Scaling the Product Owner, a Modular Approach

Presented by James Lang

@EmergentAgility

www.linkedin.com/in/spryandagile

About James Lang

James Lang is an Agile Coach, Consultant and the Principal of Emergent Agility, LLC. With over 16 years of experience across a variety of industries. He has guided organizations and teams through the challenges and finer points of adopting Lean and Agile frameworks.

James is also the founder of Backlogs & Brews, a growing Agile User group for like-minded folks who are passionate about Lean and Agile to get together in an open forum for conversation.

"A process cannot be understood by stopping it. Understanding must move with the flow of the process, must join it and flow with it."
Frank Herbert, Dune

My Philosophy and Approach

If we were to encapsulate what Agile is, I think we could all agree that it can be summarized by these four fundamental axioms:

- Value
- Flow

- Quality
- Continuous Improvement

My Philosophy and Approach

A quick story about my Philosophy and Approach…..

Just Gonzo It!!

Gonzo Agile

gonzo *adjective*

gon·zo | \ ˈgän-(ˌ)zō 🔊 \

Definition of *gonzo*

informal

a : outlandishly unconventional, outrageous, or extreme
// a *gonzo* comedian

b : very strange or unusual : BIZARRE
// *gonzo* notions

**Source: Merriam Webster Dictionary

Use Case: The Organization and the Challenges

The Company:

- A growing software company with multiple products in the marketplace

- A software development group with about 100 developers and testers

- A growing roster of new clients and customers

- A significant amount of growth in the previous 5 years or so

- At the beginning stages of it's Agile Transformation

Use Case: The Organization and the Challenges

The Challenges:

- A backlog of work that was growing exponentially, due to the rapid growth, which led to…

  - An unhealthy sense of urgency

  - Everything being a priority

  - Quality issues, namely escaped defects and technical debt

  - Duplicated Work and lots of rework

  - Lots of overtime and burned-out employees

What Did We Discover?

So, when we looked under the hood, what did we find??

- A backlog of work that was growing exponentially, due to the rapid growth, which led to...

  - Teams were struggling with understanding the "What" that needed to be built

  - Items on the Product backlog were vague or poorly defined

  - Challenges with prioritizing the backlog

  - None of the technical debt was being addressed

  - Lack of alignment and collaboration between business and development

So What Did We Do?

We focused on Product Management, concentrating our efforts further up the funnel of work

- Established a Progressive Elaboration Model (Disciplined Agile Delivery, SAFe)

- Embraced the Product Owner Cycle (Scrum at Scale)

- Organized around MetaScrums and the Executive Meta Scrum (Scrum at Scale)

The Progressive Elaboration Model

MetaScrum

Team

Feature/Epic Analysis	Business Scope	Technical Scope	Backlog Refinement	Estimation	Sprint Planning

Roles:
PM/PO
SME
Arch
Dev Mgr

Roles:
PM/PO
SME
Arch
Dev Mgr
QA Mgr

Roles:
PM/PO
PSE*
Arch
Dev Mgr
QA Mgr
SME

Roles:
PO
Dev Team
Scrum Master

Roles:
PO
Dev Team
Scrum Master

Roles:
PO
Dev Team
Scrum Master

Output:
- Description
- Acceptance Criteria
- Value Analysis (e.g. Cost of Delay)

Output:
- High Level Business Design
- UX/UI Design
- Architecture Design
- T-Shirt Sizing

Output:
- Data Model
- System/User Roles
- NFR's
- Create User & Tech Stories
- Story Splitting
- Prioritization

Output:
- Q&A – Team
- Update Stories based on Team Feedback
- Story Splitting
- Prioritization

Output:
- Update Stories based on Team Feedback
- Sizing of Backlog Items
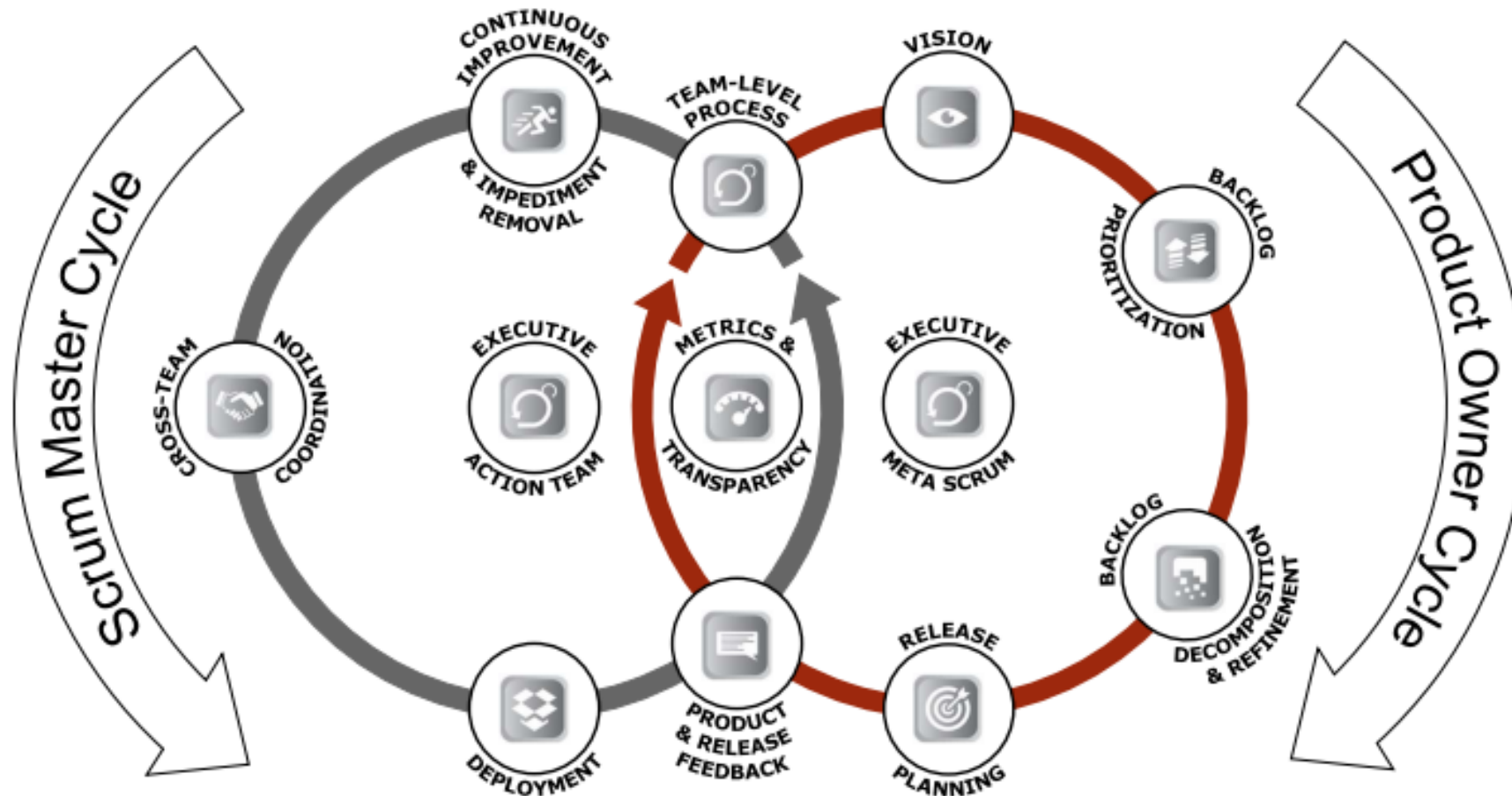- Prioritization

Output:
- Finalize Acceptance Criteria
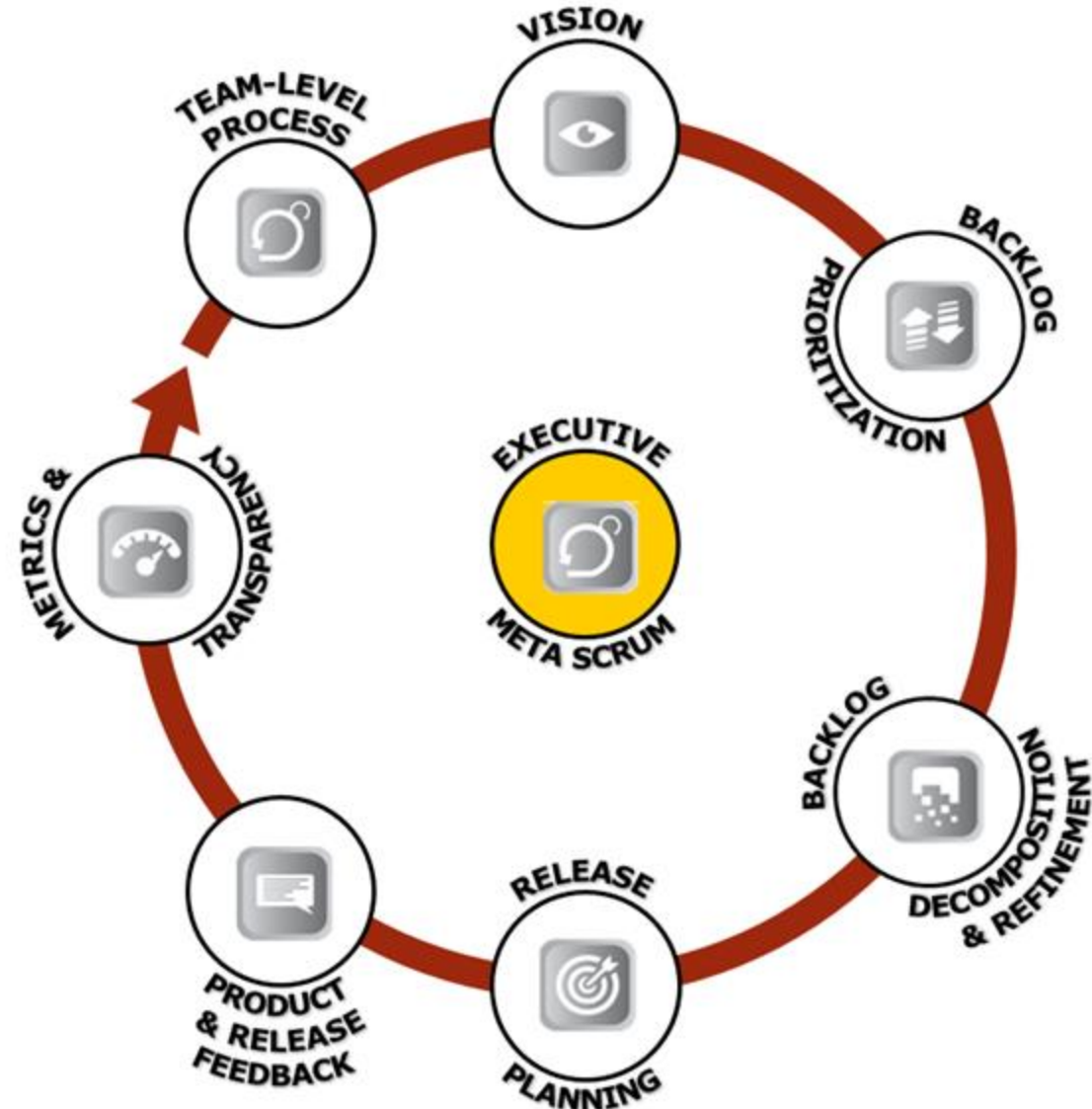- Execution Strategy
- Sub-Task Breakdown

The Scrum Cycle
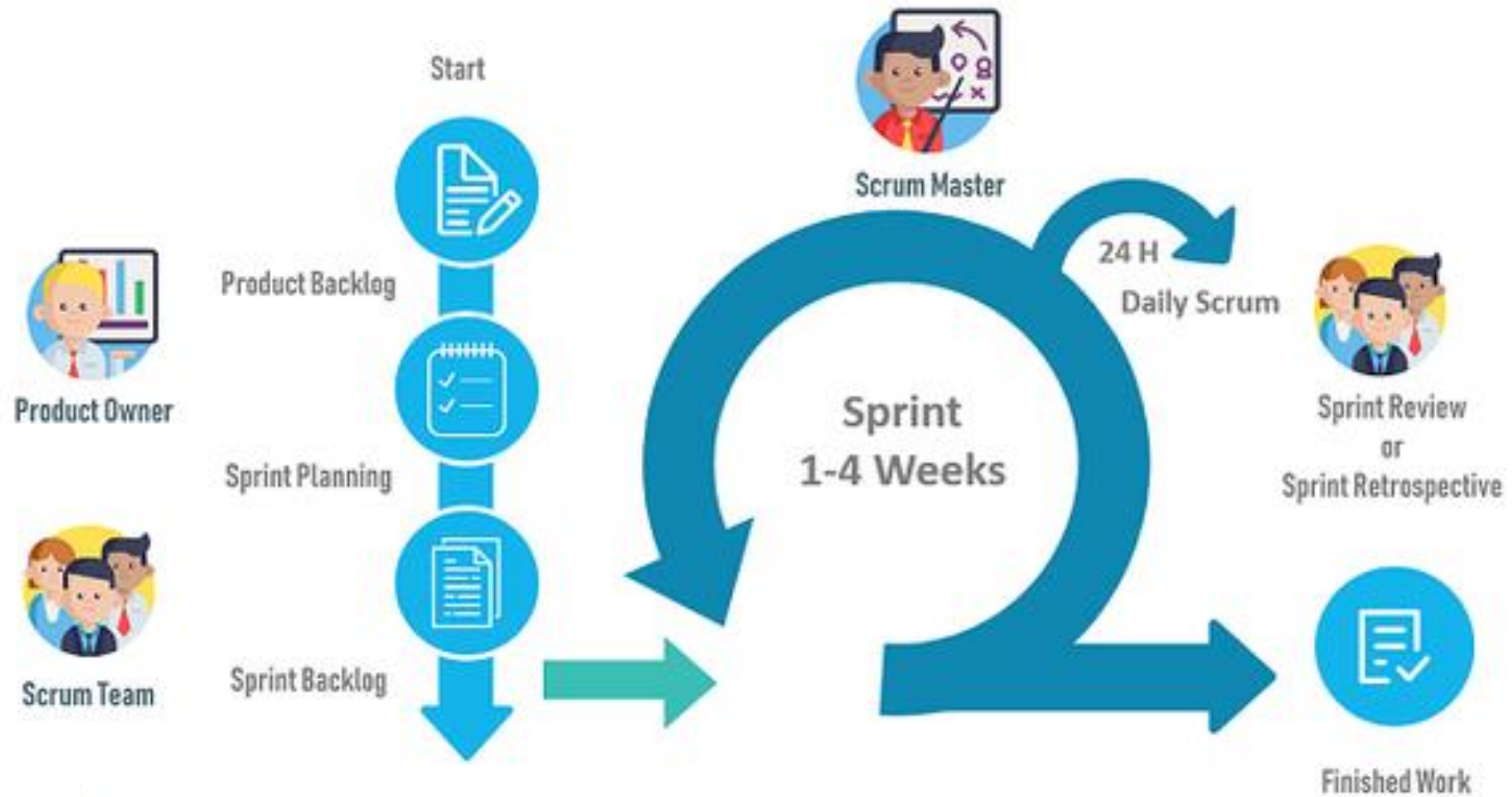
The Scrum Master and Product Owner Cycles

The Product Owner Cycle

Outputs & Outcomes: Strategic Vision

The goals of setting a **_Strategic Vision_** are to:

- clearly align the entire organization along a shared path forward.

- describe what the organization will do to leverage key assets in support of its mission.

- respond to rapidly changing market conditions.

Outputs & Outcomes: Backlog Prioritization

The goals of **Backlog Prioritization** are to:

- identify a clear ordering for products, features, services, and improvements to be delivered.

- reflect value creation, risk mitigation and internal dependencies in ordering of the backlog.

- prioritize the high-level initiatives across the entire agile organization prior to Backlog Decomposition and Refinement.

Outputs & Outcomes: Backlog Decomposition & Refinement

The goals of **Backlog Decomposition & Refinement** are to:

- break complex requirements into independent functional elements that can be completed by one team in one Sprint.

- capture and distill emerging requirements and customer feedback.

- ensure all backlog items are truly "Ready" so that they can be pulled by the individual teams.

Outputs & Outcomes: Release Planning
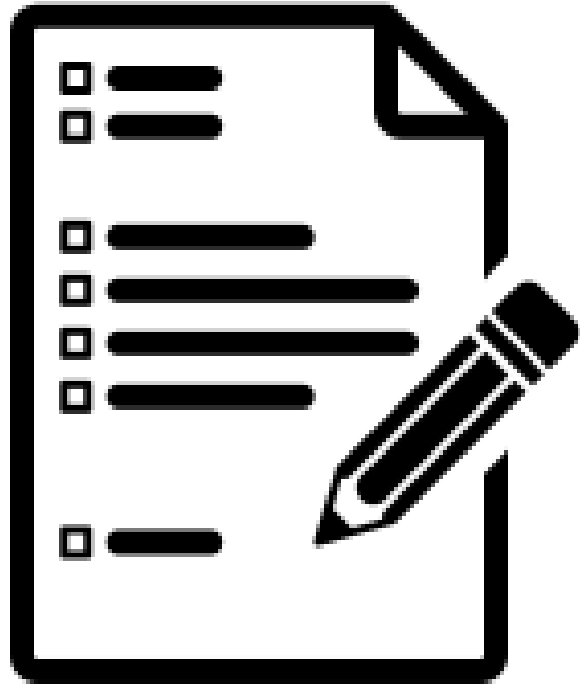
The goals of **Release Planning** are to:

- forecast delivery of key features and capabilities.
- communicate delivery expectations to stakeholders.
- update prioritization, as needed.

The Product Owner Cycle – Coordinating the "What" with MetaScrums

The MetaScrum aligns priorities on a single development value stream, so the items on the backlog can be coordinated and alignment can be built with stakeholders.

Product Owner Teams hold a scaled version of Backlog Refinement called the MetaScrum.

- Each team PO (or proxy) attends the MetaScrum where stakeholders review the Product Owner Team's backlog and address strategy, resources, and date issues.

- This event is the forum for Leadership, Stakeholders, or other Customers to express their preferences

Functions and Goals of a MetaScrum

The main functions and goals of a MetaScrum are to:

- Create an overarching vision for the product and make it visible to the organization

- Build alignment with key stakeholders to get support for backlog implementation

- Generate a single, prioritized backlog: ensuring that duplication of work is avoided

- Ensure technical debt issues are properly prioritized on the backlog

- Help establish a minimally uniform "Definition of Done" that applies to all teams

- Help resolve dependencies raised by the teams

- Generate a coordinated Roadmap and Release Plan

MetaScrums and the Executive Meta Scrum (EMS)

So how did we coordinate around all our
Products across the organization?

We scaled the MetaScrum structure across
all of Product organization.

The PO organization (the Product Owners,
the CPO's, and the Executive MetaScrum)
work as a whole through the elements of
the Product Owner Cycle:

Strategic Vision,
Backlog Prioritization
Backlog Decomposition & Refinement
Release Planning.

The Results

So, how did we improve as an organization?

- A Large improvement in Overall Quality – the number of escaped defects decreased by 62% six months after adoption

- A considerable improvement in throughput, scrum teams delivered on average 47% more Product Backlog Items per sprint six months after adoption

- Half the Technical Debt and defects on the Product Backlog we're resolved

- Improvement in the delivery to customers. We went from Releasing 4 times a year, to delivering incremental releases every sprint, and a large release every quarter

- Team members working overtime had pretty much been eliminated

- A continuous improvement and learning culture for the organization

What does that mean for me and my organization?

- Look at practices and process that will work best for your organization

- These practices and processes can come from anywhere! Experiment!

- Create your own Organization's Agile

- Practices and processes evolve and emerge, so iterate with a focus on improvement

Just GONZO it!

Further Learning

Scrum @ Scale (S@S)   https://www.scrumatscale.com/

Scrum: The Art of Doing Twice the Work in Half the Time- by Jeff Sutherland & J.J. Sutherland

Disciplined Agile Delivery (DAD)   Introduction to Disciplined Agile Delivery - by Scott Ambler & Mark Lines

Choose your WoW: A Disciplined Agile Delivery Handbook for Optimizing Your Way of Working - by Scott Ambler & Mark Lines

Disciplined Agile Delivery: A Practitioner's Guide to Agile Software Delivery in the Enterprise - by Scott Ambler & Mark Lines

Scaled Agile Framework (SAFe)   https://www.scaledagileframework.com/

SAFe 5.0 Distilled - by Richard Knaster & Dean Leffingwell

Thank You!

@EmergentAgility

www.linkedin.com/in/spryandagile