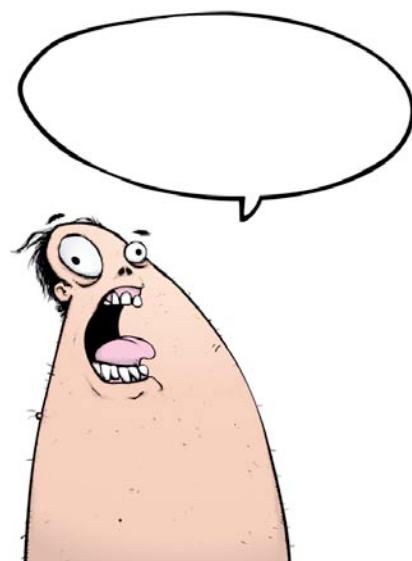


# communication skills for geeks



**NEAL FORD** software architect / meme wrangler

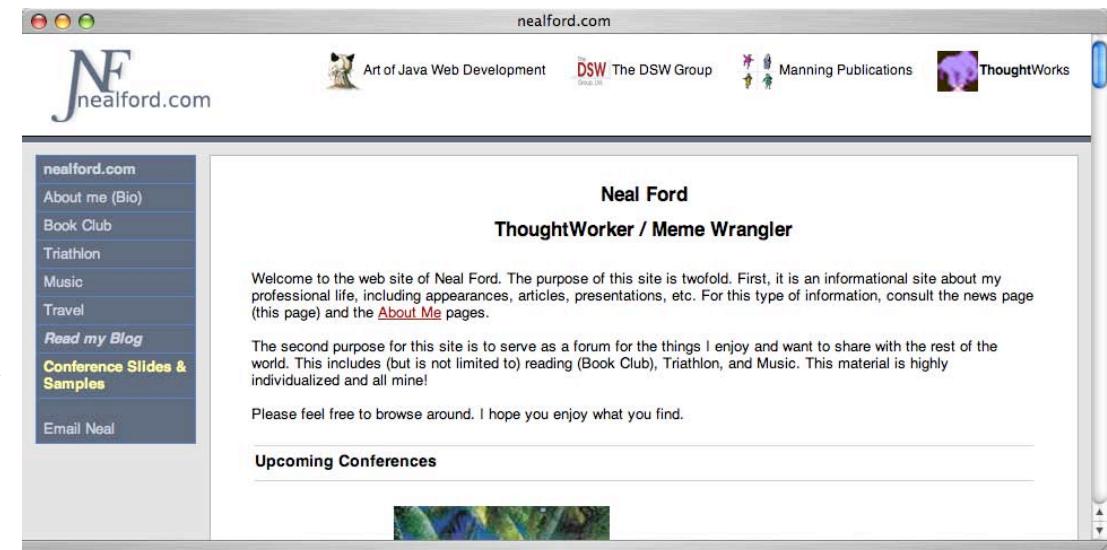
**ThoughtWorks**

**nford@thoughtworks.com**  
**3003 Summit Boulevard, Atlanta, GA 30319**  
[www.nealford.com](http://www.nealford.com)  
[www.thoughtworks.com](http://www.thoughtworks.com)  
blog: [memeagora.blogspot.com](http://memeagora.blogspot.com)  
twitter: [neal4d](https://twitter.com/neal4d)

# housekeeping

ask questions anytime

download slides from  
nealford.com



download samples from [github.com/nealford](https://github.com/nealford)

# what i cover

prelude: things to consider

writing

documentation

presentations

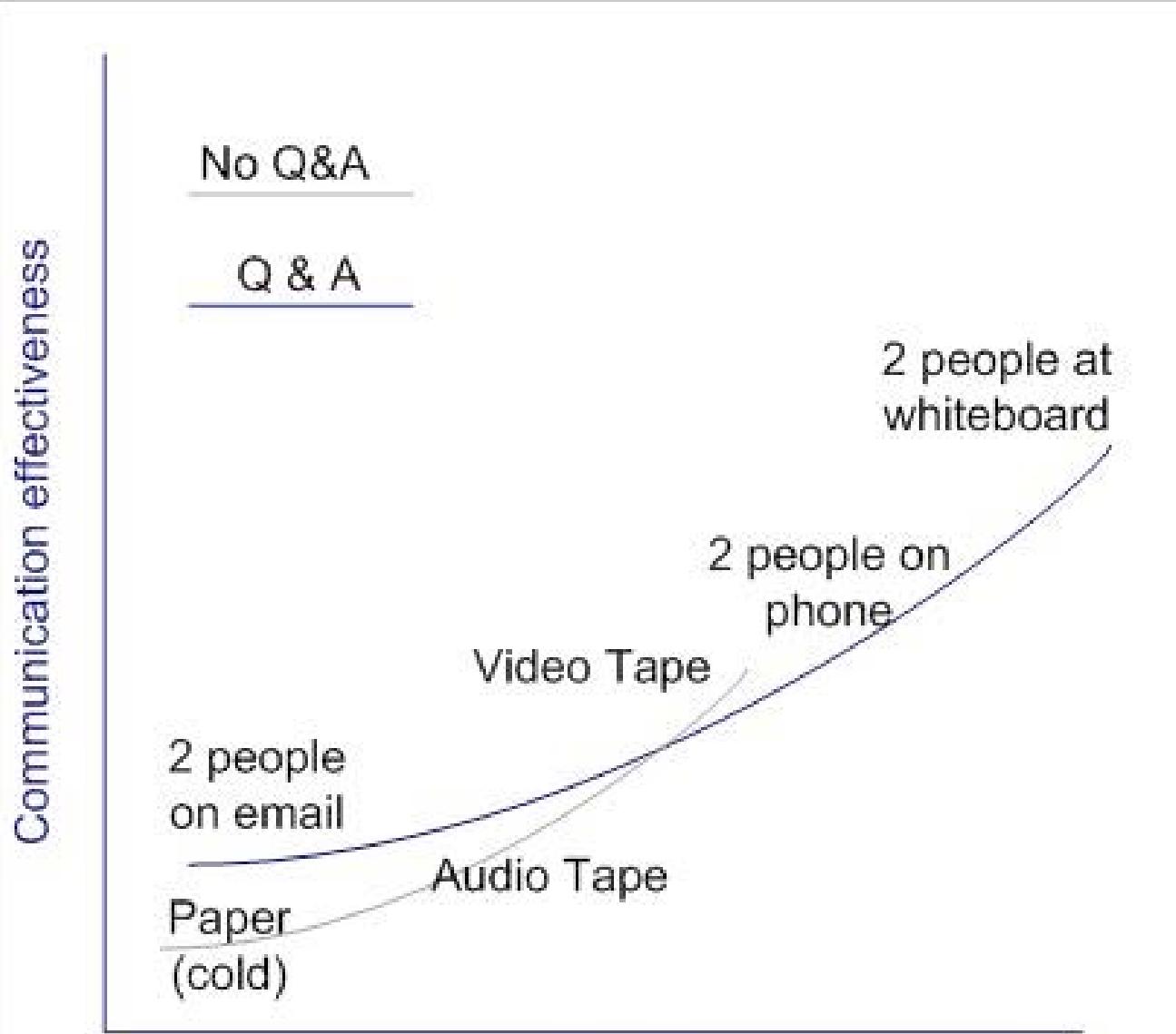
interoffice communication

prelude



software is  
more about  
communication  
than about  
technology





Richness ("temperature") of communications channel

From *Agile Software Development*,  
Cockburn 2002

# dreyfus model of skill acquisition

5 stages of learning from external instruction

gradual transition from rigid adherence to recipes to an intuitive mode of reasoning

“hero’s journey”

# novice

rigid adherence to rules

no discretionary judgement

following recipes

no deep understanding

won't understand nuanced discussions

# advanced beginner

situation perception still limited

all aspects of work are treated separately and given equal importance

limited improvisation

recipes + a few ingredients

# competent

coping with crowdedness

multiple activities

information density

now partially sees action as part of longer term  
goals

conscious , deliberate planning

# proficient

holistic view of situation, rather than in terms of aspects

sees what is most important in a situation

uses maxims for guidance

meaning of maxims may vary according to situation

# expert

no longer reliance on rules, guidelines, maxims

intuitive grasp of situation, based on tacit knowledge

vision of what is possible

“just does it”

unteachable

# understand your audience

nuanced communication confuses novices

don't assume what you care about matters to  
someone else

nurture inexperienced members

don't get frustrated!



writing

# passive voice

one of the most common mistakes in writing

Passive voice occurs when you make the object of an action into the subject of a sentence.

*Why was the road crossed by the chicken?*

form of "to be" + past participle = passive voice

# passive voice myths

1. Use of the passive voice constitutes a grammatical error.
2. Any use of "to be" (in any form) constitutes the passive voice.
3. The passive voice always avoids the first person.
4. You should never use the passive voice.
5. I can rely on my grammar checker to catch the passive voice.

# examples

The metropolis has been scorched by the dragon's fiery breath.

The dragon scorched the metropolis with his fiery breath.

When her house was invaded, Penelope had to think of ways to delay her remarriage.

After suitors invaded her house, Penelope had to think of ways to delay her remarriage.

# examples

Heart disease is considered the leading cause of death in the United States.

Research points to heart disease as the leading cause of death in the United States.

Researchers have concluded that heart disease is the leading cause of death in the United States.

The balloon is positioned in an area of blockage and is inflated.

The surgeon positions the balloon in an area of blockage and inflates it.

# "swindles and perversions"

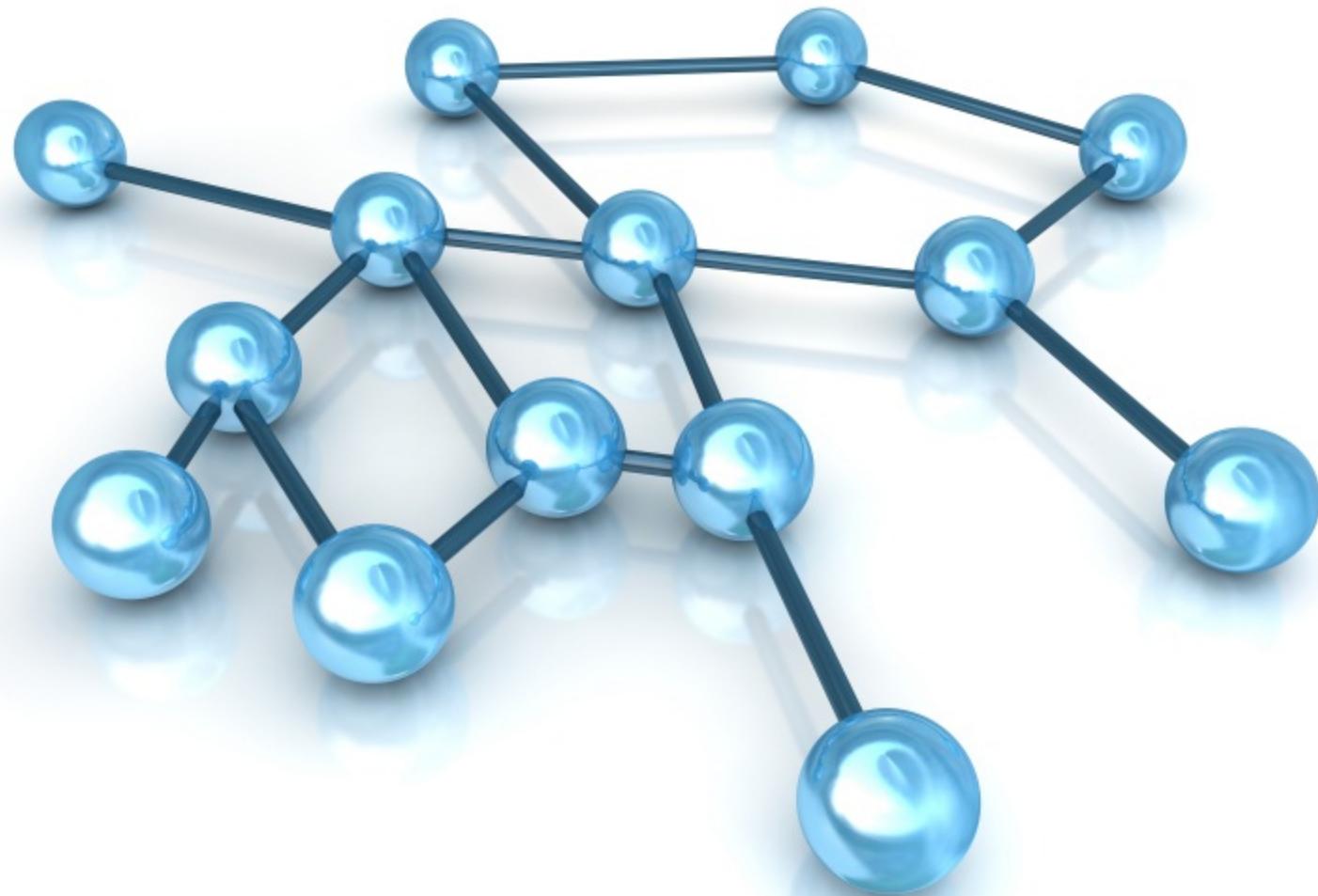
*Mistakes were made.*

*The Exxon Company accepts that a few gallons might have been spilled.*

use of language shapes clarity and meaning

some people use the passive voice to avoid mentioning responsibility for certain actions

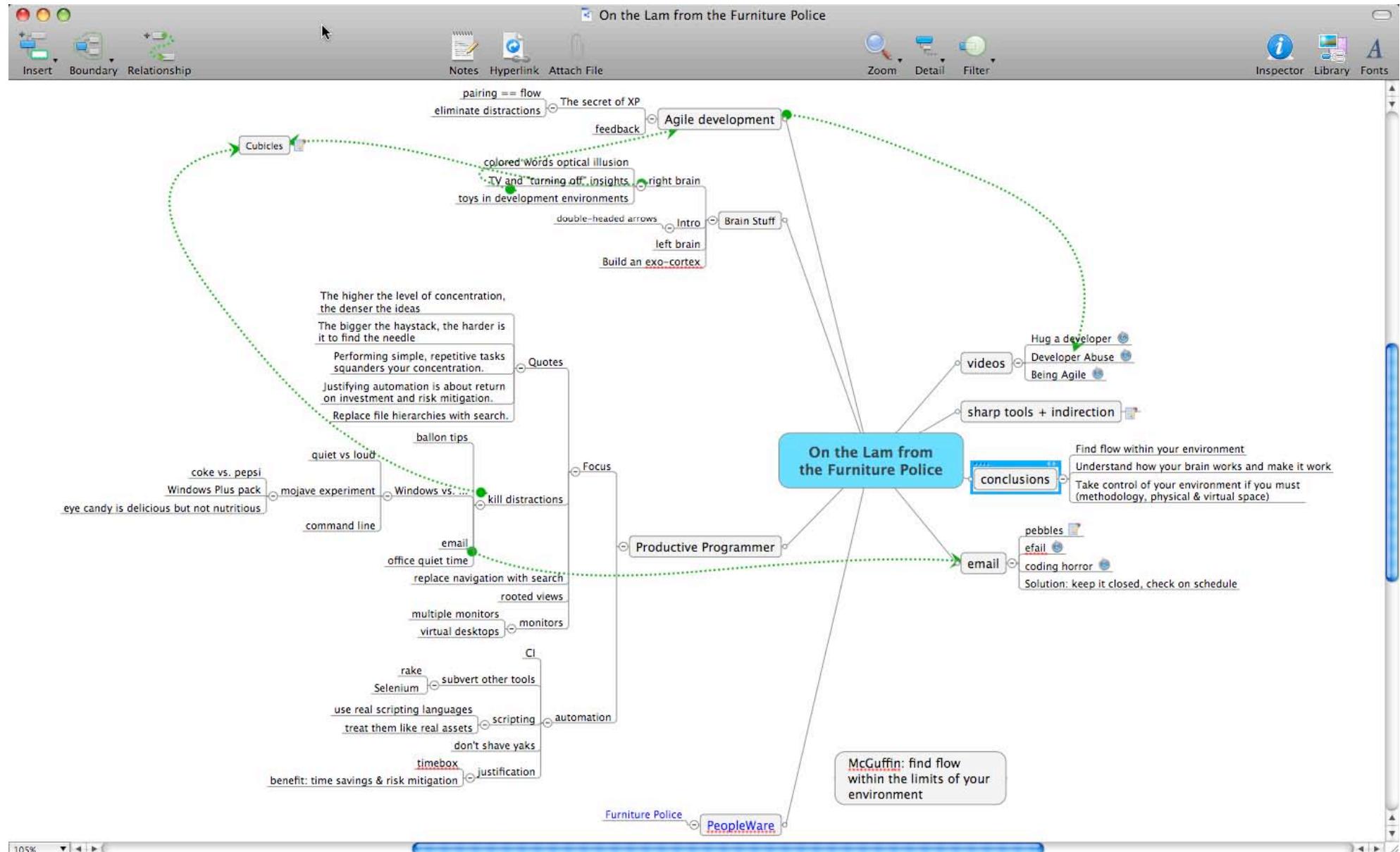
# organize before you write

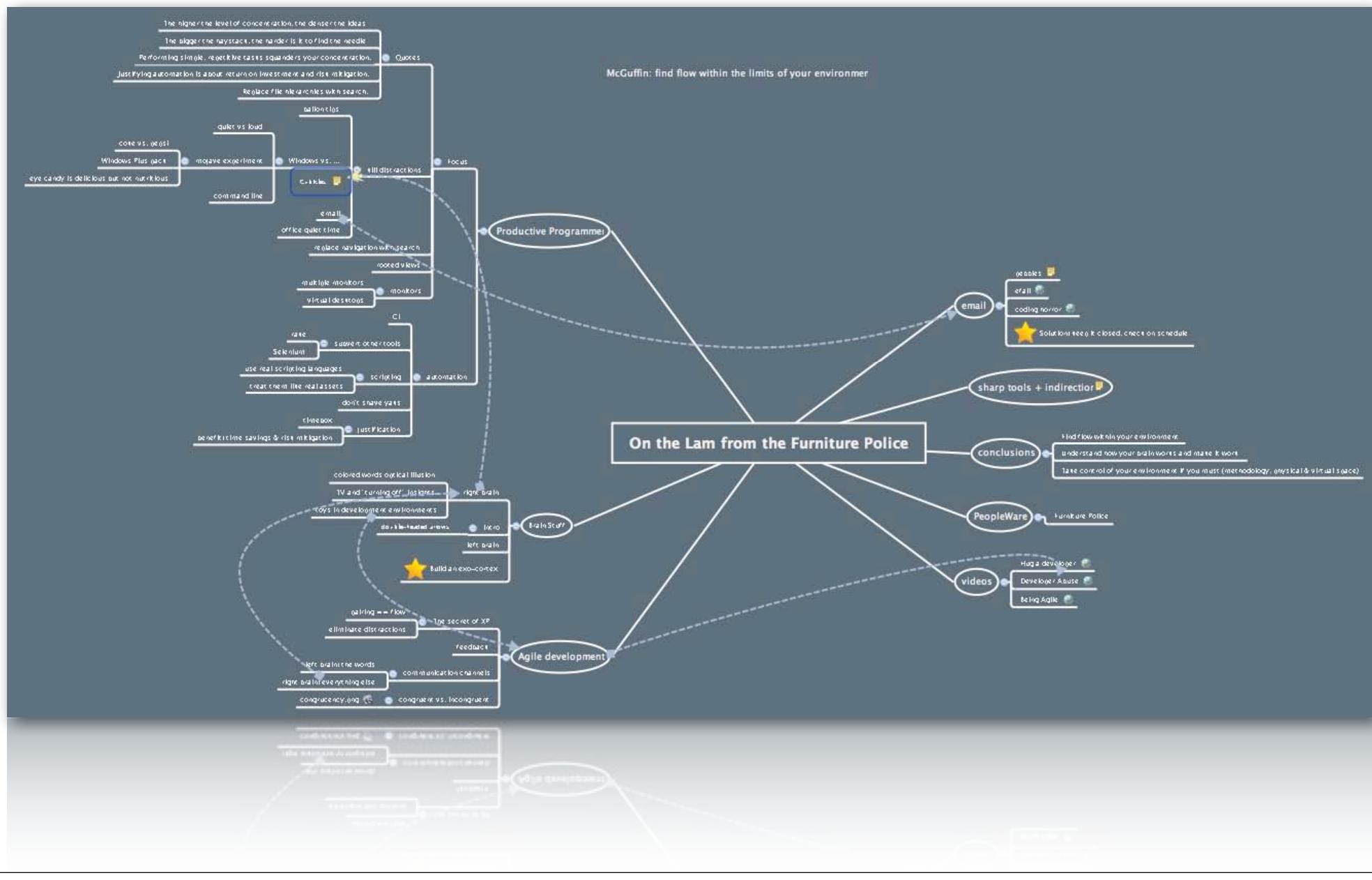


Utilities Action Add Column Attach Inspect

Topic

- ▼ □ Act I: Background
  - ▼ □ Peopleware
    - □ definition of furniture police
    - □ why do they care about this?
    - □ knowledge workers
    - □ our brains are different
  - ▼ □ (digression) How our brains work
    - ▼ □ Wetware
      - □ left brain/right brain
    - ▼ □ left brain
      - □ linear thought
      - □ chatter of consciousness
    - ▼ □ right brain
      - ▼ □ pattern matching
        - □ introduction to pattern matching
        - □ (digression) pattern matching in art (Jordon pix)
        - □ color words optical illusion
        - □ deep insights & how to enable them
        - □ but...
      - □ how we work and learn
      - □ iBrain stuff
    - ▼ □ The mind, day to day
      - ▼ □ left brain vs. right brain
        - □ left brain: writing code
        - □ right brain: finding patterns & insights
      - □ pair programming
  - ▼ □ Act II: Tools
    - ▼ □ Productive Programmer
      - ▼ □ focus
      - ▼ □ kill computer distractions



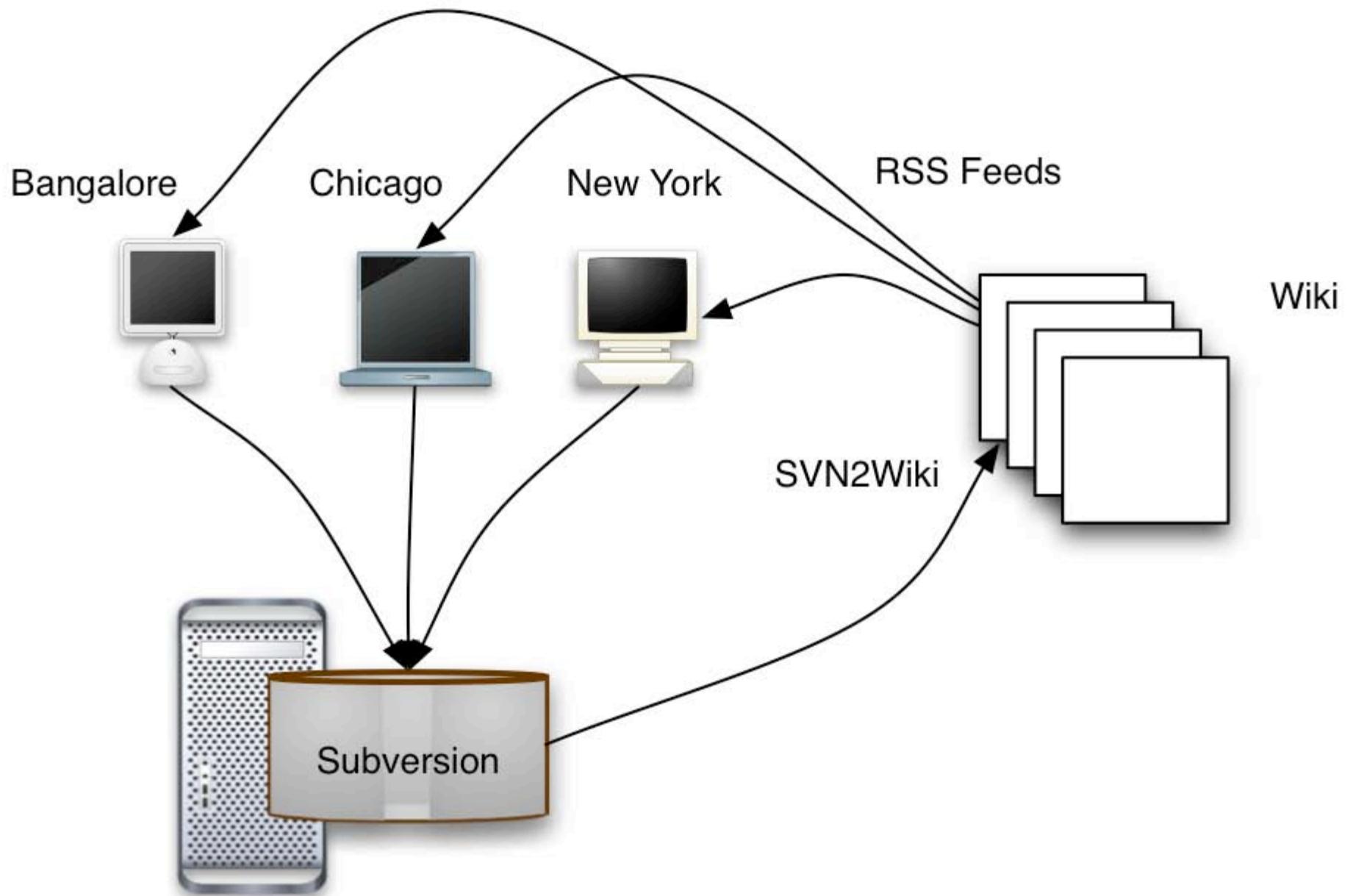


# personal brain



A photograph of a man with dark hair, wearing glasses, a light blue cardigan over a white shirt, and a black bow tie. He is sitting at a desk, looking intensely at an open book with a surprised or shocked expression. Behind him is a wall with a red and gold patterned wallpaper. There are stacks of books on both sides of him. The word "documentation" is overlaid in large, bold, black letters.

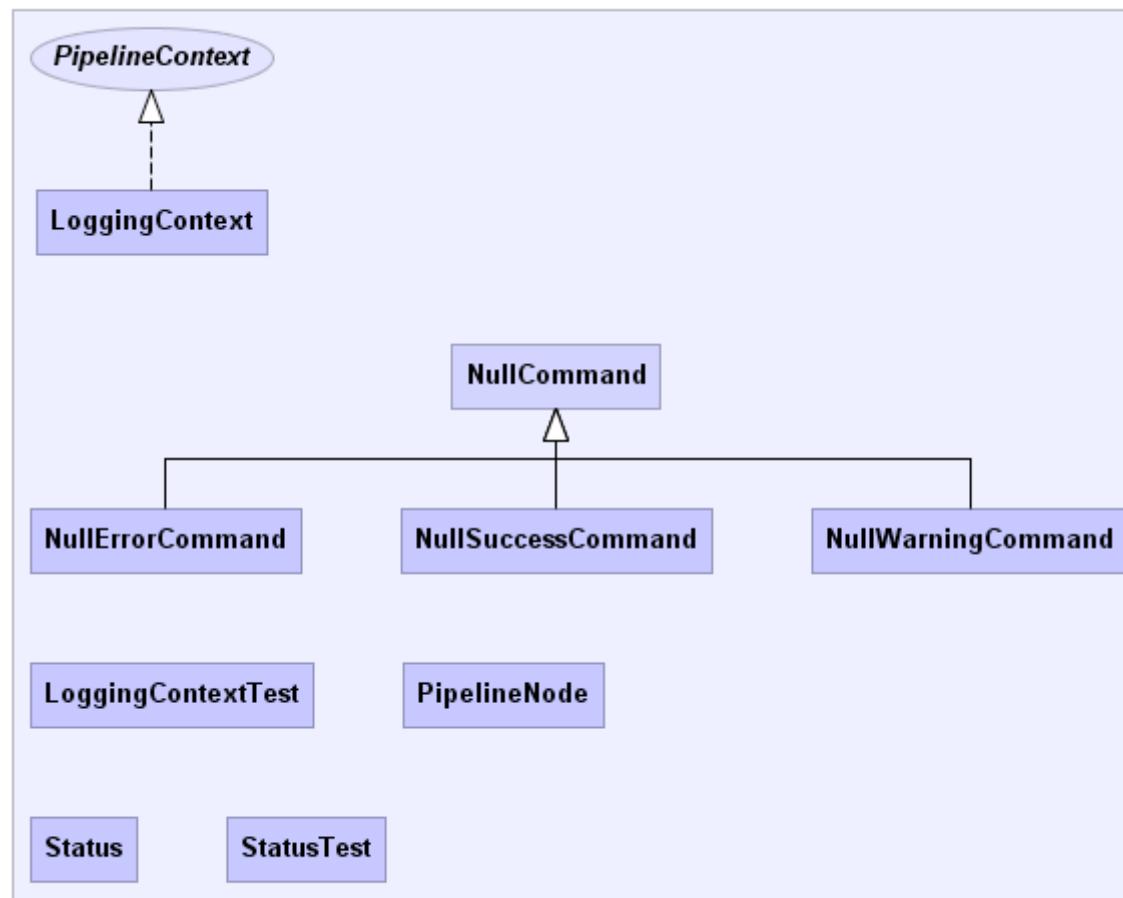
documentation



Chicago

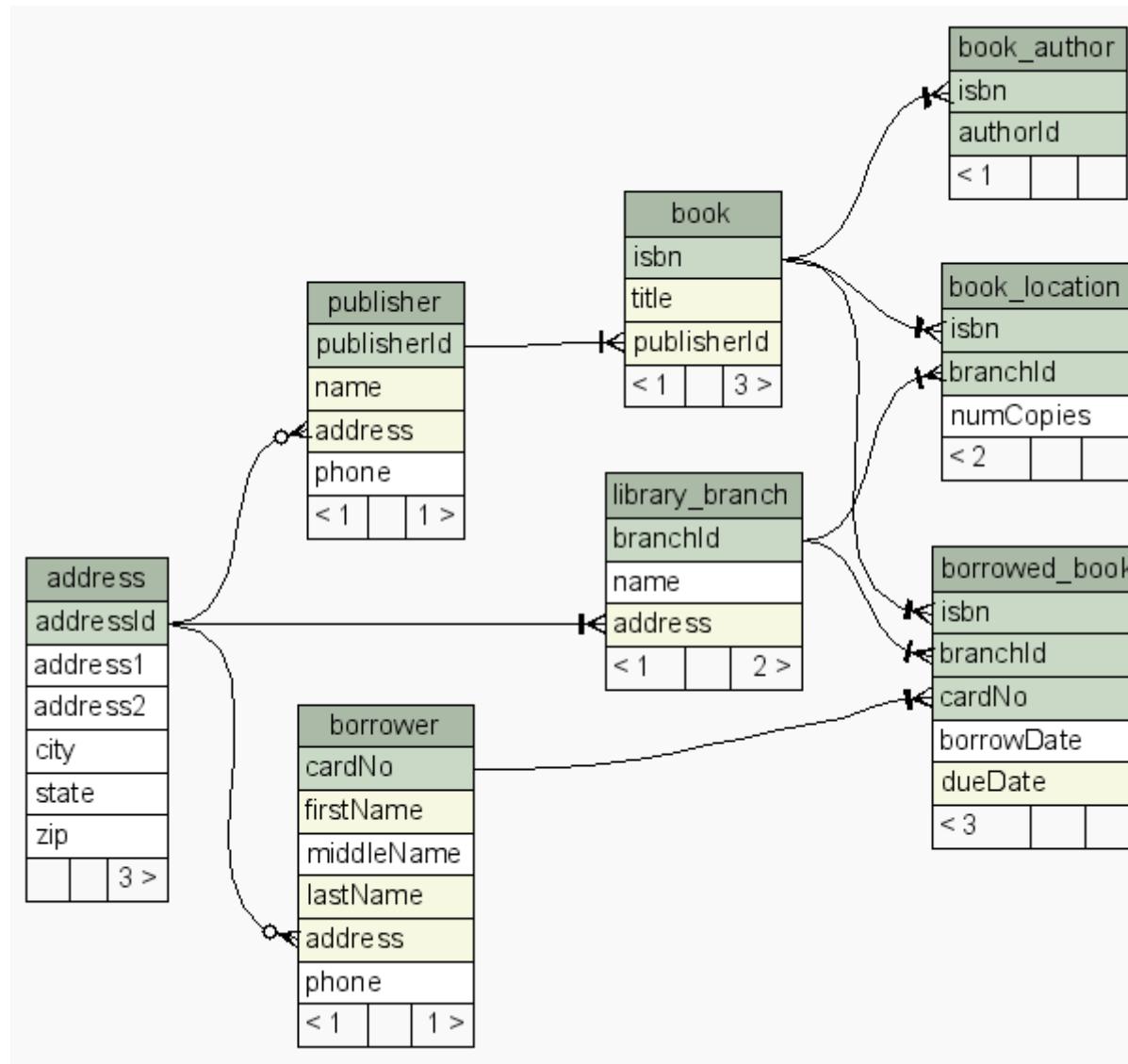
# dry documentation

# dry diagrams



Generated by yDoc Evaluation Version

# dry schemas



# design tools

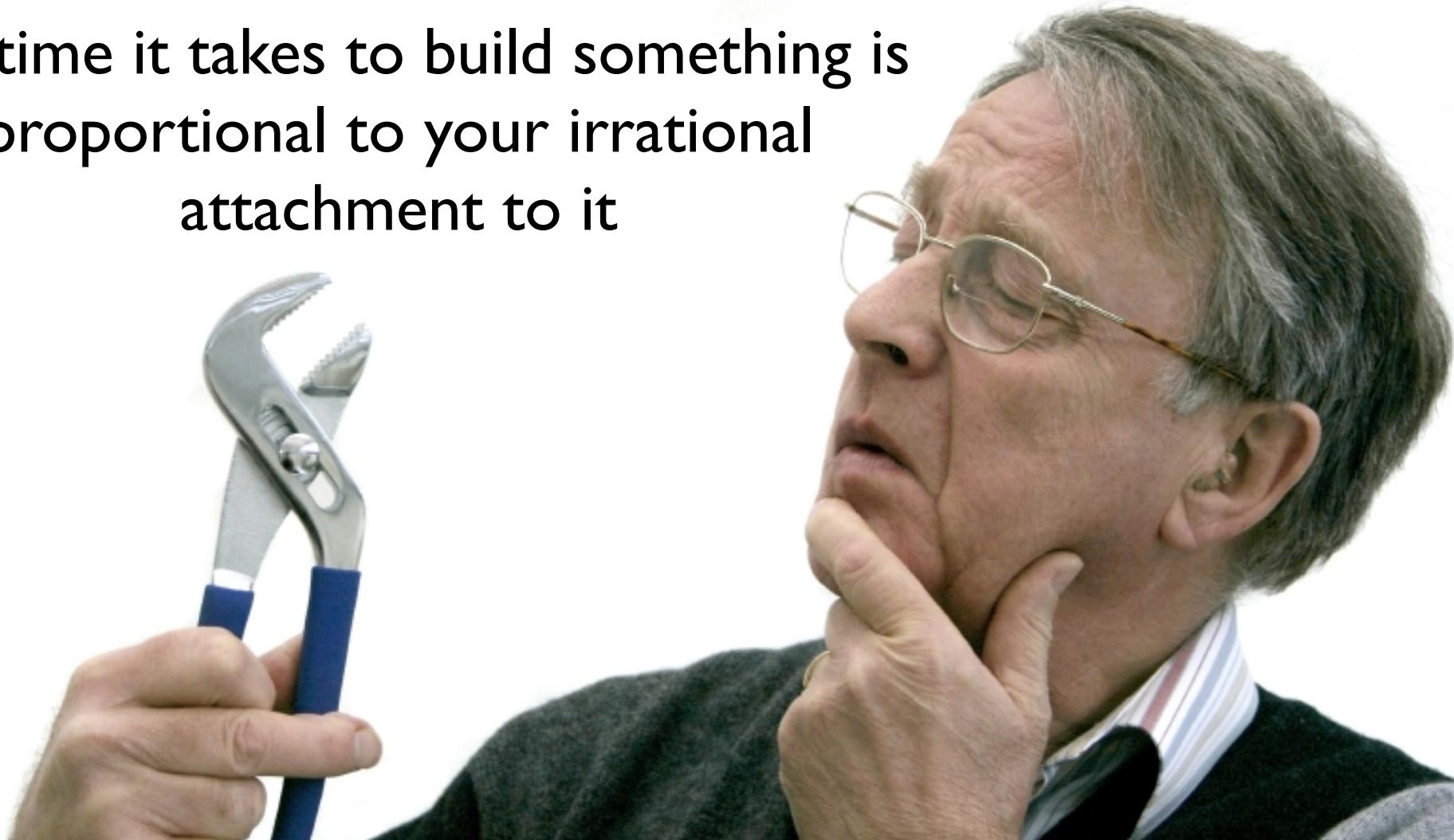


+



# irrational artifact attachment

the time it takes to build something is  
proportional to your irrational  
attachment to it



A photograph of a man with dark hair, glasses, and a beard, wearing a light blue sweater over a white shirt and a dark bow tie. He has a wide-eyed, surprised expression. The background is a patterned curtain.

# presentations

# Gettysburg Cemetery Dedication

Abraham Lincoln

11/19/1863

# Agenda

- Met on battlefield (great)
- Dedicate portion of field - fitting!
- Unfinished work (great tasks)

11/19/1863

# Not on Agenda!

- Dedicate
- Consecrate
- Hallow  
(in narrow sense)
- Add or detract
- Note or remember what we say

11/19/1863

# Review of Key Objectives & Critical Success Factors

- What makes nation unique
  - Conceived in Liberty
  - Men are equal
- Shared vision
  - New birth of freedom
  - Gov't of/for/by the people

11/19/1863

# Organizational Overview



[home](#)

[back](#)

[next](#)

# Summary

- New nation
- Civil war
- Dedicate field
- Dedicated to unfinished work
- New birth of freedom
- Government not perish

11/19/1863

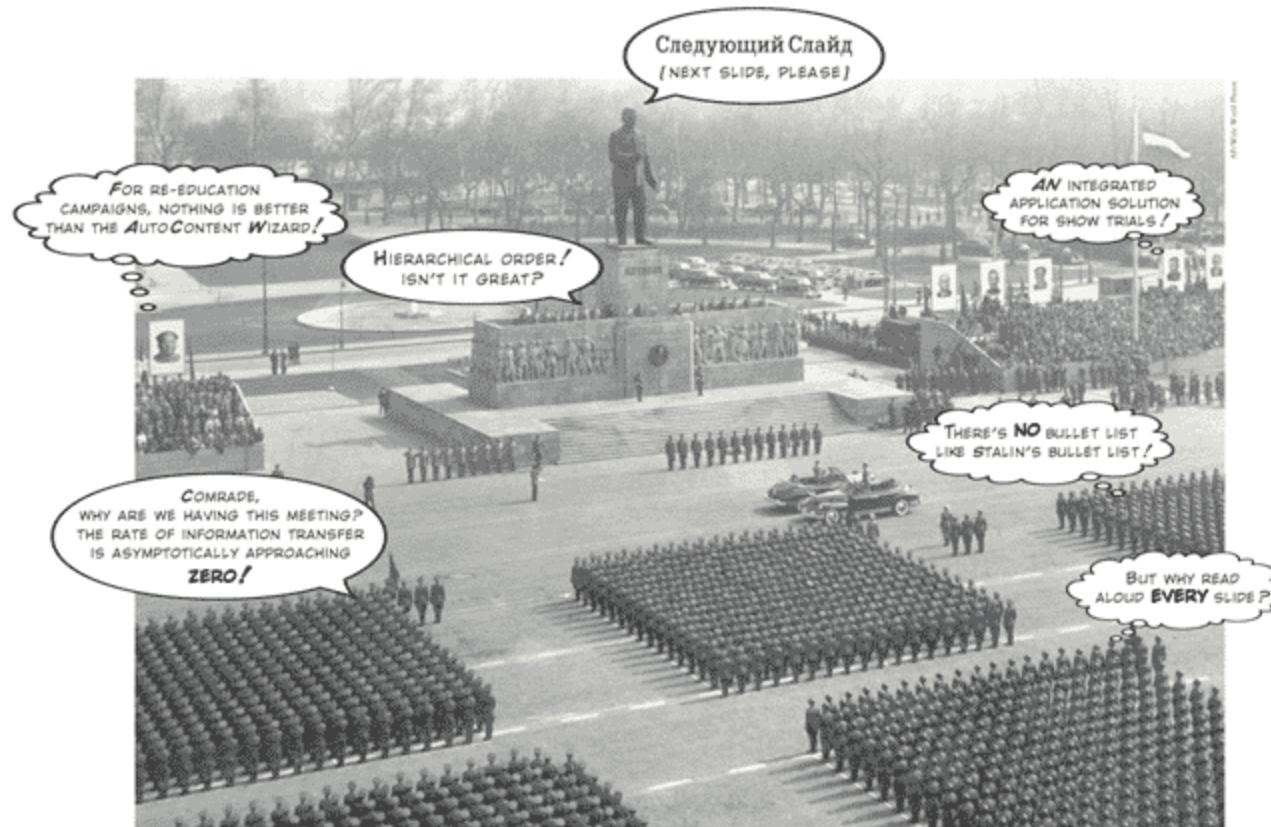


**the default cognitive  
style of powerpoint  
causes nausea**

SECOND EDITION

Edward R. Tufte

## *The Cognitive Style of PowerPoint: Pitching Out Corrupts Within*



## Review of Test Data Indicates Conservatism for Tile Penetration

- The existing SOFI on tile test data used to create Crater was reviewed along with STS-87 Southwest Research data
  - Crater overpredicted penetration of tile coating significantly
    - Initial penetration is described by normal velocity
      - Varies with volume/mass of projectile (e.g., 200ft/sec for 3cu. In)
      - Significant energy is required for the softer SOFI particle to penetrate the relatively hard tile coating
        - Test results do show that it is possible at sufficient mass and velocity
      - Conversely, once tile is penetrated SOFI can cause significant damage
        - Minor variations in total energy (above penetration level) can cause significant tile damage
    - Flight condition is significantly outside of test database
      - Volume of ramp is 1920cu in vs 3 cu in for test

"The use of the PowerPoint presentation has been a disaster... It should be ditched."

John Sweller  
University of NSW



FOREWORD BY GUY KAWASAKI

# presentationzen

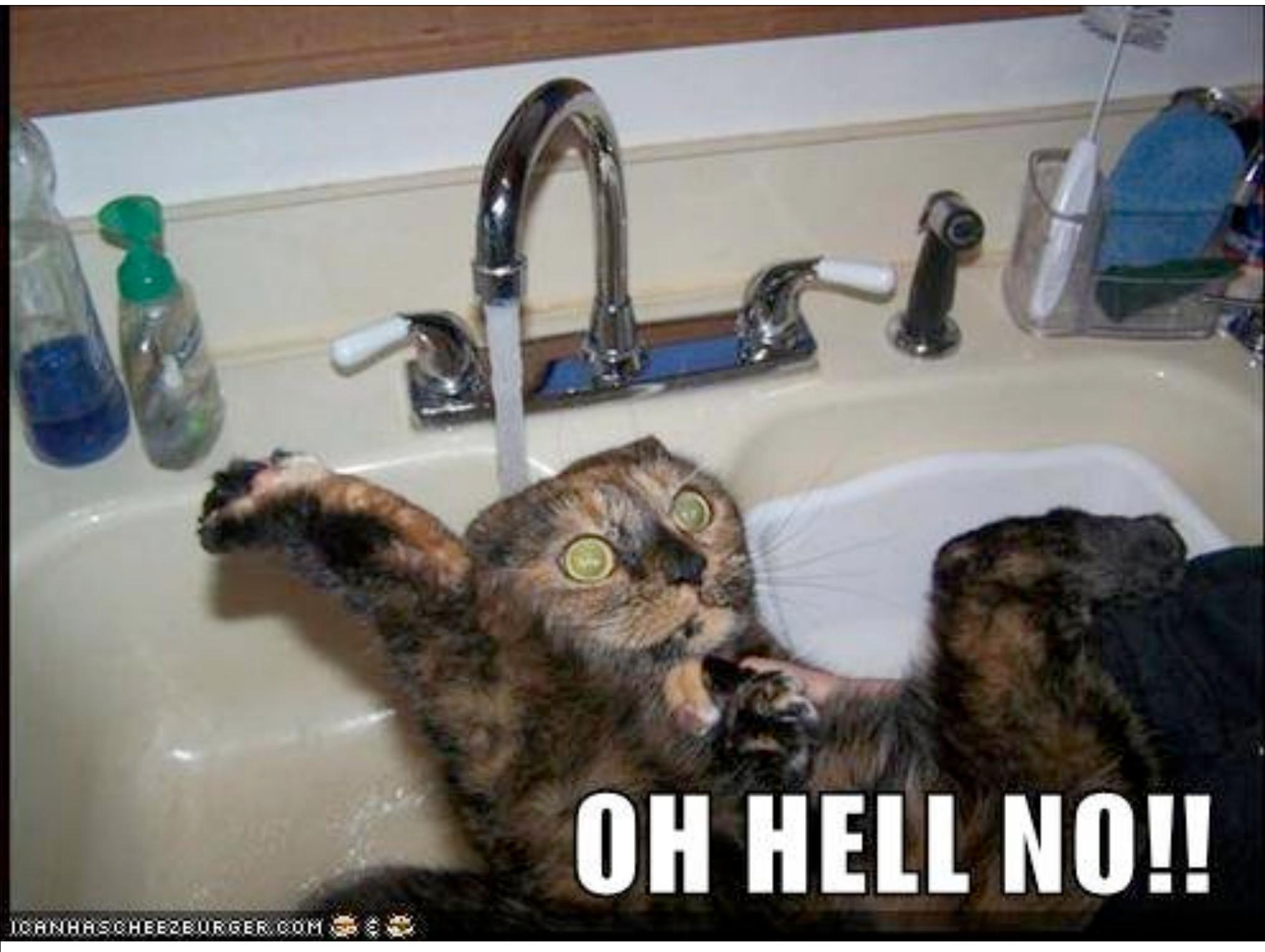
Simple Ideas on Presentation Design and Delivery



**Garr Reynolds**

New  
Riders

VOICES THAT MATTER™



**OH HELL NO!!!**

# “slideument”

you can use slides for presentations OR to  
create a document...

...but NOT both

good for neither

decide on the format

compromise where required

# avoiding slideuments

make a presentation, add text in notes

make a fancy outline, never present it

push back on company policy that says you must use powerpoint for all communication

better to use a concrete slab

leads to “death by powerpoint”

interoffice  
communication



# meetings





not all meetings  
are evil



# making meetings suck less

create an agenda & stick to it

stop long discussions and put them on the agenda for the next meeting

remind everyone how much money this costs the company

don't conflate issues

deflect them (or have someone do it for you)

# email

1. switch to your email client
2. choose "New/Compose Message" from the interface
3. type the recipient's name (autocomplete in most email programs typically helps to reduce this to 3-4 keystrokes)
4. type tab or return to go to the next field (typically another to or cc field)
5. type tab or return again to go to the subject field
6. think up a subject (or ideally skip it)
7. type a subject (or ideally skip it)
8. type tab or return again to go to the message body field
9. type in your message
10. click send

# why email sucks

emails tend to bloat with lots of different topics  
and details

hard to answer because you have to respond to  
each point

reply-to-all is evil

overloaded as the only communication channel

constant interruptions

# making email suck less

check in batches

when replying, reply to only one thing at a time

...even if the original mail had multiple parts

discourage long-winded exchanges

find a better communication channel

don't use email as your to-do list



# Inbox Zero



Email check times: 9am, 12pm, 3pm



Delete it



(2 min) = Action it.  
(2 min plus) = Action Folder



Forward it



Archive it



Action Folder



1.

Action till complete



2.

Delete it



3.

Archive it

join the  
inbox zero  
movement/  
cult



# instant messaging

much less cognitive load than email

short messages encouraged/required

status message

possible to survive disruptions to flow

quick, single subject messages disrupt workflow  
less

# effective communication



# simple, declarative writing

A faint, large watermark-like background of various letters and numbers in different sizes and orientations.

The letters include: b, V, h, u, K, o, w, M, H, i, L, d, t, S, f, y, n, L, c, Q, x, z, j, f, Y, m, v, R, B, d, t, n, f, z, u, f, g, G, A, C, P, F, e, k, T, s, h, e, n, f, o, y, C, P, f, G, A, e.

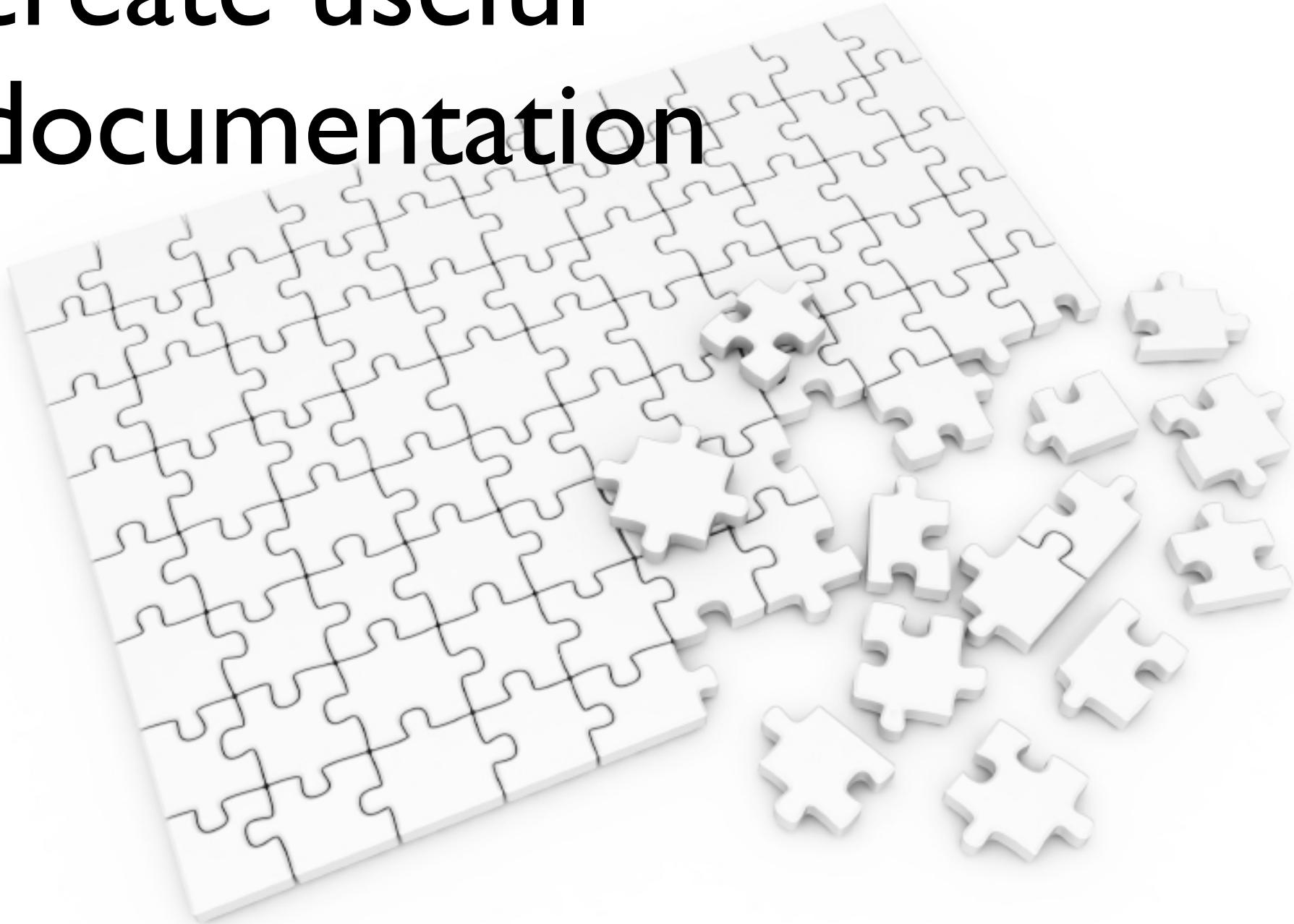


**don't create  
slideuments**

# generate documentation



# create useful documentation



? , S

please fill out the session evaluations  
samples at [github.com/nealford](https://github.com/nealford)



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**NEAL FORD** software architect / meme wrangler

**ThoughtWorks**

nford@thoughtworks.com  
3003 Summit Boulevard, Atlanta, GA 30319  
[www.nealford.com](http://www.nealford.com)  
[www.thoughtworks.com](http://www.thoughtworks.com)  
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