At the risk of disagreeing with some the Agile community, I confess I’m sometimes a ScrumBut (or perhaps a ScrumButt, however I digress). ScrumButs are those people you hear about that say “We use Scrum, but…” and then come up with an excuse for something they are not doing, like holding retrospectives or daily meetings.

Wait, hold on. That’s me. I don’t hold daily meetings!

Well OK I don’t actually run around saying those exact words but I don’t currently use all the artifacts and ceremonies of Scrum all the time. We have been running this current project for 9 months, averaging a major named release each quarter and averaging between three and five production released builds a month with what I hope my clients feel is a high level of quality.

How can it be so, if I am not following all the Scrum practices to the letter? Surely some mistake!

Perhaps it is my Australian nature but I am sometimes suspicious of rigorous boundaries. I like to think of myself as a pragmatist, taking the best from many sources where we can together build something better. Why use a process just because the manual told you to?

This is not a free ticket to ignoring all the good ideas and best practices of a process like Scrum. If you insist on just ignoring the ceremonies because they are too hard or you don’t want to invest in them, then you will truly earn the ScrumButt moniker. However, I do encourage you to examine your process and not follow your guide book blindly. Question your team’s effectiveness and then think of all the ways to improve it, remembering that many times the cure will actually be to invest in the stated ceremonies and process. Scrum did not invent these for no reason at all, they are well thought out and usually effective processes to help you.

Are your daily meetings taking too long and feeling ineffectual? The answer is usually to be disciplined about the format and remind ourselves why we hold them. I’ve found this many times and it often happens when people try to solve the problems inside the meeting rather than articulate their blockers and arrange a dialog for later.

If you are going to contemplate getting rid of them, make sure you have something that achieves the same ends. We use a dedicated Slack channel where people state their status in a scrum format rather like my conversation below, where we encourage people to post in the afternoon.

#daily-standup

Today: tested/blessed build 123, market data thoughts/design

Tomorrow: market data planning, discuss new model

Blockers: market data service is down

The ScrumMaster then has a job of nagging people to make sure this new format ceremony is adhered to and posted to regularly. It actually works pretty well, especially since we use remote development locations.

We didn’t just replace it with Slack though. Removing a ceremony without full thought isn’t a good idea and we recognized that we do need an in-person chat because we need to have a chance to hear priorities and talk it over. Since we are using Kanban/Scrumban, this is sort of operating like a sprint planning session, except Scrumban does not use formally time boxed sprints. Our team is split over two locations so we do this via video call and although we initially termed it our “weekly stand up” it is longer in duration because it provides a forum to discuss technical challenges for the upcoming week of work.

I found it interesting that even though we don’t use sprints, there was still a need for this time on a weekly basis. Sometimes we miss a week, when a key lead is out and there are no pressing alterations to direction but in general there is a need for a regular technical exchange of ideas in an open forum with everyone able to participate. We leverage one of the principal benefits of a Scrum like process, which is open communication and discussion on how to achieve the next slice of work.

I confess to also not holding formal backlog planning but again, we didn’t just throw this ceremony away. Each week we have a sales meeting where the upcoming pipeline is discussed and as the Agile Coach I make sure to attend the meeting along with our subject matter experts. In reality, I am wearing a Product Manager hat at this meeting. It provides a great forum to lead into a discussion on the product, we we use the same forum and the same people to discuss the upcoming product priorities to make sure that we are aligned with our business needs. Although this meeting does not formally review the backlog tickets it has the same effect in our Scrumban process - ensuring there is a regular forum to align and realign engineering with the business.

Examine your process with a sharp and critical eye to make sure it is appropriate for your team and don’t be afraid to consider adapting your process. Just remember where all those original ideas came from and why they were deemed necessary, because you will likely need something similar.

I use Scrum, but I adapt the process to ensure I use all the parts as best as possible for my team.