

Product Owner Anti-Patterns

Organization

- Product Owner is not empowered by the organization
- The wrong person is selected to be the Product Owner
- The Product Owner is not given decision-making Authority

Financial

- No Control of the "Purse-Strings"
- Focusing on the wrong metrics
- No visibility into the product's budget

Industry/Market Knowledge

- No industry or market research
- Not a subject matter expert
- No competitive analysis is performed
- Doesn't know about or use the product

Value

- Doesn't understand what value is in the product's context
- Acts as an order-taker rather than value maximizer
- Focus is on outputs over outcomes
- Uses inappropriate criteria to measure the value

Leadership

- Can't deal with conflict
- No leadership skills
- Inability to negotiate
- Not thanking and celebrating the Scrum Team's accomplishments
- Inability to make trade-offs
- Directs the work rather than letting the team decide what to do
- Picks solutions without consulting the developers
- Pressures the team to work overtime
- Decisions are not respected

Stakeholders

- Caters to the stakeholder with the most power or influence
- Inability to get stakeholder interest or buy-in
- Too many stakeholders to manage and align
- Lack of access or unavailability of stakeholders
- Makes decisions without stakeholder consultation
- Keeps the team from directly communicating with stakeholders
- Ignores stakeholder/customer feedback
- Unable to consider others' opinions
- Not acting as the "Voice of the Customer"

Quality

- No governance
- No user testing until the end of a Sprint
- Overlooks quality in exchange for speed
- Doesn't recognize that the team is jointly responsible for quality

Fear

- Afraid to fail
- Won't experiment or innovate
- Does not see failures as learning opportunities
- Avoids conflicts rather than facing and resolving them

Vision and Strategy

- No vision or strategy
- A vision exists, but it hasn't been communicated or evangelized
- Not seeing the "big picture" of the product
- No success criteria for the product
- Not having an overarching Product Goal
- Can't articulate the business problem

Technical

- Not dealing with Technical Debt
- Product Owner came from a technical background, rather than business
- Acting as a solution architect instead of a Product Owner
- Unrealistic expectations of the Scrum Team based on "experience"
- Product Owner sizes the stories instead of the developers
- Pre-assigns Product Backlog items to team members

Scrum Team

- Not acting as part of the team
- Tries to control the team instead of being a Scrum Team member
- Interrupts the Scrum Team during a Sprint
- Doesn't interact with the Scrum Team
- Lack of trust in the team
- Team doesn't have all the necessary cross-functional skills

Accountability

- Not the "one neck to ring"
- Throws the team under the bus
- Not held accountable for the product and its outcomes
- No one can identify or say who owns the Product Owner accountability
- Takes all the credit for the team's work
- Always making excuses

Product Owner Knowledge

- No training as a Product Owner
- Doesn't understand Agile tools and practices
- Unable to adopt an Agile mindset
- Does not have the right skills and traits
- Not leveraging the Scrum Master as a coach

Product Backlog

- Not doing backlog refinement with the Scrum Team
- Inability to prioritize
- Doesn't protect the Product Backlog
- Thinks of the Product Backlog as a commitment
- Not providing enough "ready" stories to feed the team

Commitment

- "Promoted" from a manager role
- Delegates Product Owner responsibilities (beware the PO proxy)
- The role was foisted upon them
- Leaves the team to their own devices
- Present, but not engaged
- Only in the role because they are a department lead or manager
- Not invested in the product – it's just a "job"
- Product Ownership conducted by Committee, not one person

Scrum Events

- Participating in the daily Scrum rather than listening
- Leading the Sprint Review, rather than letting the developers share
- Skips required Scrum events
- Scrum events misused to gather new requirements
- Failing to terminate a sprint with the Sprint Goal becomes obsolete
- Lack of preparation
- Does not ensure a unifying Sprint Goal is created

Roles

- Role confusion
- Misunderstanding of Scrum accountabilities (formerly roles)
- Playing multiple Scrum roles

Planning

- Not planning at higher levels
- Not ready with "ready" stories at Sprint Planning

Personality and Behaviors

- Control freaks
- Micro-management
- Lack of confidence
- Inability to say "No"
- Inflexibility
- Unapproachable
- Domineering
- Too optimistic and not realistic
- Lack of empathy for the team
- Lack of discipline
- Not listening to the developers
- Never satisfied
- Hoards decisions
- Lack of transparency
- Fixed mindset instead of a growth mindset

Requirements

- The User Story is missing
- No acceptance criteria
- Horizontally sliced stories, rather than vertical
- Writing user stories in a silo
- Half-baked, poorly written user stories
- No definition of "Ready" or "Done"
- Stories that are too large are allowed into a sprint
- Focusing on perfection versus "good enough"
- "Technical" user stories that don't deliver any direct business value
- An overwhelmingly large product backlog
- Dictating the how rather than the what and why
- Not following the INVEST acronym
- Pushing through unclear requirements
- Not questioning what the business need, versus expressed wants
- Stories that are not "ready" get pulled into a sprint
- Too many "research" spikes
- Gold-plated instead of an MVP and iterating based on feedback