Can Double Loop Learning improve effectiveness in difficult team situations?

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Structure
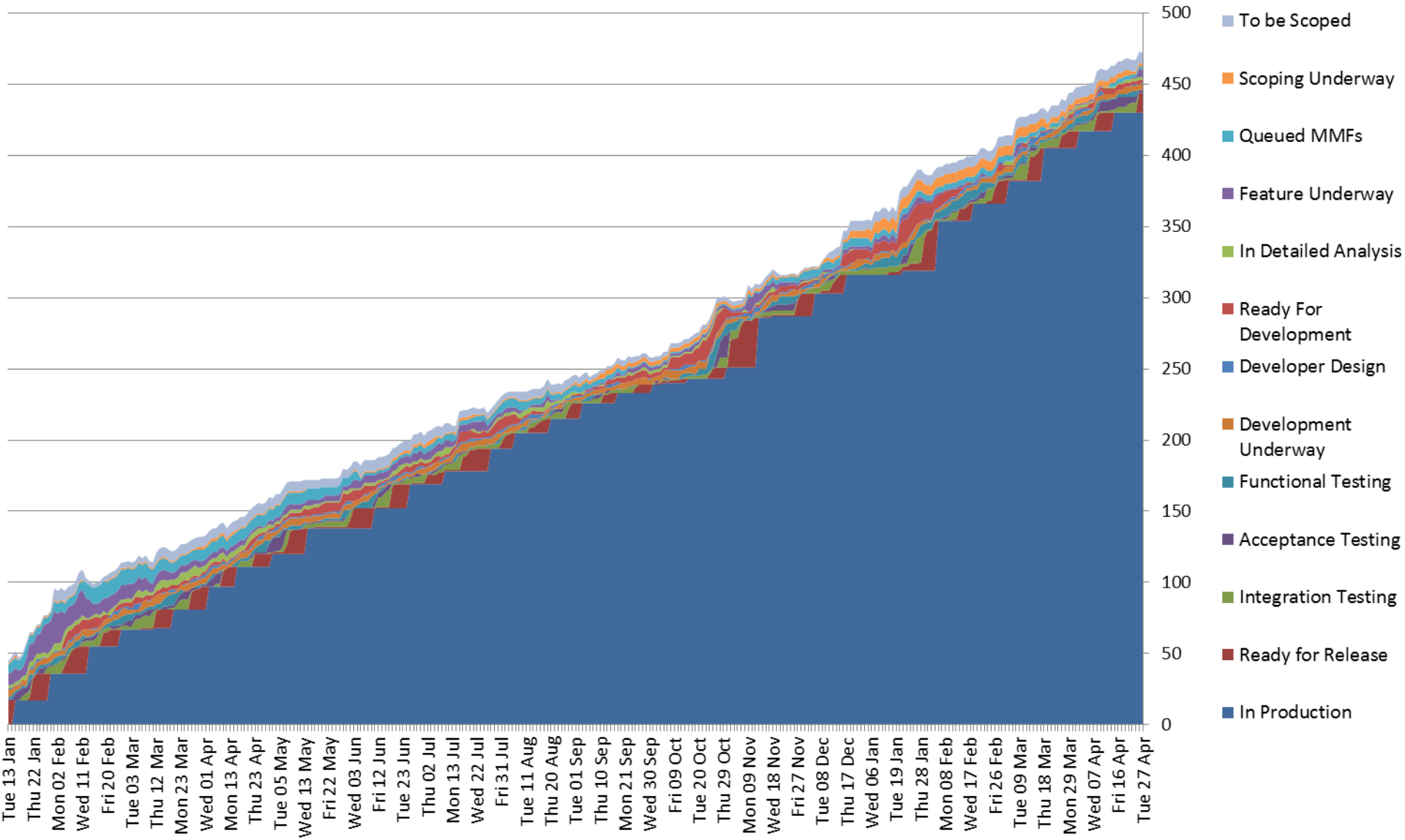
Part I: Data on our present level of effectiveness

- Exercise: Helping a manager provide feedback to an Agile Team Lead

- Introduction to Unilateral Control Model
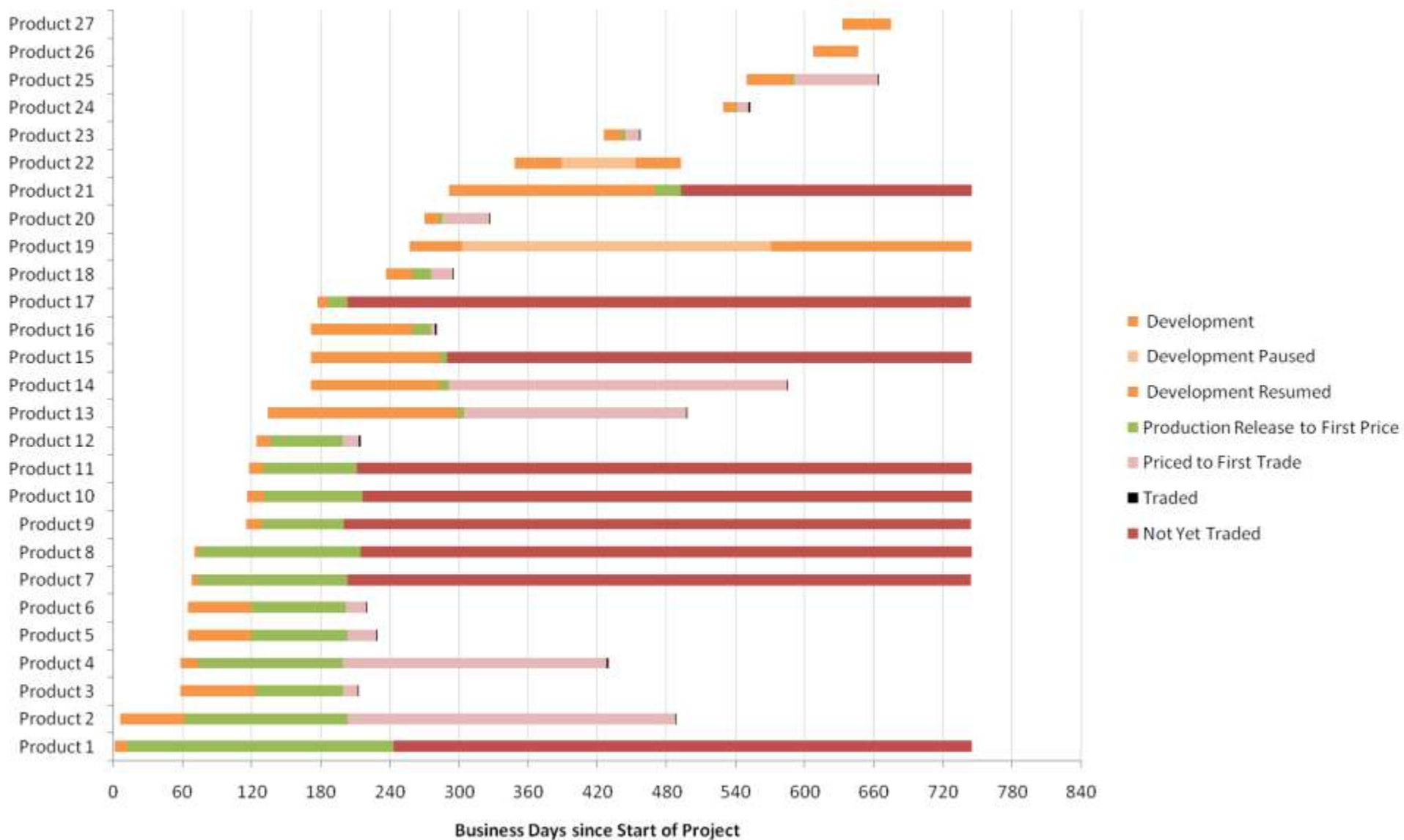
Part II: Becoming more effective

- Introduction to Mutual Learning Model

- Exercise: Using the ladder of inference

Cumulative Flow Diagram of Stories by Process Stage

Legend:
- To be Scoped
- Scoping Underway
- Queued MMFs
- Feature Underway
- In Detailed Analysis
- Ready For Development
- Developer Design
- Development Underway
- Functional Testing
- Acceptance Testing
- Integration Testing
- Ready for Release
- In Production

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Timeline of Products from Development to Production Trading

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Left Hand Right Hand Case Study

What I thought but did not say

We really need to address this – what we are doing is crazy! They might feel offended so I should be light hearted.

Oh no, I didn't mean it to be a criticism like that.

It looks like we'll never really address this point now …

What was said

Me: (Joking) I think this may be the best graph I ever produced [explain detail]. I thought it might be interesting to review here.

Sponsor: This graph shows how well the technical team has done and how badly we have made business decisions.

[all laugh]

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Exercise: Difficult Conversations

- Thinking about your own work

- Think about relationships that impact the success of your work

- What interactions do you find most difficult?
  - what are the topics?

Common Difficult Situations

Within-Team	Across teams	Across the company
Giving feedback on competence	Dealing with other teams	Dealing with groups who have a different focus (Operations, Security, Compliance)
Dealing with different approaches or views to Agile practices	Competing for access to key teams / resources	Sales, Marketing, Product Owners

Exercise: Helping a Manager give feedback to a Team Lead

- Pretend you are a consultant
- A manager has come to you to help him give feedback to a Team Lead
- Review the statements he made
- How effective do you think the manager is?
- Spend 10 minutes
  - Discuss as a small group the top 3 – 4 points you'd want to make about his effectiveness

Exercise De-brief

- What is the view of the performance of the Manager?

- What does this say about the theories we have of effectiveness?

- How effective would it be to give this feedback to the manager?

Practising Feedback

- In groups of 3
  - One person play the Manager
  - One person play the Consultant
  - One person be an observer
- De-brief

Theory of Action

Mindset → Actions → Results

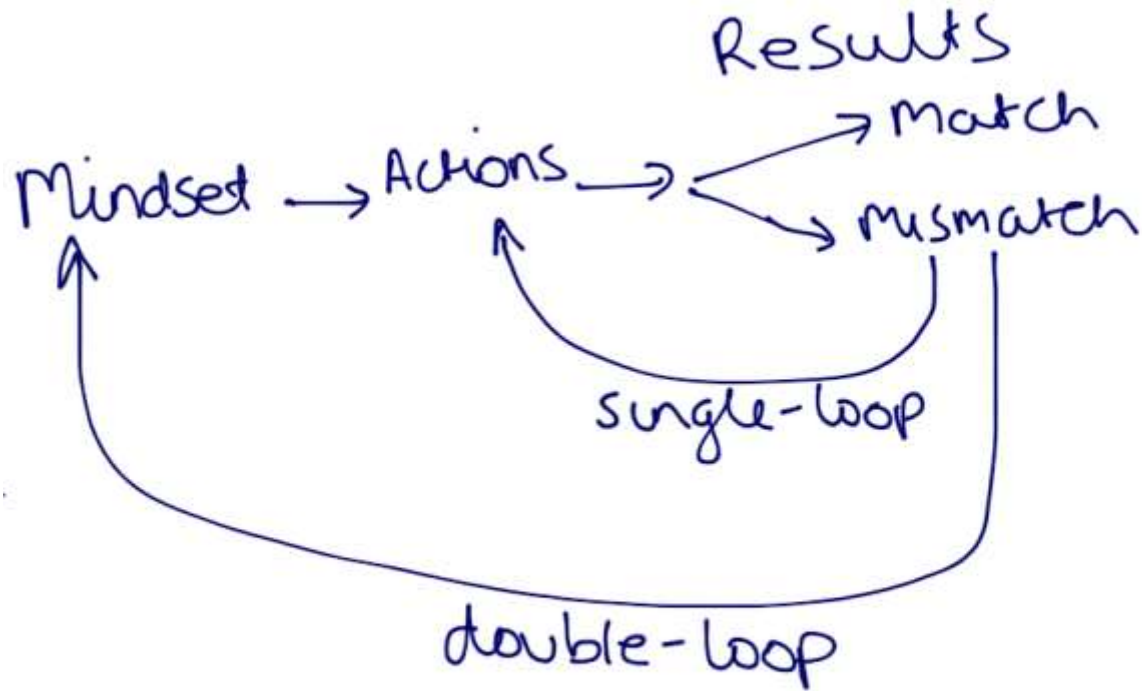# Two different Theories of Action

Espoused Theory	Theory-in-use
• How we say we act or how we advise others to act	• How we actually act • Inferred from our behaviour

We're often unaware of the gap, which is greatest under conditions of embarrassment or threat

Single & Double Loop Learning

Unilateral Control Model

Core Values & Assumptions	Strategies	Consequences
• Be in unilateral control • Win, don't lose • Ensure no one feels bad • Act rational	• Advocate my position • Keep my reasoning private • Don't ask about their reasoning • Ease-in • Save Face	• Misunderstanding • Defensiveness • Mistrust • Self-fulfilling, self-sealing processes • Limited learning • Reduced effectiveness • Reduced quality of work life

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Dominant Frame

Core Values & Assumptions	Existing Frame
• Be in unilateral control • Win, don't lose • Ensure no one feels bad • Act rational	**Self** • I understand the situation and know the right answer **Other person** • Is uninformed or ill-intentioned • May have questionable motives if they disagree **Task** • Get them to see things my way

Source: Based on the work of Schwarz, Argyris & Schon, and Action Design Partners   @benjaminm

What does being wrong feel like?

The Easing-In Script 1/2

1. I know how I want you to behave and I am not going to tell you directly.

2. I will not tell you that this is the case

3. I will ask you questions which, if you answer as I anticipate, will lead you to an understanding of my position.

4. I will expect that you will see all this without my saying it overtly.

5. I will expect that you will not discuss it.

6. I will expect that you will go along.

7. If you have questions or doubts about my intentions, I will expect that you will not raise them and will act as if you do not have any doubts.

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The Easing-In Script 2/2

8. If you do not behave as I expect, I will:

- give you more time to think "constructively" by continuing my questions.
- eventually become more forthright about my views.
- attempt to argue you out of your views.
- conclude that your defenses are too high to permit you to learn or too difficult for me to handle.
- compromise and/or withdraw and act as if I am doing neither.

Source: Agyris, Putnam & Smith (1985)

The Logic of Mixed Messages

- State a message that is inconsistent.
- Act as if it is not inconsistent.
- Make all this undiscussable.
- Make the undiscussability undiscussable.
- Again, act as if you are not doing so.

The Ladder of Inference

Propose Actions

Evaluate

Explain

Describe

Select

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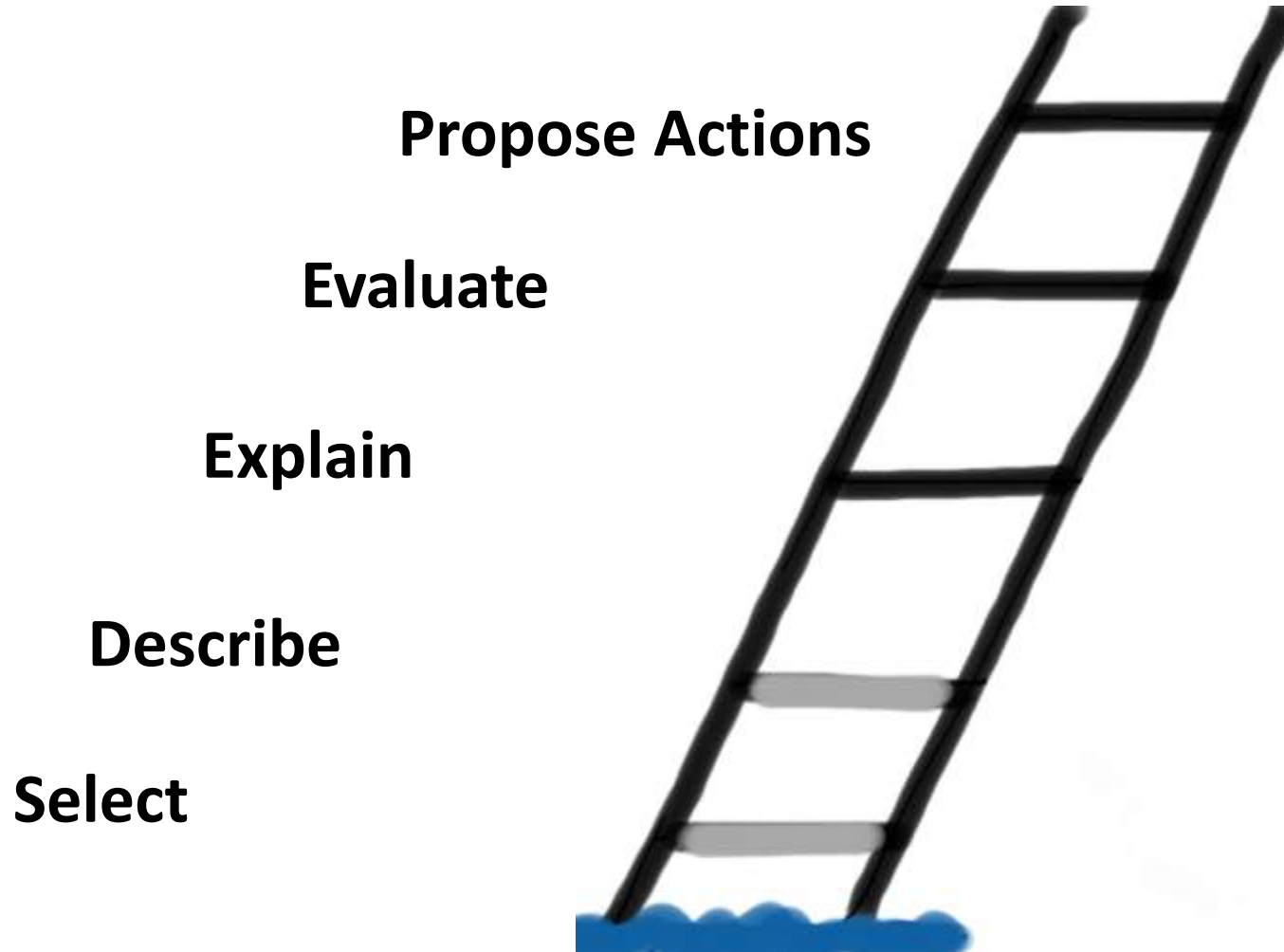
Mutual Learning Model

Core Values & Assumptions	Strategies	Consequences
• Publicly testable information • Free and informed choice • Internal commitment	• Test assumptions and inferences • Share all relevant information • Use specific examples and agree on important words • Explain reasoning and intent • Combine advocacy and inquiry • Jointly design the approach • Discuss undiscussables	• Increased understanding, reduced unproductive conflict & defensiveness • Increased trust • Reduced self-fulfilling, self-sealing processes • Increased learning • Increased effectiveness • Increased quality of worklife

Source: Based on the work of Schwarz, Argyris & Schon, and Action Design Partners   @benjaminm

Ground Rules for Effective Groups

1. Test inferences and assumptions
2. Share all relevant information
3. Use specific examples and agree on what important words mean
4. Explain your reasoning and intent
5. Focus on interests, not positions
6. Combine advocacy and inquiry
7. Jointly design the next steps or ways to test disagreements
8. Discuss undiscussable issues

Source: Schwarz (2002) The Skilled Facilitator

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The Frame Experiment

Existing Frame

Self

- I understand the situation and know the right answer

Other person

- Is uninformed or ill-intentioned
- May have questionable motives if they disagree

Task

- Get them to see things my way

Altered Frame

Self

- I have some information but I may not see or understand everything
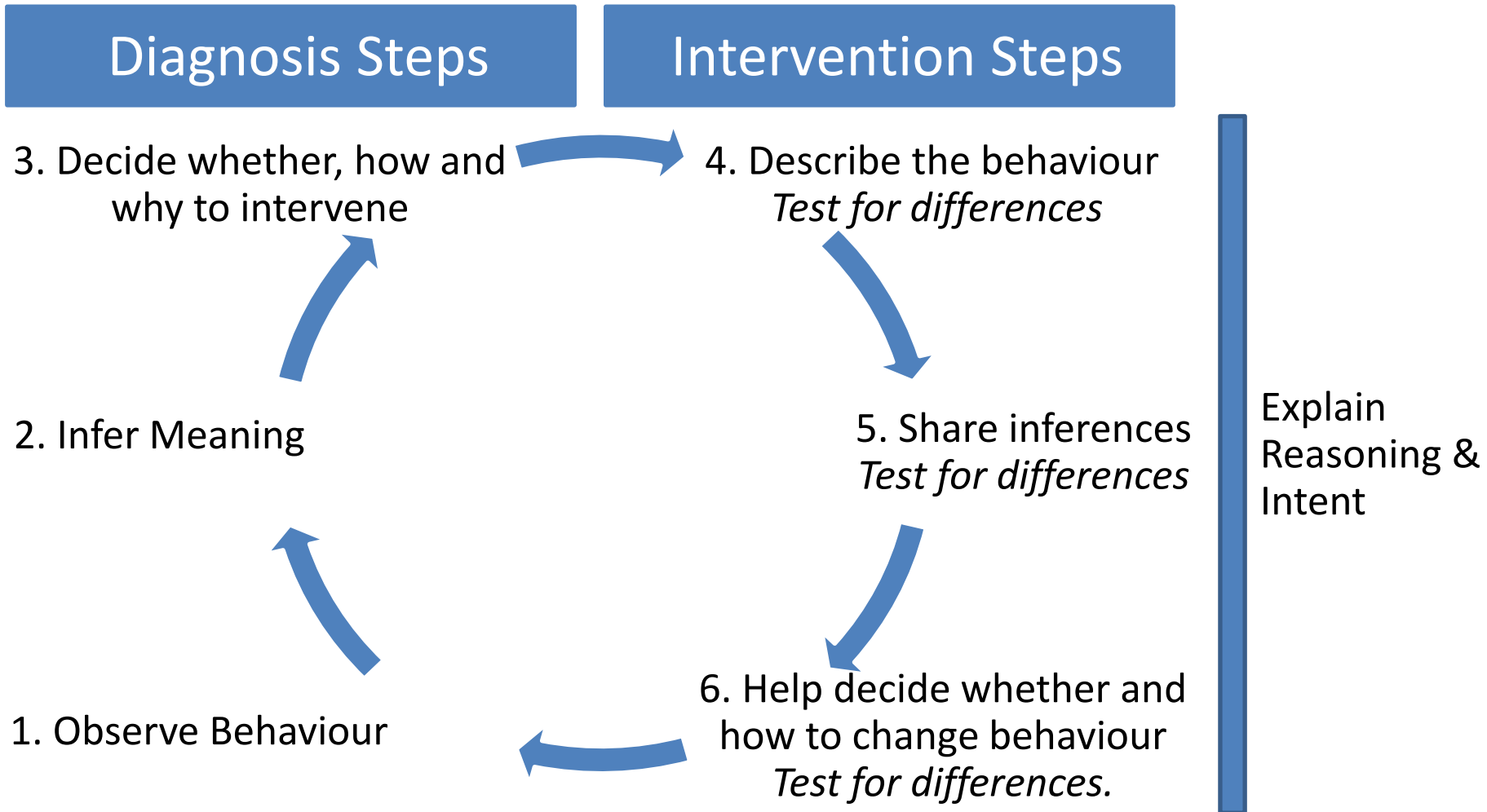
Other person

- May see things that I don't see which could help
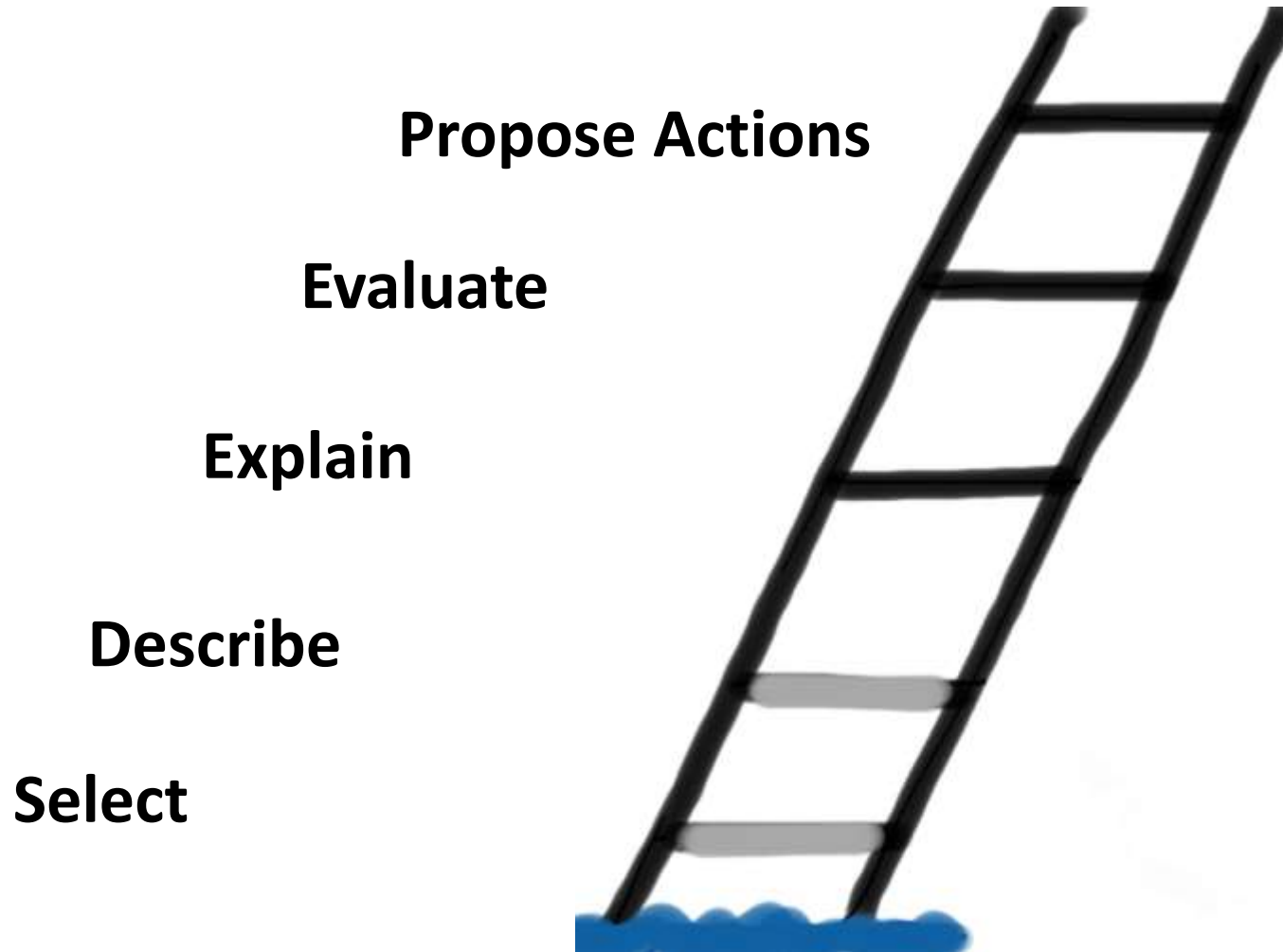- Is acting with integrity given their situation

Task

- Combine our knowledge to make the best choice

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Diagnosis Intervention Cycle

Diagnosis Steps

Intervention Steps

3. Decide whether, how and why to intervene

4. Describe the behaviour
Test for differences

2. Infer Meaning

5. Share inferences
Test for differences

1. Observe Behaviour

6. Help decide whether and how to change behaviour
Test for differences.

Explain Reasoning & Intent

Source: Schwarz (2002) The Skilled Facilitator

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The Ladder of Inference

Propose Actions

Evaluate

Explain

Describe

Select

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Exercise: Intervening

- "I just think he talks a load of rubbish"

Use the intervention cycle and the ladder of inference to write down (as a group)

- State what you saw or heard. *Check for differences*

- State the inference you made. *Check for differences*

- Decide if and how to move forward. *Check for differences*

Practising

- Pick a ground rule and focus on that
- Tell others that you're doing it
- Ask them to help you

Choose low-key situations to practise

- Watching television or movies
- Tape actual meetings (with permission)

Summary

- We commonly act in automatic ways which produce unintended consequences, especially in situations of embarrassment or threat

- The Mutual Learning Model presents a learnable, more effective set of values and actions

- The Mutual Learning Model increases the likely effectiveness of Agile approaches

- The key is to start with ourselves and practice a new frame and behaviours

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Books to read

- The Skilled Facilitator & Skilled Facilitator Workbook by Schwarz

- Discussing the Undiscussable by Bill Noonan

- Flawed Advice and the Management Trap by Chris Argyris

- Longer list on my blog: http://bit.ly/Argyris