

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 M.J



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.

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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.



**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,

WAS RIGHT THERE SHARING  
OUR BUSINESS OBJECTIVES.

PRODUCT OWNER



**VISION  
AND  
PRIORITIES**



TEAM

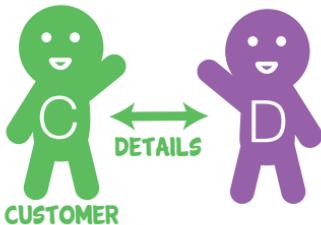


SCRUM  
MASTER

HE PRIORITIZED ONE PRODUCT BACKLOG AND WE REFINED IT TOGETHER.



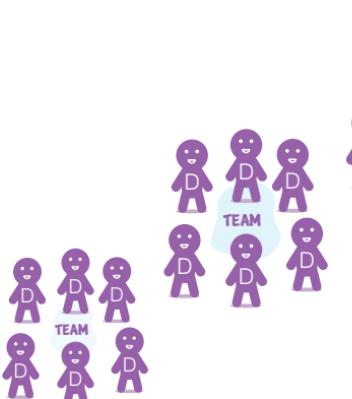
CUSTOMER INTERACTION HELPED US KNOW THE DETAILS OF WHAT TO DO.



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.



THE PRODUCT OWNER MAY DO PRODUCT BACKLOG MANAGEMENT OR HAVE THE DEVELOPMENT TEAM DO IT. THE PRODUCT OWNER REMAINS ACCOUNTABLE.  
-SCRUM GUIDE



## SCENE 2:

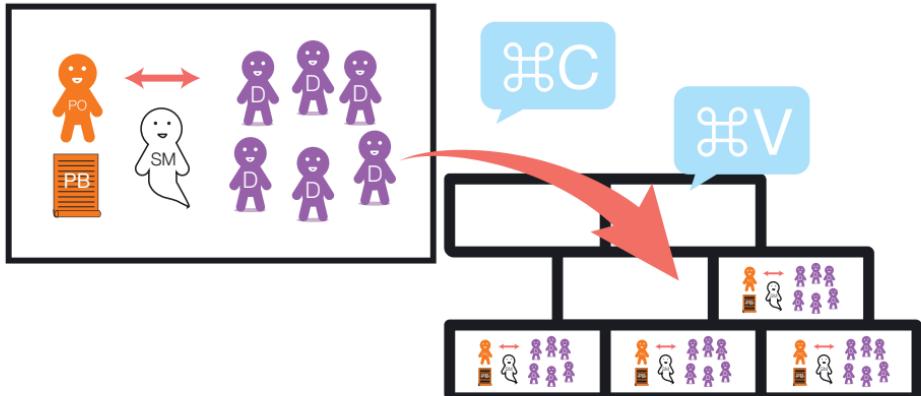
# HOW DOES YOUR LARGE ORGANIZATION MISINTERPRET THE PRODUCT OWNER ROLE?

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



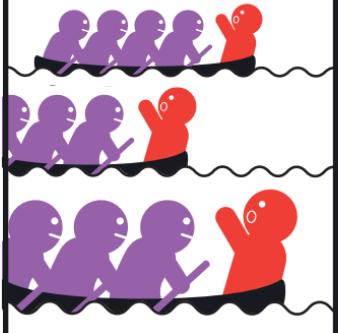
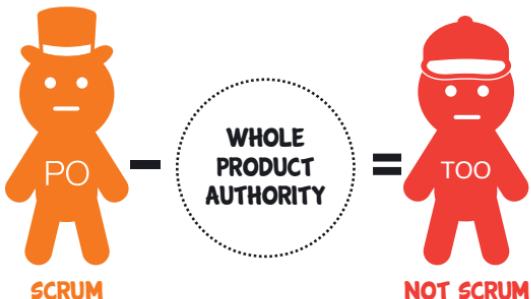
SCRUM WORKED SO WELL FOR ME IN A SMALL COMPANY,

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.



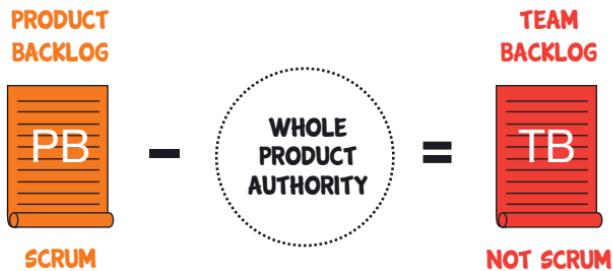
THE ORGANIZATION EXPECTED THEM TO FOCUS ON THEIR TEAM'S DELIVERY.

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.

**TEAM OUTPUT OWNER**

TOO

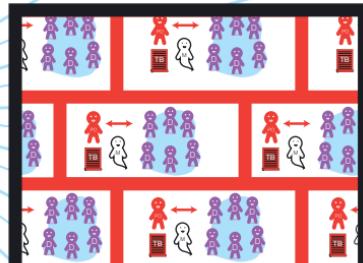
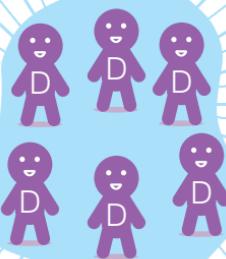
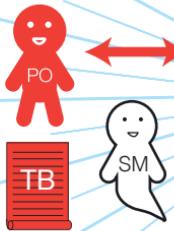
WITH RESPECT, WHEN I SAY TEAM OUTPUT OWNER, PLEASE CONSIDER THAT IT MAY APPLY TO YOU OR OTHERS YOU CURRENTLY CALL "PRODUCT OWNER."



WITHOUT AUTHORITY TO PRIORITIZE THE WHOLE PRODUCT BACKLOG,  
EACH TEAM OUTPUT OWNER WAS IN CHARGE OF A **TEAM BACKLOG**,  
WHICH FOR GOOD REASONS IS NOT A SCRUM ARTIFACT.

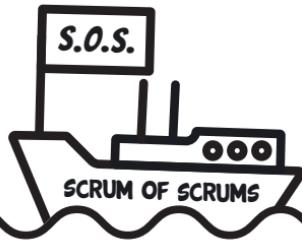


THEY IMPROVED THEIR INTERNAL COLLABORATION -- *WITHIN TEAMS*



-- 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."



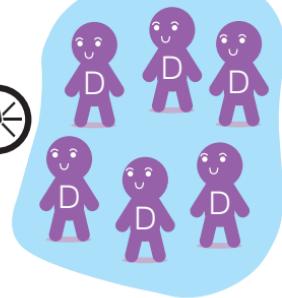
THAT OFTEN DEVOLVED INTO A TRADITIONAL PROJECT MANAGER STATUS MEETING.



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

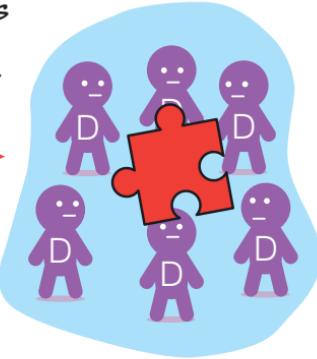
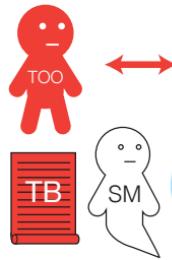
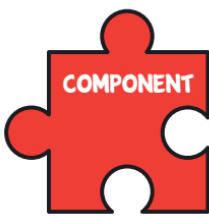


REAL SCRUM TEAMS TRY TO DEVELOP SHIPPABLE PRODUCTS  
EVERY SPRINT



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.



INTERNAL  
OBJECTIVES



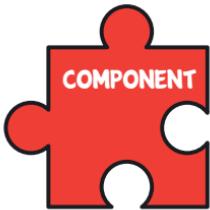
FOCUSING ON THE INTERNAL OBJECTIVES OF MIDDLE MANAGERS INSTEAD OF BROADER BUSINESS OBJECTIVES CAN CAUSE TEAMS TO TRY TO INCREASE OUTPUT,

SOMETIMES MEASURED AS "VELOCITY."

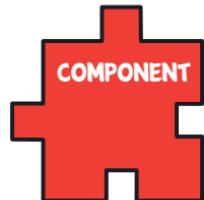


TEAM OUTPUT IS GOOD,  
RIGHT?



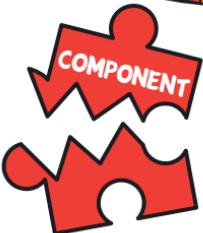
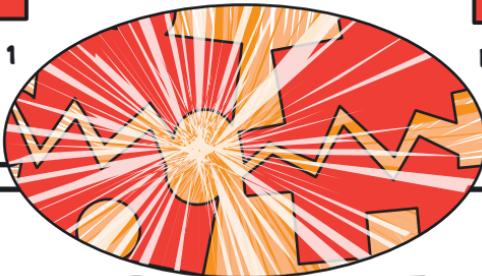


FROM TEAM 1

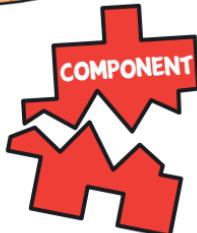


FROM TEAM 2

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

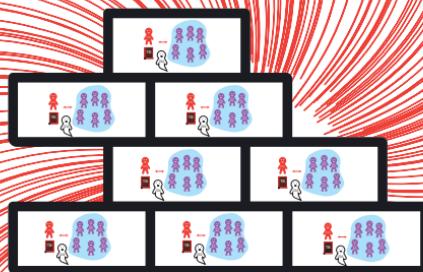


FROM TEAM 1



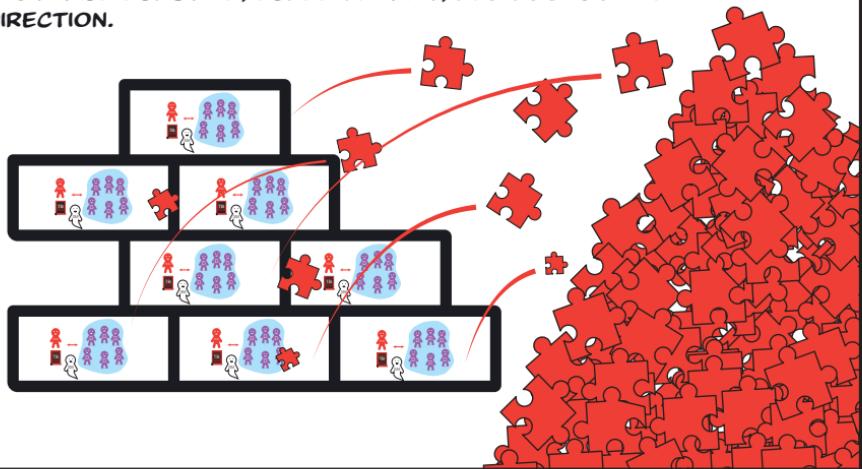
FROM TEAM 2

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

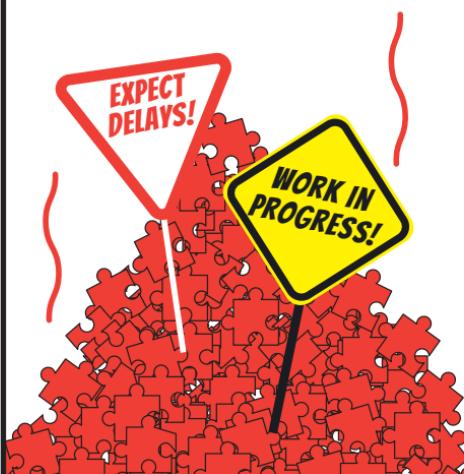


BUT IN THE BIG PICTURE, FOCUSING ON THAT CAN **INCREASE  
INTEGRATION PROBLEMS** AND ACTUALLY **DELAY** OUR ABILITY  
TO GET A CUSTOMER RESPONSE!

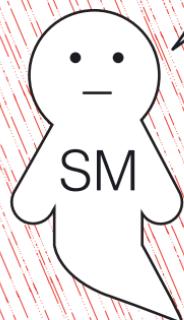
IF OUR WORK HAS TO BE INTEGRATED WITH OTHER STUFF TO GET SHIPPABLE FEATURES, IT CAN TAKE LONGER TO GET A REAL CUSTOMER REACTION, LEARN FROM IT, AND ADJUST OUR DIRECTION.



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



"HYPERPRODUCTIVITY"  
CAN HURT.



LONGER END-TO-END CYCLE TIMES WITH THE CUSTOMER REDUCE AGILITY.

### SCENE 3B:

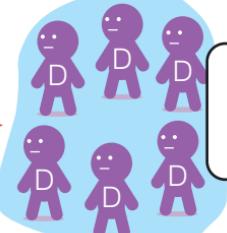
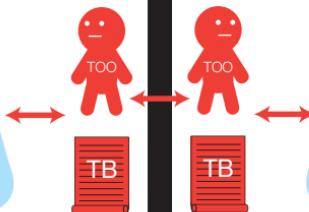
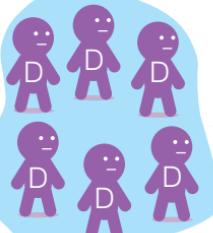
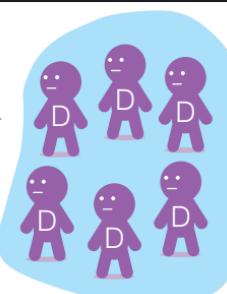
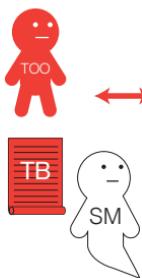
## HOW DOES MISINTERPRETING THE PRODUCT OWNER ROLE REDUCE DEVELOPER MOTIVATION AND EMPATHY FOR CUSTOMERS?



ANOTHER WEIRD THING  
ABOUT MANY LARGE  
ORGANIZATIONS IS THAT

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

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



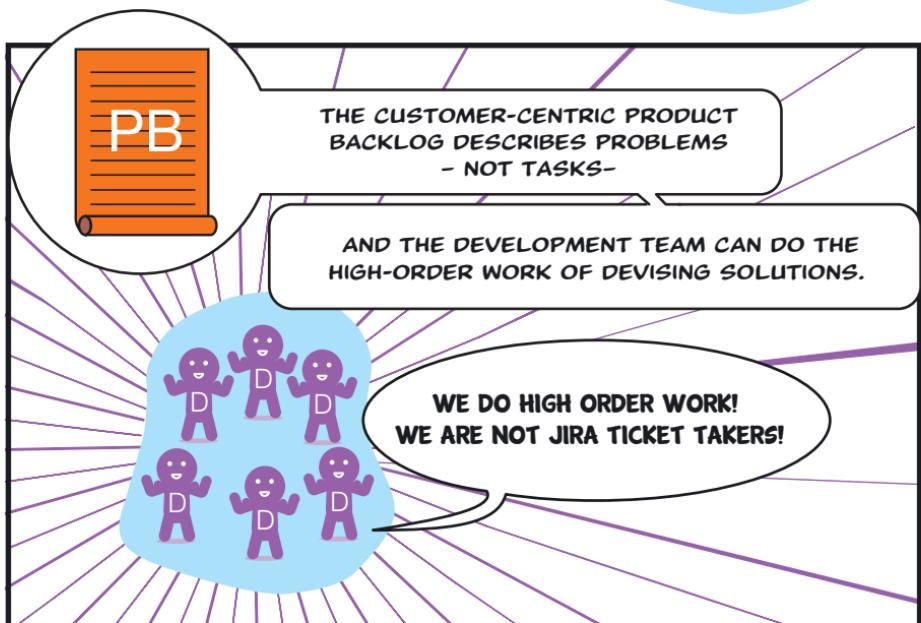
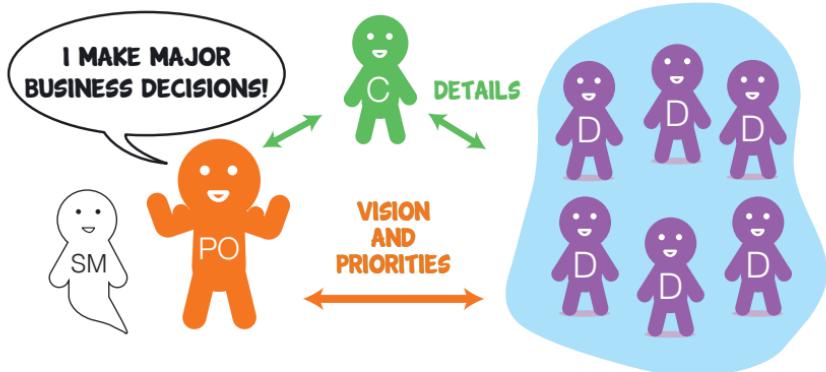
OR EVEN  
THE  
OTHER  
TEAMS.

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

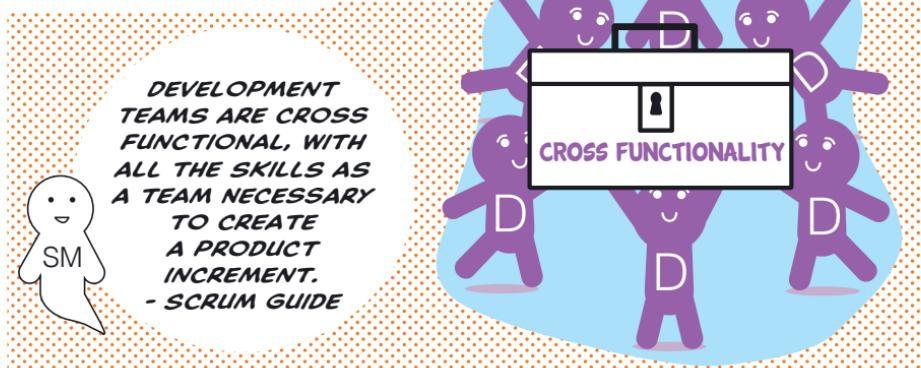


## SCENE 4A: HOW DO REAL PRODUCT OWNERS DELIVER THE HIGHEST CUSTOMER VALUE?

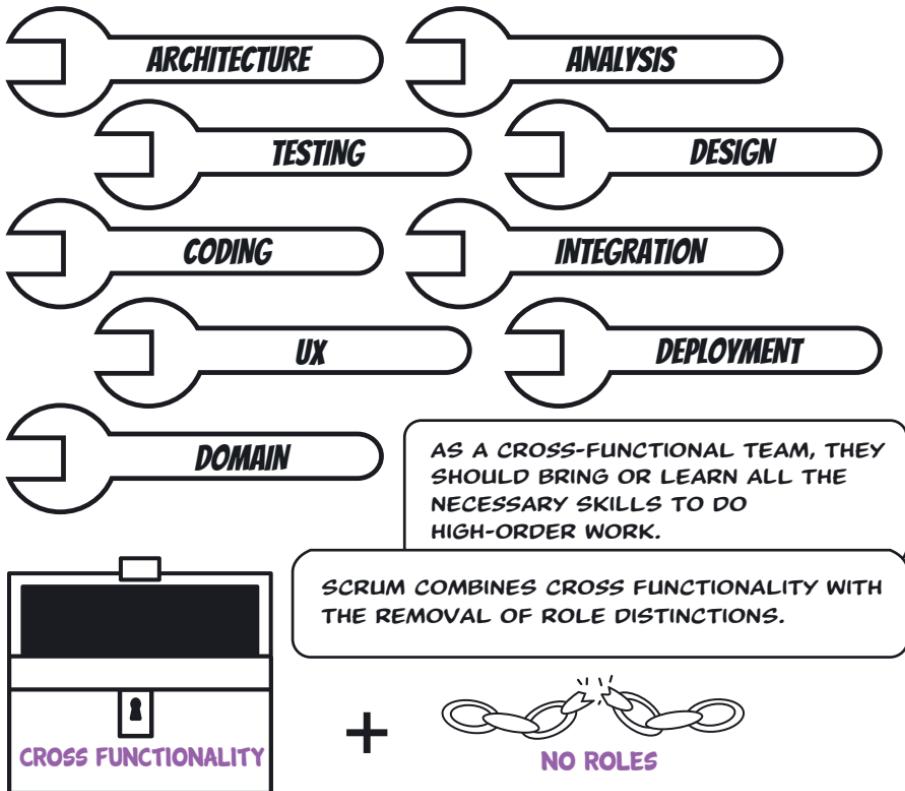
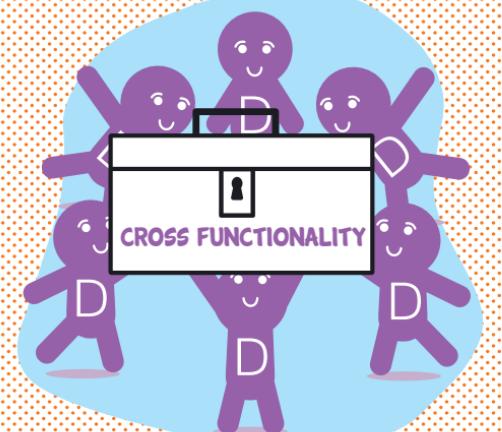
A REAL PRODUCT OWNER CAN MAKE MAJOR BUSINESS DECISIONS AND EVOLVE THE PRODUCT VISION AS WE LEARN MORE.



THEY DON'T ONLY CODE  
TO SPECIFICATIONS.

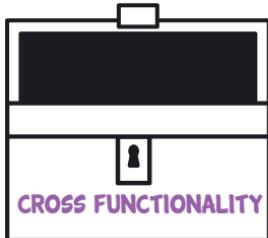


**DEVELOPMENT TEAMS ARE CROSS FUNCTIONAL, WITH ALL THE SKILLS AS A TEAM NECESSARY TO CREATE A PRODUCT INCREMENT.**



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

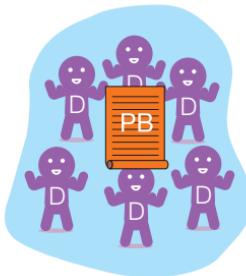
THOSE ADDED THINGS MIGHT SOMETIMES BE USEFUL, BUT THEY AREN'T PART OF SCRUM.

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.

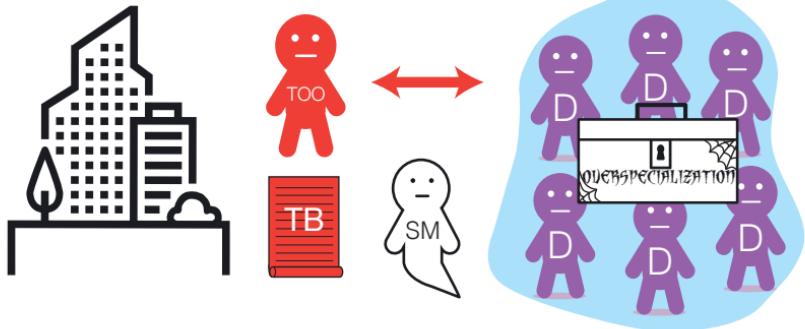


SCENE 4B:

## 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 OFTEN CAN'T UNDERSTAND THEIR CODE EITHER.

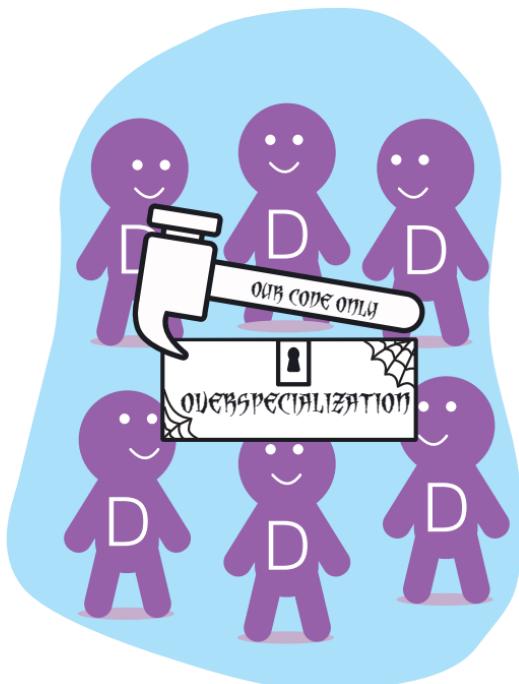


SOMETIMES THEIR SKILLS WILL BE OUT OF DATE, AND THEY WON'T KNOW THAT THERE ARE OTHER USEFUL METHODS AND TECHNIQUES.

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 CAN ALSO  
FALL INTO THINKING  
THIS IS OPTIMAL,

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

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

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

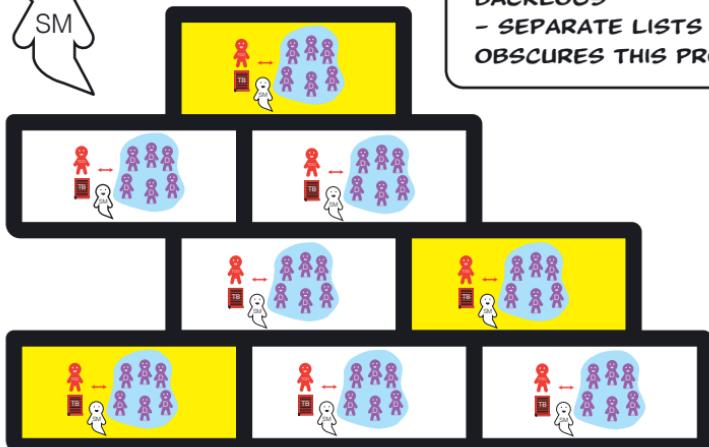
\$8000 ITEM  
\$8000 ITEM  
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\$7000 ITEM  
\$6000 ITEM  
\$6000 ITEM

ONLY A FEW TEAMS ARE DOING THE MOST VALUABLE WORK!



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 - OBSCURES THIS PROBLEM.



OUR IMPACT ON THE CUSTOMERS WILL BE LIMITED.

AND CHANGING DIRECTIONS - THE POINT OF AGILITY - WILL BE DIFFICULT WITH THIS KIND OF ORGANIZATION.

**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.

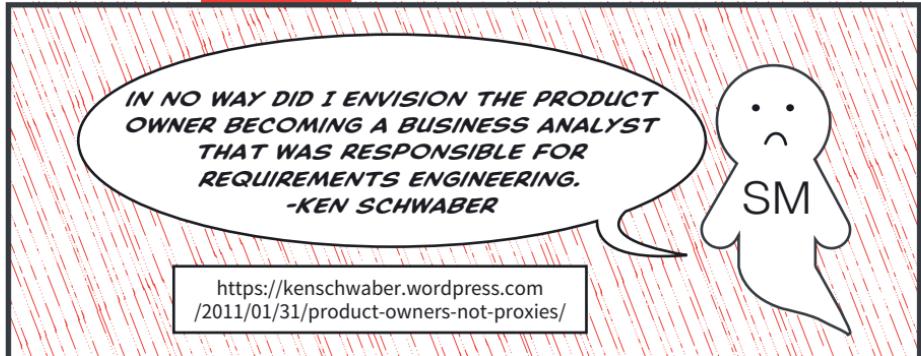
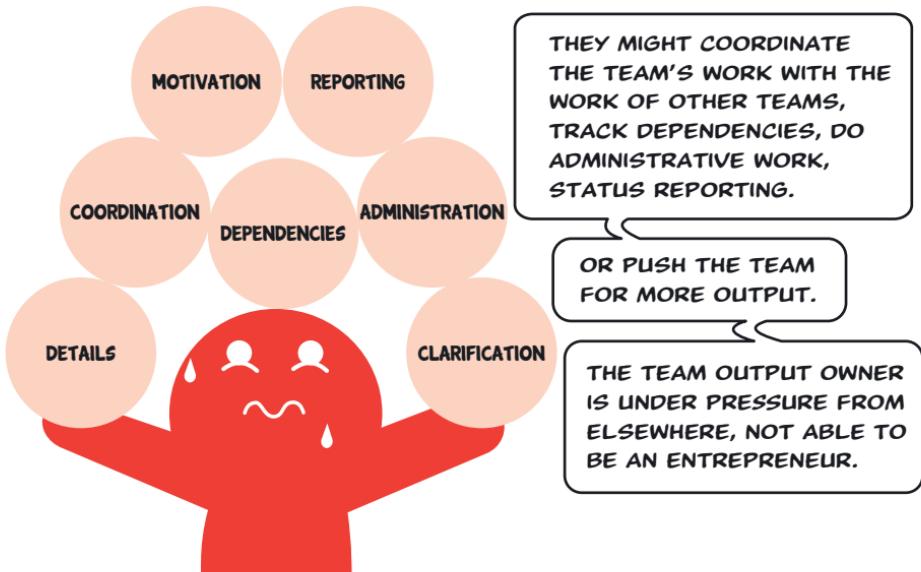
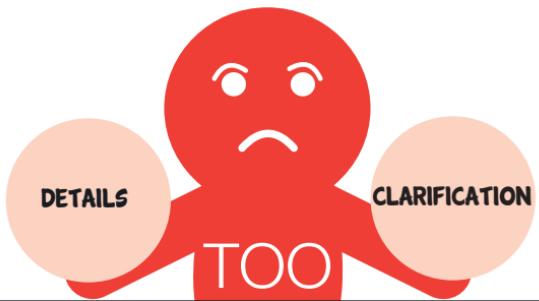


SOMETIMES THEY ARE HELD "ACCOUNTABLE" FOR THINGS THEY CAN'T ACTUALLY CONTROL.



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

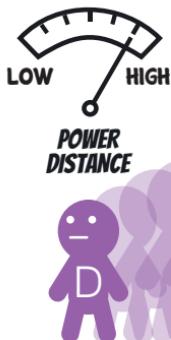
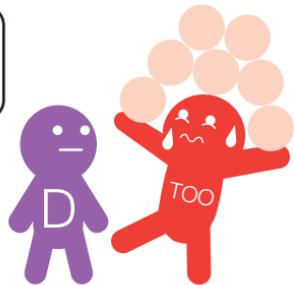
THEY MIGHT TRY TO WRITE PERFECT "USER STORIES" AS DETAILED REQUIREMENTS, THEN CLARIFY THEM WHEN THEY AREN'T PERFECT.



**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.

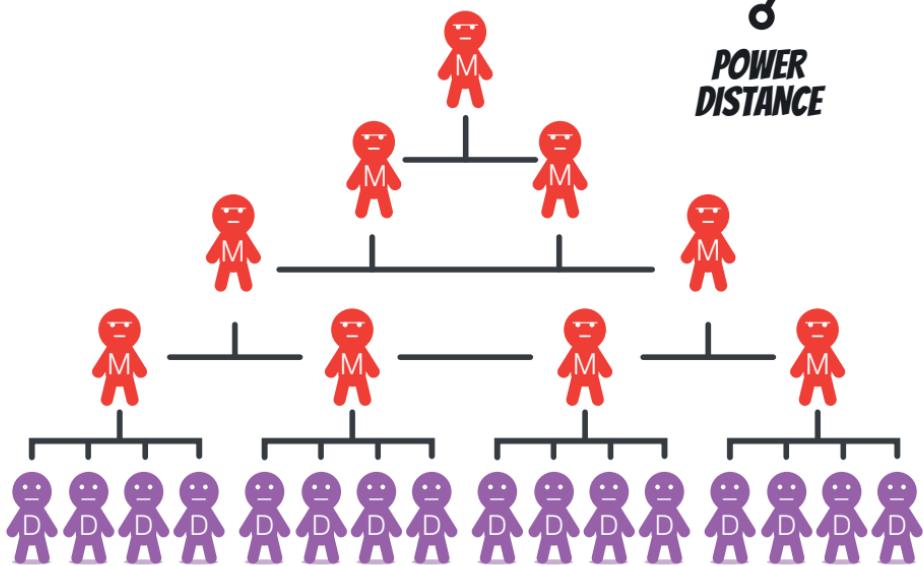


THE PLACES THIS WORKS ALREADY HAVE THE KIND OF SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT THAT MINIMIZES POWER DIFFERENCES AND PEOPLE SHARE RESPONSIBILITY NATURALLY, JUST AS A ROLE-FREE TEAM IS REQUIRED TO DO.

INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT  
TEAM MEMBERS MAY HAVE  
SPECIALIZED SKILLS AND  
AREAS OF FOCUS, BUT  
ACCOUNTABILITY BELONGS  
TO THE DEVELOPMENT  
TEAM AS A WHOLE.  
- SCRUM GUIDE

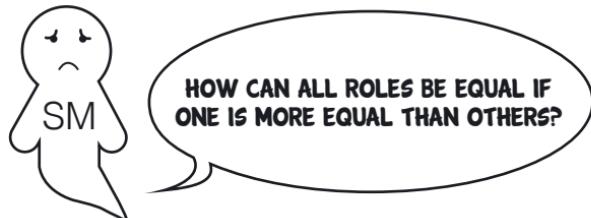
TEAM  
RESPONSIBILITY

BUT THE TEAM OUTPUT OWNER ROLE IS HARMFUL TO ORGANIZATIONS THAT ASK FOR MY HELP BECAUSE THEY ARE SO HIERARCHICAL.



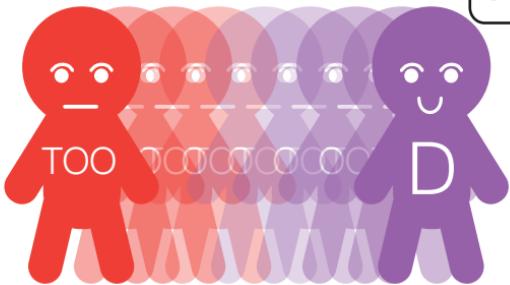
FOR THEM, STATUS DIFFERENCES  
LINKED TO ROLES ARE VERY REAL ...

AND I'M NOT GOING TO TELL THEM TO PRETEND ALL ROLES ARE EQUAL BUT ONE ROLE IS MORE EQUAL THAN OTHERS.



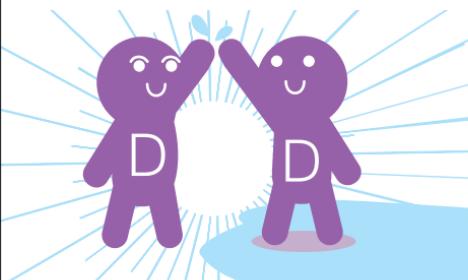
TO REDUCE THE RISK OF ADDING UNNECESSARY LAYERS, I EMPHASIZE THE REASON SCRUM HAS ONLY THREE ROLES, AND THE POWER OF ROLE-FREE TEAM SELF ORGANIZATION

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

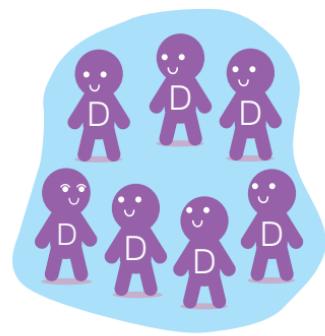


WHY BE AFRAID OF THIS PERSON JOINING WITHOUT ANY SPECIAL ROLE DESIGNATION SEPARATING THEM FROM THE OTHERS?

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 MANAGEMENT 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 RELEASEABLE 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

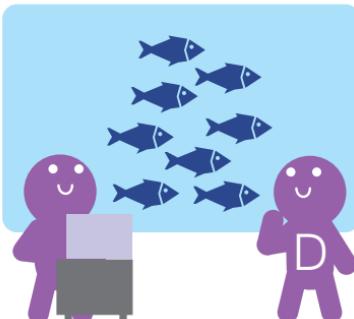


IF I WERE TRYING TO DEVELOP A PRODUCT WITH MULTIPLE TEAMS, AND IF OUR LONG-TERM SURVIVAL DEPENDED ON LEARNING TO FOCUS ON THE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS, I'D KEEP THE MOST IMPORTANT PROBLEMS IN ONE REAL PRODUCT BACKLOG. I'D ASK THE TEAMS TO FOCUS ON OUR ONE REAL PRODUCT BACKLOG,



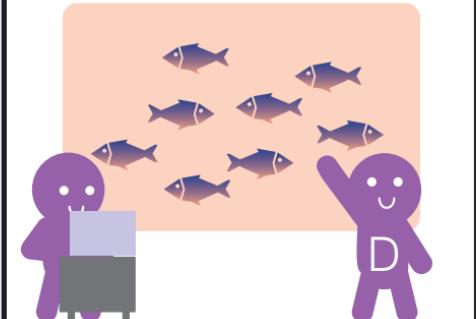
NOT WHAT WAS EASIEST FOR THEM IN THE PAST.

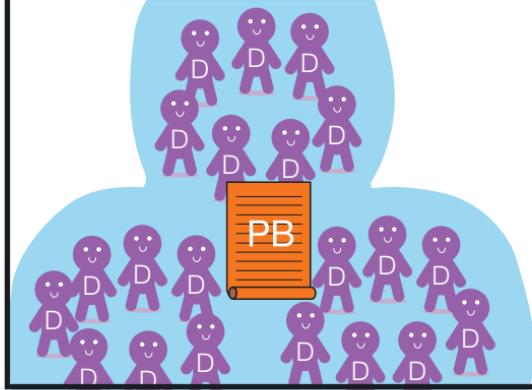
LET'S IMAGINE WE'RE ON A TEAM THAT USUALLY PROGRAMS ROBOT FISH TO STAY TOGETHER IN SCHOOLS.



BUT THIS MONTH THE HIGHEST PRIORITY WORK FOR THE COMPANY IS TO MAKE THE ROBOT FISH CHANGE COLORS WHEN THE WATER TEMPERATURE VARIES.

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



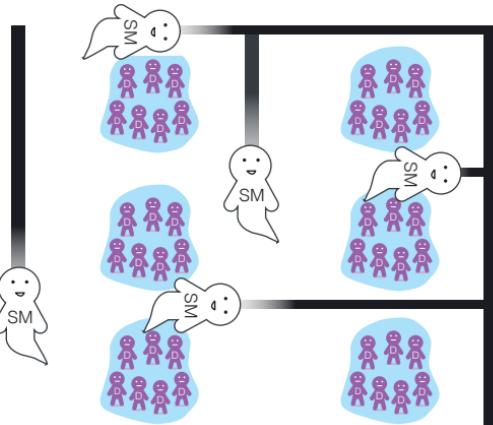


OF COURSE TEAMS  
WON'T BECOME  
INTERCHANGEABLE.

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.

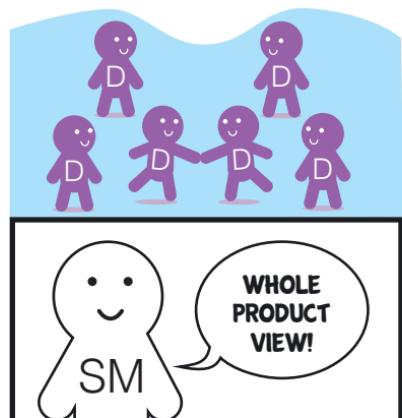


ONE PRODUCT BACKLOG IS USED  
TO DESCRIBE UPCOMING WORK ON  
THE PRODUCT  
-SCRUM GUIDE

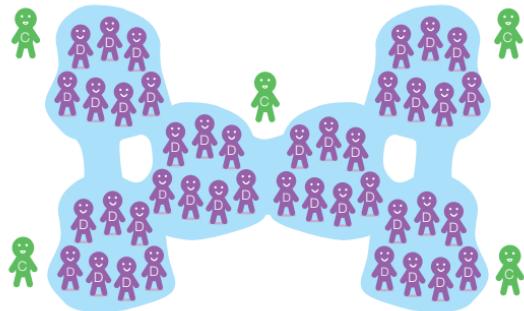


TO FOSTER A WHOLE PRODUCT VIEW,  
I WOULD ASK THE SCRUM MASTERS  
TO HELP REMOVE THE BARRIERS  
BETWEEN TEAMS,

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

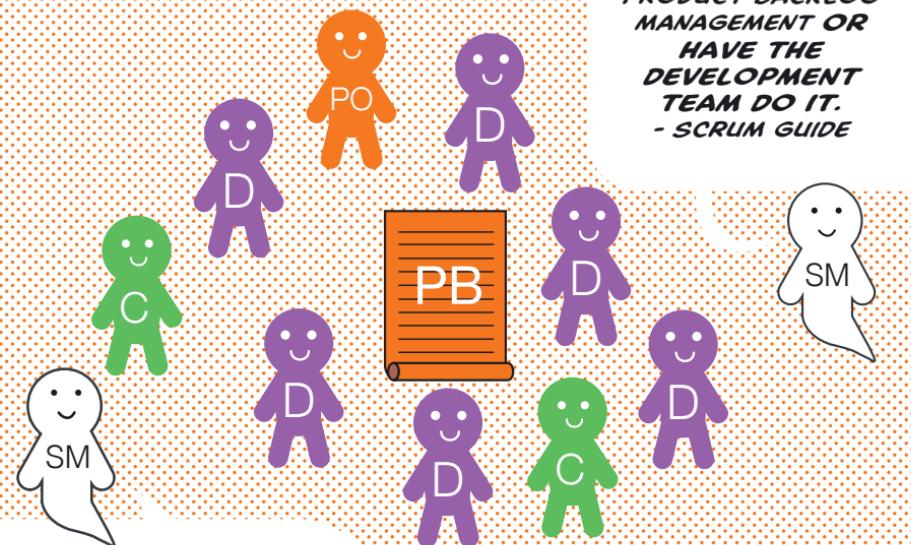


I'D ALSO WANT TO REMOVE BARRIERS PREVENTING DEVELOPERS FROM GETTING DETAILED CLARIFICATION FROM CUSTOMERS SO WE DON'T NEED TO SPOON-FEED DEVELOPERS ANYMORE.



IN FACT, NOW THE DEVELOPERS WILL HELP MANAGE THE PRODUCT BACKLOG.

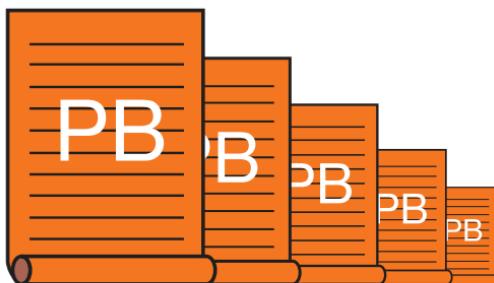
THE PRODUCT OWNER MAY DO PRODUCT BACKLOG MANAGEMENT OR HAVE THE DEVELOPMENT TEAM DO IT.  
- SCRUM GUIDE



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



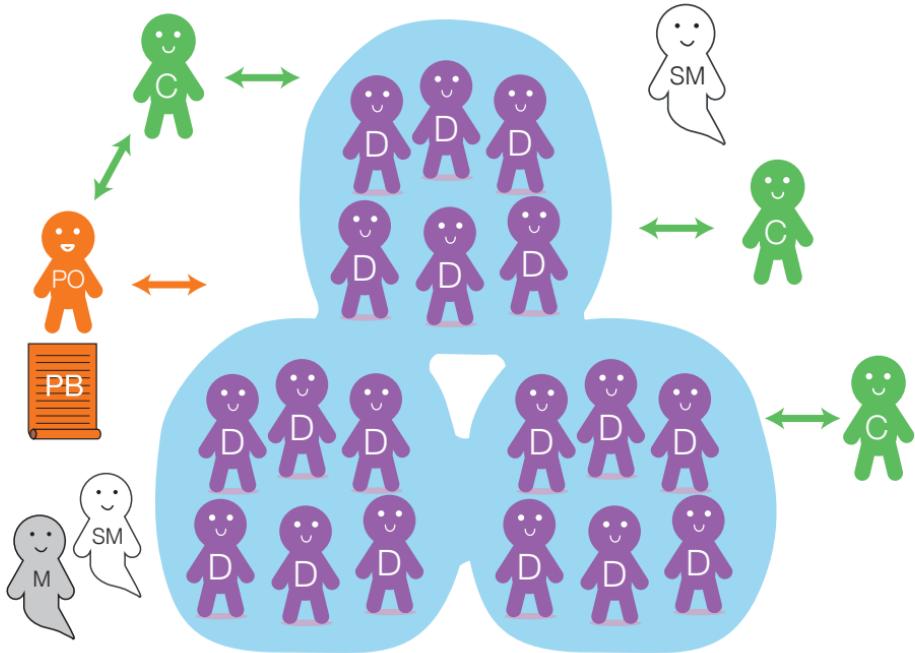
AND WE'LL NEED SOMEONE WITH REAL AUTHORITY AND VISION TO MAXIMIZE THE VALUE OF OUR WORK.

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.



PO  
**PRODUCT OWNER**



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



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



CUSTOMER CAN BE  
DIRECTLY CONSULTED  
BY DEVELOPERS,  
AVOIDING HANDOFFS.



CONVERSATIONS  
ABOUT DETAILS  
OF USER NEEDS.



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



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



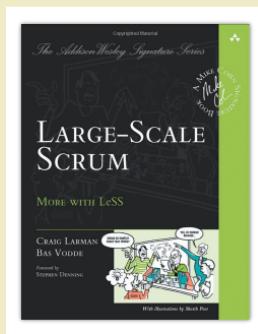
[https://youtu.be/1BZf\\_Oa7W94.](https://youtu.be/1BZf_Oa7W94)  
(That's the letter O, not a zero.)

### VISIT



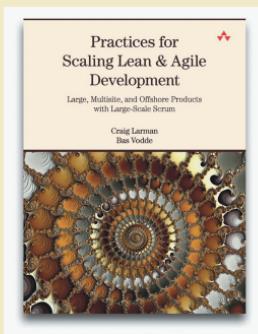
[https://less.works.](https://less.works)

### FIRST READ



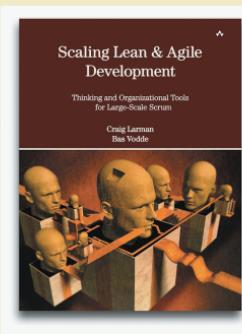
**Large Scale Scrum:  
More With LeSS,  
Larman/Vodde  
(2016).**

### THEN READ



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

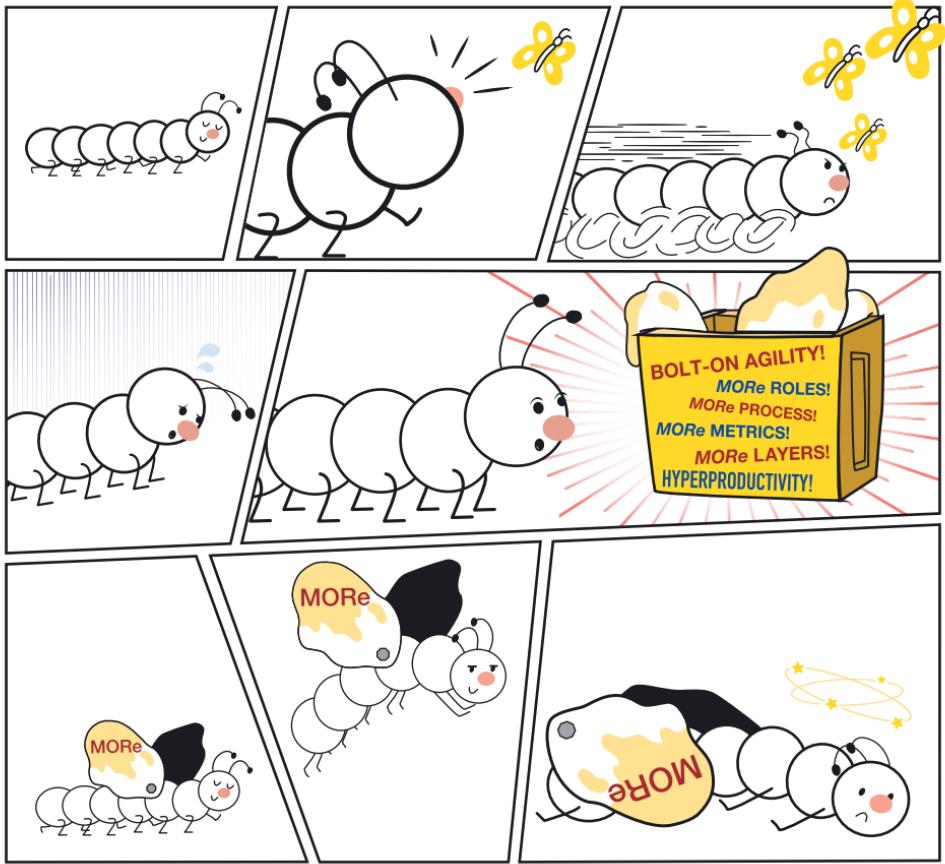
### THEN READ



**Practices for Scaling  
Lean & Agile Development,  
Larman/Vodde  
(2010).**



**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.