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Ivan Milanov

The Jedi Mindset for ERP Projects: Scrum, Stoicism & Systems Thinking

Meet your presenter

Engineering Leader

Building high-performing teams & Agile at Scale

With **15+ years** of experience in **NAV/BC**, **5+ in leadership**

Creator of the **3S Method** – uniting Scrum, Stoicism, and Systems Thinking to navigate the challenges of ERP projects.

Currently leading a team in the homecare sector, I focus on making complex **systems** like Business Central not just work—but **work well for people**.



About Me



The Dark Side of ERP Projects



Delays

Deadlines are frequently missed, leading to extended timelines and escalated costs.



Stress

Teams face immense pressure, resulting in burnout and decreased morale.



Surprises

Unexpected issues often arise during go-live, causing significant operational disruptions.



Conflict

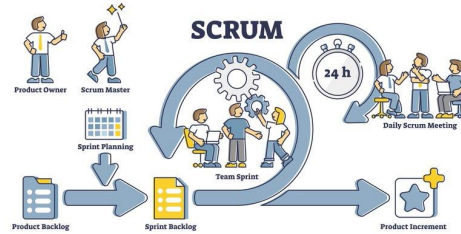
Stakeholders engage in disputes instead of collaborating, hindering progress and trust.

How to focus on what really matters?

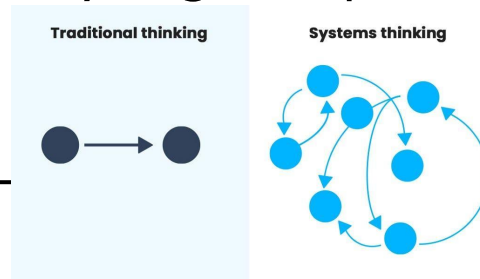
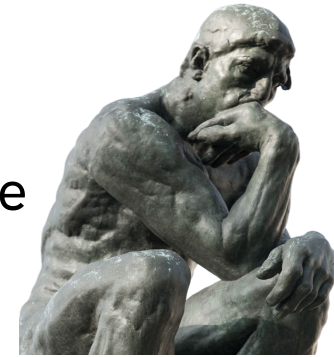
- **Urgency everywhere**—but rarely time for root-cause thinking 🕒
- **Cross-functional friction**—developers, POs, key users pulling in different directions ↻
- Too many **meetings** 📊
- A nonstop stream of **beeps, buzzes, and pings** 💬
- Always **firefighting mode** 🧯
- **Changing priorities** — today's urgent feature is tomorrow's abandoned idea ⚡



The 3S?



- **Scrum** (*inspect & adapt*)
An **agile framework** for developing and sustaining complex products
- **Stoicism** (*reflect & respond*)
A **philosophy** focused on self-control and the pursuit of virtue
- **Systems thinking** (*zoom out & redesign*)
A **holistic approach** to analyzing how parts of a system interrelate





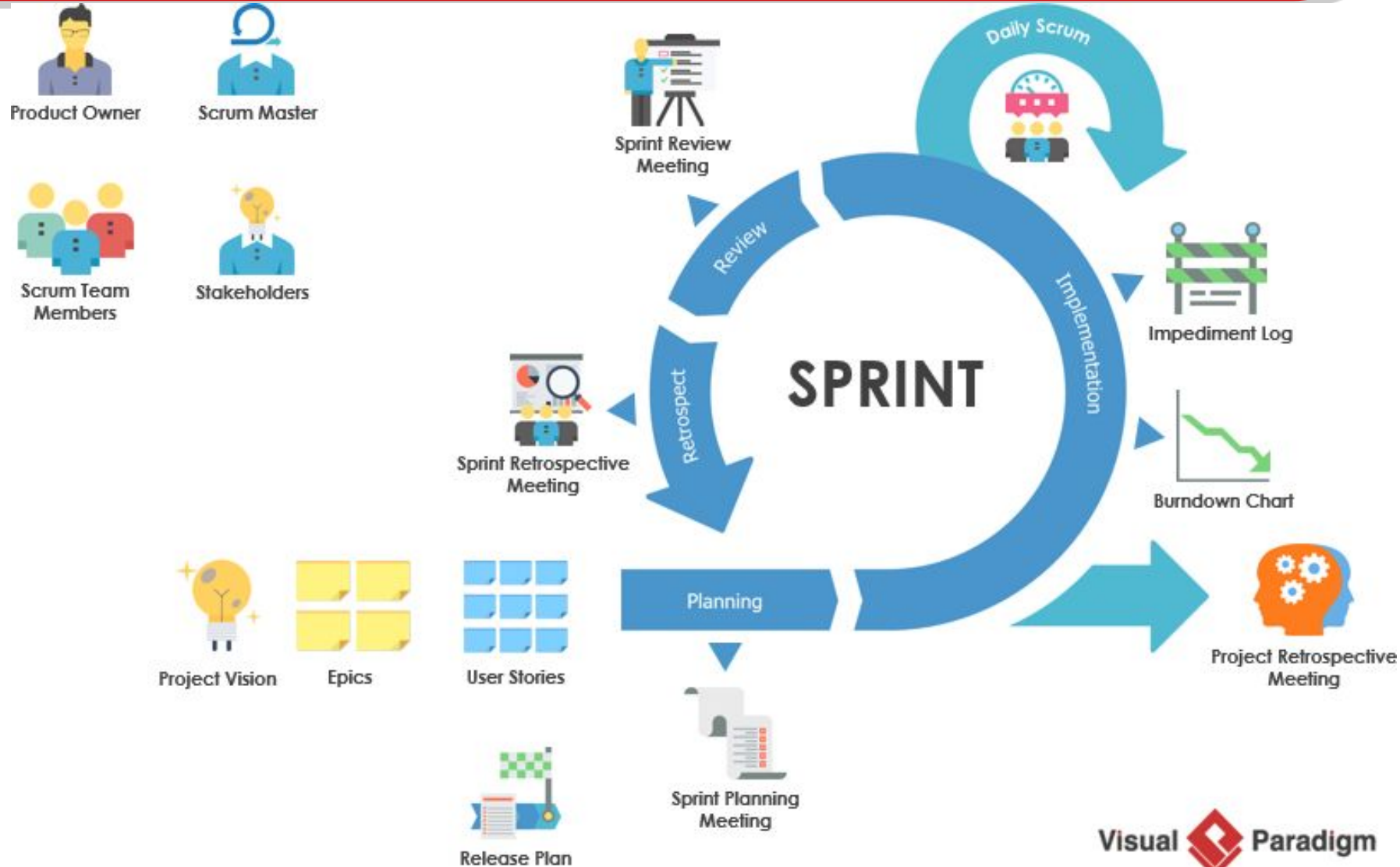
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PRACTICE: Scrum

What You DO — The Structure

Scrum provides the daily framework that turns massive ERP complexity into manageable, iterative steps. It's the training ground where discipline meets delivery.

Scrum



Scrum



- Scrum is an agile project management framework that helps teams **structure and manage their work** through a *set of values, principles, and practices*.
- Much like a rugby team (where it gets its name) training for the big game, scrum encourages teams to learn **through experiences, self-organize** while working on a problem, and **reflect** on their wins and losses to *continuously improve*.

Agile vs. Scrum

- People often think scrum and agile are the same thing because scrum is centered around continuous improvement, which is a **core principle** of agile.
- However, **scrum is a framework** for getting work done, whereas **agile is a philosophy**. The agile philosophy centers around continuous incremental improvement through *small and frequent releases*.
- The difference between agile and the definition of scrum can be found in the Scrum guide and the **Agile manifesto**. The Agile manifesto outlines four values:
 - **Individuals and interactions** over processes and tools
 - **Working software** over comprehensive documentation
 - **Customer collaboration** over contract negotiation
 - **Responding to change** over following a plan



Empiricism and Lean Thinking

- The definition of scrum is based on empiricism and lean thinking.
- **Empiricism** says that knowledge comes from experience and that decisions are made based on what is observed.
- **Lean thinking** reduces waste and focuses on essentials. The scrum framework is *heuristic*; it's based on *continuous learning* and adjustment to fluctuating factors. It acknowledges that the team doesn't know everything at the start of a project and will *evolve through experience*.
- Scrum is structured to help teams naturally adapt to changing conditions and user requirements, with re-prioritization built into the process and short release cycles so your team can *constantly learn and improve*.

Why ERP Projects Break

Ignored Flow

Teams miss feedback loops and WIP limits

False Progress

Long requirements phases create illusion of advancement

Unfinished Work

Main bottleneck in BC/D365 teams



Sprint Reviews

Strongest risk-management tool available

Definition of Ready

Forces clarity before work begins

Definition of Done

Prevents accumulation of technical debt

Scrum Values Meet Reality



Focus

Sprint goal above all distractions



Courage

Speak early when something feels wrong



Openness

Make invisible work visible



Commitment

Deliver value every week, no matter how small



Respect

Protect team capacity during chaos



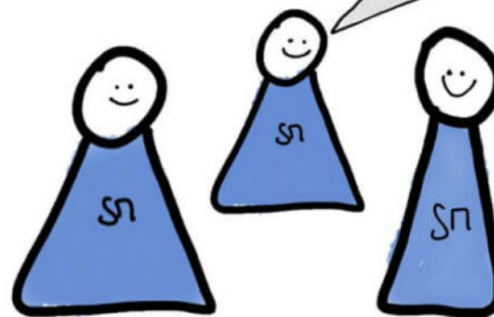
The Stoic Scrum Master

You haven't been around for **1800 years**.

Are your thoughts even still **relevant**?

"Everything we hear is an **opinion**, not a **fact**."

"Everything we see is a **perspective**, not the **truth**."



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PHILOSOPHY

Stoicism

Stoicism provides mental armor - the inner strength to stay calm under pressure, make wise decisions in chaos, and focus on what truly matters.

Stoicism

- Stoicism is a Hellenistic philosophy emphasizing virtue, resilience, and acceptance of what's beyond our control. It originated in ancient Greece and flourished in Rome, with prominent figures like Zeno of Citium, Epictetus, Seneca, and Marcus Aurelius.
- Stoics believed virtue (wisdom, courage, temperance, and justice) is the sole source of happiness and that living in accordance with nature, both human and the universe, is key to a fulfilling life.



Key Principles of Stoicism:

- **Virtue is the Only Good:**

Stoics believed that virtue, encompassing wisdom, justice, courage, and temperance, is the only true good and necessary for a well-lived life.

- **Acceptance of What You Can't Control:**

Stoics emphasized the importance of focusing on what's within our control, like our thoughts and actions, while accepting what's not, such as external events or the actions of others.

- **Self-Improvement and Self-Awareness:**

Stoicism encourages introspection, self-reflection, and continuous effort to develop virtues and overcome negative emotions.



Key Principles of Stoicism:

- Mindfulness and **Present Moment Focus:**

Stoics valued living fully in the present moment, rather than dwelling on the past or worrying about the future.

- Resilience and **Strength in the Face of Adversity:**

Stoicism emphasizes the importance of developing a resilient mindset, enabling individuals to cope with hardship and challenges.

- Importance of **Relationships and Social Cohesion:**

Stoics recognized the importance of relationships and contributing to society, believing that individuals are part of a larger community.



The Stoic Toolkit for Leaders

Stoic philosophy isn't abstract - it's intensely practical. Here are the core concepts that translate directly to ERP leadership challenges.



The Dichotomy of Control

Distinguish what you can control (your actions, responses, effort) from what you can't (others' actions, outcomes, external events). Focus your energy exclusively on the former.



Amor Fati

Love your fate. Accept reality as it is, not as you wish it were. This doesn't mean passive resignation - it means working effectively with what actually exists.



Memento Mori

Remember mortality. This project, this crisis, this frustration-all temporary. Perspective prevents catastrophizing and helps prioritize what truly matters.



Premeditatio Malorum

Premeditate adversity. By imagining potential challenges in advance, you're less shocked when they occur and better prepared to respond effectively.

The Control Dichotomy in ERP

Within Your Control

- Your reactions and attitude
- Code quality and testing rigor
- Communication clarity
- Sprint planning discipline
- Team collaboration
- Definition of Ready/Done
- Your effort and contribution

Focus here. This is where your power lives.

Outside Your Control

- Stakeholder emotions and politics
- Last-minute scope twists
- External system dependencies
- Market conditions
- Other people's decisions
- Supplier delays
- Ultimate project outcomes

Accept these. Save your energy.

📄 Wisdom means knowing the difference. Courage means acting on what you control. Temperance means accepting what you can't.

Stoic Practice: The Daily Review

The Stoics practiced daily reflection - a powerful habit for ERP leaders navigating constant change and pressure.

Morning Premeditatio

Before the day begins, anticipate challenges. What difficult conversations await? What obstacles might emerge? Mental rehearsal builds resilience.

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Evening Reflection


Review the day honestly. Where did I respond well? Where did I let emotions drive? What can I improve tomorrow? Learn from today to lead better tomorrow.

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Midday Check-In

Pause to assess: Am I focusing on what I control? Are my reactions aligned with my values? Course-correct before small issues compound.

 **Practical tip:** Block 15 minutes at day's end for reflection. Ask yourself: What would the Stoic version of me have done differently today? This habit compounds over weeks into transformed leadership.

Stoic Virtues Meet Scrum Values



Wisdom

Knowing what to do through experience and reflection

Aligns with: Focus, Openness



Courage

Speaking up early when something feels wrong

Aligns with: Courage (shared value!)



Justice

Treating team members with respect, working toward common good

Aligns with: Respect, Commitment



Temperance

Self-control, processing emotions without reaction

Enables all Scrum values

"It is the responsibility of leadership to work intelligently with what is given, and not waste time fantasizing about a world of flawless people and perfect choices." - Marcus Aurelius



The Stoic Pause

**"Between stimulus and response,
there is a space. In that space lies
your power."**

Reactive Response

- Stakeholder demands last-minute change
- You panic and scramble
- Team morale crashes
- Poor decisions made in haste

Stoic Response

- Stakeholder demands last-minute change
- **You pause and assess**
- Calm triage of options
- Team stays focused and confident

The Stoic pause replaces panic with presence. It's the difference between fighting fires and managing them.

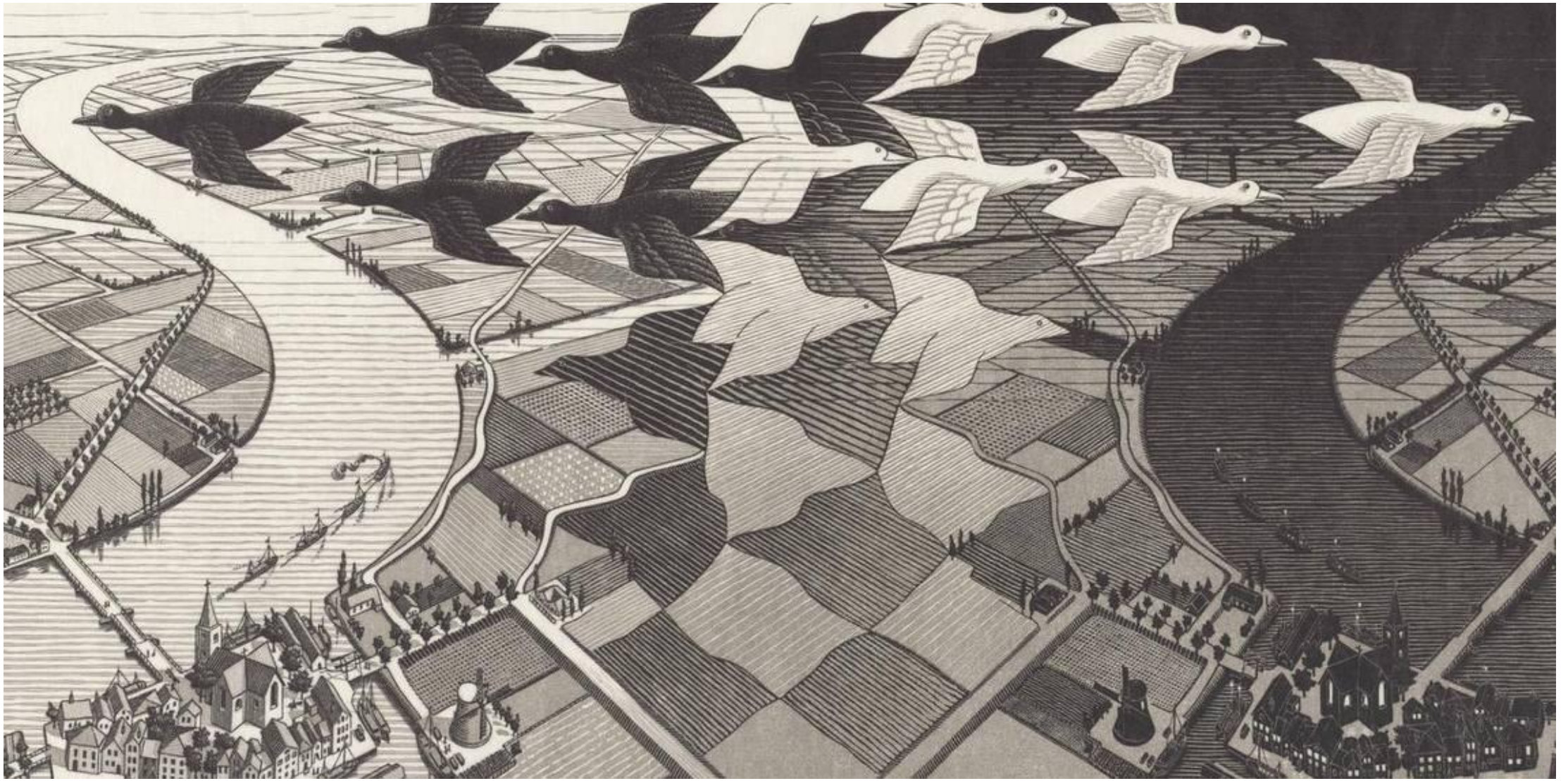


3

THEORY

Systems Thinking

Systems Thinking provides the lens to see the whole - understanding how parts connect, recognizing patterns over symptoms, and avoiding solutions that fix one problem while creating three others.



*Everything is connected... Picture by Maurits
Cornelis Escher.*

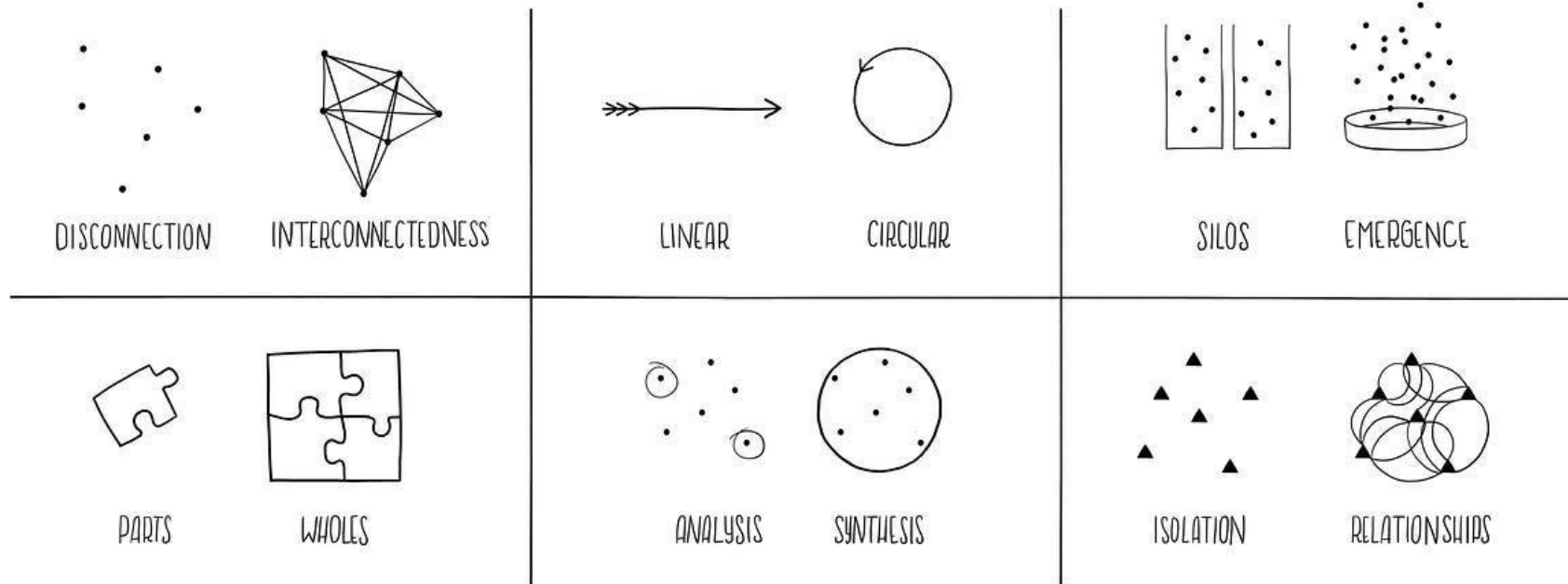
Systems Thinking



- Systems thinking is a **holistic approach** that examines the interconnectedness of elements within a system to understand how they *interact and influence* each other.
- It emphasizes seeing the **whole picture** rather than focusing on individual parts and how they relate to each other.
- This approach is useful for tackling complex problems, understanding how systems evolve over time, and making informed decisions.

Systems Thinking

TOOLS OF A SYSTEM THINKER



Key aspects of systems thinking:

- **Holistic view:** It considers all aspects of a system and its environment, not just individual components.
- **Interconnectedness:** Recognizes that elements within a system are interdependent and influence each other.
- **Dynamic systems:** Understands that systems evolve over time and are not static.
- **Feedback loops:** Acknowledges the cyclical nature of interactions within a system.
- **Causal relationships:** Explores the cause-and-effect relationships between elements.
- **Focus on patterns and structures:** Identifies underlying patterns and structures that shape system behavior.

Understanding Systems

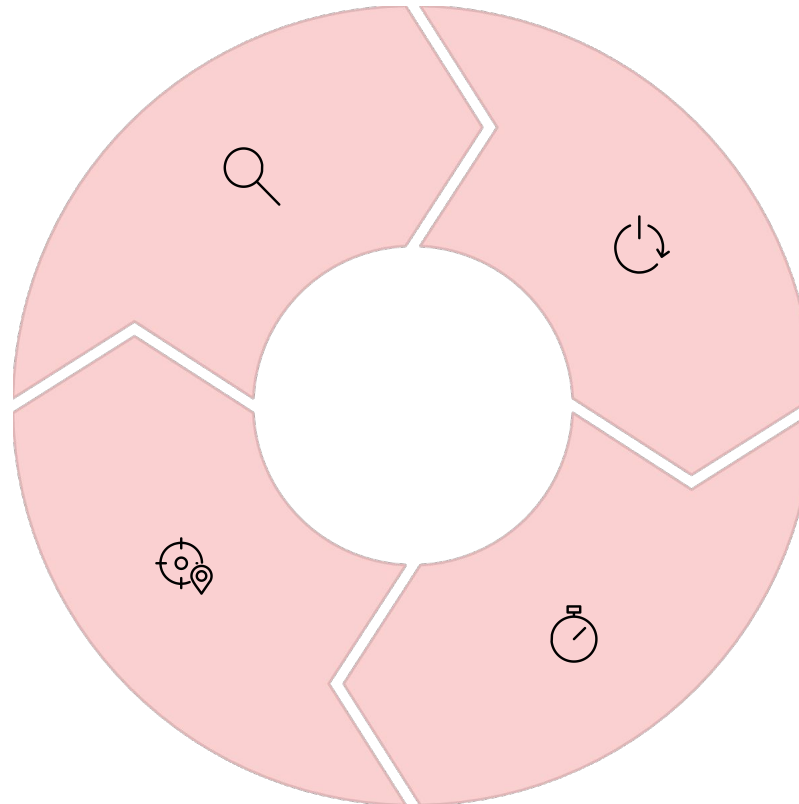
"A system is a whole which is defined by its function in a larger system of which it's a part." - Russell Ackoff

See Interconnections

Changes in Finance affect Supply Chain. Understand dependencies before you act.

Avoid Local Optimization

Teams fix their part but break the system. Think global, not just local.



Recognize Feedback Loops

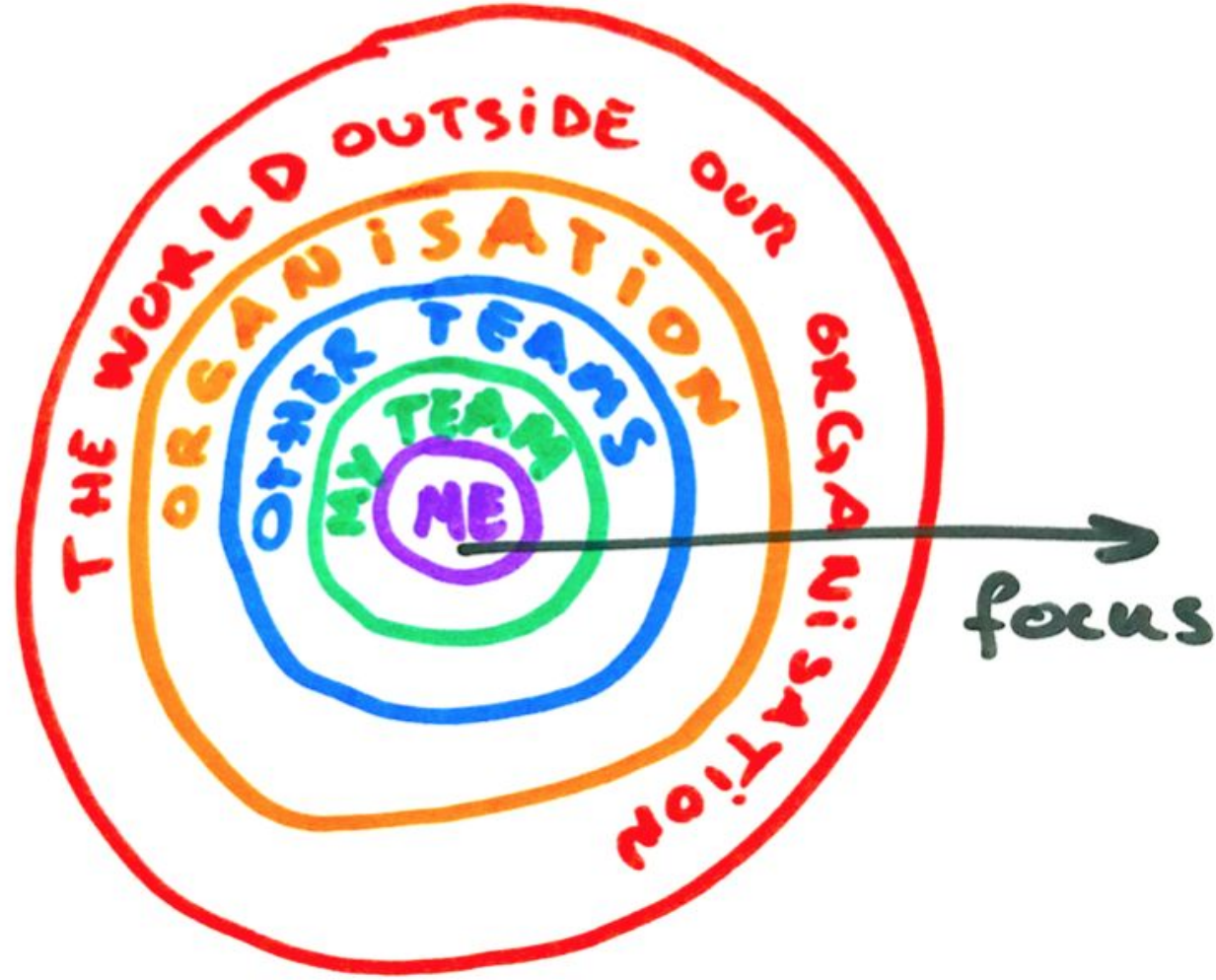
Technical debt creates more pressure creates more shortcuts creates more debt.

Understand Delays

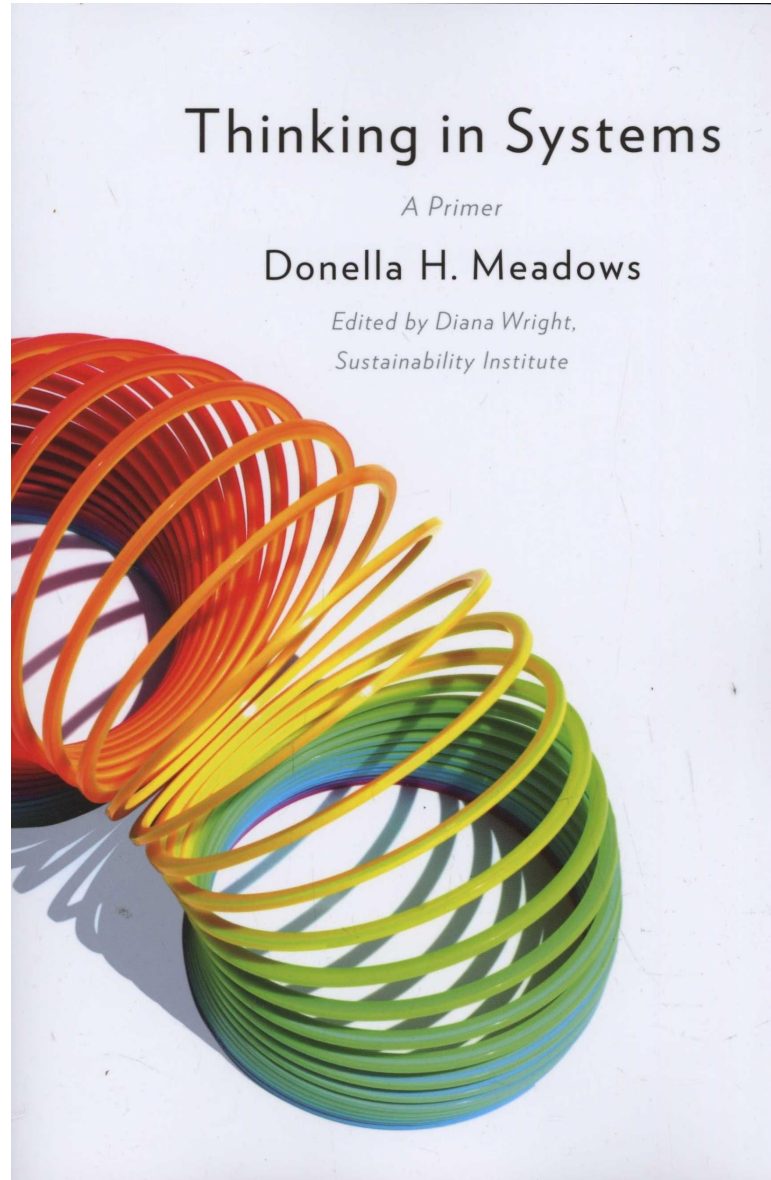
Why fixes don't show immediate effects. Give improvements time to work.

Roland Flemm

Scrum Master Challenges /time



Understanding Systems



The Perfect Mix?

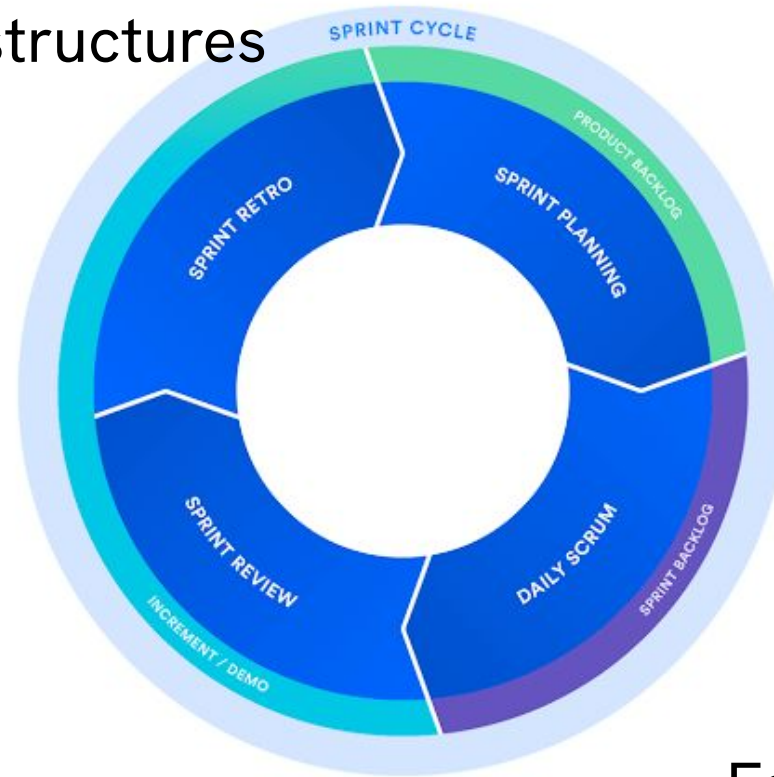
Acceptance of What You Can't Control

Patterns and structures

Self-Improvement

Resilience and Strength in the Face of Adversity

Focus on patterns and structures



Interconnectedness

Circular Synthesis

Feedback Loops

Dynamic Systems

AI Will Change the Tools — Not the

Humans

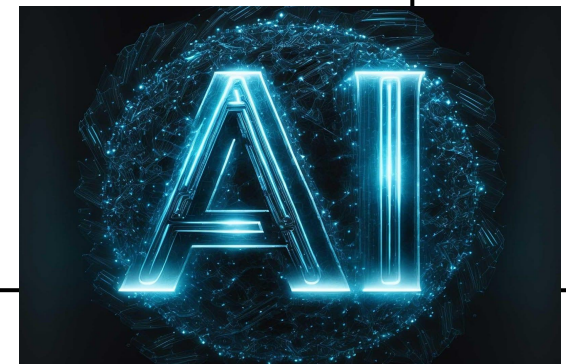
AI can build faster, **analyze** faster, **code** faster.

But **HOW we work together** — communication, collaboration, problem-solving — becomes *even more important*.

Tools change. **People stay!**

That's why I believe engineering management — focusing on how we work, not just what we build — is more important than ever.

"They say middle managers will soon die...
but good engineers and good teams will survive every era. 😊"



The Evidence

Does this actually work?

- Study of 70 project managers connecting Stoic attitudes with team performance
- Findings: stronger Stoic traits correlated with better team results and resilience
- Scrum values align directly with Stoic virtues: Courage, Justice, Wisdom, Moderation
- Systems Thinking is fundamental to SAFe and LeSS scaling frameworks

Not magic. Just better thinking habits under pressure.



The 10 Jedi Rules for ERP Work

- **Deliver value every week, no matter how small**
- **Never let unfinished work accumulate**
- **Speak early when something feels wrong**
- **Make invisible work visible**
- **Protect team capacity during chaos**
- **Treat problems as systems, not individuals**
- **Accept what you cannot control**
- **Focus on contribution, not outcome**
- **Build feedback loops everywhere**
- **Always prefer clarity over speed**

Your Monday Toolkit

What to do on Monday morning

Run a bottleneck check

Identify where work piles up

Reduce WIP

Finish work before starting new work

Apply the Stoic Pause

During next conflict, pause before responding

Map one system loop

Draw the cause-effect chain in your project

Improve Sprint Review

Ask better questions about value and risk

Delete low-value items

Remove one thing from your backlog

Materials & Inspiration

Substack articles (Various authors on Agile, Stoicism, Systems Thinking)

Allen Holub (Agile thought leader, speaker)

LeadDev (Engineering leadership conferences, blogs, talks)

Books: *The Art of Doing Twice the Work in Half the Time* by Jeff Sutherland

Thinking in Systems by Donella Meadows

Meditations by Marcus Aurelius

How to Think Like a Roman Emperor by Donald J. Robertson

In ERP work, your mind is your most powerful tool

Train it like a Jedi.

Connect with me

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May the Force be with you.



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