

Symptoms of Communication Problem



what
stakeholder
described



what data
looked like



what we
delivered



what
stakeholder
wanted

Symptoms of Communication Problem



what
stakeholder
described



what data
looked like



what we
delivered



what
stakeholder
wanted



what got
marketed:
iSwing.ai

Tell me What you
Want,
What you *Really*,
Really Want:
How to Identify the
Real Business
Question

DATACON  **NOV 8TH**
'25
DATA CAREER DEVELOPMENT TRACK

IRINA
KUKUYEVA, PHD

AI DILIGENCE, VENTURE PARTNER
KUKUYEVA CONSULTING



AI Diligence | Mentor 100+ Start-ups/year



Manage Teams | Invent, Implement, Scale Data Products



Ph.D. in Statistics



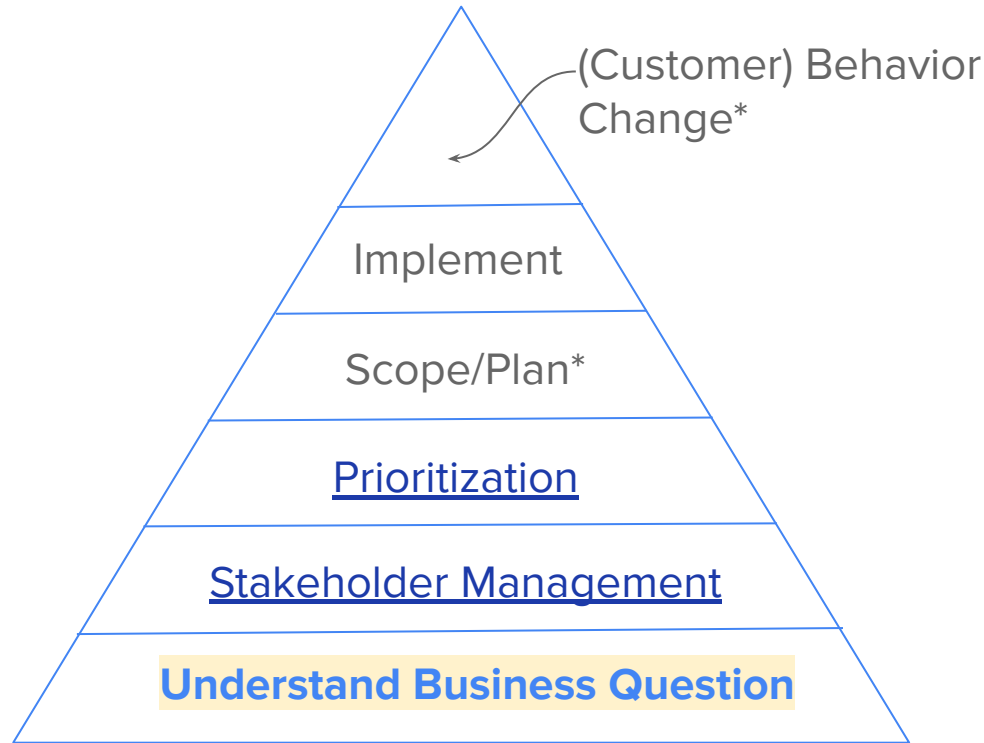
Jet Propulsion Laboratory
California Institute of Technology



FashionTech
eCommerce
Hospitality
FinTech
SaaS
IoT



Data Product (POC) Hierarchy of Needs



1. Customer Value

Company's mission is to help internal/external customers by creating (value).

2. Objective

To grow the company, we can (1 of 4 company goals).

3. Strategy

To achieve the objective, we will do the following:

- a. decrease/increase (1+ of 14 levers),
- b. summarized by (metric);
- c. (process of pulling lever to add customer value),
- d. with an (approximate or accurate) recommendation;
- e. (partners implementing process of pulling lever).

4. Outcome

Implementing the strategy above should result in:

- a. company growth of size (size),
- b. over the next (timeframe),
- c. with a deadline of (timeframe).

5. Additional Context

Is there anything else we should know?

EX: Vague stakeholder request
you're working on?

1: Customer Value

Company's mission is to help internal/external customers by creating (value).

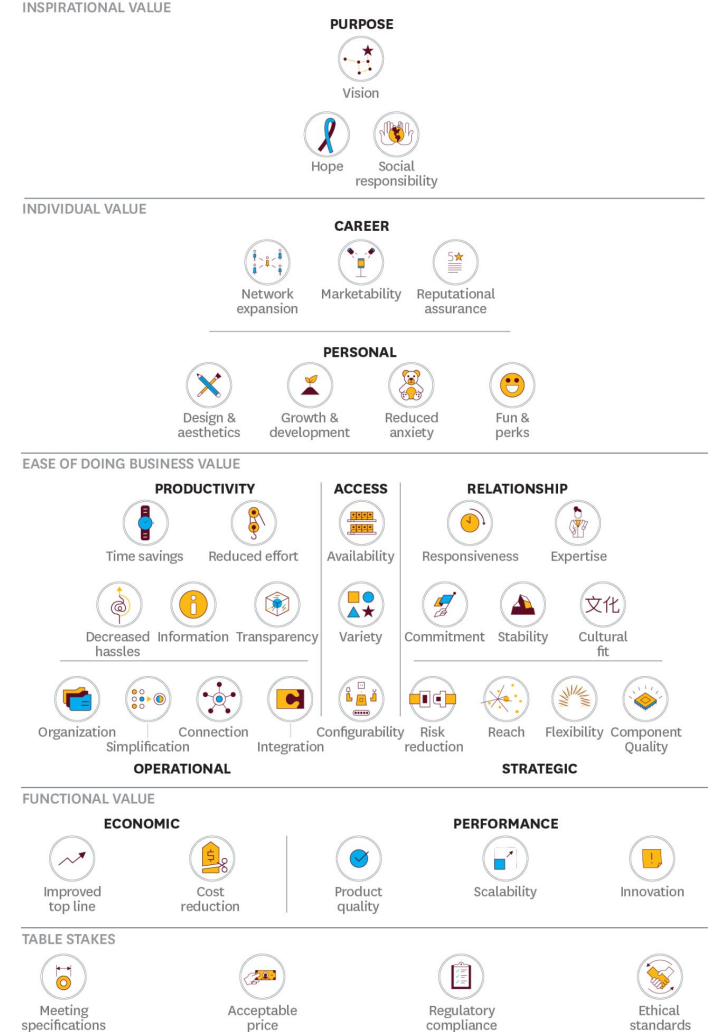
- D2C: 1+ of 30 ways



[ref]

1: Customer Value (cont'd)

- B2B: 1+ of 40 ways



EX: What value is company
bringing?

2: Company Objective

To grow the company, we can (1 of 4 company goals).

- increase revenue
- increase efficiency
- reduce risk
- improve quality

2: Company Objective

To grow the company, we can (1 of 4 company goals).



[\[ref\]](#)

*If not do the work,
what would happen?*

2: Company Objective

To grow the company, we can (1 of 4 company goals).



[\[ref\]](#)

*If not do the work,
what would happen?*

Tip: Visualize

EX: What's the company's objective?

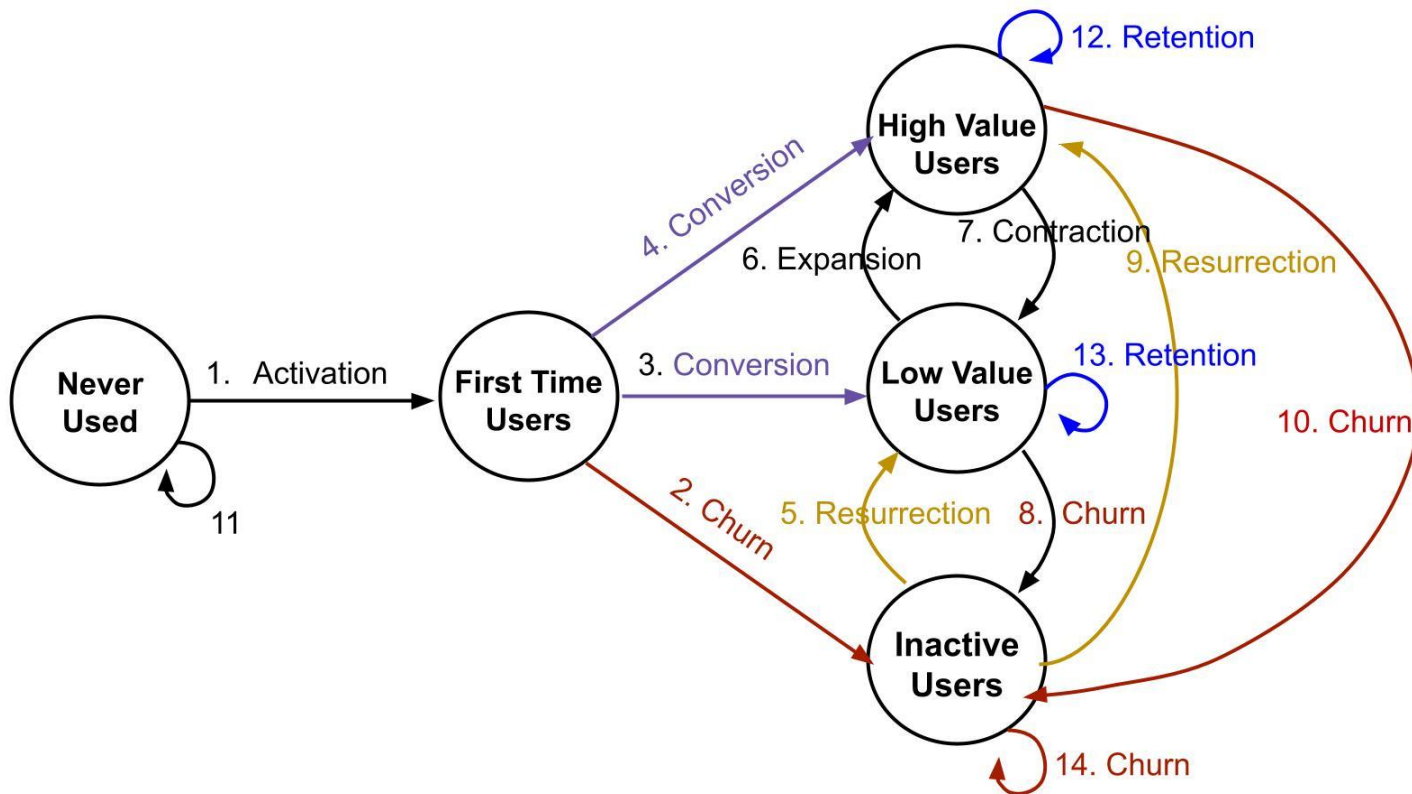
- increase revenue
- increase efficiency
- reduce risk
- improve quality

3: Company Growth Strategy

To achieve the objective, we will do the following:

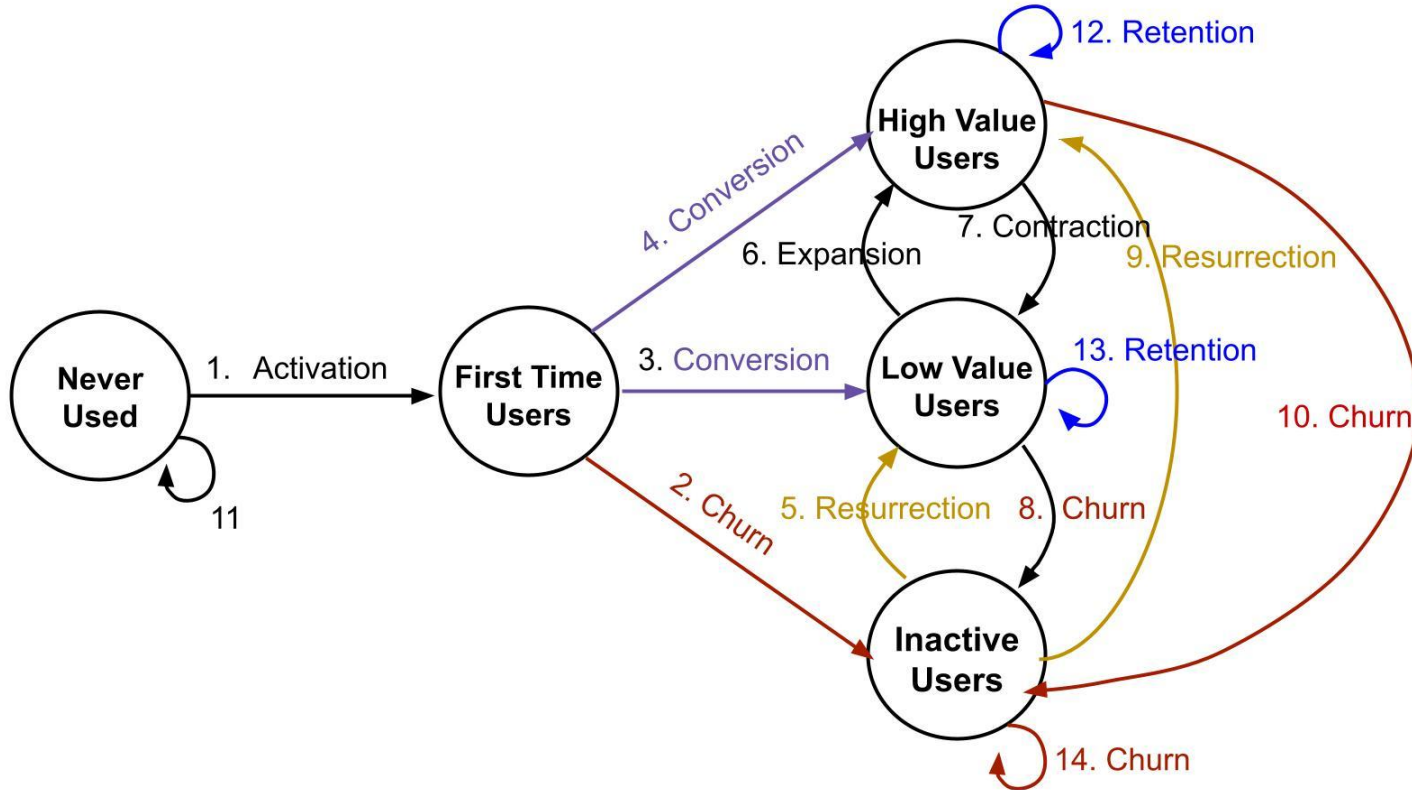
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3-a: Which Lever to Pull?

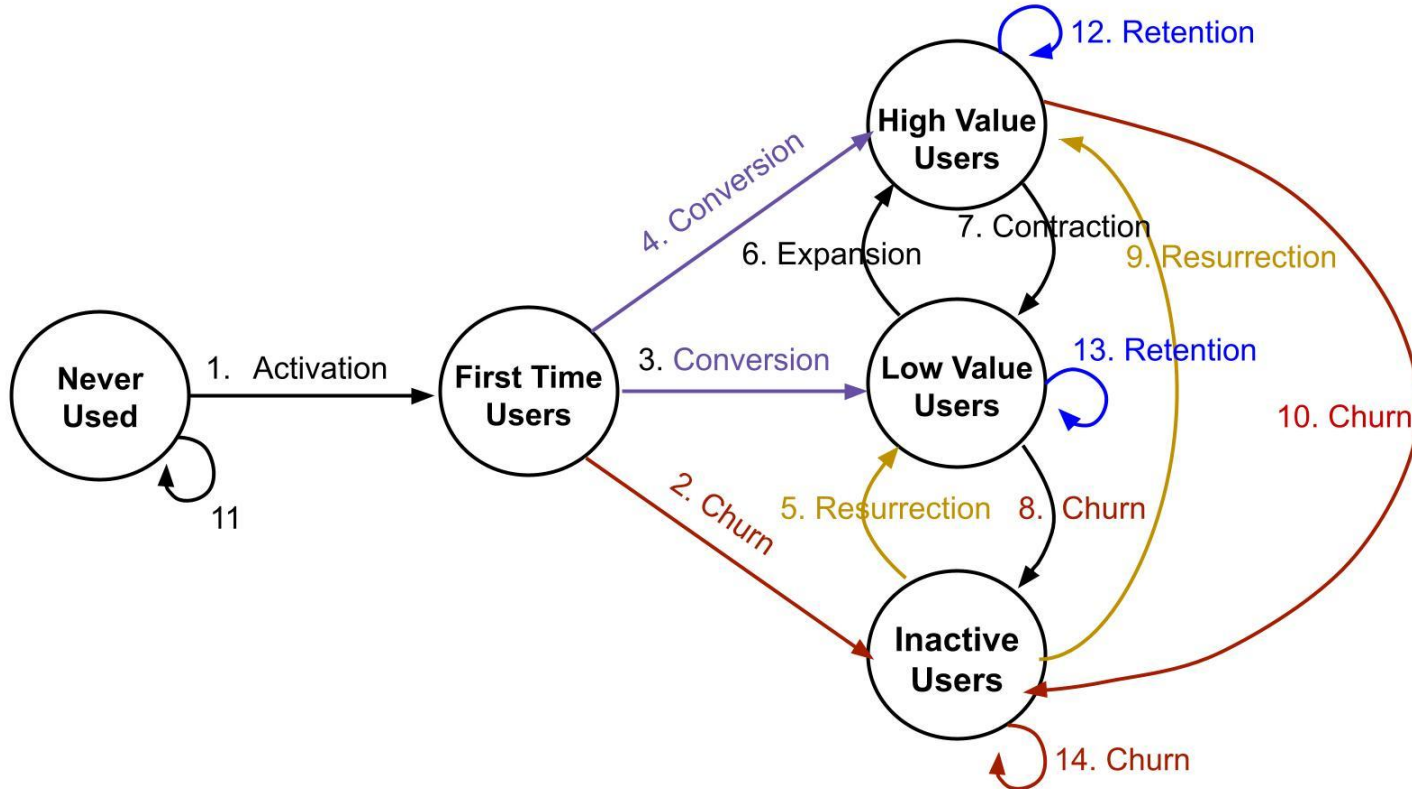


3-a: Which Lever to Pull?

supply
demand
hardgoods
[Framework]



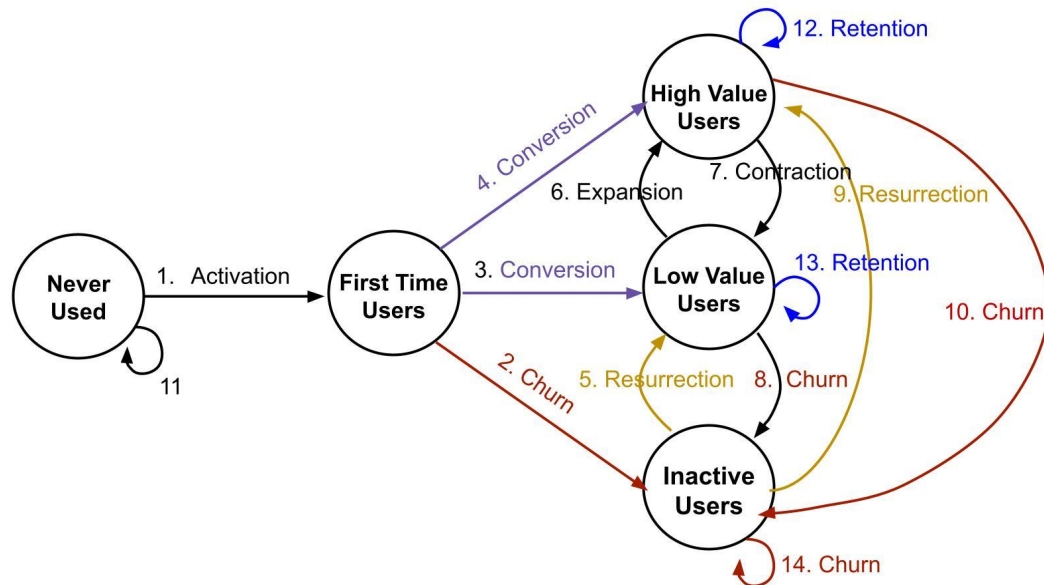
Most important line?



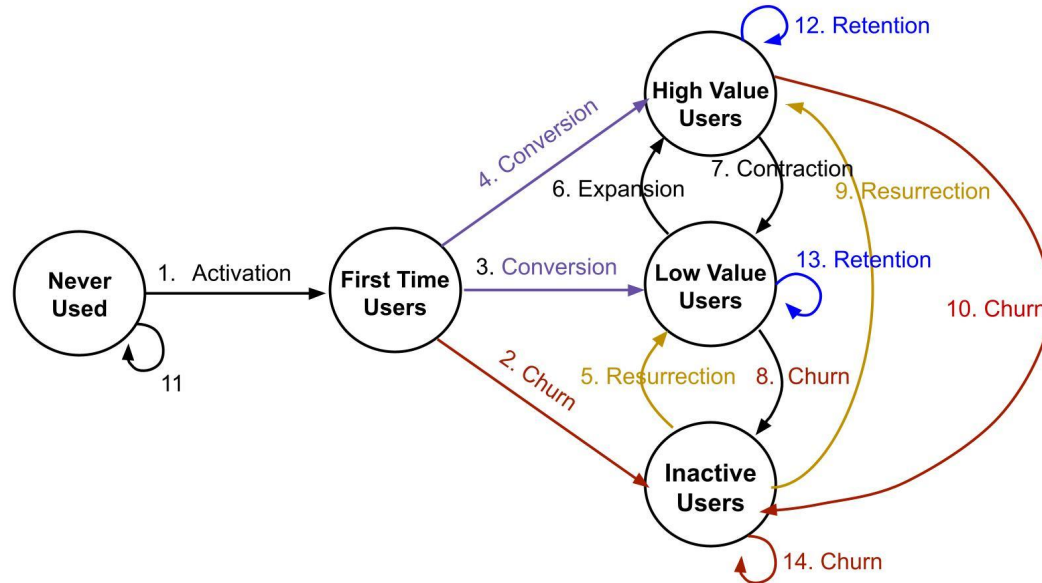
3-a: Which Lever to Pull?

4 Focus areas:

- Get customers
- Convert [into paid]
- Retain
- Expansion/upsell



EX: What lever should we pull?



3-b: Metric

- Goals:
 - Success/not?
 - Next steps?



[[ref](#)]

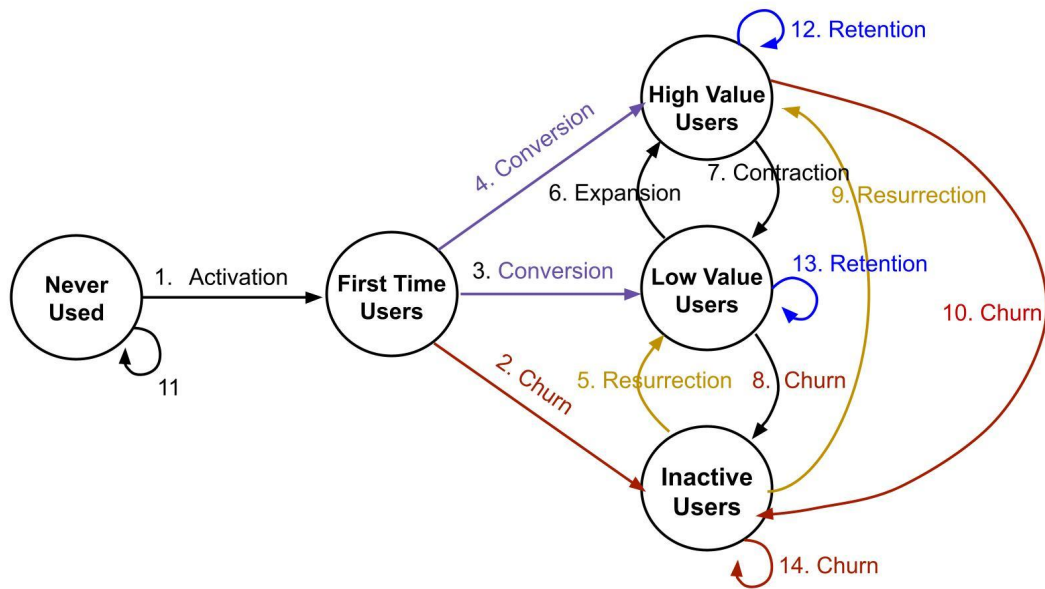
THE PROBLEM WITH
AVERAGING STAR RATINGS

3-b: Metric

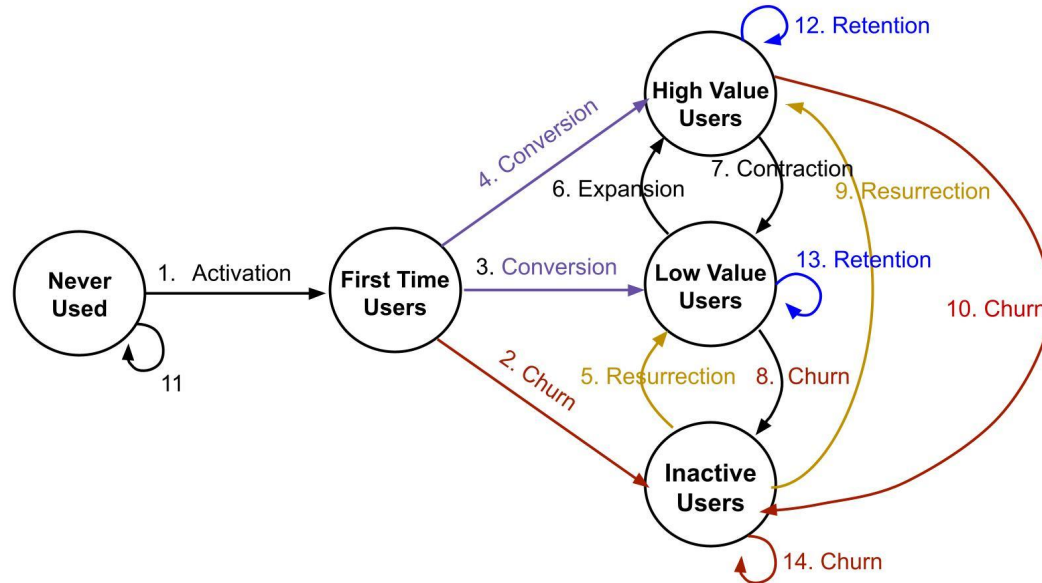
- Company/board/team metric

3-b: Metric

- Time-to-event
- #
- \$\$\$
- %



EX: What should be our metric?



3-c: How to Pull Lever

Part 1: Understand Current Customer Habits

- Try
- Shadow
- Ask

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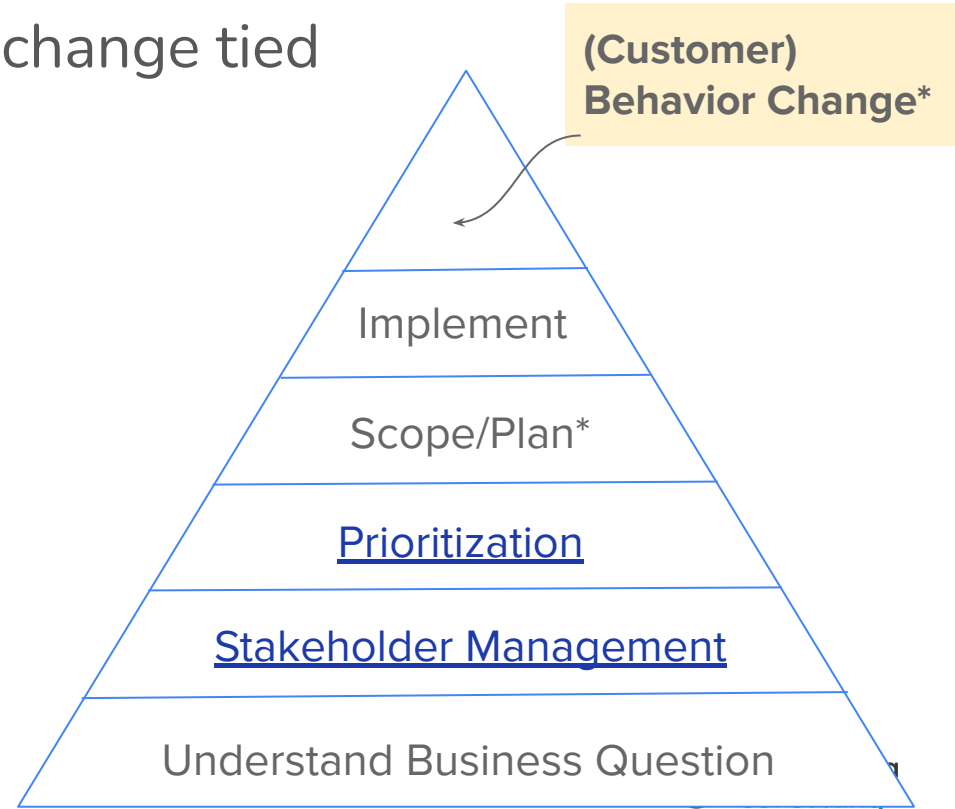
Tip: Status Quo Workflow

EX: What's 1 customer workflow?

3-c: How to Pull Lever

Part 2: Recommended behavior change tied to current habits

- Deliverable → habits



EX: What's 1 behavior change
would like to see?

3-d: Approximate or Accurate Answer?

3-d: Approximate or Accurate Answer?

EX: Due yesterday?!?!

3-e: Partners Implementing Process of How to Pull Lever



SO, NOW WE HAVE ASCERTAINED WHO IS RESPONSIBLE.... [\[ref\]](#)

EX: Who'll do what?

4: Outcome

Implementing the strategy above should result in:

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4a: Size of Company Impact

- Magnitude (10x)
- \$\$\$
- %
- Relative (t-shirt)
- Approximate



4a: Size of Company Impact

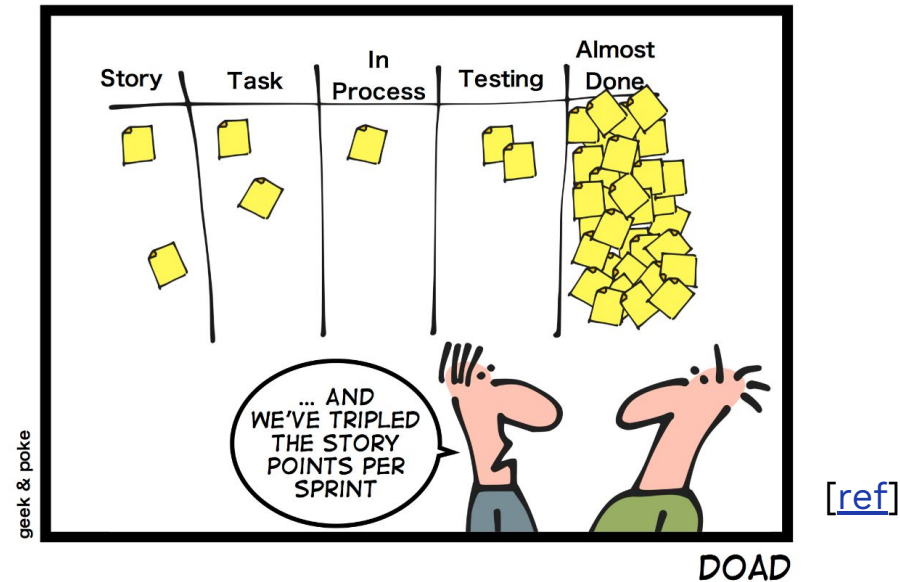
- Magnitude (10x)
- \$\$\$
- %
- Relative (t-shirt)
- Approximate

Tip: Prioritize L/XL*?

EX: If data-product success,
what impact should we expect?

4b, c: Time Frames

- Deliver data product
- See ROI



EX: Our timelines?

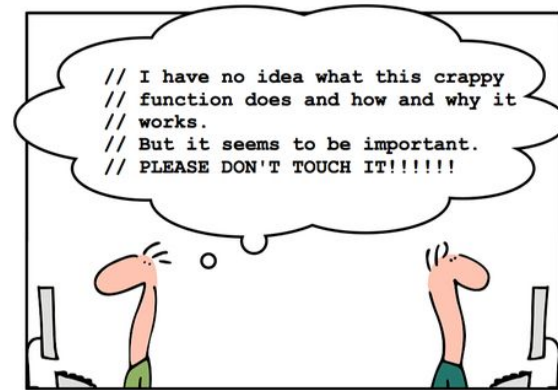
EX: Our timelines?

Tip: Do we need to modify any of steps?

5: Request for Additional Information

[[ref](#)]

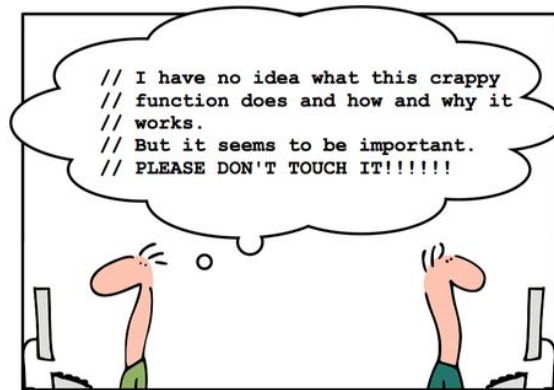
- Anything else to know?



5: Request for Additional Information

[[ref](#)]

- Anything else to know?
- Tip: Do we need to modify any of steps?



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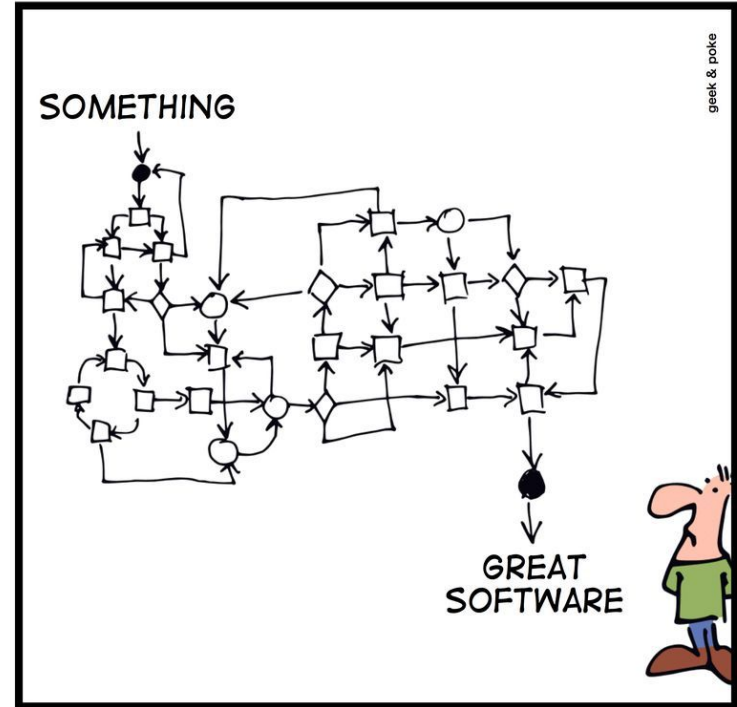
< EX >

< Before vs After >

Next Steps

- Seem like overkill
- Gradual roll-out
- Adapt as needed

SIMPLY EXPLAINED



[[ref](#)]

DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

Bonus

- Identified + (tried to) reduce points of friction = PLG
- (Tried to) Move needle on company outcomes
- (More) Strategic
- No surprises!
- Built rapport

Parting Advice

- ⚠ Multiple/many meetings
 - [Locally Optimistic blog post on this Madlib](#)
 - Stakeholder checkpoints for input on WIP: [circular project](#) → “locally linear”
 - Advice on getting data product back on track:
 - [“Dark arts” of stakeholder management](#)
 - [Deliverable didn't make it + how to fix it](#)

Takes practice. You got this!

Questions?

ikukuyeva.com/community/presentations/understand-business-question

Irina Kukuyeva, PhD

Tell me What you Want,
What you *Really, Really* Want:
How to Identify the
Real Business Question



Thanks for joining!

DATA CON LA 25

We love good **data**
and your feedback is
our favorite dataset!