Simplicity at the heart of Agile

Sami Lilja

Coach and Certified Scrum Trainer (CST)

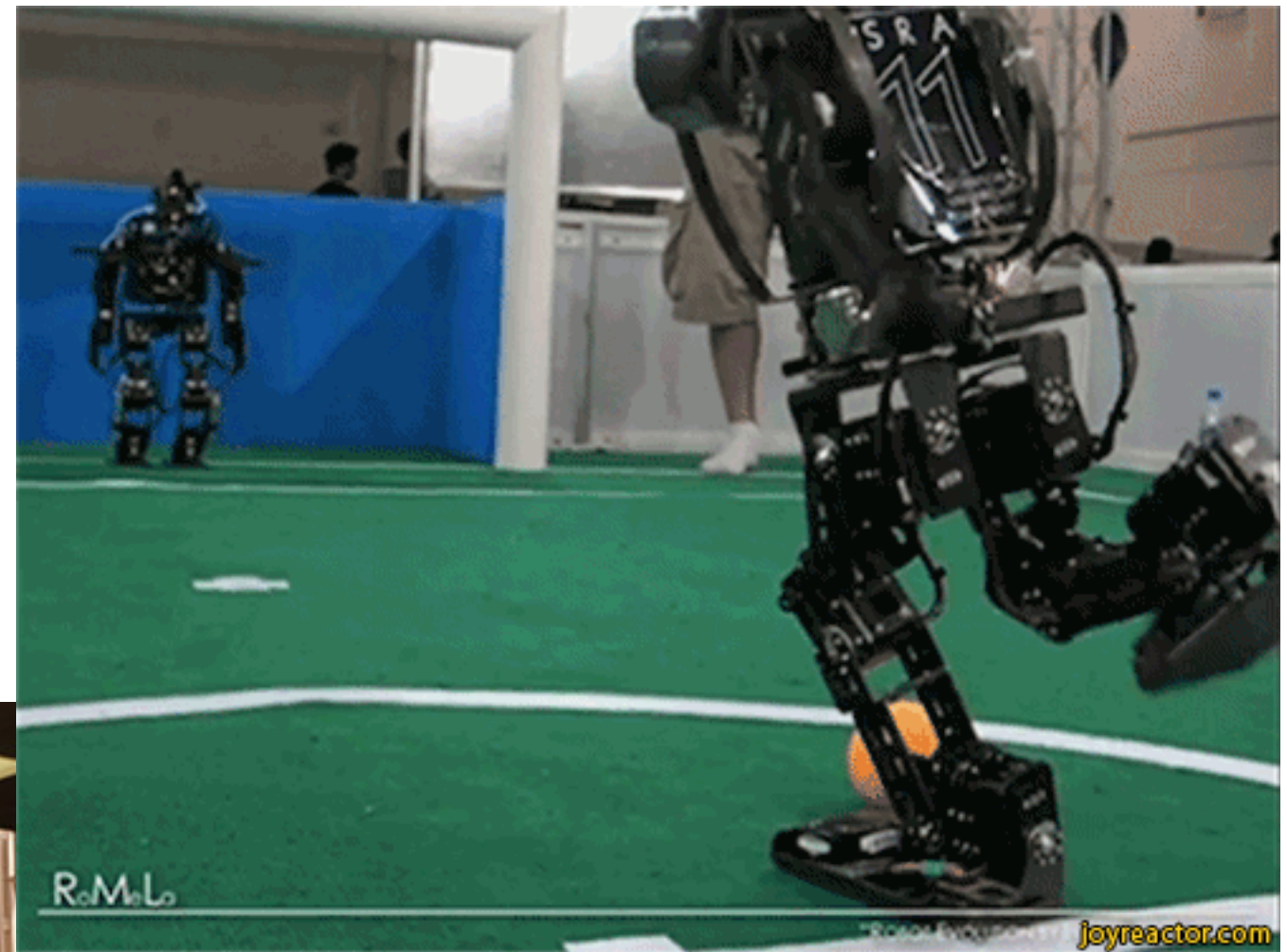Tampere Goes Agile, October 2017

Sami Lilja

Agile Coach and Cerfitied Scrum Trainer (CST).

Working for Reaktor in Helsinki.

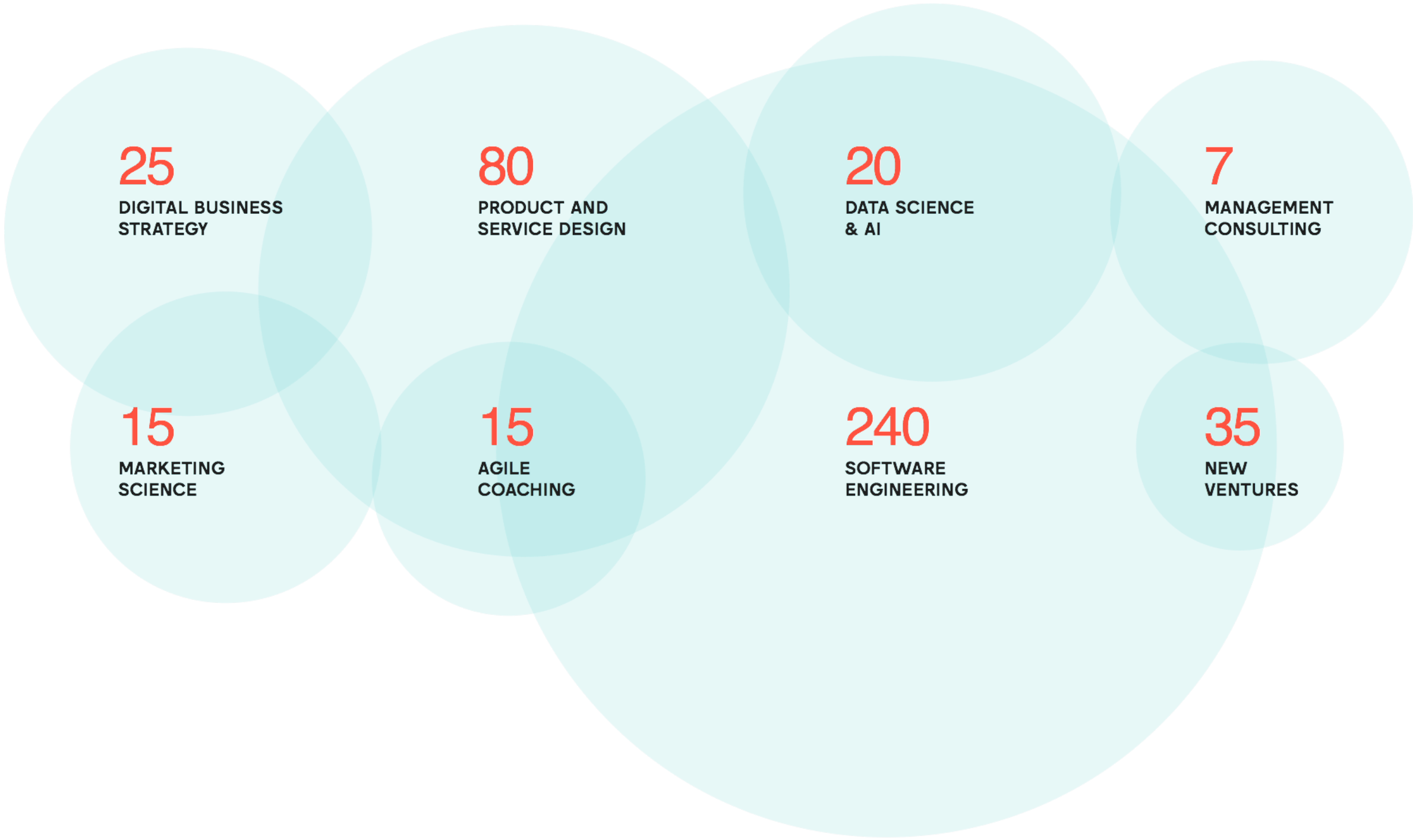Helping people and organisations become better at what they do.

Recent coaching assignments include

Reaktor in brief

25
DIGITAL BUSINESS
STRATEGY

80
PRODUCT AND
SERVICE DESIGN

20
DATA SCIENCE
& AI

7
MANAGEMENT
CONSULTING

15
MARKETING
SCIENCE

15
AGILE
COACHING

240
SOFTWARE
ENGINEERING

35
NEW
VENTURES

100%
EMPLOYEE
OWNERSHIP

2000
YEAR FOUNDED

56m
TURNOVER 2016

450+
TEAM MEMBERS

5̶ 6
OFFICES ACROSS
3 CONTINENTS

TURKU
HELSINKI
AMSTERDAM
NEW YORK
DUBAI
TOKYO
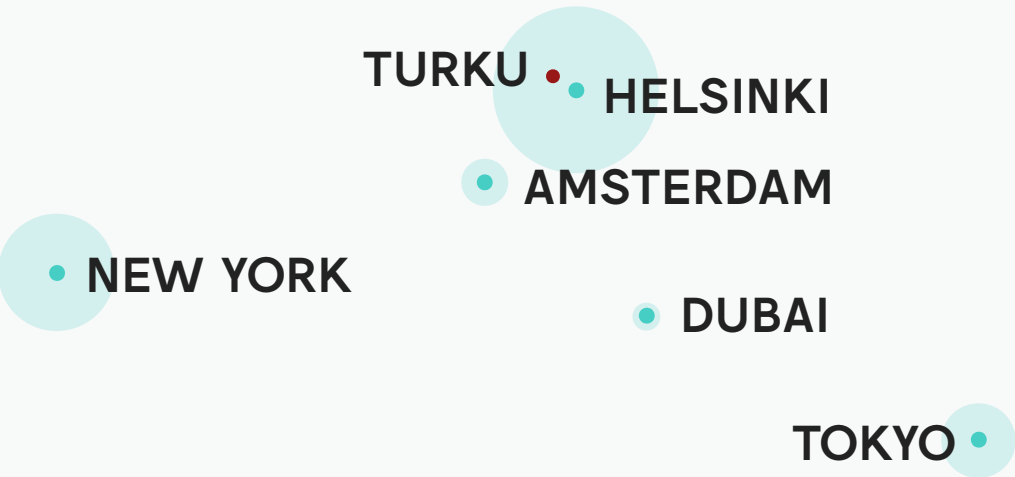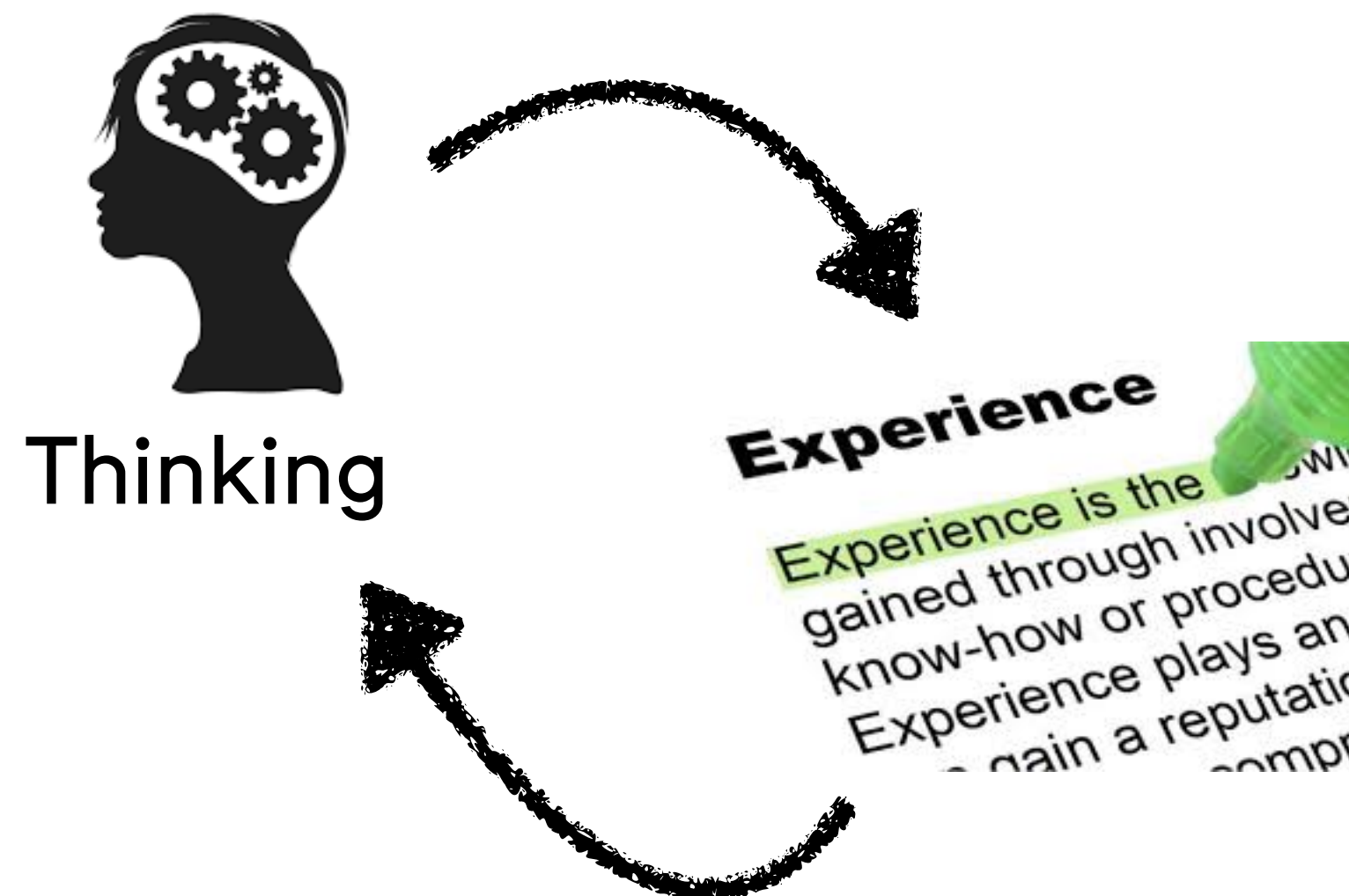
Simplicity over Tools

In this presentation **tool** refers to an electronic tool (program or application) that is used in order to plan, manage, monitor or control the flow of work.

Thinking

Experience

Experience is the know
gained through involve
know-how or procedu
Experience plays an
gain a reputatio
compr

We are using too much tools in our work.

We could have less tools and save money; not only by saving on license costs but more importantly..

With less tools our work could become better.

Why too much tools to manage our work?

✔ We create digital services and products.

We use computers to create digital content and we are at our computers all the time at work.

It is natural to start managing our work in the same place, on our computers.

✔ Human beins are driven by need for certainty.

Computers can quickly analyse information, generate graphs & pictures that create illusion of control and sense of certainty.
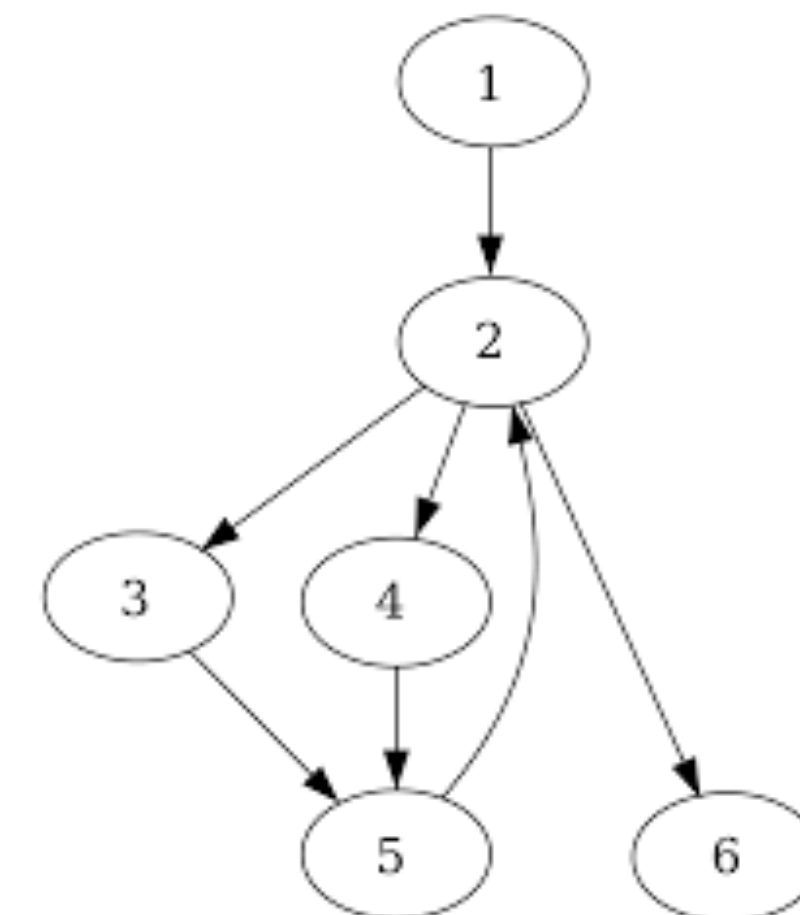
PREFERENCE BEHAVIOR IN AN IMMEDIATE VERSUS VARIABLY DELAYED SHOCK SITUATION WITH AND WITHOUT A WARNING SIGNAL
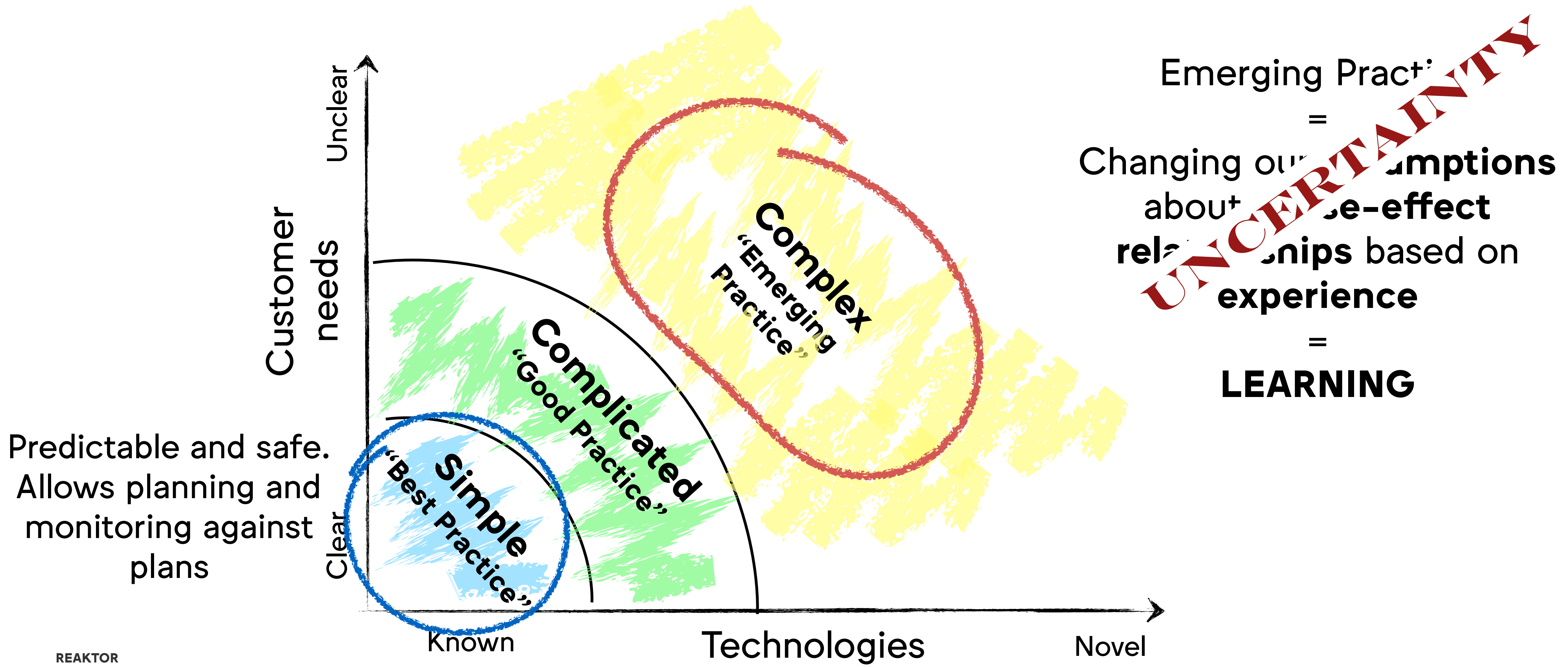
PIETRO BADIA, BONNIE McBANE, STEVE SUTER, AND PAUL LEWIS

Bowling Green State University

Results and Discussion

In answer to the question dealing with preferences, 19 Ss stated a preference for immediate as opposed to VDS ($p < .01$). When asked why they preferred the immediate shock, 2 Ss could not state a reason; 2 Ss stated that immediate shock was of lower intensity and less painful; 15 Ss verbalized in some fashion that the VDS made them more tense or anxious. Seven of these 15 Ss stated VDS was noticeably stronger.

In summary we can conclude that Ss given immediate vs. VDS develop a marked preference for immediate shock.

Complexity and predictability

Predictable and safe. Allows planning and monitoring against plans

Emerging Practice
=
Changing our assumptions about cause-effect relationships based on experience
=
LEARNING

UNCERTAINTY

Source: Strategic Management and Organizational Dynamics by Ralph Stacey

It is not the complexity that kills us – it is the assumption that things are simple.

People often say there are no silver bullets.

They are wrong.

There are silver bullets – we just don't have any werewolves.

Often, our lust for tools and processes comes from unnecessary complexity in our work.

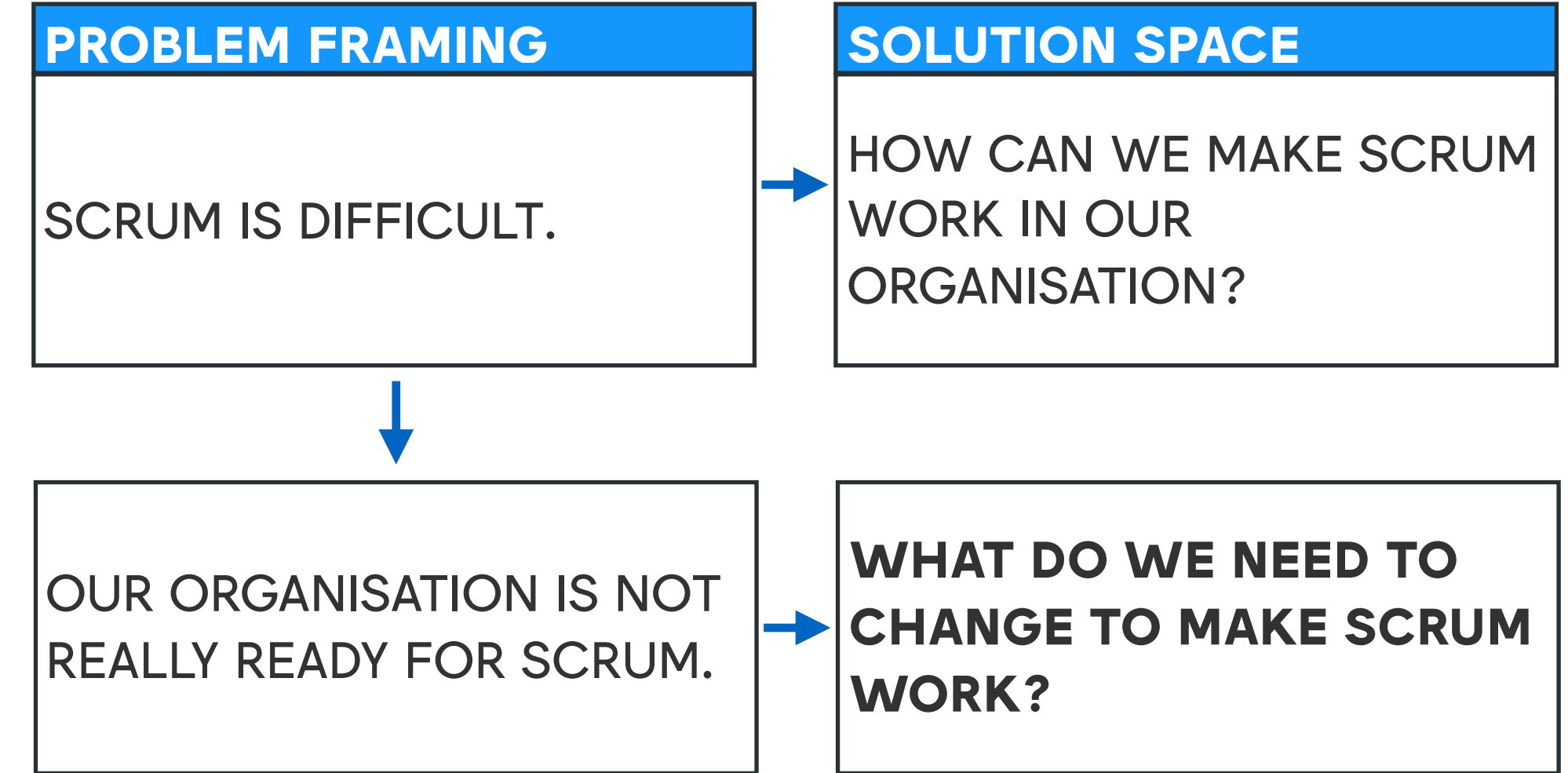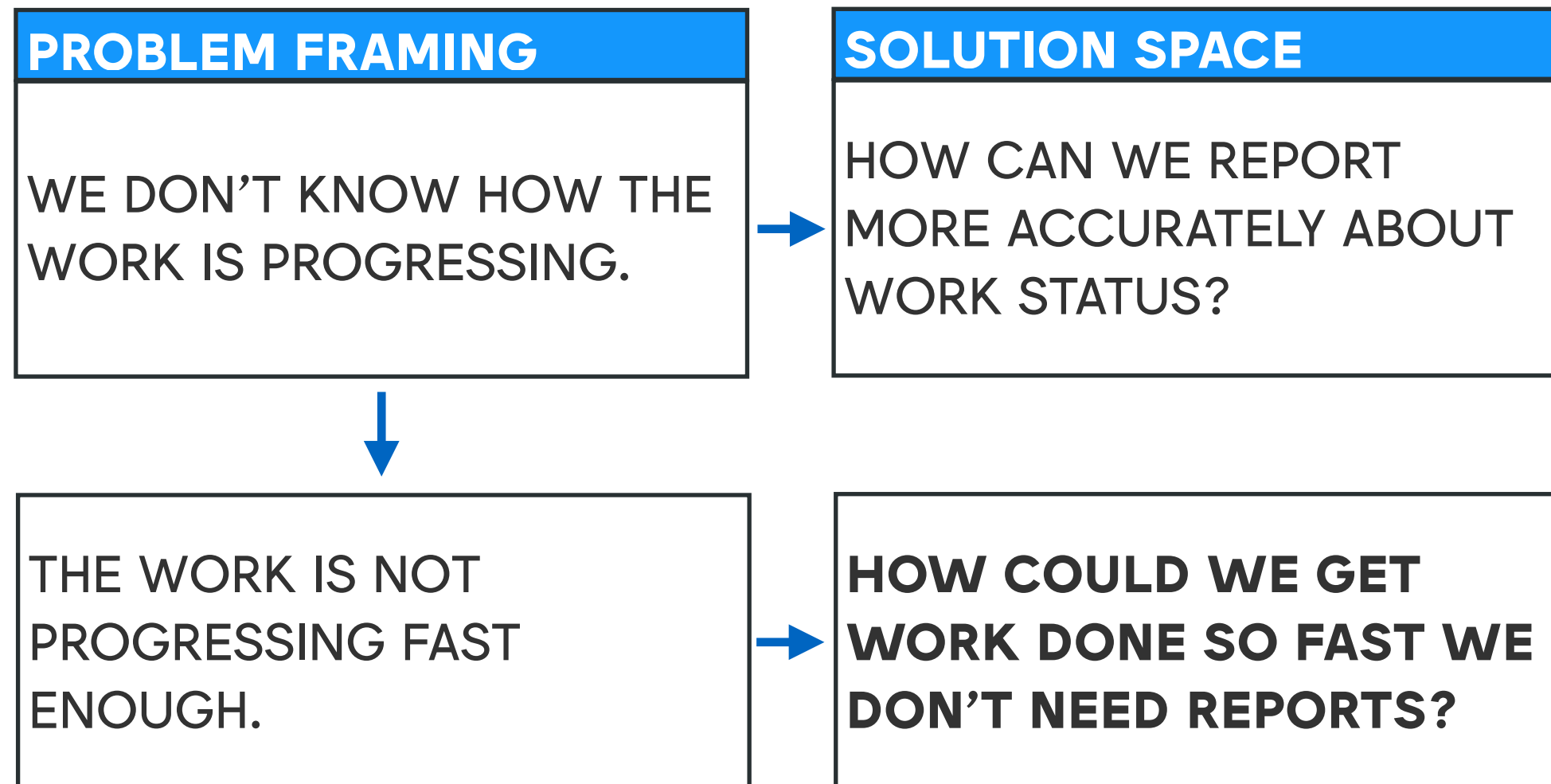A better strategy is Simplicity – getting rid of complexity.
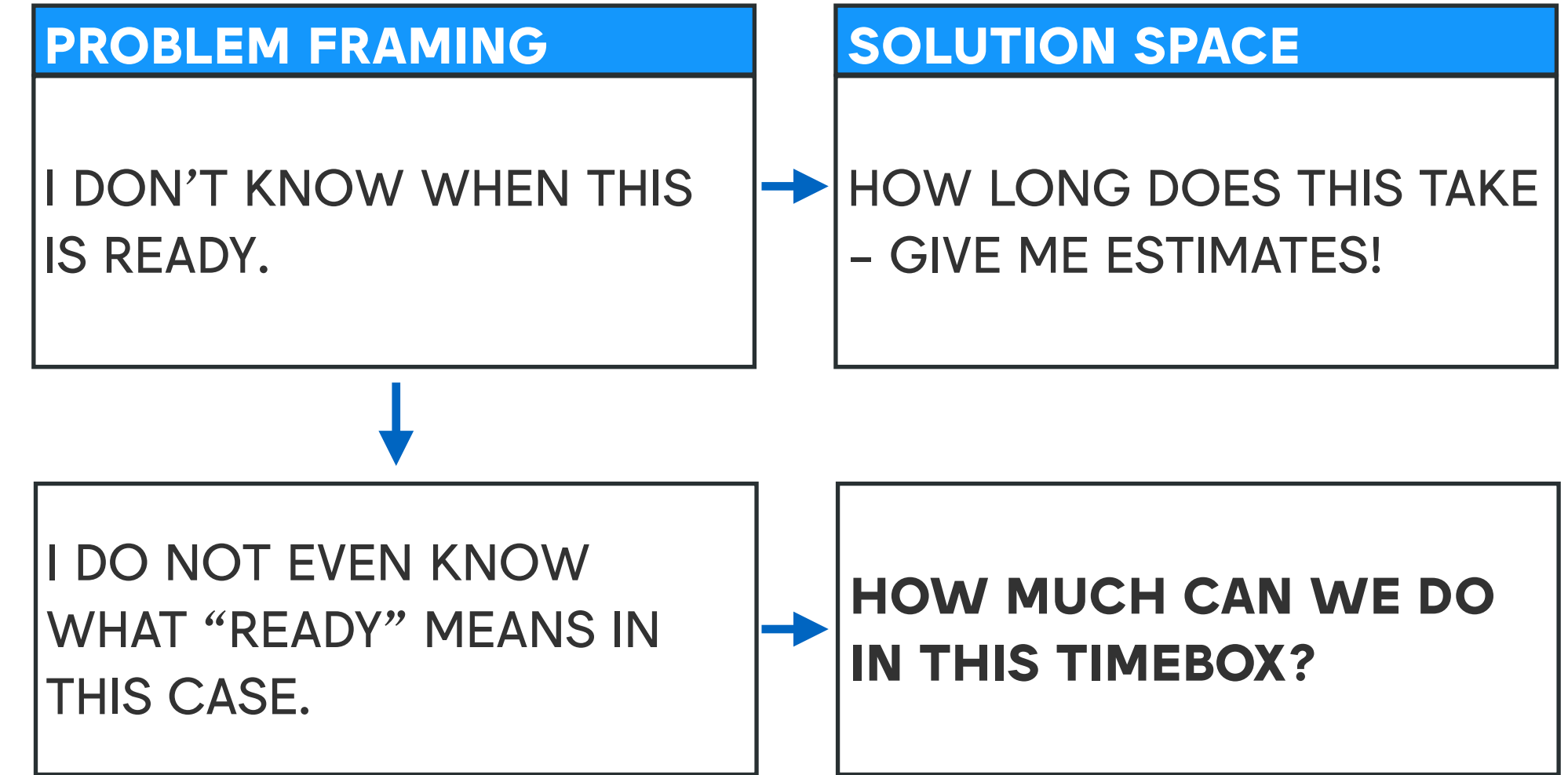
This requires we design and manage our work in a different way.

Asking the right questions

Slow elevator –problem

PROBLEM FRAMING		SOLUTION SPACE
"The elevator is too slow."	SOLUTION FINDING →	"Make the elevator faster." Install a new lift Upgrade the motor Improve the algorithm

https://hbr.org/2017/01/are-you-solving-the-right-problems

"Life Lessons from an ad man" by Rory Sutherland: https://www.ted.com/talks/rory_sutherland_life_lessons_from_an_ad_man

PROBLEM FRAMING	SOLUTION SPACE
WE HAVE TOO FEW RESOURCES.	→ HOW CAN WE GET MORE RESOURCES?
↓	
WE HAVE TOO MUCH WORK ON OUR PLATE.	→ **HOW CAN WE LIMIT INCOMING WORK TO MATCH OUR CAPABILITY?**

PROBLEM FRAMING	SOLUTION SPACE
I DON'T KNOW WHEN THIS IS READY.	→ HOW LONG DOES THIS TAKE – GIVE ME ESTIMATES!
↓	
I DO NOT EVEN KNOW WHAT "READY" MEANS IN THIS CASE.	→ **HOW MUCH CAN WE DO IN THIS TIMEBOX?**

PROBLEM FRAMING	SOLUTION SPACE
WE DON'T KNOW HOW THE WORK IS PROGRESSING.	→ HOW CAN WE REPORT MORE ACCURATELY ABOUT WORK STATUS?
↓	
THE WORK IS NOT PROGRESSING FAST ENOUGH.	→ **HOW COULD WE GET WORK DONE SO FAST WE DON'T NEED REPORTS?**

PROBLEM FRAMING	SOLUTION SPACE
SCRUM IS DIFFICULT.	→ HOW CAN WE MAKE SCRUM WORK IN OUR ORGANISATION?
↓	
OUR ORGANISATION IS NOT REALLY READY FOR SCRUM.	→ **WHAT DO WE NEED TO CHANGE TO MAKE SCRUM WORK?**

The art of asking the right questions is at the heart of finding Simple Solutions.

Tool misuse and how to overcome it

Communication

```
PINE 4.58   MAIN MENU                              Folder: INBOX  2 Messages


       ?     HELP              -  Get help using Pine

       C     COMPOSE MESSAGE   -  Compose and send a message

       I     MESSAGE INDEX     -  View messages in current folder

       L     FOLDER LIST       -  Select a folder to view

       A     ADDRESS BOOK      -  Update address book

       S     SETUP             -  Configure Pine Options

       Q     QUIT              -  Leave the Pine program



   Copyright 1989-2003.  PINE is a trademark of the University of Washington.
                      [Folder "INBOX" opened with 2 messages]
? Help                     P PrevCmd                    R RelNotes
O OTHER CMDS ▷ [Compose]   N NextCmd                    K KBLock
```

Communication problems

- Root cause: Teams are no longer co-located – they are dis-located.

- Most of the workday is spent online. When 24/7 online presence is the default we have forgotten how to work together

- Being online is not necessarily communication.

- Sitting in same meeting is not necessarily communication

- We go to great lengths in order to avoid communication: emails, documentation, user story templates, ..

- We tend to "toolify" even the basic function of human beings: communication!

Communication problems: How to fix them?

- Have time and place for significant and meaningful conversations

    - Time: Agree a weekly routine for conversations to take place

    - Place: Have a physical wall where the conversations take place

- Facilitate the discussions

    - Maybe someone else than the leader / manager?

Tool misuse and how to overcome it

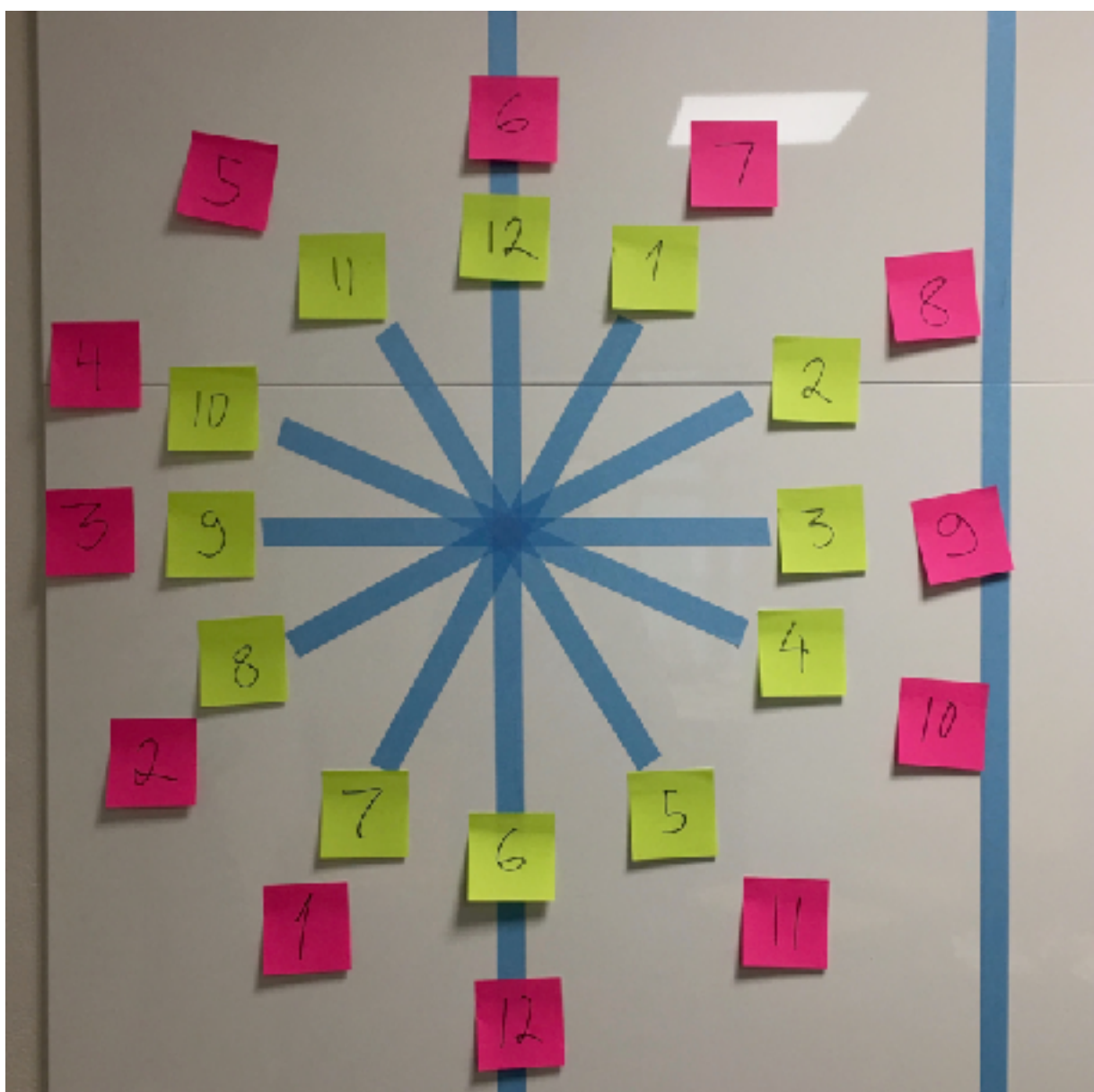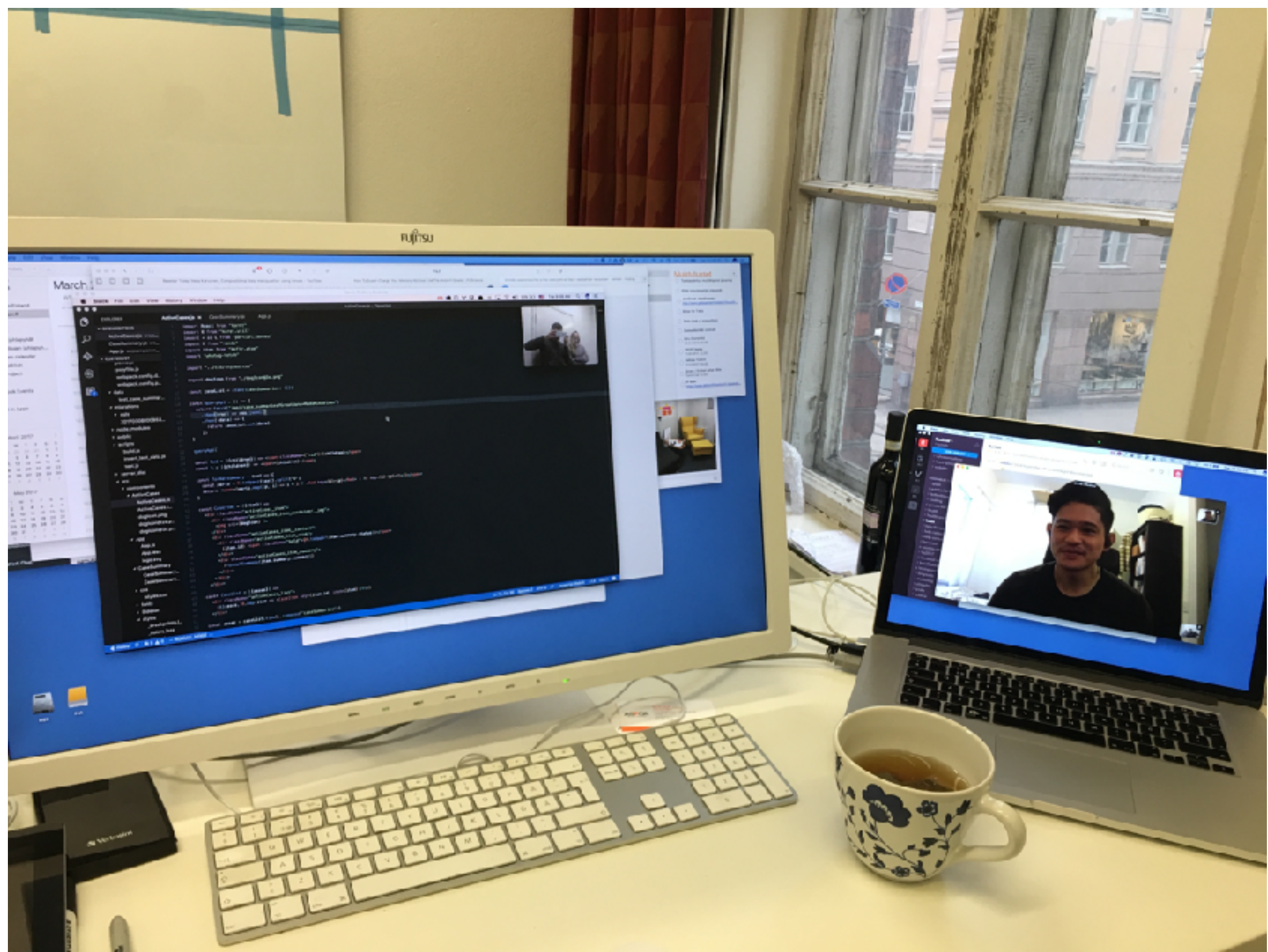## Workflow management

Workflow management

- "Why do we use an electronic system to manage our work and workflow?"

  "..because"

  1. our team members are sitting in different locations
  2. management wants to see the status of work
  3. we have so many items that we can't track them manually
  4. "X" is the corporate tool for product backlog or sprint backlog or whatever
  5. we need to store information that post-its can not hold

#1: Our team members sit in different locations

- Lower labor cost? Actually low unit cost increases total cost because the cost is not in transactions but in the flow

- Tacit information does not flow across sites –> even more tools and processes to keep everyone updated

- Failure demand skyrockets

    - Organisations try to improve working practices with offshore

    - Organisations become really good at coordinating but remain bad at delivering value

- Try to have co–located teams!!

Remote teams? Try this

- Effective communication in a dis-located team requires more effort!

- Have structured communication (="meetings") more frequently

- Have the channel (video, chat) open all the time, also outside meetings / Sprint events

- Use wide-band communication mechanisms: video, high-quality audio

- Try online visualisation tools (e.g. web whiteboards)

- Share a high-resolution still photo of the wall during the meeting if video quality is not enough

- Get together on same room frequently - it is easier to talk with people you know

#2: Management wants to see the status of work

- Management = people who have power to decide about design and management of work

- Get rid of any tool that provides management with mere numbers

- Status is not the same as flow!!

- Try inviting management to the physical board and into daily work

- Find out what drives / worries / scares management and provide them with information that helps them most!

#3: So many items that we can't track them manually

- Tracking things that are already in progress?

  - Easy to control and usually not too many

- Tracking things that are not currently under progress?

  - Root cause: Backlogs and "wish lists" are long

  - Try to have short backlog on the wall and rest of the items away

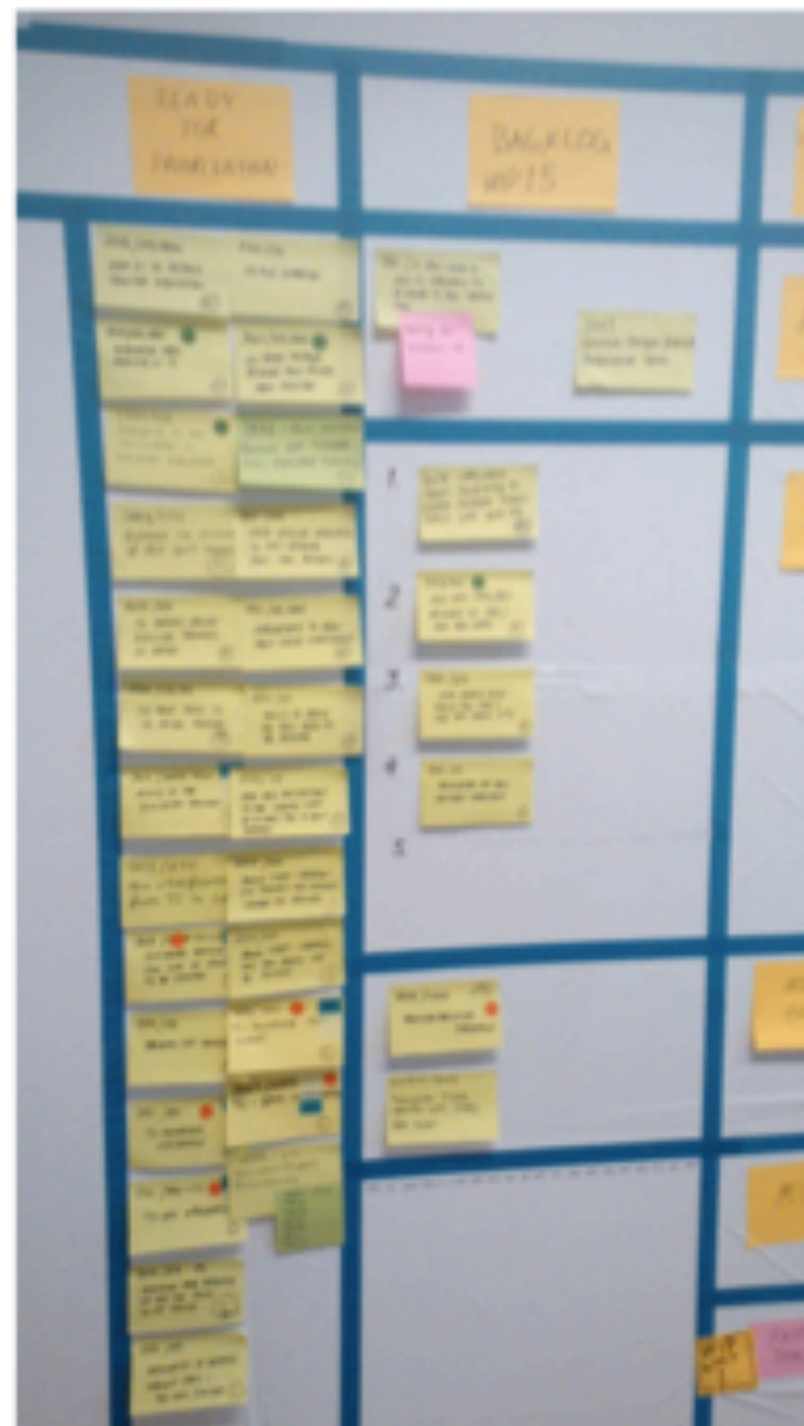 - Try saying "No!" when someone asks you to add something into product

Your call is important to us!

#4: X is the corporate tool for product/sprint backlog

- This is sign that company does not understand Agile at all!

- What kind of "self-organising team" is forced to use a certain tool to manage their own work?

#5: We need to store information that post-its can't

- This is actually a really valid argument

- Physical wall is for communication – electronic tool is for storing information
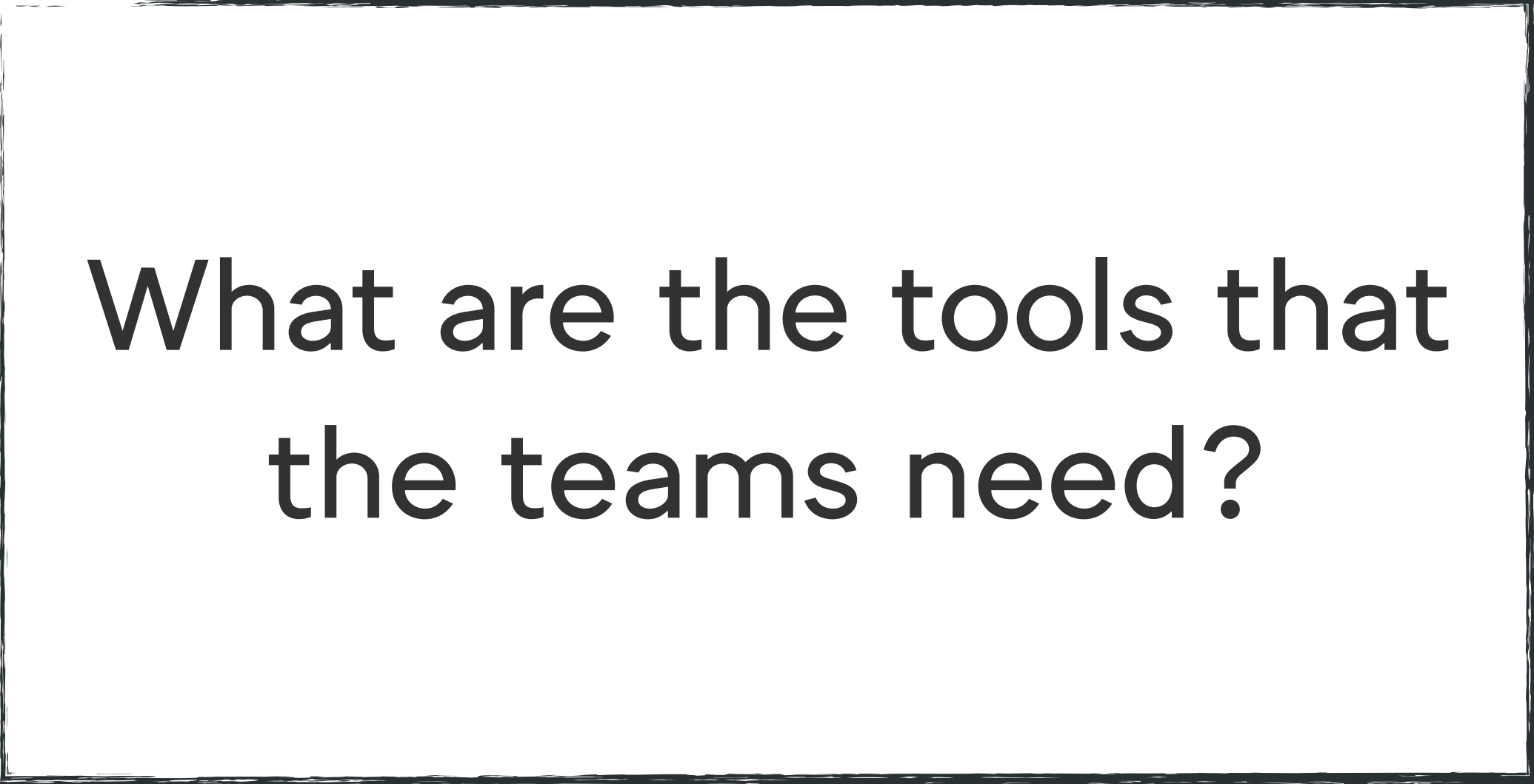
Finding the right tools?

What are the tools that
the teams need?

If tools and processes are forced upon a team, I
do not expect much Agile in that organisation..

Finding the right tools?

- Start with physical wall / post-its —> when work starts to flow then consider a tool.

- Benefits, physical wall is

  - .."tabula rasa", literally an empty board. You can start from scratch and abandon existing workflows for a while.

  - ..inexpensive, 5 m x 2 m wall costs less than 50 eur

  - ..good for communication

  - ..fast to set up when meeting starts (well, since it is there it requires no time to set up)

Summary

- Make sure the **tools are for teams**, not for managers

- However, **understand the needs of management** and provide them with useful information (preferably through conversations)

- Have **conversations at the wall** and leave electronic tool for storing information

- If the reason for electronic tool is a dysfunction (too much WIP, dis-located teams), try to **remove dysfunction** rather than hide it with yet another tool

- **Start with physical**, make it work and move to electronic tool only when needed

- Accept that the **status of knowledge work can not be expressed perfectly in any tool** (physical or electronic). The truth is in conversations.

Wrap-up

Sami Lilja

I work with people.

I believe we can make our work better if we stick to the basics.

We must break free from slavery of tools & processes.

Manifesto for Agile Software Development

We are uncovering better ways of developing
software by doing it and helping others do it.
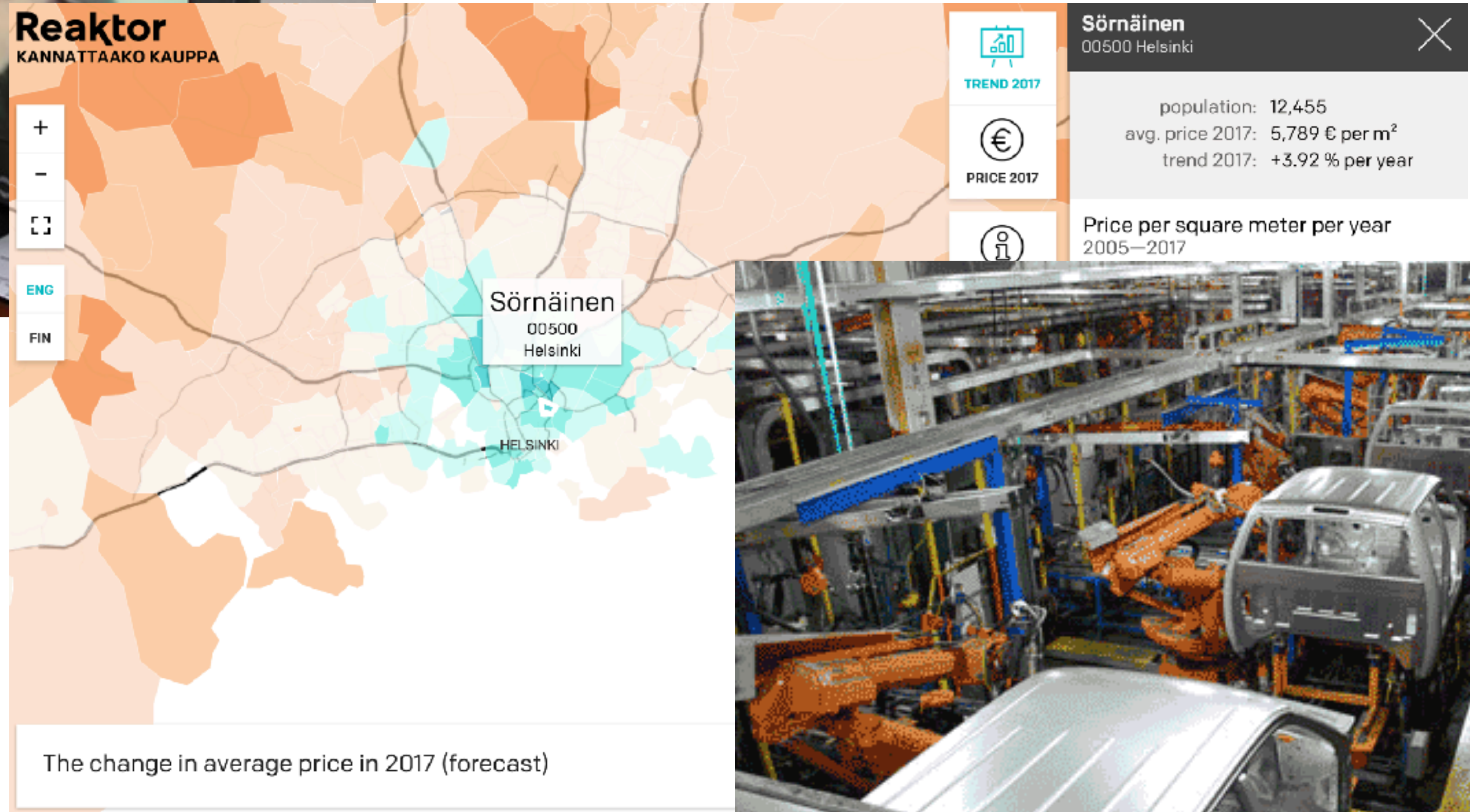Through this work we have come to value:
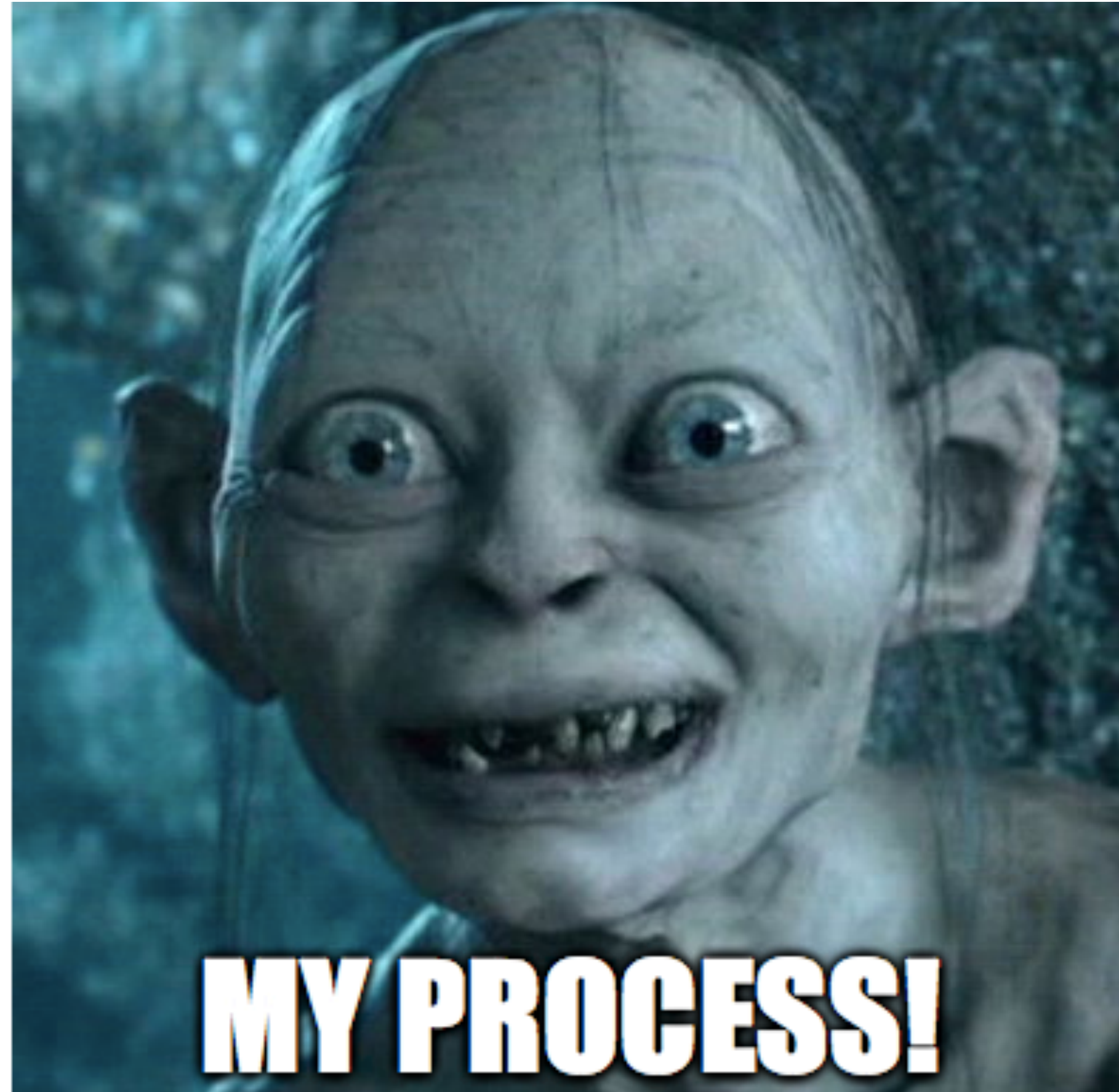
Individuals and interactions over processes and tools

Working software over comprehensive documentation

Customer collaboration over contract negotiation

Responding to change over following a plan

That is, while there is value in the items on
the right, we value the items on the left more.

Reaktor
KANNATTAAKO KAUPPA

ENG
FIN

Sörnäinen
00500
Helsinki

HELSINKI

The change in average price in 2017 (forecast)

TREND 2017

PRICE 2017

Sörnäinen
00500 Helsinki

population: 12,455
avg. price 2017: 5,789 € per m²
trend 2017: +3.92 % per year

Price per square meter per year
2005—2017

MY PROCESS!

Key takeaways

- **Find the right question.** The way we frame our question has a significant impact on the possible answers.

- **Complexity is our friend**, it won't kill us. Assuming things are simple and predictable will kill us.

- **Managing work is not that difficult.** Problems arise when design and management of work is based on wrong assumptions.

- Most harmful system conditions:

    - Handovers

    - Work-in-Progress

    - Dis-locating teams

- Visualise

- Agree working practices

- Communicate

Thank you.