

WHAT IS A RELEASE TRAIN ENGINEER?

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The Release Train Engineer (RTE) is a role in the Scaled Agile Framework (SAFe®). Developers is a role in Scrum – an Agile Framework. Developers are people in the Scrum Team that are committed to creating any aspect of a usable Increment each Sprint.

WHAT IS A RELEASE TRAIN ENGINEER?

The Release Train Engineer (RTE) is a management role for an Agile Release Train (ART) in the Scaled Agile Framework (SAFe). Unlike traditional management roles, the RTE is the Chief Scrum Master accountable for the agility and the effectiveness of SAFe across the whole ART.

ACCOUNTABILITIES OF THE RTE



Coach the ART and its Scrum Masters

The RTE coaches the ART – its Scrum Masters and team members – in self-management, helping them to solve problems regarding delivery and supporting each other to do so, without telling them how to turn their work into an Increment of Done. Often, this involves helping the teams on the ART to be cross-functional rather than working in their capability silos by encouraging collaborative work and pairing.

Should the ART face impediments to achieving its PI Objectives, creating and making their Increment potentially releasable, or meeting the Definition of Done, the RTE supports Scrum Masters to coordinate between their teams to address these issues. Should teams be unable to address the impediments, the RTE then acts to escalate the problem to someone with the authority, e.g., a manager, to take action.

The RTE also ensures that all ART events, including the Scrum of Scrums, take place and are positive, productive, and kept within the timebox. When Scrum events don't occur, transparency suffers and the risk of delivery failure increases.



Coach the Product Manager

The RTE Master coaches the Product Manager in several ways, including:

- Helping find techniques for effectively defining PI objectives and Program Backlog management.
- Helping the teams on the ART to understand the need for clear and concise Features and Stories.
- Helping establish empirical product planning for a complex environment.
- Facilitating stakeholder collaboration as requested or needed, including pre-PI Planning and Feature refinement activities, PI Planning, Scrum of Scrums, the System Demo and the Inspect & Adapt workshop



Coach the Organisation

The RTE serves the organisation in several ways, including:

- Leading, training, and coaching the organisation in its SAFe adoption.
- Planning and advising SAFe and Train implementations within the organisation.
- Helping employees and stakeholders understand and enact an empirical approach for complex work.
- Removing barriers between stakeholders and Agile Teams.



Working together as a single cross-functional ART

Agile is a “team sport”. Agile teams are expected to work together and leverage each other’s skills, experience and expertise to achieve their Iteration Goals collectively and collaboratively. This also means holding each other accountable as professionals.



Support self-organisation and decentralised decision-making

No one in the ART tells the teams how to create an Increment of work. The team are expected to hold each other to account, work within the guardrails of SAFe, and determine how they will achieve the goals together.

KEY AREAS OF RESPONSIBILITY



Facilitating ART events

- Pre-PI Planning and Feature refinement activities.
- PI Planning.
- Scrum of Scrums – to highlight and make ART-level impediments and risks transparent.
- System Demo – to support teams to demonstrate working software, inspect the product environment and metrics, and elicit feedback from stakeholders on what to do next.
- Inspect & Adapt – to understand ART-level issues and create relentless improvement amongst the ART’s agile teams.



Work closely with the Product Manager

- Work closely with the Product Manager to help cause change that increases the productivity of the ART so it can deliver more to stakeholders with higher quality, less effort and less waste.
- Work closely with the Product Manager to coach stakeholders to improve their interactions with the ART to support empiricism, improve transparency, and increase their level of interaction at team's Iteration Reviews and at the System Demo.

KEY OUTCOMES



- The ART uses empiricism to inspect and adapt their work and create transparency.
- The ART uses metrics to improve the effectiveness of their work and its quality.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS



- Take responsibility for the effective use of SAFe. A good RTE supports all teams in the ART to self-organise, self-manage and be cross-functional. An RTE doesn't delegate responsibility for agile's effective use to others.
- Simplicity – the art of maximising the amount of work not done – is essential to “building the right product” and “building it right”.

COMMON OBSTACLES TO AVOID



- Don't remove impediments for the team. Help them work out how to remove the impediments themselves. This helps you avoid becoming the “Scrum Mum”.
- Don't become the team's secretary. Meeting invites, taking minutes, updating the board quickly turn you from a coach to an administrative assistant.
- Don't use the same pattern to facilitate Scrum's events. It's the easiest way to make your agile practice stale and boring.
- When you start out, you might find the ART's team are working in functional silos. This is normal, but don't let it become the norm. Work to create truly cross-functional teams across the ART. It will take a while, but productivity and quality will increase when the team achieves this milestone.

ABOUT ZEN EX MACHINA

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