Under the topic of “fast protocyling” I believe the speaker is talking about Agile development but using a strange word for it. Agile is the concept of frequent iteration through the solutions development exercise instead of doing all design upfront. Agile means having frequent end-user contact and prototype development. However, the speaker goes on to state that the reason this is successful is “the business changes constantly and so what might be true today will clearly not be true in six months.” **This is fundamentally wrong!** So wrong I can’t actually believe he said it so confidently. If your target problem is changing over the course of six months you’ve either done a poor job defining it or it can’t be solved – it certainly isn’t worth investing tens of thousands of dollars in product development for such a moving target.

Agile works not because your target problem changes – it works because you are not smart enough to figure out the solution without experimentation. Agile allows you to solve your problem in the style of the gradient descent algorithm – try one direction, assess your solution, then keep moving in the direction that shows benefits – it is the scientific method applied to building software or other solutions. So, the main take away for analytics professionals is that instead of hearing about a business problem, thinking you’ve parameterized it after a few days of investigation, then retiring to your cubicle to write code and make charts, finally to present a power point presentation six months later with your recommendations – you should be rapidly make a first cut investigation, then apply it to the problem (or at least present it to the people who know the problem), then iterate on what you learned.

I do Agile product development consulting for a living, and the most frequent misconception is that there’s no need for long term planning. There absolutely is and I always work with clients to develop a roadmap that has end deliverables. However, unlike building a house based on an architect’s detailed blueprints, where a mistake – say a wall being off by one foot – cascades through the structure so all of a sudden a pipe can’t reach a sink – we build features within weeks of developing the detailed requirements, meaning the overall product is cohesive and responsive to user needs.