

# THE 5 PILLARS OF COLLABORATIVE PRODUCT OWNERSHIP

**JOHN LE DREW**

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# HELLO!



## JOHN LE DREW

I have worked in software engineering for almost 20 years, in that time I have worn many different hats.

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**SOFTWARE ENGINEER   TEAM LEAD**  
**TECHNICAL LEAD   ARCHITECT**  
**DEVELOPMENT MANAGER**  
**TESTER   BUSINESS ANALYST**  
**PROJECT MANAGER**

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# PRODUCT OWNER

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# WHAT MAKES A GREAT PRODUCT OWNER?

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**IS THIS THE REAL LIFE?  
OR IS THIS JUST  
FANTASY?**

**QUEEN**

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**The product owner is a role on a product development team responsible for managing the product backlog in order to achieve the desired outcome that a product development team seeks to accomplish.**

**REALLY?**

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Source: Agile Alliance

So, by this definition, is the whole team deciding on the outcome?  
Or just the product owner?  
How do we work out what the right thing?  
How do we know what the desired outcome should be?



**Clearly identify and describe product backlog items in order to build a shared understanding of the problem and solution with the product development team.**

**SERIOUSLY?!**

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Source: Agile Alliance

So, now it would seem that the PO is responsible for:

- identifying the the problems
- then defining them
- then solving the problem
- and communicating the problem and solution to the team.

If they have solved the problem already why even bother to communicate it to the team, it's solved isn't it?

**Make decisions regarding the priority of product backlog items in order to deliver maximum outcome with minimum output.**

**HOW?**

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Source: Agile Alliance

How does a product owner make these decisions?

How do you know what will deliver the maximum outcome?

How do you know what will involve the minimum output?

**Determine whether a product backlog item  
was satisfactorily delivered.**

**HOW??**

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Source: Agile Alliance

What does “satisfactorily delivered” actually mean? Delivered to spec?  
Does it mean that the item delivered the maximum outcome?  
What is the definition of success?

**Ensure transparency into the upcoming  
work of the product development team.**

**HOW???**

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Source: Agile Alliance

Is the upcoming work coming from the product owner?  
Is that where the work comes from?

# WHERE DOES THE WORK COME FROM?

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How do they (whoever they are) know what to do?

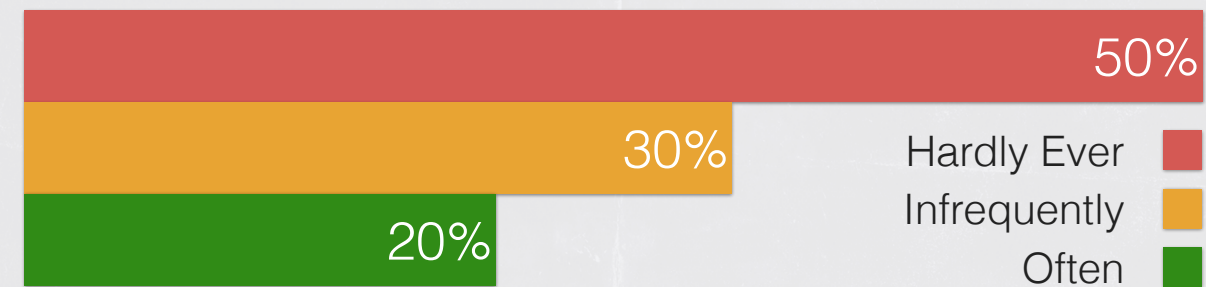


**ARE WE GOOD AT  
KNOWING WHAT TO  
DO?**

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# WE'RE ACTUALLY PRETTY USELESS.

## FEATURES USED



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Source: Standish Group "Exceeding Value"

This is taken from a study called "Exceeding Value" from the Standish Group. There are some challengers who dispute the construction of the study, but even taken with a high error margin I think that 80% of delivered features hardly ever or infrequently ever used is a pretty stark judgement on the software industries ability to "know" what our users want.



So, all this is pretty depressing.

What can we do to improve this?

**SO THE MOST  
IMPORTANT THING  
IS...**

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We need to focus on the most important and powerful thing about agile ways of working. And something that we always seem to forget.



# FREDERICK WINSLOW TAYLOR

## SCIENTIST

“...the ordinary pig-iron handler is not the type of man well suited to shovelling. He is **too stupid**; there is **too much mental strain**, too much knack required of a shoveler for the pig-iron handler to take kindly to shovelling.”

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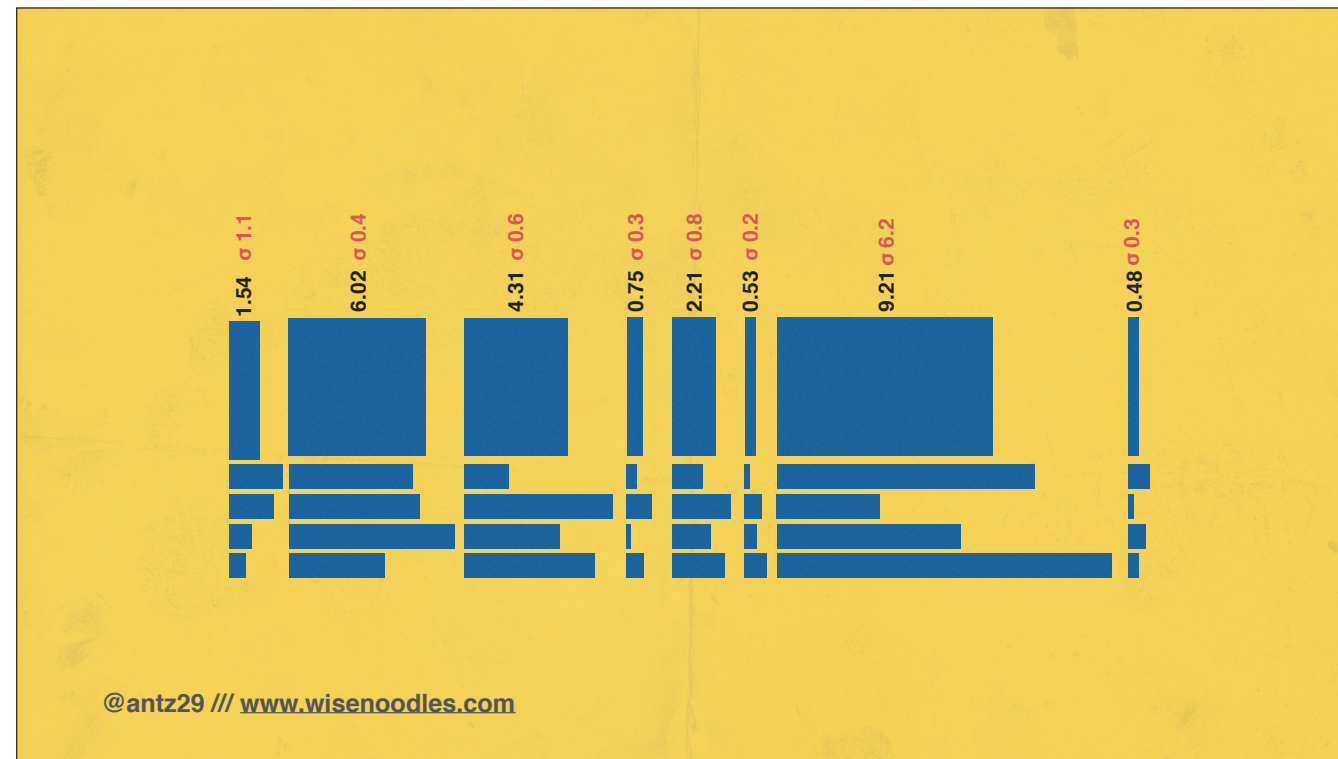


Frederick Winslow Taylor

He's an early 20th century industrialist, known as the father of “scientific management”.

What we forget (or perhaps ignore), is that Taylor was one of the first to really popularise the empirical method in business.





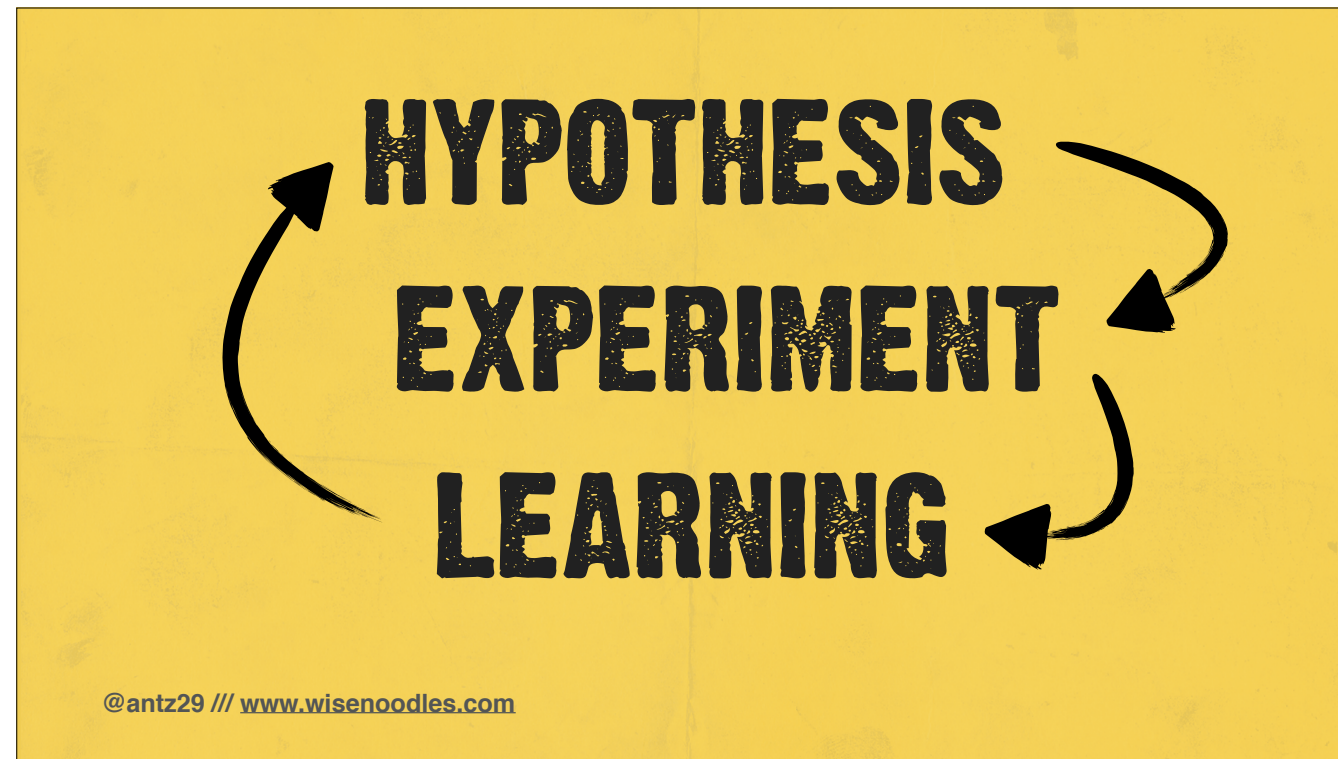
Taylor worked in a metal working factory at the turn of the century, and he wanted to improve efficiency.

So, he started by breaking down every process into its component parts.

He then measured each part to the hundredth of a minute and he measured each of the different stations. This was referred to later as a “Time and motion study” of the work.

He discovered huge inconsistency across the factory floor, each of the workers were doing the same jobs differently. And each had their own approach, their own ‘style’ of work. Some used different tools, some used a different process.

His idea was to identify the “one true way” for each process. The most efficient method which he would discover and dictate to the workers.



He looked at what he knew currently, and formed hypotheses; that if he made a small change (insisting the workers use a particular shovel for example, or carry no more or less than a certain amount) it would improve efficiency.

He then tested this hypothesis, with an experiment.

This then demonstrated the validity of his hypothesis, which produced learning. Importantly, sometimes this invalidated his hypothesis, sometimes it validated it. Either way there was learning.

This new information is fed back, to make more hypotheses, and the cycle continues.



This created an environment of continuous learning, which in Taylor's situation, led to dramatically increased efficiency, which was the goal of his work.

But, he also triggered a number of workers strikes; the more experienced workers feeling that they lost their individual style and expression, which was obviously being suppressed.

The environment of continuous learning and discovery he created was limited to the upper echelons of the organisation.

The only people (in Taylor's view) with the mental capacity for this planning work.

# WHAT WAS TAYLOR MISSING?

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So, Taylor was almost on the right track. But, he was missing something.  
So, let's fast forward a few decades to find out.



**WHAT YOU WANT  
BABY, I GOT IT  
WHAT YOU NEED  
DO YOU KNOW I GOT IT  
ALL I'M ASKIN'  
IS FOR A LITTLE RESPECT.**

**ARETHA FRANKLIN**

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At about the same time Aretha Franklin released this, on the other side of the pacific there was another movement underway.



# TAIICHI OHNO

“**People** don't go to Toyota to work, they go there to **think**.”

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Taiichi Ohno

Between 1948 and 1975 Eiji Toyoda and him developed the Toyota Production System (which later became Lean Manufacturing in the US).

# THE TOYOTA WAY

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In 2001, Toyota wrapped up its philosophy, values and manufacturing ideals and called it the Toyota Way. There are 14 principles, grouped into two key areas.

(This deck does not attempt to cover all of these, there is a lot of wisdom here and I highly recommend that you dig deeper)

# **CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT AND RESPECT FOR PEOPLE**

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The two pillars of the Toyota Way are Continuous Improvement and Respect for People. This is their constant effort to improve their processes and reduce waste. They achieve this in a number of ways, some may seem familiar from our earlier exploration of Taylor.

# **CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT AND RESPECT FOR PEOPLE**

**BECOME A LEARNING ORGANISATION  
WITH HANSEI (REFLECTION) AND KAIZEN**

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The process of becoming a learning organisation involves criticising every aspect of what one does. Nothing is sacred. They constantly reflect on practices and look into ways of improving their approach.

They have a well know Suggestion System program at Toyota and employees are encouraged to make suggestions to reduce waste or improve quality etc.

They have been reporting over 1 million ideas per year across their staff and they implement over 90% of the ideas submitted.

This is because they respect the front-line staff as the most qualified people in the organisation to make those suggestions (and implement the changes).



# **CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT AND RESPECT FOR PEOPLE**

## **NEMAWASHI - BUILD CONSENSUS**

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When problems are discovered, they:

- head straight to the place of the problem to see what is going on, this, is normally seen at Toyota when an employee pulls the Andon on cord.
- Determine the underlying cause.
- Consider a broad range of alternatives (by pulling in other staff if needed, the line is stopped so everyone can focus on the problem.)
- Build consensus on a potential solution.
- After taking the time to come up with a proposed solution, go implement it fast.

Once there is consensus around a proposed solution it is built into what Toyota call “standardised work”.



# **CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT AND RESPECT FOR PEOPLE**

## **STANDARDISED WORK**

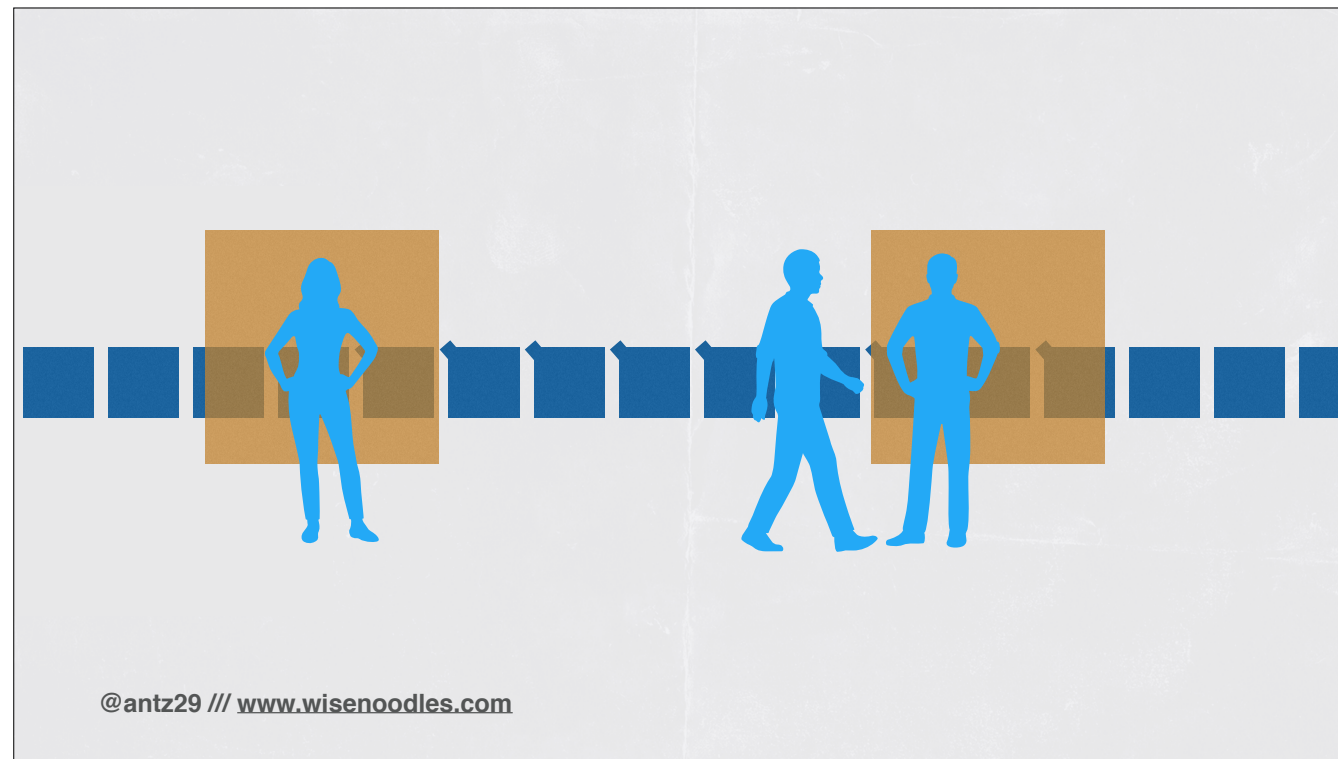
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Standardised work are tasks that are clearly defined and all workers follow the same process. They define it like this:

“Standardised tasks and processes are the foundation for continuous improvement and employee empowerment.”

The standardised work is defined and maintained by the people doing the work.

All employees are treated as experts in the work they do and encouraged to present ideas for improvement.



So, let's imagine a scene, an employee on the factory floor has pulled the Andon cord and halted the line.

At this point a manager walks down to the floor to discuss the issue with the employee. So, they will be like "What's up?"

"There's this dint in the car door, it looks like a fault in the machining further up the line"

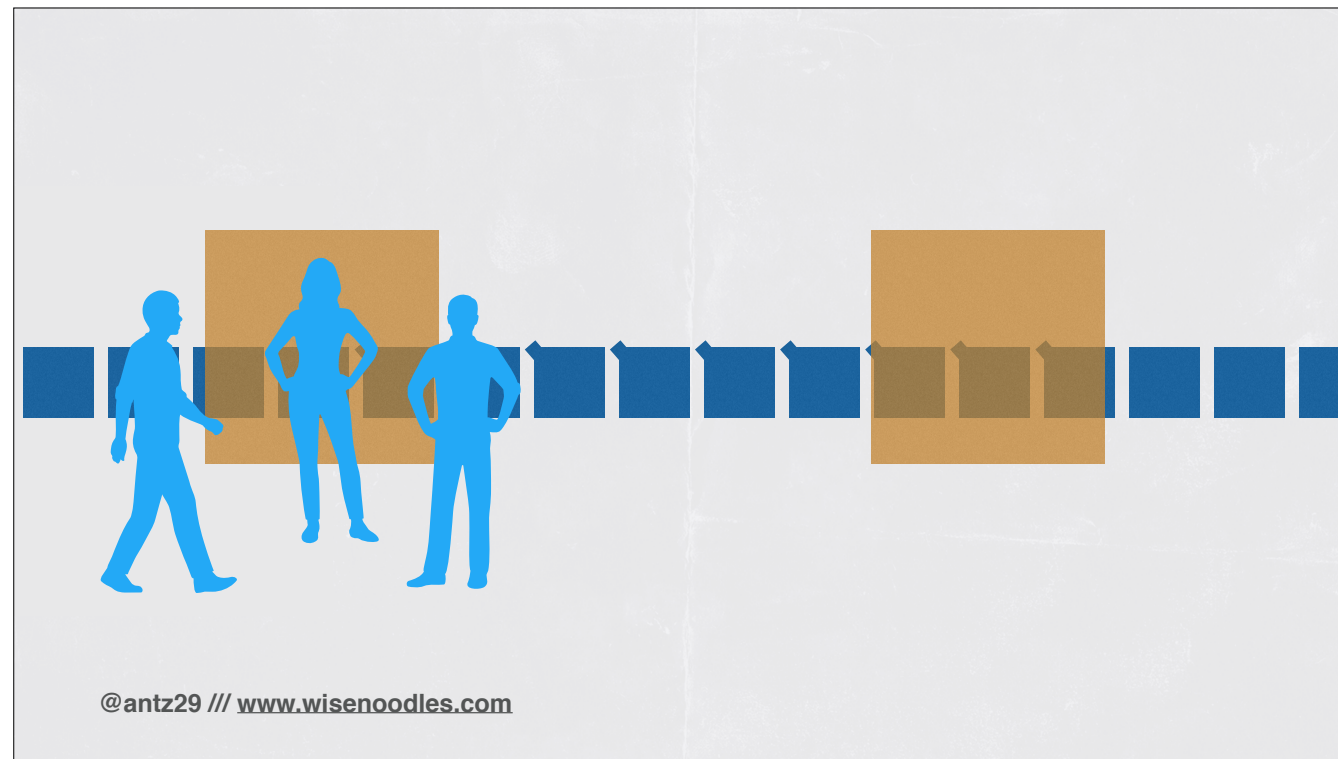
Next they challenge the employees' answer and enter into a dialogue about what the real problem is. (It's rarely the problem showing on the surface.)

"I was just at that station and didn't see any issues, could anything else cause it?"

"Well, it could be occurring when the door fixings are mounted perhaps."

Then they ask what is causing this problem and enter into another dialogue about its root causes.

At this point, they may well walk to the other station to see what is going on, remember, the whole line is stopped so everyone is focused on solving this problem. The engineer on the door fixing station looks at the machine, and can see the dint appearing in the doors downstream of his station.



At this point, they may well walk to the other station to see what is going on, remember, the whole line is stopped so everyone is focused on solving this problem.

The engineer on the door fixing station looks at the machine, and can see the dint appearing in the doors downstream of his station.

Now they have found a potential source of the problem, the manager asks

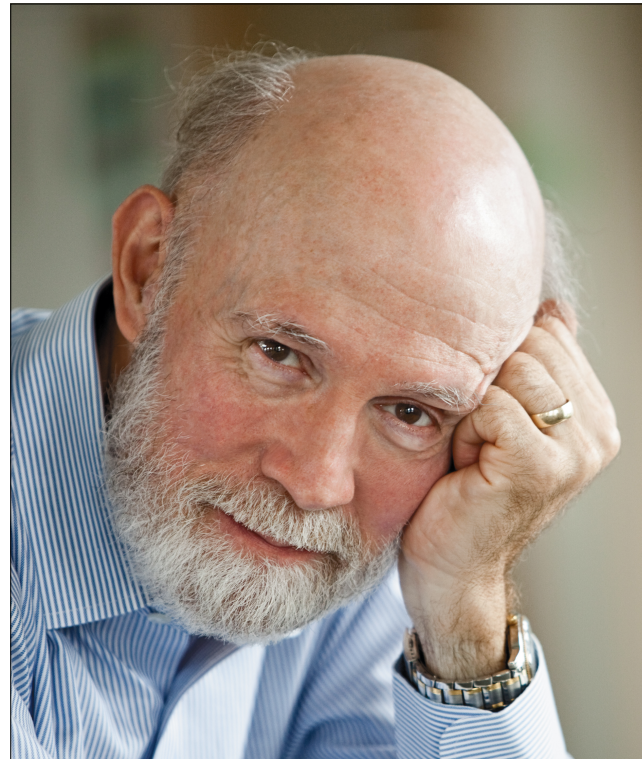
“What can we do about this?”

This could be a relatively quick process, or it could involve many team members each presenting some potential solution. Or, they might need to dig into the problem a bit more and gather some evidence.

The aim of this, is to get consensus from the team

Once they have consensus around the solution, they then discuss how they (the manager and the employees) will know when the problem has been solved? Again, they discuss with a goal to form consensus around this indicator.

Finally, once they have consensus, they set out to implement the solution.



## **JAMES WOMACK**

**“Over time I've come to realise that this problem solving process is actually the highest form of respect.”**

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James Womack, the founder of the Lean Enterprise Institute and is often credited for popularising Lean Thinking in the west.



# MUTUAL RESPECT

**MANAGER:** I RESPECT YOUR CLOSE UP  
KNOWLEDGE, ABILITY AND DEDICATION TO  
SOLVE THE PROBLEM.

**TEAM:** I RESPECT YOUR BIG PICTURE  
PERSPECTIVE, THAT ALLOWS YOU TO ASK THE  
TOUGH QUESTIONS THAT GUIDE ME.

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**YOU HAVE TO  
SOLVE PROBLEMS  
TOGETHER.**

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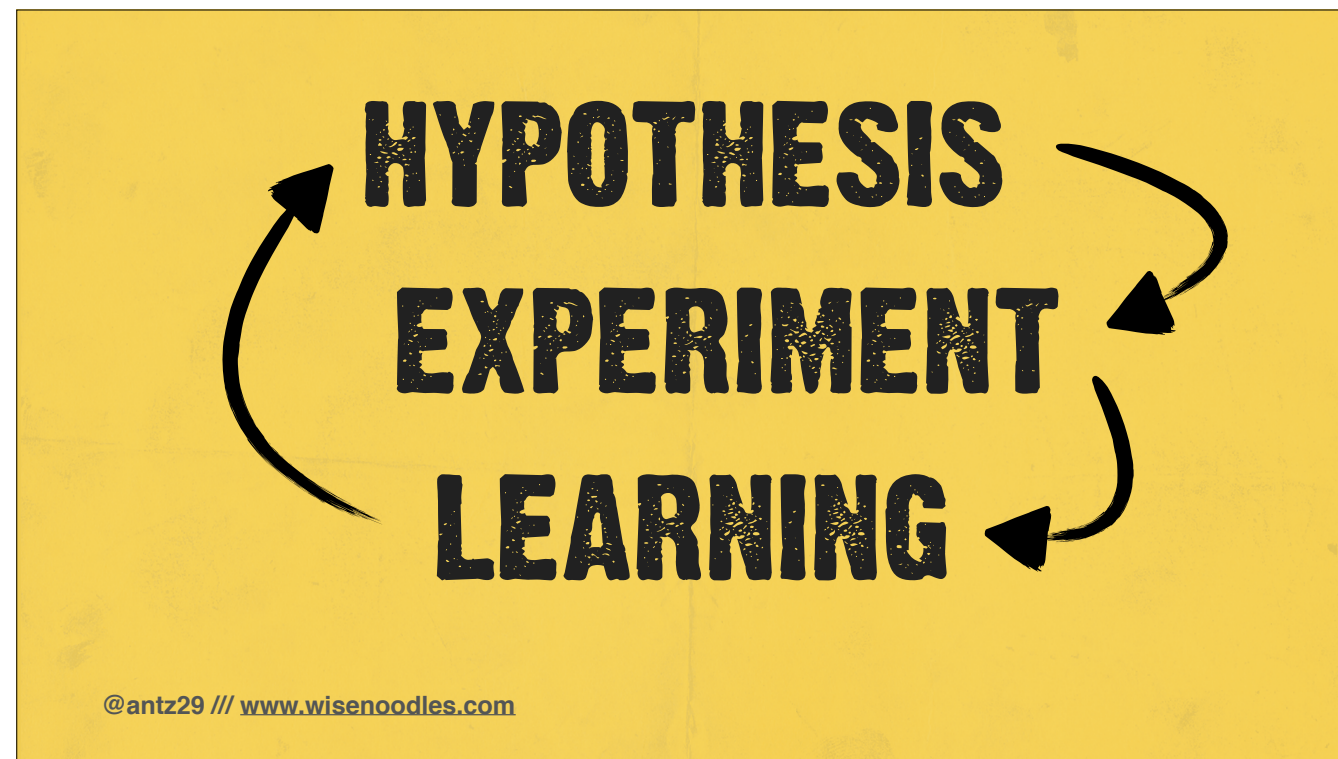
If you are not solving problems collaboratively, then you are missing out on both the greatest strengths of your team and agile's (not so secret) super power.



Yep, you got it. Collaboration!  
Perhaps, not the biggest surprise, but something we seem to frequently forget.

So, how can we bring collaboration into our product ownership?  
It's meant to be a one person show right?

Let's tie all of this together...



Start by bringing a hypothesis to your team, an idea that might solve the problem or bring you closer to your goal.

The team's job is to figure out the simplest way (minimum output) to validate or invalidate this hypothesis. They do this with an experiment.

This provides learning, which is the outcome. The team have not failed if they invalidate the hypothesis. Learning is the outcome here, and learning will always move you closer to your goal.

Knowing what doesn't work, is just as important as knowing what does.

As you learn more, you will be able to have more certainty in your hypotheses, or as the scientific community call it...

# CONSENSUS

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In science, someone will produce a theory.  
This theory is presented as a paper and published in a journal at which point it is normally peer reviewed.

Over time, other scientists may well test the theory with experiments.  
As more results come in, the scientific community will form a consensus on the original theory.

Nothing is ever considered certain, just most likely given the current shared understanding of the available information.

Don't hold anything sacred in your teams, allow consensus to form naturally, and make sure it's safe for anyone to question these ideas at any time.

If there isn't consensus in the team, perhaps, it's not the best idea?



# **THE PILLARS OF COLLABORATIVE PRODUCT OWNERSHIP**

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# **RESPECT PEOPLE**

**Don't bring your team solutions to implement,  
show the team you respect their ability to solve  
the problems you bring them.**

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# EMBRACE UNCERTAINTY

Nothing is more damaging to our organisations than fake certainty. We need to accept the inherent uncertainty that reality presents. Not pretend we have certainty when it doesn't exist.

*Embrace uncertainty and reality will hug you back!*

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# **SMALL EXPERIMENTS**

**Work with your team to overcome uncertainty by collaborating on small experiments that will gradually build a shared understanding of the problem space throughout the team.**

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# CONTINUOUS LEARNING

**With every experiment comes learning, even if it invalidates your theory. Learning will always move you towards your goal (even when it seems you haven't).**

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# **NO COMPLACENCY**

**Allow consensus to build naturally across the team, but ensure it's safe to question anything. Even things that seem certain. Especially the things that seem certain. Don't get complacent.**

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**RESPECT PEOPLE  
EMBRACE UNCERTAINTY  
SMALL EXPERIMENTS  
CONTINUOUS LEARNING  
NO COMPLACENCY**

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Source: Agile Alliance

Product Owners can respect the people on a team by collaborating with them on solving problems and embracing the uncertainty of reality. Teams can overcome uncertainty by using small experiments to test their hypotheses which leads to continuous learning and builds consensus on the validity (or invalidity) a theory. But, no team should ever be complacent with the present state of understanding, and it should always be safe to question anything however certain it might seem.

**THANKS! QUESTIONS?**

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