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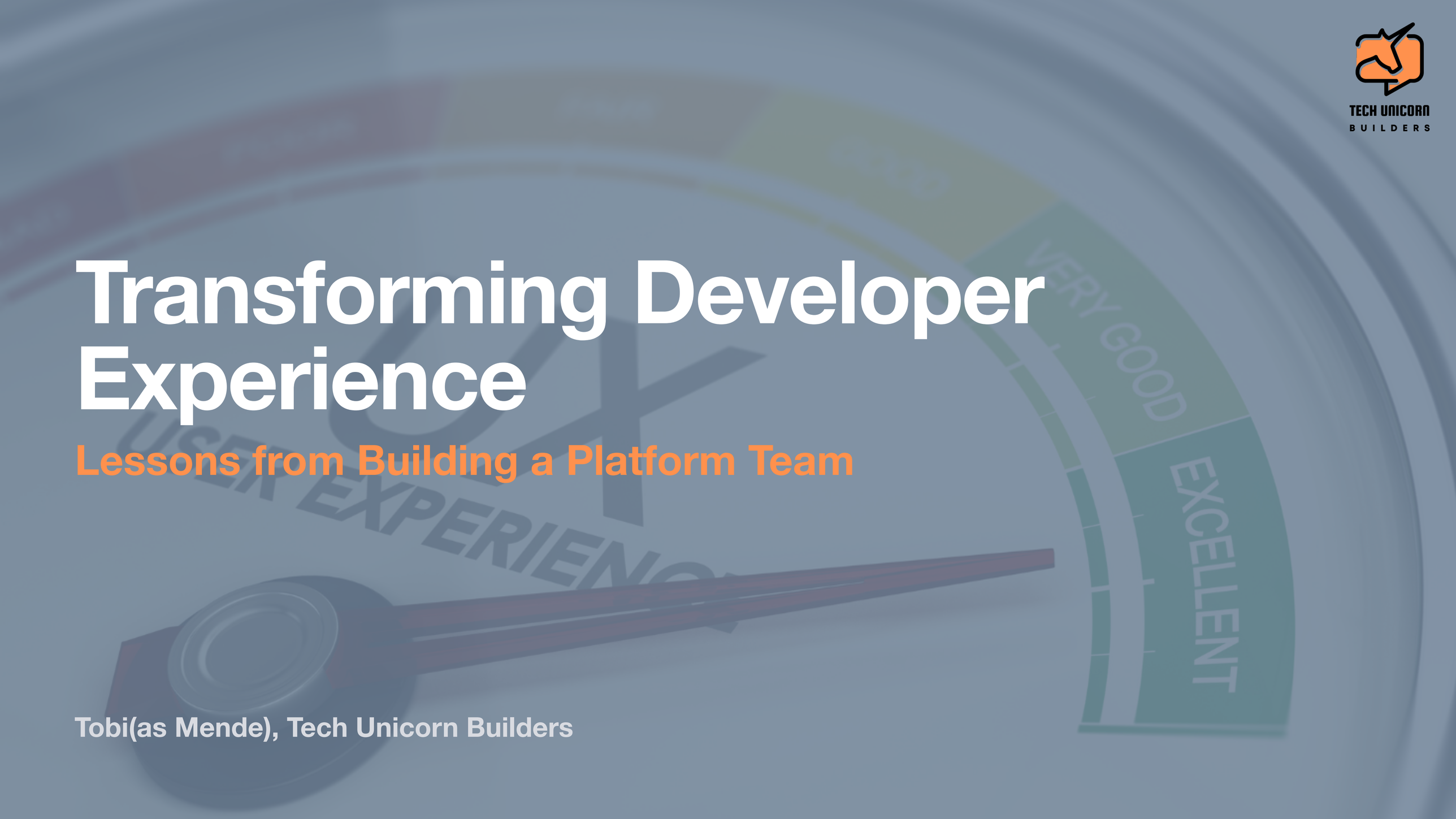
Transforming Developer Experience

Lessons from Building a Platform Team



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DevEx ✨

What it is and why it matters.

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“Happy developers are 12% more productive.”

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… but this isn’t about happiness alone.

DevEx

Great Developer Experience …

- … increases happiness
- … reduces burnout
- … increases retention
- … leads to higher developer productivity
- … increases profit

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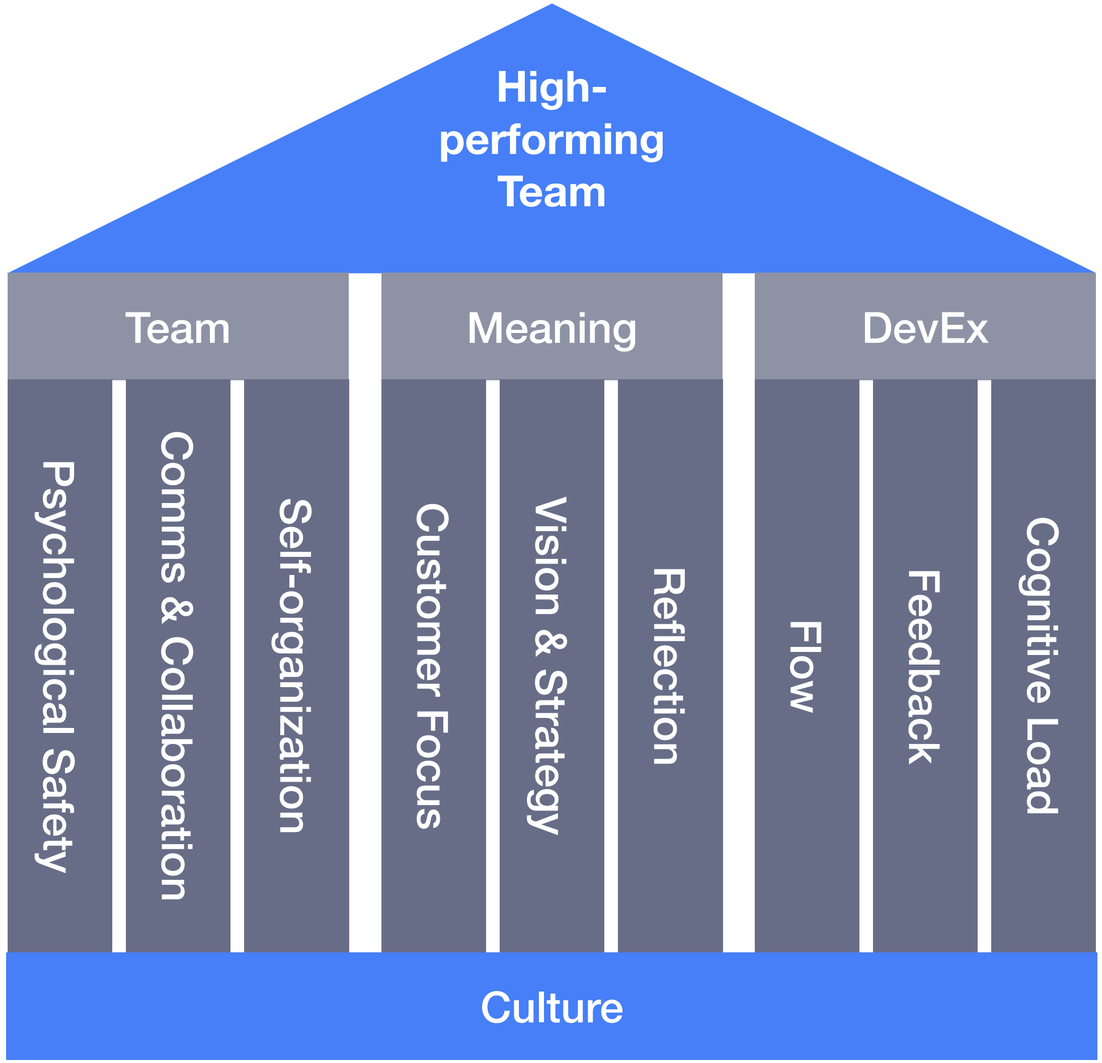
High-performing Teams

Need DevEx



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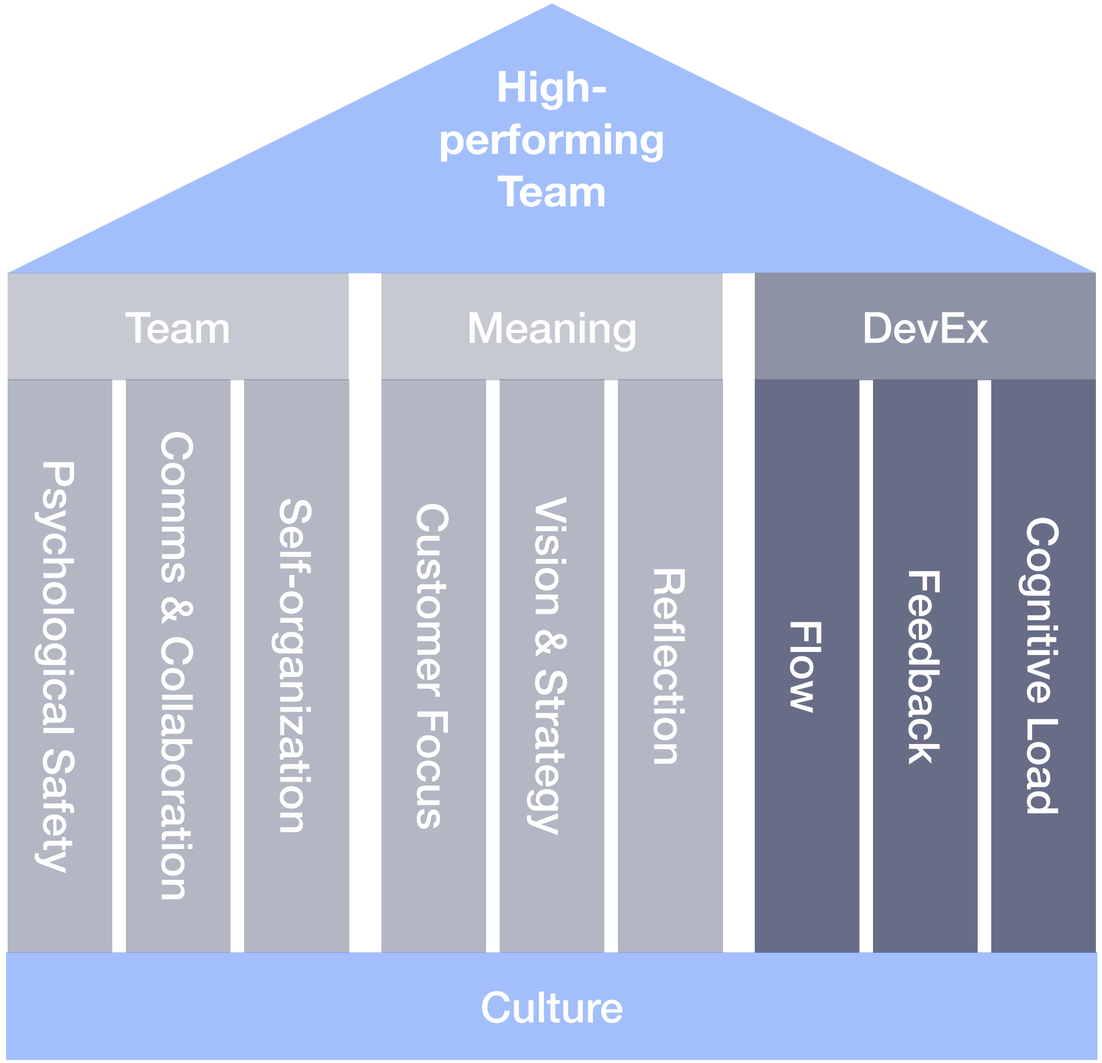
High-performing Teams

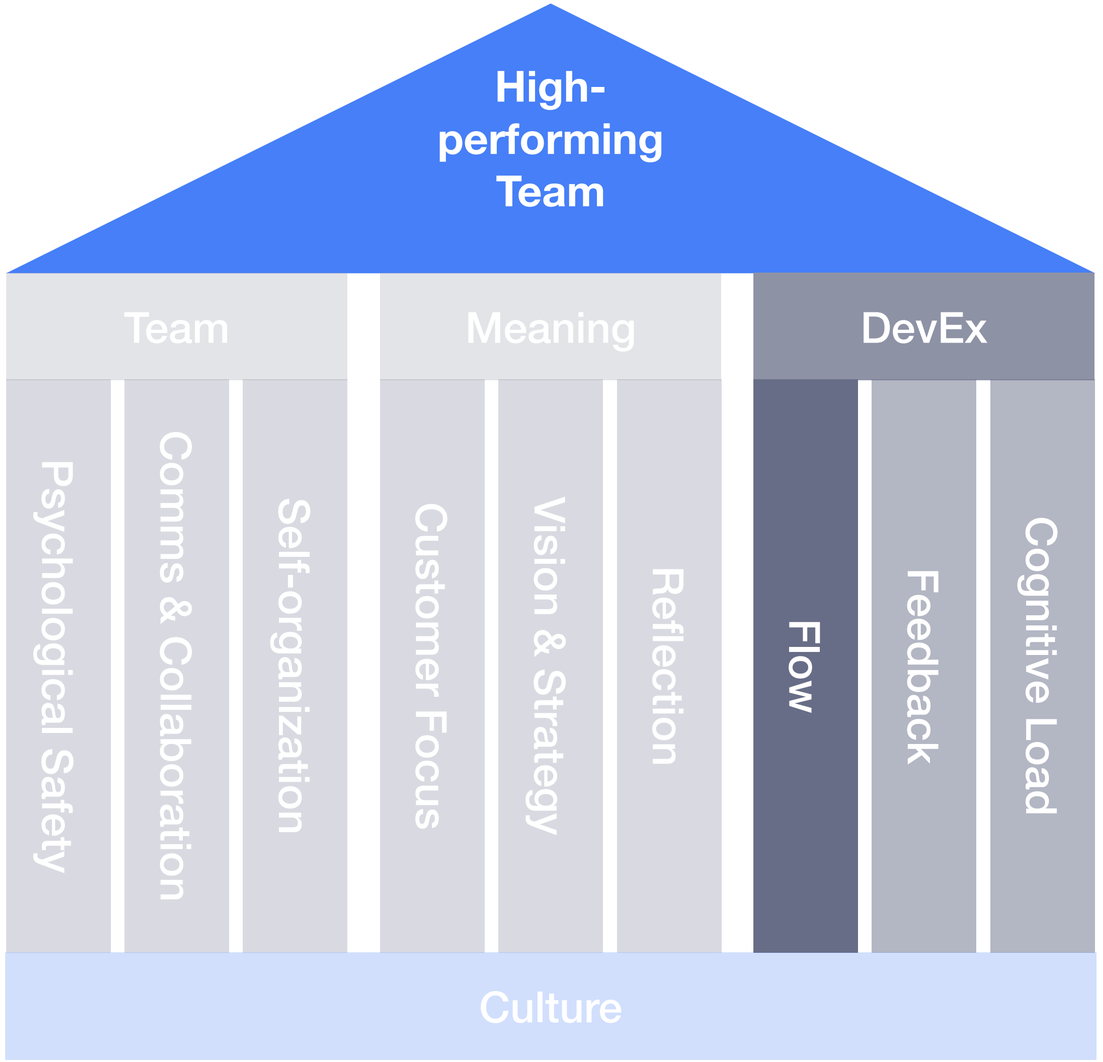
Need DevEx



DevEx

Dimension: Flow

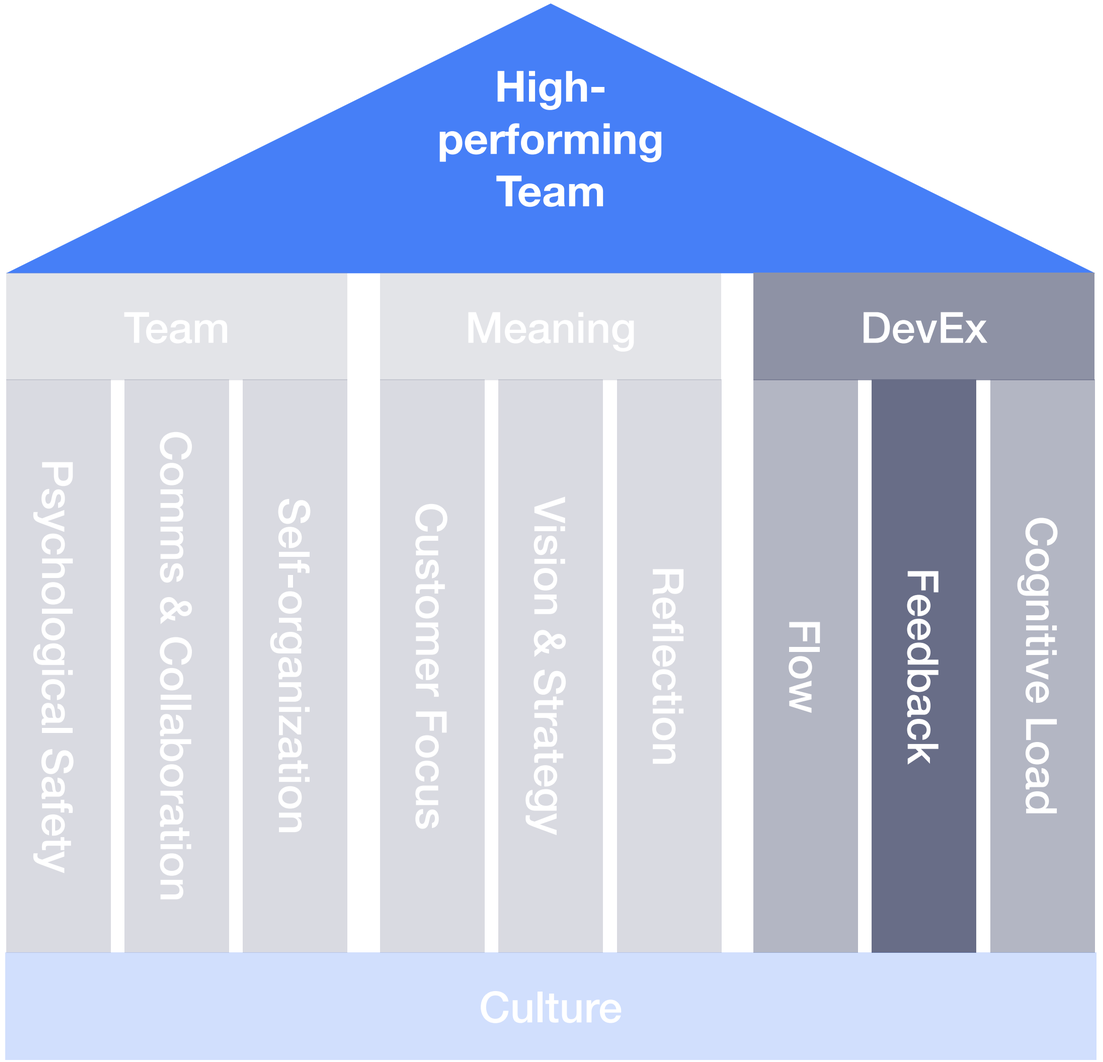
Flow =
Focused
Motivation



DevEx

Dimension: Feedback

Shift
Feedback
Left

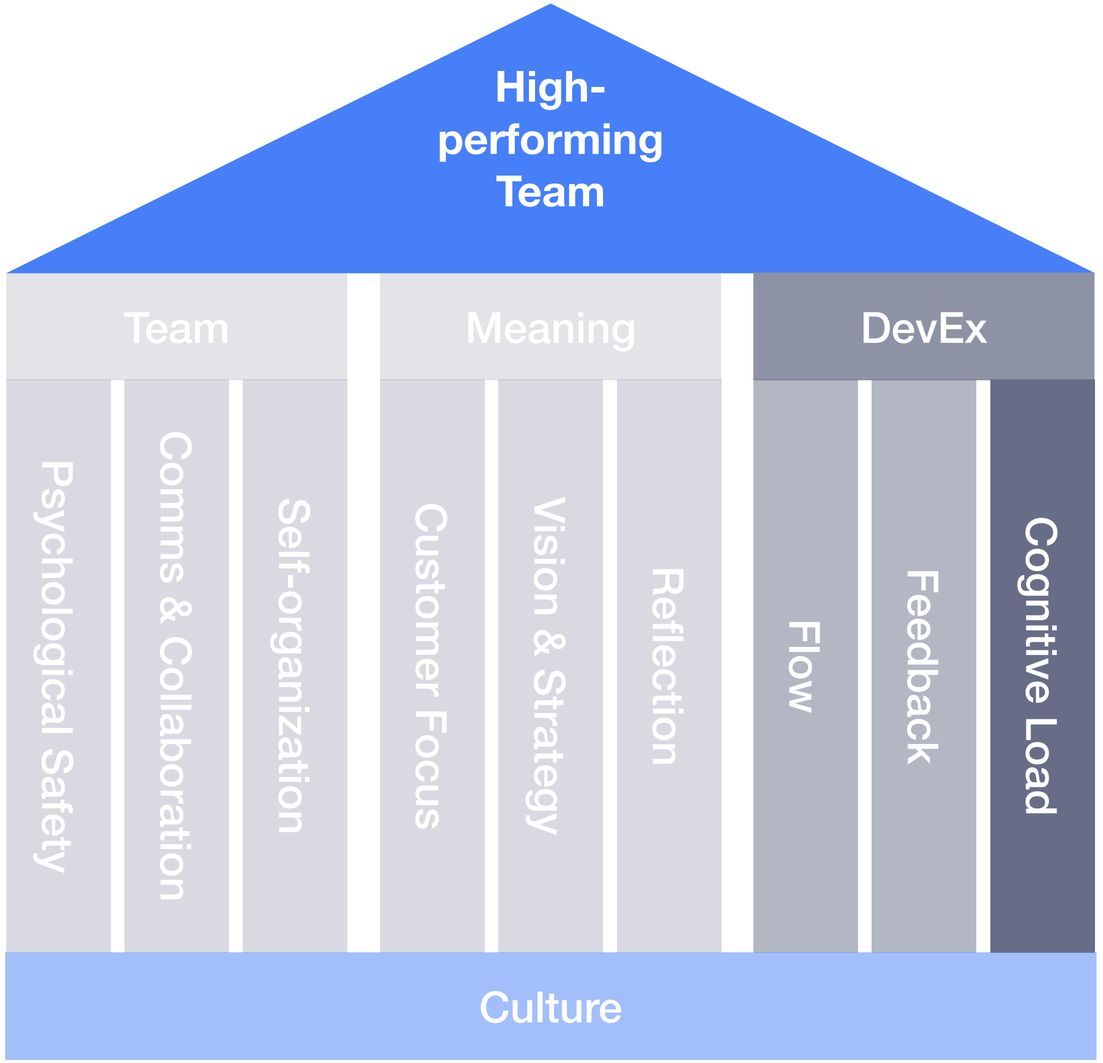


DevEx

Dimension: Cognitive Load

“cognitive load refers to the amount of working memory resources used”

Wikipedia



Our Context 🌎

Why a dedicated DevEx team made sense for us.

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Our Context

Beginning of 2021

- Remote-first B2B SaaS startup
- **One monolithic system**.
  - One backend,
  - one frontend, and
  - some smaller services around.
- One main repository.
- **Six** engineering teams.

- Tech Stack
  - Kotlin + Spring Boot
  - TypeScript + Node
  - Vue + TypeScript
  - GitLab
  - AWS (mainly EKS + S3)
  - Terraform + Ansible

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Challenges

Beginning of 2021

- Issues in tooling and structure affected all teams.
- Nobody owned these aspects.
- No team had real competency here.
- Redundant but differing solutions.

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DevEx issues were not prioritized by product teams.

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DevEx topics were a distraction.

What helped us

Beginning of 2021

- Having a homogeneous tech stack.
- Tech leadership community identifying the need for a DevEx team.
- VPs (Eng & Product) supported the idea.

The Team 🤩

Building the right team

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The Mission:
Outstanding DevEx for our product teams.

Qualities

we wanted in every team member

- Detectives
- Generalists
- Connectors

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Team Setup

How we wanted the team to look

- 6-7 team members
- Criteria:
  - Cross-functional (frontend, backend, QA, infrastructure)
  - Diverse
  - Internal hires (from different teams)
  - Trusted team members

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The Formation Phase 🌱

Approach and Initial Challenges

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Never put an “and” in your team name.
– *Mistake #1: Platform and DevEx*

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We deleted the entire backlog. Didn’t miss it.

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Start broad.
Then go deep.

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“From 2 painful weekly deploys → 20/day, fully automated.”

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No Authority Needed!

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Lost our infra expert.
Learned K8s together.

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Modes and Mindsets 💪

How we worked.

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“Not our job”
wasn’t in our vocabulary.

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DevEx was our product.
Developers were our customers.

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Leadership without authority = influence through trust.

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We didn’t force teams to use our tools. We made it easier to choose them.

We didn’t own the pipelines.
Teams did.
We made them easier to own.

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Platform mindset + enabling behavior

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Balancing Focus and Collaboration ⚖️

The pros and cons of being close to your customers.

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Being close to developers = high insight, high distraction.

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One inbox channel.
One support person.
Weekly rotation.

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Private DMs create bottlenecks.
Public channels create transparency.

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Reward the behavior you want to see.

Lessons and Mistakes 💡

Mistakes we made, so you don’t have to …

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The blurry line between platform and DevEx.

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Focus on DevEx, and DevEx only.

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DevEx Teams need DevEx, too!

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Be mindful about complexity and cognitive load of the DevEx team.

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Starting the DevEx Team too late.

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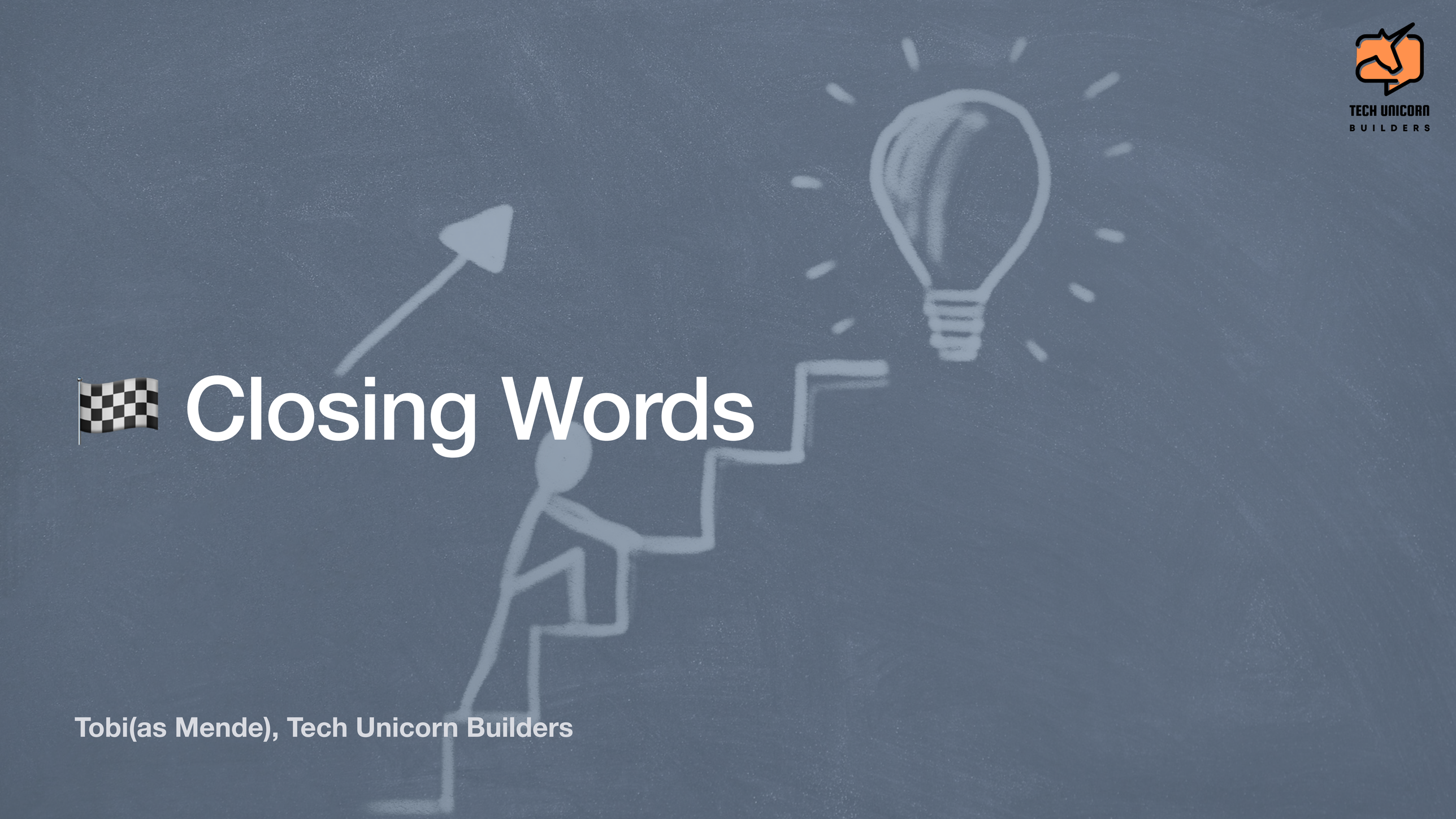
Start when 2 – 3 teams have overlapping DevEx concerns.



🏁 Closing Words

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Start small.

Stay curious.

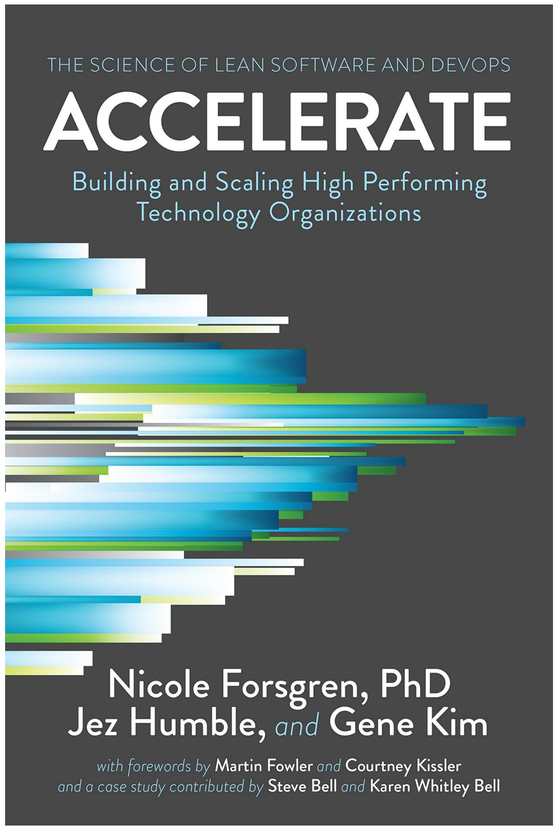
Ship early.

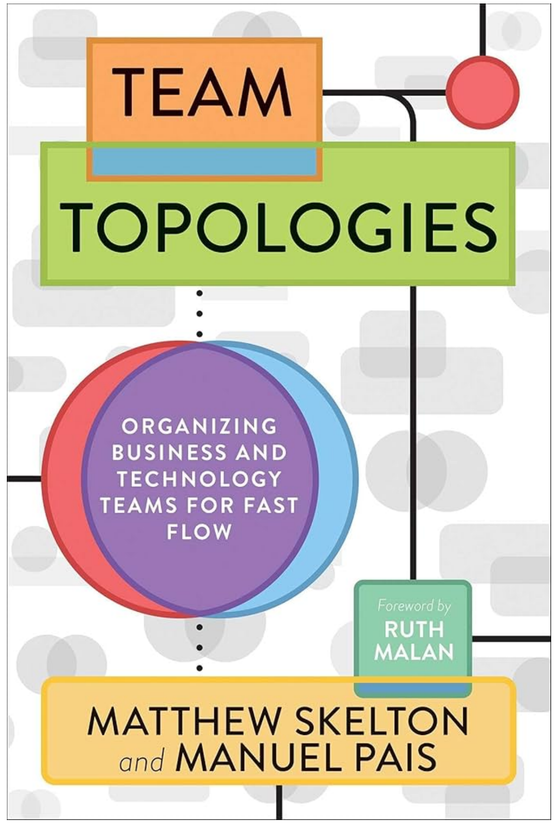
Build for devs, not their users.

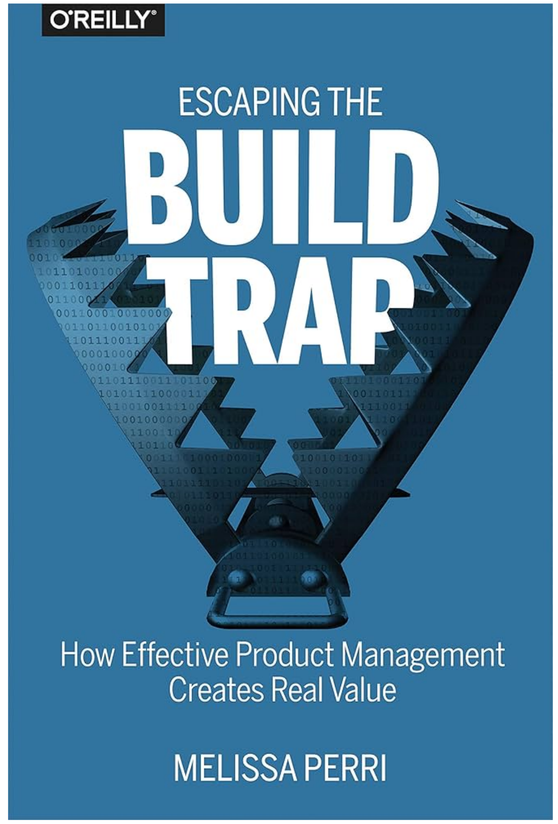
Think product.

Books

Of course we stand on the shoulders of giants ;-)







About me

Tobi(as Mende)

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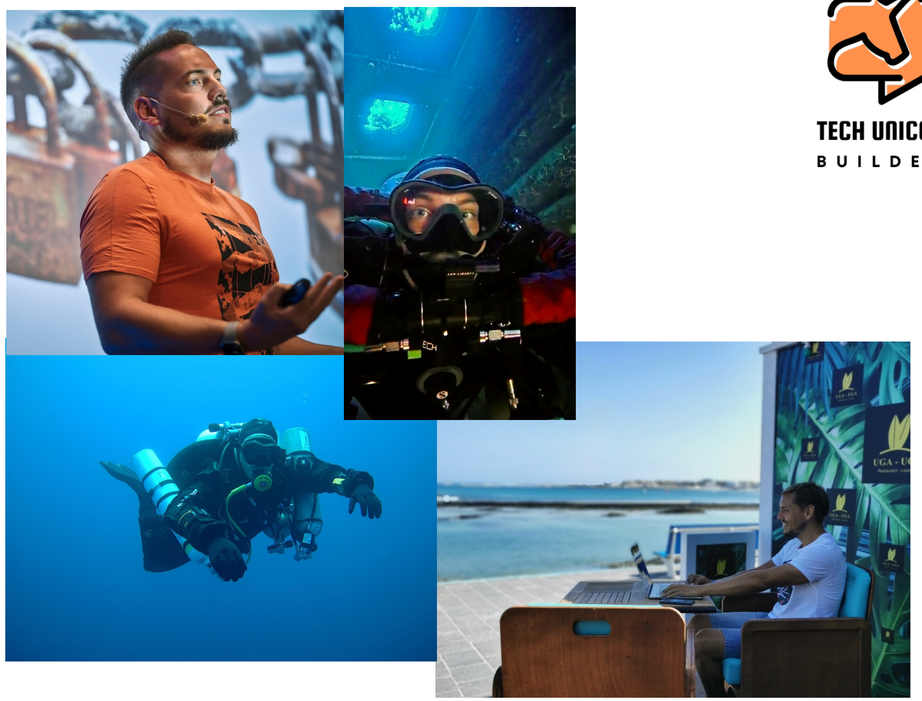

- Helping software companies build better software products faster
- Doing this through:
  - Leadership Consulting,
  - Technical Agile Coaching,
  - Interim Engineering Leadership,
  - Workshops, Courses, Mentoring

Please Give Feedback,
Connect, Get Slides

How would ideal DevEx look like in your organization?

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Please Give Feedback,
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