Current Reality Trees
A Collaborative Tool for Continuous Improvement

Your Coach: Paul Hodgetts

Your Coach

- Paul Hodgetts
  - phodgetts@agilelogic.com   @paulhodgetts
- Agile Logic
  - www.agilelogic.com (check the resources section)
- AgileSoCal User Group
  - LinkedIn: AgileSoCal

Continuous Improvement

When problem-solving, we want to:

- Collaboratively work together with a shared sense of ownership
- Get to the root causes of issues – identify the high-leverage opportunities
- Be able to move fast, with little overhead and preparation
- Have a technique that helps with focus and facilitation
- Use artifacts that serve both as a thinking & communication tool, and as historical documentation

Current Reality Trees (CRT) are an effective tool for collaboratively identifying root causes.

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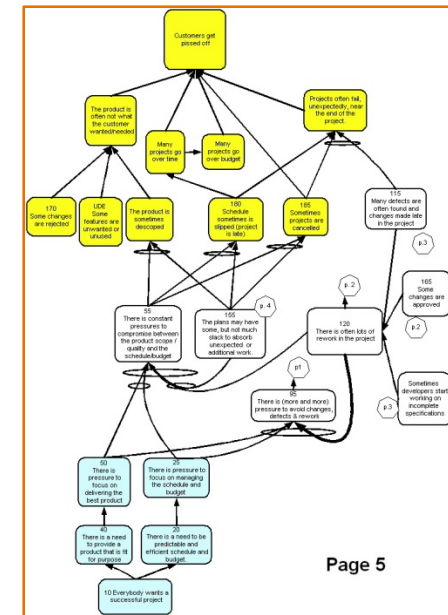
CRTs Capture a Conversation

Simple Steps:

1. Identify a symptom we are seeing (an undesirable effect)
2. Ask why that effect happens? What is the cause?
3. Turn it around – treat the cause as an effect and ask why it happens? What is the cause of the cause?
4. Keep asking why to dig into deeper root causes
5. Keep asking why to identify multiple causes for an effect
6. Look for common causes and consolidate them
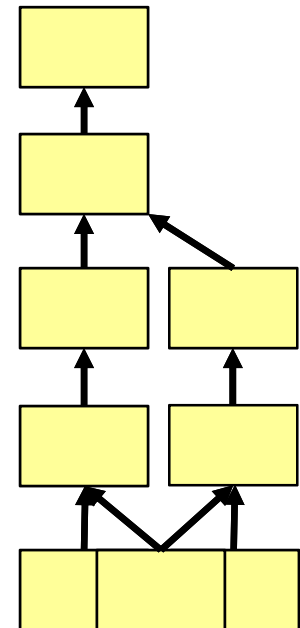
It's Not About the CRT

Current Reality Trees are a simple tool…

The magic happens in the collaboration!

- Leaders don't just heroically rescue teams by coming up with solutions behind the scenes
- Teams don't just solve local problems outside of the organizational context

Tips & Guidelines

- **Clarity** – Commonly understood words. Clearly expressed ideas. Obvious, logical connections.
- **Solid** – Single effect or cause captured as a clear statement. Watch for assumptions. Look for evidence to support it.
- **Causality** – Agreement that "If we have <cause>, the <effect> clearly results." Look for assumptions or generalizations.
- **Sufficiency** – Is the cause enough to create the effect, or does another cause need to happen along with it?
- **Uniqueness** – Is this the only cause that produces the effect?
- **Reversal** – Watch the cause → effect relationship. Don't mistake the cause for the effect.
- **Focus** – Avoid tangents. Use the above guidelines to keep things objective & fact-based.

Suggested Policies

Use the guidelines as a focus. It should be OK to ask any guideline question.

1. Ask the person proposing an effect or cause for clarity. Avoid assumptions or putting words in their mouth.
2. The proposer is responsible for substantiating their claim.
3. Assume people are trying to help and are not idiots.
4. Seek to understand what is meant. Avoid arguments over trivial details.

CRTs are sufficiency-based, not academic. Ask "Is this enough to come to a reasonable conclusion to act on?"

Exercise – Using a CRT

A team has a problem:

> Their stories are often being delayed.
> Unexpected time debugging environment issues.

Assuming this is the effect/cause we want to address…
What causes this?

- Is that a sufficient cause on its own?
- Are there other ways it can happen?
- Are we assuming things or generalizing?
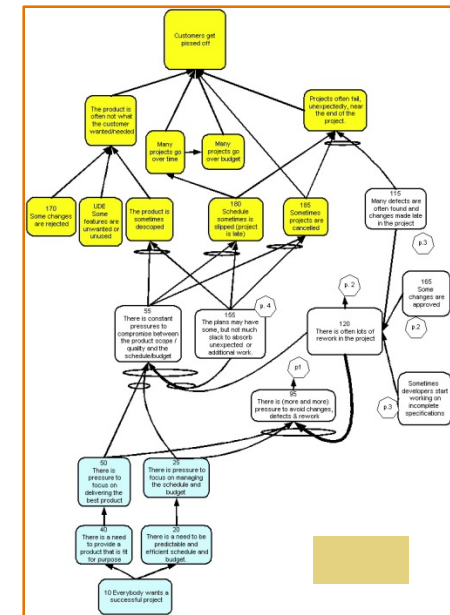
Dig deeper into the causes – what causes them?

Are there fundamental root causes that we can leverage to help remove many stacked effects?

Questions?