8 Important Traits of Agile Product Owners
By Mike McEwen, PMP, Dynanet Director of Software Solutions

Product Owners are the face of the organization for an Agile development team. They establish the product purpose, strategic vision, and tactical roadmap, and keep them and the team aligned with organizational objectives. The Product Owner connects the team with the rest of the organization and maximizes the value of the team's contributions. Product Owners constantly groom the backlog, provide clarifications, and address impediments to optimize the team's performance.

Ideally, one person with no other responsibilities performs the Product Owner's role. To select great Product Owners, look for these traits:

1. **Think Strategically and Tactically.** They define business value, articulate it to their teams, and identify features that maximize it. Ideally, they can assign a dollar value of benefits to each feature in the backlog. They know the target end-state for the product and how to get there with interim releases.
2. **Good Collaborators.** They go beyond just communicating effectively with their teams, end users, marketing, sales, service, management, and other stakeholders. They actually strive to increase empathy between those groups and the team. Product Owners are good negotiators but flexible when things change, have a sense of humor, and are patient with their teams. They are good storytellers (about the organization and its customers) as well as storywriters.
3. **Empowered.** The organization authorizes Product Owners to direct the team and speak on behalf of upper management. Therefore, they must be respected and "plugged in" (i.e., know what's going on, make good decisions, able to get help when needed, and trusted to resolve issues). Product Owners can explain technical constraints to management and, in turn, help communicate them to the customer base and other stakeholders.
4. **Leadership.** They take care of their development teams and assure management that the teams are addressing the highest value features. They work with the Agile Coach or Scrum Master to motivate their teams to do their best. They can communicate observations about issues without dictating solutions. They don't micromanage the team despite their accountability for the ultimate market success or failure of the team's products. They give the team feedback from customers and management.
5. **Available and Engaged.** Preferably dedicated to the Product Owner role, they have to be available to the team and the rest of the organization when needed. They don't just show up to meetings but actually prepare for them.
6. **Decisive.** They review implementation alternatives with the team and management, and must be comfortable making decisions about the short- and long-term features of the product with limited information. They are entrepreneurial.
7. **Know Technology.** They know enough to translate technical capabilities, team breakthroughs, and setbacks into terms that non-technical members of the organization can understand.
8. **Know the Business.** They are Subject Matter Experts in the product's line of business. They know end-user processes, related market trends, competitors, and opportunities. They know how customers feel about products in their space. They know about any legal or regulatory requirements, and communicate them with authority.

While it's rare to find all these traits in a single person, try to get as many as you can. Your organization can also help Product Owners develop any skills they lack.

Dynanet Business Analysts work closely with Product Owners in customer organizations to make them successful. Our Business Analysts can also serve as Product Owner proxies if the customer organization does not have a Product Owner or if a team of people are serving in the Product Owner role.

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About the Author: Mike McEwen (PMP, CSM) is a servant-leader who forms amazing teams and helps them deliver award-winning technology solutions to commercial, non-profit, and government customers.