PRODUCT MANAGEMENT

Common Mistakes

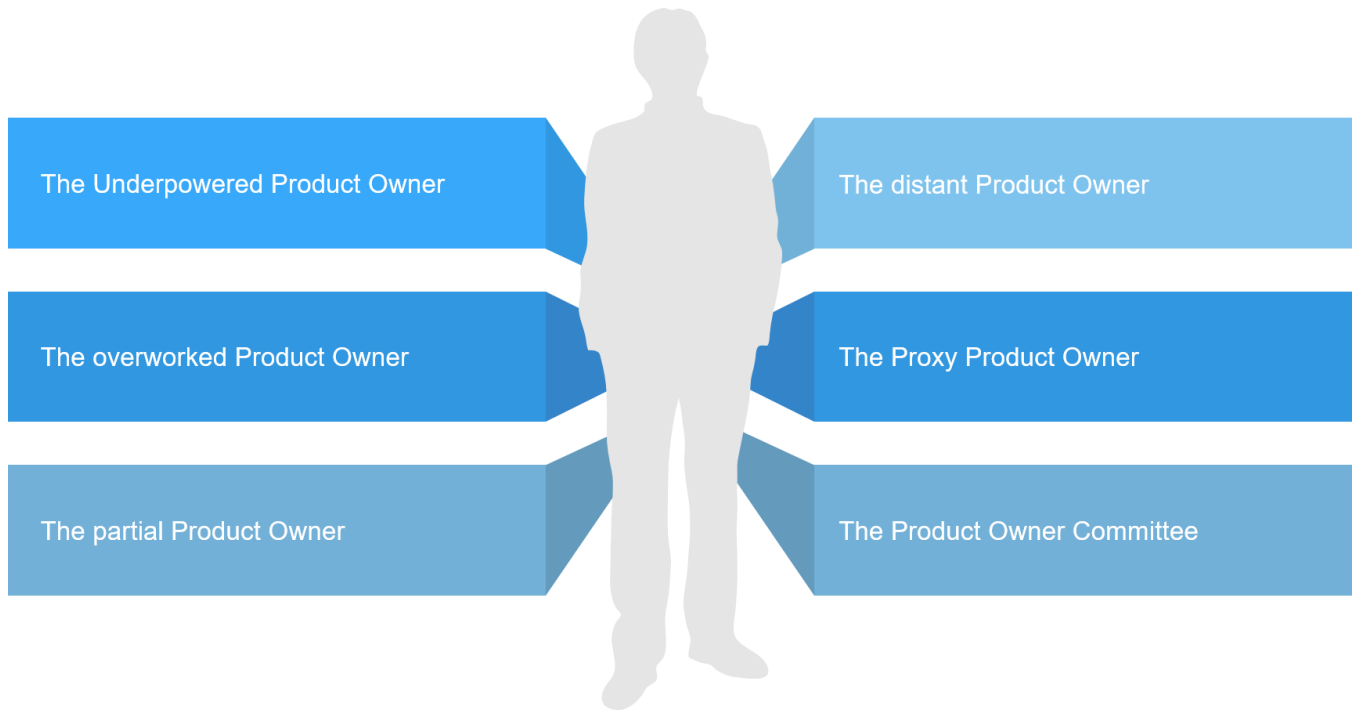|	
The Underpowered Product Owner	The distant Product Owner
The overworked Product Owner	The Proxy Product Owner
The partial Product Owner	The Product Owner Committee

THE UNDERPOWERED PRODUCT OWNER

- Underpowered Product Owners do not have sufficient authority and power.
- They lack empowerment.
- There could be a lot of factors such as:
  - Absence of enough management attention
  - Wrong level of sponsorship
  - Lack of management trust
  - Lack of ability to delegate
- To combat this common mistake:
  - Ensure that the Product Owner is fully empowered and receives adequate management and leadership support required to do his/her job.

THE OVERWORKED PRODUCT OWNER

- On large projects, it is quite common and quite easy for the Product Owner to be overworking.
- There could be many factors such as:
  - Product backlog grooming negligence (This leads to unprioritized items and incorrect release planning.)
  - Not attending or missing Sprint meetings
  - Not enough time to perform this role in addition to other day-to-day tasks
  - Not enough support to perform this role (Maybe this person was selected as a stop gap arrangement, or since no one was ready, he/she was forced to play this role.)

- Not available for clarification on requirements like User Stories from Development team (This causes lengthy delays in User Stories' development and often leads to ambiguity and rework)
- To combat this common mistake:
  - Let the Product Owner play only this role—free the individual from other responsibilities
  - Ensure that the Product Owner is available full time for the Project
  - Also, ensure that the Product Owner attends Sprint meetings and collaborates with the team for better utilization and results

THE PARTIAL PRODUCT OWNER
- In a few organizations and projects, the Product Owner role is split between the Product Manager and Product Owner.
- The Product Manager is an outward facing role and keeps in touch with the market. Product Manager owns the Product Vision and takes care of Product marketing and product management.
- The Product Owner is an inward facing role. The Product Owner works with the development team and drives the team toward meeting the Product development goals.
- In such situations, the Product Manager will have more authority and power. He/she will drive the Product Owner to maintain the Product Backlog; that is, write user stories and keep them prioritized per Product Manager inputs.
- To combat this common mistake:
  - Product Manager requires top level organization support to take tactical and strategical decisions about the Product. Similarly, the Product Owner also needs the organization's support to own the product vision and take decisions with respect to Product Backlog.

THE DISTANT PRODUCT OWNER
- This Product Owner operates away, at a distance, from the team.
- The Distant Product Owner can be in the same city or country, a different country, or a different time zone.
- Common issues faced with distant Product Owners are:
  - Misalignment
  - Mistrust
  - Miscommunication
  - Slow progress
- To combat these common mistakes:

- o Colocate the team and Product Owner (remember Agile Manifesto principle— "The most efficient and effective method of conveying information to and within a development team is a face-to-face conversation")
- o Ensure that the Product Owner spends some time with the team daily

THE PROXY PRODUCT OWNER

- A Proxy Product Owner acts as a Product Owner on behalf of the actual Product Owner.
- In the common mistakes outlined above, you may find Proxy Product Owners for Overworked, Partial, and Distant Product Owners.
- Common issues found with Proxy Product Owners are:
  - o Conflicts
  - o Miscommunication
  - o Delay and slowdown in decision-making
  - o Decrease in productivity
  - o Impact on team morale
- To combat these common mistakes:
  - o Free up the Product owner from other responsibilities
  - o Colocate the Product Owner with the team
  - o If required, even replace with full-time, empowered Product Owner

PRODUCT OWNER COMMITTEE

- This is a group of Product Owners without anyone in charge of the overall product
- Commonly in this situation, no one will
  - o Guide the team
  - o Align the team toward a common goal
  - o Facilitate decision-making
- Often, this committee goes for endless meetings with conflicting interests and politics which is also known as **Death by Committee.**
- To combat this common mistake:
  - o Ensure there is one person with required authority who can facilitate decision-making, owns Product Backlog, and does backlog grooming as required.
  - o The Chief Product Owner outlined earlier can also be used to overcome the issues.