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Agile Project Management

25 March 2020

Product Owner vs ScrumMaster

Within Agile Project Management there must be a great deal of communication and cooperation between the development team, Product Owner, and the ScrumMaster in order for the results to be successful. However, the roles of the Product Owner and ScrumMaster greatly differ in order to achieve the desired results.

**Product Owner**

The empowered central point of product leadership within agile is the Product Owner. The Product Owner must keep two lines of thought and reasoning open at all times. One keeping in mind the stakeholders while the other is communicating with the development team as to what to build, the order in which to build, as well as the correctness of what has been built. Thus, the Product Owner is not only a manager but also is a business analyst and a tester (Rubin, 2016). Product Owners also manage economics to ensure that smart and financially beneficial decisions are continuously being made at all levels. They also actively participate in planning the portfolio, product releases, and sprint level activities. Ensuring that the product backlog items are in the continuous cycle of being created, refined, estimated, and prioritized correctly is another responsibility handled by the Product Owner. Along with collaborating with the development team and stakeholders the Product Owner also must define and verify acceptance criteria to thus meet the satisfactory requirements for each product backlog item (Rubin, 2016).

In order to handle all of these responsibilities, there are four characteristics that a Product Owner should have. The first being domain knowledge, or the ability to create and execute a vision. Thus, they need to have the appropriate business and domain knowledge to do so. They also need proper people skills. Good communication, negotiation, motivation, and consensus-building all need to be in the Product Owners’ skills(Rubin, 2016). Third, they need to be able to make decisions. They need to be empowered to make the significant and possibly difficult decisions that arise within a project. Lastly, the Product Owner needs to be accountable. They are accountable for delivering good business results, for being available to the development team and stakeholders, as well as being a collaborative member of the Scrum team (Rubin, 2016). Thus, the Product Owner should be an individual who will benefit from the solution, act as a proxy for actual users, paying for the solution and receiving the benefits, and should be a technical person who understands how to best prioritize technical items (Rubin, 2016).

**ScrumMaster**

The ScrumMaster is like the coach of the whole agile team. Their focus is to be on helping all parties to adhere to and understand the Scrum values, principles, and practices. They provide process leadership which in turn helps everyone to develop their own high-performance, organization-specific approach to Scrum. As a coach, they observe the behavior of the team and Product Owner and seeks out ways to improve performance. The ScrumMaster is also a servant leader in which they serve the Scrum Team. They make sure that the highest priority needs are being met so that the team can become or be more effective (Rubin, 2016). The ScrumMaster is also empowered to ensure that the Scrum team enacts and adheres to the Scrum values and practices. This allows for the team to maximize delivered business value. Scrum Masters also run interference for the team so that they can remain focused on the goals of each and every sprint. They also remove obstacles from the team’s path. Overall, the ScrumMaster is a change agent and paves the way for a Scrum team’s success by enabling change throughout the organization (Rubin, 2016).

Like the Product Owner, ScrumMaster also has specific characteristics that benefit and aid its role. One of which is that they need to have a deep understanding of Scrum as well as a reasonable level of technical expertise, and a working knowledge of the business domain (Rubin, 2016). ScrumMasters also need to be able to construct and ask good questions with the intention of uncovering insights. Patience is also a necessary skill for them to have. Sometimes teams need to arrive at appropriate answers and methods on their own and the ScrumMaster needs to be willing to wait until they do (Rubin, 2016). ScrumMasters also need to be protective of their team and their projects. Transparency is key to communication and thus is a necessary skill for ScrumMasters to obtain.

The roles and purposes served by the Product Owner and the ScrumMaster within the agile project management method are very different. The ScrumMaster acts as a coach making it possible for their team to work as effectively as possible. While the Product Owner needs to openly communicate between the development team to provide necessary criteria as well as the stakeholders and their desires for the project. Both roles are essential to the success of Scrum and agile methodology.

Works Cited

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