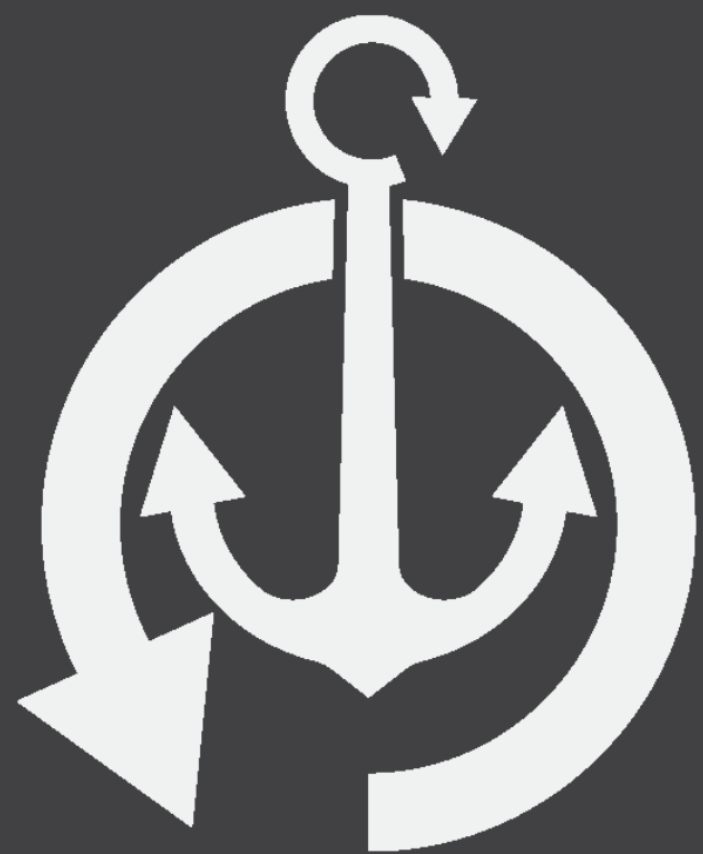


An Agile Notebook. Volume 2

Stories, analogies and ramblings about all things Agile,
leadership and everything in-between.



Everyday Agile



Intro

Another collection of stories, analogies, ramblings and ideas for you to potentially draw inspiration from. They probably won't provide many new answers. But if you are a Scrum Master/Agile Coach then this was written with you in mind.

I hope you enjoy it and keep up the fantastic work that you do.

Jac.



Imperfect Practicalities

It's easy to fall down a rabbit hole of "Scrum is this", "Agile is that"...

The problem is that these conversations/threads rarely resolve anything & leave people left behind none the wiser – AKA, a Richard swinging contest.

I try & focus on the imperfect practicalities of this stuff from a day to day point of view. So here are a few things I would look at when joining a team who may have been together for a while. These are thoughts not prescription.

I am not Nostradamus. Believe it or not, nuance is a thing.

Understand the ask – Understand the current system. Whats going on from a business, delivery, technology, challenges and opportunities point of view.

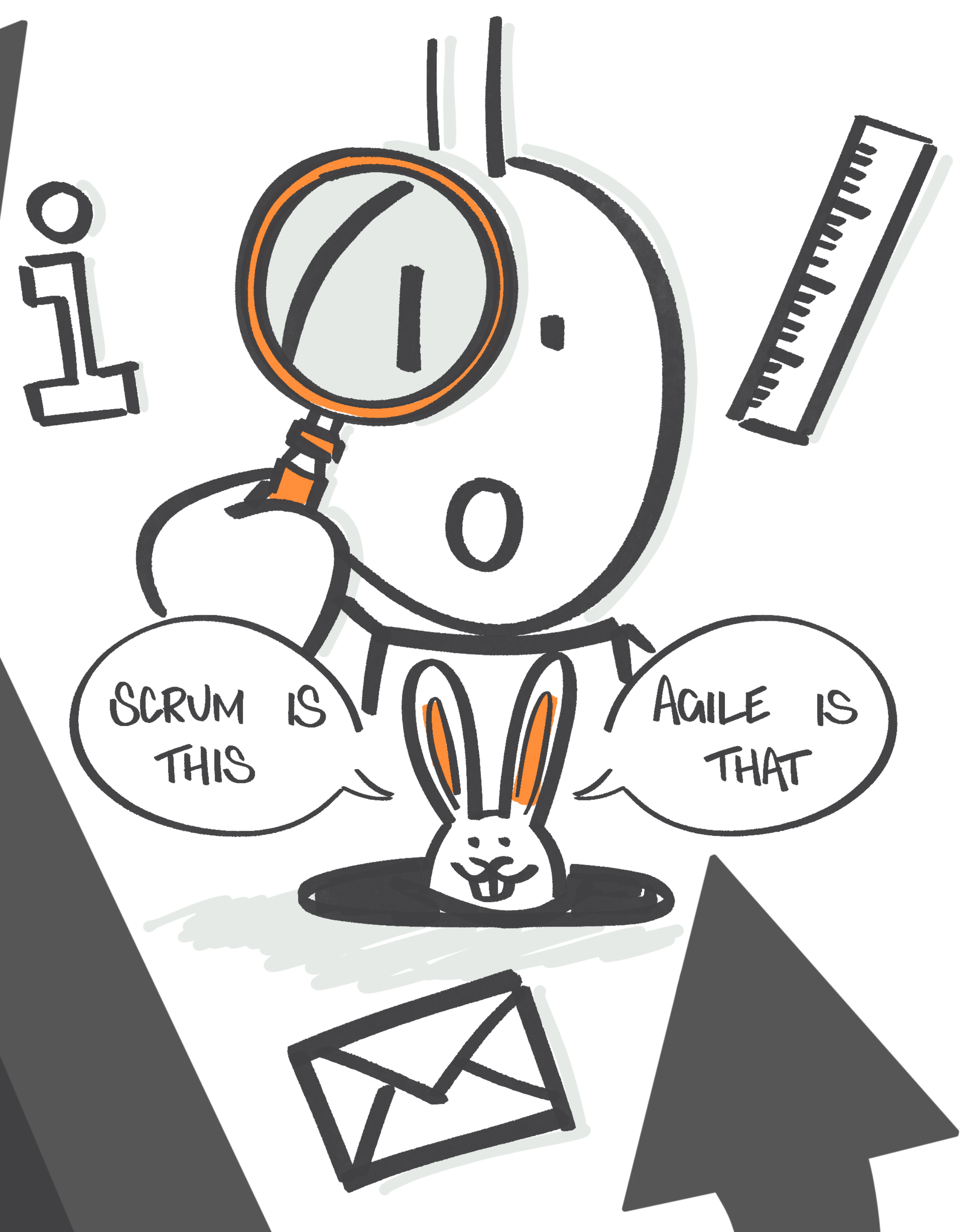
Roles – Identify the current roles & how they all complement each other. From Project Managers to Delivery Lead. What are the boundaries & expectations between each?

Understand your role & how you can add value based on the above.

Understand how you are going to be measured.

Communication – How is information flowing? Is it being maintained? Identify areas to maintain transparency that promotes creative thinking.

Recognising teams – How are teams being recognised, if at all? Playing a game of moving motivators could be a start to find out what motivates people in their effort to experiment.



A few bullets (not prescription) in regards to Sprint Planning.

...Yes I've skipped the retro, I feel there is lots of content about that event...

Read the room, virtual or otherwise. Running an ice breaker with a team who don't like them can do more harm than good.

The Product Goal might be worth reiterating

Don't forget about feedback from the Sprint Review

Sprint Planning has three topics: Why is the Sprint valuable? What can be done this Sprint? How will the chosen work get done?

Try to start with a goal in mind. The work can then be built around the goal.

Based on the above - Sprint Goals aren't a nice to have.

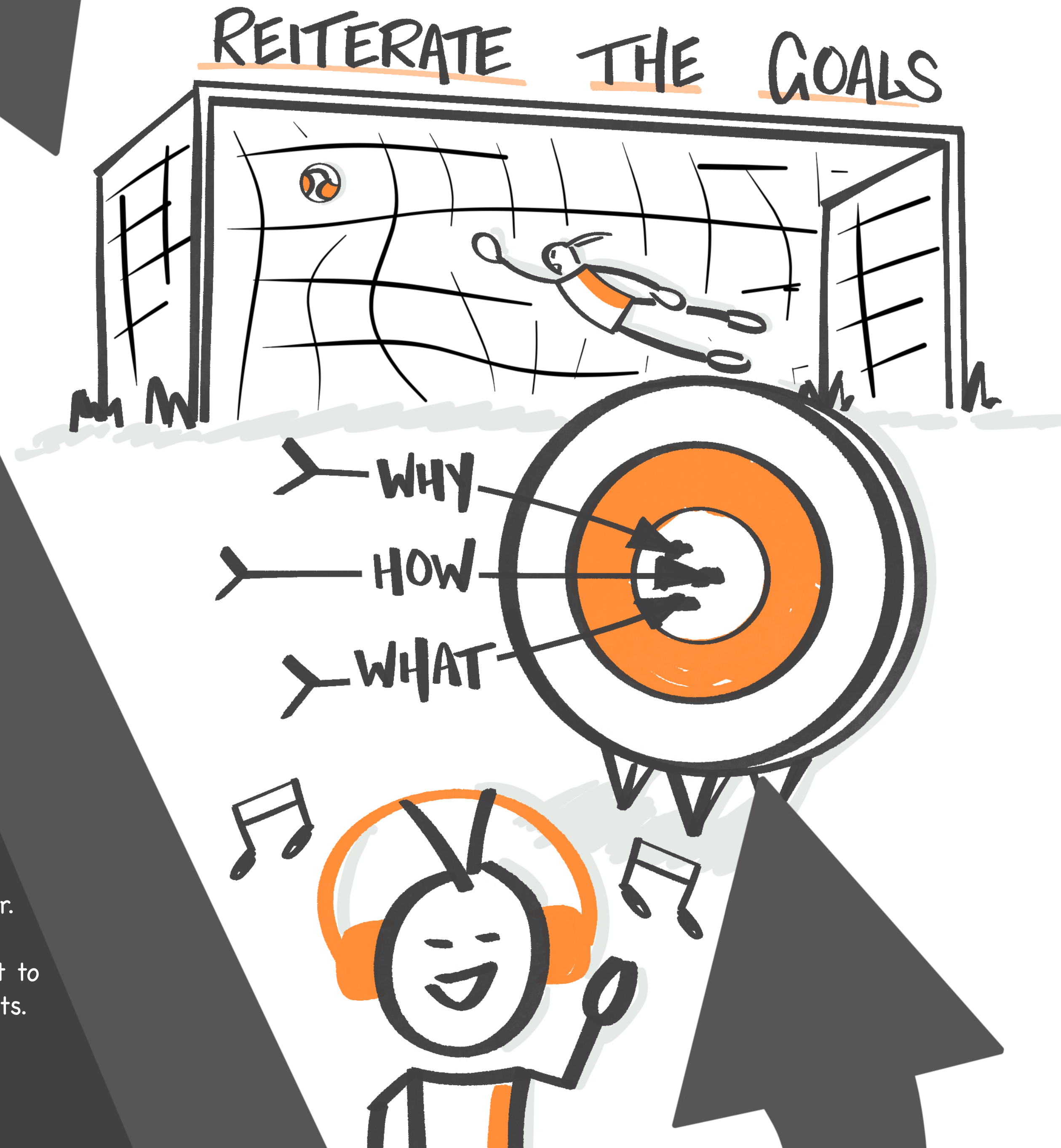
Sharing is not caring - One person sharing their screen whilst others watch them type...Nothing more to be said on that one.

Hard refinement can mean easier planning.

Give people space - Look at the what together; Allow people to utilise breakout rooms to look at the how; Leave the main room open for people to collaborate; Come back together.

Build yourselves a playlist. Music gives an insight to those we work with and can be great to have on in the background. Invite people to contribute. Mine can be found in the comments.

There will be lots more. That's all I've got today!



REITERATE THE GOALS

A few bullets in regards to Backlog Refinement

Backlog refinement is the act of breaking down and further defining Product Backlog items into smaller more precise items.

Refinement is an activity, not a meeting.

It should be continuous.

The whole team doesn't always need to be there.

The refinement triangle is a nice visual to bring it to life.

If you are using Jira, having a 'to be refined' section can help the team look at what is coming up next in a clear way.

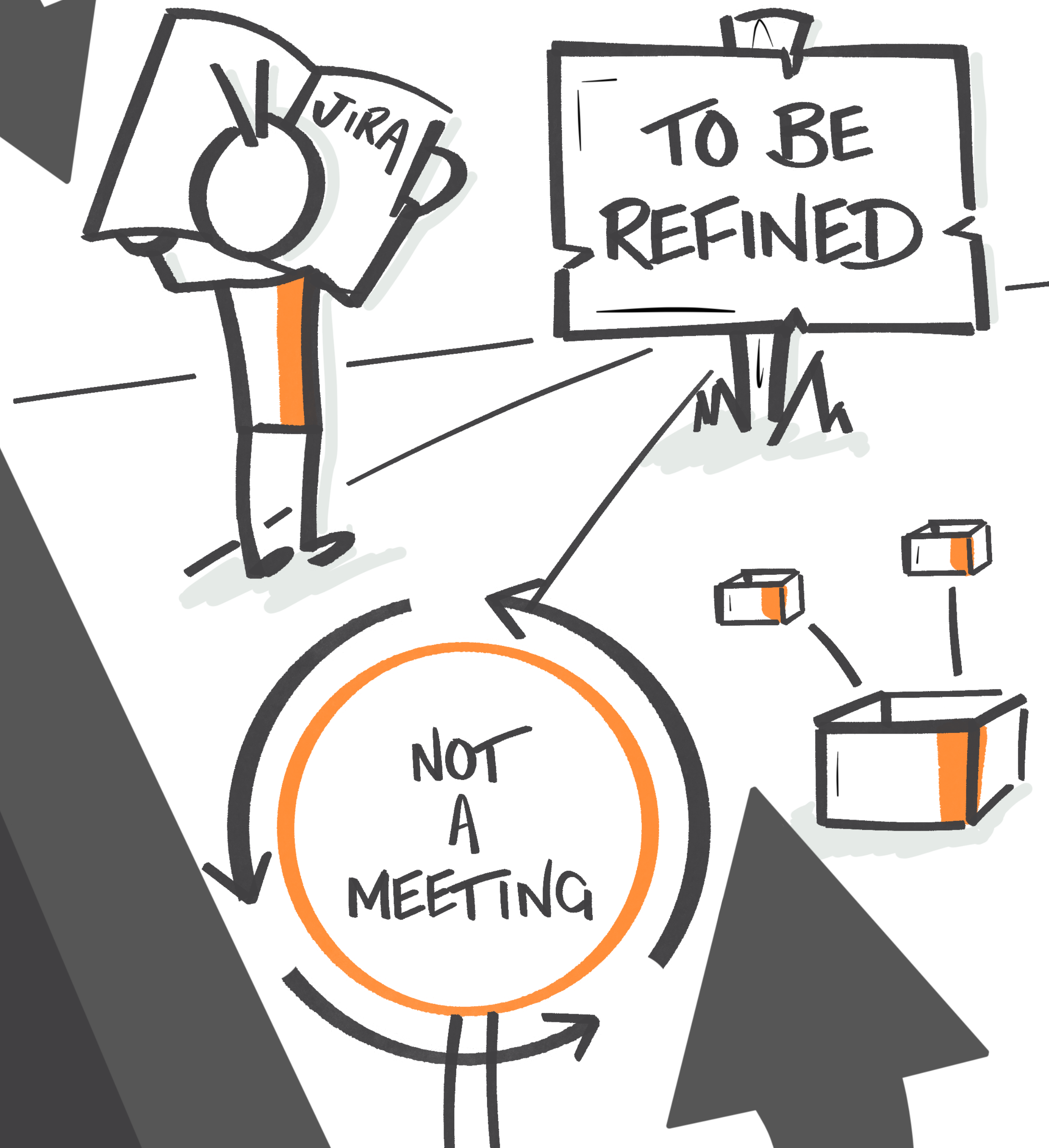
1-2-4-all is a great way to facilitate the conversation.

Estimation can be a by-product of refinement, it's not the goal.

Hard refinement can equal easier Sprint Planning.

Space for collaboration is key.

Refinement is like exercising during the winter. You may not want to do it and it won't be as nice as eating a bar of chocolate, or feel as good as writing some extra code, but ultimately it will help the team become healthier.



Have a Sprint Review this week?
Here's a few bullets to think
about, consider or ignore.

It's not a team update, people outside the
team may not be interested in:

- The Jira numbers
- Filling the time-box
- The virtual easter egg hunt

What they may be interested in: (not limited to)

- The pain the user had
- The user problem you tackled
- The solution you provided
- The potential user benefits from the solution
- What our competitors are doing
- What the market is doing
- What may be on the menu going forward

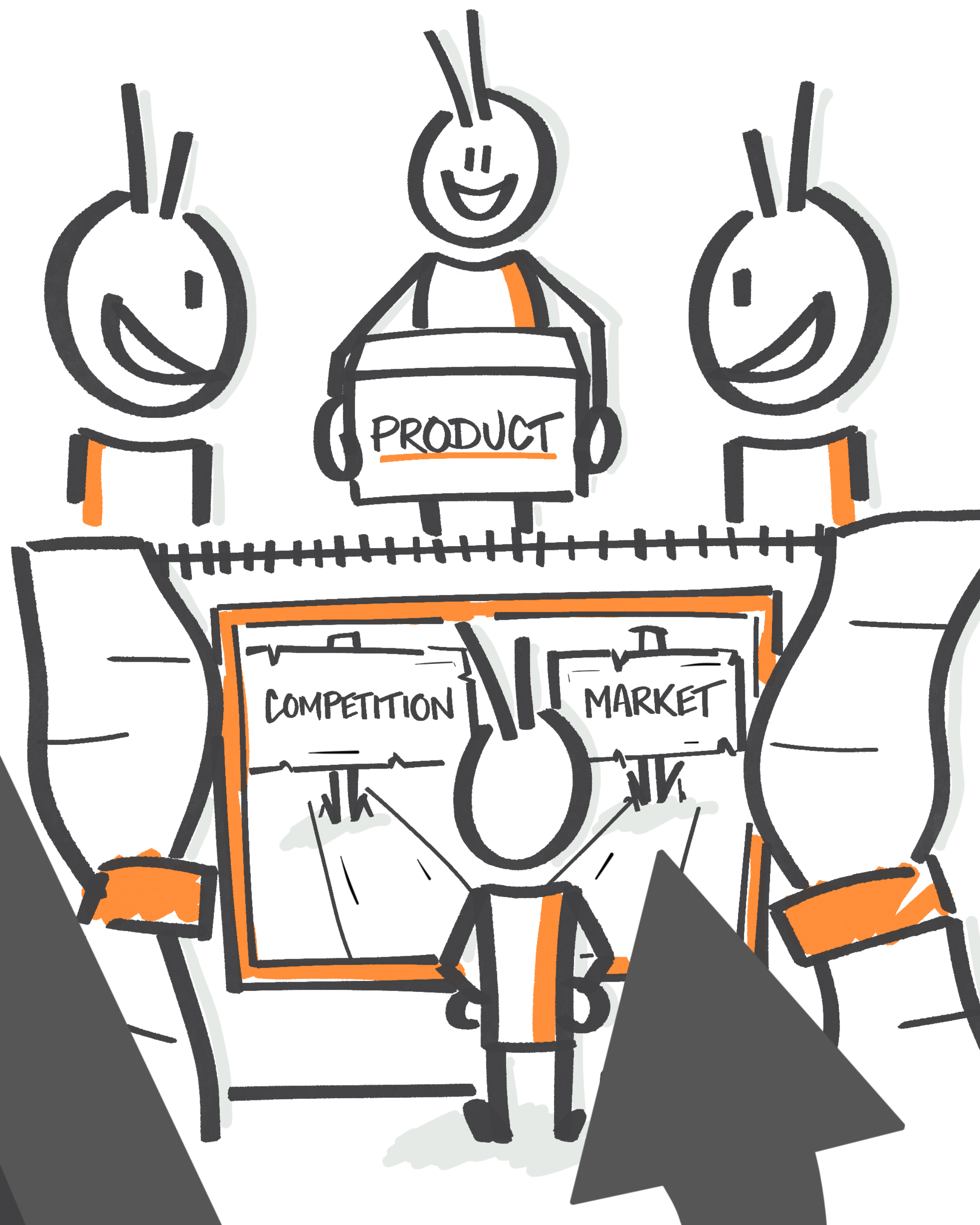
What they may want as minimum: (ideal to not so ideal)

- To use the product
- To see someone else using the product
- To see a video of someone using the product
- To see pictures of the product

If the Scrum team are the only ones in the review, is there something wrong? It's a
bit like watching your own film if this is a consistent occurrence. Good for the ego but
not much else.

Put yourselves in the shoes of those coming to collaborate with the team, and remember
that the Sprint Review is everyone's responsibility.

This is obviously quite generic but hopefully a few things to ponder on.



Let's say you run
30 miles in your first
ever week of running.

It's probably not a good idea to jump straight to 50 miles
in the second week.

You may end up doing more harm than good.

Even if it does look good on Strava.

The same goes for teams when deciding how much work to
take in for a period of time.



Every Agile book ever, boiled down to 12 simple points

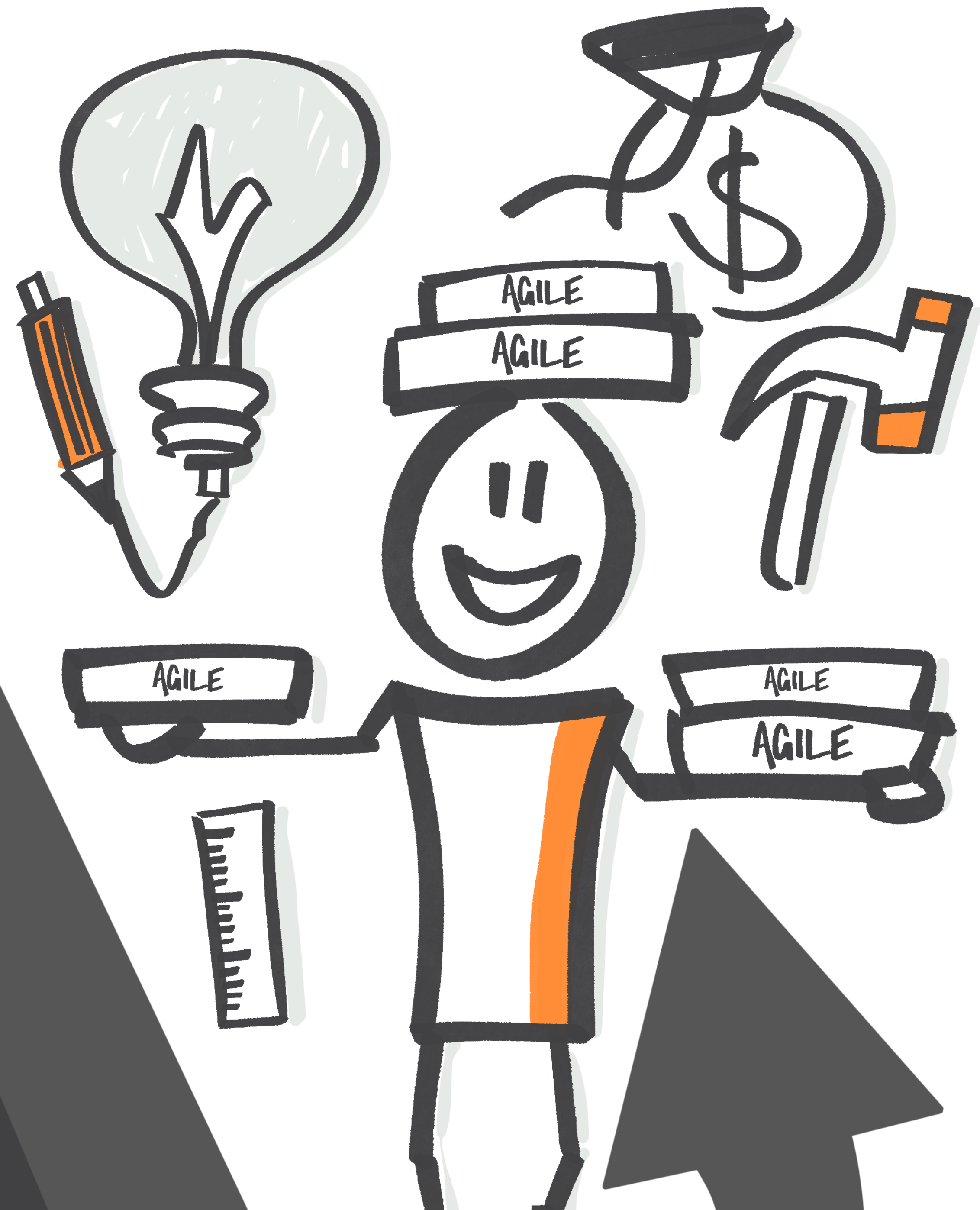
I set myself this challenge after reading an article called 'Every self-help book ever, boiled down to 11 simple rules'.

I'll probably change my mind on some of these as soon as I post it but I enjoyed the challenge.

Here goes...

- 4 values, 12 principles, unlimited number of practices.
- Visualise the work.
- If you are learning Scrum, learn about Extreme Programming.
- Needs, values, principles, tools. In that order.
- The first deployment of code should be with the minimum amount money taken from the pot and at the earliest opportunity.
- Limit work in progress.
- Involve the customer throughout.
- Small, cross functional teams with clear focus for the win.
- Small, negotiated scope contracts will help.
- Measure what actually matters.
- Nail it before you scale it.
- Deliberate action is needed to build psychological safety.

Simple, not easy



So you have been
rolled out like
C-3PO to do
another 'introduction
to agility' session

The tape is in and it's hard to stop.

The Manifesto.
The growth mindset.
The Stacey matrix.

You know the drill.

Remember, motivation may be a by-product of what you say.

But motivation isn't the goal.

It's about starting a conversation about the environment needed for
people to motivate themselves.



I wrote something,
someone gave
some feedback, I
chose not to act
on it

Something people often forget.

Implementing feedback is a choice.

Feedback is great and shouldn't be dismissed as it's obviously a key part of any improvement.

However, it's their feedback, it belongs to the individual giving it.

It's a chore to receive and an even bigger choice to do something with.

Listen.

Take onboard.

Reflect.

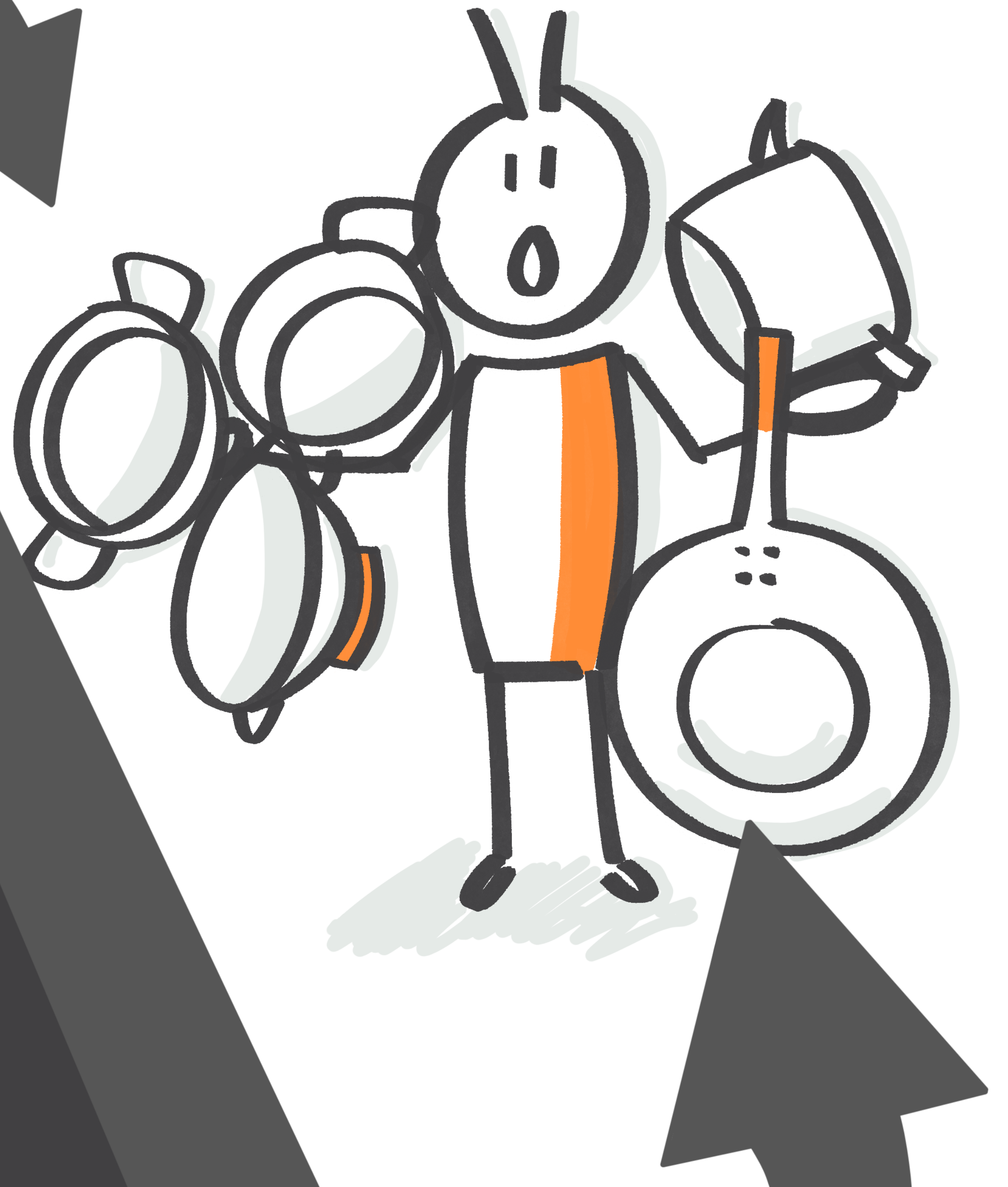
Keep in mind that the choice is yours.

Some things are just about taking ownership.



Not having work in progress (WIP) limits is like putting all the pots in the sink because you are “leaving them to soak”, and then trying to clean 5 bits of cutlery at the same time.

The end result is likely to be a follow up conversation at some point to talk about quality.



Something to keep in mind...

Just because the scope has changed doesn't mean it's now an MVP.

It just means the scope has changed.

If you are 18 months down the line you may want to stop saying you're 'going after MVP'.



How to facilitate a successful workshop in under two minutes

It starts with preparation by clearly stating the purpose, the intended outcome and of course who needs to be there. Simple things, but they are often missed out.

You then want to open strongly by confirming the goal and verifying the intended outcome. Walking the agenda and asking if it suits the attendees needs whilst introducing any tools that are going to be used.

Now the real work can begin by letting those involved generate ideas but don't forget to bring people back together in order to prioritise, choose and vote on what to do next. Having a parking zone for those conversations or topics that need revisiting can also help.

To close the loop, you are going to summarise the work, call out any actions, check the parking zone and ask if the purpose has been met. Finally celebrate that you have all made it through in one piece.

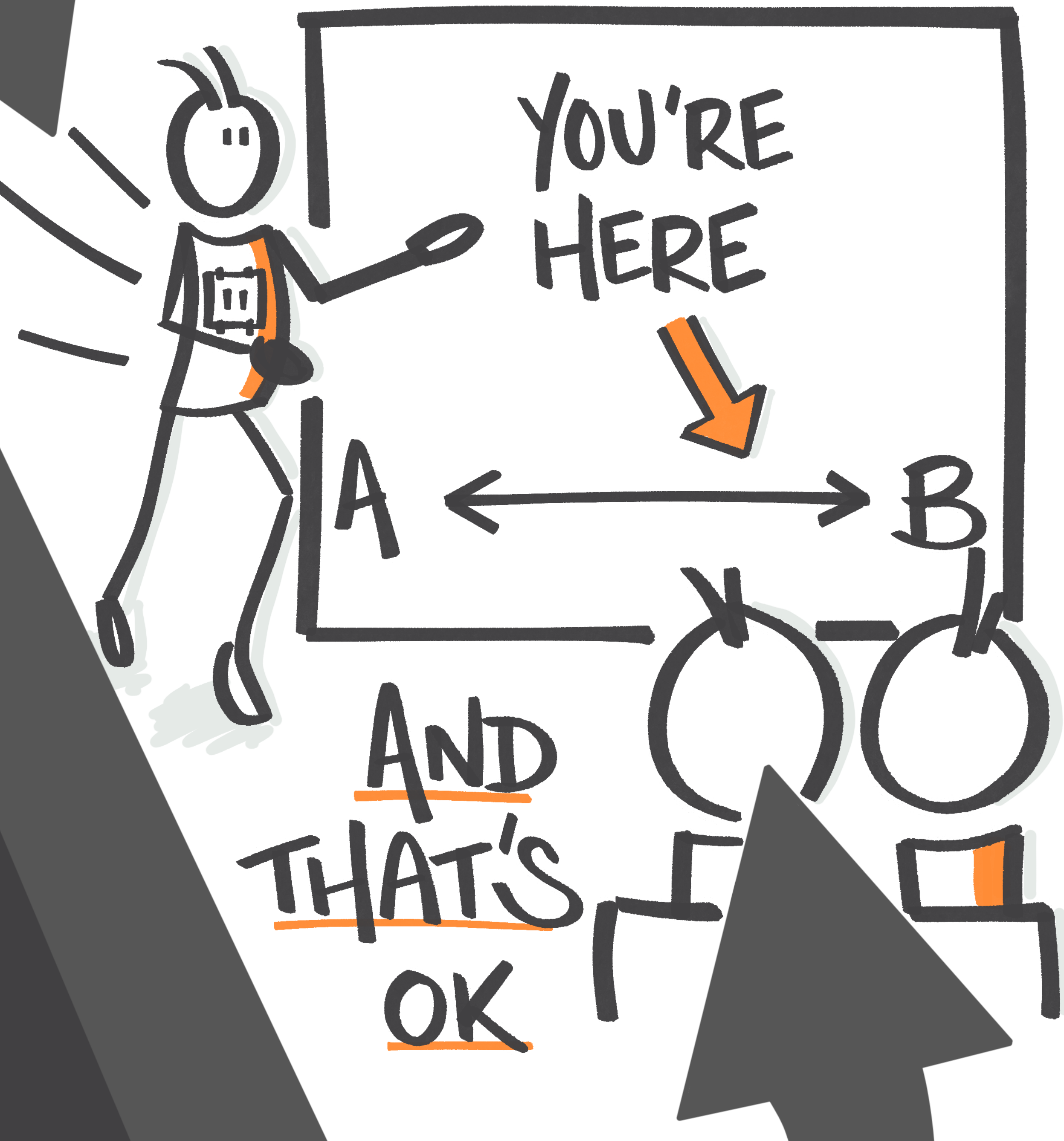
Remember, as the facilitator you create the environment for people to come up with their own great solutions. Pay close attention to where you position yourself along with your tone of voice.



As a Scrum Master/Agile Coach you may have more in common with an endurance athlete than you might think.

I've only gone and entered a 50k race in May. This got me thinking about what an endurance runner may have in common with a Scrum Master/Agile Coach.

- Expectation setting - Where are you and the team at now? What is not going to happen overnight?
- Acceptance of the above.
- Pacing - Not going too fast too soon.
- Patience - Progress in either direction takes time.
- Discipline - Slowing down to speed up takes discipline.
- Compassion - To yourself and those around you.
- Purpose - Why are we even bothering to do this?
- Playing the long game - Agility is a marathon not a sprint.
- Balancing future goals with today's reality



Swarming & The Big Roll of 2014

This picture represents one of the best examples of swarming that I have been part of.

The big roll of 2014 is something that still gets discussed in the HMS Protector WhatsApp group.

It was a night in which the ship got ticked by Poseidon's Trident whilst in an area called 'Drake Passage'.

(Fully aware that whole sentence reads like an adult film)

People & equipment were violently upended. All sorts of heavy items including a Land-Rover were no longer where they should be.

Anyway, once the people who were sneaking a cigarette at the time were accounted for it was time to swarm.

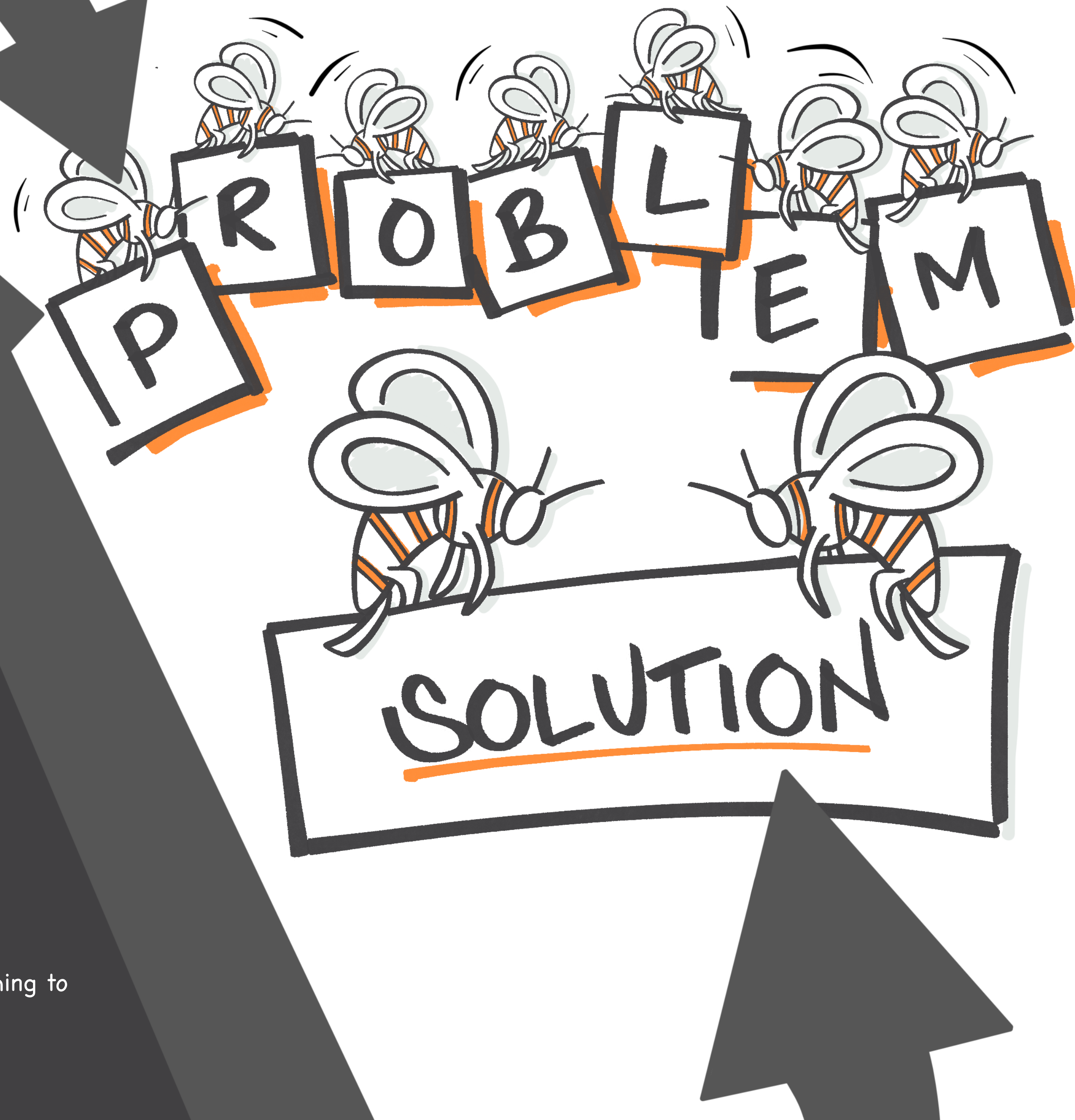
It was all hands in to solve a problem.

To check for damage and most importantly to ensure no one had become the latest crew member of the Flying Dutchman.

Back in the real world.

Understanding how you may want to swarm when things go wrong might be something to think about as a team.

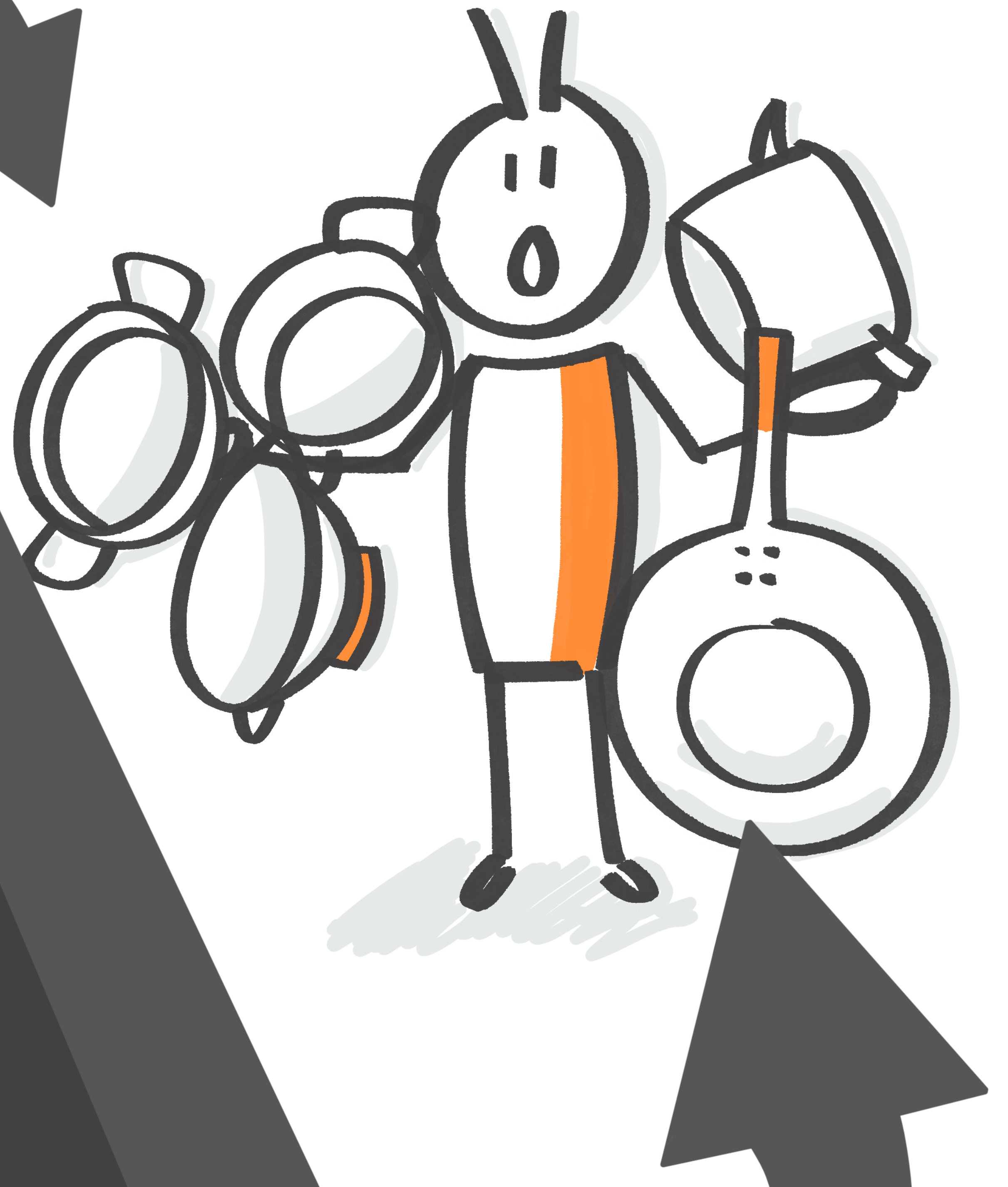
Waiting for your own 'big roll' might be too late to test that approach.



Just popping up to remind
you about what could happen
if you don't think about work in
progress limits.

It could get ugly.

Have a great day!



4 things I should have done when starting as a Scrum Master.

I'd done the course, grasped the theory and was ready to go. But much like Jon Snow I soon realised I knew nothing.

Here are four things that may help you.

1. Find someone you respect, and use them to stay honest. Who do you respect? Have you reached out to them? It doesn't have to be a coaching relationship, but finding someone who will tell you some hard truths can be a massive help.
2. Learn, digest and apply your knowledge – If you don't apply it you will probably forget it.
3. Challenge yourself to be brutally honest – if you can't be honest with yourself, receiving feedback from others will be tough to take.
4. Reflect on what you spend the most time on. Are you spending time worrying about things you can't control? Could this time be used to help the team instead?



Doesn't the Scrum Master just book and facilitate the events?

This is a common question from those who are new to the framework. Now the beauty and the curse of the Scrum Master role is that you need someone who is intrinsically motivated to influence change.

Anyone can book a few meetings in outlook, that goes without saying, and to be honest someone might get away with doing that for a while.

However, the real work comes from the work that happens beneath the surface.

Highlighting to leadership the potential value a cross functional team could bring. Helping those within an organisation understand the agility is more important than Agile. Helping to look at ways to help ship code more often.

So no, the Scrum Master doesn't just book the events. Don't just assume that's all they are doing.

Thanks for watching/reading and if you have any thoughts on this feel free to leave a comment.



Do you dislike the Daily Scrum or is it the fact it's turned into a status update?

Do you detest refinement or is it due to it being a 90 minute slog every week?

Do you hate the Sprint Review? Or is it because no one outside of the team turns up?

Do you find retrospectives pointless? Or is it that the actions aren't being followed through?

The events are conversational containers.

It's up to you how they are used.

As a team.

Together.



Things that aren't inherently bad.

Story Points.
Velocity.
Burn-down charts.

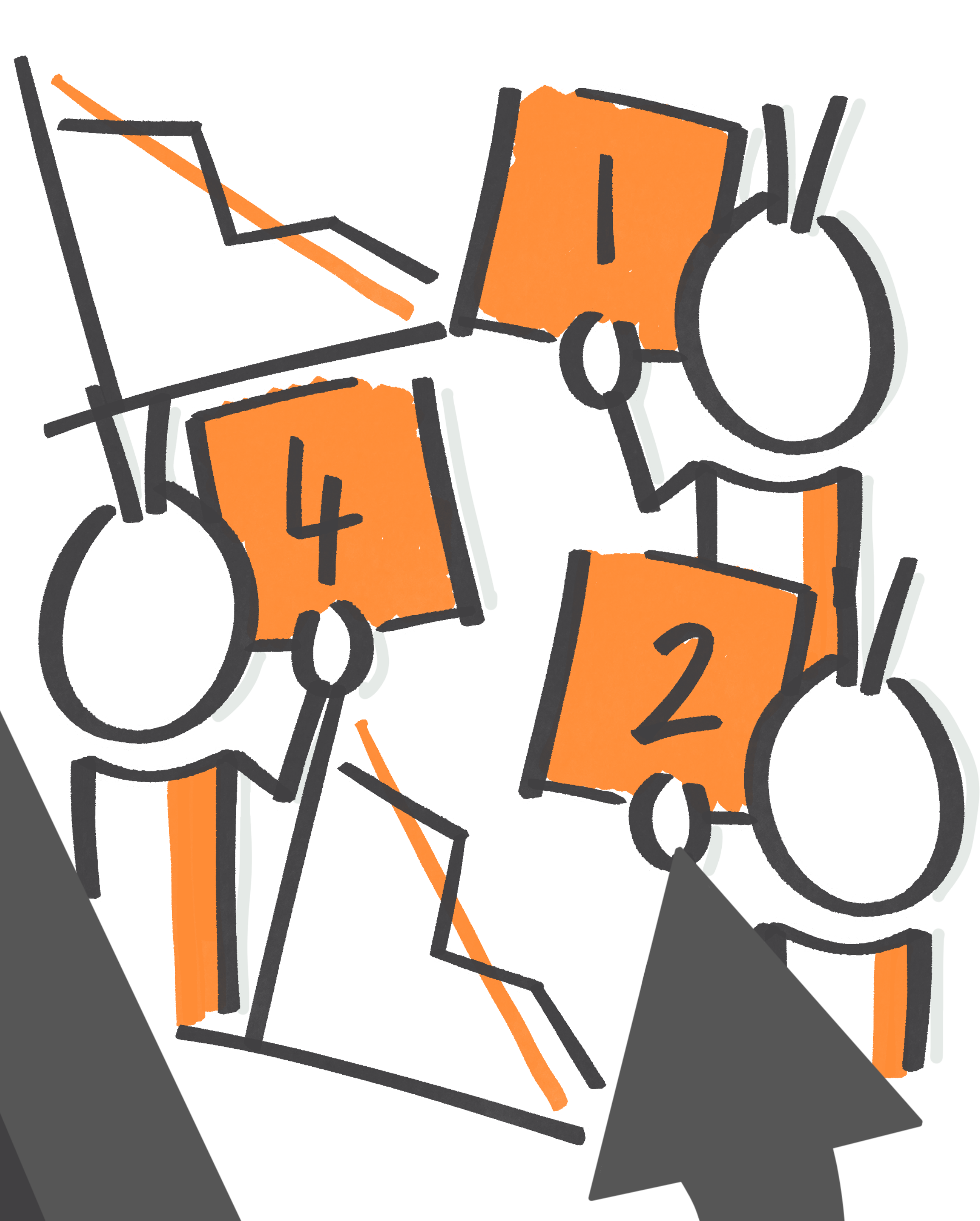
Of course they can influence behaviour that may not be helpful.

But they are tools.

Would you blame a compass for sending you in the wrong direction? Or could it be that you need to learn how to use it?

A hard but important thing to admit.

Don't blame the tools for your own failure to understand them.



It can be very easy to get caught up in what others view as the best styles/traits are as a Scrum Master/Agile Coach

Especially on LinkedIn.

The truth is that they don't really exist.

Sure some ways might be better than others. But perfection? I don't think so.

You may be better off focusing on:

Situational awareness

Self awareness

Technical understanding

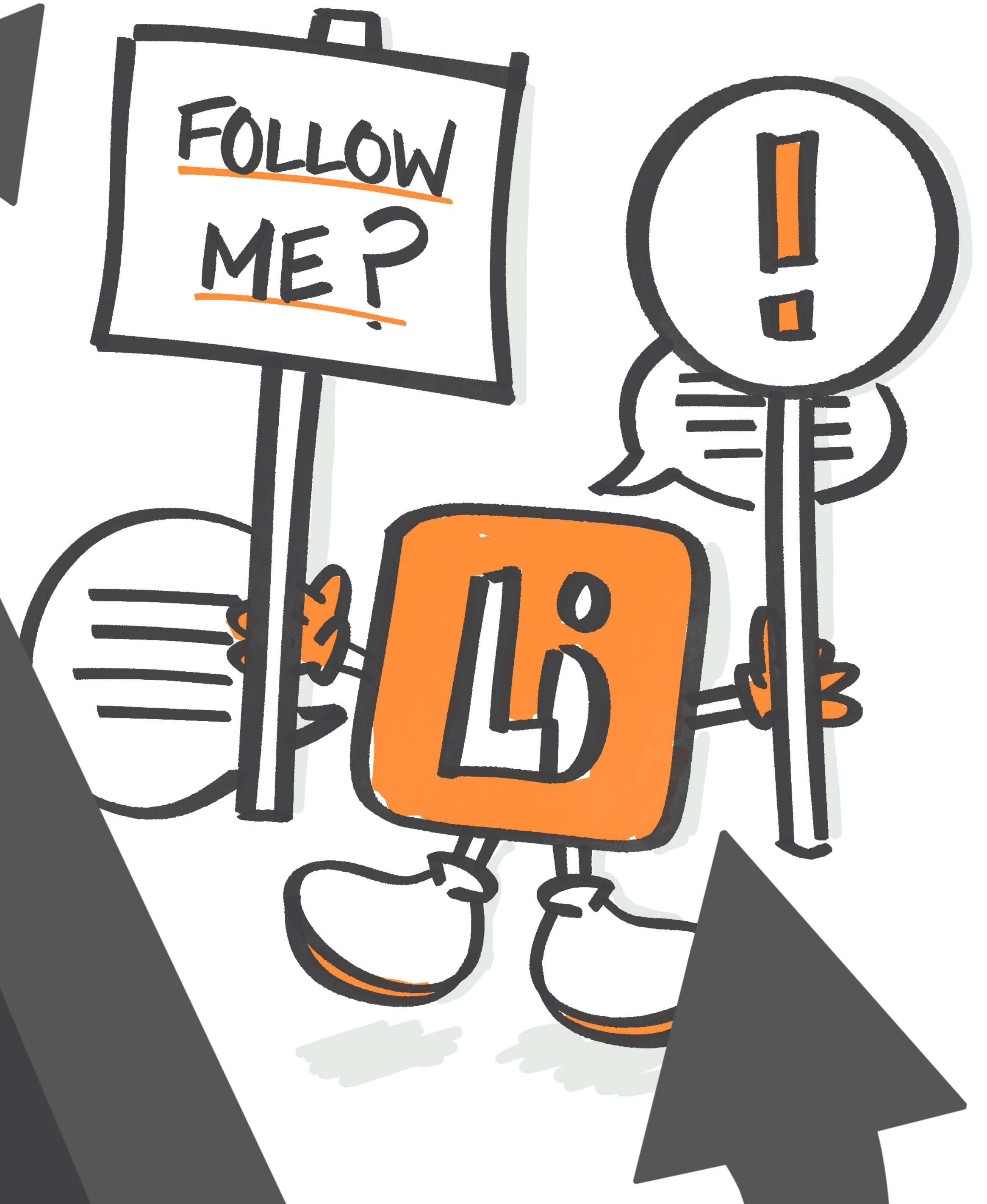
Interpersonal skills

A deeper understanding of human behaviour

Processes of influence

Radical candor

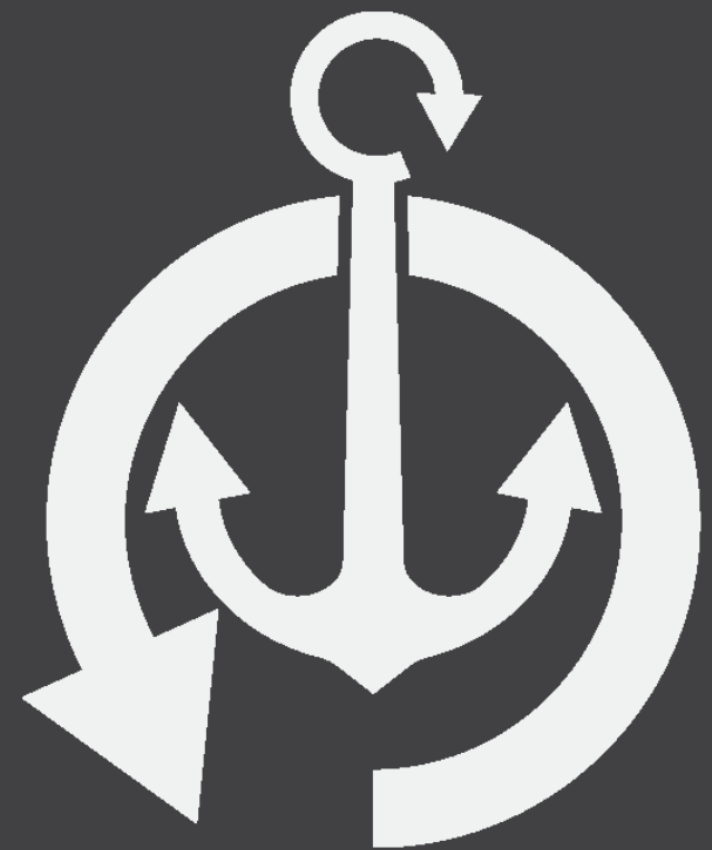
I am sure there are many more but the above may be a start.



Thanks for
reading.

Jac.

visit everydayagile.co.uk



Everyday
Agile

illustrated by
LeoDo

