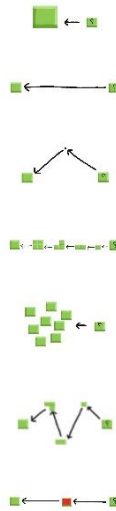# A Life Less Lean.

I get asked a lot what an Agile mindset is. It's not an easy question to answer but I tend to think of it as the ability to reflexively spot risks and consider ways of mitigating them without causing more. It takes a while for this way of thinking to percolate its way into your subconscious so it happens 'without thinking'. But a good baby step is to keep in mind a certain sort of monster.

The factory crushing Kaiju called Muda.

This was the word coined by Taiichi Ohno at Toyota to describe wastes incurred in production. Later, two books later in fact, they were renamed Lean wastes based on Womack and Jones formulation of the Lean methodology after their studies of the Japanese car company. A good way to start the process of forming the Agile mindset is to keep these definitions of wastes in mind and examining them not just at work but also as part of your own life. These waste are, in no particular order as they say on the talent shows; Overproduction; Waiting, Processing, Transport, Movement, Inventory and Defects

So lets give it a go. Let's see if I'm living a life 'less lean'.

Over Production

The easiest way of thinking of this waste is making too much of something. I do this a lot with meals. Meat is never the problem. You can't make too much pork chop so to speak. But I'm still and idiot when it comes to vegetables. Mashed potato in particular. You see I tend to use new potatoes and I never know how many of them to a single portion of mash. I could of course weigh them or keep a record of how many was too much last time. But I don't. So I end up with far too many tasty carbs on my plate. They are delicious though.

Waiting

So meat is the problem after all. I'm a child of sixties from a South London family. Hence my mother was a parent who grew up in a post war Britain where it was assumed that if a nuclear war didn't kill you then some sort of illness would. So naturally she would cook any piece of flesh until it was at least charred to make sure that their was no chance of pesky germs, or flavour, being present (sorry Mum). Unfortunately I seemed to have picked up this incendiary habit from her. I have to wait longer for my meal because I know I am overcooking it. And it's a habit. And habits are hard to break.

Transport

I try, I do. There's a certain temptation to shop online and then have a truck with pictures of food on it to come around to your house. I did try it once but we're get to that later. So instead I buy the food the old fashioned way and walk it home in a backpack. In theory this is great as I'm not overspending, I'm only buying as much as I can carry. The downside is I tend to forget some vital ingredient. So I have to go back. I don't want to be transporting materials back and forth just to make my tea.

Processing

I used to work in kitchens a lot when I was younger, everything from holiday camps to an Oxford Street bistro. So I know how to cook. Maybe a little too well. I tend to make meals from scratch and sometimes get a bit flash making a complicated sauce or preparing vegetables in a particular way so they look nice as well as taste nice. But sometimes I have to question whether its actually worth it. I mean surely the minimum viable product is just to shove stuff in my gob to keep me alive, isn't it?

Inventory

Like most of you I suspect there's a cupboard in the kitchen heaving with jars and bottles that haven't been used for a while. I also suspect that if you have a good look at those jars, that half of them are well past their sell by date.

Being a single man I suffer from worse sins than that when it comes to waste. But its mostly not my fault. I tend to buy multipacks of stuff, just to save money. This is fine for tins (as long as they don't go out of date) but I do the same thing with vegetables. Which means there's a certain inevitability about some of it going bad before I get to eat it.

Movement

Finally one of the Muda wastes where I think I might be golden ! I have a small kitchen and all the tools and materials I need are just an arm's length away. I don't have to move anywhere to complete the task or context switch away from it. Golden I tell you!

Defects

I like recipes, I do. But they never seem to turn out right the first time. It's probably due to the small differences between what I do and what the chef (or whatever celebrity's career is going downhill so they've jumped on the cookbook/children's book bandwagon) does. Ingredients are going to be subtly different due to where they are sourced from for instance. Oven temperatures are diverse despite what you set them to.

And sometimes the language used can be subjective. A doughy consistency for instance is abstract enough for the layman that it can mean anything.

But you try different stuff, increasing ingredients here, changing cooking times there and eventually you get a decent result.

Defects can be more subtle than that. For instance making a simpler meal can result in making a dinner that is substantially larger than it needs to be. Again these are little subconscious behaviours, such as making enough to cover the plate you're using, even if it is more calories than required. These defects are not linked to the recipe. But to the manner in which the product is used by the client. In this case, me being a greedy bastard.

Defects can appear earlier in the process. As I mentioned, I have tried the online shopping thing but more often than not there are substitutions made to my order (the definition of a first world problem...) so already I may be building with substandard materials.

So it's obvious that there are easy ways to reduce the waste above. But the important thing, at least to start with, is the observation of such wastes. This is a good way to begin to build up the foundation of a reflexive Agile mindset. Starting to think about Agile in everyday life is a great way to do this instead of thinking that it's just something that you consider in the workplace.

Unless you work in a kitchen of course...