Global Scrum Gathering®
Minneapolis
April 16-18, 2018
Simple solutions at the heart of Agile

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Scrum Gathering Minneapolis, Apr 2018
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Helping people and organisations become better at what they do.

Recent coaching assignments include
Who we are

Reaktor in brief

100% EMPLOYEE OWNERSHIP

2000 YEAR FOUNDED

$80M TURNOVER 2016

500+ TEAM MEMBERS

25 DIGITAL BUSINESS STRATEGY

80 PRODUCT AND SERVICE DESIGN

20 DATA SCIENCE & AI

7 MANAGEMENT CONSULTING

15 MARKETING SCIENCE

15 AGILE COACHING

240 SOFTWARE ENGINEERING

35 NEW VENTURES

6 OFFICES ACROSS 3 CONTINENTS

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The success of company is defined how well people work together, not how well they perform separated.
The enemy of **Simplicity** is **Unnecessary Complexity**.

Unnecessary Complexity happens when we forget there already is an easier solution.

Unnecessary Complexity attracts tools, processes, bureaucracy. This results in rigidity, delays and increased costs.
Simplicity over Tools

In this presentation **tool** refers to an electronic tool (program or application) that is used in order to plan, manage, monitor or control the flow of work.
We are using too much tools in our work.

We could have less tools and save money; not only by saving on license costs but more importantly..

With less tools our work could become better.
Why too much tools to manage our work?

✔ We create digital services and products.

We use computers to create digital content and we are at our computers all the time at work.

It is natural to start managing our work in the same place, on our computers.

✔ Human beings are driven by need for certainty.

Computers can quickly analyse information, generate graphs & pictures that create illusion of control and sense of certainty.
Results and Discussion

In answer to the question dealing with preferences, 19 Ss stated a preference for immediate as opposed to VDS ($p < .01$). When asked why they preferred the immediate shock, 2 Ss could not state a reason; 2 Ss stated that immediate shock was of lower intensity and less painful; 15 Ss verbalized in some fashion that the VDS made them more tense or anxious. Seven of these 15 Ss stated VDS was noticeably stronger.

In summary we can conclude that Ss given immediate vs. VDS develop a marked preference for immediate shock.
It is not the complexity that kills us – it is the assumption that things are simple and predictable.
People often say there are no silver bullets. They are wrong. There are silver bullets – we just don’t have any werewolves.
Our lust for tools and processes comes from unnecessary complexity in our work.

A better strategy is **Simplicity** – getting rid of complexity.

This requires we design and manage our work in a different way.
Asking the right questions
Slow elevator - problem

PROBLEM FRAMING

“The elevator is too slow.”

SOLUTION SPACE

“Make the elevator faster.”
- Install a new lift
- Upgrade the motor
- Improve the algorithm

https://hbr.org/2017/01/are-you-solving-the-right-problems
“Life Lessons from an ad man” by Rory Sutherland: https://www.ted.com/talks/rory_sutherland_life_lessons_from_an_ad_man
WE HAVE TOO FEW RESOURCES.

WE HAVE TOO MUCH WORK ON OUR PLATE.

GET MORE RESOURCES!

LIMIT INCOMING WORK TO MATCH CAPABILITY.
I DON'T KNOW WHEN THIS IS DONE.

HOW LONG DOES THIS TAKE - GIVE ME ESTIMATES!

I WANT TO SEE A WORKING SOLUTION SOON.

HOW MUCH CAN WE DO IN THIS TIMEBOX - THEN ITERATE.
PROBLEM FRAMING

WE DON’T KNOW HOW THE WORK IS PROGRESSING.

THE WORK IS NOT PROGRESSING FAST ENOUGH.

SOLUTION SPACE

REPORT MORE ACCURATELY ABOUT WORK STATUS!

GET WORK DONE SO FAST WE DON’T NEED REPORTS.
AGILE IS DIFFICULT.

OUR ORGANISATION IS NOT REALLY READY FOR AGILE.

TAILOR AGILE PRACTICES TO FIT OUR ORGANISATION!

THINGS WE NEED TO CHANGE TO MAKE US MORE AGILE.
The art of asking the right questions is at the heart of finding Simple Solutions.
Unnecessary complexity and how to overcome it

Communication
Communication problems

• Most of the workday is spent online. When 24/7 online presence is the default we have forgotten how to work together

• Root cause: Teams are no longer co-located – they are dis-located.
  - Teams are dis-located so we need tools.
  - With tools we can have dis-located teams.

• Being online is not necessarily communication. Sitting in same meeting is not necessarily communication

• We go to great lengths in order to avoid communication: emails, documentation, user story templates, ..

• We tend to “toolify” even the basic function of human beings: communication!
Communication problems: How to fix them?

- Have **time** and **place** for significant and meaningful conversations
  - **Time**: Agree a weekly routine for conversations to take place
  - **Place**: Have a physical wall where the conversations take place
- Facilitate the discussions
  - Maybe someone else than the leader / manager?

**Significant conversation**:
Focused discussion over a shared topic where all participants are passionate about the outcome.
Unnecessary complexity and how to overcome it

Workflow management
Workflow management

• “Why do we use an electronic system to manage our work and workflow?”
  “..because”
  1. our team members are sitting in different locations
  2. management wants to see the status of work
  3. we have so many items that we can’t track them manually
  4. “X” is the corporate tool for product backlog or sprint backlog or whatever
  5. we need to store information that post-its can not hold.
#1: Our team members sit in different locations

- Lower labor cost lead to lower cost?
  - Actually total cost increases because the cost is not in transactions but in the flow
- Tacit information does not flow across sites -> even more tools and processes to keep everyone updated
- Failure demand skyrockets
  - Organisations try to improve working practices with offshore
  - Organisations become really good at coordinating but remain bad at delivering value
- Try to have co-located teams!!

Well .. Good luck with that ..
Remote teams? Try this

- Effective communication in a dis-located team requires more effort!
- Have structured communication (=“meetings”) more frequently
- Have the channel (video, chat) open all the time, also outside meetings / Sprint events
- Use wide-band communication mechanisms: video, high-quality audio
- Try online visualisation tools (e.g. web whiteboards) or share a high-resolution still photo of the wall
- Get together on same room frequently - it is easier to talk with people you know
Facilitator
Laptop/ Skype video
Jabra loudspeaker inside sound isolation chamber (=armchair)
Colleague in other location
Editing same file
Laptop/ Skype video
Facilitator
#2: Management wants to see the status of work

- Management = people who have power to decide about design and management of work

- Get rid of any tool that provides management with mere numbers
- Status is not the same as flow!!

- Try inviting management to the physical board and into daily work
- Find out what drives / worries / scares management and provide them with information that helps them most!
#3: So many items that we can’t track them manually

- Tracking things that are already in progress?
  - Easy to control and usually not too many
- Tracking things that are not currently under progress?
  - Root cause: Backlogs and “wish lists” are long
  - Try to have short backlog on the wall and rest of the items away
  - Try saying “No!” when someone asks you to add something into product
#4: X is the corporate tool for product/sprint backlog

- This is sign that company does not understand Agile at all!
- What kind of “self-organising team” is forced to use a certain tool to manage their own work?
#5: We need to store information that post-its can’t

- This is actually a really valid argument
- Physical wall is for communication - electronic tool is for storing information
Finding the right tools and keeping Simplicity?

What are the tools that the teams need?

If tools and processes are forced upon a team, I do not expect much Agile in that organisation.
Finding the right **electronic** tools?

- Start with physical wall / post-its —> when work starts to flow then consider a tool.

- Benefits, physical wall is
  - ..“tabula rasa”, literally an empty board. You can start from scratch and abandon existing workflows for a while.
  - ..inexpensive, 5 m x 2 m wall costs less than $50
  - ..good for communication
  - ..fast to set up when meeting starts (well, since it is there it requires no time to set up)
Stepping stones to Simplicity

- Make sure the **tools and processes are for teams**, not for managers
- However, **understand the needs of management** and provide them with useful information (preferably through conversations)
- Have **conversations at the wall** and leave electronic tool for storing information
- If the reason for electronic tool is a dysfunction (too much WIP, dis-located teams), try to **remove dysfunction** rather than hide it with yet another tool
- **Start with physical**, make it work and move to electronic tool only when needed
- Accept that the **status of knowledge work can not be expressed perfectly in any tool** (physical or electronic). The truth is in conversations.
Wrap-up
Sami Lilja

I work with people.

I believe we can make our work better if we stick to the basics.

We must break free from slavery of tools & processes.
Manifesto for Agile Software Development

We are uncovering better ways of developing software by doing it and helping others do it. Through this work we have come to value:

- **Individuals and interactions** over processes and tools
- **Working software** over comprehensive documentation
- **Customer collaboration** over contract negotiation
- **Responding to change** over following a plan

That is, while there is value in the items on the right, we value the items on the left more.
The change in average price in 2017 (forecast)
MY PROCESS!
Key takeaways

• **Find the right question.** The way we frame our question has a significant impact on the possible answers.

• Assuming things are simple and predictable will lead to *unnecessary complexity* as we try to cover all possible scenarios with process steps, tools and rules.

• **Managing work is not that difficult.** Problems arise when design and management of work is based on wrong assumptions.

• Most harmful system conditions:
  - Handovers
  - Work-in-Progress
  - Dis-locating teams
• Visualise

• Agree working practices

• Communicate
Thank you.