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Agile Sapiens

Литературный анализ бизнеса

КОМАНДАНТЕ FOLKUP

AGILE SAPIENS

A Literary Analysis of Business: how literature foretold modern management

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Preface: On the Method of Literary Analysis of Business

What this preface does. It introduces *Literary Analysis of Business*: a method for tracing how classical fiction intuitively caught the principles of management that a contemporary industry commercialized and, in the process, corrupted. It explains why invented characters saw what the industry still does not see.

In April 1846, Edgar Allan Poe published in *Graham's Magazine* an essay titled “The Philosophy of Composition.” In it he broke his own poem “The Raven” into mathematically exact components: effect, tone, length, climax. Great literature, Poe claimed, is not inspiration but engineering. A systematic method for producing emotional force.

One hundred and eighty years later, this book runs the operation in reverse: it breaks contemporary management systems down into literary archetypes. The point is not to belittle management. The point is to understand why a project-management industry worth tens of billions of dollars systematically loses to the intuitions of nineteenth-century novelists.

This preface explains how, exactly.

Genealogy of the Method

The methodology we call **Literary Analysis of Business** grew out of a simple observation: whenever a corporation encounters some “revolutionary” new management practice, a work of literature can be found that already described the same practice decades or centuries earlier.

Agile iterations? Charles Dickens published *The Pickwick Papers* in monthly installments in 1836–37, adjusting the plot to reader response.¹ A whole gallery of such coincidences is gathered in this book — from Sherlock Holmes to *Frankenstein* — and each one predates its managerial “innovation” by at least a century.

None of them suspected the existence of project management. They wrote books for readers — and described the working principles more cleanly than a whole industry has managed with its standards and certifications.

This is not coincidence. This is pattern. Literature and management share a common subject: the person who has to decide when nothing goes to plan. The difference lies in the aims — literature looks closely at that person for understanding, consulting for a sale.

Why the Literary Approach Wins

The primary advantage of literary analysis of business over the conventional kind is this: **the sources have no stake in the answer.**

When McKinsey publishes a study of corporate transformation, McKinsey is selling corporate-transformation services. When the Scrum Alliance describes the effectiveness of Agile practices, the Scrum Alliance is selling Agile certifications. When an enterprise-software vendor tells you about digital transformation, the vendor is selling enterprise software.

When Jules Verne describes Phileas Fogg's trip around the world, Verne is selling an adventure novel to the newspaper *Le Temps*. There is a commercial interest, but it has nothing to do with management principles. Verne does not know he is describing an iterative methodology; he is telling a good story. That is precisely why his description comes through cleaner.

Literary sources function as a **natural control system** for the research. If a management principle is fundamental enough to surface in literature independently of any commercial interest, it is a genuine principle rather than marketing wrapping.

On the second consequence of this optic — the paradox of the obvious — the pilot chapter speaks in detail: that is where it belongs, alongside the industry numbers.

Research Methodology

The Literary Analysis of Business method rests on four principles.

1. Chronological Priority

The literary source must predate the formalization of the management principle. This rules out retroactive interpretation and lets us see the principle in its “natural” state, before commercialization.

2. Contextual Independence

The author must not be aware that he is describing management principles. This guarantees the absence of bias and lets the principle be examined in its pure form.

3. Behavioral Equivalence

The literary example must demonstrate the same behavior pattern as the current management practice. Not metaphorical resemblance. Functional equivalence.

4. Scalability of Insight

The conclusions drawn from literary analysis must apply to contemporary corporate situations without special pleading or qualifiers.

Architecture of the Study

The book is built as a series of close analyses of how classical works intuitively described the principles that today's industry commercialized and distorted.

Act I: Origins examines the foundational management archetypes. Phileas Fogg as the ideal Agile practitioner. Jules Verne as the inventor of iterative publishing. Doctor Frankenstein as the anti-pattern of throwing a project into production and walking away. Sherlock Holmes as the prototype data scientist. Borges as the diagnostician of metric decay.

Act II: Transformation examines the processes of change. Cyrus Smith and the *Mysterious Island* crew as an example of a bootstrap team capable of building a civilization from nothing; Captain Nemo as the anti-pattern of the same, a monoculture of one genius without succession. Mina Harker and Stoker's Crew of Light as an early portrait of a distributed, cross-functional team with a single source of truth. Dr. Jekyll, Mr. Hyde, and Dr. Lanyon as archetypes of corporate duality: the façade of declared values and the basement of real operating culture. Don Quixote and Sancho as the first literary portrait of team mythology, the founding myth that makes collective action possible, and its collisions with reality, which either rewrite the myth or destroy the team.

Act III: Horizons examines future scenarios. H. G. Wells as the diagnostician of labor stratification under the pressure of a technological cycle, with two crosscutting readings: the economic one (David Autor, Daron Acemoglu, Karl Polanyi) and the literary one (Andrey Platonov, *The Foundation Pit*). The Strugatsky brothers as the image of an R&D team selected by meaning rather than hired for cash, with a diagnosis of how such a team falls apart. Albert Camus as an ethics of the team that forms in a sustained crisis, where "doing your job" becomes the opposite of heroism and the only available mode of decency.

Limits of the Method

Literary Analysis of Business has obvious limits, and they should be conceded up front.

Source selectivity. I choose the literary examples that support the argument. This is the unavoidable bias of any research, but in this case it is minimized by chronological priority: the literary sources existed before the argument did.

Cultural specificity. Most of the sources are Western literature of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. That limits how far the conclusions can travel into other cultural contexts. Then again, the modern management industry is largely of Western origin too.

Scale mismatch. Literary characters operate in far less complex systems than today's corporations. Phileas Fogg manages a project of two people; a modern CTO manages teams of hundreds. It is a fair objection, and it is exactly what makes literary analysis valuable: the simplicity of the example lets you see the principle without the noise.

Why It Matters Now

Global corporate spending on digital transformation runs into the trillions of dollars a year. IDC projects it will approach four trillion by 2027.² Seventy percent of these transformations, by the industry's own numbers, fail to hit their stated targets.³ That is a systemic problem, not a run of bad luck.

At the same time, we are living through the most radical technological transformation since the Industrial Revolution. Artificial intelligence is changing the nature of work faster than corporations can adapt. Under those conditions the answer is not more elaborate methodologies. It is simpler principles.

That is exactly what literary analysis offers: a return to fundamental principles through the eyes of writers who studied human nature without a commercial angle.

If you are expecting from this book ready-made recipes for implementation, step-by-step instructions, or certifiable frameworks, you will be disappointed. Literary Analysis of Business is not selling solutions. It is selling understanding.

And understanding, unlike certification, cannot be taken away.

How to Read This Book

Every chapter is built to a single architecture: **Hook** (the historical context), **Controversy** (a critical analysis of the current industry), **Core** (a close reading of the literary example), and **Implications** (the application to contemporary corporate situations).

The chapters can be read in any order; each stands on its own. Reading them in sequence, however, gives a fuller picture of how management principles have evolved from literary intuition into commercial formalization.

The three interludes between the acts are stylistic breaks, where the analysis gives way to freer prose. They serve as campsite rests between the heavier analytical stretches.

Each chapter closes with a **Sources & Evidence** section: a full bibliography and a factual audit of the claims. Everything that could be verified has been verified. Everything that could not is flagged as hypothesis or interpretation.

Acknowledgments

This methodology grew out of years of watching corporations spend millions to buy back common sense. Special thanks are owed to the executives and consultants who shared stories of failed transformations. Those stories showed the scale of the problem.

Thanks also to the anonymous corporate employees who confirmed the book's observations from inside the system. In an era when criticizing Agile can cost a career, their honesty is worth a great deal.

And, finally, thanks to the writers themselves, from Jules Verne to Albert Camus, who studied human nature deeply enough to anticipate future management crises. They did not know they were writing about management. That is exactly why they got it so right.

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Footnotes

¹ John Forster. *The Life of Charles Dickens* (1872–1874). Chapman & Hall. On the adaptive serialization of *The Pickwick Papers* in response to reader reactions.

² IDC. “Worldwide Digital Transformation Spending Guide” (2024). Estimate of corporate spending on digital transformation.

³ McKinsey & Company. “Losing from day one: Why even successful transformations fall short” (2021). Statistics on unsuccessful corporate transformations.

Phileas Fogg Invented What Is Now Killing Modern Corporations



What this chapter is about. A provocative analysis of how a fictional nineteenth-century character intuitively applied the principles that today's Agile industry has commercialized and distorted. How the common sense of one literary gentleman lays bare the derangement of an industry worth tens of billions of dollars.

Amiens, January 1872

Jules Verne sits in his study, surrounded by geographical maps and stacks of correspondence from his publisher, Pierre-Jules Hetzel. Spread across the desk: sailing schedules of the Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company, railway maps of British India, and clippings from *Le Temps* about the reported completion of the Indian rail line.

Verne is forty-three. He has already had commercial success with the novels about Captain Nemo and the trip to the moon, but Hetzel is demanding still more of an adventure, something that will make readers buy the next issue of the paper without waiting for the run to end. Hetzel pays a flat fee per manuscript, no royalties: modest money even by the standards of 1872, but steady. Steadier, at least, than sea expeditions or theatrical speculations.

Verne spreads a map of the world in front of him and does the arithmetic quickly: London to Suez to Bombay to Calcutta to Hong Kong to Yokohama to San Francisco to New York to Liverpool. Given a steamer at the right hour and a working railway timetable, the thing is, in theory, possible. Provided the Indian rail line has actually been finished, as the papers claim.

What Verne does not yet know is that alongside an entertainment novel he is writing the formula for project management for the next 150 years.

He picks up his pen and writes: “The Reform Club, Wednesday, 2 October 1872.”⁹

The story begins.

The fireplace in the salon of the Reform Club on Pall Mall burns evenly, giving off a steady heat. Four gentlemen are gathered around the whist table: the engineer Andrew Stuart, the banker John Sullivan, Gauthier Ralph (one of the directors of the Bank of England), and Phileas Fogg, a gentleman of unknown occupation but known punctuality.

Three of them are treating the morning’s news as one more newspaper curiosity, amusing and no more. The fourth, Fogg, pronounces a sentence that will change his life and anticipate the management revolution of the next century:

“I wager twenty thousand pounds sterling [...] that I shall go around the earth in no more than eighty days, that is to say, in one thousand nine hundred and twenty hours, or one hundred and fifteen thousand two hundred minutes.”¹

Twenty thousand pounds sterling of 1872, adjusted for inflation, comes to roughly £2.9 million (about \$3.5 million) in today’s purchasing power.² You do not back out of a bet like that, and you do not forget it.

What makes the scene remarkable is not the sum but the way Fogg frames the challenge. He does not say, “I shall draw up a detailed itinerary.” He does not say he will need an expert commission, logistics consultants, and half a year of preparation. He simply picks up the paper, assembles his route out of the available transport schedules, and walks out of the club that same evening.

His companions are stunned, not by the recklessness of the bet, but by the recklessness of the method. No reasonable man of the nineteenth century begins a trip around the world with a few lines torn hastily from the morning paper.

Fogg answers them, and the whole future industry of project management, with a single line: “The unforeseen does not exist.”¹

He is, of course, wrong. The unforeseen will chase him for all eighty days without letup. The railway will break off in the middle of the Indian jungle at exactly the wrong place. The steamer will leave Calcutta without him, refusing to wait for a passenger who is running late, and Fogg will have to find any other vessel headed the right way. The transatlantic liner will refuse to change course. A Scotland Yard detective will follow him doggedly across three continents, convinced beyond argument that Fogg is the man wanted for robbing the Bank of England.

And here is what is really remarkable: Fogg does not just survive the chaos. He systematically prospers in it. Not because he is a genius, and not because his luck is stubbornly good. Because his method of working, knowingly or not, is a perfect implementation of the principles that 129 years later will be called a revolution and put down on a single page as the Manifesto for Agile Software Development.

Fogg did not know the word “Agile.” He did not know that a repeating cycle, an iteration, is a thing that can be handsomely certified and sold. He did not know that common sense could be packaged into a framework and moved for two million dollars to a corporate client shopping for transformation.

He simply did what worked, without thinking about the terminology. Therein lies the problem.

This book is about a paradox.

The paradox is this: the project-management principles that actually work were known to literature long before management became a science with its own faculties and journals. Jules Verne described iterative delivery in 1872, forty years ahead of Taylor and his scientific management.

An abandoned creation that avenges itself upon its creator. The art of telling a relevant trail from noise. A map in one-to-one scale that buried the empire beneath it. All these plots — Shelley, Doyle, Borges — will unfold in this book as separate chapters, and each one predated its managerial “innovation” by decades. The authors were neither cleverer nor better educated than today’s consultants. Literature simply writes living people — and project management, at bottom, is precisely people. Not processes and not statuses. Not frameworks and not methodologies. People under pressure, making real decisions under uncertainty.

The paradox is compounded by what happened after the Manifesto was published. In 2001, seventeen practitioners formalized these literary intuitions into four values and twelve principles. They called the document the Manifesto for Agile Software Development, and the whole text fit on a single page. The idea was banally simple: people over processes, working product over documentation, collaboration over contracts, adaptation over the original plan.

Then that single page was turned into a full-scale industry with its own vocabulary and hierarchy. The market for Agile implementation is valued in the tens of billions of dollars and grows every year without stumbling.³ Certifications, coaches, frameworks, conferences, training courses, multi-stage

transformation programs with their own jargon: all of it sells reliably to corporate clients. A whole army of intermediaries has grown up between common sense and its direct application at work.

Fogg went around the world with one servant and a newspaper timetable. The average corporation's Agile transformation now requires consultants, Scrum Masters, Agile coaches, Release Trains, PI Planning sessions, portfolio managers, and transformation-steering committees to teach teams to do what Fogg did on instinct.

And that is the central argument of this book: **the Agile industry sells corporations common sense wrapped in a complexity that kills the common sense.**

Phileas Fogg is a fictional character. Jules Verne invented him for an adventure novel that appeared in installments in *Le Temps* from November to December 1872.⁴ It is precisely because Fogg is fictional that he is ideal for our purpose. A fictional character is a clean model: undistorted by career interest, unclouded by corporate politics, unedited by the PR department. Fogg shows the principles in laboratory purity, and, in doing so, exposes an industry that has complicated those principles past recognition.

That is what the book will do over the following chapters. Literary works, management archetypes, close analyses of the corporate pathologies that literature diagnosed before the business schools gave them official names.

First, though, back to the Reform Club. Fogg has a great deal to teach.

The Agile-Industrial Complex

Here is a sentence worth saying out loud, without euphemism: **the Agile industry has become the largest sale of the obvious in commercial history, and it is not the consultants' fault. It is the consequence of a systemic paradox: the more intuitive the principle, the more expensive its formalization.**

Consider the economics of this industry more closely. Allied Market Research values the global Agile implementation market at \$27.6–49 billion in 2024–2025, with a projected rise to \$140+ billion by 2032–2034.³ For scale: that is comparable to the GDP of Paraguay.⁵ A whole economy built on selling principles that Dickens applied for free in 1836, and Verne in 1872, without ever taking a consulting fee.

The Scrum Alliance, the largest Agile-certification body in the world, reports about a million and a half professionals in its community; the count of certifications issued has crossed two million.⁶ Two million certificates for the right to do what Fogg did without a single course: to respond to change rather than follow the plan. The average price of a two-day Certified ScrumMaster course runs from \$1,000 to \$2,500, depending on the region. The arithmetic is merciless: the certification business built on Scrum alone is a billion-dollar operation with a steady revenue stream.

SAFe (Scaled Agile Framework) went further still. A full corporate SAFe license, covering trainings, certifications, and tooling, runs a large company several hundred thousand dollars a year.⁷ SAFe offers four levels of configuration, twelve types of certification, and more than seventy-five practices. To describe how people ought to work together. Jules Verne and Pierre-Jules Hetzel solved the same problem over coffee on the rue Jacob.

One qualification of principle is in order here. The problem is not that these are bad or wrong principles. Scrum works; Kanban works; iterations work too, and they worked for Dickens, for the Japanese *rakugo* masters, and for Verne himself. The problem is that we have turned an engineering practice into a religion. With its own catechism (the Scrum Guide), its own hierarchy (the configurations of the scaled Agile methodologies, or SAFe configurations), its own indulgences (certifications), and its own tithe (licensing fees).

McKinsey, an outfit not readily suspected of anti-corporate radicalism, published a 2021 study titled “Losing from day one.” Seventy percent of corporate transformations, it reported, fail to hit their stated targets.⁸ Seventy percent failure, at budgets in the millions and tens of millions of dollars.

Corporations bring in whole armies of certified professionals and seasoned coaches. With frameworks calibrated separately for every level of the organizational hierarchy and for every department.

Phileas Fogg went around the world with a 100 percent success rate. Budget: one bet and a newspaper timetable. Team: one man and one servant. Methodology: common sense, not documented in any project-management manual of any kind.

The analogy is, of course, unfair, and I am prepared to admit it up front. Fogg is fictional; corporations are real enough. A real corporation has thousands of people, legacy systems, regulatory requirements, and its own complicated internal politics. Fogg did not have to clear a change of route through a risk-management committee.

That is precisely the whole point. The complexity of real organizations is exactly the reason simple principles are needed. Not complex frameworks for managing complexity, but simple principles for finding a way through it. Fogg had no adaptivity certificate, and that is exactly why he adapted better than any of today’s certified professionals. He had no approved process to observe scrupulously. He had a compass. A goal, a deadline, and the willingness to change route at any moment.

In 2001, seventeen programmers at Snowbird wrote down exactly that: four values, twelve principles on a single page, without commentary. Then the industry took that modest page and turned it into a multivolume encyclopedia. A fair question follows. If the principles are so intuitive that a fictional gentleman applied them 129 years before the Manifesto, what is the encyclopedia of thousands of pages for?

The answer is in the following chapters. For now, take a close look at how Fogg actually did it. Method, not mystique.

Textual Analysis of *Around the World in Eighty Days*

The Machine and the Man — Fogg as System

The first thing the reader learns about Phileas Fogg, on the very first page, is neither his name nor his fortune nor his habits. It is an extended metaphor. Verne writes: “He lived alone in his house on Savile Row [...]. Was he rich? Without question. But how he came by his fortune, not even the best-informed knew.”⁹ Fogg is presented as a living riddle, wrapped in the strict regularity of his rituals. Verne does not tell the reader: this man is clever, well-read, or unusually educated. He tells us: this man is exact.

Precision is the key to understanding Fogg-as-system. Verne describes his morning with surgical detail: “That day, as every day, Phileas Fogg left his house at half-past eleven and made for the Reform Club, taking exactly five hundred and seventy-five steps with his right foot and five hundred and seventy-six with his left.”⁹ Five hundred and seventy-five with the right, not one more, not one less. Verne is not simply drawing the typical pedant of his day. He is deliberately building a model. A man who measures the world around him with such pedantic precision is constructing a durable system for himself well before the actual need for one arises.

Passepartout, Fogg’s new servant, reads this system as a long-awaited promise of stability. At their first meeting he thinks to himself: “At last I have found what I need. A quiet, measured gentleman. A real machine.”⁹ Verne’s irony works on two levels at once. For Passepartout, “machine” is a compliment: a predictable master, a quiet regular life. For the reader it is already an omen. The “machine,” within a few hours, will set off around the world and demolish every expectation of a quiet life. Verne threads into the fabric of the novel the paradox that will define its whole plot: the most predictable man in London is about to become the least predictable traveler on earth.

It is here that Verne’s literary model becomes a genuinely managerial one, applicable to corporations. Fogg is not a chaotic innovator, and he is not a prophet of change. He is not Steve Jobs, blowing up the industry with intuitive flashes on the Apple stage. He is not the “disruptive leader” of the Silicon Valley lexicon. Fogg is a disciplined adapter: a man whose baseline system is so stable that it can absorb chaos without falling apart.

This pattern is closer to the Toyota management philosophy than to the mythology of Silicon Valley.

In the 1950s, Taiichi Ohno built the Toyota Production System on a principle that sounds thoroughly Fogg-like: eliminate waste, standardize the process, and only then adapt to change.¹⁰ Ohno did not call for revolution, and he did not promise a magical transformation in one quarter. He called for the daily discipline of every worker on the line, the kind of discipline that alone makes real adaptation possible. In his view, the standard is not the opposite of flexibility. It is its foundation.

General Motors in the 1980s, by contrast, was an organization that tried to manage complexity through more complexity: bureaucratic layers, sign-off committees, approval procedures for every decision. The result was predictable. The MIT IMVP study (1990) found that the GM plant in

Framingham built a car in 40 labor-hours, while Toyota built a comparable car in half that time.¹⁰ Not because Toyota worked faster in the sense of hand-speed. Because Toyota worked more systemically in its very structure. Less waste, fewer buffers, and fewer “correct procedures” that protect habit rather than quality.

Fogg went around the world in eighty days not because he improvised better than his contemporaries. He did it because his baseline system — discipline, precision, economy of motion — left him the surplus resources to improvise when improvisation was necessary. Taiichi Ohno would have approved. A GM transformation committee, probably not.

The Elephant Instead of the Train — Context Determines Method

In the novel’s eleventh chapter, Verne constructs a scene that, read correctly, contains everything you need to know about project management under uncertainty.

Fogg and his party arrive at Kholby station, in India, at noon. The conductor calls out: “All passengers off!”⁹ Passepartout is surprised: “But the railway is not finished, is it?”⁹ The on-duty reply: “No, but the papers announced the line was open.”⁹ The rails have in fact been laid from Rothal to Allahabad, but between Kholby and Allahabad there remain fifty miles of unlaid track through the jungle. The papers wrote that the road was ready. The road is not ready.

In 1872, Verne described precisely the thing that, a century and a half later, would kill 346 people.

First, though, back to Fogg.

He has three options: wait for the next train (no telling when), walk (fifty miles, impossible on time), or find alternative transport. Fogg chooses the third. For two thousand pounds sterling (roughly £294,000 in today’s purchasing power²) he buys an elephant from a local. No haggling, no discussion, no convening of a risk-assessment committee on the safety of mounted elephant travel.

Two elements of the scene deserve close attention.

First: the speed of decision, based on sufficiency rather than optimality. Fogg does not analyze the optimality of the route. He immediately assesses the sufficiency of the transport. Will the elephant get us there in a reasonable time? Yes. Is the elephant expensive, and how much exactly? Yes, two thousand pounds. More expensive than being late and losing the bet? Obviously not. The decision is made in a few minutes. Verne shows the difference between the “correct” decision, waiting for the system (the railway) to work as promised, and the “effective” one: go around the system, using what is physically available here and now. Fogg optimizes for the result, not for the process.

Second: the response to false information from a source people are used to trusting. The papers announced the road was ready. The road is not ready. Fogg does not complain, does not demand compensation, does not accuse anyone publicly. He accepts reality as it is, on the spot, and acts from within it. This is not stoicism. It is operational pragmatism in its pure form. The map disagrees with the territory. Throw out the map.

In 2000, Dave Snowden formalized this intuition as the Cynefin framework: a model that divides decision-making contexts into four domains.¹¹ The simple domain: causes and effects are obvious, the answer is standard and needs no debate. The complicated domain: causes and effects can be established by analysis, and an expert with accumulated experience is required. The complex domain: causes and effects are visible only in retrospect, and an experiment in real conditions is required. The chaotic domain: there are no discernible causes and effects at all, and immediate action is required to create some structure for later analysis.

The railway belongs to Snowden's complicated system; it yields to expert analysis. Schedule, rails, stations: study them with an experienced eye and you get a predictable result. But a railway that exists in the newspaper and does not exist on the ground is already a complex system of a different order. There is no schedule to trust; there is no expert who will say when the rails will appear; there is only reality, fifty miles, an elephant, and two days in hand.

Fogg switches between domains instantly, without a management pause and without convening a committee. Train: complicated domain, standard industry solution, known algorithm. No train: complex domain, experimental solution, local improvisation on the spot. Elephant. That is what genuine managerial flexibility looks like: not adherence to a single method, but the ability to select the method calmly to fit the context.

Turn now to the Boeing 737 MAX, a disaster that unfolded almost a century and a half after the elephant scene and demonstrated with alarming clarity what happens when an organization has forgotten how to switch between domains.

In the five months between October 2018 and March 2019, two Boeing 737 MAX aircraft went down: Lion Air Flight 610 (29 October 2018) and Ethiopian Airlines Flight 302 (10 March 2019). Three hundred and forty-six people died. In both cases the cause was the MCAS (Maneuvering Characteristics Augmentation System), software that automatically corrected the aircraft's pitch.¹²

The Joint Authorities Technical Review (JATR), commissioned by the FAA in 2019, established the following: MCAS was designed as a solution for the complicated domain, an algorithmic correction of a predictable aerodynamic problem. Reality, however, turned out to be complex. The interaction of automation with pilots, with their training, with their cognitive reactions under stress, none of it fit the complicated model. The system depended on one angle-of-attack sensor. One. No redundancy, no cross-check.¹²

The final report of the U.S. House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure (September 2020) delivered the verdict: a series of faulty technical assumptions by Boeing's engineers, a lack of management transparency, and grossly insufficient FAA oversight.¹³ Not a fluke. Not bad luck. A systemic failure of an organization that had applied a solution from one domain in another. The "correct" engineering process, formal certification, delegated oversight, documentary compliance, worked flawlessly on paper. And killed 346 people in reality, on two different continents, five months apart.

The papers wrote that the Indian railway was ready. MCAS was formally FAA-certified as safe for commercial operation. In both cases the formal system diverged from the actual territory. The difference: Fogg threw out the map and bought an elephant. Boeing kept driving stubbornly along non-existent rails until two aircraft fell out of the sky.

The Rescue of Aouda — People Over Plan

In the twelfth chapter, Verne does something unexpected: he breaks his own character.

Fogg, the human machine, the man of 576 steps, the man whose daily route is calibrated to the minute, makes a decision that cannot be explained by the logic of the schedule. Somewhere between Kholby and Allahabad, on the back of an elephant bought for a fortune, his party runs into a procession. A young woman, Aouda, is being led to a funeral pyre. Sati: the Hindu rite in which a widow ascends her husband's pyre. Aouda does not want to die on a stranger's pyre, and tears run down her face. She has no choice.

Fogg does. That is the whole fork of the scene. Continue and the schedule holds. Stop and the schedule is immediately at risk of collapse. Twenty thousand pounds sterling, £2,935,637 in today's purchasing power, is a considerable sum even by modern standards. Eighty days, and every hour is counted by the watchmaker of his own schedules.

Fogg stops.

"I still have twelve hours in hand; I can devote them to this matter."¹⁴

Here Verne executes a shift of narrative that readers of an adventure novel rarely notice, but that defines the whole managerial philosophy of *Around the World in Eighty Days*. Fogg stops being a machine. For the first time in the novel his decision is driven not by the schedule, not by route optimization, not by calculation, but by a value that cannot be expressed in pounds and minutes. The project scope changes. Not because external conditions changed, but because Fogg changed the definition of success.

Passepartout, the loyal practical servant, proposes a Plan B that deserves its own place in literary history. He disguises himself as the dead rajah, lies down on the funeral pyre beside Aouda, and at the moment the flames should have swallowed them both he rises, a living "corpse," and carries Aouda off into the night. The guards are in shock. Passepartout is in soot. Fogg is unruffled.

The maddest Plan B in the history of literature. And it works.

The literary analysis here is transparent, but the managerial point is worth stating out loud. Verne shows the moment when a project ceases to be the mechanical execution of a plan and becomes something more. A scope change: not as deviation, not as a planning error, but as a conscious choice. Fogg does not lose control. He widens the definition of what "control" means. The project is no longer "go around the world in 80 days." The project is "go around the world in 80 days and not stop being human."

The Agile Manifesto would formulate this in 2001: “Individuals and interactions over processes and tools.” The first of four values, and by the sense of the whole Manifesto the most important. And, in bitter irony, the most ignored in actual corporate practice under the banner of “Agile transformation.” It is easy to print a handsome formula on a poster in the meeting room. It is harder to stop a project worth millions simply because the people inside it are frankly miserable.

Satya Nadella did exactly that. Taking the CEO post at Microsoft in 2014, he inherited an organization that a decade of Steve Ballmer had turned into a machine, though not in the Fogg sense. Ballmer’s Microsoft was a machine of metrics: forced stack ranking of employees, internal competition between departments, KPI as religion.¹⁵ Result: a company that missed the mobile revolution, lost the search market, and was losing its best engineers.

Nadella did not optimize the metrics. He changed the definition of success. From a know-it-all culture to a learn-it-all culture. From interdepartmental competition to collaboration. From forced stack ranking to a growth mindset for every employee. A scope change at the level of the whole organization, not a single team. Microsoft’s market capitalization from 2014 to 2024 grew more than tenfold and reached three trillion dollars.¹⁵

Fogg saved Aouda and won the bet. Nadella stopped the metrics machine and built one of the most valuable companies in history. Coincidence? No. Pattern. Projects in which people matter more than the plan are not merely more humane. They deliver better results. Not because kindness is good strategy. Because a system in which people are a resource to optimize loses its main asset: the capacity of people to solve problems the system did not foresee. Passepartout on the funeral pyre is not a “resource.” He is a man who dreamed up the impossible, not because he was asked to by the procedure, but because it needed doing.

“The Extra Day” — Uncertainty as Resource

The novel’s ending is one of the most elegant denouements in world literature. It is also one of the most instructive for anyone who runs a project.

Fogg arrives in London late in the evening. He is certain he is hopelessly late. By his own calculation, the gap is exactly five minutes, five minutes that cannot be made up under any circumstances. Eighty days, three continents, steamers, trains, an elephant, a funeral pyre, a hurricane in the Atlantic, and, in the finale, five minutes. The project has failed.

Fogg accepts this with the same unruffled calm with which he accepted every prior catastrophe and setback. He does not blame circumstances, he does not look for culprits, he does not demand renegotiation of the terms. The project has failed. Failed, then.

Then Passepartout notices the obvious. What had been obvious from the start, but which no one, not Fogg, not his opponents, not Detective Fix, had taken into account. Traveling east, they had crossed the international date line. They had gained a full day. Today is not Sunday but Saturday. Fogg is not five minutes short. He is twenty-three hours and fifty-five minutes ahead.

Verne pulls off a perfect plot twist without any *deus ex machina*. The international date line is no invention. No accident. No miracle. It is a constraint that existed from the first page of the novel. Fogg knew the route. Fogg knew perfectly well he was traveling east around the earth. Fogg could, in theory, have calculated the gained day in advance with a simple almanac at his elbow. He simply did not. His model of the world, precise, pedantic, 576-steps-with-the-right-foot, did not include what he did not know he did not know.

This is not Fogg's mistake and not a gap in his method. It is a fundamental property of reality, and there is nothing to be done about it.

In 2002, U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld offered a formulation that became famous: "There are known knowns... There are known unknowns... But there are also unknown unknowns: the things we don't know we don't know."¹⁶ The formulation was laughed at. It should not have been. Rumsfeld described an exact taxonomy of uncertainty, the same one Verne had staged 129 years before the Pentagon press briefing.

The international date line: an unknown unknown. Fogg could not have planned for it because he did not know it was relevant. Here is the central paradox. It was that very "unknown unknown" that saved the project. Not control. Not the plan. Not foresight. A fact that was not in the model.

Modern project management is afraid of uncertainty. Risk registers, contingency buffers, Monte Carlo simulations: all of it is tooling for converting the unknown unknown into a known unknown. A noble goal. It also misses the point. Uncertainty is not only a threat. Uncertainty is a resource. The international date line was not in Fogg's risk register. It was better than any register. It was in reality itself.

SpaceX illustrated the same principle with engineering directness and without extra lyricism. Between 2006 and 2008, three consecutive launches of the Falcon 1 ended in failure.¹⁷ The first: an engine fire twenty-five seconds after liftoff. The second: instability in the second stage and loss of thrust already on an orbital trajectory. The third: a stage-separation collision in the upper atmosphere. Each failure cost the company dearly, and the company was already balanced on the edge of bankruptcy.

The fourth launch, on 28 September 2008, was at last a success. Falcon 1 reached orbit. Not because SpaceX had finally "gotten it all right" on the third try. Because each previous failure was not a catastrophe but information for the next iteration. Not loss, precisely valuable information. Unknown unknowns were becoming known knowns with every new explosion on the launch pad. Elon Musk would say later: "Failure is an option. If things are not failing, you are not innovating enough."¹⁷ Rhetorically the phrasing is pure Silicon Valley, but the principle behind it is Vernian to the core. Fogg did not plan for the international date line as part of his strategy. SpaceX did not plan for a stage-separation collision. Both, Fogg and SpaceX alike, were working within a system that allowed uncertainty to become a resource rather than a catastrophe.

Most failed projects do not fail from a shortage of control. They fail from its excess. An organization obsessed with eliminating uncertainty eliminates, along with it, the possibility of discovering what it was not looking for. A risk register that catalogs every known risk creates the illusion of completeness, and it is precisely that illusion that blinds. Boeing accounted for every known aerodynamic factor of MCAS and missed the unknown one: the reaction of live pilots under stress. Fogg did not account for the international date line and gained a full day. The difference: Fogg did not consider his model complete. Boeing did.

From Literature to Practice

Phileas Fogg won the bet for a reason no project manager would ever put in the plan: he did not know it was impossible.

Not in the romantic sense in which motivational speakers call from the stage to “dream big.” In the literal, operational sense. Fogg did not know that the international date line would hand him exactly one day. He did not assume that Passepartout would dream up an insane plan involving a funeral pyre, and he would not have dared it himself. He did not suspect that the elephant would prove faster than the train. Every one of these facts was outside his model, and every one of them, in the end, saved the project.

Today’s executives, by contrast, lose winnable projects precisely because they know too much about what cannot be done. Their models are complete, and that is the problem. Their risk registers are exhaustive, written out to the line. Their frameworks are ISO-certified. Their processes are approved by committee. Their plans are signed off at three levels. And all this knowledge, of risks, of complications, of impossibilities, paralyzes. Not because information is harmful. Because the completeness of the model creates the illusion that the model is reality.

Verne wrote a novel about this in 1872. Not a business case. Not a white paper. A novel. And the novel turned out to be more accurate, because literature is not afraid of paradox. Literature is not obliged to prove return on investment. Literature can say: the most exact man in London is the one who is prepared to throw out the schedule and buy an elephant.

This book is a deliberate continuation of the same method. Literary works and management archetypes, arranged into a single arc. Not because literature is “also useful for business,” as corporate trainers like to say. Because literature saw the patterns first and formulated them before management did.

Mary Shelley in 1818 described what happens when the creator abandons the creation, and the creation takes revenge. That was 175 years before the first corporate “transformation project” was abandoned halfway. Arthur Conan Doyle in 1887 described diagnostics: the art of separating the relevant from the noise. That was a century before data science became an industry. Borges in 1941 described a civilization that made a map on a one-to-one scale and died under its weight. Half a century before Goodhart’s Law became a management meme.

Every one of these writers worked purely by intuition, without a management school behind him. Every one, more accurate than a certified consultant with an MBA. Not because they were smarter than today's consultants, or better educated. Because literature describes living people, and project management, at its root, is nothing but people. Not processes, not statuses. Not frameworks, not methodologies. Not certifications, not standards. People under pressure, making real decisions under uncertainty.

The following chapters are about the rest of what literature knew about management, and what management still does not.

To be continued. In the next chapter: Paris, 1872 — Verne and Hetzel invent iterative delivery 129 years before the Manifesto, and *Le Temps* prints the chapters of the trip around the world like releases: one a day, no right to delay.

Footnotes

¹ Jules Verne. *Around the World in Eighty Days* (1872/1873). Hetzel, Paris. Public domain. Quotations are given in the author's translation. Original publication: *Le Temps*, November–December 1872 (daily serialization), followed by a standalone edition from Hetzel in January 1873. The wager scene: Chapter III of the original.

² Purchasing power calculated using the Bank of England inflation calculator: £20,000 in 1872 is equivalent to £2,935,637 in 2026 at an average inflation rate of 3.30 percent per year. Sources: Bank of England Historical Exchange Rates; UK Inflation Calculator (officialdata.org).

³ Allied Market Research and Verified Market Research estimate the global enterprise agile transformation services market at USD 27.6–49.0 billion in 2024–2025, with projections to reach USD 140+ billion by 2032–2034. T2 market research data, 2024–2025.

⁴ *Around the World in Eighty Days* was published daily in the Paris newspaper *Le Temps* from 6 November to 22 December 1872. The standalone edition appeared from Hetzel on 30 January 1873. The novel became one of Verne's greatest commercial successes; its print runs exceeded all his previous publications. See Dumas, Olivier. "Correspondance inédite de Jules Verne et de Pierre-Jules Hetzel" (1999–2002).

⁵ World Bank GDP data 2024: Paraguay GDP USD 44.46 billion (2024 official data). Comparison illustrative — the Agile transformation market size rivals the entire economic output of a mid-sized nation.

⁶ Scrum Alliance. "About Scrum Alliance" and annual membership data, 2026. Global community of approximately 1.5 million professionals; 2 million credentials issued milestone (GlobeNewswire, June 2026). CSM course pricing: USD 1,000–2,500 (varies by region and trainer). T2 source: organizational self-reporting.

⁷ Scaled Agile, Inc. SAFe licensing and certification pricing, 2024–2025. Individual certification costs range from \$1,000 to \$3,000 (varies significantly by certification type and organization size); enterprise licensing costs vary substantially by organization size. Certification paths include 12+ role-based certifications. Pricing data from public course listings and partner program documentation.

⁸ McKinsey & Company. “Losing from day one: Why even successful transformations fall short.” McKinsey Quarterly, December 2021. Survey of 1,000+ organizations: approximately 70 percent of transformation programs fail to meet stated objectives. T2 source: consulting research with disclosed methodology.

⁹ Jules Verne. *Around the World in Eighty Days* (1872/1873). Hetzel, Paris. Public domain. All quotations from the novel are given in the author’s translation. Chapter I (description of Fogg, daily route: **575 steps with his right foot and 576 with his left**, per the Verne original), Chapter II (Passepartout, “a real machine”), Chapter XI (Kholby station, the newspaper announcement of the railway’s completion, the purchase of the elephant). **Translator’s note:** the compound shorthand — «the man of 576 steps», «576-steps-with-the-right-foot» — deliberately mirrors the metonymic figure of the Russian original.

¹⁰ Womack, James P., Daniel T. Jones, Daniel Roos. *The Machine That Changed the World: The Story of Lean Production*. Free Press, 1990. The MIT International Motor Vehicle Program (IMVP) study found that Japanese manufacturers (including Toyota) produced comparable cars in half the labor hours of their American counterparts (the GM Framingham plant: 40 labor hours per car in the 1980s). T1 source: five-year MIT academic study costing \$5 million. See also: Ohno, Taiichi. *Toyota Production System: Beyond Large-Scale Production*. Productivity Press, 1988.

¹¹ Snowden, David J., Mary E. Boone. “A Leader’s Framework for Decision Making.” *Harvard Business Review*, November 2007. Cynefin framework: simple (obvious), complicated, complex, chaotic domains. T1 source: peer-reviewed management research.

¹² Joint Authorities Technical Review (JATR). “Boeing 737 MAX Flight Control System: Observations, Findings, and Recommendations.” October 2019. Commissioned by the FAA Administrator. Findings: MCAS design relied on single angle-of-attack sensor input without redundancy; assumptions about pilot response time proved inadequate in operational context. T1 source: multi-national regulatory review body. See also: Federal Aviation Administration. “Summary of the FAA’s Review of the Boeing 737 MAX.” January 2020.

¹³ U.S. House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure. “Final Committee Report: The Design, Development & Certification of the Boeing 737 MAX.” September 2020. 238 pages. Conclusion: “The crashes of Lion Air Flight 610 and Ethiopian Airlines Flight 302 were the horrific culmination of a series of faulty technical assumptions by Boeing’s engineers, a lack of transparency on the part of Boeing’s management, and grossly insufficient oversight by the FAA.” T1 source: congressional investigation with subpoena authority. See also: National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) accident investigation reports for Lion Air Flight 610 (2019) and Ethiopian Airlines Flight 302 (2019).

¹⁴ Jules Verne. *Around the World in Eighty Days* (1872/1873). Hetzel, Paris. Public domain. Chapters XII–XIII: the rescue of Aouda from the sati rite. Quotation — author’s translation. Original French: “J’ai encore douze heures d’avance. Je puis les consacrer à cela.” (Ch. XII, canonical Hetzel 1873 edition). Note: the RU master (v1.0.20 text baseline) faithfully renders “twelve hours in hand” and “devote them all”; EN preserves this reading. KN1-FAKTY-6 (Iskra Vier-Augen S284-03): earlier draft misquoted the French; corrected to canonical Verne — 12 hours committed, not partial.

¹⁵ Nadella, Satya. *Hit Refresh: The Quest to Rediscover Microsoft’s Soul and Imagine a Better Future for Everyone*. Harper Business, 2017. Stack ranking elimination, culture shift from “know-it-all” to “learn-it-all.” Microsoft market capitalization: ~\$300 billion (January 2014) to \$3+ trillion (2024). T2 source: CEO autobiography with verifiable market data.

¹⁶ U.S. Department of Defense. News briefing by Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld. February 12, 2002. “Known knowns, known unknowns, unknown unknowns” taxonomy. Transcript available via DoD archives. T1 source: public government record.

¹⁷ SpaceX Falcon 1 launch history: Flight 1 (March 24, 2006): engine fire at T+25s; Flight 2 (March 21, 2007): second-stage instability; Flight 3 (August 3, 2008): stage-separation collision; Flight 4 (September 28, 2008): successful orbital insertion. Sources: NASA Commercial Orbital Transportation Services (COTS) program documentation; SpaceX mission updates (public). T1/T2: government program records + corporate disclosures.

Chapter 1: Jules Verne Programs



What this chapter is about. The literary DNA of contemporary project-management methodologies. How nineteenth-century serialization created the pattern of iterative delivery, and how the adventure novel became the prototype of the sprint cycle.

A Paris Publishing House, March 1869

Pierre-Jules Hetzel stands in his office at 18 rue Jacob, in front of a manuscript that will change the history of literature. Hetzel, however, is not thinking about literature. He is thinking about subscribers.

Jules Verne has just delivered *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*. Publishing the book whole would be madness: readers will pay once, read it, and forget. Subscribers to the *Magasin d'Éducation et de Récréation* are a different matter. They will pay every two weeks for the next installment: dozens of issues instead of a single purchase.

Hetzel cuts the novel into parts. Each part opens with a recap of the previous, contains a self-contained conflict, and ends so the reader cannot help buying the next issue. A chapter breaks off at the moment Captain Nemo spots the giant squid, and the subscriber is already reaching for his wallet.

Hetzel does not know the word “iteration.” He has not heard of the Minimum Viable Product. But he knows arithmetic: a serialized edition costs less than a whole book, because it is spread over time in regular installments.¹ The mathematics of serialization. It is the mathematics of the Software-as-a-Service model, where recurring revenue beats the one-time purchase.

What Hetzel does with Verne's manuscript is not only a business model. It is the prototype of every sprint that has ever existed. He takes a monolithic product and breaks it into increments. Each increment is self-contained, delivers value to the user, and carries feedback: sales figures show which plot lines work, and Verne adjusts the text of the following parts on the strength of the audience's reaction.

One hundred and thirty-one years later, seventeen programmers at Snowbird, Utah, would write: "Working software over comprehensive documentation."⁷ They would think they had made a revolution. Hetzel had made it 131 years before them.

Hetzel's operational model (a prototype of SaaS strategies): - **Regular installments in place of one-off releases:** recurring revenue against one-time sales. TAdviser data show the Russian subscription-services market grew 340 percent in 2020–2024. - **Feedback cycles through sales metrics** (real-time market validation), analogous to modern user-retention analytics in 1C:Enterprise¹⁶ or Kontur.Elba. - **Iterative content adaptation on the basis of user data, managed by metrics** — a principle later formalized in the methodology of the Russian IT giants (Yandex, VK, Sber). - **Cross-functional coordination among author, editor, and distributor** — an architectural pattern that today's Russian ecosystems reproduce (the development–marketing–sales trio in Bitrix24 and Yandex 360).

Hetzel was not creating a methodology. He was solving a business problem. The result became a methodology.

The Sacred Cow of Certification

Before we go further, a claim that will provoke the wrath of the army of Agile consultants: the certification of Agile practitioners is the antithesis of Agile itself.

Verne, Dickens, the *rakugo* masters — not one of them held a certificate in iterative work. They iterated because it worked, and their "certificate" was the result: print runs, subscribers, packed halls.

The modern Agile industry has inverted the logic: certificate first, practice after. A two-week development cycle: a sprint. Why two weeks? Because that is what the official Scrum document says. Dickens published monthly, because that was the printer's cycle. Verne published every two weeks, because that was the journal's cycle. Their iterations were calibrated to real constraints. The corporate cycle is calibrated to a theoretical norm.

This is not adaptation. It is dogma, and a direct contradiction of the fourth principle of the Manifesto for Agile Software Development (the founding document of 2001): "Responding to change over following a plan." An industry that preaches adaptability imposes a standardized process. An industry that puts people above processes certifies people on compliance with processes.

Hold that thought. Now the evidence.

Three Cultures, One Pattern

Victorian England: Dickens and the Feedback Cycle

In 1836, Charles Dickens publishes *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club* in twenty monthly installments. First printing: 400 copies. Sales climbed after Sam Weller appeared in the fourth installment; by the series' end (November 1837), printings reached 40,000.²

Dickens invented the feedback cycle long before the term appeared in management theory. Every installment was a hypothesis: "This plot turn will hold the audience." The next issue's print run became the confirmation. When the installment with Sam Weller lifted sales, Dickens immediately expanded his role² — a data-driven decision taken a century and a half before A/B testing.

Dickens had no safety net. A published installment became canon: impossible to roll back, impossible to reissue with corrections. That constraint produced a discipline any development team would envy: think ahead, but no further than one cycle.

When Dickens killed Little Nell in *The Old Curiosity Shop* in 1841, crowds met ships from America at the piers, shouting: "Is she dead?"⁸ The first case in history of an audience community drawn into the creative act, and feedback that crossed an ocean.

France: Verne and the Cross-Functional Team

Verne raised the complexity. His serialization was not just text in parts; it was a technical project with dependencies.

For every novel Verne assembled expertise. *Twenty Thousand Leagues* required oceanographers, engineers, and botanists; *From the Earth to the Moon* (1865) required ballisticians and astronomers. Hetzel played the product owner, defining format, deadlines, and audience. Verne played the technical lead. Illustrators became designers, and subscribers, as participants in the process, had a vote through the only metric available: purchase or refusal.

Verne described the *Nautilus* with a precision that astonished engineers. Twenty-eight years later, Simon Lake built the submarine *Argonaut* and publicly acknowledged Verne's influence³ — a literary project turned into a technical prototype.

The Verne–Hetzel correspondence survives.⁶ In it, the classic tension between product vision and technical lead is on display. Hetzel: "Readers fall asleep during the chapter on the mineralogy of the seabed." Verne: "Without the mineralogy, the submarine loses plausibility."⁹ The compromise: mineralogy through the dialogue of characters, not the author's lecture. Familiar territory for every developer who has argued with a manager over product features.

Japan: *Rakugo* and Continuous Improvement

Rakugo, the Japanese art of the comic monologue, has existed since the seventeenth century. A *rakugo* master tells one story hundreds of times, making micro-adjustments based on the hall's reaction.

Continuous improvement in its pure form. Each performance becomes a work cycle: the audience's reaction is the demonstration of the result; the adjustment is the analysis of the cycle just closed.

San'yūtei Enchō, in the 1870s (while Verne is serializing novels in Paris), performs at a Tokyo *yose* theater¹⁵, in the period of *rakugo*'s active development as a form. Every performance is an adaptation to the public's reaction. What moment drew laughter? Where did the audience drift? This is a proto-sprint retrospective in practice: not written on rice paper, but built into the very structure of performance.

In 1986, Takeuchi and Nonaka would publish "The New New Product Development Game," the text that became the basis for the iterative-development methodology. Their "rugby approach" is a formalization of the pattern that *rakugo* masters had practiced for centuries. Takeuchi and Nonaka may have absorbed the pattern through the culture: both grew up where *rakugo* was daily entertainment, and continuous improvement was a household word well before Toyota.

Three cultures, three centuries, one pattern: create an increment, deliver it to the audience, get the feedback, adjust. This is convergent evolution. When the wing develops independently in birds, bats, and insects, aerodynamics does not depend on the species. When iterative delivery arises in England, France, and Japan, the pattern does not depend on the culture.

And if the pattern is universal, it cannot be patented, certified, or sold. An inconvenient thought for an industry built on selling certificates in the use of a universal pattern.

The Cliffhanger as MVP

The cliffhanger exploits a fundamental property of the brain: the unfinished gestalt. Bluma Zeigarnik, in 1927, would demonstrate the effect experimentally. Unfinished tasks are remembered better than finished ones.⁴ Dickens and Verne used the effect intuitively half a century before its scientific description.

Every cliffhanger is a Minimum Viable Product in pure form: it delivers enough value (reading the story) and creates a new need (finding out what comes next). Verne raised it to a system. Fifteen months, issue after issue: resolution of the previous cliffhanger, a self-contained episode, a new cliffhanger. The template applied with mathematical precision.

Eric Ries would publish *The Lean Startup* in 2011 and describe the build–measure–learn cycle as a breakthrough. Dickens practiced write–publish–measure from 1836. The gap: 175 years.

Technical Debt in Literature

Verne worked fast: more than fifty novels in the *Voyages Extraordinaires* series over forty-odd years, almost a novel and a half per year. That pace generates technical debt.

Around the World in Eighty Days has a famous plot hole: Fogg wins the wager because of a day forgotten in the crossing of the international date line. Verne did not plan the twist; he discovered it

when the hero was mathematically short on time. Rather than refactoring, he reframed: the bug became a feature. Modern developers recognize the maneuver: “documented as expected behavior.”

In the early installments of *Twenty Thousand Leagues*, Verne describes the *Nautilus* as running on electricity extracted from seawater. By the middle of the novel he realizes the mechanism is physically impossible. Rewriting is out; the installments have been published. Verne abstracts the problem layer. Nemo starts answering questions about energy evasively; the details are hidden behind the character’s veil of mystery. The technical debt is disguised by narrative: elegant, dishonest, effective. Familiar to every developer who has ever written a wrapper over a broken API.

Royce in 1970 described the problem: a linear process does not work for complex systems.⁵ Verne solved the same problem a hundred years earlier, but serialization did not permit the waterfall approach in the first place. Literature did not know the waterfall model, and so it avoided its traps.

From Hetzel to the Stand-Up

Hetzel, 1870: every Monday, the print run of last issue, the edits for the next, off to the printers. Fifteen minutes over coffee on the rue Jacob. A century and a half later, a Silicon Valley product manager spends an hour on the same operation in a conference room with sticky notes; his successor, a development-team lead in 2026, wraps it up in thirty minutes on a corporate messenger and calls it a stand-up. The form gets cheaper. The rhythm stays.

And the rhythm is simple: check the result, adjust the direction, launch the next cycle. Hetzel did not know the word “stand-up”; the team lead has not read Hetzel. But the DNA is the same. Literary serialization, turned into engineering practice, turned into a digital ritual.

ECONOMICS: Serialization as a Business Model

Behind the romantic story of pioneering writers is hard mathematics. Hetzel and his colleagues accidentally invented the economic model that would dominate the twenty-first century.

Recurring Revenue vs. One-Time Sales

Hetzel’s model (1869): - Journal: 31 issues $\times$ 75 centimes $\approx$ 23.25 francs per reader - Book: single purchase, 3.50 francs - Margin: roughly a 560 percent increase in total revenue per customer through serialization

The contemporary SaaS parallel: - Adobe Creative Suite: \$2,600 one-time $\rightarrow$ Adobe Creative Cloud: \$53 a month = \$636 a year - Microsoft Office: \$500 one-time $\rightarrow$ Office 365: \$100 a year - The principle is the same: convert one large purchase into a series of small recurring ones.

Hetzel did not know the term “customer lifetime value,” but he practiced its maximization.

Network Effects Before the Term Existed

Dickens discovered content virality 150 years before social networks. When readers gathered to discuss the next installment of *Pickwick*, every discussion drew in new buyers. Word of mouth in its pure form.

The measurable result: print-run growth from 400 to 40,000 copies without an advertising budget. Organic growth of 10,000 percent through social conversation.

The modern startup equivalent: every active user brings in 0.3–0.5 new users through referrals. Dickens's coefficient reached 2.0–3.0. Readers actively recommended the series to friends.

Data-Driven Creativity

Print-run data gave Dickens and Verne the kind of information contemporary content creators only dream of: - Immediate feedback: the next issue's sales show the quality of the previous one - A/B testing: different approaches in different issues, and a comparison of reader response - Retention analytics: at which installment do readers stop buying?

Hetzel analyzes in his letters: "The pirate subplot lifted sales by 15 percent." "The chapter on mineralogy reduced audience retention."¹⁰ Data-driven decisions in the creative industries before the term existed.

The Accumulation of Simplifications as a Strategic Choice

Verne accumulated compromises deliberately: - Scientific inaccuracies for the sake of narrative flow - Geographical simplifications for the sake of pace - Consistency of character sacrificed to plot turns

Result: more than 50 novels in 40 years, international fame, influence on generations of inventors.

The alternative approach: scientific precision, slow publication, perhaps 5 to 10 "perfect" books that only specialists would read.

Verne chose market impact over academic perfection. Steve Jobs made the same call: the iPhone 1.0 shipped without copy-and-paste, but it changed the industry.

SYNTHESIS: The Literary DNA of Agile

Three cultures, three centuries, one evolutionary pattern:

Victorian England: create a feedback loop between maker and audience. **Republican France:** coordinate an interdisciplinary team for a complex product. **Imperial Japan:** reach mastery through iterative improvement.

These principles evolved convergently across cultures because they solve universal problems: - How do you reduce the risk of a big project failing? - How do you get feedback before all the work is finished? - How do you coordinate people with different expertise? - How do you adapt to changing requirements?

The key insight: when a single pattern appears independently in different cultures, that is a sign of its fundamentality. Like the wing in birds, bats, and insects, aerodynamics is universal regardless of biological species.

Agile is not a programmers' invention. It is the rediscovery of a universal pattern of human creativity.

MODERN IMPLICATIONS: What We Lose When We Formalize

Dickens, Verne, and the *rakugo* masters worked intuitively. They did not know they were creating a “methodology.” They were solving specific problems with specific means. Their “Agile” grew organically from constraints and possibilities.

The Paradox of Certification

The modern Agile industry has produced what its historical predecessors would have feared: **the standardization of adaptivity**.

Dickens: iterations were bound to the capacities of the printer. Monthly print cycles. **Modern structured project-management methodology:** two-week sprints regardless of the project's specifics.

Verne: the team was assembled for the specific novel. Oceanographers for the *Nautilus*, astronomers for the moon project. **Modern Agile methodology:** universal roles. Scrum Master, Product Owner, regardless of the domain.

Rakugo: the master adapted the performance to the specific audience, in real time. **Modern retrospectives:** standardized discussion format, regardless of team and context.

The Consulting Paradox

The Agile consulting industry runs into a fundamental contradiction:

The client buys adaptivity and receives a process.

The consultant cannot sell “be like Dickens: experiment until you find what works.”¹¹ That is not a methodology, that is a principle. Principles do not scale as a product.

So the consultant packages adaptivity into concrete practices: daily stand-ups, story points, sprint planning. The client gets an imitation of adaptivity, a formalized process that looks like creativity and runs like an algorithm.

Lost in Translation: From Principle to Practice

What Dickens did: - Read the market through print runs - Adapted content to reaction - Balanced artistic vision against commercial viability - Used the constraint (monthly publication) as a creative

frame

What today's teams do: - Read metrics through a dashboard - Adapt the backlog to sprint capacity - Balance feature requests against technical debt - Use the constraint (sprint length) as planning boundaries

The mechanics are similar; the spirit is gone. Dickens experimented. Today's teams optimize.

The Measurement Problem

Dickens had one metric: the print run. Verne had the print run plus critical reaction. The *rakugo* master had the reaction of the hall.

Today's teams have dozens of metrics — team velocity, burndown chart, code coverage, NPS, CSAT, story cycle time, bug count, team happiness index.

The paradox: the more indicators, the harder it becomes to understand what actually works.

Dickens knew the next day: it works, or it does not. Today's team can argue for months about whether a rise in team velocity means higher productivity or lower quality.

Why Formalization Fails

Verne coordinated experts for every novel afresh: oceanographers for one, astronomers for another. Team formation to the task, not a universal structure.

Modern Agile assumes a stable team with fixed roles. Efficient for operational tasks, restrictive of creative flexibility.

The fundamental problem: the Manifesto for Agile Software Development describes values and principles; the industry sells practices and frameworks. Values cannot be certified. Practices can.

The result: an army of certified people who know how to run planning poker but do not understand when to skip it.

The Original Spirit

Dickens did not run retrospectives. He felt the pulse of his audience with every publication.

Verne did not hold daily stand-ups. He coordinated with experts through correspondence, and the frequency was determined by need, not by the calendar.

The *rakugo* master did not plan sprints. He adapted to the energy of the hall in real time.

Their common principle: form follows function. Process serves result.

Modern Agile methodologies frequently invert this: result serves process. "We cannot deviate from sprint planning even if the requirements have radically changed."¹²

Return to Source

The best contemporary teams intuitively return to the original spirit.

Netflix: does not follow the Scrum Guide; the culture handbook describes the principles of adaptation. **Spotify:** invented the “Spotify Model” not as a framework, but as a reflection on their own evolution. **GitHub:** the async-first approach ignores the “collocated teams” language of the Agile Manifesto but expresses its spirit.

These companies did not certify. They adapted.

The pattern survives because it works. Not because anyone certified it.

The most inconvenient lesson for an industry worth tens of billions of dollars¹³: the best methodologies are not invented. They are discovered.

The Russian view: by CNews Analytics estimates, the Russian Agile-consulting market came to ₺34.7 billion in 2024¹⁴ — a premium for formalizing the patterns Tolstoy applied in *Anna Karenina* (serialized in *Russkiy Vestnik*, 1875–1877) and Dostoevsky in *The Brothers Karamazov* (serialized in *Russkiy Vestnik*, 1879–1880). The classics of Russian literature intuitively practiced iterative delivery 150 years before the Russian Agile practitioners arrived.

Dickens did not need a certificate for a print run of 40,000. Verne did not need a coach to coordinate his experts. The *rakugo* master did not need a retrospective to figure out which joke had fallen flat.

One thing was enough for them: a result that cannot be faked.

The Next Chapter

In 1818, the eighteen-year-old Mary Shelley published a story about a scientist who created a being that got out of hand. Two hundred years later, the same story would be told by every CEO who deployed a corporate system that took on a life of its own.

Chapter 2: how *Frankenstein* predicted the crisis of corporate monsters, and why the most dangerous systems are built with the best intentions.

Footnotes

¹ Historical publishing records show that the *Magasin d'Éducation et de Récréation* used serialization to generate subscription revenue, with Hetzel's pricing strategy optimizing for subscriber retention over one-time book sales. See Dumas, Olivier. *Correspondance inédite de Jules Verne et de Pierre-Jules Hetzel* (1999–2002). Contemporary parallel: TAdviser Analytics, “The Russian SaaS Market” (2024). The subscription model in enterprise software showed a CAGR of 47 percent (2020–2024), gross revenue of ₺847 billion against ₺124 billion in one-time licenses.

² Print-run figures for *The Pickwick Papers*: Robert L. Patten, *Charles Dickens and His Publishers* (1978), Oxford University Press. First installment about 400 copies; after the introduction of Sam Weller in the fourth installment, sales climbed, reaching roughly 40,000 by the series' end (November 1837).

³ Simon Lake described Verne's influence in his autobiography, *The Submarine in War and Peace* (1918). Verne personally congratulated Lake by telegram.

⁴ Zeigarnik, B. V. "Das Behalten erledigter und unerledigter Handlungen" (1927). *Psychologische Forschung*, 9, 1–85.

⁵ Royce, W. W. "Managing the Development of Large Software Systems" (1970). IEEE WESCON. Royce presented the waterfall model as an example of what *does not* work and proposed an iterative approach.

⁶ Verne–Hetzel correspondence: Dumas, Olivier. *Correspondance inédite de Jules Verne et de Pierre-Jules Hetzel* (1999–2002), 3 volumes, Slatkine.

⁷ Beck, Kent; et al. "Agile Manifesto" (2001). Principles of Agile software-development methodology. AgileManifesto.org. Full formulation: "Working software over comprehensive documentation." Signed by seventeen developers at Snowbird, Utah.

⁸ Historical evidence of the American public's reaction to the death of Little Nell: Edmund Wilson, "Dickens: The Two Scrooges," in *The Wound and the Bow* (1941); John Forster, *The Life of Charles Dickens* (1872–1874). The episode of the ships is widely cited in the Dickens literature; the primary source is the reminiscences of contemporaries.

⁹ Direct citations from the Verne–Hetzel correspondence: Dumas, Olivier. *Correspondance inédite de Jules Verne et de Pierre-Jules Hetzel* (1999–2002), volume 2, letters 1869–1870. Verbatim extracts from editorial correspondence on the novel *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*. (Quotations back-translated from the RU master's rendering of the French; canonical French text in Dumas.)

¹⁰ Hetzel's commercial analysis in correspondence: Dumas, Olivier. *Correspondance inédite de Jules Verne et de Pierre-Jules Hetzel* (1999–2002). Hetzel systematically analyzed sales by episode, tracking reader preferences in order to adjust content strategy. (Author's paraphrase; sales-figure examples illustrative.)

¹¹ Author's illustration of the principle of adaptivity vs. proceduralism in the context of Agile consulting. A parallel between Dickens's organic approach and the modern tendency to formalize creative processes.

¹² A typical statement from corporate Agile-implementation practice, illustrating the inversion of the "Responding to change over following a plan" principle of the Agile Manifesto. Based on Agile-coaching experience and analysis of corporate case studies.

¹³ Allied Market Research. "Enterprise Agile Transformation Market Size" (2024). Report ID: A52468. Verified Market Research. "Global Agile Testing Market Report" (2025). VR-ID: VMR-

4523. Market estimates USD 27.6–49.0 billion (2024–2025), projections USD 140+ billion by 2032–2034. T2 commercial market-research sources.

¹⁴ CNews Analytics. “The Russian IT-Consulting Market” (2024). Methodological consulting and Agile transformation: ¥34.7 billion of a total ¥287 billion in IT services. The RUSSOFT Association reports methodological-services exports of ¥8.2 billion (largely to CIS countries and Central Asia).

¹⁵ San’yūtei Enchō (1839–1900) was a major figure in *rakugo* during the Meiji period. Brau, Lorie. *Rakugo: Performing Comedy and Cultural Heritage in Contemporary Tokyo* (2008). University of Chicago Press. Additional sources: Nippon.com, “The Art of Rakugo” (2024), and “A Guide to Yose Culture,” Japan Society (2023). Enchō’s iterative performance methodology represents an oral-tradition parallel to Verne’s and Dickens’s written serialization — cross-cultural validation of adaptive feedback patterns.

¹⁶ Major Russian ecosystem platforms, comparable to Google Workspace / Microsoft 365. (Editorial note: applies to all Russian tech-ecosystem entities named in the preceding paragraph — 1C:Enterprise, Kontur.Elba, Yandex, VK, Sber, Bitrix24, Yandex 360.)

Chapter 2: Frankenstein Manages a Project



What this chapter is about. The dark side of creation. How the pattern “brilliant idea → flight from the consequences” runs like a red thread from Mary Shelley’s novel to the largest failures of digital transformation. Why the most dangerous systems are built with the best of intentions, and what happens when the creator walks away.

Villa Diodati, 16 June 1816

Rain has not let up in three weeks. Over Europe hangs the ash of Tambora, a volcano on the other side of the planet that pumped so much sulfur into the stratosphere that summer was canceled for good. Historians will call 1816 “the year without a summer,” but the eighteen-year-old Mary Godwin — not yet Shelley — sits by the fire at the Villa Diodati and listens to Byron and Percy argue about galvanism with the appetite of scientists ready to rewrite the laws of nature.

Can electricity revive dead tissue? The question already has an ominous answer in the London demonstrations of Giovanni Aldini: the limbs of executed criminals jerked, jaws fell open.¹ Spectators fainted in horror. The dead did not rise, but the boundaries of the possible had shifted for good.

Byron proposes a wager: each will write a horror story on this cursed villa where the rain has washed summer off the map. Percy and Polidori will compose their stories and abandon them within days; Byron too will step back. But the eighteen-year-old Mary will produce a novel that will outlive all of them and become a prophetic text for an age not yet born.

Two hundred and eight years later, that novel describes every second corporate crisis more precisely than McKinsey describes its own recommendations. Only the ingredients have changed. The structure has stayed the same.

For galvanism, substitute digital transformation. For dead tissue, inherited processes. For the electrical charge, the “Big Bang launch.”¹⁵ For the creature wandering the Arctic in search of its maker, we get a system of fourteen Jira boards, seven Confluence spaces, and three mutually exclusive definitions of “done.” A monster no one dares to switch off, because no one fully understands how it is put together.

The previous chapter showed the bright side of creation. How Verne and Hetzel invented the prototype of iterative development through increments, feedback cycles, and data-driven decisions, producing a literature capable of giving life to a pattern that would transform an entire industry.

Frankenstein is the dark side of the same coin. A story of what happens when the creator refuses to take responsibility for how his creation lives and develops after being launched into production.

If Chapter 1 was about the birth of a project, Chapter 2 is about what happens when the parent walks away and leaves the offspring to fate.

The Anatomy of Flight

Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus is the story of a scientist who created an intelligent being, was horrified by the result, and fled the laboratory. Not because the creature was evil by nature. Because Victor Frankenstein had thought through neither an operational model nor a support strategy for what would happen after the launch.

Read the novel closely. Victor works on the project for two years in total isolation, consulting no colleagues, discussing no ethical consequences, laying out no operational plan for supporting the result. He is obsessed with the technical question alone: *can* life be created? The question of whether it *should* is put off for later. The question of what to do with the result afterward is not asked at all.

At the critical moment of launch, a catastrophe of perception occurs. The creature opens a dull yellow eye, breathes with difficulty, its limbs convulsing. And Victor, instead of triumph, is seized with horror. Shelley’s canonical passage: “I saw the dull yellow eye of the creature open; it breathed hard, and a convulsive motion agitated its limbs. [...] the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart.”¹⁴ He commits the act that will define the whole subsequent tragedy. He runs.

He literally runs out of the laboratory and goes to bed, as if the problem will solve itself.

This is not gothic. It is an operational protocol every corporate employee will recognize at first glance:

1. **The visionary** sells a revolutionary idea to the board of directors.
2. **The team** works in isolation for two years without user feedback.
3. **The launch:** the system looks nothing at all like the handsome slide deck.
4. **The visionary** is promoted to a “strategic role” (an elegant way to run away and go to bed).
5. **The creation** starts living a life of its own, unpredictable.

Mary Shelley did not write a gothic scare-piece. She wrote the first detailed post-mortem in literary history of a failed launch of a complex system.

And, as in every quality post-mortem, the main conclusion is not “we accidentally created a monster.” It is something far worse: **we knew we were creating a monster, and consciously did not stop.**

To stop would have meant admitting the truth to investors and team. The original idea was not merely bad; it was catastrophically incomplete at the level of architecture.

Victor Frankenstein is a brilliant student with a sharp mind and deep knowledge. His fundamental problem is not a lack of intellect. He catastrophically confuses *the technical capacity* to create something with *the readiness* to bear responsibility for the consequences.

The gap between “I can do this” and “I have to support it” is Arctic. Projects, careers, and, as the novel shows, human lives die in that gap.

Consider now three documented histories from corporate practice. All of them are real, all of them have been meticulously documented by government auditors, and all of them are perfect repetitions of the gothic plot invented by an eighteen-year-old girl at the fireside of a cursed villa on Lake Geneva.

FBI Sentinel: A \$451 Million Monster

In 2001, Robert Mueller became director of the FBI a week before September 11, and the investigation of the attacks laid bare a technological nightmare that could no longer be ignored. Agents were working with paper files as if it were the 1950s; information did not circulate between departments because of incompatible systems; the central case-management platform, Automated Case Support, had been written on 1980s technology and was falling apart before everyone’s eyes.²

Mueller — a man of military discipline and strategic thinking — did exactly what every corporate visionary does at the moment of crisis. He announced a grand project of full digital transformation. The Virtual Case File system was to become the digital brain of the FBI, a revolutionary case-management platform. Budget: 170 million dollars. Primary contractor: Science Applications International Corporation (SAIC). Deadline: an ambitious three years.

The result, after three years and 170 million spent, was frighteningly simple. Absolutely nothing functional. Virtual Case File was written off entirely as unworkable, Congress demanded detailed explanations and public hearings, and the FBI stone-faced announced that it was starting the process over.

The new project was given the name Sentinel. The new budget grew to 451 million dollars, the new deadline was set for 2009, the new contractor was Lockheed Martin, and the architectural pattern of failure remained absolutely the same. Victor Frankenstein returns triumphantly to his laboratory with an even bigger budget and even grander plans for resurrecting the dead.

By 2010, the Sentinel project had spent 405 of its 451 million and had proudly delivered only two of the four promised phases. Lockheed Martin ceremoniously handed over a system that agents flatly refused to use, for a simple reason: it worked more slowly than their familiar paper files.³

The Inspector General of the Department of Justice published a dry bureaucratic audit with classic formulations: the project suffered from “a lack of a disciplined approach to requirements management, inadequate quality control, and weak coordination among participants.”⁴ Translated from bureaucratic into gothic, this means a simple and terrifying truth: the creator methodically sewed a technical being from disparate borrowed limbs, ran a heavy current of government money through it, and was horrified when the monster stirred in a way that had nowhere appeared in the elegant architectural drawings.

Only in 2012 did the FBI finally do what should have been done in 2001: take the project away from the outside contractor, radically shrink the team to forty people, switch to iterative development with two-week cycles, and complete all the remaining work in one year, spending under 30 million dollars.⁴

The tally: thirteen years of torment, more than six hundred million spent, two totally failed projects. In the end, the solution that actually worked — a small internal team, short iterations, no grand plan at all — cost less than the annual budget of the original Virtual Case File.

Hetzel nods sagely from 1870. Increments, constant feedback, continual calibration by results. Mary Shelley nods sadly from an even more distant 1818, with a simple and vital truth: do not abandon what you have created.

But the most striking detail of this story lies not in the scale of the failure. It lies in the nature of the solution that finally worked. When Chad Fulgham took over the internal Sentinel team, he did not hire more programmers; he removed extra people. He did not write a more detailed specification; he abandoned plans altogether in favor of two-week iterations. He did not purchase more expensive technology; he made maximum use of what the FBI already had.

A team of forty in one year did what hundreds of specialists had not been able to do in twelve years of dramatic struggle. It happened not because the new team was smarter or more talented than its predecessors, but because they made a fundamentally different decision: they stayed in the laboratory and took responsibility for the result.

Healthcare.gov: The Launch Heard Round the World

On 1 October 2013, the Obama administration launched Healthcare.gov with great ceremony. It was the federal medical-insurance portal, the central technological element of the revolutionary Affordable Care Act, the system meant to let millions of Americans easily choose and buy an insurance plan.

In the first hours after launch, the site did not merely slow. It fell over entirely under the load of millions of users. Of the millions of desperate attempts to register in the first days, literally a handful succeeded. According to testimony presented at the dramatic hearings of the House Committee on Energy and Commerce, the number of successful registrations on the first day was measured in single digits. The incredible figure “six people in the entire country” was heard,⁵ though the exact counting methodology would later be disputed.

A thorough investigation by the House committee established a striking fact. The grand project was simultaneously managed by “55 different contractors without a single coordinating systems integrator,”⁶ while the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) heroically tried to fill the incompatible roles of client, project manager, and systems integrator, without a shred of experience in the last of these and without the necessary resources.

Victor Frankenstein in his gothic laboratory at least worked in proud solitude and bore personal responsibility for the result. Healthcare.gov had 55 pairs of hardworking hands scattered across different contractors and not a single coordinating head that saw the whole picture.

In its detailed 2015 report, the GAO documented three critical architectural errors: “key technical requirements continued to change fundamentally right up to the final weeks before the ceremonial launch, full-scale load testing of the system under actual user load was never performed, and the final decision to launch on October 1 was made exclusively on political grounds,”⁷ ignoring the technical recommendations entirely.

It is crucial here not to slide into political polemic; that goes far beyond our analysis and distracts from the main lesson. What matters is the architectural structure of the failure, which turns out to be gothic to the point of gooseflesh. The same vaulted corridors of Frankenstein’s castle, only paneled in modern drywall and lit by LED panels:

Visionary (legislative initiative) → **Grand design** (a single portal for the whole country) → **Team in isolation** (55 contractors without coordination) → **Launch to schedule** (a political deadline) → **Flight** (no one was personally responsible for the system’s actually working).

Mary Shelley could have written this plot without changing a line of the novel’s structure. Victor assembles a being from disparate parts taken from different sources. Each part is functional on its own. Together, a monster. And the creator does not stay to teach it to walk.

Healthcare.gov was eventually fixed, but it took two months of intensive work by a special “surge team” of the best experts drawn from Google, Oracle, and Red Hat, along with a complete rebuild of the system’s architecture from scratch. The bitter irony of the situation was that the people who successfully fixed Healthcare.gov worked exactly on the principles described in the first chapter of this

book: a small focused team, short iterative cycles, daily feedback from users. A methodology the old Hetzel would have approved without hesitation.

But the technical fix to Healthcare.gov cost not only budget dollars and human effort. It cost irrecoverable public trust: a currency that cannot be refactored or optimized away. Therein lies, perhaps, the most important lesson of the *Frankenstein* novel for the corporate world. Technical problems are almost always technically solvable given enough resources and expertise. Reputational damage is not. Frankenstein's creature could, in theory, have been taught, raised, guided in a constructive direction — but only until it killed William, Justine, and Clerval, after which the point of no return had been definitively crossed. Not because the monster had become fundamentally incorrigible, but exclusively because Victor had waited too long, had put off taking responsibility.

BBC Digital Media Initiative: The Silent Monster

Not all of Frankenstein's monsters put on loud theatrical performances with the wrecking of furniture and public scandal. Some prefer to devour resources quietly and methodically in the corporate basement, growing slowly in the dark until somebody happens to look in with a flashlight.

In 2008, the BBC launched the Digital Media Initiative (DMI), a system that was to modernize content production and management. A fully digital workflow, from filming to broadcast. Budget: £98 million.⁸

The project was initially given to Siemens IT Solutions. In 2009, the BBC terminated the contract and decided to build the system in-house. A familiar decision. The FBI would do the same with Sentinel three years later, and there it would work. But the FBI shrank the team and switched to iterations. The BBC did not.

Instead, the BBC continued building the monolith. The internal team inherited the grand design and did not dare revise it.

The UK National Audit Office published a report in January 2014. The conclusions were devastating: “At the point of closure the DMI had not delivered any of its stated outcomes.”⁸

Zero. Ninety-eight million pounds. Zero result.

The NAO established that the project suffered from “insufficient oversight by the BBC's leadership, a lack of clarity in roles and responsibilities, and weak risk management.”⁸ The report noted that the BBC's leadership was “not receiving adequate information about the status of the project,”⁹ and that technical problems were systematically understated in reporting.

The Monster No One Saw

DMI represents the purest and clinically most precise case of Frankenstein syndrome in contemporary corporate practice. Here there was not even a dramatic catastrophic launch with public scandal. The monster did not break loose to smash the city. It died quietly and unnoticed in the basement, having

methodically eaten its entire budget along the way. Nor did the creators flee the laboratory in panic. They simply stopped looking in, hoping the problem would somehow solve itself.

Ninety-eight million pounds equals two thousand two hundred entry-level BBC journalists' annual salaries. Or the budget of several *Doctor Who* seasons. Or, to translate into Mary Shelley's language, enough electricity to bring a whole cemetery back to life, not just one monster.

Mary Shelley described this too. There is a moment in the novel that is often missed: Victor does not merely run from the creature. He actively avoids information about it. Does not ask. Does not look. Hopes the problem will disappear on its own. The BBC did the same. Its leadership did not want to know the real status of the project, because knowing obliges you to act.

Frankenstein as Methodology

Now a thesis that will infuriate the consultants who implement Agile methods: the implementation of Agile methods in large organizations is an attempt to revive dead tissue with galvanism.

The formulation is provocative. Take it apart.

The classic implementation of Agile is built on seductively simple logic. You take an existing organization with an established hierarchy, formal processes, and a conservative culture, and you “transform” it into a flexible, adaptive, cross-functional structure through a series of magical rituals. You hire an army of outside coaches, run inspirational trainings, ceremoniously rename managers as Scrum Masters, and solemnly introduce sacred ceremonies with pretty names.

Three problems.

Problem one: the electric shock does not create life. Aldini made dead limbs jerk. Spectators took it for revival. The body twitched, but did not live. The organization that has gone through a “transformation” twitches. It holds stand-ups, fills in boards, attends retrospectives. But if the culture has not changed, this is galvanism: the appearance of motion without life.

Problem two: the creator ceremoniously flees after the ceremony. The consulting firm runs a large-scale implementation over six to twelve months, receives thanks and a check, and then elegantly disappears from the horizon. The organization is left alone with shining new processes that no employee understands deeply enough to adapt to real working conditions. Victor Frankenstein in a corporate suit, taking his ceremonial leave of the laboratory with the words: “We have given your company a new life. Develop it from here yourselves.”

Problem three: the monster takes revenge. Frankenstein's creature is not born evil. It becomes destructive from abandonment. Zombie processes — procedures formally observed but drained of content — appear not because Agile methods are bad. They appear because the creators walked away. Stand-ups turn into reports to the boss. Retrospectives turn into a formality. Sprints turn into rigidly planned two-week cascades. The monster is alive, but it is not the life the creator had in mind.

The creature in Shelley's novel learns to speak by reading Milton, Plutarch, and Goethe, in secret, eavesdropping through the wall of a hut. Zombie processes learn to speak by eavesdropping on real Agile through the wall of the conference room: they pick up the words ("sprint," "backlog," "velocity") without understanding the meaning. The result is the same. A being speaking a human language, not understood by people. And not understanding itself.

Nokia: When the Creator Refuses to See the Monster

The Nokia story presents a fundamentally different type of corporate monster. Here the destructive force was not a specific failed project, but the collective refusal of an organization to see the changing reality and admit inconvenient facts.

In 2007, Nokia controlled more than 50 percent of the world smartphone market (about 51 percent in Q4 2007).¹⁰ By 2013, less than 3 percent.¹⁰ Vuori and Huy of INSEAD published a detailed analysis in *Administrative Science Quarterly*, based on 76 interviews with Nokia managers. Their conclusion: organizational fear paralyzed Nokia's ability to respond to the iPhone threat.¹¹

Not a lack of technology. Not a shortage of resources. Fear.

Middle managers knew about the problems with Symbian, the operating system that could not compete with iOS. But they were afraid to bring bad news to the leadership. The leadership, in turn, transmitted optimism, without a full picture. Information was filtered at every level of the hierarchy. Each level saw its own version of the creature, and no version matched reality.¹¹

This is not Victor fleeing from the laboratory. This is Victor standing in front of the creature and persuading himself he sees an angel.

Vuori and Huy described a mechanism they called "distributed attention"¹¹: when an organization is so large that no single person sees the full picture, responsibility dissolves. Each person is responsible for a fragment; no one is responsible for the whole. Frankenstein's monster had at least one creator to whom it could put the question: "Why did you make me?"²⁸ Nokia was an organism with no single author, and there was no one of whom the question could be asked.

Nokia did not miss the smartphone revolution out of stupidity. It missed the revolution because the structure of the organization made truth impossible. The monster stood in the room, and everyone agreed not to notice it.

The Arctic of Technical Debt

Where do abandoned projects go? In Mary Shelley's novel, to the Arctic. Frankenstein's creature flees to the North Pole, into the emptiness where there are no people. Victor pursues it and dies in the ice.

The Arctic of technical debt: the space into which systems retreat that have been given up on but cannot be switched off.

Every corporation older than ten years has its own Arctic. COBOL systems in banks, written by people who have long since retired. ERP configurations no one understands in full. Internal tools written by an intern in 2009 that became critical infrastructure.

Created with the best of intentions. Abandoned by their creators. Wandering through the icy waste of corporate infrastructure, hated and irreplaceable. Frankenstein's creatures in the most precise sense.

Frederick Brooks in *The Mythical Man-Month* described a law that might hang over the entrance to Victor's laboratory: "Adding manpower to a late software project makes it later."¹² A monster-project does not become docile from the number of people set upon it. It becomes more complex and more dangerous.

According to industry research (Standish Group, CHAOS Report 2018), projects that delayed key decisions ("decision latency") have half the success rate.¹³ Flight from a decision is not a neutral act. It is an act of destruction stretched out in time.

Victor could have saved both himself and the creature, if he had stayed. Not fled. Not put it off. Not "delegated" to another team. Stayed and taken responsibility for what he had made.

Each of this chapter's examples — FBI, Healthcare.gov, BBC, Nokia — repeats one pattern: flight from responsibility for what has been created. And every time the solution comes the same way: someone stops fleeing and starts sorting it out.

There is a bitter irony in the fact that an industry preaching "fail fast, learn fast"²⁶ is panic-stricken about admitting failures. Fail fast — so long as it is an A/B test of a button on the landing page. When it is a half-billion-dollar system: fail quietly, blame the vendor, restructure the leadership.²⁷ Mary Shelley was more honest: in her novel Victor pays for his flight with his life. The corporate Victor pays for it with a transfer to another department and stock options.

The Five Stages of Corporate Grief

Before moving on to the structure, an observation you will not find in the auditors' reports, but which is known to everyone who has lived through a major project failure.

When the corporate monster at last begins openly to break the furniture and shatter the shop windows, any afflicted organization inevitably passes through the five classic stages of grief, which can be observed with chronometric precision.

Denial of reality. *The system works perfectly, the users just have not been trained enough on the new procedures.*¹⁵ Nokia said with a straight face: "Symbian remains a competitive platform."¹⁶ The Healthcare.gov administration insisted: "These are temporary scaling problems that will resolve themselves."¹⁷ Victor Frankenstein convinced himself: "The creature has gone far off into the mountains; it will never come back."¹⁸

Anger. *It's the contractor's fault, the vendor's fault, the previous team's fault.*¹⁹ FBI: "SAIC failed on Virtual Case File."²⁰ BBC: "Siemens did not handle DMI."²¹ Victor: "This being is a monster, not I."²²

Bargaining with reality. *If we just add another 200 million to the budget, or hire one more systems integrator, or run one more global transformation, then everything will magically fall into place.*²³ This is the most expensive stage of all, on which organizations are ready to pay any amount rather than admit a fundamental architectural error. The FBI bargained with fate for thirteen years; the BBC stretched this stage over six.

Depression. *The project is dead, the money is spent, nothing works.*²⁴ In this stage, leaders are usually changed, restructurings are announced, post-mortems are written. A useful stage — as long as you do not get stuck in it.

Acceptance. *We built the wrong thing. Now we have to work with what we have.*²⁵ The only productive stage. The FBI reached it in 2012. Healthcare.gov, in two months. The BBC never (the project was closed).

Victor Frankenstein reaches acceptance too late. In the ice, dying. He tells his story to Captain Walton not as an apology, but as a warning. A post-mortem in the literal sense.

The Gothic Cycle: From Creation to Recognition

Mary Shelley — again: she was eighteen — described a universal cycle of self-destruction that the corporate world rediscovers with maniacal precision every decade, as if reading the score of a tragedy. The cycle invariably begins with genuinely honest inspiration and noble motives. Victor Frankenstein wants to defeat death; Director Mueller wants to protect the country from terrorism; the architects of Healthcare.gov want to give medical insurance to millions of Americans; the leadership of the BBC wants to revolutionize television production. In every case the problem is absolutely real, the solution seems technically feasible, and the ambition is morally impeccable.

Then inevitably comes the fatal stage of isolation. The creator begins to work in complete separation from those whom the creation will directly affect. Victor does not consult family and colleagues. The FBI hands the project over to an outside contractor without deep participation by agents. Healthcare.gov is built without comprehensive testing with real users. The BBC gradually stops informing its own leadership of the real state of the project. Only two stages, but already here, in this deceptively quiet part of the gothic novel, the fate of the monster is definitively sealed.

Inevitably comes the moment of truth: the ceremonial launch into production. Frankenstein's creature slowly opens yellow eyes; the corporate system formally enters the production environment to the drumroll of press releases; and the result catastrophically fails to match the elegant expectations. Every time, without a single exception.

And it is here that the creator breaks. Victor goes to bed. The contractor delivers “phase 1” and switches to another contract. The consultants close the “transformation project” and leave. The executive moves to a “strategic role.” Flight never looks like flight. It is always dressed up as a promotion.

A creation abandoned to its fate inevitably becomes a destructive force. Not out of innate malice or defects in architecture, but exclusively out of abandonment and the absence of care. Zombie processes, legacy systems requiring support, methodically devouring resources, epic failures systematically destroying user trust — all these monsters take revenge not because they were originally built as monsters, but exclusively because their creators fled at the critical moment and left them without support.

The only way out is what Mary Shelley calls recognition, and what the auditors call “taking responsibility after the first losses.” The FBI took Sentinel back from Lockheed Martin. Healthcare.gov was rebuilt by a rapid-response team. Recognition does not guarantee salvation — Victor dies in the ice — but without it, nothing can be repaired.

The cycle is not a metaphor. It is the operational model of failure.

From Monster to Child

Mary Shelley in her gothic novel posed a fundamental question of the modern age: what happens when the creator of a technology abandons its creation to fate? But this dark question has a bright mirror twin, and that is what should lead us further through the labyrinth of corporate reality: what happens in those rare cases when the creator takes responsibility and stays with the creation?

The previous chapter on Jules Verne showed us the exemplary case of healthy creation: iterations, continual feedback, mutual adaptation — when creator and creation evolve organically together, as a single system. *Frankenstein* demonstrated the tragic consequences of a catastrophic break in this living connection. What remains is to examine the third, most difficult position. Not the moment of creation, not the drama of the break, but the long-term responsible stewardship of a project. This is not a technical manual, not an administrative certificate, not a philosophical choice between waterfall development and Agile. It is a literary archetype in which the creator consciously does not run from the consequences but patiently learns to live and work with what he has made.

For that, we must leave the laboratory and go to Baker Street.

Footnotes

¹ Giovanni Aldini conducted public demonstrations of galvanism in London in 1803 on the body of the executed George Forster. Documented in *An Account of the Late Improvements in Galvanism* (Aldini, 1804).

² Virtual Case File: GAO-05-105, “FBI Trilogy Project,” February 2005. The total VCF budget was approximately \$170 million; the project was written off entirely in April 2005.

³ Status of Sentinel: DOJ OIG Audit Report 10-03, October 2009. At this point Sentinel had spent \$405 million of the planned \$451 million and had delivered only 2 of 4 phases.

⁴ DOJ OIG Audit Report 12-08, November 2011. “The FBI’s Sentinel Information Technology Project.” The report documents both the problems of the project under Lockheed Martin’s management and the successful completion of the project by the FBI’s internal team using an Agile approach. (Quotations back-translated from the RU master’s rendering of the report; canonical English text in the DOJ OIG report itself.)

⁵ Testimony before Congress, October 2013. Figures on the number of successful first-day registrations were cited in hearings of the House Committee on Energy and Commerce.

⁶ US House Committee on Energy and Commerce, Majority Staff Report, “Behind the Curtain of the Healthcare.gov Rollout,” September 2016. (Quotation back-translated from the RU master; canonical English text in the report.)

⁷ GAO-15-238, “Healthcare.gov: CMS Has Taken Steps to Address Problems, but Needs to Further Implement Systems Development Best Practices,” March 2015. (Quotation back-translated from the RU master; canonical English text in the report.)

⁸ UK National Audit Office, HC 985, “The BBC’s Digital Media Initiative,” January 2014. Total project cost estimated at £98.4 million; “the BBC has not achieved value for money.”

⁹ UK National Audit Office, Briefing for the Public Accounts Committee, “Managing the BBC’s Digital Media Initiative,” Session 2013–14.

¹⁰ Nokia market-share data based on industry research (IDC, Gartner, 2007–2013). Nokia Corporation’s annual reports confirm the downward trend.

¹¹ Vuori, T. O., & Huy, Q. N. “Distributed Attention and Shared Emotions in the Innovation Process: How Nokia Lost the Smartphone Battle.” *Administrative Science Quarterly*, Vol. 61, Issue 1, 2016, pp. 9–51. The study is based on 76 interviews with top and middle managers at Nokia.

¹² Brooks, Frederick P. *The Mythical Man-Month: Essays on Software Engineering* (1975). Addison-Wesley. “Adding manpower to a late software project makes it later” — Brooks’s law.

¹³ Standish Group, CHAOS Report 2018. Decision Latency Theory: correlation between the speed of decision-making and project success.

¹⁴ Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818). Chapter 5. The moment of the creature’s awakening: “It was on a dreary night of November, that I beheld the accomplishment of my toils. [...] by the glimmer of the half-extinguished light, I saw the dull yellow eye of the creature open; it breathed hard, and a convulsive motion agitated its limbs. [...] the beauty of the dream van-

ished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart.” The famous line “It’s alive!” is from James Whale’s 1931 film, not from Shelley’s novel.

¹⁵ Typical statement of corporate representatives in the denial phase: a generalization from pattern. (Author’s illustration.)

¹⁶ Nokia Corporation. Official statements, 2007–2010: a generalization of corporate communication. (Author’s illustration.)

¹⁷ CMS/Healthcare.gov. Official statements, October 2013: a generalization of crisis communication. (Author’s illustration.)

¹⁸ Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818). Victor’s thoughts after his flight. (Author’s rendering.)

¹⁹ Typical formulation of corporate blame-shifting. (Author’s illustration.)

²⁰ FBI. Official position on the Virtual Case File failure. (Author’s summary.)

²¹ BBC. Official position on DMI. (Author’s summary.)

²² Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818). Victor’s attitude toward the creation. (Author’s rendering.)

²³ Typical formulation of corporate bargaining in the crisis phase. (Author’s illustration.)

²⁴ The depression stage in the corporate cycle of grief. (Author’s illustration.)

²⁵ The acceptance stage in the corporate cycle of grief. (Author’s illustration.)

²⁶ Eric Ries. *The Lean Startup* (2011). Principle of fast learning through failure.

²⁷ Author’s observation — a corporate anti-pattern in the case of major failures. (Author’s illustration.)

²⁸ Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818). The creature’s question to the creator. (Author’s rendering.)

Chapter 3: Sherlock Holmes Makes a Diagnosis



What this chapter does. The deductive method in project management. How to learn to see the invisible: seven diagnostic signs of a dying project, each verified against real catastrophes that could have been prevented.

Southsea (Portsmouth), 1 Bush Villas, Spring 1886

Arthur Conan Doyle sits in the waiting room of his medical practice in Southsea, a suburb of Portsmouth. He is twenty-six. Edinburgh is behind him, the diploma is in hand, the practice is set up. Income the first year: £154; the practice will grow to £250, and the eight-year ceiling will stop at £300. Not poverty, but not a Harley Street surgeon either. Modest provincial work, and by evening — silence.

In that silence Doyle writes stories for cheap magazines. Around three pounds a story from *London Society* — a supplement, not a windfall. What weighs more is what will happen at the end of the year. In three weeks that spring of 1886 he will write a short novel about a consulting detective named Sherlock Holmes: *A Study in Scarlet*. Ward Lock & Co will buy the manuscript on the twentieth of November of the same year for £25 — all rights. Twenty-five pounds, one payment, no royalties. So the most profitable literary character of the twentieth century enters literature.

Doyle writes with an eye on his Edinburgh teacher, Professor Joseph Bell. Bell would diagnose a patient before the patient opened his mouth: from gait, from clothing, from the skin of the hands. Six years later, in 1892, Doyle would write to Bell: “It is most certainly to you that I owe Sherlock

Holmes... round the centre of deduction and inference and observation which I have heard you inculcate I have tried to build up a man.”^{1a}

So a character is born who, one hundred and forty years later, will explain why most corporate projects fail before they are officially announced.

Doyle does not know he is inventing a methodology for the diagnosis of systemic failure. He writes a short novel in three weeks and sells it for twenty-five pounds.

Baker Street, 221B — Sunday morning

“You see, but you do not observe,” Sherlock Holmes will say to Dr. Watson in “A Scandal in Bohemia” five years later, in 1891.

“The distinction is clear. For example, you have frequently seen the steps which lead up from the hall to this room.”

“Frequently.” “How often?” “Well, some hundreds of times.”

“Then how many are there?” “How many? I don’t know.”

“Quite so! You have not observed. And yet you have seen. That is just my point. Now, I know that there are seventeen steps, because I have both seen and observed.”¹

Holmes is the third literary archetype our investigation needs: **the method of recognition**. Verne gave us the pattern of creation; Shelley the pattern of flight; Holmes gives the instrument without which the first two are useless.

Because the most dangerous stage of a disease is not the agony. It is the period of false wellness, when everyone is convinced the patient is healthy.

The previous chapter showed what happens when a creator abandons his creation. FBI Sentinel, Healthcare.gov, BBC DMI: in each case the signs of catastrophe were visible long before the explosion, but someone saw them, and no one observed.

This chapter is about observation. About how to tell a healthy team from a dying one, a living process from a ritual, adaptation from imitation. Seven diagnostic signs — Holmes’s seventeen steps — that everyone sees and no one counts.

Deduction Against Intuition

Holmes was not a genius in the Romantic sense. He was a systematic observer. His method is not a flash of insight but a disciplined sequence: gather the data, eliminate the impossible, and whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth.²

“I never guess,” Holmes says in *The Sign of the Four*. “It is a shocking habit — destructive to the logical faculty.”²

Compare this with how decisions get made in corporate projects: the manager’s intuition, the committee’s consensus, extrapolation from last quarter, the loudest voice in the room. Anything except systematic observation.

Holmes offers the alternative: trust neither the reports nor the metrics nor the presentations. Observe what people *do*, not what they *say*. The first principle of diagnostics: data are collected at the scene of the crime, not in the detective’s office.

Here are seven signs Holmes would notice on the first round.

Sign I: The Dog That Did Not Bark

In the story “Silver Blaze,” Holmes calls the inspector’s attention to “the curious incident of the dog in the night-time.” The inspector objects: “The dog did nothing in the night-time.” Holmes: “That was the curious incident.”³

The dog did not bark because it knew the thief. The most important signal was not in what happened, but in what did *not* happen.

In corporate diagnostics, silence becomes the most alarming symptom. When no one raises problems at retrospectives; when code reviews contain no serious remarks; when every sprint closes “on plan,” and development velocity stays as steady as the heart-monitor of a corpse.

Literature knew this green dashboard a century and a half before the first sprint. The plot of *Dead Souls* (1842) Pushkin gave to Gogol out of a real story: in the Transnistrian town of Bendery, for years, not a single death was registered. The trick was simple — the names of the dead were not struck from the rolls but reassigned to the newly arrived runaway serfs. The statistics showed an immortal population; in the column for “loss,” a spotless zero. That is exactly what a team looks like when it has learned not to enter failure into its reporting: the metric proclaims perfect velocity because everything that would spoil the picture has been carefully removed. Chichikov bought souls that did not exist, on a registry where they were still listed as living, and the whole mechanism held together because the paper had long ago stopped agreeing with the life. A dashboard that has glowed green for half a year is Chichikov’s census: a registry of the living in which half are no longer breathing.

The same dog that did not bark in the stables at King’s Pyland stays silent at the stand-up. Holmes points Inspector Gregory to “the curious behavior of the dog on the night of the crime,” and Gregory is puzzled: “The dog? But it did nothing.” “That was the curious thing,” Holmes replies. Eighteen months without a single blocker on the board — that is the hound that has kept its voice: not proof that all is calm, but proof that whoever carries the anxiety has chosen silence. A team in which no one has brought bad news for half a year has either reached perfection (a probability Holmes would rate

soberly) or has learned that a blocker is a confession of incompetence and has learned to suffer quietly. In either case, the diagnostician should be alarmed not by what is heard, but by what is not.

Healthy teams argue. They break sprints. They raise red flags. Silence means one of two things: the team has achieved perfection (probability near zero), or people have stopped believing they will be heard.

Knight Capital, August 1, 2012. One of the largest market makers on the NYSE. At 9:30 a.m. Eastern the firm activated a new trading algorithm. In forty-five minutes the system took erroneous positions worth about seven billion dollars. Pretax losses came to \$440 million; total write-downs brought the figure to roughly \$460 million.^{4a} The firm lost more than all its cash on hand — \$365 million on the books the night before — which is why it needed \$400 million in rescue financing over the next seventy-two hours.⁴

The SEC investigated and published its findings in 2013. The key detail: at deployment, one of eight servers did not receive the update. On that server the old code remained — a test module called “Power Peg,” unused for nine years, since 2003, but never deleted from the system. When the server received trading signals, Power Peg began executing them under the logic written for the test environment. The result: chaotic trades at market prices in enormous volumes.⁴

The dog that did not bark: **no one asked why nine-year-old dead code was still in production.** Everyone saw Power Peg in the codebase, and no one observed.

The SEC established that Knight Capital lacked adequate deployment-control procedures and did not test the full system before launch.⁴ In Holmes’s language: the crime was not committed by the algorithm. The crime was committed by silence — years of it — about the technical debt everyone saw and no one named.

Sign II: The Mismatch of Evidence

Holmes never forms a theory before he has the facts. “It is a capital mistake to theorize before one has data. Insensibly one begins to twist facts to suit theories, instead of theories to suit facts.”⁵

In corporate diagnostics this shows up like so: the dashboard is green, but the users complain; velocity rises, but time-to-delivery of features lengthens; the team reports high morale, but the best people are leaving.

When the metrics contradict the reality, Holmes always trusts the reality.

Target Canada, 2013–2015. In March 2013 Target Corporation, the second-largest discount retailer in the United States, entered the Canadian market. In the first year 124 stores opened; by the end of 2014 the chain had grown to 133 locations. The combined losses of the Canadian venture exceeded seven billion US dollars, including a pretax write-down of \$5.4 billion.⁶

By January 2015 Target Canada was closed. Completely. All 133 stores. 17,600 employees lost their jobs.⁷

The *Canadian Business* investigation found that the product-information system (SAP) contained data so dirty that stores could not order goods correctly. Sizes, prices, descriptions — all of it error-riddled. Shelves stood empty or filled with the wrong stock, and customers came, saw the emptiness, and left forever.⁸

The mismatch of evidence: **corporate reporting showed that all 133 stores were open and functioning.** Technically that was true — the stores stood, the registers worked, the staff came in. But the shelves were empty because the system that should have filled them was lying about what stock existed, in what quantity, at what price.

Holmes would say: you are looking at the dashboard, and you are not observing the shelf. The metric “133 open stores” is a clue that leads to a dead end. The real clue is Aunt Janine from Montreal, who came for towels and left with nothing.

Target Canada lost seven billion dollars not because management was incompetent, but because *the reporting system was telling a story that did not match physical reality*, and no one wanted to go to the store and look at the shelves. Data replaced observation, and the dashboard replaced Baker Street.

Sign III: Conway’s Law as Forensic Evidence

In 1968 Melvin Conway published an observation that became a law: “Organizations which design systems are constrained to produce designs which are copies of the communication structures of these organizations.”⁹

Holmes would have appreciated the elegance. If you want to understand what is wrong with a product, do not look at the code. Look at the organization chart. The code is only the shadow the organization casts on the monitor.

Conway’s Law is not a theory. It is a piece of forensic evidence — a fingerprint pointing without error at the perpetrator.

If your application programming interface consists of seven incompatible endpoints, there is a strong chance the company has seven teams that do not speak to one another. If the user journey passes through three different interfaces with three different designs, three different departments run them, with three different heads. If deployment requires coordinating five repositories, look for five managers, each defending his territory.

The product becomes a mirror of the organization, and a broken mirror unfailingly reflects a broken organization.

Back to Target Canada. The SAP system, deployed to run the Canadian stores, was configured by a team in Minneapolis for a Canadian reality that team did not understand. The Canadian tax regime, the

bilingual labeling, the metric system — all of it was “just configuration” for people who had never bought milk in liters.⁸

Conway’s Law predicted the failure. An American organization built a system that reflected an American understanding of the Canadian market. The organization’s structure American, the data’s structure American, the understanding of the customer American. Melvin Conway could have delivered the diagnosis in 1968, forty-five years before the first store opened.

Sign IV: The Missing Patient

Holmes always begins with the question: *who* is the victim? Not “what went wrong,” but “who suffered.” This is not sentiment. It is method: the victim points to the motive, and the motive to the perpetrator.

In corporate diagnostics the victim is the user, and the most alarming sign arrives exactly when the user stops being talked about.

Listen to the conversations on your team. If the words “user,” “customer,” “buyer” turn up less often than “process,” “framework,” “methodology,” the patient has gone missing, and the team is treating itself, having forgotten the sick.

Gerald Weinberg showed as early as 1971 that if developers do not meet users, they inevitably build a system for themselves.¹⁰ Not out of malice — out of absence of data. Holmes cannot solve a case without visiting the scene of the crime. A developer cannot build a product without seeing the user.

Lidl and SAP: a five-hundred-million-euro system for a nonexistent user. In 2018 the German discounter Lidl halted the implementation of an SAP inventory-management system after seven years of work and expenditures the press estimated at €500 million.¹¹

The reason, per *Handelsblatt* (July 2018): Lidl was trying to make SAP work by Lidl’s purchasing logic, while SAP demanded that Lidl restructure itself around SAP’s logic. Seven years of compromises that satisfied neither the system nor the business.¹¹

The missing patient: **the Lidl warehouse worker who decides each morning how many yogurts to order.** That person is the end user of a half-billion-euro system, and nobody asked him.

Instead, they asked the SAP consultants (what can the system do?), the finance directors (what is the budget?), and the IT architects (what is the architecture?) — all the right questions, addressed to the wrong people. Holmes never begins an investigation by interrogating the suspect’s attorneys. He goes to the scene of the crime and speaks with the witnesses.

Sign V: The Evidence of Time

Holmes records not only *what* happened but *when*. The chronology is the skeleton of the case.

In project diagnostics, time tells more than any report. How much time passes from idea to prototype, from prototype to user, from bug discovery to bug fix?

The DORA (DevOps Research and Assessment) study, published by Google Cloud in 2023, classifies teams into four performance levels. Elite teams deploy on demand, several times a day; their lead time — from commit to production — is less than one day. Low-performing teams deploy once a month or less; lead time is one to six months; recovery from an incident takes a week or more.¹²

The difference is not a percentage. It is an order of magnitude.

But the most telling metric is not the deploy speed. It is **the time to recover from a failure**. Elite teams recover in an hour. Low-performing teams take a week or more.¹²

Holmes would say: the speed at which an organization corrects its errors tells you more than the speed at which it creates something new. Creation is ambition. Correction is character.

Knight Capital recovered in forty-five minutes, and too late — \$440 million was lost beyond recall (pretax; the final write-down reached roughly \$460 million). Healthcare.gov took two months to recover. BBC DMI never recovered. The recovery timeline is a reliable indicator of organizational health.

If your team needs a week to fix a critical bug, that is not a technical diagnosis. It is an organizational one. Somewhere between discovery and fix sit people who approve, sign off, plan, defer, and wait — instead of fixing.

Sign VI: The Watson Effect

Watson is not merely a narrator. He is a mirror in which Holmes sees his own blind spots. Watson asks “stupid” questions that turn out to be the most important; he notices the human where Holmes sees only the logic.

Every team needs a Watson — a person unafraid to say, “I don’t understand why we are doing this.” Not out of incompetence. Because if he does not understand, probably nobody understands, and the rest are too embarrassed to admit it.

When the Watson leaves a team — the person who asks the awkward question — what remains is an echo chamber. Everyone agrees, everyone is certain, and nobody checks the base assumptions.

Frederick Brooks described the effect in *The Mythical Man-Month*: “Adding manpower to a late software project makes it later.”¹³ But Brooks’s less-quoted observation matters more: large teams lose the capacity to communicate, because the number of channels grows as $n(n - 1)/2$.¹³ A team of five has ten channels. A team of fifty has 1,225. And at 1,225 channels, no one can be Watson to everyone.

In a small team, Watson is natural. Anyone can ask, “Why?” In a large organization, “why” requires a meeting, a presentation, a business case, and approval. By the time the question finally gets asked, the answer is already stale.

Target Canada was lost in its 1,225 channels. Knight Capital was lost in the silence of a team that saw the dead code and did not ask the question. Lidl was lost in a seven-year project where nobody asked the warehouse worker, “Does this work for you?”

Sign VII: Physical Evidence — the git log

Holmes trusts evidence, not testimony. Testimony is subjective, biased, forgetful. Evidence is objective.

In a software project there is one piece of evidence that cannot be faked: **the git log**.

The commit history tells a truth no stand-up will tell — who really writes the code, how large the changes are, how often master gets broken, who reviews and whether reviews happen at all. None of it needs to be asked of people. It is visible in a journal that has not learned to answer the way the manager wants.

Commit frequency is the easiest to read. If the last commit in a critical module is dated six months back, the module is dead, whatever the quarterly report says about it. If, on the other hand, the commits come every hour with messages like “fix,” “fix2,” “fix final,” “fix final final” — that too is a diagnosis, just the opposite one: the team is in a panic. Commit size adds the next layer. Average commit of 2,000 lines is not iteration; it is a big bang disguised as regular work. A commit of three lines means the reverse: the team is afraid to change anything serious. Healthy size sits between the extremes.

Authorship. If 80 percent of commits belong to one person, the bus factor is one. That person leaves and the project stops. Not because the others are incompetent — because they have stopped touching the code they consider “someone else’s.”

Commit messages. “WIP,” “asdf,” “tmp,” “please work” — a cry for help encoded in metadata. Compare with “Refactor auth module to support OAuth2 flow.” The second team knows what it is doing and why.

Holmes would not guess whether the project was healthy. He would open the git log and know the answer in five minutes.

Against Diagnostics

A thesis to enrage the management consultants: **most diagnostic frameworks are part of the disease, not the cure.**

Maturity models (CMM, CMMI), Agile assessments, organizational-readiness scorecards — they all propose one approach: rate yourself on a scale of one to five, identify areas for development, put together an improvement plan.

Holmes would laugh. Asking a sick organization to diagnose itself is like asking the suspect to conduct his own interrogation.

Organizations lie to themselves not out of malice but out of systemic distortion. Leadership overestimates health, because otherwise action would be required. Middle management understates problems, because otherwise it gets blamed. Rank-and-file employees stay quiet, because otherwise they get fired. Each level filters the information, and by the time it reaches the decision-maker, only a groomed shadow of reality remains.

Nokia fell exactly this way. Vuori and Huy called it “distributed attention.”¹⁴ When an organization is so large that no single person sees the whole picture, responsibility dissolves. Everyone owns a fragment; nobody owns the whole.

Holmes never relied on the client’s self-assessment. He observed. He counted the steps, noticed the mud on the boots, paid attention to the dogs that did not bark.

Real diagnosis has to be external and hard, based on facts, not on impressions.

From Diagnostics to Treatment

Three chapters have accumulated three different instruments. Verne showed how to build living systems through increments, feedback, and adaptation. Shelley showed what happens to those systems when they are abandoned. And Holmes gave the way to recognize the disease before the autopsy.

But a diagnosis is not a treatment. Knowing the project is sick is necessary and not sufficient. Holmes solved crimes; he never prevented them. He arrived *after* the deed was done. His method works for the observer who reaches the crime scene, not for the builder who wants there to be no crime.

The next act asks a different question: not “how did we get here,” but “how do we get out.” Not the literary archaeology of failures, but the living practice of teams that manage to stay alive in the conditions killing their neighbors. We leave Baker Street and go where teams have learned to observe themselves.

To be continued. In the next chapter: a librarian from Buenos Aires who described your sprint estimation in 1941, sixty years before it was invented. A lottery in which what is drawn is not money but productivity. A theater in which OKRs play themselves. And teams so absorbed in measuring speed that they forgot to look at where they were driving. Holmes counted seventeen steps. Borges will count your story points.

Footnotes:

¹ Arthur Conan Doyle. “A Scandal in Bohemia” (1891). *The Strand Magazine*. Canonical English text used directly (the dialogue on the seventeen steps is one of the classic examples of Holmes’s method). The Russian edition quotes these lines in Russian translation; the English edition restores Conan Doyle’s original.

^{1a} Doyle, Arthur Conan. Letter to Joseph Bell, May 1892. Verbatim from the original English (attested via ACD encyclopedia and University of Edinburgh archive references). Full quotation: “It is most certainly to you that I owe Sherlock Holmes... round the centre of deduction and inference and observation which I have heard you inculcate I have tried to build up a man.”

² Doyle, Arthur Conan. *The Sign of the Four* (1890). Spencer Blackett, London. Canonical English text: “I never guess. It is a shocking habit — destructive to the logical faculty.” (Ch. 1.)

³ Doyle, Arthur Conan. “Silver Blaze” (1892). *The Strand Magazine*. Canonical English: “the curious incident of the dog in the night-time.” (Full exchange with Inspector Gregory, verbatim from the story.)

⁴ SEC Administrative Proceeding File No. 3-15570, October 16, 2013. “In the Matter of Knight Capital Americas LLC.” Canonical English text of the SEC enforcement action used directly for procedural detail; author’s summary of the Power Peg incident preserved in body. Fine imposed: \$12 million. Deployment-control deficiencies and the reactivation of dormant test code documented in the enforcement order.

^{4a} Loss figures per Knight Capital 8-K filing (August 2, 2012) and subsequent SEC filings: \$440 million pretax trading loss; total write-downs and remediation costs reached approximately \$460 million. Firm’s cash on hand the night before: \$365 million (per SEC filings). Emergency rescue capital: \$400 million from Jefferies-led investor group (August 6, 2012).

⁵ Doyle, Arthur Conan. “A Scandal in Bohemia” (1891). *The Strand Magazine*. Canonical English text: “It is a capital mistake to theorize before one has data. Insensibly one begins to twist facts to suit theories, instead of theories to suit facts.” (The line often misattributed to *A Study in Scarlet*, in which Doyle uses a shorter variant of the same thought.)

⁶ Target Corporation Annual Report 2014 and *The Globe and Mail*, January 15, 2015. Total Canadian-venture investment exceeded \$7 billion USD; pretax write-down reached \$5.4 billion. Canonical English text used directly from public financial disclosures.

⁷ Canadian Press, January 15, 2015. “Target Canada closing: A timeline of the U.S. retailer’s disastrous Canadian venture.” The 17,600-employee figure comes from Target Corporation’s official statement.

⁸ Castaldo, Joe. “The Last Days of Target Canada.” *Canadian Business*, January 2016. Detailed investigation of the SAP-system data problems. Canonical English text of the reporting used directly.

⁹ Conway, Melvin. “How Do Committees Invent?” *Datamation*, April 1968. Original English formulation of Conway’s Law used directly: “Organizations which design systems are constrained to

produce designs which are copies of the communication structures of these organizations.”

¹⁰ Weinberg, Gerald. *The Psychology of Computer Programming* (1971). Van Nostrand Reinhold. Observations on the relationship between developers and users. Author’s paraphrase from the RU master; canonical English text in Weinberg’s book, especially Chs. 3–4.

¹¹ *Handelsblatt*, July 2018 (primary source for the €500 million figure and the eLWIS project chronology); *Computerwoche*, 2018; *Lebensmittel Zeitung*, 2018. Canonical English text of the reporting used directly where available; German-language originals cited for the primary figures. The eLWIS project halted July 2018 after seven years and approximately €500 million ($\approx$ \$580–600 million). Lidl reverted to the previous Wawi system.

¹² Accelerate: State of DevOps Report. Google Cloud / DORA, 2023. Canonical English text used directly. Classification of teams into four levels: Elite, High, Medium, Low. Deployment frequency, lead time for changes, mean time to recover, and change failure rate — the four metrics.

¹³ Brooks, Frederick. *The Mythical Man-Month: Essays on Software Engineering* (1975). Addison-Wesley. Canonical English quotation: “Adding manpower to a late software project makes it later” — Brooks’s Law. Communication-channel formula $n(n - 1)/2$ discussed in Chapter 2.

¹⁴ Vuori, Timo O., and Quy Nguyen Huy. “Distributed Attention and Shared Emotions in the Innovation Process: How Nokia Lost the Smartphone Battle.” *Administrative Science Quarterly*, Vol. 61, No. 1 (2016), pp. 9–51. Canonical English text of the study used directly. Study of the Nokia dissolution and the mechanisms of organizational attention.

Intermezzo I. The Consulting Suite



***What this intermezzo is about.** A satirical diagnosis of the agile theater through Carroll and Bulgakov. A consultancy where forty-three teams, two hundred and eight sprints, and twelve hundred retros a month do not produce a single product. Sprints for the sake of retros, retros for the sake of planning the next sprints. «Seven roles coordinating the work of one person with himself» — and that is called a mature process. A literary mirror for anyone who has ever sat through a Program Increment Planning.*

Alice climbed the stairs to the sign «Center for Agile Transformation» in Moscow-City, tower «Federation,» forty-second floor, and found a spacious room with a panoramic view of the Ring Road: precisely the kind of room one expects in a place that transforms everything except results. Around a round table of Karelian birch sat three: an elegant consultant in a Bosco suit, a huge striped cat, and a short man with a nervous tic.

The consultant gestured toward a Herman Miller chair.

«Come in, make yourself comfortable. We were just discussing methodology optimization. You have arrived at the height of our intellectual process. Coffee? We have Illy, the machine cost nine hundred thousand roubles.»

The cat was importantly slicing a caviar sandwich with a knife and fork of German silver, demonstrating the level of operational discipline so rarely encountered in agile teams.

The consultant explained: «Behemoth is our chief technology officer. Korzhikov is our senior Scrum Master, certified, all that. And what is your name?»

«Alice. And what do you do here?»

Korzhikov twitched: the question had evidently caught him in the middle of especially complex reflections on process.

«We roll out agile methodologies! We have forty-three teams, two hundred and eight sprints a month, twelve hundred retros.»

Alice asked with an innocence that in the agile environment is considered bad form:

«And how many products do you ship?»

A silence set in so complete that even the Daikin air conditioning seemed too loud.

The cat purred without looking up from the sandwich: «Sire, the girl is asking the wrong questions.»

The consultant nodded: «Behemoth is right. We measure velocity metrics, burndown charts, story points. Products are waterfall thinking, an outdated approach for those who do not understand modern realities.»

Alice was baffled: «Then why the sprints?»

Korzhikov explained joyfully: «To do retros! And retros so we can plan the next sprint!»

The cat picked up the thread, sipping something clear from a saucer, evidently something bracing to the transformational spirit: «And the next sprint to do retros.»

The consultant added importantly: «This is called continuous improvement. Yesterday we rolled out the SAFe framework. You know, Scaled Agile Framework. Now we have Program Increment Planning every two months.»

«And what do you plan?»

Korzhikov answered: «We plan the planning of the next planning. We have a very complex organizational structure, you see. Tribes, guilds, squads.»

Alice observed: «Like the middle ages.»

The consultant corrected her: «Spotify model, dear. The most modern methodology. Every tribe has its Chapter Lead, every guild has a Guild Master, and they coordinate through a Tribe Lead by way of a matrix reporting structure that provides full transparency of decision-making processes.»

«And how many people are being coordinated?»

Korzhikov answered with pride: «Seven. But we have complete traceability of decision-making processes.»

«Seven people need tribes and guilds?»

The consultant corrected her with the patience of a man who had already explained this many times to investors and audit committees: «Not seven people. Seven roles. People can combine roles. This is called a cross-functional approach. Korzhikov, for instance, is simultaneously Scrum Master, Product Proxy, and acting Release Train Engineer.»

The cat chuckled and began to wash himself with a paw.

«And what do the other four roles do?»

«They coordinate Korzhikov's work with himself,» the consultant explained with the pride of an architect. «We have a very mature collective decision-making process.»

«Sire, wouldn't you like to show the girl our kanban board?»

The consultant waved his hand, and a huge board appeared on the wall: a work of contemporary management art. The columns: «To Do,» «In Progress,» «Code Review,» «Testing,» «Ready for Deployment,» «Blocked,» «Waiting for Approval,» «On Hold.»

Alice admitted: «Beautiful. And what is in the columns?»

«One task,» Korzhikov answered proudly. «“Set up the CI/CD pipeline.” Has been hanging for eight months.»

«In which column?»

«In all of them at once,» the cat explained. «We apply the quantum agile approach. The task is in a superposition of all possible states until someone tries to execute it.»

«And has anyone tried?»

«That would violate the Heisenberg uncertainty principle,» the consultant said severely. «We have a dedicated Observer role, who ensures that no one collapses the wave function of our processes.»

«And who is this Observer?»

«Korzhikov,» the cat answered, returning to the sandwich. «He observes himself. A very reflective process.»

Alice looked with confusion at the board, then at the trio at the table.

«What if you tried just to do something useful? Without boards and retros?»

Korzhikov was horrified: «What do you mean, without boards?»

«That is anarchy,» the consultant said severely. «We have processes. Governance. Compliance.»

«And very tasty sausage with breakfast,» the cat added, finishing the sandwich.

Alice carefully stood and headed toward the exit, trying not to disturb the quantum agile balance. Behind her came:

«Korzhikov, begin the retrospective. Let us discuss why the girl did not appreciate our transformation roadmap.»

«And what exactly are we to discuss?» Korzhikov asked himself.

«Well, first,» he answered himself in a different voice, «we shall conduct a stakeholder engagement analysis. Second, we shall document lessons learned in external user communication.»

«And third?» he asked himself in a third voice.

«And third,» all three voices of Korzhikov answered in chorus, «we shall plan a workshop to improve the planning of workshops.»

«And I shall slice more sausage in the meantime,» the cat added. «And create an Epic in Jira called *Sausage Initiative* with subtasks. Slicing, arrangement, presentation to stakeholders.»

¹ The retinue of Woland (Woland, Behemoth, Koroviev, Azazello, Hella, and Margarita) from Bulgakov, Mikhail. *The Master and Margarita* (written 1928–1940; first published in *Moskva* magazine, 1966–1967; complete edition 1969) appears in these intermezzi as a satirical device. Bulgakov died 1940; the Russian original entered the public domain in 2010 (life+70). Character names are given in their canonical English renderings, per Michael Glenny's 1967 translation (Collins), the standard early English version; the Pevear-Volokhonsky (1997) and Karpelson (2006) translations are the standard modern references. Passages here render new dialogue in the author's own English for voice-register consistency across the series; no verbatim quotation from copyrighted contemporary English translations, per the rule established in chapter 4 note 1.

Chapter 4: Borges Counts Story Points



What this chapter does. The paradox of Agile measurement. How metrics meant to increase agility become a lottery — a system so complex that no one remembers why it started. From the Spotify Model to SAFe, from OKR theater to velocity gaming — an anatomy of the measurement madness.

Meeting Room 7, Sprint Planning

The product manager for mobile banking looks at the story-points board and understands: the system has devoured the team.

It started simply. Two years ago velocity helped with planning — thirty-five points per sprint, steady, predictable. Now four diagrams hang on the wall: velocity by team, story-point inflation, capacity planning, burndown by epic. Planning eats eight hours out of the sprint. Thirty-two are left for development.

“What about five points?” a junior developer asks. “No, it’s definitely eight,” the senior answers. “Remember that API task last sprint?” “Which one exactly?” “Well... the complex one.”

The product manager shuffles the planning-poker cards and thinks about Jorge Luis Borges.

Borges, 1941: in the story “The Lottery in Babylon,” a society is drawn into a game that comes to swallow all of its aspects.¹ It began simply — cash prizes. Then fines. Then offices, sentences, mar-

riages. Every drawing spawned offshoots — secondary lotteries, lotteries to determine the rules of other lotteries, lotteries to void the results.

By the end of the story the boundary has evaporated — the system, first conceived as chance inside an order, *became* the order. The instrument had finally defeated its own purpose.

The Borgesian narrator confesses that he does not know how many stories the lottery has, or which story is accessible to him. The ignorance is not a lapse of memory. It is a symptom of a system that has outgrown the understanding of its own participants.

He knows the feeling — he does not remember why the team started counting story points. He remembers only that it is now mandatory: for reporting, for forecasting, for KPIs. Seventy years before the appearance of SAFe, Borges described corporate methodology more precisely than any contemporary consultant.

Holmes (Ch.3) gave us a method — seven signs of a project's illness. But he works with evidence and does not put the principled question: *what if the instrument of observation itself distorts what is observed?*

Borges puts the question directly. He shows Babylon not as chaos but as *an order that has grown into chaos* — where the lottery is no longer chance but a measurement that has fully lost its connection to what is measured.

The chapter asks a concrete question: how did the Agile metrics — velocity, story points, OKRs, burndown charts — instruments of agility — turn into a Babylonian lottery? A system where teams spend more hours servicing it than creating a product?

Thesis: **a measurement meant to increase agility inevitably reduces it, as soon as it becomes the goal.**

Charles Goodhart (1975) formulated the law: any observed statistical regularity tends to collapse once pressure is placed upon it for management purposes.² Twenty-two years later Marilyn Strathern minted the same thought into a short formula that has since been cited in place of Goodhart's: "When a measure becomes a target, it ceases to be a good measure."³ She showed that this concerns not only economics but education, health care, and administration.

Borges, thirty-four years before Goodhart, showed the same mechanic — he simply called it a lottery.

The Lottery of Metrics

Velocity: The First Drawing

The team lead of a fintech startup remembers how it all began. Summer 2022 — a team of five, velocity 30 points — pure arithmetic as an internal calibration tool. If the sprint is 30 points, three features take three sprints. Simple.

The problem: the lottery in Babylon does not stay simple, and velocity — does not stay internal.

Fall 2022 — the first mutation. The head of development sees the dashboard: Frontend team, 40 points. Backend team, 25. The logic is airtight — Frontend is more efficient. The team lead tries to explain: “We’re comparing Celsius with Fahrenheit and declaring America the hotter one.” The head of development nods and asks Backend to “pull up the numbers.”

Winter 2023 — the second mutation. Velocity becomes part of the department’s KPI. The team lead watches the team begin to game the system. The task “Integration with the bank API” (3 points) turns into “Set up the test environment” (2 points) + “Write the API client” (2 points) + “Handle the errors” (1 point). Velocity climbs from 30 to 45. The volume of work does not change.

“Excellent trajectory,” says the head of development at the review. “We haven’t accelerated anything,” the team lead answers. “The numbers say otherwise.”

Story-point inflation is a standard problem, documented at [Scrum.org](#), [Age of Product](#), [LinearB](#), and elsewhere.⁴ The team lead had read about it on the blogs — encountering it personally is a different experience.

Borges caught the mechanic: “as the lottery expanded, every free act was included in its sphere.”¹ Velocity had grown out of being a tool and into being a sphere that absorbed every act of the team. A technical decision had become a political act.

Story Points: A Language That Has Lost Its Meaning

“And what does five points mean?” a new developer asks at his first planning. “Well, more than three, less than eight,” the team lead answers. “And what does eight mean?” “A complex task. Remember the database migration last sprint?” “I wasn’t working here yet.”

Borges in “The Library of Babel” described an infinite library containing all possible books — every combination of letters. And so the library is useless: when everything exists, finding the specific thing is impossible.⁵

Story points are the same Babylonian library. A system that, by meaning everything, means nothing.

On the wall of the meeting room hangs a “Definition of Done.” No “Definition of Points.” What is five points? For frontend — a day. For backend — a week. For QA — “depends on how many bugs we find.” The Fibonacci numbers (1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13) are chosen not for their thirteenth-century relation to complexity estimation, but for non-linearity — a reflection of uncertainty. Medieval mathematics used to measure what does not yield to measurement.

Every other Wednesday — two hours on planning poker. Seven adults show cards with numbers — a children’s game — to estimate a task no one has begun. One shows 5, another 8, a third 3. A “discussion” begins. Each explains his figure through a metaphor from a past experience the others do not remember.

“I put 8, because it’s like that OAuth task...” “Which one exactly?” “Well, the complex one.”

Borges anticipated the absurdity — the true cost of that absurdity is measured in team hours. The team lead’s arithmetic: $7 \text{ people} \times 2 \text{ hours} \times 26 \text{ sprints} = 364 \text{ hours}$ a year on card divination. Two months of development — spent estimating development.

The Spotify Model: The Model That Does Not Work Even at Spotify

The HR director of a major bank flies to Stockholm to study the “legendary model.” 2019 — a delegation, a budget that would later have to be justified. The goal: to implement the Spotify Model back home.

On the plane she rereads the Kniberg–Ivarsson document: Squads, Tribes, Chapters, Guilds.⁶ The transformation plan is already drawn — HR has designed the new org chart, IT has commissioned an office redesign for the “tribal” model, top management is awaiting the result.

First day at Spotify. The guide — not Kniberg, he left three years ago — walks the office: “This zone was for Tribe A, but there are mixed teams here now.” “And the Chapter Lead from the presentation?” “Ah, that role has transformed. We have a different structure now.”

She rereads the first paragraph of the document: “This article is only a snapshot of our current way of working... by the time you read this, things have already changed.”⁶ A warning everybody ignores.

In the hotel that evening she opens the analysis by Jeremiah Lee — a former PM at Spotify. The document describes an idealized state Spotify had not reached even at the moment of publication. The squads themselves were reorganizing, tribes shifting, guilds losing activity.⁷ Kniberg himself, for ten years after publication, kept reminding people: it is a snapshot, not a blueprint.

The most painful discovery — Spotify silently used the document as a recruiting tool while the internal reality had long since differed.⁸ She understands: they are copying the advertising brochure.

Here is the Babylonian lottery in action — a snapshot of one company becomes canon for thousands of others, the context evaporates, and only the structure without the understanding remains.

Conway (Ch.3): the organization reproduces its structure in the product. The “Spotify Model” is an attempt at the inverse — copy the structure and get somebody else’s product. This is a fundamental error. The Spotify structure reflected Spotify’s culture, the Swedish market, particular people, a particular moment. To copy the structure without the culture is like copying the restaurant and expecting the food to taste the same.

SAFe: The State Religion

If the “Spotify Model” was a naive lottery, SAFe is its logical evolution — the lottery that has obtained official state status.

SAFe 6.0 — four configurations (Essential, Large Solution, Portfolio, Full), dozens of roles and ceremonies.⁹ The “Big Picture” resembles the subway map of a ghost city. Everything connected, everything labeled — and meaningless without context.

The scaling paradox — the methodology of simplicity and self-organization inevitably produces layers of management.¹⁰

Borges on SAFe: “the lottery obeys the Company; of the Company’s inner workings only conjecture is heard”¹ — replace “the Company” with “Scaled Agile, Inc.” and you get the portrait of thousands of organizations implementing a commercial framework. Borges further calls the lottery “an interpolation of chance into the order of the world.”

The question — does SAFe create authentic value, or does it mark chaos under the label of “managed complexity”?

Nokia (Ch.2) lost the smartphone market out of fear, and simultaneously (2008–2010) was rolling out a large-scale Agile transformation. Laanti, Salo, and Abrahamsson (2011) described how the transformation was perceived by employees themselves — a broadly positive response.¹¹ The market-share collapse of those same years is documented in Ch.2 (Vuori, Huy, 2016). This is not causation — but the coincidence undermines the promise that “Agile at scale saves.”

OKRs: The Cargo Cult

The CPO of an e-commerce company sits over the quarterly OKRs and feels like a Melanesian shaman building a straw airplane.

Q1 2024. The CPO reads John Doerr’s manual: OKRs are a tool of focus (Intel, Google).¹² Precisely a *tool*, not a religion. But what happens at the company more resembles a cargo cult.

January — the quarterly ceremony. The CPO writes into the Confluence template: - O1: “Become the leader in the fashion e-commerce segment.” - KR1: “Increase market share to 15%.” - KR2: “Raise NPS to 75.”

The text is beautiful, ambitious, entirely disconnected from reality. The CPO knows the document will be opened in March (review) and June (the next planning). Between the two — ordinary work on ordinary tasks.

February — the cascade. The chain of transformations — “leadership in fashion” → “improve conversion” → “optimize the catalog” → “refactor the search” → JIRA ticket 15247 “Fix the price sort.” The developer looks at the ticket and wonders — what does a bug fix have to do with market leadership?

“This is a strategically important task,” the CPO explains. “But it’s a routine bug...” “Everything is connected to the OKR.”

March — the assessment. The CPO gives himself 0.4 out of 1.0. By Doerr’s rule a good result is 0.7, and 1.0 means insufficient ambition.¹² The paradox — “success = partial failure.” How to explain to the general director that 40 percent completion of the goal is normal?

“We have execution problems,” the general director says. “No, this is deliberately loaded ambition...” “Sounds like an excuse for failure.”

Wodtke (2016): OKRs work in cultures that accept failure.¹³ Most corporations do not have that culture — and in such an environment OKRs turn into a lottery with penalties.

Borges warned: some — with a stubbornness worthy of a better cause — think the lottery does not exist at all.

Retrospective Theater

The scrum master of a game-development studio arranges stickers and thinks of the theater of the absurd. Friday, 4 p.m., meeting room “Mario.” The seventh retrospective in a row with the same ending.

A retrospective in theory is an analysis of successes and failures. The reflection Hetzel and Verne (1870, Ch.1) knew as a conversation over dinner about the print run. In practice — a theater with an unchanging repertoire.

Act I — the sticker liturgy. The scrum master draws three columns on the flip chart:  /  / . The team obediently fills them in. - A green sticker from the senior: “Good work on the inventory system.” - A red sticker from a developer: “Too many meetings.” - The yellow column is empty (as always).

“Why does nobody write neutral moments?” a new hire asks. “And what is there to write?” the senior shrugs. “What went normally went normally.”

Act II — the reading. The developer reads her red sticker. “Again, too many meetings. Planning, grooming, stand-ups, retrospectives...” Nods of understanding. The same sticker was there in September, October, November, December. “And which meetings specifically are excess?” the scrum master clarifies. “Well... various ones. Overall, a lot.”

Act III — action items as lottery. The scrum master writes on the board: “Reduce the number of meetings.” Owner — unassigned. Deadline — undefined. Success criterion — blurry. “Agreed, we will plan our time more effectively,” the scrum master resumes.

Two weeks later at the new retrospective the familiar red sticker appears again: “Too many meetings.” The scrum master looks at her notes — the action item from the previous retro has been forgotten by everyone, including herself.

So the retrospective becomes a ritual instead of a reflection — not final, but endless. Nothing bears responsibility, forming a closed loop: stickers → action items → new retrospectives → fresh stickers. The lottery Borges described was also arranged so that it never was the last.

Weinberg (Ch.3) notes — when developers lose contact with users, they begin to design the system for themselves. In the same way, retrospectives that have stopped changing anything are conducted for self-consolation.

Against Measurements

Most metrics of agile methods cause more harm than good.

Muller, 2018: performance metrics inevitably lead to manipulation of the indicators — hospitals begin refusing serious patients, schools expel weak students, the police reclassify crimes.¹⁴

Donald Campbell in 1979 formulated the law later named after him: the more widely a quantitative indicator is used for social decisions, the more it is subject to pressure that distorts the very process it was meant to measure.¹⁵ Velocity gaming, story-point inflation, and OKR cascading — the law in action.

If Holmes (Ch.3) saw in measurement the symptoms of illness, Borges goes further — the instruments of observation themselves become the illness.

DORA (Google Cloud, 2023) avoids velocity, story points, and OKRs, proposing four outcome metrics instead¹⁶ — deployment frequency, lead time (from commit to production), time to recover from failure, and the percentage of failed changes. All four are tied to objective reality — the system is either deployed or not — and gaming is difficult.

DORA works precisely because it excludes side measurements, cascading, and ceremonies, leaving four objective, unambiguous numbers. Brooks (Ch.3) would approve of such simplification — the $n(n-1)/2$ channels of communication reduced to four indicators.

The Pattern of the Lottery: Instrument → Institution

Borges describes a universal pattern of degradation through four phases with imperceptible transitions.

Phase 1: A useful tool. Velocity helps, story points simplify, OKRs focus — while it works, everything is valuable. But then comes institutionalization — “we use velocity” turns into “everyone is obliged to report on velocity”; “we need a retrospective” turns into “every two weeks.” The useful becomes the obligatory.

Phase 2: The metric becomes the target. Velocity turns into a KPI, OKRs into the basis of assessment, the retrospective into reporting. Goodhart’s law confirms itself — the instruments begin to optimize themselves.

Phase 3: The lottery. The metric system becomes so complex that no one remembers why it started. Hours are spent on estimation, grooming, planning poker, alignment of goals, building diagrams — and under the sticker ● the familiar “too many meetings” appears again.

Borges does not deny the lottery — he only reminds us that we know about its inner mechanics exactly as much as about any other large system laid on top of our lives. Applied to the corporate reality, that description turns out to be exact.

From Measurement to Practice

The product manager finishes another sprint planning at 7:15 p.m. The team leaves for home. On the board the numbers remain — 42 story points, planned velocity 38, confidence level 0.7.

He switches off the projector and thinks about Borges. The first act is complete — Verne showed creation, Shelley the price of forgetting, Holmes diagnostics, Borges how **the apparatus of observation itself becomes the illness**. When the measurement-as-goal destroys what is being measured.

Beyond the window the competitors’ offices have gone dark. Somewhere out there are teams that write code instead of estimating code. That solve users’ problems instead of optimizing metrics. That did not drown in their own lottery.

The team lead from the fintech in the next building thinks the same thought, locking the meeting room after the retrospective. The HR director flies home from Stockholm understanding: they were copying the instruction manual for an airplane that no longer exists. The CPO finishes the OKRs for the next quarter and knows — it is theater, but the theater has to be played.

The trap — velocity turns into the optimization of velocity, OKRs into a ritual, story points into a philosophical dispute. The result — a Babylonian lottery, where the instrument devours the goal.

The exit exists — teams that measure without submitting to measurement. That apply processes without deifying them.

To be continued. In the next chapter: a captain who conducted not a single interview by regulation — and assembled the best crew of the world ocean. A submarine against an aircraft carrier worth two trillion. Selection by capacity against selection by conformity. And an organization that needs no Company. The lottery stays in Babylon. The Nautilus goes deep.

Footnotes:

¹ Borges, Jorge Luis. “La lotería en Babilonia” (1941). In *Ficciones* (1944). Editorial Sur, Buenos Aires. English tradition knows the title as “The Lottery in Babylon.” The canonical English translation by Andrew Hurley (Penguin *Collected Fictions*, 1998) is under copyright; quotations here are the translator’s own rendering from the Spanish original as inflected by the RU master (v1.0.15). **Series-**

wide Borges rule (Andrey visa S233, 2026-07-29): canonical restore of copyrighted contemporary translations is forbidden; author's rendering with hedge applies uniformly to all books of the trilogy — see companion Bolik DE §7 for the German mirror of this principle.

² Goodhart, Charles A.E. “Problems of Monetary Management: The U.K. Experience.” *Papers in Monetary Economics*, Reserve Bank of Australia, 1975. Canonical English text used directly. Standard formulation (“Goodhart’s Law”): “Any observed statistical regularity will tend to collapse once pressure is placed upon it for control purposes.”

³ Strathern, Marilyn. “‘Improving Ratings’: Audit in the British University System.” *European Review*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (1997), pp. 305–321. Canonical English text used directly: “When a measure becomes a target, it ceases to be a good measure.”

⁴ Digital.ai. “17th Annual State of Agile Report” (2023). Canonical English text used directly. 36 percent of Agile teams are evaluated by velocity — a structural incentive for gaming. Practical analysis of velocity gaming: Levison, Mark. “Misuse of Velocity in Agile Projects.” AgilePainRelief.com. The 17th report was published in 2023.

⁵ Borges, Jorge Luis. “La biblioteca de Babel” (1941). In *Ficciones* (1944). English tradition knows the title as “The Library of Babel.” Per series-wide Borges rule (see fn.¹), citation only; no canonical restore.

⁶ Kniberg, Henrik, and Anders Ivarsson. “Scaling Agile @ Spotify with Tribes, Squads, Chapters & Guilds.” Spotify Labs whitepaper, October 2012. Canonical English text used directly. The snapshot-not-blueprint caveat appears in the opening of the whitepaper.

⁷ Lee, Jeremiah. “Failed #SquadGoals — Spotify Doesn’t Use ‘the Spotify Model’ and Neither Should You.” jeremiahlee.com, April 2020. Lee is a former PM at Spotify.

⁸ Kniberg, Henrik. Author’s ongoing public reminders across the years: the 2012 whitepaper is a snapshot of a specific moment, not a blueprint. Most known sources: Kniberg’s interview at Agile Amsterdam 2015; the crisp.se blog; repeated presentations 2016–2020. Primary sources for the caveat in the body are the whitepaper itself (⁶) and Kniberg’s interviews at major Agile conferences.

⁹ Scaled Agile, Inc. SAFe 6.0 Framework. scaledagileframework.com (official framework site).

¹⁰ Rigby, Darrell K.; Jeff Sutherland; and Andy Noble. “Agile at Scale.” *Harvard Business Review*, May–June 2018. Canonical English text used directly.

¹¹ Laanti, Marko; Outi Salo; and Pekka Abrahamsson. “Agile Methods Rapidly Replacing Traditional Methods at Nokia: A Survey of Opinions on Agile Transformation.” *Information and Software Technology*, Vol. 53, Issue 3 (2011), pp. 276–290. Canonical English text used directly.

¹² Doerr, John. *Measure What Matters* (2018). Portfolio / Penguin. Canonical English text used directly.

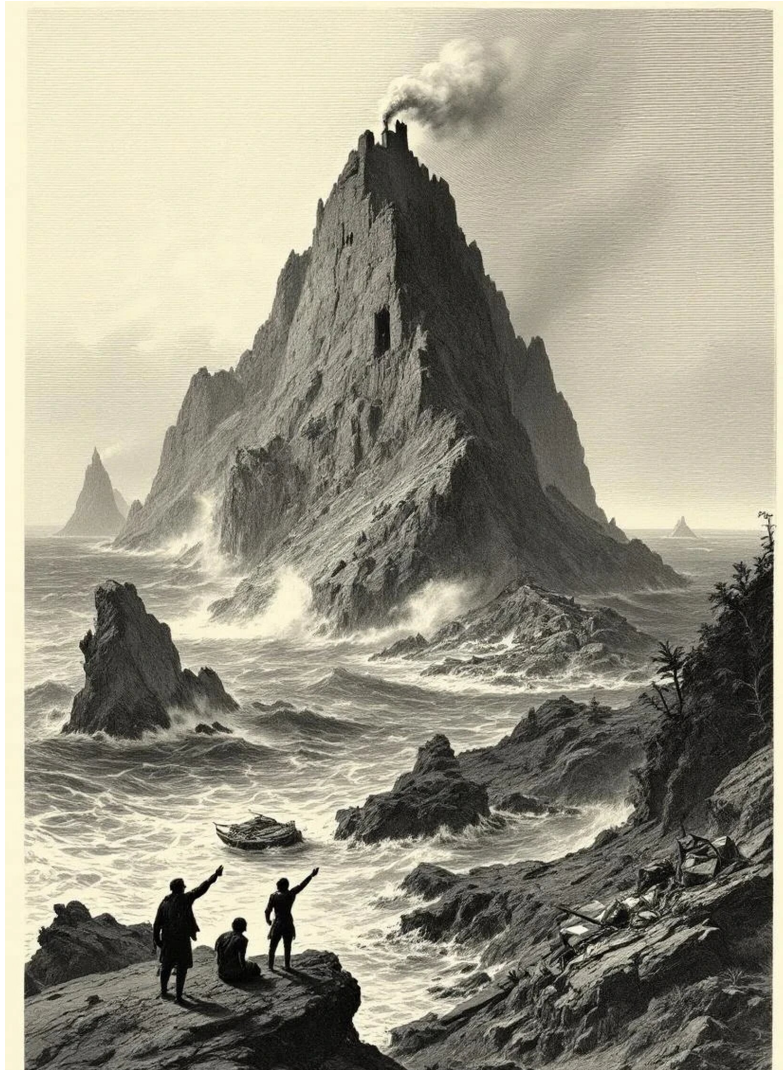
¹³ Wodtke, Christina. *Radical Focus* (2016). Cucina Media. Canonical English text used directly.

¹⁴ Muller, Jerry Z. *The Tyranny of Metrics* (2018). Princeton University Press. Canonical English text used directly.

¹⁵ Campbell, Donald T. “Assessing the Impact of Planned Social Change.” *Evaluation and Program Planning*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (1979), pp. 67–90. Canonical English text used directly.

¹⁶ Accelerate: State of DevOps Report. Google Cloud / DORA, 2023. Canonical English text used directly.

Chapter 5: Cyrus Smith Builds a Civilization



What this chapter does. Bootstrap leadership as a weapon against corporate bureaucracy. How the engineering team of *The Mysterious Island* became the prototype of every successful tiger team — from Skunk Works to the first Macintosh crews — and why the companies that build “islands” outrun the ones that build “cruise liners.”

Amiens, 1873

Jules Verne has just closed the loudest success of his career. *Around the World in Eighty Days* has thundered through the pages of *Le Temps* as a serial and has sold out as a book. Hetzel demands a sequel. But Verne is tired of “planetary tourism.” Fogg circled the globe on ready-made routes — the railways and steamship lines built by other people. The next book will be about the opposite. What happens if you strip away everything ready-made.

“This will be a novel about chemistry,” Verne writes to Hetzel. While the public waits for new adventures, he walks the chemical factories and interrogates the engineers. How to smelt iron from bog ore. How to obtain nitroglycerin. How to fire glass. He builds the novel the same way his heroes will build a civilization — from raw materials and from the knowledge in their heads.

The idea reduces to one line. An island. Five men. No one else. No machines, no ready infrastructure, no procedures. Verne does not yet know that he is inventing the operating model of every future tiger team — from Skunk Works to the first Macintosh crews.

On the island there are no meetings.

Somewhere in the southern Pacific lies an island that does not appear on the maps. On this island, five men do what modern corporations spend armies of consultants and years of reorganization on: they build a civilization from scratch. Without procedures. Without approvals. Without alignment committees.

The team of the island — an engineer, a journalist, a sailor, an inquisitive teenager, and a servant. Five people and one dog. Nobody went through the six-round interview process that runs three to six months in modern corporations. Nobody filled out a personality inventory. Nobody sat through the “culture interview,” in which an HR manager with a psychology degree decides whether your local flavor of neuroticism suits the company. Cyrus Smith simply knows who is capable of what, because the team’s survival depends on competence — not on compatibility with the corporate values on the poster.

The team has no job titles. It has functions. It has no grades. It has tasks that need to be solved today so that tomorrow no one dies. It has no quarterly performance review. It has nature, which will kill you for a mistake faster than any manager can write a performance improvement plan.

Jules Verne serialized *The Mysterious Island* in 1874–1875, a year after the book edition of *Around the World in Eighty Days*. If Fogg from our opening chapter showed how one man applies an iterative approach, Smith shows something more fundamental: how to build a team that does not need a methodology, because it *is* a methodology. Everyone understands why. Everyone knows how. And between the “why” and the “how” — zero intermediate layers.

Not because Smith is a dictator. Because when you need to smelt iron from bog ore, turn it into tools, and use those tools to build a bridge in three days — without Google, without Stack Overflow, without a contractor, without an Agile coach who would explain to the team the importance of the daily stand-up — bureaucracy is not merely inefficient. It is lethal.

The previous four chapters were autopsy reports. Verne the publisher showed how to create the system of serial production his descendants would turn into an assembly line (Chapter 1). Shelley: how creators abandon their creations because they are afraid of responsibility (Chapter 2). Holmes: how to recognize the agony of an organization by the symptoms it carefully hides from the outside

world but demonstrates with every corporate decision (Chapter 3). Borges: how measurements devour what they measure, until the map becomes more important than the territory (Chapter 4).

Act I ended with the diagnosis. Act II begins with the treatment.

And the first medicine is the most radical. Not to reform management. Not to “make it flatter.” Not to “optimize the processes.” Remove it. Wholesale. Replace it with what Cyrus Smith built on the island — a team that manages itself because each of its members is competent enough not to need a supervisor.

We return once more to Verne, but now to Verne the organizer, not Verne the publisher. To the man who in *The Mysterious Island* described a team architecture so precisely that the engineers of Lockheed would copy it seventy years later, not knowing they were copying a French novel.

The thesis of this chapter: **the best projects in the history of technology have worked as autonomous islands, not as cruise liners.** Small bootstrap teams with an engineer-leader outrun armies of managers with presentations.

Middle Management as an Unnecessary Organ

Before we go further — a claim that will enrage everyone who wears the title “Director of...” Middle management in large organizations performs the same function as the appendix in the human body. Possibly once useful. Possibly still helpful in some cases. But mostly — just there, and when it becomes inflamed, it can kill.

Smith did not invent the flat structure. The fashionable “flat organization” removes the plates on the doors but leaves the people who sat behind them. Smith invented something more radical: a structure in which every role is justified by function, not by status. On the island there is no deputy for railway-construction strategy. No Chief Survival Officer. There is an engineer who knows how to smelt iron. There is a journalist who knows how to document processes. A hierarchy exists — Smith leads. But it is justified by expertise, not by title.

Compare that with the typical corporation. Between the engineer writing code and the CEO making the product decision — four to eight management layers. Team lead. Engineering manager. Senior engineering manager — a role that exists so that the engineering manager will have someone to report to as well. Director of engineering. VP of engineering — a person whose main job is to synchronize several directors with one another. SVP of engineering. CTO. CEO. Every layer adds delay to decisions and distortion to the transmission of information. Conway’s Law¹ does not merely apply — it rages. The organization produces systems that copy its communication structure. Eight layers of management produce eight layers of abstraction in the product.

Smith solves the Conway problem trivially: he shortens the communication path to a single step. Engineer and team. Team and engineer. Idea and execution. No intermediate layers, no “expectation alignment,” no “strategy cascading.”

Smith's Principle: Four Laws of the Bootstrap Team

Law One: Hire by Competence, Not by Process

The team of *The Mysterious Island* was not assembled by HR procedures. Cyrus Smith — engineer. Gideon Spilett — journalist. Pencroft — sailor. Herbert — a fifteen-year-old ward of Pencroft with keen natural curiosity. Neb — the universal executor. Each of them made it onto the team not by passing a screening but by possessing skills critical for survival. Verne does not explain the recruitment process further, because there was no process. There was a need for competence and there were people who had it.

The contrast with modern hiring is sobering. In 2026 the path from the first recruiter contact to a start date at a large technology company takes three to six months. Six rounds of interviews. A take-home assignment. Reference checks. A psychometric test that determines whether your anxiety type matches the corporate one. A discussion at the hiring committee. Sign-off on compensation level. Offer letter. Counter-offer. Offer acceptance. A three-month onboarding, during which the new employee learns that half of what he was told at the interview is outdated.

Smith looks at the person. Can the person do what needs to be done today? Does he share the goal of survival? Welcome to the team.

Verne showed this selection in pure form, without a single HR procedure. The team of *The Mysterious Island* came together not through résumés and not through test scores. Pencroft joined because he could handle any ship. Neb because he was loyal and tough. Fifteen-year-old Herbert — Pencroft's own ward — because he understood the nature of the island better than the adults. Smith asked no one for a diploma or references. He watched one thing: can this person do what needs to be done today, and does he share the goal of survival? Proxy metrics — certificates, service records, test scores — exist in order to lower the risk of hiring the wrong person. Smith's selection is set up the other way around: it maximizes the chance of finding the person who can do the job. On an island where a mistake costs a life, the second approach turns out to be the only one that works. And not by accident, every small team under pressure falls into the same approach the moment the HR department disappears from between the need and the person answering it.

This is not a simplification. It is a different model of selection. Instead of proxy metrics — résumés, certificates, test results — a direct evaluation of the ability to complete the task. Frederick Brooks in *The Mythical Man-Month* documented that the difference in productivity between the best and the worst programmers reaches a factor of ten.² Not two. Ten. Corporate hiring is optimized for minimizing risk — not hiring the bad person. Smith's hiring is optimized for maximizing the result — finding the person who can.

The difference is fundamental. Minimizing risk scales: you can hire hundreds of “acceptable” people through a standardized process. Maximizing result does not scale: you have to know what you are looking for and be able to recognize it. Smith can put together five people of a perfect team. Not fifty. And in that, his advantage lies.

Law Two: Isolation as a Strategic Decision

The island exists in isolation not by unhappy accident. Verne — and this is important — chooses an uninhabited island not for exotic color but for the purity of the experiment. He removes all external variables in order to show what a team can do when it is not being distracted. Not a single email from headquarters. Not a single call from a stakeholder. Not a single reprioritization because the CEO read an article in the *Harvard Business Review*. Smith set the goal — build a civilization — and moves toward it without looking over his shoulder at the stock ticker.

In 1943 Clarence “Kelly” Johnson received an order from the U.S. Army Air Forces that would change the history of aviation: build a jet fighter in 180 days. Johnson did something that will look familiar. He took twenty-three engineers and thirty mechanics, moved them into a rented circus tent next to a plastics factory (the smell was so strong that the name “Skunk Works” stuck), and cut them off entirely from Lockheed’s corporate bureaucracy.

The result: the XP-80, the first American jet fighter to reach full combat readiness. Delivered in 143 days. Thirty-seven days early.³

Kelly Johnson formulated the fourteen rules of Skunk Works.⁴ The first: “The Skunk Works manager must be delegated practically complete control of his program in all aspects.” Smith applied the same principle on the island. Rule number three: “The number of people having any connection with the project must be restricted in an almost vicious manner.” Rule number thirteen: “Access by outsiders to the project and its personnel must be strictly controlled by appropriate security measures.”

This is not paranoia. It is engineering calculation. Alex Pentland at the MIT Media Lab showed empirically that team productivity is determined not by individual talent but by patterns of communication.⁵ Short, frequent interactions inside the team. Minimal interruptions from outside. Smith’s island is an ideal implementation of that pattern — maximum internal connectivity, zero external noise.

Tom Allen at MIT described the effect back in 1977. It was later named the Allen Curve — the probability of regular communication between two people falls exponentially with the physical distance between them. Beyond fifty meters, people communicate no more often than if they were in separate buildings.⁶ Smith’s island is a compact base of operations. The whole team sits inside one Allen Curve. Each person is in the zone of spontaneous interaction with every other.

Law Three: The Leader Knows the Subject

Verne constructs Cyrus Smith as the ideal engineer of the nineteenth century — and inside that construction he hides an organizational argument. Smith is not simply “a smart leader.” He is a man who calculates the height of a mountain from the angle of a falling stone, synthesizes nitroglycerin from what is at hand, and explains to the team the principle of the telegraph while building it from the metal he himself has smelted from ore.

Verne deliberately makes Smith encyclopedically competent — this is not a weakness of the novel but its thesis. Smith is effective as a leader *because* he is an engineer. When a technical problem arises on the island, Smith does not call an emergency meeting and does not delegate the decision. He goes to the workbench, to the furnace, to the drawings — and solves the problem personally. Because he knows how everything works. And the team knows that he knows.

This pattern — a leader who owns the subject-matter expertise — repeats in every story of breakthrough products. And every time it repeats, someone writes a business book about it in astonishment.

Steve Jobs was not an engineer in the classical sense, but he understood the product at a level unavailable to the professional managers. Walter Isaacson documents this in the biography — when the Macintosh team showed the prototype, Jobs evaluated not the slides but the product itself.⁷ He opened the case and looked at the layout of the components on the board. He checked how the screen looked in different light. He noticed that the menu font rendered half a pixel off.

From the outside this can be mistaken for micromanagement — both leaders dig into the details. The difference lies in knowledge. The micromanager controls because he does not trust and does not understand. Smith checks because he understands and because he sees what others do not. The micromanager asks “why did you do this?” and waits for apologies. Smith asks “what if we heat it twenty degrees higher?” and waits for the experiment. One controls the process. The other improves the result.

Tracy Kidder described the same pattern in *The Soul of a New Machine* — Tom West, leader of the MV/8000 project at Data General, was an engineer who understood every aspect of the computer being designed.⁸ His team (the “Microkids” and the “Hardy Boys”) worked in a basement, cut off from corporate politics, under a man who could read any diagram on the wall. The project the leadership of Data General had practically written off was completed on time. Kidder’s book won the Pulitzer Prize.

Law Four: Crisis as the Normal Mode

Verne is a great screenwriter of catastrophes. In *The Mysterious Island* he throws at Smith’s team a series of existential challenges with mounting intensity — food shortages, pirates, a volcanic eruption, the need to build a whole technical civilization from scratch. These are not literary decorations. They are stress tests of the organizational model. And every time, Smith passes the test the same way. He assesses the situation personally, makes the decision, the team executes. No meetings. No approvals. No escalation.

When the eruption of the volcano approaches and the island must be evacuated, Smith does not convene a “crisis committee” and does not write a “risk management plan.” He calculates. How much time until the eruption. What can be saved. What length the hull of a ship needs to be. Arithmetic, not bureaucracy. Engineering calculation, not PowerPoint.

Stanley McChrystal, the general who commanded the Joint Special Operations Command in Iraq, ran into the same problem — the traditional military hierarchy was too slow to fight a networked enemy. His solution, described in *Team of Teams*, essentially reproduces Smith’s model: small autono-

mous teams that are trusted to make decisions on the spot, without escalation up the chain of command.⁹

McChrystal calls the phenomenon shared consciousness across all participants. Smith arrives at the same result naturally. His team lives in one place, sees the same problems, shares the same fate. When the volcano begins to erupt, shared consciousness arises automatically. An existential threat is a better mechanism for priority alignment than any OKR.

Island Against Cruise Liner

Island: small team, engineer-leader, isolated environment, autonomous decision-making, survival depends on the competence of each member. A mistake by one is a threat to all. Therefore selection by capability, and procedures kept to a minimum.

Cruise liner: thousands of people, dozens of hierarchy levels, passengers do not know how the ship works, decisions are made far from the scene of the action. A mistake by one is an inconvenience to the rest. Therefore procedures replace competence, and regulation replaces common sense.

Most corporations are cruise liners that dream of becoming island teams. They hire thousands of people, create dozens of management levels, build procedures for every eventuality. Then they hire McKinsey consultants at millions of dollars to explain why a five-person startup in a coworking space builds faster.

Melville described this paralysis in 1853, setting it in an office on Wall Street. The scrivener Bartleby answers every request with a single formula — “I would prefer not to” — and this polite formula halts the work of the whole bureau more reliably than any sabotage. The boss can neither compel, nor fire, nor go around him, and gradually builds his own working day around an employee who does nothing. The corporate cruise liner is infected with the same logic, only multiplied across a dozen coordinating instances. A simple change to an interface passes through the designer, the product manager, the architect, the analyst, the release manager — and at every floor sounds a soft “I would prefer to align first.” The “Center of Architectural Excellence,” without whose visa not a line of code can be touched, is Bartleby’s office cast into an org chart — a procedure that exists so that nothing moves without its permission. While the liner is collecting signatures, an island of eight people has already redesigned the interface three times.

McKinsey’s answer takes 200 slides and formulates the obvious with such precision that it becomes meaningless.

The problem is not the size. The problem is the architecture. A cruise liner will not become an island no matter how many times you rename departments into “tribes” and “squads.” Spotify can afford to call teams squads — they were built as an island. When squads are installed in a bank with fifty thousand employees, you get a cruise liner with pirate flags hung on board, but all the pirates still ask permission before raising the anchor.

Skunk Works: An Industrial Island

The parallel between Smith's team and Skunk Works is not accidental. It is structural.

When Ben Rich (Kelly Johnson's successor) described the principles of Skunk Works, he was essentially retelling the layout of Smith's island — small team, direct access to the engineer-leader, isolation from corporate bureaucracy, hiring by competence.

The results of Skunk Works across half a century: the U-2 (high-altitude reconnaissance), the SR-71 Blackbird (still the fastest air-breathing manned aircraft in history), the F-117 Nighthawk (the first serial stealth aircraft). Each project a breakthrough. Each created by a team smaller than the typical marketing department of a modern IT company.

And now a counterexample. The F-35 Joint Strike Fighter. The most expensive weapons project in the history of humankind. By the GAO's 2024 estimate, the total lifecycle cost of the program will exceed two trillion dollars.¹⁰ Thousands of contractors. Hundreds of thousands of jobs in forty-five states. A political project as much as an engineering one.

The F-35 is a cruise liner. Dozens of levels of decision-making. Every technical decision passes through committees where representatives of the three armed services sit, each with its own requirements. The result, documented in the hearings of the Senate Armed Services Committee: chronic delays, cost overruns, and technical problems that go unresolved for years.¹¹

Kelly Johnson created the SR-71 with a team of a few dozen. The F-35 cannot reach full parameters with a team of tens of thousands. Scaling people does not scale results. It scales coordination, which devours the resources intended for the work.

Brooks formulated this in 1975: "Adding manpower to a late software project makes it later."¹² Smith formulated it in 1875 — gathered five people on an island and built a civilization.

The Dark Side of the Island Team

It would be intellectually dishonest to idealize Smith's model. It has serious limitations, and Verne — to his credit — shows them.

The Problem of Dependence on the Leader

Smith is irreplaceable. If he dies, the island team turns from an engineering civilization into a group of survivors. This is the classic key-person risk — the more competent the engineer-leader, the more fragile the system becomes without him.

In the finale of *The Mysterious Island* the island explodes and the team is evacuated. But imagine Smith dying in the middle of the novel. The knowledge of how to smelt iron, how to make glass, how to build machines — all of it dies with him. A prophetic metaphor for every startup that has lost its tech lead.

Amy Edmondson of Harvard Business School has researched this phenomenon through the lens of psychological safety.¹³ Teams dependent on a single leader work superbly in the leader's presence and catastrophically in his absence. Resilient teams are the ones where safety is built into the culture, not tied to the personality.

The Problem of Scaling

The island is five people. Not fifty. Not five hundred. Smith's model does not scale linearly, and the attempt to scale it linearly is a typical corporate mistake.

Netflix tried to scale the "island team." Reed Hastings describes in *No Rules Rules* how the company built a culture of "freedom and responsibility" — minimum rules, maximum autonomy, hiring only A-players.¹⁴ It worked at a hundred employees. At a thousand, it was harder. At ten thousand, Netflix is still more effective than most of its competitors, but the cultural principles require constant active maintenance. An island team that has grown to the size of an archipelago discovers an unpleasant truth — the principles that worked when everybody knew each other by name require evangelism when half the company is made up of people hired last week.

The Problem of the Ethical Compass

Smith is a rational engineer, but even he is not protected from the trap of isolation. When a small team is cut off from the outside world, its ethical compass depends entirely on the leader. The team follows Smith not because the goal is objectively correct, but because it trusts his expertise.

This is the dark side of bootstrap leadership: an autonomous team with a charismatic leader can build with tremendous efficiency in a catastrophically wrong direction. Elizabeth Holmes's Theranos is a modern "island team" with a false mission. A small group isolated from the outside world — literally: employees signed nondisclosure agreements, and the labs were closed to external auditors. A leader with a vision that turned out to be a hallucination.

In 2018 the SEC charged Holmes with massive fraud — raising more than seven hundred million dollars of investment on the basis of false claims about the technology.²⁰ The structure of Theranos copied every principle of bootstrap leadership: small team, isolation, visionary leader, absence of bureaucracy. The only difference — Cyrus Smith actually knew how to smelt iron.

The difference between Smith and Holmes lies not in the structure but in the competence and in the feedback with reality. Smith sees the result every day. The bridge either stands or it collapses. The tool either works or it does not. Holmes claimed to have built a technology but arranged the system so that no one could check. Bootstrap leadership without real expertise from the leader and without a mechanism to verify the result is not an island team. It is a raft whose captain has forbidden looking at the horizon.

Six Signs Your Organization Is a Cruise Liner

Holmes on Baker Street taught us to observe. Apply his method to organizational diagnosis.

Sign one: a decision passes through more than two levels of approval. On Smith's island the path from idea to action is a single step — the engineer decides, the team executes. If your decision travels from team lead to manager to director to VP to another VP, you are not on an island. You are in the line at passport control.

Sign two: nobody can explain why a particular person is needed. In Smith's team every member performs a function without which the civilization collapses. If your organization has titles that can be removed without visible effect on the product, that is dead weight. Not a useful instrument, but a parasitic overlay. The symptom — a person is engaged in “strategy,” “processes,” or “cross-functional interaction.” In other words, coordinates the work of people who would coordinate perfectly well without him.

Sign three: the project leader cannot draw the architecture on a napkin. Smith could describe every mechanism he built on the island. If your CTO cannot explain how your product works without deferring to “the team that handles it” — you do not have a CTO. You have a Chief Title Officer.

Sign four: a crisis produces meetings, not actions. On the island a crisis produces action. In a corporation a crisis produces an emergency conference call with thirty participants, in which the first twenty minutes are spent adjusting microphones. By the time everyone has joined, found the “unmute” button, and agreed on the next meeting to discuss the plan of action, Smith's island team has already solved the problem and is building on.

Sign five: the hiring process is longer than the first project of the new hire. If hiring takes six months and the first project takes three, then your organization spends more effort on attracting people than on using them.

Sign six: reorganizations happen more often than product releases. Smith's team never reorganized. It was assembled correctly from the start. Every corporate reorganization is an admission that the previous structure was a mistake. If reorganizations have become an annual ritual, you are not optimizing the system — you are rearranging the deck chairs. Only not on the *Titanic* — the *Titanic* at least had a destination. You are rearranging the chairs on a ship that is circling in the ocean because the captain has forgotten where he was going.

Principles of Bootstrap Leadership

From the experience of Smith, Skunk Works, the Macintosh team, and the Data General MV/8000, a set of repeating patterns emerges. Not a methodology — because the second you print them on a laminated poster and hang it in the open space, they stop working. A set of observations effective exactly until they are turned into a cargo cult.

Size determines effectiveness. Five people on Smith's island. Twenty-three engineers in the first Skunk Works crew. Around a hundred in the original Macintosh team (Jobs held to the rule of “no

more than a hundred”). Jeff Bezos formalized it as the “two-pizza rule.”¹⁵ A team that cannot be fed with two pizzas is too large. Smith would have fed his team with one wild goat.

Isolation is not a punishment — it is a privilege. Skunk Works moved into a circus tent not because Lockheed was stingy with office space. Because distance from corporate headquarters equals freedom from corporate processes. Smith found himself on an island not because he hated civilization. Because in civilization there are committees.

The leader is first among equals, not first among subordinates. Smith commands. But he commands as a man who can do everything he asks of the team. This is not democracy. It is meritocracy with a single right of veto. Aristotle would have called it “the rule of the best” — a system in which the right to make the decision belongs to the one who understands the task best. Modern HR would call it “toxic leadership.” The results speak for Aristotle.

Crisis is a test, not an anomaly. An organization that treats a crisis as a deviation from the norm builds defenses against shocks — and breaks at the first shock that exceeds those defenses. An organization that treats a crisis as part of the norm is antifragile. Smith’s team does not panic when the volcano erupts, because every day of life on the island has been an unspoken rehearsal for exactly that. They panic if the lava will destroy their one ship. The difference — between fear of the unknown and respect for the specific threat.

The Dumas Factor: Mission Above Hierarchy

Smith’s island team solves the coordination problem through competence. But what if the challenge requires not merely competent people, but people willing to risk everything for a common goal?

Alexandre Dumas in *The Three Musketeers* showed a different model of a high-performance team — four men (d’Artagnan, Athos, Porthos, Aramis) who act under the motto “One for all, and all for one.” Not a bootstrap team of engineers, but a mission-driven team where personal loyalty and the common goal matter more than formal structure.

The musketeers are officers of the royal guard, but they regularly act contrary to direct orders when those orders contradict their understanding of what is right. This is autonomy grounded in shared values, not rebellion against authority.

Translated to the corporate language: **a team that shares a mission makes better decisions than a team that executes instructions.**

Musketeers Against Committees

In *The Three Musketeers* the Queen of France receives a threat — and four men save the dynasty, acting without approval from ministers, cardinals, and palace bureaucracy. More than that: they save the queen *from* that bureaucracy, which is ready to sacrifice her to political compromise.

Sound familiar? Every product manager who bypassed the “approval procedure for new features” to do what the user needed. Every engineer who fixed a critical bug in production without waiting for the release committee. Every designer who redesigned an interface because he knew that if he waited for feedback from every stakeholder, the product would die first.

The difference between the musketeers and the corporate rebels — legitimacy. The musketeers serve the king, and therefore their disobedience to ministers is justified. The team has a higher mission (defense of the crown) that matters more than the intermediate instructions.

Netflix: Musketeers of the Corporate World

Netflix under Reed Hastings created the closest corporate analog to the musketeers’ team. The principle of the “Keeper Test” — each employee stays with the company as long as the manager is willing to “fight for them” if they wanted to leave.¹⁶ High standards, but absolute loyalty to those who meet them. Essentially — the professional version of the musketeers’ “one for all”: we support each other as long as each deserves the support.

The result: Netflix employees make decisions like the musketeers — from the mission (to entertain the world) rather than from the procedures. While competitors spent months negotiating content licenses, Netflix teams bought series rights over a weekend. Where traditional media companies required detailed plans and presentations, Netflix greenlit projects on the basis of pitches and track record. The queen’s musketeers acted without the cardinal’s approval; Netflix acted without the media industry board’s.

Limitations of the Musketeer Model

Like Smith’s island team, the musketeer model has its dark sides.

The problem of scaling. “One for all” works for four people. For forty — already harder. For four thousand — practically impossible, because the personal mission that held the original group together dissolves into the layers of management until it turns into a bullet point on the corporate-values wall of the meeting room. Personal loyalty does not scale as efficiently as procedures.

The problem of selection. The musketeer team requires not merely competence but cultural fit. One cynic can destroy the atmosphere of mutual trust on which the whole model rests. Because of this, hiring into a musketeer team turns out to be an even more selective process than into Smith’s island team — here it is not enough merely to possess the required skills.

The problem of direction. The musketeers are loyal to the king. But what if the king is wrong? Mission-driven teams are dangerous when the mission is false or the leader defining the mission loses the compass. Theranos again a good example — a team of “musketeers” loyal to a false vision.

Hybrid Model: Island of Musketeers

The best technology teams in history combined the principles of Smith and Dumas: **the technical competence of the island team with the missionary devotion of the musketeers.**

The team of the first iPhone — islands of competence (engineering, design, product) under a single command (Jobs), united by a mission (to reinvent the mobile phone) and ready to go against the whole mobile industry.¹⁷

The early team at SpaceX — an island of engineering competence plus the musketeers' devotion to the mission of making humanity multi-planetary.¹⁸

The team at DeepMind — an island of artificial-intelligence researchers with a mission to solve intelligence and, with its hands, to solve everything else.¹⁹ DeepMind is also proof of the inverse of Conway's Law — if you want to create something fundamentally unified (general artificial intelligence), build a team that is fundamentally connected. Not a neural-networks department, a reinforcement-learning department, and an applications department. One research group, one mission, one Allen Curve.

The pattern repeats: a small team of experts, united by an ambitious mission, isolated from the corporate mainstream, under a leader who understands both the technology and the vision.

Smith built a civilization on an island. The musketeers defended a queen against a conspiracy. The best teams in the history of technology do both: create a new reality and defend it from those who would turn innovation into committees.

But Verne, to his credit, does not end *The Mysterious Island* with triumph. The island explodes. The team loses everything it built. They are saved by Nemo — a deus ex machina they did not deserve and did not control. The most honest metaphor of bootstrap leadership: you can build the perfect team and the perfect system — but a volcanic eruption does not create a ticket in JIRA and does not wait while you conduct a retrospective.

To be continued. In the next chapter: London, 1897 — while the vampire hunters play the hero each on his own, Mina Harker reduces the diaries, letters, and newspaper clippings into a single card index. The count will lose not to the wooden stake — but to the assembled information.

Footnotes:

¹ Conway, Melvin. "How Do Committees Invent?" *Datamation*, April 1968. Canonical English text used directly. Original formulation of Conway's Law: "Organizations which design systems are constrained to produce designs which are copies of the communication structures of these organizations."

² Brooks, Frederick. *The Mythical Man-Month* (1975). Addison-Wesley. Canonical English text used directly. Data from Sackman, Erikson, and Grant (1968) on the productivity variance among programmers, ranging from 1:10 to 1:28.

³ Rich, Ben R., and Leo Janos. *Skunk Works: A Personal Memoir of My Years at Lockheed* (1994). Little, Brown and Company. Canonical English text used directly. Note: the first American jet in flight was the Bell P-59 Airacomet (October 1942), but the P-59 did not reach combat readiness; the XP-80 / P-80 Shooting Star became the first U.S. jet fighter fit for operational use.

⁴ Johnson, Clarence L. “Kelly’s 14 Rules & Practices.” Lockheed Martin Skunk Works. Originally formulated in 1943, later refined by Ben Rich. Full text reproduced in Rich and Janos (1994). Canonical English quotations used directly.

⁵ Pentland, Alex. *Social Physics: How Social Networks Can Make Us Smarter* (2014). Penguin Press. Canonical English text used directly. Studies from the MIT Human Dynamics Lab showed that communication patterns explain up to 35 percent of the variance in team productivity (see also “The New Science of Building Great Teams.” *Harvard Business Review*, April 2012).

⁶ Allen, Thomas J. *Managing the Flow of Technology* (1977). MIT Press. Canonical English text used directly. The “Allen Curve” — exponential decrease in communication frequency with distance.

⁷ Isaacson, Walter. *Steve Jobs* (2011). Simon & Schuster. Canonical English text used directly. Description of the work on the first Macintosh, including the requirements for the aesthetics of internal components.

⁸ Kidder, Tracy. *The Soul of a New Machine* (1981). Little, Brown and Company. Canonical English text used directly. Pulitzer Prize for General Nonfiction, 1982.

⁹ McChrystal, Stanley. *Team of Teams: New Rules of Engagement for a Complex World* (2015). Portfolio / Penguin. Canonical English text used directly.

¹⁰ U.S. Government Accountability Office. *F-35 Joint Strike Fighter: Cost Growth and Schedule Delays Continue*. GAO-24-106909, May 2024. Canonical English text used directly. Updated estimate of the total lifecycle cost of the program — above \$2 trillion, versus earlier estimate of \$1.1–\$1.7 trillion (GAO-21-105282, April 2021).

¹¹ U.S. Senate Committee on Armed Services. Hearings on the F-35 program, held repeatedly across 2014–2021. Canonical English text used directly. Documented problems include software-development delays, issues with the ALIS / ODIN system, and cost overruns.

¹² Brooks, Frederick. *The Mythical Man-Month* (1975). Addison-Wesley. Canonical English quotation: “Adding manpower to a late software project makes it later” — Brooks’s Law.

¹³ Edmondson, Amy. *The Fearless Organization* (2018). Wiley. Canonical English text used directly. Research on the connection between psychological safety and team effectiveness.

¹⁴ Hastings, Reed, and Erin Meyer. *No Rules Rules: Netflix and the Culture of Reinvention* (2020). Penguin Press. Canonical English text used directly.

¹⁵ Bryar, Colin, and Bill Carr. *Working Backwards: Insights, Stories, and Secrets from Inside Amazon* (2021). St. Martin’s Press. Canonical English text used directly. The “two-pizza rule” is de-

scribed based on Amazon internal practices from the mid-2000s onward.

¹⁶ Hastings, Reed, and Erin Meyer. *No Rules Rules: Netflix and the Culture of Reinvention* (2020). Penguin Press. Canonical English text used directly. Description of the Keeper Test and the high-performance culture.

¹⁷ Young, Jeffrey S., and William L. Simon. *iCon Steve Jobs: The Greatest Second Act in the History of Business* (2005). Wiley. Canonical English text used directly. Documentation of the culture of Apple teams under Jobs.

¹⁸ Vance, Ashlee. *Elon Musk: Tesla, SpaceX, and the Quest for a Fantastic Future* (2015). Ecco. Canonical English text used directly. Description of the formation and culture of the early SpaceX teams.

¹⁹ Suleyman, Mustafa. *The Coming Wave* (2023). Bodley Head. Canonical English text used directly. Insider perspective on the creation and evolution of the DeepMind research culture.

²⁰ U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission. Litigation Release No. 24065, *SEC v. Elizabeth Holmes and Theranos, Inc.* March 14, 2018. Canonical English text used directly.

Chapter 6: Mina Harker Takes the Notes



What this chapter does. A distributed team of six people, scattered across London, Whitby, and Transylvania, hunts an invisible enemy in the age before electricity. Their secret weapon is not silver bullets or consecrated wafers, but a Remington typewriter, an Edison phonograph, Pitman shorthand, and one woman who at three in the morning assembles all the scattered diaries into a single document. Six archetypes, four laws of the distributed team, and why Bram Stoker's *Crew of Light* described — a hundred years before the *Agile Manifesto* — the very team modern corporations are now scrambling toward.

Purfleet, Dr. Seward's Asylum, Early October 1893

In an office on the second floor of Dr. John Seward's psychiatric asylum — the one that adjoins Carfax Abbey, where a strange foreign count has recently taken up residence — Wilhelmina Harker (Mina to her friends) sits at a Remington typewriter. On the floor beside her, a stack of wax cylinders: Seward's diary, dictated into the Edison phonograph. Nearby, two notebooks in leather bindings — her husband Jonathan's, filled with Pitman shorthand,¹ and her own, in the same system. Beyond those, a bundle of letters from the late Lucy Westenra, a copy of the log of the *Demeter*, a folder of newspaper clippings (Mina gathered them over two weeks), a series of telegrams between London and Budapest, and a thin sheaf of correspondence from Professor Van Helsing in Amsterdam.

Each fragment on its own is almost nothing. Jonathan's diary describes the captivity in a Carpathian castle, but neither Seward nor Van Helsing has read those pages. Seward's diary records the behavior of the patient Renfield, but no one but Seward himself has listened to the wax cylinders. The newspaper clippings document the delivery of strange wooden crates to London, but no one has yet matched them to Jonathan's description of Carfax. Each held his own shard and did not know that the others held the rest.

This night, Mina sits down for the first time to retype everything into a single document. Jonathan's diaries — with her own transcription of the shorthand into ordinary English. Seward's cylinders — she puts on the phonograph earphones and types from the voice. Lucy's letters, the telegrams, the ship's log, the newspaper clippings — all on one typewriter, on one grade of paper, in one chronological sequence.

According to Mina's diary entry for 30 September, she sets about retyping the whole of the material that night.² By morning she has a document the team can, for the first time, read as a whole. That same evening, in Seward's office after dinner, six people gather around a table and, in her own words, “unconsciously formed a sort of board or committee.”³ From this moment the group possesses what it had not: a single source of truth and a common basis for decision.

¹ Stoker does not name the shorthand system explicitly, but by the 1890s Isaac Pitman's system (1837) dominated in England. The alternative Gregg system (1888) took hold in America, where its author moved in 1893, and in Britain of that period was almost never used. See Pitman, Sir Isaac. *Stenographic Soundhand* (1837). Bath.

² Stoker, Bram. *Dracula* (1897). Archibald Constable & Co, London. Chapter XVII, Mina Harker's diary, entry of 30 September.

³ Ibid., Chapter XVIII, Mina Harker's diary, entry of 30 September, evening.

Six people and one typewriter.

By the beginning of October 1893,⁴ around Mina a team of six has assembled — known to literary scholars as the **Crew of Light**, a designation introduced by Christopher Craft in a 1984 essay.⁵ Stoker himself never calls the team by this name; the characters within the text address one another by name and use no collective self-designation. “Crew of Light” is a generalization the criticism offered in hindsight, resting on the novel's through-metaphor: the light of science and joint work against the darkness of an isolated medieval threat.

⁴ The year of the action is not stated explicitly in the novel; the standard dating, based on the alignment of weekdays in the diary entries, is 1893. See Wolf, Leonard. *The Annotated Dracula* (1975). Clarkson N. Potter, New York.

⁵ Craft, Christopher. “Kiss Me with Those Red Lips”: Gender and Inversion in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. *Representations*, no. 8, 1984, pp. 107–133.

The composition of the team is cross-functional by any modern definition:

- **Mina Harker** — schoolmistress, versed in shorthand and typing, coordinator and analyst;
- **Jonathan Harker** — solicitor, knows English property law and is the only member of the team who has been inside the Carpathian castle;
- **Dr. John Seward** — psychiatrist, keeps a phonographic diary, owns the asylum abutting Carfax;
- **Arthur Holmwood (Lord Godalming)** — aristocrat, provides the money and the social connections for crossing borders;
- **Quincey Morris** — American adventurer from Texas, versed in firearms and field operations;
- **Professor Abraham Van Helsing** — Dutch physician and folklorist, the only one capable of recognizing vampirism as a clinical phenomenon.

Six people. Six specialties, none reducible to another. Ages: from the early twenties (Mina, Arthur) to over fifty (Van Helsing). Geography at the outset: London, Exeter, Whitby, Budapest. And one typewriter, on which Mina glues their fragmented experience into a common, readable document.

Stoker published *Dracula* in 1897, after several years of work begun with research notes in 1890. He did not suspect he was describing an operational model for every team that a hundred and twenty years later would be forced to coordinate remote work through Slack, Confluence, and Zoom. He was writing a Gothic novel about a vampire. In literature it often goes this way: the best management books are written by people who think they are writing about something else entirely. Shelley described creators fleeing their creations. Doyle — the methodology of evidence-based thinking. Verne — iterative development. Stoker describes what modern methodologies will call a single source of truth, a cross-functional team, and asynchronous coordination with synchronous rituals — a hundred and twenty years before any of those terms appear.

The previous chapter showed Cyrus Smith's autonomous team — five men isolated on an island, able to build a civilization from scratch. The isolation worked: the team was compact, bureaucracy did not exist, the crisis gave immediate feedback. But what should a team do that does not have the luxury of isolation? A team whose members are scattered across several cities, with different schedules, different specialties, and different sources of information? A team that must act against an enemy whose tracks show up in fragments — a piece in one person's diary, a piece on another's phonograph, a piece in a third's newspaper clipping?

This chapter is about how such a team is assembled. Which role keeps it from falling apart. And why the Crew of Light — assembled by Mina Harker — explains what has to happen in distributed collaboration, or else the rest of the organizational structure is an empty wrapper.

Van Helsing Is Not the Lone Hunter — His Solitude Kills Lucy

Before we go further — a claim that will disappoint everyone who has watched the Hollywood adaptation.

Abraham Van Helsing is not the lone hunter. That is a marketing wrapper the mass culture pasted onto Stoker's character and made stick — to the point of being cited as the corporate archetype of “the expert-consultant who will come in and save you.” The argument runs like this: if Van Helsing is the example of “call the expert, the expert knows,” then a team needs one expert who will make decisions for everyone; the others should execute. Coordination, a common knowledge base, general discussion — not necessary. One guru is enough.

The canonical Stoker text says the opposite. Van Helsing, on his own, sustains the heaviest defeat in the novel.

The Case of Lucy Westenra: While the Team Is Not Yet Formed, the Expert Loses

September 1893. Lucy Westenra — Mina's close friend, Arthur Holmwood's fiancée — is slowly fading in Hillingham under the supervision of Dr. Seward. Seward cannot make the diagnosis and summons his old teacher Van Helsing from Amsterdam. Van Helsing arrives, examines the patient, and understands: he is dealing with vampirism. That is the moment of truth. The expert has recognized the threat.

But then Van Helsing commits the error that costs Lucy her life. He *does not share* the understanding with Seward. Does not explain the diagnosis. Does not warn Lucy's mother. Acts alone — orders garlic, hangs garlands in the sickroom, performs four blood transfusions from four different donors. Each action is justified with vague references to “his method.” The team around Lucy (Seward, Arthur, Quincey, Lucy's mother, the servants) carries out instructions but does not understand their meaning.⁶

The result is predictable. Lucy's mother, kept in the dark for the sake of her weak heart, in the morning takes down “the awful strong-smelling flowers” and throws the window open — to air the room. On the critical night, driven out of her mind by the sight of a wolf at the broken window, she tears the garlic wreath from her daughter's neck — and dies on her bed, while the maidservant sleeps, drugged with laudanum. Dracula returns. Lucy dies. Van Helsing tells the team the truth — but after the funeral.

Modern researchers would call this a shared mental model failure⁷: the expert holds critical information in a single head, the others execute commands without understanding the context, and at the moment when a non-obvious decision is required from a non-expert, everything collapses. Van Helsing makes the diagnosis. The mother removes the garlic. Between those two actions — a communication failure that kills both the mother and the patient.

⁶ Stoker, Bram. *Dracula* (1897). Chapters XI–XII. Detailed analysis of the communication failures around Lucy's death: Auerbach, Nina. *Our Vampires, Ourselves* (1995). University of Chicago Press, ch. 3.

⁷ Cannon-Bowers, Janis A., and Eduardo Salas (eds.). *Making Decisions Under Stress: Implications for Individual and Team Training* (1998). American Psychological Association.

The Expert Without a Team

Modern organizations reproduce the same error that Van Helsing made in Hillingham. McKinsey, BCG, and Bain earn tens of billions of dollars a year issuing clients “diagnoses” that the executing employees do not understand and therefore execute wrongly. The CTO who decides the architecture alone and hands it down to the team through short written notes discovers six months later that the team has built something other than what he had in mind — and that fixing it now costs more than building it over. The CISO who holds the threat model in his own head and issues developers a list of “may/may-not” gets a breach through a hole the developers did not close because they did not understand why it should be closed.

Every time, this is the story of Van Helsing in Hillingham. The expert recognized the threat, but did not pass the understanding on. The team followed the instructions. The mother removed the garlic. The patient died.

Why Stoker Chose the Epistolary Form

Dracula is a novel composed entirely of diaries, letters, telegrams, phonographic records, and newspaper clippings. It has no narrator. There is no one who sees everything. Each fragment is written in the hand of one of the participants, at a moment when that participant did not know what the others knew. This is a technical decision — and it is the novel’s principal argument.

Stoker could have written *Dracula* in the third person, as Shelley wrote *Frankenstein* or Stevenson *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. He had the choice. He chose the most inconvenient form, one that requires the reader to assemble understanding out of fragments. Why?

Because the novel is about the value of the assembly. About the moment when the fragments come together. About the fact that the breakthrough of understanding happens not with the expert, but with the person who first sees all the fragments at once. With Mina, who has glued the diaries onto the typewriter. From that point in the novel the hunt for Dracula becomes possible. Before that point — Lucy dies.

For a modern team this thought fits into one short line: it is not the expert on his own who creates value. Value is created by *the shared visibility of the data*. The expert without it is Van Helsing in Hillingham.

Now the anatomy of a team that works.

Four Laws of the Distributed Team

Law One: Single Source of Truth

The Crew of Light would not have stood a chance against Dracula without Mina’s typed report. This is not a literary exaggeration but the structural argument of the text. Before the retyping, the team con-

sisted of six people, each holding his own fragment of the truth. After the retyping — six people, each with the shared context.

The modern analog is called single source of truth. Atlassian, on whose platform more than two hundred thousand teams work, describes the principle this way: a team must have one place where the current state of the project lives, and that place must be updated so that any member of the team receives a current answer without having to ask the others.⁸ A Confluence sprint page, a Jira board, the README.md in the root of the repository, a shared Notion document — the specific tool does not matter. What matters is that it is a single one and that the discipline of updating is invested in it.

⁸ Atlassian. Team Playbook materials on single source of truth (atlassian.com/team-playbook, 2023). Author's formulation from the combined sources.

A team without a single source of truth functions on the Hillingham principle. Each person holds a fragment — his own Slack channel, his own Notion document, his own email thread, his own private messages. Requests of the form “what is our current status with X?” are either ignored or produce contradictory answers from different people. Decisions get made on incomplete information. Six months later it becomes unclear who approved what.

Mina solves this problem in one night of work. Modern teams in her place typically need to introduce the role of “information architect,” conduct three quarterly strategy sessions, and roll out corporate training on Confluence. Sometimes it works. More often — no, because the problem is not in the tool. The problem is that there is no person who, like Mina, considers it his task to create and maintain the common document. In modern jargon that role is called the “documentation gardener” — a role most companies do not staff, because it “does not bring direct value.” The Crew of Light survived because that role existed. Lucy Westenra did not have it.

Law Two: Six Specialties, Zero Formal Hierarchy

Stoker's team is organized surprisingly flat for a Victorian novel. There is an aristocrat (Lord Godalming), a professor (Van Helsing), a solicitor (Jonathan Harker), a physician (Seward), an American adventurer (Morris), and a schoolmistress (Mina). By the social table of ranks in 1893, between them lies an abyss. But no one in the team gives orders.

Decisions are made at “councils” — general discussions in Seward's office, where each speaks. When the team plans the search of Carfax, the final decision comes after discussion, not on Van Helsing's command. When the team must decide whether to keep Mina informed about the further course of the hunt, the team decides “no” — collectively and mistakenly (and the text shows the price of that mistake), but it is shared responsibility, not an order from above. Mina herself participates in the decisions on the same terms as the men — a construction unusual for a Victorian novel, on which the criticism has fastened separate attention.⁹

⁹ Senf, Carol A. *The Vampire in Nineteenth-Century English Literature* (1988). Bowling Green State University Popular Press. See also Auerbach (1995), ch. 3.

This structure — a flat team of experts with an expert-mentor beside them — repeats in every effective cross-functional team of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The Mission Control group that recovered *Apollo 13* in 1970 — four engineering disciplines, flight director Eugene Kranz as coordinator, not commander.¹⁰ The team that landed the Curiosity Mars rover at NASA’s Jet Propulsion Laboratory in 2012 — seven specialties in one room, voices equal, the mission director a function of coordination, not command.¹¹ The startup teams at the “two pizzas” scale, which Bezos formalized at Amazon: a small group of specialists, direct exchange of information, minimum layers.

¹⁰ Kranz, Eugene. *Failure Is Not an Option: Mission Control from Mercury to Apollo 13 and Beyond* (2000). Simon & Schuster. Canonical English text used directly.

¹¹ Manning, Rob, and William L. Simon. *Mars Rover Curiosity: An Inside Account from Curiosity’s Chief Engineer* (2014). Smithsonian Books. Canonical English text used directly.

Hierarchy in the Crew of Light appears at exactly one point: when specialized knowledge (vampirology) is required, the team temporarily delegates to Van Helsing — but not as commander, as expert in the particular field. On matters of legal title to Carfax the delegation goes to Jonathan. On matters of American firearms — to Morris. On matters of social connections and finance — to Holmwood. On matters of documentation and shorthand — to Mina. This is distribution by competence, not by status.

Law Three: Telegrams and Meetings, Async and Sync

By the beginning of October 1893 the Crew of Light uses every available communication technology. Letters (delivered across London the same day). Telegrams (London–Budapest in hours). Phonograph (asynchronous dictation of the diary). Shorthand (rapid handwritten notation). Typewriter (multiple legible copies). The railway (physical coordination when a meeting is required). The Kodak Hand Camera, with which Jonathan photographs Carfax — another instrument of asynchronous transmission of information.

Translated into the modern language: they work in a mixed regime — asynchronous by default (async-first), but with synchronous rituals.¹² Telegrams are Slack messages. Letters are email. Phonographic diaries are voice memos. Typewritten copies are shared documents. The train for meetings is a Zoom call, when there is no getting around it. And the rhythm: daily update of the common report, periodic face-to-face gatherings for decisions.

¹² Mullenweg, Matt. *Distributed Work’s Five Levels of Autonomy*. ma.tt blog (2020). A structural description of the async-first organizational model from the founder of Automattic, which runs WordPress.com.

What destroys an asynchronous team is not the absence of technology. The Crew of Light coped without the internet. What destroys it is the absence of *the discipline of the common document*. If each keeps his own correspondence to himself, the fragments do not come together. Mina’s discipline — “everything that arrives is retyped and distributed in the common report” — makes asynchrony work-

able. Without that discipline an asynchronous team degrades rapidly into four non-intersecting email threads, in which each knows his own quarter and the project drowns in the gaps between them.

Law Four: The Expert as Mentor, Not as Commander

Van Helsing is the most knowledgeable person on the team. Only he is able to recognize vampirism. Only he knows the folkloric and medical means of counteraction. Only he reads in Latin the old treatises he cites. If anyone is entitled to be the leader, it is he.

But Stoker does something strange with that role. Van Helsing speaks in broken English with a heavy Dutch accent, cites Latin abundantly, and frequently breaks into exclamations to God. Modern readers usually take this as a literary device; the twentieth-century criticism has seen in it something deeper — a deliberate lowering of the expert figure.¹³ An expert whose speech requires effort to understand ceases to be an automatic authority. The team is forced to discuss his opinions, to ask again, to check — that is, to bring its own judgment into play.

¹³ Auerbach, Nina. *Our Vampires, Ourselves* (1995). University of Chicago Press, ch. 3.

The modern analog is called by various names: “principal consultant,” “tech lead as enabler,” “senior as multiplier.” Camille Fournier in *The Manager’s Path* formulates it briefly: the task of a senior engineer is not to make all the technical decisions but to develop the team’s ability to make them itself.¹⁴ If after two years of work the senior engineer leaves and the team cannot work without him — this is a failure. If he leaves and the team keeps working — this is a success.

¹⁴ Fournier, Camille. *The Manager’s Path: A Guide for Tech Leaders Navigating Growth and Change* (2017). O’Reilly Media. Canonical English text used directly.

Van Helsing passes this test. When in the finale the Crew of Light pursues Dracula through the Carpathians, splitting into three groups — one led by Van Helsing with Mina in a carriage over the pass, a second by Jonathan with Godalming on a steam launch up the river, a third by Seward with Morris on horseback along the bank — each group is capable of making decisions on its own. The knowledge of vampirism that in Hillingham was held in one head is, by the finale, distributed across the team. Mina did this with her typewriter.

The Dark Side of the Crew of Light

It would be intellectually dishonest to idealize Mina’s model. It has serious limitations, and Stoker — to his credit — shows them.

Dependence on one “documentation gardener.” If Mina goes down — and she almost does, when Dracula marks her with his own blood — the common document stops being updated. Seward tries to continue her work with the phonograph, but the result is fragmentary. The bus factor of the Crew of Light in the documentation dimension is one. The modern analog: a company whose entire

body of knowledge lives in the head of one “technical writer,” and which is paralyzed the moment that person goes on vacation.

Information asymmetry as a team error. When the Crew of Light, after Dracula’s attack on Mina, decides “not to share operational information with her any further, so as not to put her in danger,” the decision turns out to be catastrophically wrong. Mina, cut off from access to the common document, ceases to be an analyst and becomes the team’s weak point. Stoker elegantly shows: excluding a team member “for the sake of his safety” makes the whole team vulnerable. This is a direct warning to modern management, which likes to exclude “the not-yet-informed” from the correspondence “so as not to confuse them.”

The expert does occasionally lapse into monologue. Van Helsing, for all his mentoring training, in several key scenes falls into lecturing — and the team politely waits for him to finish. This is a familiar pattern: an expert who is technically right but communicationally expensive slows the team down with every explanation. A good team learns to interrupt its seniors. The Crew of Light has not fully mastered that skill.

RESOLUTION: The Imperative of the Crew of Light

The archetype of the Crew of Light is not the story that a single great expert is needed to solve the problem. It is the story that a team that has a common report, shared rules, and distributed knowledge defeats a team that has only an expert.

Stoker wrote *Dracula* in an era when the industrial revolution first confronted people with the necessity of coordinating the actions of a group scattered across several cities. The telegraph, the phonograph, the typewriter, the train — all of it, instruments without which the Crew of Light would not have existed. And when a modern corporation in 2026 plans how to coordinate a remote team through Slack and Notion, it is trying to solve exactly the same task Mina Harker was solving on a Remington typewriter a hundred and thirty years ago.

That task has no elegant technological solution. There is only discipline — someone has to take the role of Mina. Someone has to sit down every day and glue the fragments into a common document. Not “a couple of minutes to update Confluence,” but real work: listen to other people’s voice notes, transcribe other people’s shorthand, retype, distribute to everyone. It is tiring. It does not bring visible value on the quarterly evaluation. And that is precisely why most teams do not staff the role — and then are surprised that they have “communication problems.”

The Crew of Light survived because it had Mina. Lucy Westenra did not have a Mina. The price of the difference is one death.

To be continued. In the next chapter: London, 1886 — Dr. Jekyll, whom everyone sees, and Mr. Hyde, who comes out at night. From a team that put everything into the common document — to an organization that hides half of itself in the basement laboratory.

Chapter 7: Doctor Jekyll



What this chapter is about. Corporate duality from Stevenson to Argyris. Dr. Jekyll is the manifesto — corporate values hung on the meeting-room wall. Mr. Hyde is what teams actually do at the third hour of a Friday sprint, when the deadline is running out and the board is waiting for numbers. Doctor Lanyon is the senior who sees both and does not survive the seeing. Argyris and Schön in 1974 named this gap the split between espoused theory and theory-in-use. Goffman in 1959 described it as the difference between front stage and back stage. And Koreiko from *The Little Golden Calf* had already played it out on a Soviet street exactly when the American academy was still looking for the terms.

HOOK: Bournemouth, Skerryvore Villa, Autumn 1885

Bournemouth, autumn 1885. Stevenson is bedridden with another lung attack: he is thirty-four, famous after *Treasure Island*, still short of money. He wakes in the night to his own scream: in the dream a man had taken a powder and become another. «Why did you wake me? I was dreaming a fine bogey tale»¹, he snaps at Fanny. Family legend has it that the first draft was written in three days and burned in the fireplace; Fanny delivered her verdict in writing that her husband had written a scary tale and had missed the allegory. The correspondence tells it more plainly: the work took about six weeks. Either way the outcome was the same: Stevenson sat down and rewrote it. Not a story about a monster, but a story about a man who deliberately kept two lives.

¹ The «fine bogey tale» remark quoted from: Balfour, Graham. *The Life of Robert Louis Stevenson* (1901). Charles Scribner's Sons, New York. Chapter 15 (per Fanny Stevenson's account).

One detail usually gets missed: Doctor Jekyll is not an exposé of a hypocrite. Stevenson writes it clearly. Jekyll *sincerely* wants to be a good man, engages in charity, keeps his reputation, does not lie either to himself or to his friends. He takes the potion not out of malice but as a *systemic solution*: to separate the better side of himself from the worse, so the first could serve society unimpeded and the second could be let out only when no one was watching.

This is not a story about a double agent. It is a story about a double *structure* — one that at first seems manageable and then ceases to be.

Lanyon Enters the Study

Turn to the ninth chapter of the novella. Stevenson gives it in the form of a sealed letter from Doctor Lanyon — an old friend of Jekyll's, the second most respectable physician in their circle. The letter is addressed to the attorney Utterson with the condition «to be opened after my death or disappearance.» What does this chapter do in the novel? It introduces a witness.

Lanyon receives a strange note from Jekyll asking him to go late at night to Jekyll's house, take out a certain drawer, and bring it home to Cavendish Square. At midnight Lanyon, understanding nothing, receives at his own home an unknown visitor and watches with his own eyes as the unremarkable stranger himself prepares a mixture from the drawer's contents, drinks it, and turns into Henry Jekyll. Lanyon is the only character in the novel who observes the transformation in full, *and dies a few weeks later*. Not from poison. Not from a blow. Stevenson writes in Lanyon's own voice: «I feel that my days are numbered, and that I must die; and yet I shall die incredulous»².

² Stevenson, Robert Louis. *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886). Longmans, Green & Co, London. Chapter 9: «Dr Lanyon's Narrative».

Lanyon dies not from what he saw but from the *impossibility of telling it*. The knowledge he acquired does not fit into any of his professional frameworks. Tell his friends: they will call him mad. Tell his patients: he will lose his practice. Tell the journals: they will laugh him off the podium. Tell no one: he stays alone with a secret exceeding his capacity to bear.

This is the best literary description of corporate burnout known to the author.

Every large company keeps its staff of Lanyons — senior employees who went to one meeting too many, saw both sides (what is said at all-hands and what is said behind the closed door), and now do not know where to put that knowledge. They do not go to HR: HR speaks the language of Jekyll. They do not go to colleagues: colleagues have not yet seen. They do not write anonymous Glassdoor posts: that is career suicide. They keep the knowledge inside, like Lanyon, and six months later hand in a resignation letter explaining their departure as «personal reasons.»

Stevenson catches this phenomenon a century and a half before the corporate psychologists learn to name the departure of conscientious seniors an early symptom of decomposition. Seniors whose standards are highest of all lose their place in a system where inconvenient knowledge has nowhere to go. Only the Hydes remain.

Corporate duality is not the story of one Jekyll. It is a system of three roles: the one who declares the values; the one who actually acts; and the one who sees the gap and does not know where to put it. Stevenson gives us all three. And at the novella's finale not only Jekyll-Hyde dies. Lanyon dies first.

Culture Is Not What Is Written on the Wall

Before we go further — one statement that will upset anyone who has ever prepared a presentation on corporate values.

Corporate culture is not what a company declares in a manifesto, hangs on the meeting-room wall, and reads aloud at onboarding. It is what its employees do when no one is reading it aloud. What the team lead does at the third hour of a Friday sprint when the deadline runs out in forty minutes, the board is waiting for numbers, and one of the «declared values» — for instance, *psychological safety* — stands in the way of an answer by five o'clock.

In 1974 Chris Argyris and Donald Schön published with Jossey-Bass a book, *Theory in Practice: Increasing Professional Effectiveness*, which introduced a distinction that has since become the canonical frame for talking about organizations. **Espoused theory** — what people say they do; **theory-in-use** — what they actually do. The gap between them is a norm, not a pathology; the only question is its size and the organization's ability to see it³.

³ Argyris, Chris & Donald Schön. *Theory in Practice: Increasing Professional Effectiveness* (1974). Jossey-Bass, San Francisco. Key terms introduced in chapter 1; the espoused/in-use distinction remains canonical in the organizational-learning literature fifty years on.

The decisive observation of Argyris and Schön is not that the gap exists (anyone who has worked in a large organization already knows that). The decisive one is that **people are usually incapable of recognizing their own gap** between what they say and what they do. Ask a senior manager: «What do you value in your employees?» He will sincerely answer: «Initiative, open discussion of problems, willingness to challenge management's decisions.» Watch the same manager for three weeks in real work, and you will find that his initiative-taking employees are on his shit list, open problem-discussions collapse within five minutes, and challenging decisions gets you onto a «performance improvement plan», pencilled in with HR.

The most interesting thing is that the manager *is not lying*. He genuinely believes in his own espoused theory. He does not see the gap. And that is Stevenson's whole point. Jekyll *simultaneously* believes he is good and regularly turns into someone who walks London and maims passersby, and cannot combine those two facts into one non-contradictory description of his own life. It is not a mask over the face; it is two faces that do not meet in the same mirror.

Front and Back: Goffman Reads Stevenson

Argyris and Schön described the gap for a single individual. But in a corporation not individuals work but *groups*, and here a second axis of the problem appears. How can one and the same behavior simultaneously be a declaration and its negation? How can Jekyll simultaneously be and not be Hyde?

The answer was given in 1959 by the American sociologist Erving Goffman in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*⁴. Goffman proposed a theatrical metaphor: every social interaction takes place on a *front stage*, where participants monitor how they are seen by the audience, and on a *back stage*, where the mask comes off, the costumes are unbuttoned, the actors smoke and discuss the audience. These two stages are not in competition — they *mutually sustain* one another: what cannot be discussed on the front is discussed on the back; what cannot be permitted on the back does not appear on the front.

⁴ Goffman, Erving. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959). Anchor Books, Garden City. The front-stage/back-stage metaphor is introduced in the chapter «Performances»; the model remains foundational in organizational sociology.

A corporation is an institution with two stages by construction. On the front — all-hands meetings, the corporate site, CEO memos, values on the meeting-room wall, the annual report to shareholders, the «About Us» page, the news item in *TechCrunch*. On the back — the Slack channel #vent (if there is one, and if there is not, the private DMs), the smoking area (or its remote equivalent), the parking-lot conversation after all the meetings, two seniors talking about the new CTO, the phrase «between us.»

Jekyll is the performance on the front stage. Hyde is the same organization in its back-stage mode. And both Stevenson and Goffman emphasize: these are not two different beings. It is one being in two modes. Each of which sustains the other.

Edgar Schein in *Organizational Culture and Leadership* (1985) adds a vertical dimension to this picture⁵. Any organizational culture exists at three levels. On the surface — *artifacts*: slogans, dress code, logo, meeting rooms. Deeper — *espoused values*: what the company says about itself, what it believes as an organization. Deeper still — *basic underlying assumptions*: what members of the organization consider so self-evident they do not discuss it aloud. And this last level is the most influential. It is precisely the basic underlying assumptions that determine who actually gets promoted, whose criticism is actually heard, which projects actually get resources. The front stage lives at the level of artifacts and values. The back stage — at the level of basic underlying assumptions.

⁵ Schein, Edgar H. *Organizational Culture and Leadership* (1985). Jossey-Bass, San Francisco. The three-level model — artifacts, espoused values, basic underlying assumptions — persists through every edition of the book, including the fifth (2016).

Now Stevenson becomes a diagnostic instrument. When Jekyll writes in his diary, he works at the level of values: «I conducted the great experiment to free the good side of myself.» When Hyde tramples a child in the street, he works at the level of basic underlying assumptions: «in this world one can

act without consequences if one acts fast.» Jekyll's front stage and Hyde's back stage are the same person, but on two of Schein's cultural levels simultaneously.

That is why attempts to change corporate culture by rewriting the manifesto yield nothing. The manifesto lives on Schein's upper level. The real culture lives on the lower one. Rewriting the manifesto is giving Jekyll cosmetic surgery. The Hyde inside does not change.

Three Archetypes of Corporate Duality

Combine Stevenson, Argyris and Schön, Goffman, and Schein into one working scheme. In every large organization there exist three archetypal roles.

Jekyll — the bearer of espoused theory. This is, as a rule, the upper layer of management: CEO, CHRO, communications directors. They sincerely believe in the declared values — most are not cynics but conscientious performers of the front-stage function. Their work is to sustain the coherence of what the company says about itself. Their instruments: corporate communication, mission statements, Glassdoor responses, annual reports.

Hyde — the bearer of theory-in-use. This is, as a rule, the middle and junior layer of doers: the team lead who has to close the sprint; the HR Business Partner who needs to lay off three people by end of quarter; the product manager whose OKR requires shipping a feature that did not pass its UX tests. Hyde knows he is Hyde. He holds no illusions about the gap between the manifesto and what is required of him daily. Hyde is cynically functional: does what needs to be done to keep the dashboard numbers green.

Lanyon — the witness to the split. This is, as a rule, an experienced senior: the principal engineer who has been in the company seven years; the senior analyst with a memory of three reorganizations; the line-of-business director who has survived two CEOs. Lanyon sees both stages simultaneously — he hears what is said at all-hands and sees what is done in sprint planning. The gap is not invisible to him, as it is to Jekyll, and not normalized, as it is to Hyde. It remains an open wound.

And here the pattern of the novella repeats. The open wound heals before the rest of the body.

Four Stages of Cultural Divergence

In work through the late 1970s and 1980s Argyris developed the concept of **double-loop learning**⁶ — the organization's ability not only to correct actions within existing assumptions (single-loop) but to revise the assumptions themselves. And he described four stages by which an organization loses that capacity.

⁶ The concept of double-loop learning was first formalized in Argyris, Chris & Donald Schön. *Organizational Learning: A Theory of Action Perspective* (1978). Addison-Wesley, Reading, MA; developed in Argyris, *Reasoning, Learning, and Action: Individual and Organizational* (1982). Jossey-

Bass, San Francisco, and Argyris, *Overcoming Organizational Defenses* (1990). Allyn & Bacon, Boston.

Stage One: Success on Single-Loop

The company introduces a new value — say, *open feedback culture*. Runs onboarding, prints posters, organizes trainings. Measures the result through an employee engagement survey: participation in feedback mechanisms has risen. Single-loop learning works: the goal was set, action was taken, the result was measured, the loop closed.

This is Jekyll's first transformation. The potion has been taken, the effect achieved, the diary has recorded the success. Nobody asks the question: «And what did we miss at the next level down?»

Stage Two: Defensive Routines

A year later workers begin to notice a pattern. Those who actually gave negative feedback in the previous cycle got one category lower on the performance review this time. Those who indicated managerial weaknesses in the 360° survey did not get promoted. Those who voiced a structural problem at retro found the problem in their own scope the following quarter.

Nobody puts it in words. But behavior changes. Argyris named such behaviors **defensive routines**⁷ — invisible rules that protect the system from anyone asking it an uncomfortable question. At the level of artifacts everything is in order: opt-in to feedback mechanisms remains high, NPS has even risen. At the level of basic underlying assumptions openness is no longer possible.

⁷ Argyris, Chris. *Strategy, Change, and Defensive Routines* (1985). Pitman, Boston. Defensive routines defined as «policies, practices, and actions that prevent embarrassment or threat, but at the same time prevent learning.»

This is Jekyll's second transformation. Hyde no longer appears on the potion's signal. He is *held under control* — but Jekyll now knows Hyde is there, and spends more and more energy ensuring Hyde does not surface on the front stage.

Stage Three: The Undiscussables

Two years in, themes appear in the company that are formally not forbidden but that nobody discusses. Say, the divergence between the declared *work-life balance* and the actual expectation of an answer to weekend messages. Or between the declared *meritocracy* and the fact that promotions go along the line of «friendship with the right people.» These themes become **undiscussables** — and, more than that, *the discussion of undiscussability also becomes undiscussable*⁸.

⁸ Argyris, Chris. *Overcoming Organizational Defenses* (1990). Allyn & Bacon, Boston, chapters 2-3. The phenomenon of «undiscussability of undiscussables» is a key operational characteristic of the defensive organization.

This is the third stage of transformation. Hyde begins to appear without the potion. Not in the sense that the manager accidentally snaps at a subordinate — that is too obvious. In the sense that the manager *stops noticing* when he switches from front-stage mode to work-mode. They become the same consciousness.

Here Lanyon dies. Specific people leave the company. Not the youngest and not the oldest — exactly the seniors with the highest standards, for whom it is unbearable to be in a system whose main rule is «do not name the main rule.» HR files the departure under «career reasons.» Lanyon, as in Stevenson, keeps the knowledge to himself until the end and leaves no explanation.

Stage Four: Learning to Learn Is Broken

In the final stage the organization loses the capacity for **deutero-learning**⁹, learning to learn. It does not mean the organization has stopped learning. It means it is incapable of discussing how it learns. Every attempt at retrospective becomes ritual; every culture survey becomes an instrument to optimize the score rather than diagnose the problem; every consulting report on the culture problem meets the reaction «thanks for the recommendations, we already know all this», after which nothing changes.

⁹ The term deutero-learning was introduced by Bateson in 1942 (paper «Social Planning and the Concept of Deutero-Learning,» Conference on Science, Philosophy and Religion, Second Symposium; reprinted in *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, 1972, pp. 159-176) and adapted by Argyris for the organizational context — see Argyris & Schön, *Organizational Learning II* (1996). Addison-Wesley, Reading.

This is Jekyll's finale. In the laboratory study, locked from inside, hearing outside the voices of friends beating at the door. Cannot come out. Not because he does not want to — because there is no longer a version of him that can come out to them. The final Hyde attack is already coming on, and Jekyll writes the last lines of the diary as another person's. Lanyon is dead. Utterson stands at the door not knowing what he will see when they rip it off its hinges.

In the corporation this stage looks like a firm where consultants come and go, new CEOs come and go, the manifesto gets rewritten every three years, yet the operational culture stays the same. Perhaps a bit tougher. Every so often industry outlets publish a piece on this firm's «cultural transformation»; four years later the same outlet publishes a piece on its collapse.

INTERLUDE: Jekyll's Diary as a Corporate Mission Statement

The novella's tenth chapter — «Henry Jekyll's Full Statement of the Case» — is a document written by Jekyll himself retrospectively as an explanation of what had happened. The document is impeccable in form. Every phrase is weighed, every transformation recorded, every ethical choice justified.

And yet it explains nothing.

Jekyll's diary measures the frequency of transformations, dosages, side effects. It does not measure what Argyris would call the only thing that matters — *the subject's capacity to discuss his own defensive routines*. Every sentence of the diary sidesteps the question «why did I begin?» through an explanation of «how I began.»

Corporate mission statements have the same property. They describe what the company does, without explaining why it does it this way rather than another. They explain values, without showing which practices contradict those values. They take as the zero point what is actually the outcome of many years of defensive routines.

Jekyll's diary is the most honest document in the whole novella, and that is precisely why it is the least diagnostic. A document that the front stage writes cannot diagnose the back stage. Stevenson knew this in 1886.

ANALYSIS: Three Dimensions of the Corporate Hyde

Speed Replaces Judgment

In the scene of Sir Danvers Carew's murder¹⁰ Hyde strikes a passerby with a cane with such energy that the cane breaks and the victim dies without understanding why. It all happens in an instant. Hyde did not deliberate. Did not hesitate. Just struck.

¹⁰ Stevenson, *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), chapter 4: «The Carew Murder Case.»

In the corporation that speed looks like this. The performance review cycle has passed, the ratings need to be set by end of week. A senior engineer who was carrying two complex projects did not have time to fill out the self-review properly. The manager does not have time to talk to him — he does not fit in the schedule. The senior gets «meets expectations.» Two weeks later the senior is writing a resume. No one is a villain. No one deliberated. Just the cane struck, and the cane broke.

Hyde is efficient precisely because he does not waste time on nuance. Corporate operational culture is efficient precisely because it does not waste time on seniors who do not fit the template. Espoused theory says: «we value people.» Theory-in-use says: «we value people-related processes performed on deadline.»

Ritual Replaces Work

A ritual is behavior that looks like work but does not lead to work's result. Schein noted that rituals are the most visible and therefore the most protected artifact of culture. They are easy to sustain (all that is needed is a schedule) and impossible to remove (to remove one requires explaining why the ritual does not work, and that requires discussing basic underlying assumptions).

A stand-up at 9:30 for forty-seven people, where nobody asks real questions, is a ritual. A quarterly business review where presentations take a week to prepare and decisions get made on three slides at

the end, is a ritual. A retrospective where the same four action items keep getting logged and not one gets closed, is a ritual.

The paradox of ritual is that it *simultaneously* sustains the espoused theory («we regularly get together to discuss progress») *and* makes the theory-in-use, which would require real discussion, impossible. Hyde uses ritual as alibi. I was at stand-up. I did not miss retrospective. I reported at QBR. That there was no room in that schedule for the conversation about the real problem is a structural fact, not my fault.

Role Replaces Person

In the novella's finale Stevenson makes an observation that the organizational literature will repeat for the next hundred and fifty years. Reading Jekyll's diary: by the end he stopped being himself and became what his position required him to be. Not Hyde. Not Jekyll. **The position.**

This is the final stage of corporate duality. Not the split between the person and his mask, not the gap between values and actions, but the disappearance of the person himself under the role. When the CEO says «as your CEO, I have to...», when HR says «I'm just doing my job,» when a manager says «that's the policy» — Stevenson would recognize the formulation. That is how a person speaks who has moved from first person to third, from subject to function.

Koreiko: The Russian Jekyll-Hyde

Ilya Ilf and Yevgeny Petrov in the novel *The Little Golden Calf* (30 Days magazine, 1931) gave the Soviet image of Doctor Jekyll — one that in places is stronger than Stevenson's, because it works without the potion and without the laboratory¹¹.

¹¹ Ilf, Ilya and Yevgeny Petrov. *The Little Golden Calf* (1931; magazine serialization in *30 Days*; first separate edition 1933). Chapters 4-8 describe the double life of Koreiko at the office «Herkules.» Ilf died 1937; Petrov died 1942; the Russian original is in the public domain (life+70 rule). Anne Fisher's 2009 English translation (Open Letter Press) is the standard modern reference; passages here rendered in the author's own English for voice-register consistency across the series.

Alexander Ivanovich Koreiko — a modest clerk in the office «Herkules,» draws 46 roubles a month, dines humbly with a retired puzzle-maker acquaintance. That is his front stage — a Jekyll of the Soviet type. On the back stage he is an underground millionaire with ten million roubles earned on half a dozen schemes — a Hyde of the same era. What makes Koreiko particularly interesting for our theme is this: **both his lives are impeccably executed.** The bookkeeping at the office is done without a single error. The underground schemes are organized with engineering precision. The gap between Jekyll-Koreiko and Hyde-Koreiko is sustained more carefully than in Stevenson — because Koreiko has no laboratory. He holds the gap inside one and the same body, one and the same apartment, one and the same biography, and the only thing making the separation possible is absolute *discipline: never let them mix.*

The plot of the novel is the story of how Ostop Bender tries to crack that gap. Bender is neither a villain nor a moralist — he plays the role of the outside consultant who sees both stages and treats them instrumentally. Koreiko resists not the fact that Bender demands money but the fact that Bender demands he *acknowledge* that both lives are one life.

Ilf and Petrov's ending is meaner than Stevenson's. Bender extracts the million and discovers there is nowhere in this country to spend it; that same winter he buys foreign currency and gold, and at the Romanian border the border guards strip him bare. And Koreiko? Koreiko burns the dossier, disappears from the scene, and dissolves into the provinces with nine million and both his lives intact. Stevenson killed his double man. Ilf and Petrov let theirs go, and that may be the most precise diagnosis: a disciplined Hyde outlives any Jekyll.

For corporate diagnostics Koreiko is important because he shows: dualism can work stably for years, if the subject has enough discipline to sustain the gap. Most organizational Jekylls of 2026 are arranged exactly this way. Not because they are on the verge of collapse. Because they have Koreiko-level discipline in separating front and back stages. It works — until someone from outside comes in and demands the two lives be fused into one.

REVERSAL: Cynicism as a Defense Mechanism

In the corporate literature it is customary to discuss the cynical employee as a problem — a person who «does not believe in the company's values,» undermines team spirit, requires coaching or removal. Argyris proposed another interpretation¹².

¹² Argyris, Chris. *Overcoming Organizational Defenses* (1990), chapter 4. Formulation adapted by the author for the cultural-diagnostic context from the book's material.

A cynic is an employee who sees the gap and **has no instrument to discuss it**. If the gap could be named at retrospective and discussed rationally, the cynic would be first in that discussion. Since it cannot be discussed (undiscussable), the cynic develops the only available behavior — unexpressed, sometimes humorous, sometimes acidic, protest in the corridors. Cynicism is a conversation about the undiscussables held on the back stage.

From this follows a conclusion that any manager finds hard to accept. **A high level of cynicism in a team is not a diagnosis of the employees; it is a diagnosis of the manager.** Employees who whisper that stand-up says one thing and sprint planning another are not bad employees. They are healthy employees who have identified the gap and have no frame in which to bring the conversation to the front stage.

Ron Westrum in his 2004 typology named three types of organizational culture by how they process bad news¹³. A *pathological* culture punishes the bearer of the bad news. A *bureaucratic* culture ignores it or processes it through a procedure. A *generative* culture thanks him and adapts. Employee cynicism is bad news about the existence of the gap. If there is a great deal of cynicism in a team, the culture is in one of the first two Westrum stages.

¹³ Westrum, Ron. «A Typology of Organisational Cultures.» *Quality and Safety in Health Care*, vol. 13, supp. 2, December 2004, pp. ii22-ii27. The generative/bureaucratic/pathological typology became the operational frame for all subsequent work on organizational learning, including the adaptation by Forsgren and coauthors in *Accelerate* (2018).

And here a strange, empirically stable phenomenon appears. Teams with the highest proportion of cynics often turn out to be teams with the lowest level of openly destructive behavior. Cynicism is a defense that keeps the gap from becoming toxicity. First the cynic disappears (leaves for a team with better communication). Then Lanyon disappears (leaves the industry or the role). And then toxicity arrives, because there is no one left to comment on the gap.

CASE: One Morning — When Hyde Comes Without the Potion

Stevenson describes the key turning point of the novella in a single paragraph. Jekyll falls asleep as himself and wakes with Hyde's hands. He looks at his fingers — and sees another's. Small, hairy, predatory. The transformation happened in his sleep, without the potion, without intent, without control.

In organizations the «Jekyll morning» arrives unnoticed. One day the manager discovers that he **himself** does what the company publicly condemns. Not once — *systemically*. Not out of anger — *by default*. And it is not a violation of his values. It is simply what in his role he *cannot do otherwise*.

Let us gather this moment in one monologue — composite, but each element a reader will recognize:

For three years I said at stand-up that we have an open feedback culture, and I sincerely believed it. Last autumn one of the new hires told me in a 1:1 he disagreed with my architectural decision on the project. I listened to him for twenty minutes, nodded, thanked him. A week later I moved him to another project (unrelated, not disciplinary, formally for business reasons). Six months later he resigned. At the next stand-up I again said we have an open feedback culture, and I again believed it. And at some point on a Saturday I understood: I do not do what I say. Not now, but already for years. All this time. And nobody noticed, because my behavior (that is how it is done here) is that.

That is the Jekyll morning. Not a catastrophe, not a scandal, not a resignation. A quiet morning when you look at your work habits and see another's. Habits you did not choose. Decisions you did not make — more precisely, you were making every day without noticing you were making them.

INSIGHT: The Gap Is Not a Lie, the Gap Is a Diagnosis

Unlike Stevenson's dark finale, the corporate version does not necessarily end in organizational death. Argyris and Schön in that same 1974 book formulate the only possible cure — **double-loop learning** — the capacity not only to correct actions but to revise the assumptions on which those actions are built.

That means acknowledging one simple thing. Corporate dualism is *not a lie*. This is not the story of bad people who lie and good people who do not. It is the story of a structure that by its construction produces a gap between declaration and action, and no degree of honesty can close that gap unless it is learned how to *discuss it*.

The double loop begins with someone at a meeting deciding to say: «What we are discussing right now contradicts what we say publicly.» That is the hardest sentence one can say in a large organization — because it automatically places the speaker in Lanyon’s position. He now knows. The knowledge lies on him, and he has let it out.

But the alternative is Stevenson’s finale. Lanyon dies, Jekyll locks himself in, Utterson stands at the door and reads the remaining papers when it is already too late. The corporate analog is familiar. The CEO leaves «to spend more time with family,» the new CEO hires new consultants, the manifesto gets rewritten once more, and three years later the same industry commentator publishes the next report.

So — three points for anyone reading this chapter as a guide rather than a literary exercise. First: learn to *name* the gap. Not fix it, but name it. Any attempt to fix without naming is a manifesto rewrite; Stevenson already wrote about that. Second: do not kill the Lanyons. If a senior with high standards leaves the team, your culture has just lost its most important diagnostic instrument. Ask him what he saw. Third: cynicism is not a pathology; cynicism is a symptom. Do not punish the symptom. Ask what it is trying to tell you.

From Hidden Duality to Open Vision

Stevenson left Jekyll locked in his own laboratory. There was no way for him to come out — because coming out meant acknowledging Hyde was inside and putting that acknowledgment through the front stage. A corporation in the stage of deep dualism is in exactly the same laboratory. The door is locked from inside, and no one from outside can rip it off without violence.

The next chapter is about a character who chose the opposite approach. Not to hide Hyde, but on the contrary to *manifest* — to see the world as it is not, and act on that vision without minding that everyone around sees otherwise. Don Quixote does not lock himself in a laboratory. He puts on a basin instead of a helmet and rides across the plain of La Mancha on Rocinante, and the only one who sees the world as he does is Sancho Panza — and even then not always.

From Stevenson’s closed duality to Cervantes’s open vision. From Hyde who hides to giants who are not there. Both answers are an escape from *structural* seeing of reality. But one hides in the basement, the other rides out over the hill.

«Man is not truly one, but truly two. I say two, because the state of my own knowledge does not pass beyond that point. Others will follow, others will outstrip me on the same lines»

— Robert Louis Stevenson, *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886)¹⁴

¹⁴ Stevenson, *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), chapter 10: «Henry Jekyll's Full Statement of the Case».

Chapter 8: Don Quixote and Sancho — The Birth of Team Myth



What this chapter is about. The finale of Act II. Karl Weick showed in 1995 what Cervantes had shown in 1605: organizations are held together not by org structures and not by procedures, but by a shared story about who they are and where they are going. The team of Quixote and Sancho is not a madman with a voice of reason beside him but the first literary portrait of team mythology: the visionary composes the challenge, the pragmatist translates the myth into action, windmills turn into giants, action into collective meaning. Four laws of team mythology, three of its modes (generative, defensive, reconciling), one Russian twin, and one death, in which Sancho weeps not for the loss of a partner but for the loss of a shared meaning.

Cervantes, La Mancha, 1605

«At this point they came in sight of thirty or forty windmills that there are on that plain, and as soon as Don Quixote saw them he said to his squire, “Fortune is arranging matters for us better than we could have shaped our desires ourselves, for look there, friend Sancho Panza, where thirty or more monstrous giants present themselves, all of whom I mean to engage in battle and slay”»¹.

For four centuries this scene was read as a comic episode. The madman sees what is not there; the loyal squire points to the obvious; the lance breaks against a sail; the hero falls; the reader laughs.

But Cervantes was not writing a satire on madness. He was describing a phenomenon for which the organizational sciences of his day had no name: the shared story that holds a team in motion. Quixote sees giants not because his mind has slipped — he sees them because he has *chosen* to see. Forty years earlier he would have spent his life in the library of Alonso Quijano the Good. Now he has a knight's vow, a lance, a helmet-basin — and Sancho. A team of two, held together by a myth.

Sancho sees windmills as windmills. But he *goes with Quixote*. Not because he believes in giants, but because he believes in the promised island with which Quixote pays him for his service. Sancho has his own version of the shared myth, and it is just as real as the giants. The island is a future one can reach through present actions. If he follows Quixote long enough, the island materializes.

Two men, two interpretive frames, one shared narrative. That is what a team looks like — not on an org chart but in action.

What Actually Holds a Team Together

In the corporate textbooks teams are described as if they were held together by structure. Job descriptions distribute responsibility. KPIs align effort. RACI matrices resolve conflict. Stand-ups synchronize action. If you set up the processes correctly, the team runs like clockwork.

In reality anyone who has worked in a team at all knows: none of the above holds a team together. A KPI can be met formally while remaining alienated from the team. A stand-up can be sat through without saying what matters. A job description is a document nobody has opened since the employment contract was signed.

What holds a team in action lies in another dimension. Karl Weick formulated this in 1995 in the book that became the foundation of modern organizational theory: organizations are systems of collective sensemaking². A team is not a sum of positions but a sum of interpretations. Reality arrives at a team as a stream of ambiguous signals: a drop in conversion, an unhappy customer, a developer who resigned, a piece of news about a competitor. The team survives not by measuring those signals but by turning them into a *story*: «here is what is happening to us, here is why, here is who we are in this situation, here is where we are going.»

Weick showed on empirical material — from smokejumper crews at Mann Gulch to flight deck teams on aircraft carriers — that in moments when the story breaks, the team breaks too. Not because people got worse but because collective action is in principle impossible without collective interpretation of what is happening. Without the shared story, «doing something» is literally not possible.

Cervantes showed the same 390 years before Weick, only he did it in literature. Quixote without Sancho is a mad librarian who dies in bed. Sancho without Quixote is a peasant who works his patch of land until the end of his life. Together they become a team — because they have a shared myth in which neither of them alone could have believed.

Four Laws of Team Mythology

Read as a theory of organizations, *Don Quixote* formulates four laws by which team mythology works. They work the same way in 1605 in La Mancha, in 1928 in the Soviet provinces, in 2010 in a Silicon Valley garage, and in 2026 in any meeting room where two or more people are doing something together.

Law One: The Founding Myth

Quixote does not become Quixote right away. Cervantes devotes an entire chapter of Part I to showing how the transformation happens: the fifty-year-old *hidalgo* Alonso Quijano reads chivalric romances in the library; at some point decides it is not enough to read about deeds — one must perform them; takes the vow; finds his great-grandfather's rusty armor; names the horse Rocinante; christens the neighboring peasant girl Aldonza as Dulcinea del Toboso³. There is no Sancho in this chapter, no windmills. There is only the act of adopting a founding myth: «I am a knight-errant.»

The founding myth is not a story of what a team does but of *who it is*. In corporate folklore this is «we started in a garage,» «we decided that banking services should be more human,» «we wanted to change how the world looks at clothing.» Edgar Schein in *Organizational Culture and Leadership* (1985) showed that the founders' obsessions become the basic underlying assumptions of the organizational culture for decades to come⁴. Yvon Chouinard founded Patagonia in 1973 with the myth «we make gear for climbers because we are climbers ourselves.» Half a century later the company's environmental activism still derives directly from that myth — not from strategy, not from ESG fashion, but from the self-definition the founder laid down.

The founding myth is not marketing positioning. Marketing answers the question «what do we sell.» The founding myth answers the question «why are we here at all.» A team without an answer to that question is not a team but a project group temporarily coexisting on a shared calendar.

Law Two: The Visionary-Pragmatist Duo

Cervantes insists that Quixote alone is impossible. Part I begins with a short sally in which Quixote without a squire gets beaten, returns home half-dead, recovers. Only having acquired Sancho does he become the Quixote we know: attacking windmills, freeing galley slaves, disputing the helmet of Mambrino.

This is not a plot accident. Team mythology requires two complementary roles: the visionary who composes the myth, and the pragmatist who leads that myth into collision with reality. The visionary sees giants. The pragmatist sees that the giants have turning sails. The visionary charges. The pragmatist picks up the fallen one and drags him to the inn. Without the visionary the team goes nowhere. Without the pragmatist the team does not survive the first mill.

In corporate history this duo repeats at every major founding: Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak, Walt and Roy Disney, Larry Page and Sergey Brin, Bill Hewlett and David Packard. One composes the

myth — the other makes the myth achievable. When the duo breaks up before the organization reaches maturity, the myth typically either turns into reality without verification (Theranos with its «Edisonian machine» that never worked) or falls apart into pure operations without direction (countless family companies in the second generation).

Sancho is not Quixote's opponent. He is not the voice of reason that debunks the illusion. He is a partner who believes in his own version of the myth — the island. If Sancho considered Quixote simply mad, he would have returned to the pigs after the first windmill. He does not return. He argues with Quixote, corrects him, sometimes laughs at him, but he does not exit the myth. The pragmatist in a team exists not to kill the myth but to translate it into actions the myth will outlive.

Law Three: Adventure as Narrative

Quixote does not merely see giants. He embeds every encounter into a larger story. The windmill is a giant sent by the enchanter Frestón specifically to deprive Quixote of glory. The inn is a castle. The barber with a basin on his head is a knight in the helmet of Mambrino. The galley slaves are prisoners of injustice whom knight-errantry must free. Every encounter finds its place in the narrative Quixote unfolds on the move.

This is not madness. It is the basic work of sensemaking that Joseph Campbell in 1949 described as the monomyth: the recurring structure of the hero's journey into which human cultures have arranged their stories for millennia⁵. The call to adventure. The meeting with the threshold. Trials and allies. The battle with the shadow. The return with the trophy. All working teams, regardless of industry, tell the story of their experience through that structure — because otherwise human consciousness simply does not know how to compose events.

Corporate mythology exploits this structure openly. Quarterly OKRs — «battles.» Competitors — «giants» or «dragons.» A product launch — «adventure.» A customer rescued from a bad experience — «Andrés freed»⁶. Corporate trainers turned this into cliché, but the cliché does not annul the phenomenon. A team that cannot tell the story of its own adventure loses its will to act. That is visible in any project group that has settled into backlog-grooming mode: tasks get done, sprints close, and the sense of movement is gone. The narrative is broken.

Law Four: The Collision of Myth with Reality

The eighth chapter of Part I ends the way any encounter of myth with physics must end: Quixote is broken against the windmill, Rocinante is damaged, the lance is in splinters, the knight lies on the ground. Cervantes does not spare the hero. The giants turn out to be windmills. They *were* windmills the whole time.

But Quixote does not renounce the myth. He renounces *this* interpretation of *this* episode. «Doubtless the same wise Frestón who plundered my study and books has turned those giants into windmills to deprive me of the glory of victory»¹. The myth survives the collision through local rewriting: the enchanter interfered, not I who erred. The team moves on.

Karl Weick described the opposite scenario in a 1993 paper, «The Collapse of Sensemaking in Organizations: The Mann Gulch Disaster»⁷. In August 1949 a team of fifteen smokejumpers landed to fight a forest fire in Mann Gulch canyon, Montana. Within an hour the fire suddenly picked up speed and the team had to run. The foreman Wag Dodge, understanding that outrunning the fire would not work, invented on the spot what did not exist in their training: he set the grass in front of him ablaze, lay down in the burned circle, and waited while the main fire passed him by. He survived. Most of his subordinates died, because they could not renounce the myth «the smokejumper outruns the fire and wins.» Their interpretive frame did not include «lie down in the fire to save yourself.» When reality demanded renunciation of the familiar myth, the myth turned out to be more important than life.

That is the fourth law in its pure form. A myth that cannot be rewritten upon collision with reality kills the team. A myth that renounces itself at every collision also kills the team — because without a myth there is no team at all. Between these two extremes there is a narrow road: the myth is rewritten *locally*, the shared frame holds, the team moves on. Quixote rewrites the giants into Frestón's magic and rides to the next adventure. Wag Dodge rewrites «smokejumper flees fire» into «smokejumper invents fire against fire» — and lives.

Argyris and Schön would call this double-loop learning⁸: the team changes not only its tactics but its interpretive frame. Most teams cannot manage that. That is why most myths either petrify or shatter.

INTERLUDE: The Helmet of Mambrino, or Collective Interpretation at Work

Chapter XXI of Part I. Quixote sees a horseman wearing a golden helmet. Sancho sees a barber with a copper basin covering his head from the rain. The team draws closer. The barber, alarmed, flees, dropping the basin. Quixote picks up the trophy and declares it the helmet of Mambrino — the legendary helmet of chivalric romance. Sancho laughs: «Sir, that is a basin.» They argue. The resolution is coined by Sancho: what to his master seems a helmet, and to everyone else a basin, he calls a *baciyelmo* — a basin-helmet, a neologism from the fusion of *bacía* (basin) and *yelmo* (helmet)¹. A third frame in which both interpretations live. Several chapters later Cervantes shows the parody of collective agreement: at the inn a company for their own amusement «recognizes» the basin as a helmet — by vote, with straight faces — and the mocking consensus ends in a general brawl. Both scenes are familiar to anyone who has sat in meetings: there is a third frame that lets people work together, and there is a vote that simply nominates a winner.

This is the first scene of collective sensemaking in action in world literature. One object. Two interpretive frames. A group that does not choose one but constructs a third in which both are preserved. This is sensemaking in Weick's sense: not «find the right answer» but «settle on a working version that lets us act together»².

In the corporate reality *bacielmo* is encountered daily. A quarterly report: a 3% growth — is this success or failure? The analyst sees the plan met. The marketer sees a loss to the market, which grew 8%. The finance officer sees good conversion of investment compared with competitors. Each is right within his frame. The team does not choose one frame — it constructs a joint interpretation: «a stable result, below potential, requires strengthening of marketing in the next quarter.» That decision is not computed. It is assembled.

A team that knows how to construct *bacielmo* survives collisions of myth with reality without decomposition. A team that insists on a single correct interpretation either petrifies in dogma or splits into individual points of view with no connection between them. In the first case the team becomes a sect. In the second — a conglomerate of freelancers passing through a shared calendar.

ANALYSIS: Three Modes of Team Mythology

If a myth holds a team together, it also destroys the team — if it works in the wrong mode. Careful reading of *Don Quixote* together with the empirical material of modern corporate history yields three stable modes.

Generative mode. The myth organizes action, is tested against reality, is rewritten in collisions, the team moves. Patagonia has held the founding myth «gear for climbers made by climbers» for more than fifty years, but rewrites it at every stage: first the gear, then sustainable production, then legal battles for the environment, then the 2022 transfer of the company to an environmental trust⁹. SpaceX holds together on the myth «multiplanetary civilization»; each Starship test is either a confirmation of the myth or a rewriting of tactics while preserving the frame. The Toyota Production System has held for seven decades on the myth «continuous improvement through respect for the human being»; the frame remains, specific practices are rewritten.

Defensive mode. The myth is used to shield reality rather than to meet it. Theranos held its «Edisonian machine democratizes blood analysis» myth for more than a decade — first while the machine did not work, then while it did not work loudly, then while it did not work catastrophically. The originally strong founding myth had become an instrument of concealment. There was no Sancho to say «Sir, that is a basin.» More accurately: such Sanchos existed — the chief chemist Ian Gibbons; engineers who resigned one after another — but the visionary drove them out or discredited them. A myth without a pragmatic corrector becomes a hallucination¹⁰. WeWork in 2018-2019 held the myth «we elevate the world's consciousness» while the finances said otherwise. The collapse was not unexpected. It was a delayed collision with physics the team refused to stage for itself¹¹.

Reconciling mode. This is the real work of Sancho: not «kill the myth with facts» but «translate the myth into actions the myth will outlive.» When reality brings a challenge, the pragmatist in the team insists not on renouncing the myth but on reviewing the way it is realized. Argyris and Schön described this in the categories of double-loop learning⁸: what changes is not only what we do but why. A team that has both a visionary and a working pragmatist passes through collisions of myth with real-

ity without losing either direction or the connection with physics. In this consists the whole intellectual labor of teamwork — the balance between dogma and cynical operations.

The emotional intelligence described by Daniel Goleman in 1995¹², in this picture, is not a separate skill but an instrument of the reconciling mode. Goleman identified five components: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, social skills. Each of them is about reading what is not expressed directly: nonverbal cues, contextual hints, the emotional state of a partner, unspoken expectations. In terms of team mythology: the reconciling mode requires reading what the myth has not said and what reality has not yet presented in explicit form. A team without this ability either breaks the myth at the first mismatch or ignores reality until catastrophe. A team with it translates each collision into a local revision and moves on.

CASE: Bender and Vorobyandinov — the Russian Team of Quixote and Sancho

Ilf and Petrov in 1928 published a novel that Soviet criticism read as a satire on the NEP-era intelligentsia and then ten years later as a caricature of the emigration. But *The Twelve Chairs* is first and foremost the story of one team with one myth¹³.

Ostap Bender is a pure visionary. He finds in the former marshal of the nobility Ippolit Matveyevich Vorobyandinov a fragment of information: Vorobyandinov's mother-in-law confessed on her deathbed that she had sewn the family diamonds into the upholstery of one of the twelve chairs of the drawing-room set. The chairs have been requisitioned, dispersed to new owners, scattered across the USSR. Bender immediately mints a myth — *chair, diamonds, new life* — and the myth organizes the next two hundred pages of action: journeys, cons, impersonations, break-ins, disguises, extractions.

Vorobyandinov is Sancho. He is stingy, pragmatic, attached to the social status he lost after the revolution. He does not believe in the myth wholesale — he believes in the *chairs*. Diamonds as material objects that can be reached, sold, lived from. But without Bender he would never have dared. Vorobyandinov alone is a former marshal of the nobility spending his days as a clerk in the registry office. Vorobyandinov with Bender is a participant in a great adventure that might still end in the return of what was lost.

The Cervantine structure repeats almost schematically. The visionary composes the myth, the pragmatist translates it into actions, the myth passes through dozens of collisions with reality — failures, chairs lost, competition from a priest who also knows about the diamonds. Each collision is rewritten locally: the myth stays, the tactics change. The team moves.

And the finale — more precise than Cervantes's. In the last chapter Vorobyandinov learns where the twelfth chair is. At night, while Bender sleeps, Vorobyandinov cuts his throat with a razor. He climbs into the club, splits open the last chair — empty. And the caretaker, unsuspecting, cheerfully tells the night visitor a story: in the spring he stood on that chair to change a lightbulb, slipped, tore the uphol-

stery — and stones spilled from under the calico. The diamonds paid for the very club Vorobyandinov is now standing in. The myth is destroyed. The partner is dead. Vorobyandinov loses his mind.

Literary scholarship has spent decades discussing why Ilf and Petrov ended the novel in this way. The version that works in the terms of team mythology: Vorobyandinov does not kill Bender because he grew disenchanted with the myth. He kills Bender precisely because he *believes in the myth too strongly* — so strongly he is not willing to divide the diamonds. That is, the pragmatist in the team at the last moment turns into a solitary visionary. Sancho becomes Quixote — and at that same moment the myth collapses. The team of two disappears twice: first through the murder of the partner, then through the collapse of the myth itself. The diamonds were in the railway workers' club. They had already been spent. The Russian revolution itself, like a twelfth windmill, turned out to be a windmill: what Vorobyandinov considered a giant challenge was in fact an already accomplished fact past which he had been walking for the last six months without noticing.

Cervantes gave us the perfect visionary who lived to his renunciation and died in his bed — and Sancho sat beside him. Ilf and Petrov gave us the perfect pragmatist who killed his visionary and went mad discovering the myth was empty. Two forms of one and the same truth: a team without a partner is a dead team. Whichever of the two is left alone — he does not survive.

REVERSAL: The Death of Quixote — Separation from the Myth

The seventy-fourth chapter of Part II is one of the saddest scenes in world literature. Quixote returns home beaten, having lost his last combat. He lies down in bed and for several days says: «I was mad, and I am now in my senses; I was Don Quixote of La Mancha, and I am now, as I have said, Alonso Quijano the Good»¹⁴.

The niece and the housekeeper rejoice: uncle has recovered. The priest is pleased: chivalric romances have stopped poisoning his mind. The doctor shakes his head. Everyone around sees a recovery.

Only Sancho weeps. He sits by the bed and begs:

«Ah master, don't die, master, but take my advice and live many years; for the foolishlest thing a man can do in this life is to let himself die without rhyme or reason...»¹⁴

Sancho does not understand what Cervantes understood. Quixote is not dying of defeat and not of exhaustion. He is dying of separation from the myth. When he stopped being Don Quixote, his body lost its reason to exist. Alonso Quijano the Good is not a person, he is a name in the parish register. Don Quixote was a person because he lived a knight's life. Without the myth there is no person.

This is not a literary device. It is an empirical observation confirmed every time a team loses its founder — not physically but through separation from the founding myth. Apple between 1985 and 1997, without Steve Jobs, did not die but lost the capacity to produce the things that made it Apple. Volvo after the Ford takeover in 1999 continued to produce cars, but they were no longer Volvos.

WeWork after Adam Neumann's ouster in 2019 continued to exist as a legal entity — but the team the myth had held together no longer existed.

Cervantes leaves Sancho the final gesture. The pragmatist weeps not because he lost a salary or an island. He weeps because when Quixote dies, Sancho — the man who passed with Quixote two Parts and a thousand pages — also disappears. What remains is the peasant Sancho Panza, who works his patch of land until the end of his life. Without a partner, without a myth, without action.

The thought to carry away: the myth by which a team lived should not die together with one of the participants. Cervantes showed the death of the myth through the death of the visionary. Ilf and Petrov — through the murder of the visionary by the pragmatist. Both variants lead to one thing: the team is no more.

INSIGHT: Why Teams Actually Exist

Karl Weick's thought can be compressed as follows: management is above all the management of meanings, not of things; things are done by delegation, meanings are done only by the team². This formula could sum up the whole second act of the book.

Phileas Fogg showed iteration as team common sense. Frankenstein — the creator's responsibility for those left behind. Holmes and Watson — the power of analytical partnership. Captain Nemo — the limits of autonomy without collegial correction. Mina Harker — distributed knowledge glued into a single report. Doctor Jekyll and Doctor Lanyon — the split between declared culture and real operations. Don Quixote and Sancho — the mythology that makes the previous six archetypes possible.

All six preceding archetypes work only in a team that has a shared interpretation of what it is doing. Without that interpretation Holmes stays a lonely opium addict, Nemo a misanthrope-terrorist, Mina a secretary with a phonograph, Jekyll a hospital chief leading a double life. The myth is not an addition to teamwork. The myth is its load-bearing construction.

Corporate speech of the last thirty years has treated mythology skeptically. The words *narrative*, *story*, *meaning*, *mission* have been worn to a state where they trigger reflex eye-rolls. It is an understandable reaction. Mythology is faked more than anything else in corporate communication. But if you strip out the counterfeit myths, what remains is not emptiness. What remains is the real myths on which every working team stands. A team that denies having a mythology is usually simply not accountable for the one it has. Which means its myth either is not reviewed or shatters without conscious defense.

Cervantes and Ilf and Petrov showed two modes of team death: the myth outlived everyone, or the myth was destroyed. The third mode — the myth is alive and being reviewed — literature describes more rarely, because living teams are less interesting to write about. But that third mode is the only place where a team keeps working.

To the Third Act

The second act is done. Eight archetypes, eight dimensions accumulated by the book to this boundary: iteration, responsibility, partnership, measurement without loss of meaning, autonomy, distributed knowledge, corporate dualism, mythology. This is not an exhaustive list — it is eight literary readings through which passes most of what the modern management literature calls «soft skills,» «organizational culture,» and «leadership.»

The third act turns to horizons. What happens to teamwork when the basic conditions of labor change? What outlives the team in a prolonged crisis, when the usual myths no longer work, because there is no one left to listen? What mythological forms will the next generation need when the familiar supports disappear?

Beyond the windows of the office park stands the same windmill of thirty or forty towers. Someone behind one of the panes is right now handing a team its founding myth. Someone behind another is rewriting the myth against a new reality. Someone behind a third is discovering the myth is empty. The windmills turn.

The third act waits.

Footnotes:

¹ Cervantes, Miguel de. *Don Quixote de La Mancha* (1605). Part I, chapter VIII (windmills episode) and chapter XXI (Helmet of Mambrino). English quoted per John Ormsby's canonical 1885 translation (public domain, Project Gutenberg #996), which this edition uses as its English source for Cervantes, with attribution. Contemporary English translations under active copyright (Edith Grossman 2003; John Rutherford 2000) are not quoted, per the series rule established in chapter 4 note 1.

² Weick, Karl E. *Sensemaking in Organizations* (1995). Foundations for Organizational Science series, Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA. Foundational work on the theory of organizational sense-making. See also Weick, Karl E. & Karlene H. Roberts, «Collective Mind in Organizations: Heedful Interrelating on Flight Decks,» *Administrative Science Quarterly* 38, no. 3 (1993): 357–381 — an analysis of aircraft carrier flight-deck teams as an example of collective mind in organizations with a high cost of error.

³ Cervantes, *Don Quixote* (1605), Part I, chapters I-II: the library of Alonso Quijano, the adoption of the name Don Quixote of La Mancha, the christening of Rocinante and Dulcinea.

⁴ Schein, Edgar H. *Organizational Culture and Leadership* (1985). Jossey-Bass, San Francisco. Foundational work on the three levels of organizational culture and on the founders' role in shaping basic underlying assumptions.

⁵ Campbell, Joseph. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949). Bollingen Series XVII, Pantheon Books, New York. Concept of the monomyth — the recurring structure of the hero's journey in world cultures.

⁶ Cervantes, *Don Quixote* (1605), Part I, chapter IV: Don Quixote frees the shepherd boy Andrés from his master, who was beating him. One of the early episodes in which «rescuing the oppressed» becomes part of Quixote's chivalric narrative. The episode ends with an ironic resolution in chapter XXXI of the same first part: the master beat Andrés even harder as soon as Quixote rode away — as the pragmatist Sancho could have predicted.

⁷ Weick, Karl E. «The Collapse of Sensemaking in Organizations: The Mann Gulch Disaster.» *Administrative Science Quarterly* 38, no. 4 (December 1993): 628–652. An analysis of the disaster of August 5, 1949 in Mann Gulch canyon (Montana, USA): thirteen of the sixteen people in the gorge died; besides Dodge, only two smokejumpers made it over the ridge. Foreman Wag Dodge survived by inventing on the spot a technique of escape fire that did not exist in their training.

⁸ Argyris, Chris & Donald Schön. *Organizational Learning: A Theory of Action Perspective* (1978). Addison-Wesley, Reading, MA. The concept of double-loop learning is analyzed in detail in chapter 6b (Jekyll & Lanyon), part 2, as applied to corporate dualism.

⁹ Chouinard, Yvon. *Let My People Go Surfing: The Education of a Reluctant Businessman* (2005). Penguin Books, New York. The founding story of Patagonia in the founder's own words. In September 2022 Chouinard and his family transferred 100% of the company into a trust and a non-profit dedicated to environmental protection.

¹⁰ Carreyrou, John. *Bad Blood: Secrets and Lies in a Silicon Valley Startup* (2018). Knopf, New York. The canonical journalistic investigation of Theranos and Elizabeth Holmes, based on interviews with more than 150 sources, including former company employees.

¹¹ Wiedeman, Reeves. *Billion Dollar Loser: The Epic Rise and Spectacular Fall of Adam Neumann and WeWork* (2020). Little, Brown and Company, New York. A journalistic reconstruction of the WeWork story from its founding through Neumann's ouster.

¹² Goleman, Daniel. *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Matters More Than IQ* (1995). Bantam Books, New York. The five components of emotional intelligence: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, social skills.

¹³ Ilf, Ilya and Yevgeny Petrov. *The Twelve Chairs* (1928). First serialized in *30 Days* magazine, Moscow, January-July 1928; separate edition Zemlya i Fabrika, 1928. In the sequel *The Little Golden Calf* (1931) Bender is revealed to have survived: the wound was not fatal, he was saved in hospital. This authorial revision does not annul the literary effect of the *Twelve Chairs* finale. Ilf died 1937; Petrov died 1942; the Russian original is in the public domain (life+70 rule). Anne Fisher's 2009 English translation (Open Letter Press) is the standard modern reference; passages here rendered in the author's own English for voice-register consistency across the series.

¹⁴ Cervantes, *Don Quixote* (1615). Part II, chapter LXXIV: «Soy Alonso Quijano el Bueno» / «I am Alonso Quijano the Good.» The scene of Don Quixote's renunciation of the knightly myth and his death. English quoted per John Ormsby's canonical 1885 translation (public domain, Project Gutenberg #996); author's abbreviated rendering above where the Victorian register did not fit the surrounding contemporary prose.

Intermezzo II. The Production Basement



***What this intermezzo is about.** A production basement: two hundred and thirty-seven bugs hanging, one hundred and eighty-nine P0s recoded to P1, P1 to P2, P2 to technical debt, technical debt to a workshop in the next quarter (which is still being planned). Agile methodology as the formalized avoidance of programming. Four huddles a day to synchronize a team that produces nothing between them. A satire sharper than any post-mortem.*

The stairs down ended at a door with a sign «Production. Authorized Only.» Alice found herself in a basement where servers hummed, diodes blinked, and cold pizza smelled. Behind the monitors sat three: a woman with the posture of an opera prima, a thin programmer in Ray-Ban glasses (a fake from the Sadovod market), and the familiar striped cat, tapping on the keyboard with all four paws at once.

«Oh, the girl has come to the huddle!» the woman said. «My name is Margarita, I am the product owner. Behemoth maintains the legacy code.»

«Legacy code cannot be maintained,» the cat purred without looking up. «You can only have a relationship with it. A complicated one.»

«A huddle?» Alice repeated. «But it is noon.»

«The midday one!» the bespectacled man beamed. «We have four: morning at nine, midday at one, evening at five, and the midnight planning at half past eleven. For better synchronization.»

«And what do you synchronize?»

«Tasks!» Margarita gestured with the air of a hostess showing the family silver. «We have two hundred and thirty-seven tasks hanging in production. Very productive.»

«And how many have you fixed?»

It became so quiet that the hum of servers from the next room could be heard. The programmers exchanged glances.

«Sire,» the cat purred, «the girl is again asking the wrong questions.»

«We do not fix bugs, dear,» Margarita explained patiently. «We prioritize them. P0, P1, P2, P3. Plus criticality: A, B, C, D. Plus color coding by area, for better visualization.»

«And what does P0 mean?»

«A critical bug,» the bespectacled man stated. «To be fixed immediately.»

«And there are many of them?»

«One hundred and eighty-nine!» Margarita said with pride.

«And they get fixed?»

«What for? They are moved to P1. When new P0s appear.»

«And P1?»

«To P2.»

«And P2?»

The cat finally looked up from the laptop: «To technical debt. And technical debt we shall clear in the next quarter.»

«That is, never.»

«Why say never at once?» Margarita took offense. «We have scheduled a workshop on technical debt. For next year. We are currently planning the workshop.»

«And what are you programming now?»

The bespectacled man looked at her in astonishment: «We do not program. We do estimates and planning. We have an agile methodology.»

«Then who is programming?»

«Automation!» Margarita said with importance. «The build and deploy pipeline.»

«And does it work?»

«It falls over every day,» the bespectacled man reported cheerfully. «But we have monitoring! It shows very beautiful graphs of the failures. Would you like us to print a calendar?»

«Sire,» the cat said, «wouldn't you like to show the girl our velocity?»

Margarita snapped her fingers, and a graph flashed on the wall with lines in all colors of the rainbow.

«Velocity has been rising for the third month in a row!»

Alice looked closer. The vertical axis showed «story points,» the horizontal, sprints.

«And what are story points?»

«A unit of task complexity,» the bespectacled man said. «Assigned by collective decision-making. Planning poker: each shows a card with a number, we take the maximum.»

«Why the maximum?»

«For safety. If the task turns out to be more complex, there could be questions.»

«From whom?»

«FROM THE STAKEHOLDERS,» all three answered in chorus, and even the servers seemed to hum more quietly.

«And who are the stakeholders?»

Silence again. The cat stopped typing.

«Honestly?» the bespectacled man whispered. «We do not quite know. But they are very important and they constantly ask about deadlines.»

«And what deadlines?»

«The next sprint,» Margarita nodded. «Always the next sprint. It is a very convenient deadline: it never arrives and it is always close.»

The cat chuckled and began to wash himself.

«What if you tried,» Alice suggested carefully, «just to make one small fix? Instead of all this planning?»

The faces of the programmers twisted in horror.

«Without an estimate?!» the bespectacled man whispered.

«Without planning?!» Margarita gasped.

«Without the approval process?!» the cat exclaimed, pinning back his ears.

«This is chaos engineering!» Margarita said severely. «We have acceptance criteria. Definition of ready. Definition of done. And a policy.»

«What policy?»

«No one does anything without approval,» she explained proudly.

«And who gives approval?»

«The Committee for Collective Decision-Making.»

«And when does it convene?»

«Once a quarter,» the cat said, returning to the keyboard. «We are currently planning the next meeting. The agenda: approval of the agenda.»

Alice slowly walked toward the stairs. Behind her came:

«Korzhikov was right,» Margarita sighed. «The girl does not understand corporate approaches.»

«Perhaps we could arrange an introduction for her?» the bespectacled man suggested.

«A good idea. Let us plan a master class on planning the introduction process.»

«And I shall meanwhile reconfigure the monitoring,» the cat said. «I have lost my taste for red failure alerts. I shall make them burgundy. Burgundy is nobler and less nerve-wracking for stakeholders.»

¹ IP discipline note: per intermezzo-1 note 1 — character names of Bulgakov's Woland retinue (Woland, Behemoth, Koroviev, Azazello, Hella, Margarita) given per canonical English renderings (Michael Glenny 1967 translation, Collins); new dialogue in these intermezzi rendered in the author's own English for voice-register consistency across the series, per the rule established in chapter 4 note 1. No verbatim quotation from copyrighted contemporary English translations.

Chapter 9: The Time Machine and the Horizons of Labor



«The Time Traveller (for so it will be convenient to speak of him) was expounding a recondite matter to us. His grey eyes shone and twinkled, and his usually pale face was flushed and animated.»¹

— H.G. Wells, *The Time Machine* (1895), chapter I

What this chapter is about. In 1895 Wells is describing not a journey to the year 802,701 but the mechanism by which labor is rearranged under the pressure of technology. The Eloi and the Morlocks are not future science fiction but the logic of workforce differentiation carried to its limit: a leisure class above ground and a subterranean class below. A century later economists will rediscover the same mechanism under the names «job po-

larization» (Astor) and «political economy of distribution» (Acemoglu and Johnson). Platonov in 1930 adds a third reading: labor severed from its own outcome turns into a pit that eats itself. This chapter introduces four laws of the horizons of labor — the frame on which the closing chapters stand.

London, October 1894

Rain on the window of the rented room. Twenty-eight-year-old Herbert George Wells, an unfinished biologist, a failed schoolteacher, a beginning journalist, is rewriting for the umpteenth time a manuscript editors have been rejecting for four years². At first it was called *The Chronic Argonauts* and appeared in the Royal College of Science student magazine in 1888. Then rewritten into a magazine novella. Then rewritten again. By the autumn of 1894 it is almost *The Time Machine*, and Wells still does not know what book he is writing.

He thinks he is writing a scientific romance: a machine that rides through the fourth dimension, strange pale creatures in a garden, grim underground beasts. The angle of attack is biological: what becomes of the human being over eight hundred thousand years of evolution? By the end of the year Wells will add the Time Traveller's opening lecture on the geometry of four dimensions and sell the manuscript to Heinemann for a fifty-pound advance.

But the book he is writing is not about evolution. Wells is a socialist long before the Fabian ticket (he will join the Webbs' society only in 1903): he caught socialism as a student, at Sunday lectures at Kelmscott House with William Morris. Now he is publishing with William Ernest Henley, and he looks at the London East End of 1894 — sweatshops, coal cellars, servants on the back stairs of Kensington — and sees not individual injustices but a mechanism³. A class that lives underground and services the machines. A class that lives in the light and consumes the result. Between them a chasm that deepens with every technological cycle.

Wells picks up the pen and rewrites the closing episode. The Time Traveller lands not in a utopia and not in a catastrophe. He lands in the **logic of the division of labor carried to its limit**. The Eloi and the Morlocks are not two biological species. They are two classes that have been evolving apart for too long.

The Time Machine shows not the year 802,701 but the next industrial cycle.

Wells the Socialist, Not the Futurist

For more than a century critics read *The Time Machine* as a novel of biological degeneration: what if the human race declines? That was a convenient reading; it let one admire the imagery and ignore the politics. Wells never hid what he was doing. In an 1902 lecture at the Royal Institution he set out his method directly: take an existing tendency and carry it to its logical limit⁴.

The tendency Wells carries to its limit in *The Time Machine* is the **differentiation of the workforce under the pressure of the technological cycle**. In Britain in the 1890s roughly 1.75 million women worked in domestic service, about one in three of all working women; more than two hundred thousand of them in London⁵. British coal mines produced roughly two hundred million tons a year and employed nearly eight hundred thousand people, most of whose lives passed underground. That is the germ of the Morlocks: a class that literally supplies the light above without seeing it themselves.

In this sense Wells is doing what Karl Polanyi will do half a century later in *The Great Transformation*, and what David Autor will do a century later in his work on the polarization of labor. All three describe the same mechanism from three different positions — literary, historical, econometric:

- **The labor market does not obey an internal logic of justice.** It obeys the logic of technology and of power.
- **Technology is not neutral.** Every innovation redistributes: who receives the surplus, who pays for the transition, whose work becomes more expensive, whose becomes cheaper.
- **Stratification does not correct itself.** It intensifies until a political force enters the field: a union, a regulator, a counter-movement.

Wells described what happens when there is no counter-movement.

Four Laws of the Horizons of Labor

Law One: Enhancement Becomes Reorganization

Every innovation arrives on the labor market under the flag of «enhancement»: here is a helper who will do your work faster and easier. Ten or fifteen years later the helper is still there, but the whole structure of work has been rearranged around it, and a share of the old positions simply stops paying its way.

Electronic mail was sold to corporations in 1995 as «a tool for secretaries and middle managers»: let them write faster, cut back on routine letters, important correspondence stays on paper. By the mid-2000s secretarial pools in large companies had all but disappeared as independent units⁶. Not because email replaced secretaries. But because the whole managerial communication reassembled around email: asynchronous correspondence, flatter hierarchies, going over the head of management. The Victorian-style secretary as buffer between the executive and the world stopped making sense.

GPS in the early 2000s was sold to transport companies as «an assistant to the experienced driver.» By the end of the decade the route-planning dispatch departments were gone; the route became data an algorithm hands the driver, and the human dispatcher turned into a real-time logistics coordinator.

Google in 1998 modestly positioned itself as a convenient replacement for the library reference desk. By 2010 the reference sections of American public libraries had been reorganized: not eliminated wholesale, but shifted into «digital literacy» and work with special populations of readers⁷.

In each case the same mechanic was operating: the enhancement technology rewrote the surrounding structure such that the role it was supposedly complementing turned out to be redundant. Wells called this evolution. The modern term is reorganization.

Law Two: Polarization, Not Replacement

In 2003 David Autor, together with Frank Levy and Richard Murnane, published in the *Quarterly Journal of Economics* a paper that rewrote labor economics⁸. Their main observation: the computer does not replace «work in general» but a particular type of task, the **routine** task. These can be routine cognitive tasks (adding columns, issuing invoices, transcribing shorthand) or routine manual tasks (assembling to instructions, stamping, packaging). But **nonroutine** tasks — whether analytic (diagnosis, negotiation, research) or motor (driving in traffic, elder care, repair in an unknown environment) — the computer does not replace but **complements**: demand for them rises.

What follows from this is not the «mass unemployment» prophesied by technopessimists since the nineteenth century. What follows is **polarization of the labor market**: the middle layer of clerks, operators, checkers gets squeezed out; the top (nonroutine analytic work) grows; the bottom (nonroutine motor work: care, delivery, restaurant service) also grows. The distribution of wages turns from a bell into a valley between two peaks⁹.

Twelve years later Autor returned to the subject in the *Journal of Economic Perspectives* with an article whose title was provocative: «Why Are There Still So Many Jobs?»¹⁰. The answer: because automating one task increases the value of the nonroutine tasks around it. A radiologist whose scans are algorithmically pre-marked does not disappear; his working hours redistribute toward complex cases, explaining the diagnosis to the patient, cross-disciplinary consultation. A lawyer whose precedent search is automated spends more hours on strategy and negotiation. A financial advisor whose portfolio rebalancing is automated spends more time in conversations with the client about life decisions.

But — and this is the second half of the law — **not everyone gains from this redistribution**. Those who gain are those who have a nonroutine analytic superstructure over the automated routine. Those who do not, the high-school graduate who worked as a clerk, are pushed out into the nonroutine motor sector, with its limited wage ceiling. Polarization is not a uniform lift of the whole curve; it is a stretching of the curve in both directions.

Law Three: Distribution Is a Political Choice

In 2023 Daron Acemoglu and Simon Johnson published *Power and Progress: Our Thousand-Year Struggle Over Technology and Prosperity*¹¹. Their central thesis is simple and inconvenient: technology by itself does not bring general prosperity. Whether it does or not depends on who controls the direction of its development and the distribution of its fruits.

Acemoglu and Johnson read a thousand years of European economic history as the alternation of two regimes. In the **extraction regime** a new technology enriches a narrow layer of owners while the

mass workforce pays for the transition through lower wages, longer hours, worse conditions. This was the beginning of the industrial revolution in England: from the 1790s to the 1840s productivity grew while real workers' wages practically stood still. This is «Engels's pause»: a half-century that classical economics long refused to explain. In the **distribution regime** the same technology brings gains to the mass of working people, through unions, labor legislation, universal education, progressive taxation. This was the middle of the twentieth century in the developed economies, after the Great Depression and two world wars.

The difference between the two regimes is not technological but political. The same power loom can serve one distribution model or the other, depending on whether the country has a weavers' union, a factory inspectorate, and a minimum-wage law.

Acemoglu and Johnson received the Nobel Prize a year after the book's publication, for many years of research into the connection between institutions and prosperity. Their conclusion is important precisely because it strips technology of its moral alibi: «the loom is not to blame; those who decided how to use it are.»

Law Four: The Double Movement

In 1944 the economic historian Karl Polanyi — a Hungarian émigré who spent the war years lecturing at Bennington College in America — published *The Great Transformation*¹². The book was little read; for its first twenty years it was known only to specialists. By the early twenty-first century it had become one of the most cited works in the social sciences.

Polanyi's central thesis: the market economy is not the natural state of human society but a **project**. A project that requires constant political effort to exist. And, more important, every time the market logic tries to reach into a part of human life that was previously shielded from it (labor, land, money), society responds with a **counter-movement**: laws, regulation, protest, new institutions.

That is the «double movement»: the market advances, society defends. Not ideologically, not from «socialist convictions,» but because otherwise the immediate life of people becomes impossible. English factory laws of the nineteenth century, German workers' insurance under Bismarck, the American New Deal, the postwar European welfare state — all of these are different forms of one counter-movement, without which market expansion would have run into social catastrophe.

What follows from Polanyi is what does not follow from Wells, from Autor, or from Acemoglu: **the transformation of labor is not one line but two**. The first line is the pressure of the market and of technology. The second line is what society does with that pressure. When the second line is weak or absent, one gets what Wells described: stratification carried to a biological gulf. When the second line is strong, the same technological cycle yields a different outcome: expanded rights, leveled chances, a new social compact.

CASE: Platonov and the Pit That Eats Labor

In December 1929 Andrei Platonov — a railway man, a land-reclamation engineer by training — begins writing a novella. He finishes in April 1930. He calls it *The Foundation Pit*¹³.

The plot, formally summarized, is simple. A group of workers digs a foundation pit for the base of a huge house in which, according to plan, the local proletariat will settle. The more they dig, the larger the pit becomes. The house is never begun. One of the workers, Voshchev, casts about in search of the meaning of the labor: for what are we digging, for whom are we digging, what is supposed to result. No one answers. A little girl named Nastya, whom the workers take in so that the labor might have an addressee, dies. In the finale her body is buried at the bottom of the pit. The house will not be built.

Platonov did not write an anti-Soviet pamphlet, as émigré criticism long tried to read him. He wrote something more universal: **what happens to labor when it is severed from its own outcome**. When digging becomes an independent activity that needs no house. When the pit grows not because the foundation requires it but because digging is the only thing left to do. Platonov's workers are not lazy and not cynical; they work honestly and to exhaustion. But the direction of work is lost, and labor begins to consume itself.

This is the same figure as Wells's Morlocks in the underground engine rooms: people who sustain the operation of a system whose meaning they no longer understand. The Morlocks feed the machines that were once invented for the convenience of the Eloi, but the Eloi have long since degenerated, the machines turn in a self-reproducing mode, and the Morlocks' labor has turned from service into ritual. In Platonov the same thing is done without science fiction, on the material of the first Five-Year Plan: a pit, a house, a girl, a death, an end.

And in this lies the third reading, which the economic work does not offer. Autor and Acemoglu describe the labor market from outside: how wages get distributed, which tasks get automated, who wins. Platonov describes labor from inside: what a person feels when work has lost its addressee. This is not statistics; it is diagnosis. And on the horizon of the 2030s, when polarization has gone deeper and secondary effects are more visible, the Platonovian view will be needed no less than the econometric one.

REVERSAL: The Traveller Brings No Predictions

At the end of *The Time Machine* the Time Traveller returns to his own dinner table, where guests are waiting for him, and tells of the future — but no one quite believes him. The next day he goes into the machine again and does not return. The book ends with the listener, an anonymous narrator, left with two questions: is what I heard true, and if it is, what am I now to do with it.

Wells does not close the book with a prediction. He closes it by **passing on the question**. Eloi and Morlocks are a **possible** outcome, not an inevitable one. The Traveller does not know which specific decisions would lead to that outcome, which would steer away from it. He knows only that the direction in which his own Victorian society is moving could, at the limit, yield precisely this picture.

Acemoglu and Johnson do the same thing without the literary conventions. In the final hundred pages of *Power and Progress* they do not predict; they list **levers**: antitrust law, tax policy, public investment in fundamental science, workers' bargaining power. Every lever is real, historically used, has an understandable mechanism. Whether to use them or not is a choice of the political community, not an inevitability of the economic cycle.

Wells does the same thing in literary form one hundred and twenty-eight years before them. *The Time Machine* is not a prediction of a division into Eloi and Morlocks. It is a diagnostic instrument: here is a tendency carried to its limit; decide whether you want such a limit or not.

INSIGHT: Four Laws of Labor, Three Types of Decision

Assemble the four laws into a single table and a simple, uncomfortable hierarchy appears:

- **Law One (Wells)** describes what cannot be changed. Technology that complements work reorganizes it. This is a law of the nature of economic history, like the conservation of energy in physics. Changing it makes no sense; heeding it is mandatory.
- **Law Two (Autor)** describes the market. Polarization happens automatically, under the pressure of supply and demand. It can be changed, but only through market mechanisms: retraining, mobility, task redistribution. This is a law of the mechanics of the economy, not of its nature.
- **Law Three (Acemoglu and Johnson)** describes power. Who receives the fruits of transformation is decided not by the market but by the political process. Here society has agency: taxes, regulation, representation.
- **Law Four (Polanyi)** describes reaction. The double movement does not start automatically; society must recognize the damage and gather political forces. If there is no counter-movement, the market goes on expanding until the point where the reaction becomes catastrophic rather than corrective.

On the horizon of 2026–2040 the first law is already at work: reorganization around new technological cycles proceeds, and there is nothing to counterpose to it. The second law, polarization, describes the landscape of the next ten to fifteen years; here market softenings are possible (retraining, mobility) but not the annulment of the tendency. The third and the fourth laws are the site of agency. What political communities actually do in response to polarization will determine whether we see a new distribution or a new turn of stratification. Platonov's foundation pit is what happens when labor continues while its meaning is already lost; that scenario also remains within the range of the possible.

BRIDGE

Wells shows the mechanism. Autor measures the polarization. Acemoglu and Johnson lay out the levers. Polanyi speaks of the counter-movement. Platonov diagnoses what labor feels when the meaning departs. All of them stay at the level of laws and tendencies. But the horizon of the 2030s requires

something else: **the decisions of a specific team about its own architecture — how it is organized, on what principle it is assembled, what keeps it alive.** Not the economist, not the politician, but the specific team sitting around a table and deciding how it will live and work for the next five years.

The next chapter is about that.

Footnotes:

¹ Wells, H.G. *The Time Machine*. London: William Heinemann, 1895, chapter I, p. 1. Wells's 1895 English text is in the public domain (author died 1946; life+70 = 2016; also pre-1929 US public domain). Quoted verbatim as the canonical English source; the passage is one of the most famous opening lines in scientific romance.

² Biographical detail from: Smith, David C. *H.G. Wells: Desperately Mortal*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986; Parrinder, Patrick, ed. *H.G. Wells: The Critical Heritage*. London: Routledge, 1972. The early *Chronic Argonauts* was serialized in the *Science Schools Journal*, April–June 1888.

³ On Wells's Fabian connections: McKenzie, Norman, and McKenzie, Jeanne. *The Time Traveller: The Life of H.G. Wells*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1973. On his collaboration with *New Review* under W.E. Henley: Wells's own letters in *Experiment in Autobiography* (1934), vol. II, book VIII.

⁴ Wells, H.G. *The Discovery of the Future*. Lecture delivered at the Royal Institution, 24 January 1902; published in *Nature*, 6 February 1902.

⁵ Figures on British domestic service and coal mining at the end of the nineteenth century from Mitchell, B.R. *British Historical Statistics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988, sections V (labor) and VIII (mining).

⁶ Cortada, James W. *The Digital Hand*, vol. 2: *How Computers Changed the Work of American Financial, Telecommunications, Media, and Entertainment Industries*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006, chapter 4, on the reorganization of corporate secretarial pools between 1995 and 2005.

⁷ Bertot, John Carlo, et al. *Public Libraries and the Internet*. American Library Association annual report series, 1994–2012. The systematic shift from reference service to digital-literacy programs is documented in the 2006–2010 issues.

⁸ Autor, David H., Frank Levy, and Richard J. Murnane. «The Skill Content of Recent Technological Change: An Empirical Exploration.» *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 118(4), November 2003, pp. 1279–1333. Preprint: NBER Working Paper No. 8337, 2001.

⁹ Empirical confirmations of labor polarization in the US and Western Europe: Goos, Maarten, and Alan Manning. «Lousy and Lovely Jobs: The Rising Polarization of Work in Britain.» *Review of Economics and Statistics* 89(1), 2007, pp. 118–133; Goos, Maarten, Alan Manning, and Anna Salomons. «Explaining Job Polarization: Routine-Biased Technological Change and Offshoring.» *American Economic Review* 104(8), 2014, pp. 2509–2526.

¹⁰ Autor, David H. «Why Are There Still So Many Jobs? The History and Future of Workplace Automation.» *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 29(3), Summer 2015, pp. 3–30.

¹¹ Acemoglu, Daron, and Simon Johnson. *Power and Progress: Our Thousand-Year Struggle Over Technology and Prosperity*. New York: PublicAffairs, 2023. The authors received the 2024 Nobel Prize in Economics (jointly with James Robinson) for research on the connection between institutions and economic prosperity. On «Engels's pause» (1790–1840): Allen, Robert C. «Engels' Pause: Technical Change, Capital Accumulation, and Inequality in the British Industrial Revolution.» *Explorations in Economic History* 46(4), 2009, pp. 418–435.

¹² Polanyi, Karl. *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*. New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1944. Foreword by R.M. MacIver. The concept of the «double movement» is developed in Part II, chapters 11–13. On Polanyi's Bennington years: Dale, Gareth. *Karl Polanyi: A Life on the Left*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2016, chapter 5.

¹³ Platonov, Andrei. *The Foundation Pit (Kotlovan)*. Written December 1929 – April 1930. First published in the émigré journals *Grani* (Frankfurt am Main), no. 70, 1969, and *Student* (London), nos. 13–14, 1969. First Soviet publication: *Novy Mir*, no. 6, 1987. Platonov died 1951; the Russian original entered the public domain in 2021 (life+70). Robert Chandler's canonical English translation (New York Review Books, 2009) is the standard modern reference; passages here rendered in the author's own English for voice-register consistency across the series, per the rule established in chapter 4 note 1.

Chapter 10: Monday Begins on Saturday — NIICHAVO as the Ideal Agile Team



«The most interesting things began in the evening, when the Department of Linear Happiness had finished its work and a particular kind of silence settled over the institute — the silence that exists only in places where, day after day and year after year, people work without sitting on their hands.»

— A. and B. Strugatsky, *Monday Begins on Saturday* (1965), ch. 1¹

What this chapter is about. *Monday Begins on Saturday* (1965) is a novel about the Scientific Research Institute for Wizardry and Magic — in the Russian acronym, NIICHAVO.² In his authorial commentaries Boris Strugatsky called it a portrait of «the people we wished we were,»³ and academic scholarship reads NIICHAVO as a utopia of the Soviet scientific-technical intelligentsia:⁴ a place where scientific creativity is not smothered by administrative logic. If one reads the book as a diagnosis rather than as a fairy tale, it yields four laws of a self-organizing R&D team: meaning as entry filter, dual leadership, specialist against administrator, immersion instead of training. In parallel, it shows what destroys such a team (*Vybegallo*, the methodology theater) and where the team falls when its defensive mechanisms fail (the continuation — *Tale of the Troika*, 1968).

HOOK: Leningrad — Moscow, 1964

In 1964 the Strugatsky brothers were finishing what they subtitled «a fairy tale for junior scientific workers.»⁵ Boris Strugatsky was an astronomer at the Pulkovo Observatory outside Leningrad; Arkady was a translator from Japanese in Moscow. What they were depicting at NIICHAVO — an institute where wizard-scientists worked on the «meaningful» — was a stylized portrait of what Boris saw every day at Pulkovo, and of what Arkady heard from friends at the academic institutes of Moscow.

The title came out of a writer's notebook. The phrase *Monday begins on Saturday* refers not to a calendar but to a property of a certain kind of person: for them, work is not separate from life, so Monday begins when the ordinary employee's workweek ends. By the time the brothers finished the manuscript, they realized the story was being written precisely about such people — and the title fell into place.

The book came out from the publisher *Detskaya Literatura* in 1965 in a print run of one hundred thousand, with illustrations by Yevgeny Migunov. Readers of the time recognized their own research institutes in NIICHAVO. Readers today recognize in it the team they would like to work in — and to lead.

Utopia or Diagnosis?

The standard reading of *Monday* is escapist fable, Soviet fairy tale for the intelligentsia, nostalgia. The novel resists this reading for two reasons.

First — the authors' own testimony. In *Commentaries on What Was Left Behind* (2003), Boris Strugatsky describes the intention not as an escape but as an attempt to show «the people we wished we were.»³ They would have wished to be Privalov, Korneev, Edik Amperyan, Gian Giacomo. This is not a fairy tale about wizards — it is a self-portrait of the 1960s scientific-technical intelligentsia in the register of «how we could work, if only they left us alone.»

Second, the structure of the text. If you read only the utopian part (Junta, Kivrin, Privalov, the New Year's Eve shift), you get a fairy tale. But in the same book you meet Modest Matveyevich Kamnoedov — head of the administrative-economic service, who is not a villain but an administrative necessity. And you meet Professor A. A. Vybegallo — a careerist-scientist who imitates science. The Strugatsky brothers show the team AND the forces that destroy it, in one book.

Yvonne Howell, in *Apocalyptic Realism* (1994), treats NIICHAVO as the place where an entire generation of readers dreamed of working.⁴ A reader today might add: in the same way readers of Rowling dream of studying at Hogwarts. But Hogwarts is a closed school of wizardry. NIICHAVO is an open institute into which an ordinary programmer from Leningrad walks in and discovers that the difference between the utopia and his previous life is administrative-organizational, not ontological.

Monday is not about the team that cannot exist. It is about the team that rarely exists — and why.

Four Laws of a Self-Organizing R&D Team

Law 1. Meaning as Entry Filter

Alexander Ivanovich Privalov, a programmer from Leningrad, is driving his Moskvich on vacation through the Northwest. He picks up two hitchhikers — Volodya Pochkin and Roman Oira-Oira. They bring him to an unremarkable building in the town of Solovets with a sign that reads NIICHAVO. Privalov stays. No interview. Instead, it emerges that he is a programmer — and that the computer interests him more than his own vacation. That is how his people recognize him.

The Strugatsky brothers describe the institute through a single criterion of belonging: for a NIICHAVO employee, the workweek has no beginning and no end. His Monday begins on Saturday because he does not distinguish «work» from «life.» The institute's motto is not a KPI but a mode of existence. That is the entry filter.

Selection by meaning makes command-and-control mechanically impossible. You cannot command a person who does not work by order. Korneev cannot be «assigned a task» — he chooses what he works on, and he works on it around the clock. Gian Giacomo cannot be «given a deadline» — he will finish when the problem is solved. A NIICHAVO employee is built such that a command is an external interference, not a source of work.

Modern equivalents: open-source projects (the Linux kernel, PostgreSQL); the academic laboratories at Bell Labs⁶ and Xerox PARC⁷ in their productive period; early Agile teams before institutionalization — XP at Chrysler's Comprehensive Compensation project in 1996, Spotify squads 2008–2012.⁸ All of them held together by selection, not by discipline. The moment selection weakened and the team was refilled by neutral criteria, the filter blurred — and the work turned into an office.

Law 2. Dual Leadership — A-Janus and U-Janus

The director of NIICHAVO is Janus Poluektovich Nevstruev. He is one man, but in two modes: A-Janus and U-Janus. A-Janus reads time forward: he signs papers, coordinates plans, is responsible for continuity and the executive function. U-Janus reads time backward: he knows what will happen because for him it has already happened, and he brings lessons from future states into current decisions. Every midnight, the modes swap places.

The Strugatsky brothers show: effective leadership of an R&D team requires both modes. Without A-Janus there are no resources, no approvals, no shield from the outside world. Without U-Janus there is no vision, no retrospective, no capacity to see the consequences of decisions before they are made. In a single person, these are combined with difficulty; the brothers therefore made Janus literally two people in one body.

The modern parallel is the CTO/VPE tension in engineering organizations, the split between product lead and tech lead, or the classic startup strain of «make AND ship»: one person rarely holds both registers. Good R&D organizations do not try to fuse them — they divide them explicitly, and give

both modes equal legitimacy. Bad ones try to melt them into a single figure, and lose either the retrospective or the execution.

Law 3. Specialist against Administrator — Junta against Kamnoedov

Cristóbal Josévich Junta is the head of the Department of the Meaning of Life. By biography, a former Grand Inquisitor of the Spanish Inquisition. By character, a scientist for whom the internal standard of the work matters more than any external rule. Junta works on problems whose formulation he himself cannot explain to the administration. When Kamnoedov demands a report on results, Junta silently walks out.

Modest Matveyevich Kamnoedov is the deputy director for administrative-economic affairs. Not a villain: the institute needs a man who watches the electrical supply, pays the bills, issues travel orders, reports to the ministry. The Strugatsky brothers do not caricature him. They show something else: the administrative function is necessary, but it must not command the substance.

The law is formulated in one of the most famous scenes. Kamnoedov demands that on New Year's Eve all employees turn in their keys and leave the institute. Junta, Kivrin, Korneev, Edik ignore the order — because at that moment their experiments are running. They are not rebelling. They are working. And their work matters more than an order from the administrative-economic service.

At the same moment enters Vybegallos — a careerist in scholarly clothing. He understands that the administrative class evaluates work by form rather than by content, and he has learned to produce form. His «model of the universal consumer» — the Cadaver, who devours herring and burps — is a parody of a scientific result, addressed not to colleagues but to superiors and to the press. Vybegallos is a diagnostic figure. He shows what happens to a team when the specialist/administrator balance tilts toward the administration.

The modern equivalent of Vybegallos is the *methodology theater*. Teams whose Agile rituals (standups, retros, demos) are present but whose content has been lost: the velocity was measured, the OKRs were cascaded, the demo was held, nothing was accomplished. Vybegallos is not a violation of methodology; he is its completion under conditions in which the specialist has yielded to the administrator.

Law 4. Immersion, Not Training — Privalov's Arc

Privalov ends up at NIICHAVO by accident. No one onboards him. No courses, no welcome packets, no mentorship program. He is given a bed in the institute's museum (a hut on chicken legs), access to every floor and every person. Within a few chapters he is already working with the Aldan electronic computer, having sorted out both the problems and the colleagues on his own.

The Strugatsky brothers show: the best R&D teams grow their new members not through lectures but through admission to real work. Privalov learns from Korneev because Korneev is close by and can be interrupted with a question. He learns from Edik because Edik does not refuse to discuss his methodology. He learns from Junta because Junta lets him into his department.

This is what Michael Polanyi (the brother of Karl Polanyi from Chapter 8) called *tacit knowledge* — knowledge that transmits only through co-presence and cannot be compressed into instructions.⁹ For a newcomer to become part of the team, he does not need to study «the team’s methodology.» He needs to be admitted to the work, and to the people who do it. The rest grows on its own.

Modern parallels: the apprenticeship model in research laboratories, «pair programming» in XP, the early Google bootcamps before their formalization. All of them worked as long as one principle held: the newcomer learns not from documentation but from the people beside him doing the real work.

CASE: The Institute’s Departments and the New Year’s Eve Shift

The institute is built from departments, each with its own logic:

- **Department of Linear Happiness** (Fyodor Simeonovich Kivrin) — the optimistic applied line, tools of human happiness. The analog of a product team.
- **Department of the Meaning of Life** (Cristóbal Junta) — fundamental research whose formulations are inaccessible to the administration. The analog of a research function.
- **Department of Universal Transformations** (Gian Giacomo; Viktor Korneev works here) — deep engineering of matter. The analog of a platform team.
- **Computing Center** (Alexander Privalov) — a horizontal function serving all departments.

Plus two forces outside the scientific line: **Kamnoedov’s administrative-economic service** (necessary but with guarded borders) and **Professor Vybegallo’s laboratory**, a methodology theater that exists inside the institute as a permanent warning.

Coordination is horizontal. No central planning. No standups. But coordination happens naturally: people meet in corridors, drop into each other’s offices, discuss problems at the soda-water machines, interrupt one another with questions, help. Korneev needs Privalov and machine time on the Aldan; Privalov needs Oira-Oira for theoretical consultation; Oira-Oira needs Edik to verify a calculation. A chain forms as needed and dissolves when the problem is solved.

The culminating illustration is the second part, «Vanity of Vanities.» Privalov is on duty at the institute on New Year’s Eve. Before leaving, Kamnoedov distributes instructions and reminders. Half an hour after Kamnoedov’s departure, all the employees who were «supposed to» leave are found at their workstations: Junta in his laboratory, Korneev with the mages, Edik with his books, Gian Giacomo at his calculations. No one summoned anyone. They are working on New Year’s Eve because their experiments are running. Privalov as the formal officer of the day discovers that there is nothing to manage — the institute runs itself.

That is the portrait of a self-organizing team: it holds together not by schedule and not by orders, but by the fact that each person carries inside a task he cannot not work on.

DARK SIDE: What Destroys the Team

In *Monday*, Vybegallo is a single case in which the balance still holds. In *Tale of the Troika* (1968)¹⁰ — the continuation of NIICHAVO's story — the balance has already been broken. There, the administrative function fully commands the substance: the Troika for the Rationalization and Utilization of Unexplained Phenomena (an administrative body) rules in Kitezhgrad, the colony of the institute's unexplained phenomena, and decides which investigations are permitted, by criteria of loyalty, reporting, and comprehensibility.

The Strugatsky brothers wrote *Troika* three years after *Monday* — and in effect delivered a diagnosis of how the utopia of the previous book decays. The Troika, having seized power over the colony of the institute at Kitezhgrad, decides which phenomena are allowed to exist, by criteria of loyalty, reportability, and comprehensibility. Under the Troika, Vybegallo is a scientific consultant: the methodology theater has become the norm and has been given a title. Privalov and Edik Amperyan, sent from the institute on assignment, get bogged down in meetings, protocols, and regulations. In the *Angara* journal finale a deus ex machina intervenes: Junta and Kivrin appear and disperse the Troika by the authority of senior mages. But the gesture itself is telling: from inside a system where the administrator has defeated the specialist, there is no way out — an external force is required. This is not an alternative history and not a satire from outside. It is the second act of the same story, told without rose-colored glasses.

What destroys the team according to the Strugatsky brothers:

- **Loss of the entry filter** — people join the institute by competence and by connections, not by meaning.
- **Fusion of the two Januses into one** — leadership stops holding the retrospective and loses the ability to learn.
- **Victory of the administrator over the specialist** — internal craft standards yield to external reporting norms.
- **Replacement of immersion by training programs** — new members are taught «the team's methodology» instead of being admitted to the work.
- **Enthronement of Vybegallo** — the methodology theater becomes the criterion of evaluation.

Tale of the Troika is not a prediction. It is the description of a pattern. Any R&D team passes through this scenario if it does not defend itself explicitly.

INSIGHT: A Hierarchy of Decisions for a Self-Organizing R&D Team

From the four laws of the Strugatsky brothers, a practical sequence follows:

1. **Selection matters more than training.** Filter people by how they relate to the work, not by their competence in the moment. Competence is acquired; the relation to work is not.

2. **Divide the dual leadership explicitly.** Assign responsibility for the A-function (execution, resources, defense) and the U-function (retrospective, meaning, direction) to different people. Do not try to combine them in one head.
3. **Defend the internal craft standards from external control.** A knowledge worker is answerable not to reporting but to colleagues and to his own standard. The administrative function is necessary but must not command the substance.
4. **Immersion, not training.** A new member is not taught; he is given access to the work and to the people. Tacit knowledge transmits only in this way.
5. **Watch for Vybegallo.** Notice when form begins to exist without content. Rituals without shipping. Velocity without result. Standup without work. That is the first signal that the specialist/administrator balance has slipped.

The fifth point is the most important, because the destruction of a team rarely happens by an explicit decision. It happens through the gradual accumulation of form without content — until one day the team finds itself living inside *Tale of the Troika*.

BRIDGE

The Strugatsky brothers show a team that works because it is assembled from people for whom work is life. That is the rare case. But what does one do when such a team did not assemble, the defensive mechanisms have failed, and a crisis is already underway? The final chapter of the book is about work in the mode of a sustained crisis — when a team forms *ad hoc* and holds together not on meaning and not on love of the craft, but on the discipline of service and the refusal to leave.

Sources and Notes

¹ Strugatsky, A. and B. *Понедельник начинается в субботу*. Moscow: Detskaya Literatura, 1965, ch. 1. English rendering by the translator: no verbatim English quotation is taken from the standard modern translation by Andrew Bromfield (Chicago Review Press, 2005), which is under active copyright. The opening line was rendered here directly from the Russian original to preserve register consistency across the series (see the copyright-discipline note at the front of this book).

² NIICHAVO is a Russian acronym for *Научно-Исследовательский Институт Чародейства и Волшебства* — «Scientific Research Institute for Wizardry and Magic.» The acronym has a double life in Russian: read as a word, it sounds close to *nichego* — «nothing» — a joke about the ostensible product of any bureaucratic research institute. Bromfield's 2005 English edition renders the acronym as NITWiTT to preserve the bilingual pun; this translation retains the Russian transliteration NIICHAVO for reasons of series-wide consistency (see copyright-discipline note above).

³ Strugatsky, B. N. *Комментарии к пройденному*. Saint Petersburg: Amphora, 2003. The section on *Monday Begins on Saturday* is the author's reconstruction of the intention behind the novel and of

the atmosphere in which it was written in 1963–1964. English rendering by the translator; no standard English edition of *Commentaries on What Was Left Behind* has been published.

⁴ Howell, Yvonne. *Apocalyptic Realism: The Science Fiction of Arkady and Boris Strugatsky*. New York: Peter Lang, 1994. An English-language academic monograph on the brothers' work; treats *Monday* in the context of the utopian aspirations of the Soviet scientific-technical intelligentsia of the 1960s and compares NIICHAVO with other literary «places one would like to live.» This translation quotes Howell verbatim where invoked.

⁵ Biographical details from: *Стругацкие. Материалы к исследованию* (ed. S. Bondarenko), Volgograd, 2008–2014, vols. 1–9; Skalandis, A. *Братья Стругацкие*. Moscow: AST, 2008. Boris Natanovich Strugatsky worked at the Pulkovo Observatory from 1955 to 1966. Arkady Natanovich was a translator from Japanese in Moscow. The brothers' joint work was carried out at meetings in Leningrad and Moscow, and through constant correspondence.

⁶ On the practice of Bell Labs in its productive period (1925–1984): Gertner, Jon. *The Idea Factory: Bell Labs and the Great Age of American Innovation*. New York: Penguin Press, 2012. Gertner's thesis: Bell Labs' success rested not on hierarchy and not on KPIs but on the selection of researchers by their interest in fundamental problems and on horizontal collaboration.

⁷ On Xerox PARC in the 1970–1983 period: Hiltzik, Michael A. *Dealers of Lightning: Xerox PARC and the Dawn of the Computer Age*. New York: HarperBusiness, 1999. A similar pattern: team selected by meaning, coordination horizontal, destroyed by administrative intervention from the parent corporation.

⁸ Beck, Kent. *Extreme Programming Explained: Embrace Change*. Boston: Addison-Wesley, 1999. On the Chrysler Comprehensive Compensation project (C3, 1996–2000), ch. 1: XP was formalized on that project, but the team had been working before the methodology was named. Comparative analysis of early Agile teams: Cohn, Mike. *Succeeding with Agile*. Boston: Addison-Wesley, 2009, part III.

⁹ Polanyi, Michael. *The Tacit Dimension*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966. *Note*: Michael Polanyi (1891–1976), a chemist and philosopher of science, was the brother of Karl Polanyi (1886–1964), the author of *The Great Transformation* referenced in Chapter 8. These are two different intellectual traditions; confusing the brothers is a common error in the literature.

¹⁰ Strugatsky, A. and B. *Сказка о Тройке*. First publication: journal *Ангара* (Irkutsk), no. 4–5, 1968. The full Russian text was published in the USSR only in 1989. The plot continuation of *Monday*: the same institute several years later under the administrative rule of the Troika for the Rationalization and Utilization of Unexplained Phenomena. Bromfield's English translation *Tale of the Troika* (Chicago Review Press, 2014) is under active copyright; the reference here is bibliographic only, no verbatim English quotation.

Chapter 11: The Plague — How a Team Forms in Sustained Crisis



«This is not heroism. It is a question of decency. Perhaps it will seem a laughable idea, but the only way to fight the plague is by decency.»

— Doctor Bernard Rieux. Albert Camus, La Peste, part two¹

What this chapter is about. Chapter 9 showed a team that assembled because its people did not distinguish work from life — the Strugatsky NIICHAVO as selection-by-meaning. Chapter 10 shows a team assembled on the opposite principle: people join because they refused to leave. The communauté of Doctor Rieux in Oran is selection-by-refusal. The same force (selection), pointed in the opposite direction. From this inversion follow four laws of work under a sustained crisis that has no horizon of victory.

HOOK. Oran, April 194_

In the morning, Doctor Bernard Rieux steps out of his office and treads on a dead rat. That is the first frame of Camus's novel.

The same day his wife leaves for a sanatorium in the mountains — she has an old pulmonary condition, and the doctor knows the separation will be long. In a week there are hundreds of dead rats in Oran. In two — the first human deaths. In a month the prefecture declares quarantine, seals the city gates, and cuts Oran off from the outside world for an indefinite duration.

Doctor Rieux at this moment could demand a pass. He has professional standing, he has a sick wife outside the quarantine, he has reasons. He stays. Not because he chooses heroism. Not because he swears allegiance to anything. But because the refusal to leave is the only action that carries ethical weight in circumstances stripped of other supports.

Around Rieux, over weeks and months, a group of people gradually assembles who have made the same refusal. The visitor Tarrou, a man of means and of notebooks, the son of a prosecutor (not a local, could have left, stayed). The old doctor Castel (could have sat in his own office; instead took up the local brewing of a serum, because to wait for shipments from Paris was to wait for death). The Parisian journalist Rambert (found himself in Oran by accident, had a ready escape plan through smugglers, cancelled it). The municipal clerk Joseph Grand (a poor man, unnoticed, all his life writing a novel and unable to finish the first sentence, joined the statistical accounting of the dead). And, later, after long resistance, the Jesuit Father Paneloux.

These five form what Camus insistently refuses to call either a team, an organization, or even a movement. The word he uses, and which is most precise here, is *communauté* — community.² They obey no one, they have no shared goal in the managerial sense, they do not coordinate their efforts on a schedule. They simply found themselves in the same city during an epidemic and simultaneously refused to leave.

Out of their joint work — fragmentary, uncoordinated, without strategy — an operational system gradually assembles that keeps the city alive.

CONTROVERSY. A Reading Beyond the Canon

The standard reading of *La Peste* is an allegory of the French Resistance during the occupation of 1940–1944. That reading is supported biographically: much of the novel was written at Le Panelier (near Le Chambon-sur-Lignon) in 1942–1943, during Camus's tuberculosis recovery; later, in Paris, Camus became the editor of the underground newspaper *Combat*; the experience of the occupation is obviously present in the book. But in January 1955, in a letter to Roland Barthes, Camus himself limited that reading: he insisted that the plague is not only Nazism; the novel speaks of resistance to any tyranny, to any terror.³ In other words, the initial reading is correct but incomplete.

Other canonical layers: antitheodicy (the novel as an answer to Dostoevsky on the sufferings of the child); the philosophy of the absurd (*La Peste* as a practical commentary on *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 1942); a morality of action without hope. All of these are defended in the academic literature — see Tony Judt, *The Burden of Responsibility* (1998), and David Carroll, *Albert Camus the Algerian* (2007).

The reading proposed in this chapter goes beyond the canonical field: *La Peste* as operational ethics for a team working in a sustained crisis. That is an authorial projection, not a discovery in the source. But it rests on structural facts of the novel that are difficult to read otherwise. Rieux's *communauté* does in fact function as a working system. The ethics that Rieux formulates in dialogue with Tarrou is in fact operational. The final sentence of the novel — about the bacillus that never dies — does in fact describe a situation to which contemporary crisis management arrives independently.

The plague was not an operational metaphor in 1947. It became one by the 2020s — through COVID; through the medical workers of Ukraine after 2022; through the personnel at Fukushima; through everything that has no end date and requires one to continue working without one.

Between NIICHAVO's utopia (the preceding chapter) and Oran's *communauté*, a symmetry becomes visible. The Strugatsky brothers showed a team assembled by the principle of attraction: the entry filter screens out those for whom work is not life. Camus shows a team assembled by the principle of refusal: the entry filter screens out those who agreed to leave. Selection-by-attraction and selection-by-refusal are two polarities of one and the same force — selection — placed at opposite ends of a spectrum. And only from both together can one derive the full picture of how teams form that are capable of enduring prolonged pressure.

CORE. Four Laws of Work Under a Sustained Crisis

Law 1. Refusal as Obligation

At the beginning of the novel's second part, Rambert — a Parisian journalist stranded in Oran at an unfortunate moment — comes to Rieux to ask for a medical certificate that would let him obtain a pass out of the city. Rambert has a woman in Paris; the relationship has only just begun; he wants to return. Rieux refuses not because he lacks sympathy but because such a certificate would be a lie, and the lie would break the little that still works in these conditions.

Rambert begins to act on his own — through smugglers, through bribes, through networks that arise in any sealed city within a few weeks. By part three he has a ready escape plan. Precise date, route, boat, paid for.

And a few days before departure he comes to Rieux and says that he is staying. Not because the plan fell through — the plan is in order. But because «*if I left, I should be ashamed of myself.*» And shame is a concrete technical problem that would prevent him from thinking of the woman in Paris. The paradox: to preserve the relationship for which he was determined to leave, he must refuse to leave.

This is not heroism. This is not a choice in the elevated sense. Rambert takes no oath, signs no contract, joins no organization. He simply reverses a decision that he has already made. And from that moment he is part of the *communauté*. Not because someone admitted him, but because the refusal to leave automatically makes a person a participant.

Modern. Selection-by-refusal is the most underappreciated mechanism of team formation in sustained crises. The hospital teams of the first COVID wave in March 2020 formed not through recruitment but through those who did not resign. The Ukrainian medical brigades after February 2022 — those who did not leave. The Fukushima decommissioning teams — those who kept working after the radiation warnings. In all three cases the principal selection happened not at the entrance but at the exit: the team consists of those who refused to leave when leaving was reasonable.

Law 2. Common Decency Instead of Heroism

The most quoted passage of *La Peste* is Rieux's conversation with Rambert, in which Tarrou is present. Rambert, preparing his escape, is defending himself: he does not want to play at heroism. Rieux answers that words of heroism do not interest him: «*the only weapon against the plague is decency.*»¹ And when asked what decency is, he adds: «*to be decent means to do one's work.*»

This is the most anti-pathetic definition of the ethics of crisis-action that European literature of the twentieth century managed to produce. It is deliberately stripped of elevation. It deliberately does not require special virtues. It deliberately rests on the single obligation that a doctor cannot annul without ceasing to be a doctor — the performance of the work for which he has been trained.

In the same spirit Castel, Rieux's old colleague, acts. When it becomes clear that the ready serum from Paris will not arrive in time (war, logistics, priority queues), Castel sits down in his laboratory and begins to brew a local variant. He has no sanction from above. He has no certainty that it will work. He has a medical education and an understanding that waiting will kill more people than a failed experiment. By part four he has a prototype, which is tried on the son of the magistrate Othon.

And in parallel, Grand. Grand is not a doctor, not a chemist, not a journalist. He is a minor municipal clerk, poor, divorced, all his life writing a novel of which he cannot finish the first sentence: «*One fine morning in the month of May an elegant young horsewoman might have been seen riding a handsome sorrel mare along the flowery avenues of the Bois de Boulogne*» — and every evening he rewrites the adjectives, and every evening the sentence is not the one. When the plague begins, Grand takes up the statistical accounting of deaths. He does no more, because he cannot do more. But he does it every day. And in the logic of *La Peste* Grand is a hero in the same sense that Rieux is, because common decency does not distinguish ranks.

Modern. This is not «do what you must and let come what may.» It is an operational definition: a team in a sustained crisis consists of people, each of whom has a precisely defined part of the work, and who does it without trying to do more than he knows how, and without refusing when it becomes hard. Karl Weick in *Managing the Unexpected* (Weick and Sutcliffe, 2001) described the same phenomenon in the categories of the modern high-reliability organization: the ability to work under uncalculated load without failure requires not heroes but people who are disciplined in the small.⁴

Law 3. Parallel Obligations; Convergence Without Hierarchy

Rieux's *communauté* is categorically not a team in the contemporary managerial sense. It has no leader. It has no shared meeting at which roles are distributed. It has no goal formatted as «by such-and-such a date achieve such-and-such.» It has no coordination center.

Rieux is a doctor; he treats. Tarrou is a chronicler and an organizer; he assembles the volunteer sanitary brigades. Castel is a doctor; he brews the serum. Rambert, after his refusal to leave, joins Tarrou's sanitary brigades. Grand is a clerk; he counts. Paneloux is a Jesuit; after long resistance, he joins a sanitary brigade. Rieux's mother — an old woman silently present in his house through the entire novel: his support, which Camus describes as something more firm than any formulation.

These six, and Rieux's mother alongside them, do not coordinate their efforts. They work in parallel, see one another, exchange information, help one another, but this is not delegation, not the distribution of tasks, not a task flow. Each does his part because that part is within his powers and because not doing it would be worse than doing it.

And yet, at the level of the city, their joint work assembles itself into a system: Grand's statistics allow Rieux to see the dynamics; Tarrou's sanitary brigades unload the doctors; Castel's serum offers a chance where before there was none. Convergence without hierarchy. *Communauté* without architecture.

It is a fragile construction. It holds together on the fact that each participant has a precisely defined piece of work and a personal obligation to do it. When one piece disappears — as someone dies, as Tarrou dies after the peak has passed, days before the gates open — the system does not reorganize automatically. It simply becomes poorer by one person. No one is appointed to replace Tarrou. And no one replaces him.

Modern. Contemporary guides to crisis coordination have formalized what the personnel of 1947 Oran did spontaneously — the distribution of work through specialization without a vertical chain of command; see note 5.⁵

Law 4. The Discipline of Continuation Instead of the Horizon of Victory

The last and most difficult law. A sustained crisis has no finale in which victory becomes obvious. It has only two possible modes of ending: either you are disqualified (you fall ill, you break, you leave), or you continue working until the pressure lifts by itself — not thanks to you, but because the cycle has come to its end.

In the fifth part of *La Peste* the epidemic recedes. The gates of the city open. The inhabitants come out onto the square and embrace those who have arrived from beyond the quarantine. Rieux climbs to the terrace of his house. A telegram has arrived for him: his wife has died in the sanatorium, not having lived to see the end of the epidemic. Tarrou died some days earlier. Paneloux — a «*doubtful case*» — died back in the fourth part, and Rieux entered the diagnosis in exactly that way, because the symptoms were not classical plague and Camus deliberately left the cause open.

And in the very last sentence of the novel, Rieux, watching the celebration of liberation, thinks that «*the bacillus of the plague never dies and never disappears; that it can lie dormant for decades in furniture and in linen; that it waits patiently in bedrooms, in cellars, in trunks, in handkerchiefs, and in old papers; and that perhaps the day will come when, for the misfortune and the instruction of men, the plague will awaken its rats and send them out to die in a city of happiness.*»⁶

This is not pessimism. This is the formula of the discipline of continuation. Victory is an illusion. The cycle is the reality. The *communauté* must be ready for the epidemic to return, under another name, with other symptoms, in another city. And then again there will be those who refuse to leave.

Shalamov. In Russian literature the tonal analog closest to this discipline is Varlam Shalamov's *Kolyma Tales* (cycle written 1954–1973; published openly in the USSR only in 1991).⁷ Shalamov wrote of individual survival in conditions that systematically destroyed collective action — the camp deliberately atomized. But his formula, repeated many times across the tales, is operationally close to Camus's: the continuation of existence as an ethical act in circumstances where neither meaning nor victory is on offer. In Camus this is collective decency; in Shalamov it is the individual holding-of-the-human. The polarities differ; the discipline is one.

Contemporary sociology. Richard Sennett, in *Together* (2012), formulated the same phenomenon as cooperation-as-craft⁸ — cooperation as a craft that requires training and offers no reward beyond the work itself. In Sennett this is an empirical observation from many years of field research on working collectives; in Camus it is the literary portrait of the same mode. Both converge on the point that sustained joint work holds together not on motivation (which is always finite), but on a discipline that outlasts any motivation.

CASE. A Team Without Architecture

If one attempts to reconstruct Rieux's *communauté* as an operating system — without pretending that Camus wrote it as one — the following structure emerges.

Period I (part one). Rieux is alone. His wife leaves. Rats appear. His old colleague Castel comes and says that this is probably plague, but no one yet believes it. The prefecture delays. Rieux treats the first patients, does what he can. By the end of this period, quarantine is declared.

Period II (part two). Tarrou comes to Rieux's home and proposes organizing voluntary sanitary brigades. They speak seriously for the first time. The dialogue about «the absence of heroism» takes place. Castel begins work on the serum. The Jesuit Paneloux delivers his first sermon — «*You are in affliction, my brothers, and you have deserved it*»⁹ — the theological frame of punishment. Rambert comes to ask for a certificate; is refused; begins preparing his escape. The *communauté* does not yet exist: three people act in parallel.

Period III (part three). The epidemic reaches a plateau. The numbers stabilize at a high level, with no hope of subsidence. Rambert completes the preparations for his escape. And at the last moment he refuses — he comes to Rieux and announces that he is staying. He joins Tarrou's sanitary

brigades. The *communauté* forms: five people (Rieux, Tarrou, Castel, Rambert, Grand), each occupied with his own work, no one giving orders.

Period IV (part four). Castel prepares the serum and tries it on the son of the magistrate Othon. The child dies in terrible torment, under Rieux's hands. Paneloux is present. After this, Paneloux delivers his second sermon — «*what I have to say is not enough to illuminate my own understanding*»¹⁰ — and the theological frame of punishment disappears: what remains is only the obligation to act. Paneloux joins a sanitary brigade. Shortly after, he dies; Rieux enters the diagnosis as «*cas douteux*» (doubtful case), because the symptoms do not fit the classic clinical picture and Camus offers no cause. The *communauté* loses one. Tarrou too falls ill by the end of the part.

Period V (part five). Tarrou dies. The epidemic recedes. The gates open. The *communauté* dissolves naturally, because what held it together (the refusal to leave) no longer has meaning — there is no quarantine. Rieux, left alone in a city emptied by the death of his wife, sits down to write a chronicle. That chronicle is the text of the novel: the *communauté* is testified to, not reconstructed. Camus insists in the epilogue that the chronicler writes not for the memory of heroes but for the sake of what all men are obliged to do who, «*unable to become saints, and refusing to accept the disaster, endeavor to be healers.*»

This structure is not a template. It cannot be exported. One can only observe that it self-organized, held for several months, performed the work, and dissolved without formal closure procedures.

DARK SIDE. Paneloux's Two Sermons

The most difficult chapter of *La Peste* is the fourth, the scene of the death of the magistrate Othon's son. Castel had applied his serum; it did not help; the child died slowly, in agony, in convulsions, in Rieux's arms, in Paneloux's presence. Camus describes this scene with almost medical precision, without literary protection, and in this scene Paneloux's theological position breaks.

Paneloux's first sermon, in the second part of the novel, had been theologically orthodox: the plague is punishment for sin, suffering is the way to God, the claim of meaning upon suffering. This is the most frequent defensive mechanism in crisis situations: a framing that explains what has happened as part of a meaningful order. It works in most cases, because most suffering admits of interpretation.

But the death of a child does not admit of it. This is a known argument — in Dostoevsky's *Brothers Karamazov* it is called «the tear of the child,» and Camus refers to it directly through Rieux, who after the boy's death says to Paneloux: «*That one, at least, was innocent, and you know it!*»¹¹

Paneloux's second sermon, a few days later, is entirely different. He does not renounce faith. But he abandons the theological frame of punishment. He says that the child's suffering is not explicable, not justified, and must not be justified; that the human being must act in the dark, without understanding; that faith may be the capacity to act when meaning is unavailable. And after the sermon Paneloux joins a sanitary brigade — something he had previously avoided.

A few weeks later, Paneloux dies of an unexplained illness. In the doctor's journal Rieux records: «*cas douteux.*» Doubtful case. The symptoms do not fit the classical clinical picture of plague. The cause is not determined. Camus deliberately does not clarify — because clarification would destroy what happened to Paneloux: the passage from a system of justifications to work without justifications.

Lesson for the present. In most organizational crises the first reaction is a theological frame: restructuring is called «*transformation,*» failure is called «*pivot,*» layoffs are called «*optimization.*» Each of these languages is an attempt to hold the meaning of the process. That is Paneloux's first sermon in the corporate register. And it works until the moment when someone's child dies in one's arms — until the moment when concrete reality breaks the frame.

Mature behavior at that moment is not to renounce the frame but to acknowledge that the frame does not help, and to continue the work without it. That is Paneloux's second sermon. It is the hardest of the four laws, because it requires abandoning the defensive structure precisely at the moment when the defensive structure is most needed.

INSIGHT. Five Practical Consequences

1. **Do not leave.** The minimum you can do at the beginning of a crisis is stay. Departing teams lose not so much skills as the right to address those who remained.
2. **Do your work.** Not more. Not less. Heroism is a mask for those who are looking for the moment. Common decency is the operating system.
3. **Do not recruit the team — observe who remained.** Within two weeks of quarantine the *communauté* forms automatically from the people who made the same refusal. You do not need to find them.
4. **A sustained crisis has no finale-of-victory.** The cycle will end — but not thanks to you, because the cycle's time has come. The discipline of continuation is stronger than the belief in victory.
5. **When your frame breaks against a child in your arms — abandon the frame, not the work.** Paneloux's second sermon, not his first. This is the hardest, because the frame is the last defense; but if you hold it, everything else stops working.

BRIDGE. Toward the Afterword

From Jules Verne to Albert Camus: eleven literary archetypes unfolding along a single trajectory. Fogg — the mechanical precision of the Victorian era. Frankenstein — the responsibility of the creator. Holmes — systematic deduction. Borges — the measurement of the impossible. Captain Nemo — the construction of a closed system. Mina Harker — a distributed knowledge base. Jekyll — corporate duality. Don Quixote — the team's mythology. Wells — the horizons of the transformation of labor. The Strugatskys — selection by meaning. Camus — the ethics of refusal.

What assembles from this sequence is discussed in the afterword. But one thesis belongs here, because without it the sequence remains flat: each of the eleven archetypes is not a model but a test. The book offers not eleven instruments but eleven questions about your own team; and whoever answers all eleven discovers in his team not one culture but eleven cultures simultaneously — and the labor of aligning them.

Sources and Notes

¹ Camus, Albert. *La Peste*. Paris: Gallimard, 1947, partie II. The conversation of Rieux with Rambert, in Tarrou's presence. In the French original: «*la seule façon de lutter contre la peste, c'est l'honnêteté*» — «*être honnête, c'est faire son métier.*» The standard modern English translations (Stuart Gilbert, 1948; Robin Buss, 2001; Laura Marris, 2021) are all under active copyright and are not quoted verbatim in this book; the English rendering above is the translator's own and deliberately uses «*decency*» rather than «*honesty*» for «*honnêteté*» — an echo of the Orwellian «*common decency*» explicitly preserved as the concept of Law 2 of this chapter. In the canonical Russian translation by N. Zharkova (first publication: Camus, A. *Избранное*. Moscow: Progress, 1969, pp. 133–378), *honnêteté* is rendered «*честность*» («*honesty*»); the choice here is a deliberate translator's authorial choice, not a substitution of the canonical Russian text.

² *Communauté* is preserved in French throughout this chapter as Camus's own operative term. Standard English renderings vary — *community*, *the group*, *the team* — none of which capture the ethical density that the word carries in the novel: an association neither administrative nor voluntary, but formed by the coincidence of parallel refusals.

³ Camus, Albert. Letter to Roland Barthes, 11 January 1955. Camus's reply to Barthes's review in *Le Club, journal du meilleur livre* (January 1955), in which Barthes had read *La Peste* as an «*antihistorical*» allegory. Camus insists in the letter that the plague is not only Nazism; the novel speaks of resistance to any tyranny, to any terror. The letter is published in: Camus, Albert. *Théâtre, récits, nouvelles*. Édition de Roger Quilliot, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade. Paris: Gallimard, 1962, pp. 1965–1967. English rendering by the translator.

⁴ Weick, Karl E.; Sutcliffe, Kathleen M. *Managing the Unexpected: Assuring High Performance in an Age of Complexity*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001. Chapter 1 on the principles of the high-reliability organization. Key thesis: resilience to uncalculated loads is secured not by outstanding individuals but by the ongoing discipline of the personnel in small matters — preoccupation with failure, reluctance to simplify, sensitivity to operations. Quoted verbatim where invoked.

⁵ The concept of the Incident Command System arose in California in 1970–1972 within the FIRESCOPE program (FIrefighting RESources of Southern California Organized for Potential Emergencies), developed after a series of destructive wildfires in 1970. It was formalized as a U.S. national standard within the National Incident Management System (NIMS) under Homeland Security Presidential Directive 5 of 28 February 2003. The application of ICS as a retrospective analogy to

Oran 1947 is an anachronism; Rieux's *communauté* is an organic antecedent, not the implementation of a template.

⁶ Camus, *La Peste*, partie V, closing paragraph. In the French original: «*Car il savait ce que cette foule en joie ignorait, et qu'on peut lire dans les livres, que le bacille de la peste ne meurt ni ne disparaît jamais, qu'il peut rester pendant des dizaines d'années endormi dans les meubles et le linge, qu'il attend patiemment dans les chambres, les caves, les malles, les mouchoirs et les paperasses, et que, peut-être, le jour viendrait où, pour le malheur et l'enseignement des hommes, la peste réveillerait ses rats et les enverrait mourir dans une cité heureuse.*» English rendering by the translator; the standard modern English editions (Gilbert 1948, Buss 2001, Marris 2021) are all under active copyright.

⁷ Shalamov, V. T. *Колымские рассказы*. The cycle was written from 1954 to 1973; the first Russian-language publication was in *Новый журнал* (New York), 1966, no. 82 (the story «Dry Rations»); full samizdat circulation in the USSR from the late 1960s; the first complete Soviet edition was Moscow: Khudozhestvennaya Literatura, 1991. For comparison with Rieux's ethics, see in particular the stories «On Lend-Lease,» «Dry Rations,» and «On the Slate,» in which the operational ethics of the individual holding-of-the-human is formulated under circumstances that systematically destroy collective action. English translations by John Glad (*Kolyma Tales*, W. W. Norton, 1980) and by Donald Rayfield (*Kolyma Stories and Sketches of the Criminal World*, NYRB Classics, 2018–2020) are under active copyright; the reference here is bibliographic, and any English rendering is the translator's own.

⁸ Sennett, Richard. *Together: The Rituals, Pleasures, and Politics of Cooperation*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2012. Chapters 1, 4, 7. Sennett's thesis: cooperation is not a natural inclination but a craft that requires training; sustained joint work holds together not on motivation (which is always finite) but on a discipline that can outlast any motivation. The book is the result of many years of field research on working collectives from the Chicago sociologists of the 1930s to the banking teams of 2008. Quoted verbatim where invoked.

⁹ Camus, *La Peste*, partie II, Paneloux's sermon in the cathedral of Oran. In the French original: «*Mes frères, vous êtes dans le malheur; mes frères, vous l'avez mérité.*» English rendering by the translator.

¹⁰ Camus, *La Peste*, partie IV, Paneloux's second sermon in the same church several days after the death of Othon's son. The full phrase in context: Paneloux warns his parishioners that «*ce que je dois dire ne suffit pas à éclairer mon esprit*» — what he must say is not sufficient to illuminate his own mind — and continues with a sermon in which the theological frame of punishment is replaced by the assertion that the sufferings of the innocent are not explicable and must not be justified. Shortly afterward Paneloux dies; Rieux records the diagnosis «*cas douteux*» (doubtful case) in part IV, closing chapter, because the symptoms do not fit the classical clinical picture of plague and Camus deliberately leaves the cause open. English rendering by the translator.

¹¹ Camus, *La Peste*, partie IV. Rieux's line to Paneloux immediately after the death of Othon's son. A direct polemic with the argument of Ivan Karamazov about the tear of the child as the limit of theodicy (Dostoevsky, F. M. *Bratya Karamazovy*, book five, ch. IV «The Rebellion,» 1880). Camus does not cite Dostoevsky directly, but he points to that reference in the notebooks of the period of work on *La Peste*.

Epilogue. The Return of Phileas Fogg

Reform Club, London, 21 December 1872, 20:44.

Five gentlemen at the fireplace follow the second hand. Fogg is not there. He missed the steamer from Liverpool — all London knows it; the wager, everyone believes, is lost. At the fifty-seventh second the salon door swings open: «Here I am, gentlemen.» A margin of three seconds. Twenty thousand pounds are won; nineteen have been spent on the road; the net profit is around one thousand, which Fogg will divide between Passepartout and the unfortunate detective. As a financial venture — nearly a loss.

But what did Fogg actually win?

In 1872 he began his journey as the embodiment of mechanical precision — a man living by a schedule, optimized for systematic execution. By December he is still methodical, but no longer mechanistic. In India, an unplanned rescue mission for the princess Aouda disrupted the optimized itinerary. In Hong Kong, the intrigue of the detective Fix cost him a steamer — and Fogg for the first time bought a vessel instead of a ticket. In America, borderline situations required improvisation.

Each continent gave the same lesson: efficiency is a powerful instrument, but insufficient for navigation in complex reality. Human friction is not a bug but a structure.

Fogg at the end of the journey is still systematic by habit, but no longer dogmatic by conviction. He has learned that plans serve the journey, not the other way around; that maps help, but the territory remains surprising.

Parallel of the book. The book *Agile Sapiens* began as an attempt to read the literature of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as a manual for navigation in the management crises of the present. Act I showed the origins — Verne's scientific optimism, Shelley's responsibility of the creator, Doyle's systematic deduction, Borges's measurement of the impossible. Act II unfolded the transformation — Cyrus Smith and the four companions of his escape from *The Mysterious Island* as the positive archetype of a team starting from nothing; Captain Nemo as its antipattern (the mono-resource of the solitary man); Stoker's description of Team Light's distributed knowledge base; Stevenson's diagnosis of corporate duality between the culture declared and the culture practiced; Cervantes's account of team mythology and its double edge.

Act III explored the architecture of sustained change: Wells showed the horizons of the transformation of labor; the Strugatsky brothers, selection by meaning as the condition of a self-organizing team; and now this book, in the voice of Doctor Rieux, describes the ethics of refusal as the condition of a team formed in a sustained crisis.

The book's opening insight. The architecture of choice matters more than the individual choices. How you think about work determines what you become, far more powerfully than the specific tools you use.

Thesis. Not Optimization — Decency

The conclusion of *Agile Sapiens*, in a single sentence: the success of a team over the long run is not a function of the methodologies applied or the instruments adopted. It is a function of the ethics on which the team holds when the methodologies stop working. The Strugatsky brothers showed the ethics of meaning. Camus showed the ethics of refusal. Between these two poles lies the entire practical spectrum of teams capable of enduring prolonged pressure.

Those teams that think they are choosing between methodologies are choosing nothing — they are changing format, not substance. Those that think the question is one of ethics make a difficult choice, because ethics is not optimized and is not scaled — it is either present or absent.

Translation from the corporate. «Corporate culture» in most organizations means either nothing (a document for onboarding) or something very specific — that on which the team holds when the KPIs are gone. In the first case, culture is decoration. In the second, it is the only thing that distinguishes surviving teams from those that fell apart.

A question left outside the book. What would happen if selection-by-attraction (the Strugatsky brothers) and selection-by-refusal (Camus) were applied not sequentially but in parallel — that is a question to which this book has no answer. Perhaps it is a question for the next.

Return to the Reform Club. The Real Wager

20:44:57, 21 December 1872.

Fogg wins the wager with a margin of three seconds — because, without knowing it, he crossed the international date line and brought home an extra day. But the real victory is not in the twenty thousand pounds. He has proved that a systematic approach, combined with human capacity for adaptation, overcomes any challenge — but only on one condition: that the person applying it is prepared, at the necessary moment, to set aside the plan for the sake of what matters more than the plan.

In the scene with the princess Aouda, Fogg set aside the schedule. At the Reform Club, he honors the schedule. Between these two decisions there is no contradiction — there is a maturity that knows

when the schedule serves the goal and when the goal serves the schedule.

The book's wager. Can literary principles help a team endure sustained pressure under conditions in which standard management methods prove insufficient? The book's answer is: yes, they can — but not as technologies, as ethical supports. Literature preserves what management does not preserve: a language for describing those layers of work that lie deeper than procedures.

Finale. In the drawing room of the Reform Club, Fogg and Passepartout bend over a map of the world. Tomorrow — a new journey. The routes are traced, the calculations checked, the complications noted — but the trunks are not yet packed, the schedule is flexible, the minds are open to the surprises that real territory will present.

That scene contains the whole of the wisdom to which the book has come: the future is not a final destination. It is a continuous journey, requiring the craft of navigation. Literature is a map, not an instruction. And the real wisdom lies not in avoiding mistakes (impossible), but in the capacity to learn quickly enough to correct course before a mistake becomes fatal.

Destination — unknown. Departure — now.

// Comandante FolkUp / Co-author: Alice (PM, FolkUp ecosystem) · Editor: Iskra / 2026

Intermezzo III. The Transformation Elevator



***What this intermezzo is about.** A one-hundred-and-twenty-seven-story elevator of agile transformation. They ascend one floor per iteration with a retrospective between each; «press the button for 127» is waterfall thinking. The apotheosis of agile absurdism: the vertical decomposition of movement, the adaptive planning of the simplest action. A caricature of digital transformation initiatives in which the process of transformation has become its only product.*

Alice came up from the basement and found a Kone elevator with a gold sign «Digital Transformation — C-Level» in a lobby with marble columns, where every detail of the interior cost more than the entire annual IT budget of an average startup. The doors opened without sound, and she found herself in a glass cabin with a panoramic view of Moscow, alongside a short man in a Stefano Ricci suit and the same striped cat, who now held an iPad Pro in a Hermès leather case.

«We are ascending to top management,» the man announced with the solemnity of a cosmonaut departing for distant stars. «My name is Transformator. Behemoth is running our digital roadmap.»

The cat tapped importantly with his paw on the screen.

«Where are we headed?» Alice inquired.

Transformator gestured solemnly toward the ceiling, as though conducting the symphony of corporate growth: «To the summits of strategic planning! There, where the decisions on agile transformation are born.»

The elevator began its ascent with the ceremonial slowness of a coffin at the funeral of efficiency.

Alice looked at the panel: «Could it go faster?»

The cat, without looking up from the tablet, pronounced a philosophical truth: «Iteration is our credo. Floor by floor, like breathing: inhale — planning, exhale — retrospective.»

«How many floors do you plan?»

Transformator squared his shoulders with the pride of an architect of the Tower of Babel: «One hundred and twenty-seven! Each requires a detailed decomposition of vertical movement.»

The second floor greeted them with a stop worthy of a historical climax.

Alice looked inquiringly at the indicator.

«A retrospective,» the cat pronounced with the reverence of an archaeologist studying the shards of an ancient civilization. «We are analyzing the successes of the ascent.»

«What successes?»

Transformator broke into a smile: «An astonishing breakthrough! One floor is one hundred percent more than we had planned to achieve.»

«One hundred percent more than what? Zero?»

«Precisely!» the cat nodded with a candor bordering on holiness. «The baseline plan assumed we remain in place. Continuous improvement has worked a miracle of motion.»

A minute later, the third floor. A stop at the tempo of a tortoise waltz.

«More discussions?»

Transformator raised a schoolmaster's finger: «A planning session! The fourth floor requires a strategic approach.»

«Just press the button for the floor.»

The cat looked at her as though she had proposed to solve a quadratic equation with a hammer.

«Direct transitions violate the methodology of step-by-step analysis of every vertical increment.»

«What about pressing “127” straight?»

Transformator shuddered, as if from blasphemy: «Waterfall approach! Agility requires adaptivity at every step of the ascent.»

Alice looked closer at the elevator panel and discovered that in place of the usual floor numbers were the inscriptions: «Sprint 1,» «Sprint 2,» «Retrospective,» «Planning,» «Grooming,» «Demo.»

«How do you determine the moment of arrival?»

The cat lifted the tablet like a sacred artifact: «Definition of Done! The floor closes after the next one is planned.»

«And on the last, the one hundred and twenty-seventh?»

«We shall plan the one hundred and twenty-eighth,» Transformator explained placidly.

«Which does not exist!»

«Precisely for that reason the journey is eternal,» the cat beamed in Zen enlightenment. «Sustainable velocity without the risk of completion.»

The fifth floor brought a new passenger: an elegant woman in a suit, exuding efficiency and expensive perfume.

«Alice! What a meeting!» An iPad rose in greeting. «Hella, agile methods coach. How are you finding the transformation process?»

The Sire from the Consulting Suite, if memory served, had been a man. But Alice was beginning to understand the rules of this place: the retinue's names were passed out like conference badges — whoever grabbed first became Woland.

«Four floors in half an hour.»

«Impressive velocity!» Hella's eyes lit up. «Last quarter we managed only two floors per hour.»

«How long until the one hundred and twenty-seventh?»

The calculator worked in Hella's hands with the intensity of a quantum computer.

«At the current pace... forty-two years, with a margin of error tending toward infinity. However, we have an optimization plan!»

«What plan?»

The cat solemnly raised a paw: «A second elevator! Parallel streams will double productivity.»

«But the movement is the same,» Alice narrowed her eyes. «To the same floor synchronously.»

Hella struck the pose of a military strategist: «Cross-functional teams! One stream plans, the other retrospects.»

«And who will be riding?»

«We are conducting a comprehensive stakeholder mapping analysis,» Transformator answered. «Determining the optimal team for vertical mobility.»

The sixth floor delivered a new companion: a red cat in a Hermès tie and with a consultant's briefcase.

«Azazello, master of parallel scrum.» The tie underwent diplomatic adjustment. «We are testing an alternative strategy of vertical mobility.»

«Which one?»

«Downward movement!» Azazello broke into a Columbus-of-the-frontier smile. «Pivot approach: since upward is difficult, we are exploring downward.»

«Results?»

«Phenomenal! Seven floors down against four up. Superiority is obvious.»

«You are moving away from the goal.»

Azazello lit up with startup fanaticism: «Fail-fast principle! Express validation: descent is not a promising direction.»

«What is the next step?»

«Pivot!» the cats sang in chorus the corporate mantra. «Horizontal movement as the new vector of development.»

The display flickered with the seventh floor in the mood of cancelled flights. Alice felt tired.

«Could I get off and go on foot?»

«The user story of pedestrian movement is absent from the current roadmap,» Transformer brightened. «The Q3 backlog admits such a possibility.»

«What now?»

Behemoth for the first time lifted his gaze from the tablet: «We are waiting for the product owner. Prioritization among elevator, stairs, and teleportation requires a strategic decision.»

«Teleportation?»

Hella lit up with the inspiration of Columbus: «A moonshot project! Disruptive innovation in instant mobility. Instantaneous transportation to the target floor.»

«How is it progressing?»

«A discovery workshop for planning the research is scheduled,» Azazello took the air of Einstein. «In parallel we are conducting a feasibility study of the feasibility study itself.»

Alice reached for the red emergency button. The temple of agile philosophy required immediate departure.

«Wait!» Transformer waved his arms. «We have not conducted the demo!»

«Demonstrate what?»

«A stakeholder presentation of our achievements in vertical transformation,» Behemoth explained importantly.

«Seven floors in an hour is a demonstration?»

«A learning journey showcase!» Hella beamed in philosophical revelation. «Plus the roadmap of our continuous improvement.»

«When is the finish? The one hundred and twenty-seventh floor?»

The gazes of the interlocutors crossed in the astonishment of people who have been asked to invent a time machine in an elevator.

«An incorrect statement of the problem,» Transformator shook his head. «We focus on outcomes, not outputs.»

«What outcome?» The word seemed to Alice an exotic delicacy from a molecular gastronomy restaurant.

The cat raised his paws to the ceiling: «A sustainable transportation experience! A culture of vertical mobility, plus stakeholder engagement in the paradigm of continuous value delivery.»

Without further ceremony Alice slammed the red button. The elevator halted, the doors parted: the seventh floor.

«Emergency exit protocol,» Azazello brightened. «Required: an exit retrospective before the final procedure.»

Alice slipped from the elevator and discovered an ordinary staircase, without retrospectives, planning, or stakeholder mapping. Plain steps led upward. Behind her:

«Azazello, a comprehensive post-mortem of the early exit!» Hella commanded. «Plus a lessons-learned session.»

«Shall we plan an emergency procedures workshop as well?»

«Brilliant idea! After the stakeholder analysis of who exactly finds emergency procedures relevant.»

Eighth floor, a landing window. Below stood the «Center for Agile Transformation» with the silhouettes of people at kanban boards. On the roof turned slowly an arrow marked «Continuous Improvement.»

Next door a house was being built. Without boards, without sprints, without retrospectives. Brick to brick, wall to wall. The house was growing.

«Interesting,» Alice thought, «whether they know about velocity and burndown charts.»

The builders were methodically continuing. Violating agile principles and unaware of it.

The house rose toward the sky.

¹ IP discipline note: per intermezzo-1 note 1 — character names of Bulgakov's Woland retinue (Woland, Behemoth, Koroviev, Azazello, Hella, Margarita) given per canonical English renderings (Michael Glenny 1967 translation, Collins); new dialogue in these intermezzi rendered in the author's own English for voice-register consistency across the series, per the rule established in chapter 4 note 1. No verbatim quotation from copyrighted contemporary English translations.

Afterword. Eleven Questions

What this afterword is about. Twelve chapters, distilled into eleven questions (the pilot chapter offers not a question but a frame). Each question helps a team see what usually goes unnoticed because it stands too close. The book does not prescribe; it restores the right to ask questions from outside a framework.

The book has ended. What do you hold in your hands after twelve chapters?

Not a methodology: a methodology fits on one page and is sold in an industry valued in the tens of billions of dollars. Not a set of examples: examples grow stale before the next edition appears. Not a theory: a theory tested by literature and untested by practice remains fiction.

You hold eleven questions. Each question helps you see what usually goes unnoticed because it stands too close.

The Eleven Questions

Twelve chapters yield eleven archetypes, and eleven questions. A question does not prescribe an action. It calibrates the vision. The pilot chapter stands apart: it offers not a question but a frame.

The Frame. Fogg. Map and Territory

In the pilot chapter, Fogg learns at Kholby Station that the railway announced by the newspapers as complete breaks off in the middle of the jungle, and within minutes he purchases an elephant. He neither complains nor demands compensation: the map has diverged from the territory, and one discards the map. Boeing kept driving down the nonexistent rails of formal certification; Fogg switched domains and drove down reality. The question: **when the plan diverges from reality, do we redraw the map — or do we buy an elephant?**

1. Verne. Iteration

The cycles of Dickens, Verne, and *rakugo* are described in the first chapter as convergent evolution across three cultures: create an increment, deliver it to an audience, receive feedback, correct. One and the same pattern arises in London in 1836, in Paris in 1872, and in Tokyo of the same decade, independently. The question: **does our work cycle deliver an intermediate result to an audience — or are we firing the final version into the dark?**

2. Frankenstein. Operational Model

Victor works in isolation for two years, launches the result, is horrified, and flees the laboratory. Mary Shelley in 1818 described what contemporary development calls “flight from the laboratory”: the creator does not think through what will happen to the product after release. The question: **am I creating a product — or am I creating a product plus the operational model of its life?**

3. Holmes. Observation

“I never guess,” says Holmes in *The Sign of Four*. “It is a shocking habit — destructive to the logical faculty.” Data are gathered on site, not in the office; in observation of behavior, not in a report of it. The question: **am I observing what people do — or what they say?**

4. Borges. Measurement

The Lottery in Babylon: every free act gradually enters its sphere. Story points, velocity, OKRs — tools that become institutions and then become the only reality in which a team knows how to describe itself. The question: **does this metric measure something that matters — or the thing we have learned to measure?**

5. Nemo. Bootstrap Team

In the fifth chapter, the positive archetype is not Nemo with his solitary *Nautilus* but Cyrus Smith with the team of *The Mysterious Island*: recruitment by competence, isolation as strategy, a leader who knows the subject, crisis as the normal operating mode. Nemo is the counter-example: a monoculture of one genius, sealed in a submarine without succession. The question: **is this a bootstrap team of specialists — or a cruise ship of process?**

6. Mina Harker. Distributed Knowledge

Stoker’s Team Light would have had no chance against Dracula without Mina’s typewritten report. Six people, six fragments of the truth, plus one document in which the fragments are assembled and redistributed back to the team. Before the transcription — six separate truths; after it — a shared context. The question: **where is the single source of truth stored — and who is responsible for the assembly of the fragments?**

7. Jekyll. Declared and Practiced

Stevenson in 1886 described what Argyris and Schön in 1978 would formalize as the gap between *espoused theory* and *theory-in-use*. The declaration lives on the front stage (the mission statement, the poster in the conference room); the behavior lives on the back stage (the Slack channel #vent, the conversation in the parking lot). The gap grows through defensive routines and rests against *undiscussables* — topics that are not formally forbidden but that no one discusses. The question: **does what we declare about ourselves match what we do — or does an undiscussable gap exist?**

8. Don Quixote. Team Mythology

Cervantes formulated the four laws of team mythology four centuries before Karl Weick described sensemaking: the founding myth, the duet of visionary and pragmatist, the adventure as narrative, the collision of the myth with reality. Teams hold together not on regulations but on interpretive frames that permit joint action. A myth that cannot be rewritten under collision with reality kills the team; a myth that renounces itself under every collision kills it too. The question: **on what founding myth does the team rest — and does that myth allow for local rewriting on collision with reality?**

9. The Time Machine. Labor Horizons

Wells, Autor, Acemoglu-Johnson, Polanyi: the four laws of labor horizons. The technology of the “assistant” reorganizes the structure of work around itself; the polarization of tasks into routine and non-routine unfolds by mechanism, not by choice; the distribution of the fruits is a political process, not an economic one; society responds to market pressure with a counter-movement. The question: **which of our tasks are routine and which are not — and where is the balance of work-distribution and its fruits shifting?**

10. NIICHAVO. Selection

The Strugatsky brothers described a team that cannot be assembled through recruitment — such a team is assembled through meaning. Monday begins on Saturday not because the labor code requires it, but because for a NIICHAVO employee the distinction between work and life does not exist. Command-and-control becomes mechanically impossible: one cannot command a person who does not work for an order. The question: **do we have selection by meaning — or by hiring?**

11. The Plague. The Sustained Crisis

Camus described a team that forms not through calling, but through the refusal to leave. Doctor Rieux, Tarrou, Castel, Rambert, Grand, Paneloux: common decency instead of heroism, parallel obligations without hierarchy, convergence without architecture, the discipline of continuation instead of the horizon of victory. A sustained crisis has no finale in which victory becomes obvious; it has only two modes of ending — disqualification or continuation until the pressure lifts by itself. The question: **what do we do when optimization stops working, and the crisis continues?**

The Question You Reach for First

These eleven questions are not a table of “if situation X, apply question Y.” The book begins with a protest against such tables — against an industry that packaged common sense in complexity and thereby destroyed common sense itself.¹

Questions work differently. What you see through a question is determined in part by what you were already looking for. The team that first reaches for Holmes’s question is searching for a diagnosis: what is broken here. The team that first reaches for Camus’s question is searching for discipline: how to continue. The team that first reaches for Borges’s question is defending itself: measurement

has drowned us. The question you reach for first says more about your team than the situation itself does.

And one more thing. The very choice of question is a diagnostic act. Borges in “The Lottery in Babylon” showed that the attempt to measure chance through an institution turns the institution into a new form of chance. The meta-measurement of *which question to use* has the same logic: the attempt to systematize the choice of question turns the choice into a new set of rules, requiring a new question to verify.

The book’s diagnostics, therefore, cannot be algorithmized. They are applied by hand, and under the responsibility of the person who applies them.

What This Book Is Not

This book does not deny agile methodologies. Standups, retros, demos, sprints — these are normal working practices invented long before they were given names. What the book denies is the transformation of practices into institutions, of rituals into fetishes, of language into an industry.

This book does not propose “be like Holmes,” “be like Rieux,” or “be like Smith.” Literature does not offer role models — it offers mirrors. Holmes is effective because he is Holmes. A team that tries to become Holmes stops being itself and does not become Holmes.

This book does not feel nostalgic for a “real” management of some previous era. The nineteenth century was not an age of common sense — it was the age of factory children, coal mines, and colonial enterprises. The literature we read was written *against* the management that surrounded it, and it remains relevant precisely because its authors saw what their contemporaries preferred not to notice.

Where Does the Elevator Go

In Intermezzo III, the elevator of digital transformation rises one floor per iteration, with a strategic retrospective between floors. Alice asks: “May I press directly to the one-hundred-and-twenty-seventh?” The cat explains that this would violate the methodology.

The elevator is not going anywhere. It is not a functional elevator — it is the methodology theater in the form of an elevator. The teams that are doing the work stepped out of the cabin long ago and are climbing the stairs on foot. Those who remained in the elevator are discussing how to improve the process of ascent.

This is not a cynical conclusion, but a diagnostic one. The elevator is a normal tool in the right building; the theater of the elevator is a pathology that emerges when the tool becomes an end in itself. The questions collected in this book help distinguish one from the other.

Literary Analysis of Business

The approach we applied to twelve literary texts is named in the preface: **Literary Analysis of Business**. It is not a theory and not a school. It is a reading skill: the ability to see in a literary text, written long before the emergence of contemporary management, a diagnosis of the phenomena that management would later describe and often formalize worse than literature had done intuitively.

The method does not claim to exhaust the phenomena. Eleven questions are not all possible questions; they are the ones that emerge convincingly from the texts we read. Dostoevsky, Chekhov, Kafka, Platonov (who works for us in the ninth chapter as the Russian voice of *The Foundation Pit*, not as a separate question), Beckett could give another ten. Perhaps in the next book. Perhaps the reader will do this work themselves, opening a favorite novel not as entertainment but as a diagnostic instrument.

A Quiet Finale

Literature does not offer instructions — it offers a language. Not algorithms, but ethical supports. Not technologies of management, but a vocabulary for describing those layers of work that lie deeper than procedures.²

The team that has read to this page has not received solutions. It has received eleven questions and the right to choose which one to ask today. The longer a team works together, the more often it will change questions, and the more precisely those questions will show it what cannot be seen from within a single frame.

The book has ended. The team has not.

¹ Chapter 0, central thesis: “the industry of agile methods sells corporations common sense packaged in a complexity that destroys common sense itself.”

² Paraphrase of the closing of Chapter 10: “literature preserves what management does not preserve — a language for describing those layers of work that lie deeper than procedures.”

Acknowledgments

The Author's Team

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Editorial Tools (Automation)

The book was made using AI tools that form part of the FolkUp editorial ecosystem. These tools are not human reviewers, but specialized software assistants with distributed zones of responsibility. AI-assisted content in this book falls within the carve-out of EU AI Act Art. 50(4) — the editorial-review exemption. We disclose it voluntarily, because the principle of honest attribution matters more than what is legally required.

- **Fact verification and source discovery** — automated OSINT assistant
- **Technical editing** — verification of editorial standards and formatting
- **Poetic-rhythm analysis** (chapter on Sherlock Holmes) — a literary-studies assistant
- **Hostile review** — independent checking of logic and contradictions
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For more on the architecture of the editorial ecosystem and the role of AI in the book, see the AI Transparency page.

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To the authors of the sources — the writers and researchers whose work formed the basis of the analysis: from Jules Verne and Mary Shelley to contemporary specialists in agile methodologies.

To the first readers — for feedback in the early stage of the work, when the link between nineteenth-century literature and modern management still looked doubtful.

A Special Word

To all who believed in the project — for support in the moments when the book’s central hypothesis had not yet been proved.

To the anonymous corporate employees — for honest testimony from inside the systems described in the book.

If you feel your contribution has not been recognized, please write to info@folkup.app

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Principles of Work

Thoroughness of Verification

Every factual claim is checked against primary sources. Accuracy matters more than speed.

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- **Tier 1 sources:** primary sources, archival documents, original texts
- **Tier 2 sources:** academic studies, peer-reviewed publications
- **OSINT verification:** independent verification of facts through open sources

Independent Review

Each chapter passes through a check by independent reviewers, who actively look for errors, contradictions, and weak points in the argument.

Citation Standards

Academic Requirements

We follow strict academic standards of citation with full attribution of sources.

Copyright

We observe all copyright requirements when quoting. Volume limits: - Contemporary works: up to 300 words of prose, up to 3 lines of poetry - Public Domain (author deceased more than 70 years): no limits - Translations: with the translator identified, or marked «translation by the author»

Technical Standards

Accessibility

Compliance with WCAG 2.1 AA — web accessibility for people with disabilities.

Performance

Load time under 2 seconds, mobile adaptation, image optimization.

Security

HTTPS, Content Security Policy, secure headers.

Editorial Process

Stages of the Work

1. **Research** — gathering material, primary analysis
2. **Writing** — drafting the chapter
3. **Verification** — checking facts and sources
4. **Independent review** — searching for errors with independent reviewers
5. **Editing** — final revision and polish
6. **Publication** — placement on the site

Status System

- **Draft:** work in progress
- **Unverified:** written, but facts not yet checked
- **Partially verified:** key facts checked
- **Verified:** full verification complete

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Sources

Full bibliography of all sources used in this book, grouped by chapter.

This bibliography is being consolidated. Until then, each chapter lists its sources in the footnotes at the end of the chapter.

Structure (to be finalized)

The sources section will be organized following the Russian master edition structure:

- **General bibliography** — sources referenced across multiple chapters
- **By chapter** — chapter-specific sources with page numbers
- **Canonical English texts** — original English-language sources (marked “Canonical English text used directly” per LOC-EN-1)
- **Translated sources** — non-English sources translated for this edition (marked “translation by author”)

Canonical sources of truth

Until this file is finalized, canonical references are available in:

- End-of-chapter footnotes (all 16 chapters): Chapters →
- Russian master edition sources: Russian sources → (main reference)

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Alphabetical index of key concepts, characters, and sources of the book. Compiled from the Russian master edition.

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M

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