

Agile Traps:

Common practices that wreck teams



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Agile

Axiom:

Diverse, inclusive teams produce better results.



**The best architectures,
requirements, and designs emerge
from self-organizing teams.**

Principle 11 from Principles behind the Agile Manifesto

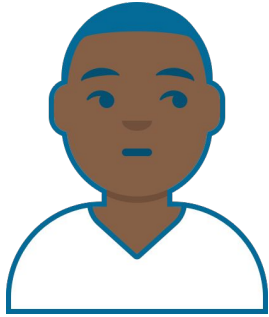
<https://agilemanifesto.org/principles.html>



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May work fine for *completely
homogeneous* teams.

The tyranny of structurelessness

A "laissez faire" group is about as realistic as a "laissez faire" society; the idea becomes a smokescreen for the strong or the lucky to establish unquestioned hegemony over others.

—Jo Freeman, [The Tyranny of Structurelessness](#)



Power dynamics in Retrospectives

Common practice: “What went well, what went badly”

Issues:

- Requires high trust to be in place
- May have different levels of confidence embracing failure (sticks harder to some people than others, also cultural differences)
- Teams often agree to the conclusions of the high-status individuals.

Power dynamics in Planning

Common practice: switching to autopilot and pulling straight from the backlog

Issues:

- Weak team decision-making
- Some voices much louder than others.
- Work assignments reflect power structures too
 - Administrative labor is often not reflected in the sprint plan
 - Which comes back around in performance reviews

Power dynamics in Standup

Common practice: Yesterday, today, blockers

Issues:

- Participants often experience these as checkups on their productivity
- Hard to flag issues if you're worried about being judged
- Requests for help may be answered differentially, depending on privilege

Interlude: a rant

What's up with all the orientalism?

The [Toyota Production System](#), and later on the concept of Lean, was developed around eliminating the three types of deviations that shows inefficient allocation of resources. The three types are Muda (無駄, waste), Mura (斑, unevenness), and Muri (無理, overburden).



TOYOTA KATA @ UNIVERSITY

What is a Gemba Walk and Why is it Important?

A Gemba Walk Can Open Leaders' Eyes to Real-World Business Challenges



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It started with the Toyota Production System. The original intent of empowering and developing people got lost and exoticism crept in, trading on Japanese symbolism.

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It started with the Toyota Production System. The original intent of empowering and developing people got lost and exoticism crept in, trading on Japanese symbolism.

This traces back to the shift in application from manufacturing to knowledge work. Then the cultural symbols got appropriated and fronted by white people, and caught on like wildfire.



We don't even know which kind of problem to call **Scrum Master but...**

End rant.

Inclusive Agile

Doing ceremonies like this makes for a hostile environment and ultimately wrecks a team.

Many teams interpret these problems as “we’re just not doing Agile right.”

We don’t believe that.

We believe that the next phase of agility embraces people as individuals and as part of a team.

1. Prioritize education

- **Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions**

<https://www.hofstede-insights.com/country-comparison/the-usa/>

- **Dismantling Racism**

<http://www.dismantlingracism.org>

Special thanks:

Tina Ye (@tinabeans) & Cordelia Yu (@thebestsophist) corgiandbun.com/decolonizing-decisions

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- **All the antiracism books you bought last summer**

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2. Tune in to power dynamics

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Don't expect people to say they're being marginalized!

Being marginalized might look like...

- Rarely voicing dissent
- Speaking last
- Waiting (indefinitely) to enter the conversation
- Worrying about the “tone” of a statement
- Worrying about “looking professional”
- Not putting self forwards for opportunities
- Taking on all the administrative work
- Not taking personal credit

3. Learn how to facilitate

Great facilitators were already doing the work of equalizing the room - elevating the voices of the marginalized to get the best from all team members.

It's often hidden.

**There's no such thing as a neutral facilitator.
Everything you do, or don't do, impacts whose
voice is heard.**

A few inclusive facilitation tips

Special thanks to Jacklynn Pham (@JackPham)



Create structure! Base your structure on the needs of each person, not the average of the group.



Pay attention to who is in the room and what their relationships are.



Provide multiple ways to contribute (speaking, writing) and consider making everyone anonymous.



Find out ahead of time if anyone needs accommodations (and then provide them).

Recap

- Self-organizing teams is not an inclusive principle - it's time to move on!
- Power dynamics are present across all Agile practices.
- Recommendation: Tune in to the needs of individuals, not “the team.” Learn, observe power dynamics, facilitate thoughtfully.

Questions?

<https://join.tts.gsa.gov>