



Quick or Dead

**Organizational Velocity
for an Impatient World**

Boston SPIN: February 21, 2006

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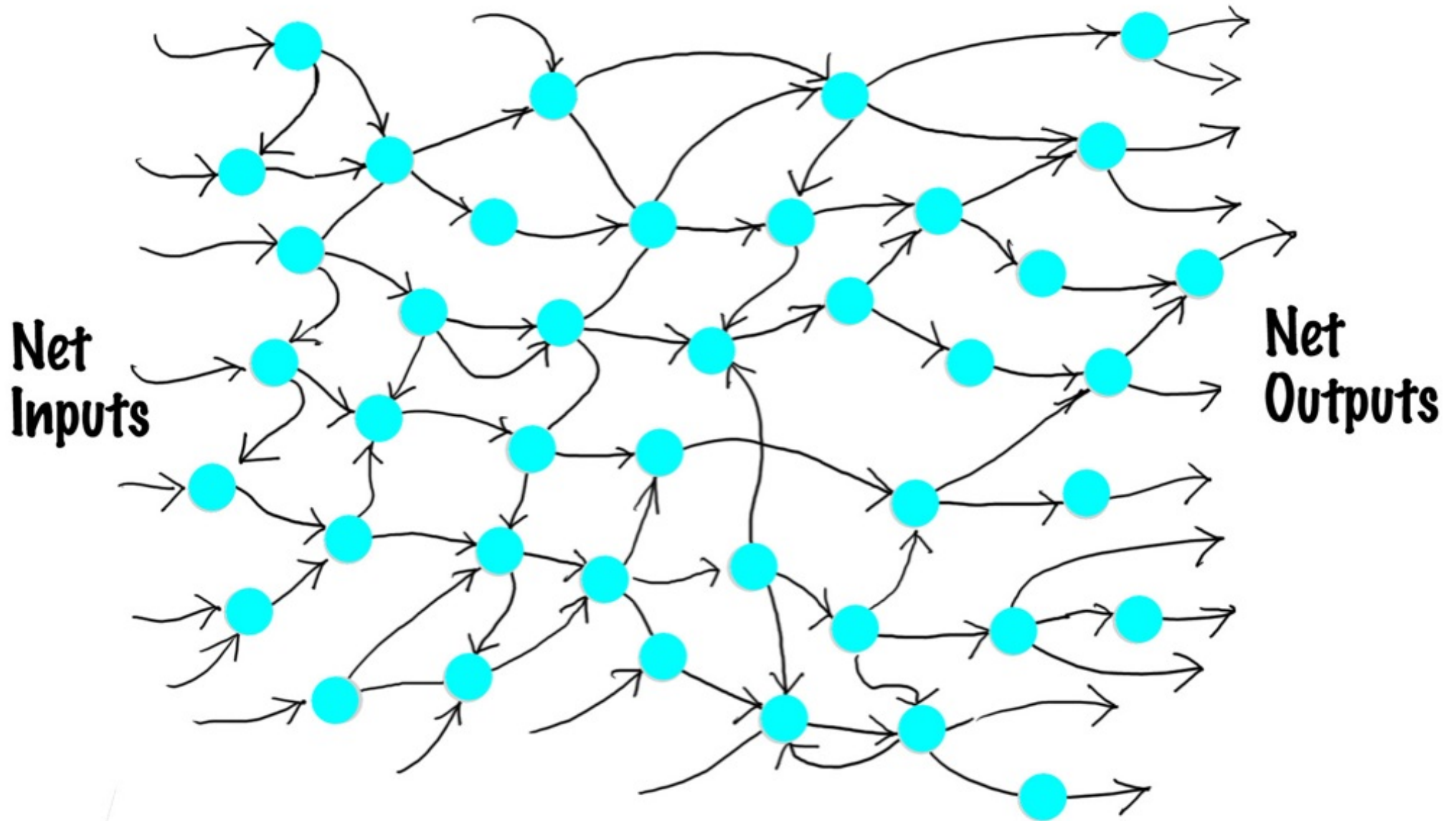
“We used to live in a world where only the fittest survive. Today we live in a world where only the fastest survive.”

-Bill Gates

Three things to talk about:

1. S is for "System"
2. V is for "Velocity"
3. A is for "Addiction"

S is for "System"



Examples of Systems

- * Microsoft Word
- * The cardio-vascular system
- * The federal government
- * The product that your project is building
- * The project that is building that product

“Immutable Law”

Without exception, always and forever, the system shall:

-  exist to serve the needs of its owners
-  conform to the design criteria imposed by its noble designers

Let's get real:

- **Systems have needs of their own.**
- **Their needs trump ours.**
- **Most systems are designed by Happenstance.**

V is for “Velocity”

Consider the system for building a system, your project:

- Velocity (getting a lot of meaningful stuff done in not very much time) is clearly a need of the users.
- But did Happenstance understand that?
- Are the system’s own needs (which trump ours) consistent with high velocity?

V: the false model

The faster we are at doing our work, the more organizational velocity will improve.

Closer to the truth

The difference between fast and slow organizations is not how quickly they do their work, but how much of their time they spend on-task.

Are you and your people on-task

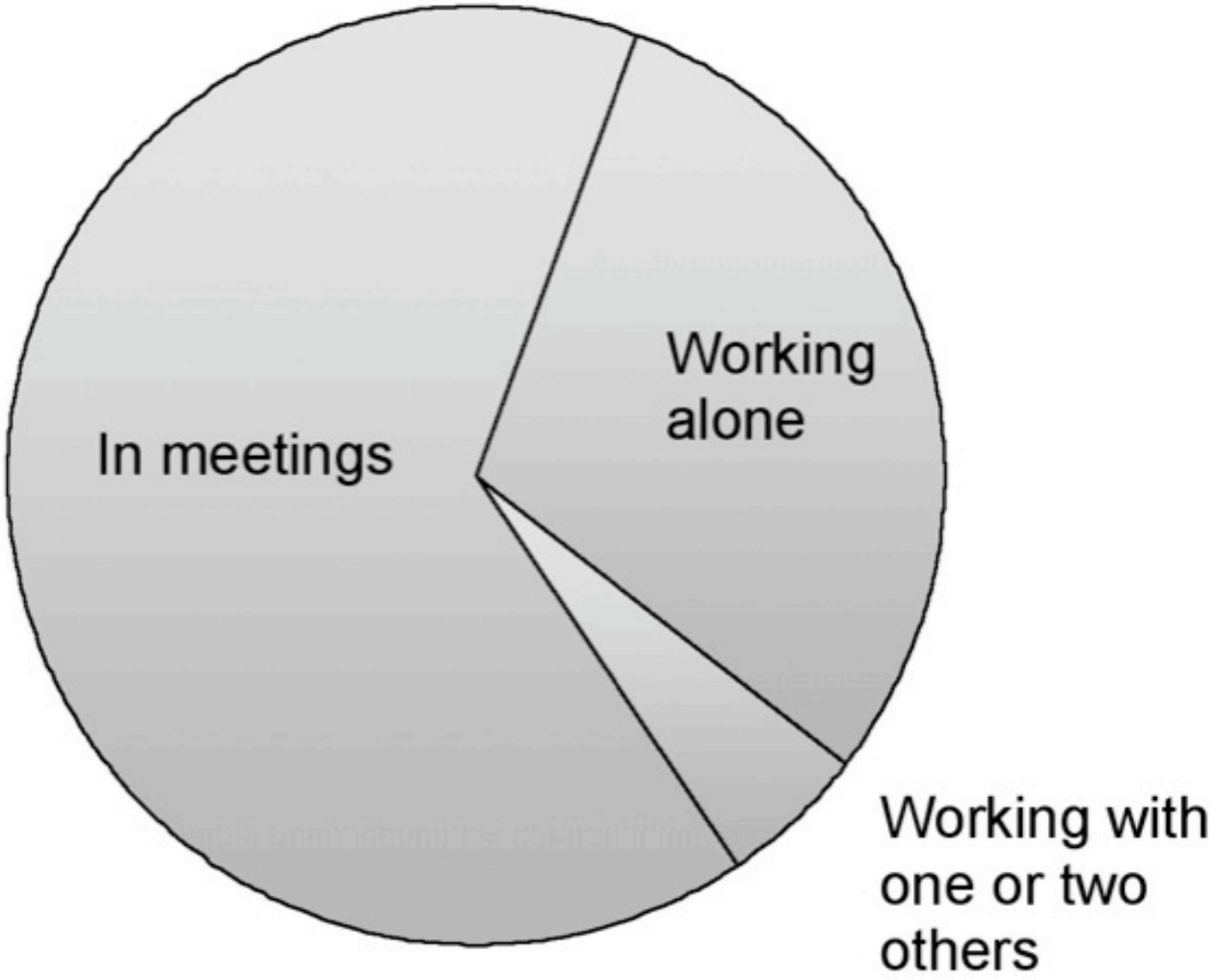
- * when doing email?
- * when in a meeting?
- * when presenting and viewing powerpoint?
- * ????

How Knowledge Workers Spent Their Time (1970s)



Source: Gerald McCue, "IBM's Santa Teresa Laboratory — Architectural Design for Program Development," *IBM Systems Journal*, April, 1983.

How Knowledge Workers Spent Their Time (Today)



A ceremony

- ◆ a meeting with no defined exit criteria
- ◆ ended by the clock
- ◆ attended by all members of some group
- ◆ characterized by serial one-to-one interaction

A working meeting:

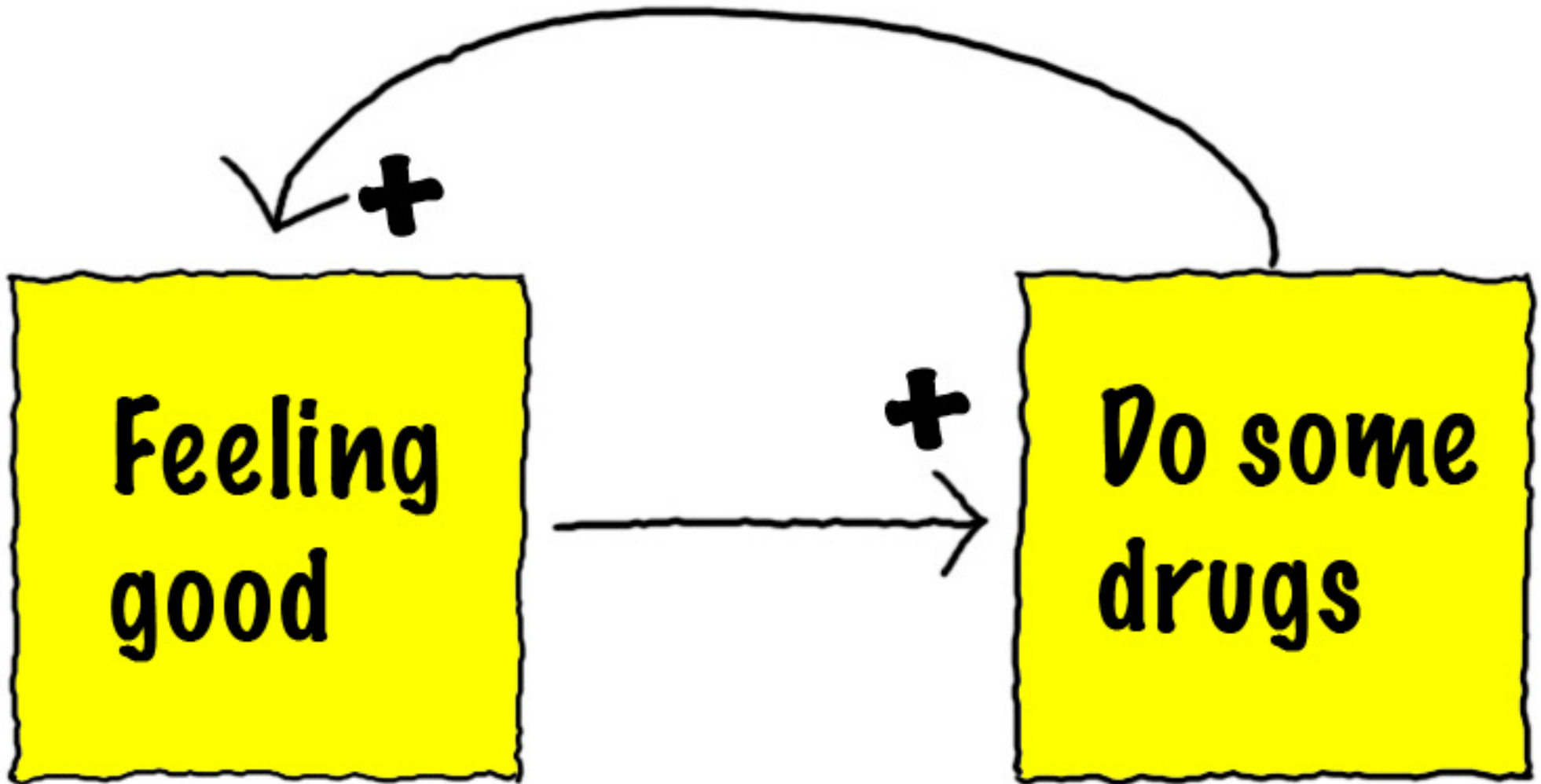
1. Exists for one purpose and one purpose only: to make a decision.
2. Is attended only by those people needed to make the decision.
3. Is constrained by a published agenda (the decision).
4. Is ended when the decision is made.
5. Is allocated at least a 4-hour block.

A is for "Addiction"

You know humans can become addicted to narcotics and alcohol. But how about:

- * meetings
- * email
- * powerpoint
- * documentation
- * review
- * ...

Flawed Model of Addiction

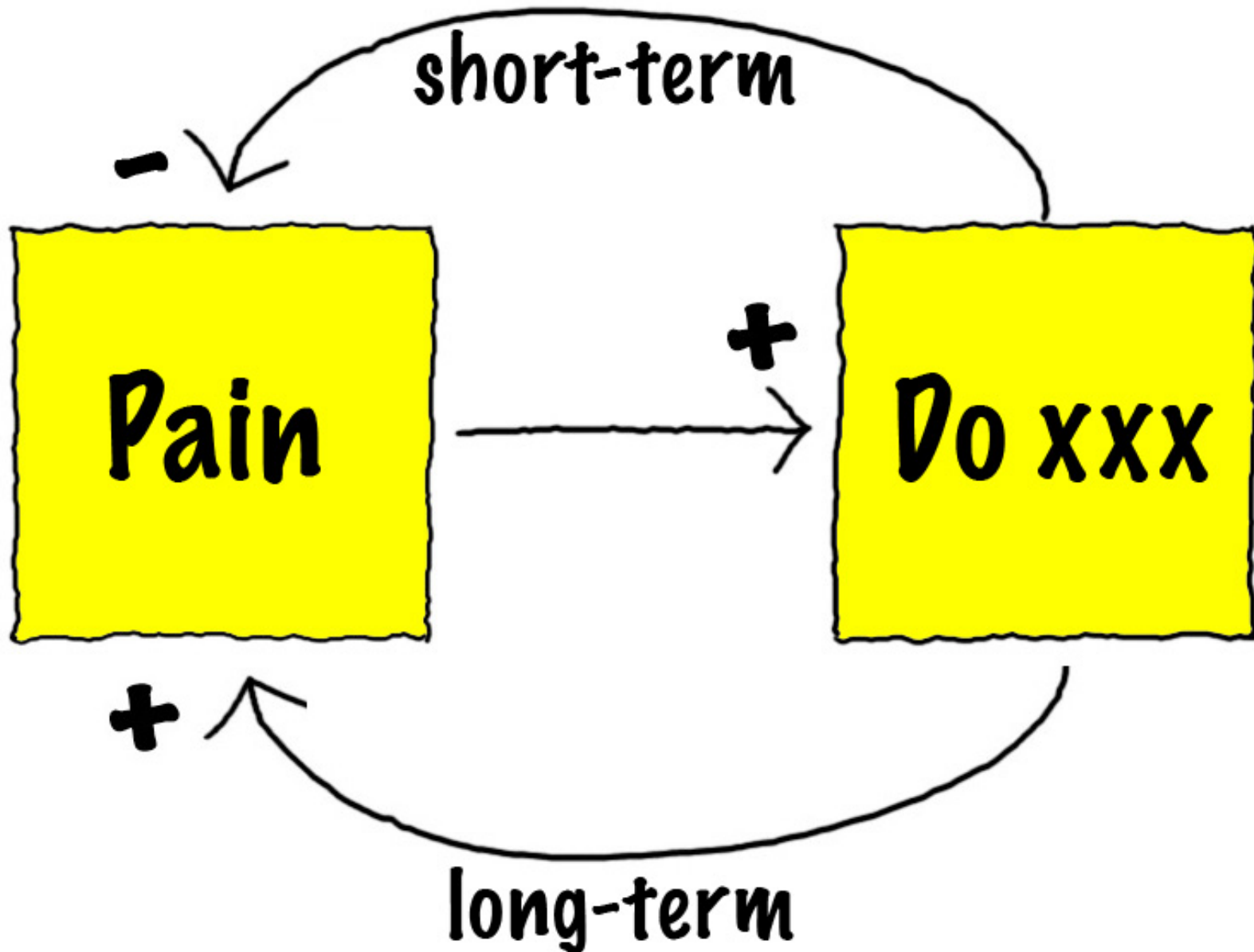


The 4 Elements of Addiction

All four of the following have to be present for addiction to happen:

1. pain
2. a defect of reasoning of the form: "only doing xxx will relieve my pain"
3. short-term reduction of pain due to doing xxx
4. long-term increase in pain due to doing xxx

The 4 Elements of Addiction



The DeMarco Prescription

- ★ Abolish ceremonial meetings.
- ★ Make a cult of one-on-one and 3-way interaction.
- ★ Take steps to eliminate corporate spam.
- ★ Teach the organism to self-coordinate.

