



Getting Prioritisation Right

Bring some order to your backlog.

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Previously on #boxukagile...

“Time thieves”

- Too much Work In Progress (WIP)
- Unknown dependencies
- Unplanned work
- **Conflicting priorities**
- Neglected work
- Lack of visibility - not knowing what is going on



Why prioritise?

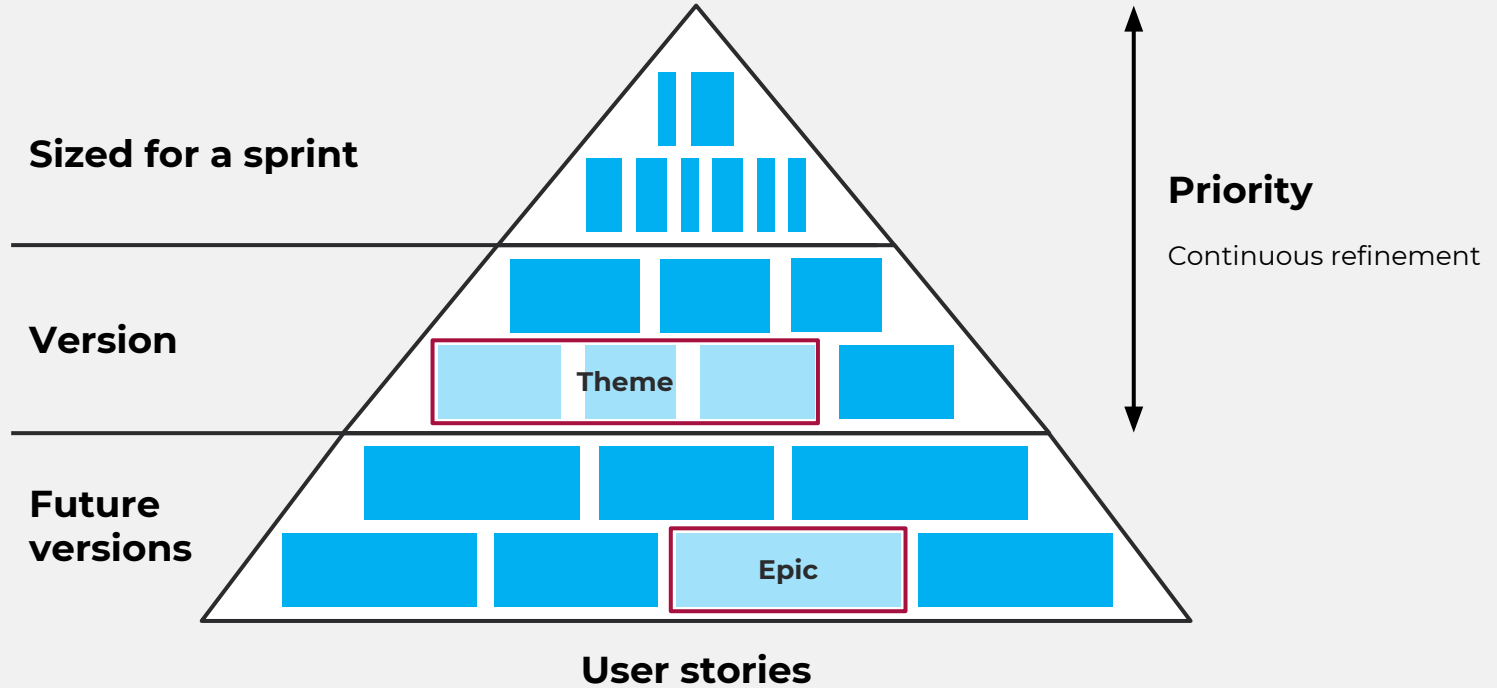
Why prioritise?

- To ensure your team works on the **most important** thing at a given time
- To be able to deploy the **right skills** in the right place at the right time
- To make **coherent decisions** from multiple (competing) inputs
- To help **manage risk** and dependencies

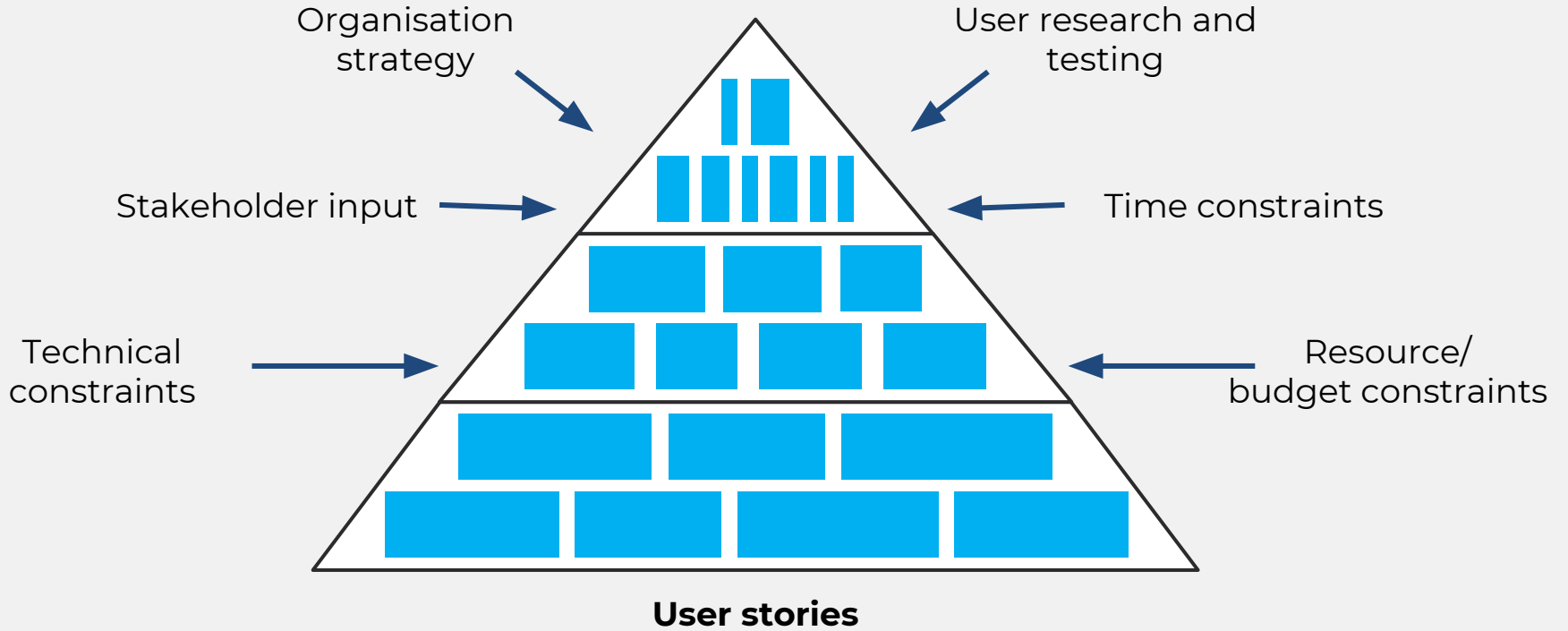
... because you will always run out of **budget** before you run out of **ideas**!



Backlog management



Inputs



On prioritisation

“Discipline is choosing between what you want now and what you want most”

— *Abraham Lincoln*

“The oldest, shortest words - ‘yes’ and ‘no’ - are the ones which require the most thought”

— *Pythagoras*

On prioritisation

“It’s only by saying ‘no’ that you can concentrate on the things that are really important”

— *Steve Jobs*

“Focus on impact, not approval”


— *Tim Ferriss*

When prioritisation goes wrong...

- 2019 FA Cup 3rd round:
Newport County 2 - 1 Leicester City
- Premier League Leicester City **deprioritised the FA Cup**, fielding a weakened team against League Two side Newport County
- Newport subsequently **knocked Leicester out** of the Cup
- Part of a series of events that led to the **dismissal of the Leicester manager**



Phrases and anti-patterns
that make this worse



*“This is
really
urgent”*



*“This is
really
urgent”*



*“I really
need this”*

*“This is
really
urgent”*

*“I really
need this”*

*“You’re the
only one who
can help”*

Business value



Prioritisation and value

- **Desirability:** how badly do your users want this?
- **Feasibility:** how straightforward or difficult is this to achieve?
- **Profitability:** how (and how much) will your business benefit from doing this?



Exercise #1

A group of celebrities are on a ship that is sinking. You have a life raft that you can use to rescue one celebrity at a time. You don't know how long you have got until the ship sinks. As a team, choose the order in which you want to rescue the celebrities.

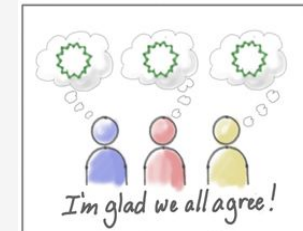
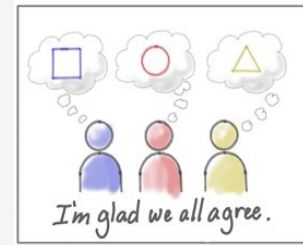
How did you choose?

- **Define the criteria** by which you could choose to save each celebrity
- **Agree the criteria** that you will use to make that choice
- Agree the **relative importance** of each celebrity for the agreed criteria



Importance of collaboration (again!)

- How difficult was it to agree on the criteria?
- How difficult was it to agree on the ratings?
- **Collaborative prioritisation** surfaces different perspectives, allows exploration of them, and strives for agreement across participants
- Also promotes collective **ownership of decisions**



Prioritisation needs **LOVE**...

Leadership

Ownership

Value

Evaluation

Goals, Strategy, Tactics

- Prioritisation is needed at **multiple levels**
- A business can aim for many **high level goals**: which are achievable, most valuable, most appropriate?
- For a particular goal, which **strategic approach** should be prioritised to achieve it? Should there be more than one?
- And how do you prioritise **day-to-day working** to achieve all of the above?



Basic prioritisation techniques

Affinity / stack ranking

- Place candidates in a single priority order
- You have already seen this in the first exercise!



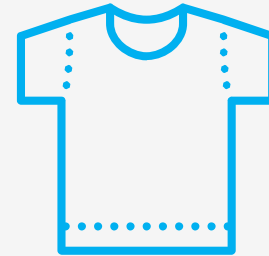
Bubble sort

- Place candidates in a list
- Perform a comparison sort by stepping through the list and comparing adjacent pairs
- If the pairs are in the wrong order then swap them
- Move on to the next pair
- Continue to do this until the list is in the right order
- Potentially time-consuming and tempting to go to affinity comparison as a “short-cut”



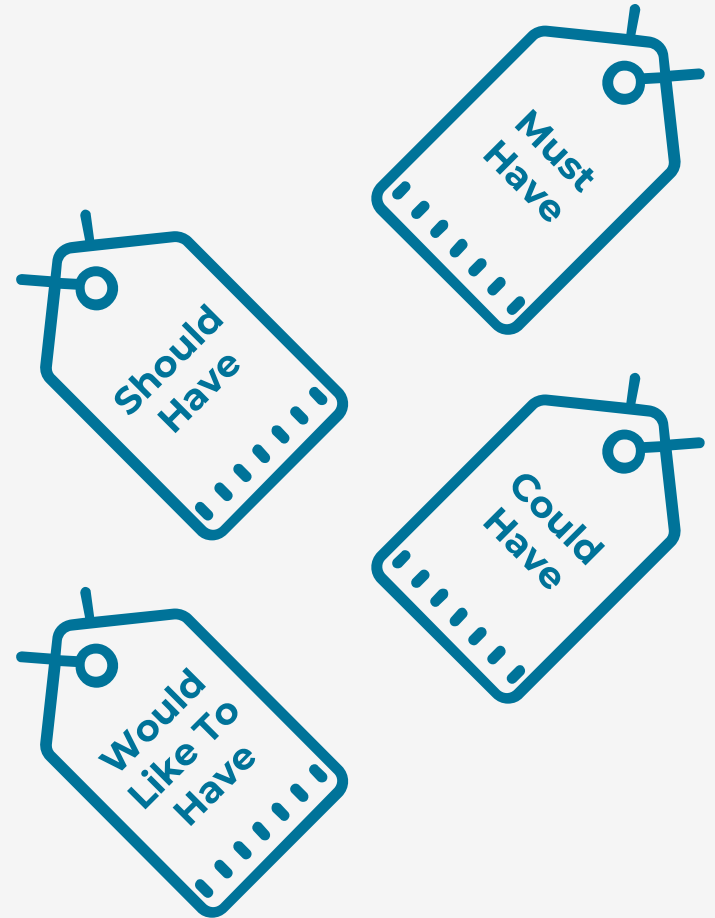
T-shirt sizing

- An approximate grouping of tasks into priority “bins”:
 - Small
 - Medium
 - Large
- Useful for gaining a quick, high-level prioritisation picture
- Does not worry about detailed ordering within each bin



MOSCOW prioritisation

- Assigning a priority label to each candidate:
 - Must Have
 - Should Have
 - Could Have
 - Would Like To Have
- Popular method, but there is often confusion over what constitutes a “Must Have”



MOSCOW classification

Must Have	Project/delivery will fail if this is not delivered
Should Have	Important requirement without which the project outcome is adversely affected and a solution should be sought; workarounds may be available
Could Have	Desirable requirement without any detrimental effect to the outcome if not delivered
Would Like To Have	Requirement that is not needed (at this time) but would add value if delivered

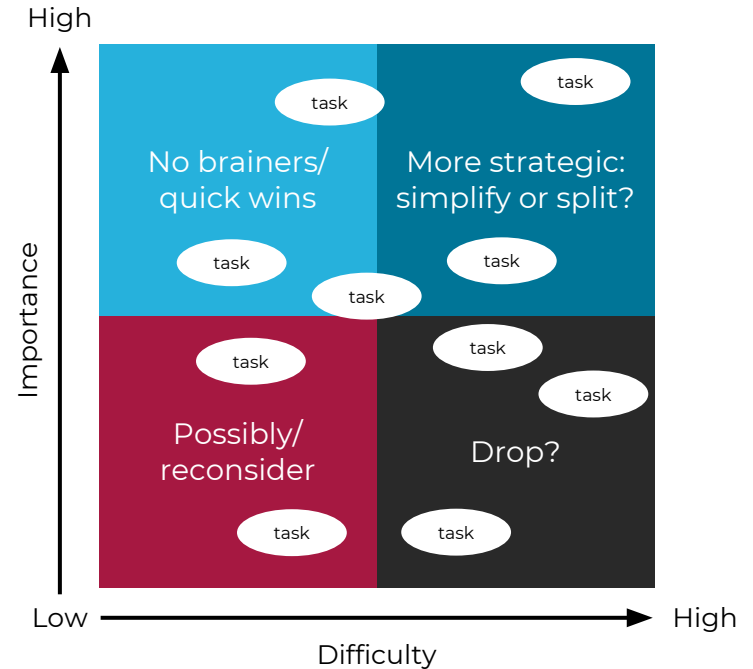
Recap

- Prioritisation is necessary to show you what is best to do next
- The concepts of value, and how you should prioritise, are vitally important to identify, define and agree
- For efficiency and clarity, try and define and agree the prioritisation criteria before you start assessing candidates
- Some basic techniques can still be really powerful

Next steps

Boston Matrix

- Plot each candidate on a 2D graph
 - Some measure of **importance** (e.g. revenue, cost saving etc.)
 - Versus some measure of **difficulty** (e.g. time, cost, risk, complexity, effort)
- Visual comparison of candidates across different axes (points of view)



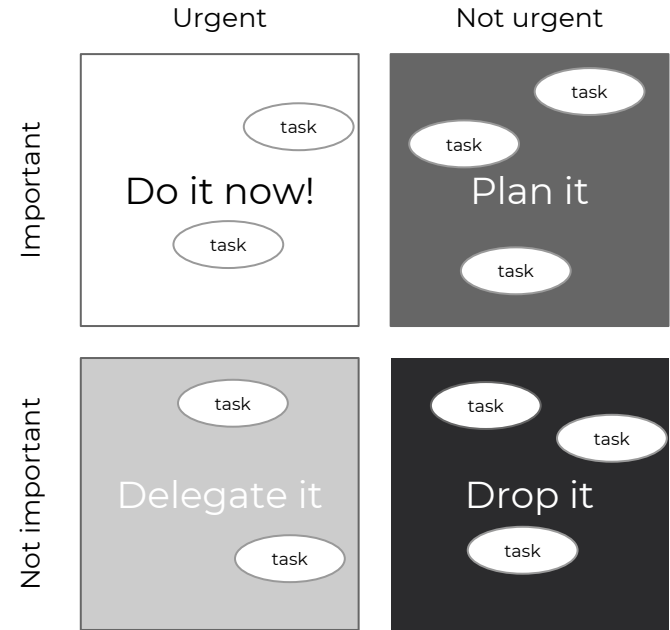
Importance vs. Urgency

“Most of us spend too much time on what is urgent and not enough time on what is important”

— *Stephen Covey*

Eisenhower Matrix

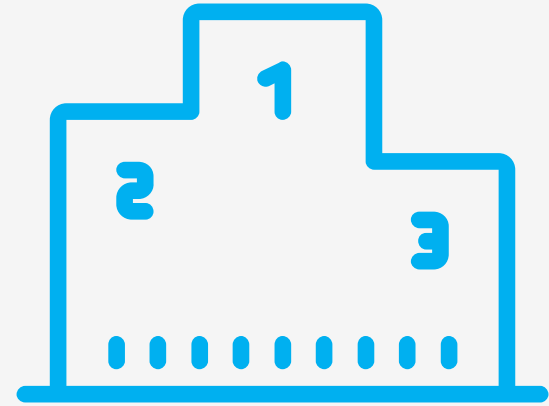
- Special case of a Boston Matrix
 - Plot **importance**
 - Versus **urgency**
- Visual comparison of candidates across different axes (points of view)



RICE prioritisation

- Four prioritisation criteria:
 - **Reach** (high is better)
 - **Impact** (high is better)
 - **Confidence** (high is better)
 - **Effort** (low is better)
- Calculate a score for each candidate:

$$\frac{\text{Reach} \times \text{Impact} \times \text{Confidence}}{\text{Effort}} = \text{RICE score}$$



Alternative concepts

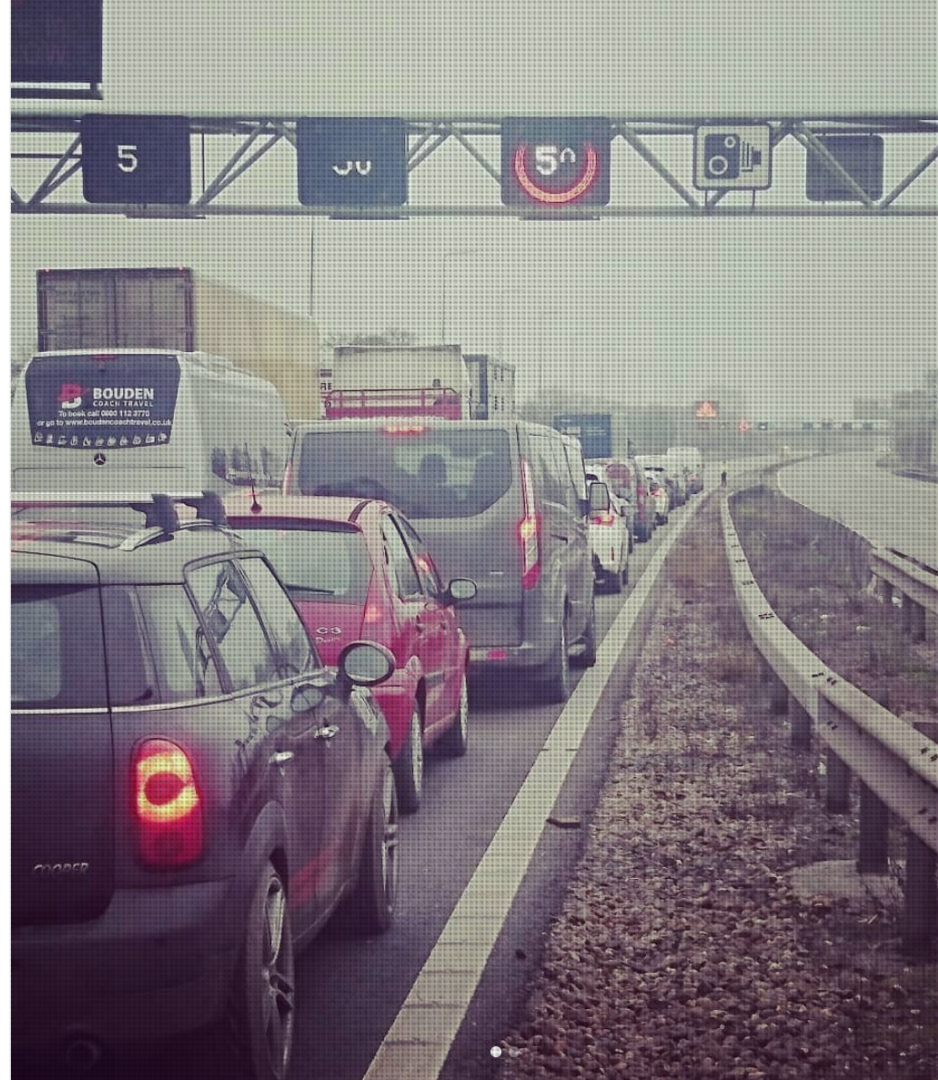
Cost of delay

- Aka prioritising by money!
- Other methods look at the **value gained after delivery**
- Cost of delay looks at the **value you miss out on until you deliver**
- Estimate the **value** generated by each feature
- Estimate **how long it will take** to deliver

Value generated

= **Weighted value**

Time taken to deliver



Cost of delay

Feature	Estimated time to deliver/sprints (T)	Estimated value (V)	Estimated value (£)	Weighted value V/T
A	2	7	7000	3.5
B	3	8	8000	2.7
C	5	15	15000	3.0
D	7	24	24000	3.4

Value could be estimated in **revenue** (\$, £, etc.) or as relative **“value points”** (V)

Cost of delay

Priority method	Total cost of delay incurred to deliver all features
No priority: produce all features at the same time	?
Shortest job first	?
Most valuable job first	?
Weighted shortest job first (WSJF)	?



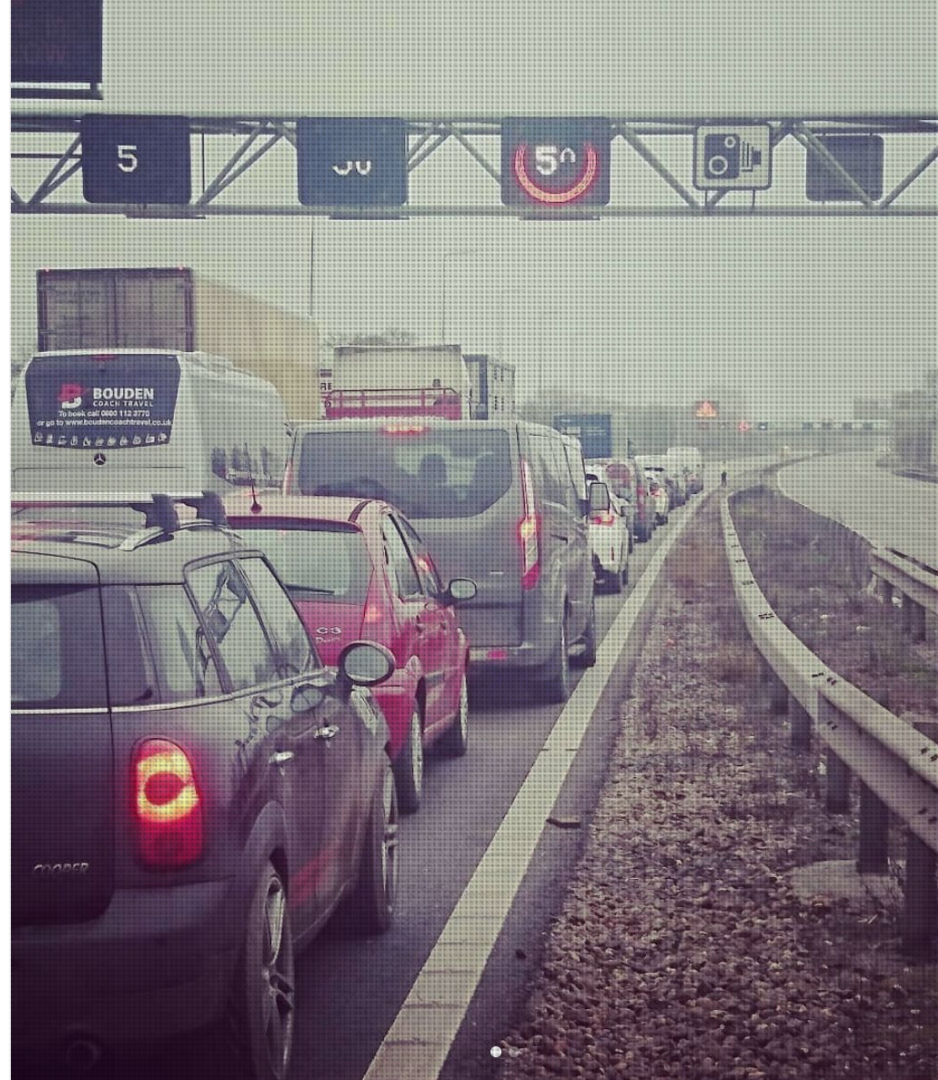
Cost of delay: results

Priority method	Total cost of delay incurred to deliver all features
No priority: produce all features at the same time	777000
Shortest job first	612000
Most valuable job first	587000
Weighted shortest job first (WSJF)	576000



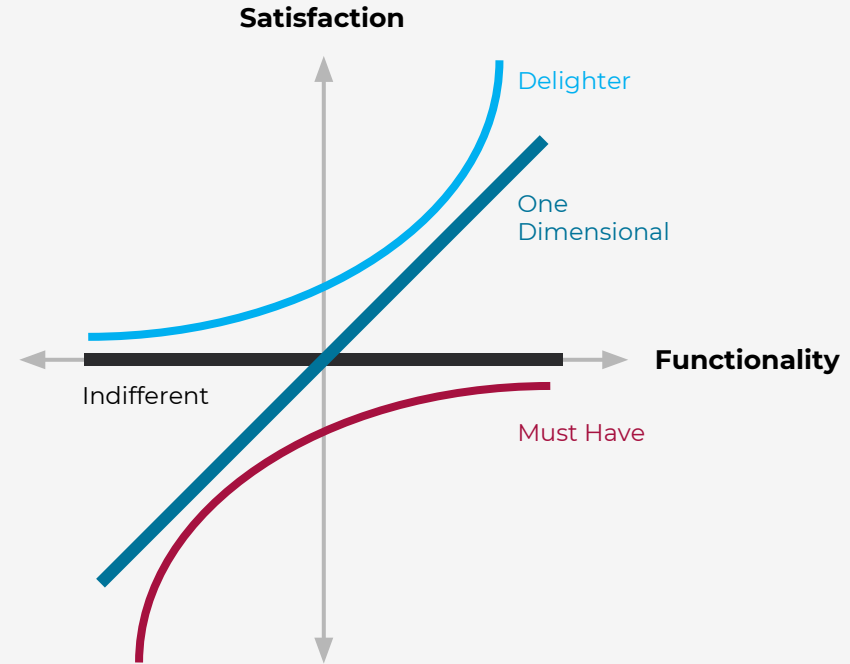
Cost of delay

- Advantages
 - **Quantitative method** to indicate prioritisation
- Disadvantages
 - You need to know a lot about your **market** and **product** to have confidence in the outcome
- This may be useful to help prioritise features in **existing products or marketplaces**



Kano prioritisation

- Categorise features (priority implied):
 - Must Have
 - One Dimensional
 - Delighter
 - Indifferent
 - Reverse
- Ask customers how they would feel if they **had** the feature
- Ask customers how they would feel if they **didn't have** the feature



KANO classification

Must Have	The product must have this feature for me to consider the product acceptable
One Dimensional	The more I get of this, the better
Delighters	I love this element of the product (but I don't necessarily need it)
Indifferent	Its presence (or absence) doesn't make a real difference to the customer - question whether any of these get done
Reverse	Customers actively dislike these e.g. something that is dated - actively avoid any of these

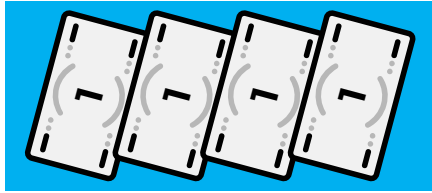
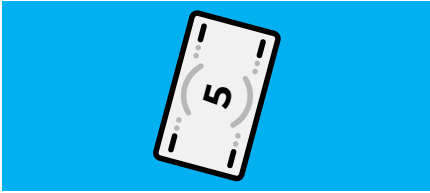
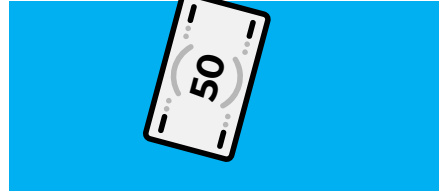
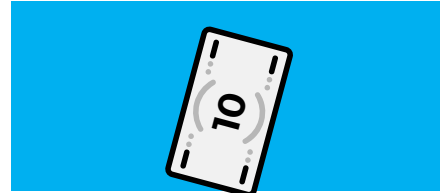
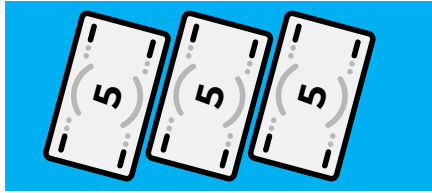
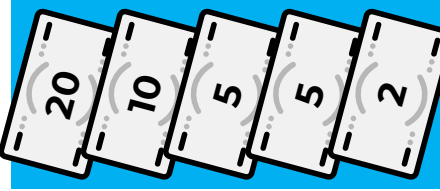
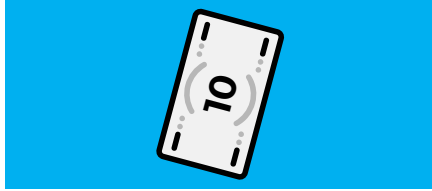
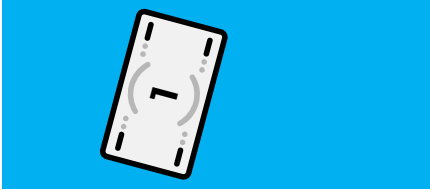
Categories can change over time: what was once an exciting “Delighter” may become a “Must Have”, before sliding through “Indifferent” to “Reverse” as it becomes out-of-date.

Planning monopoly

- A number of candidates are written on tickets and placed for review
- Each stakeholder is given a nominal “budget”
- They are asked to “spend” their budget on the feature(s) that they want to see being built first
- The features with the most money “staked” on them are declared the highest priority



Planning Monopoly



Exercise #2

*A large media company has decided to compete with Netflix, Amazon Prime et al and offer their own digital entertainment delivery service. You are stakeholders in this company, each with a monopoly money budget. Base functions such as “**sign up/cancel**”, “**select content**” and “**play content**” are **already in the system**.*

Please examine the features in front of you and decide how you would like to spend your budget to get features built first.

Planning monopoly

- Are you surprised by the results?
- Was there consensus on the prioritisation?
- What drove your personal voting decisions?
 - Global “big picture”?
 - Or your particular needs and wants?



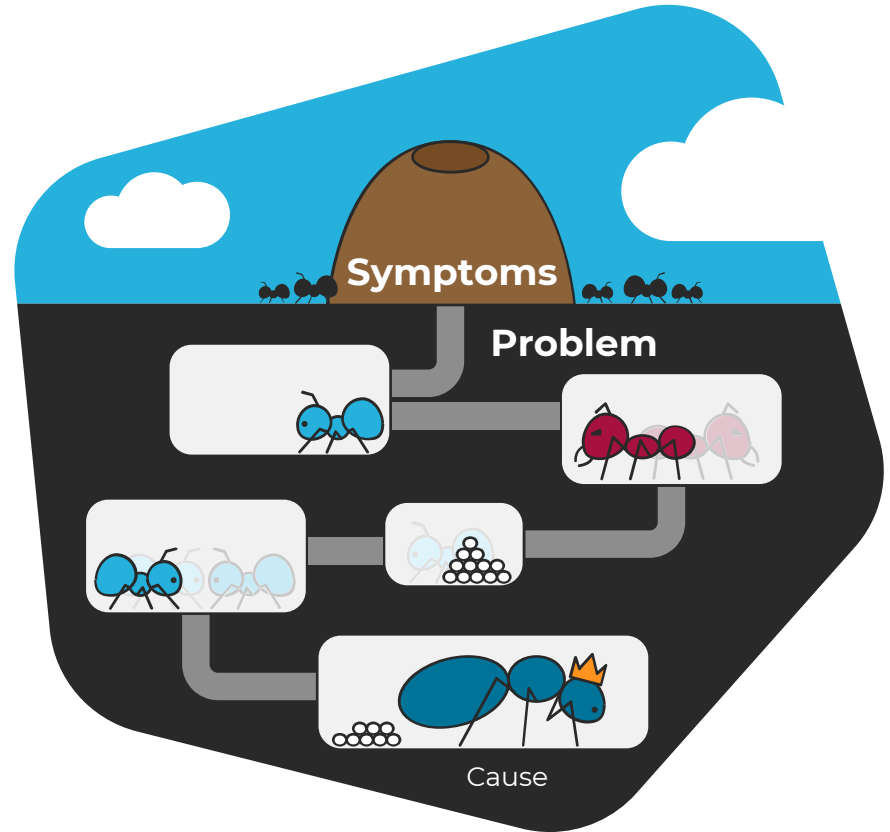
Useful adjuncts

The “Five Whys”

- You may know this from **Root Cause Analysis**:

Analysis:

- Presented with an issue
- Ask “Why?” approximately five times to drill down to the root cause of the issue
- Repurpose this for prioritisation:
 - This is important - why?
 - Because of... - why?



“Stop doing” list

- A technique from personal time management
- Humans can tend to pick tasks that are **interesting**, rather than **valuable**
- So move these tasks onto a “**stop doing**” or “**to don’t**” list
- In prioritisation - ask the question “what would happen if this was on the stop doing list”?



“Eat a frog”

“Eat a live frog first thing in the morning and nothing worse will happen to you the rest of the day” - *Mark Twain*

- Do the **most difficult task first**
- Prioritise difficult tasks - which should **de-risk projects**
- “Difficult” does not always correspond to “giving most business value”
- Potential use as a tie-breaker



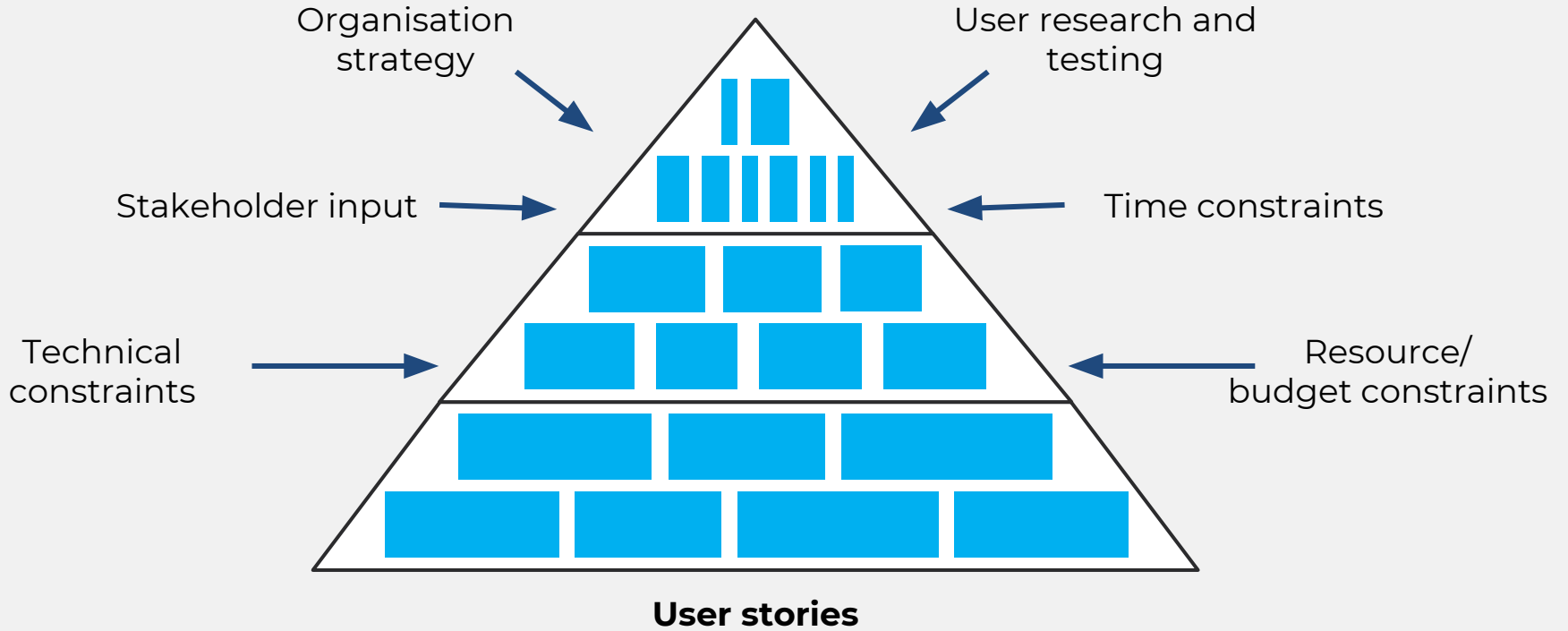
Bringing this together

Goals, Strategy, Tactics

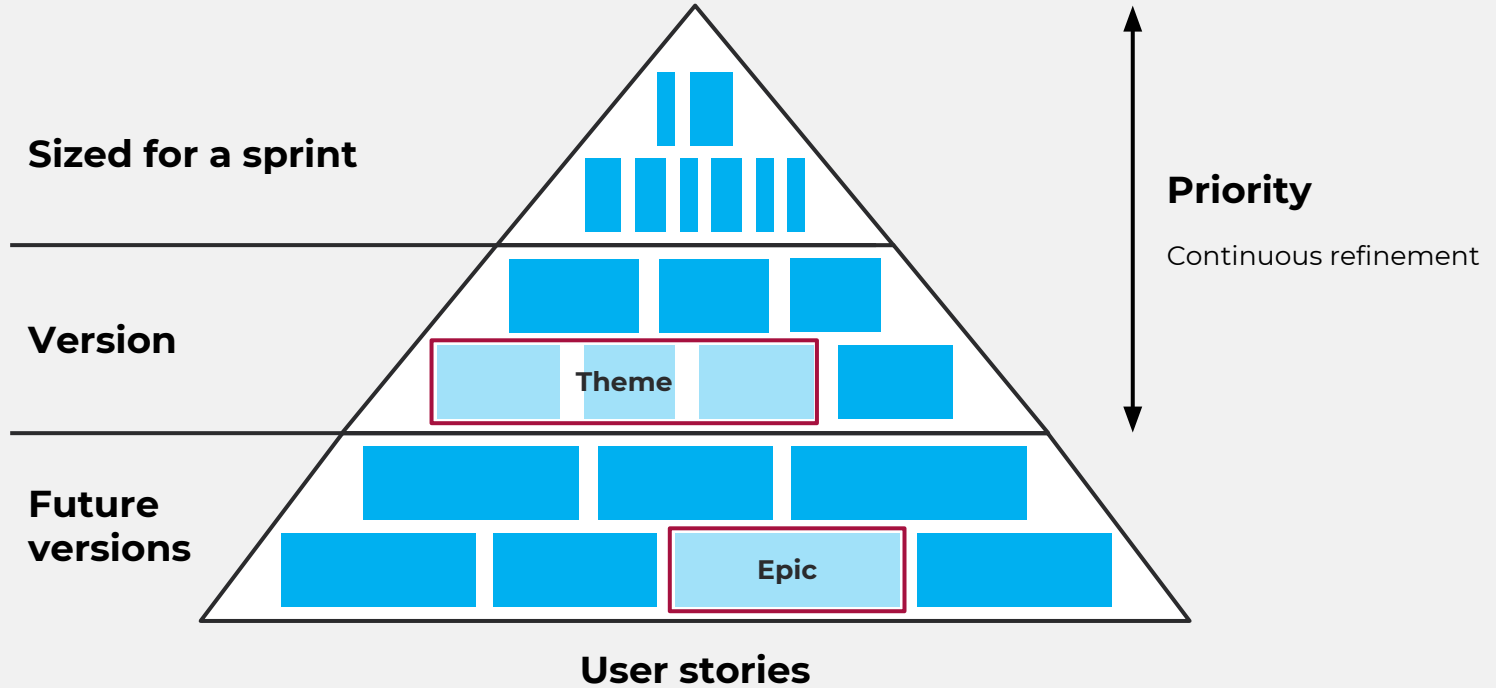
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Inputs

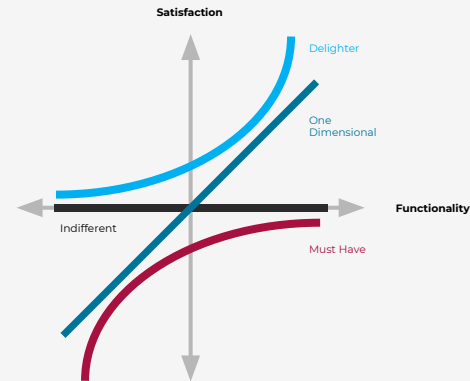
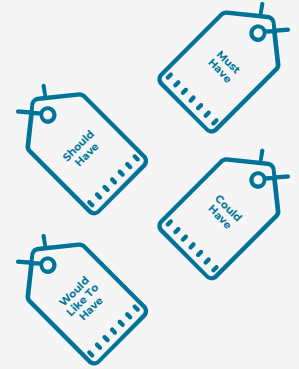
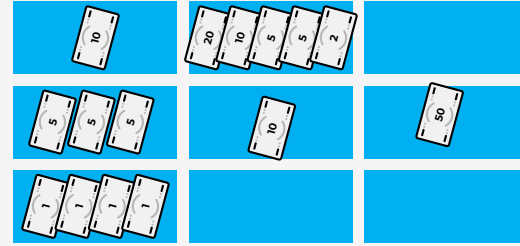


Backlog management



Combinations

- You don't have to rely on a single method all the time
- Occasional changes of approach, or adding new ways of questioning a prioritisation, can yield significant changes in approach
- Give greater context for a final prioritisation



Playback



Key takeaways

- Humans are weak
- Prioritisation is important but difficult
- Prioritisation is not an exact science
- But it can be aided by having logical frameworks to help make conscious decisions

Key takeaways

- Prioritisation needs LOVE
- There are many approaches to prioritisation - choose one (or more) and try it
 - Some are “quick and dirty”, some are more involved
- Can use more than one technique for comparisons
- Evaluate and iterate your priorities - regular collaborative review

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Thank you!

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