How to find a true Product Owner
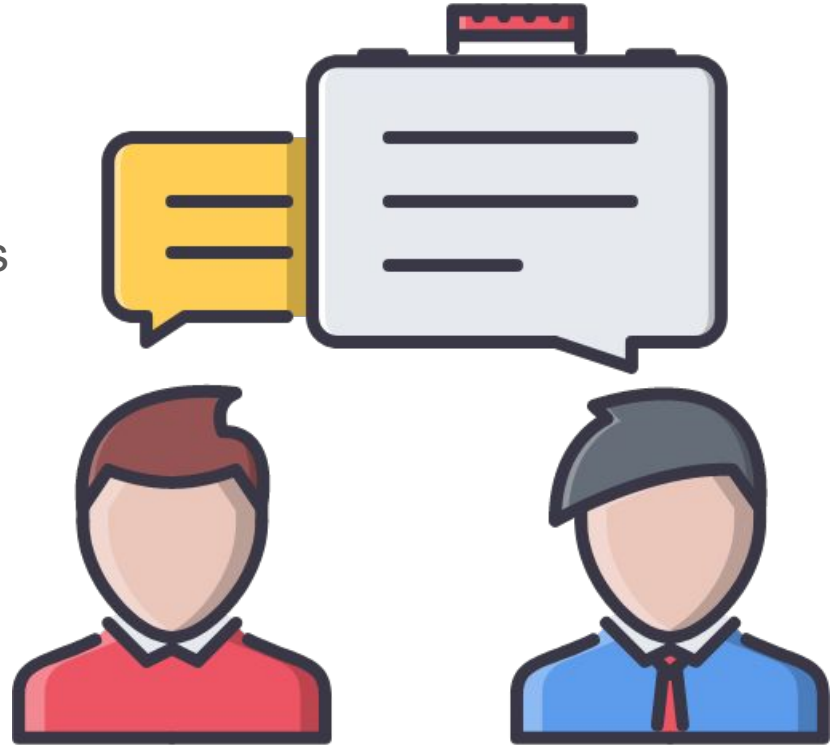
Robert Batůšek,
LeSS conference Warszaw 2022

Exercise - introduction

Form a pair/triple, introduce yourselves, discuss

In your current assignment

- how many Products
- how many Product Owners
- how have POs been chosen

Why does Product Owner choice matter

Why does Product Owner exist

Scrum Guide:

Developing and explicitly communicating the Product Goal

Creating and clearly communicating Product Backlog items

Ordering Product Backlog items

Ensuring that the Product Backlog is transparent, visible and understood.

Centralizing business decision

LeSS Guide: Getting Started

Educate everyone

Define product

Define "done"

Have appropriately structured teams

Only **Product Owner** provides work for the teams

Keep project managers away

Choosing a Product Owner

Product Owner Choices in companies

Analyst

Also:

- solution architect
- systems engineer

Benefits:

- knows the product
- knows the domain
- speaks customer language

Programmer

Also

- tester
- any other technical person

Benefits

- knows the product
- knows the technology
- speaks developer language

Project Manager

Also:

- program manager
- project lead

Benefits:

- broad (but shallow) focus
- has people skills

Manager

Also:

- director
- team lead

Benefits

- he knows the product
- a decision maker

Leads to the following antipatterns
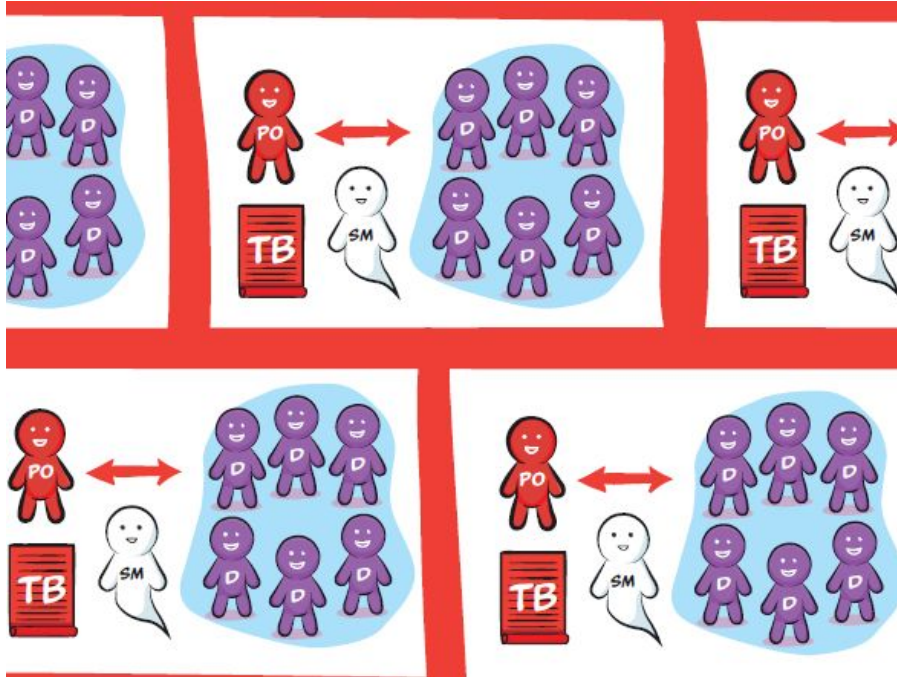
Team Output Owner

Component Owner

Scribe
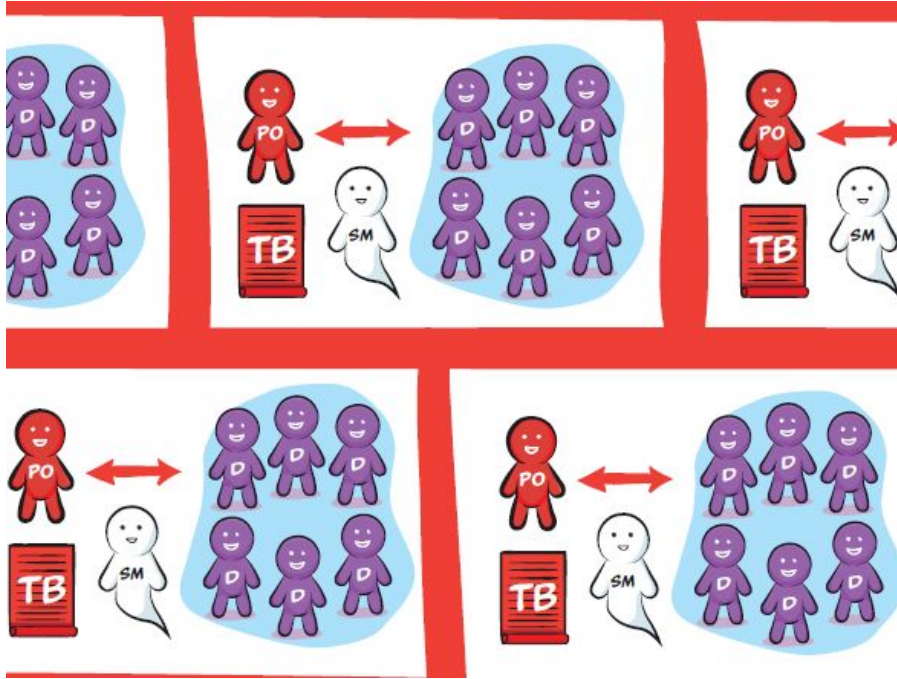
Beggar

Dictator

Hamster

Team Output Owner*

Also

- proxy Product Owner
- technical Product Owner
- delivery manager
- …

Consequences

- multiple Team backlogs instead of one Product Backlog
- multiple "Product Owners" per Product
- man in the middle - needs business counterpart

* term invented by Michael James

Team Output Owner*

Risks

- one or more layers between developers and customers
- need for status reporting
- need for coordination
- loss of information
- overproduction
- feedback delay

* term invented by Michael James

Component Owner

Risks

- focus on technology → the "Product" is not sellable / marketable
- long feedback cycle from users
- need for multiple layers of "POs"
- dependencies

Scribe

Risks

- produces long an detailed documents
- verifying against the specification
- focus is on the tools
- the teams become less educated in the business domain

Beggar

Risks

- doesn't own the budget
- cannot do product-wide decisions

Dictator

Risks

- decisions accepted even if they oversteps PO role "holds an invisible gun"
- conflict of interests between the product and the system

Hamster

Risks

- little availability (he has too much on the plate)
- easily distracted

Committee

Consequences

- teams prioritize work for the person with the highest impact on their careers

And BTW Scrum Guide: "The Product Owner is one person, not a committee."

Why do fake Product Owners exist?

Definition of the Product in the Scrum Guide

A product is a vehicle to deliver value. It has a clear boundary, known stakeholders, well-defined users or customers. A product could be a service, a physical product, or something more abstract.
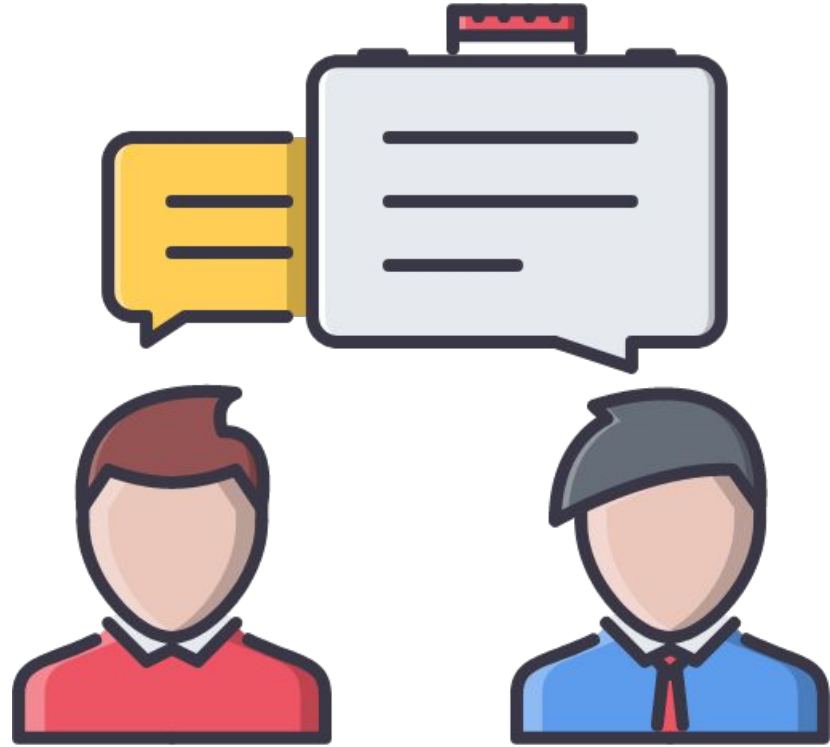
Test framework

- clear boundary

- known stakeholders

- well-defined users

Exercise - fake products

Find other fake products from your life that fit Scrum Guide definition.

A product is a vehicle to deliver value. It has a clear boundary, known stakeholders, well-defined users or customers. A product could be a service, a physical product, or something more abstract.

Copy-paste Scrum

By misunderstanding of Scrum Guide

Scrum Guide: *"Scrum teams … should share the same Product Goal, Product Backlog, and Product Owner"*

Scrum Guide 2020 change: *"There is now just one Scrum Team … with three different sets of accountabilities: PO, SM, and Developers."*

Copying the whole Development Team - Scrum Master - Product Owner structure

Communication myth

Myth: "Teams and customers speak different languages"

we establish a translator from a business language to a technical language

so that they can focus on coding and deliver features faster

Efficiency myth

With multiple Product Owners …

we can have each team focus on one feature

and deliver features faster

Change resistance

Larman's law #1: *"Organizations are implicitly optimized to avoid changing the status quo middle- and first-level manager and "specialist" positions & power structures."*

Renaming business analyst or program manager to "Product Owner" is the way of least resistance

Power games

The more people I have at my command, the more important manager I am

Therefore, Product Owner will report to me and I will have many of them.

Incentives

I have been made responsible* for this feature and I have other things on my plate so I need someone to execute it for me

* my bonuses depend on it

How to find a better fit for a PO

LeSS Guide: Getting Started

Educate everyone

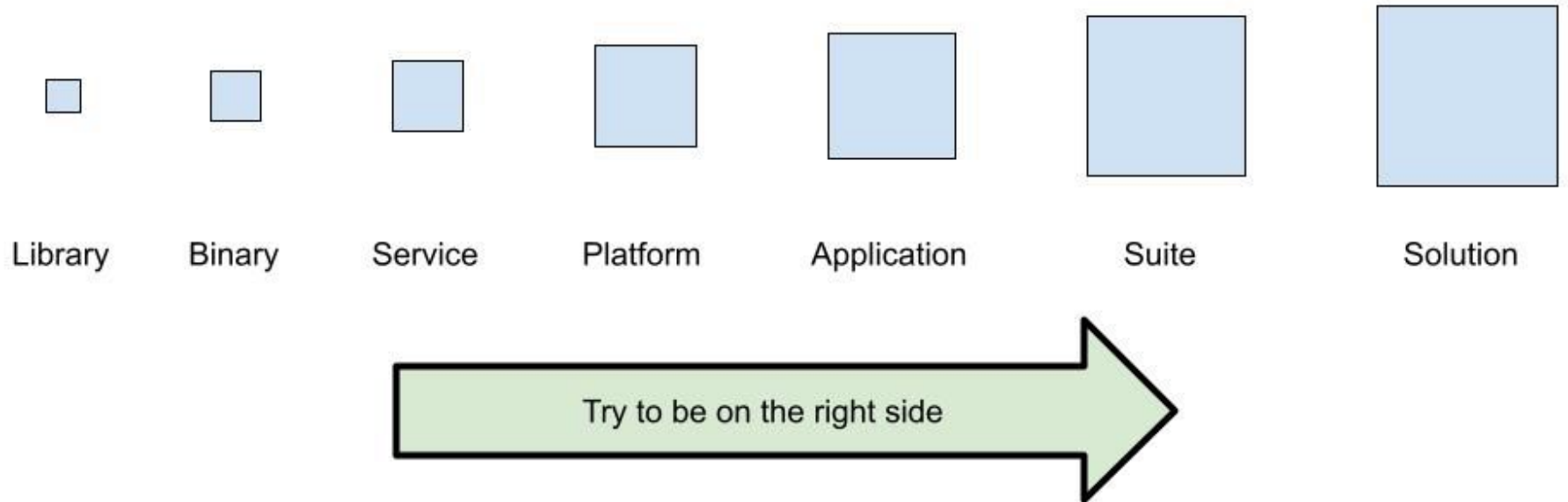**Define product**

Define "done"

Have appropriately structured teams

Only PO provides work for the teams

Keep project managers away

LeSS Product

If you choose a broader product it will constraint your Product Owner choice

Library   Binary   Service   Platform   Application   Suite   Solution

Try to be on the right side

Broader products

Less POs

POs higher in the hierarchy

more customer-centric

less dependencies

business prioritization

less duplicates

simpler organizations

Feature Teams

Customer focus

End 2 end focus

Focus on value rather than outcome

⇒Less need for coordination

⇒Less need for fake POs

less duplicates in code

flexibility and learning

Techniques

Broad Products

Feature Teams

Education

Budgeting

Practical Indicators that help you find a candidate Product Owner

Can kill the product

No status reports

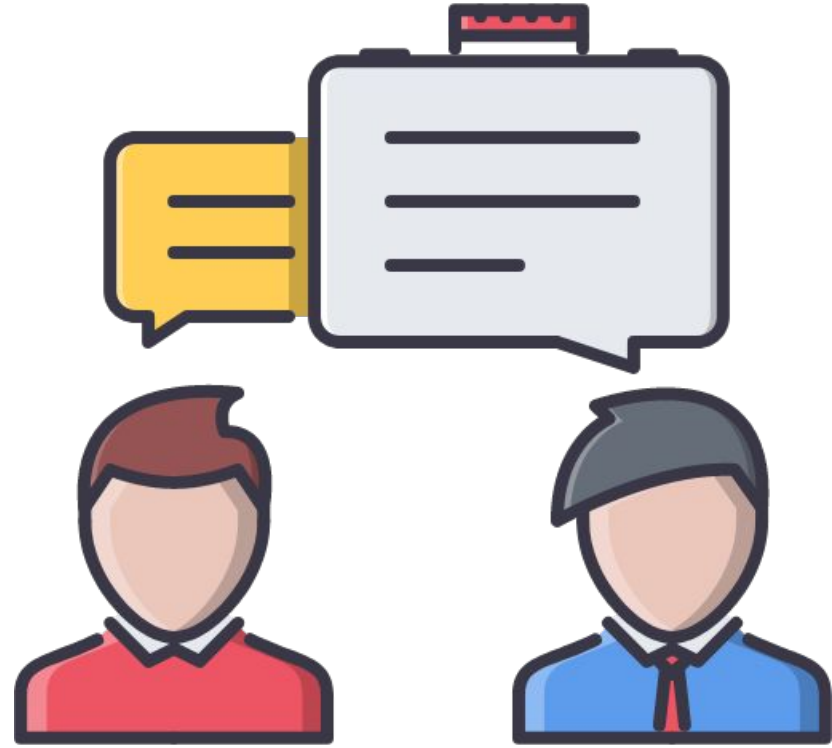# Decides priorities alone

Owns the budget

Talks to customer more than to teams

Exercise - Product Owner

Who would be the best fit for a PO in your current assignment?

Can kill the Product
No status reports
Decides alone
Owns the budget
Talks to customers

Good choices for Product Owner

Company Types

One Product

CEO

Multiple Products

mini-CEO   mini-CEO   mini-CEO

CEO or mini-CEO (for small companies or small products)

Can kill the Product
No status reports
Decides alone
Owns the budget
Talks to customers ?

~~Team Output Owner~~
~~Component owner~~
~~Scribe~~
~~Beggar~~
Dictator ?
Hamster ?
~~Committee~~

Product Manager

Can kill the Product
No status reports ?
Decides alone
Owns the budget ?
Talks to customers

idea

~~Team Output Owner~~
~~Component owner~~
~~Scribe~~
Beggar ?
~~Dictator~~
~~Hamster~~
~~Committee~~

Product User

Can kill the Product ?
No status reports ?
Decides alone
Owns the budget ?
Talks to customers

~~Team Output Owner~~
~~Component owner~~
Scribe ?
Beggar ?
~~Dictator~~
~~Hamster~~
~~Committee~~

Maybe needs to be hired

Conclusions

Choice of the Product Owner affects adaptiveness

Start with the product definition

Look in the product management department first

Or hire and give enough competences

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