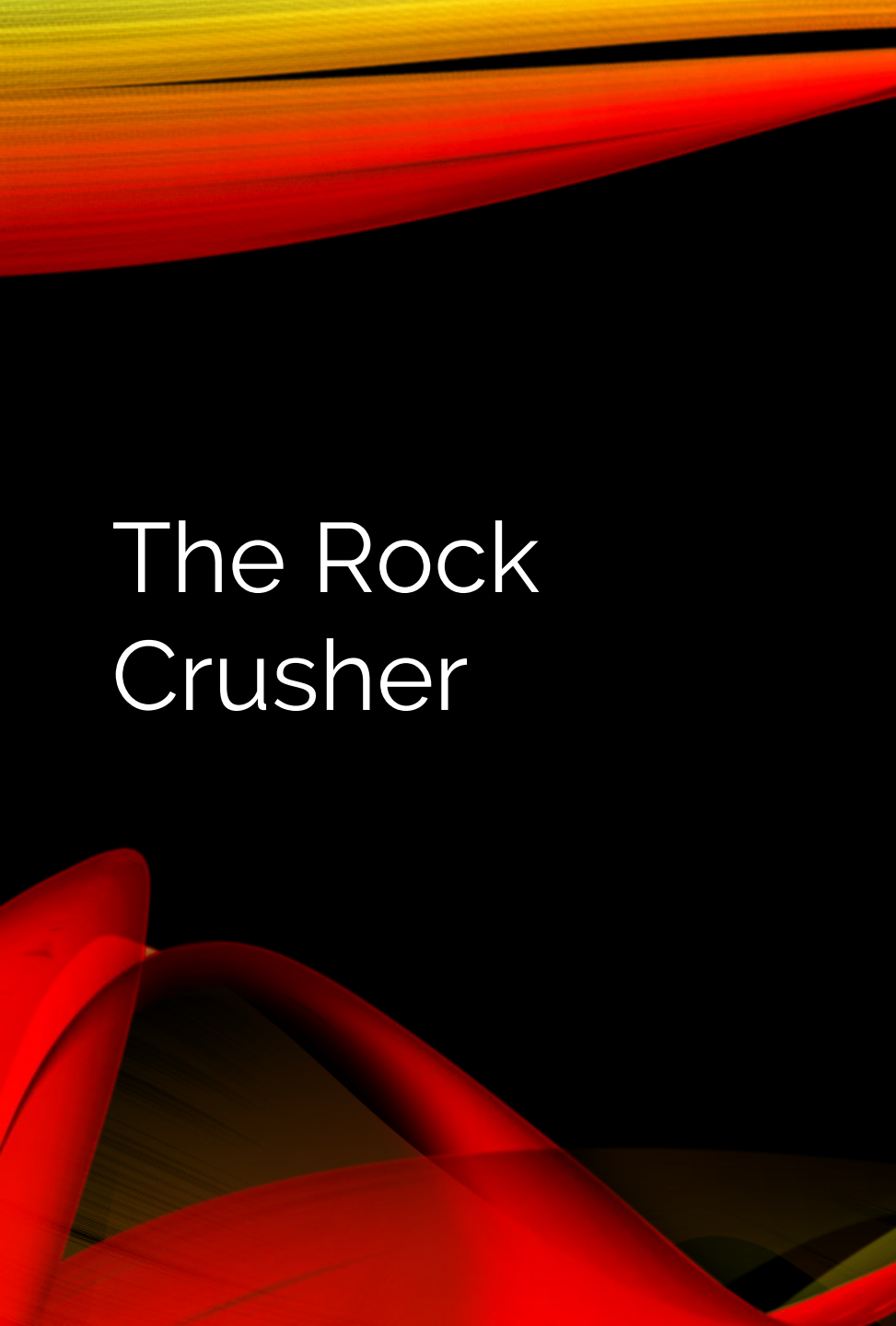# ABOUT ME

Rachael Wilterdink

- Started Life as a Front-end Web Publisher at Netflix (when it was a start-up) back in 1998
- Transitioned to Business Analysis in 2005
- Adopted agile practices in 2011
- Became a Consultant in 2013
- CBAP®, AAC, & CPOA from IIBA®
- PBA®, ACP® from PMI ®
- PSM & PSPO with Scrum.org
- CSM with Scrum Alliance
- (And I blame my husband for my last name…)

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The Rock Crusher

The Problem with Backlogs

The Rock Crusher Analogy

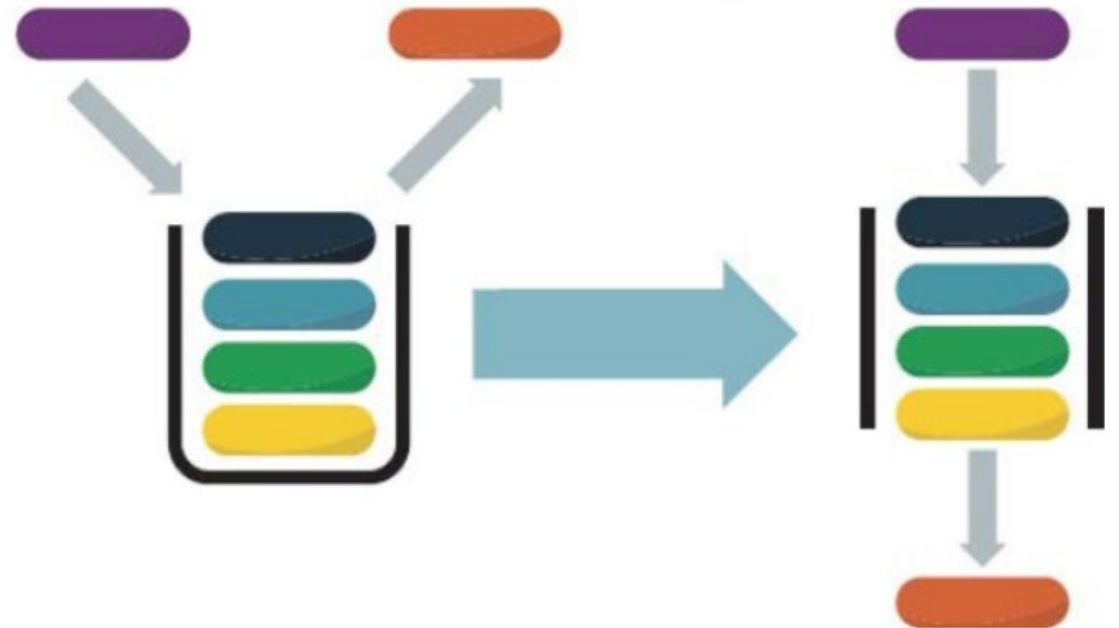Roles & Responsibilities

Defining & Managing Rocks

Crushers

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1

THE PROBLEM WITH BACKLOGS

Stacked Plates

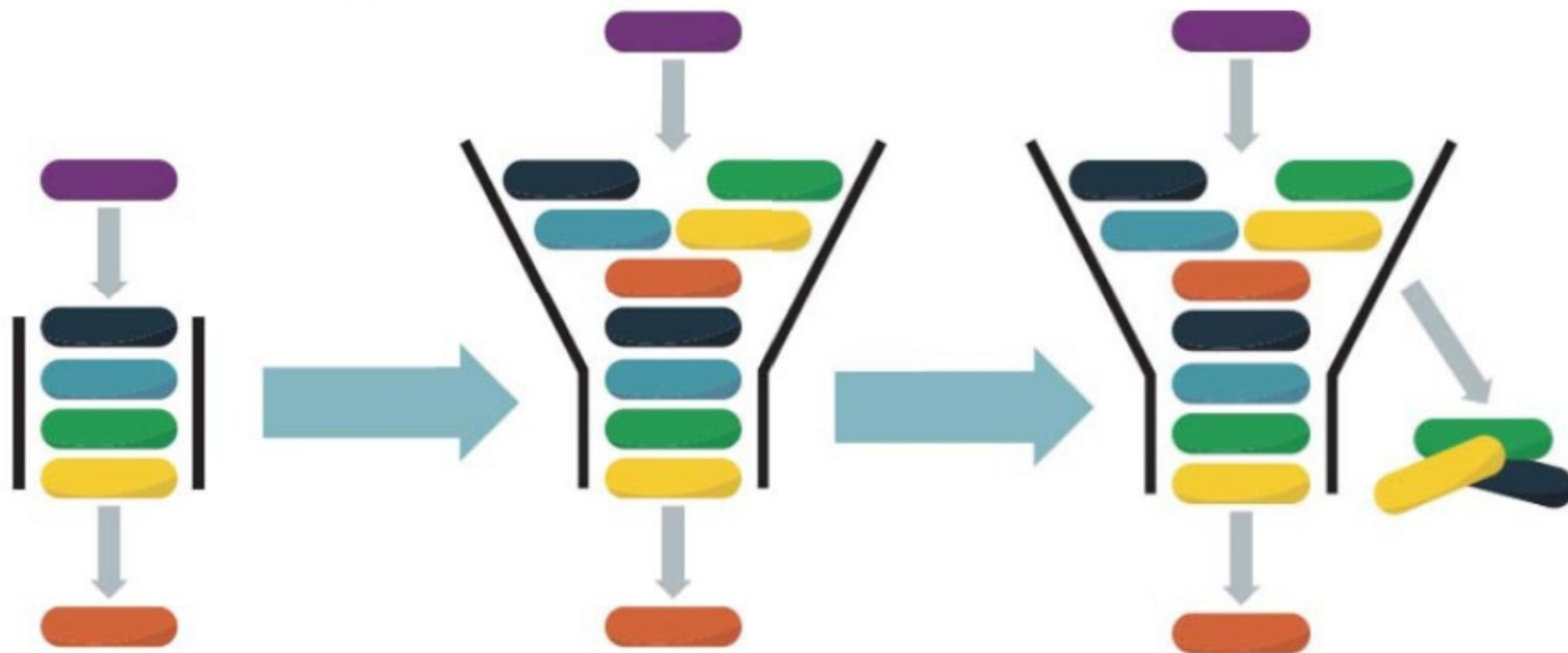What We Need Now

What We Need Soon

What We Want Someday

Wishful Thinking

Flow does not happen through a closed pipe

We always have more ideas than capacity to deliver

We need to **Throttle** and **Stabilize** a Turbulent Flow

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Broken Value Streams

Impediments:
- Impeded flow
- Loss of customer focus
- Overprocessing
- False precision and needless sequencing
- Unrealistic Product Owner Role

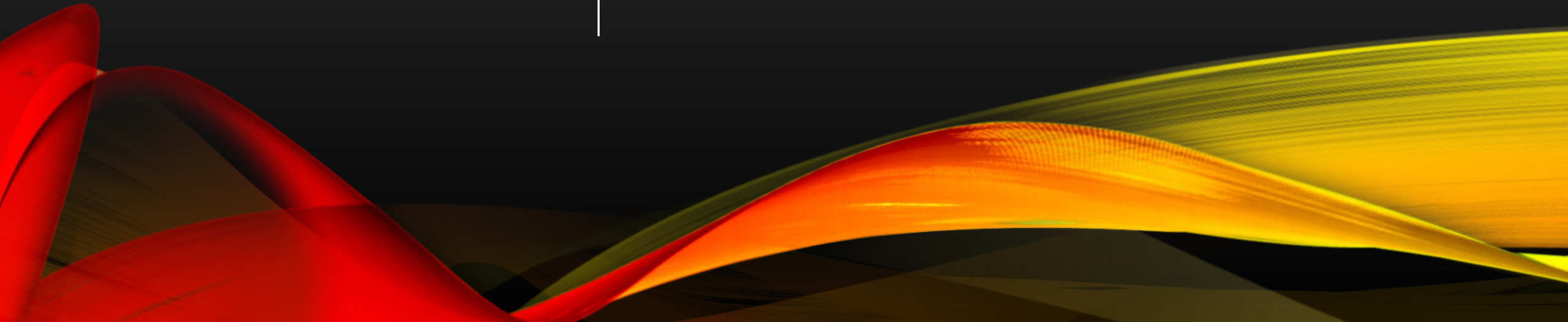rachael wilterdink
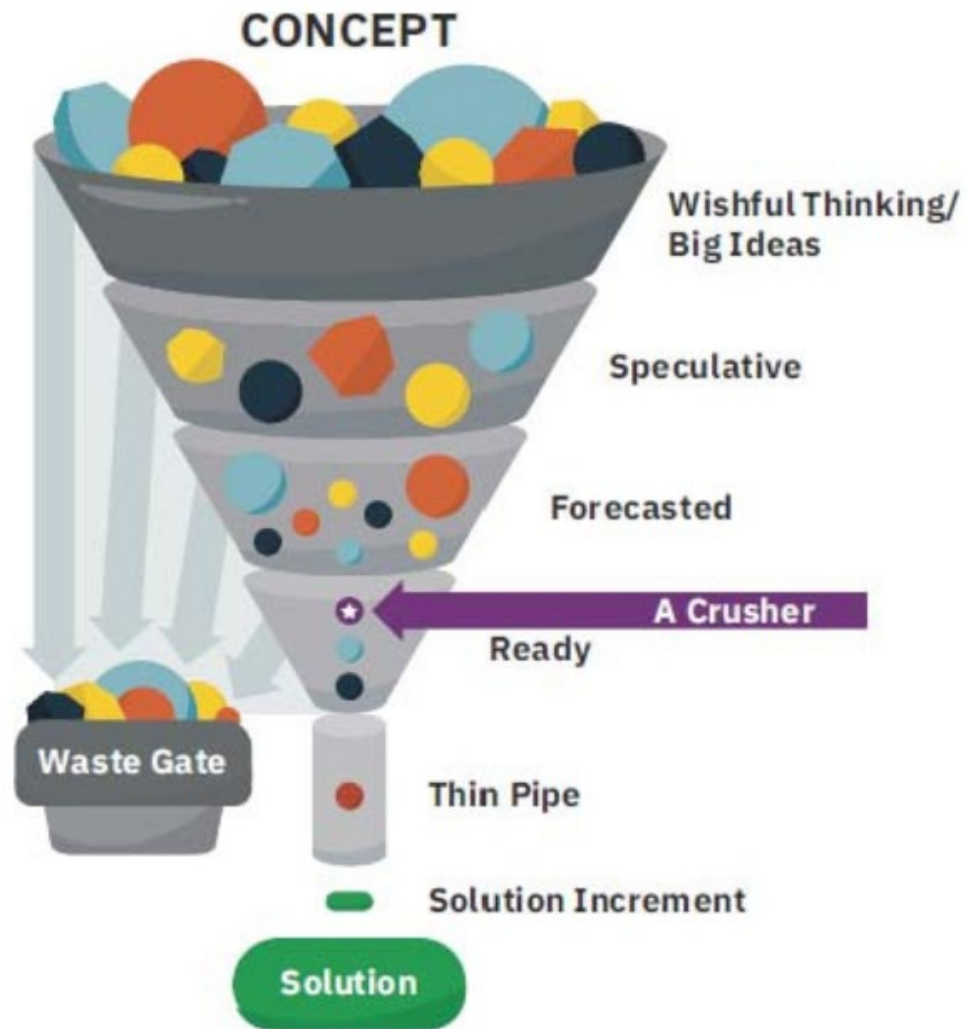
One Product Owner?

Only Super-Heroes Need Apply!

Common Problems:
- Product Owner unavailability
- Multiple Product Owners don't speak with one voice
- Unwillingness to use their authority
- Know less about their product than the team
- No real interest in the product

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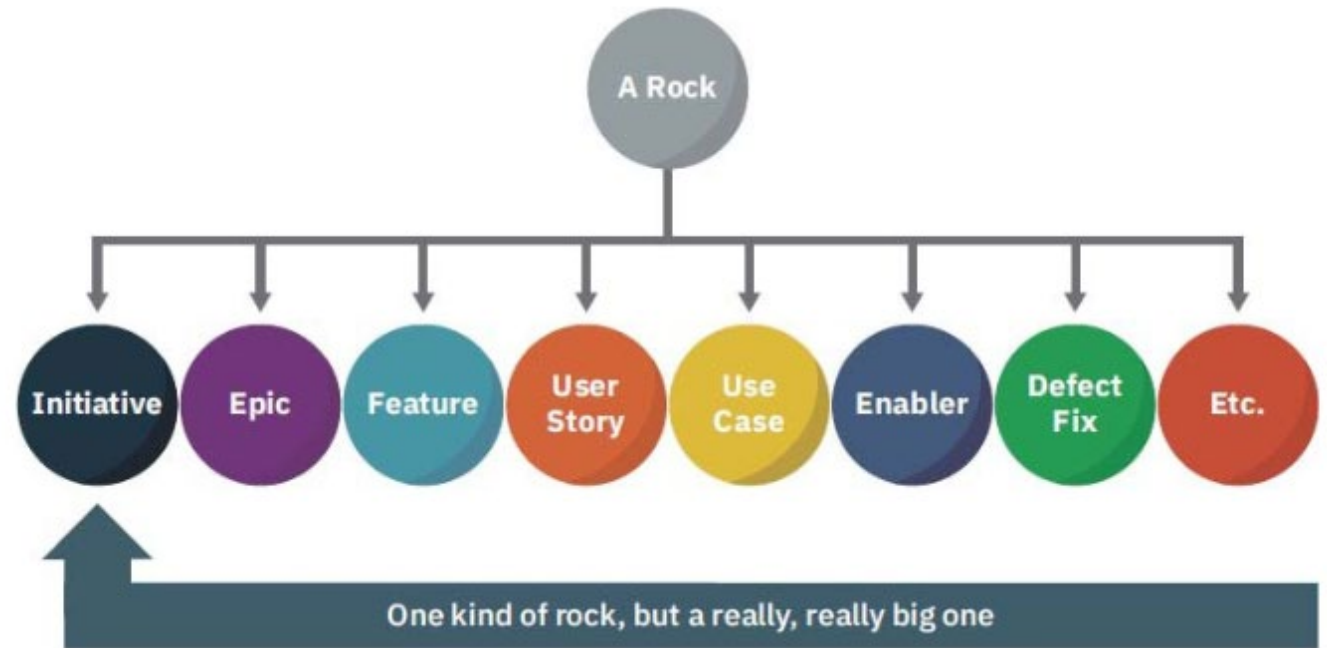
2

THE ROCK CRUSHER ANALOGY

Why the Rock Crusher?

Benefits of the Rock Crusher:
- All the work is made visible
- It highlights flow
- Not everything gets done
- It takes a village

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Funnel

CONCEPT

- Wishful Thinking/ Big Ideas
- Speculative
- Forecasted
- A Crusher
- Ready
- Waste Gate
- Thin Pipe
- Solution Increment
- Solution

A Rock

Initiative | Epic | Feature | User Story | Use Case | Enabler | Defect Fix | Etc.

One kind of rock, but a really, really big one

A rock simply represents something we want.

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Intake Process

- All rocks arrive through the top of the funnel

- Rocks include everything, from big initiatives to tiny changes

- Most new items get added during regular backlog refinement or planning meetings

- Team evaluates new rocks that have arrived at the top of the funnel since the last meeting

- After discussion, the backlog owner can discard or accept rocks

- Rocks get added to one of the readiness horizons

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READINESS HORIZONS

Wishful Thinking/Big Ideas

Speculative

Forecasted

Ready

Thin Pipe

Thin Pipe

- Metaphor for the limited capacity of the team

- Valuable, well-refined ideas are pulled for development

- Other parts of the idea that have not been accepted or discarded stay in the tumbler

- The thin pipe is the mechanism through which the team pulls "ready" rocks
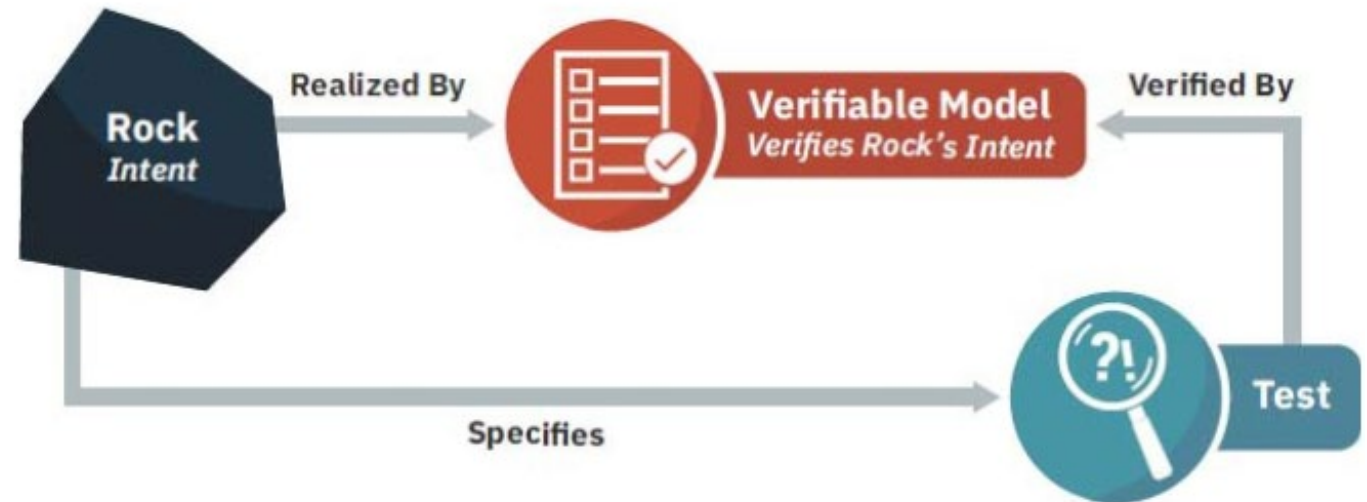
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Waste Gate

- The waste gate is a drain for excess rocks

- What goes it, must come out

- Not every stone holds a diamond

- Any given rock may have nothing valuable in it

- There's nothing wrong with discarding a whole or partial concept

Well formed rocks are:
- Clearly defined
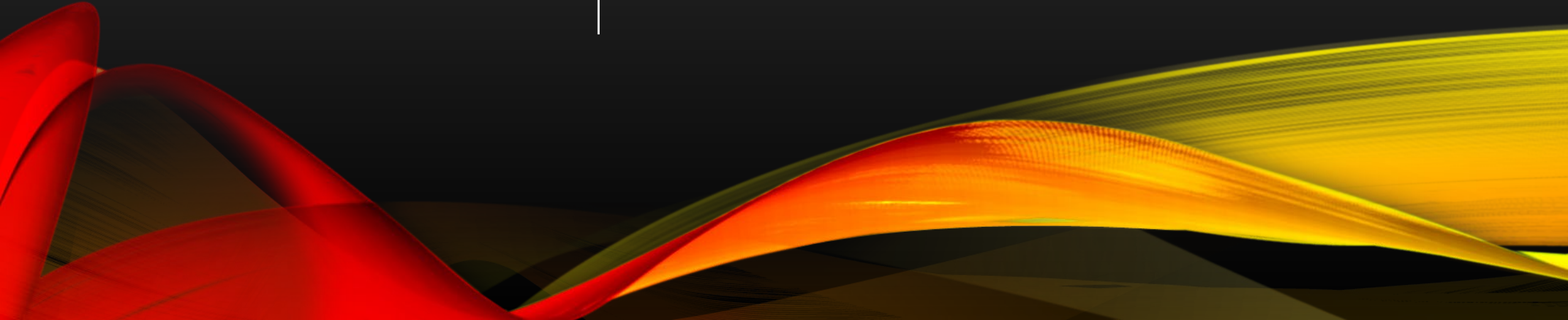- Verifiable
- Demonstrable and testable

Solutions & Solution Increments

- **Solution:** a product or service that creates value for the enterprise

- **Solution Increment:** a verifiable model accepted by the backlog owner that contributes to a solution

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The Village

Role	Description	RACI
Backlog Owner	Final say on sequencing and prioritizing rocks	Accountable
Solution Owner	Customer-face role accountable for choosing rocks for a solution	Accountable
Analyst	Transforming input into a shared understanding of precisely what to build	Responsible
Customer	Recipient of the benefits of the solution; consulted or informed about what to build	Consult/Inform
Stakeholder	Anyone who must be consulted or may have decision-making authority	Consult/Inform
Subject Matter Expert	People with deep knowledge who may be advised	Consult/Inform
Team	A group of people who work together on a solution and commit to developing ready rocks	Responsible

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- Has the final say on sequencing & prioritization
- Ensures the team works on the most valuable rocks
- Maximizes the value delivered by the team
- Collaborates with all other roles (including the team)
- Inward-face and technology oriented
- Takes a tactical view, rather than strategic
- Ensures the team is not starved for work
- Accepts the team's work
- Responsible to the overall enterprise
- Works closely with one or more solution owners

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Solution Owner - A

- Customer-facing role accountable for the features of a solution
- Does not have the final say regarding prioritization
- Manages and maximizes the value created by the solution
- Collaborates with a backlog owner to get features into a solution
- Takes a strategic view and own the solution roadmap

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- Transforms the competing needs of village members into a shared understanding of precisely what to build
- Boundary-spanning role collaborating with all others
- Increases the knowledge and understanding across roles
- Uses crushers to make their work visible

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- Collaborates with all roles to decide what the build
- Delivers on their commitments to the backlog owner
- Participates actively in backlog refinement

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Subject Matter Expert (SME) – C/I

- Someone with in-depth knowledge of the relevant problem domain, solution technology, or development practices
- Uses their knowledge to advise other roles
- Provides expertise to other roles
- Collaborate with all roles in the village
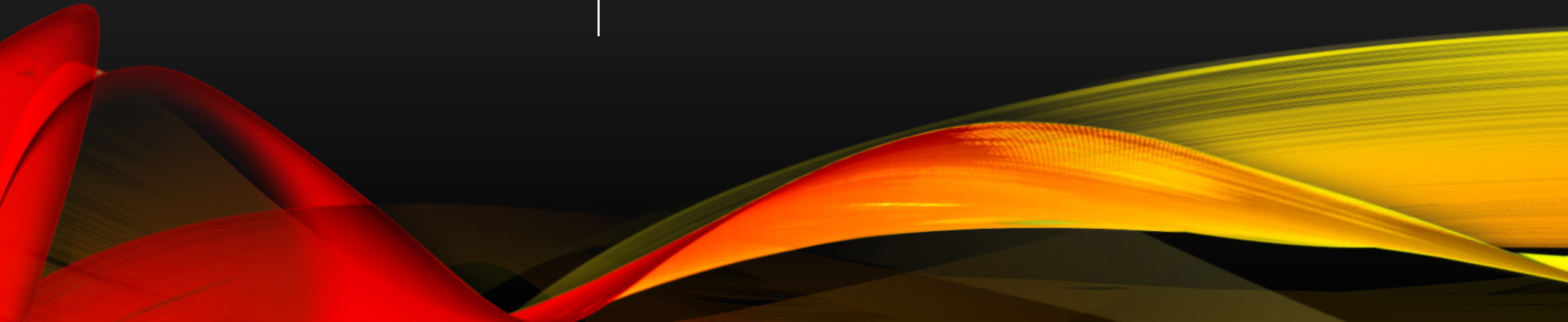- Advise solution owners, analysts, and backlog owners

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Stakeholders – C/I

- Someone who must, at a minimum, be consulted about what is built
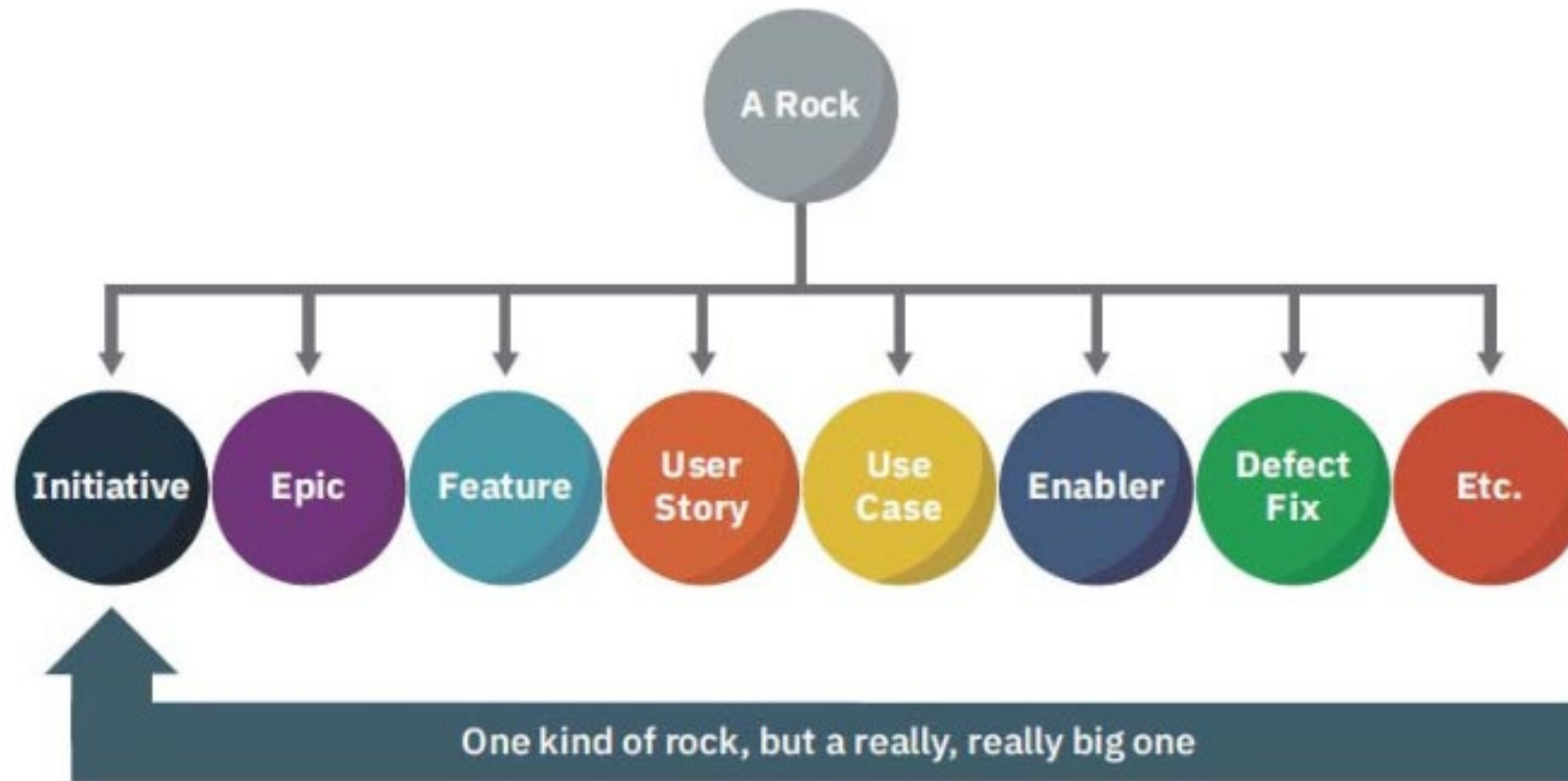- May have decision-making authority
- May also be a customer

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- People who benefit from the solution
- May need to be informed of decisions about what the team is building
- Can also be a stakeholder

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DEFINING & MANAGING ROCKS

A Rock

Initiative | Epic | Feature | User Story | Use Case | Enabler | Defect Fix | Etc.

One kind of rock, but a really, really big one

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Size Does Matter

Why does it matter?
- Rocks that are too big will clog the thin pipe
- Large rocks must be decomposed
- Small is beautiful and allows predictable flow
- Rocks rarely start out well formed
- By the time it reaches the thin pipe, rocks should be well-formed

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Incoming Rocks

	Planned (known)	Unplanned (unknown)
Expected (high probability)	Classic road-mapped work	Regularly receives rocks and can be anticipated based on historical patterns
Unexpected (low probability)	Unexpected rocks with a low chance of being needed	Crisis or black swan events; must be dealt with causing the team to break the thin pipe and deal with it

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Backlog Refinement:

- An essential Rock Crusher activity

- Team collaboratively analyzes and splits rocks, by asking four questions:
    1. How valuable is this rock?
    2. How big is this rock?
    3. Is this rock worth it?
    4. How ready is this rock?

- Rocks that require significantly more investigation and analysis are added as "Crushers" (rocks used to help define other rocks)

- Backlog owner may accept or remove rocks (into the waste gate)

- Rocks are put in the appropriate readiness horizon

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The Front & Back Doors

Front Door:
- Most rocks are introduced at regular backlog refinement or planning meetings

Back Door:
- Small requests
- Requests that need to be expedited
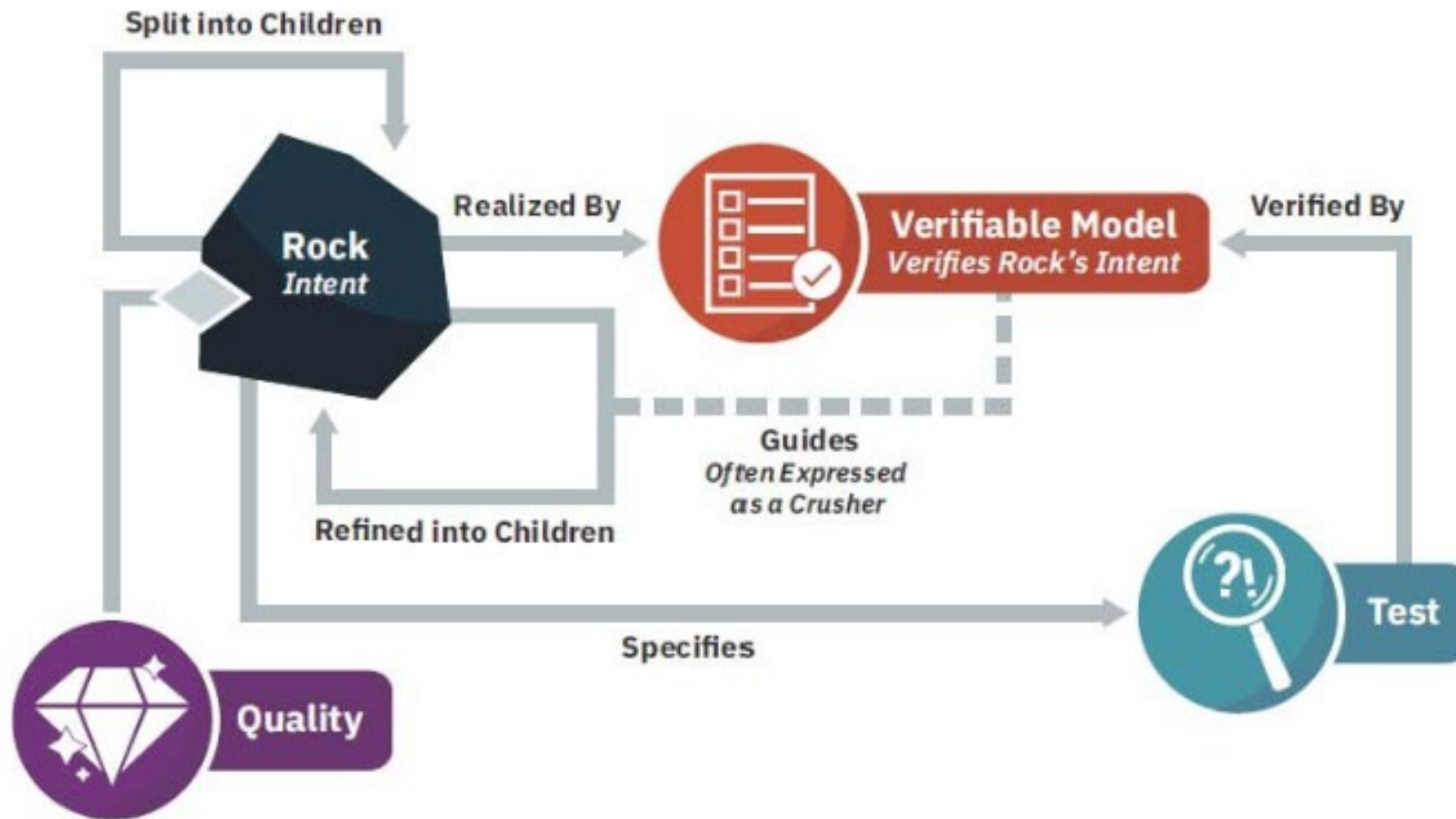- Backlog owner is accountable for deciding which items to let in

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Horizons as a Kanban Board

Through the Thin Pipe

Split into Children

Rock
Intent

Realized By

Verifiable Model
Verifies Rock's Intent

Verified By

Guides
*Often Expressed
as a Crusher*

Refined into Children

Test

Specifies

Quality

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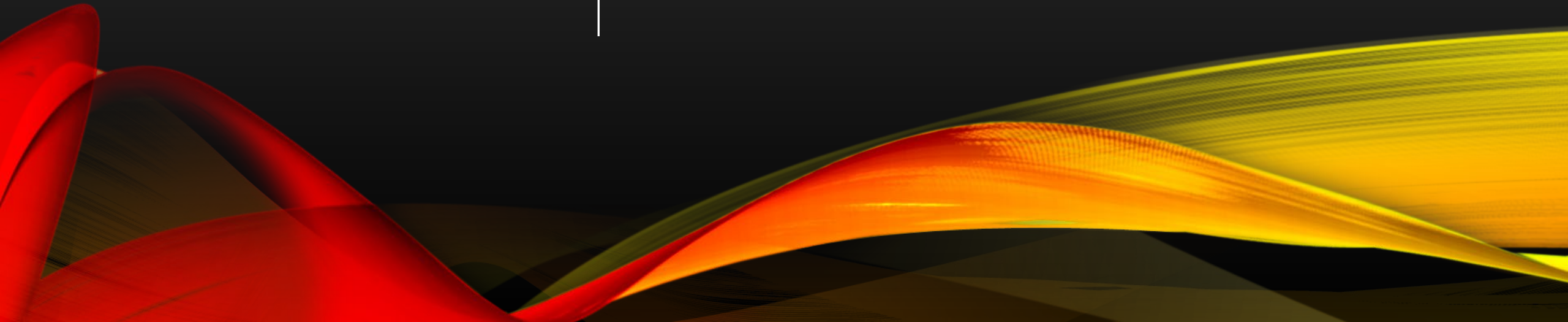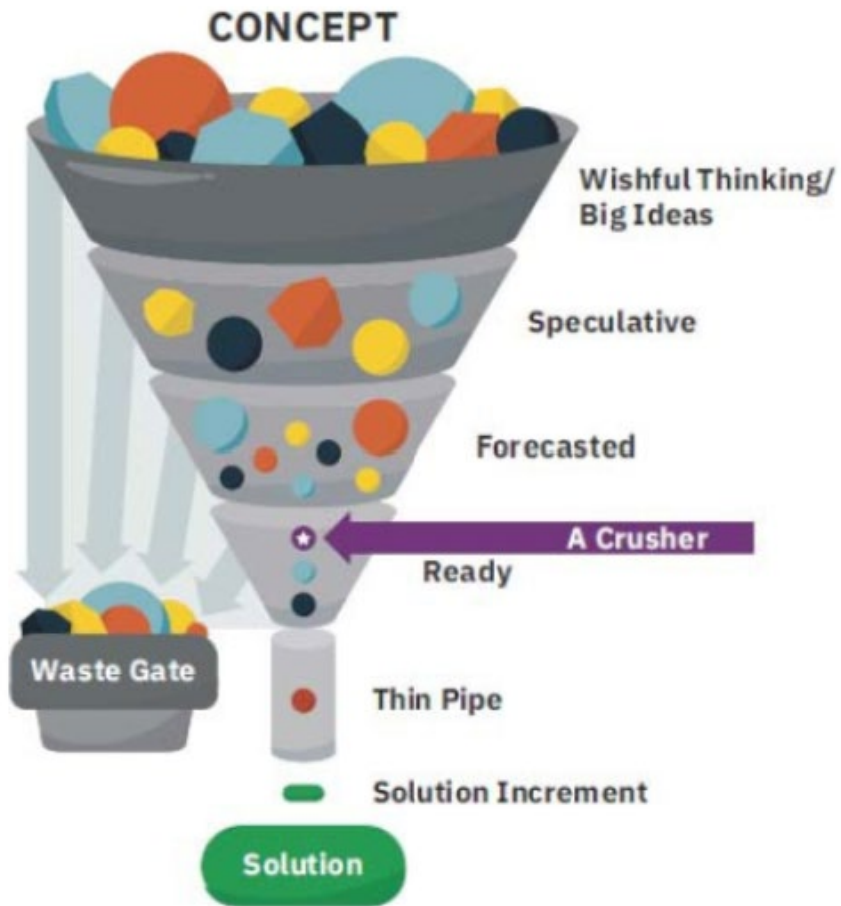## **What is a Crusher?**

- A visual representation of analysis work necessary to properly refine a rock
- Represents what is learned about the rock being defined

Why Crushers?

- Makes analysis visible
- Bridges the gap between emergent design and BDUF (Big Design Up Front)
- Intent is to learn

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🔗 https://www.linkedin.com/in/rachaelwilterdink/