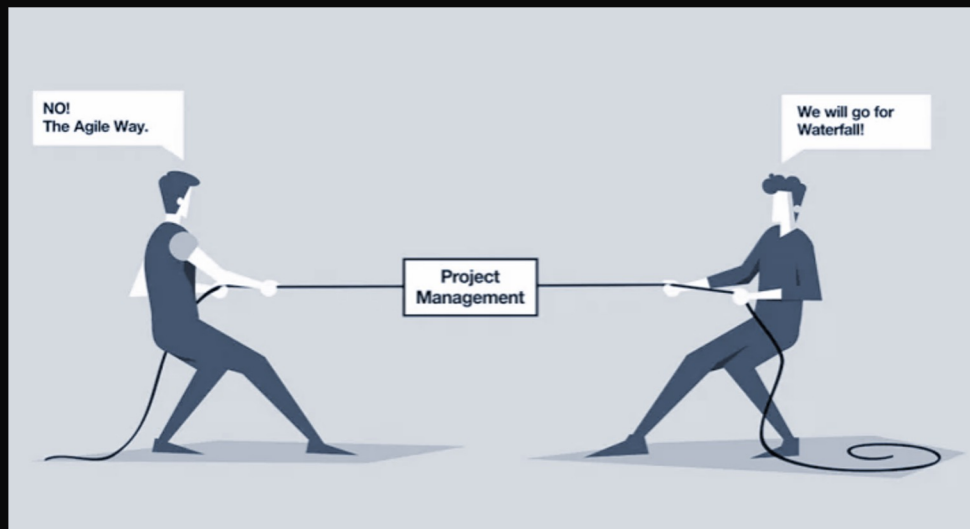


BEYOND THE METHODOLOGY WARS

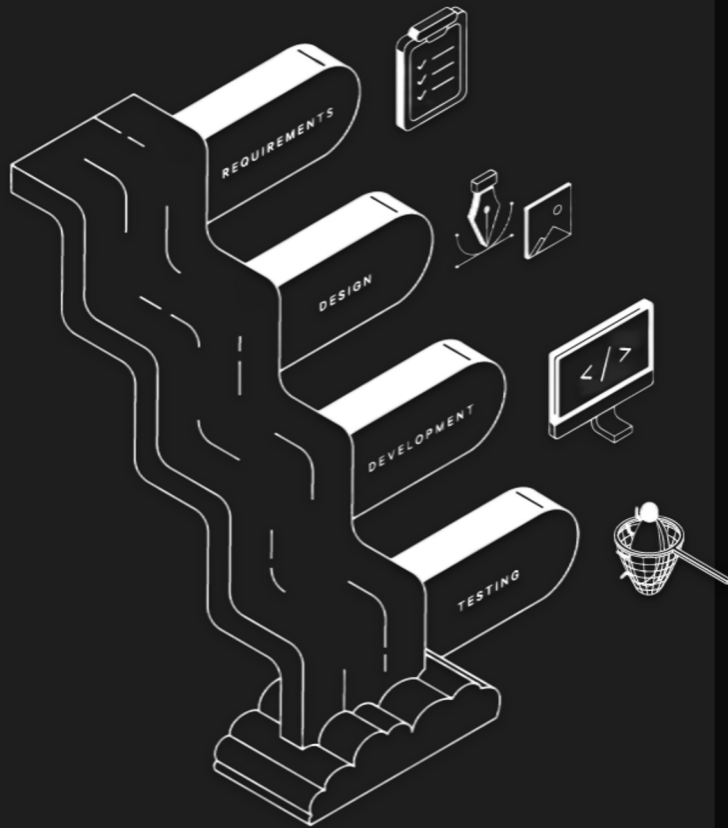
Jana Hodgins, Director of Strategic Partnerships, Xsolla

janahodgins.com

THE TUG OF WAR



"All models are wrong but some are useful" – George Box, 1978



WATERFALL

WHEN IT SHINES

- Clear scope, budget & timeline from day one
- Process and documentation for every phase gate
- Requirements are truly fixed
- Regulatory, compliance & safety-critical contexts



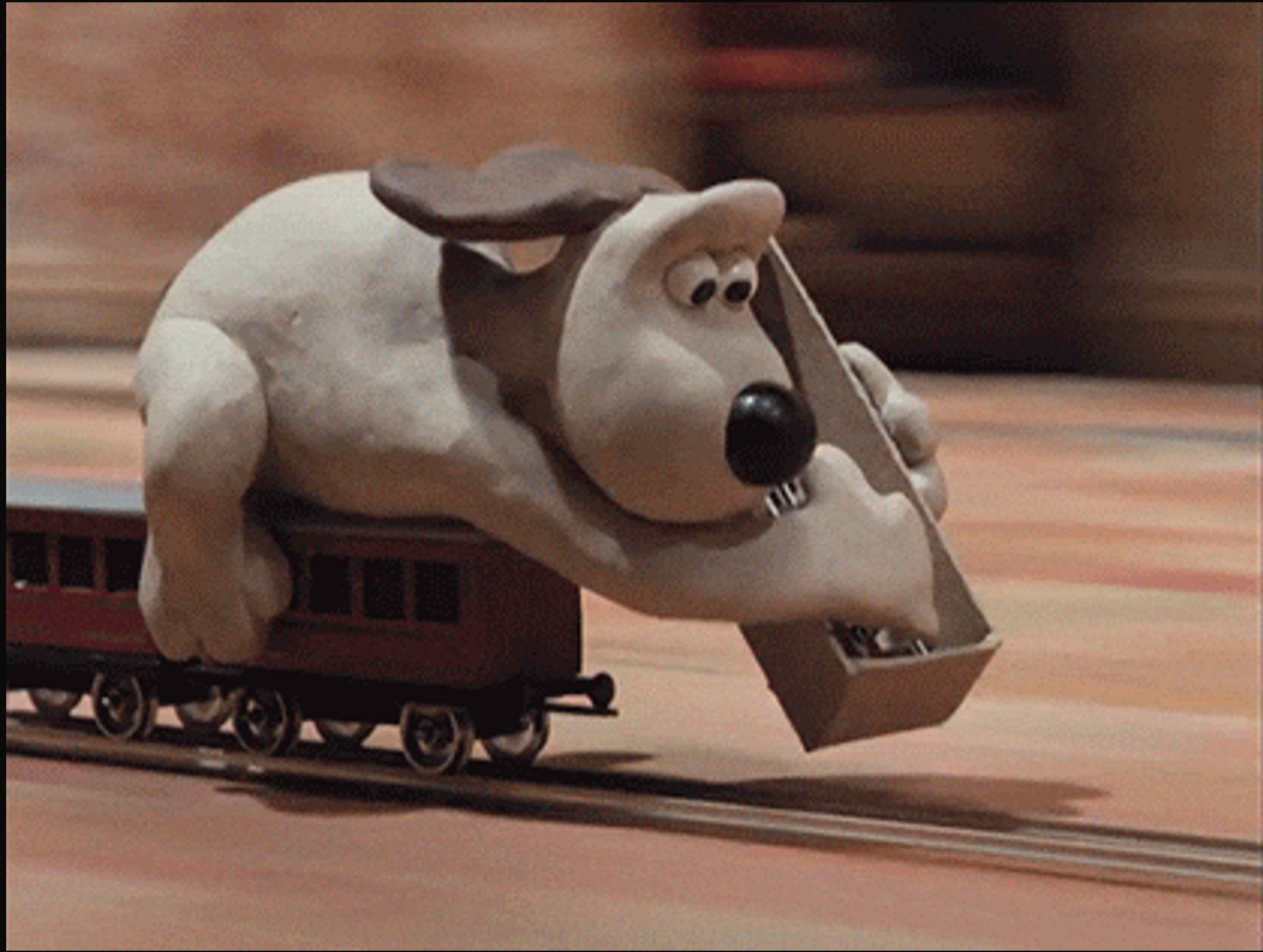
AGILE

VALUES

- Individuals & interactions > processes & tools
- Working software > comprehensive documentation
- Customer collaboration > contract negotiation
- Responding to change > following a plan

THE SPRINT CYCLE





DISCIPLINED AGILE

LIFE CYCLES

- Agile
- Continuous Delivery: Agile
- Lean
- Continuous Delivery: Lean
- Exploratory
- Program

SEVEN PRINCIPLES





NOT A BINARY. A SPECTRUM.



PURE WATERFALL

Construction
Compliance
Aerospace

HYBRID

Product teams
Enterprise IT
Marketing

PURE AGILE

Startups
Game dev
R&D

“May your choices reflect your hopes, not your fears” – Nelson Mandela

THE RIGHT QUESTION ISN'T "WHICH ONE?"

It's: "What does this project, this team, this moment actually need?"

5 QUESTIONS TO CHOOSE YOUR PATH

-
- 1 How stable are your requirements today?
 - 2 How often do you need to deliver value?
 - 3 What does failure cost in your context?
 - 4 How much trust exists between team & stakeholders?
 - 5 What's your team's actual experience level?

WHAT TO DO

Methodology is a tool. You create the craft.

01

DEFINE

Begin with the end in mind

Definition of ready.
Definition of done.
Deliverables.
What tools will we use?

02

DOCUMENT

Make it accessible

Every decision. Every step.
Visualize what you know.

03

DISCIPLINE

Follow through

Fail fast — and find out why.
Don't fail for lack of trying.

04

DELIGHT

People are the whole point

Your stakeholders. Your team. Make sure they're happy, heard, and with you.

05

DELIVER

Be a badass

Give the business and your customers what they need. Don't wait.

IN THE WILD



GAME STUDIO

Agile-led Hybrid

- Sprints for feature development.
- Milestone gates for publisher reviews.
- Retrospectives every 2 weeks.

INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECT

Waterfall Core

- Sequential phases with formal sign-offs.
- Change control board.
- Risk register from day one.

MARKETING CAMPAIGN

Flexible Kanban

- Backlog-driven.
- Continuous delivery.
- Weekly stakeholder check-ins.
- No fixed sprints.

YOUR PERMISSION SLIP

You are not obligated to any manifesto.

You are not failing if you mix methods.

You are not perfect – and that's a strength.

The future of project management is not one-size-fits-all.
It's yours to define – context by context, team by team.

You. Get. To. Decide.

YOUR TURN

REFLECTION PROMPTS

Think of a project that struggled. Which methodology were you using? Was it the right fit?

Where have you seen Agile fail? What was the root cause?

Where have you seen Waterfall get blamed for problems that were actually people problems?

What would a truly tailored approach look like on your current project?

THE FUTURE IS FLEXIBLE.

And so are you.

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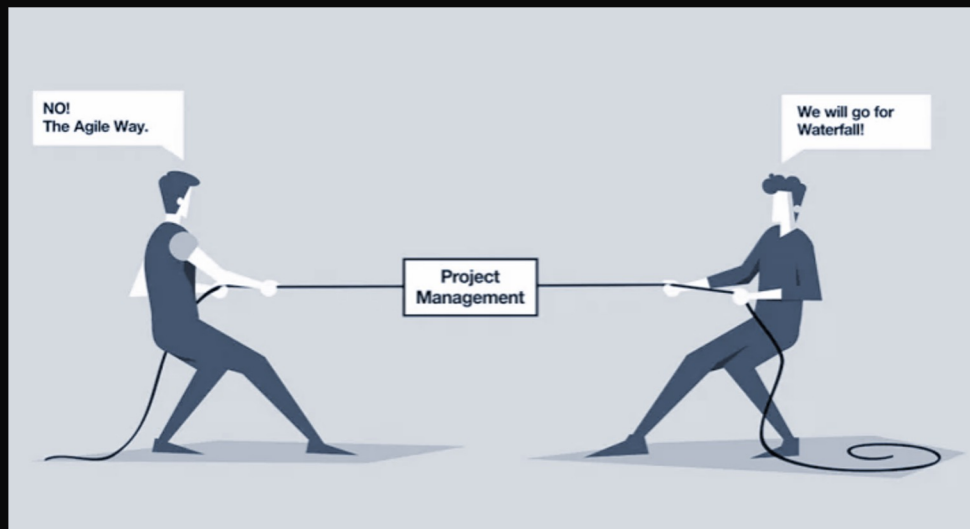
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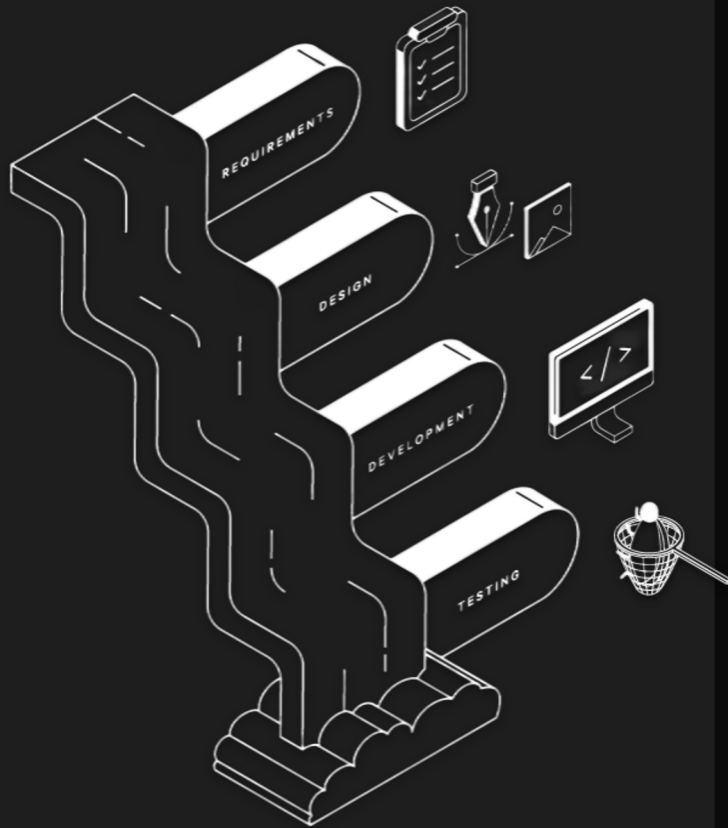
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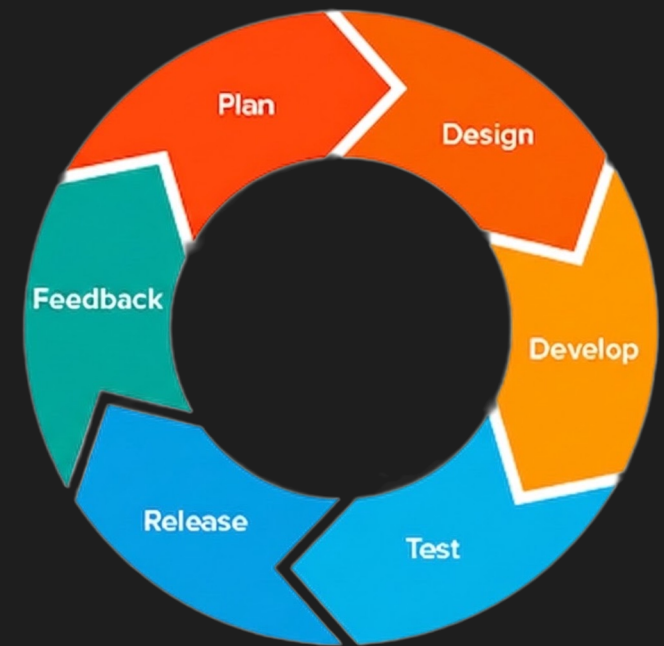
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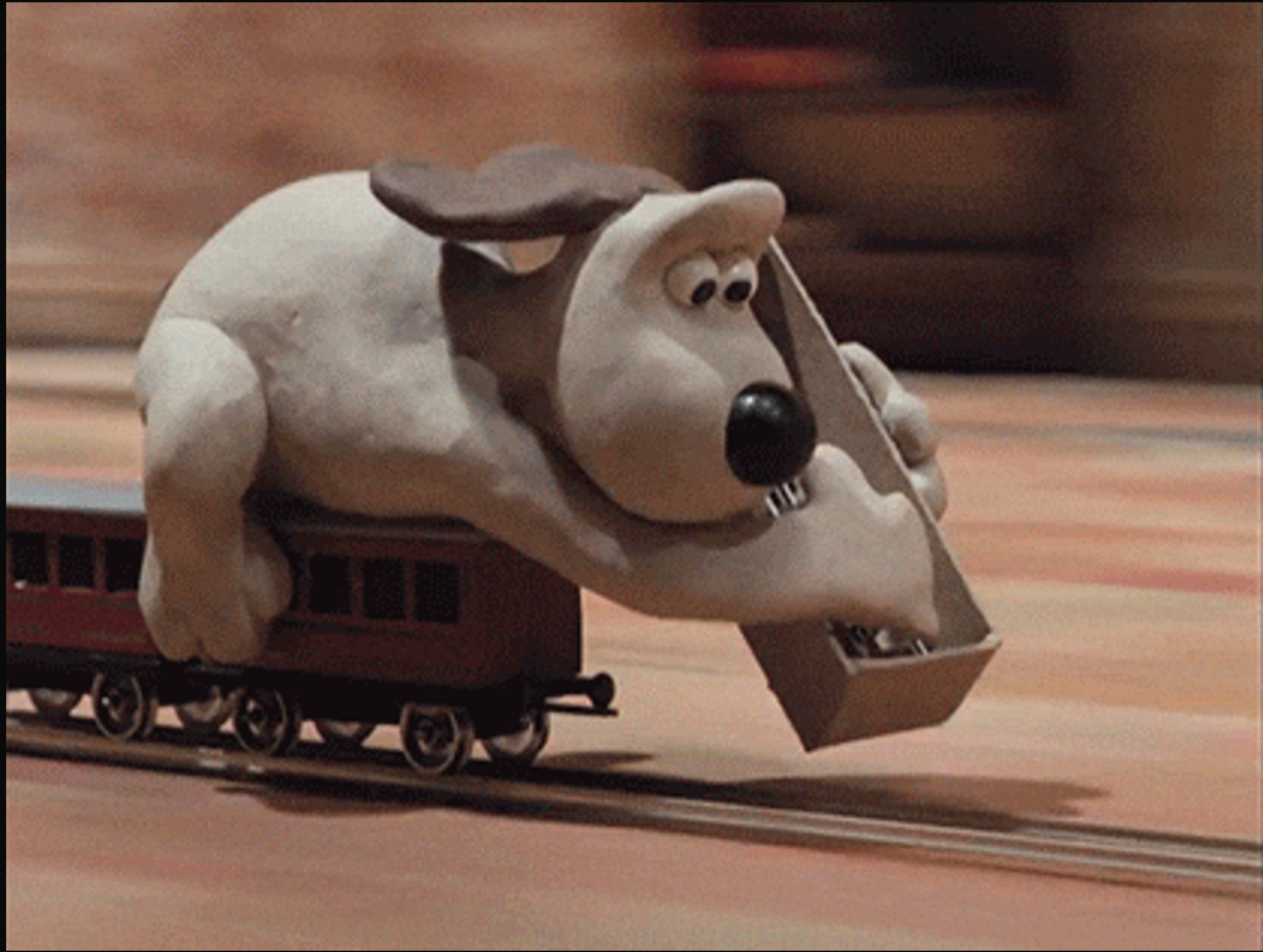
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THE AGILE LANDSCAPE IS CHANGING

PDX PMI - April 2026

Lorie Gordon, Agile Coach



AGENDA

- Introductions
- Agile: Quick Reset
- State of Agile
- Future of Agile
- What is Changing?
- Outcomes vs Outputs
- Business & Technical Acumen
- The Challenge of “Being the Glue”
- The Heart of Agile
- Continuous Evolution
- AI in Agile = Your Edge
- Agile Self-Reflections

A LITTLE BIT ABOUT ME

- ✈ Before software (Military - USAF)
- 🏢 Years in Software & Supply Chain Industries (30 years)
- 👤 Career (SW Eng, Lead, Sr Dev Mgr, Scrum Master. Lead Agile Coach)
- 👤 What I do now: Cross Team Agile Coach & AI OKR Lead
- 👤 Now what about you?



AGILE: QUICK RESET

Agile Foundations

- The shift from waterfall projects to thinking in iterative steps

Agile Manifesto

Individuals &
interaction

over processes
and tools

Working
solutions

over
comprehensive
documentation

Customer
collaboration

over contract
negotiation

Responding
to change

over following
a plan

<https://agilemanifesto.org/>

Agile Principles...

AGILE PRINCIPLES

The 12 Agile Principles

Customer Satisfaction



Changing Requirements



Frequent Delivery



Regular Communication



Motivated Individuals



Face-to-face meetings



Measure Outputs



**Sustainable
Development Processes**



**Technical Excellence
& Good Design**



Simplicity



Self-sufficient Teams



Continuous Improvement



<https://agilemanifesto.org/>

<https://www.scalablepath.com/project-management/12-agile-principles>

STATE OF AGILE

- Agile industry Timeline...
- Agile TODAY!
 - What we practice today looks very different
 - That version of Agile? It's not what we're living...
 - Expanding past software teams as businesses teams (* SMBs) also seek the newest ways of working by meeting teams where they are at
 - Confirm Vision, Mission, & Strategy & Define OKRs to set & ensure iterative business value
 - Value Stream Maps to remove\reduce waste
 - Dependency Mapping to expose risks early & establish realistic timelines + Stakeholder mappings to ensure feedback loops are engaged through frequent\continuous feedback
 - Help them with tools that makes sense for their business



- Stacey Louie, Hyperdrive
@ AONW 2026

AGILE... WHAT IS CHANGING?

- **Roles are blending**
 - SM, PM, Delivery, Coach -> overlapping
 - Scrum Master ≠ Just a Scrum Master
 - Agile Coach = roles now met with Unclear Definition
 - Project \ Delivery Managers expected to Understand and Educate Agile Principles
 - Titles are blending... but expectations are increasing at the same time
- **How Expectations are Increasing:**
 - Business Value Outcome Focused, not Output of the Team
 - Business AND Technical Acumen Necessary
 - Build & Lead Self-Sustaining Teams
- **Agile is expanding beyond Tech teams...** This is a great thing!



STABILITY OF AGILE

“The real need underneath is still very real

It was never supposed to be about another scaling model. It was supposed to be about how decisions get made, how funding moves, how quickly organizations can learn, and how fast they can redirect to close the bureaucratic gap between intention and customer value. That is what the Business Agility Labs were really trying to get at, even if a lot got in the way

So yes, the label may be losing energy. But the need behind it is not

Organizations still need to learn faster, adapt sooner, and close the gaps that slow value down. They need less theater, less bureaucracy, and a lot more honesty about what actually makes adaptability real”

- Ray Arell, NuAgility

FUTURE OF AGILE

“Agile Organizations don’t transform. They adapt before they have to

In the January 2026 issue of Harvard Business Review, the answer is simpler than many leaders expect: organizational agility

Organizations that break the cycle of constant restructuring tend to share three things:

- They detect shifts early, before small problems compound
- They empower teams closest to the work to act without waiting for approval
- They measure what matters and redesign metrics that get gamed

• **This way of thinking goes beyond frameworks**

Organizational agility = operating the way it's supposed to”

- Stacey Louie, Hyperdrive

AGILE IN FOCUS



Dami Owaseye, CBAP, PSM II, PSMO II, · Following · · ·
ICP-CAT

£10M+ Portfolio Delivery | Digital Product Delivery Manager | Sc...
1d · 🌐

Project management is a leadership role.
Full stop.
Not coordination.
Not task tracking.
Not an administrative function.

That misunderstanding is exactly why the profession is sometimes underappreciated and why the best PMs are trusted long before they are ever recognized.
Here is what the job actually looks like from the inside:

- ✅ Walking into rooms where priorities are unclear and facilitating decision making
- ✅ Aligning people who fundamentally disagree and still delivering together
- ✅ Translating vague executive direction into something a team can actually execute
- ✅ Holding tension when no one agrees and progress still has to happen
- ✅ Leading change without authority and delivering outcomes without control
- ✅ Absorbing pressure so the people around you can stay focused.



Dami Owaseye, CBAP, PSM II, PSMO II, · Following · · ·
ICP-CAT

£10M+ Portfolio Delivery | Digital Product Delivery Manager | Sc...
1w · 🌐

This week reminded me of something most teams don't talk about. Agile delivery doesn't break because people aren't working hard. It breaks in quieter ways.

- ✓ When priorities aren't fully aligned
- ✓ When "we'll figure it out later" becomes rework
- ✓ When decisions take longer than the work itself

From the outside, everything can still look fine.
Tickets are moving.
Meetings are happening.
Updates are being shared.

But underneath?
Momentum is leaking.
This week, one thing stood out clearly:
High-performing teams don't move faster because they work harder.

They move faster because:

- Ownership is clear
- Priorities are aligned
- Decisions are made early
- And uncomfortable truths are surfaced quickly

As we wrap up the week, take some time to reflect.
Are we busy...
or are we actually making progress?

-Dami Owaseye

AGILE: OUTCOMES ≠ OUTPUTS

- **It's Not Simply About Agile -> It's About OUTCOMES**

- Bottomline: are we helping our teams continuously deliver business value?

- **Outcomes vs. Outputs**

- Are we solving real problems? Are we making an impact?
- Because velocity and story points don't matter if value isn't there
- Still necessary to be predictable and plan...
 - With the understanding that iterative value reveals feedback, business problems, and better results for stakeholders and clients\customers
 - Changed plans elevate things and allow conversations for trade-offs to happen

BUSINESS + TECHNICAL ACUMEN

WE are the leaders to help bridge two worlds

- Speak business clearly
- Understand technical context

You NEED both Business AND Technical Acumen

BUSINESS:

- When leadership asks what's happening - can you explain it in 30 seconds or less?
- Not at an expert level - but enough to build trust & represent the team

TECHNICAL:

- When your team talks about tools or systems - do you actually understand what they're saying? Can you support them by asking the right prompts?"



STOP BEING THE GLUE

STOP Being the Glue!

- Glue = Bottleneck
- OUR role is to enable & grow connections so teams don't need us in the middle of all the time
- That's an important part of how we build autonomy within the teams

KEY: Stakeholder Mapping & Communication plans

- First, help your teams with stakeholder mapping
- With that you can co-design a communication plan with them for how & WHEN they interact with their stakeholders & partner teams



THE HEART OF AGILE

- **The Heart of Agile = People**
 - Are teams talking?
 - Are cameras ON when remote?
 - Do people feel SEEN, not just heard?
 - Is there TRUST?

Agile isn't a process problem... It's a human connection problem

High-performing teams aren't have strong relationship “wealth” through

- **Trust:** Allowing faster decision-making without constant oversight
- **Empathy:** Teams navigate roadblocks and support each other during "crunch" times
- **Shared Purpose:** Everyone is “rowing” in the same direction, reducing friction caused by misaligned goals

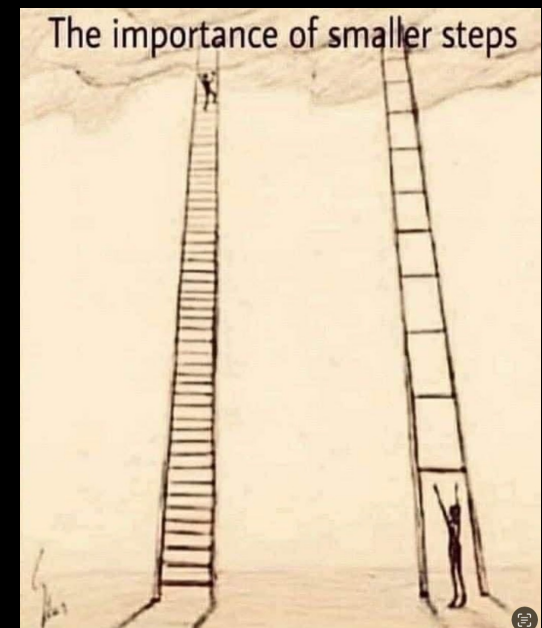
CONTINUOUS EVOLUTION

Retrospectives = Non-Negotiable

- No retro = no improvement
- Don't let leadership cut or shorten them

Retrospectives are the heartbeat of the team

- When we remove them (or rush them) - we remove the team's ability to reflect and improve
- Make them meaningful (not a check box); Create space for real conversation
- Ensure the team (AND leadership) see the value through measurable outcomes



AI IN AGILE = YOUR EDGE

AI Isn't Replacing You, It's Expanding You

- My Journey
 - Resistance
 - Listening
 - Experimenting
 - “Partnering”
- Prompt format basics
 - As a [role], I want [goal], so that [outcome]
 - “One good prompt deserves three”
- Reframing AI

AI “SECRETS”

- **Before I go further (NO commissions here),...**
- If you are new (or internally pedaling backward) on AI, Marina Alex offers a **free** intro that helped me gain my own AI momentum AND I am now leading internal OKRs to advance AI partnership through prompts* and Agents*
- Her goal is to advance “agile coaches” (insert role here) in leading SMBs
 - <https://www.swaysystem.com/offers/St9okLhS/checkout>
- She has a sales background and I’ve learned the most simplistic approach was to LISTEN, to hear the business needs, and THEN use my skills (without agile words) to help them resolve their current business problems
- AI is key to helping me\us finding our niche - to build trust and grow relationships; while also helping navigate tools all of us are just learning
- Next, I’ll share a few prompt examples!

AI EXAMPLES – PT 1

- PROMPT to break down an Epic:
 - Please review <EPIC> to determine what stories may be needed based on the guideline references below. Also please consider vertical slicing where possible + complete a gap analysis for any information we may have forgotten to add.
<GUIDELINE LINKS>
- PROMPT for Weekly Update
 - As a Program Manager, please help me provide a weekly update, based on <BOARD> 1. What Epics were closed\delivered this week (other than “Will Not Implement”) 2. What other incremental deliverables completed this week 3. what other key areas was the team focused on, but is not yet ready.

AI EXAMPLES - PT 2

- 2 PROMPTS for RETROS:
 - Based on the past two weeks, what areas might the team want to discuss in our next team retrospective based on the team's JIRA board: <BOARD>
 - Summarize the included document into an exec-ready readout (word document). Keep the context and key details, but make it concise and leadership-friendly. Group discussion into themes and patterns. For each theme, include 2 to 4 high-impact callouts that explain business impact, risks, and what leadership can do. End with a short 'Top 5 takeaways' section and a 'Leadership asks' section. Do not quote the contents verbatim, and avoid filler
- PROMPT for a new team:
 - As a new team member, based on the <JIRA SPACE>, what tools and technology should I be familiar with ?



AGILE SELF REFLECTIONS

“How do you show up?”

“What do you want to be known for?”

“Are you connecting people - or managing tasks?”

THE STATE OF AGILE



THE CHANGING AGILE LANDSCAPE

Q&A

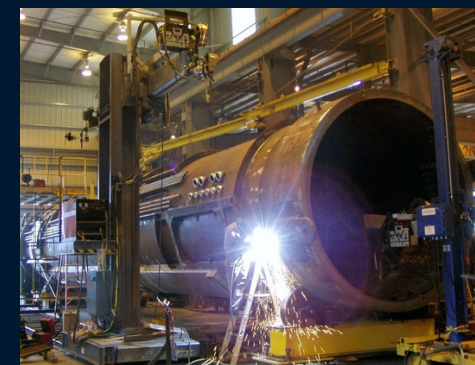
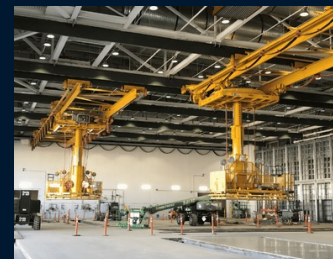
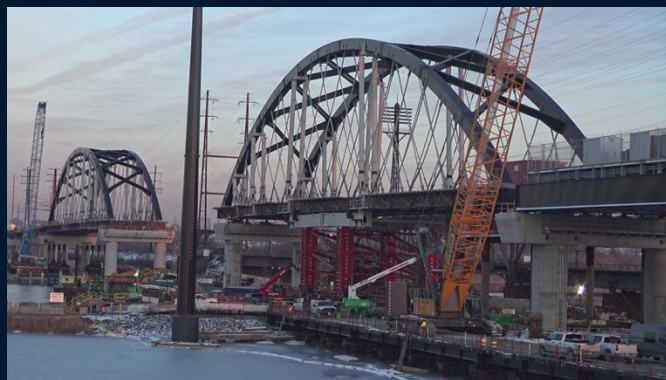
Welcome to:

WHAT UP WATERFALL



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Who am I



TRIMET



abbvie



ExxonMobil



U.S. Department of Defense

“What’s the first thing that comes to mind when you think of waterfall?”



WHAT PEOPLE SAY WATERFALL IS

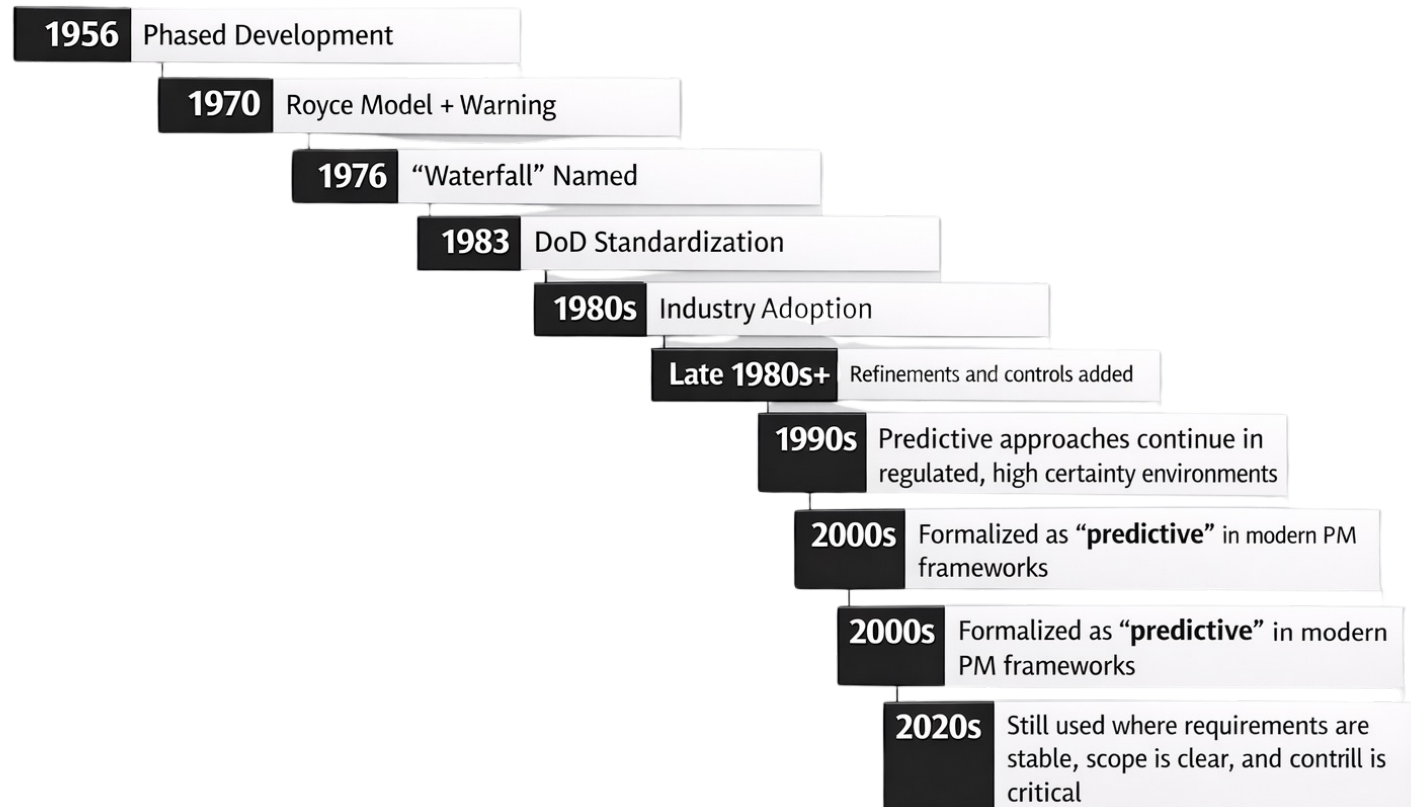
- "Waterfall is outdated"
- "It can't handle change"
- "It's too slow"
- "It only works on paper"



Predictive doesn't eliminate change. It controls how you respond to it.



Waterfall in Time



Be Water



**" Absorb what is useful,
discard what is useless,
and add what is specifically
your own"**

What Waterfall actually is

- Structured phases
- Decision gates
- Smart sequencing
- Risk-managed execution



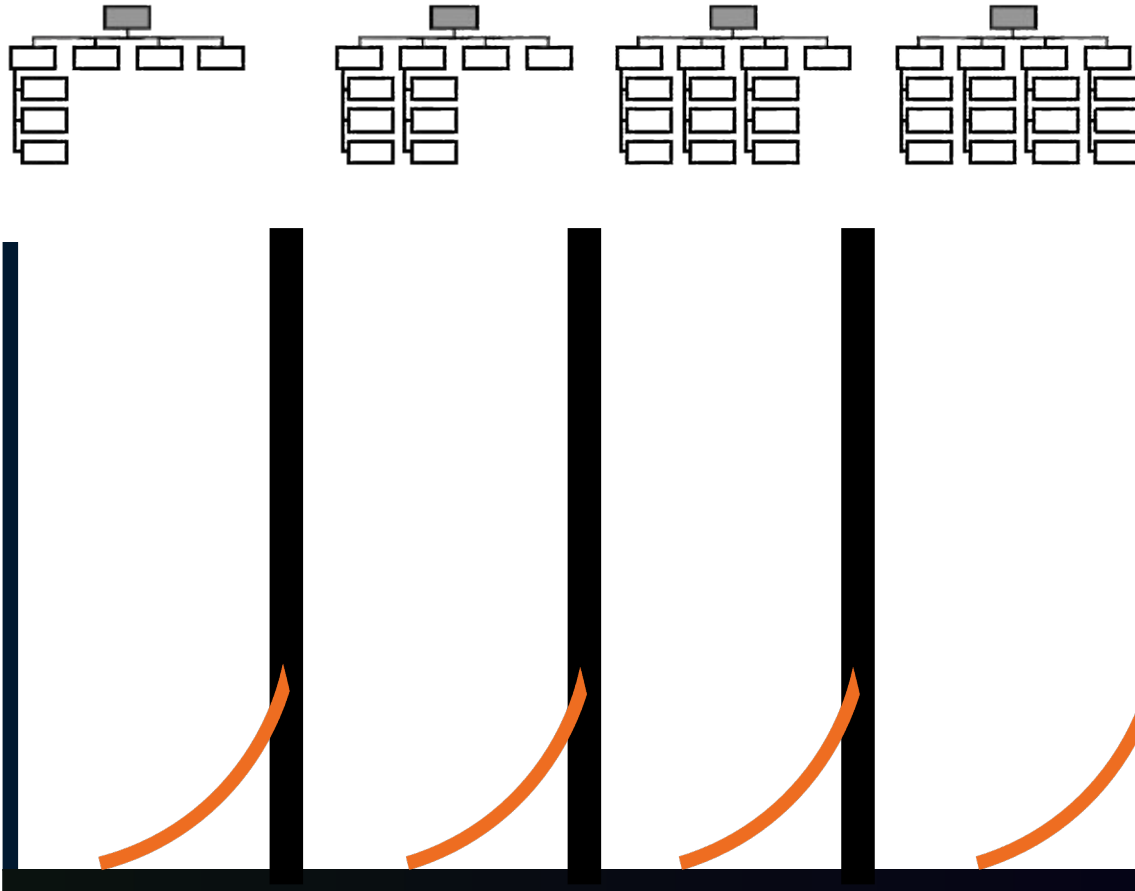
***What Got Us Here
Won't Get Us
There!***



How do you create flexibility in execution while still maintaining strict compliance with regulations, governance, and non negotiable requirements in a highly controlled environment?



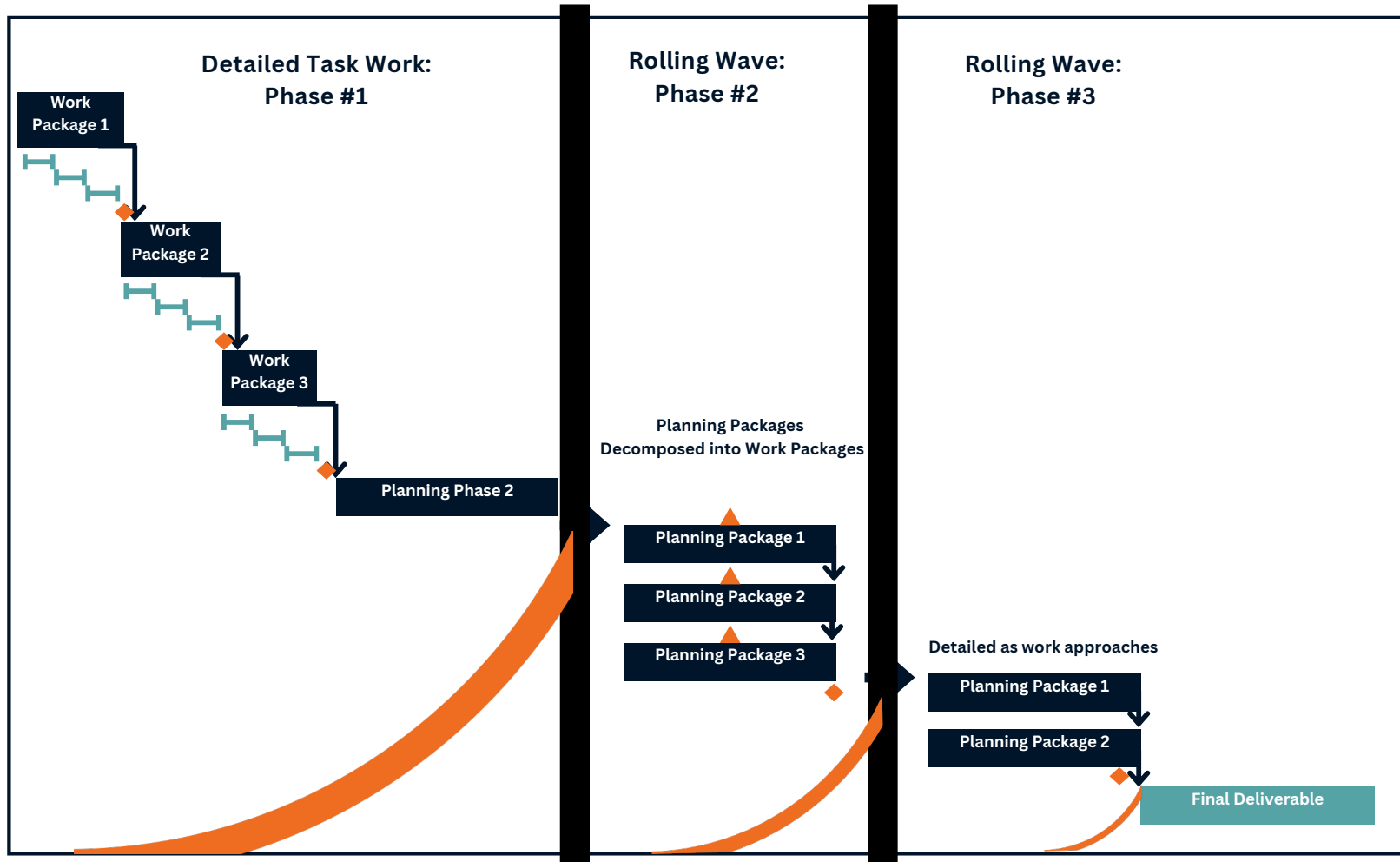
Rolling Wave



**“If you don’t know
where you are going,
you’ll end up someplace
else.” – Yogi Berra**



What Gets Scheduled Gets Done



M.O.R.E



M.O.R.E. WATERFALL

**Manage Perceptions
Own Project Success
Relentlessly Reassess
Expand Perspective**

**PROJECT
REVOLUTION**



M – MANAGE PERCEPTIONS

What it is

- Align stakeholders on success
- Ensure they see the value delivered

Why it matters

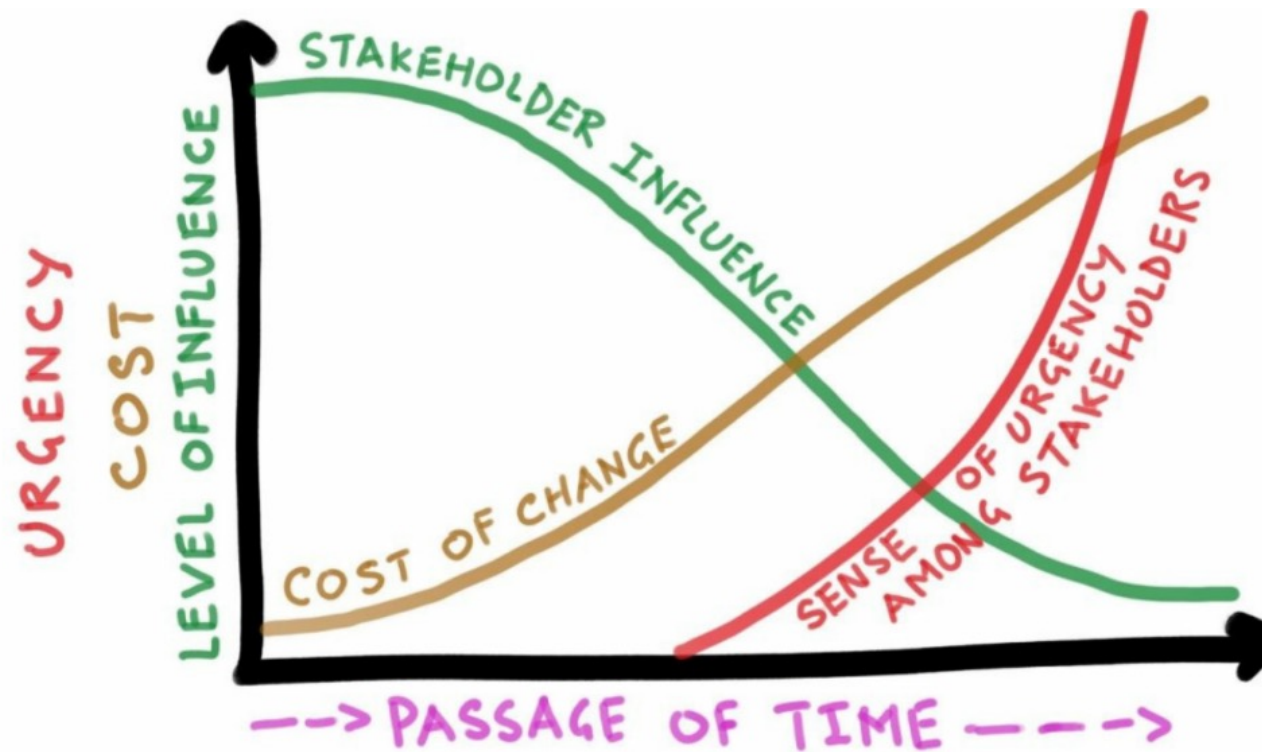
- If you don't align expectations early, you find out late and pay for it with time, cost, and rework

How to do it

- Use measures stakeholders actually care about.
- Align on those metrics upfront.
- Reassess perception as the project unfolds.



M - MANAGE PERCEPTIONS



O – OWN SUCCESS

What it is

- Deliver outcomes tied to business value, not just complete tasks

Why it matters

- If we are not working on the highest value task
- We are majoring in the minors

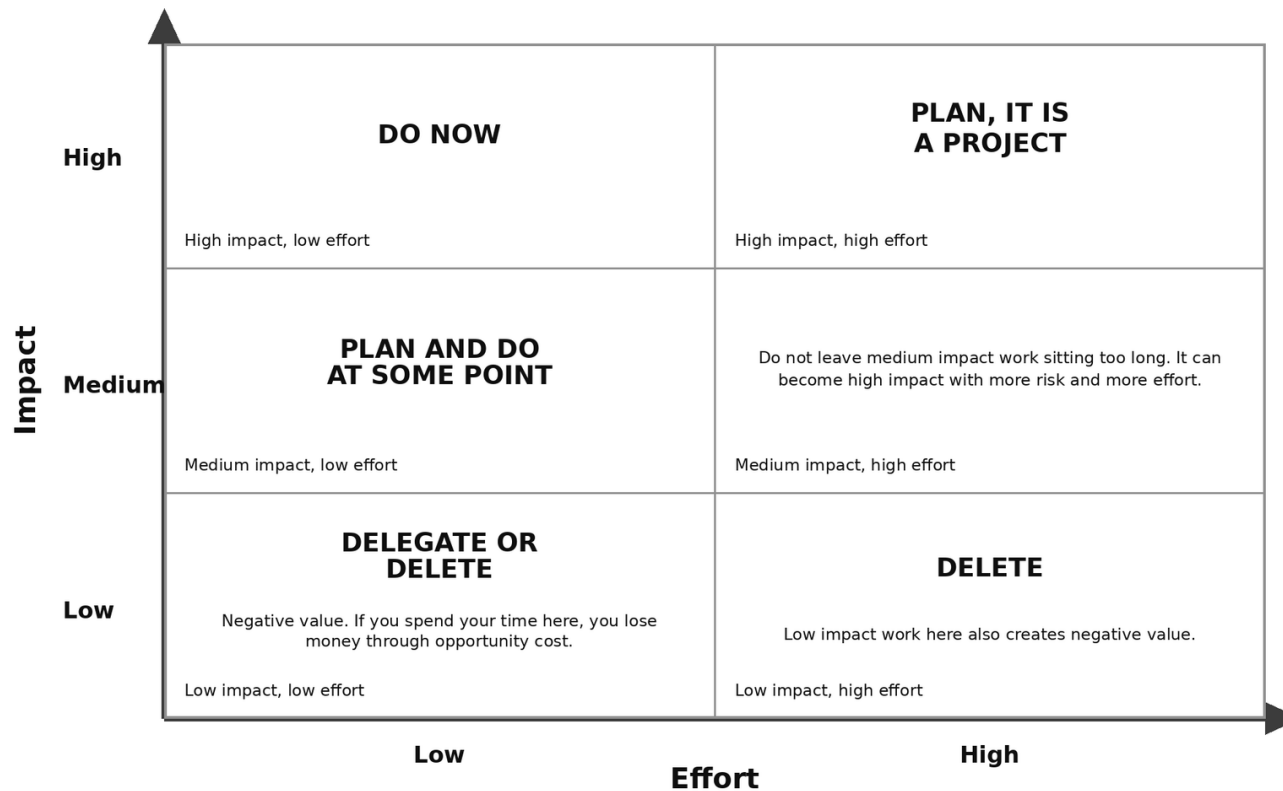
How we do it

- Build work packages around value delivery.
- Break them down and get team buy in.
- Use 80/20 thinking to focus effort where it matters most.



O - OWN SUCCESS

Impact vs Effort



R – RELENTLESSLY REASSESS

What it is

- Continuously evaluate progress, risk, and assumptions

Why it matters

- If we do not track and reassess regularly, we will not know we are off until it is expensive to recover.

How we do it

- Track metrics, budgets, and progress visibly.
- Use checkpoints to compare reality to the plan.
- Adjust based on complexity, change, and risk.
- Use the stakes in the ground.

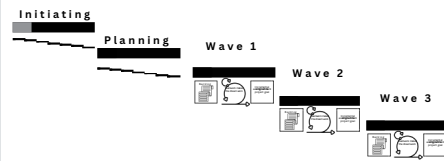


R - RELENTLESSLY REASSESS

Control Panel

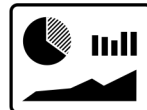
Schedule

Rolling Wave



EV Metrics

BAC	BCWS	ACWP	BCWP	CPI	SPI	EAC	VAC	TCPI



Risk Register

Risk	Impact: What will happen if not mitigated?	Cost of Impact	Probability: High, medium, or low?	Recovery Plan: Yes or no

RADAR

Risk	Action Plan	Dependencies	Activation	Result

Communication Matrix

1.	R A C I P N
2.	R A C I P N
3.	R A C I P N
4.	R A C I P N
5.	R A C I P N
6.	R A C I P N
7.	R A C I P N
8.	R A C I P N
9.	R A C I P N



E – EXPAND PERSPECTIVE

What it is

- Connect the project to broader business and stakeholder impact

Why it matters

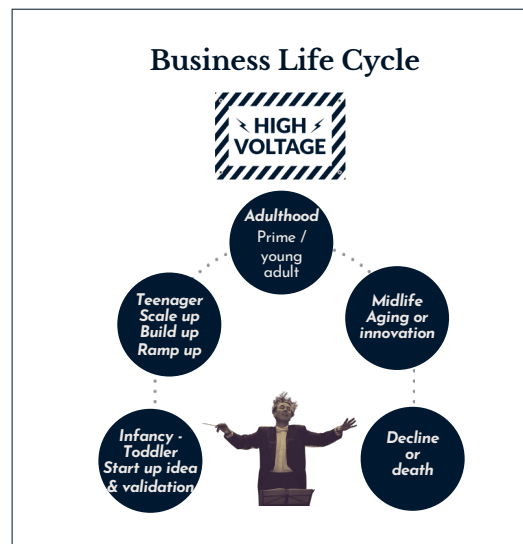
- Delivering the work doesn't mean it created value, if it doesn't solve a real problem, it's not success.

How we do it

- Understand business goals and constraints
- Include multiple stakeholder perspectives
- Think beyond the immediate deliverable



E – EXPAND PERSPECTIVE



Addressing Business Problems

Problem Types:

- **Normal**: Handle internally with existing resources.
- **Abnormal**: Seek external help to avoid disruptions.
- **Pathological**: Take immediate action to prevent decline.

Operational Excellence

Optimization:

- Enhance processes to achieve maximum efficiency and productivity.

Standardization:

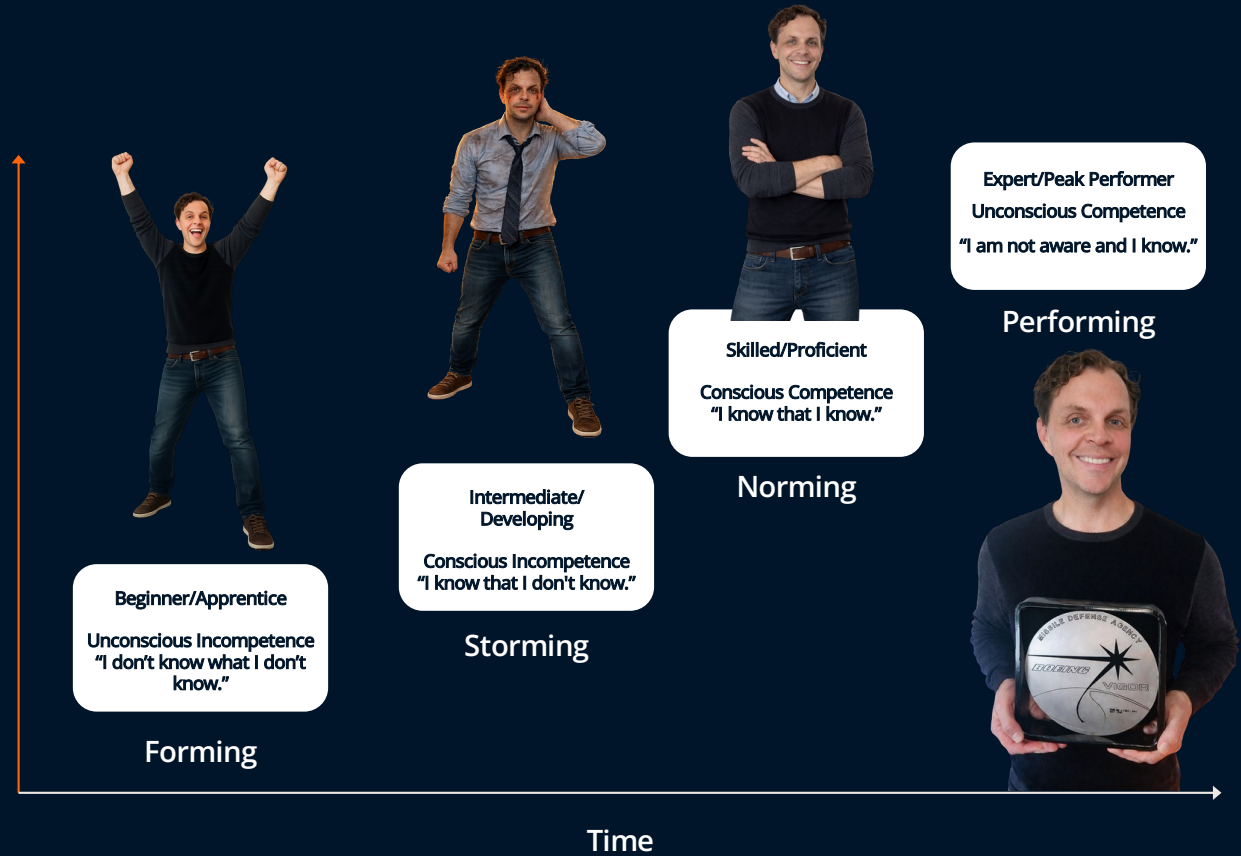
- Implement consistent procedures across the organization for uniformity and scalability.

Maximization:

- Fully utilize resources to expand capacity and output to their fullest potential.

Don't Forget to Plan Team Development

Skill Development



**“Plans are of little
importance, but planning
is essential.” – Winston
Churchil**



What Stood Out?

- What was your biggest insight or shift today?
- How will you use this in your next real conversation?
- What's one action you'll take right away?



JEREMIAH HAMMON, PMP

Lead Facilitator & CEO, Project Revolution

team@projectrevolutionllc.com

projectrevolutionllc.com

[LinkedIn Click Here](#)



The Response Zoo

Decoding Stakeholder Behavior in Complex Change

Sarah Parsons | strategysarah.com

The Response Zoo is built on a simple but consequential idea: behavior is communication. Every response you see in an initiative - the Badger who comes in hot, the Opossum who goes quiet, the Porcupine who creates friction without drama - is telling you something about what that person needs, what feels threatening, and what conditions would let them engage differently. Ross Greene, who studied the most challenging behavior in classrooms, put it plainly: people do well if they can. If they could, they would. The same is true in your conference rooms.

The Eight Archetypes

THE ELK

Commands the room. Moves the herd.

POSITIVE EXPRESSION

The most powerful ally you can convert. When an Elk endorses the change, others follow without being asked. A converted Elk builds momentum that no communications plan can manufacture.

CHALLENGING EXPRESSION

Moves the herd in whatever direction they are pointed. Skepticism spreads faster than your plan. An Elk who has not been consulted will make that known publicly.

WHAT DRIVES IT

The Elk responds to being genuinely consulted, not told. Their nervous system is wired for social leadership -- they need to be part of the decision, not informed of it. If they find out the same way everyone else does, that is already a problem.

ACTIVATION Get there before the announcement, not to give a heads up, but to genuinely ask for input on implementation. Give them something specific to lead: a working group, pilot team, or communication role. A converted Elk does not just support the change -- they carry it.

THE RAVEN

Watches everything. Speaks when it is worth saying.

POSITIVE EXPRESSION

Early warning system. Surfaces insights the project team missed. Catches logical gaps before they become operational problems. When trusted, makes your change better.

CHALLENGING EXPRESSION

Circles overhead without landing. Commentates from a distance, smart, pointed, often right, but will not fully commit. Can shift room energy before you have had a chance to respond.

WHAT DRIVES IT

They are evaluating whether the effort is worth their intelligence. The Raven will not engage fully until they trust the plan and the people running it. Their silence is assessment, not disengagement.

ACTIVATION Bring them in early and privately. Ask for their analysis specifically: "I want your read on where this breaks down." When they are right, say so directly. If they are circling in group settings, give them a structured role.

THE COYOTE

Resourceful, adaptive, already three steps ahead.

POSITIVE EXPRESSION

Solves problems the project team did not know existed. Keeps things moving when bureaucracy would stall them. When aligned, finds the fastest path through adoption.

CHALLENGING EXPRESSION

Goes rogue. Builds workarounds that technically achieve the goal but undermine the standard. Shares them with enough colleagues that you now have two parallel processes running.

WHAT DRIVES IT

The Coyote has a strong drive for autonomy. The official path is too slow or does not make sense, so they find their own. This is not defiance -- it is how their nervous system works. They need a path they have chosen, not one handed to them.

ACTIVATION Involve in process design. Their workarounds are often genuinely better, and incorporating them officially converts an independent operator into a co-owner. Give them a legitimate sandbox and be clear about which constraints are real.

THE BADGER

Fierce, territorial, committed to protecting what matters.

POSITIVE EXPRESSION

When converted: your most tenacious ally. Fights for the change with the same ferocity they fought against it. Protects things that genuinely deserve protecting.

CHALLENGING EXPRESSION

Attacks first, asks questions later. Creates a combative atmosphere in group settings. Can make others reluctant to engage. Feels personal. Usually is not.

WHAT DRIVES IT

The Badger is in a fight response. Something they value is threatened, or they believe it is. Ross Greene would say: find the unsolved problem underneath the challenging behavior. "What are you trying to protect?" is the right question.

ACTIVATION Meet privately first -- the Badger in a group setting is performing for an audience. Ask directly: "What are you trying to protect?" If their concern is legitimate, say so and address it explicitly. If you cannot address it, do not pretend you can.

THE PORCUPINE

Not aggressive. Just very uncomfortable to approach when threatened.

POSITIVE EXPRESSION

Loyal, steady, durable trust. Because that trust was

CHALLENGING EXPRESSION

Every interaction has extra drag. Never says no, never quite says

WHAT DRIVES IT

The quills are a warning signal, not aggression. The nervous

hard-won, it holds. The Porcupine will not abandon you when the initiative gets hard -- they have already decided you are worth the risk.

yes. The accumulated weight of Porcupine friction across a team slows adoption without there ever being a visible moment of resistance.

system has learned that moving too fast toward new things costs something. They need safety before they can move -- and reassurance is not safety. Specificity is.

ACTIVATION Go slow -- moving faster makes things slower. Acknowledge what is hard specifically, not generically: "I know this shift changes how you run your Tuesday process" lands; "I know change is difficult" does not. Name explicitly what is not changing.

THE OPOSSUM

Goes still, goes quiet, waits to see if danger passes.

POSITIVE EXPRESSION

Observant and adaptive once safe. They have been watching the whole time and have more information than they have let on. Because they waited, their adoption tends to stick.

CHALLENGING EXPRESSION

Passive non-adoption. Checks neutral in surveys. Says "sounds good" in the hallway. Six months post-launch you find out they never changed a single behavior. Hard to catch because they are not visibly resistant.

WHAT DRIVES IT

This is a freeze response -- the nervous system has gone still because stillness feels safer than exposure. Psychological safety is the only thing that moves an Opossum. You cannot logic them out of a nervous system state.

ACTIVATION Do not mistake silence for agreement. Build explicit check-in mechanisms: not "any questions?" but "tell me one thing that feels unclear." Create low-stakes, small-group engagement. Show them evidence the change is real and lasting before expecting commitment.

THE TORTOISE

Deliberate, protected, built to outlast.

POSITIVE EXPRESSION

Quality control for the initiative. Catches implementation problems fast movers create by skipping steps. When the Tortoise finally moves, they have committed fully and they do not reverse course.

CHALLENGING EXPRESSION

Digs in at critical junctures. Slows momentum when you need it most. Has seen enough initiatives come and go to wait for evidence this one is actually different.

WHAT DRIVES IT

William Bridges distinguishes between change and transition. The Tortoise may still be completing the internal transition from the last change -- finishing the Ending before they can begin the new thing. Their pace is not stubbornness. It is process.

ACTIVATION Give full information early -- not a summary, the actual details. Build in real processing time. Pair them with a peer who has already made the move. Never mistake their pace for their position: a Tortoise who has not said yes yet has not said no.

THE SALMON

Built to move upstream. Does not need favorable conditions. Gets there anyway.

POSITIVE EXPRESSION

Creates momentum others follow. Models behavior change visibly and early. Normalizes the new way of working through their own example. When a team has an activated Salmon, adoption curves shorten measurably.

THE SALMON'S CHALLENGE

Their challenging expression is not resistance -- it is pace. They move so fast they lose the Tortoises, exhaust the Porcupines, and create adoption gaps that look fine on the surface but are not.

FOR CHANGE LEADERS Identify your Salmon early and give them a formal champion role. Coach them on the pace gap. The most valuable thing a Salmon can do is slow down enough to bring someone with them. Protect them from burnout -- they will keep going long after they should have rested.

Three Activation Principles

01

READ THE BEHAVIOR BEFORE YOU MANAGE IT

Every animal is communicating something. Before you decide what to do, ask what you are being told. The Badger is telling you something feels threatened. The Opossum is telling you something does not feel safe. Start there.

02

CHANGE THE CONDITIONS, NOT THE PERSON

You cannot argue someone out of a nervous system state. What works is changing the environment -- the setting, the stakes, the level of safety. The private conversation. The small group. The explicit acknowledgment of what is not changing.

03

NAME WHAT IS NOT CHANGING

Every change communication focuses on what is new. But what is staying the same is just as important -- especially for Tortoises, Porcupines, and Opossums. Include it explicitly: "Here is what changes. Here is what does not."

Common Hybrid Animals

In practice, people are rarely one animal. The hybrid naming convention is intentional. "Your Raven-Badger is showing" creates professional distance that makes feedback land.

HYBRID	WHAT YOU ARE DEALING WITH	FIRST MOVE
Raven-Badger	Sees everything AND will fight for what they believe. Your most formidable combination.	Bring in early with a substantive role. Private conversation and specific analytical ask.
Elk-Raven	Highly influential AND highly analytical. Smart enough to find the gaps, powerful enough to make them everyone's problem.	Your highest-stakes stakeholder. Consult early, give them something real to own.
Tortoise-Porcupine	Slow AND defended. Requires patience and specificity in equal measure.	Go slow, give depth of information, name what is constant. Earned trust is durable.

HYBRID	WHAT YOU ARE DEALING WITH	FIRST MOVE
Coyote-Elk	Creative AND influential. When they go rogue, they take people with them. When converted, they build movements.	Involve in design early. Give legitimate territory before they create their own.
Coyote-Opossum	Goes quiet AND goes rogue. Silent non-compliance with infrastructure behind it.	Do not mistake silence for acceptance or inaction. Ask them to walk you through how they are actually running the process.
Opossum-Porcupine	Quiet AND defended. Most invisible stakeholder in your map. High turnover risk post-change.	Build explicit adoption checkpoints. Do not discover them missing after the fact.
Salmon-Elk	Change champion with followership. Rare and powerful. Can carry an entire initiative.	Give a formal champion role immediately. Point them toward the animals still on the journey.

This framework works on yourself as well as your stakeholders. The most useful question is not just "which animal is my Badger?" It is "which animal am I in this initiative, and am I expressing the positive version or the challenging one?" Self-awareness is where this goes from a diagnostic tool to a leadership practice.

The Psychology This Framework Draws From

The Response Zoo is grounded in several bodies of research on behavior, nervous system states, and what makes change possible at the human level.

Ross Greene The Explosive Child / Lost at School	Behavior as communication; collaborative problem solving; people do well if they can.
Stephen Porges Polyvagal Theory	Three nervous system states: ventral vagal (safe, engaged), sympathetic (fight/flight), dorsal vagal (freeze). Behavior is a function of state, not character.
Amanda Diekman The PDA Paradox	Pathological -- or Pervasive -- Demand Avoidance: when the nervous system experiences demands as threats. Low-demand approaches and autonomy restore capacity.
Brene Brown Daring Greatly / The Gifts of Imperfection	Psychological safety and vulnerability as prerequisites for engagement, not luxuries.
Amy Edmondson The Fearless Organization	Team psychological safety as the single strongest predictor of team performance.
William Bridges Transitions	The distinction between change (external event) and transition (internal psychological process). The Ending must be honored before the New Beginning can begin.

