

The background of the slide is a complex, blue-toned fractal pattern resembling frost or snowflakes. The pattern is dense and intricate, with many small, branching, and repeating geometric shapes that create a sense of depth and complexity. The overall color is a deep, dark blue, with lighter blue highlights that define the edges of the fractal structures.

Beyond transparency

Next-gen communication strategies

Elizabeth Ayer
Agile Cambridge 2024

Image: [Fractal Frost](#) by Jack Hunter

Transparency

Giving information access to a whole group

**“Why pick on
transparency?
Why now???”**

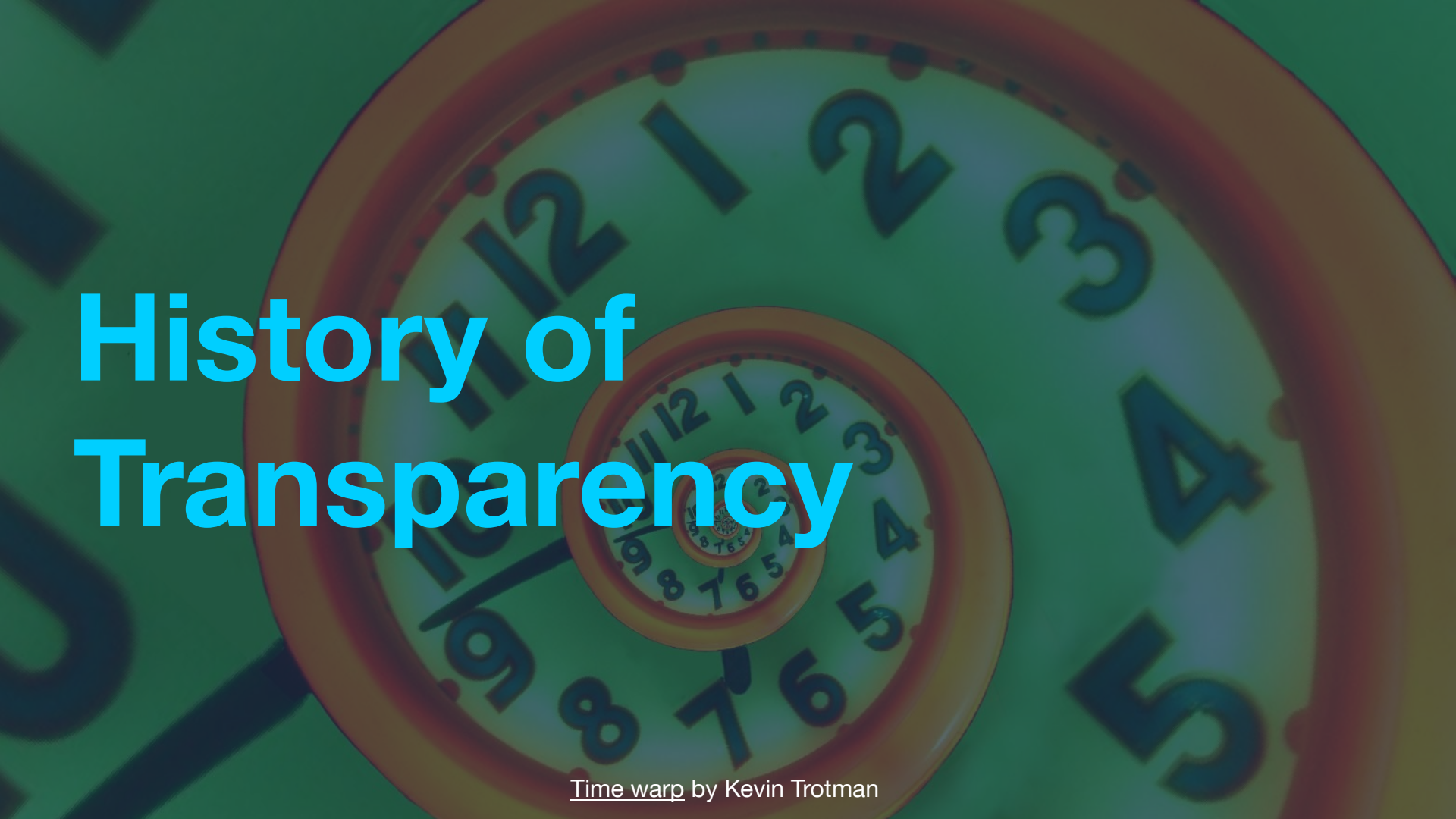
**“Why pick on
transparency?
Why now???”**

**Transparency is at best
inadequate, and now is the
time to move past it.**

About me

My whole adult life I've benefited from the open sharing of information.



The background of the slide is a green-tinted image featuring a spiral of clocks. The spiral starts from a small clock in the center and expands outwards, with each successive clock face becoming larger. The clock faces are white with black numbers and hands, and the spiral is composed of concentric rings of these clock faces, creating a sense of depth and time passing.

History of Transparency

Time warp by Kevin Trotman

First wave: progressive reform

“**Publicity** is justly commended as a remedy for social and industrial diseases.

Sunlight is said to be the best of disinfectants; electric light the most efficient policeman”

- Louis Brandeis, *Other People's Money* (1914)



Illustration from [Other People's Money and How Bankers Use it](#)

AMERICANS DON'T PATRONIZE REDS!!!!

**—•—
YOU CAN DRIVE THE REDS OUT OF
TELEVISION, RADIO AND HOLLY-
WOOD**

THIS TRACT WILL TELL YOU HOW.

WHY WE MUST DRIVE THEM OUT:

1) The REDS have made our Screen, Radio and TV Moscow's most effective Fifth Column in America . . .
2) The REDS of Hollywood and Broadway have always been the chief financial support of Communist propaganda in America . . . 3) OUR OWN FILMS, made by RED Producers, Directors, Writers and STARS, are being used by Moscow in ASIA, Africa, the Balkans and throughout Europe to create hatred of America . . . 4) RIGHT NOW films are being made to craftily glorify MARXISM, UNESCO and ONE-WORLDISM . . . and via your TV Set they are being piped into your Living Room—and are poisoning the minds of your children under your very eyes ! ! !

So REMEMBER — If you patronize a Film made by RED Producers, Writers, Stars and STUDIOS you are aiding and abetting COMMUNISM . . . every time you permit REDS to come into your Living Room VIA YOUR TV SET you are helping MOSCOW and the INTERNATIONALISTS to destroy America ! ! !

History of Transparency

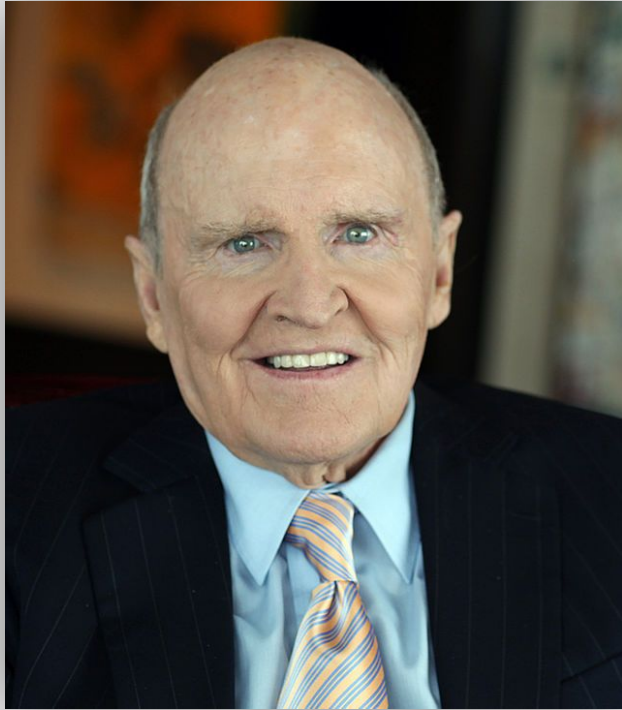
End of the first wave: McCarthyism

From 1950-1954 Senator Joe McCarthy turned the spotlight of transparency on communist sympathizers in government and media, wrecking lives.

Second wave: the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), 1967 / 2000

- To promote democratic **accountability** and public **trust**
- Coalition of journalists, scientists, consumer advocates, and Congress

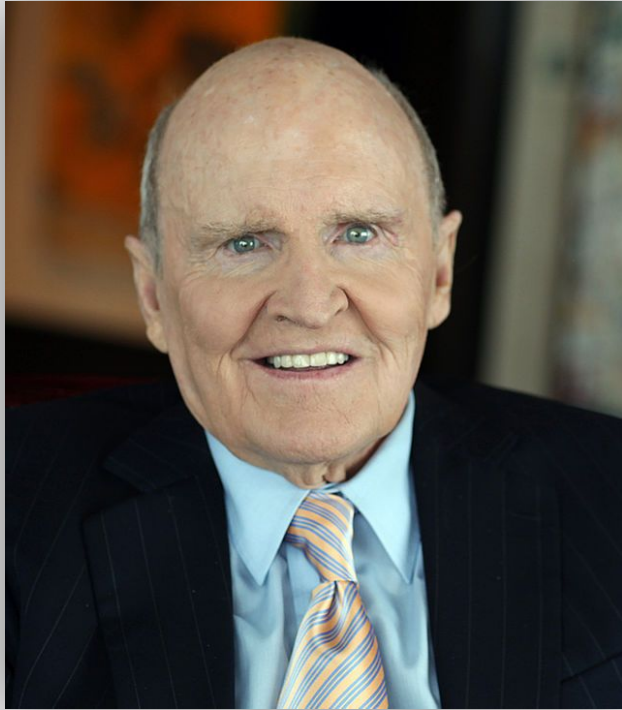




Jack Welch

Image: [Wikimedia CC BY-SA3](#)

Transparency in management



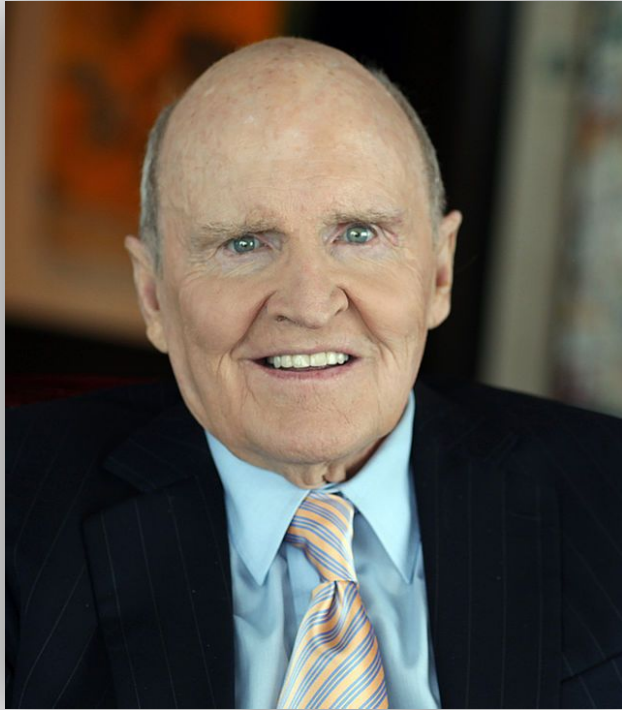
Jack Welch

Image: [Wikimedia CC BY-SA3](#)

Transparency in management

“Above all else, though, good leaders are open. They go up, down, and around their organization to reach people. They don’t stick to the established channels.... They never get bored telling their story.”

- Jack Welch, [Harvard Business Review](#)



Jack Welch

Image: [Wikimedia CC BY-SA3](#)

Transparency in management

“They never get bored telling their story.”

Welch’s story? We must maximize shareholder value.

“Transparency” implies neutrality and symmetry, but information transparency has many asymmetries....



Transparency asymmetries

What is the **power dynamic** between the parties?

Who is the information **supplier** and who is the **observer**?

Is the information being **pushed** or **pulled**?



Transparency asymmetries

Example: Jack Welch, the **high-power** party, **supplied** information to low-power staff via **push**.

This can be genuinely helpful....



Transparency asymmetries

Example: Jack Welch, the **high-power** party, **supplied** information to low-power staff via **push**.

This can be genuinely helpful.... It can also be **gaslighting**.



Transparency asymmetries

Example: Brandeis espoused publicity, the **pull** of information by **lower-power** members of the public.

This *can* provide **accountability**. It can also lend credence to **unfounded narratives**.



Transparency asymmetries

Example: Joe McCarthy, as a member of a **high-power** Senate Committee, **pulled** information from **lower-power** public figures.

This can provide **key insights** to decision-makers. It can also be **surveillance**.

TALES FROM THE NEAR FUTURE —

Omnipresent AI cameras will ensure good behavior, says Larry Ellison

"We're going to have supervision," says billionaire Oracle co-founder Ellison.

BENJ EDWARDS - 9/16/2024, 8:22 AM



Transparency has a completely different meaning when it's consolidating power vs redistributing power.

Where transparency does and doesn't work

Image: [broken dreams](#) by waferboard

In cases of journalism and civic governance, transparency hasn't reliably given the desired results.

In theory...

Transparency ➡ **trust**

Transparency of bad things ➡ **accountability**



Transparency in journalism

“Transparency is the new objectivity”

— D. Weinberger, 2009

Does transparency in journalism build trust?

“Audiences’ **trust perceptions did not differ between** a text/website that had no transparency features and a text/website that had **hyperlinks to original documents, corrections, time stamps, reader comments, call for reader participation, and an editorial text explaining the production** of the news article.”

- M. Koliska, 2015

ABSTRACT

Title of Document: TRANSPARENCY AND TRUST IN
JOURNALISM: AN EXAMINATION OF
VALUES, PRACTICES AND EFFECTS

Michael Koliska, Doctor of Philosophy, 2015

Directed By: Professor Linda Steiner, Philip Merrill College
of Journalism

Journalism scholars and practitioners have repeatedly argued that transparency is crucial to generate trust in the news media, which, over the years, has faced continues decline in public trust. As news organizations have been encouraged to implement transparency in their daily work, transparency has increasingly gained the status of a professional norm in journalism. However, very little is actually known about how journalists think and apply transparency in their everyday practices or how news organizations in the United States implement transparency. Similarly, normative assumptions about the trust-generating effects of transparency have not been consistently shown to exist.

This dissertation examined to what extent journalists at 12 national news outlets embraced transparency on a day-to-day basis and how these news organizations implement transparency online at the news item level. Moreover, this

[Transparency and trust in journalism: an examination of values, practices and effects](#), M. Koliska, 2015



Fox news and a closed world

Consistency leads to trust

Around 35% of Americans believe the 2016 election was stolen.



PHASE 1

PHASE 2

PHASE 3

TRANSPARENCY

?

OUTCOMES!





Transparency for governance

“[T]here is **no consensus about whether transparency improves concrete outcomes.**

The answer, as with so many other questions in political science, seems to be that ‘it depends.’”

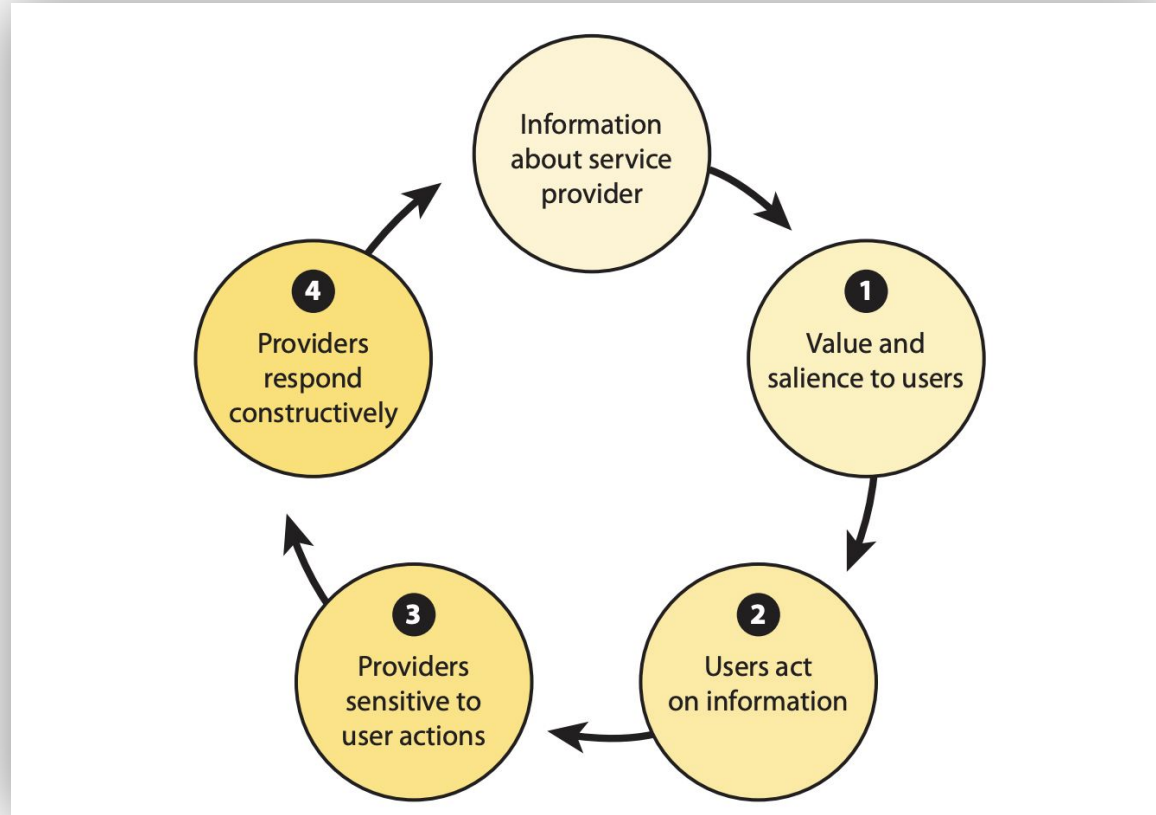
- [Does Transparency Improve Governance?](#)
Kosack and Fung, 2014



Transparency for accountability: Report cards in Ugandan health care

- Ugandan health services underwent a sudden loss of funding and infrastructure
- During rebuilding, a “transparency intervention” tried
 - Collecting service data, e.g. equipment usage, waiting times
 - Hosting meetings: staff, citizens, interface
 - Designing action steps
 - Checking back in
- Saw marked improvement in health outcomes and staff engagement

How transparency can improve governance



[Does Transparency Improve Governance?](#) Kosack and Fung, 2014



Transparency for civic outcomes: Citizen's report cards in Uganda

- Ugandan health services underwent a sudden loss of funding and infrastructure
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The meta-story here is how much *work* it took.

**“It costs a lot of money
to look this cheap.”
- Dolly Parton**

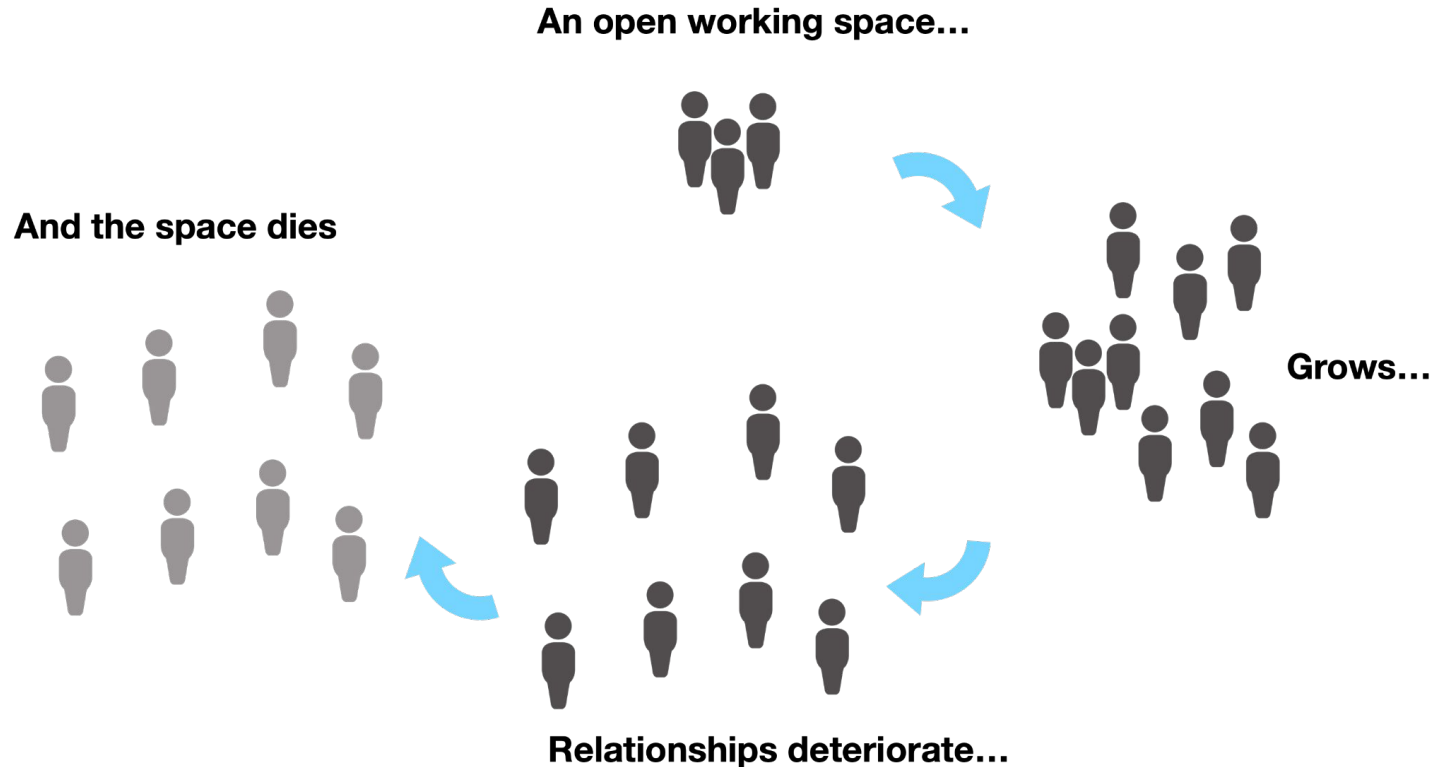
**It also takes a lot of work
to be “transparent.”**



[Dolly Parton, 2005](#)

In agile orgs, transparency has also had mixed results.

The cycle of transparency



Losing confidentiality via transparency

“You idiot. You naive, foolish, irresponsible nincompoop. There is really no description of stupidity, no matter how vivid, that is adequate. I quake at the imbecility of it.”

-Tony Blair on the Freedom of Information Act, 2000



Tony Blair in 2022



Objections to “transparency”

- Erases asymmetries: high power/low power, info provider/receiver, pull/push
- Assumes that the viewer has the tools to interpret what they see
- Used to give veneer of objectivity to judgements and interpretations
- Implies low effort for the information provider
- Denies the importance of interpretation
- Leads to feelings of surveillance inside previously safe spaces
- Easily weaponized



Reframing transparency

A photograph of a storefront window display at night. The image is overlaid with a dark blue tint. Two large windows are visible. Above the left window is a large, faint letter 'C'. Above the right window is a large, faint letter 'A'. The left window displays a mannequin in a dark, patterned dress. A person in a dark jacket and light-colored pants is walking past the left window. The right window displays three mannequins: one on the left in a blue and white striped dress, one in the center in a red and black outfit, and one on the right in a dark, patterned dress. The background of the right window is divided into three vertical panels of different colors: blue, red, and yellow.

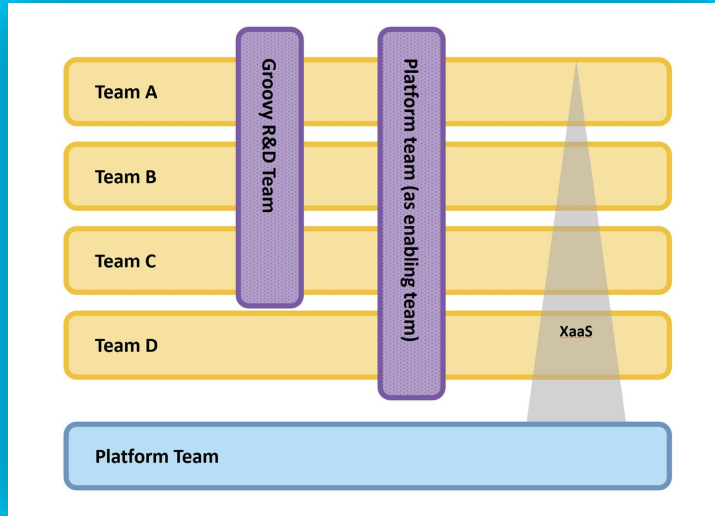
Image: Technicolor by Chris (a.k.a. MoiVous)

**We're aiming for an approach that
embraces differences in
perspective and the need for
active communication.**

**We're here at an agile conference.
It's time we talk teams.**

Assumption: the most effective configuration for value delivery is loosely-coupled teams of 4-14.

Team Topologies

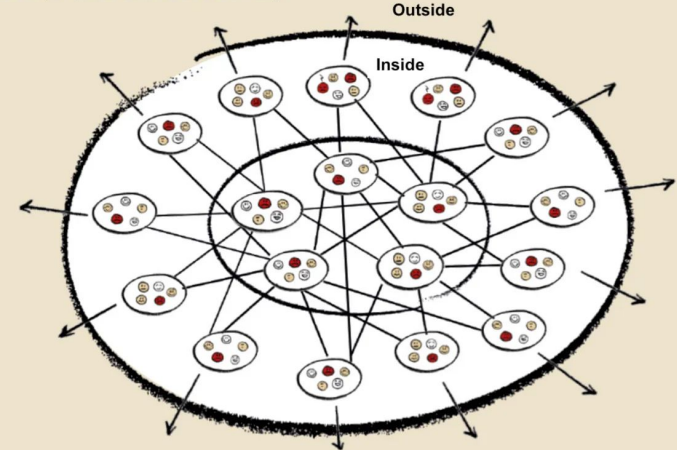


<https://teamtopologies.com/industry-examples/building-a-successful-platform-team-at-croz>

Beta Codex

Value Creation Structure

Power: Reputation, or power of those with mastery



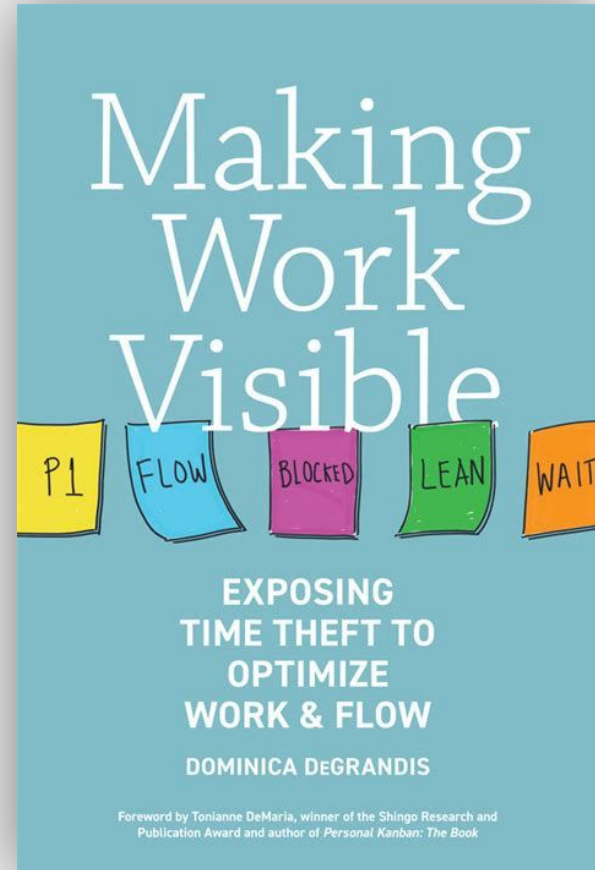
<https://nielspflaeging.medium.com/org-physics-the-3-faces-of-every-company-df16025f65f8>

Communication inside teams



Inside teams, we have years of experience now in visualizing work.

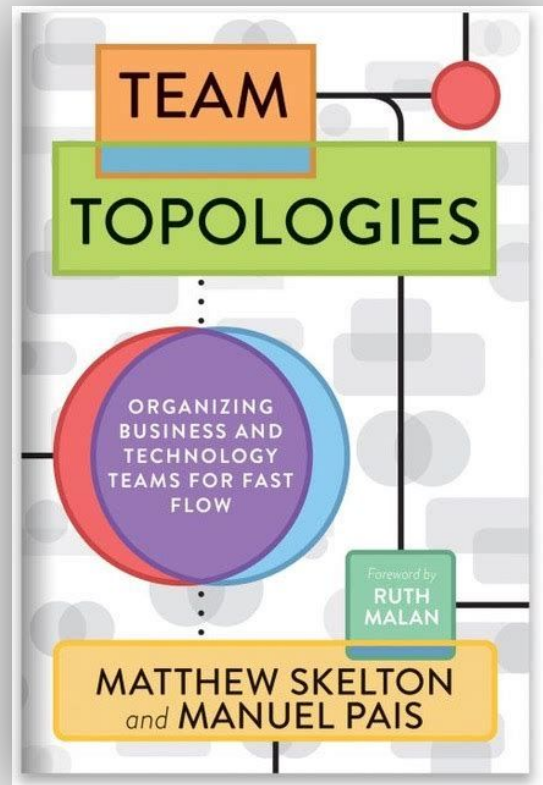
Also, deep literature on psychological safety.



Communication between peer teams



Team Topologies provides framing to evolve inter-team relationships, e.g. Team APIs and the collaboration-to-XaaS pipeline.



**But this isn't where we're
struggling with transparency**



Where transparency approaches often fail

- Up and down levels of the org
- Across disciplines
- In heterogeneous or diverse environments

= Anywhere we have to communicate across worldviews!



Image: Frugal by TaxCredits.net



Struggling business area: two worlds, two answers

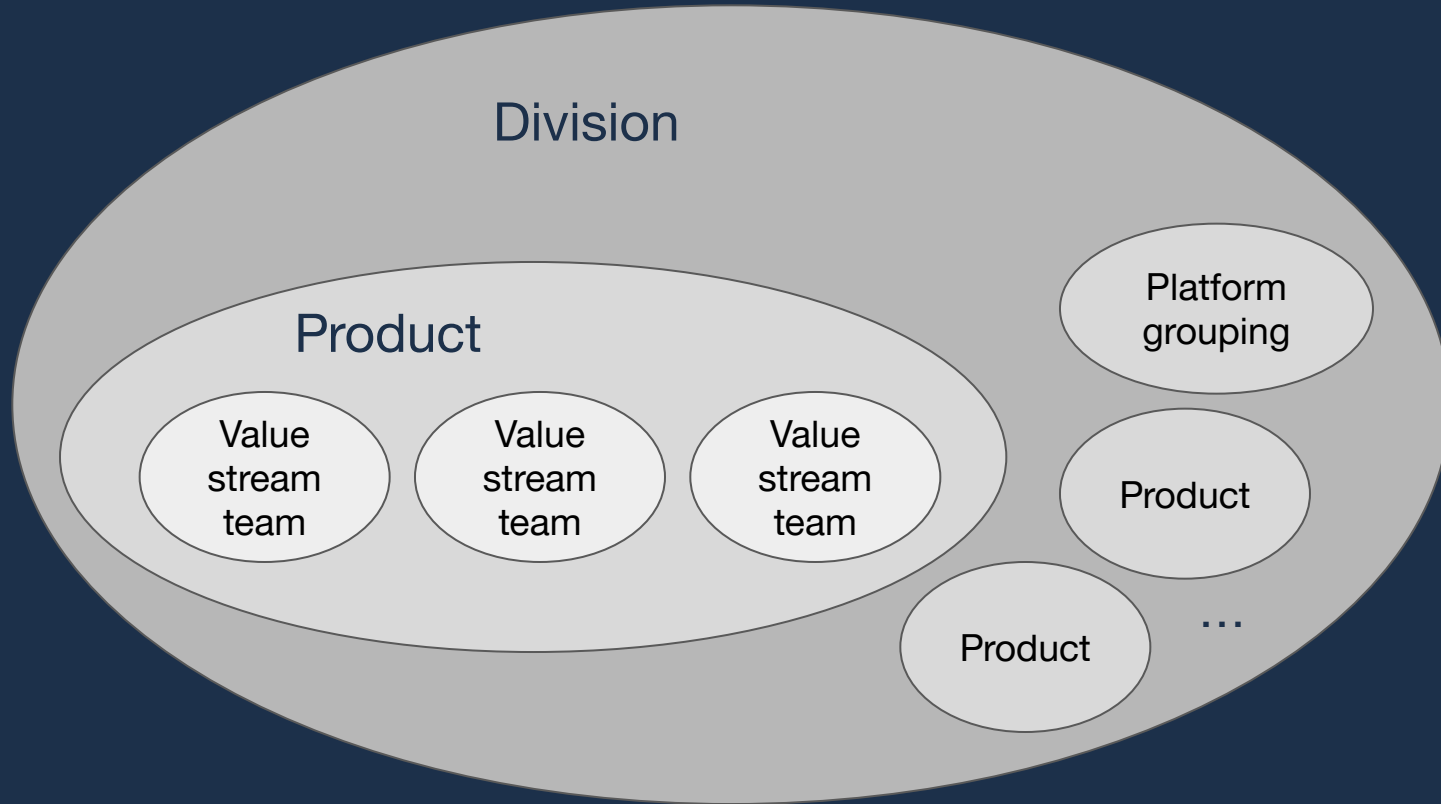
Leadership

- **If** an area of the business isn't working well,
- **Then** the org should slim it and improve effectiveness, while investing in areas with solid fundamentals

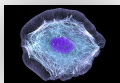
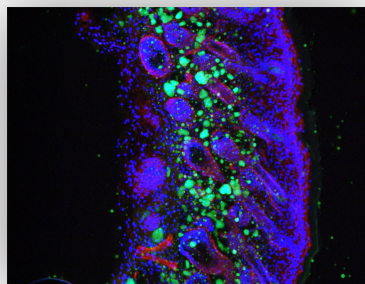
Team

- **If** you want better results,
- **Then** the org should invest to stabilize, then explore options

Organisational zoom levels

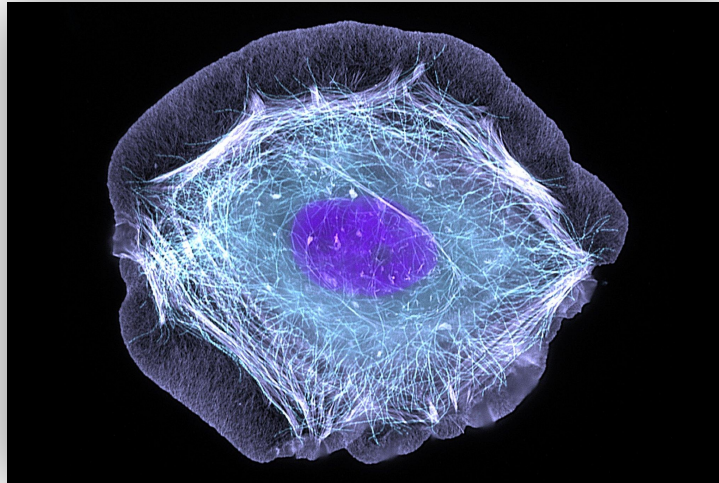


Scale example: skin



Scale example: a cell

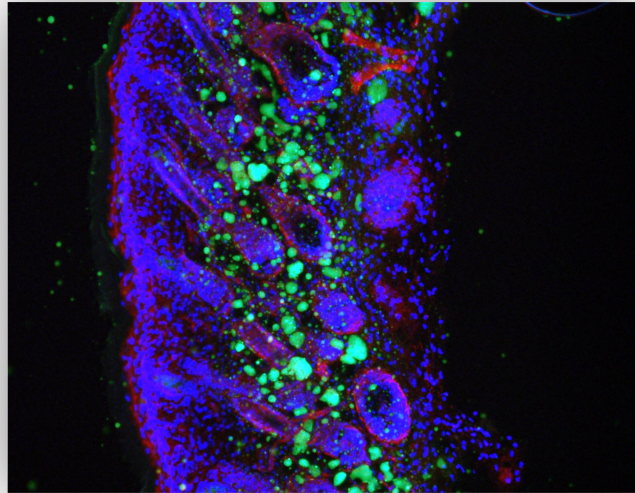
“I want to take in nutrients, keep out toxins, and make energy”



[Skin cell \(keratinocyte\), NIH Image Gallery](#)

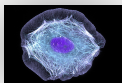
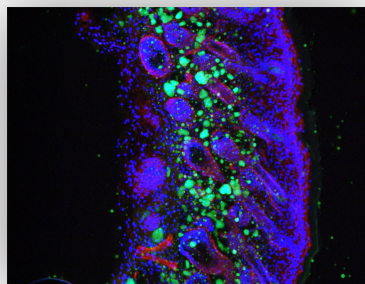
Scale example: skin cell / fat cell structure

“I want to act as a barrier to keep out harmful bacteria”



[Skin and fat cells, NIH Image Gallery](#)

Scale example: skin



Different zoom levels in an organisation also have different dynamics.



Common zoom level differences

Zoomed out

(e.g. division leaders)

- Change is slower
- Impact is over longer horizon
- More people affected by decisions
- Aggregated information

Zoomed in:

(e.g. a stream-aligned team)

- Change is faster
- Impact is either fast or untraceable
- Small number of people
- Direct, granular information

**Our communication, especially
across zoom levels, must account
for different worldviews.**





Communication beyond transparency

Communication beyond transparency

1. Send out information others need

The goal is not just for the information to exist, but *stick in stakeholders' heads*

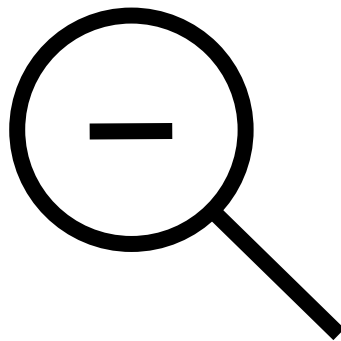
Narrative is critical. Important to be clear, relevant, and interesting.



Communication beyond transparency

2. Assume everyone else is zoomed out from your work

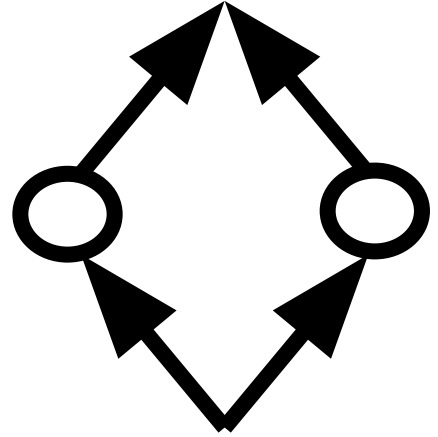
Your information is probably not their top priority. What's the right level of fidelity?



Communication beyond transparency

3. Information flowing through the org should still be consistent when it meets up again

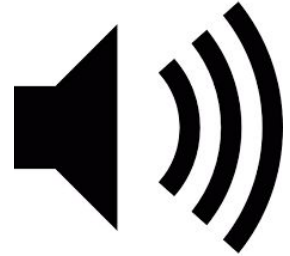
Two stakeholders who talk about your project should not surprise each other. This is important for trust.



Communication beyond transparency

4. Every venue is a good venue for storytelling

That townhall everyone hates? Those reports you think nobody reads? Often beneficial to build awareness





Case study: product initiation in an enterprise

A pair of changemakers who were given a remit to bring existing technology to market as a new product.

They methodically built bridges to

- HR
- Marketing
- Contracting
- Security
- Legal
- Finance



Case study: product initiation in an enterprise

They connected each group into their coalition

1. Started with individual introduction
2. Connected to wider team, if appropriate
3. Sought examples of what had gone before
4. Defaulted to accepting other group's interpretations and constraints
5. Checked for impact on the rest of the network



Case study: product initiation in an enterprise

They finely tuned ongoing communications.

The pair established rhythms: infrequent enough that there was news, but frequent enough to keep channel warm.

They took every opportunity for communication and maintained very high communication standards.

Techniques for collaborative reasoning

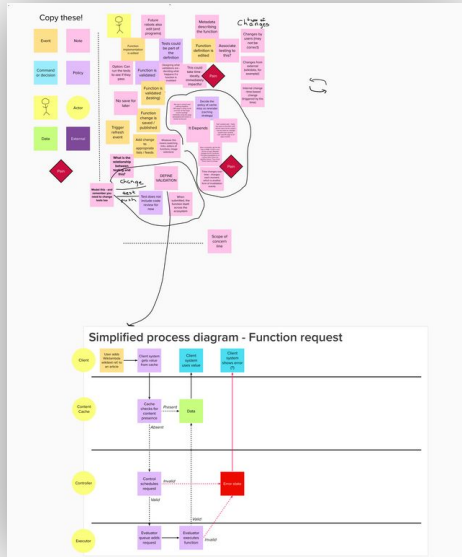
Image: psychedelic by mini-malist

“Reasonable people exposed to the same information generally come to the same conclusions.”

“Reasonable people
exposed to the same
information generally
come to the same
conclusions.”

Reasonable people
regularly disagree.

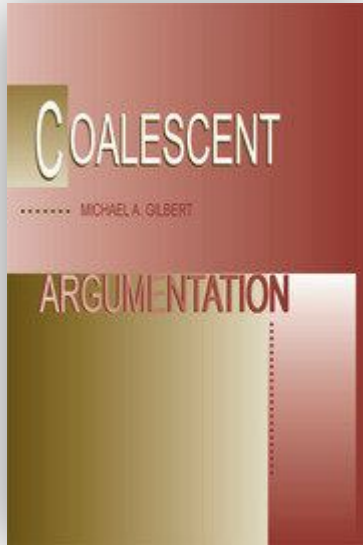
Tools for collaborative reasoning: Mapping



Mapping works to provide safe ways to explore revealed perspectives and preferences.

The value is in the conversation, not the map!

Tools for collaborative reasoning: Coalescent argumentation

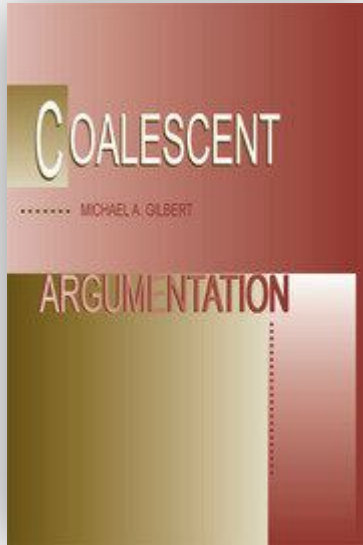


“[M]ost arguments are not about facts, but about values or how to use and/or choose facts.”

— Michael Gilbert

[Coalescent Argumentation,](#)
Michael Gilbert, 1997

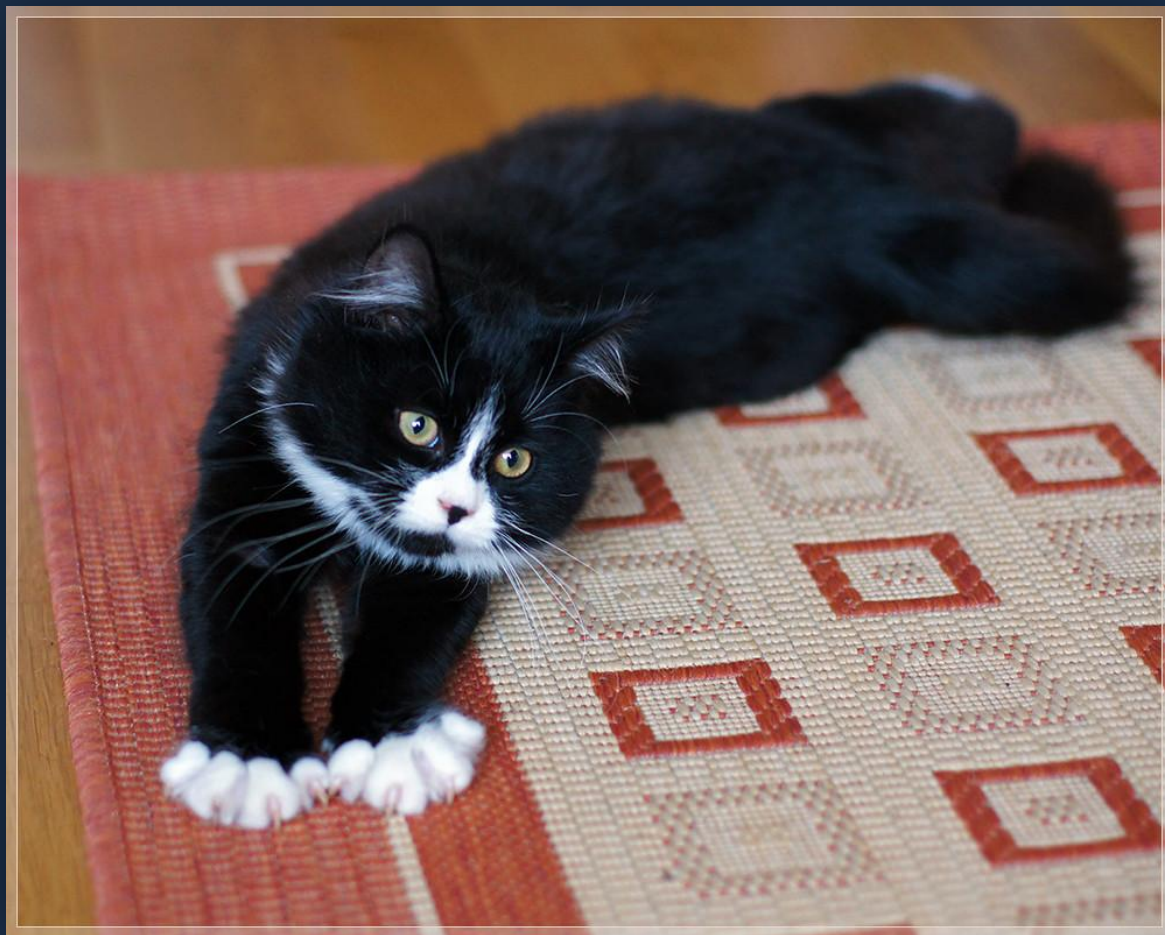
Tools for collaborative reasoning: Coalescent argumentation



Situate logic amongst the different types of reasoning humans do:

- Logical
- Emotional
- Visceral
- Kisceral

[Coalescent Argumentation,](#)
Michael Gilbert, 1997



Lucy by hehaden

Tools for collaborative reasoning: Reflection



In order to understand other people's positions, you need to understand your own.

What are my prior beliefs? What biases do I bring? What are my values? What will I not compromise?

**A collaborative reasoning toolkit,
aka a “social epistemology and
metacognition” toolkit**

**Transparency approaches help
us solve the **easiest problems**,
not necessarily the **most
important**.**



Key takeaways

- Move away from “transparency”
- Communicate actively
- Think zoom levels, not hierarchy
- Recognize different ways of reasoning as valid
- Give yourself the space for social reasoning and reflection
- And yes, it takes a lot of work

Thanks to...

Nikki Lee, Alex Soble, Alex Bielen, Tadgh O'Higgins, John Cutler, Christian Crumlish, Sean Blanchflower and all the people who helped mature this talk beyond its original Charlie Day rant.



One last thing...

Please don't use LLMs for this.

Thank you!