

COMING TO A SHARED UNDERSTANDING

(OR, HOW I LEARNED TO STOP ASSUMING
AND LOVE COMMUNICATION)

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HOW OLD AM I?

ASSUMPTIONS!

- Take a guess, on appearance alone.
- Show of hands!
- 18 - 24?
- 24 - 29?
- 30 - 34?
- 35 - 39?
- 40 - 49?
- Older than 50?

- Let's try this again!

HOW OLD AM I?

WITH EXTRA INFORMATION

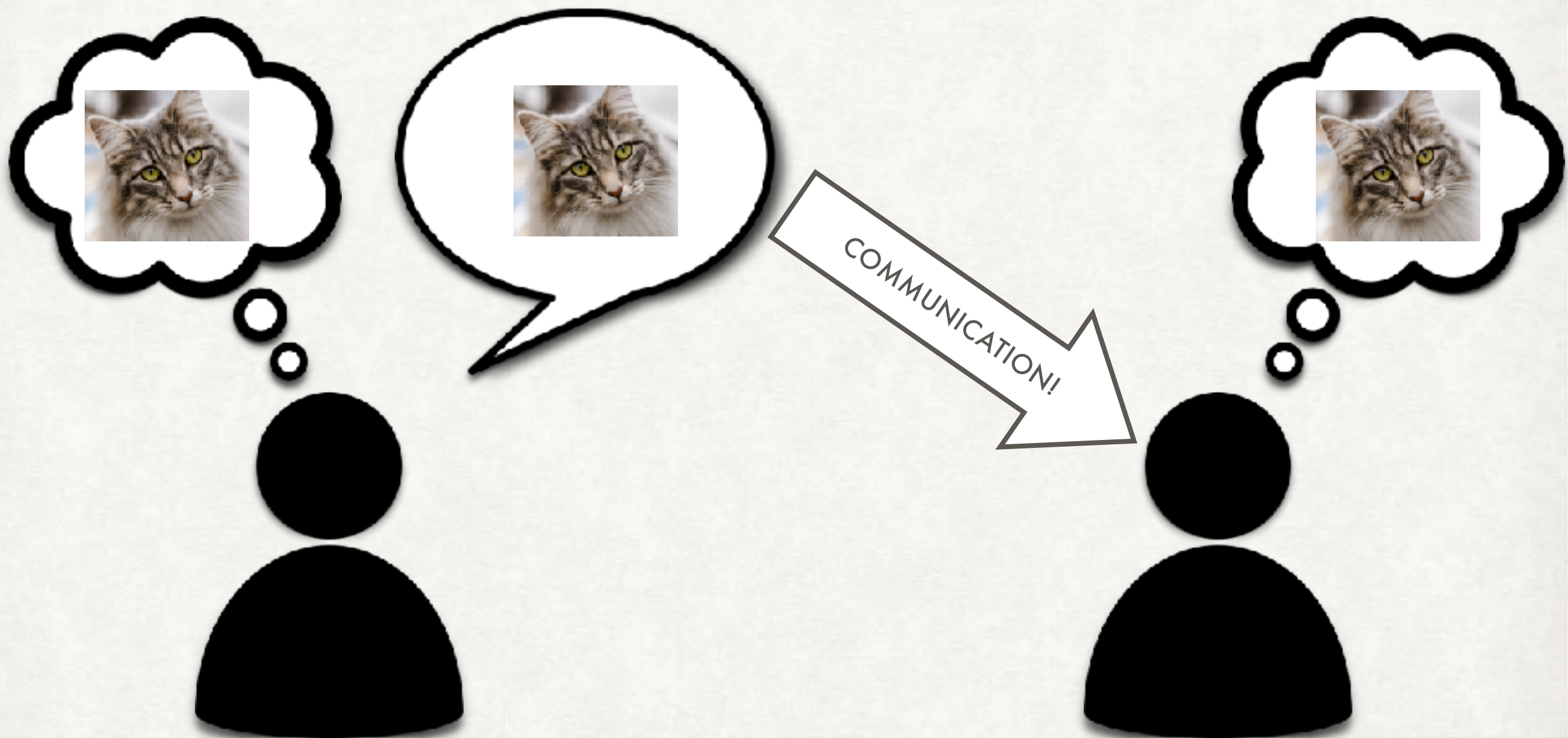
- I used to be a police officer
- My job title is Head of Software Engineering
- I also volunteer for St John Cymru
- Does that change how old you think I am?
- Younger?
- The same?
- Older?

I AM:

30

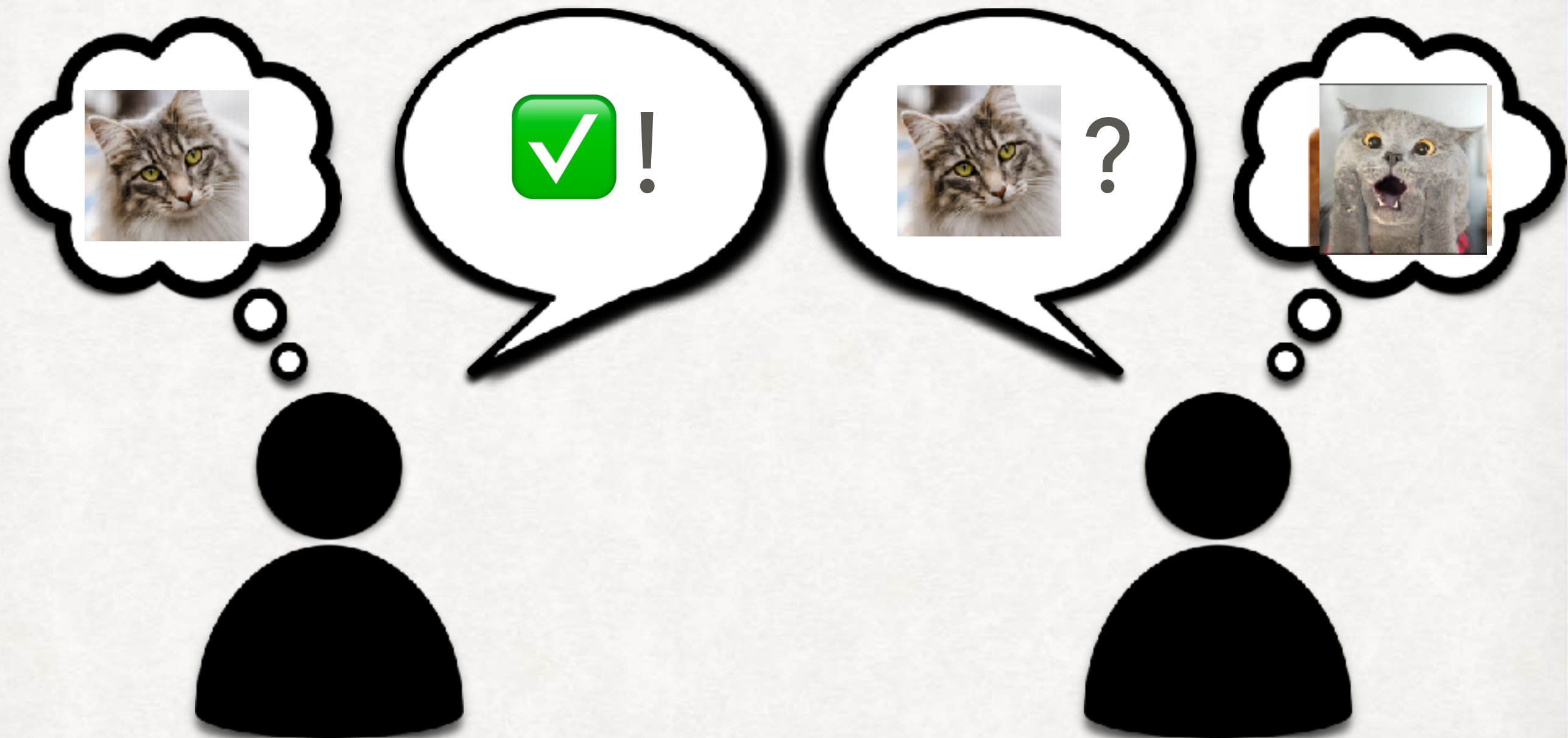
COMMUNICATION

HOW WE LIKE TO THINK IT HAPPENS



COMMUNICATION

HOW IT ACTUALLY HAPPENS



WHAT IS “SHARED UNDERSTANDING”

- Where two or more people have a common perception of a situation and how ideas or actions would affect it
- It's a refinement process
- Something we do every day
- Relevant in all areas of life

WHO ELSE USES IT?

NOT JUST SOFTWARE

- Military
- Emergency Services
- Medical Practitioners
- Pilots
- Sales teams

“
DARMOK AND JALAD AT
TANAGRA

— *Dathon and Captain Jean-Luc Picard*

”



ASSUMPTIONS

WE ALL HAVE THEM!

- We're really good at taking shortcuts in conversations
- Everyone:
 - has the same experience as me
 - has the same education as me
 - has the same culture as me
 - thinks like me
 - knows what I'm talking about. Right?

WHAT IF I TOLD YOU

NOT EVERYONE UNDERSTANDS THIS MEME

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BUT WHY DOES THIS CAUSE PROBLEMS?

- Two (or more) team members may have wildly different ideas about the same piece of work
- Have to redo work
- “That’s not what I meant when I wrote the spec”
- Often causes friction in teams
 - Can be very disheartening to have to throw work away and start again
- Slows work down
- Reduces your bus number

HOW CAN WE IMPROVE OUR UNDERSTANDING?

- Encourage questions
 - Asking AND answering
- Say "I don't know" or "I don't understand"
- Challenge assumptions and your own understanding
 - Restate in your own words - create a feedback loop
- Consider the language being used
- Involve all relevant team members
- Measure twice, cut once
- Document. Document. Document.
 - Not just words, pictures, links, anything relevant
 - Conversations are important, need to be captured!

TOOLS

WHAT DO WE NEED?

- Somewhere to record information:
 - A wiki
 - A ticketing system
 - A whiteboard
 - Post-its
 - Pen and paper
 - Emails
- How you record the information is less important than the fact that you do and that it can be accessed
- Consistency

MEETINGS

HOW CAN WE MAKE THEM BETTER?

- Meetings are a big part of creating a shared understanding
- Have a clear idea of the agenda before the meeting
 - "In this meeting we are going to discuss features X, Y and Z and finalise the user flow"
- Ask every participant to articulate what they expect to get out of the meeting
 - "I am expecting that we will decide whether to use widget A or widget B"
- Document. Document. Document.

**INCREASE
YOUR
BUS NUMBER**

**ANY
QUESTIONS?**