#NoFrameworks
How We Can Take Agile Back

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Agenda

• Mea culpa
• What is a framework?
• What is the problem with frameworks?
• Why are frameworks so popular?
• How effective are frameworks in practice?
• What actually works?
• How can we taking agile back?

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Mea Culpa....

... is latin for “my bad”
“Method Prison”

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What is a Framework?
Definition: Framework

- A system of veneration and devotion directed toward a particular figure or concept
- A relatively small group of people having beliefs or practices regarded by others as strange or sinister
- A misplaced or excessive admiration for a particular concept or thing
Definition: Cult

- A system of veneration and devotion directed toward a particular figure or concept
- A relatively small group of people having beliefs or practices regarded by others as strange or sinister
- A misplaced or excessive admiration for a particular concept or thing

Mea Culpa!

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What is a Framework?

Possible Definitions for a Prescriptive Framework:
• Collins: A framework is a particular set of rules, ideas, or beliefs which you use in order to deal with problems or to what to do.
• Cambridge: A system of rules, ideas, or beliefs that is used to plan or decide something.
• MacMillan: A system of rules, laws, agreements, etcetera that establish the way that something operations in business, politics, or society.

Possible Definition for a Flexible Framework:
• MacMillan: A set of principles, ideas, etcetera that you use when you are forming your decisions and judgments.
The Problem With Frameworks

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Frameworks Define Principles, Rules and Beliefs

But what if the rules aren’t applicable?

What happens when your situation changes?

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Prescriptive Frameworks Solve a Specific Problem

But what if you don’t have that problem?

What happens once you’ve solved that problem?

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Frameworks Box You In

But what if the language of the framework’s limits your ability to discover other ideas?

What if the framework’s “best practices” aren’t?

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Frameworks Are Oversold

What if your organization or team is already pretty good?

What if your problems aren’t so easy to solve?
Flexible Frameworks Require You to Use Judgement and Make Decisions

But what if you don’t know what your options are?

What if you don’t know how to compare options?

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Frameworks Aren’t Silver Bullets

What if your leadership isn’t ready?

What if your staff aren’t sufficiently skilled?

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Why Are Frameworks So Popular?

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Executive Leadership

- Great poster and web site
- "Quick and easy" answer to their software process problems
- Their traditional competitors are often doing it
- Large consulting companies can provide armies of SAFe-certified people
- Desire to reduce "process variance" and increase predictability

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Consultants

Cha-Ching!

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Developers

- Its 18-page body of knowledge is easy to consume
- Simple answer to a complex problem
- Confirms that traditional management is bad, mostly by glossing over spectacularly important concepts

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Tool Vendors

Cha-Ching!

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How Effective Are Frameworks in Practice?

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Agile Frameworks/Methods Can Help

Effectiveness vs. Time

- Agile methods: 7-12% more productive on average
- Agile scaling frameworks: 3-5% more productive on average

- Initial learning curve
- Things get better
- We hit the limits of the framework (we’re in method prison)

Source: Reifer, D. *Quantitative Analysis of Agile Methods Survey (2017): Twelve Major Findings*
1500+ agile teams at 150 orgs
What Actually Works?

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We Should Look at Apex-Level Competitors
The DevOps Case Study Pattern

1. At some point in the distant past:
   • We’re in trouble!
   • We need to improve! Now!
   • Let’s start an improvement project!

2. Realization: Improvement is a journey, not a project! Who knew?

3. New strategy: Adopt an “improve through experiments” approach

4. Today: Look at us, we’re awesome and not afraid to share our “secret”
Kaizen Loops: Improve via Experiments

1. Identify Problem
2. Identify Potential Solution(s)
3. Try the Solution(s)
4. Assess Effectiveness

- Adopt What Works
- Abandon What Doesn’t Work
- Share Learnings

Plan → Do → Study → Act

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Guided Continuous Improvement (GCI)

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Identify Problem

Identify Potential Solution(s)

Try the Solution(s)

Assess Effectiveness

Adopt What Works

Abandon What Doesn’t Work

Share Learnings

If we get better at this, we succeed more often and we improve faster.

We can do this if we have access to an experienced agile coach, but they’re expensive and hard to find.

We can do this if we have access to a process knowledgebase, like the Disciplined Agile (DA) toolkit.

Some experiments fail. You learn something, but it’s still a failure.

Failing fast is fine, but succeeding early is better.

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GCI

Guided Continuous Improvement (GCI)
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Effectiveness vs. Time

Guided Continuous Improvement (GCI)
Continuous Improvement

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Taking Agile Back

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Respect Yourself
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Go Back to Fundamentals

Agile was originally about discovering what works in practice for software development

Agile should be about discovering what works in practice for our organization
Be Humble
Be Agnostic

Hint: If you use terms like Sprint or Scrum Master you’re not agnostic

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#NoBestPractices

Wait.... that’s another keynote
Start Where You Are

Effectiveness

Guided Continuous Improvement (GCI)

Your current WoW

Time

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Observe (deeply)

Think (critically)

Experiment (to learn)
Optimize the Whole
Take Agile Back

• Respect Yourself
• Go Back to Fundamentals
• Be Humble
• Be Agnostic
• #NoBestPractices
• Start Where You Are
• Observe, Think, Experiment
• Optimize the Whole

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Thank You

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