PRODUCT MANAGEMENT

PRODUCT OWNER ROLE

Find out how Product Management happens in Agile Software Development.

Learn more about Product Owner Role.

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PRODUCT OWNER

The Product Owner is the one and only person responsible for managing the Product Backlog and ensuring the value of the work the team performs. This person maintains the Product Backlog and ensures that it is visible to everyone.

■ Scrum Guide

The product owner leads the work; that is, the development required to produce a Business Product or Service that generates the expected benefits.

Benefit

- A Benefit is a measurable and achievable improvement that arises after using the project's final output.
- A project's final output is the final deliverable of the project; that is, the product of the project.
- These benefits are specified by the actual users of the product or service.

Example	An e-commerce company used to take orders over phone. Now this company has built a website where customers can purchase the required merchandise online.
	
	 • Output: This project's final output is the website.
	 • A few benefits of this project are:
	     o More business; that is, more customers ordering merchandise using the online platform
	     o Savings from reduced staff due to discontinuation of phone-based ordering
	     o Ability to develop online and dynamic real-time analytics, creating cross selling and up selling opportunities

The Product Owner Role

- Product Owner provides requirements to the team and directs the team toward realizing the Product Vision.

Responsibilities of the Product Owner

- The following are two primary responsibilities of the Product Owner.

Providing Vision

- Product Owner is responsible for establishing the Product Vision and communicating it to the team.
- This compelling vision should ignite passion in the team.
- Product Owner creates, maintains, and prioritizes the Product Backlog.
- Product Owner also provides answers to questions from team members on User Stories (requirements).

Providing Boundaries

- Boundaries provide the realities within which the vision must be realized.
- Boundaries can come in the form of constraints such as:
  - Project deadline
  - Cost
  - Scope and Quality
- Product Owner sets these boundaries as the business situation demands.

Time demands on Scrum Master and Product Owner over the Project duration
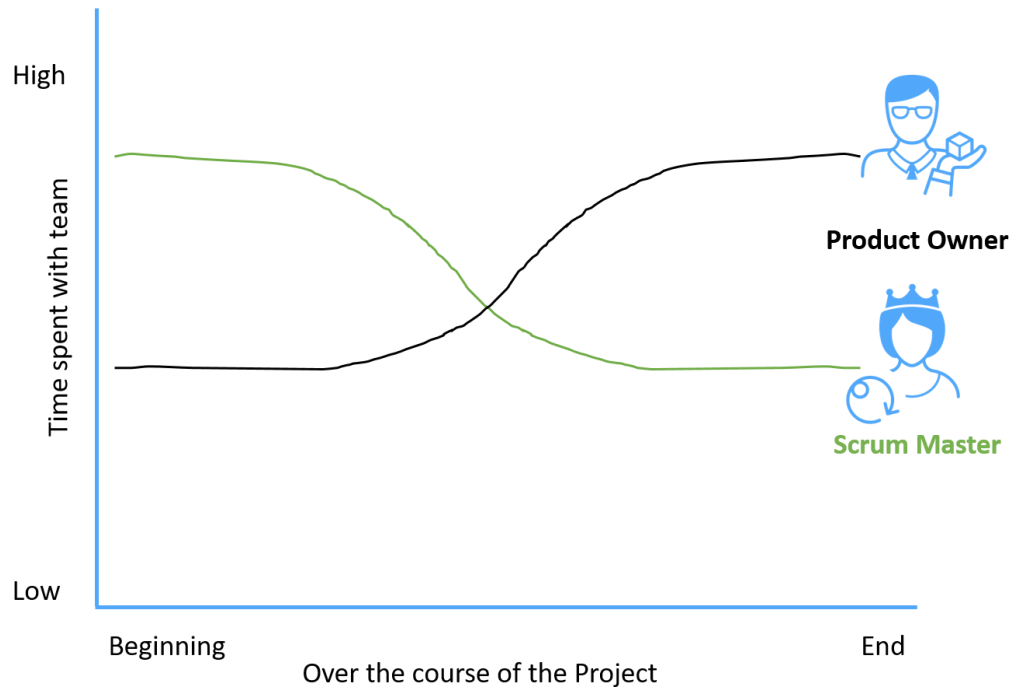
- When the team is new to Scrum, Scrum Master's job can be very time-consuming.
- Scrum Master will be busy in activities such as training team members, removing impediments, helping the team to self-organize, etc.
- Over time, teams might master Scrum and might become self-organizing. As these changes occur, Scrum Master spends less time with the team.
- Now, let us look at the Product Owner's time demands over the course of the project.
- During the beginning of the project, the team is coming together, trying to understand how much detail should go to Product Backlog items, how much work it can commit in a sprint, etc. The team members may have fewer questions to the Product Owner during initial sprints.
- As the project progresses, the team may complete more work in each sprint.
- This may produce more and more questions to the Product Owner. This implies that the time demands of Product Owner increase as the project progresses.

## Each team needs exactly one Product Owner
- Each team should work with only one Product Owner.

- If there are multiple Product Owners, team members may try to take advantage of the situation. For example, if one Product Owner says no, they may approach another Product Owner differently to get approval.

Product Owner team

- There can be situations where the Product Owner role can be too much for one person due to certain reasons.
- In such situations, a Product Owner Team can be formed by splitting the duties of the Product Owner across a team, that is, across multiple individuals.
- Care should be taken in such situations that there remains one person who owns the Product Backlog and has the ultimate decision making authority.

Attributes of a good Product Owner

Available   Business-Savvy   Communicative   Decisive   Empowered
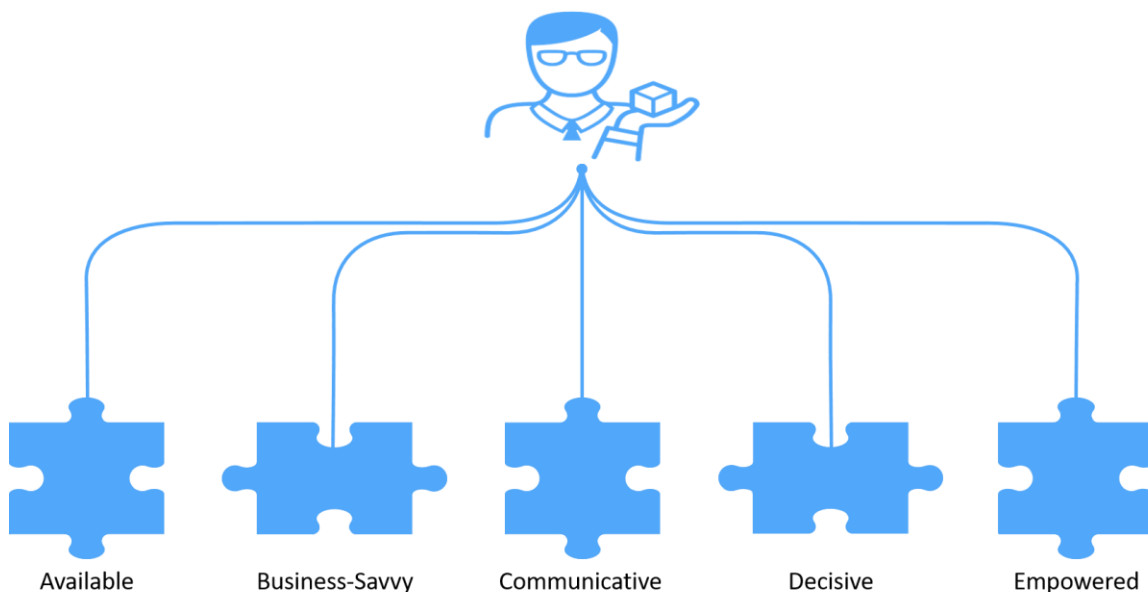
Available

- By being available for the project, the Product Owner demonstrates his/her commitment to the team.
- Product Owner has a full-time role in the project.
- Product Owner must be available during Sprint Planning and Sprint Review.
- Product Owner may join the team in daily scrum and sprint retrospect as needed.
- Due to continuous backlog grooming activity, the availability of Product Owner throughout the project is very important.

Business-Savvy

- Product Owner must understand the business and the product.

- Product Owner must have a deep understanding of business, market conditions, customers and their interests, and end users.
- Product Owner must demonstrate very good domain knowledge or subject matter expertise.

Communicative

- Product Owners must be good communicators and must be able to work well with multiple stakeholders.
- Typically, Product Owners interact with multiple stakeholders such as customers, end users, leadership within the organization, partners, vendors, and team members. So, Product Owner must be able to deliver the same message to each of these different audiences and must communicate in the style suitable to that target audience.
- Communication also includes good listening skills. Product Owners must have good listening skills as they are approached by multiple stakeholders and team members with requirements, questions, clarifications, etc.

Decisive

- Product Owner must be able to decide about Product Backlog Items, release priorities, etc.
- An indecisive Product Owner may lead to eventual project failure and a frustrated team.

Empowered

- Product Owner must be empowered with authority to make decisions and is accountable for those decisions.
- For this empowerment, it is highly recommended that Product Owner sits a bit high in the organization hierarchy.

Scrum Master as Product Owner

- This should never be attempted. If these two roles are combined, a lot of power will be in one person's hands, which creates confusion for the team members.
- Performing both the roles can lead to contradictory actions by the same individual—as a Product Owner that person wants more and more features but as a Scrum Master that person may try to protect the team.
- However, if an individual is very good at understanding the market and has technical and collaborative skills of Scrum Master, these two roles can be combined.

Overcoming common problems

- When selecting the initial Product Owner, a few common problems may occur. They are:

Product Owner delegates decision making but then overrules the decision maker

- It is quite common for new Product Owners to delegate decisions to others, for example, to a Business Analyst.
- Though the decision-making has been delegated, Product Owners may continue to overrule the decisions by approving some items or even reversing the decisions taken by those to whom they were delegated.
- In such situations, the Product Owner must free some time by delegating the decision-making responsibility to those with whom the Product Owner is comfortable.

Product Owner pushes the team too hard

- The Product Owner is an outward-facing role. It involves interacting with business and market. Product Owners are almost always under constant pressure of deadlines, market demands, competition launches, etc.
- This pressure percolates to the team and may increase from sprint to sprint.
- In such situations, Scrum Master should push back work first and then work with Product Owners to set long-term goals.

Product Owner compromises on quality

- Sometimes, Product Owners may compromise on quality. They may accept items even though they are not fully tested due to market pressure. This may result in short-term gains but it may create havoc on the product and brand itself in the long run.
- Scrum Masters should work with Product Owners to have a well-defined Definition of Done and also ensure that the accepted items conform to the Definition of Done and there are no deviations.

Not collocated Product Owner

- This can be a common situation with more and more projects being outsourced.
- In such situations, a few actions should be taken by the Product Owner for better collaboration with the team:
  - Remain available and engaged with the project
  - Establish rapport with the team (for example, at the beginning of the project, face-to-face meetings with team members would be of great help)

- o Perform all the required duties for the role (for example, Backlog prioritization)
- o Be available over email and phone (for example, dedicated time in the day for phone calls)