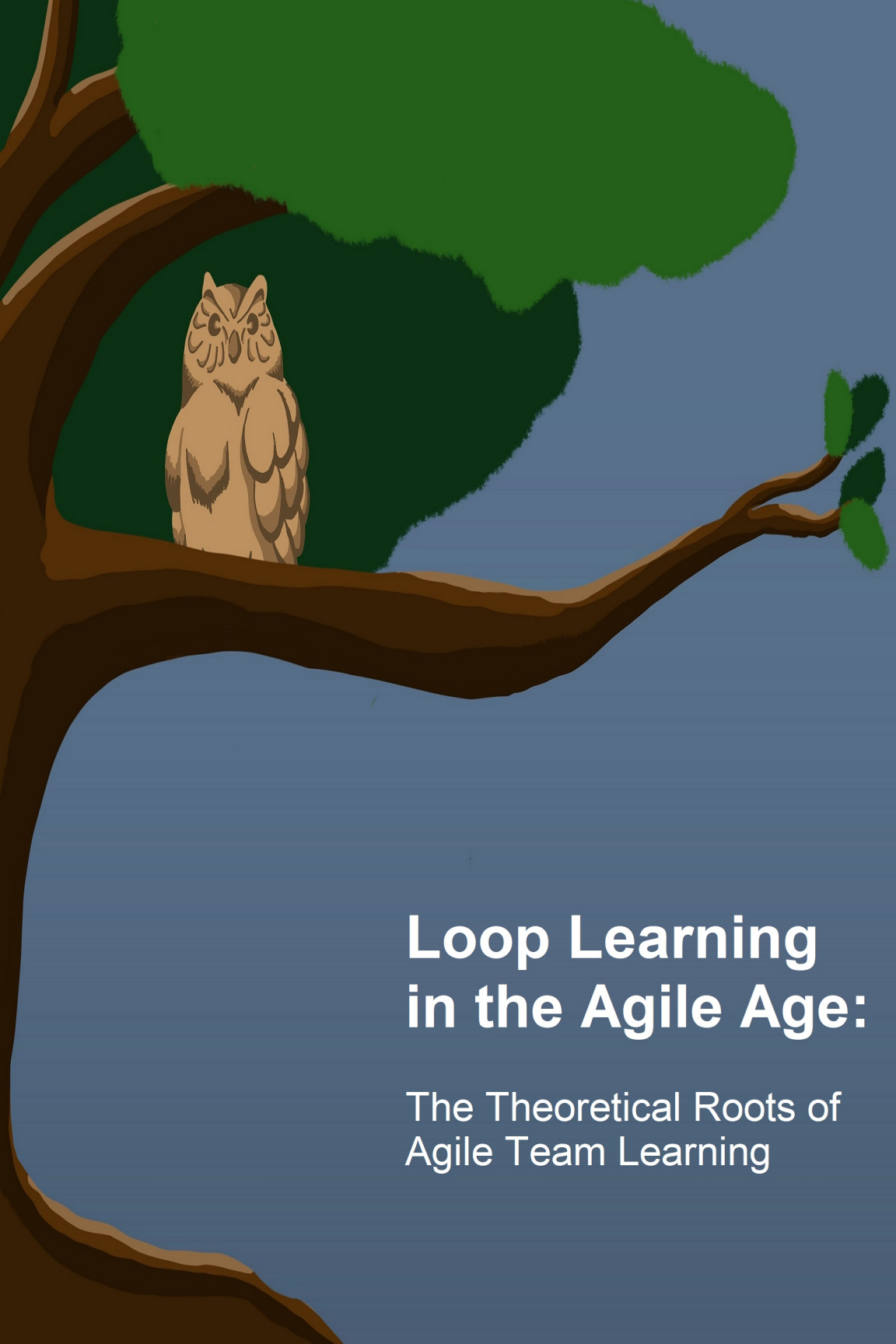

Loop Learning in the Agile Age:

The Theoretical Roots of Agile Team Learning

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The Theoretical Roots of Agile Team Learning

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Minimum Viable Product

Writing this book is challenging. It is an exercise in Loop/Experiential Learning. The content documented here came from career experiences that proved to be helpful. After observing a surprising business outcome, I searched for an explanation for the sequence of events. Learning a relevant theory allowed me to apply that knowledge in this and later situations.

There is so much helpful information it is difficult to limit what should be in the book. I added these Minimum Viable Product sections to significant chapters to document the minimum content expected for that chapter. This is not a warranty or guarantee that any information will be included in the final version. If you are familiar with iterative development approaches, you will understand this technique.

Minimum Viable Loop-Learning Product

Agile Team-Learning is really just an application of Loop Learning. People who work on Scrum teams are actually participating in (perhaps three simultaneous) loop learning activities. Loop Learning is decades old and predates Scrum. It is part of a larger concept of Organizational Learning. THIS IS NOT "TAYLORISM!" In fact, this proves that companies have been using human eccentric management styles for decades, but it was never accepted into a wide range of industries. Loop Learning is decades-old proof that trusting your employees and providing a psychologically safe work environment can actually accelerate successful business outcomes.

As you are going to read in a bit, this book is based on my forty years of experience in applying these concepts in my career. A few simple ideas gave me the skills to become a strategic analyst and thinker. This book is broken into two parts: skills for an individual and those for a team.

The suggestions for the individual are seemingly simplistic; I fear the reader will not take them seriously and not buy the book. But, they are surprisingly subtle and are often implemented poorly. The informed effort will return powerful insight. What are the suggestions?

1) Look at who gives you work. Who gets your work? Look upstream and downstream. This is a mental model of the workflow across your desk.
2) Observe the work as it flows across your desk. Don't just watch or "see" what is going on, observe. "Observe" includes attention to detail and purpose. It involves more than just "seeing".
3) Reflect/ponder/think about how you are impacted by these activities. How does your behavior impact the behavior of the people around you? What patterns do you notice? This is a very simplistic version of Loop Learning. Take a serious effort to do these three things over the next week. If the results surprise you, then this book could help you in your career.

Loop Learning and Experiential Learning are closely related. Experiential Learning has more of a one-and-done feel to it. So the name "Loop Learning" is preferred, as it suggests the student is going to revisit the topic before they master the material. This is a common behavior across several industries, and each has its own version of the loop. Loop learning applies to new learning as well as learning gained from continuous improvement activities.

Later the book will talk about Single-Loop learning: do what the boss tells you to do, then check the quality of your work. Then

the book will look at Double-Loop Learning as it applies to work environments where the employee is legitimately empowered to make decisions, self-organize, and self-manage. In addition, Loop Learning helps create psychological safety in a team. It also strongly develops and reinforces the soft skills needed for career success. Lastly, we will look at how this looping process affects teaching and learning in the team or "classroom".

Preface

I'm not an academic, nor someone with a master's degree, or even a person with a completed bachelor's. I'm someone who struggles to learn in the classroom. I had difficulty if the information provided by the book or the professor could not be visualized. Yet, I had no such difficulty at work. Why was work so different?

The training materials for the APICS (American Production and Inventory Control) certification test suggested that fixing a problem upstream could create problems downstream. They suggested the wise practitioner would observe the whole process and look for potential problems before making any changes to any part of the process.

To observe the whole process, a practitioner would need to map out the tasks. The best approach for that was the Value Stream Analysis and mapping. Once you made a change, you needed to observe the whole value stream, validate the change worked, and that it did not introduce errors. If an error did pop up, it could be corrected instead of the typical whack-a-mole fixes applied until the process worked. The wise practitioner would reflect on the error, review the value stream, and the team, and then propose before attempting a new process fix.

> Relative success would follow the practitioner that observed, mapped/modeled, validated the model, then reflected on what they did to correct the process.

This is an example of real-life experience applied in real-life situations. That was the difference between school and work. This make-a-model, observe-a-model technique began to open my eyes to the effects of social networks in the workplace. The fault lines

of corporate culture began to pop out like the yellow and white lines seen on roads and highways. It highlighted the need to get employees aligned to a common goal. This led to a deeper understanding of Systems Thinking and Complexity.

General Motors was formed near the banks of the river running through my hometown. My dad completed the GM extensive apprenticeship program that included a mix of academia and on-the-job practice. This mix of academia (certification-directed study) and on-the-job experience helped him succeed. This same approach helps me succeed. As you will learn, several businesses and industries are realizing this is the future of learning at work: Organizational Learning… Organizational Learning… Observing, reflecting, and learning.

Tree of knowledge

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Imagine a Tree

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Organizational/Team Learning

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MVP—Double-Loop Learning

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Single/Double-Loop Learning

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Return to the Tree of Knowledge

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Model I

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Model II

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