

# Politics & Hierarchy

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# Introduction

- @kkirk
- Insight facilitation, co-discovery
- Transformation in tech

The 'hell' we are in

# Political Quagmire & Hierarchy

## Ever had that heavy disappointment

- Join an 'empowered team'
  - Pumped up
  - Maybe your first time working with Lean/Agile
  - Maybe heard great things... great tech... great people
- After a while
  - realise that politics and hierarchy are driving behaviour
  - FOR NO REASON
  - .. and it won't stop?

## Ever been frustrated that no matter what you do

- the political games just endlessly confuse and muddy any earnest attempt at doing work?

## What the hell is going on? Is it hopeless?

# Agenda

How do we create politics and hierarchy?

Why? 2 Assumptions

Examine why that happens

Is there anything we can do about it?

At least one practical suggestion

What you can do tomorrow



How to create politics

# 3 Ways to Create Politics

Self pity

Entitlement

Envy

# Effect of politics...

So busy fighting for what we

- Want
- Haven't got
- Get attention

Risk

- losing what we've already got
- Our value in the bigger picture



# How to create hierarchy

# 2 Ways to Create Hierarchy



Ambition

The diagram for 'Ambition' consists of two overlapping rounded rectangles. The outer rectangle is a dark reddish-brown color, and the inner rectangle is a lighter, semi-transparent pinkish-red color. The word 'Ambition' is centered in the inner rectangle in a large, black, sans-serif font.



Competition

The diagram for 'Competition' consists of two overlapping rounded rectangles. The outer rectangle is a dark reddish-brown color, and the inner rectangle is a lighter, semi-transparent pinkish-red color. The word 'Competition' is centered in the inner rectangle in a large, black, sans-serif font.

# Effect of hierarchy

## Fighting again

- For privilege
- To be special
- To have better
- To have more

## Risk

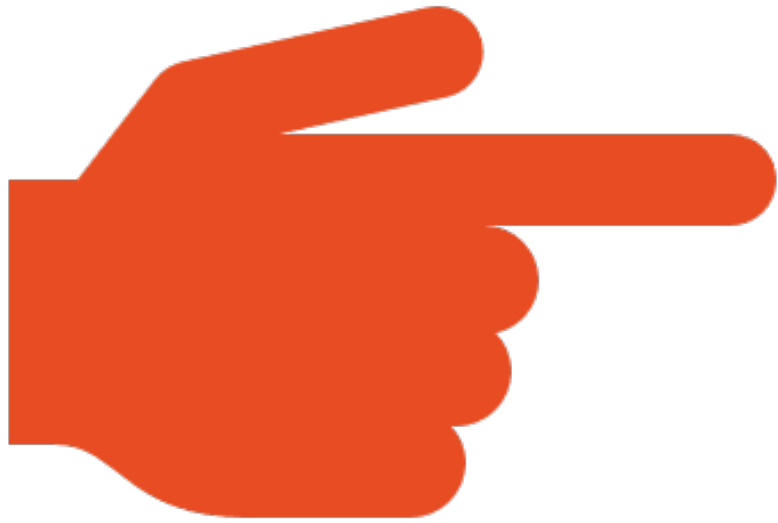
- Degrade relationships – e.g. that you'll need later

# How politics affects delivery

## Imagine a beautiful car engine

- Amazing objects working together to run a car
- Now imagine if each part was alive and decided to play politics
  - with all its interconnecting parts
    - before it would do its job
    - claiming it had to do that to do its job
- Human system
  - politics and hierarchy at each collaboration and interaction
  - = delay and degradation of data
  - = delay in and reduced quality of delivery

So what is happening here?



# Common mistakes we are making

We are making two assumptions

# Assumption 1: “I am the centre of the universe”



- How
  - Taking your own point of view as unquestioned
  - Determining what outcome is best for you without context
  - Aim for short term results in your favour
- Why
  - Intention: make it easier for myself
- Fixing this is ‘hopeless’
- Its too big
- Not my problem
- Feels better: I worry just about me – nice and simple

# DANGER of this Assumption

Do it long enough

- Isolated (can become depressed/apathetic)

Side effect

- Feel misunderstood
- Defensive

I am an island – I have to fight for myself



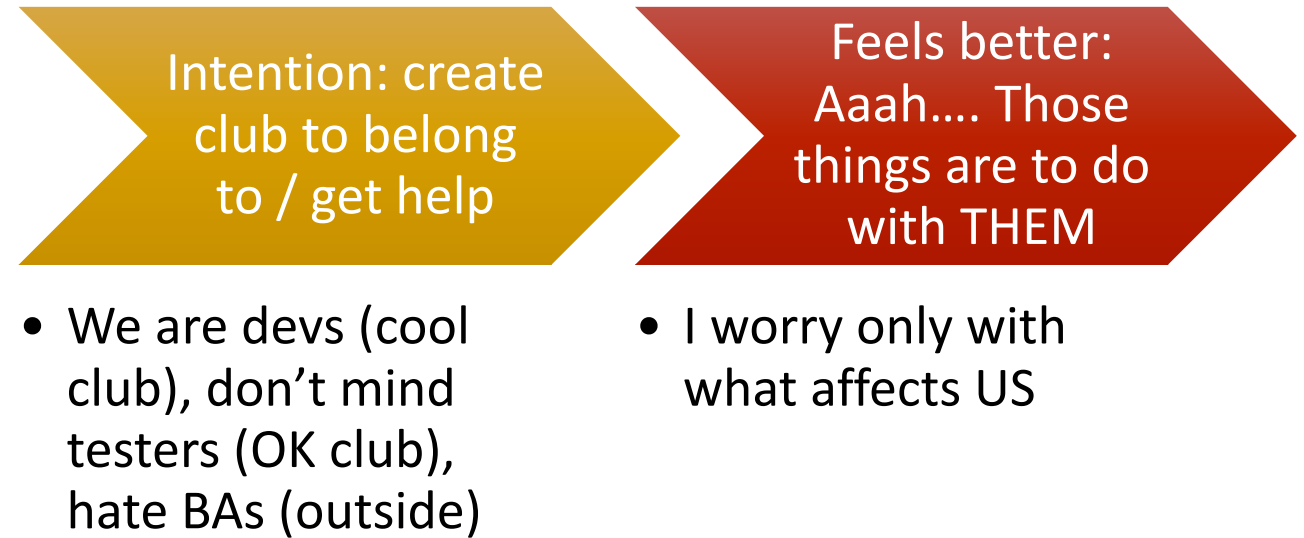


## Assumption 2: “Us vs Them”



- How
  - Taking the group's point of view as unquestioned
  - Determining what outcome is best for your group without context
  - Aim for short term results in your group's favour
- Why
  - We get 'lonely' as the centre of the universe
  - We want 'helpers' to help us get what we want

# WHY: “Us vs Them”



# DANGER of this Assumption

## Do it long enough

- Don't feel connected to the rest of the organisation

## Side effect

- Feel like you aren't doing 'meaningful work'
- Or that others are not doing 'meaningful work'
- Resentful
- Arrogant

## Aggressive stance

- Defend and fight for OUR 'better' group



Why do we do this?

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**When we KNOW BETTER!!!!**

# Bigger picture

What's happening in our context (Fourth Industrial Revolution)

- HUGE increase in pace – expectation of speed
- Rapid, high demand from customers
- Ambiguity
- Complexity / interdependency

Overwhelming!

**FASTER**

**MORE**

**NOW**

**YESTERDAY!!!!!!**

# Stress & Fatigue

Decision  
fatigue

Collaboration  
fatigue

Empathy  
fatigue

Change  
fatigue

ITS TOO  
MUCH!!!!



- Overwhelmed...
  - Reduce our 'Sphere of Caring'



The pressure  
keeps going  
on and on  
and on....

We develop

- BAD habitual reactions

We are used to thinking

- We are the centre of the universe
- We must create clubs and hierarchies

To survive

Reaction determines outcome

# If you are not careful

You might unconsciously be  
perpetuating this!!!

# Example:

Person comes to you

- “I am the centre of the universe”
  - Agree = hierarchy
  - Disagree = politics



Is there a way out????

Re-act?

If you re-act



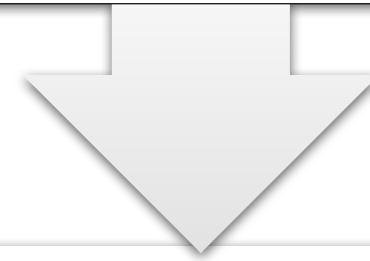
You re-create  
the same  
situation/culture

# What we are missing: Creating Politics

The underlying assumptions “I am the  
centre of the universe”

Neglects to utilise the power of

- A different reaction
- Persistence



Consider

Have you seen one person

- Added to a team
- Make it worse/better?

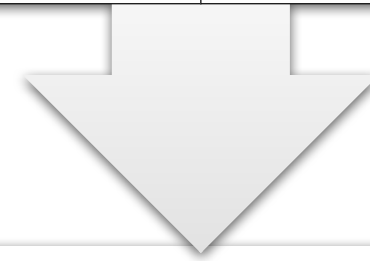
What we are  
missing:  
Creating  
Hierarchy

The underlying assumptions “Them  
versus Us”

Neglects to see

- how much ALL of us matter  
and can achieve

Does not see the whole  
system



Consider

the value everyone brings



Someone has to  
respond  
DIFFERENTLY

- A different reaction (over time)
- Will give a different result



# Back to the Example:

Person comes to you

- “I am the centre of the universe”
  - Agree = hierarchy
  - Disagree = politics



Is there a way out????

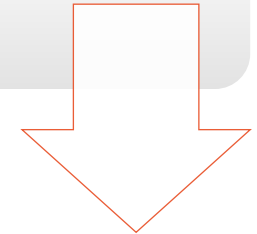
# YES: Move attention



- From the relationship
- To where you add value
- To the whole system
  - Devs = add value this way
  - Testers = add value this way
  - BAs = add value this way
- We are valued parts of an ecosystem

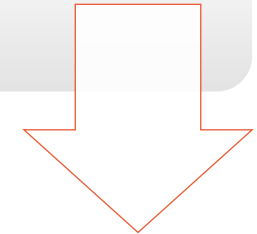
This is not  
about  
'hugging'!

Practical application  
could be



Visualise your system

- Workflow
- Collaboration



Get a wider view

- Acknowledge the value each person our group provides
- Appreciate

Agreeing we have value is easier to agree on

RATHER than  
'who is most  
important'

RATHER than  
'which group is  
more special'

# Recap

# Reasons for

Politic-  
making

- Assumption:  
“I am the  
centre of  
the  
universe”

Hierarchy  
creation

- Assumption:  
“Us versus  
Them”

# Why?

Stress

Fatigue

Habitual Reaction

*From stress, fatigue or  
negative cultures in  
previous places of  
work*

# How to remedy?

## Identify, acknowledge and appreciate

- The value people bring
- Including yourself

## Persist

- It might be bad habitual reactions which are in play
- Don't give up
- Changing habits takes TIME



# Why persist?

1

Do as we always  
have done

- Difficult
- Chance for new outcome: Zero

2

Do something  
different

- Difficult
- Chance for new outcome: Likely

3

Do something  
different consistently

- VERY difficult
- Chance for new outcome: VERY likely

# Conclusion

# Agenda: How did we do?

How do we create politics & hierarchy?

- **Self pity, entitlement, envy, ambition, competition**

Why? 2 Assumptions

- **“Centre of the universe”/“them versus us”**

Examine why that happen

- **Stress, Fatigue, Habitual Reaction**

Is there anything we can do about it

- **Change our reaction (persist)**

At least one practical suggestion

- **Visualise your system, show value**

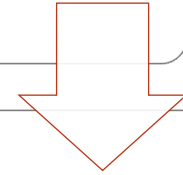
What you can do tomorrow

- **Acknowledge and focus on people's and your value**

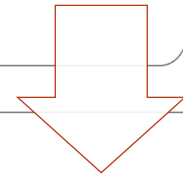


# Don't give in to temptation

You are not 'the centre of the universe'

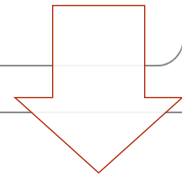


There is no 'them versus us'



If you think this way

- DANGER: isolated
- DANGER: meaningless work/can't see value in others



REALITY: You or your group is not  
BETTER or WORSE than other groups

Don't forget

- You are already a part of a community
- You matter – because EVERYONE matters
- See how interconnected you are
- Value the sum of ALL the parts

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You are a valued member of  
a interdependent ecosystem

# Benefits of keeping politics & hierarchy at bay?

De-risk

Take  
advantage of

Create  
opportunity

Increase  
likelihood of

Boost result

Increase  
speed and  
accuracy

Pay it forward

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Be first

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Reach out

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Persist

You CAN make a difference

Thank you