

How To Identify Agile “Masquerades”? What Alternatives Can We Offer Instead?

Presented @ Agile Munich Meetup

About Gene

Gene Gendel is an organizational design specialist, agile/lean coach and trainer, consultant and adviser to senior leadership. Almost 15 of 20+ years of his professional experience – Gene dedicated to working with companies of various sizes and lines of business, trying to help them improve internal dynamics, organizational structure and becoming a better place to work. Gene engages at all organizational levels: senior- and mid-level management, teams and individuals. In his work, Gene uses various methods, tools and techniques to amplify learning by others and to ensure that people gain autonomy after Gene “coaches himself out of the job”.

Gene is Certified Agile Coach (CAC), by Scrum Alliance – small elite community of Scrum Alliance Certified Enterprise Coaches (CEC). Today, he is the only CEC who resides in NY State. Gene is also one of the co-creators of Team Level Coaching Certifications (CTC) program for Scrum Alliance.

Gene is also one of very few Certified LeSS Trainers (CLT) that are based in the United States.

He is also well-recognized blogger and publisher. He is the author of Adaptive Ecosystems: Collection of Independent Essays About Agility and co-author of:

- Agile Coaching: Wisdom from Practitioners (free pdf).
- Best Agile Articles of 2017 and 2018



Gene significantly contributes to global and local agile communities, where he influences people by running workshops, webinars, seminars, panel discussions, lunch & learn, coaching retreats, professional gatherings and other events. While teaching and coaching Large Scale Scrum (LeSS) to organizations, Gene has built the biggest in world (today) LeSS meetup community that is used as a free educational hub about LeSS available to many people.

Assets To Consider

- gg_nyc@yahoo.com (underscore)
- <https://www.linkedin.com/in/ggnyc/>
- <http://www.keystepstosuccess.com/contact-us/>
- <https://www.meetup.com/Large-Scale-Scrum-LeSS-in-NYC/>
- https://join.slack.com/t/kstsconsulting/shared_invite/zt-ege93ww2-h_IAPArcR8CyujNi2umlKw (Gene's free Slack channel – ask questions about LeSS)
- [6/03-05 \(14:30 EST\) Certified LeSS Basics](#)



Pessimism vs. Realism



Not Me



Not Me



Me

...and hopefully...



Me

Important

Organizational STRUCTURE –

is the 1st Order Factor (Variable) that has impact on everything else inside ECOSYSTEM.

Everything else just follows: culture, mindset, behaviors, norms, values, processes, policies

This is what some less experienced agile coaches do not stress, when they coach senior management 😞

Important

Larman's Laws of Organizational Behavior

([Russian translation here](#))

After decades of observation and organizational consulting, here are *Larman's Laws of Organizational Behavior*. These are observations rather than laws to follow ;)

- 1. Organizations are implicitly optimized to avoid changing the status quo middle- and first-level manager and “specialist” positions & power structures.**
- 2. As a corollary to (1), any change initiative will be reduced to redefining or overloading the new terminology to mean basically the same as status quo.**
- 3. As a corollary to (1), any change initiative will be derided as “purist”, “theoretical”, “revolutionary”, “religion”, and “needing pragmatic customization for local concerns” — which deflects from addressing weaknesses and manager/specialist status quo.**
- 4. As a corollary to (1), if after *changing the change* some managers and single-specialists are still displaced, they become “coaches/trainers” for the change, frequently reinforcing (2) and (3).**

5. Culture follows structure.

Or, *Culture/behavior/mindset follows system & organizational design*. i.e., If you want to really change culture, you have to start with changing structure, because culture does not really change otherwise. By the way, this is an observation in large-scale; in small start ups, it's the reverse: structure follows culture (org design follows mindset).

And “culture follows structure” (in large scale) is why deep systems of thought such as *organizational learning* are not very sticky or impactful by themselves in large scale, and why systems such as Scrum (that have a strong focus on structural change at the start) tend to more quickly impact culture — if the structural change implications of Scrum are actually realized.

I discovered that the well-known systems-thinker/advocate John Seddon also observed this: “*Attempting to change an organization's culture is a folly, it always fails. Peoples' behavior (the culture) is a product of the system; when you change the system peoples' behavior changes.*”

Important

It is vital to appreciate that organizational agility cannot be achieved by a development team in isolation -- it is a system challenge for organizational redesign. Especially when you are interested in LeSS within an R&D department of thousands, where each product group may have 200 or 700 people distributed in two or five sites around the world. If an engineering team has the technical capacity to adapt or change quickly, but requirements management, legal practices, product management, HR policies, site strategies, and deployment processes all emphasize rigidity, conformance to original plans, conformance to the status quo, and slow practices, then how can there be real agility?

Source: <https://www.scrumalliance.org/community/spotlight/craig-larman/june-2015/less-agile-or-less-agile>



<http://www.keystepstosuccess.com/2017/08/agile-organization-as-a-sushi-roll/>

Big problem

“Triple Taxation” on Client Companies

Big Consultancies
(supported by
recruiting agencies),
advising of “Tool +
Framework” Big-Bang
Agile Transformations

“Agile” Tools,
supportive of
Big Bang “Agile
Frameworks”

Large,
Commercially
Successful **“Big-
Bang Agile”
Frameworks”**



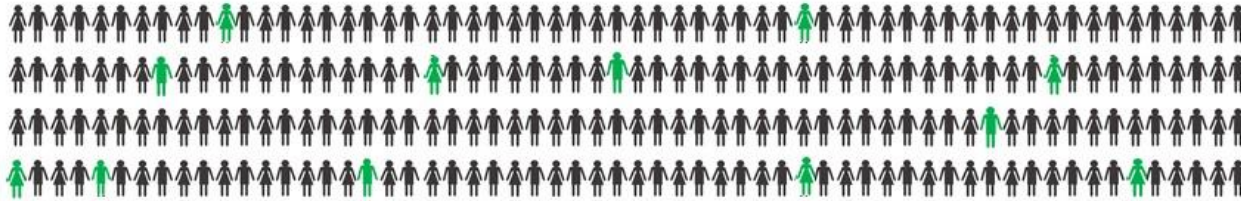
Avoid This:



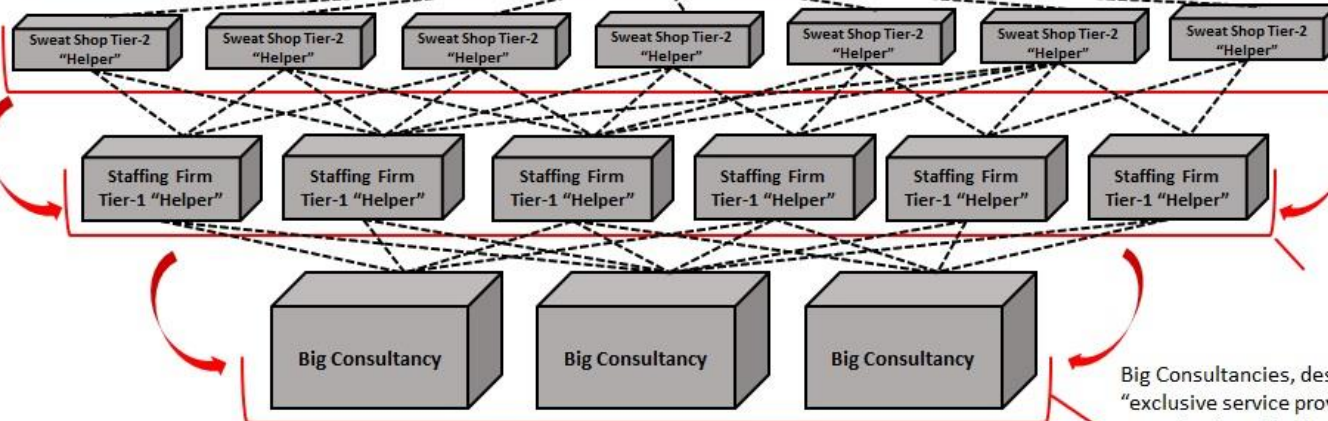
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Big problem

“Resource-Processing Food Chain”



A huge pool of workers, with the word “agile”, in their public profile. Majority of these people are at risk of being displaced from their traditional roles, now wanting to become agile coaches, as per Larman’s Law #4. Amongst them, there is a tiny fraction of **really experienced coaches** that are very hard to find in this huge mix.



Remote site-based, “boiler room” - “sweat-shop” style companies, full of VOIP cold-callers that call, text and email every person, whose public profile contains the word “agile” - this is an “agile leads” generation factory. **People work for an extremely low pay.**

Staffing firms, aggressively trying to hunt for resources, while using primitive (border-line unethical) screening techniques, to submit a heavy volume of profiles to Big Consultancies. **People work for a very small mark-up fee.**

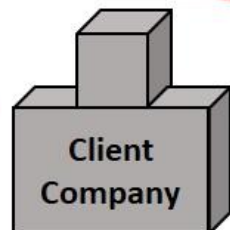
Big Consultancies, desperately fighting for an opportunity to become an “exclusive service provider” to Client. While not having their own internal expertise (usually, their consultants are *not* coaches), to meet Client’s needs, they now have to hunt for additional resources to fill a gap. **Big Consultancies charge Client Companies a lot of money.**

Client Companies that have a shortage of their own internal agile expertise to meet demand for quality training, coaching and organizational design advisory. They naively rely on “best practices” and thick power point decks, presented by Large Consultancies – long time preferred vendors that are great at traditional staffing and cookie-cutting “installations” of heavy frameworks.

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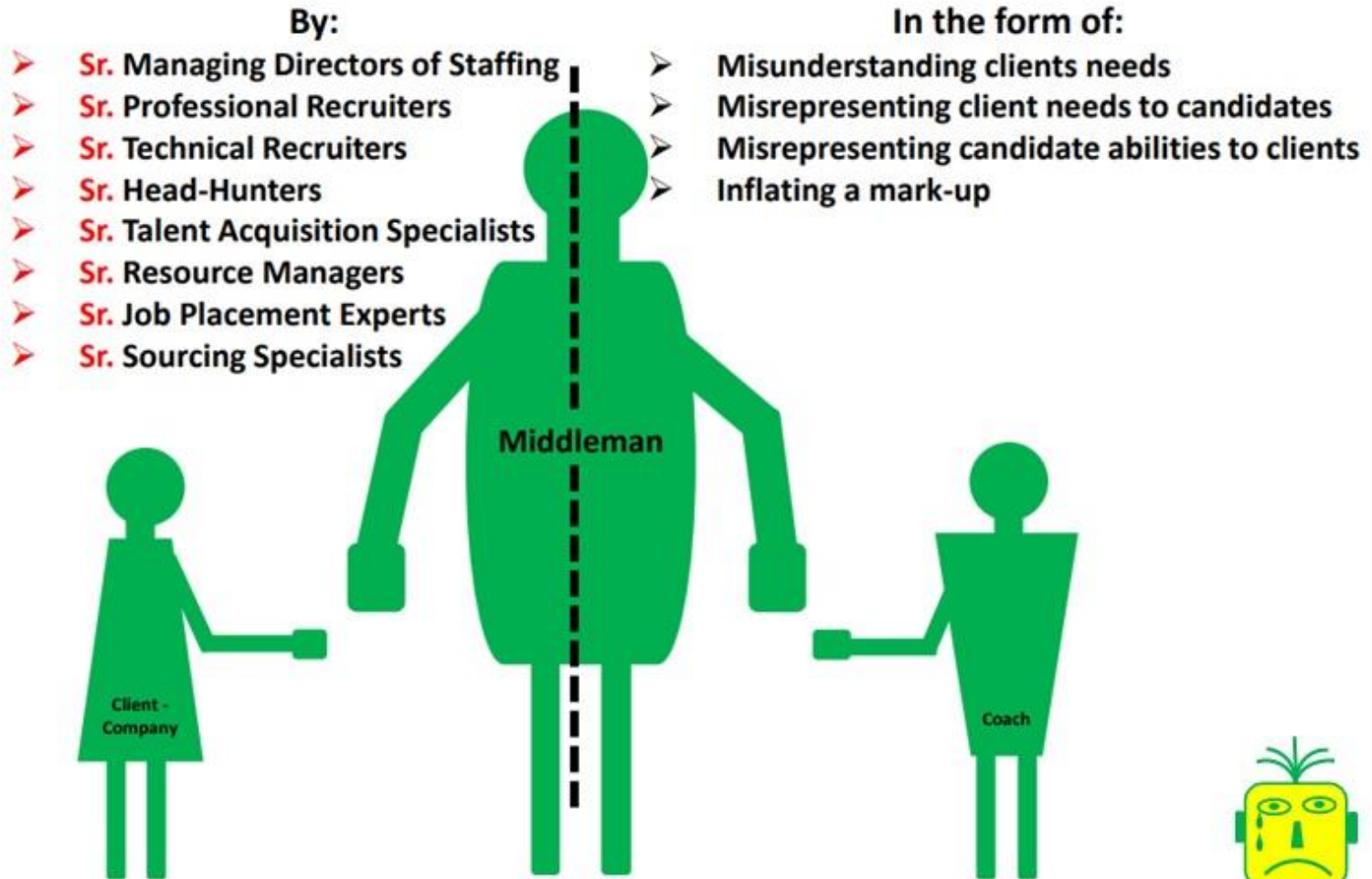


Avoid This:



Big problem

Middleman Problem: Low (very) Value Proposition



Avoid This:

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Big problem - Exposed

05/05 – LESS TALKS: DAVE SNOWDEN: ANSWERING TOUGH QUESTIONS (Q&A)

🕒 MAY 5, 2020 👤 GENE 💬 LEAVE A COMMENT ✎ EDIT



A great talk today (this is round 2), with **Dave Snowden** (round 1 was on [04/20](#)), who took on some provocative and pretty powerful questions. All points that Dave made were strong.



Here is one that resonated really strong (the quote in blue below is semi-transcribed/paraphrased, starting from about 4 min 20 sec in the video recording below):

"...SAFe is perfect for big consultancy firms...

With big consultancies, when the ratio between a principal and a doer (partner and consultant) is up to about from 1:5 to 1:10 – apprentice model.

With ratio of above 1:15 – it becomes an industrial model (you have to "feed" a lot of people), when you get more structured processes and recipes.

This is why big consultancies want high utilization and long-term projects, [using] Six Sigma, BPR, SAP...etc.

What they like is a massive roll out, with lots of people, over a long period of time.

What they DONT like, are small improvements in the present.

...So you [if you are a client company] are better off working with small consultancies, not big consultancies...."

<http://www.keystepstosuccess.com/2020/05/05-05-less-talks-dave-snowden-answering-tough-questions-qa/>

Big problem



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Cyber Vigilance is important. Spam. Plagiarism. Impersonation.

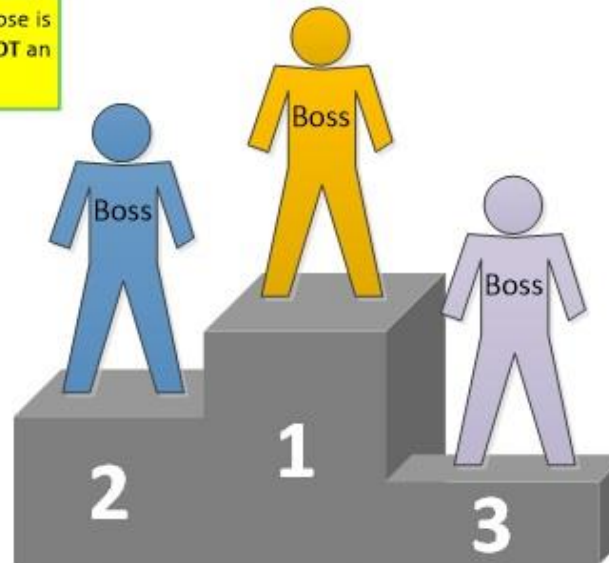
<https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:6579194210258345984/>

Big problem

Attention: This graphic is a cartoon and its purpose is to expose a dysfunction through irony. This is **NOT** an invitation to experiment with this approach ☹.



Agile “Semi-Finals” Race



EoY Agility: 45.373% 67.924% 37.184%

Agile Maturity Level: 12.3455 16.9729 7.1223

Rewards:



Organizational Agility Meter:

4 5 . 3 7 3 9 9 . 4 %

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Different Ways To Teach

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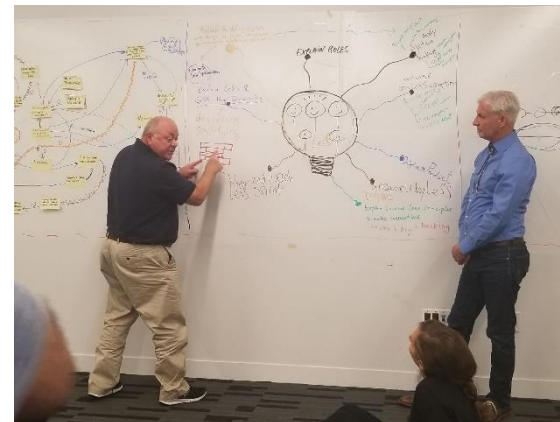
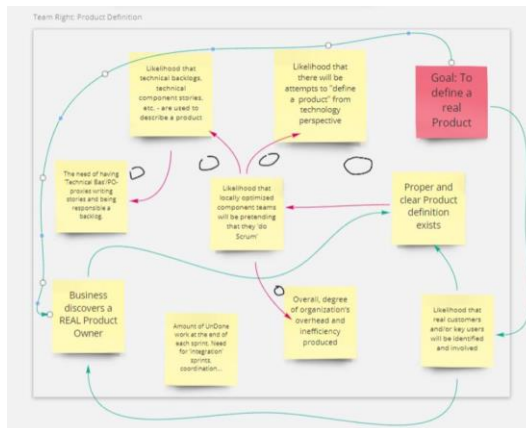
**Avoid
(Deck – Driven Transformations)**

DDT

Knowledge retention and quality of learning are inversely proportional to thickness of a power point 'agile transformation' deck and directly proportional to font size used in a deck ;)

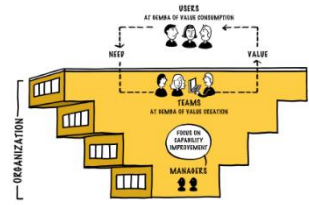
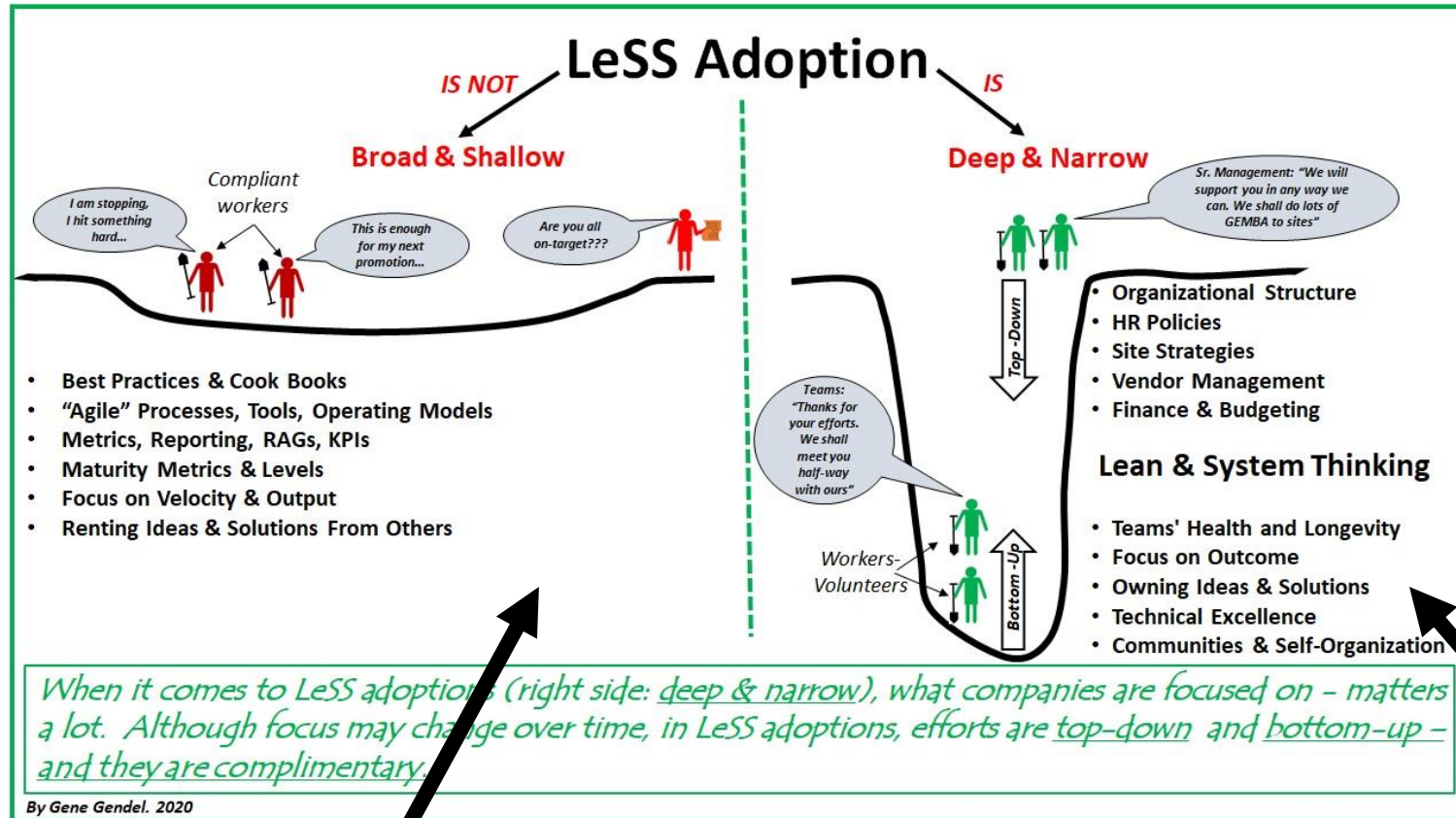


Masquerade



Alternative

Masquerade: Superficial Adoptions



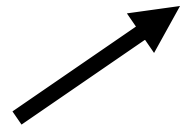
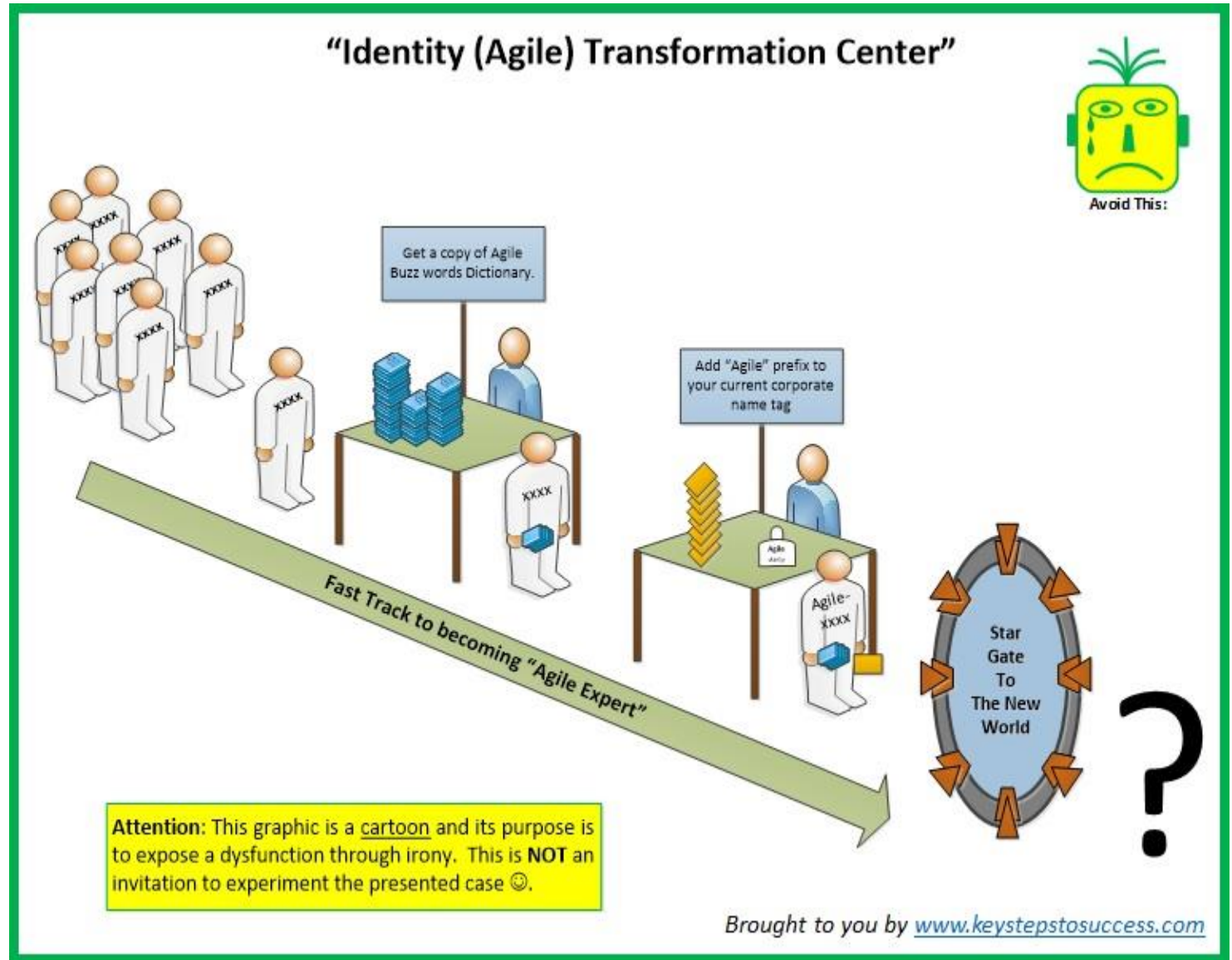
Masquerade

Three LeSS Adoption Principles

- Deep and narrow over broad and shallow
- Top-down and bottom-up
- Use volunteering

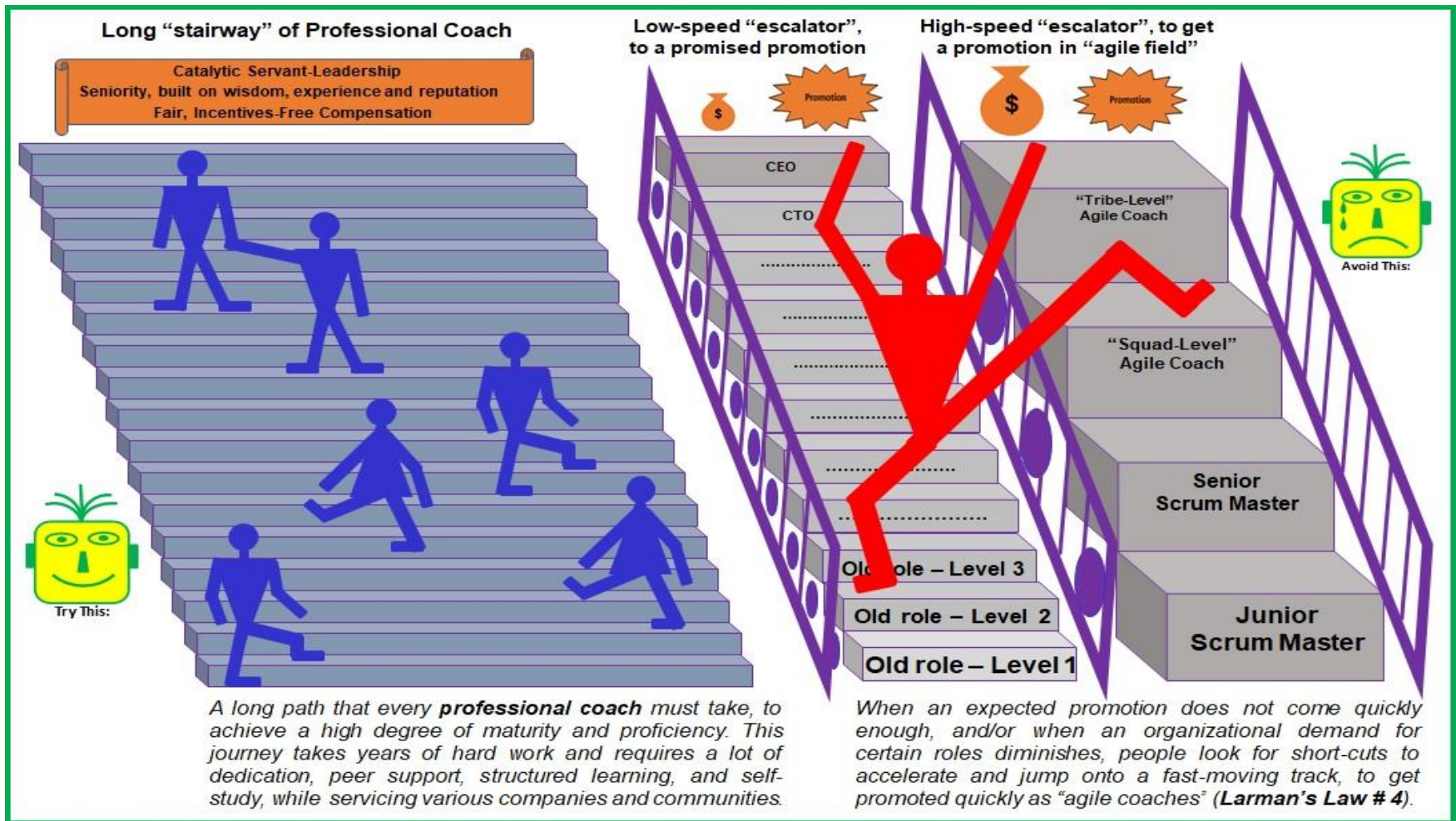
Alternative

Agile Fast-Trackers



Masquerade

Agile Fast-Trackers



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Alternative

Masquerade

Title Relabeling



Bad SQL

(in HR Database)

It is amazing if your company, creates the following important titles (marked in **red**) in its HR database, to support agile roles and careers. However, it is a sign of a deep systemic dysfunction and 'agile masquerade', if the following SQL queries are ran, as a batch job, overnight... @.

```
UPDATE table_employee
  SET table_employee.title = 'Senior Agile Coach'
WHERE table_employee.title = 'Senior Project Manager'
```

```
UPDATE table_employee
  SET table_employee.title = 'Scrum Master'
WHERE table_employee.title = 'Junior Project Manager'
```

```
UPDATE table_employee
  SET table_employee.title = 'Product Owner'
WHERE table_employee.title = 'Business Analyst'
```

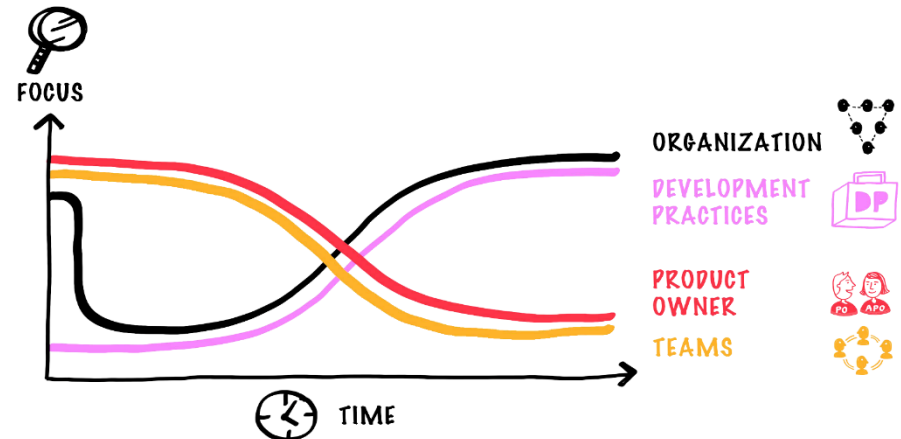
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Masquerade

Alternative

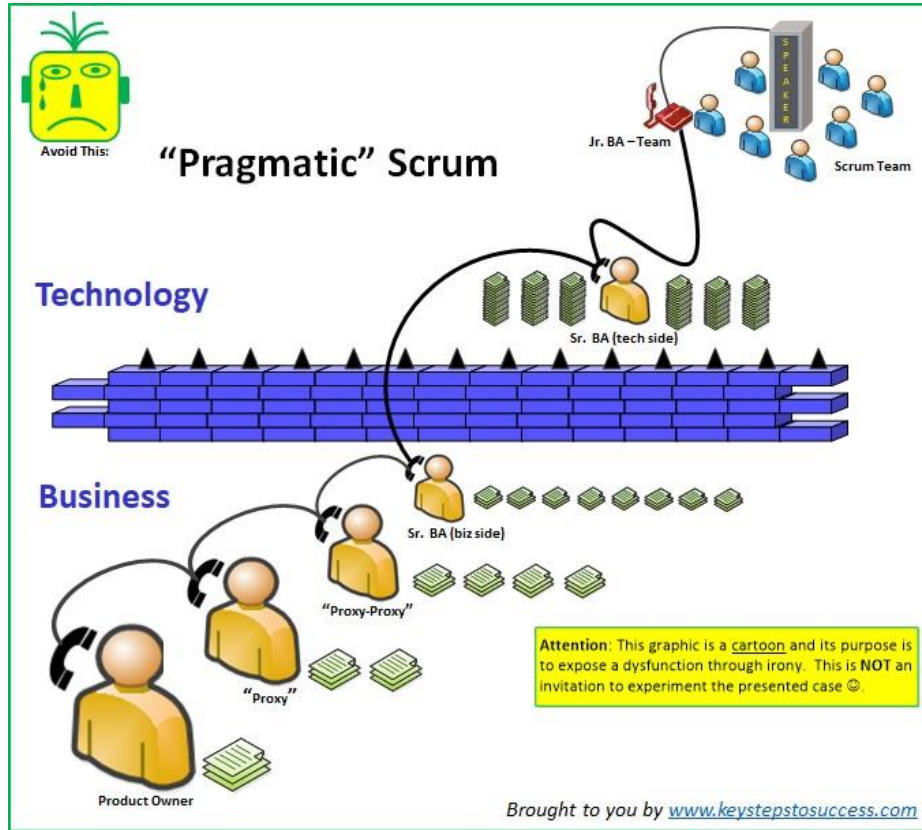
Dedicated full-time role

In LeSS, the ScrumMaster role is vital. We've seen many organizations try part-time ScrumMasters, which usually leads to no ScrumMasters at all. This then affects the LeSS adoption enormously. In LeSS the ScrumMaster is a dedicated, full-time role in the same way that being a Scrum Team member is a dedicated, full-time role. Having said that, it is possible for one full-time ScrumMaster fill the role for up to three teams, depending on any number of factors.

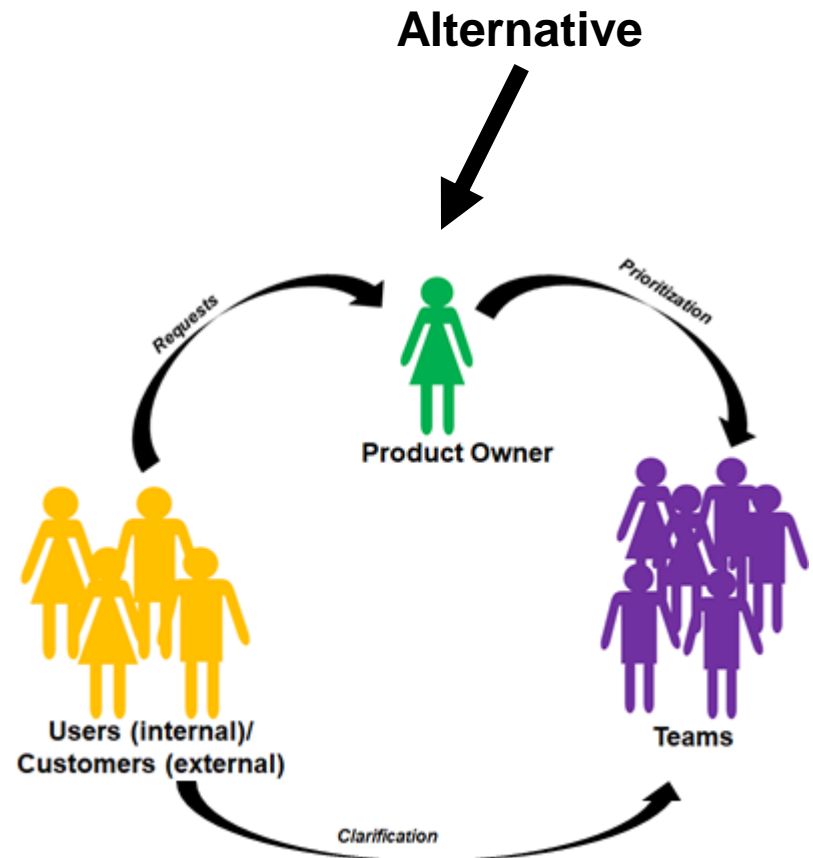


<http://less.works>

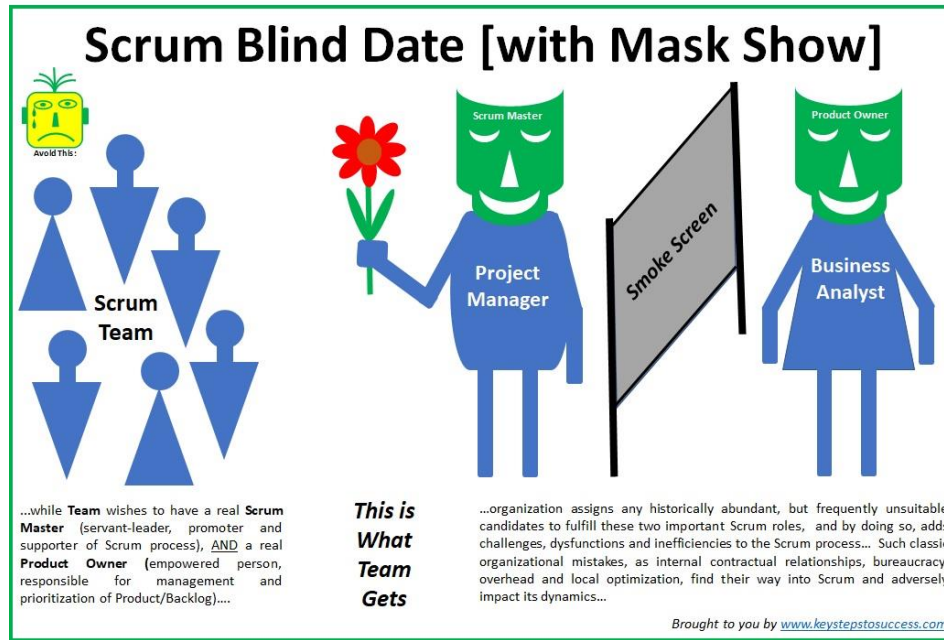
“Pragmatic” Product Ownership



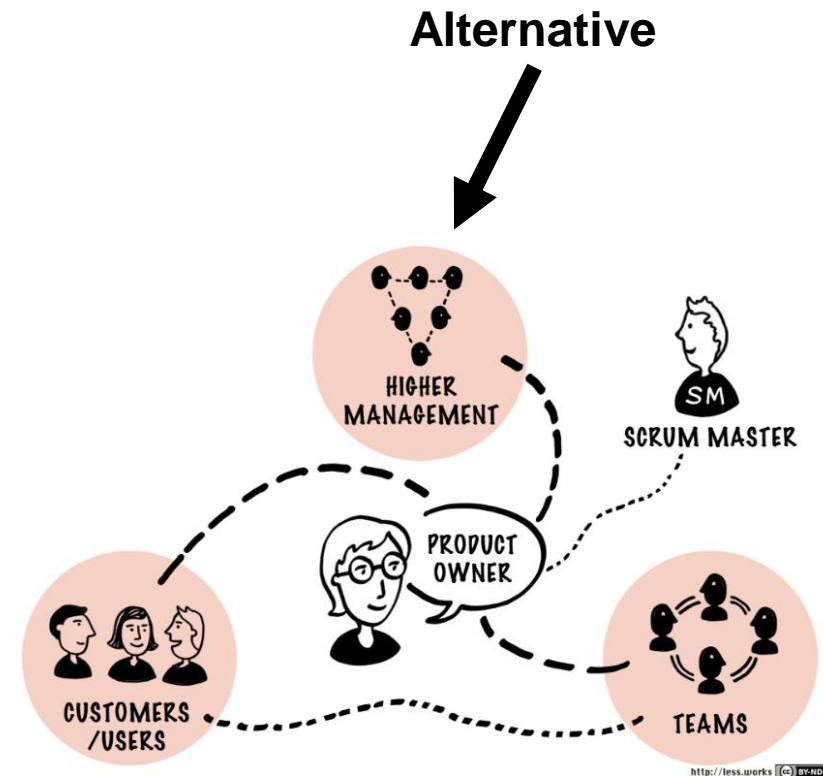
Masquerade



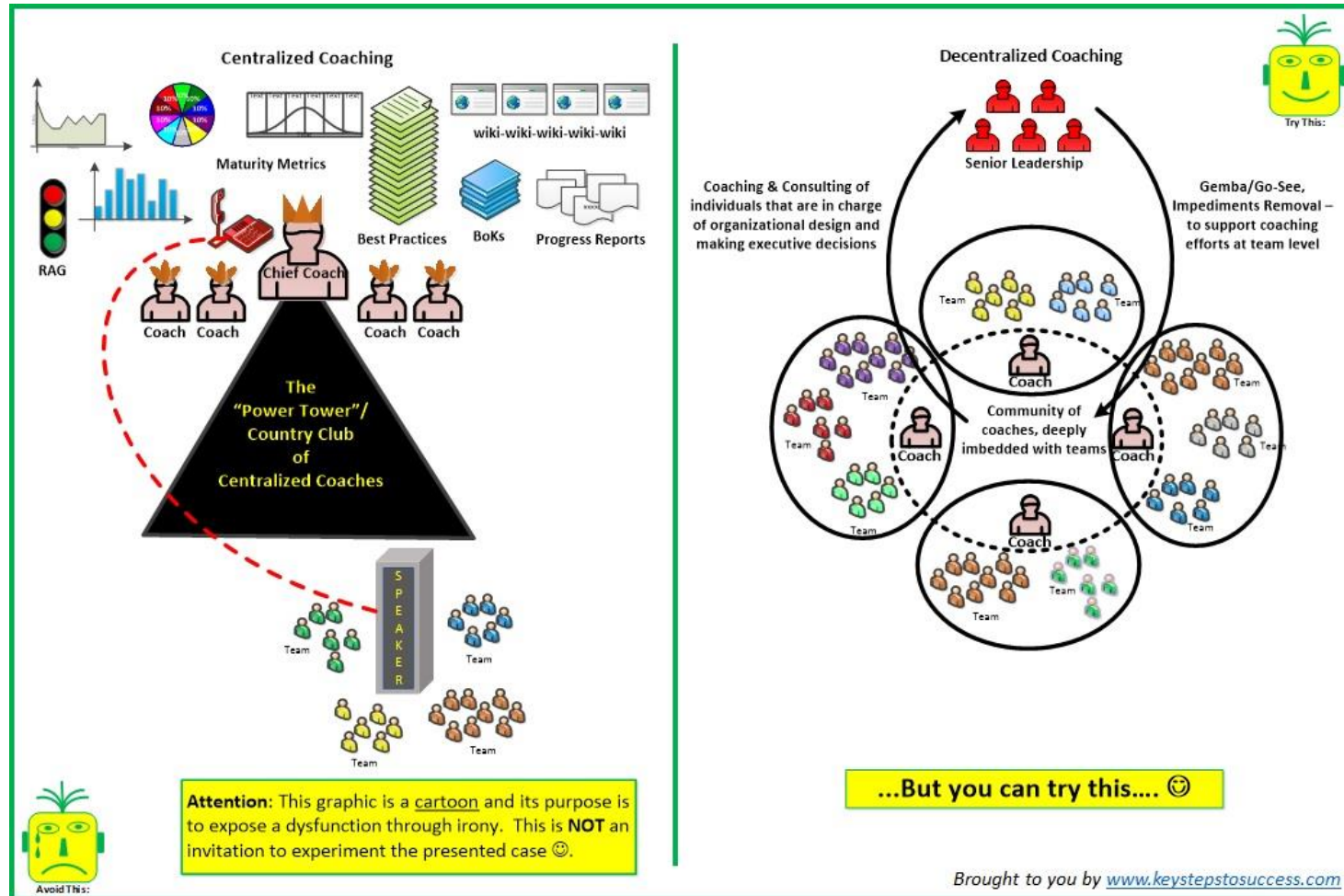
Scrum “Blind Date”



Masquerade



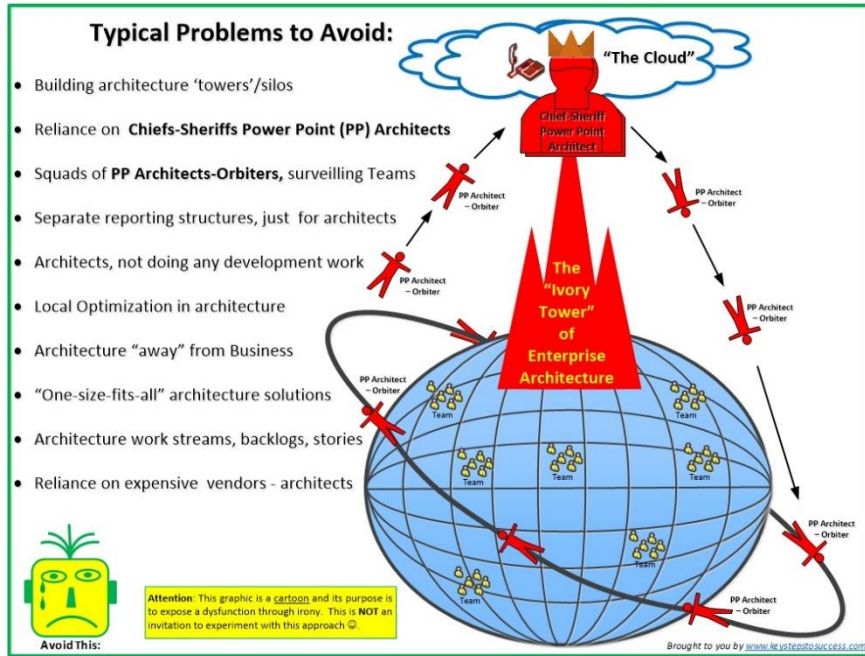
Ivory Towers of “Coaches”



Masquerade

Alternative

Ivory Towers of “PPT Architects”



Masquerade

Alternative


SPECIFICATION BY EXAMPLE


CONTINUOUS DELIVERY


TEST AUTOMATION


CONTINUOUS INTEGRATION


ACCEPTANCE TESTING


THINKING ABOUT TESTING


TECHNICAL EXCELLENCE


ARCHITECTURE & DESIGN

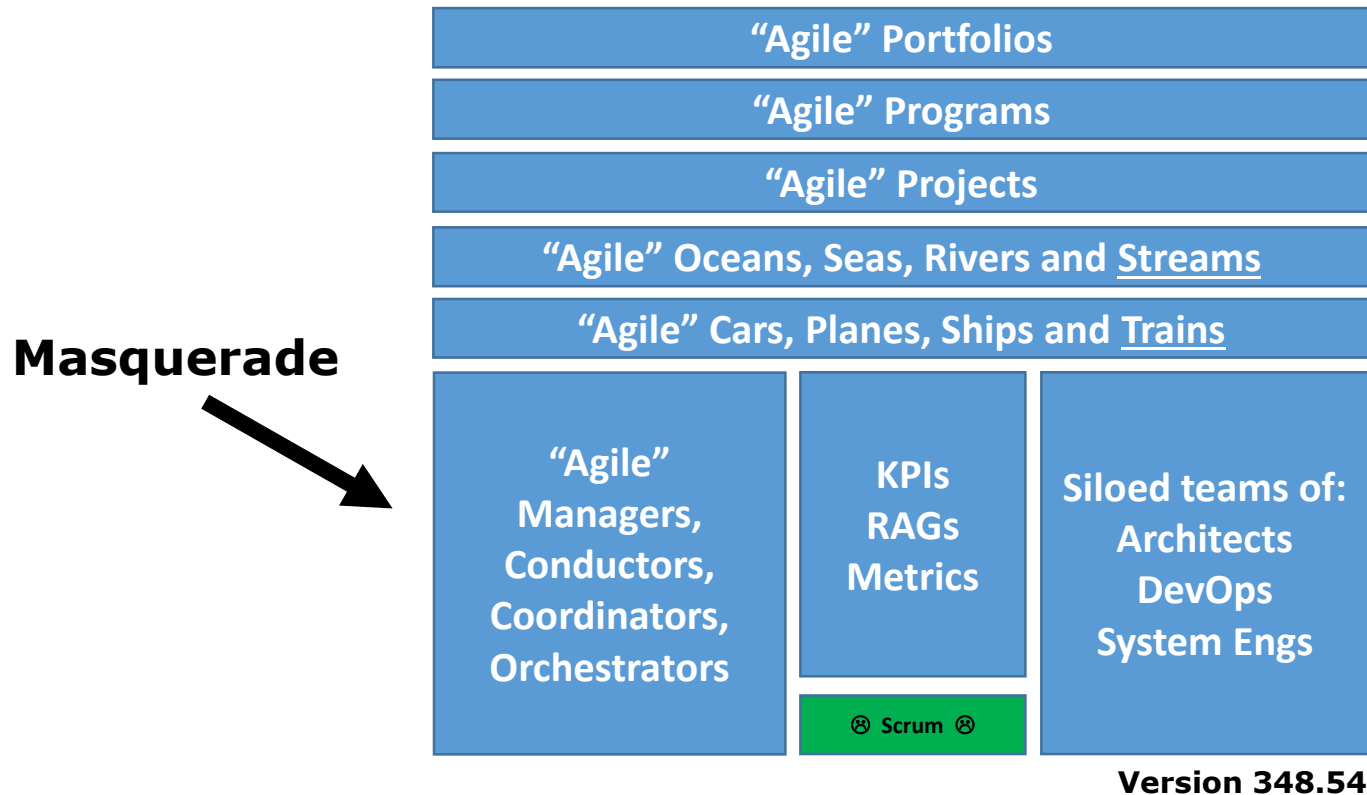

CLEAN CODE


TEST-DRIVEN DEVELOPMENT


UNIT TESTING

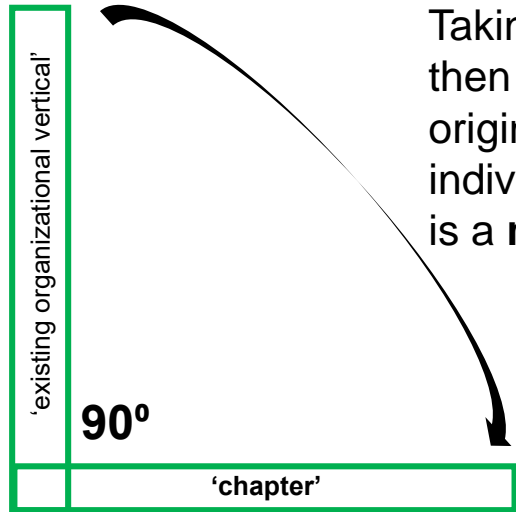
<http://less.works> 

Burying Agility Under Layers of Waste



- Where is customer – centricity?
- Where is a feedback loop between customers and developers?
- Where is real organizational agility/adaptiveness?
- What has changed from what you saw prior to “installation”?

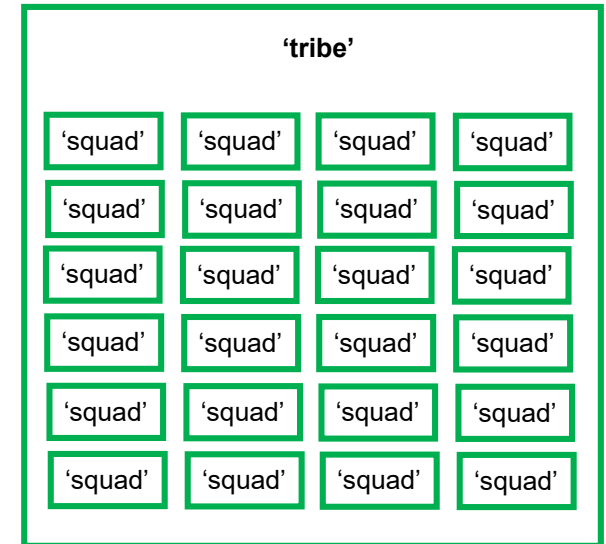
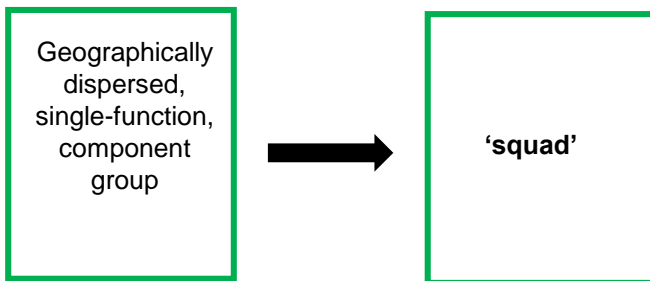
Re-Labeling Existing Organizational Elements



Taking an existing organizational vertical, flipping it on its side, and then calling it a 'chapter', while preserving all elements of the original structure (reporting lines, management relationships, individual performance by 'chapter leads', mandatory participation) - is a **masquerade**

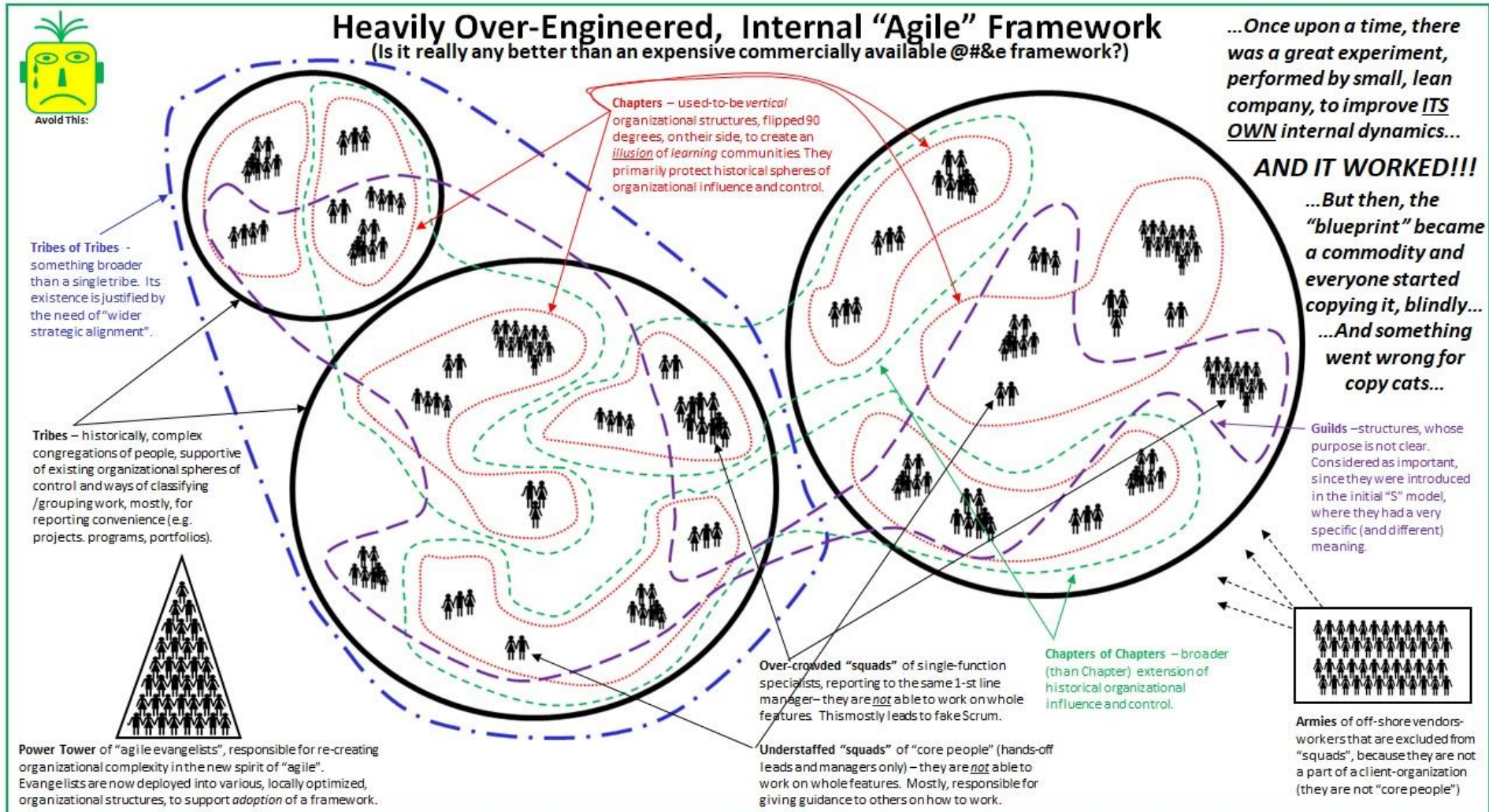
Masquerade

Relabeling large, geographically dispersed, single-function specialist/component group, managed by engagement managers and technical leads (with groups, frequently coming from external vendors, bound by fixed-everything SOWs) into a 'squad' - is a **masquerade**



Taking an existing *portfolio* of *programs* and *projects* (usually, they weakly support customer-centric products) that are worked upon by used-to-be component groups and now 'squads', while relabeling it into a 'tribe' - is a **masquerade**

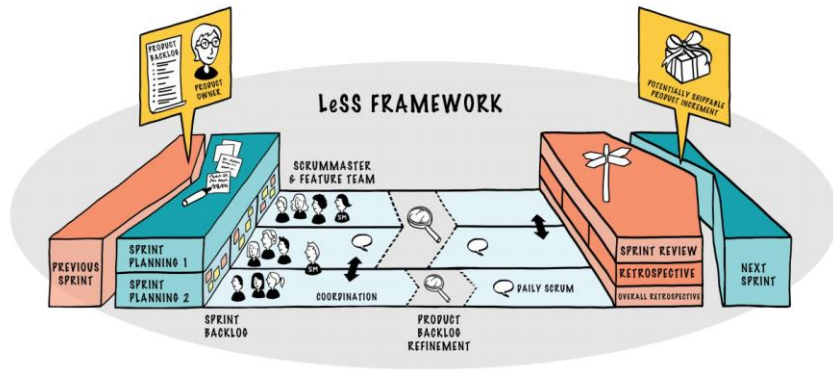
Copy & Pasting Someone Else's Experiment



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Masquerade

Alternative To Copy & Pasting



Real Product Group

<http://less.works>



Real Team (Feature)

Alternative



COMMUNITIES



by

Real Community (for functional learning)

Not To Get Too Political, But...



@americastheme



Manifesto for Agile Software Development

We are uncovering better ways of developing software by doing it and helping others do it.
Through this work we have come to value:

Individuals and interactions over processes and tools
Working software over comprehensive documentation
Customer collaboration over contract negotiation
Responding to change over following a plan

That is, while there is value in the items on the right, we value the items on the left more.

Kent Beck	James Grenning	Robert C. Martin
Mike Beedle	Jim Highsmith	Steve Mellor
Arie van Bennekum	Andrew Hunt	Ken Schwaber
Alistair Cockburn	Ron Jeffries	Jeff Sutherland
Ward Cunningham	Jon Kern	Dave Thomas
Martin Fowler	Brian Marick	

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<http://agilemanifesto.org/>

Q & A

APPENDIX

Less is More

Scaling Organizational Adaptiveness (a.k.a. “Agility”) with Large Scale Scrum (LeSS)

Organizational De-Scaling / Flattening

Organizational de-scaling (flattening) takes months and years to complete and from a high perspective, looks like a gradual process.

However, throughout this long process, there are many phases (bursts) of: comprehensive preparation, followed by a organizational “flipping”.



Diagram created by Gene Gendel

LeSS

Simplified (flatter) and **inverted** (senior leadership is in supportive function) **organizational design**. **System Optimization**. Reduction of: silos, hand-overs. Scrum is implemented by coordinated, feature-centric teams (2-8), building the same, widely defined Product/serving the same Product Owner. Scrum is the main building block of IT org. structure. Teams are collocated. Teams strive to ‘own’ their decisions, not ‘rent’ from others. Adoption of LeSS is “**deep & narrow**”, not “**broad and shallow**”; no Big Bang transformation attempts.

Multi-site development - used for multiple locations. Reliance of technical **Mentoring** and **Communities**. No subsystem code ownership. Reduction of ‘undone’ work. Focus on **Customer value**. Support of Senior Leadership. **Involvement of HR**, supporting the concept of **job security, not role security**.

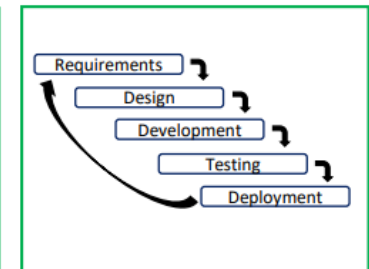
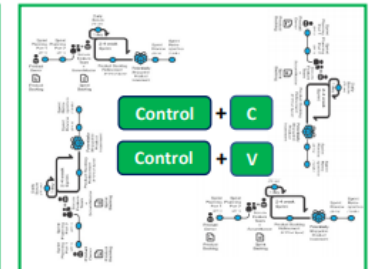
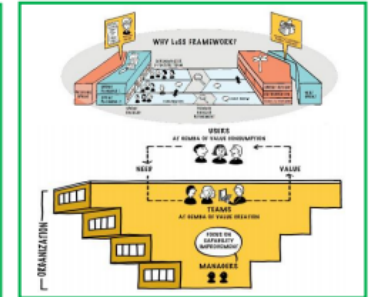
Transition from independent basic Scrum, performed by multiple teams to LeSS, is a desirable approach, when a product is widely defined and real Product Owner is identified

Scrum

Copy-paste scaling (no conscious scaling strategy) of Scrum throughout an organization: many teams doing their ‘own’ Scrum. Frequently manifested, when there is an internal competition between departments or company areas, on e.g. “*who is going to have more scrum teams by e.g. end-of-year*”. True product definition is weak. Cases of using **Scrum for component-centric development** are frequent (often, the result of trying to meet goals of agile transformation (% annually), set at enterprise level. This results in massive integration problems that need to be resolved by adding “*integration/stabilization*” sprints. Importance of **Scrum dynamics and roles** is viewed as **secondary**, to existing organizational structures and blueprints. Too many single-specialty experts and very few T-shaped workers. **No meaningful HR changes**.

Waterfall

Complex organizational design. Domains of single-function expertise, ownership and control. Numerous silos, hand-offs and translational layers between component teams, single-function specialty groups, and technology and business, overall. **Internal contracts and blame-shifting** strongly prevail. Long cycle “from concept to cash”. **Local optimization** by single-specialty workers/departments. **Theory X management** – is the primary way to manage/treat individuals. **HR** – putting a lot of emphasis on performance appraisals and individual ownership; manipulating workers with **subjective bonuses**; fostering an environment of **internal competition** and “*I am the best and you are not*” attitude. Weak definition of product value, from a stand-point of a paying customer. Manifestation of **Larman's Laws of Organizational Behavior**.



Graphics are courtesy of <https://less.works>

Scaling Scrum

Waterfall

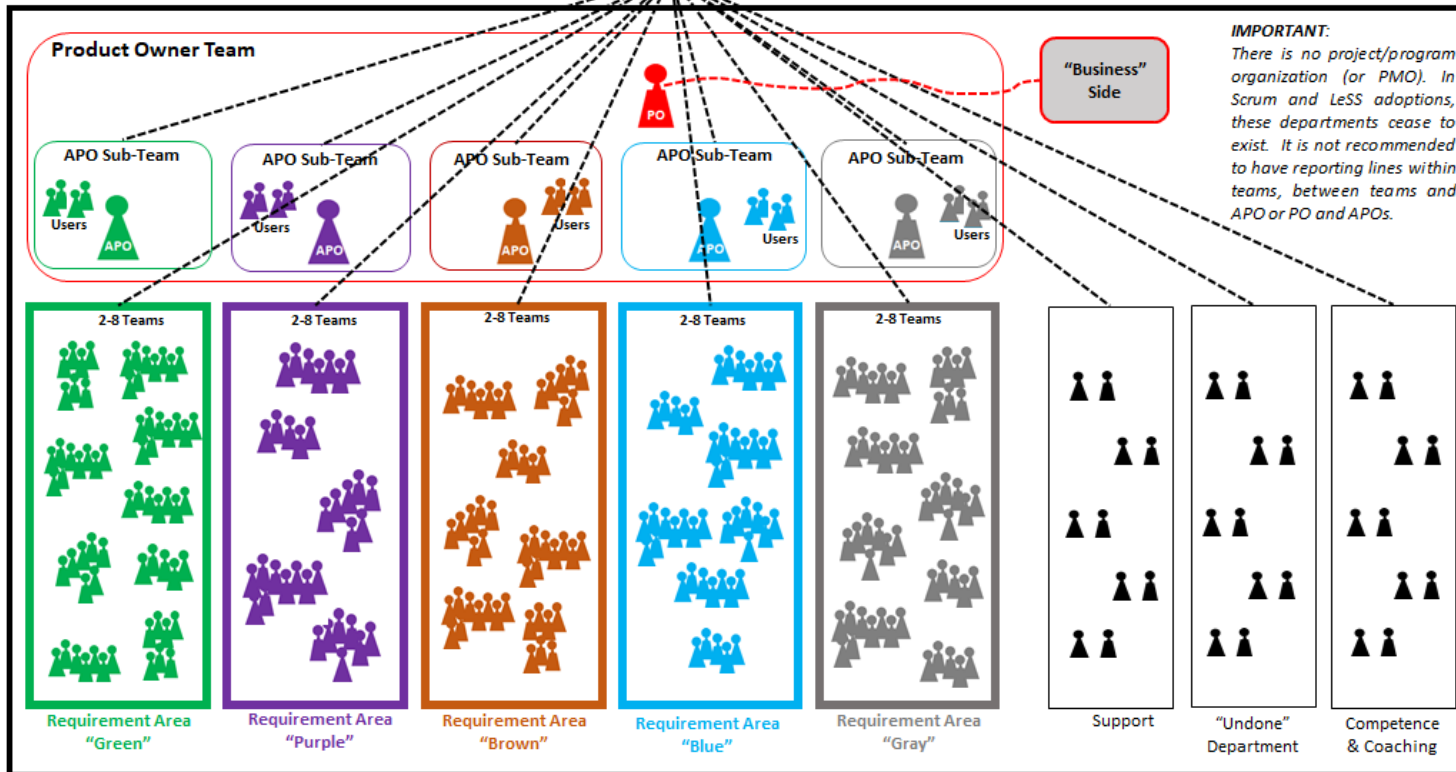
Source: http://www.keystepstosuccess.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/scrum_scaling_org_descaling-1.pdf

Relationships in LeSS

Guide: TRY.... Keeping LeSS Huge Organizational Reporting Structure As Flat and Simple As Possible

Product Owner Team— Product Owner plus all Area Product Owners. Conceptually, the same as in a LeSS structure. In huge LeSS Huge, there are also APO Sub-Teams that are, essentially, what is Product Owner team is in LeSS. Each APO Sub-Team consists of Area Product Owner and customers/users that can help APO with clarification and other daily work (**NOT** departments of analysts, specification writers, UI/UX designers, or architects).

Head of Product Group - most likely, a traditional “head of product group”. Whereas the whole group supports teams by Go See and help them remove obstacles and improve, Head of Product Group plays the *role of the line manager* of all the teams, whatever that is called in your organization. Product Owner Team members (including APO Sub-Teams) and all developers from teams in requirement areas, as well as people in other supportive organizational structures (e.g. support, ‘undone’ department, competence & coaching) -all report to Head of Product Group. **Note:** Since LeSS organizations don’t have matrix structures, there are no dotted-line managers.



Undone department - e.g. test, QA, architecture, or business analysts - they should not exist in the smaller LeSS framework groups; rather, they should be integrated into the teams. Undone department is still frequently seen, in some LeSS adoptions, as they often cross organizational boundaries. A goal in every LeSS adoption should be to remove an undone department.

Support - In a LeSS Huge organization, it typically centralizes some support because of the massive volume of work. Still, this department should be as small as possible with the attitude “How can we help?” rather than “Take it this way!” This department is less likely to exist in smaller LeSS organizations, where teams support each other without the need for a separate, centralized group.

Competence and Coaching (technical, organizational) - group consists of skillful practitioner-experts who actively Go See and observe how people work. They pair up and work with people to discover their training and coaching needs.

By Gene Gendel. 2020