



Michael James

Michael James is a software process mentor and Certified Scrum Trainer, focusing on the engineering practices that enable Agile project management. Having worked in the software industry for more than 20 years as a software developer (formerly “architect”), he has experience in automated testing that predates the Extreme Programming movement; formal, phased, high-ceremony processes based on DOD-STD-2167A; chaotic non-processes of the dot-com era; and Agile processes including Scrum and XP.

## Analysis Paralysis

Posted by Michael James on November 18, 2007 at 2:42 p.m.

From the November 2007 issue of *Fast Company*<sup>1</sup>:

*[Researchers] gave doctors the medical history of a 67-year-old man who'd been suffering chronic hip pain from osteoarthritis. He'd been given drugs to treat his pain, but they had been ineffective, so there was only one viable option: hip-replacement surgery, which would involve a long and painful recovery. Then a final check with the pharmacy uncovered one medication that hadn't been tried. Would the doctors like to give the drug a shot? 47% of doctors chose to try the medication in a final attempt to keep the patient from going under the knife.*

*Another group of doctors saw the same facts, except they were told that the pharmacy had discovered two medications that hadn't yet been tried.... only 28% chose to try either one.*

(The article goes on to advocate simplified strategies such as “We don't want to be first but we sure as hell don't want to be third.”)

What's going on here? Did reluctance to make a decision block *any* action to prevent surgery?

“Dammit Jim, I'm an engineer, not a doctor<sup>2</sup>.”

Do you find yourself spinning in circles over design decisions and business priorities? Perhaps analysis paralysis is perfectly natural because human nature is optimized for a simpler life. We certainly see this with our clients.

Scrum's insistence on demonstrating a **potentially shippable product increment** every Sprint encourages teams to make a choice. The two-week to 30-day Sprint length is a kind of circuit breaker on analysis paralysis. Don't expect a perfect choice. Do your analysis through exploratory action. Often making a mistake<sup>3</sup> is the fastest way to find out what the right choice may have been.

--mj

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.fastcompany.com/magazine/120/analysis-of-paralysis.html>

<sup>2</sup> [http://memory-alpha.org/en/wiki/I%27m\\_a\\_doctor%2C\\_not\\_a...](http://memory-alpha.org/en/wiki/I%27m_a_doctor%2C_not_a...)

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/bradpaisley/makeamistake.html>