# Using the Impediment List

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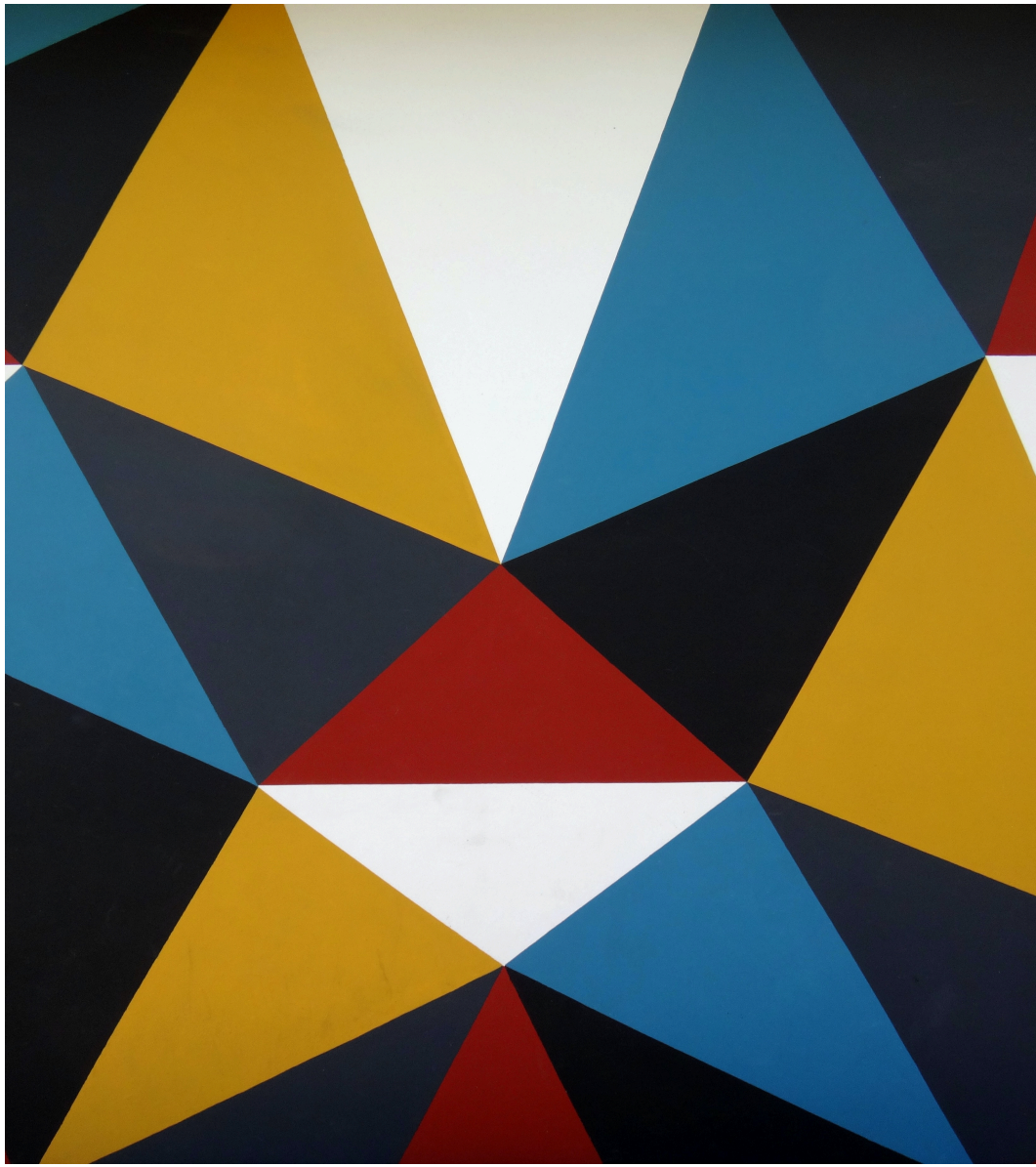
# Intro



# Reminder to me…

- **If you want the slide deck (in PDF):**
- If I don't have your email associated with this webinar:
  - Chat (less secure)
  - Send me a quick email. (jhlittle@LeanAgileTraining.com)



# Recommendation

- “**A Scrum Book”** by Jeff Sutherland, James Coplien et al.
- It’s full of about 94 Patterns in ~500 pages.
- Patterns movement.
  - See Christopher Alexander, “A Pattern Language.” “The Timeless Way of Building.”
  - See wikipedia (“A Pattern Language”).
  - See also: ScrumPLOP.org or Scrumbook.org



# Agenda…

- What is an Impediment List
- Wait!  What is an Impediment
- How to use the Impediment List
- Some ideas around that.

- Let’s start!



# Change



# Talking about change

- We must have a sustainable pace of change
- Not for you, but for “the culture”
- “Hard to see, this one is”



# What is an Impediment List



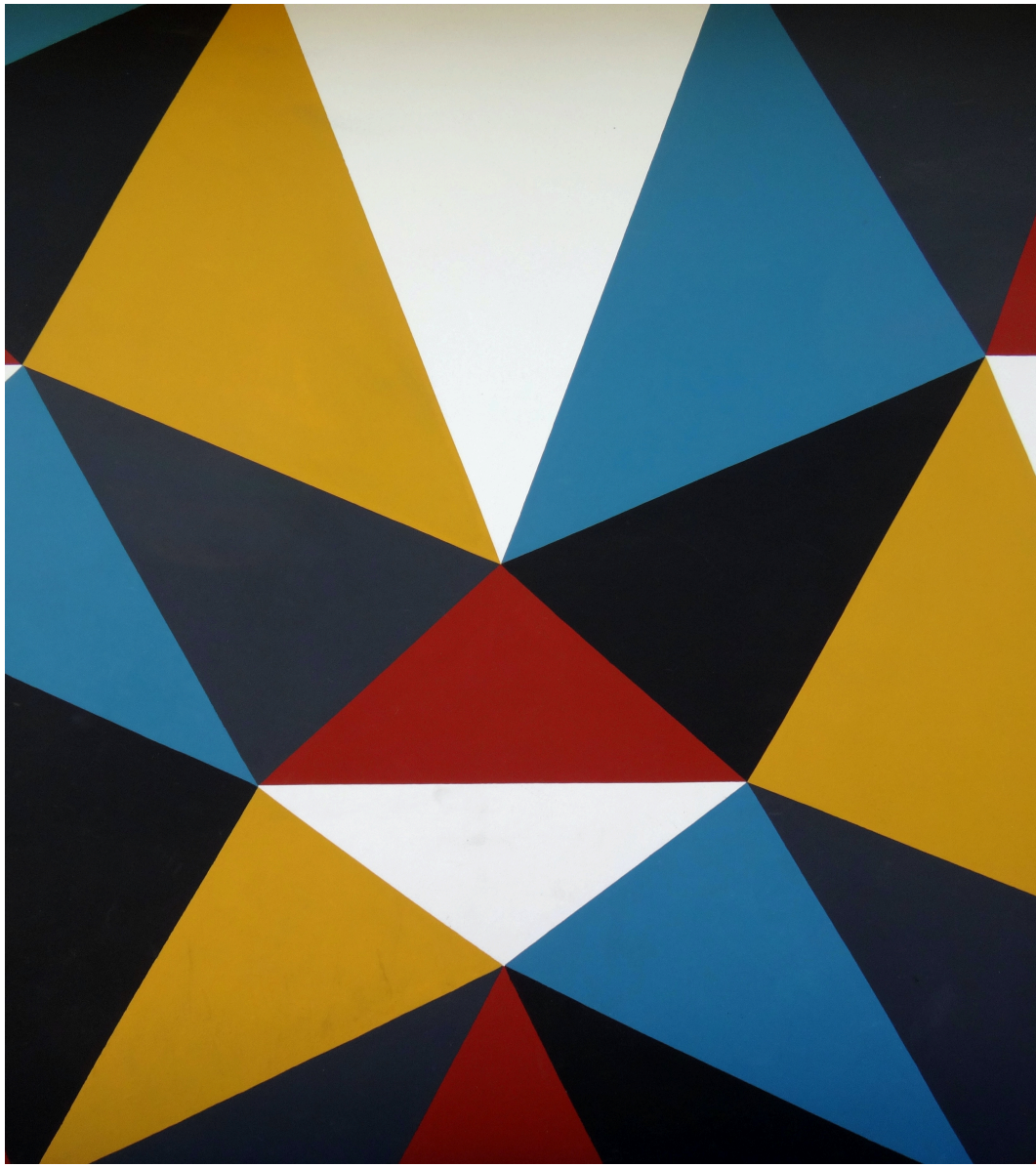
# Impediment List Is a Pattern

- This pattern fits with other patterns (e.g., ScrumMaster, First Things First)
- This pattern (we hope) helps you become better, or your team become better. And maybe more broadly, helps others become better.
- This pattern is basic to becoming better. But, it is not a silver bullet.
- Where are the darn **silver bullets**!?!?



# Not Just One Pattern, but How It All Works Together

- **Also:** Not a noun, but a verb.
- It's not having an Impediment List, it's working the Impediment List to become better.
- Some patterns it works with: Daily Scrum, SM, Sprint, Sprint Retrospective, Velocity, etc.



# What is an Impediment List?

- A list of Impediments.
- A list of the Top 20 (a) things to fix, and/or (b) opportunities for improvement
- Prioritized: By benefit (mostly increased Velocity), really ROI (bene/cost), and other factors
- Prioritized by the Scrum Team
  - How to see the BEST impediment? A diff webinar for later.
- Part of the social contract between the Organization and the Team



# What is an Impediment?



# What Is an Impediment?

- Anything that is “slowing us down”
- Not just “blockers” of stories in the Sprint
- Any “opportunity for improvement.”
- I suck, we suck, they suck, it sucks
- From which: A collection of improvements that helps us become 100% more productive fairly quickly. (A subset of 20?)
- *“What do we need to change around here to become 100% more productive?”*



# Team Goals

- More fun / happiness
- Less stress
- 40 hours? (fewer hours, commonly)
- Higher quality
- Increased Velocity
- More BV (per unit of time)
- So, a balance!
- Higher motivation and morale



# How can we improve? Some ways…

- Automate work
- Improve the process
- Make fewer mistakes
- Learn more, faster, better
- Become more skillful
- Less “non-Value Added time” (Cf. Lean)
- Less wait time or delay (Cf. Lean)
- More efficient
- Less distracted
- Better collaboration
- Have everything we need to be successful (DOR)
- Less time stuck or spinning
- More energy (awake, motivated, having fun)



# How do you measure improvement?

- Many possible ways
- One: Within a time box, with a given set of inputs,  more good stuff to customers in T2 than in T1
- What is “good stuff”?  Probably more BV than lines of code.
- It’s the Gestalt, the whole. It’s not about the individual parts, per se.  But the overall improvement of the Team, within the context of company, customers, etc.
- Increase in Velocity?  Mainly? First?  Can we measure BV yet?



# How Big is an Impediment?

- By the time an impediment gets to the Top…
- Normally fixable (or can be mitigated enough) in one Sprint
- Slicing and dicing takes cleverness
- Some resulting benefit (ROI on the impediment) starting (we hope) immediately
- Sometimes: “Oh sugar, maybe that was not the right thing to fix!”
- Company Culture is definitely TOO big for one Sprint



# If I, we, they or “it” is not Perfect

- …then you have an “impediment”.

- Let’s be fair: by that definition everything is an impediment.
- “The relentless pursuit of perfection.” (Lexus slogan)
- Yes, it is humbling, daunting somewhat
- The LA Dodgers must be better than last year (they won the World Series 2024 & 2025).



# How to use Impediments?



# Watch Out!

- People can feel pushed. Not good.
- Improving also requires these:
  - More happiness / fun
  - Higher quality
  - Less stress
  - Fewer hours
  - More BV per Story Point
  - More motivation
  - *“I never want to leave this team — the best 6 months of my work life, ever.”*
- Otherwise: They will assume that “impediments” is just talk, and assume management wants us to work harder, more hours.  “Under Pressure”



# Exercise: Write Impediments

- Take 2 minutes and write as many impediments as you each can.
  - In the Chat
  - Or: On our mural at **mural.co**.
- So, you have some examples.



# Examples

- Here is one list:
- https://leanagiletraining.com/better-agile/impediments-orlando-may-2015/



# Problems

- Humans telling the truth…
- A Team member doesn't want to admit she is not perfect.
- Low trust within Team.
- The organization does not want to talk about the dirty linen.
- People blame Scrum for the problems Scrum reveals.

- Hence: Courage



# Some Domains for Impediments

- People issues
- Scrum-Butt
- Lack of Automation (Testing, CI, etc.)
- Distractions
- Organizational impediments (wide range)
- Unwillingness to change, mindset, culture
- Business side issues (PO sucks, BSHs suck, DOR process sucks)
- Etc.



# Prioritize - factors

- Benefits:
  - Increased velocity
  - Higher morale
  - More BV
  - Less confusion, waste
  - JIT knowledge conversion
  - Higher quality
- Costs of implementation
- ROI
- Other factors
- Key: Make impediments the right size



# “One step at a time.”

- Work on one impediment at a time. Usually.
- Don’t get distracted. (So easy to get distracted.)
- Suggestion: Make a list of the impediments fixed or mitigated.  And a Velocity chart (improving?) - over time. To encourage people to improve.
- Don’t scatter your energies on many small impediments and get nowhere.



# The People



# The Team Must Help

- We mean the whole Scrum Team, including the PO.
- Learn to identify the best impediments (eventually)
- Fix or mitigate some impediments



# ScrumMaster

- Guides, cajoles, coaches, etc.
- Fixes some impediments
- Pulls in other parties, manages, helps
- The main driver (“the straw that stirs the drink”)



# The Manager

- [A Team should have one manager.]
- A manager must help them attack impediments — in general and specifically.
- The manager must say yes (sometimes) to giving people, money or approval, or all 3.
- A manager might actually fix some impediments.



# Business Stakeholders

- They see the list every Sprint (or the Top 3)
- Let the BSHs choose whether to invest in fixing some impediments. (They can get some money, normally)
- They should help some (maybe only by saying yes)



# People Outside Team/Firm

- Commonly, we have to pay them.
- Obviously, only pay them if a good value.
- And commonly it is.  They can fix things well, quicker, at a reasonable price.  Yay!



# Summary:
# Who fixes impediments?

- The SM
- The Team (like a PBI in the sprint). The whole Team… (PO)
- The Manager
- Other people outside the Team (eg, BSHs, others)
- **People outside the company (eg, a vendor, etc.)**



# When



# When do we identify impediments?

- Before the First Sprint
- In the Daily Scrum
  - Everyone must have a biggest impediment (biggest thing that we might improve on)
  - “Everything is perfect” is a silly answer.
- In the Retrospective
  - Every one must have an “I suck”, a “We suck”, and a “They suck”. (Or “It sucks”.)
- Or, anytime!
  - Tell the ScrumMaster



# The Bigger Picture



# Impact?

- If you did the Top 8 (or N) impediments, could you **double the Velocity**?
- How long to fix the Top 8 (or N)?



# Transparency

- The Impediment List brings transparency.
- And more honesty.



# Painful, some

- Being honest
- Being humble
- “More” effort (other than building the product)
- Annoyingly, people & things never become perfect!!!
- The Org provides friction
- CHANGE! (is, among other things, painful)



# What is the gain for the pain?

- Tell us the ways an **Impediment List** helps.



## Benefits

- Increased velocity
- Visibility
- Transparency
- First Things First
- Less complaining
- Higher quality
- Things become Less Stupid
- Higher morale
- They learn to identify the important stuff
- SM work list
- SM less distracted

# Discussion, Questions



# Discussion, Questions

- Don’t be shy!
- Just turn off the mute
- OR: Type them in the Chat



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