

Extracted from:

# Competing with Unicorns

How the World's Best Companies Ship Software  
and Work Differently

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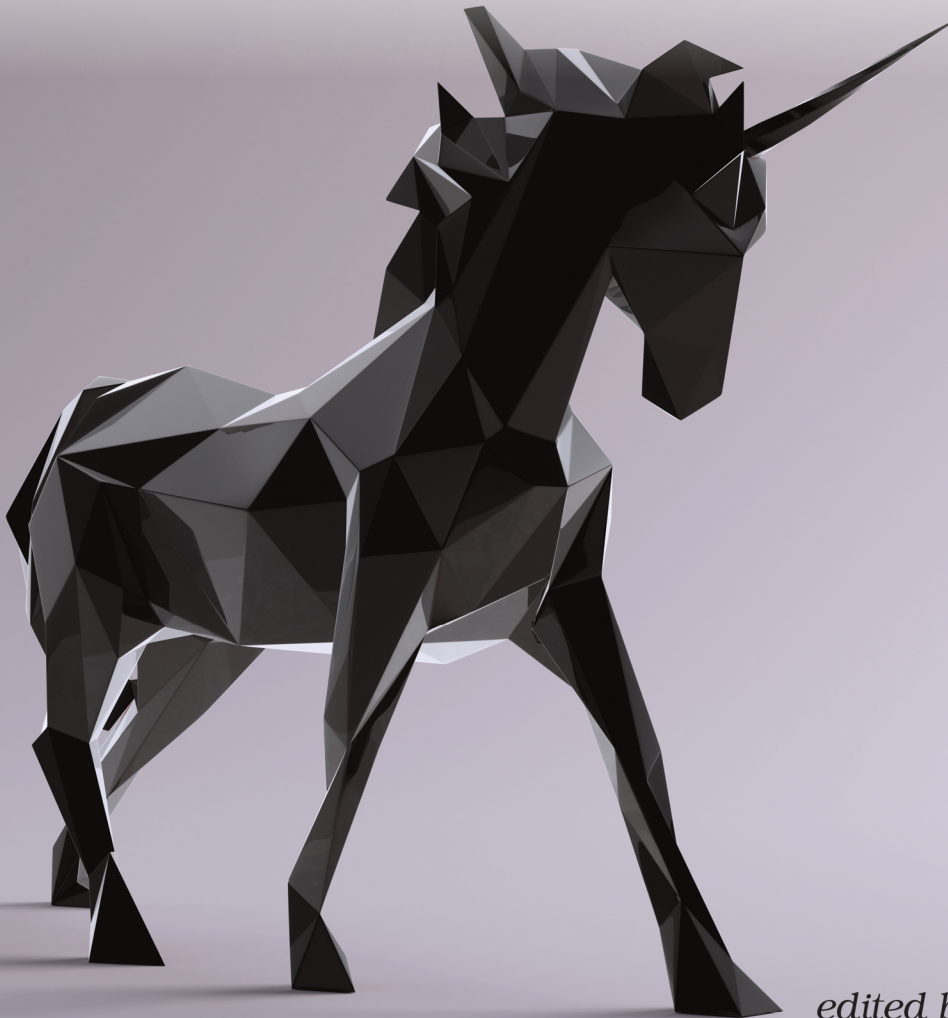
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The  
Pragmatic  
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Ship Software and Work Differently



Jonathan  
Rasmusson  
*edited by Michael Swaine*



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# It's Good to See You

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Today's tech unicorns develop software differently. They don't do textbook agile. They certainly don't do Scrum. What they do do is something completely different. Something that enables them to scale like an enterprise while working like a startup.

This book is about taking you behind the scenes, and showing you how the Googles, Facebooks, Amazons, and Spotifys of the world do it.

- How they scale
- How they organize
- How they empower
- And how they trust

In essence how they work.

This will not only help you and your teams work better. It will give you insight into how these companies move so fast, innovate so quickly, and what the rest of us need to do to compete and keep up.

## How to Read This Book

While you are of course free to jump to any section of the book at any time, there is some method to the madness.

The first chapter of the book explains what the world of software delivery looks like through the eyes of a startup and what traditional companies need to rediscover to compete in the future on product.

The middle chapters of the book will give you a sense of what working at one of these tech companies feels like and some of the profound differences in how tech companies are led, organized, and aligned versus more traditional ones.

The last part of the book then dives into culture and explains the cultural differences between how unicorns work versus the rest of us in more

traditional companies. Turns out we all value the same things—unicorns just value them differently.

## Definitions and Language

Throughout the book I use several terms loosely, which I will attempt to put some context and clarification round.

### Startup

When I say startup, know that I am referring to a small company, numbering no more than fifty people, armed with little more than an idea or insight, and looking to take on the world through an innovative product or service.

### Tech Companies and Unicorns

Unicorns are those magical, extremely rare tech companies, who have really made it. These are the Googles, Amazons, Facebooks, and Spotifys of the world. When you hear unicorn, think billion-dollar company that still operates like a startup. When you hear tech company, think wannabe unicorn that hasn't yet made it. For the purposes of this book, I use these terms interchangeably, and you can think of them as one and the same.

Also, while many of the unicorns work and collaborate in similar ways, most of the examples we're going to cover will come from my experiences as an agile coach and engineer at Spotify. So while we'll occasionally cover Google, Apple, Facebook, and Amazon, the bulk of the material will come from the former.

### Enterprise and Traditional Companies

These are the big, lumbering, slow to change companies we work at day-to-day and know and love. These are going to be the companies against whom we're going to contrast unicorns, because these are the companies that stand to improve the most.

### Ready Player One?

You can't take this stuff too seriously, and it helps if you approach the material with a bit of a sense of humor.

To that end, I have lightened things up with pictures, war stories, and other knickknacks to make the material more appealing along the way.

If you see a bit of fruit, know you are about to receive an unbelievably insightful pearl of wisdom as shown in the first [figure on page vii](#).



**SMALL EMPOWERED CROSS-FUNCTIONAL TEAMS  
ARE THE FOUNDATION OF FAST-PACED  
PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT AND INNOVATION.**

And when you see the gorilla, take a minute to reflect on something you just read and think about how it might affect you and your organization.



## **FOOD FOR THOUGHT**



The top three things keeping my team from feeling completely empowered are:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_



Let's begin.