



AGILE THINKING BEFORE AGILE

There's plenty of it.

1. **Kant:** *"Out of the crooked timber of humanity, no straight line was ever made."*

2. **Kay:** obliquity. The world is too complex to be direct. Instead, we need incremental modification. Examples of direct thinking are long-term planning processes based on assumptions of what the future will be like. But the future is oblique: we should drop the fiction of prediction. What we understand about our complex environments and organisations is piecemeal and imperfect. It follows to solve problems we need to be adaptive and iterative.

Kay criticises rational design over adaptation. We imperfectly understand our complex systems. Problems we face are rarely completely defined. The environment in which we tackle them contain numerous uncertainties. One example is planning how we live: Basildon versus Birmingham.

"Perhaps we should recognise the ubiquity, and inevitability, of obliquity."

3. **De Bono:** rock and water logic. Rock logic is hard-edged, permanent and unchanging. If you have a rock, it's just that—a static collection of atoms and molecules. If you add one rock and one rock, you get two rocks. On the other hand, water logic is fluid. If you pour more water into a glass of water, you don't get two layers of water.

Water logic moves away from straight-line thinking. *"A rock has a shape of its own. It is hard-edged, permanent and unchanging. We can see or feel its shape... Water is very different from rock, but just as real.*



It flows. The emphasis is on 'to' rather than 'is'. Water flows according to the gradient (context). It takes the form of the vessel in which it is placed (circumstances)."

With rock logic, pieces sit passively waiting to be moved logically to produce a predetermined end result. It's how many organisations try to make their world, and the people in it, work. With water logic, it's flowing and fluid.

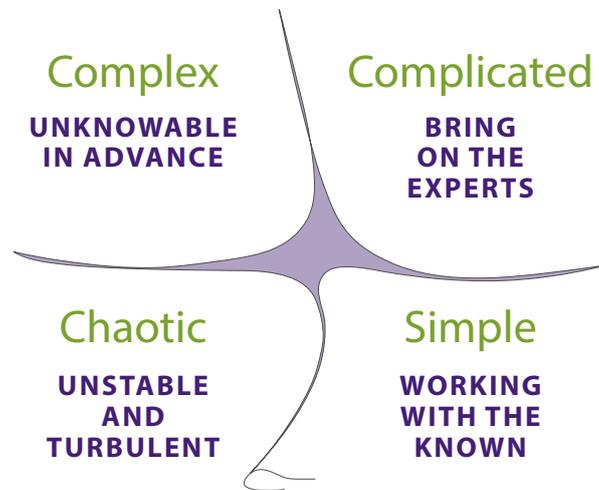
4. **Johansson:** success is far more random than we believe. He suggests success can often be attributed to *"a serendipitous encounter, and unexpected moment of insight, or an unplanned culmination of events."*

The world's an unpredictable place, and here's the paradox. In our lives and in business we logically plan our way to achieving goals. But at the same time we aren't surprised when unexpected events happen all the time.

ISN'T ANYTHING SIMPLE?

So is everything crooked; oblique; water, rather than rock; and unpredictable? No, but trying to solve complex problems with straight-line, planned logic is problematic.

The Cynefin framework is an essential element of an agile mindset.



AN AGILE MINDSET

Learning and curiosity

Be curious, experiment, learn, keep up that curiosity, experiment some more and keep on learning. And each learning cycle creates a new reality. With an agile learning mindset, you're used to starting again from a new jumping off point.

It's continual change, continual improvement and continual innovation. And you're improving:

- what you're producing or delivering, and
- how you're producing or delivering it.

Learning to fail

Part of experimenting is failing—failing fast with a small blast radius—and recovering fast as well. Agile organisations make it safe to fail by recognising failure is part of daily work and not something to blame others for. The problem is compound failure—not learning from your mistakes and carrying on investing in them.

You can go further by introducing failure KPIs and parallel experiments. Bouncing back from failure helps build your resilience, but you're unlikely to bounce back without the support of others. That's why collaboration is vital and framing failure as an inherent, natural part of success is valuable.

A growth mindset

Thanks to Carol Dweck for this important idea. A growth mindset means you're learning continually and creating new possibilities and realities. But a fixed mindset isn't just about staying static; it's about judging the whole time. *"I've stuffed up. This is hopeless. I'm a failure."* Not very agile.



Single-loop, double-loop and triple-loop learning

- Single-loop learning asks: What do I need to do to put this right?
- Double-loop learning asks: Am I doing the right things? Do I need to do it at all? Should I fundamentally change course?
- Then triple-loop learning turns up and asks: What have I learned about myself? What does this mean for what I believe, my values and how I see the world?



And lastly:

1. Remember Shaun Hendy's and Sir Paul Callaghan's advice for innovators: embrace the weird.
2. A question: does your business model include fascination?

COLLABORATION



Steve Johnson, and others have made the case for collaboration and innovation as best friends. At the heart of agile are teams, and that's not just groups of people who work together and get stuff done.

Critical to effective team and organisation-wide collaboration is transparency, trust, respect, relationships—all that soft stuff. But let's go further.

Collaboration and vulnerability

Marsha Shenk, a Business Anthropologist and agile advocate, gets into the neuroscience of collaboration. Our brains are designed to sense rejection. One key decision we're making all the time is: who am I going to make myself vulnerable with? And if we're used to being vulnerable with our colleagues, we're more likely to courageously question assumptions or the status quo. We're more likely to take in challenging information, and share failure, with people we trust.

Think of all interactions as either:

- poor
- ho-hum
- rich
- hitting the sweet spot.

And it's those rich and sweet spot interactions we find irresistible, rejuvenate us and build our resilience. They build our curiosity and fuel our addiction to social certainty.

SELF-MANAGEMENT AND BASIC 'LAWS'

Which do you prefer?

Each person has a job description.	Roles defined through work not people. People have several roles.
Managers delegate and ultimately decide.	Authority is distributed to teams and roles. Decisions are made by teams locally.
Big re-organisations 'solve' organisational problems.	Structure changes via iterations and teams are self-organising. They can respond quickly to changes, experiment and learn.
Office politics and implicit rules slow down change and innovation.	Rules and culture are transparent and everyone's included.

Three laws

Stephen Denning has three laws:

- 1. Law of the customer.** Here's a simple question for teams: what are you doing to make it possible for your customers to do something tomorrow they can't do now?
- 2. Law of the small team.** In our VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous) world, small teams:
 - descale our big problems
 - work iteratively in small collaborative teams in short cycles, with regular feedback
 - take accountability for their work and have pride in it.
- 3. Law of the network.** The whole organisation works as an interactive network, to bring about continuous innovation and a pervasive entrepreneurial mindset. This is the approach Spark has recently gone for.



AGILE HABITS

Checking in and changing continuously

Useful basic agile habits and tools:

- Kanban boards: you'll see them all around businesses/organisations in Wellington
- daily (or at least regular) stand ups
- working in fortnightly sprint cycles
- regular retrospectives, such as:
 - Proud, Thankful, Learned
 - Ropes and Fuels
 - one, two or three words.
- user stories: simple customer stories about what they want from a product or service. Here's an example:
As a policy analyst (Who?)...
I want a simple and easy-to-use way of finding out what other policy shops are working on (What?)...
so I can collaborate, save time and produce joined-up policy advice. (Why?)

Continuously innovating

Again, essential tools are:

- design thinking: it's really design doing
- Lean Start Up: developing MVPs (Minimum Viable Products) and testing them, before you either pivot or persevere.

A FINAL WORD



All models are wrong but some are useful

Is agile the answer? Nothing ever is. But it helps us adapt, change and innovate in a crooked timber, oblique, water logic and unpredictable world. It's how we actually operate in so many parts of our lives personally and professionally.



KICKSTART TO LEADERSHIP SPACES AVAILABLE

We're holding a KickStart to Leadership programme (2 days) on 16th & 17th August. And we've got limited spaces available!

Let us know if you want to take advantage of this opportunity. Talk to one of the team or email office@trainingpractice.co.nz.

To learn more about our KickStart programme go to www.trainingpractice.co.nz/what-we-do.

CHECK OUT OUR WEBSITE EVENTS PAGE

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This handout will be available to view and download from our website later today. And you can also find the handouts from past Tea & Toast sessions there.

Thanks for coming!

From The Training Practice Team
(Hilary, Paula H, Paula S, Andrea and Luuk)

Let us know how we can help you!
04 472 6267 | office@trainingpractice.co.nz

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www.trainingpractice.co.nz

office@trainingpractice.co.nz

04 472 6267 | 09 358 5849

