Intersecting Agile and the Antidotes to White Supremacy Culture

Nam Provost | Meaghan Tongen | Nikhil Trivedi
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Session Overview

Scrum is an agile framework that encourages teams to learn through experience, work iteratively, and reflect often. It puts people before process or output, by focusing on the values and environment we share as much as the work we’re doing. How could Scrum -- an established framework for addressing complex adaptive problems across industries -- be applied to counteract white supremacy culture in our organizations?

Diversity educators Kenneth Jones and Tema Okun identified the characteristics (and antidotes) of white supremacy culture, including: perfectionism, sense of urgency, power hoarding, fear of open conflict, and individualism. By advocating for transparency, learning, and reflection, Scrum aligns closely with these antidotes.
Session Agenda

2:45  Welcome (5 min)
2:50  White Supremacy Culture (15 min)
3:05  Intro to Agile + Scrum (5 min)
3:10  Ball Point Activity (10 min)
3:20  Breakout Discussion (15 min)
3:35  Report Back (10 min)
Welcome
Land Acknowledgement

We would like to welcome you to this session by acknowledging that the land on which our community gathers is the traditional and unceded territory of the Kumeyaay Nation. We want to pay respect to the citizens of the Kumeyaay Nation, both past and present, and their continuing relationship with their ancestral lands.
Nam Provost

Nam Provost has served as Mia's Diversity and Inclusion Manager since April 2018. She oversees a new fellowship program and is helping to guide the museum towards equity through programs, relationships and strategies for effective organizational change.

She has facilitated many workshops and courses, hoping to creatively empower individuals and organizations to work towards true Cultural Fluency which is:

The ongoing **journey** of learning the **language of equity** and embedding it into our **critical consciousness** by examining ourselves, learning about cultures and identities different than our own, and **understanding systems** and structures in order to transform ourselves and our organizations.
I’m a systems thinker.

I lead “digital strategy” at the Minneapolis Institute of Art (Mia). For me, that means building connections and supportive environments for people through integrated systems, cross-functional teams, beautiful workflows, and collaborative processes that deliver and sustain digital products.

I’m energized by learning about systems, how we interact within and around them, and building processes that create space for teams to grow and succeed.

I also appreciate great coffee, being outside in all seasons, and believe most anything can be accomplished with enough post-it notes.

source: https://medium.com/disruptive-design
I'm a Web Architect at a museum in Chicago and a social justice activist. As a facilitator, educator and strategic planner, my activism work focuses on institutional healing and accountability from historic traumas like colonialism, slavery, genocide, and war. I'm a long-time volunteer with Resilience, Chicago's largest rape crisis center, I'm a regular contributor at The Incluseum, and my writing has been featured in Model View Culture, Fwd: Museums and the Journal for Museum Education. You will also find me playing guitar and stand-up bass, hiking, making herbal medicines, and drinking warm glasses of chai on cold winter nights.
White Supremacy Culture
White Supremacy: Normalizing the Phrase

THE LONGER YOU SWIM IN A CULTURE, THE MORE INVISIBLE IT BECOMES
White Supremacy

is...

• The system we are all a part of
• The system of oppression beyond race
• Part of our legacy –whether we acknowledge it or not
• Maintains the status quo
• Is a foundational truth of the US

is not...

• An individual characteristic
• Only about hate speech and actions
• Limited to overt racism, sexism, heterosexism, classism, etc.
• Not in the past
Characteristics of White Supremacy Culture
“white supremacy culture” by Tema Okun / dRworks / www.dismantlingracism.org

- Perfectionism
- A sense of urgency
- Defensiveness
- Quantity over quality
- Worship of the written word
- Paternalism
- Either/or thinking
- Power hoarding
- Fear of open conflict
- Individualism
- Progress = bigger, more
- Objectivity
- Right to comfort
Perfectionism: Antidotes
“white supremacy culture” by Tema Okun / dRworks / www.dismantlingracism.org

develop a culture of appreciation, where the organization takes time to make sure that people’s work and efforts are appreciated;
develop a learning organization, where it is expected that everyone will make mistakes and those mistakes offer opportunities for learning;
create an environment where people can recognize that mistakes sometimes lead to positive results; separate the person from the mistake;
when offering feedback, always speak to the things that went well before offering criticism; ask people to offer specific suggestions for how to do things differently when offering criticism;
realize that being your own worst critic does not actually improve the work, often contributes to low morale among the group, and does not help you or the group to realize the benefit of learning from mistakes
Sense of urgency: Antidotes
“white supremacy culture” by Tema Okun / dRworks / www.dismantlingracism.org

realistic workplans;
leadership which understands that things take longer than anyone expects;
discuss and plan for what it means to set goals of inclusivity and diversity, particularly in terms of time;
learn from past experience how long things take;
write realistic funding proposals with realistic time frames;
be clear about how you will make good decisions in an atmosphere of urgency;
realize that rushing decisions takes more time in the long run because inevitably people who didn’t get a chance to voice their thoughts and feelings will at best resent and at worst undermine the decision because they were left unheard
Power hoarding: Antidotes
“white supremacy culture” by Tema Okun / dRworks / www.dismantlingracism.org

include power sharing in your organization’s values statement;
discuss what good leadership looks like and make sure people understand that a good leader develops the power and skills of others;
understand that change is inevitable and challenges to your leadership can be healthy and productive;
make sure the organization is focused on the mission
Fear of open conflict: Antidotes
“white supremacy culture” by Tema Okun / dRworks / www.dismantlingracism.org

role play ways to handle conflict before conflict happens;
distinguish between being polite and raising hard issues;
don’t require those who raise hard issues to raise them in ‘acceptable’ ways, especially if you are using the ways in which issues are raised as an excuse not to address those issues;

once a conflict is resolved, take the opportunity to revisit it and see how it might have been handled differently
Individualism: Antidotes
“white supremacy culture” by Tema Okun / dRworks / www.dismantlingracism.org

include teamwork as an important value in your values statement;
make sure the organization is working towards shared goals and people understand how working together will improve performance;
evaluate people’s ability to work in a team as well as their ability to get the job done;
make sure that credit is given to all those who participate in an effort, not just the leaders or most public person;
make people accountable as a group rather than as individuals;
create a culture where people bring problems to the group;
use staff meetings as a place to solve problems, not just a place to report activities
## Continuum on Becoming an Anti-racist, Multicultural Organization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monocultural</th>
<th>Multicultural</th>
<th>Anti-racist</th>
<th>Anti-racist Multicultural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Racial and Cultural Differences Seen as Defects</td>
<td>Tolerant of Racial and Cultural Differences</td>
<td>Racial and Cultural Differences Seen as Assets</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Intentionally and publicly excludes or segregates African Americans, Native Americans, Latinos and Asian Americans</td>
<td>- Tolerant of a limited number of People of Color with “proper” perspective and credentials</td>
<td>- Makes official policy pronouncements regarding multicultural diversity</td>
<td>- Commits to process of intentional institutional restructuring, based on anti-racist analysis and identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- May still secretly limit or exclude People of Color in contradiction to public policies</td>
<td>- Sees itself as “non-racist” institution with open doors to People of Color</td>
<td>- Sees itself as “anti-racist” institution</td>
<td>- Future vision of an institution and wider community that has overcome systemic racism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Institutionalization of racism includes formal policies and practices, teachings and decision-making on all levels</td>
<td>- Carries out intentional inclusiveness efforts, recruiting “some of color” on committees or office staff</td>
<td>- Increases commitment to dismantle racism and eliminate inherent white advantage</td>
<td>- Institution’s life reflects full participation and shared power with diverse racial, cultural and economic groups in determining its mission, structure, constituency, policies and practices</td>
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<tr>
<td>Usually has similar intentional policies and practices toward other socially oppressed groups, such as women, disabled, elderly and children, lesbians and gays, Third World citizens, etc.</td>
<td>- Expanding view of diversity includes other socially oppressed groups, such as women, disabled, elderly and children, lesbians and gays, Third World citizens, etc.</td>
<td>- Increases commitment to dismantle racism and eliminate inherent white advantage</td>
<td>- A sense of restored community and mutual caring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Often declares, “We don’t have a problem.”</td>
<td>- Continues to intentionally maintain white power and privilege through its formal policies and practices, teachings and decision-making on all levels of institutional life</td>
<td>- Began to develop accountability to racially oppressed communities</td>
<td>- Allies with others in combating all forms of social oppression</td>
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Bread for the Journey: An Online Companion

Minneapolis Institute of Art
Intro to Agile + Scrum

3:05
Agile methodology is centered around the idea of iterative development, where requirements and solutions evolve through collaboration between self-organizing cross-functional teams.

The founders of agile worked to create a set of compatible values based on trust and respect for each other, and to promote organizational models centered on people, collaboration, and building communities in which they – and others – would want to work.
Agile

Small, frequent releases are safer than big, infrequent releases.

Iterative improvements beat big bets.

Well-sized stories mean less wasted work.

"Three drawings I use to explain agile and the stories I tell about them", Michael Williams, Dec 12, 2018, https://medium.com/swlh/three-drawings-i-use-to-explain-agile-9c0ef15b64b8
Scrum

Scrum is an **agile process framework** that encourages teams to learn through experience, work iteratively, and reflect often.

It puts people before process or output, by **focusing on the values and environment we share** as much as the work we’re doing.
It’s a mindset.

**Agile Values**
- Individuals and interactions over processes and tools
- Working product over comprehensive documentation
- Customer collaboration over contract negotiation
- Responding to change over following a plan

**Scrum Team Values:** Focus, Courage, Openness, Commitment, and Respect

**Scrum Pillars:** Transparency. Inspection. Adaption.
Let’s try it.

3:10
Ball Point Game (10 minutes)

Self-organized team

**Objective:** Achieve as many Ball Points as possible within a 2-minute Sprint

**Requirements:**
- Each ball = 1 Point
- A dropped ball is 0 points
- The ball must pass through every team members’ hands at least once
- The ball must return to the person that it started with
- Each ball must have air time
- Team members cannot pass immediately to their right or to their left
Activity: Ball Point Game Debrief

What did you learn from the game?

How did the team make decisions?

How would things have gone differently if the team had an appointed leader?

How important were retrospectives?

Did you realize stress? – When?
“If you want truly to understand something, try to change it.”

Kurt Lewin, Social Psychologist
White Supremacy Culture Antidotes via Scrum

- develop a learning organization, where it is expected that everyone will make mistakes and those mistakes offer opportunities for learning *(Agile Values)*
- learn from past experience how long things take *(Velocity)*
- take the time to analyze how people inside and outside the organization get and share information *(Information Radiators)*
- make sure that everyone knows and understands who makes what decisions in the organization *(Scrum Team)*
- once a conflict is resolved, take the opportunity to revisit it and see how it might have been handled differently *(Retrospective)*
- include teamwork as an important value in your values statement *(Agile Values)*
- make people accountable as a group rather than as individuals *(Scrum Team)*
- create a culture where people bring problems to the group *(Scrum Team)*
- include process goals in your planning, for example make sure that your goals speak to how you want to do your work, not just what you want to do *(Agile Values)*
Breakout Discussion

3:20
Move Up / Move Up
Report Back + Questions

3:35
Resources

– Okun White Supremacy Characteristics: dismantlingracism.org/white-supremacy-culture.html
– Scrum Guide: scrum.org/resources/scrum-guide
– Scrum: The Art of Doing Twice the Work in Half the Time, by Jeff Sutherland
Thank you