Sound check
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1

sketch
development
Better Teams // Better Software
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This is a talk about

- Problem solving through experimentation and feedback
- Continuous improvement
- Productivity

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Why this is important

- Maybe you're stuck at 99%
- Maybe your meetings are dysfunctional
- Maybe you're drowning in VUCA
- Maybe you're constantly facing novel problems in your company and and the solution is not always obvious or easy

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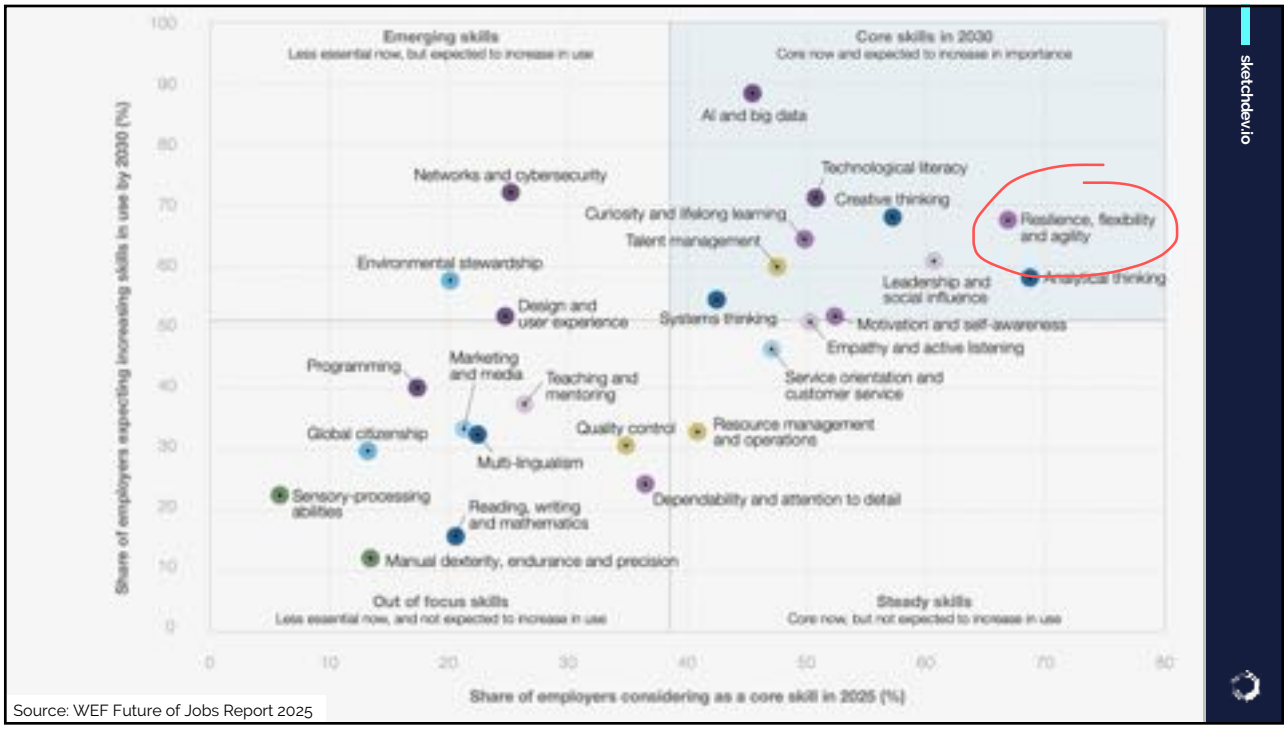

Source: WEF Future of Jobs Report 2025

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Learning objectives

- Learn how to foster high performing teams who can solve their own problems
- Learn how to iterate through solutions
- Learn how to operate and communicate progress on a cadence
- Learn how to leverage slack and waste as a competitive advantage

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Map for today

- Act I: my story
- Act II: case study: Saturday Night Live
- Act III: lessons in agility

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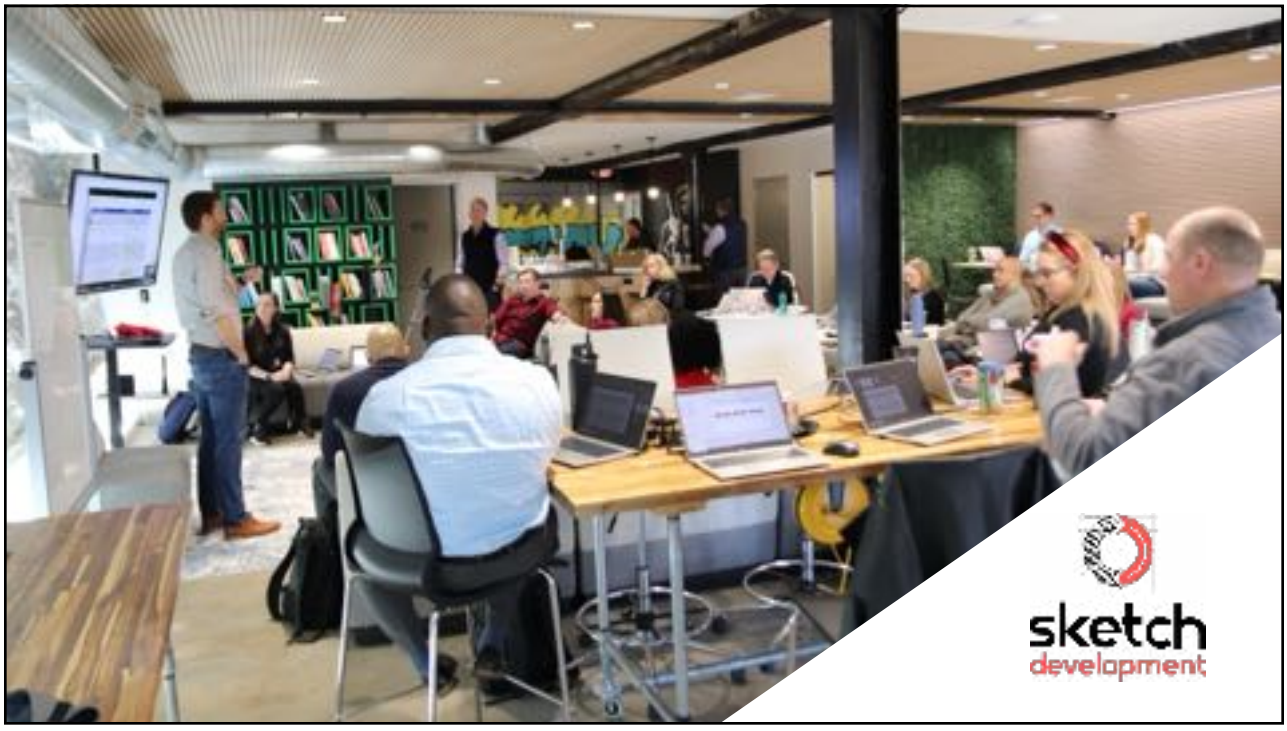

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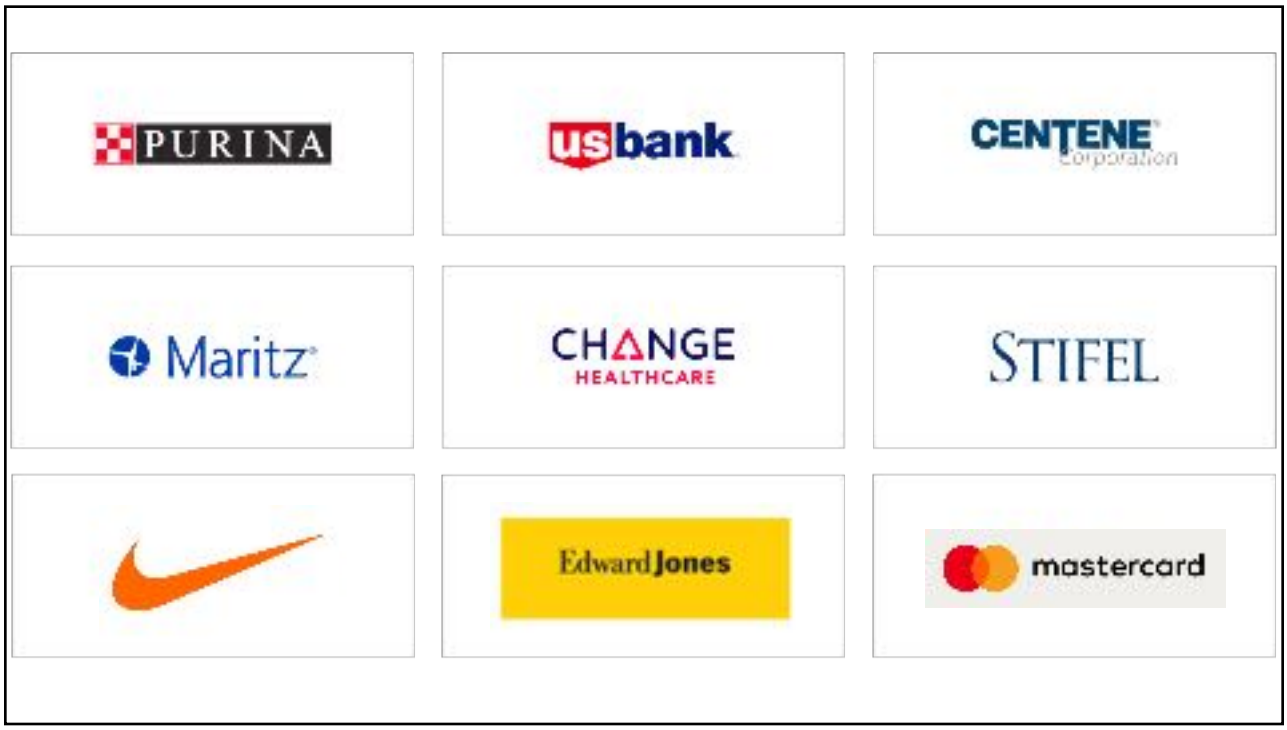

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Sketch comedy? Really?

- Collections of small-batch value
- Team based
- Feedback driven
- Requires vulnerability
- Iteratively developed
- Product minded

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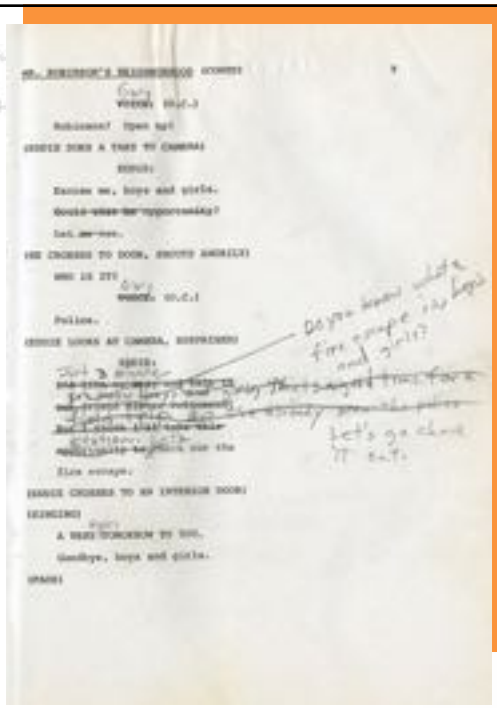
But first, we need to play a game

Characteristics of the perfect sketch?



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Lorne Michaels

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SNL at a glance

- Withstood competitive threats over 50-year run
- 200+ Emmys
- Comedy legend factory
- Highest rated show in its category
- Can charge up to $300,000 for 30 seconds of air time
- They thrive VUCA conditions

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SNL team structure
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Transparent
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11:30
12:00
12:30
COMM. 1
COMM. 2
COMM. 3
COMM. 4
UPDATE
COMM. 5
COMM. 6
COMM. 7
STATION BREAK
COMM. 8
COMM. 9
GOODNIGHT & CREDITS

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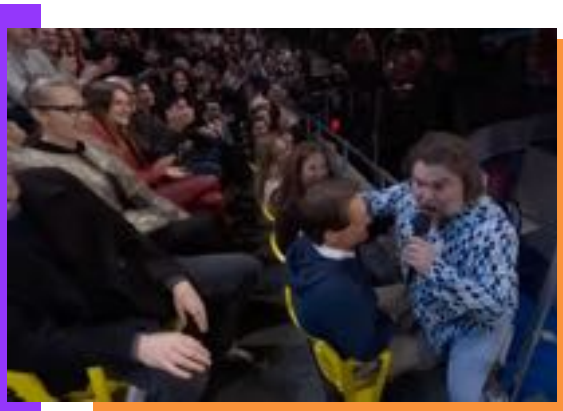
Transparent



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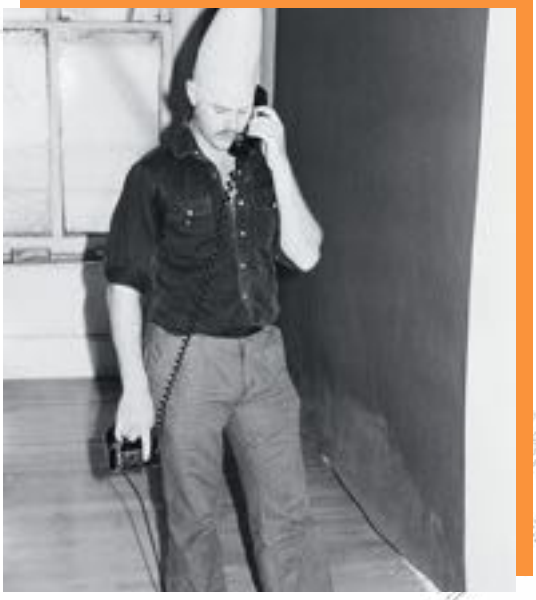
Lorne's Principle:

"We don't go on because it's perfect, we go on because it's 11:30."



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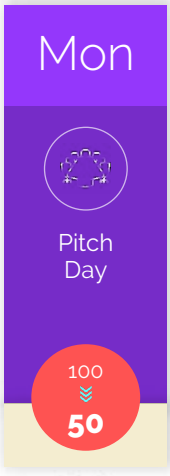
A week in the life



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A week in the life

Mon	Tue	Wed
Pitch Day	Writing ~~Day~~ Night	Read-through & Picks
100 → 50		50 → 20

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Photo by Edie Baskin/Courtesy of SNL

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A week in the life

Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri
Pitch Day	Writing ~~Day~~ Night	Read-through & Picks	Design	Rehearsal
100 ⌄⌄ 50		50 ⌄⌄ 20		

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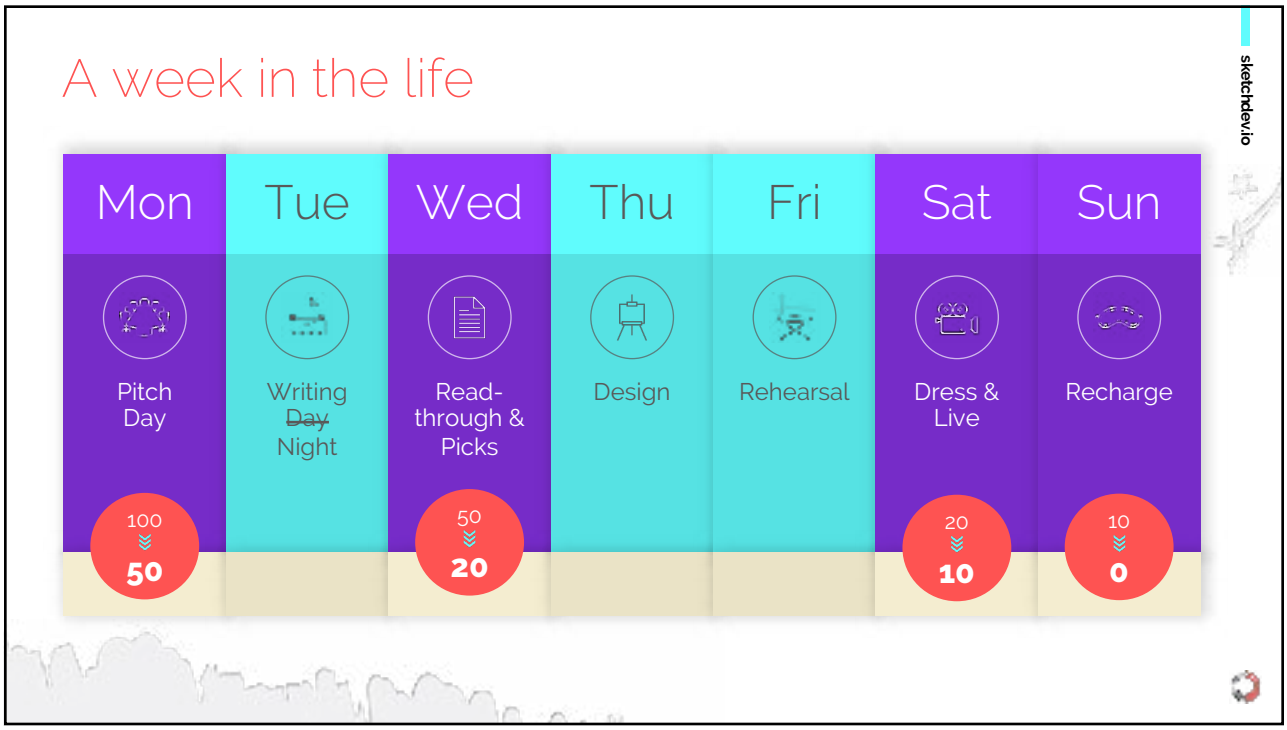
A week in the life
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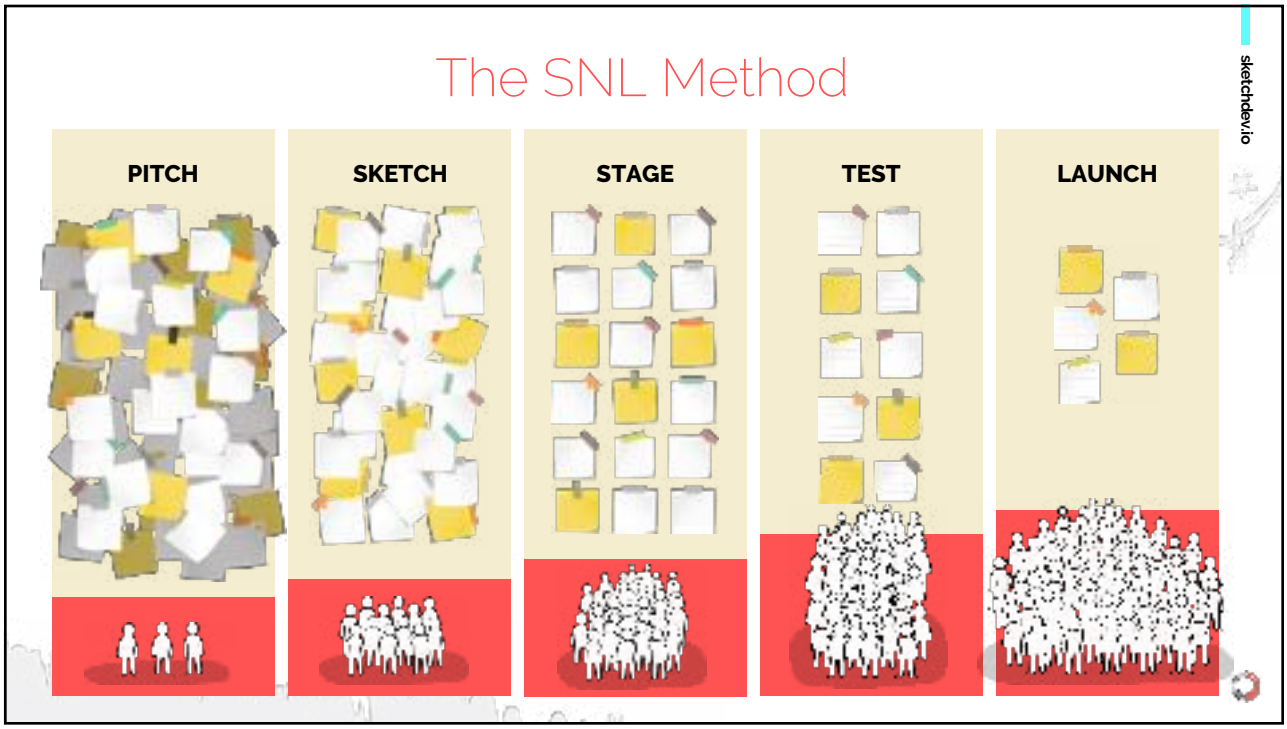
Mon
Tue
Wed
Thu
Fri
Sat
Sun
Pitch Day
Writing ~~Day~~ Night
Read-through & Picks
Design
Rehearsal
Dress & Live
Recharge
100
50
50
20
20
10
10
0

35


The SNL Method
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PITCH
SKETCH
STAGE
TEST
LAUNCH

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Let's chat

Can you think of a time when you should have changed course but didn't?

Why didn't you?

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SNL set design

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Tony Cenicola/The New York Times

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Team building

Photo by Marty Lederhandler/AP

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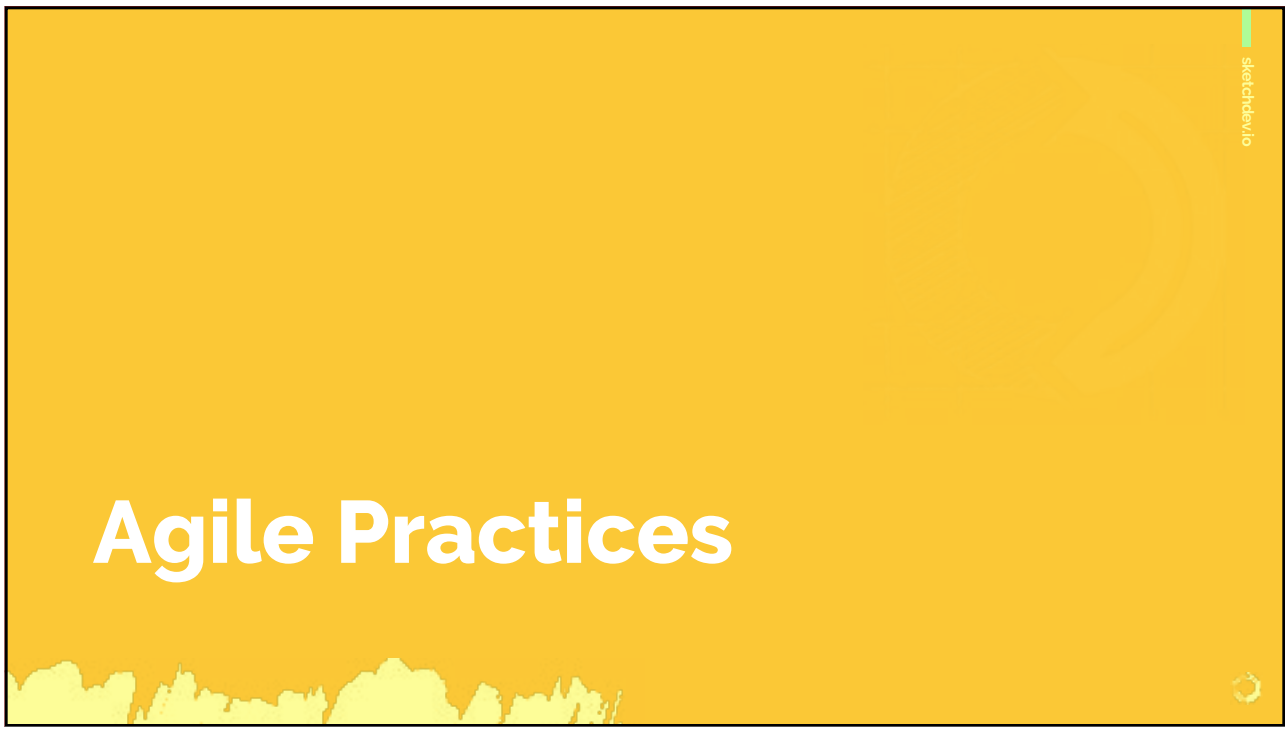

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Let's chat

What is "Agile"?

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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.

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Agile principles

- Our highest priority is to satisfy the customer through early and continuous delivery of valuable [software].
- Welcome changing requirements, even late in development. Agile processes harness change for the customer's competitive advantage.
- Deliver working [software] frequently, from a couple of weeks to a couple of months, with a preference to the shorter timescale.
- Business people and developers must work together daily throughout the project.
- Build projects around motivated individuals. Give them the environment and support they need, and trust them to get the job done.
- The most efficient and effective method of conveying information to and within a development team is face-to-face conversation.
- Working [software] is the primary measure of progress.
- Agile processes promote sustainable development. The sponsors, developers, and users should be able to maintain a constant pace indefinitely.
- Continuous attention to technical excellence and good design enhances agility.
- Simplicity--the art of maximizing the amount of work not done--is essential.
- The best architectures, requirements, and designs emerge from self-organizing teams.
- At regular intervals, the team reflects on how to become more effective, then tunes and adjusts its behavior accordingly.

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AGILITY

A working definition

Teams of self-organized individuals
transparently developing products
and rhythmically delivering value,
continuously learning from that delivery,
and adjusting accordingly.
Indefinitely.

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The Agile Team

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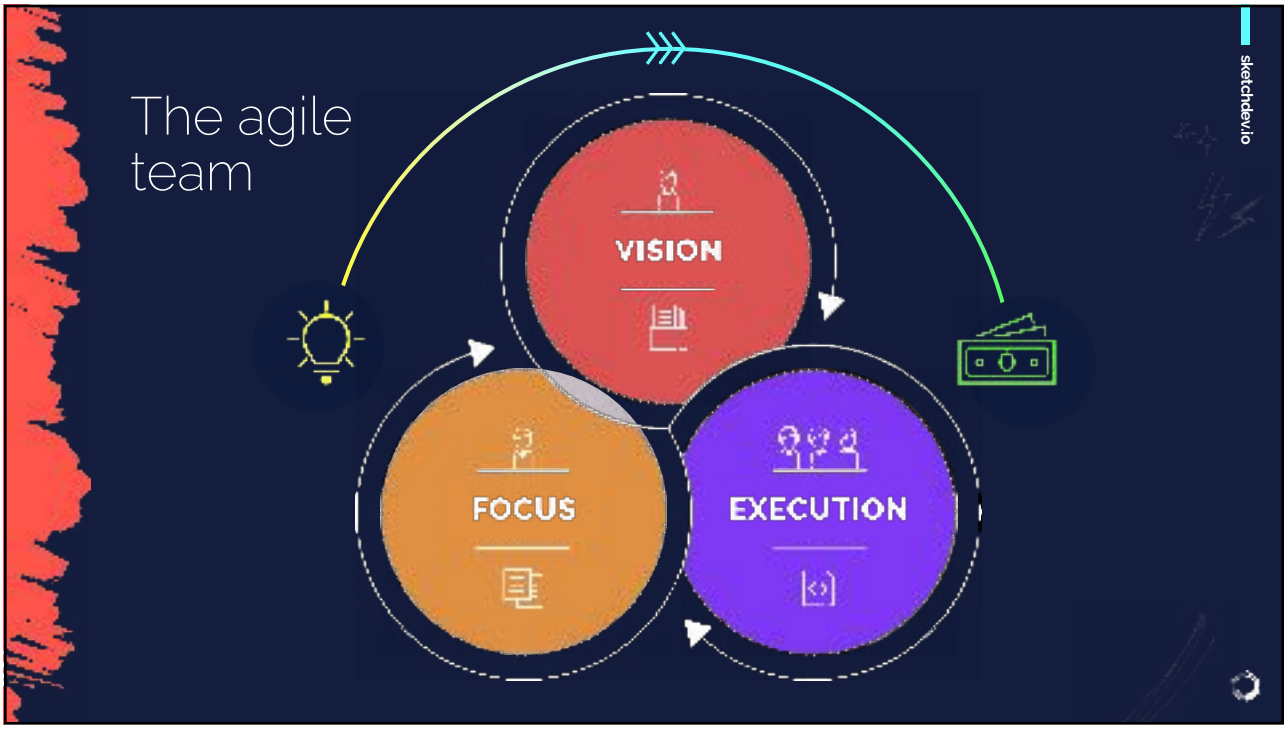

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Less like this
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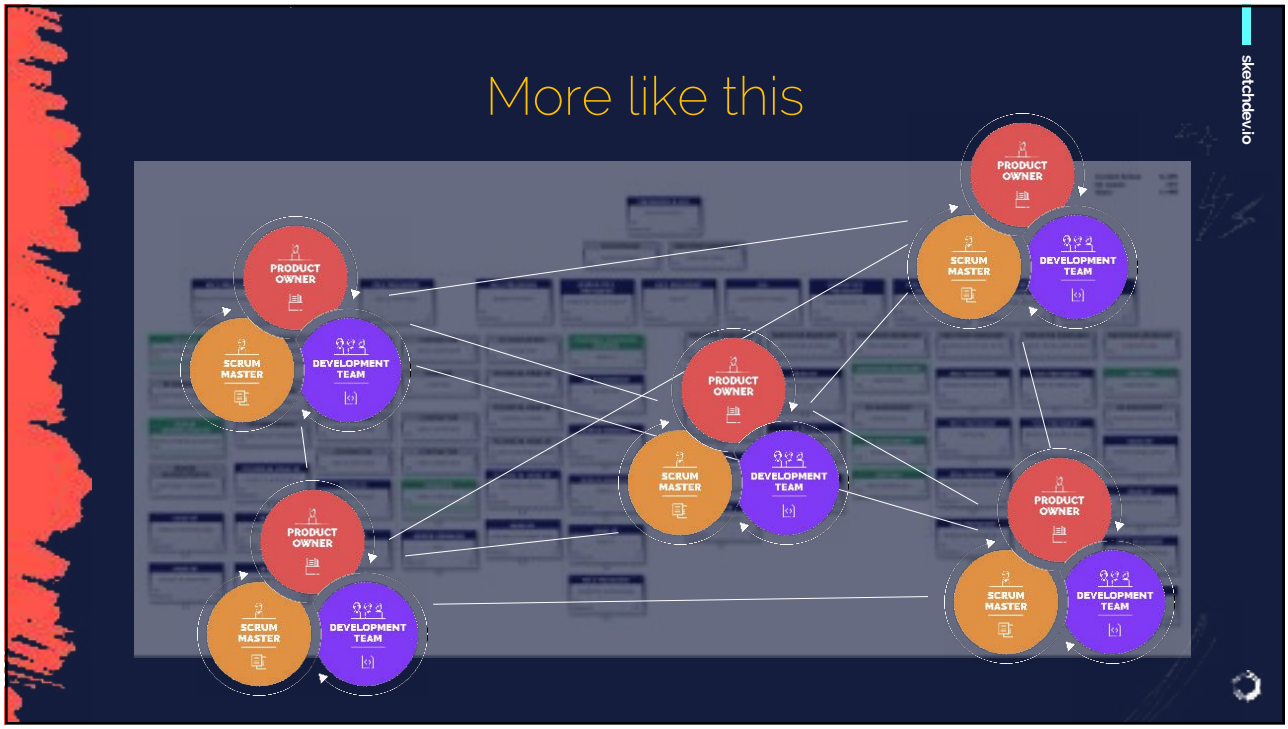
More like this
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PRODUCT OWNER
SCRUM MASTER
DEVELOPMENT TEAM

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Team building

Photo by Marty Lederhandler/AP

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The self-organized team

Photo by Marty Lederhandler/AP

- Performing
- Norming
- Storming
- Forming

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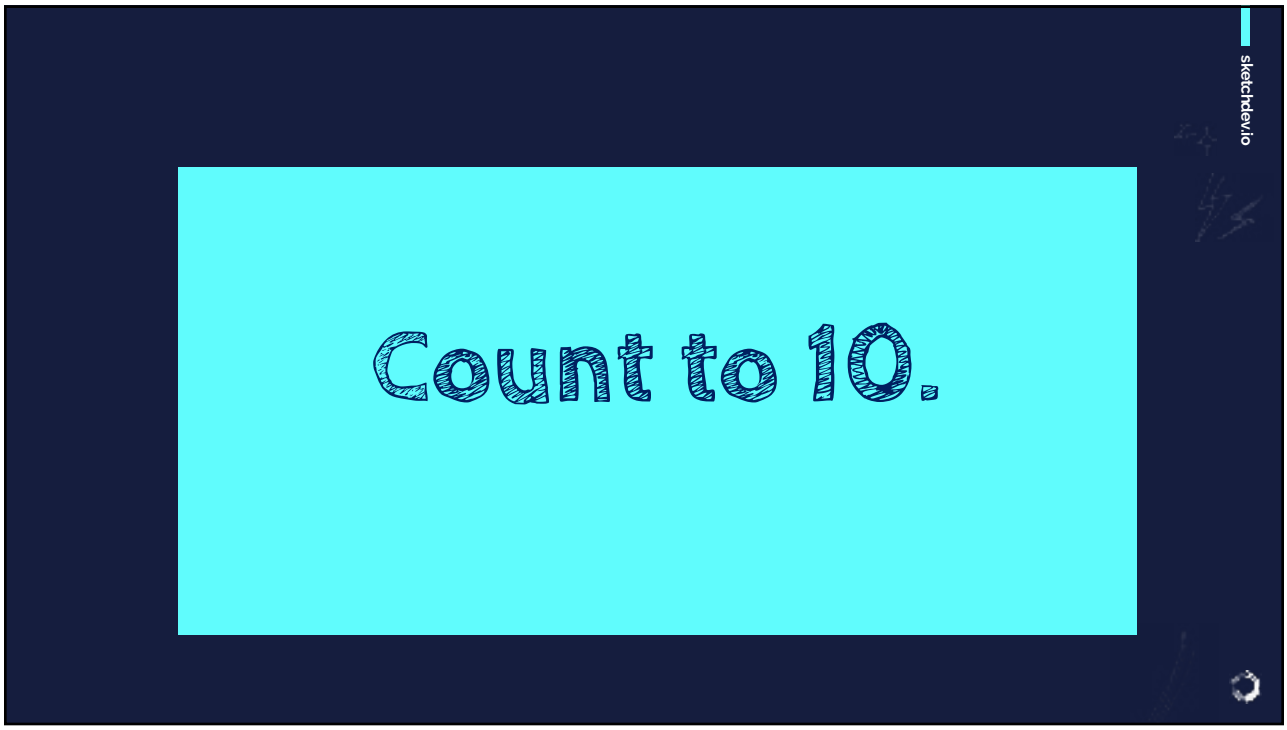
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Count to 10.

60

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The Power of Iteration

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Complicated or complex?

Something that is complicated is not simple, but is ultimately knowable (how an aircraft is constructed, for example).

Something that is Complex is never completely knowable, because there are too many interacting variables (e.g., how an aircraft will perform during a specific flight).

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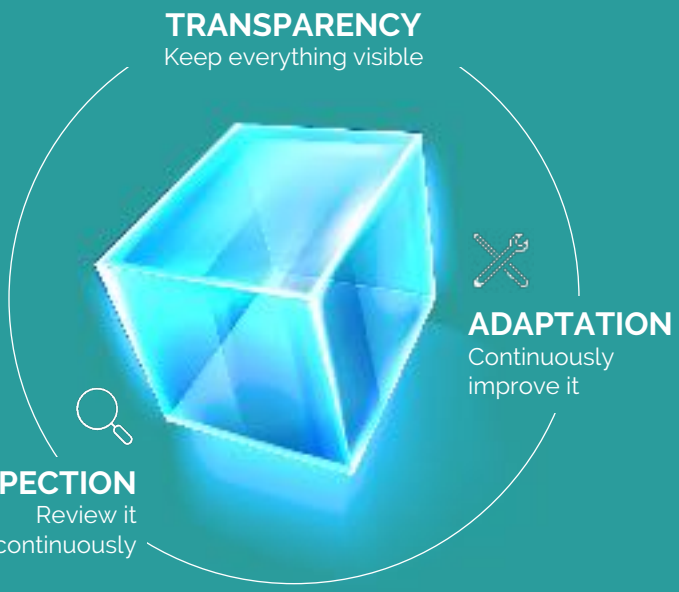
Empirical Process Control

A FRAMEWORK FOR MANAGING VUCA



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Empirical Process Control

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DEFINED

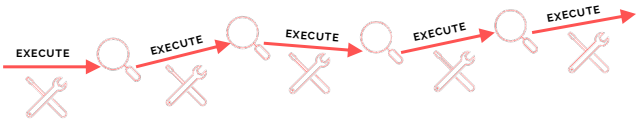
START
All specifications planned

EXECUTE THE PROJECT

FINISH
All specifications complete

EMPIRICAL

START
Determine goals and priorities



FINISH
Goals met

ITERATE ON THE PRODUCT

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Hypothesis-Driven Development

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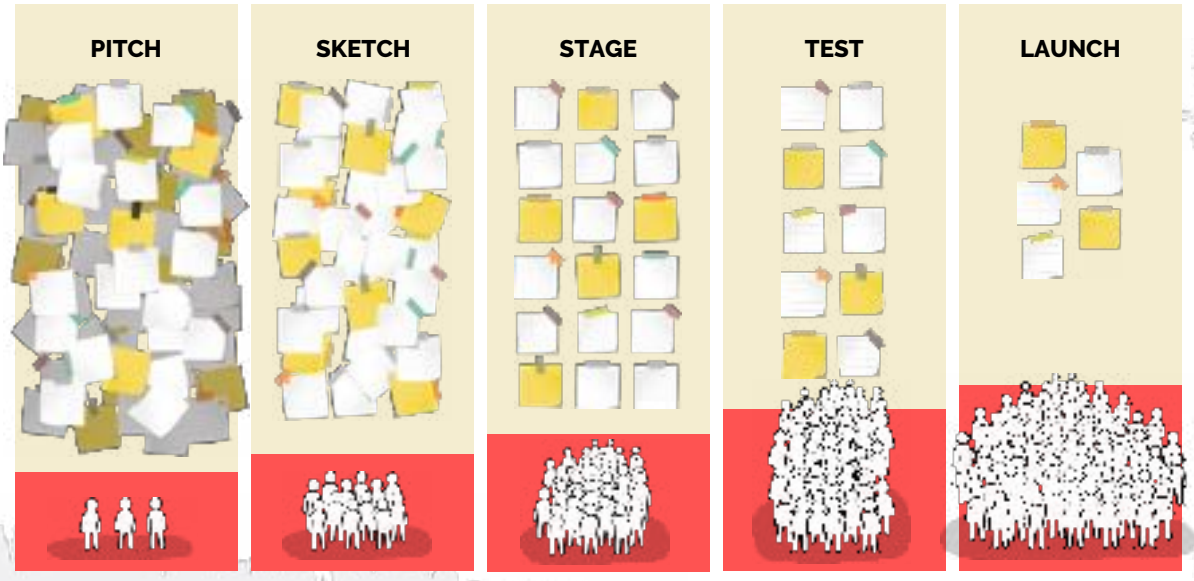

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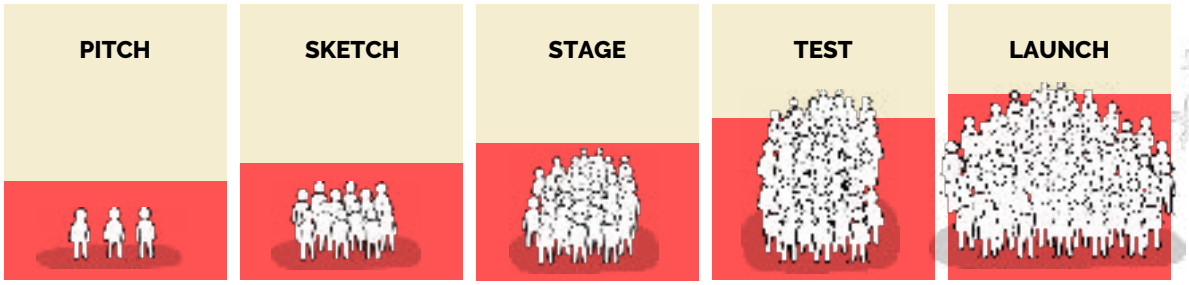
Pitch Sketch Launch at your company



- In 90 minutes: Lean Coffee
- In one week: Design Sprint
- Every two weeks: Scrum
- Over three months: EOS Planning

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Technical Debt

Tony Cenicola/The New York Times

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The Cadence

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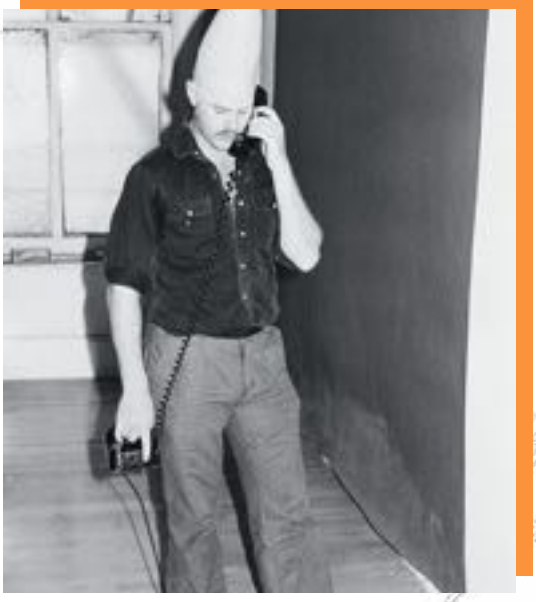
Sustainable pace

The spirit of Scrum

"We don't go on because it's perfect, we go on because it's 11:30."



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The Definition of DONE

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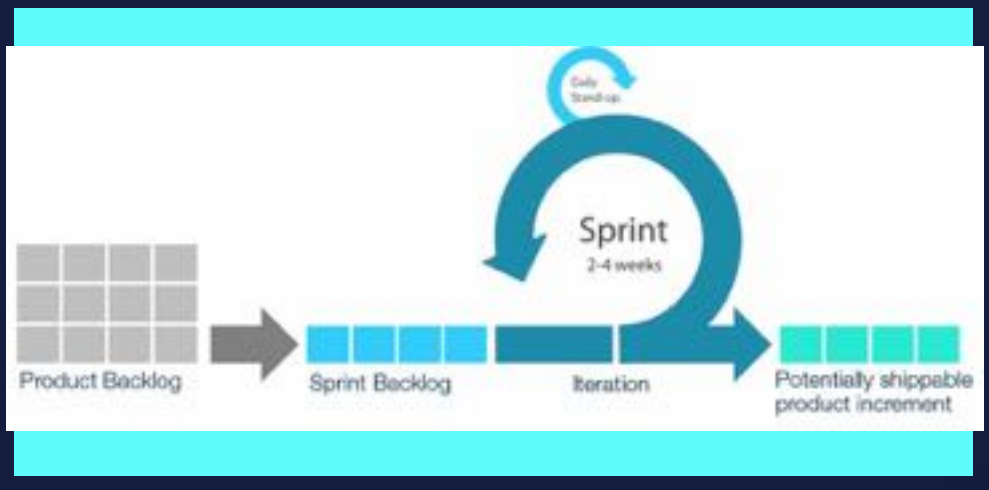
Scrum



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Scrum Cadence

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S	M	T	W	Th	F	S
	CHECK IN	REHEARSAL REVIEW RETRO PLANNING	CHECK IN REFINEMENT	CHECK IN	CHECK IN	
	CHECK IN	CHECK IN	CHECK IN REFINEMENT	CHECK IN	CHECK IN	

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The "iron triangle"

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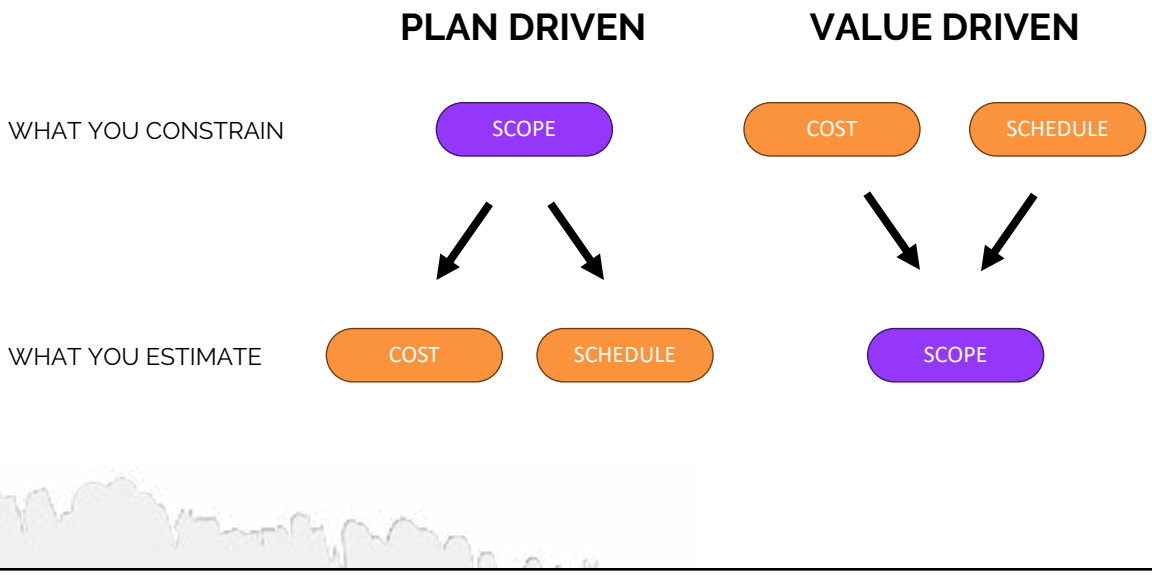

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The Tao of Lorne

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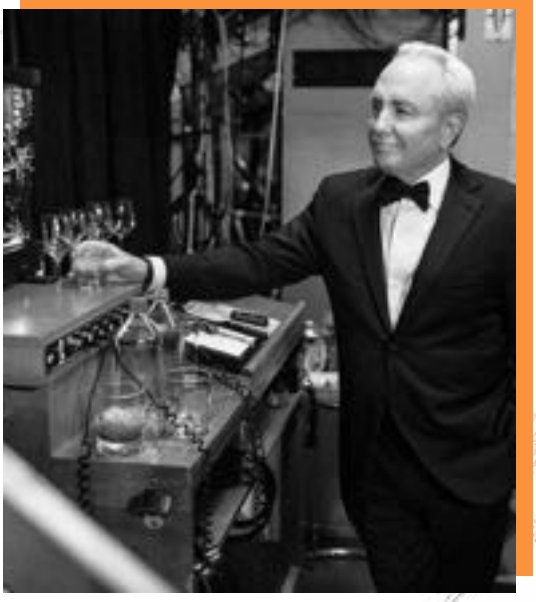
The Tao of Lorne

AGILE LEADERSHIP IN PRACTICE

- "We don't go on because it's perfect, we go on because it's 11:30."
- Producers are supposed to be invisible. The cast has to inhabit their own decisions.
- Organize loosely. You never know what will come up.
- "In the end, you really need someone to say, 'This is what we're doing.'"



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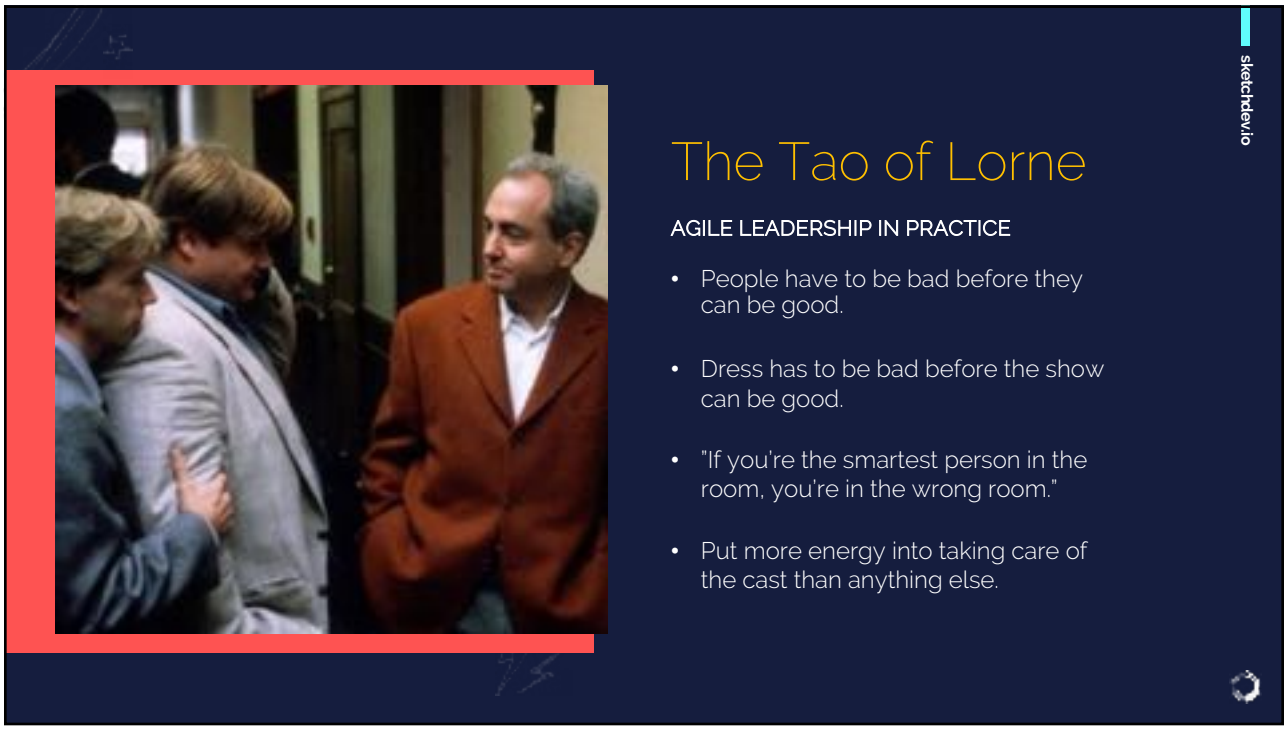
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The Tao of Lorne
AGILE LEADERSHIP IN PRACTICE
• People have to be bad before they can be good.
• Dress has to be bad before the show can be good.
• "If you're the smartest person in the room, you're in the wrong room."
• Put more energy into taking care of the cast than anything else.

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AGILITY
A working definition
Teams of self-organized individuals
transparently developing products
and rhythmically delivering value,
continuously learning from that delivery,
and adjusting accordingly.
Indefinitely.

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Actionable Takeaways
1. Where does your organization need more transparency?
2. What parts of your organization involve the most VUCA?
3. Where could your company benefit from more options?
4. How might you organize your company into high-performing teams?
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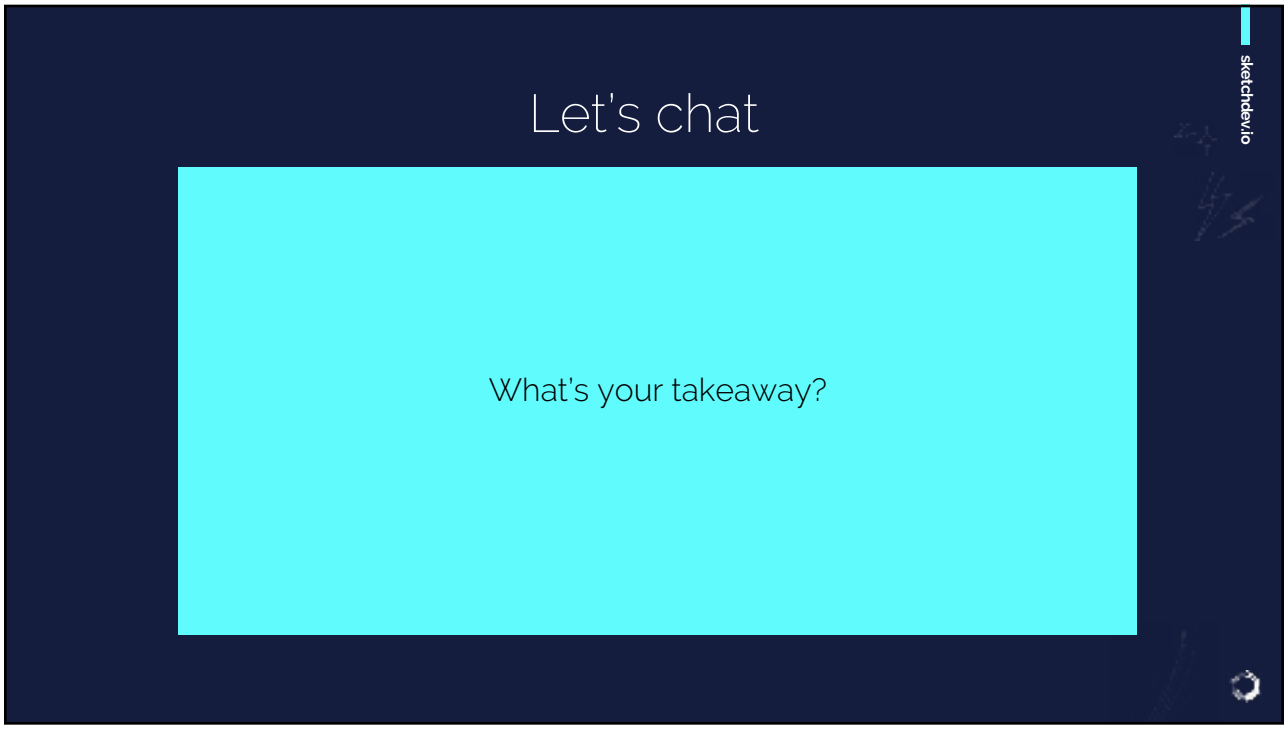
Let's chat
What's your takeaway?
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June 10

Pitch, Sketch, Launch

What Sketch Comedy Can Teach Us
About Product Development

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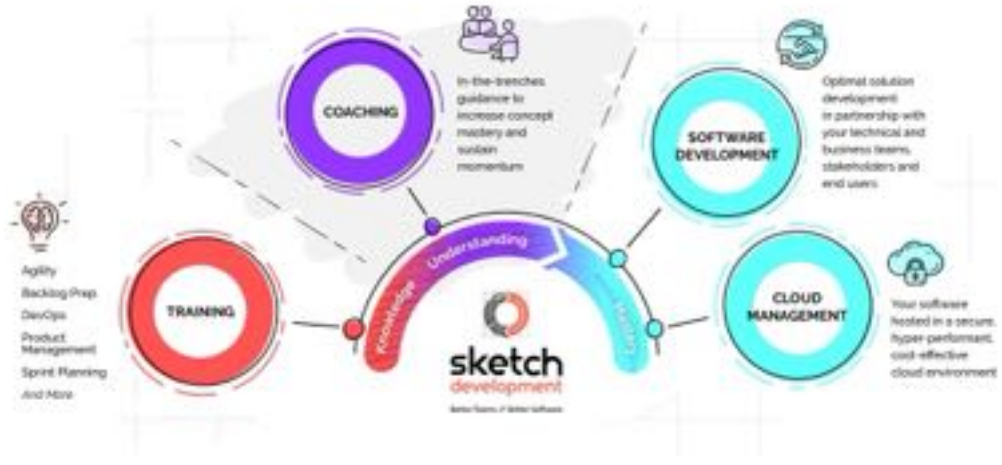
This is Sketch



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Further reading
TALK AMONGST YOURSELVES, I'LL GIVE YOU A TOPIC
Live From New York, Miller and Shales
Saturday Night, Hill and Weingard
Saturday Night Live, Castle
Wired, Woodward
Bossy Pants, Fey
God, If You're Not Up There..., Hammond
Based on a True Story, MacDonald
I Must Say, Short

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Further reading
TALK AMONGST YOURSELVES, I'LL GIVE YOU A TOPIC
Creativity, Inc., Catmull
The Future of Management, Hamel
Drive, Pink
The Lean Start-Up, Ries
Artful Making, Devin and Austin

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Vistage Review

If you don't mind

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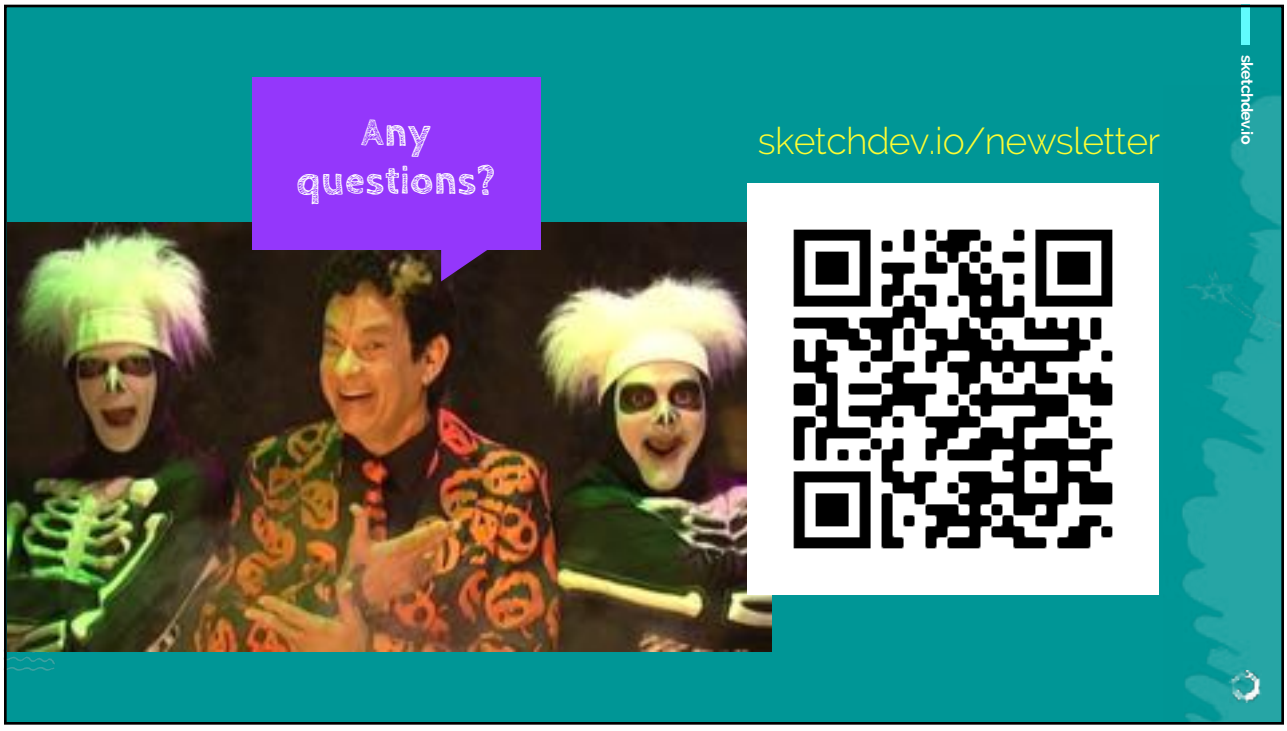

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