INNOVATING INSIDE LARGE ORGANIZATIONS

LESSONS FROM A TROUBLE-MAKER

WHO IS THIS GUY?

- My name is Devin
- Director of Data Science, Advance Auto Parts
- 20 years of experience in a variety of large organizations
  - Grew into technology, didn’t start there
- Reputation as an innovator
  - ….or pain in the hindquarters, depending on your perspective

WHAT THIS TALK IS…AND WHAT IT ISN'T

- Not research
  - Purely anecdotal

- Not authoritative (nor the opinions of my current or former employers)
  - Just my observations
    - Plenty of room for disagreement and discussion

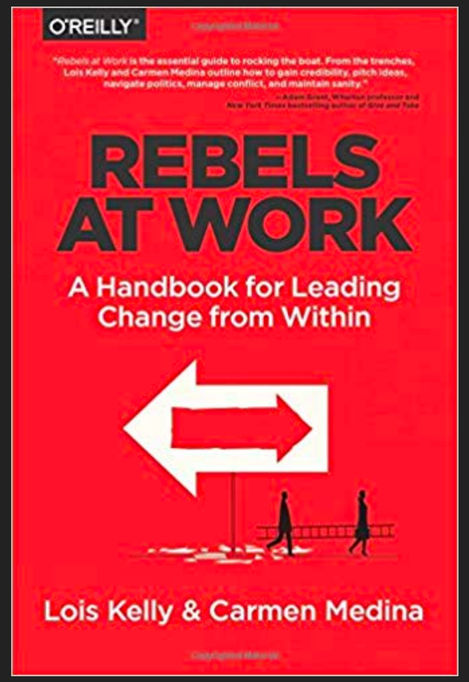
BASELINE ASSUMPTIONS

- Innovation is important

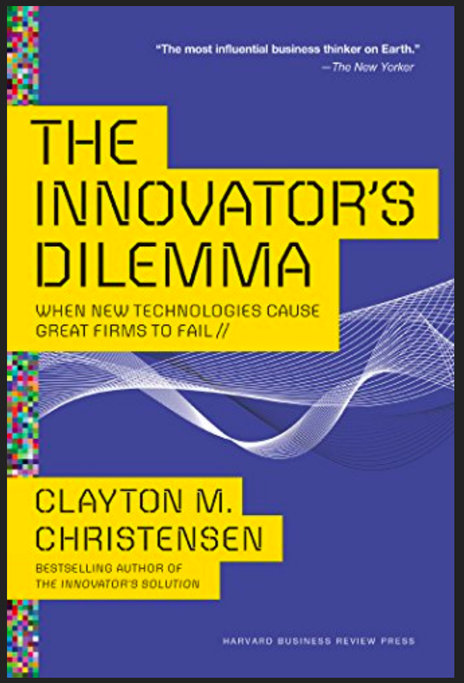
- Discussion is in the context of large organizations
  - Not startups or small firms

RECOMMENDED READING

- **Rebels at Work**
  - Read this before you take on The Man



- **Innovator's Dilemma**
  - Build an intuition for the somewhat counterintuitive nature of innovation
  - Understand organizational perspective



KEY TAKEAWAYS

UNDERSTANDING

“WHY IS INNOVATION SO HARD?”

Everyone

SUPPORT FOR THE STATUS QUO

- Product
  - Meets customer demands
- Processes
  - Multiple generations of operational lessons-learned
- People
  - Rewarded based current way of doing business

LARGE ORGANIZATIONS GOT THAT WAY BY BEING SUCCESSFUL

- The way they currently do it, works (to a certain degree)

- New ideas can be subject to a lopsided risk vs. reward calculus
  - An innovation might pay off eventually,
    but the way things work now….works now

ANYTHING YOU WANT TO DO IS ALREADY SOMEONE ELSE'S JOB.

Devin's Law of Bureaucratic Completeness

WHY EVEN BOTHER?

THE UPSIDES OF LARGE ORGANIZATIONS

- Numerous Opportunities for Innovation
- Significant Resources Available
- Potential for Significant Impact

EMPATHY

CAUGHT BETWEEN TWO STRONG FORCES

- Business of today
  - Familiar

- Need to innovate
  - Unfamiliar

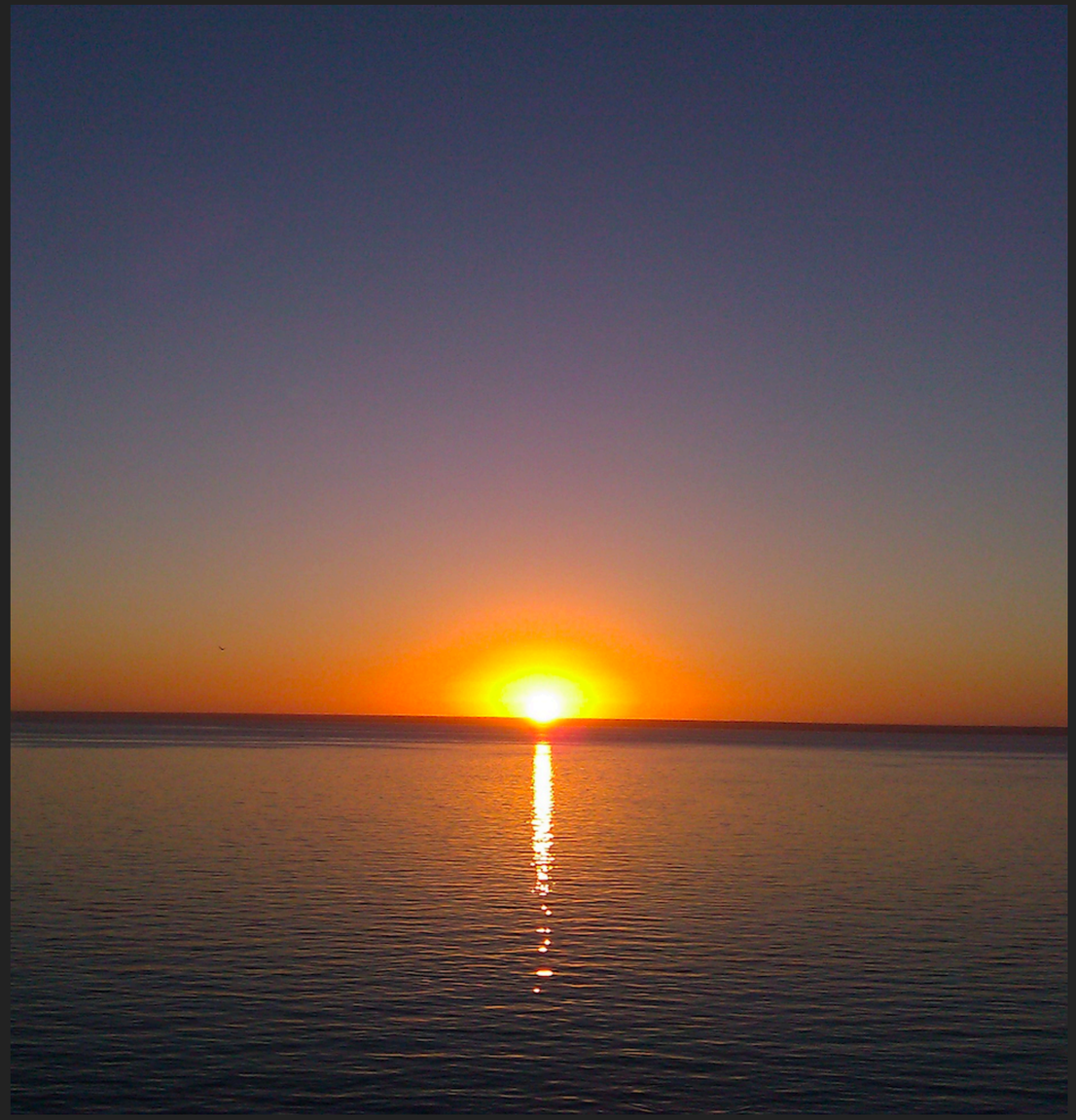
NDS BECOME FOUND
PPENS ONCE A YEAR)
Atlas
Van Lines
Commerce Bank

UNCERTAINTY AROUND TECHNOLOGY

ACTION

FIND INSPIRATION

- Organizational vision/impact
- Problem solving
- Helping people
- Building stuff



MAKE FRIENDS

STORYTELLING & PROTOTYPING

Master your two most powerful tools

STORYTELLING

- Have a vision
- Learn how to talk about it in a compelling way
- **Put it in the context of what other people care about!**

PROTOTYPING

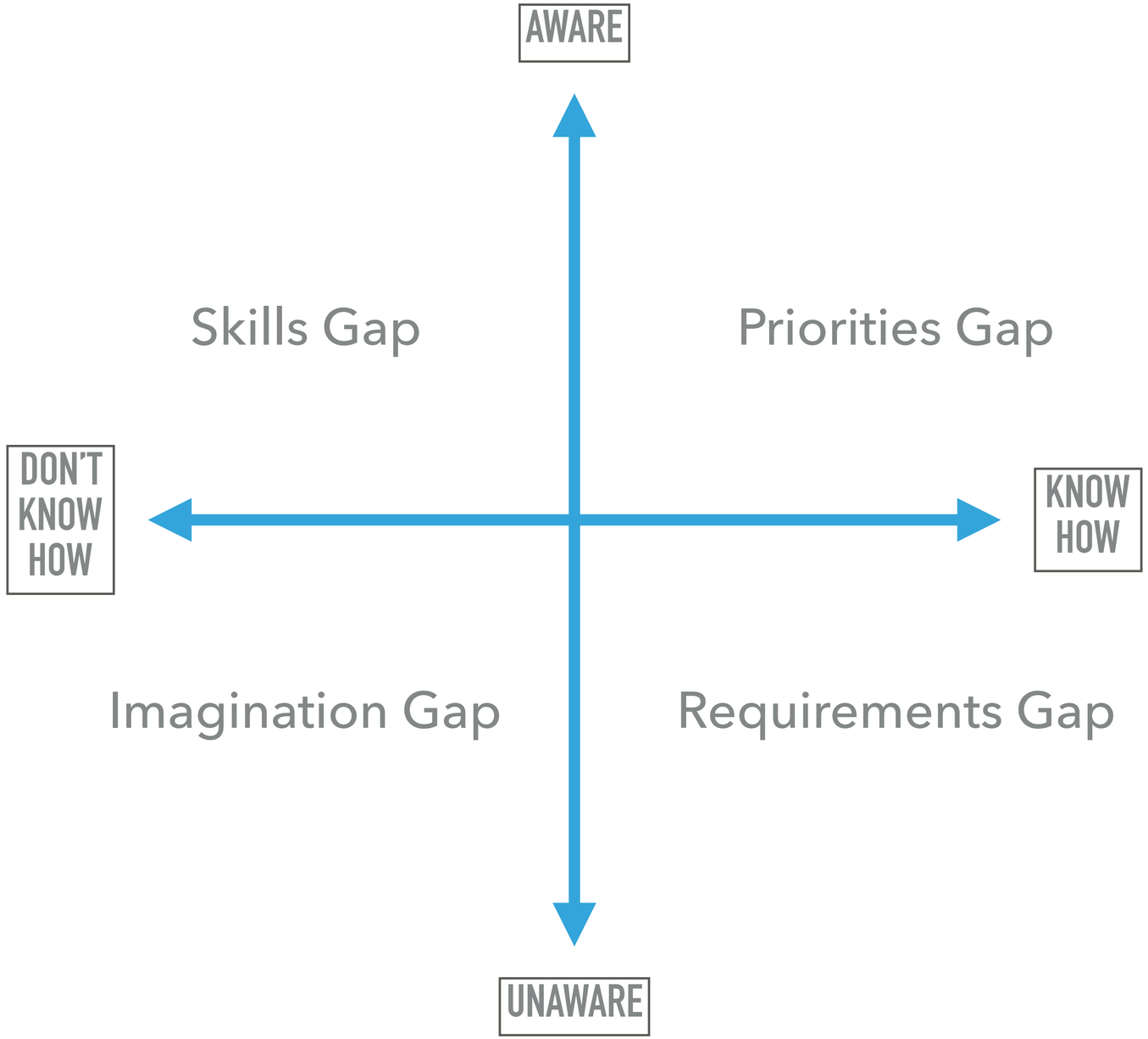
- Demonstrate (potential) value as quickly as possible
- Builds trust and allows for feedback
- Makes abstract ideas concrete
  - Acts like a map for the uncertain distance

IMPACT

IDENTIFY OPPORTUNITY AND FOCUS

- Find opportunities for impact
  - Gaps
  - Inefficiencies

IMPACTFUL INNOVATION - IDENTIFYING GAPS



COMMON SOURCES OF INEFFICIENCY

- Law
- Policy
- Ideal Solution + Time
- Individual Drive + Skills Gap

ENGAGE THE BIG MACHINE

LEAN IN ON EXISTING RESOURCES

- Build Business Support
- IT Project Onboarding Pipelines
- Internal Innovation Platforms

AVOID GETTING BOGGED DOWN

- Permission vs. Forgiveness
- Under-the-radar vs. Buy-in
- Speed vs. Consensus

MANAGE YOUR "INNOVATOR'S DEBT"

BEWARE OF POLICY MYTHOLOGY

Always ask to see the policy.
Then actually read it.

FINAL THOUGHTS

CONCLUSION

GET COMFORTABLE SHARING WINS

Accelerate yourself by crediting others

TALKING ABOUT HOW TO INNOVATE…

- …is like talking about how to have a conversation
  - It is a balance of a few key factors
  - The right balance is dependent on a lot of context
  - It takes practice to get good at it

TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

- Find something to be passionate about
- Large Organizations NEED YOU
- You have options

QUESTIONS?