



# Risk Assessment

In a software context

Neil Barnatt

# Software still goes wrong today

## Issues

- ▶ Software keeps going wrong
  - ▶ Airplanes
  - ▶ Trains
  - ▶ Financial systems
- ▶ Financial pressure plays a role
- ▶ Lack of understanding

## Improvements

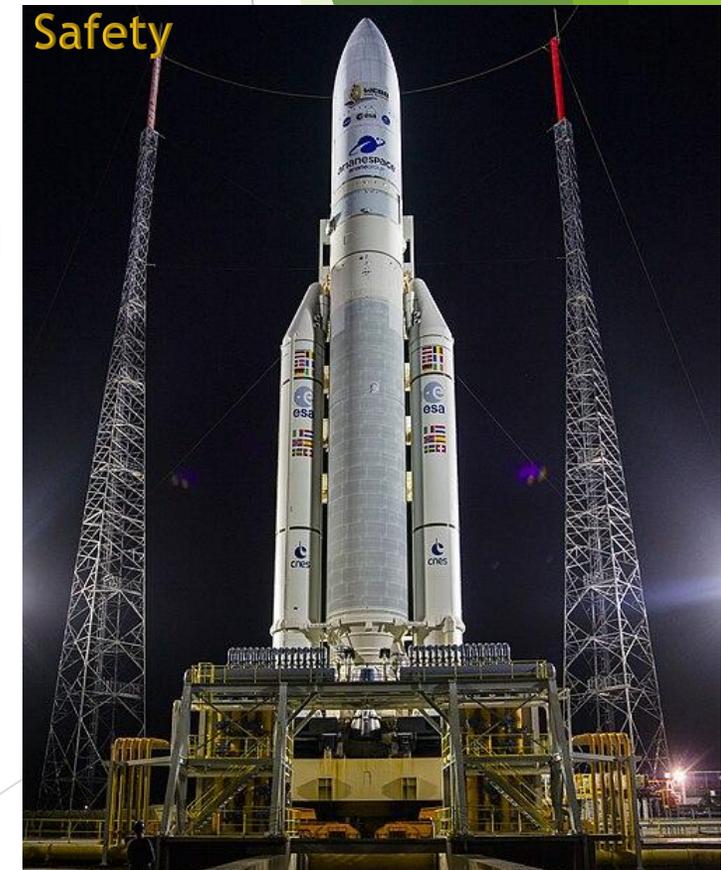
- ▶ IDEs have improved
- ▶ Architectural understanding improved
- ▶ Design patterns have improved
- ▶ Testing is more fully applied



Reputation/legal



Variable speed limit, M25 by N Chadwick, CC BY-SA 2.0  
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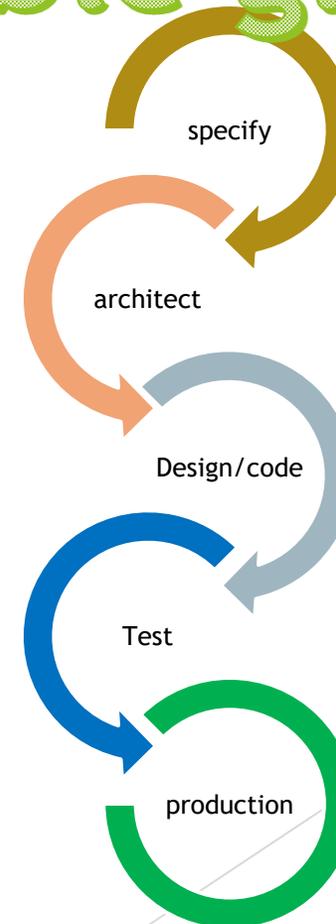
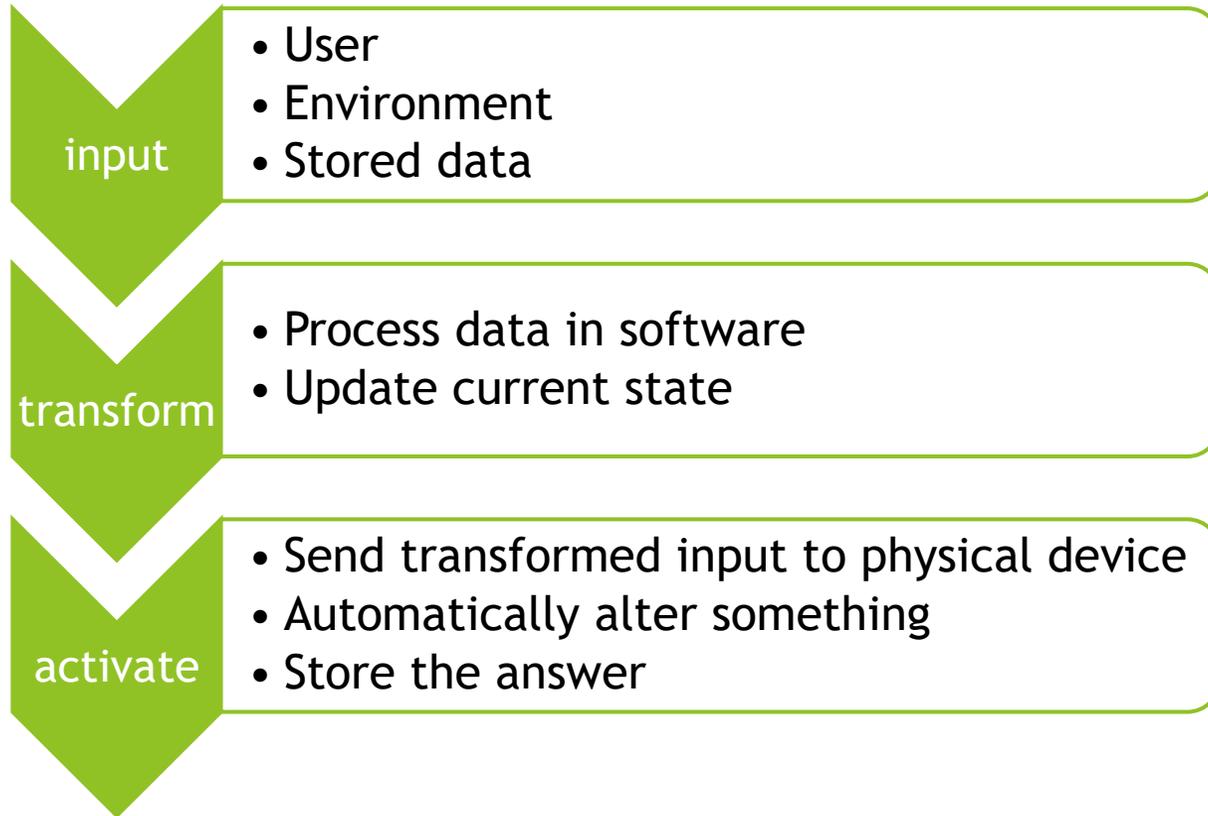
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# Why assess risk?

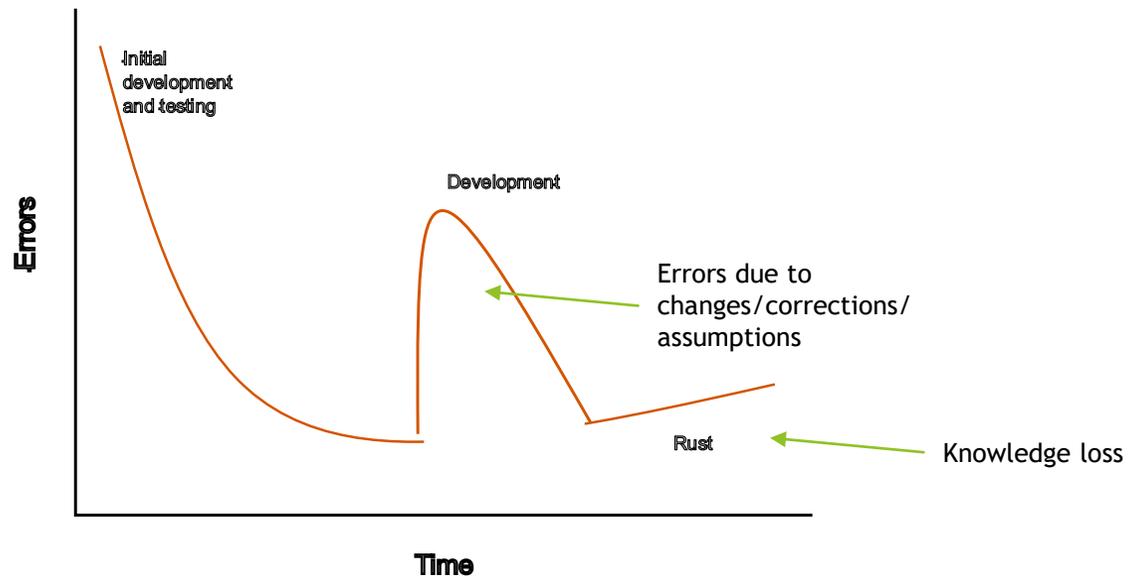
- ▶ Moral            The right thing to do. Society expects safety & things to work
- ▶ Legal            fines (not insurable), custody, civil suits
- ▶ Financial        fines, lost income, go out of business
- ▶ Reputation     could go out of business if customers go elsewhere or public forces closure.

# Conceptual software

## Software the flexible glue

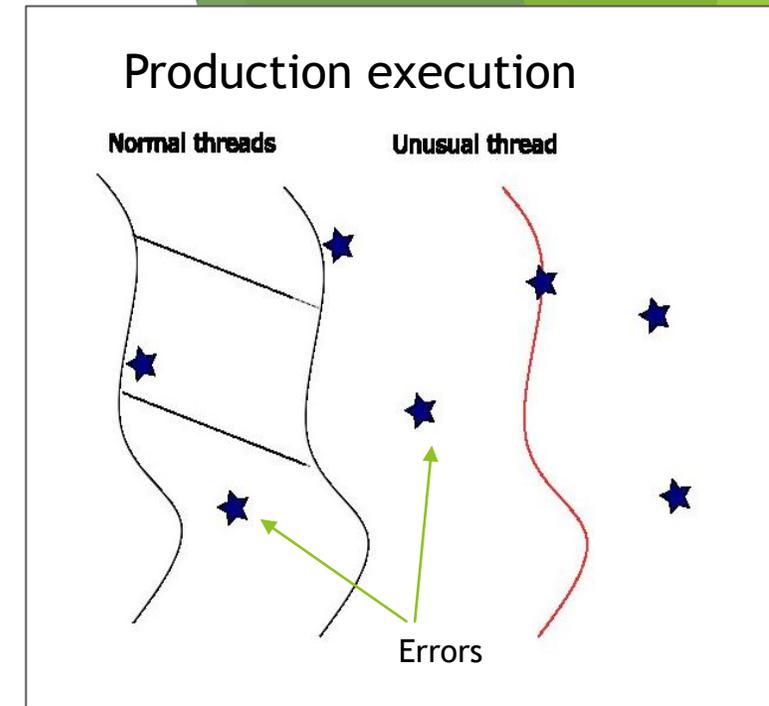


# Software error lifecycle



# Software errors

- ▶ Software and systematic errors
  - ▶ When triggered by input conditions they will be executed..time..after time
  - ▶ They are latent and unknown
  - ▶ The quantity is also unknown
  - ▶ Consequence is unknown
- ▶ The error density is estimated from the development process or operational experience
  - ▶ Gives rise to the idea of Safety Integrity Levels (SIL)
  - ▶ However, there is no guarantee it's just a statistical estimate
  - ▶ Better processes thought to produce less errors per lines of code



# Error association

▶ Errors tend to be:

- ▶ Associated with complexity
- ▶ Number of parties involved
- ▶ Age of system - sometimes there's no one left from the original team
- ▶ Frequency of upgrades/fixes/patches
- ▶ Lack of understanding
- ▶ Lack of testing
- ▶ Interfaces



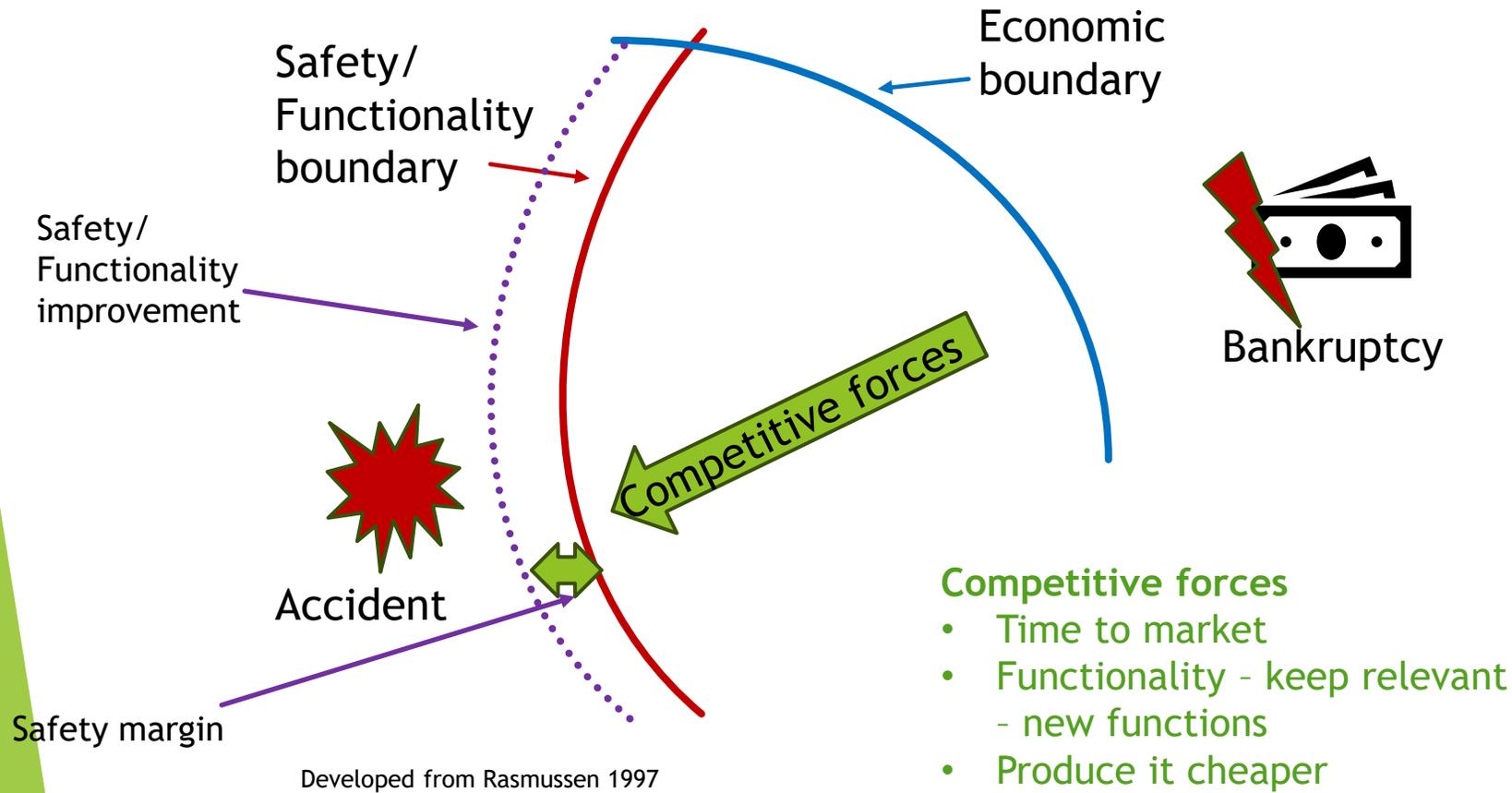
Leads to tension between  
functionality/quality/safety and  
cyber security

# Problem

- ▶ Software is largely unseen
  - ▶ We reason about how it performs
  - ▶ What bits are meant to do what
- ▶ However, the effects are felt on the product/system as a whole
  
- ▶ Therefore,
  - ▶ The primary analysis tends to take place at the system or subsystem level
  - ▶ No one cares if the part of the software goes wrong and it has no material effect. But they do care if someone gets injured, they lose money, or reputation
  
- ▶ **A reliable system is not sufficient for safe system. They are two distinct properties**
  - ▶ A system can be unreliable and safe
  - ▶ A system can be reliable and unsafe
  - ▶ Or a system can be reliable and safe

Levenson 2011

# The commercial dilemma



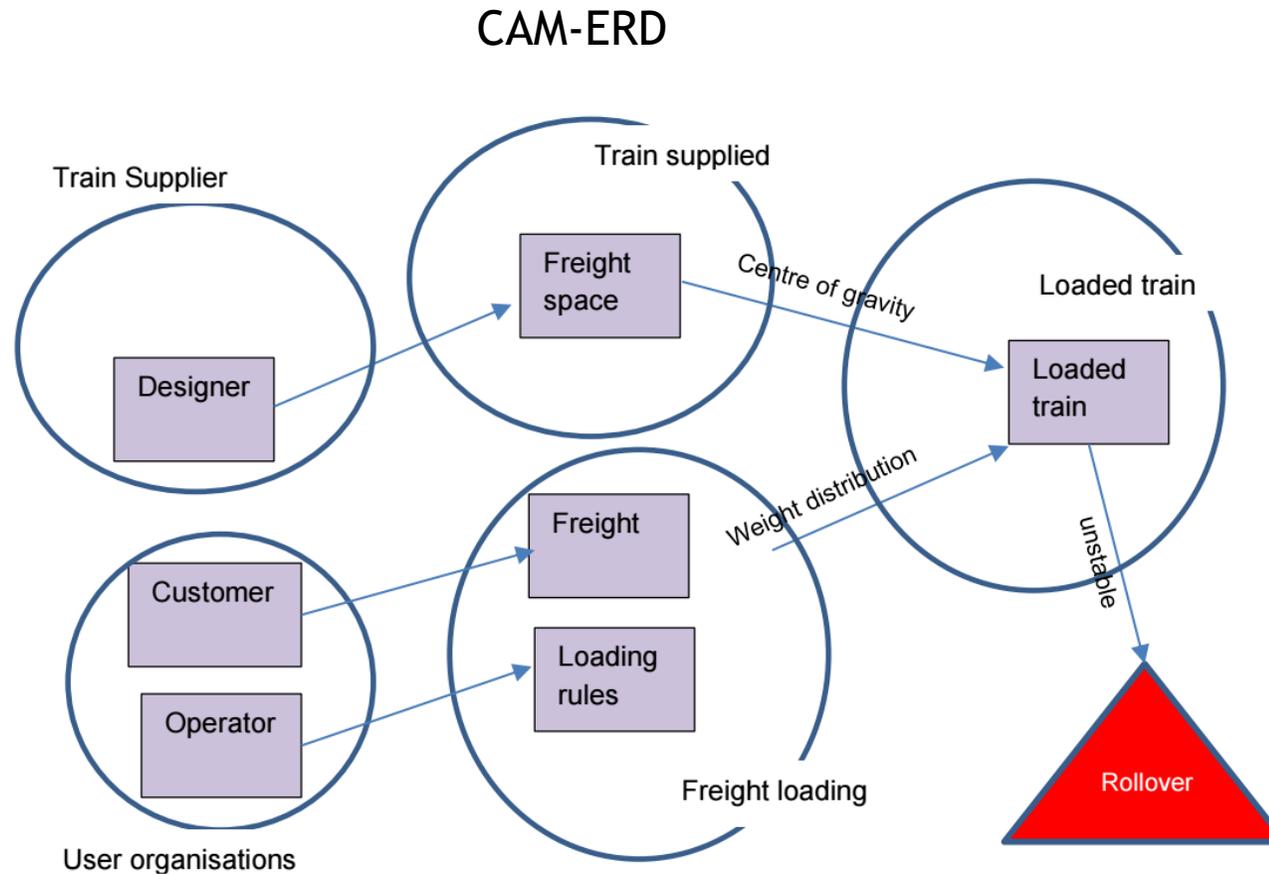
Homeostasis

Wilde 1998

## Competitive forces

- Time to market
- Functionality - keep relevant - new functions
- Produce it cheaper

# Everyone does their bit

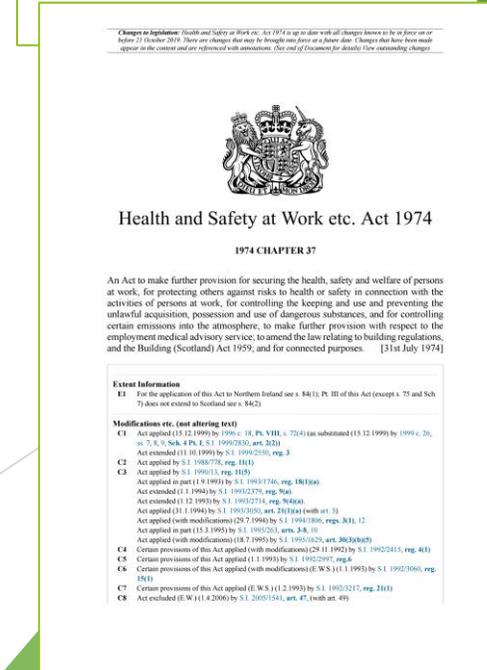
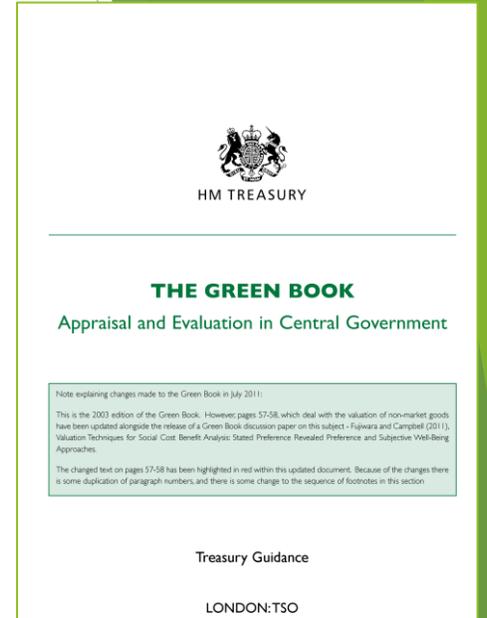


# Safety

- ▶ A social concept.
  - ▶ An acceptably safe system is one that the level of risk is tolerated by society
  - ▶ People decide what is and is not safe - laws and regulation back this up
  - ▶ Generally, safety is measured in money because its convenient
    - ▶ Value of preventing a fatality is ~£2M in UK rail (based on the Green Book and calculations of economic worth). Note it's a theoretical measure
  - ▶ The law does not specify what safety is instead it refers to case law, a concept of gross disproportionality and So Far As Reasonably Practicable as measures
- ▶ Proving something is safe is impossible!
  - ▶ Would need to prove something is safe in all possible cases
  - ▶ A case of the 'All swans are white' falsification
  - ▶ Checking something likely to be safe is done by showing its not unsafe.

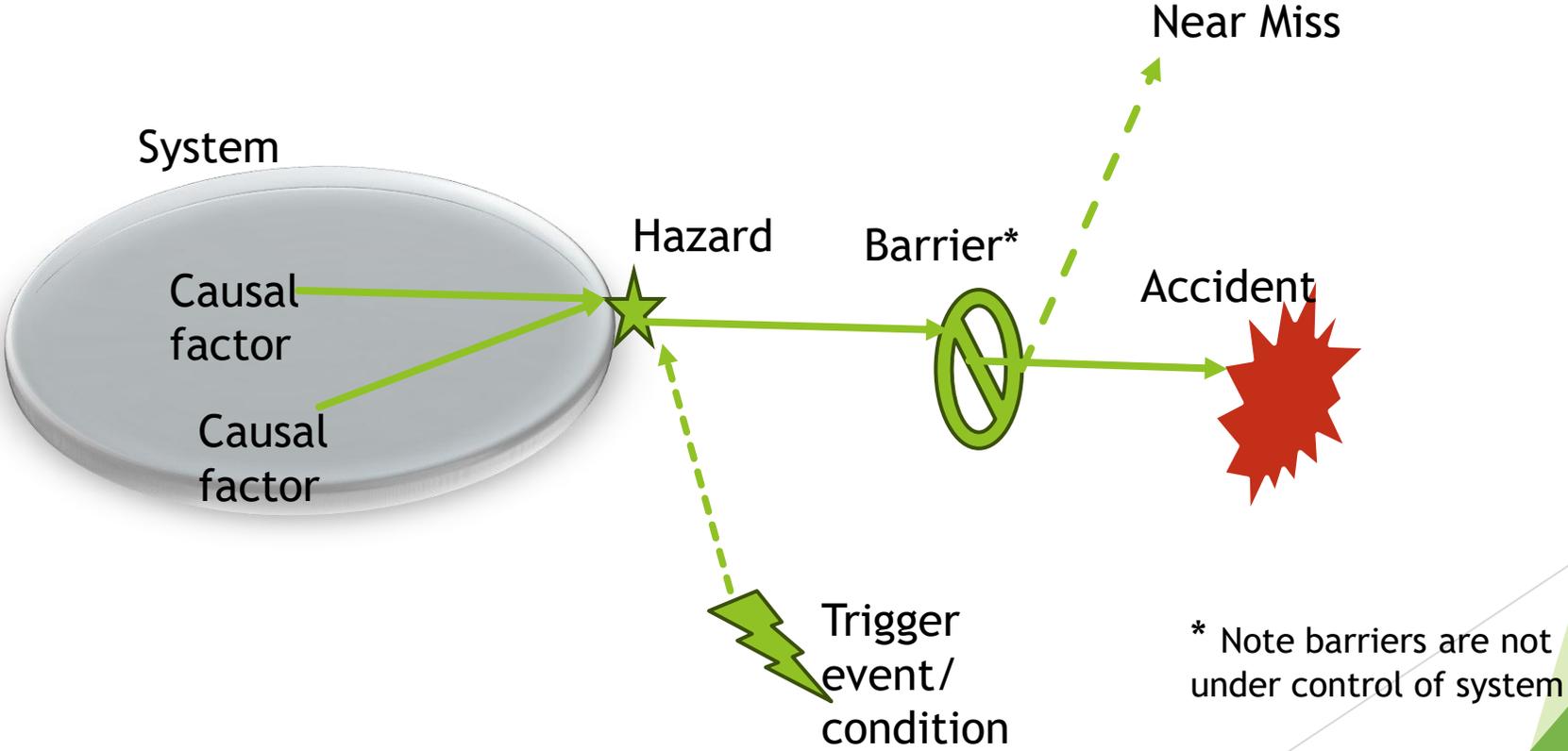


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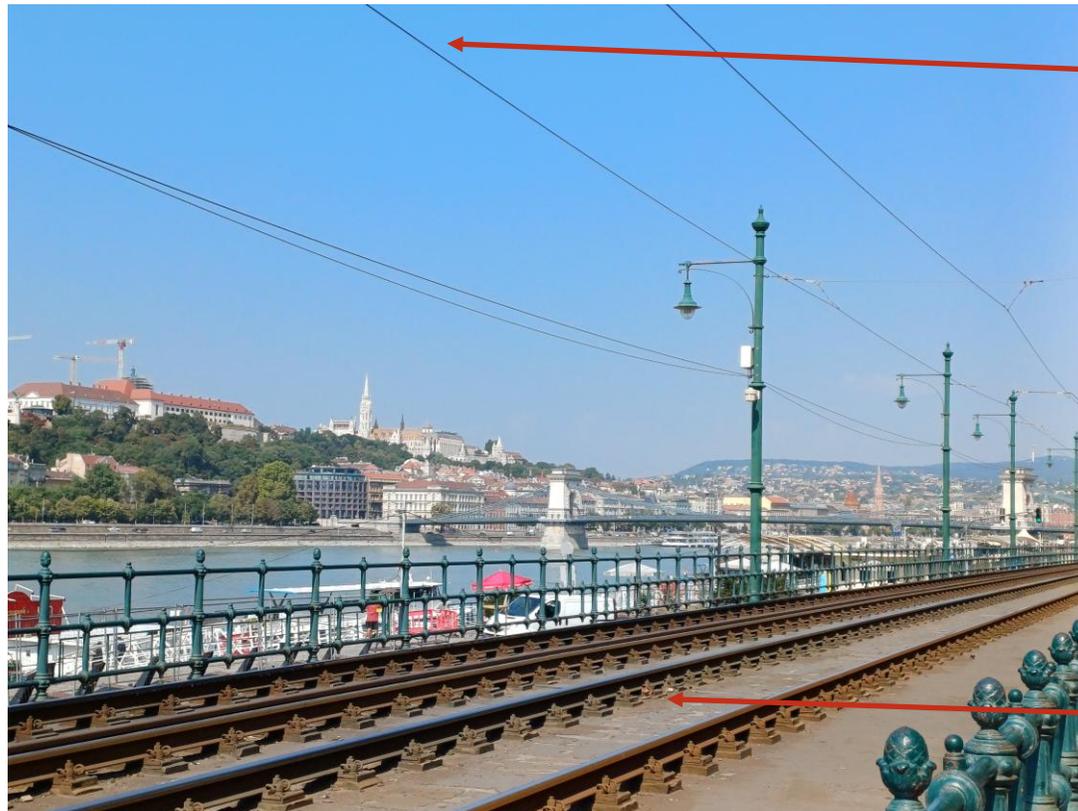


# Definitions

Risk is a combination of likelihood and consequence



# Example



Hazard

Looks benign but looks can be deceptive

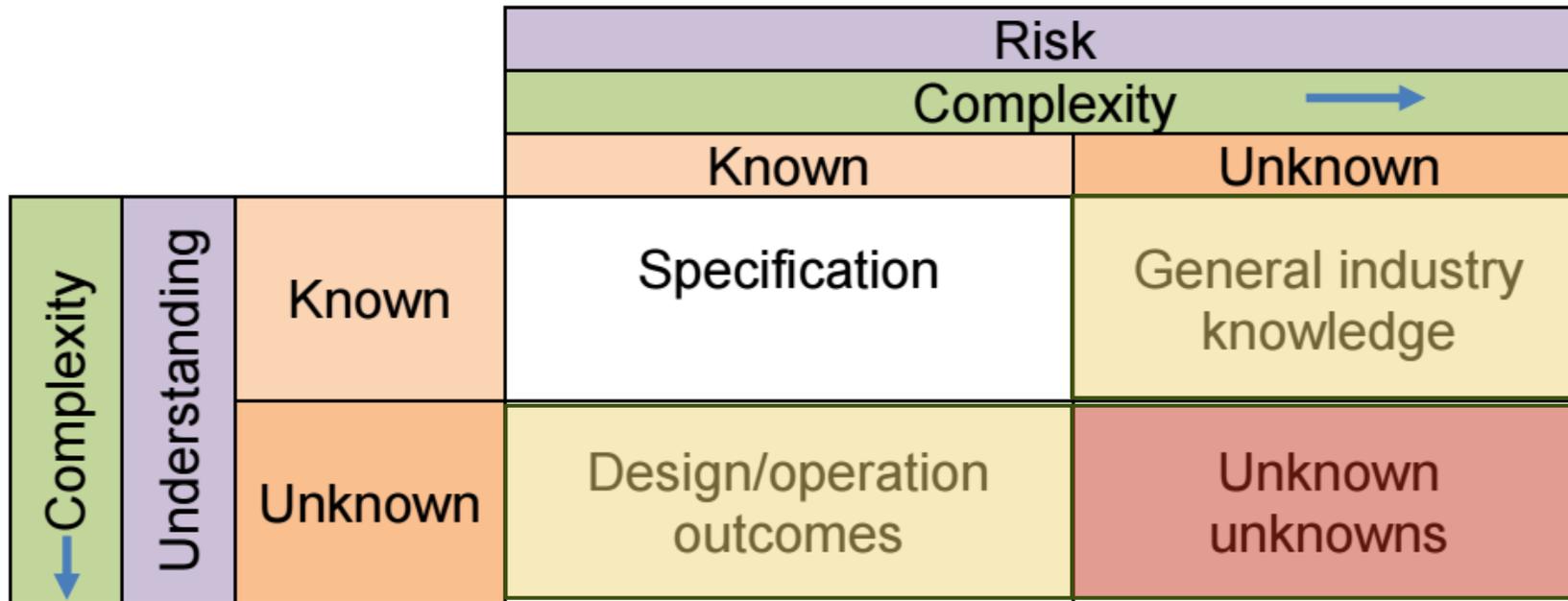
Obvious Hazard

# Visualisation of Risk

	Insignificant	Marginal	Major	Critical	Catastrophic	
Frequent	Tolerable	Intolerable	Intolerable	Intolerable	Intolerable	<1yr
Probable	Tolerable	Tolerable	Intolerable	Intolerable	Intolerable	<2yrs
Occasional	Tolerable	Tolerable	Tolerable	Tolerable	Intolerable	<5yrs
Rare	Negligible	Negligible	Tolerable	Tolerable	Tolerable	<10yrs
Improbable	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible	Tolerable	Tolerable	<20yrs
Highly Improbable	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible	Tolerable	Tolerable	≥20yrs

Formulated from EN50126 Cenelec 2017

# Risk, Complexity and Understanding



Adapted from Bowman 1990 & Barnatt 2021

# Implication for software

Much smaller  
than  
perceived →

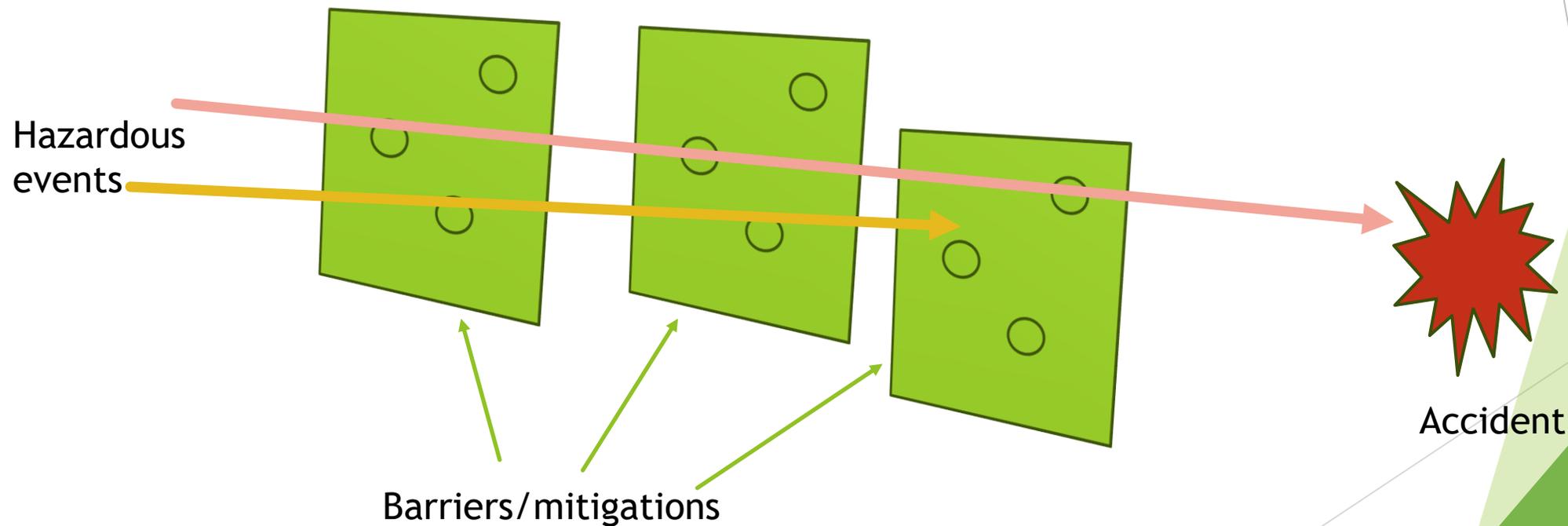


- ▶ A customer requirement is likely to be incomplete and fuzzy
- ▶ A specification is only an interpreted codification of what is known
- ▶ Therefore, there are likely to be holes in design documentation, coding and testing

# Swiss Cheese - defence in depth



Franz Golthen, Public domain,  
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# Software

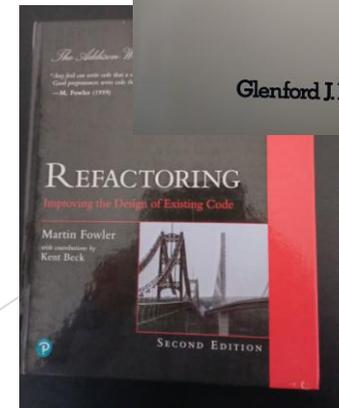
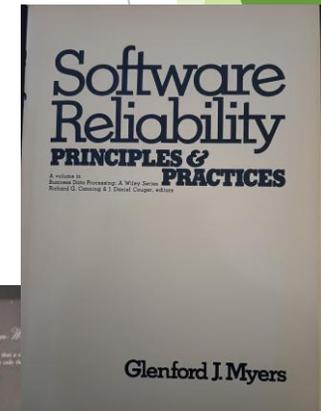
## Positive defences

- ▶ Defensive programming
  - ▶ Check inputs
  - ▶ Check outputs
  - ▶ Task monitoring
  - ▶ watchdogs
  - ▶ Simplicity
- Mutual suspicion
- ▶ Keep methods simple
  - ▶ Adhere to the solid principles
  - ▶ Loose coupling **Data coupling** 6 types
  - ▶ High strength **Functional strength** 7 types
  - ▶ Log events
  - ▶ Testing

## Negative drivers

- ▶ Required speed
- ▶ Complex product requirements
- ▶ AI
- ▶ Non-deterministic

Myers 1976



# Complex systems

- ▶ Difficult to understand
- ▶ Have emergent behaviours as a result of interactions
- ▶ Not possible to test the parts and pronounce on the system safety
  
- ▶ Systems become more complex when intercommunication taken into account
  
- ▶ Software has a stack of dependencies - High level language does not necessarily mean better
  - ▶ Hardware - micro code
  - ▶ Operating system
  - ▶ Tools for creation and maintenance, language nuances
  - ▶ Compiler/interpreter correctness
  - ▶ User compliance
  - ▶ Interfaces
  - ▶ libraries

# Soup

- ▶ Software of uncertain pedigree
- ▶ No special process beyond normal commercial requirements
- ▶ Windows falls into this category
- ▶ The positive is that lots of people use it so errors are more likely to be discovered quickly - lowering the probability density of errors
- ▶ It's cheaper than creating your own
- ▶ Convenient

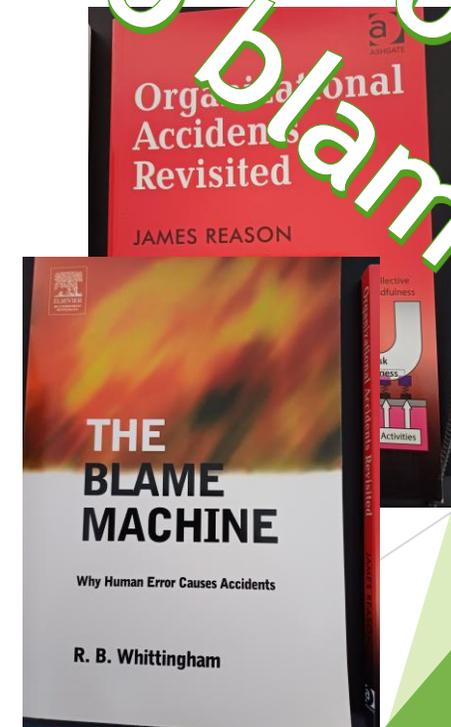


- ▶ Defences:
  - ▶ Use wrappers to limit connections between SOUP and the application
  - ▶ Restrict unused functionality and the influence on other parts of the application
  - ▶ Avoid newest versions of the SOUP

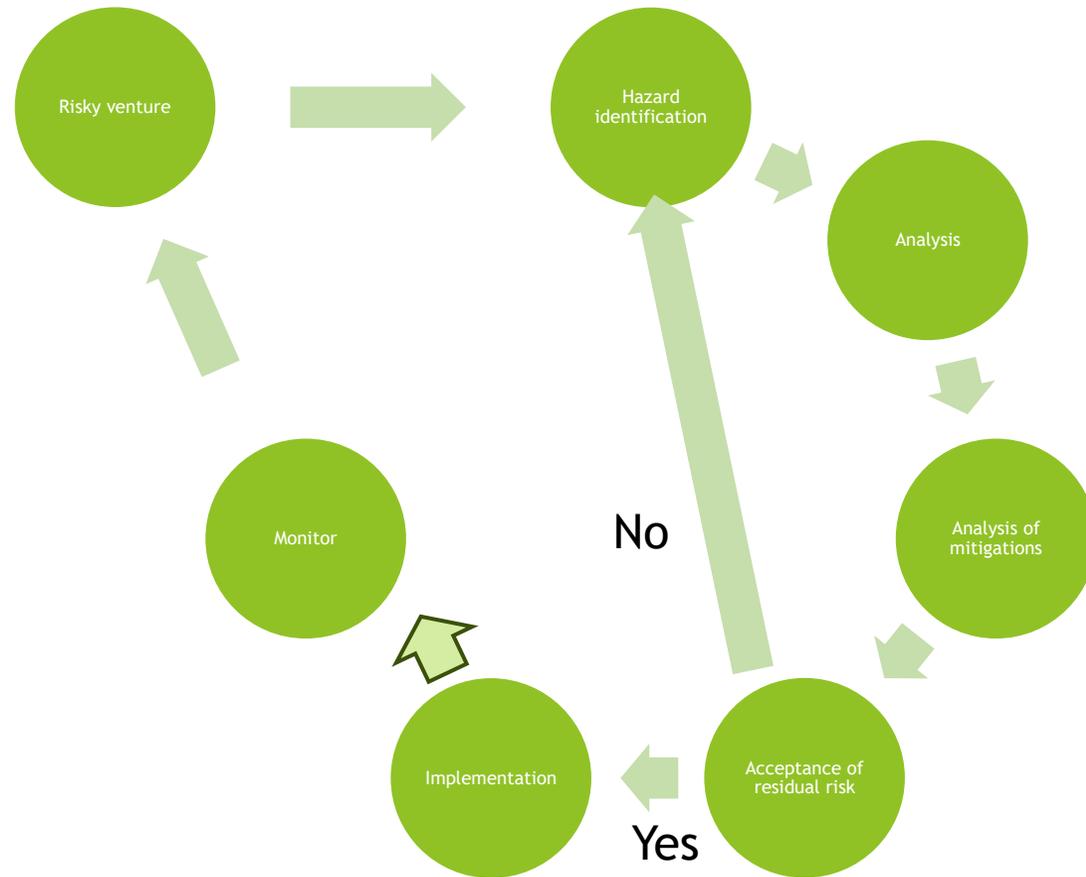
# Sociotechnical environment

- ▶ A System/software is a collaborative endeavour of groups of people to produce an outcome.
- ▶ Roles range from law makers to designers and coders and users
- ▶ Users are the ultimate recipient of the products.
- ▶ Users are human
  - ▶ Make mistakes
  - ▶ Limited in capacity
  - ▶ Lazy - try and find the easiest way to do something
  - ▶ Flexible
  - ▶ Subject to influence
  - ▶ Break rules
  - ▶ Easy to blame
- ▶ The best a human (when checked) can manage is an error rate of  $10^{-5}$ /hr

Users to die often NOT to blame



# Conceptual hazard analysis process cycle



## Risk Assessment Objective

- E - Eliminate
- R - Reduce
- I - Isolate
- C - Controls (processes)
- P - PPE
- D - Discipline

# Risk Assessment ->Opinion Engineering

- ▶ The hazards are often those with a very small likelihood of happening
  - ▶ Therefore, little or no statistical data
- ▶ The hazards are having to be guessed as the system did not exist before...no experience
- ▶ The hazards are latent and unknown
  
- ▶ This leads to 'experts' being asked what they think.
- ▶ There are formal identification methods
  - ▶ HAZOP, SHARD (an examination of data flows)
  - ▶ What if - sometimes called SWIFT
  - ▶ Day-in-the-life-of



# The trouble with complex systems & understanding

- ▶ Humans are not capable of deciphering complexity

- ▶ 3 types: Manson 2001

- ▶ Algorithmic

- ▶ difficult to create equations to describe

- ▶ Deterministic

- ▶ settle on a universal answer; where small changes lead to different outcome

- ▶ Aggregate

- ▶ understanding overall effect where behaviours emerge and coupling

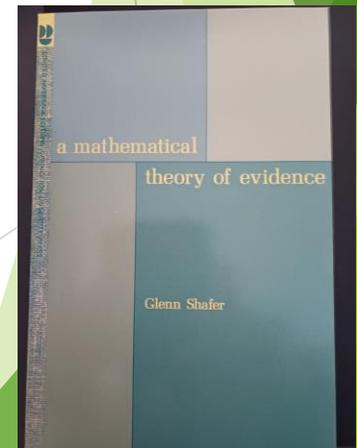


White to  
win in 73  
moves



# Opinions

- ▶ Humans are rubbish at estimating probabilities
- ▶ Instead answer a substitute question based on feelings, associations and heuristics Kahneman 2011
- ▶ A further concept to remember is what is known at the time is all the information to base any judgement on Kahneman 2011
  
- ▶ This leads to the concepts of likelihood, belief and plausibility as the basis for forming relationships of cause and effect in a risk assessment. Shafer 1976
- ▶ Therefore the ‘expert’ may well base the assessment on the strength of belief given a scenario is plausible. ... In other words: OPINION!
  - ▶ Value of opinion base on credibility, experience and background knowledge of person
  
- ▶ Therefore, completeness and accuracy are a problem!



# Hazop - issues

- ▶ A real concern is completeness
- ▶ A Hazop is designed to prompt participants to suggest hazards and causes through a series of keywords.
- ▶ A good session will get many suggestions.
  
- ▶ However, there is a problem with probability analysis
  - ▶ Mathematically probability is required to have 3 properties
    - ▶ Probabilities are to be between 0 and 1
    - ▶ The underlying model for each probability estimate is constant
    - ▶ All probabilities represent a unique event

Edwards 1992 & Pawitan 2001

# Hazop - consequence

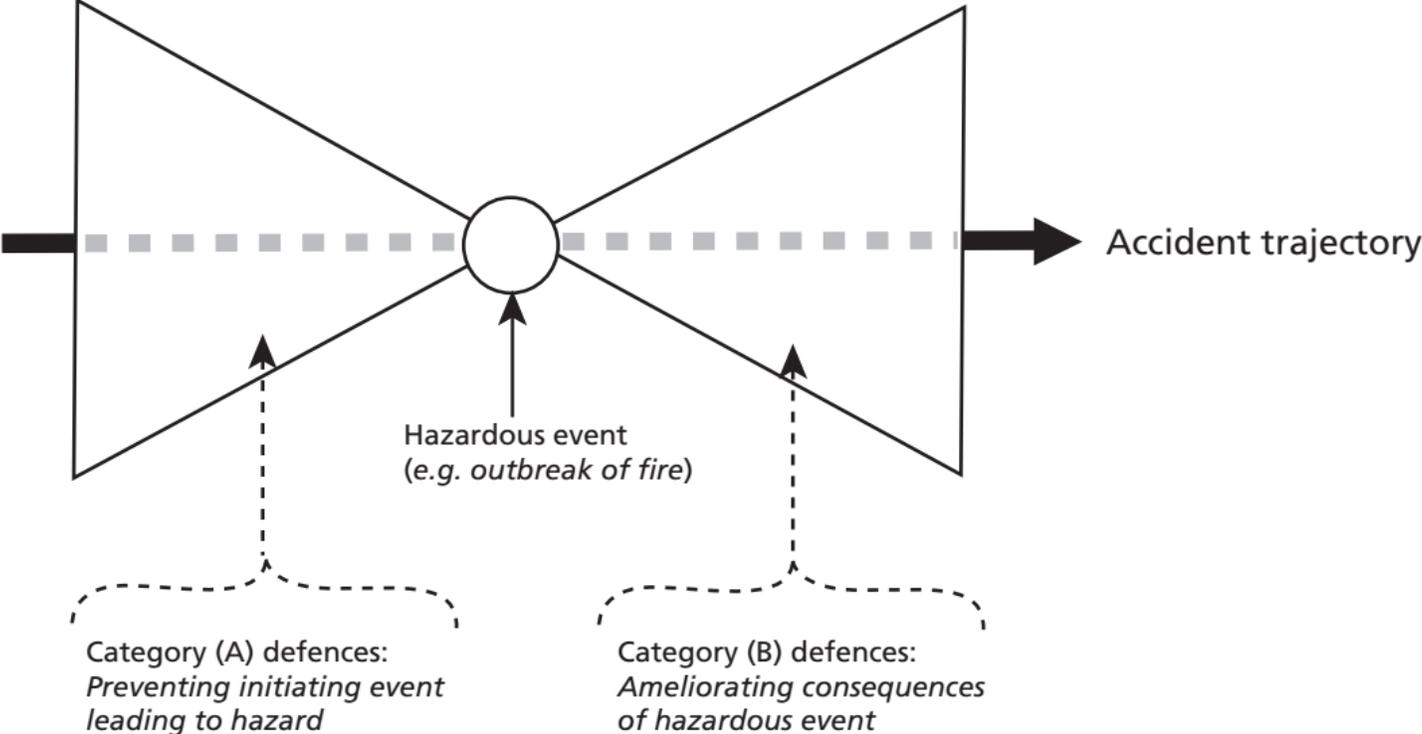
- ▶ Because Hazops are opinion based the events are highly likely to be polluted
  - ▶ ie 2 hazards partially describing the same thing in different words
- ▶ Consequently, for probability-based analyses (e.g. FTA) the total probability of the top event can exceed 1
  - ▶ Can lead to the whole analysis being called into question
- ▶ However, it's better to have this fault to deal with than miss a hazard which later turns out to be critical
- ▶ In essence it is more appropriate to refer to likelihood as a more flexible and suitable candidate as a basis of assessment.

# Many analysis methods

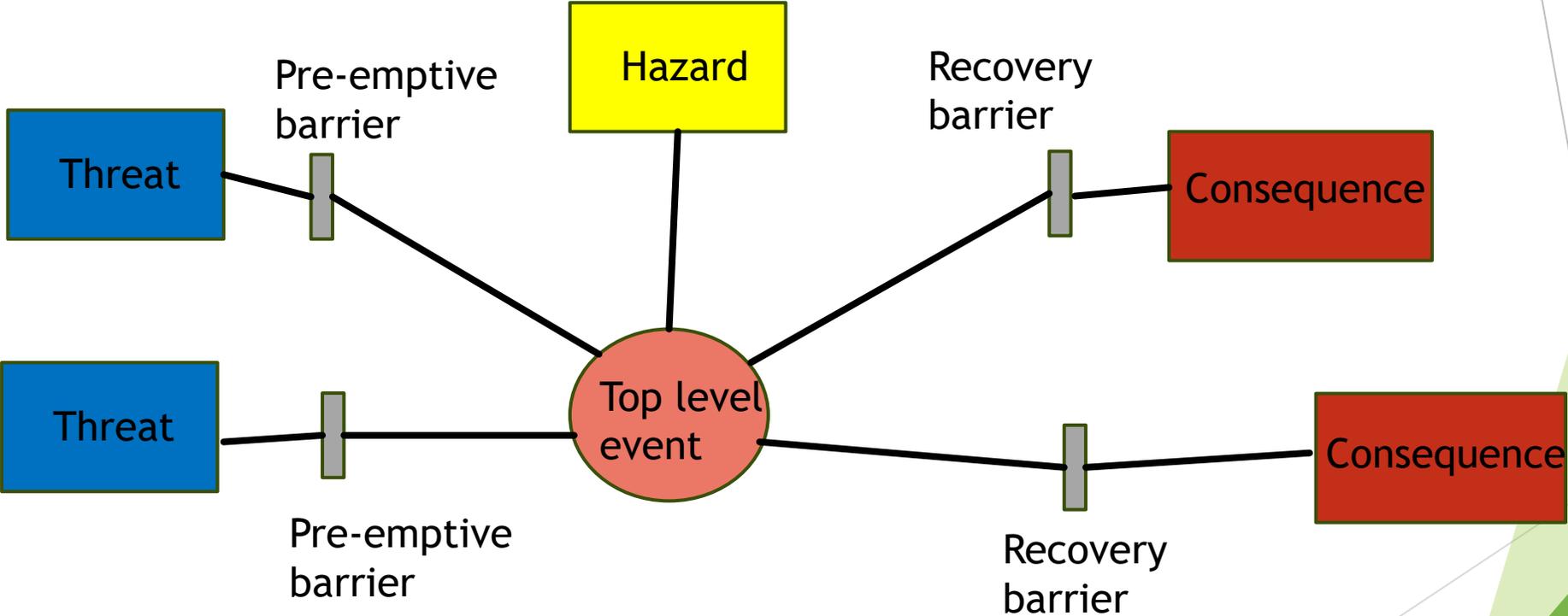
- ▶ FMEA & FMECA - Failure Modes and Effects Analysis (criticality)
- ▶ STAMP - System Theoretic Accident Model and Processes
- ▶ FRAM - Functional Resonance Analysis Method
- ▶ CAM - Composite Analysis Method
- ▶ Bow-tie
- ▶ FTA - Fault Tree Analysis
- ▶ ETA - Event Tree Analysis
- ▶ FFA - Functional Failure Analysis
- ▶ Bayesian networks - computationally complex with joint probability tables

Lots to choose from each has strengths and weaknesses

# Bow-tie

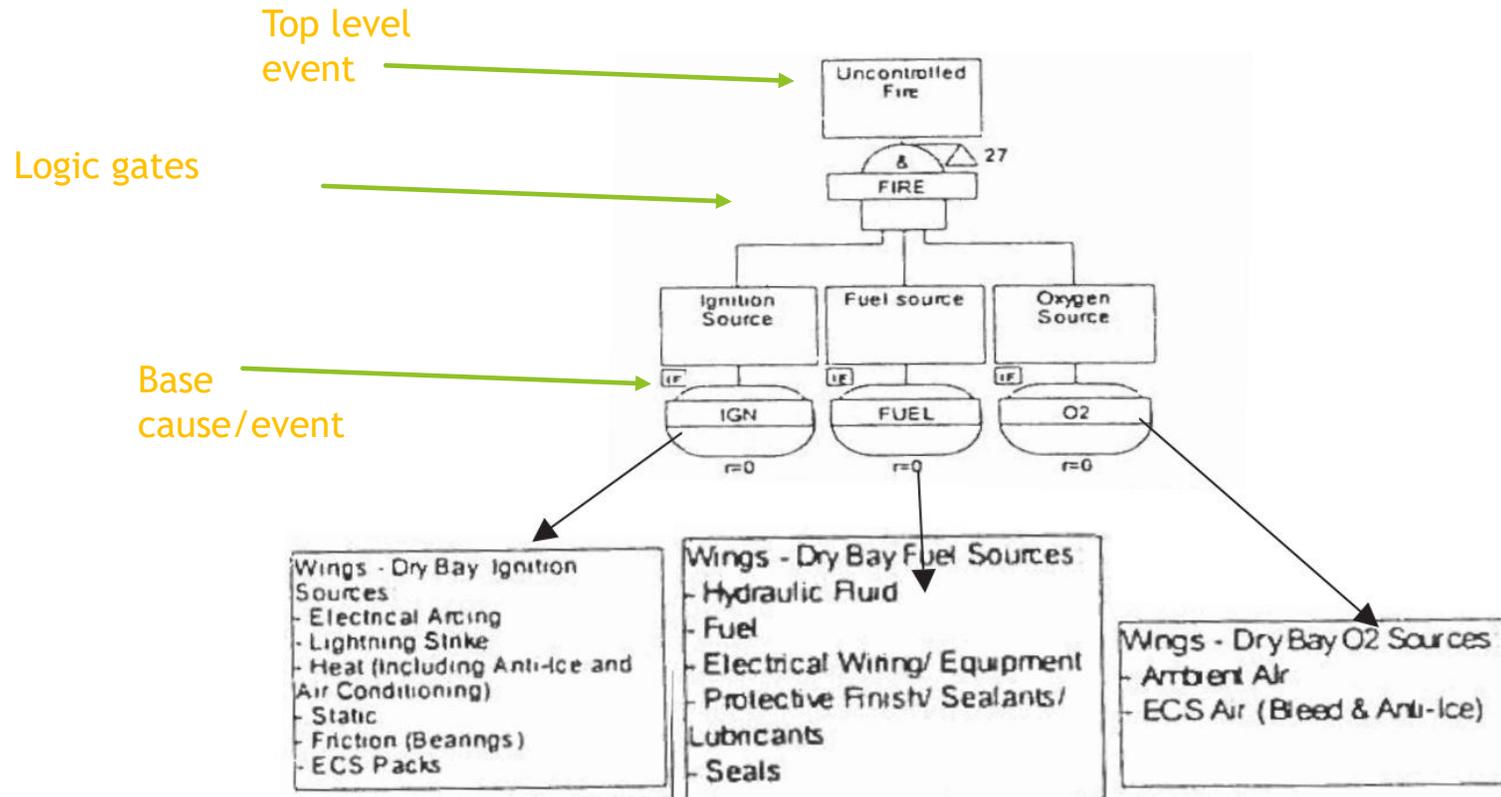


# Bow-tie details



Threat= cause of top level event      Top level event = Loss of control      recovery barrier= interrupt event  
Pre-emptive barrier= interrupt threat      Hazard = state

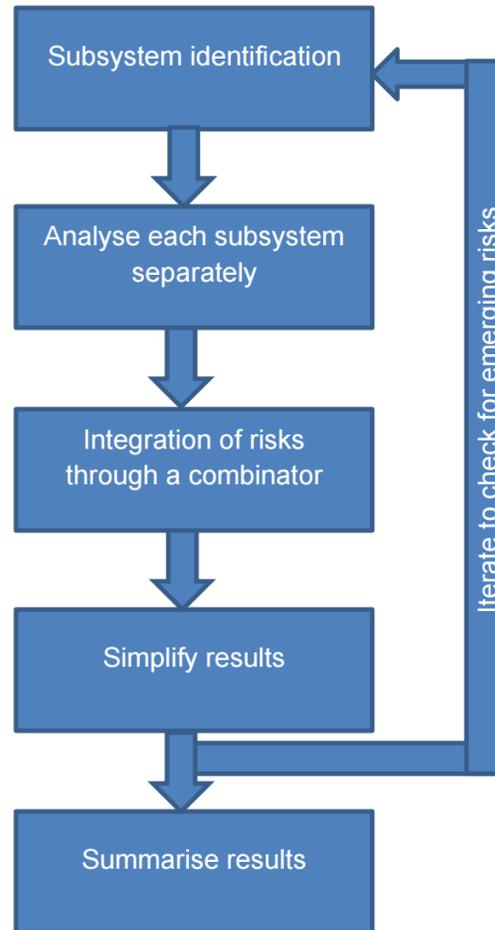
# Fault-tree analysis FTA



Beware of being too precise as there is normally uncertainty in the base events

# Analysis method - CAM

- ▶ Composite Assessment Method (CAM)
- ▶ Designed to analyse complex systems
- ▶ Allows the use of existing techniques and combines the results to an understandable output

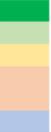


# FMEA - example

Ref	Item	Functional requirements	Potential failure type	Potential failure mode	Potential failure effects	Severity	Classification	Potential cause or mechanism of failure	Occurrence	Controls for prevention	Controls for detection	Detection	RPN	Comment	Adjust sys level 301	Adjust sys level 302
104	Material	Stable even surface	Failure during operation	Material washed away	Uneven surface And exposed meters  Tripping likely	4	S	Water flow downhill causing scouring	1m	Choice of material packing and containment	Inspection and surveys	5		Water and materials dependent	0	
105	Material	Solid surface	Failure during operation	Material does not support load	Uneven surface	2	S	Material too soft (sand) instead of rock based	1m	Choice of material design codes	Construction inspection and surveys	5		Materials dependent	0	
106	Buried service	Meter top to be flat with path	Failure during operation	Exposed meter head above ground level	Tripping hazard	3	C	Surrounding material not solid	<del>4m</del> 2wks	Design codes	Inspection and surveys	4		Meters need to be accessible which means the top has to meet the surface of the path. Detection is not so easy in the dark	1	

# Rationalised - CAM-C example

System level item  
 remove effective duplicates  
 eliminate terminators  
 remove links that do not affect system of interest  
 signify summary links



		Path breaks up	Material washed away	Material does not support load	Exposed meter head above ground level	Structural failure	No friction	Loss of grip	Fall off	Fail to stop	Bike skids away	Mechanical failure
		101	104	105	106	201	202 203	204	301	302	303	304 305
101	Path breaks up		2	2								
104	Material washed away											
105	Material does not support load											
106	Exposed meter head above ground level	3	3									
201	Structural failure											
202												
203	No friction											
204	Loss of grip											
301	Fall off	2	2	2	3	-10		2			2	2
302	Fail to stop									PD	2	
303	Bike skids away											
304												
305	Mechanical failure					2	2					

Barnatt 2021

			Culvert	Pipes	Ballast			
			101 102	103	104	105	201	202
Culvert								
101 102	Blocked							
103	Structural collapse							
104	Water leaks out of manholes					3		
Pipes								
105	Flow not enough							

Barnatt 2021

# Cause-consequence analysis - example

Ref	Title	Hazard	Cause	Description	Consequence scenario	Consequence description	Control	Evaluation type	Likelihood	Consequence	Risk
301-104 (R1)	Fall off	Unbalanced	Path material washed away	Heavy rain washes material away and leaves uneven surface	Rider loses balance and falls off	grazed leg	Path maintenance	Risk Estimation	Occasional	Marginal	Tolerable
301-105 (R2)	Fall off	Unbalanced	Path material not suitable	Path rutted	Rider loses balance and falls off	grazed leg	Path design	Risk Estimation	Occasional	Marginal	Tolerable
301-106 (R3)	Fall off	Unbalanced	Exposed meter head	Meter head is above path and is hit by bike wheel	Rider loses balance and falls off	Broken leg	Path design and maintenance	Risk Estimation	Probable	Major	Intolerable
301-204 (R4)	Fall off	Unbalanced	Loss of grip on tyres	Tyres lose grip on the surface	Rider loses balance and falls off	grazed leg	Experience	Risk Estimation	Rare	Marginal	Negligible

# Risk matrix - example

	Insignificant	Marginal	Major	Critical	Catastrophic
Frequent					
Probable			R3		
Occasional		R1, R2, R5, R7			
Rare		R4			
Improbable					
Highly Improbable			R6		

# Final remarks

- ▶ Software almost certainly has errors
- ▶ The effect on the outside world is what counts
- ▶ Defence in depth is essential to prevent software errors doing nasty things
- ▶ Humans are often pointed to as being at fault, but are they? They could be heroes!
- ▶ Assessment is difficult and often comes down to opinions
- ▶ There are many risk assessment methods each with strengths and weaknesses

▶ **Understanding the hazards and the resulting risks is critical**



Checklists are  
the enemy of  
understanding

Else there is  
no value in  
risk  
assessments

# Questions



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