

FREE



MONKEYUSE

# Organisation Smells

My early experience with workplaces whose design smells were a product of their organisation smells

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# Introduction

What is significant about smells? - They indicate the presence of a problem.

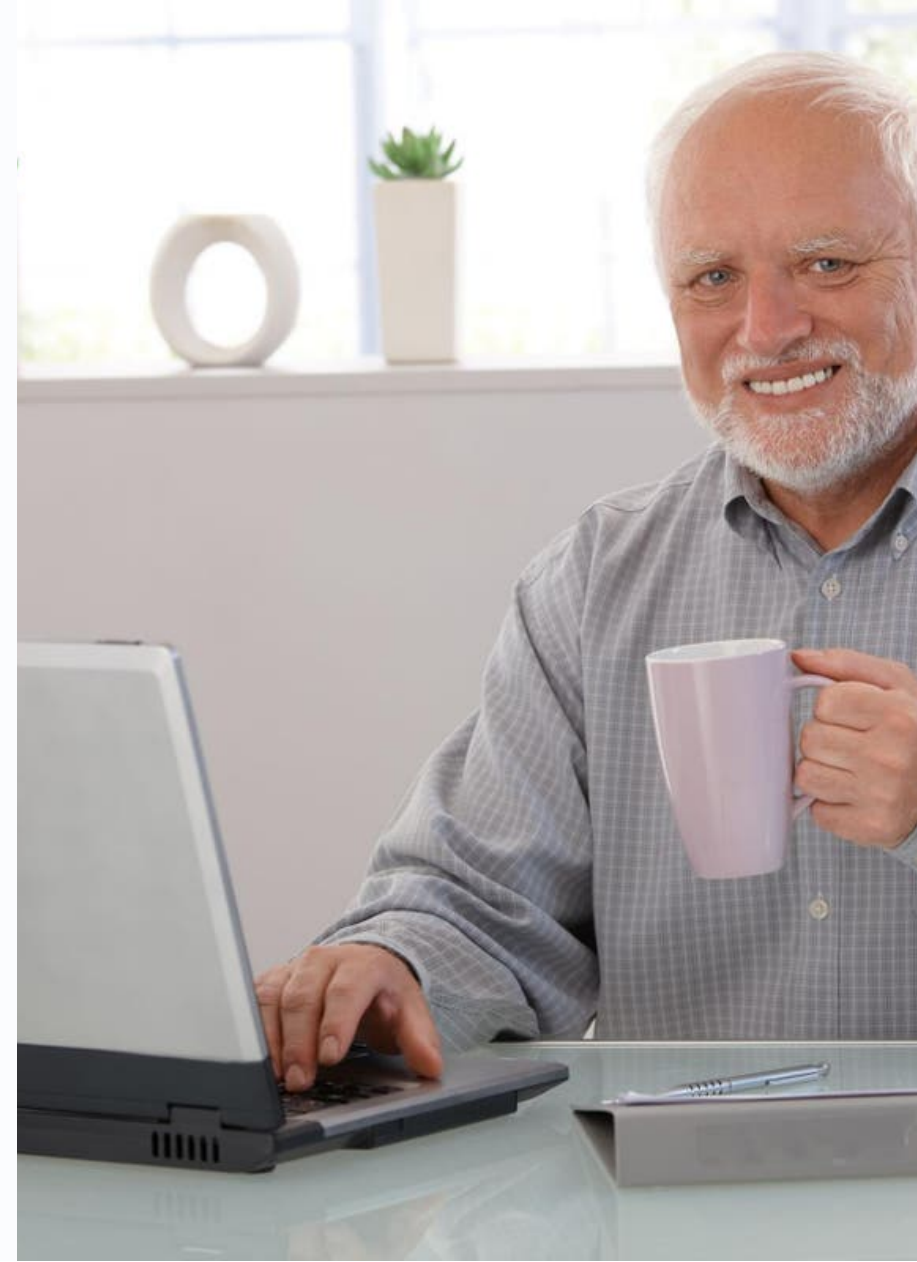
We often focus on smells in our code - granular smells indicating unique and contained problems within our code.

But these can be just be a symptom of a wider and less well defined problems - design smells.

These high-level smells alert us to large over-arching problems in the design of our code.

Designs are an outcome of the organisation that produced them.

When focusing on design smells, shouldn't we also focus on organisation smells?



# What Are Organisation Smells?

Organisation smells are signals that there may be deeper problems with the organisation. Smells provide feedback on our decisions, and we should pay attention to them. The following examples are bad smells paired with their opposing good smells.

- **Constraint versus Stretch**
- **Compliance versus Self-Discipline**
- **Control versus Support**
- **Contract versus Trust**
- **Project versus Product**
- **Commitment versus Forecast**
- **Resources versus People**
- **Requirements versus Desirements**



*"Changing people's behavior is not about changing people, but changing the context which they are in:  
the smell of the place."*

— **Prof. Ghoshal**





# My First Company

**Time period:** March 2020 - July 2022

**What did they do:** Hastily trained graduates and sent them out as consultants

**How were they run:** A close-knit group of managers isolated from the rest of the company

# What Were The Organisation Smells?

## Constraint

The culture of training was constrained. A program overly focused on technologies over methodologies produced fragile developers.

## Compliance

Every aspect of work was systemised to enforce compliance. Training was strictly timeboxed and limited, disallowing self-led learning.

## Control

A culture of control existed which caused unnecessary anxiety among developers. Negative emotions can make it difficult to focus on difficult problems.

## Contract

The roles of developers, testers etc were very strictly defined. This encouraged a silo mentality which created knowledge boundaries and poorly tested code.





"People are resourceful, but they are not resources"

— ***Barry Overeem***

# What Could Have Been Done Differently?





# My First Client

**Time period:** August 2020 - July 2022

**What did they do:** Continually develop a large enterprise product

**How were they run:** A large hierarchy of management which encouraged silo mentalities between teams



# What Were the Organisation Smells?

## Project

Budget and deadlines took priority. A project-heavy focus led to features being prioritised over solution health and a large technical debt.

## Commitment

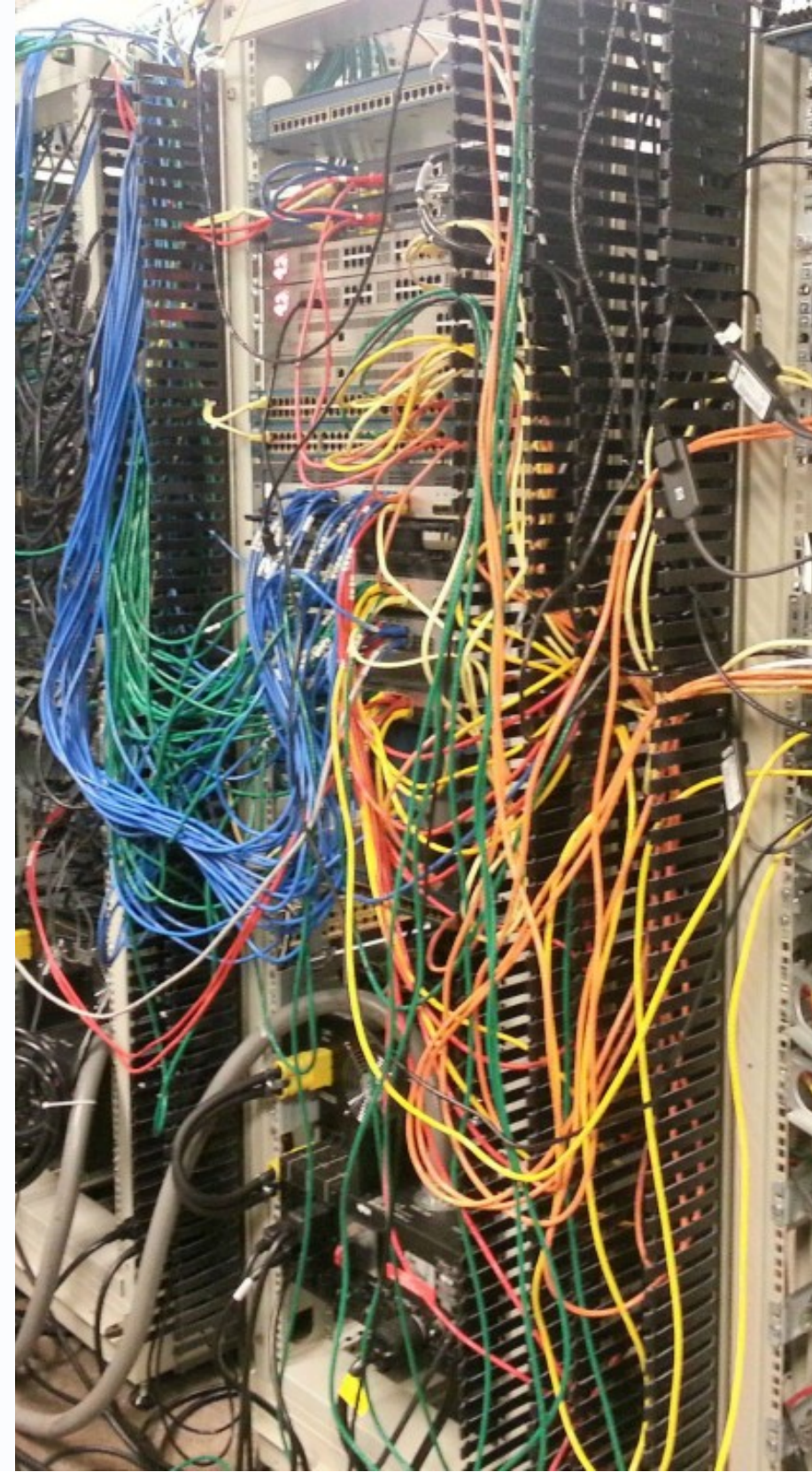
Much emphasis was placed on the values of story points which themselves are estimations. Story points equalled units of development time and deviation was frowned upon. Stories were rushed.

## Resources

Treating developers as resources and constraining their freedom prevented natural cross-team collaboration and led to under-developed areas of the solution.

## Requirements

An over-detailed and over-specified approach to story features constrained technical solutions and led to needlessly complex code to keep within artificial boundaries.



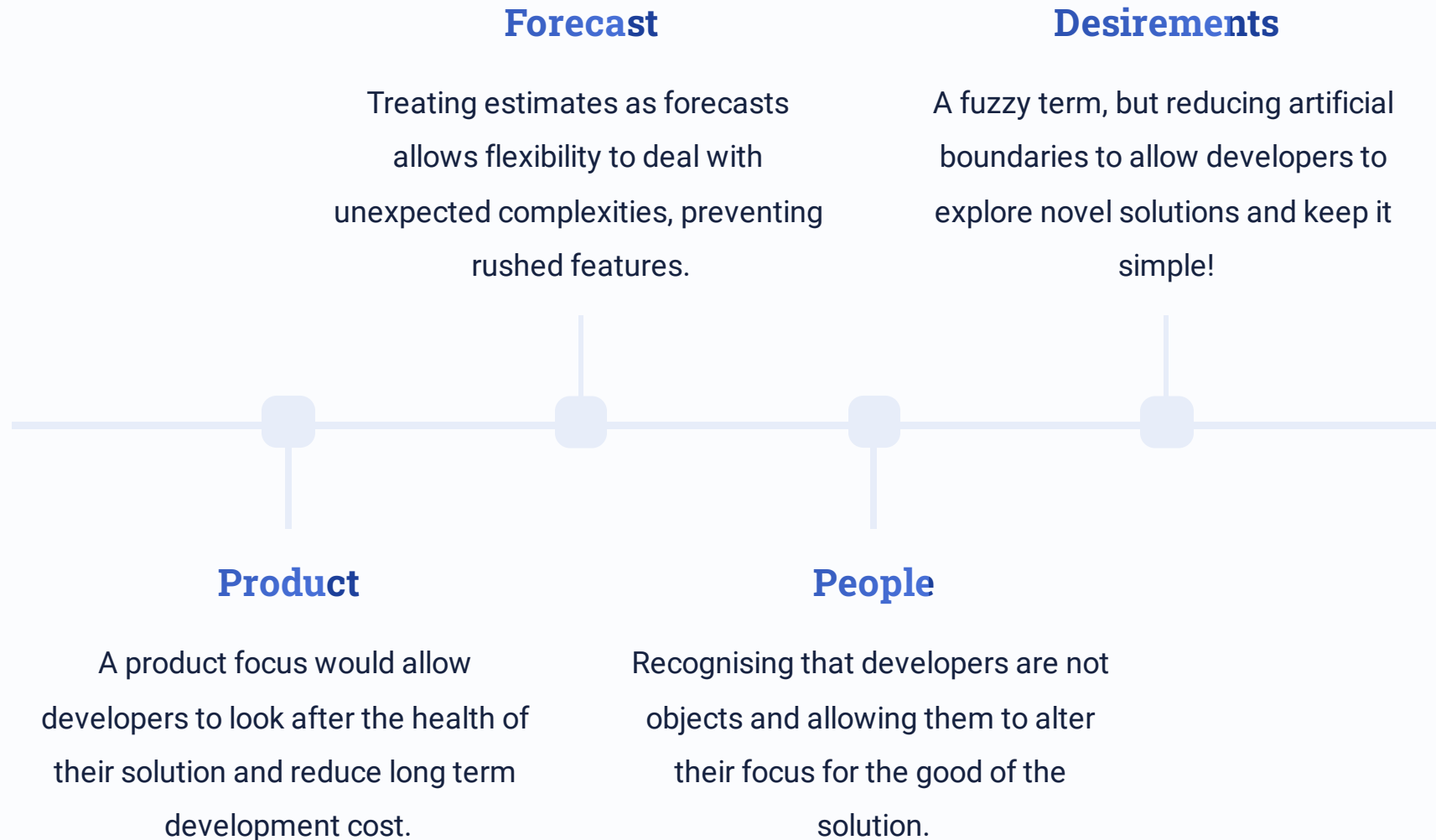
**WE'LL ASK THEM FOR ESTIMATES**



**AND THEN TREAT THEM AS  
DEADLINES**

makeameme.org

# What Could Have Been Done Differently?







“You can change your organisation or change your organisation”

— **Martin Fowler**



# Conclusion and Key Takeaways

As developers, we rightly focus on granular code smells.

But we shouldn't ignore the impact that issues within our organisation can have on our overarching designs.

Focusing on organisation smells can have just as big an effect on our code in the long run as focusing on code smells.

# Thank you!



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# Questions?

## References

- The 9 Smells of an Organization - <https://www.scrum.org/resources/blog/9-smells-organization>
- Alcor Academy - Agile Technical Practices Distilled