

Taking Care of our World: Promises and Actions

Care Drives our Actions

Why do we expend so much energy on our work? It's easy to lose track of what originally drew us to the things we invest energy in, when we get caught up in "todo lists" and interminable, guilt-ridden backlogs of work. We can forget that the inconvenient "tasks" that pile up are in service of important outcomes we desire for ourselves and others.

A common approach to work is to plan-execute-replan and so on. Agile software development explicitly adds short cycles, "reflection" and "learning" to this pattern, to bring more realism into the way work is done. Still, there is something missing, not explicitly called for in most Agile methods, and that is: *why* we are working!

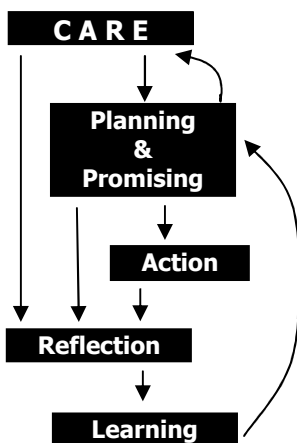
FtSoW

Most work is wearing, otherwise we'd call it play! And when people lose track of why they are working so hard, motivation drains away and non-productive behaviours like procrastination and c-y-a can show up. So it is important to frequently and explicitly ask, at all levels of the work: "**For the Sake of What** are we doing this?" This can also be called a "relevance story" – it explains what is being taken care of, when these actions are accomplished. It ties mundane work to meaningful goals and encourages realism, passion and creativity in getting the work done.

The Anatomy of Action

There are numerous models used in the world of education and pedagogy to talk about how work gets done, and they have much in common, as can be seen below. All of them seem to assume that the actors in these cycles are motivated and engaged, but give no clue as to how this occurs.

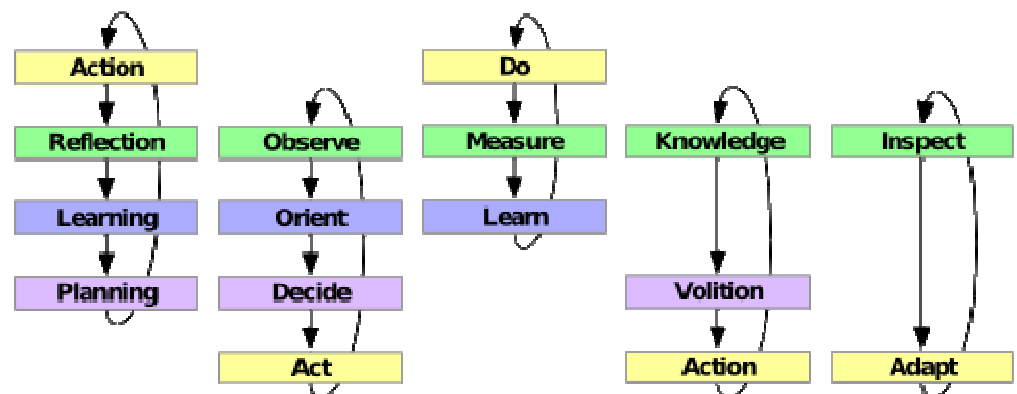
The "Anatomy of Action"



The "Anatomy of Action" explicitly brings **Care** to the forefront in understanding our work. It also introduces important distinctions in the area of Promises – an area not well taught in our culture, and hence poorly handled.

(Note that the Learning Circle, not shown, does include Care as "Love", though it is not particularly indicated as the starting point).

Other familiar models tend to begin with Action or Observation:



Deborah Preuss

Broken Promises and Moves for Taking Care

Language to help us move from suffering to choice

Choice Begins with Awareness: Clear Language Helps

There are things we avoid thinking about, because to do so would make us responsible for the state in which we find ourselves! When we fail to behave as the responsible people we consider ourselves to be, we often make up a story about what's happening. It keeps us from seeing what's really going on, and where we can improve.

When we fail to keep our promises to friends or customers, it's not uncommon to find we are overcommitted. We develop language that allows us to skate around responsibility for it, endorsing it or avoiding the reality of having taken on more than we logically can do. Overcommitment narratives we find ourselves in may include:

Blindness

this is not a narrative about being overcommitted, but a state of not knowing that you are overcommitted; you don't discover you were blind until some breakdown shows up that reveals the situation.

Heroic

this is the narrative that you will take on doing more because it is needed; the danger is that you don't set boundaries, particularly the boundary of fulfilling the promise or not, you take on more and more, and you wind up a dead hero.

Hopeful

you are clear you are overcommitted, and you don't know how you will get it all done, but you live in hope that with hard work it will all work out in the end.

Fantasy

you reject all facts, indications, and the assessments of others that you cannot fulfill, and hold on to your story that you will without any grounding; this can be mistaken for faith.

Resigned

you assess and feel that you cannot avoid being overcommitted, you know you will not fulfill, but have some story of why you cannot say so, or that it will make no difference; you allow your resignation to keep you and your customer in a public story that it will happen, when your private story is that it will not, usually due to some justifying narrative.

Cynical

you have a story that overcommitment is unavoidable due to the power, policies, decisions, and actions of others, that they will always keep things that way, and you are resentful of them for doing so – you assess that they deserve the negative results that will occur and that no action you take to avoid overcommitment will have any effect.

Criminal

you know you cannot fulfill when you make the commitment, and you knowingly keep the customer in the interpretation you will fulfill when you have no commitment to fulfill.

Broken Promises and Moves for Taking Care

Language to help us move from suffering to choice

Moves Available, to Return to Taking Care of What We Care About

When we know what we care about, who our key customer is, and what our customer cares about, we are equipped with the motivation to “win the game” in creative ways. Rather than staying stuck in our narratives about why we can’t or shouldn’t deliver, we can take responsibility and hold the conversations required to achieve success, in whatever form we agree upon.

For a team to be effective, they must know that they are free to make all of the following moves, or at least to make clear requests that lead to things like “change the game” and “change the team”, (these often require collaboration with other parts of the organisation).

IMMEDIATE MOVES

- Decline
- Defer
- Delegate
- Clarify priorities
- Counteroffer
- Transfer
- Renegotiate
- Revoke

INCREASE CAPACITY

- Get help
- Request resources
- Get new talent
- Redesign work
- Redesign roles
- Improve processes
- Build competencies

MAKE A WINNING GAME

- Change the game
- Change the team
- Change the strategy
- Create alliances

The Wheel of Team Care and Action

A tool for honing your effectiveness

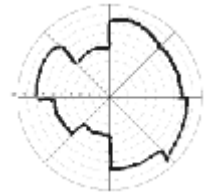
“Conversations for Action” Touch on Many Aspects of Your Work

The work we will do around Conversations for Action or “Action Meetings” touches on many areas of behaviour: how you assess your capacity and your ability to deliver; how you communicate about this with others; habitual moods you bring to planning, and to your work; how you respond to surprises and disappointments; and how you set up both yourself and your customer, for success.

The Wheel

This wheel is composed of eight activities that together make up a way to plan and execute, in order to make real what you collectively care about. These are not simply methods or ideas – they are fundamental, healthy “ways of being,” proven (by years of practice at the Institute for Generative Leadership) to work together to enhance effectiveness and to create teams that consistently bring positive change into the world. These can be learned, and with time, if not well tended, will probably be dropped and unlearned.

So, at this point in time, how strong would you say your practices and skills are in the following areas? Ranking is arbitrary, so if unsure where to start, just pick the category you are most satisfied with, give it a high score, and work your way around the circle from there, drawing the arc at the right place in each circle segment. It will look something like this when you are done:



This is not a test, but rather a way to help you identify where to focus, both in your team reflection activities, and with your coach during coaching calls.

Observation: given the shape of your “wheel”, what kind of “ride” can your team realistically expect? And what about your customer’s ride?

