

# “The Backlog is in the Eye of the Beholder” Game

(Developed at DeepAgile Boston 2010)

## Description

Organization and prioritization are two distinct activities that can be used to improve the quality of a product backlog. A simple linear list is difficult to prioritize. As well, many stakeholders are forgotten in the rush to deliver customer value. See [example list of stakeholders](#). The purpose of this game is to expand the view of multiple stakeholders as well as illuminate the value of organizing the work without prioritizing.

## Learning Points

- The value of organizing before prioritizing

## Timing

45 minutes. (Variant: drop a round to shorten)

## Ingredients

The game consists of the following items for each participating team:

1. **Persona Cards:** (5"x8" cards) There are four persona cards or sheets. Each persona should be copied to a separate card.
2. **Story Cards:** (3"x5" cards) In this game, the stories consist of a verb and a noun (e.g. Fertilize Crops). There are 18 cards, but more cards can be added. One verb noun grouping should be copied to each card.
3. **Category Cards:** (3"x5" blank cards - use different colour than story cards) - The category cards are initially blank. A set of blank cards are needed for each round and team. Typically there are around 5 Categories per round.
4. **Black Marker:** Any pen or felt tip mark should work. This is used for writing on the category cards.

One timer is needed in order to time each round and the debrief sessions.

## Recipe

1. Introduction (5 min)
  - a. Draw simple Product Backlog in Scrum
  - b. Ask participants what it is
  - c. Comment that there is a lot of complexity that may not be best represented by a

single sorted list.

2. Form the group into teams - each at a table. (2 min) 4 seems a good number for a team. More than this and it is hard to jointly sort the cards. 5 may be OK.
3. Introduce the domain. Once upon a time, there was a farm and different people had different ideas how the farm should be run. (MORE)
4. Iterate! There are 4 rounds - each with a different persona (see table below)
  - a. Shuffle story cards between rounds
  - b. Introduce Persona (1 min + 1 min for questions)
  - c. Ask participant *organize* the backlog based on the persona.
  - d. Debrief the round. Do this in a circle. See debrief questions below.
5. Debrief the whole game.

Round	Persona	Round Duration	Debrief*
1	Producer/Farmer	5'	4'
2	Customer/Buyer	4'	3'
3	Farm Bureau/ Inspectors	4'	3'
4	Land Owner	3'	10' - whole game

\* Larger groups may require more debrief time.

## Debrief Questions

### First Round

- Each team: talk a little about how you organized the backlog.
- What is the same/different?
- What else did you notice?
- If no one mentions, may notice that we are used so used to prioritizing we often go there automatically. Did any of the teams create a structure that helps them understand their world?

### Second/Third

- Same questions as first plus
- What was different from earlier round(s)?

### Final

- Over all 4 rounds, what have you noticed about backlog organization?
- How does this relate to product backlogs that you work with?
- How well do real world product backlogs represent different stakeholders?

## Story Cards

There are 18 story cards. Each story card consists of a verb and noun pair.

(Note: Michael S removed story numbers since it may confuse people)

Stories:

- Fertilize Crops
- Spray Insecticide
- Harvest Crop
- Buy Seed
- Rotate Crops
- Weed Fields
- Survey Market
- Kill Groundhogs
- Lay Fallow
- Define Market Needs
- Till The Ground
- Assure Organic (inspect for selected crops)
- Plant Seed
- Sell Early Summer Crops
- Sell Late Summer Crops
- Water Plants
- Recover from Natural Disaster
- Forecast Profit

## Personas

### Producer / Farmer

As a farmer, I'm focused on legally maximizing my profits by controlling costs, buying the right seeds, planning crop rotations, reducing pests, and timing the release of my products to markets. I follow closely the agreements set forth in the lease with the Land Owner.

### Consumer / Buyer

As a customer of the local farm, I want healthy and reasonably priced food that has been grown with sustainable and environmentally friendly practices.

### Land Owner

The farm land has been in my family for over 200 years. My family's income depends on the revenue generated from the farm lease. Hence, we are interested in ensuring the long-term sustainability of the land. As a family, we have been engaged in wildlife preservation and conservation of natural resources. It is imperative our property used in accordance with all relevant laws and regulations.

## Farm Bureau / Inspectors / Regulatory Agencies

As a regulatory body, we are tasked with ensuring that produce is safe and fit for human consumption. We test and verify that the land is used in accordance with local, state, and federal regulation to protect from erosion, run off, soil depletion and other activities that may harm the land. We enforce all animal protection laws and regulations.

## FAQ

*There are no story points (cost). How does this make any sense?*

The whole point of the game is to ignore prioritization. Story cost is only relevant for making prioritization decisions. In this game we want people to think about stakeholders and how to organize the work in terms of who cares about what.

## Contributors

This game was created at Deep Agile 2010. It was started in the game design workshop led by Mike McCullough and Don McGreal and then continued in the Open Space Session at Empowering Teams with Agile Games (May 16, 2010) hosted by New England Agile Bazaar

## Core Team

The core team worked through all open space sessions

- Michael Sahota (session convener)
- Warren Elliott
- Greg Ott
- Mary Gorman
- Dan Zaino
- Judy Rivais

## Additional Contributors

Concept Session	Design Session	Play Session
Mary McAuliffe		Mary McAuliffe
Gerry Gan		Gerry Gan
Jeff Lopez-Suit		Jeff Lopez-Suit
Mike McCullough	Allison Weiss	Tobias Mayer
Lyssa Adkins		Jackie Albrecht
Brian Bozzuto		Howard Katz

Phyllis Hodge		Peter Barzdings
		Sameh Ziad
		Luigi

## Feedback from Pilot Players

Players Learned	Players Rating (1- 10)	Players Liked	Players Ideas To Perfect
organize before prioritize; different meaning & value of story by persona	7	preparation of artifacts	add initial phase - work out personas & key values for each persona
how different personas organize backlog differently; to create clusters before prioritizing clusters; naming clusters is powerful			how does one merge the backlog of different personas?
importance of the persona, backlog cannot be prioritized before factoring in the persona	10	liked it a lot	sorry I missed the first 2 sessions
value of organization over prioritization	9	participation and collaboration among players and follow up discussions	the rules of the game. Some people seemed to be stuck on methods and forming categories. The benefit of the game is received if the players complete the task.
	8	interaction with people of my team and collaboration we got from it	
backlogs are complex and dialog focused around 'what matters'	9	game was open (no pre-determined categories for each	don't! imperfect is good. It gives us more opportunities to

is very good dialog to have. And we don't have to solve the problem immediately		persona); whole group feedback and having different approaches	explore.
people with different roles can see backlog items differently - that items on cards describing the roles could be in conflict, a nice division, or all saying the same thing	7	example of the farm and backlog items	set your objectives for role cards and think carefully about their bullet points
how organizing can lead to or support prioritization but that is a distinct aspect of backlog that should be explored BEFORE attempting to prioritize (w/o regard to organization)	8	persona cards w organizing principles and it was good idea to withhold from 1st round	minor cleanup of activity cards; consider impact of order of personas; clarification of producer vs business person or farmer caused confusion for couple of people
allocate stories to persona; don't care stories from persona view	8	keep revisiting stories for each persona	dependencies among stories
I would like to steal this awesome game	10	speed at which conversations happened; fun!	
	6	interaction game created	
more about significance of personas and how they influence what way backlog might be interpreted	8	low-cost of getting into game; very quick to explain & materials were simple; learning thru iterations; comparing results & finding to other teams; good balance between activity & discussion	maybe more work on personas; also try a multi-persona part of exercise

# Game Design Team Retrospective

Do these next time:

- More Teams (max 4 per team)
- Improve Intro - frame domain (Backstory)
- Clarify debrief questions
- Personas (Write paragraph rather than bullets so participants create their own categories/groupings)
- Do producer first to induce incorrect assumptions about organizing by time rather than meaning.

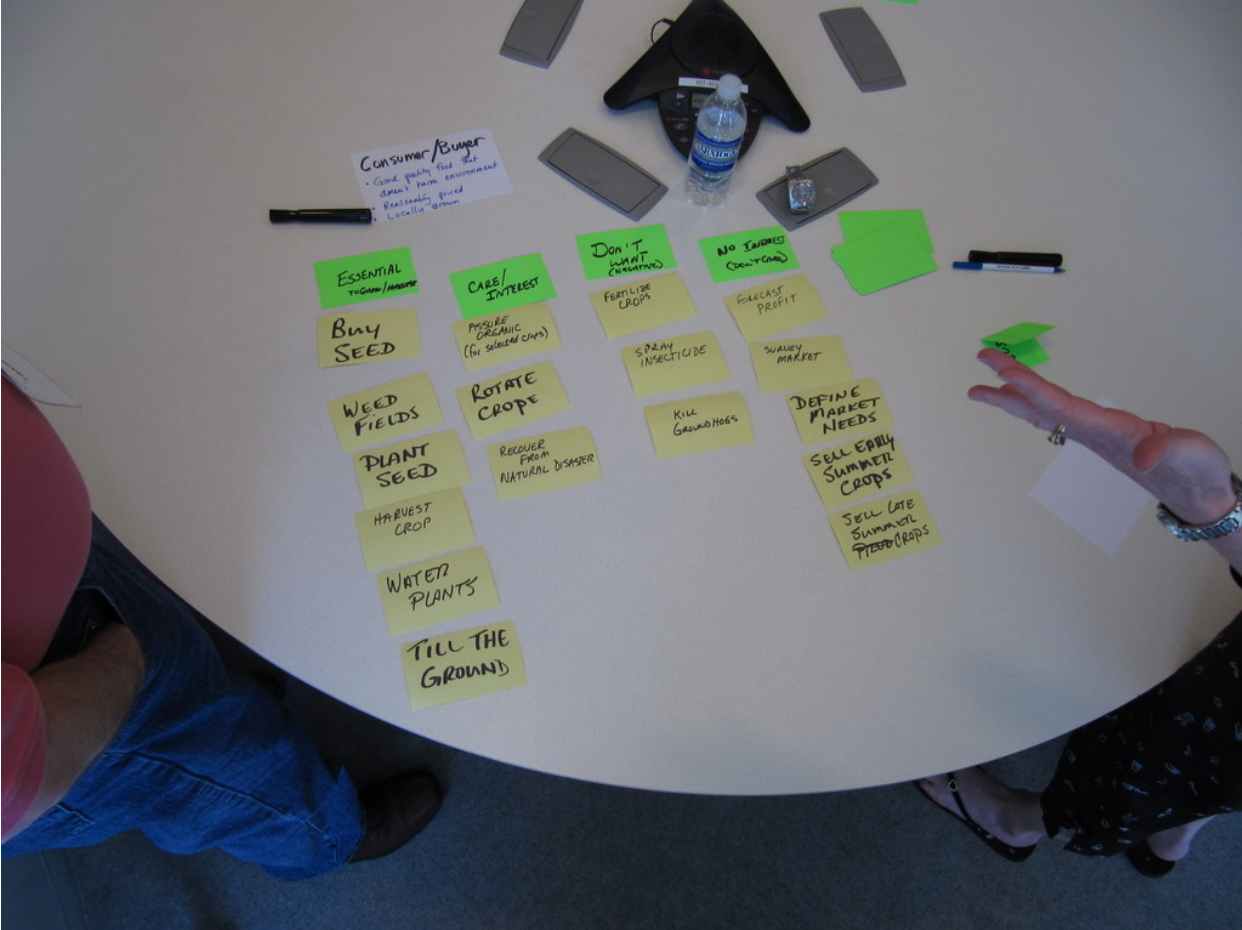
## Designers' Mini Retrospective after Pilot

personas very helpful for focus - designing & playing
"I learned..." was useful technique for keeping focus
focus on issue/topic
Go wild!
Letting go of our ideas
took courage to stick with it, especially at first
take risks
At first, didn't think farm was good idea but turned out well
stepping stones
when blocked, brainstormed
break down original idea - brainstorm
clarifying game objectives was hardest work
aim for narrow, specific game objectives
simplify always - keep making it more simple
develop a context (farm, house, etc.)
helped to play game ourselves, then refine it
took lots of time upfront, then design went quickly

plan as far as we can see
pomodoro
timebox
timeboxing facilitated progress
identify a completion date/time
commitment
just do it
Michael's energy!
pacing
flexibility
speed of organization
helped having 'core' group thru effort & new blood coming in later
cooperation
diversity
teamwork

## Photos





Consumer/Buyer  
• Good quality food for animal farm environment  
• Reasonably priced  
• Locally grown

ESSENTIAL TO GROW/HARVEST

BUY SEED

WEED FIELDS

PLANT SEED

HARVEST CROP

WATER PLANTS

TILL THE GROUND

CARE/INTEREST

POSSIBLE ORGANIC (if selected crops)

ROTATE CROPS

RECOVER FROM NATURAL DISASTER

DON'T WANT CHEMICALS

FERTILIZE CROPS

SPRAY INSECTICIDE

KILL GRASSHOPPERS

NO INDEKS (COUNTDOWN)

FORECAST PROFIT

WAVEY MARKET

DEFINE MARKET NEEDS

SELL EARLY SUMMER CROPS

SELL LATE SUMMER/ FRESH CROPS

