

# Software development, procurement, & management fundamentals

## Product ownership

## Part 2 of 5

**Presented by 18F for:  
Office of Child Care, HHS**

# August, 2022

# Software development, procurement, & management fundamentals series

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Agile  
management

2

Product  
ownership

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User-centered  
design

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Software  
development  
practices

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Agile  
Contracting

## What is 18F?

18F is a technology and design consultancy for the U.S. Government, inside the government.





**We share the same  
motivations as you:  
delivering great  
service to the public.**

# Product ownership

## In the public sector

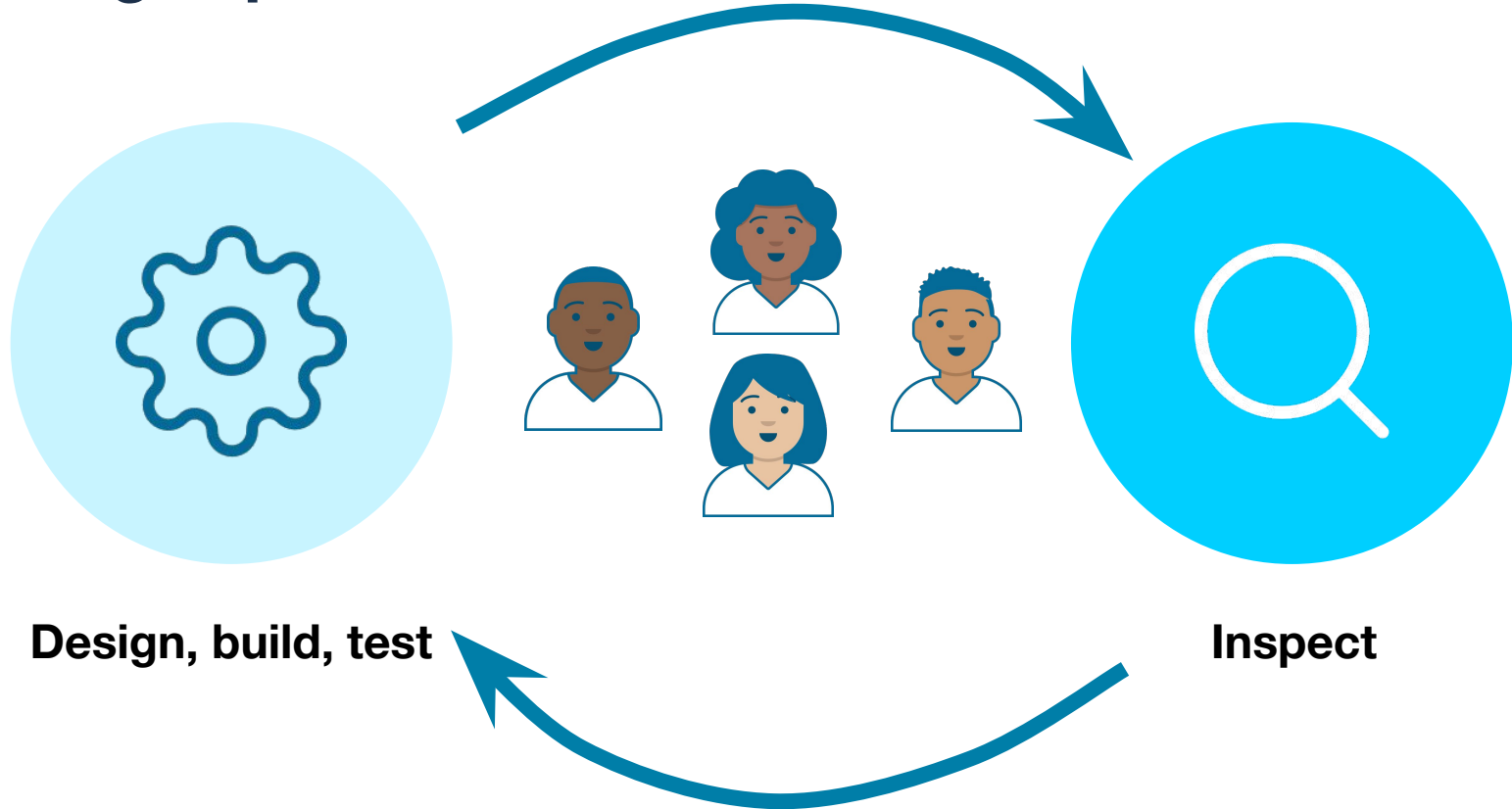
# Session Goals

1. **Why** is product ownership necessary
2. **What** is product ownership?
3. **How** can I apply product thinking to an existing project

## *Not Covered:*

We're not going to go into the details of how to do product ownership (building roadmaps, user stories, etc.).

# The agile process



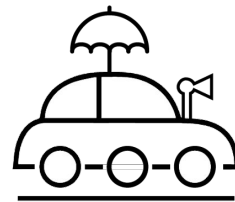
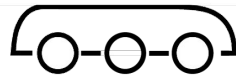
# Iterative development

Building big things in small pieces and delivering frequently

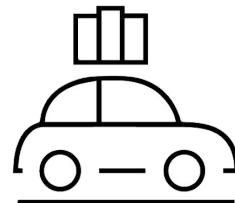
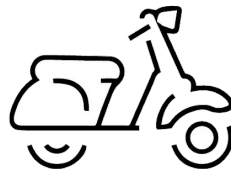
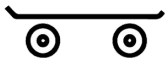


# Constantly delivering value

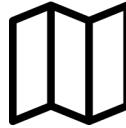
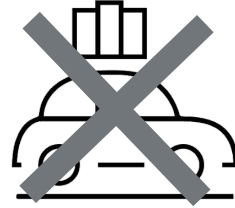
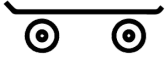
FROM



TO



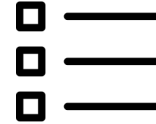
# Constantly delivering value



Roads



Payment

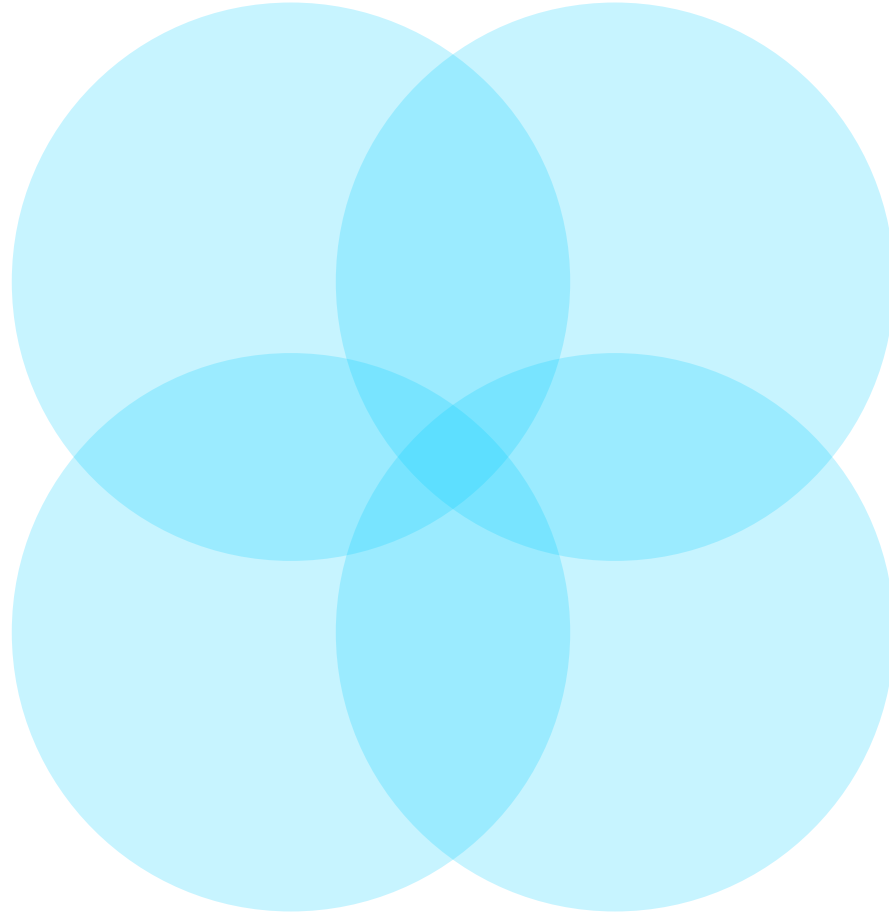


List  
Planning

**The team needs a vision  
*and* needs to make day-to-day  
decisions.**

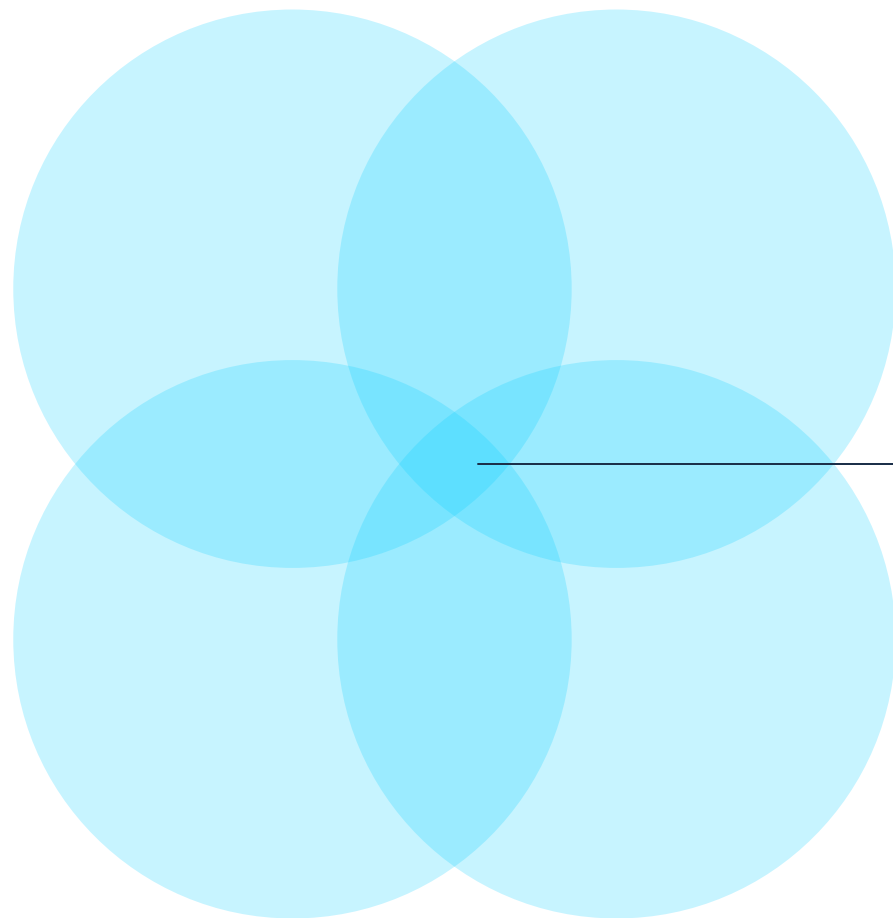
user need

stakeholders

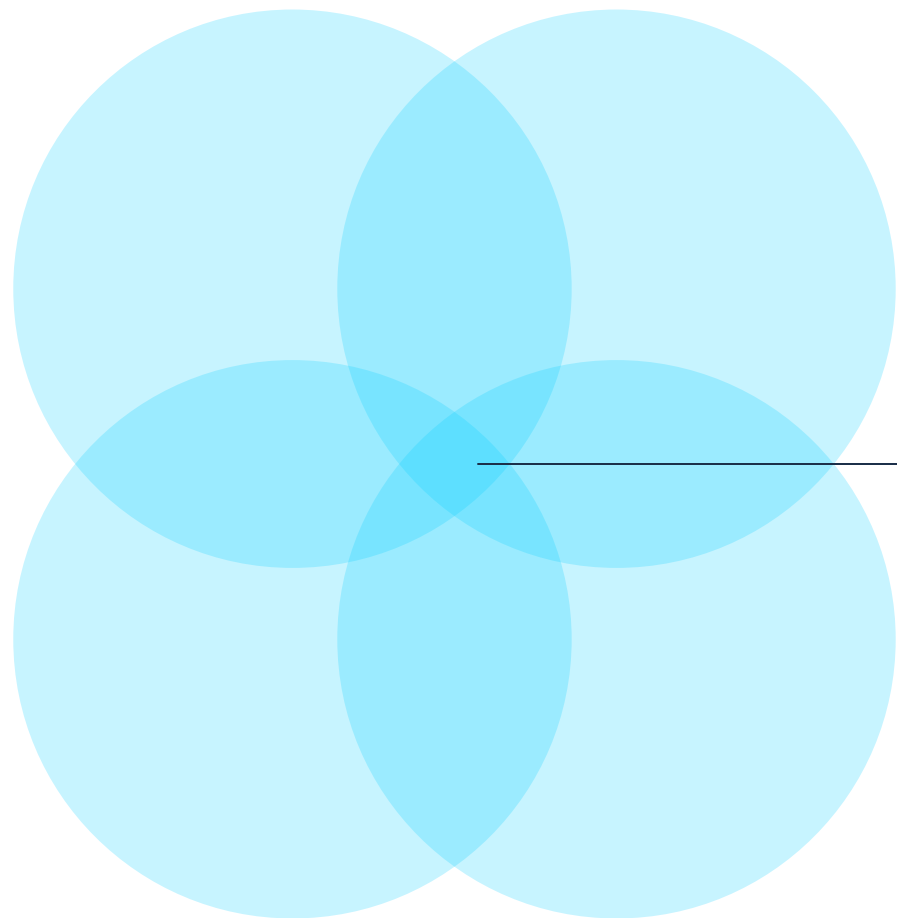


technology

business

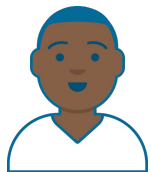


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# An interdisciplinary agile team



User researcher



Product designer



Engineer



Product owner

Based on the project, can include other roles:  
data analysts, content designers, operational staff, etc.

# What is product?



# product

*noun*

**anything that can be offered to a market that might satisfy a want or need<sup>1</sup>**

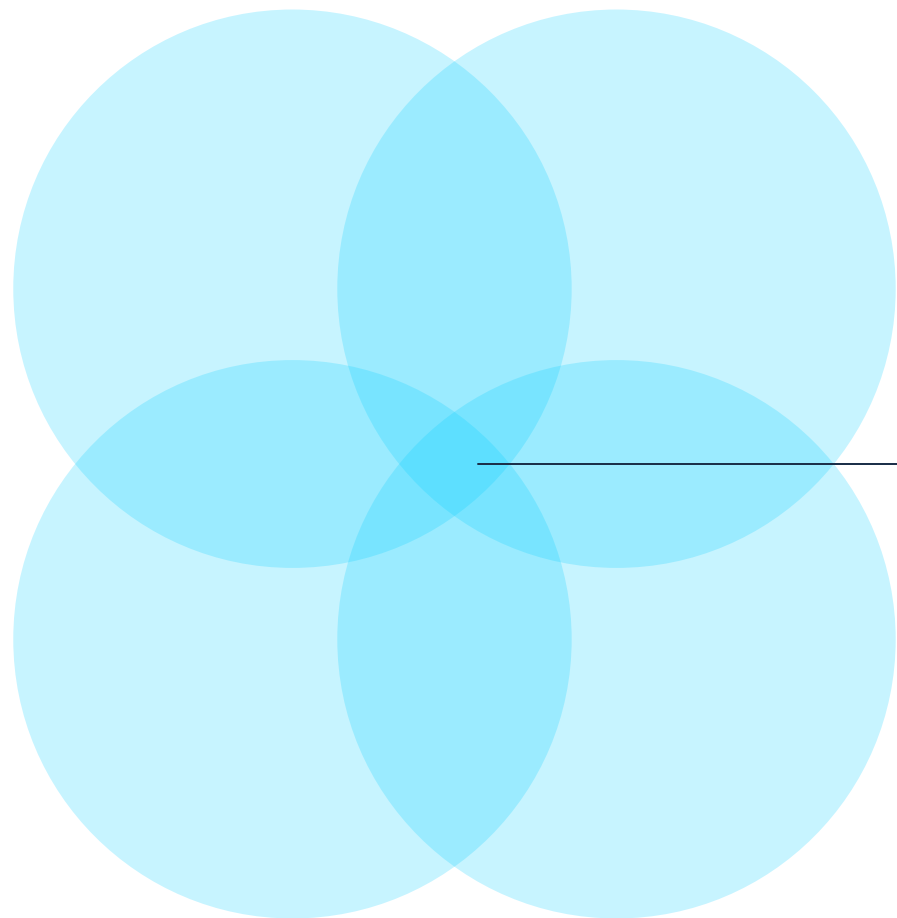
<sup>1</sup> P. Kotler : Kellogg School of Management

## product owner

*noun*

**a person who guides subject matter experts in an interdisciplinary team to envision and deliver products<sup>1</sup>**

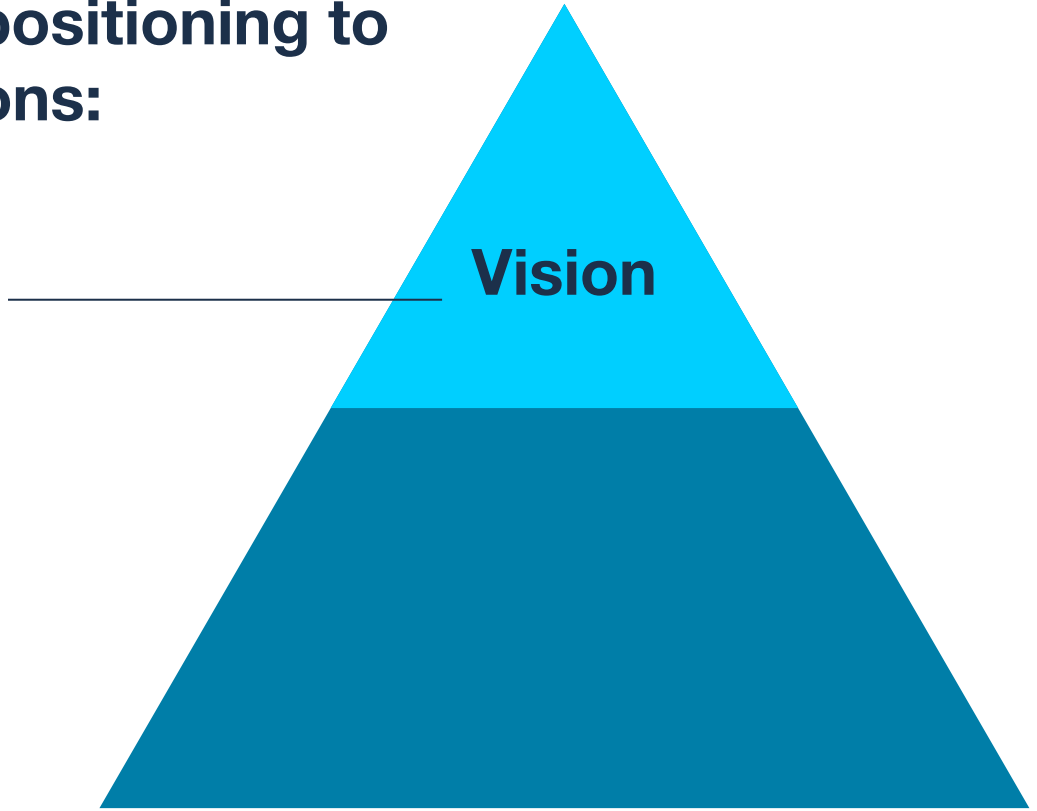
<sup>1</sup> N. Lee: 18F



Product owners sit at the intersection of design+research, development, business, policy, and politics. They are a bridge across all of those groups.

**Product uses that positioning to answer two questions:**

- 1. What should we do? Why?**



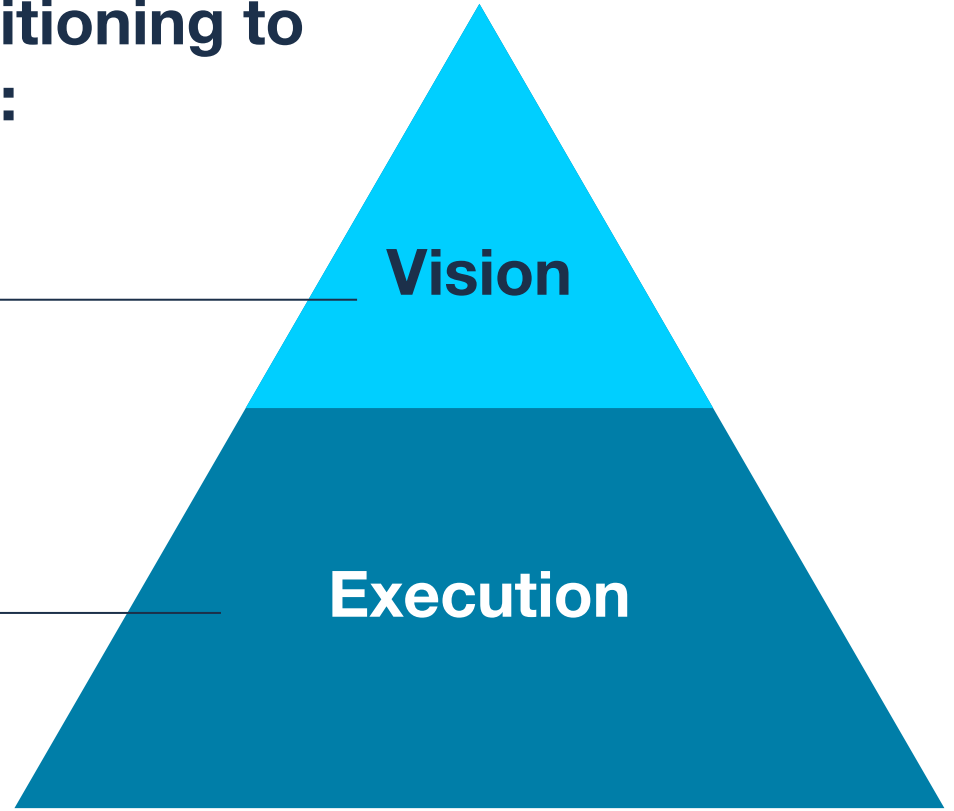
**Product uses that positioning to answer two questions:**

**1. What should we do? Why?**

**Vision**

**2. How do we get there?**

**Execution**



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1. What's the problem we're solving? (and why does it matter?)
2. What will our impact be?
3. How are we doing it?
4. **Is our solution good?**

**Product teams have to be able to provide good answers to all of these questions.**

Product teams have to be able to provide good answers to all of these questions. **When the answer is “we don’t know,” they need to have a concrete plan to get to an answer.**

# Product Owner vs. Project Manager

# Project Manager vs Product Owner

	Project Manager	Product Owner
Measuring Output	Tasks Completed Project On Track	Delivering value to users and agency
Tools	Gantt Chart Project Plan	Roadmap Sprint Board
Timeline	Project Start to End	Whenever the problem is solved



# Product owners are **not**:

Project managers

Scrum masters

Agile coaches

Engagement managers

Designers

Researchers

Strategists

Coffee getters

Note takers

Developers

Data scientists

Security experts

Infrastructure experts


Marketers

PR people

Salespeople

The team's psychologist


The team's parent



However, product managers *sometimes* play one or more of these roles **in order to fill a need** on the team (sometimes the team *really* needs a project manager and some coffee).



# Product Thinking



**Product owners are always focused on  
delivering the right solution to solve a  
problem.**



**Product owners protect the project team,  
scope, and what gets built.**



**Product owners protect the project team, scope, and what gets built.**


**They should say “no” often, and leadership should give them the space to do so.**

Design and execution matter





**Product owners **prioritize to reduce risk** across technical, legal, business and user needs.**

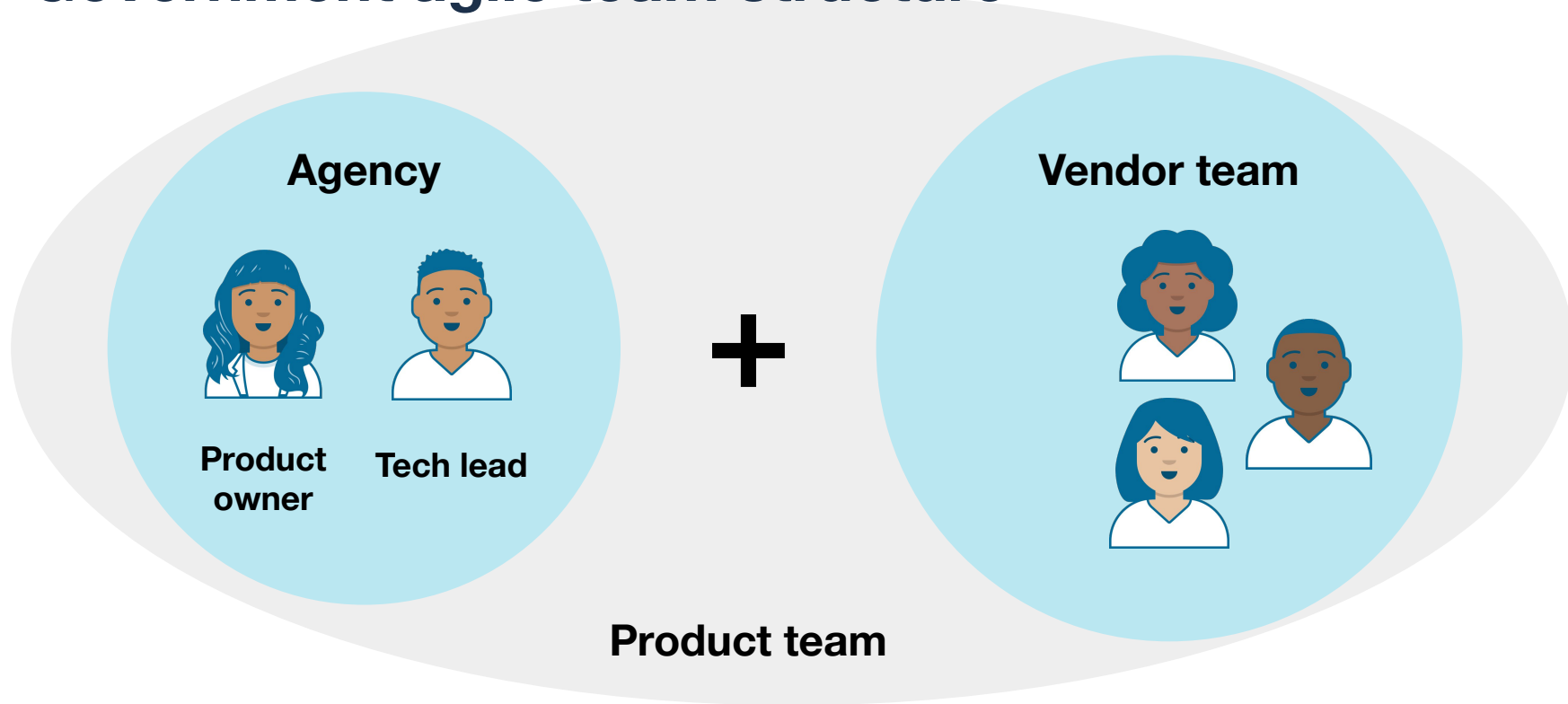


**Product owners don't make decisions in a vacuum. They get ideas and buy-in from engineering, design, policy and program staff.**

# **Product ownership in government**



# Government agile team structure





## **Product owners should be **agency employees**.**

1. Agencies own the business outcomes of the product.
2. Agencies have the knowledge to own the project irrespective of the vendor.

**Product ownership is a full-time job. Days are filled with team ceremonies, clearing blockers for the team, attending usability sessions, meeting with users, communicating with stakeholders, refining the backlog, etc.**

**Treating product owners as “other duties as assigned” may not set the product owner, or the effort, up for success.**



# What makes a good product owner

- Agency and user context
- Guide (not control) an interdisciplinary team
- Outcome oriented
- Comfortable prioritizing and saying No



## What outcomes should product owners create?

- Clear vision statement for their area of ownership
- Key Performance Indicators for their area of ownership
- Prioritized and stack-ranked list of features
- An actionable product backlog for the team
- A product roadmap for upcoming milestones
- Product quality, testing, and bug triage process



# Working with your existing vendor and project

**This is difficult.** Existing contracts and relationships can be limiting.

- Ask for / review working software from vendors that **you can use** (if possible within your arrangement)
- When given choices on a project (i.e. a change request)
  - Insist on outcomes, not features
  - Focus on small pieces that independently add value
- Apply outcome orientation and product thinking to other projects (not just software)

# Recap





# Product ownership in government

1. Product owners should be **agency employees**.
2. Product owners sit at the **intersection of technology, business, users, policy and process**.
3. Product owners help **guide an agile interdisciplinary team** to make decisions about vision, strategy, roadmaps and day to day features
4. Product owners make sure that the team is **focussed on delivering ongoing value** for end users and the agency

# Thanks!

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