Agile Leaders' Journey Towards Inclusive Leadership

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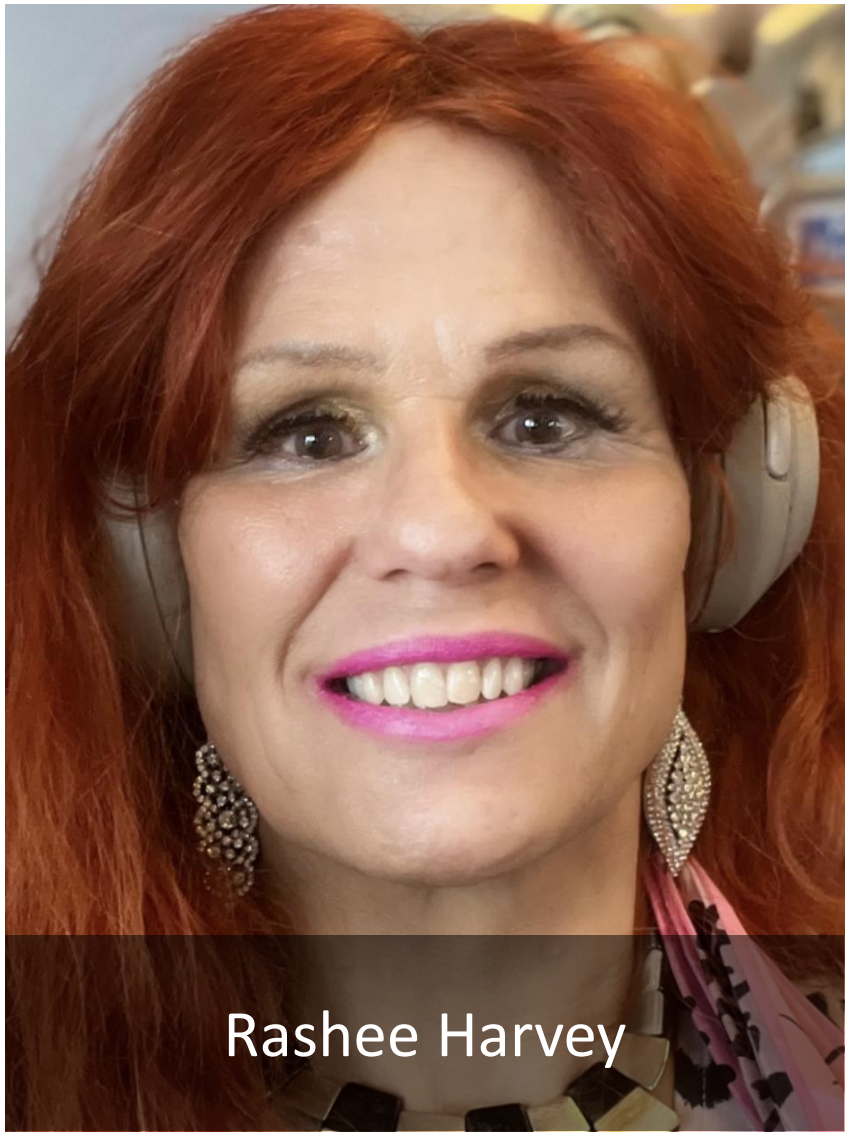
WOMEN IN AGILE EUROPE 2023

About us



Today's talk

Agenda

- Frame inclusivity and why it is critically important
- Examine team and organizational dynamics in three scenarios
  - Highlight non-inclusive behaviors we have seen
  - Share how we have dealt with these non-inclusive behaviors
- Share our lessons learnt

This talk is applicable to **all agile practitioners**, not just leaders.

Everybody has a role to play in creating an inclusive environment.

Definition: Diversity & Inclusivity

A diverse workforce is having many kinds of vehicles.

An inclusive workforce is allowing them to drive off the beaten track.

Why Inclusivity?

> Economic growth is at its best when it is most inclusive. Conversely, left unaddressed, inequality and economic exclusion threaten economic growth.

An inclusive culture welcomes ideas and people – and that's what drives innovation.

Let's explore what can happen when non-inclusive leadership styles dominate decision making ….

sky news

‘SEXIST’ NO 10 CULTURE ‘MAY HAVE COST LIVES’

Covid 19 UK Public Inquiry

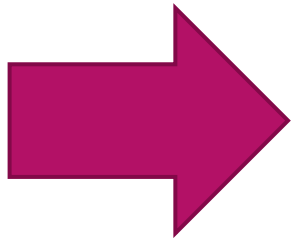
> There was a total lack of an empathic, knowledgeable female perspective directly led to an increase in women harmed or worse by being forced into a captive environment with their abusive partners.

Helen MacNamara, UK Governments former ethics chief.

Consequence of lack of inclusivity
(of just one parameter – gender (female))

"There was a total lack of an empathic, knowledgeable female perspective directly led to an increase in women harmed or worse by being forced into a captive environment with their abusive partners."

Helen MacNamara, UK Governments former ethics chief.



The Office for National Statistics recorded 14% more arrests for domestic violence between 1 April and 30 June 2020 compared to the same period in the previous year."

This amounts to over 7000 more arrests during the same period. For each arrest there are countless other domestic violence incidents that go unreported

What is inclusive leadership?

> Inclusive leadership creates a space in an environment where people feel like they can actually express dissent, where they can bring their ideas to the table, and it's not a matter of just feeling welcomed, but also valued, "What I say matters". **-- Aiko Bethea**

Role of curiosity in inclusive leadership

- An inclusive leader has a deep, authentic curiosity for the perspectives of others.
- You are all curious – you are here! But how does all this apply to Agile ?

Why is inclusive leadership so hard?

Deeply personal

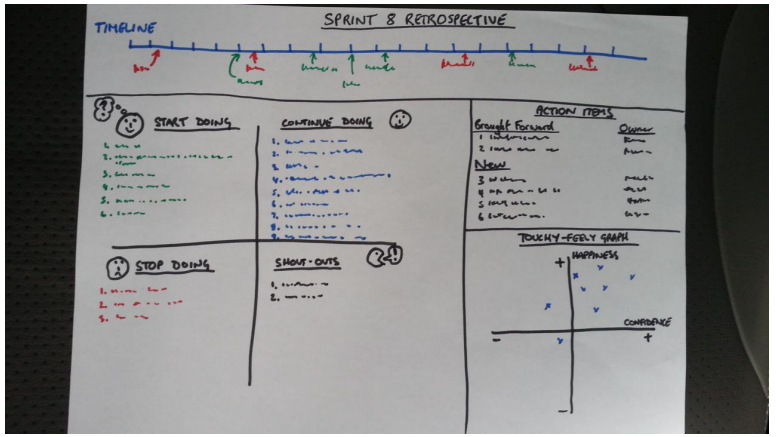
Qualitative feedback hard to obtain

Quantitative feedback not helpful

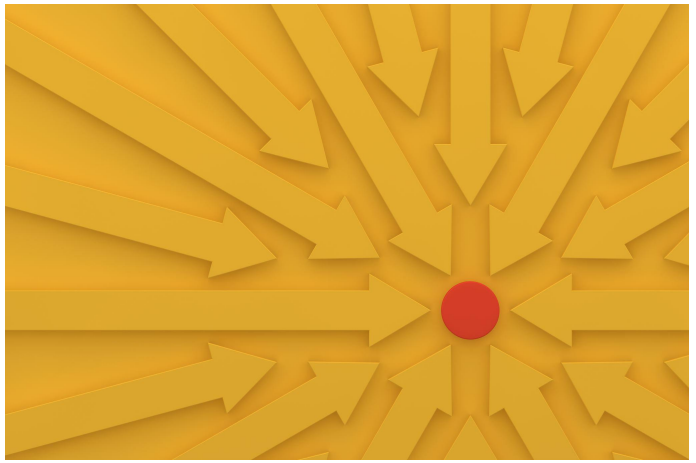
How do inclusivity challenges surface in Agile contexts?

Sprint Planning

Sprint Retro



Sprint in Crisis



Before we start…

Non-inclusive behaviors are behaviors of others that make you feel like **what you say doesn't matter**.

The non-inclusive behaviors we will discuss in this talk may not be intentional.

Proceed with **kindness.**

Sprint Planning

Non-inclusive behaviors in Sprint Planning

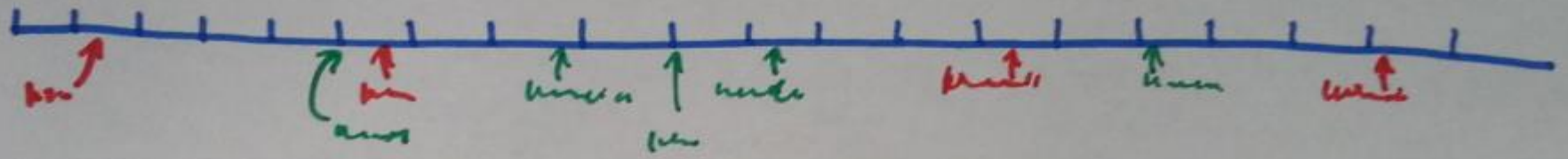
- People with more strong voices dominating team discussions
- Experience bias – “my view is the only truth”
- Neurotypical at odds with neuro-divergent thinking
- Rushing to conclusions under time pressure
- Management pressure to deliver more

How to create inclusivity in Sprint Planning

- Give people time to think
- Encourage small group discussions
- Accommodate different ways of processing information
- Help master the art of “good enough”
- Empathy building through shadowing & role reversal
- Revisit disagreements in the retro

SPRINT 8 RETROSPECTIVE

TIMELINE



START DOING

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.

CONTINUE DOING

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.
7.
8.
9.

STOP DOING

1.
2.
3.

SHOUT-OUTS

1.
2.

ACTION ITEMS

Brought Forward	Owner
1	
2	
New	
3	
4	
5	
6	

TOUCHY-FEELY GRAPH

Sprint Retro

Non-inclusive behaviors in Sprint Retro

- Mental and physical fatigue
- Attribution theory and other mental shortcuts
- Anxiety about being blamed, pre-emptive blame
- Holding onto one's narrative (Not open to seeing how other people experienced the same event)

How to create inclusivity in Sprint Retro

- Set the stage
  - No personal attacks
  - Use data whenever possible
  - Start with a timeline of events review
  - Anticipate different perspectives on the same event
  - Encourage using “I” - “This is how I remember” instead of “this is what happened”
- Acknowledge emotions in the room
- Share your own vulnerability

Sprint in crisis!!!

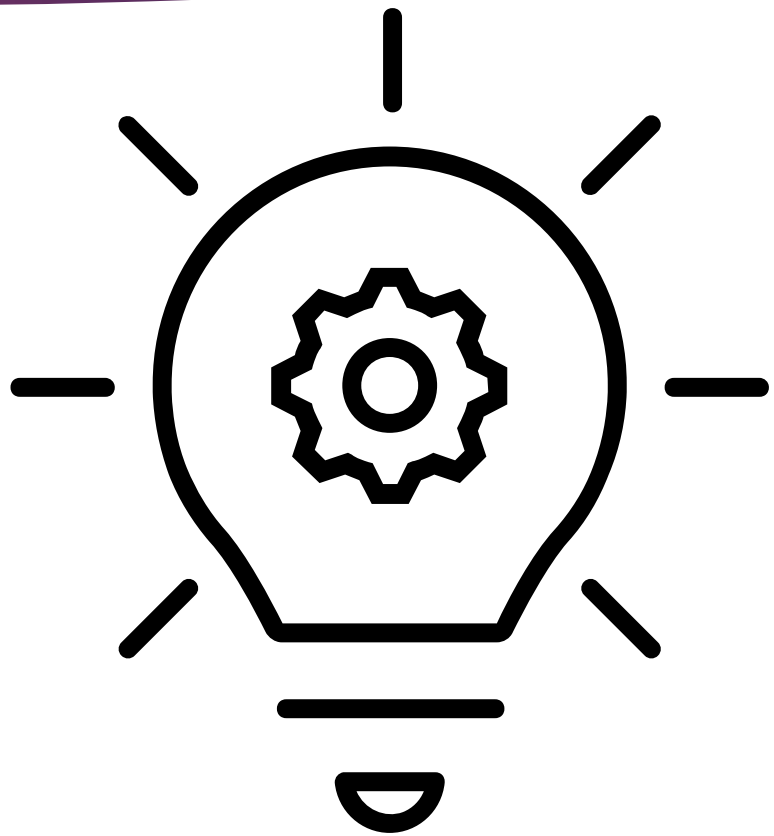
Non-inclusive behaviors in times of crisis

- Fight or flight response
- Command and control behaviour
- Stress induced deliberation to intuition

How to create inclusivity in times of crisis

- Let the team focus on the work and decide how to solve the problem
- Remember to be customer focused
- Remember that we are a team
- Pause before reacting

Our lessons learnt



Our biggest Lessons Learned

- Learn about our own biases & preferences
- Examine our automatic behaviours in critical moments

Develop a self-reflection routine

Self-reflection routine is like doing a “sprint retro” for yourself

- On regular cadence
- Structure – retro goals, working agreements, questions to explore, evidence, etc.
- Improvement action planning

Inspect and Adapt!

Suggested self-retro structure

- **Cadence:** Daily or weekly
- **Focus area:** What event or situation stood out during this period?
- **Goal:** What do I want to get out of this retro?
- **Working agreements:** E.g., Be kind to myself, no judgment, no beating myself up, do not aim for perfection

Suggested self-retro structure

- **Questions:**
  - What was my behavior?
  - What was my intention?
  - What was the impact of my behavior on others?
  - What evidence is available to understand the impact (feedback, observation, etc.)
  - What kept me from being curious?
  - What did I learn about myself?
- **Improvement Action:** What action do I need to take?

We have innate leadership superpowers

Women Outscored Men on Most Leadership Competencies

According to an analysis of 360-degree reviews during the pandemic, women were rated higher on most competencies.

Competencies — WHERE DIFFERENCE IS STATISTICALLY SIGNIFICANT	Ratings WOMEN	MEN
• Takes initiative	60	50
• Learning agility	59	50
• Inspires and motivates others	59	52
• Develops others	58	49
• Builds relationships	58	51
• Displays high integrity and honesty	57	49
• Communicates powerfully and prolifically	57	52
• Collaboration and teamwork	56	50
• Champions change	56	51
• Makes decisions	56	49
Innovates	56	53
Solves problems and analyzes issues	56	53
Customer and external focus	56	54
• Drives for results	55	48
• Values diversity	55	45
• Establishes stretch goals	55	50
Develops strategic perspective	55	54
Technical or professional expertise	53	55
Takes risks	52	51

Source: Zenger Folkman, 2020 HBR

- Empathy
- Compassion
- Nurturing
- Active Listening
- Authentic Curiosity
- Communication
- Bridge Building
- Relationship Building
- Collaboration

Inclusive Leadership

Thank you

Please reach out with questions or to share your thoughts:

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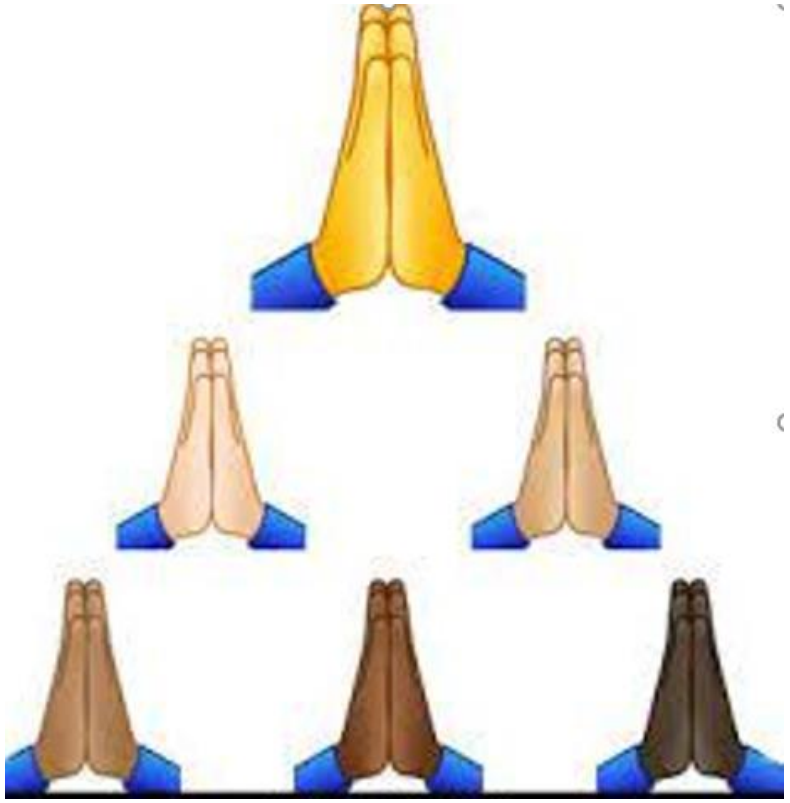
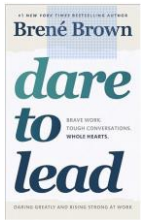
Or come talk to us during the rest of the conference

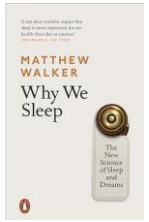


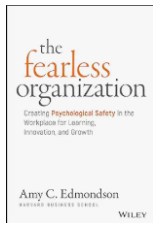
Other ideas to help leaders be inclusive

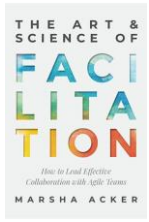
1. Share vulnerability – *create trust and inclusivity*
2. Employ structure – *guiding principles, working agreements, facilitation techniques*
3. Get feedback from someone you trust
4. Harness the power of empathy *- curiosity + multiple perspectives*
5. Create safe spaces – *Show compassion, kindness and make everyone feel valued*
6. Use inclusive language e.g. *daily check-in versus daily standup*
7. Actively listen – *WAIT! – Why Am I Talking?*
8. Make inclusivity a principle – *include in your **enterprise** design principles*
9. Tool up for collaboration & inclusiveness – E.g. Miro/Mural/Teams/Slack
10. Encourage the use of team charters – *find the night owls and morning larks*

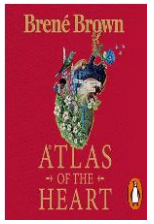
Further Reading & References

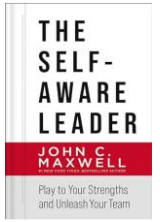


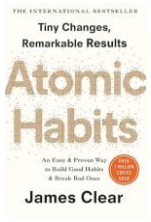


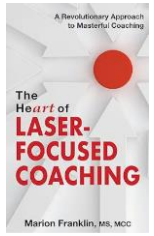


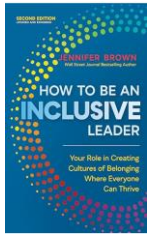


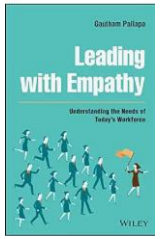


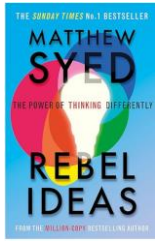


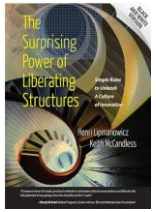


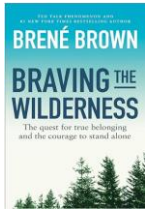


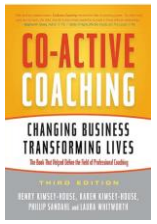


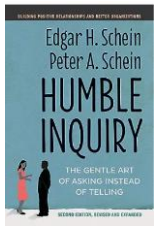


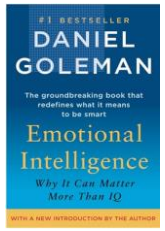


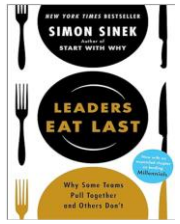












A quote by Viktor E. Frankl

“Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.”