Agile Black Holes and Revelations

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Work is moving through the system…
...until it doesn’t.
This looks like a process problem...
...but it’s likely there is a behavioral issue.
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What happened?
BLACK HOLE

A region of space composed of super densely packed matter with a gravitational pull so strong that nothing, not even light, can escape it.
Sarah’s Theory of Agile Black Holes

- Any Kanban status which acts as a “holding pen” for work items will eventually turn into a black hole.
- Once a sufficient number of items are blocked for the same reason, it is concluded that those item types will always become blocked.
- It becomes acceptable for the team to allow items to easily move to the status and stay there.
- Time seems to slow down inside the status.
- No work appears to be done to the outside observer.
Potential Symptoms of Agile Black Holes

• Queue Busts***
• Exceeded WIP Limits
• Blocked Column
• Excessive "Done" or "Ready" columns***
• Long Stage Cycle Time
How do Agile Black Holes form?
Activity
Learned Helplessness
Locus of Control
Self-Handicapping
You miss 100% of the shots you don’t take.

Wayne Gretzky
Somebody Else’s Problem & Bystander Effect

“An SEP is something we can't see, or don't see, or our brain doesn't let us see, because we think that it's somebody else’s problem...The brain just edits it out, it's like a blind spot.”

- Ford Prefect, *Life, the Universe, and Everything*

**Bystander Effect**

<table>
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<th>Event</th>
<th>Action</th>
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<td>You notice the event, and take notes of the events are transpiring.</td>
<td>Either assume responsibility, or assume that others will assume responsibility for the situation.</td>
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<td>Realize that there is an issue.</td>
<td>Either recognize that you have the knowledge to help the situation, or acknowledge that you don’t know enough to be helpful.</td>
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| Either act to help the situation, or simply remain an observer. | }
How Do Black Holes Form?
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How Do Black Holes Form?
Black Hole Formation
How can we spot Agile Black Holes?
Standard Kanban Board

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Gestalt Principles of Visual Perception

• We tend to order our experience in a manner that is regular, orderly, and recognizable.
• Help us determine what design elements to use for a given situation.
• Influence our visual perception, allowing us to direct our attention to specific places, take specific actions, and create behavioral change.
• Design something that is intuitive to use.

1. Figure-ground
2. Common Region
3. Similarity
4. Proximity
5. Continuity
6. Focal Point
7. Closure
Figure-Ground

Elements are perceived as either the figure (element of focus) or ground (background).

Tells us what to focus on and what to safely ignore.
Figure-Ground

Make the cards appear in the foreground.
Common Region

When objects are located within the same region, we perceive them as being grouped together. Borders help.
Common Region

Make sure you have clear regions.

User Story XYZ
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123.abc
Similarity

When elements appear similar, we group them together and tend to think they have the same function.
**Similarity**

Change the blocked cards to look different.
Proximity

Things close together appear to be more related than things spaced farther apart.

Proximity overrides similarity
Continuity

Elements arranged on a line or curve are perceived to be more related than elements not on the line or curve.

Lines follow the smoothest path.
Proximity & Continuity

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Proximity & Continuity

- No more Blocked column!
- Swim lane for Blocked
- Proximity to the status we are blocked in.
Focal Point

Whatever stands out visually will attract and hold our attention.
Foveal & Peripheral Vision

• Foveal system permits 100% visual acuity. It has the highest concentration of cone cells and a very high resolution.

• Peripheral vision is outside the very center of gaze.
  • Takes random samples and our brains fill in the gaps.
  • Important because
    • Provides clues to the fovea to move our eyes in the direction of the important thing in the visual field.

• Make something **POP** to get attention
  • Use color sparingly to allow users to notice changes easier.
Focal Point

Add something to draw attention to the blocked items.
Closure

We try to find one recognizable pattern when we look at a complex arrangement of visual elements.
Just Noticeable Difference
How do I escape the Agile Black Hole?
Sling-shot techniques

• Engage the team directly about the problem
  • Model the right-kind of truth-telling
• Visualize the future state and take action
• Find your Influencer
• Queue Bust***
• Root Cause ALL THE THINGS!
In summary...

Where is work stalling/disappearing? Do you have a red shift?
What is the source of your Agile Black Hole?
Do you have team behavioral issues that contribute to black holes?
Is your Kanban board set up to monitor for black holes?
What slingshot techniques can you use to get out of black holes?