# Using Bets, Boards and Missions to Inspire Org-Wide Agility

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# Who is this for?

# Anatomy of a failed change agent…

“Oh, this sounds interesting…”

“It is! Happy to have you aboard JC!”

“We should try this…”

“What is John saying? What does he want?”

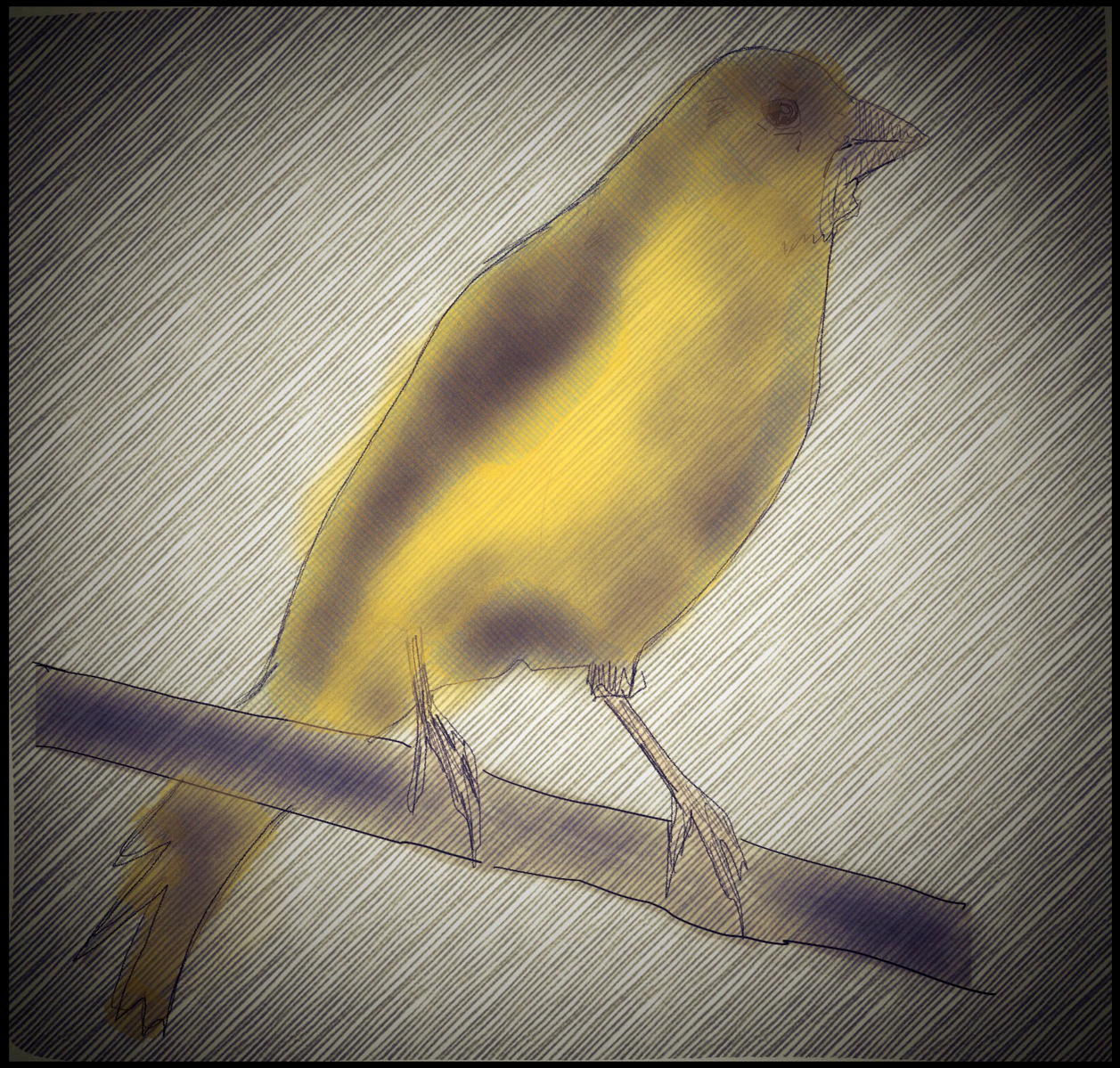
“We need more of that! But how?”

“John is causing mass agitation!”

“Ugh. Politics as usual…”

“Danger! DANGER!”

“I guess this will never change…”



Professional Canary in a Coal Mine

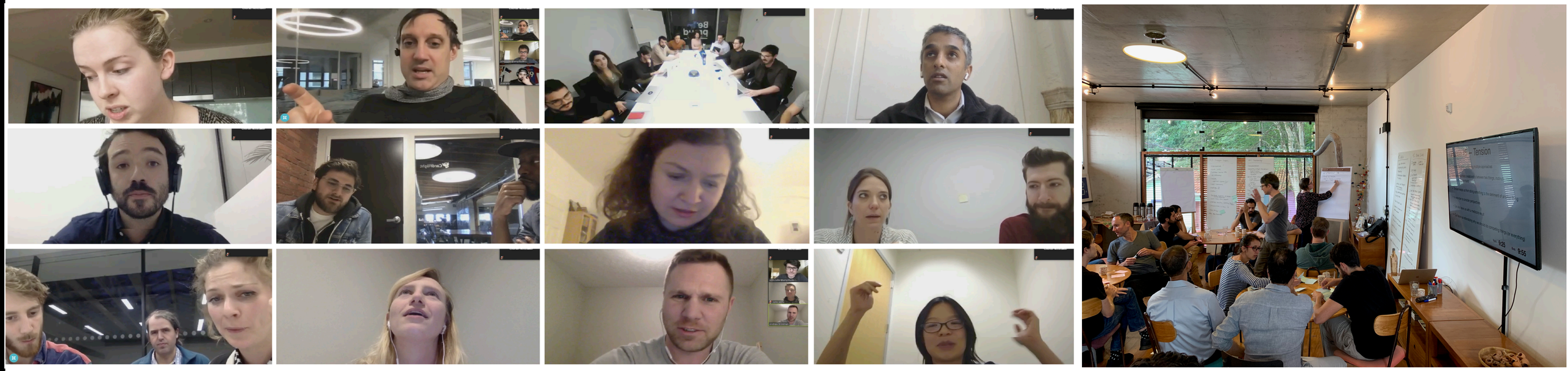
**Confusion (externally, and personally) between…**

**My personal needs (including a new to “fix”)**

**Advocating for participatory continuous improvement (the process, not specific outcomes)**

**Specific interventions (e.g. let’s do this)**

# Change agent V2(or 10)…


Tension

**It is hard. For everyone.**
**Some are healthier than others.**

OKRs?
Canvas X?
Canvas Y?
Discovery Sprints?
Research Sprints?
Google Sprint?
Jobs-to-be-done?
One-pagers?
Tribes and squads?
HEART?
AARRR?

**Joshua J. Arnold**
@joshuajames

Following

Replying to @johncutlefish

In my own experience doing this over the years I've found it's the opposite of the Anna Karenina principle.

Unhappy teams and orgs are often *very* similar, while happy/successful teams and orgs can be quite different.

12:05 PM - 20 Feb 2019

**2** Retweets **22** Likes

2 2 22

## Structural/Cultural (27)

- Org structure, silos (3)
- Command and control culture, “politics” (4)
- Fear of failure, risk aversion, urge for predictability (4)
- Trust and safety, motivation, change resistance (3)
- Team autonomy, ability to collaborate (3)
- Communication (1)
- No clear ownership, Discipline (2)

## Alignment, Strategy, Decision-Making (25)

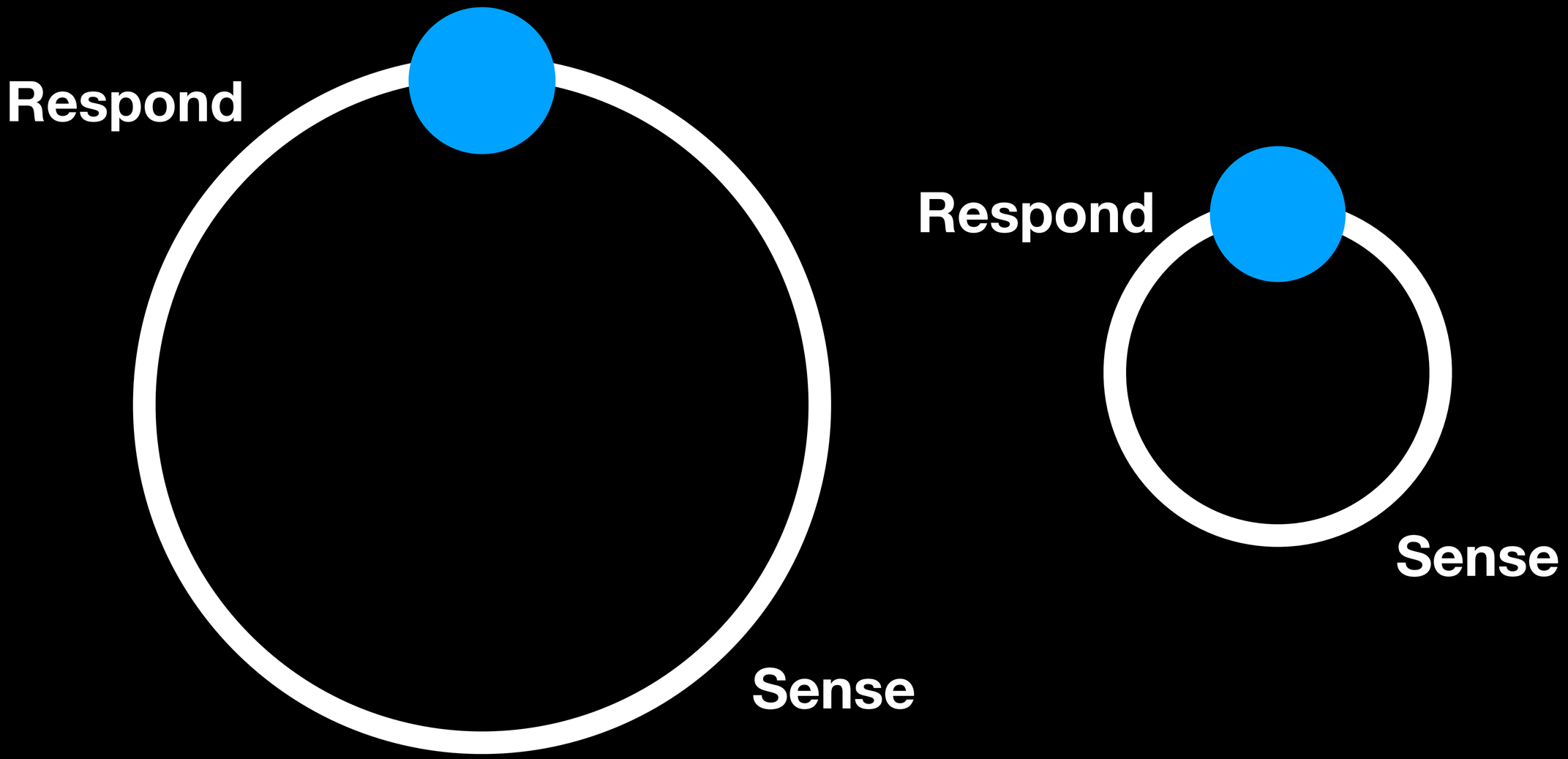
- Connecting high-level goals to team activities. Goal setting ineffective (e.g. OKRs) (2)
- HIPPO prioritization, “great idea-ism”, success theater (4)
- Constantly shifting priorities, lack of focus. Lack of product strategy, deep work, clear vision and direction. Lack of context and the why. Unclear who user/customer is (6)
- Difficulty aligning. No proper kickoff (2)
- Ignore existing data. “Gut based” decision culture (2)
- Premature convergence, premature solutioning (3)

## Revenue Pressure, Deal Closing, Feature Factory (17)

- Pressure to close deals. Too sales driven. Short term revenue/”growth story” focus (5)
- Myopic focus on individual customer needs (2)
- Feature-centrism, output-centrism (4)
- Copying competitors, copy-cat
- Don’t see value, can’t justify investment. “What we’re doing is working”
- Don’t feel competitive pressure

## Busyness, High-Utilization, Constraints (14)

- Too many constraints and dependencies (1)
- Too busy, lack of slack time. Firefighting (4)
- Focus on deadlines/timelines
- Vendor relationship (1)
- Technical debt inhibiting velocity, legacy decisions/software (3)


Respond
Sense
Respond
Sense

A whole universe of safe to fail hacks
Focus on the OS for “trying things”
Coherence and sense-making
Offer ideas occasionally

# The big ideas…

Product development is a beautiful, fractal, networked mess

Efforts to simplify or standardize often backfire

Treating it like a factory often backfires

Reflect on what is actually happening

Create a flow of meaningful stories

Embrace the mess

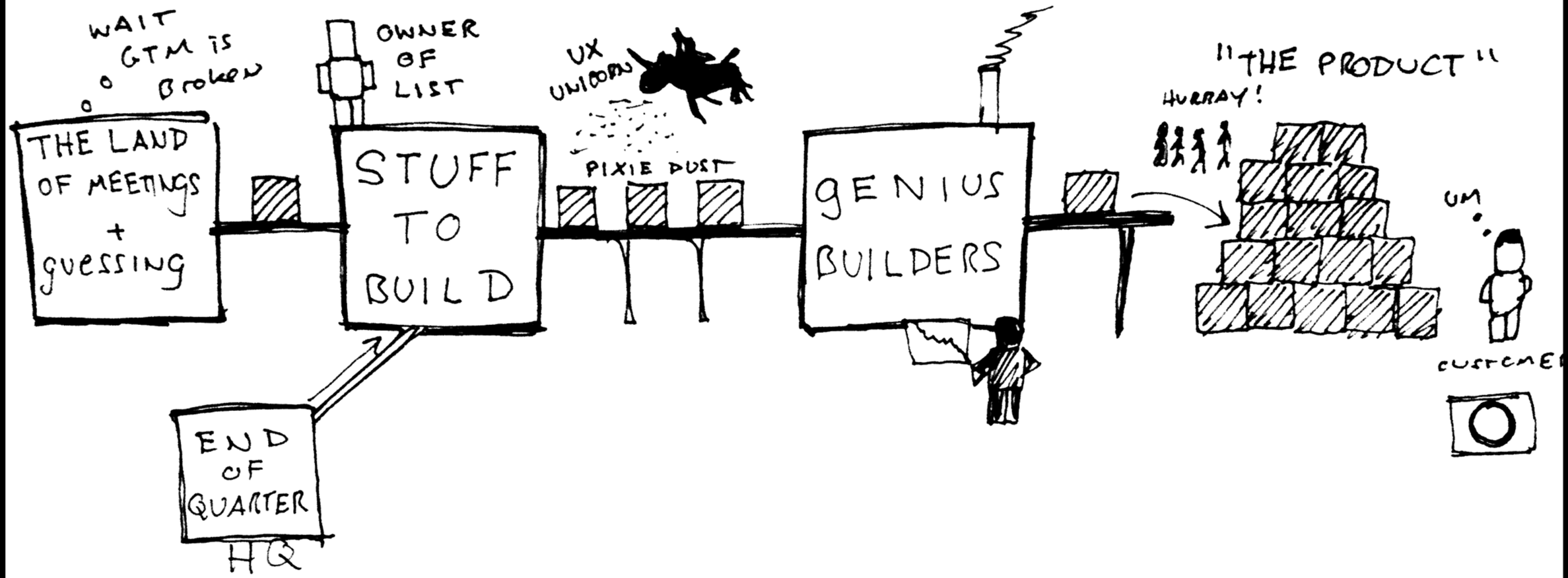
Mirrors are powerful.

# A quick Feature Factory detour…

# 12 Signs You're Working in a Feature Factory

John Cutler

Nov 16, 2016 · 4 min read



Angst is easy (and easy to trigger)

People crave certainty (and uncertainty = opportunity)

People have a deep, deep need for a sense of impact

People have a deep, deep need for coherence

More about a constant flow of impactful stories

*Impact Total*

Difficult to get anything “out the door”. Extremely long feedback loops.

6

Well oiled feature factory. Reasonably usable features. Reasonably happy customers. Occasional wins.

27

Rapid feedback loops. More repeatable wins (and bigger wins). More with less complexity.

49

1

# Framing things as bets…

“So that is your bet? Let’s talk about it…”

# Bets can be…

**Big**
**Small**
**Risky**
**Safe**
**Prescriptive**
**Descriptive**
**Big batch**
**Increment friendly**
**Upfront gamble**
**Change bet over time**
**Networked/connected**
**Isolated**

# http://tiny.cc/you-betcha

In the not-so-distant future we will see the commodification of [some customer/user need, technology service, etc.]. There will be a lowering of prices, and a focus on scale and reliability. This will present the following opportunities: [ways to exploit this shift to commodification], but also trigger the following challenges: [threats to mitigate].

We believe that by focusing on [some intervention] we will make it possible for customers to [achieve some outcome] more [efficiently, accurately, joyfully, effectively], which we believe will benefit the business by [some business benefit, or causal chain].

Operationally, we know we have been been deprioritizing [some process, system, activity]. We realize this causes pain and frustration to our people by [some observable pain points, frustration]. The important bet that we hope will offset this short-term pain is that we are [some larger, valuable bet].

We are betting that customers will continue to use our product because [some value proposition] despite the fact that other products are more [positive attributes of competitive products].

You could call [some set of interventions, or class of interventions] as our “safe bet”. We put time/money in, and get outcomes out. For example, [a scenario described with inputs and outputs]. As with all good things, this could come to an end. The most likely threats are [some list of threats to this predictability].

# Write some BetLibs

2

# The work takes on different shapes…

A. Build exactly this [to a predetermined specification]

B. Build something that does [specific behavior, input-output, interaction]

C. Build something that lets a segment of customers complete [some task, activity, goal]

D. Solve this [more open-ended customer problem]

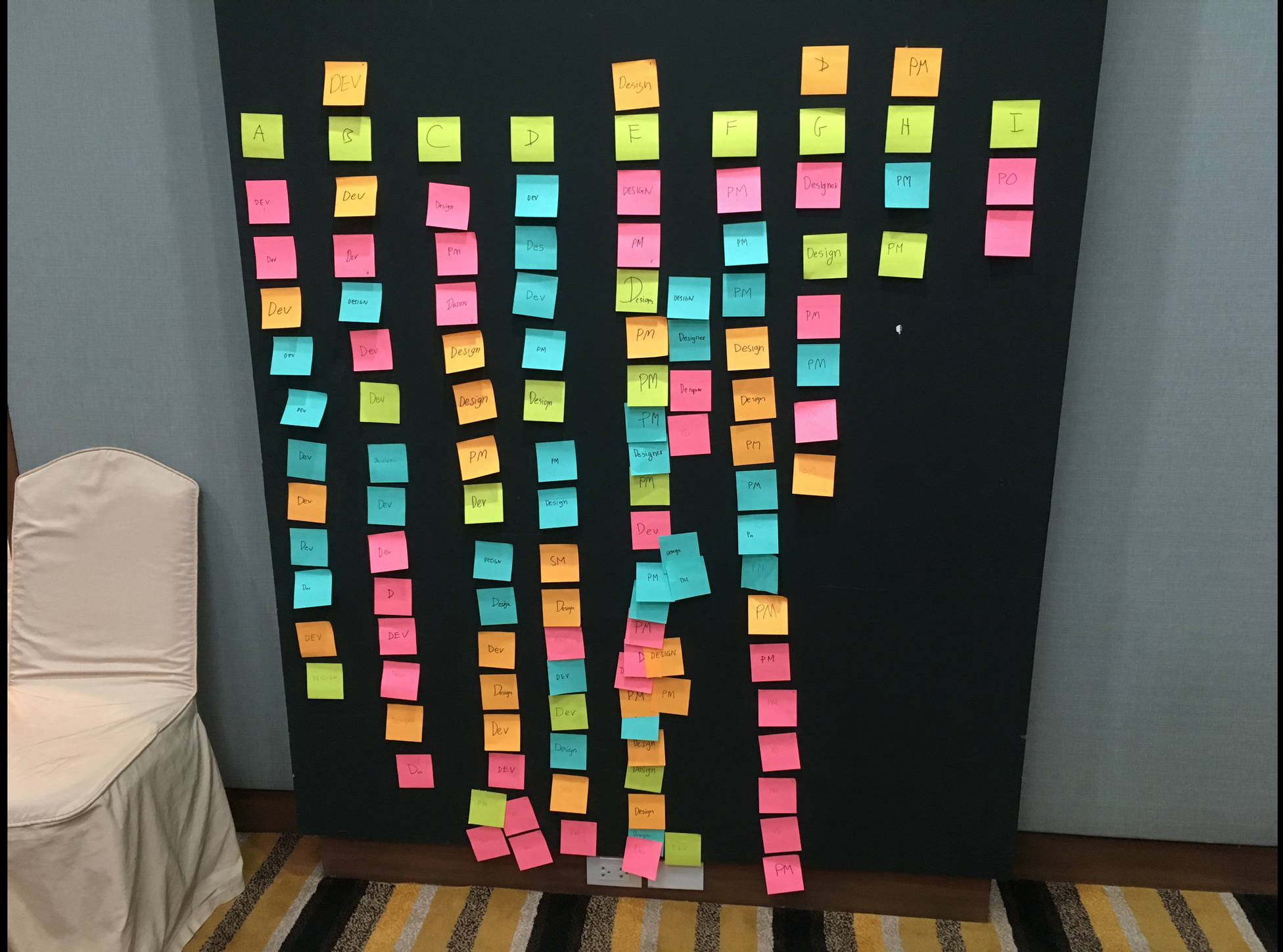
E. Explore the challenges of, and improve the experience for, [segment of users/customers]

F. Increase/decrease [metric] known to influence a specific business outcome

G. Explore various potential leverage points and run experiments to influence [specific business outcome]

H. Directly generate [short-term business outcome]

I. Generate [long-term business outcome]


A
B
C
D
E
F
G
H
I
DEV
Design
PM
PO
Designer
SM

A. Build exactly this [to a predetermined specification]

B. Build something that does [specific behavior, input-output, interaction]

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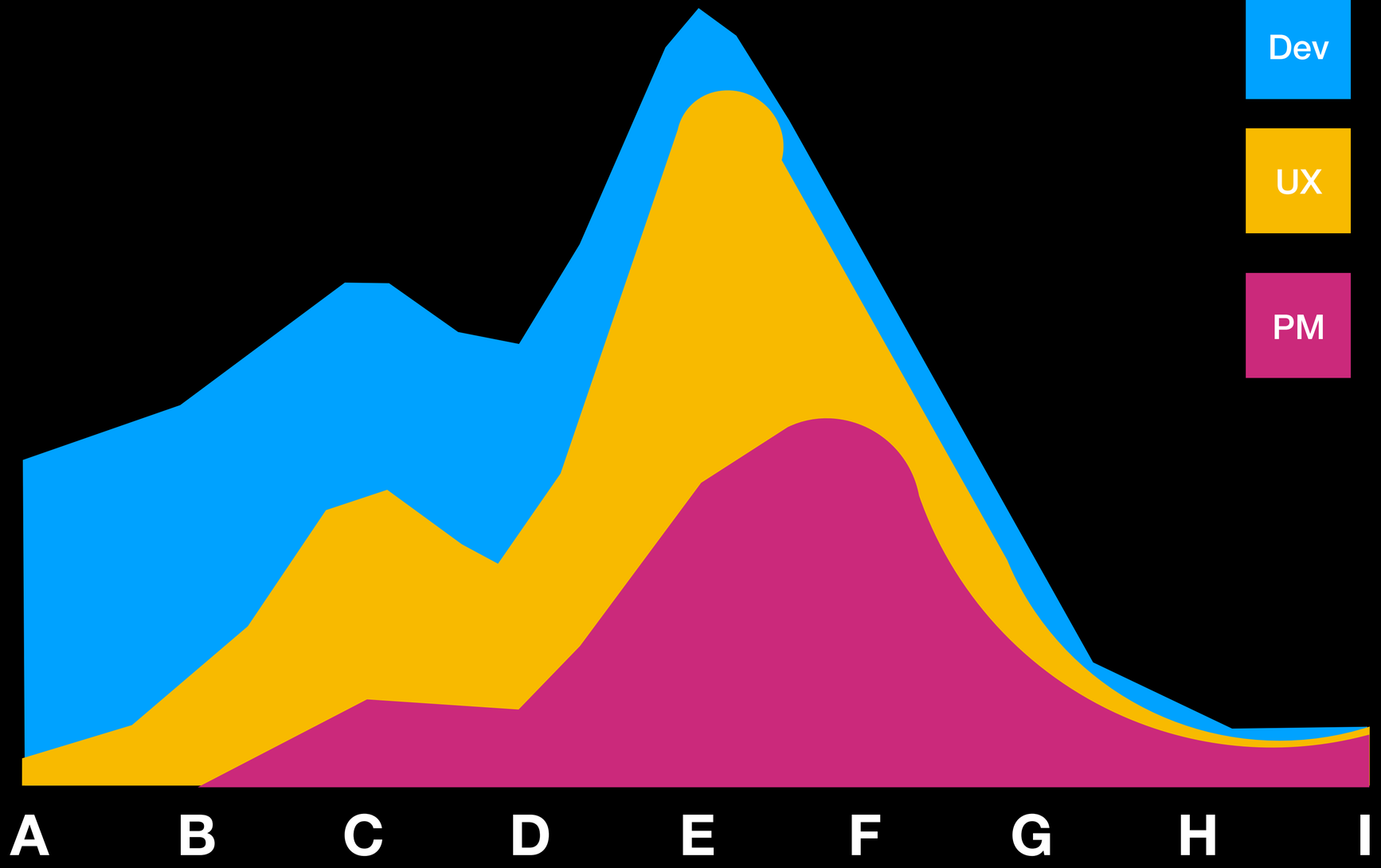
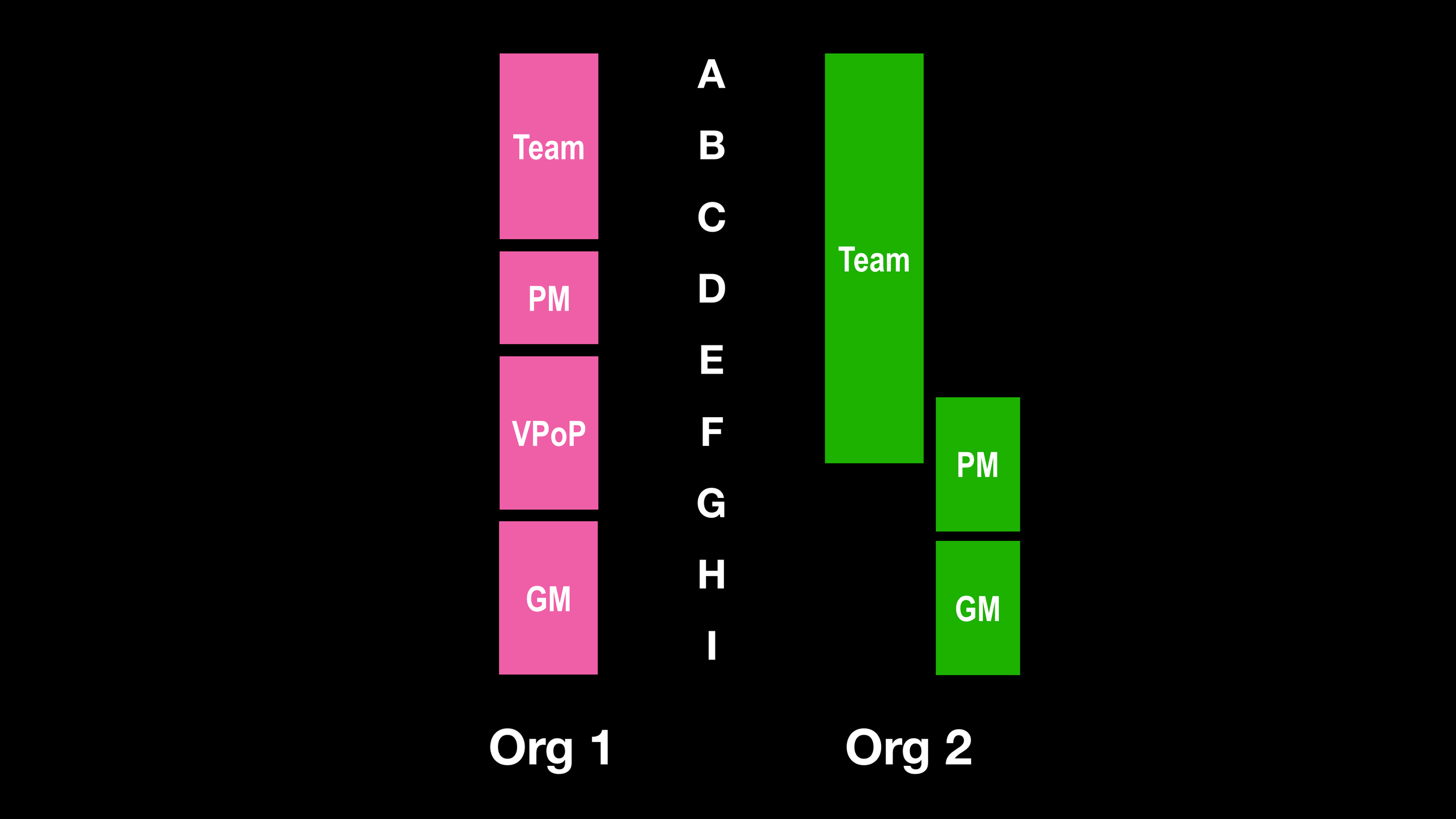
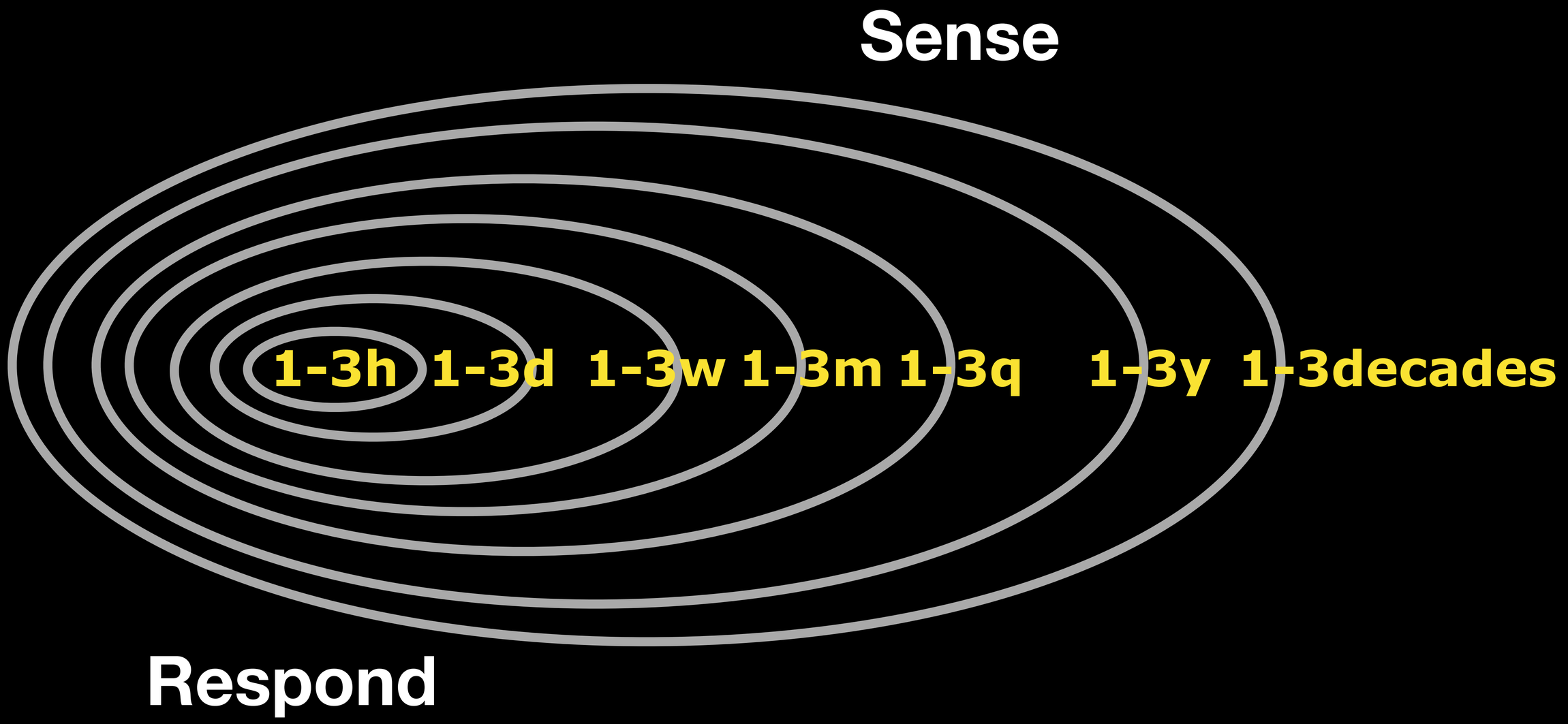


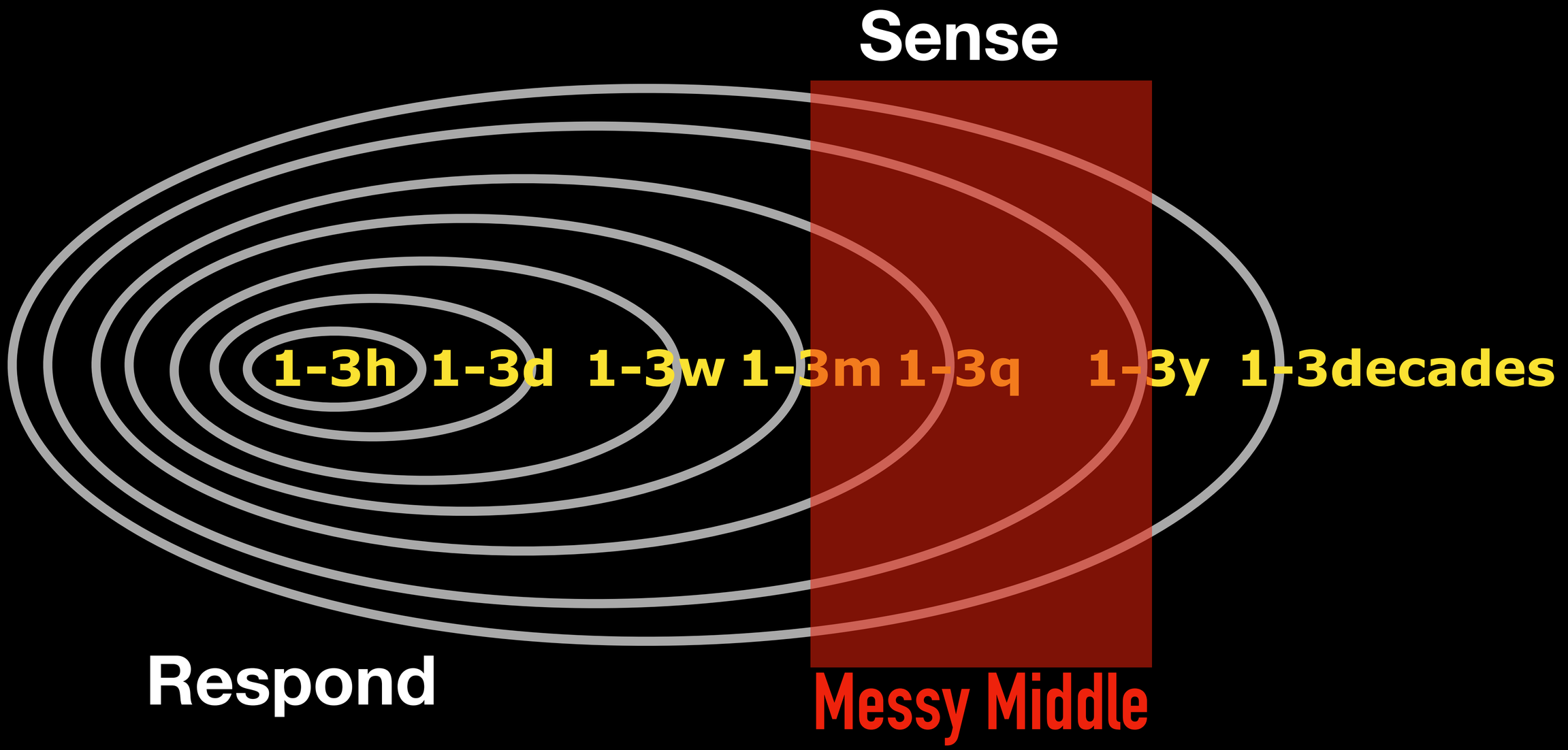

Team
PM
VPoP
GM
A
B
C
D
E
F
G
H
I
Team
PM
GM
Org 1
Org 2

Categorize a sample of work.
Make it visual.

3

# The messy middle…


Sense
1-3h
1-3d
1-3w
1-3m
1-3q
1-3y
1-3decades
Respond

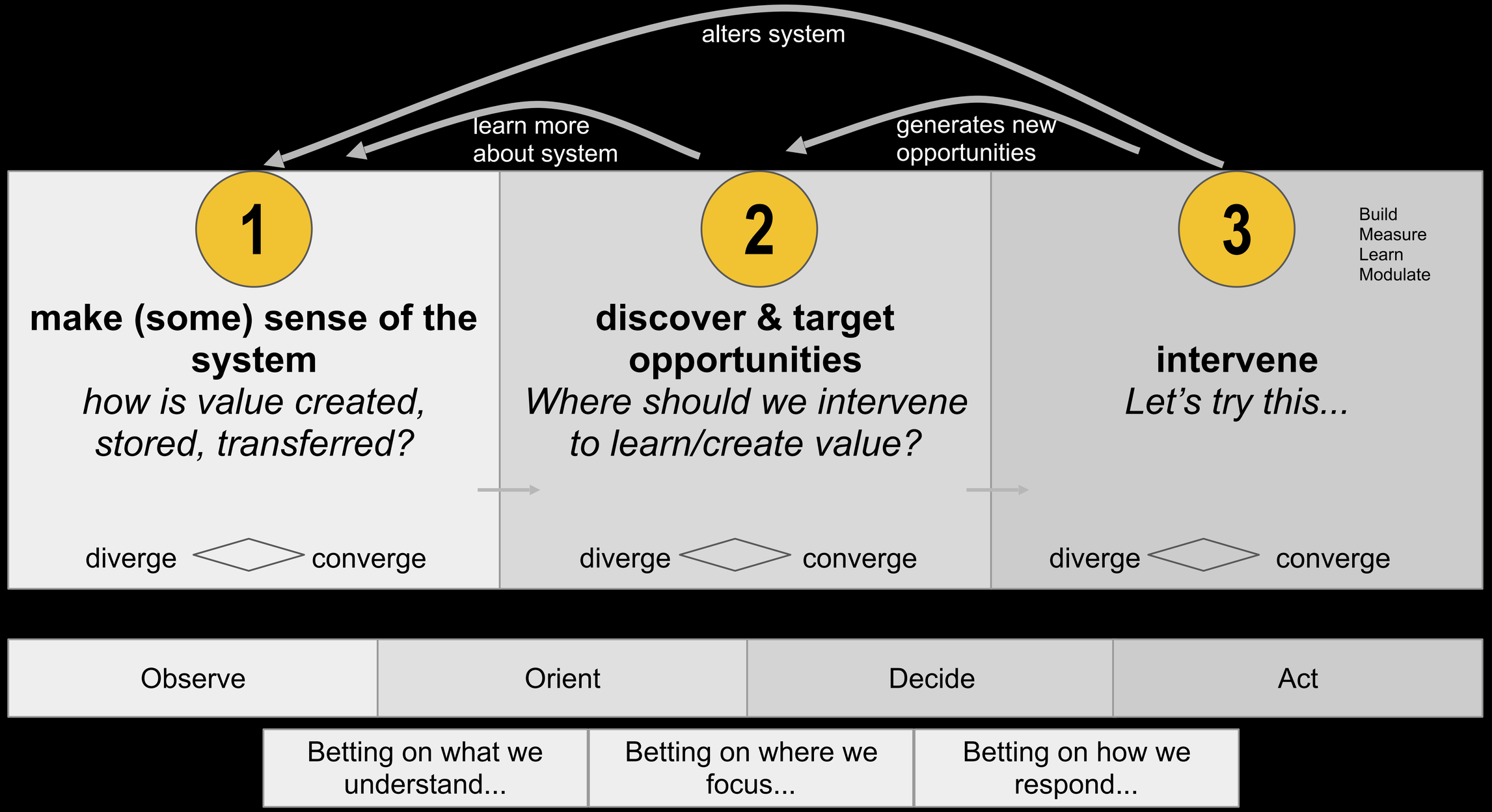

Sense
1-3h
1-3d
1-3w
1-3m
1-3q
1-3y
1-3decades
Respond
Messy Middle

# Map work along a time horizon.
# Nest related work

4

# Hack the language…

| | |
|---|---|
| Problems/Solutions | Opportunities/Interventions |
| Projects | Missions |
| Experiments | Bets |
| “Done” | Decision Point |
| “Done” | Review & Measurement |
| Dependency Wrangling | Playing Tetris |
| Debt | Drag |


alters system
learn more about system
generates new opportunities
1
2
3
Build
Measure
Learn
Modulate
make (some) sense of the system
how is value created, stored, transferred?
discover & target opportunities
Where should we intervene to learn/create value?
intervene
Let's try this...
diverge
converge
diverge
converge
diverge
converge
Observe
Orient
Decide
Act
Betting on what we understand...
Betting on where we focus...
Betting on how we respond...

# Catalog language in use.
# Try subtle changes.

5

# Designing the work taxonomy…

What must you eventually know about this work to make good decisions at the right cadence?

# Tags V1

Vs.

How does work appear in these queues?
How often? With advance notice? Who puts work in these queues?
Dependencies on other groups
Deadline? (real or not)
Cost of being late (or not delivering feature)
Size of effort
Expect impact of item
  Ability to measure impact (and time)
Data on existing usage
Who is advocate? Who are stakeholders?
What is solution certainty? (range)
What is problem uncertainty?
Impacting current customers?
Type of design work
  Core improvements
  New feature development
  Bandaids/fixes
Skills/functions required
Customer visibility
Collaboration model (e.g. contractor teams)
Urgency (P0, P1, P2)
Assumptions / beliefs
Learning goal? Permanence?
Risks willing to incur
Needed / caused by / blocked by tech debt
Background / prior story / veracity of data
Headwinds / blockers
Connected to core strategy?
Reactive vs proactive
Tech used
Org visibility
PIA factor / fun factor
Do not disturb - focus required
Solve tech debt / add new tech debt
When do you need to know the info?
Who needs to be around?

“Got it! So we will have a PRD template that EVERYONE needs to fill in, and review it at each and every handoff?”

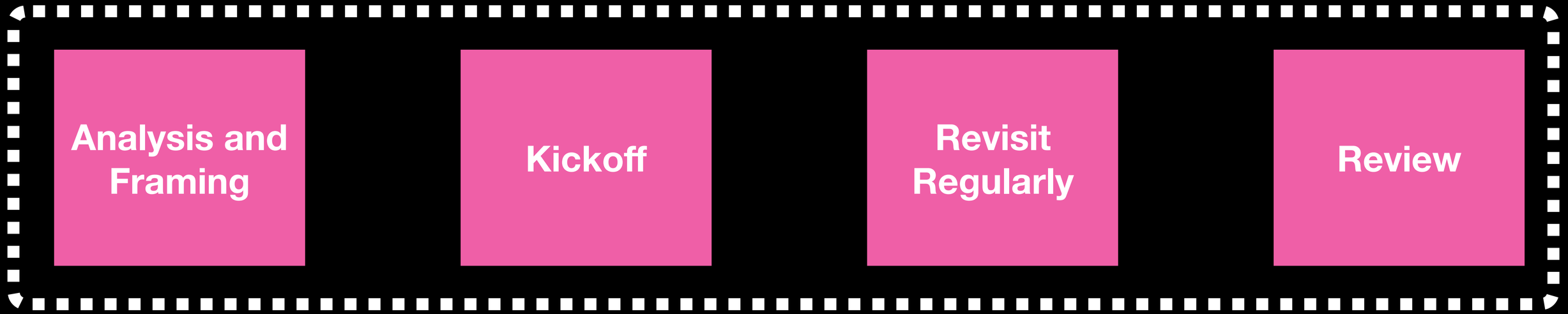
Instead consider…

# Try a “flexible design a one-pager” exercise (or one-pager checklist)

6

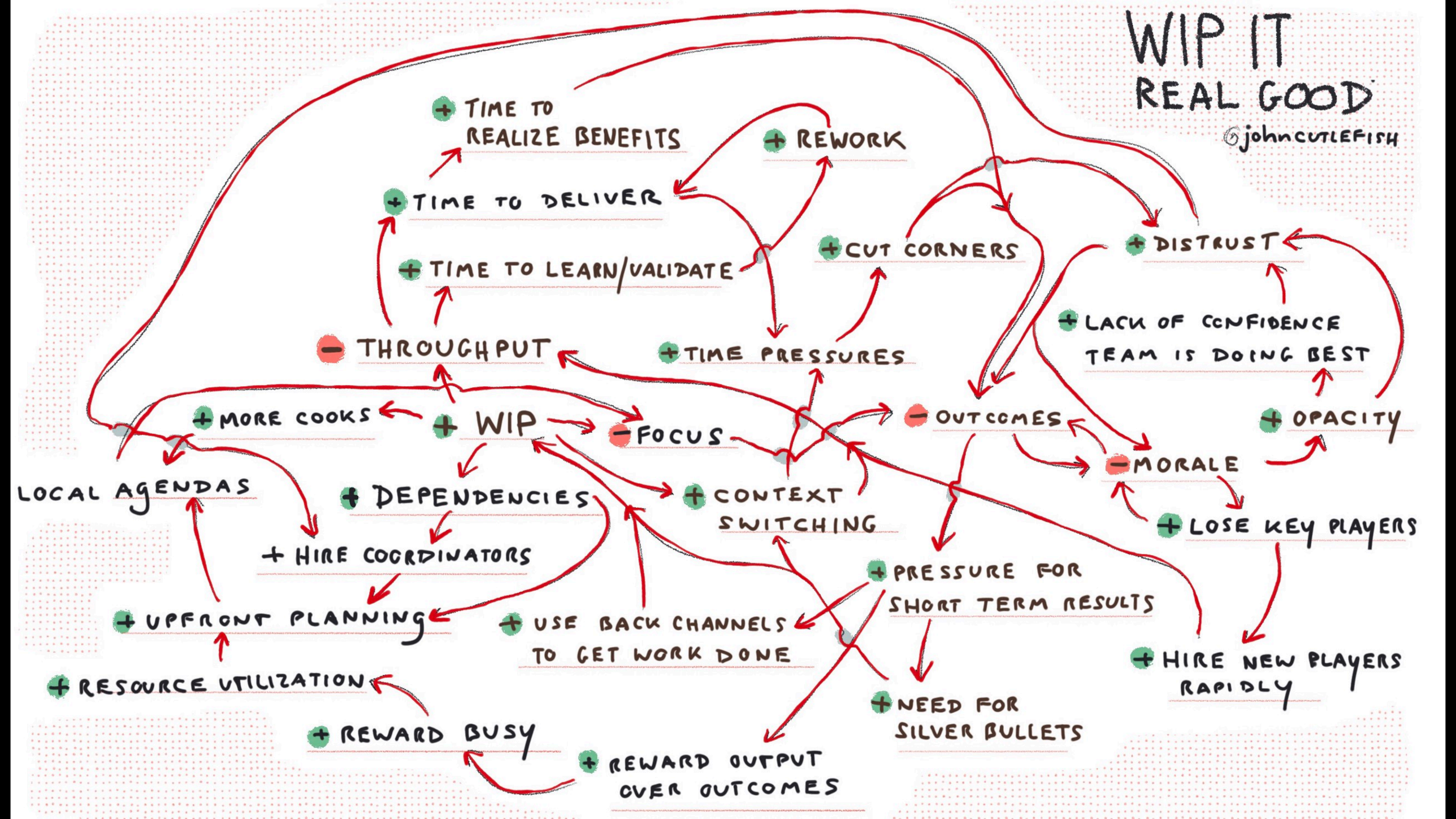
# Letter to the future…

# A continuous artifact…



# A safe decision review.

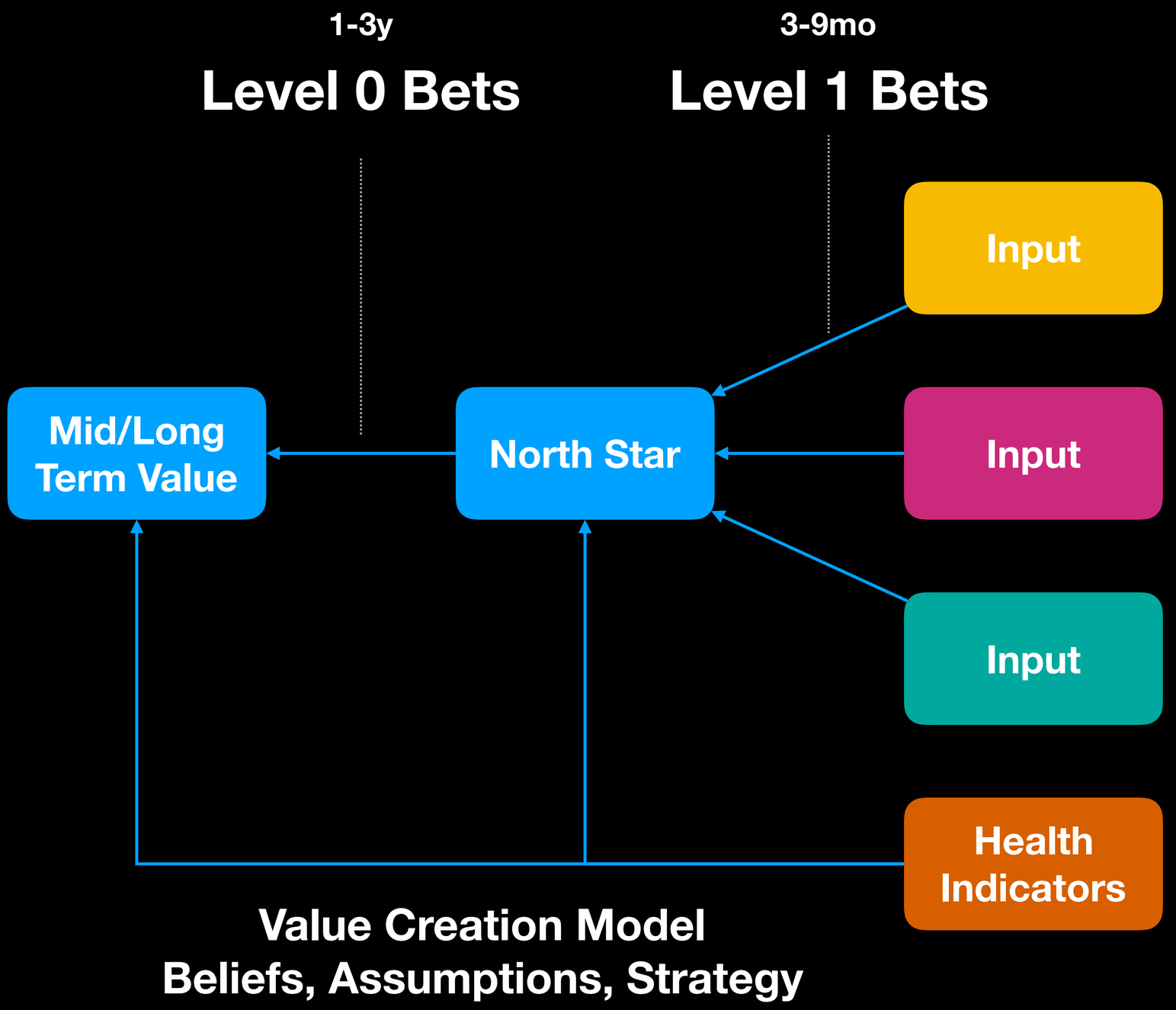
# Big maps of systems…


WIP IT
REAL GOOD
©johncutlefish
+ TIME TO REALIZE BENEFITS
+ REWORK
+ TIME TO DELIVER
+ TIME TO LEARN/VALIDATE
+ CUT CORNERS
+ DISTRUST
+ LACK OF CONFIDENCE TEAM IS DOING BEST
- THROUGHPUT
+ TIME PRESSURES
+ MORE COOKS
+ WIP
- FOCUS
- OUTCOMES
+ OPACITY
- MORALE
LOCAL AGENDAS
+ DEPENDENCIES
+ CONTEXT SWITCHING
+ LOSE KEY PLAYERS
+ HIRE COORDINATORS
+ PRESSURE FOR SHORT TERM RESULTS
+ UPFRONT PLANNING
+ USE BACK CHANNELS TO GET WORK DONE
+ HIRE NEW PLAYERS RAPIDLY
+ RESOURCE UTILIZATION
+ NEED FOR SILVER BULLETS
+ REWARD BUSY
+ REWARD OUTPUT OVER OUTCOMES

# Just try it…

8A

# Flattening the model…


1-3y
3-9mo
Level 0 Bets
Level 1 Bets
Input
Mid/Long Term Value
North Star
Input
Input
Health Indicators
Value Creation Model
Beliefs, Assumptions, Strategy

**Weekly Learning Users (WLUs)**
# of Weekly Users who are active and share a learning that is consumed by at least 2 other people in the previous 7 days.

**Activated Accounts**
Organizations that have reached at least 5 WLUs.

**Broadcasted Learning (BL)**
A chart, dashboard, or Notebook consumed by 2 or more people within a 7 day period.

**Consumption of Learnings (CoL)**
Total reach of BL in an organization within a 7 day period.

# North Star workshop

8B

# Layering in interventions and OKRs…

1-3y

## Level 0 Bets

3-9mo

## Level 1 Bets

1-3mo

## Level 2 Bets

Target Input(s)

Input

Input

Input

Mid/Long Term Value

North Star

Health Indicators

Value Creation Model
Beliefs, Assumptions, Strategy

1-3y

## Level 0 Bets

3-9mo

## Level 1 Bets

1-3mo

## Level 2 Bets

Target Input(s)

Input

Input

Input

Health Indicators

Mid/Long Term Value

North Star

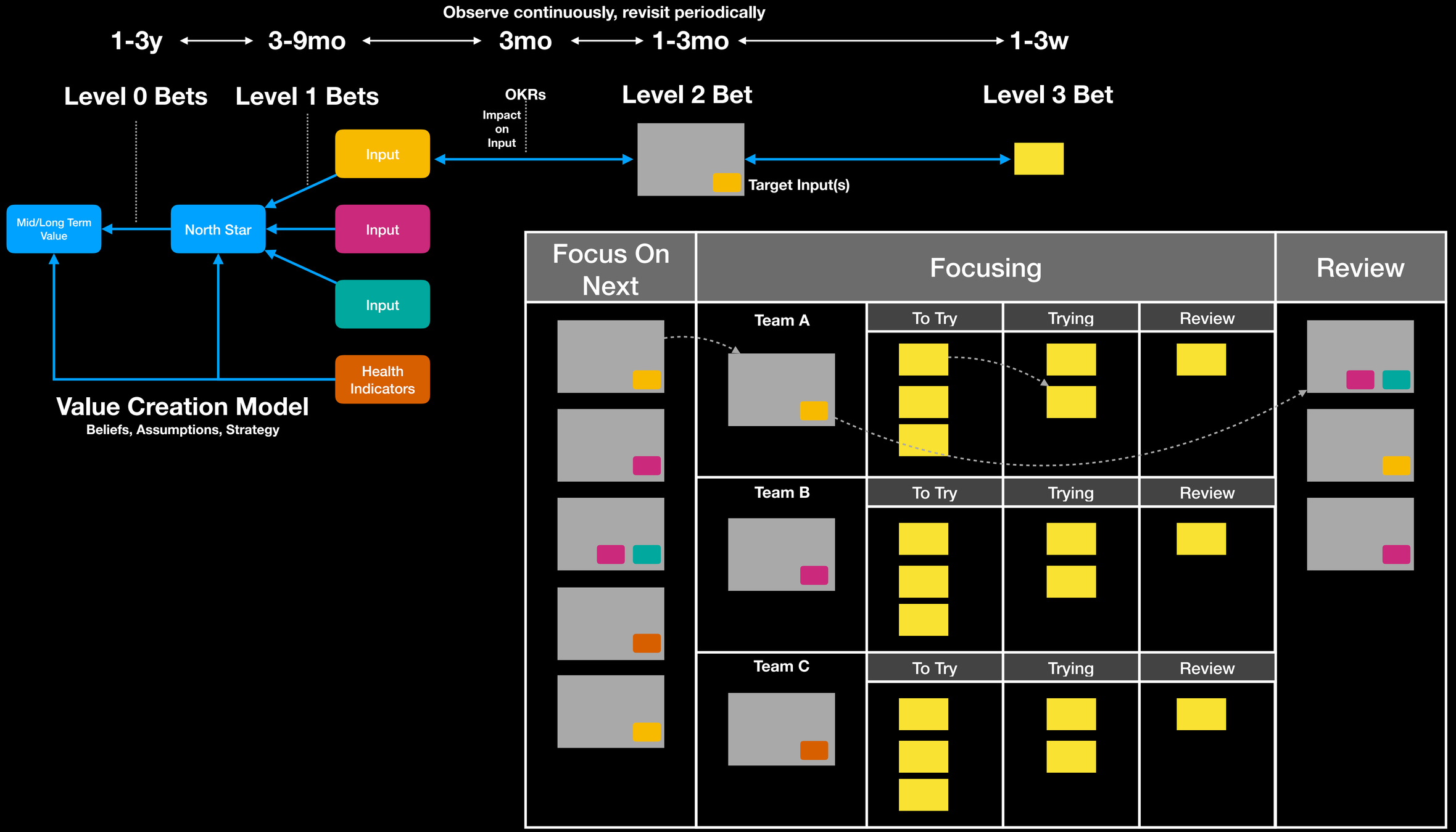
OKRs
Forecasted impact on input

Value Creation Model
Beliefs, Assumptions, Strategy

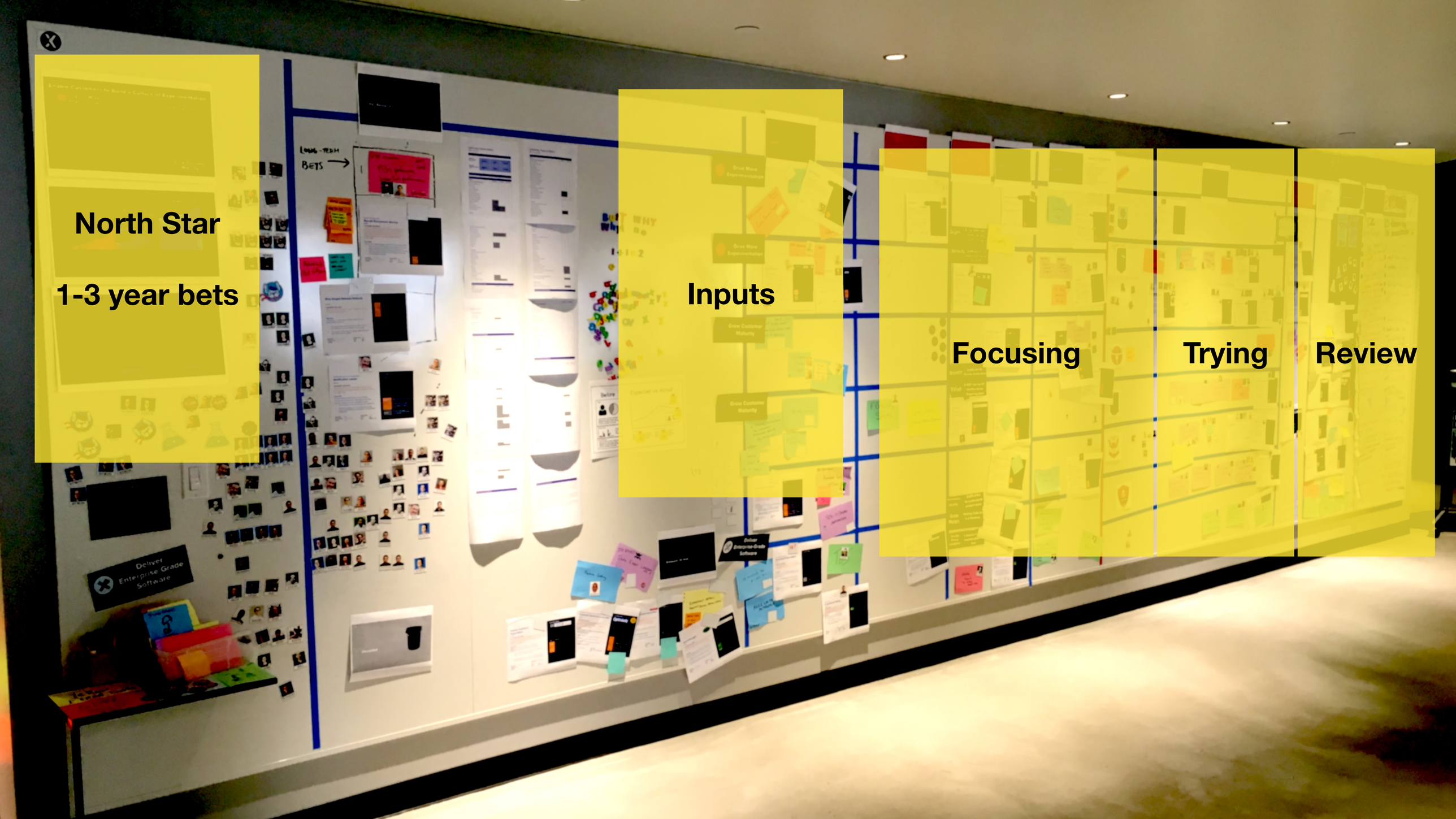
# Map work to Inputs.

8C

# A big, visual, hybrid board…


Observe continuously, revisit periodically
1-3y
3-9mo
3mo
1-3mo
1-3w
Level 0 Bets
Level 1 Bets
OKRs
Impact on Input
Level 2 Bet
Level 3 Bet
Input
Input
Input
Mid/Long Term Value
North Star
Health Indicators
Target Input(s)
Value Creation Model
Beliefs, Assumptions, Strategy
Focus On Next
Focusing
Review
Team A
Team B
Team C
To Try
Trying
Review
To Try
Trying
Review
To Try
Trying
Review

Enable Customers to Build a Culture of Experimentation
Cross-Team Bets
Drive More Experimentation
Drive More Experimentation
Grow Customer Maturity
Grow Customer Maturity
Deliver Enterprise-Grade Software
Deliver Enterprise Grade Software
Before
Expected vs Actual


North Star
1-3 year bets
Inputs
Focusing
Trying
Review

Get out that tape.
Get those magnets.

# Questions