

HELLO

Presentation by Christopher Curley to the ALN Scrum Master Focus Group
15 March 2017
6:30pm to 8:00pm Eastern

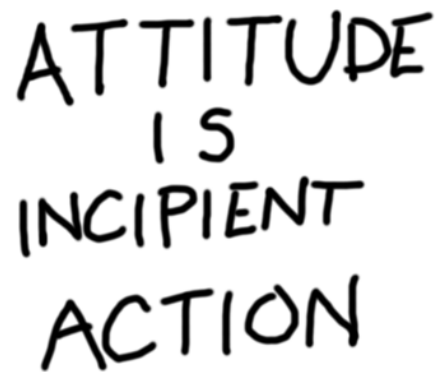
1. This is my spectacular slide deck made with only the highest quality presentation tools.... The purpose is to keep me on focus during the discussion and to keep us focused on the topics at hand.
2. I've included the details in the speaker's notes to keep the conversation focused on the room and not on the slide deck.
3. About me:
 - Teaching the material for years.
 - Mostly to students of AP Government and AP History
 - Tried to teach it as consultants to a business clients. Didn't go over all well.
 - Most of the group that I was working with gave up on it.... But I continue to be stubborn about it.
4. Bio (generic text about the person yammering at you)
"Christopher Curley is a project and operations professional with more than twenty years of experience in R&D, Information Technology, and Business Operations.

An Agile practitioner since 2004, Christopher has coached small teams, coordinated Scrum of Scums, and implemented Agile at scale across global enterprises. He has enabled project delivery and DevOps improvements in small business concerns to Fortune 100 organizations.

Christopher's professional research focuses on Agile and epistemology, developing and applying meta-languages to improve how teams think to purpose before taking purposeful action. His goal is to continuously advance the understanding of cognition in the practical empiricism of Agile practices.

Christopher is a graduate of the Schreyer Honors College at Penn State with BAs in Political Science and History. He holds PMP, CSM, CSPO, and SAFe SA certifications. He is an active member of the Research Triangle Park Agile Leadership Network (ALN). He lives in Durham, North Carolina with his wife, Kelly, and an ever-changing number of dogs they rescue."

Honestly, writing about myself in third person is strange experience.

A black and white image showing the phrase "ATTITUDE IS INCIPIENT ACTION" written in a bold, hand-drawn, sans-serif font. The text is centered within a thin black rectangular border. The letters are slightly irregular, giving it a hand-drawn appearance. The word "IS" is smaller and positioned between "ATTITUDE" and "INCIPIENT".

ATTITUDE
IS
INCIPIENT
ACTION

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1. Despite all the complicated conversation why we need to be concerned with Agile attitudes, I can explain it in four words:
 - “Attitude is incipient action”
 - Incipient: emergent, forming
2. When acting purposefully, we have to first think to purpose
 - Thinking to purpose is description, prediction, and choice
 - How we think about something before we act determines the range of actions select from
3. So, how we think about something before we act shapes the action, and how we think about something is shaped by our attitude

This is not the same as “having a positive attitude.” Being optimistic that falling out of an airplane without a parachute will not lever a favorable outcome. Accepting the impending transition with grace and dignity might be the best you can do.

I say this because businesses that “have a positive attitude that sales will improve if we just set our minds to it,” may be trying “have a positive attitude about falling out of an airplane without a parachute.”

Instead, we need to have an attitude that seeks data, thinks purposefully about that data, and then takes purposeful action – and if the outcomes of that action are not what we expect, then that is data that drives an adjustment.

The universe is a big place with a lot of stuff in it.

In order to deal with a really big universe, we filter in data we think will be important to us and filter out the data that we think we can live without. What we filter in is a tiny bit of the universe. Mostly, we filter out or fail to perceive a massive amount of data. If we could understand the universe, we'd have to be the universe.

Our attitude influences the filters we employ to take in or throw away data.

What we take in and throw away necessarily limits the range of options we make available to us. The attitude we start out with narrows our field of vision. It's unavoidable that we have to do this, because the whole of the world is too big for us.

If we don't pay careful attention to the attitude we start with, then we're including or excluding certain options without properly understanding that we've just made a choice – an attitudinal choice – that will set us on a particular path at the exclusion of other possible paths.

"Action by all means. But in a complex world, there are many kinds of action. Action requires programs -- programs require vocabulary. To act wisely, in concert, we use many words. If we use the wrong words, words that divide up the field inadequately, we obey false cues. We must name the friendly and unfriendly functions and relationships in such a way that we are able to do something about them. In naming them, we form our characters, since the names embody attitudes; and implicit in the attitudes are the cues of behavior....
...it is an act for you to attempt changing your attitudes, or the attitudes of others."

. Burke, *Attitudes Toward History*, 4.

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Scrum is an empirical framework. It is founded on empiricism

So, we need data.

We need a way to detect that data.

Then, we need a framework or a context to put that data into in order to act to purpose: to describe, predict, or choose.

The tools we use and the framework we use with those tools involves words.

Words are the tools we are working with. Words are what we use when we communicate at planning, stand ups, reviews, retros and demos.

When we're dealing with detecting attitudes and taking action on attitudes, our tools in BOTH detecting AND acting on attitudes are WORDS.

Google Kenneth Burke.

YES = ~NO
~YES = NO

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1. There's a problem of "yes" and "no"
 - We think of yes as being on one side of an range, and no is the extreme opposite on the other end.
 - But, "yes" also means "not no" and "no" also means "not yes"
2. Here's an example:
 - If I pick a person and focus my attention on that person, am I focused on that one person or am I ignoring the room
 - If I ignore that one person, would I be embracing the whole of the room?
3. Did that idiot just tell us that "yes is no, and no is yes???"
 - Pretty much, yeah
 - And, this has been a problem vexing philosophers for a heck of a long time.
4. If you think this is irrelevant to the practical matters of being a scrum master, let me try this:
 - Did your organization say hold up the Agile Manifesto and the Scrum Guide and say, this will accelerate our performance greatly!
 - Did your organization say, "if we don't find a way to deliver products faster, the competition is going to eat our lunch."
5. One is a turning toward Agile, one is a turning away from Waterfall

- Turning toward Agile is a focus on Agile
 - Turning away from Waterfall is turning towards many other things, that we can call Agile
1. Which one is your organization embracing? Remember, attitude is incipient action
 - Turning towards Agile cues up one set of actions based on alternatives focused deliberately on Agile and Scrum, implicitly turning away from Waterfall. The field is divided up with a focus on the qualities of Agile that will make the organization successful
 - Turning away from Waterfall (implicitly embracing Agile NOT because of the qualities of Agile, but because of the failures and frustrations of Waterfall) divides up the field with a focus on why Waterfall DOES NOT WORK and not with an emphasis on why Agile does
 2. Seriously, doesn't that explain a whole hell of a lot about why Agile succeeds in some teams and fails in others?



COLLECT
SAMPLE
DATA

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Quick pole:

- "I prefer something that tastes bad to something that tastes good"
- "I prefer working with a bunch of fools to working with a team of heroes"
- "I prefer to fail the first time I try something to succeeding immediately."

The first question establishes a baseline of general preferences, makes sure there are no outliers

The second question establishes a baseline in the domain of Scrum teams

The third question designed to disturb the team and get the team thinking

Well, okay, actually, the second question is the key question and the third question is the MacGuffin (Google it ;))

A team of fools, of course, is a team with a "foolish attitude," an attitude where failure is the result not of

- The whim of the gods (or executives)
- The fatal flaw in our nature (this is the way we've always done it)
- The woeful state we're in (this just sucks)
- The public agreement we make about the thing we privately disagree about (and

won't do anything about because even though we said we agreed, we don't)

- The ridiculous caricature we've made of our organization
- A team of fools treats all of the causes of failures as foibles, folly (not fate, not destiny, not burden, wickedness), just foolishness. The fool falls down, then gets up again.
- We want a team of fools.

$f(\text{metaphor}): \text{compare}(A, B)$

$f(\text{metonymy}): \text{reduce}(A \rightarrow \{a \in A\})$

$f(\text{synecdoche}): \text{substitute}(A \rightarrow B \mid B \rightarrow A)$

$f(\text{irony}): \text{synthesize}(A, B) \rightarrow C$

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Four definitions

- Metaphor
- Metonymy
- Synecdoche
- Irony

Using metaphor, we communicate something new by comparing it to something known. "This new thing, which is unfamiliar to you, is a lot like this other thing that you're already familiar with." We can easily convey a heavy work load with aggressive deadlines and ambitious objectives as "drinking from a firehose;" and, we can "get on the same page" without having to itemize all the facts that will help foster an agreement about what really matters. This comparative association accelerates understanding.

Metonymy reduces something into a part from its whole. The sailor is a hand; the scholar, a brain. We can reduce something down to its essential characteristics; or, we can abuse metonymy by objectifying or discriminating. Reducing down the piranha fish to be "one large set of teeth" may help you survive the rivers of South America.

At the same time, reducing down is the chief tool of the bigot and chauvinist.

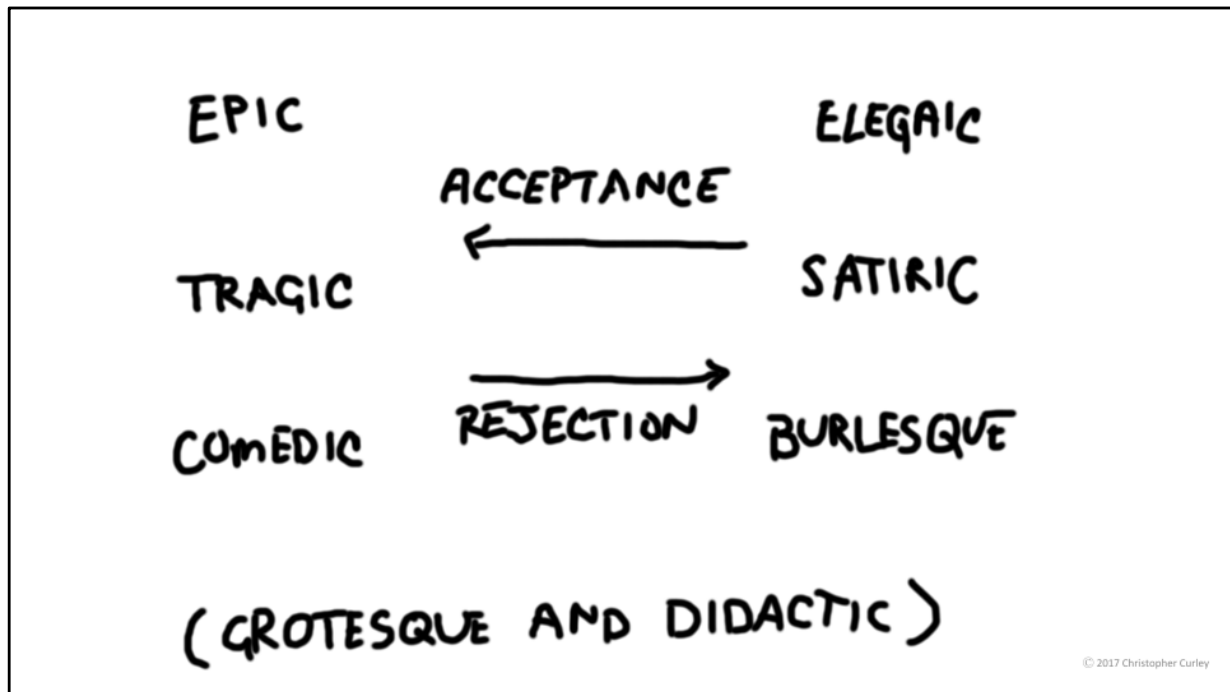
Synecdoche substitutes "a whole" with "another whole." Consider the difference between "A senior spokesperson for the Chief Executive read a prepared statement about a policy position arrived at by the President's staff and advisors and approved of by the President himself..." with "The White House said...." Or, imagine a map of a city that is actually the size of a city, and each feature of that city is on the map on a one to one scale; could you use this map? A functional map substitutes the "whole" of whatever it is it depicts with a "symbolic representation of that whole."

Unlike the metonym (the reduction of something to a part), the substitution in a synecdoche is bi-directional. If I look at the spokesperson, I can see the White House; and, when I look at the White House, I can see the spokesperson. They are *interchangeable* without losing meaning. When I look at a mountain range, I expect to see the mountain range on the map before I consult it. Likewise, if I see mountains represented on a map, I expect to see those mountains when I look up. We use synecdoche to make the unwieldy manageable while obeying rules of symmetry. Substitution without symmetry will lead you put you on the wrong road – if you say “the forth floor said,” but the EXECUTIVES DON’T REALLY agree, then this is NOT a bi-directional substitution – this is a mess.

Irony is the most complicated of the four. It has three parts: a statement, a counter statement, and meaning we arrive at from combining the two. Irony synthesizes these the two parts into a third meaning.

The phrase "servant leader" is irony. The common or day-to-day definitions of these terms are in opposition to one another. That is, a servant is generally understood as one who *follows*. These two terms need to be synthesized into a new meaning. Without synthesis, the terms in the phrase compete. Team members will choose to emphasize one over the other. Typically, the Scrum Master leans to "leader" and the team leans to "servant." These ideas can be -- and frequently are -- synthesized successfully to mean, "leading the team by keeping them on the right path and making sure they've got what they need," or something similar. Of course, each team member can synthesize these terms in different ways, so the wise "servant leader" will start a discussion with the team to collaboratively synthesize these terms into an agreed-to meaning.

Whenever you have “irony” you have to get agreement about what it means. People will synthesize meanings into lots of different ways.



This is the framework we use to put the tropes into context

Acceptance (turning TOWARD, emphasis on “Yes” to SOMETHING in particular with a lot of “implicit NOs”)

- Epic Heroes – Endure (surviving is our nature, we can’t change nature or the whimsy of the gods)
- Tragic Heroes - Atone (wickedness is our nature, we’re fated from the start)
- Comedic Fools – Learn (we’re fools, our acts are prone to folly, foibles lead to confusion and conflict, but learning resolves the crisis)

Rejection

- The elegiac suffers (woe is me, this just sucks!)
- The satirist turns the rules inside out (public agreement, private disagreement)
- The burlesque ridicules (this is Scrum with roles, events, OR artifacts WITHOUT the ‘rules that bind them.’)

The Epic team endures the things they can't control. In the epic, the hero accepts what he or she can do nothing about. The gods harry heroes with obstacles to torment humans, and it's the heroes' burden to endure. And, so with the gods, it can

be the same with executives, directors, and managers. What the epic hero accepts is the need to deal with whatever it is he or she is facing. The hero doesn't attempt to change the situation or the circumstances they find themselves in. The Epic team copes.

They "weather storms." They "fight fires." They execute the stupid instructions of capricious leaders, because it's their "duty to just get it done."

The Tragic team accepts the flaws in the team culture without ever learning from them, fixing them, or changing them. Instead they suffer these flaws with long hours, weekends of work, re-work, and burn out.

At the heart of tragedy is the tragic flaw. That is the hero's destiny. Tragedy deals with fate.

For the tragic team, "it is what it is." "The ship has sailed." "The tiger can't change its stripes." "The scorpion will always sting the turtle." The tragic team explains the limits of their performance as a result of "our culture," without trying to improve or alter that culture. "It's just the way we do things." And, "we've always done it this way."

Unlike the Epic team that endures an outside influence (the enterprise, the leadership, the funding stakeholder), the tragic team's "faults are not in the stars, but ourselves." Rather than fix, the Tragic team atones.

Which brings us to the foolish team. The Comedic team of fools does have a mechanism for change. The Scrum Master, in this mode of thinking, defines a learning outcome, and the foolish team can use messaging between each other to choose an action program aimed to achieving a goal.

This is your goal as an Agile coach: to make your team a team of fools, one and all.

More on this later.

We'll take the Comedic out of order, since it's useful first to deal with problems of the rejecting and transitional teams before getting to "the Comedic fix."

So, the key thing with the Epic and the Tragic is that they've willingly adopted Agile. They've adopted Agile with attitudes that inhibit or prevent learning. They tend to fail fast and often, but don't actually learn from them; this is fail fast, fail fast, fail fast, etc.

The key to fixing the Epic and Tragic is the retrospective. The Agile coach will need to focus on transforming the Epic team to challenge and debate ideas they disagree with, *respectful of* but *challenging toward* authorities. The Agile coach will need to focus the Tragic team on Kaizen, defining the processes to improve, discovering root causes, and defining the corrective actions. The retrospective is the strategic location for shifting the Epic and the Tragic team into the Comedic team.

Rejecting

While two of the three Accepting attitudes (Epic and Tragic) aren't especially useful, since neither team will take action to correct or improve their circumstances until they are nudged out of these ruts, all three of the Rejecting attitudes face the same limitations.

For the Elegiac team, everything just sucks. "This place sucks." "This project sucks." "This product sucks" The company sucks, the leadership.... You get the idea. The point is, everything sucks so much, the elegiac team forgets that "sucking" is a metaphor. It's so overused it becomes an abstraction.

What sucks the most for the Elegiac Agile team is that they are being forced to adopt Agile in the first place. Agile really sucks.

The good news for the Agile coach is Elegiac teams are especially obvious. It's easy to detect. We'll get to the fix a bit later.

On an Agile team, satire is hard to detect and harder to coach.

The satirical team is a complicated team, and you don't typically find them in Scrum. You find them all over the place in SAFe™.

We need to get a little technical here: A satirist will advocate something in order to reject it. When Swift advocates eating children as a solution to the problem of childhood poverty, of course, he doesn't mean it. What he means is that we should feed starving children.

At the same time, he's taking a shot at the reader. Swift implies that the reader will find his unreasonable proposal reasonable. The satirist points a finger at the reader and saying, "you know that I'm not making fun of *you*, right?"

Now, there are two tricks to fully understanding a satirist:

First, to make fun of something from inside it, the satirist has to have an insider's knowledge. Satirists have expertise in the things they make fun of.

Second, nobody can have that kind of insider's knowledge of any topic without actually being insider themselves. The satirist likes to think he or she is criticizing someone else from the outside. They don't always get that they're necessarily criticizing themselves, also.

In the Agile team, the Agile satirist's tool is frequently synecdoche -- substitution. Typically, what they are substituting is the pronoun "we" for "you," which is to say "never me." The satirist will say, "We need to scrub the backlog," or "we need to flap our arms like chickens," or some such sentence with the same construction before heading out the side door and down the alley.

In saying "we need to," but meaning "someone other than I will have to," the satirist is generating *inaction* that looks like *action*. The satirist appears to be taking initiative while ducking responsibility. The end result of the satirist's call to action is no action whatsoever.

The Satirical team is an outfield of three players all shouting, "We got it!" while each one watches the ball land on the grass.

The Satirical team PUBLICLY agrees to the sprint goals and the backlog, but PRIVATELY thinks it's a bad idea and is not especially interested in achieving the sprint goal

The Agile coach attacks the Elegiac and Satirical teams with the same tool: "choice."

Coaches cannot force quality results out of the miserable or the do-nothing. Instead, the Coach offers the each of these teams' authorship, agency, and autonomy in return for commitment; a commitment made to the product owner, not the Coach. Authorship distinguishes. Agency enables. Autonomy frees. To capture these rewards, each of the team members will have to willingly step forward and take it. Choice flips rejecting with accepting.

Providing the Elegiac and Satiric team authorship, agency, and autonomy is "the rope the team will use to climb out the hole they've dug for themselves, or it will be the rope they use to hang themselves."

And that leaves the Burlesque.

The Burlesque team is similar to the Satiric team, but opposite in one critical aspect. The Burlesque team understands all the parts of Agile as a set of rituals instead of

practices -- "what to do." They have no understanding or care for the function or purpose of practices -- "why we do them."

The Satiric team completely understands Agile, which is how they manage to undermine the process.

The Burlesque team is clueless of Agile, but goes through the day performing a pantomime of Agile practices.

Metonymy is the chief tool of the Burlesque team. They "reduce down" the Agile guide to a set of activities, where doing the activity without respect to any result makes them Agile. The Burlesque team can point to a checklist of completed activities, like "held scrum meeting," or "went to retrospective," without having to point to a result, outcome, or benefit from any of these activities.

The Burlesque team "eats the menu at a restaurant and declares the meal delicious."

The Agile coach attacks the Burlesque team with Socratic education. The Burlesque team needs to shift from "what" to "why." The Coach has to directly ask team members "why do we do this?" and "what is the benefit to the team, what is the benefit to the product owner?"

Again, the Coach offers the Burlesque team a choice to depart from the empty rituals they undertake daily. In its place, the Coach offers the team an opportunity to willfully embrace agency, authorship, and autonomy.

We can express this problem in terms of mechanism design, which may be more immediately accessible to engineers. In terms of the Stanley-Reiter diagram for Hurwicz's Mechanism Design Theory, the Scrum Master can't move the game to a learning end state, since no mechanism will perform this function regardless of the information passed in the game. In this model, without a mechanism, neither the Epic nor Tragic Hero will get from (Θ) to the social choice or transfer function that can move the team, $(f(\Theta) : \Theta \rightarrow X)$. The retrospective for the Tragic and Epic team has the same beginning as end, with an "equilibrium" at "there is no choice, there never was a choice" or " $\Theta = f(\Theta)$, so deal with it."

The comedic is the only learning category.

If we want to get to the comedic team, we need to shift learning from the retrospective (which is still critical) but to the stand up. It's okay if the demo utterly fails – when do you want to know? In the demo or at the customer site. It's okay if Jenkins bombs out and chucks out a hundred errors – when do you want to know the code is broken, at system test or at the stand up? And so on.

So, the “trust building,” the “listening,” and all of that “coaching” stuff – it’s all about building the comedic attitude.

If the team takes its cues from the comedic attitude, they select options that learn, adapt and improve.