges, such as choreography or improvising a dance when the music stops.

I instruct new dance moves in steps. First, I show the move. Then, I explain it. Now we move together slowly, step by step. And we speed it up! Until they can do it by themselves before we...

**Repeat!**

In my professional training, I am doing it the other way around! We first experience and try the structure with limited instruction; after that, we take a step back to reflect before repeating the steps. Both approaches work.

That's what we do with this Playbook. We share different approaches with you. We're providing ways to play. There's no one-size-fits-all, not in dancing or in professional training.

**Create your own dance** and and valuable events, with this great Playbook for inspiration.

This collection is for those who love to teach, train, lead, coach and facilitate. It is based upon many ways, structures, principles, and experiences we have collected over the years that have worked well for us. It is crafted using the knowledge and experience of Scrum Masters from all over the world! We are continuously improving. So, if you have any feedback or additions, join the dance. Inspect and adapt.

- **EVELIEN**



# \* Sjoerd Nijland \*

# Playfulness

Most books are for reading, but this book is for playing. Playing together promotes transparency and bridges learning gaps. Apply this Playbook, and your events will never be the same. But why play? Playing is serious business, and we can trust the neuroscience on this. Playing relieves stress, improves brain function, boosts energy and creativity, increases and improves connections with others, and heals emotional wounds. Playfulness is a state of mind where we experience being absorbed in the moment, a collective flow during which we are focused, curious, spontaneous, engaged, and open to learning.

As in sports, coaches and trainers use a Playbook. This Playbook provides a collection of short activities for Scrum Teams called plays. It contains instructions and templates for Scrum Masters on how to play them. These plays can be applied in both virtual (distributed) and co-located settings.

I encourage you to use this Playbook and create your own. **Make it yours.**

By mastering this Playbook, you'll unlock the true potential of yourself and your team. The impossible becomes possible. It empowers you and your team. Your events will be truly eventful. I created this Playbook to make work more enjoyable and meaningful. I am confident that it will have the same outcome for you!

The plays increase effectiveness according to learning principles derived from neuroscience. I won't bore you with too much theory as this book is all about playing. But we'll leave breadcrumbs so you can find your way down these rabbit holes.

The plays in this book are in alphabetical order. So feel free to skip the intro and jump right into the action somewhere in the middle. I am not sensitive to the complexity and context of your work environment, so figuring out if and when to apply which play is entirely up to you. You can find a helpful 'playguide' in the back. We will share some secret tricks-of-the-trade, so you can design your training and effectively facilitate your events using these plays.

- **STOERD**

# 6 inspiring quotes from sports coaches

"I'M NOT COACHING TO KEEP MY JOB, I AM COACHING WHAT I BELIEVE." - JILL ELLIS

"AVERAGE PLAYERS WANT TO BE LEFT ALONE. GOOD PLAYERS WANT TO BE COACHED. GREAT PLAYERS WANT TO BE TOLD THE TRUTH." - DOC RIVERS

"I ALWAYS DELEGATE. IF SOMEONE IS VERY GOOD AT SOMETHING, WHATEVER IT IS, HE WILL BE IN CHARGE." - JOHAN CRUIJFF

"IT'S WHAT YOU LEARN AFTER YOU KNOW IT ALL THAT COUNTS THE MOST." - PATT SUMMITT

"PLAY THE RIGHT WAY' MEANS PLAY UNSELFISHLY, RESPECT EACH OTHER'S ACHIEVEMENTS, PLAY HARD, FULFILL YOUR ROLE." - GREGG POPOVICH

"I HAVE JUST THREE THINGS TO TEACH: SIMPLICITY, PATIENCE, COMPASSION. THESE THREE ARE THE GREATEST TREASURES. SIMPLE IN ACTIONS AND THOUGHTS, YOU RETURN TO THE SOURCE OF BEING. PATIENT WITH BOTH FRIENDS AND ENEMIES, YOU ACCORD WITH THE WAY THINGS ARE. COMPASSIONATE TOWARD YOURSELF, YOU RECONCILE ALL BEINGS IN THE WORLD." - PHIL JACKSON

oooo

# Are you ready to play?

If you believe playing is just for children, you wouldn't have picked up this book. 'Play' is serious business. For me, work and play are inseparable. It takes work to enable creative play.

Scrum is a game, or so the cover of the Scrum Guide tells us. We practice and play Scrum. Moreover, it is a team game, which is mastered together. A game has rules that guide the interactions. No rules, no game. A game offers a goal and constraints. It leaves it up to the players to figure out how to succeed.

We're in the business of changing the game. We are uncovering better ways.

**WHEREVER YOU CAN FIND A WAY OF DOING THINGS THAT IS BETTER THAN WHAT HAS BEEN DONE BEFORE, YOU ARE BEING CREATIVE.**

**- JOHN CLEESE**

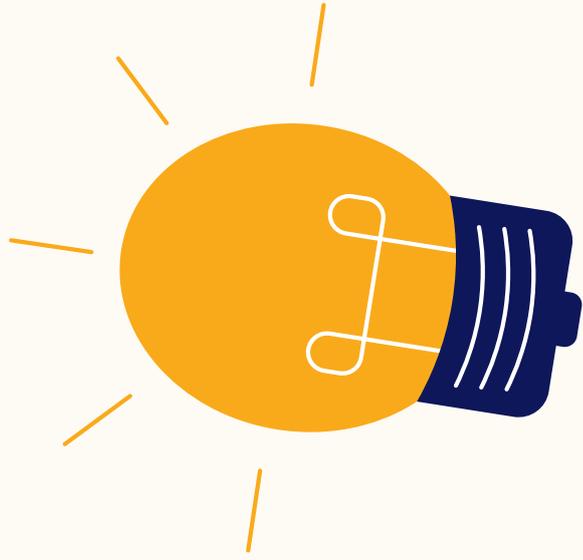
We regret to say we have come across so-called "Agile-in-name-only" companies that downright discourage any form of free, open, creative play. These companies were all about predictable delivery and productivity: *more, better, faster*. Naturally, they accomplished the opposite. Agility requires an unhealthy dose of creativity to find simple, adaptive ways to engage complex challenges.

One must **slow down, stop worrying, and mess things up** to enter that creative, playful state of mind. When playing, we get to be curious, focused, and absorbed: We can explore without experiencing any anxiety about wasting time. When we play, we learn. Yet most of the time at work, we are not playful at all. Being (or appearing) busy seems to be priority number one in the workspace. At work, we are slightly impatient: a perpetuated state of ever more work to be done, in which not being a busybee is considered a crime. Overbooked agendas, back-2-backs, swamped inboxes, beasts of backlogs... Is that effective time management?

Specialists can delude themselves into thinking that complex problems require complex approaches. They lack playtime, encouraging us to imagine painfully simple ways. They may presume that intricate designs and methods make them look smart. Creativity involves imagining **stupidly simple things that work**. After all, simplicity is the art of maximizing the work NOT done.

Fortunately, play has only a limited number of prerequisites. All you need is space, time, courage, and humor. Consider yourself invited.

**HOW MANY AGILE COACHES DOES IT TAKE  
TO CHANGE A LIGHTBULB?**



**WELL, "IT DEPENDS..."**



# Don't Panic!

**A warning to all managers!** Applying this Playbook will make your *subordinates* question your paradigm, spend time doing absurd things, and undermine rigid protocols. They'll take control over the way of working, gain confidence, and have fun. If you think playtime is unproductive and you worry impatiently when people finally "get back to work", then this book is not for you. Or, perhaps, all the more reason it is.

Those outcomes may be precisely what you are looking for. In that case, you might be slightly worried about how to introduce these plays to your corporate environment. What if people resist? Well good! We all have a mind of our own, wired with natural resistors.

- "Why?!"
- "Why now?"
- "What will happen?"
- "What will be expected of me?"
- "Can I live up to these new expectations?"
- "What about the rest of the work?"
- "What if I do something wrong?"
- "Will it all be worth it?"
- "Is this what I want?"
- "Can I trust you?"

At the same time, **human beings are naturally playful and adaptive**. We are all capable of dealing with complex challenges and changing our ways. It's our nature. We may raise children, fill in tax forms, process trauma, and maintain relationships. What it boils down to is: Do we feel safe enough to build deeper, stronger connections? Are we open to new ways, and do we have the courage to go on these short adventures?

When individuals don't feel like collaborating or don't want to join in, that's okay. They have the right to PASS. We will not force anyone to play, but we can encourage them. The right people always show up. Embrace a little resistance and encourage imperfection. Take your time. Slow it down. Have fun. Help each other along the way. The more relaxed you are, the more relaxed they are. When we relax and create space, we create room to maneuver creatively. When the play becomes rigid, it's often because people hang on too tightly to expectations that are set. **So, listen, laugh, and say yes.**

In the upcoming chapters, we'll bore you with some theories. It's the theory we've learned through lots of practice. It's simple enough and easy to remember. So don't worry about the theory, we already did that. We designed the plays so you can put them into practice.