putting power into practice
as a staff+ engineer

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Previously worked at:

Twitter, Netflix, Comcast

Focus Areas:

Backend Distributed Systems, AI/ML infrastructure

why does **nobody know what a Staff Engineer is?**
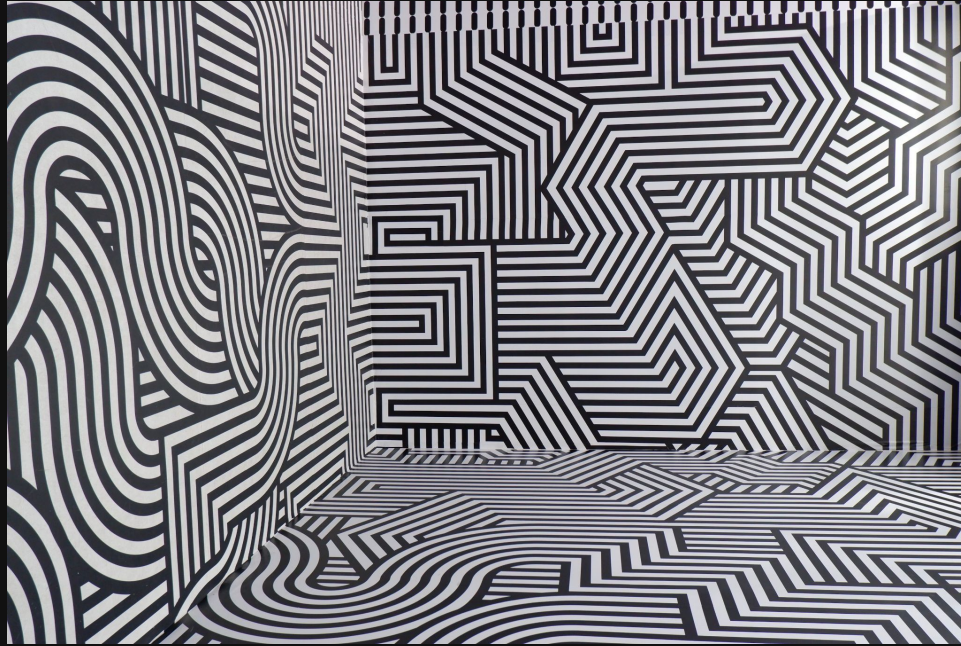
why do I spend so much time solving **people problems?**

when will I get to **choose my own projects?**
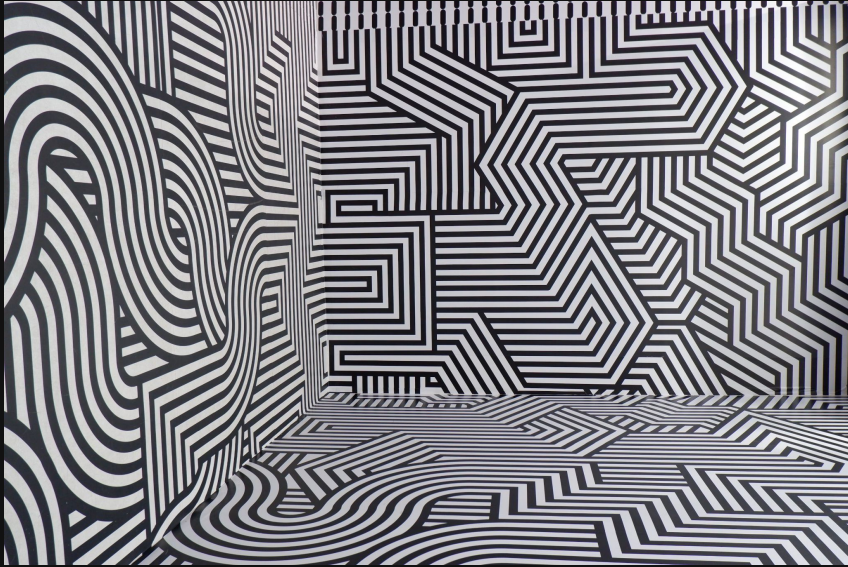
culture is mutable

tricky situations

power moves

power phrases

mentoring and leadership

your manager
asks you to schedule an
"emergency meeting"
for the **3rd**
no-meetings day
in a row

what would you do?

don't make statements, ask questions

"this would be our 3rd no-meetings day in a row with a meeting.

how do we feel about that?"

get comfortable with awkward silence

manager agreed to bump the meeting to the next day

you decide how
to deploy your
workplace capital

"I'll take the blame"

(if something goes wrong)

SCHEDULE SLIPS

"**our** estimate was too aggressive, **we've** extended it by 2 weeks"

using your capital to absorb risks that other people cannot

"who is asking for this?"

(regarding a feature request)
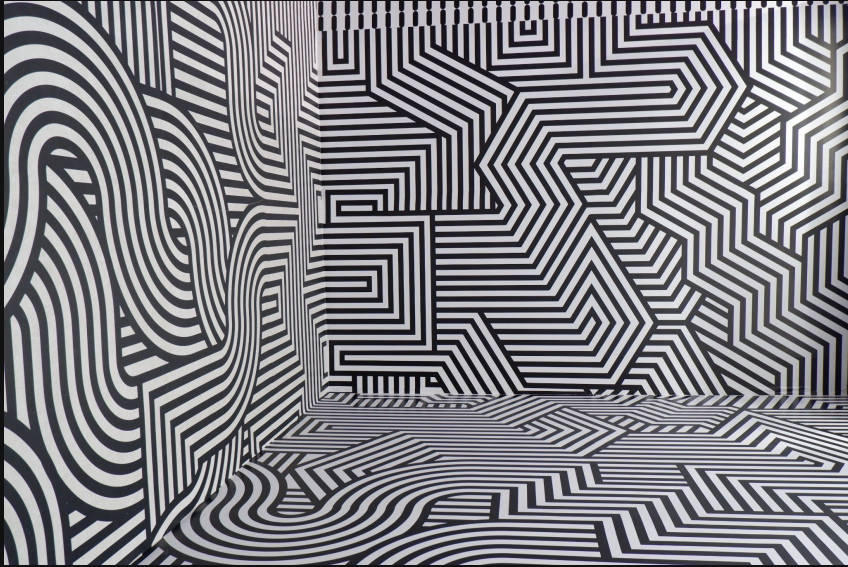
messenger:
this dataset needs
99% data quality

source:
70% data quality
is fine

get information
directly
from the source

your manager asks you to take on another project, but **you don't have capacity for it**

what would you do?

(remember…)

don't make statements, ask questions

"at the end of the quarter, would we rather have 2 projects make a little progress…

or 1 project make a lot of progress?"

(awkward silence)

**manager said:
let's focus on the more
important project**

get comfortable
saying "no"

useful mentoring =
exercising
and
training

"can you review this doc and tell me what you think?"

"what do you wish you had more time to work on?"

"don't worry about that for now"

(regarding operational concerns or edge cases of a new feature)

"how will this scale?"

(regarding a new system or feature)

"let's talk about that tomorrow"

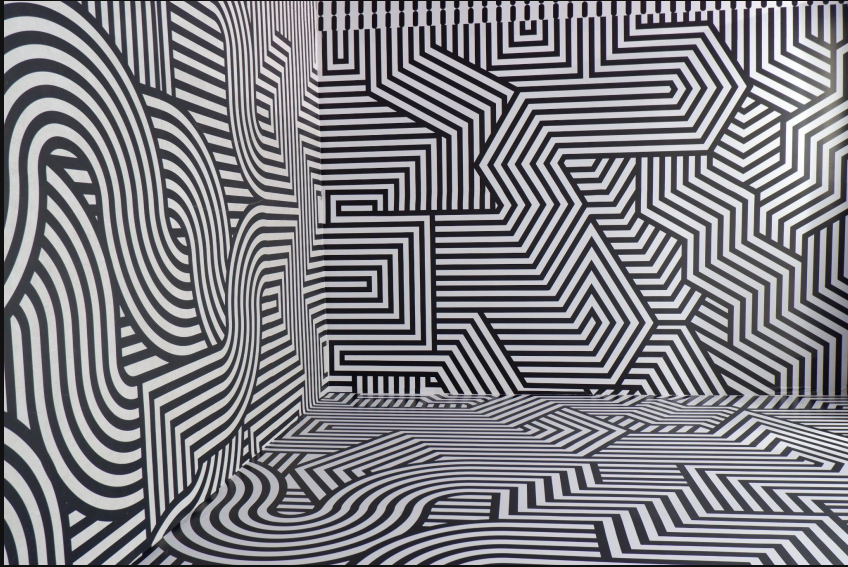(followed by)

"close your laptop and enjoy your evening"

put yourself in your manager's shoes

always have an answer for:

what would I do with N more engineers?

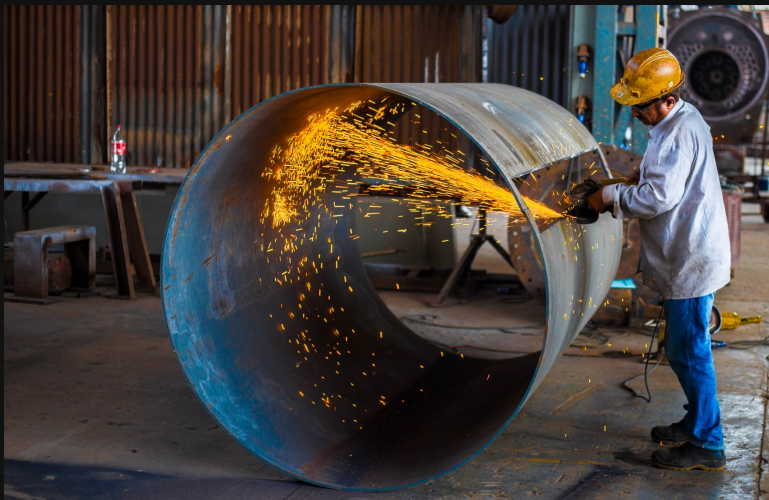your colleague suggests
you assign
the only
"minority" engineer
on the project
to be in charge of
organizing JIRAs

what would you do?

INNOVATION (good work)

vs.

TOIL (bad work)

under-represented groups are assigned bad work more often

**do your part
to ensure that
work is assigned
fairly and ethically**

technology is downstream of culture

work should be **fun** and/or **interesting**

use your power for good

thank you!

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