Ken Schwaber:
THE SCRUM STORY

✏ **By Gustav Bergman, Marketing Director Softhouse Consulting**

Ken Schwaber, who is known to be the co-founder of Scrum together with Jeff Sutherland, paid a visit to Sweden in April this year. Lean Magazine got a chance to talk with him about the origins and evolution of Scrum in the nineties, and what he thinks about the future of Agile Development.

The Scrum philosophy was conceived in the Boston area in the late eighties. This is where the two founders Ken Schwaber and Jeff Sutherland – in their respective companies – were building software products on object-oriented IDEs (Integrated Development Environments). These environments were the first to allow for integrated team coding, building, testing and rapid deployment – up to several times a day.

"Jeff has always been a deep thinker, and he had been struck by the initial findings of Nonaka and Takeuchi," recalls Schwaber. "Jeff started forming a process according to those principles that also met the needs of a rapidly changing business with constant demands. I had been working on process, process automation, and methodology for a decade and was getting insufficient improvements in the underlying waterfall, predictive process."
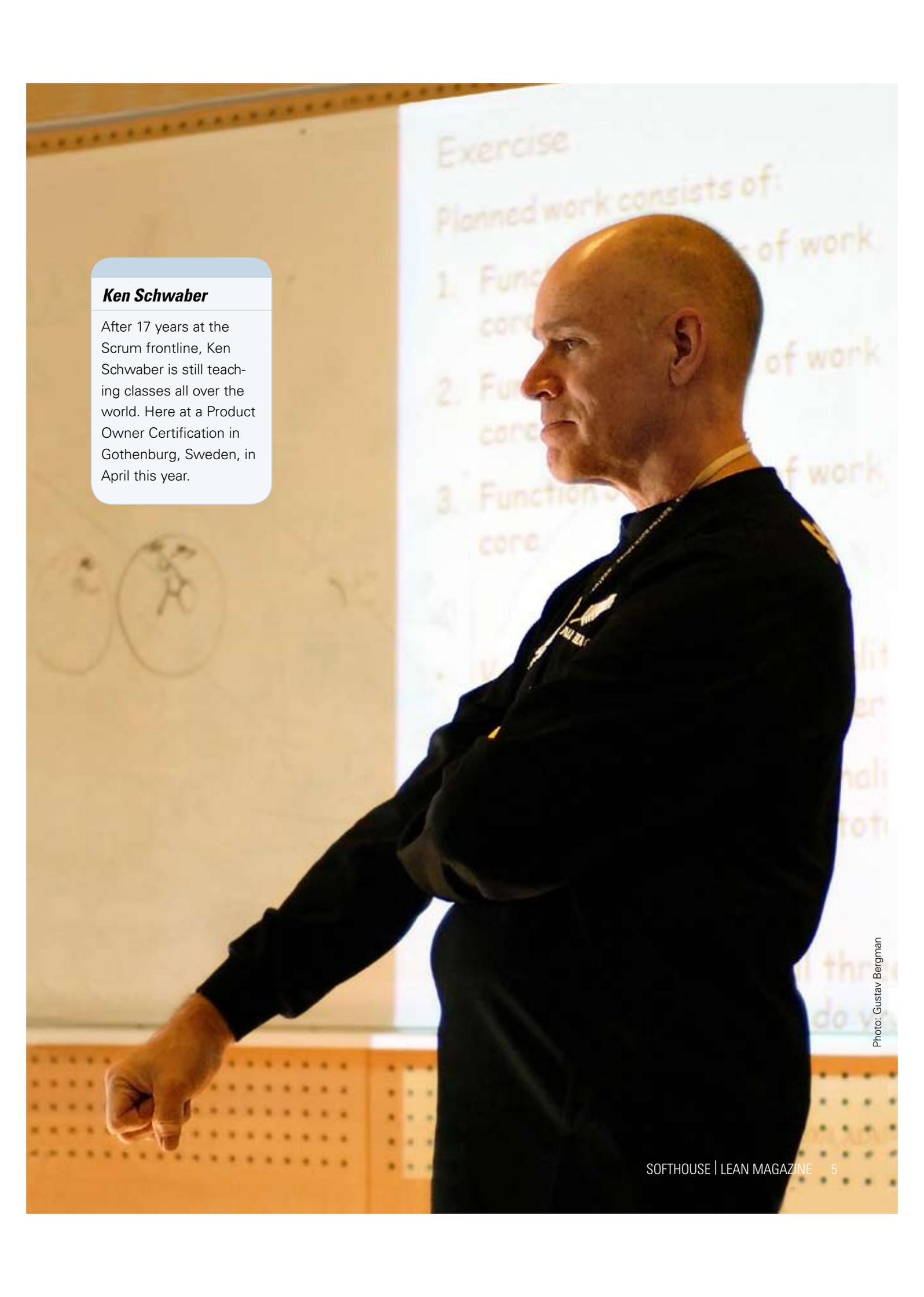
Ken Schwaber

After 17 years at the Scrum frontline, Ken Schwaber is still teaching classes all over the world. Here at a Product Owner Certification in Gothenburg, Sweden, in April this year.

Photo: Gustav Bergman
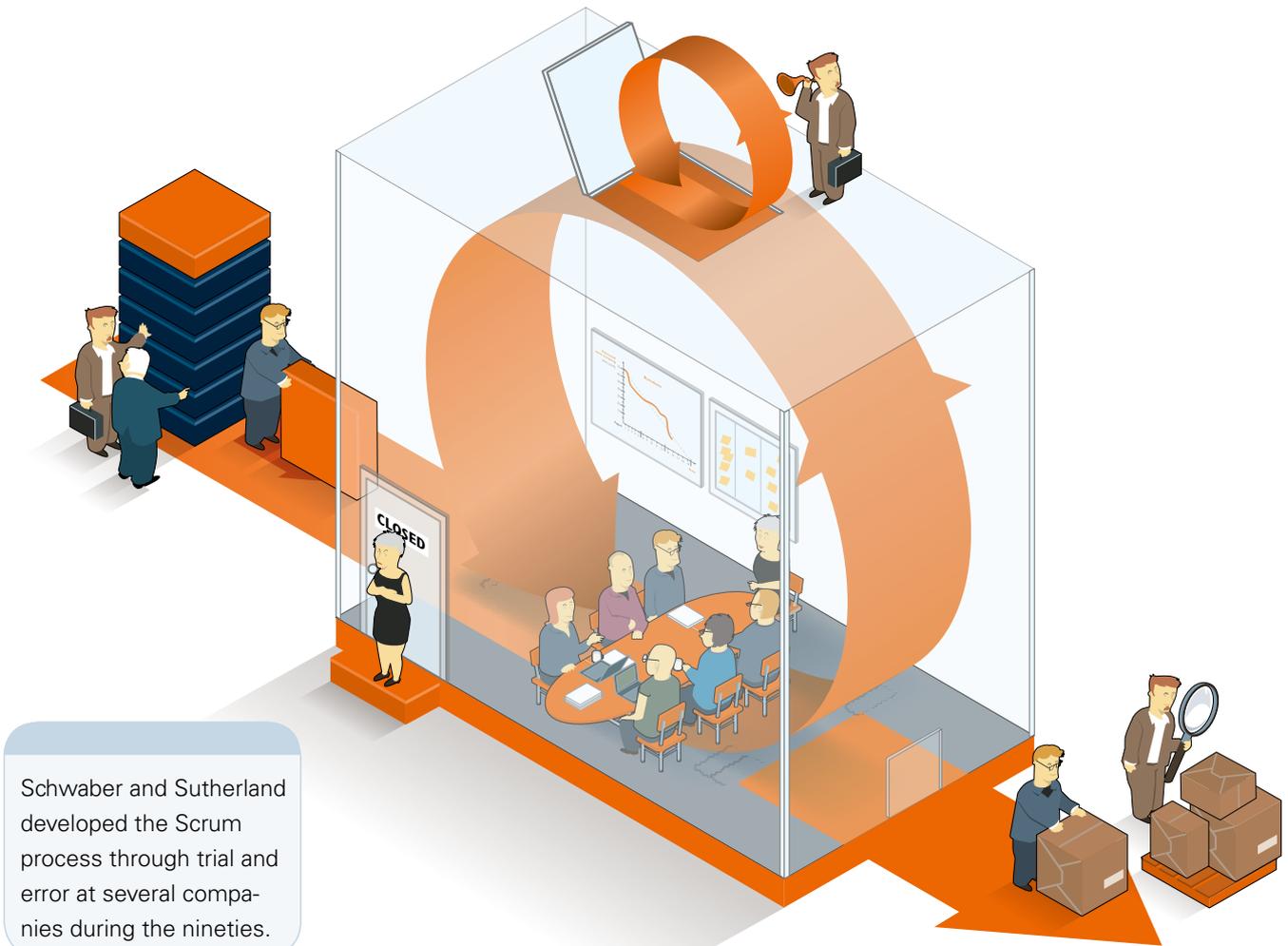
Schwaber and Sutherland developed the Scrum process through trial and error at several companies during the nineties.

Sutherland kept experimenting with his groundbreaking concept, which he had already started to call Scrum. Eagerly, he kept calling Schwaber for his advice on it. Sutherland wanted to compare Scrum to whatever process Schwaber was using.

"Jeff was under the impression that I was using one of the major methodologies, like Navigator, Method/1, or Summit. I told Jeff that I was using none of those, that I would have gone out of business if I relied on their unwieldy, unfriendly-to-change nature. When we compared what I did use with Jeff's Scrum, they were very similar. The rest is history, as we collaborated to bring Scrum to life."

"Only those organizations with compelling reason to change and management with insight and courage will succeed."

The Evolution
Sutherland and Schwaber evolved Scrum through trial and error at a number of companies during the 1990s – NewsPage, IDX Systems, Fidelity Investments, and PatientKeeper. The Daily Scrum, the burndowns and the Sprint Backlog were added, and planning Sprints were dropped. The importance of self-managing, cross functional teams became apparent and a bedrock to Scrum.

Schwaber also collaborated with process control scientists at DuPont to tie Scrum to first principles in industrial process control theory, learning that the reason Scrum worked was that it was empirical.

"In 2001, the Agile Manifesto was formed," says Schwaber. "The signatories gathered in SnowBird because we felt our approach to software development had something in common that was far better and more people-oriented than the emerging favored process of the day, Rational Unified Process. The principles of the manifesto are the common touch points that we agreed upon."

Today, Schwaber notices that the term "Agile" is often used in a careless way.

"Many people think that there are Agile processes. There aren't. There are processes that conform to the Agile Manifesto principles, such as Scrum and Extreme Programming. However, the word Agile is often used as a description for 'we aren't using waterfall.' That is not what Agile means!"

In Schwaber's mind, Scrum and Agile started emerging for two reasons:

"The Agile Manifesto was a rallying point for dissatisfaction and a new approach. The emergence of new IDEs that were as powerful as SmallTalk, like VisualStudio and Eclipse, were the technological enablers." ◼

The origin of the name Scrum

Jeff Sutherland got the name "Scrum" from the famous article "The New New Product Development Game," which was published by Takeuchi and Nonaka in the Harvard Business Review in 1986. On the first page of the article they write: "Companies are increasingly realizing that the old, sequential approach to developing new products simply won't get the job done. Instead companies in Japan and the United States are using a holistic method – as in rugby, the ball gets passed within the team as it moves as a unit up the field."
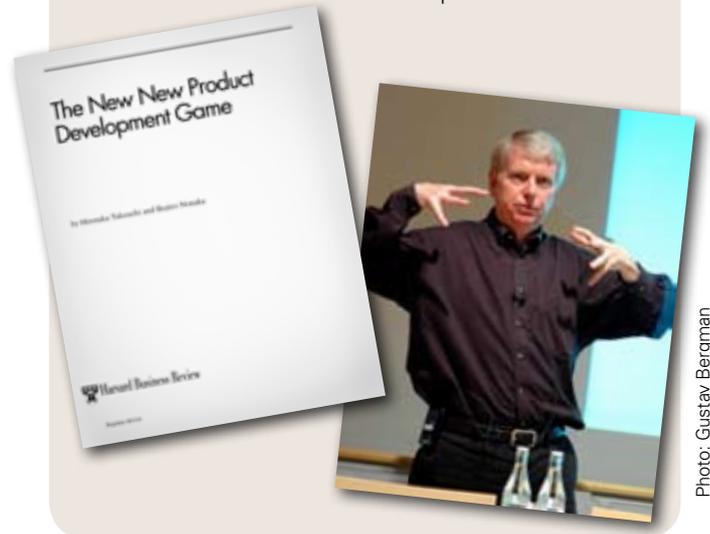

The New New Product Development Game

by Hirotaka Takeuchi and Ikujiro Nonaka

Harvard Business Review

Photo: Gustav Bergman

The Future of Scrum and Lean – according to Ken Schwaber

"Scrum and Agile are similar to Lean Thinking. Scrum is a new way of doing business, but there won't be that many that reap all of its benefits – such as productivity, quality, engaged people, and maximized return on investment. American automobile companies were immersed in running their operations top-down, using the principles of Scientific Management to try to plan everything. Even while Toyota began to reach their market by using flexible lean techniques, they were unable to adapt. The change in perceptions, culture, and habits was too great. Many places that are trying to shift from the predictive approaches of waterfall and command and control are having the same problems. The change in thinking is particularly hard. The improved engineering practices to support the change are also hard. I predict that only those organizations with compelling reason to change and management with insight and courage will succeed."

"John Chambers, the CEO of Cisco, put his organization through such a change over the last four years and commented that it was the hardest thing he had ever done. I predict that only 15–25 % of all organizations attempting to use Scrum throughout the enterprise will succeed in making the change and reaping the benefits. As a result, they will outcompete those who weren't able to change and become dominant players in their markets."