

# Are distributed teams the new normal?

Agile Turkey Summit, Nov 2022

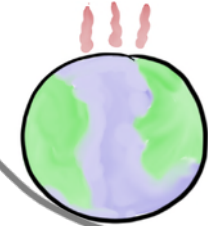
Change instigator



Consultant  
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@HenrikKniberg

Climate entrepreneur  
GoClimate.com



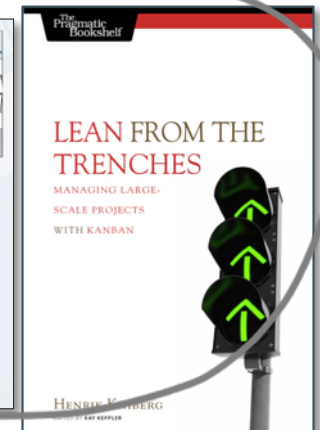
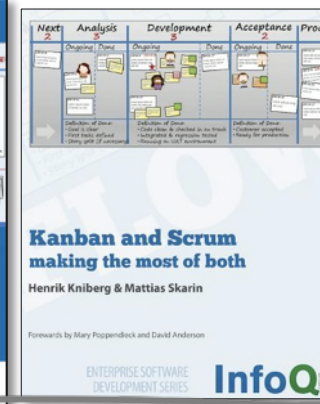
Dad



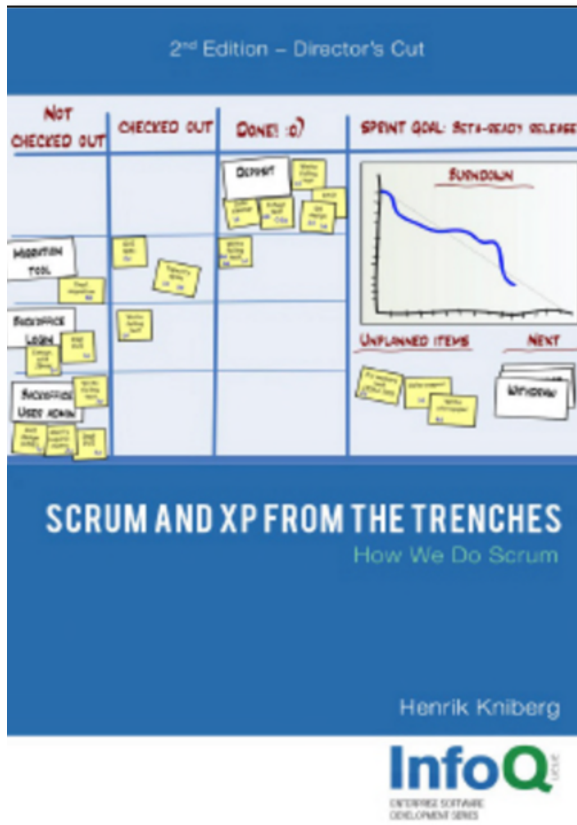
Coach, Designer, Developer



Author



Seat the team  
together (?)



Henrik Kniberg

HOW WE ARRANGE THE TEAM ROOM



Above: a daily scrum going on in the aforementioned corner.

Hmm... that burndown looks suspiciously nice and straight, doesn't it? But the team insists that it is real. :o)

The Evil Coach provides fake burn-down rulers. Very convenient for highly dysfunctional environments. :o)

<http://blog.crisp.se/2013/02/15/evil-coach/fake-burndown-ruler>

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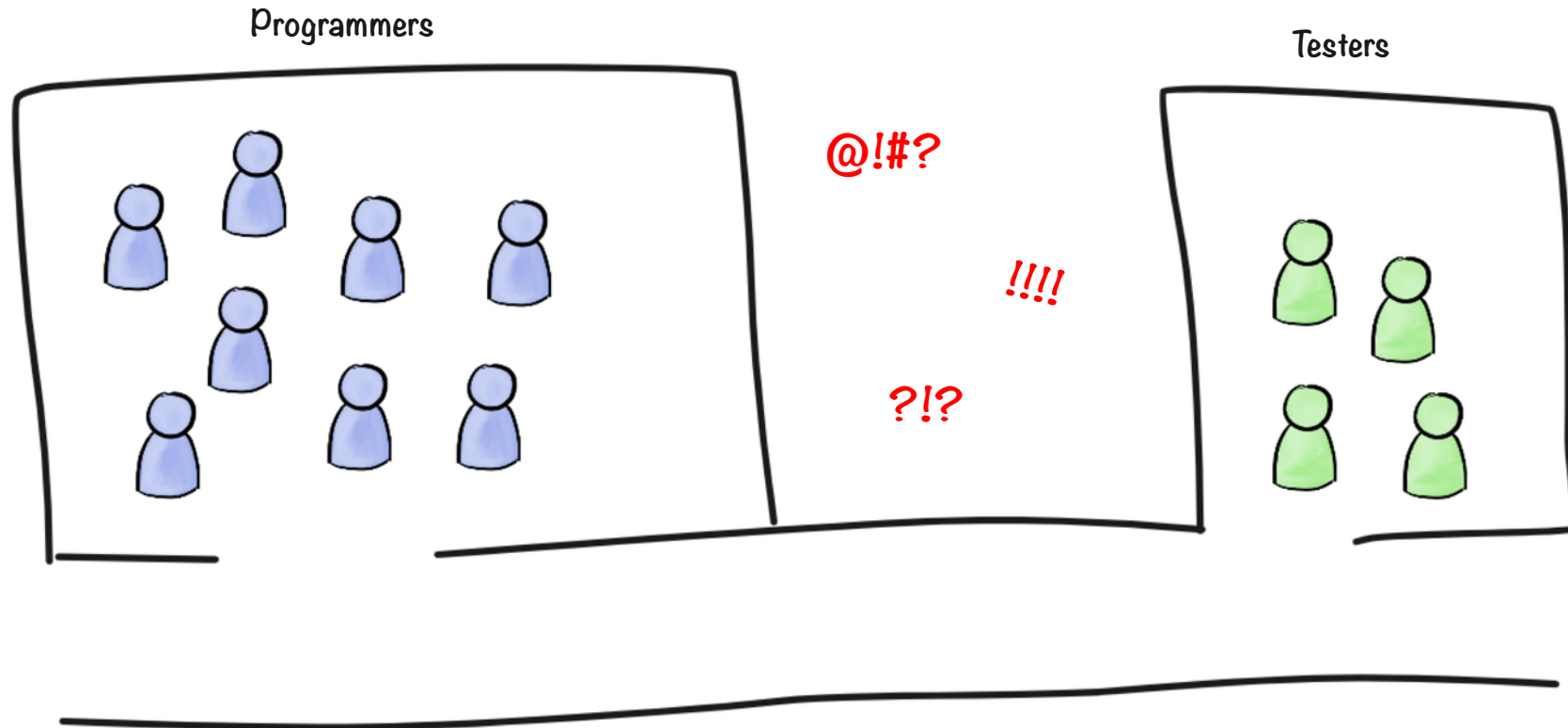
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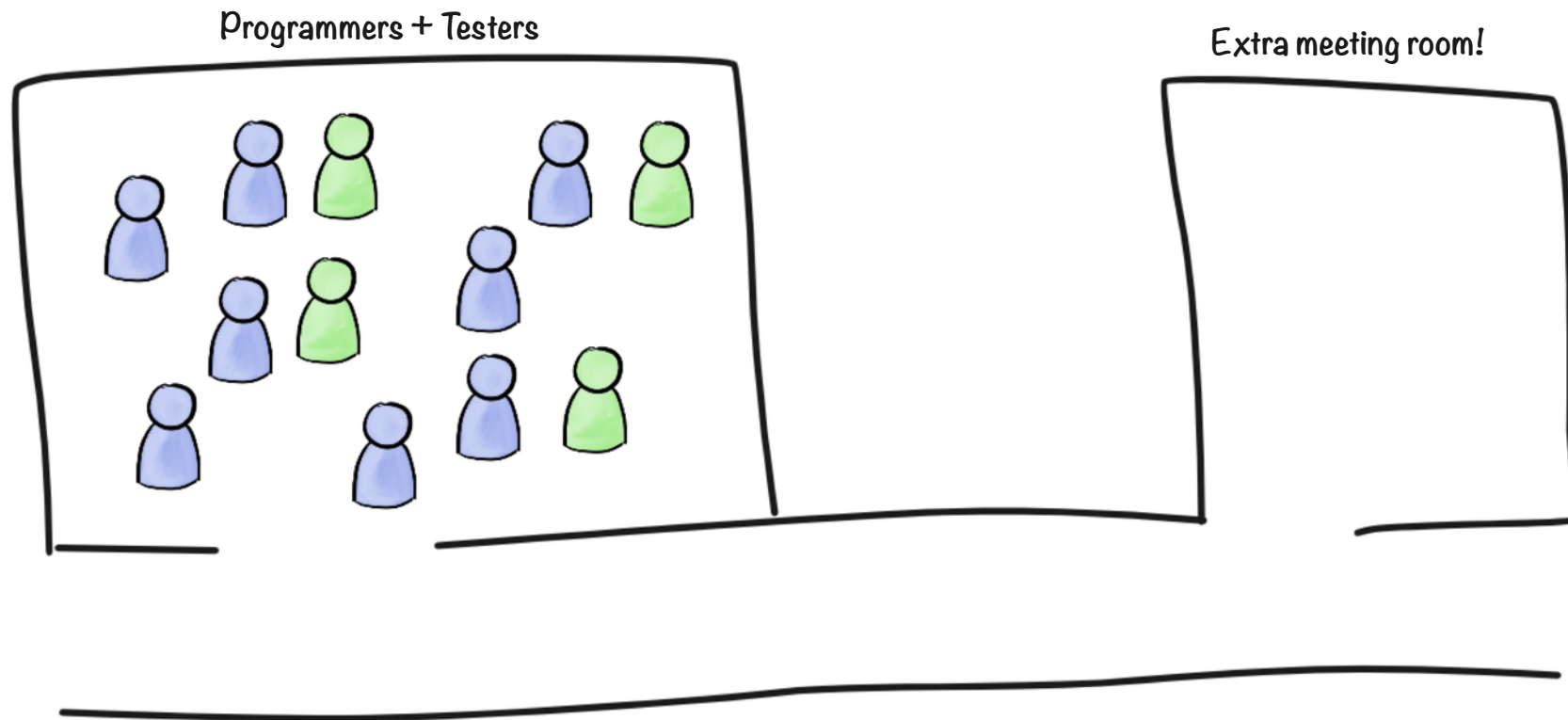
# Example - before



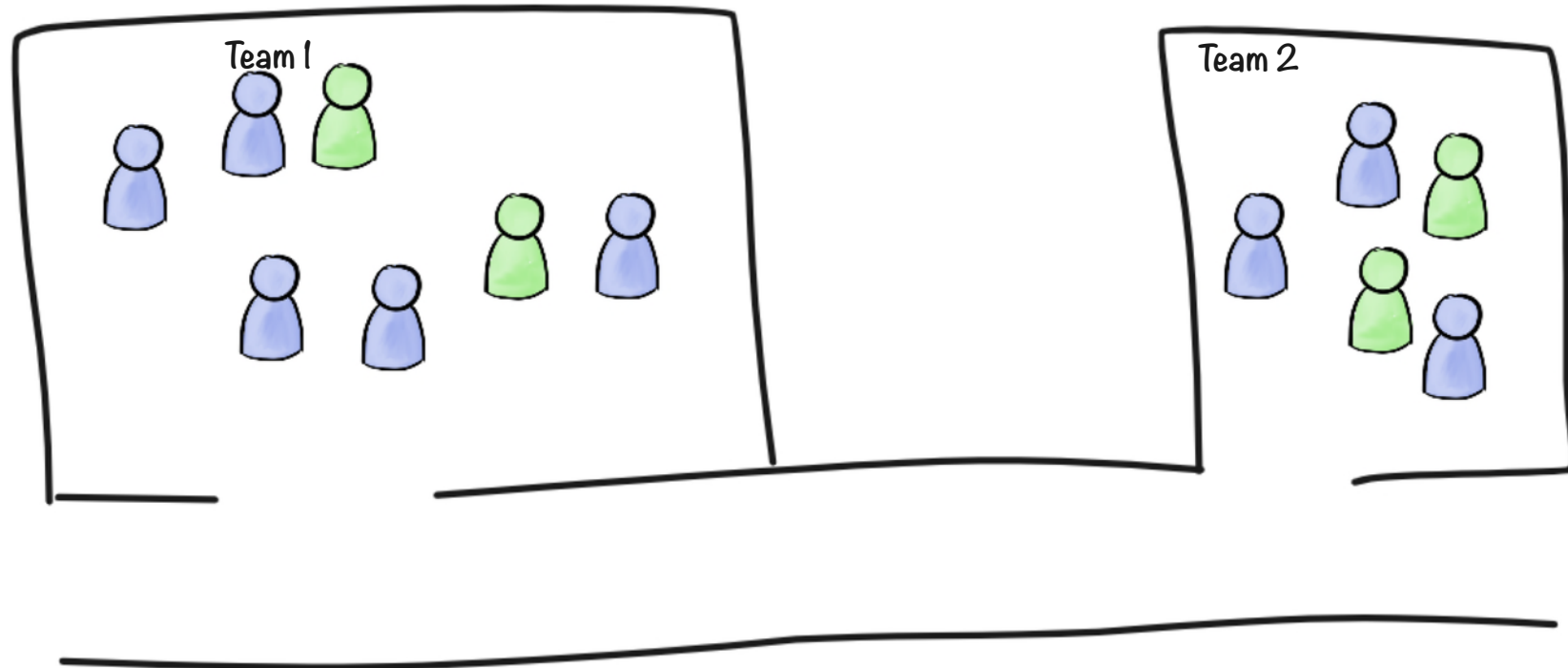


# Example - after

If "us" and "them" work together every day, then gradually "us" and "them" becomes just "us".



# Even better



# Cross-functional colocated team = Magic



But what if we  
**CAN'T** seat the  
team together?

# Distributed teams are not a new thing

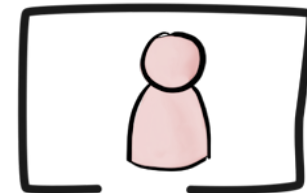
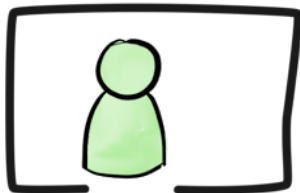
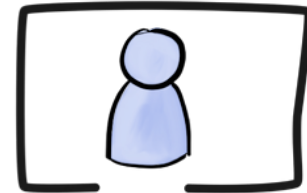
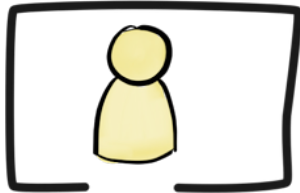




So... a pandemic came along...

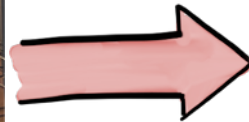


# Now what?



# What happens when the physical workspace moves?

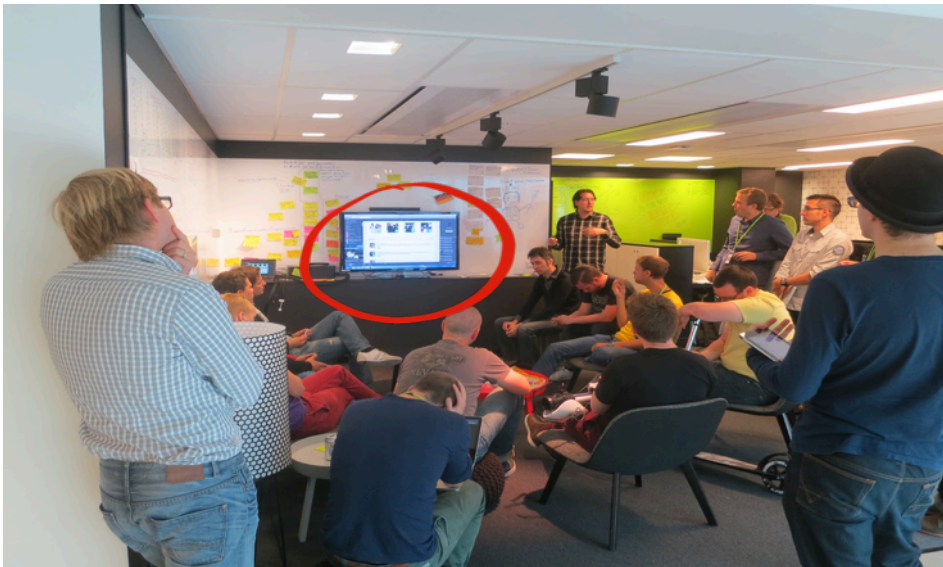
Office



Home

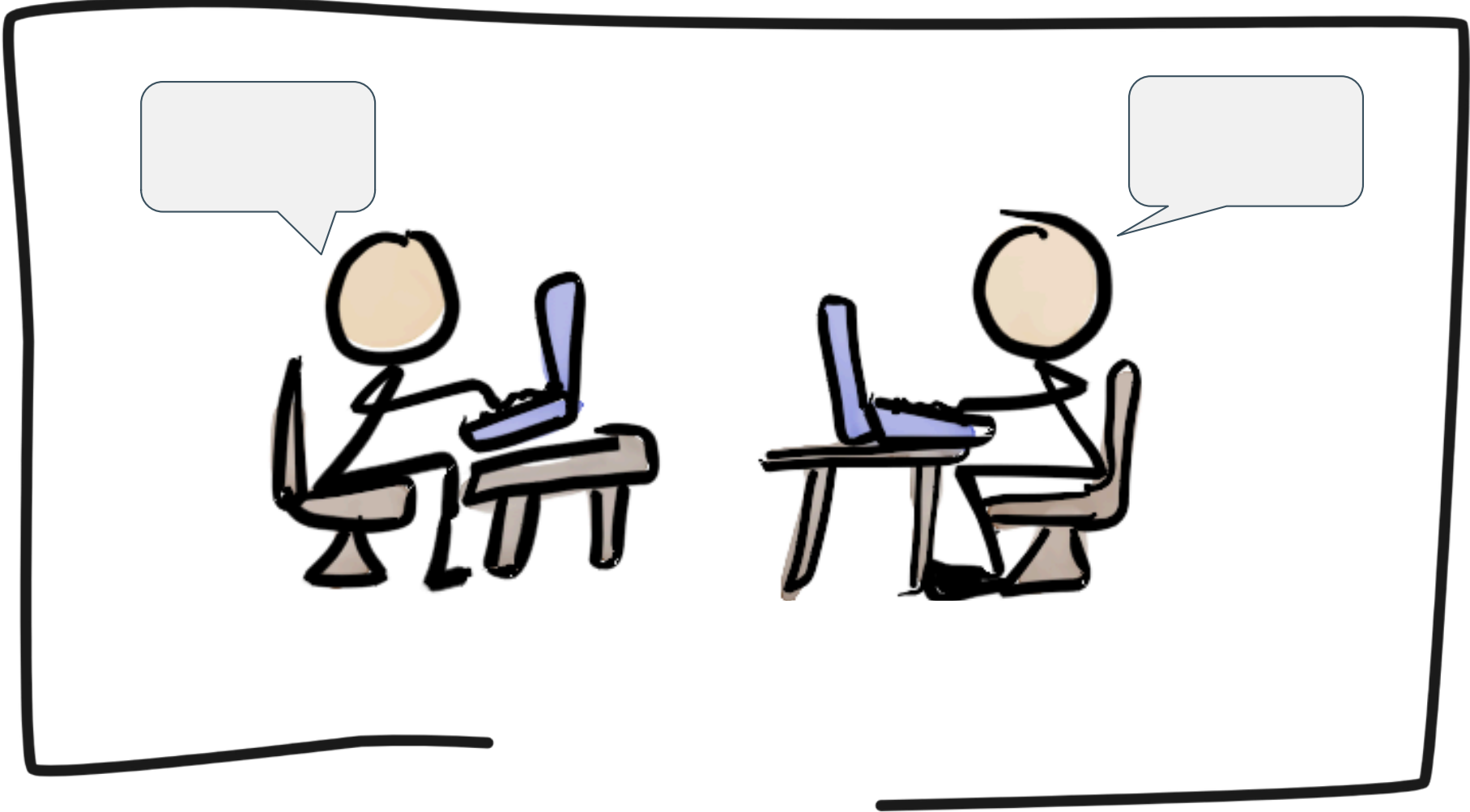


# What do these pictures have in common?



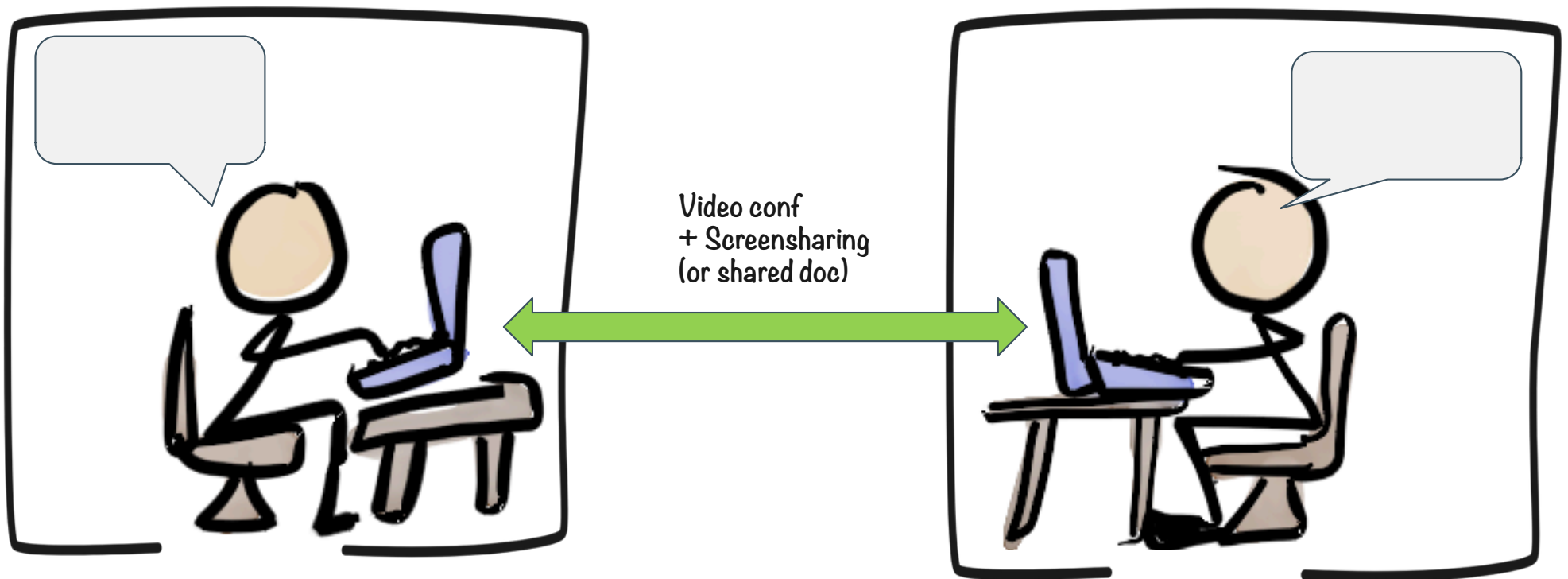


Screen work doesn't really require people to be in the same physical room

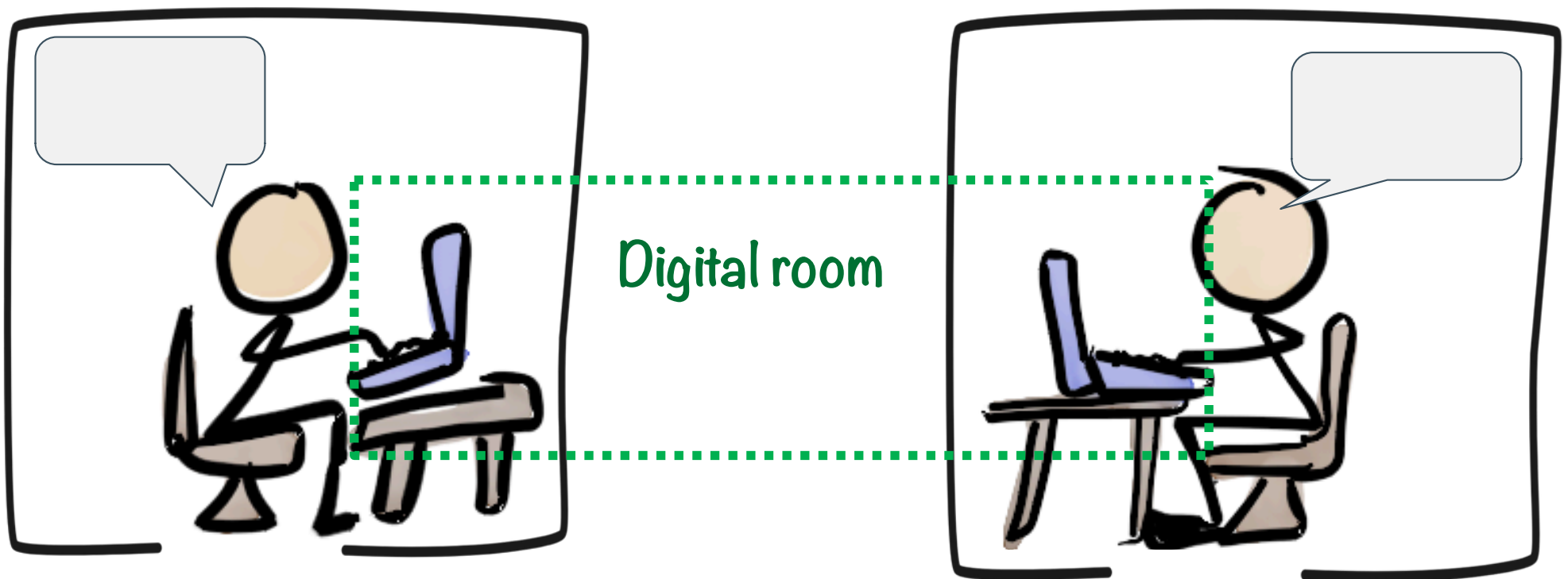




# Screen work doesn't really require people to be in the same physical room



# They kind of ARE in the same room!



A photograph of a brown corkboard with a white rectangular card pinned to it. The card is slightly tilted and has the words "Digital room" written on it in a bold, black, sans-serif font.

**Digital room**





# What is the Digital Room? Where is it?

Digital Room = a set of tools and digital workspaces that create the feeling of being in the same location and let us work together effectively.

## Common tools:

- **Miro** (boards, drawings)
- **Google drive** (docs, presentations)
- **Slack** (chat)
- **GitHub** (code)
- **Zoom** (video conf)

## Future:

- **VR? AR? Metaverse?**





Humans are capable of mentally teleporting to another dimension (even without VR...)

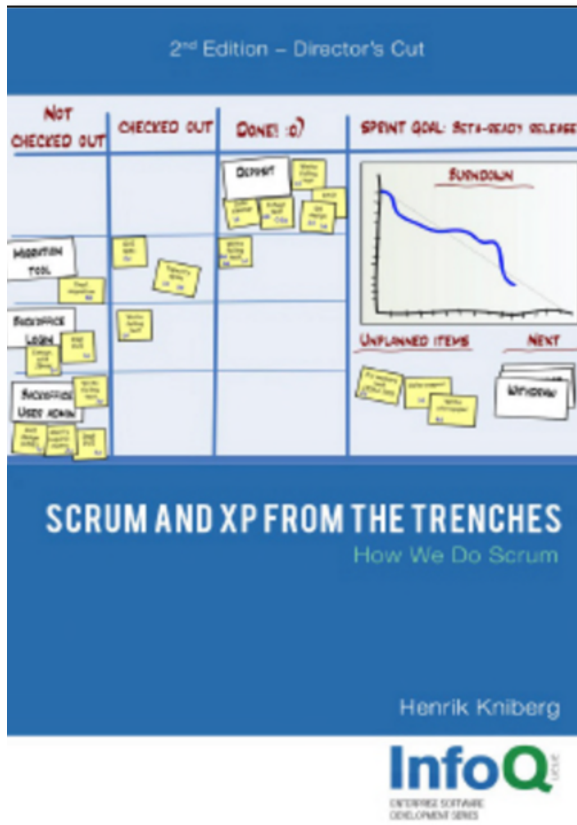


**Digitally colocated  
teams**

# There's nothing in the agile manifesto that requires people to actually be in the same physical room

- Our highest priority is to **satisfy the customer** through early and continuous delivery of valuable software.
  - **Welcome changing requirements**, even late in development. Agile processes harness change for the customer's competitive advantage.
  - **Deliver working software frequently**, from a couple of weeks to a couple of months, with a preference to the shorter timescale.
  - **Business people and developers must work together** daily throughout the project.
  - Build projects around **motivated individuals**. Give them the environment and support they need, and **trust** them to get the job done.
  - The most efficient and effective method of conveying information to and within a development team is **face-to-face conversation**.
- **Working software** is the primary measure of progress.
  - Agile processes promote **sustainable development**. The sponsors, developers, and users should be able to maintain a constant pace indefinitely.
  - Continuous attention to **technical excellence and good design** enhances agility.
  - **Simplicity**--the art of maximizing the amount of work not done--is essential.
  - The best architectures, requirements, and designs emerge from **self-organizing teams**.
  - At regular intervals, the team **reflects on how to become more effective**, then tunes and adjusts its behavior accordingly.





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Physically or Digitally!

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# Teams!

(physically or digitally)  
stable, small, cross-functional, self-organizing, co-located

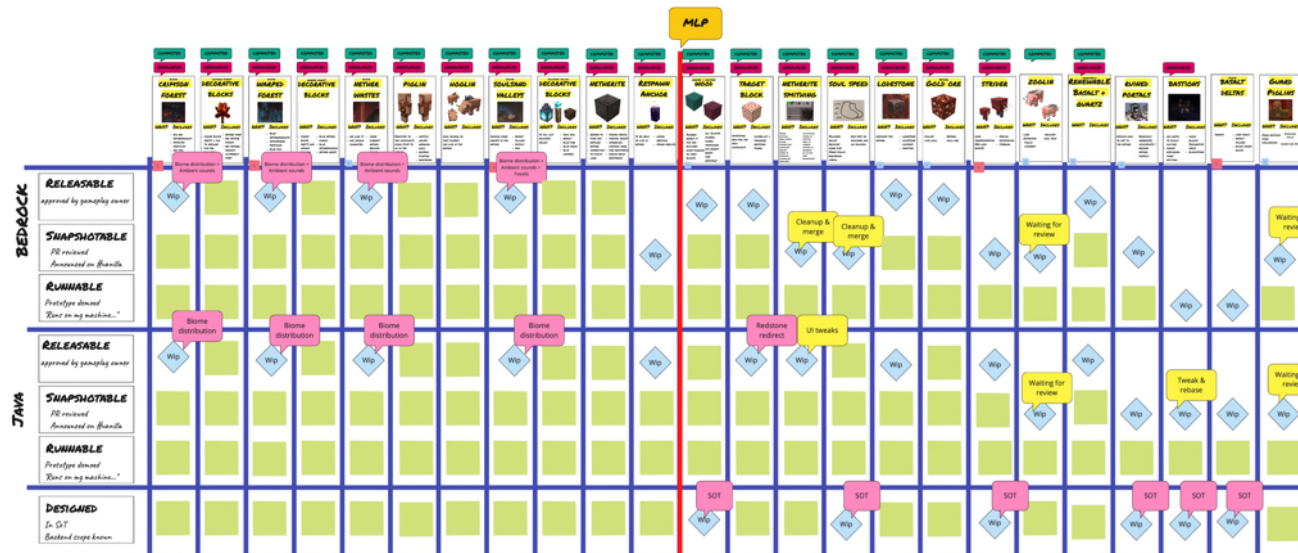




# What about those big wall boards and standups?

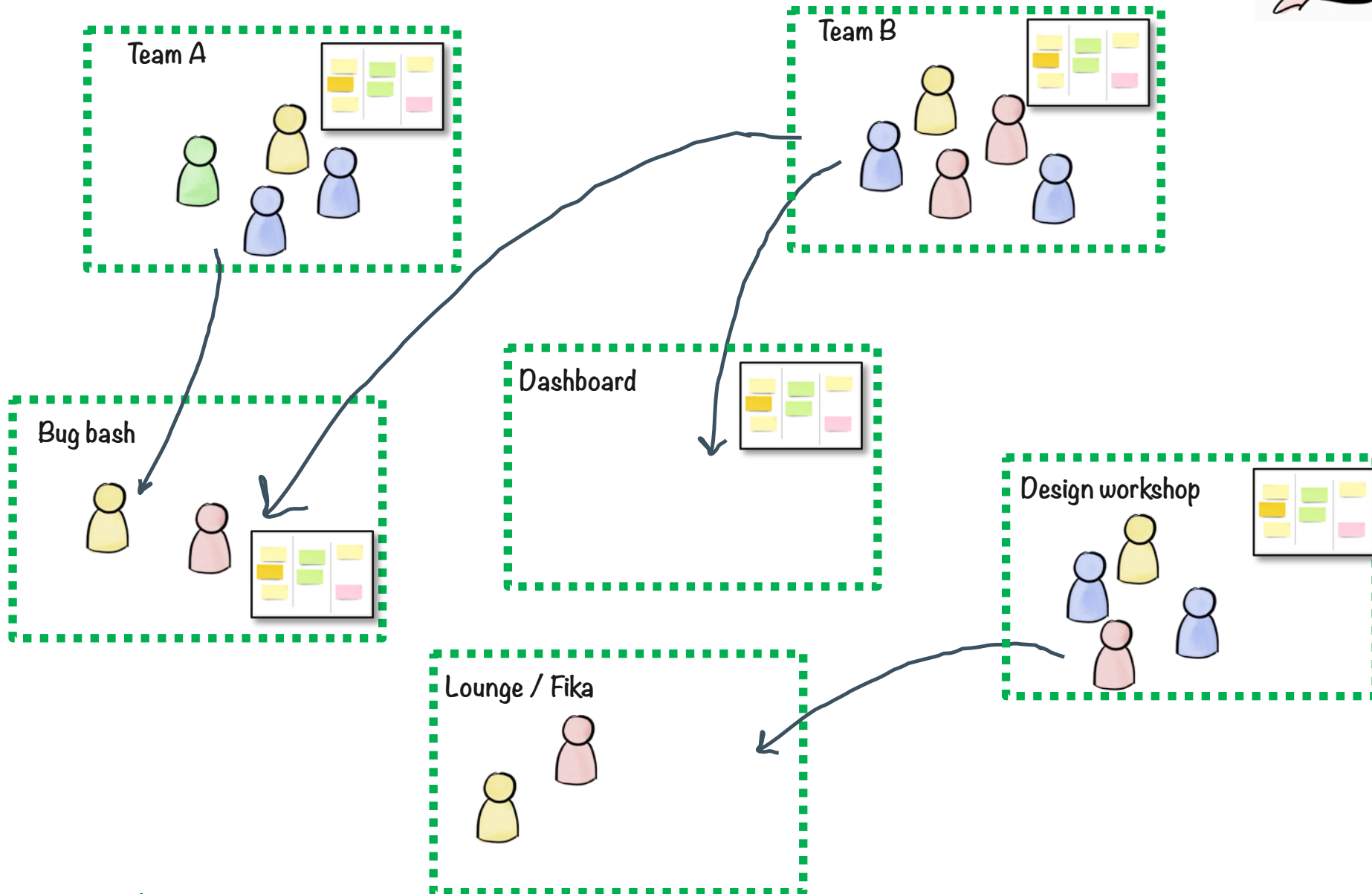


# Move everything to the digital room!



# Multiple digital rooms = Digital office!

And you can teleport!



**Transcending the  
physical office**



# Transcending the physical office



transcend

/trənˈsɛnd, trɑːnˈsɛnd/

verb

be or go beyond the range or limits of (a field of activity or conceptual sphere).

Similar: go beyond rise above cut across

- surpass (a person or achievement).  
"he doubts that he will ever transcend Shakespeare"



# Parallel communication during meetings

Feel free to add stickies here!

Questions

**QUESTIONS ?**

How do you reserve time for improvements?

What is the key to maintain an agile culture, making sure that people are willing to constantly adapt and improve?

Did you or did you hear anything about Art of Hosting during the process of "the Spotify model"?

<https://artofhosting.org/>

What's the most horrific story you've heard from the Spotify model being implemented (or misunderstood)?

Do you think we really need a model at all? What's the lure with models that keep us wanting one?

Can we get a deeper dive re: team of teams?

Impact of Spotify Model on hiring processes?

Could you elaborate around the role of the agile coach - in the beginning it was ScrumMobi, but then agile coach (its cover image) - is a "teaching" or more "developing common principles" (like when you say standardization)?

The biggest challenge I see at places "implementing the Spotify model" is to artificially creating chapters and "lead position" without knowing what to build (aka, which product teams to create). Can that be prevented?

More resources for case studies?

Ways of working. What approach do you recommend organizations use to experiment and share ways of working?

HAS BEEN ANSWERED ... QUESTION: Here, how would you respond to the notion that the Spotify culture (model) is NOT per se (in every case) superior as its value proposition must be put into the context/purpose of the business - it supports? Simply speaking: not every business is served best with the Spotify model!

When you work with other businesses - what does your approximate problem solving process look like?

How do you make leaders understand that they can't copy / buy a model but have to develop their own via hard work & change?

Did you consider a scaled model (SAFe, SaaS etc) and why/why not?

How to achieve "loosely coupled, tightly aligned teams" in a "roundabout" system, not controlled by PMs or other "managers"?

How do you do strategic planning in this way when you need some predictability but there are a lot of unknowns?

It is kind of easy to backwards engineer the Spotify ideas and principles to theories about flow and complexity, i.e. decentralized decision making psychological safety, empirical process etc but did this ("Spotify model") come natural to you or did you base your experiments with that "science" in mind?

Lots have changed since this model came out. How would you do it now, especially with distributed teams and in remote-working era? Is there a new model coming out?

What tool did you use to create your videos?

Would you still recommend using "frames" (agile) if yes, with any caveat?

How did Spotify manage the budgeting/ financial processes? One organisation I was coaching felt that finance was a huge blocker.

Should orgs always make their own version of models they adopt? Are there downsides, risks?

How do you keep up with new hires when so much thought was put in way of working by the old guard? How do you scale way of working thinking?

Are the words "squads", etc a bit dated today? We are introducing them now, and I get an "also ran" vibe.

What do you think about the unFIX model?

There's a lot of reference to the Spotify model and the improvements unFIX make.

Jurgen Appelo  
Let's Unfix the Spotify Model - unFIX  
<https://unfix.work/blog/lets-unfix-spotify>

How do we help manage/support the human brains that prefer certainty?

How did the teams manage the competing with other teams while attempting to solve the same problem? What was the point of view around duplication of work?

Let's Unfix the Spotify Model - unFIX

# Passive participation

Normally considered to be bad

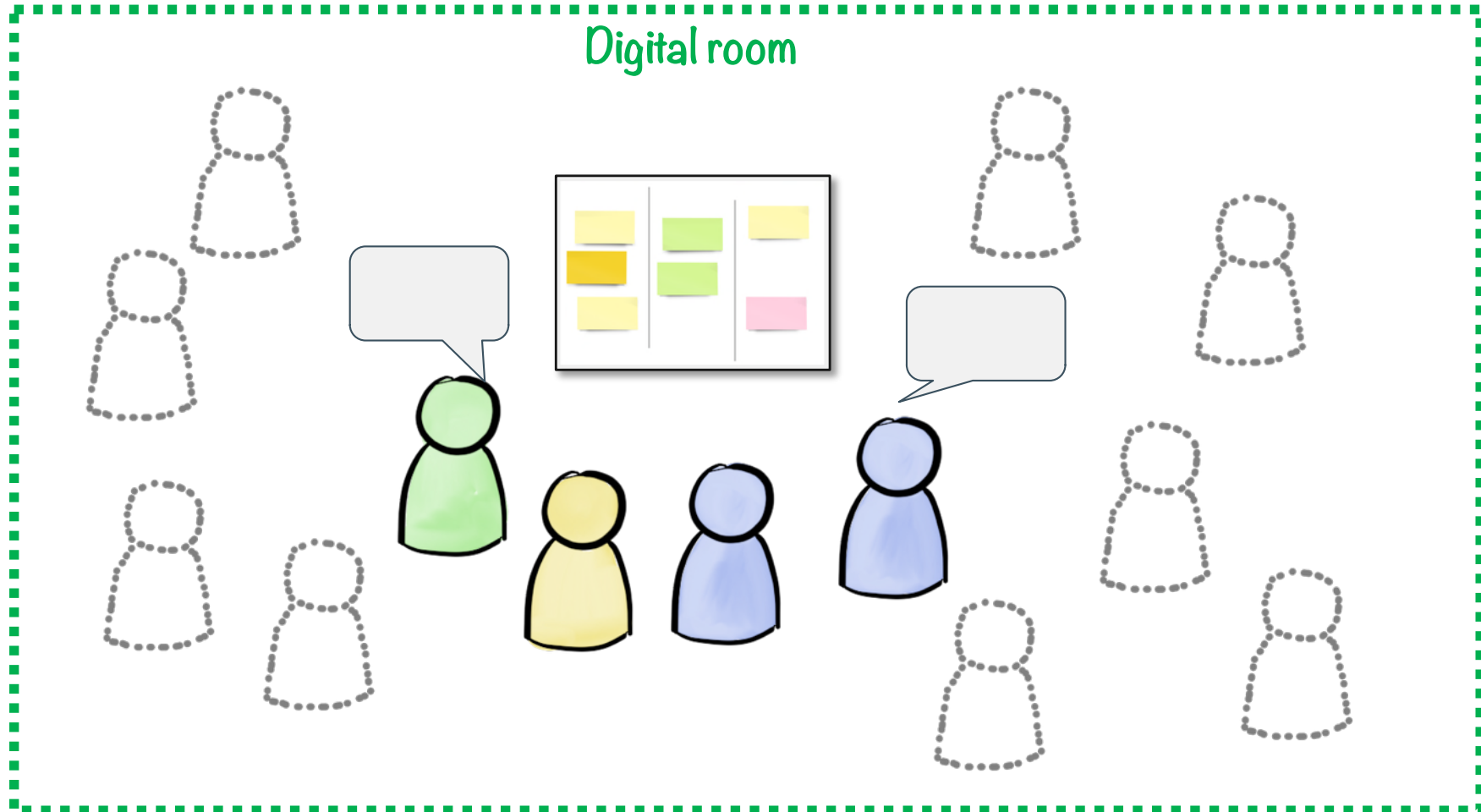


You can be invisible!



# Passive participation ("spectator mode")

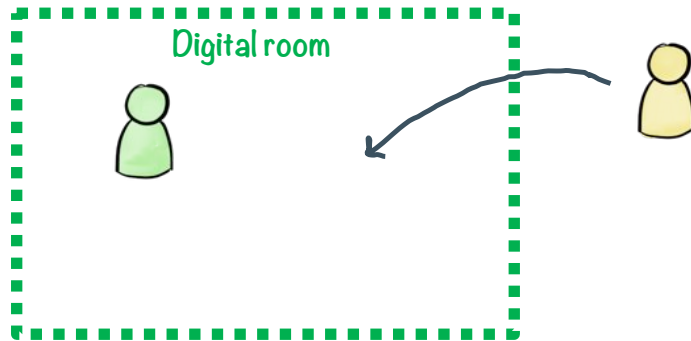
Can be great!





# Temporary digital rooms

You can conjure new rooms!



Opens up for informal communication!  
Chit Chat! Gossip! That's how we humans bond!



**Henrik Kniberg** 8:27 AM

Hey folks I'll be working on the feature X today, [in this room](#), doing some prototyping. Feel free to hop in if you want to help out, or maybe just curious.



**Henrik Kniberg** 11:40 AM

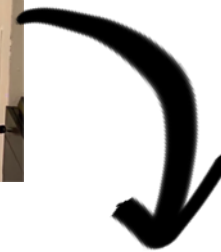
Good morning! I'm working on the performance problem today, [in this room](#). Any help is welcome!



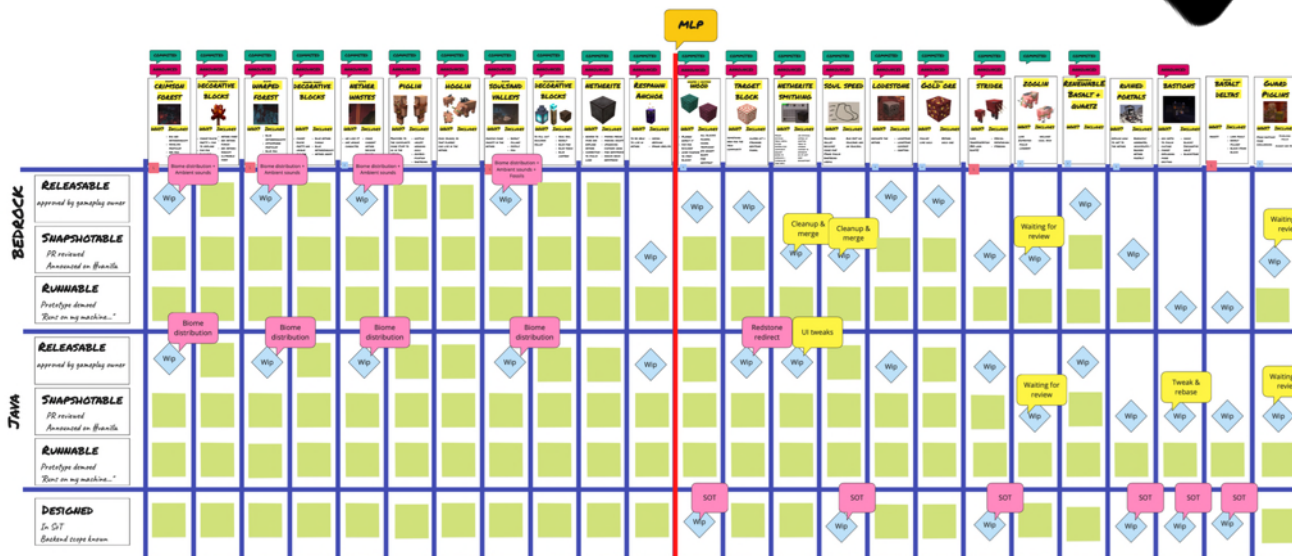
**Henrik Kniberg** 2:52 PM

Lisa and I will be in [this room](#) during most of today, making a preliminary plan for next release, prepping for next week's workshop. Welcome to join if you are interested.

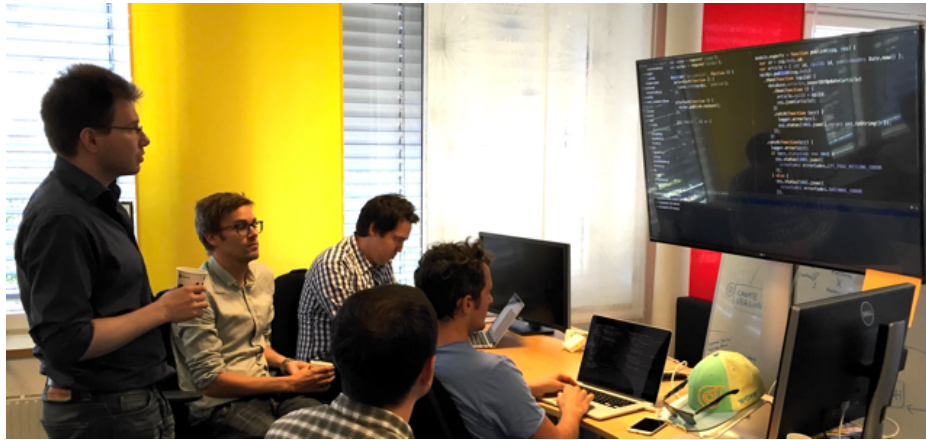
# Transcending the limits of physical boards



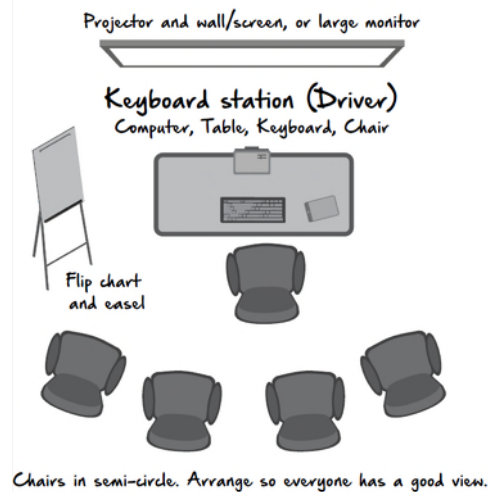
- No bad handwriting
- Not limited by physical materials
- Notes can be edited in parallel
- Easily rearrange columns/rows on the board
- People don't block each other's view
- Unlimited participants (well, almost)
- Anyone can zoom in or pan around
- No need to negotiate for wall space in the office
- Anyone can attend from anywhere
- Easy to keep backups and history



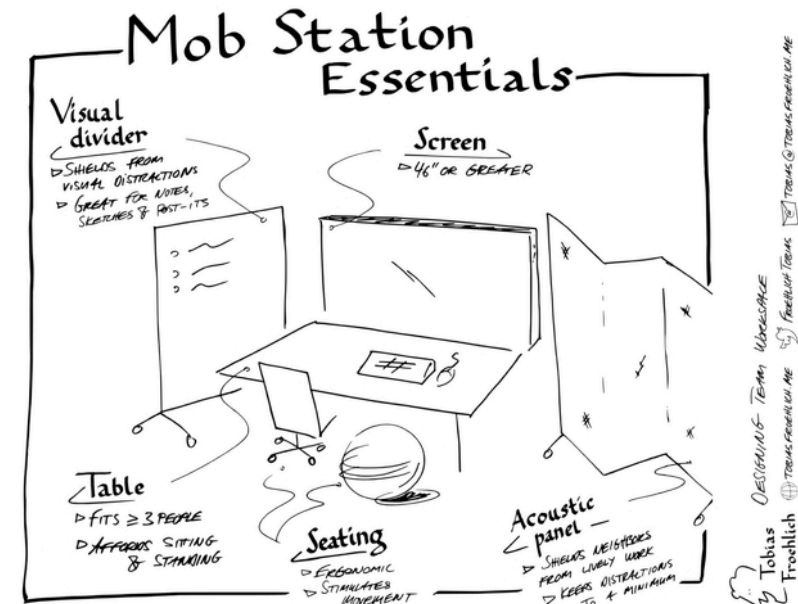
# Mob programming: Easier setup when distributed



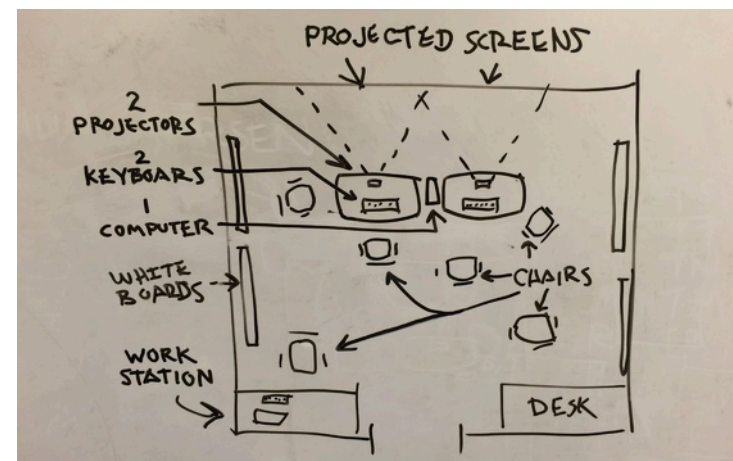
Basic Mob Programming Workspace Setup



<https://blog.altabel.com/2018/10/23/what-is-mob-programming/>

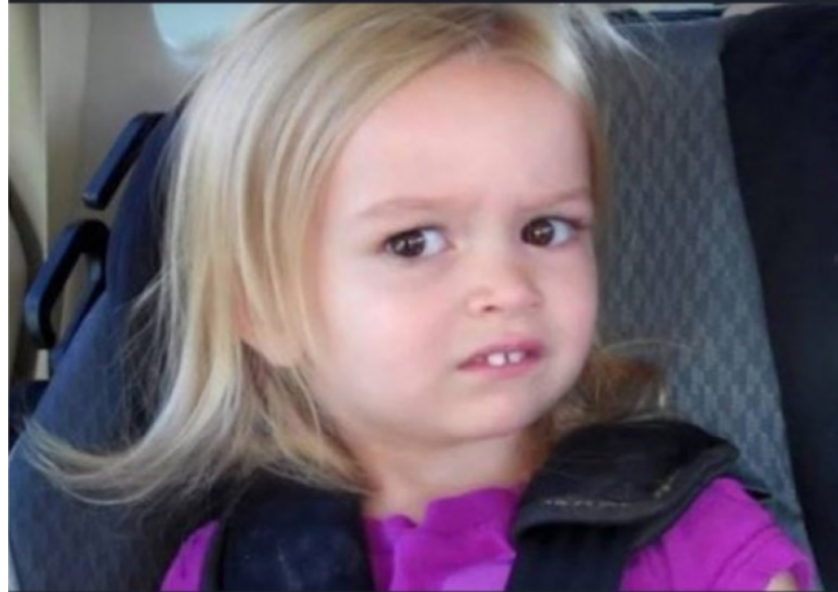


<https://medium.com/@tobias.j.froehlich/how-to-setup-your-mob-programming-station-6aec86fc5604>



<https://www.agilealliance.org/resources/experience-reports/mob-programming-agile2014>

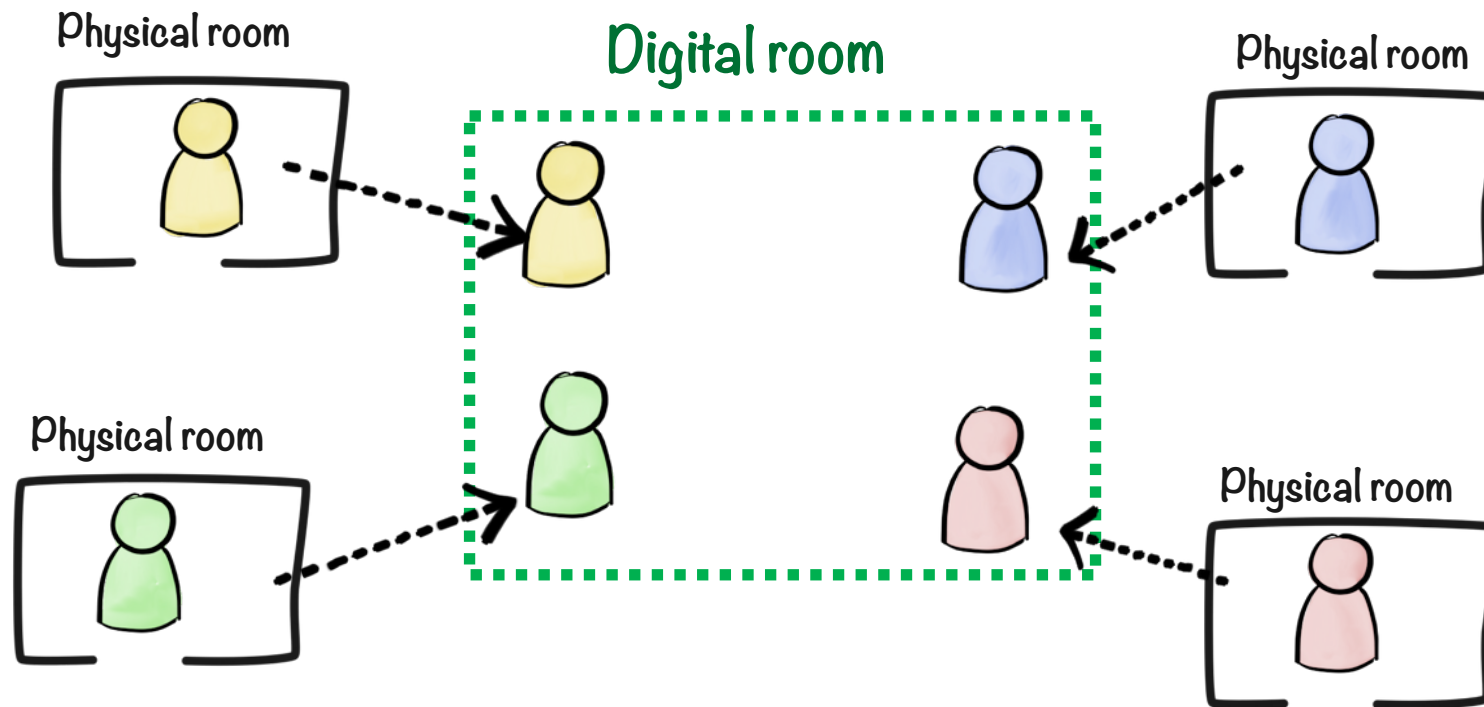
**SO....WHAT'S THE CATCH?**





**The physical room  
still matters**

# Your work environment is only as good as your physical room and digital room together

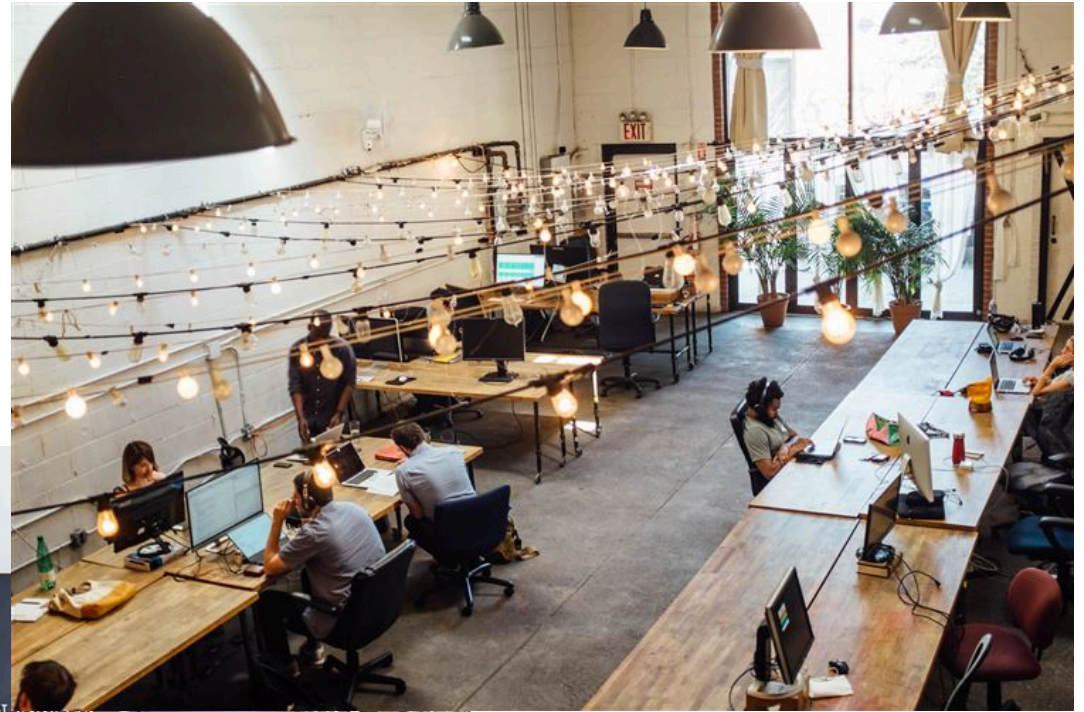


# Working from home isn't the same for everyone



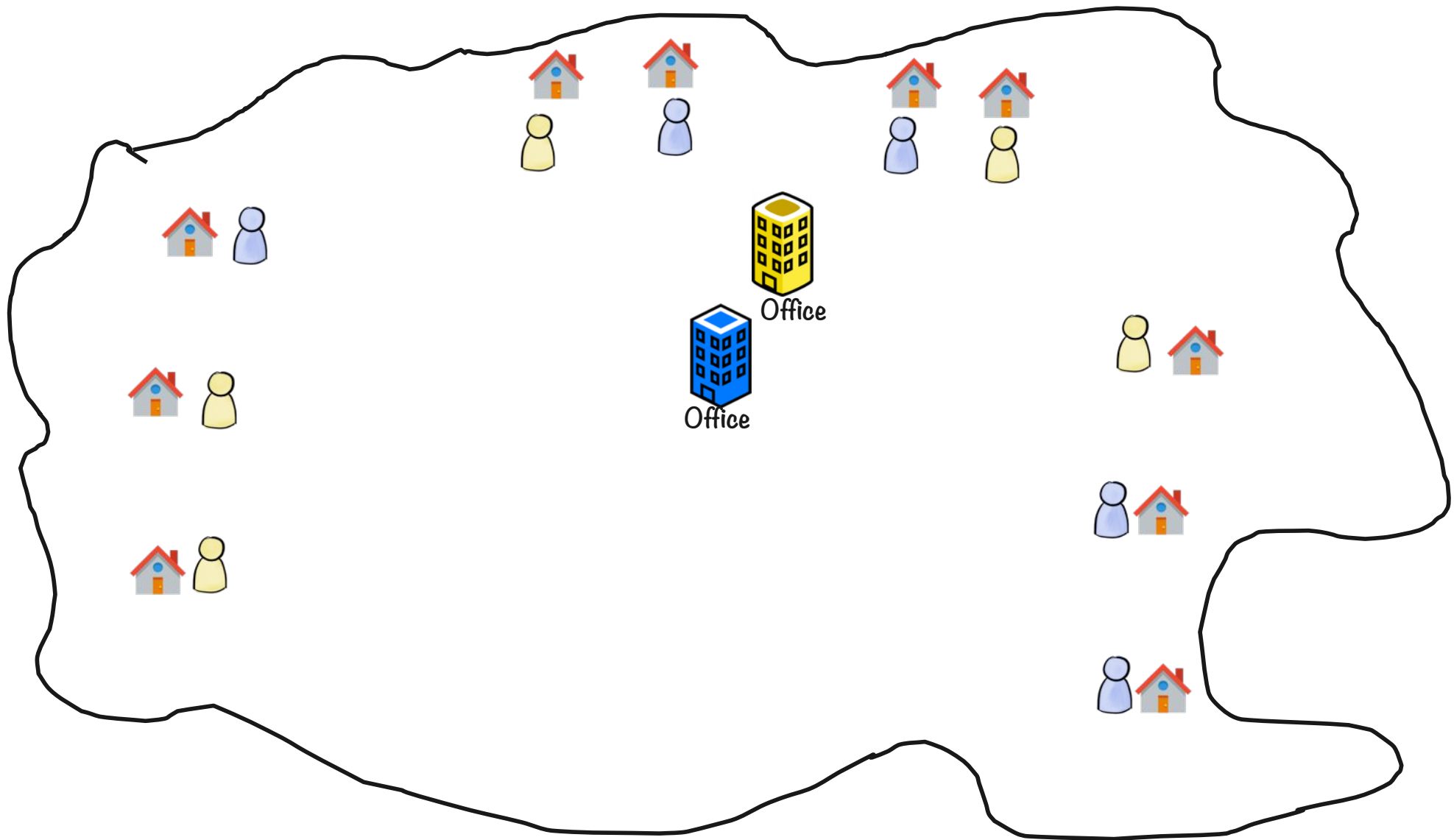


# Trend: coworking spaces

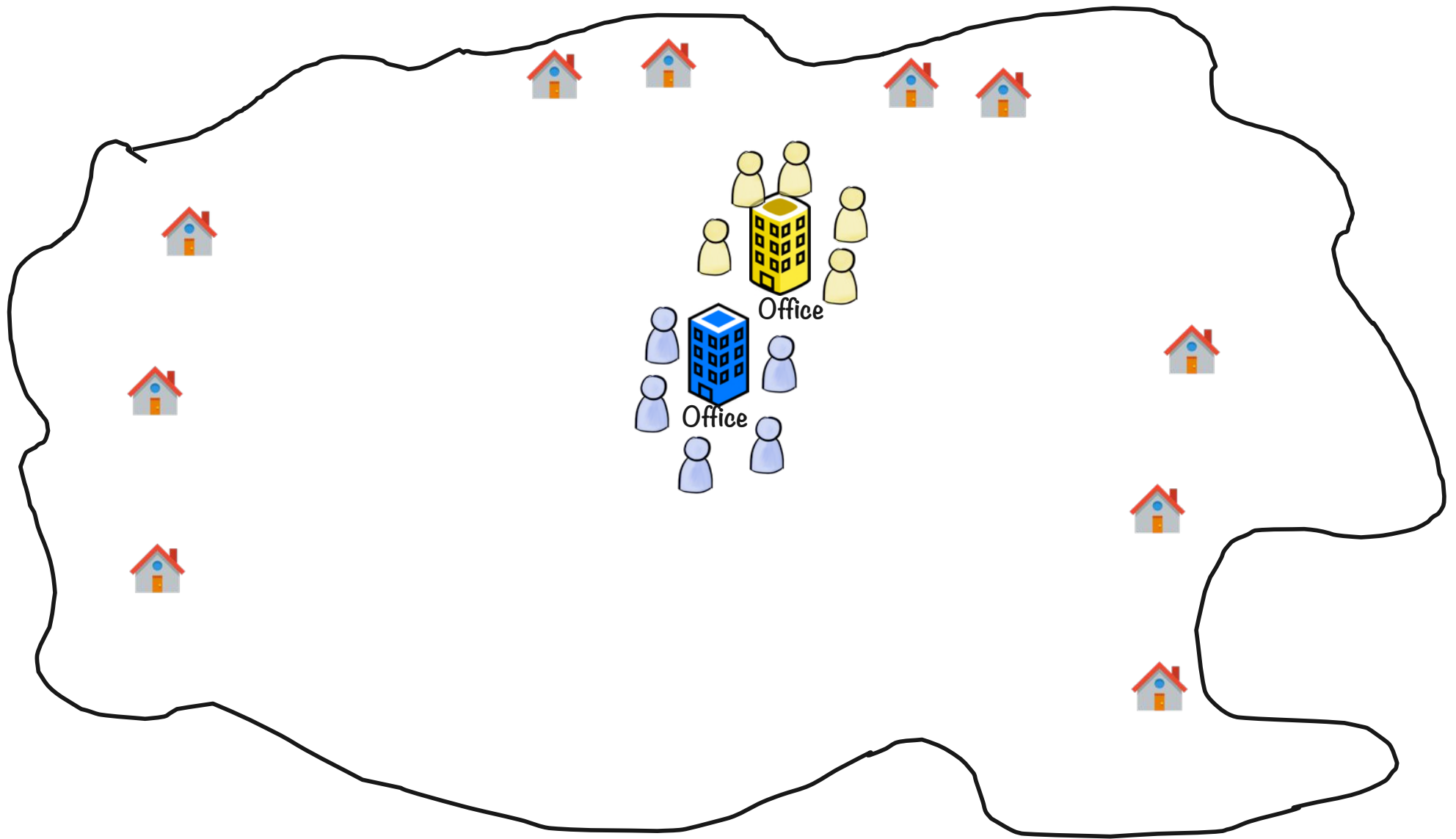




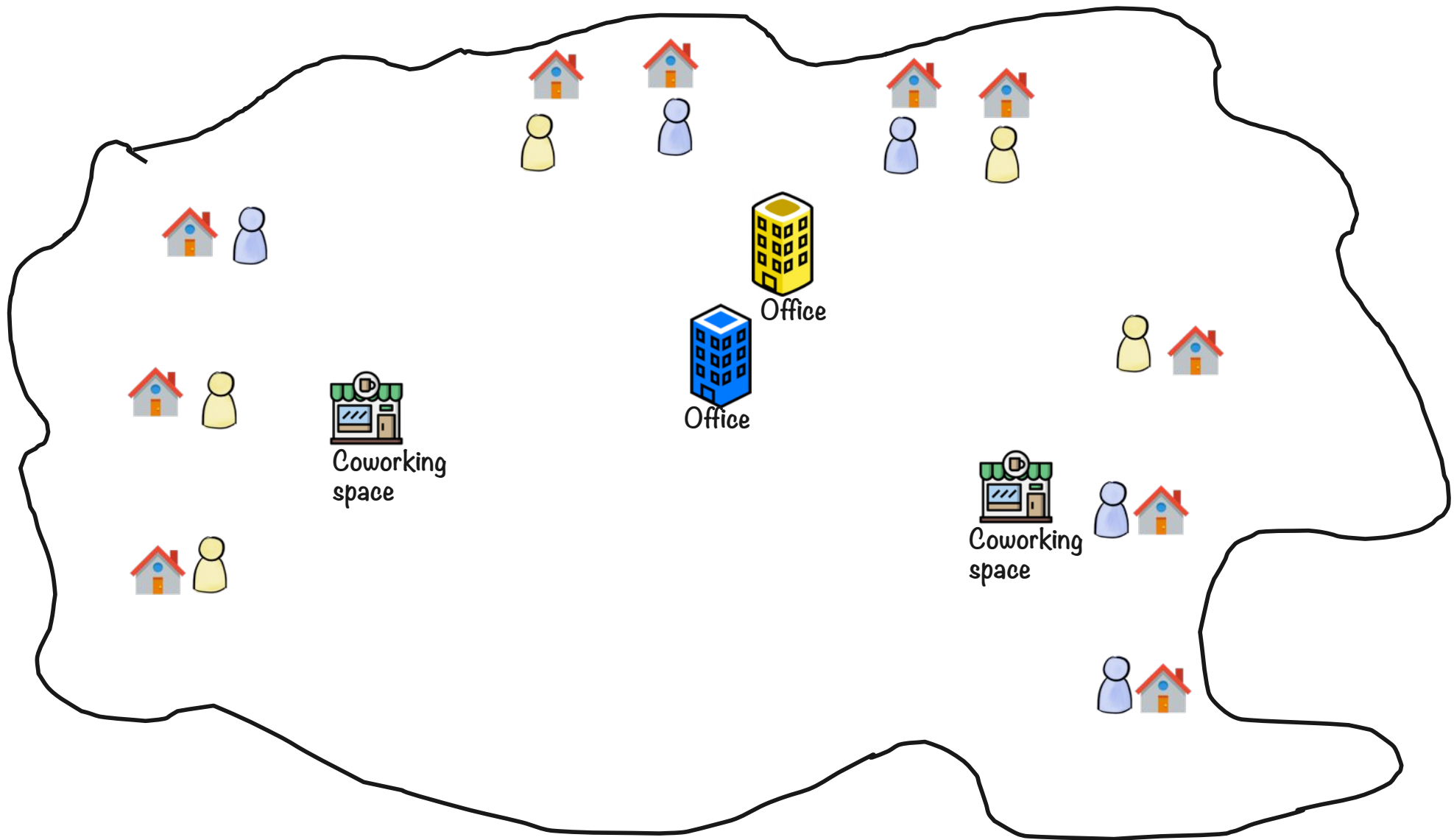
# Be smart about transit



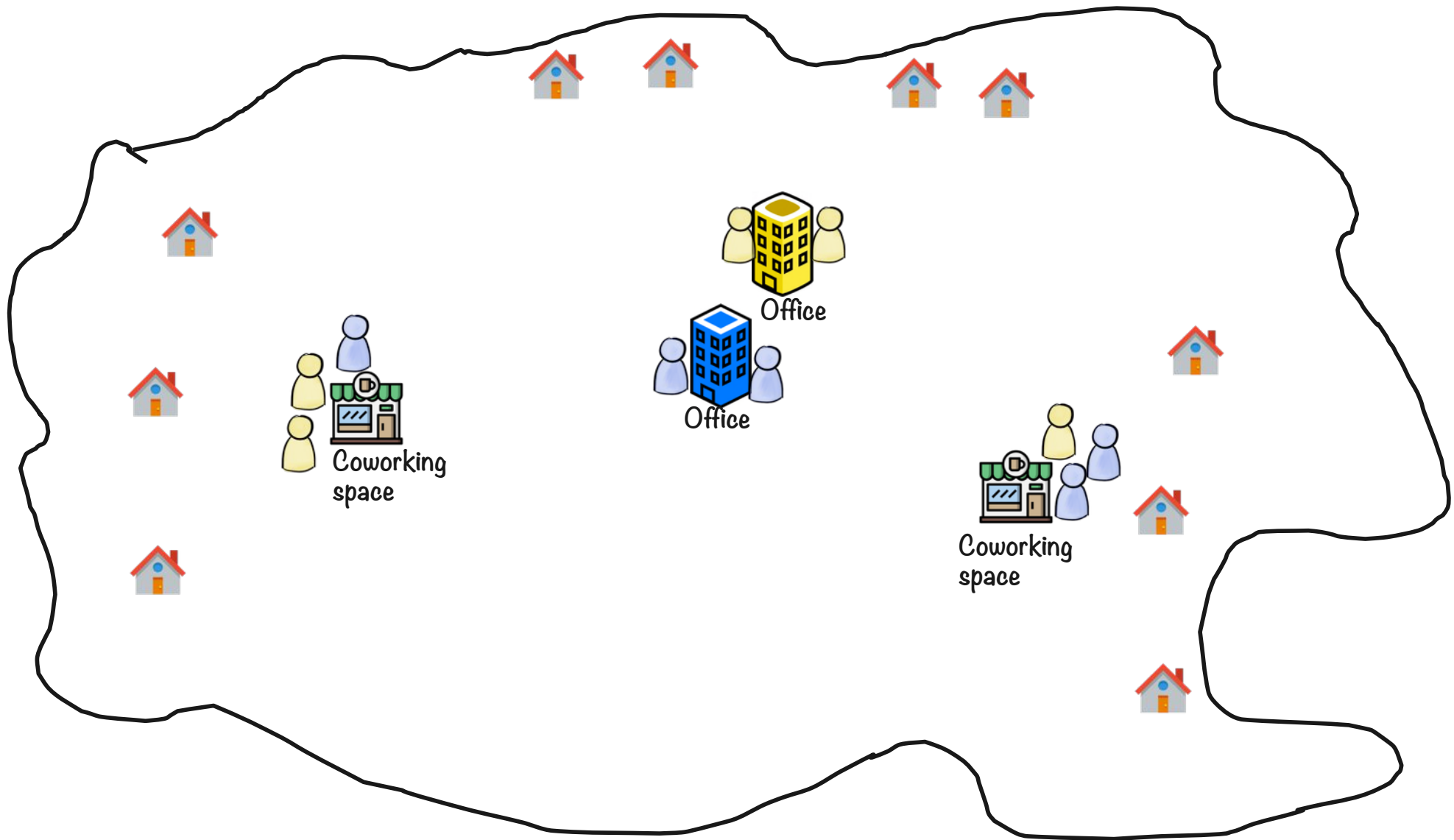
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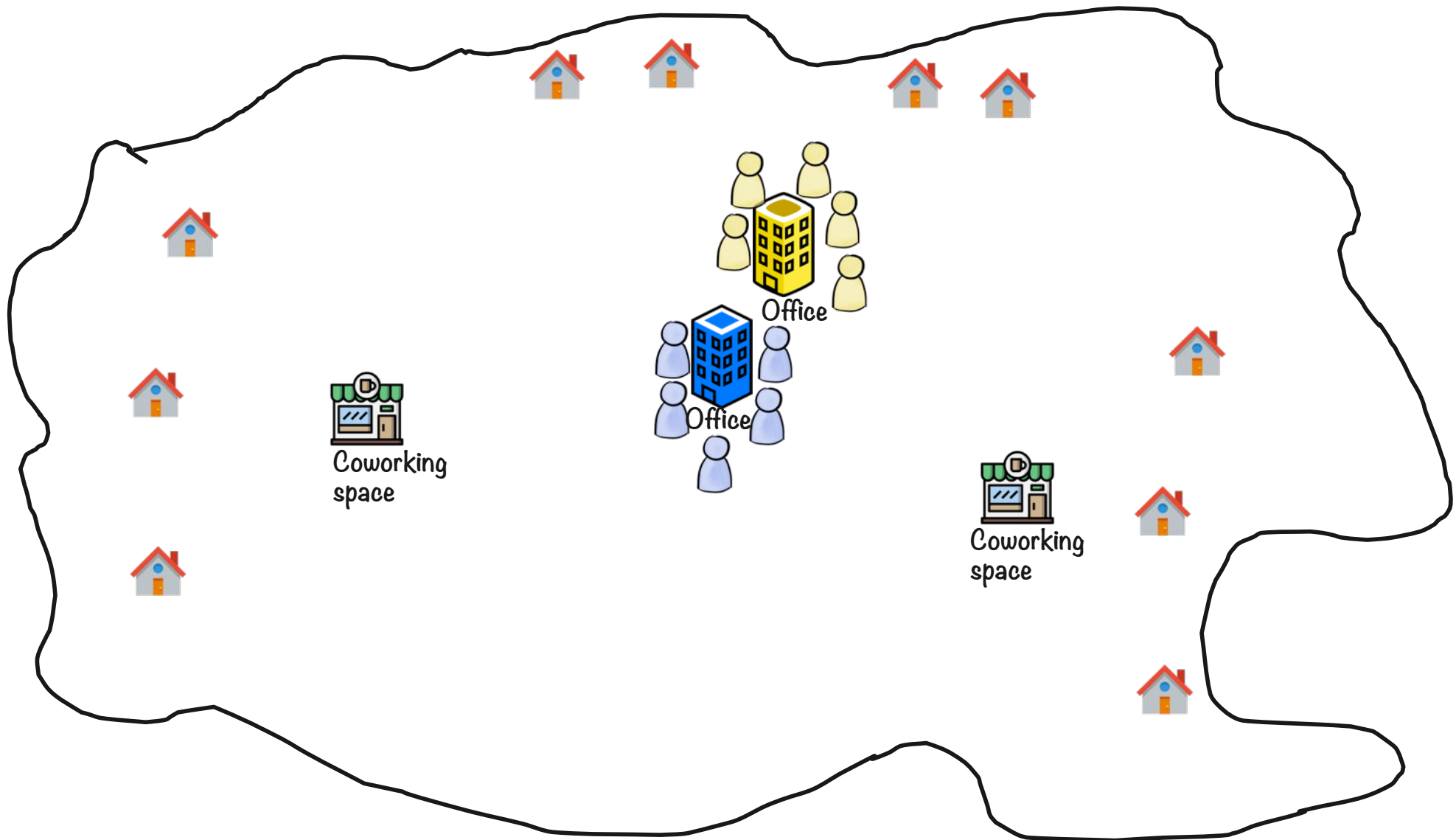


# Be smart about transit





# Be smart about transit



**Cultural health**

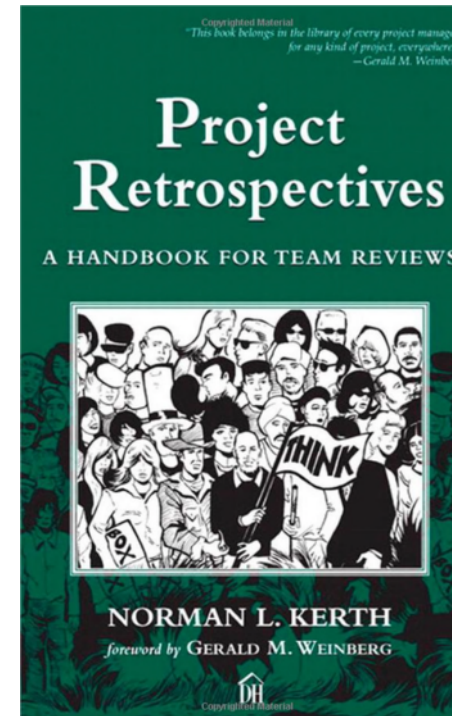
# Assume positive intent

## Retrospective Prime Directive



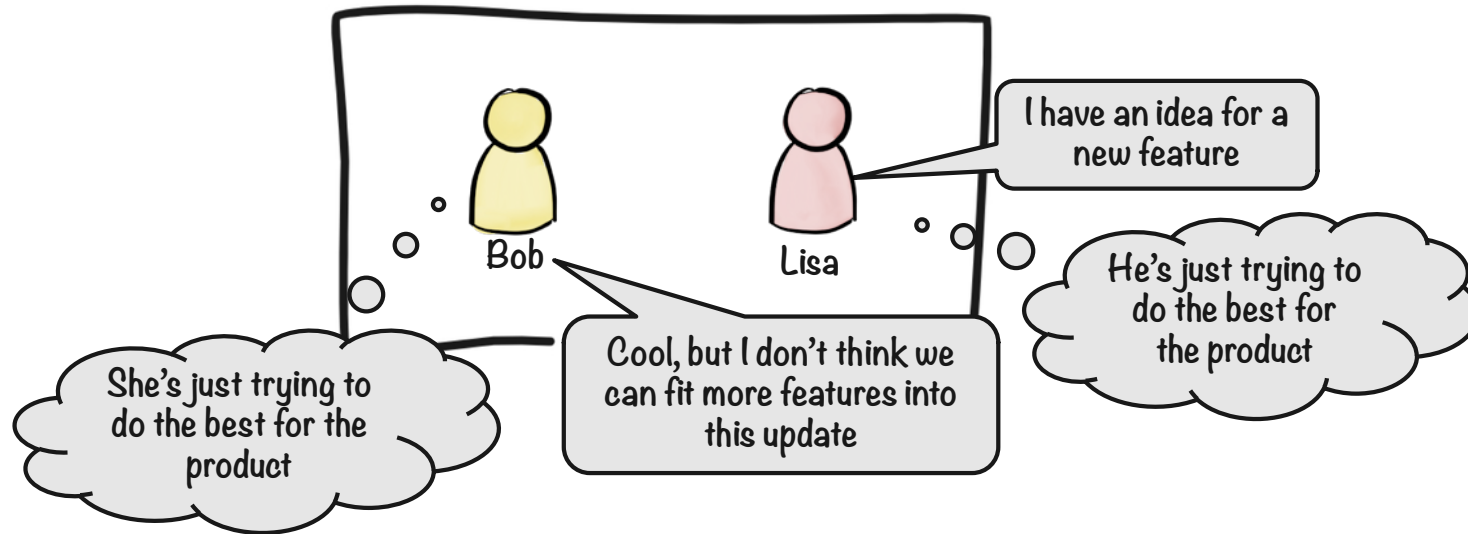
Regardless of what we discover, we must understand and truly believe that everyone did the best job he or she could, given what was known at the time, his or her skills and abilities, the resources available, and the situation at hand.

■ NORMAN KERTH

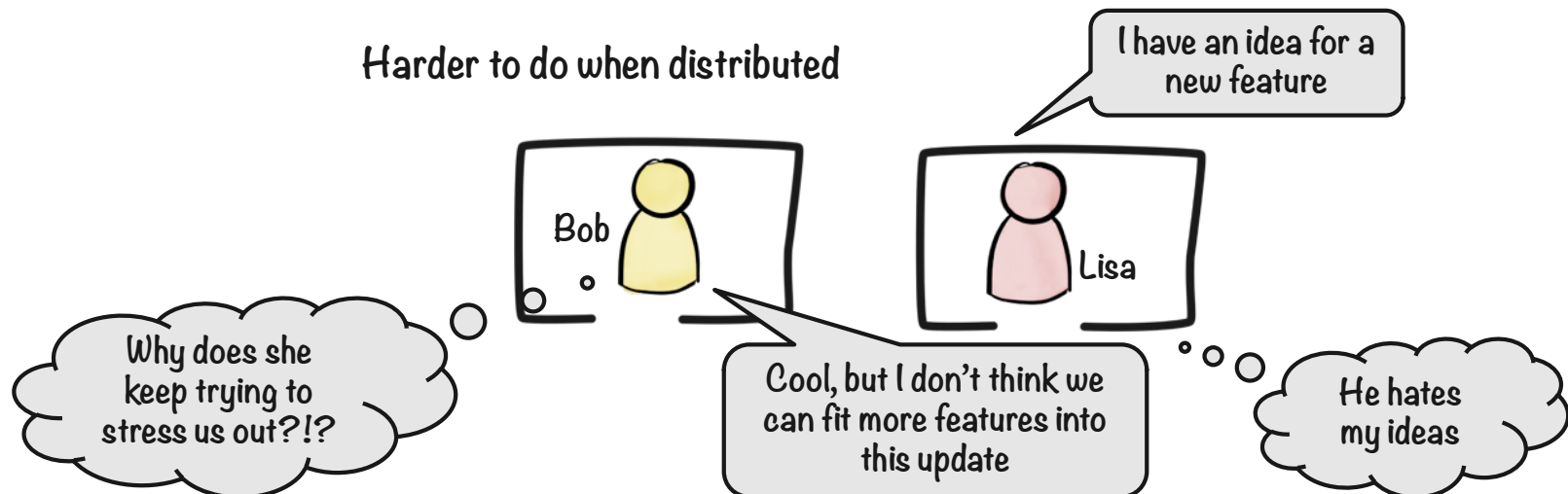


# Assume positive intent

Easier to do when physically close



Harder to do when distributed



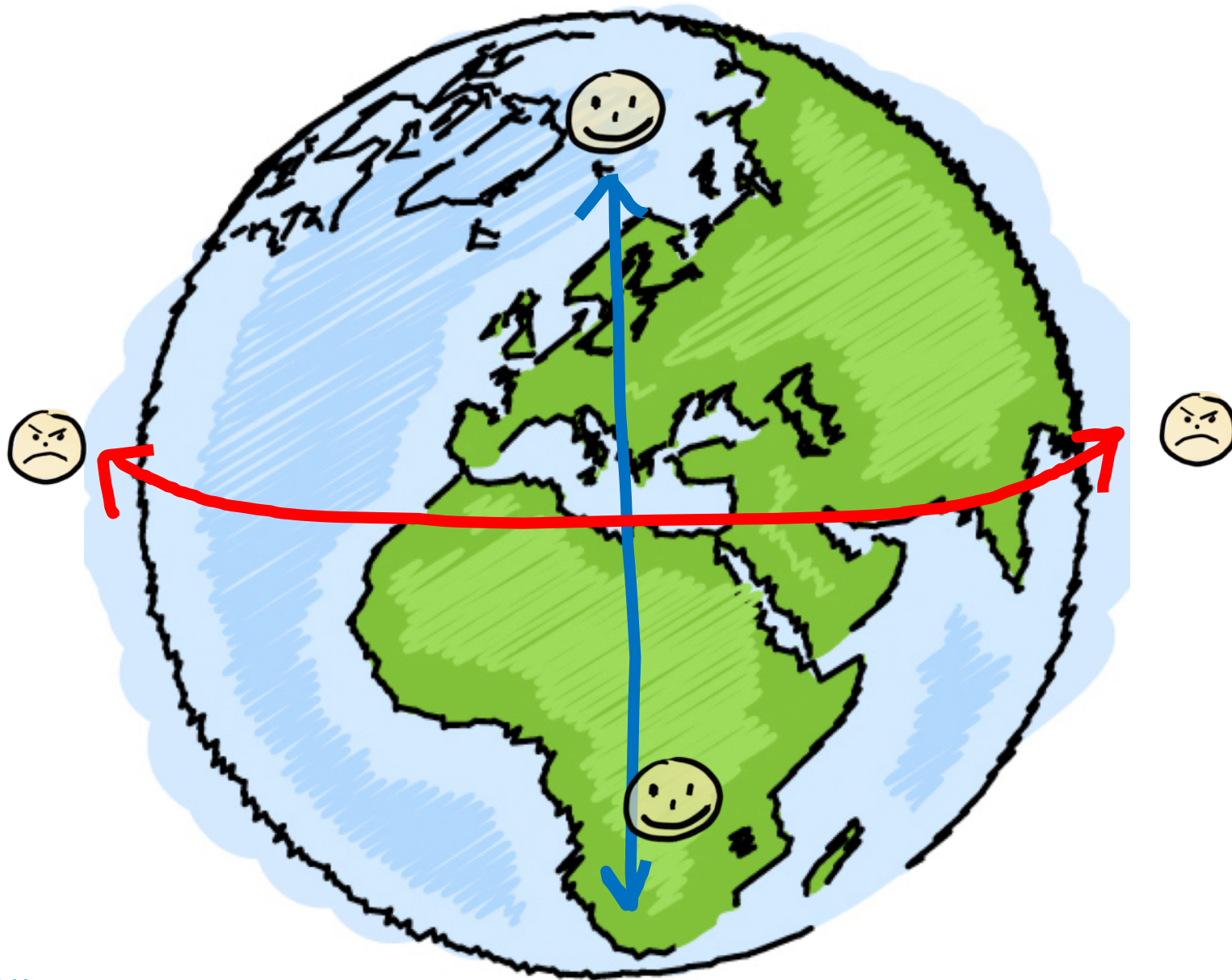


# Counteracting culture rot

- Create space for informal communication
- Create a feedback culture
- Meet and hangout physically sometimes



# Time zones matter more than distance





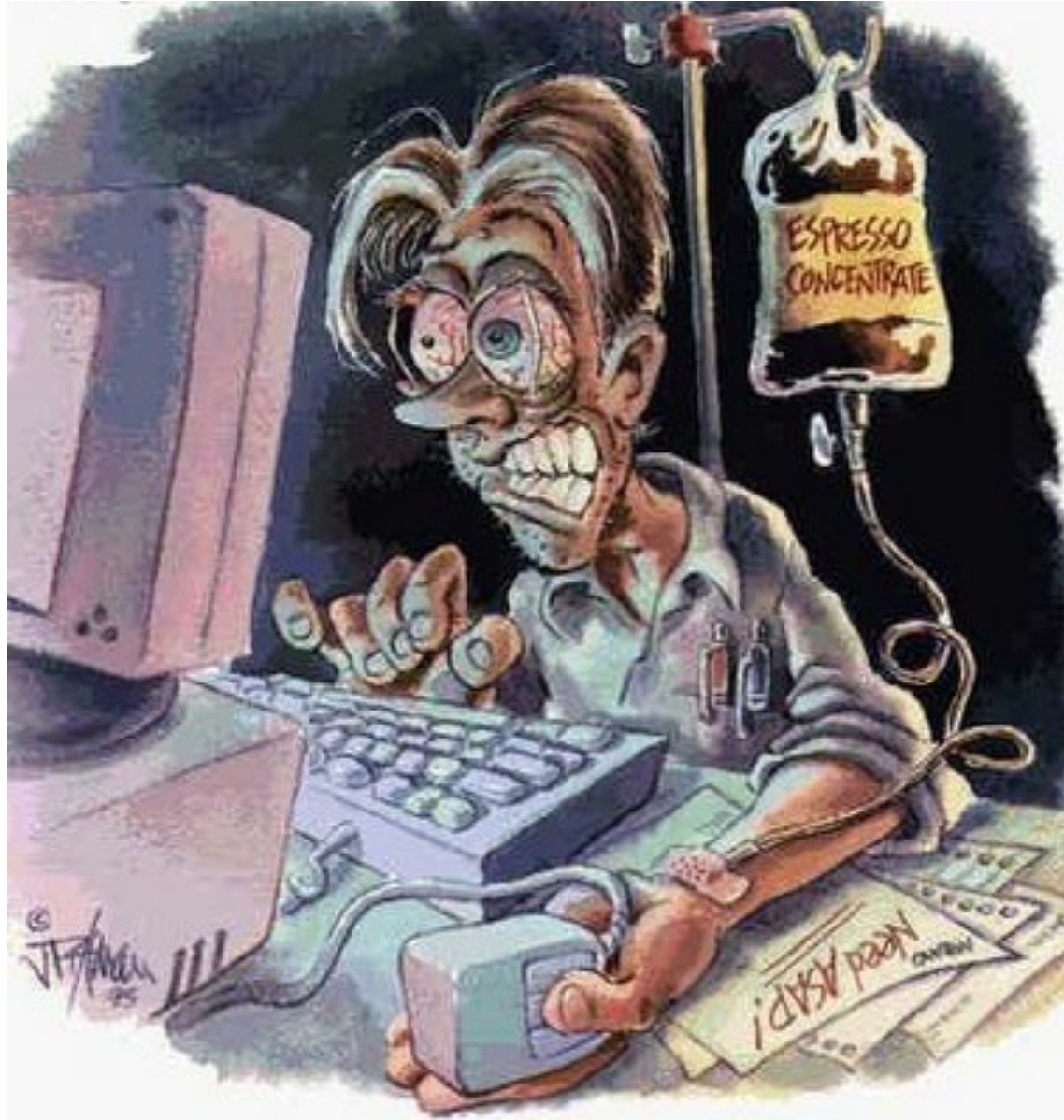
# Embrace the silliness



**Psychological  
health**

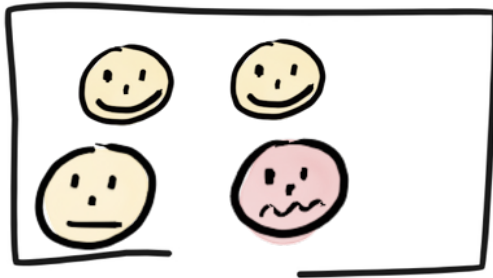


# How are your teammates?

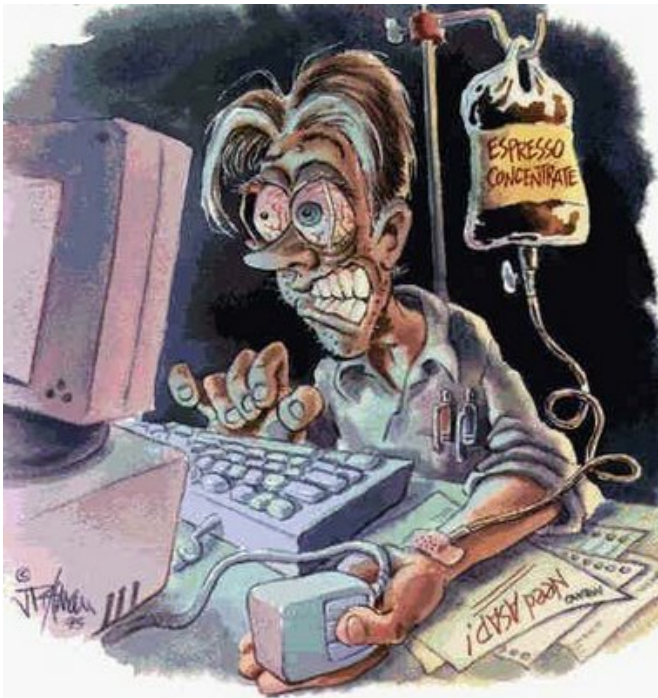
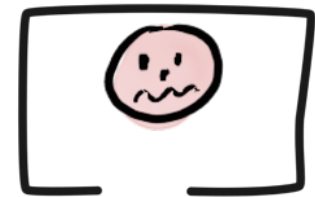
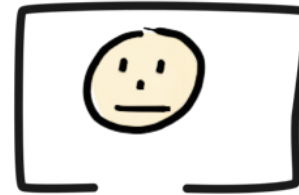
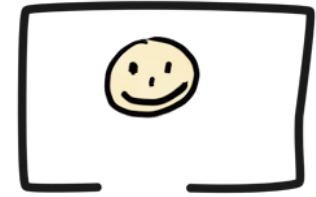
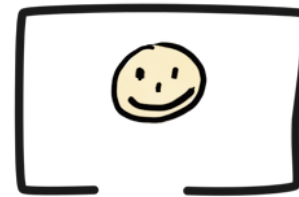


# Demotivation, Stress, Loneliness, Depression...

Physically colocated = Easier to notice



Distributed = Harder to notice



# Counteracting psychological health problems

- Create space for informal communication
  - Create a feedback culture
  - Meet and hangout physically sometimes
- 
- Acknowledge the problem
  - Frequent 1 on 1s
  - Don't overwork (and turn off notifications!)
  - Surveys
    - Ex: Confidence check, Stress check

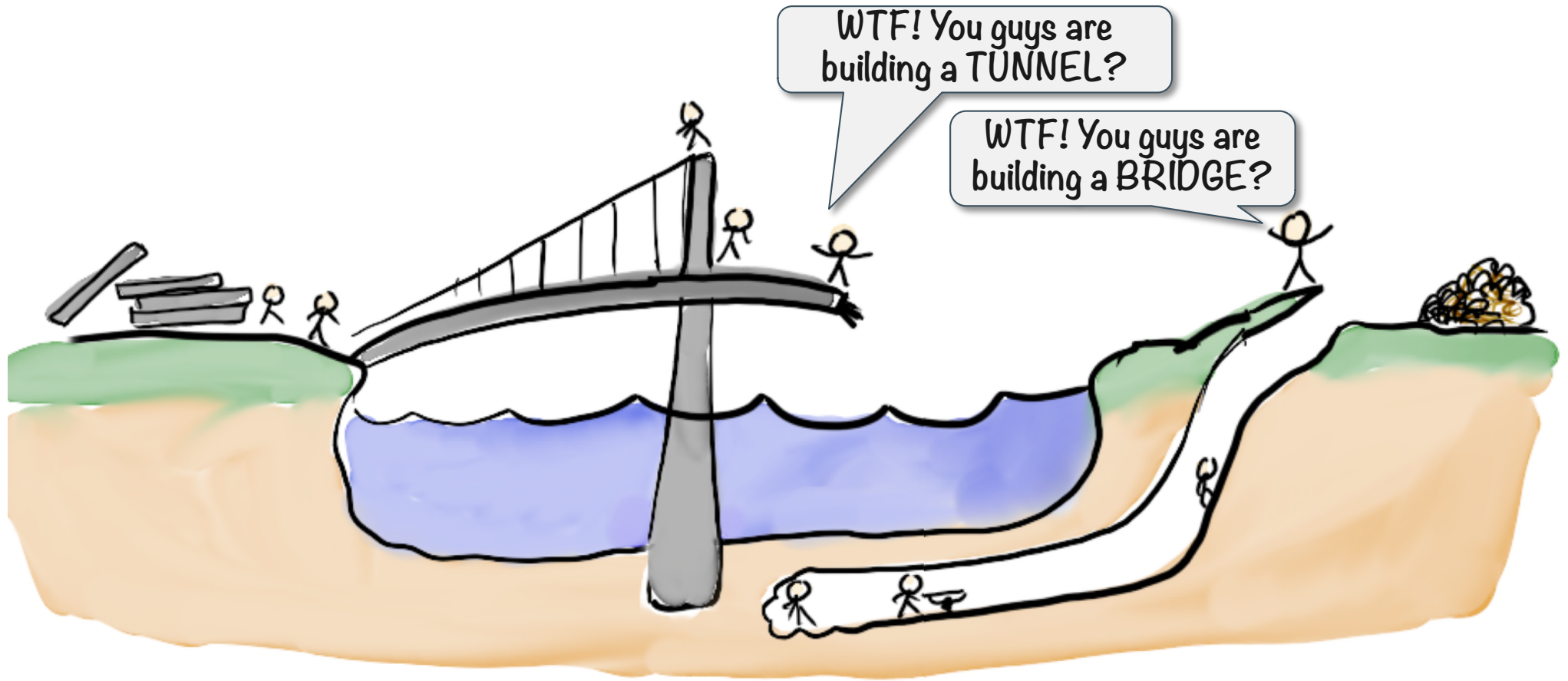


A photograph of a brown corkboard with a white rectangular card pinned to it. The card is slightly tilted and has the word "Leadership" written on it in a bold, black, sans-serif font.

**Leadership**



# Suboptimization

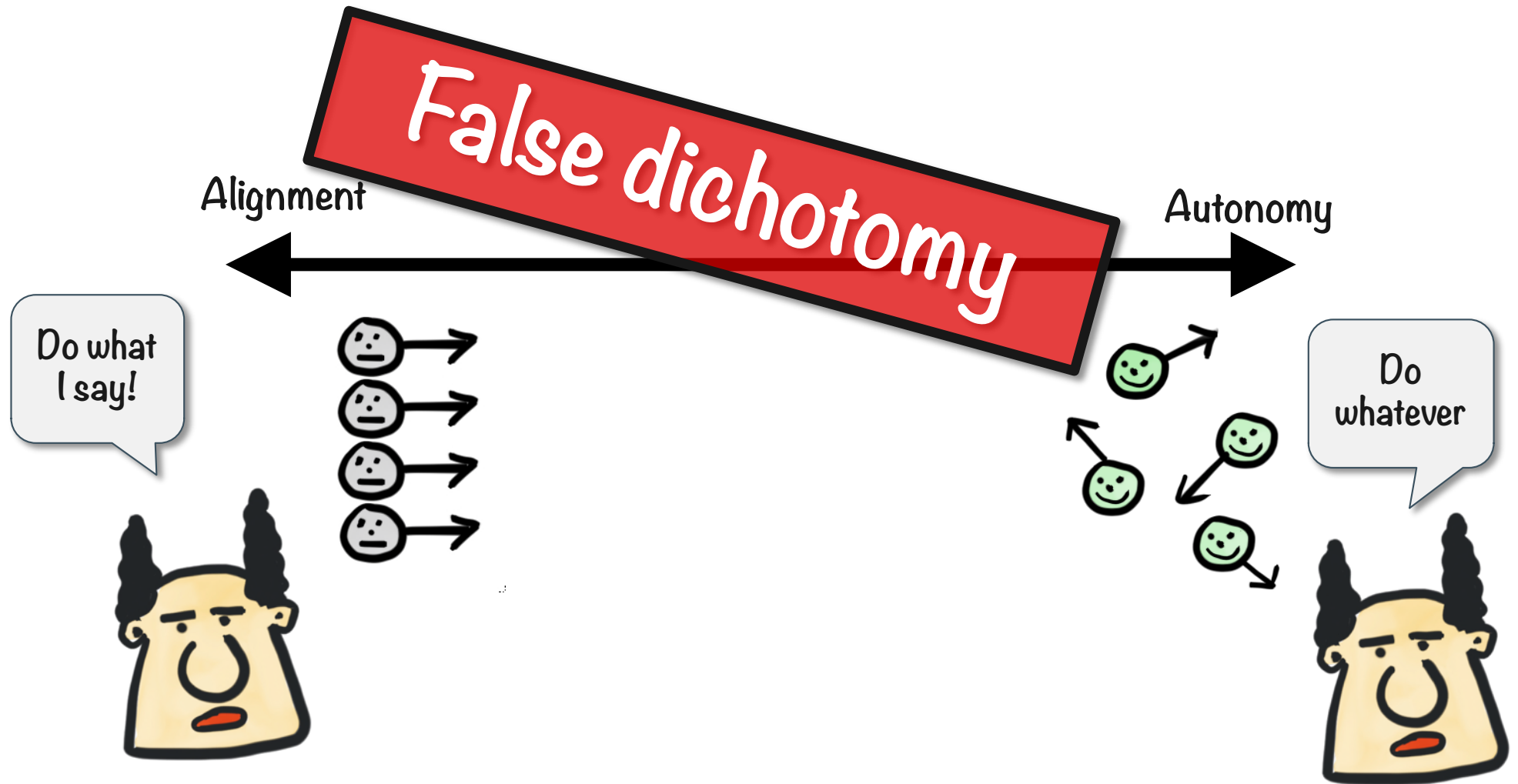


# Common reaction



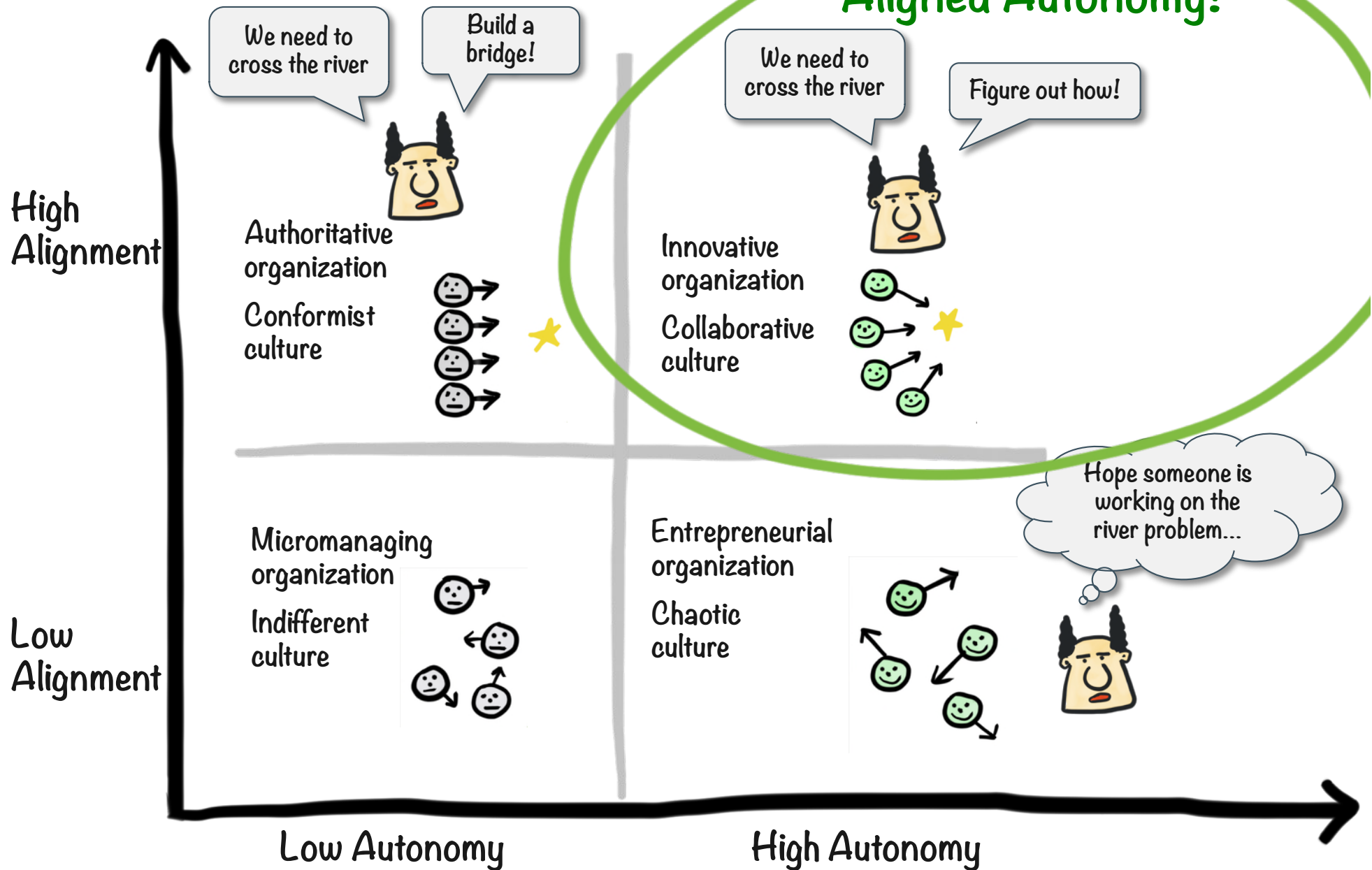
Someone needs to  
take charge!

# Alignment & Autonomy



# Alignment enables Autonomy

Aligned Autonomy!





Leader's job:  
Explain what problem needs to be solved.  
And Why.

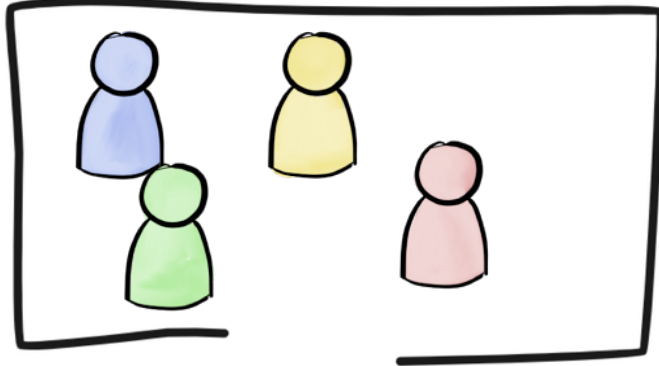


**Hybrid is hard!**

# Hybrid is hard!

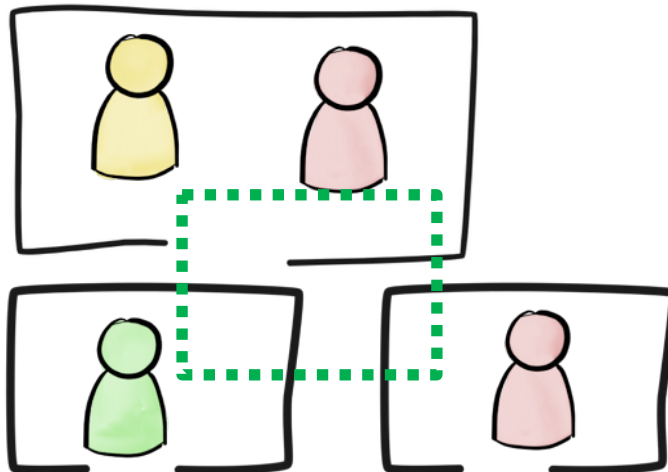
## Fully colocated

Everyone one is in the same (physical) room



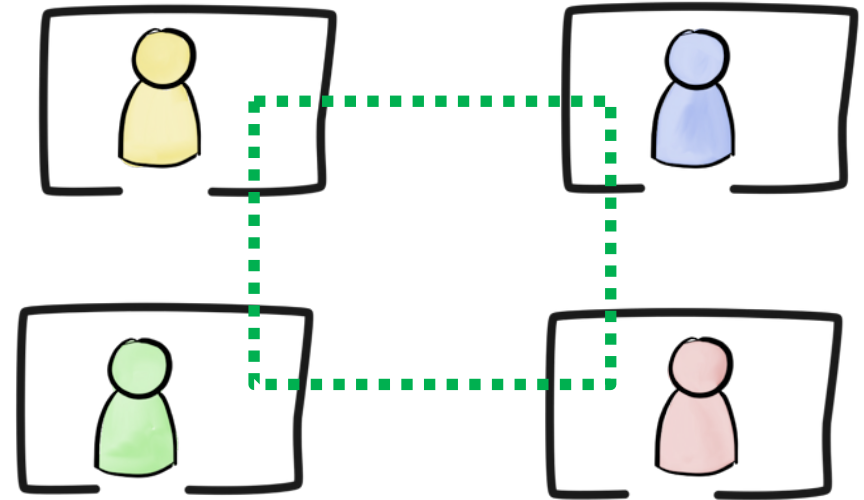
## Hybrid

Everyone isn't in the same room!

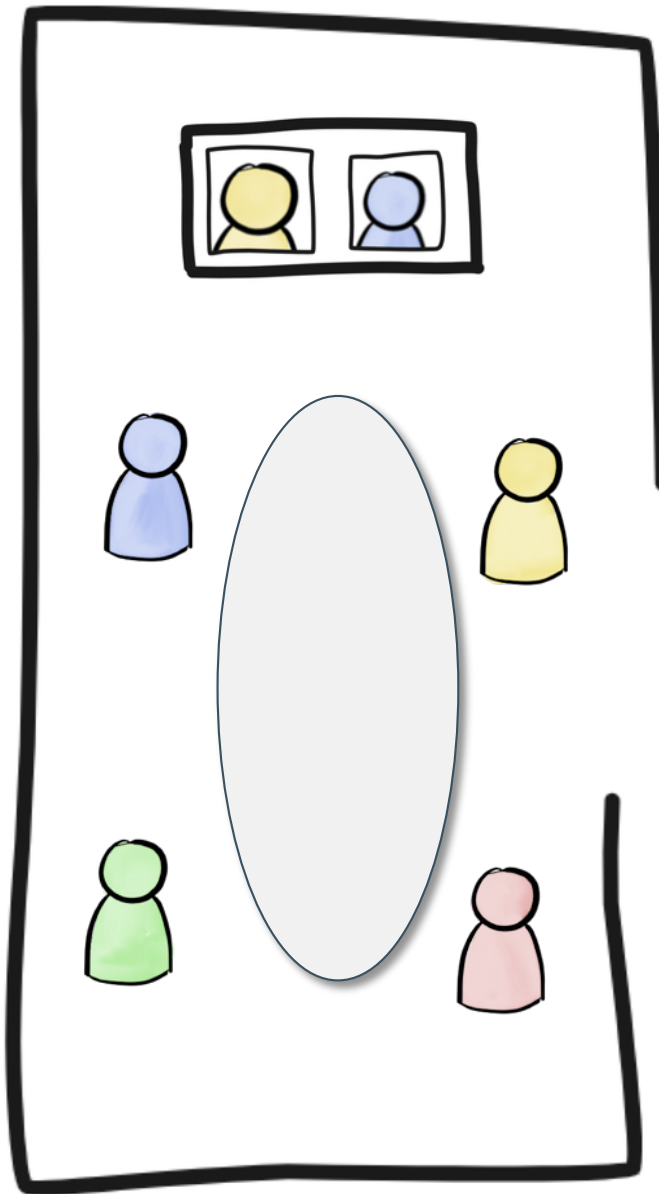


## Fully distributed

Everyone one is in the same (digital) room



# People in the same location have richer communication



How to handle this "unfair" difference?

Option A: Don't do hybrid

Option B: Try to remove the unfair advantage

Option C: Accept & leverage the difference



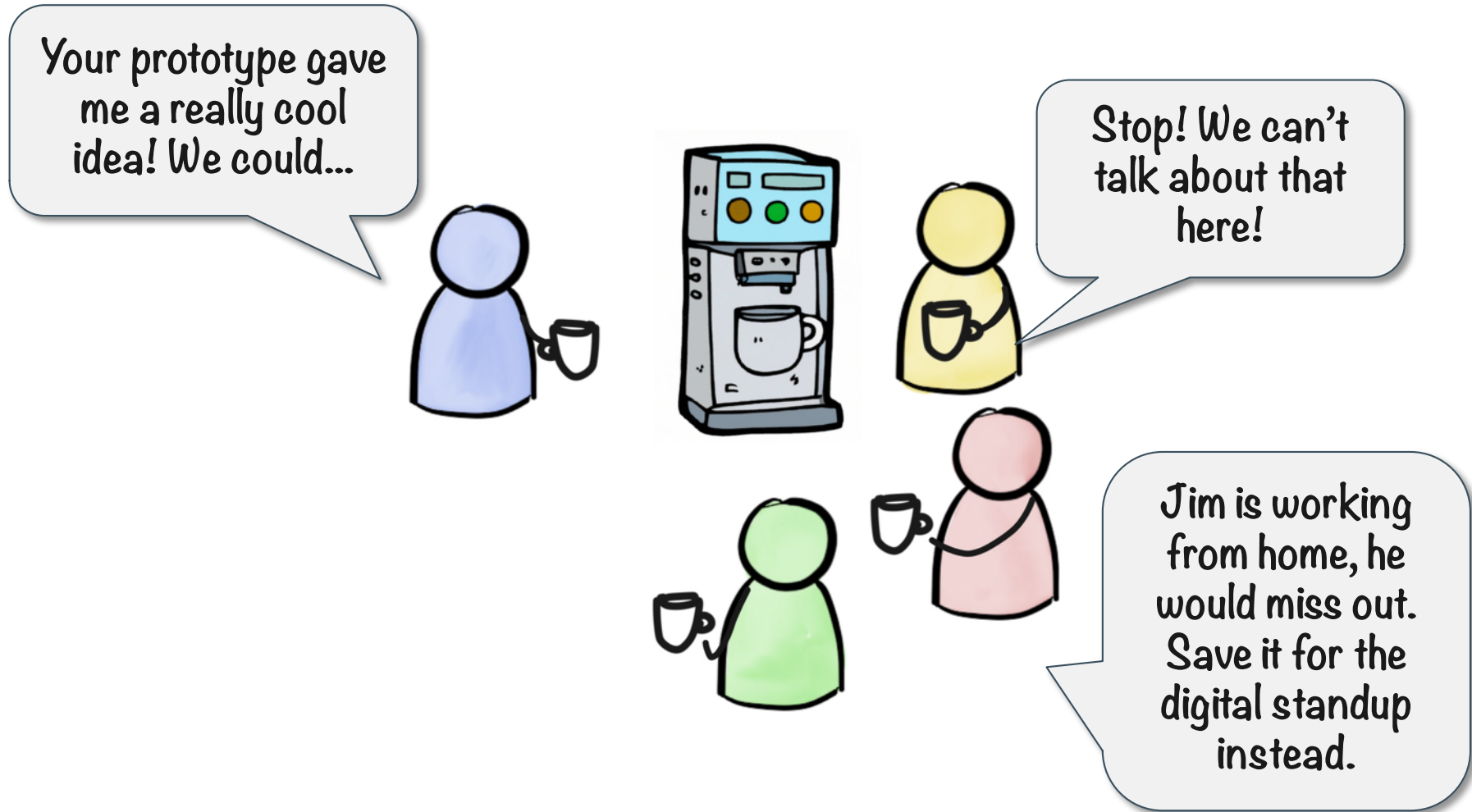
# Broken hybrid

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Option A: Don't do hybrid

Option B: Try to remove the unfair advantage

Option C: Accept & leverage the difference





Wrapup

# Wrapup

Are distributed teams the new normal?

**Yes, distributed & hybrid teams are the new normal**  
(you can't put the genie back into the bottle)

**Companies that are good at this have a huge competitive advantage**

**Distributed teams can work really well, with the right leadership and tools**

**Respect and counteract the downsides**

**Especially cultural health and psychological health**

**Hybrid is hard**

But we'll probably figure it out some day...