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The Product Backlog is not a Backlog

Presenter:

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Author, Consultant, Teacher and Coach

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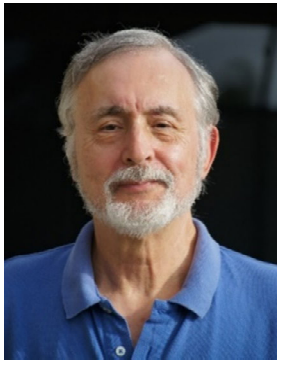
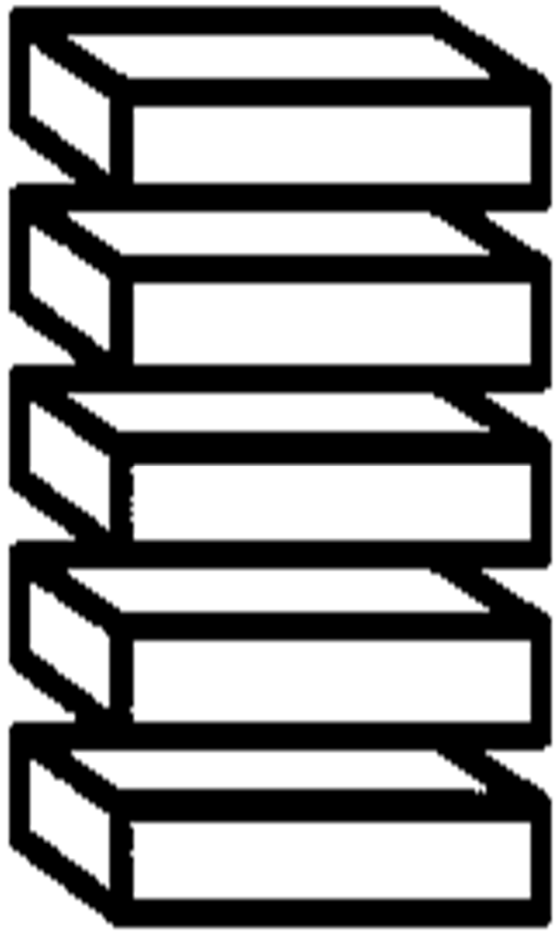


Steve Blais, PMP, PMI-PBA, is an author, consultant, teacher and coach who has over 56 years' experience in Information Technologies working as a programmer, project manager, business analyst, system analyst, general manager, and tester.

He is the author of Business Analysis: Best Practices for Success (John Wiley, 2011) and co-author of Business Analysis for Practitioners: a Practice Guide (PMI, 2014) and a contributor to the Business Analyst Body of Knowledge, V3 (IIBA, 2015). His new book, The Digital Transformation of Business Analysis, published by IIBA Press, will be out at the end of the year.



Backlog & Product Backlog

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The dictionaries say…

- "Backlog - an accumulation of tasks unperformed or materials not processed" (Merriam Webster)
- "Backlog - a large number of things that you should have done before and must do now" (Cambridge)
- "Backlog - an accumulation or buildup, especially of unfilled orders, unconsumed products or unfinished work." (Wiktionary)

Static list of work you must do

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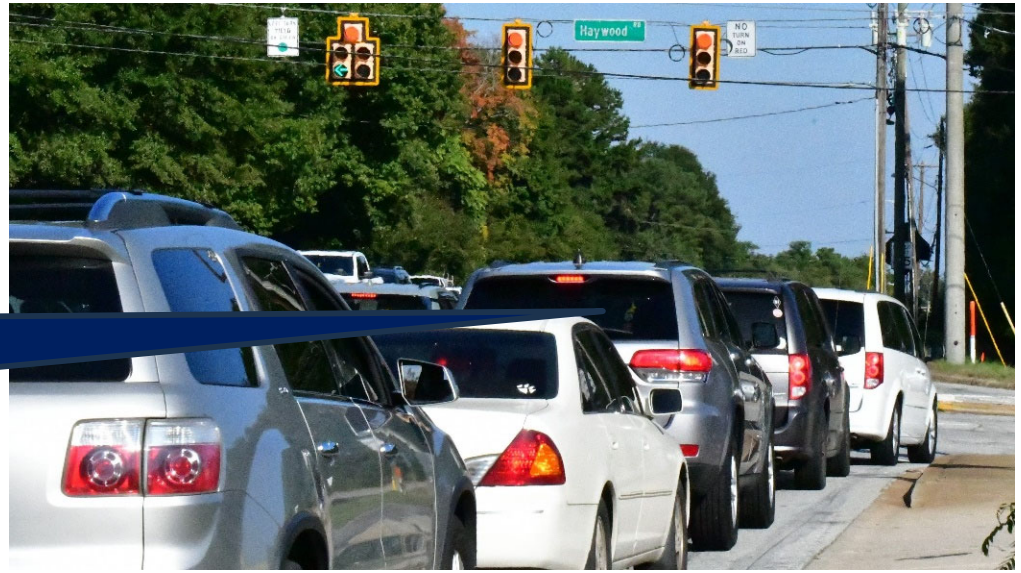
Example Backlogs

- **Backlog at stop light**

The guy in front is on his phone and we missed the light change again



- **Long line at McDonalds**

The backlog is greater than 5 minutes, Open register 2



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Product Backlog

- **The product backlog is a list of items, as envisioned or thought of at a given point in time**
- **A prioritized list of work items there are needed to develop a product**
- **An emergent, ordered list of what is needed to build or improve the product**

Dynamic, flexible

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Other Questionable Scrum Labels

- **Scrum**
  - Daily short meeting of all team members to review progress and identify obstacles
- involves players from both teams packing together in three rows to try to gain possession of the ball.





- **Sprint**
  - A timebox within which the work of the team is done
  - A Foot race over a short distance with all-out burst of speed

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Why?

- **Ikujiro Nonaka**



- **Hirotaka Takeuchi**



- ***The New New Product Development Game (1986)***



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Backlog Definition Problems

Are we just going to start at the top of this list and work our way through to the bottom?

The developers are going Agile. They want a backlog instead of requirements . What is the difference?



I am used to gathering information, drilling down with questions, analyzing the results and producing a business requirements document. This seems to be different.

So, we've got a product backlog. Where are the requirements anyway?

Do I have to reformat all the requirements and stuff into user stories to get them on the backlog?

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Requirements ?

Product backlog versus Business Requirements Document

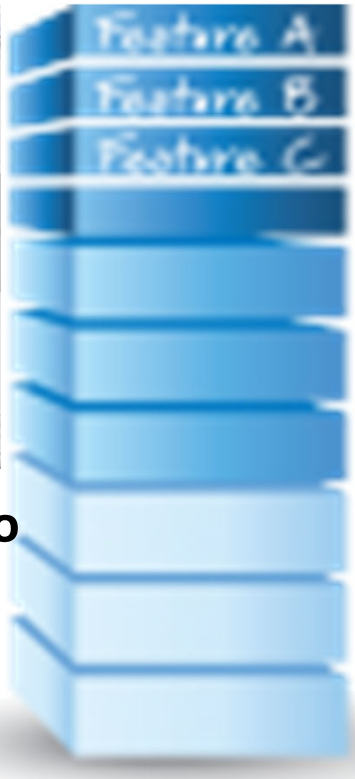


Everything that needs to be done to solve the business problem

Signed off / Approved / accepted . Committed

Change through change management process

All ‘items’ are at the same granularity



Everything that needs to be done to solve the business problem

No product backlog approval or sign off

Items / requirements are prioritized

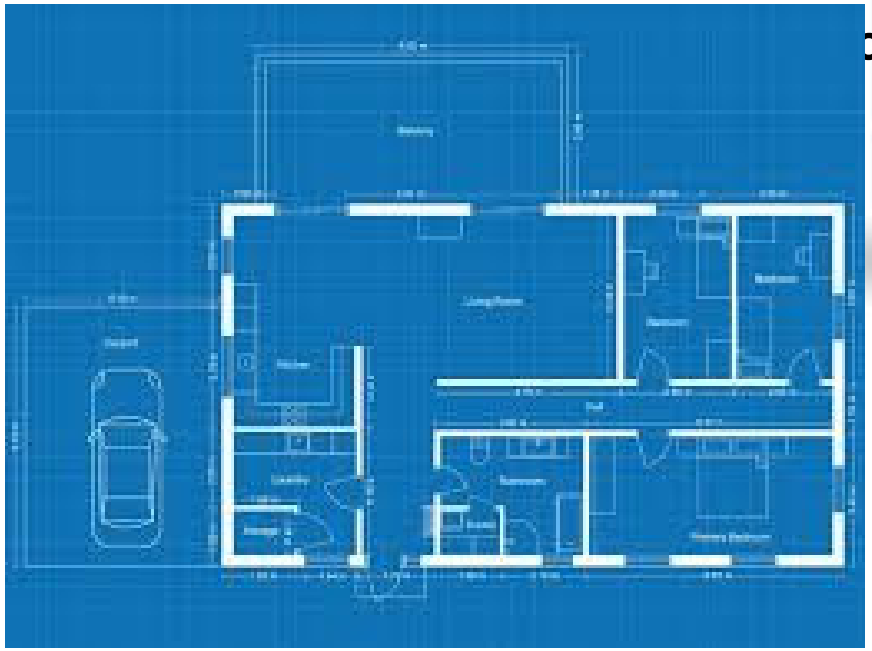
Flexible – can be changed at any time in any way

Multi-granular

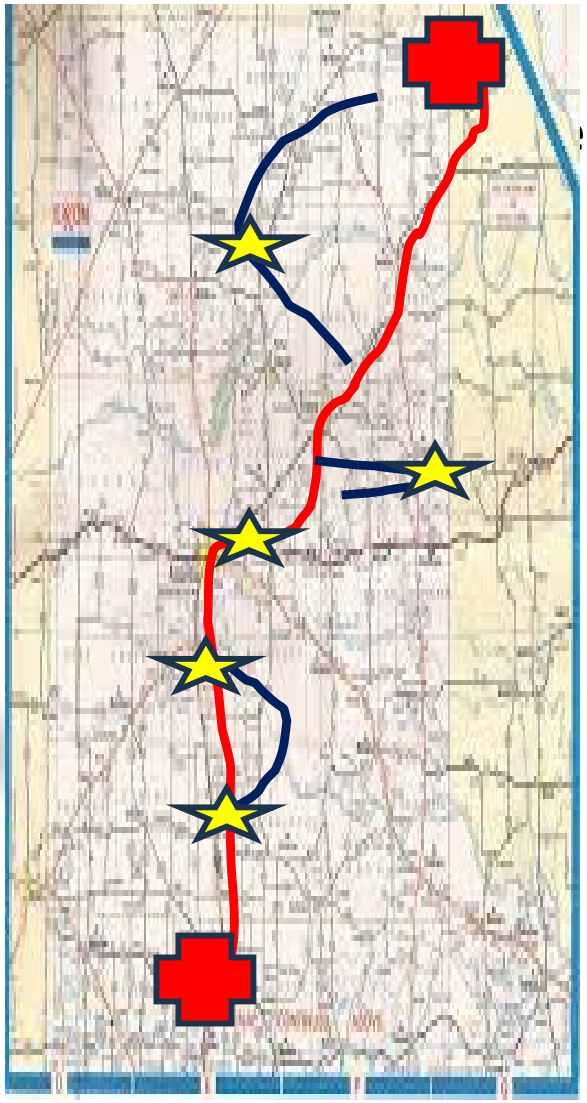
Product backlog versus Business Requirements Document

Product "Atlas"









“Put it on the list”



User stories

defects

Requirements

Or items

wants







Product Owner

use cases

“I have an idea”

Hallucinations

“how hard would it be to…”

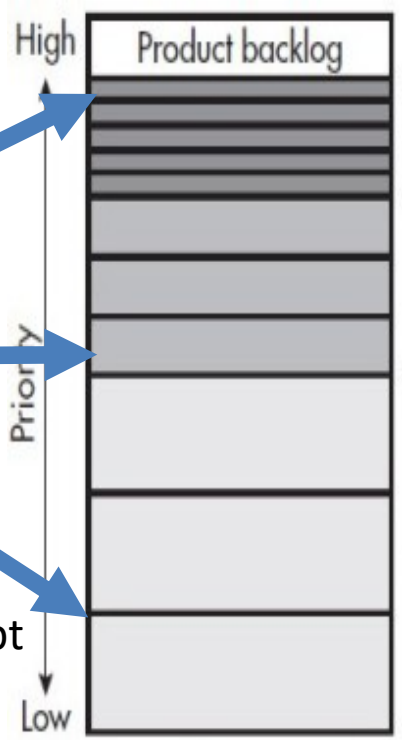
Technical debt reduction

Technical specifications





Wish list



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Requirements Meetings

I'm not sure what a 'requirement' is. I'd better not say anything

I'm Steve, your business analyst and we are here to gather the requirements …

My boss isn't here and I don't have the authority to commit to a requirement



Great. If I give him a requirement, it gets in the book and I 'll be blamed if it isn't right

We'll agree to whatever you need to get this thing going, we can always change it later

Why am I in this meeting anyway?

Let me get all my requirements into the book. They are more important

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“Product Backlog” Meetings

It's good to hear other people's ideas about this product

I’m Steve, I'm here to get your ideas on what you think you'd like to see in this new product we're going to build…

Cool. I've got a whole bunch of ideas about that product



He's asking for ideas so we won't be held responsible for whatever we say or suggest

Ideas? All ideas? No need to approve or commit do anything?

I'm sure that I can come up with some idea to contribute something

He is taking all the ideas Without discussion or judgment

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Level of Granularity: the Story

My customers need to be able to see their account balances so that they know that the ATM credited their deposit

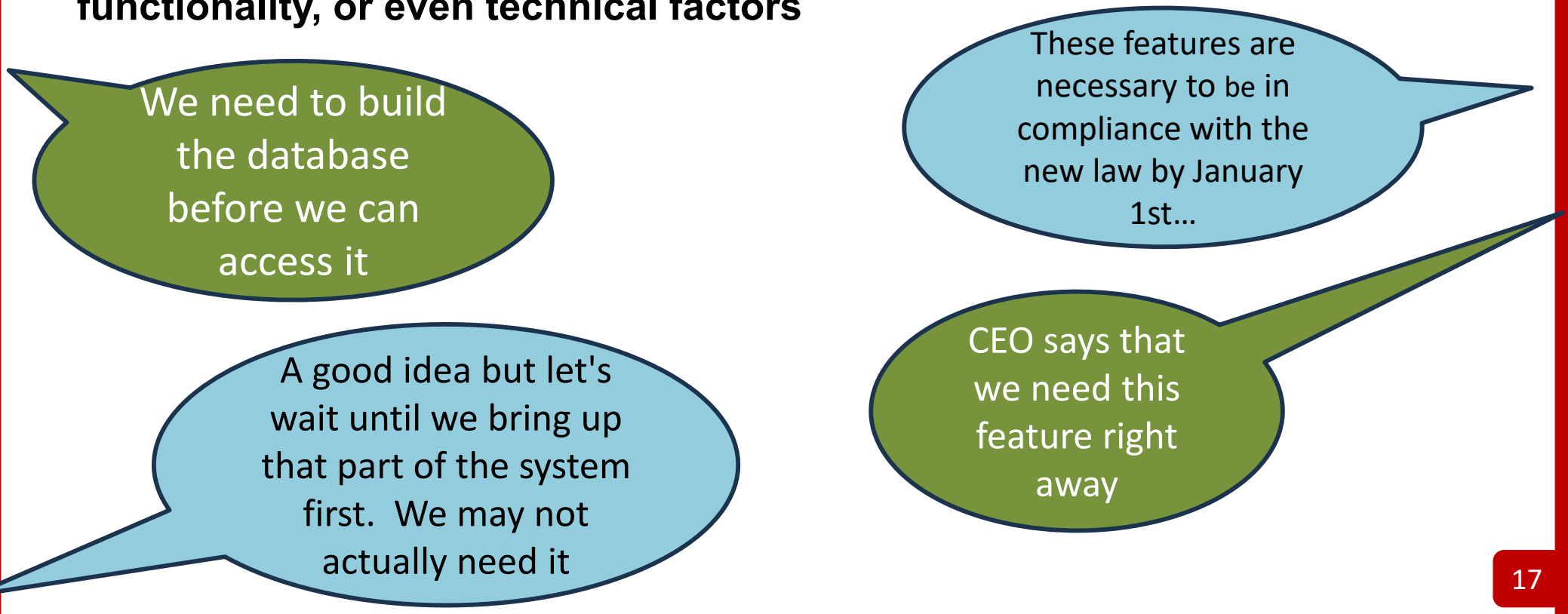


As a bank customer, I want to view my current account balance
so that I know my recent deposit went through.

- **Get the basics: who (role), what (an activity or function) and why (reason for needing to do it)**

Prioritized Backlog

- **Backlog is assumed always to be in priority order with the highest priority being at the top of the list**
- **priorities change almost daily**
- **new items are added, items increase in priority based on time or functionality, or even technical factors**



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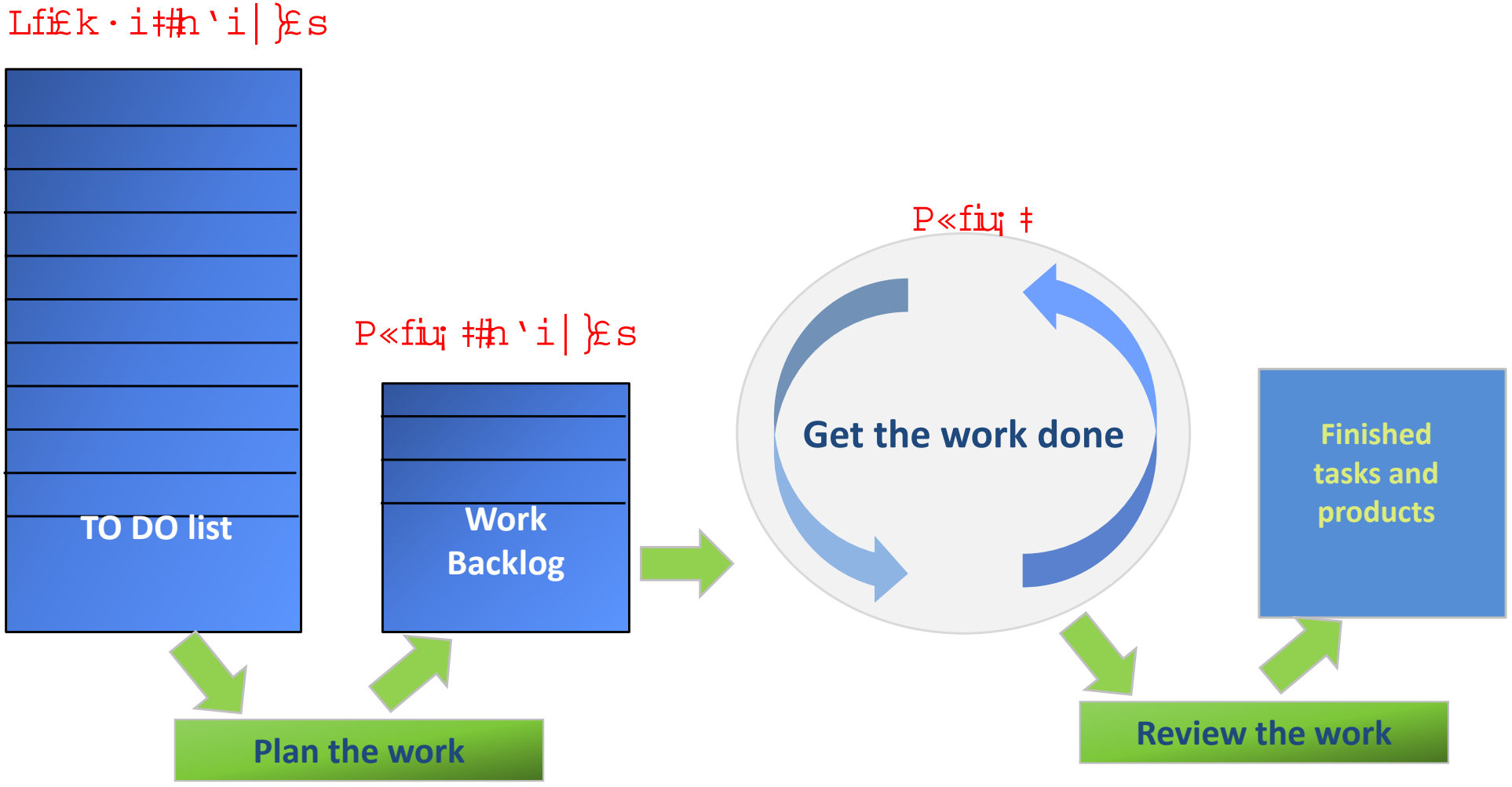
Product Backlog in Practice



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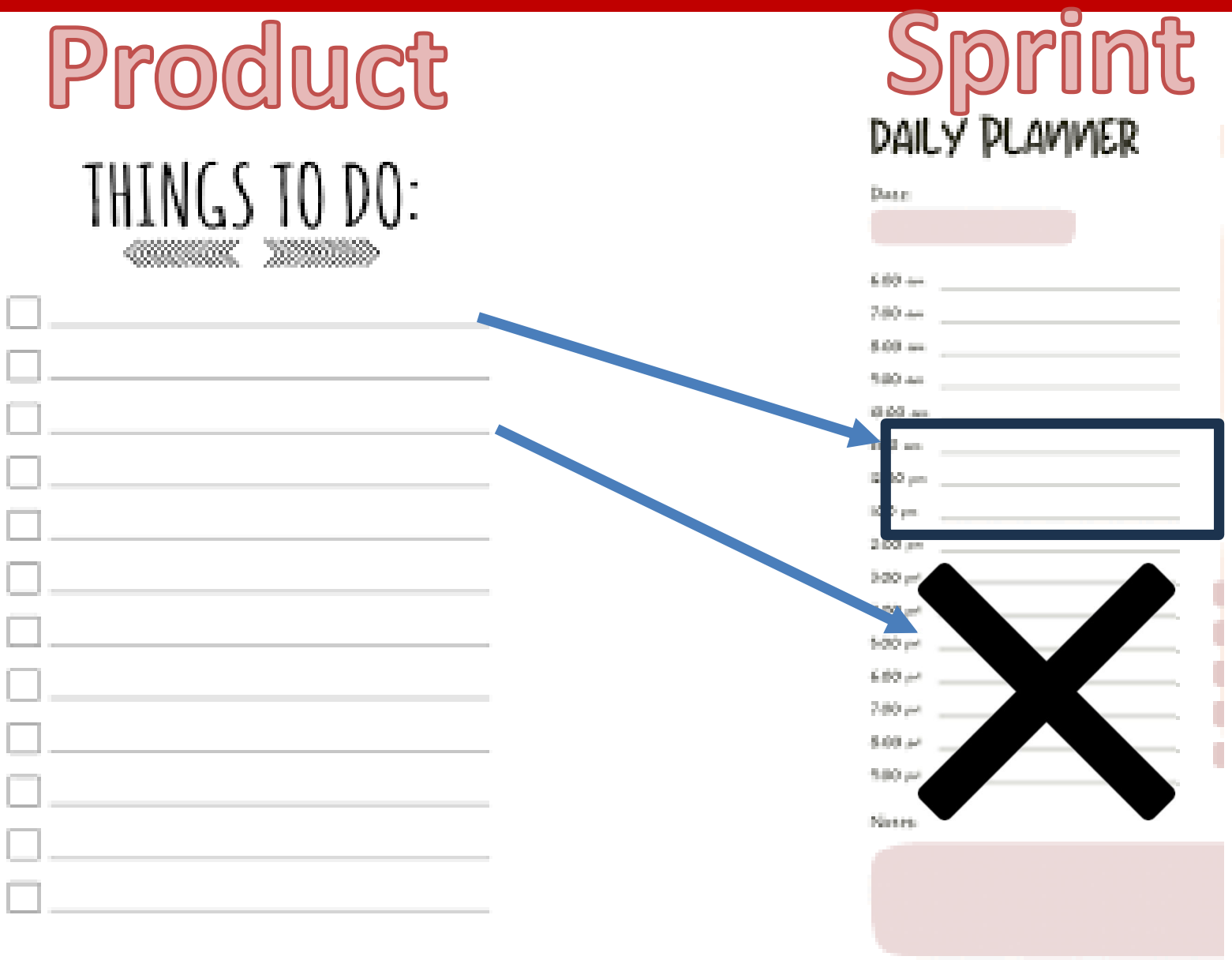
Sprint Backlog at Work



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Product Backlog versus Sprint Backlog

Product

TODO list for the entire project or product

Prioritized

Identifies everything that needs to be done to solve the business problem

Long term strategic plan that evolves with product

Items may be of any size

Anyone can see and contribute ideas to the product belief through the product owner

What we build

Sprint

Plan for what is going to be done now

Prioritized

Provides focus for the development team tasks to be completed immediately

Short term tactical plan that doesn't change

Items must be small enough to be done in the sprint

Only the developers see and manager the sprint backlog

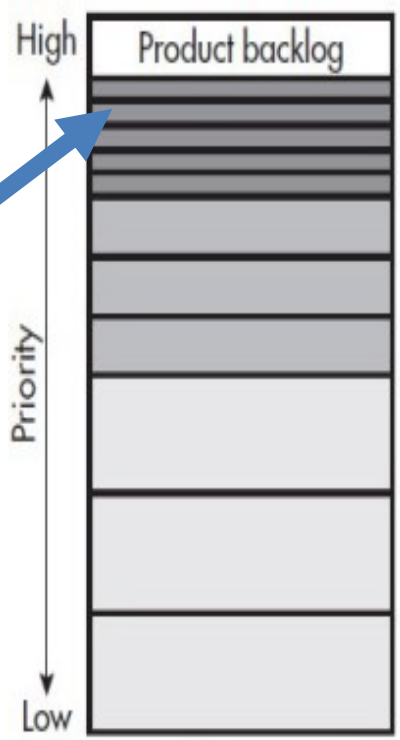
how we build it

“How are we Going to do it”

Product



Product Owner





Sprint Backlog

Select
Discuss
Estimate
Decompose as necessary
Discuss
Task
Add to backlog
Commit



Developers

- When Sprint bucket is full, go to work to clear the backlog

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From Product Idea List to Sprint Backlog

The story

As a bank customer, I want to view my current account balance
so that I know my recent deposit went through.

Tell me more…



What tells me you're a bank customer?
When would you be doing this? How often?
Under what circumstances?
Describe what you wish to see?

- **Developer will determine … requirements be or sh… to get th…**

Facts / requirements
Bank customer account number 12 characters numeric on BC221
"current" includes all transactions on file for customer account
recent is all deposits on file. Xaction file = TLDGR2301
Deposits appear on file after 24 hours of the date of the transaction.

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Product Backlog keeps context

- **A rudimentary road map (Product Atlas) for the entire product**
- **Defines the entire product (and project): the solution to the business problem**
- **Also contains ideas, thoughts, possibilities, dreams, and everything else**
- **Items may or may not be completed or even started**

I changed my mind.. Take that off the list

I wonder if we could …

This item has been on the list for 3 years . Maybe we should do part A soon and leave Part B for later

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The Real “Backlog”

- **Items that describe committed work**
  - Sized
  - Estimated
  - Tasked
  - Committed
- **The work that is to be done**
- **Specify the requirements**

Sprint backlog

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The Business Analyst's job

Product "Atlas"

Facilitate information gathering

Build the Big Picture

Understand and specify the problem domain

Define the direction





Sprint backlog

Ensure the items on the backlog are

- **Unambiguous**
- **Precise**
- **Testable**
- **Concise (small)**
- **Understandable**
- **implementable**

Help the development team clear the backlog

Questions and Contact

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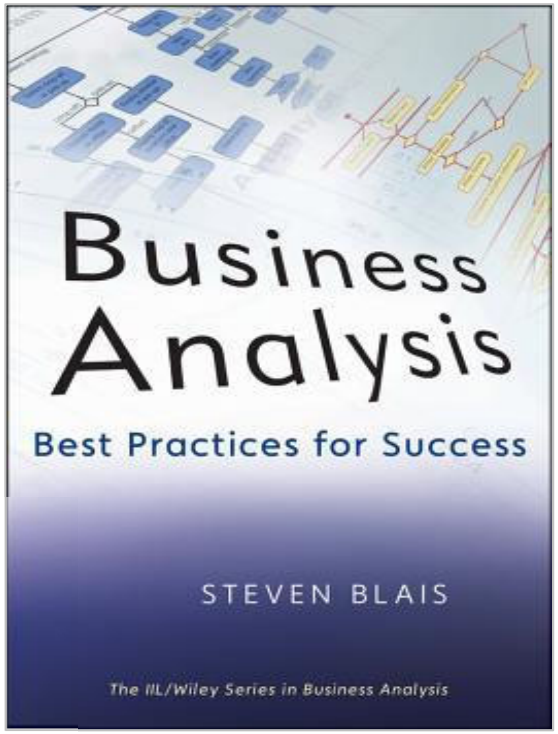



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