Escaping the Rewrite Trap

Camille Fournier

Author, *Platform Engineering: A Guide for Technical, Product, and People Leaders*

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What do you do when your platform is failing?

Everything's not fine.

You want to rewrite to get yourself
out of this mess.

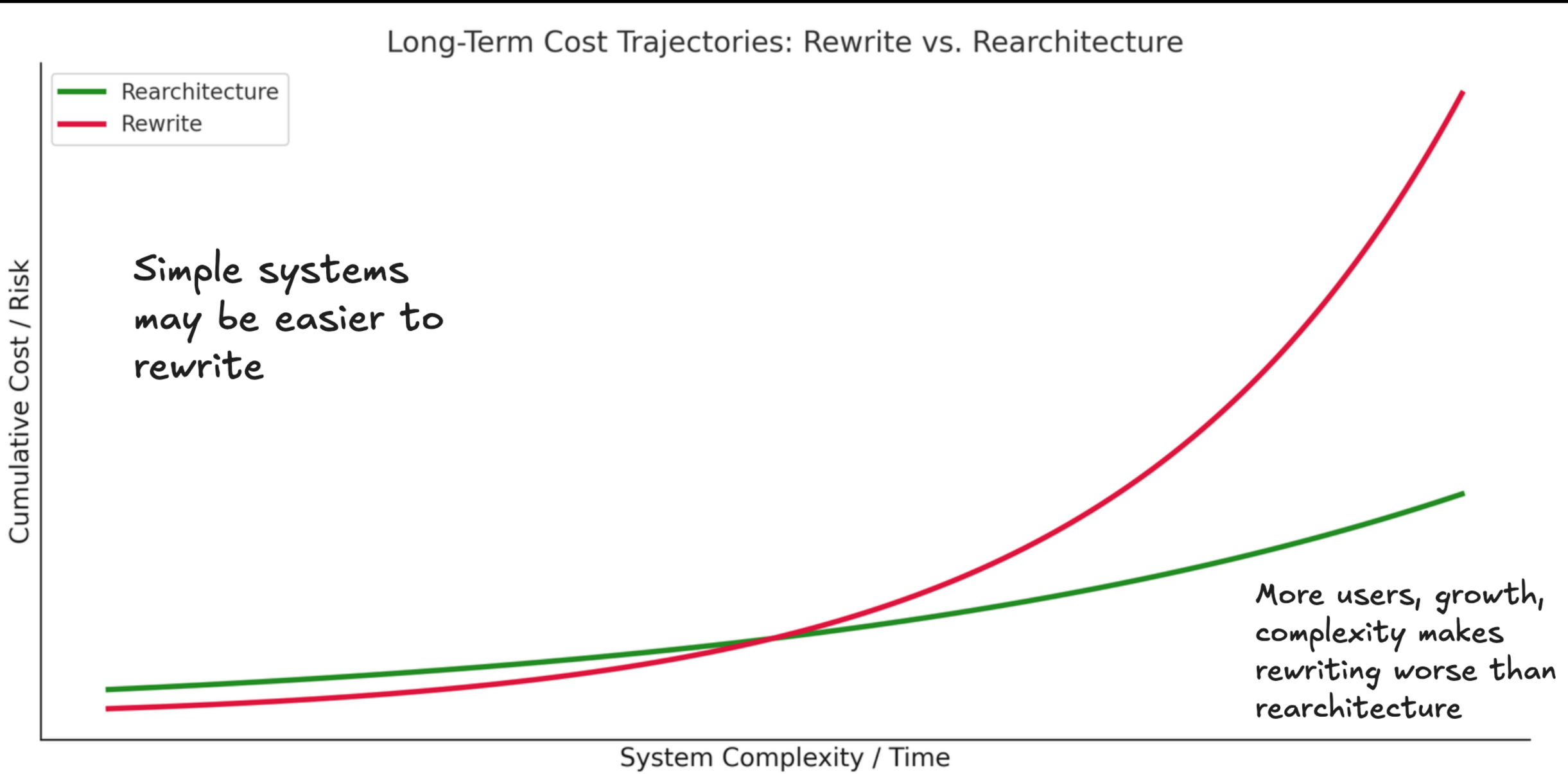
Rewrites (Almost) Always Fail

Instead

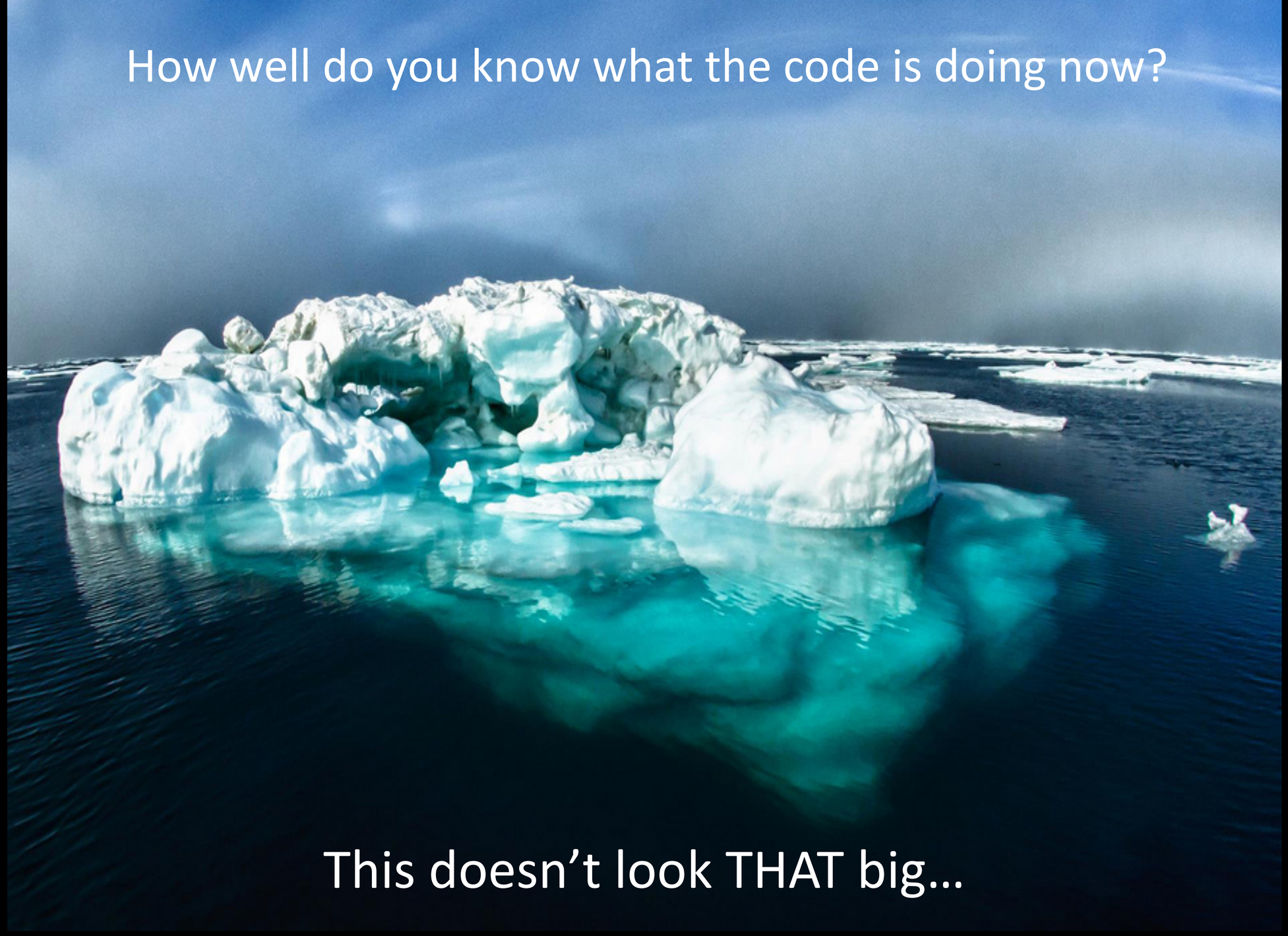
Rearchitect: Make Major Changes, Internally

Why do rewrites fail when rearchitectures succeed?

COMPLEXITY


Long-Term Cost Trajectories: Rewrite vs. Rearchitecture
Rearchitecture
Rewrite
Simple systems may be easier to rewrite
More users, growth, complexity makes rewriting worse than rearchitecture
Cumulative Cost / Risk
System Complexity / Time

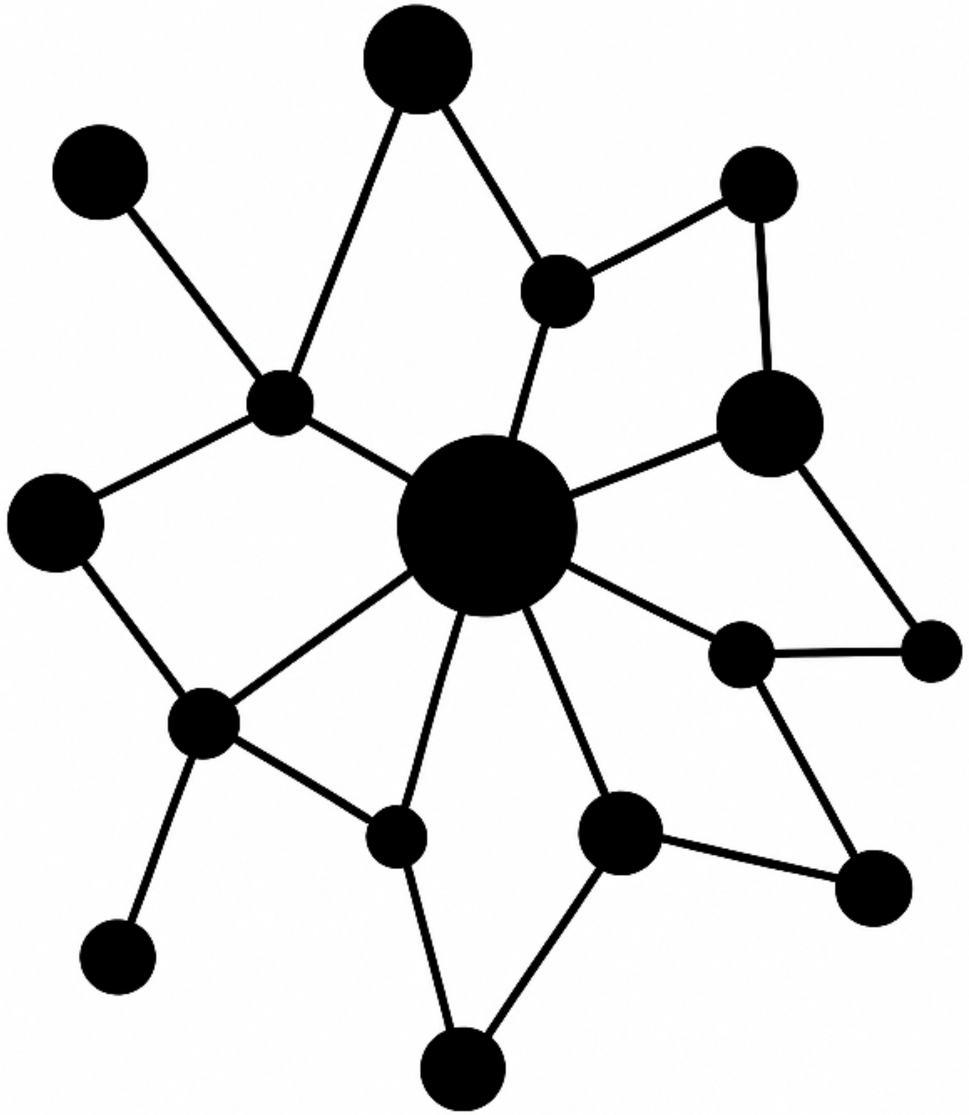
How well do you know what the code is doing now?



This doesn’t look THAT big…

Hyrum's Law

"With a sufficient number of users of an API, it does not matter what you promise in the contract: all observable behaviors of your system will be depended on by somebody."

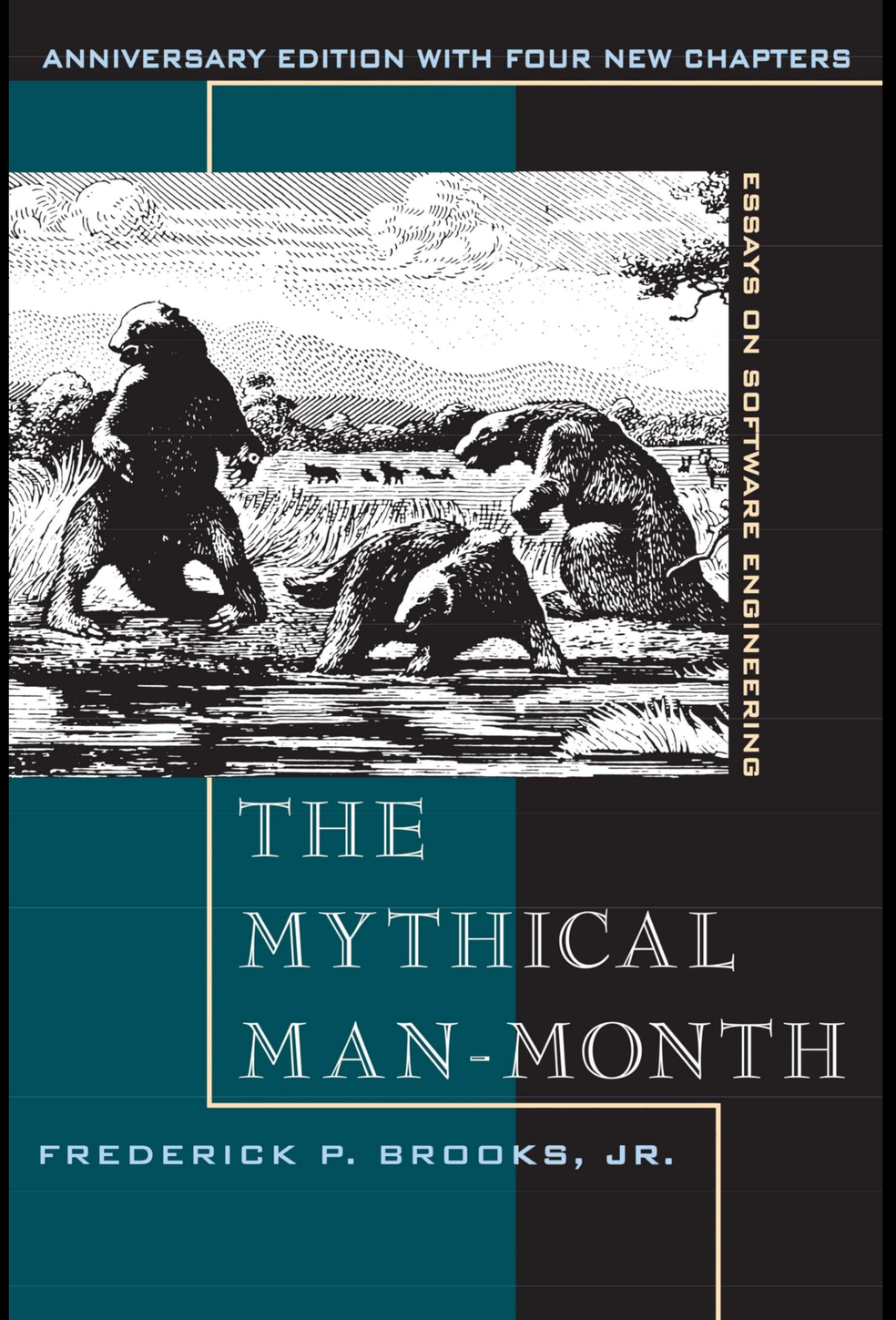


Second System Effect

Inflated Expectations

Overconfidence

Redesigns the Obsolete



YOUR TEAM IS NOT STAFFED FOR NOVELTY

becoking mountains

Pioneers, Settlers, Town Planners (swardley)

indigenous population

settler

settler

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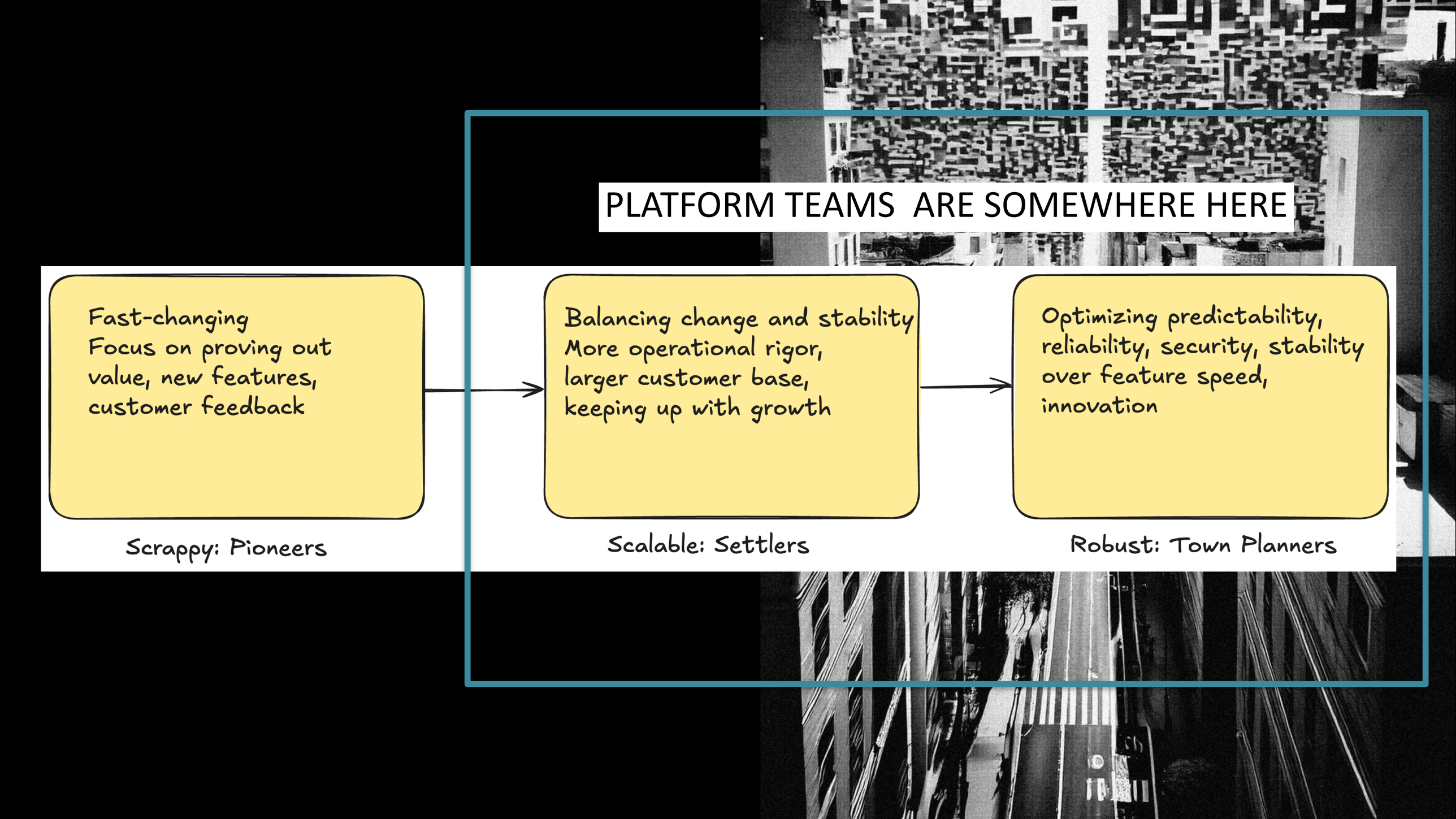
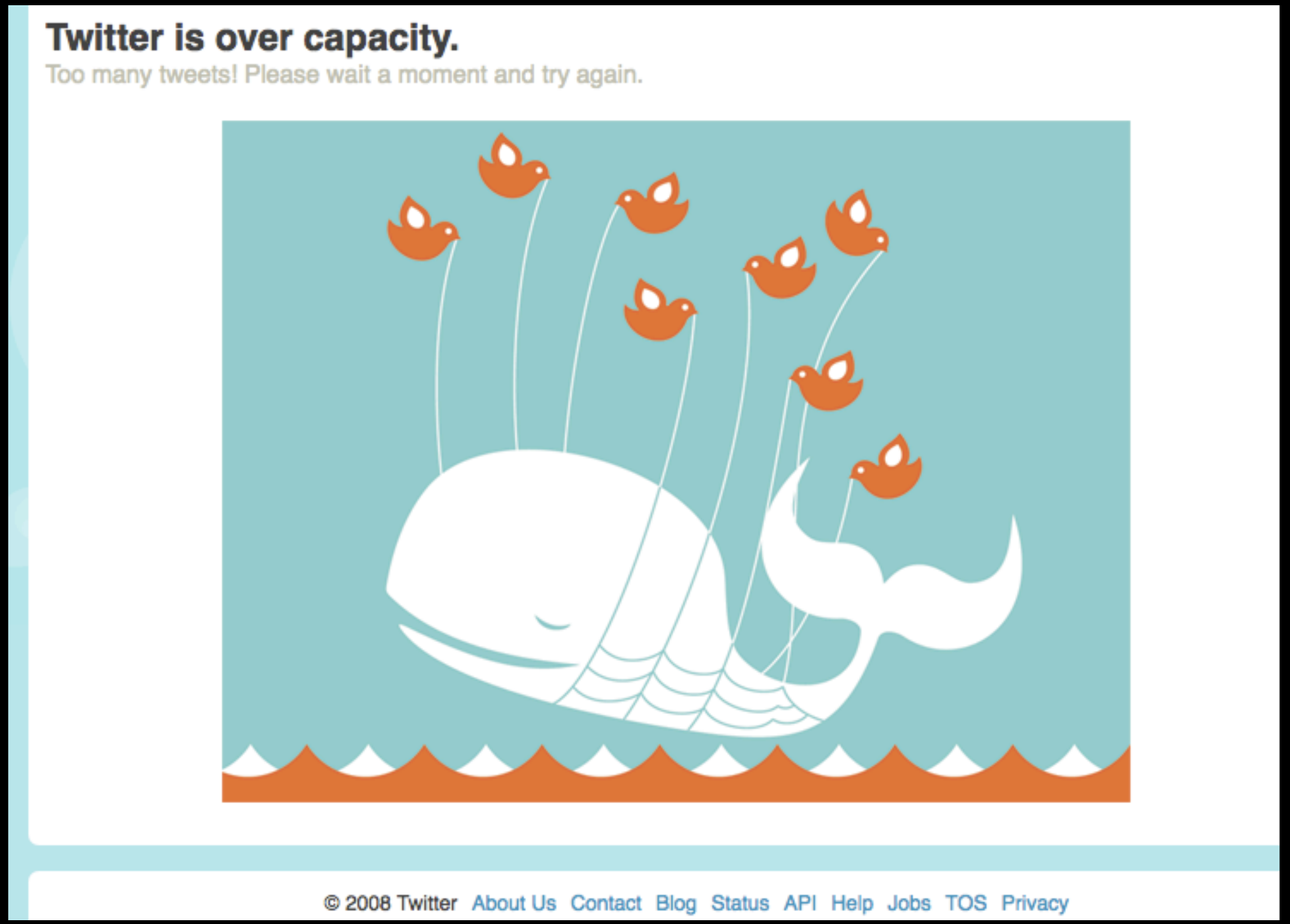
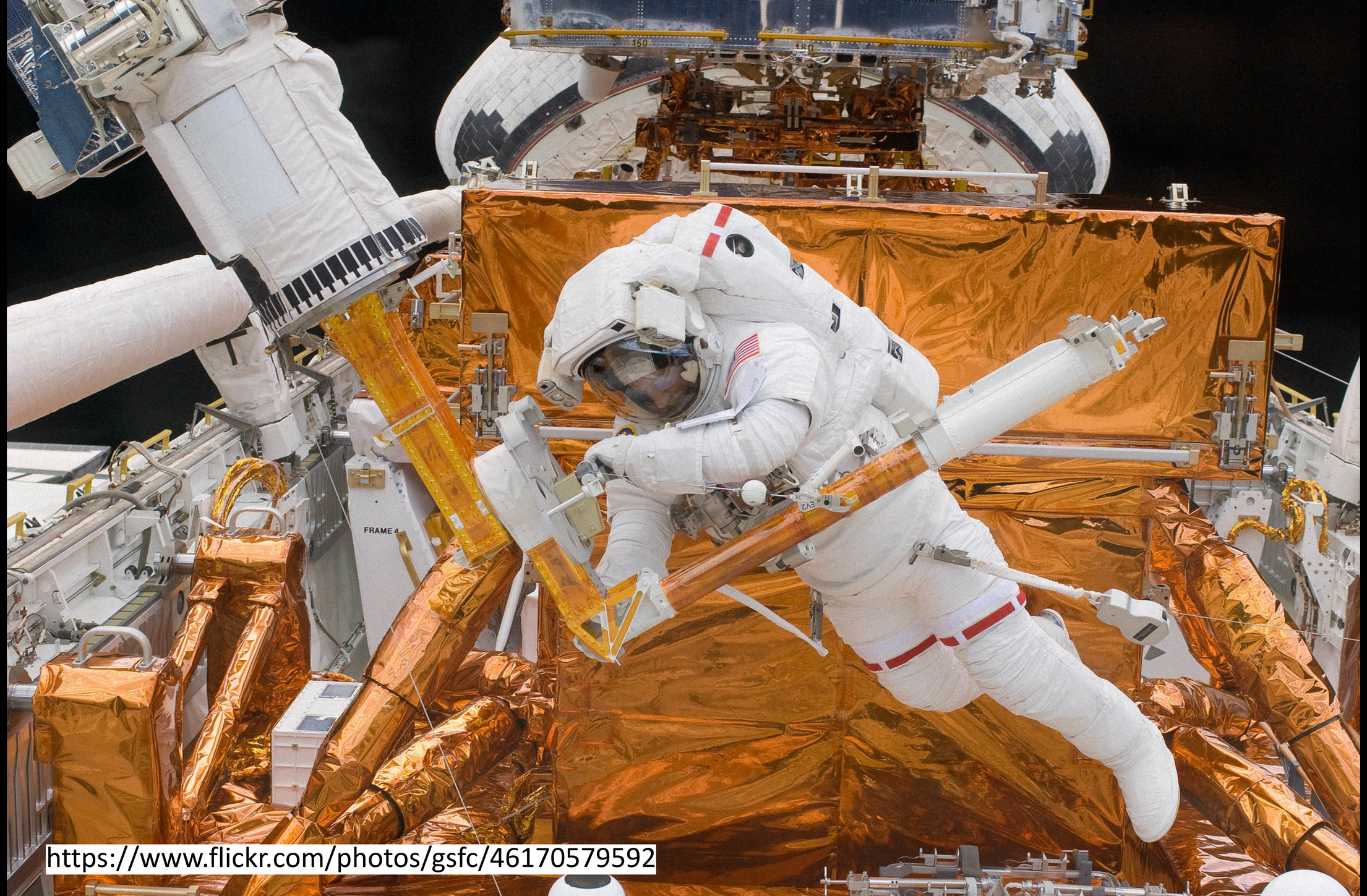

PLATFORM TEAMS ARE SOMEWHERE HERE
Fast-changing
Focus on proving out value, new features, customer feedback
Scrappy: Pioneers
Balancing change and stability
More operational rigor, larger customer base, keeping up with growth
Scalable: Settlers
Optimizing predictability, reliability, security, stability over feature speed, innovation
Robust: Town Planners

Your Team is Already Stressed



Rearchitecting Provides Natural Guardrails

Expanding system capabilities within the existing system



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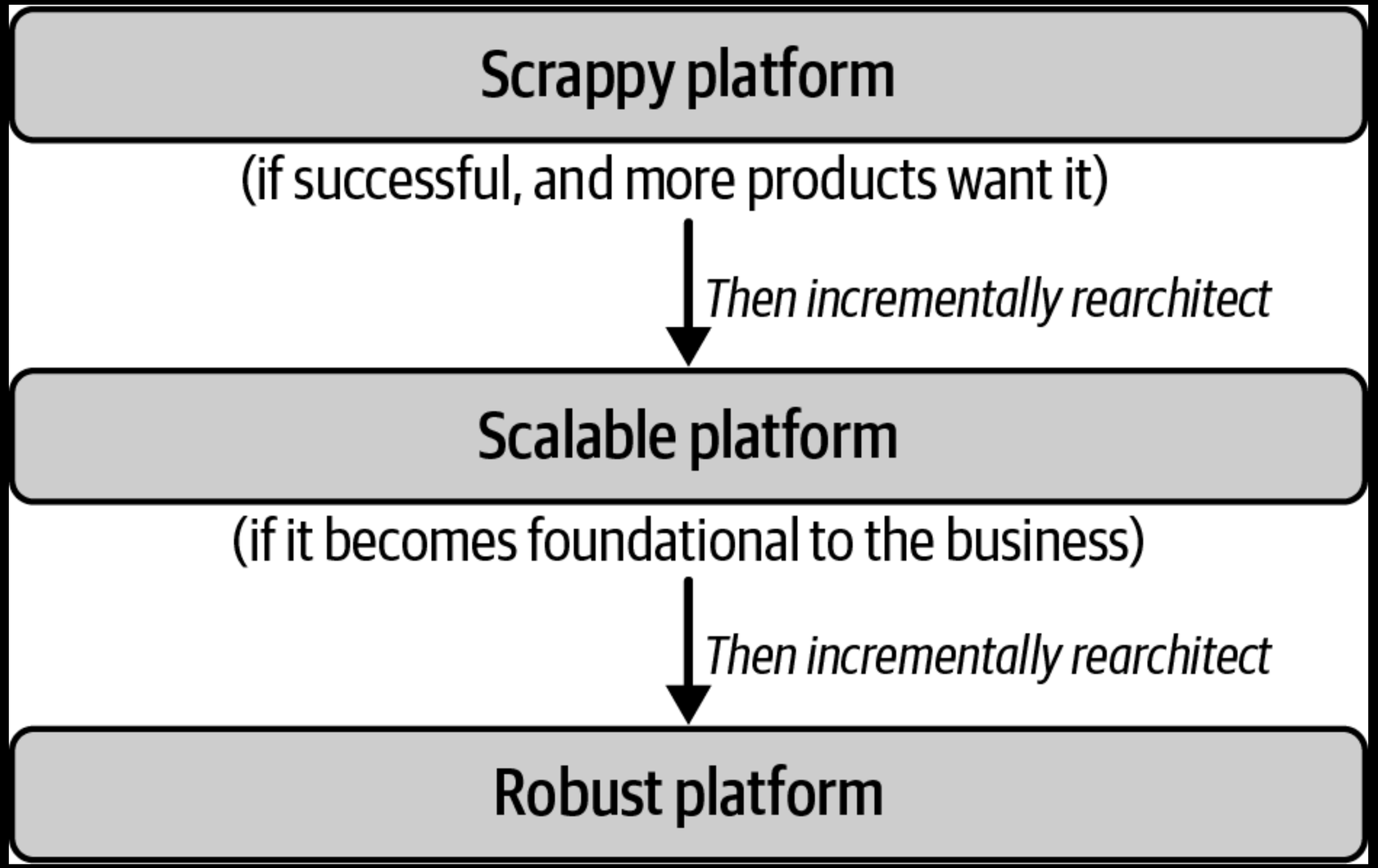
Scrappy platform
(if successful, and more products want it)
Then incrementally rearchitect
Scalable platform
(if it becomes foundational to the business)
Then incrementally rearchitect
Robust platform

Principles For Success

VISION AND PLANNING

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Identify Long-Term Goals

Long Term Goals

Features

What is needed? Can we do more?

Efficiency

How can we make this more cost efficient, scalable, or meaningfully cheaper to operate?

Reliability

Improve uptime, reduce errors

Security

Enable more security by design

Consider Adjacent Systems, OSS, and Vendor Components

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Right-Size to the Company and Rate of Growth

Factor in Migration Costs

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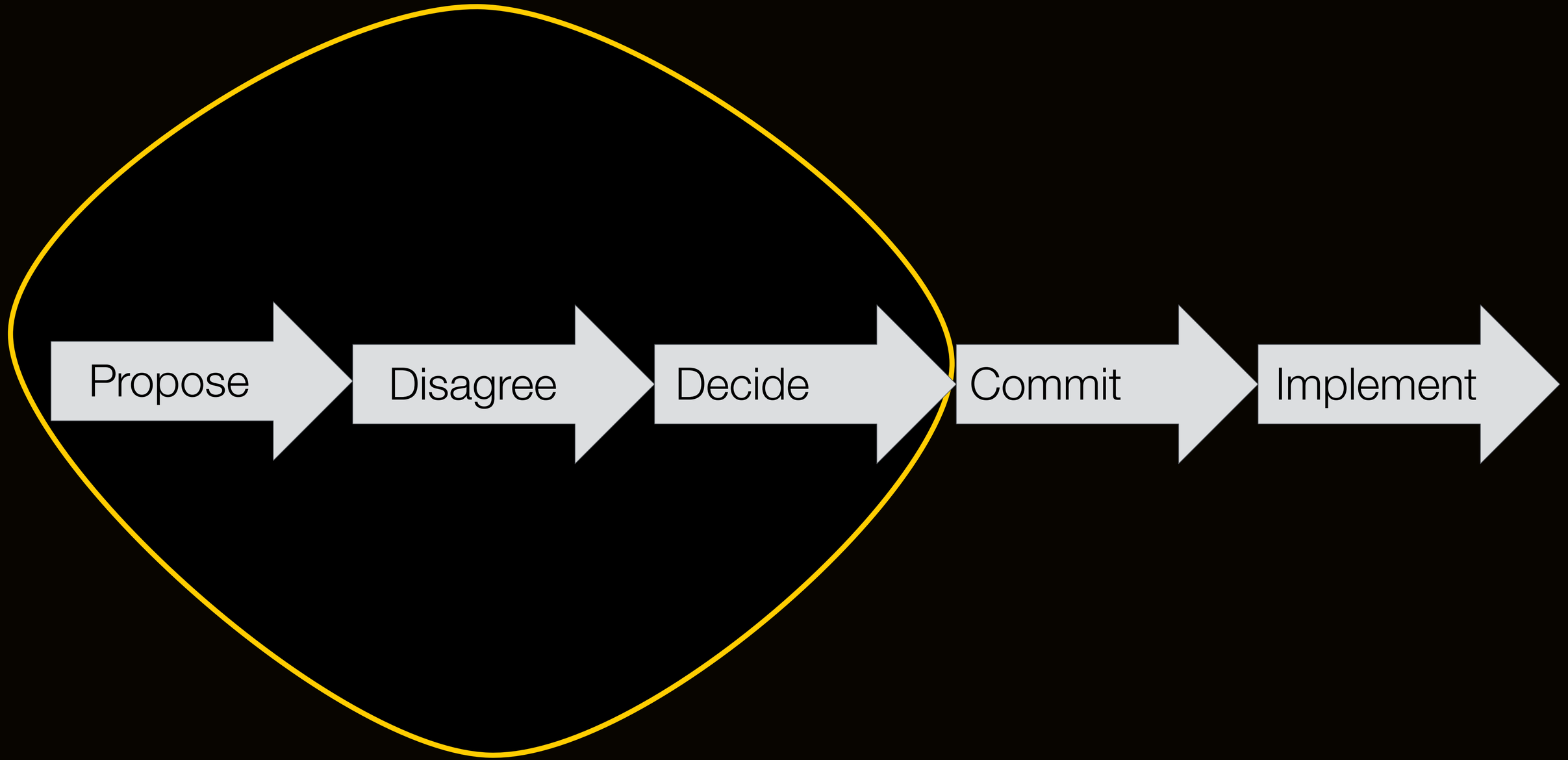
Determine Major 12-Month Wins

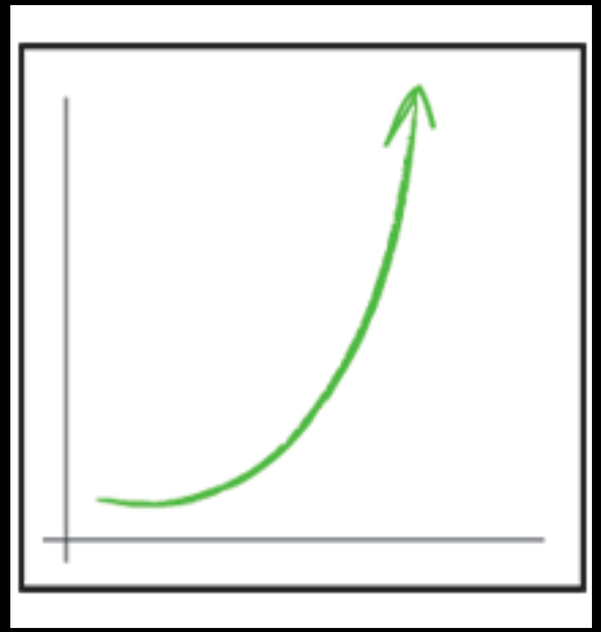
SELL THE PLAN

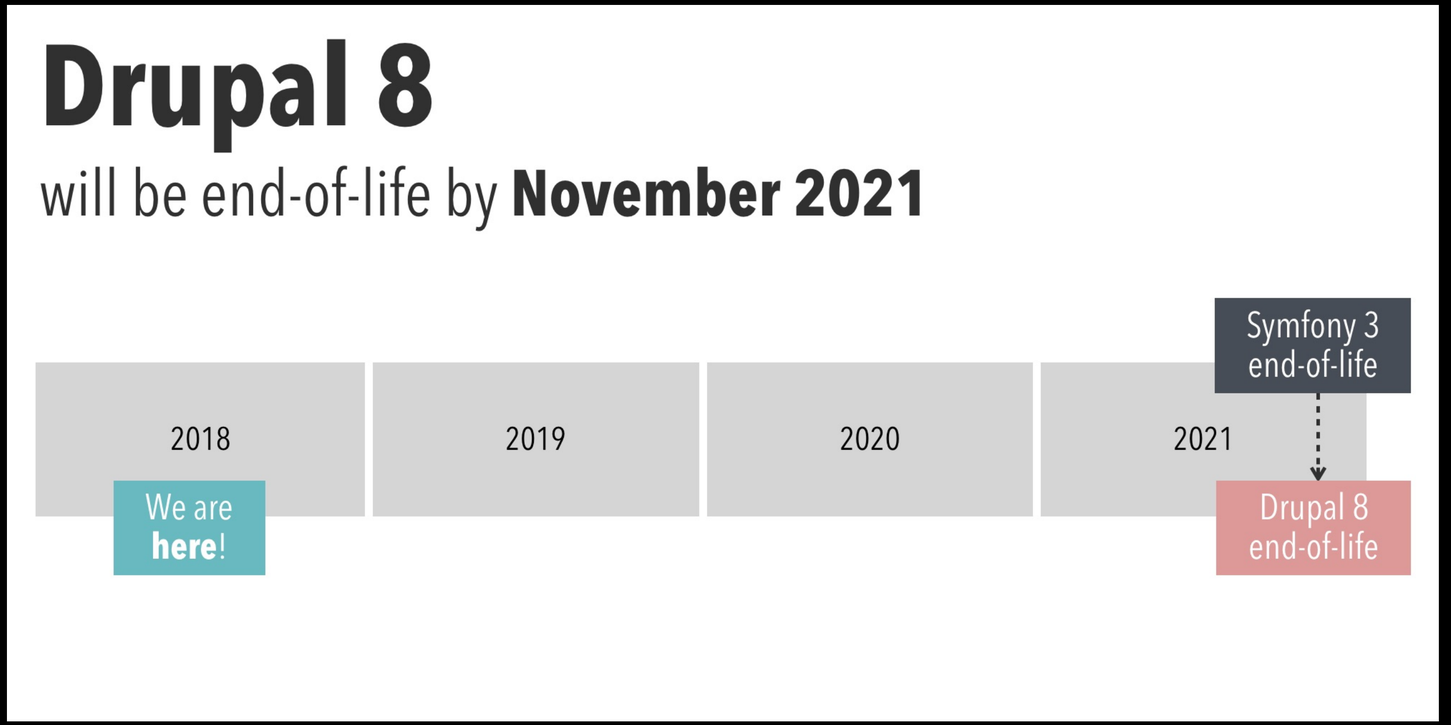
Sell it to your team.


Propose
Disagree
Decide
Commit
Implement

Sell it to your stakeholders.

Take advantage of extrinsic deadlines and Big Scary Graphs





The Computers Are Not Your Stakeholders

Daniel Espeset, Director of Architecture, Etsy

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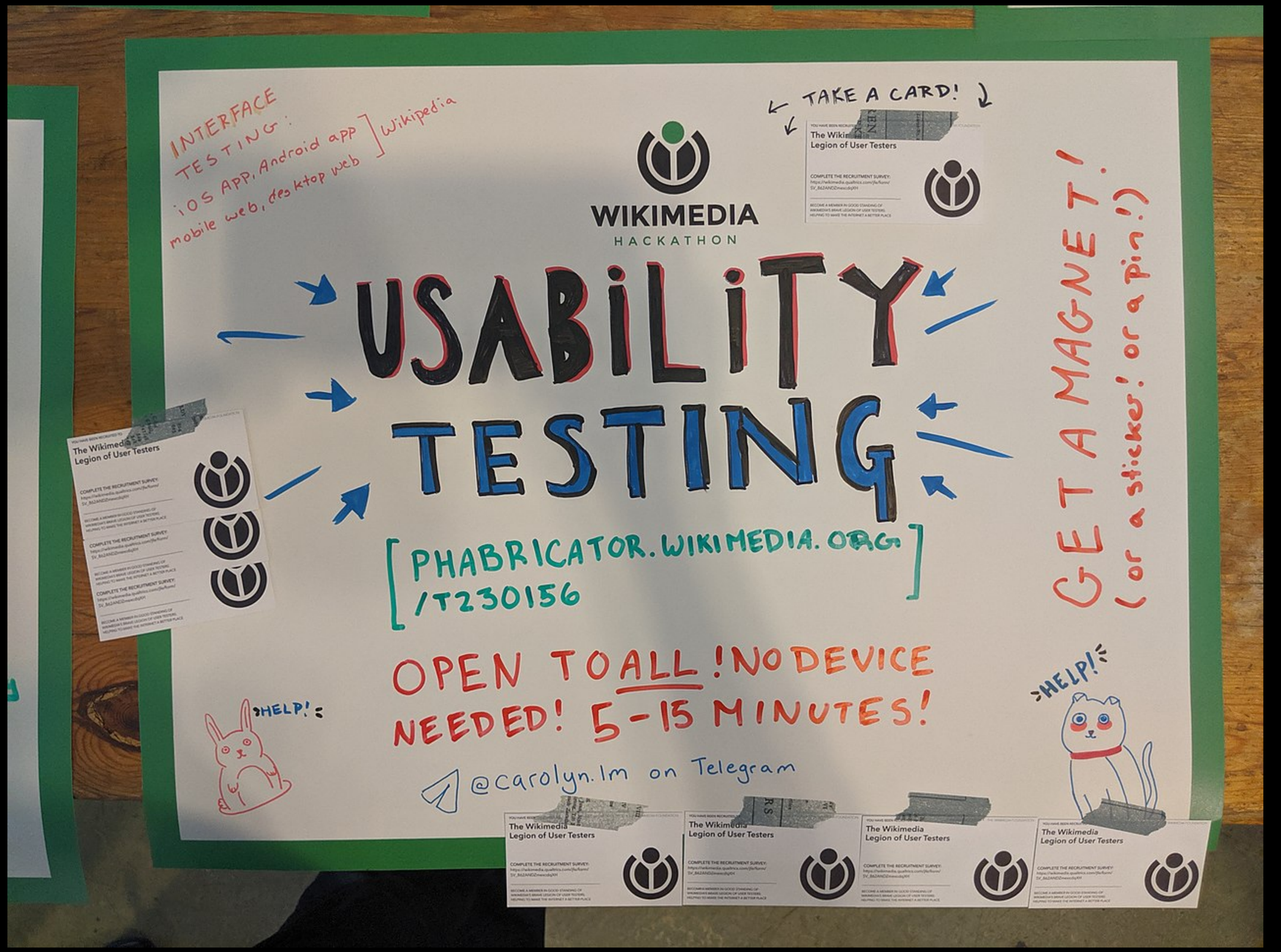
EXECUTION GOTCHAS

Beware The New External-Hire Manager/Tech Lead

Minimize disruption to users



Correctness

Strategy

DUDE
WHERE'S MY STRATEGY?
imgflip.com

We need to move to the cloud

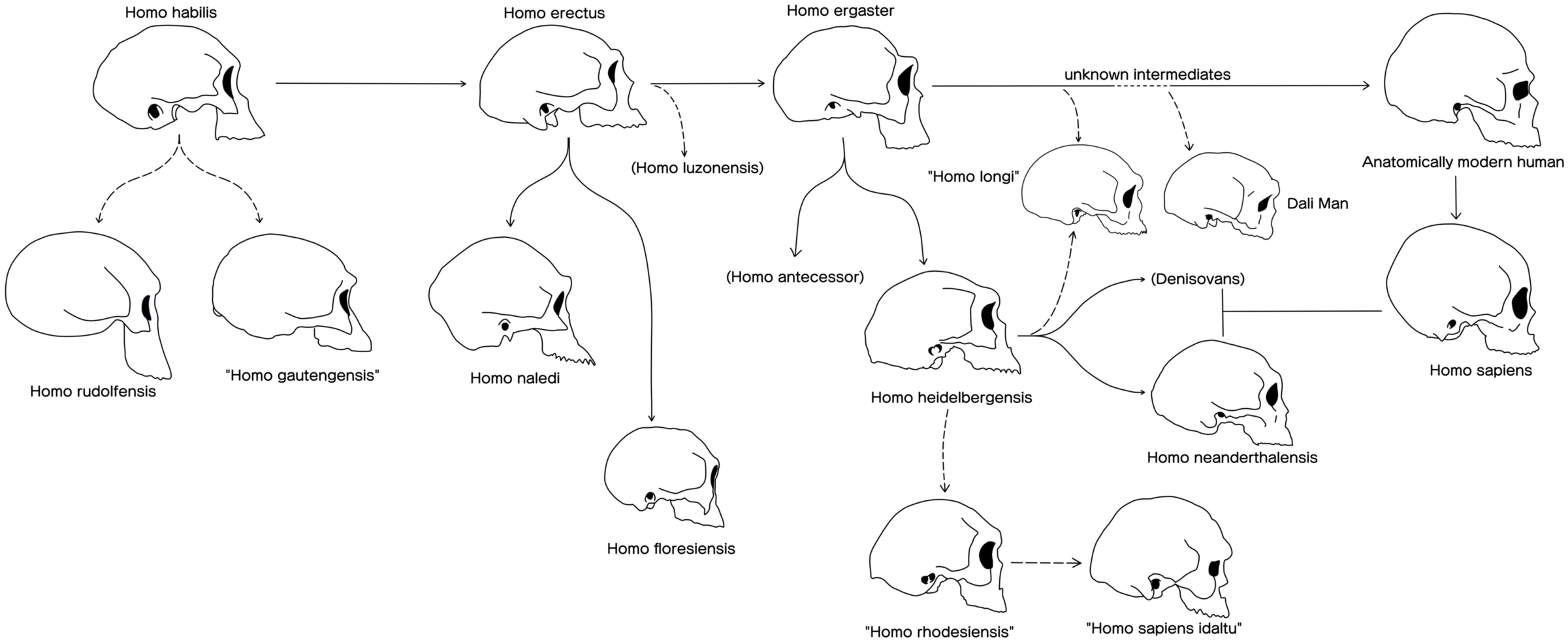
We need to achieve Continuous Delivery

We need to kill the monolith

We need to change our architecture patterns

We need to radically adopt AI

Platform Teams Drive Evolution, Not Revolution



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You’re never really done.

Everything wasn’t fine.

You needed to ~~rewrite~~.
rearchitect!

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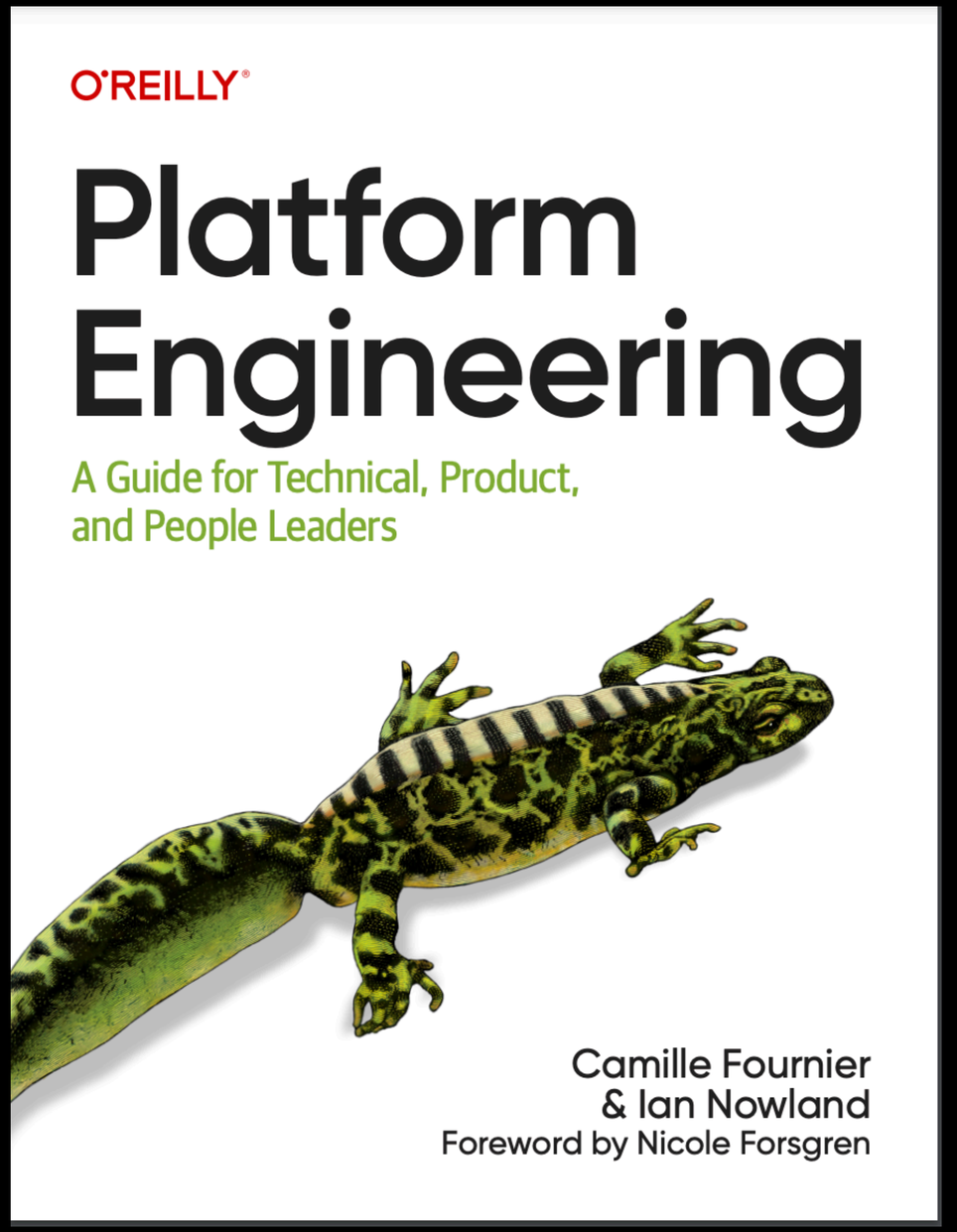
You’ve supported the evolution of your company to a more strategic future.

Thanks!

Find me on bluesky:

@skamille.themanagerswrath.com

Book Signing

Tomorrow 11am