

# OWN IT

8 Simple **Secrets** of Product Owner Success



Arto  
Kiiskinen

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Product Owner Success

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# Foreword

When Arto told me about his new book and asked me to both review it and to write a foreword, I was both flattered and scared. I was flattered by Arto's trust in me and scared of writing this foreword. I wasn't scared about reviewing the book, as over the years we've worked jointly on several product manuals, guides, and white papers, in which Arto did the bulk of the writing and I then "polished" them (a bit).

Arto is one of the most humane tech leaders and educators that I've ever met, and it was a great pleasure to read and review this book (several revisions of it, as a matter of fact); it's a clear demonstration of his humanism, passion, and vast expertise in software development processes and best practices.

For this book, Arto has invested a lot of thought in putting forth a structure that makes his views and ideas approachable and easy to remember and use. The book was a pleasure to read and reminded me of more than a few "challenges" we've tackled (or just experienced) together,

and I wish I had realized years ago some of the things I learned while reviewing the book.

This book should be read by every Product Owner, Product Manager, Project Manager, R&D Manager, Quality Assurance Manager, Scrum Master, Tech Lead . . . and every technology company founder and CEO. It helps those who need the skills and tools that this book teaches, but it also provides great insight to those stakeholders who need to understand why a software product development organization does (or at least should) work the way that Arto describes.

This book also contains novel concepts and ideas that will make the process more effective and enjoyable for product organizations that adopt them, and make the end products better for it.

—Petri Bäckström (who has served in numerous specialist, generalist and management roles in almost as many companies)

# About the Author

Arto Kiiskinen has worked for over 20 years in product development, in different roles such as R&D Project Manager, Program Manager, Product Owner, Scrum Master, Test Engineer, R&D Team Lead, R&D Manager, and R&D Director. He has over 10 years of experience on agile methods, Scrum, Kanban, and experience on leading complex R&D projects that span multiple cultures, countries, and across large time zone differences.



He worked 15 years in Nokia, in different product and service areas such as mobile phone software development, digital service business and venture programs, and others. After his Nokia career, he has led the R&D organization in a smaller software company for 5 years.

As a trainer and coach, Arto has helped small and large companies and projects and programs of widely different industries transition to more effective and agile ways of working. Speeding up the path to reduced



waste, increased efficiency, and superior team-learning and morale are Arto's main strengths and passions.

Arto is a PSM certified Scrum Master, PSPO certified Product Owner, certified ISTQB Tester, and certified SAFe Agilist. He has a Master's degree from Lappeenranta University of Technology.

He is the inventor or co-inventor in 15 U.S. patents and 6 EU patents.

Arto lives in Kirkkonummi, Finland with his wife, cat, and fleet of motorized and pedal powered vehicles.

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/arto-kiiskinen-a98611/>

# Introduction

## Product Owner Is the Most Important Role in Agile

Most organizations that are involved in research and development of new products or services acknowledge that one of their key success factors is R&D, especially the people who work in R&D. In modern R&D, almost everyone has access to same technologies and computer resources, but the people create the difference. People use their knowledge and skills and the organizations' resources and work together to create new, innovative products and services. R&D people with good motivation, tools, ways of working, freedom to self-organize, and vision are vitally important to any organization's future aspirations.

How does the organization maximize the value they get from their people? The answer is simple – in addition to having the correct skills, tools, and resources, the people need a clear vision and goals, work that's clearly specified and tested to be of the highest value in any given moment. In essence, that's what product ownership is all about.

## 2 Introduction

The Product Owner is one of the principal roles in Agile, the others being the development team and the Scrum Master. While scrum is the most popular agile framework, even if the organization or team is using some other agile method, such as Kanban, most of the time, it still makes sense for them to have the roles of team, Scrum Master, and Product Owner. Sometimes, especially in smaller teams, a single person has multiple roles. This doesn't detract from the importance of still having the roles of Product Owner and Scrum Master in the team.

Having a Product Owner isn't mandatory. It's not a law. Some organizations don't have dedicated Product Owners in their R&D, yet they manage to create products of value. When we later on in the book discuss the concept of Product Owner, the tasks, routines, the Success Factors, and, eventually, the 8 Principles for Successful Product Owners, it doesn't mean that a single person always has to fill this role. The mission of this book is to describe to the reader what Product Ownership is, why the things that Product Owners do are important, and how one can be successful in the role of Product Owner. It would be best if the organization would endorse product ownership, but even if it doesn't, if someone does the same work, it will lead to good results.

Why is product ownership so important? It's because even the best teams need direction, and even the best self-organized teams benefit from having somebody with the single responsibility to define priorities. Product ownership doesn't mean product dictatorship – the main skills for a successful Product Owner is being able to communicate and listen to a lot of different voices, and then to boldly make informed and transparently communicated decisions.

The role of Product Owner is a challenge. But it's also a role in which you'll get satisfaction from optimizing the team performance and defining what gets done. You're part of creation of new things and new customer value. It feels good. And getting better at this role and achieving more success is fun. The mission of this book is to help you understand the why, what, and how of achieving more success as a Product Owner.

## Who This Book Is Meant For

This book is targeted to help people who have a Product Owner role in their organization. It doesn't matter whether they're new or experienced. While it's recommended to read the whole book, an experienced Product Owner could dive directly into the 8 Principles in Part 3.

When starting as a Product Owner, it's important to understand the different responsibilities and routines of the role. For a person new to the job, it's advisable to read the entire book. This way, the reader can have some background on the execution of the tasks before proceeding to the mindset, values, and the 8 Principles.

In many organizations, the role of the Product Owner is poorly defined. In many cases, the responsibilities are divided between different people such as Product Manager, Scrum Master, Technical Lead, Architect, or Line Manager. In such a situation, this book can be used as a source of knowledge on agreeing who does what. One of the challenges for organizations is finding the correct person with the right skills who is still close-by and available to act as the Product Owner for the team.

While the book is targeted for Product Owners, people who work in Scrum Master, R&D Manager, or Product Manager roles might also benefit in understanding the methods behind successful product ownership.

# About the Structure of The Book

The book consists of three parts:

- Part 1: Introduction to Product Ownership
- Part 2: The Success Factors for Product Owners
- Part 3: The 8 Principles for Successful Product Owners

To lay the foundation for the reader, Part 1 introduces why Product Owners are needed, how the role compares to other management roles, and what kind of routines and tasks Product Owners need to perform. This part of the book can be seen as the *why* for Product Owners.

In Part 2 we will look at the success factors for Product Owners. The success factors can be seen to define the *what* for Product Owners. Part 2 will start to reveal the concept of the Product Owner's Wheel of Success to the reader with its major success factors and subfactors.

The 8 Principles that are then introduced in Part 3 build on the success factors and help the reader understand the effective ways that they can work in the Product Owner role. The Principles define the *how* for Product Owners. The 8 Principles complete the Product Owner's Wheel of Success.

The book doesn't introduce details of Scrum or Kanban. The reader is assumed to know the basics of Scrum before proceeding. For a good and free introduction into Scrum, the reader can, for example, look at the Introduction to Scrum<sup>1</sup> webinar. Another good resource is The Scrum Guide<sup>2</sup>. Terms that are used in this book are explained there.

Many books have been written about product ownership. Similarly, there are lots of training courses for people new to the Product Owner role. The mission of this book isn't to be a comprehensive, detailed guide to the role. Rather, the book aims to offer an overview into the responsibilities and routines that each Product Owner will face, as well as offering a structure to the factors that affect whether or not a Product Owner is successful.

This book isn't the only book that offers useful knowledge to the aspiring Product Owner. In the course of reading the book, some very good additional readings will be listed in the text and in the footnotes. The recommended reading chapter at the end of the book collects these resources into a single list.

1 <https://www.scrum.org/resources/introduction-scrum>

2 <https://www.scrum.org/resources/scrum-guide>

## Original Concepts

The following concepts introduced in this book were developed by the author and introduced for the first time in this book:

- *The Success Factors for Product Owners* (introduced in Part 2 of the book)
- *The 8 Principles for Successful Product Owners* (introduced in Part 3 of the book)
- *The Product Owner's Wheel of Success* (complete Wheel of Success is introduced first in the beginning of Part 3)
- *The DEEP Method for User Stories* (introduced in Part 1 – On User Stories)
- *The Backlog Swimming Pool* (introduced in Part 1 – On User Stories)
- *The Small Discussions Ceremony* (introduced in Part 3 – Principle #4)

Part 1

# The Product Owner





# OWN IT

8 Simple **Secrets** of Product Owner Success

“Your products live or die with Product Owner competence. This book is the essential guide to make your products succeed!

Henri Hämäläinen, CEO,  
Contribyte

Arto's book is a clear demonstration of his humanism, passion, and vast expertise in software development processes and best practices.

Petri Bäckström, IT Director,  
Clausion



## THE DEFINITE BOOK ON PRODUCT OWNERSHIP SUCCESS

- How to maximize results while minimizing waste?
- What is the most important routine for Product Owners?
- How to avoid drowning into the DEEP end of the Backlog Swimming Pool?
- How to keep you and your team learning and improving while constantly delivering maximum customer value?
- And how to have fun while doing it?

Product Owner is the most important role in agile development. The *8 Simple Secrets of Product Owner Success* shows how any Product Owner can follow easy steps to guarantee great results and a positive and constantly improving team.

**Are you ready to learn the Secrets of Product Ownership?**

**Are you ready for the success?**

**Are you ready to OWN IT?**

