Scrum Master

Skills in the New World of Work: Specialty Report

July 15, 2024

ScrumAlliance®

BUSINESS **AGILITY** INSTITUTE

Introduction

Hypothesis and Purpose

This report expands on the 2023 Skills in the New World of Work[1] report to identify the key functional and human skills needed for Scrum Masters in companies today.

Our goal is to help organizations recruit and develop highly effective individuals to future-proof their workforce. We also aim to guide the professional development of Scrum Masters towards the most sought-after skills.

This report is part of a broader effort to drive positive change in the agile industry.

The Role of a Scrum Master

According to the latest Scrum Guide[2], the *"Scrum Master is accountable for the Scrum Team's effectiveness. They do this by enabling the Scrum Team to improve its practices, within the Scrum framework. Scrum Masters are true leaders who serve the Scrum Team and the larger organization."*

The Scrum Master serves the Scrum Team, the Product Owner and the organization in several ways. These include, but are not limited to;

- coaching team members in self-management and cross-functionality,
- helping the team to focus on creating high-value product increments,
- helping find techniques for effective Product Backlog management,
- helping establish empirical product planning for a complex environment,
- removing barriers between stakeholders & teams, and
- leading, training and coaching the organization in its Scrum adoption.

Executive Summary

Over the last 20 years, the role of Scrum Master has become prevalent in product organizations worldwide. The Scrum Alliance alone has certified over a million Scrum Masters since 2001.

In that time, the expectations that organizations have of Scrum Masters has evolved significantly. To understand the changing demands on the role, we have conducted a series of worldwide interviews and surveys with senior professionals with recent experience in recruiting Scrum Masters.

This report establishes the essential functional and human skills that organizations require from Scrum Masters—extending far beyond the Scrum Guide's definitions. While the specific mix of skills vary between organizations—technical expertise, coaching, facilitation, and effective communication are crucial. Adaptability is key with many organizations seeking Scrum Masters who can navigate complex team dynamics and drive strategic initiatives.

By aligning the priorities of businesses and professionals, we can foster a more effective and agile workforce, ready to meet the challenges of tomorrow.

[1] https://ba.institute/skills2023 (November, 2023)
[2] https://scrumguides.org/ (November, 2020)

Key Findings at a Glance

Adaptability is Crucial

In the dynamic environment of agile teams, adaptability is crucial for a Scrum Master. Companies seek candidates who not only understand Scrum but can also **tailor its implementation** to their organization's needs. They look for individuals who can be flexible with practices, understand organizational nuance, and can quickly adapt to changes in team dynamics or project requirements.

Essential Functional Skills

In addition to the core Scrum Master skills and the Agile Acumen skill (needed in 100% of cases), the most sought after functional skills are **Technical skills** like software engineering and data analytics (needed by 49% of organizations) and **Coaching and Facilitation skills** (38%).

Essential Human Skills

Human skills are equally, if not more, important. **Communication skills** (both written and verbal, needed by 56% of organizations), **Mindset Behaviors** most notably adaptability (40%), and **Influence skills** (e.g. conflict resolution and general interpersonal skills, 37%) are highly valued.

Communication	Technical Skills	Mindset Behaviors	Coaching & Facilitation	Influence	Leadership
56%	49%	40%	38%	37%	33%
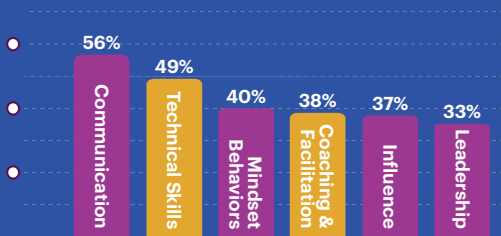
Challenges in Hiring

Organizations report three key challenges when recruiting Scrum Masters.

1. **Skills Gap**: Otherwise strong candidates often lack required complimentary skills, technical proficiency, or product / industry domain experience.
2. **Cultural fit and Adaptability**: Scrum Masters need to work effectively within diverse team dynamics and cultures.
3. **Market Saturation**: The market for Scrum Masters is competitive, with hundreds of similar candidates vying for each position.

Competitive Market

The job market for Scrum Master roles is highly competitive with organizations receiving over **180 resumes per job** posting on average. However, despite the high volume of applicants, finding candidates with the right mix of practical experience and skills remains challenging.

Min	Average	Max
5	182	1265

Global Trends

The demand for Scrum Masters **varies significantly** by region with higher demand in countries like the United States, India and parts of Europe particularly in the technology and financial services sectors. Conversely, some countries like Australia, Mexico and parts of south east Asia are seeing a decline in the role.

Varied Role Definition

The responsibilities and role definition for Scrum Masters **vary significantly** across organizations. Depending on the company, a Scrum Master could be a team facilitator, project administrator, agile coach, or product leader.

The Skills Gap

As the responsibilities of Scrum Masters evolve, employers struggle to find candidates with the required combination of skills, alongside the necessary certifications and experience.

Organizations that need **coaching, technical, or influence** skills in Scrum Masters, report that these are the hardest to find.

For candidates, it can be challenging to showcase the relevant experience as organizations often require a different combination of skills.

| Coaching Skills	Technical Skills	Influence
93%	61%	38%
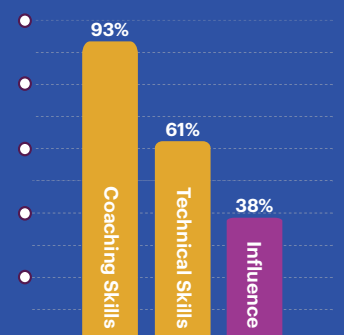
Current Market Trends

Changing Responsibilities

Scrum Masters are expected to take on more **strategic roles**, integrating agile practices into broader business processes.

There is also greater emphasis on continuous learning in modern agile practices. And, as remote work becomes more prevalent, skills in facilitating remote teams and virtual collaboration are becoming increasingly important.

> " *Scrum Masters are expected to take on more strategic roles, integrating agile practices into broader business processes.*"

Greater Demand 8%

Same Demand 50%

Lower Demand 42%
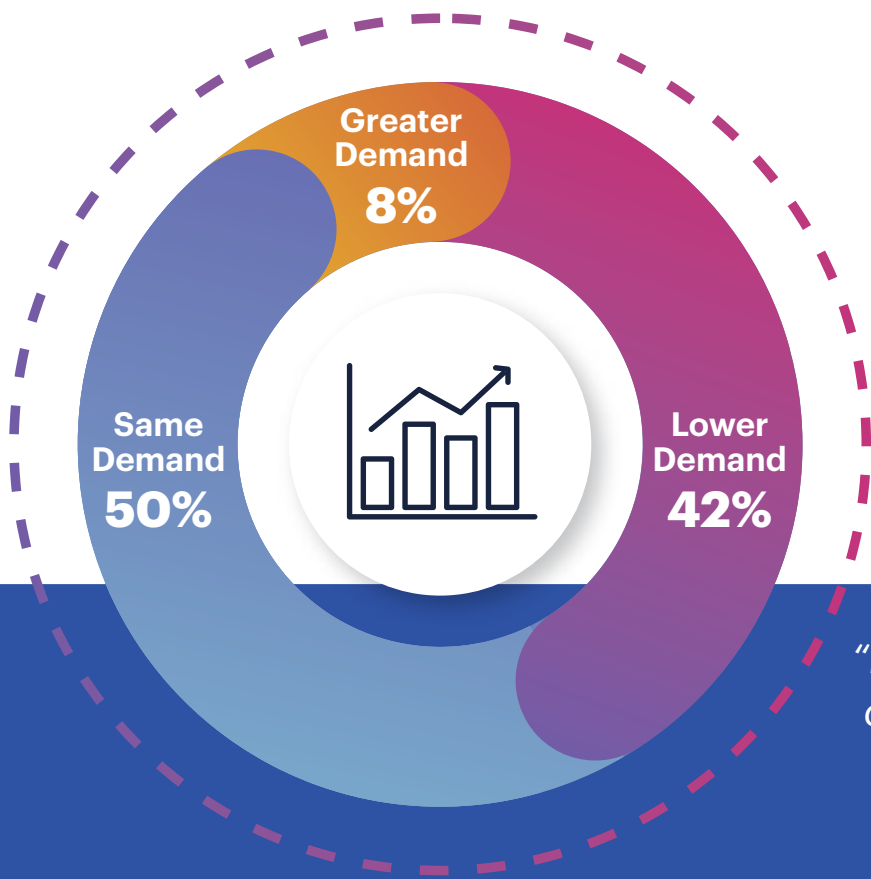
Change Over Time

Agile roles have seen a shift towards more integrated responsibilities, focusing on both technical and human skills.

The traditional boundaries between Scrum Masters and product or team leadership roles are becoming blurred.

> *"Demand for Scrum Masters is steady, driven by the need for effective team facilitation and continuous improvement in agile practices."*

Changing Market Demand

The demand for Scrum Masters varies significantly across different regions and industries, influenced by local market conditions, the global economy, and general agile maturity.

Most organizations advertise new Scrum Master roles each quarter, with a few as often as once a month.

Monthly	9%
Quarterly	48%
Annually	22%
Bi-Annually	17%
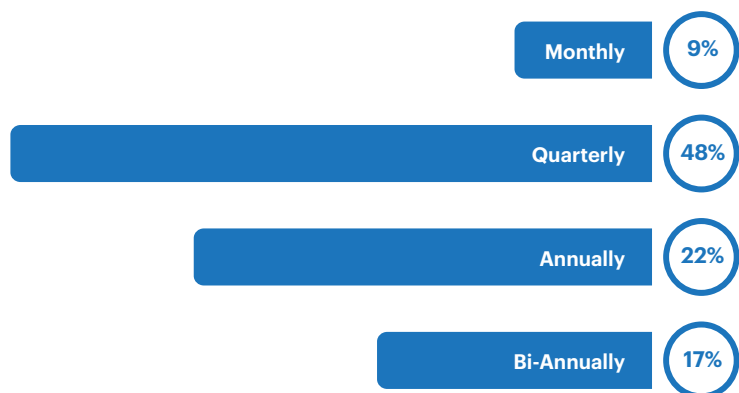
Hiring Frequency

Supply and Demand

There is a strong supply of qualified candidates which often exceeds demand. Organizations report that, on average, they receive between 70 and 300 applications for each Scrum Master role (averaging 182). In one instance, an organization reported 1265 applicants for a single role within a short period.

Despite this, the majority (55%) of organizations report finding candidates with the right set of skills very challenging.

Very Challenging — 55%

Easy to Find — 9%

Difficult to Find — 36%

Geographic Trends

United States

Demand for Scrum Masters is seen particularly in the technology and financial services sectors. The role has expanded to include more strategic responsibilities and change management.

South America

There is a growing demand for Scrum Masters in the technology and financial services sectors.

Organizations value practical experience, facilitation, communication, and the ability to lead multiple teams.

United Kingdom

Consistent demand exists in financial services and technology sectors. Organizations are increasingly looking for Scrum Masters who can integrate agile practices into broader business strategies, reflecting a need for strategic thinking and leadership.

Western Europe

There is growing demand for Scrum Masters in the automotive, manufacturing, and telecommunications industries. In these organizations, there is a strong demand for technical skills and knowledge of Lean principles.

India

The IT and tech services sectors show significant demand for Scrum Masters, with companies expecting candidates to have strong technical backgrounds and experience in managing large teams. The emphasis is often on practical agile experience and technical proficiency.

Australia

Demand for Scrum Masters is steadily declining. Industries which continue to hire, such as telecommunications and finance, place a strong emphasis on practical experience and cultural fit. Companies prefer practical agile knowledge and hire people who can seamlessly integrate into existing team dynamics.

Industry Trends

Technology

Scrum Masters are expected to have significant domain-specific technical knowledge and experience.

Manufacturing

Integration of Lean principles with agile practices. There is a strong focus on process improvement and managing complex supply chains.

Healthcare

Patient-centric projects require Scrum Masters with strong empathy and communication skills. Knowledge of, and compliance with, healthcare regulations is essential.
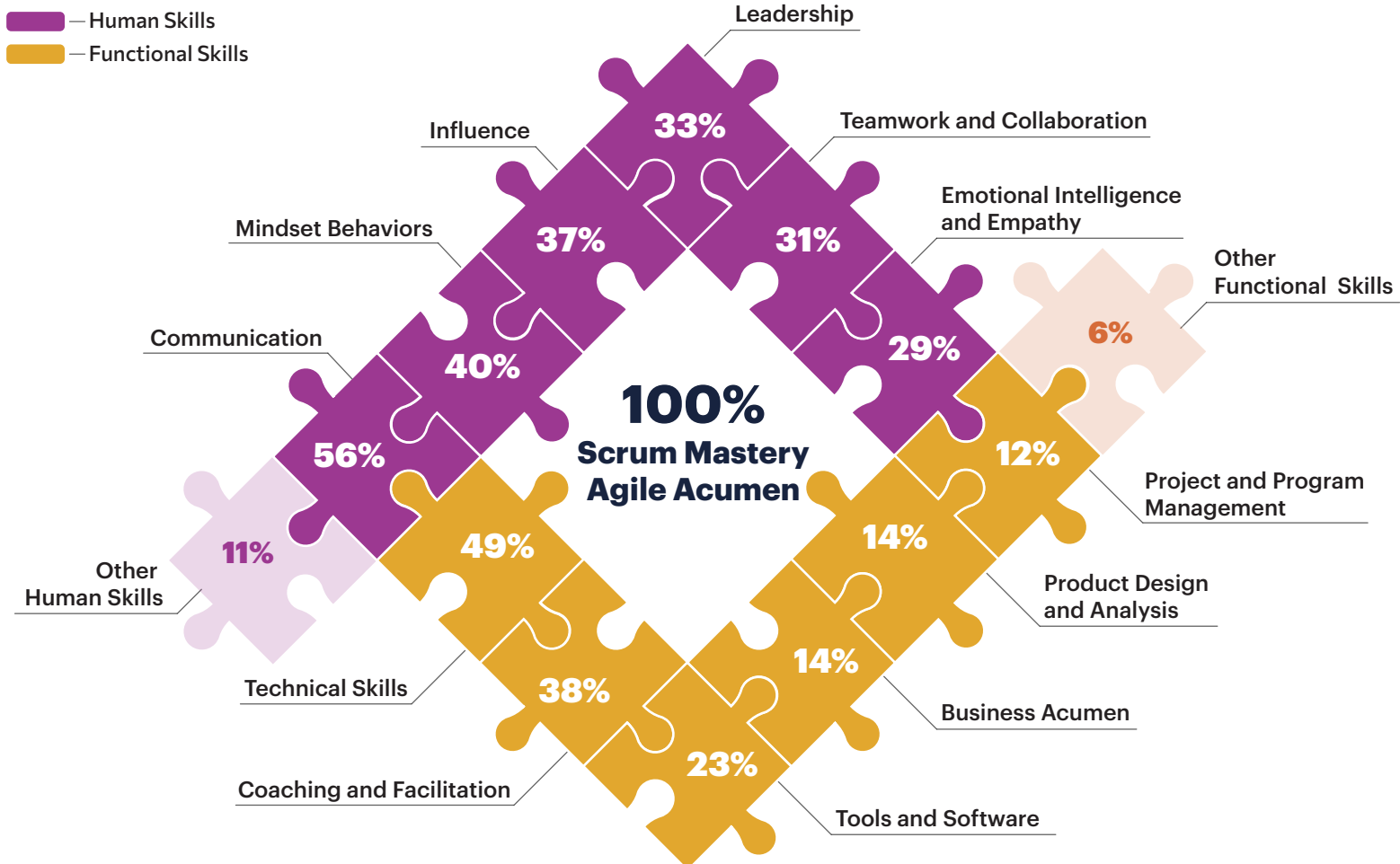
Financial Services

Regulatory knowledge and data-driven decision-making are crucial. The role is increasingly strategic, focusing on aligning agile practices with business goals.

Scrum Master Skills

The responsibilities of a Scrum Master are highly varied and, in addition to the core Scrum Master skills and general Agile Acumen skills (needed in 100% of cases), require a balanced combination of **functional** and **human** skills.

Top Complimentary Skills for Scrum Masters

— Human Skills
— Functional Skills

Leadership **33%**

Influence **37%**

Teamwork and Collaboration **31%**

Mindset Behaviors **40%**

Emotional Intelligence and Empathy **29%**

Communication **56%**

Other Functional Skills **6%**

100% Scrum Mastery Agile Acumen

12% Project and Program Management

Other Human Skills **11%**

49% Technical Skills

14% Product Design and Analysis

38% Coaching and Facilitation

14% Business Acumen

23% Tools and Software

Functional Skills

The most sought after functional skills are Technical skills like Software Engineering and Data Analytics (needed by 49% of organizations) and Coaching and Facilitation skills (needed by 38% of organizations).

Human Skills

Equally, if not more, important are human skills. Communication skills (both written and verbal, needed by 56% of organizations) and Mindset Behaviors most notably adaptability (needed by 40% of organizations) are highly valued.

Senior Scrum Masters

Compared to others, Senior Scrum Masters are expected to handle politically sensitive or technically complex situations. In these roles, coaching and facilitation skills are highly valued, being requested **2.8** times more often than in others. In some organizations, the skills required for a Senior Scrum Master are indistinguishable from the skills required for an Agile Coach.

By focusing on developing these skills, Scrum Masters can enhance their ability to lead agile teams effectively and meet the evolving demands of organizations across different industries and regions.

A Rose By Any Other Name

While the Scrum Guide defines a Scrum Master as a facilitator, impediment remover, and coach for the team, real-world job descriptions vary widely.

- **Scrum Master as Agile Coach**: Since 2023, coaching and facilitation skills, alongside influence and leadership, have become significantly more important for Scrum Masters. The demand for these skills has **almost doubled in the last 12 months**. In part, because many organizations have reduced their coaching workforce and are looking to Scrum Masters to pick up these responsibilities.

- **Scrum Master as Transformation Leader**: Interviews with industry professionals revealed that Scrum Masters are often expected to integrate agile practices into broader business processes, demonstrating a blend of technical, leadership, and strategic skills.

- **Scrum Master as Manager**: Some organizations place Scrum Masters in positions of authority over teams (often multiple teams). Taking on responsibilities for people development, performance management, and budgeting.

- **Scrum Master as Project Manager**: Some organizations expect Scrum Masters to take on traditional project management responsibilities. Anything from project scheduling to managing the RAID (Risk, Assumptions, Issues, and Dependencies) log.

- **Scrum Master as Technical Lead**: Other companies expect Scrum Masters to have detailed technical knowledge and support the team in code reviews, DevOps practices, and (in some cases) solutions architecture.

- **Scrum Master as Project Admin Support**: Some organizations view junior Scrum Masters as administrative support for projects. Limiting their responsibilities to scheduling meetings and coordination activities. This approach undermines the Scrum Master's potential effectiveness.

> " *The hardest skills to find are those related to collaboration and teamwork for Scrum Masters."*

- **Scrum Master as Product Owner**: Lastly, in a few cases, Scrum Masters are expected to handle some Product Owner responsibilities. This is problematic and creates significant tension (most commonly between creating a sustainable & productive work environment for the team and maximizing the value of the product for business stakeholders).

While many of these responsibilities exceed the formal definition of the Scrum Master role, there is nothing "wrong" with most of these (Scrum Master as Product Owner and Admin Support being the two most problematic). However, organizations need to be clear in their expectations when defining their role requirements to avoid any incorrect assumptions from potential candidates.

Career Paths

Many Scrum Masters aim to transition into senior Scrum Master, agile coaching, management, or consulting roles.

These career aspirations align closely with the skills and responsibilities reported by organizations that emphasize the importance of coaching, facilitation, technical skills and leadership.

While most organizations were focused on the immediate need for these skills, the career aspirations of today's Scrum Masters reflect a long-term desire to deepen expertise and broaden responsibilities. These aspirations often included more strategic and high level goals, such as the opportunity to influence company culture or expand agile practices across organizations.

Skills and Education

Continuous learning and certification are important to many Scrum Masters, with goals such as becoming certified Scrum Trainers or obtaining a PMP certification. There was an emphasis on developing technical or coaching skills to improve team performance and lead agile transformations.

Challenges and Opportunities

Scrum Masters highlighted the challenge in balancing the technical and coaching aspects of the role, alongside navigating organizational hierarchies and influencing company culture. Many Scrum Masters also wanted to contribute more to agile transformations and improve organizational agility.

Summary

The career paths of Scrum Masters are diverse, with common aspirations towards agile coaching, leadership, product management, and consulting roles.

To achieve these, continuous learning, certification, and a blend of technical, managerial, and coaching skills are crucial for their career advancement.

Common Career Goals and Aspirations

Based on the responses from nearly 200 Scrum Masters, here's a summary of their career paths and aspirations:

01 Leadership and Management Positions

Many aspire to move into people leadership or management positions such as PMO Manager, IT Manager, Director / Head of Agile Delivery, or Transformation Leader.

02 Transition to Agile Coaching Roles

Many aim to become Agile Coaches, Enterprise Agile Coaches, or Agile Trainers. For some, the goal is to take on an executive position as Chief Agility Officer or similar.

03 Product Management Roles

Some aim to transition into Product Management, either as a Product Owner or Product Manager.

04 Advanced Scrum Master Roles

Many wish to continue growing within their current roles or take on a Senior Scrum Master or Lead Scrum Master position.

05 Project/Program Management

A few plan to move into project or program management roles.

06 Consulting and Advisory Roles

Some Scrum Masters are interested in moving into consulting and advisory roles. Primarily consulting on Agile transformations.

Challenges in Hiring

Closing the Skill Gaps: Hardest to Find Skills

Finding Scrum Masters with the right mix of skills is challenging. Organizations report that candidates often lack:

Practical Experience
Many candidates possess certifications but lack hands-on experience in agile environments.

Domain Expertise
While candidates often have relevant skills, they often lack experience in the relevant industry or product domain that the organization is looking for.

Technical Proficiency
Organizations are expecting Scrum Masters to be more hands-on. As such, candidates with dedicated Scrum Master experience, often do not have sufficient technical knowledge. This challenge is compounded by the fact that different organizations need a different combination of technical skills.

Key Skills
Finding candidates with strong coaching, influence, and/or technical skills is challenging.

Cultural Fit and Adaptability

Dealing with change is a crucial skill for Scrum Masters, as they need to be able to personally adapt to diverse team dynamics and organizational cultures as well as help teams and organizations change.

Organizational Culture
Ensuring candidates can fit into the company culture and work effectively within diverse teams.

Adaptability
The ability to adapt to changing environments and team dynamics is crucial but often lacking.

Market Saturation & Competition

The market for Scrum Masters is competitive, with many candidates possessing similar qualifications. Organizations need to be clear on what complimentary practical skills are needed for the role.

High Volume of Candidates
Despite a large number of candidates, finding the right fit remains challenging.

Competitive Landscape
The agile job market is competitive, with many candidates possessing similar qualifications.

Our Advice to You
Standing Out in the Crowd

In a competitive job market, standing out as a Scrum Master requires a strategic approach. By being specific on your resume, focusing on practical experience, continuous learning, and tailored applications, you can effectively showcase your unique qualifications.

Here are some ideas to help differentiate yourself:

Emphasize Practical Experience

Be specific with your practical experience in agile environments, showcasing how you have led teams and supported their growth.

Balance Technical and Soft Skills

Identify your proficiency with agile tools and practices, along with strong communication, leadership, and facilitation skills.

Pursue Continuous Learning

Include certifications and ongoing education efforts, showing participation in agile communities and staying updated with the latest trends.

Network with Current and Former Employees

Gain insider insights on the day-to-day responsibilities and expectations for the role.

Tailor Your Resume

Customize your resume and cover letter to align with the job description, reflecting a clear understanding of the company's needs.

> *" So many people have Scrum Master certifications but have never leveled up their skills. I want you to understand what you're doing and why. I want you to understand how to grow a team."*

Showcase Cultural Fit and Adaptability

Highlight experiences where you successfully adapted to new environments or overcame challenges by being flexible.

Research the Company

Understand the unique challenges of the company and how agile practices are integrated into their business processes.

Acknowledgements

Methodology

The primary objective of this report was to understand and reconcile the primary and complementary skills demand for Scrum Master roles at various levels of seniority between businesses and professionals.

The taxonomy used for categorizing skills is the Business Agility Institute's standardized skill framework (Appendix A) developed for the Skills in the New World of Work[1] report (2023). This framework categorizes skills into two main types: Functional (hard) skills and Human (soft) skills. Functional skills encompass technical knowledge and practical abilities, while Human skills include interpersonal and psychological competencies.

Primary data was gathered through structured interviews with 27 professionals who have recent experience in recruiting Scrum Masters. These interviews were sourced from diverse organizations ensuring a broad spectrum of insights—the demographics of these organizations are below.

This data was supplemented with insights from the global survey conducted for the Skills in the New World of Work report (2023). From the 1,128 original survey responses, this report incorporates responses from 223 managers and 182 Scrum Master professionals. Participating organizations ranged from 6 to 600,000 employees, spanning 23 industries, across 75 countries.

Interview data and survey responses were cross referenced against publicly available job descriptions providing statistical validation—57 in total.
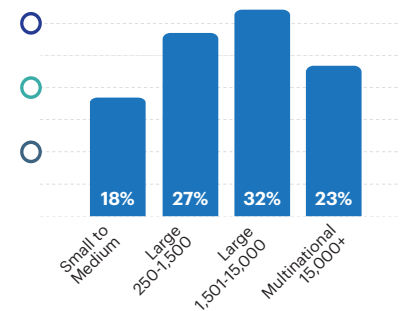
[1] https://ba.institute/skills2023 | (November, 2023)
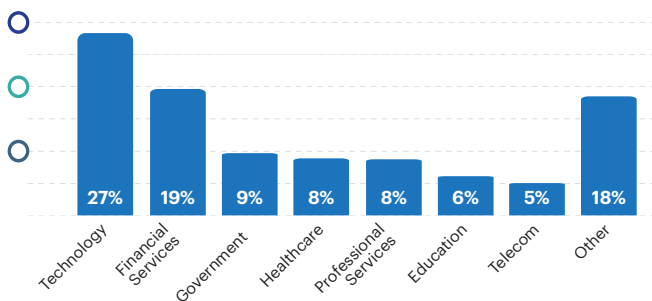
Interview Demographics

During May and June 2024, 27 interviews were conducted with hiring managers across a diverse range of geographic regions and industries.

Number of Employees: Companies ranged from Small to Medium Enterprises (50 - 250) to Multinational Organizations (up to 150,000 employees).

Number of Employees

Small to Medium	Large 250-1,500	Large 1,501-15,000	Multinational 15,000+
18%	27%	32%	23%

Industry

| Technology	Financial Services	Government	Healthcare	Professional Services	Education	Telecom	Other
27%	19%	9%	8%	8%	6%	5%	18%

Industry: The majority of interviewed organizations were in the Financial Services sector, with Technology and Professional Services organizations making up the top 3 industries.

Geography: Multinational (worldwide operations) organizations made up the largest geographic segment (38%) with a fairly even split of other major geographies (Europe, North America, APAC, and Asia).

The diverse demographic background of the interviewees ensures that the findings of this report are comprehensive and reflective of the varied needs and expectations for Scrum Masters.

Geography

Worldwide	North America	Oceania	Asia	Europe	MEA	South/Central America
38%	20%	12%	10%	10%	6%	3%
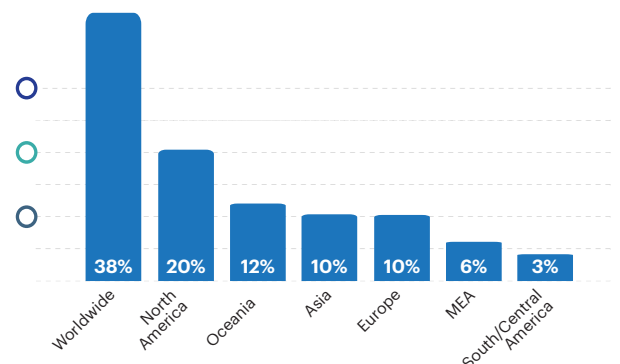
Appendix A: BAI Skills Framework

Human Skills

Skill	Subskills	Description
Communication	Active Listening, Presentation Skills, and Written and Verbal Communication	Convey information and ideas through words, either in written or spoken form.
Emotional Intelligence and Empathy	Emotional Intelligence and Empathy	Understand and manage your own emotions and the emotions of others.
Influence	Conflict Resolution, Interpersonal Skills, Motivational Skills, and Negotiation	Interact with others effectively and respectfully to achieve your goals.
Leadership	Building & Leading Teams, and Managing People	Get the best out of a team or individual to achieve a common goal.
Mindset Behaviors	Adaptability, Agile Mindset, Confidence, Curiosity, Learning Mindset, and Passion	The mindset to adjust to change and new situations quickly and effectively.
Personal Accountability	Ownership & Accountability and Self-Motivation	Take responsibility for your actions and being committed to deliver your promises.
Problem Solving and Critical Thinking	Creativity & Innovation, Critical Thinking, and Decision-Making	Think clearly and rationally, understanding the logical connection between ideas.
Teamwork and Collaboration	Teamwork and Collaboration	Work effectively with others to achieve a common goal.
Time Management and Organizational Skills	Organizational Skills and Time Management	Manage your time, tasks, and resources effectively.

Functional Skills

Skill	Subskills	Description
Agile Acumen	Agile Methods, Frameworks, Techniques, and Practices (including Scrum Mastery)	Modern approaches to work that focus on delivering value to customers early and often.
Business Acumen	Business Expertise, Systems Thinking, and Value Management	Understand and apply business principles and concepts to make sound business decisions.
Business and Domain Expertise	Specialized Domain and Industry Expertise	Any specialized skillset tied to an industry or product/service domain.
Coaching and Facilitation	Coaching, Facilitation, and Mentorship	Help others achieve their goals by providing support, guidance, and accountability.
Product Design and Analysis	Analytical Skills, Architecture, and Product Design	Design products and solutions that meet the needs of users and are aesthetically pleasing.
Product Leadership	Product Management and Product Ownership	Maximize the value of a product for its users and stakeholders.
Project and Program Management	Project, Program, and Portfolio Management	Plan work to achieve specific goals within a set timeframe, budget, and scope.
Relationship Management	Client and Stakeholder Management	Identify, understand, and manage the needs and expectations of the stakeholders.
Technical Skills	AI&ML, Cloud, Data, DevOps, Software Engineering, Specialized Technologies	The development and application of technologies in product and service creation.
Tools and Software	Tools and Software	Use a variety of tools and software programs to complete tasks efficiently and effectively.
Transformation	Change Management, Organizational Development, and Transformation	Make positive changes to business systems, processes, or people.