

# Zombie Scrum

CE418: Systems Analysis and Design

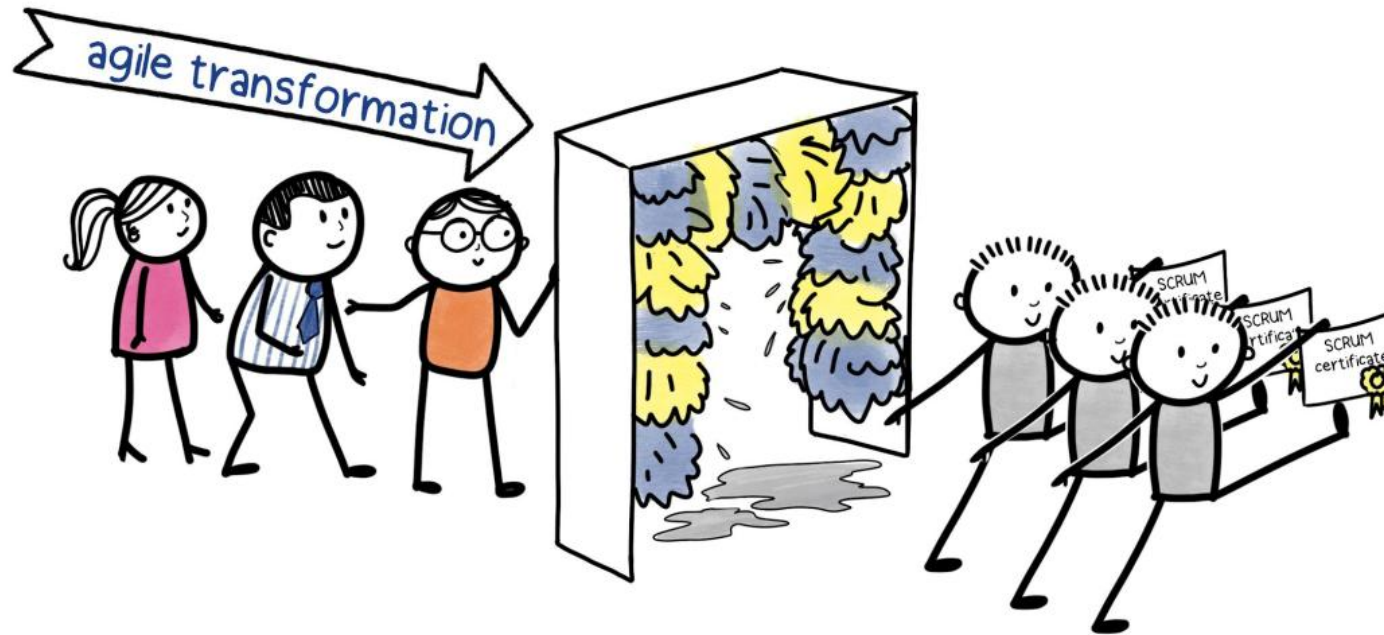
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# Introduction



Created by Thea Schükken for the Zombie Scrum Survival Guide  
by Christiaan Venwijs, Johannes Schärtau & Barry Overeem  
[zombiescrum.org](http://zombiescrum.org)

# What is Zombie Scrum?

- Zombie Scrum is Scrum, but without the beating heart of working software.
- Don't have any intention to improve their situation.
- Stakeholders have forgotten the existence of this team long time ago.



# The Symptoms of Zombie Scrum



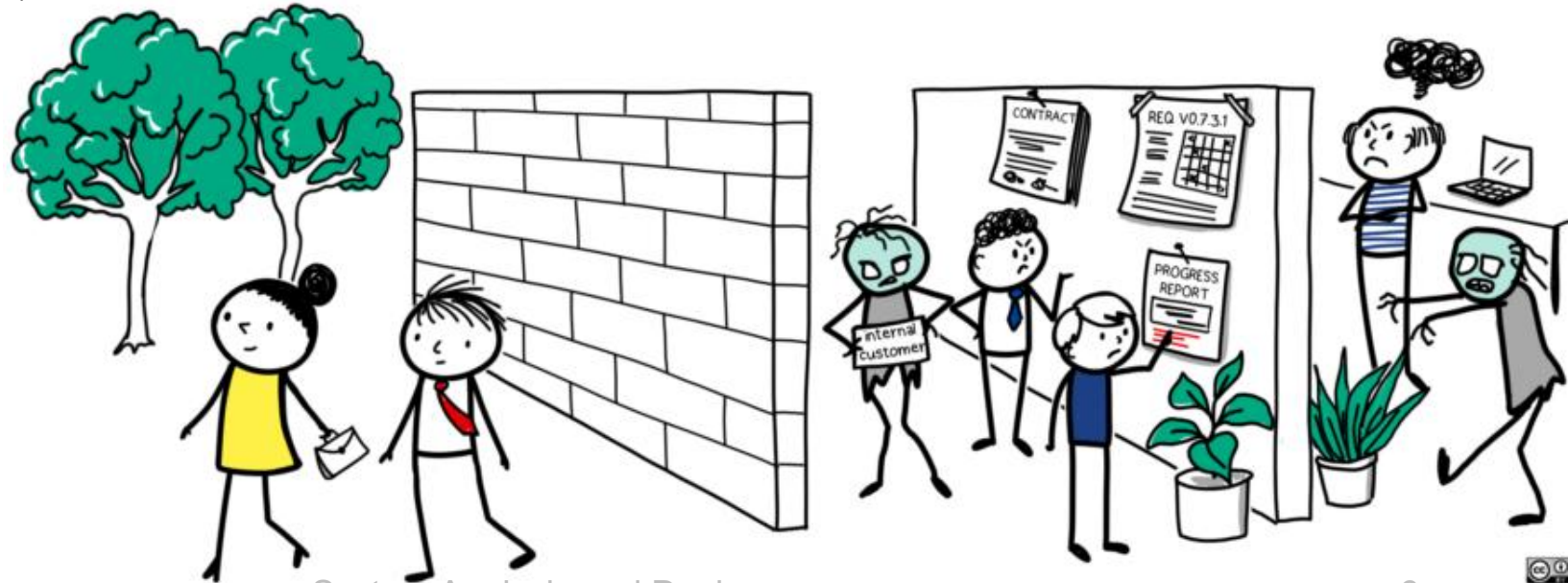
# Symptom #1: No beating heart

- Completed functionality is often treated as a ‘nice-to-have’, and can be finished in any other sprint.
- A very limited and unambitious definition of what ‘done’ means, and no drive to extend it.
- “Who cares about working software, gathering feedback and generating insights?”
- In healthy Scrum having a continuous stream of ‘done’ software is an essential goal of Scrum.

# Symptom #2: No (desire for) contact with the outside world

- Scrum zombies prefer to hide away from people and keep to their familiar surroundings.
- Don't care what's upstream nor what's downstream in the value chain. **"I'm only here to code!"** Zombie Scrum teams unable and unwilling to change anything and have a real impact.

- Want to depend on others in order to avoid taking responsibility



# Symptom #3: No emotional response to success or failure

- Team morale is very low.
- Items from the Sprint Backlog get carried over to the next Sprint without question:
  - Because why not? There's always a next Sprint and the iterations are artificial anyway!
- The lack of contact with the outside world often leads to this symptom, but it can also manifest itself independently of the other symptoms.

# Symptom #4: No drive to improve

- Nobody really seems to care:
  - The Product Owner is hardly ever present during the Sprint Review or the Sprint Planning
  - Teams are highly unstable, as members continuously get loaned out to other teams in need of their (specialised) skills.
  - there's no actual Scrum Master present to help the team grow.
- Boring retrospectives, a lot of complaining and no desire to improve.

# Symptom #5: Unable to ship fast

- “that can’t possibly work for a product or organization as complex as ours”
- shipping fast is only possible for small and inconsequential products or for huge tech companies like LinkedIn, Facebook, and Etsy.



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And how to solve it

System Analysis and Design

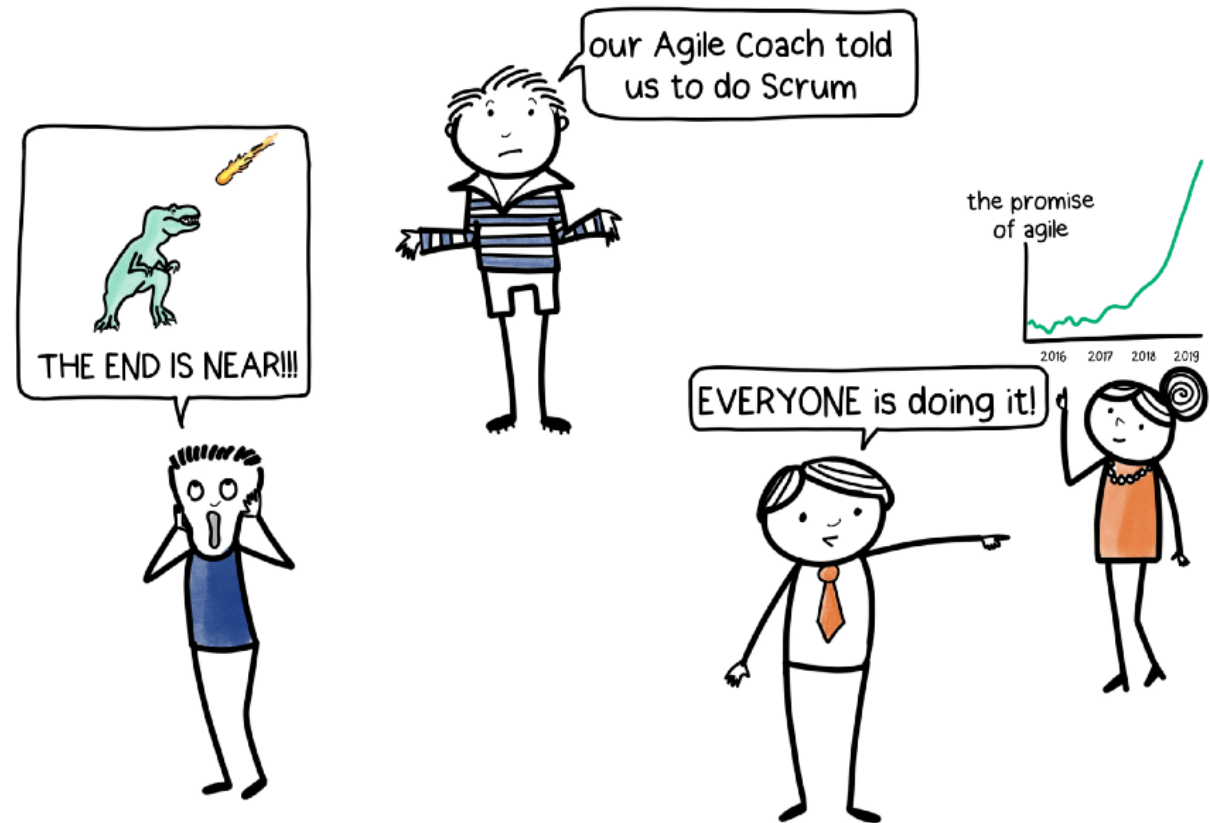
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# The Causes of Zombie Scrum

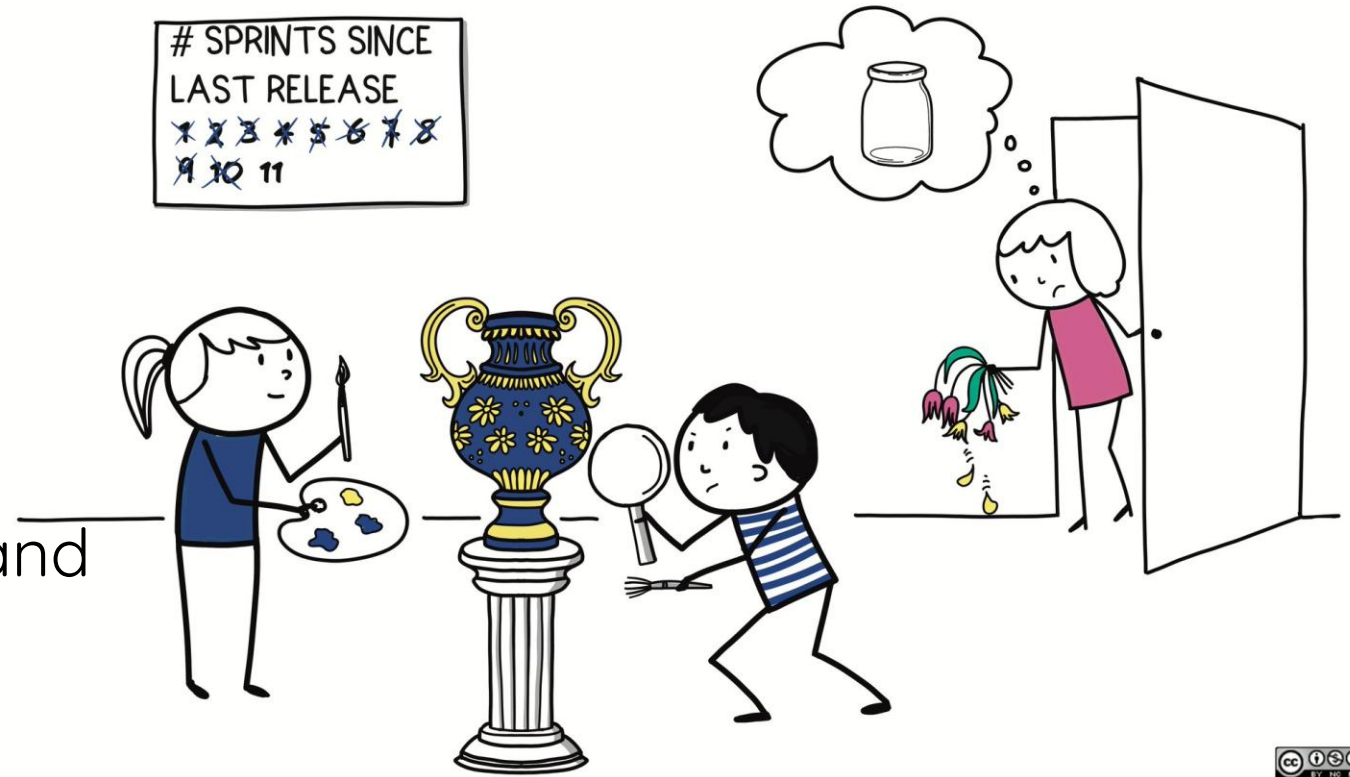
# Cause #1: A bit too homegrown, or 'Cargo Cult Scrum'

- Homegrown Scrum is great.
- Start working with Scrum without the help of external trainers and coaches. Some of the best Scrum Teams started out like this.
- Scrum can be a bit too home-grown
- Cause for **unintentional** partial adoption of Scrum.



# Cause #2: No Urgency

- There's no real understanding of value
- Teams often have a hard time coming up with clear goals
  - Without goals there's simply no reason for urgency
- Goals are the glue for any team and provide them with purpose and motivation.

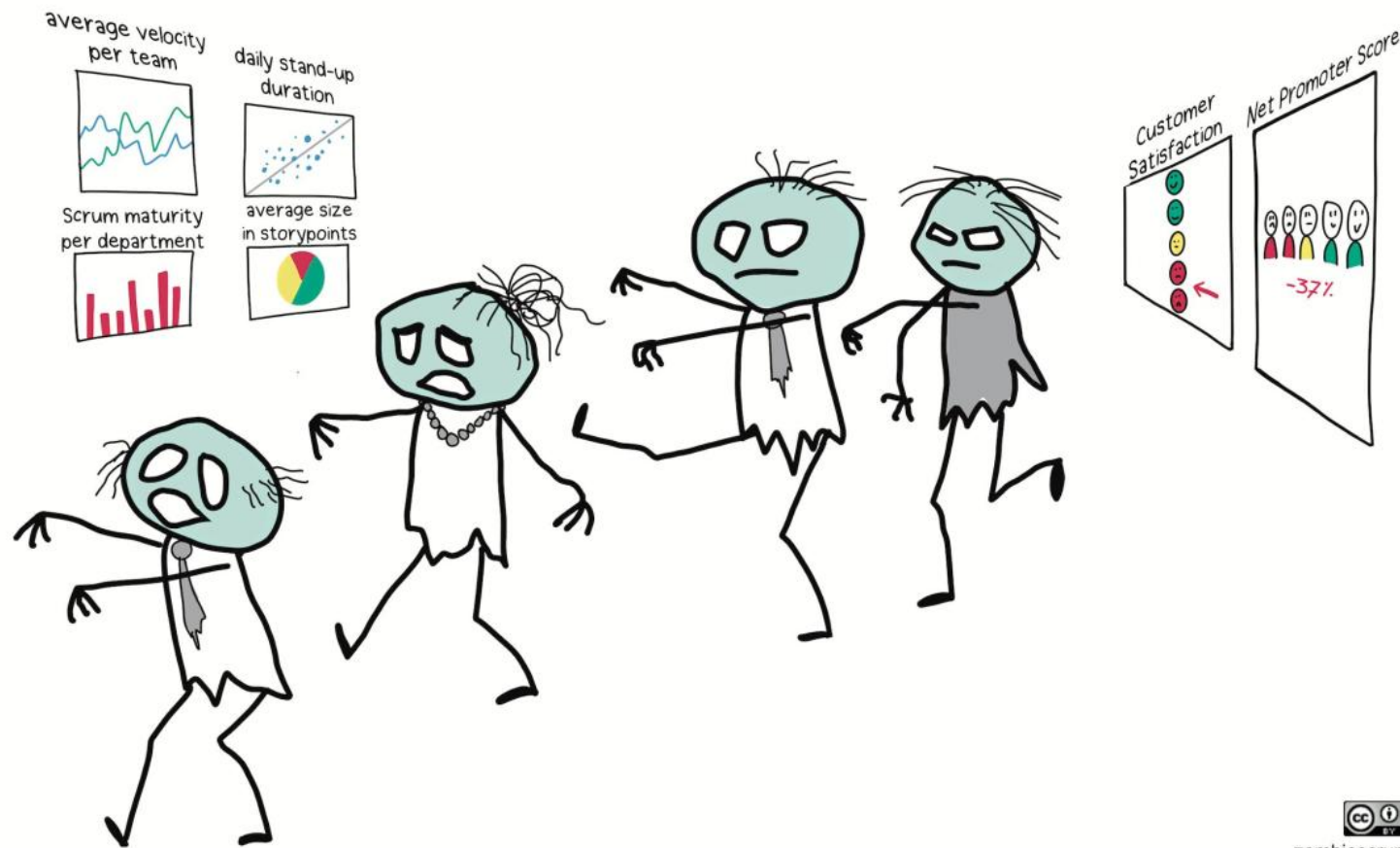


# Cause #3: Competing Values

- Zombie Scrum is essentially the result of a systemic mismatch with Agile values.
- Considers the purpose of Scrum a process that **must be followed** (for its own sake).
  - Instead of understanding that Scrum allows us to ‘fail fast’ because of a steady stream of working software.
- Considers working software a **nice-to-have**.
  - In healthy Scrum working software is essential; we learn most from it.
- Teams experience no sense of **urgency**. There’s always a next sprint! Sprints are artificial time-boxes.
  - In healthy Scrum teams however, a sprint is the longest allowed period between feedback opportunities.



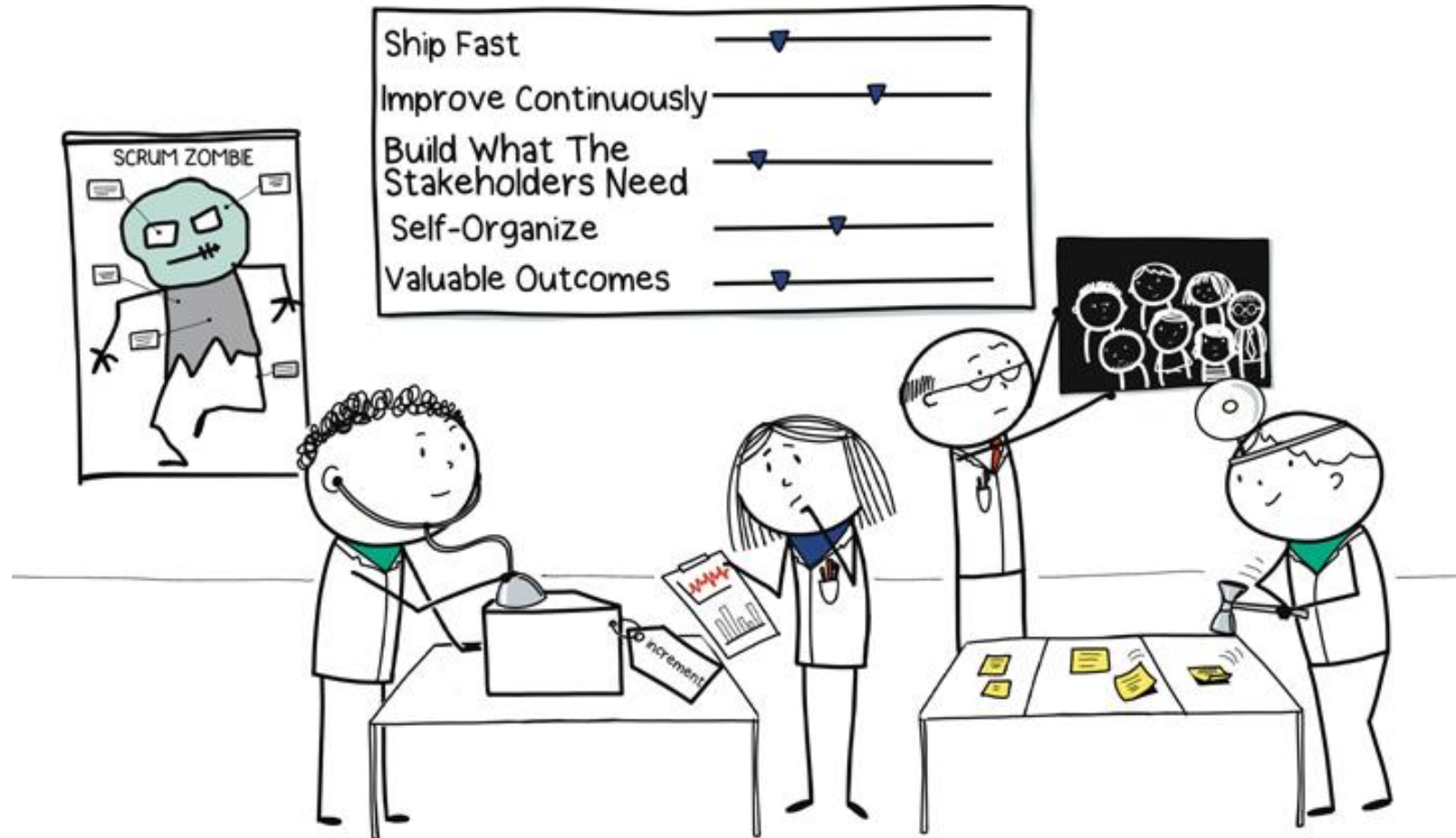
# Cause #4.5: attention to some aspects



zombiescrum.org

Created by Thea Schukken for the Zombie Scrum Survival Guide  
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# Diagnose Your Team Together



# FIRST AID FOR ZOMBIE SCRUM



## 1 Take Responsibility

You haven't caused this situation, but nothing will change unless people like you step up. Don't blame or hide behind others. Model responsible behavior and investigate how you may be, inadvertently, contributing to Zombie Scrum yourself.

## 2 Assess the Situation

Find out as much as you can about what is going on. What problems do you see? How do they manifest? Do you have data to back up what you're saying? Why should others care? If you can't answer these questions, you will fight alone.



## 3 Create Awareness

Make others—both inside and outside your team—aware of what is happening. They may not have realized it yet. Create urgency and show what is lost to your team and the organization because of the problems caused by Zombie Scrum.

## 4 Find Other Survivors

Once you have created awareness, you will find others in your organization who have started to see the problem too. Form groups and build networks to increase your reach and strengthen your ability to





## 5 Start Small

Instead of immediately going for the "Big Ones," start with the small and incremental changes that you have control over. Recovering from Zombie Scrum is complex work, so use short feedback cycles to quickly adapt to the situation as it unfolds.

## 6 Stay Positive!

Complaints, cynicism, and sarcasm don't help anyone. They may even contribute to teams sliding further into Zombie Scrum. Instead, highlight what is working well, where improvements are taking place, and what is possible when you work together. Use humor to lighten the mood, but not to sugarcoat the truth.



## 7 Celebrate

You won't recover from Zombie Scrum overnight. It may take a while before you start noticing improvements. This is perfectly okay. No matter how small they are, celebrate successes together when they happen, to offset the eventual setbacks you will also face.

## 8 Find Help

Look for help outside of your own organization. Join or start a regional Scrum Meetup. Reach out to Scrum Masters who inspire you. Or join workshops or classes with people who face similar challenges.



# Experiment sample

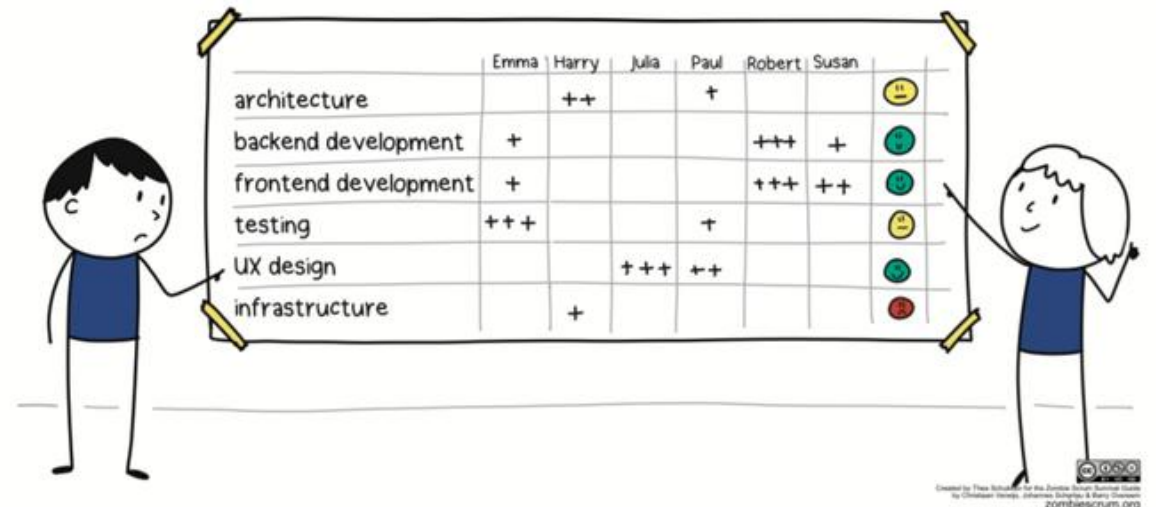
## ■ Increase Cross-Functionality with a Skill Matrix

- A developer on your team is struggling to implement something that is blocking everyone else until she is done.
- Team is experiencing bottlenecks because only one person is capable of testing work

### Steps

To implement this experiment, do the following:

1. With your team, map the skills you need during a typical Sprint. Together, create a matrix on a flip chart where you plot the members of your team against the skills you identified. Invite people to decide for themselves what skills they possess and to self-rate their proficiency with it using plus signs (+, ++, and +++).
2. When you're done with the matrix, ask "What do you notice about how the skills on our team are distributed? What is immediately obvious?". Invite people to reflect on this question individually for two minutes, then for a few minutes in pairs. With the whole group, capture important patterns on a flip chart.
3. Ask "What does this mean for our work as a team? Where should we focus our improvements?" Let people reflect on this question individually, then in pairs for a few minutes, and then capture the biggest insights on the flip.
4. Ask "Where should we start improving? What first step is possible for us without needing approval from others or resources we don't have?" Let people reflect on this individually, then in pairs for a few minutes, and then capture the biggest insights on the flip chart. Use the strategies as described in the next section as inspiration when people struggle to see possibilities.
5. Keep the skill matrix in your team room and update it frequently. You can tie it to flow-based metrics such as throughput and cycle time, which should improve over time as cross-functionality increases. See the experiment "Limit Your Work in Progress" in our book to learn how to do this.



# References

- <https://www.scrum.org/resources/blog/zombie-scrum-symptoms-causes-and-treatment>
- <https://www.scrum.org/resources/zombie-scrum-survival-guide>
- <https://medium.com/the-liberators/the-rise-of-zombie-scrum-cd98741015d5>
- <https://shop.theliberators.com/collections/free-downloads/DIY-String>
- <https://zombiescrum.org/>

*Any Question?*