SLOwly Burning Out

Avoiding Common Pitfalls When Setting SLOs

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I'll share about

- Pitfalls encountered when setting **SLOs**
- How avoiding and/or climbing out of these pitfalls can bring about a better **understanding of the system**, reducing **burn out**
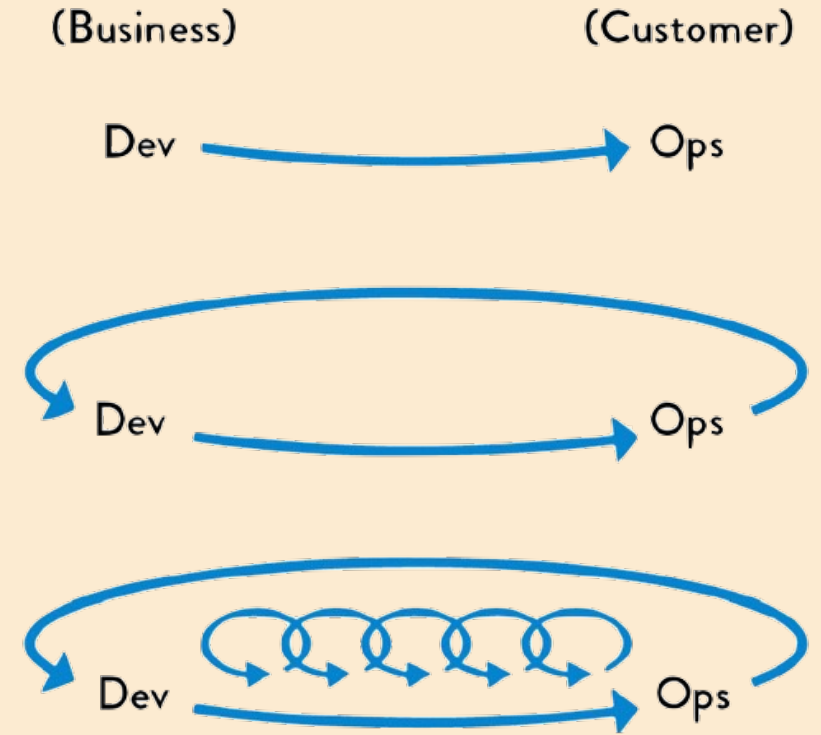
SLO

- A **service level objective** (SLO) is a target value or range of values for an indicator [1]

- The Kubernetes API Server is available 99.95% of the time

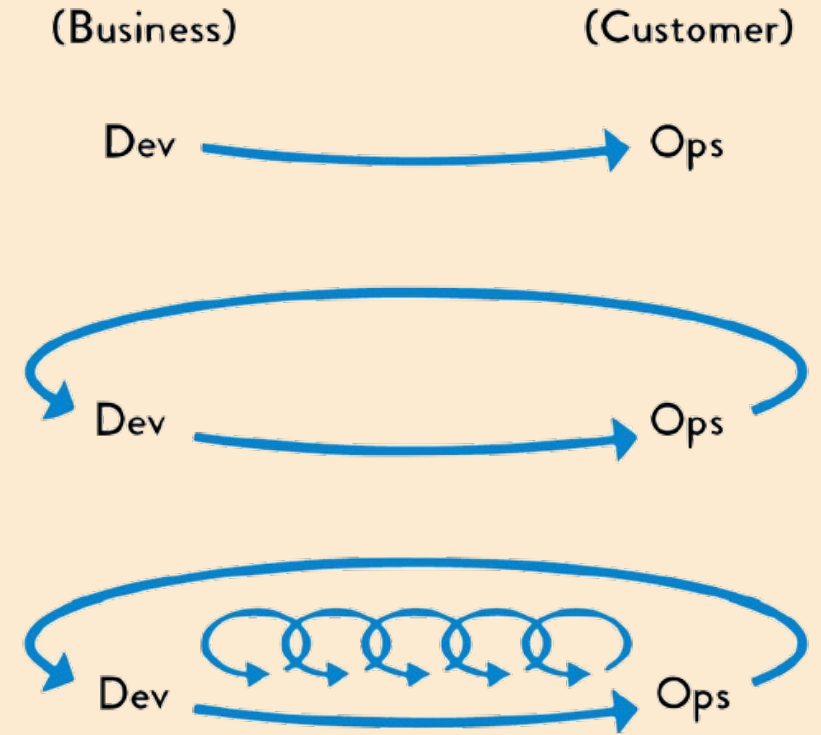[1] https://sre.google/sre-book/service-level-objectives/

Why Care about an SLO?

- Flow/Systems Thinking

- Amplify Feedback Loops

- Culture of Continual Learning and Experimentation

(Business)   (Customer)

Dev → Ops

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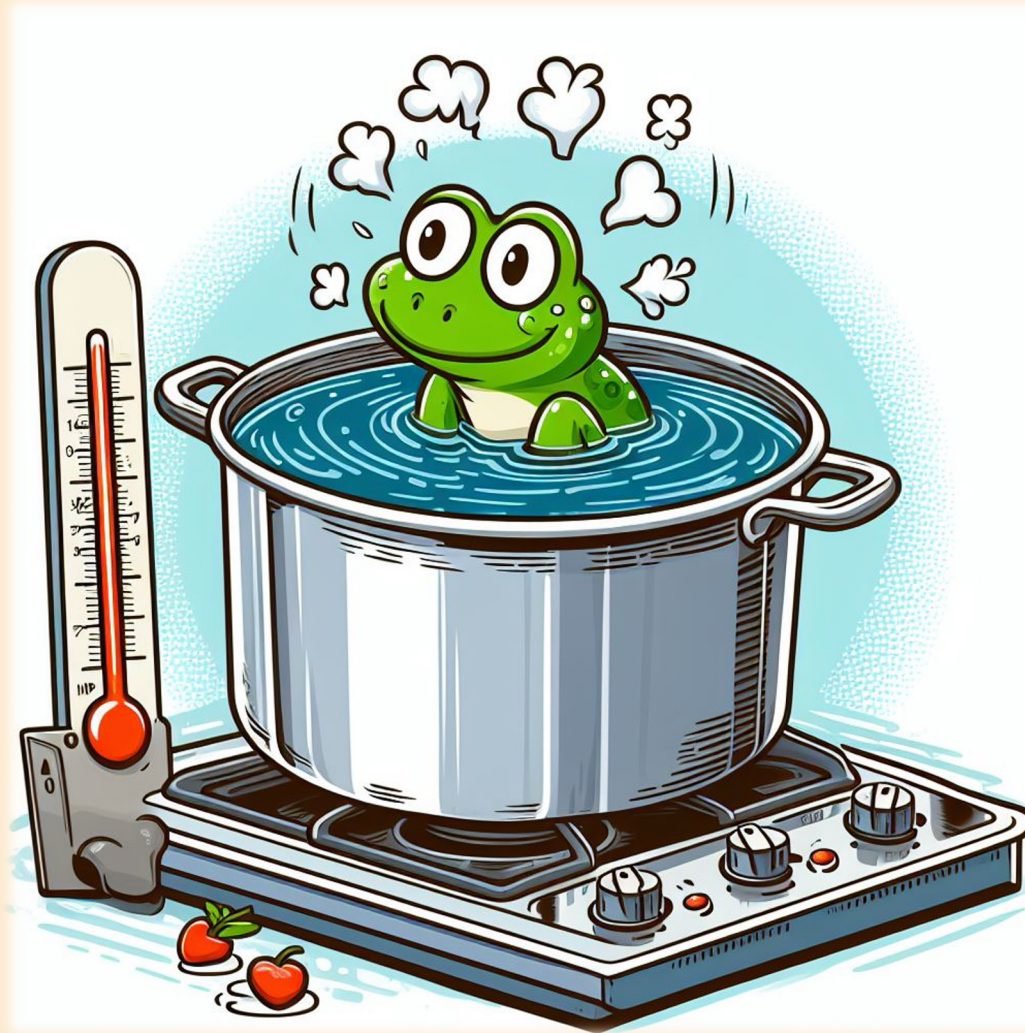[2] https://itrevolution.com/articles/the-three-ways-principles-underpinning-devops/

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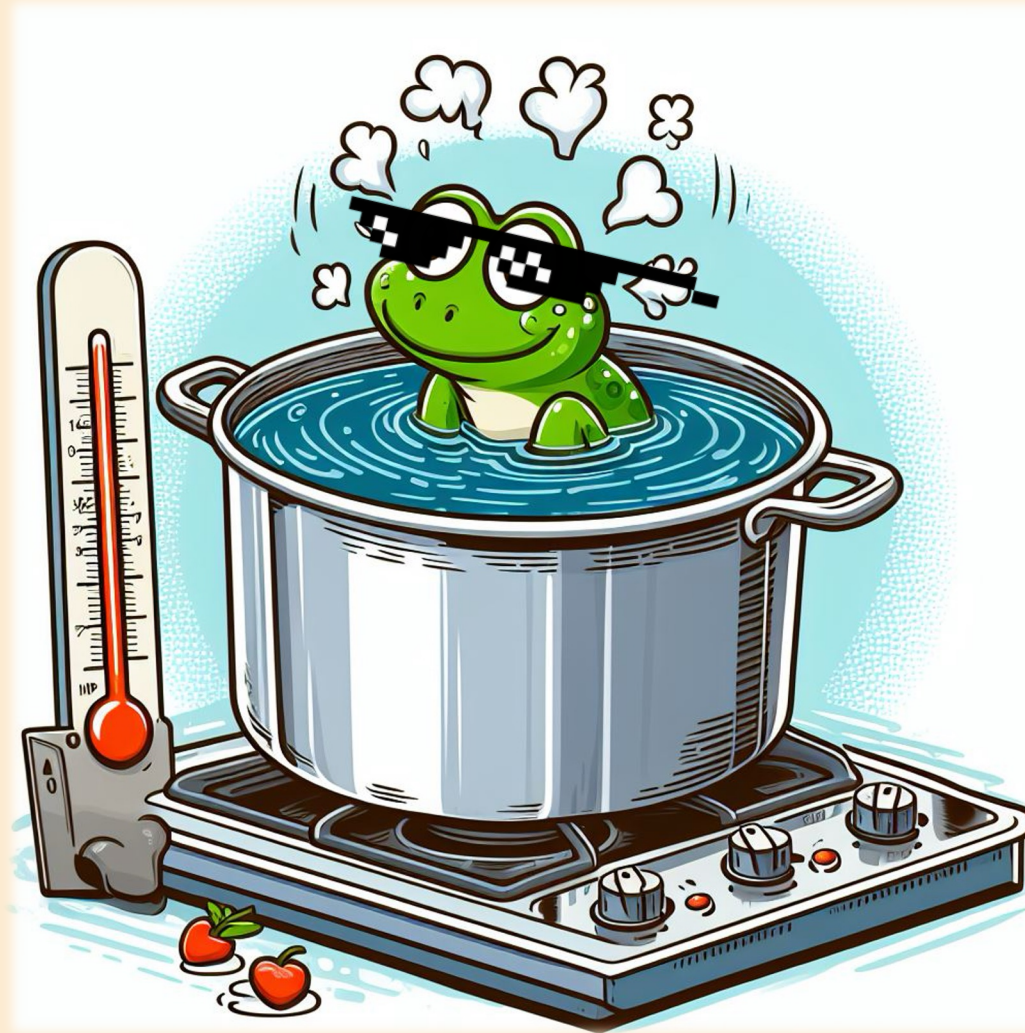
Story Time

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Burn out?

- **Burn out** is a syndrome conceptualized as resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed
  - feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion;
  - increased mental distance from one's job, or feelings of negativism or cynicism related to one's job; and
  - reduced professional efficacy

[3] https://www.who.int/news/item/28-05-2019-burn-out-an-occupational-phenomenon-international-classification-of-diseases

Pitfall #1: Having Impossible SLOs

- Being unable to differentiate misconfigurations from broken systems

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- Being unable to differentiate misconfigurations from broken systems

- Alerting on SLOs when we are confident that we have excluded or otherwise prevented known misconfigurations

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Pitfall #2: Bureaucracy around SLO changes

- Difficulty finding the right people to talk to in order to change SLOs

Bureaucratic Westrum Organizational Culture

- **Awareness** comes when there are conscious efforts to keep team members informed about all the variables that affect their efforts.

- Bureaucratic – awareness constricted by the employee or department
- Generative – team members are put in the picture about what is happening and why

[4] http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/qshc.2003.009522

Pitfall #2: Bureaucracy around SLO changes

- Difficulty finding the right people to talk to in order to change SLOs

- Working towards increasing awareness about our SLOs between the business and SREs

Pitfall #3: Ignoring developer well-being over customer experience

- Continuing to add SLOs and alerts when existing ones are not being met

Pitfall #3: Ignoring SRE well-being over customer experience

- Continuing to add SLOs and alerts when existing ones are not being met

- Setting a team health SLO for alert volume

In Review

- Ensure SLO definitions exclude misconfigurations or invalid requests

- Work towards a generative Westrum culture around changing SLOs

- Try setting a team health SLO for alert volume if it's overwhelming

References

- [1] https://sre.google/sre-book/service-level-objectives/
- [2] https://itrevolution.com/articles/the-three-ways-principles-underpinning-devops/
- [3] https://www.who.int/news/item/28-05-2019-burn-out-an-occupational-phenomenon-international-classification-of-diseases
- [4] http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/qshc.2003.009522