Introduction to Backlog Grooming

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What is Backlog Grooming?

what is backlog grooming?

Backlog grooming is when the Product Manager and their team review items on the backlog, ensuring it only contains appropriate items ordered by priority, and that the items on the top of the backlog are ready for delivery.

Some of the activities that occur during the refinement of the backlog include:

- Removing user stories that no longer appear relevant
- Creating new user stories in response to newly discovered needs
- Re-assessing the relative priority of stories
- Assigning estimates to stories which have yet to receive one
- Correcting estimates in light of newly discovered information
- Splitting user stories which are high priority but too large to fit in an upcoming iteration
- Looking more extensively into the total backlog to enable long-range technical and project planning

who should be involved in a grooming session?

✅ Invitation to participate should be open to the whole team (however, smaller groups work better)

✅ Scrum Masters and Product Managers lead the session

✅ While it is desirable to have the whole development team, this is not always feasible. At a minimum, the lead developers should attend

✅ There should be at least a few stakeholders involved (keep numbers to a minimum to avoid distractions)

benefits of backlog grooming

- ✅ Increases efficiency of the team by greatly reducing uncertainty and unknowns

- ✅ Better refined stories are more accurately estimated, tested and implemented

- ✅ Delays related to external dependencies and larger efforts are discovered sooner

- ✅ Increases efficiency of the team due to increased shared knowledge and understanding of the product

- ✅ Allows the team to maintain a sustainable, higher pace = greater team velocity

- ✅ Reduces the time spent on Sprint Planning sessions

- ✅ Increases the value of Sprint Planning meetings

guidelines for effective backlog grooming sessions

Set a goal for the session: send out a list of stories you want to groom ahead of time and ask the team to review, coming to the meeting with any questions, tasks, hours etc. - the overarching goal should be for all attendees to leave with a clear understanding of what is left for project completion and the upcoming sprint goals

Keep the group small: involve the PM, their agile team and a few stakeholders. A smaller group = more engagement and the less likely you are to get sidetracked.

Meet frequently: a good backlog grooming session leaves everyone feeling familiar with the product backlog, gives them a clear understanding of the goals for the next sprint, and means they can hit the ground running in the Sprint Planning meeting. Schedule grooming sessions regularly, usually a few days before the Sprint Planning meeting

differences between backlog grooming and sprint planning sessions

	backlog grooming session	sprint planning meeting
purpose	To maintain a healthy updated product backlog to ensure time spent in sprint planning is optimised	To agree on a goal for the next sprint and the set of backlog items that will help the team to achieve it
components	1) re-writing backlog items to be more expressive and deleting obsolete ones 2) Breaking up large stories	1) prioritising backlog item s 2) agreeing on the amount of backlog items in the sprint based on capacity
when?	A few days prior to the sprint planning meeting	At the beginning of every sprint

Backlog Grooming Example: Apple TV

product backlog example: Apple TV

A product backlog for Apple TV at the beginning of a grooming session

As an iTunes user I want to redeem my gift card so that I can claim my credit — ATV-121

As a user I want to find movies easily so that I save time browsing long lists — ATV-111

As a user I want to be able to fast forward movies so that I skip scary parts of the film — ATV-483

As a user I want to be able to save my favourite movies to a list so that I can watch them later — ATV-345

As a user I want to use Paypal as my preferred payment method so that I feel safe about my transactions — ATV-345

prioritising the backlog

The Product Manager knows that their users are having significant trouble searching for films, resulting in higher churn. They decide to prioritise that backlog item for the upcoming sprint.

As a user I want to find movies easily so that I save time browsing long lists   ATV-121

As an iTunes user I want to redeem my gift card so that I can claim my credit   ATV-111

As a user I want to be able to fast forward movies so that I skip scary parts of the film   ATV-483

As a user I want to be able to save my favourite movies to a list so that I can watch them later   ATV-345

As a user I want to use Paypal as my preferred payment method so that I feel safe about my transactions   ATV-345

refining the backlog

The Product Manager and Scrum Master begin to breakdown the prioritised backlog item. After discussions with the team, they realise that this user story is going to be a large amount of work. They refine the user story into an epic, to better illustrate the amount of work involved to achieve this objective

As a user I want to find movies easily so that I save time browsing long lists   ATV-121

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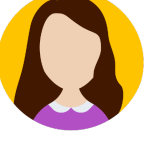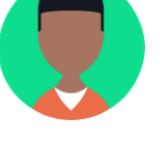
Search

breaking epics down into user stories

Using the epic, the team start to define various user stories that sit under the umbrella of that 'Search' epic. The team prioritise the user stories by most immediate value to the customer. Value can be identified through conversations with users, analytics on usage patterns, or another insight appropriate for your product.

⚡ Search

🔖	As a user I want to free text search so that I save time browsing long lists	ATV-485
🔖	As a user I want to browse by genre so I can find movies I like quicker	ATV-486
🔖	As a user I want to browse by most popular so I can find inspiration for films to watch	ATV-487
🔖	As a user I want to browse by most popular by genre so I can find movies I like quicker	ATV-488
🔖	As a user I want to browse by recent addition by genre so I find movies I haven't watched before quicker	ATV-489

estimating

Now that the user stories are ordered by priority, it is time for the team to allocate estimates to how long/how much effort each particular story will take. This requires team members detailing requirements and acceptance criteria to understand the scope of the work. Every team member is given the opportunity to put forward their estimate and justification. The Product Manager will take the majority SP estimate or average, in this example the majority of the team think the estimate should be 2.

As a user I want to free text search so that I save time browsing long lists ATV-485 **2**

2

3

1
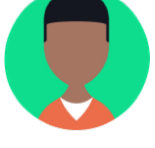
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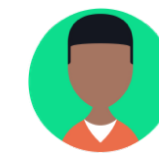
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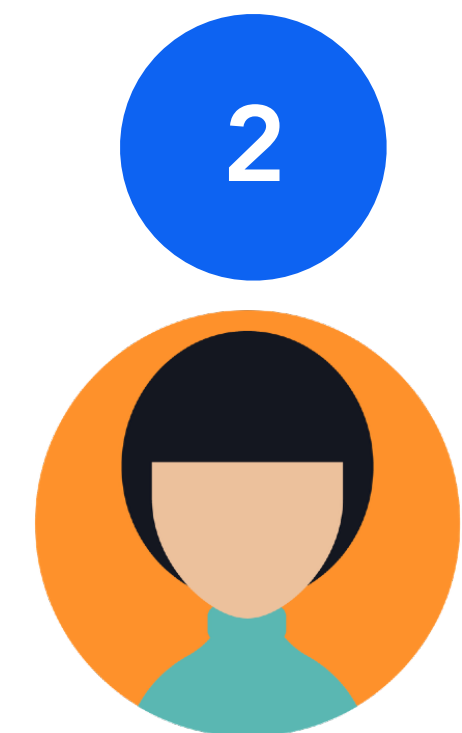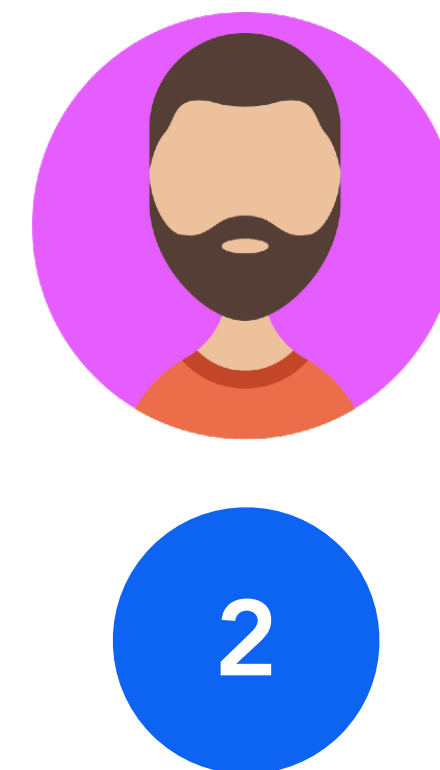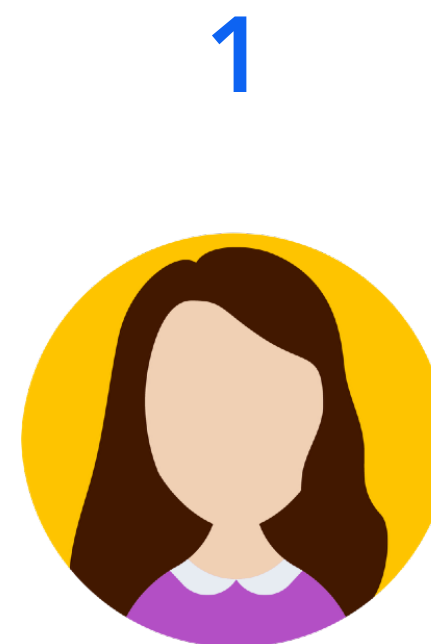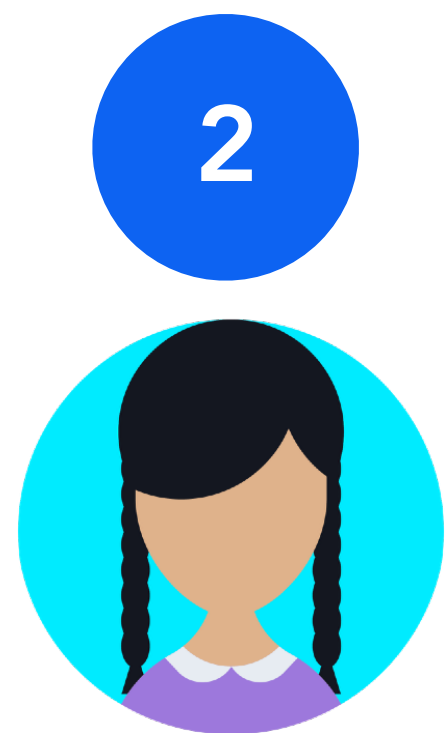
repeat and refine

Continue going through the backlog with your team splitting stories and breaking out tasks. Work with the team to prioritise backlog items, identify requirements, acceptance criteria and estimate work = a healthy backlog and an enlightened team

As a user I want to free text search so that I save time browsing long lists	Search	ATV-485	2
As a user I want to browse by genre so I can find movies I like quicker	Search	ATV-486	3
As a user I want to browse by most popular so I can find inspiration for films to watch	Search	ATV-487	1
As a user I want to browse by most popular by genre so I can find movies I like quicker	Search	ATV-488	3
As a user I want to browse by recent addition by genre so I find movies ……..	Search	ATV-489	3