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Why Is Agile So Hard - The Backward Bicycle?

One of my favorite quotes about an agile transformation is “If you think Scrum (/ Agile / SAFe) is easy, just try it”. I have no idea who said it first, but it captures a lot. Done right, the move to agile will make visible all the problems you currently have, and then gives you a couple of weeks to make progress on them. While this is all going on there are subtle shifts in the thinking process that you have, which adds to the confusion (for more see [What Are The Changes in Culture That Need To Happen with Agile?](#))

But under all this, I think there is something more subtle going on and that is the difference between “knowing” something and truly understanding that thing. A colleague recently sent me a video that really helped me understand the difference:

- [The Backwards Bicycle / Brain](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MFzDaBzBIL0) - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MFzDaBzBIL0>

I think there are a number of other interesting lessons from this video:

1. Clearly “knowledge” is not the same as “understanding.”
2. You will often not understand something until you have done it yourself. Can you say “gemba?” It is especially interesting to me that people's reaction to the backward bike is to scoff at the person that is having such a hard time because it is clearly so easy to do. “In theory, theory and practice are the same thing. In practice ...”
3. You have biases, and you are probably unaware of them.
4. If you already “know” something, learning a variation on what you know is especially hard.
5. If you are older it will be even harder to unlearn something. Which is also related to the idea that if you “know” something for a long time, it will take a long time to undo that learning

Since most of us have been working software development for a lot of years, is it any surprise that we have difficulty changing how we think about the problem?

This is what I got out of the video - what else did you learn?

Additional Learning

I've been an agile coach for a while and have used the video of the backward bicycle a lot to help people understand the mind shift required. Intellectually I understood the lesson. But one day we actually got one of these bikes and we were able to try it.

And what I learned really surprised me. What I learned was that while I intellectually understood the message I really did not think it applied to me. In my heart of hearts I expected to actually be able to ride the bike. When I climbed on, it was amazing to me how I reacted - I just am amazed that I am unable to do anything with the bike.

To emphasize, knowledge really does not equal understanding.

[BlogEntry](#), [Knowledge](#), [Understanding](#), [FAQ](#)

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