

# Stances of the Product Owner

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# Stance

'*stan(t)s* - noun

a: a way of standing or being placed

b: intellectual or emotional attitude

You can think of a stance as a pattern.

Attitudes and behaviors that Product Owners display *at times*.

People do not display these stances continuously, but adopt them in particular moments.

# Product Owner

The Product Owner is accountable for maximizing the value of the product resulting from the work of the Scrum Team.

[...]

(Doing that) is by doing effective Product Backlog management.

[...]

# Misunderstood Stances

- Occur when Scrum framework and Product Owner accountabilities are mapped to existing organizational patterns.
- Attitudes and behaviors that are ineffective in practice.
- Not wrong, per se, but misunderstood application of Scrum.

# Misunderstood Stances

- Clerk
- Story Writer
- Project Manager
- Subject Matter Expert
- Gatekeeper
- Manager

# The Clerk

- Getting and delivering on “orders” dominates.
- Tend to have an endless backlog. Say yes to almost everything.
- Internal focus. Stakeholders tell them what to do. Limited external interaction.
- Go-between between Developers and stakeholders. Reactive; seeks permission before acting.



# The Story Writer

- Lots of conversations about the details of Product Backlog items.
- Developers push back when stories don't meet the Definition of Ready. A contract instead of a handy checklist.
- Stories are small, specific, designed, detailed, estimated, and refined to be clear. Work is specified, not the outcome. No questions remaining.
- Constantly writing in JIRA. Close to being a business analyst or technical writer.



# The Project Manager

- Never miss a Daily Scrum. What have team members done, what are they going to do, is anything blocking them?
- Report on velocity and story points, burn-down charts, etc during Sprint Review. Focused on resource utilization, dependency management, doing Scrum events by the book.
- Focus on output and the day-to-day progress of Developers. Not on value.
- Used to getting clear projects or assignments from elsewhere. Report on them with scope, time, budget, deliverables, etc.



# The Subject Matter Expert

- Single point of knowledge for the team. And often, outdated knowledge leading to bias if not supported with preferred stances.
- Product Owners don't have to be The Expert on the subject matter. Either business or development.
- He can always dive into more detail. But miss the bigger goal.
- "You don't need to know that", "I'll let you know when we get there". Spoon-feeding the Developers.



# The Gatekeeper

- Everything must always go through the Product Owner. Sign off on every requirement. Protecting the Developers from the outside world.
- Single point of contact can lead to missed opportunities for maximizing value.
- Developers do not pose questions directly to the users or stakeholders, all questions go through the Product Owner.
- Sprint Reviews are a waste of time, let the Product Owner manage stakeholders and feedback



# The Manager

- Performance management of teams and individuals.
- Lots of conversations with team members, focused on growth.
- Or focused on all the Scrum implementation.



# Preferred Stances

- Customer Representative
- Visionary
- Experimenter
- Decision Maker
- Collaborator
- Influencer

# The Customer Representative



“What’s the problem to solve for customers?”

**The Customer Representative** focused on helping others (Developers or others) to understand what customers need, what their challenges are, what pains and gains they have. Acting from this stance, the Product Owner tends to explain how our work affects customers, users, and business processes.

# The Visionary



“It’s not where we are, it’s where we want to be that matters.”

**The Visionary**, clearly communicating the product vision, strategy, business goals, and objectives with all the relevant parties. A visionary Product Owner tends to focus on the future, on changing the status quo, and helping people to see what could be, instead of what is.

# The Experimenter



“What is the smallest experiment we can run to validate that idea?”

**The Experimenter**, by stating a hypothesis, explaining what we know AND what we don't know, by seeing a lot of the work we do as experiments, rather than 'set-in-stone' work packages. The Experimenter understands the need of trying out new things, exploring, innovating, and therefore; experimenting.

# The Decision Maker

“Let’s look at the data, and move forward.”

**The Decision Maker**, which helps the stakeholders and Scrum Team to keep time-to-market short, by keeping decision making time short. All sorts of decisions have to be made on a daily basis. Some can be delegated to the Scrum Team or stakeholders, some the Product Owner has to take him-/herself.



# The Collaborator



“Let’s get stuff done, together.”

**The Collaborator**, engaging with and closely working together with the various stakeholders and Scrum Team(s). A collaborative Product Owner tends to support people in their own discovery process, whether it’s about defining goals, clarifying PBIs, or analysing customer needs.

# The Influencer



“How can I align people to do what is best for the product?”

**The Influencer**, who helps the stakeholders to align around the product vision, strategy, goals, and objectives. Influencing the stakeholders and Scrum Team is a hard but very important job. The Influencer uses effective communication, negotiation, and influencing skills to get people to join the cause.

# Evolution of PO

Yes, We Do Scrum. And our Product Owner is a ...

