How to Build Lean Capability Within Tech
(and other large, complex, fast-moving orgs)

with Jim Benson and Lex Schroeder

Agenda

1. Review: Lean capability development

2. Reflect: How does change happen?

    1. Jim's perspective and lessons learned

    2. Lex's perspective and lessons learned

3. Common leverage points for change

4. Q&A

What are we talking about when we talk about Lean capability development?

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Who is Jim Benson

- Author of Personal Kanban, The Collaboration Equation, etc.
- Co-Founder of Modus Institute.
- <Punk Rocker, Civil Engineer, Urban Designer, Software Designer, Business Owner, Educator, Likes to Cook, Hates PowerPoint>.
- Senior Faculty at LEI.
- I believe in collaboration and well-designed cultures of continuous improvement.
- I have grown tired of lazy process consultants and their willing victims.

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Change, Why is it Hard?

- Human beings naturally resist change
  - Behavioral Economics always comes before Lean
  - Status Quo Bias, Overload, Learned Helplessness, Reactance, Founder Syndrome
- Not the enemy of the change agent, but the topography of the battlefield.

This is humanity and if we have respect for people, we need to respect this.

Because we all do the same things.

- Our work is complicated or complex
- We are overloaded and goal oriented
- We prefer outcomes to solving problems (sorry, it's true)
- We estimate the effort of others more harshly than our own
- We routinely underestimate complex tasks
- We believe we've given others the information they need
- We believe in our plans and distrust those of others
- We undervalue collaboration and overvalue individuality
- We think that continuous improvement just … *happens.*

Using Tech as an Example

- Totally and intentionally siloed (but don't know it).
- Huge culture of heroics.
- Huge rhetoric of awesome process.
- Unbelievably happy with shoddy work.
- Pockets of learning die because of lack of collaboration.
- Different silos (teams) become frustrated because of "dependencies."

Case in Point: The Californian Cloud Computing Company

Good to meet you! I'm Lex Schroeder

- Sr. Manager, Technology Transformation Enablement (Office of the CIO, Ryder System, Inc.)
- Former Twitter OpEx leader and coach
- LEI alum (founding editor of The Lean Post)
- Living systems nerd
- Editor of Lean books and case studies
- Advocate for gender and racial equity in organizations

And… I think Lean works best when it's paired with other ideas about how change happens in complex orgs…

> "Remember, always, that everything you know and everything everyone knows, is only a model. Get your model out there where it can be viewed. Invite others to challenge your assumptions and add their own."
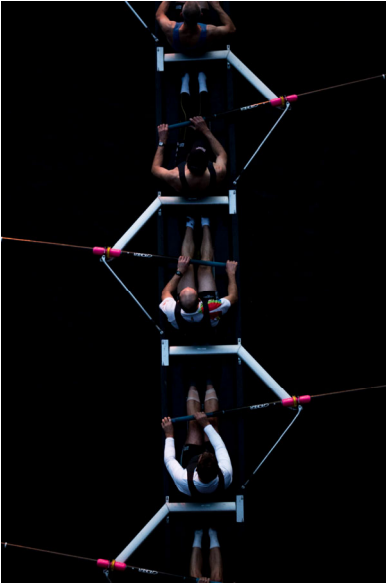>
> -Donella Meadows

Lean capability development starts with asking key questions…

- What is our purpose?
- What business problems are we trying to solve?
- Where does our team have capability now?
- Where can we grow while delivering on our purpose?
- How do we make people feel a part of this? (and why does this matter?)

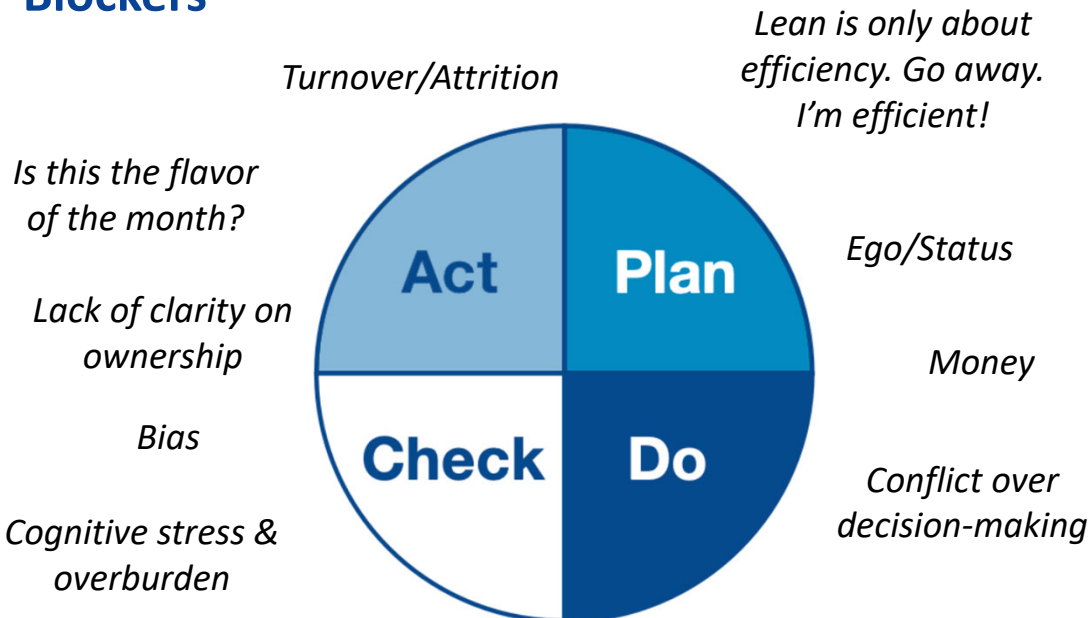# Harder, but necessary, questions to ask as well...

- Do we have leadership's support?
- What, if any, harm has been done by "Lean" leaders and teams in the past?
- Are teams receiving conflicting messages about which direction we're going?
- How does power and (healthy) authority work in this organization?
- To what degree does this organization lead with data?

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"Blockers"

Turnover/Attrition

Lean is only about efficiency. Go away. I'm efficient!

Is this the flavor of the month?

Ego/Status

Lack of clarity on ownership

Money

Bias

Conflict over decision-making

Cognitive stress & overburden

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So, if everything is a model…

What have you noticed that has worked?

(And what do we mean by "worked"?)

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So, if everything is a model…

Here's what seems to land *most* of the time (concepts & tools):

- PDCA / the concept of continuous improvement
- Finding root cause around specific problems
- Process mapping

Here's what only *sometimes* lands:

- A3 thinking for singular projects and within individual teams
- "Problems are treasures"
- Intentional kaizens

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So, if everything is a model...

And here's where I notice that people REALLY struggle:

- Clear prioritization (goals and/or problems to solve)
- Using A3s to create alignment across teams
- Value stream mapping
- PDCA learning cycles and slowing down to reflect on a regular cadence
- Ideas like "capability development"; "institutional memory"; and shared language

Which reminds me of a story... and the power of the A3!

Common Leverage Points

Q&A

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