Scrum.org™ The Home of Scrum | Whitepaper

# The AI Teammate Framework: *A Four-Step Framework for Product Teams*

*Companies are utilizing AI tools to develop products, but many teams waste money and achieve poor results from random experimentation. This paper presents the AI Teammate Framework, which treats AI as a new team member through four steps.*

**September 2025**

© 2025 Scrum.org | All Rights Reserved.

## Maximizing AI Efficiency While Managing Rising Operational Costs: *A Strategic Imperative for Product Teams*

As artificial intelligence becomes an indispensable component of product development workflows, organizations face a critical challenge that will define competitive advantage today and beyond. While AI tools promise unprecedented productivity gains, from accelerating user research analysis to enhancing strategic decision-making, the current ad-hoc approach to AI integration leaves significant efficiency opportunities untapped while simultaneously driving potentially significant operational expenses and environmental impact. This whitepaper explores a fundamental hypothesis: product teams that adopt systematic, team-management principles for AI integration can simultaneously unlock dramatically higher value from their AI investments while establishing usage patterns that drive responsible and cost-conscious practices. By treating AI as a strategic team member that requires thoughtful onboarding, clear role definition, and continuous optimization, teams can achieve these dual objectives. The AI Teammate Framework provides a pathway for organizations to harness AI's transformative potential without succumbing to the inefficiencies and resource waste that often characterize current AI adoption strategies.

## The Opportunity: *Treating AI as Your Newest Team Member*

When your product team needs additional expertise, you shouldn’t randomly assign tasks to whoever happens to be available. You should carefully consider what skills are missing, interview candidates, onboard them with context, manage their contributions, and evaluate their performance over time. Yet when it comes to AI, many teams treat it as a mysterious black box rather than a valuable team member requiring thoughtful integration.

The proliferation of AI engines—from enterprise-specific solutions to major platforms like ChatGPT, Claude, and Gemini—means product teams now face the same strategic decisions they would when hiring human talent. Which AI capabilities align with your Product Goal? How do you set up your AI teammate for success? When do you know it's time for a change?

© 2025 Scrum.org | All Rights Reserved. 

This approach treats AI integration as a four-step team management process:

- Defining and selecting the right AI (hiring)
- Providing necessary context (onboarding)
- Optimizing interactions (leveraging)
- Evaluating performance (managing).

By applying proven team management principles to AI, product teams can move beyond ad-hoc experimentation to a strategic AI partnership that generates value through adaptive solutions for complex problems.

Success comes from applying the same empirical approach you use for product development—making decisions based on what is observed, inspecting outcomes regularly, and adapting based on the insights gained. When these principles guide AI integration, teams create transparent and valuable partnerships that support the achievement of their Product Goal.

**Step 1: Model Management - Defining the Role and "Interviewing" Your AI**

Just as you wouldn't hire without a clear job description, selecting an AI engine requires understanding exactly what role it will play on your team. This Model Management phase focuses on aligning AI capabilities with your specific product needs through transparent evaluation and empirical decision-making.

**1.1 Understanding the AI Landscape**

Today's AI ecosystem offers specialized engines for different functions. Enterprise solutions, such as Microsoft Copilot, integrate with existing workflows, while general-purpose models like GPT-5 or Claude excel at diverse reasoning tasks. Specialized engines focus on coding, data analysis, or creative work. Each brings different strengths, limitations, and integration requirements that must be transparent to your team.

**1.2 Key Selection Criteria**

Three critical factors should guide your AI "hiring" decision, each requiring the same careful evaluation you'd apply to any team addition:

***Product Goal Alignment:*** A team building developer tools has different AI needs than one creating consumer experiences. Consider

© 2025 Scrum.org | All Rights Reserved. 

whether your AI needs to understand technical documentation, user research, market analysis, or creative content. Your AI should advance your long-term product objectives, not just solve immediate tactical problems.

***Team Capability Gaps*:** Cross-functional teams possess all the necessary skills to create value, and AI is a part of that cross-functional team, augmenting these capabilities in specific areas. Identify where your team needs augmentation, data analysis, user story refinement, technical documentation, or strategic insights. Your AI should fill genuine competency gaps while respecting existing team strengths.

***Delivery Integration*:** Consider how AI integration affects your team's ability to deliver value consistently. Early-stage products benefit from AI that excels at generating hypotheses and facilitating rapid iteration. Mature products might need AI focused on optimization, scaling, or maintenance tasks. Ensure the AI supports rather than disrupts your established delivery cadence.

> The "interview" process involves testing potential AI engines with real scenarios from your backlog. Can the AI understand your domain? Does it provide insights that enhance team decision making? Does integration align with your team's collaborative approach and values of openness and respect?

**Step 2: Context Management - Onboarding Your AI Teammate**
Even the most capable team member struggles without proper context. Your AI teammate needs the same foundational understanding that any new hire requires to contribute effectively. This context establishment creates the transparency necessary for valuable AI collaboration.

**2.1 Establishing Clear Communication**
Teams that embody values like openness develop shared language patterns and domain expertise. Start by auditing your team's communication—industry-specific acronyms, internal terminology, and domain-specific concepts all require a clear definition for your AI. Create explicit context that mirrors how you would onboard any new team member, defining not just what terms mean, but how your team uses them in practice.

**2.2 Clarifying Roles and Collaborative Structure**
Your AI needs to understand the team structure and its place within your collaborative approach. Who makes final product decisions? What role does the AI play in backlog refinement versus delivery planning? Is it contributing to research, analysis, ideation, or execution?

© 2025 Scrum.org | All Rights Reserved. 

Clear role definition prevents confusion and ensures the AI contributes appropriately to team dynamics without undermining the self-managing approach that enables effective teamwork. AI should enhance your team's cross-functional capabilities while respecting established accountabilities and decision-making processes.

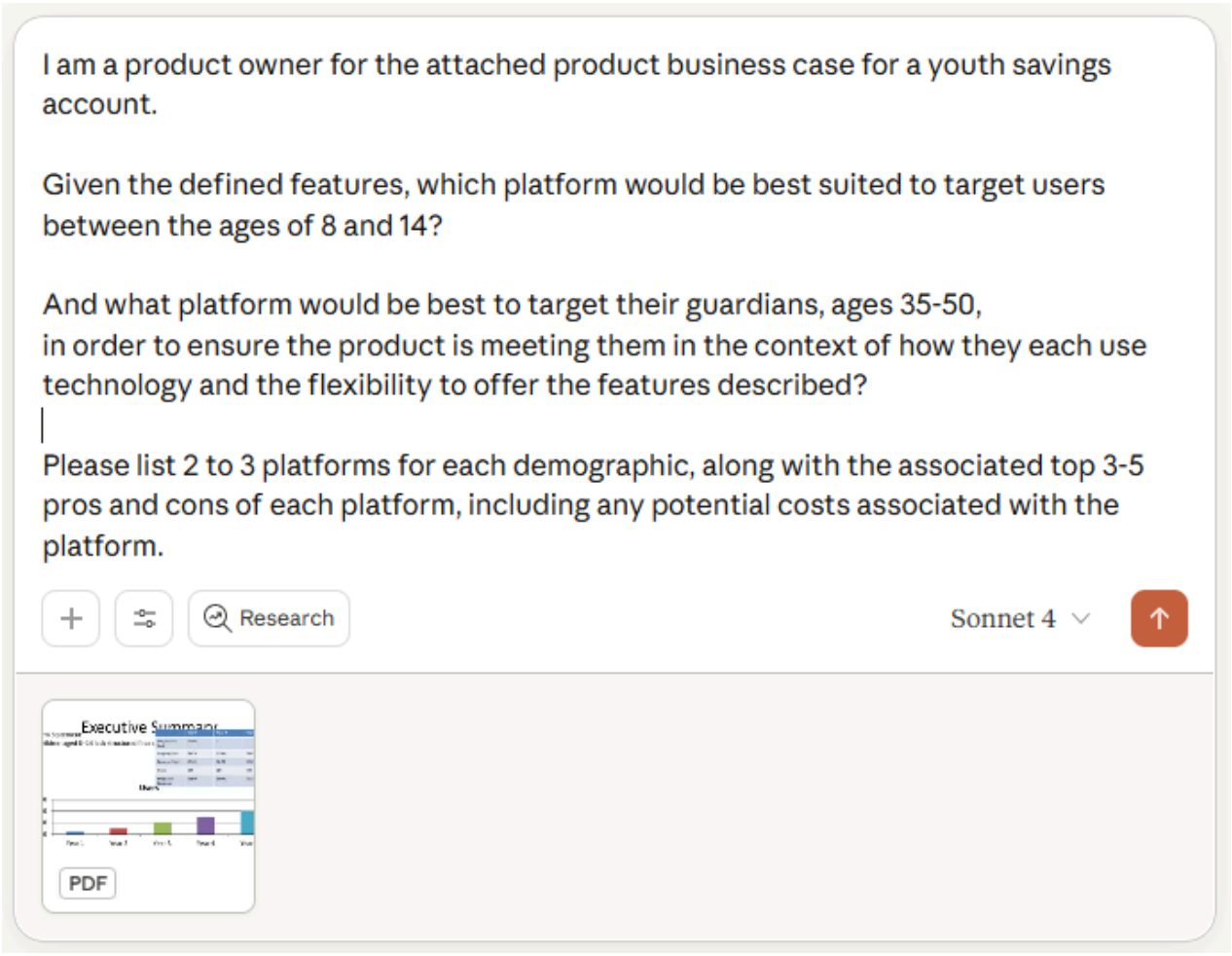
### 2.3 Sharing Product Context

Provide a comprehensive background on your market, customers, users, and key stakeholders. Your AI should understand the problem you're solving, your value proposition, and success metrics. Include information about your product vision, current challenges, strategic objectives, and the Product Goal that guides your work.

This context enables the AI to provide relevant, targeted assistance rather than generic responses. Just as team members need to understand the "why" behind their work, AI requires the same strategic context to contribute meaningfully to your product's success.

Context management requires ongoing attention, as your product evolves and your understanding deepens; your team members (both physical and AI) need continual updates to maintain relevance and value.

For Example:




© 2025 Scrum.org | All Rights Reserved. 

## Step 3: Prompt Engineering - Optimizing Team Interactions

Once your AI teammate understands its role and context, the quality of your collaboration depends on how effectively you communicate with it. Prompt engineering applies the same principles of clear, focused communication that characterize high-performing teams.

### 3.1 Framing Problems with Focus and Commitment

Teams that commit to achieving their goals maintain focus on the work that makes the best possible progress toward those objectives. Apply this same focus when presenting challenges to your AI teammate. Instead of asking "How can we improve user engagement?", provide specific context: "Our B2B dashboard users spend an average of 3 minutes per session, but successful customers in similar products average 8 minutes. Given our current feature set and recent user research findings, what specific engagement strategies should we test next?"

### 3.2 Defining Clear Expectations

Just as you would with any team member, clearly communicate what constitutes a complete response. Do you need three specific recommendations with implementation considerations? A comprehensive analysis with supporting data? A prioritized list with trade-off discussions?

Apply the same "Definition of Done" thinking to AI interactions that you use for other work—establish a shared understanding of what complete, valuable output looks like. This transparency prevents misaligned expectations and ensures AI contributions support your team's objectives.

### 3.3 Iterative Collaboration and Adaptation

Effective teams employ iterative approaches to optimize outcomes and manage complexity. Treat AI interactions as collaborative conversations rather than single transactions. Build on previous responses, ask follow-up questions, and refine your requests based on initial outputs.

This collaborative approach mirrors how you develop ideas with any teammate—starting with broad concepts, then progressively adding detail and clarity as understanding emerges. Each interaction should build toward your objectives while maintaining the learning culture that characterizes effective product teams. There is a notable side benefit of your AI collaboration: you will be able to review the context of how the interaction evolved into its current state and what prompts may have contributed to a particular outcome.

© 2025 Scrum.org | All Rights Reserved. 

### 3.4 Supporting Team Autonomy

Self-managing teams decide internally who does what, when, and how. Ensure that AI collaboration supports rather than undermines your team's autonomy and professional accountability. Use AI to enhance team decision-making capabilities without creating dependencies that reduce team ownership or the courage to tackle complex problems independently.

## Step 4: Governance Management - Evaluating and Adapting Through Continuous Improvement

Like any team member, the effectiveness of your AI teammate requires ongoing evaluation and potential adjustments. This governance management ensures that your AI partnership continues to deliver value as your product and market understanding evolve, applying the same continuous improvement mindset that drives effective teams.

### 4.1 Establishing Evaluation Criteria

Define specific, observable metrics for AI contribution quality that align with your team's values and objectives. Are the insights actionable and relevant to your current challenges? Do recommendations align with your product strategy and Product Goal? Is the AI helping accelerate decision-making or creating additional complexity?

Track both quantitative measures (time saved, tasks supported) and qualitative assessments (insight quality, strategic alignment, team satisfaction). Apply the same rigor to AI evaluation that you use for any process improvement discussion—focus on outcomes and value rather than just activity.

### 4.2 Recognizing When Adaptation is Needed

Teams that inspect their work regularly can detect when processes need adjustment. Several indicators suggest it might be time to reconsider your AI teammate selection, training, and/or approach:

- Consistent generic responses, despite a suitable context, suggest a lack of domain expertise.
- Recommendations that conflict with your product strategy indicate misalignment.
- Technical limitations that prevent integration with your workflow create ongoing impediments.

© 2025 Scrum.org | All Rights Reserved. 

### 4.3 Values-Driven Assessment

Regularly inspect whether AI collaboration reinforces or undermines the values that guide effective teamwork. Does AI support commitment to your objectives? Is it helping maintain focus on what matters most? Does AI collaboration promote transparent problem discussion? Is it enhancing team members' professional capabilities while maintaining mutual respect? Does AI support your team's courage to tackle complex challenges?

### 4.4 Continuous Context and Process Refinement

Just as teams refine their approach based on learning, AI context requires ongoing updates. Product discoveries, market changes, stakeholder feedback, and evolving objectives all necessitate adjustments to context. Establish regular review of AI integration effectiveness as part of your continuous improvement practices.

### 4.5 Strategic Evolution

Sometimes, the best decision is to transition to a different AI platform or approach based on empirical evidence. Perhaps your needs have evolved beyond the current AI's capabilities, or new platforms better align with your requirements. Approach this transition strategically, documenting lessons learned and ensuring knowledge transfer that maintains team effectiveness.

Make these decisions based on observed outcomes rather than technical preferences, applying the same evidence-based approach you use for other strategic choices.

### Summary: AI as Strategic Team Enhancement

By treating AI as a team member requiring thoughtful management, product teams can move beyond experimental AI usage to strategic integration that generates sustainable value. The four-step framework, **Model Management, Context Management, Prompt Engineering, and Governance Management** (the AI Teammate Framework), provides structure for building AI partnerships that enhance team capabilities while maintaining the transparency, continuous learning, and collaborative values essential to effective product development.

Success comes not from implementing the most advanced AI, but from thoughtfully integrating AI capabilities that complement your team's strengths and address specific product challenges. Like any valuable team member, your AI teammate's contribution grows stronger with clear expectations, proper context, ongoing development, and regular evaluation.

© 2025 Scrum.org | All Rights Reserved. 

Teams that apply empirical thinking—making decisions based on observation, regularly inspecting outcomes, and adapting based on learning—can leverage AI to enhance their cross-functional capabilities while maintaining a self-managing, values-driven approach that enables complex problem-solving and consistent value delivery.

## Looking Forward: The Evolution Toward Context Portability

While the four-step framework provides a foundation for effective AI team integration today, emerging developments promise to transform how teams manage AI partnerships. The Model Context Protocol (MCP) and its ecosystem of intelligent agents (dedicated modules with a dedicated and specific subject area focus) represent a fundamental shift from the current model of isolated AI interactions to a more sophisticated, interconnected approach that mirrors how human teams actually collaborate.

For clarity, **Model Context Protocol (MCP)** is an open standard that enables AI systems to securely connect with external data sources and tools in real-time, transforming AI assistants from isolated systems into dynamic agents capable of interacting with live information and user environments. This protocol enables AI to move beyond static training data, becoming contextually aware and actionable systems that can integrate seamlessly into existing digital workflows and execute real-world tasks.

### The Context Portability Challenge

Today's AI integration faces a fundamental limitation: context isolation. When teams invest weeks building comprehensive context for one AI platform—documenting domain knowledge, establishing communication patterns, and refining collaborative processes—that investment becomes stranded if they need to switch platforms or leverage multiple AI capabilities simultaneously. This creates artificial barriers to the strategic evolution outlined in Step 4, forcing teams to choose between maintaining inferior AI partnerships or starting the context-building process from scratch.

The current landscape forces product teams into suboptimal decisions. A team might continue using an AI that no longer matches their evolving needs simply because the cost of rebuilding context elsewhere

© 2025 Scrum.org | All Rights Reserved. 

feels prohibitive. Alternatively, they might fragment their AI usage across multiple platforms without a shared understanding, creating inconsistent experiences and duplicated effort in maintaining separate contexts.

## A Potential Approach for Model Context Protocol

MCP addresses these limitations by establishing standardized protocols for context sharing and agent communication. Rather than treating each AI platform as an isolated system requiring complete context recreation, MCP enables the development of specialized "context agents" that serve as persistent repositories of team knowledge and collaborative patterns.

These context agents serve as intelligent intermediaries, maintaining a comprehensive understanding of a team's domain, objectives, communication style, and collaborative patterns, while consistently providing that context across different AI platforms. Think of them as sophisticated onboarding specialists that can quickly bring any new AI teammate up to speed with the full richness of your team's context.

## Architectural Implications for Team Management

This evolution transforms each step of the four-step framework in significant ways:

**Enhanced Model Management:** Rather than evaluating AI platforms in isolation, teams can assess capabilities while knowing that context transfer costs between multiple AI capabilities approach zero, i.e., a team can move seamlessly between capabilities, maximizing the advantages of each. This enables more strategic AI selection based solely on capability fit, rather than considering switching costs. Teams can maintain a "bench" of specialized AI capabilities, deploying the most appropriate tool for specific challenges while maintaining consistent context across all interactions.

**Persistent Context Management:** Context agents eliminate the recurring overhead of context establishment by maintaining living documentation that evolves with the team. As product understanding deepens, market conditions change, or strategic objectives shift, the context agent updates its knowledge base automatically, ensuring all AI interactions benefit from the most current understanding without manual synchronization across platforms.

© 2025 Scrum.org | All Rights Reserved. 

**Sophisticated Interaction Orchestration:** Context agents can intelligently route different types of requests to the most appropriate AI capabilities while maintaining conversation continuity. A complex product challenge might involve strategic analysis from one AI, technical feasibility assessment from another, and market research from a third—all coordinated through a single, context-aware interface that ensures consistent understanding across all specialized interactions.

**Continuous Governance and Optimization:** With standardized context protocols, teams can implement more sophisticated evaluation approaches, comparing AI performance across platforms with identical context and requirements. This enables evidence-based platform selection and creates opportunities for continuous optimization of AI capability mix based on empirical outcomes.

## The Agent Ecosystem Advantage

Beyond simple context portability, MCP enables the development of specialized agents that enhance team capabilities in domain-specific ways. Product teams might leverage agents specialized in user research analysis, competitive intelligence, technical feasibility assessment, or market opportunity evaluation—all while maintaining a consistent understanding of the team's specific product context and strategic objectives.

These specialized agents can collaborate through the same protocols, creating sophisticated analysis chains that combine multiple perspectives while maintaining transparency and traceability. A product decision may involve coordination among market analysis agents, technical feasibility agents, and user research agents, all contributing their specialized capabilities while building on a shared context about the team's specific situation and objectives.

## Strategic Implications for Product Teams

This evolution toward context portability and agent collaboration creates several strategic opportunities that extend well beyond current AI integration approaches:

**Multi-Model Optimization**: Teams can continuously optimize their AI toolkit, selecting the best available capabilities for each type of challenge while maintaining consistent context and collaborative patterns. As new AI platforms emerge with superior capabilities in specific domains, adoption becomes a tactical decision rather than a strategic upheaval.

© 2025 Scrum.org | All Rights Reserved. 

**Collaborative Intelligence Networks:** Rather than replacing human decision-making, context agents enable more sophisticated human-AI collaboration by ensuring that AI contributions are always grounded in a comprehensive understanding of the team's context, objectives, and values. This supports the autonomy and professional development that characterize effective teams while enhancing analytical capabilities.

**Institutional Knowledge Preservation:** Context agents create persistent repositories of team learning that survive personnel changes, platform transitions, and organizational evolution. This addresses one of the most significant challenges in product development—maintaining institutional knowledge and collaborative effectiveness as teams evolve.

**Cross-Team Learning and Standardization:** Organizations can develop best practices for AI integration that transfer effectively across different product teams, creating economies of scale in AI adoption while respecting the unique contexts that drive each team's specific challenges and opportunities.

## Implementation Considerations

While the Model Context Protocol promises significant advantages, successful implementation requires thoughtful consideration of several factors that parallel the team management principles outlined in this framework:

Teams must approach context agent development with the same empirical mindset that drives effective product development—starting with clear hypotheses about value creation, implementing incrementally, measuring outcomes rigorously, and adapting based on learning. The goal is not to implement the most sophisticated possible system, but to create AI partnerships that genuinely enhance team effectiveness while maintaining the collaborative values and autonomous decision-making that enable complex problem-solving.

Privacy and security considerations become more complex with persistent context agents, requiring the same careful attention to risk management that teams apply to other aspects of product development. Context agents must earn the same level of trust that teams place in human colleagues, with transparent governance and clear boundaries around information access and usage.

© 2025 Scrum.org | All Rights Reserved. 

Integration with existing tools and workflows requires the same strategic thinking that guides other technology adoption decisions. Context agents should enhance rather than disrupt established collaborative patterns, supporting team effectiveness without creating dependencies that reduce professional development or autonomous decision-making capabilities.

## The Path Forward

The evolution toward context portability and intelligent agent collaboration represents a natural progression of the team management approach to AI integration. Rather than fundamentally changing how teams should think about AI engagements, these developments make it easier to implement the strategic, values-driven approach that generates sustainable value. This could also facilitate the seamless integration of different team members at various capability levels, depending on the jobs to be done.

Teams that establish strong foundations using this four-step framework—clear role definition, comprehensive context management, effective interaction patterns, and continuous evaluation—will be well-positioned to leverage context agents and multi-model optimization as these capabilities mature. The principles of empirical decision-making, transparent collaboration, and strategic evolution that guide effective team management apply equally to this more sophisticated AI ecosystem.

The future of AI integration lies not in replacing human judgment and collaborative capabilities, but in creating more powerful tools for analysis, insight generation, and strategic thinking while preserving the autonomy, creativity, and values-driven decision-making that enable teams to solve complex problems and deliver consistent value. Context agents and the Model Context Protocol provide the technical foundation for this vision. However, success still depends on the same thoughtful team management principles that drive effective collaboration in any context.

© 2025 Scrum.org | All Rights Reserved. 

## About the Author

**Darrell Fernandes - Executive Advisor at Scrum.org**

Darrell partners with multiple organizations to provide market perspective, executive insights and leadership mentoring. Covering a breadth of topics from AI, the evolution from project-based execution to a product operating model, as well as executive coaching. He's engaged with a variety of small, medium and large organizations. Through these engagements he is able to influence countless change agents and leaders across industries. Previously he was the Head of Product Technology at TIAA, he led multiple technology functions at Fidelity Investments where he was most recently their Head of Technology Strategy & Planning. Darrell is an active mentor in the Women's Unlimited LEAD program and is a member of the advisory boards of the University of New Hampshire's College of Engineering & Physical Sciences, Flow Executive Council and scrum.org. He's also President of the Waterville Valley Foundation, a non-profit serving the community interests.

## About Scrum.org

Scrum.org, the Home of Scrum, was founded by Scrum co-creator Ken Schwaber as a mission-based organization to help people and teams solve complex problems. We do this by enabling people to apply Professional Scrum through training courses, certifications and ongoing learning all based on a common competency model.

© 2025 Scrum.org | All Rights Reserved. 