

Agile Product Management with Scrum: Creating Products that Customers Love

Roman Pichler. Boston: Addison-Wesley, 2010. xxv + 133 pages. US\$34.99

Agile Product Management with Scrum, details how product management works in an agile context. Throughout the book, Roman Pichler's treatment is laconic and authoritative. The book is intended for those interested in the role of the product owner. The author assumes that readers already have product management knowledge and are familiar with Scrum.

In one concise table, Pichler contrasts Scrum-based agile product management with what he characterizes as 'old school' approaches (pp. xx-xxi). One approach embraces a process where requirements emerge. The other approach attempts to define detailed requirements early in the development process.

Often Pichler provides a context-specific definition followed by a suggestion. For example, "A product road map is a planning artifact that shows how the product is likely to evolve across product versions, facilitating a dialogue between the Scrum team and the stakeholders... I recommend keeping product road maps simple and focused on the essentials" (p 41). Sometimes the examples are more concise such as "*feature soup... Avoid this antipattern*" (p 43).

The the role of the Product Owner within a Scrum framework is focus of Chapter . Jeff Sutherland, who is credited as a co-creator of Scrum defines a product owner as some who is "embedded in the market and embedded in the team at the same time" in a total immersion experience (p. xvi). The product owner

is *primus inter pares*, first among peers. As both leader and team player, they create cohesion and alignment from the product concept to the launch.

Pichler states that the roles of Product Owner and ScrumMaster are designed to complement each other. He declares that on a Scrum team, the project manager role is redundant because the team identifies, estimates, and manages the tasks.

Most of the chapters contain an explicit 'Common Mistakes' segment. These include:

- Underpowered and overworked Product Owners (Chapter 1)
- Analysis paralysis (Chapter 2)
- Competing backlogs (Chapter 3)
- Quality compromises (Chapter 4)
- Unsustainable pace (Chapter 5)

The Chapter 3 treatment of operational requirements (which are also known as nonfunctional requirements) includes their impact the definition of 'done' and their description as project constraints.

Chapter 5 examines how to make the best team even better. Interspersed with the description of common Scrum practices (such as sprint backlogs, burndowns, and retrospectives) are insights on improving collaboration.

Chapter 6, Transitioning into the Product Owner Role, includes segments on "becoming a great product owner" and "developing great product owners." Table 6.1, "Product owner Dos and Don'ts" includes the recommendation to "Incorporate change between sprints" and to not "Allow change to creep into sprints" (p. 112).

Pichler's empirical insights are best suited to accelerate learning that places customers at the center of development efforts. He asserts that "Applying the product owner role effectively is not only the cornerstone of making agile product management work. It is also a learning process for individuals playing the role and for the organization" (p. 118).