Ashby's law of requisite variety describes how the controlling mechanism of a system must be capable of representing what is being controlled. Organisations are both complicated and complex things. They are generally *complicated* because they have a large scope, contain many components that require specialisation and are difficult to grasp and manage. They are also *complex* because there are many emergent behaviours. For example, they have many components in the uncharted space for which there is uncertainty and you cannot predict this. The best you can do here is to feel your way. Whilst mapping provides you with a window onto this, you need to have a management capability able to cope with it.

There is unfortunately another solution to Ashby's law. Instead of coping with a complicated environment that contains complexity, you make the choice to pretend that what is being managed is simple. In business, we like things such as 2x2 diagrams not because they represent reality but because they obscure it and hence are easy to understand. We trade-off our ability to continuously learn about the environment for an illusion of simplicity and easy management.

It's important to make a distinction here. The act of taking something complicated (like a machine) and breaking it down into small but manageable components or using a mechanism to sense uncertain change in a complex environment is not the same as trying to manage such a system by pretending it's a 2x2 matrix. As Einstein would say *"Everything should be made as simple as possible, but no simpler"*