

Designing Friendship

Tools to growing meaningful
friendships in online games

Daniel Cook

Game designer for 20 years



LOSTGARDEN



SPRYFOX

Triple Town



SPRYFOX



S> Essence Tap/Para
Attack ring 1 speed each

SELLING NECRO 2 DEF

SELLING PARA DEF

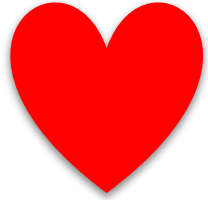
ik but what ur offer?
need good bow

- <Carlooga> k
- <DricePACK> S> Essence Tap/Para Attack ring 1 speed each
- <Baitos> ty
- <TigerDrago>
- <Flblade> meh
- <XMikex> S> Cwand
- <Sockitnoob> my friend has a tralizu
- S> Abbysal





Happiness



A small number of
deep friendships leads to
greater **happiness** in life



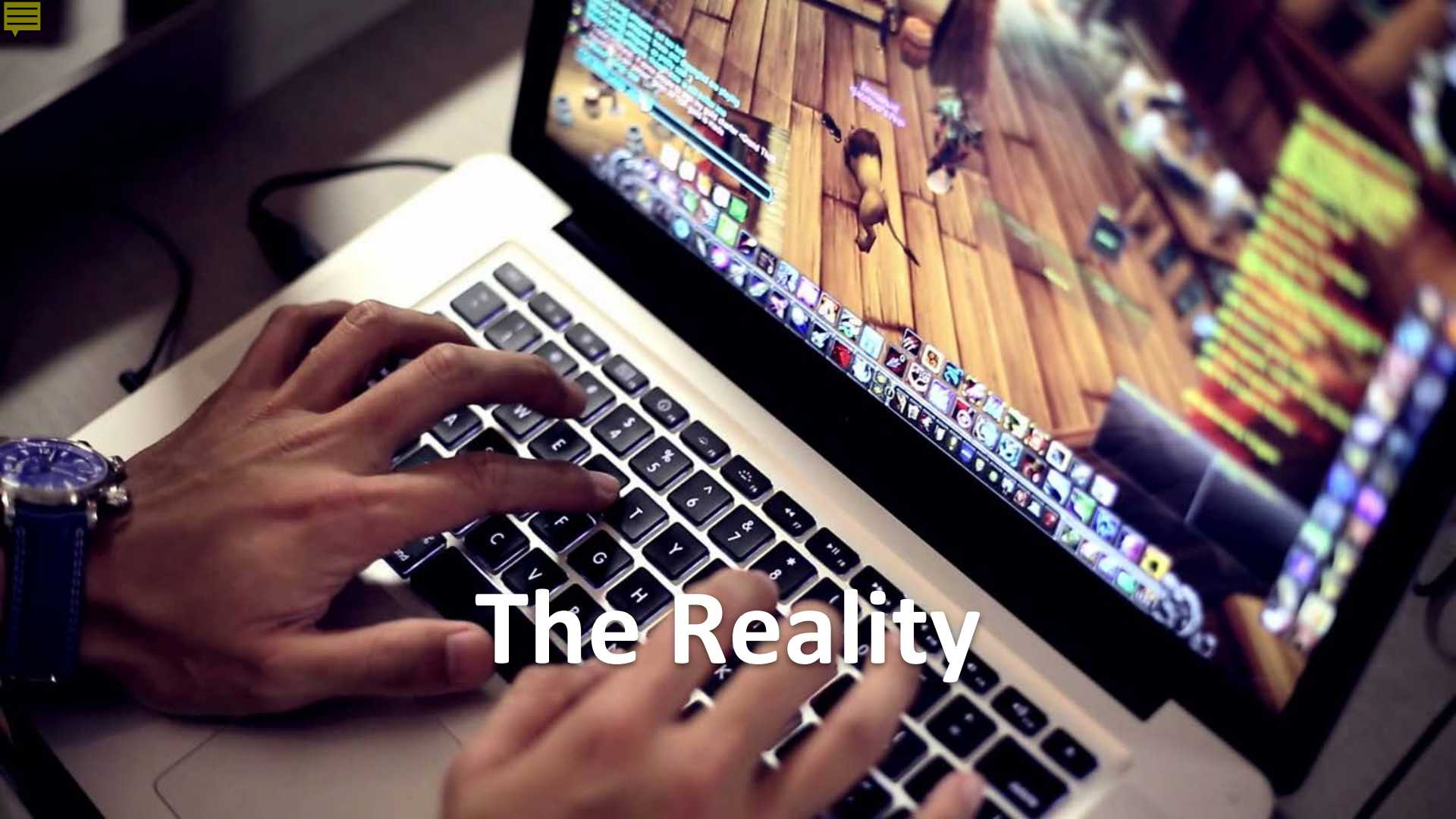
Large numbers of
shallow, status-based
relationships leads to
increased depression

“Close Friendship Strength and Broader Peer Group Desirability as Differential Predictors of Adult Mental Health”, Narr, Allen, Tan, Loeb

**So...how can online games create
meaningful friendships?**



The Fantasy



The Reality



Match-based systems create throwaway relationships

5v5 NORMAL DRAFT

Summoner's Rift

Finding match

REWARDS

Zero Chance Bruh
Primary Secondary

Zero Chance Bruh : fizz tilts me
Zero Chance Bruh : evri tim
PrucsokHUN : if he dont pick
PrucsokHUN : i kill myself
PrucsokHUN : fuck

A player did not lock in their pick or ban. Your group was returned to matchmaking.

Estimated Wait: 0:20
Current Wait: 10746:37



Viral systems turn friendship into an
dehumanized marketing resource

+1 Add Friend



Restricted or unsafe chats kills deep relationships

Error: You do not have 64x slimeball.

[Shout] [Empress]~ Onion : Well everyone you have just found the sexists on the server

[Shout] [VIP]Gri_Malkin: if women want equality then they should be willing to be drafted and do all the jobs that men do

[Shout] [Empress]~ Onion : Most women are willing Gri

[Shout] [Empress]YTM: women do the same jobs as men do

[Shout] [Default]steponmycubez: yea ur real cute jr

[Shout] [Empress]YTM: have you never seen a women doing construction? for exmaple

[Shout] [Empress]~ Onion : But men don't let women stand up

[Shout] [Empress]YTM: examples

[Shout] [Default]steponmycubez: they do wtf

[Shout] [VIP]Gri_Malkin: i am a female and I took a construction class for 2 years

[Shout] [Default]simo6956: my mo can construct a sandwich

[Shout] [Empress]YTM: thats a lie, we had a female primisiter

[Shout] [Default]skippersam: there it is

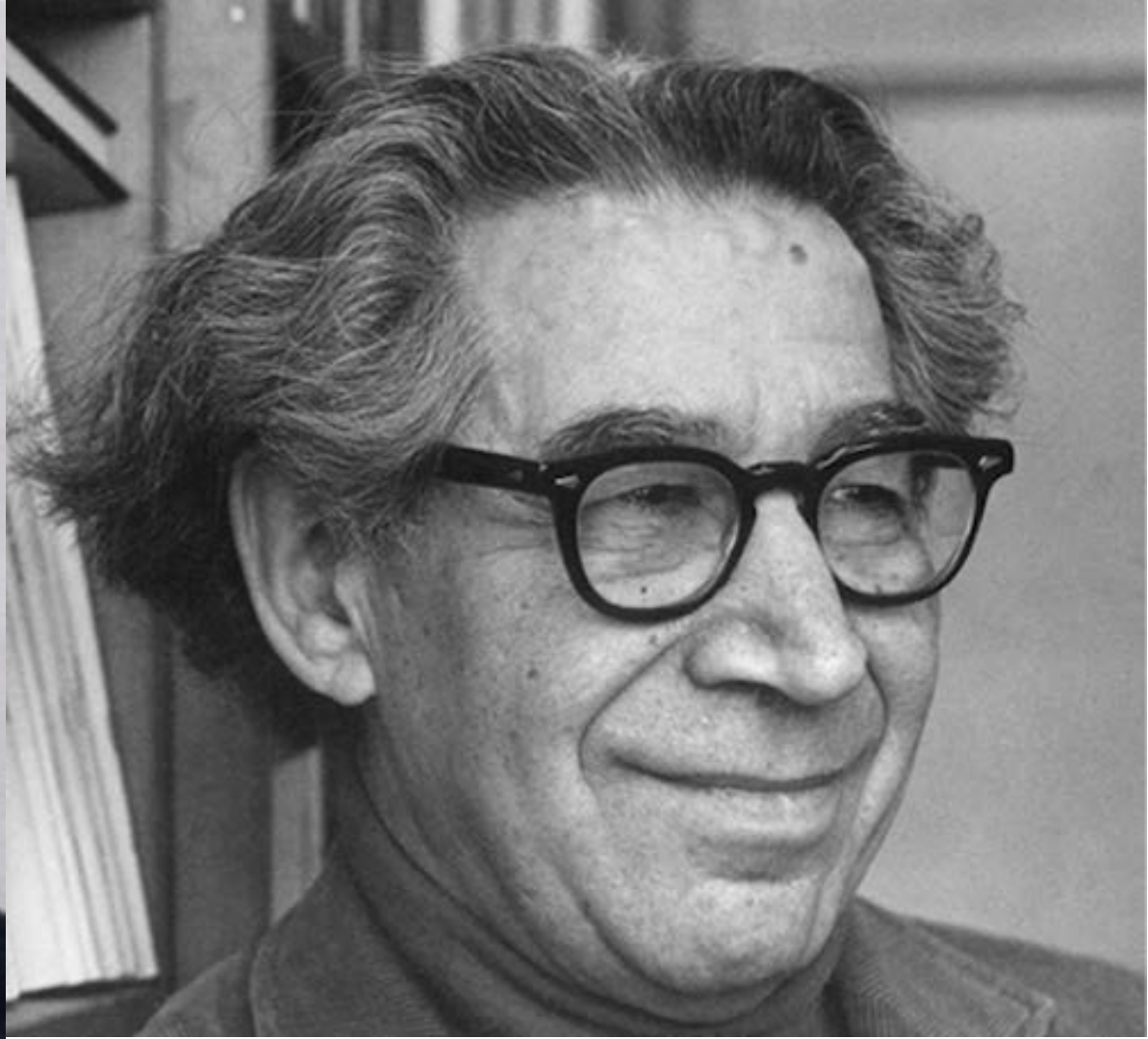
[Shout] [Default]steponmycubez: there are girls doing

64 64 64 64 64 64 64 64 64



Can we do better?

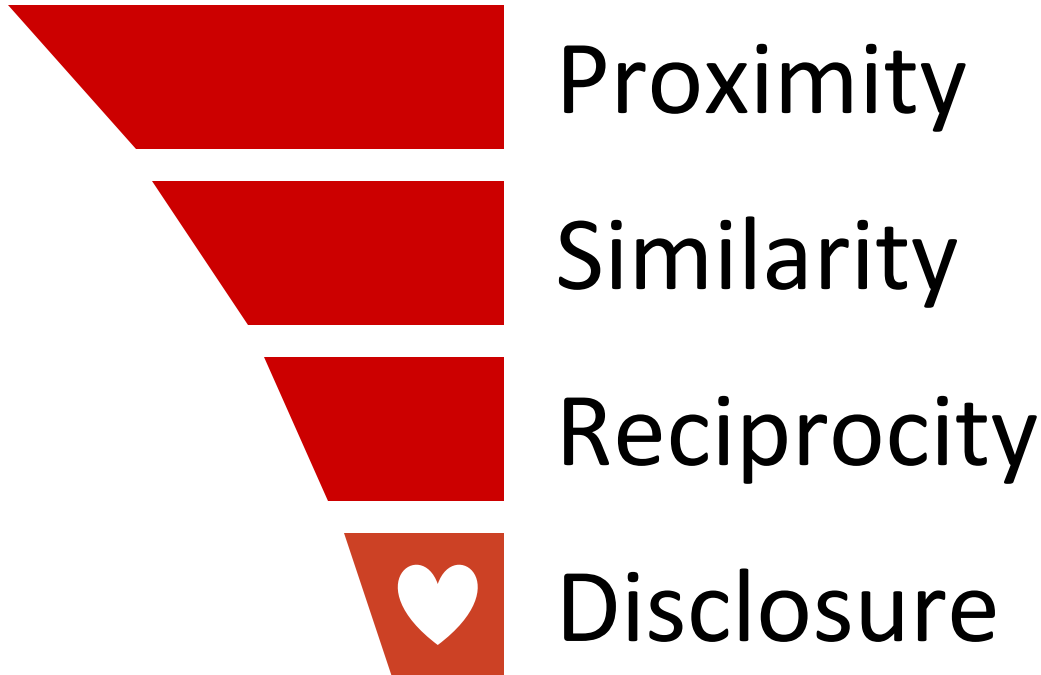
Is there a framework for building
better friendships?



**A proven model for
friendship formation**



The Laws of Friendship Formation



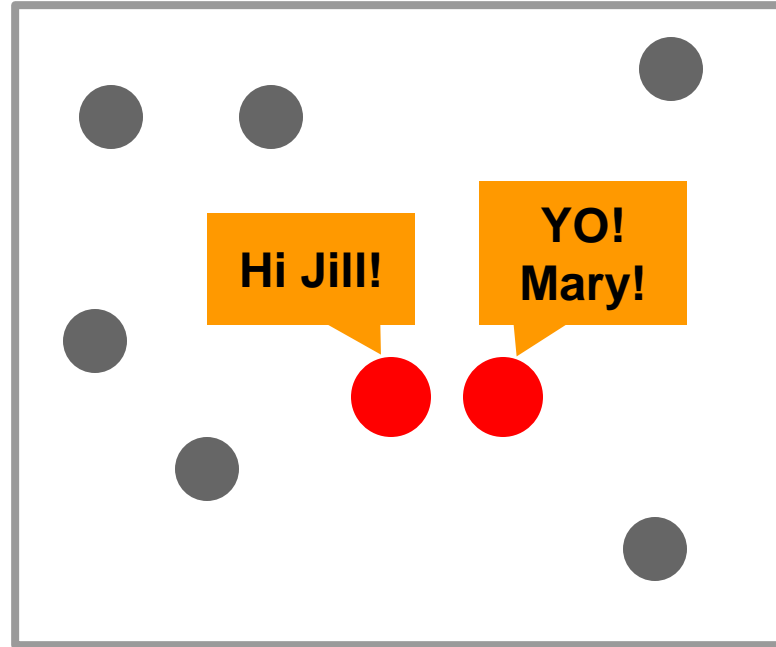


1. Proximity

Propinquity: Social distance

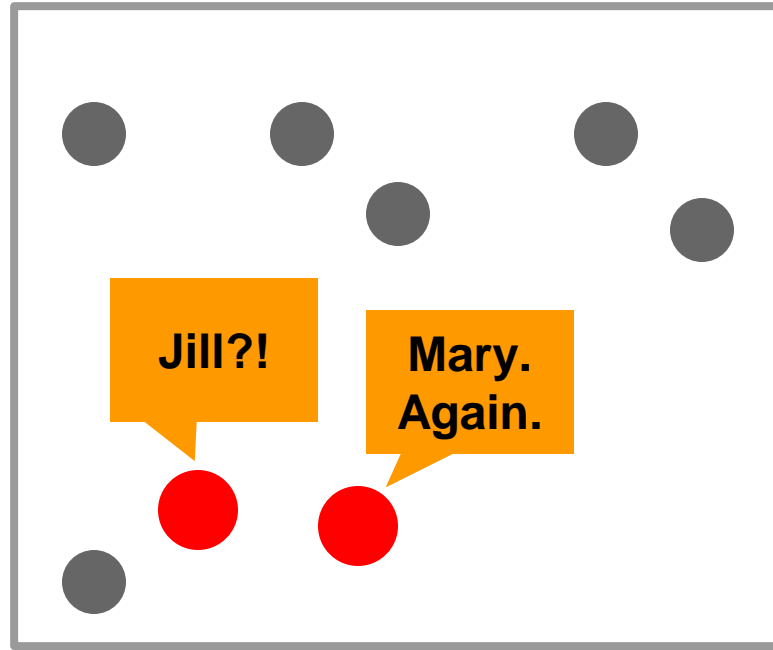


Repeat, Serendipitous Interactions



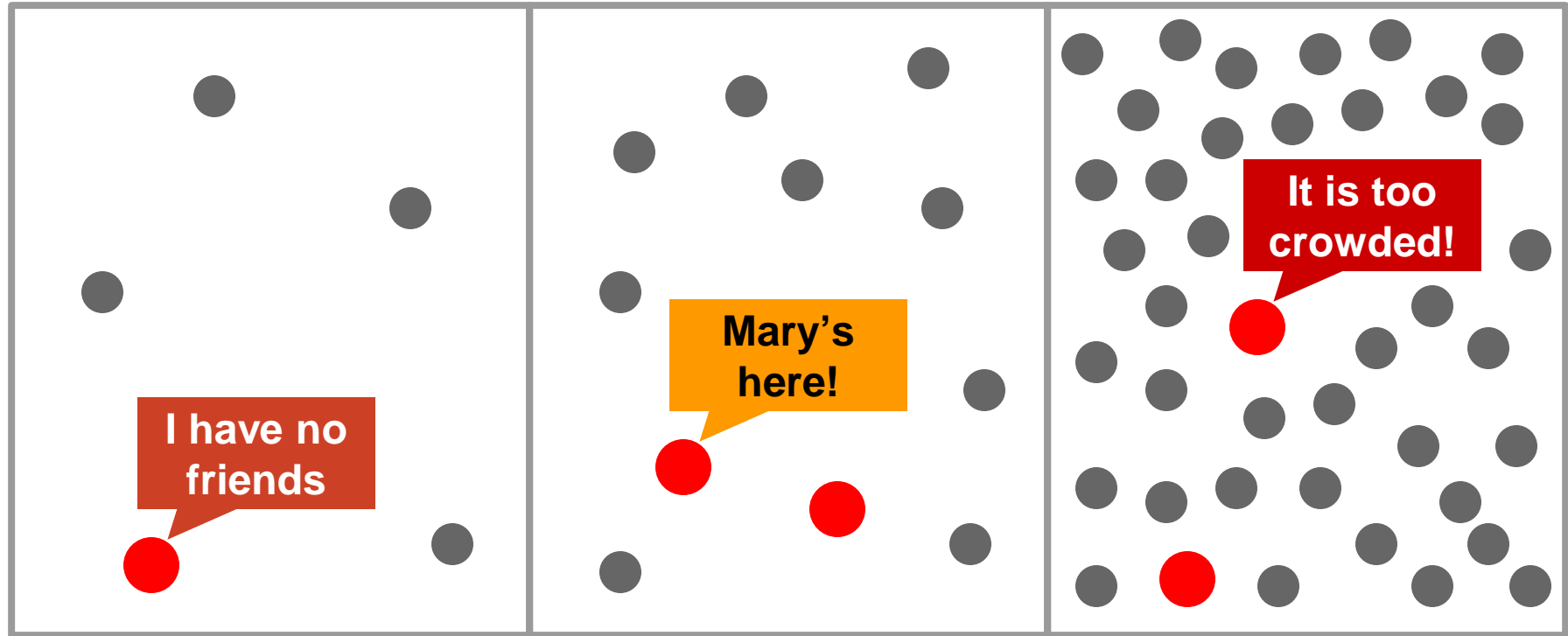


Repeat, Serendipitous Interactions





Density





This is a

Logistics Challenge

Example of logistics thinking
Why not just play with friends?



Concurrency Ratios

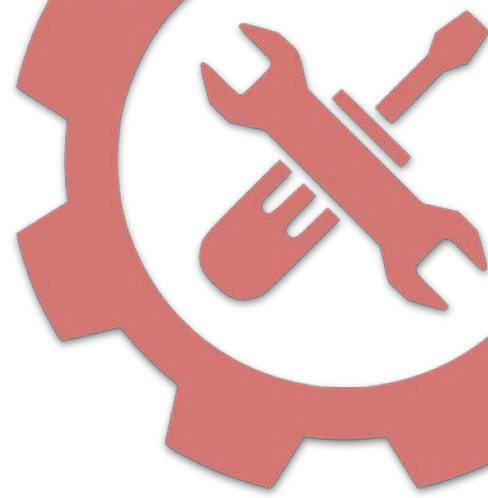
- **MMO: 10:1**
- **Online Console Service (like Xbox Live): 25:1**
- **Individual Console game: 150:1**
- **Web game: 250:1**



Your Friends Aren't Online

Concurrency of 25:1 means...

- if you have 10 friends...
- 33% chance a friend is online when you are



The insight

Friendship rarely transfers to new contexts due to logistics

Design bomb

So you need to build up new friends out of strangers. UGH!



Design Tools to
Maximize Proximity

Basic Tools

- **Persistent Identity:** +Repeat Encounters
- **Events:** +Density
- **Daily Incentives:** +Repeat Encounters
- **Offline Communities:** +Repeat Encounters



Basic Anti-Patterns

- Anonymous players
- Huge, empty areas
- Many gameplay modes
- Separating player by skill



The Big Anti-Pattern Matches





The Amazing Eternals

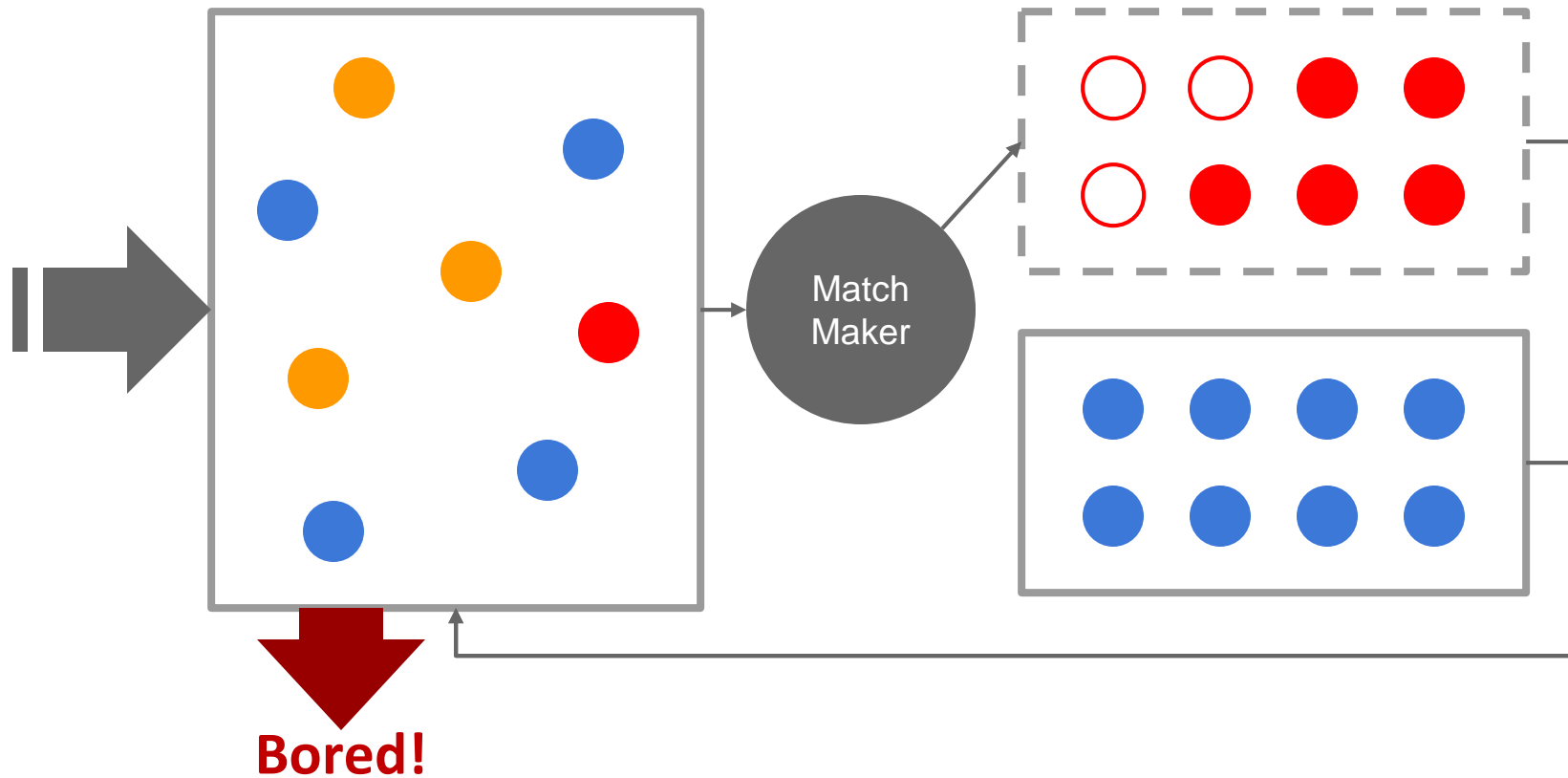
*“Unfortunately, the game wasn’t attracting players fast enough to support a **viable matchmaking player base** with the current game design direction, which is the lifeblood of this type of game”*

– Digital Extremes



Wait in lobby

Play match





The cost of this hoary old pattern

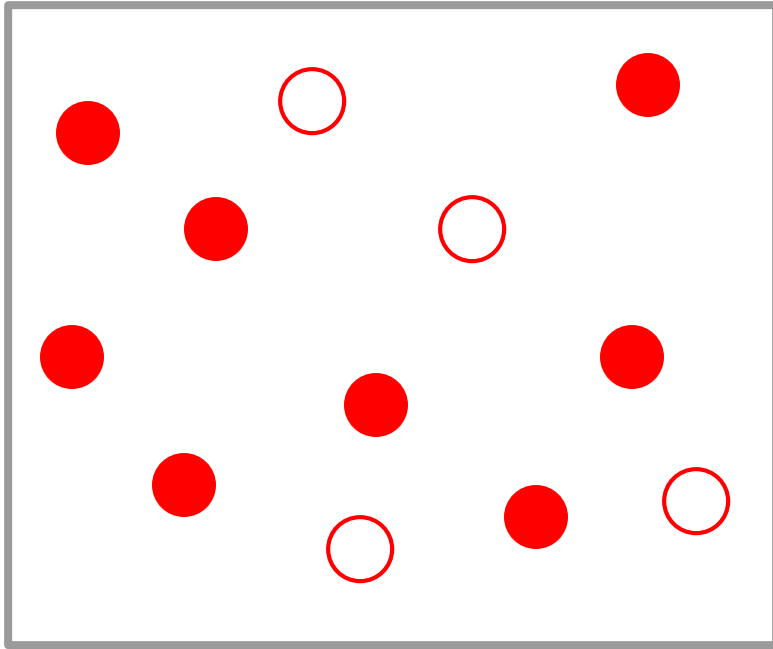
- Works only with mega hits
- High **churn** due to matchmaking queues
- Low **repeat** interactions



**We can design
Better**



Pattern: Rooms!



Density Management

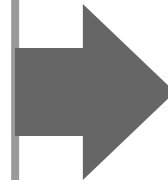
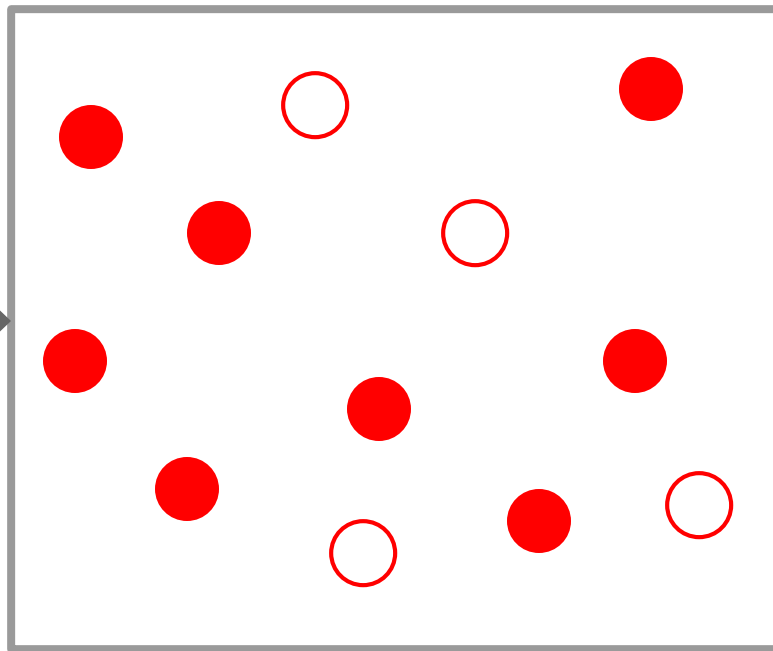
Repeat Encounters

Low wait times



**N slots
in Room**

**Join
in Progress**



**Leave
in Progress**



- steve, today's longest snake
with a length of 4491

Mancow

#2	Crossfade	1024.8
#3	owwie	1019.8
#4	Blip	1010.9
#5	Rusty	987.9
#6	Zeno's Paradox	976.7
#7	Happy Hardcore	920.7
#8	MaSe	920.3
#9	Amek	897.2
#10	nine	867.1

slither.io

Your length: 364

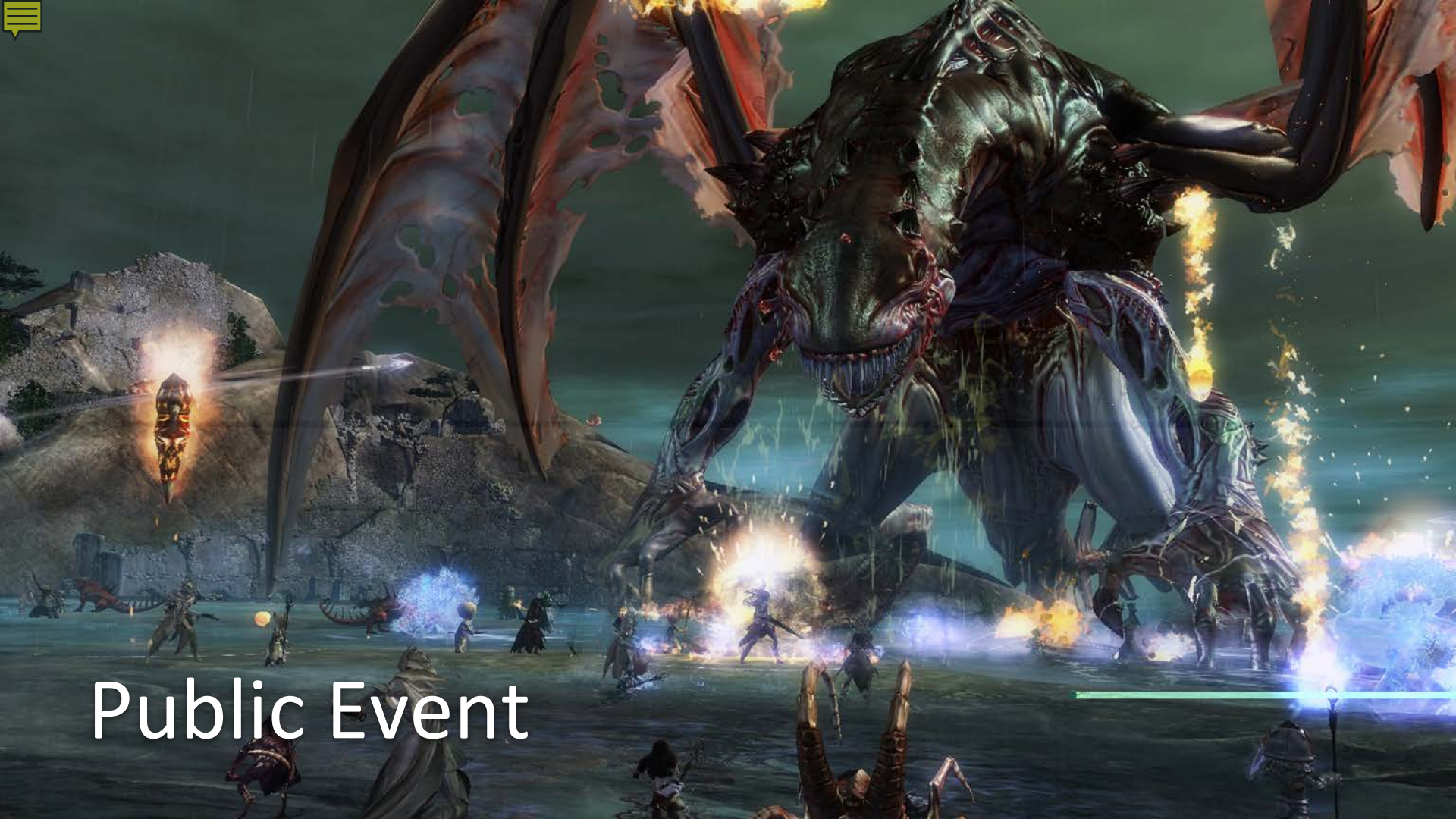


Pattern: **Active Waiting Rooms**

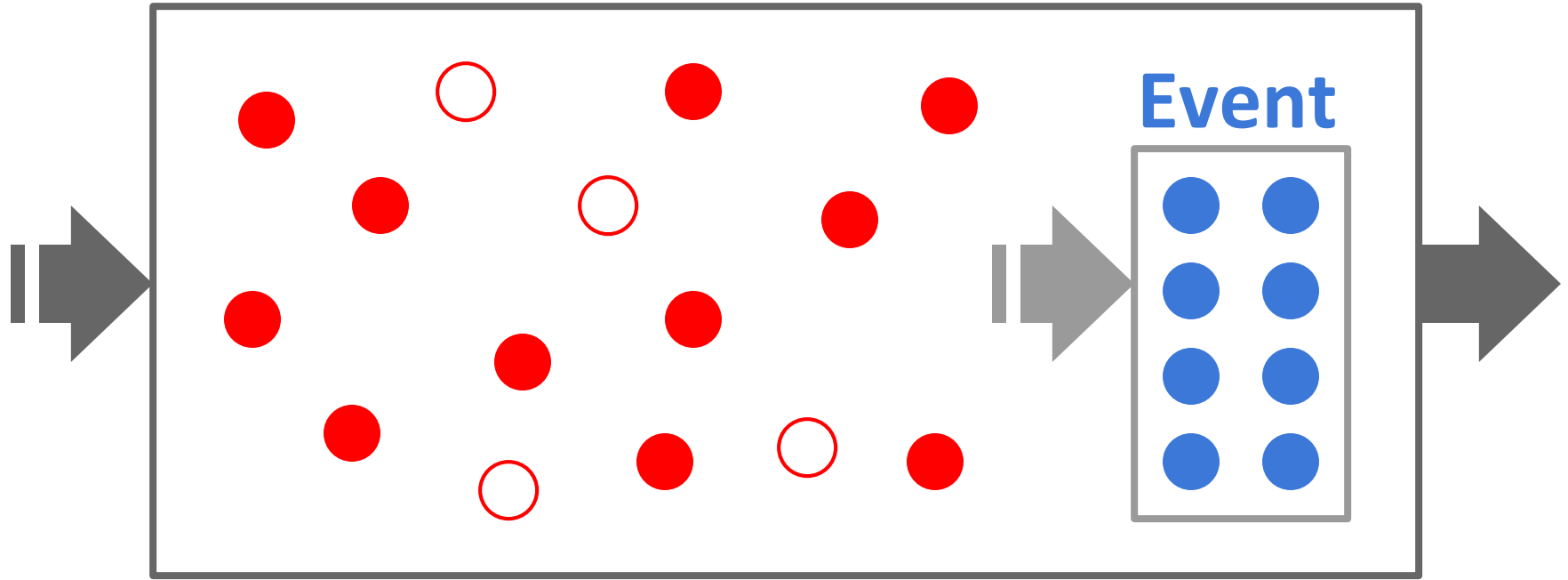




Room with single player quests



Public Event



Prevents premature leaving

Maximizes ideal density (+Serendipity)

Pattern: Elastic Instancing of Rooms





Squidly 30

Lvl 17

HP

MP

ATT - 38	DEF - 10
SPD - 30	DEX - 40
VIT - 32	WIS - 39



Rambo **KEJEF**

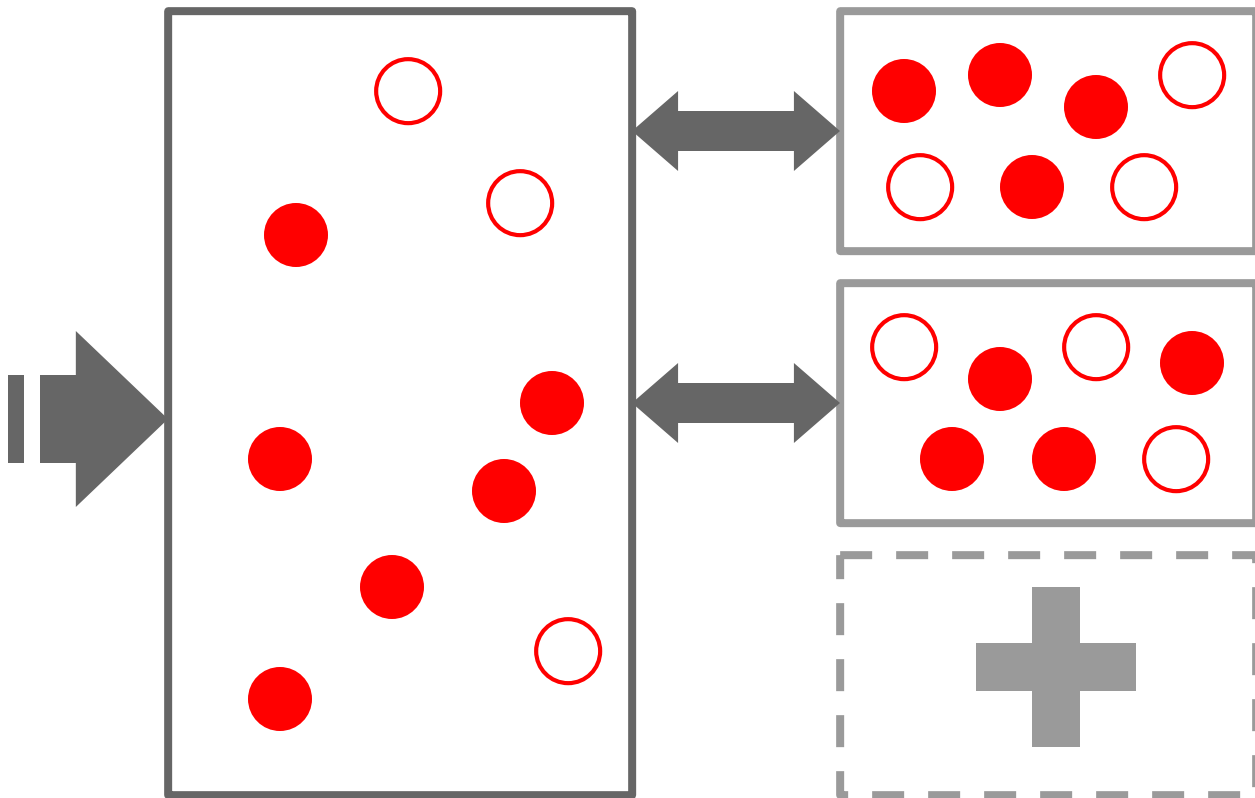


<Boogers> nvm
<Archer> i need bow
<OP> cheese



Hub

Instances



**Ideal Gameplay
Density**

+Serendipity

Social space
+Serendipity



$$\text{\# of Rooms} = \frac{\text{Concurrent Players}}{\text{Ideal Players per Room}}$$

Smarty pants question from the crowd

What happens when population shrinks?




Pattern: Garbage Collection of Instances

In Realm of the Mad God

- Players 'beat' instanced servers
- Those servers go away
- Don't create new instances



Pattern: Voluntary Migration



There are few players remaining on this map. Would you like to move to a more populated version of this same map?

You have 41 m, 40 s to volunteer before the map closes.

Volunteer reward:



Yes

Later

Guild Wars 2



Pattern: Involuntary Migration

In Guild Wars 2

- If you ignore the offers...
- You just get kicked out.



Maximizing **Repeat** Interactions

Pattern: Preserve Cohorts

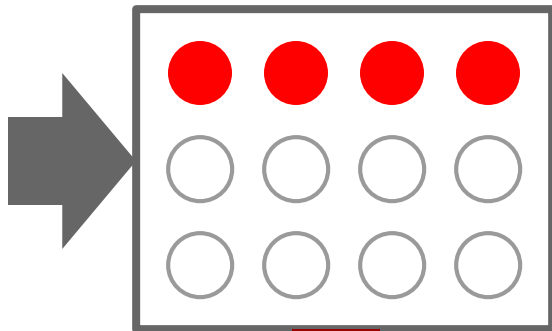




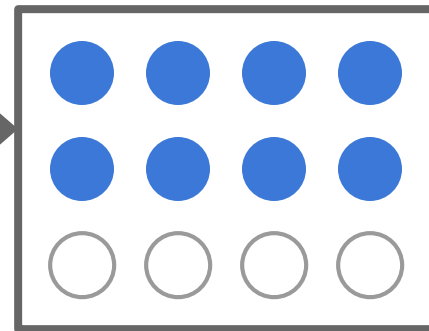
Failing Village

Thriving Village

Backfill
with new
players

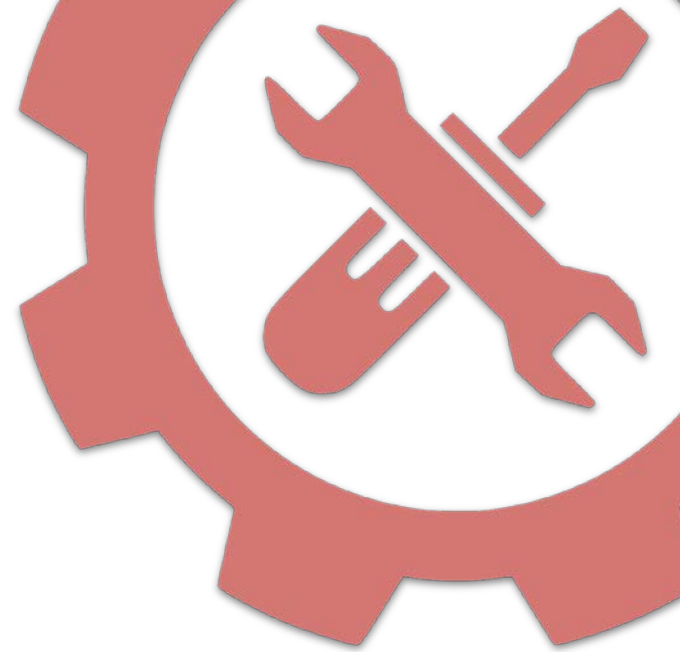


Migrate



Clean up inactive
players





Key lesson

**To maximize repeat interaction,
try to keep the cohort together**



All tools

- **Cohort-based placement:** Keep friend groups together
- **Elastic instancing:** Only create villages that hit max density
- **Garbage Collection:** Villagers and villages ascend
- **Idle detection:** Frees spots if people go idle
- **Backfill** with new or migrating users
- **Voluntary migration:** If low density
- **Forced migration:** If players don't take rewards

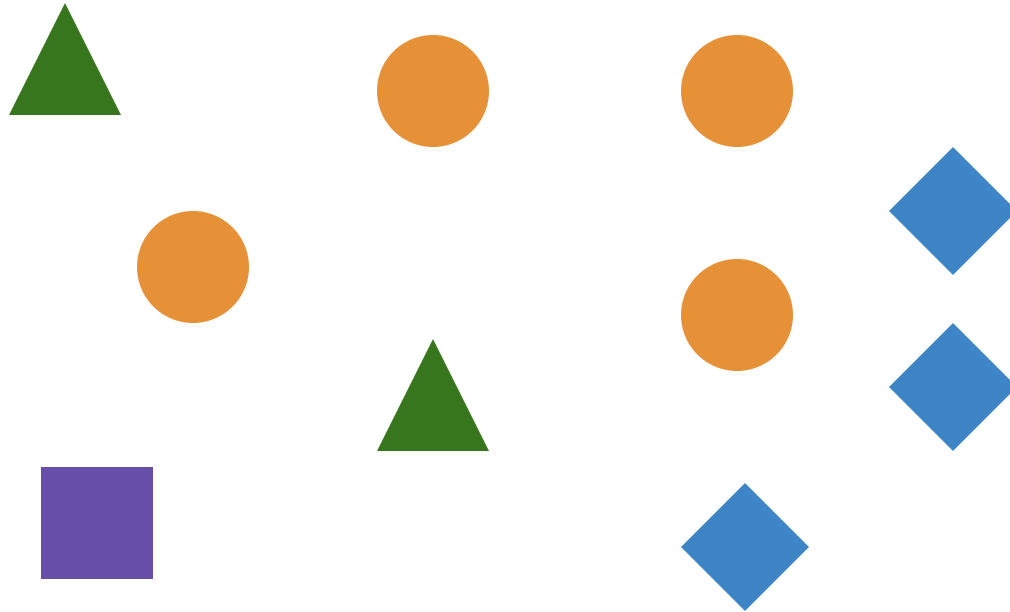


2. Similarity

Perception of shared social norms

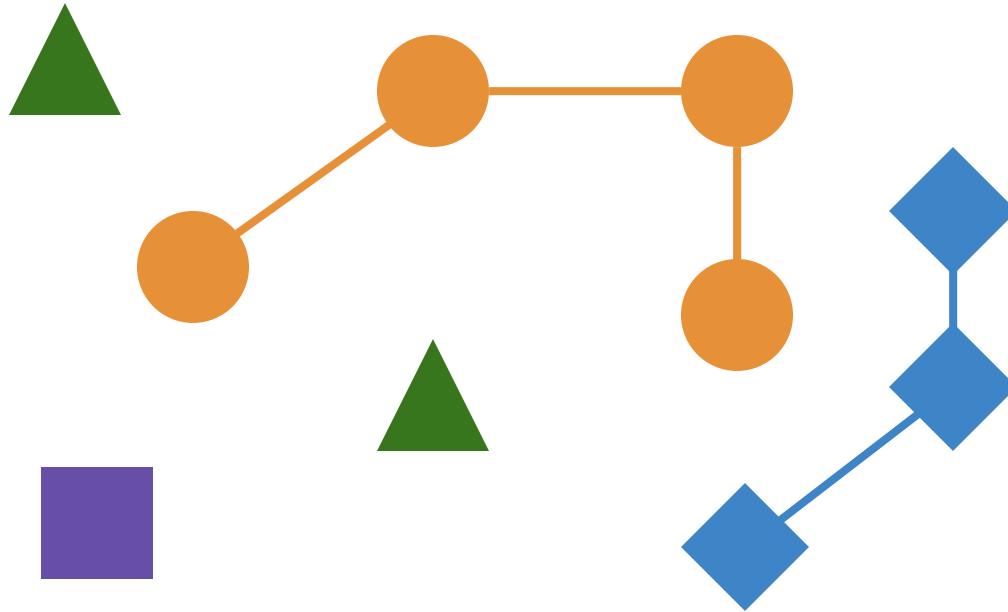


1. People make friends with people like them





1. People make friends with people like them



Shared norms lower cost of social negotiation



2. Similarity is an incredibly strong filter

Anti-Pattern: Nationalism

agar.io

France

AlexBasch

United States

Leaderbo

1. I'M FA
2. Kahlee
3. USSR
4. □ □
5. An unname

USSR

Design Tools to Benefit from Similarity





Basic Tools

- Putting the player in a **faction**
(Horde vs Alliance)
- Shared **experiences**
- Shared interests or **goals**



“An individual’s behavior conforms to their digital self-representation”

Yee & Bailenson, Proteus Effect



Pattern: Positive Fictional Identities





Create...

- Pro-social player roles
Tend & Befriend - Brie Code
- Positive fictional cultures
- That **do not reference the real world directly**
- Make a better world & Assign player to that culture

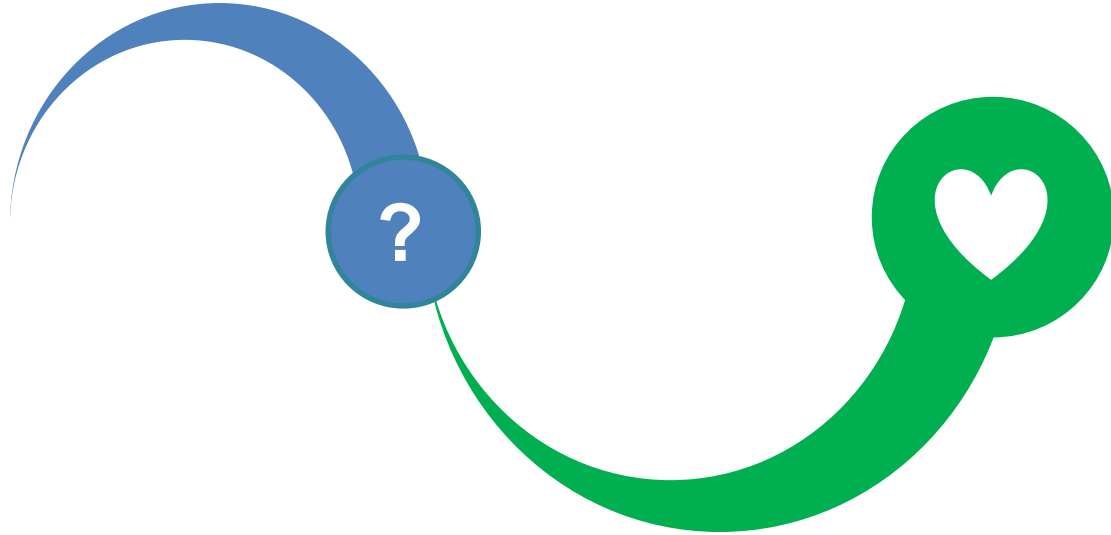


3. Reciprocity

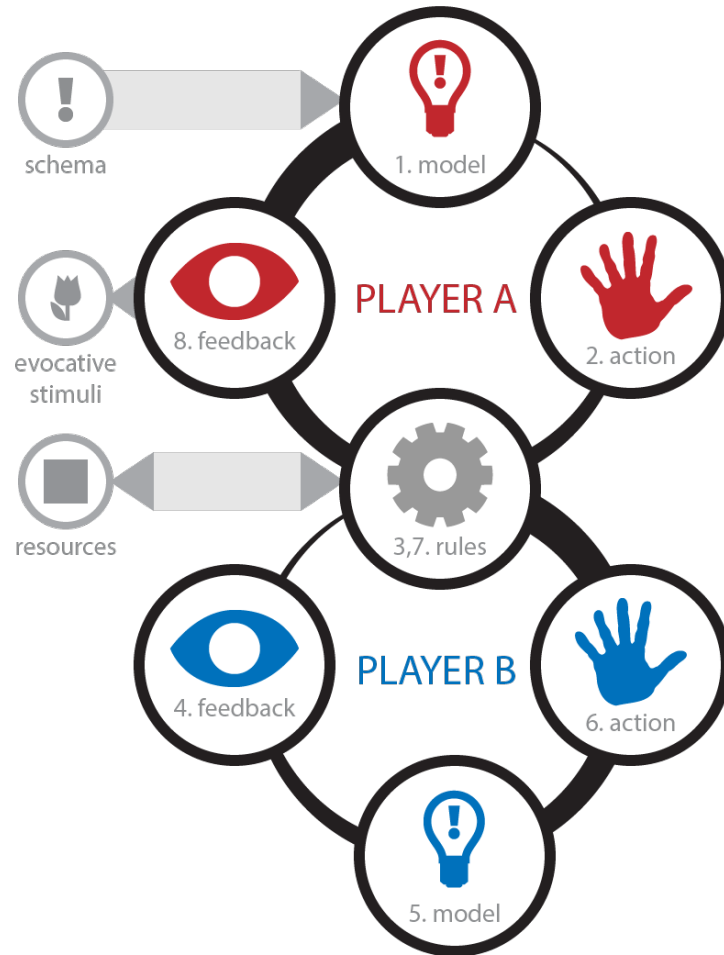
Tit for Tat levels up relationships



1. Make a friendly **offer...**



...Give a positive **response**





2. Each interaction builds **Trust**





Trust is another name for
Shared Social Norms

**Predictable behaviors that facilitate
cooperation and coordination**

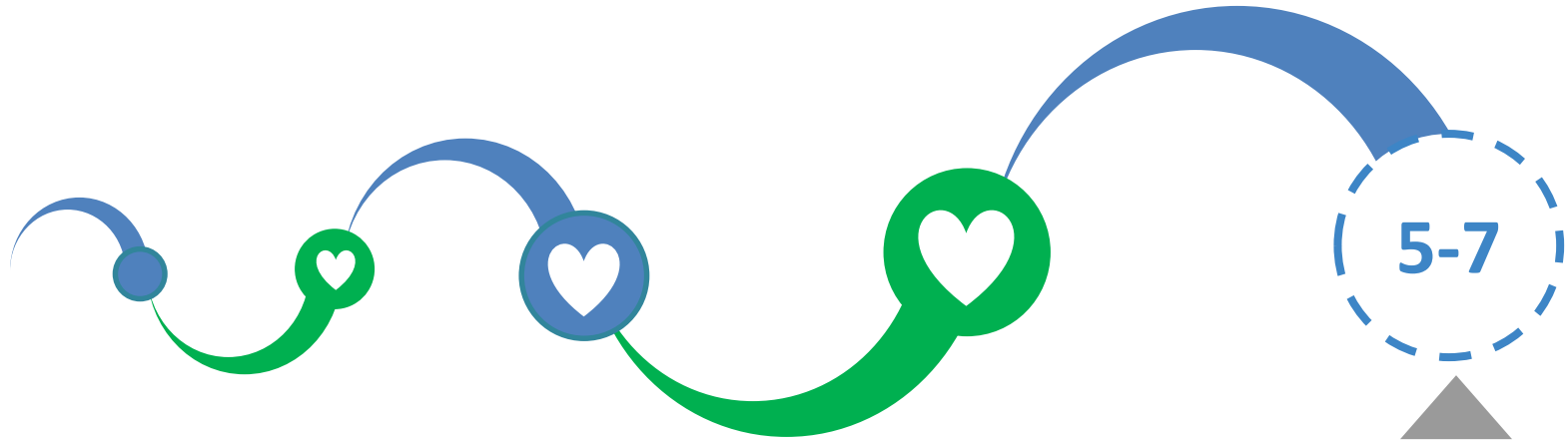
3. Trust grows slowly.



But crashes quickly



4. Trust allows us to increase stakes of each interaction



Deep friendships
are expensive



**Groups with trust
accomplish more than an
individual**



People are wired to reciprocate

ROBERT
CIALDINI

THE POWER OF
PERSUASION AND
INFLUENCE



Design Tools to Maximize Reciprocity





Anti Patterns

- Trade scamming / **Deceit**
- **Lack of predictability**
- Extreme **power differentials** (no mutual need)
- Over designing for freeloaders
- High initial **interaction costs**



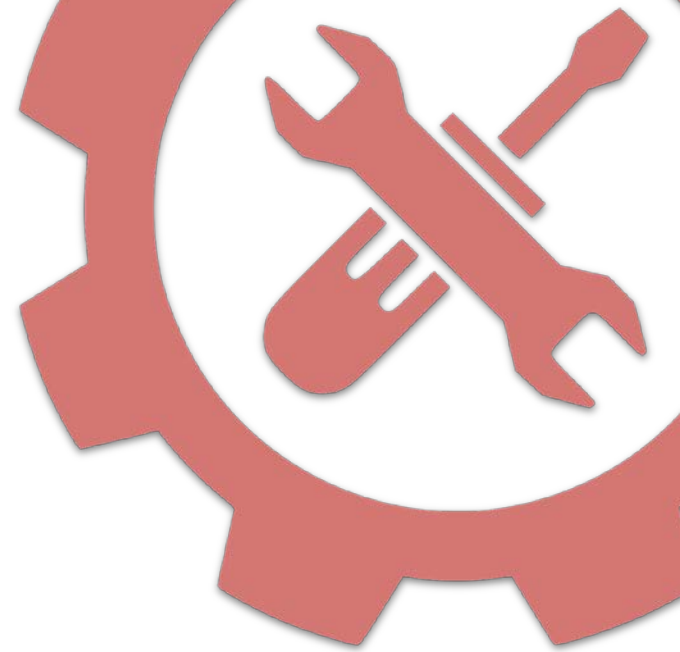
The Big Anti-Pattern

Early Zero Sum



Naive Tools

- **Chat:** We can reciprocate socially
- **Friend lists:** We acknowledge a relationship
- **Shared Goals:** We each want the same thing
- **Guilds:** Opt-in tribes with shared norms
- **Gifting:** Giving something to someone
- **Trade:** We each have what the other needs



Key lesson

**Design systems that intentionally
level up Friendship**



Friendship Levels



Solitary play

Playing alone



Parallel play

Playing next to others



Ambient Coop

We help others without meaning to



Soft Coop

We intentionally benefit others



Hard Coop

We must collaborate to progress



Friends

We spend time together.
Because we find it intrinsically rewarding.



Pattern: Automated Initial Interaction

October 25, 2017

→ montonero is here to kick butt and chew bubblegum. And montonero is all out of gum. Last Wednesday at 6:58 AM



Daniel Cook Last Wednesday at 9:50 AM

gives motonero some gum. It is spearmint.



Message #general

Pattern: Non-zero sum XP and Loot



MISSION COMPLETE

Defeated Beach Snake

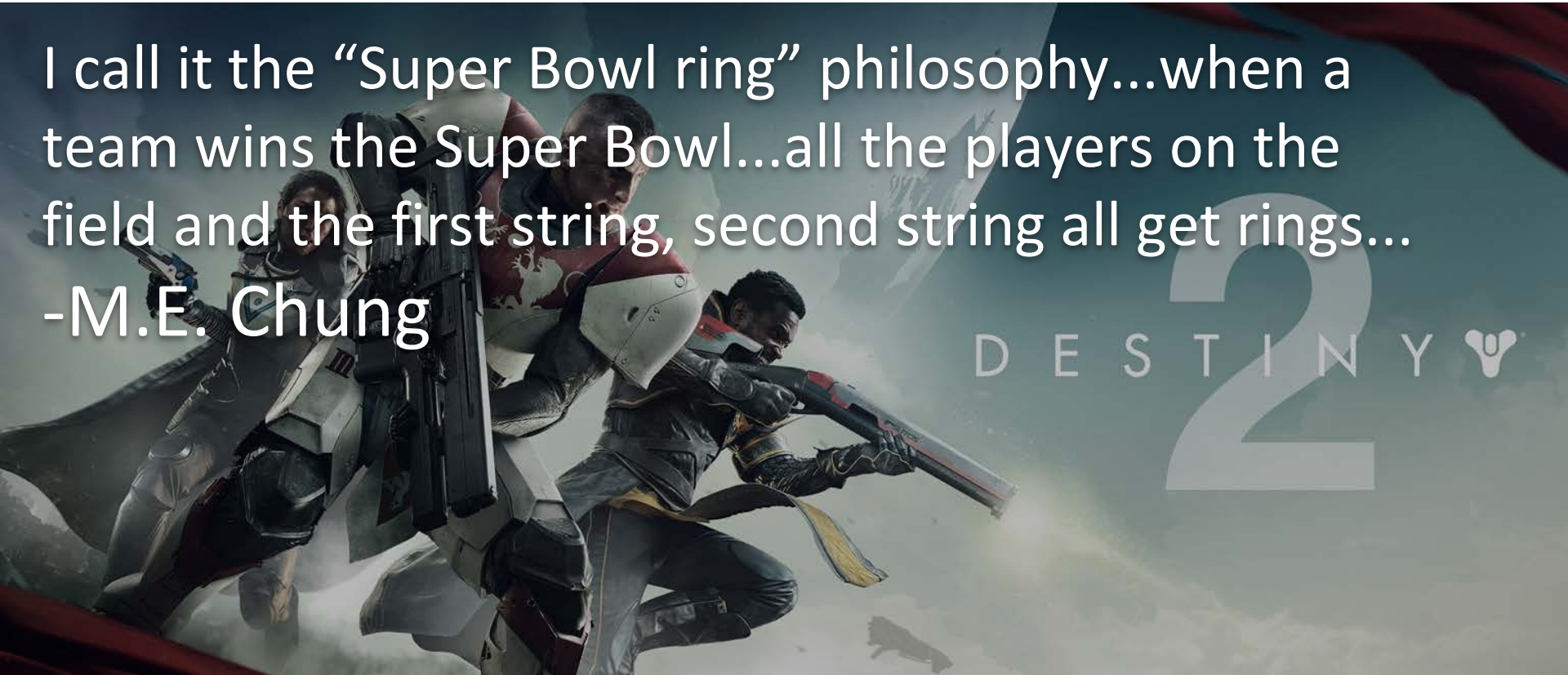




Pattern: **Non-zero sum guild rewards**

I call it the “Super Bowl ring” philosophy...when a team wins the Super Bowl...all the players on the field and the first string, second string all get rings...

-M.E. Chung



Pattern: Roles







You fail if you don't work together



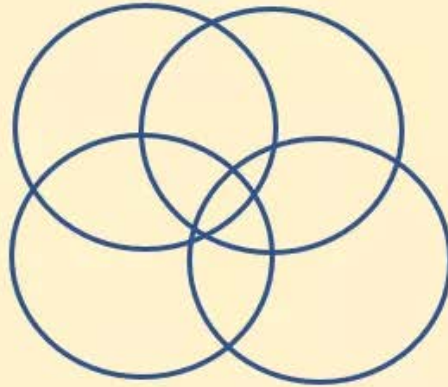
Low trust

Players have high overlap in their capabilities. Each player can therefore be pretty independent. Occasionally, a player might be able to do something that others cannot.



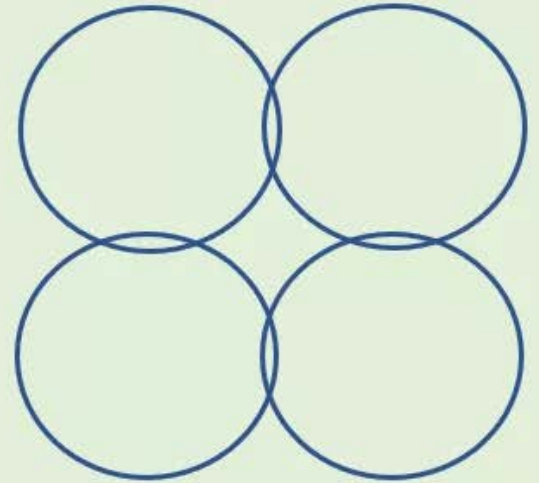
Medium trust

Players have specific, key overlaps. For example, an ability that all players have. But they can specialize otherwise. They may overlap in purpose, but have different tools.



High trust

Players are specialists who require other players to succeed. Role overlaps are minimal.

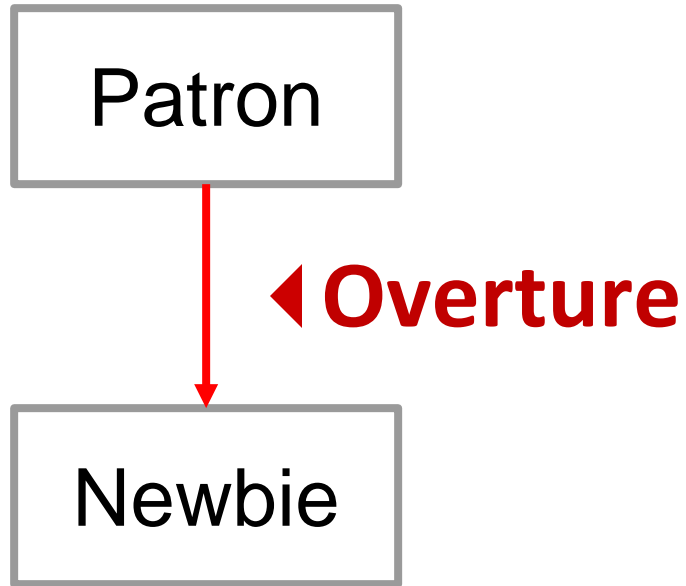


Official Relationships



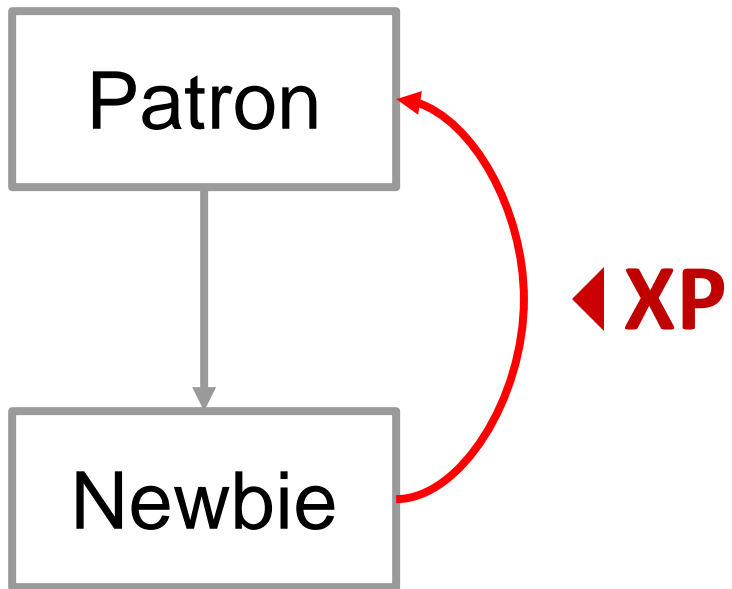


Patronage



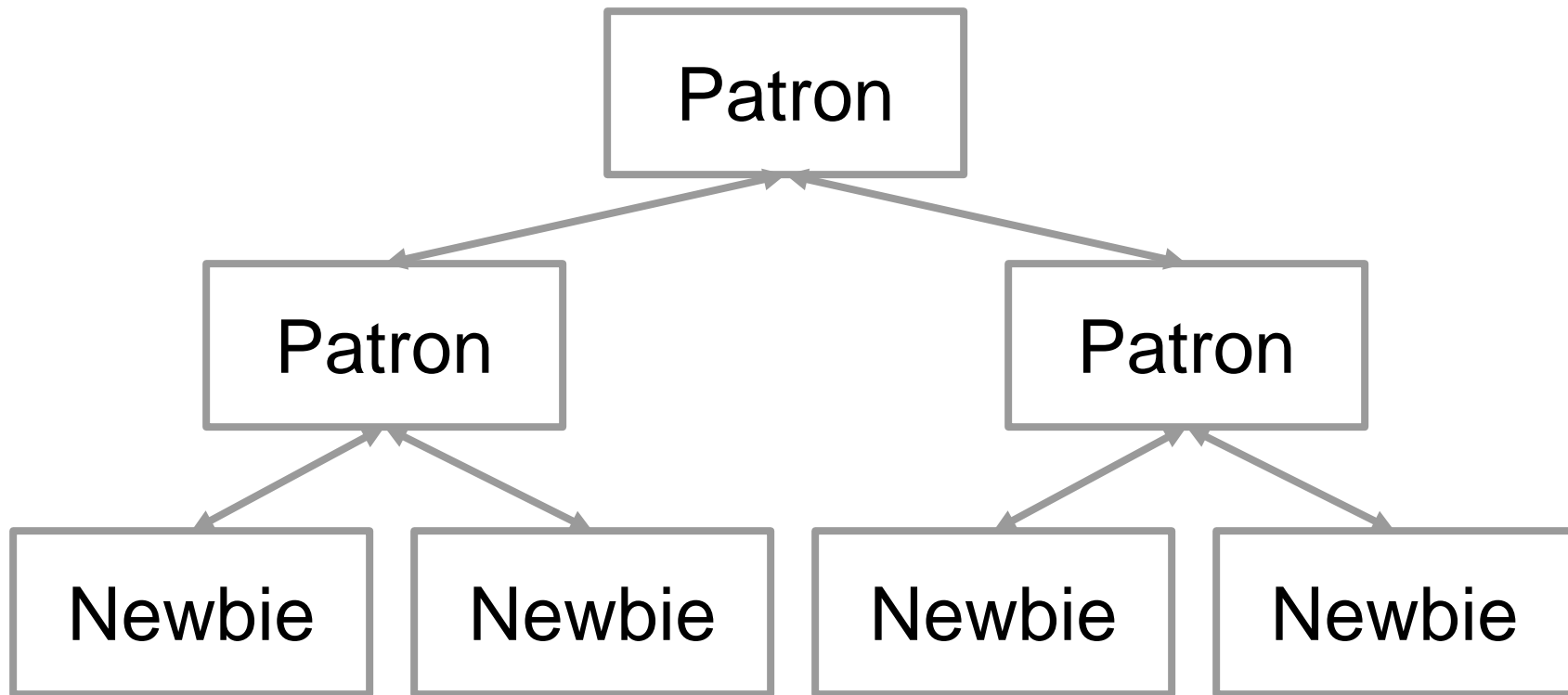


Patronage





Patronage





Reveal weakness for
strongest bonds

4. Disclosure

In deep relationship: Reciprocation loops change from superficial mirroring to **riskier trust building**

The key to deep trust: The ability to disclose risky information to a friend without rejection

Disclosure is risky



But the only way to grow





Personal info triggers nasty reactions

racism

sexism

ageism

classism

height

religion

nationalism



Friendship Levels

1. Solitary play
2. Parallel play
3. Ambient Coop
4. Soft Coop
5. Hard Coop
6. Good friends



Premature Disclosure



Opt-in disclosure



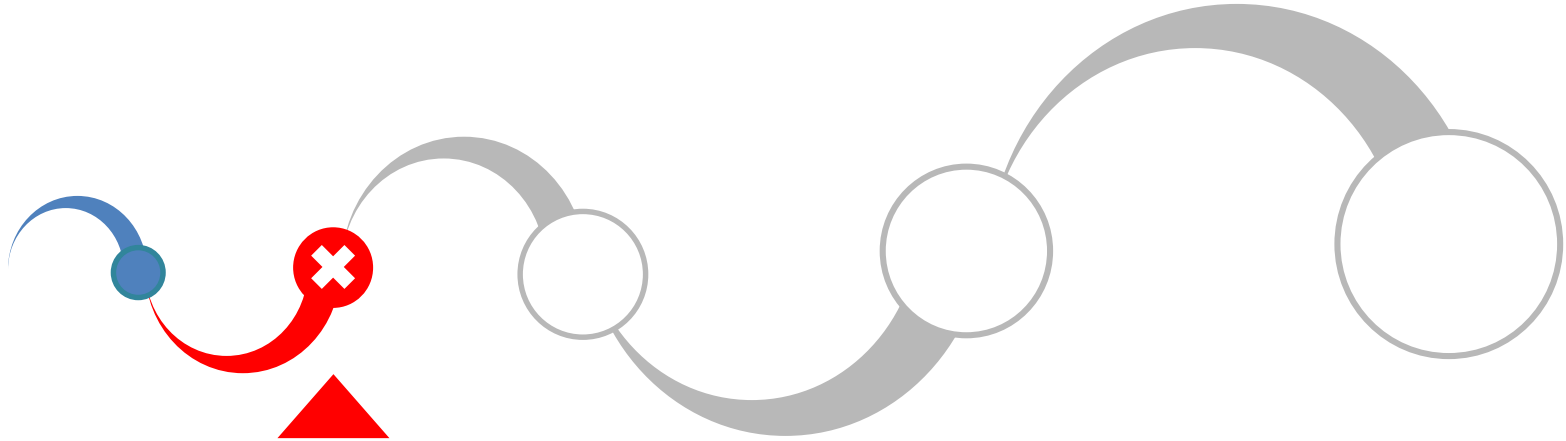
Overwatch

*“I like to play comp in overwatch but **i can't use the voice chat without getting marriage proposals** etc.*

Do you guys have any tips on programs that can change my voice to be alot more masculine?”



Premature disclosure kills relationship leveling

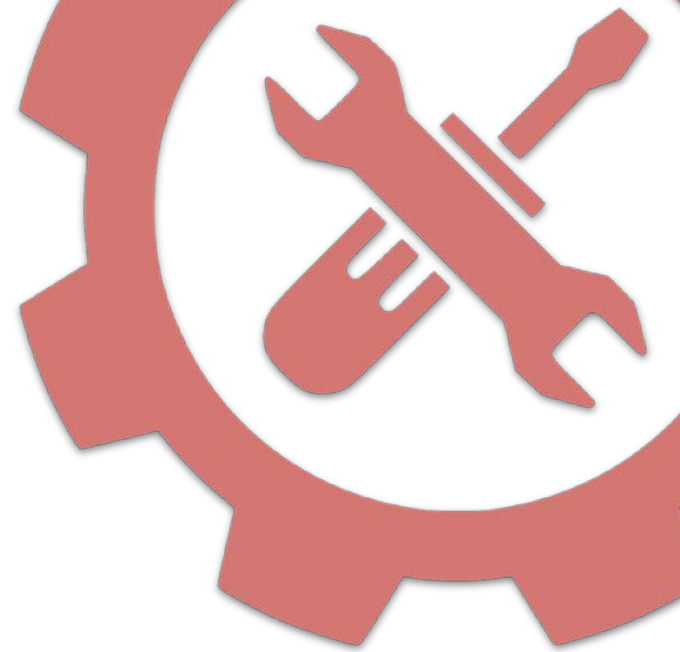


Trust is lost

Anti-Patterns

Don't start with new unsocialized players using

- Real name
- Voice chat
- Real location
- If item was purchased with real money









Key lesson

Design a ladder of opt-in intimacy

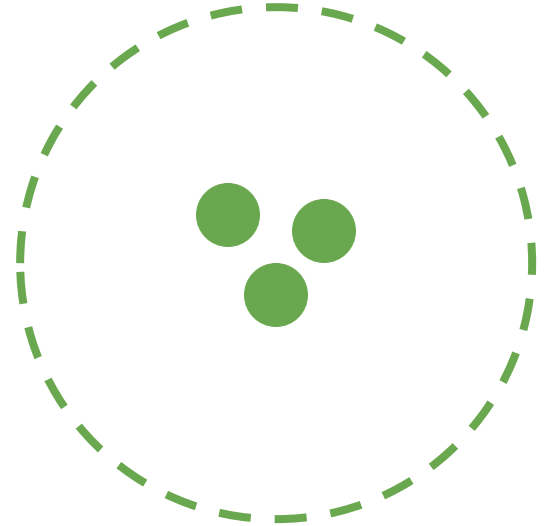
“Opt-intimacy” - Lisa Brown, Master Game Designer, 2018



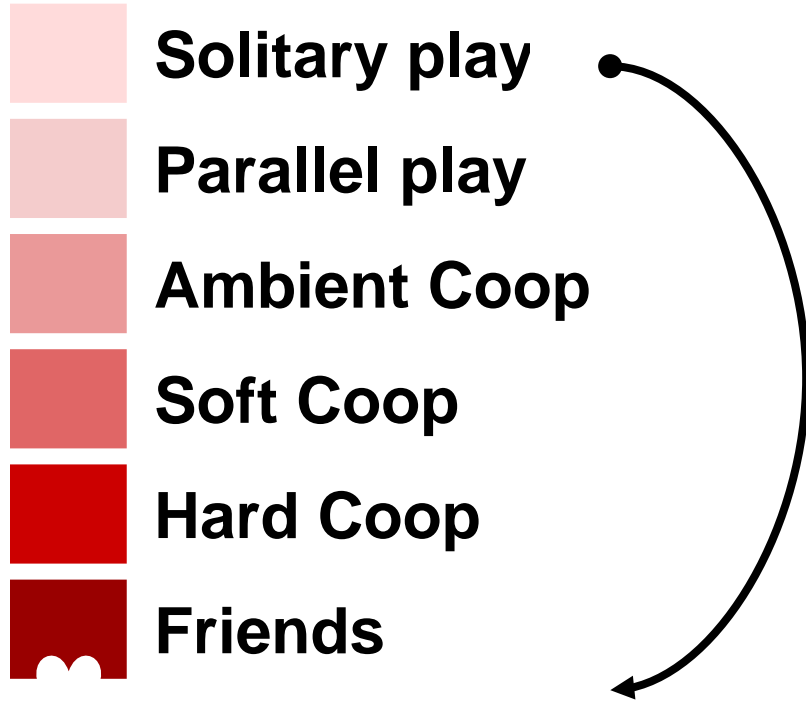
	Solitary play	Identity
	Parallel play	+ Expressive Actions
	Ambient Coop	+ Emotes
	Soft Coop	+ Chat + Blocking
	Hard Coop	+ Group Chat
	Friends	+ Private Spaces



Pattern: Cone of Silence







Real friends get to skip

Friend invites

Timed for privacy

Shared via private chat

Conclusion

Design for friendship formation

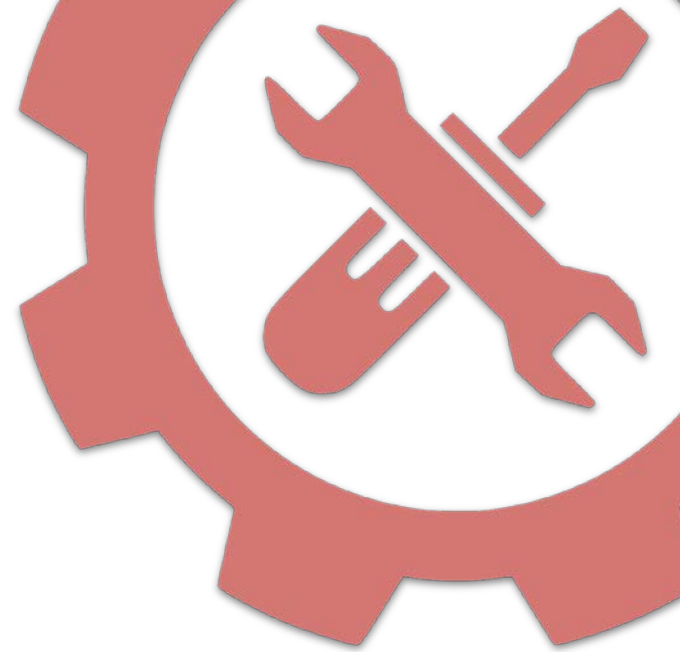


	Proximity	Similarity	Reciprocity	Disclosure
Solitary play				
Parallel play				
Ambient Coop				
Soft Coop				
Hard Coop				
Friends				



Anti-Pattern

Retrofitting a social architecture is hard



Key lesson

**Design friendship leveling in
from the start. Make it a design pillar.**



More info

Game Design Patterns for Building Friendships

<https://www.projecthorseshoe.com/reports/featured/ph16r4.htm>

Yuri Bialoskursky

Daniel Cook

Michael Fitch

Bill Fulton

Joel Gonzales

Trust Spectrum

<https://www.raphkoster.com/2018/03/16/the-trust-spectrum/>

2-year google project on trust formation using games

Questions?

Daniel Cook

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design writing: **lostgarden.com**

company: **spryfox.com**