

why product owners fail

... and how to avoid that

Markus Tecza, Large Scale Scrum Munich Meetup, 11.4.2019

why product owners fail



3 Pitfalls to avoid
as a Product Owner

5 Things Product
Owners Need To Know

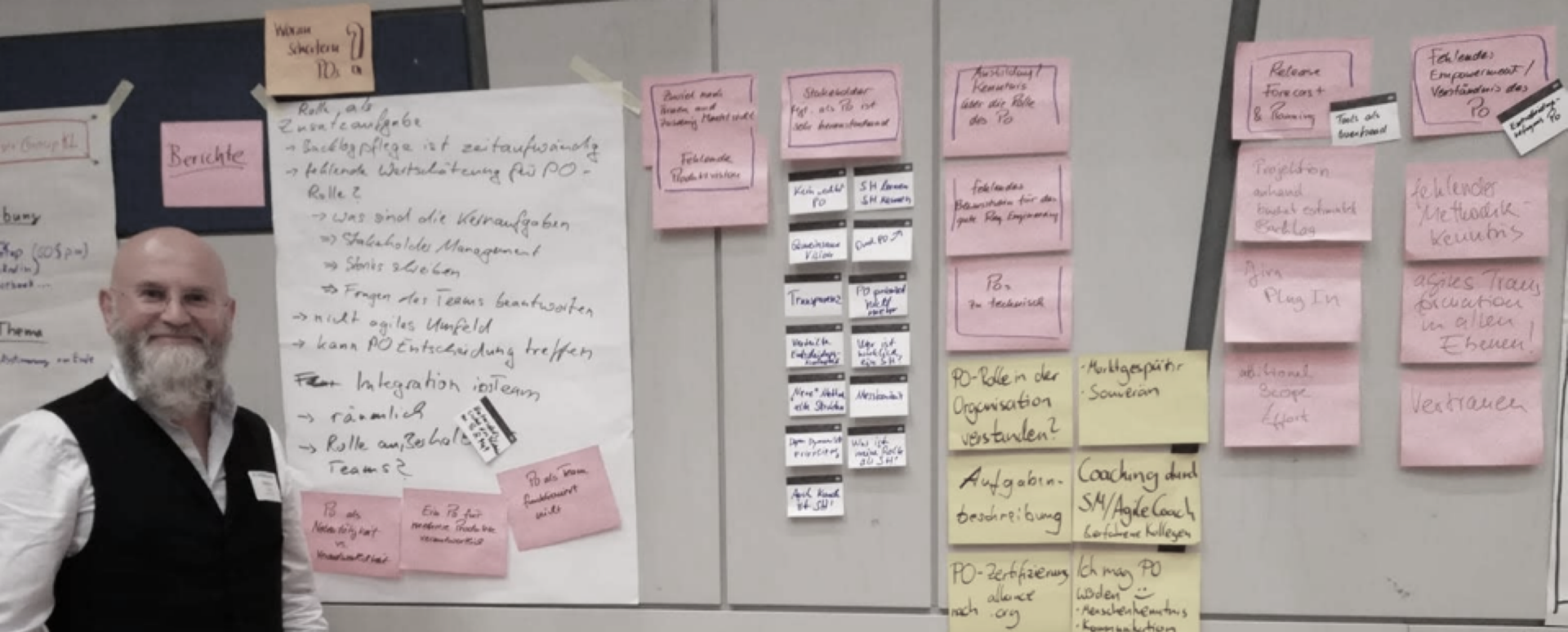
8 Sins of the Product Owner

20 Top Fails in Executive
Agile Leadership

The Great 20 Product Owner
AntiPatterns in Scrum

Deadly Errors of a
Scrum Product Owner

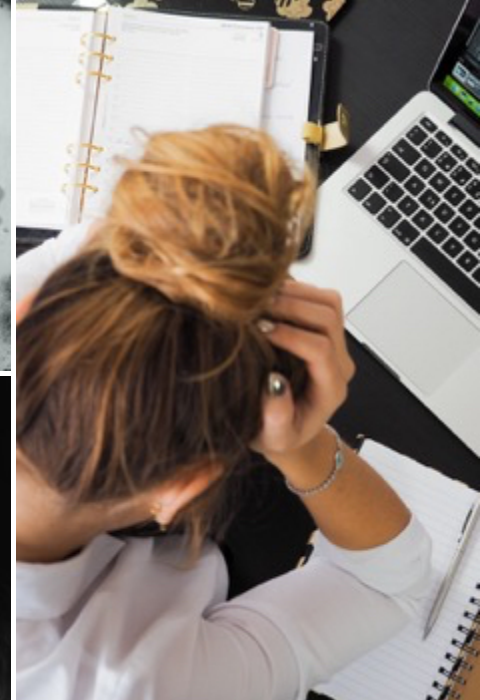
5 Mistakes a Product
Owner Should Avoid



Scrum Days 2018, Stuttgart

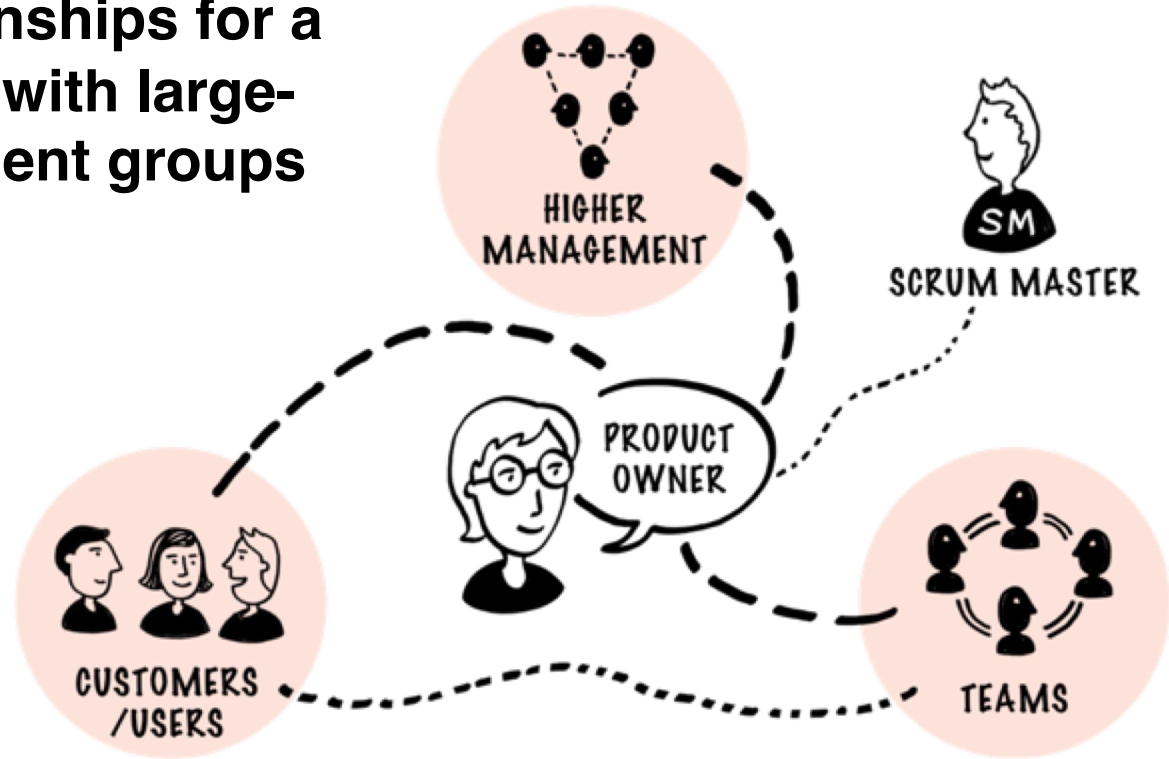
last June ...

**Every Product Owner
fails in a different way!**



lets see what LeSS tells us

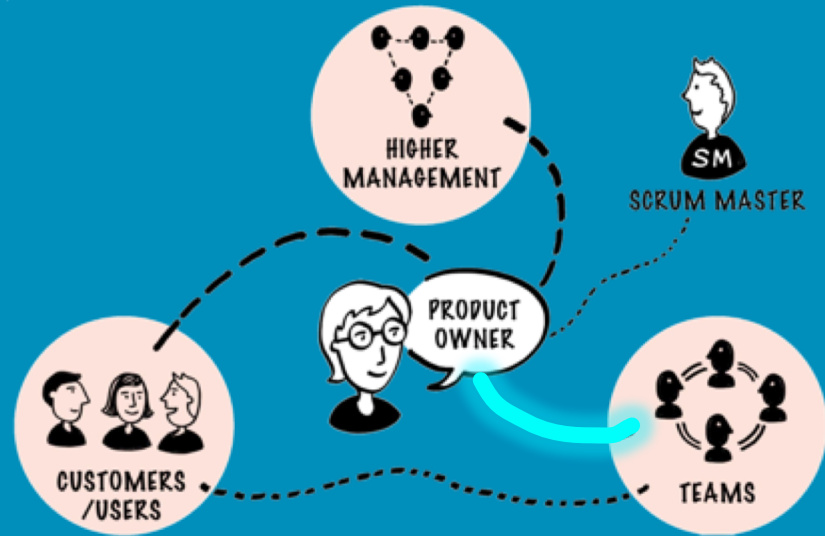
Five key relationships for a Product Owner with large-scale development groups



<https://less.works> BY-ND

Product Owner – Teams

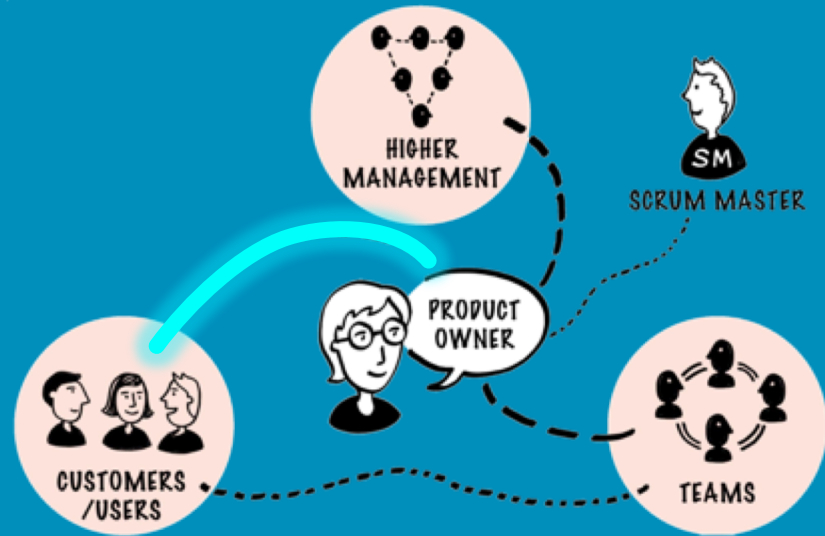
- Traditionally silos
- Own it together
- Build trust
- Dont micromanage
- Retrospect
- Visit team sites



<http://less.works> BY-ND

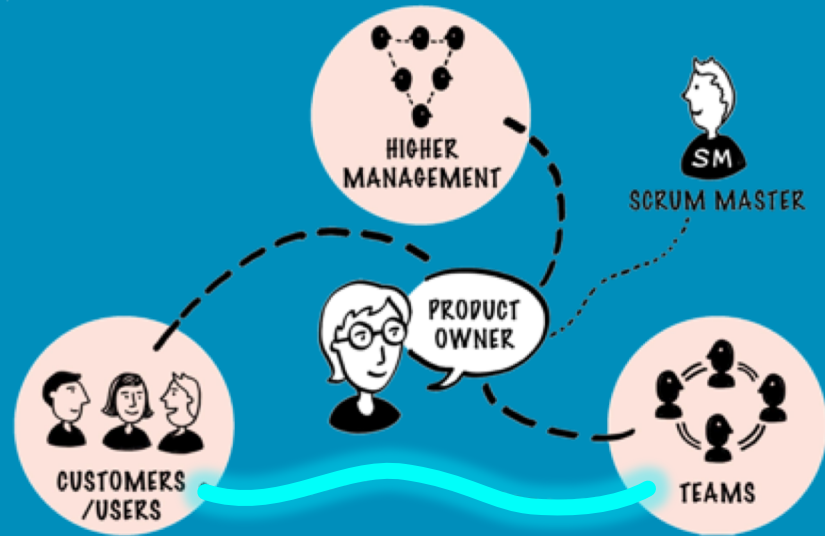
Product Owner – Customers / Users

- Traditionally silos
- Educate them
- Increase transparency
- Invite them to participate
- Ship as often as possible



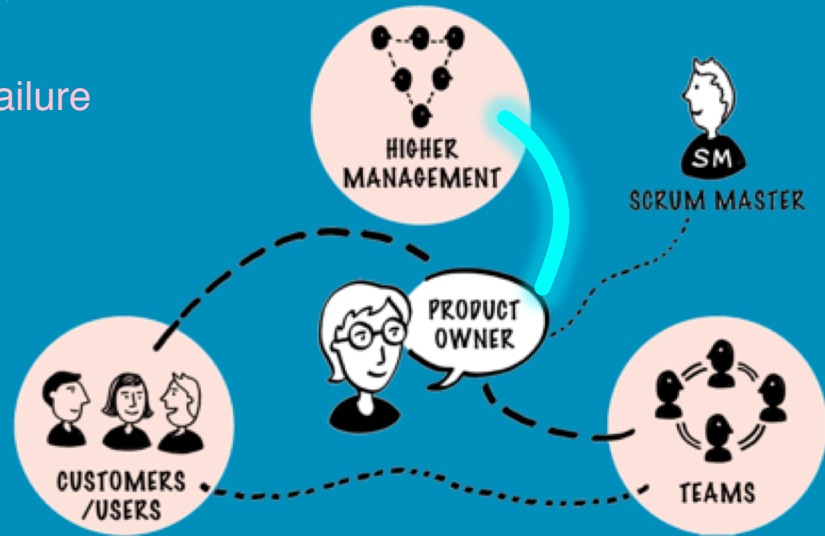
Teams – Customers / Users

- Traditionally no interaction
- Be a connector for both
- Share business activities
- Teach how to talk with customers
- Integrate intermediaries, create a simpler organization with real feature teams



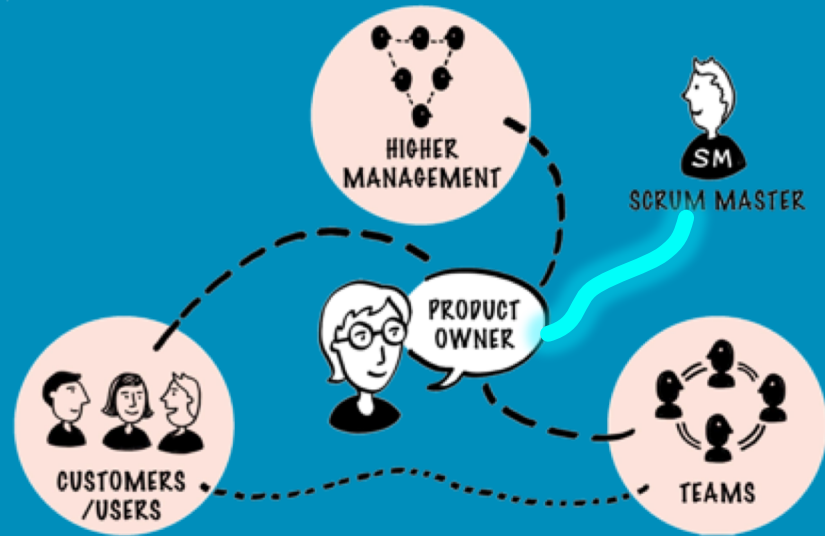
Product Owner – Higher Management

- Traditionally no one person with ownership for product success & failure
- Self-evaluation
- Educate and market role
- Communicate „To the PO“



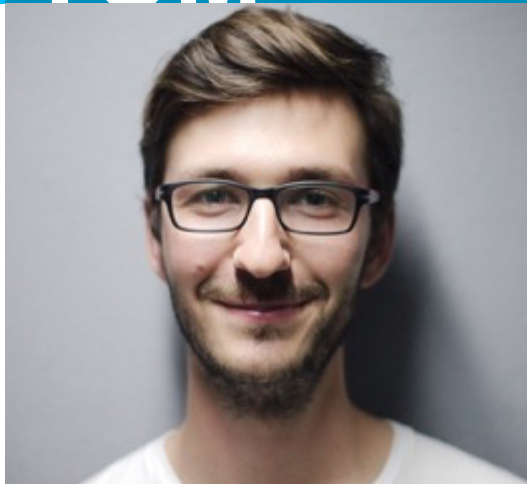
Product Owner – Scrum Master

- Traditionally not existing
- Just a few ...
- Be a student
- Reflect



in theory yes, but ...

TOM



With my technical experience,
I am able to better lead the
development teams and thus
build better products.

the techie

AGE

32 years

STATUS

Single

EDUCATION

Computer Scientist

LOCATION

Munich

HOBBIES

Music fan, race biker

YEARS IN COMPANY

5 years

DOMAIN KNOWLEDGE

Indirect knowledge gained (1 year)

CAREER GOALS

Wants to start own software company

PROFESSIONAL MASTERY

Very active in Communities &
Meetups, is actively seeking further
education

MOTIVATIONS

Incentive

Fear

Achievement

Growth

Power

Social

NEEDS

- High quality technical architecture
- Appreciation of development teams

BEHAVIOUR

- Still develops from time to time
- Writes technically detailed backlog items
- Little questioning for customer value in his requirements
- Willingly spends 80% of his time for only 20% of tangible customer features

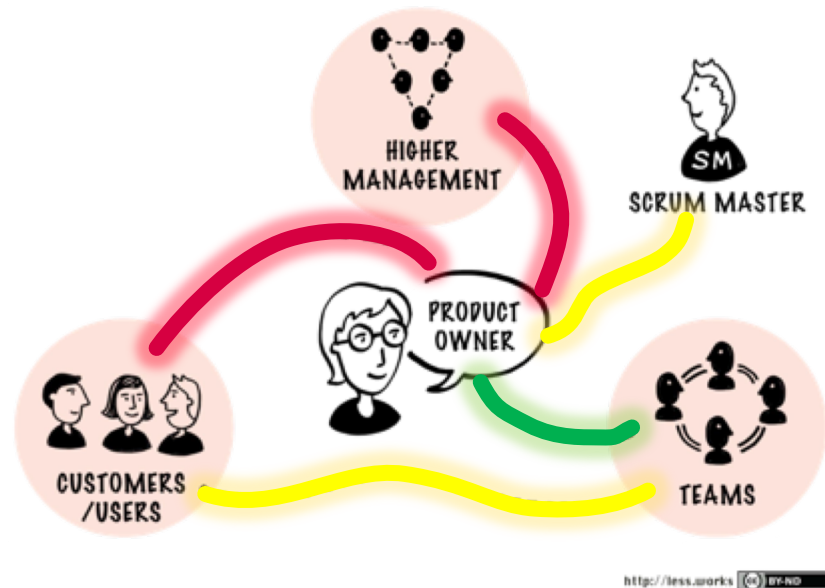
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WEAKNESSES & STRENGTHS



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ANTIPATTERNS

- Lack of product knowledge and vision
- Not respected as PO from management
- Too much facing to the inside, too little to the outside
- Poor stakeholder management
- Component thinking
- Prioritizes his Product Backlog from a technical point of view
- Wants to understand all backlog items from a technical point of view
- Micromanages the teams

TRY THIS

- Mentoring from another experienced PO who followed the same path
- Perform backlog refinements as they are meant to be, i.e. on business level
- PO should not be in a leading role during Refinement Sessions
- Shadow PO through an Agile Coach
- No Design Workshops anymore

Plan B:

- Convince him to work in team again

DONALD

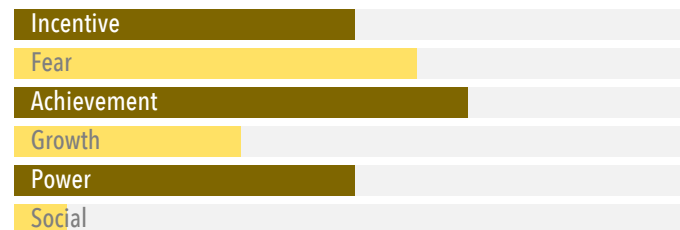
the control freak



Your voice is good.
But control leads to success.

AGE	45 years
STATUS	Married
EDUCATION	Business Administration
LOCATION	Moosach
HOBBIES	Runs 10km every morning
YEARS IN COMPANY	10 years as project manager
INDUSTRY KNOWLEDGE	Sound knowledge
CAREER GOALS	Strives for a management position
PROFESSIONAL MASTERY	Very selective, relies heavily on his project manager competence

MOTIVATIONS



NEEDS

- Wants to keep a „perfect“ overview
- Product Roadmap = milestone plan
- User stories well estimated by teams
- Loads of documentation
- Full blown sprint reports

BEHAVIOUR

- Loves to work with burndown charts
- Often checks if deadlines will be met
- Pushes teams to a definition of „ready“ and „done“ for backlog items
- Tries to get more items „ready“ than actually required

DONALD

the control freak

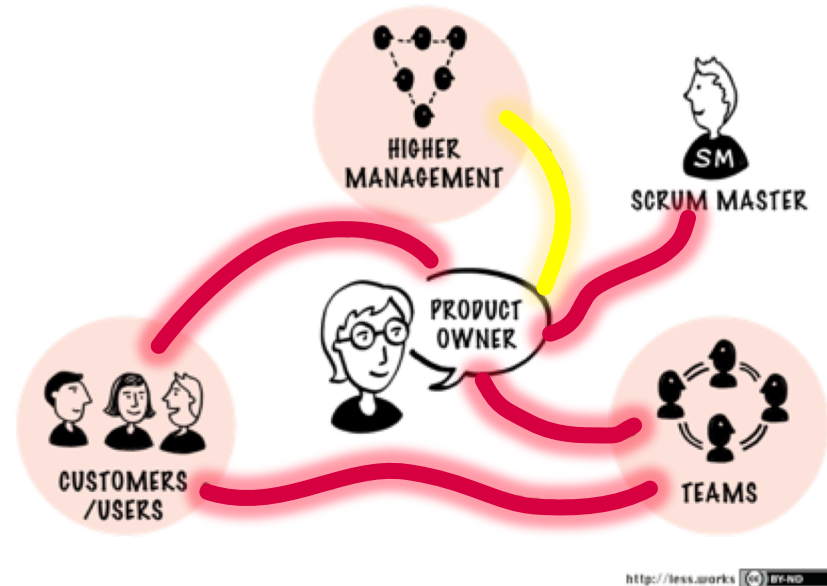
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ANTIPATTERNS

- Overly controlling
- Failure to Trust
- Focusing on the WHEN and not the WHY
- Still thinks in project goals and not of customer value
- Acts like a Proxy PO „in between“
- Inadequate Product Backlog Management
- Wrong understanding of queues (draft → ready → done)
- Process control is done by the whole organisation and not by one person

TRY THIS

- He definitely needs a PO training!
- Customer value must be key to his work, WHEN can be measured every sprint
- In LeSS you can influence the WHEN with Feature Teams
- Explain PO the focus on vertical rather than horizontal slicing during refinement
- Sensitize the PO that ...
 - Responsibilities are different in Scrum
 - Retrospectives offer enough to identify measures to eliminate deficiencies in the working model as a whole organisation

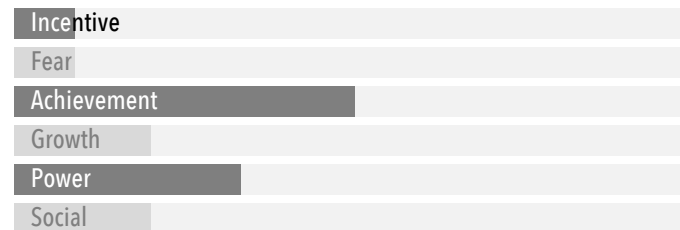
WALTER



I started it all and know what the product requires.
I don't need long discussions with development teams.

AGE	56 years
STATUS	Married
EDUCATION	Business Administration
LOCATION	Starnberg
HOBBIES	Golf
YEARS IN COMPANY	Founded the company years ago
INDUSTRY KNOWLEDGE	Profound knowledge
CAREER GOALS	None anymore
PROFESSIONAL MASTERY	None anymore

MOTIVATIONS



the patriarch

NEEDS

- Freedom to make decisions on all levels
- Positive feedback on product from users
- Control over a PO organisation that manages the teams directly
- Teams that never question his product demands

BEHAVIOUR

- Loves to visit business partners
- Makes phone calls from the car
- He doesn't know the names of dev teams
- Does not take part in Scrum meetings
- Holds status meeting with his PO-Team
- Prevents teams from talking to stakeholders

WALTER

the patriarch

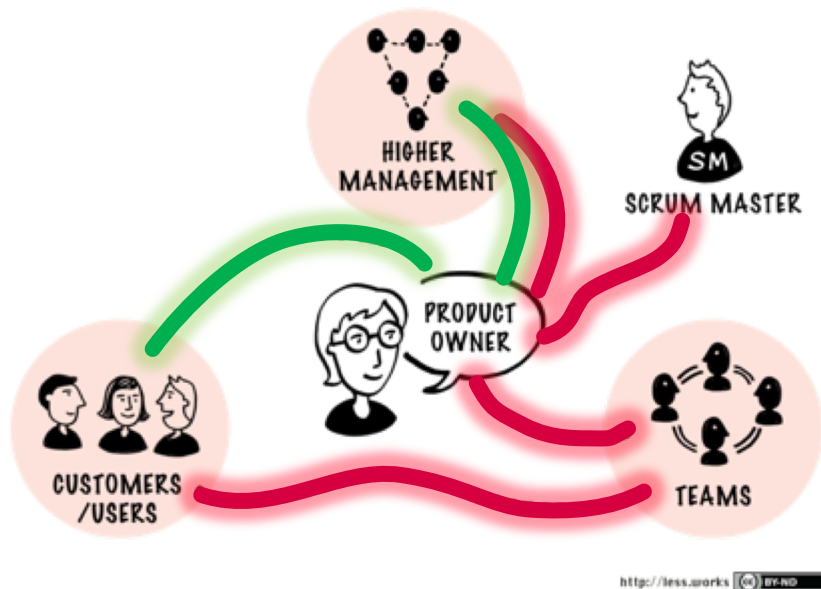
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ANTIPATTERNS

- Not enough time to work with teams
- Spatial separation to teams
- No trust in his teams
- Missing Release & Forecast Planning
- Less interest in quality, more interest in delivery speed
- PO is line manager of the team and/or the scrum master
- Event-driven management

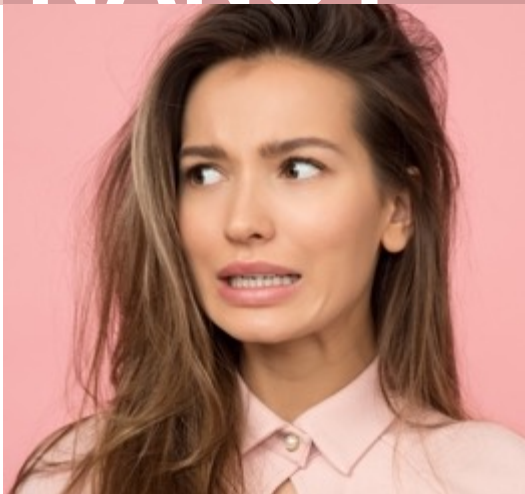
TRY THIS

- Start talk & listening to your teams
- Reserve time for communication with the teams
- Give back credit to the teams
- Give refinement responsibility to teams

If all that does not help:

- Move him into sponsor / stakeholder role
- Install another Product Owner who balances facing inside and outside
- The old PO will be present at least for sprint reviews

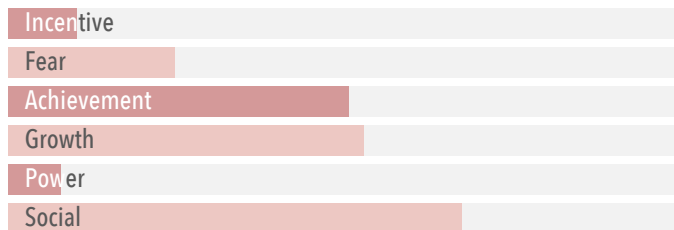
NANCY



I believe that my stakeholders know best what they need. I can then pass that on directly to my teams.

AGE	37 years
STATUS	Living in a partnership
EDUCATION	Career Changer
LOCATION	Munich
HOBBIES	Languages, Travel, Culture
YEARS IN COMPANY	3 years, became PO recently
INDUSTRY KNOWLEDGE	Basic knowledge
CAREER GOALS	No big career ambitions
PROFESSIONAL MASTERY	Occupies herself a lot with value-based collaboration privately

MOTIVATIONS



the waiter

NEEDS

- Would like to have her peace
- Well put business requirements
- Dev teams talking directly to stakeholders
- Self-organised system without her leadership

BEHAVIOUR

- Has no vision, no decision is made
- Does not validate business ideas
- Prioritizes according to stakeholders popularity
- Takes all input from stakeholders „as is“ and creates backlog items accordingly
- Avoids being involved during backlog refinements

NANCY

the waiter

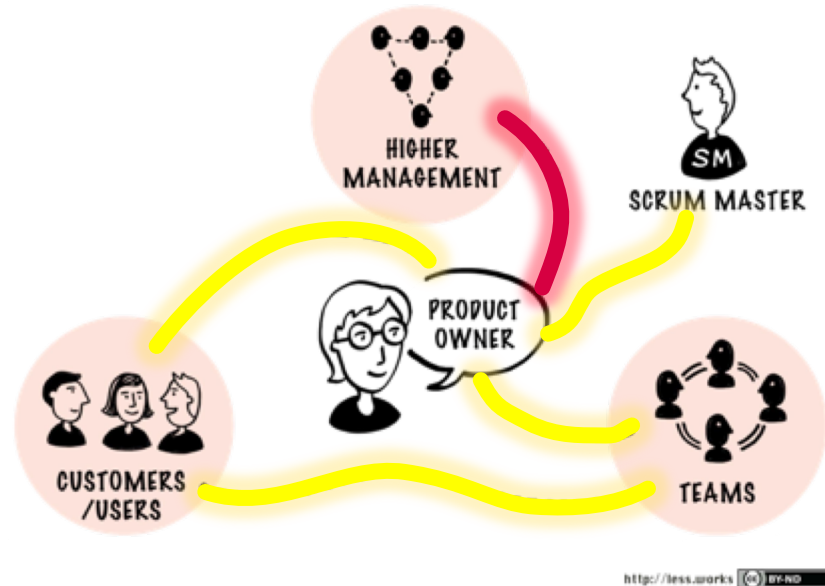
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ANTIPATTERNS

- Unfamiliar with product domain
- Product knowledge deficiency
- No product vision
- No ownership of the product
- No decision-making authority
- No product backlog prioritization
- Poor feature refinement
- Absence in many Scrum meetings

TRY THIS

- Find another Product Owner
- Maybe make her part of the PO team

Well, if there is no other way:

- Strong mentoring from management
- Strong coaching focus on Product Owner from the Scrum Master
- Education on domain expertise
- Ask stakeholders WHY they want requirements → learn from that!

questions



thank you