shopify

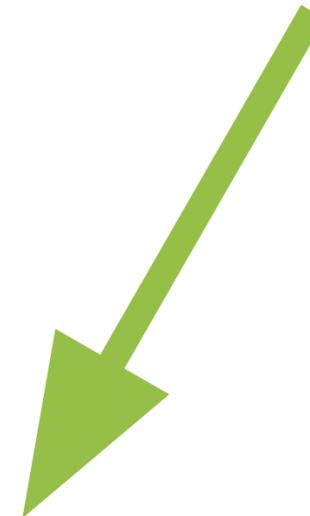# Our remote working toolbox

The craft of succeeding remotely: lessons learned

Speaker

(Dr.) James Stanier

Director of Engineering

Guten Tag, Berlin!

Fun fact!

I live in the **307th** least densely populated county in the UK, out of **317**.

Like, *actually* remote.

Coming up

01 The future of work

Uh oh…

Well, **I'm sure you remember this.**

- The biggest remote working experiment in history.
- A watershed moment.

The old normal

Designed: <mark>c.1950</mark>

- Collaboration, serendipity, convenience?
- Our tools now supercede

The world has changed. We owe it to ourselves to **remaster our tools for a new era.**

02 Org structure

Let chaos reign.

Initial shift to remote

Opportunity, energy, excitement

Rein in chaos.

Desire for order and efficiency

Design, structure, process

Andy Grove, **High Output Management**

Questions

- How do we **structure a global team?**
- How can we **collaborate and transfer context?**
- How do we **have an identity?**

Structure

Within each team

- Optimize for real-time communication (1-2hrs diff.)
- Organise by rough timezone bands, not countries or locations

Between teams

- Optimize for async communication (1-2hrs overlap)
- Have an async division/department identity and culture

Async wider culture

- Written project updates
- Video demos
- Written celebrations
- Social channels
- With **leadership intentionally leaning in**

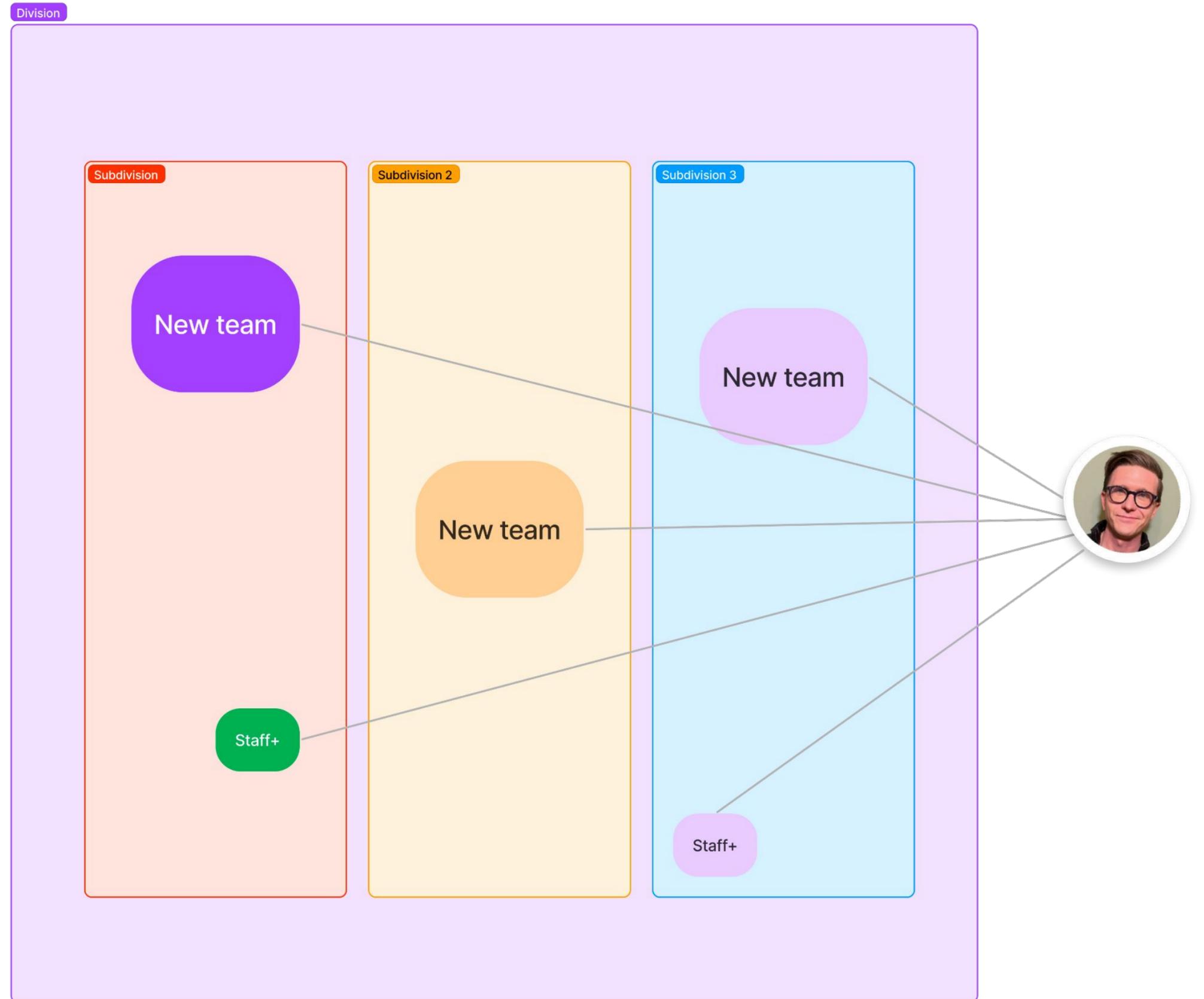What if you have to build a division **from scratch?**

From zero

Context as primary goal

Contribute, learn

Slowly shift the center of organizational knowledge and gravity

Now (1yr+) evolving into new vertical slices

Sacrifice identity, lead through impact

03 Onboarding
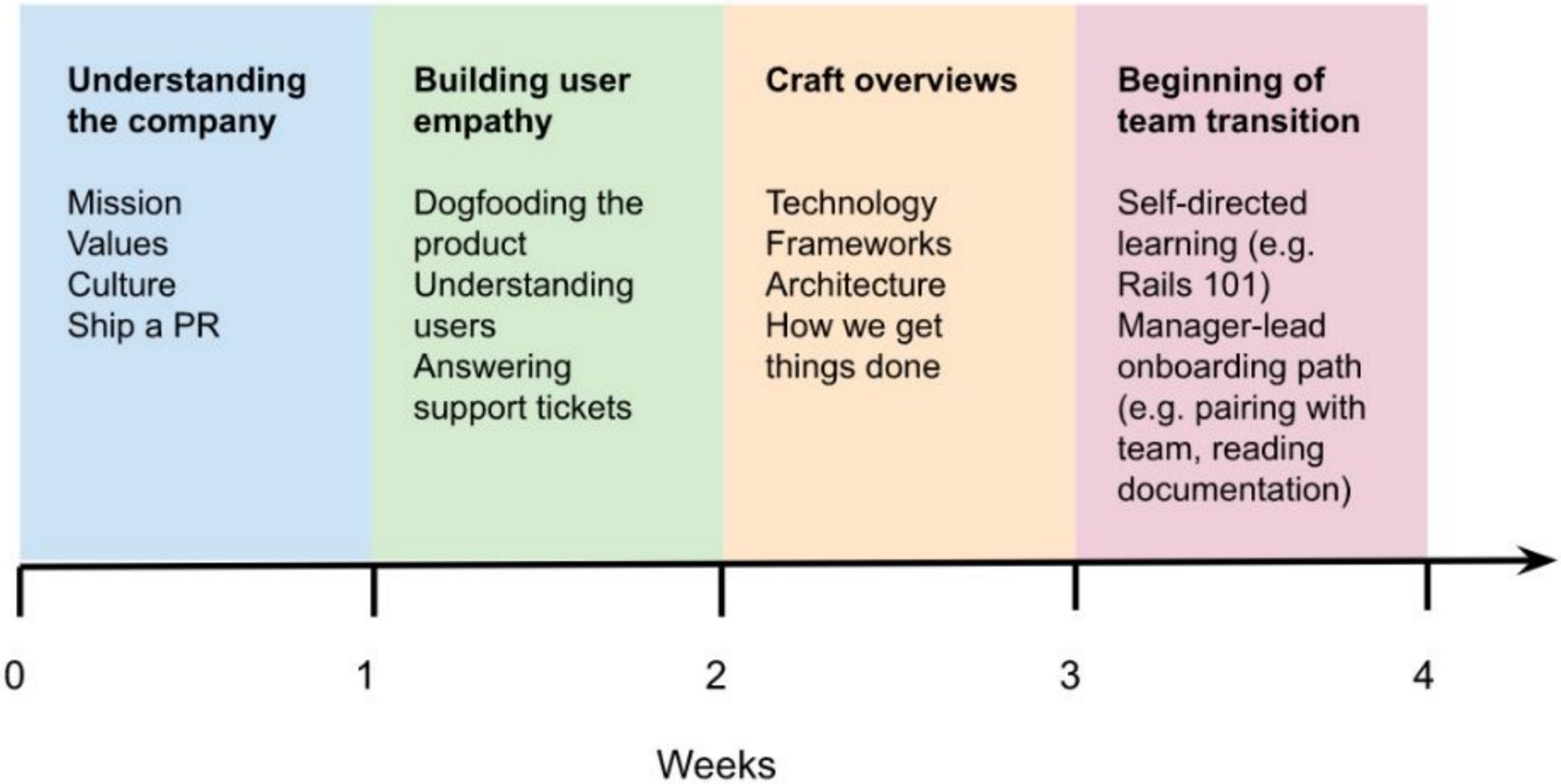
Onboarding is…

Essential

- Great onboarding reduces the time that it takes to get to net positive contribution
- A one-time-only opportunity

A funnel

- Generic → specialist
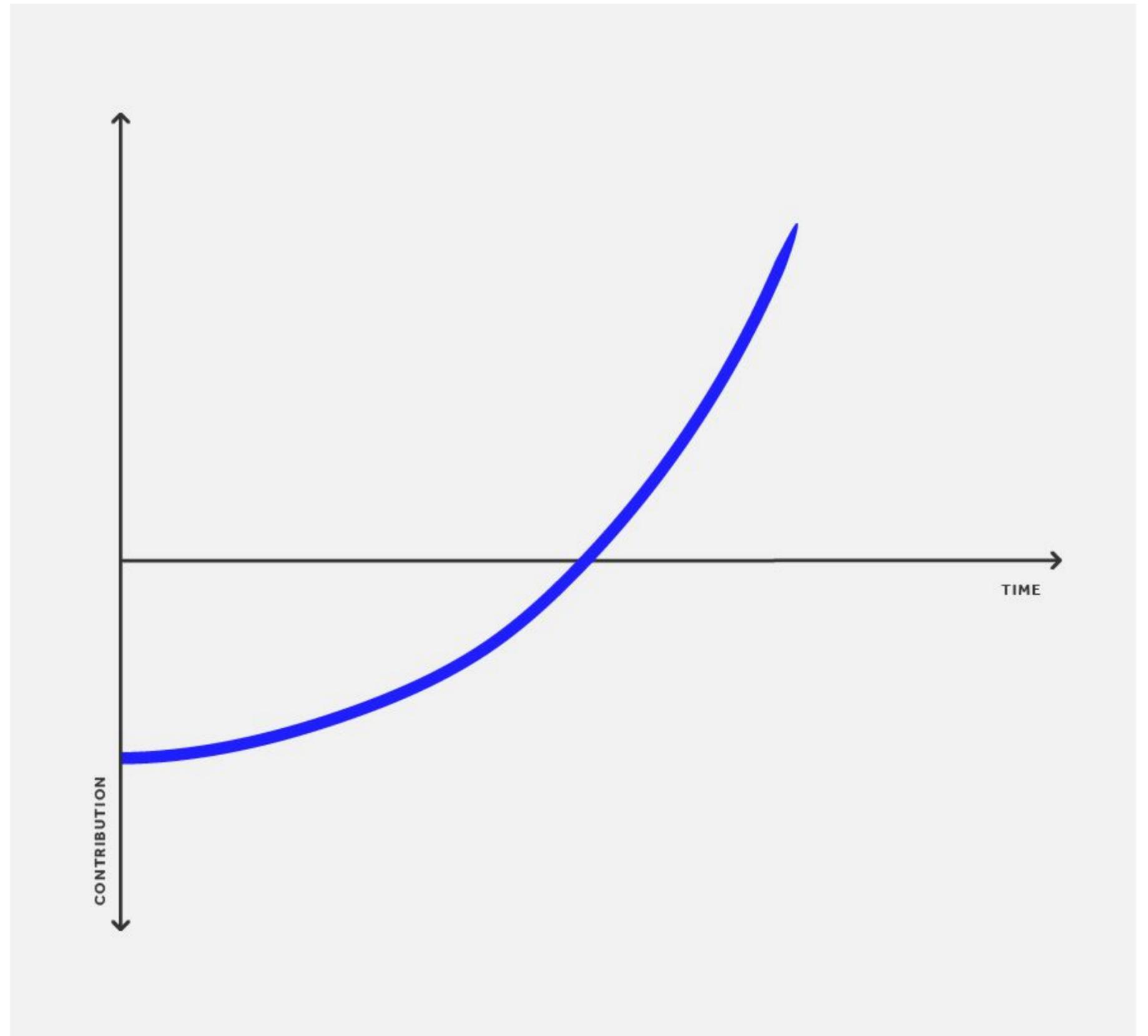- Centralized → decentralized

4 weeks

Understanding the company	Building user empathy	Craft overviews	Beginning of team transition
Mission Values Culture Ship a PR	Dogfooding the product Understanding users Answering support tickets	Technology Frameworks Architecture How we get things done	Self-directed learning (e.g. Rails 101) Manager-lead onboarding path (e.g. pairing with team, reading documentation)

0   1   2   3   4

Weeks

Generalism   **Specialism**

Passive   **Active**

Me x Lead Dev, **How to onboard remote staff in 4 weeks**

Accelerate through the curve

The Engineering Manager, **The Contribution Curve**

04 Norms

Should we tell teams how to…

- Organize their work?
- "Be agile"?
- Communicate?

Autonomy over mandate, freedom over structure, **tools over prescriptions.**
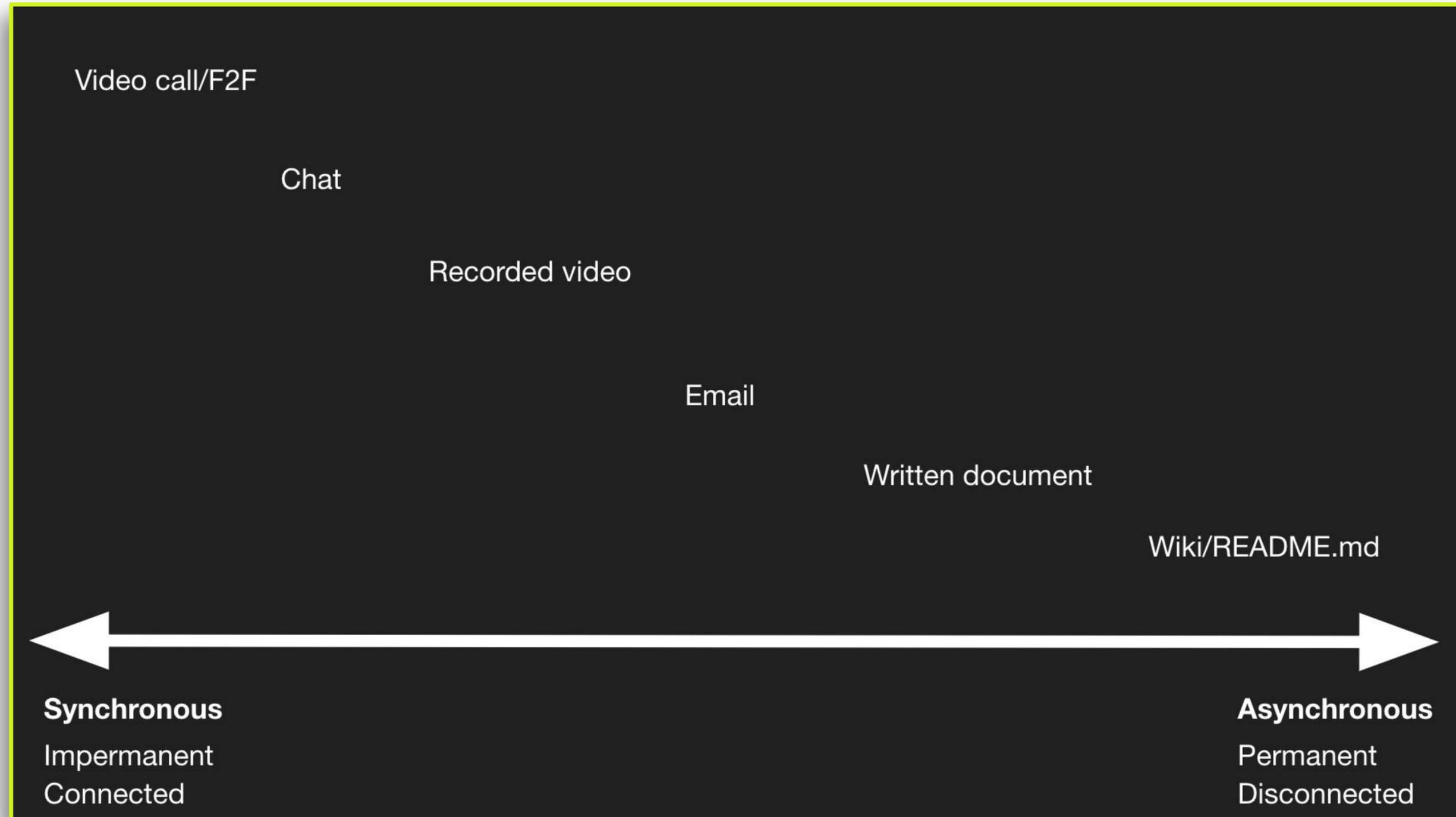
Setting norms

Do this together

Teams decide how to structure their communication

Apply to any collaborative process

Medium	Length	Reply expected?	Reply time?	After hours?
Phone call	Short	Yes	Immediate	Yes
SMS	Short	Typically	Hours	No
Chat	Short	Typically	Hours	No
Video call	Medium	Yes	Immediate	No
Email	Medium	Not always	Days	No
Recorded video	Medium	No	N/A	N/A
Written document	Long	No	N/A	N/A
Wiki/README	Long	N/A	N/A	N/A

It's all a spectrum

Your choice has an effect, whether you like it or not

Video call/F2F

Chat

Recorded video

Email

Written document

Wiki/README.md

Synchronous

Impermanent
Connected

Asynchronous

Permanent
Disconnected

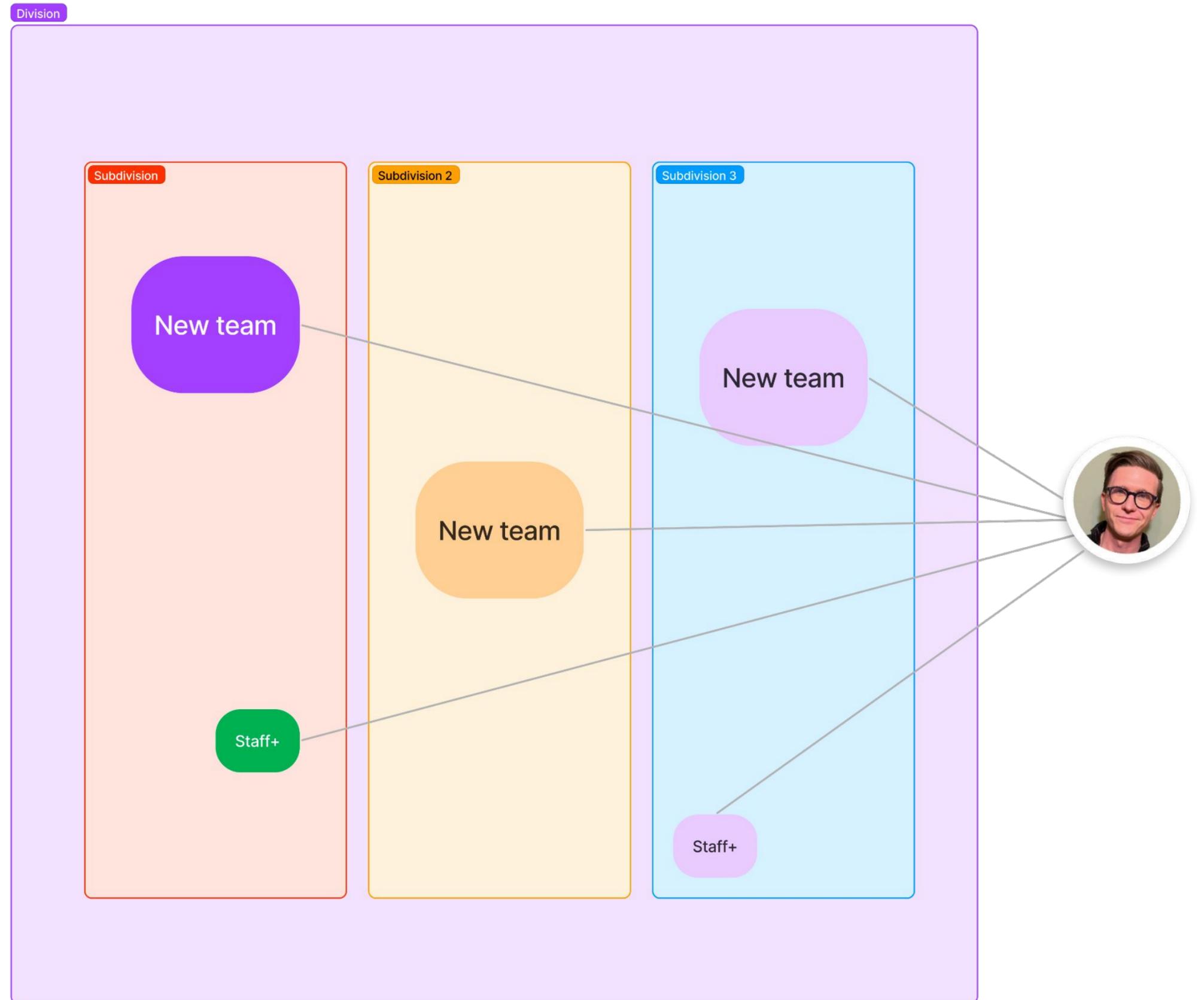The Engineering Manager, **The Spectrum of Synchronousness**

05 Async and writing

Context

Reminder: remote success comes from distribution of context

Reminder: the world has changed. We owe it to ourselves to **remaster our tools for a new era.**

Writing

The essential tool for remote success

You owe it to yourself and your teams to invest in your writing

`writing to think != writing for others`

University of Chicago Leadership Lab: **The craft of writing effectively**
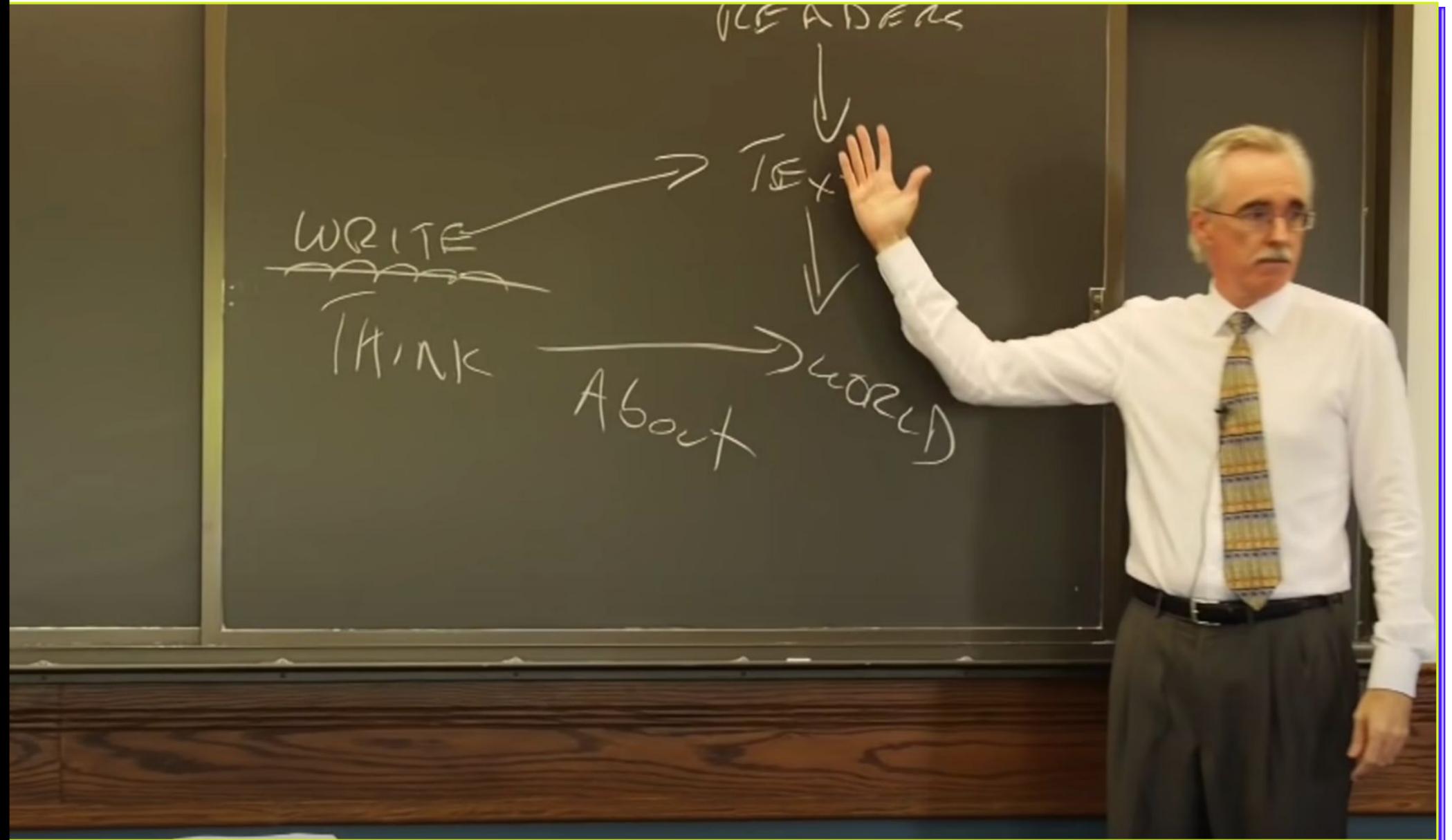
You need to find the time to **intentionally practice your writing.** But how?
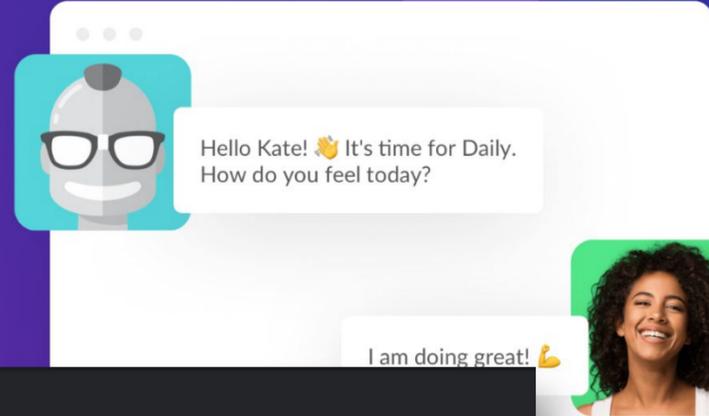
Improve your docs

Make the boundaries of your team **clear and concise.**

- Practice writing for an audience.
- Definition of done?
- Try a **docs sprint**!

geekbot

Run standup meetings in Slack & Teams

Join thousands of teams that use Geekbot to automate standups, surveys, and daily reports.

Add to Slack   Add to Teams

Hello Kate! 👋 It's time for Daily. How do you feel today?

I am doing great! 💪

Chris Waters 09:41
Chris Waters posted an update for **SMS wind down**

What will you do today?
Good morning, folks.

I hope you slept well and are all keeping nicely hydrated.

Yesterday I was working on shortening the URL in the order confirmation SMS. I have something that works, but need to implement this into the template behind a beta flag.

I was thinking about introducing a new attribute on the OrderDrop (the Liquid-safe representation of an Order record) such as `sms_order_status_url`. But this is causing me some problems that I can't quite figure out just yet – the admin JS breaks when my new method on the OrderDrop contains some non-trivial Ruby. (It doesn't seem to break if the method simply returns `"foo"` or similar, which seems *super-weird* to me, but maybe I'm going snowblind with errors.)

Anyway, I'm trying to figure it out, but I'm also wondering if we even need a separate method, perhaps `order_status_url` should just return the new, shorter URL if the beta flag is on. 🤔

The reason I didn't do this initially is because I thought the confirmation email might be using this Liquid method too, and those can still be customised. But then perhaps *that* doesn't really matter either. It's just an autogenerated URL which is largely a bunch of human-incomprehensible characters, so what does it matter anyway? 🤯

Anyway, that's what's on my mind. Any clarity welcomed.

I'll also spend some time looking at the PRs you fine folks have ready for review.
Show less

Is there anything you need from others?
Nein.

nein 3

GitHub

Async stand-ups

Shift to async **and automate it.**

- A daily chance to write.
- Your journal and audit log for the week.

Tuesday

- Shipped i18n fix to production
- Reviewed Sam's slider PR
- Helped Alex learn how to debug memory leaks

Brag docs

Write down every day **what you have achieved.**

- A daily chance to write.
- Big or small: doesn't matter.
- Next step: **share with your lead!**

Julia Evans, **Get your work recognized: write a brag document**

Write an internal newsletter

Tell your story internally.

- What have you been working on?
- What have you seen?
- What are you celebrating?

Just simple writing can have **outsized influence**.

The Engineering Manager, **How do I make sure my work is visible?**
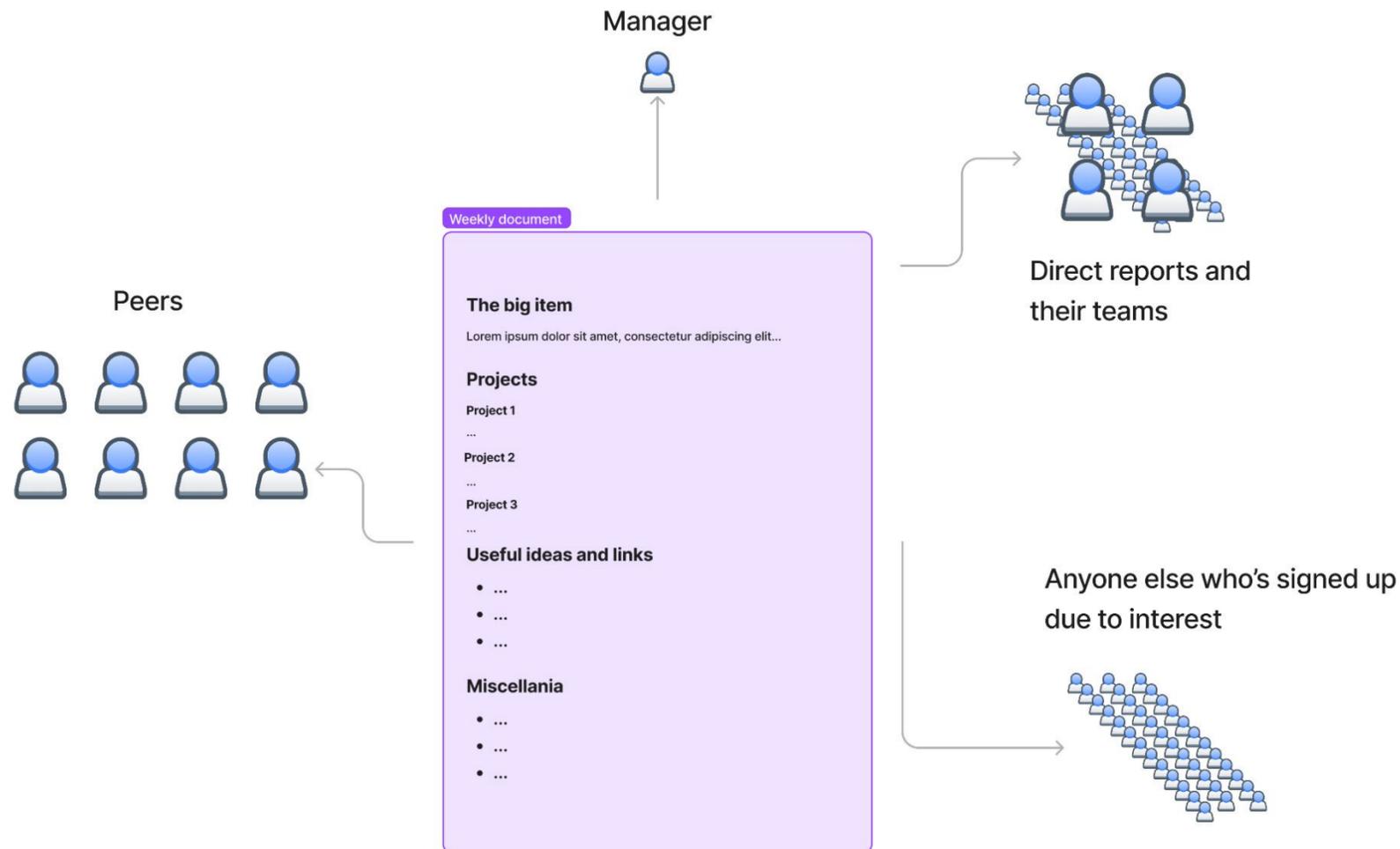
06 Wrap up

What we covered

The world has changed. We owe it to ourselves to **remaster our tools for a new era.**

Thank you!
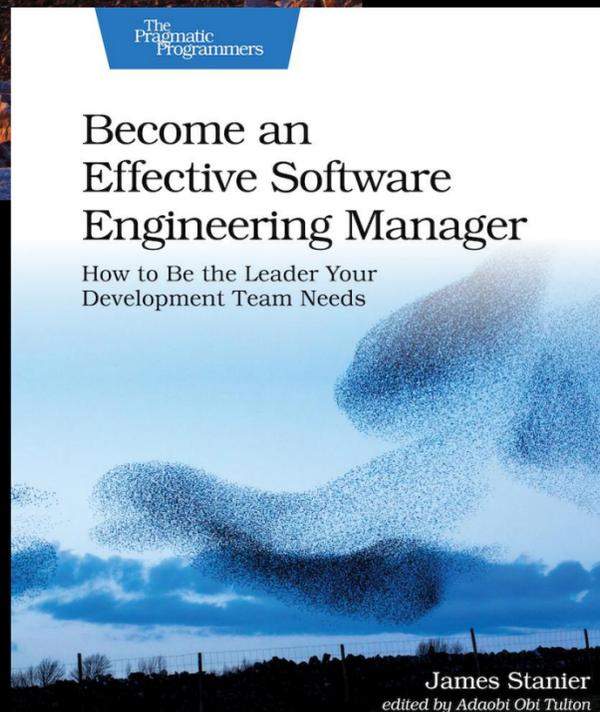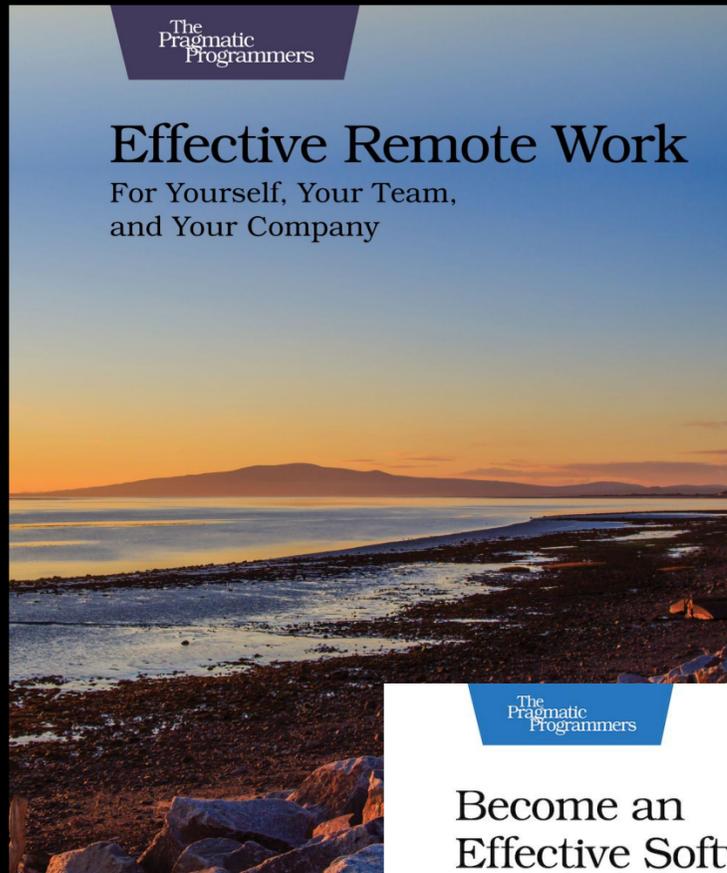
Always happy to chat

- @jstanier everywhere
- theengineeringmanager.com

I wrote a book on this topic

- It's called **Effective Remote Work**

...and on eng management!

- **Become an Effective Software Engineering Manager**