Reflective Communication Scrum /
Recipe for accountability

Betteke van Ruler
Most people responsible for managing projects have been taught a deterministic approach to project management that uses detailed plans, Gantt charts and work schedules. Scrum is the exact opposite.'

Ken Schwaber in Agile Project Management with Scrum
/ Table of Contents
Reflective Communication Scrum

008 Introduction

015 Chapter 1 | A new way of planning

033 Chapter 2 | This is how you do it

055 Chapter 3 | 5 x 4 Essentials of the RCS

074 Chapter 4 | Backgrounds of the RCS

088 Glossary

090 List of references
/ Introduction
Reflective Communication Scrum is a new methodology for planning communication actions. Its execution is governed by strict rules, but none of the content, i.e. what you do, is prescribed in advance. The characteristics of Scrum methodology are defined as: strict adherence to the rules and flexibility regarding content.

In traditional corporate communication or public relations planning the results you will obtain (in smart objectives) and the actions needed to achieve your objectives are precisely defined. Changing conditions along the way, or proof of any unanticipated negative effects of your actions will impel you to admit in hindsight that your goals had not been realistic, that you had aimed at the wrong targets or that you had not had the right strategy or taken the correct actions, and that your actions had therefore been misconstrued. In short: a waste of (most of your) time and money.

Many communication professionals encounter these problems and are tempted to deviate from their communication plan, or drop it altogether. But it’s a case of ‘no plan, no future’, as the saying goes. It is clear that one simply must keep track of things, otherwise you risk losing your way in any process. Most people need some sort of a lead or a map for reference and at least some generalized objectives. Otherwise any incident that occurs will force you to improvise and probably take you further off course as a result. That is, if you can still see any course. If you are about to lose focus because of changes along the way, chaos is a real threat. So instead of an unrealistic plan you need a method to provide structure to your thoughts, to give direction and to determine priorities. Planning methodology helps you to justify decisions and be accountable regarding manpower, money, choices and so on. It also dissuades you from thinking solely about doing things, taking action. But such a method must be equal to the challenges of the unpredictability and dynamics in the realm of professional and strategic communication.
Reflective Communication Scrum is just such a method. RCS not only embraces flexibility, but also justifies it by using ongoing evaluation to gain insights for decision-making. That is why it is called Scrum for reflective communication. People who scrum are excited about it. They rave about its natural intensity of cooperation, the genuine urge to get things done in the shortest possible time, the rapid results you can get and the facilitating position of the Scrum master (who is sometimes also called team leader, or facilitator. We call her the Scrum master). Last but not least, they favor the central role of the client, or his representative, here called the ‘project owner’. All of which makes work much more fun while delivering much better results. It is therefore no surprise that the Scrum method is on a rapid rise all over the world.

Scrum was conceived by two Japanese scientists, Ikujiro Nonaka and Hirotaka Takeuchi, as a result of their research about the competitive Japanese automotive industry in the 1980s. Those corporations who led the field used a very flexible project planning method. Nonaka and Takeuchi called it ‘Scrum’. Much later the software industry adopted it and developed it further to achieve its popular perfection of today. Today you will see Scrum also applied in other fields: in online communication, website development, marketing, finance, HR management, E-health, organizational change, policy making and so on.

After many experiences with Scrum experts and professionals in the communication business, and having read many books and websites on Scrum, I’m sure Scrum answers the demands of the new reality of communication management. First of all because even unforeseen dynamics and complexity are no longer seen as obstacles. They are cleverly accommodated in the method. Second, because the time has passed that it was only after the event, if at all, that you had to justify your choices and decisions. With this method, you are
automatically accountable throughout the method. It comes with the territory. And who would not want that? In Scrum the team is always self-steering and multi-disciplinary. Creativity, entrepreneurship and cooperation are the keywords. The performances of members are closely monitored, not to see if they are doing what they’ve promised, but to check whether their actions are functional, whether what they do makes a constructive difference for the project as such and the team as a whole.

In Scrum a project is divided into sprints, brief time-fixed periods of one to four weeks. During a sprint, every day – or every other day, whichever seems appropriate – the team discusses its progression during a 15-minute stand-up meeting (the daily scrum) to reflect on what its members have done and will do, what is going on in the outside world and whether those two things fit together. After each sprint the project owner (and other stakeholders if desired) joins the team to evaluate results and process. The project owner – always a mandated delegate of the client and in IT called product owner – is actively involved in and committed to the Scrum project, participates in planning and evaluation meetings and decides on the priorities. In short: he ‘owns’ the project and thus keeps a close eye on it.

Do not expect this booklet to provide all the answers to questions concerning Scrum practices in the communication business. Scrum is a new phenomenon in communication and at this time simply too fresh to yield a comprehensive range of experiences. In this booklet I attempt to adapt the method to benefit the needs of communication professionals in their daily work. I believe that together we can refine the method and start to identify best practices so as to tailor the method for the benefit of all communication professionals.

Betteke van Ruler
www.bettekevanruler.nl
What's the use of RCS?

Hi Stephen, what do you think of Scrum?

So, we need to align with modern demands?

Do you think that Scrum is only for projects with a typical final product, like a conference or an advertising campaign? Or will it be suitable for other public relations efforts, too?

Knowledge scholars are talking about the change from routine expertise to reflective or adaptive expertise. Do we need to include these types of expertise into our toolkits?

What kind of competencies do we need to pilot new approaches and structures?

Thanks Stephen!

Betteke van Ruler Emeritus Professor of Communication Studies University of Amsterdam.
The dominant workflow in public relations is more than 100 years old. It’s no longer fit for purpose in a real time always on world.

Yes, we need to redevelop our processes and systems.

In my view there is an opportunity to use the Scrum approach in any situation where you’re able to define a clear objective with a measurable outcome. That could be an ongoing public relations program just as easily as a discrete project.

A shift to a more agile approach that is suited to modern forms of engagement is critical to our future. We need to pilot new approaches and structure within our teams. I’m a huge believer in fast failure and rapid iterative development.

We need to be brave enough to recognize that our existing structures are no longer fit for purpose. We also need to recognize that we can’t start from scratch and that we need to transition from old models to new. That requires bravery and starts with pilots at the edges of communication programs.

Stephen Waddington @wadds is European Digital & Social Media Director Ketchum
Reflective Communication
Scrum

/ A new way of planning

The more dynamic the environment, the more flexible the plan
Scrum embraces and formalizes this flexibility
It is all about cooperation, entrepreneurship and creativity
The traditional planning method

- diagnosis
- target groups
- objectives
- strategy
- tactics
- evaluation

In the various editions of his well-known book *Strategic Planning for Public Relations*, R.D. Smith suggests that the planning process in public relations consists of four phases with altogether nine steps. The first phase is analysis of the situation, the organization and the publics. The second is to draw up a strategic plan, which means establishing goals and objectives, formulating action and response strategies and developing the message strategy. The third phase is tactics, which means first selecting communication tactics, and then implementing the strategic plan. The fourth phase is evaluation of the plan. This method is also known as RACE: Research, Action plan, Communication, Evaluation.

All too linear

In this kind of traditional communication planning you determine beforehand what results you want to achieve and what actions you must perform to arrive there. You set your targets and tactics in advance.
When conditions change along the way, or when the effects of your actions prove to be different to what you expected, you are forced to admit that your goals were not realistic, that you had aimed at the wrong target and/or that you had not chosen the right strategy, the right actions, or the right message. In short: a waste of money and effort. The traditional planning method is based on the classical theory of scientific management and a rather old-fashioned idea of how to build strategy. In our dynamic and digitized world, these approaches to management and strategy are seen as ‘far too linear’. Most books on communication planning leave scant room for adjustments, or only by exception. It is in no way a structural building block of the planning model. So how can it do any good in the dynamic environment in which organizations are living today?

**Many plans are merely action plans**
In traditional planning methods goals are formulated as the second step and they need to be formulated SMART: Specific, Measurable, Acceptable, Realistic, Time-bound. This is done to make it possible to show what you’ve accomplished at the end of the project. That implies that the effects of communication are assumed to be predictable. Many communication professionals therefore rightly refrain from formulating specific objectives. But then, by doing so, there is little left to evaluate afterwards. Some practitioners do not mind. But if evaluation is not deemed necessary, communication is in fact seen as a magic bullet. A magic bullet which, if properly orchestrated (usually with a core message) and smartly distributed, may well ensure success. That is a pre-scientific approach to communication, and also to planning. Such a plan is by no means a strategic communication plan. It should merely be labeled an action plan.

**Communication is not all that powerful**
Of course, everyone knows it’s not that simple. It is simply not the case that ‘if only you knew what
I know, you would have the same idea’. Yet I often see corporate communication and public relations plans promising specific effects, greater knowledge, or changed attitudes or behavior, without answering the question whether these claims can be made in advance and why. If any attention is paid to evaluation, it is only to verify whether the objectives have eventually been achieved. The erratic nature of ideas, attitudes and behavior of target groups are not too often subject of the conversation between professionals. How realistic is that?

In Scrum changes are no obstacles
The traditional communication plan does not take into account the complexity of most communication issues and the dynamics in their context. If circumstances change, communication professionals too readily regard these changes as obstacles and consequently as natural excuses for objectives not being achieved.

Most professionals therefore indeed produce a communication plan – as is expected of them - and almost immediately put it aside because it is outdated the moment they have completed it. Is it then not better to replace it and have a method which by nature embraces dynamics and change?