A GRAND (un)UNIFIED THEORY OF AGILITY

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CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING:

TEAM A

- Large team, struggles to create value due to handoffs with other teams
- Mini-waterfalls (Design Sprint > Build Sprint > Test Sprint)
- Long (multi-week) manual regression cycles

TEAM B

- 4 → 11 major business initiatives & features/year
- 6-out-of-12 → 18-out-of-18 monthly uptime SLAs met
- 20-40 incidents/month → <5 incidents/month
BIG REVEAL!
(It’s the same team...)

- Has some large teams, and some teams struggle to create value on their own due to handoffs
- Some teams doing mini-waterfalls (Design Sprint > Build Sprint > Test Sprint)
- Certain products still have long (multi-week) manual regression cycles
- 4 → 11 major business initiatives & features per year
- 6/12 → 18/18 monthly uptime SLAs met
- 20-40 → <5 incidents per month
HOW CAN THIS BE?

DE-SCALE!! SCALE!!

{excluded middle?}
QUANTUM MECHANICS and GENERAL RELATIVITY, the two pillars of 20th-century physics, have both been abundantly confirmed by experiment within very wide domains.

BUT THEY ARE BASED ON INCOMPATIBLE CONCEPTUAL STRUCTURES: THEY CANNOT BOTH BE EXACTLY CORRECT.

ALAN SOKAL – Professor of physics, NYU

Excerpt taken from an Op-ed in the New York Times

*emphasis added
(And yet...) BOTH STILL MAKE VALUABLE PREDICTIONS & DISCOVERIES
Lesser degree of directly-observable intersection between the "laws", "forces", and "predictions" governing the micro- vs. macro- world as scale increases dramatically.
THE MAIN FINANCIAL GAINS COME FROM STRATEGIC AGILITY:
MARKET-CREATING INNOVATION THAT BRINGS IN NEW CUSTOMERS

OPERATIONAL AGILITY is about making existing products and services better, faster, cheaper for existing customers...Operational Agility may not make much money!

(Evidence: “The Dark Secret of Agile Today”)

STEVE DENNING
Excerpts and image from “The Age of Agile: From Operational to Strategic Agility”, a talk given at the Agile2018 Conference

*emphasis added
FOR PREDICTIVE VALUE:

ASK “WHAT ‘WORLD’ AM I IN?”

(Releases keep failing and they take too long…)

We are losing market share to our competitors… How can we get our customers back?

Should we partner with that startup? Or should we just acquire them?

Why can’t I just buy that widget? Why should I build it?

(and be prepared to change focus over time…)
PRAGMATIC ADVICE

• Don’t discount micro- or macro-agility – accept (at least) the experimental validity/predictive value of both within their own domains.

• It can be practical to focus attention to the “laws”, “forces”, or “experimental variables” that have the most directly-observable impact on the specific challenge in front of you.

• Don’t rely on micro- or macro-agility theories exclusively – be empirical and learn by doing, especially outside your biases/comfort zone.

• If you can only get one thing right, make it continuous learning.

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THANK YOU!