Things to Think With

TORCHI / DEC 2020

Stephen P. Anderson

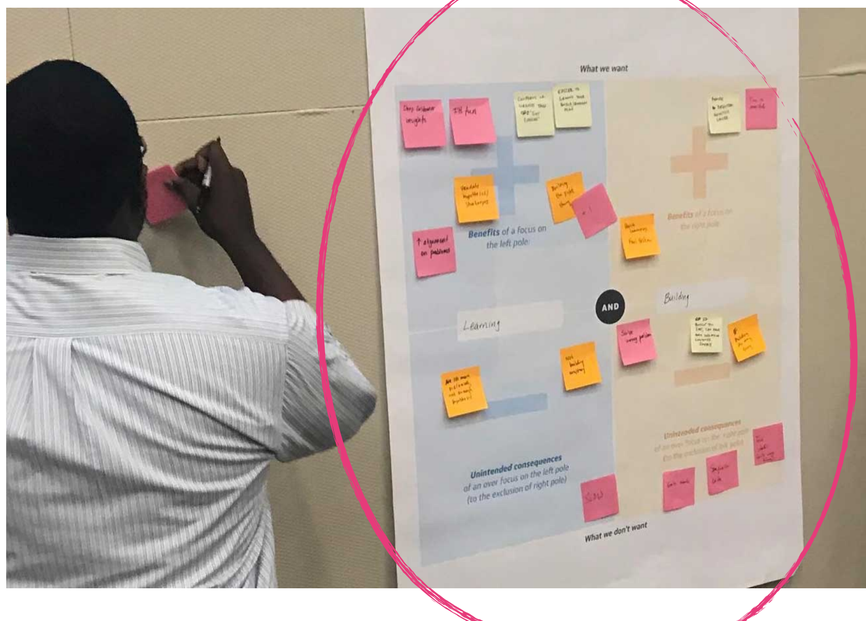
@stephenanderson

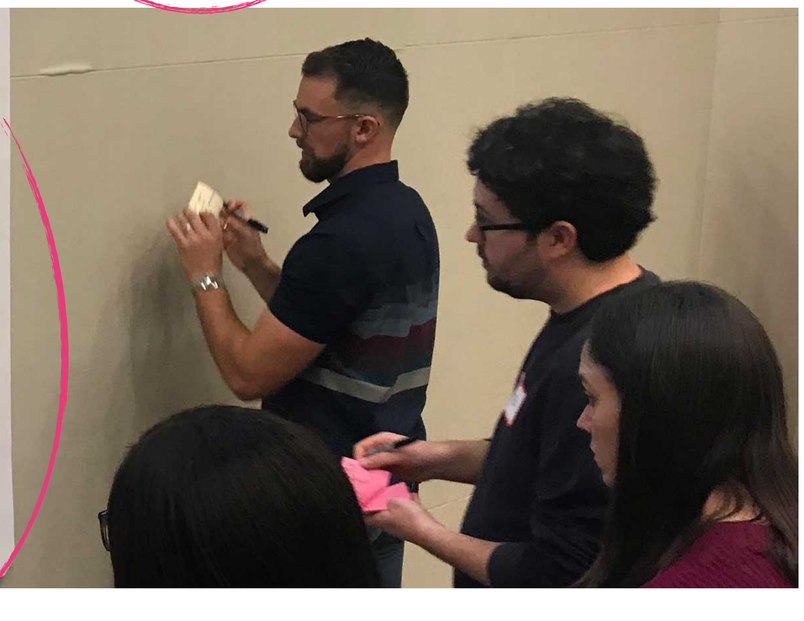
ON A MISSION...

To make learning the hard stuff fun, by creating ‘things to think with’ and ‘spaces’ for generative play.

CARD DECKS
TILES
CANVASES
MAPS
MODELS
REFLECTION QUESTIONS
GAMES

‘things to think with’





ANALOGIES
EXPLORABLE EXPLANATIONS
GAMEBOOKS
SIMULATIONS
DATA VISUALIZATIONS
ETC.

CARD DECKS
TILES
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MAPS
MODELS
REFLECTION QUESTIONS
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WHY ‘things to think with’?

ANALOGIES
EXPLORABLE EXPLANATIONS
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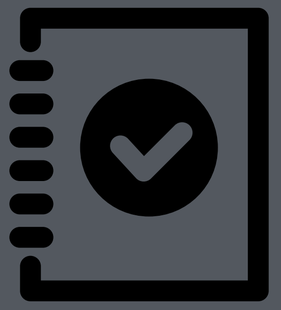
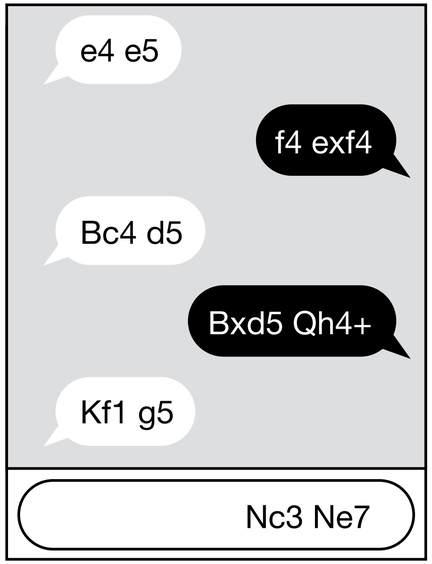
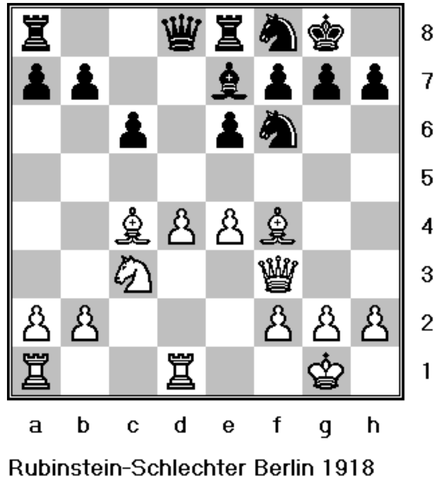


When we bring ideas into the world (in a thoughtful, structured way) we extend our ability to think about and discuss complex topics.

REQUIRES SERIOUS CONCENTRATION AND RECALL OF ALL THAT HAS BEEN SAID



OFFERS A RECORD OF INFORMATION WE CAN REFER BACK TO



Rubinstein-Schlechter Berlin 1918

HOLDS INFORMATION IN A WAY THAT:

- SUPPORTS REFLECTION
- REVEALS PATTERNS

+ INTERACTIONS ALLOW US TO EXTEND OUR THINKING AND SEE MORE POSSIBILITIES

SUPPORTS MORE COMPLEX THINKING!

NOW, THINK ABOUT THE LAST SERIOUS DISAGREEMENT YOU GOT INTO…

…OR A BIG DECISION THAT YOU RECENTLY MADE

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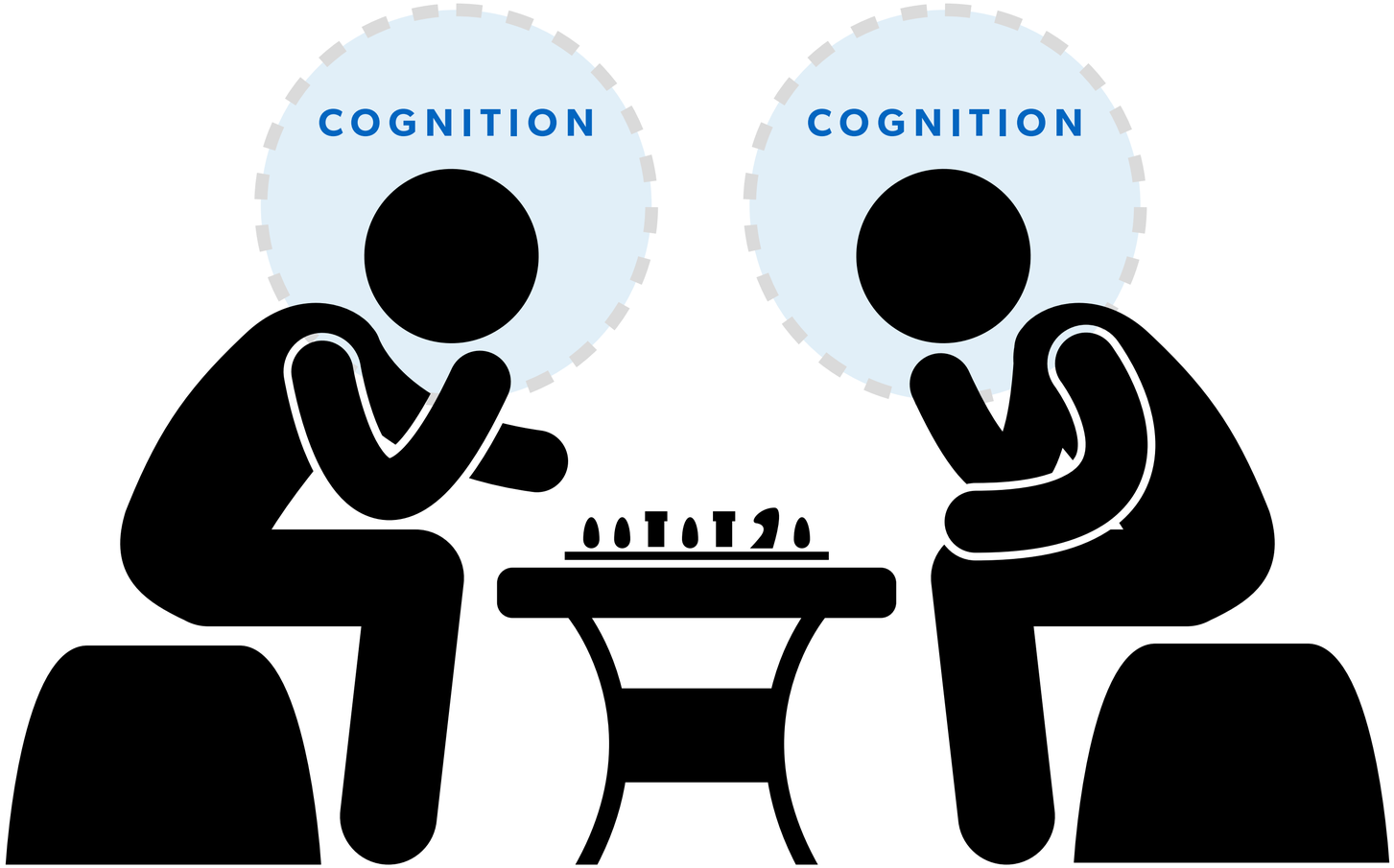

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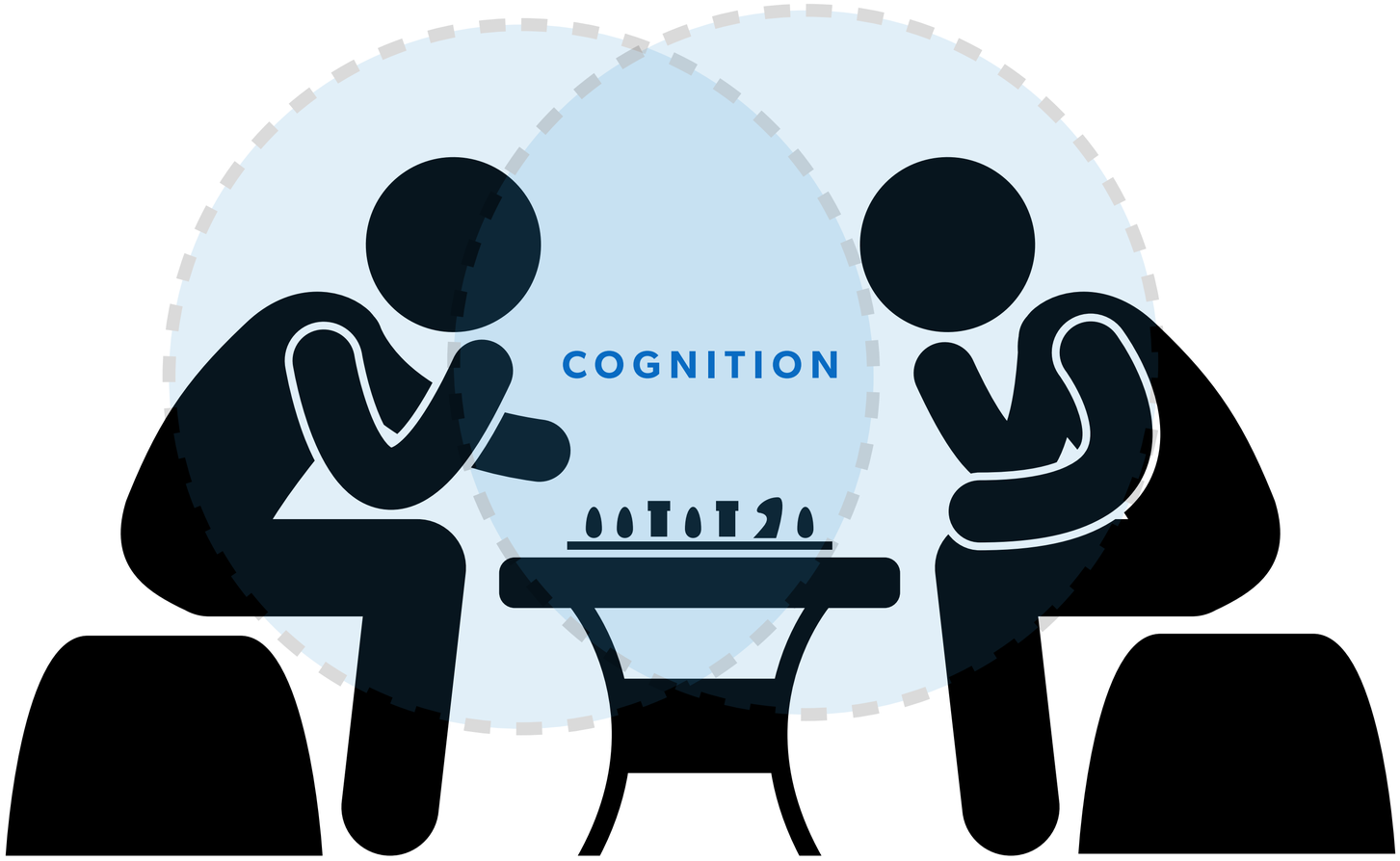

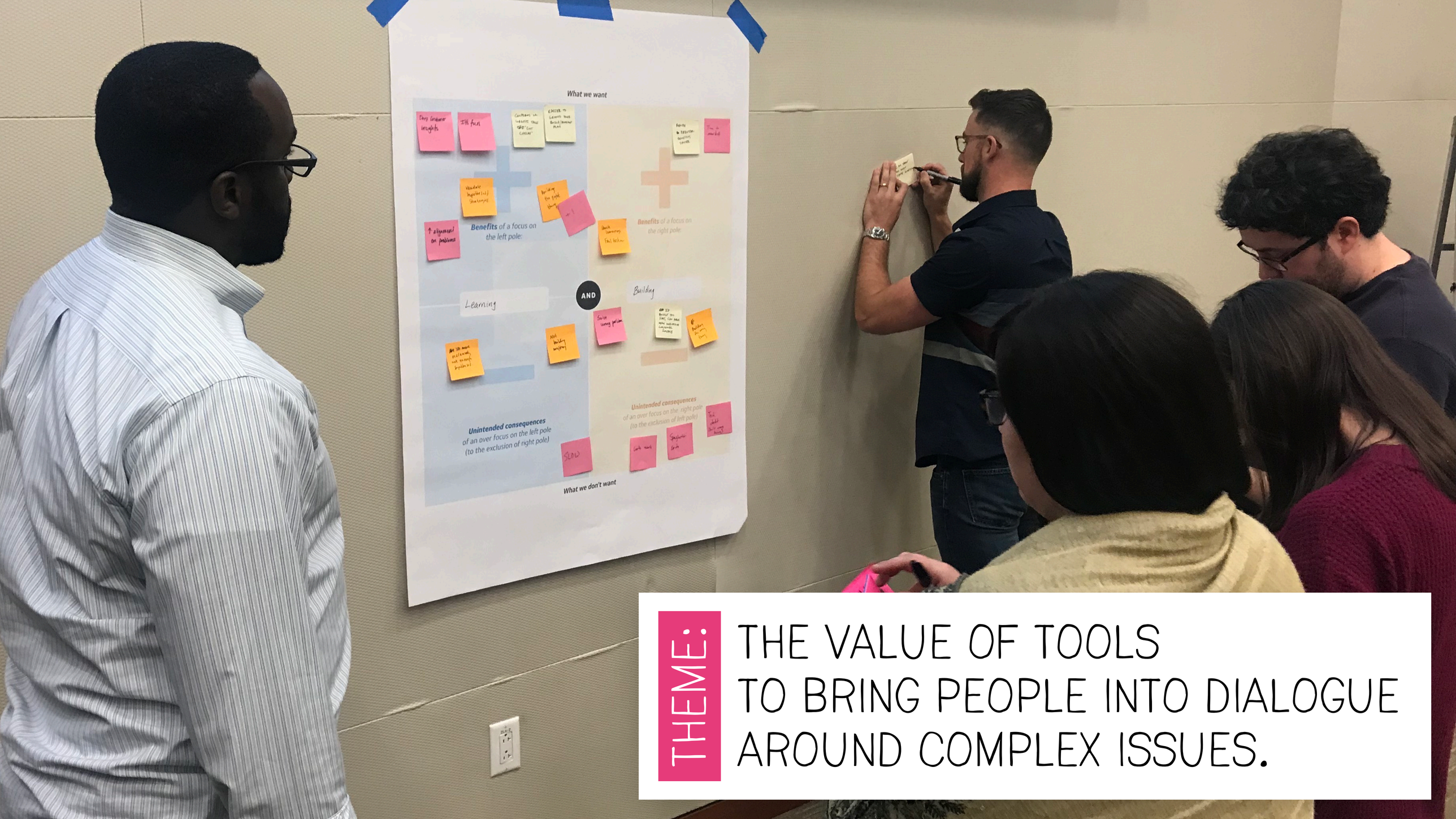

THEME:

THE VALUE OF TOOLS TO BRING PEOPLE INTO DIALOGUE AROUND COMPLEX ISSUES.

Multiply 2 x 3.

Multiply 32 x 11.

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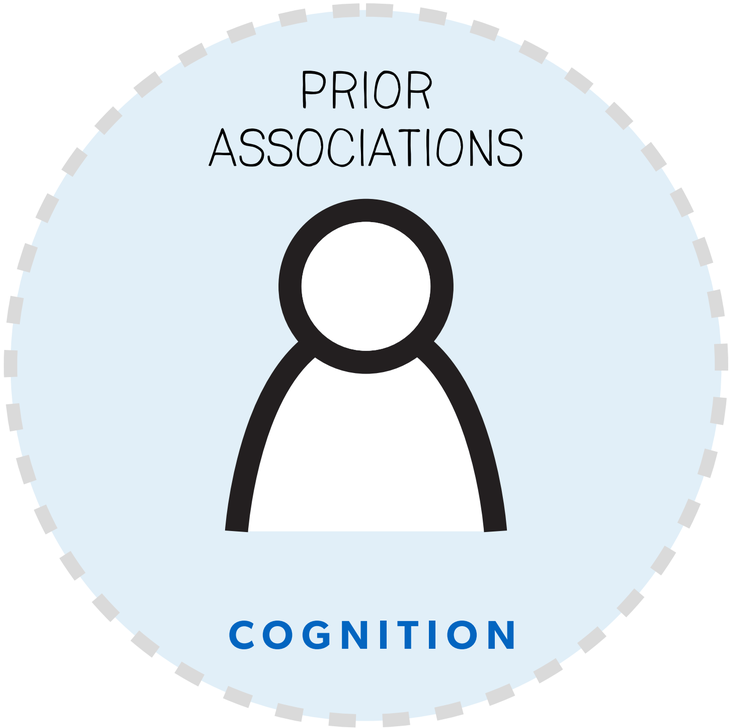

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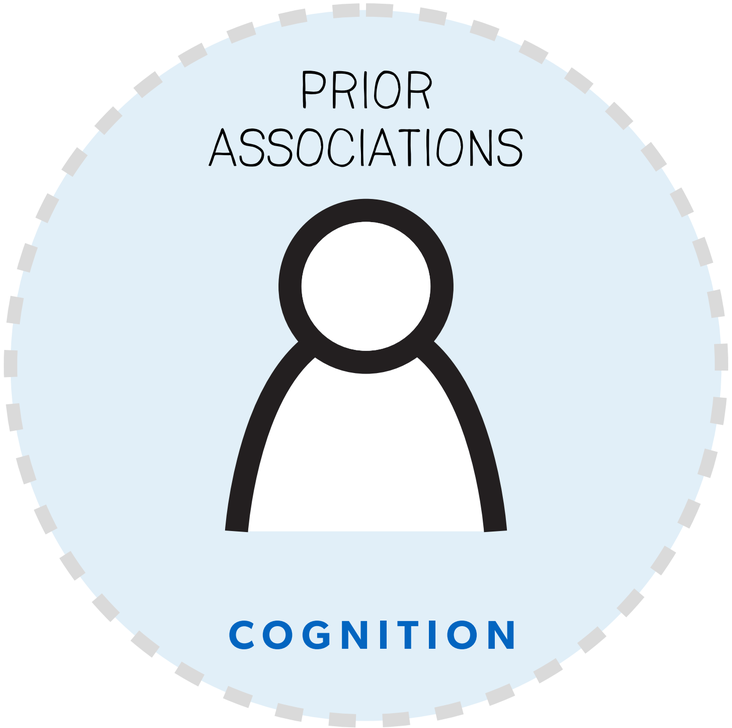

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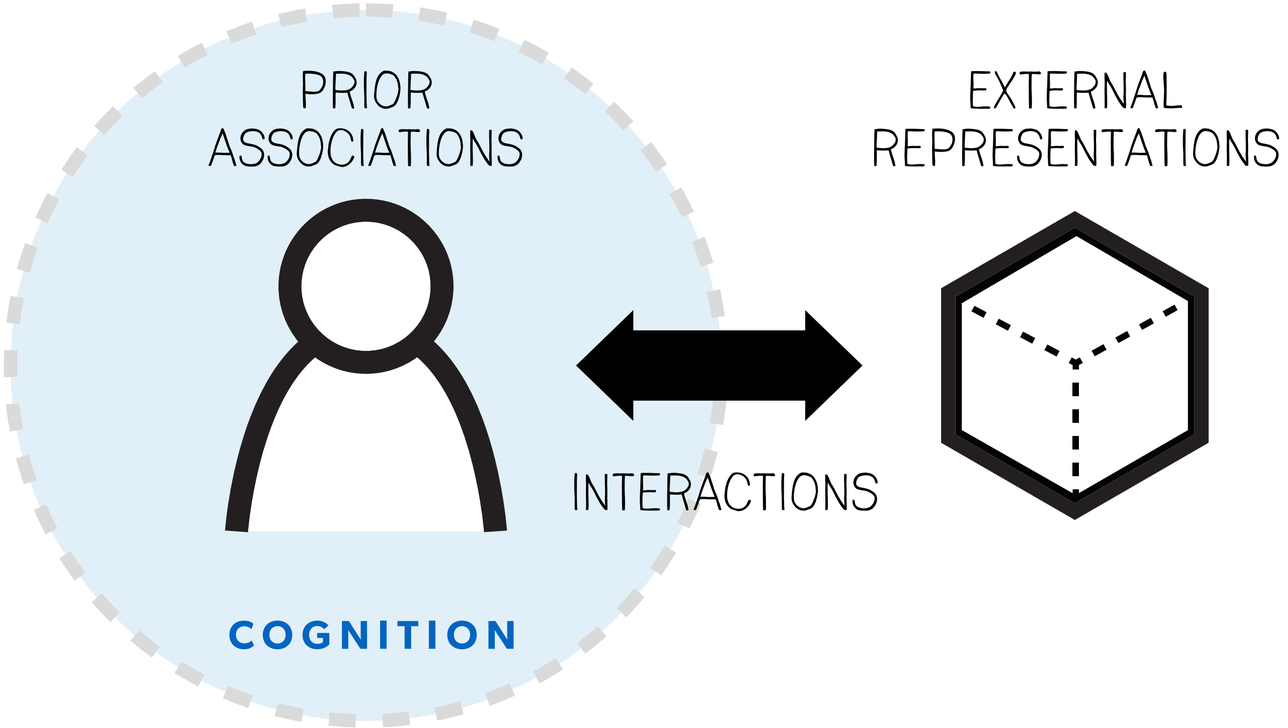

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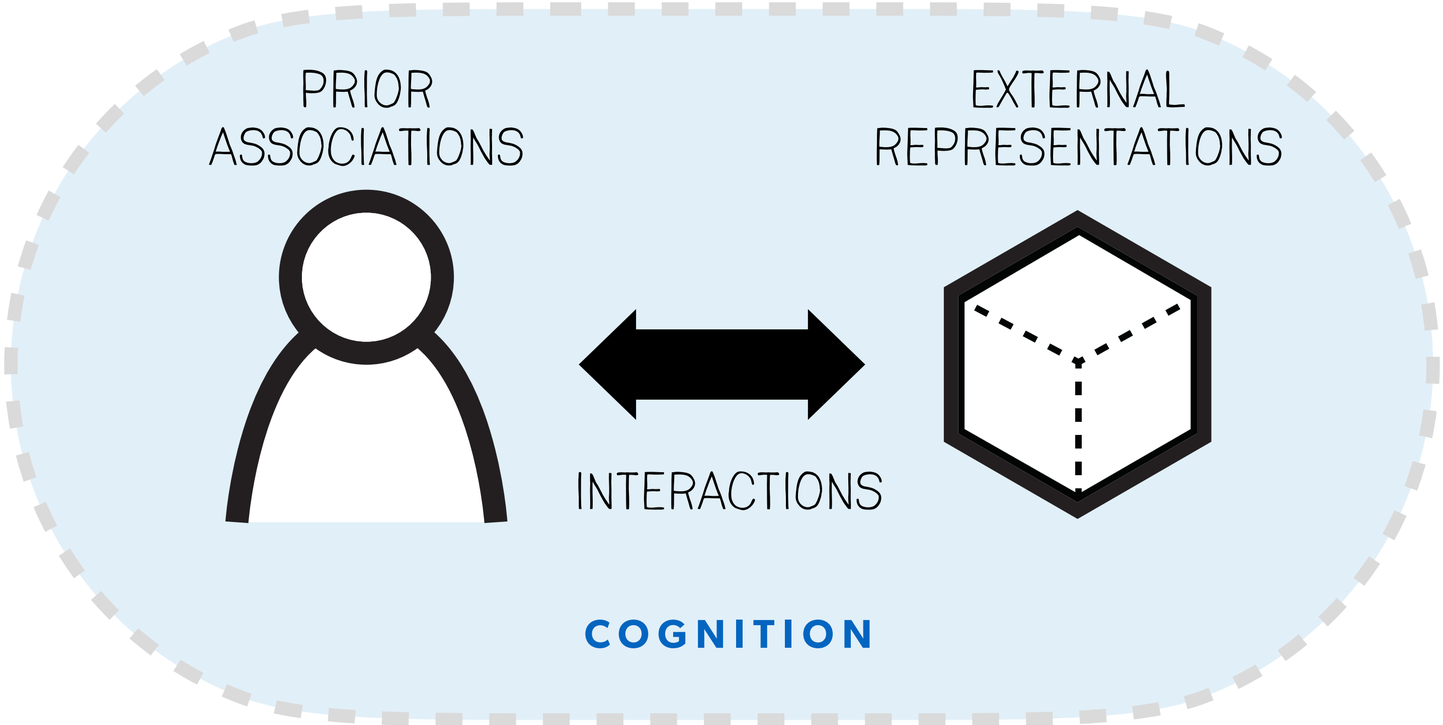
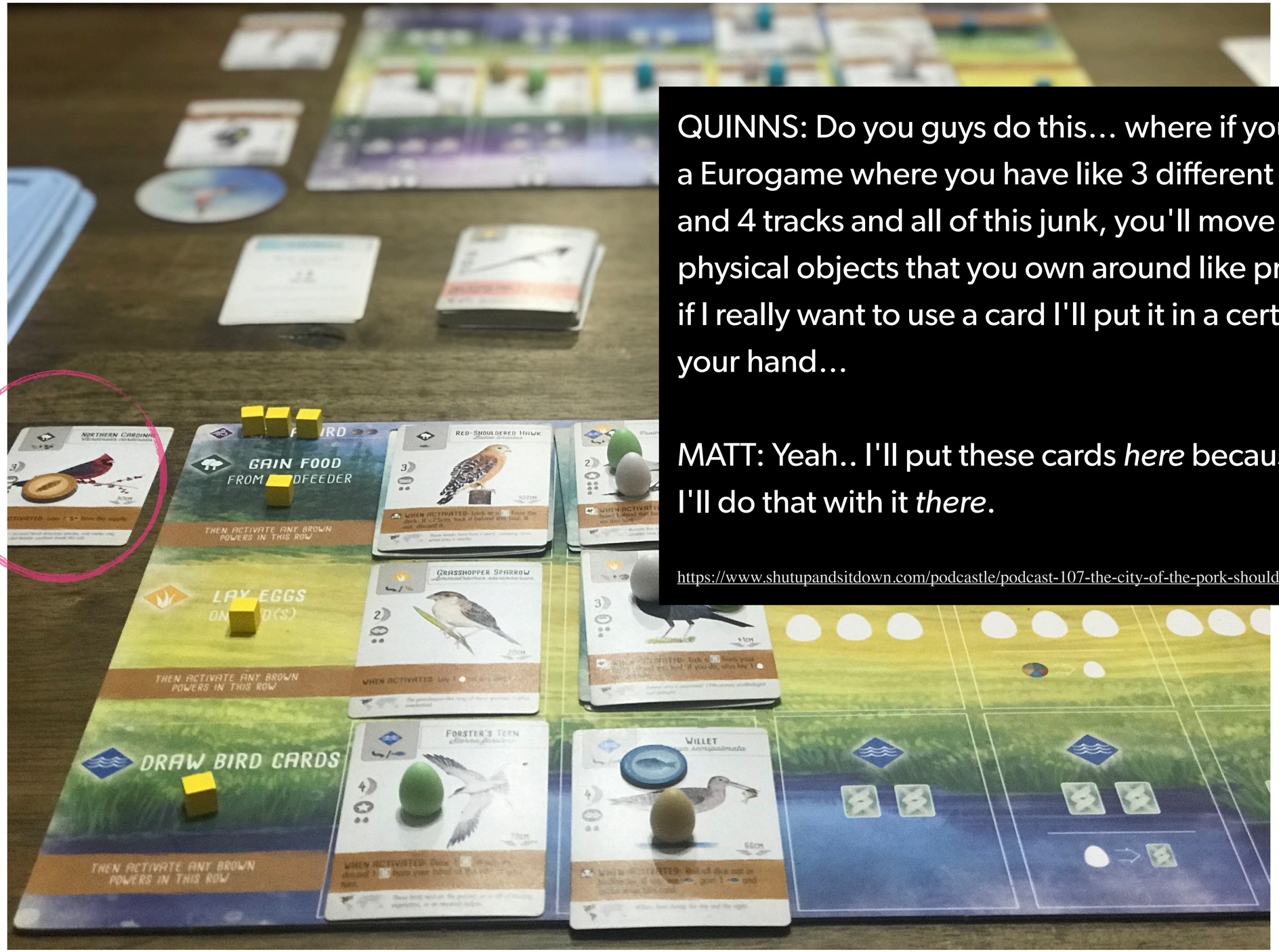


GAIN FOOD
FROM FEEDER
THEN ACTIVATE ANY BROWN POWERS IN THIS ROW
LAY EGGS
THEN ACTIVATE ANY BROWN POWERS IN THIS ROW
DRAW BIRD CARDS
THEN ACTIVATE ANY BROWN POWERS IN THIS ROW
RED-SHOULDERED HAWK
BUSHTIT
PYGMY NUTHATCH
GRASSHOPPER SPARROW
FORSTER'S TERN
WILLET



QUINNS: Do you guys do this… where if you're playing a Eurogame where you have like 3 different resources and 4 tracks and all of this junk, you'll move the physical objects that you own around like prompts. Like if I really want to use a card I'll put it in a certain place in your hand…

MATT: Yeah.. I'll put these cards *here* because I know I'll do that with it *there*.

https://www.shutupandsitdown.com/podcastle/podcast-107-the-city-of-the-pork-shoulders/

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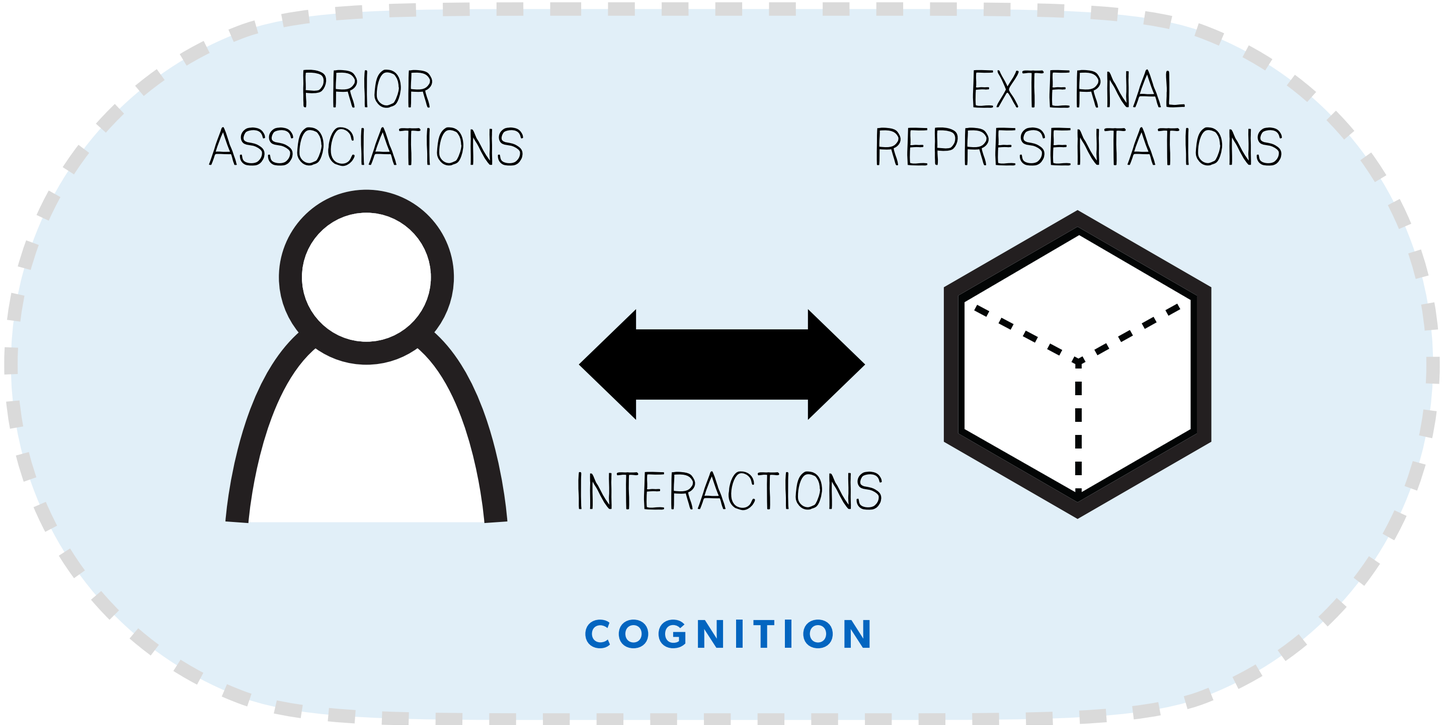
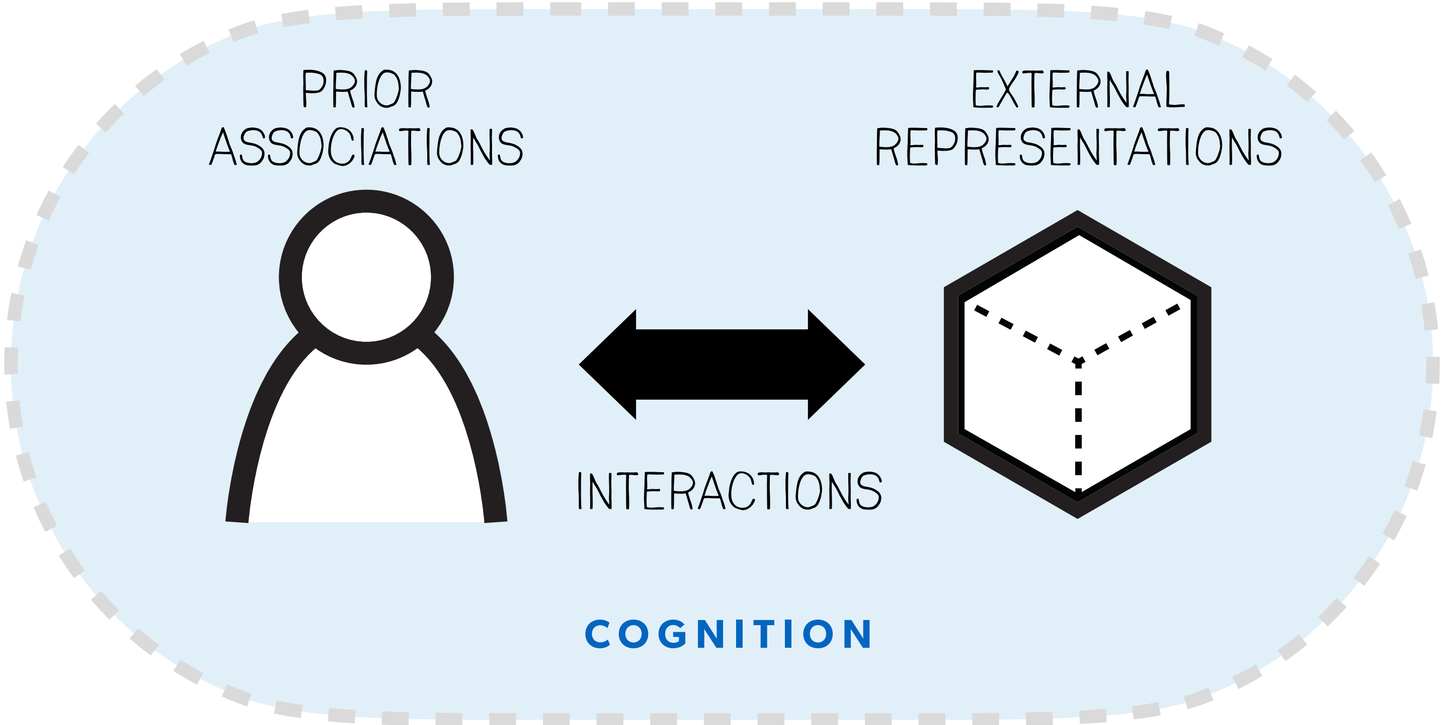


“Let’s plan the next sprint.”



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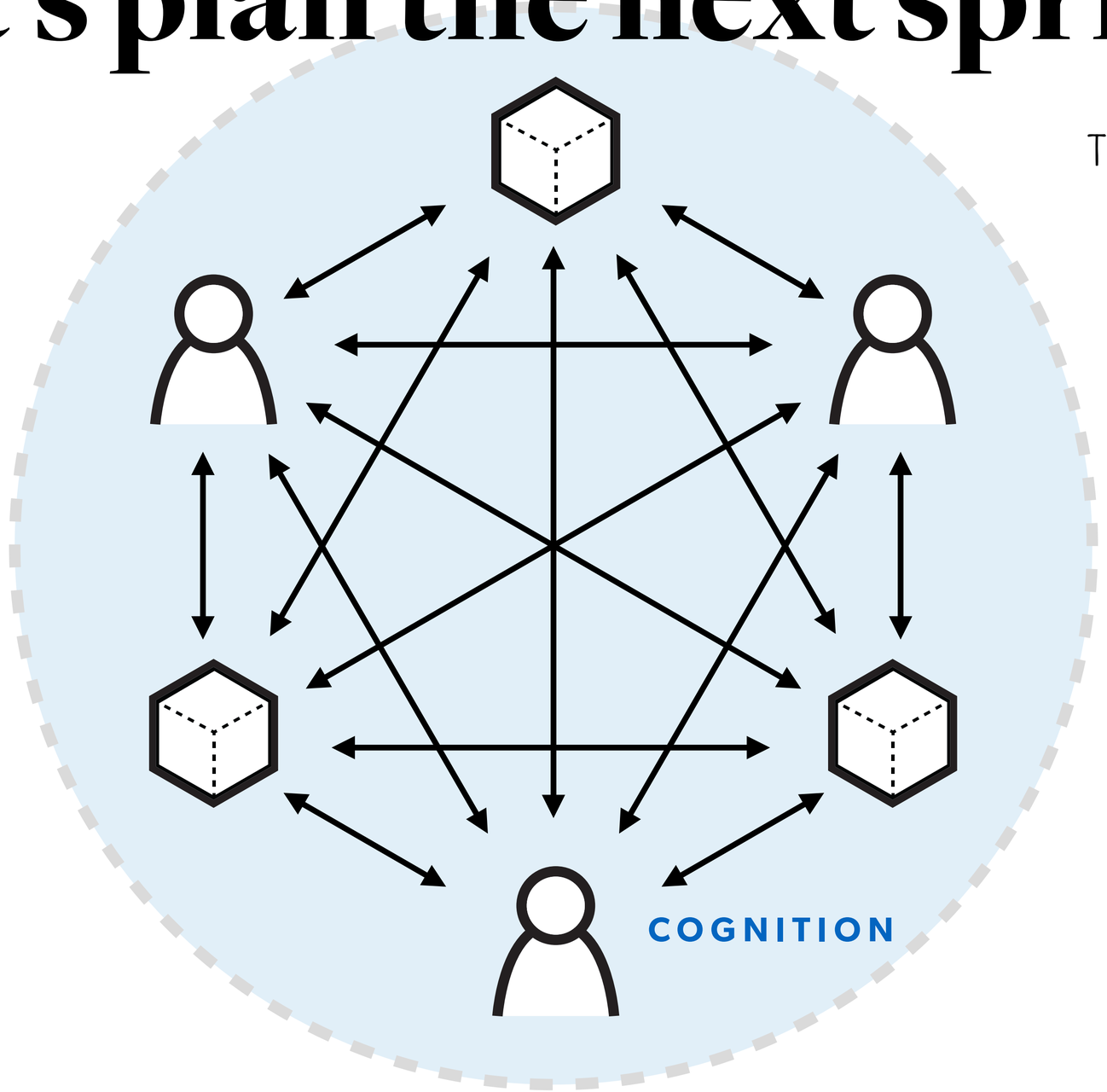


THE COORDINATION OF…

PRIOR ASSOCIATIONS

EXTERNAL REPRESENTATIONS

INTERACTIONS

Impressed
Delighted
Engaged
Sensified
Amused
Meh
Unimpressed
Curious
It's Fine
Impatient
Surprised
Awkward
Anxious
Awww
Annoyed
Confused
FOMO
Disappointed
Pissed Off
WTF
Pathetic
Put Out

WHY?

EXTERNAL VISUAL TOOLS…

…create persistent, shareable structures:

- *Are persistent structures.*
- *Can be shared with others*
- *Can represent literal as well as conceptual ideas.*

…provide perceptual, computational benefits:

- *Relieve our short term memory*
- *Help us to spot patterns*
- *Are powerful as mental construction tools.*

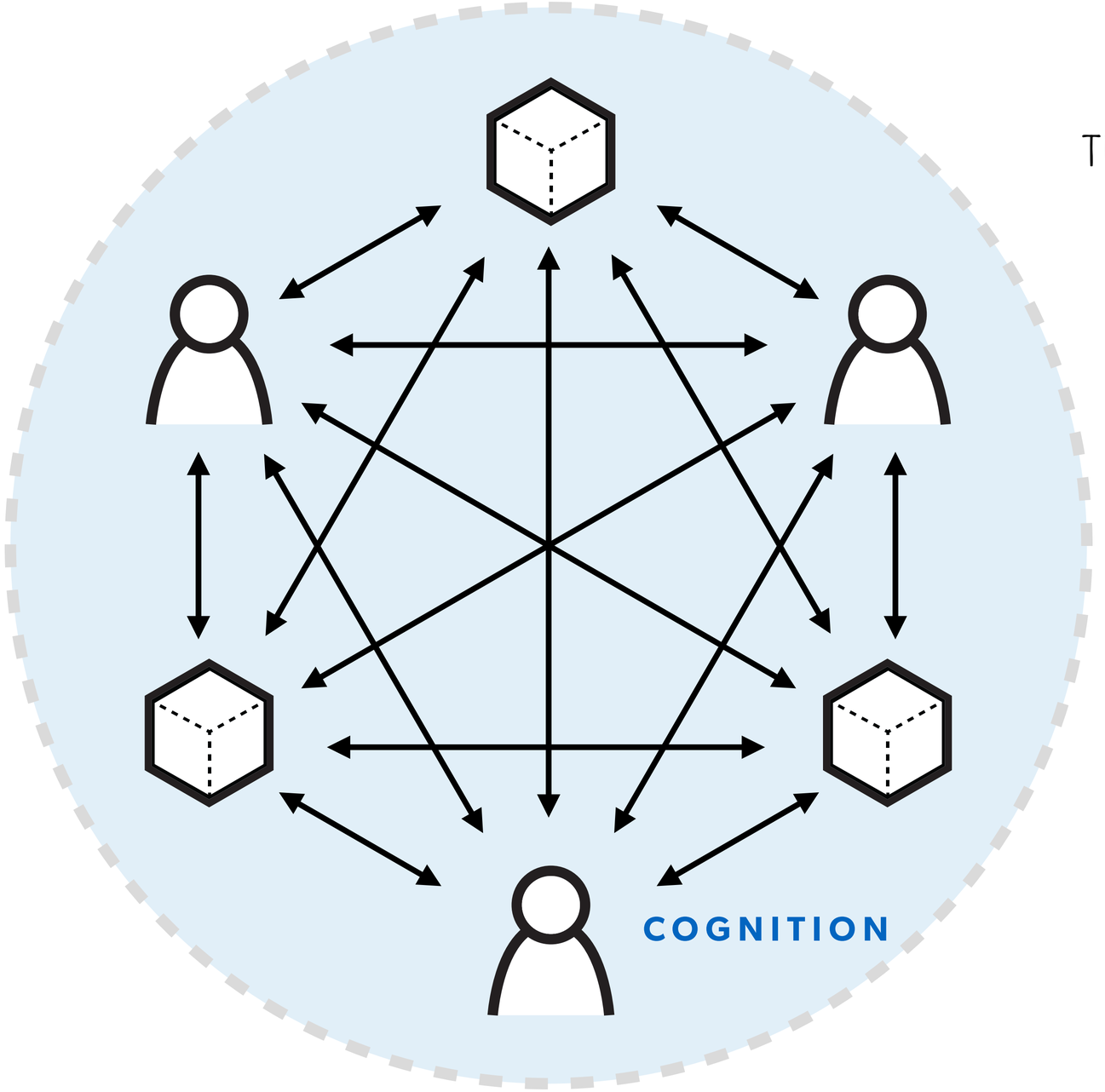
…allow us to more easily interact with information:

- *Can be modified.*
- *Can be rearranged (making it easier to explore many options)*
- *Can be "reformulated"*

…frame the conversation

- *Align us to specific outcomes*
- *Define boundaries within which we explore*
- *Direct us to think in one or several different ways*

…accelerate collective learning!



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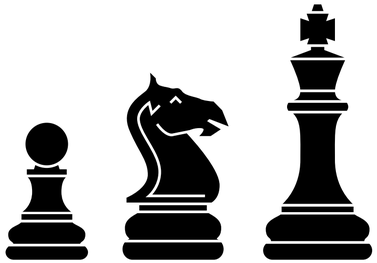
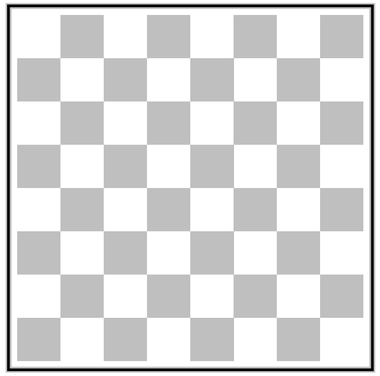


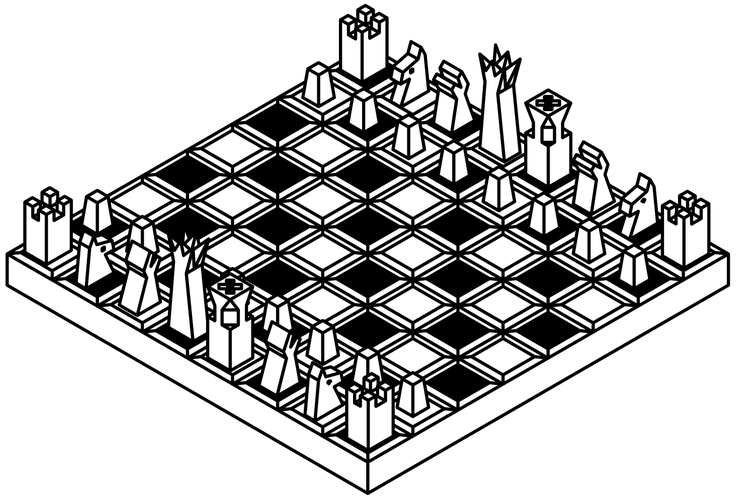
VISUAL ENCODINGS



SPATIAL POSITIONING

EXTERNAL
REPRESENTATIONS

INTERACTIONS



Pieces activate prior associations

Pieces hold meaning

Pieces hold place

Placement holds meaning

Interactions facilitate meaning making

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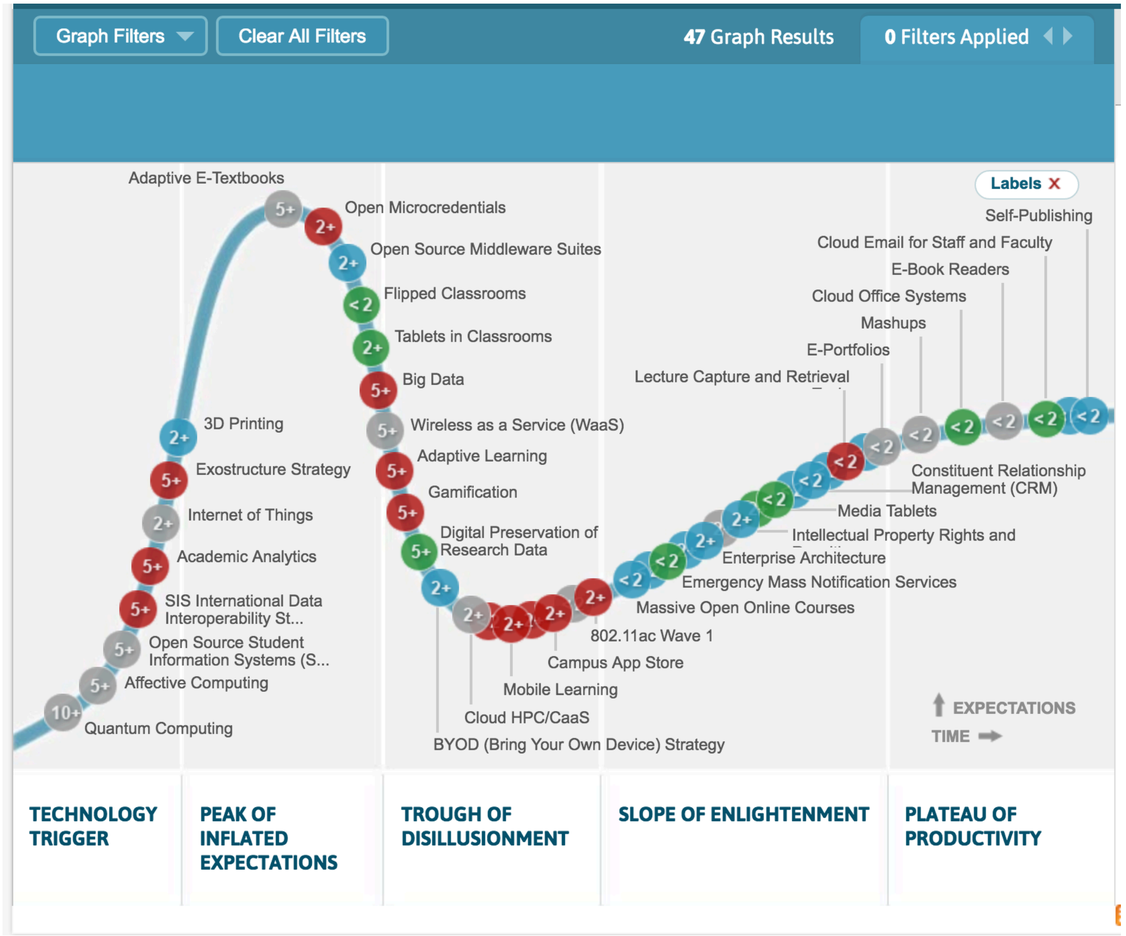

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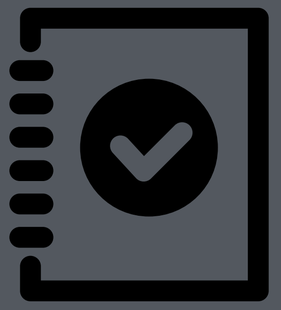

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What do you see?

(THINKING ABOUT COGNITION)

Meeting A

Meeting B

☑ THEORY

☐ EXAMPLES?

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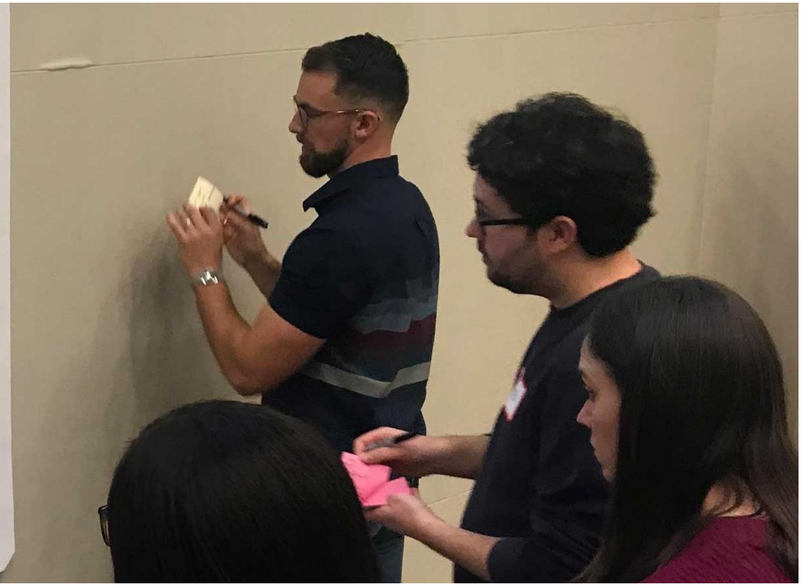
‘things to think with’



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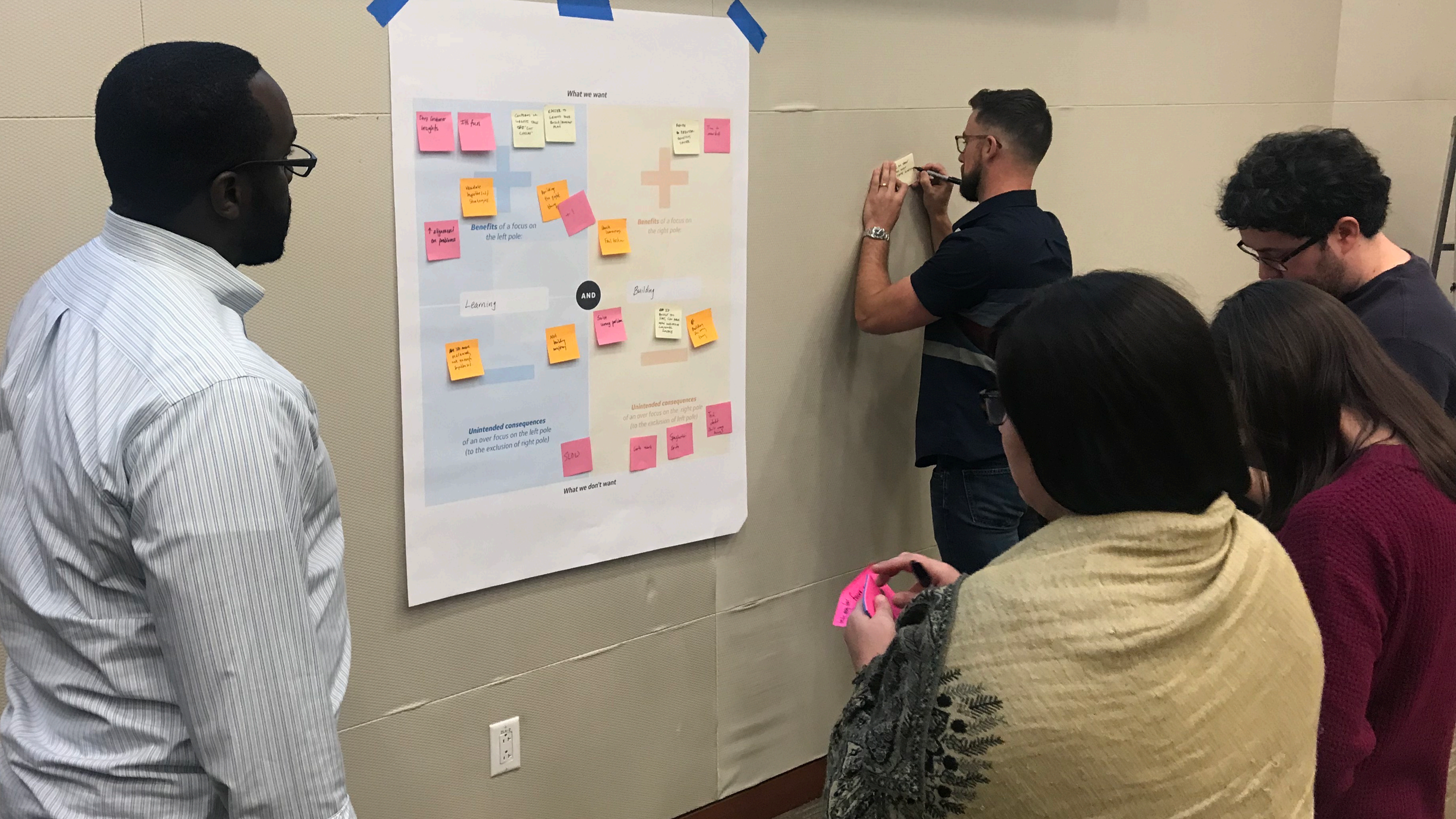
What we want
Benefits of a focus on the left pole:
Benefits of a focus on the right pole
Learning
AND
Building
Unintended consequences
of an over focus on the left pole
(to the exclusion of right pole)
Unintended consequences
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What we don't want

How do we discuss competing priorities?

(Polarity Mapping)

“ It feels like no cares about user research, or leaves room for good, thoughtful design. We talk about how important users are, but our processes are all about shipping *features*—as quickly as possible—with the promise that we’ll make it better in the future. To be frank, I’m not proud of the work I've done. We’re building the wrong things; most of it is stuff only the business cares about.”

“ The design team wants to slow everything down. Right now, we need to move fast and get a pilot in market—ASAP. We can learn along the way. As it is, teams spend too much time in research. We need more execution.”

[LEARNING]

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[BUILDING]

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#UX

A PROBLEM... OR A POLARITY?

TWO IDEAS ARE DIRECTLY OPPOSED AND IN CONFLICT

SOMETHING THAT CAN HAVE A RIGHT — OR BEST — ANSWER; A SOLUTION EXISTS

EITHER/OR

BOTH/AND

A DILEMMA THAT IS ONGOING, UNSOLVABLE AND CONTAINS SEEMINGLY OPPOSING IDEAS

TWO IDEAS ARE COMPLEMENTARY AND INTERDEPENDENT

Should we focus on Innovation or Efficiency?

Should we prioritize Delivery or Quality?

Growth vs. Consolidation?

Short-term Gains vs. Long-term Organic Growth?

Centralization vs. Decentralization

Change vs. Stability?

Empathy or Toughness?

Keeping Control or Empowering Others?

Generalist or Specialist?

POLARITIES ARE NOT A PROBLEM TO BE SOLVED, BUT RATHER A PARADOX TO BE BALANCED.

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"Think of it like breathing. Breathing isn't a choice between inhaling or exhaling. If you inhale to the exclusion of exhaling, the negative results show up quickly. And the reverse is also true. The polarity approach says, we must both inhale and exhale."

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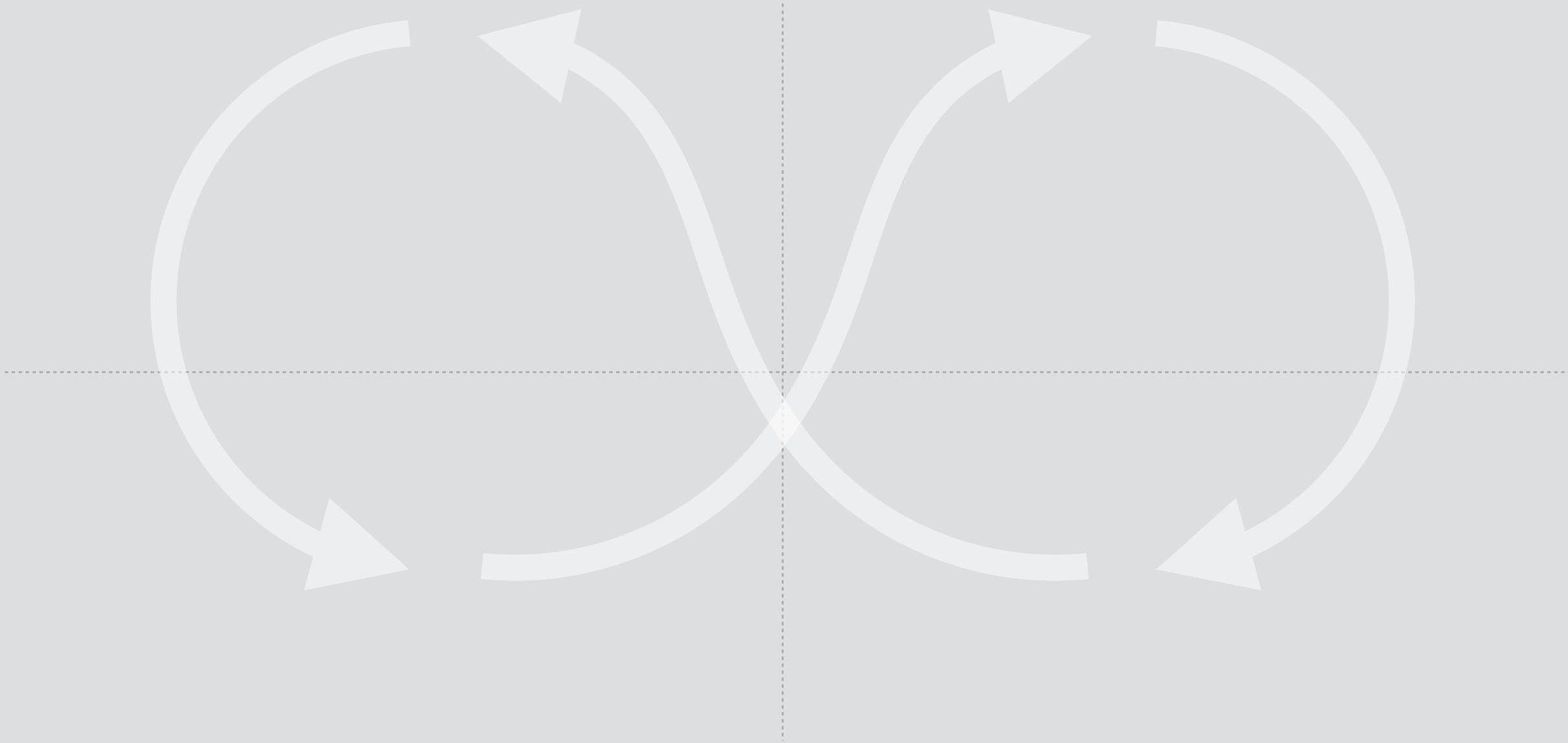

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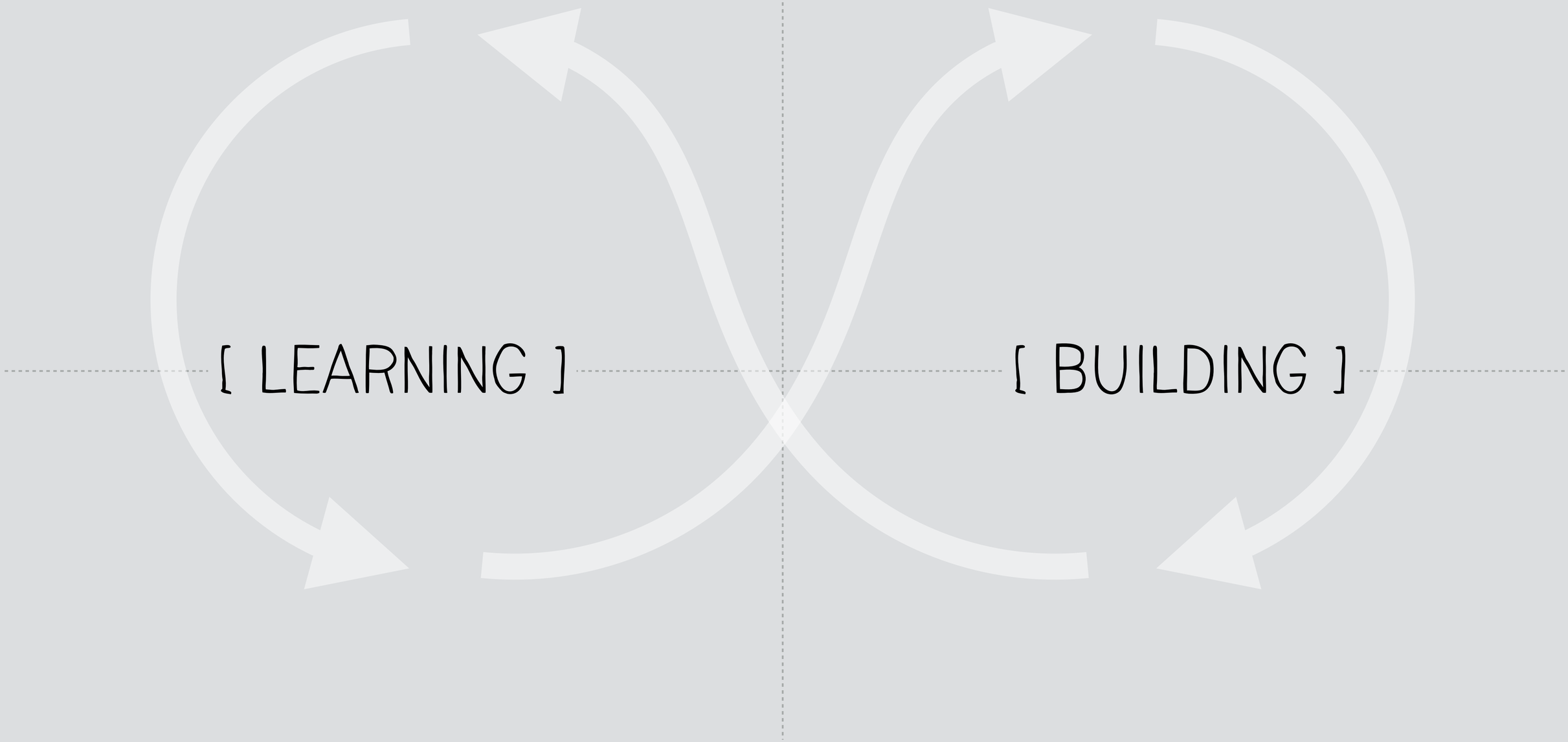

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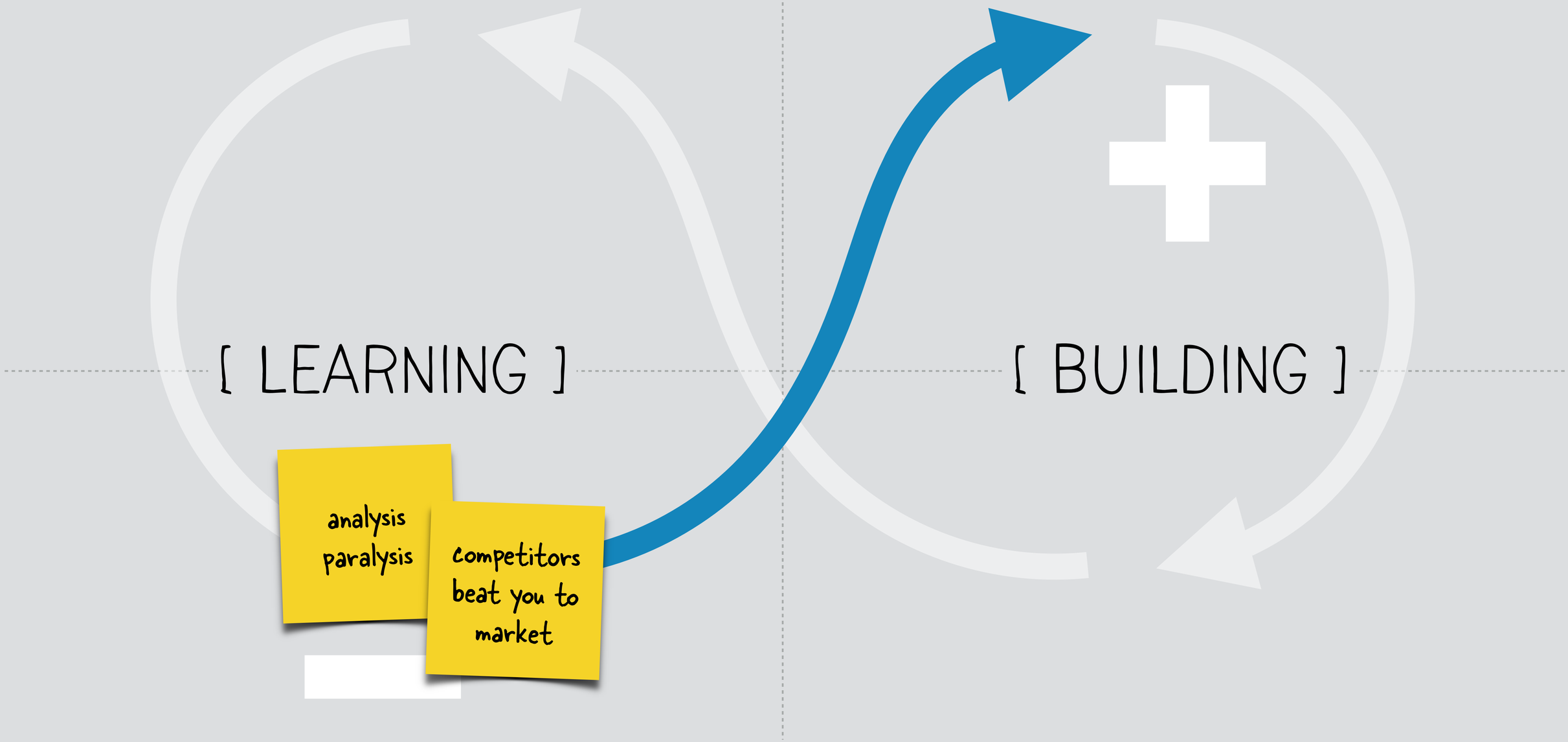

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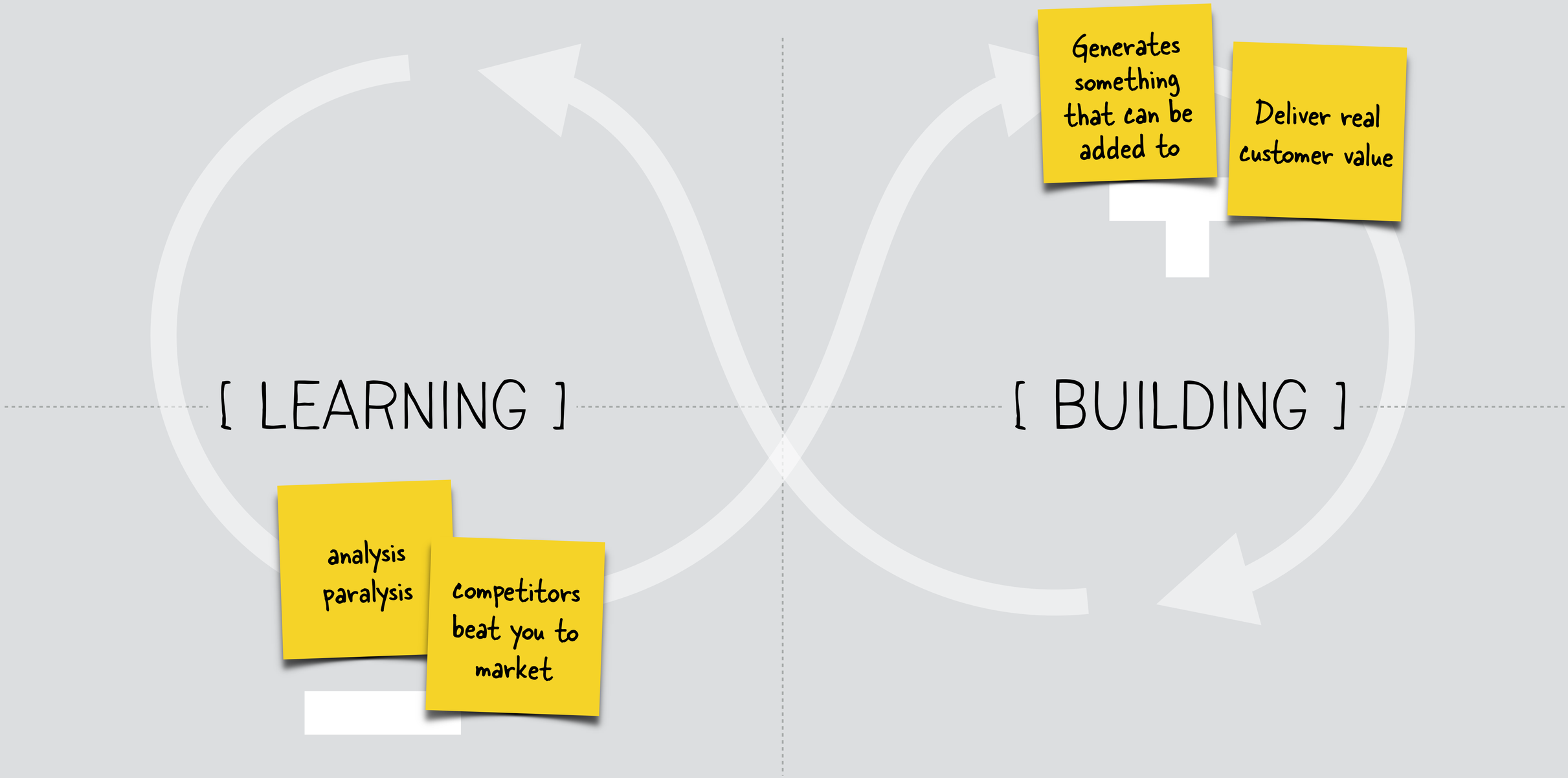

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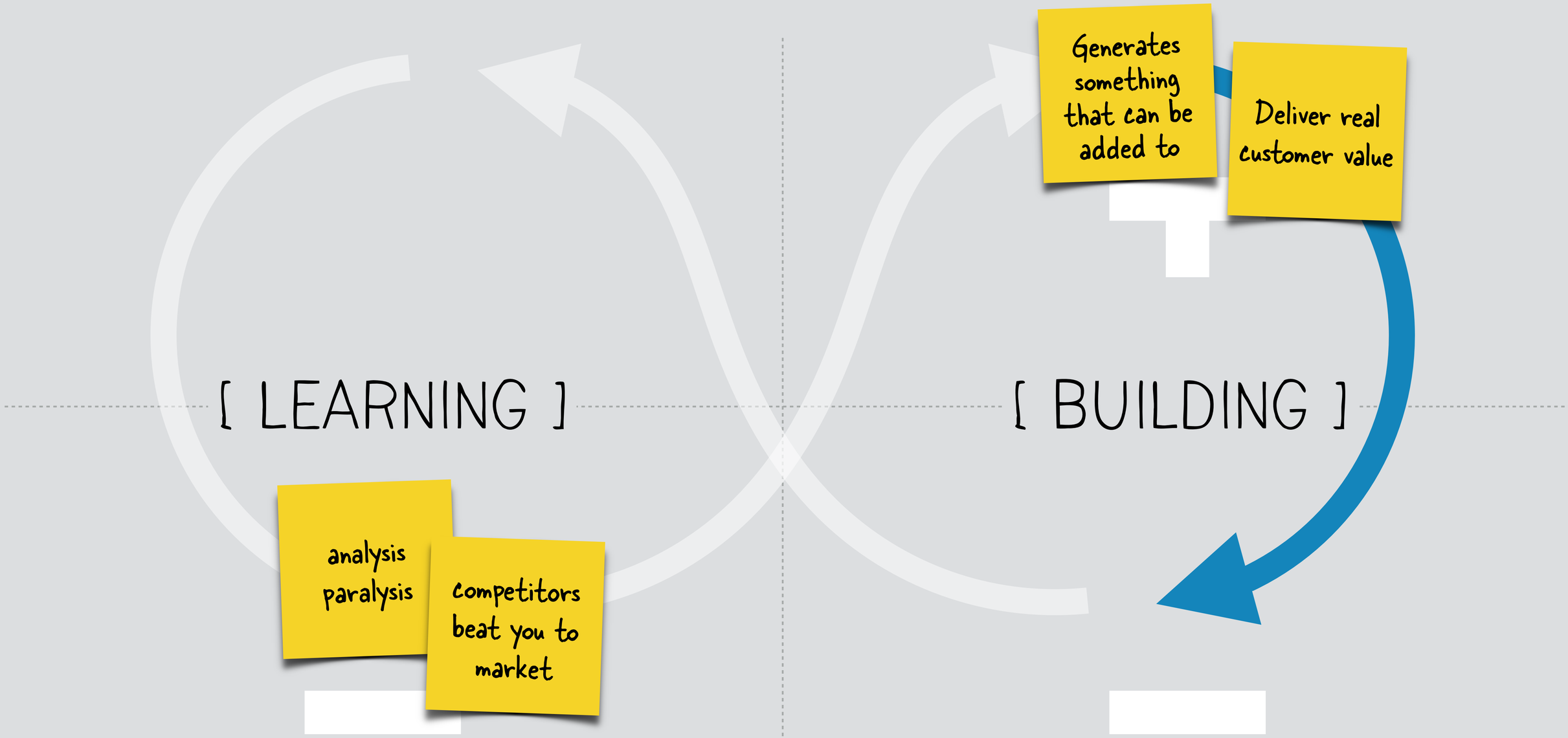

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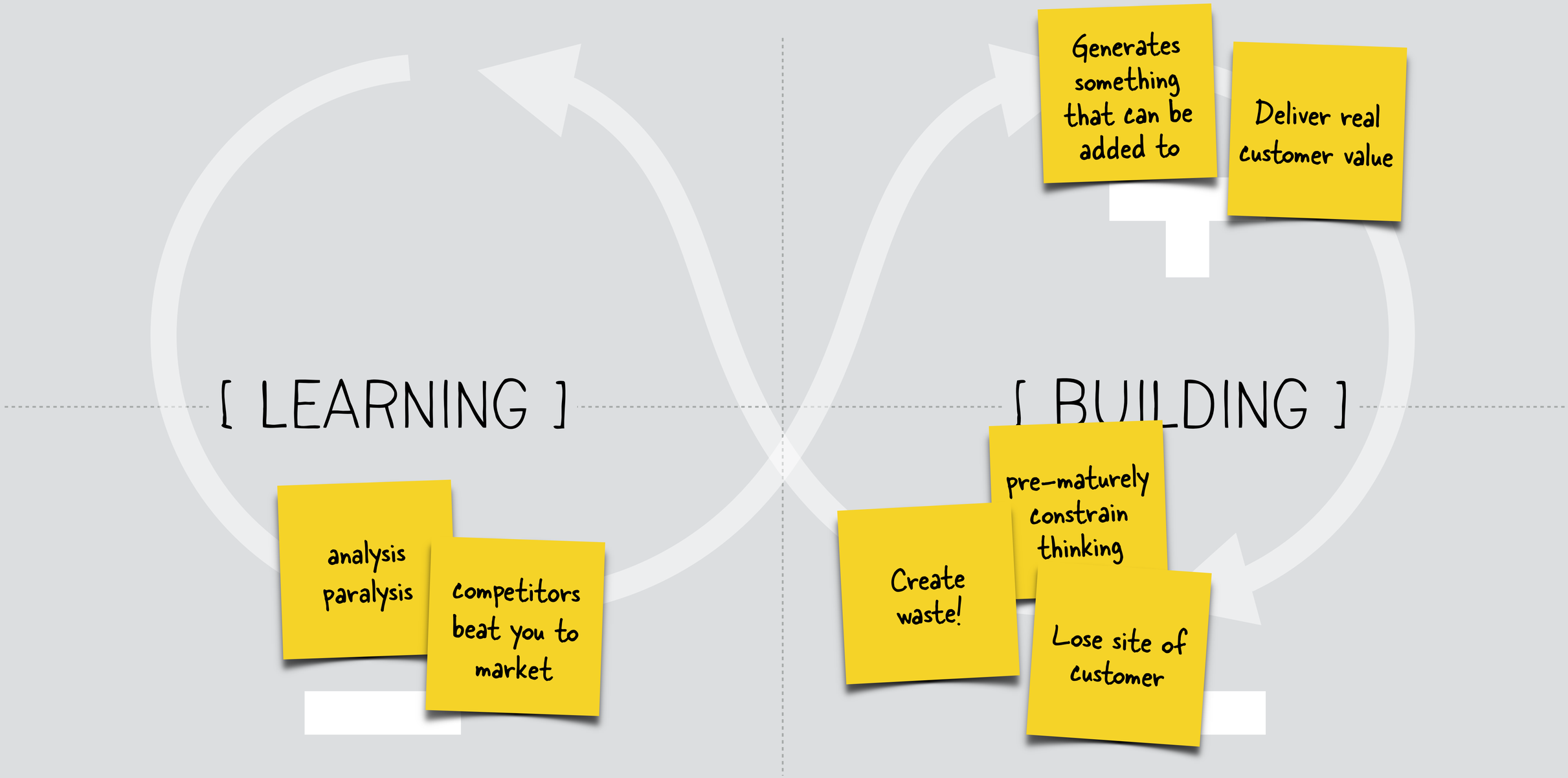

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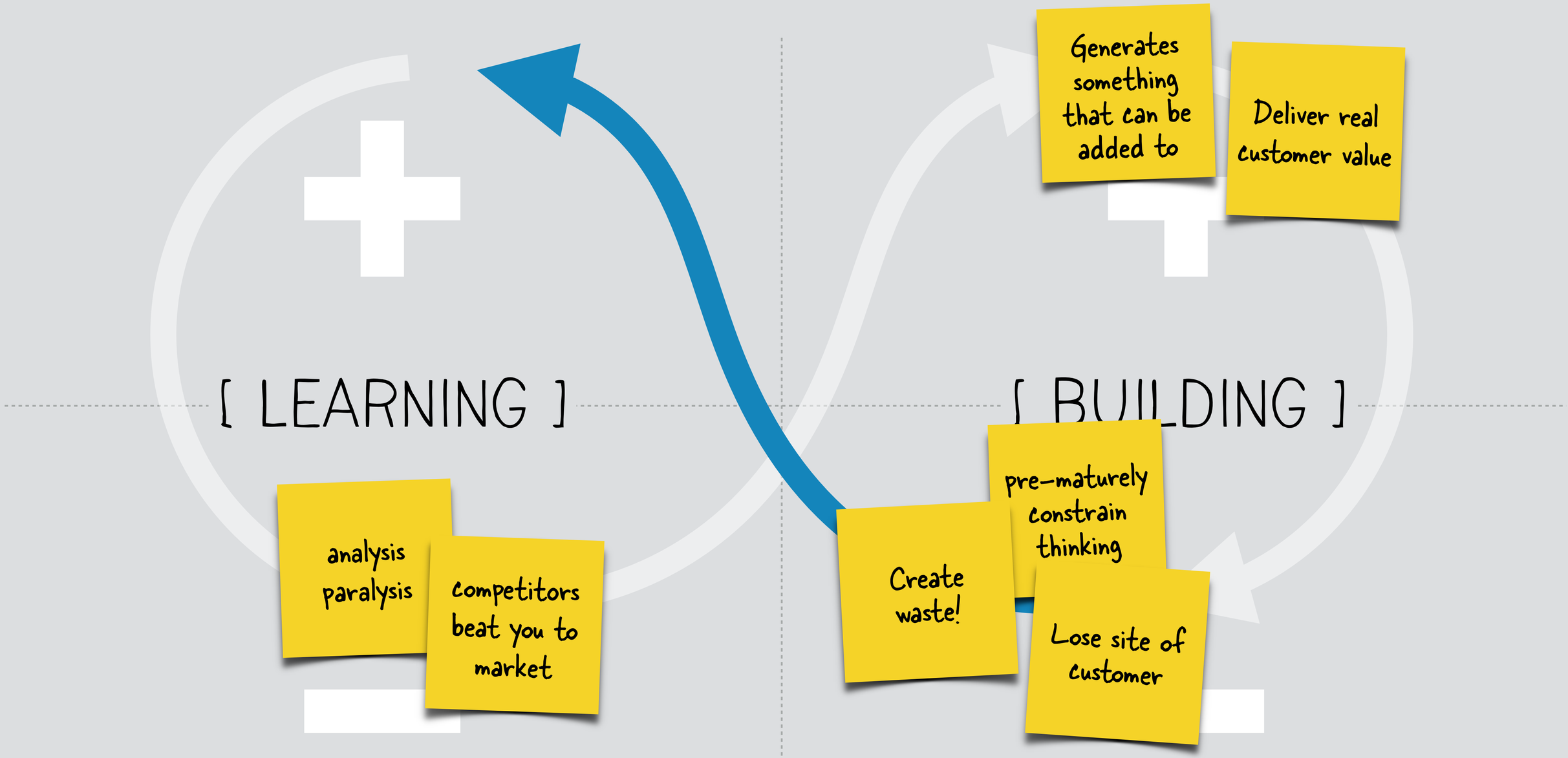

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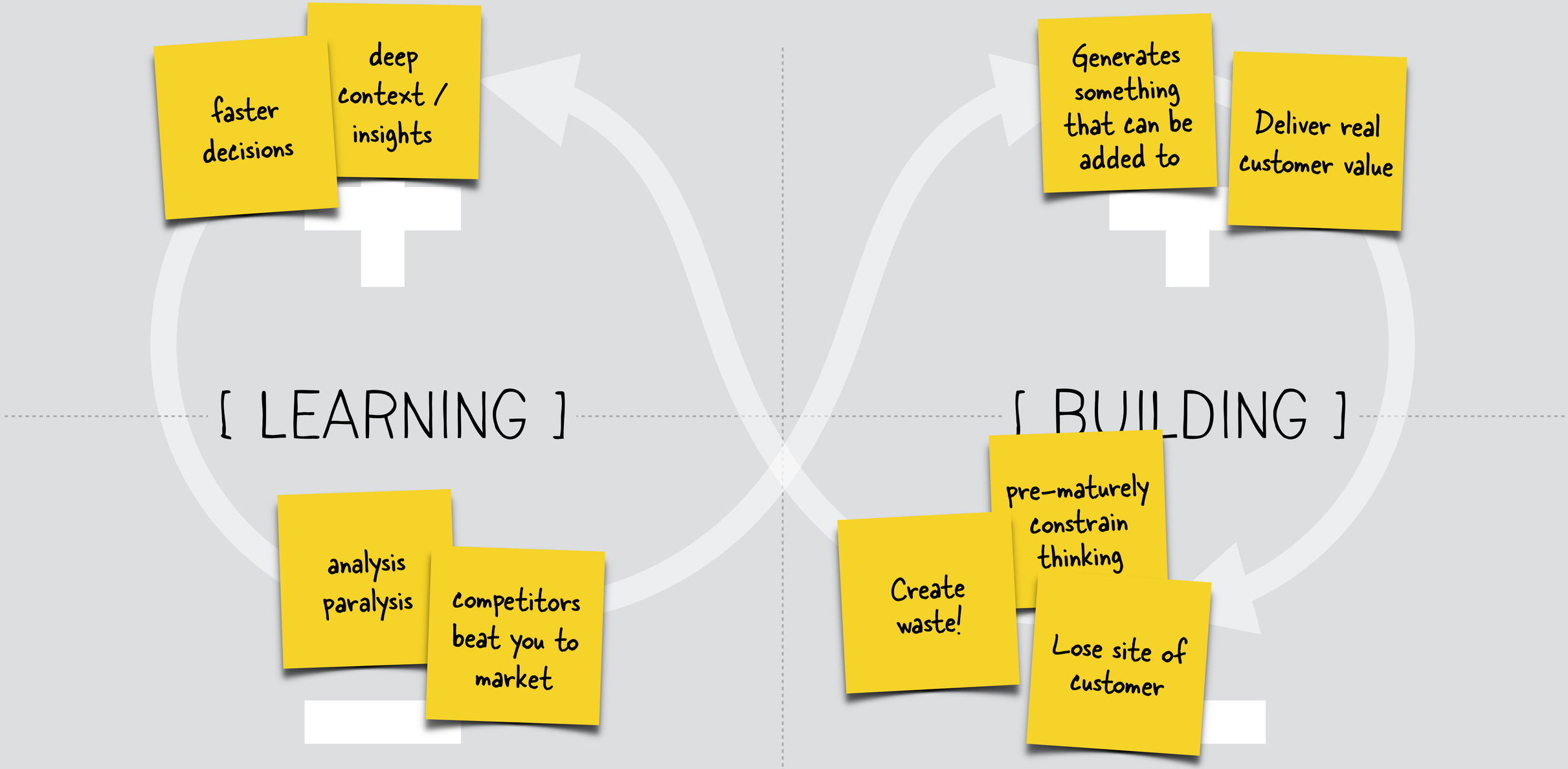

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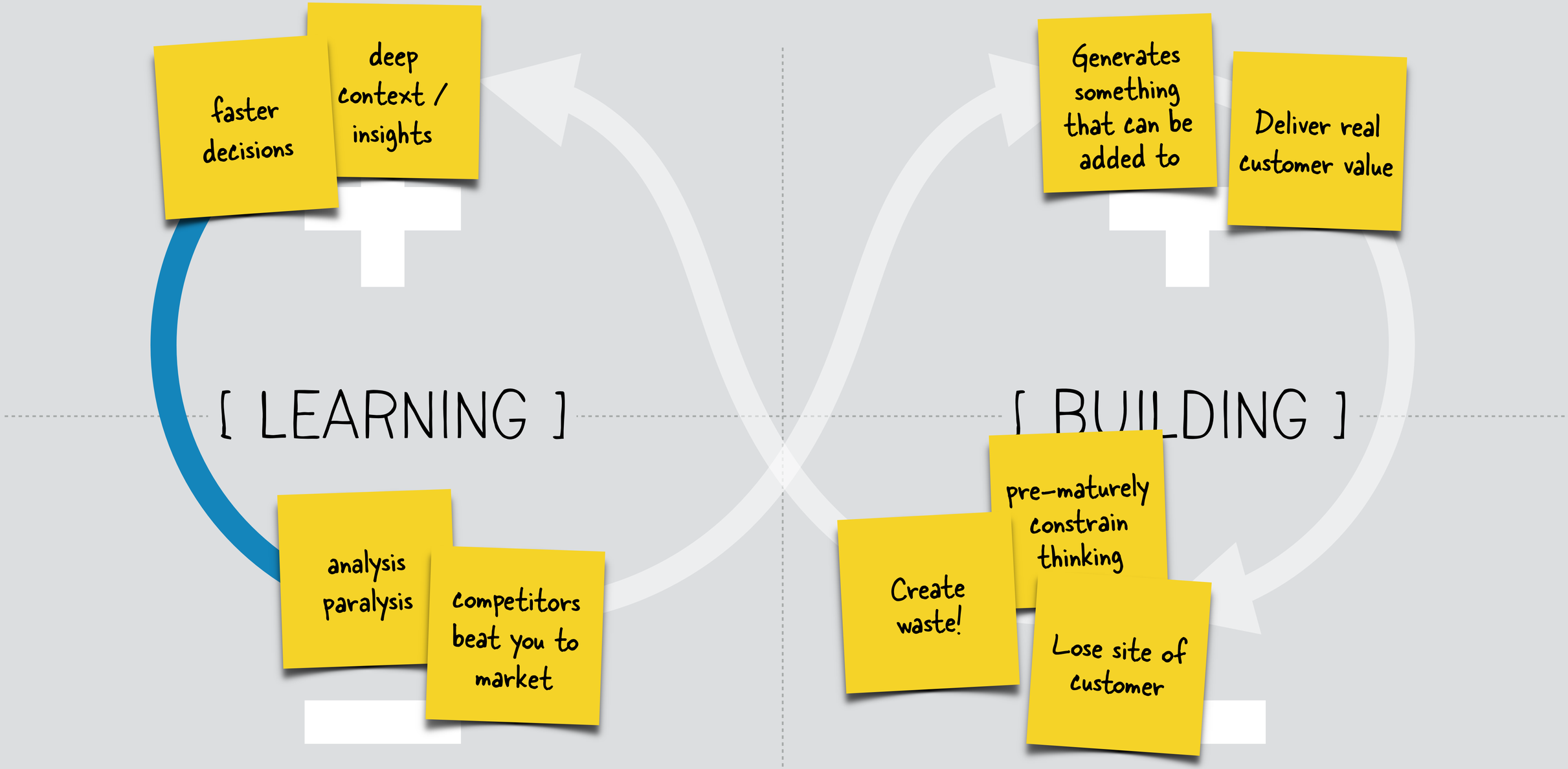

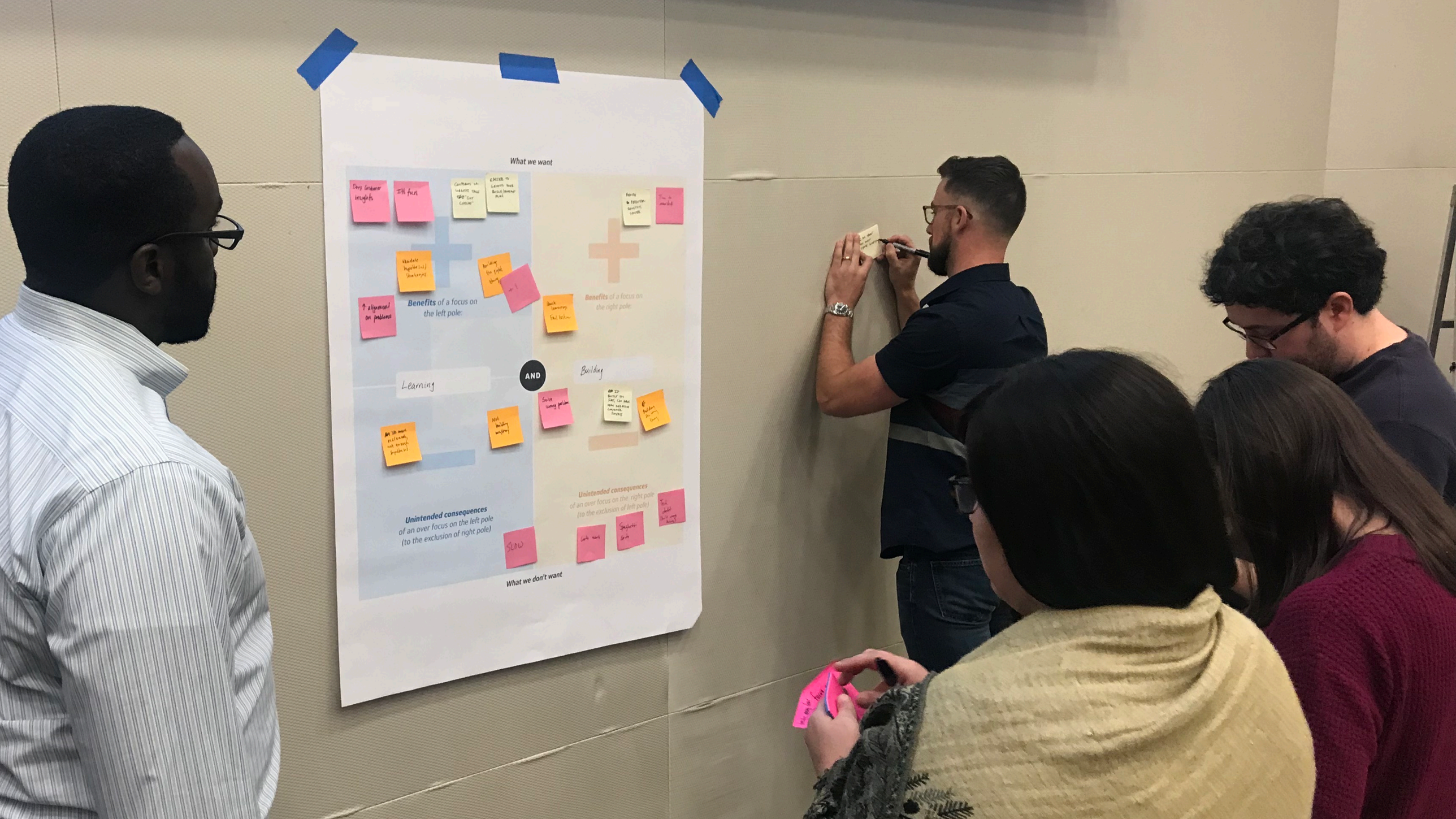
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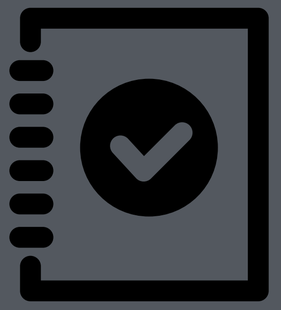

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Mind if I geek out about cards?

MIND THE FUTURE
BrandSort
IMPACT
RUNNING LEAN
DIRTY RHETORIC
CHOOSE TO BE OPTIMISTIC
by taking the time to compliment.
Testing ballots for usability
INFORMATION ARCHITECTURE LENSES
By Dan Brown
THE TAROT CARDS OF TECH
SPARKUP
IGNITE THE FUTURE
ANALYTICS CARDS
The Art of Game Design
A Deck of Lenses
by Jesse Schell
Vulnerability is sexy.
Trust. Connect. Love.
Surviving Design Projects
JUDGMENT
BRAIN FOOD

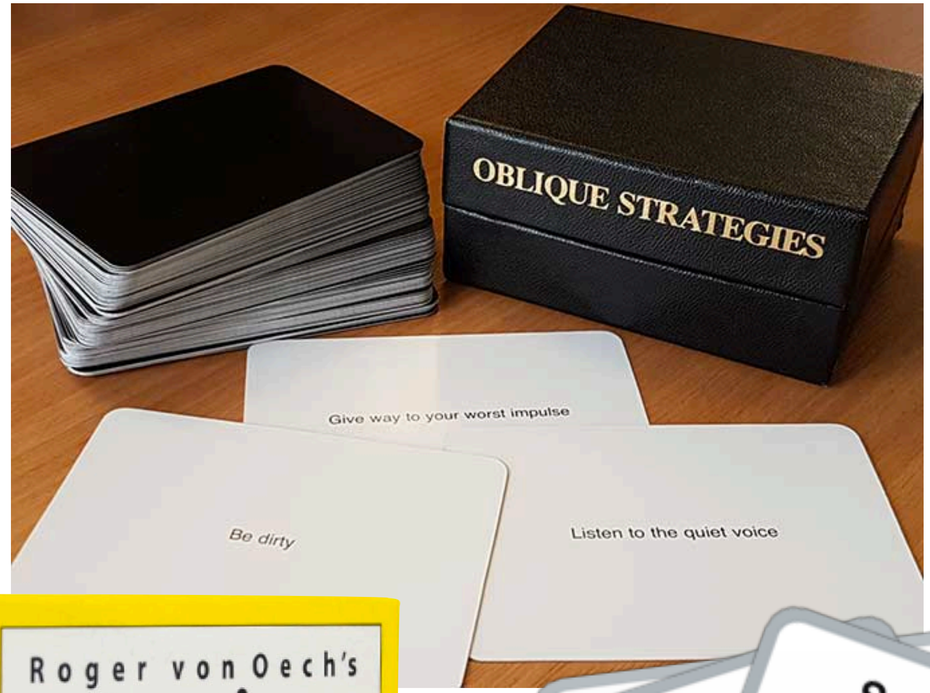
Value of (Physical) Cards?

DISCRETE (NON-LINEAR) UNITS OF INFORMATION

CAN BE ORGANIZED IN DIFFERENT WAYS

CAN BE MANIPULATED IN DIFFERENT WAYS

IDEO METHOD CARDS
A Day in the Life
Learn
Look
Ask
HOW: Catalog the activities and contexts that users experience throughout an entire day.
WHY: This is a useful way to reveal unanticipated issues inherent in the routines and circumstances people experience daily.


OBLIQUE STRATEGIES
Give way to your worst impulse
Be dirty
Listen to the quiet voice

Creative Whack Pack
Roger von Oech's
Creative Whack Pack™
64 Creativity Strategies
TO PROVOKE AND INSPIRE YOUR THINKING

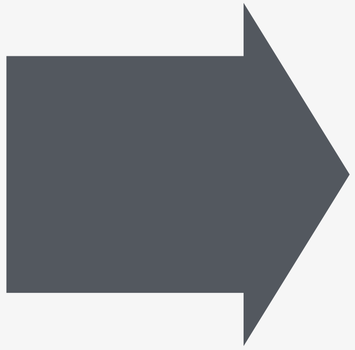
Social Proof
PERSUASION
We tend to follow the patterns of similar others in new or unfamiliar situations.

Let’s level up...

Spotting Bad Problem Statements

(CARD FLIP SUPPORTS ‘CHECK YOURSELF’)

Talk



Card Deck

...plus a Bingo Sheet!

EVERY CARD HAS TWO SIDES:

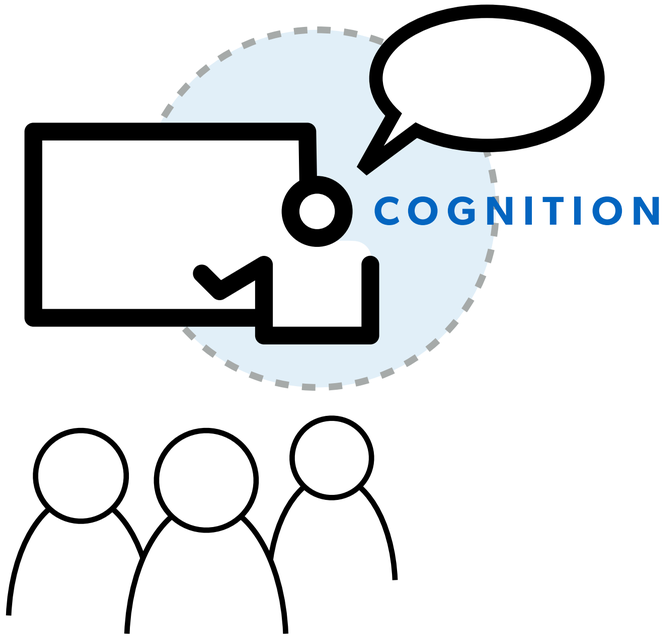
SIDE A: AN EXAMPLE BAD PROBLEM STATEMENT

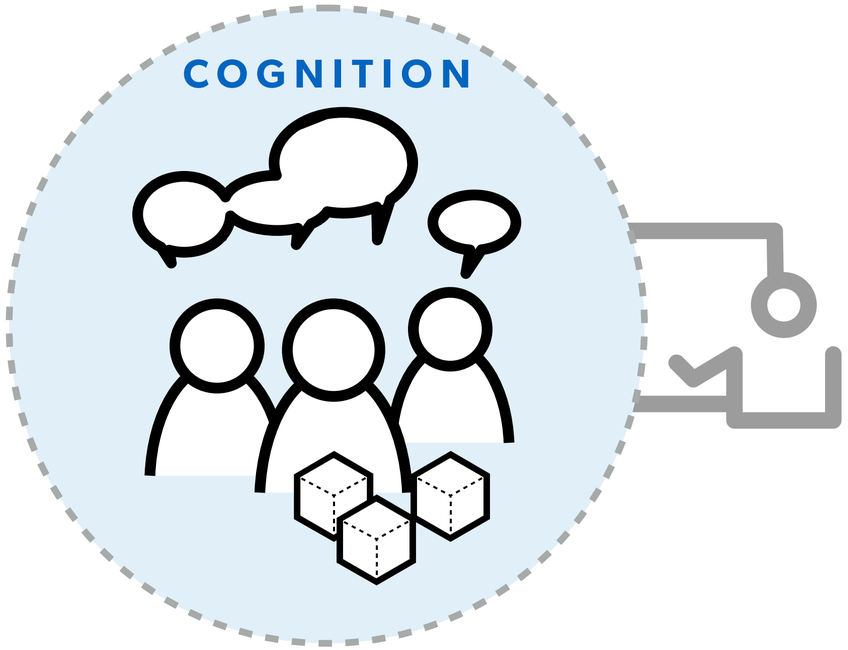
SIDE B: BAD PROBLEM STATEMENT DEFINITION

"This UI looks great while we only have a few options, but we'll have hundreds in a few years! We need to design for both scenarios..."
ESE BAD PROBLEM STATEMENTS ARE EXAMPLES OF...
Narrowing the Problem
lefined problem is overly specific d a subset of the real, broader problem.
THESE BAD PROBLEM STATEMENTS ARE EXAMPLES OF...
Anchoring
aming the problem in the context of specific solution which immediately discounts all other solutions

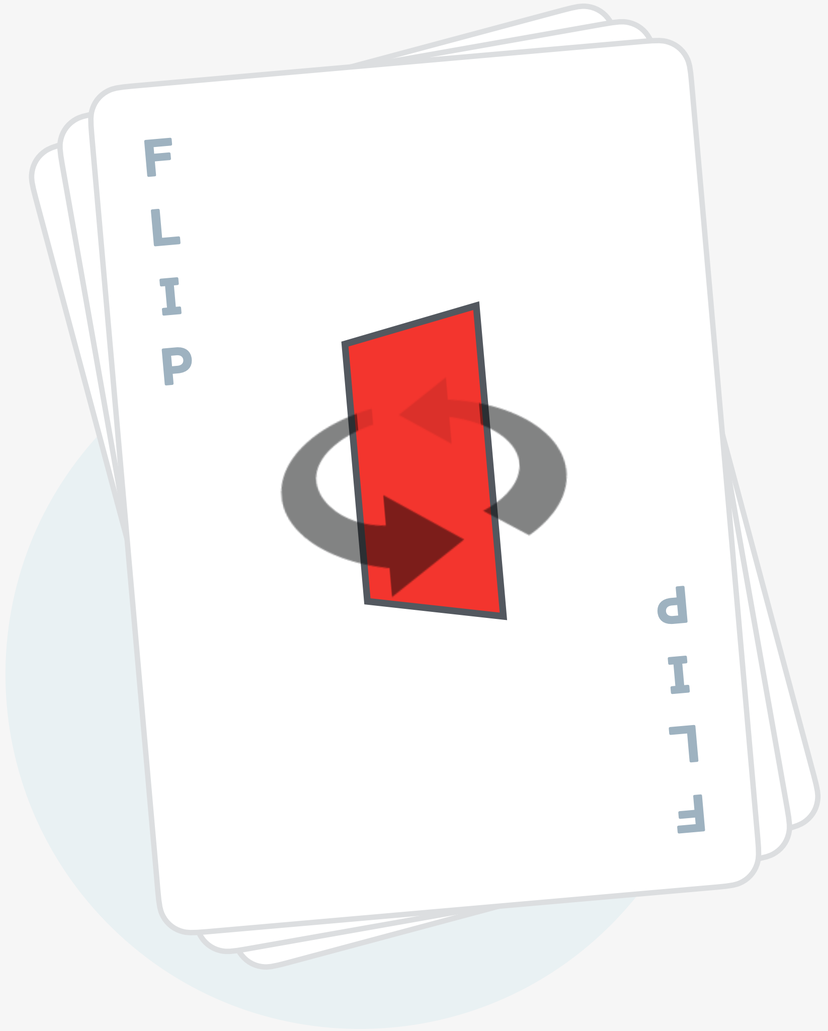
THE REAL TAKEAWAY:

From Passive Learning…





…To Active Learning



PATTERN / ‘FLIP’

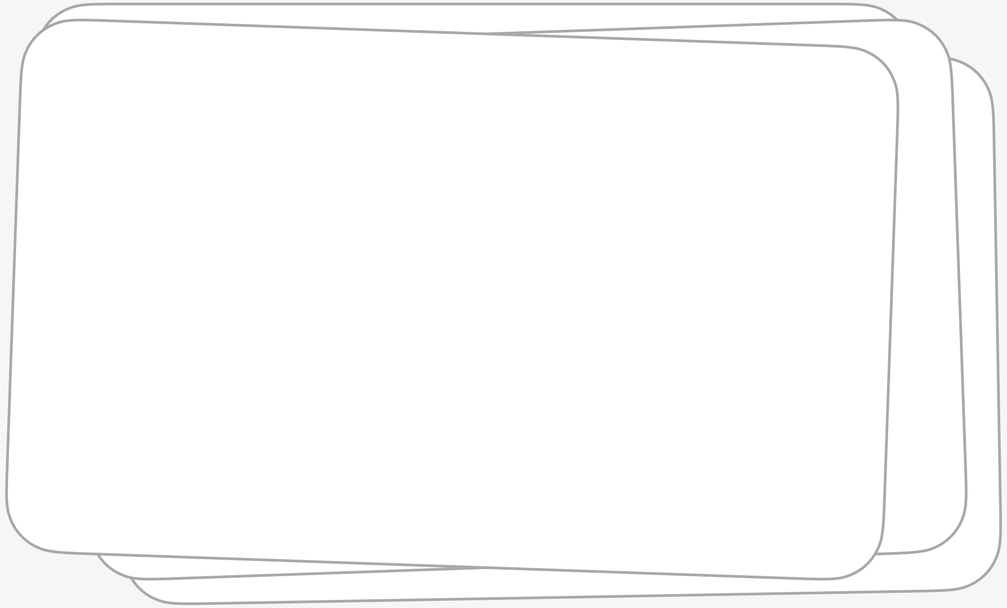
Distinguishing Between Facts and Beliefs

(SORTING SPURS DIALOGUE)

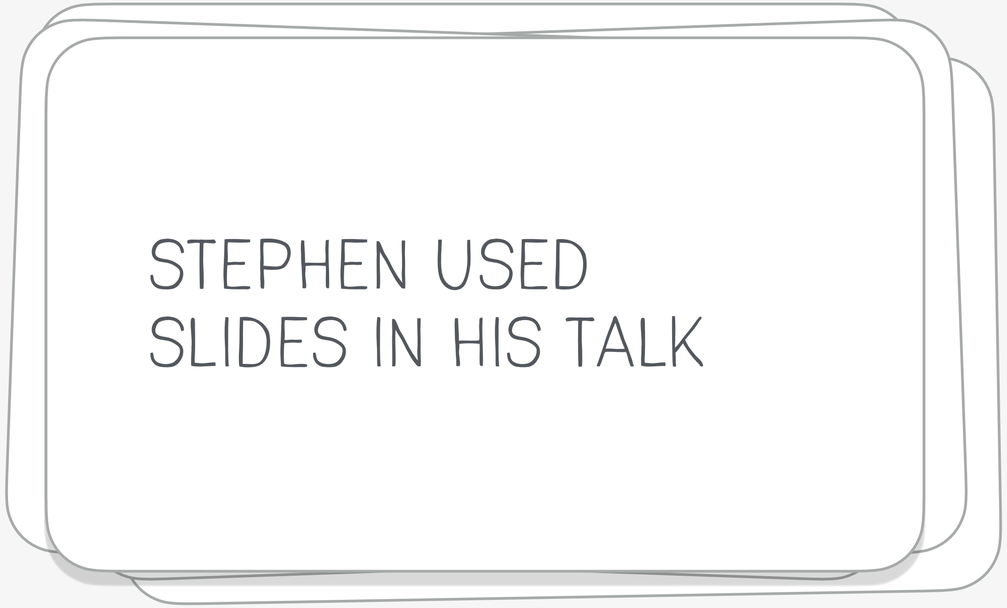
Amanda
SRE

hint

Fact or Belief?



Fact or Belief?

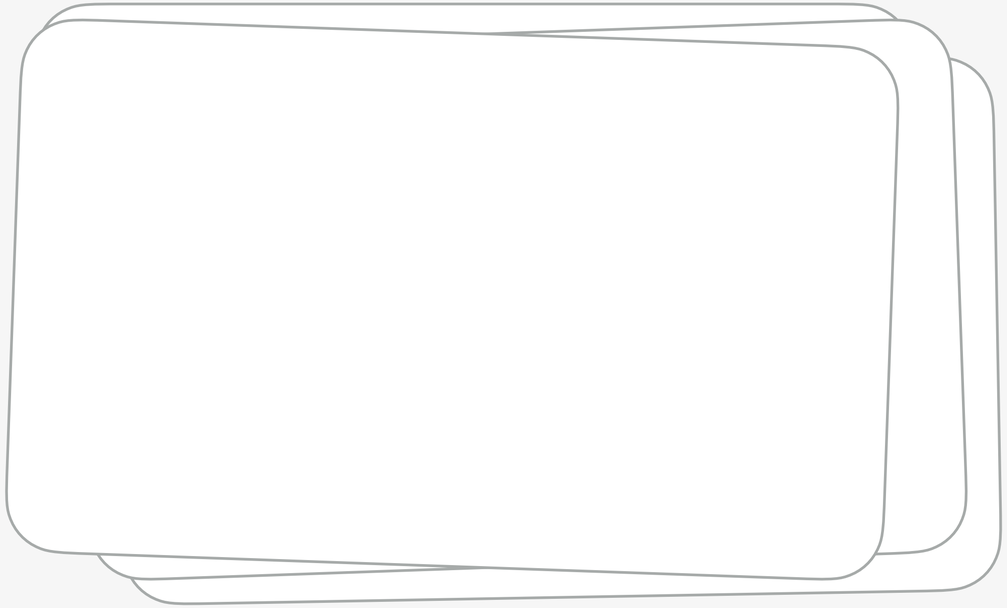


Fact or Belief?

STEPHEN GAVE
THE WORST TALK
EVER AT TORCHI!

TEPHEN USED
LIDES IN HIS TALK

Fact or Belief?



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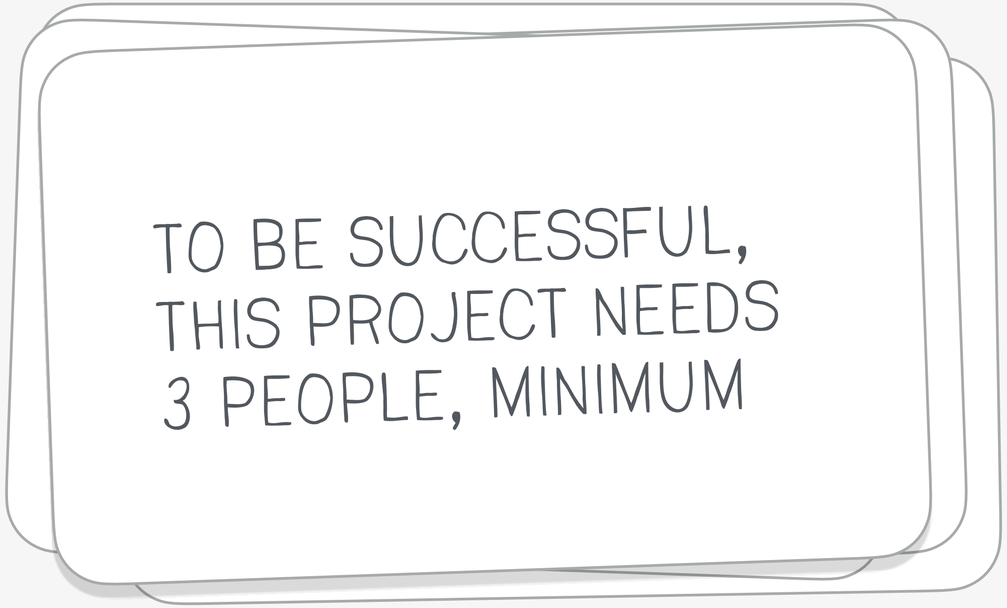
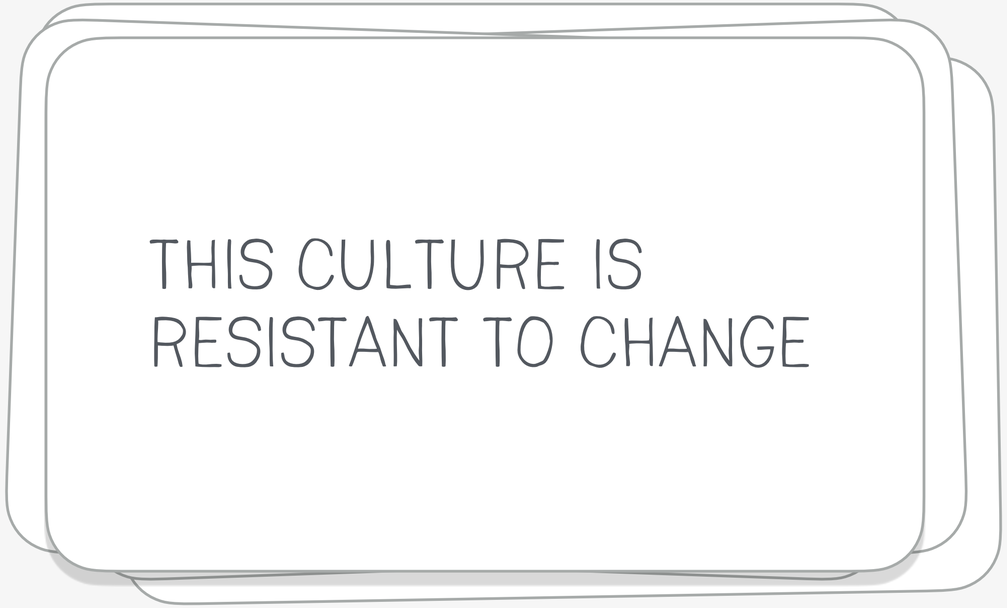


Fact or Belief?

Fact or Belief?

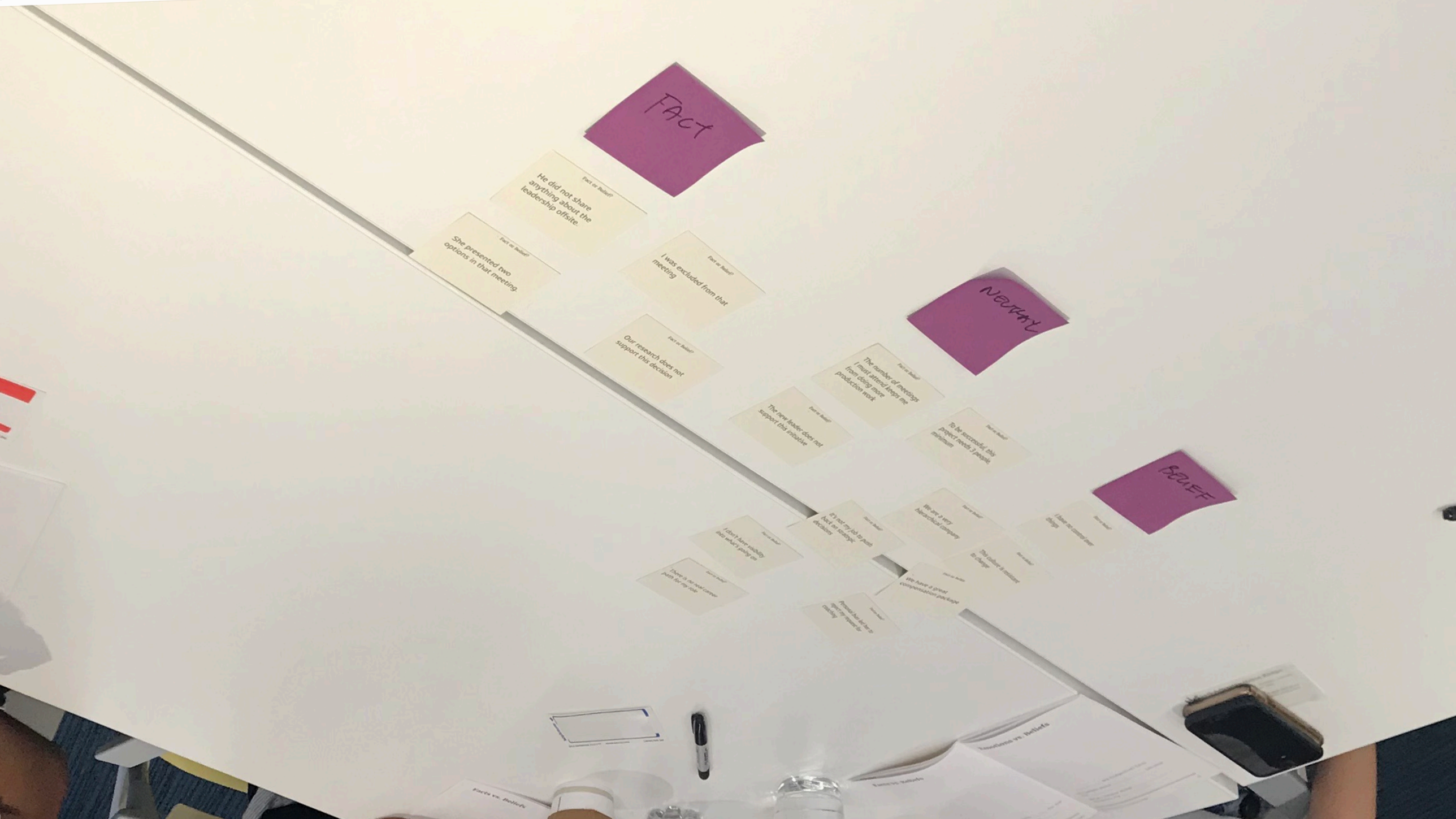
Fact or Belief?

Fact or Belief?



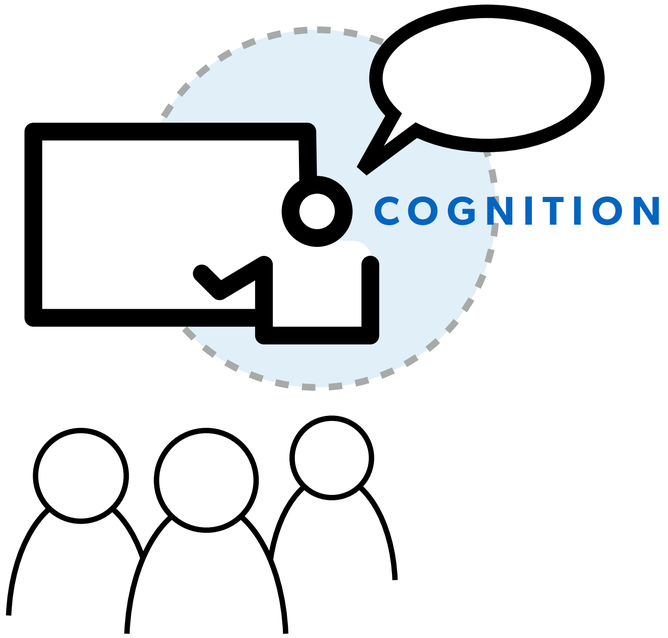
Amanda
SRE

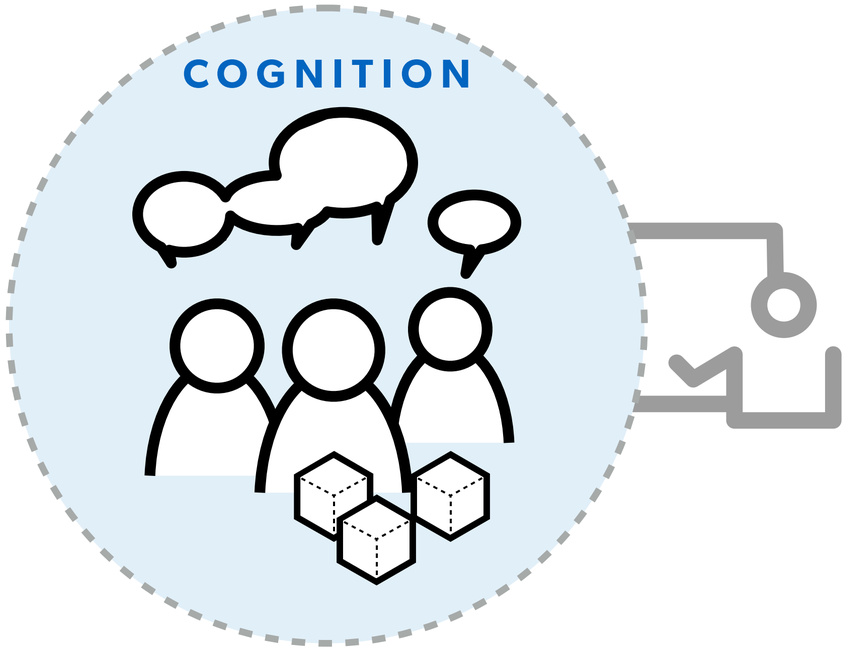
hint


FACT
Fact or Belief?
He did not share anything about the leadership offsite.
Fact or Belief?
She presented two options in that meeting.
Fact or Belief?
I was excluded from that meeting
Fact or Belief?
Our research does not support this decision
NEUTRAL
Fact or Belief?
The number of meetings I must attend keeps me from doing more production work
Fact or Belief?
The new leader does not support this initiative
Fact or Belief?
To be successful, this project needs 3 people, minimum
BELIEF
Facts vs. Beliefs
Facts vs. Beliefs
Assumptions vs. Beliefs

THE REAL TAKEAWAY:

From Passive Learning…





…To Active Learning

STACK A

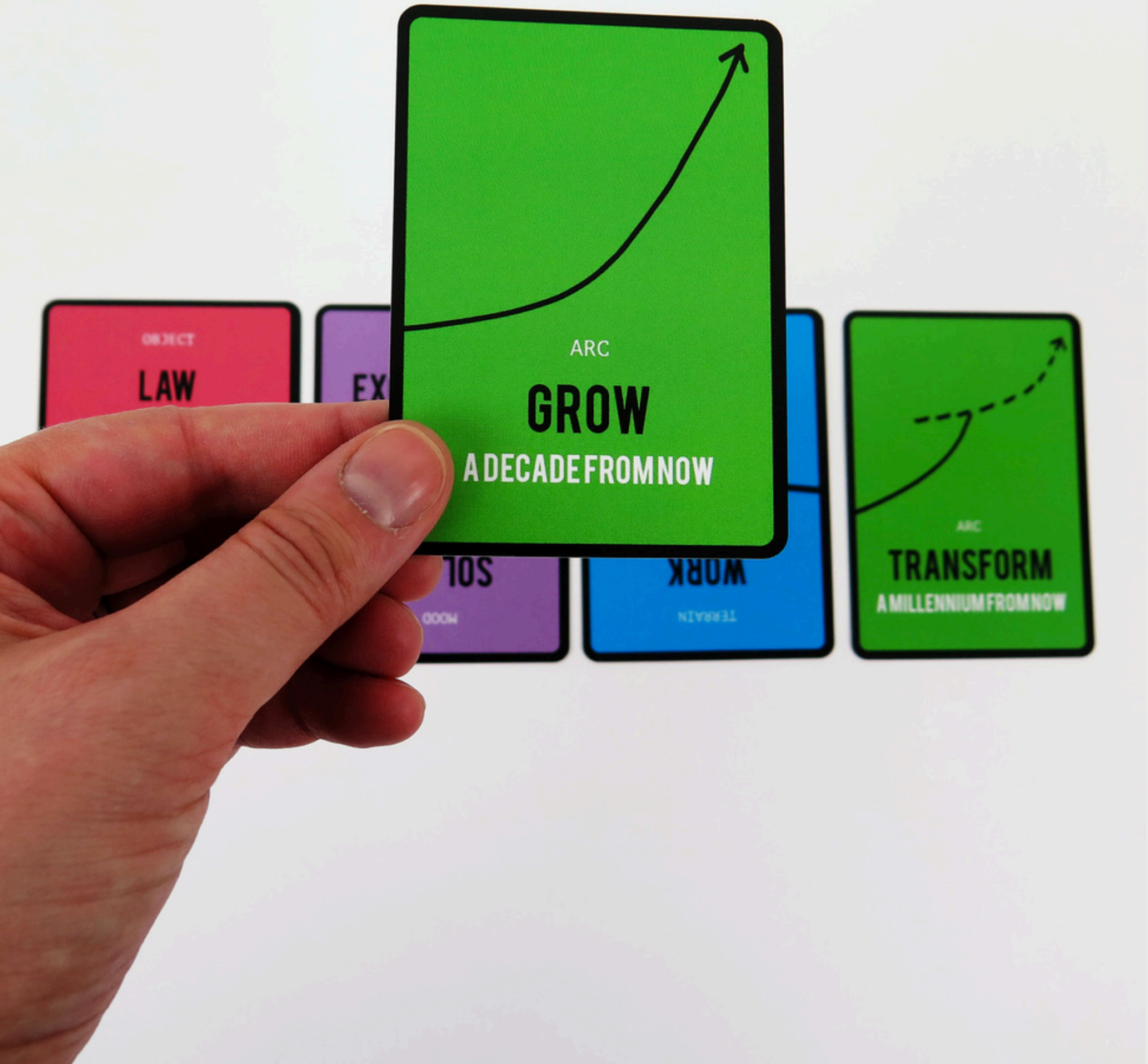
STACK B

PATTERN / ‘FORCED SORTING’

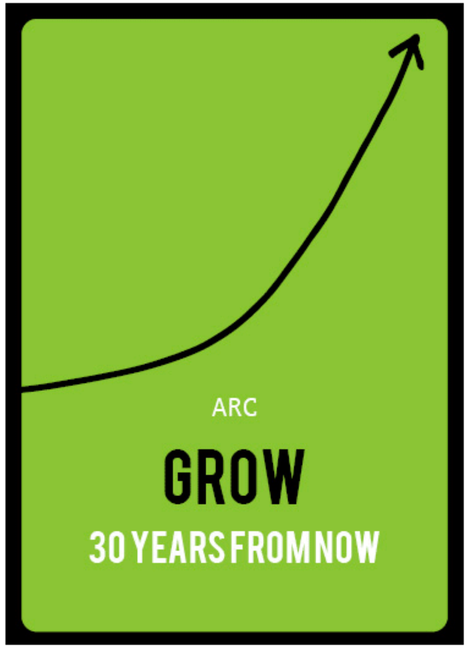
The Thing from the Future

(COMBINATOREAL CREATIVITY SUPPORTS IDEA GENERATION)

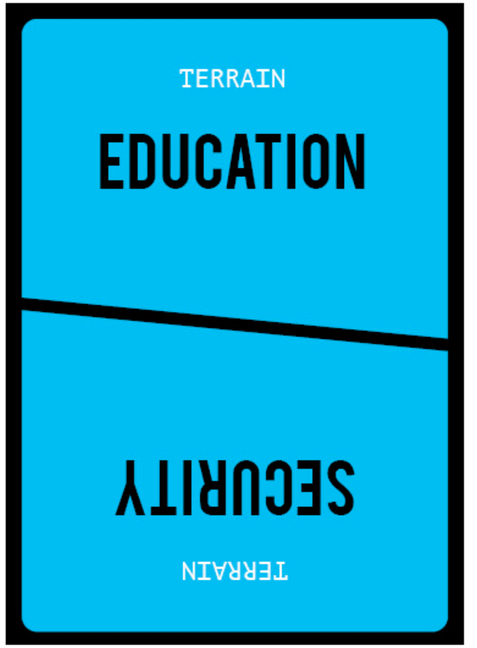
THE THING FROM THE FUTURE
THE THING FROM THE FUTURE
THE THING FROM THE FUTURE
TULLY'S


LAW
ARC
GROW
A DECADE FROM NOW
ARC
TRANSFORM
A MILLENNIUM FROM NOW

A PRE-DEFINED SET OF CONSTRAINTS USED TO CHANNEL BRAINSTORMING ABOUT OBJECTS FROM POSSIBLE FUTURES:

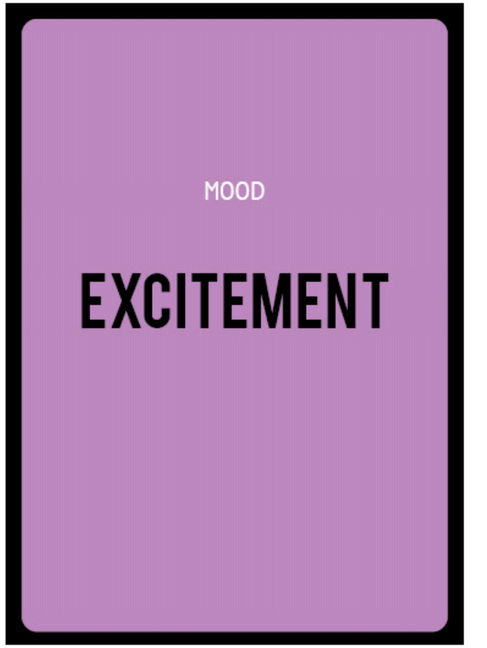


ARC cards broadly describe different kinds of possible futures. The main (top) text of each Arc card specifies one of four generic images of alternative futures. The bottom text on each Arc card describes the "time horizon" — the distance into the future that players must project their imaginations.



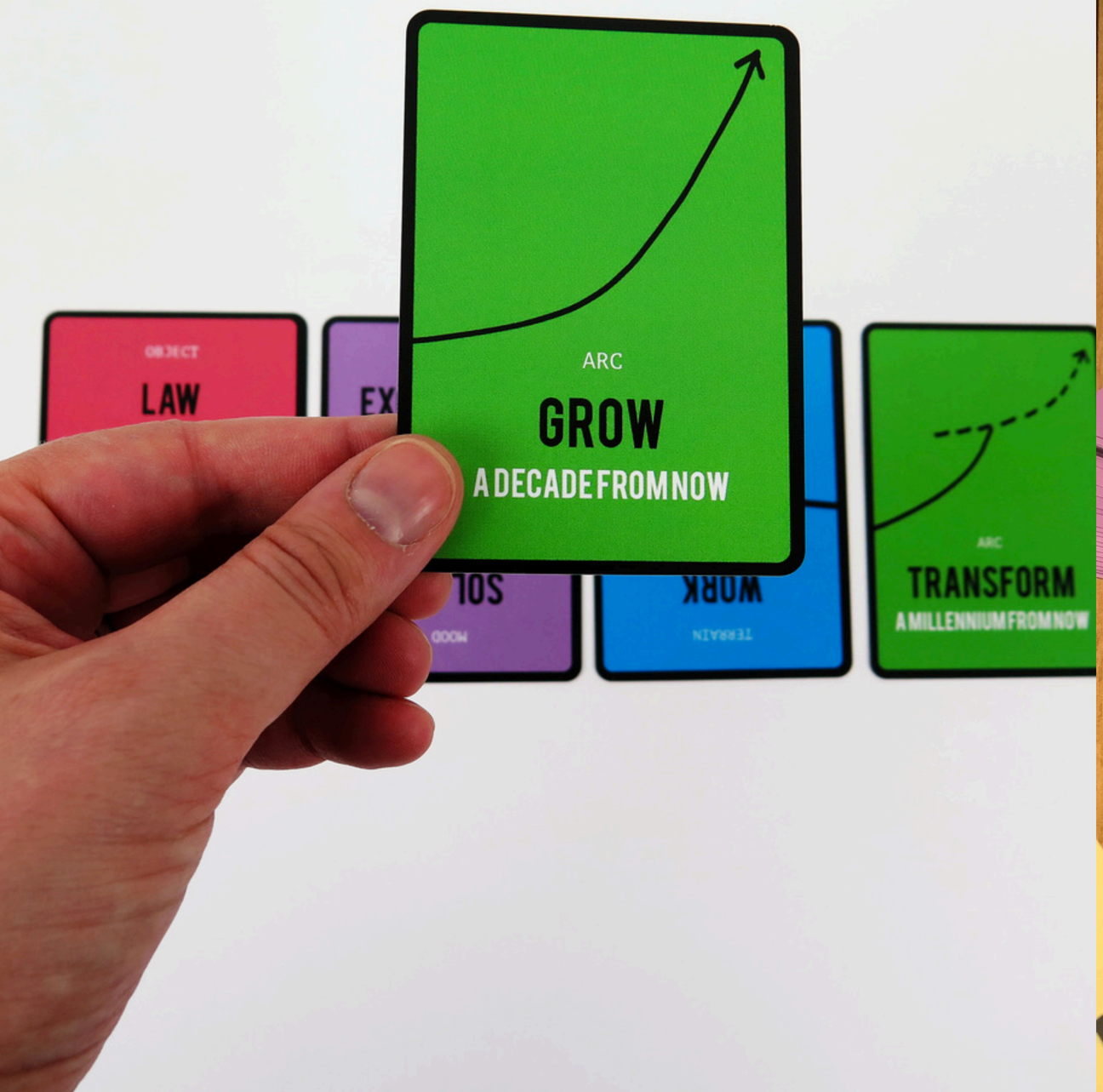
TERRAIN cards describe contexts, places, and topic areas. In a completed prompt, the terrain card describes where – physically or conceptually – the thing from the future might be found. Two terrains appear on each card in order to provide richer possibilities for the deck.

OBJECT cards describe the basic form of the thing from the future.



MOOD cards describe emotions that the thing from the future might evoke in an observer from the present.

V1.0


LAW
ARC
GROW
A DECADE FROM NOW
ARC
TRANSFORM
A MILLENNIUM FROM NOW

V2.0

THE THING FROM THE FUTURE
in a
there is a
related to
city
what is it?
2) OUTLINE THIS THING FROM THE FUTURE
THE THING FROM THE FUTURE
CITIES EDITION
in an
AMBITIOUS
city
there is a
SITUATION
related to
BIG DATA
what is it?

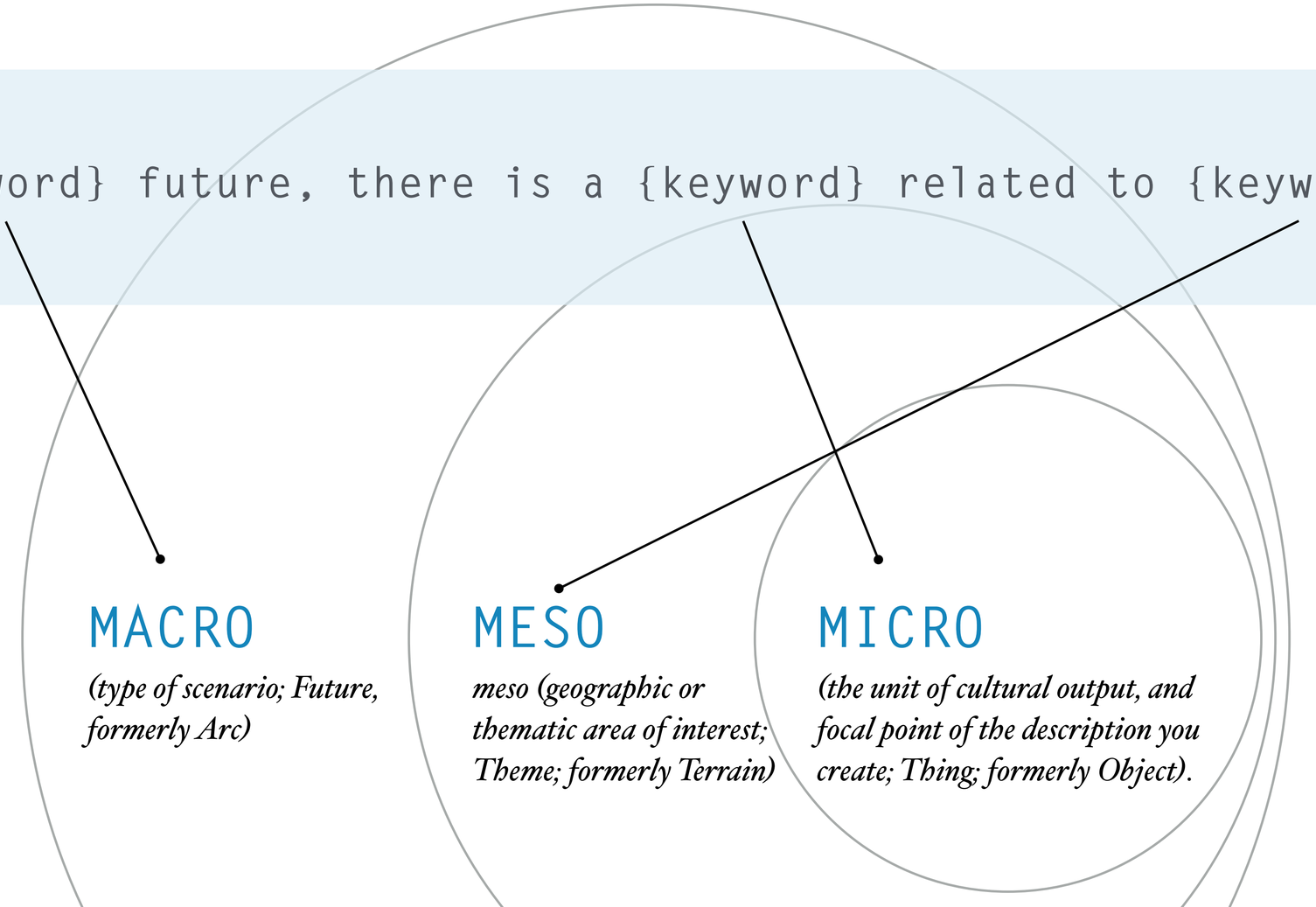
+ SIMPLER STRUCTURE (JUST THREE SUITS)

+ ADDITION OF A MAD-LIBS PHRASE
(FORMED BY SEQUENCING THE THREE CARD TYPES)

“In a {keyword} future, there is a {keyword} related to {keyword}. What is it?”

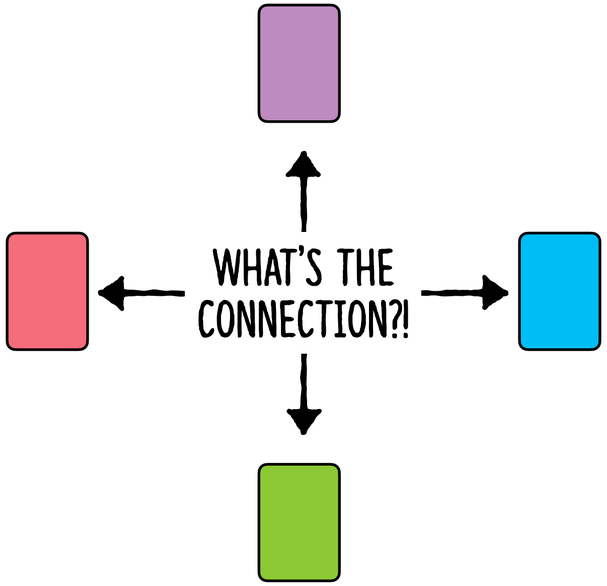
+ + A WELL-CONSIDERED STRUCTURE OF CONSTRAINTS, THAT OFFERS “THREE COMPLEMENTARY LEVELS OF ABSTRACTION…”

“In a {keyword} future, there is a {keyword} related to {keyword}. What is it?”

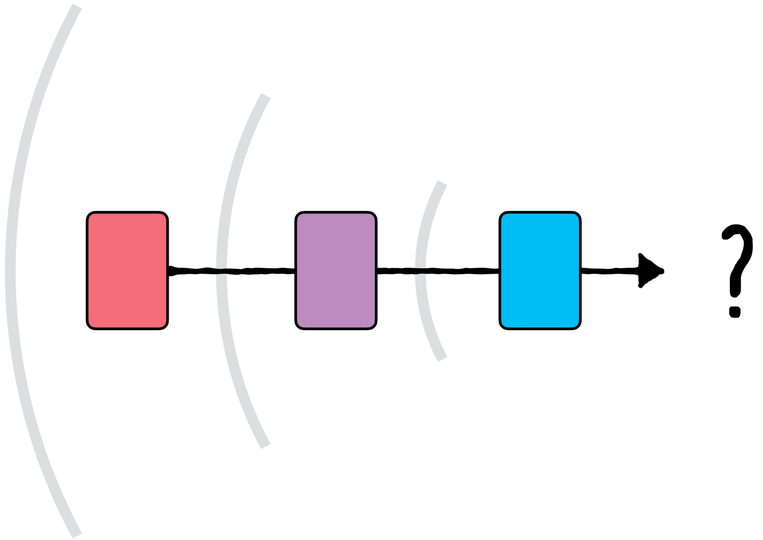


+ BOTH VERSIONS USE CONSTRAINTS TO FACILITATE BRAINSTORMING, BUT IN SUBTLY DIFFERENT WAYS:

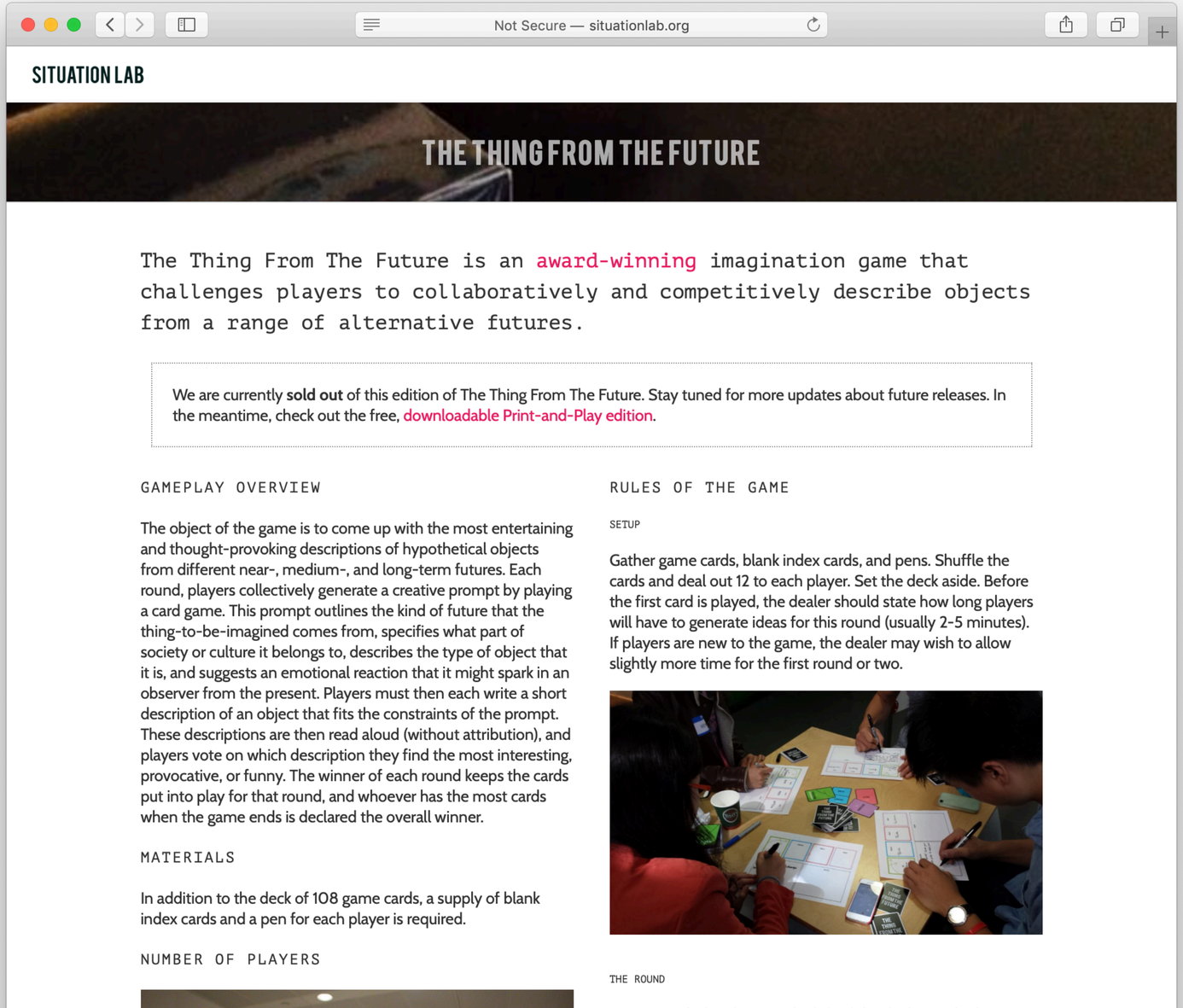
VERSION 1.0 FELT LIKE AN EXERCISE IN "COMBINATORIAL CREATIVITY," WHERE YOU ARE CHALLENGED TO IMAGINE SOMETHING BASED ON FOUR RANDOM THINGS.



WITH VERSION 2.0, THESE CONSTRAINTS FEEL MORE NATURAL, WITH ONE CONSTRAINT LEADING INTO THE NEXT, LEAVING YOU TO IMAGINE WHAT FOLLOWS:



http://situationlab.org/project/the-thing-from-the-future/



The Thing From The Future is an award-winning imagination game that challenges players to collaboratively and competitively describe objects from a range of alternative futures.

We are currently **sold out** of this edition of The Thing From The Future. Stay tuned for more updates about future releases. In the meantime, check out the free, downloadable Print-and-Play edition.

GAMEPLAY OVERVIEW

The object of the game is to come up with the most entertaining and thought-provoking descriptions of hypothetical objects from different near-, medium-, and long-term futures. Each round, players collectively generate a creative prompt by playing a card game. This prompt outlines the kind of future that the thing-to-be-imagined comes from, specifies what part of society or culture it belongs to, describes the type of object that it is, and suggests an emotional reaction that it might spark in an observer from the present. Players must then each write a short description of an object that fits the constraints of the prompt. These descriptions are then read aloud (without attribution), and players vote on which description they find the most interesting, provocative, or funny. The winner of each round keeps the cards put into play for that round, and whoever has the most cards when the game ends is declared the overall winner.

MATERIALS

In addition to the deck of 108 game cards, a supply of blank index cards and a pen for each player is required.

NUMBER OF PLAYERS

RULES OF THE GAME

SETUP

Gather game cards, blank index cards, and pens. Shuffle the cards and deal out 12 to each player. Set the deck aside. Before the first card is played, the dealer should state how long players will have to generate ideas for this round (usually 2-5 minutes). If players are new to the game, the dealer may wish to allow slightly more time for the first round or two.

THE ROUND

SUIT A

+

SUIT B

+

SUIT C

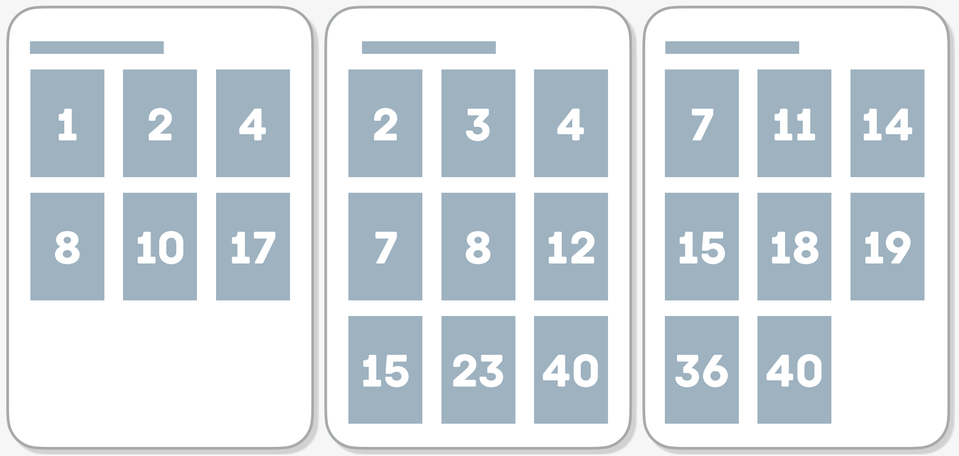
=

PATTERN / ‘FORCED COMBINATION’

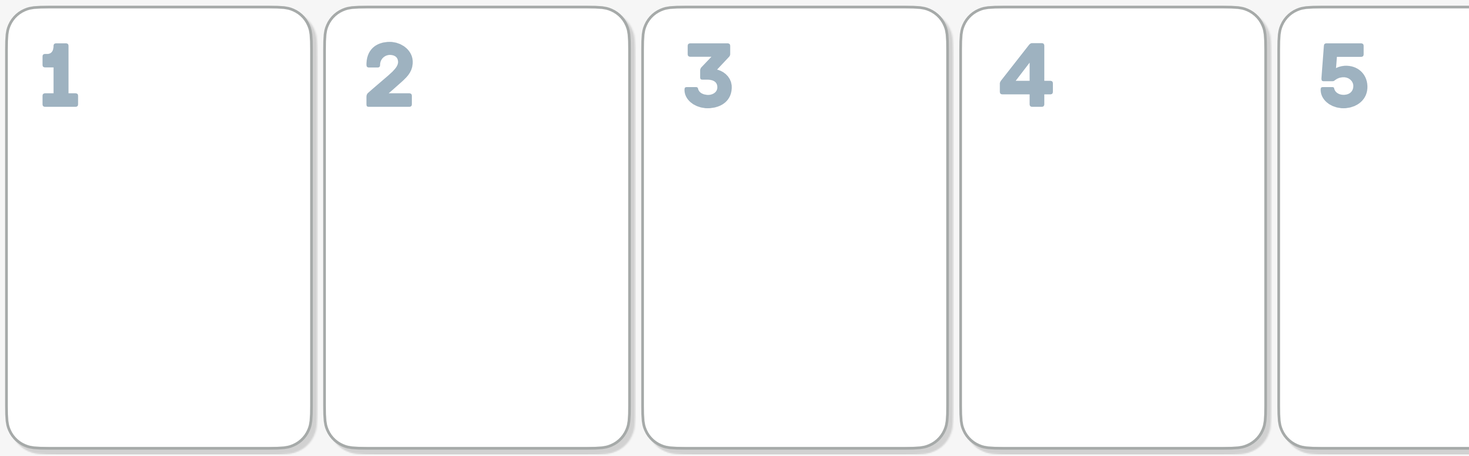
Personalizing your Yoga Workout!

(INDEX CARDS ALLOW A ONE TO MANY RELATIONSHIP)

Extended Child's
Utthita Balasana
Mermaid
2nd edition
Yoga Cards
Professional study, sequencing
and practice visual guide
BEGINNER & INTERMEDIATE SET
25,000+
SOLD WORDLWIDE
WL
WorkoutLabs



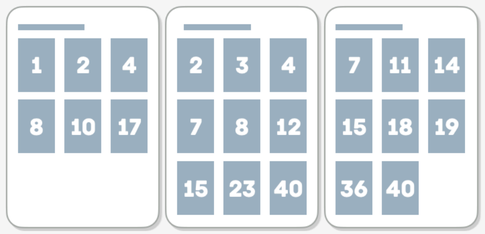
INDEX CARDS



CONTENT CARDS

PATTERN / ‘RECIPE’

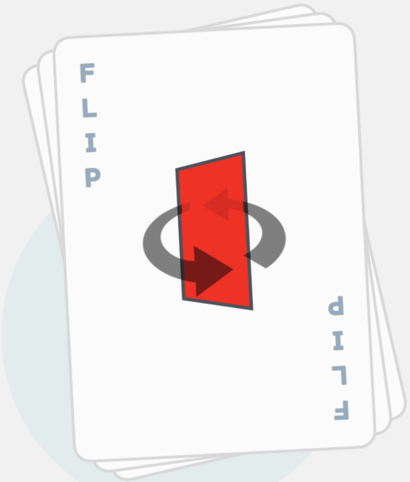
Why all this is interesting… (to me!)



INDEX CARDS

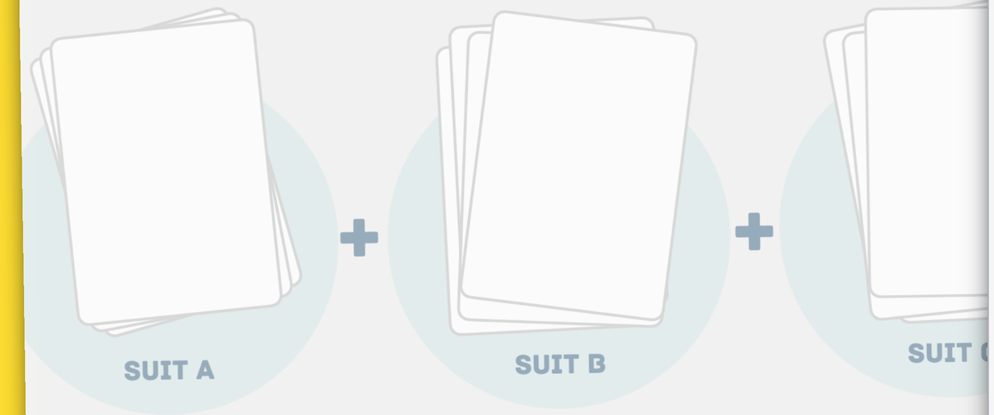
CONTENT CARDS

PATTERN / ‘INDEXING’

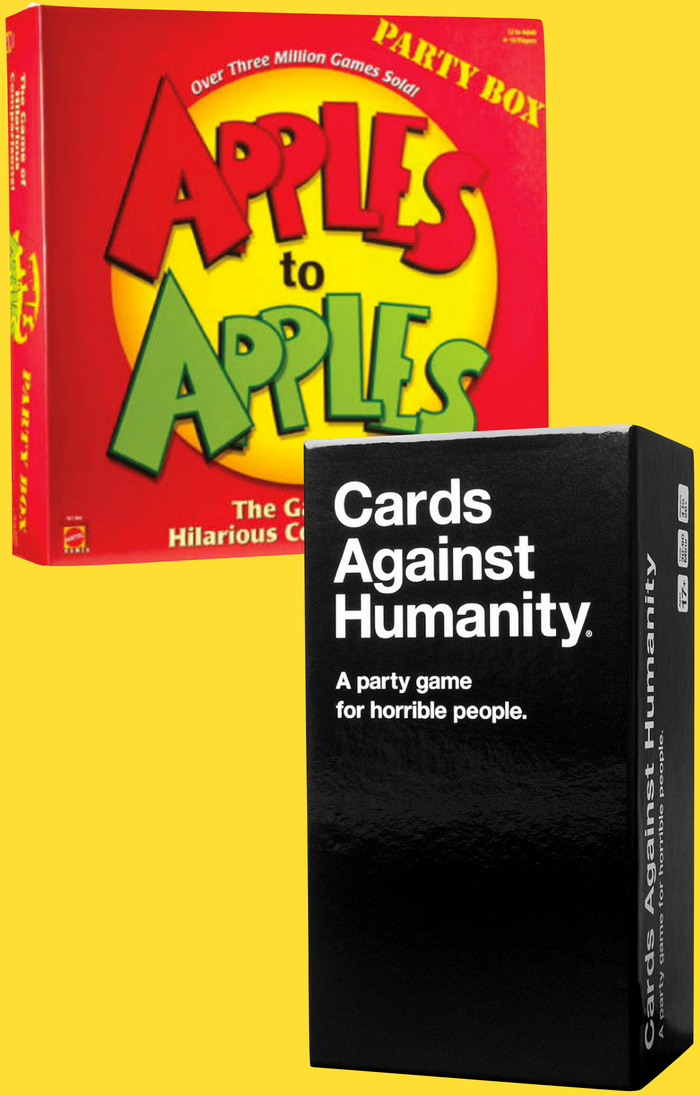


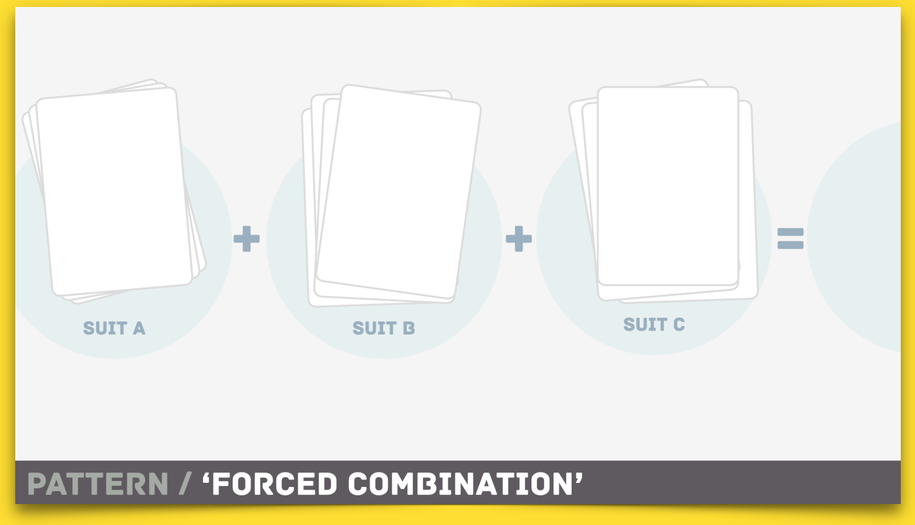
PATTERN / ‘FLIP’

PATTERN / ‘FORCED SORTING’



PATTERN / ‘FORCED COMBINATION’

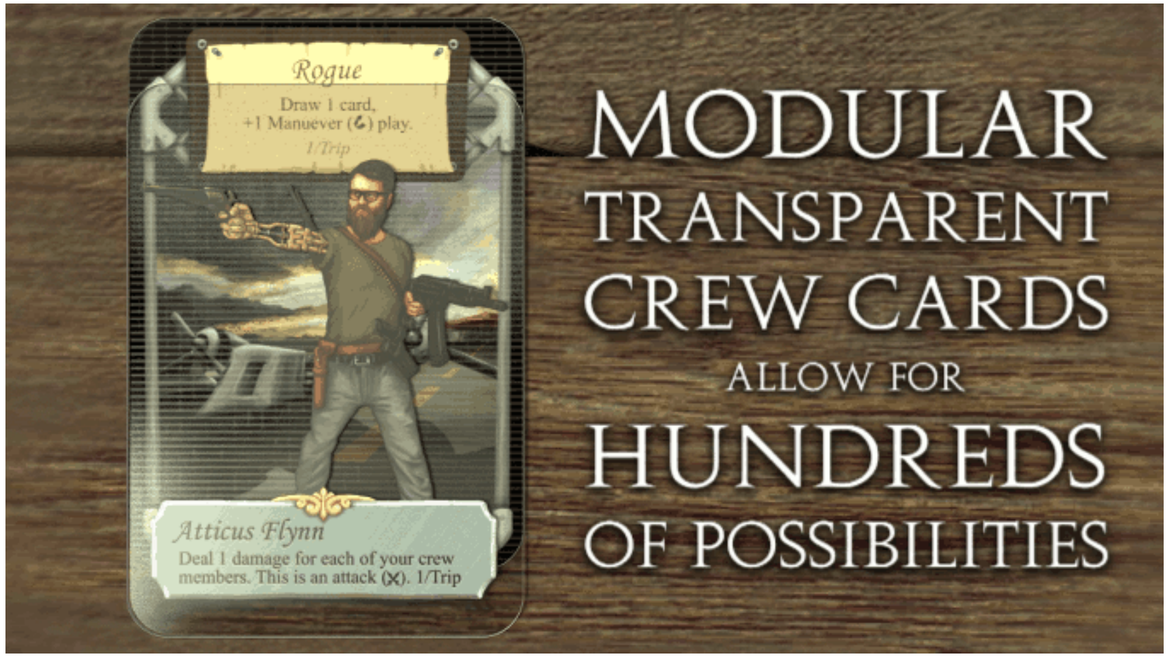

Over Three Million Games Sold!
PARTY BOX
APPLES to APPLES
Cards Against Humanity
A party game for horrible people.
Cards Against Humanity
A party game for horrible people.


SUIT A
SUIT B
SUIT C
PATTERN / 'FORCED COMBINATION'

THE THING FROM THE FUTURE
SINGULARITY UNIVERSITY EDITION
#FUTURETHING
@SILAB @SINGULARITYU

The Gettysburg Address
1863
Disneyland opens
1955
Man lands on the moon
1969
?
DO YOU KNOW WHERE THIS CARD GOES IN THE TIMELINE ABOVE?
The Bikini is introduced
???
20th Anniversary Edition
CHRONOLOGY
THE GAME WHERE YOU MAKE HISTORY
E. Anheuser & Co.

WAS DIVERTED BY DRINK
+10
-10
-15
: Discard 1 card from your hand.
A little diversion goes a long way.
deviant practices.
paternal resemblance.


Rogue
Draw 1 card,
+1 Manuever ( ) play.
1/Trip
Atticus Flynn
Deal 1 damage for each of your crew members. This is an attack (X). 1/Trip
MODULAR
TRANSPARENT
CREW CARDS
ALLOW FOR
HUNDREDS
OF POSSIBILITIES

AGENDA DECK

ACT DECK

Agenda 1a

What's Going On?!

It is late at night. You are holed up in your study, researching the bloody disappearances that have been taking place in the region. A few hours into your research, you hear the sound of strange chanting coming from your parlor down the hall. At the same time, you hear dirt churning, as if something were digging beneath the floor.

3

Illus. Mark Molnar

2/16 105

Act 1a

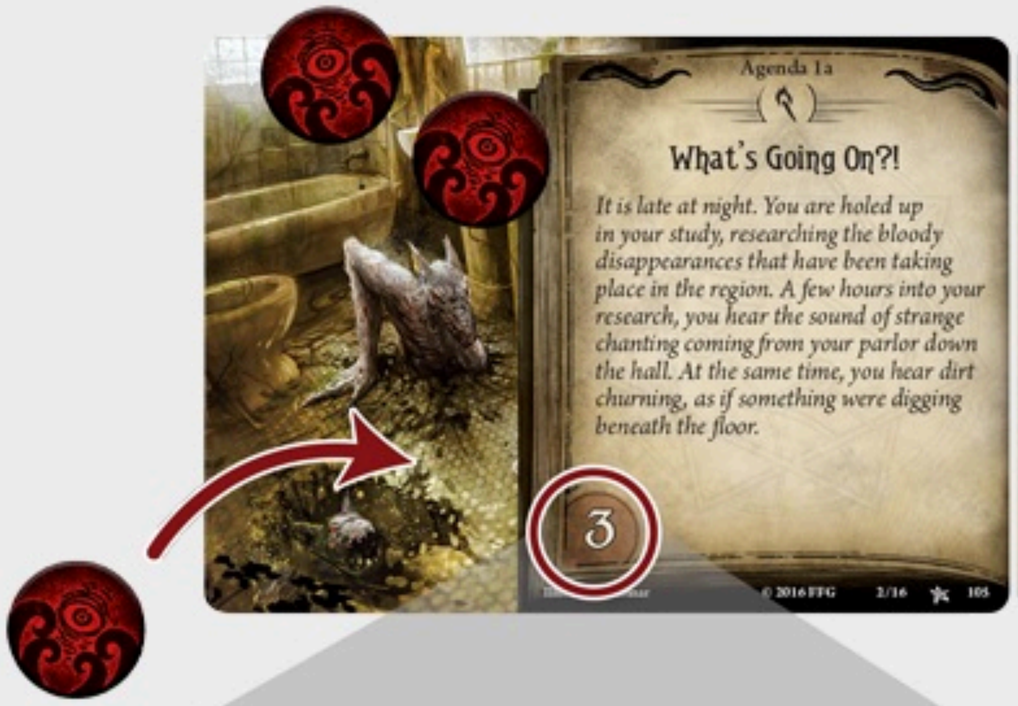
Trapped

As you leap to investigate, the door to your study vanishes before your eyes, leaving behind only solid wall. You're trapped inside your study until you can find another way out.

2

Illus. Jose Vega

© 2016 FFG 5/16 108



Agenda 1a

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3

Act 1a

Trapped

As you leap to investigate, the door to your study vanishes before your eyes, leaving behind only solid wall. You're trapped inside your study until you can find another way out.

2

Agenda 1b

A Lapse in Time

Your house continues to change before your very eyes. The walls have decayed, and the ground in many rooms has turned to dirt. It is almost as if you have been transported somewhere else entirely, although every now and again you recognize elements of your former home.

The lead investigator must decide (choose one): Either each investigator discards 1 card at random from his or her hand, or the lead investigator takes 2 horror.

PATTERN / ‘FLIP’

PATTERN / ‘PAIRING’

PATTERN / ‘SATURATION’

PATTERN / ‘???’

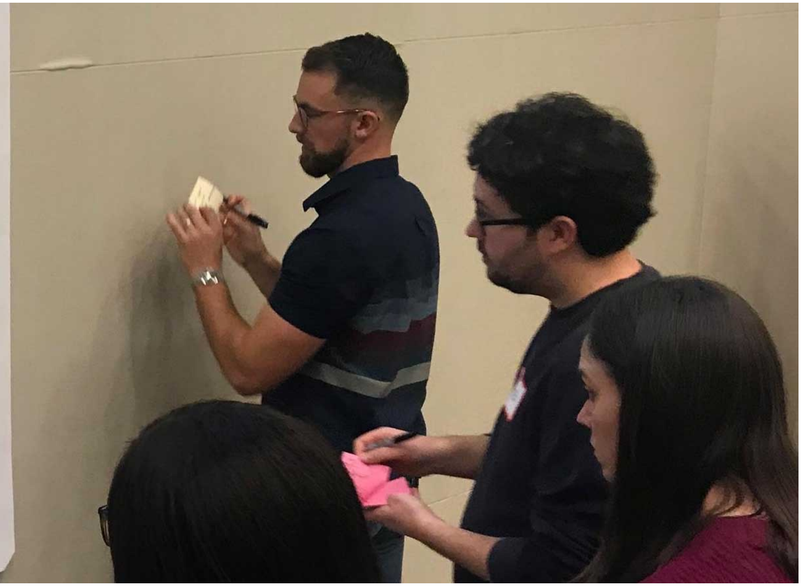
?

Games

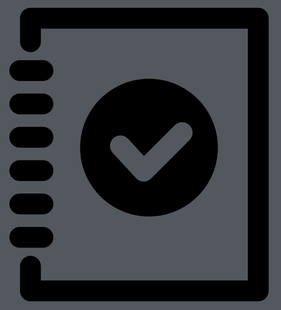
Work Context

CARD DECKS
TILES
CANVASES
MAPS
MODELS
REFLECTION QUESTIONS
GAMES

‘things to think with’



ANALOGIES
EXPLORABLE EXPLANATIONS
GAMEBOOKS
SIMULATIONS
DATA VISUALIZATIONS
ETC.



When we bring ideas into the world (in a thoughtful, structured way) we extend our ability to think about and discuss complex topics.

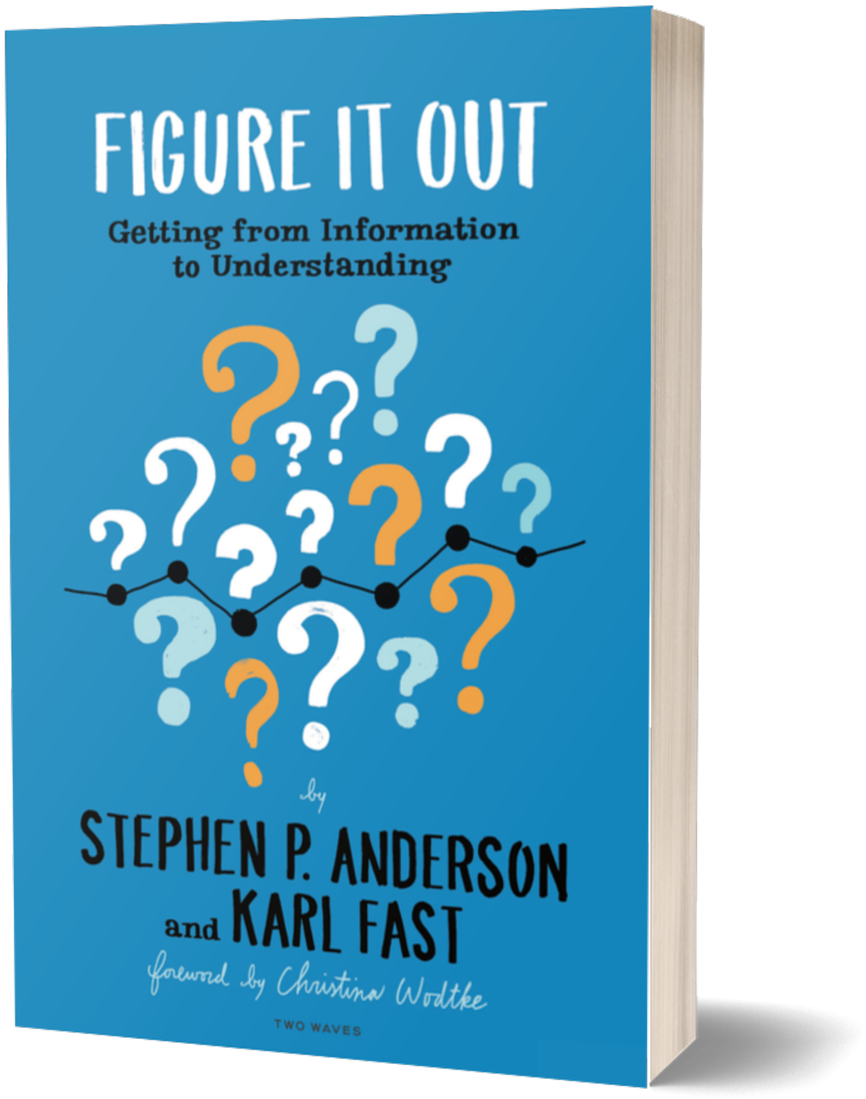
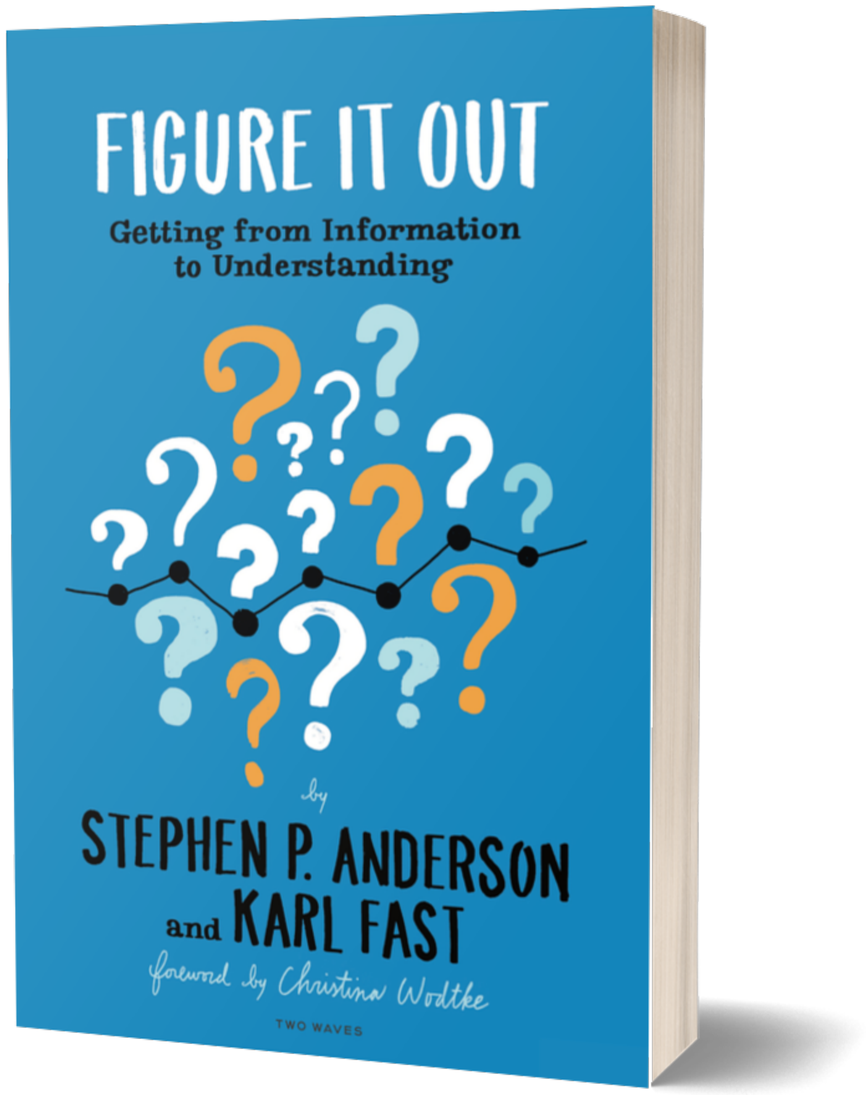


FIGURE IT OUT
Getting from Information to Understanding
by
STEPHEN P. ANDERSON
and KARL FAST
foreword by Christina Wodtke
TWO WAVES

The Mighty Minds Club

A community of working professionals
who share and create ‘things to think with’.

TheMightyMindsClub.com



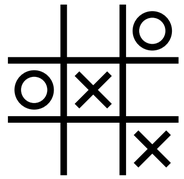
Thanks!

Stephen P. Anderson

@stephenanderson • stephen@poetpainter.com

HOW DO WE ASSESS A SITUATION
AND MAKE DECISIONS?

Cynefin



TIC TAC TOE

CLEAR

SENSE
CATEGORIZE
RESPOND

CHESS

COMPLICATED

SENSE
ANALYZE
RESPOND

POKER

COMPLEX

PROBE
SENSE
RESPOND

CHILDREN'S PLAY

CHAOTIC

ACT
SENSE
RESPOND

ORDERED

CAUSE AND EFFECT ARE KNOWN OR CAN BE DISCOVERED

UNORDERED

CAUSE AND EFFECT CAN BE DEDUCED ONLY WITH HINDSIGHT OR NOT AT ALL

HOW DO I REFLECT ON PURPOSE AND CAREER GOALS?

“What’s Worth Doing” Cards

“ I’m trying to figure out what’s next for me.
What I’ve been doing no longer excites me.
But, I’m not sure what I want to do.

#UX

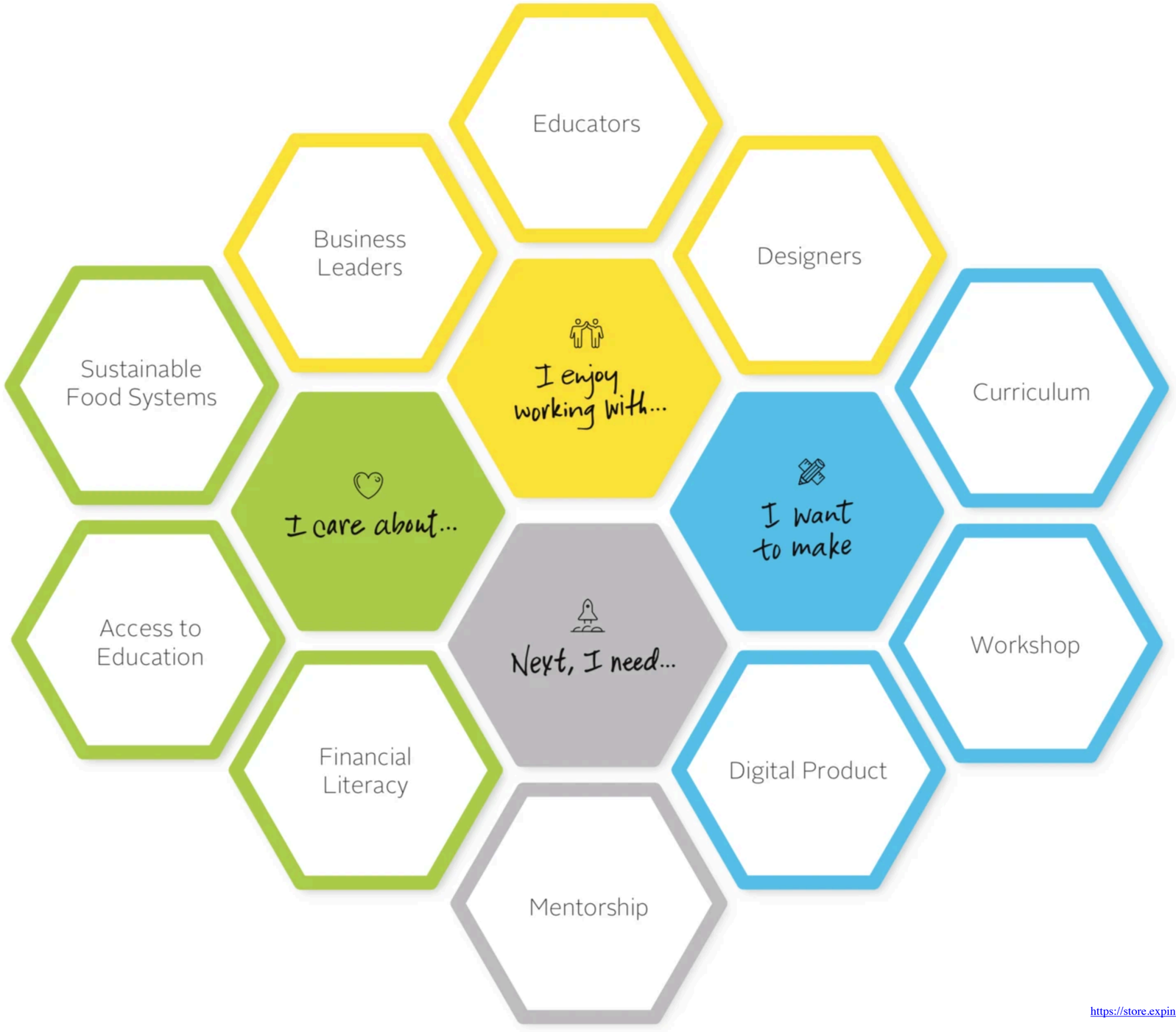
What's Worth Doing? Cards for your next step.

What's Worth Doing is a deck of cards created by friends from Stanford, MIT, IDEO, and Experience Institute to help you with life's big and small decisions.

The tool uses a simple hexagon shape to help you create a mind map around three main questions: (1) What challenges do you want to address? (2) What kind of people do you enjoy working with? (3) What do you like to make?

You'll be challenged to sort through 85 cards quickly and then draw connections across your mind map to see what types of interesting and meaningful projects you might do next.

The cards help you navigate transitions and dive deeper into your work by designing small projects that allow you to learn, grow, and change your life, work, or world for the better.



https://store.expinstitute.com/collections/catalog/products/whats-worth-doing-pre-sale