



The Product Owner - Top 10 Responsibilities

by Jack Milunsky · Jun. 05, 09 · Agile Zone · Analysis

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Over the course of the past 5 years, I have often been asked about the role the Product Owner plays in an Agile company. More recently in a rather controversial blog post by Adam Bullied he raised the question – Is there such a thing as an Agile Product Manager?

From my experience, there is. And this role in Scrum is defined as the Product Owner. The Product Owner from my experience differs from that of the traditional Product Manager role in many ways. Additionally, the role the Agile PM plays may vary depending on the environment and situation at hand, but for certain there are key activities the Agile PM must perform.

The Product owner (or Agile PM) shoulders all the responsibility for Project success and is ultimately responsible to the Team, stakeholders and to the company. With so much at stake it's easy to get bogged down or revert back to old ways and the whole team suffers as a result. In order for Scrum to work the Product owner has to focus his time on activities that matter.

Here are the top ten activities I have experienced a Product Owner must perform well in order to keep scrum teams effective:

- 1. Creates and MAINTAINS the Product Backlog** I emphasize MAINTAINS as this is an on-going job and more than likely a full-time activity. Nothing is constant in the world of software and it's important that the Product Owner keeps his/her eye on the ball. Note: the Product Backlog must be groomed prior to the Sprint Planning Meeting in order for the team to remain productive.
- 2. Prioritizes and sequences the Backlog according to business value or ROI** (there are lots of tools to help Product Owners do this and lots of books on the subject) The Product Owner is required to have the Backlog sequenced prior to the Sprint Planning Meeting. This means that each user story must be ordered by relative importance. It's no good to have 5 high priority or 5 medium priorities. It's important to know which User story is #1, which is #2 etc.
- 3. Assists with the elaboration of Epics, Themes and Features into user stories that are granular enough to be achieved in a single**

sprint. User Stories are elaborated at the last responsible moment and it is the Product Owners responsibility to be there during the Sprint Planning meeting to help the teams to understand exactly what is required.

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4. **Continuous Delivery:** A pragmatic approach to **Uncover the Hidden Value of** **Crack the Automation Code and Create a** Sprint and Release **Mitigating Risks** helps to keep the team on track **Your CI/CD Pipeline** ever-arching yardstick for the **Balanced Test Strategy** activity and progress against.

5. **Represents the customer** Watch New interfaces and engages the customer. The Product Owner must continuously engage the customer and stakeholders to ensure the Team is building the right product and therefore delivering the ROI expected of it. The Product Owner has the opportunity to steer the team in a different direction at the end of every Sprint, so he/she must be ready to do just that if necessary.

6. Participates in the daily Scrums, Sprint Planning Meetings and Sprint Reviews and Retrospectives. There's always a lot going on and always an excuse to miss the meetings. But each of these Scrum ceremonies is another chance for the Product Owner to inspect and adapt. And as a result being present at these ceremonies is tantamount to success.

7. Inspects the product progress at the end of every Sprint and has complete authority to accept or reject work done. Work that is either not complete or un-done needs to be re-prioritized or sequenced. An Agile PM is one who is quick to recognize and understand change and to ensure the Product Team adapts to the change in landscape, be it competition, target market or other.

8. Can change the course of the project at the end of every Sprint (30 days if you're following traditional Scrum methodology by the book). The Product Owner is in complete control and can steer the team in a completely different direction at Sprint boundaries. And good Agile teams will welcome this change as long as the Product Owner is confident and knowledgeable.

9. **Communicates status externally.** The product owner is the voice of the Team to the outside world and should ensure that all channels of communications are open and that projects have the right amount of support required to succeed.

10. **Terminates a Sprint if it is determined that a drastic change in direction is required** e.g. a competitor releases a new version which demands a counter response. This is a pretty serious event for Scrum teams. And what this means “technically” is that all work done up until that point is lost. I have not seen this done to many times in my career especially since, there’s really not that much time between Sprints in any event.

The responsibilities of the Product Owner are onerous and there is no one else on the team to cover for him/her or pick up the slack. So if you're choosing a Product Owner, choose wisely, the difference can be success or failure for the entire project or, in the worst of circumstances, the success or failure of the company.

Written by: Jack Milunsky - COO at Brightspark and Co-founder of Agilebuddy (An Agile project management tool, built with rich collaboration

features for Scrum teams). For more from Jack please visit: www.twitter.com/agilebuddy and blog.agilebuddy.com

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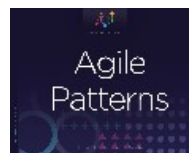
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Citytown Training

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Scrum Reboot, This Time with the Values - A Case Study with Intralinks

Scrum.org

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Agile at Scale: 3 Must-Have Tools for Enterprise Agile Teams

1 Gang

Create Focus With Ecocycle Planning

Continuous Delivery: A Pragmatic Approach to
by Barry Overeem • MVB • Oct 18, 18 • Agile Zone • Tutorial
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How often have you found yourself juggling too many balls? You may start dropping things left and right in a frantic effort to keep everything in the air. You will also find yourself unable to pick up new balls as it will only add stress and chaos. This may happen to you personally. Or in your team. Or in your entire organization.

Ecocycle Planning is about exploring what it is that you're keeping in the air (but shouldn't), and what it is that you aren't (but should)

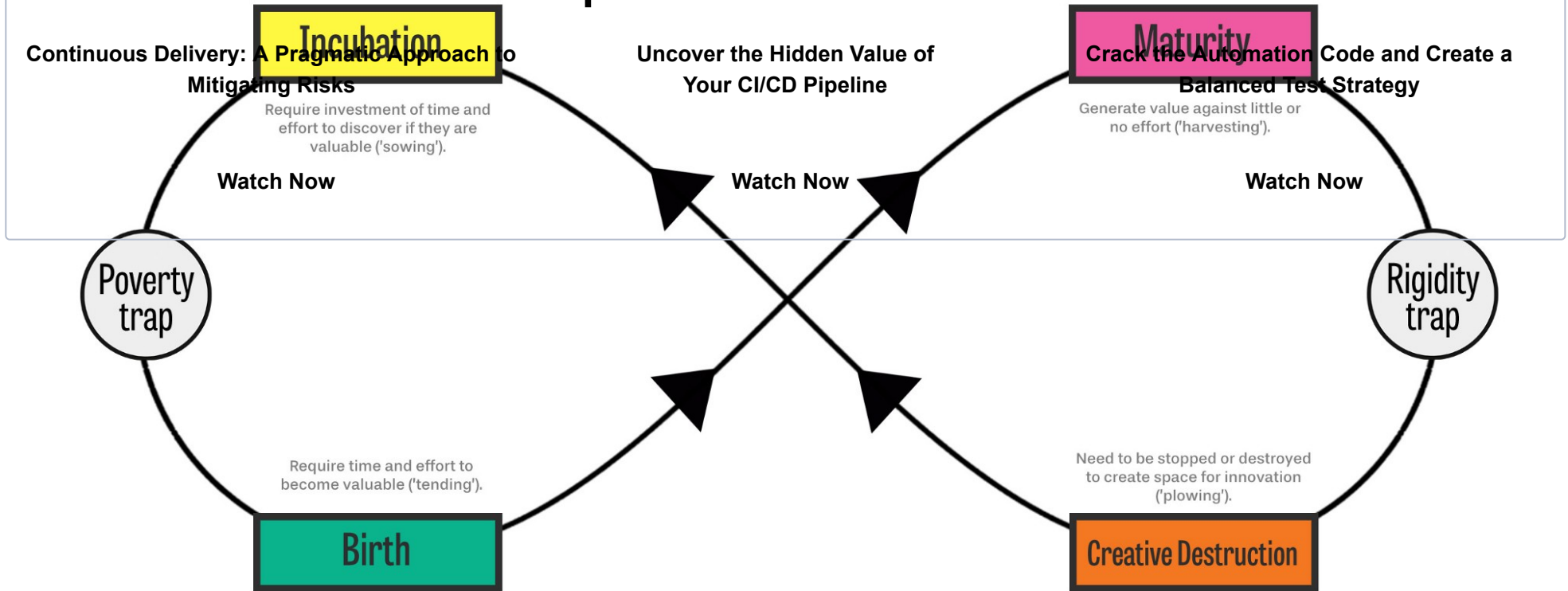
In these situations, we have to rediscover our focus and creatively 'destroy' what isn't valuable anymore. The Liberating Structure Ecocycle Planning is about exploring what it is that you're keeping in the air (but shouldn't), and what it is that you aren't (but should). You can do this individually or with a group of people.

A Metaphor from Nature and An Example

The name of this Liberating Structures borrows from the ecological cycle of life. Plants, for example, grow from seeds when they land in fertile ground (incubation). When the ground is fertile enough, seedlings will sprout that in turn depend on sufficient sun, shelter and minerals to grow (birth). When these conditions have been met, seedlings grow into plants that bear fruits and/or spread new seeds (maturation). But eventually, even mature plants die and are composted to become energy for new plants. Or their removal simply makes place for new seeds to grow (creative destruction).

Ecocycle Planning

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Developed by Keith McCandless & Henri Lipmanowicz. Based on a version by Fisher Qua.

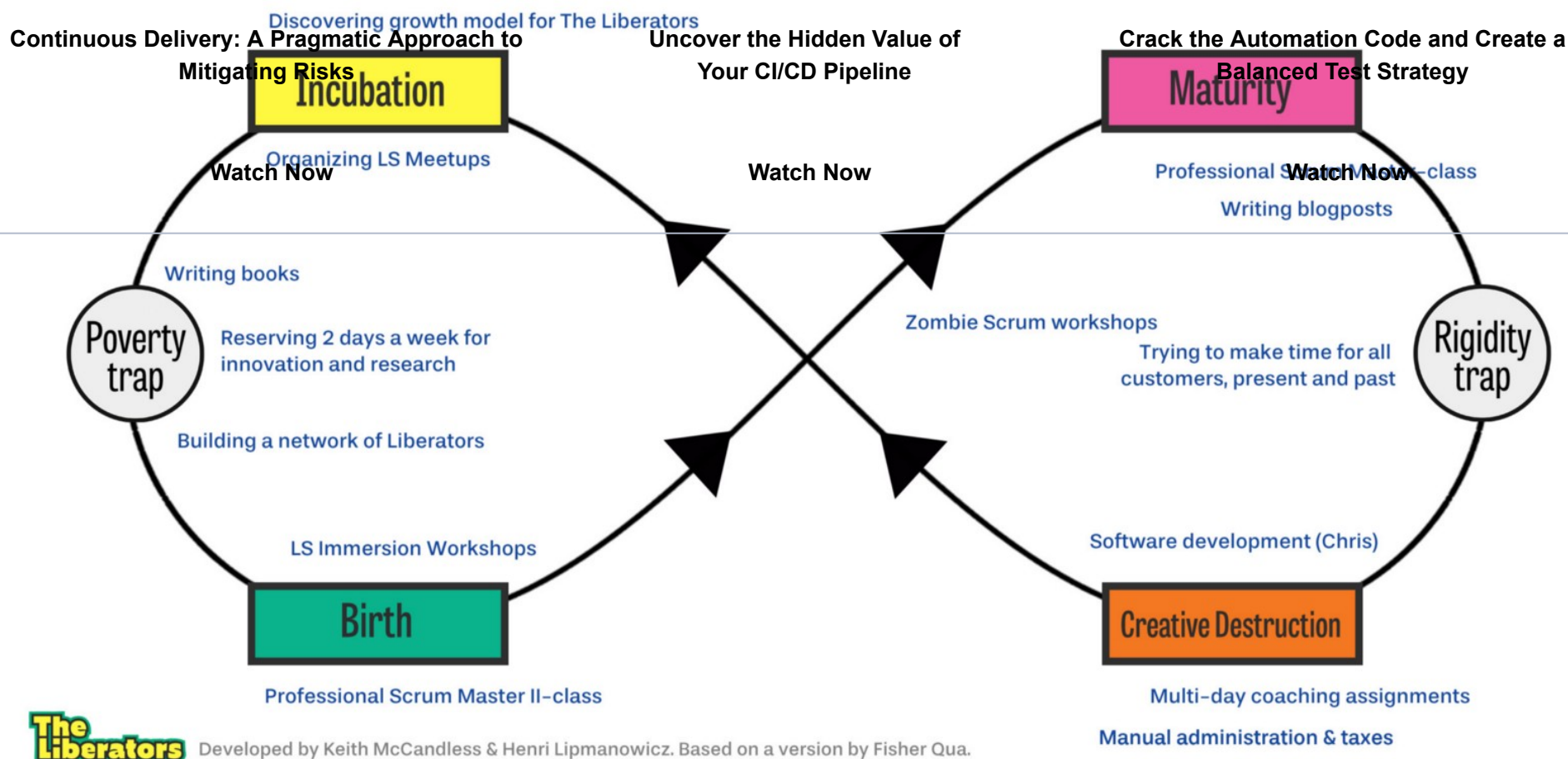
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The work that we do in daily life can be plotted onto this cycle. We often embark on activities that may become valuable at some point, but require our energy and time to grow. Other activities are more mature in that we can do them without much effort to get a lot of value out of them. But as with plants, sometimes we need to stop activities (destroy them) to make space for something new in our agenda's. Still to vague? Below is an example of an Ecocycle Planning for The Liberators:

Ecocycle Planning

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Example for The Liberators



The Ecocycle model adds two dimensions:

- Some activities may get stuck in the Poverty Trap or the Rigidity Trap. The first holds the activities that aren't getting the energy and time they need to grow into something valuable, while the second holds the activities that are costing us energy and time while their value is diminished or diminished;
- As in nature, ecocycles are multi-layered in that every activity on the ecocycle contains another ecocycle, only on a lower level. So one ecocycle may describe your personal hobbies or all the products you're working on as a team. A lower-level ecocycle can describe the activities you perform for one specific personal hobby or one particular product that you're working on. This layering also emphasizes that everything is related. Change on one level impact activities on other levels;

Uses in Scrum

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- Cleaning up a Product Backlog or an entire portfolio of products together with a representation (or everyone) involved with the product(s);

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- Personal development and coaching;

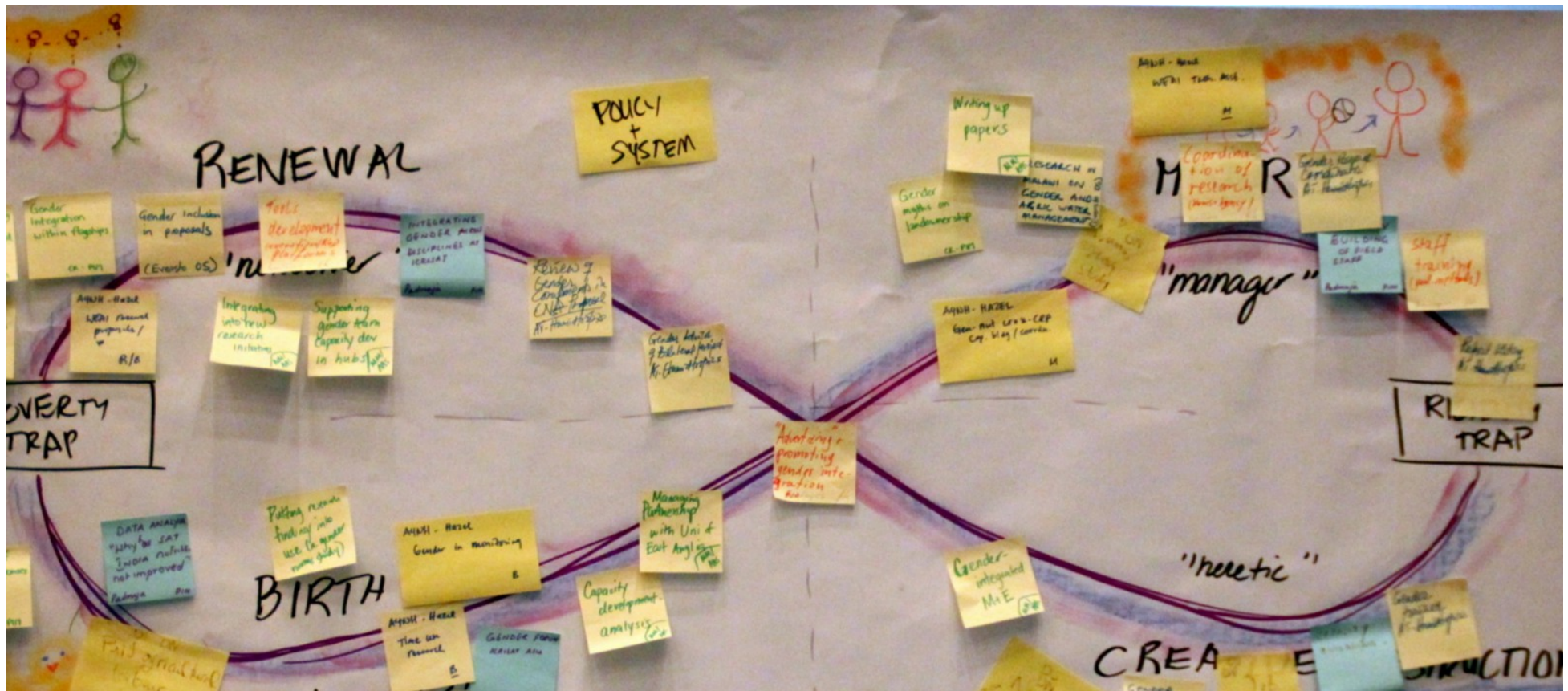
Your CI/CD Pipeline

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Balanced Test Strategy

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- Plotting the activities that Scrum Teams do and to discover what they should spend more time on. And most importantly, what to let go of;
- Helping Scrum Masters and Product Owners develop themselves. What are they spending a lot of time on that isn't delivering value?;
- Plotting all kinds of meetings that people have to attend and weeding out what isn't helpful and investing in what is;
- Combine the creating of a stakeholder-map with an Eco-cycle. What are the relationships we should invest in more or let go off?



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An example of a Group Ecocycle (by Nancy White)

Your CI/CD Pipeline

Balanced Test Strategy

Steps (~60 min)

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The steps of this structure are detailed below. The timeboxes are indicative. We are offering an example of how you would do an Ecocycle Planning with groups. But they need only a few tweaks for individuals.

1. Introduce Ecocycle Planning. Explain the metaphor with an example, preferably a personal one. If you're doing a group Ecocycle, bring a large version (the larger the better) or model it on the floor. You can hand-out printouts of the Ecocycle to help people understand the model **(5 min)**;
2. Invite people to individually, and in silence, generate a numbered list of activities that occupy their time **(5 min)**;
3. Invite people to work in pairs to share and plot the activities on the Ecocycle **(5 min)**;
4. Invite the pairs to pair up to form small groups and have them share and finalize the placement of activities and write them on stickies **(10 min)**;
5. Invite the small groups to put their stickies on the larger Ecocycle that they share with all the other groups **(5 min)**;
6. Use 1-2-4-ALL to have the small groups to focus on activities for which there is consensus among the groups and to reflect on the patterns that emerge out of the distribution of all the stickies. Ask: "What do we need to creatively destroy or stop to move forward? What do we need to invest in?" **(15 min)**;
7. Invite the small groups to identify first-action steps or 15% Solutions that can help stop activities in the *Rigidity Trap* **(10 min)**. Repeat for items in the *Poverty Trap* when you have the time **(10 min)**;
8. If you have the time, invite the small groups to explore activities for which there is no consensus. When possible, identify first-action steps **(10 min)**;

Combinations

A single Liberating Structure is helpful. But their true power becomes apparent when you combine them into strings. Here are some potential variations:

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- Follow-up with a 1-2-4-ALL, 15% Solutions or 25/10 Crowd Sourcing to discover strategies and first steps that can help stop activities that are in the rigidity trap or reignite activities in the poverty trap;

Continuous Delivery: A Pragmatic Approach to What to identify patterns and discover meaning and actions together; Watch Now

- When using Ecocycle Planning on an individual level, follow-up with Troika Consulting to give and get help;
- Precede with a Nine Whys to first clarify the purpose of the group. Then identify all the activities and the work that the group does in order to achieve the purpose. Or simply use the purpose statement generated during Nine Why's to help the group identify what is valuable and what isn't;

- Embed within a Panarchy to emphasize and explore ecocycles on many levels and how they interact.



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Tips

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- Include people with different perspectives and different stakes. This helps create a more complete picture;
- If you use small-scale versions of the Ecocycle (like A4 or letter), invite people to number the activities and put the numbers in the model rather than the activities. This leaves more space and makes it easier to identify patterns;
- Bring a personal example of an Ecocycle. People often struggle with the quadrants and the abstractness of the model. An example helps. But it also helps to emphasize that it isn't about getting it 100% right;
- If you're daring, you can plot people instead of activities. This can help you identify the relationships that are starving and those that may be getting in the way as they are now. Rather than ending relationships that aren't helpful, you can use the Ecocycle Planning to discover which relationships may be in need of a shake-up in their dynamic in order to become fruitful again.

Closing

In this post, we've explained one of the more complicated Liberating Structures called Ecocycle Planning. It helps to bring clarity in your activities as an individual or as a group of people and helps to identify where your energy and time you should go. As such, it is a foundational structure that you can use periodically to reflect and refine your work. We're always happy to hear your experiences or hear your suggestions.

If you'd like to know more about Liberating Structures or experience a large number of them first-hand, make sure to join our Immersion Workshop in Amsterdam (December 10 & 11) or one of the others taking place in Europe in that month. Or join the Dutch User Group to give and get help from other users.

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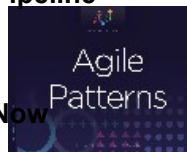
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Topics: AGILE, SCRUM, ECOCYCLE PLANNING, TIME MANAGEMENT, PRODUCTIVITY, LIBERATING STRUCTURE

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