# Comfort Zone

Anna-Jayne Metcalfe

@annajayne

anna@riverblade.co.uk

Riverblade Ltd
www.riverblade.co.uk

**Riverblade**

# Hello

*I'm Anna, and I'm outside of my Comfort Zone.*

*This is not unusual.*

*If I were comfortable, I'd be at home lurking amongst my nest of monitors, or maybe out swordfighting or something.*

*Instead, I started a software company and somehow ended up here.*

*Life is full of surprises, and sometimes you need to confront your fears, learn from them and move the cheese anyway.*

@annajayne
#caffeinedrivendevelopment

Riverblade

# Musings

- Cute and not-so-cute (but still furry) animals
- Instinct, reflexes and training
- Moving the user interface cheese
- Rational vs instinctive behaviour
- The pain of code critique
- Brains, change and the neuroscience of anger
- Saying "welcome"
- Some hopeful signs

# What are our Comfort Zones?

# Scared of Spiders?



Brazilian Wandering Spider - *Phoneutria nigriventer*
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brazilian_wandering_spider#/media/File:Phoneutria_nigriventer.jpg

# But are you scared of THIS spider?



DEAL WITH IT

Coastal Peacock Jumping Spider - *Maratus speciosus*       https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d_yYC5r8xMI

@annajayne
#caffeinedrivendevelopment

www.riverblade.co.uk

Riverblade

# Spider Dog, Spider Dog

(does whatever a spider dog does)

# Instinct and Training



**Re-enactment of the Battle of Tewkesbury (1471)**     https://www.flickr.com/photos/39400215@N04/3716314978/

# I *Like* Visual Studio® (yes, I know...)

- I'm productive in this environment. Just give me my usual plug-ins (Visual Assist etc.) and I'm happy. But YMMV, and that's cool too

- *Microsoft's unofficial"two step release policy" for Visual Studio:*
  - *One release (VS5, VS2002, VS2005, VS2010....)* **changed too much**
  - *The next one (VS6, VS2003, VS2008,....) largely fixed it*

- *VS2012 was an unexpected* **cheese-moving anomaly**
- *VS2013  (sort of, grudgingly, after lots of complaints) fixed it*

- *...and VS2015 is* **surprisingly** *unbroken, despite some major internal changes.\**

*\* Dare we  let ourselves believe that Microsoft are finally becoming agile?*

# The Visual Studio Blog

The official source of product insight from the Visual Studio Engineering Team

## Introducing the New Developer Experience

February 23, 2012 by Visual Studio Blog  /  945 Comments

★★☆☆☆

*Has someone moved the cheese?*

f 0    ✆ 0    in 0

**UPDATE:** We hear you. There's a lot of excitement about this release and a lot of passion about colors, designs, styles and icons. Know that we are listening to all your comments here, across social media and we are working hard to make Visual Studio 11 a fast, powerful and feature-rich product. Keep the comments coming, both good and bad. We are reading them all.
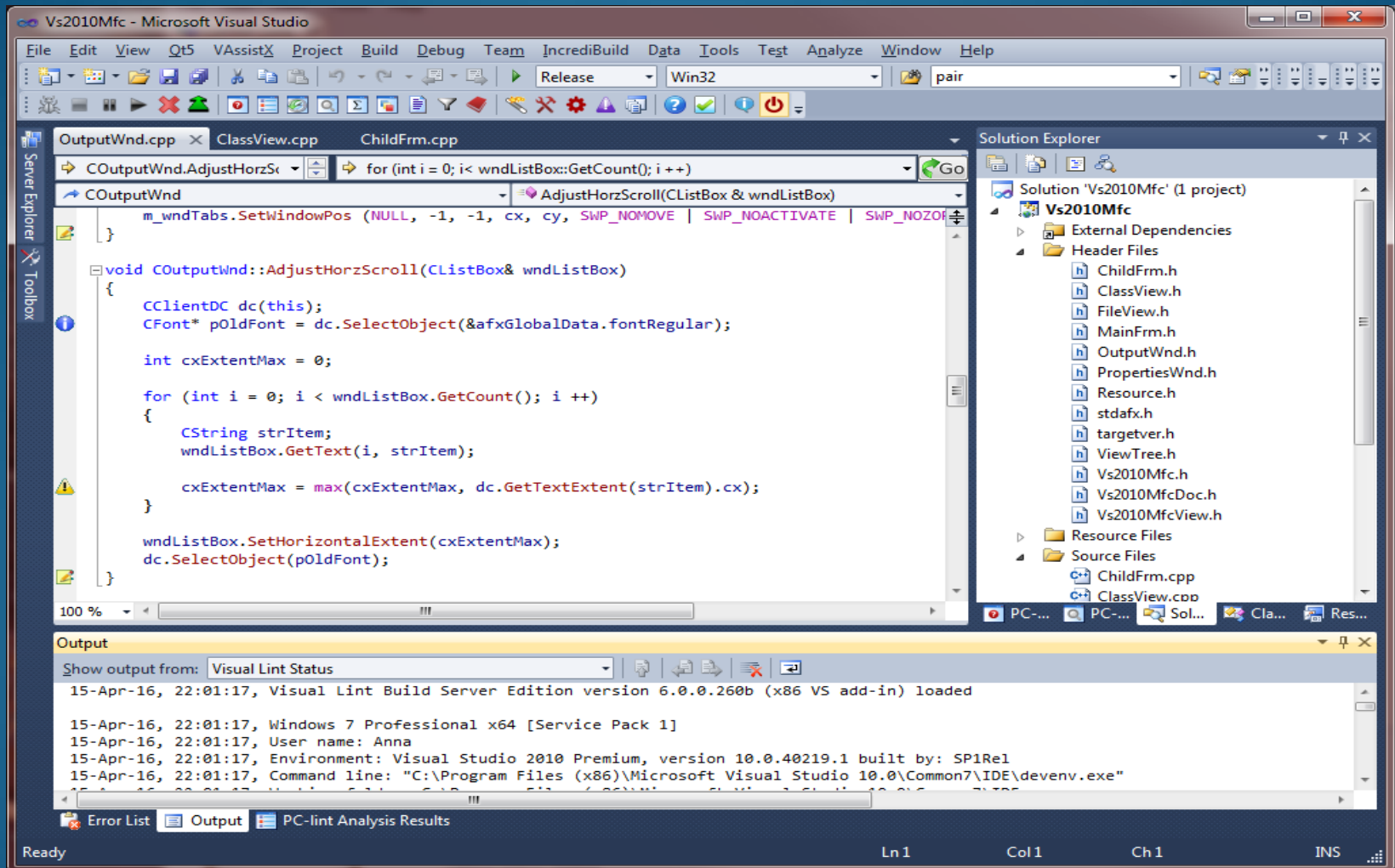
*I read this as: "When we told you what we'd done, so many of you shouted so loudly about it that we think we'd better do something."*

In this blog post (and the one that will follow) we'd like to introduce a few of the broad reaching experience improvements that we've delivered in Visual Studio 11. We've worked hard on them over the last two years and believe that they will significantly improve the experience that you will have with Visual Studio.

@annajayne
#caffeinedrivendevelopment

www.riverblade.co.uk

Riverblade

# Comfortable Cheese

(Visual Studio 2010)

@annajayne
#caffeinedrivendevelopment

Riverblade

# The Cheese Has Moved

## (Visual Studio 2012 Beta 1)

@annajayne
#caffeinedrivendevelopment

**Riverblade**
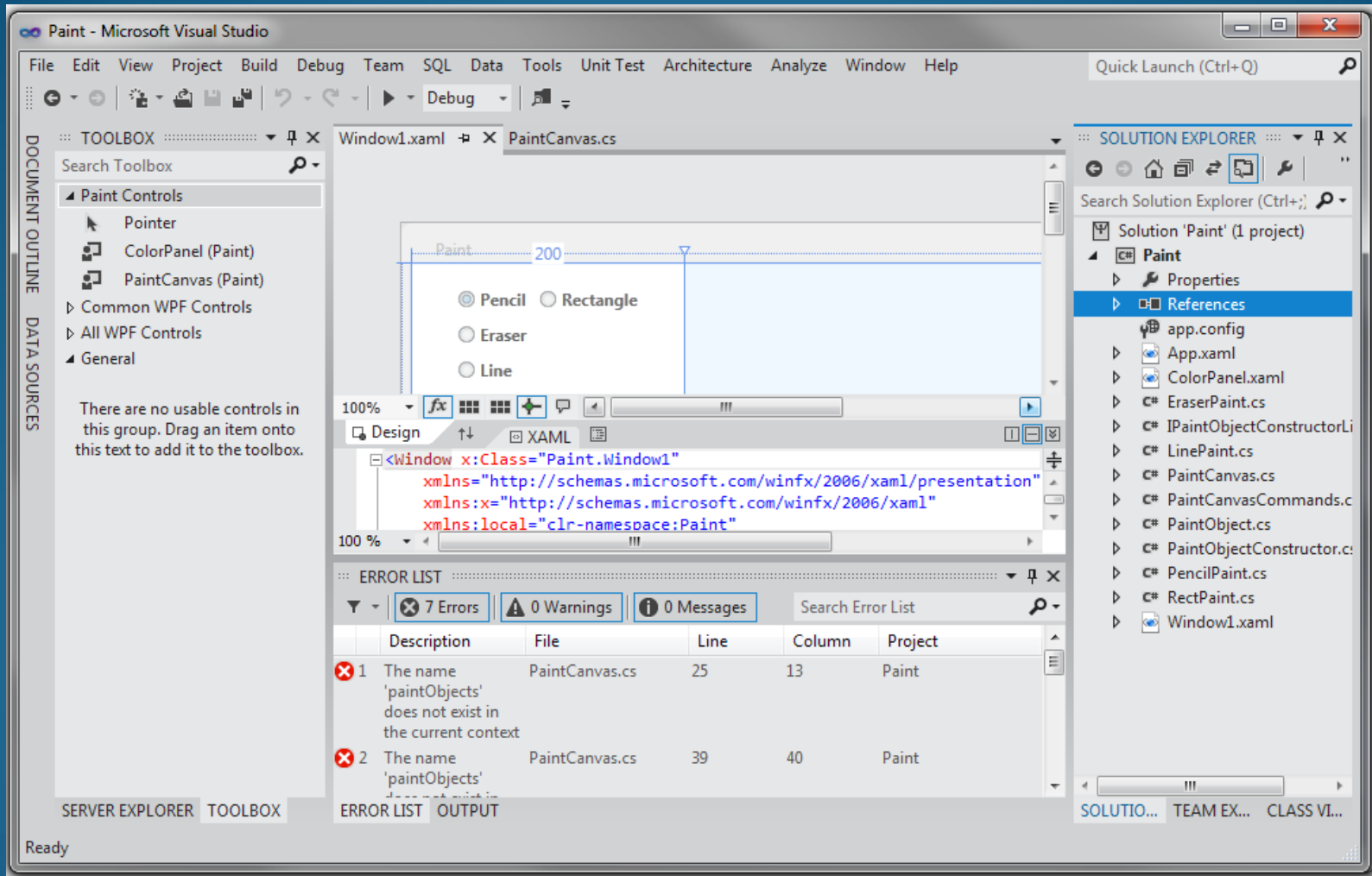
# Was this a *Rational* Reaction?

- The *tone* of the comments indicated otherwise
  - Mostly **anger** at the unexpected nature of the change
  - Even rational arguments tended to be presented in an emotional context

- Fear of change is natural
  - Change in our environment represents a potential **threat**
  - **Fear** is an evolutionary response to that threat
    (in extreme cases it becomes a phobia - *Metathesiophobia*)

- We like to *feel* in control of our environment. When the cheese moves, we lose that, and it's uncomfortable!

# Why Do We Have Comfort Zones?



Suzy Polucci –"The Brain Show" (TEDxPioneerValley 2012)  https://flic.kr/p/bgpTDK

www.riverblade.co.uk

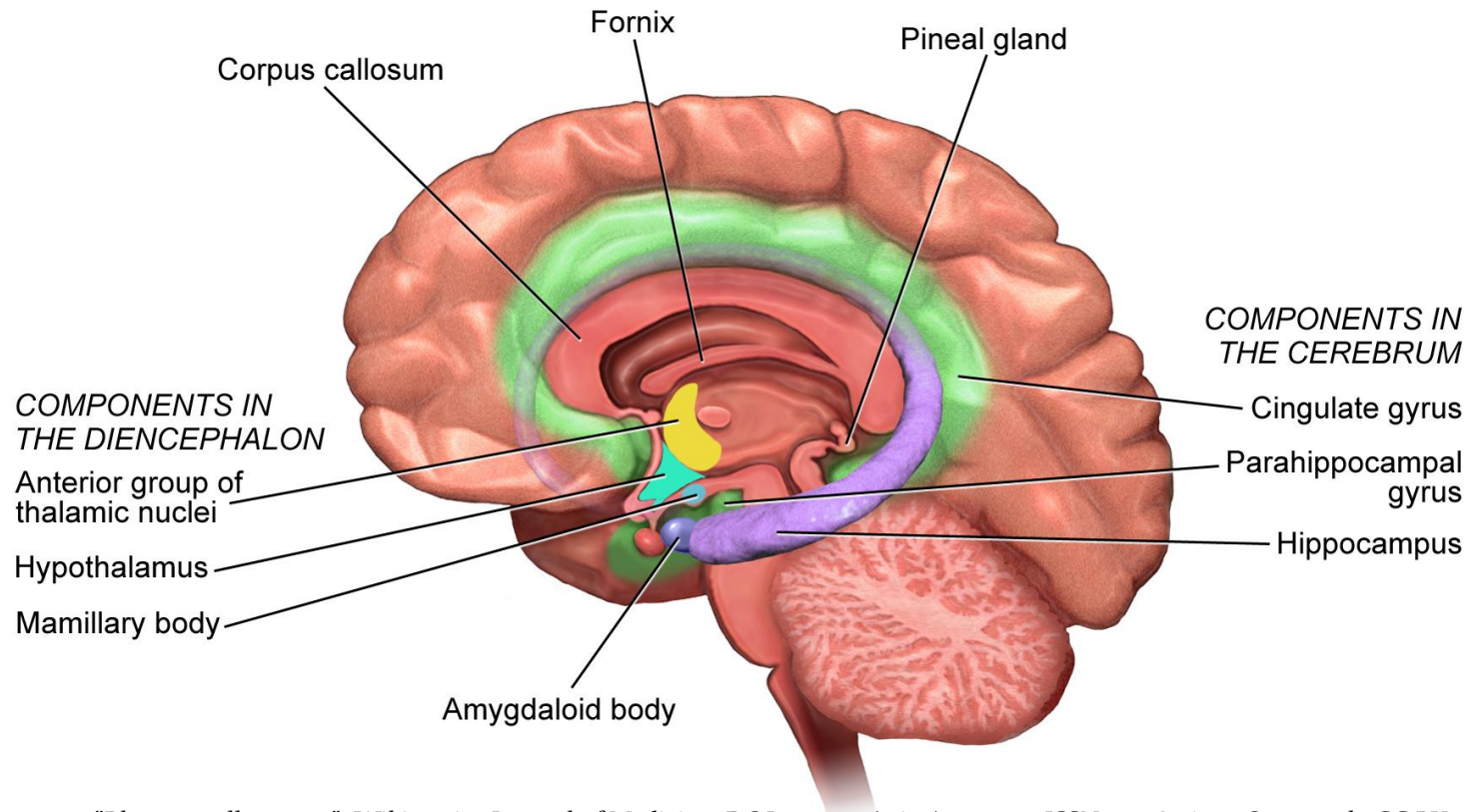Riverblade

# Metaphorically Thinking

- The Triune Brain (primal, emotional and rational) model: [Paul D. Maclean]

    - Primal (reptillian complex)
        - Vital functions, fight, freeze or flight, sex, food etc.

    - Emotional (paleomammalian complex)
        - The emotional seat of the brain ("I hate tabs/beetroot" etc.)

    - Conscious (neomammalian complex)
        - The rational, thinking brain....(but prone to switching off under stress)

# Brain Food

- A couple of must see talks:

  - **Nathalie Nahai** (@Nathalienahai) –
    **The Secret Psychology Behind Online Persuasion**
    (Business of Software Europe 2014)
    https://vimeo.com/100713580

  - **Jenni Jepsen** (@jenniindk) –
    **High Performance Teams, Neuroscience and Agile**
    (Agile on the Beach 2015)
    https://youtu.be/5AbnwwtXaQE

# Emotionally Thinking



The Limbic System

Corpus callosum

Fornix

Pineal gland

COMPONENTS IN THE CEREBRUM

Cingulate gyrus

Parahippocampal gyrus

Hippocampus

COMPONENTS IN THE DIENCEPHALON

Anterior group of thalamic nuclei

Hypothalamus

Mamillary body

Amygdaloid body

# "A Gut Feeling"?

*"When you get a gut feeling, this is the brain recognising patterns, giving you that feeling but it doesn't tell you why it's making you feel this way.*

*"Change for the brain is novel. The first time you see something it may be scary so it warns you to back away. This means that humans will resist change and have a lack of understanding of why they would want to change. They want to know "what's in it for me".*

*- Jenni Jepson*

https://agileworldblog.wordpress.com/2015/09/04/the-neuroscience-of-agile-leadership-teams-jenni-jepsen/

# Circuits, Devices and Braincells

- Parts of the limbic system are **hardwired** to produce specific responses to certain stimuli

- These circuits haven't changed in 100,000 years
  - But our environment has, *massively!*

➢ We're getting emotional about things we weren't designed for
  - (Teddy bears, robots, cube farms, tabs v spaces etc. *)

  * not to mention beetroot. But please don't mention the beetroot.

# A Case In Point: Anger

- A destructive emotion, or a survival reflex?

- A trigger for **aggression**

  - But that need not follow. We have a *choice*
    ...but the stronger the emotion is, the harder it is to not react

- The "Hypothalamic Attack Area" [R Dougas Fields]
  - Produces a "rage" response when stimulated

# Triggers for Rage

- **L**ife or Limb
- **I**nsult
- **F**amily
- **E**nvironment
- **M**ate
- **O**rder
- **R**esources
- **T**ribe
- **S**topped (i.e. restraint)

*Is this why we get angry when "the cheese moves"?*

*Ref: "**Why we are prone to sudden 'snaps' of rage and what we can do to control them**" - R Douglas Fields*

*http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/health-and-families/features/why-we-are-prone-to-sudden-snaps-of-rage-and-what-we-can-do-to-control-them-a6847426.html*

# We Don't *Have* To React, But…

- When we push people out of their comfort zones, we can expect a reaction. We're "threatening" them

- Just because we *feel* something doesn't mean we have to *act* on it
  - But the stronger the emotion (or the higher the stress level) the harder it becomes to not do so instinctively

➢ Small changes with high engagement are less likely to provoke a backlash than larger, imposed changes

# How Dare *You* Tell **Me** My Code is...

- Critique pushes people out of their comfort zone

  - Remember the "Insult" trigger?
    If the critique is coming from outside their "Tribe", that insult is instinctively compounded

- Code Review by peers can be bad enough, but "How dare a dumb automated tool tell me my code is..."

- A newly introduced process also violates the existing Order and represents a change in Environment

# Are Tech Communities Rational?

- We like to think of tech communities as meritocratic places (and to be fair some try hard to be), but all too often...

  - **We see bullying, misogyny, anger and aggression**

  - It can be **much** worse (death/rape threats, SWATing etc.)  if you are perceived as being outside the Tribe (e.g. if you are female, gay, trans etc.) and to be threatening the status quo.

- **We can do better than this, but why does it happen?**

➤ This is **instinctive**, *not* rational, behaviour!

# We're Emotional - *Not* Rational

*"We spend most of or time in our social/emotional brains. We think we are being logical and thoughtful. In reality, we are trying to stay in the good graces of an imaginary tribe and make sure that things never change."*

*"The violence at this level rarely gets physical, when it does it is (with only two exceptions) designed NOT to [physically] injure.*

*"Social violence is all about sending messages: "You are not one of us. You broke the rules. This is my territory. Treat me better. I am superior to you. Aren't I cool?""*

*- Rory Miller: "Communication, Violence and the Triune Brain"*

http://conflictresearchgroupintl.com/communication-violence-and-the-triune-brain-rory-miller/

# How Can We...

# Change Reaction

- We're wired to react to change and (even implied) criticism

➤ To successfully introduce change, we must *understand its potential impact and consequences*

  - Do we really know better than our audience does?
  - Does it help or hinder them…or is it neutral?
  - Will they have to invest time in re-learning?
  - How are they likely to react? Can we mitigate that?

@annajayne
#caffeinedrivendevelopment

**Riverblade**

# What about the Nastiness?

- Aim for the best (meritocratic, respectful) behaviour, while planning for the worst (aggressive, tribalistic)

- *i.e.*:
  - Understanding how people react, and why

  - Deciding what is and is not acceptable...
    ...as well as what should happen when things go wrong

  - Recognising potential harassment or abuse and supporting its victims.

# Why a Code of Conduct?

- I know some think "but my tech space doesn't have a problem…", but…

  - *"A code of conduct, fundamentally, exists in a community in the same way that a disaster plan exists. It is there, so that, should an incident occur, there is a clear indication of both the process through which that incident can be reported, and the potential outcomes of resolution of that incident should remediation fail.*

    *To put it more succinctly, the involvement of the formalized process of a code of conduct is, in itself, a method of last resort."*

    - Lauren Voswinkel

    https://bugs.ruby-lang.org/issues/12004#note-209

# Sending a Message

- A good Code of Conduct also says something important to people who may not otherwise feel able to get involved:

  *"This is an environment where you will be respected and safe. Welcome"*

- FAQ:      http://www.ashedryden.com/blog/codes-of-conduct-101-faq
- Examples:      http://trans-code.org/code-of-conduct/ (Trans*Code)
  http://bit.ly/2oIQIGH (ACCU)

# Digression: Facilities

- People have different needs, so detailing the facilities available in your space also can also say **"Welcome"**

e.g.:

*"If you need gender neutral toilets\*, disabled access or childcare facilities, we have them, so you don't need to worry when considering whether to come."*

\* Not everyone identifies as male or female. Biology is **far** more creative in that regard than most people realise.



https://mkmesirow.wordpress.com/2014/12/09/peeing-in-peace-gender-neutral-bathrooms/

# Expanding "the Tribe"

- Increasing diversity is *change*, and therefore a **threat** (remember Order, Tribe and Environment...)
  - Is this why parts of the media are so disdainful of diversity?

- But if we're all too alike, we tend to think alike – which makes it harder for us to innovate effectively
  - We also have a skills shortage, so we need all the help we can get...

- If your environment is predominantly cisgender\*, male and straight, you are **missing out** on talented people

  \* Cisgender just means "not Transgender" (c.f. cis- and trans-isomers in chemistry)

# Other Unnecessary Barriers

- Changing the composition of any community is *hard*
  (but what other barriers could you be creating without realising?)

- Lack of role models/mentors is a very real problem
  (I can't speak for others, but I really struggled initially)

- You may have them already, **but not know it**
  - People often won't come forward unless it's **obvious** that your space is **safe enough** to do so

    (but Codes of Conduct/inclusive policies etc. can help)

# The Empathy Opportunity

- In the 20th century most businesses were run on a systemising, hierarchical, top-down basis
  - Hence cube farms, fixed hours, presenteeism etc.

- The world has changed. We're more connected than ever!
  - People can see (and hurt) each other much more easily
  - The consequences of social violence are **much** greater

- It's harder to hurt people* when you empathise with them
  - \* or to ignore the hurt they are being subjected to by others

- ➢ We can't hide in silos. We **all** need to  think more about how others are impacted by what we are doing (c.f. craftsmanship, ethics)

# Revelations

- The Three Empathy Revelations: [Belinda Parmar]

1. *Empathy is a commercial tool, which can be deployed to drive profit.*

2. *Empathy is not just an innate quality - it is a skill that can be taught, trained and honed.*

3. *The more empathy is embedded in a company's culture, the more it will attract female customers and employees.* [*]

- *Belinda Parmar, "The Empathy Era"*
- *http://www.amazon.co.uk/The-Empathy-Era-Business-Pathway/dp/0957389817*

[*]   Not just female customers/employees either, but also LGBT people and those from other minority groups too.

# I'm Hopeful, But Impatient

- Our industry now is a **very** different one from even a decade ago

- Young people joining our industry bring new ideas, expectations  and standards (and hopefully more diversity). Change *never* ceases

- But I don't think we can afford to wait for it to ripple through. The skills and marginalisation problems we face are more urgent than that.

# Summary

- Our Comfort Zones are a result of the way the brains work.

- We're nowhere near as rational as we like to believe. Our wiring is *ancient* and makes us **very** emotionally driven.

- If you understand **why** people react the way they do, you are more likely to be able to mitigate those reactions.

- The more diverse and empathic your environment, the more effective (and interesting!) it can be.

- Change is not in our comfort zone. But sometimes we just need to take a deep breath and **move the cheese anyway**.
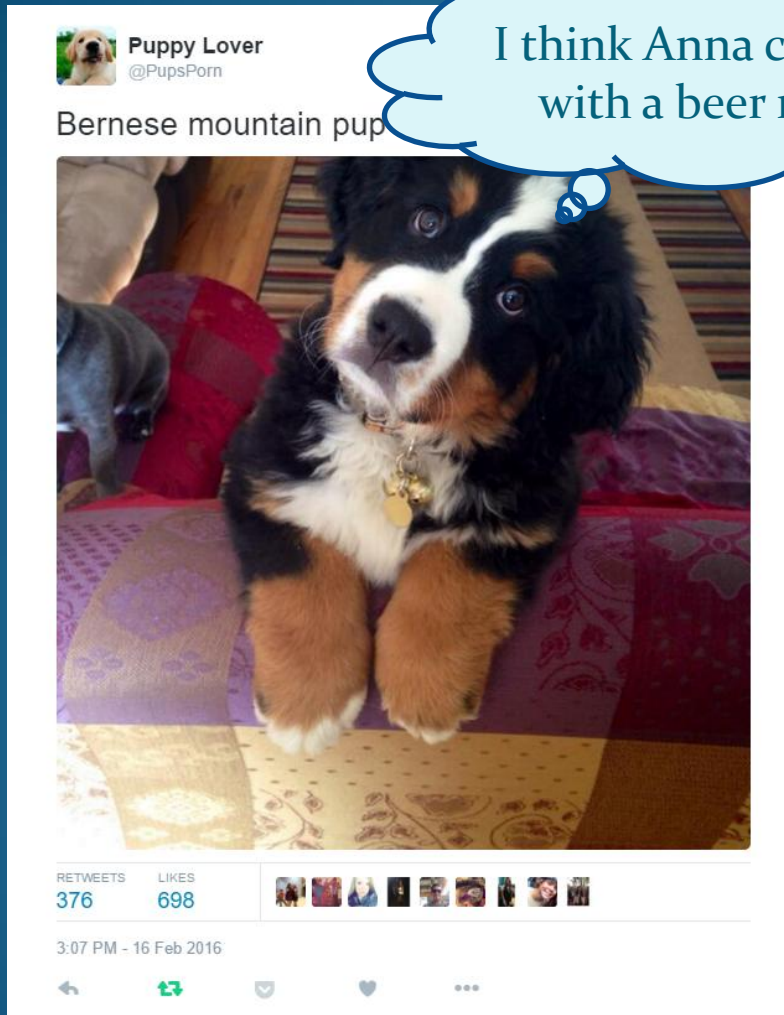
# Links & References

- Peacock Jumping Spider
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d_yYC5r8xMI
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xYIUFEQeh3g (YMCA mix!)
  http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/australias-peacock-spiders-so-cute-even-arachnophobes-will-love-them-photos-video-1493538

- Mutant Giant Spider Dog
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YoB8t0B4jx4
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YDdO2vGtk28 (the sequel)

- "A New Look for Visual Studio 2010" [Microsoft® Visual Studio® 2010 Beta UX announcement]
  http://blogs.msdn.com/b/jasonz/archive/2009/02/20/a-new-look-for-visual-studio-2010.aspx

- "Introducing the New Developer Experience" [Microsoft® Visual Studio® 2012 Beta UX announcement]
  https://blogs.msdn.microsoft.com/visualstudio/2012/02/23/introducing-the-new-developer-experience

Riverblade

# Links & References

- The Secret Psychology Behind Online Persuasion - Nathalie Nahai [BOS Europe 2014]
https://vimeo.com/100713580 (video)
http://www.slideshare.net/nathalienahai/the-secret-psychology-of-online-persuasion (slides)

- High Performance Teams, Neuroscience and Agile - Jenni Jepsen  [AOTB 2015]
https://youtu.be/5AbnwwtXaQE (video)
http://www.slideshare.net/marklittlewood/jenni-jepsen-high-performance-teams-neuroscience-and-agile (slides)

- Why we are prone to sudden 'snaps' of rage and what we can do to control them - R Douglas Fields
http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/health-and-families/features/why-we-are-prone-to-sudden-snaps-of-rage-and-what-we-can-do-to-control-them-a6847426.html

- The Forum: Anger (BBC World Service)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LqYKftvTwKE

# Links & References

- Communication, Violence and The Triune Brain – Rory Miller
  http://conflictresearchgroupintl.com/communication-violence-and-the-triune-brain-rory-miller/

- Codes of Conduct 101 + FAQ - Ashe Dryden
  http://www.ashedryden.com/blog/codes-of-conduct-101-faq

- Example Conference Codes of Conduct
  http://trans-code.org/code-of-conduct/ (Trans*Code 2015)
  https://www.cvent.com/Pub/eMarketing/Pages/WebEmail.aspx?emstub=852a4afb-e5cc-4fa4-a375-6428facaf491 (ACCU)

- Who Moved My Cheese - Spencer Johnson (ISBN 978-0091816971)
  http://www.amazon.co.uk/Who-Moved-My-Cheese-Amazing/dp/0091816971

- Thinking, Fast and Slow - Daniel Kahneman (ISBN 978-0141033570)
  http://www.amazon.co.uk/Thinking-Fast-Slow-Daniel-Kahneman/dp/0141033576

- The Empathy Era – Belinda Parmar (ISBN 978-0957389816)
  http://www.amazon.co.uk/The-Empathy-Era-Business-Pathway/dp/0957389817

# Final Word

**Your brain is amazing. Use it wisely.**

#caffeinedrivendevelopment

Slides: http://www.riverblade.co.uk/downloads/slides/comfort_zone.pdf
(Related lightning talk: http://www.riverblade.co.uk/downloads/slides/your_mission.pdf)