Safe-to-Fail

Liz Keogh

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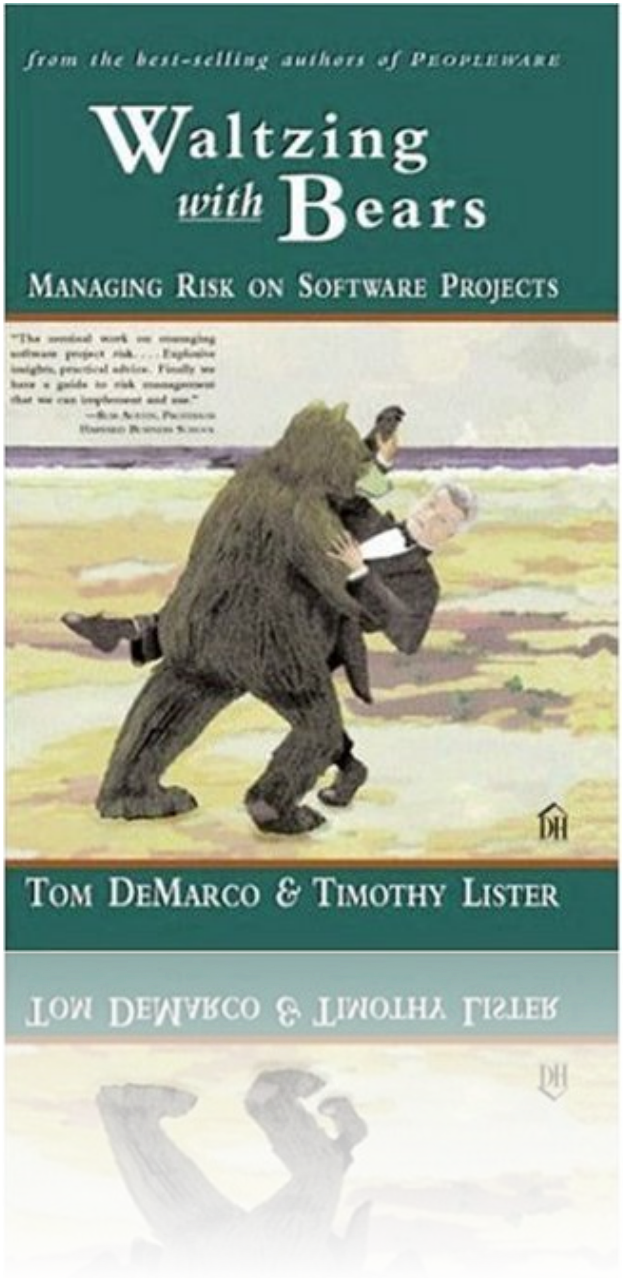
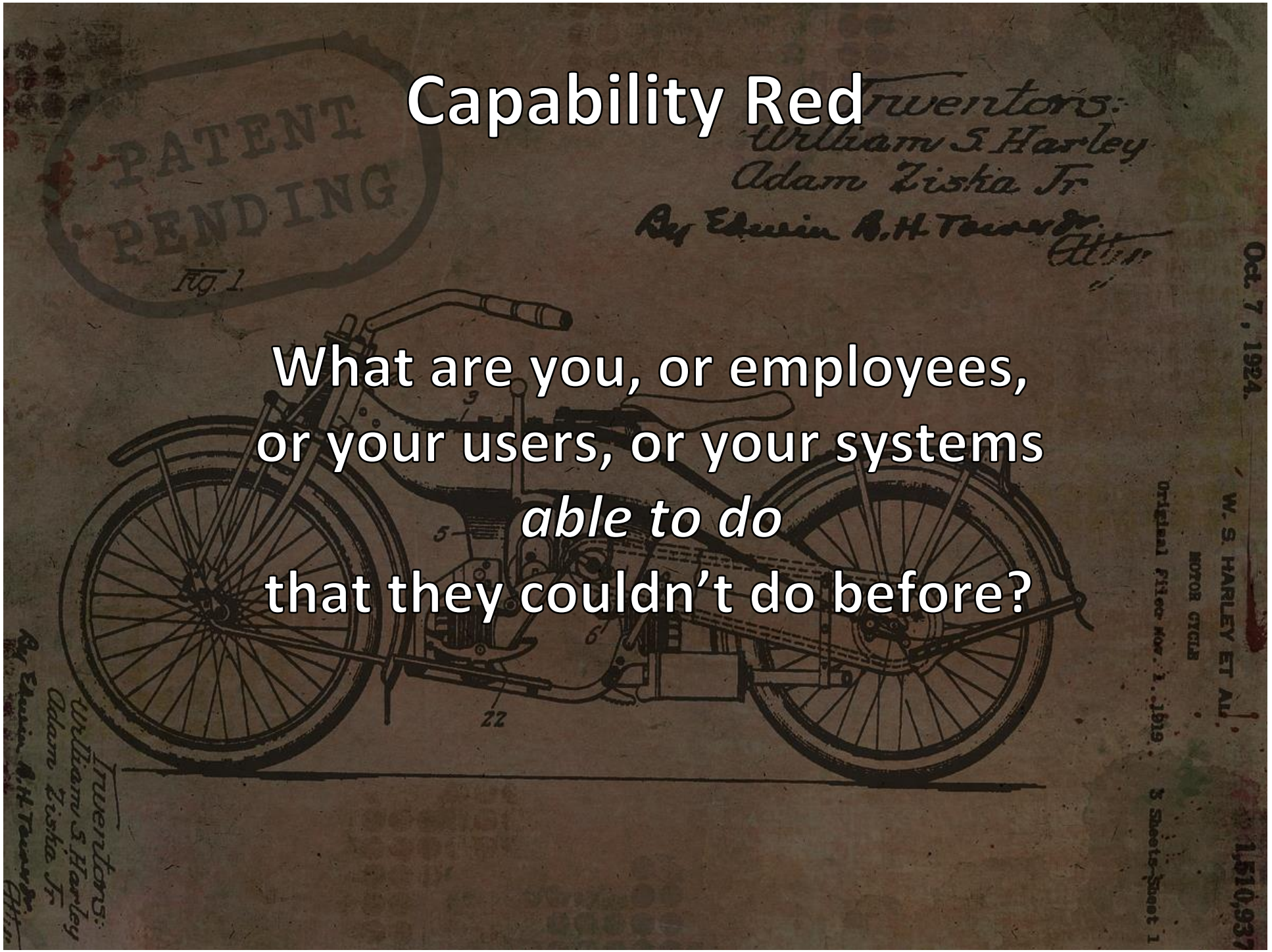


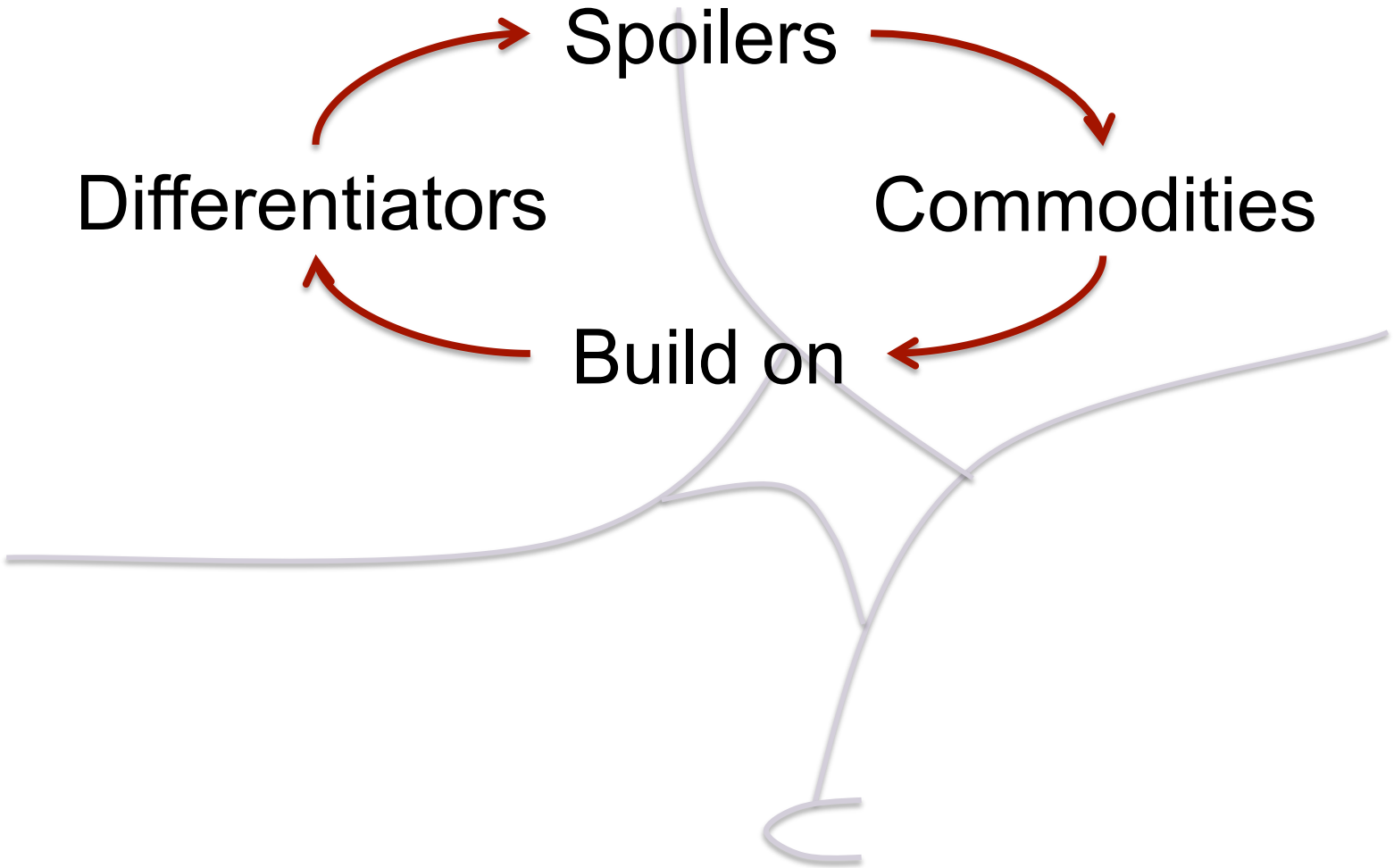
If a project has
no risks,
don’t do it.

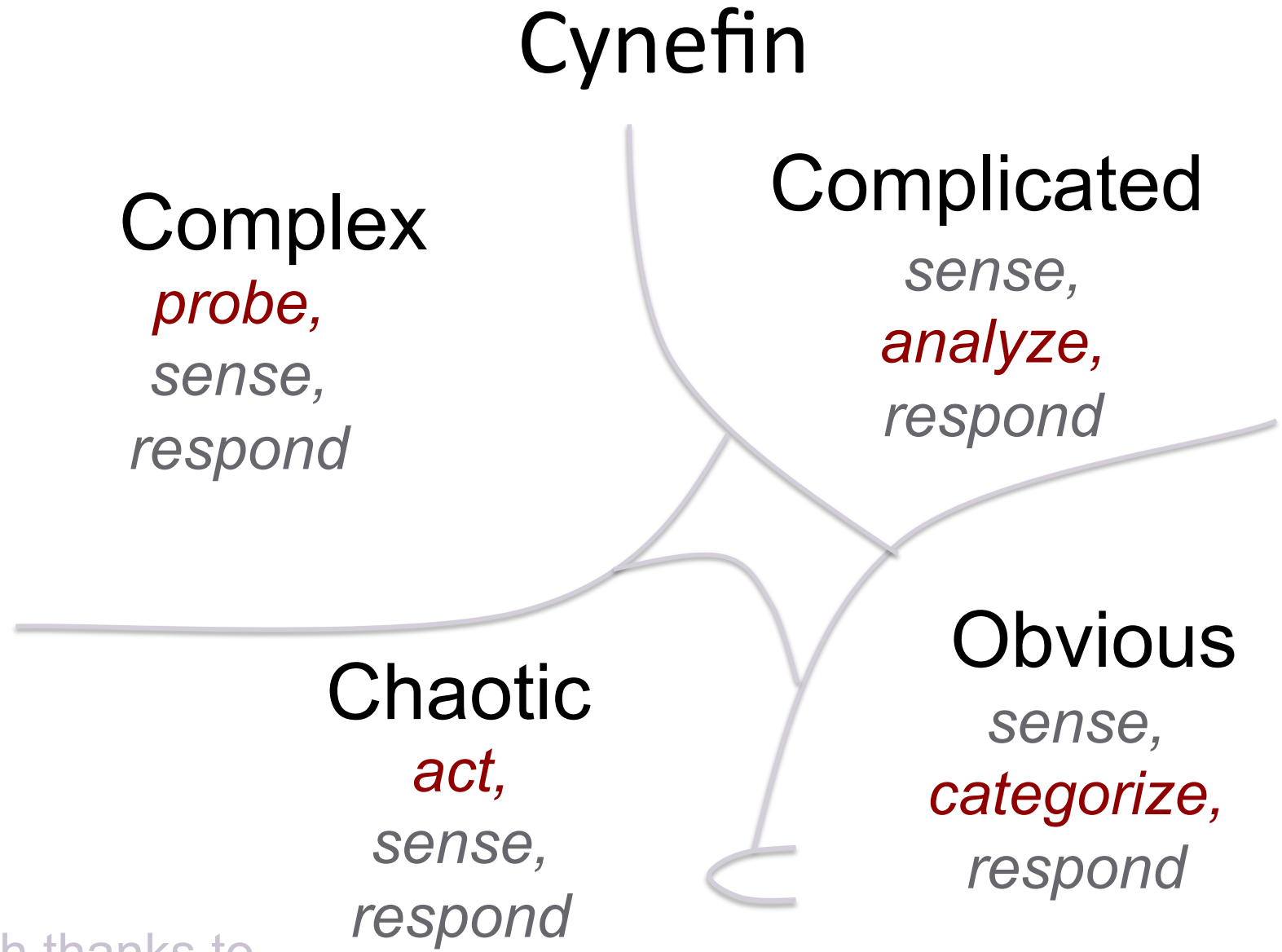
Capability Red



What are you, or employees,
or your users, or your systems
able to do
that they couldn't do before?

The Innovation Cycle



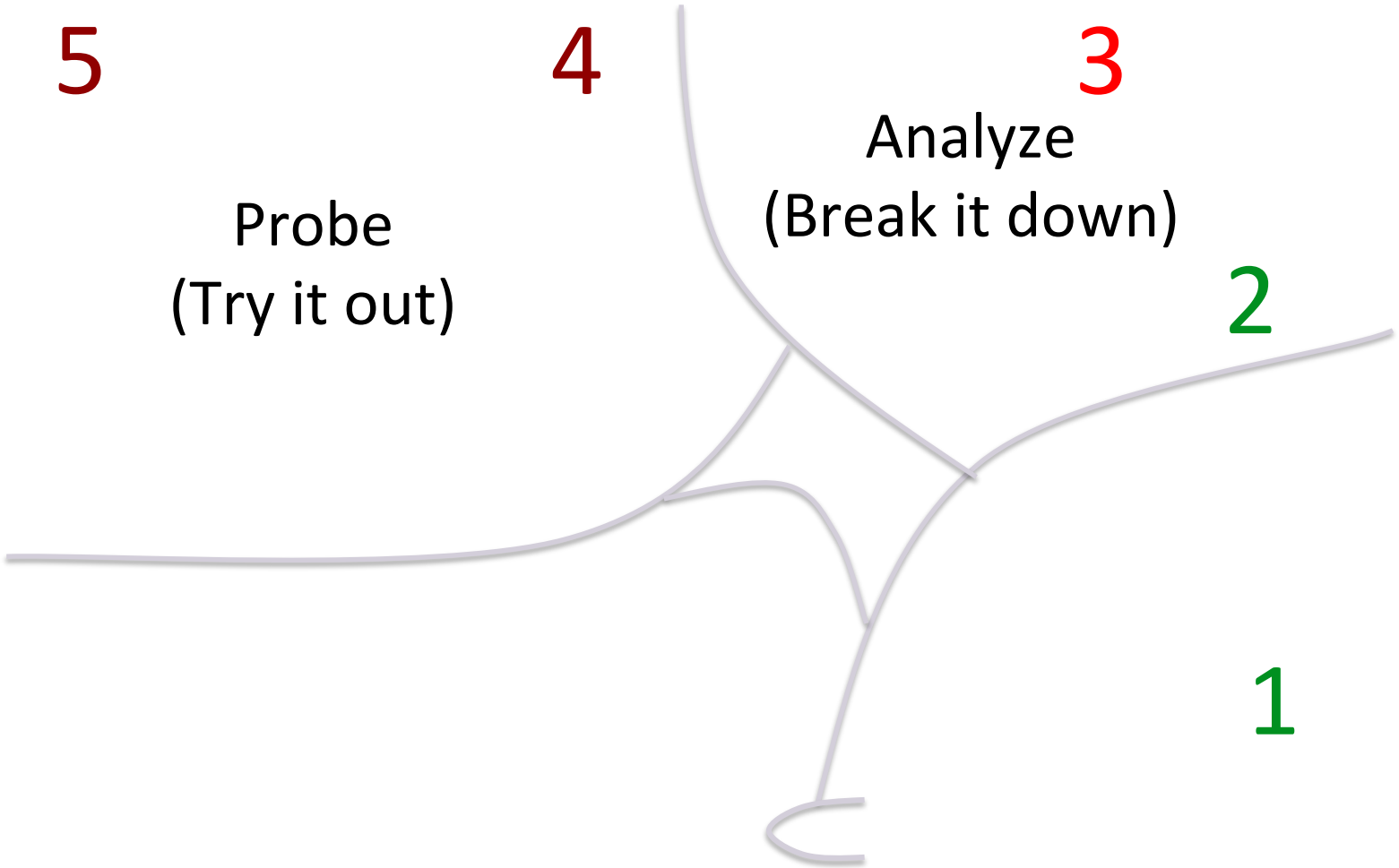


With thanks to
David Snowden and Cognitive Edge

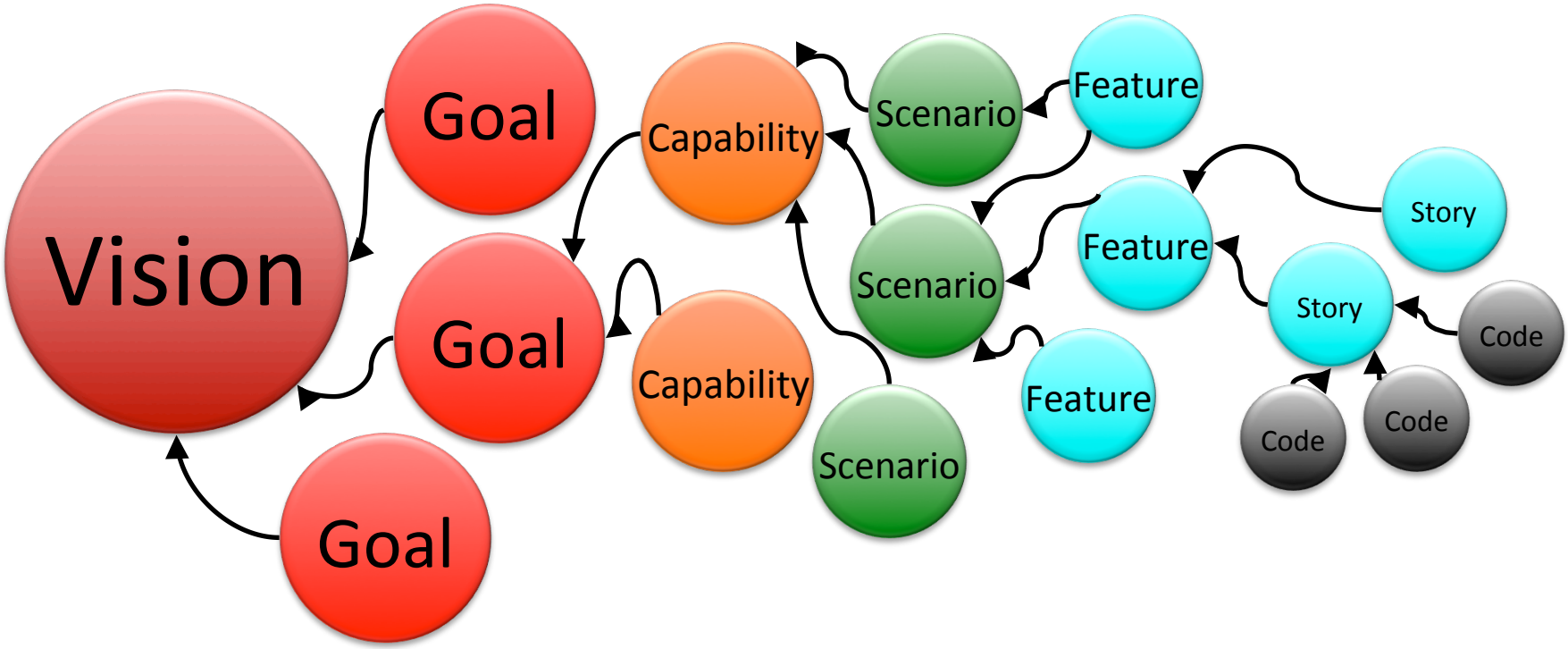
Estimating Complexity

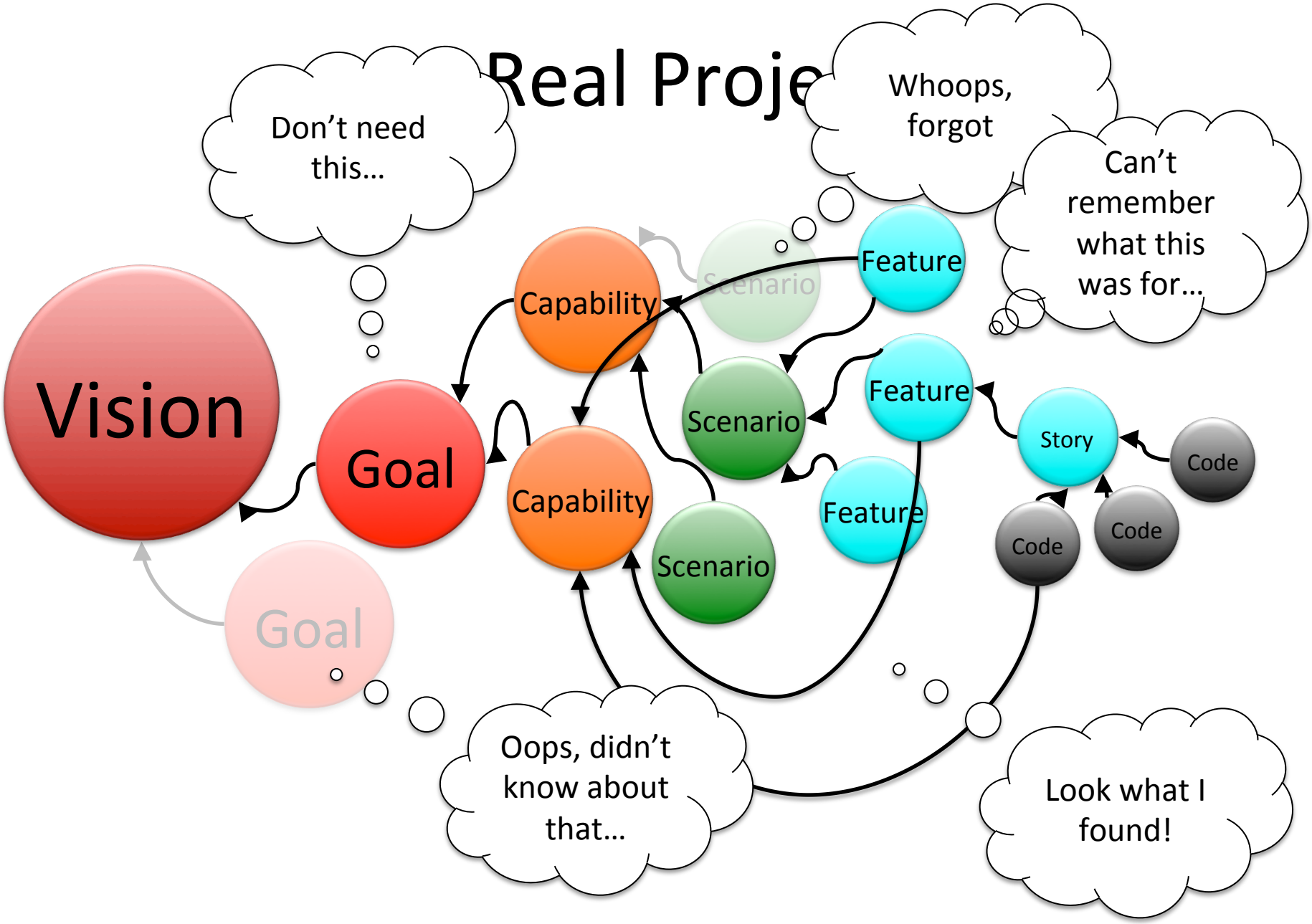
5. Nobody has ever done it before
4. Someone outside the org has done it before (probably a competitor)
3. Someone in the company has done it before
2. Someone in the team has done it before
1. We all know how to do it.

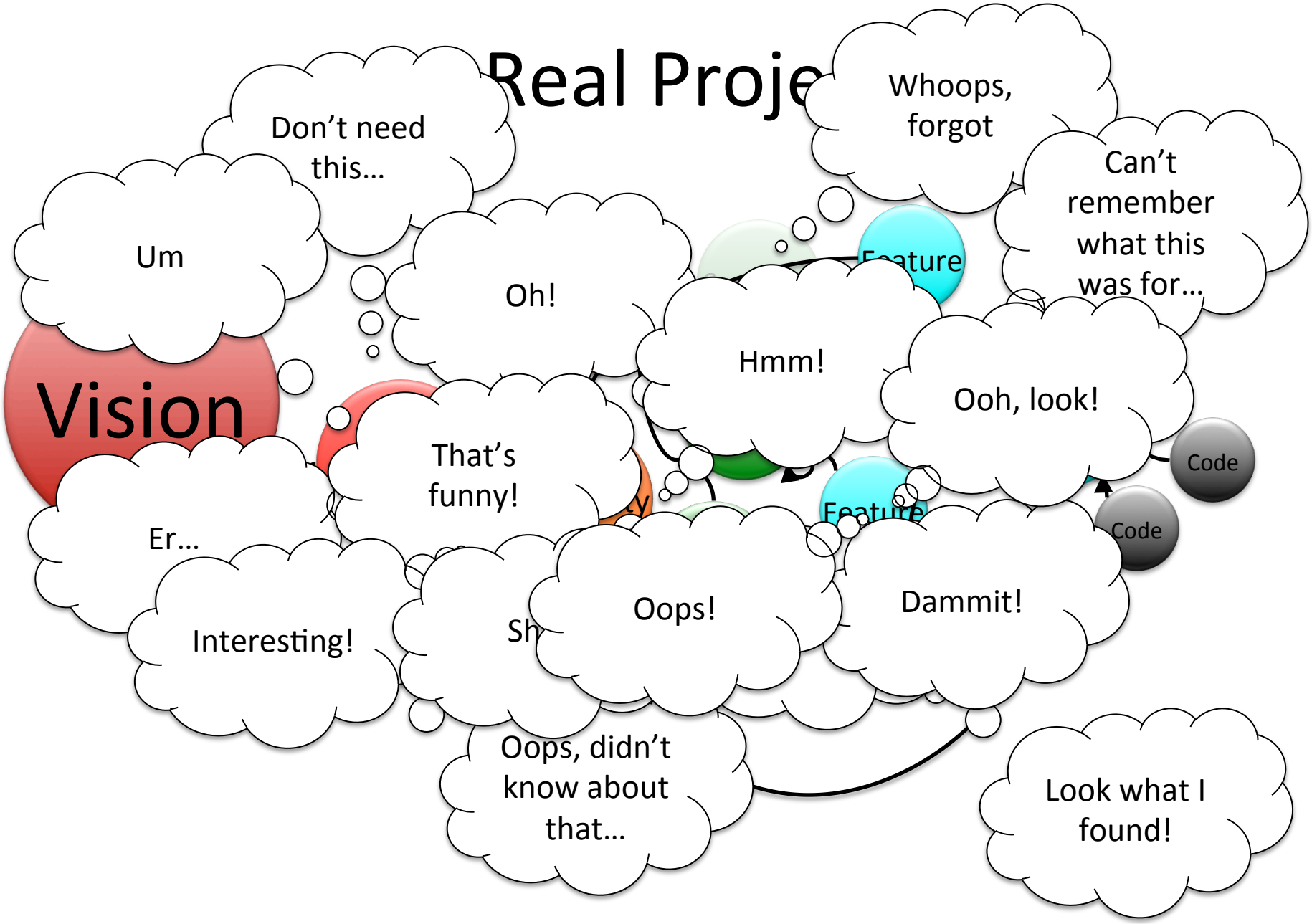
Estimating Complexity



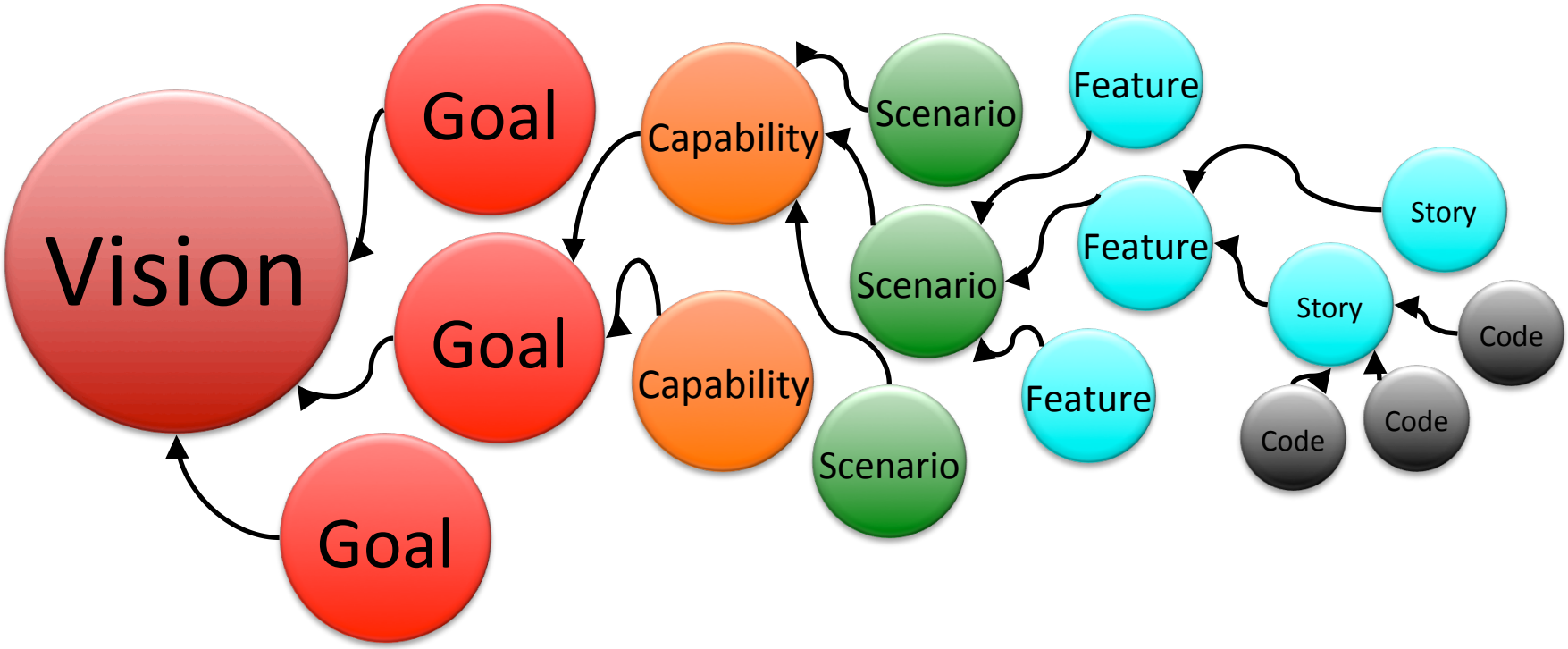
Fractal beauty



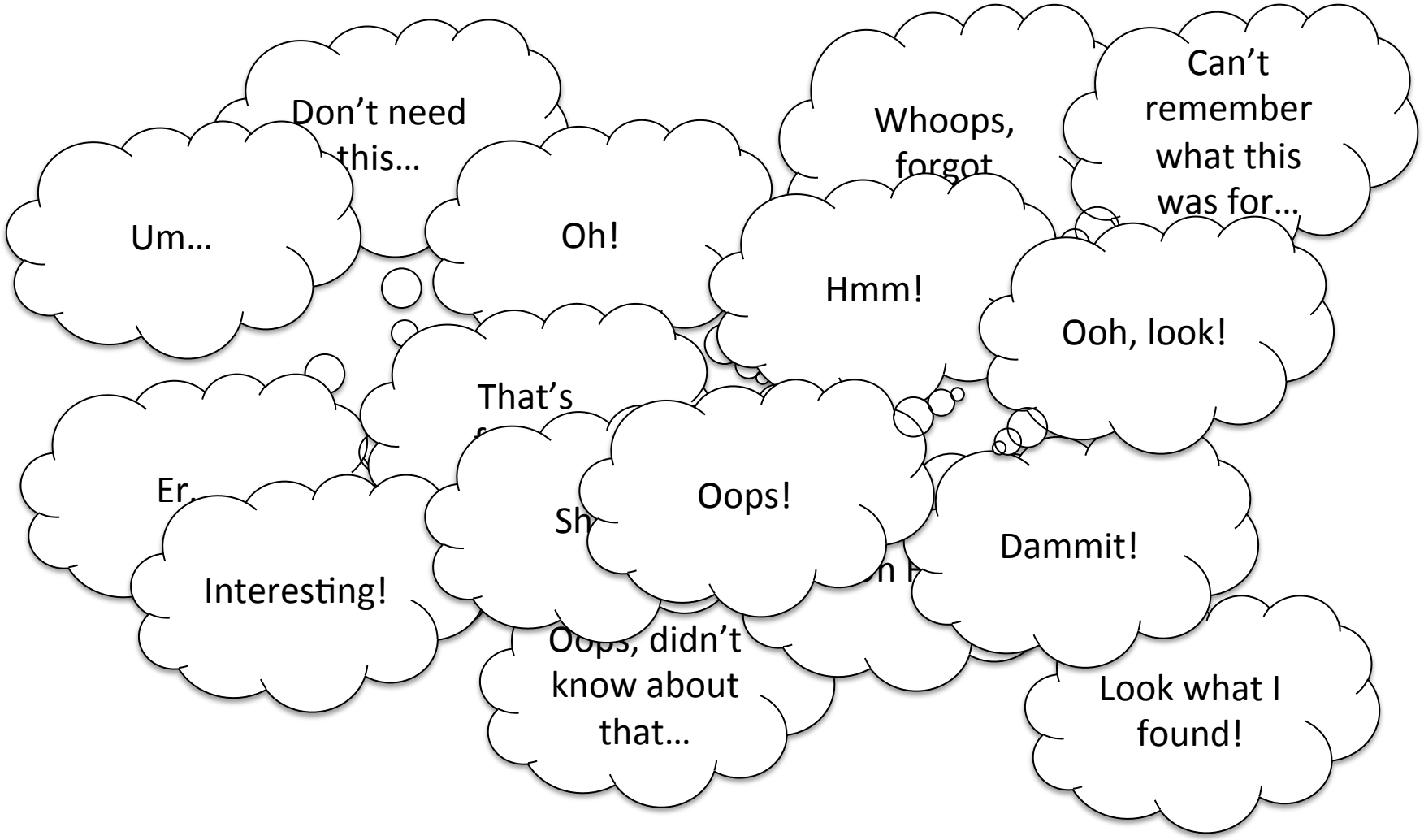

Real Proje
Don't need this…
Whoops, forgot
Can't remember what this was for…
Vision
Goal
Goal
Capability
Capability
Scenario
Scenario
Scenario
Feature
Feature
Feature
Story
Code
Code
Code
Oops, didn't know about that…
Look what I found!


Real Proje
Vision
Um
Don’t need this…
Oh!
That’s funny!
Er…
Interesting!
Sh
Oops!
Oops, didn’t know about that…
Hmm!
Feature
Feature
Whoops, forgot
Can’t remember what this was for…
Ooh, look!
Code
Code
Dammit!
Look what I found!

~~We are uncovering better ways of developing software by doing it~~



We're discovering how to discover stuff by doing it



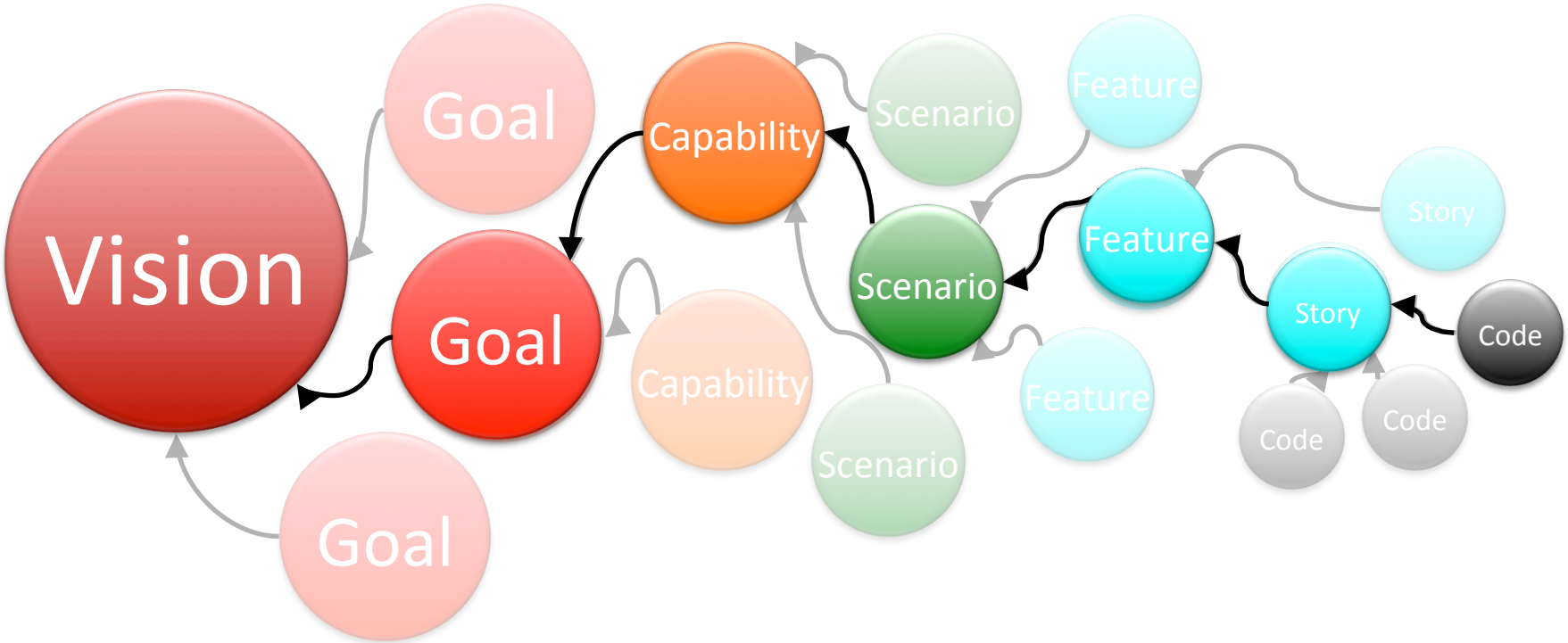
Deliberate Discovery

Assume ignorance

Assume second-order ignorance

Optimise for discovery

Risk (Newest Stuff) First



If your stakeholders
don’t trust you,
that’s
your biggest risk

A Safe-To-Fail Probe has…

A way of knowing it's succeeding

A way of knowing it's failing

A way of dampening it

A way of amplifying it

Coherence

Coherence

A realistic reason
for thinking the probe
might have a
positive impact

Can you give me an example?

Well-formed outcomes

Vision

Hearing

Smell

Taste

Sensation

Kinesthetic

Propriaception

In high uncertainty…

…scenarios provide

coherence,

not

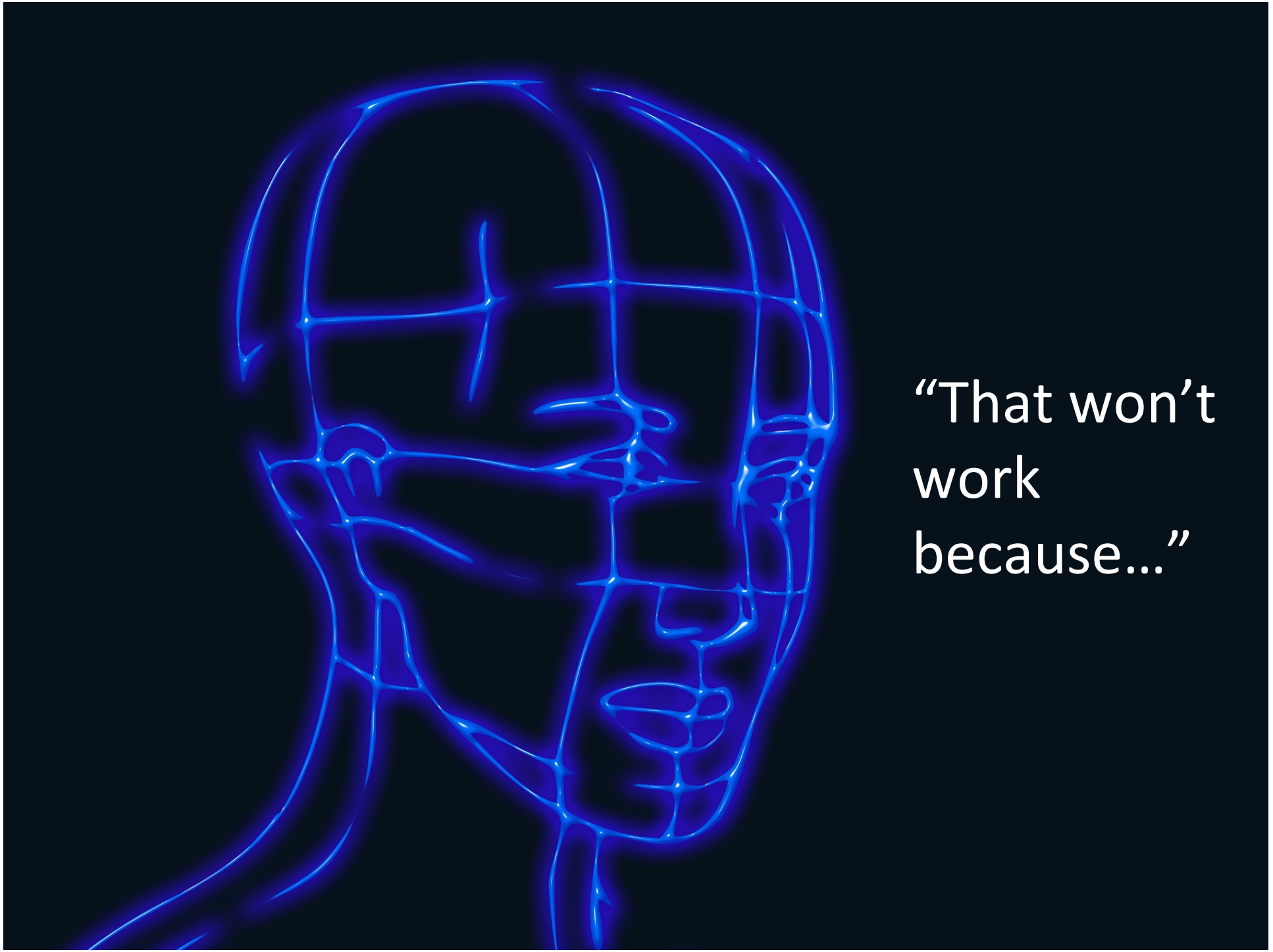
tests

Coherence

Given my boyfriend and I
have been going out for four years

When we move in with each other

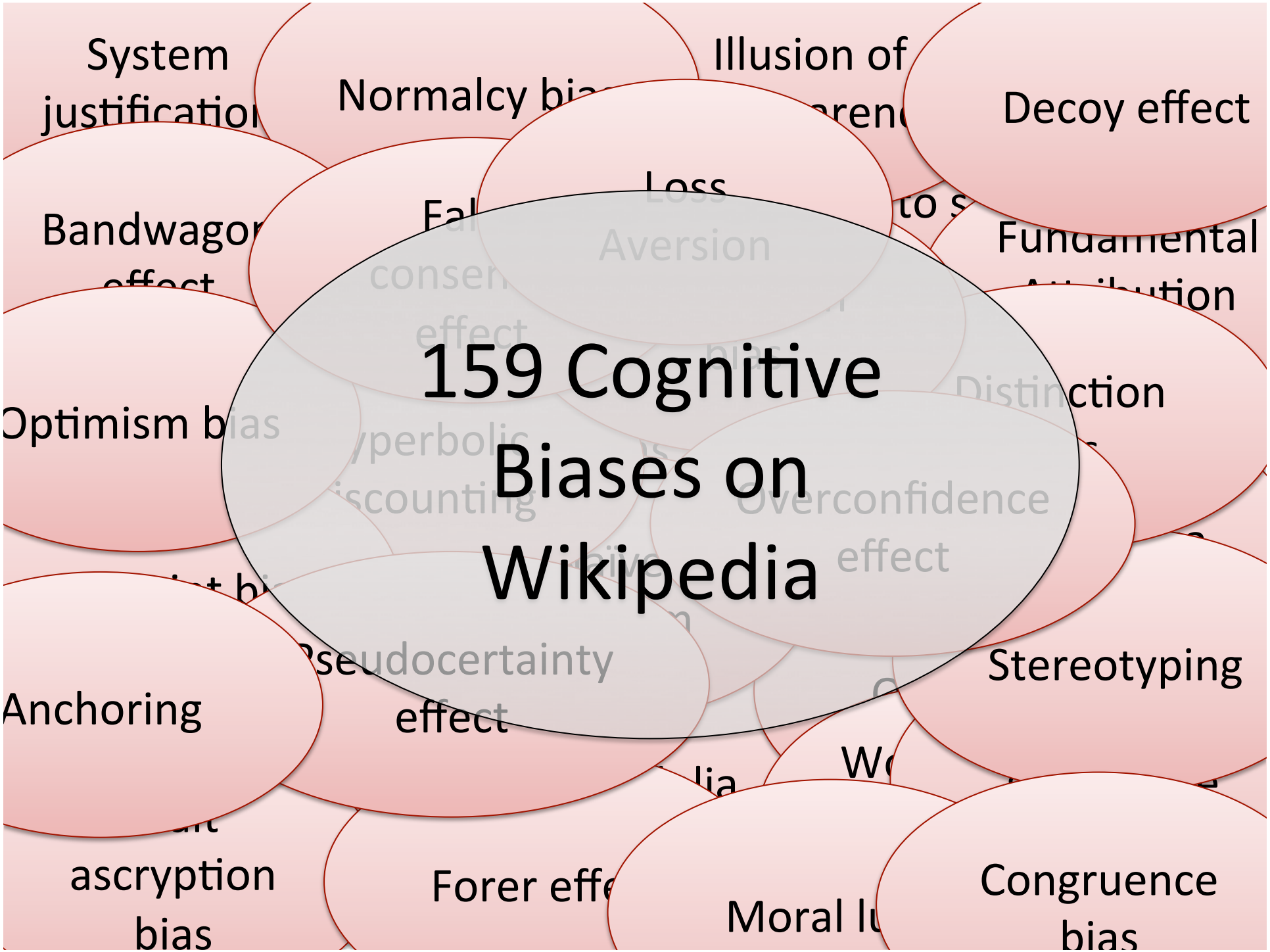
Then we should be even happier together.


“That won’t work because…”

Cydonia, Viking 1, 1976

Cydonia, Viking 1, 1976

Cydonia, Mars Reconnaisance Orbiter, 2006


159 Cognitive Biases on Wikipedia
System justificatio
Normalcy bia
Illusion of
Decoy effect
Bandwagon effect
Loss Aversion
Fundamental
Optimism bias
Distinction
Overconfidence effect
Anchoring
Pseudocertainty effect
Stereotyping
ascryption bias
Forer effe
Moral lu
Congruence bias

Failure Scenarios

Given my boyfriend and I
have been going out for four years
When we move in with each other

Then we *might* get on
each other's nerves.

A Safe-To-Fail Probe has…

A way of knowing it's succeeding

A way of knowing it's failing

A way of dampening it

A way of amplifying it

Coherence

~~A way of avoiding failure completely~~

The Probe

“How about we try it
for 1 year
as an experiment?”

Real Options

Options have value

Options expire

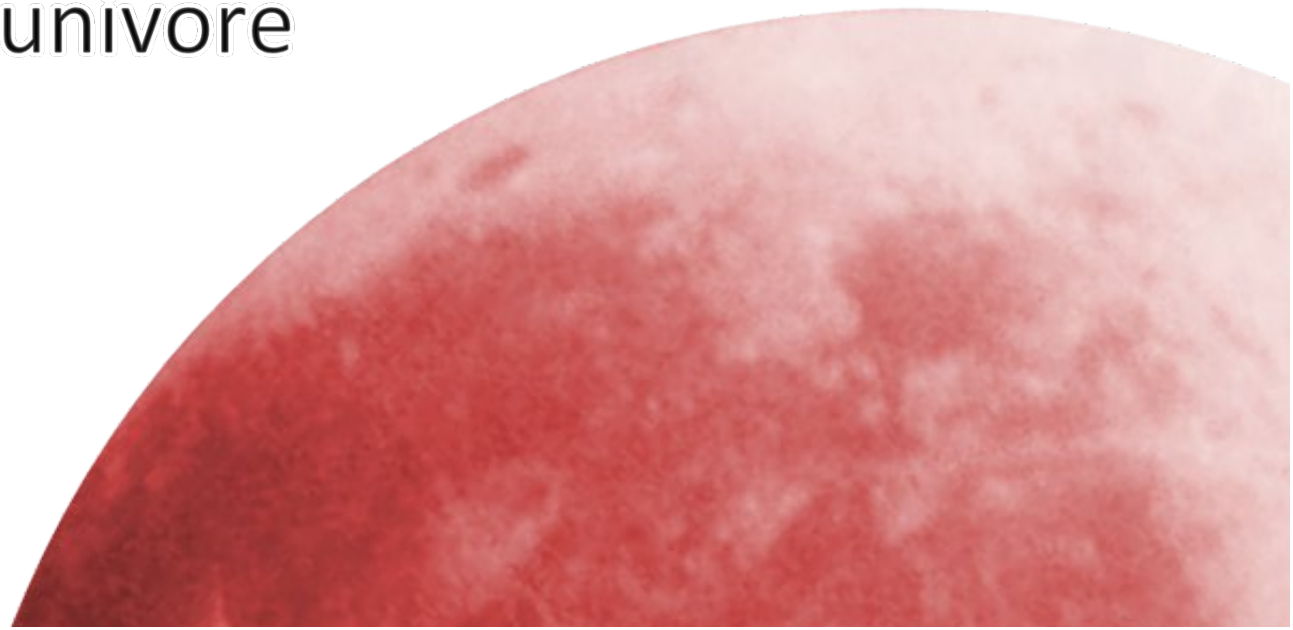
Never commit early
unless you know why

The Palchinsky Principles

Seek out new ideas and try new things

When trying something new,
do it on a scale where
failure is survivable

Seek out feedback
and learn from your mistakes
as you go along

Making it Safe to Fail
Ritual Dissent
Ask a Tester!
@lunivore

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