Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

The Value of the Certified Scrum Master (CSM) Certification in 2026

Our Friends · Monday, March 23rd, 2026

For the last ten years, Scrum has been the most popular Agile Framework in Software Development. When the framework became mainstream, the Scrum Alliance began issuing Certified Scrum Master (CSM) credentials. And since then, the CSM has been seen as a requirement for Agile practitioners. With the changes that have been seen in the last ten years, the question is valid. The nature of agile has shifted, the organizational contexts have changed, and the credential landscape has diverged. In order to answer the question, a closer look is warranted in CSM. Specifically, what does a CSM certify, how has the market for agile certifications evolved, and in what areas does the CSM credential still provide value?

What the CSM Certifies

The Certified Scrum Master is one of the first practitioner level certifications showcasing a basic level of understanding of the Scrum framework. It is awarded after attending a two-day instructor-led course by a Certified Scrum Trainer (CST) and passing the online exam. The course includes Scrum values, roles (Product Owner, Scrum Master, and Developers), events (Sprint, Sprint Planning, Daily Scrum, Sprint Review, Sprint Retrospective), and artifacts (Product Backlog, Sprint Backlog, Increment). The Scrum Master role is primarily about serving the Scrum team by facilitating Scrum events, removing impediments, coaching the team on Scrum, and protecting the team's ability to work. It is valuable context to understand the role and the things the role is explicitly not supposed to do when assessing the credential. Notably, the CSM is not a technical certification. It does not assess knowledge of programming, project planning tools, or any domain-specific knowledge. It certifies that you have basic knowledge of Scrum and are ready to step in the role of Scrum Master in a team.

The changing environment of Agile makes the criticism that it has developed too much for the CSM to be relevant a critique to engage with rather than dismiss. The landscape of Agile by 2026 will hold meaningfully different conditions from when the CSM was most relevant. Scaled Agile Frameworks (SAFe, LeSS, Nexus and Spotify models) are now standard in organizations with a multitude of Scrum teams. A Scrum Master in these larger constructs requires more than single team Scrum knowledge and the basic CSM does not cover scaled agile topics to any reasonable depth. Furthermore, Agile has migrated from software development to other domains like marketing, finance, HR and Operations. The Scrum Master role in such arenas requires Scrum as well as Agile thinking in non-software environments. The expectation to facilitate and steer remote and distributed teams has evolved to more than just an exception. The Scrum Master role has

expanded Entails, more than it has in the past due to distributed team contexts , the dimensions of collaboration and servant leadership, skill set, and these combined constructs more than the basic CSM has attempted to foster. The fundamentals of Scrum, and the CSMs coverage of the fundamentals of Scrum, have not changed and thus, remain relevant and accurate.

The certification maintains foundational validity and will continue to be updated for future revisions to the Scrum Guide.

Projected Value of CSM in 2026

The CSM's projected value in 2026 has become more crystallized in certain market segments and more contextualized in others. In IT companies with agile software development teams, CSM has an almost ubiquitous recognition and assimilation for Scrum Master positions. Most job advertisements for Scrum Master positions in IT companies consider CSM or its equivalent certification a prerequisite or an advantage. The certification becomes a hiring criterion, suggesting that the individual has gone through the necessary Scrum education and passed the requisite exam. The salary differential of CSM-certified Scrum Masters has been consistently documented. In the US, Scrum Masters earn a base salary between $95,000 and $125,000, and possessing a CSM credential definitely positions one towards the higher end of that spectrum. In large corporations that have implemented scaled agile frameworks, the CSM credential is a must, though it is typically accompanied by scaled agile qualifications — SAFe cert, Certified Scrum Professional, or Certified Agile Leader — which show a more comprehensive organizational perspective. In some sectors more recently adopting agile practices, particularly traditional manufacturing, government, and healthcare administration, the CSM's value is less common, but in these cases, the CSM suggests an understanding of agile that these organizations committed to building agile capability appreciate.

CSM vs PSM: The Key Differences

The PSM, offered by Scrum.org, is the most common rival to the CSM. CSM candidates have to attend a training course, but PSM candidates can skip training and just take the exam; the exam is one of the most difficult Scrum exams and requires a more comprehensive knowledge of Scrum. CSM (**??certified scrum master certification**) exams are generally considered to be less difficult than PSM I exams, and PSM II exams are designed to assess whether a candidate can utilize Scrum in more complex environments. The CSM's training course is a strength, but also serves as a limitation. The two-day course led by a certified trainer is designed to promote active learning, and combine direct instruction, and group/activity facilitation, and that learning context is something that pure exam preparedness paths lack. The limitation, however, is that course quality can be incredibly disparate, and the learning experience is influenced largely by the trainer. The CSM is generally more recognized in corporate HR systems and hiring frameworks, partially due to the lack of CSM's in comparison to PSM's causing more CSM's to have a PSM, and also because the PSM's pathway is more identifiable pre-work, and the CSM's training course influences a candidate's exam preparedness more than PSM's exam, whereas the PSM's are generally considered more 'rigorous'.

Higher-Level Scrum Alliance Certifications

In addition to the CSM, the Scrum Alliance certification pathway includes the Advanced Certified Scrum Master (A-CSM) and the Certified Scrum Professional-Scrum Master (CSP-SM). These

credentials demonstrate advanced experience and training, and reflect increased proficiency in areas such as coaching, facilitation, and organizational agile transformation. The A-CSMs and CSP-SMs are better suited for those practitioners who have been Scrum Masters for 1-3+ years and who wish to articulate their increasing proficiency. Compared to the base CSM, they provide better market differentiation for senior Scrum Master, agile coach, and agile transformation positions.

The CSM Still Holds Value in 2026

The CSM is still a worthwhile investment for new Scrum Masters in the tech industry. The two-day course provides a credential that is a hiring baseline requirement for most job postings. It's also provides a baseline understanding of a basic Scrum framework. For those in more senior agile roles, most of the CSM, which they've likely already earned, offers little value. The same is true for those in adjacent roles, like project management or product management, where the goal is to develop Scrum-oriented thinking for those roles and not Scrum Masters. The CSM is still positioned well for 2026. The credential has evolved alongside the Scrum frameworks and other credentials that have emerged in the last decade. It is still the most widely accepted entry credential for professional services in Scrum.

Photo: redgreystock via Freepik.

CLICK HERE TO DONATE IN SUPPORT OF OUR NONPROFIT COVERAGE OF ARTS AND CULTURE

This entry was posted on Monday, March 23rd, 2026 at 10:26 am and is filed under Uncategorized You can follow any responses to this entry through the Comments (RSS) feed. You can leave a response, or trackback from your own site.