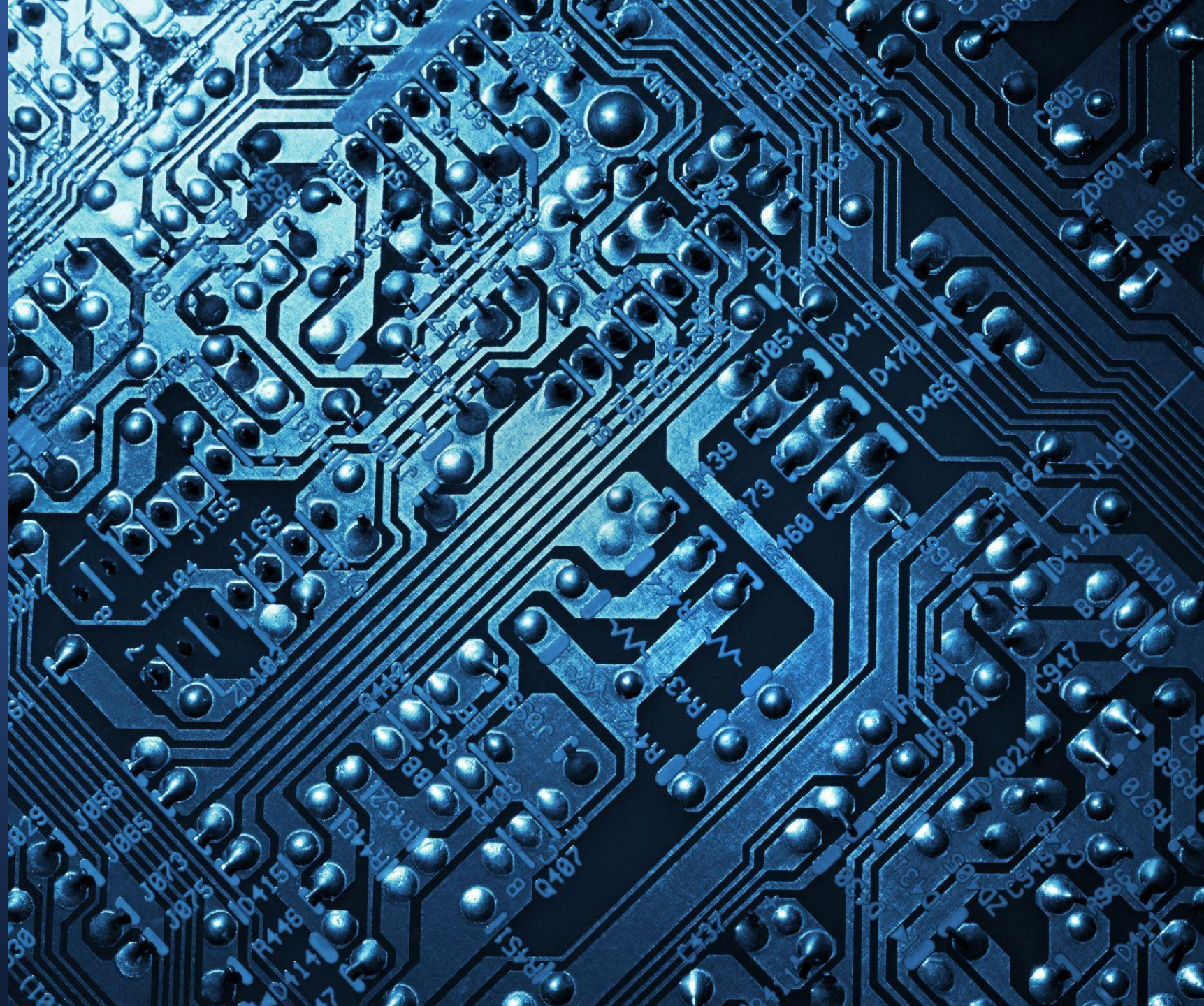
Autism in Tech

@DennieDeclercq

WeAreDevelopers // 2022



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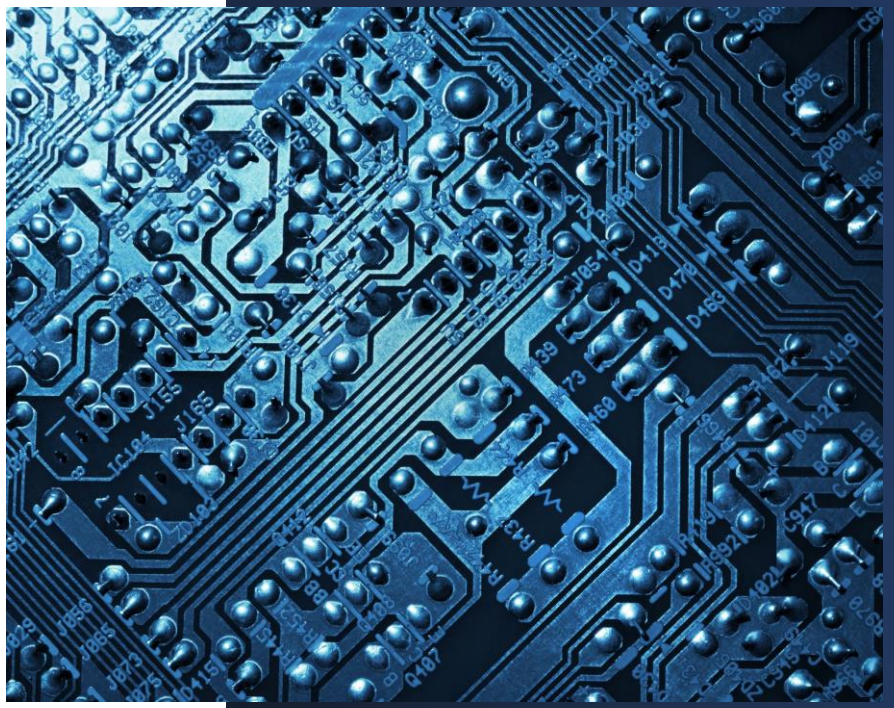


Who am I?

- Dennie Declercq
- DDSoft
- President / Developer
- @DennieDeclercq
- Mr. #DreamingIsBelieving

I am different

Autistic

- Different since I was a child
- Autism diagnose at age of 13
- No university college

Without a paid job

- 2008 – 2011: Tried some jobs
- No science degree
- Factory for people with disabilities
- Tech / development in after hours
- Ended on a sickness benefit

A tech lover

- Very passionate
- Fanatic pro Microsoft
- Windows Mobile
- Why did Windows Phone die?
- Windows 3.1 → 10
- VB6 → C#

How did I roll into tech world?

- 15yo: I wanted to be a developer
- Microsoft Office at school
- Mike was a programmer
- 2007: Programming as ‘escape’
- 2012: Volunteer developer
- Belgian community
- 2014: DDSoft
- 2017: Started as conference speaker
- 2019: Microsoft MVP

Autistic logic & Developers logic

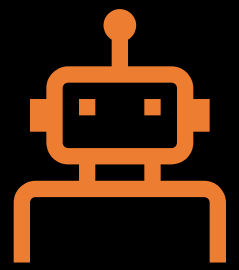
Developers Logic

A Boolean is true or false

It’s good to declare variables, what type it’s expected

If you program a loop, the exit scenario should be clear

It’s very structured



Autistic Logic

A fact is only true or false

It’s very nice that every circumstance is declared

If there’s a path to follow, auti’s like it’s clear and clean

Most of them are very structured

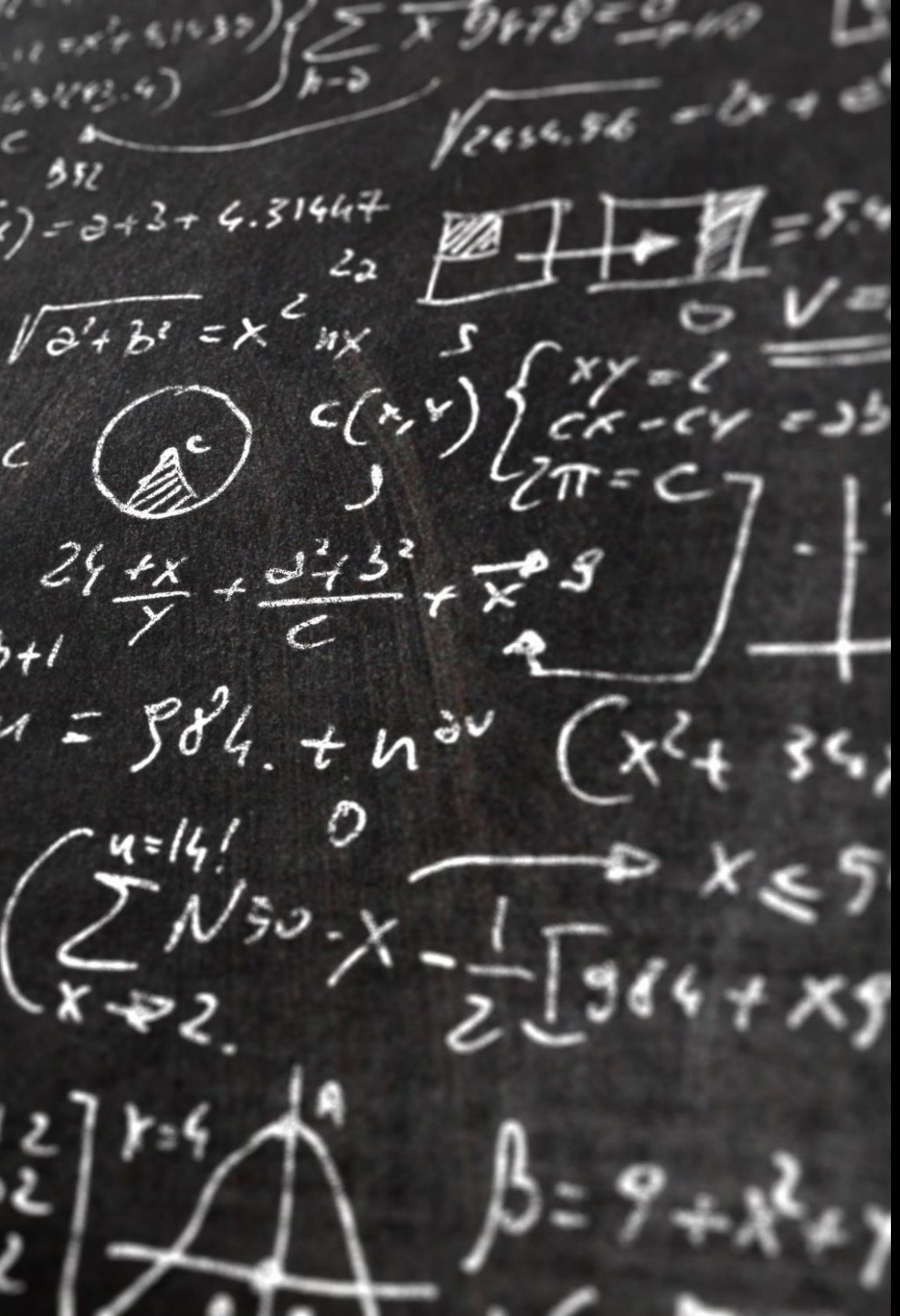
The Autist’ Brain

Theory of Mind

- Understanding the WHY
- Seeing which behavior causes which outcome
- Seeing logical steps

Executive Functioning

- Everything that you need in daily living or in a working environment
- Examples:
  - Planning a timeslot
  - Planning what to wear at a conference, meeting
  - Planning which sessions, you want to see



Central Coherence

- Coherence of situations, things, tasks, words
- Seeing the global picture

Context Blindness

- Understanding the context of something
- ‘One incentive has one meaning’
- Problems with ‘use of the same words’ for other meanings

Sensory deficiencies

- Sensory Overload
- The need for additional sensory stimulation
- Sensory deficiencies can cause difficulties at the job

Extra: STRESS! Anxiety! Depression! ADHD! (Mental Health)

- Additional Mental Health conditions
- Can trigger more difficulties
- Can trigger ‘Being more autistic’ ➔ At least behaving more different.

Basic solution

- Explaining, Explaining & Explaining
- Trying to understand
- Trying to figure out
- Trying to Adjust

Myths & Beyond

Autism / ASD: Disability or Neurodiversity?

- Thought leadership on autism changed
- People with autism / Asperger's are superpowers
- Good for inclusion
- People with autism need to know their self very good.
- Example: Greta Thunberg

Paid job or volunteer job?

- Paid job is sometimes possible
- Not always
- Advice: Start with QoL “Quality of Life“ and Basic comfortable feeling

Executive functioning in Tech

Different energy and new technologies

Code Style

- People with autism think straight forward
  - My way of the highway
  - Can be sure they use the best classes, procedures
- Difficult to change code style
  - New possibilities with new versions
  - Difficult to adapt some patterns.

```
(function () {
    window.blazorFocus = {
        set: (element) => { element.focus(); }
    };
})();
```

Structure

- Day Structure
  - Huge change of different day structure
  - More breaks during day
- Project timeframe

Central Coherance in Tech

Cross – software solutions

Selection View Go Debug Terminal Help _Host.cshtml - Visua

st.cshtml ×

DSoft > Projects > Blazor > Bethanys > 02 > demos > Demos > End > Bethany

```
@page "/"
@namespace BethanysPieShopHRM.Server.Pages
@addTagHelper *, Microsoft.AspNetCore.Mvc.TagHelpers

<!DOCTYPE html>
<html lang="en">
<head>
    <meta charset="utf-8" />
    <meta name="viewport" content="width=device-width, in
    <title>BethanysPieShopHRM.Server</title>
    <base href="~/" />
    <link rel="stylesheet" href="css/bootstrap/bootstrap.
    <link href="css/site.css" rel="stylesheet" />
    <script src="https://kit.fontawesome.com/273d0585ea.j
```

Colors and IDE's

Theory of Mind in Tech

Being fanatic & user groups and conferences

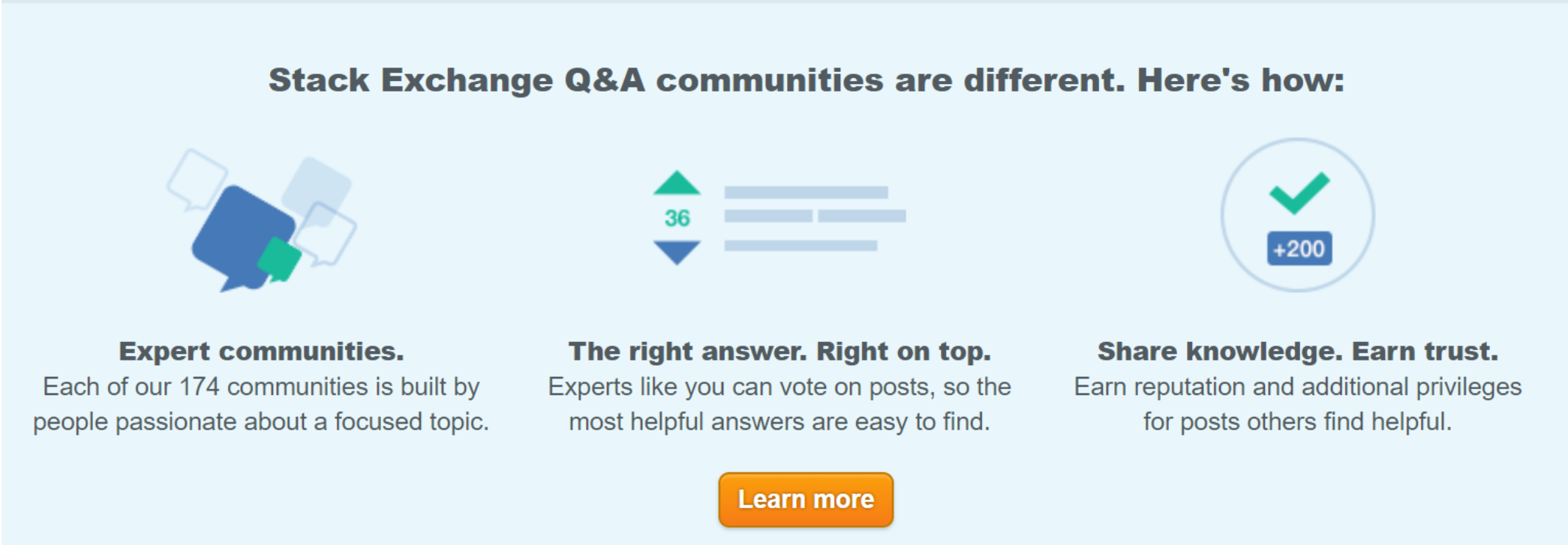
- Can be an issue
- More difficult at conferences
  - Variety of topics / speakers

User groups & conferences and different communication

- Talking too much or too little
- Problems with eye contact
- Different non-verbal communication
  - Example: being excited but can’t show

Being fanatic in tech

- Pro Microsoft / Apple / Linux?
  - Difficult to use both
    - C# / JavaScript
- Me: so happy with Blazor ☺
  - ASP.NET or PHP
- Biased in apps / libraries



Forums and communication

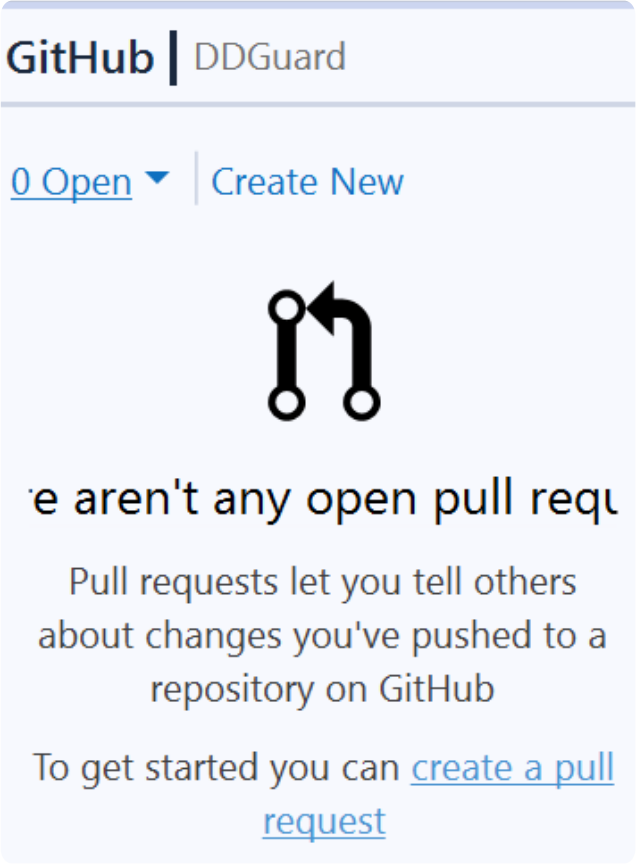
- Difficult if you are fanatic
- Forum expect knowledge and DIY
- Was difficult in the beginning

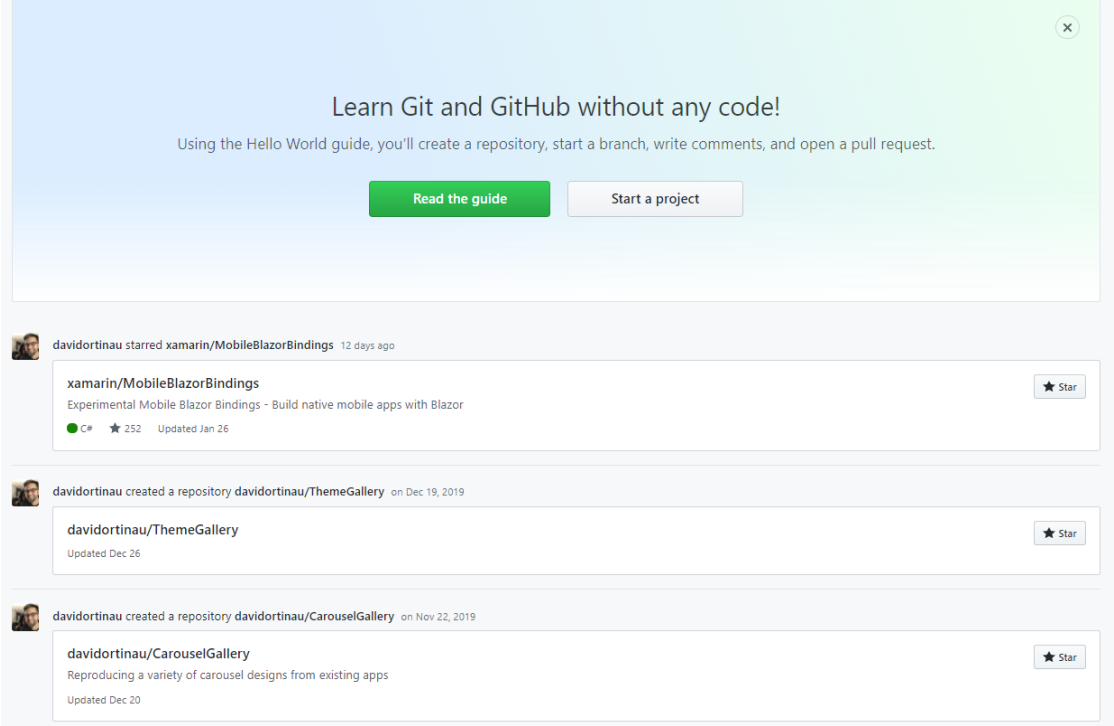
DM’s and communication

Big mismatch in communication

Code reviews

Difficult if you have a different code style





Contributing OSS

- Can be a reason for not contributing to OSS.
- Being afraid to be different
- Afraid from criticism

Special topics of interest

- Can be very fanatic for an investment
- Invest in:
  - Technology nobody cares about
  - Time in specific nice side project

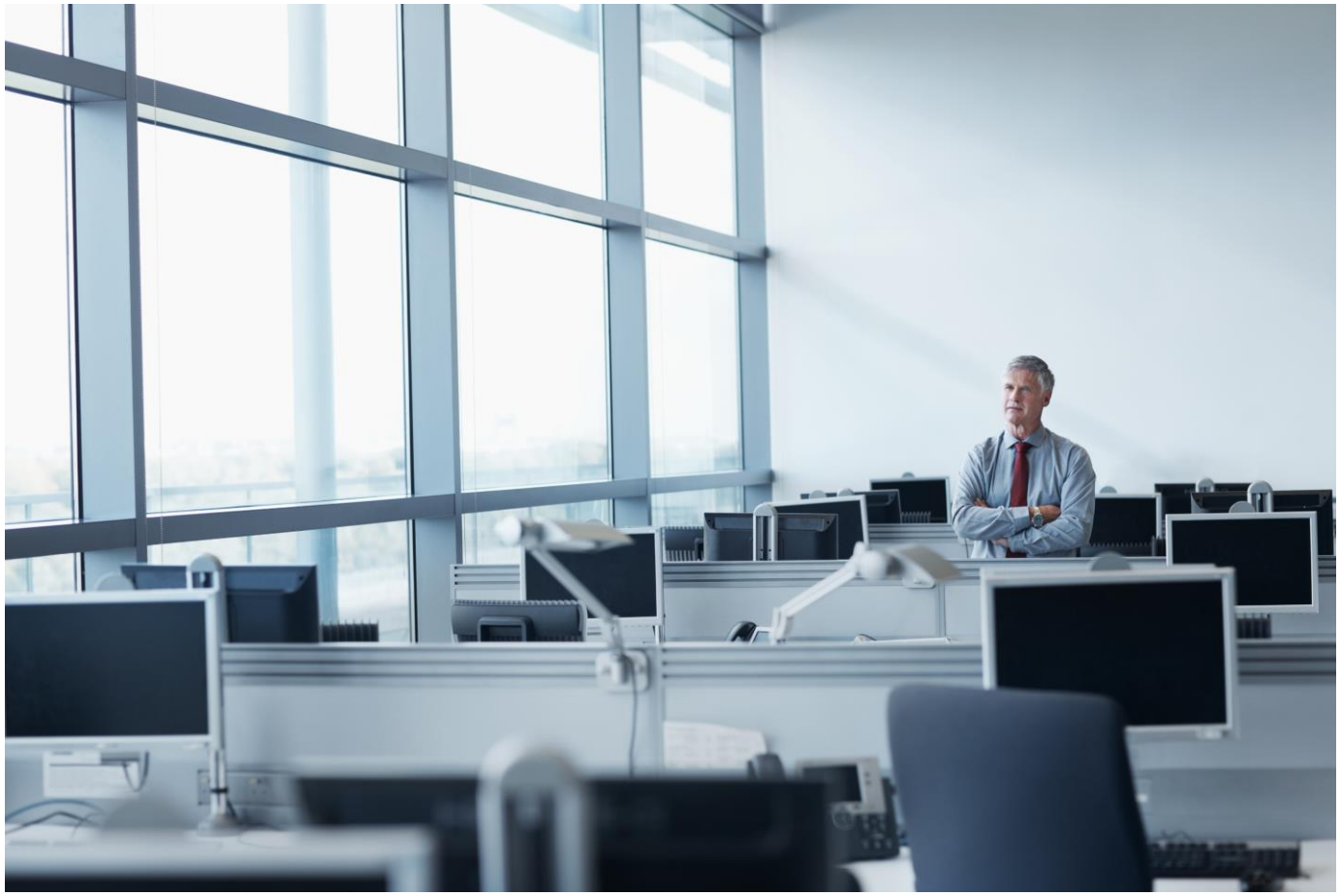
Sensory Deficiencies in Tech

Music & Headphones

- Being more productive with music
- Having auditory distractions
  - People talking

Office Space

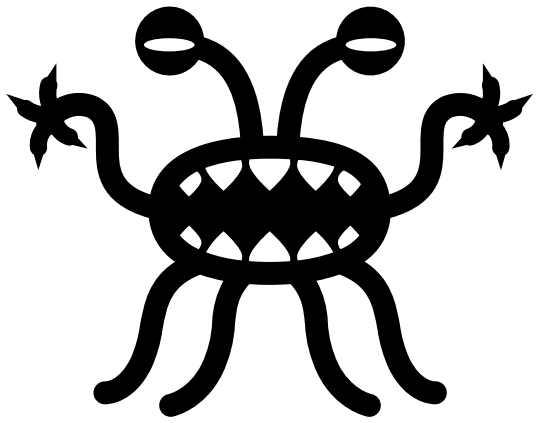
- Being distracted
  - People passing by
- Stimming
- Meltdowns

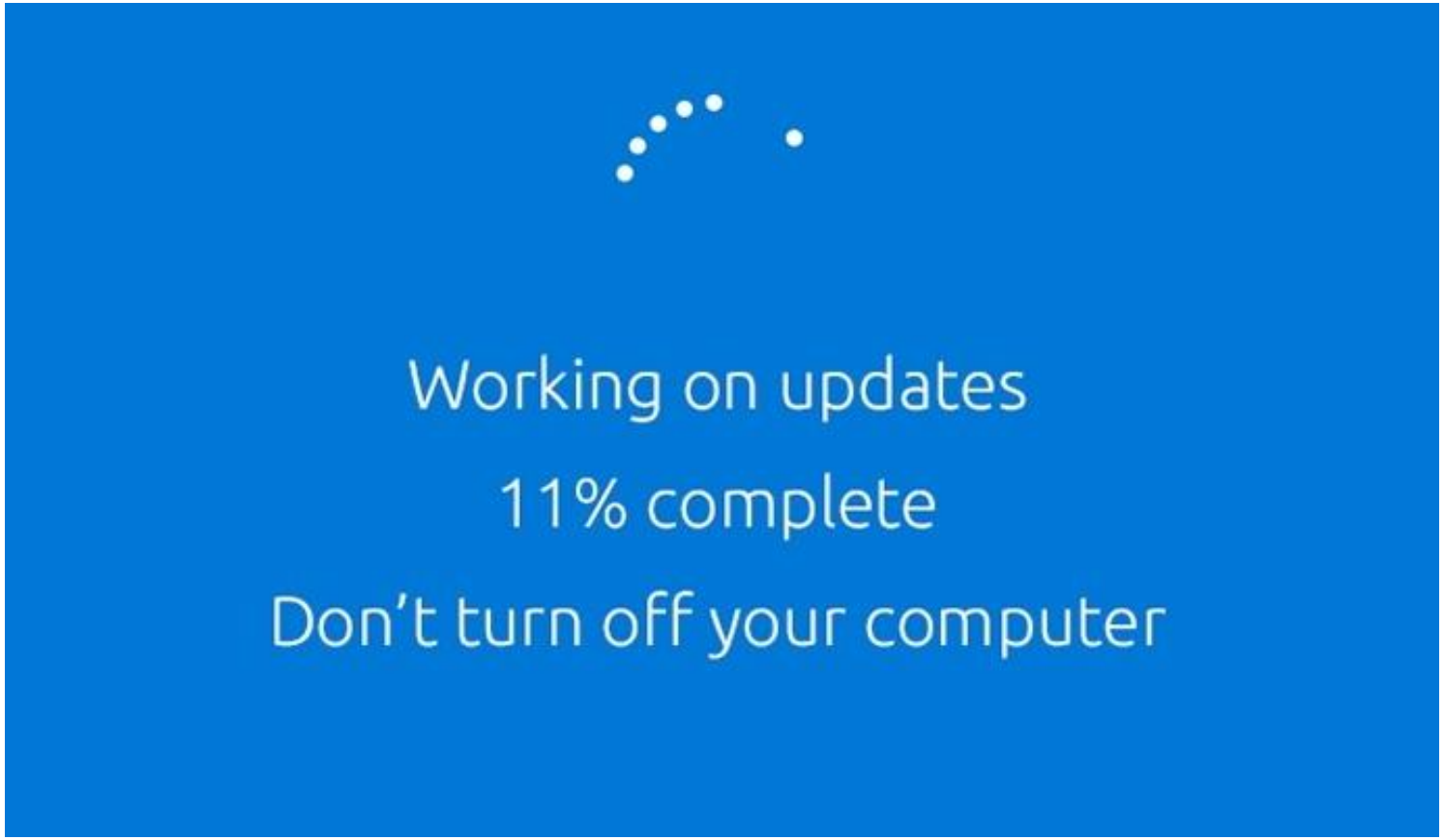


Smell & Food

- Heavy sensory reactions to smells like:
  - Perfume
  - Food
  - Body smell (Yeah.. Maybe taboo to say)

Anxiety & Stress in Tech





Anxiety in tech

- Being afraid to change from tool stack
- Windows update
- Being afraid to ask questions in fora
- Being afraid to use public transport (too little time in the community)
- Cloud changes
- Being afraid of losing friends & Being fanatic
- Afraid of losing your job & own vision

Example: Moving from Azure IaaS to PaaS

Customers and Separation Anxiety

- Stress & Anxiety with:
  - Customer demands
  - Pricing (asking too little)
  - Borders & Limits by specific questions

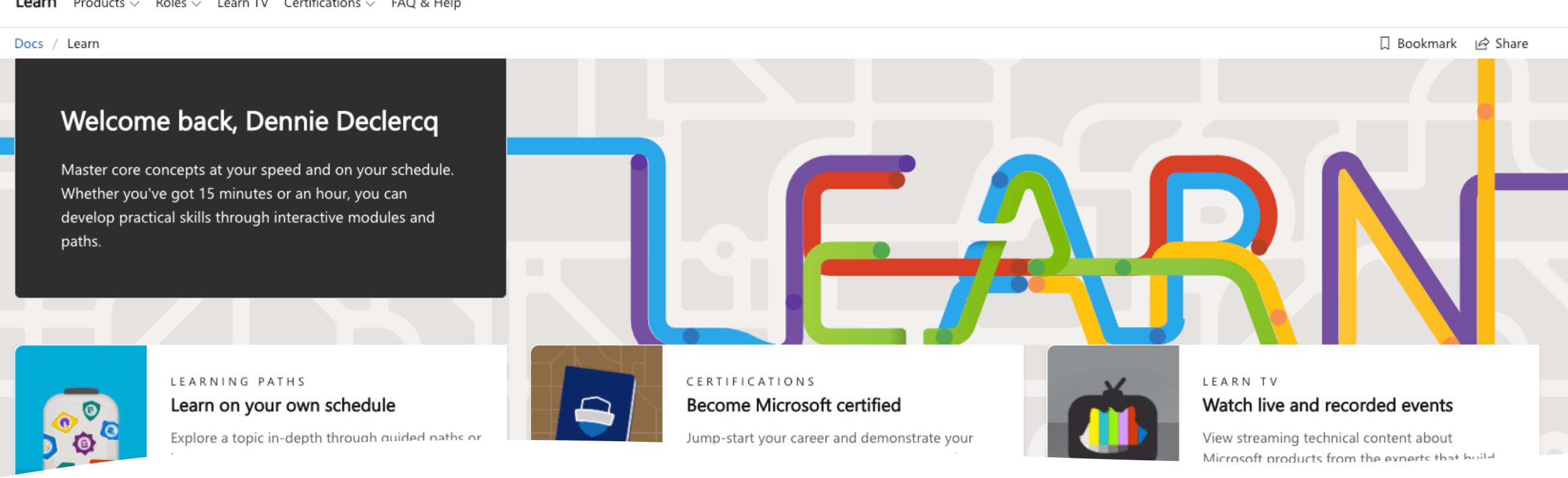
DEADlines

- Afraid for not getting the deadline.
- Working even slower due to the stress

What works for Me?

Being vulnerable… (WIP)

- Anxiety & Separation Anxiety
  - Still a lot of work…..
  - It is what it is? ☺



Code style

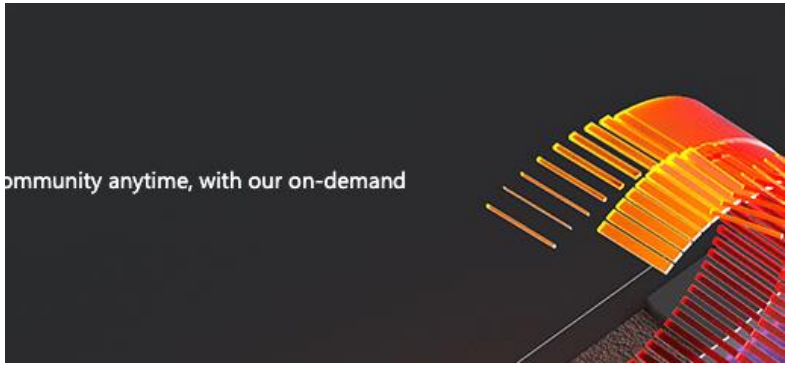
- Community Leaders
- Interest
- Microsoft Learn
- Conference talks
- Pluralsight

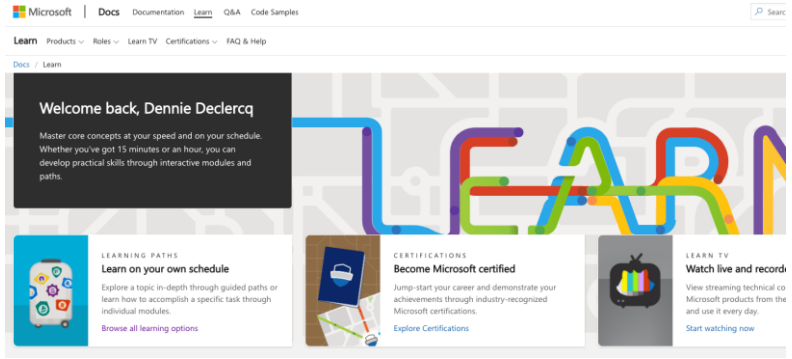
Colors

- The need and the urge
- The broad possibilities

New Technologies

- Focusing on interest
- The love of conferences
- The joy of being inspired
- Microsoft Learn





Windows / Mac

- The need and the urge
- Web versions look the same!
  - Thank Microsoft for Edge

Wrap up

Thanks! Q&A

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