

# Pushing the Limits Being Outside of Your Comfort Zone

Dr. Robert Joslin



# About the Presenter



**Dr Robert Joslin**

***AIPMO Founder***



Association of International PMOs

- Professor SBS Swiss Business School and chair of SBS 'Research Advisory Board'
- 20 years in designing, initiating and program management delivery of large scale business transformation, reengineering, infrastructure, strategy development including **winning prizes for ideas and product innovation**
- Consultant in telecom, banking, insurance, manufacturing and direct marketing whilst working for McKinsey & Co, Logica and own consulting company
- Author of **books**, chapters and research papers in the field of PMOs, project, program and portfolio management. Architect of PMO BOK which comprises of seven books
- **Peer reviewer** for four academic project management journals
- **Part of the PMI core portfolio team** that produced the latest V4 Project Portfolio Standard, and **key reviewer** of the pre-exposure draft of the V4 Program Management Standard
- **AIPMO's PMO lifecycle framework** and Body of Knowledge comprising of seven books
- Present at conferences such as PMI research and EURAM. **Best paper** award for EURAM - PMI and IPMA conference in 2015



# Agenda

- ▶ • *'Pushing the limits being outside of the comfort zone'*
  - Well known term - but what does it really mean?
- Prerequisites for 'pushing the limits'
- Do 'Comfort Zones' also relate to organizations?
- Applying 'pushing the limits' to the community of PMOs
- Cognitive development
- Applying 'pushing the limits' in your PMO



Yesterday I got my haircut way too short for my comfort zone.

In my mind having long hair is a safety zone. I don't have to style it as much as when I have shorter hair. Shorter hair requires more work and definitely makes me self conscious.

Honestly, anything out of my comfort zone brings a temporary discomfort and vulnerability and then once I adjust I can acclimate to the new experience and build upon the next version of myself.

What are you doing to purposely get uncomfortable so you can grow as a person?

[#business](#) [#innovation](#) [#success](#) [#entrepreneur](#) [#inspiration](#) [#motivation](#)



*“Yesterday I got my hair way too short for my comfort zone!”*



011 • EDITED

There are a lot of ways to get your team out of their **comfort zone** and bring people together.

This is how **Teddy O'Connell** does it!

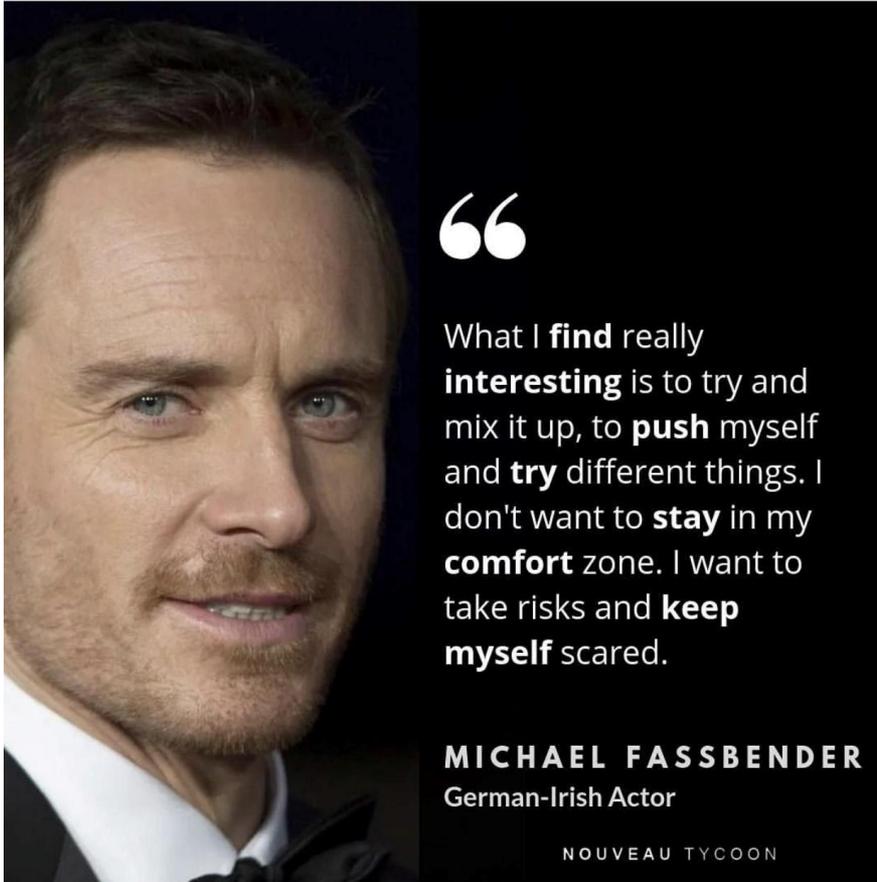
Most people would not be able to pull something like this off and I wouldn't recommend trying this unless it fits your personality.

At first everyone was pretty uncomfortable when Ted got this started. Then we started swaying and felt a human connection. People started laughing, some people weren't following along and then something amazing happened. We all came together and embraced it. The energy in the room went way up and we all felt more connected.



*“...a lots of way to get you team out of their comfort zone and bring people together...”*





“

What I **find** really **interesting** is to try and mix it up, to **push** myself and **try** different things. I don't want to **stay** in my **comfort** zone. I want to take risks and **keep myself** scared.

**MICHAEL FASSBENDER**  
German-Irish Actor

NOUVEAU TYCOON



THE SECRET TO SUCCESS  
IN ANYTHING:

GETTING  
UNCOMFORTABLE

WHEN YOU GET OUT OF  
YOUR COMFORT ZONE,  
THAT'S WHERE GROWTH,  
OPPORTUNITY, AND MAGIC  
HAPPENS!

DOLLARSANSENSECOACH.COM



# Origins of the Term 'Comfort Zone'

... As humans, we only **grow** outside our **comfort zone**. Outside your teen's **comfort zone**, they learn new things and build their character. If they are living each day inside their **comfort zone**, where things come easily and they seldom feel challenged

Gates, B. (1847).

Neural network predictor for **thermal comfort conditions**.  
*JOURNAL OF COMPUTER SCIENCE AND CONTROL SYSTEMS*,  
ISSN, 6043(2), 1844



19<sup>th</sup> Century expression referring to 'personal development' and 'thermal heating' systems temperature ranges



# Definition of Comfort Zone

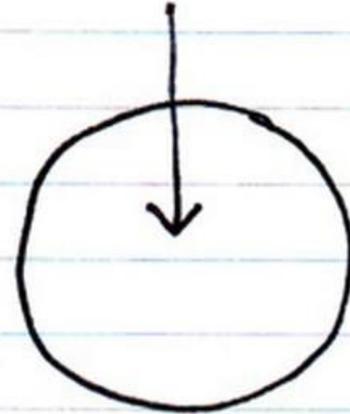
A state of relative comfort in which a steady level of performance is maintained

Yerkes, R. M., & Dodson, J. D. (1908). The relation of strength of stimulus to rapidity of habit-formation. *Journal of comparative neurology and psychology*, 18(5), 459-482.





Your comfort  
zone



From Harvard Business Review



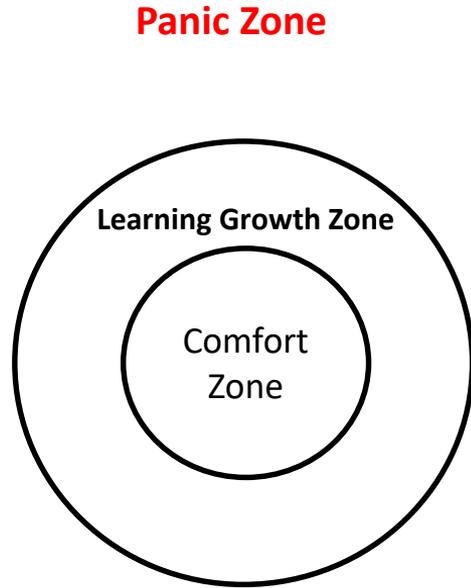
**'If You're Not Outside Your Comfort Zone, You Won't Learn Anything'**

Source: <https://hbr.org/2016/07/if-youre-not-outside-your-comfort-zone-you-wont-learn-anything>



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# Comfort Zone Model\*



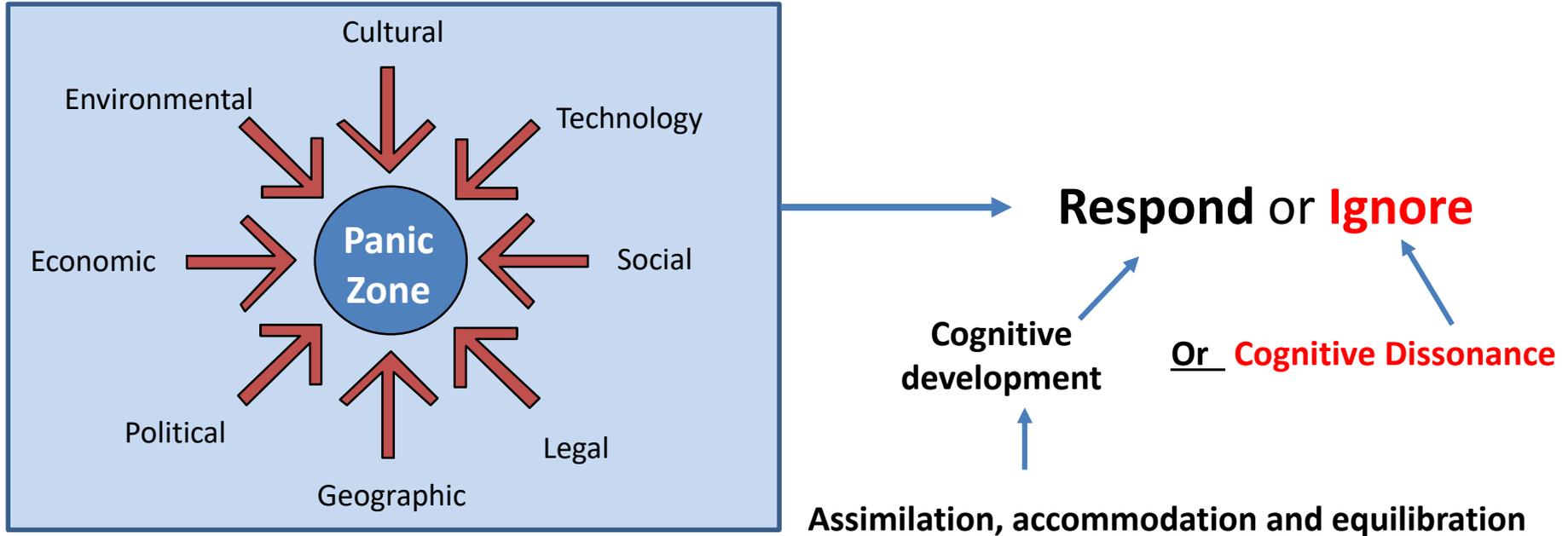
- Model uses risk to promote situations of disequilibrium/dissonance
- Explored theories from cognitive and social psychology

\*Panicucci, J. (2007). Cornerstones of adventure education. In D. Prouty, J. Panicucci & R. Collinson (Eds.), *Adventure education: Theory and applications* (pp. 33-48). Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.



# Panic Zone – Cognitive Development or Cognitive Dissonance

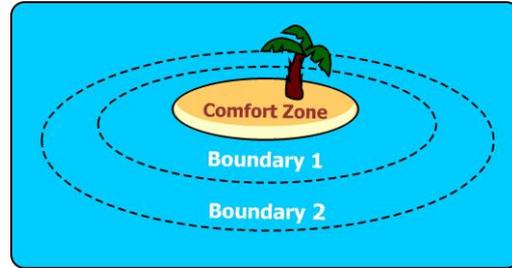
Factors that influence being outside of your comfort zone



# Comfort Zone: A Model or a Metaphor?

## Model

...a thing used as an example to follow or imitate.  
"the project became a model for other schemes"



## Metaphor

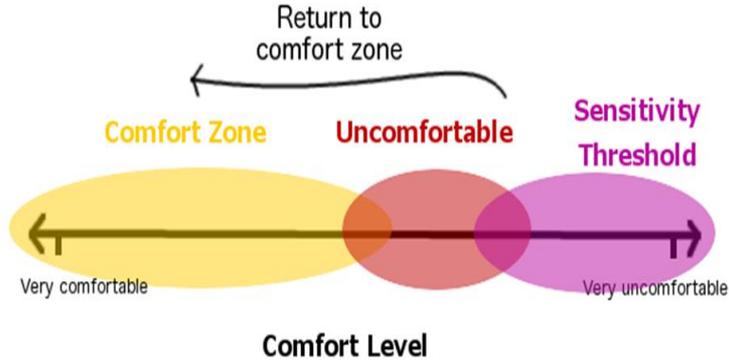
...a **figure of speech** in which a word or phrase is applied to an object or action to which it is not literally applicable.

Model uses risk to promote situations of disequilibrium/dissonance but **does not find strong support** in educational literature. Suggested that the comfort zone model should be reframed as a **metaphor**

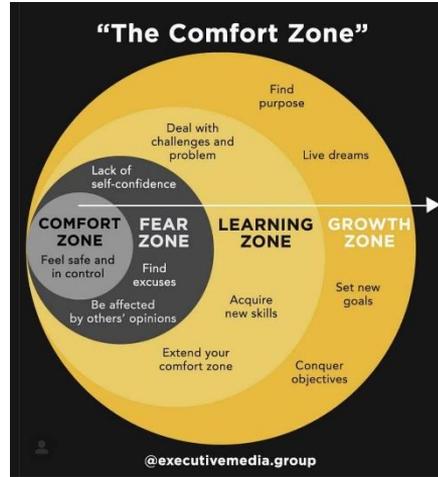
Brown, M. (2018). Comfort Zone: Model or metaphor? *Journal of Outdoor and Environmental Education*, 12(1), 3–12.  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/bf03401019>



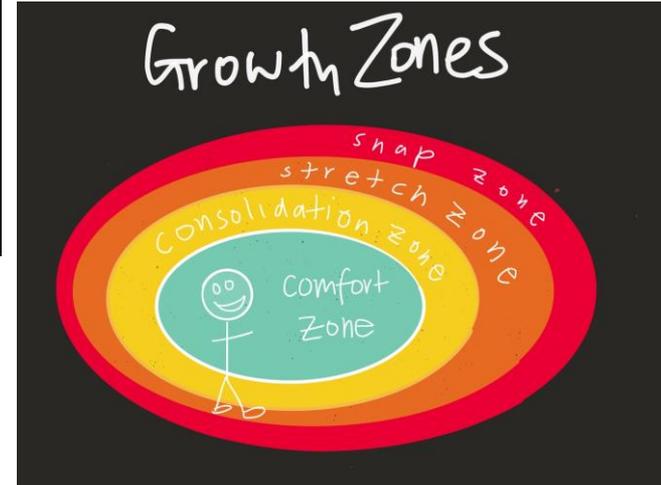
# But... People Like Models



**'Elastic band' model**



**Executive Model**



**Stretch and Snap Model**



# Summary of Section

- Irrespective the term “comfort zone is a ‘model or, a metaphor’ is it not a good place to be
- Adjectives used in articles describing comfort zone’s include
  - *Complacency*
  - *Kills productivity*
  - *Stagnating*
  - *Accepting ‘as is’*



# Agenda

- Well known term but what does it really mean?
- ▶ • Prerequisites for 'pushing the limits'
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# Quotes to Bear in Mind

“**Move out** of your comfort zone. You can only grow if you are willing to feel awkward and uncomfortable when you try something new.” — Brian Tracy

*We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them*

— Albert Einstein

“The answers you get depend on the questions you ask.”  
— Thomas S. Kuhn



# Remove Constraints



Putting everything into boxes



Transactional thinking



# Pushing the Limits Means Having Time to Think

Few PMOs  
operate here



*Value creation*

Typically PMOs  
operate here



**Efficiency**

PMOs set aside resources (time) for **knowledge management, innovation and partnering**

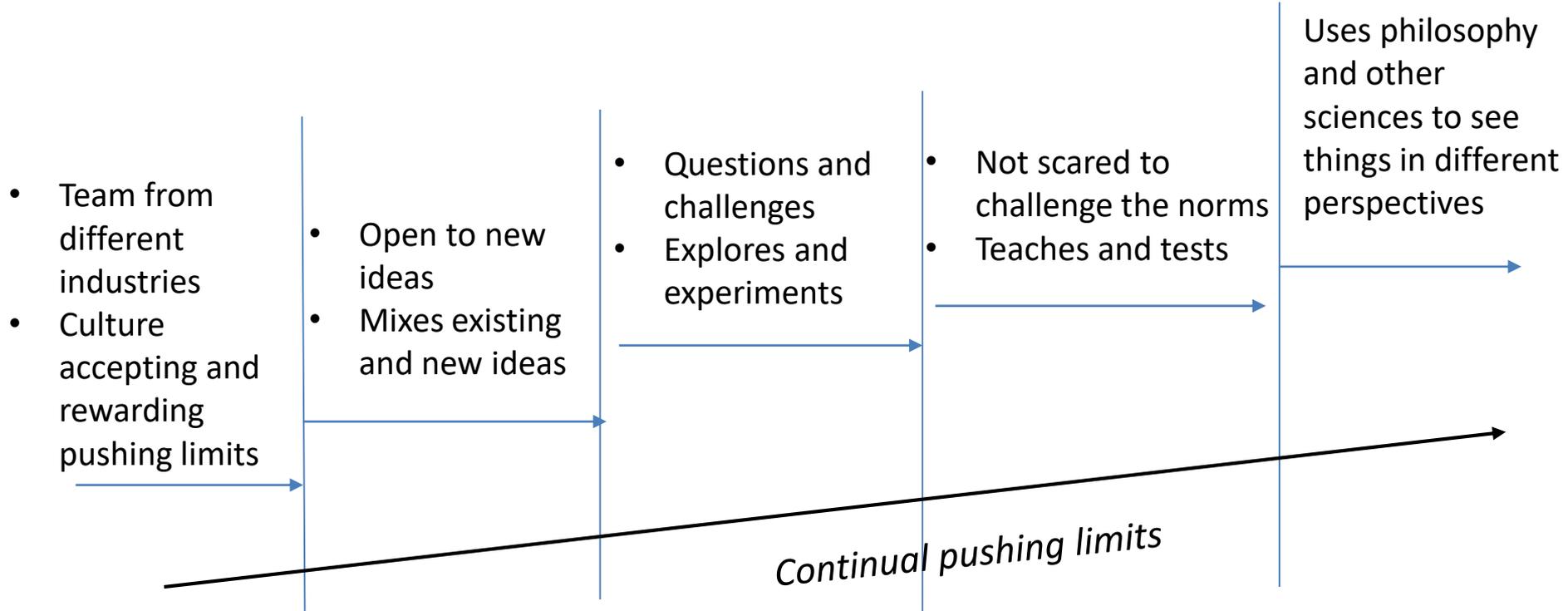
PMOs are focused to help projects complete on time, cost, budget  
*typically admin and supportive*

See Müller, R., Glückler, J., & Aubry, M. (2013). A relational typology of project management offices. *Project Management Journal*, 44(1), 59–76

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# Factors That Help in Pushing the Limits

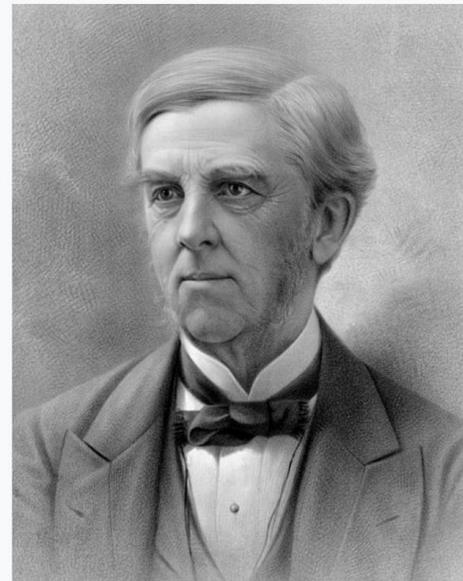


# Motivational Quote

A mind when stretched by a new idea **never regains its original dimensions.**

*Oliver Wendell Holmes*

Oliver Wendell Holmes



Holmes c. 1879

**Born** Oliver Wendell Holmes  
August 29, 1809  
[Cambridge, Massachusetts, US](#)

**Died** October 7, 1894 (aged 85)  
[Boston, Massachusetts, US](#)



# Agenda

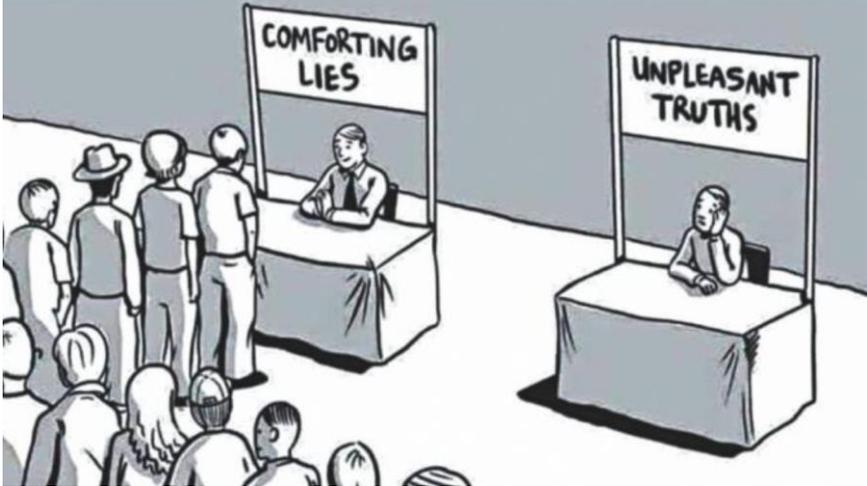
- Well known term but what does it really mean?
- Prerequisites for 'pushing the limits'
- ▶ • **Do 'Comfort Zones' also relate to organizations?**
- Applying 'pushing the limits' to the community of PMOs
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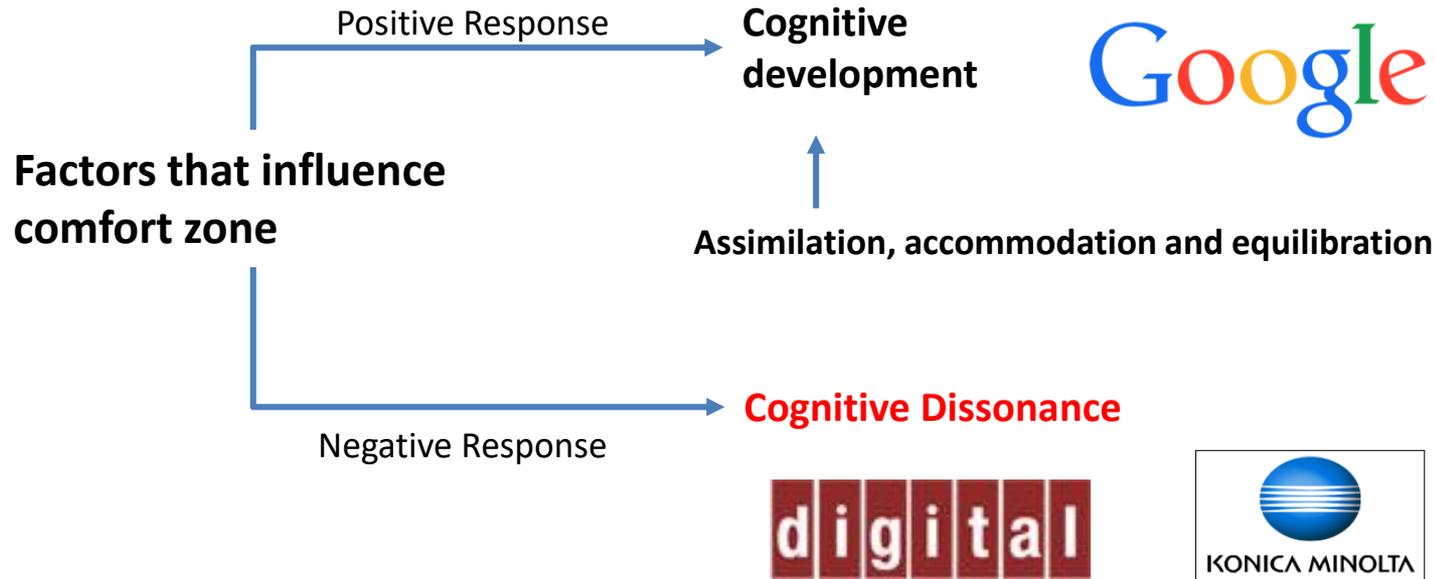
# Do Comfort Zones Relate to Organizations?

Organizations

=



# Examples of Organizations Responding to Being Outside of Their Comfort Zone



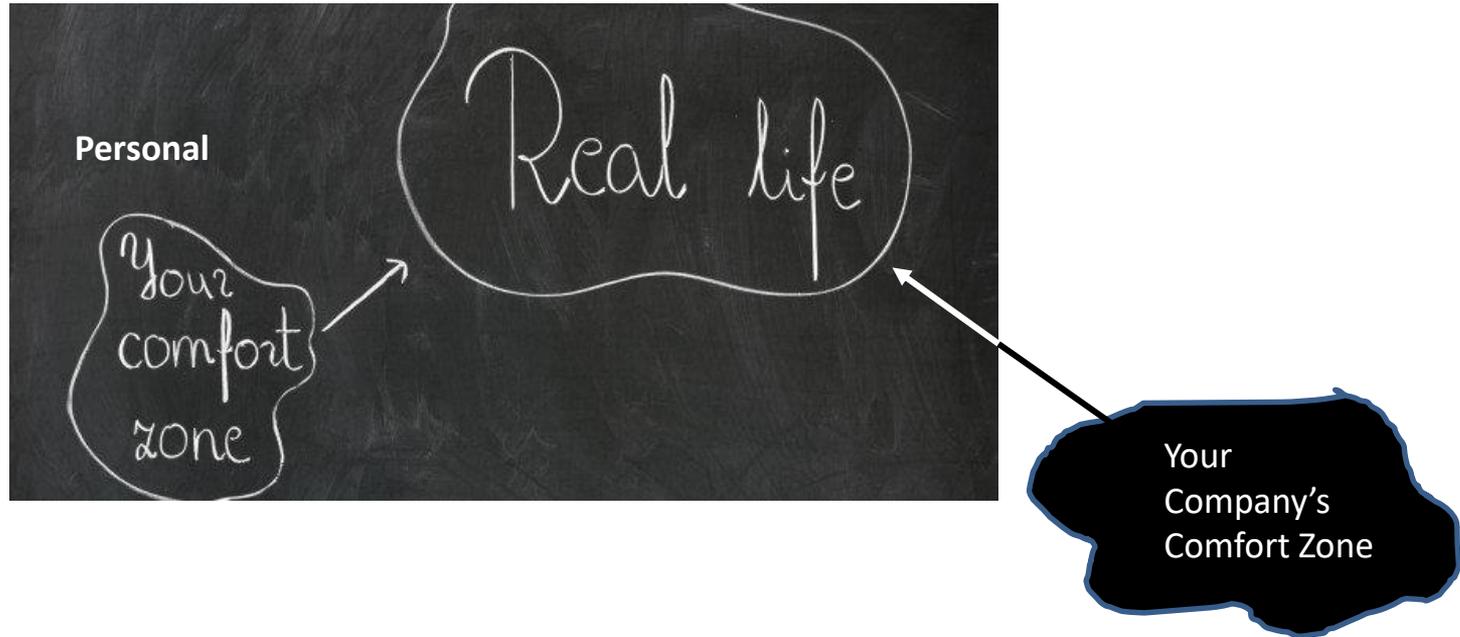
# Organizations Can Have a Form of Collective Cognitive development

Google



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# Organizations Can Have a Form of Collective Cognitive Dissonance

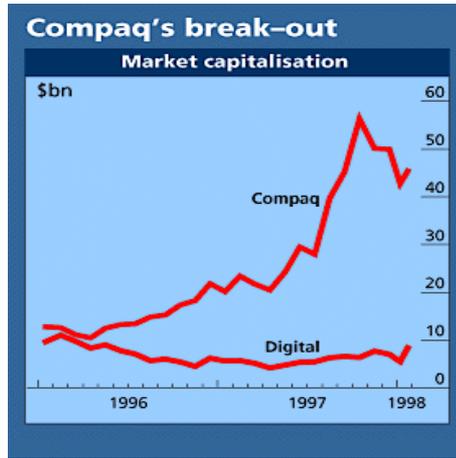


# What it Really Means



# Examples of Companies That Did Not Respond to Market Factors in Time:

## Cognitive dissonance amongst their management



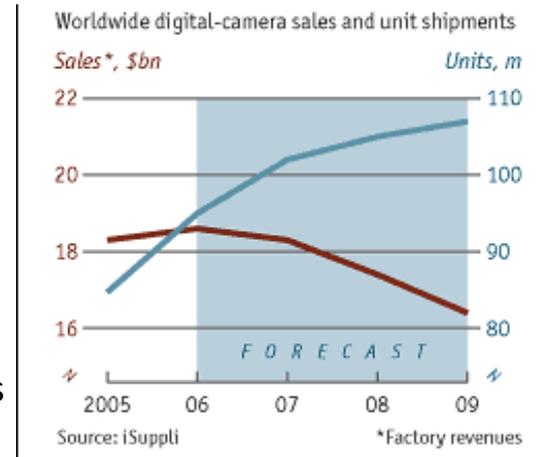
digital

Did not accept the impact of microcomputers on their business

Bought by Compaq



Did not accept the impact of digital cameras on their business



Struggling



# Traits of Failing Companies/Influencers

## Failing companies

- Failing to recognize reality
- Failure to forecast cash/liquidity
- Lack of a detailed, bottom-up business plan
- Wrong people at the wrong time

<http://www.clearthinkinggroup.com/2015/02/18/common-characteristics-of-failing-companies/>

## 15 Traits Of Entrepreneurs Who Fail

- They make **excuses**
- They **blame others** or outside forces
- They are **dishonest**
- They are **lazy**
- They are **convinced they know it** all
- They hesitate to make decisions
- They have not defined a clear direction for the company
- They **refuse to delegate**
- They are involved in a niche that is not scalable
- They are **unable to handle confrontation**
- They are not organized
- They serve a niche that cannot possibly be profitable
- They provide a terrible service or product
- They are bad marketers
- They **ignore metrics**



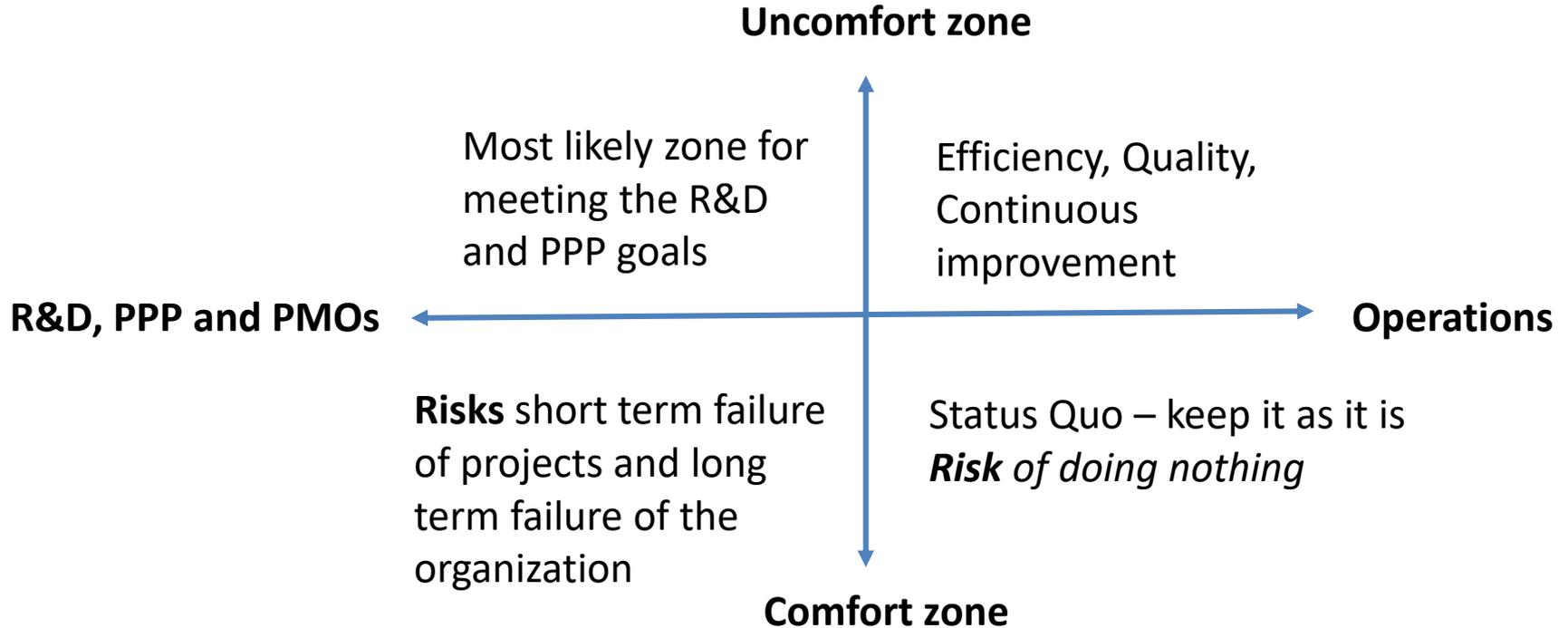
Both references show many examples of **cognitive dissonance**

<https://www.businessinsider.com/traits-of-entrepreneurs-who-fail-2014-6?r=US&IR=T>

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# Traits of an Organization's (un)Comfort Zones



# Agenda

- Well known term but what does it really mean?
- Prerequisites for 'pushing the limits'
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- ▶ • **Applying 'pushing the limits' to the community of PMOs**
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# Actors Likelihood to Pushing Known-Limits on PMO Thinking

Likelihood to push known limits



## Applied research

- Solve problems
- Looks what exists
- Develop theories

## Project Management Institutes e.g. PMI, IPMA, Axelos

Look to see what exists in the community and takes what they consider is best practice and write it into a Standard and/or a Body of Knowledge. *This approach is called a **lagging standard**.*

## Non-for-Profit Interest Groups

e.g., PMO Focus Groups

- Take a topic and explore it
- Tend to be constrained by their limited experience and world view

Pushing the limits?

## Conferences/Presentations

Present their own topics which may or may not be a breakthrough

## Practitioner books

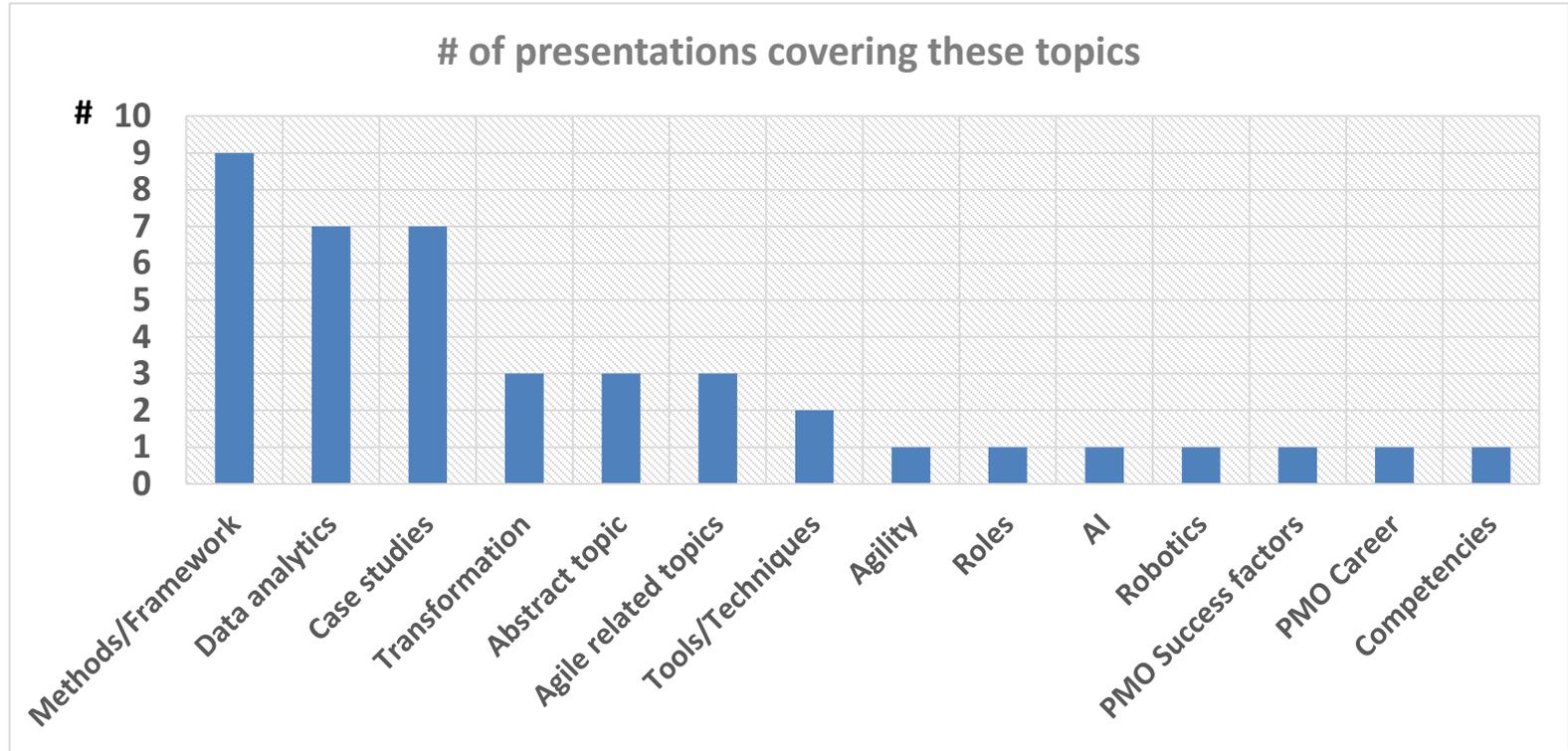
Write about what they know which is greatly influenced by the associations, focus groups and academics

## For profit Companies

Commercialize existing ideas for profit. Unlikely to push limits of thinking except as a indirect result of the product or service – *accidental breakthrough*

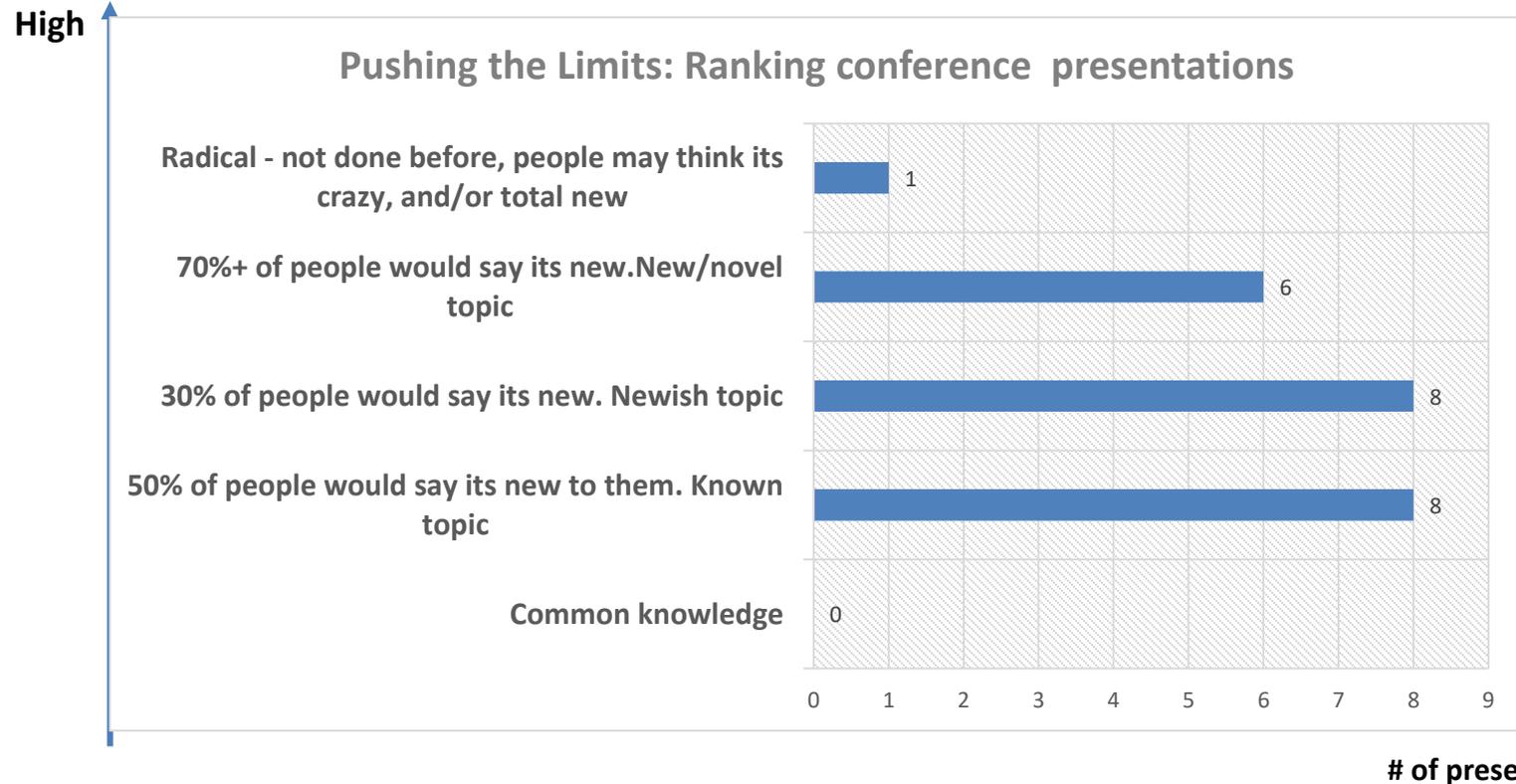


# Presentation Topics Covered in this Conference



# Pushing the Limits: Ranking Conference Presentations

*Note: Subjective assessment*

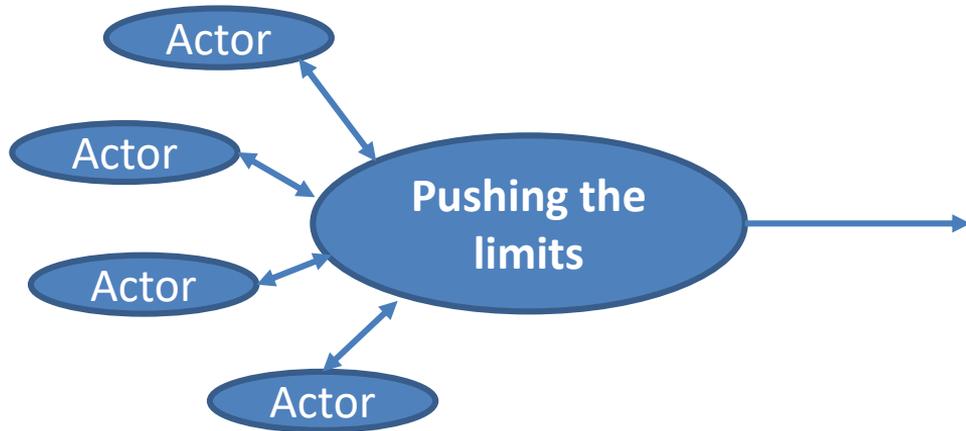


Source: Joslin Analysis

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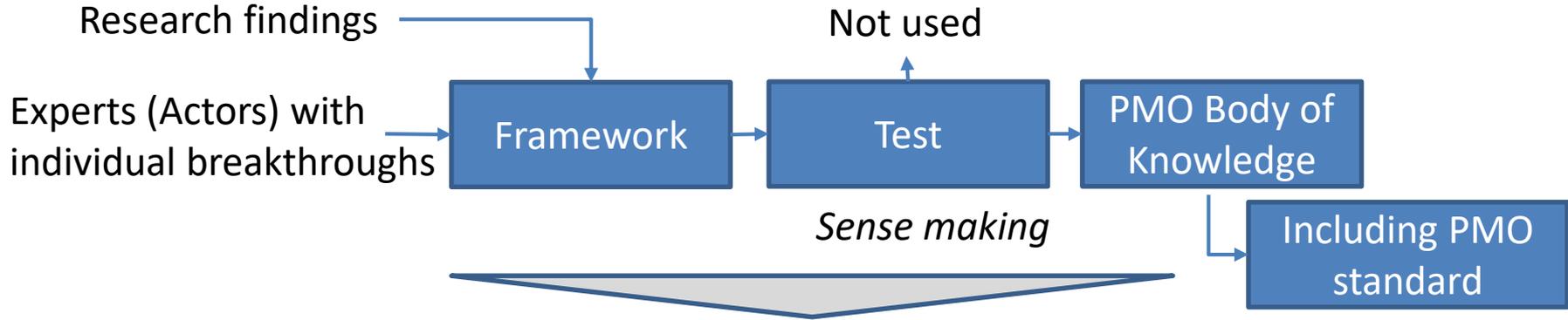
# Challenge is How to Bring the Breakthroughs Together to Benefit the PMO Community



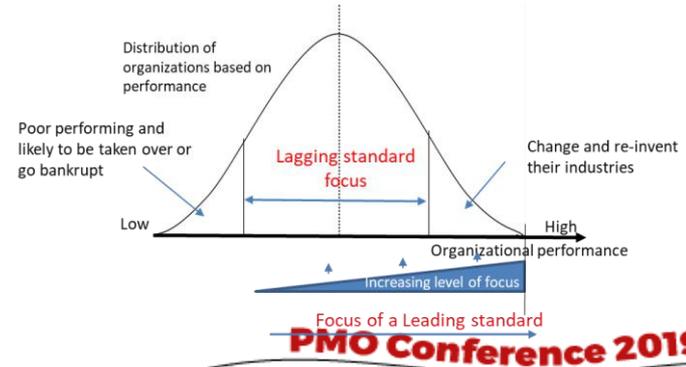
How to bring the **breakthroughs together** into a **structured framework** to benefit the PMO community?



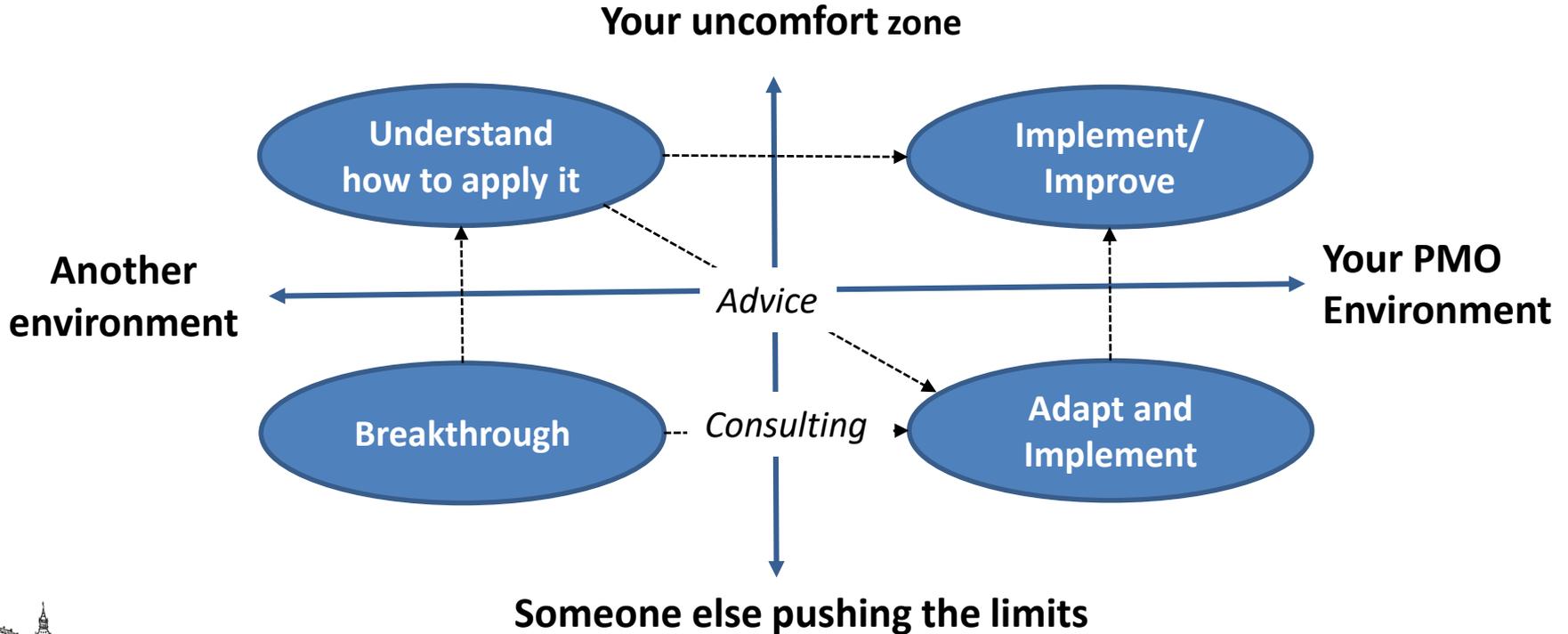
# A PMO Body That Brings Together the Breakthroughs in a Structured Way



This is called a 'leading standard and Body of Knowledge'



# Benefiting from Others Who Push the Limits Including Yourself Being in the Uncomfort Zone



# Applying Pushing the Limits in the PMO Community

Scan



Who is (or, saying they are), pushing the limits?

Ignore

Extend the thinking

What is your response

Sense Making

Make sure it really makes sense

**Motivate others** to carry out their sense making



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- ▶ • **Cognitive development**
- Applying pushing the limits to your PMOs



# Things You Should Look For In an Organization

Attributes	Comfort zone	Out of your comfort Zone
Do the organization's values align with yours?	X	X
Does the organization's culture fit your personality?	X	X
Will you be offered opportunities to learn?		X
Is there room for growth within the organization?		X
Does the organization offer security and stability?	X	
Will your role teach your transferrable skills?	X	
Will you be challenged in a positive way?		X
Will your managers make you feel appreciated?	X	
Are the team members people you'd love to work with?	X	

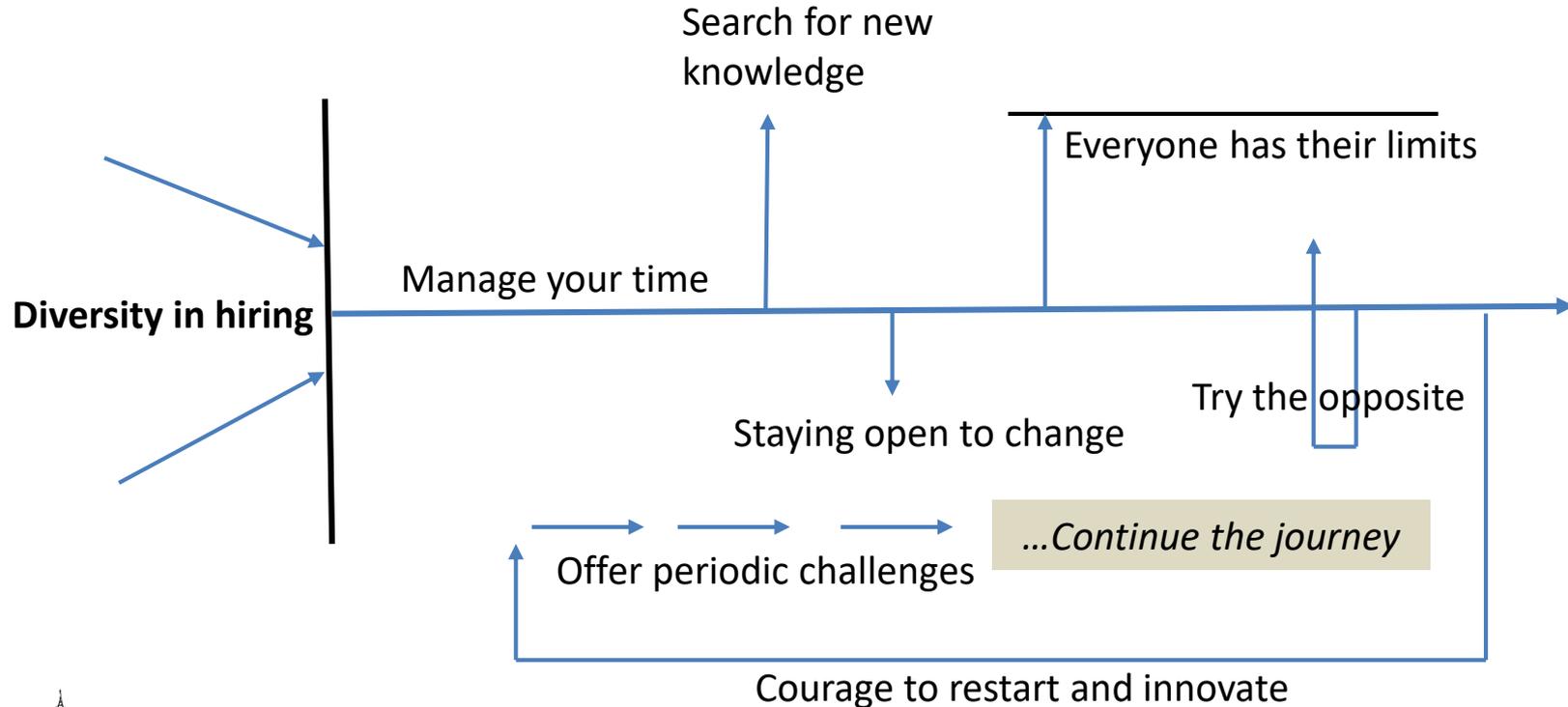


Balance is important

<https://www.wayup.com/guide/10-things-look-company/>



# Tips to Get your PMO Team Out of Their Comfort Zone

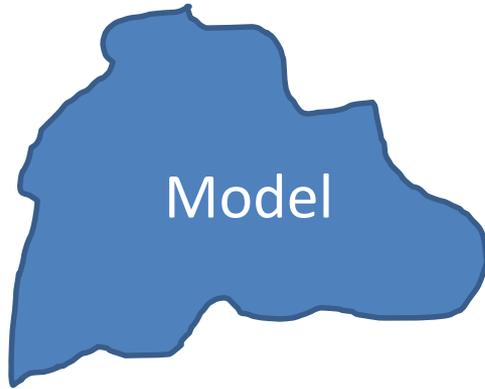


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# The Model or the Metaphor



Try to structure it, model and proceduralize it



Or, understand that pushing the limits is personal and at the same time a team effort that is a mindset

**Which one are you?**



# To the Closing Question

Can pushing the limits of your understanding of PMOs double the impact they are currently having in your organization?

