

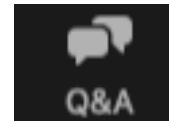
Why Scrum Isn't Working

Robert Pieper & Jason Malmstadt

January 15, 2026

Quick Guidelines

- Your microphones will be muted throughout
- This session is recorded. The recording and slides will be available after the webinar within 24 hours.
- Please ask questions!
 - Submit questions by selecting the Q & A icon:



Who is Scrum.org

Mission:
*Helping People and
Teams Solve
Complex Problems*



Ken Schwaber
Scrum.org Founder,
Chairman and
Co-creator of Scrum





Robert Pieper

Robert Pieper is a licensed Scrum.org Professional Scrum Trainer and National Public Speaker who has been teaching and coaching Scrum since 2013. He brings an MBA from Marquette University and an Electrical Engineering degree from the Milwaukee School of Engineering, supported by 20 years of hands-on software development experience. Robert specializes in helping organizations make Scrum work in real product environments with a practical and engaging approach that cuts through dogma and focuses on outcomes. As the founder of Responsive Advisors, he teaches teams and leaders how to use Scrum to drive meaningful business results while keeping learning approachable and entertaining.



Jason Malmstadt

Career

- 20 years of product development and agile transformation experience
- 10 years as a Software & Systems Engineer in Healthcare Technology
- Began teaching Scrum in 2017, Professional Scrum Trainer since 2022
- Loves teaching people new to Scrum using everyday analogies

Personal

- Will discuss Marvel Comics, Star Wars, or Zelda lore for hours
- Recovering Theater Kid (Wicked soundtrack currently on loop)
- Frequent traveler to Mombasa, Kenya and the surrounding area



We live what we teach and advise.
You are not a “one size fits all” story.

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Today's Agenda

Getting Started

Why Scrum
Isn't Working

Now What?

- Introductions
- Misfire 1
- What To Do
- Agenda
 - Misfire 2
 - Misfire 3
 - Q&A
- What We Mean
 - Misfire 3
 - Thank You!



A black and white photograph of a diverse group of professionals in an office environment. They are gathered around a large screen, looking at data and discussing it. The scene is focused on the interaction and collaboration between the team members.

0

What “Scrum Isn’t Working” Means

What “Scrum Isn’t Working” Means

What People Say

“Scrum isn’t working.”

“Scrum isn’t solving our problems.”

“Scrum isn’t helping us.”

What It Points To

Our outcomes aren’t improving.

Scrum doesn’t solve problems, it reveals them.

We aren’t changing the systems around it.

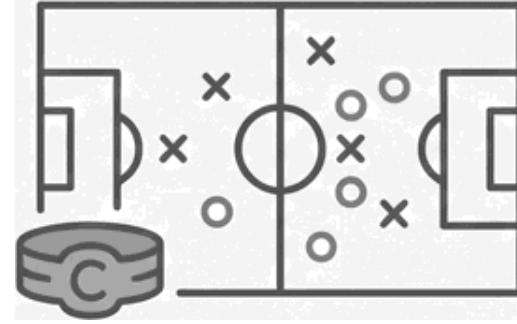
We Will Diagnose Three Common Organizational Misfires

The Rigid Process



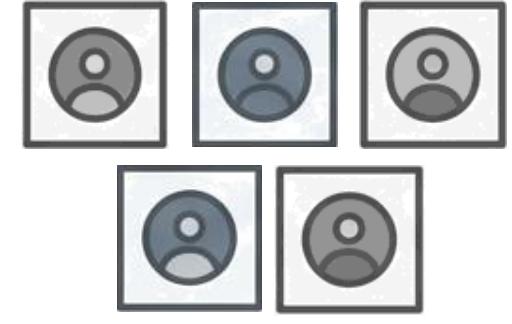
Scrum is treated as a strict set of rules to be followed, stifling the ability to learn and adapt.

Powerless PO



The person accountable for value lacks the authority or availability to lead the team effectively.

Siloed Team



Teams are composed of narrow specialists who create dependencies and cannot deliver value independently.

A black and white photograph of a group of five people in an office environment. They are all looking at a computer monitor together, which is displaying a complex chart or graph. The people are dressed in casual to semi-casual attire. The background is slightly blurred, focusing on the group and the screen.

1

Scrum Becomes a Rigid Process

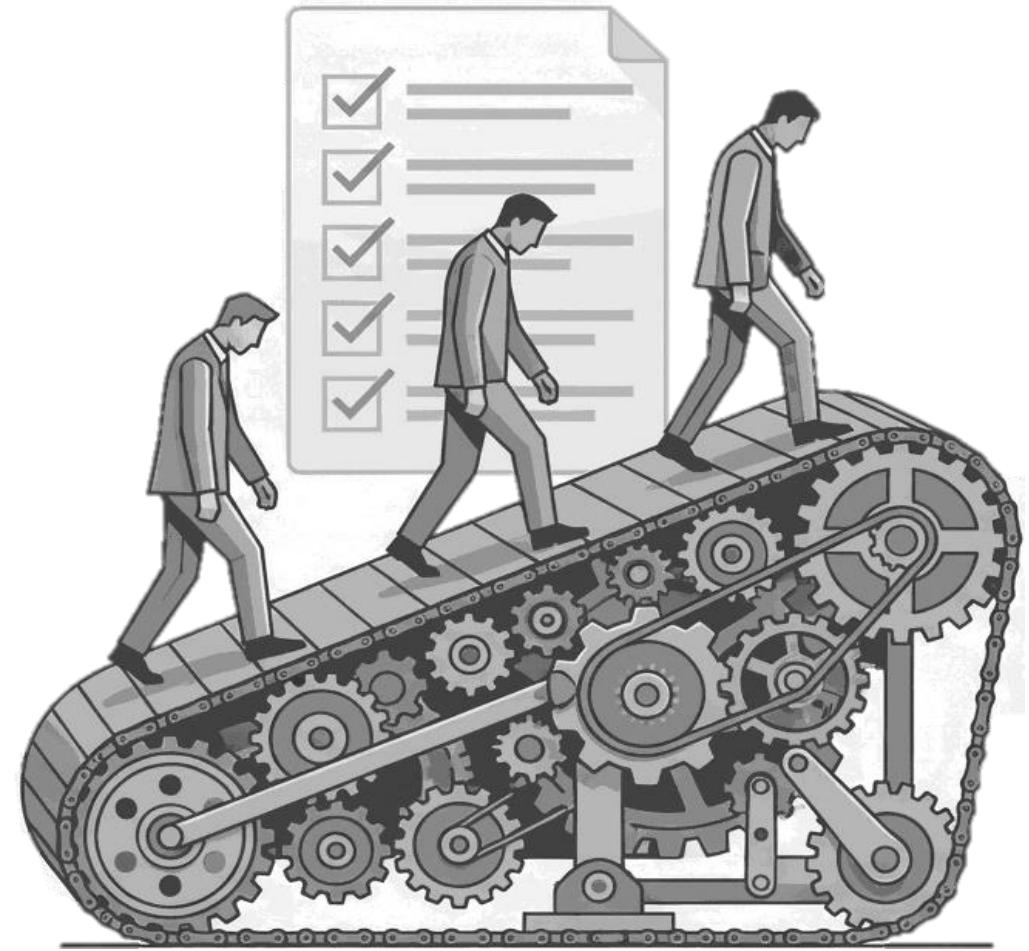
Misfire #1: When Scrum Becomes a Checklist, It Loses Its Power

The Misunderstanding

Scrum is incorrectly viewed as a predefined delivery process or a checklist of meetings to run and roles to fill. Teams treat ceremonies like Sprint Planning and Retrospectives as “boxes to check off.”

The Consequence

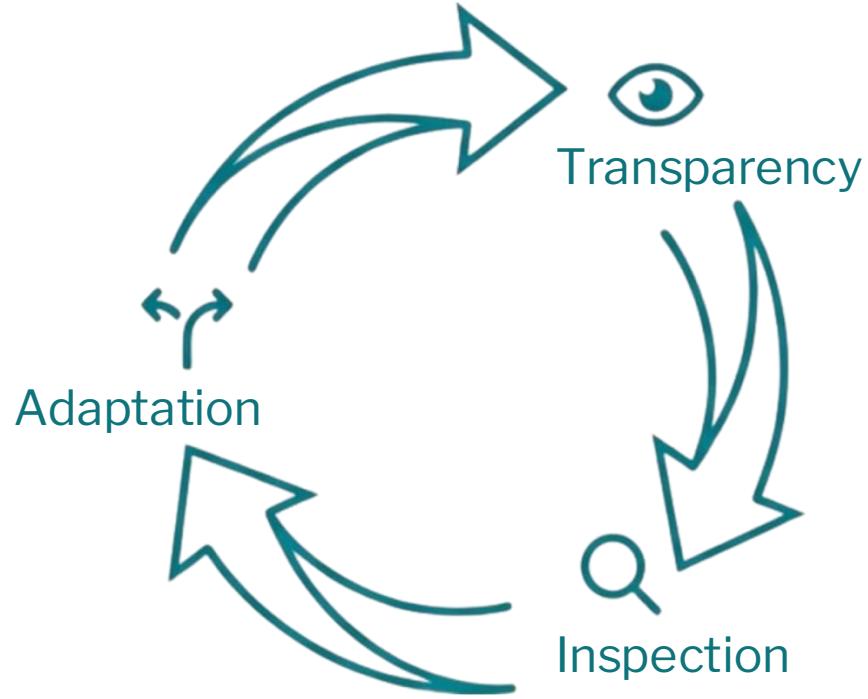
This creates an illusion of agility. Teams become busy and compliant but are not adaptive or purposeful. They lose the core benefit of Scrum: the ability to navigate complexity and uncertainty through empirical control.



Fix 1: Reframe Scrum as a Framework, Not a Process to Follow

Audit Purpose, Not Process

Managers should stop asking if a Daily Scrum happened and start asking *if it helped the team align and adapt their plan.*



Use Scrum as a Diagnostic

Leverage Scrum to reveal organizational dysfunctions like bottlenecks or skill gaps, rather than hiding them to appear "successful." True maturity is how well a team responds to change.

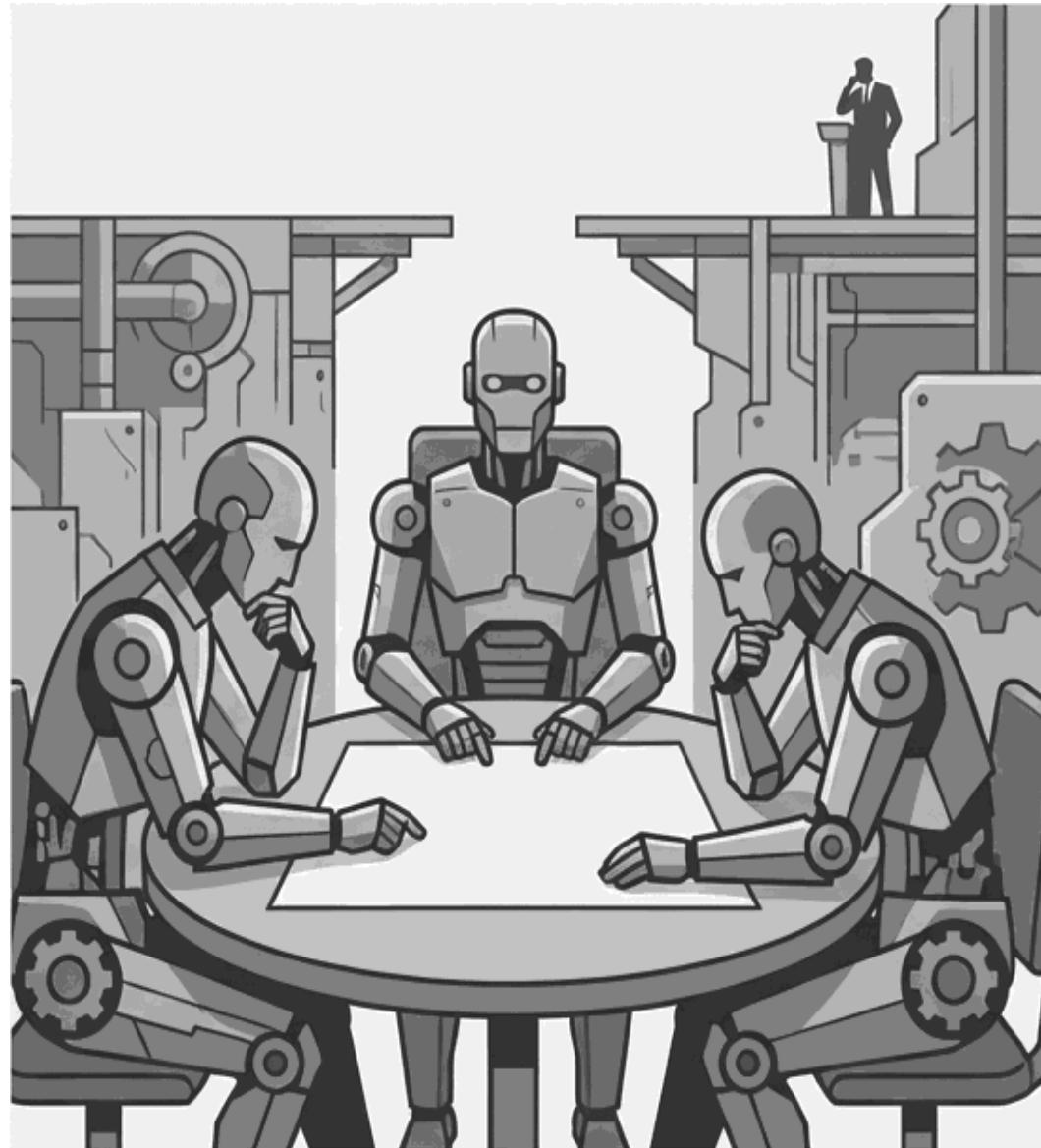
Recenter on Core Principles

The focus must shift from following rules to using the pillars of transparency, inspection, and adaptation to test assumptions and make better decisions each Sprint.



2

Powerless/Absent Product Owner



Misfire #2: A Powerless Product Owner Creates a Leadership Vacuum

The Authority and Accessibility Gap

Many Product Owners are either proxies who lack the authority to make **real decisions**, or they are senior leaders who are **too busy to engage** with the team.

The Impact on Value Delivery

- **Delayed Decisions:** Priorities are unclear, blocking the team and delaying value.
- **Failure to Build Increment:** Without active PO involvement, it is highly unlikely a valuable, usable increment is produced.
- **Strategic Disconnect:** The team is disconnected from market fit and business goals, reducing the PO to a mere note-taker.

Fix 2: Product Owner Must Be Empowered, Accessible, and Visionary

Grant True Authority

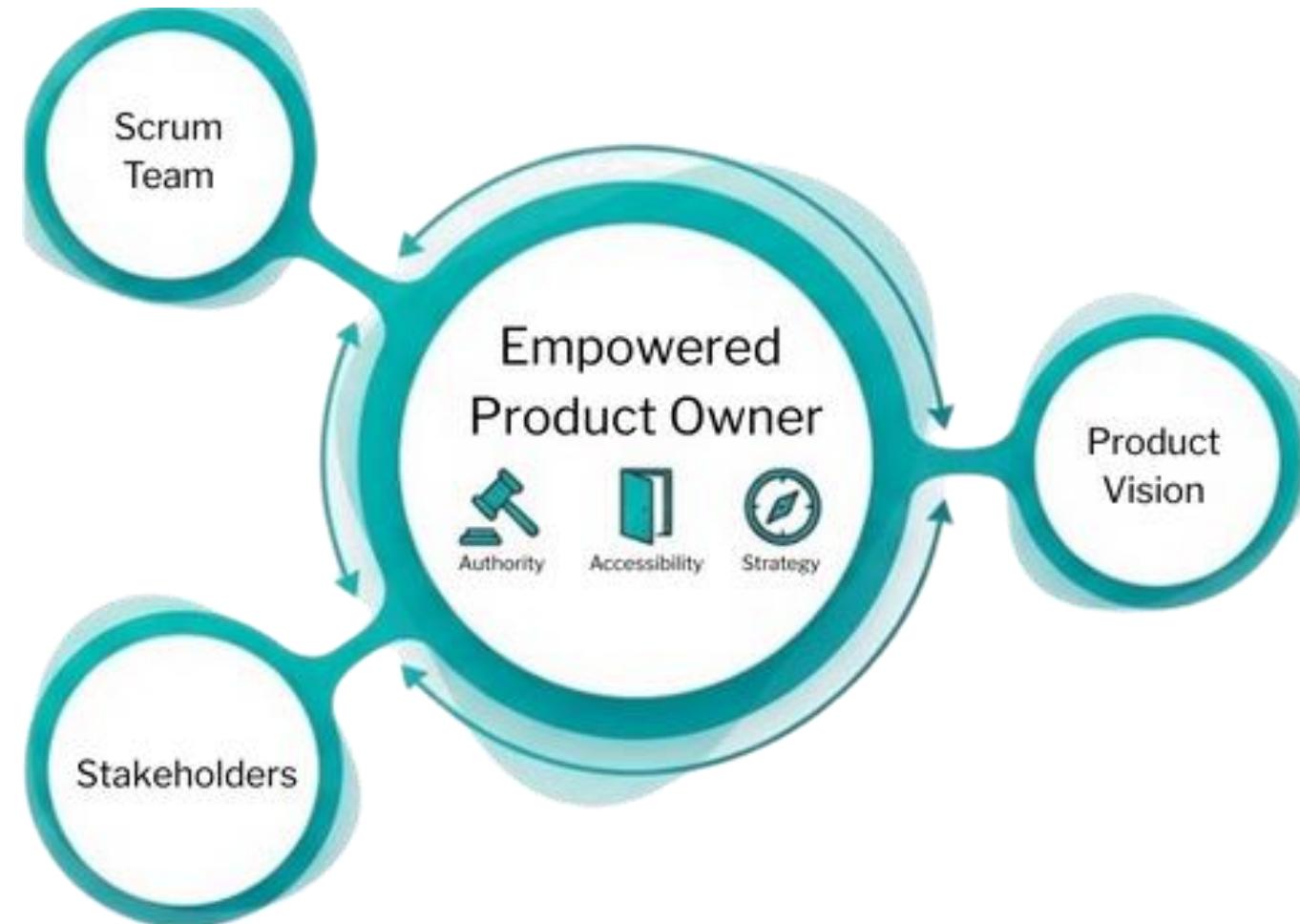
The PO must be empowered by the organization to make final decisions on the Product Backlog, including the authority to prioritize work and to accept or reject the increment.

Ensure Deep Involvement

The PO must be accessible to the team and an active participant in events like backlog refinement and Sprint Planning to provide direction and feedback.

Choose the Right Person

Avoid assigning the role to an executive too senior to participate. The PO must be a proactive leader who can own the product strategy and communicate it effectively.



A black and white photograph of a group of people working together in an office environment. Several individuals are visible, some looking at documents and others at computer monitors. The scene is slightly blurred, creating a professional and collaborative atmosphere.

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The Siloed Team

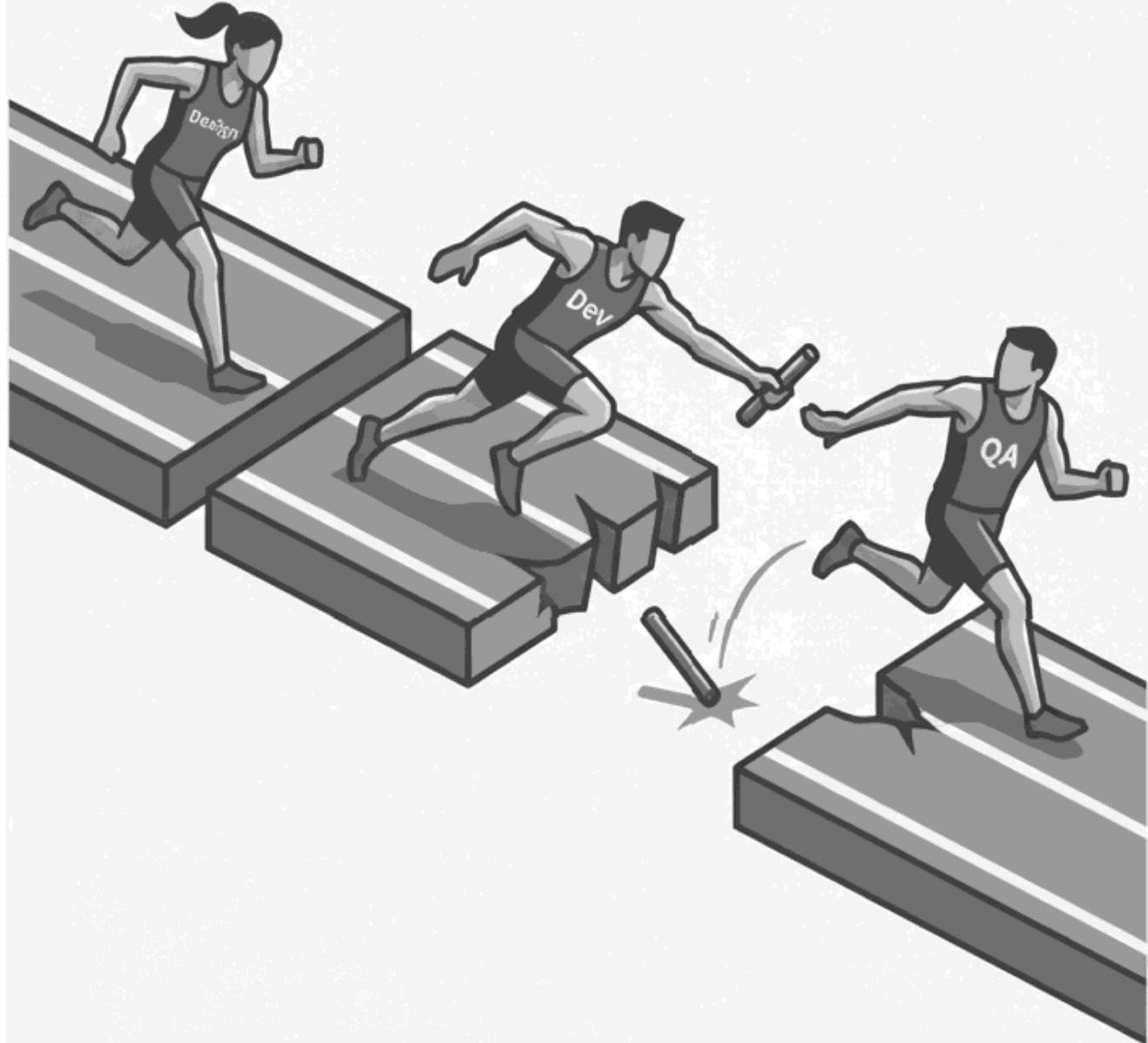
Misfire #3: Component Teams Cannot Deliver End-to-End Value

The Specialist Silo Problem

Scrum teams are designed to be self-managing and end-to-end capable. However, many are composed only of narrow specialists (e.g., all front-end developers or all QA engineers).

The Chain of Dependencies

These teams cannot deliver value on their own. They are constantly waiting on external departments for testing, integration, or deployment. This fragments ownership, dilutes accountability, and creates slower feedback.



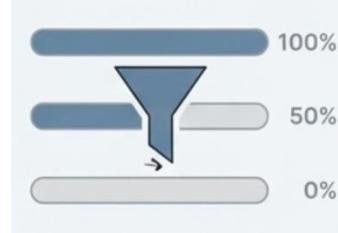
Over-Specialization Creates Handoffs, Hides Risk, and Halts Progress

Incomplete Work



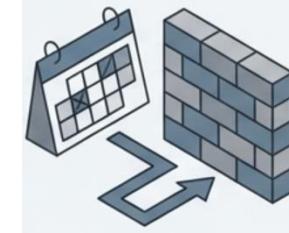
Without a diverse skill set, a team cannot produce a usable increment that can be truly inspected. This breaks the central feedback loop of Scrum. 'Done' becomes a local, meaningless term.

Misleading Visibility



True progress is compromised because work is fragmented across different team queues and backlogs. What looks like progress for another.

Loss of Agility



Incremental delivery of value becomes rare or impossible because the team tacks the breadth of skills needed to finish work completely within a Sprint.

Fix 3: Build Cross-Functional Teams with “T-Shaped” Capabilities

Foster T-Shaped People

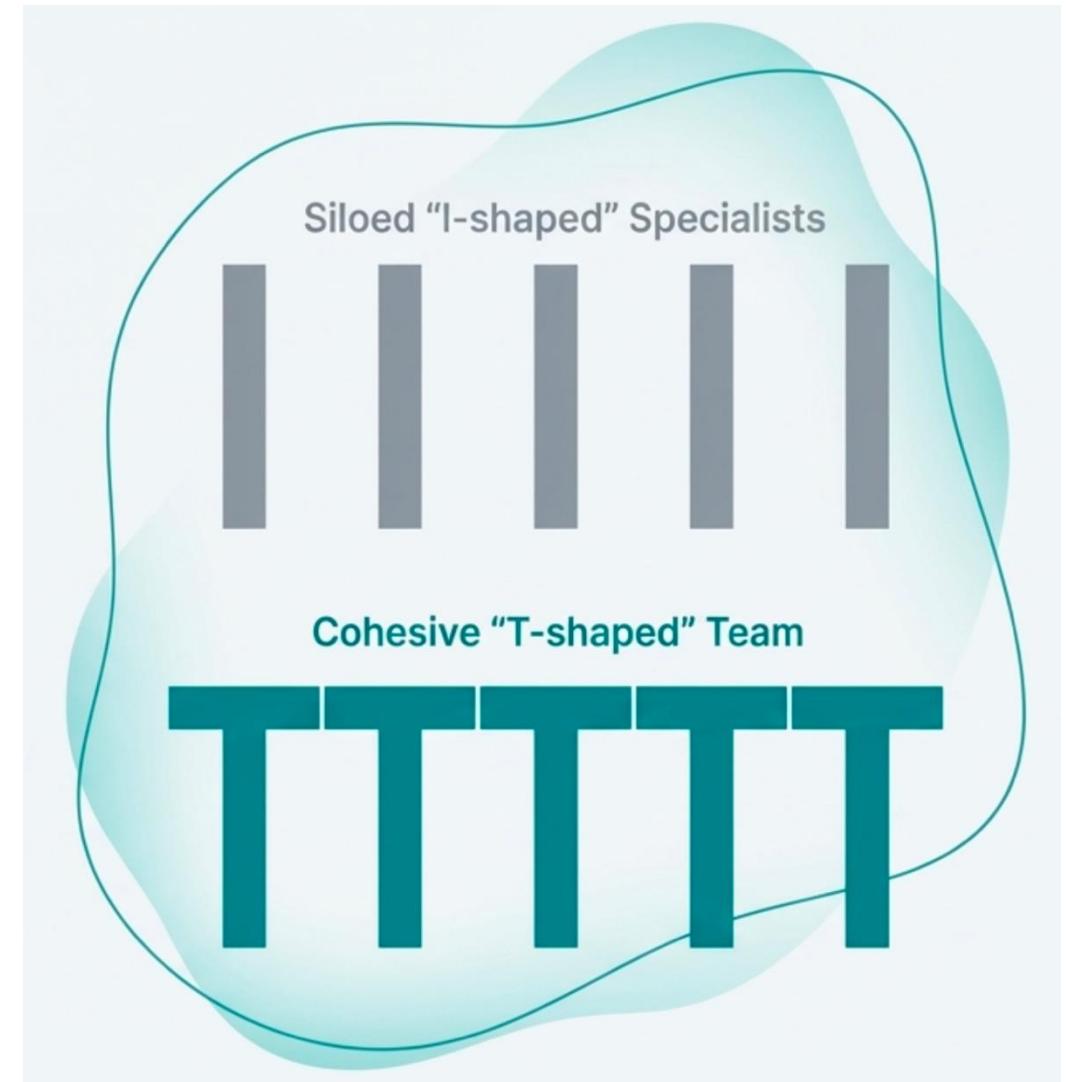
Encourage team members to maintain deep expertise in one area (the vertical bar of the T) while also gaining a breadth of skills to support teammates in related areas (the horizontal bar).

Identify and Fill Skill Gaps

Managers must work with teams to identify the skills needed to deliver a complete increment. These gaps can then be filled through training, hiring, or restructuring.

Collapse Handoffs

The ultimate goal is to reduce dependencies. Where possible, embed specialists from shared departments (like QA or Devops) directly within the Scrum team to increase cohesion and accelerate delivery.



A black and white photograph of a group of people in a meeting room. They are seated around a table, looking at documents and discussing something. The scene is slightly blurred, creating a professional and collaborative atmosphere.

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What To Do

Summary: The Journey from Mechanical Compliance to Empirical Success

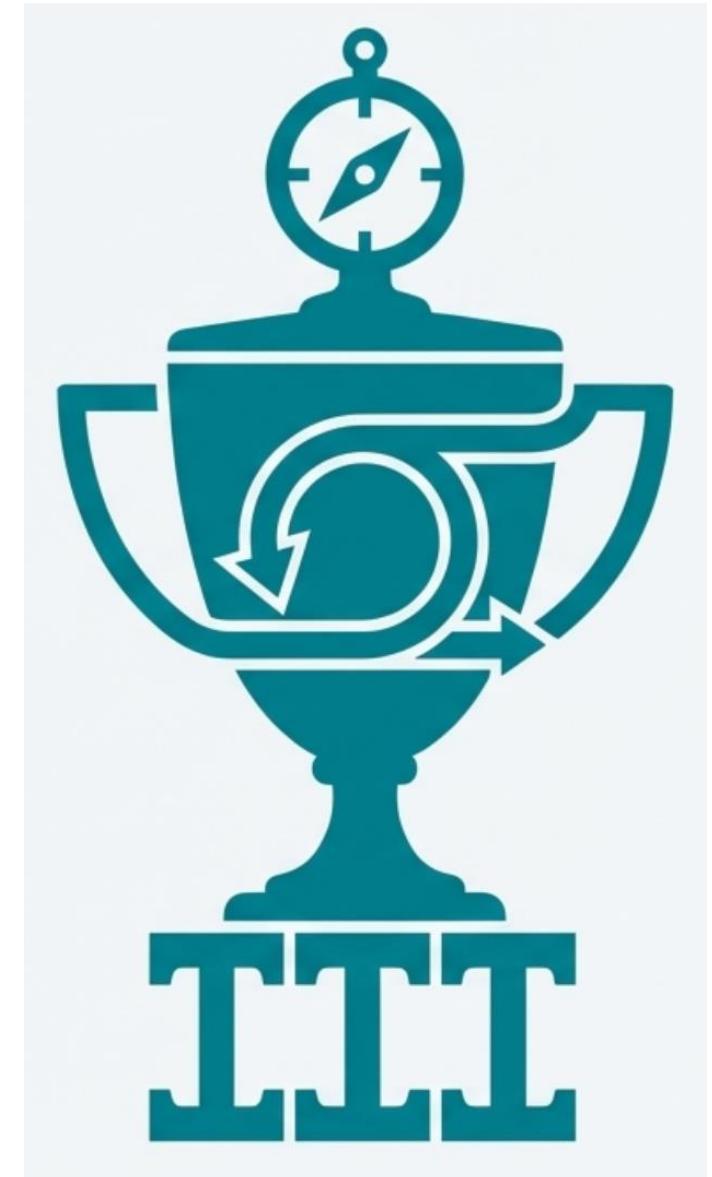
Misfire	Mechanical State (The Trap)	Empirical State (The Goal)
Rigid Process	A checklist of rules to be followed. Success = compliance.	A framework for learning. Success = making better decisions.
Powerless PO	A proxy or order-taker with no real authority.	An empowered and accessible leader who owns the product vision.
Siloed Team	A group of specialists dependent on others.	A self-managing, cross-functional team that can deliver end-to-end.

You Can't Win the Game by Just Practicing the Drills

A professional sports team will never win a championship if:

- The coach must follow a pre-written script every game
They need a flexible framework.
- The captain has no authority to change the play on the field.
They need an empowered leader.
- The roster only has star quarterbacks but no defense.
They need a cross-functional team.

**Winning with Scrum requires the same.
It's not about perfecting the mechanics.
It's about building an adaptive team
that can play the game and win.**



Questions

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Thank you!