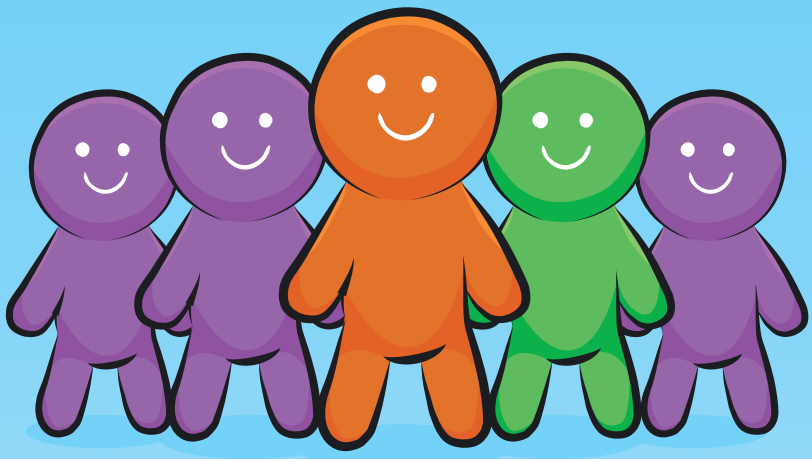
AMAZING SCRUM

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
or tweet them to
@michaeldotjames.

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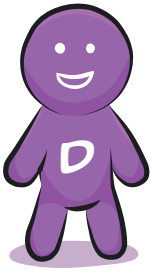
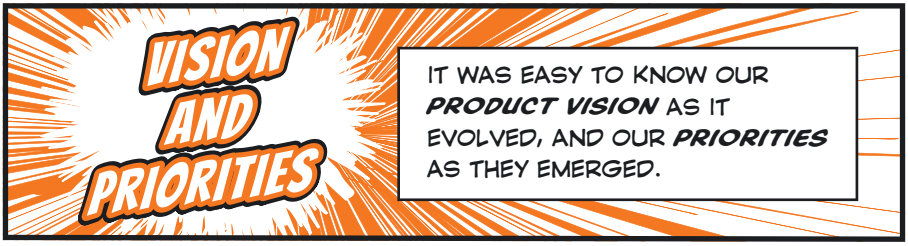
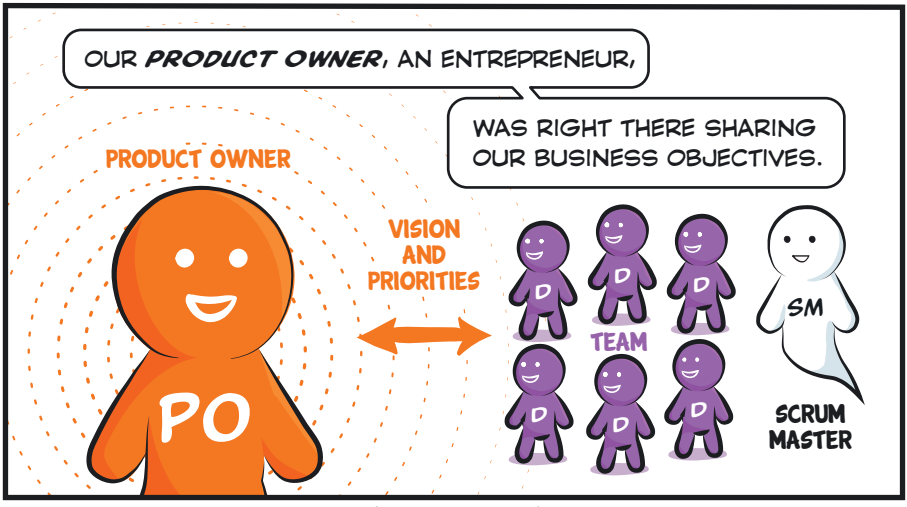
SCENE 1:
HOW IS THE PRODUCT OWNER ROLE SUPPOSED TO WORK?

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



DEVELOPER





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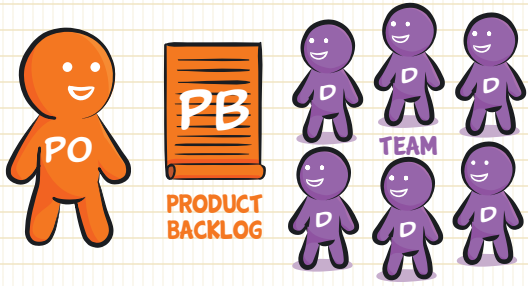
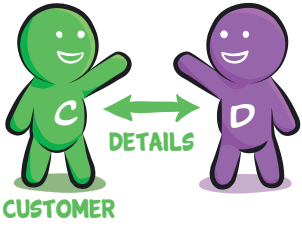
HE PRIORITIZED ***ONE PRODUCT BACKLOG*** AND WE REFINED IT TOGETHER.

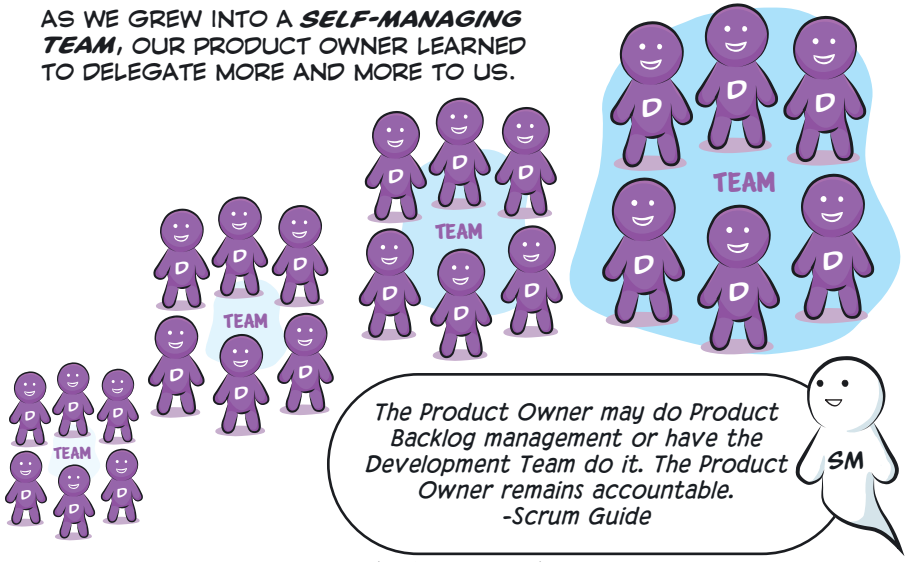


CUSTOMER INTERACTION HELPED US KNOW THE ***DETAILS*** OF WHAT TO DO.



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.



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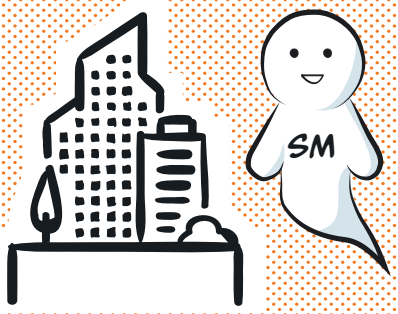
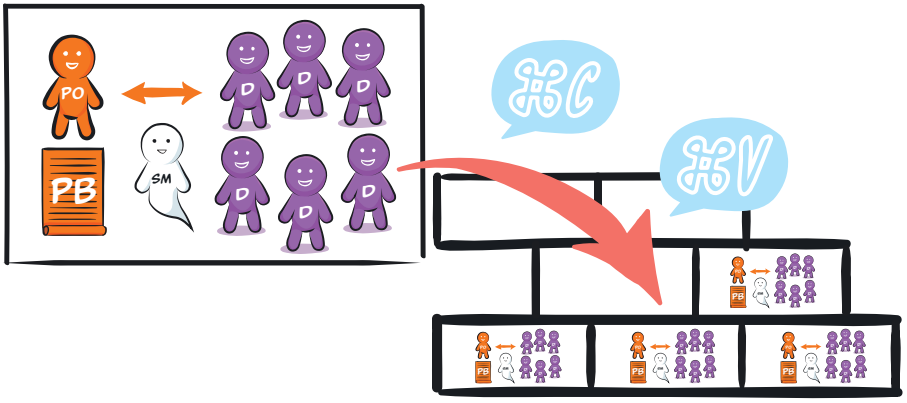
SCENE 2:
HOW DOES YOUR LARGE ORGANIZATION MISINTERPRET THE PRODUCT OWNER ROLE?

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.

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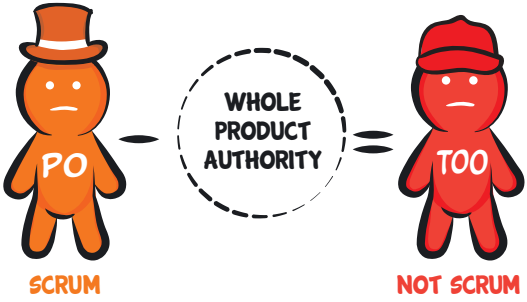
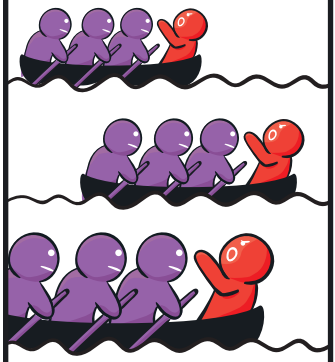
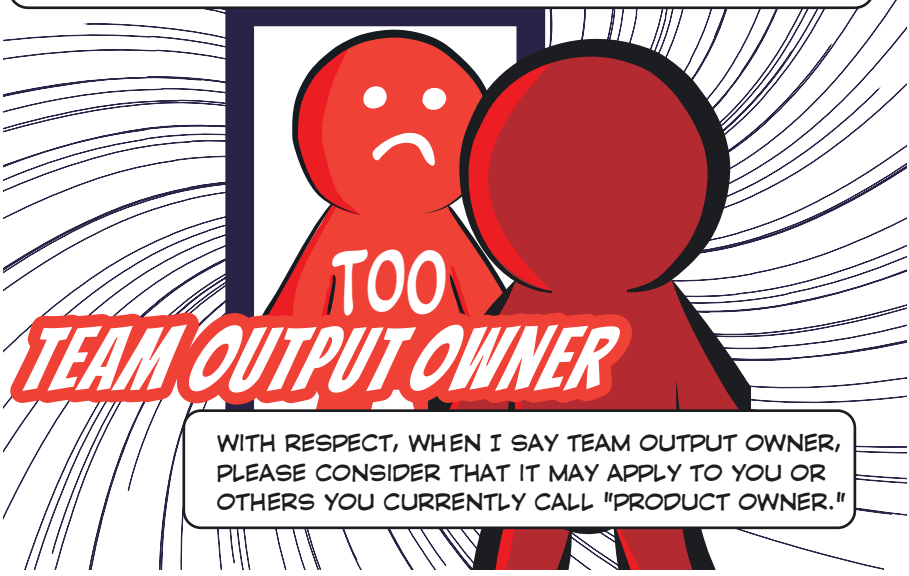
BUT UNLIKE MY PRODUCT OWNER FROM SCENE 1, THESE PEOPLE LACKED THE AUTHORITY TO MAKE MAJOR BUSINESS DECISIONS ABOUT THE WHOLE PRODUCT.





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."

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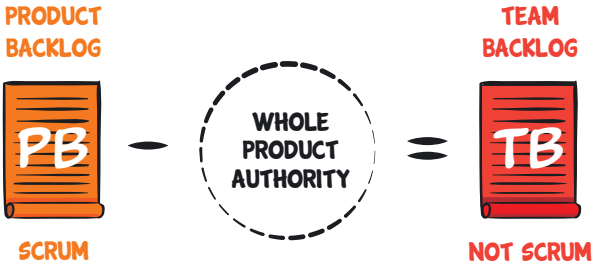
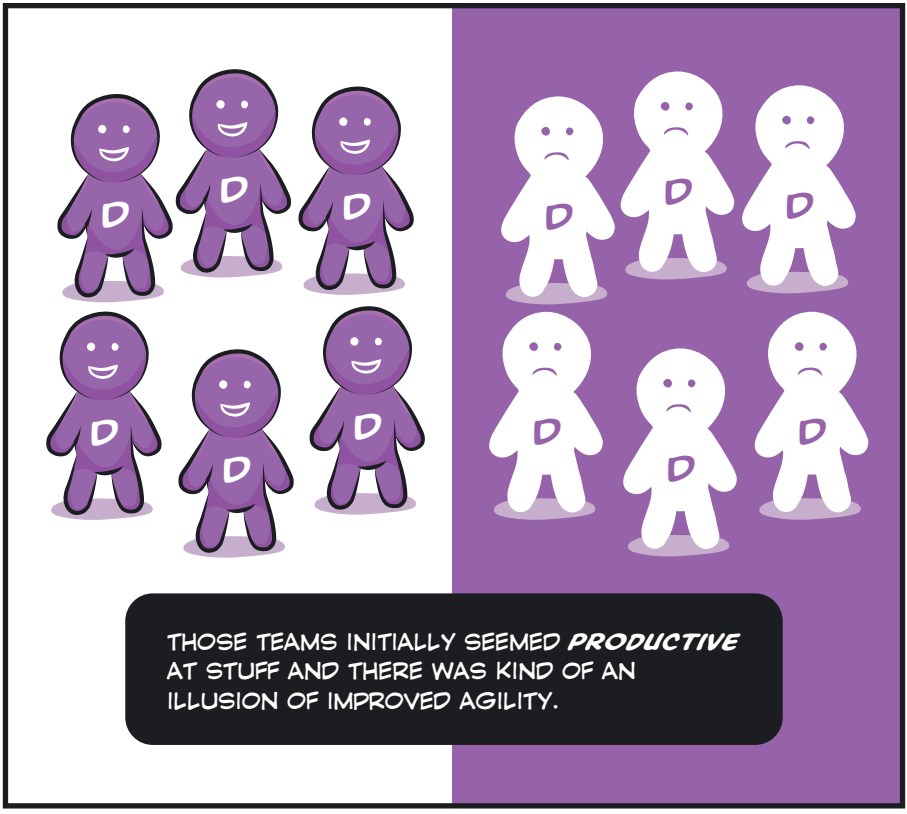


WITHOUT AUTHORITY TO PRIORITIZE THE WHOLE PRODUCT BACKLOG, EACH TEAM OUTPUT OWNER WAS IN CHARGE OF A ***TEAM BACKLOG***. WE'LL SOON SEE WHY THIS IS NOT A SCRUM ARTIFACT.



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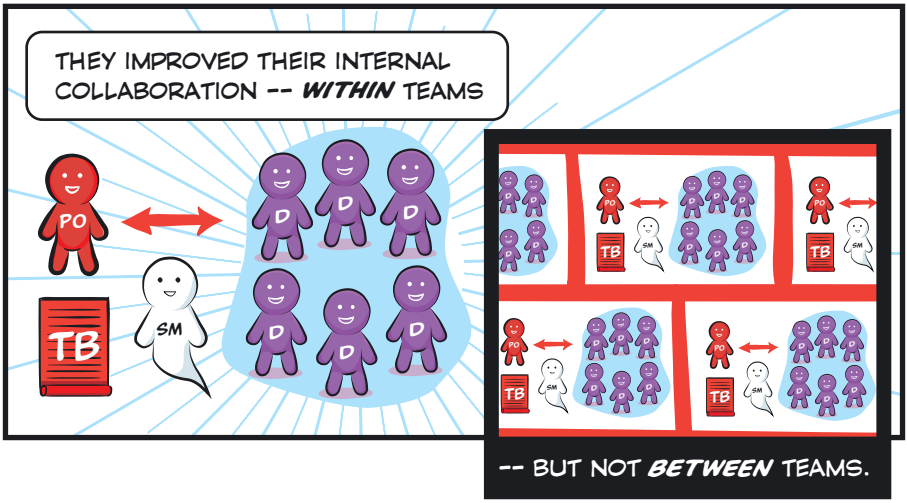
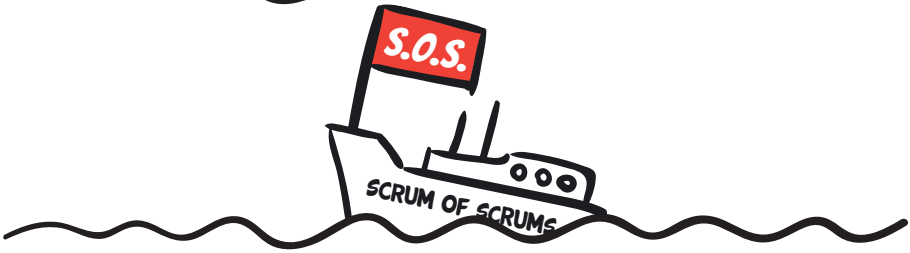


AS A NAIVE AGILE COACH I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT TO DO EXCEPT A PATTERN I'D HEARD OF CALLED "SCRUM OF SCRUMS."



THAT OFTEN DEVOLVED INTO A TRADITIONAL PROJECT MANAGER STATUS MEETING.

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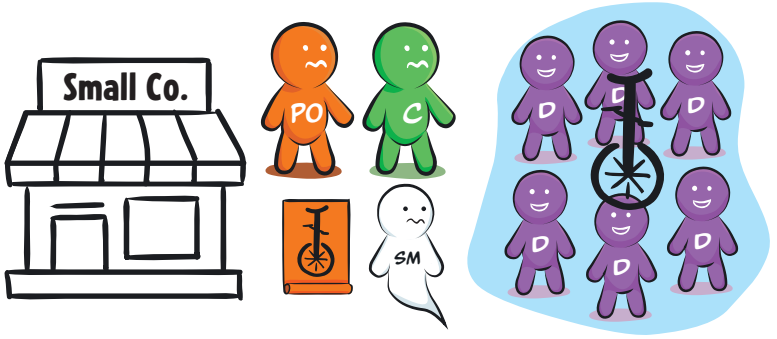
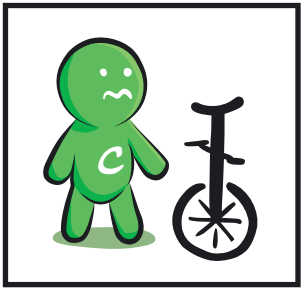
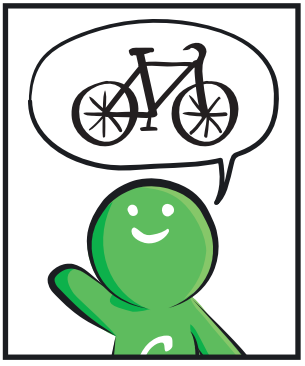
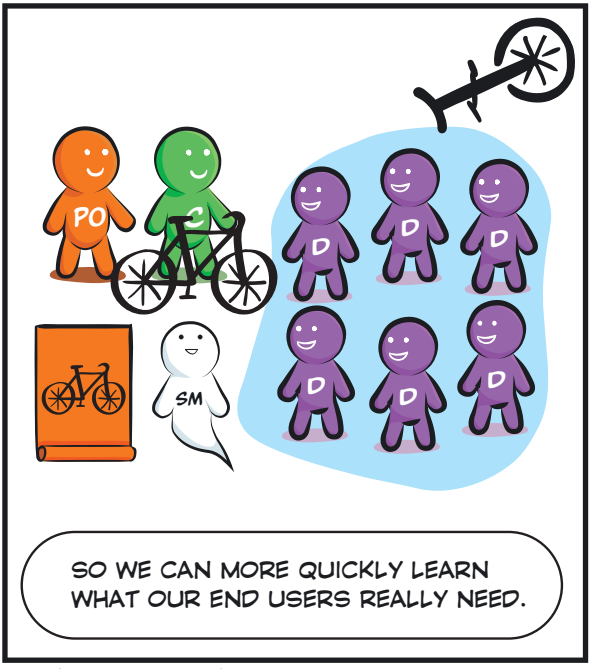
SCENE 3A:
HOW DOES MISINTERPRETING THE PRODUCT OWNER ROLE DELAY CUSTOMER FEEDBACK?



REAL SCRUM TEAMS TRY TO DEVELOP SHIPPABLE PRODUCTS EVERY SPRINT







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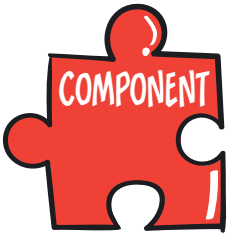
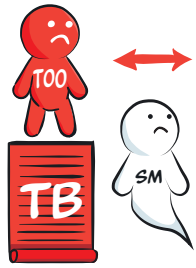
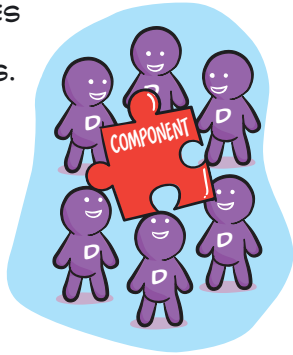
TEAMS IN LARGE ORGANIZATIONS SOMETIMES ONLY MAKE ***COMPONENTS*** THAT ARE NOT END-TO-END, CUSTOMER-CENTRIC FEATURES.

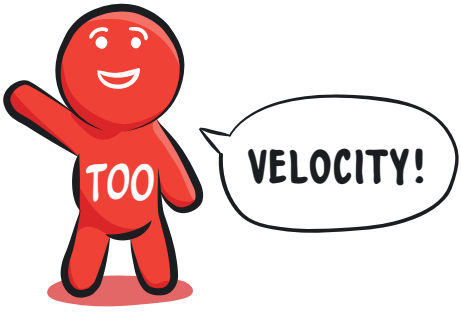






FOCUSING ON THE ***INTERNAL OBJECTIVES*** OF MIDDLE MANAGERS INSTEAD OF BROADER ***BUSINESS OBJECTIVES*** CAN CAUSE TEAMS TO TRY TO INCREASE OUTPUT,

SOMETIMES MEASURED AS "VELOCITY."



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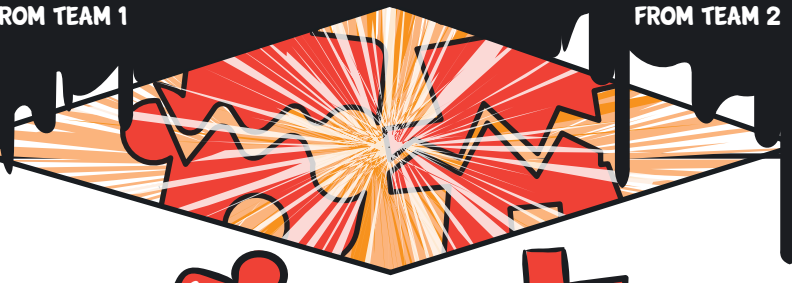
COMPONENT

COMPONENT

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

FROM TEAM 1

FROM TEAM 2



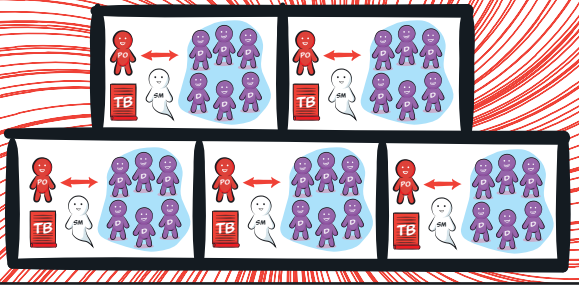
COMPONENT

COMPONENT

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!

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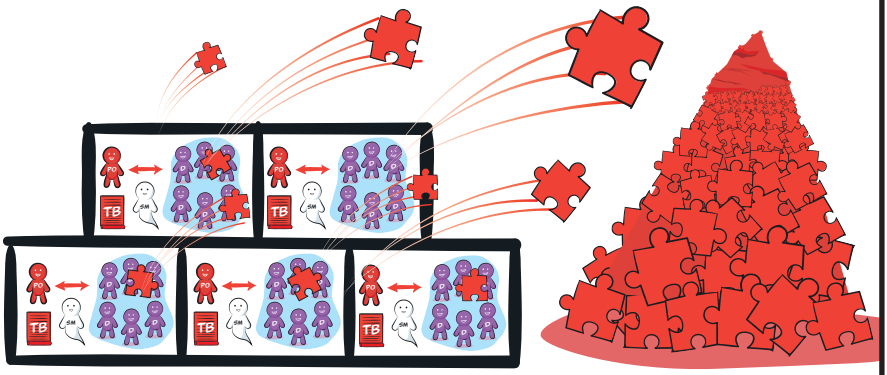
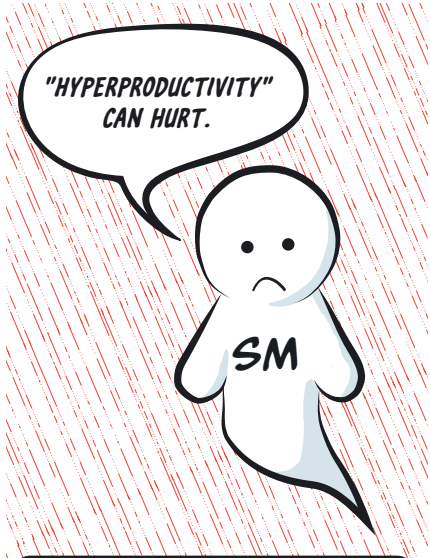
IF OUR WORK HAS TO BE INTEGRATED WITH OTHER STUFF TO GET SHIPPABLE FEATURES, IT CAN TAKE LONGER TO GET A REAL CUSTOMER REACTION, LEARN FROM IT, AND ADJUST OUR DIRECTION.



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



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

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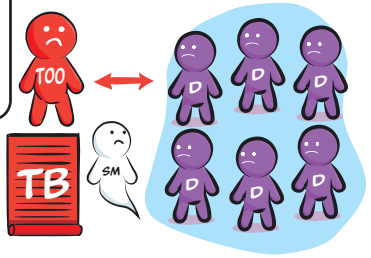
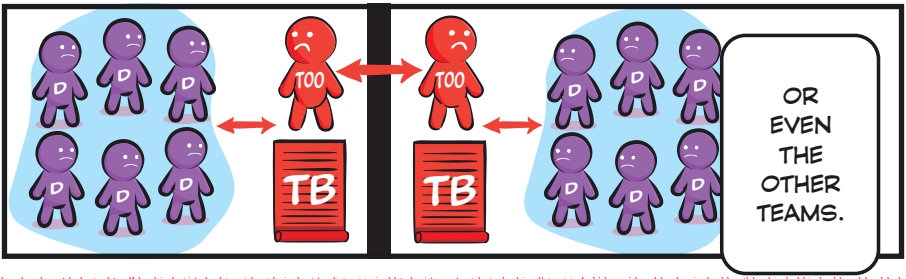
SCENE 3B:
HOW DOES MISINTERPRETING THE PRODUCT OWNER ROLE REDUCE DEVELOPER MOTIVATION AND EMPATHY FOR CUSTOMERS?

ANOTHER **WEIRD** THING ABOUT LARGE ORGANIZATIONS ...

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

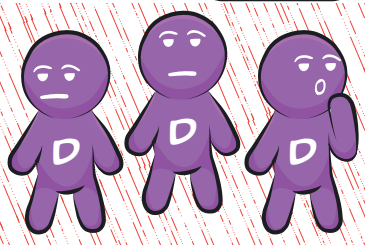
DEVELOPERS SEE GO-BETWEENS AS THEIR MAIN CONNECTION TO THE CUSTOMERS





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.



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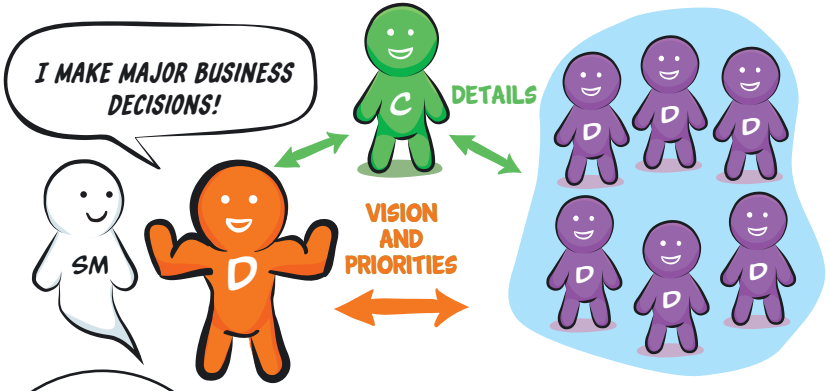
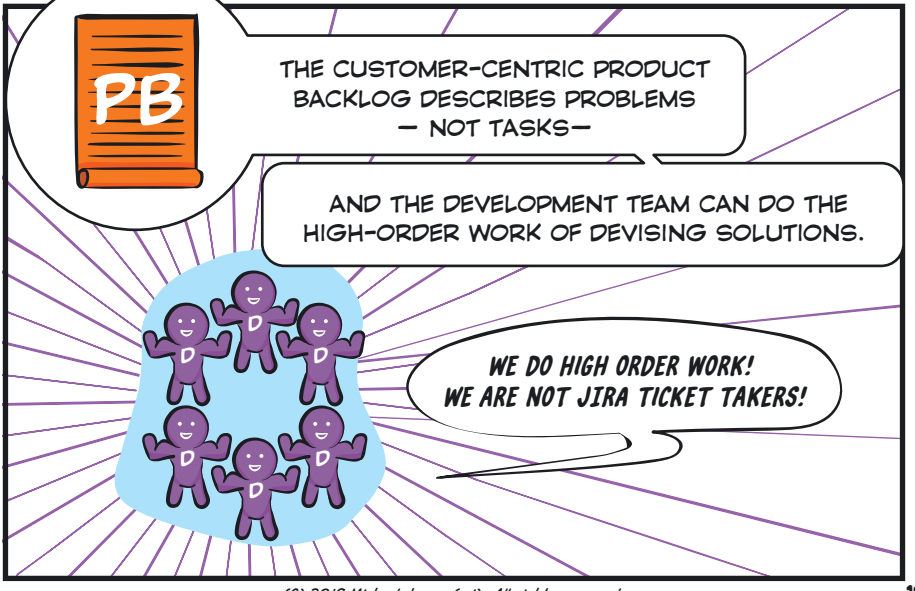
SCENE 4A:
HOW DO REAL PRODUCT OWNERS DELIVER THE HIGHEST CUSTOMER VALUE?

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





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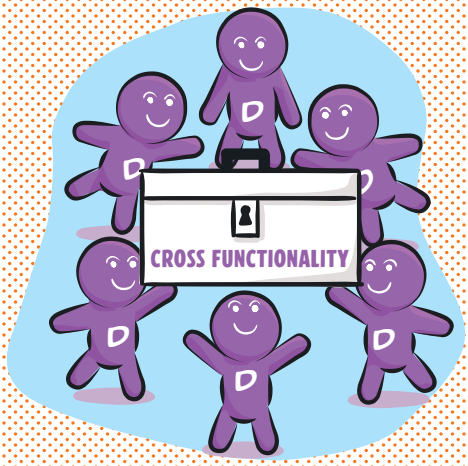
THEY DON'T ONLY CODE TO SPECIFICATIONS.

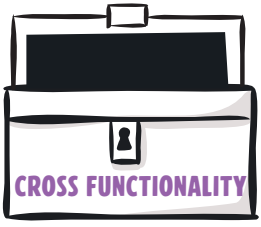
Development Teams are cross functional, with all the skills as a team necessary to create a product Increment.
- Scrum Guide



DOMAIN
ARCHITECTURE
ANALYSIS
TESTING
DESIGN
CODING
INTEGRATION
UX
DEPLOYMENT

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.



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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.

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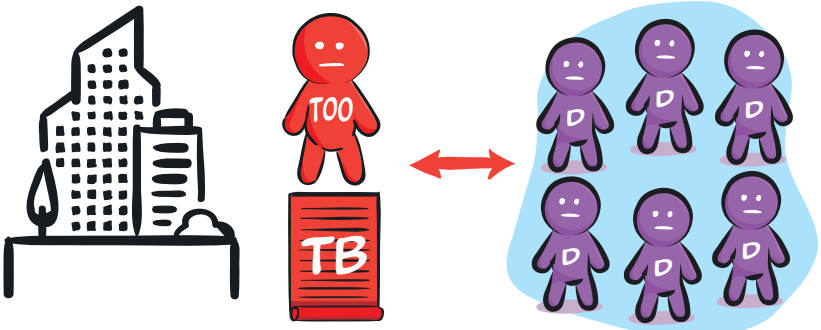
SCENE 4B:
HOW DOES MISINTERPRETING THE PRODUCT OWNER ROLE REDUCE VALUE DELIVERY?

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.

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

$5 ITEM
$1 ITEM
$8 ITEM
$5 ITEM
$7 ITEM
$10 ITEM
$5 ITEM

WE'LL HAVE THE ILLUSION THAT SCRUM IS WORKING.

TOO

$10 ITEM
$8 ITEM
$7 ITEM
$5 ITEM
$5 ITEM
$5 ITEM
$1 ITEM

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***.

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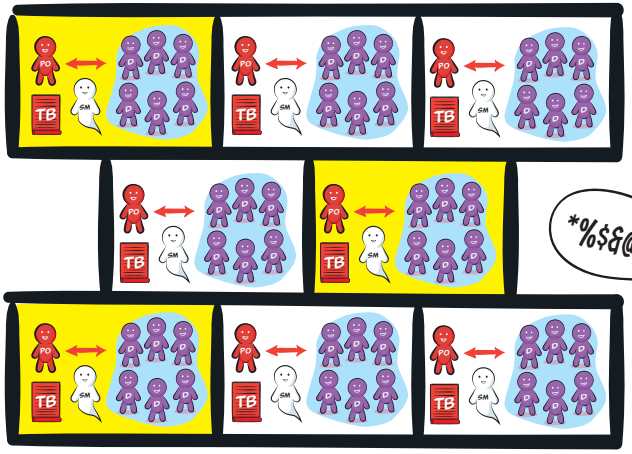
BUT THE BENEFIT TO CUSTOMERS IS LESS THAN IT SHOULD BE. ***THERE'S MORE IMPORTANT WORK HIDDEN IN OTHER BACKLOGS THAT OUR TEAM ISN'T LEARNING ABOUT!!***

$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.



ONLY A FEW TEAMS ARE DOING THE MOST VALUABLE WORK!

*%$&@#!

SM

OUR IMPACT ON THE CUSTOMERS WILL BE LIMITED.

AND ***CHANGING DIRECTIONS – THE WHOLE #$@*& POINT OF AGILITY*** – WILL BE DIFFICULT.

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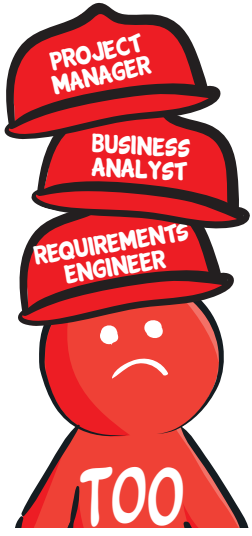
SCENE 5:
WHAT SUCKS ABOUT BEING A TEAM OUTPUT OWNER?

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.

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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/

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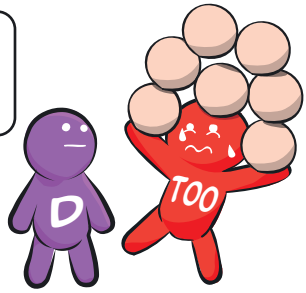
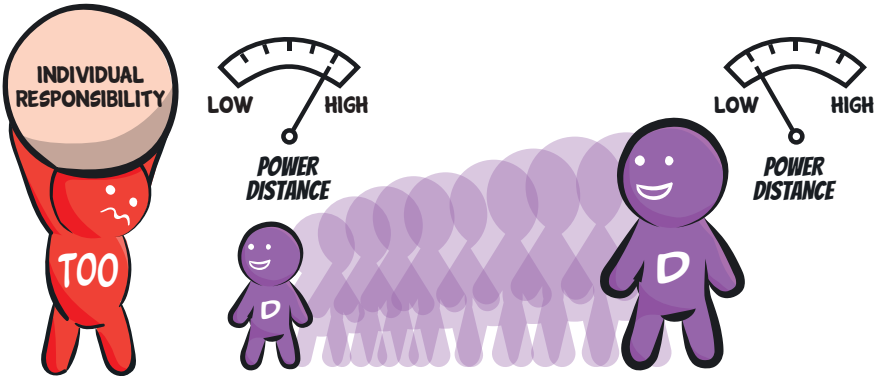
SCENE 6:
HOW CAN WE HELP PEOPLE STUCK IN THIS ROLE WHILE INCREASING TEAM SELF ORGANIZATION AND CROSS FUNCTIONALITY?

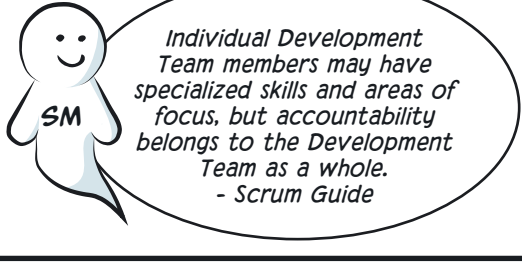
I RESPECT PRACTITIONERS WHO FEEL THAT ONE PERSON PER TEAM PLAYING THIS ROLE IS APPROPRIATE ***FOR THEIR SITUATION***.

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.



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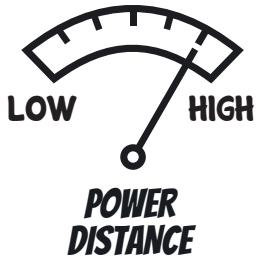
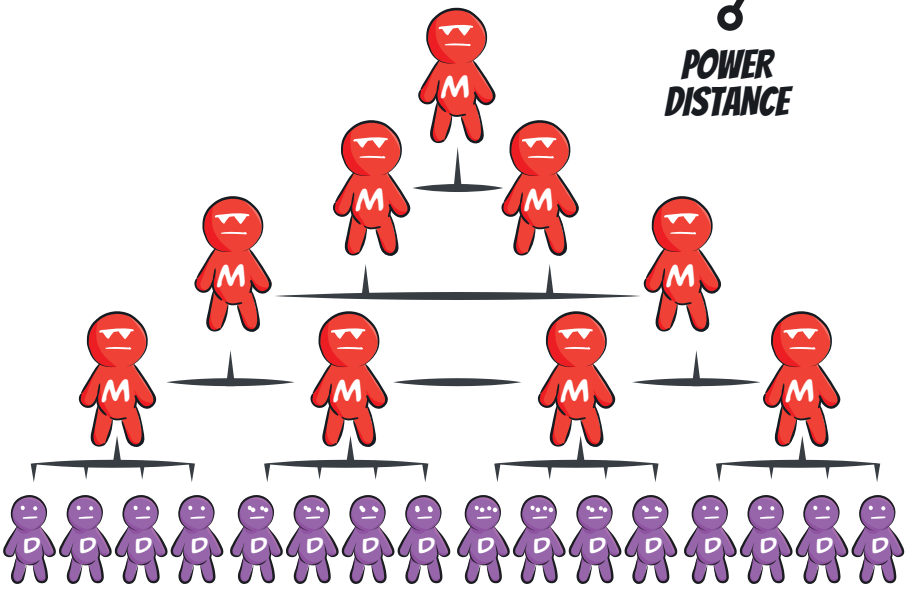
BUT IN ***TYPICAL*** ORGANIZATIONS, PEOPLE ARE INFLUENCED BY LAYERS AND TITLES.





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.

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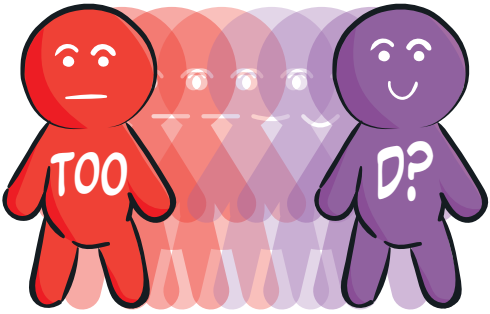
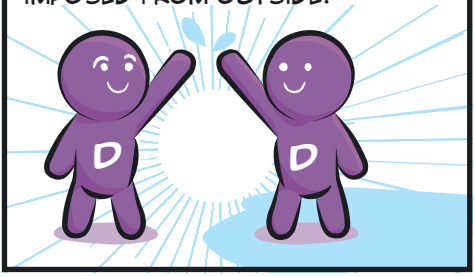
TO AVOID ADDING UNNECESSARY LAYERS, CONSIDER THE REASON SCRUM HAS ONLY THREE ROLES, AND THE POWER OF ROLE-FREE TEAM SELF ORGANIZATION



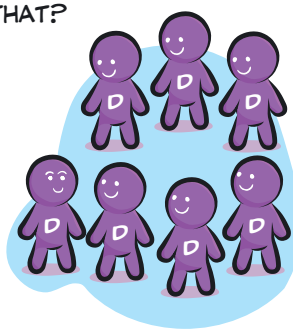
... WHEN THE SCRUM MASTER AND MANAGEMENT CREATE THE ENVIRONMENT THAT ALLOWS IT.

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.

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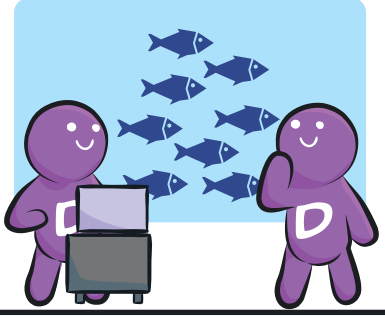
SCENE 7:
WHY IS IT UNNECESSARY TO CREATE NEW ROLES SUCH AS "CHIEF PRODUCT OWNER"?

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,

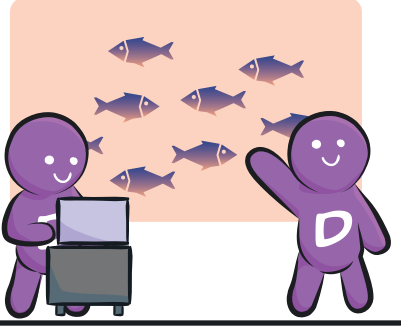
NOT WHAT WAS EASIEST FOR THEM IN THE PAST.

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.



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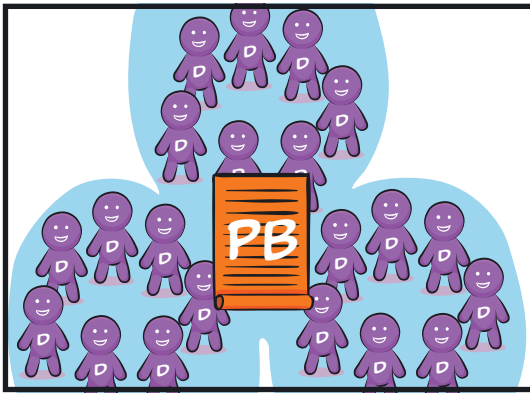
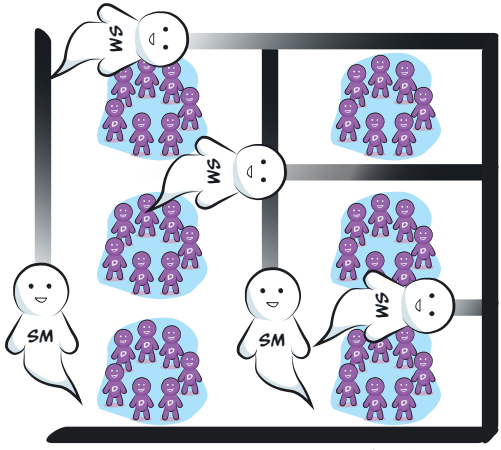


OF COURSE TEAMS WON'T BECOME INTERCHANGEABLE.

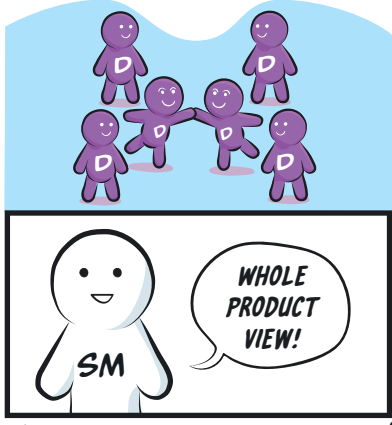
THAT'S SOMETHING THEY CAN WORK OUT WITH EACH OTHER AS THEY **DECIDE FOR THEMSELVES** WHICH TEAMS WILL DO WHICH PRODUCT BACKLOG ITEMS EACH SPRINT.

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.



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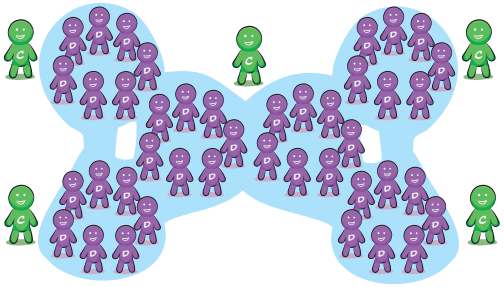
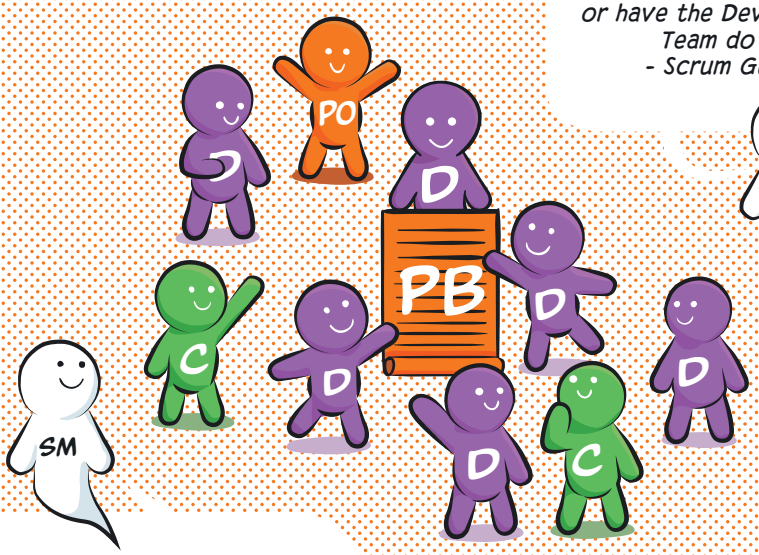
I'D ALSO WANT TO REMOVE BARRIERS PREVENTING DEVELOPERS FROM GETTING DETAILED CLARIFICATION FROM CUSTOMERS SO ***WE DON'T NEED TO SPOON-FEED DEVELOPERS*** ANYMORE.



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.

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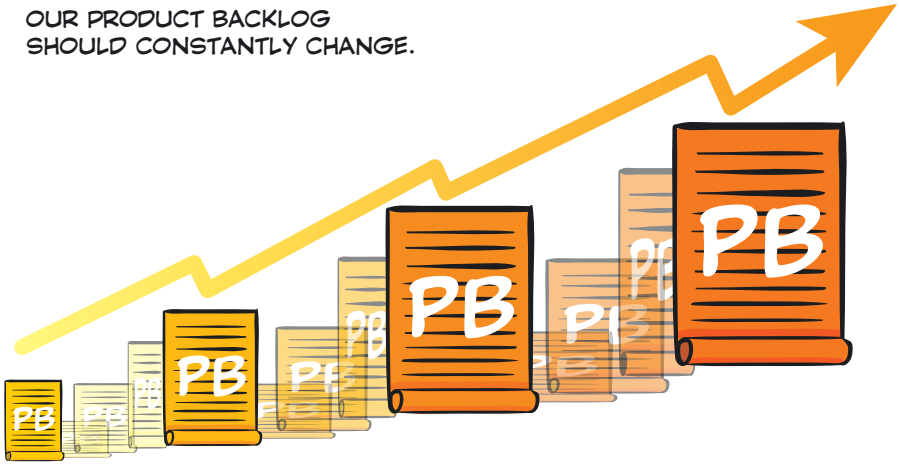
OUR PRODUCT BACKLOG SHOULD CONSTANTLY CHANGE.



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.***

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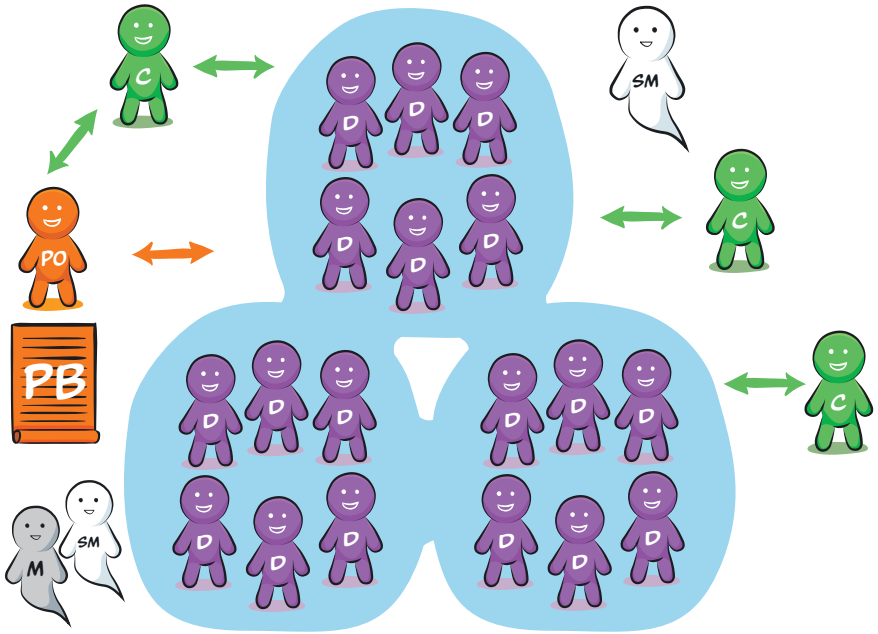

ONE PRODUCT OWNER AND ONE PRODUCT BACKLOG DESCRIBE THE ***WHAT.***

CUSTOMER CAN BE DIRECTLY CONSULTED BY DEVELOPERS, AVOIDING HANDOFFS.

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

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.

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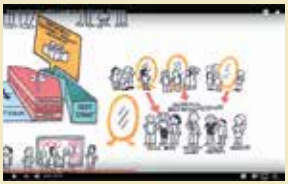
IF YOU WANT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT HOW TO DEAL WITH THE PROBLEMS DESCRIBED IN THIS STORY,

WATCH



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

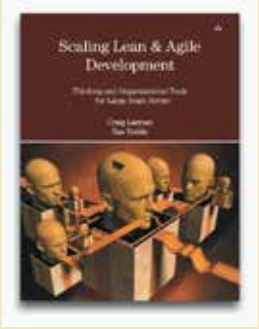
VISIT

https://less.works.

FIRST READ

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

THEN READ

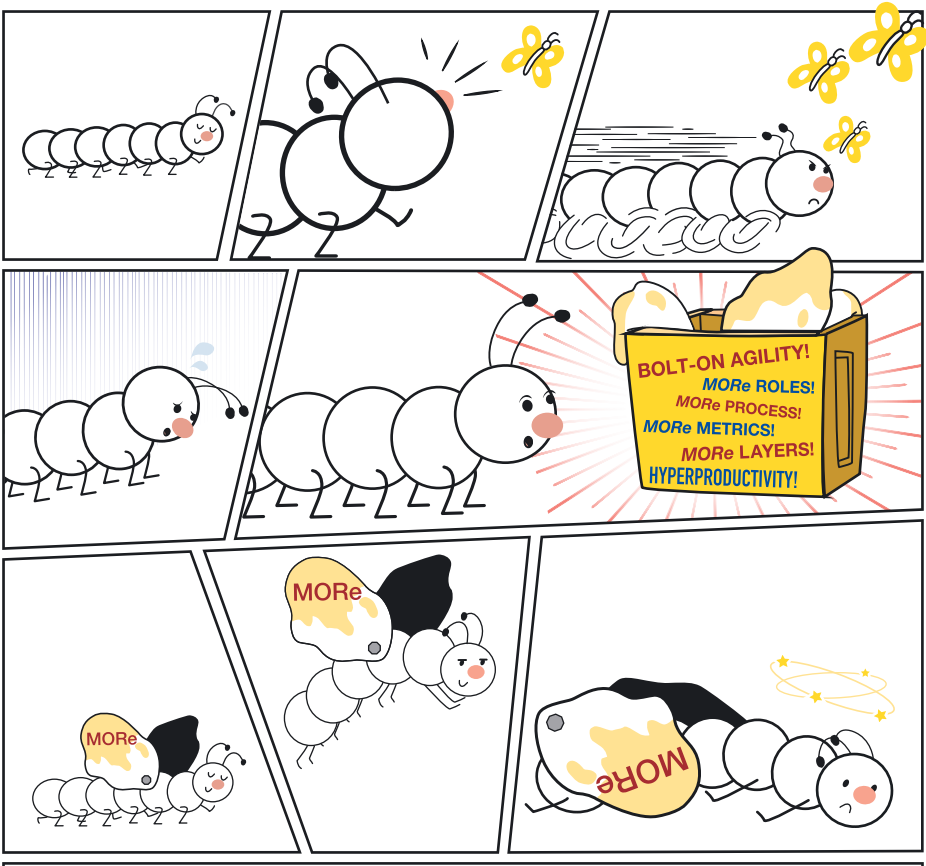


Scaling Lean & Agile Development, Larman/Vodde (2008).

THEN READ

Practices for Scaling Lean & Agile Development, 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
or tweet him at @michaeldotjames.



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