Continuous Improvement: Hell on Earth?

Katherine Kirk

19 May 2014

GOTO Amsterdam Evening

Intro

- Katherine Kirk
  - Over 10 years contracting and freelancing in a variety of roles within the IT and Media industries

  - Coach, PM, Delivery Improvement Specialist, DBA, Web Admin etc etc

  - Specialise working with really "troubled" projects, where simplistic solutions don't quite cut it

  - First class MSc in Multimedia Computer + PG studies at Oxford

Why Hell on Earth?

The Fundamental Issue

"Continuous Improvement is based on two dangerous inbuilt assumptions which **automatically predisposition it to failure**"

Work in Progress

- No answers – opening discussion
- Who knew: controversial?

Agenda

- NEW Industry demands: Continuous Improvement is not enough

- People dislike Continuous Improvement Programs
    - 2 common failures
    - Why they occur, using Eastern Philosophy

- A different perspective

- What we can do about it

CONTEXT

… Sigh …

- Late 90's/early 2000's management style is no longer the answer
  - 1 big release
  - 1 big star per company to run the show
  - 1 single innovation department
  - A couple main territories worldwide

Its MUCH tougher out there!

Ever changing industry:

Innovation is the norm

Our response?

Just ALWAYS keep improving:

Continuous Improvement

Improvement

2006

Nokia N72

Improvement... Continuously?

2006

Nokia N72

2007

Nokia 6555

Improvement vs Innovation

2006

Nokia N72

2007

Nokia 6555

2007

Apple's First iPhone

Blackberry

2006

2007

2008

2009

Continually Improving…

2010

2011

2012

2013

Blackberry now

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Blackberry-maker RIM going back to its roots

30 March 2012 Last updated at 06:09 GMT

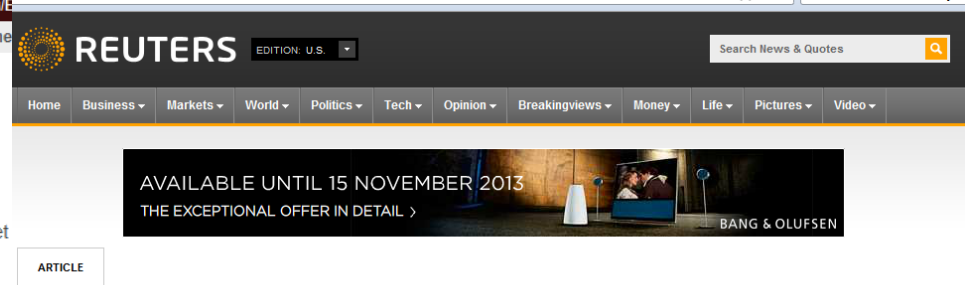The company that makes Blackberry smartphones says it will refocus on the corporate market than consumers.

Research In Motion has seen its sales fall behind the competition from Apple's iPhone and dev running Google's Android software.

The Canadian company made a net loss for the three months to 3 March 2012 of $125m (£78 compared with a profit of $934m a year earlier.
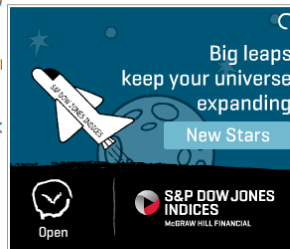
Speaking to Wake Up To Money on **BBC Radio 5 live** Larry Magid from CNET said that the co may look at selling the consumer arm of the business.

*To listen to other 5 live interviews, please visit the **Best Bits** page*

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ARTICLE

BlackBerry Takeover Bid Falls Apart, CEO to Depart

By Benjamin Kabin at **Entrepreneur.com**
Mon Nov 4, 2013 11:12am EST

The $4.7 billion deal that would have taken BlackBerry Ltd. private has come undone. The Waterloo, Canada-based tech company announced today that Fairfax Financial Holdings, the investment firm that proposed the takeover bid but was unable to raise the necessary funds, will instead invest $1 billion in BlackBerry

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…

Its just not enough anymore!!!!

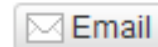# But: even big players are faltering

Come on Apple, think different

The Apple known for thinking big and deep is in danger of becoming the new Microsoft. It needs to innovate to stay cool

Heidi Moore
theguardian.com, Thursday 24 January 2013 18.30 GMT

The new iPad

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Article history

Technology
Apple · Computing · Tablet computers · Steve Jobs · iPad · iPhone

World news

The era we live in now

... its about **consistent innovative thinking**:

"Globalisation + technology = complexity"
– Need for speed
– *We require innovative solutions:*
  • *to release, to adapt for a variety of territories, adjust to legislation, interfacing / extending legacy systems, service multiple devices and multiple versions (e.g. mobile, IPTV etc)....*

Our response?

- Just ALWAYS keep improving
  - We think Continuous Improvement is the answer
- Improvement =
  - Work out what is wrong
  - Change it to what's right
  - Build on what's right with other right things
- Continuous =
  - Do this over and over, indefinitely

SUPER POWER: Agile/Lean

- Agile/Lean has continuous improvement inbuilt

- So all we have to do is go Agile / Lean, right?

… RIGHT … ???

PEOPLE DISLIKE CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMS

An interesting pattern

- Ask a software engineer (even from an Agile/Lean team)

- Ask an environmental scientist
- Ask an archaeologist

Whaaa??

- Engineers are discovery junkies
  - Teen years in dark rooms 'improving'!

  - Isn't Continuous Improvement always fixed by Agile/Lean?????

Summary

- So Continuous Improvement
  - isn't cutting it in the industry ?
  - somehow it's messing up morale?

- But, we NEED Continuous Improvement
  - We love to improve
  - We GENUINELY want to get better and better
  - Industry DEMANDS it

So what's going wrong?

TWO COMMON CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT FAILURES

Two common failures

- Distilled, exaggerated 'parables'

- Even in AGILE/LEAN scenarios

  – Story 1: Continuous Improvement Management
  – Story 2: Continuously Improved Application

We need Continuous Improvement!

- People are gaming management
- Quality is dropping
- Can't deliver what we promised
- No predictability / consistency
- Apathy (increase in sick days/everyone wants to work from home)
- Product is degrading (legacy code hell)

Story 1:

Continuous Improvement Management

- Philosophy:
  - Agile/Lean initiative
  - Add Continuous Improvement BOOST
    - Give you 50% less (e.g. Time)
    - Expect 100% more (e.g. Output)

- Driver
  - Faster, better
  - Get predictable improvement
  - Get promotion!

Example

Phase	Will take	Output	Team	Manager
Phase 1	4 weeks	10 items	...	Anger
Request	*2 weeks?*	*20 items?*	*Permissive*	*Frustration*
Phase 2 - achieved	**2 weeks**	**20 items**	Excitement	Pleased
Request	*1 week?*	*40 items?*	*Trepidation*	*Determined*
Phase 3 – achieved	**1 week**	**40 items**	Surprise & Exhausted	Confidence & drive
Request	**2.5 days?**	**80 items?**	Anger/Frustration	Convinced

This is CRAP

PROVEN
Yes it works!!!!
(sack those who don't believe it)

The GREAT divide

- Management confirms
  - I've seen a pattern
    - The team can ALWAYS do more than they say
    - There WAS something wrong with their attitude
    - Ignore the protestations of impossibility

- Team confirms
  - I've seen a pattern
    - Manager is disengaged from our situation
    - To make this work we now need to game the system
    - Trying to make it better never works
    - Best to get left alone just to do our job

Ouch?

- **They will revert to original behaviour**

  - *People are gaming management*
  - *Quality is dropping*
  - *Can't deliver what we promised*
  - *No predictability / consistency*
  - *Apathy (increase in sick days/everyone wants to work from home)*
  - *Product is degrading (legacy code hell)*

What's happening here?

"Punching the puppy won't make it play"

Forcing people to improve
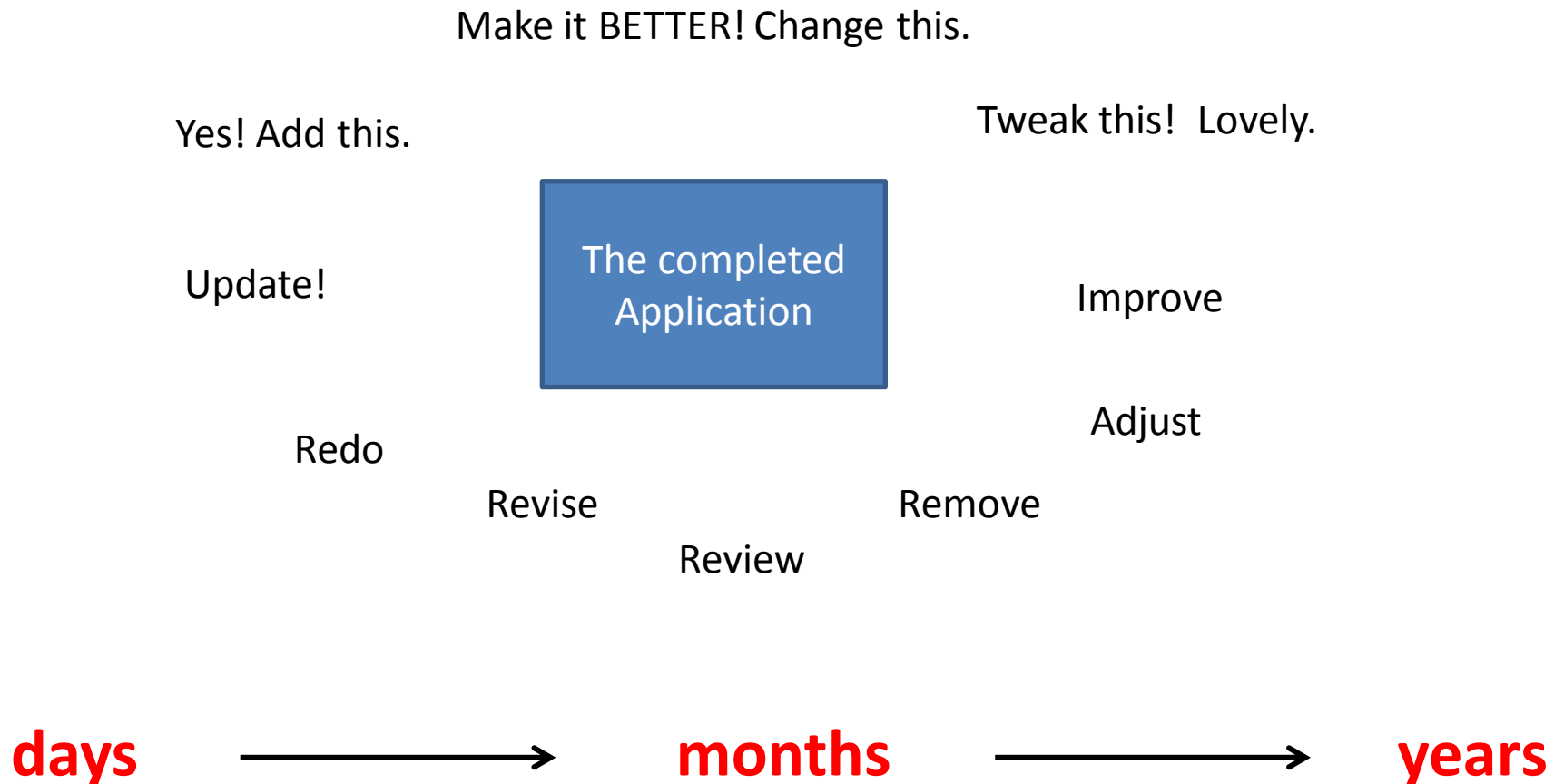*won't make them innovate*

Story 2:
Continuously Improved Application

- Philosophy:
  - Make something MUCH better
  - Respond really really quickly
  - Adapt to what is asked

- Driver
  - Make people happy
  - Get it out now
  - Get promotion!

How it begins….

The completed Application

We improve 'indefinitely'

Make it BETTER! Change this.

Yes! Add this.

Tweak this! Lovely.

Update!

The completed Application

Improve

Adjust

Redo

Revise

Remove

Review

days → **months** → **years**

Continuously 'improved' app
(Legacy code)

Application
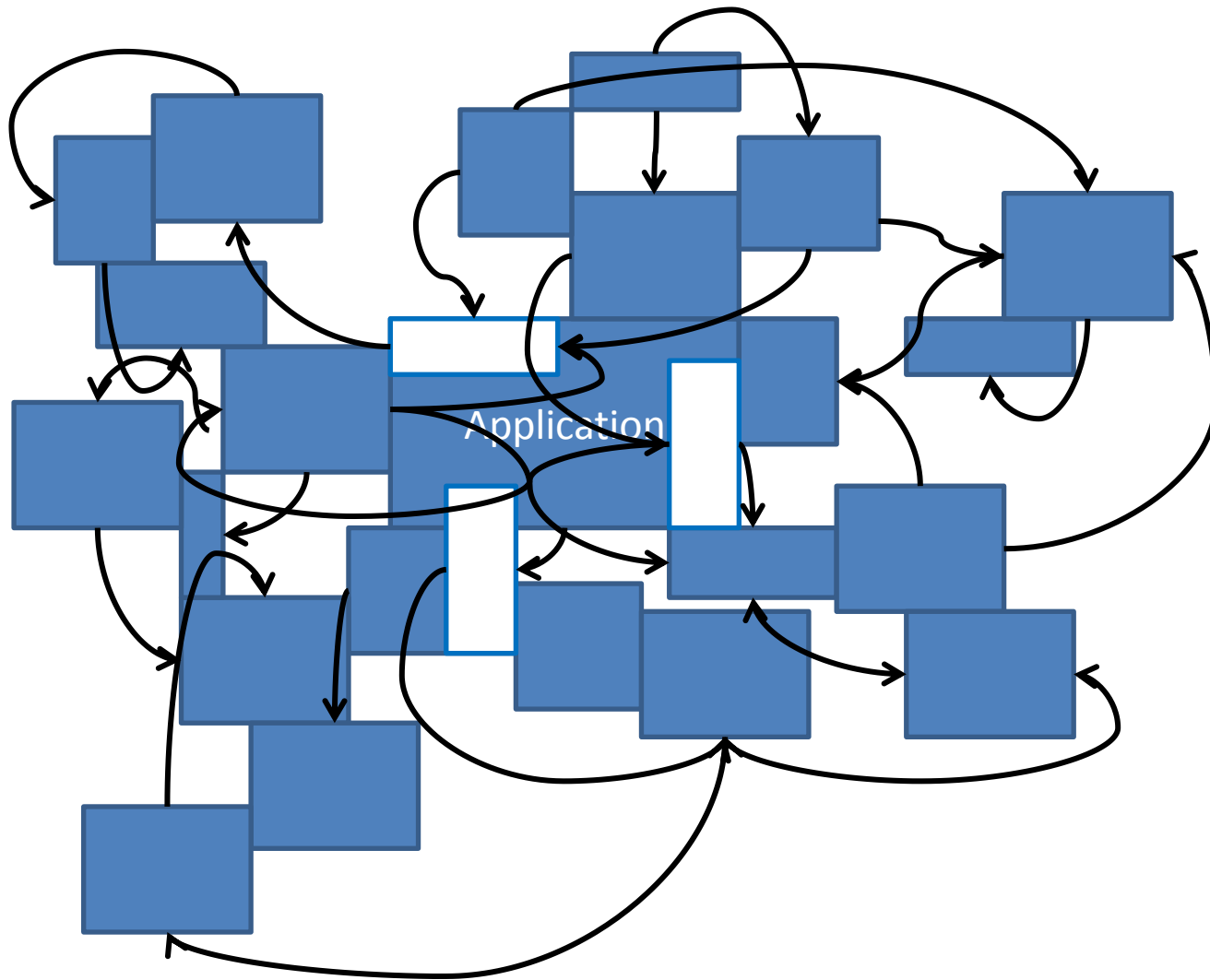
What's happening here?

"The influence of idiots"

Press release driven development (PRDD)?

Who judges something to be an improvement?

Who is judging the judge?

Time for….

The Fundamental Issue

"Continuous Improvement is based on two dangerous inbuilt assumptions which **automatically predisposition it to failure**"

Dangerous Inbuilt Assumptions

Continuous

- Assumption 1:

  "Infinite improvement is possible"

- *Allows unrealistic expectation*

Improvement

- Assumption 2:

 **"Something is wrong and must be fixed"**

- *Begins with negative judgement*

Assumptions + expectation + judgement

Continuous

- Assumption 1:

**"Infinite improvement
is possible"**

- *Allows unrealistic
expectation*

Improvement

- Assumption 2:

**"Something is wrong
and must be fixed"**

- *Begins with negative
judgement*

So how what the hell can we do about it?

Section 4

STEP 1: UNDERSTAND THE FAIL

Continuous Improvement can be hampered by

Expectation

Judgement

Assumption
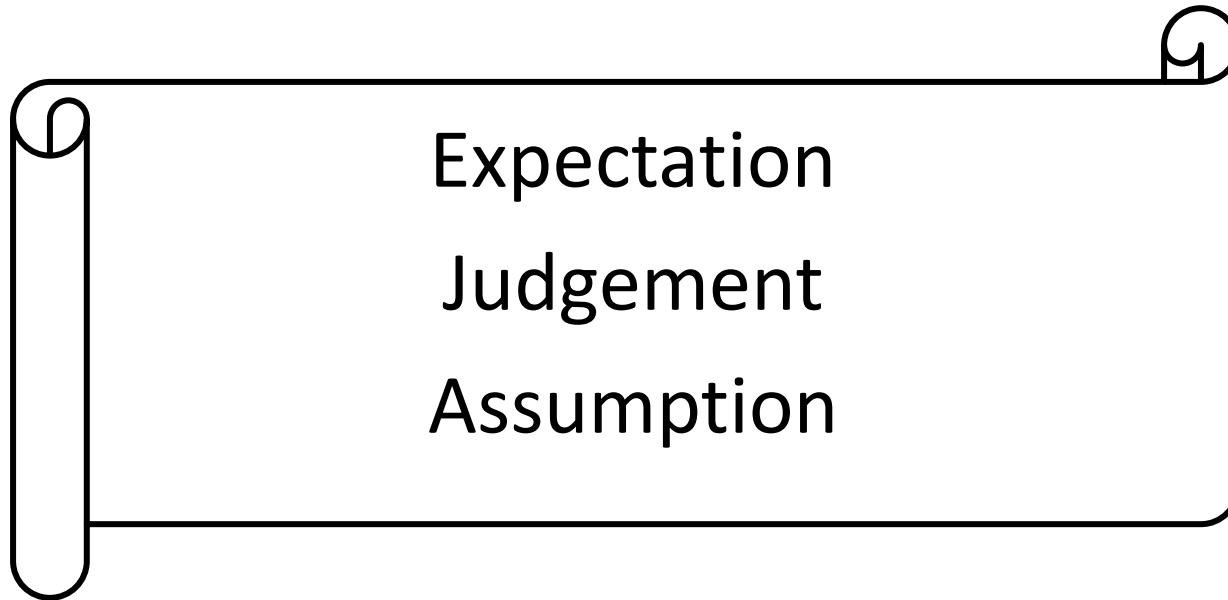
(Interactions / culture)

Hmm…. notice… Even in Agile/Lean

- **PEOPLE OVER PROCESS**: Interactions / culture can sabotage even the best process!

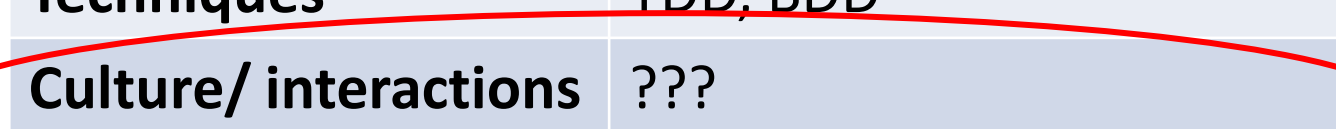## Manifesto

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

Unintentional sabotage

Philosophy	Agile, Lean
Processes/Methods	Scrum, Kanban
Practices	e.g. 2-4 week cadence, continuous delivery, retrospectives, daily meetings
Techniques	TDD, BDD
Culture/ interactions	???

Story 1 (Manager) & 2 (Legacy Code)

- Interactions are HIERARCHICAL
  - Expectation – command/control
  - Assumption – don't really ask/collaborate
  - Judgement – one person's view can override others

If this is the case...

"How can we see the influence of culture and interactions more clearly?"
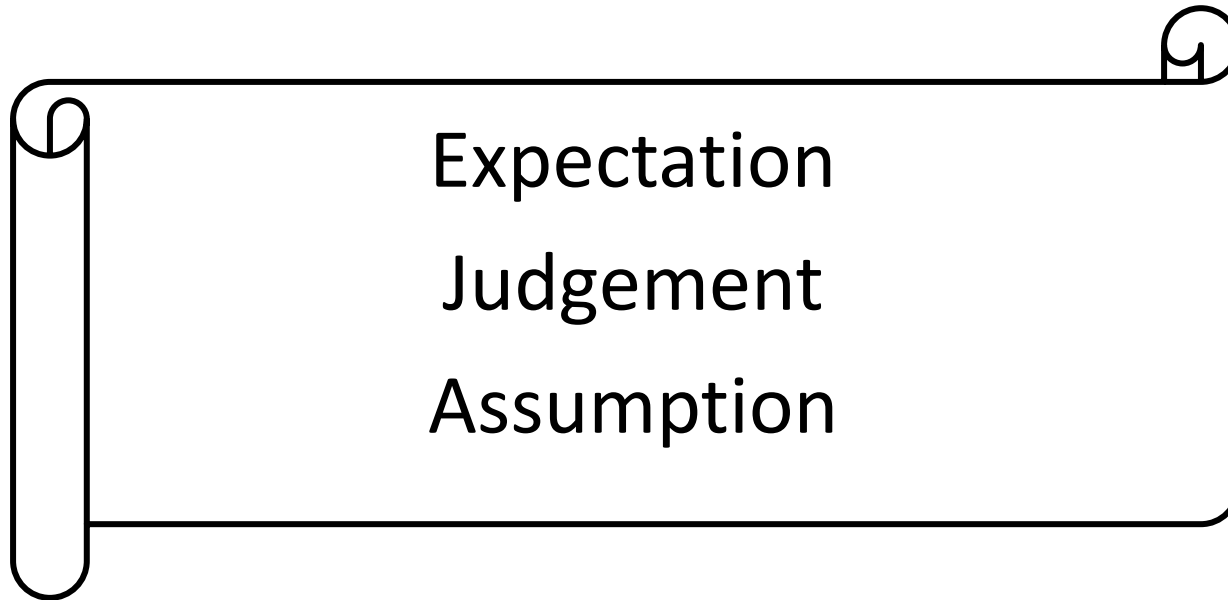
Modeling (e.g. architecture) in different ways

=

Freedom to choose strategy and reaction

Drawing from eastern philosophy

- This is not a recent technique
  - Steve Jobs
  - Management & Mindfulness Research

- Mindfulness
  - Mahasi Vipassana – a very 'practical' strain of Buddhism
    - AIM 1: Reduce Suffering
    - AIM 2: Continually Improve indefinitely till enlightenment

Back to this...

Expectation

Judgement

Assumption

(Interactions / culture)

Monks say: They're 'poisons'

Assumption	Expectation	Judgement
• You're not necessarily working with the REAL data!!	• Impossible goals breed apathy • Getting what you expect might not be what is best (e.g. not innovative enough) • Too much emotional investment: expectation can create morale crashes when it isn't achieved	• Subject to ignorant influence • Can be critical, and self-orientated

STEP 2: AN ALTERNATIVE?

Change the WAY you interact

Expectation (Demand)

- "Assumes, presumes, takes for granted. Its a manifestation of arrogance. **Expectation is bound to fail us one way or another for it projects an ideal, a concrete goal on the future whose parameters we don't know.** We simply don't know what is going to happen. So when our expectation fails to materialise we are disappointed, depressed by it. A life that rests on expectation is forever falling into ditches. Consider how many times we've been disappointed in our lives. Such is the measure of expectation.

- Expectation is a dangerous poison. **When we fail to get what we expect, we are disappointed, humiliated, depressed**"

Bhante Bodhidhamma

Aspiration (Aim)

- "Does not expect, assume, presume. It does not have a success time or finishing date. Aspiration does not presume fulfilment, does not presume on others. It is simply a movement in the mind, a desire for the wise, the beautiful and the virtuous. **An inclination towards a goal.** And so aspiration **gathers all the necessary qualities and support to move in that direction**.

- Aspiration is humble. Not the false humility of a prideful self. [Not] a cover to prevent the humiliation of failure in others eyes. Genuine humility is that **groundedness that comes with seeing life not as success and failure, but as trial and error. If things dont work out, well, at least I know** what is not for me. **It clarifies future action**"

Bhante Bodhidhamma

Change the WAY you interact

Judgement
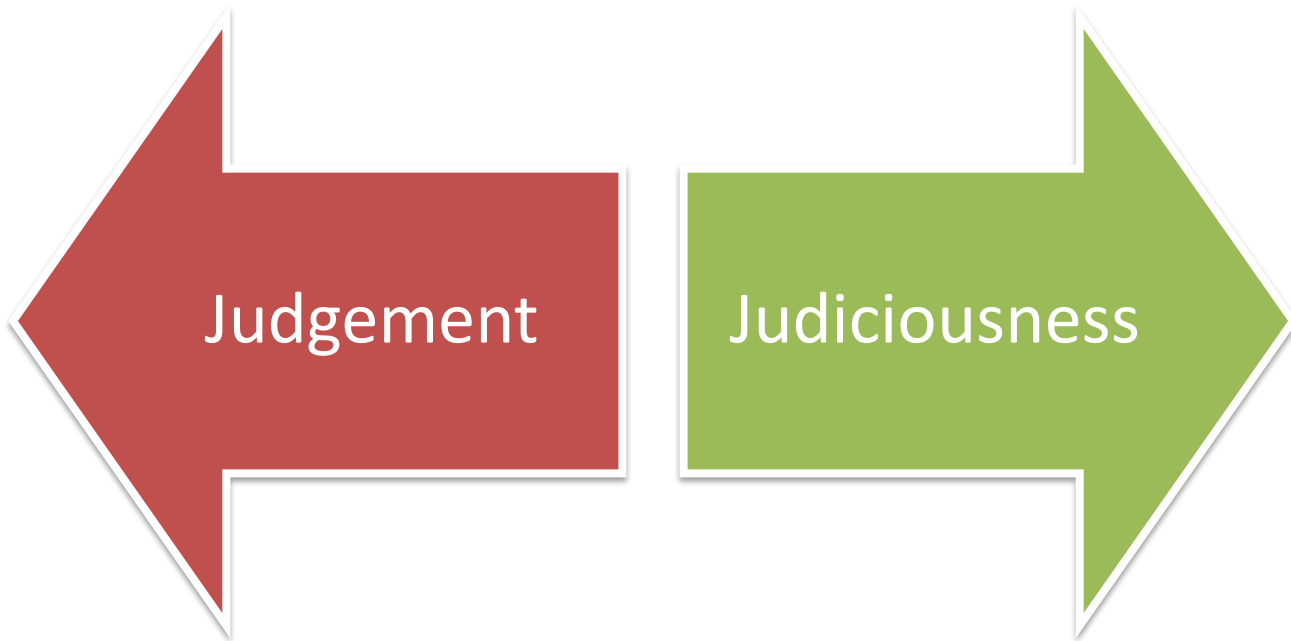
Judiciousness

Judge vs Judicious
(Command vs Collaborate)

- **Judging** – to take a position that is critical, and self-righteous.

- **Judicious** – there is a judging that is not judgmental; judicious means to be wise and sensible. To be judicious means **to see the whole situation** even from the other person's or institution's point of view. To do that we must **drop our own little opinion and see it in a wider perspective**. These are the virtues we expect in a judge – **not to be hijacked by a crowd baying for blood or duped by the clever arguments of lawyers**.
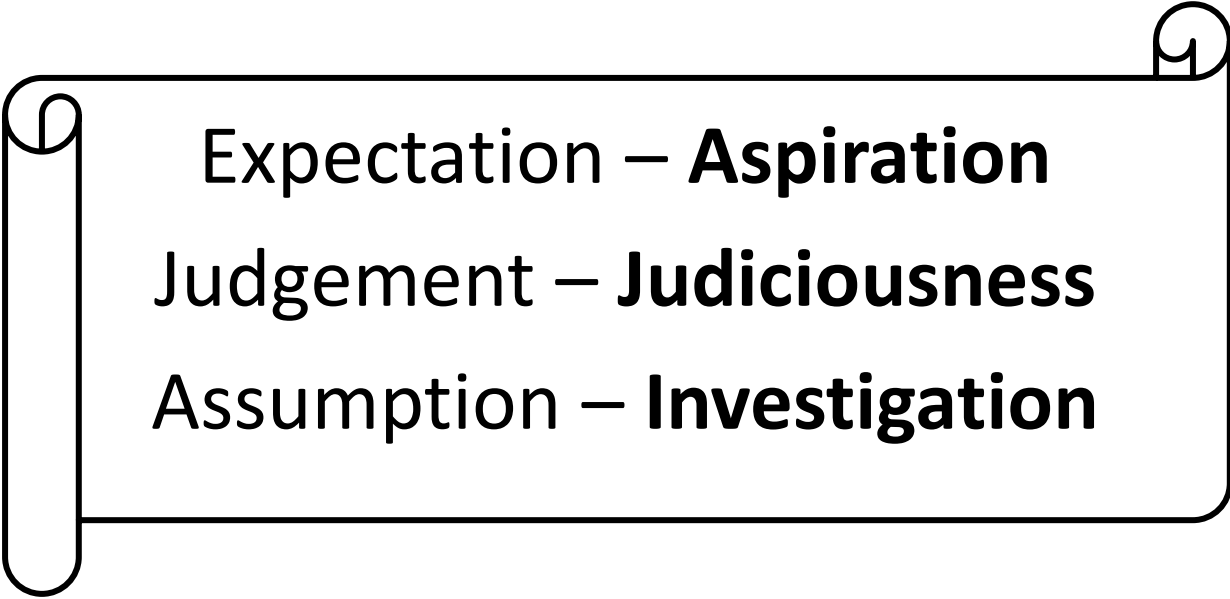
Bhante Bodhidhamma

Change the WAY you interact

Assumption (expect) vs Investigation (ask/inquire)

- Assumption
  - We can (when we can't)
  - We can't (when we might)

- Investigation
  - How interesting: What can we do?
  - How interesting: What can't we do?

Summary

Expectation – **Aspiration**

Judgement – **Judiciousness**

Assumption – **Investigation**

APPLICATION

Armed with the new viewpoint…

… lets revisit why a continuous improvement PROCESS might be failing….

Consider...

- Continuous improvement can only exist via INSIGHT (Aha!)
- Insight needs retrospection, review, learning

- Therefore: **Retrospectives can be vital**

But Retrospectives have

- LOTS and LOTS of interaction

- Relies on communication and collaboration

- A <u>highly subjective</u> process, very influenced by
  - the culture
  - and people within it

Core part of Agile/Lean

Caution: be careful

- Dysfunctional retrospectives = highly likely that
  - Continuous Improvement could fail/stagnate
  - Significantly less innovation

- That's why we think they 'don't work' sometimes!!!

Our culture and the way we interact defines the level of success of the retrospective

When a retrospective fails

INTERACTIONS:
Directive, order,
silence, demand,
control, abide by
plans, rules

Expectation – Aspiration

Judgement – Judiciousness

Assumption – Investigation

When a retrospective works

INTERACTIONS:
Aim to do better
Collaborate / vote
Ask, strategise, check
Explore

Expectation – **Aspiration**

Judgement – **Judiciousness**

Assumption – **Investigation**

In other words...

Aim instead of Demand

Ask/Inquire instead of Expect

Collaborate instead of Instruct

- Seems 'too simple'!

- But how we interact can make or break continuous improvement / innovation

Quick note

- Olav will be talking about integrating continuous learning later, which does not necessarily have retrospectives
- Bit like:
  - KICK OFF: Retrospective – meditate once per day
  - ZEN: Continuous Learning – meditate continuously in mindfulness

Story 1:

Phase	Will take	Output		Team	Manager
Phase 1	4 weeks	10 items		...	Anger
Request	*2 weeks?*	*20 items?*	(R)	*Permissive*	*Frustration*
Phase 2 - achieved	**2 weeks**	**20 items**		Excitement	Pleased
Request	*1 week?*	*40 items?*	(R)	*Sensible*	*Hopeful*
Phase 3 – achieved	**3 weeks**	**25 items**		Pleased	Confident
Request	**3 weeks**	**25 items?**	(R)	Confident	Trusting

*Sustainable pace?
= resilient innovation?*

*Aspire: 2 weeks,
20 items, no
legacy?*

Try new things?
Learning a lot!

We can predict!
We get better

Story 2

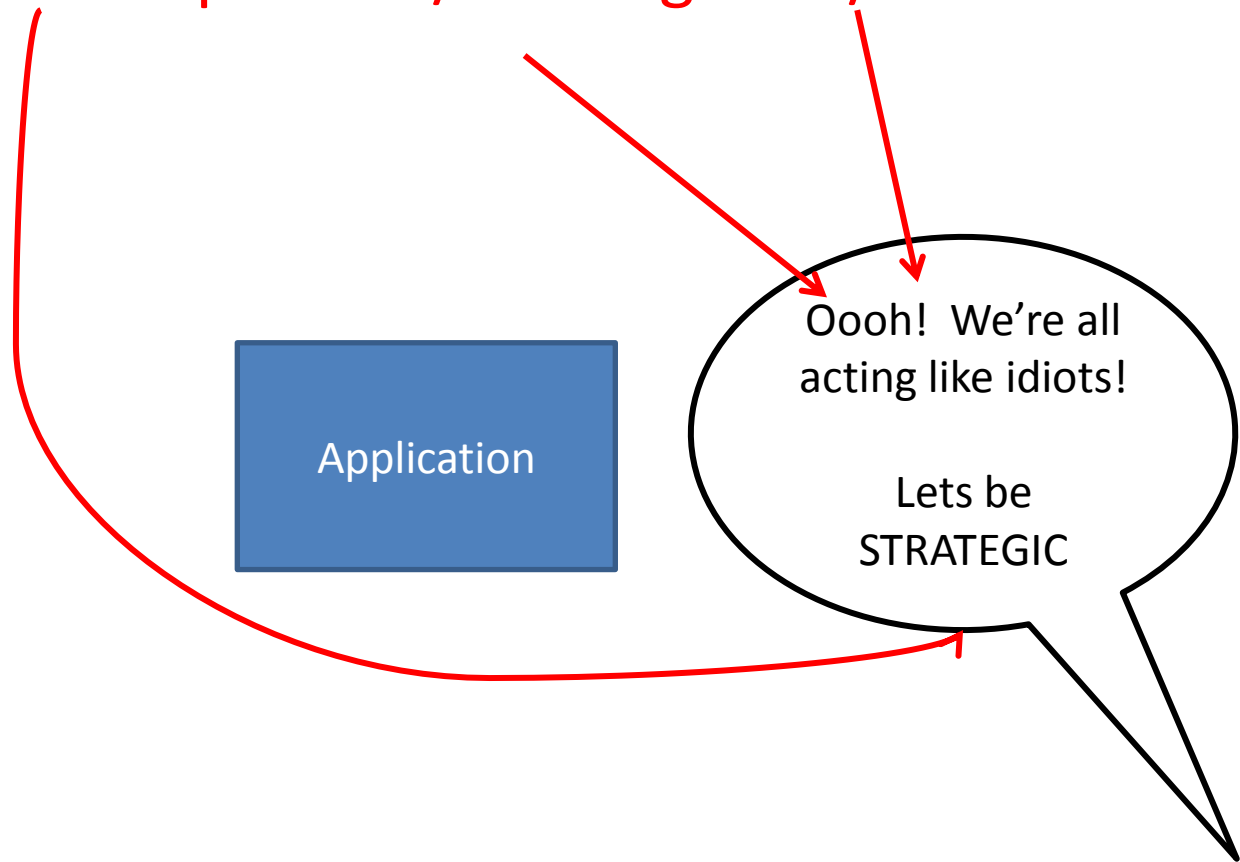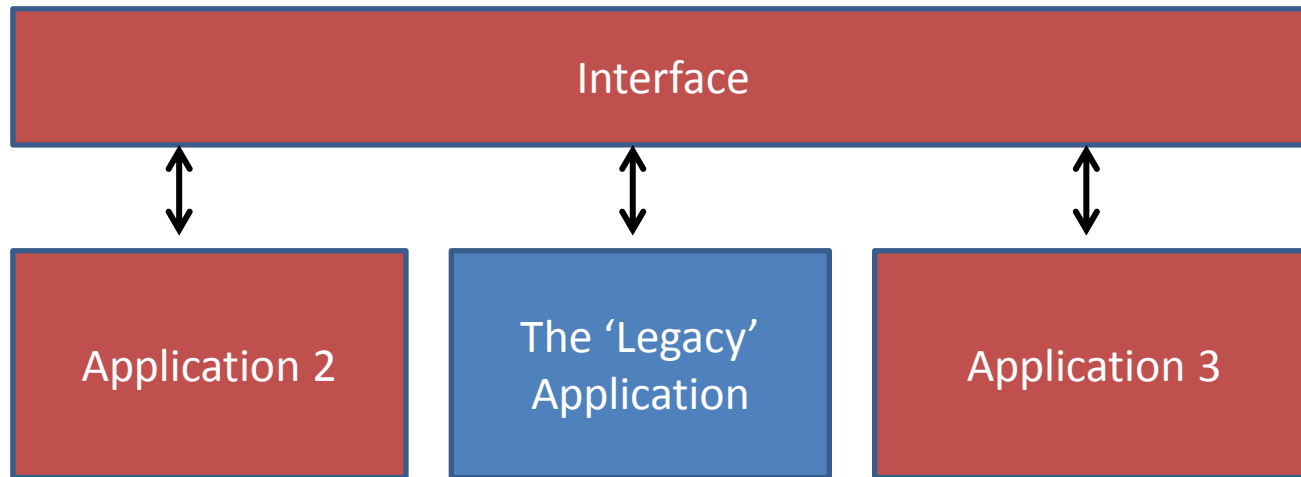Aspiration/Investigation/Judiciousness

Sustainable, innovative solutions

Aspiration/Investigation/Judiciousness

Less influence of idiocy

- Healthy interactions in retrospectives turn Continuous Improvement into <u>Consistent Discovery</u>

- **MORE FUN! : Easier to stay in discovery state for longer periods = foundation for innovation**
  - **'not being good enough' vs 'learning a lot'**

REAL LIFE EXAMPLE: JIMDO

Jimdo

- An German based WYSIWYG web hosting service
  - Has had significant, rapid expansion across 12 countries
  - Constantly doubled its head count every two years
  - Experiencing significant success in the market
  - Innovation is at its core

Aim:

Consistent INNOVATION not a Continuous Improvement 'program'

Jimdo

- Dr Roock: Retrospecting 'on steriods'
  - 350 retrospectives thus far
  - Diverse pool of 12 'neutral' moderators that facilitate teams when required
  - All employees (even kitchen staff) retrospect

More info: Dr Arne Roock presentation at LKCE
2013 and his most recent InfoQ articles

Quick Observation

- A pool of specialist retrospective moderators – not relying on one person, not involved in politics (**judicious**)

- Experiment focussed, without demanding targets so that innovation can be nurtured (**investigation**)

- Concerned about creating a Kaizen culture, without restrictive, definitive goals (**aspiration**)

Emphasis is on culture NOT program or initiative

POINT 1 + 2 + 3 + 4 + 5 = ?

Review

Point 1 - New Industry demands: aggressive competition, relentless innovation

Point 2 - Pattern 1: People dislike Continuous Improvement Programs, even in Agile/Lean

Point 3 - Pattern 2: Common Continuous Improvement Program failures - Unrealistic management & Legacy code

Point 4 - Continuous Improvement Processes can be sabotaged by negative culture and interactions

Point 5 - A focus on 'healthy' Retrospectives and keep an 'eagle eye' on HOW you interact can help your team to become truly innovative

IN CONCLUSION

The era we live in now

… its about **consistent innovative thinking**:

"Globalisation + technology = complexity"

– The need for speed

– *We require innovative solutions:*

- *to release, to adapt for a variety of territories, adjust to legislation, interfacing / extending legacy systems, service multiple devices and multiple versions (e.g. mobile, IPTV etc)….*

The pressure…

2006

Nokia N72

2007

Nokia 6555

2007

Apple's First iPhone

Improvement
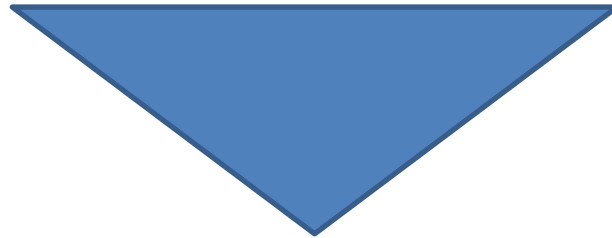
Innovation

No need for dramatics!

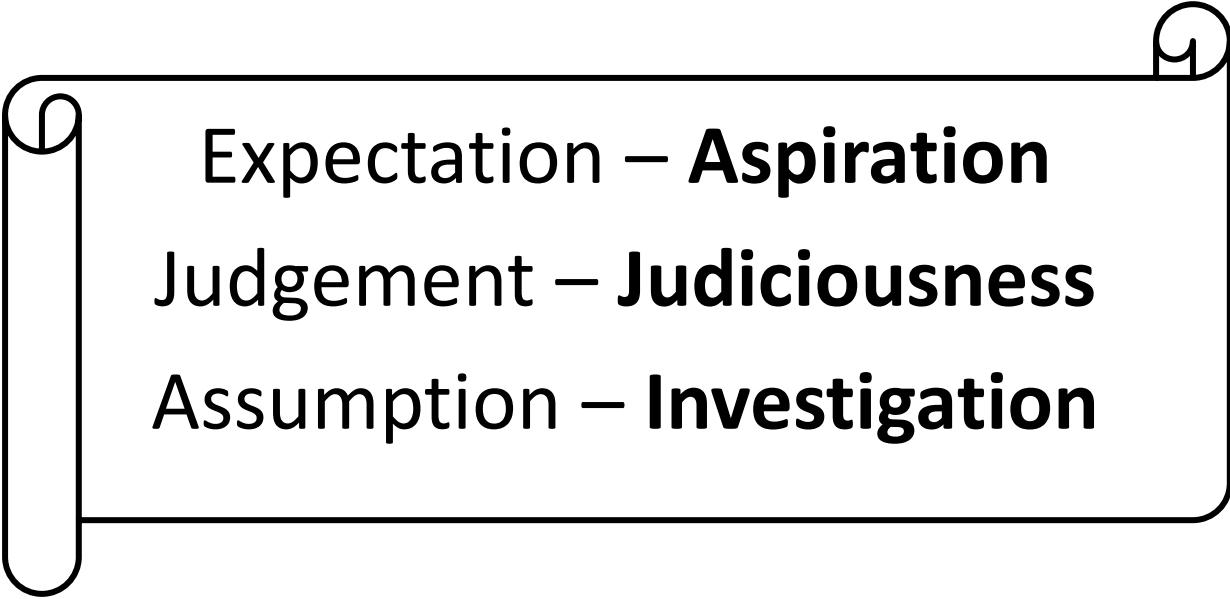Continuous Improvement

Consistent Innovation

… its 'simple'…

Be aware...

Philosophy	Agile, Lean
Processes/Methods	Scrum, Kanban
Practices	e.g. 2-4 week cadence, continuous delivery, retrospectives, daily meetings
Techniques	TDD, BDD
Culture/ interactions	???

Find ways to illuminate and increase the quality of your interactions....

Expectation – **Aspiration**

Judgement – **Judiciousness**

Assumption – **Investigation**

During the meeting…

- Watch the mood of the room
  - Morale: up or down?
    - Too many 'single opinions'? Time to collaborate…
    - Too many demands? Time to break down 'what we can do' versus 'what we aspire to do'….
    - Too many assumptions? Time to investigate reality…
- Use a model as a collaborative scale
  - E.g. Where are we: expectation / aspiration
- Look at how you deal with others

People over Process

- Don't rely on 'Continuous Improvement' programs or just 'adhering to the practices of Agile/Lean'

- You need to **focus on your interactions**

- Boost and value your retrospectives

- Really work with your culture and aligning it to your chosen philosophy (e.g. Agile/Lean)

Interactions really do matter!

Quality of Culture & Interactions

= defines level of success of retrospectives

= defines level of success of Continuous
Improvement

Thankyou

@kkirk