

Transforming Developer Experience

Lessons from Building a Platform Team

Tobi(as Mende), Tech Unicorn Builders

“Great software is built by happy developers.”

– Said no one who’s ever used JIRA.

DevEx ✨

What it is and why it matters.

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“Happy developers are 12%
more productive.”

... but this isn't about happiness
alone.

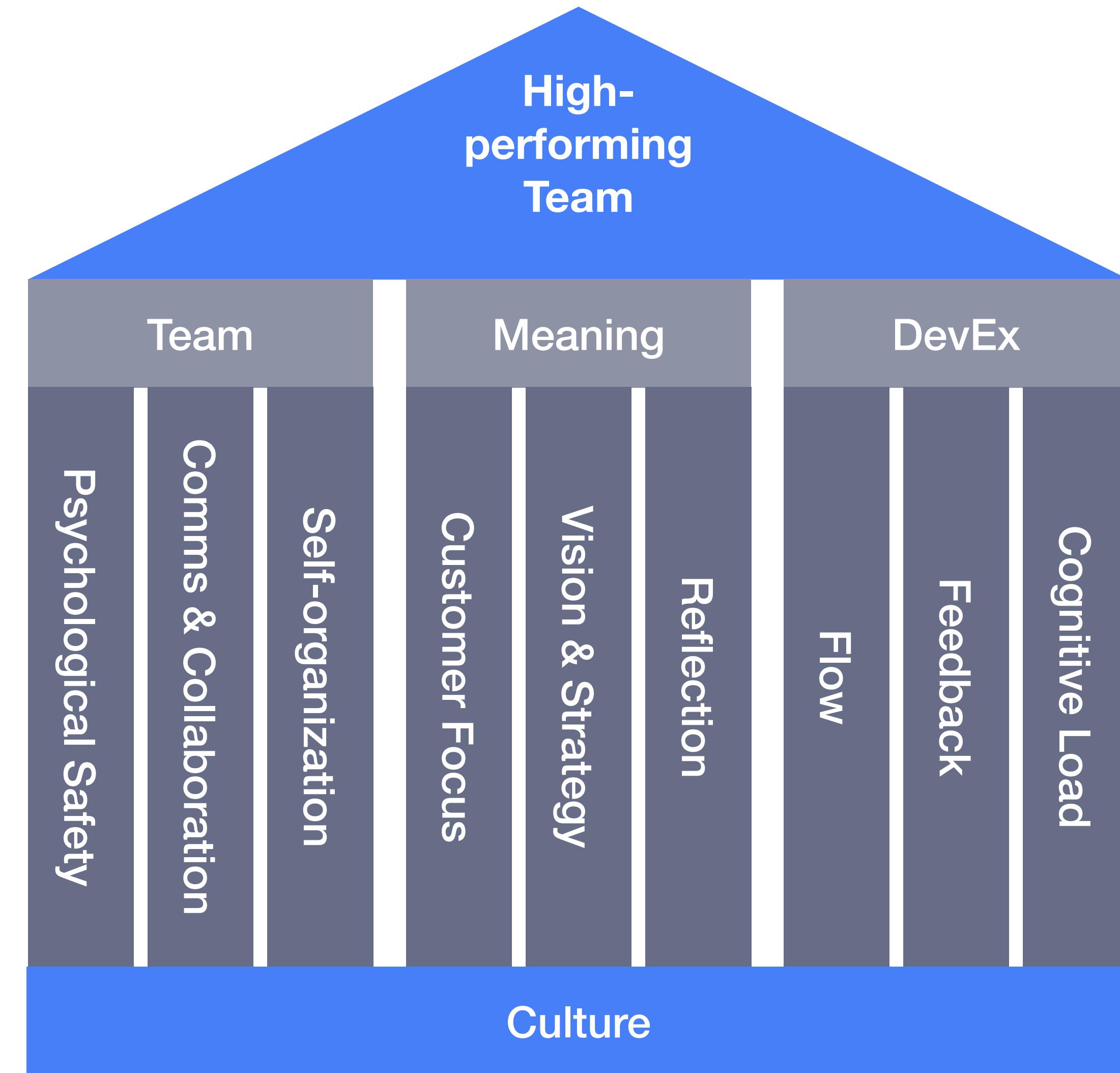
DevEx

Great Developer Experience ...

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

High-performing Teams

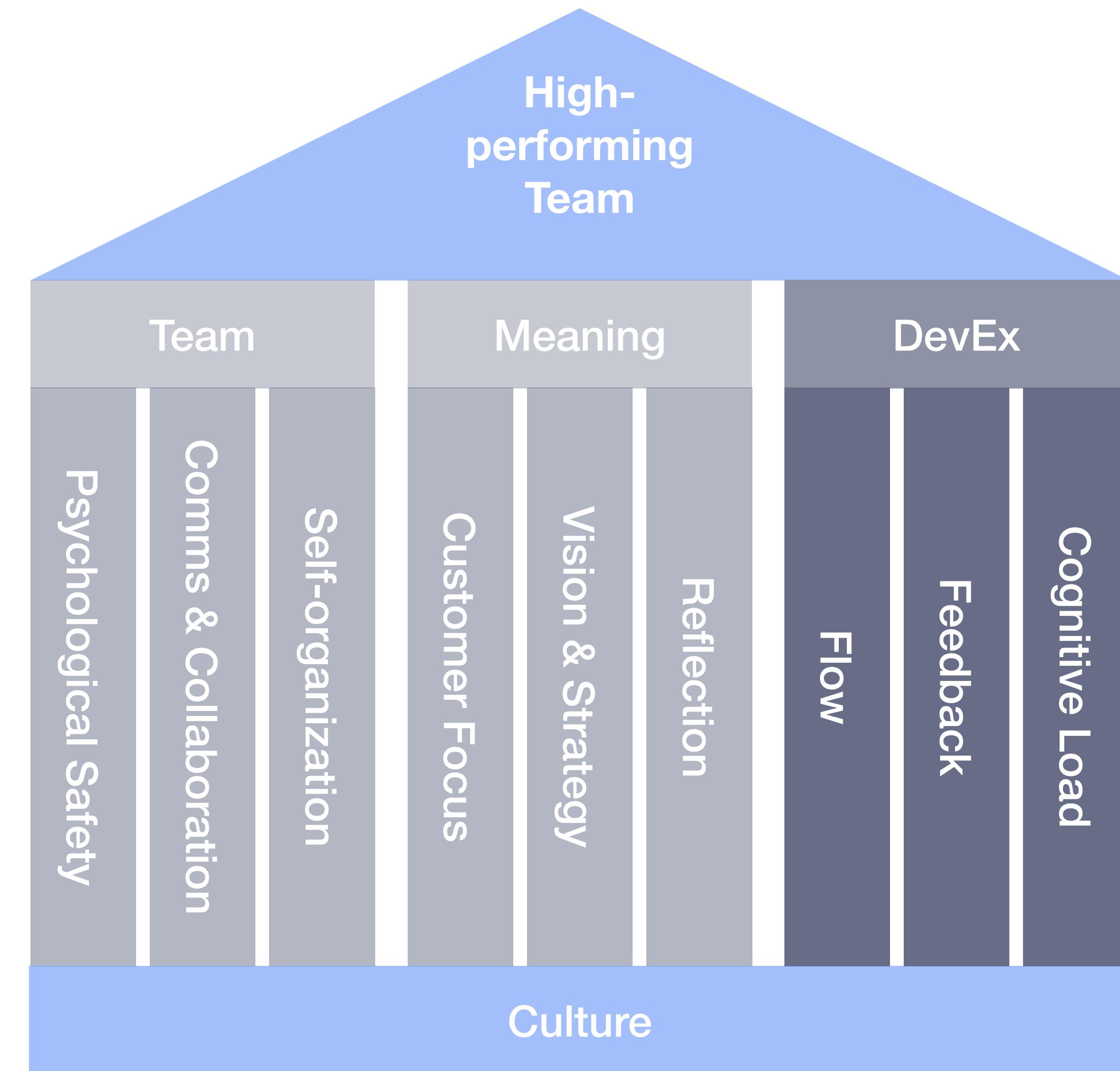
Need DevEx





High-performing Teams

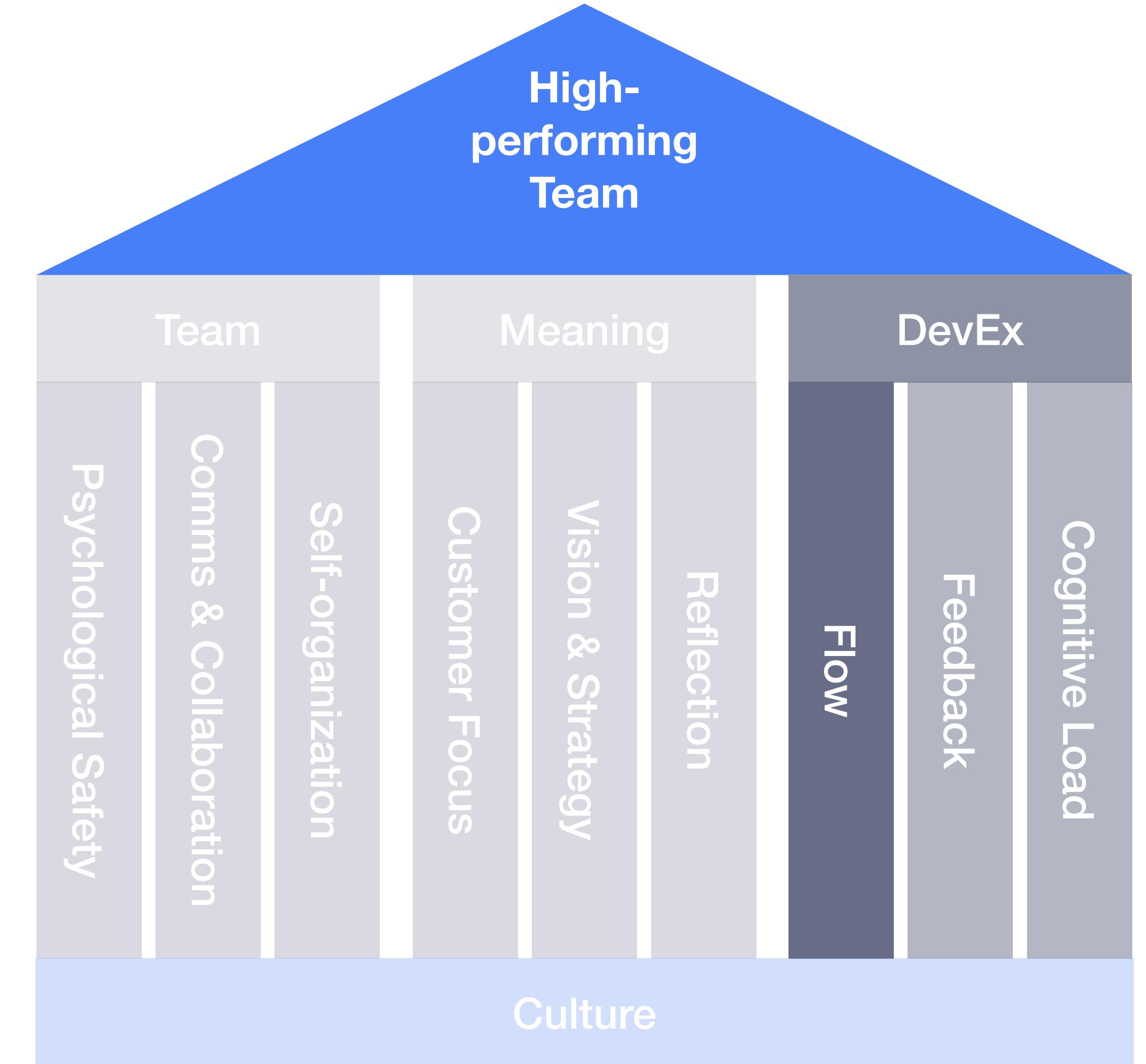
Need DevEx



DevEx

Dimension: Flow

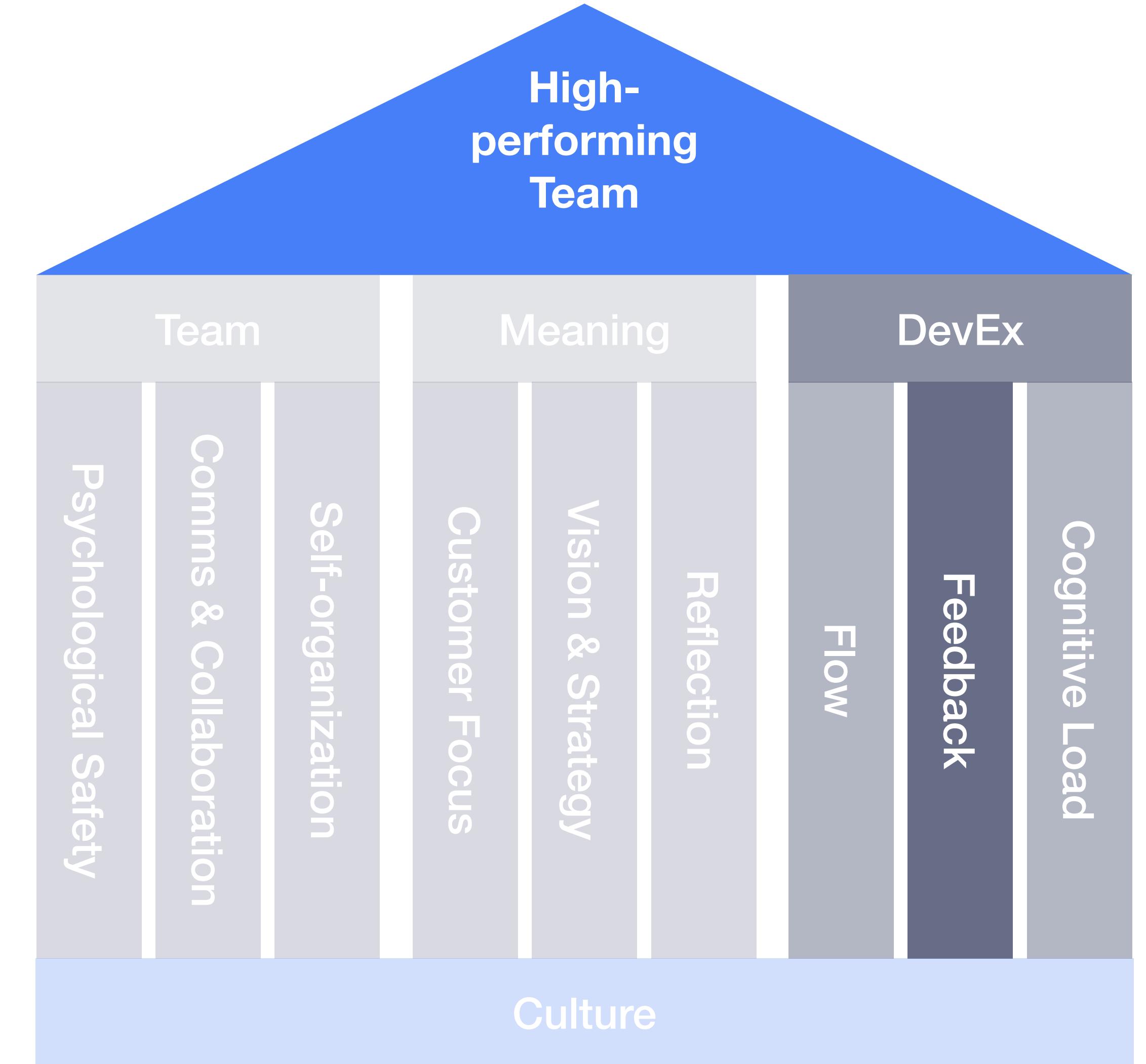
Flow =
Focused
Motivation



DevEx

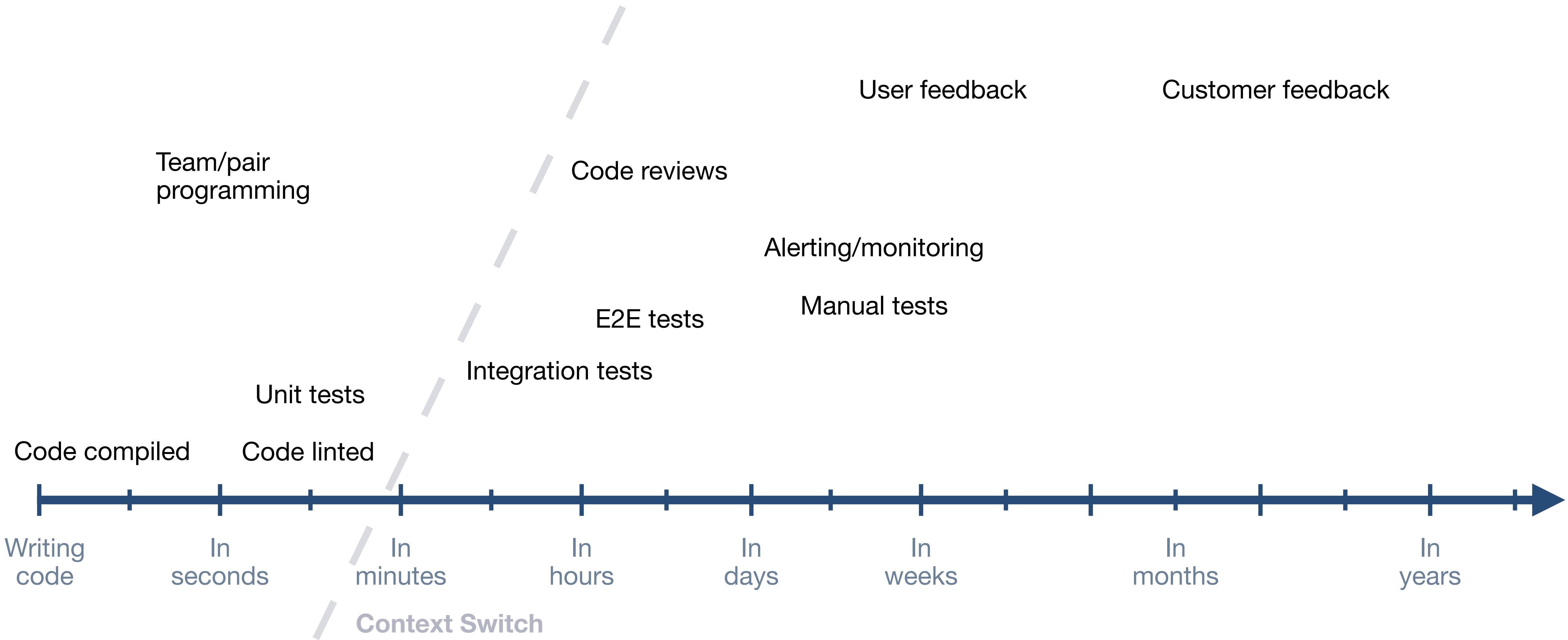
Dimension: Feedback

Shift
Feedback
Left



DevEx

Shorten feedback loops

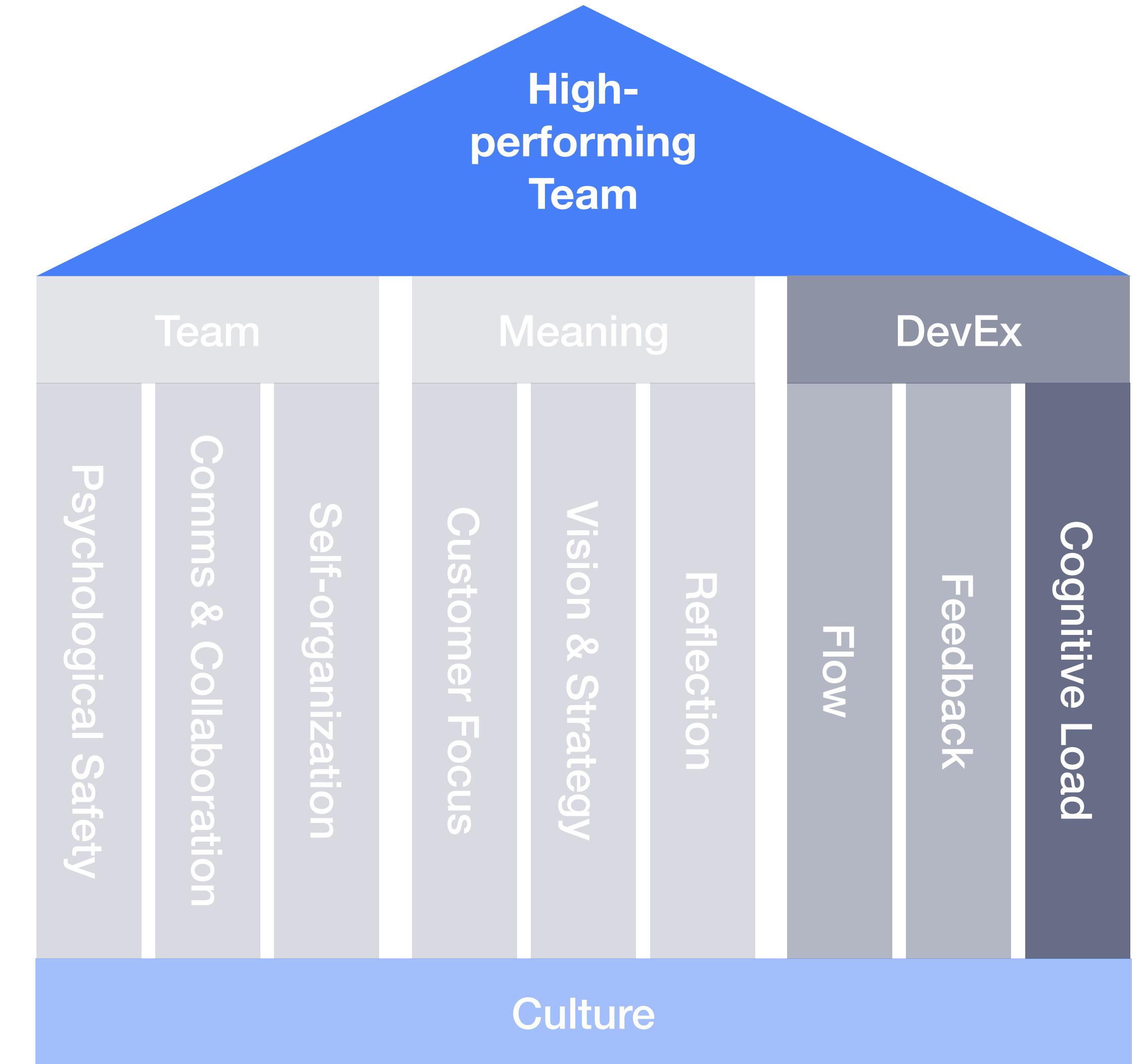


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Dimension: Cognitive Load

“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

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.



DevEx issues were not prioritized by product teams.



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

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

The Formation Phase

Approach and Initial Challenges

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

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

Start broad.
Then go deep.

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

No Authority Needed!

Lost our infra expert.
Learned K8s together.

Modes and Mindsets 💪

How we worked.

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

**DevEx was our product.
Developers were our customers.**

Leadership without authority
= influence through trust.

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.

Platform mindset + enabling behavior

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.

One inbox channel.
One support person.
Weekly rotation.

Private DMs create bottlenecks.
Public channels create transparency.

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.



Focus on DevEx, and DevEx only.



DevEx Teams need DevEx, too!



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



Starting the DevEx Team too late.



Start when 2 – 3 teams have overlapping
DevEx concerns.



Wanting a dedicated infrastructure
engineer.



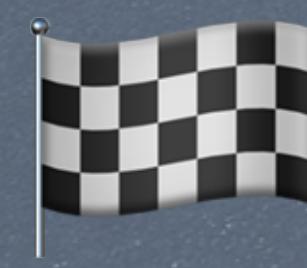
Invest in training and education.



Having (not so) secret agendas.



Be (even more) explicit about the
“not the police” mindset.



Closing Words

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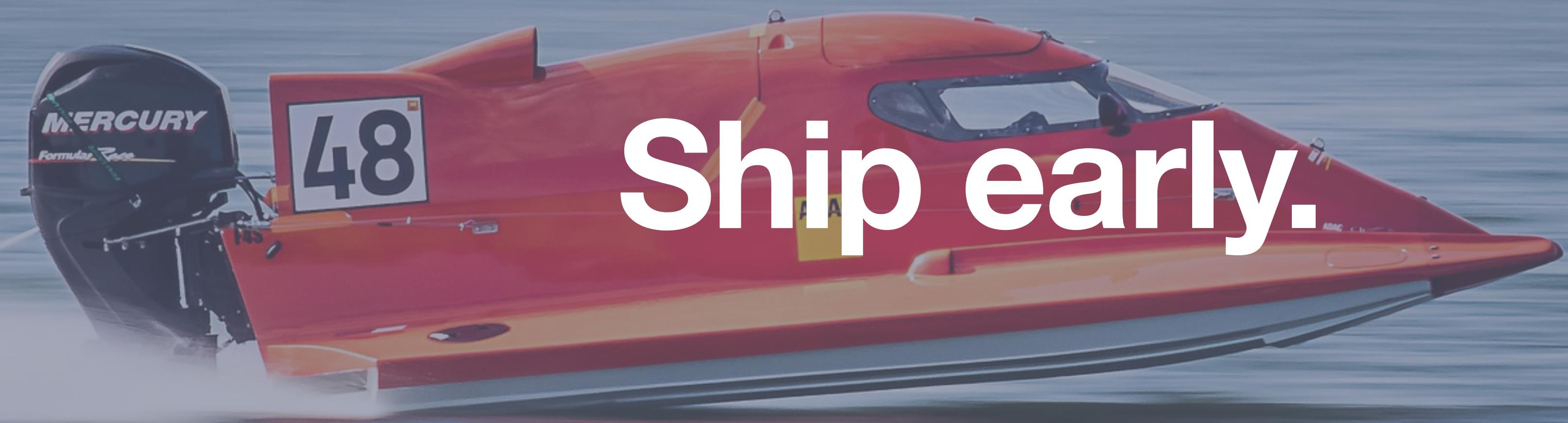
Start small.





Stay curious.

Communicate.



Ship early.

A dark silhouette of two hands forming a heart shape against a blurred background of mountains at sunset.

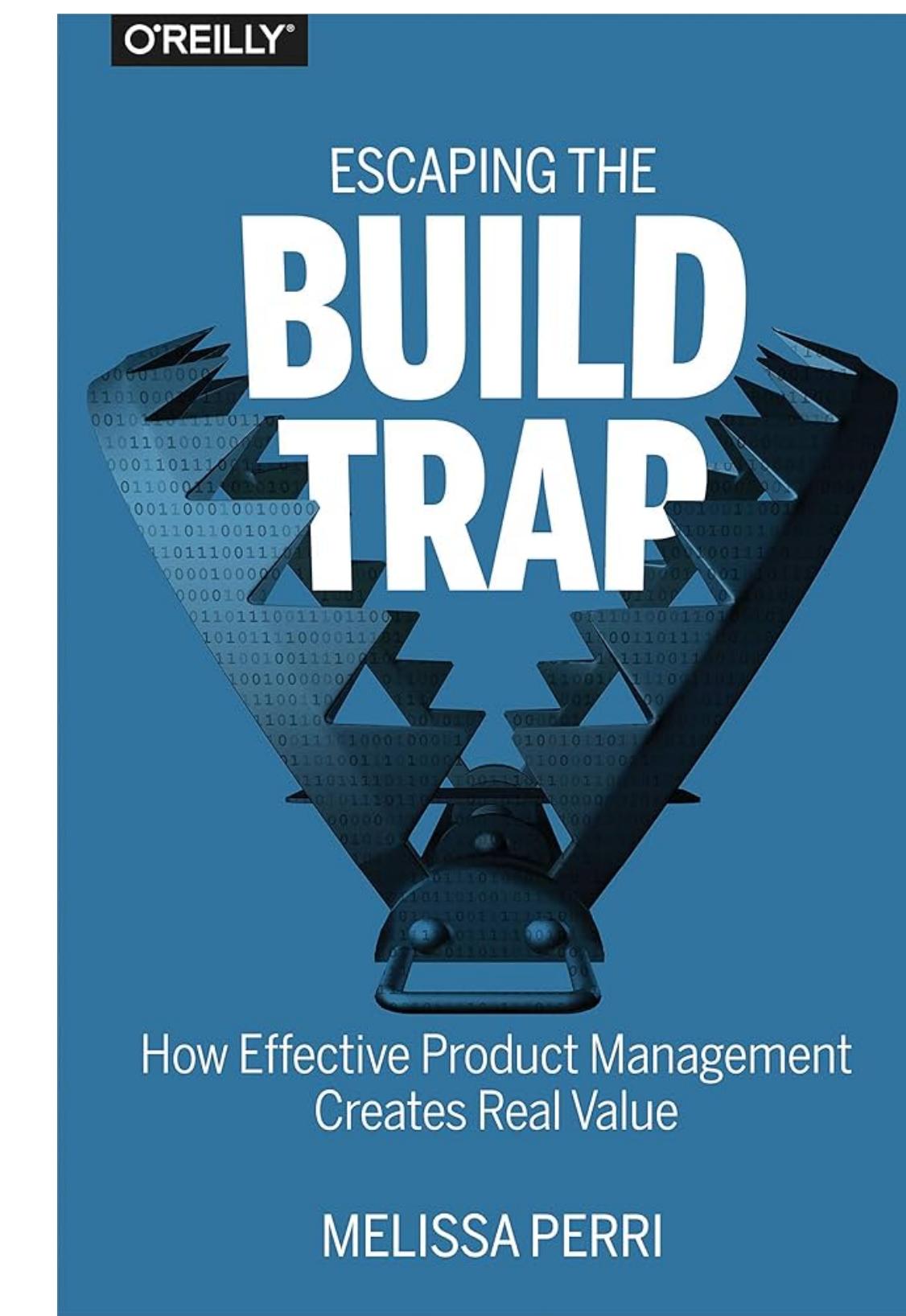
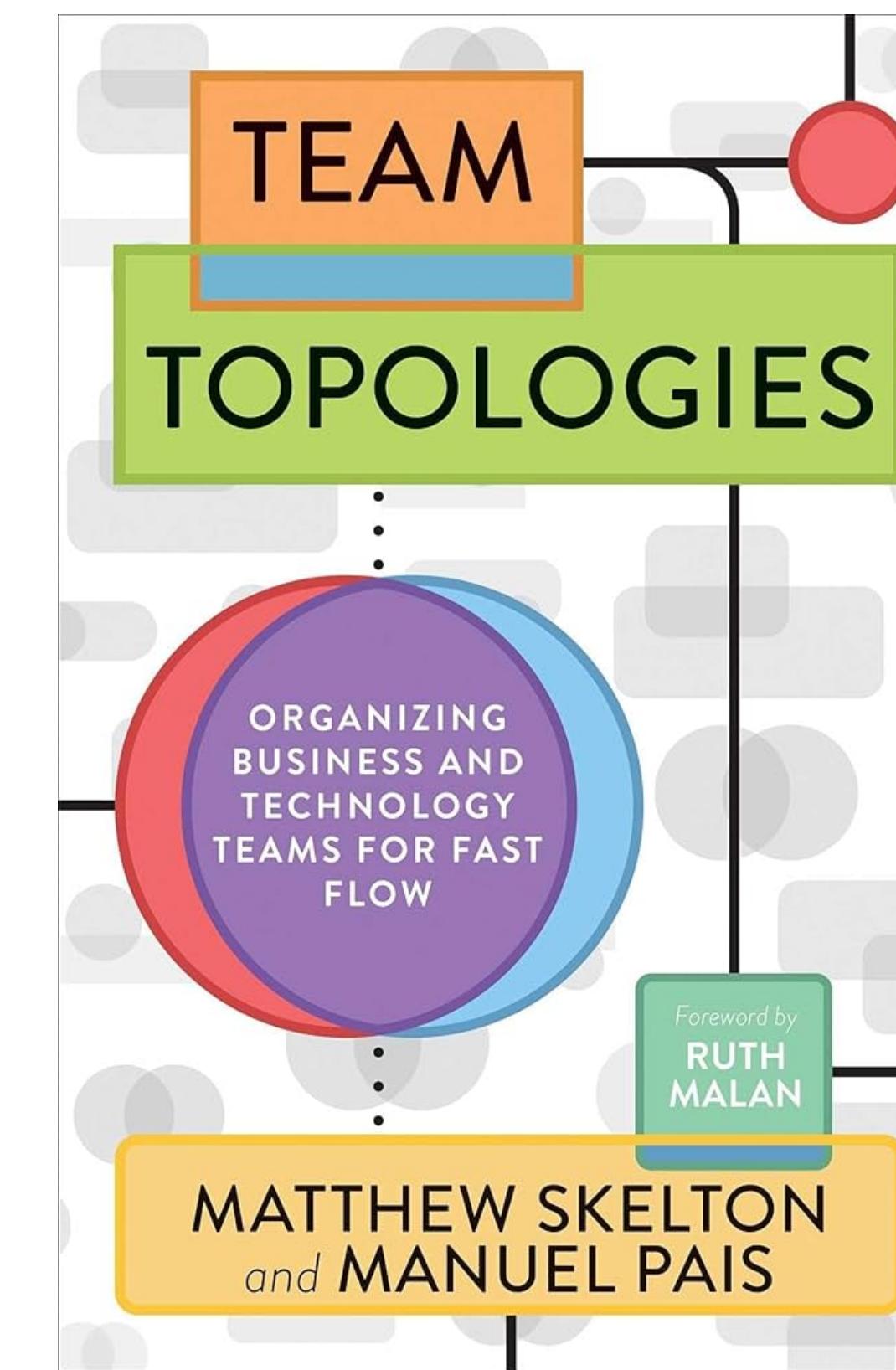
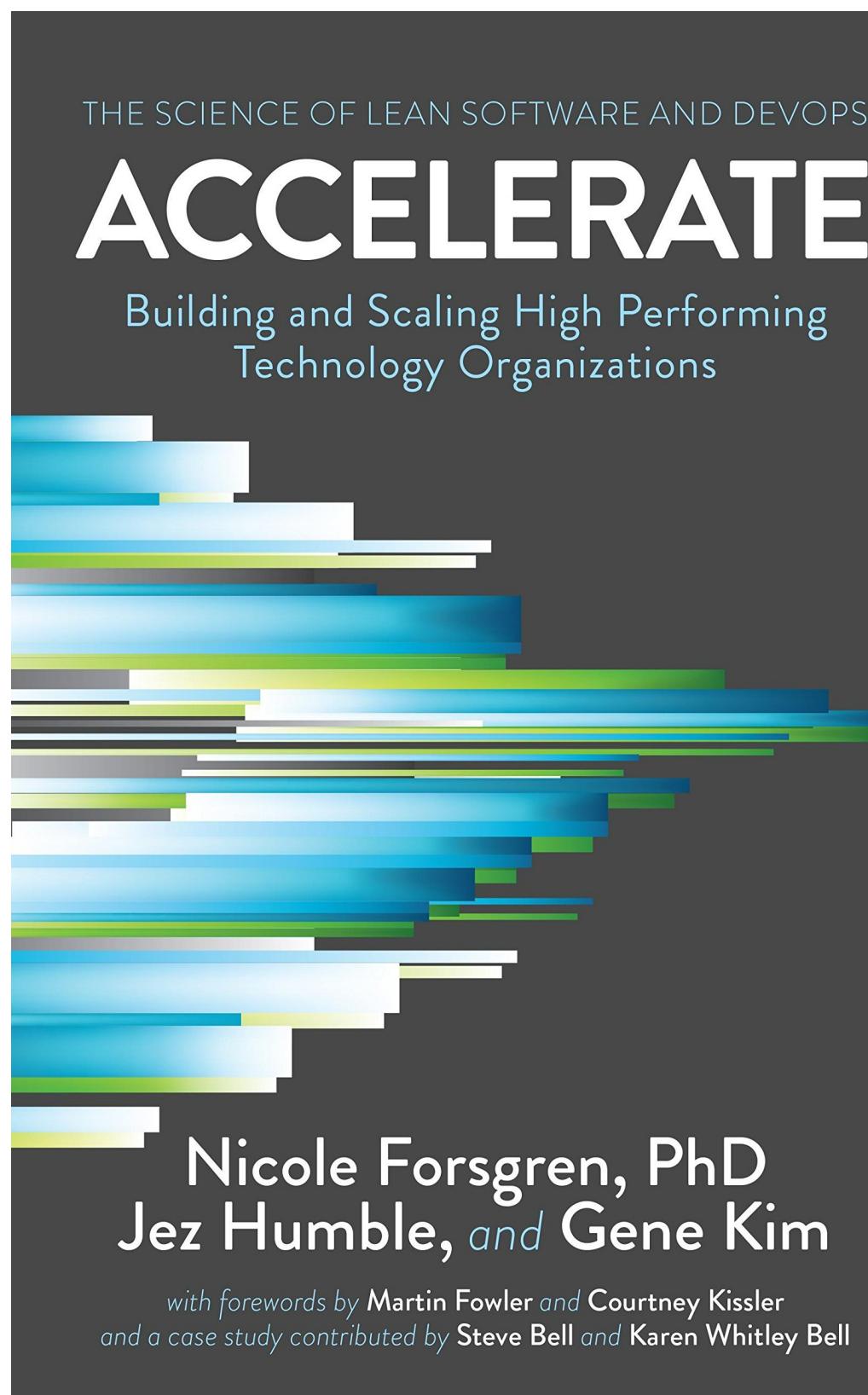
Build for devs, not their users.

A person wearing a blue and white striped long-sleeved shirt and dark jeans is shown from the waist up. They are holding a small brown cardboard box with both hands and using a black pen to write on its top flap. In the background, there are several other cardboard boxes stacked on a surface. On the left side of the frame, there is a white tray containing various office supplies: a pair of yellow-handled scissors, a roll of clear tape, a roll of yellow packing tape, a black pen holder with several pens, and a small pink notepad. The overall scene suggests a workspace or a shipping area.

Think product.

Books

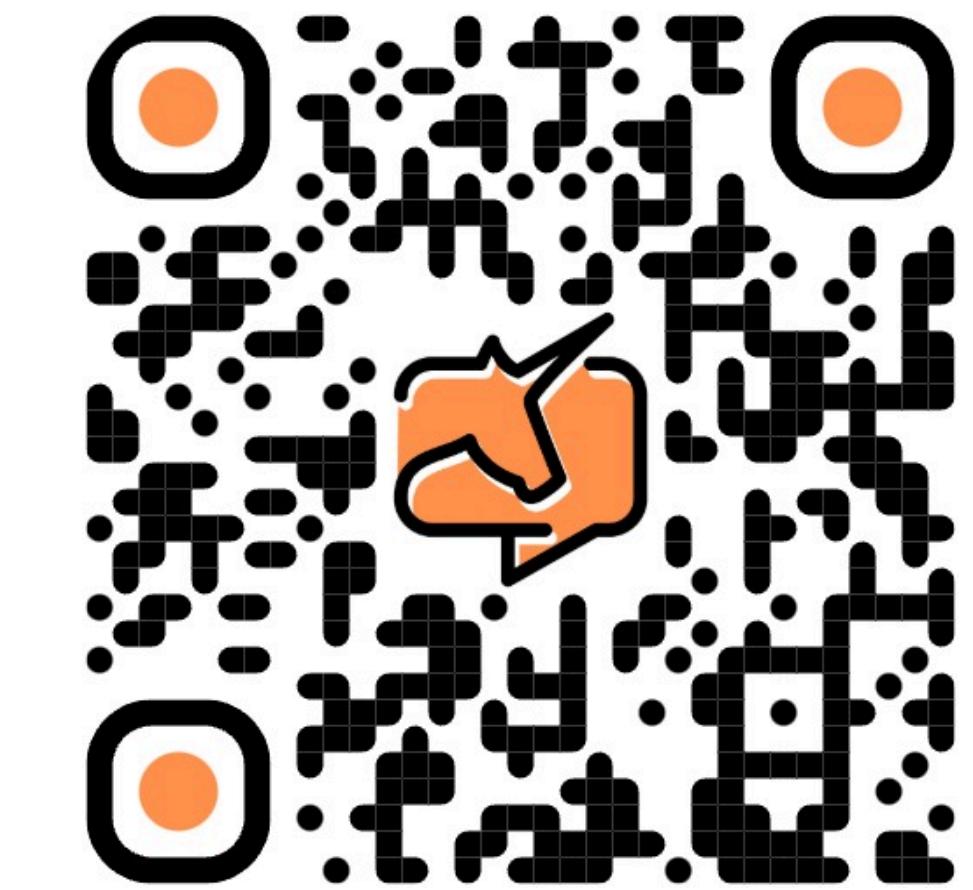
Of course we stand on the shoulders of giants ;-)



About me

Tobi(as Mende)

- 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,
Connect, Get Slides