Designing for trust:

Applying Promise Theory
to collaborate effectively with your remote teams

Akira Motomura @ YUMEMI

Introduction

Akira Motomura
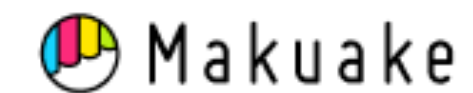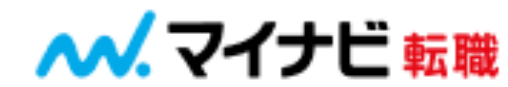
Board Member / Service Designer

Digital Design x Engineering Agency

We help our trusting clients
to create digital services that everyone uses.

Business and Business to Customer
a.k.a. BnB2C

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Before and after the covid-19

Information, context, and understanding

The basics of Promise Theory and its applications

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This talk's main point

I **promise** that
my **language** is always carefully designed
for us to **collaborate effectively.**

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Before and after the covid-19

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before
Time to breathe

e.g., coffee break, taking a walk

after
Endless meetings and chat responses

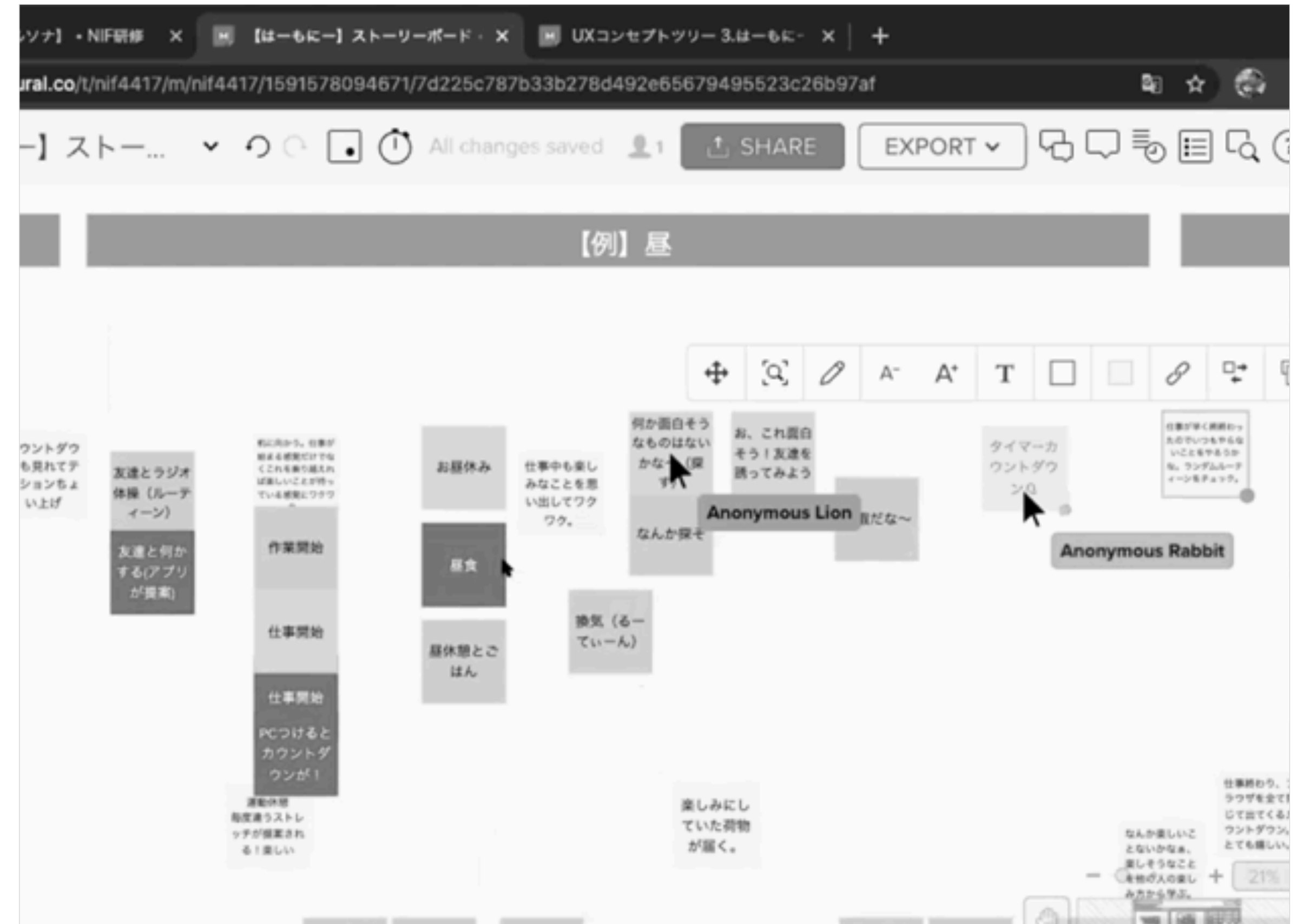e.g., meeting after meeting, chat after chat

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before
Physical space

e.g., office, conference room

after
Digital space

e.g., video conference, chat room

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before
Verval + non-verval communications

e.g., voice, gesture, facial expression

after
Textual communications

e.g., text

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What've been changed?

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Everything happens inside screens.

Photo by Trinity Nguyen on Unsplash

question

**What do we need to design
to collaborate effectively with others
in an environment like this?**

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Information, context, and understanding

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What is information?
Are there different types?

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3 types of information

Tacit ←――――――――――――――――――――――――――――――→ **Explicit**

Physical information

Information animals including humans use to perceive
their environment for the purpose of taking physical action

Semantic information

Information people create for the purpose of
communicating meaning to other people

Digital information

Information by which computers operate,
and communicate with other computers

Perception / Cognition

Photo by Cam Adams on Unsplash

Spoken language

Photo by Priscilla Du Preez on Unsplash

Written / Graphical language

Photo by Aaron Burden on Unsplash

Information organization + design

Photo by charlesdeluvio on Unsplash

Information technology

Photo by Alexander Shatov on Unsplash

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Context (and its collapse)

Tacit ⟵——————————————————⟶ **Explicit**

Physical information

Information animals including humans use to perceive
their environment for the purpose of taking physical action

Semantic information

Information people create for the purpose of
communicating meaning to other people

Digital information

Information by which computers operate,
and communicate with other computers

Information

Agent   Agent

Circumstance

Agent   **Information**   Agent

Circumstance   Circumstance

Agent   Agent   Agent

Agent   **Information**   Agent

Agent   Agent   Agent

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What our current work environment consists of:

Tacit ⟷ Explicit

Physical information

Information animals including humans use to perceive their environment for the purpose of taking physical action

Semantic information

Information people create for the purpose of communicating meaning to other people

Digital information

Information by which computers operate, and communicate with other computers

Agent   Information   Agent

Circumstance

Agent   Information   Agent

Circumstance   Circumstance

Agent   Agent   Agent

Agent   Information   Agent

Agent   Agent   Agent

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Some characteristics of our current work environment:

1. No physical qualities available
2. No synchronous and shared contexts
3. Less tacit (and unedited) information available

4. More explicit means of communications such as text
5. More individual perspectives and contexts
6. More explicit (and edited) information available

<u>More upfront designs of what we communicate with others are required; you are the one who is responsible for designing your own messages.</u>

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What are the things to consider?

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Information processing limitation:
The magical number seven plus minus two

The number of objects an average human can hold in working memory is **7 ± 2**. What this means is that the human memory capacity typically includes strings of words or concepts ranging from 5–9.

$$7 \pm 2$$

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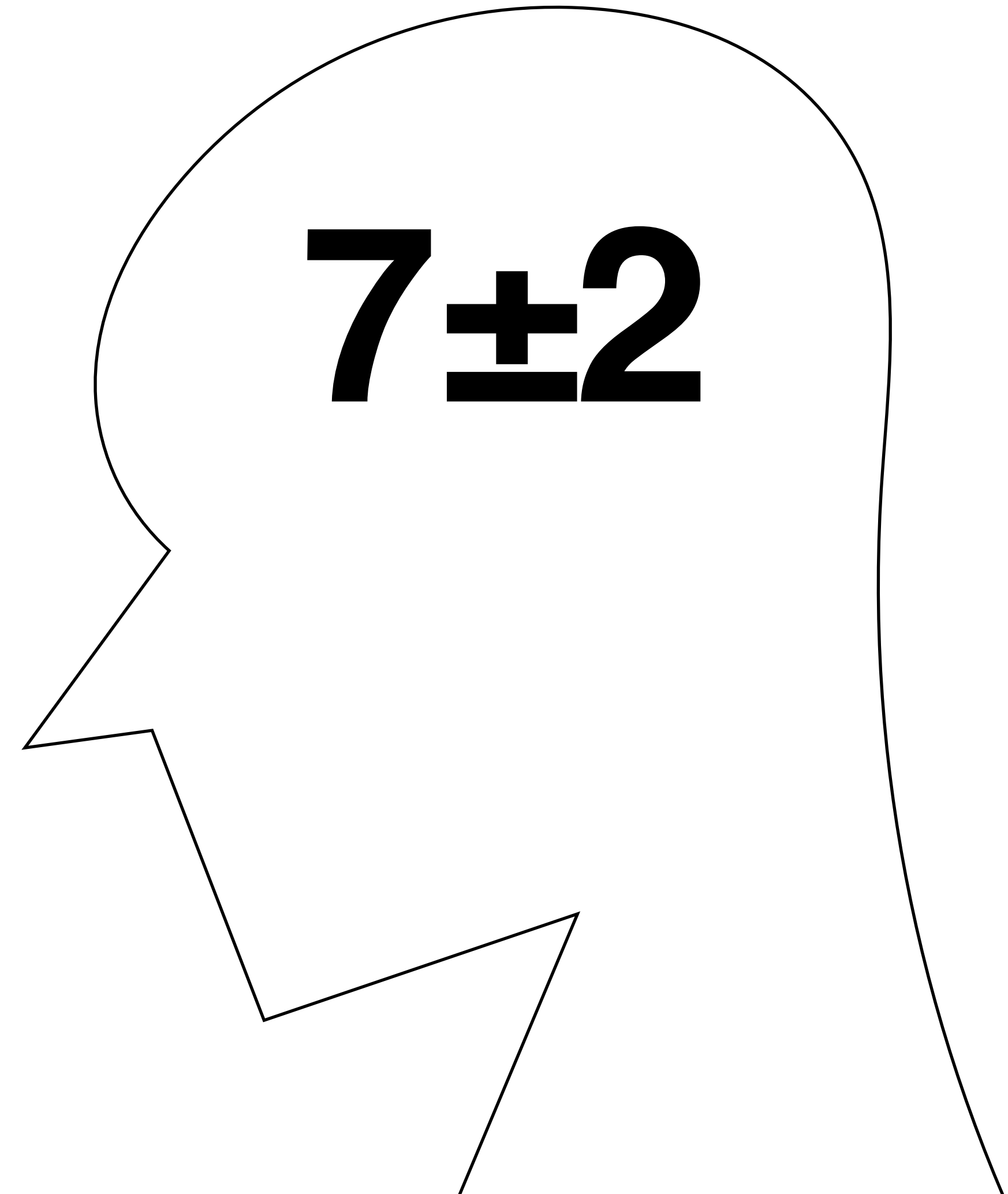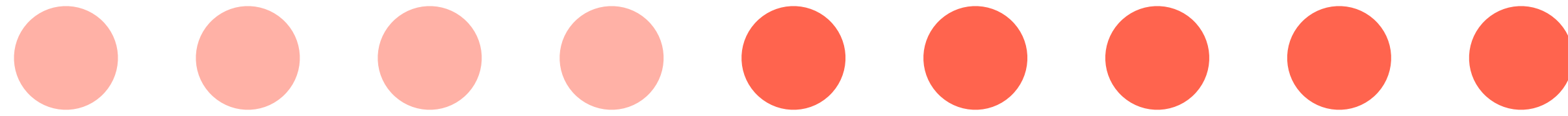
Cognitive tendency:
Principles of least effort

We act to perceive, based on the least effortful interpretation of the information provided, even though it sometimes leads us astray.

If there are several ways of achieving the same goal, people will choose the least demanding course of action.

Tacit   **Explicit**

LEAST
EFFORT

Unconscious   Conscious
Intuitive   Deliberate
Automatic   Reflective
"System 1"   "System2"

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Individual understanding:
Umwelt

Different people experience and interpret differently
even though they share the same information and environment

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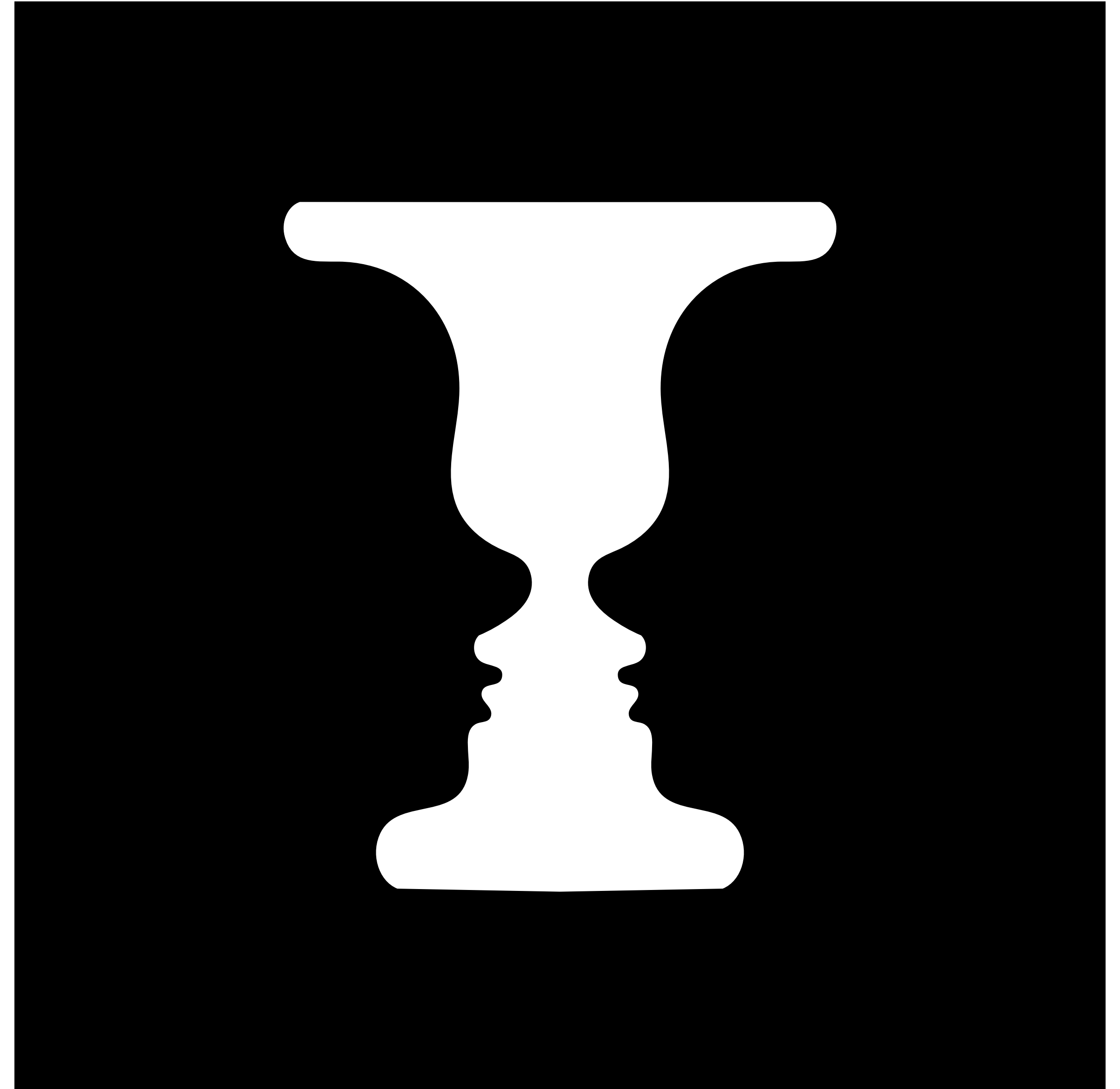
Cognitive scaffolding:
Physical invariants

Semantic invariants

Persistently stable properties of given physical environment
e.g, stairs, floor plans

Persistently stable properties of given semantic environment
e.g., labels, signs, symbols, rules, definitions
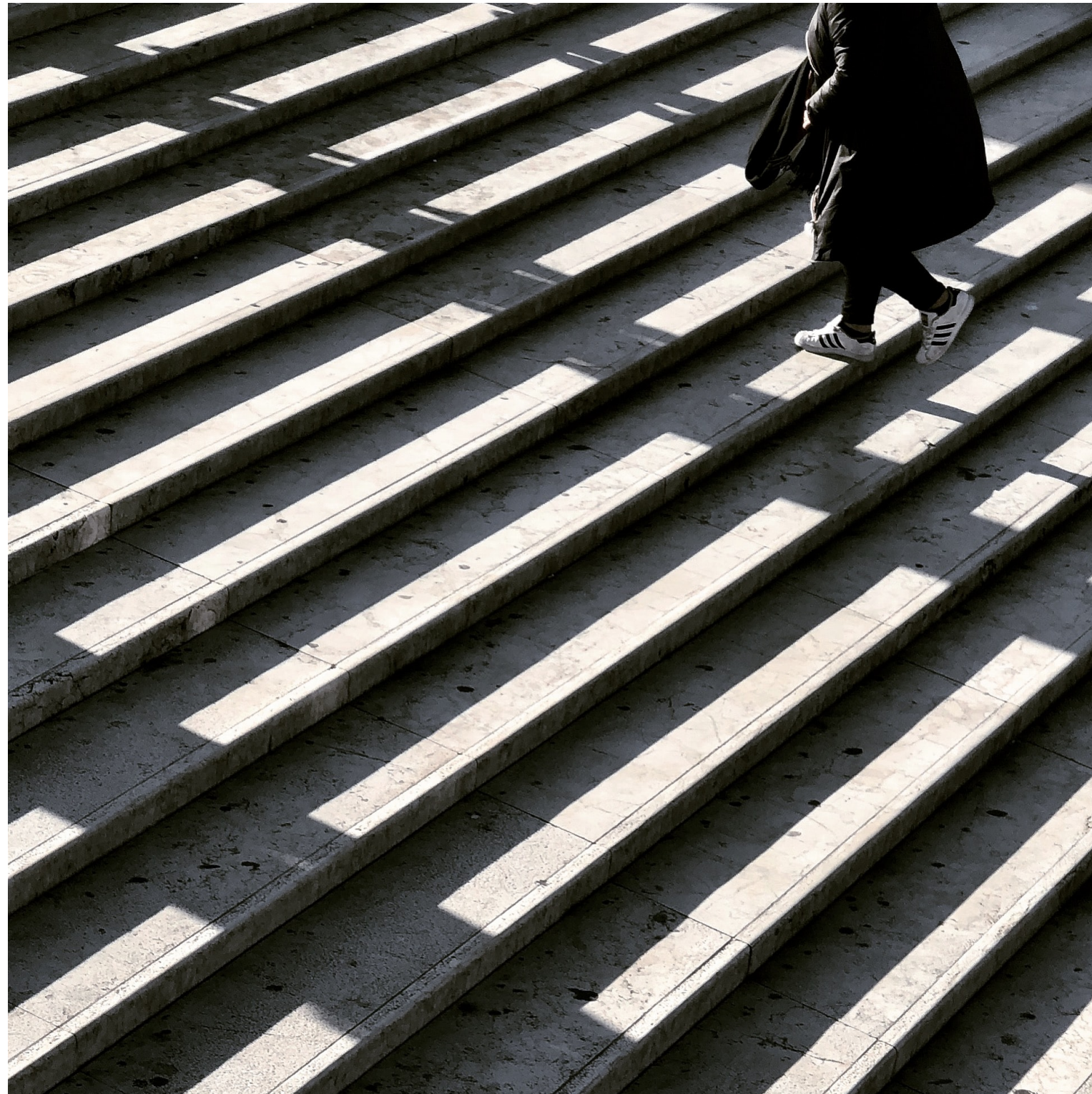
Photo by Martino Pietropoli on Unsplash

Photo by Balázs Kétyi on Unsplash

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Interpreting experiences:
Narrative

Humans make sense of the world through stories

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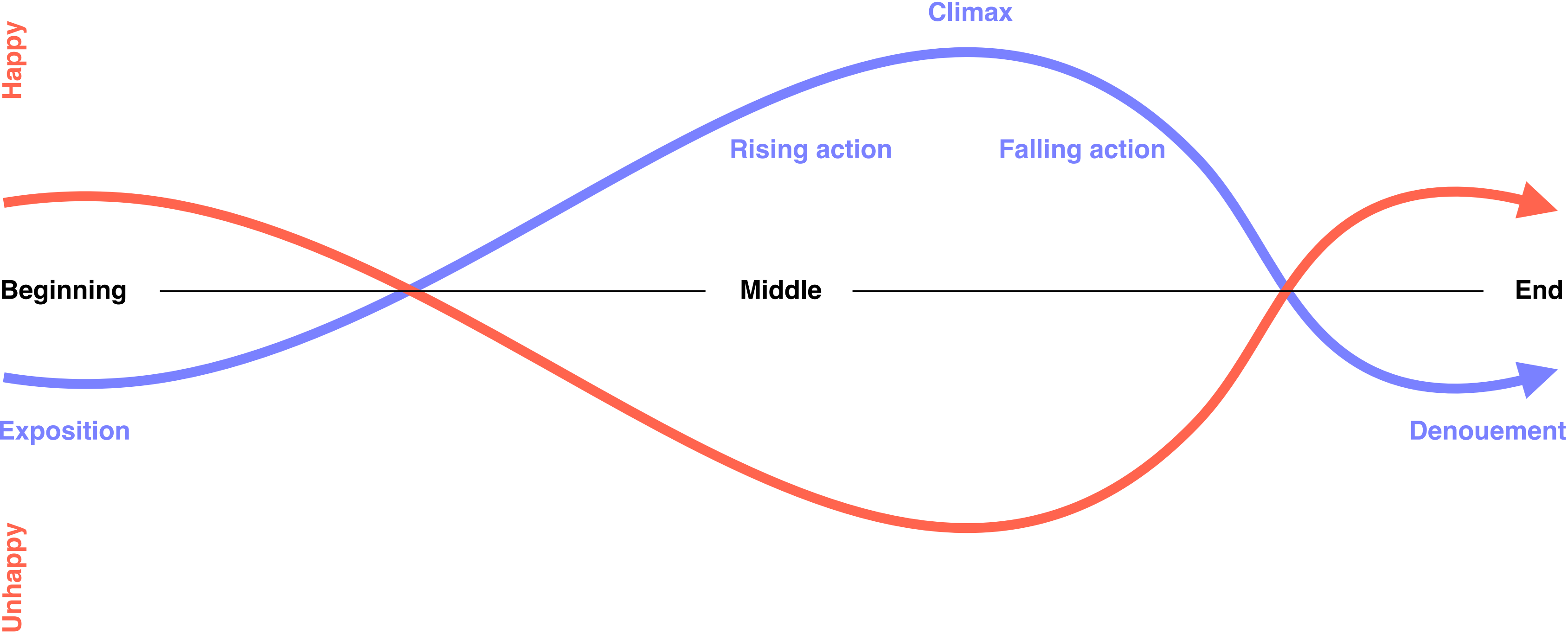
A crazy dude?

Photo by Viktor Bystrov on Unsplash

~~A crazy dude?~~

"A staring contest"

Photo by Viktor Bystrov on Unsplash

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A simple description changes our understanding

"A staring contest"

Photo by Viktor Bystrov on Unsplash

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Language as infrastructure

Design has traditionally been centered on objects and physical environments. **There is no "language design" discipline — it's instead called "writing."**

There's nothing wrong with that, but we have to come to grips with **the reality that language is a more important material for design than ever, especially with the arrival of pervasive, ambient digital systems.**

Andrew Hinton
Understanding Context: ENVIRONMENT, LANGUAGE, AND INFORMATION ARCHITECTURE

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How can we take an advantage of this?

Designing a meeting

A meeting

Designing a meeting:
Defining the (external) context

When is it?

What is it about?

Where is it held?

A meeting

Who attends?

Why do we need it?

How to attend?

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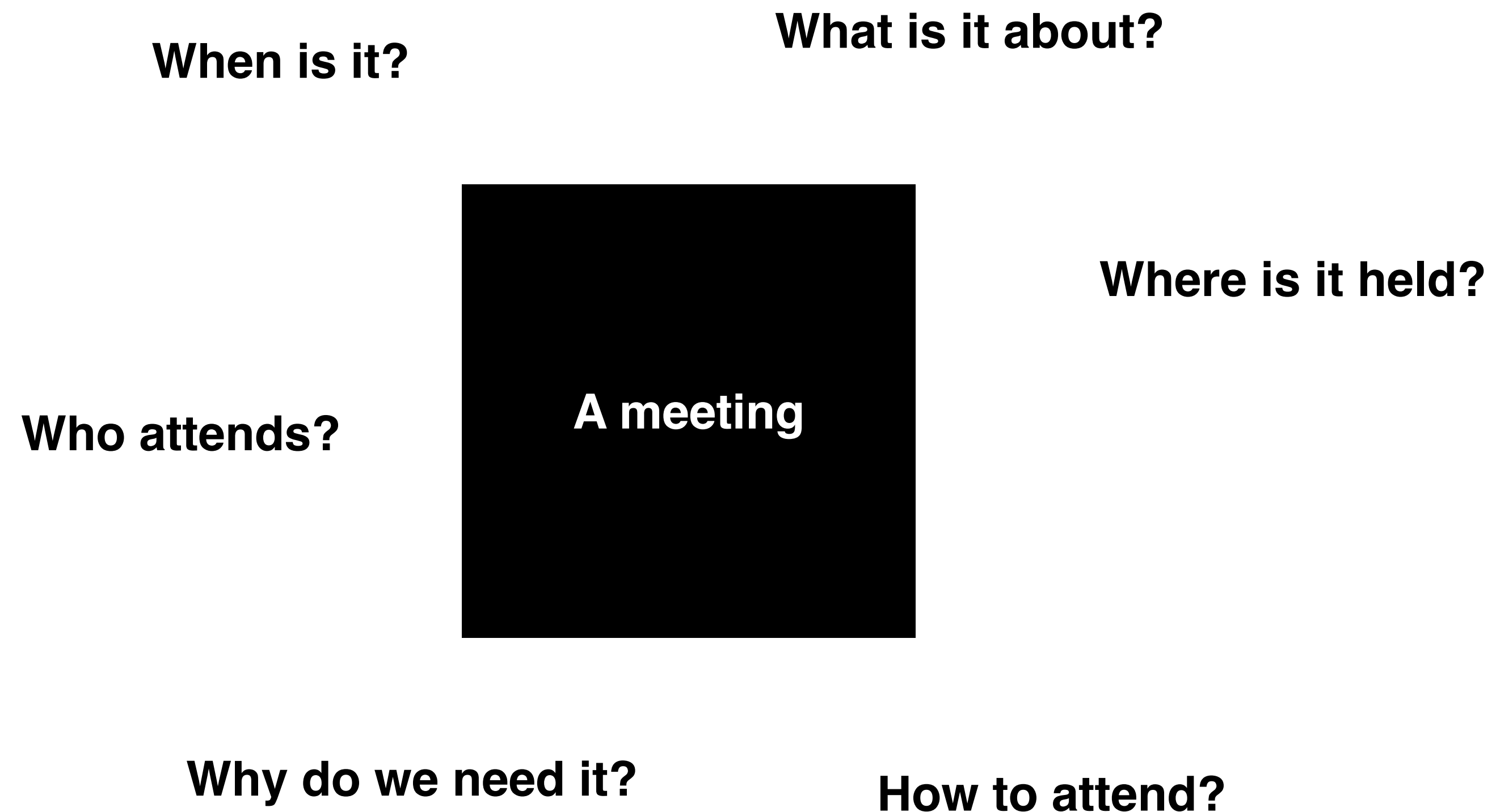
Designing a meeting:
Defining the (external) context

Why do we need it?	**To review and discuss**
What is it about?	**Design specs**
When is it?	**12:00 p.m. on Tuesday**
Who attends?	**Ryo, Mike, and, Akira**
Where is it held?	**Via Online**
How to attend?	**Via Zoon Meeting URL**

A meeting

Designing a meeting:
Defining the internal structure

Why do we need it?	**To review and discuss**
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A meeting

How do we proceed?

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Designing a meeting:
Defining the internal structure

How do we proceed?

Why do we need it? **To review and discuss**

What is it about? **Design specs**

When is it? **12:00 p.m. on Tuesday**

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Where is it held? **Via Online**

How to attend? **Via Zoon Meeting URL**

A meeting

Ice break — Beginning

Context sharing

Goal definition

Q & A

Agenda 1 — Middle

Agenda 2

Agenda 3

Wrap-up — End

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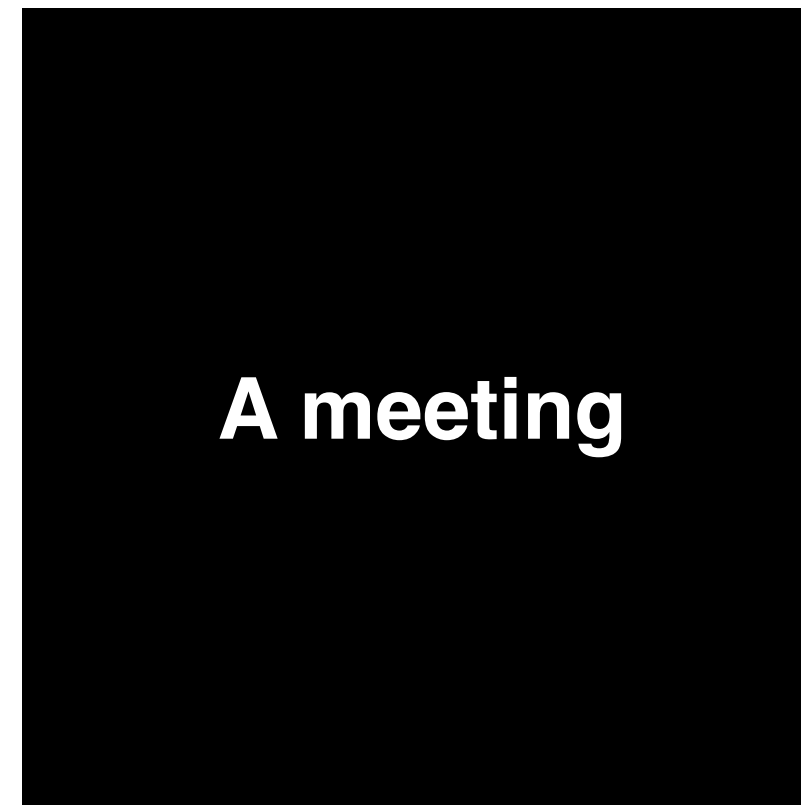
Can you **"promise"** to thoughtfully design your everyday communications?

Can your promises create **"trust"**?

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The basics of Promise Theory and its applications

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What is Promise Theory
and why do we need to care?

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Promise Theory

A modeling language of information to describe and discuss cooperative behavior among different agents or actors, proposed by Mark Burgess, an independent theorist and practitioner in the field of information science, in 2004.

It has the capability to visualize, analyze, and solve any problems and bottle-necks of how people communicate and collaborate with each other in a formalized way.

Also, it offers a completely new way to understand the word around us.
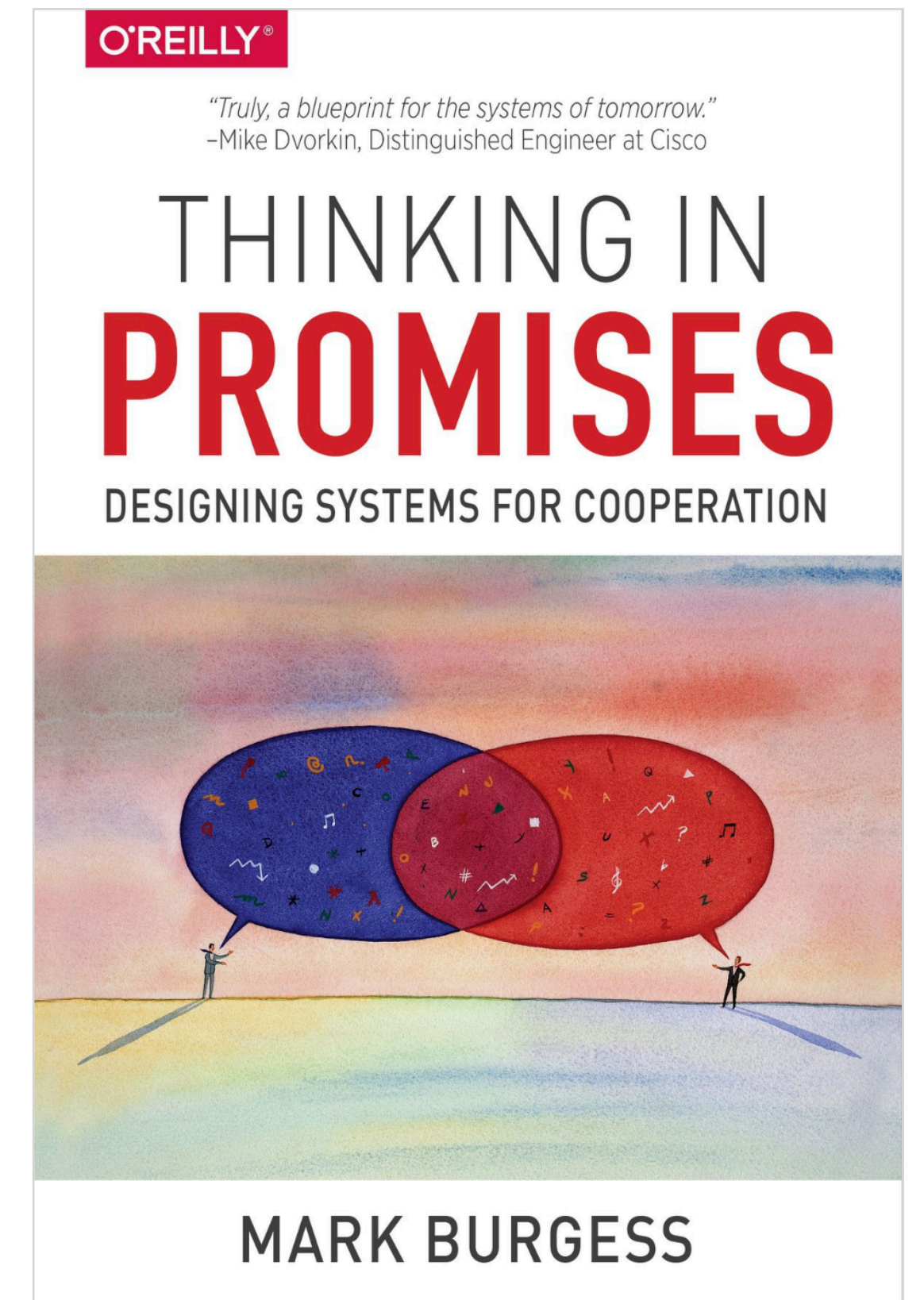
https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B01092PYG8/ref=dbs_a_def_rwt_bibl_vppi_i1

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Core concepts:

Imposition

————————■

Promise

————————▶

Clean up the room.

I promise that the room will be clean.

Is applied to others
Tells how to behave or follow a certain recipe
Diverges *into unpredictable outcomes*
Is a top-down strategy

i.e., hints, advice, suggestions, requests, commands,

Is applied only to yourself
Defines an end state or outcome
Converges towards an intended outcome
Is a bottom-up strategy

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A concept map of Promise Theory

Autonomy

The state of being free
to choose

Assessment

A decision about whether a promise
has been kept or not

Trust

The basis for expectation or
certainty of promised outcomes

influenced by

can increase

possesses

evaluated by

If repeatedly kept, increases

Agent

Any part of a system that can intend
or promise something independently

Promise

Publicly declared or
stated intention

Imposition

An attempt to induce
cooperation in
another agent

Obligation

An imposition that implies a cost or
penalty for noncompliance

makes

can be

may take a
form of

has

If stated publicly, becomes

If accepted, leads to

attempts to induce

Intention

The subject of some kind of possible
outcome

Agreement

An autonomous decision
to accept a proposal
from another agent

Cooperation

A voluntary behavior to give up an
agent's autonomy to accomplish a
common and larger outcome

is necessary for

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An imposition:
Throwing a ball without warning
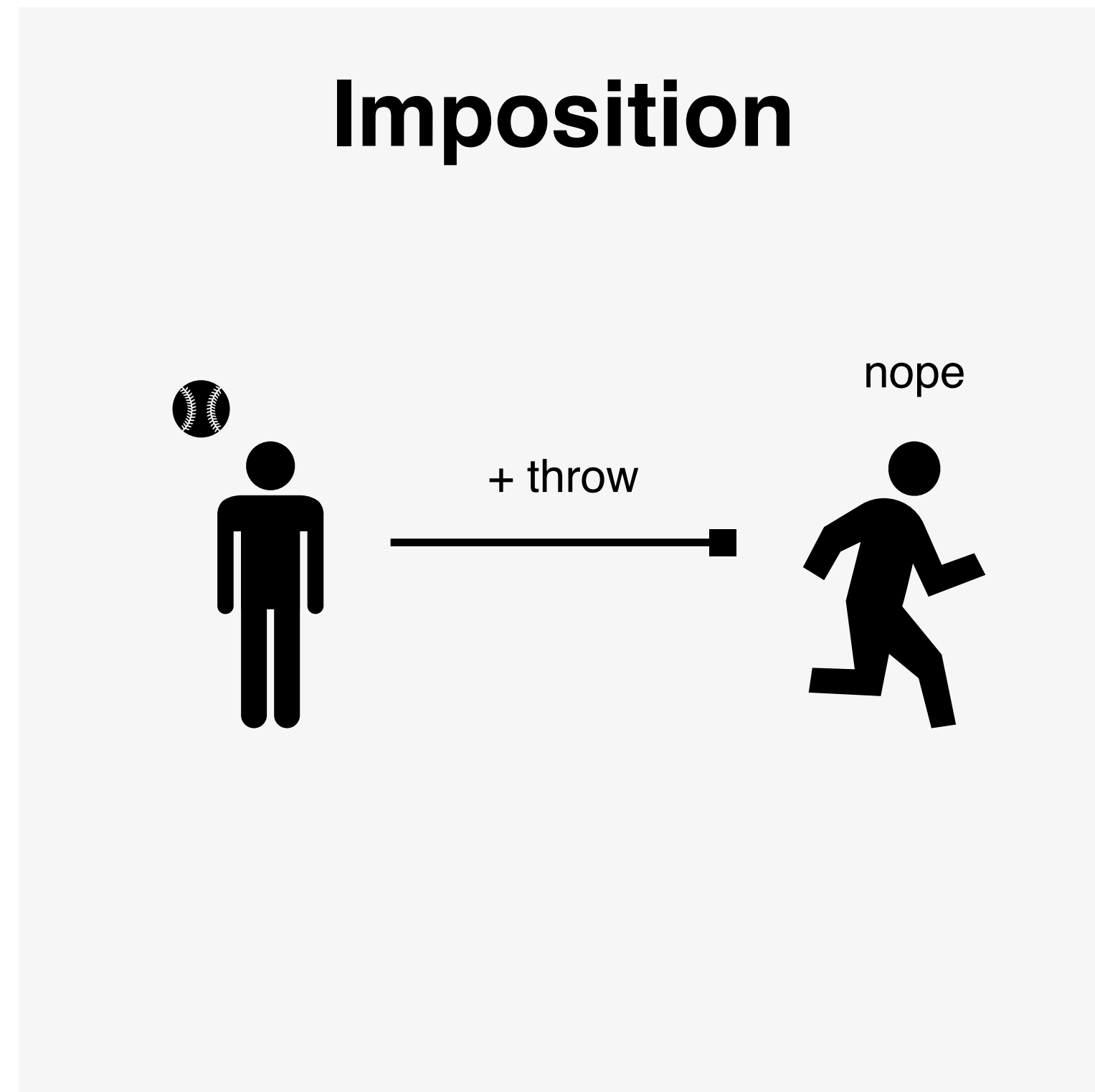
A promise:
Throwing a ball and accepting to catch the ball

Imposition

nope

+ throw

Promise

+ throw

- catch

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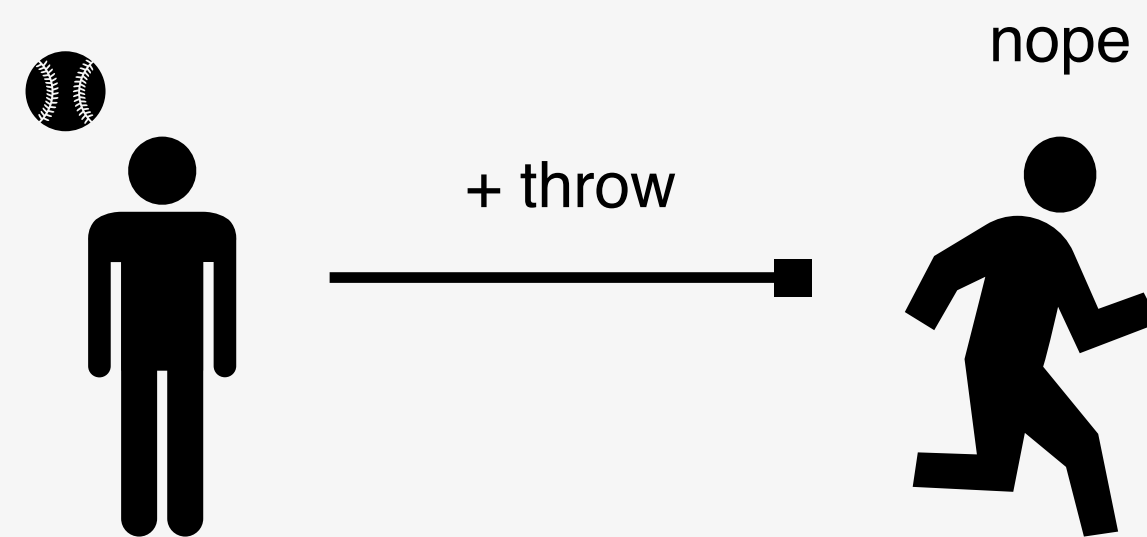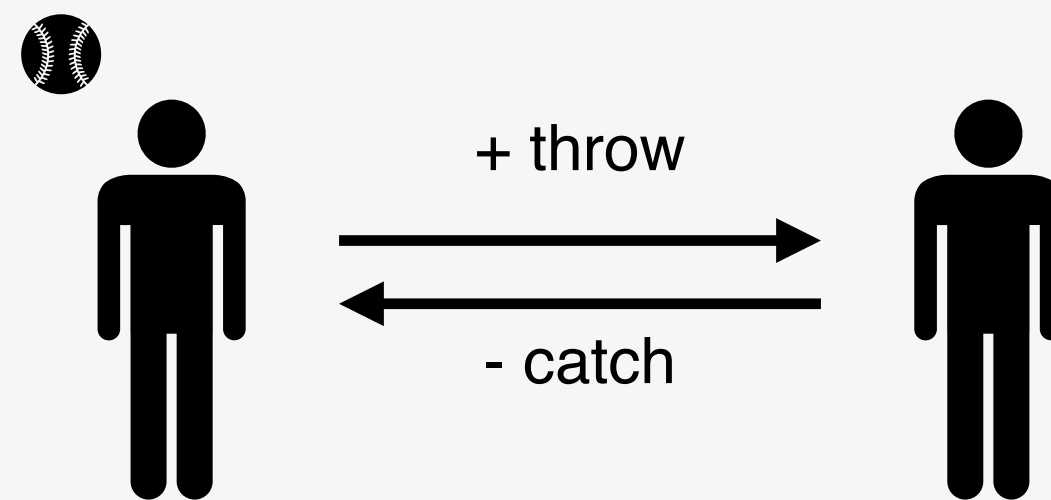
Repeated promises:
Repeated enough times, then it becomes playing catch

Imposition
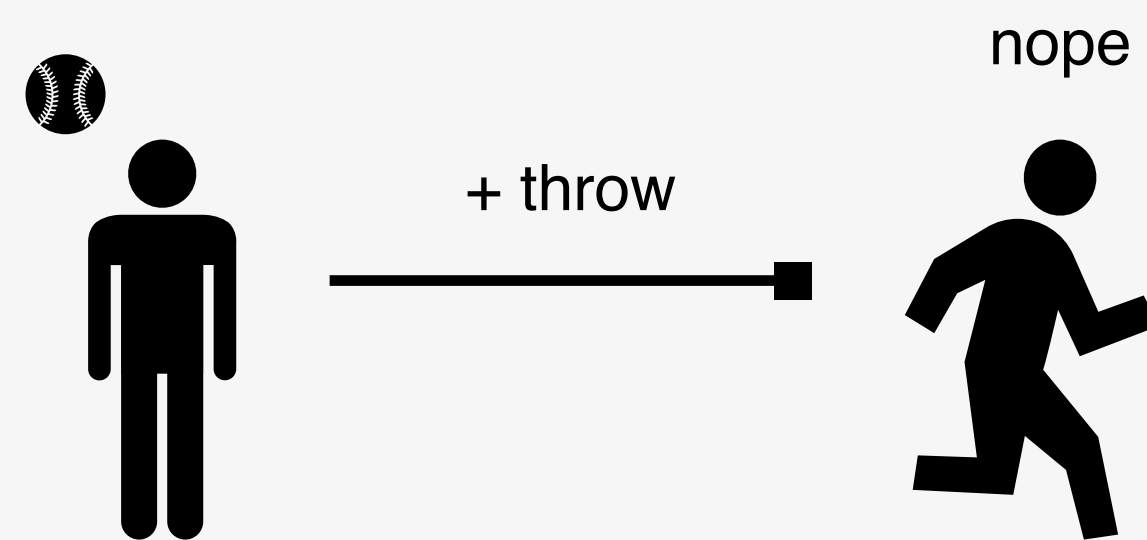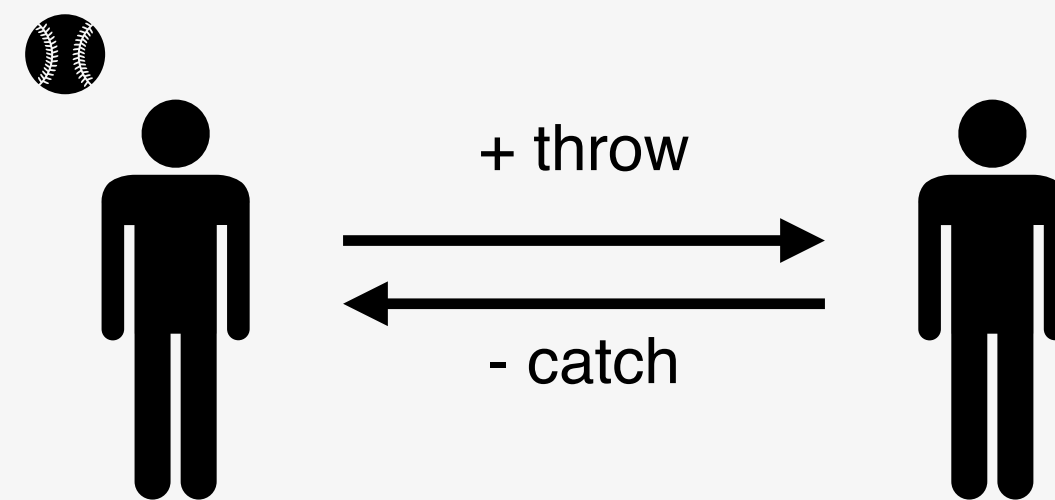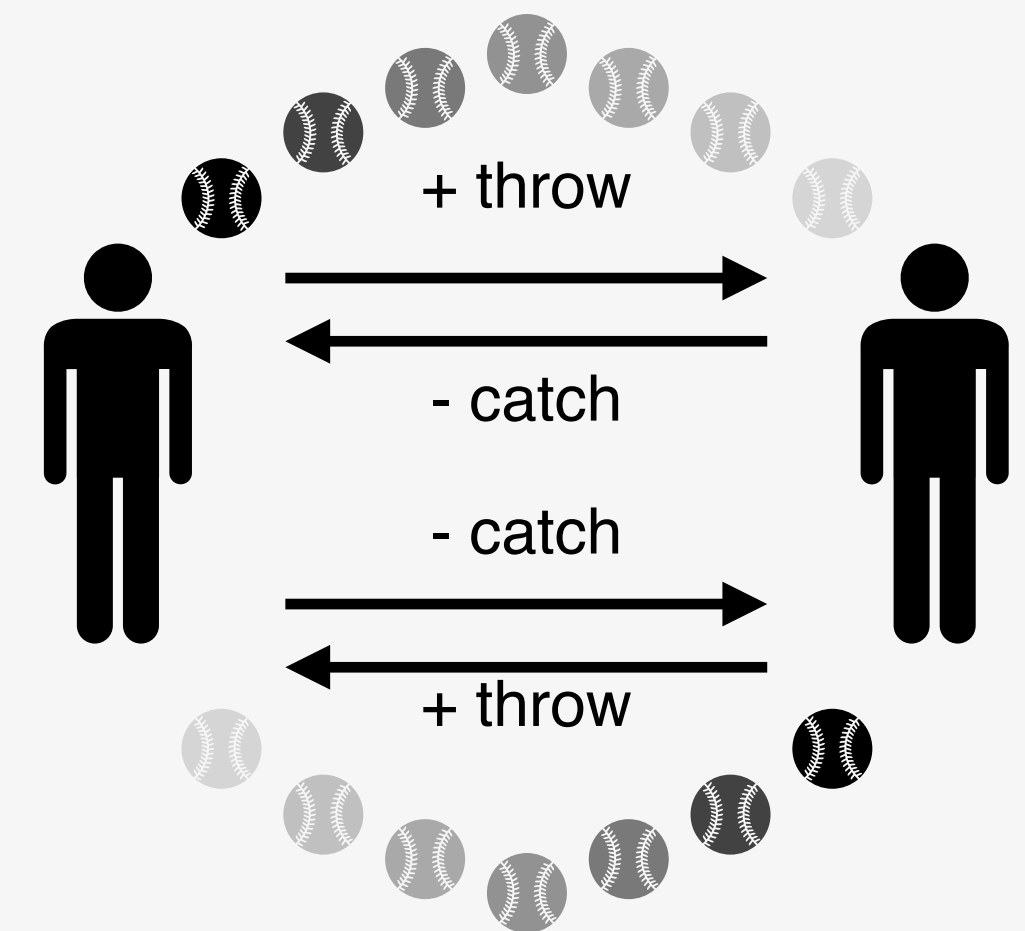
nope

+ throw

Promise

+ throw

- catch

Playing catch

+ throw

- catch

- catch

+ throw

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An emergent promise:
With multiple promises combined,

Rules of play

+ rules
- accept
- accept
+ rules

+

Hitting a ball

+ throw
- hit

+

Playing catch

+ throw
- catch
- catch
+ throw
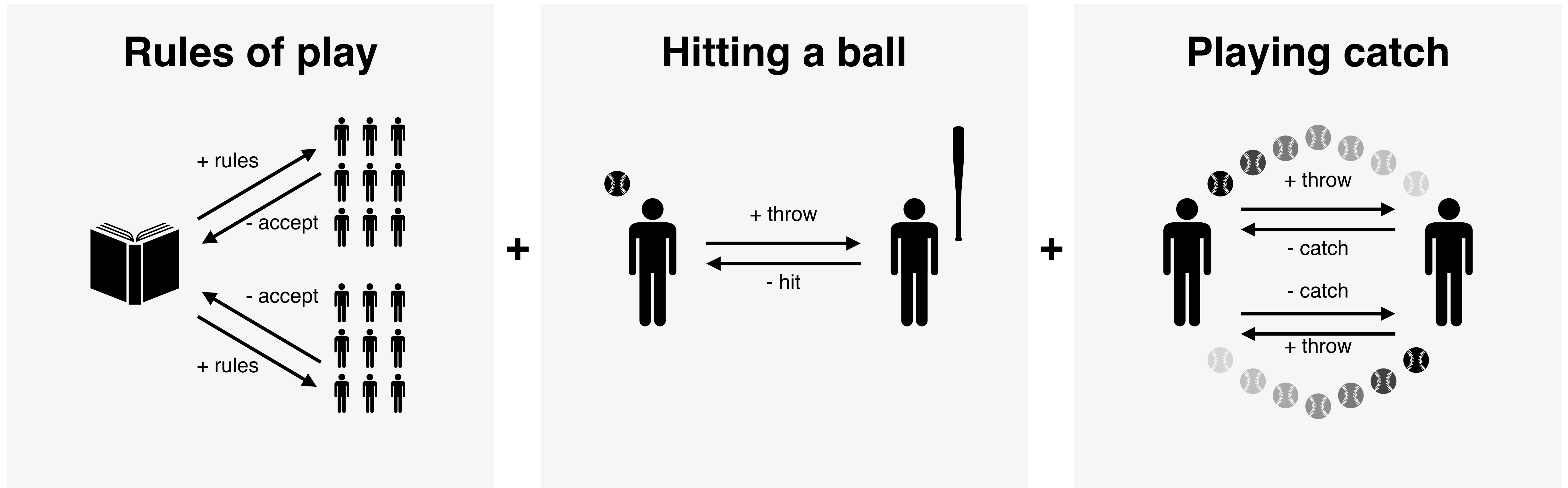
An emergent promise:
With multiple promises combined, it is a baseball game

Rules of play

+ rules
- accept
- accept
+ rules

Hitting a ball

+ throw

Playing catch

+ throw
- catch
- catch
+ throw
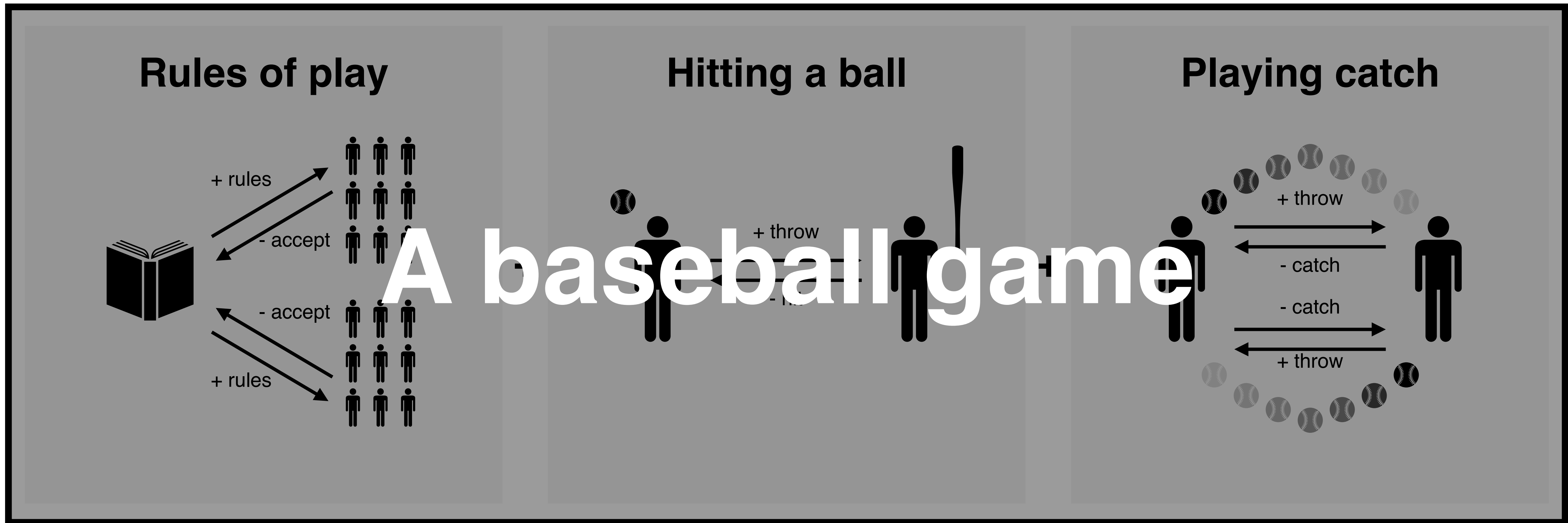
A baseball game

Trusting means ignoring the internal promises, which greatly reduces the amount of information

A baseball game

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Trusting enables us to cooperate at scale,
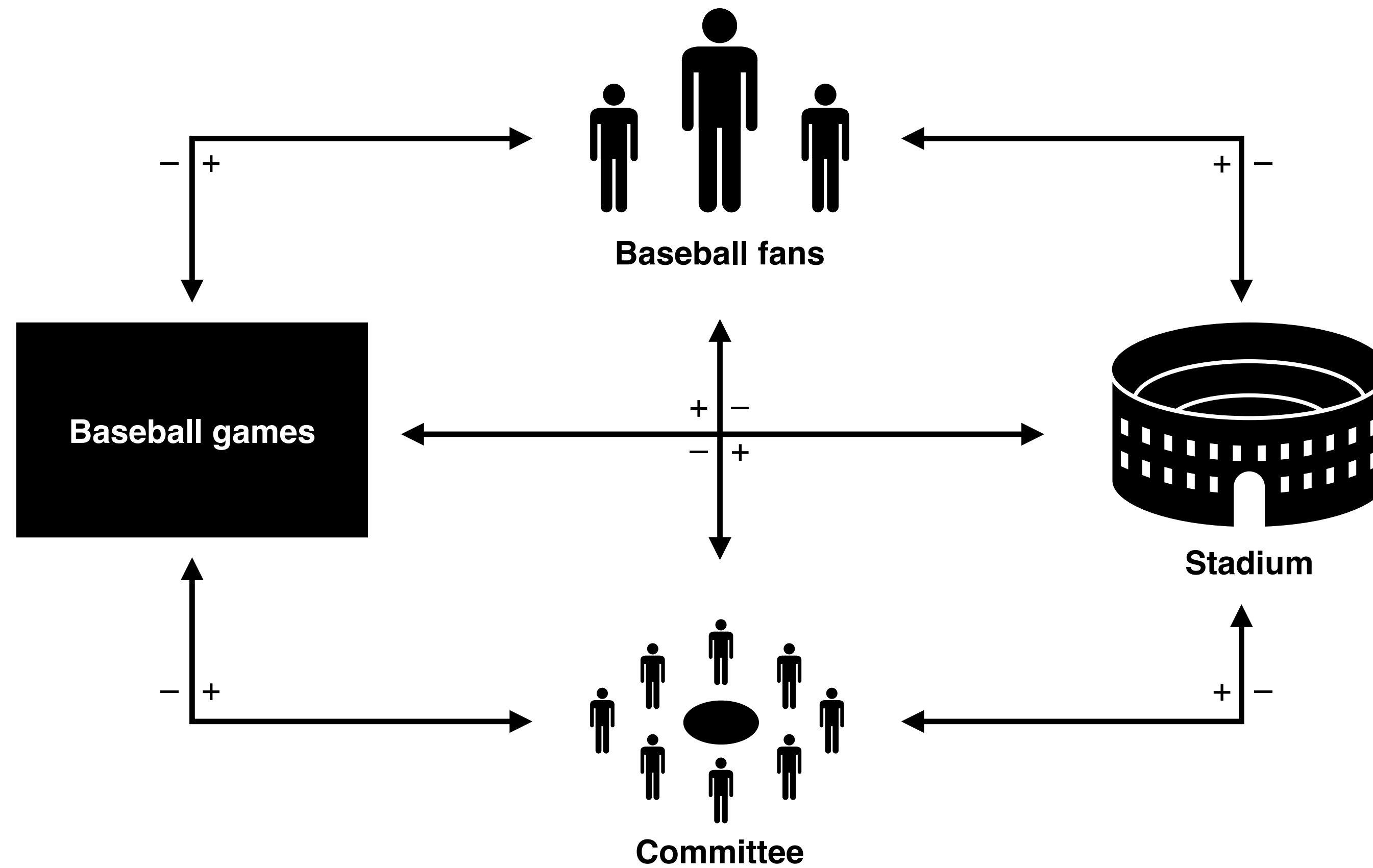
Trusting enables us to cooperate at scale, promising much more complex activities

A baseball league

Baseball fans

Baseball games

Stadium

Committee
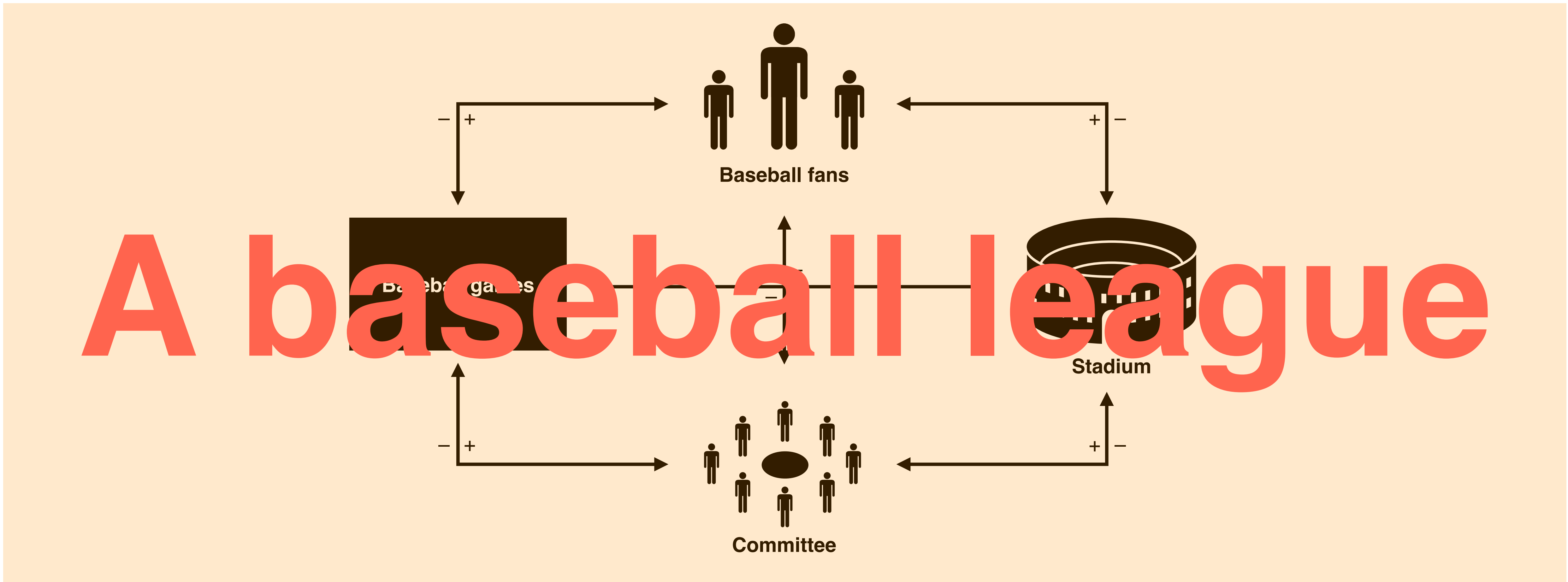
Having a lens of promises brings more rigor and discipline to your way of communicating with others.

And, it is a bottom-up strategy to increase and improve cooperations with your teams.

Two types of disruptors:

Trouble-makers

Leading from the edges
Not having trusting relationships with other members of a community
Being regarded as causing troubles
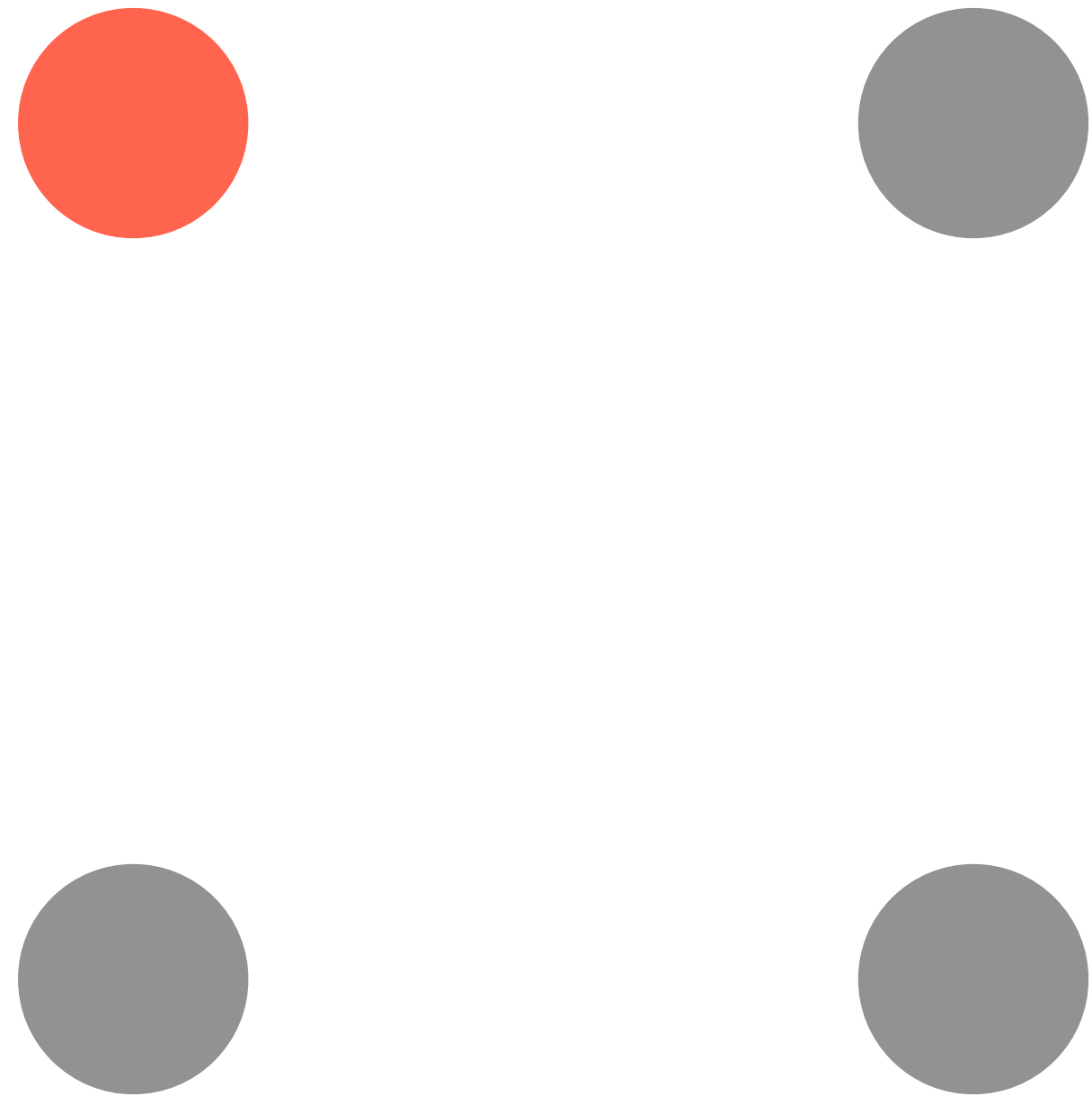
Change-makers

Leading from the edges
Having trusting relationships with other members of a community
Being regarded as making positive changes

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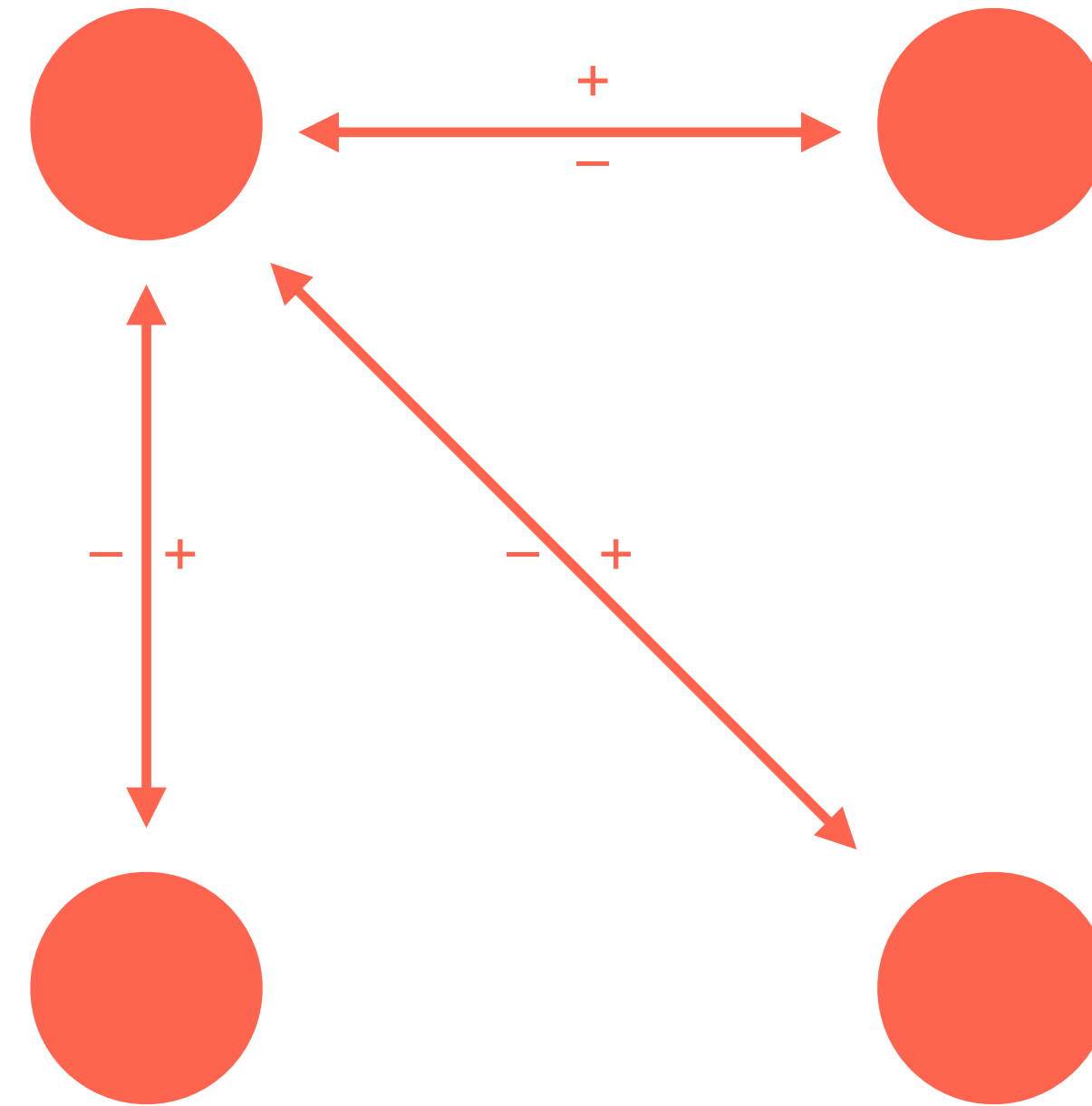
Steps to build trust and become a change-maker:
1. Competence

Show what you are competent at
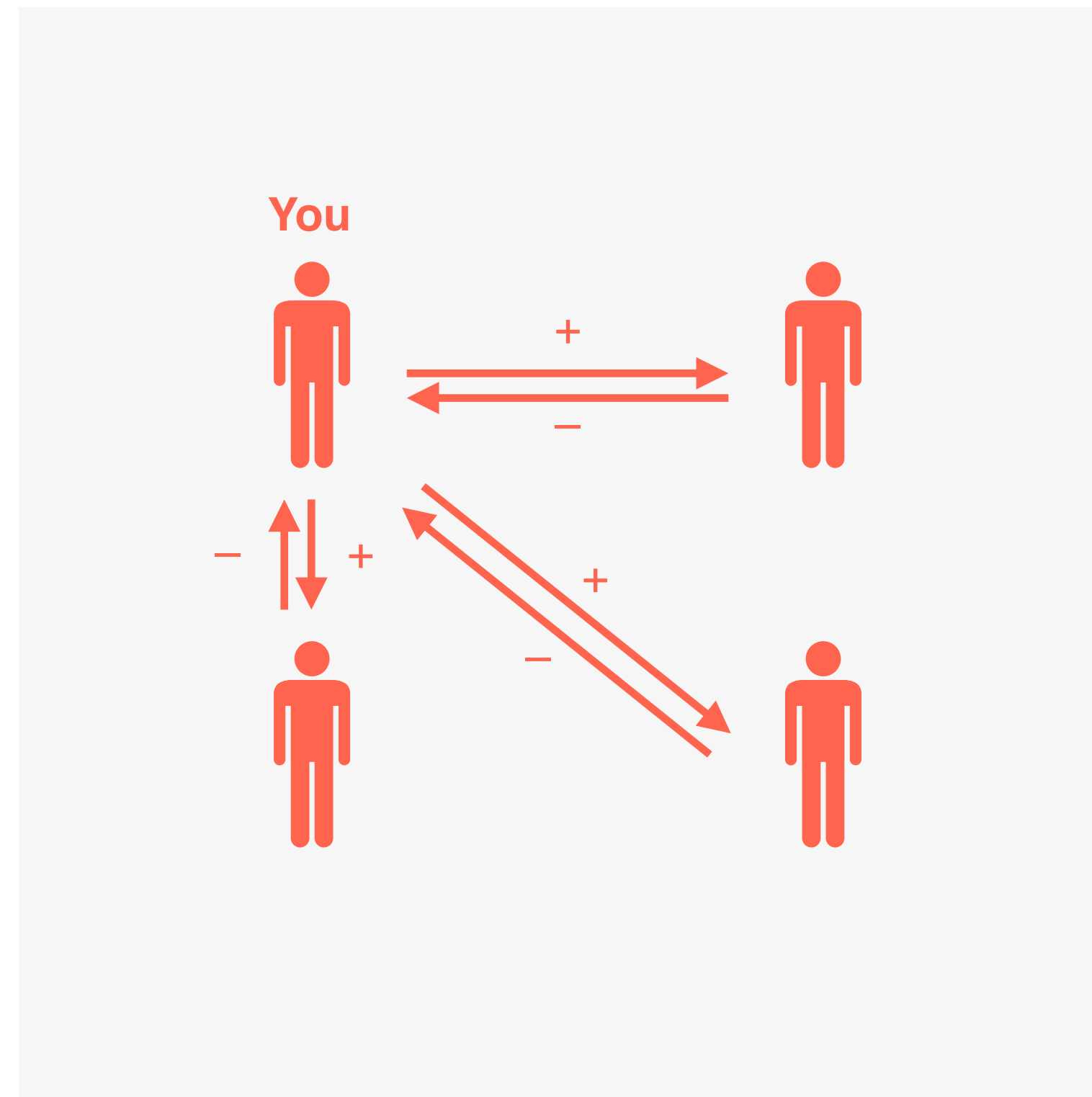
Steps to build trust and become a change-maker:

1. Competence

2. Relationships

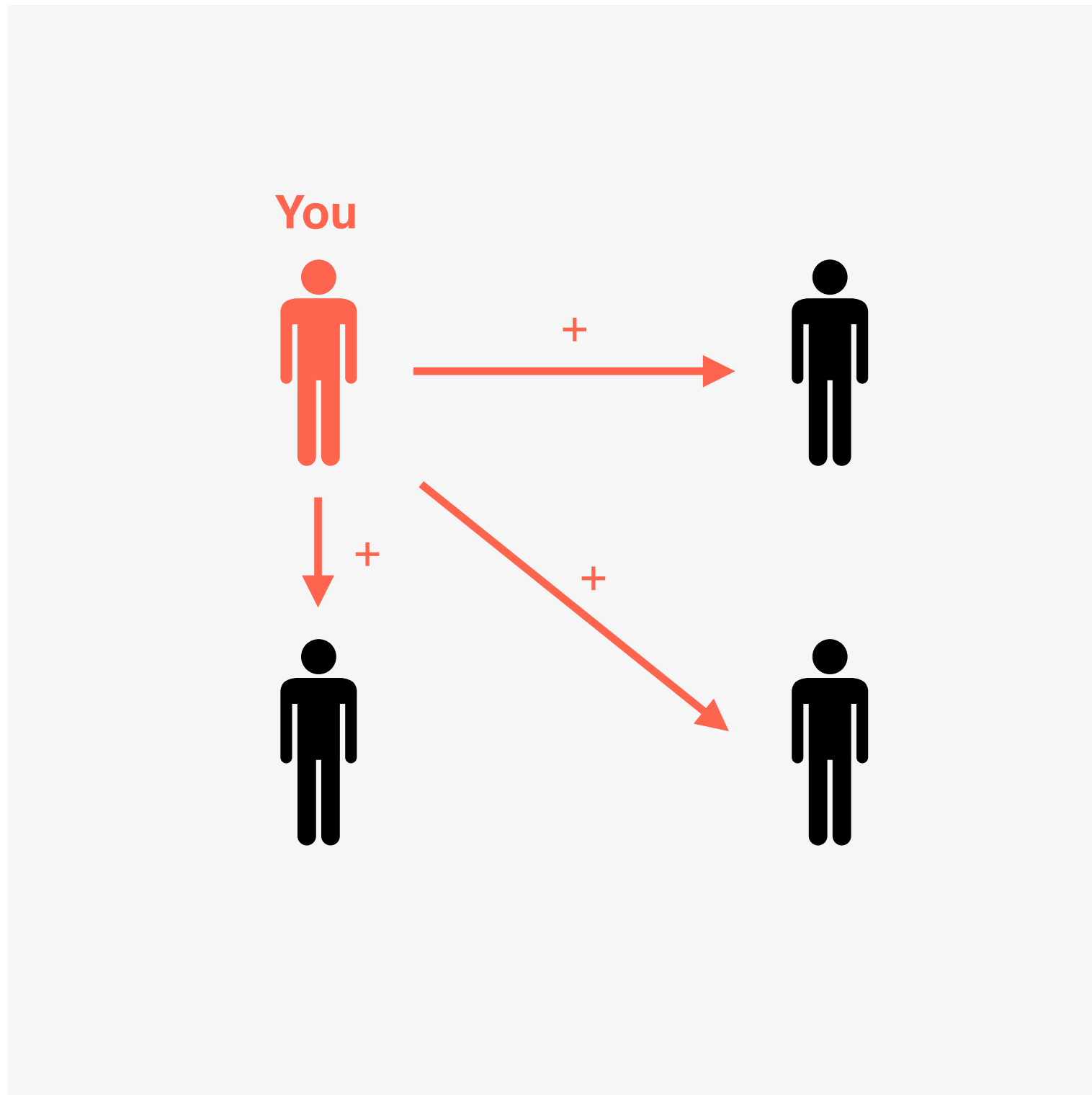Show what you are competent at

Establish relationships and build allies
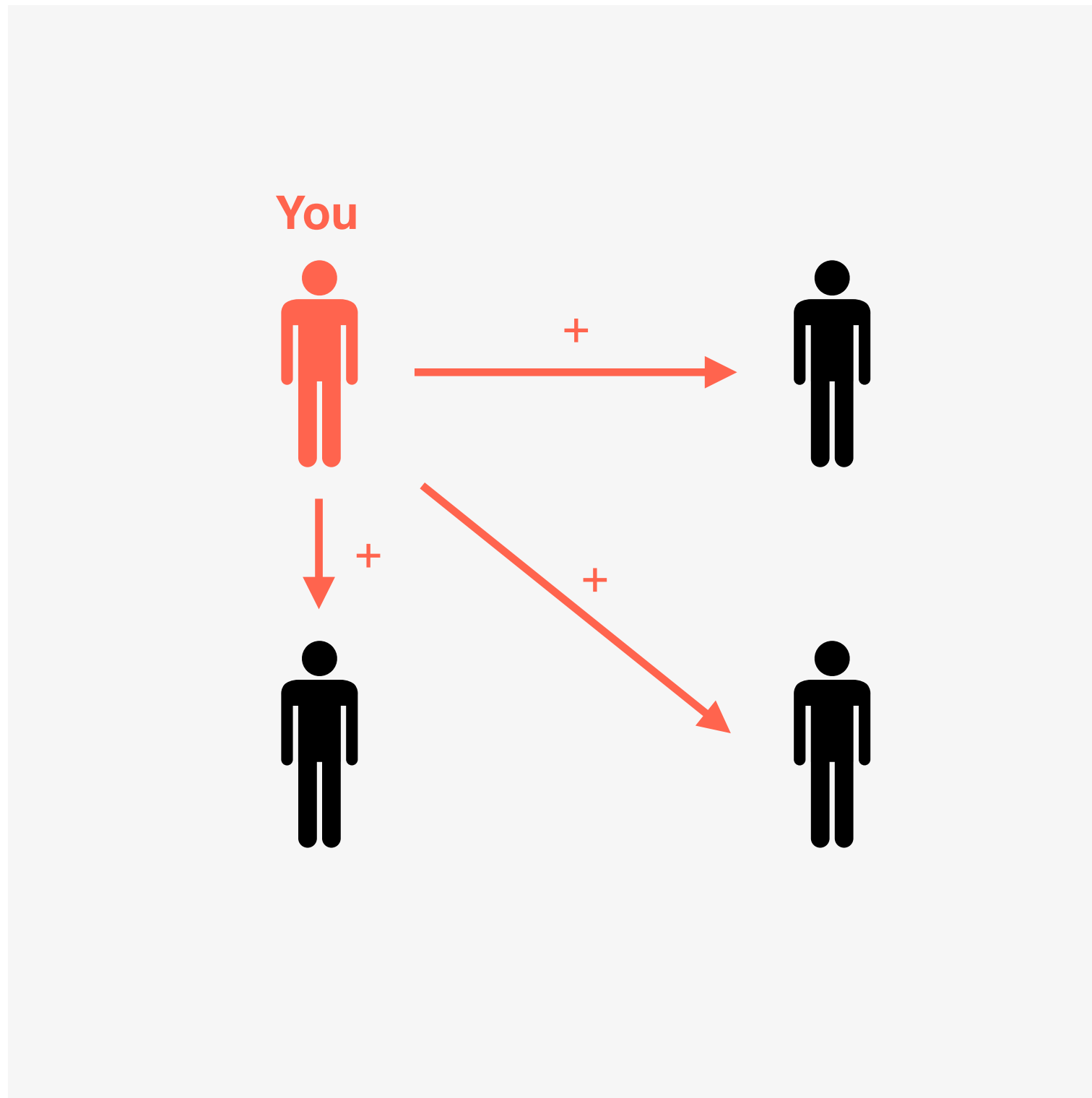
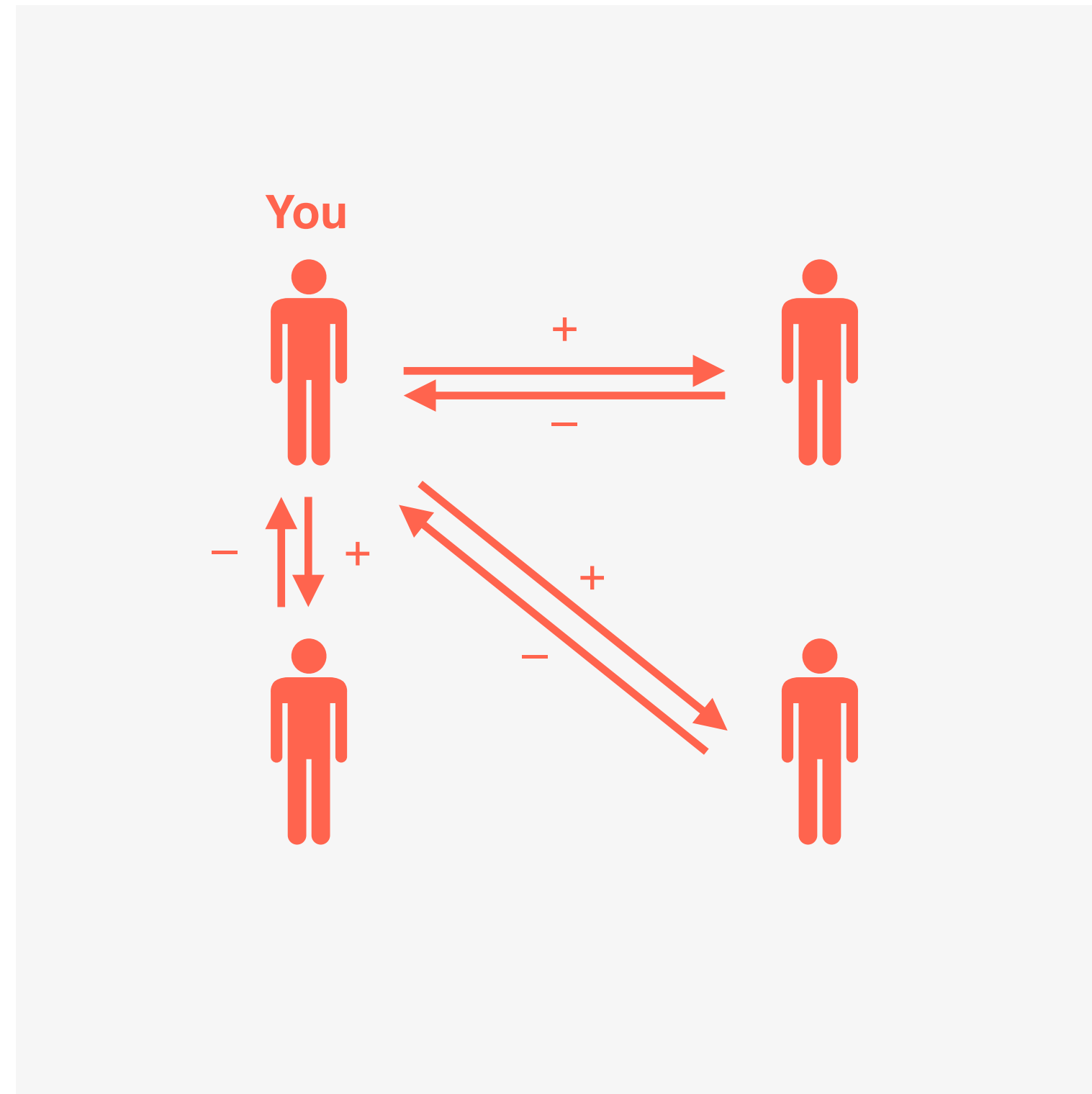# Steps to build trust and become a change-maker:
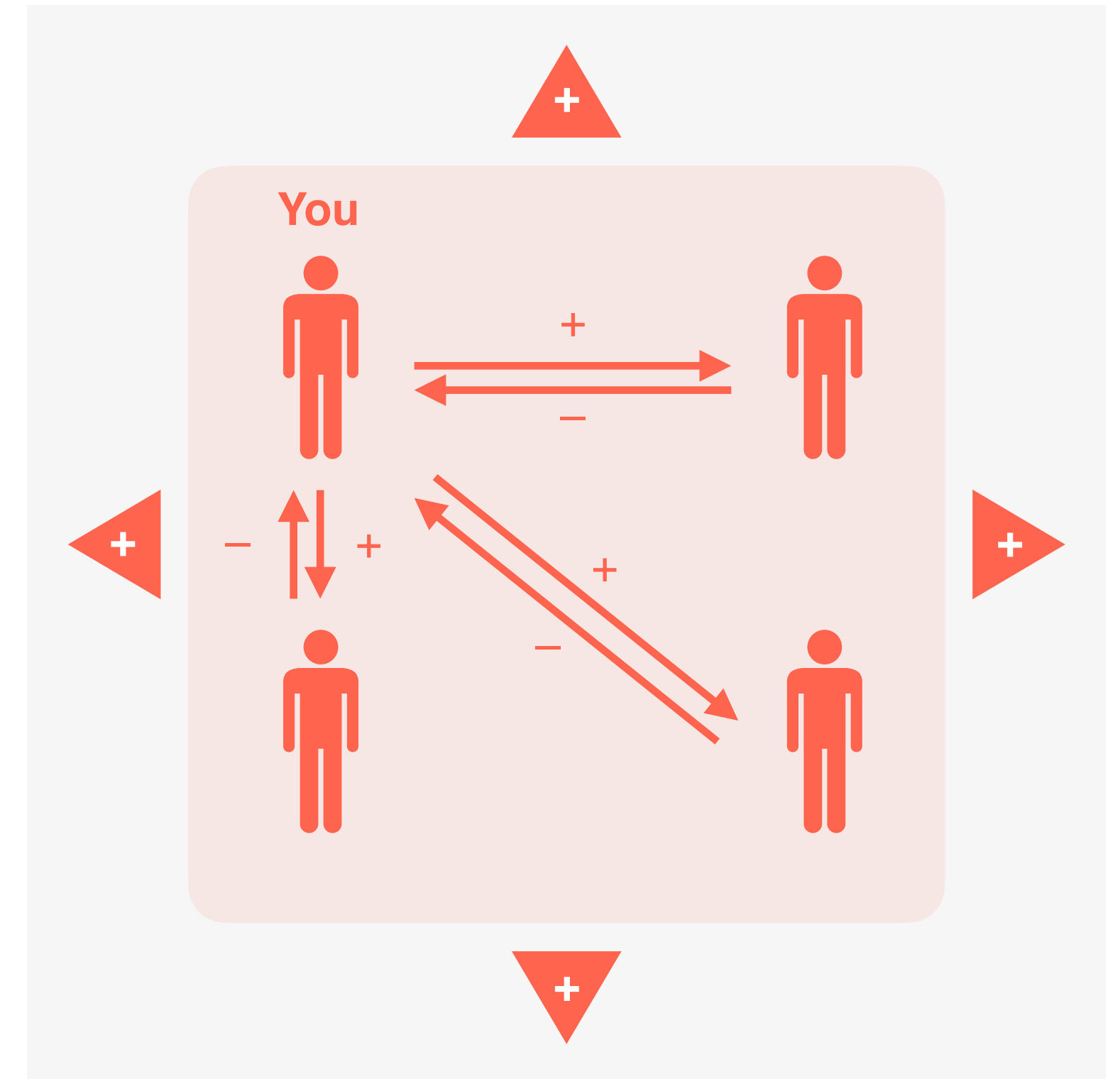
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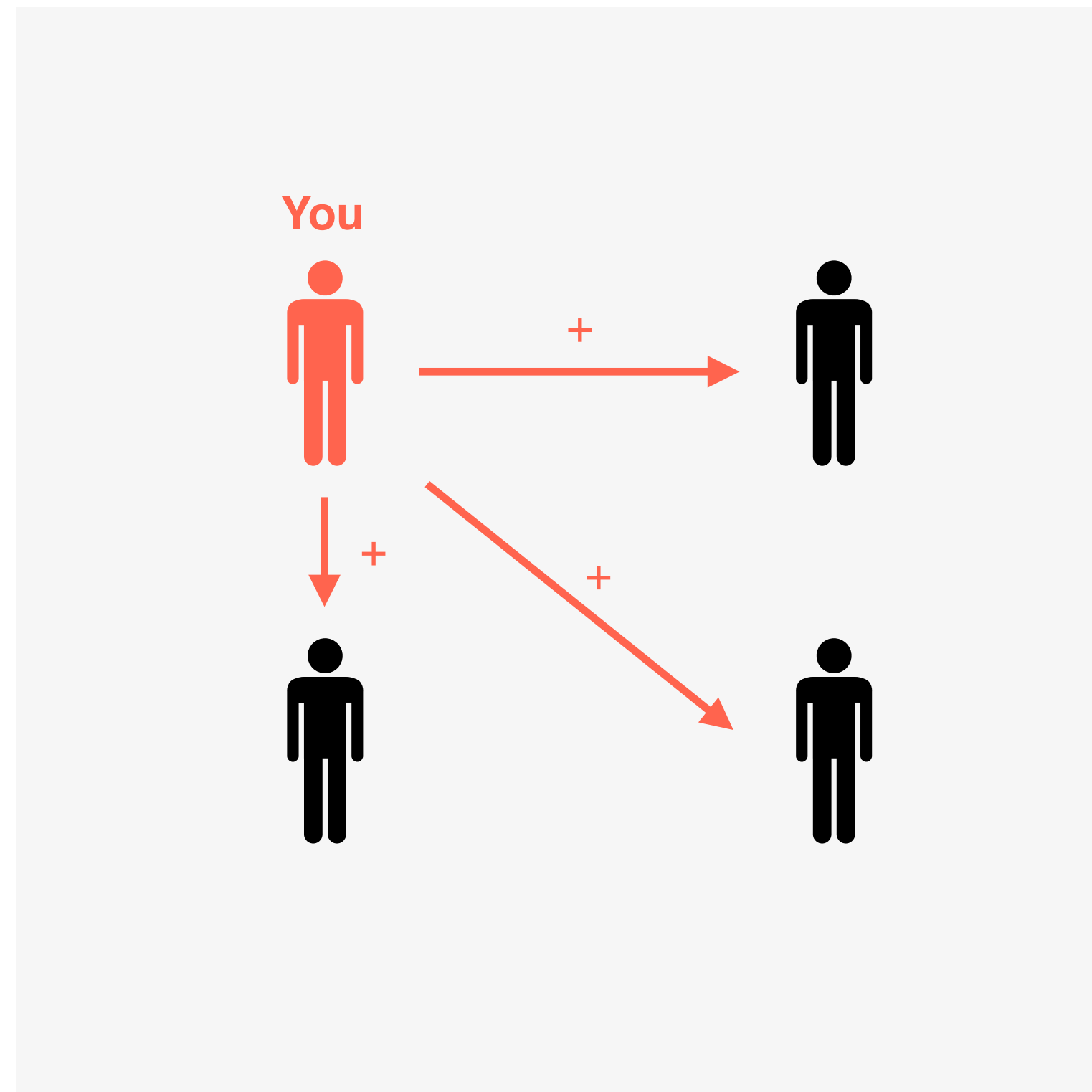
2. Relationships

Establish relationships and build allies

3. Initiative

Start new initiatives that actually make changes

Conclusion

To summarize, in a remote environment,

Everything happens inside screens,
offering only semantic and digital information.

Deliberately designing every message you make is ever more imperative
as language is the primary construct of the semantic and digital context.

Promising to design your everyday language enables you
to build trust with your peers and collaborate more effectively.

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A bottom-up strategy for better remote collaborations:

<p style="text-align:center">I promise that
my language is always carefully designed
for us to collaborate effectively.</p>

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References

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Thanks!

Let's have a chat 💁‍♂️

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GROW

with

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