Growing and managing communities for large Open-Source projects

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SymfonyLive Madrid, 2014

Drupal™

BAD CAMP

BAY AREA DRUPAL CAMP

backdrop

"A community is a social unit of any size that **shares common values**."

DrupalCon Portland, 2013

Drupal Community

Huge.

13 years old

(almost 14)

2,400

People who have worked on Drupal 8

9,715

Contributed modules for Drupal 7

(not counting sandbox projects)

1,557,792+

Registered accounts on drupal.org

(as of May 2014)

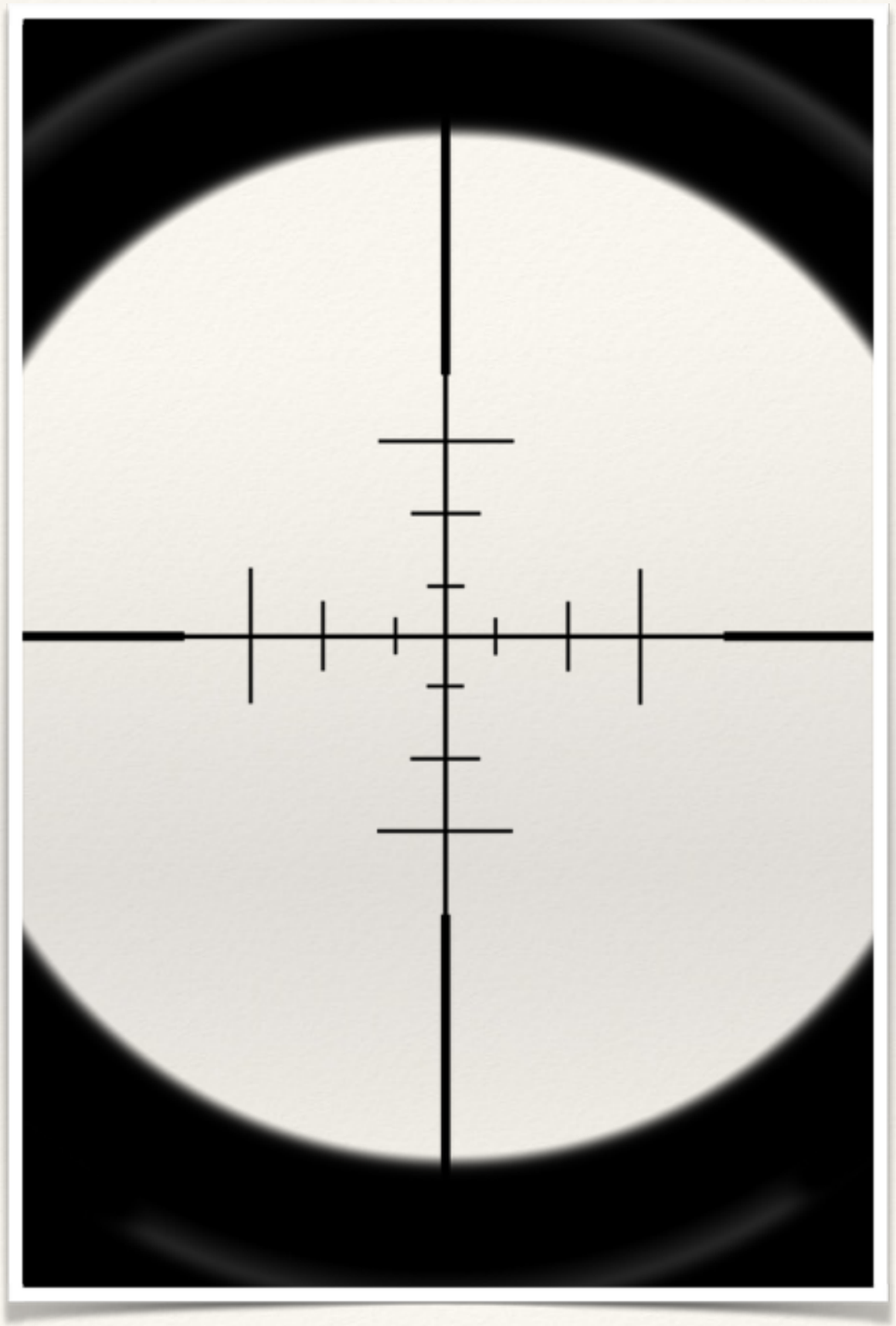
Community growth is good

- validation
- future proof
- increased resources
- better job opportunities
- helping more people

Something else is also growing: PROBLEMS

Controlling **scope**

- When is a feature pushed to the next release?
- When is a feature request denied?



Product size

- Small core?
- Complete out-of-box experience?

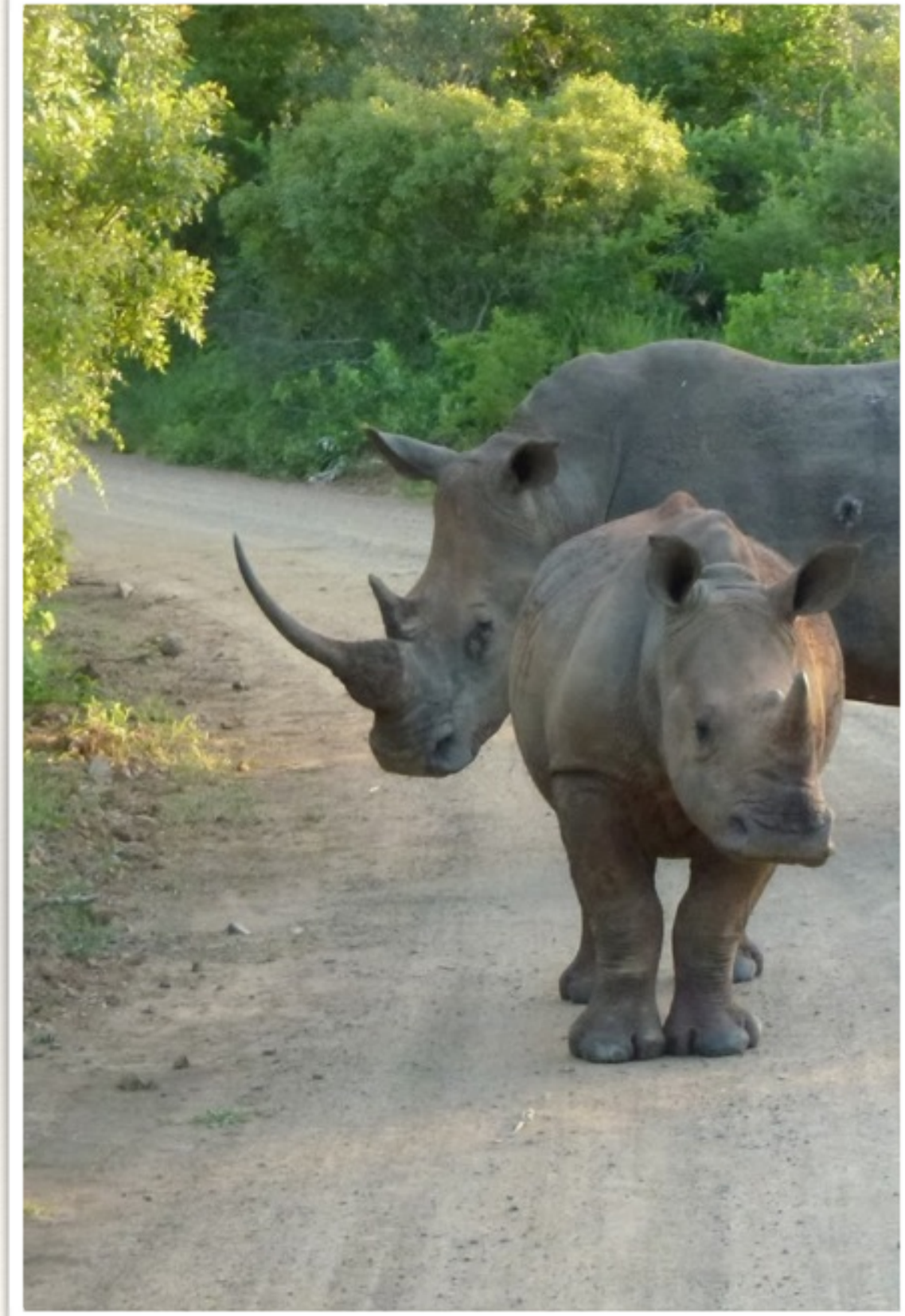
Keeping **focus**

- 14,341 open (core) issues
- Where to begin?
- What's most important?

Road-Blocks

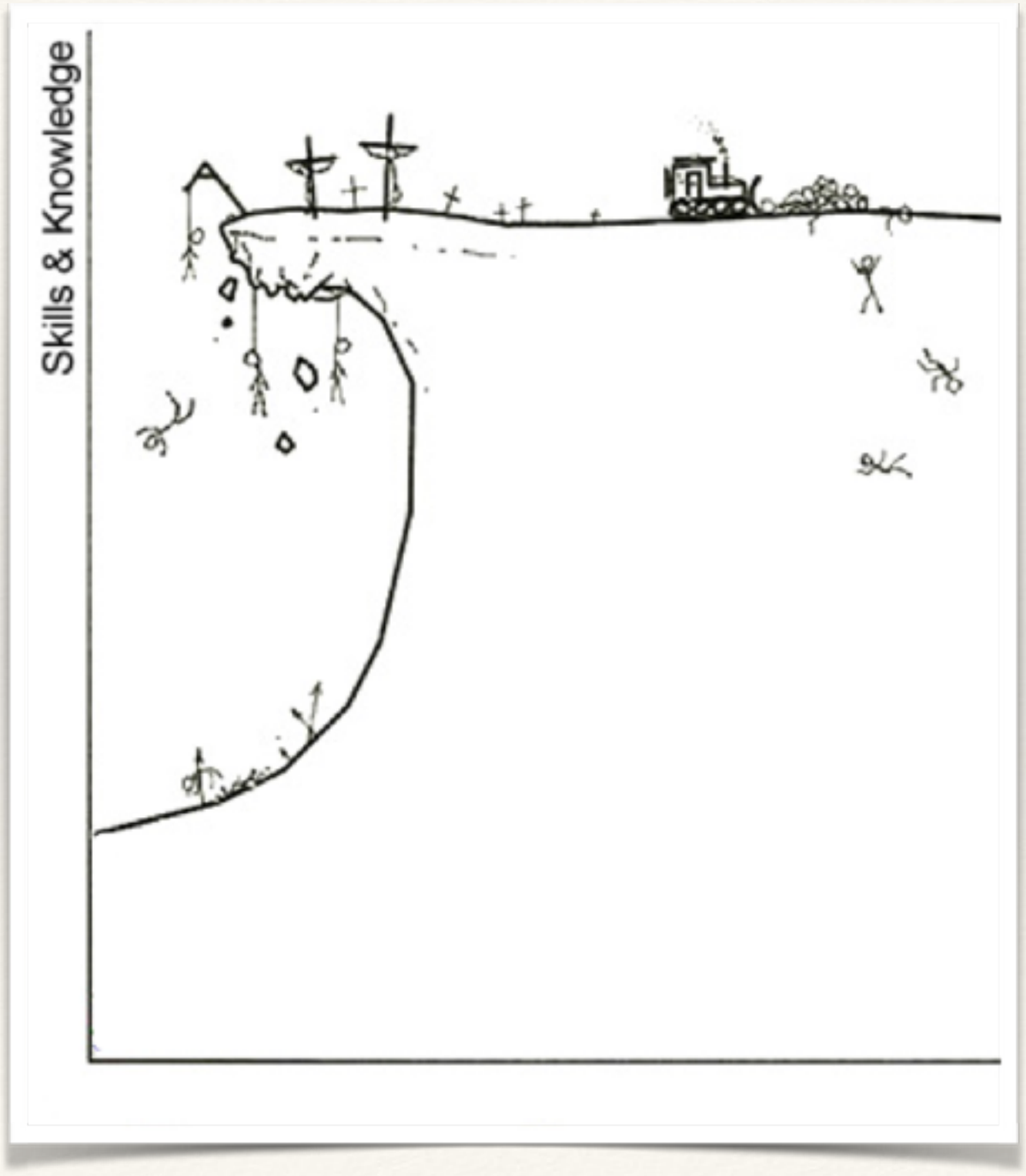
You thought you fixed a problem but…

- No PosGres support
- Your solution introduces performance regression
- It's not usable enough
- It's not translatable
- It's not accessible



Increasing Learning Curve

- Install
- Set-up
- Design / theme
- Add features / modules
- Customize
- Support
- Upgrade
- Contributing



Where are the new people?

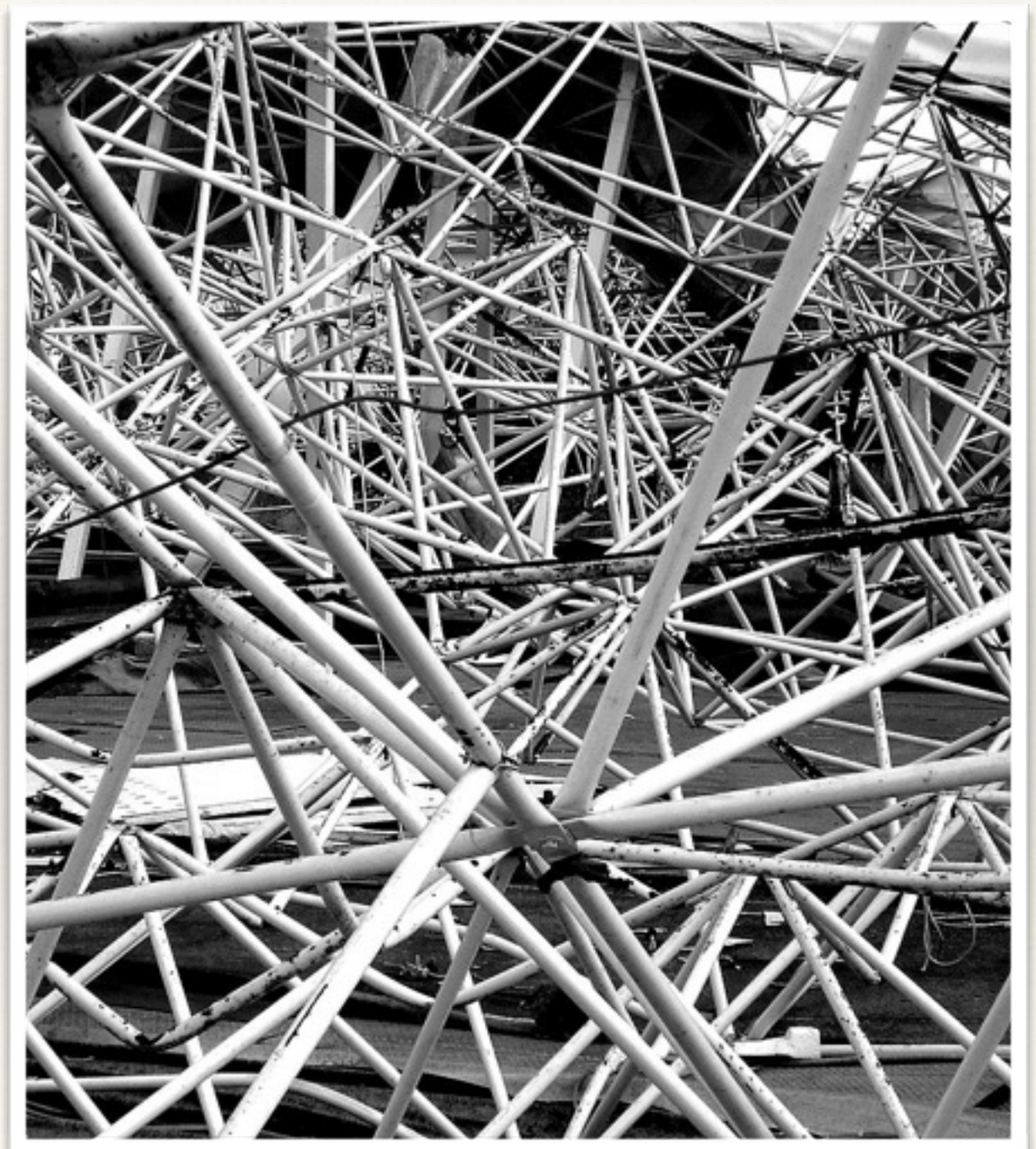
- How is the first time experience?
- How easy is it to get help?
- What else might be preventing people from adopting?

Quality Documentation

- How easy is it to find?
- Is it accurate?
- Is it complete?
- Is there too little?
- Is there too much?
- Is it out of date?
- Who is responsible?

No backwards compatibility

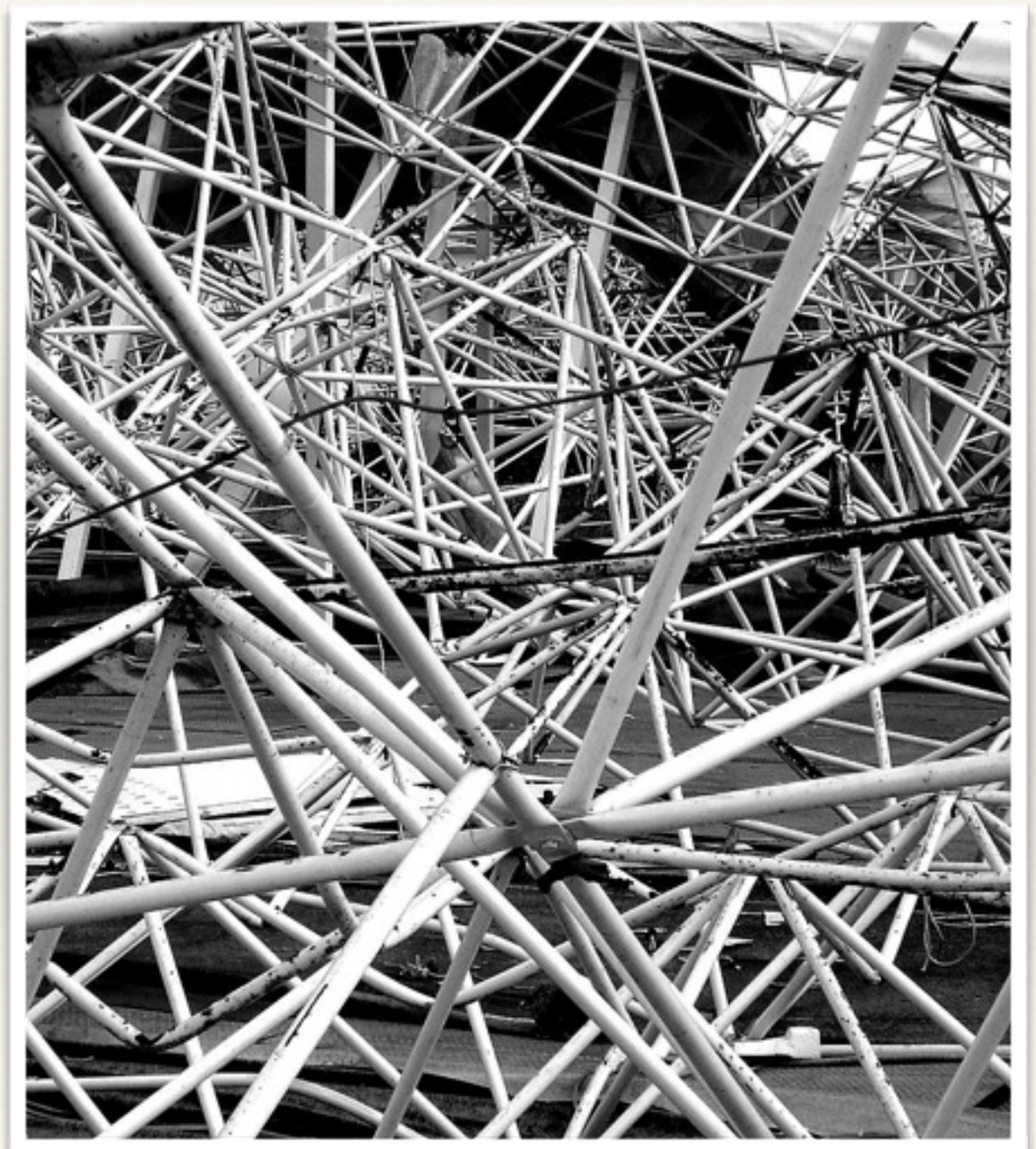
- Historically, drastic change was prevented by annual releases.
- Without regular releases, we've ended up changing everything.
- For our users, upgrades become rebuilds.



Increasing Complexity

"There is no problem you can't solve by adding another layer of abstraction, except for too many layers of abstraction"

-Kevlin Henney



Frustration

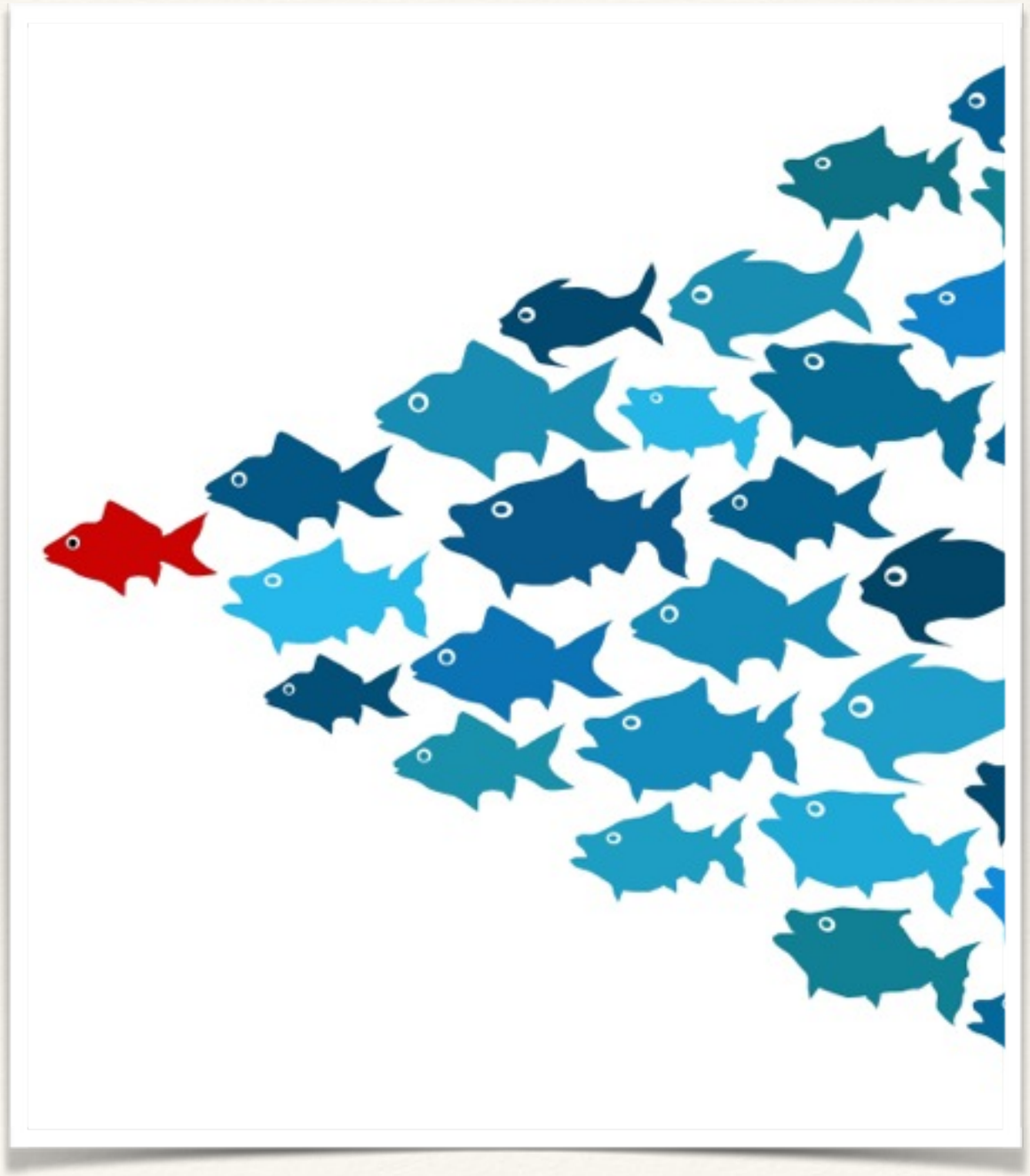
- Inability to get anything done
- Not having your perspective heard (or understood)
- Under-appreciation

Burn Out

- Working too hard.
- Getting too little accomplished.
- People are leaving.

Leadership

- Who's in charge?
- Make sure leadership structure is clearly visible from the outside.
- Are people in leadership positions **empowered** to actually make anything happen?



Decision Making

- What tradeoffs should be made?
- Consensus doesn't scale.
- The loudest voice often wins.
- If you ask, know who answers.

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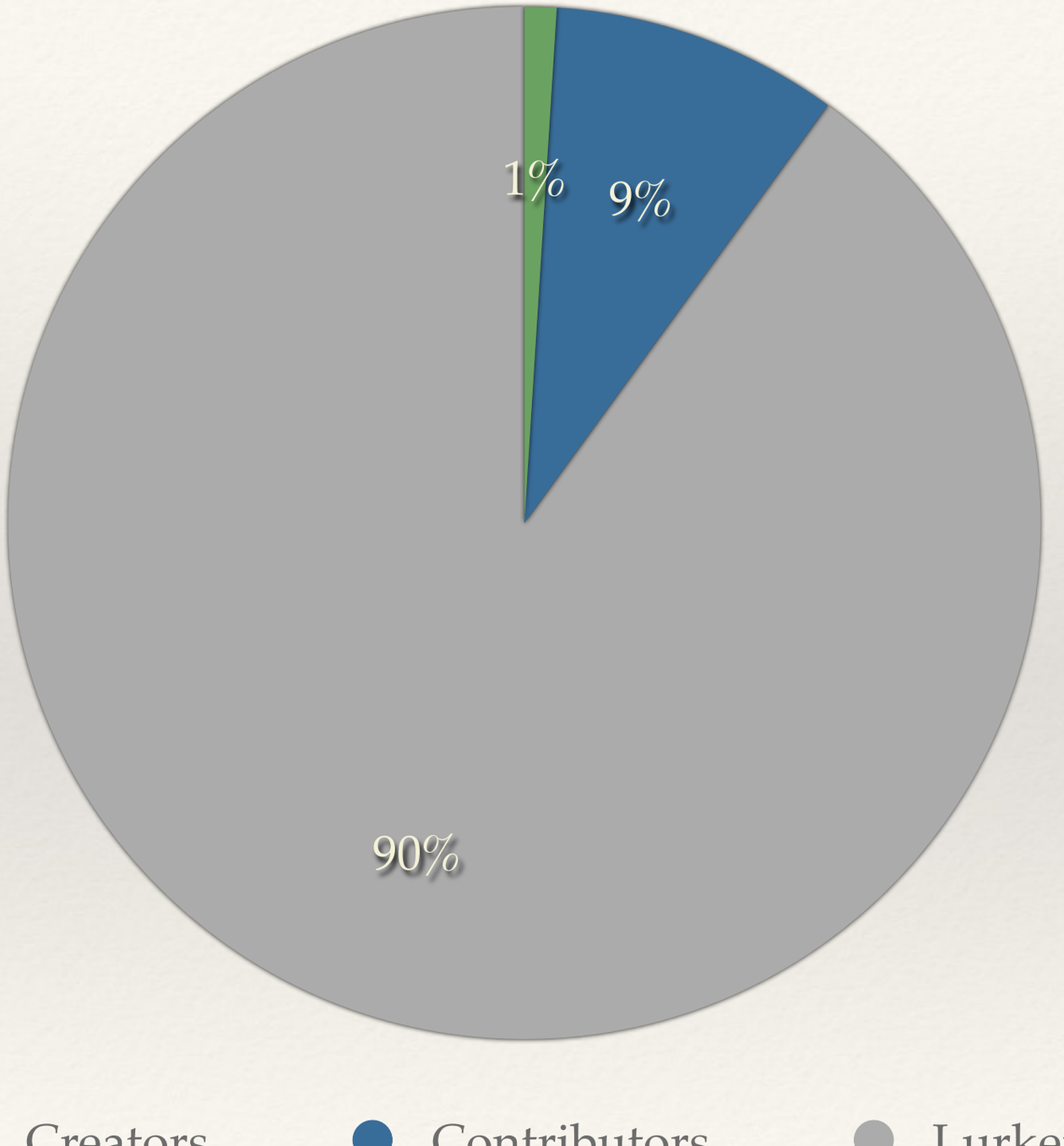

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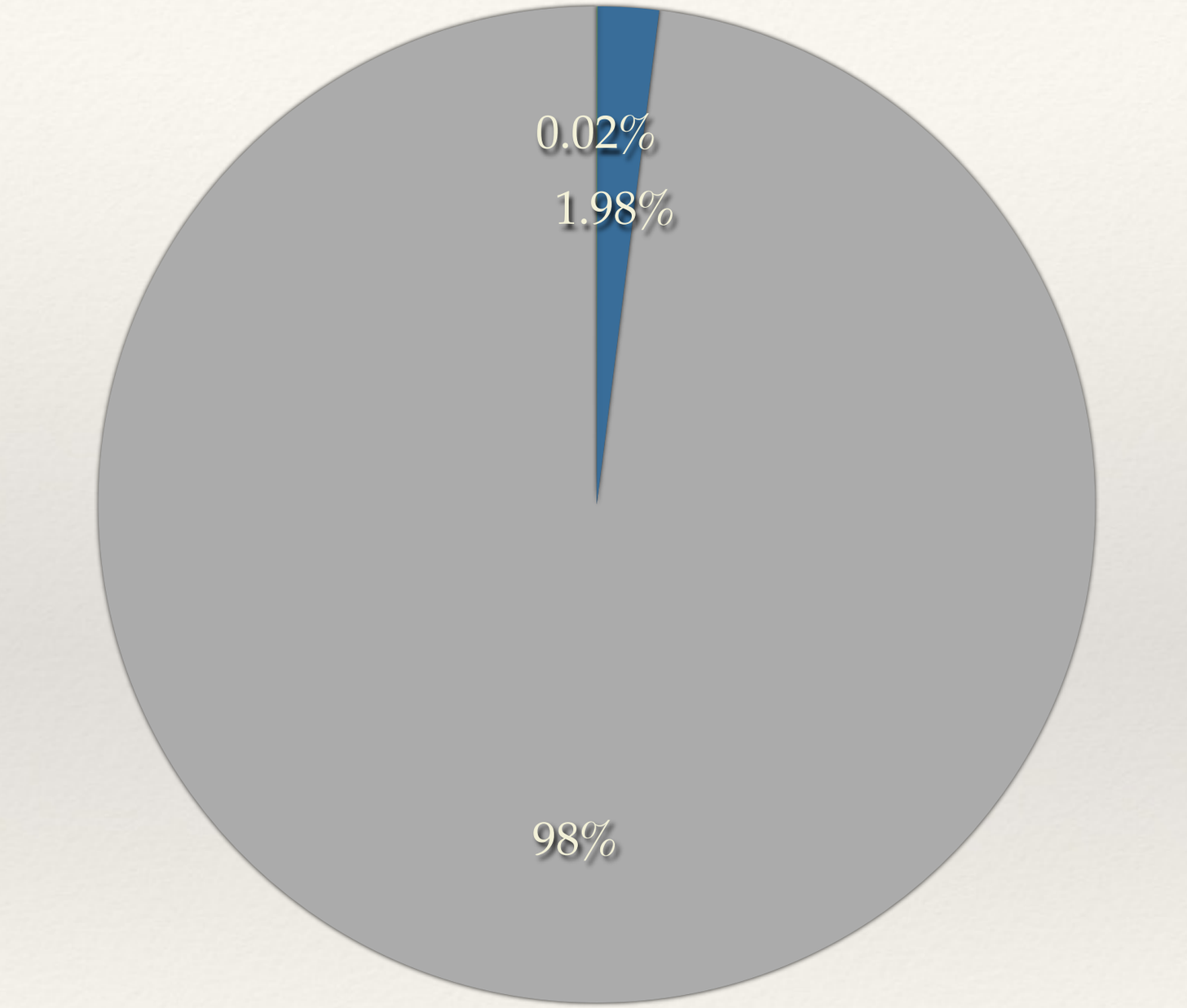


Money

Money creates invisible influence.

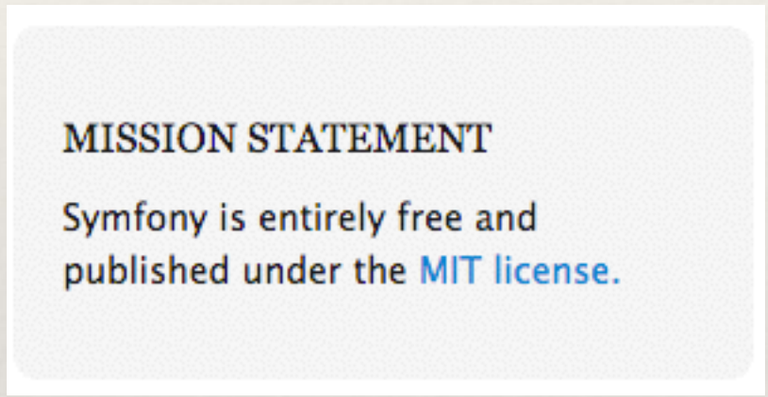
Do your community **tools** scale?

- Issue queues w/ 10,000+
- IRC w/ 500+
- Mailing lists w/ 5000+
- Version Control Systems
- Conferences

How does a growing community combat these problems?

Write a good mission statement.

It should capture the essence of your project's goals and the philosophies underlying them.



~~“Symfony is entirely free and published under the MIT License.”~~

"Embracing and promoting professionalism, best practices, standardization and interoperability of applications."

– *symfony.com/what-is-symfony*

"The Drupal mission is to develop a leading edge open-source content management system that implements the latest thinking and best practices in community publishing, knowledge management, and software design."

“To democratize publishing through Open Source, GPL software.”

– *wordpress.org/about/philosophy*

Identify your audience

Who is this software for?

"Embracing and promoting professionalism, best practices, standardization and interoperability of applications.."

– *symfony.com/what-is-symfony*

“Many end users of WordPress are non-technically minded. […] these are the users we consider first.”

– *wordpress.org/about/philosophy*

Who is this software for?

When you say nothing, everyone can believe something different.

Define your philosophy.

What are the most important things to your community?

If this exists…
… I can't find it :/

Symfony Philosophy

Embracing and promoting professionalism, best practices, standardization and interoperability of applications.

Mission, values and principles

The Drupal mission is to develop a leading edge open-source content management system that implements the latest thinking and best practices in community publishing, knowledge management, and software design.

Values

We value:

- Flexibility, simplicity, and utility in our product;
- Teamwork, innovation, and openness in our community;
- Modularity, extensibility and maintainability in our code.

Principles

- **Modular and extensible**
  Drupal aims to provide slim, powerful core that can be readily extended through custom modules.
- **Quality coding**
  High quality, elegant, documented code is a priority over roughed-in functionality.
- **Standards-based**
  Drupal supports established and emerging standards.
- **Low resource demands**
  To ensure excellent performance, Drupal puts a premium on low-profile coding (for example, minimizing database queries) Drupal should also have minimal, widely-available server-side software requirements.
- **Open source**
  Drupal is based on the open source philosophy of collaborative free software development and is licensed under the GPL. Drupal is itself open source and builds on and supports other open source projects.
- **Ease of use**
  Drupal aims for a high standard of usability for developers, administrators, and users.
- **Collaboration**
  Drupal development supports open, collaborative information sharing systems and approaches.

Out of the Box
Great software should work with little configuration and setup. WordPress is designed to get you up and running and fully functional in no longer than five minutes. You shouldn't have to battle to use the standard functionality of WordPress.

We work hard to make sure that every release is in keeping with this philosophy. We ask for as few technical details as possible during the setup process as well as providing full explanations of anything we do ask.

Design for the Majority
Many end users of WordPress are non-technically minded. They don't know what AJAX is, nor do they care about which version of PHP they are using. The average WordPress user simply wants to be able to write without problems or interruption. These are the users that we design the software for as they are ultimately the ones who are going to spend the most time using it for what it was built for.

Decisions, not Options
When making decisions these are the users we consider first. A great example of this consideration is software options. Every time you give a user an option, you are asking them to make a decision. When a user doesn't care or understand the option this ultimately leads to frustration. As developers we sometimes feel that providing options for everything is a good thing, you can never have too many choices, right? Ultimately these choices end up being technical ones, choices that the average end user has no interest in. It's our duty as developers to make smart design decisions and avoid putting the weight of technical choices on our end users.

Clean, Lean, and Mean
The core of WordPress will always provide a solid array of basic features. It's designed to be lean and fast and will always stay that way. We are consistently asked "when will X feature be built" or "why isn't X plugin integrated into the core". The rule of thumb is that the core should provide features that 80% or more of end users will actually appreciate and use. If the next version of WordPress comes with a feature that the majority of users immediately want to turn off, or think they'll never use, then we've blown it. If we stick to the 80% principle then this should never happen.

We are able to do this because we have a very capable theme and plugin system and a fantastic developer community. Different people have different needs, and having the sheer number of quality WordPress plugins and themes allows users to customize their installations to their taste. That should allow all users to find the remaining 20% and make all WordPress features those they appreciate and use.

Striving for Simplicity
We're never done with simplicity. We want to make WordPress easier to use with every single release. We've got a good track record of this, if you don't believe us then just take a look back at some older versions of WordPress!

In past releases we've taken major steps to improve ease of use and ultimately make things simpler to understand. One great example of this is core software updates. Updating used to be a painful manual task that was too tricky for a lot of our users. We decided to focus on this and simplified it down to a single click. Now anyone with a WordPress install can perform one-click upgrades on both the core of WordPress and plugins and themes.

We love to challenge ourselves and simplify tasks in ways that are positive for the overall WordPress user experience. Every version of WordPress should be easier and more enjoyable to use than the last.

Deadlines Are Not Arbitrary
Deadlines are not arbitrary, they're a promise we make to ourselves and our users that helps us rein in the endless possibilities of things that could be a part of every release. We aspire to release three major versions a year because through trial and error we've found that to be a good balance between getting cool stuff in each release and not so much that we end up breaking more than we add.

Good deadlines almost always make you trim something from a release. This is not a bad thing, it's what they're supposed to do.

The route of delaying a release for that one more feature is, literally, a rabbit hole. We did that for over a year once, and it wasn't pleasant for anybody.

The more frequent and regular releases are, the less important it is for any particular feature to be in this release. If it doesn't make it for this one, it'll just be a few months before the next one. When releases become unpredictable or few and far between, there's more pressure to try and squeeze in that one more thing because it's going to be so long before the next one. Delay begets delay.

The Vocal Minority
There's a good rule of thumb within internet culture called the 1% rule. It states that "the number of people who create content on the internet represents approximately 1% (or less) of the people actually viewing that content".

So while we consider it really important to listen and respond to those who post feedback and voice their opinions on forums, they only represent a tiny fraction of our end users. When making decisions on how to move forward with future versions of WordPress, we look to engage more of those users who are not so vocal online. We do this by meeting and talking to users at WordCamps across the globe, this gives us a better balance of understanding and ultimately allows us to make better decisions for everyone moving forward.

Our Bill of Rights
WordPress is licensed under the General Public License (GPL v2 or later) which provides four core freedoms, consider this as the WordPress "bill of rights":

- The freedom to run the program, for any purpose.
- The freedom to study how the program works, and change it to make it do what you wish.
- The freedom to redistribute.
- The freedom to distribute copies of your modified versions to others.

Part of those licensing requirements include licensing derivative works or things that link core WordPress functions (like themes, plugins, etc.) under the GPL as well, thereby passing on the freedom of use for these works as well.

Obviously there are those who will try to get around these ideals and restrict the freedom of their users by trying to find loopholes or somehow circumvent the intention of the WordPress licensing, which is to ensure freedom of use. We believe that the community as a whole will reward those who focus on supporting these licensing freedoms instead of trying to avoid them.

The most responsible use of WordPress community resources would therefore be put to best use by emphasizing high quality contributions that embrace the freedoms provided by the GPL.

Establish a Leadership structure.

"BDFL"

Benevolent Dictator For Life

Establish a Leadership structure.

A BDFL doesn't scale.

Establish a Leadership structure.

What support structures are in place for your BDFL?

- Multiple Core committers?
- Core development teams?
- Initiatives / initiative leads?
- Working groups?

Are these support structures clearly defined?

Are the people involved empowered to act?

Establish a Leadership structure.

Companies behind the scenes, too.

SensioLabs

AUTOMATTIC

Establish a Leadership structure.

"PMC"

Project Management Committee

Decision Making

BDFL decides

PMC votes

Majority must be clear

Consensus must be reached

Ask the community

Conflict Resolution

BDFL rules

PMC rules

Mediation attempted

Post this process publicly.

Update your tools

Github + Travis CI + Robots

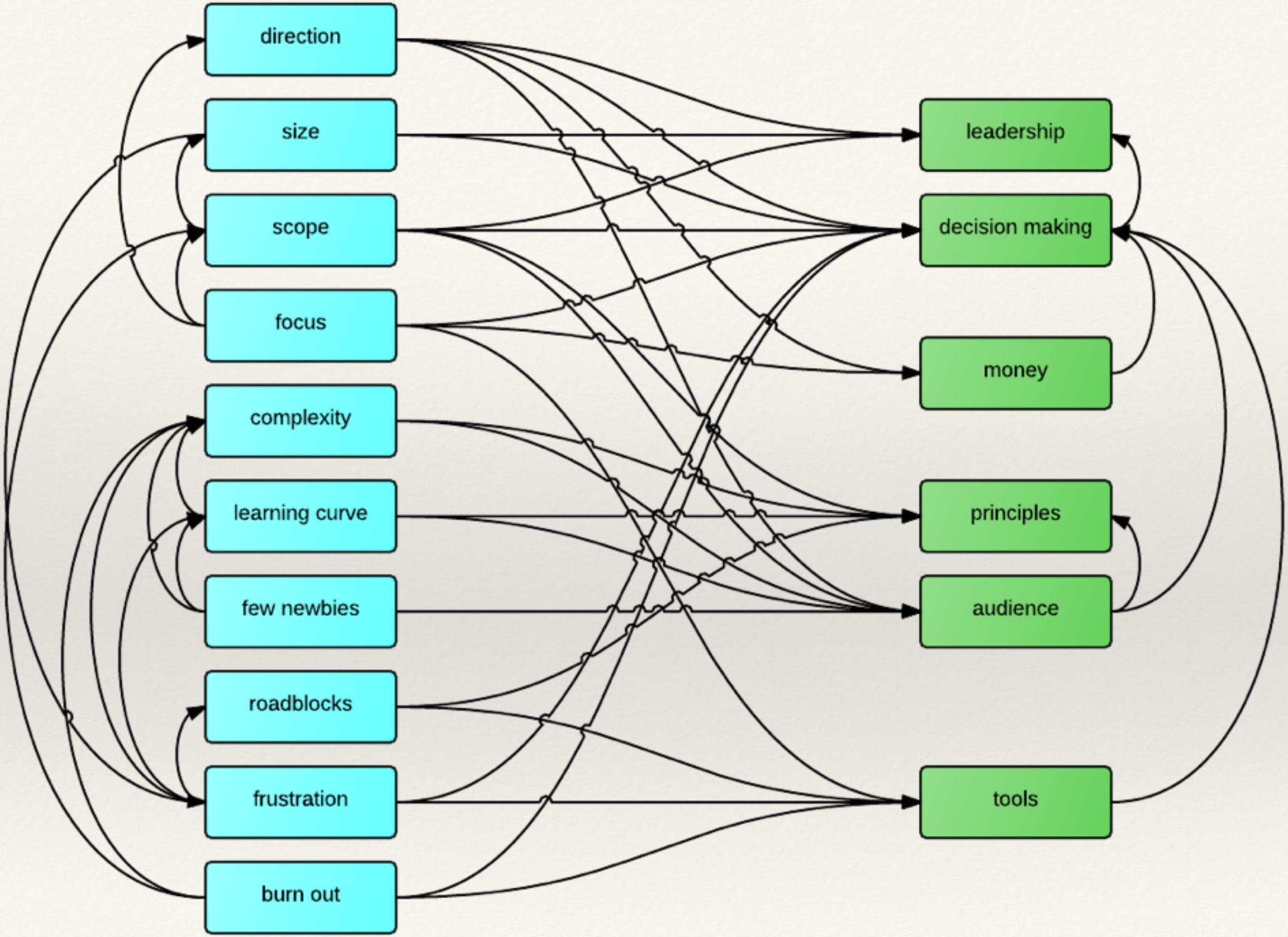
drupal.org issue queue improvements

Create more IRC channels

Mailing list software improvements

Have more (local/focused) conferences (or camps)

These problems are related


direction
size
scope
focus
complexity
learning curve
few newbies
roadblocks
frustration
burn out
leadership
decision making
money
principles
audience
tools

"Come for the software, stay for the **community**."

Thank you.

Jen Lampton (@jenlampton)

SymfonyLive Madrid, 2014

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10th birthday http://schmidtpa.com/happy-birthday-facebook/