



Strategic Narrative

A Simple Method that Business Leaders Can Use to
Help Everyone Understand Their Business,
Get Behind It, and Believe In It.

METAHELM

Guillaume Wiatr

Strategic Narrative

A Simple Method that Business Leaders Can Use to
Help Everyone Understand Their Business,
Get Behind It, and Believe In It.

Guillaume Wiatr

Copyright © 2022 by Guillaume Wiatr.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law. For permission requests, write to the publisher, addressed “Attention: Permissions Coordinator,” at the address below.

First Edition, 2022

ISBN 979-8-9862185-0-2

Published by MetaHelm, Seattle, Washington
3945 SW Elmgrove Street

METAHELM

www.metahelm.com

Bulk Orders: contact@metahelm.com

To Deana

We make the best team.

Contents

Alignment is gold. **6**

But alignment is hard. **20**

So, “You need a story.”, they said. **29**

One more story won’t fix your company. **37**

Build a strategic narrative instead. **50**

People will pay for a story, but people will die for a narrative. **61**

Building a new strategic narrative is an act of leadership. **69**

Time for action. **82**

Alignment is gold.

This is you.

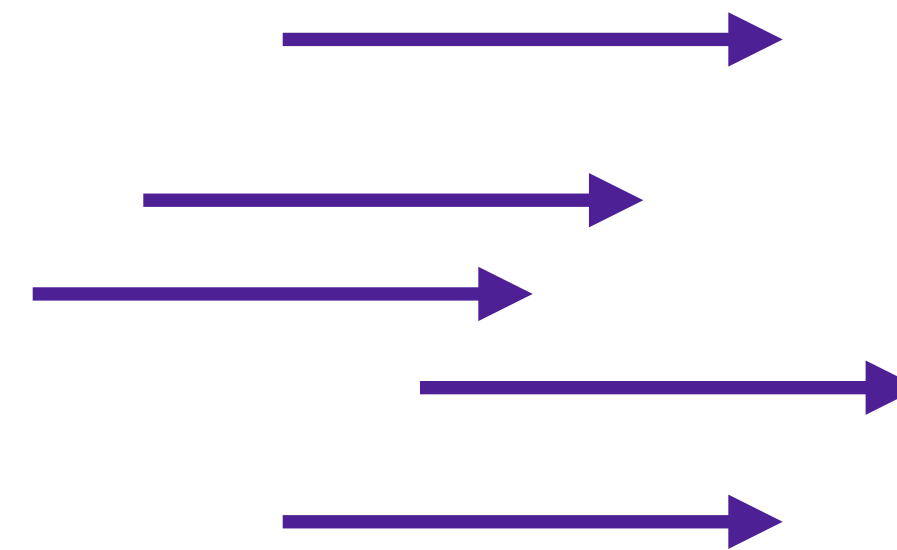
Running at full speed, with a big idea, and a direction to pursue.



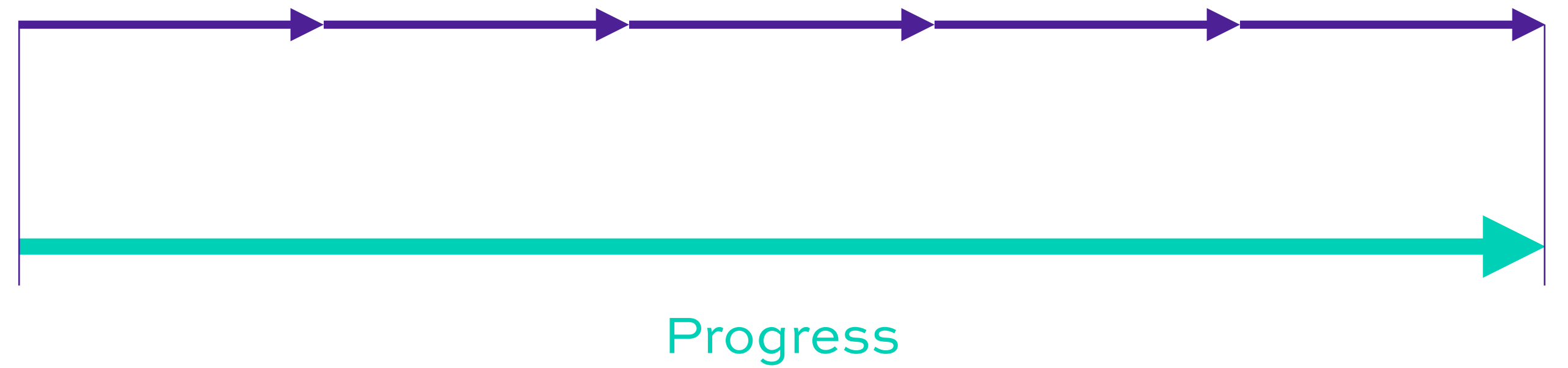
This is you and your team.

When your company is small,
you're aligned, so you're
making progress.

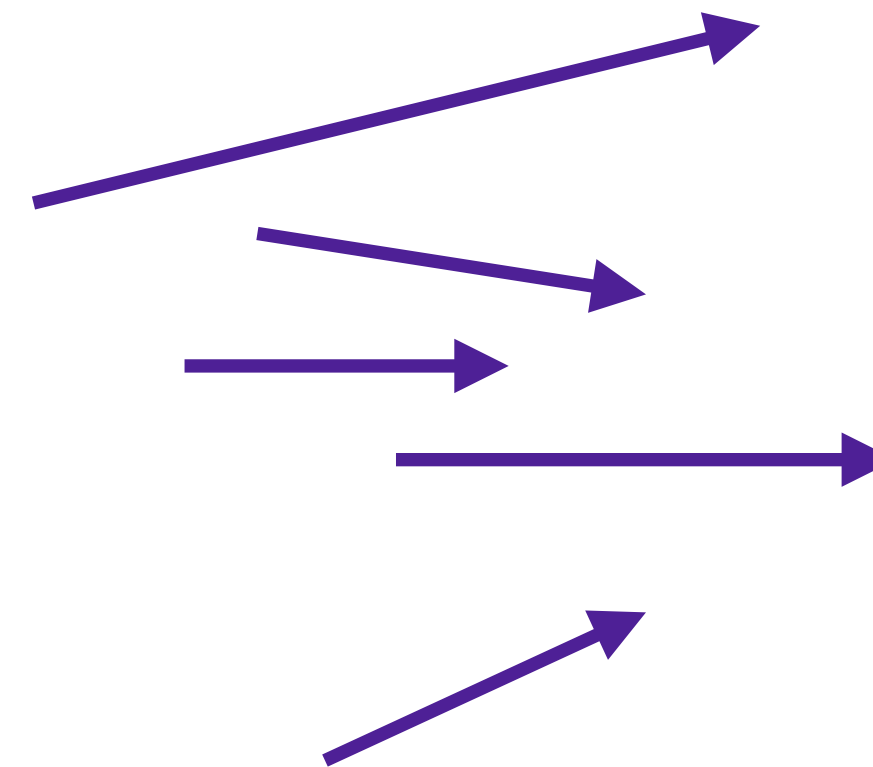
How much progress?



Well, if every person is a vector,
progress is the sum of all vectors.

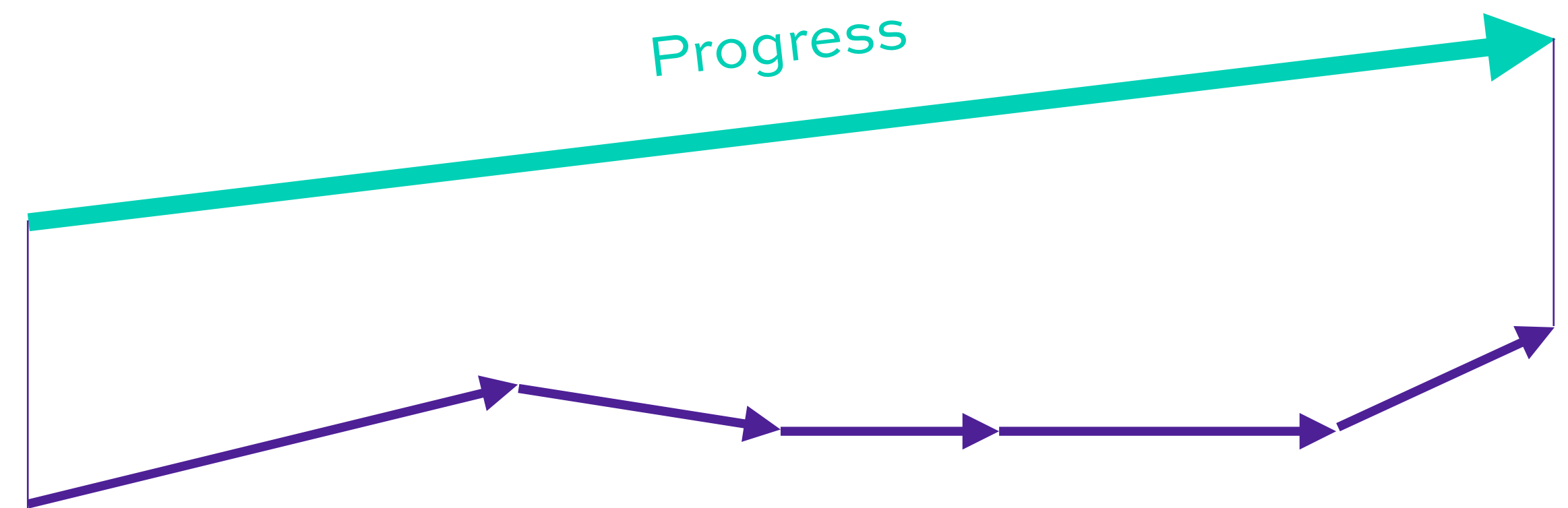


But let's be real, perfect alignment doesn't exist. In reality, good alignment looks more like that.



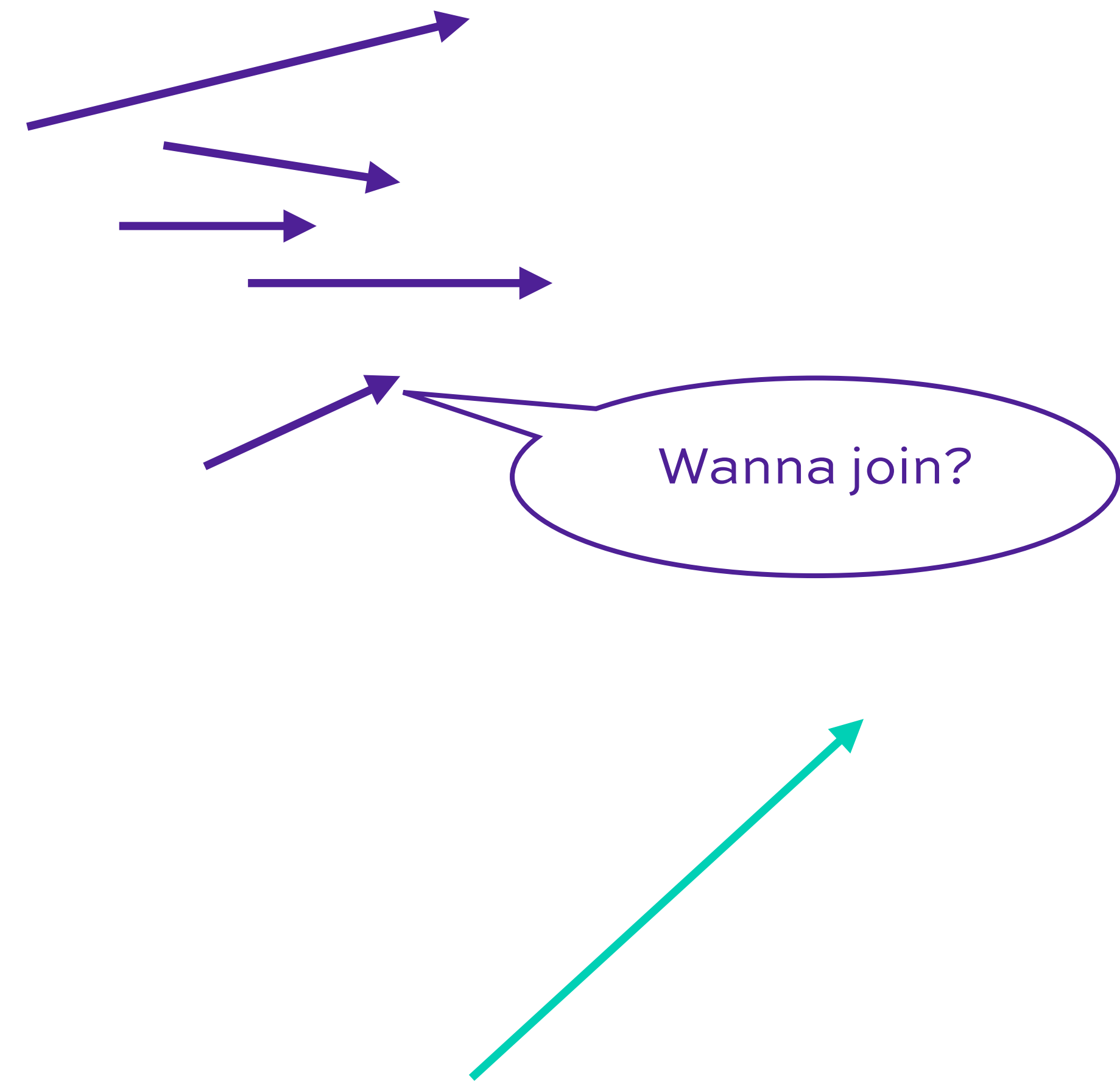
Still, if we add all vectors together, that's quite a lot of progress.

And when your team is aligned, you create something very precious.

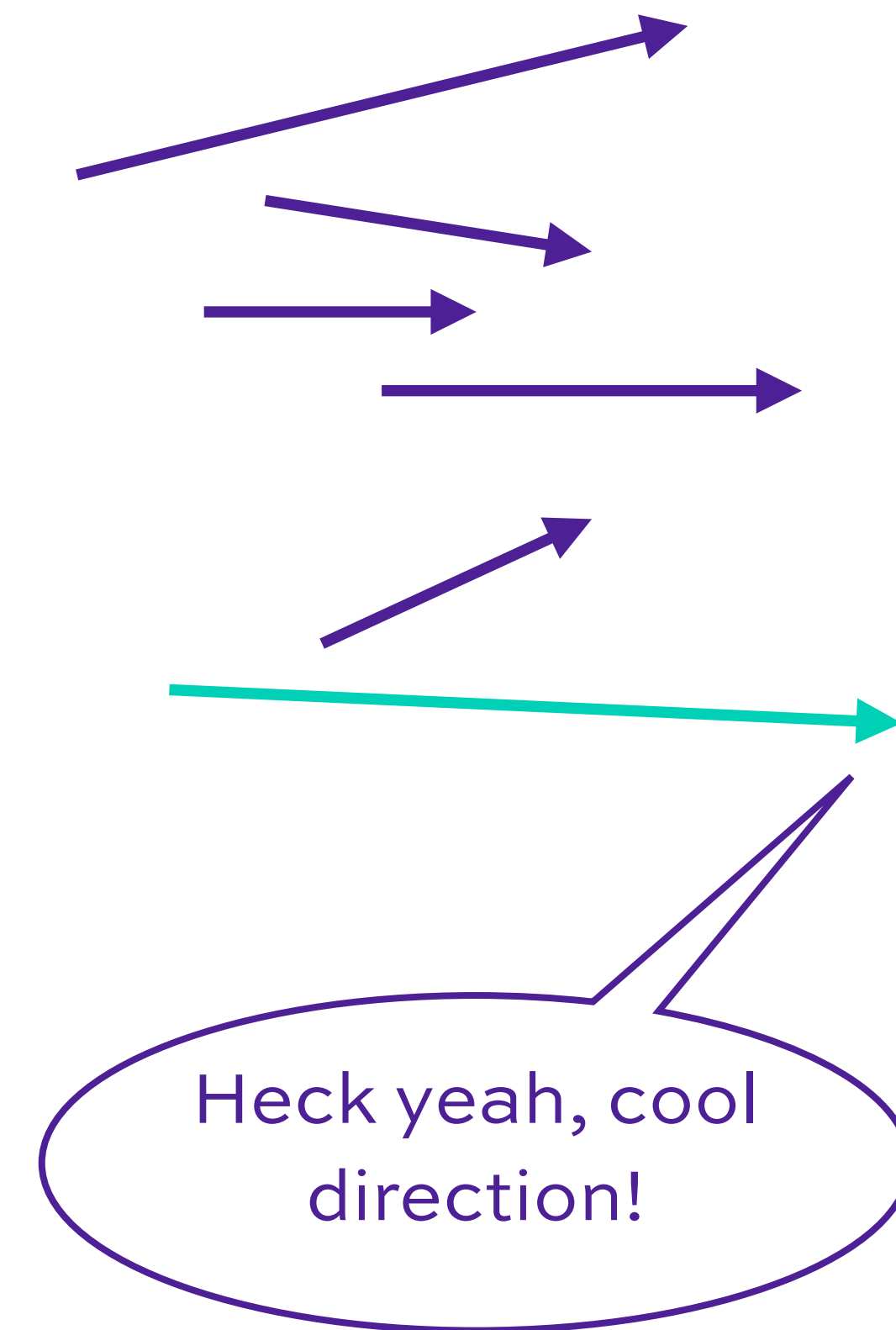


You create true believers.

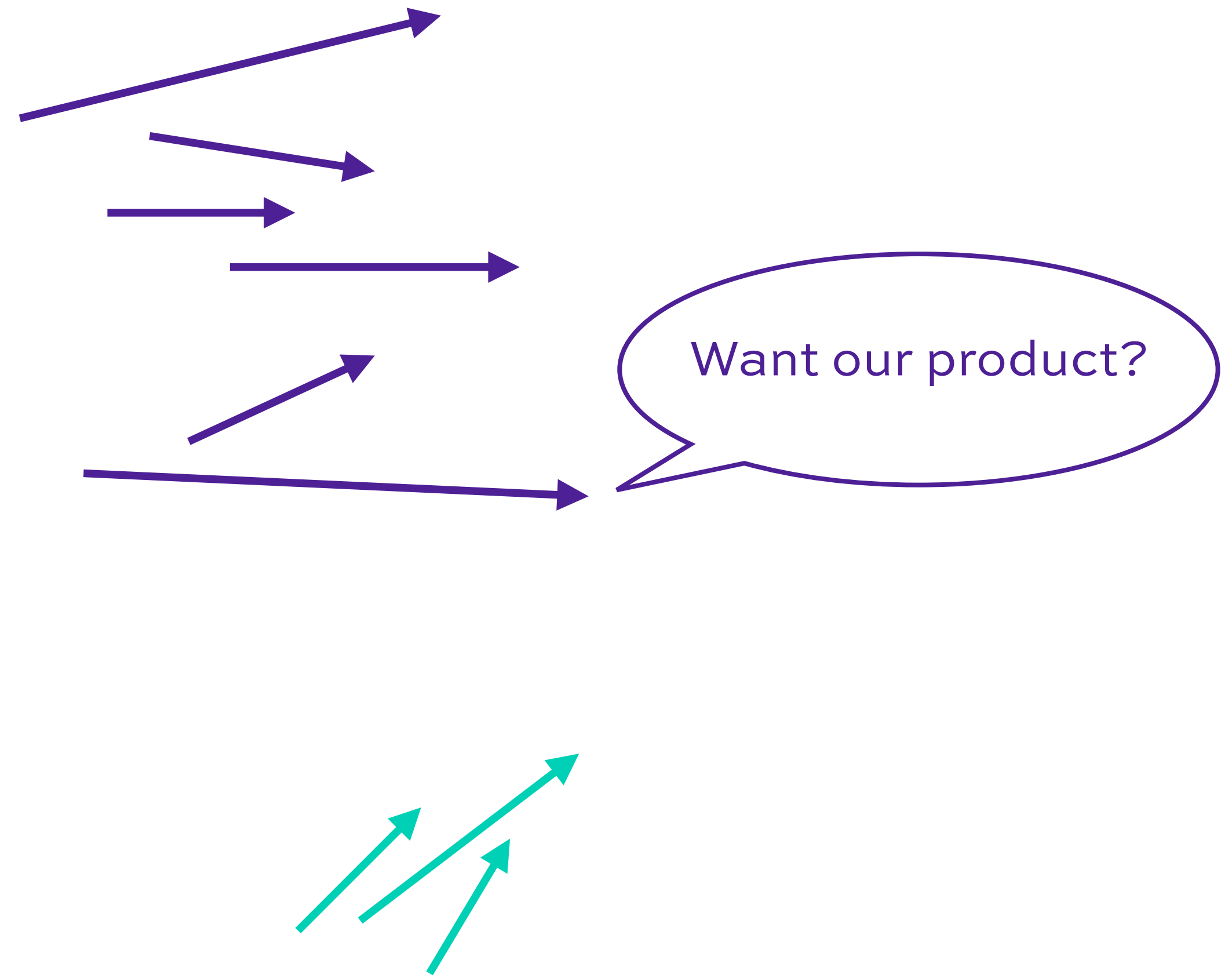
New talent...



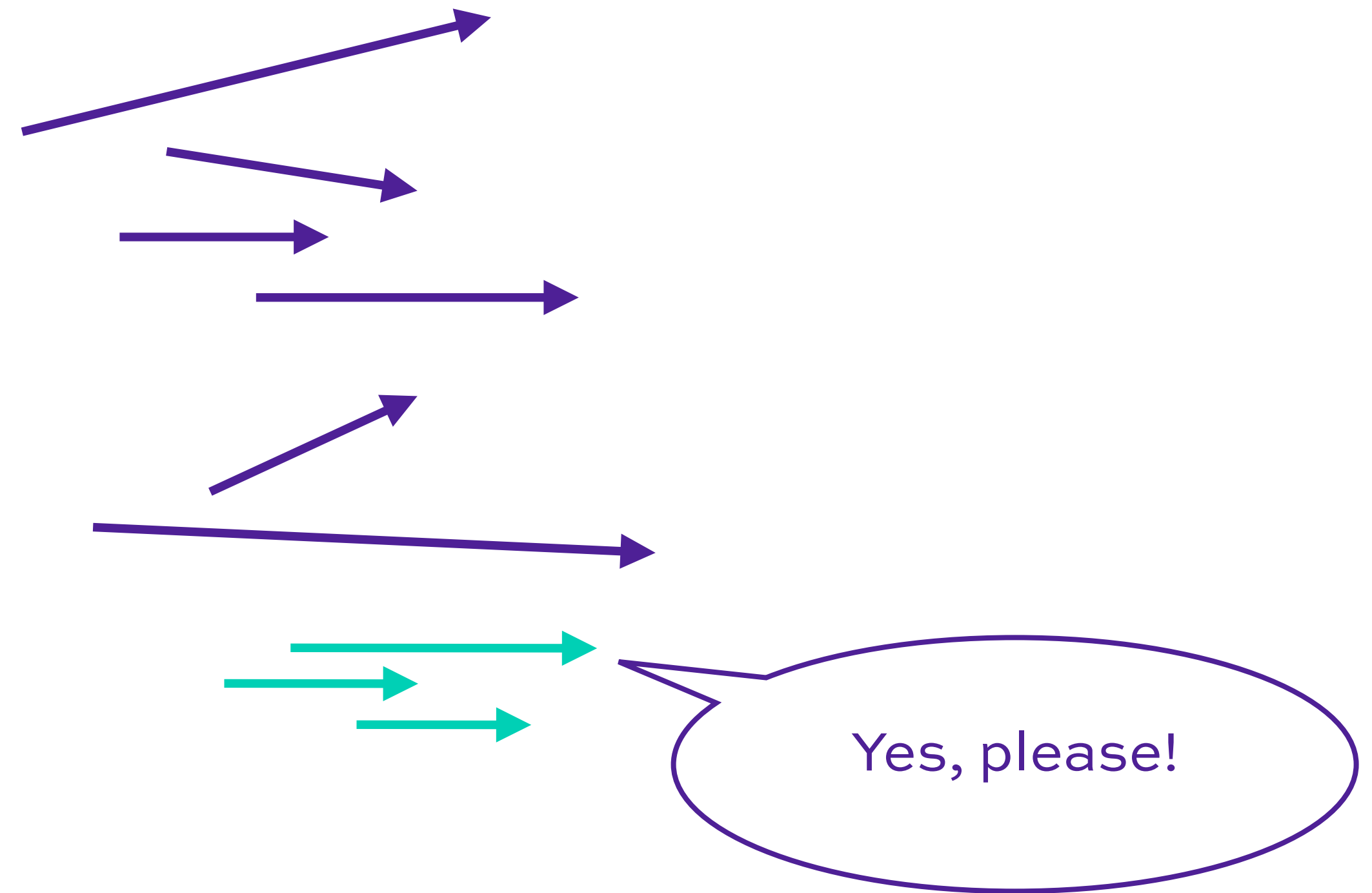
... wants to work with you.



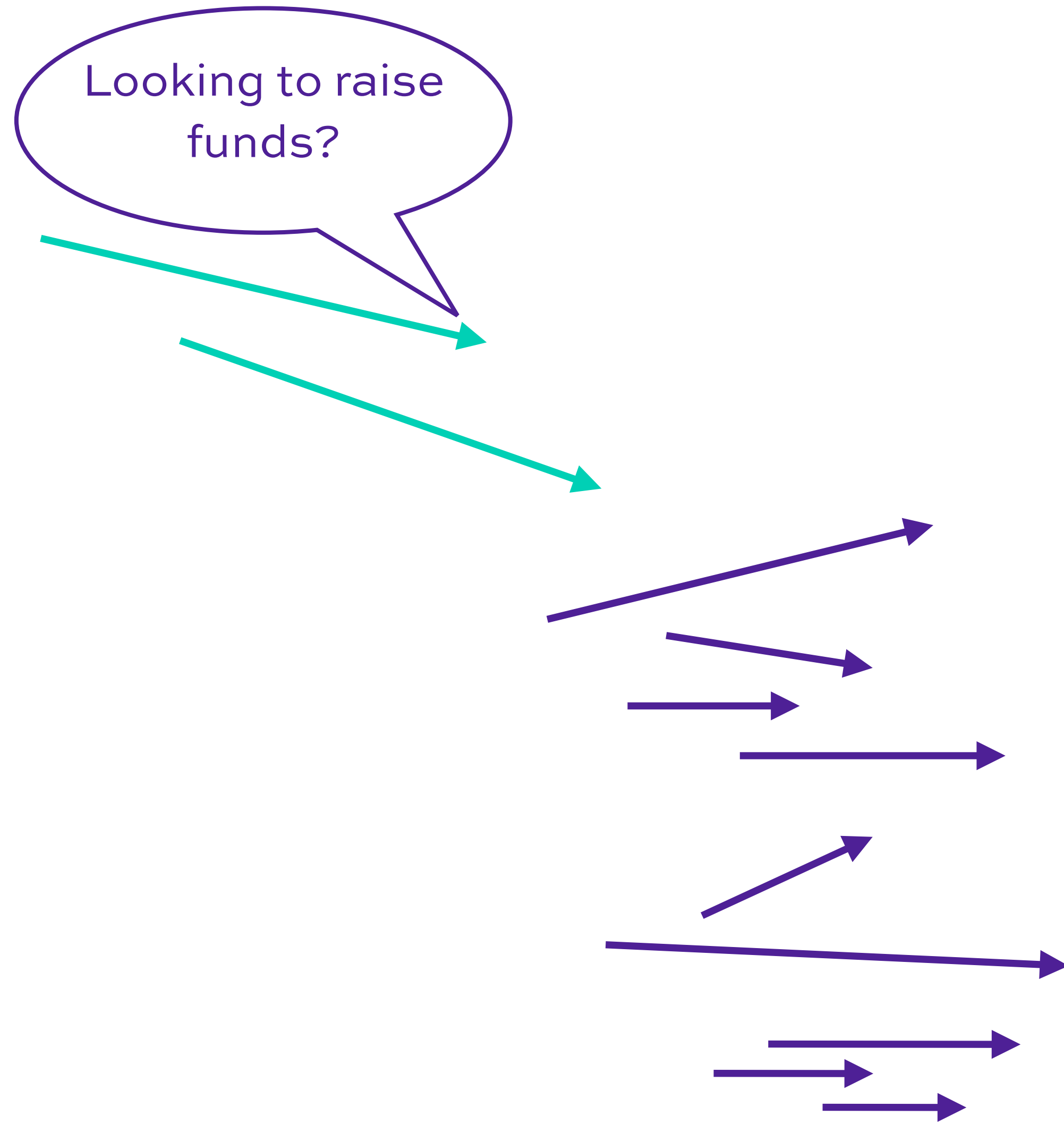
New customers...



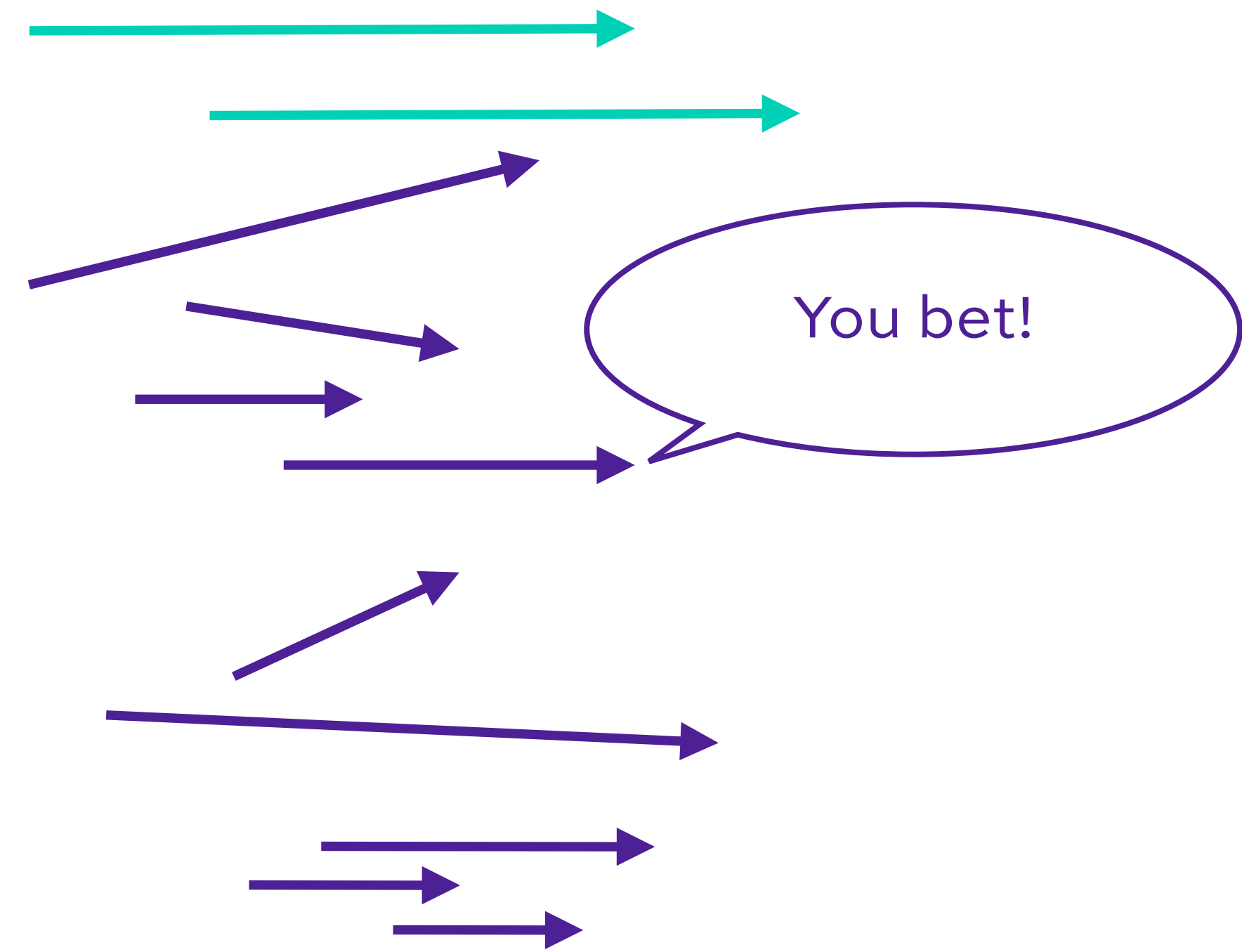
....want to buy from you.



Investors...

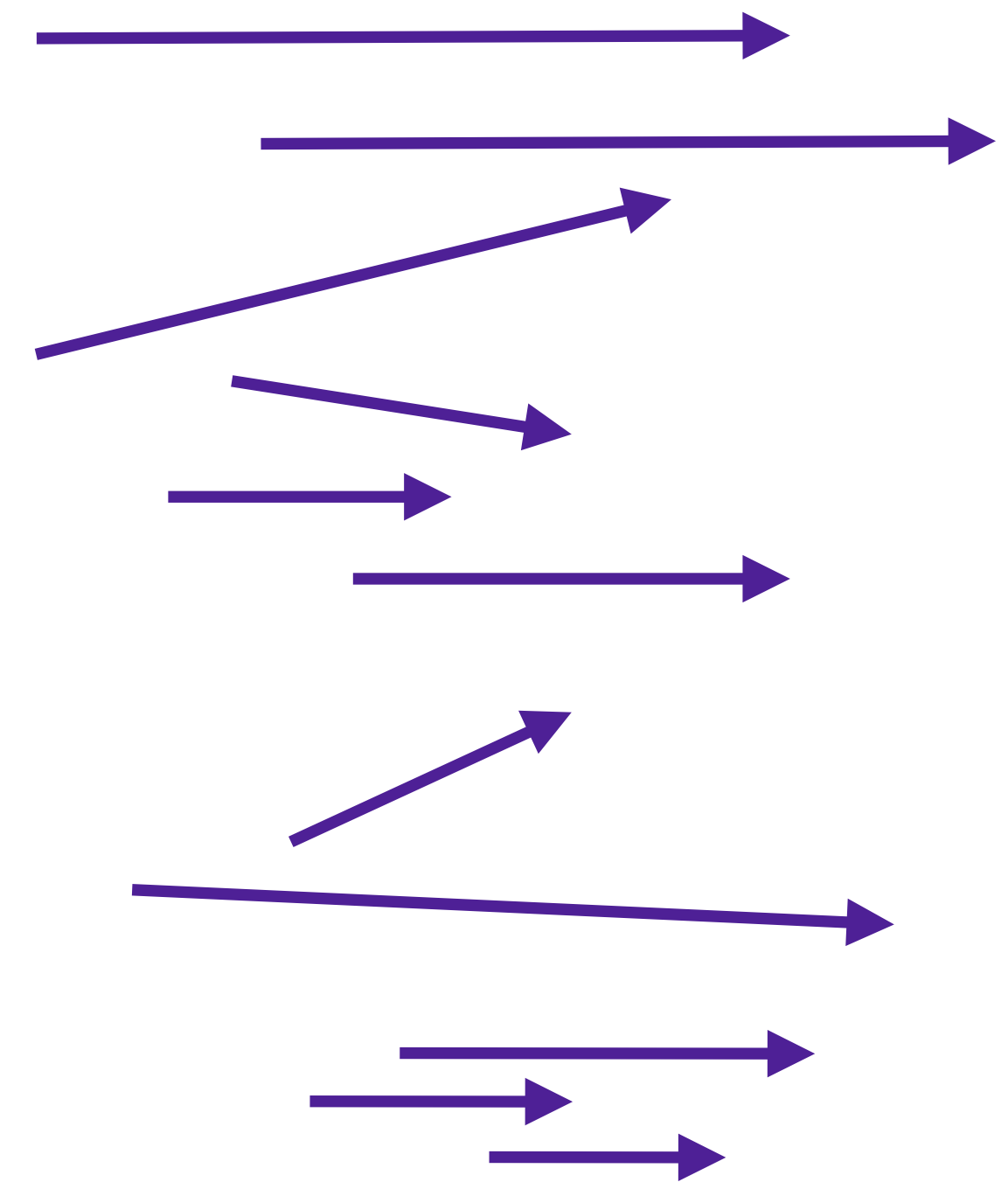


... want to back you.



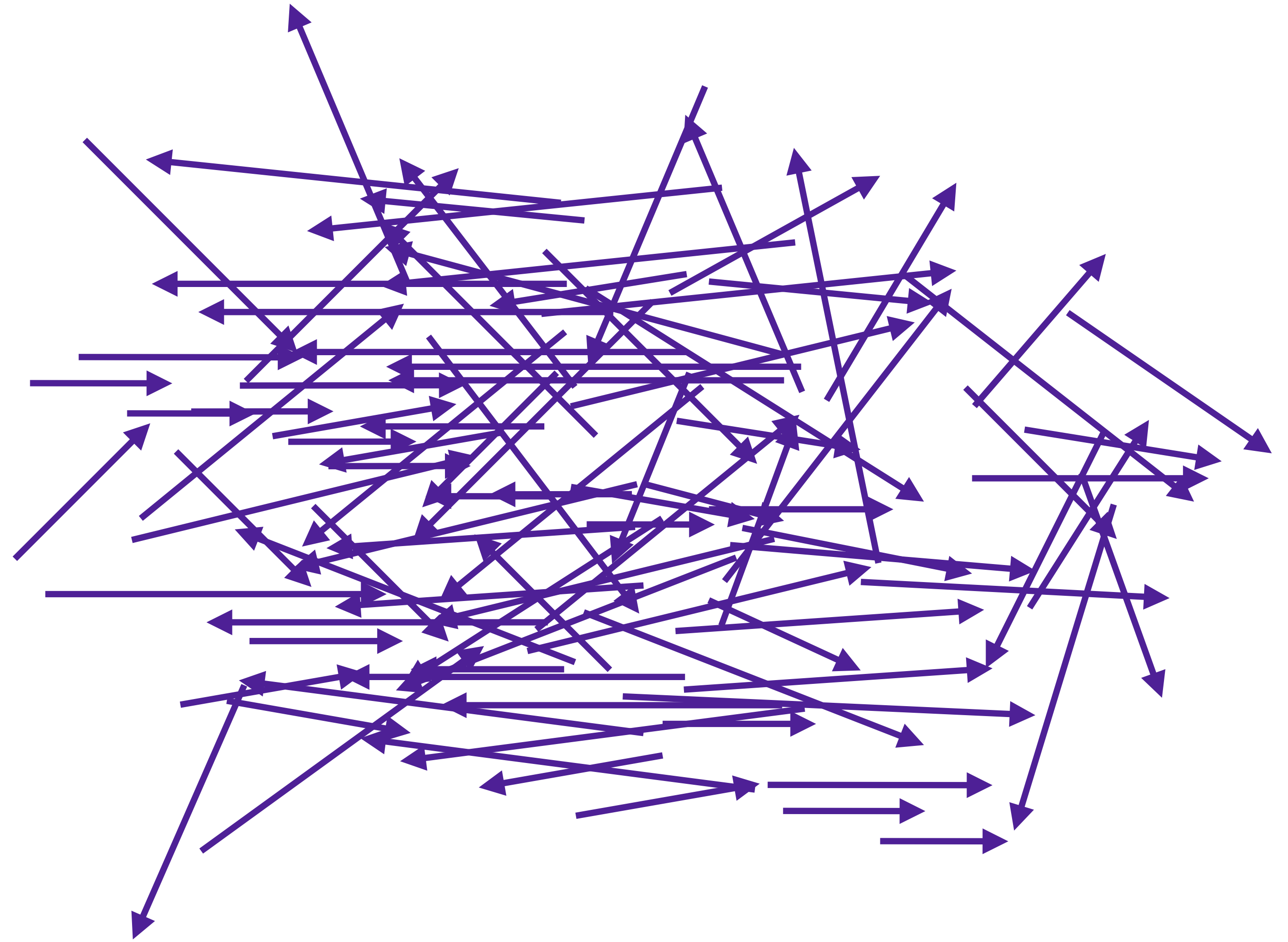
When everyone inside AND outside your company aligns to the same goal, your company grows.

And you create more impact.

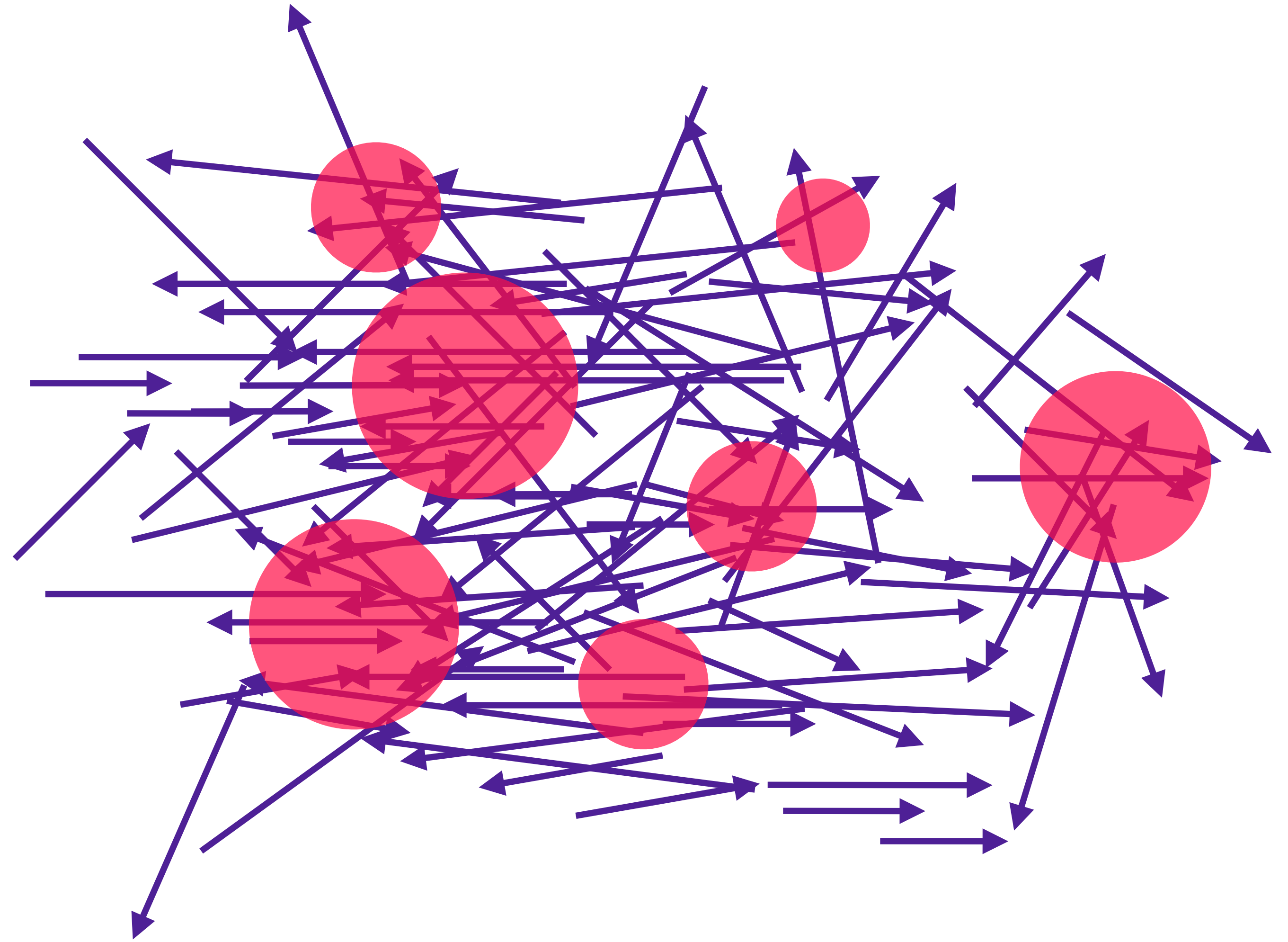


But alignment is hard.

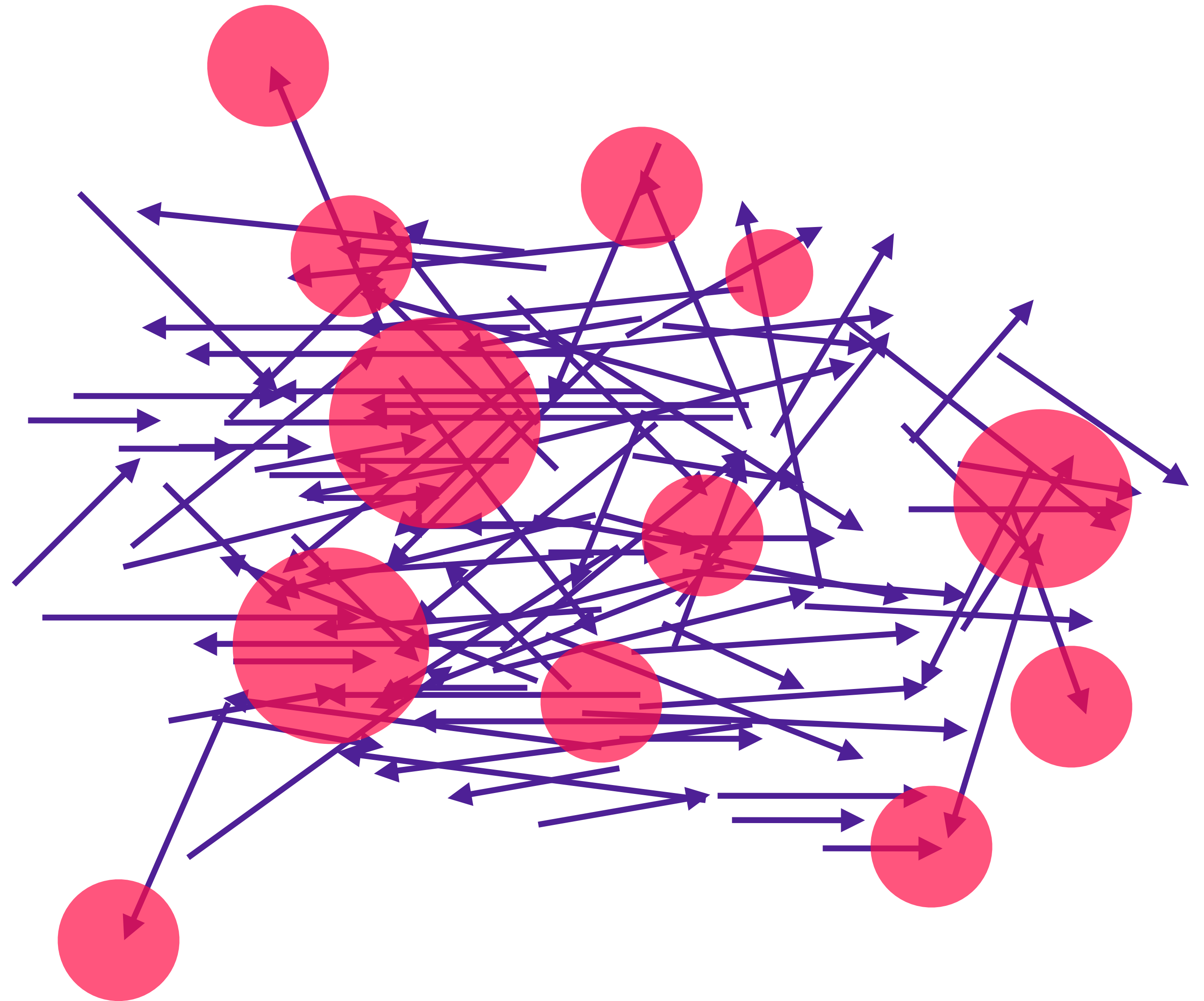
As your company grows,
keeping everyone rowing in the
same direction becomes tough,
and expensive problems start
to loom.



Inside, if people don't share the same priorities, it's hard to work together, and projects fail or just don't get done.



From the outside, if your direction is unclear, recruits and partners don't want to join, and product adoption is slow.

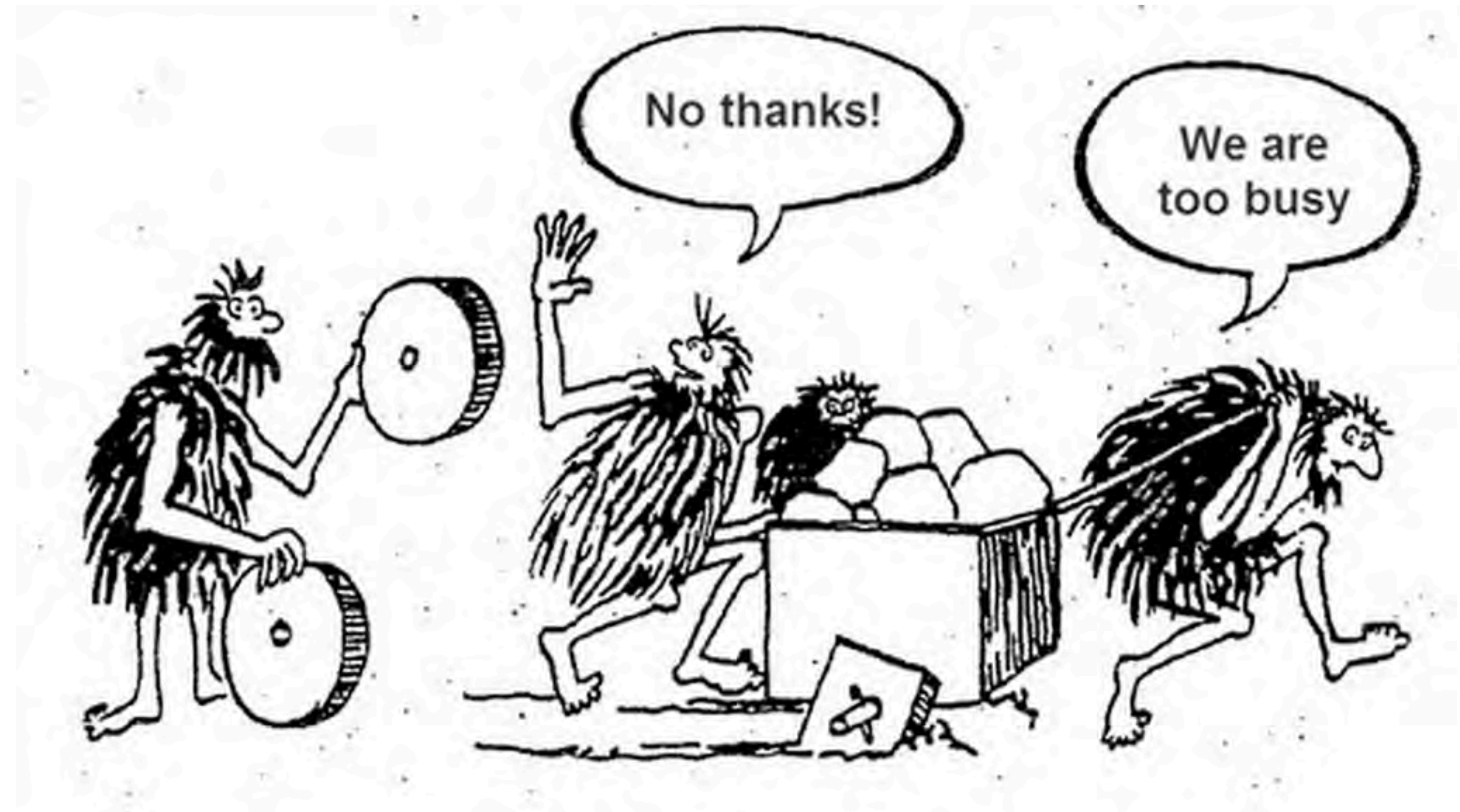


What do I mean by
“product adoption is slow”?

I mean this:

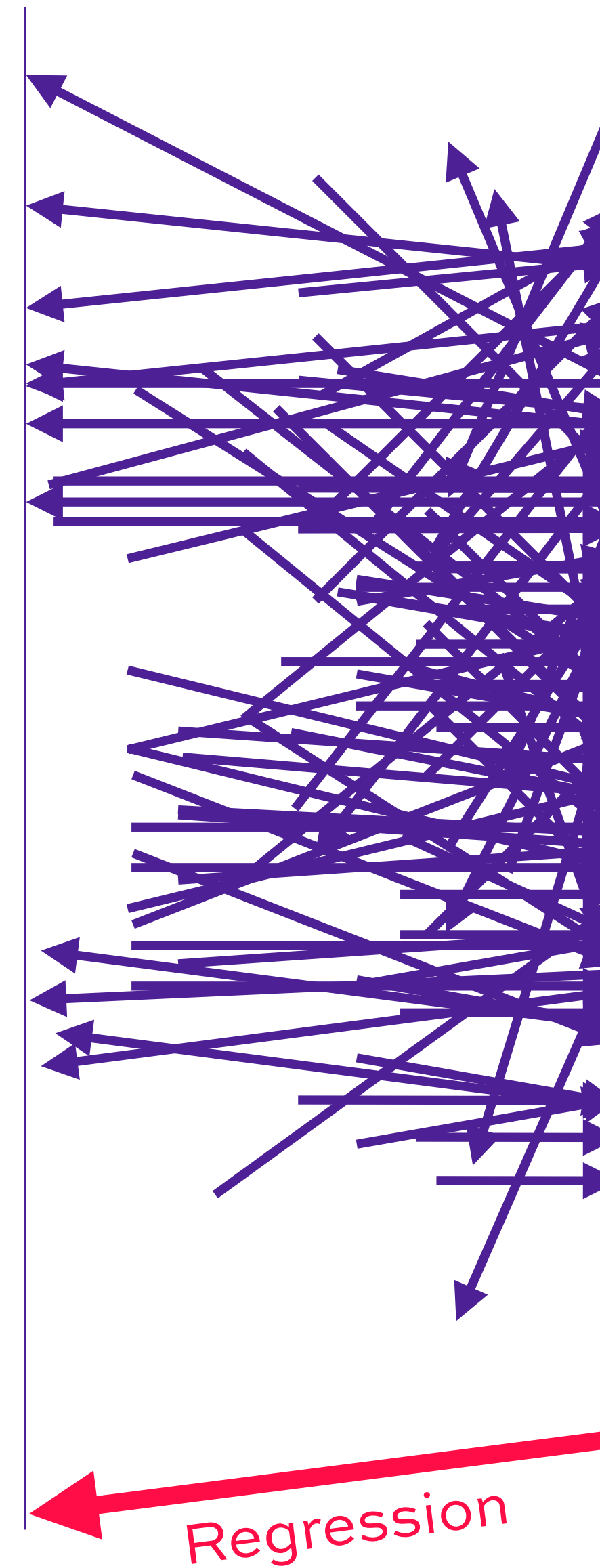
Although you know that people need your product, they don't notice it.

How frustrating.



Your strategy is just as good as people's ability to understand and participate in it.

Misalignment puts a brake on progress and can even lead to regression.



Since the 1950s, we have found many ways to align people, all traditional techniques from the Industrial Age, designed to command and control.

And they're fantastic; if you think of your company as a machine and people as little more than cogs in a wheel.

The CEO “alignment stack”

Status meetings

Emails

Slide decks

Scorecards

Objectives and results

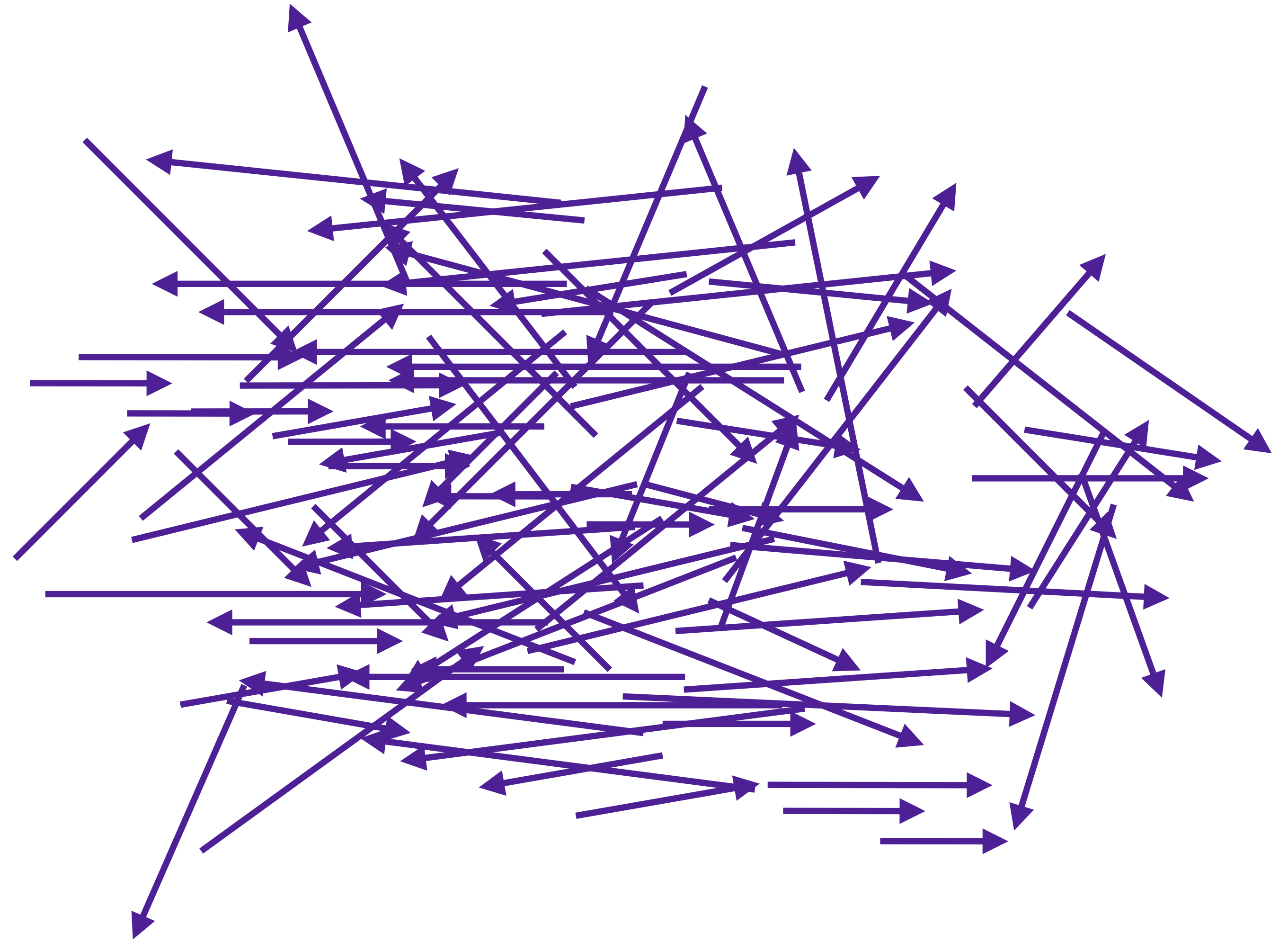
Best practices

KPIs

OKRs

Smart Goals

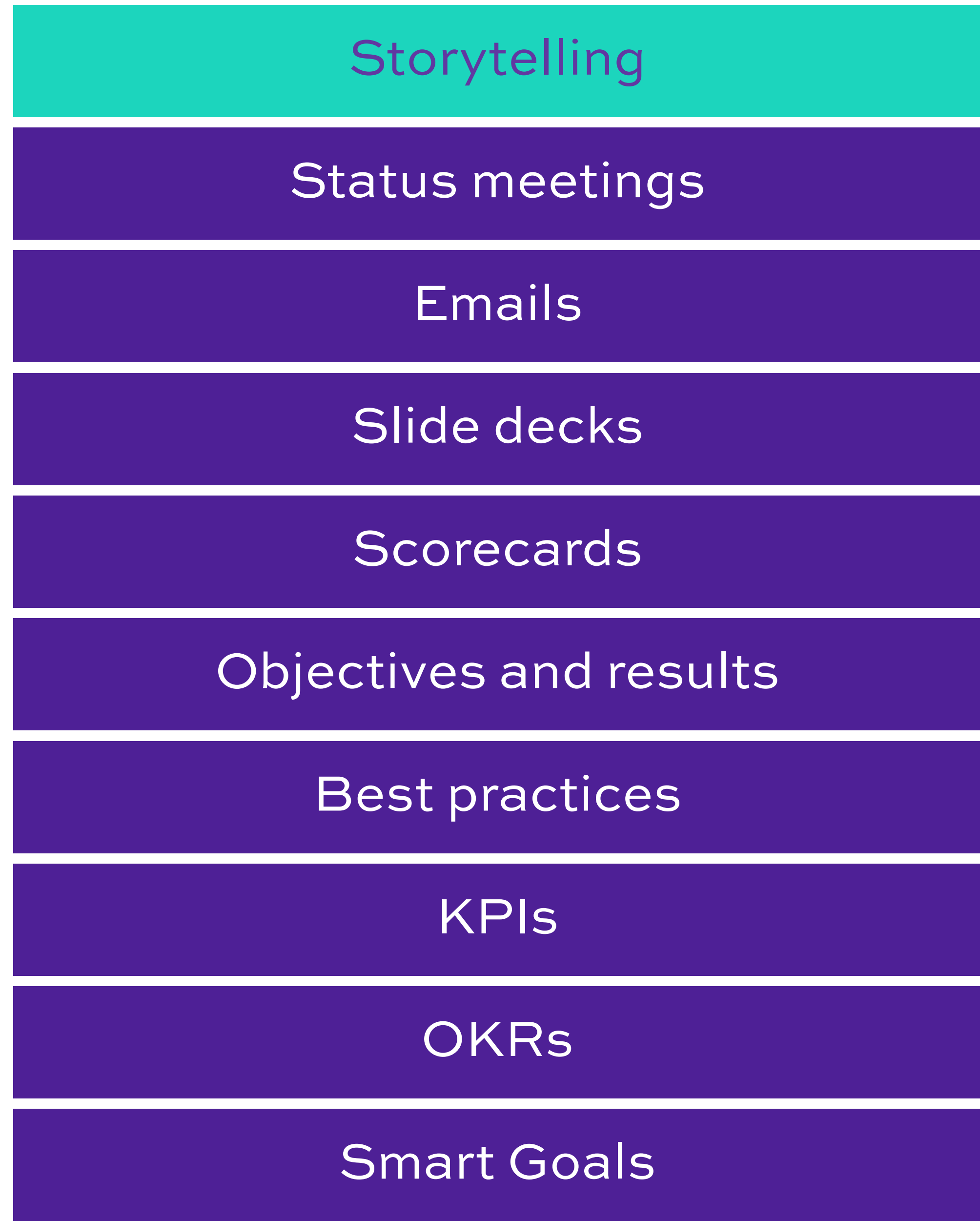
But with the rise of employee empowerment and the need for more meaningful, agile, and sustainable companies we need a better way to align and mobilize people.



So, “You need a story”,
they said.

Storytelling is the latest thing on the CEO strategic alignment stack.

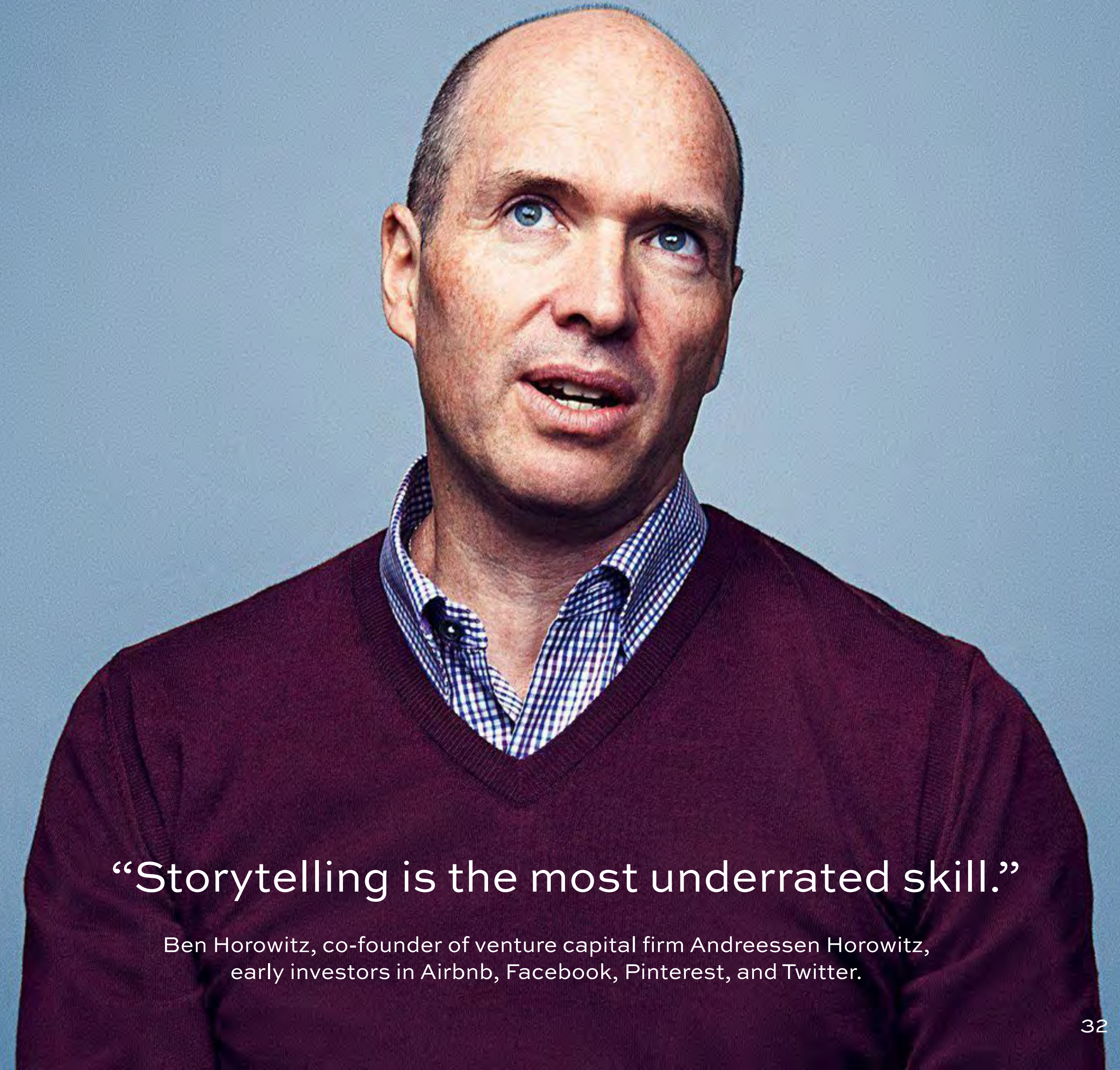
The CEO “alignment stack”



That's why you'll hear people say
"What's our story?".



That's why investors want
you to tell a story.



“Storytelling is the most underrated skill.”

Ben Horowitz, co-founder of venture capital firm Andreessen Horowitz,
early investors in Airbnb, Facebook, Pinterest, and Twitter.

That's why when you sell commodities like coffee, the real difference *is* the story.

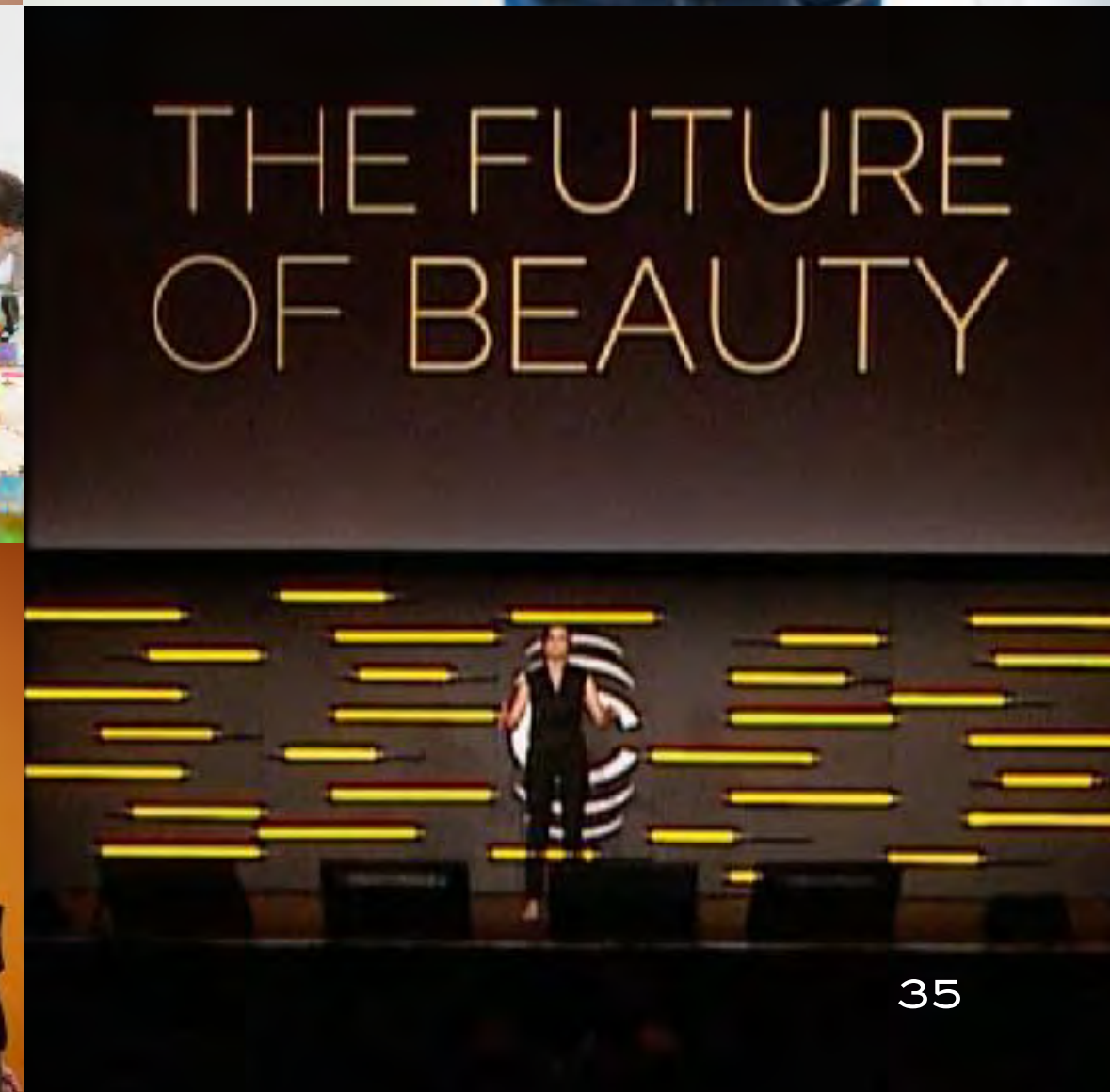
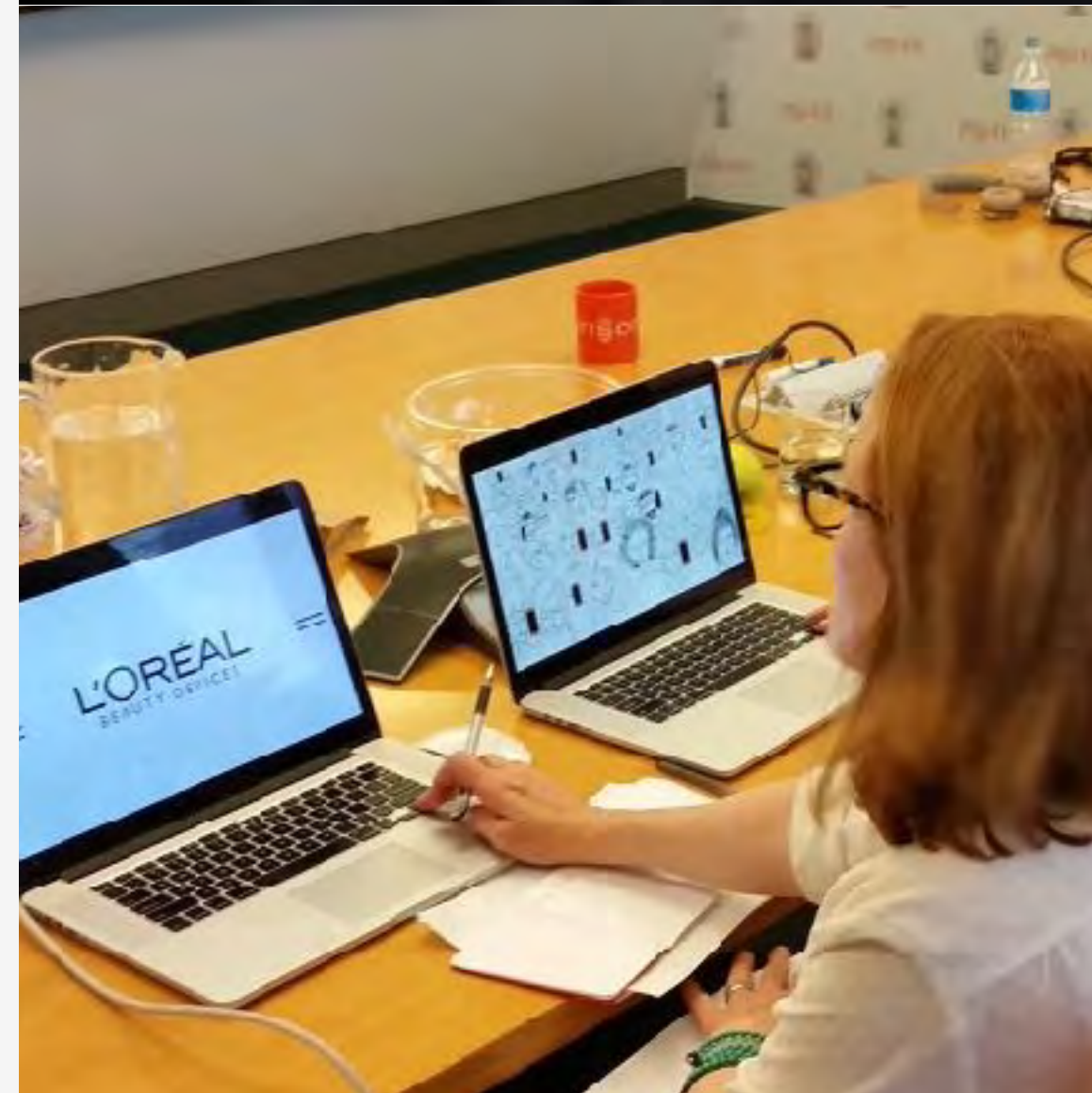




That's why there are dozens of business books on how to tell a story.

And that's why me too, I said,
"You need a story."

Since 2001, I have guided
hundreds of business leaders in
telling their stories.



But in looking for ways to build better companies, I found that storytelling was much harder than it looks, simply because like many people, **I was getting it wrong.**

In fact,...

One more story won't fix
your company.

First, your company doesn't have **a** story.

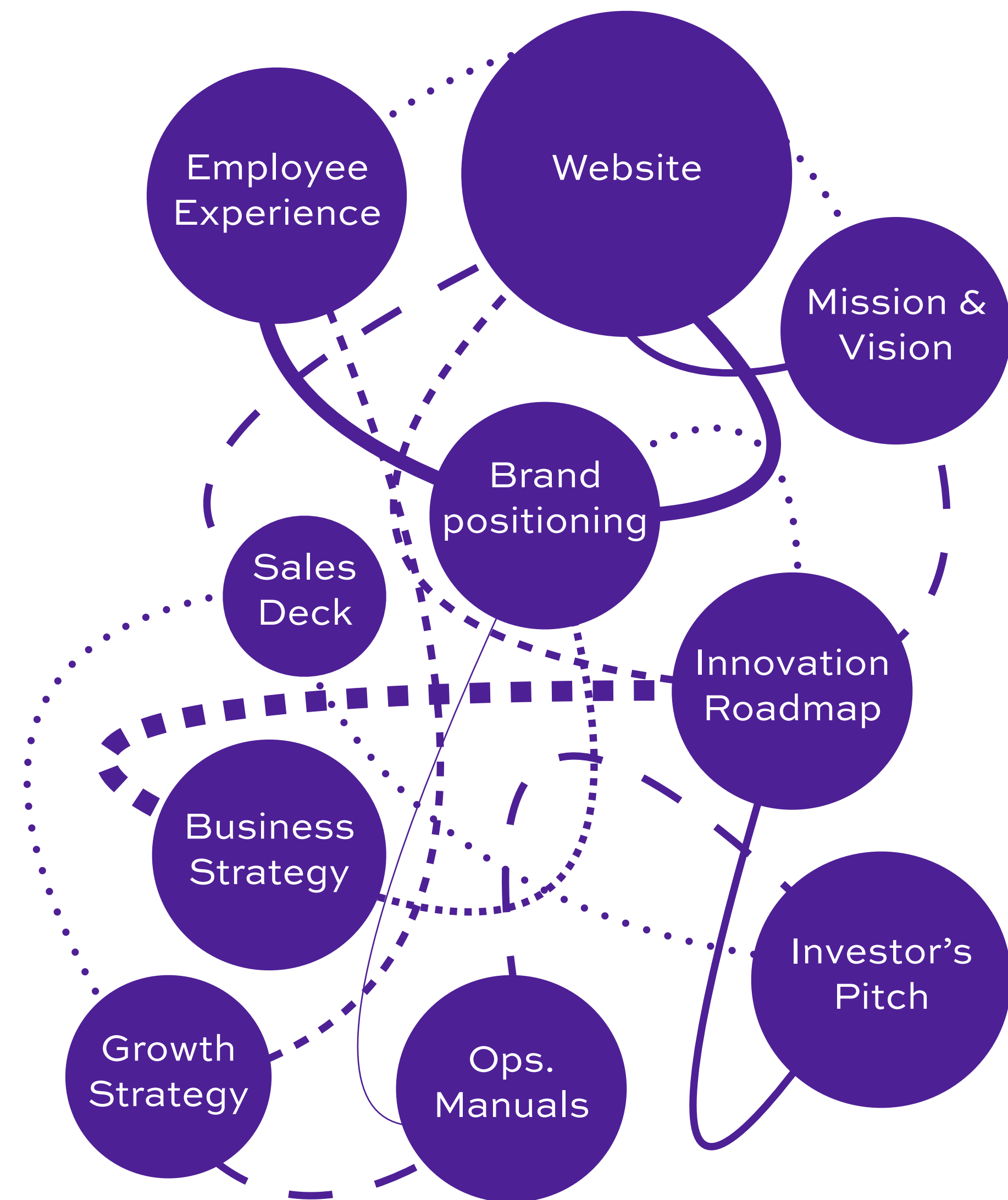
Your company has many stories.

As you can see in this example, these are just 10 of the most common stories in a business.

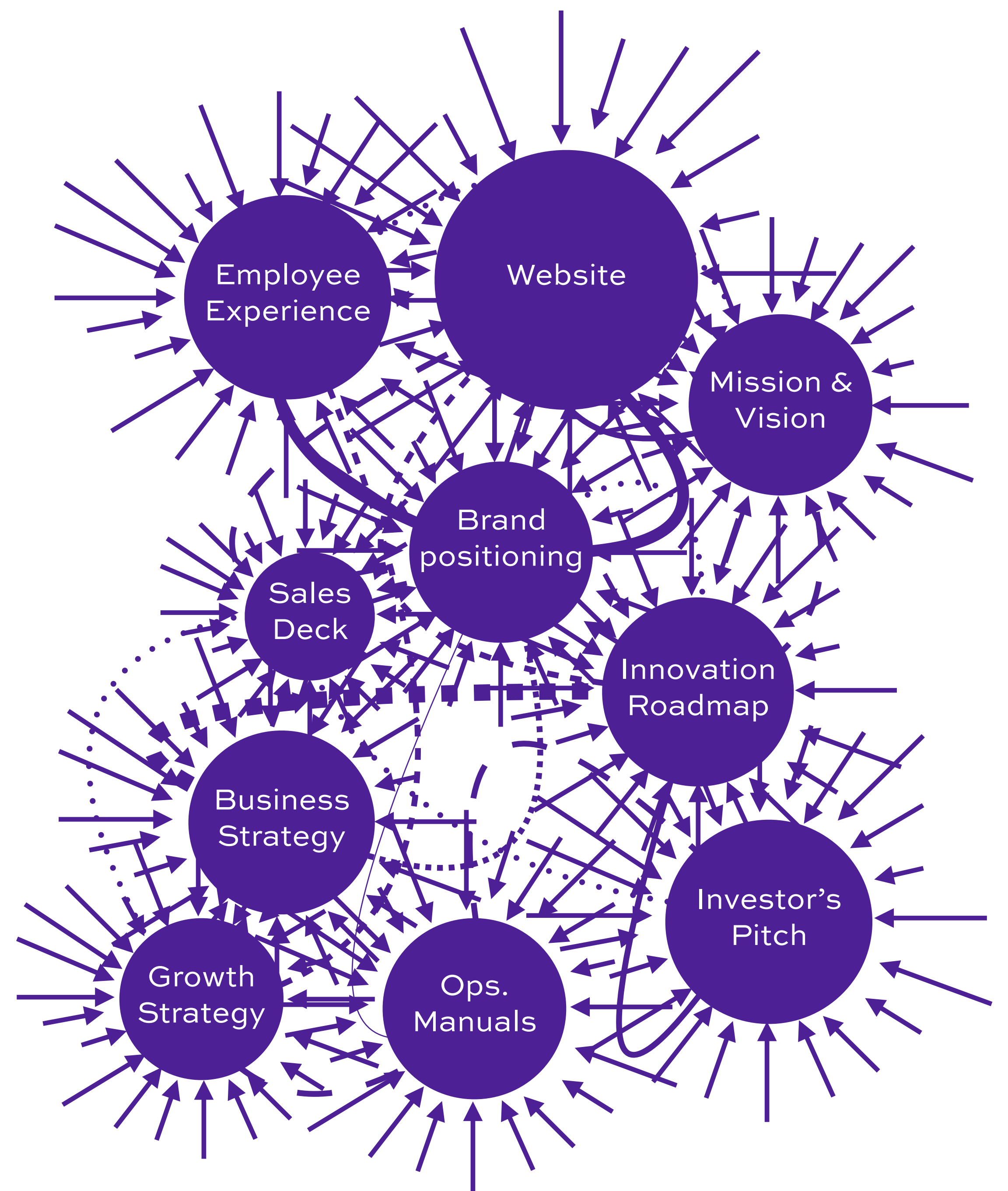


And if your stories don't make sense together:

- you don't provide enough focus to people,
- you don't align and mobilize them,
- and your company struggles.

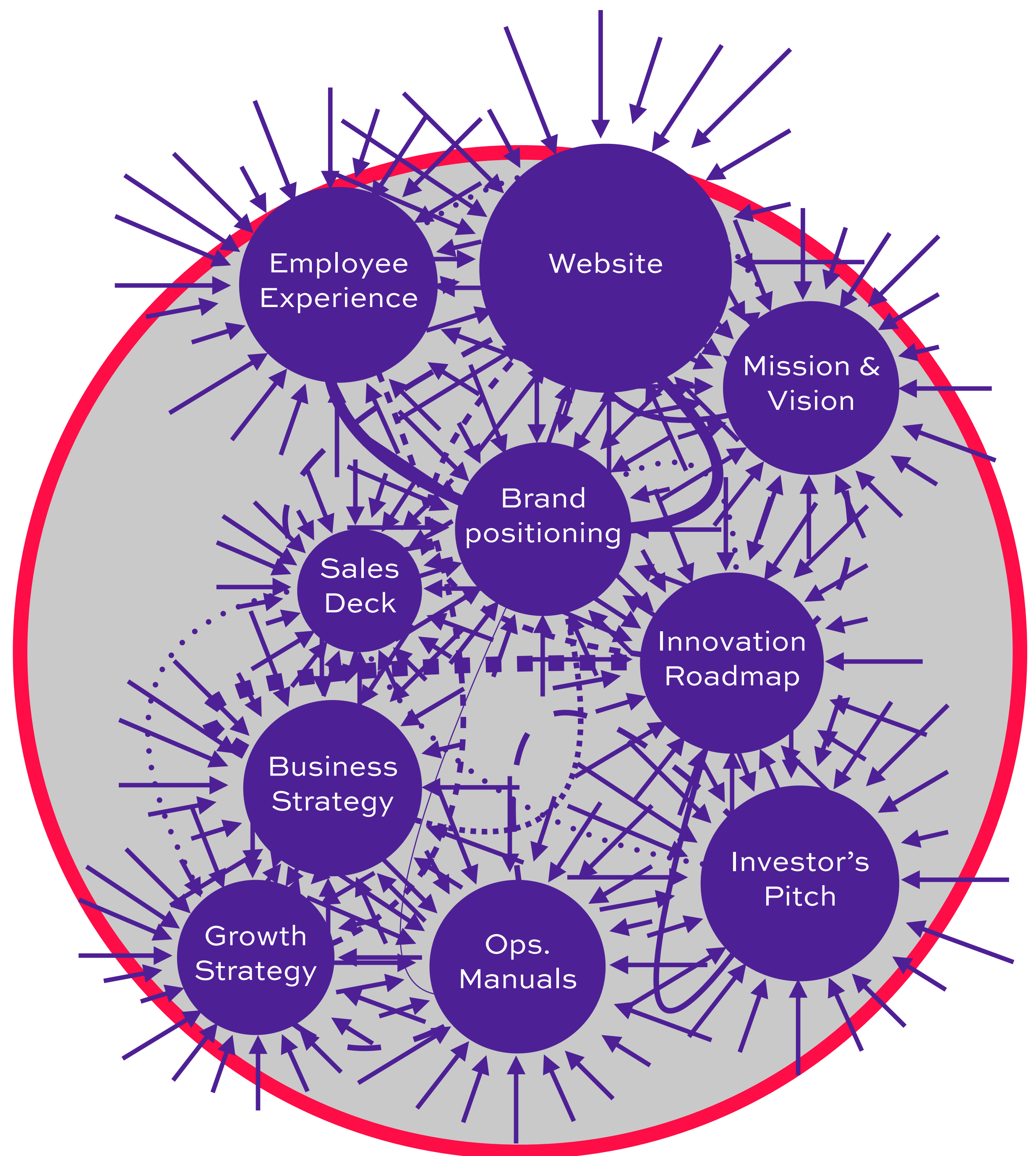


As a result, people will work in silos, pushing and pulling in conflicting directions.



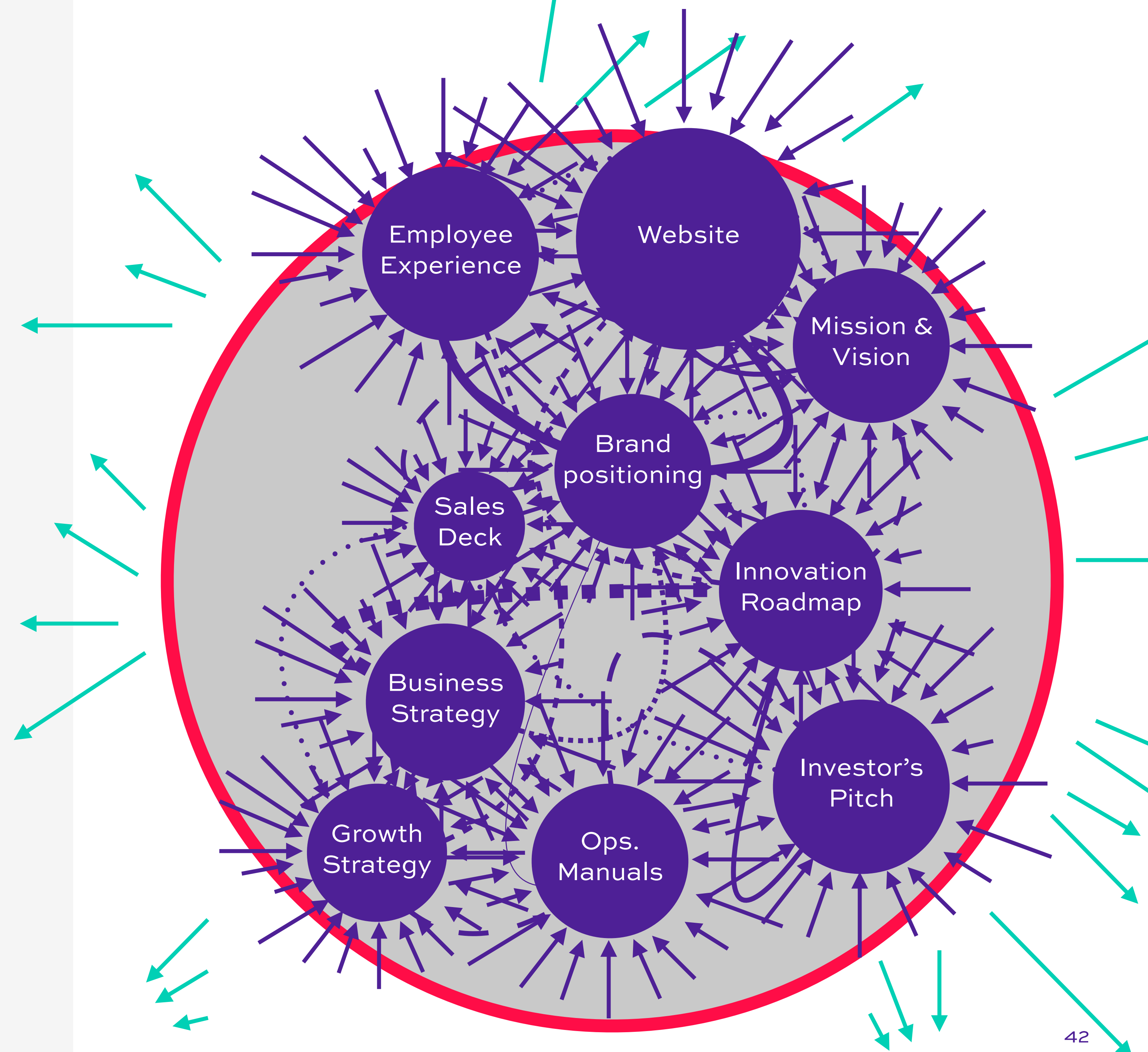
In this case, most of us believe that the solution is to craft one more story as a “branding layer” around the company.

But this is like “putting lipstick on a pig”.



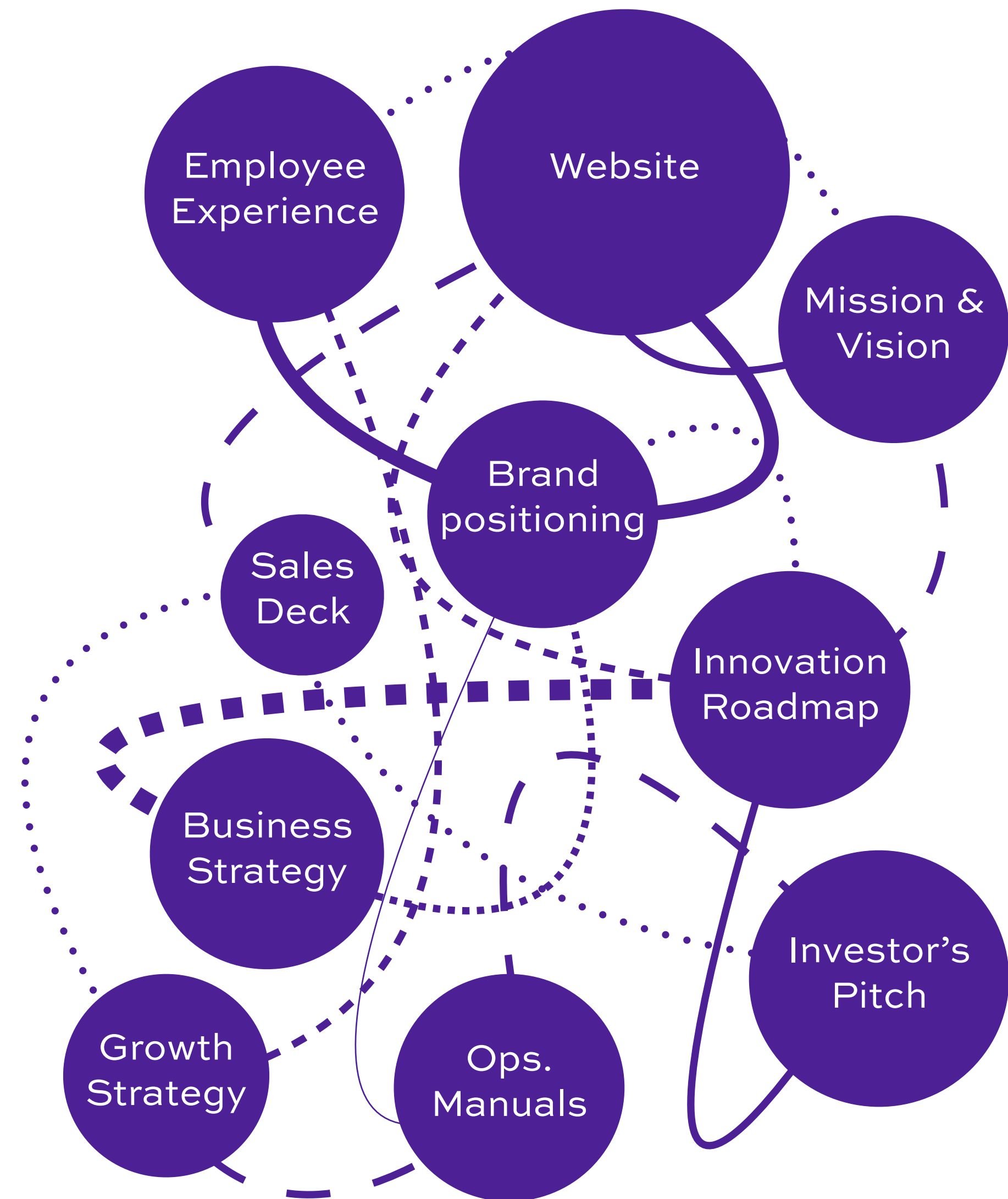
Thinking of your story as marketing only is a trap and a dangerous one.

Inside and outside, people will lose trust if they see the gap between what your branding says and what your company does.



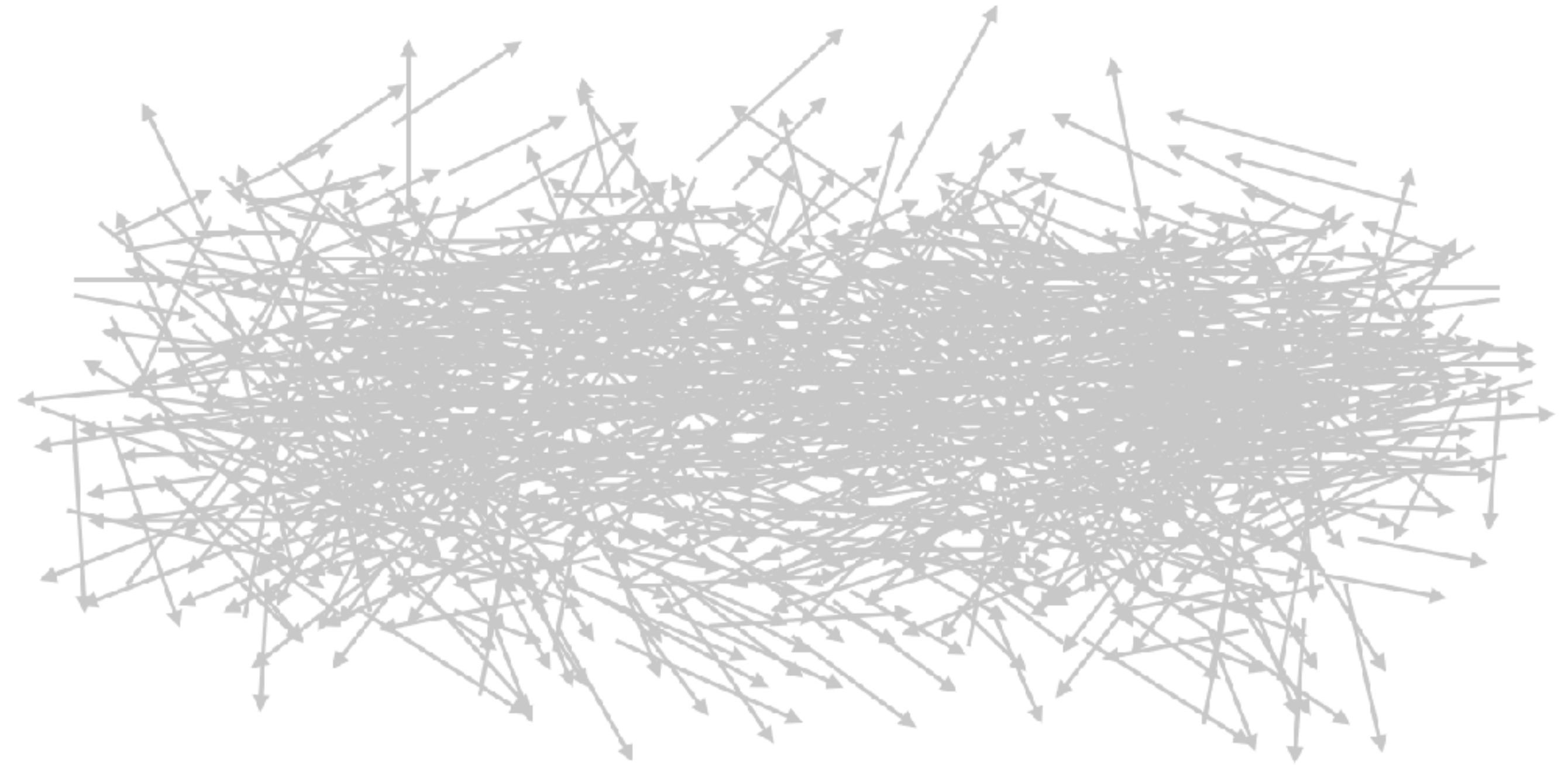
If you see yourself in the situation I faced, this is not your fault, and you're not alone.

This is the default mode of most companies, from two-people businesses to large organizations.



And the larger the organization,
the bigger the consequence.

This is a company of about 1,000 people.

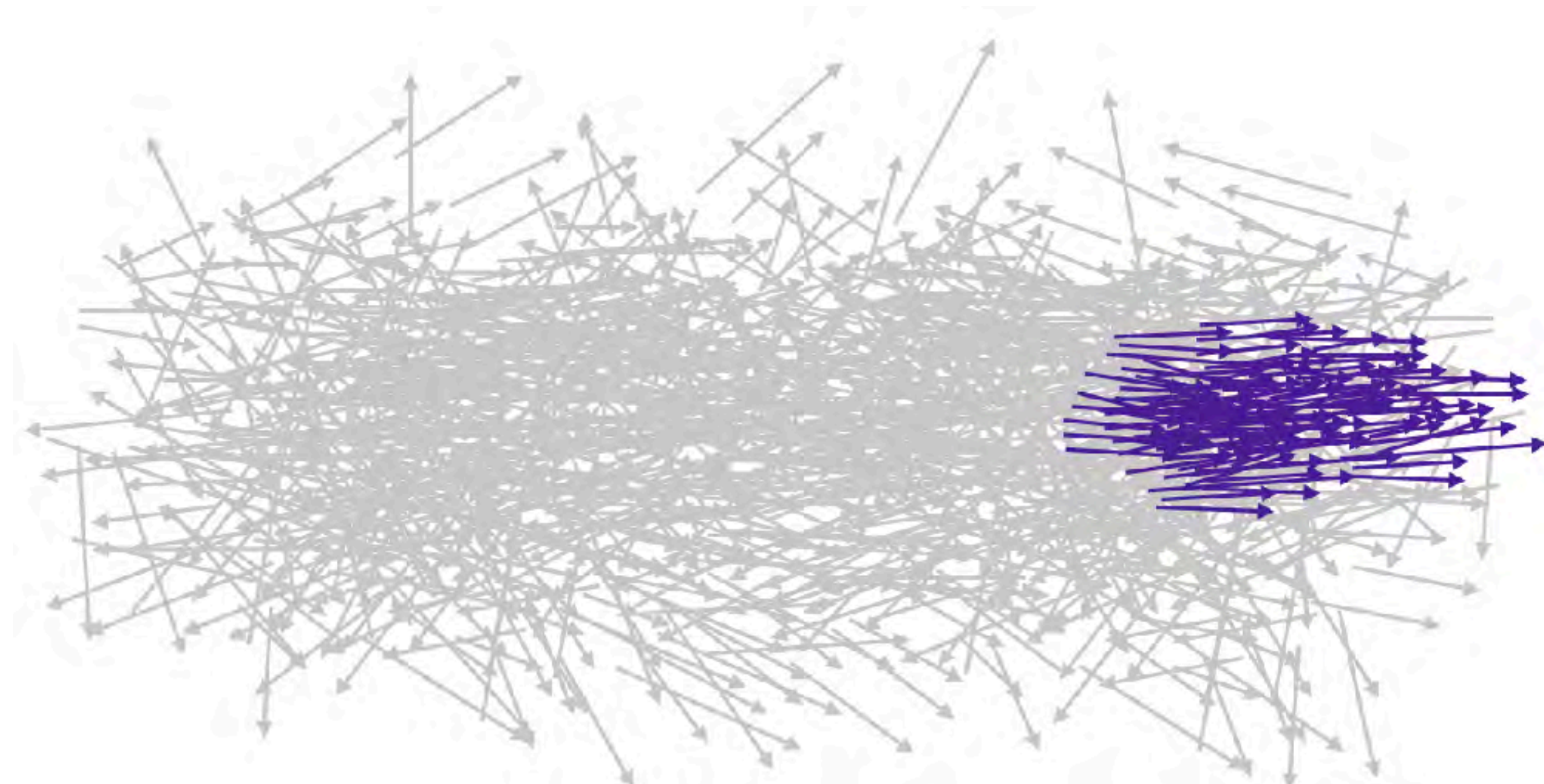


Research shows that in this type of company an average of only 10% of people understand where the company is going.

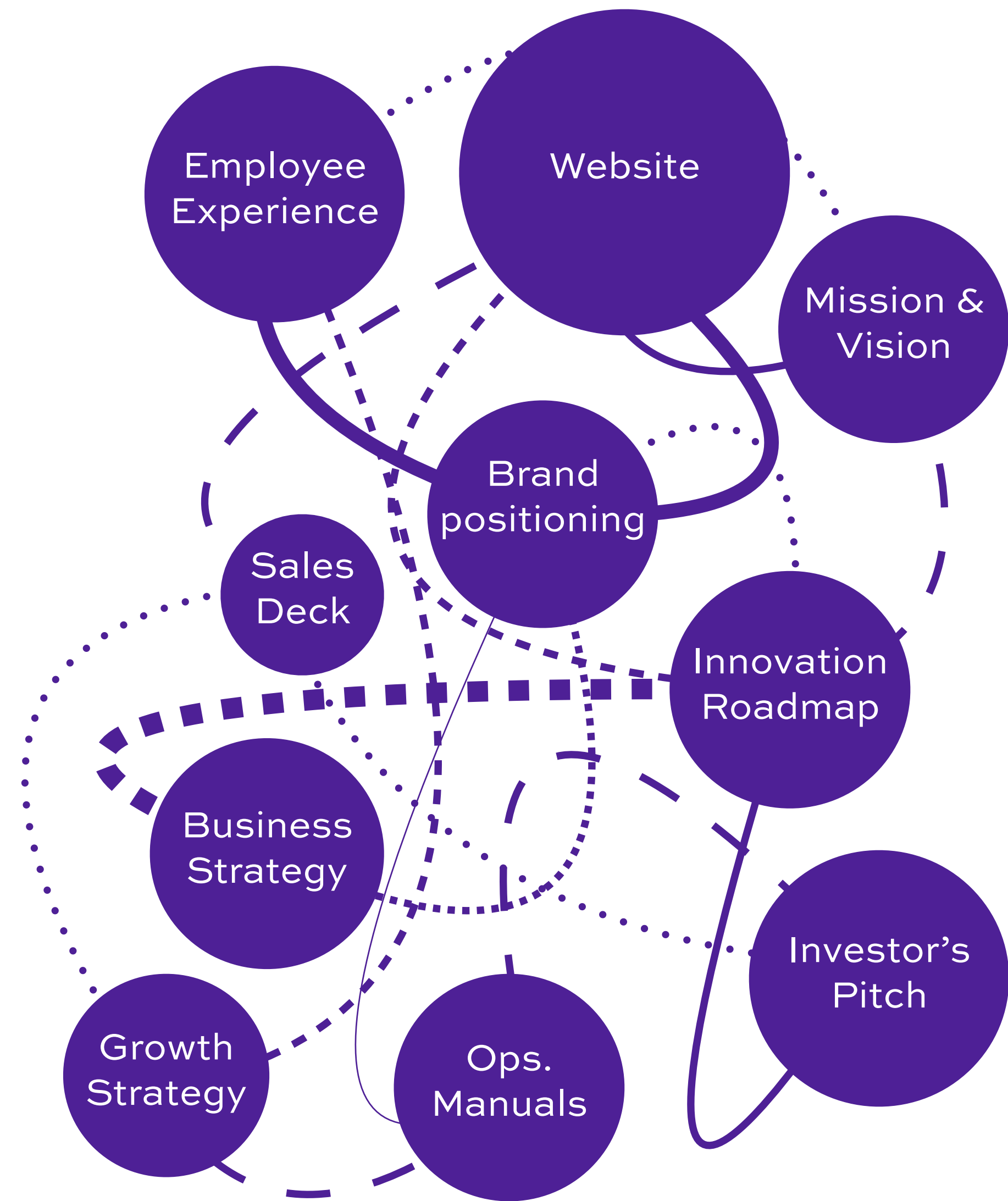
10%.

How do you expect people to adapt to change and make consistent decisions?

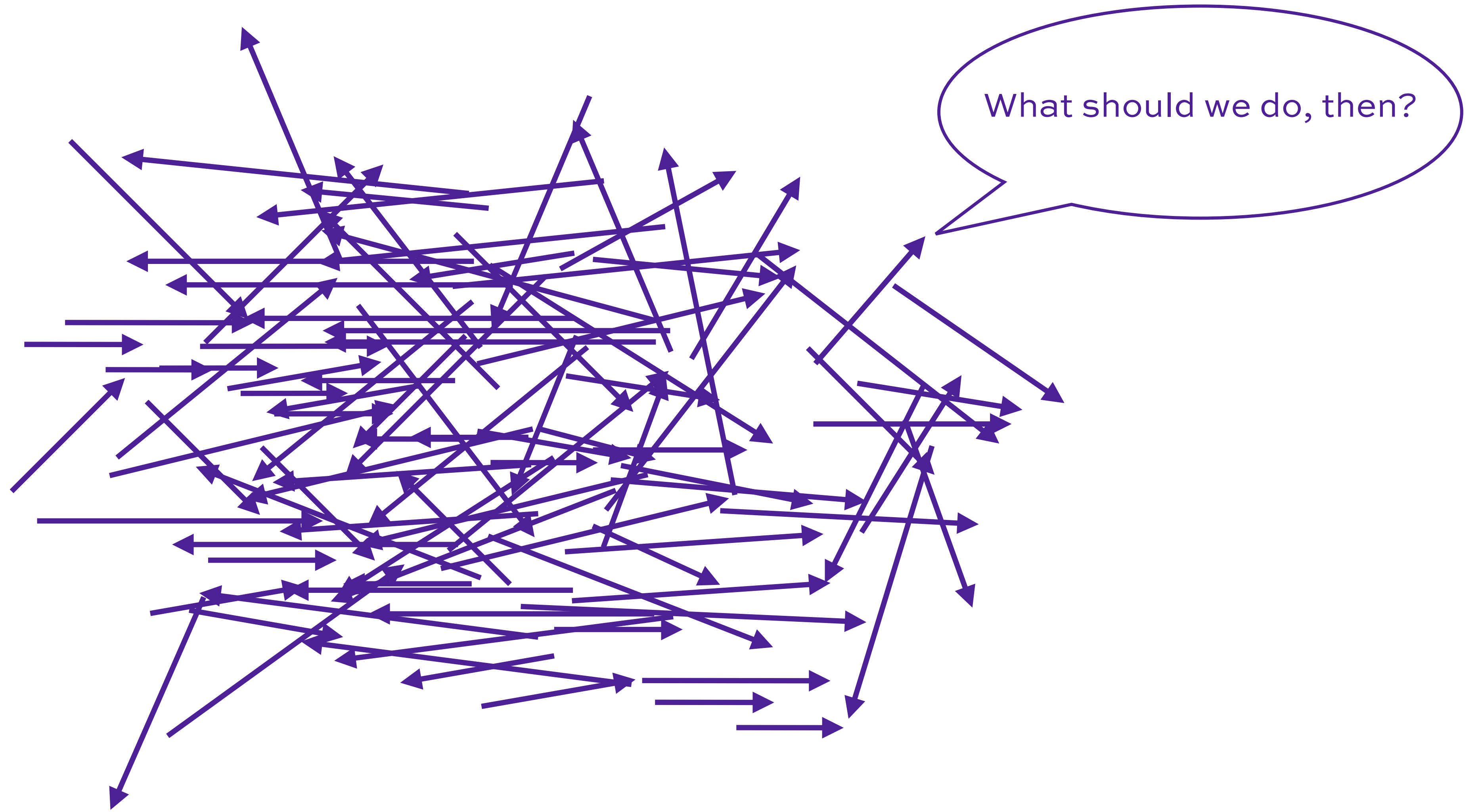
This creates expensive problems.



This default mode is what I call "Business Storytelling 1.0."



And business storytelling 1.0 is dead.

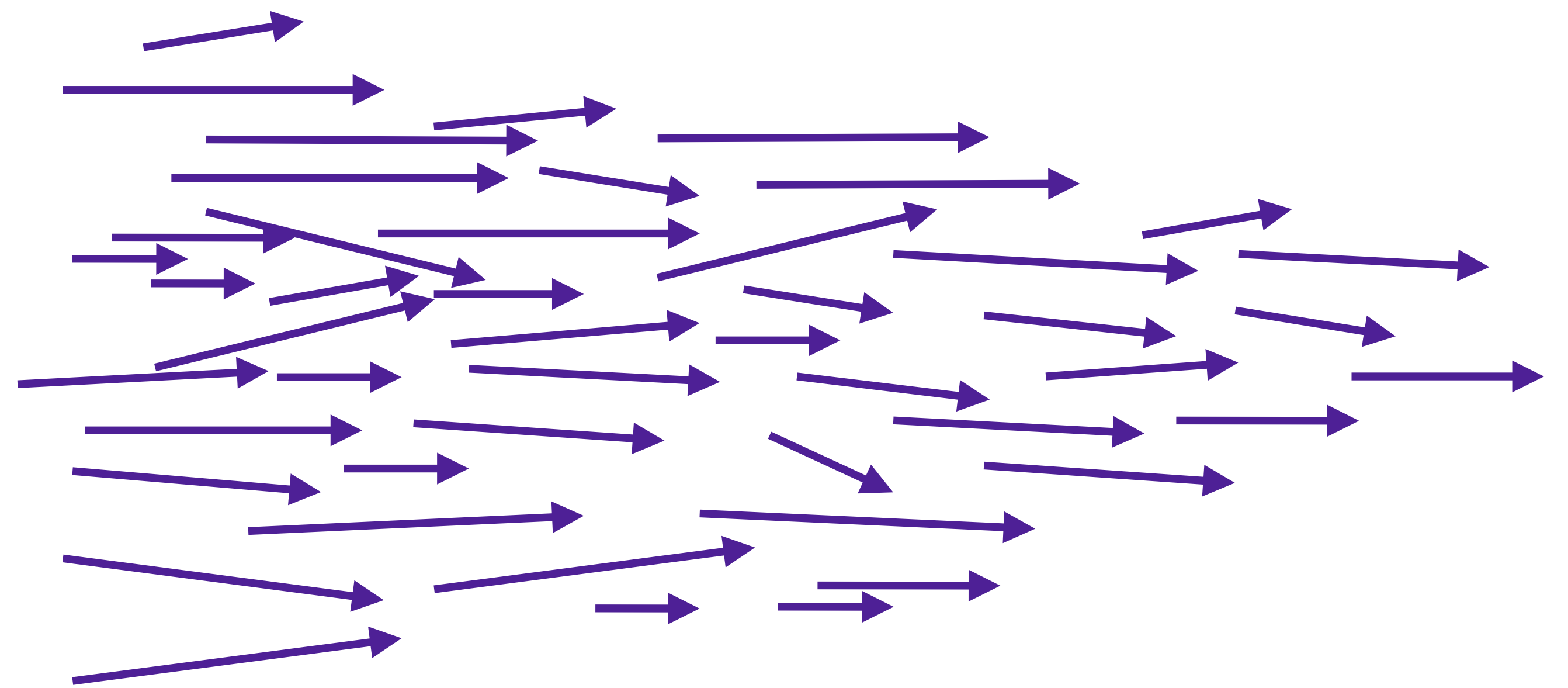


Build a *strategic narrative* instead.

Business leaders who build impactful companies don't just tell better stories.

They build a new narrative.

Then, they use it as a force to align and mobilize people with a new way to think and act in their market category.



When Scott and Aly Svenson started Mod Pizza in 2008, the last thing the world needed was yet another pizza place.

So, they built Mod Pizza on a new narrative: **“Pizza As A Platform”** for addressing societal challenges.

In 2021, MOD celebrated the opening of its 500th store and granted over \$750,000 to employees in crisis, amongst many other key initiatives.



In 2007, Mark Frohnmayer, founder of Arcimoto, was tired of adding to traffic and CO2 emissions by driving his multi-ton SUV for all of his simple trips.

He wanted a light-footprint electric vehicle that was affordable, fun, and dialed for every day, but he couldn't find it.

Thus, he built a new narrative, a public company, and a new platform for urban mobility: **the “FUV” – Fun Utility Vehicle.**



When he was 22, Blair Enns refused to pitch as the way to sell in the creative industry.

He founded Win Without Pitching on a new narrative: **“You can deliver better work and be more profitable without giving your ideas for free.”**

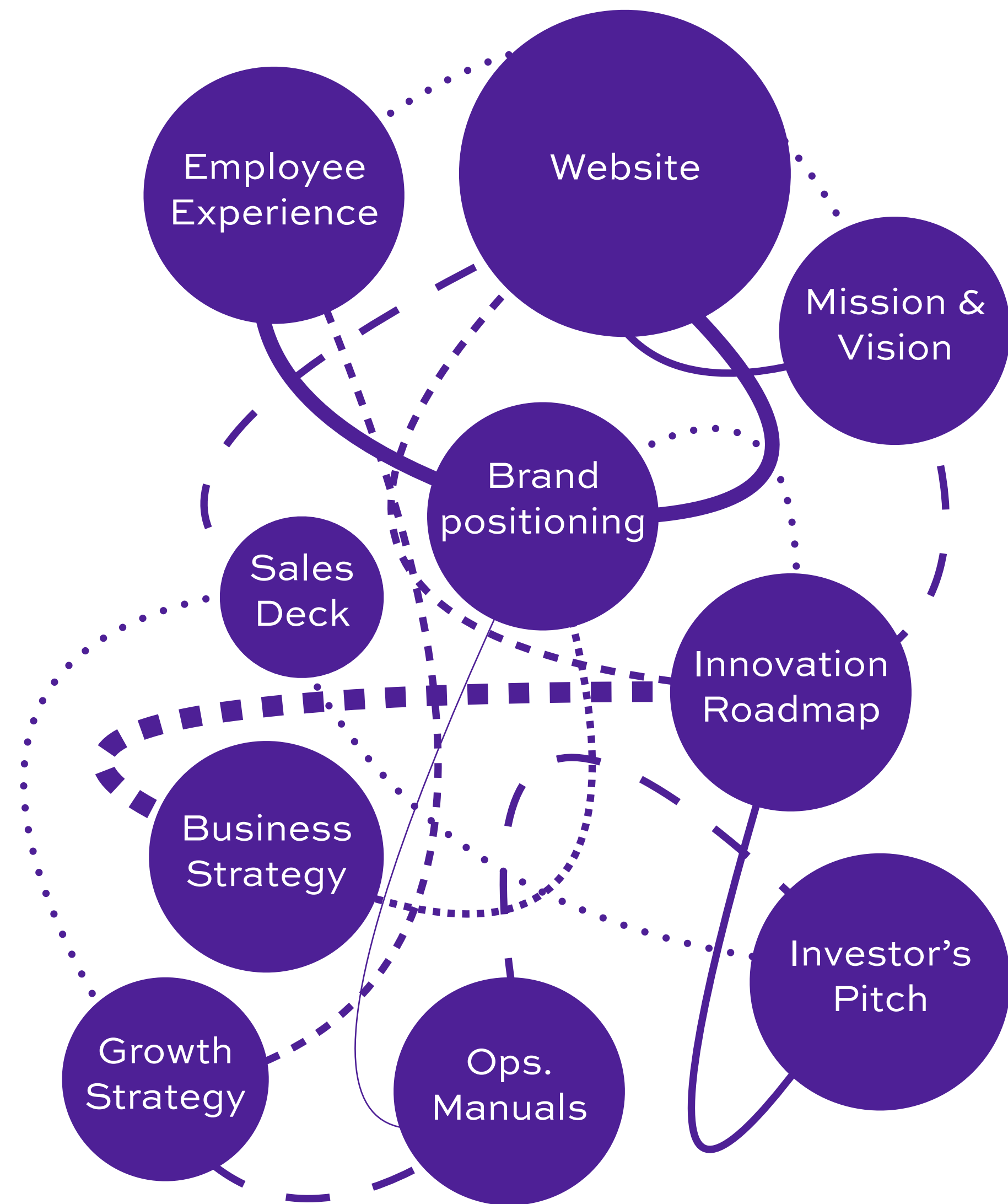
Today, Blair and his team lead a movement to change the way creative services are sold and bought, one agency at a time.

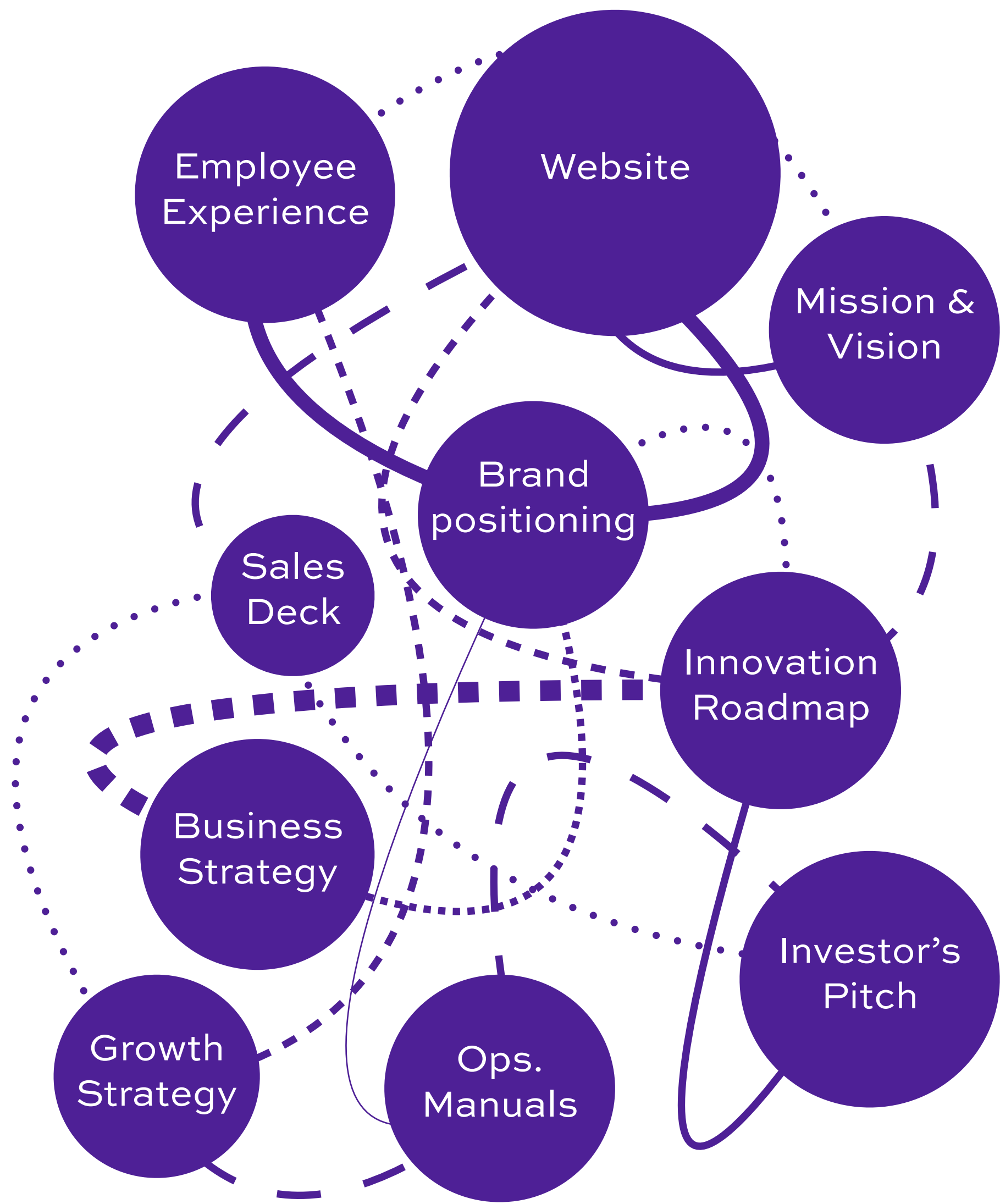


Scott and Ally Svenson, Mark Frohnmayer, and Blair Enns
have this in common:

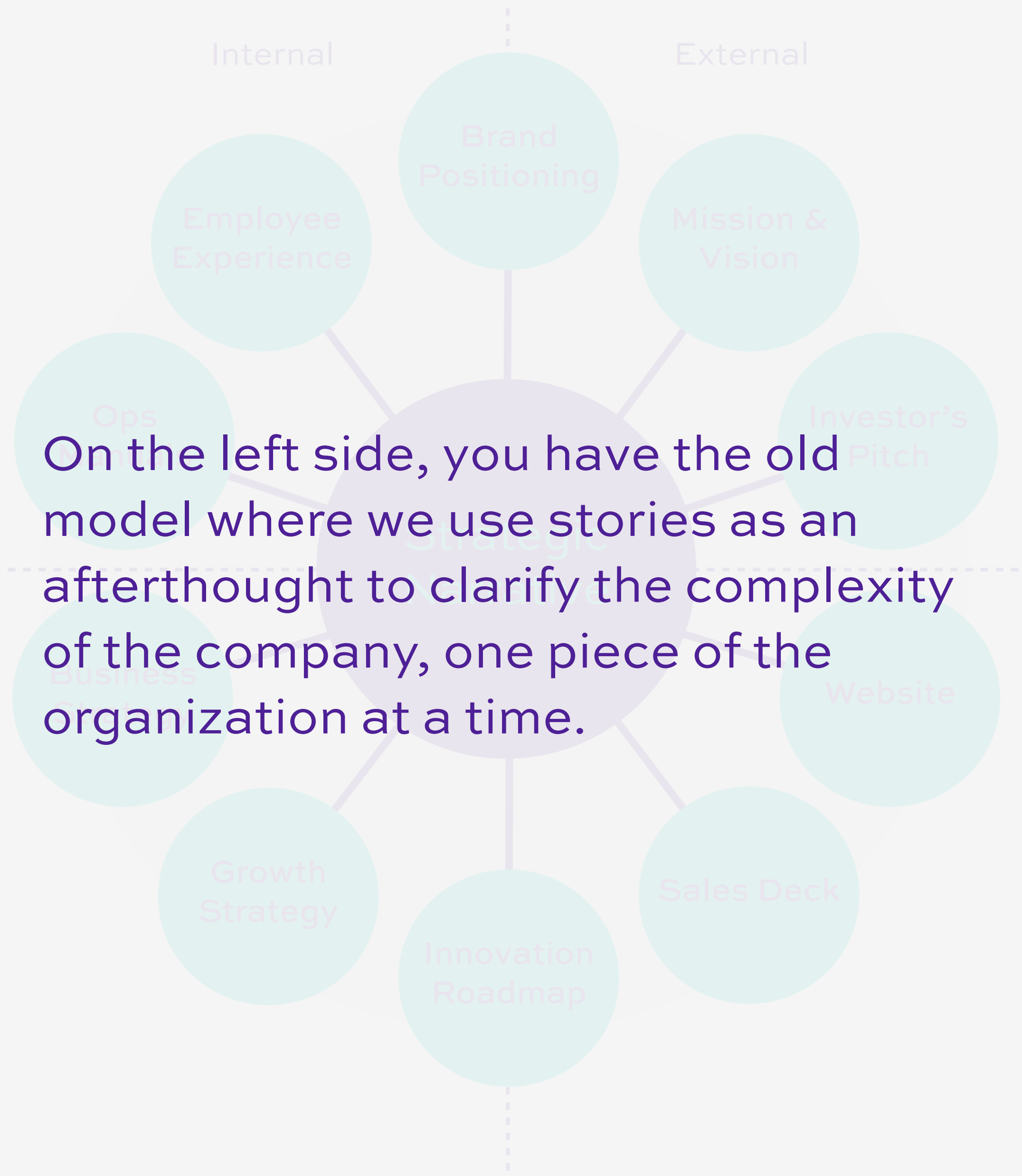
Their strategy *is* to
build a new narrative.

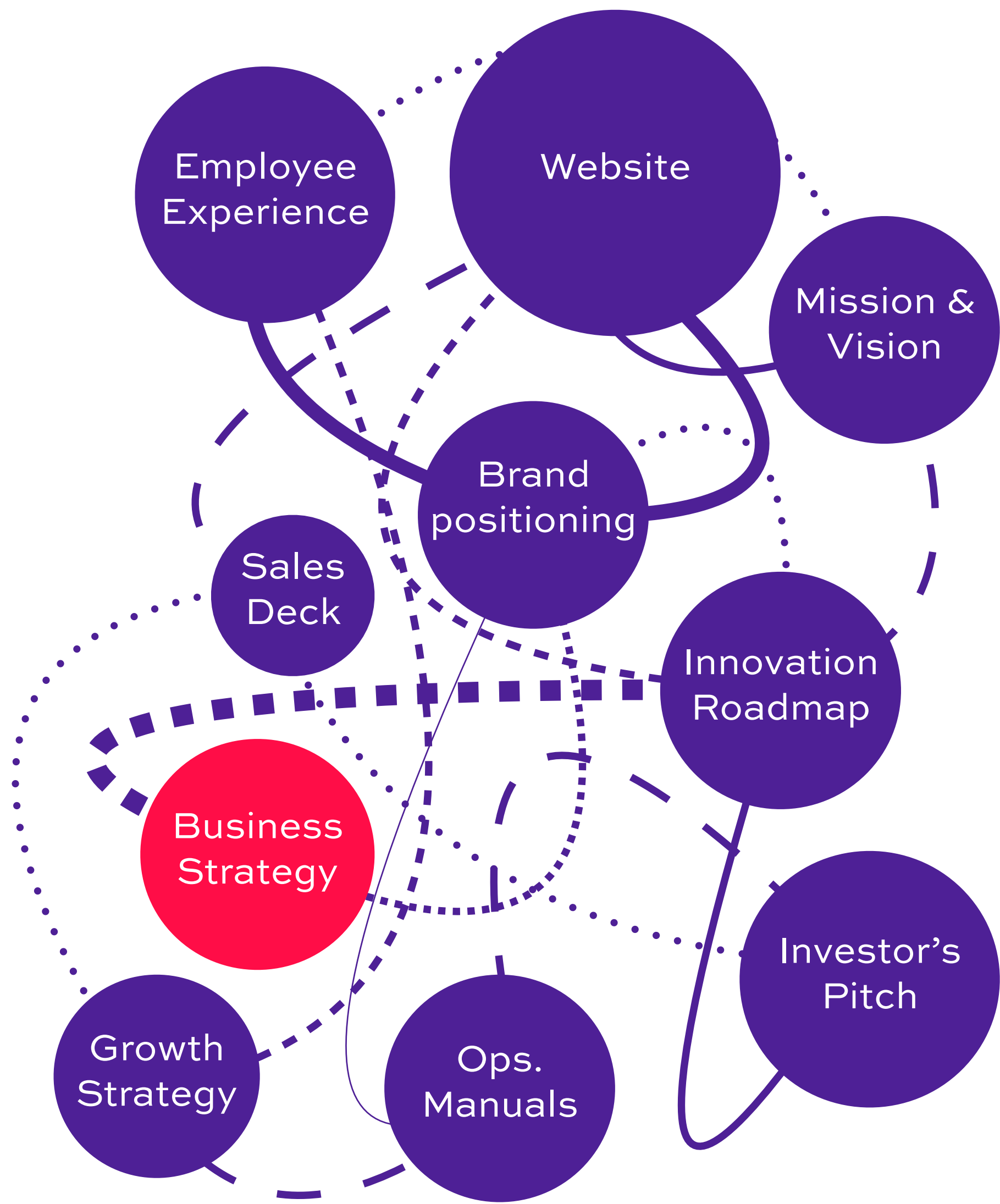
If you remember one thing about this book, remember this diagram.



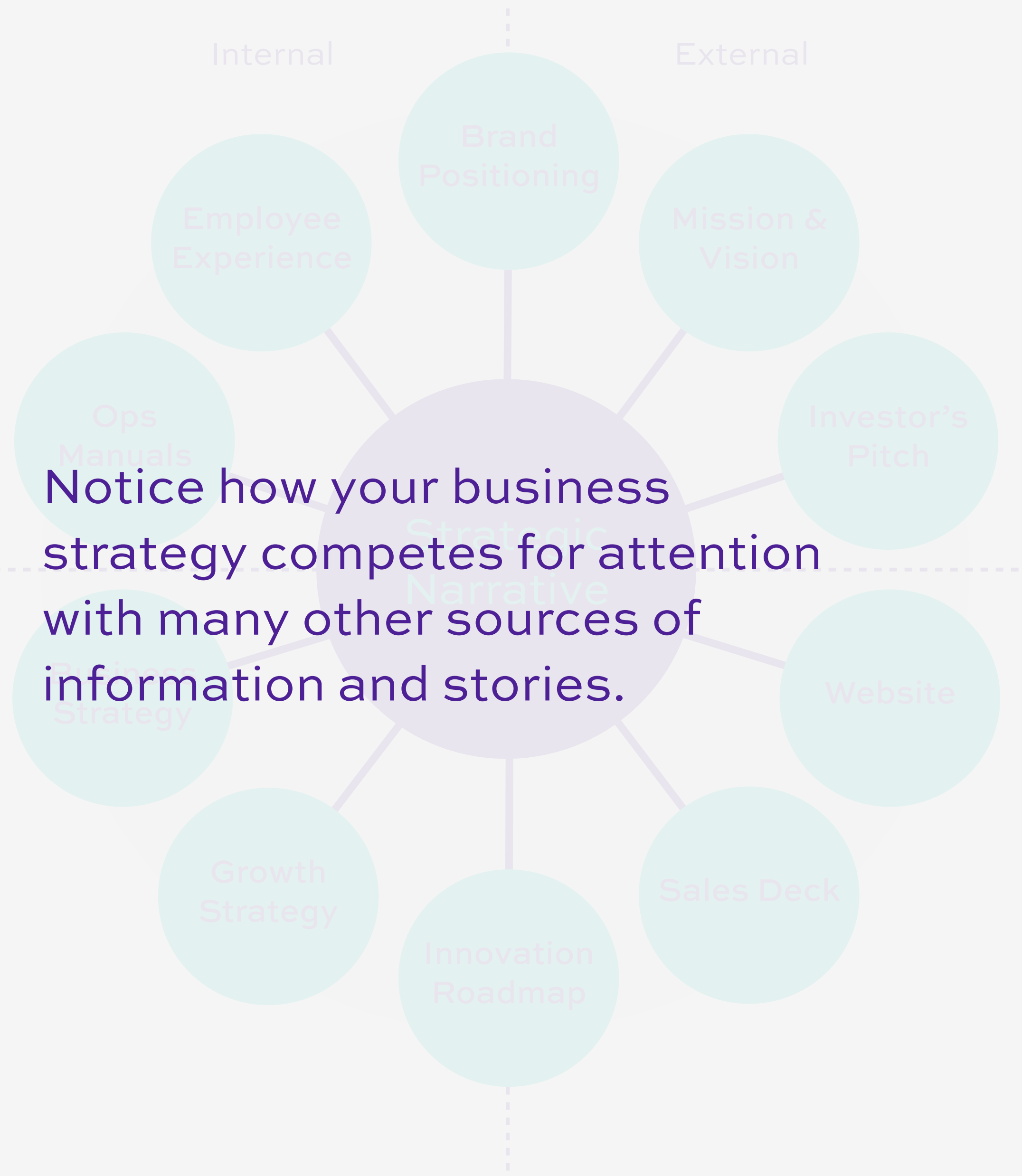


On the left side, you have the old model where we use stories as an afterthought to clarify the complexity of the company, one piece of the organization at a time.





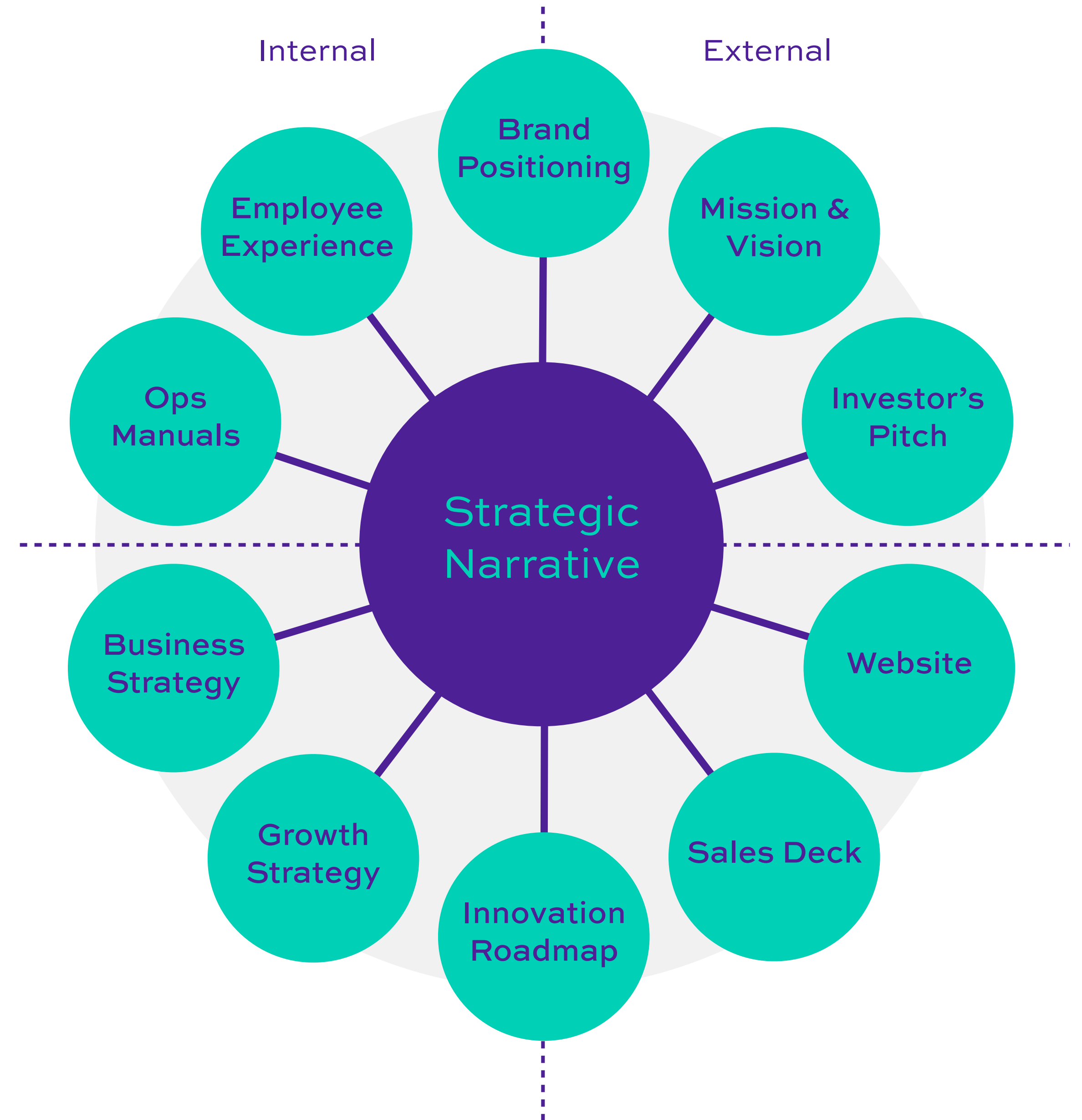
Notice how your business strategy competes for attention with many other sources of information and stories.

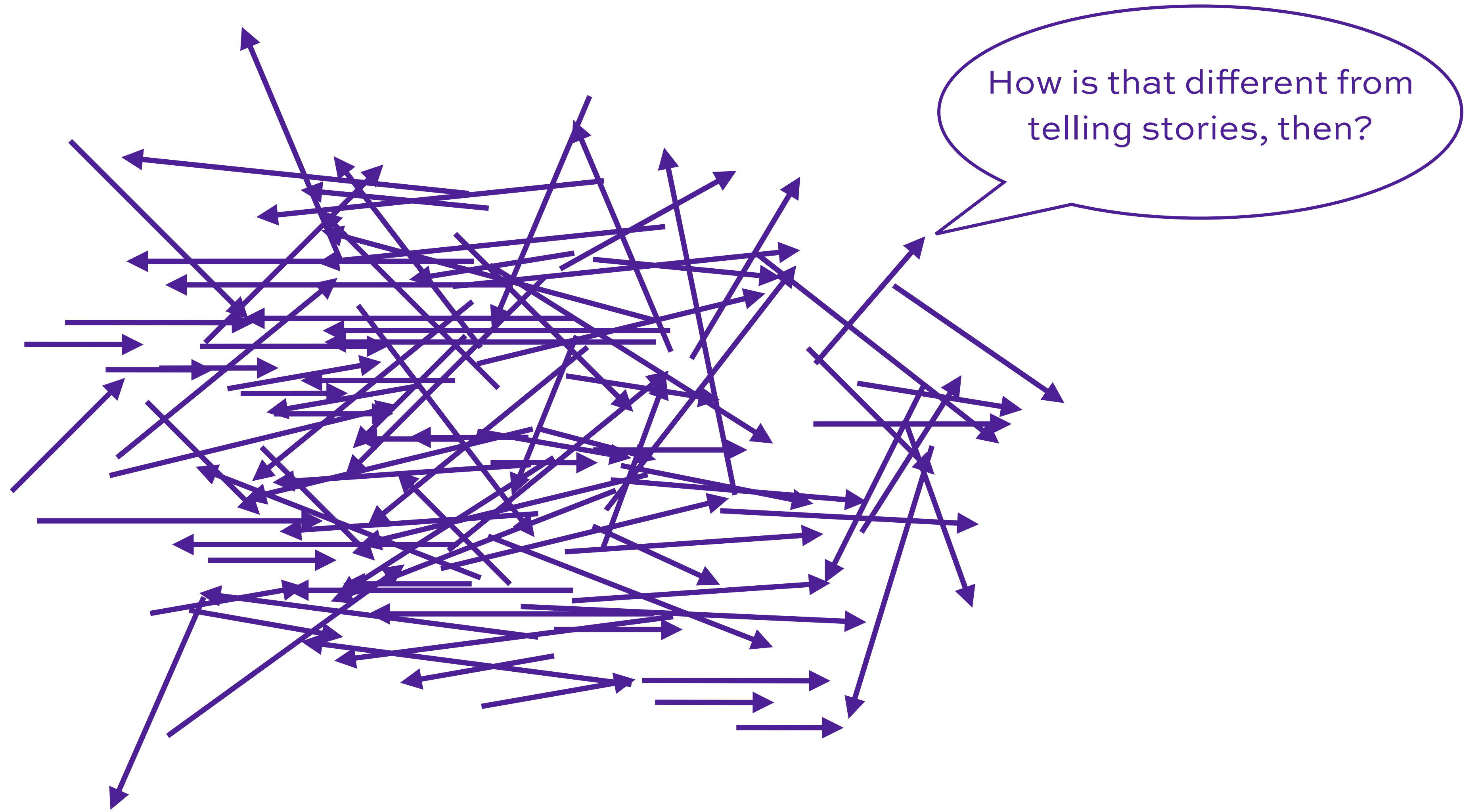


On the right, you can see how modern founders start by building a new narrative about how we should think and act differently in a given market category.

They build their strategic narrative at the core of everything and then use it as a filter to align everything else consistently with it.

Remember, their strategy *is* to build a new narrative.





People will pay for a story,
but people will die for a narrative.

Did you notice?

Whether social, political, religious, business, or economic, any significant movement has a strong narrative at its core.



Stories *engage*.



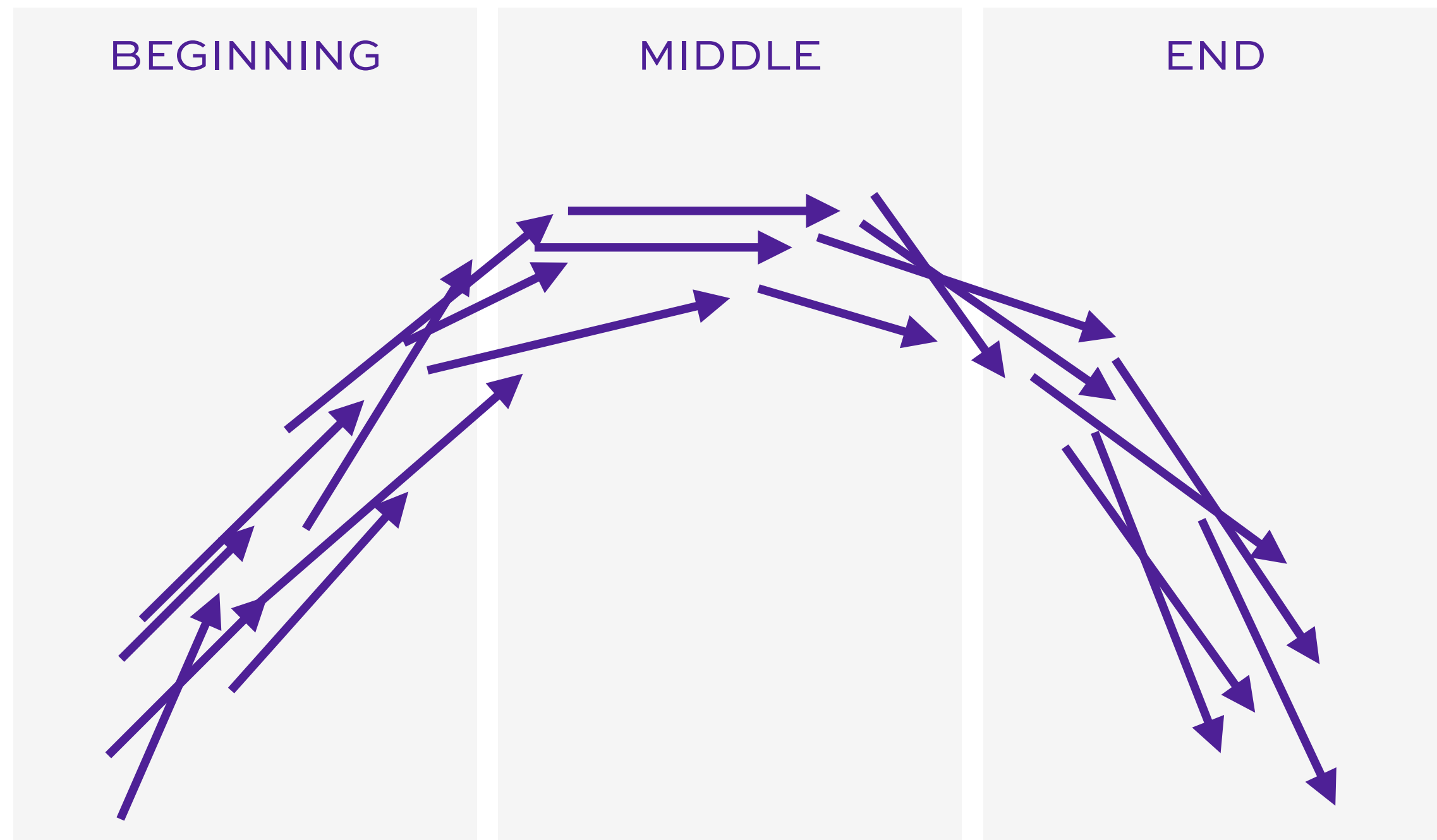
To engage is “to hold the attention of someone”, especially at length.

Narratives *mobilize*.



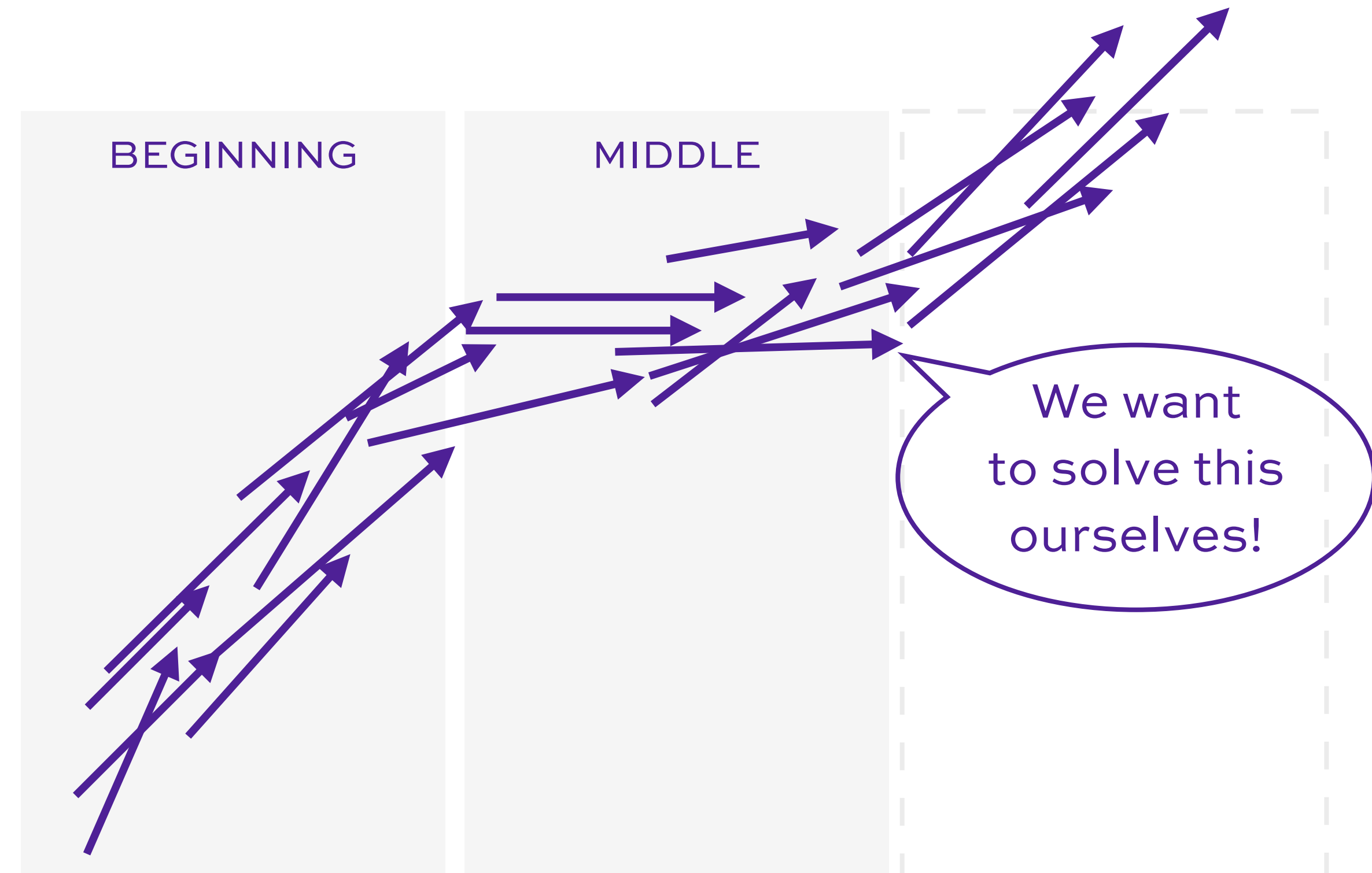
To mobilize is “to bring people together for action”.

Stories are **closed-ended**.



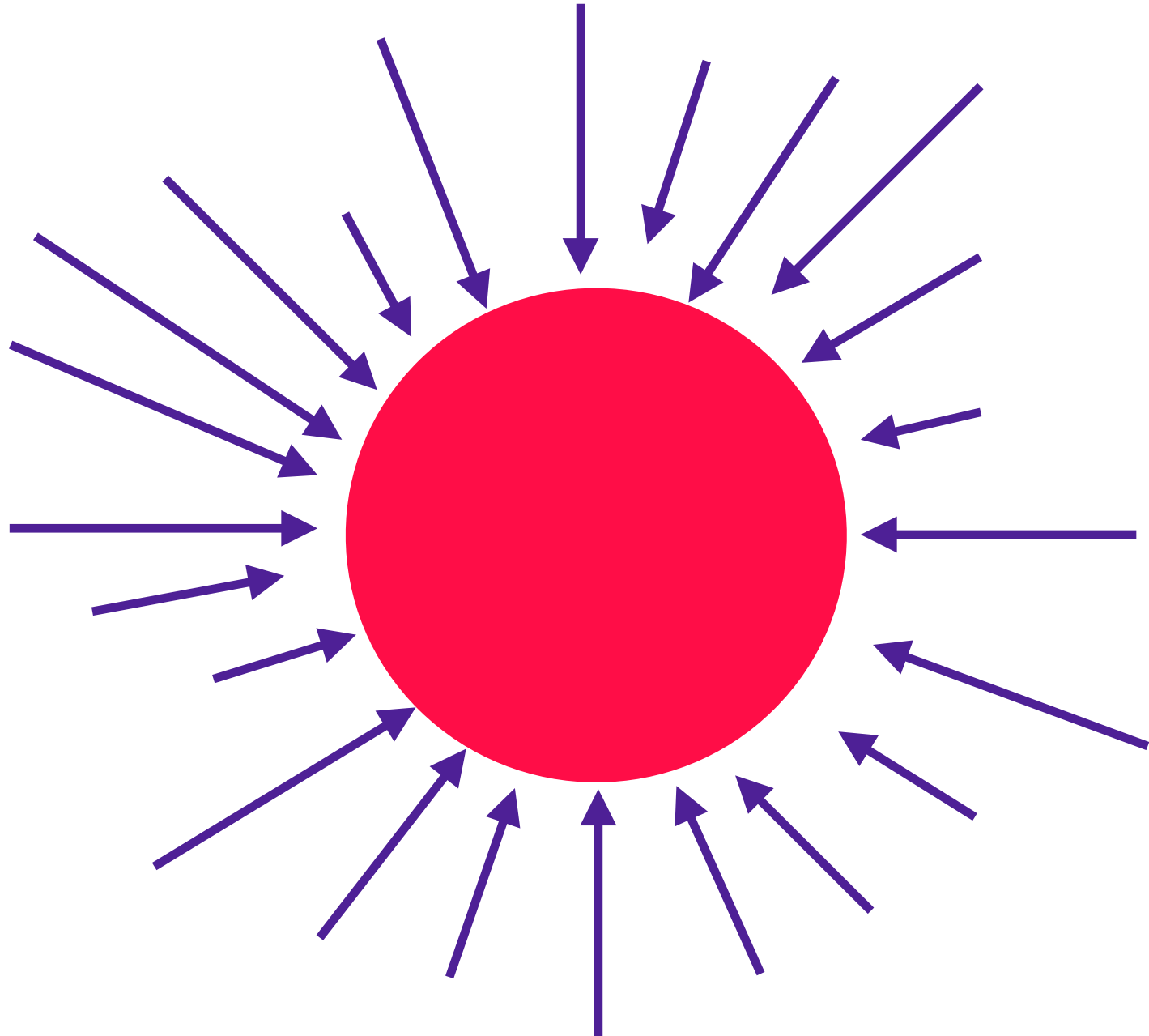
They have a beginning, a middle, and an end.

Narratives are **open-ended**.



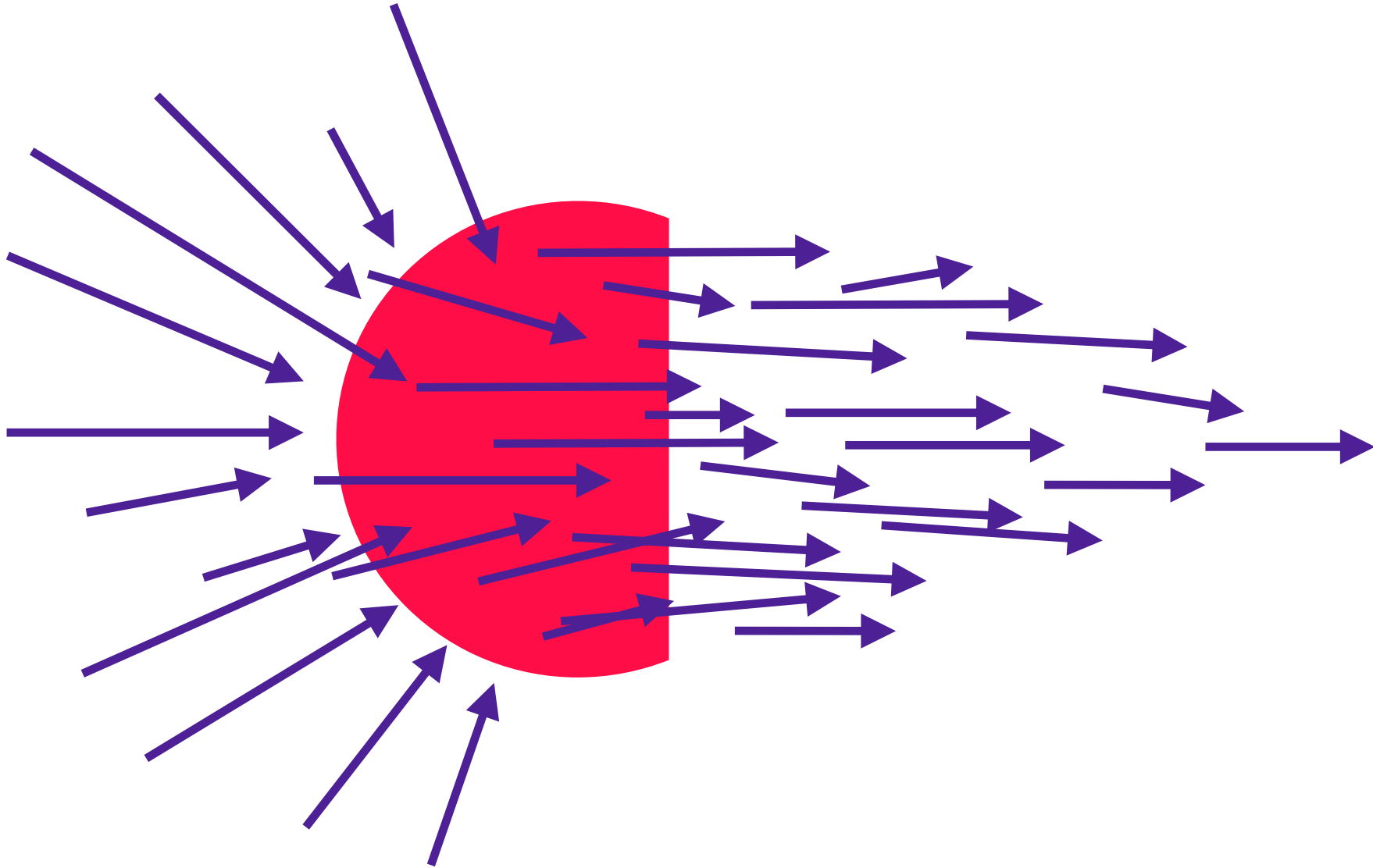
They have a beginning, a middle, but no pre-determined end.

We *tell* stories.



So, a story has an **audience**.

We *enact* narratives.



So, a narrative has **participants**.

A strategic narrative shifts the way we think and makes people take extraordinary measures.

For businesses, the **five powers** of a strategic narrative are:

1 - **Differentiation**

Your strategic narrative is a chance to disagree with your competitors.

2 - **Adoption**

Your strategic narrative frames why people should get your product now. It creates urgency.

3 - **Decision**

Your strategic narrative is a powerful filter to decide what aligns with your strategy or not.

4 - **Purpose**

If your strategic narrative defends a cause, it will rally people to support your efforts and be part of a movement.

5 - **Trust**

Investors and partners want to work with companies with a strong strategic narrative because they're twice as likely to cause market disruption.

But here is the thing.

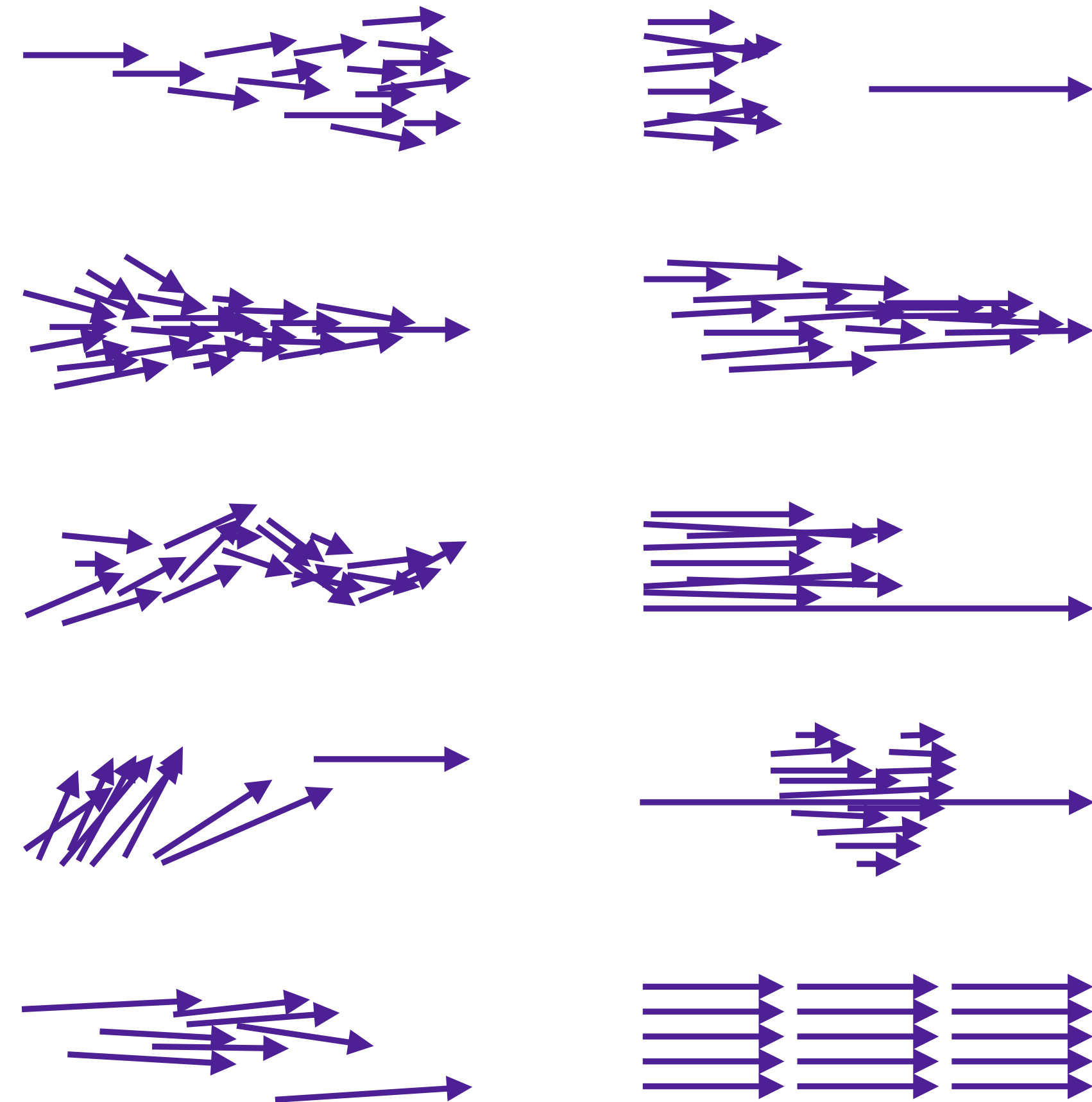
Business leaders think of
storytelling mainly as an
act of literature.

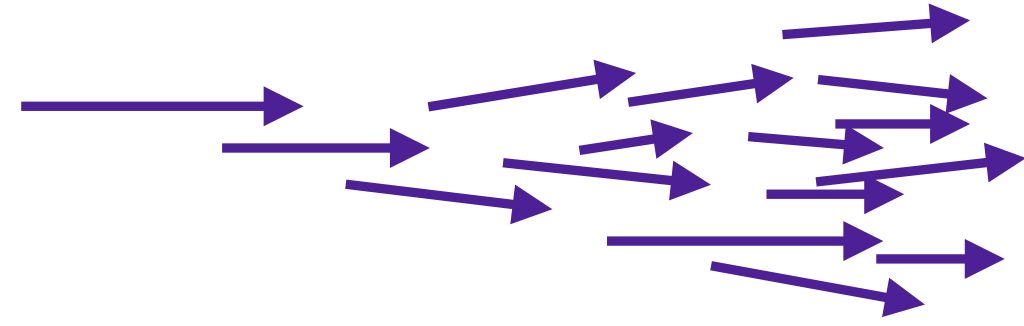
However...



Building a new strategic narrative
is an act of leadership.

Here are **ten principles to turn your organization into a source of inspiration few can resist**, and some of the leaders who applied them successfully.





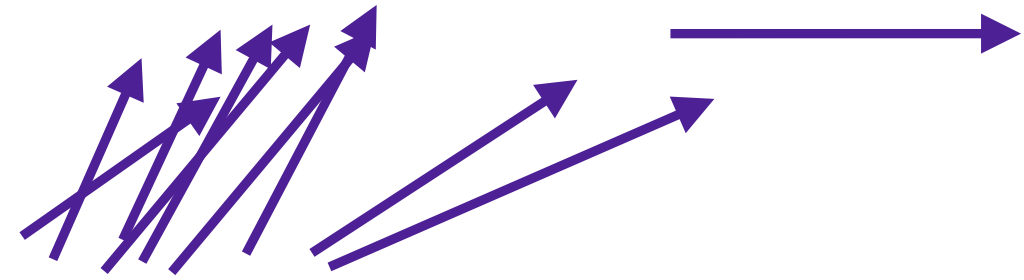
Tell people how you started.

To be excited about your company, people need to know WHY you were excited about it in the first place.

Companies with a clear sense of purpose outperform by a factor of 10.



Client: Fabien Comtet, CEO & Founder of KESTIO - Liberate Sales Potential



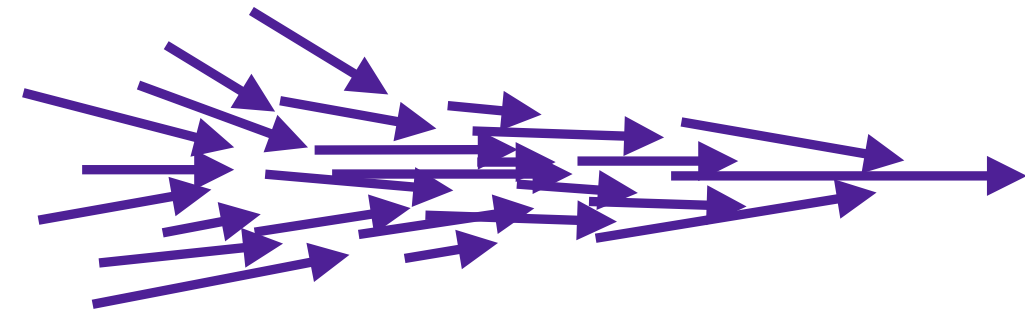
Challenge what
everybody else
accepts as truth.

You will animate people if your strategic
narrative is distinctive and novel.

A different perspective is a chance
to disagree with your competitors.



Client: Leslie Feinzaig, Founder of Graham & Walker Venture Fund



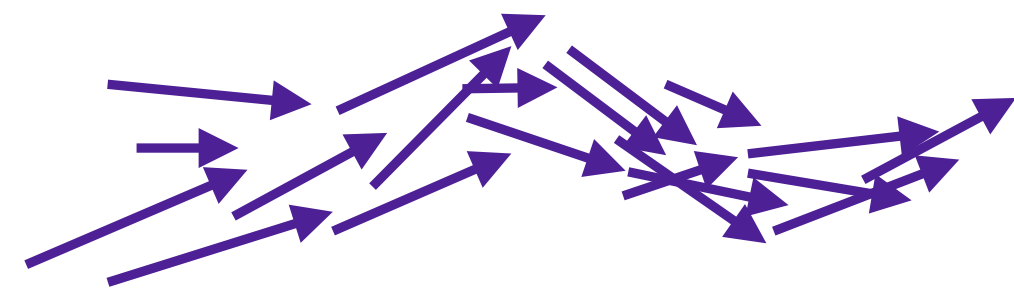
Advertise your beliefs before you advertise your product.

You can only sell what you do if,
first, people believe why it matters.

Your strategy is only as good as
people's ability to believe in it.



Client: Veresh Sita, Chief Information Officer, Alaska Airlines



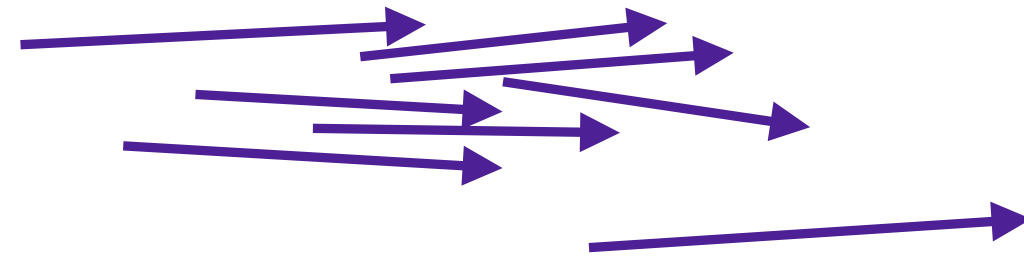
Co-create your strategic narrative.

When people have their fingerprints on a strategic narrative they built together, it becomes their own.

They know what to do, figure things out, and need less oversight.



Client: Microsoft Global Advertising Leadership Team



Shrink the “Brag Zone”.

If your narrative is all about your company and your product first, it will sound narrow and uninspiring.

When people feel heard, they'll find an active role in your narrative.



Client: David Campbell, CEO, Horizon Airlines - Alaska Air Group



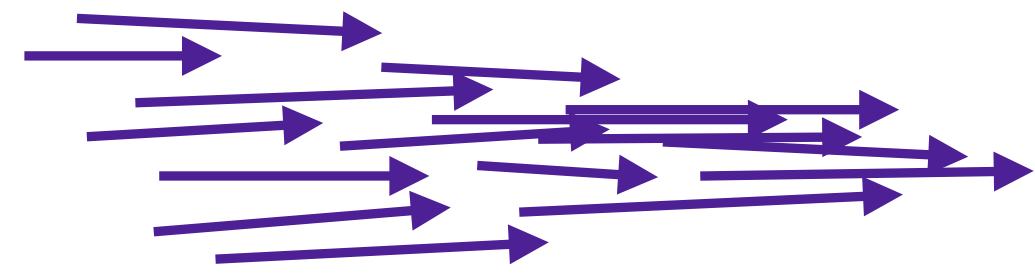
Say the thing you
are afraid to say.

Speak the truth.

People will trust you for saying and
doing what they wanted to say and do.



Client: Elisabeth Araujo, Managing Director Europe Zone - L'Oreal



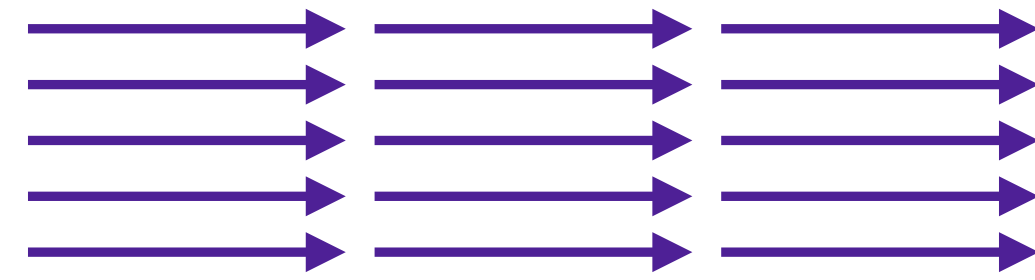
Say it humanly, without bullshit.

Your words matter. They mobilize
people. They sell your ideas and
your products too.

The good ones can be painful to
find but powerful to own.



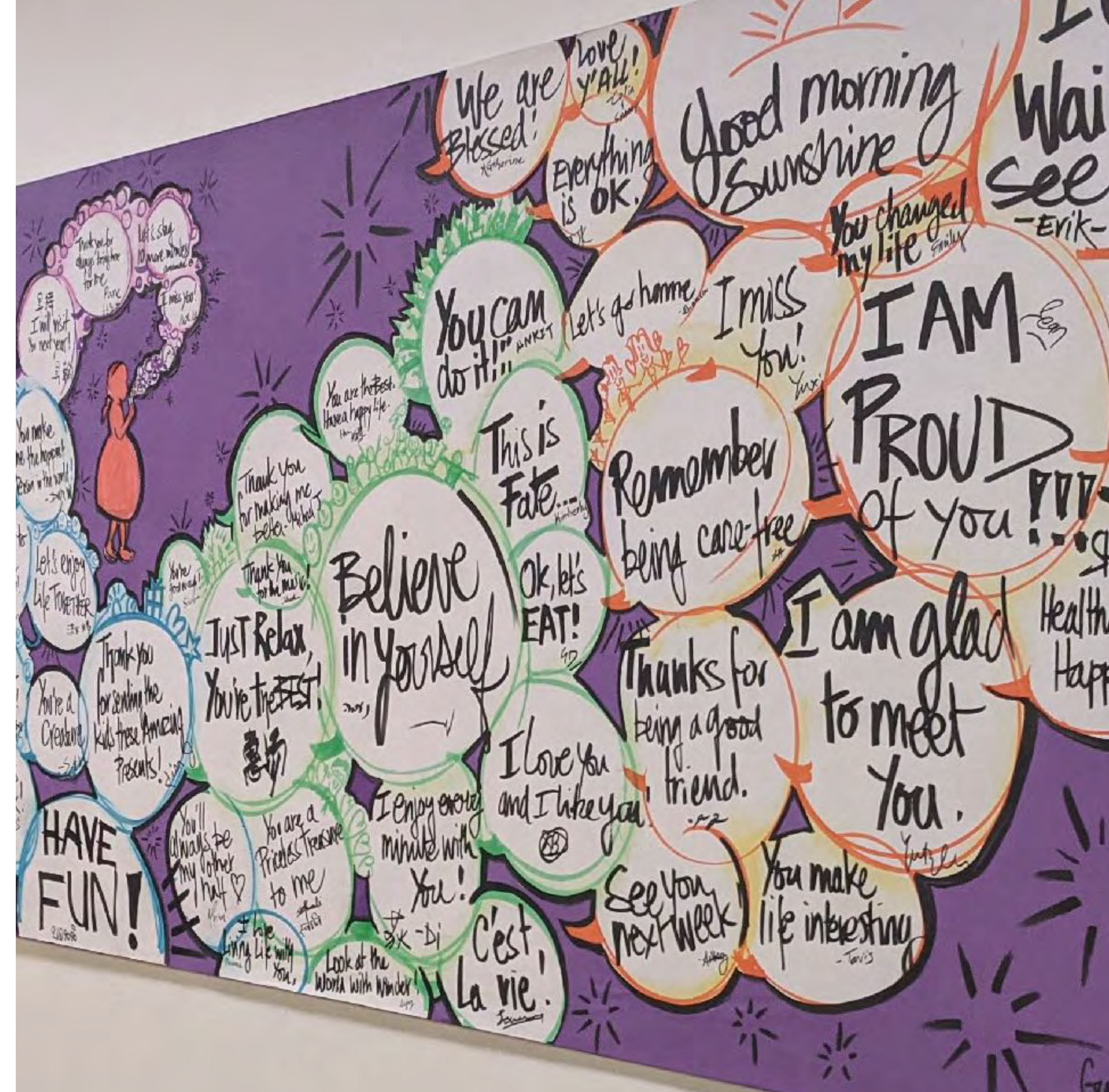
Client: Joshua Gebhart - Co-founder, CEO, and Board Director - Ampd



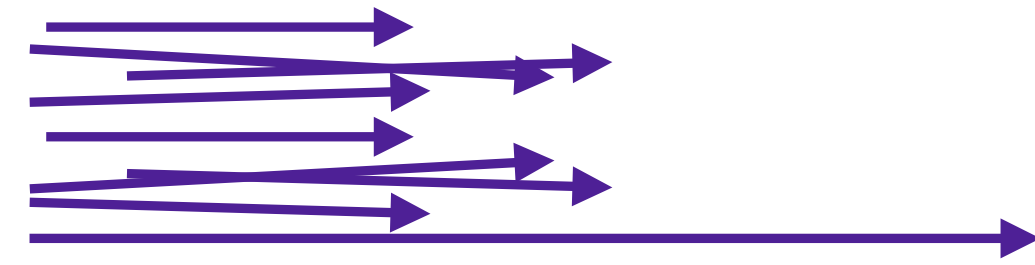
Repeat yourself; consistently.

What is new is always rejected
the first time.

Repetition helps people get from
knowing to believing to acting.



Client: Google COMMS Products Team



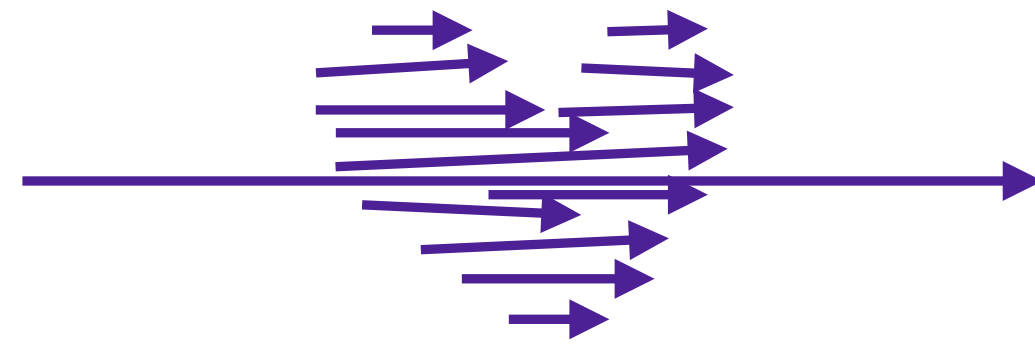
Serve your community.

If you craft a narrative about how everybody can benefit from what you do, everybody will want you to succeed.

They will want to participate.



Client: Malaria Geospacial Epidemiology Team, The Gates Foundation



Lead with passion.

You can't inspire people around you
and make things happen
with a lukewarm heart.



Client: Jim Citrin, Head of the CEO Practice, Spencer Stuart

These business leaders frame and activate their company strategy with a shared narrative that they ground in the reasons why the world is better off as a result of their company's existence.

Their strategic narrative brings all stakeholders along to take action, and as a result, they thrive.

Their path might not be yours. Alignment takes time, courage, and a change in the way you do business.

Will you follow their steps?

It's up to you to decide.

Time for action.

Visit

www.strategicnarrative.com



Guillaume Wiatr is a strategy consultant, leadership coach, and the author of *Strategic Narrative: A Simple Method That Business Leaders Can Use to Help Everyone Understand Their Business, Get Behind it and Believe In It*.

His company, MetaHelm, guides CEOs, founders, and business owners of transformative companies to align teams and accelerate innovation adoption.

A former big-firm strategy consultant, Guillaume has founded four ventures.

He is sought after by senior executives of companies like Alaska Airlines, the Gates Foundation, Generations For Peace, AIG, L'Oréal, Spencer Stuart, GAP, Google, Microsoft, and the US and French governments.

Guillaume teaches and mentors entrepreneurs at startup incubators, EMLyon international business school, and the University of Washington Master of Science in Entrepreneurship, ranked #3 in the US.

About MetaHelm

MetaHelm specializes in Strategic Narrative for leaders of transformative companies.

We guide CEOs, Founders, and Business Owners to align people and accelerate innovation adoption.

Our mission is to turn every company into a source of inspiration that few can resist.

Guillaume Wiatr - Principal
MetaHelm LLC - www.metahelm.com
3945 SW Elmgrove Street, Seattle WA 98136
guillaume@metahelm.com
+1 206 637 6564

