

ALTOGETHER AGILE

# Is Scrum Right For Your Team?

A practical guide for any team considering Scrum or reviewing how they use it

## The Core Test

Scrum works when work is **complex**: you cannot predict the answer in advance and you learn by doing. It does not suit **complicated** work, where best practice exists and experts apply it reliably. Knowing the difference matters more than knowing the framework.

## Three Questions to Ask

### 1. Is the work complex? Do you need to experiment to find the answer?

**SCRUM FITS**

Each sprint teaches you something new that changes what you do next.

**WARNING SIGN**

Process is known. Experts follow it. Think audits, statutory reporting, contract admin. Consider Kanban.

### 2. Can your team deliver something usable every sprint without external sign-off?

**SCRUM FITS**

Team has all the skills it needs. It does not wait on others to reach done.

**WARNING SIGN**

If an approver always sits outside, that is a design problem, not a Scrum problem.

### 3. Can you describe something usable your team could deliver in two weeks?

**SCRUM FITS**

Not the finished product. A slice. Something a real person can act on today.

**WARNING SIGN**

If the answer is always "a draft" or "a deck for review," the real value team is somewhere else.

## What "Usable" Means: Slicing

A sprint delivers a usable *slice* of the final thing, not the finished product. The test: can someone act on this today, without waiting for the next sprint?

Team	Full outcome	Usable sprint increment
Policy	HR policy approved and live	Synthesis of 10 stakeholder interviews
Marketing	Full campaign launch	One tested landing page with live data
L&D	Full onboarding programme	One module rated by 5 pilot learners
Legal	Updated contracts signed off	Revised clauses reviewed, issues logged
Finance	New budgeting model org-wide	Model piloted with one team, documented

**THE WATERFALL-IN-SPRINTS TRAP**

Sprint 1 research, Sprint 2 draft, Sprint 3 approval is not agile.  
 It is waterfall with a sprint cadence.  
 A genuine increment means someone can use it NOW, not after the next sprint.

**The Cross-Functional Team Model**

Do not turn each department into a Scrum team. Ask: what is the product, and who needs to be in the team to deliver it? Marketing, finance, and HR become competencies inside a cross-functional team, not separate teams with their own backlogs.

<p><b>NEW SERVICE LAUNCH</b></p> <p>Product owner, marketing, operations, finance, subject expert</p>	<p><b>DIGITAL EXPERIENCE</b></p> <p>Content, design, analytics, technical lead</p>
<p><b>POLICY REFORM</b></p> <p>Policy lead, legal, comms, front-line representative</p>	<p><b>L&amp;D PROGRAMME</b></p> <p>L&amp;D lead, subject experts, learner representative</p>

**Which Framework Fits?**

<p><b>SCRUM</b></p> <p>Complex, emergent work              Cross-functional team              Clear Product Goal              Usable increments every sprint</p>	<p><b>KANBAN</b></p> <p>Continuous flow work              Varied, unpredictable requests              Still needs WIP limits              and clear definition of value</p>
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**KANBAN IS NOT AN ESCAPE HATCH**

- A board without WIP limits and flow metrics is just a to-do list with sticky notes.
- Kanban demands explicit flow management and a clear definition of value.
- Scrum teams can also use Kanban practices inside their sprints.

**Should You Start Before You Are Ready?**

Some coaches argue: start running sprints, fail visibly, use that failure to expose dysfunction. Scrum is a mirror. It surfaces problems that were always there.

This works where psychological safety is high: teams can look at failure honestly and act on it without blame. Where safety is low, the framework gets blamed instead, and the organisation becomes more resistant to change. Know your environment first.

**Red Flags: Scrum in Name Only**

<p><b>WATCH FOR THESE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>× Functional silos running sprints with no shared Product Goal</li> <li>× Increments always "ready for review," never in the hands of a real user</li> <li>× Sprint Goals that are task lists dressed up as outcomes</li> <li>× A Product Owner who is just a project manager with a new job title</li> <li>× Teams that adopted the events but kept the waterfall mindset underneath</li> </ul>
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