Project Management in the Age of Complexity - what every manager needs to know

Detailed Session Description

Have you ever slaved hard to produce what you thought was a great plan only for it to start unraveling almost from day 1? If so, you may well have just had a run-in with a "Wicked Problem" and the unpredictability that comes with project environment that is itself a complex system. Complexity is the domain of unknown unknowns - the home of the sort of surprises familiar to any of us who work in systems development. This raises the question: how can you effectively manage something that you cannot predict?

It is clear that we live in an increasing complex and interconnected world in which millions of lines of code run our cars and social networking services support emergent political change in the middle-east. Complexity is the domain of unknown unknowns - the home of the sort of surprises familiar to any of us who work in software development.

The computer systems that we develop, the project environments we develop them in, and our organisations themselves are all becoming more complex, not less. It follows then that those organisations who acknowledge this and find ways to be effective at delivering projects in complex environments are likely to be more successful than their competitors who don't.

It turns out that the directive management style that we inherited from the industrial revolution 200 years ago is not the most effective approach in such complex environments.

The mindset, organisational design and behavioural implications of Agile ripple out much further through the organisation than many realise at first. Too often, management says it supports agile adoption yet makes little or no attempt to undertake the deep changes to its own approach needed to adequately support it.

In this session we unpack the nature of complexity and explore the latest management science that shows why the traditional project management approaches used in most organisations break down in the face of complexity and unpredictably.

Luckily, there is an increasing understanding of management techniques with which we can control the unpredictable and determine what works when the nature of the project's variables are unknown. The nature of such projects is illustrated using real examples from the speaker's experience.

We present a proven model for successful project management in a complex environment. In doing so, we uncover a number of fundamental paradigm shifts that underpin agile methods as well as the attributes and skills that this requires of managers and leaders who wish to be effective in the face of the 21st century's wicked problems of complexity and unpredictability.