Collaboration as systems practice: Simple, but not easy

What do we want to get across?

Like you, I have become fascinated with the models and theories of systems thinking.

However, systems *practice*, remains elusive. We, in our own company (DoITogether), and quite a number of you, do systems practice projects, but the projects don't seem to add up to a bigger story in the mind of the general public.

Most important, we have not been able to make it relevant for 80% of employees who work in large companies.
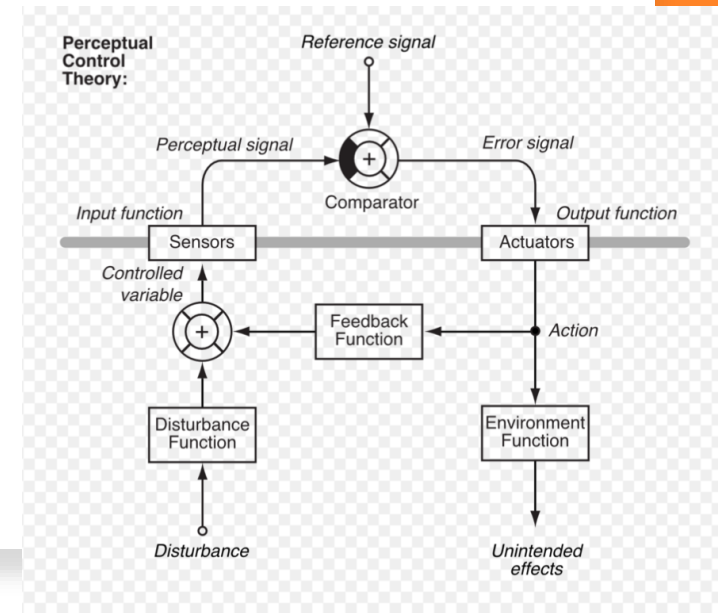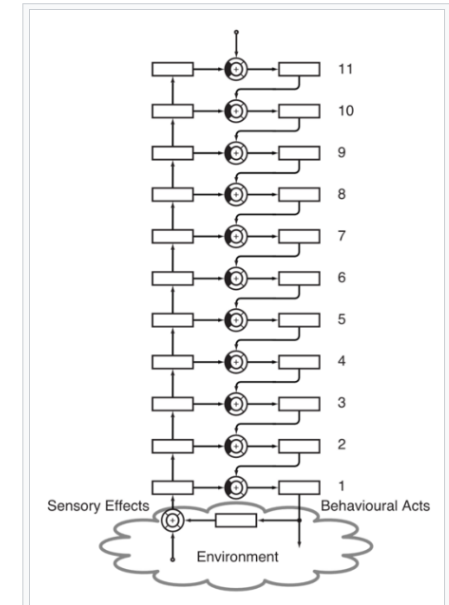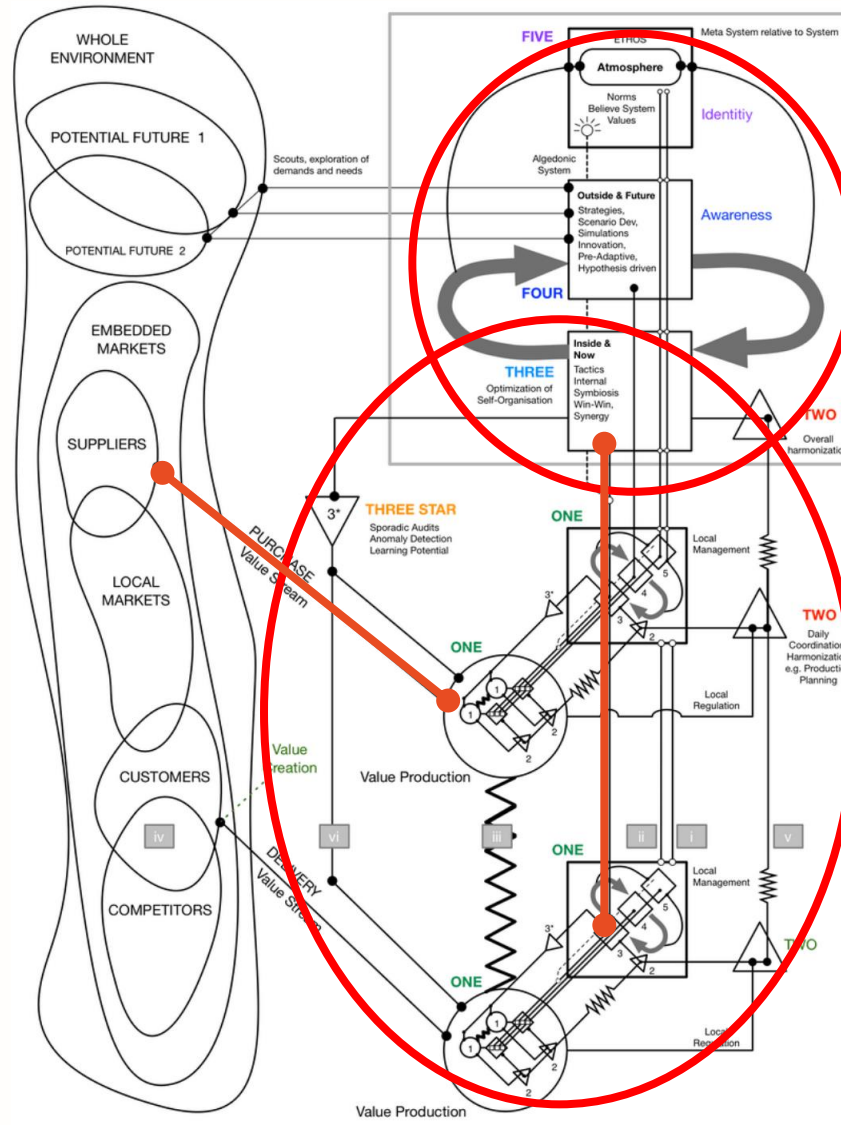
When it comes to systems thinking and systems practice, these "average employees" keep asking the question: "This sounds interesting, but what should I do?" For the last couple of years, Vincent and I have been working on a model to adress precisely this question.

In this presentation we like to share this model with you, this systems thinking community. We are interested in discussions and collaborations to further develop the model and bring it into practice.

Positioning the model

1st perspective: Conversations-for-Action of Fernando Flores
(and Chauncy Bell)

Phase 1: Prepare the request

Phase 2: Negotiate mutual conditions of satisfaction

Phase 3: Execute

Phase 4: Determine satisfaction

Request

Promise

Acceptance

Complete product

CUSTOMER

SUPPLIER

Customer concerns

Supplier concerns

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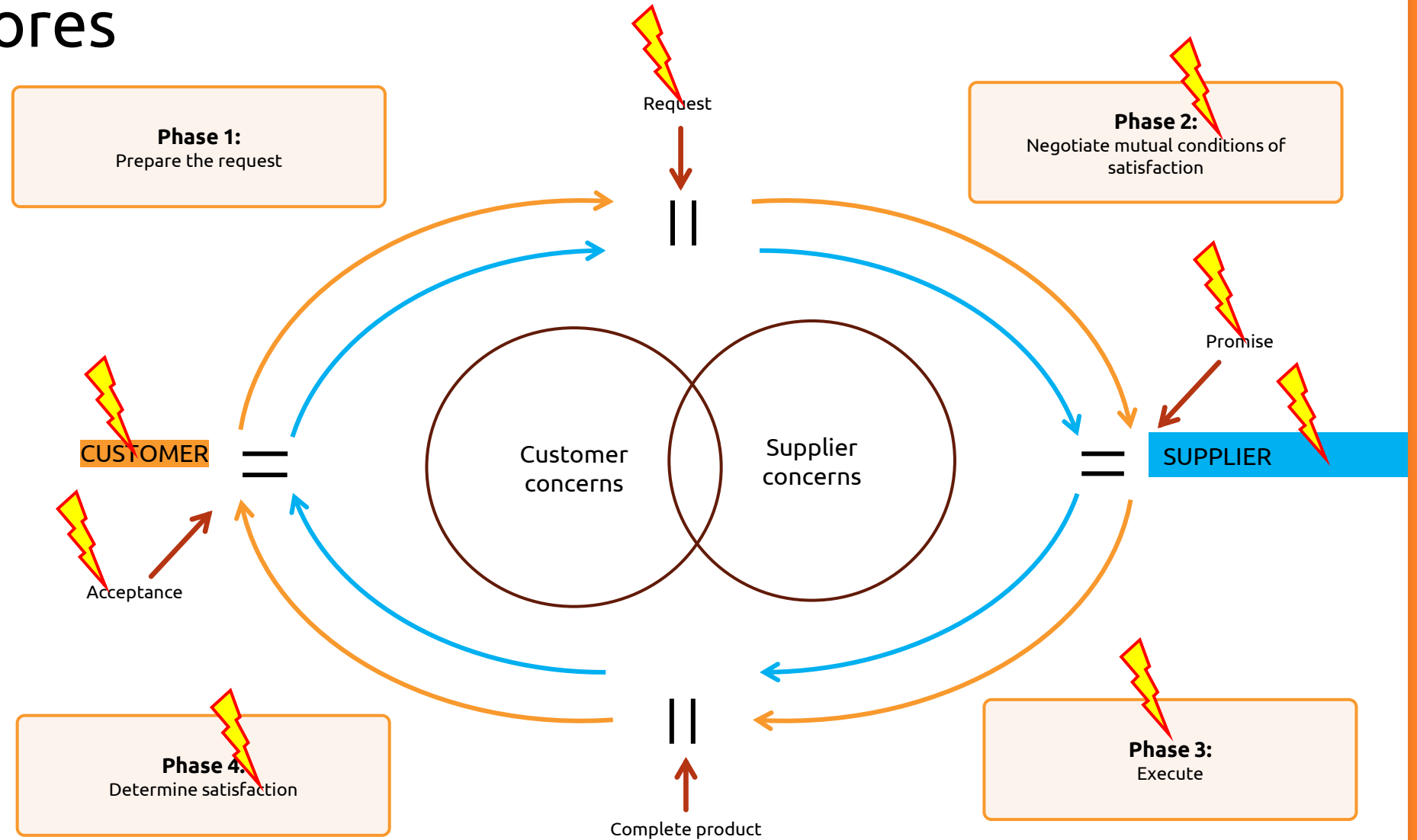
2nd perspective: Negative feedback in collaborations

Phase 1: ~~Prepare the request~~

Phase 2: ~~Negotiate mutual conditions of satisfaction~~

CUSTOMER → Request

Phase 3: Execute
SUPPLIER → Complete product

The naive heuristic: "people are computers"

Phase 1: Plan (Prepare the request)
CUSTOMER → Request

Phase 2: ~~Negotiate mutual conditions of satisfaction~~

Phase 3: Do (Execute)
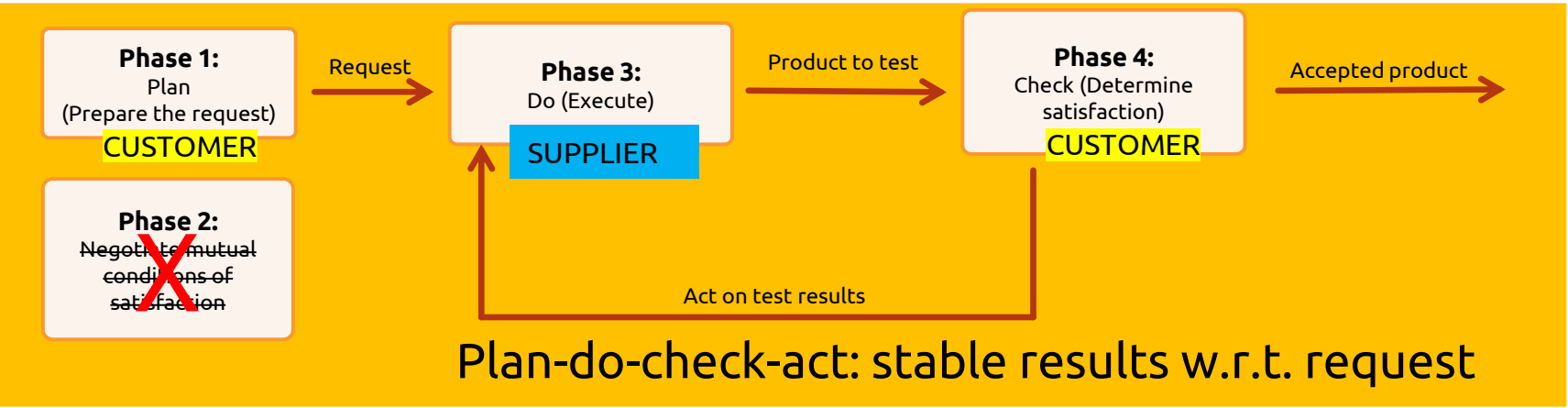SUPPLIER → Product to test

Phase 4: Check (Determine satisfaction)
CUSTOMER → Accepted product

Act on test results

Plan-do-check-act: stable results w.r.t. request

Customer needs & concerns
CUSTOMER &
SUPPLIER

Supplier needs & concerns

Phase 1/ phase 2: Plan and negotiate (Balance asks and offers)
CUSTOMER &
SUPPLIER → Mutual promises

Phase 3: Do (Execute)
SUPPLIER → Product to test

Phase 4: Check (Determine satisfaction)
CUSTOMER &
SUPPLIER → Multiple accepted products over time

Stable collaboration (team, department, organisation)

Act: What can we do different to prevent current mishap from reoccurring?

Plan-do-check-act with a focus on stable *collaborations*

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3rd perspective: Stafford Beers variety equations

No control!

You

Some control!
Simple, but not easy.
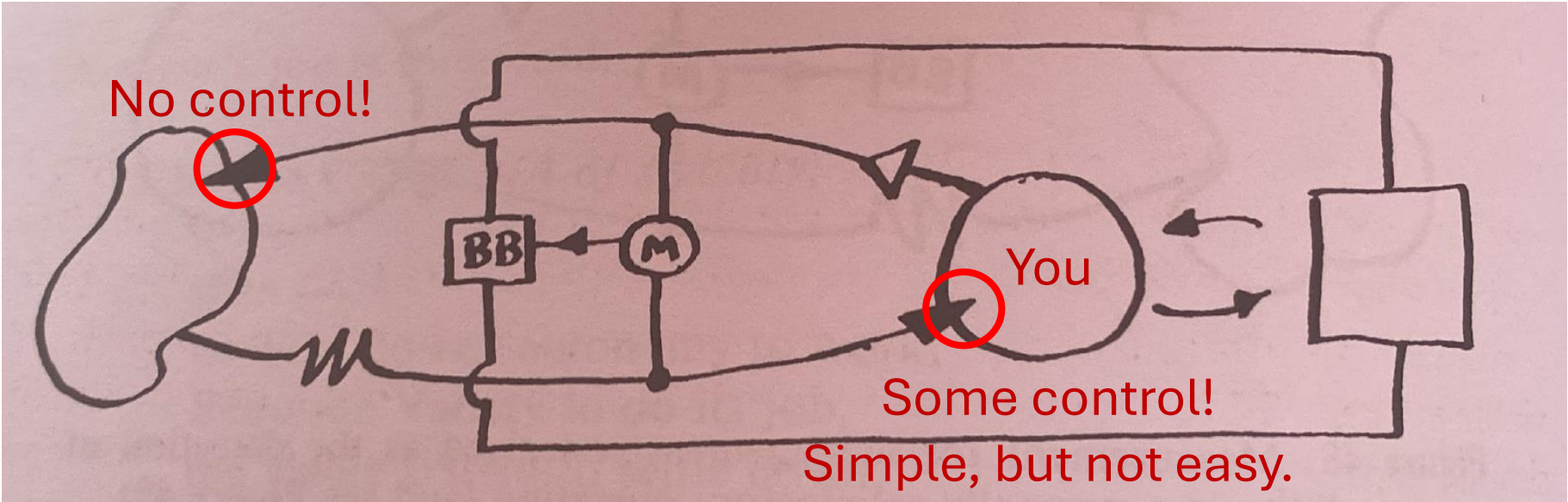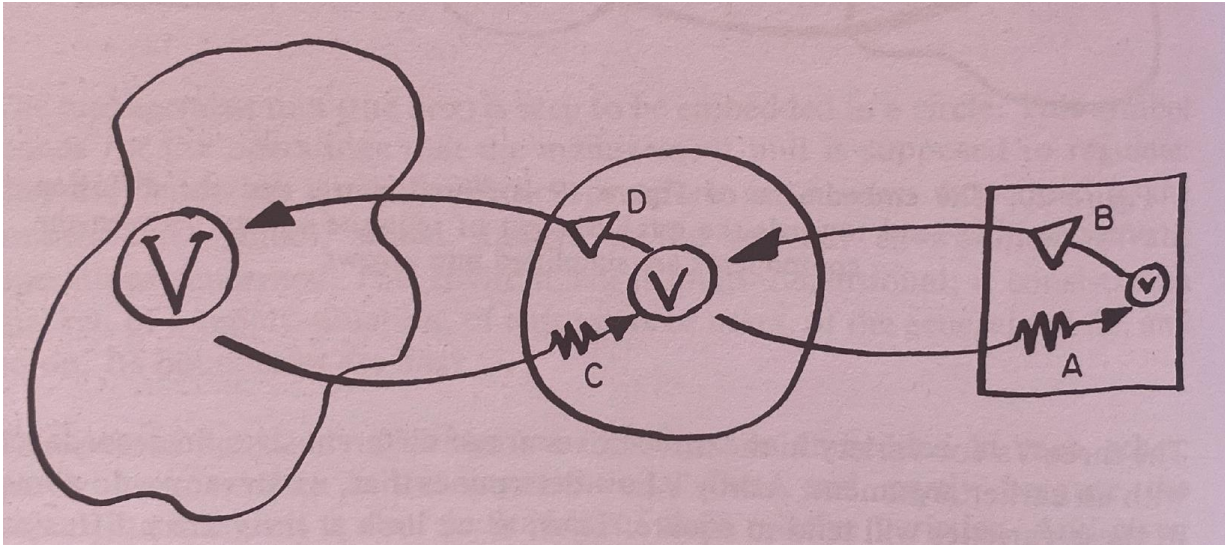
# The difficult project manager – primacy of the "balancing act"

1

2

Sketch of situation: I had to work with a project manager that many architects find difficult. He "does architecture", is a "strong personality", pretty opinionated (all three of which apply to architects as well ☺). I had no previous relationship with him.

My approach, based on the fact that the collaboration is the most important thing: Start with listening and lean in to *his* needs and concerns. Be very aware of creating and maintaining the right balance.
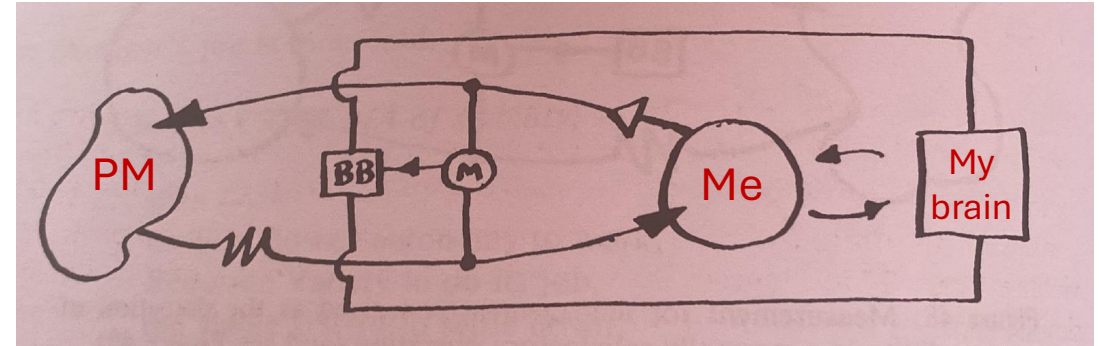
From document to diagnosis – Start with "Check"

1

Sketch of situation: Incident management team report to higher management on a regular basis, but reports are not paid attention to. Discussions on recent improvements or on new proposals for improvements (and corresponding budgets) are lacking (although wanted by incident management team).

2

Our approach, based on the fact that many breakdowns are actually visible in existing documentation, was to look at the existing reports. Basically, when this situation was brought to our attention, the report was based on standard diagrams, without any focus on the actual underlying relationship and (implicit) collaboration of incident and higher management.

Customer needs & concerns

Supplier needs & concerns

CUSTOMER & SUPPLIER

Phase 1/ phase 2: Plan and negotiate (Balance asks and offers)

CUSTOMER & SUPPLIER

Mutual promises

Phase 3: Do (Execute)

SUPPLIER

Product to test

Phase 4: Check (Determine satisfaction)

CUSTOMER & SUPPLIER

Multiple accepted products over time

Stable collaboration (team, department, organisation)

Act: What can we do different to prevent current mishap from reoccurring?

Plan-do-check-act with a focus on stable *collaborations*