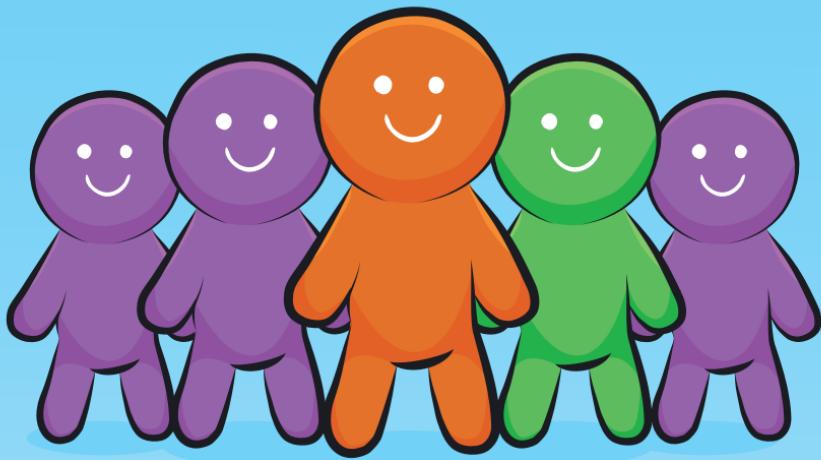


AMAZING SCRUM

Volume 1 Episode 1

# WHY "SCRUM" ISN'T MAKING YOUR COMPANY VERY AGILE

HOW MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT THE PRODUCT OWNER ROLE  
HARM YOUR ORGANIZATION, AND WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT.



BY MJ

This story first appeared as a video at  
<https://youtu.be/cr2rjaGmUzo>

以下のサイトにて、本ストーリーの日本語版ビデオおよび  
コミック版をご覧いただけます。

<http://seattlescrum.com/jp/>

MJ thanks Shinya Shibusa, Benjamin Leffler,  
Tommi Johnstone, and Yoko Hinoue  
for their help telling this story.

Please send comments and corrections to  
[mj@seattlescrum.com](mailto:mj@seattlescrum.com)  
or tweet them to  
[@michaeldotjames](https://twitter.com/michaeldotjames)

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**SCENE 1:**  
**HOW IS THE PRODUCT OWNER ROLE  
SUPPOSED TO WORK?**

I FIRST DID SCRUM AS A  
PRODUCT DEVELOPER IN  
A VERY SMALL COMPANY.



DEVELOPER

**VISION  
AND  
PRIORITIES**

IT WAS EASY TO KNOW OUR  
**PRODUCT VISION** AS IT  
EVOLVED, AND OUR **PRIORITIES**  
AS THEY EMERGED.

OUR PRODUCT OWNER, AN ENTREPRENEUR,

PRODUCT OWNER



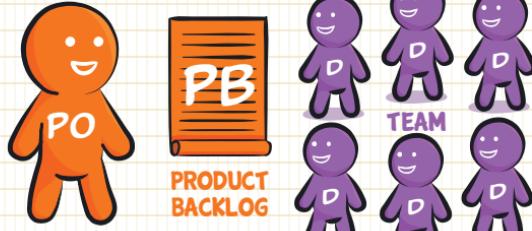
VISION  
AND  
PRIORITIES

WAS RIGHT THERE SHARING  
OUR BUSINESS OBJECTIVES.

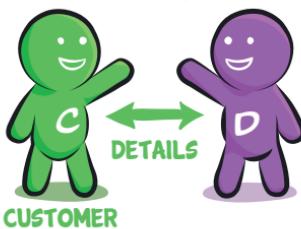


SCRUM  
MASTER

HE PRIORITIZED  
**ONE PRODUCT**  
**BACKLOG** AND WE  
REFINED IT  
TOGETHER.



CUSTOMER INTERACTION  
HELPED US KNOW THE  
**DETAILS** OF WHAT TO DO.



IT ALSO HELPED THAT WE WERE  
A **CROSS-FUNCTIONAL TEAM**,  
INCLUDING A UI DESIGN  
EXPERT.



AS WE GREW INTO A **SELF-MANAGING**  
**TEAM**, OUR PRODUCT OWNER LEARNED  
TO DELEGATE MORE AND MORE TO US.



## SCENE 2:

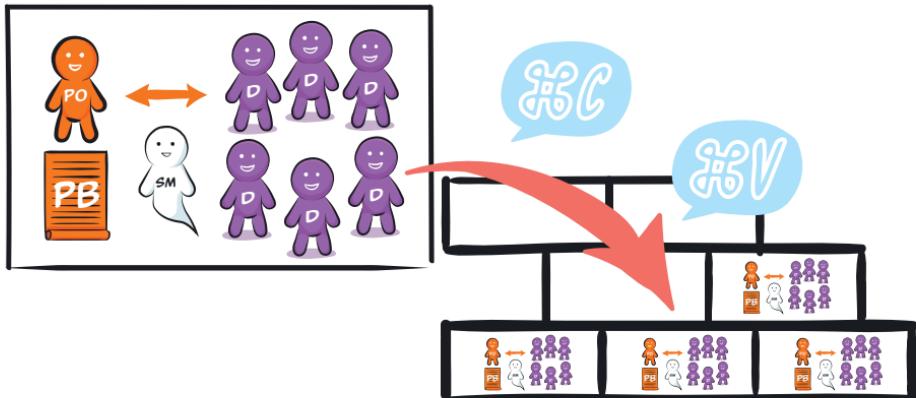
# HOW DOES YOUR LARGE ORGANIZATION MISINTERPRET THE PRODUCT OWNER ROLE?

WHEN I STARTED WORKING AS A SCRUM MASTER WITH **LARGER ORGANIZATIONS**, I MADE THE MISTAKE OF FOCUSING ON **TEAM PRODUCTIVITY**.



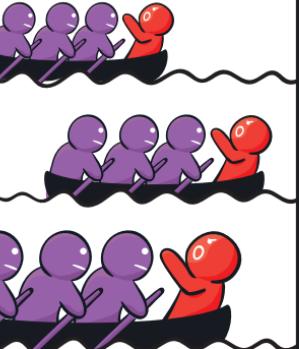
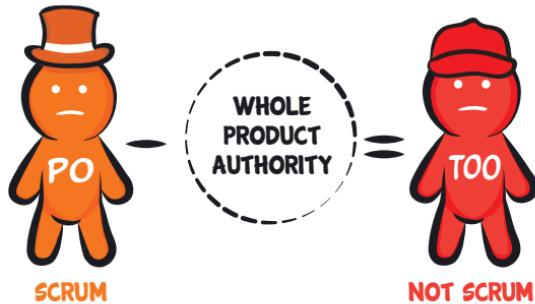
SCRUM WORKED SO WELL FOR ME IN A SMALL COMPANY,

WHY NOT JUST **COPY-PASTE** THE SAME PATTERN INTO A LARGE ORGANIZATION?



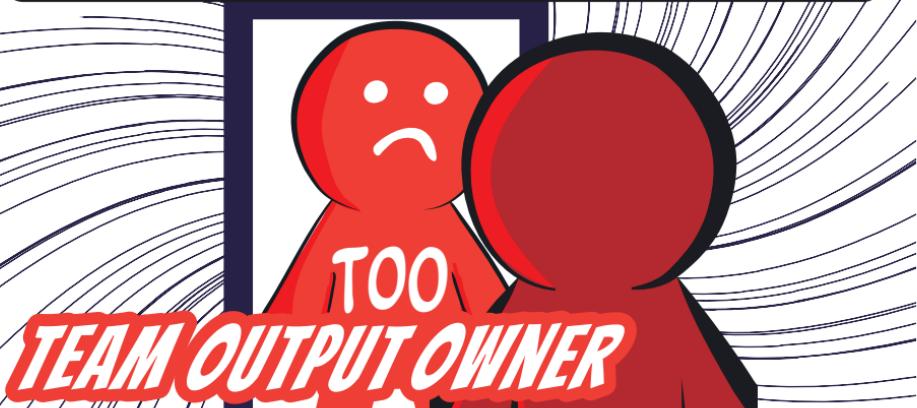
THINKING ONLY ABOUT TEAM PRODUCTIVITY, IN THOSE DAYS IT SEEMED TO MAKE SENSE FOR EACH TEAM TO HAVE ITS OWN PERSON TRYING TO ACT AS PRODUCT OWNER.

BUT UNLIKE MY PRODUCT OWNER FROM SCENE 1, THESE PEOPLE LACKED THE AUTHORITY TO MAKE MAJOR BUSINESS DECISIONS ABOUT THE WHOLE PRODUCT.

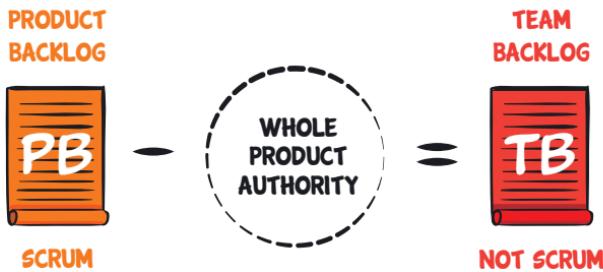


THE ORGANIZATION EXPECTED THEM TO FOCUS ON THEIR TEAM'S DELIVERY.

I'LL CALL THIS COMMON DEVIATION FROM SCRUM A **TEAM OUTPUT OWNER**, BECAUSE THAT'S WHAT THE ORGANIZATIONS I'VE SEEN ARE ACTUALLY EXPECTING FROM THEM.



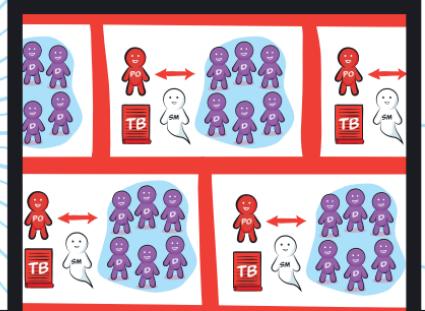
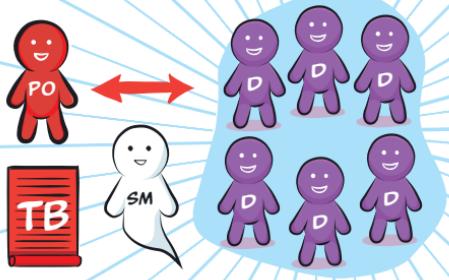
WITH RESPECT, WHEN I SAY TEAM OUTPUT OWNER, PLEASE CONSIDER THAT IT MAY APPLY TO YOU OR OTHERS YOU CURRENTLY CALL "PRODUCT OWNER."



WITHOUT AUTHORITY TO PRIORITIZE THE WHOLE PRODUCT BACKLOG, EACH TEAM OUTPUT OWNER WAS IN CHARGE OF A **TEAM BACKLOG**. WE'LL SOON SEE WHY THIS IS NOT A SCRUM ARTIFACT.

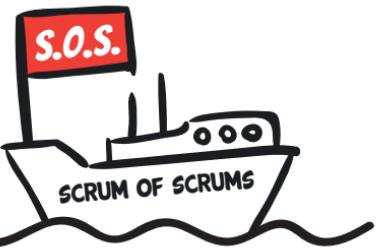


THEY IMPROVED THEIR INTERNAL  
COLLABORATION -- *WITHIN TEAMS*



-- BUT NOT *BETWEEN TEAMS*.

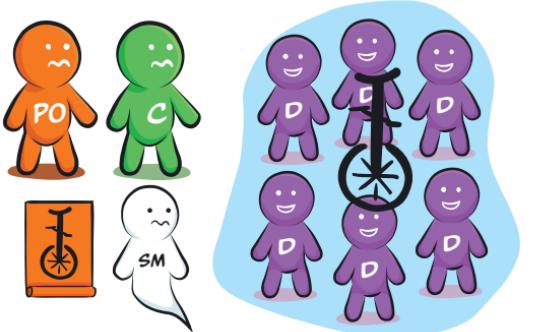
AS A NAIVE AGILE COACH I  
DIDN'T KNOW WHAT TO DO  
EXCEPT A PATTERN I'D HEARD OF  
CALLED "SCRUM OF SCRUMS."



THAT OFTEN DEVOLVED INTO A  
TRADITIONAL PROJECT MANAGER  
STATUS MEETING.



**SCENE 3A:**  
**HOW DOES MISINTERPRETING THE PRODUCT OWNER ROLE DELAY CUSTOMER FEEDBACK?**

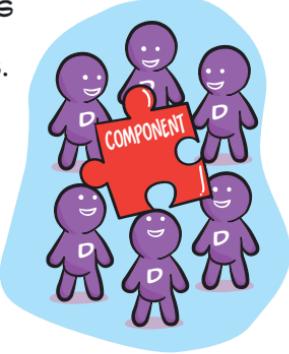
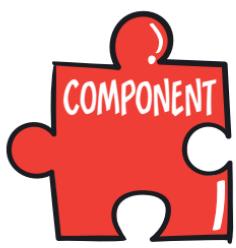


REAL SCRUM TEAMS TRY TO DEVELOP SHIPPABLE PRODUCTS  
EVERY SPRINT



SO WE CAN MORE QUICKLY LEARN  
WHAT OUR END USERS REALLY NEED.

TEAMS IN LARGE ORGANIZATIONS SOMETIMES ONLY MAKE COMPONENTS THAT ARE NOT END-TO-END, CUSTOMER-CENTRIC FEATURES.

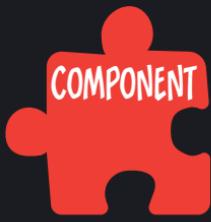


FOCUSING ON THE **INTERNAL OBJECTIVES** OF MIDDLE MANAGERS INSTEAD OF BROADER **BUSINESS OBJECTIVES** CAN CAUSE TEAMS TO TRY TO INCREASE OUTPUT,

TEAM OUTPUT IS GOOD,  
RIGHT?

SOMETIMES MEASURED AS "VELOCITY."



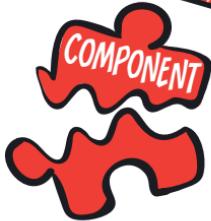


WHAT WILL HAPPEN LATER  
WHEN COMPONENTS MADE BY  
BY DIFFERENT TEAMS  
DON'T FIT TOGETHER?



FROM TEAM 1

FROM TEAM 2

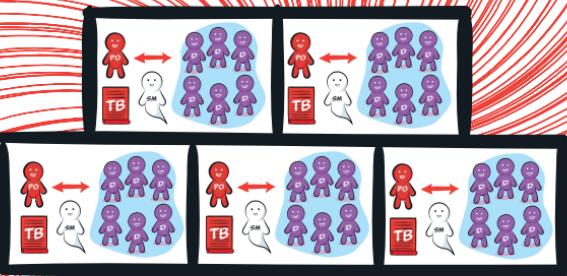


FROM TEAM 1



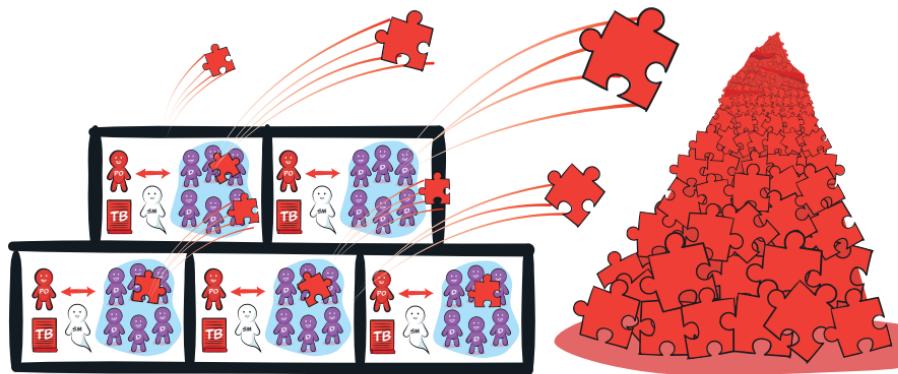
FROM TEAM 2

PEOPLE SOMETIMES THINK TEAMS SHOULD FOCUS ON INCREASING THEIR OUTPUT. IT'S EASY TO GET DISTRACTED BY MEASURABLE THINGS LIKE "VELOCITY."



BUT IN THE BIG PICTURE, FOCUSING ON THAT CAN  
**INCREASE INTEGRATION PROBLEMS** AND ACTUALLY DELAY  
OUR ABILITY TO GET A CUSTOMER RESPONSE!

IF OUR WORK HAS TO BE INTEGRATED WITH OTHER STUFF TO GET SHIPPABLE FEATURES, IT CAN TAKE LONGER TO GET A REAL CUSTOMER REACTION, LEARN FROM IT, AND ADJUST OUR DIRECTION.



MORE FOCUS ON INTERNAL OBJECTIVES FROM INTERNAL ORGANIZATIONAL LAYERS MEANS LESS FOCUS ON BUSINESS OBJECTIVES.



"HYPERPRODUCTIVITY"  
CAN HURT.



SCENE 3B:

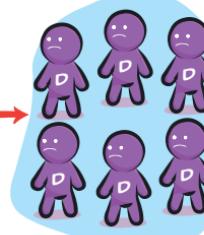
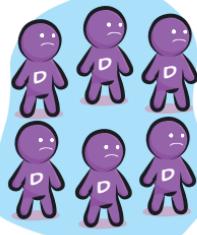
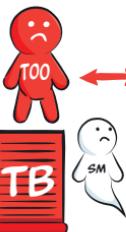
## HOW DOES MISINTERPRETING THE PRODUCT OWNER ROLE REDUCE DEVELOPER MOTIVATION AND EMPATHY FOR CUSTOMERS?

ANOTHER WEIRD THING  
ABOUT LARGE  
ORGANIZATIONS ...



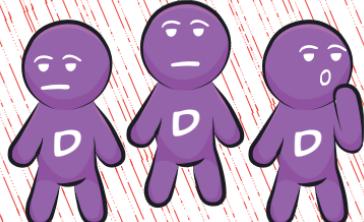
DEVELOPMENT TEAMS OFTEN  
DON'T TALK TO  
CUSTOMERS AND END  
USERS!

DEVELOPERS SEE  
GO-BETWEENS AS THEIR  
MAIN CONNECTION TO  
THE CUSTOMERS



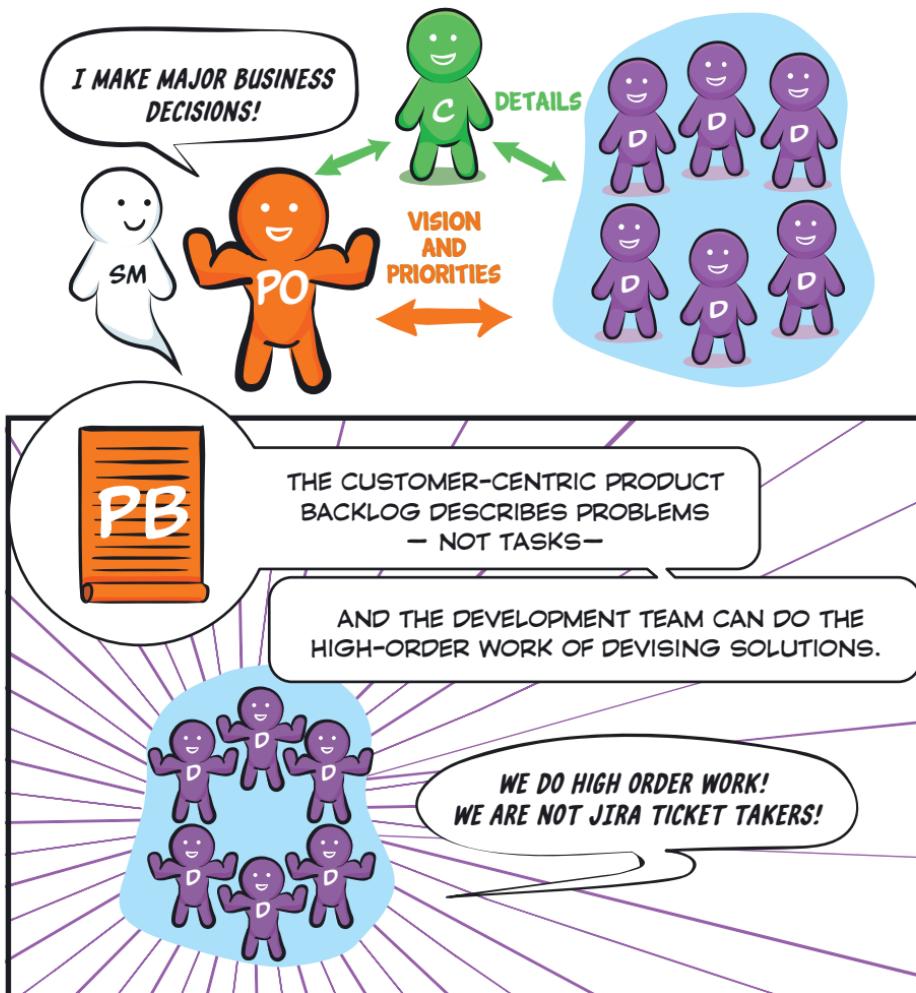
OR  
EVEN  
THE  
OTHER  
TEAMS.

TRYING TO SATISFY INTERNAL  
GO-BETWEENS ISN'T NEARLY AS FUN  
OR EFFECTIVE AS TALKING TO REAL  
CUSTOMERS USING OUR PRODUCT.



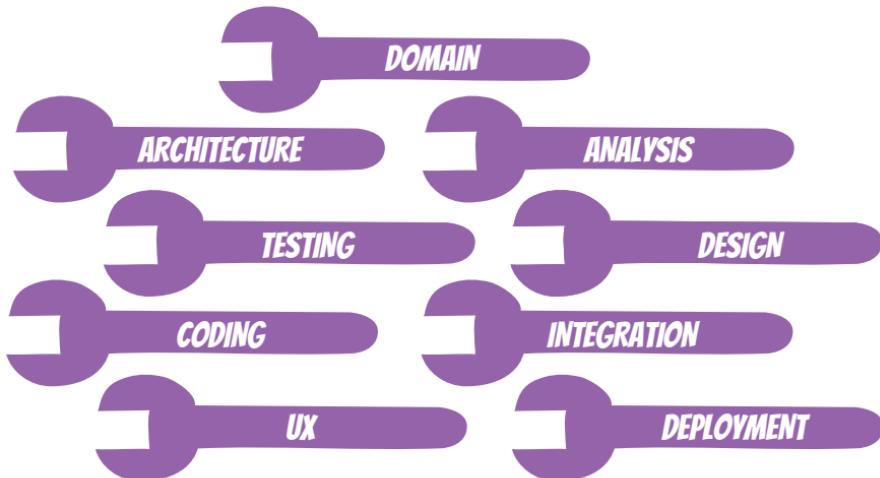
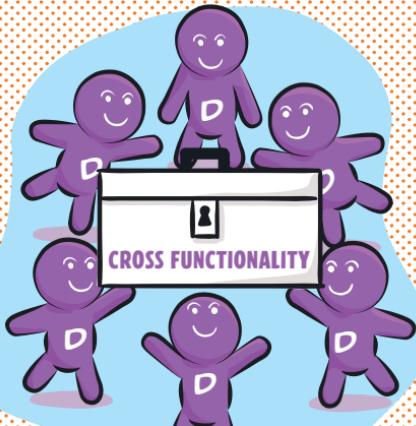
**SCENE 4A:**  
**HOW DO REAL PRODUCT OWNERS DELIVER THE HIGHEST CUSTOMER VALUE?**

A REAL PRODUCT OWNER CAN MAKE MAJOR BUSINESS DECISIONS AND EVOLVE THE PRODUCT VISION AS WE LEARN MORE.

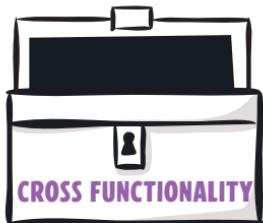


THEY DON'T ONLY CODE TO SPECIFICATIONS.

*Development Teams are cross functional, with all the skills as a team necessary to create a product Increment.  
- Scrum Guide*



AS A CROSS-FUNCTIONAL TEAM, THEY SHOULD BRING OR LEARN ALL THE NECESSARY SKILLS TO DO HIGH-ORDER WORK.



SCRUM COMBINES CROSS FUNCTIONALITY WITH THE REMOVAL OF ROLE DISTINCTIONS.



NO ROLES

ELIMINATING ROLES PUTS PROCESS OWNERSHIP IN THE TEAM'S HANDS!

SOME PEOPLE THINK SCRUM IS ABOUT **ADDING** STUFF LIKE BURNDOWN CHARTS, FIBONACCI NUMBERS, VELOCITY.



*Scrum recognizes no titles for Development Team members, regardless of the work being performed by the person.*  
- Scrum Guide

THOSE ADDED THINGS MIGHT SOMETIMES BE USEFUL, BUT THEY AREN'T PART OF SCRUM.

THE MAIN BENEFITS OF SCRUM ARE FROM **ELIMINATING** PROCESSES AND ROLES.



WHEN THE PRODUCT OWNER HAS MADE A MAJOR BUSINESS DECISION, HE OR SHE CAN CHANGE THE PRODUCT BACKLOG TO REFLECT THIS.

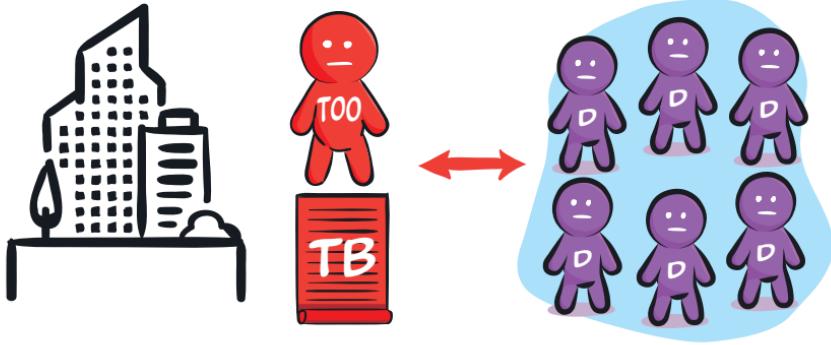
THERE'S NO STRUCTURAL CHANGE TO THE ORGANIZATION, AND THE TEAM IS ALREADY IN THE HABIT OF TAKING ON HIGH ORDER PROBLEMS AND LEARNING NEW THINGS.



SCENE 4B:

## HOW DOES MISINTERPRETING THE PRODUCT OWNER ROLE REDUCE VALUE DELIVERY?

A TEAM IN A LARGE ORGANIZATION RUNS THE RISK OF BECOMING **OVERSPECIALIZED** IN ONE AREA OF THE CODE.



(OTHER TEAMS CAN'T UNDERSTAND THEIR CODE EITHER.)



THEIR SKILLS WILL BE OUT OF DATE. THEY WON'T KNOW THAT THERE ARE OTHER USEFUL TECHNIQUES.

THE TEAM OUTPUT OWNER  
WILL TRY TO ORDER THE  
LOCAL BACKLOG TO DELIVER  
THE MOST VALUE.



WE'LL HAVE THE ILLUSION  
THAT SCRUM IS WORKING.



TEAMS ALSO FALL  
INTO THINKING THIS  
IS OPTIMAL,

MAYBE FROM BEING TOO  
FOCUSED ON OUTPUT. OR  
MAYBE TOO COMFORTABLE  
BEING TOLD EXACTLY  
WHAT TO DO.

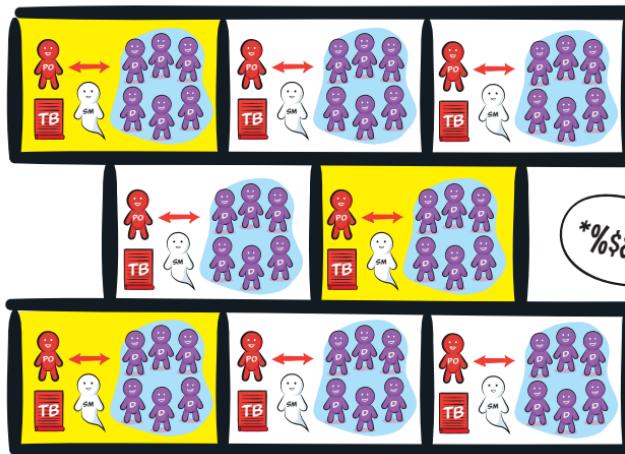
SCRUM MASTERS,  
MANAGERS, COACHES,  
AND TRAINERS CAN ALL  
BE FOOLED BY LOCAL  
OPTIMIZATION.

BUT THE BENEFIT TO CUSTOMERS  
IS LESS THAN IT SHOULD BE.  
**THERE'S MORE IMPORTANT  
WORK HIDDEN IN OTHER  
BACKLOGS THAT OUR TEAM  
ISN'T LEARNING ABOUT!!**

\$8000 ITEM  
\$8000 ITEM  
\$7000 ITEM  
\$7000 ITEM  
\$7000 ITEM  
\$6000 ITEM  
\$6000 ITEM

OUR TEAM'S TOP ITEM IS **LESS IMPORTANT** THAN  
THE WORK OTHER TEAMS DON'T HAVE TIME TO START!

KEEPING SEPARATE TEAM BACKLOGS  
— SEPARATE LISTS — HIDES THIS PROBLEM.



OUR IMPACT ON THE CUSTOMERS WILL BE LIMITED.

AND CHANGING DIRECTIONS - THE WHOLE #\*\$@\*! POINT OF  
AGILITY - WILL BE DIFFICULT.

**SCENE 5:**  
**WHAT SUCKS ABOUT BEING A TEAM  
OUTPUT OWNER?**



TEAM OUTPUT OWNERS  
ARE STUCK IN THE MIDDLE.

THEY ARE INTERMEDIARIES WITHOUT THE AUTHORITY TO MAKE MAJOR BUSINESS DECISIONS.



THEY ARE  
"ACCOUNTABLE" FOR  
THINGS THEY CAN'T  
CONTROL.



THEY RISK BECOMING REQUIREMENTS ENGINEERS, BUSINESS ANALYSTS, OR PROJECT MANAGERS.

THEY MIGHT TRY TO WRITE PERFECT "USER STORIES" AS DETAILED REQUIREMENTS, THEN CLARIFY THEM WHEN THEY AREN'T PERFECT.



THEY MIGHT COORDINATE THE TEAM'S WORK WITH THE WORK OF OTHER TEAMS, TRACK DEPENDENCIES, DO ADMINISTRATIVE WORK, STATUS REPORTING.

OR PUSH THE TEAM FOR MORE OUTPUT.

THE TEAM OUTPUT OWNER IS UNDER PRESSURE FROM ELSEWHERE, NOT ABLE TO BE AN ENTREPRENEUR.

*In no way did I envision the Product Owner becoming a business analyst that was responsible for requirements engineering.*  
-Ken Schwaber

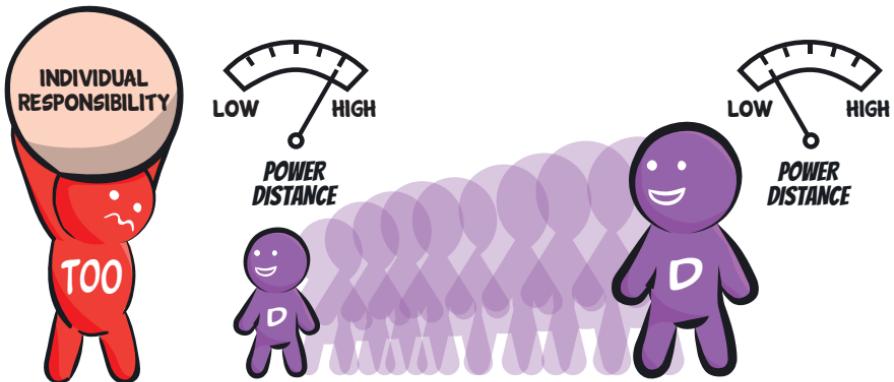
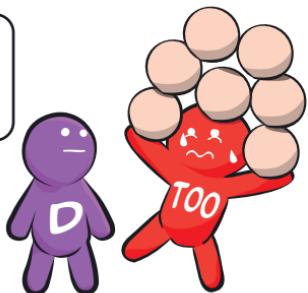
<https://kenschwaber.wordpress.com/2011/01/31/product-owners-not-proxies/>



**SCENE 6:**  
**HOW CAN WE HELP PEOPLE STUCK IN THIS  
ROLE WHILE INCREASING TEAM SELF  
ORGANIZATION AND CROSS FUNCTIONALITY?**

I RESPECT PRACTITIONERS WHO FEEL THAT ONE PERSON PER TEAM PLAYING THIS ROLE IS APPROPRIATE **FOR THEIR SITUATION**.

THEY GET A LOT DONE HAVING SOMEONE IN THE ROOM WHO CAN GIVE IMMEDIATE FEEDBACK. OF COURSE WE ALL WANT THAT.

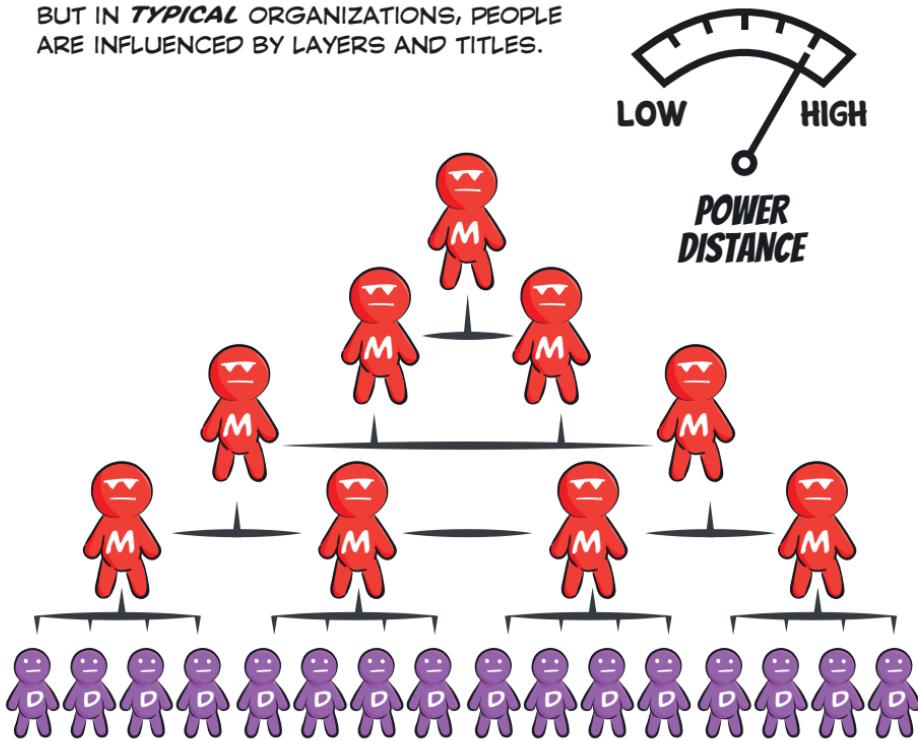


THE PLACES THIS WORKS ALREADY HAVE A SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT THAT MINIMIZES POWER DIFFERENCES AND PEOPLE SHARE RESPONSIBILITY NATURALLY, JUST AS A ROLE-FREE TEAM IS REQUIRED TO DO.

*Individual Development*  
Team members may have specialized skills and areas of focus, but accountability belongs to the Development Team as a whole.  
- Scrum Guide

**TEAM  
RESPONSIBILITY**

BUT IN **TYPICAL** ORGANIZATIONS, PEOPLE ARE INFLUENCED BY LAYERS AND TITLES.



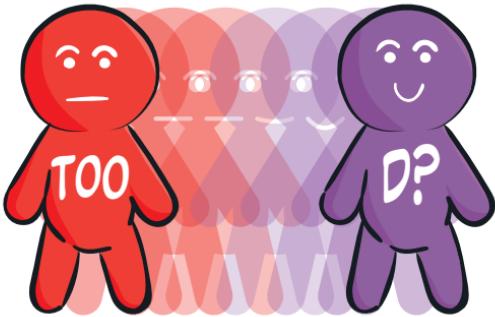
FOR THEM, **STATUS DIFFERENCES LINKED TO ROLES** ARE VERY REAL ...

IS A TEAM **SELF ORGANIZING** IF WE GIVE ONE MEMBER A SPECIAL ROLE? DO WE SEE THE CONTRADICTION OF SAYING "ALL MEMBERS ARE EQUAL," BUT ONE MEMBER IS MORE "EQUAL" THAN OTHERS?



WE LIMIT AGILITY BY PRETENDING THAT TEAM OUTPUT OWNERS ARE THE PRODUCT OWNER.

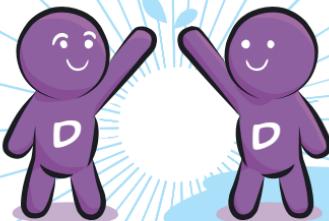
TO AVOID ADDING UNNECESSARY LAYERS,  
CONSIDER THE REASON SCRUM HAS ONLY THREE ROLES,  
AND THE POWER OF ROLE-FREE TEAM SELF ORGANIZATION



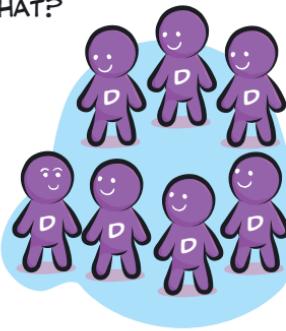
... WHEN THE SCRUM  
MASTER AND MANAGEMENT  
CREATE THE ENVIRONMENT  
THAT ALLOWS IT.

WHY BE AFRAID OF THIS  
PERSON JOINING WITHOUT  
ANY SPECIAL ROLE  
DESIGNATION SEPARATING  
THEM FROM THE OTHERS?

THEN THE TEAM COULD FIGURE  
OUT FOR THEMSELVES WHO  
WOULD DO WHAT IN EACH  
SITUATION INSTEAD OF BEING  
CONSTRAINED BY A PROCESS  
IMPOSED FROM OUTSIDE.



TEAM SELF ORGANIZATION  
HAPPENS WITHOUT ROLES.  
WHAT'S SCARY ABOUT  
THAT?



*They are self-organizing. No one (not even the Scrum Master) tells the Development Team how to turn Product Backlog into Increments of potentially releasable functionality.*  
- Scrum Guide



PLEASE WRITE TO ME  
ABOUT WHAT BAD  
THING YOU IMAGINE  
WOULD HAPPEN AND  
I'LL MAKE FOLLOW-UP  
COMICS ABOUT  
THOSE CONCERNs.

## SCENE 7: WHY IS IT UNNECESSARY TO CREATE NEW ROLES SUCH AS "CHIEF PRODUCT OWNER"?

*In the long run, the only sustainable advantage is your organization's ability to learn faster than your competition.*

- Peter Senge

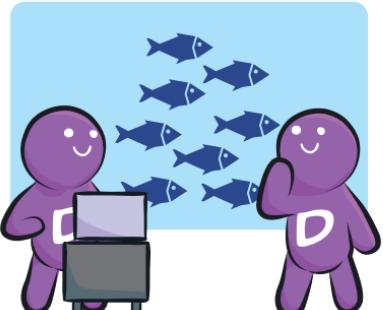


IF I WERE TRYING TO DEVELOP A PRODUCT WITH MULTIPLE TEAMS, AND IF OUR LONG-TERM SURVIVAL DEPENDED ON LEARNING TO FOCUS ON THE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS, I'D KEEP THE MOST IMPORTANT PROBLEMS IN ONE REAL PRODUCT BACKLOG. I'D ASK THE TEAMS TO FOCUS ON OUR ONE REAL PRODUCT BACKLOG,



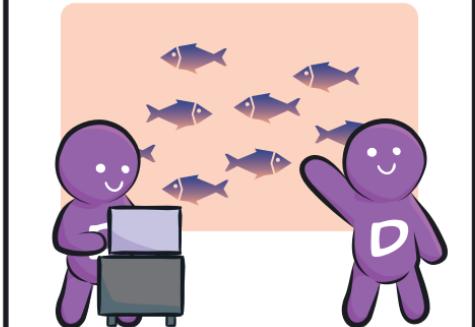
NOT WHAT WAS EASIEST FOR THEM IN THE PAST.

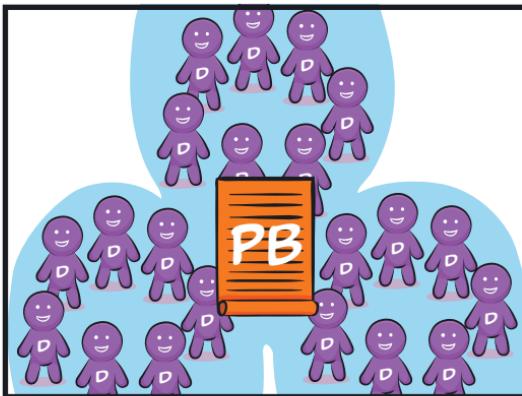
LET'S IMAGINE WE'RE ON A TEAM THAT USUALLY PROGRAMS ROBOT FISH TO STAY TOGETHER IN SCHOOLS.



BUT THIS WEEK THE HIGHEST PRIORITY WORK FOR THE COMPANY IS TO PROGRAM THE FISH TO CHANGE COLORS WHEN THE WATER TEMPERATURE VARIES.

OUR TEAM MUST LEARN NEW SKILLS TO HELP THE BUSINESS SUCCEED.





OF COURSE TEAMS  
WON'T BECOME  
INTERCHANGEABLE.

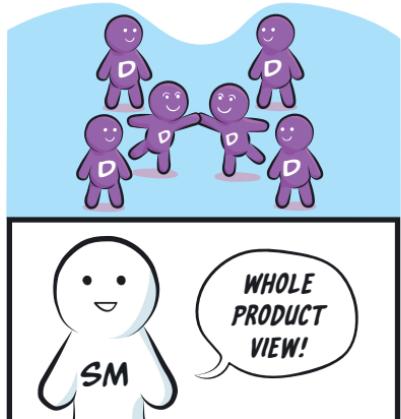
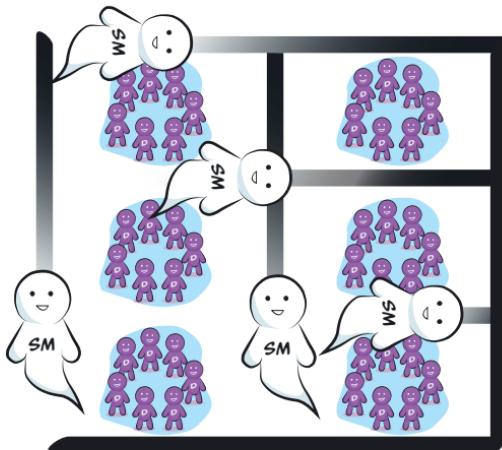
THAT'S SOMETHING THEY  
CAN WORK OUT WITH EACH  
OTHER AS THEY DECIDE  
**FOR THEMSELVES** WHICH  
TEAMS WILL DO WHICH  
PRODUCT BACKLOG ITEMS  
EACH SPRINT.



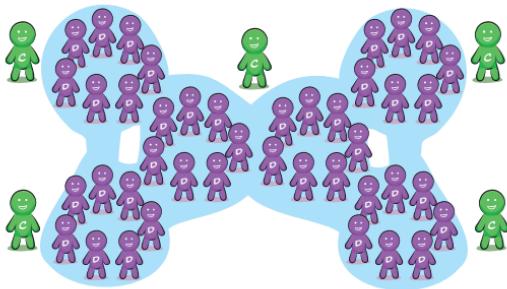
*One Product Backlog is used to  
describe upcoming work on the  
product.  
-Scrum Guide*

TO FOSTER A **WHOLE PRODUCT  
VIEW**, I WOULD ASK THE SCRUM  
MASTERS TO **REMOVE THE  
BARRIERS** BETWEEN TEAMS,

AND TO TEACH THE PRODUCT  
DEVELOPERS THAT  
COLLABORATING ACROSS  
TEAMS IS NOW A DEVELOPER  
RESPONSIBILITY.

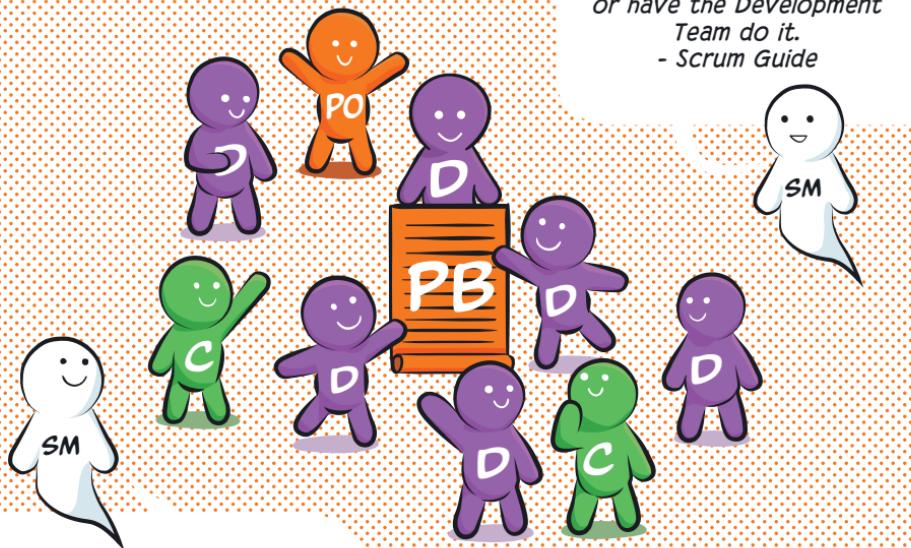


I'D ALSO WANT TO REMOVE BARRIERS PREVENTING DEVELOPERS FROM GETTING DETAILED CLARIFICATION FROM CUSTOMERS SO WE DON'T NEED TO SPOON-FEED DEVELOPERS ANYMORE.



NOW THE DEVELOPERS WILL HELP MANAGE THE PRODUCT BACKLOG.

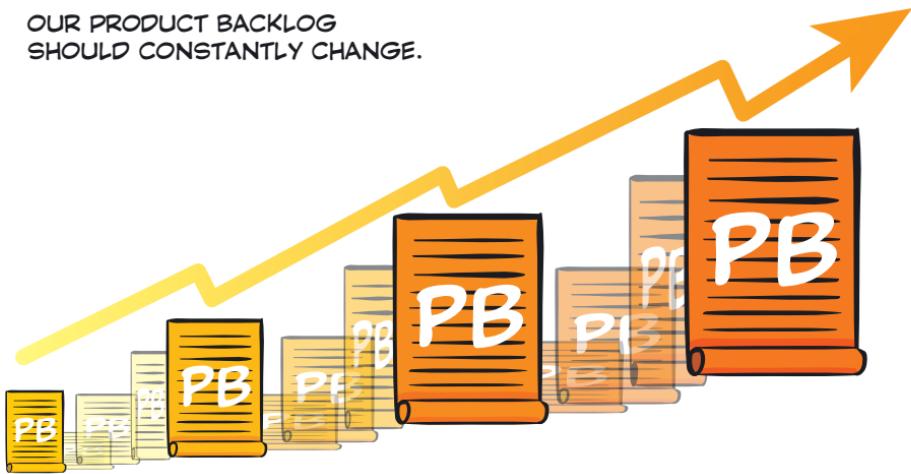
*The Product Owner may do Product Backlog management or have the Development Team do it.*  
- Scrum Guide



*Everyone must spend face time with customers and users to build empathy and insight.*  
- Jeff Patton

IT COULD TAKE **YEARS** BEFORE ALL THIS WORKS THE WAY I'M DESCRIBING, BUT IT HAS BEEN DONE BEFORE.

OUR PRODUCT BACKLOG  
SHOULD CONSTANTLY CHANGE.

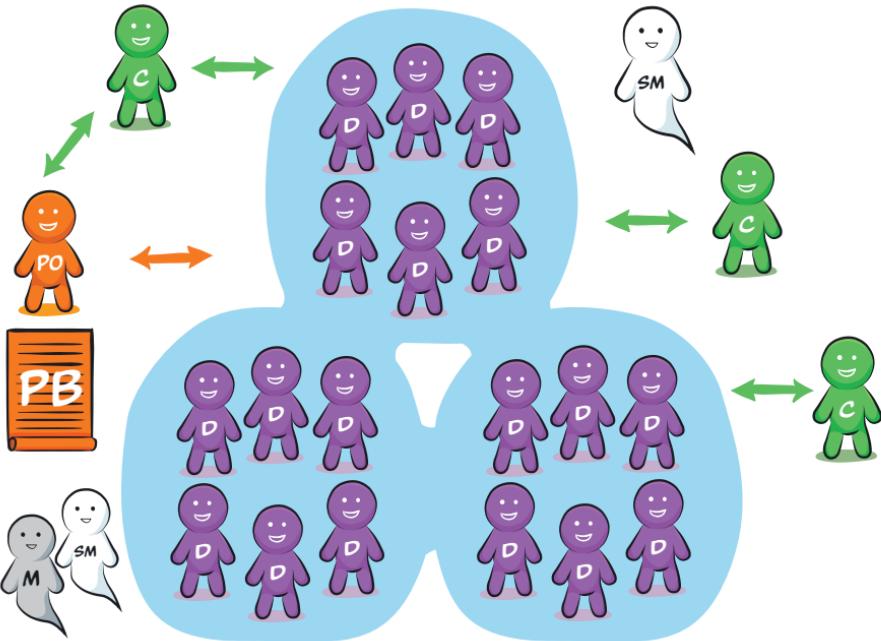


WE'LL NEED SOMEONE WITH REAL **AUTHORITY AND VISION** TO  
MAXIMIZE THE VALUE OF OUR WORK.

WE DON'T NEED TO  
INVENT A NEW NAME  
FOR OUR ULTIMATE  
SOURCE OF  
PRIORITIES, BECAUSE  
IT'S NOT REALLY A  
NEW ROLE.

LET'S CALL THIS PERSON  
**PRODUCT OWNER.**





ONE PRODUCT OWNER AND  
ONE PRODUCT BACKLOG  
DESCRIBE THE *WHAT*.



CONVERSATIONS ABOUT  
DIRECTION, PRIORITIES,  
BUSINESS STRATEGY, AND  
VISION.



DEVELOPMENT TEAM MEMBER  
COULD ALSO BE A BUSINESS  
DOMAIN EXPERT, UI/UX  
DESIGNER, FORMER TOO, ETC.



CUSTOMER CAN BE  
DIRECTLY CONSULTED  
BY DEVELOPERS,  
AVOIDING HANDOFFS.



CONVERSATIONS  
ABOUT DETAILS OF  
USER NEEDS.



FLUID, ROLE-FREE  
COORDINATION SPANS  
TEAMS. TEAMS OWN  
THE *HOW*.



SCRUM MASTER AND MANAGEMENT ON A DIFFERENT PLANE,  
NO LONGER COORDINATING OTHERS' WORK. NOW THEY  
ABOLISH HARMFUL POLICIES AND TEACH SYSTEMS THINKING.

**IF YOU WANT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT HOW TO DEAL WITH THE PROBLEMS DESCRIBED IN THIS STORY,**

### WATCH



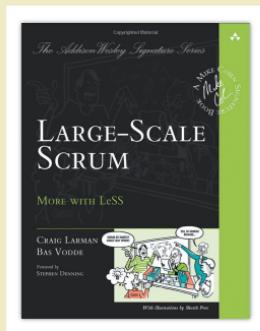
[https://youtu.be/1BZf\\_Oa7W94](https://youtu.be/1BZf_Oa7W94)  
(That's the letter O, not a zero.)

### VISIT



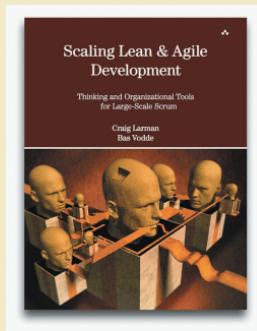
<https://less.works>

### FIRST READ



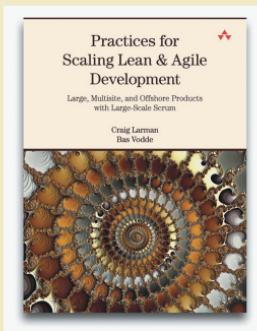
Large Scale Scrum:  
More With LeSS,  
Larman/Vodde  
(2016)

### THEN READ



Scaling Lean & Agile  
Development,  
Larman/Vodde  
(2008)

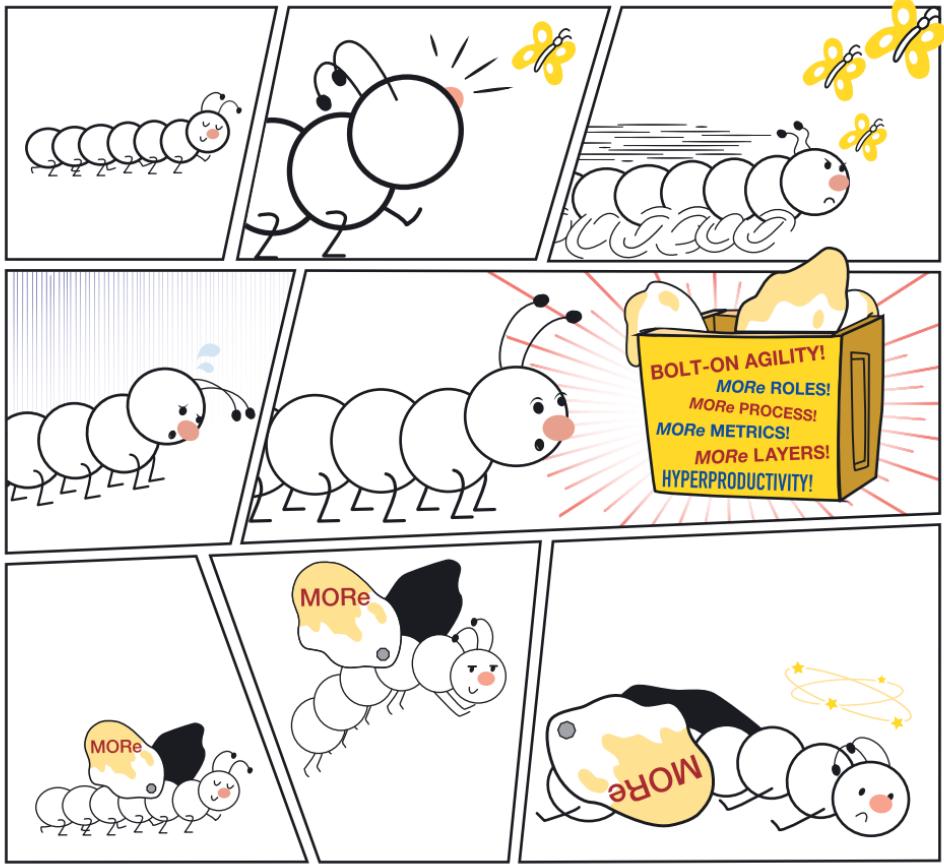
### THEN READ



Practices for  
Scaling Lean & Agile  
Development  
Large, Multitier, and Offshore Products  
with Large-Scale Scrum  
Craig Larman  
Bas Vodde



**MJ (MICHAEL JAMES)**  
has written many things,  
including the Scrum Master Checklist at  
<http://ScrumMasterChecklist.org>  
Email him at [mj@seattlescrum.com](mailto:mj@seattlescrum.com)  
or tweet him at @michaeldotjames



When you get tired of MORe, try LeSS.