



Distributed Agile

Ambassador Model for Effectively  
Distributed Agile Teams



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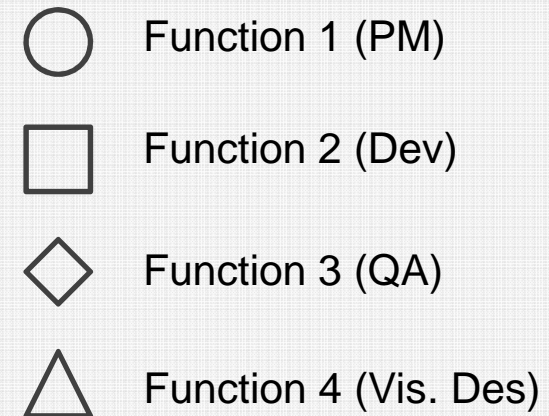
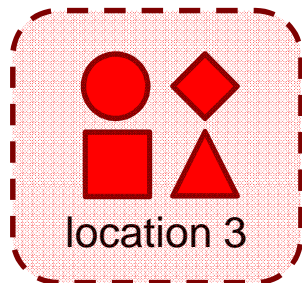
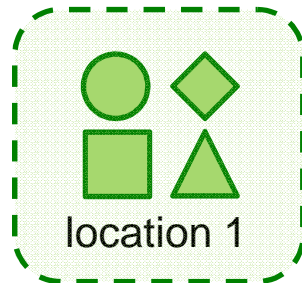
1. Distributed Teams
  1. Cross-functional Teams
  2. Scrum Teams
2. Challenges of Distributed Teams
3. Anti-Pattern
4. Ambassador Model
  1. Ambassador Types
  2. Challenges of the Ambassador Model
5. Case Study
6. Discussion/Questions

▶ Driven by business constraints

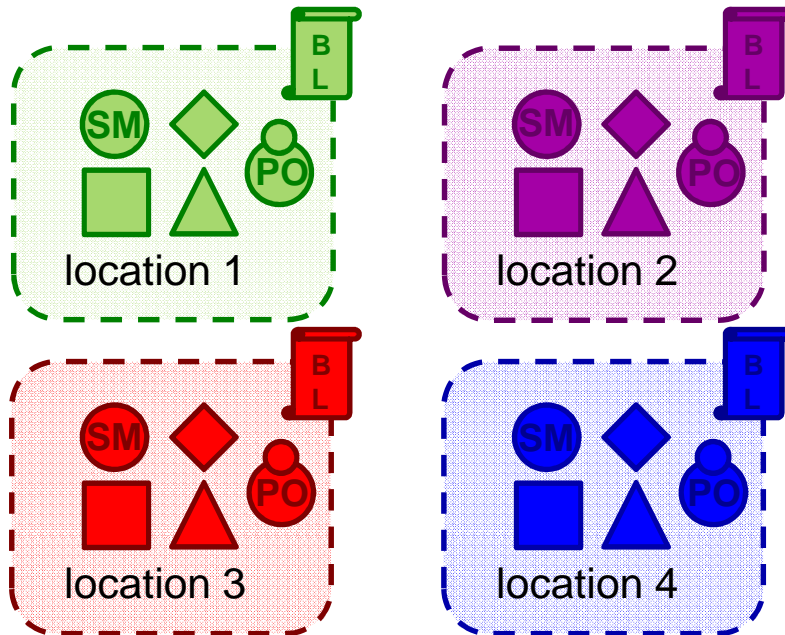
- cost
- proximity to market
- skills availability

▶ Distributed vs. Virtual teams

Virtual Team	Distributed Team
Individuals in multiple remote locations	Individuals in co-located teams in different locations
Never collaborate in person, regardless of location	Individuals collaborate in-person with others in same location. Teams communicate virtually across locations
Extremely high levels of cross-location dependencies	Lower levels of cross-location dependencies



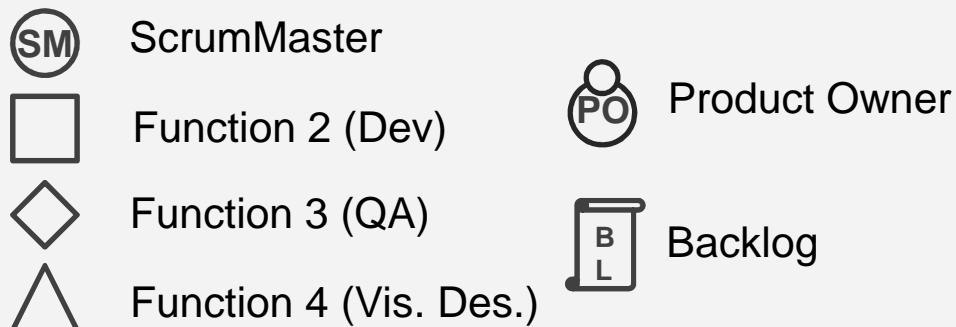
- ▶ Multi-location, multi-team project
- ▶ Each team is cross-functional
- ▶ Limited dependency across locations



## Each Team...

- ▶ ...has its own ScrumMaster
- ▶ ...has its own Product Backlog
- ▶ ...has a dedicated Product Owner
- ▶ ...can plan sprints independently
- ▶ ...can optimize itself
- ▶ ...is co-located

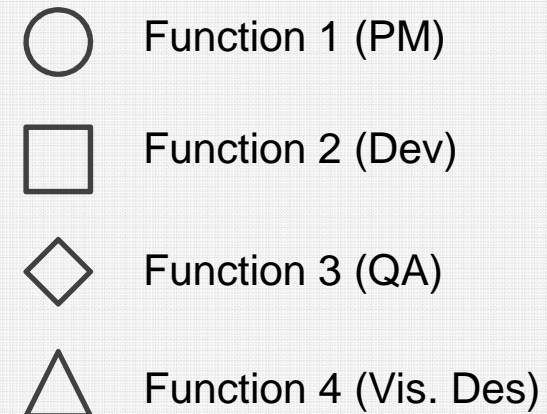
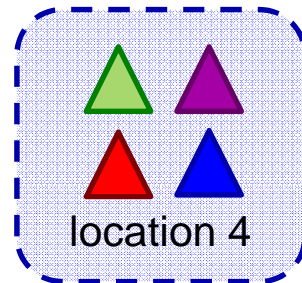
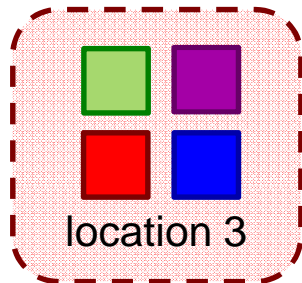
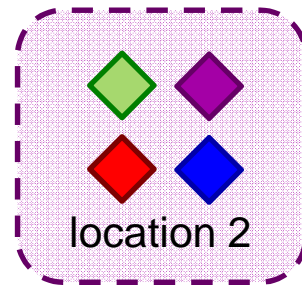
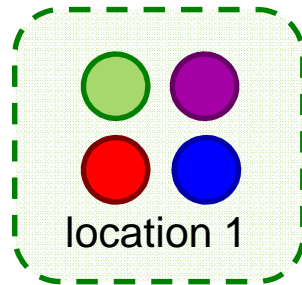
- ▶ ScrumMasters integrate via Scrum-of-Scrums
- ▶ PO's integrate via MetaScrums



**THE IDEAL!**

# Anti-Pattern: Dispersed, Functionally-Silo'd

Distributed Agile



- ▶ Multi-location, multi-team project
- ▶ Each location is functionally organized
- ▶ Cross-functional teams are virtual
- ▶ High dependency across locations

**AVOID THIS**

- ▶ **People distributed based on role**
  - Developers in one location, testers in another etc.
  - Functionally organized
- ▶ **Virtual scrum team**
  - Limited or no face-to-face interaction
  - Poor collaboration and communication
- ▶ **High levels of cross-geographic dependencies**
  - Highly dependent on team members in difference places, times and cultures
- ▶ **Dependency on asynchronous communication**
  - Extensive lags and delays
- ▶ **Poor Productivity**



- ▶ Communication
- ▶ Culture
- ▶ Time zones
- ▶ Cross-Team Dependencies
- ▶ Shared Resources
- ▶ Isolated Team Members
- ▶ Deep Specialists
  - leveraging expertise across teams

- ▶ Informal cross-team communication is typically low
  - “out of sight, out of mind”
- ▶ Product vision is not effectively communicated
  - Vision evolves while understanding does not
- ▶ Communication modes relegated further from face-to-face
  - Heavy reliance on documentation and technology

- ▶ Language Barriers
- ▶ Different expectations of communication levels
- ▶ Cultural divides – “not everyone knows what a popsicle is”
- ▶ The word “no”
- ▶ Underestimating the impact of cultural differences

- ▶ I'm asleep and can't help you
- ▶ Staggered work days are often uncomfortable
  - Either somebody or everybody is unhappy
- ▶ Jet lag

- ▶ Related backlog items
- ▶ Changes to shared components
- ▶ “I’m counting on functionality that you might be changing”
- ▶ Collective code ownership
- ▶ Broken builds
- ▶ Awaiting Spike results

- ▶ Some capabilities/skills are not available everywhere
- ▶ Not enough need to warrant one per team
  - Would become a scaling constraint
- ▶ Cost and budget constraints
  - Cannot afford more team members
- ▶ Some individuals need to participate in entire product
  - Architect
  - Visual design/IA

- ▶ Limited number of superstars
  - Must leverage their expertise across multiple teams
- ▶ Localized subject matter expertise
  - “Take ‘em where you can find ‘em”
- ▶ Limited access to specialists across teams
  - Some teams may get insufficient exposure

- ▶ Most companies are functionally organized
- ▶ Some capabilities and skills are not available everywhere
- ▶ Typically customer or business/PO group is co-located
  - Should they be?
- ▶ Many don't wish to relocate
- ▶ That's the hand you were dealt



Because of these challenges, the **Ambassador Model** evolved

*What is it?*

- ▶ Bridging distributed team gaps by having various team members travel to other team locations
- ▶ Substitute planes for phones

- ▶ Emissaries
- ▶ Traveling Troubadours
- ▶ Visiting Professors
- ▶ Foreign Exchange
- ▶ Ninja

- ▶ Team members visiting other location
  - Temporary or Permanent
  - May have Rotating Emissary
- ▶ Act as team representative
  - Bridge cultural and communication gaps
  - Facilitate collaboration across geographic locations
- ▶ Remain members of original team
  - Participate in all planning and ceremonies
  - Can be any team member

## Typical Emissaries

- Team leads
- Product owners

- Product owners
- Team leads

## Emissary Guidelines

The less self-sufficient a team is,  
the greater the need to use emissaries

- ▶ Evangelize vision and culture
  - Bridges communication gaps
  - Responsible for sharing product and project vision
  - Communicate decisions
- ▶ Typically not a permanent member of any team
  - Project and product leadership
- ▶ Spread “the word”

## Typical Traveling Troubadours

- Senior stakeholders
- Uber product owners
- Functional managers
- Technical leaders

- Technical leaders
- Functional managers
- Uber product owners

- ▶ Thought leaders
- ▶ Temporarily joins a team
  - Specific tactical role on team
- ▶ Typically an expert or specialist
  - Fill a specific need on the team
  - Often limited specialty on program
- ▶ Overcome specific distributed team challenges
  - Shared resource
  - Deep specialist

## Typical Visiting Professors

- Subject matter experts
- Coaches
- Architects

- Architects
- Coaches

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- ▶ Swap peoples across teams
  - Can be any role
  - Exchange of similar skill set
  - Volunteer-based – should not be forced or coerced
  - Veteran of original team
- ▶ Knowledge sharing across teams
  - Share learning across teams
- ▶ Integrate team cultures
  - Highly social people

## Typical Exchange Workers

- Developers
- Testers
- DBA's

- DBA's
- Testers

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- ▶ Deployed to tackle critical tactical problem
  - Can be any role
  - Exchange of similar skill set
- ▶ Get In :: Fix It :: Get Out
  - Temporary – very short-term
  - Focus on problem resolution
- ▶ Superstar
  - Specialists or broad generalists

### Typical Ninja's

- Technical Experts
- Product Experts
- Troubleshooting Experts

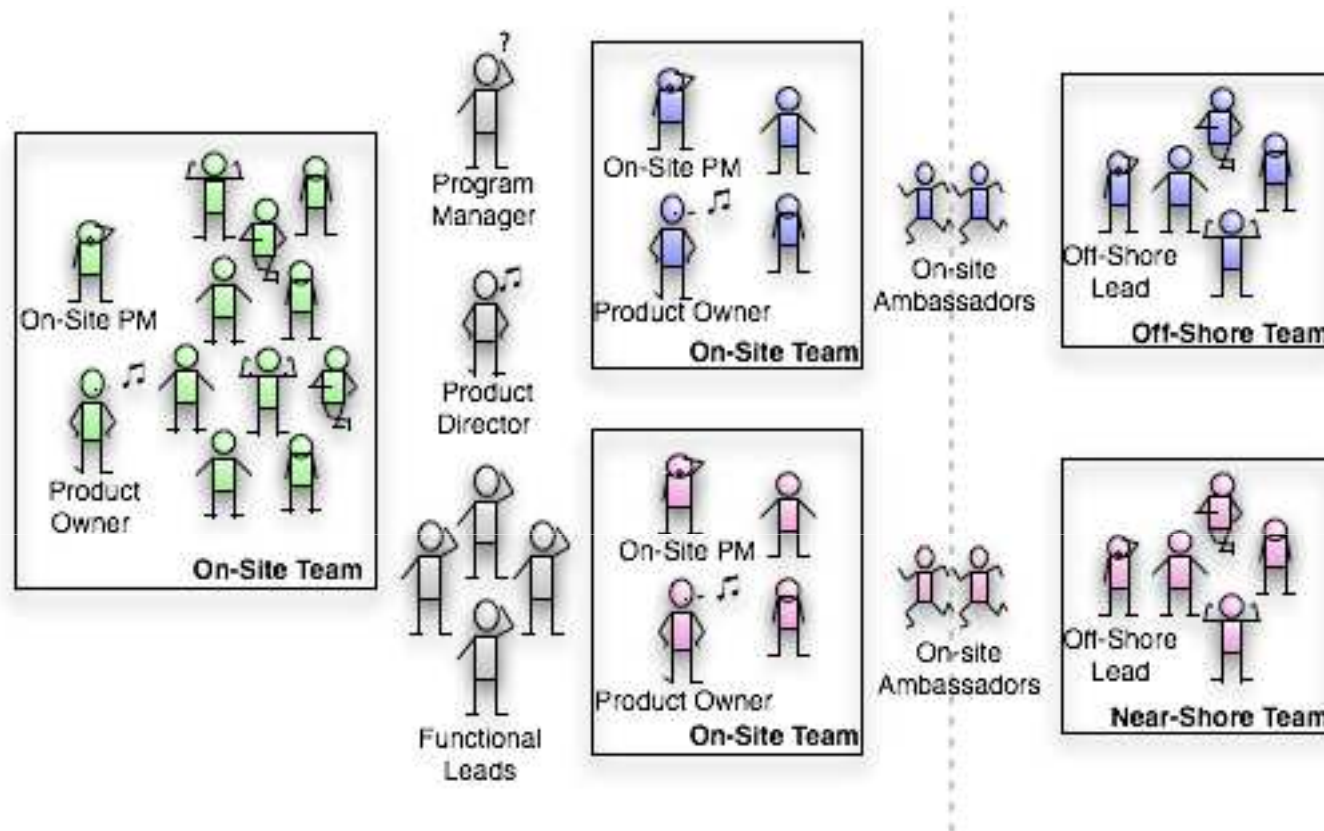
- Troubleshooting Experts
- Product Experts

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- ▶ **Cost**
  - Requires investment in travel
- ▶ **Not everyone wants to travel**
  - Ambassadors must be volunteers to be successful
- ▶ **Poor ambassadors**
  - Effective ambassadors sometimes difficult to find
- ▶ **Not very “green”**
  - Increased air travel is not eco-friendly
- ▶ **Can result in isolated team members**

- ▶ **\$40+ Million Distribute Agile Program**
- ▶ **Multiple Locations**
  - US Teams
  - Near-shore Canada Teams
  - Off-shore India Teams
- ▶ **Distribution Model:**
  - Independent cross-function distributed teams
  - Leveraged “Emissary” Ambassadors
- ▶ **Isolated Resources**
  - Product Owners
  - Visual Designers
  - Business Analysts
- ▶ **Shared Resources**
  - DBA’s
  - Architects



- ▶ Leveraged Emissaries to bridge gap between on-site “hub” and distributed teams
- ▶ Emissaries helped bridge cultural and communication gaps

## ► Assessment: Effectiveness of Distributed Teams

- Quality
- Productivity
- Communication
- Perceived Value

## ► Results:

- On-site teams are more productive but distributed model highly effective
- Distributed team highly cost-effective
- Individuals with more experience with past off-shore projects scored the Agile Distributed Ambassador model higher in effectiveness



When asked to compare this Agile off-shore project with past non-Agile off-shore projects:

81% of respondents rated the Agile project "Better" or "Much Better"