

Session Title: The Product Owner in a Corporate Environment

Organizers: Koen De Hondt & Bart De Gruyter

XPday website link:

<http://www.xpday.be/Xpday2007/session/ProductOwnerInCorporateEnvironment.html>

Participants: Jan Bakker, Nicole Belilos, Sven Clarysse, Jef Cumps, Ilse Dierickx, Marleen Emmerechts, Lieven Govaerts, Machiel Groeneveld, Yves Hanouille, Bernard Notarianni, Vera Peeters, Piet Verstraete, Koen De Hondt and Bart De Gruyter

Session notes:

At the start of the session Koen De Hondt gave a presentation which introduced the participants to our context. He explained what EMC does and what Centera is. Koen informed the group about the development organization: 3 sites, 7 teams, and detailed the working relationships with other teams in the organization. Koen also proposed a definition of the product owner role, soft skills, who. During the presentation one of the participants informed the team that her vision on the product owner role was that he/she needs to pick up a lot more responsibilities. However we unfortunately did not take the time to look into that question during our session.

After the introduction we started the fishbowl for about 90 minutes. We were able to discuss the following questions:

**Is being a product owner a full-time job? What should a product owner do on a daily basis? Can a product owner handle 2 jobs, for instance development manager and product owner?**

- Availability is an important aspect for most environments. It looks like in some companies it makes sense to define a rule that questions posed to the product owner need to be answered within 24 hours. However, it needs to be said that there are different types of questions. Blocking questions need to be answered within 24h but there are also long term issues that may take longer to answer.
- The amount of time that the product owner needs to allocate is linked to the size of the organization. For the organization like we described it, the team felt that we would probably need multiple people full time to do the work associated with the product owner role.
- The proxy customer role also needs to be defined.
- The specific feedback from the team towards the specific presented EMC Centera context was that there are too many people responsible for the same thing. There is need for a more steering culture where one person gets responsibility and not to divide this responsibility in parts and make a lot of people responsible.
- It was suggested that it could be useful to work with buckets: for instance: 60 % is allocated to the plans of record and 40% of the time is reserved for service or short term requests.
- Book series: Quality Software Management by Gerald M. Weinberg.

**How does the product owner succeed to balance functional and non-functional work on the product backlog?**

- First we had a long discussion on what exactly is non-functional work. We did not quite get to a full conclusion on this and were not able to give very good examples that brought everyone on the same page.
- We did agree that the dev team and the scrum master should only declare a story or a part of work done if and only if: the quality is ok, the refactorings are all done, and the maintainability is safeguarded. The team needs to become more honest when declaring done.
- It was suggested that one could also reserve x% of time for aspect y.
- For non-functional work the general rule is valid: the person proposing the non-functional work needs to convince the product owner of its value so that the product owner decides to select it as part of a future sprint goal.

**In principle the product owner should attend the planning review meeting of the team. How does that work when you only have 1 product owner, but you have multiple sites with different teams at each site?**

- The general conclusion the team reached on this point was really different than what we first had in mind. The team's conclusion was that we should create a team of proxy customers, one proxy customer per site, and have only one product owner who then forms a team with these proxy customers.
- Interesting book: The Enterprise and Scrum, Ken Schwaber.
- Different floors, buildings, countries (in that order) imply a loss of communication (which needs to be compensated).
- Shadow product owner role (cf. Thoughtworks).
- One can do a distribution based on functionality.
- Availability is an important aspect to keep in mind.
- We need the proxy customer to explain the stories.
- We need to make the distinction between business issues and technical issues: developers can test technical issues, QA can test business issues.

**What are the requirements for tool support in this context: multi-site, multi-team, multi-product, and product owner team?**

- Everyone should have access to the tool (multi-site).
- Tools should be linked to the code.
- Communication tools: use many different forms: phone, webcam, IRC, conference calls
- ...
- Check-in with feelings (cf. core protocols). Example: had an argument at home.
- Meeting protocol (cf. core protocols): I want to get x out of this meeting
- Wiki
- Planning tool: single source of information.
- Requisite pro
- Jira (<http://www.atlassian.com/software/jira/>)
- Mingle (<http://studios.thoughtworks.com/mingle-project-intelligence>)
- <http://www.fogcreek.com/FogBugz/>