

10 Temptations of An Agile Coach

Stevie Borne, Thomson Reuters



Outline

- Describe each temptation
- Explain the effects of each one
- Offer tips to avoid them
- Provide opportunities to hear from each other

10 Temptations



Avoidance



Meddling



Impatience



Fuzziness



Mastery



Love



Changeful



Utopia



Control



Inflexibility

1. Meddling

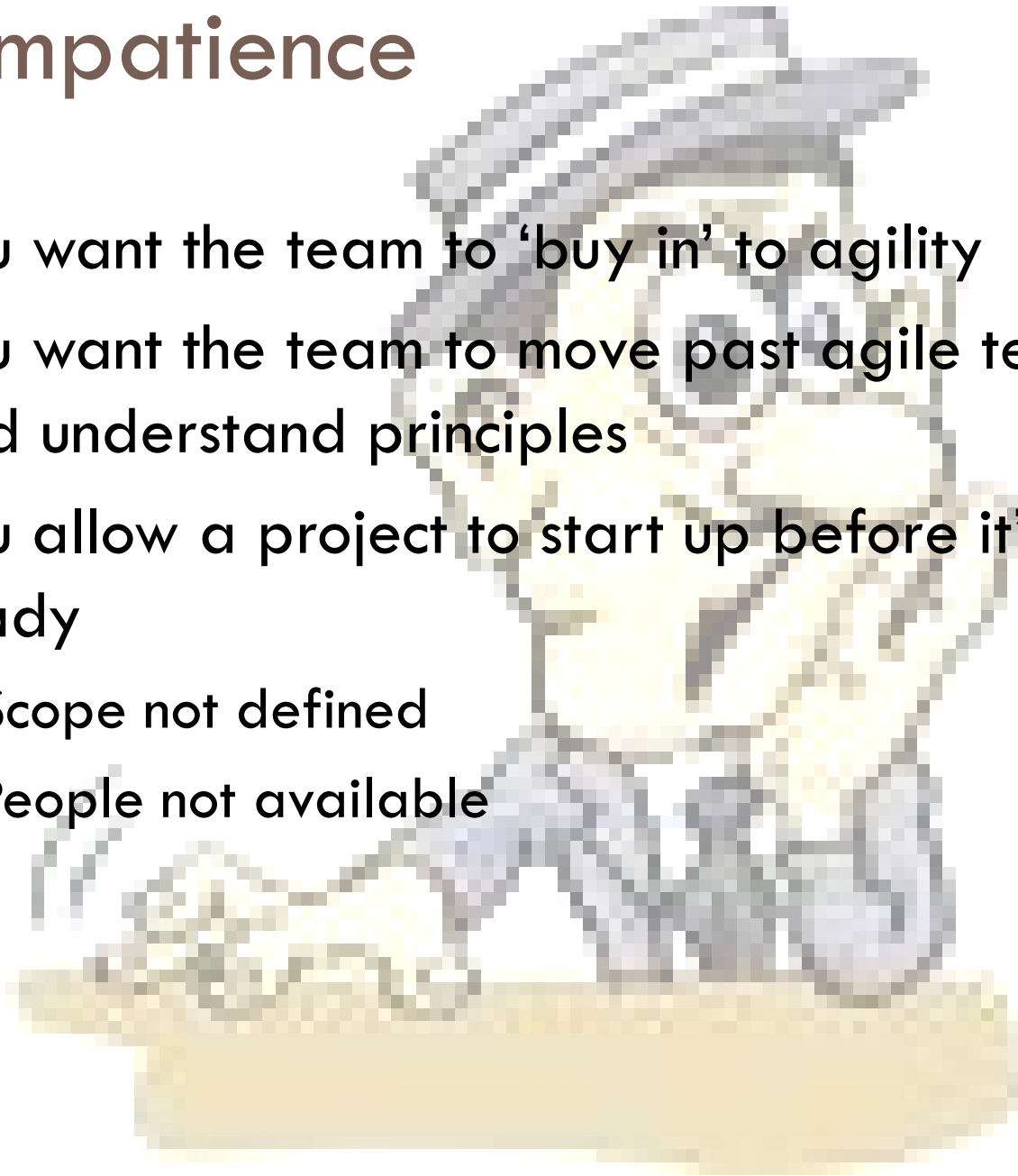
- To interfere with the team's activities when you shouldn't
 - Technology
 - Updating story board
 - Writing stories
 - Creating acceptance criteria

Meddling – Effects and Tips

- Effect 1: Takes away from team ownership
- Tip 1: Make suggestions but let the team do the experimentation
- Tip 2: Allow the team to make mistakes

2. Impatience

- You want the team to 'buy in' to agility
- You want the team to move past agile techniques and understand principles
- You allow a project to start up before it's really ready
 - ▣ Scope not defined
 - ▣ People not available



Impatience – Effects and Tips

- Effect 1: Team becomes discouraged
- Effect 2: Coach burn-out
- Effect 3: Spending unnecessary time and resources

- Tip 1: Remember that change takes time
- Tip 2: Find a coaching mentor

3. Mastery

- You have all the answers so you freely give them out



Mastery – Effects and Tips

- Effect 1: Team fails to problem solve on their own and will continue to rely on you for answers
- Effect 2: Team becomes afraid to fail because they don't know the 'right' answer
- Effect 3: It's your process, not the team's

- Tip 1: Ask the team how they would handle the given situation
- Tip 2: Share with them a variety of ways to solve the problem and let them choose one or make up their own

4. Changeful



- Every iteration you have a new idea to try
- Change for the sake of change, to keep things 'fresh'
- You want all your teams/workstreams doing things the same way

Changeful – Effects and Tips

- Effect 1: The team doesn't have the chance to get a feel for the new technique to see if it works for them
- Effect 2: Too focused on the 'how', not the 'why'
- Tip 1: Let the team stick with a change for at least 2 iterations
- Tip 2: Make sure you have a good reason to recommend change – run it by someone first

5. Inflexibility

A large steamship with two masts and two funnels is shown at sea. The ship is white with dark accents and is viewed from a distance. The water is choppy, and the sky is overcast.

□ Uniformity

- ▣ You only know one way of executing agile practices
- ▣ “If it worked well on the last team, surely it will work well for this team.”

□ Dogmatism

- ▣ There is only one ‘right’ way to perform agile practices

Inflexibility – Effects and Tips

- Effect 1: The team loses sight of the value behind the practice
- Effect 2: Alienates team against you
- Effect 3: Team allows the process to replace their own thinking

- Tip 1: Learn new techniques to accomplish the same objectives
- Tip 2: Focus on principles rather than practices

Inflexibility - Exercise

- ▣ What's an agile practice that you've become inflexible about?
- ▣ Why?
- ▣ What other approach(es) can accomplish the same objective as the technique you adhere to?

6. Control

- Take control of the team through work assignment, representing them at meetings, mandatory overtime, speaking for the team, etc.
 - ▣ Often happens when team faces delivery pressure
 - ▣ Adding small pieces of work into the iteration

Control – Effects and Tips

- Effect 1: The team is no longer empowered to speak for themselves.
- Effect 2: The team may lose respect for you as their coach.

- Tip 1: Force yourself to step back and re-engage the team. Give them back control of their work.

7. Utopia

- Agile will solve all your problems.
- Agile is the only way to work.
- Agile adoption will always go as planned.

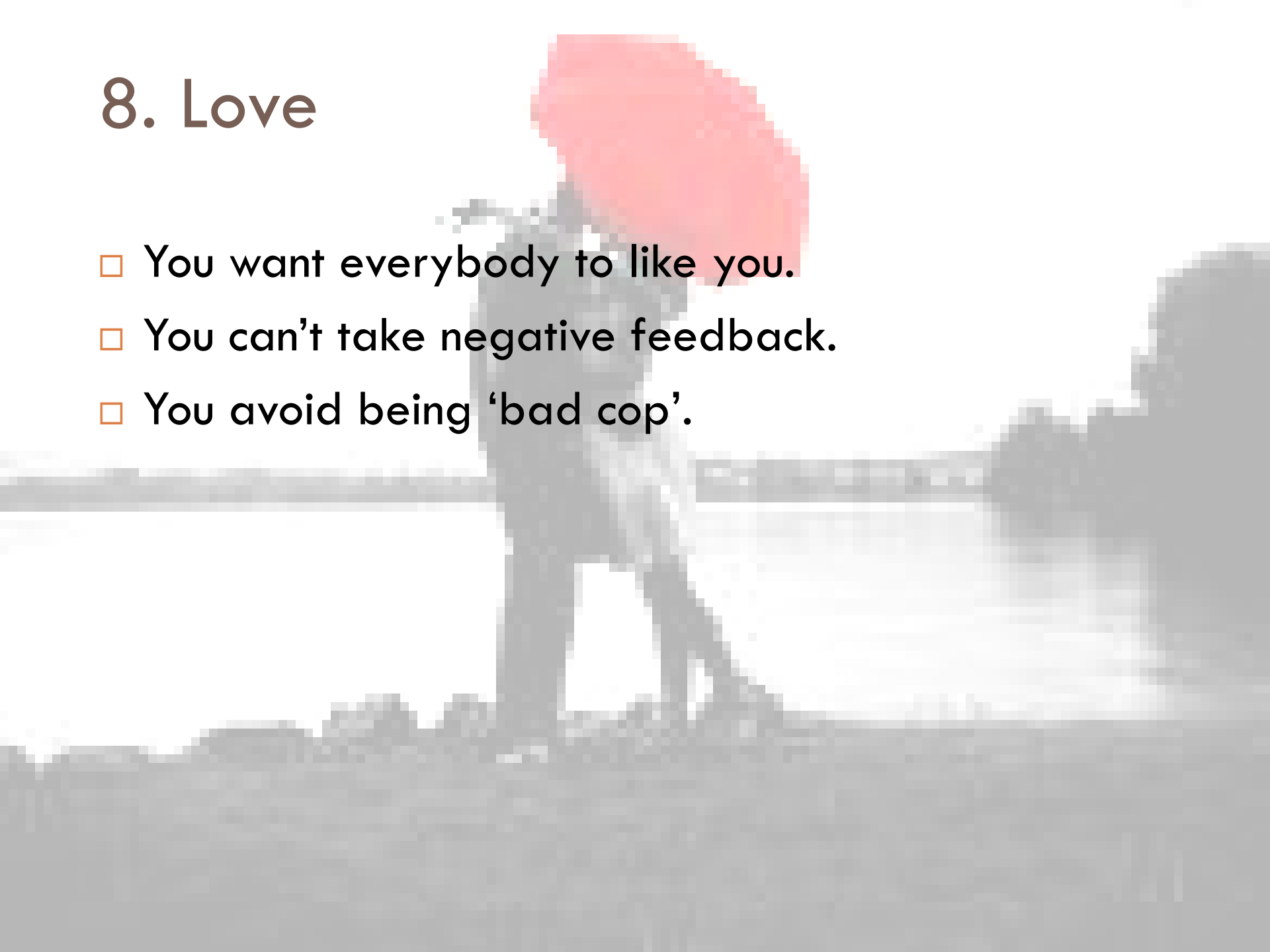
Utopia – Effects and Tips

- Effect 1: Team loses faith in agile principles
- Effect 2: Team feels like they've failed
- Effect 3: You're unprepared for potential disasters

- Tip 1: Discomfort during change is normal. Admit it and learn to be OK with it

8. Love

- You want everybody to like you.
- You can't take negative feedback.
- You avoid being 'bad cop'.



Love – Effects and Tips

- Effect 1: Your feelings get hurt
- Effect 2: The team stops being honest with you

- Tip 1: Develop thick skin
- Tip 2: Stay objective and only mention facts

Love - Exercise

- Describe a time when you fell into the temptation of Love
 - ▣ Had to deliver unwanted bad news
 - ▣ Became discouraged when team got angry at you
 - ▣ Others.....

9. Fuzziness

- A problem is talked about in vague terms with no path toward resolution
 - “We have too many meetings.”
 - “We don’t know how to test these stories and big features.”

Fuzziness – Effects and Tips

- Effect 1: Issues go unresolved and become increasingly frustrating
- Effect 2: The team grows apart

- Tip 1: Ask the team questions – 5 Why's
- Tip 2: Name the issue and create an approach to attempt to resolve it

10. Avoidance

A blurred background image showing a woman in a blue shirt and a man in a red shirt in a boxing ring. The woman is on the left, and the man is on the right, both appearing to be in a boxing stance. The background is out of focus, showing the ropes of the ring and some lights.

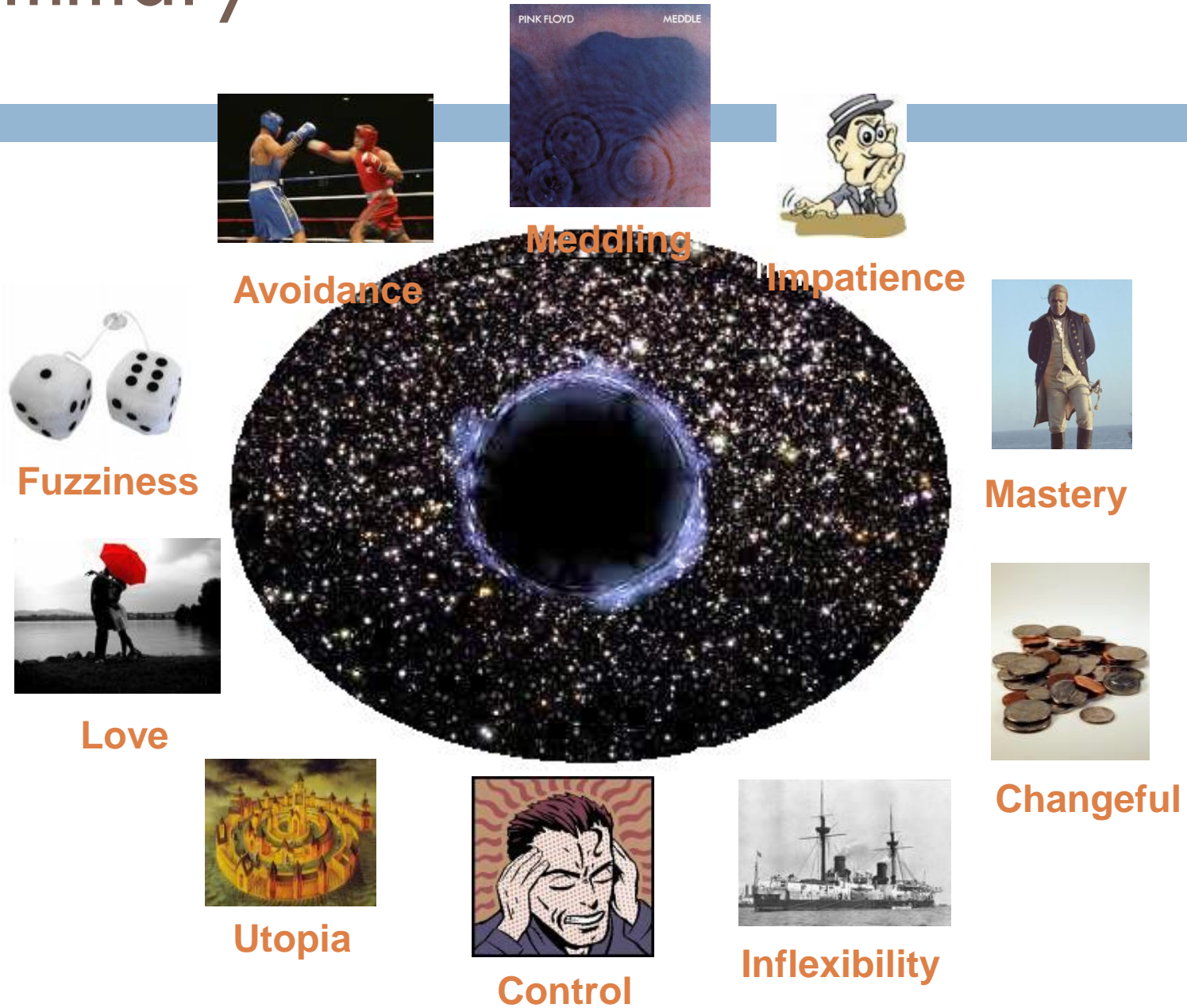
- Avoid failure
 - Unwilling to try new techniques
- Avoid conflict
 - Unwilling to challenge the team when things go awry

Avoidance – Effects and Tips

- Effect 1: Your team misses growth opportunities
- Effect 2: You miss coaching growth opportunities

- Tip 1: Occasional failure is OK
- Tip 2: Find a coaching mentor

Summary



Contact Info

For more coaching conversations, feel free to contact me:

