



Everyone Sucks at Estimating!

Making Progress through Imperfection with Story Estimates and OKRs ...Because Embracing the Agile Mindset is More Important

Brian Link
CincyDeliver
July 2024



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The agile mindset behaviors
that define being agile

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Relative Estimating

Performance Measures

Everyone Sucks at Estimating

OKRs

Refinement

Strategy

“Directionally correct and usefully wrong...”

Story Points

Story Mapping

Embracing the Agile Mindset

Outcomes vs Outputs

#noestimates

Velocity

Why DO YOU Use Story Points?

- What are they for? What benefits do you get from using them?

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Obvious Truths and Assumptions

“Being directionally correct and usefully wrong brings focus to the Agile Mindset and principles”

- If you spend too much time estimating, you deliver less value
- Being agile is less about making specific predictions than it is delivering the most important value sooner
- Trying to be precise or estimate work that is too large is a fool’s errand

Agile Mindset

An Iterative Mindset

A Product Culture

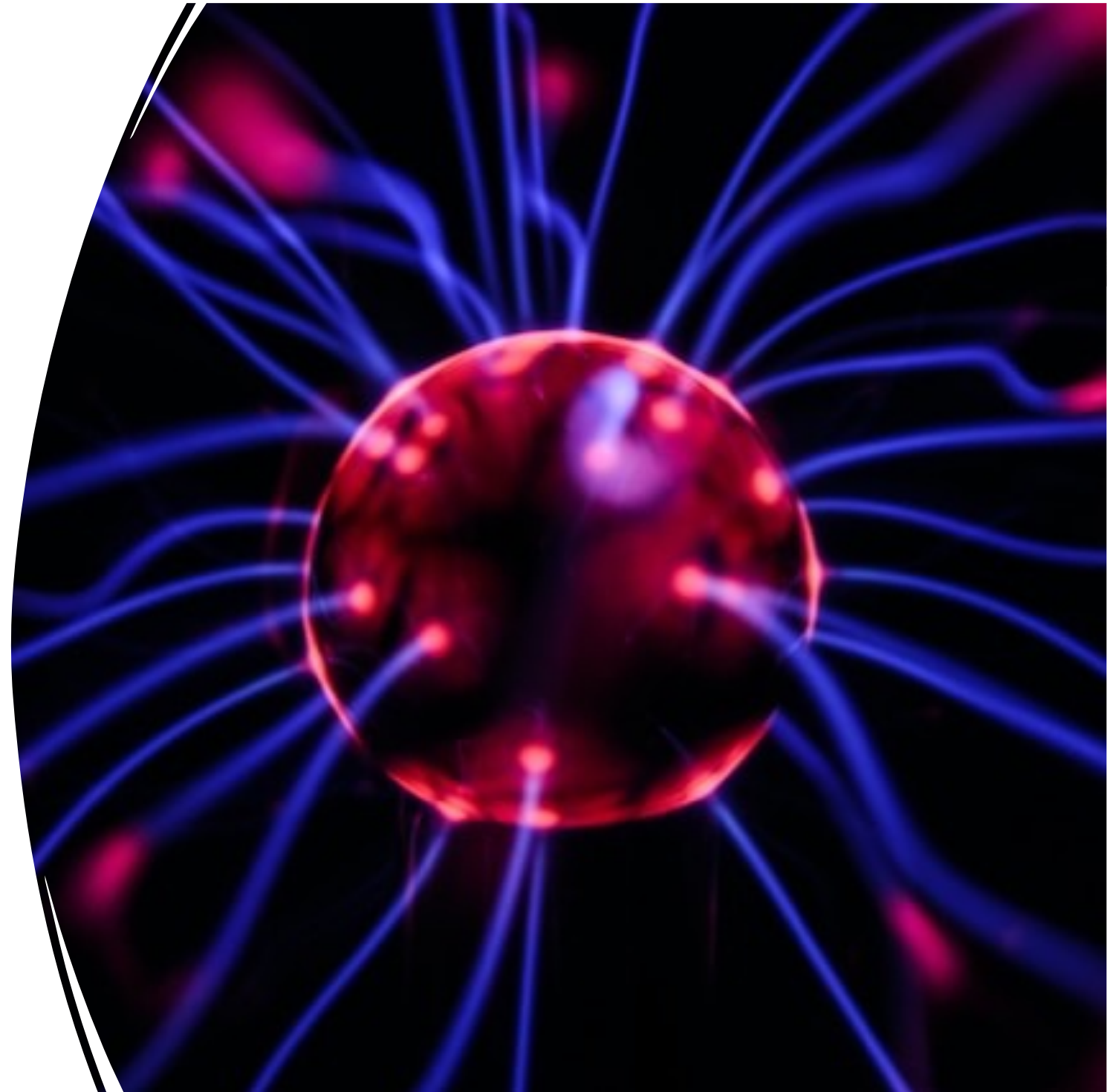
Customer Centric Mindset

Culture of Learning

Culture of Experimentation

Culture of Continuous Improvement

Culture of Psychological Safety





Why Use Story Points?

Relative Estimation!

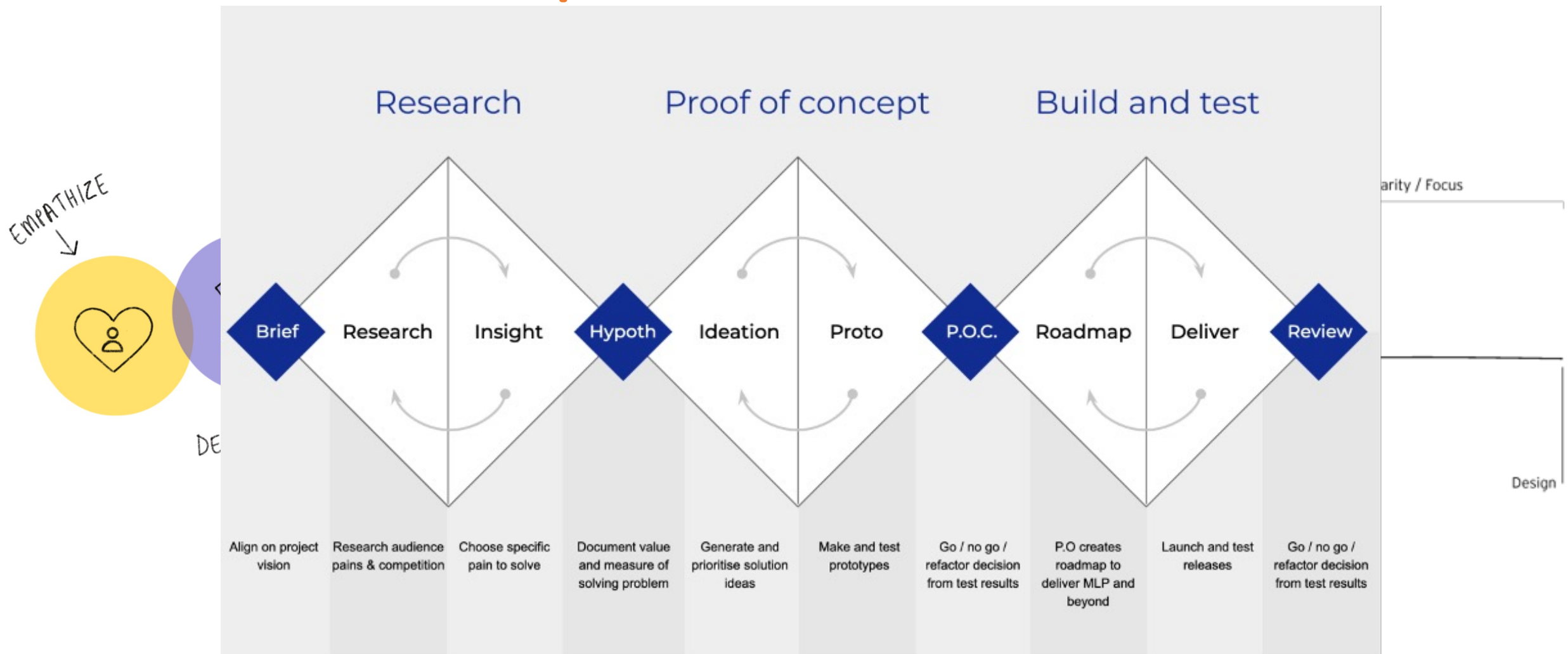
- Humans are horrible at guessing things precisely
- But we are awesome at comparing two things quickly
- The point is to suck consistently and not spend much time on it!



Writing Good Stories

Experiment! Get Feedback Sooner!

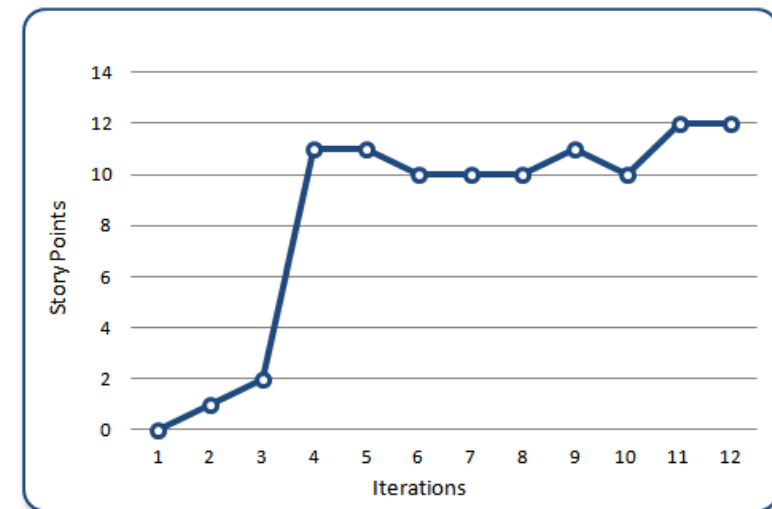
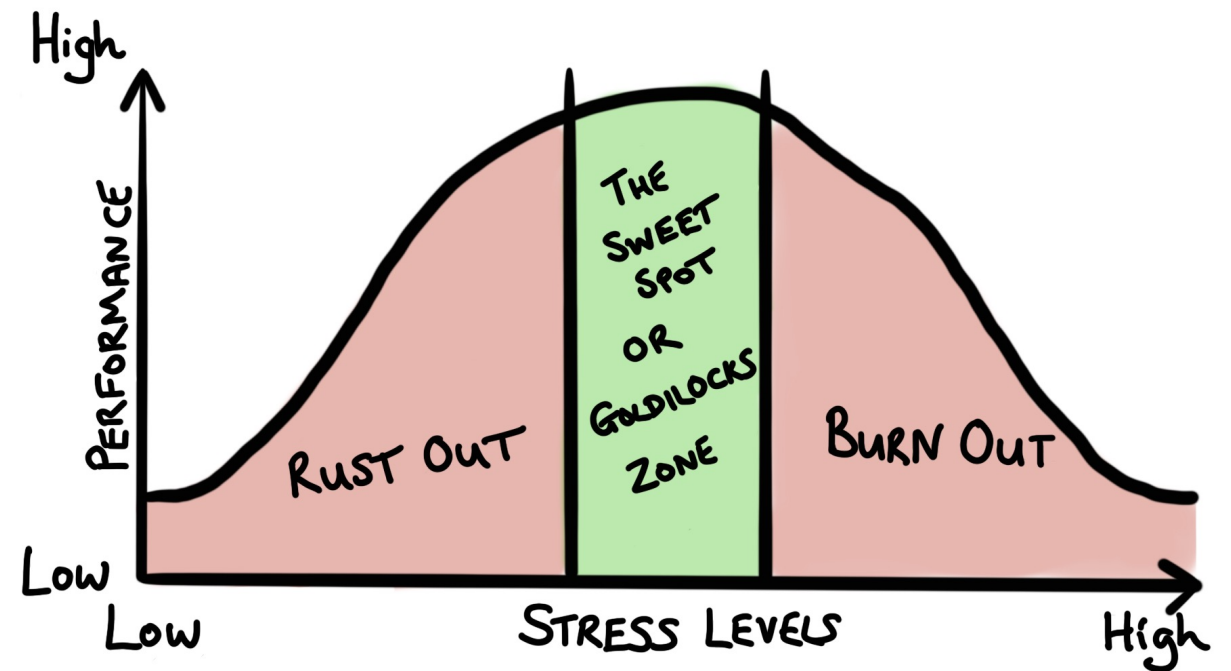
- Stories should define a hypothesis around value
- Do the least amount of work to prove or disprove
- Design Thinking brings focus to Customer



Why Use Story Points?

Sustainable Pace!

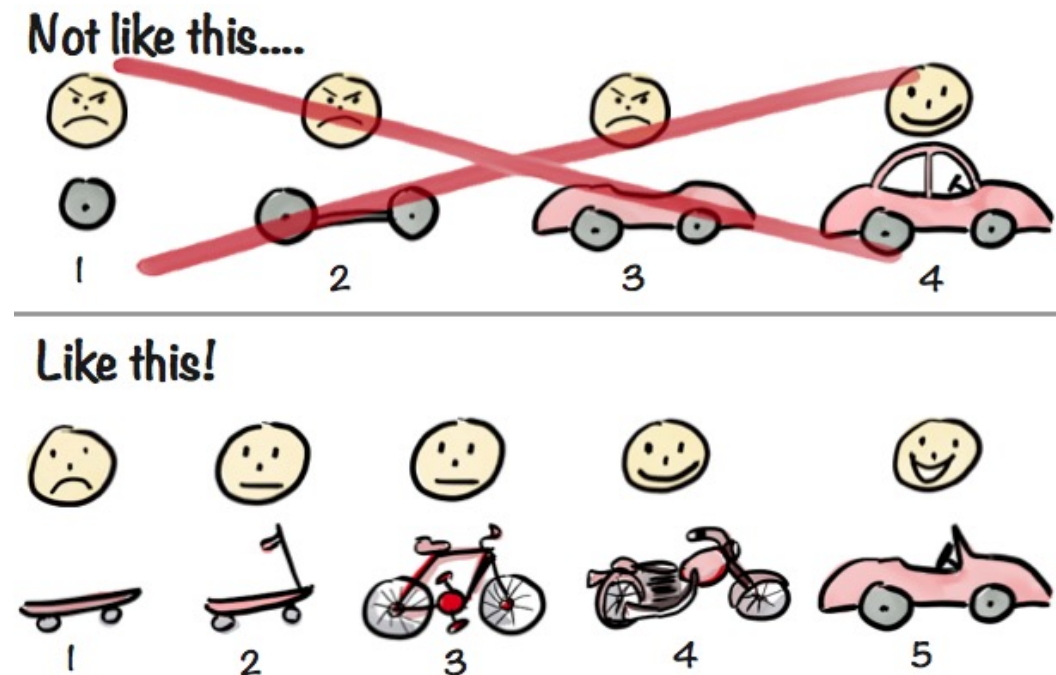
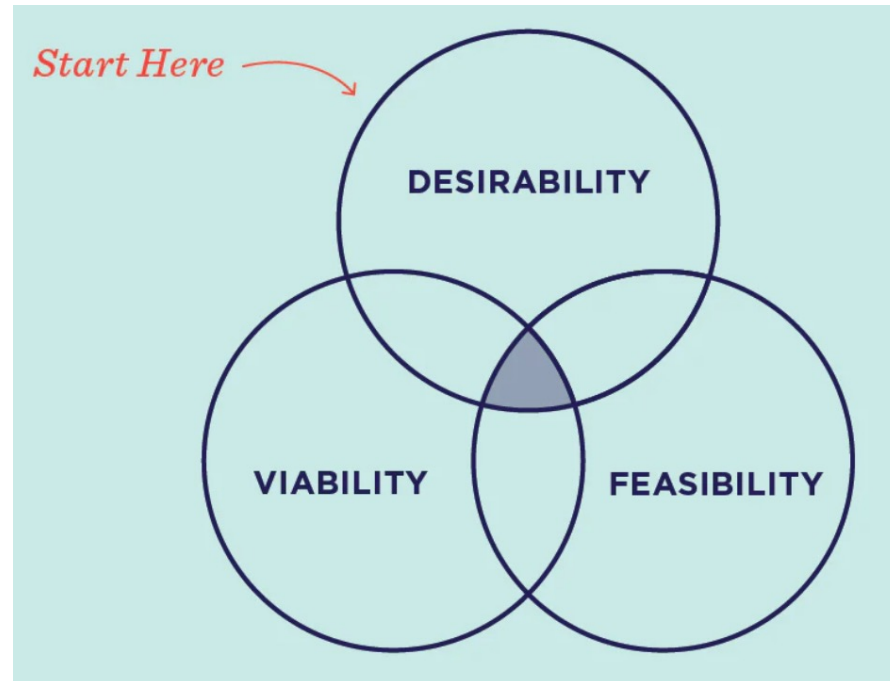
- Velocity (just a number) = reasonable capacity and sustainable pace
- Usefully wrong and directionally correct. Relative estimation as a trend smooths out all the bumps. No rabbit hole required.
- Measures about how much the team can do in 10 working days
- Helps predict and set expectations and ensure everyone is working normal work week



Writing Good Stories

Solve a Real Problem for a Real Customer!

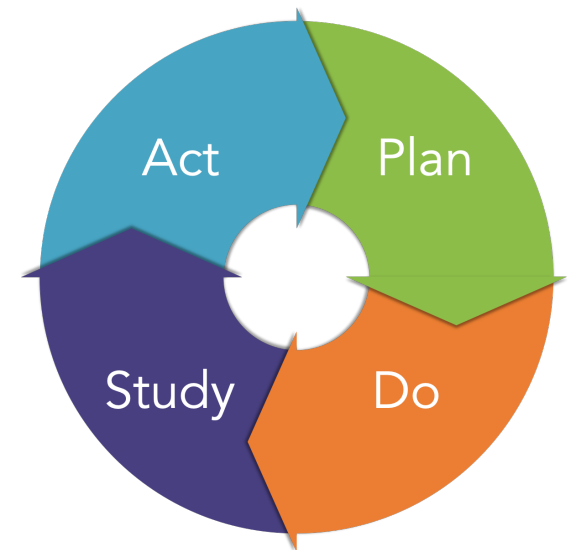
- Do we even know what the customer wants?
- Start w/ desirable: Balanced Breakthrough Model
- Discuss progress w/ customer... convertible?



Why Smaller Story Points?

Think Iteratively!

- Small stories with outcomes - focus on “Simplicity”
- Maximize the amount of work NOT done
- Get feedback sooner. Build better products.



Why Smaller Story Points?

Minimize Risk and Save Time! Be Lean!

- If a story's too big, ask yourself what "unknowns" are in there
- Small stories minimize risk, in case any story is off by 50%...
- Ideally, slice stories to the *same* size so you can just count cards



Writing Stories Together?

Shared Understanding!

- Three “C’s” – the Conversation leads to a shared understanding
- Discuss the differences to be sure there’s similar ideas in tech design “how”
- Requires Psychological Safety





Reset Your Story Point Process

- How can a team reset how they're using story points?
 - Pick a medium story everyone understands
 - Call it a 5 as your anchor story
- Compare everything to the anchor story
 - Roughly twice as hard? Half as hard?
- Why Fibonacci? (This is not exactly Fibonacci)
 - 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 20, 40



The Ultimate Promise

With relative estimating + rigorous backlog prioritization... you can say:

“Our team guarantees that we are working on the absolute most important outcomes for our customers at all times and will deliver incremental and demonstrable value every two weeks!”

Keep delivering and build trust and accountability... and suck consistently!





VISION

VISION PLAN

STRATEGY

STRATEGY

STRATEGY PLAN

MUSERABLE STRATEDS

MUSERABLE KEY RLANS

MUSERABLE KEY RESULTS



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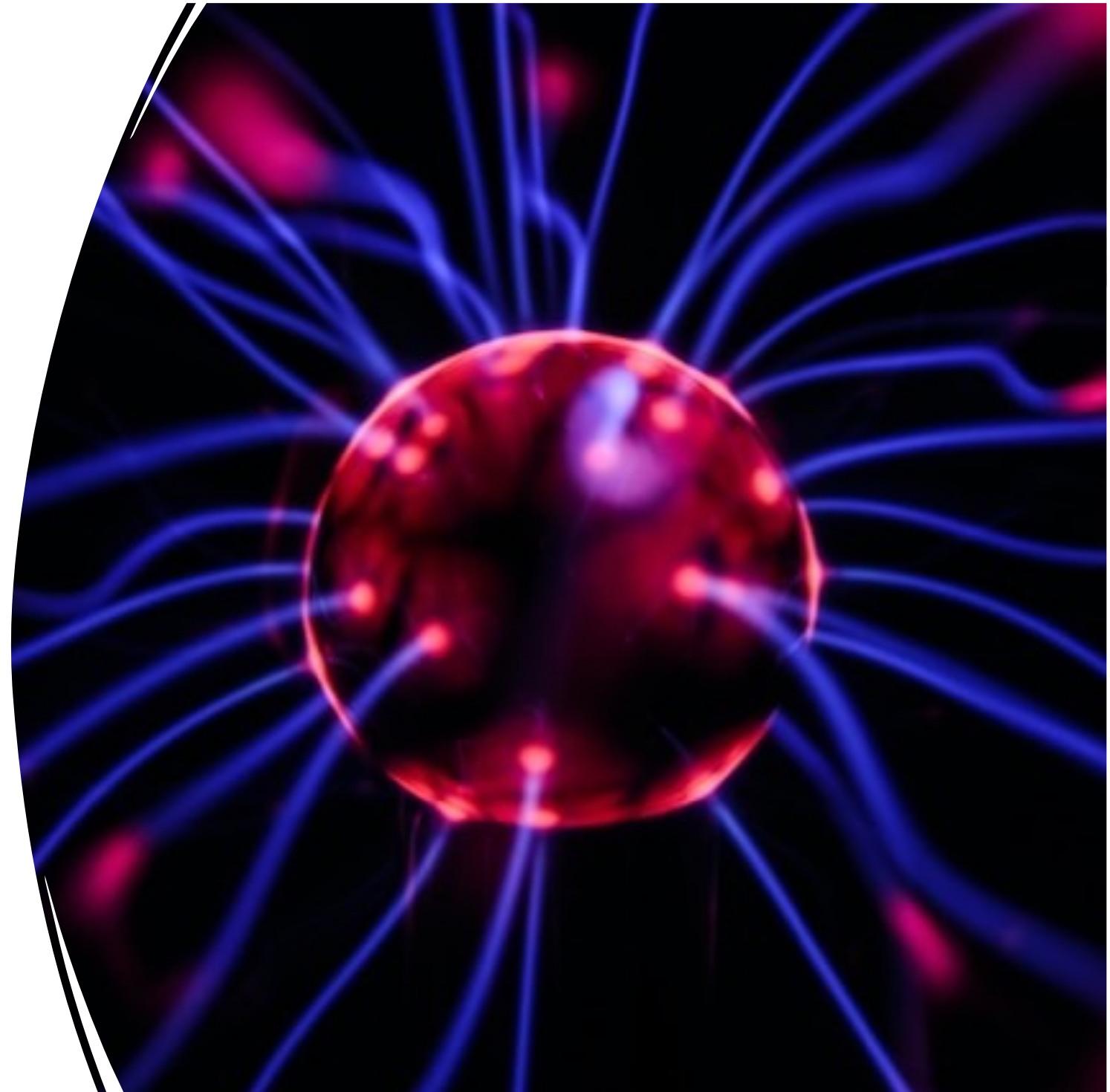
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What are OKRs?

- What do you use them for? What benefits do they bring?

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What are OKRs?

- Objective
 - Beautiful Huge Audacious Goal (BHAG)
 - Longer timeframe (1 year+)
- Key Result
 - Baby Step. Measurable.
 - Shorter timeframe (3 mos)
- Why even use OKRs?
 - Objectives should be inspirational
 - Key Results keep the team(s) focused

OKRs are a goal setting technique to create alignment and engagement around measurable goals and track their outcomes



What's the Connection?

- User Stories is where all the work happens
- OKRs are the vision, embodiment of the strategy that inspires the work
- What do these two lessons have in common?
 - Approximate is OK!
 - Directionally correct and usefully wrong!
 - Big picture (outcome orientation) and iterative approach (small steps)
 - Don't over analyze or dwell on getting them perfect!
 - Get back to focusing on the value delivery...

Why use OKRs?

Vision Led vs. Command and Control!

- Guidance and Flexibility vs. Micromanagement
- “Take the Hill” analogy
- In a VUCA world, the organization must adapt at scale



Why use OKRs?

Leadership Levers

- A true focus on strategy
- Create space for innovation
- Keep leaders out of the weeds



A scenic view of a coastline with mountains and a bridge. The image shows a large bridge spanning across a valley, with mountains in the background and the ocean in the foreground. The sky is clear and blue.

Command and Control vs. Vision Led

- What benefits do we get by OKRs being approximate and not dictating specific solutions and expectations? How does work change for our teams? What should we see?
- Teams learn to innovate. Product People get to decide what to do and why with leeway and flexibility. Steve Jobs said to hire smart people so they can tell you what to do.
- Teams know how to prioritize their work. What to say no to. Empowers every person on the team to raise their hand and say “why are we building this when it doesn’t help achieve any of our short term key results?”



Set Curbs of the Road!

Why use OKRs?

- Longterm vision context with short-term focus
- Creates clarity in leadership's absence. Not forgotten.
- Enablement. Trust. Delegation. Delivery.
- Specific targets inspire great work, not precise achievements

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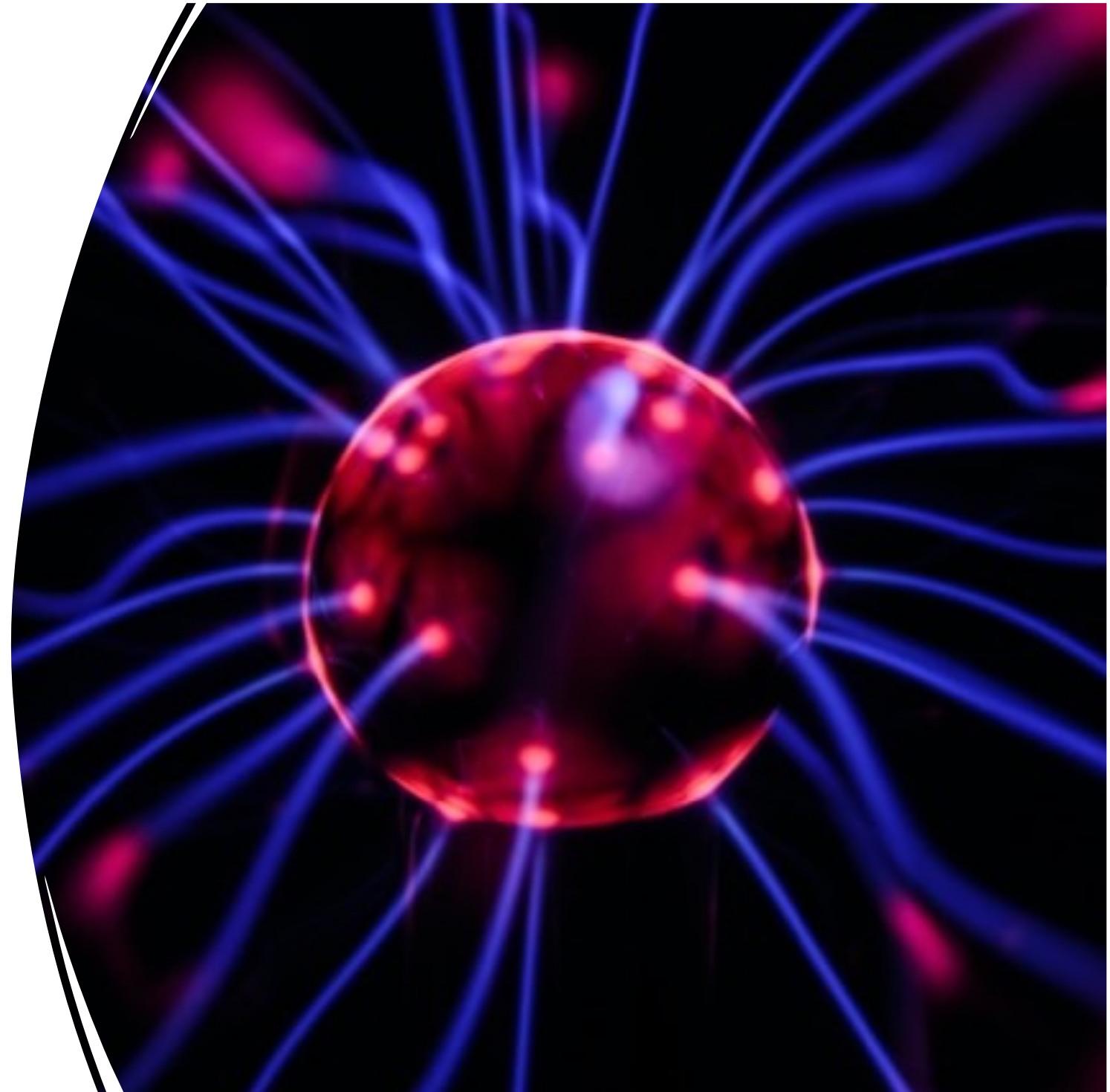
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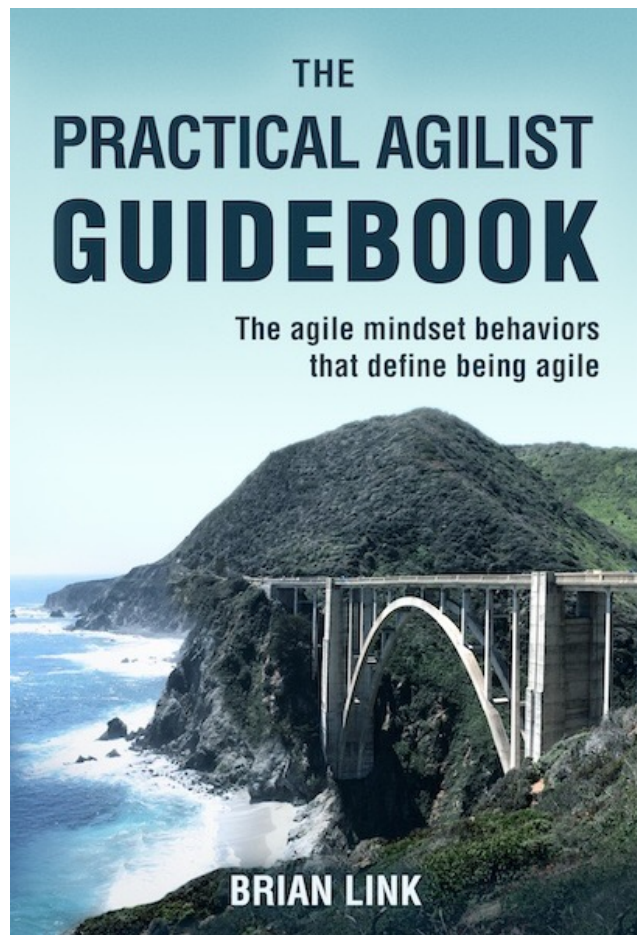
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Questions?



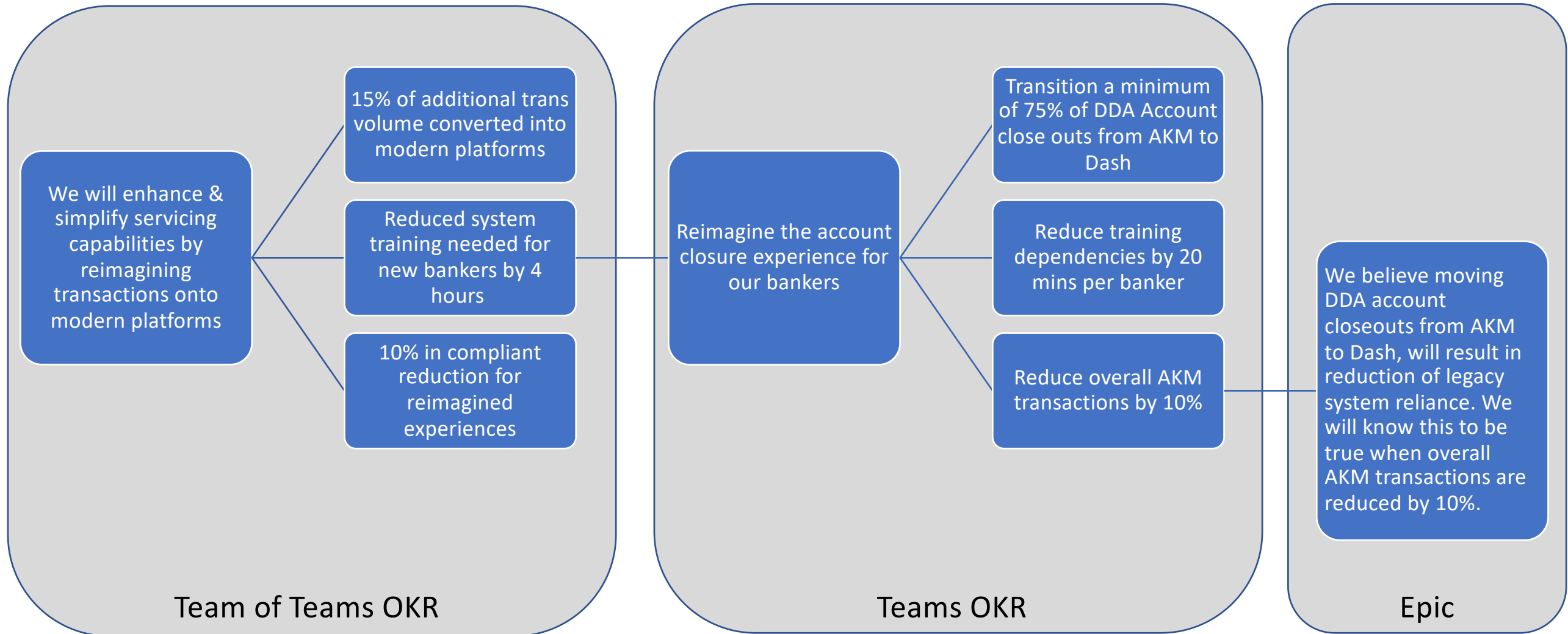
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OKR Example – Team of Teams



Mapping OKRs

