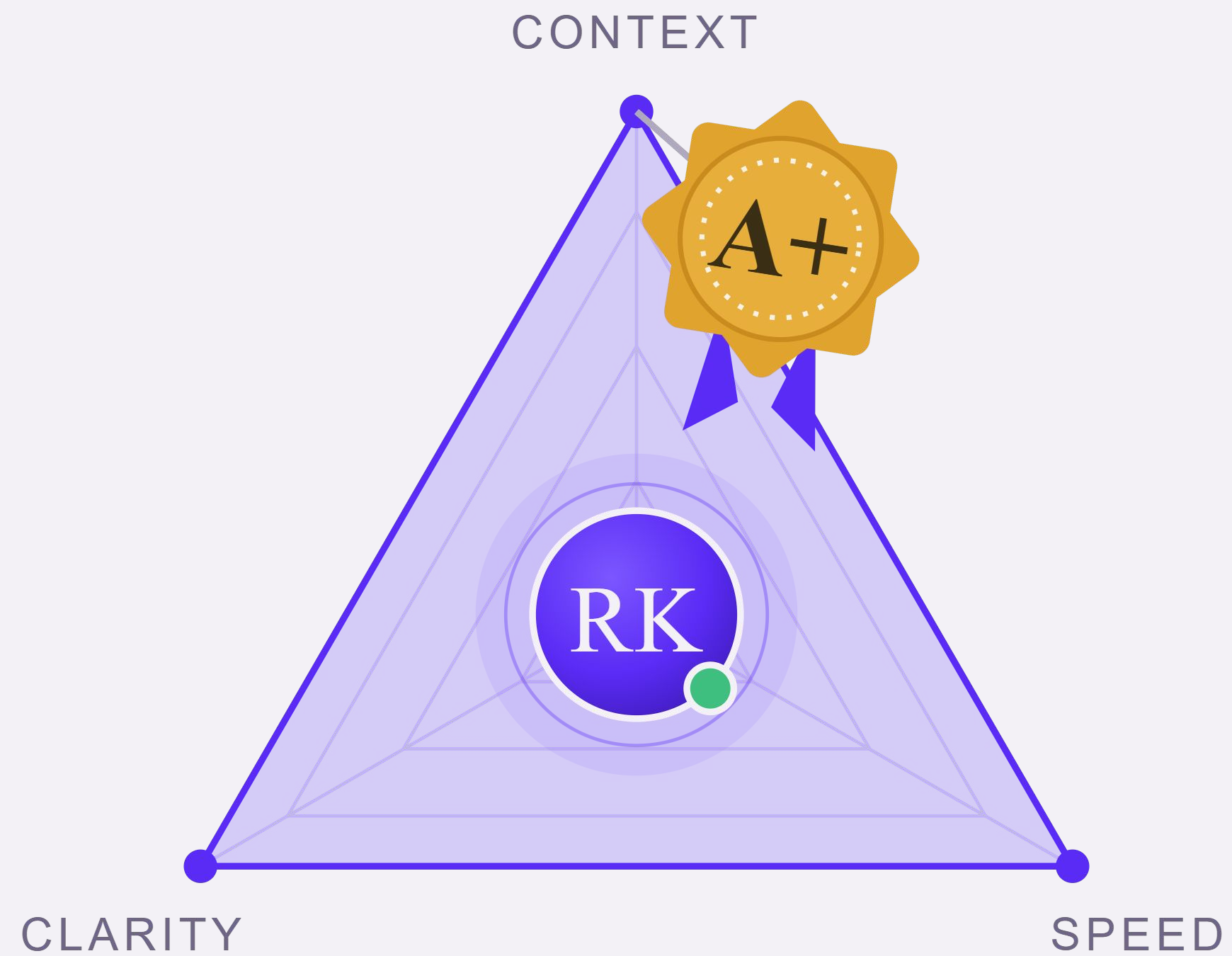


Your Slack has a *neurotypical* bias

Rebecca Koniahgari

AI Engineering Lead · Uptrend Motion

LDX3 New York



When something works for us we
don't question it.

We assume it works for everyone.

When something works for us we
don't question it.

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When something works for us we
don't question it.

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Rebecca Koniahgari

AI Engineering Lead, Uptrend Motion

neurotypical



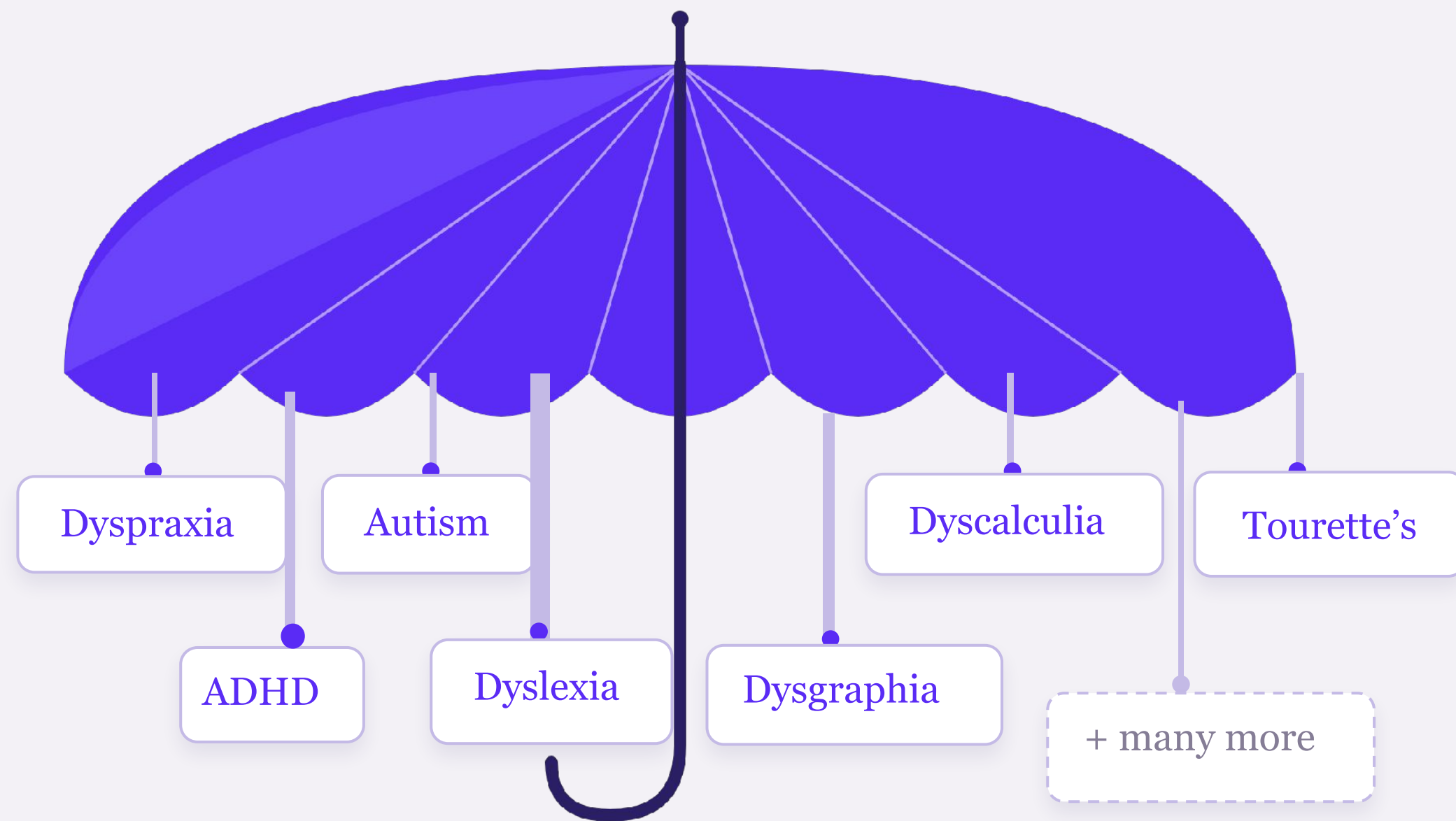
neurodivergent

neurotypical

a brain that develops and processes information in ways considered
typical.

neurodivergence · an umbrella term

natural differences in how people process information, communicate, learn, and experience the world.



Neurodivergent people are *not a monolith*.



EXPERIENCES



STRENGTHS



CHALLENGES

NEURODIVERGENT

now it's on us

the work

NEUROTYPICAL

Agenda

01

See It

Spot the biases and invisible patterns hiding in most teams.

Agenda

01

See It

Spot the biases and invisible patterns hiding in most teams.

02

Own It

Run the Communication Burden Audit — one sprint, no disruption to delivery.

Agenda

01

See It

Spot the biases and invisible patterns hiding in most teams.

02

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Run the Communication Burden Audit — one sprint, no disruption to delivery.

03

Fix It

Make the shift that sticks: from “they adapt” to “I design.”

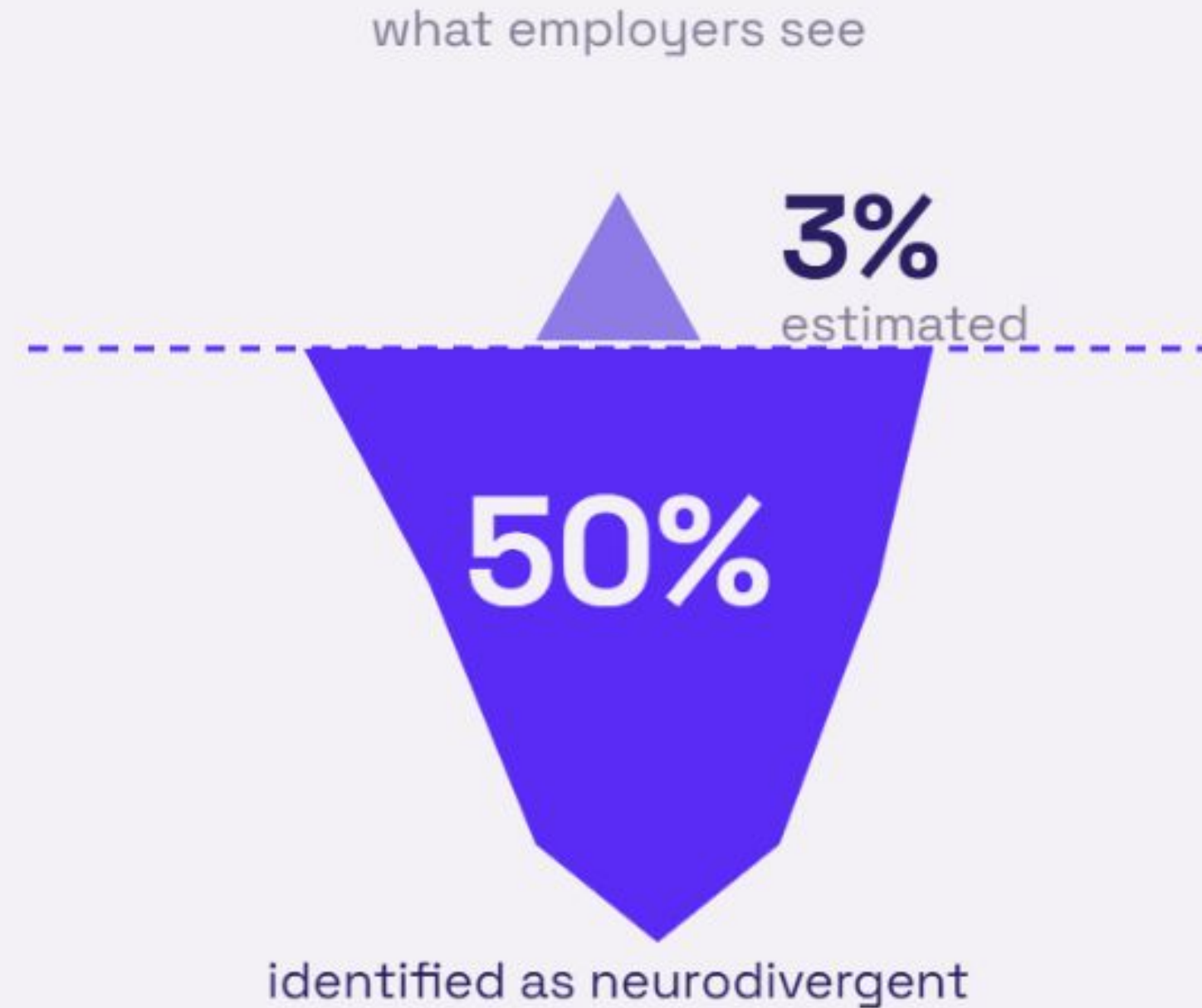
01 See It

The biases hiding in plain sight.

230,000 TECH WORKERS SURVEYED

94%

never disclosed being
neurodivergent at work.



<https://wearetechwomen.com/major-new-report-from-the-tech-talent-charter-reveals-tech-employers-massively-underestimate-neurodivergence-in-their-workforce/>

WHY STAY SILENT?

Disclosure requires *trust*.

Believing that being understood will outweigh the risk of being *misunderstood*.

THE DOUBLE EMPATHY PROBLEM



https://public.otter.ai/reports/The_Cost_of_Unnecessary_Meeting_Attendance.pdf

BIAS 01

The Speed Bias

The assumption that thinking should happen in real time.

Delay → *disengagement*

BIAS 01

The Speed Bias

The assumption that thinking should happen in real time.

Delay → *disengagement*

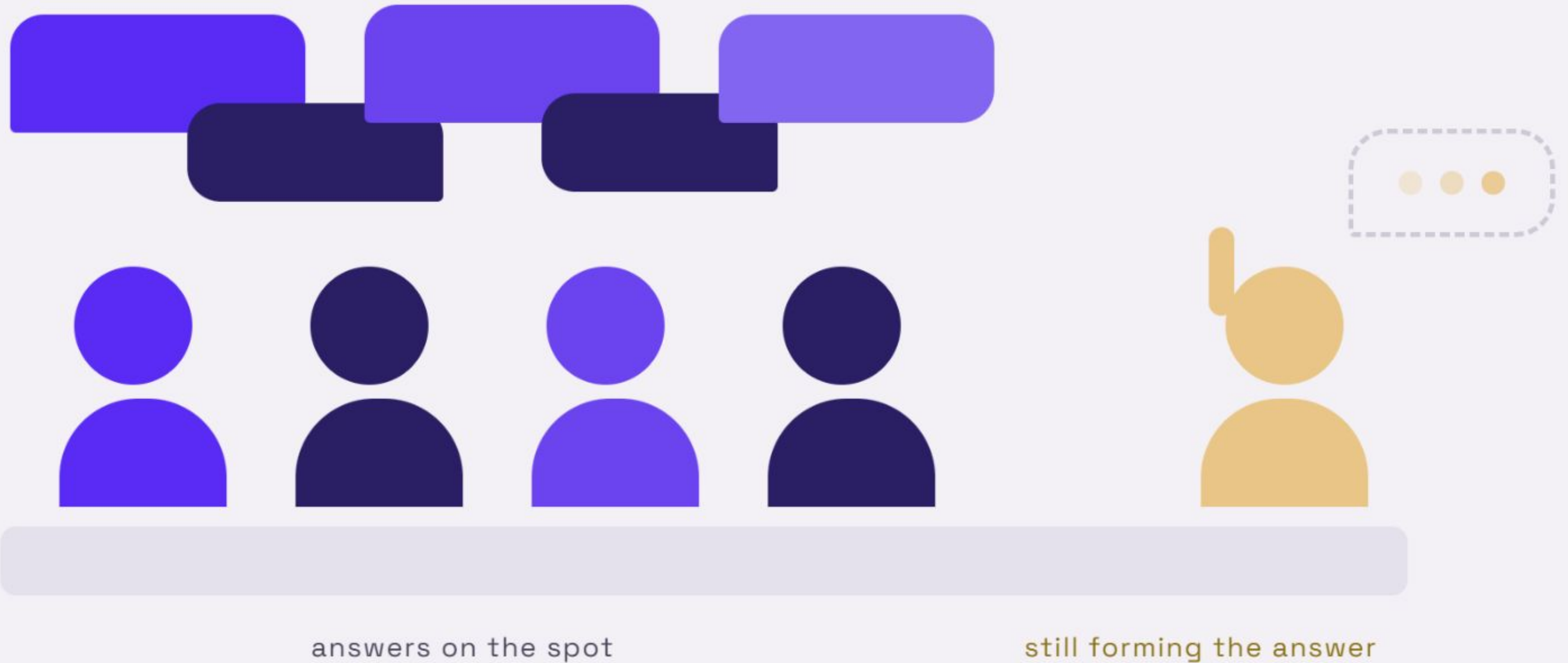
BIAS 01

The Speed Bias

The assumption that thinking should happen in real time.

Delay → *disengagement*

The meeting that rewards whoever answers *first*.



THE COST

\$101M

a year in unproductive meetings, for a company of 5,000 people.

https://public.otter.ai/reports/The_Cost_of_Unnecessary_Meeting_Attendance.pdf

BIAS 02

The Visibility Bias

The assumption that if you can't see the work, it isn't happening.

Silence → *not working*

backend-team

MONDAY



Dev 9:02

Morning! Diving into the auth refactor 🚀



3



Lena 9:14

nice, ping me if you want a second pair of eyes 👁️



Dev Tue 14:03

Quick sync anyone? Want to talk through the approach



2 replies Last reply Tue 15:20



Maya Wed 16:05

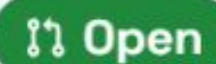
Haven't heard from @Ari all week — everything on track? 👁️

THURSDAY



Ari 16:42

Done. PR up for review 🙌



Open

opened 2 minutes ago by Ari

Fix auth token race condition #482

merge `fix/auth-482` into `main`

+412 -68 18 files changed Closes #319



5



4



2

ACCOUNTABILITY IS

Output.

Not activity.

THE COST

50—200%

of an employee's salary to replace them.

<https://www.shrm.org/executive-network/insights/myth-replaceability-preparing-loss-key-employees>

BIAS 03

The Credibility Bias

The assumption that questions signal a lack of understanding.

Questions → ~~blocks the team~~

THE CREDIBILITY BIAS

The questions become the *feedback*.



BEFORE



DURING



AFTER



SPRINT REVIEW

“Blocks the team.”

THE QUESTIONS WERE

Foresight.

Not friction.

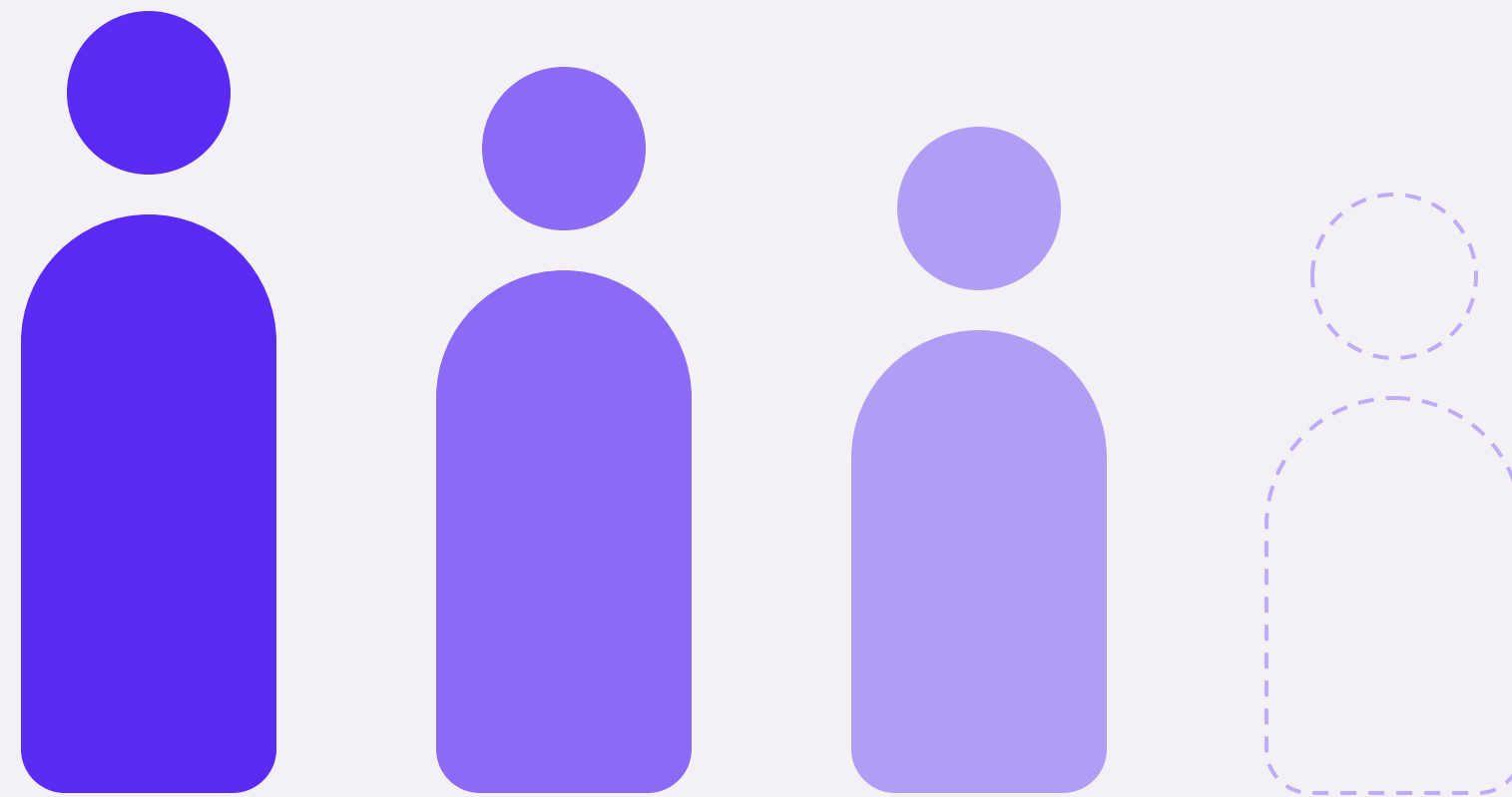
THE COST

100×

more to fix a bug in production than to catch it in development.

<https://dl.acm.org/doi/10.1109/2.962984>

Invisible *Exclusion* Patterns





Masking

The conscious suppression of who you are to meet the environment's expectations.

*Because the environment gives them **no other choice.***

“

We quickly learn the environments are actually *unsafe* for us because of the NT biases that are built into every aspect of the working environment, and successful participation in that environment and culture is essentially a non-negotiable. For many ND people this means masking in order to meet the expectations of our NT peers and bosses. This means constantly monitoring and adapting our facial expressions, speech patterns, communication styles, how much we talk, our appearance, and even concealing our special interests. It may also mean orchestrating and participating in (and for our survival, *scripting*) social and professional rituals we find deeply uncomfortable, that lean heavily into unpredictable, ambiguous, and performative social interactions.

— A director at a tech company

91%

of neurodivergent workers
mask at work.

1 in 3

fear losing their job if they
stop.

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/bryanrobinson/2024/12/03/1-in-3-neurodivergent-workers-worry-theyll-be-fired-per-research>

MASKING HAS A COST

“

All of this over time inevitably leads to burnout. Many of us have experienced this, and it often manifests as a full-blown mental health crisis that can take months or years to resolve fully. Many also lose their jobs, or experience retaliation and/or discrimination as a result of their medical conditions and support needs.

— A director at a tech company

Exceptional. Then *suddenly not.*



50%

of neurodivergent employees are already at burnout. The rest are on their way

<https://www.wtwco.com/en-gb/news/2022/09/almost-three-quarters-of-neurodiverse-employees-suffering-with-mental-health-issues>

50%

of neurodivergent employees are already at burnout. The rest are on their way — *unless something changes.*

<https://www.wtwco.com/en-gb/news/2022/09/almost-three-quarters-of-neurodiverse-employees-suffering-with-mental-health-issues>

It isn't the people. It isn't their capability.

It isn't the people. It isn't their capability.

It's in how we communicate.

It isn't the people. It isn't their capability.

It's in how we **communicate**.

*Which means it's measurable. Which means we can **fix it**.*

~~Not HR.~~

~~Not HR. Not a policy.~~

~~Not HR. Not a policy.~~

~~Not a program.~~

~~Not HR. Not a policy. Not a program.~~

Us.

The most overlooked systemic problems
are the ones *hiding in plain sight*.



And once you see them, they *stop being culture.*

They become *design decisions.*

02 Own It

Run the Communication Burden Audit — find where these patterns live on your own team.

The *Communication* *Burden* Audit

The *Communication Burden* Audit

THE FLAG FRAMEWORK

Find

the channel where the work actually happens.

Log

the last 20 threads into one sheet.

Assess

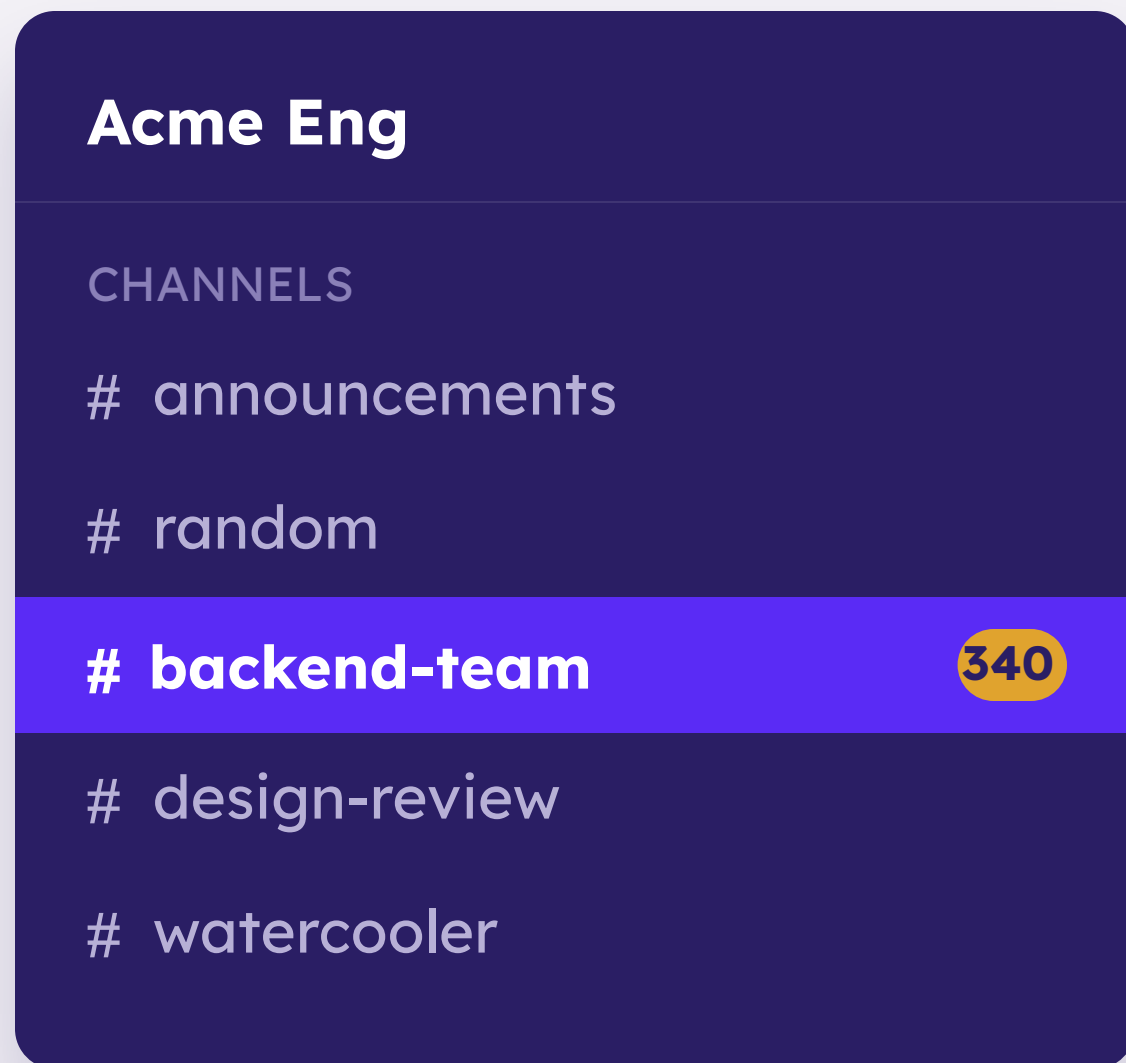
each thread against three patterns.

Group

to reveal your team's real defaults.

STEP 01 • FIND

The channel where the work **actually** happens



→ Where the decisions get made.

The Communication Burden Audit

STEP 02 • LOG

Last 10 threads · names removed — including yours

Message	Pattern	Rewrite
"Hey — can you talk?"	Urgency ambiguity	"Got 15 min to review the cache fix? Not urgent."
"Quick thing... might be worth a look."	Buried action item	"Please check the API cache today — details below."
"Per my last message."	Implicit tone	"Re-sharing so it's easy to find: ..."

The *Communication Burden* Audit

STEP 03 • ASSESS

Three patterns.

01

Urgency ambiguity

02

Buried action items

03

Implicit tone

The Communication Burden Audit

PATTERN 01

Urgency ambiguity

backend-team



Dave 9:02

Hey — can you talk?



Maya 9:14

Can we jump on a quick call?



Lena 9:26

Just saw your update.

The Communication Burden Audit

PATTERN 01

Urgency ambiguity

backend-team



Dave 9:02

Hey — can you talk?



Maya 9:14

Can we jump on a quick call?



Lena 9:26

Just saw your update.

WHAT THE RECEIVER NOW HOLDS

Is this urgent?

Is something wrong?

What did I miss?

Cost: **hours of focus.**

The Communication Burden Audit

PATTERN 02

Buried action items

backend-team



Noah 11:02

Hey — quick thing. We've been seeing inconsistencies in the API responses. Not sure if it's the caching layer or something upstream, but it's affecting a couple of downstream services. **Might be worth taking a look when you get a chance.**

The Communication Burden Audit

PATTERN 02

Buried action items

backend-team

N **Noah** 11:02

Hey — quick thing. We've been seeing inconsistencies in the API responses. Not sure if it's the caching layer or something upstream, but it's affecting a couple of downstream services. **Might be worth taking a look when you get a chance.**

HELD IN WORKING MEMORY

API inconsistencies

Caching layer

Downstream impact

...the ask came last.

The Communication Burden Audit

PATTERN 03

Implicit tone

backend-team



Dave 10:41

Noted. → *reads as frustration*



Maya 10:52

As discussed. → *reads as correction*



Lena 11:03

Per my last message. → *reads as a nudge*

The Communication Burden Audit

PATTERN 03

Implicit tone

backend-team

- D** Dave 10:41
Noted. → *reads as frustration*
- M** Maya 10:52
As discussed. → *reads as correction*
- L** Lena 11:03
Per my last message. → *reads as a nudge*

The words say one thing. The meaning depends on what you *assume*.

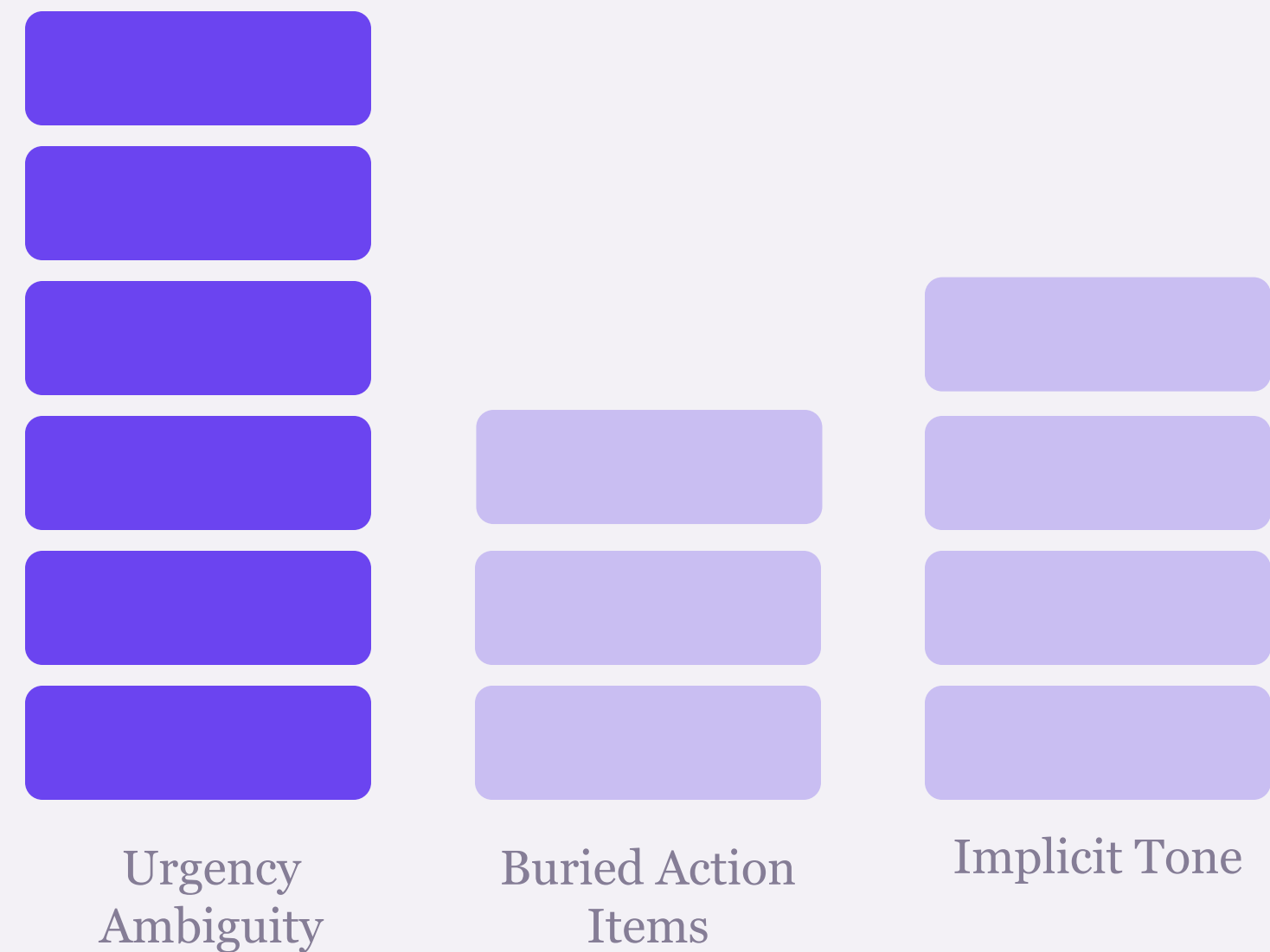
Subtext isn't a stable signal — it's an *interpretation*.

The Communication Burden Audit

STEP 04 • GROUP

What repeats.

What your system *actually rewards*.



The *Communication Burden* Audit

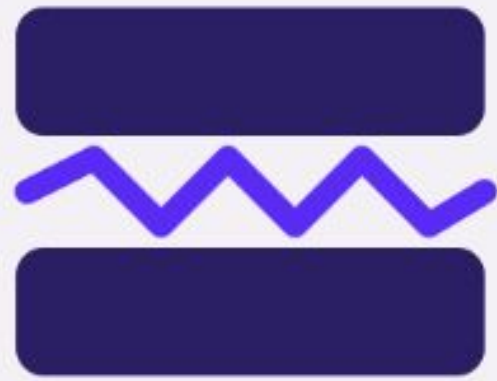


Fix It

We've seen the patterns. Now we fix the design.

LEADERS

This is where you have **real leverage.**



↓ Friction



↓ Hidden load

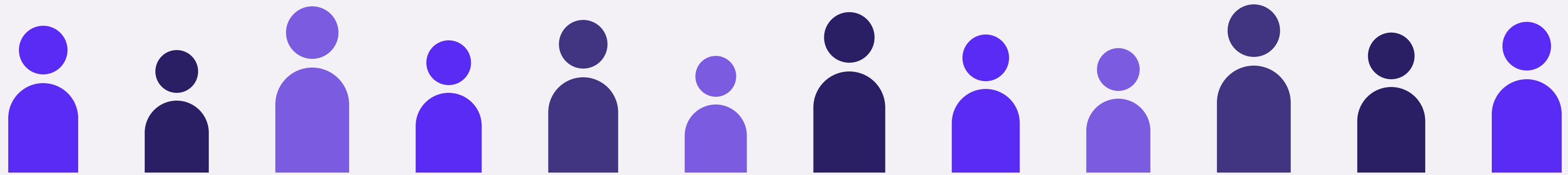


↑ Safety

“Who am I designing for?”

“Who am I designing for?”

Everyone.





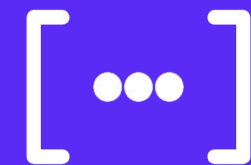
01

Agendas



02

Explicit asks



03

Space to
think



04

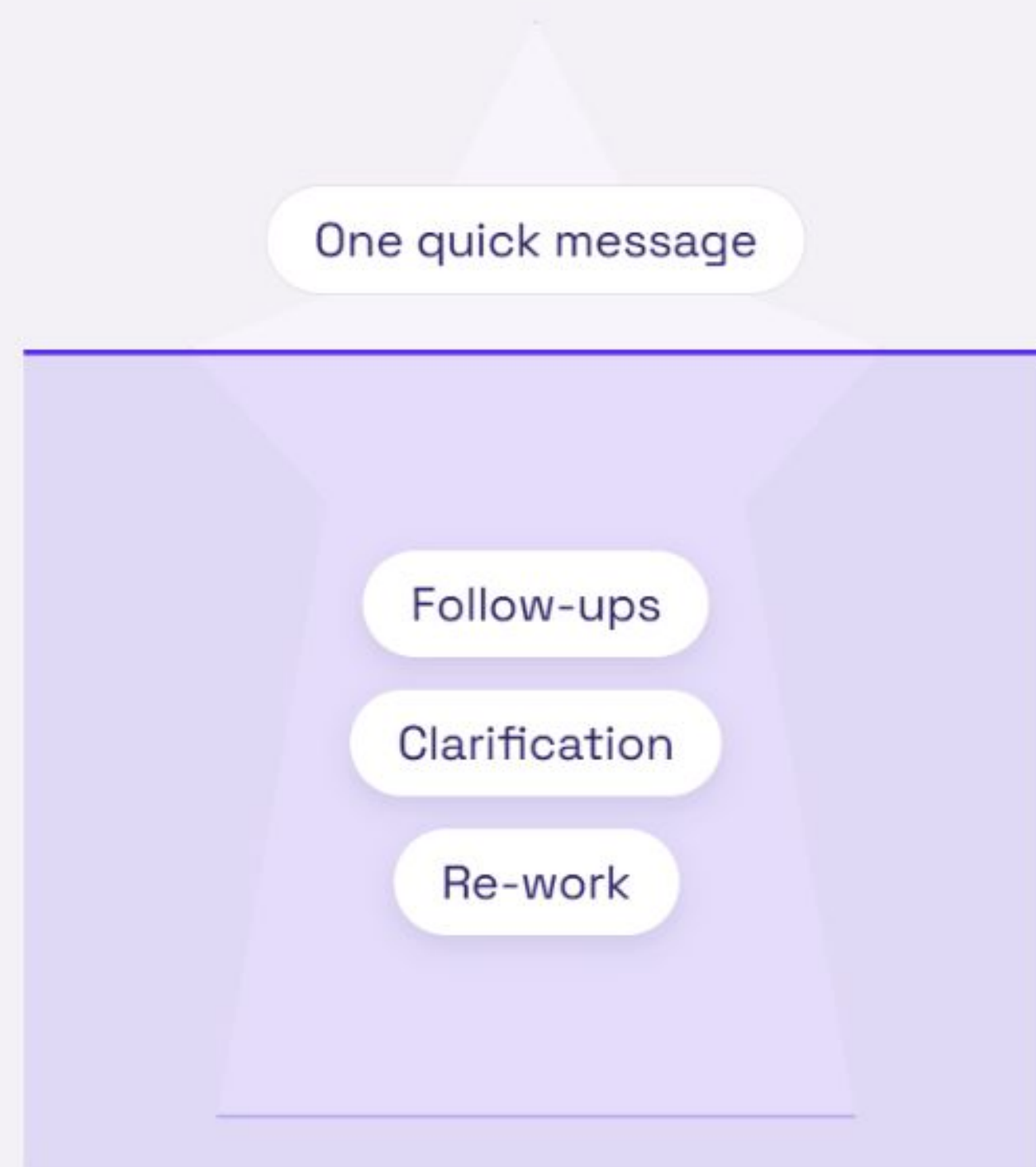
Clear
expectations

“This will slow us down.”

“This will slow us down.”

You **already** pay
for it *later*.

Clear communication removes the
recovery work you're already doing.



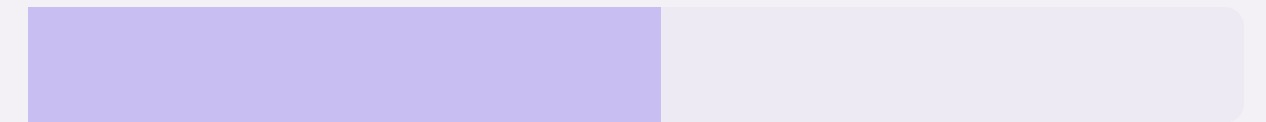
GOOGLE • 180 TEAMS • 2 YEARS

One thing predicted the best teams.

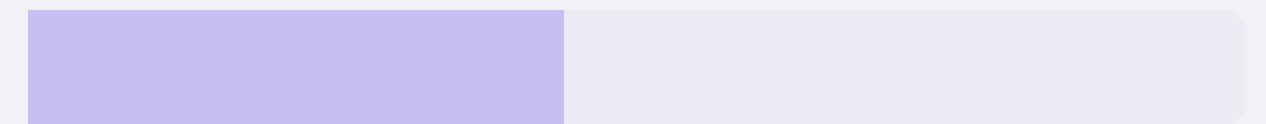
**01 Psychological
safety**



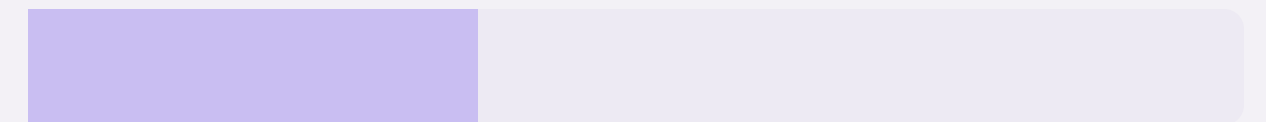
02 Dependability



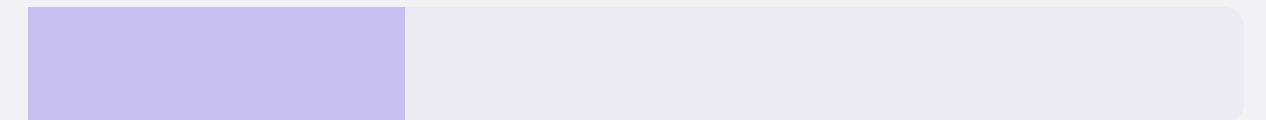
03 Structure & clarity



04 Meaning

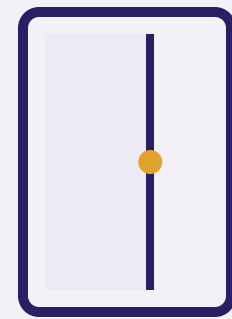
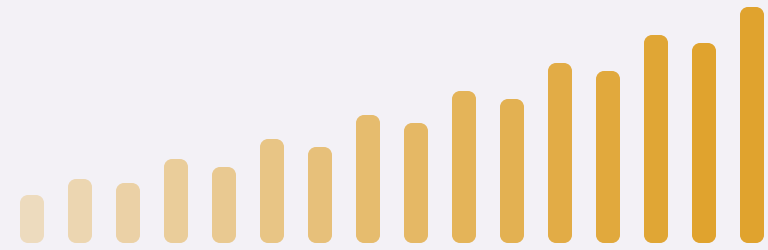


05 Impact



<https://rework.withgoogle.com/intl/en/guides/understand-team-effectiveness>

Nobody leaves after one bad day.
They leave after *months of friction.*



Repeated misunderstandings · constant adaptation · becoming someone else

SHIFT 01

Remove Uncertainty

INSTEAD OF



You 9:14

Can we talk?



unclear



WRITE



You 9:14

Can we talk for 15 minutes this week? It's not urgent. I want to discuss the API review.

✓ clear

The Communication Burden Audit

SHIFT 02

Put the action first

INSTEAD OF

Y

You 11:02

We've been seeing inconsistencies in the API...

🤔 what's the ask?



WRITE

Y

Yo 11:02

Can you investigate the API response issue today? Context below...

✓ clear

The Communication Burden Audit

SHIFT 03

Make the meaning explicit

INSTEAD OF

 **You** 14:20
Per my last message.

 **You** 14:22
Noted.



WRITE

 **You** 14:20
Please review section two before
updating the PR.



 **You** 14:22
I've seen this. I'll make the change by
Thursday.

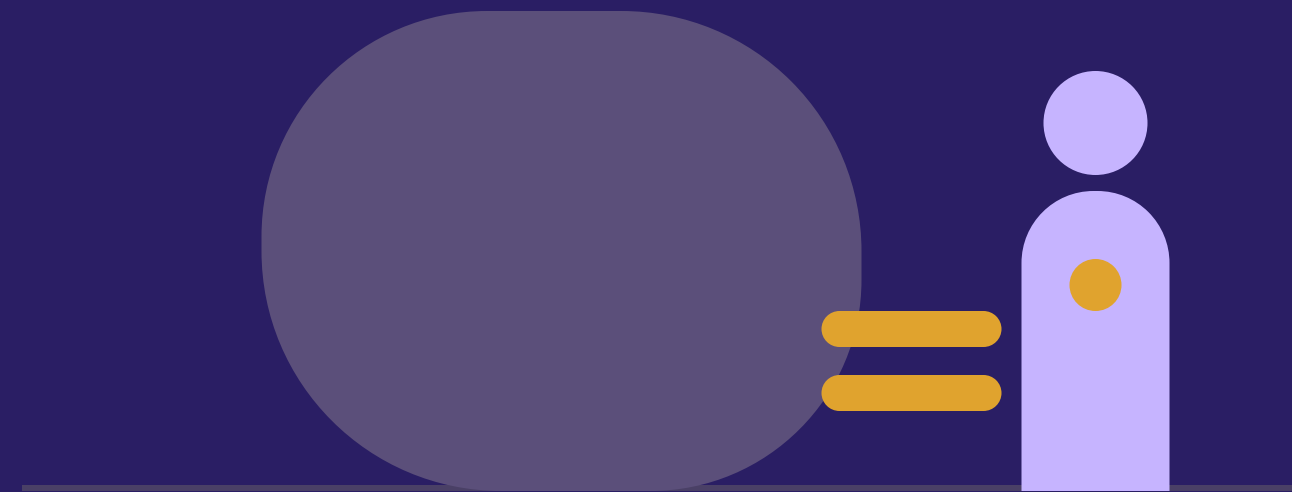
The goal isn't less directness. It's less interpretation.

The Communication Burden Audit

This doesn't make things work for fewer people.

It removes the effort
everyone was carrying.





EMPATHY

feeling the weight on your own chest.



COMPASSION

moving the rock.

~~Awareness sessions~~

~~Sensitivity training~~

~~DEI workshops~~

~~Awareness sessions~~

~~Sensitivity training~~

~~DEI workshops~~

They don't remove **invisible**
exclusion patterns

Key Takeaways

3

biases to see

3

patterns to detect

1

audit to run

1

mindset shift

FROM ~~“They need to adapt.”~~

TO “I need to design.”

The leaders who build the highest-performing engineering teams of the next decade won't just be the ones who hire the best talent.

They'll be the ones who design environments where that talent can thrive.

Thank you.

Rebecca Koniahgari · AI Engineering Lead - Uptrend Motion



Communication
Burden Audit