Why Enterprises Should Embrace Distributed Agile Teams

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Scaling teams up in short span is a business need which is driven by fast changing market conditions. Also, changing market needs poses a challenge of need for rare skills which might make scaling much tougher. Then you start seeing for expansion in other geos where there are these skills readily available. Skills are available, but are they ready to integrate culturally is a challenge.
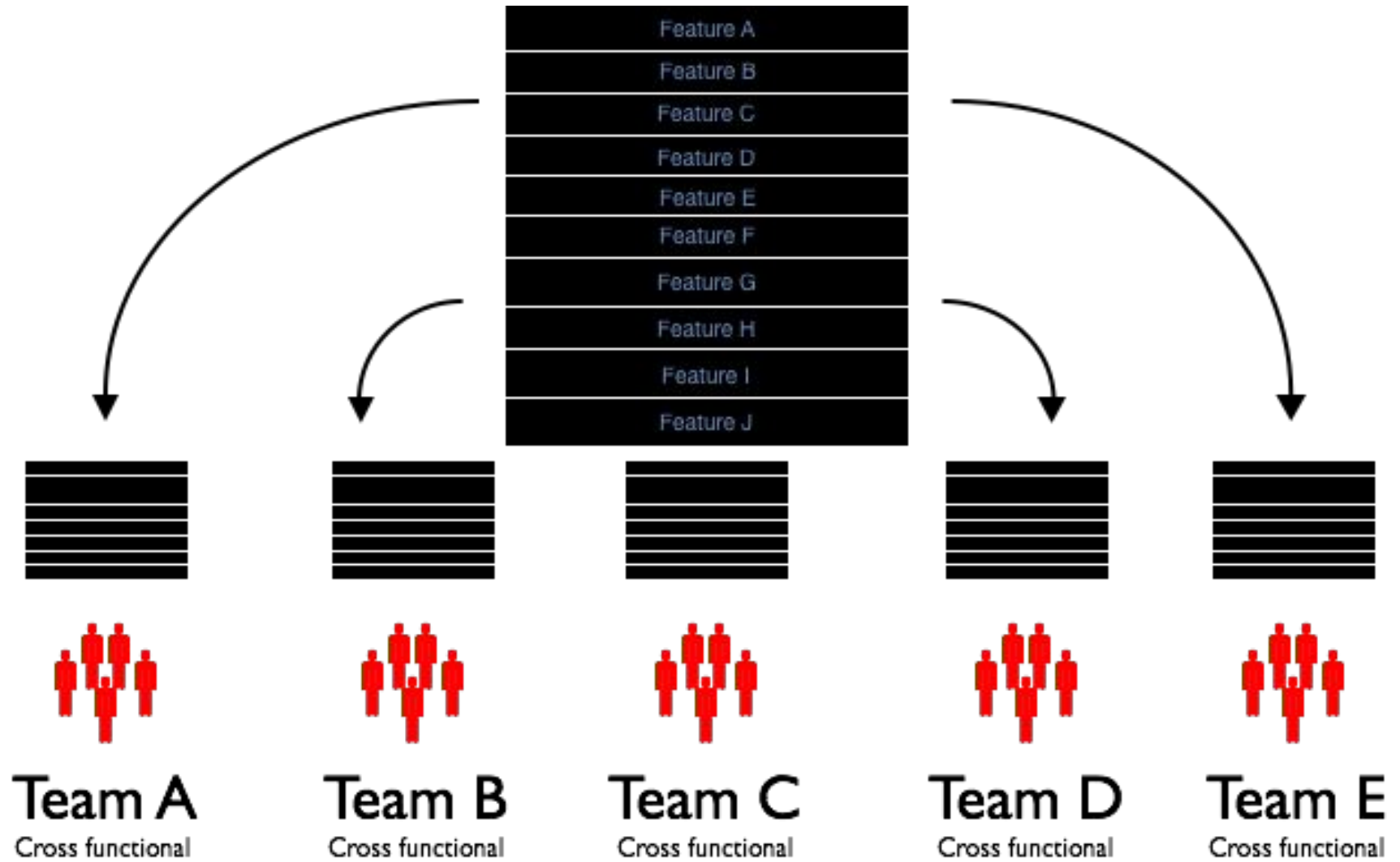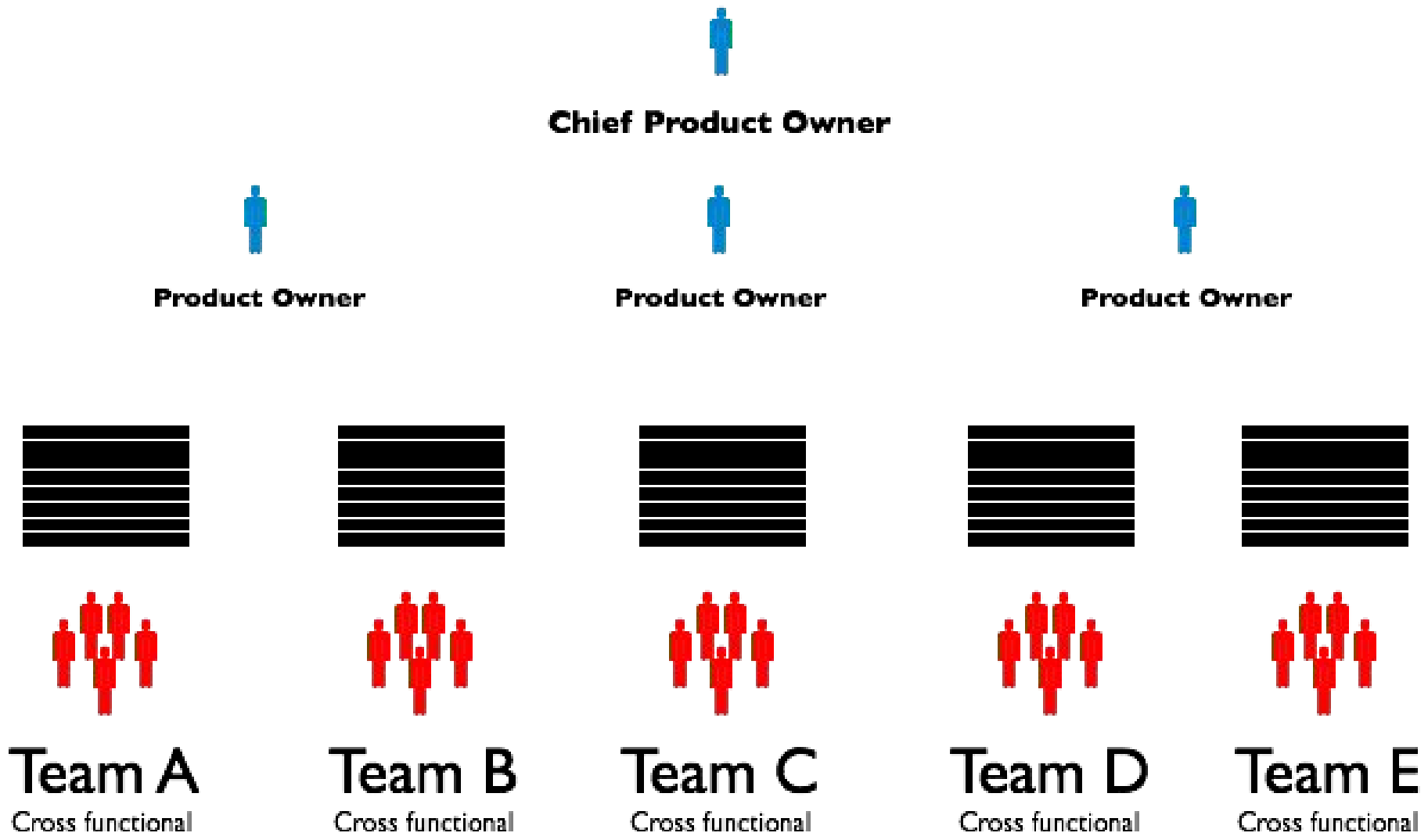
Quote of a Pessimist........

"*There is the "perfect world"....and then there is "our world"....and I'm finding from most people that distributed/virtual teams can work and do work, but you need a leader that knows how to enable virtual teams. This is not a skill that most people have, so co-location is highly recommended***"**
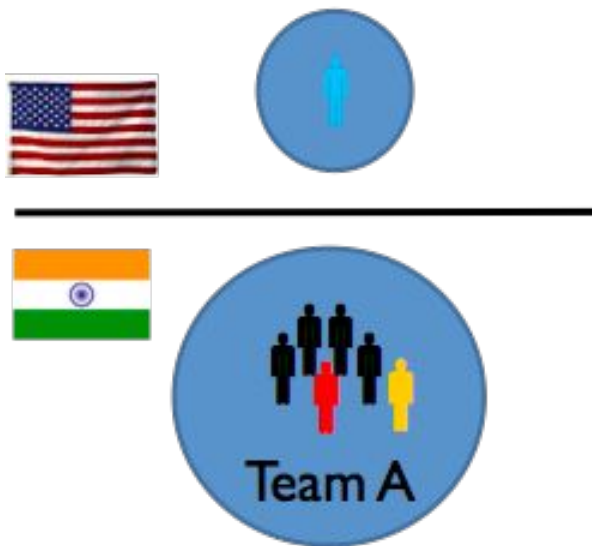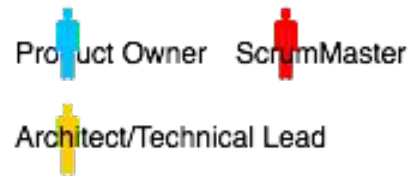
Optimist Solution:
Revert to co-location and thereby never build up this leadership is **NOT A SOLUTION!**. Applying proven patterns and practices combined with strong introspection and rigorously improving every iteration will get you there!

Feature A
Feature B
Feature C
Feature D
Feature E
Feature F
Feature G
Feature H
Feature I
Feature J

Team A
Cross functional

Team B
Cross functional

Team C
Cross functional

Team D
Cross functional

Team E
Cross functional

Chief Product Owner

Product Owner   Product Owner   Product Owner

Team A   Team B   Team C   Team D   Team E
Cross functional   Cross functional   Cross functional   Cross functional   Cross functional

Model A: PO Onshore, Team Offshore

Product Owner   ScrumMaster

Architect/Technical Lead

Team A

- Scrum Master to be with the offshore team

- PO travels to offshore location in periodic intervals

- All real-time meetings to be audio-visual

- Daily standup at Team site preferably with PO

- At least one real-time call between PO and Team/ week

- Use wikis and collaborative software extensively

Model B: Team Split between locations

Product Owner   ScrumMaster

Architect/Technical Lead

Team A

Team B
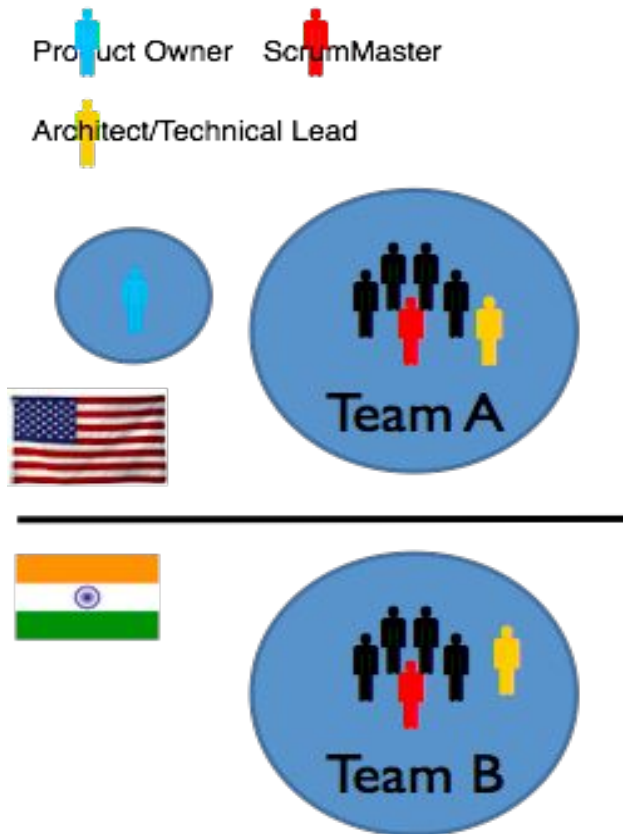
- Each team requires its own Scrum Master

- If time zones permit, one joint Daily Standup

- If too much gap in time zones, separate stand-ups with one person from each team connecting with each other later(Scrum-of-Scrums)

- Scrum Artifacts done electronically, in a shared location

- Co-location between teams

Product Owner Challenges

- Product owner is in a different location from team
- Loss of Business & technical contexts
- Product development visibility to PO & other stakeholders is reduced
- Feedback cycle looping gets increased
- Higher documentation overhead

People Issues

- Lack of common infrastructure
- Difference in Skill set & expertise
- Lack of Trust
- Decrease in communication bandwidth

Cultural Challenges

- Different ideas about authority
- Language Barriers
- Holidays
- Time zone differences

The Nut/Bolt Pattern

- Successful fully distributed teams **have leaders on both sides** that actively bring two teams together
- They act as a **nut and the bolt** that pull other team members close into a whole
- By acting as a nut and a bolt their communication and partnership removed impediments in working distributed and this leadership will pull entire team close as a result
- Identify nut and bolt in your team
- Their personal link based on mutual respect, goodwill and eventually friendship will be your conduit for success
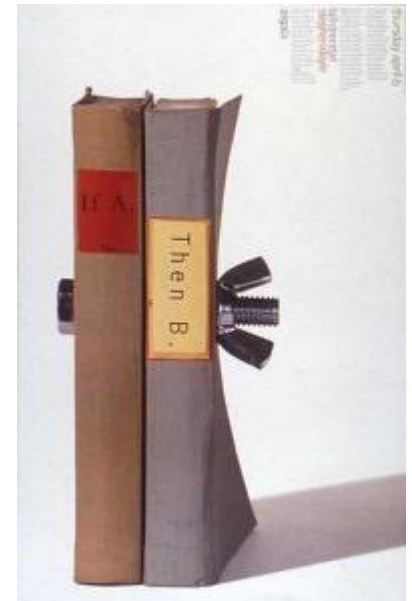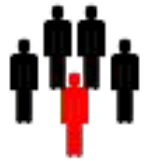
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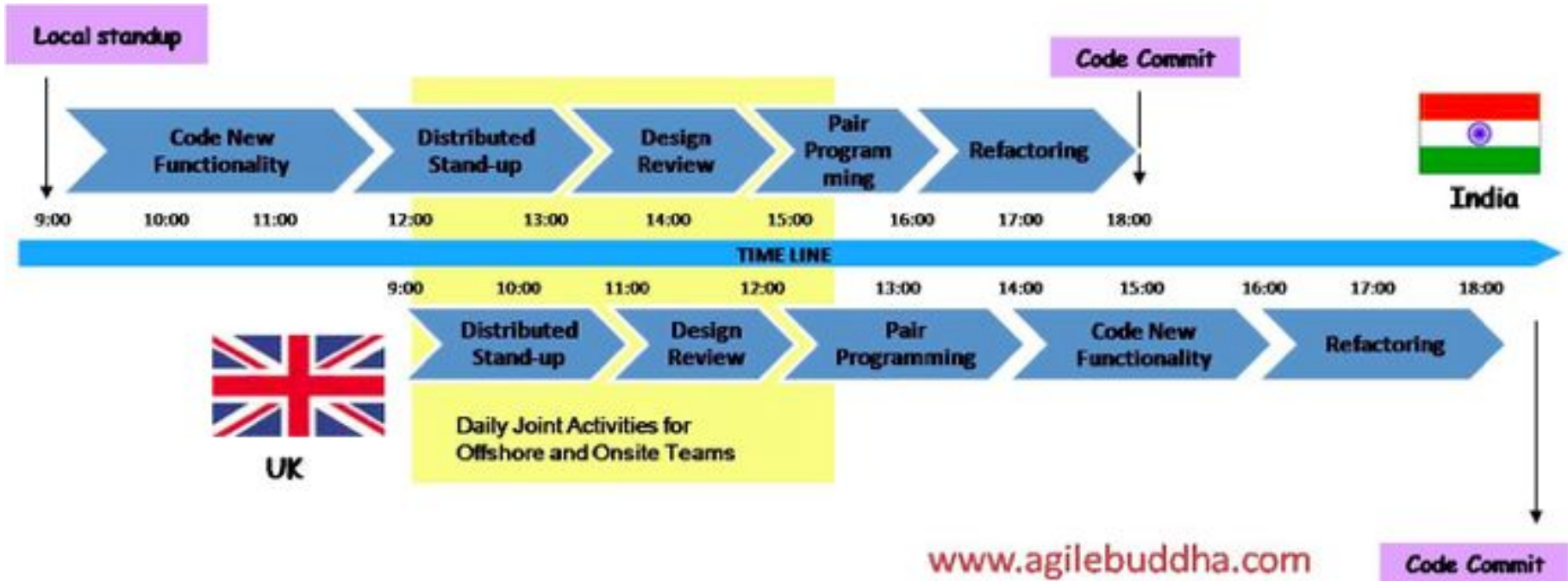
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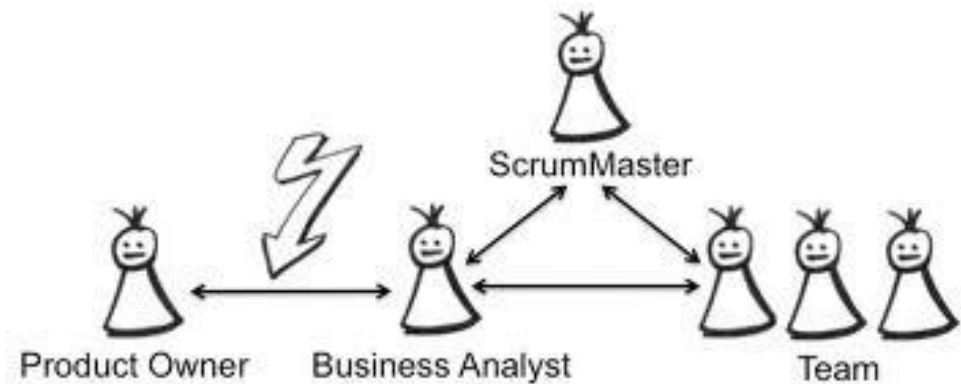
Scrum-of-Scrums
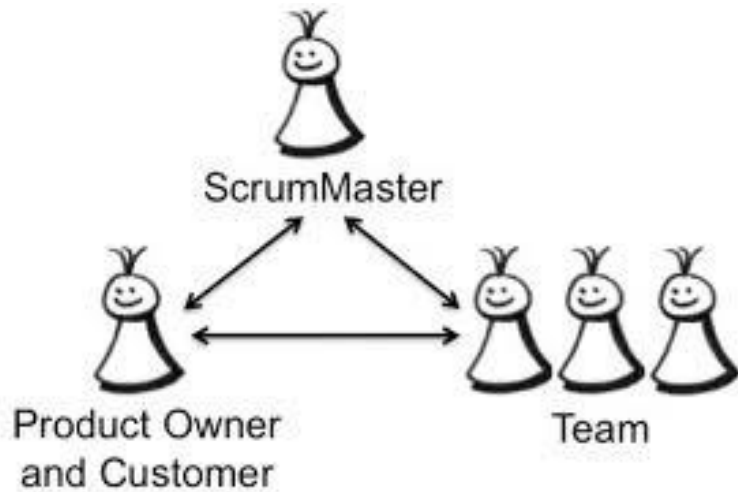
Team A Team B Team C Team D Team E

Product Owner Proxy

Checklist for Successful Distributed Agile

- Frequent collocation with clearly defined goals to achieve from each side
- Scrum Master at team site
- Distributed stand-up every day on Skype or with some other video-conferencing tool
- Integrate project email/slack list of both onsite and offsite
- Good headphones, bandwidth, microphones
- Pre-planning meetings
- Local retrospective is a must

Checklist for Successful Distributed Agile

- Have distributed retro to address inter-team challenges
- Provide the same development environment to onsite and offshore teams
- Define a slot for technical discussion after standup is over
- Some time overlap between distributed teams for better communication. Team may have to shift their work timings
- Leaders on both sides who act as nut and bolt to bring team together
- Knowledge sharing between distributed teams
- A Great LEADER(S)! who would motivate team on both sides

The Real Cost of Distributed Teams

- Added Documentation
- Different Time zones – 24 hour work clock?
- Hardware costs for communication
  (High speed lines, communications hardware/software, cameras, security protocols)
- Different Processes
- Misunderstood requirements, Vendor selection process, Delivery Quality inadequate, Different cultures

Managing the Cost of Distributed Teams

- Focus on *increasing value* vs. reducing costs

- Using *time overlaps* to engage more

- Establishing *protocols* for communication beforehand

- Scrum Master/Proxy Product Owner needs to ensure *clarity on requirements*

Thank You!

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