Overcoming Roadmap Realization Hurdles

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CASE STUDY

The Company
The company highlighted in this case study is a fast-growing Dutch scale up, which develops software solutions for the HR industry. With around 60 employees, organized over 5 Scrum Teams, the company focuses on building and expanding an innovative SaaS platform.

The Challenge
The featured company in this case study faced serious challenges with its product roadmap execution. As a rapidly growing software provider, they had ambitious goals but struggled with frequent delays. Roadmap milestones were frequently missed, creating uncertainty for the business. The development team was juggling too many tasks at once, causing numerous roadmap items to slip and not get done. Ad-hoc work became the norm where urgent fixes and unplanned requests constantly disrupted planned Sprint work. This led to mounting technical debt and growing frustration among the team and its stakeholders.

The key challenges included:

- **Chronic delays:** Roadmap milestones were rarely met, leading to missed deadlines and unpredictable releases.
- **Trust erosion:** Stakeholders were losing faith in the team's ability to deliver on commitments, the Product Owner's mandate decreased and team interventions peaked.
- **Scope creep and technical debt:** Constant ad-hoc requests increased scope creep and accumulating technical debt threatened long-term stability.
- **Team burnout:** Shifting focus and the need for firefighting drained the team's energy, reducing productivity and morale.

Solution: Building Scrum Teams and Self-Management

The company decided to engage with Productowner.nl, who applied a comprehensive strategy to get the company's Product Owner and the team back on track. They took the following steps:

1. **Reduce Work in Progress (WIP):** A workshop was conducted to visualize all work-in-progress. By imposing WIP limits, the team was encouraged to finish existing tasks before starting new ones. This exposed hidden bottlenecks and improved workflow, enabling faster completion of high-priority roadmap items, leading to a higher team satisfaction and less work pressure.
2. **Investigate root causes:** After conducting Sprint Retrospectives and Sprint Reviews, they identified underlying causes of delay, like significant technical debt in the codebase, environmental impediments (e.g., dependencies on other teams) and unclear requirements. The team developed a plan to tackle these issues, like dedicating time each Sprint to refactor code or clarify requirements before moving forward.
3. **Outcome-focused planning:** A key step was restoring the Product Owner's "ownership" accountability. Leadership began to empower the Product Owner to make decisions. The team shifted its mindset from output-driven work (simply delivering features) to outcome-driven results (achieving customer and business value). Clear acceptance criteria and success metrics were established for each roadmap item, ensuring development efforts were aligned with desired outcomes.
4. **Reinforce vision and stakeholder engagement:** The Product Owner validated the product vision and adjusted the roadmap based on conversations with stakeholders, leadership and team members. The updated roadmap was communicated transparently to stakeholders. Regular stakeholder review meetings were introduced, so feedback and insights could be integrated early. The Product Owner was trained on active stakeholder management techniques, rebuilding relationships and trust through open dialogue.

Results

Overcoming their recurring challenges resulted in improved delivery, renewed trust, increased team energy, and enhanced collaboration.

Over several months, The company observed significant improvements:

- **Improved delivery:** More roadmap items were completed as planned. Release predictability increased, helping the organization meet its business objectives.
- **Renewed trust:** Consistent delivery and transparency led stakeholders to regain confidence in the team. The Product Owner was once again seen as a trustworthy leader and decision-maker.
- **Higher team energy:** With fewer interruptions and clearer priorities, team morale improved noticeably. Team members reported feeling less stressed and more focused on completing meaningful work.
- **Enhanced collaboration:** Improved communication between the Product Owner, development team, and stakeholders led to faster issue resolution. Structured feedback loops meant that concerns were raised early, reducing last-minute crises and rework.

Teams once again have the time to focus on what they value most: delivering value to customers and end users," said Jochem Nuij, Director at Productowner.nl. "They are now doing so at a cadence that—unlike before—is once again aligned with the initially defined roadmap. The result? A happy organization, satisfied teams, engaged stakeholders, and most importantly, delighted end users."

About Productowner.nl

At Productowner.nl, we help Product Owners in the Netherlands take ownership, grow and deliver impact. We do this through hands-on training, expert interim placements and sharing real-world insights via our podcast, yearly national survey, and Product Owner Book. Whether you're looking to develop yourself as a Product Owner or strengthen your team, we're here to support the entire product owner community.

About Scrum.org

Scrum.org, the Home of Scrum, was founded by Scrum co-creator Ken Schwaber as a mission-based organization to help people and teams solve complex problems. We do this by enabling people to apply Professional Scrum through training courses, certifications and ongoing learning all based on a common competency model.