



Signal Over Noise: Adaptive Leadership and Metrics that Matter

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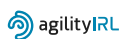
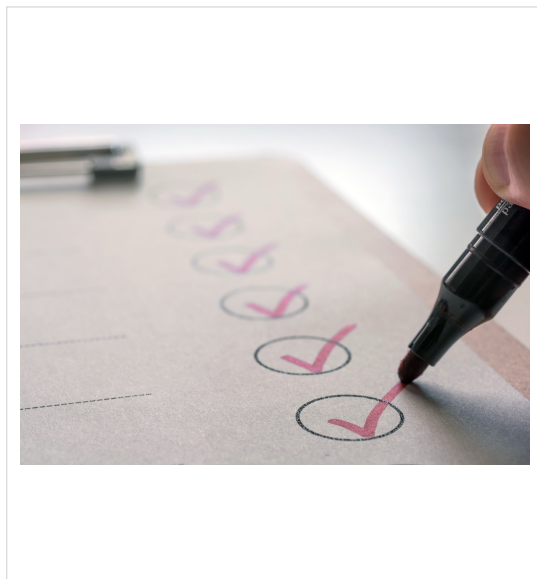


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1

Signal Over Noise – Metrics that Matter

- What is "Signal" vs. "Noise"?
- How do Leaders act on signals?
- What signals should you measure?
- How do you build an early warning dashboard?
- How do you use that dashboard to make better decisions?



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2

2

Working Together Agreement



As a class, we will...

- Not multi-task
- Be open to new ideas
- Respect the time-boxes and each other
- Ask questions
- Use Artificial Intelligence (AI) ethically to supplement our work, but own the outcome
- Provide feedback
- Have Fun!

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3

3



What is “Signal” and what
is “Noise”?

4

Case Study: Would You Have Seen This Coming?



Self-organize into groups.

Read through the summaries for the sample projects provided.

Be prepared to answer the following questions when the time-box expires:

- 1.) Which project was the healthiest?
- 2.) What action would you have taken if you were managing each project?



7 Minutes

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5

5

Traditional Project Management Metrics

Which of these tells you that failure is imminent?

- Schedule Variance
- Budget Variance
- Actual vs. Estimate
- RAG Status
- Earned Value
- Percent Complete
- Milestones/Phase Gate Completion
- Velocity
- Story Points Completed
- Tickets Closed
- Others?



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6

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Signal vs. Noise – What's the Difference?



Noise

- Awareness
- Maybe Lagging
- Focused on activity
- Easier to manipulate
- Creates false confidence
- Internally Focused

Signal

- Actionable
- Leading
- Focused on outcomes/flow
- Difficult to manipulate
- Encourages Learning/Awareness of Uncertainty
- Customer-focused

Key Question: What is your organization focused on?

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7

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Tools You Can Use: The Signal Test



When evaluating metrics ask yourself:

- ☐ **Is it Predictive vs. Historical?**
- ☐ **Is it Actionable vs. Interesting?**
- ☐ **Is it measuring the System vs. Individuals?**
- ☐ **Does it support Learning vs. Reporting?**

If you are choosing the items on the right – it's probably noise.
If you choose the items on the left – it's likely signal.

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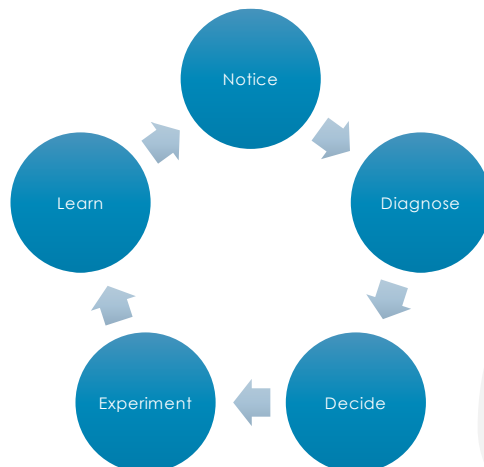
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Adaptive Leadership: How Leaders can act on Signals

9

Adaptive Leadership: Decision-Making Cycle



10

Adaptive Leadership Decision-Making Cycle: Notice

Key Question: What is changing?

Weak Signals	Strong Signals
User Frustration	Missed Milestone
Decision Delays	Budget Overrun
Forecast Volatility	Executive Escalation
Increasing Work-in-Progress (WIP)	Project Cancelled

Notice Weak Signals before they become Strong

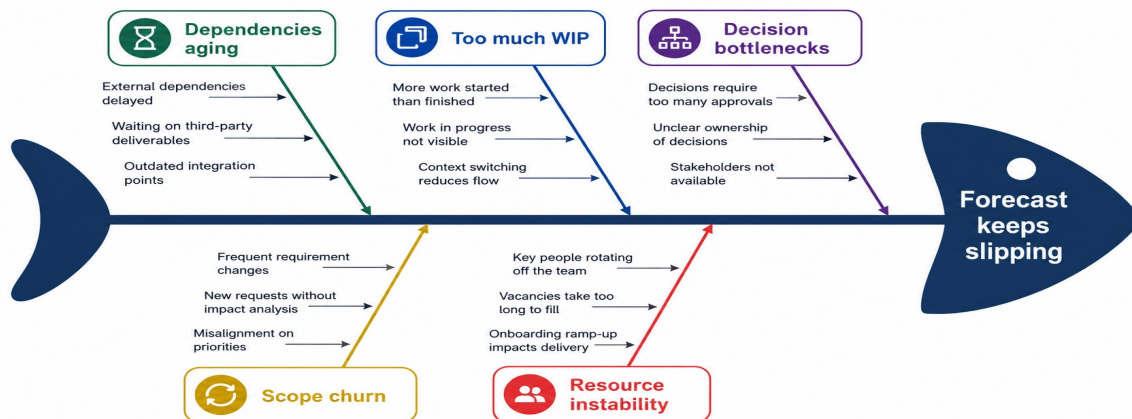
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Adaptive Leadership Decision-Making Cycle: Diagnose

Key Question: What's really causing the problem?



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12

ADAPTIVE LEADERSHIP DECISION-MAKING CYCLE

Decide

Key question: What should I do next?

1 · FRAME IT**Decision**

What specific decision must be made?

Signal

What evidence suggests action is needed?

2 · CHOOSE**Options**

What realistic options are available?

Trade-offs

What are the consequences of each option?

Decision made

What is my decision?

3 · INSPECT**Review date**

When will I inspect again?

Success signal

What will tell us we are moving in the right direction?

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Adaptive Leadership Decision-Making Cycle: Experiment

Key Question: What's the smallest thing I can change?



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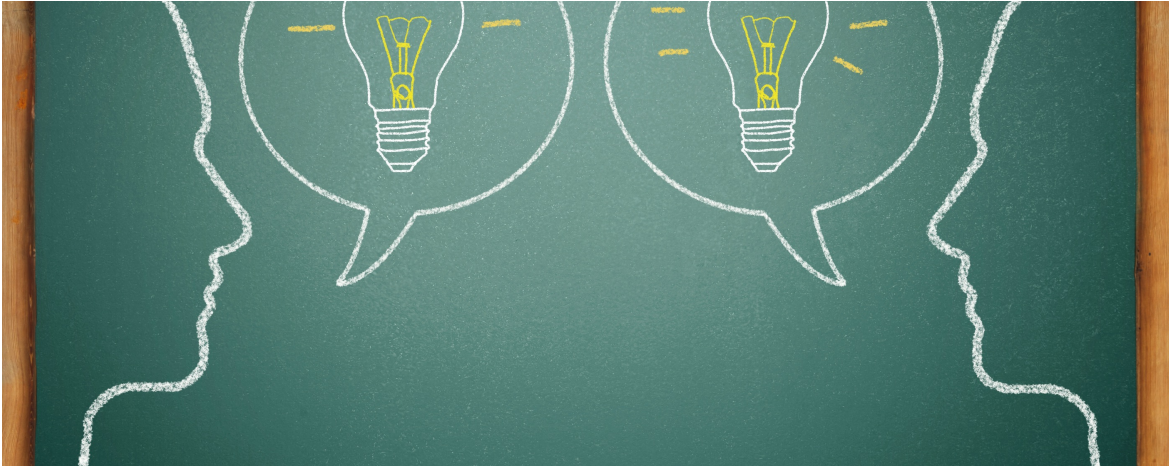
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Adaptive Leadership Decision-Making Cycle: Learn



Key Question: Did our experiment work?



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Discussion: "The _____ is the hardest part"

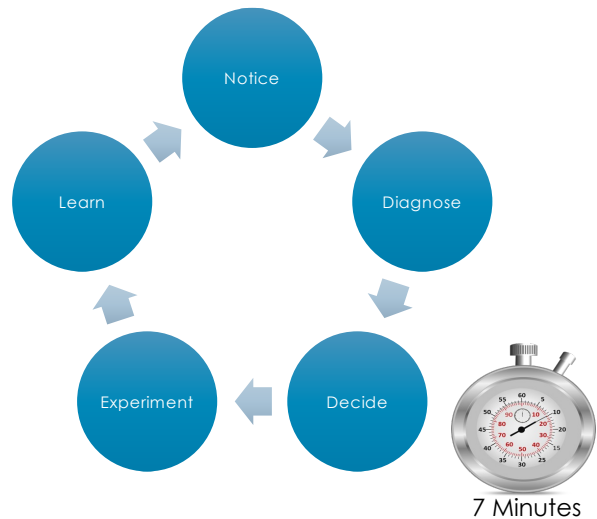


Self-organize into groups.

In your group, discuss the following questions:

- 1.) Which step does your organization do well?
- 2.) Which step is the hardest? Why?
- 3.) Are there steps that you skip entirely?

Be prepared to share your answers when the time-box expires.



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18

18



What Signals Should We Measure?

19

What Signals Do We Measure?

Guiding Principles

- "What can we measure?" vs. "What decisions do we need to make?"
- Key Questions:
 1. What decision does this metric support?
 2. What change will it reveal?
 3. What action could it trigger?
 4. How easily can we measure it?
- Measure conditions, not just results.
- Every metric must earn its place

No Decision. No Action. No Signal.



20

What Signals Do We Measure?

A Practical Starter Set

1. Decision Latency
2. Blocker Age
3. Work in Progress
4. Rework Rate
5. Forecast Volatility
6. Stakeholder Alignment



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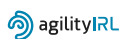
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1. Decision Latency

What it is:

- Time from when a decision is requested until it is made.



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What it tells us:

- Who has the authority to actually decide?

Example:

- Median decision latency has increased from 7 days to 12 days in the past month.

Potential Actions:

- Clarify Decision-Rights
- Delegate

22

2. Blocker Age

What it is:

- How long a work item remains blocked.



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What it tells us:

- What blocker requires the most attention?

Example:

- We have 5 blocked items, the oldest one is 16 days.

Potential Actions:

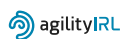
- Make a decision
- Assign an owner
- Resolve the dependency

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3. Work in Progress(WIP)

What it is:

- How much work is started but not finished.



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What it tells us:

- WIP is the **leading indicator**
- TRANSLATION: Too much parallel work = **schedule risk**

Example:

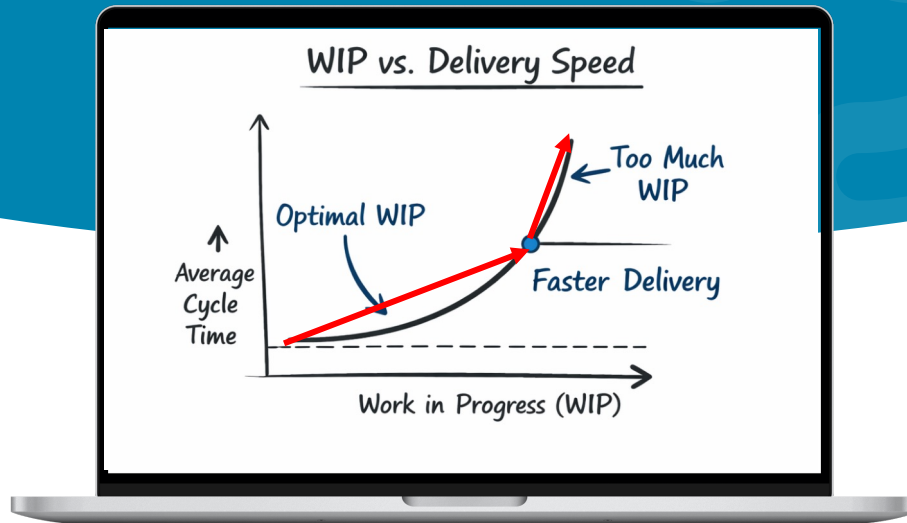
- Our WIP has increased from 14 to 26 items in the last 2 weeks.

Potential Actions:

- Stop Starting, Stop Finishing
- Apply WIP Limits
- Prioritize

24

Little's Law: Cycle Time = WIP/Throughput



25

4. Rework Rate

What it is:

- Percentage of work reopened, redone, corrected, or invalidated.



26

What it tells us:

- What are we learning too late?

Example:

- 18% of our completed work has been rejected or returned.

Potential Actions:

- Shorten iterations
- Strengthen Retrospectives
- Increase Feedback Frequency

5. Forecast Volatility

What it is:

- How frequently and significantly a delivery forecast changes.



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What it tells us:

- Are we planning beyond what we know?

Example:

- The release date has changed by 3 months, 4 times in the last month.

Potential Actions:

- Shorten planning horizon
- Use Ranges
- Reduce Scope

27

6. Stakeholder Alignment

What it is:

- Agreement on priorities, outcomes and trade-offs.



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What it tells us:

- Where are expectations diverging?

Example:

- 90% of our stakeholders agree that the Search feature is our top priority.

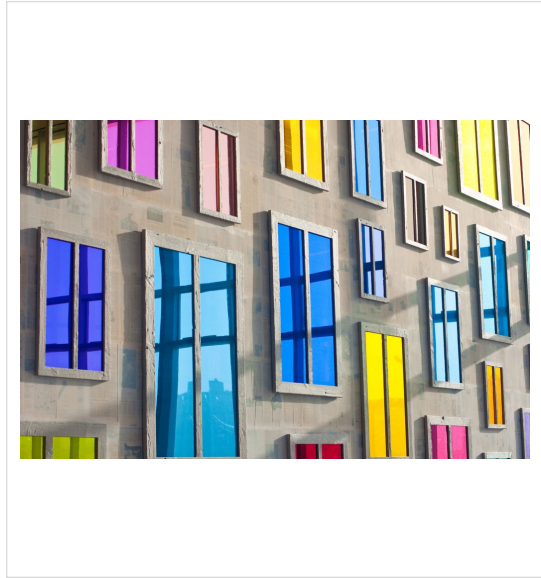
Potential Actions:

- Facilitate an alignment or trade-off discussion.

28

Signals: Other Options

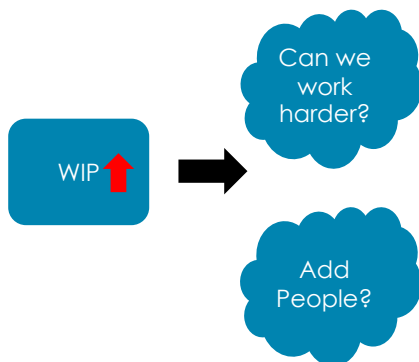
-  Cycle Time
-  Flow Efficiency
-  Throughput
-  Lead Time
-  Others



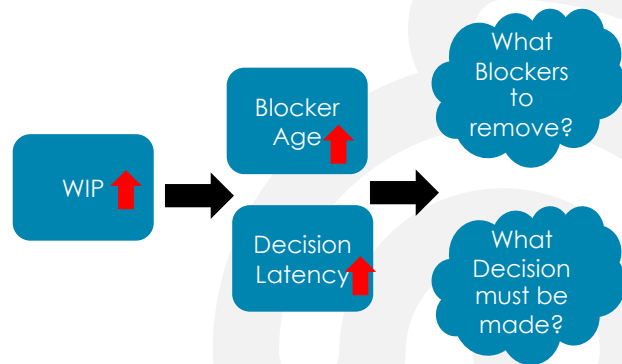
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Interpret Signals Together – An Example

Scenario 1



Scenario 2



30

Case Study: Where to Start



You are the project manager for Project Orion. Your product launch date has moved twice in the last month. The team is reporting increasing velocity and has met its sprint goals for the last four sprints. However, several vendor approvals remain outstanding including some from both legal and regulatory.

A key stakeholder approached the Product Owner yesterday regarding a scope change and, while the Product Owner hasn't approved it yet, she is likely to do so. The team is currently working on 17 items in its current sprint.

At your table, do the following:

- 1.) Select three metrics to monitor
- 2.) Explain why each matters
- 3.) Identify the decision that each metric supports
- 4.) What metrics, if any, would you deliberately exclude

Be prepared to share your results when the time-box expires.



7 Minutes

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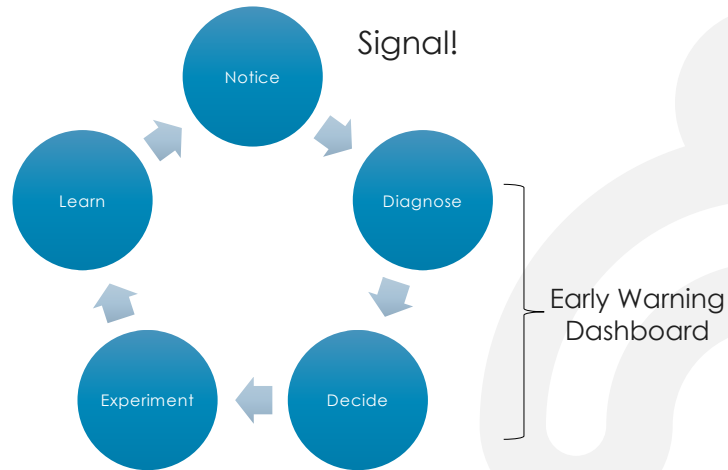
31



Putting It All Together:
Building and Using an Early
Warning Dashboard

32

Adaptive Leadership: Decision-Making Cycle



33

A Dashboard is a Not a Report

Reports

- What happened?
- Are we on plan?
- What is our status?
- What color is this project?

Dashboards

- What is changing?
- What should I be focused on?
- What decision do I need to make?

If a dashboard does not change a conversation or a decision, it's probably a report

34

Do Not Start with Signals (Metrics)

Signal-First Approach

1. What data do we have available?
2. Create some charts
3. Assign colors
4. Hope someone notices something important.

Decision-First Approach

1. What decision might leadership need to make?
2. What questions must they be able to answer to make that decision?
3. What signals do we need to answer those questions?
4. What dashboard can we create to show those signals?

35

EARLY WARNING DASHBOARD

Six building blocks



01

Signal

What are we monitoring?



02

Current value

What is happening now?



03

Trend

Is it improving or worsening?



04

Threshold

When does it require attention?



05

Leadership question

What should we discuss?



06

Possible action

What might we do?

36

An Early Warning Dashboard - Sample



Early Warning Dashboard

Project	Customer Portal Modernization		Reporting period	Week 18	
Decision to support	Should leadership reduce scope or delay the release?		Dashboard owner	Program Manager / Sponsor	
Signal	Current value	Trend	Attention trigger	Leadership question	Possible action
Decision latency	9 days	+	> 5 days	Which decisions need escalation or clearer ownership?	Clarify decision rights, escalate the oldest decisions.
Work in progress	27 items	+	> 18 items	What can we stop starting so the team can finish?	Pause lower-priority work and apply a WIP limit.
Average blocker age	11 days	+	> 5 days	Which dependency needs leadership intervention now?	Assign an executive owner and resolve the oldest blocker first.
Forecast volatility	3 date changes in 4 weeks	+	> 1 change/month	Is the current date still credible?	Use a forecast range; reduce scope or shorten the planning horizon.
Rework rate	18%	+	> 10%	What are we learning too late?	Increase customer feedback and clarify acceptance expectations.
Stakeholder alignment	3.1 / 5	-	< 4.0	Where do priorities or success criteria differ?	Facilitate a tradeoff discussion and document the decision.
Leadership focus: Decision delays, excess WIP, and aging blockers are making the release forecast unstable.				Next review: In one week	

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Signal over Noise: Adaptive Leadership and Metrics that Matter | Completed Sample

[Sample Early Warning Dashboard](#)

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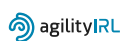
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37

A Warning about RYG/RAG

Use Color as Navigation, Not Analysis

- Thresholds are arbitrary
- Green may always be green (until it is not)
- Yellow may always be yellow (until it is not)
- Teams Negotiate the Color
- Green may hide a deteriorating trend
- Red may produce blame



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38

38

Exercise: Building an Early Warning Dashboard



Self-organize into groups and do the following:

- 1.) Review your scenario
- 2.) Identify the primary leadership decision
- 3.) Select 3 – 5 signals
- 4.) Define the current value and trend
- 5.) Set an attention trigger
- 6.) Write one leadership question and possible action for each signal.

Be prepared to share thoughts on the process when the time-box expires.



15 Minutes

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39

39

Exercise: Your Dashboard Just Changed



Based on the update you just received, consider the following:

- 1.) What signals need to be updated?
- 2.) Identify the most important change.
- 3.) What should leadership do next?

Be prepared to share thoughts on the process when the time-box expires.



5 Minutes

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40

40



41

A Call to Action

Things to do when you return to your Team:

1. Choose 1 project
2. Identify 1 Decision
3. Select 3 Signals
4. Track for 4 weeks
5. Create your Dashboard
6. Have the Conversation

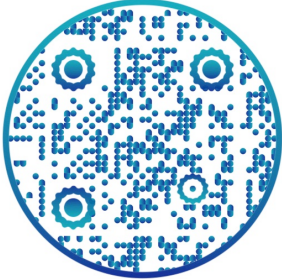


42

Wrapping Up

Thank You!!

Provide Feedback Here:



Want the Slides and Template?:



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43

43



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Cycle Time

What it is:

- How long delivery **actually** takes from the start to end.



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What it tells us:

- Health and predictability of the delivery process.

Example:

- Our cycle has increased in the past month from 14 days to 23 days.

Potential Actions:

- Reduce WIP
- Identify and remove bottlenecks
- Remove dependencies

45

Flow Efficiency

What it is:

- Total time a work item spends in your system spent doing active work vs. waiting.



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What it tells us:

- How much of a cycle time is related to actual work vs. wait time

Example:

- Wait time: 14 days. Active Development: 6 days. Our current flow efficiency is 30%.

Potential Actions:

- Reduce WIP
- Reduce approvals
- Resolve dependencies

46

Throughput

What it is:

- Rate of completed work over time.



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What it tells us:

- Measures capacity and consistency of system.

Example:

- The last three weeks our throughput has been 12, 11, and 14 items.

Potential Actions:

- Reduce WIP
- Is rework occurring?
- Resolve dependencies

47

Lead Time

What it is:

- How long from the time a customer requests something to the time they receive a solution.



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What it tells us:

- Responsiveness of the organization including delivery.

Example:

- Our Lead Time is currently 38 days.

Potential Actions:

- Improve prioritization.
- Remove bottlenecks
- Reduce WIP.

48