



Beyond “Agile”

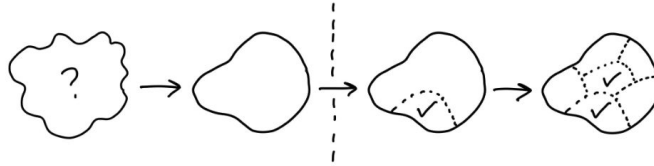
People-Centered Development, User-Centered Results

Laura Kinhead • 13 June 2025



Read the book
online - seriously
it's good and easy
to read!

← [Basecamp.com](#)



Shape Up

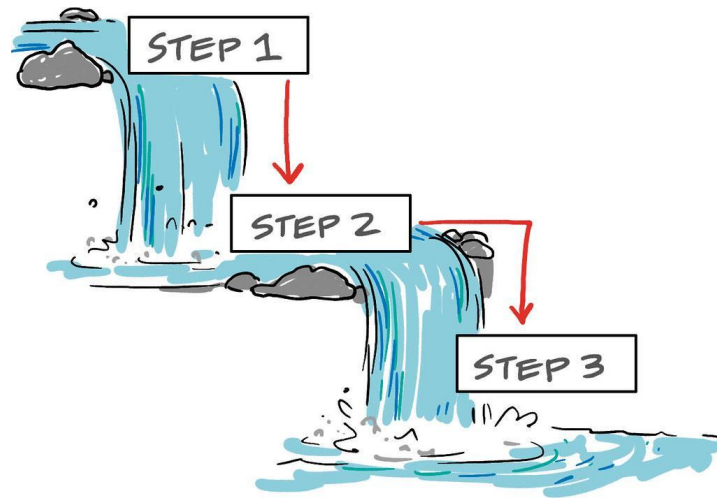
Stop Running in Circles and Ship Work that Matters

by Ryan Singer

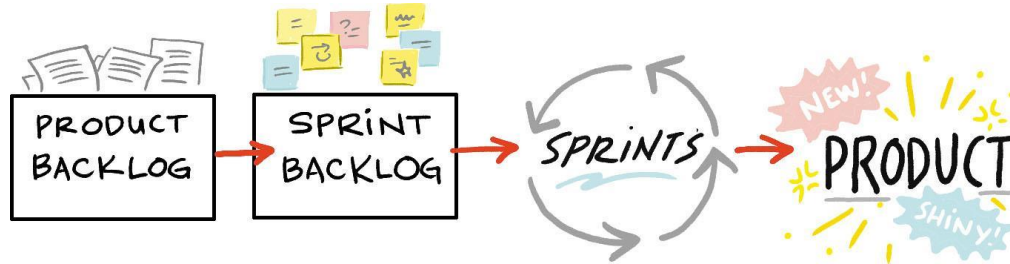
[Buy the print edition](#)

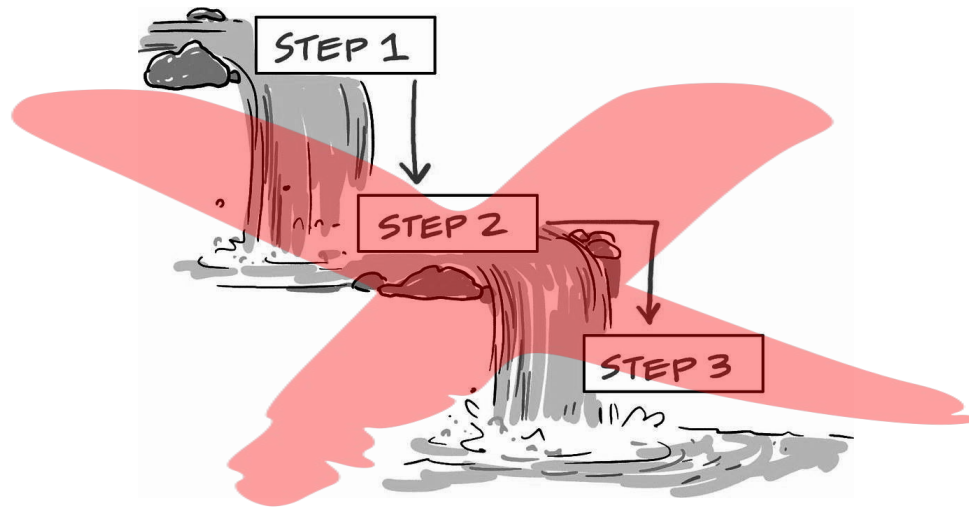
[Continue from where you left off →](#)

[Foreword by Jason Fried](#)

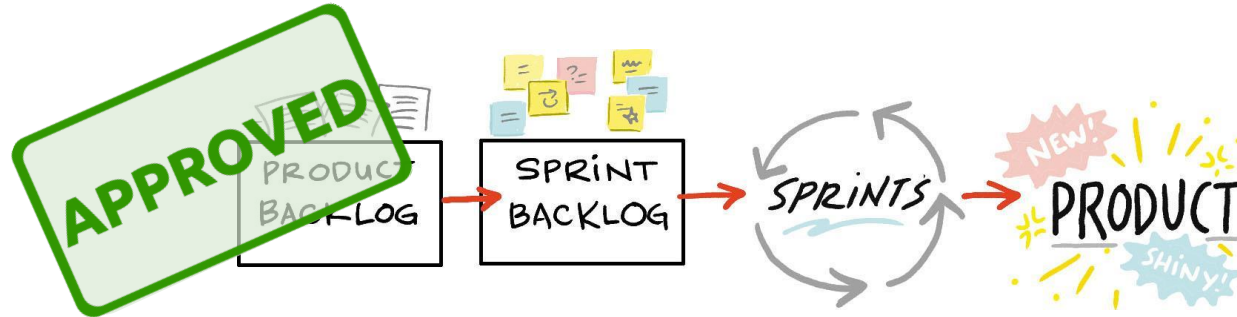


VS

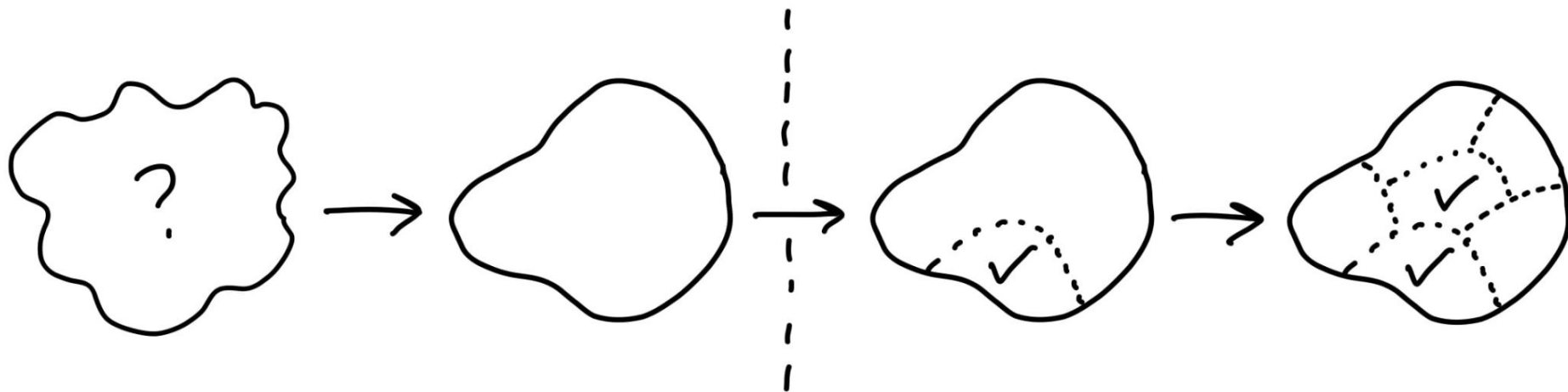




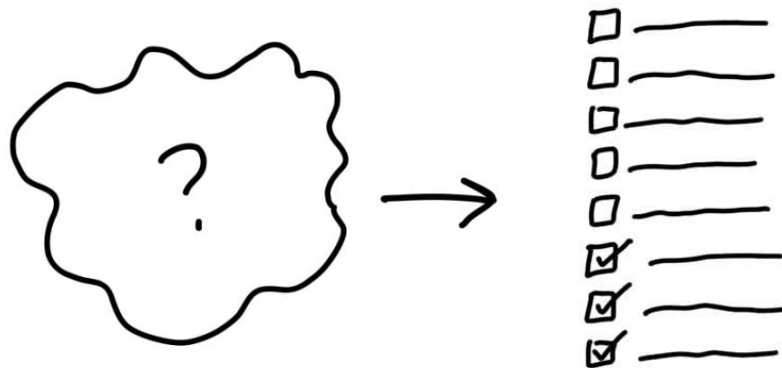
VS



Shape Up



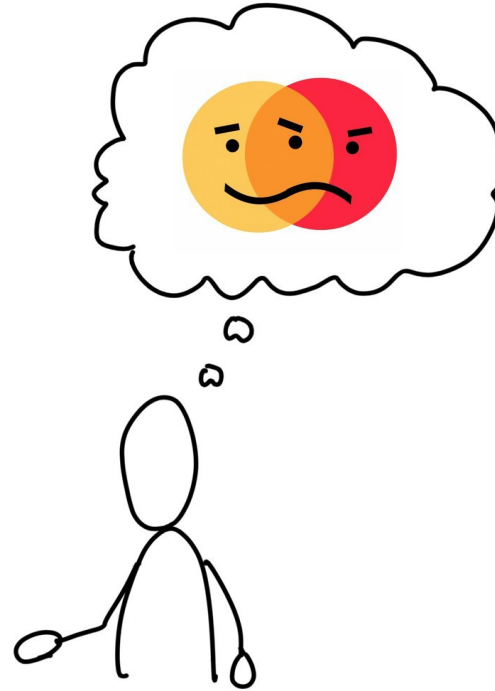
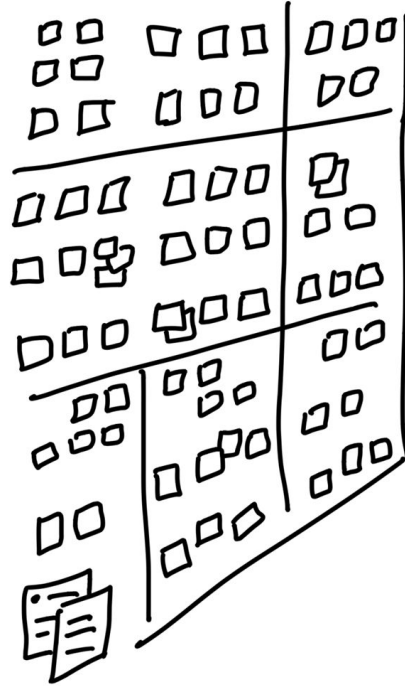
*Let's turn all our requests into a
prioritized list of issues!*



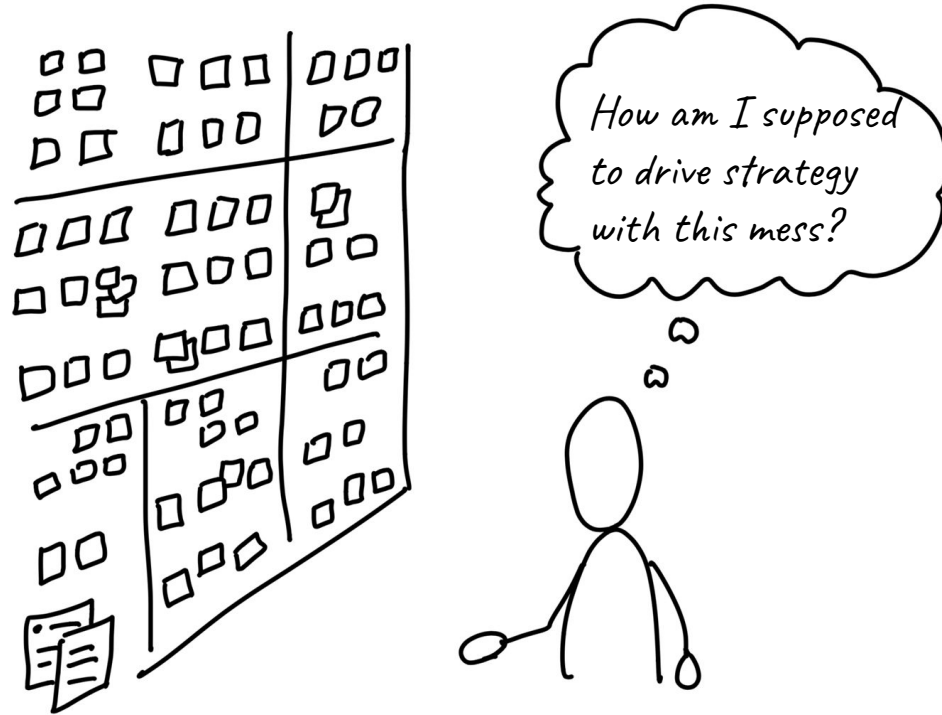
storytime



THE ISSUE WITH ISSUES



THE ISSUE WITH ISSUES

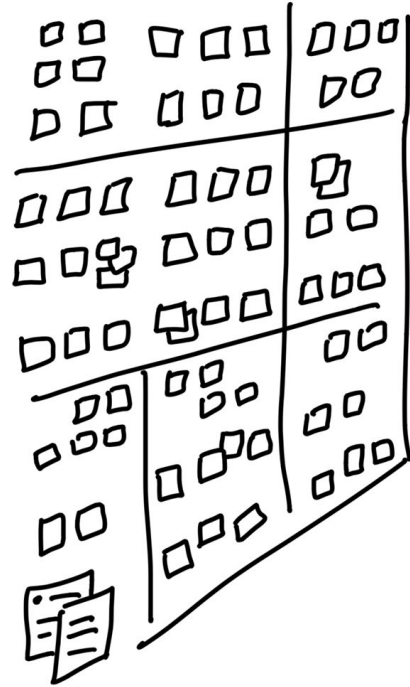


Frustrating

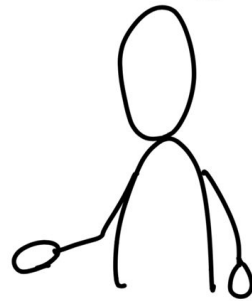
You feel like you're building a castle with **grains of sand**, rather than **building blocks**.

(hint: issues are not the right tools for steering the strategic direction of a project)

THE ISSUE WITH ISSUES

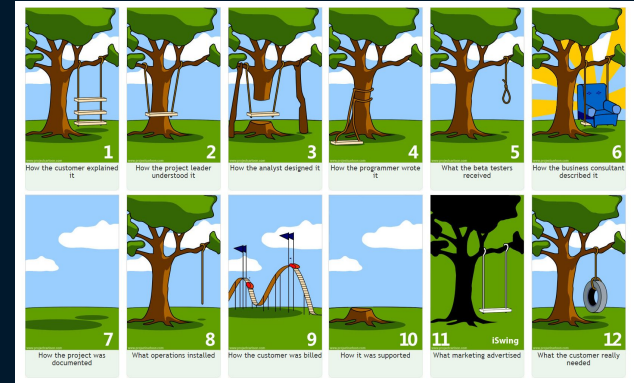


Oh no! We got so lost in details, we lost sight of what's useful.



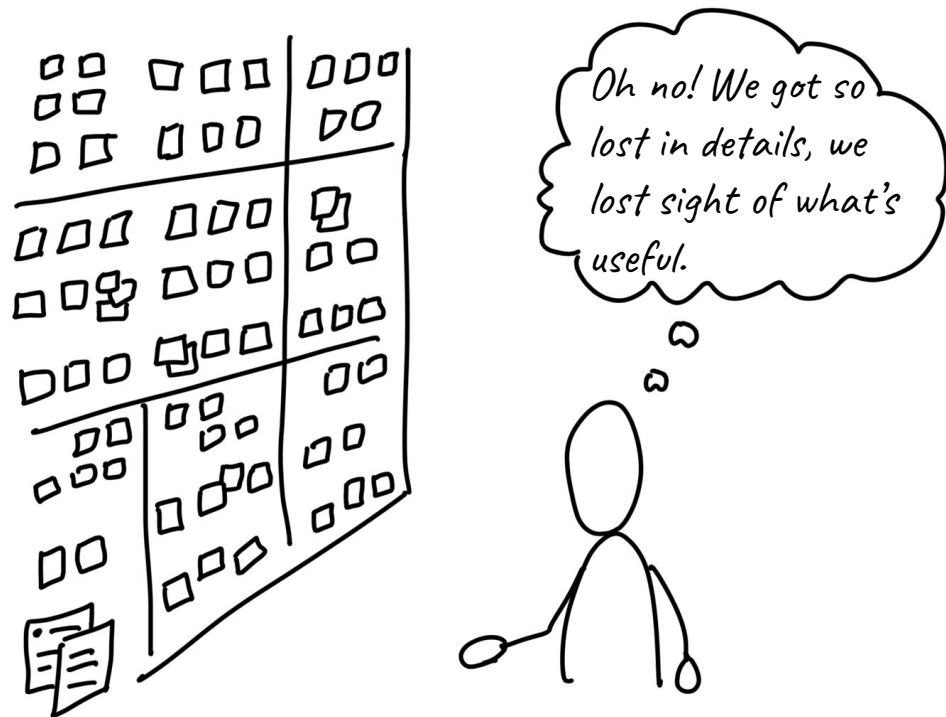
Oh no!

You build something and then realize it's **not** what the user needs.



<https://pmac-agpc.ca/project-management-tree-swing-story>

THE ISSUE WITH ISSUES

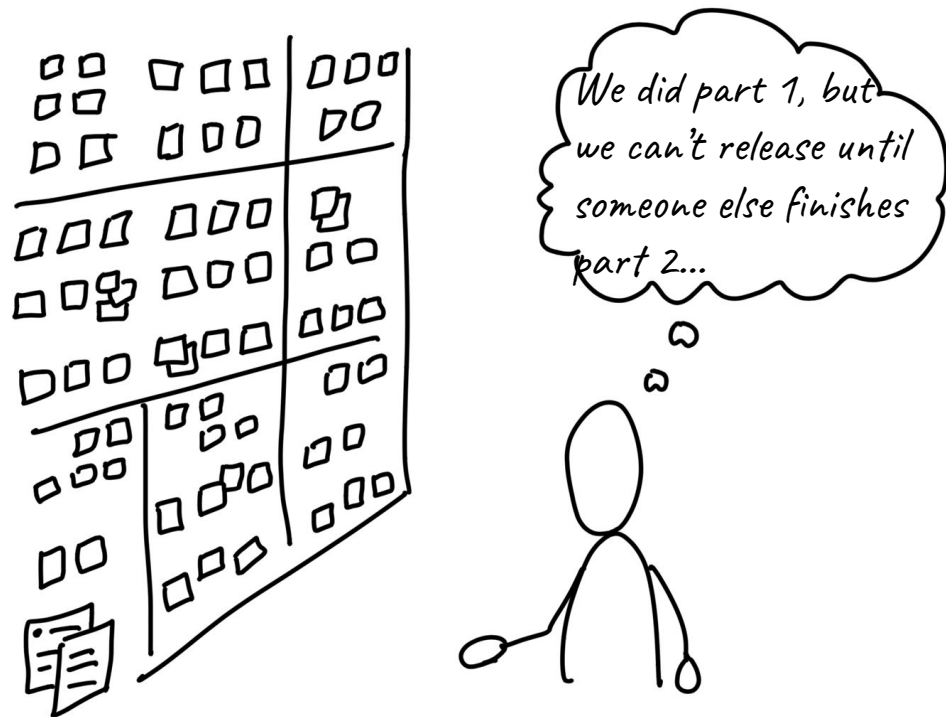


Oh no!

You build something and then realize it's **not what the user needs**.

"When teams are assigned individual tasks, each person can execute their little piece without feeling responsible for judging how all the pieces fit together." -Shape Up

THE ISSUE WITH ISSUES

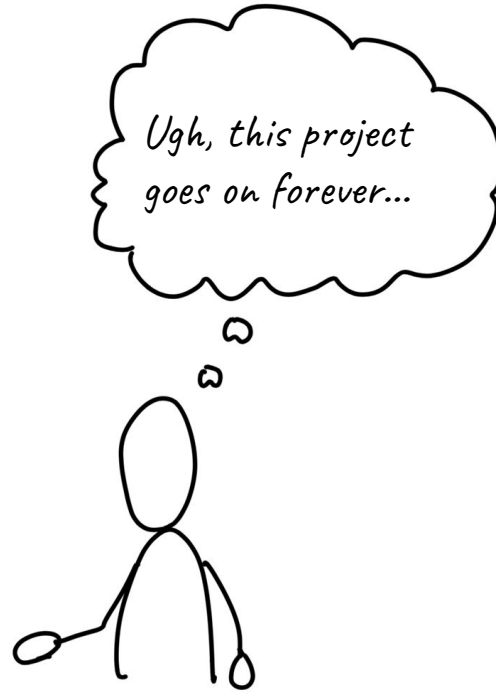
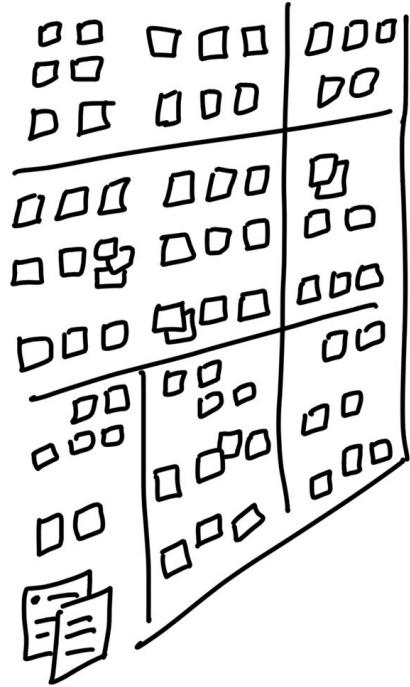


Slow

Long delays slip in when a feature requires multiple issues to achieve a **visible result**.

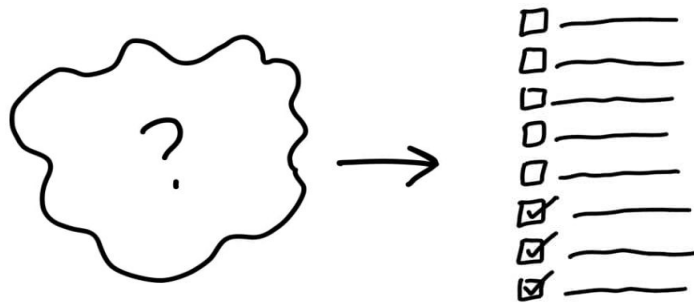
(especially when issues are spread across multiple people!)

THE ISSUE WITH ISSUES

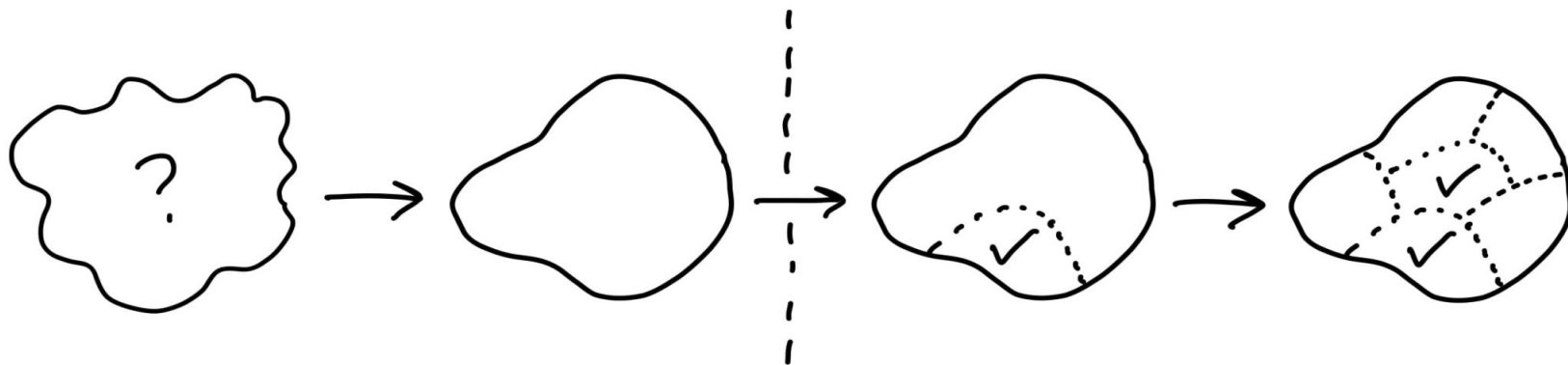


Unsatisfying

Feel like projects go on and on, with **no end in sight**.



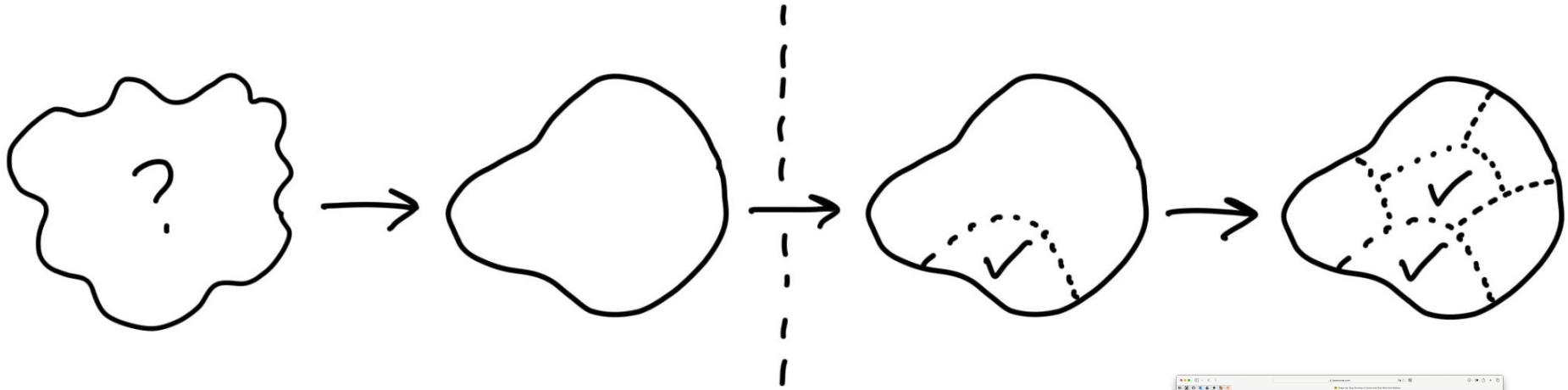
VS



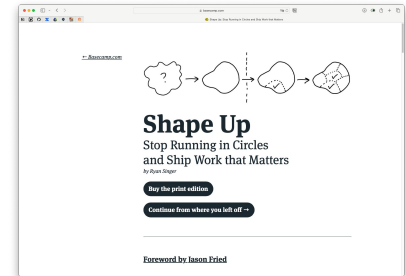
Shaping

The up-front design work to **set boundaries** and **reduce risks** on projects before **committing** to them.

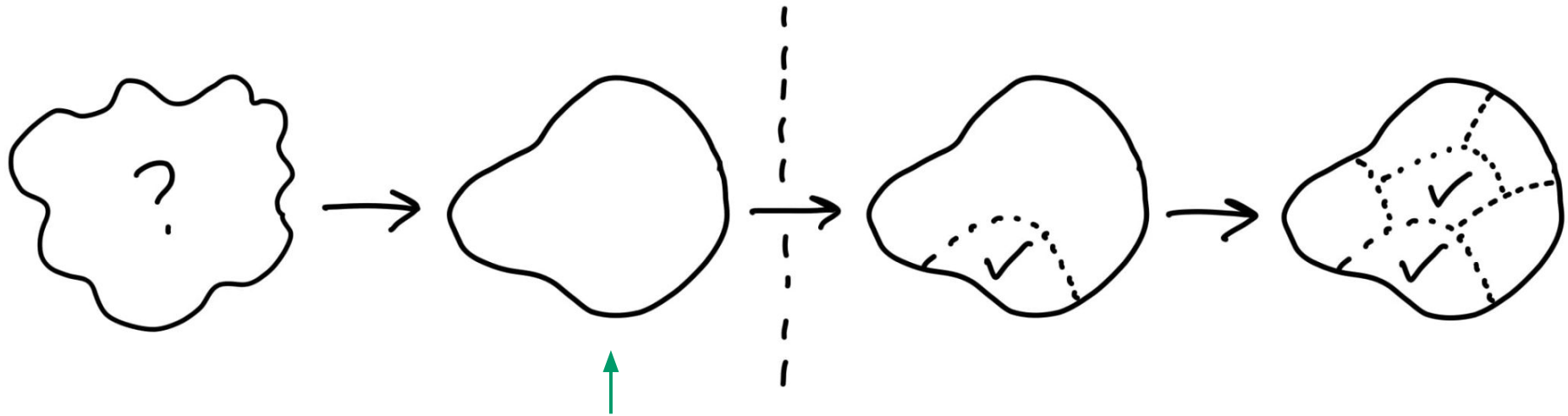
Shape Up



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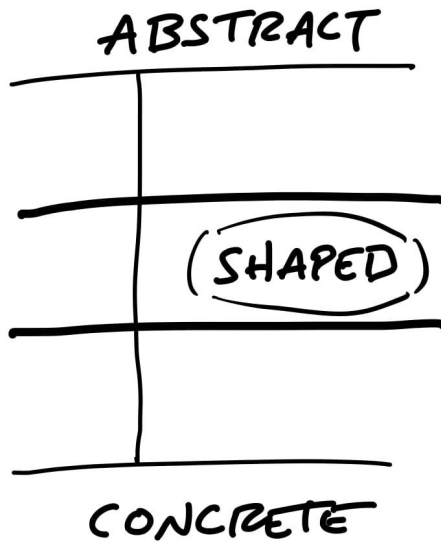
Shape Up



*Shape an idea before you commit
to building it*



Components of a well shaped idea:



1. **Problem** - Describe as viewed by the user
2. **Appetite** - Answer “*how much time is this problem worth?*”



Recommendation: 6 week cycles

3. **Solution** - Outline a rough solution, often via sketches
4. **Rabbit Holes** - Address risk to minimize spiraling beyond the timebox
5. **No Gos** - be explicit about what is out of scope in order to stay in the timebox



Renku Pitches
are public!

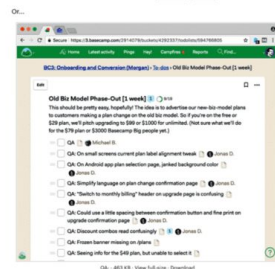
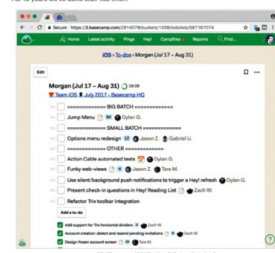


Write the
Pitch

Problem • Appetite • Solution • Rabbit Holes • No-Gos

To-Do Groups

Jason Fried
Sep 12, 2017 • Notified 3 people
For 13 years we've done stuff like this...



What we're trying to do is create simple groups of to-dos within a single list. So we're hacking it. We're creating "Artificial Dividers" or prepending a batch of to-dos with a label like "QA" or our old standby, the trusty - which is code for "meh". Yeah it works, but it's messy, and it's not a refined pattern to share with customers. 13 years in, it's time to level up.

To-do groups

A couple weeks ago, Ryan and I spent an afternoon working out an idea out to make to-do groups first class citizens without adding noticeable complexity to the purity of today's to-do lists. We're pleased with where we landed, and we'd like to put it forward as a big batch project this cycle.

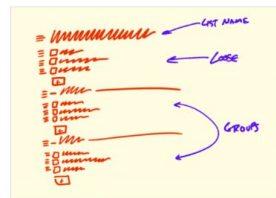
Here's how it works:

First, to-dos without groups will look identical to today's to-dos. We won't add any additional UI around them, no new buttons, etc.



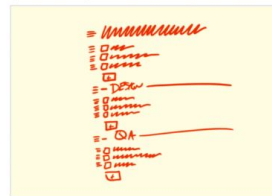
A basic list remains the same. 103 KB • View Subtitle • Download

But, if you add a group for groups, it'll look like this...



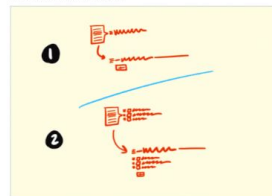
A list with some loose to-do plus two groups of to-dos. 230 KB • View Subtitle • Download

This means now you could make a list for a specific scope that had a section for design-specific to-dos, and QA-specific to-dos.



A group is defined by a divider. You can name a divider anything you want. It can't be checked off, it's not a to-do itself. Any to-do you put below the divider become part of that group. And critically, groups always go before any ungrouped to-do's. This simplifies a bunch of behaviors, and prevents loose to-dos from being lost between groups. If it's loose, it's at the top.

You can create a divider in two ways...



Two ways to make a divider. 103 KB • View Subtitle • Download

1. Click the hamburger menu next to the list title. You'll get a menu. One of the items will be "Create a group" (or add a divider, exact language TBD). It'll then add a blank divider at the end of the loose to-dos, and scroll right to that point so you can name it.
2. You can multi-select (shift key) multiple loose to-dos, and instantly create a group from those to-dos. If you do this, an unnamed divider will be created, and the to-dos will be placed under that divider.

Key to this concept is that we'll add "Add a to-do" buttons to the bottom of each group (and the loose to-dos at the top). So once a divider exists, you can add to-dos directly to that section. If we didn't do this, and we only had one add-to-do button at the top or bottom, you'd have to add and then move into place. That's a hassle. It's much better to add it place when we have places to add.

Completed to-dos will still be grouped into a single collection at the bottom of the entire list. If they were part of a group when you checked them off, we'll present the group name before the to-do list...



If you uncheck a completed to-do from a group, it could get back up to the group (assuming the group divider hasn't been deleted). 103 KB • View Subtitle • Download

Groups will also have their own perms. So you can click the title of a group/divider, and you'll see a new page with just the to-dos in that group...



Group perms for QA. 103 KB • View Subtitle • Download

What we like about this concept overall is that it's very straightforward. It doesn't change existing to-do lists at all. No new permanent UI in the way, no behavior changes if you don't use groups.

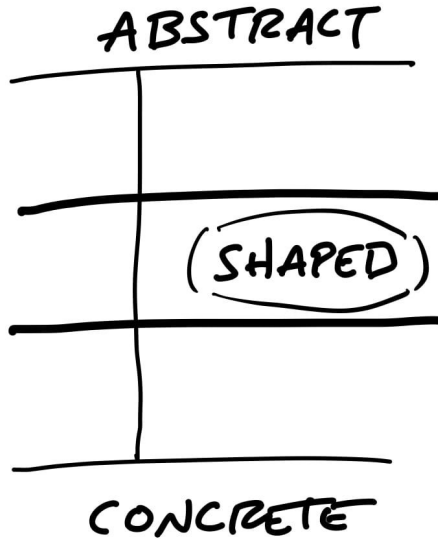
But if you want to level up your organization - and we'd use the shot out of this - then you can add groups to a list. No group within groups, no indenting - just as many one-level groups as you'd like.

There are open questions. Things like if you move the divider, do all the items move with it? If you delete it, do the items move to the top? Also, since you can't put groups above loose to-dos, we'd have to prevent dragging above a certain point, but that's doable as well. I'm sure there are a few other questions as well, but we can work those out as we go.

BONUS: Down the road we'd like to explore adding to-do templates to BC3. We have project templates, but now we're just talking to do templates. You can imagine creating a template with no to-dos, but with groups in place. This is a process booster - people can organize projects in similar ways with just a little bit of structure like this...



Just add to groups. 103 KB • View Subtitle • Download



Shaping is Design

“The shaped concept is an interaction design viewed from the user’s perspective. It defines what the feature does, how it works, and where it fits into existing flows.”

Shaping is Strategy

“What are we trying to solve? Why does it matter? What counts as success? Which customers are affected? What is the cost of doing this instead of something else?”

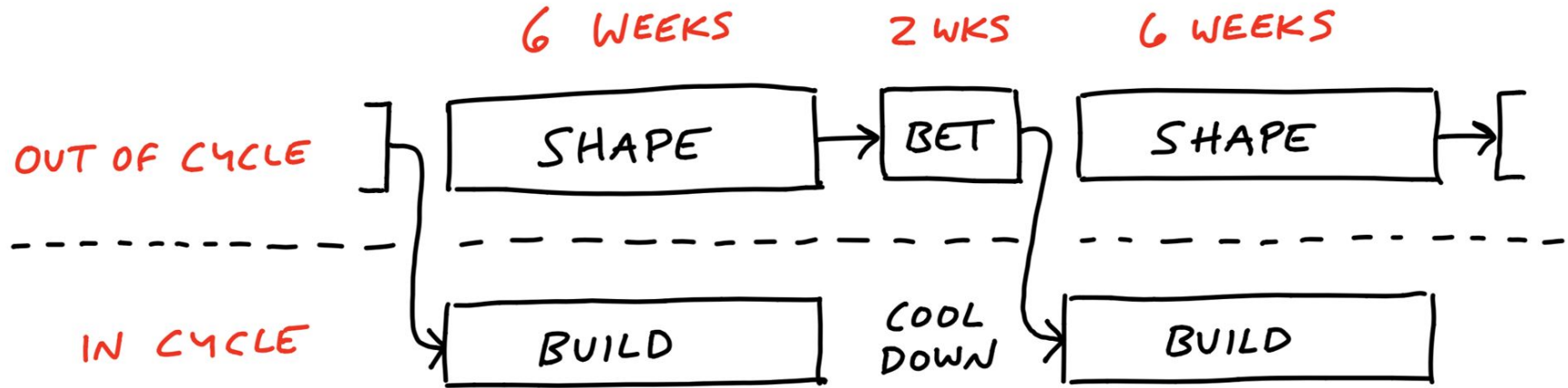
To increase ownership and satisfaction:
consider a 6 week build cycle

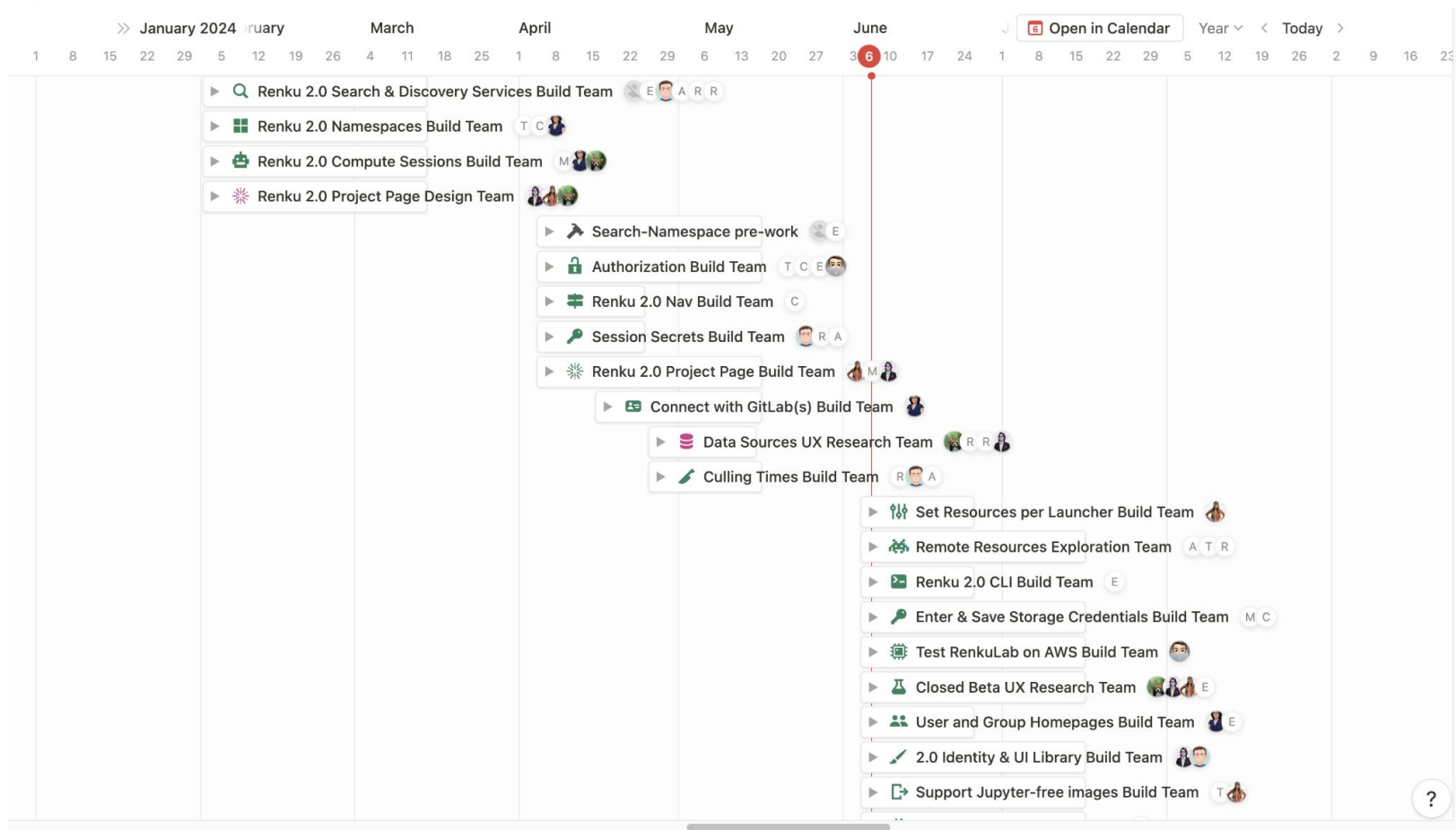


Assign
Projects, not
Tasks



Setting the
Appetite



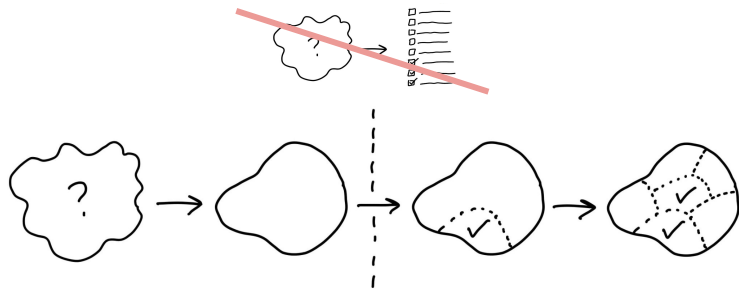




Renku 2.0 is Launched!

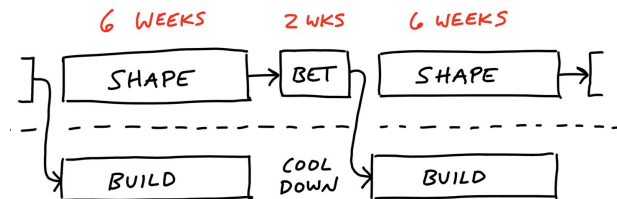


TAKEAWAYS



Don't skip “Shaping”

Translate strategy into action at the scale of a human brain (“**building blocks**”), not the scale of a task manager.



Try a longer development cycle

Build in meaningful chunks that you can **celebrate**.



laura.kinhead@sdsc.ethz.ch

APPENDIX

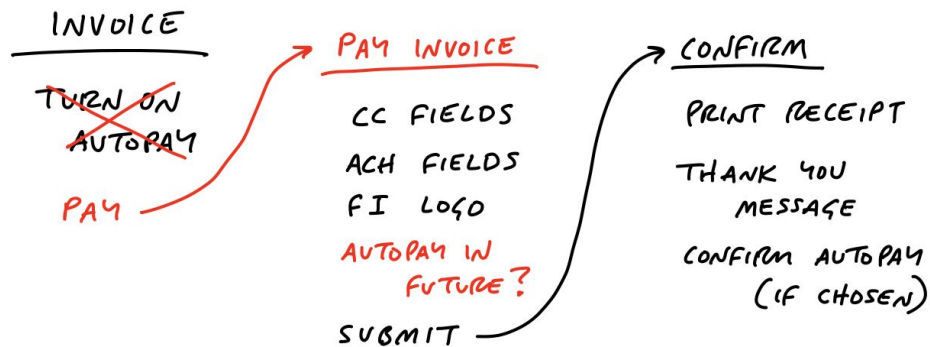
The issue with issues

- **Frustrating:** Feel like you're building a castle with grains of sand, rather than building blocks (not the right tools for **steering the strategic direction** of a project).
 - -> *translate strategy into action at the scale of a human brain, not the scale of a task manager*
- **Oh no!** Build something and then realize it's the **wrong thing**.
 - -> *before you do anything else, figure out how what the experience should be like of actually using it*
- **Unsatisfying:** Feel like projects go on and on, with **no end in sight**.
 - -> *craft your development process to be satisfying for humans who are doing the work*
- **Slow:** **Long delays** slip in when a feature requires multiple issues to achieve a visible result (especially when issues are spread across multiple people!)
 - -> *shape the whole problem before you start working on it*

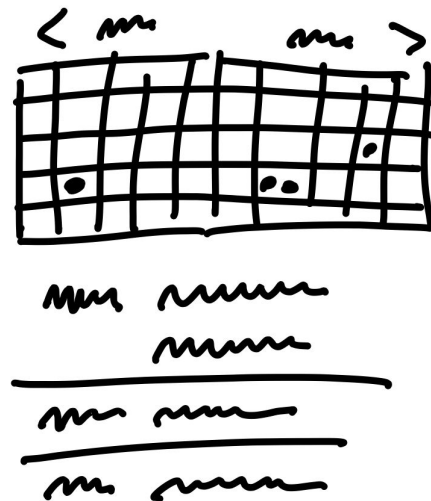
Shaping

Shaping Strategies

Breadboarding

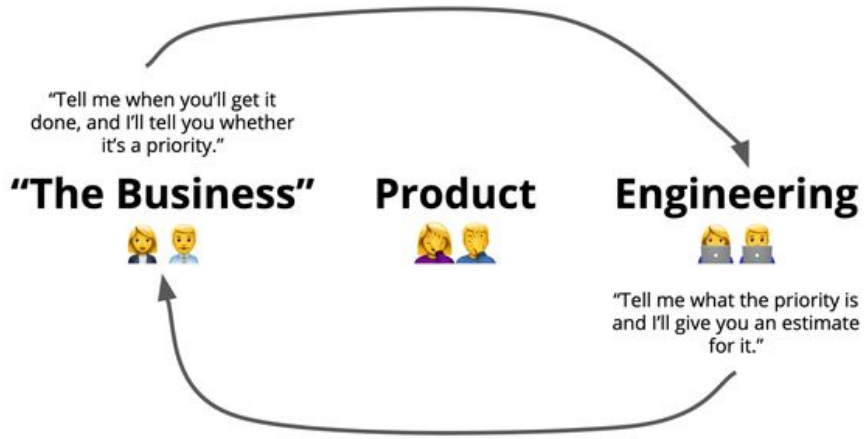


Fat Marker Sketches



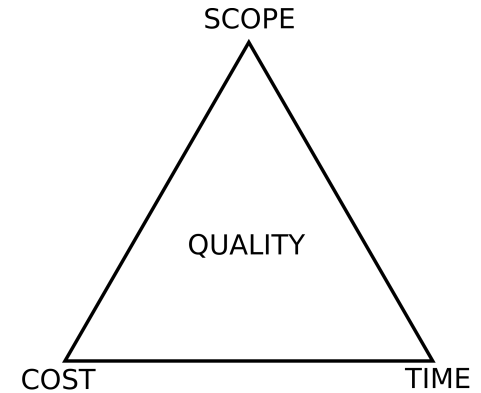
Set Boundaries

Set an *appetite*, not an *estimate*



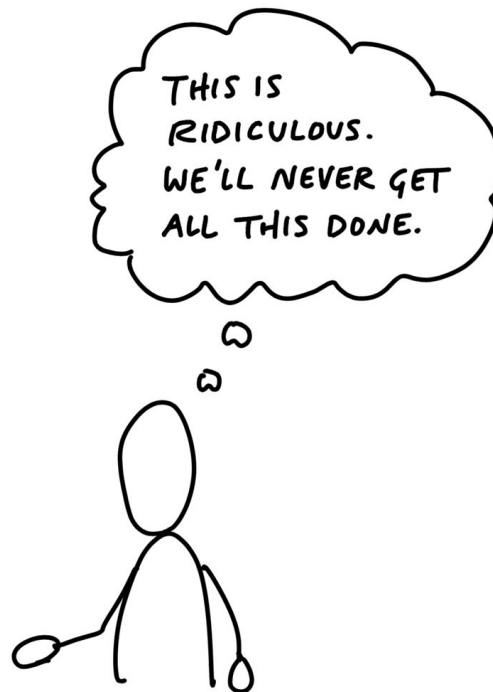
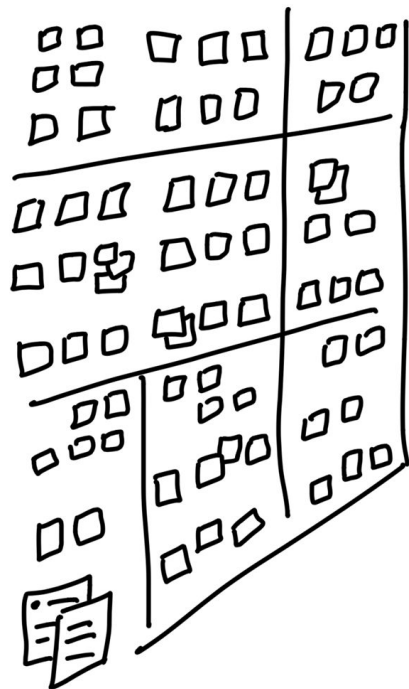
[Image source](#)

Fixed time, variable scope



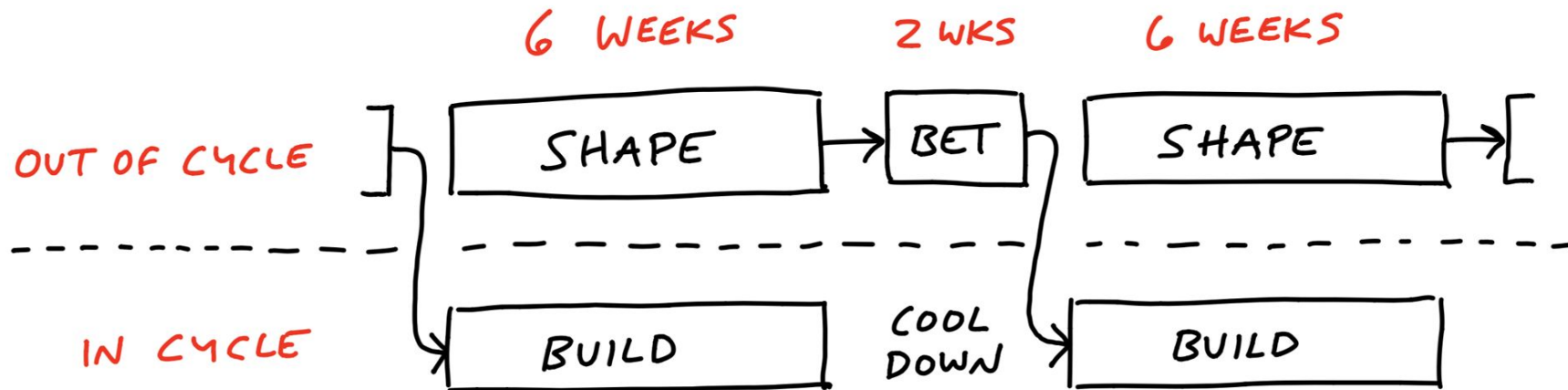
Betting

Bets, not Backlogs

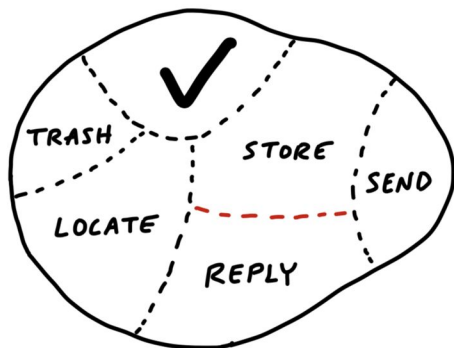


Building

6 week cycles



Map the Scopes



Send

- ☐ Hook up Send from Draft edit state
- ☐ Handle draft message timestamps after sending

Store

- ☐ Remember draft content when editing draft
- ☐ Remember addresses when editing draft
- ☐ Hook up re-saving from Draft edit state

Reply

- ☐ Intercept attempts to reply to Topic if a draft from a different message exists

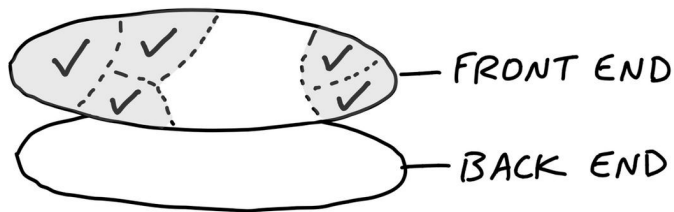
Trash

- ☐ Hook up Draft deletion from Draft edit state
- ☐ Design a way to trash drafts from the index of drafts

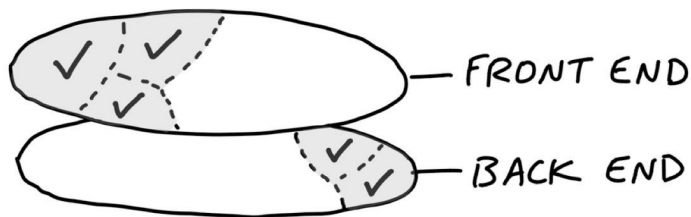
Locate

- ☐ Design index of existing Drafts
- ☐ Design a way to navigate to Drafts via "Inbox..." menu

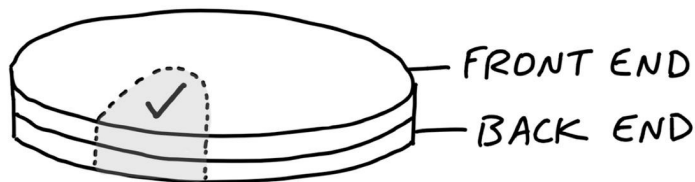
Get One Piece Done



NOTHING WORKS



NOTHING WORKS



SOMETHING WORKS!

