BEING AGILE IN A STRAIGHT JACKET

How to get stuff done when everything around you is restrictive

Codemotion Berlin, October 13th 2017

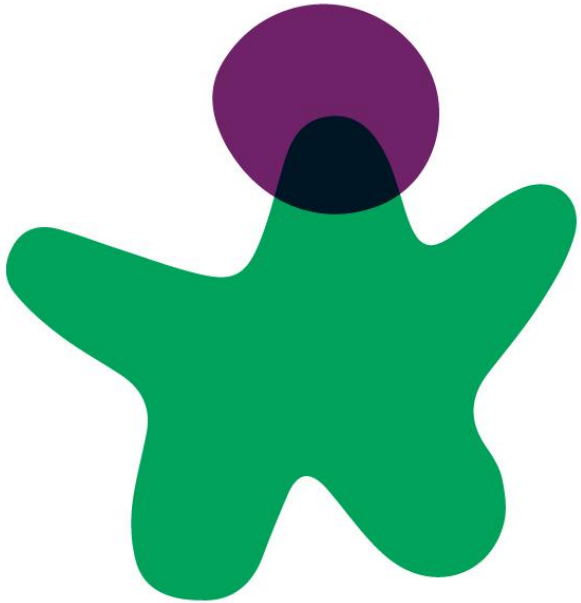
ThoughtWorks®

BEING AGILE IN A STRAIGHTJACKET

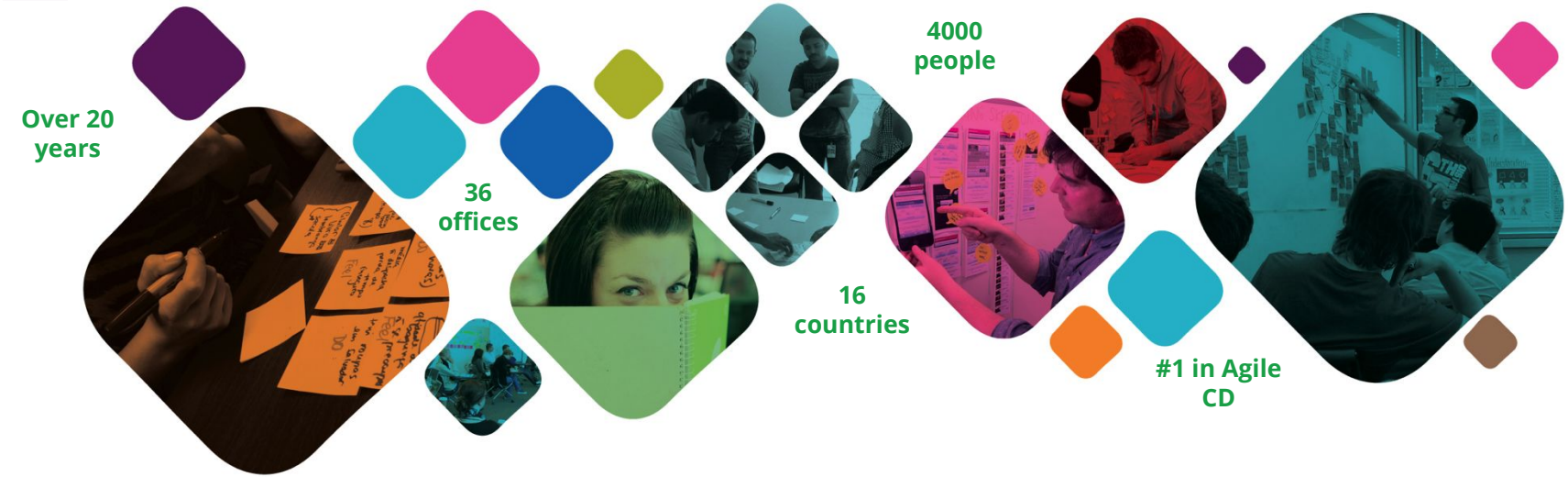
- Introduction - Why Agile in a StraightJacket
- What we found
- Why is it so hard?
- What worked well
- What didn’t work quite so well
- What we recommend

ABOUT ME

- James Birnie, lead consultant, ThoughtWorks, since June 2015
- http://www.jamesbirnie.com/
- jbirnie@thoughtworks.com
- Worked at Viagogo.com for 9 years
- Worked in software since 1996

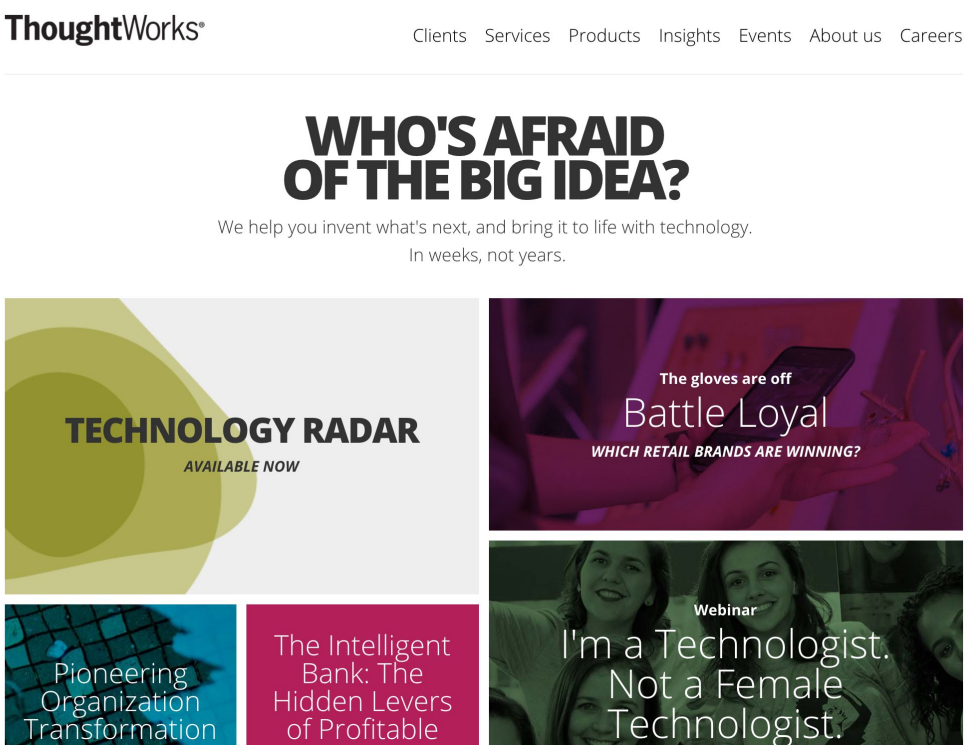


A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO THOUGHTWORKS



We are a group of passionate individuals and a software solutions leader with technology at our core. Over time we've grown to incorporate an experience design practice and organisational development capability to help our clients to build solutions loved by their customers, as well as helping to grow and exercise the organisational muscles that embed successful innovation.

Our mission is to better humanity through software and help drive the creation of a socially and economically just world. We bring together the most capable, driven and passionate people. We call ourselves ThoughtWorkers.



https://www.thoughtworks.com/social-justice
https://www.infoq.com/news/2016/11/thoughtworks-women-friendly
https://www.thoughtworks.com/radar

WHY AGILE IN A STRAIGHTJACKET?

- Joined ThoughtWorks in June 2015
  - First engagement at a big bank, we walked away
  - Second engagement was a “digital transformation”
  - Third engagement was 8 months at a big bank
  - Fourth engagement 7 months at a publisher
  - Fifth engagement (so far) 3 months in public sector
- DISCLAIMER: this presentation is a mash up of the most frustrating aspects of all of these organisations
- DISCLAIMER: not all infrastructure and infosec teams are dysfunctional, some are very good!

WHAT WE FOUND

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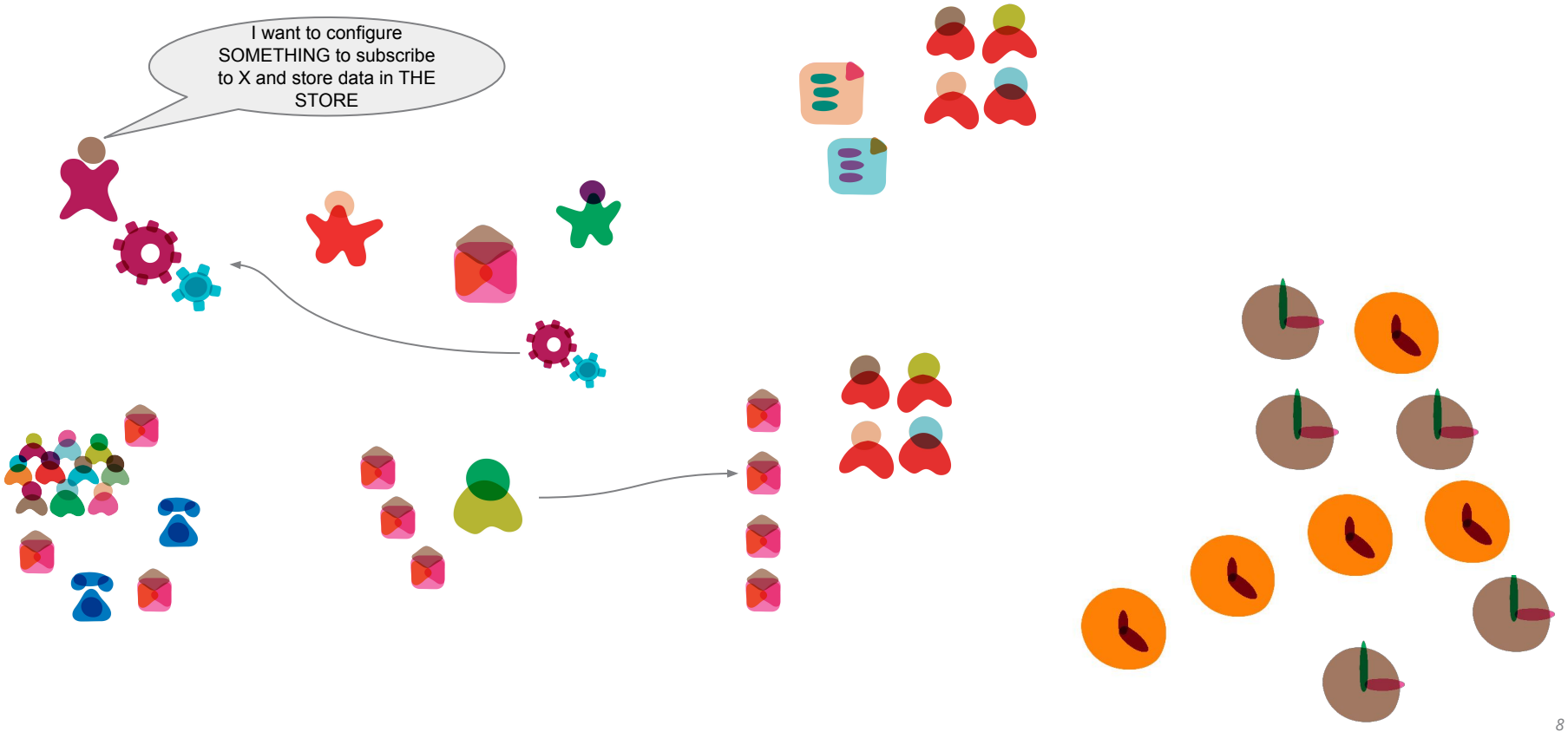
WORKING THROUGH ENDLESS SILOS

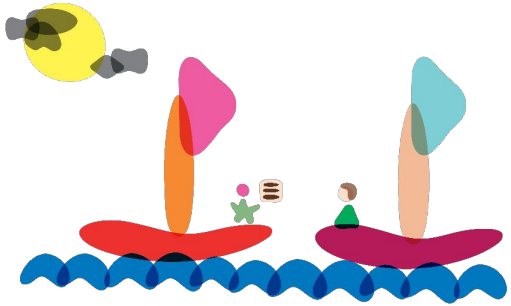


PATH TO PRODUCTION… EVENTUALLY…

WHY DO HANDOVERS MATTER?

1 - Intra team, empathetic handover

2 - Aligned team, sympathetic handover



3 - Transactional handover, no alignment, no empathy, no sympathy

RISK MANAGEMENT THEATRE

- Processes that are detached from the original intent
- Obsession with box ticking
- Security teams not interested in outcomes
- Infrastructure teams obstruct instead of enable
- Change management teams that refuse to manage change
- Teams that add no value

HOW AGILE CAN YOU BE WHEN THOSE AROUND YOU AREN'T?

- Surrounding teams
- Third parties
- Funding cycles
- Ticketing systems
- CI / CD practices are hard to find
  - Lack of respect for test systems and servers
  - Things are thrown over the wall
  - Broken window syndrome on build monitors

WHY IS IT SO HARD?
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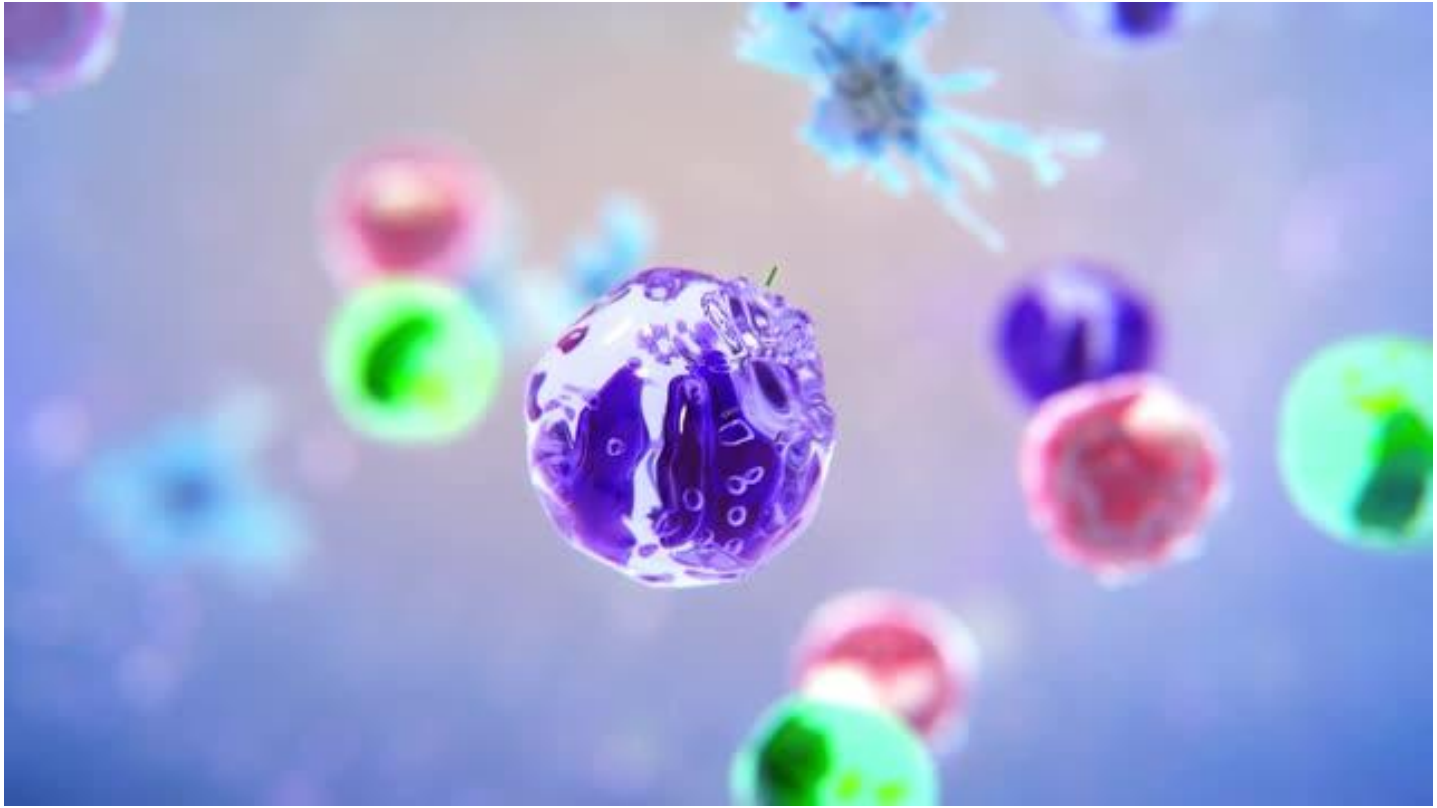
CORPORATE IMMUNE SYSTEM REJECTS INNOVATION



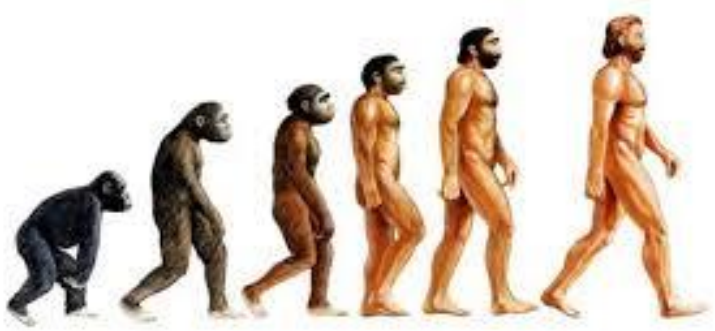
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corporate_immune_system

CUSTOMER FOCUS?

- Everybody talks about it
- Goals and incentives are not aligned to customer focused outcomes
- End to end customer focused outcomes are not curated
- Customer focus training is more theatre

SYSTEMS EVOLVE - THEY WEREN'T DESIGNED THAT WAY!

- Larger organisations tend to have the oldest estate
- Acquisitions have cobbled together systems
- Lots of people have worked on systems over time
- Documentation is not often good for internal systems
- Archaetectologists is a smell!



WHAT WORKED WELL
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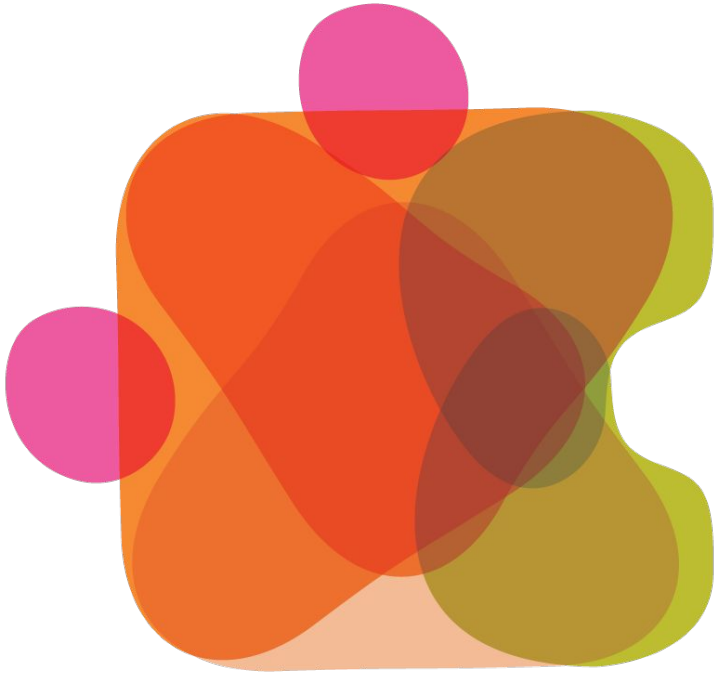
HOW WE BUILT RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER TEAMS

- Visited teams on other sites
- Discussed how they can help us help ourselves
- Empathised with them
- Worked within their rules and constraints
- Relieved their pain points
- Avoid raising tickets



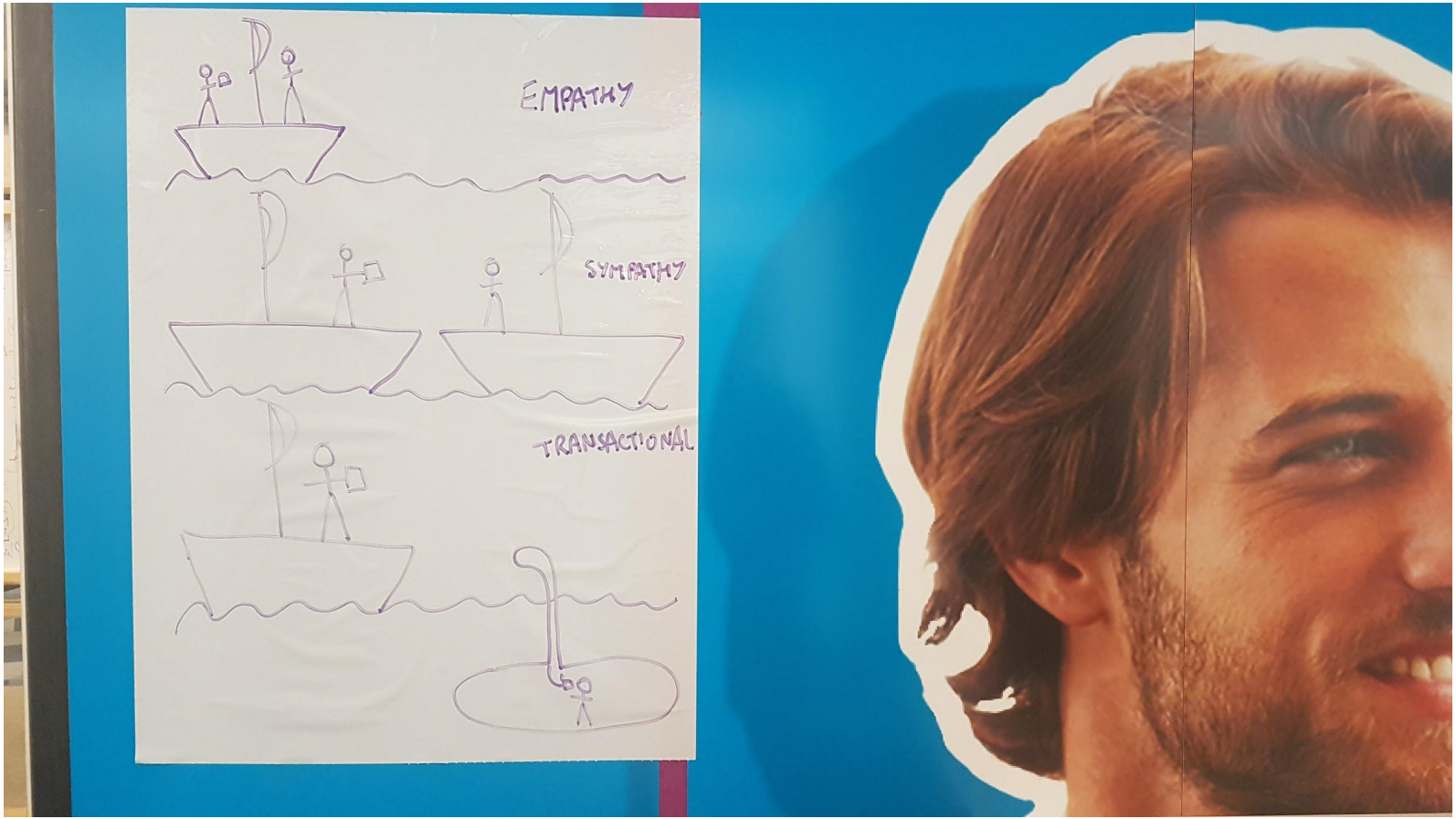
WE RAN WORKSHOPS TO EFFECT CHANGE

- What is obvious to us may not be obvious to others
- Discover and understand their own pain points
- Guide toward the “right” answer
- You can guide a horse to water but you can’t make it drink
  - Make sure you get actionable points
- http://www.jamesbirnie.com/2016/10/convincing-client-to-invest-in-build.html

WE SPREAD THE WORD

- Joined the Agile community
  - made presentations, ran workshops
- Advertise:
  - have a wall, show flow of work clearly
  - take advantage of empty wall space
- Have conversations:
  - in the pub, at the watercooler, around desks
- Communicate your pain points
  - creates empathy and encourages collaboration

ADVERTISING WORKS!



GET PEOPLE FOCUSED ON CUSTOMER VALUE

- We had to traverse silos in order to deliver value
- People understood their part of the larger system very well
  - Good understanding of “what” but not “why”
  - We asked “what customer outcome does this service?”
- The message resonated very well

WHAT DIDN'T WORK
QUITE SO WELL
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DREADFUL EXPERIENCE WITH THIRD PARTY SOFTWARE

- Our client signed a [illegible]cial agreement for a decisioning sy[illegible]
  - We never [illegible]was “confidential”
  - The deliv[illegible]
- It was supp[illegible]
  - It needed [illegible]
  - It didn’t wo[illegible]n a client site
- It didn’t follow [illegible]
- We had to raise th[illegible]thing done

INTERACTIONS WITH CLIENT STAFF AND STAKEHOLDERS

- Tolerated anti-Agile practices too readily
  - We allowed them to abuse story points
  - Client BAs were all from a waterfall background
- Showcases could have been better
  - Sterile and formulaic
  - Should have got more team members involved
- Failed to change the conversation on how value returned is measured

WE DIDN'T ACHIEVE CONTINUOUS DELIVERY

- Allowed 1 rele er week
- Code freeze nore test team
- Had to rene eNow ticket every 2 weeks

BUT...

- The bank considered that v ieved CD
- We won an internal award e team

WORK IN PROGRESS - PUBLIC SECTOR BODY

- They don’t know who their customer is
- Strategy is set by government, not by the CEO
- Funding is linked to policy implementation
- No commercial competition

WHAT WE RECOMMEND

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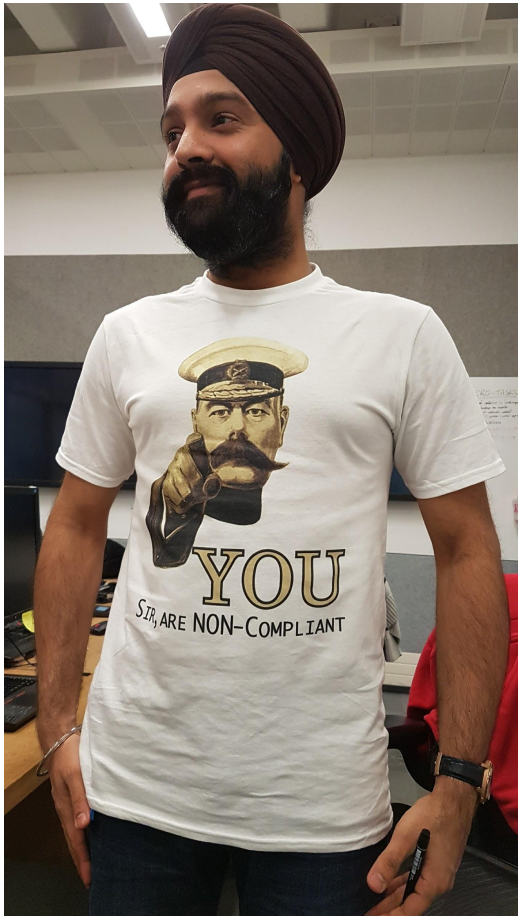
KEEP SMILING!

HOW ABOUT A TEAM T-SHIRT?

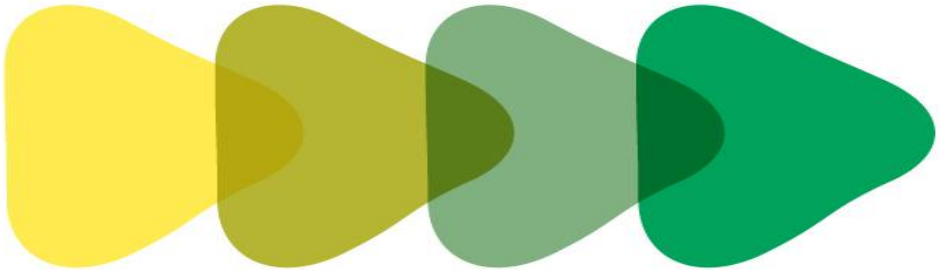


SOME TIPS THAT MAY ONLY WORK AS A CONSULTANT

- Don’t be afraid to walk away from the engagement
- If you become part of the establishment ROLL OFF
- Empathise with the client:
  - use “we” in communication (not “you”, or “the company”)
  - never be superior
  - beware of dogma
- Try to communicate value in better ways e.g:
  - release cadence
  - features completed
  - NOT STORY POINTS!

TIP #5: OWN THE WHOLE CUSTOMER OUTCOME

- Cross functional teams may be aspirational only
- Traverse the silos
- Focus everybody on customer value
- Reduce wasteful process



TIP #4: SPREAD THE WORD!

- Individuals ALWAYS want to improve, talk to them
- Communicate pain
- Create a buzz
  - Lunch and learn
  - Meet ups
  - Internal conferences
- Make showcases fun
- Working software wins arguments

TIP #3: DON'T LET BAD THINGS GO

- Small problems glossed over are a good indicator of wider issues
- Broken window syndrome sets in all too easily
- Others may not know what good looks like

TIP #2: CUSTOMER IS KING

- Focus conversations on customer value
- Alignment around customer brings internal alignment
- If a process doesn't support a customer outcome should you be doing it?

TIP #1: SHERPA

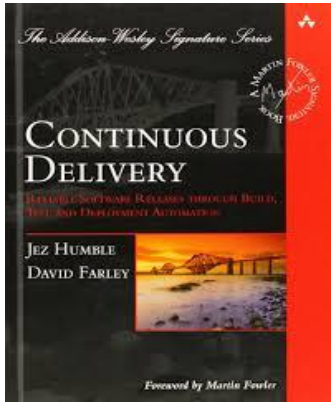
- Somebody who has been around for a while
- Understands the products and processes end to end
- Knows who to contact and can introduce you
- Help with governance

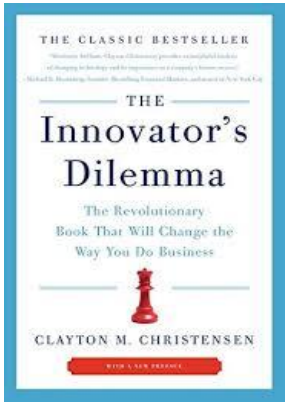
TOP 5 TIPS FOR BEING AGILE IN A STRAIGHTJACKET

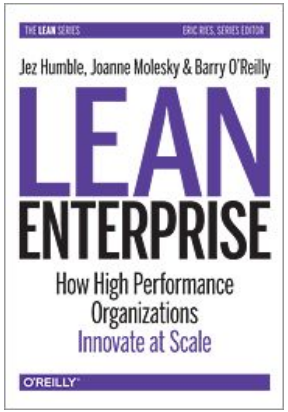
1. Get an organisation sherpa in your team
2. Customer value should be the only driver
3. Molehills DO become mountains
4. Spread the word
5. Encourage end to end ownership of outcomes

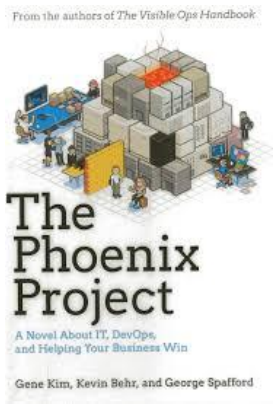
> in the land of the blind the one-eyed man is King

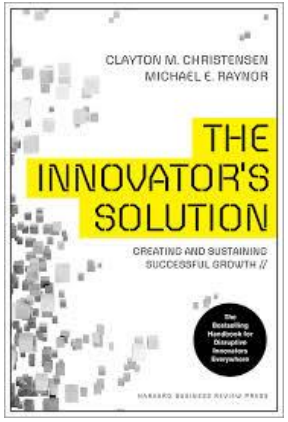
SOME USEFUL BOOKS...

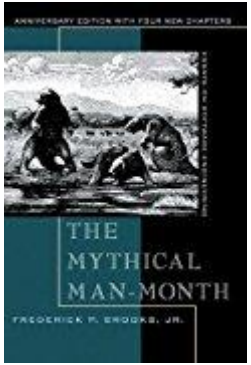


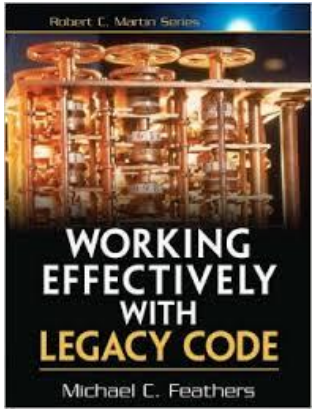












THANKS FOR LISTENING...

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QUESTIONS?
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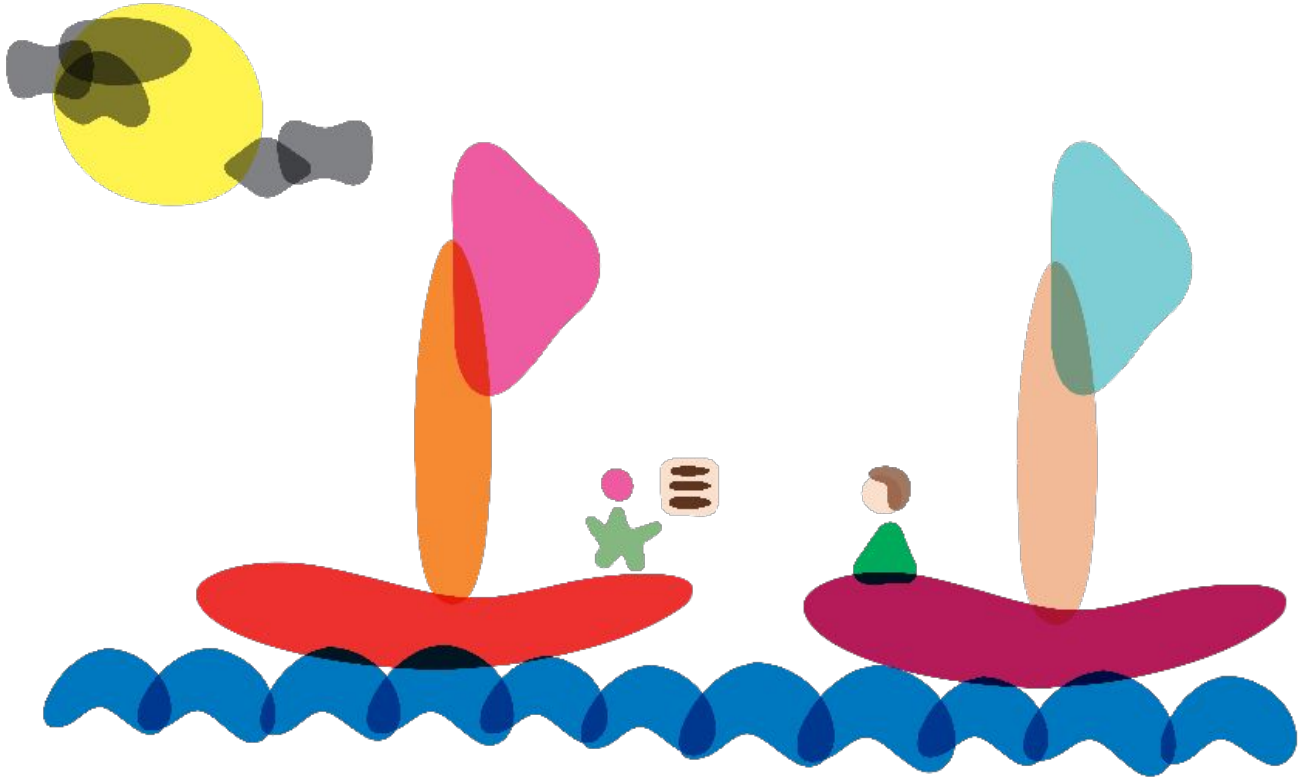
HANDOVER WITH EMPATHY (INTRA TEAM)

HANDOVER WITH SYMPATHY (INTER TEAM, ALIGNED TEAM)



TRANSACTIONAL HANDOVER - NO EMPATHY, NO SYMPATHY

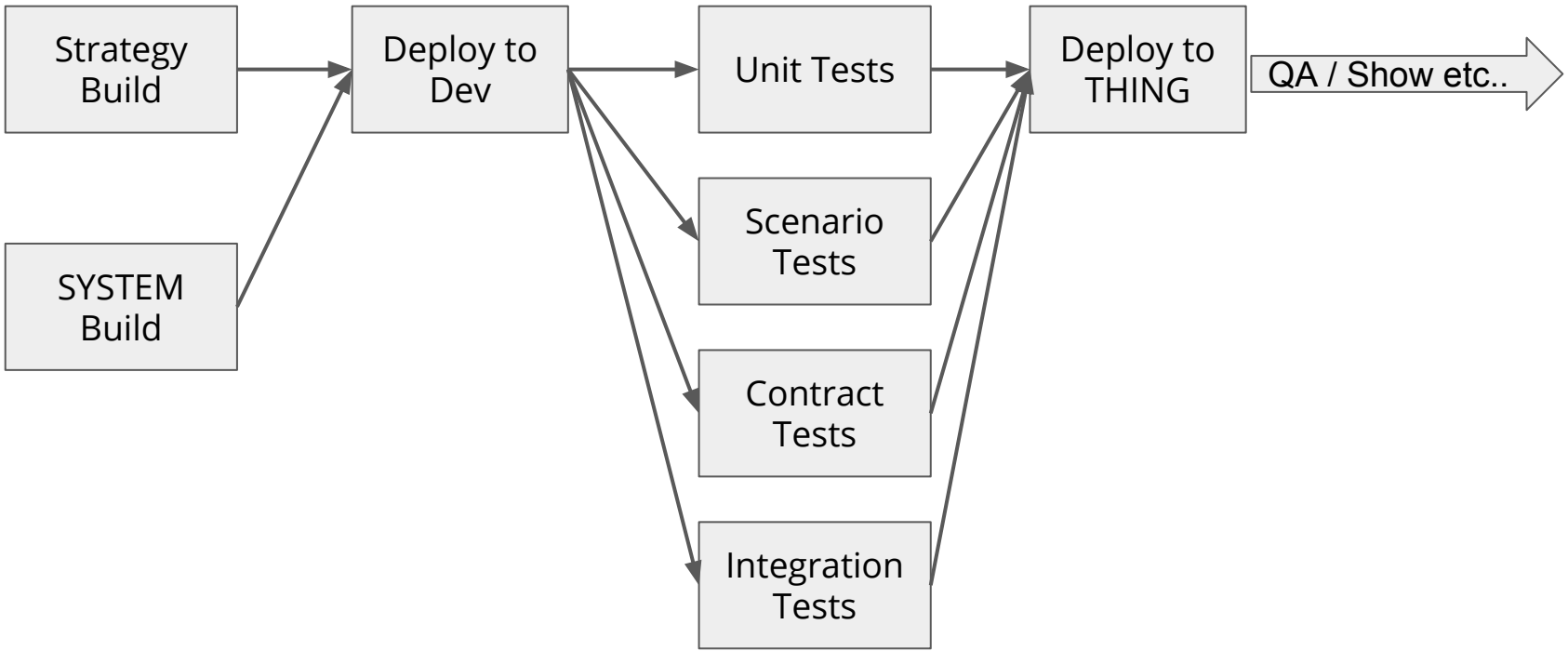
HOW WE STARTED A CONVERSATION WITH CREDIT RISK

- Interacted with CRO because they owned risk strategies
- Owned executable units but didn’t treat them well
- Poor concept of value pipeline
- Collaborated on our deliverables
- Brief presentation and proposal

REDACTED - REDACTED Strategy

- Some good parts
  - Committed staff in REDACTED
  - Good alignment of goals across teams
  - Co-location of people from REDACTED and REDACTED in REDACTED
- Lack of Agility
  - Waterfall attitude to development
  - Very poor partner processes (REDACTED)
  - Separate test teams
  - No source control of strategy
  - Manual release process
  - No unit test persistence
  - Used Jenkins contract tests to increase confidence

Strategy Pipeline?



KEEP SMILING - THOUGHTWORKS IS GOOD AT PROVIDING SNACKS

KEEP SMILING - TEAM OUTINGS ARE ALWAYS GOOD

BECOMING PART OF THE ESTABLISHMENT....

Eventually they sometimes look like this...

Eventually they sometimes look like this...

KEEP SMILING - BUT TRY NOT TO CAUSE UNPRODUCTIVE DAYS!

WITH MANY THANKS TO...

- Obviously I didn't work alone so thanks go to...
- REDACTED for preparing the way at REDACTED - truly we stood on the shoulders of giants
- REDACTED and REDACTED for their help with this deck
- REDACTED for helping with the workshops at REDACTED and teaching me new things