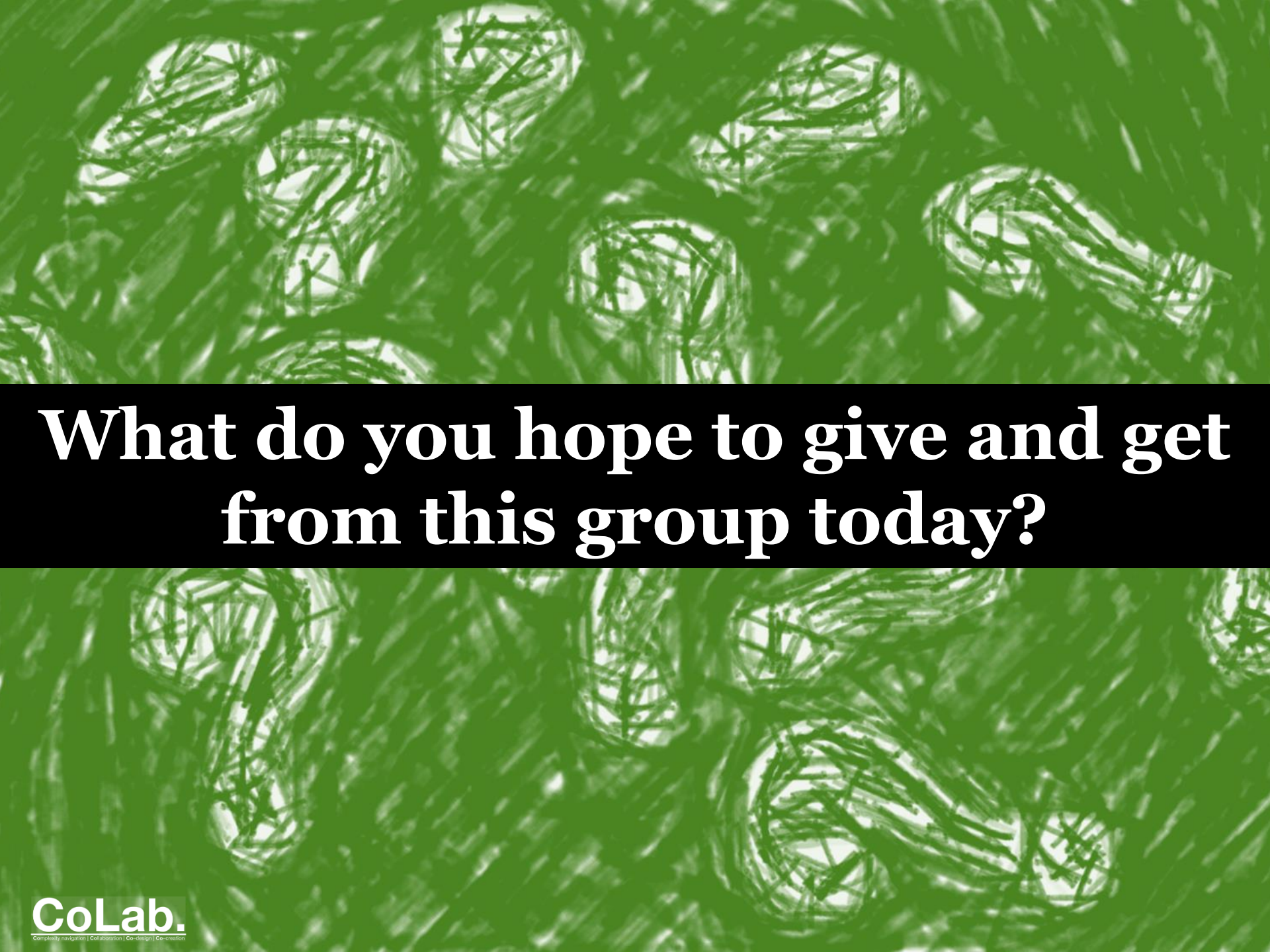
The Root of Why

How to ask & answer questions without sounding like a jerk

Alberta CoLab Systemic Design
Community of Practice
November 8, 2017

CoLab.
Complexity navigation | Collaboration | Co-design | Co-creation



CoLab.
Complexity navigation | Collaboration | Co-design | Co-creation

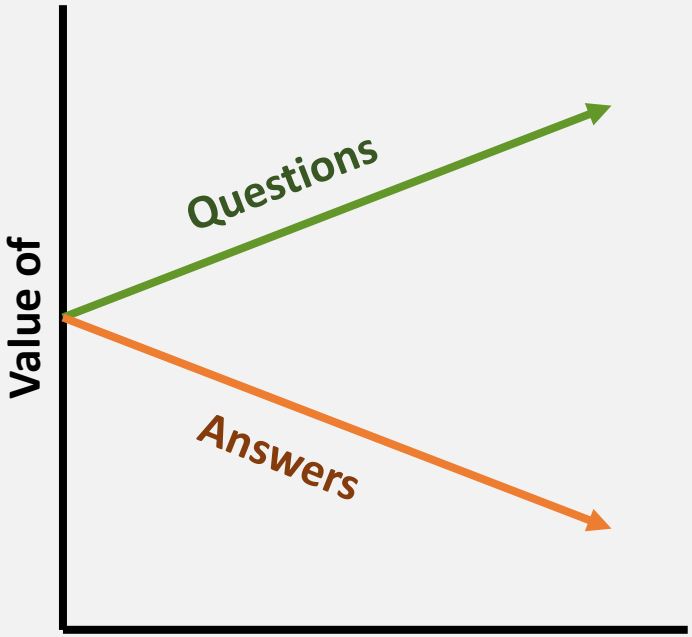
CoLab.
Complexity navigation | Collaboration | Co-design | Co-creation

Why do we ask Questions?

Questions facilitate **learning** – they enable us to move forward.

Questions enable us to challenge **assumptions** – ours and those of others.

Questions enable us to act in the face of **uncertainty** by helping us to organize around what we don't know.



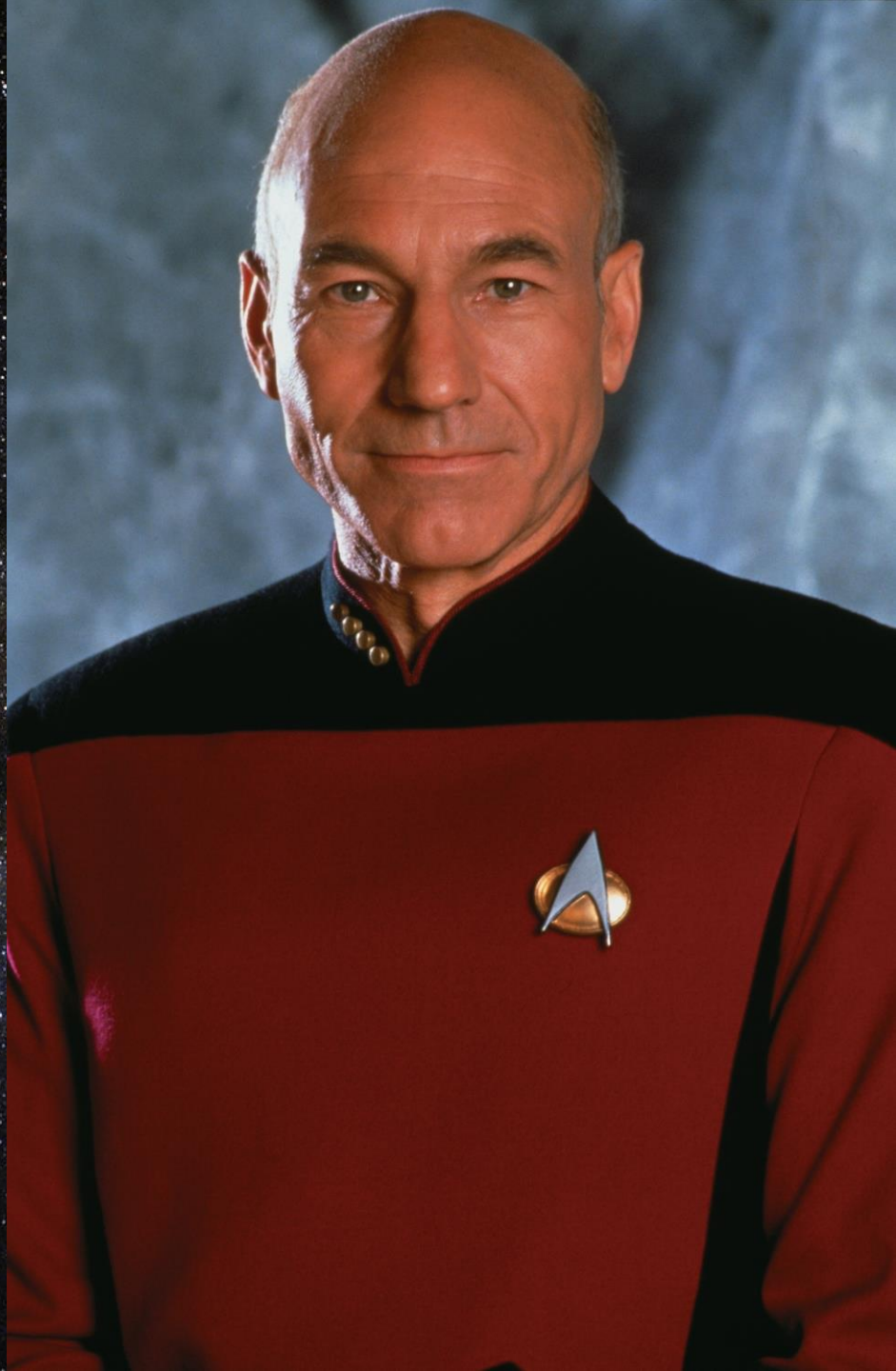
From Berger (2014)

The only way to **access network knowledge** effectively is to ask it the right question (Berger).

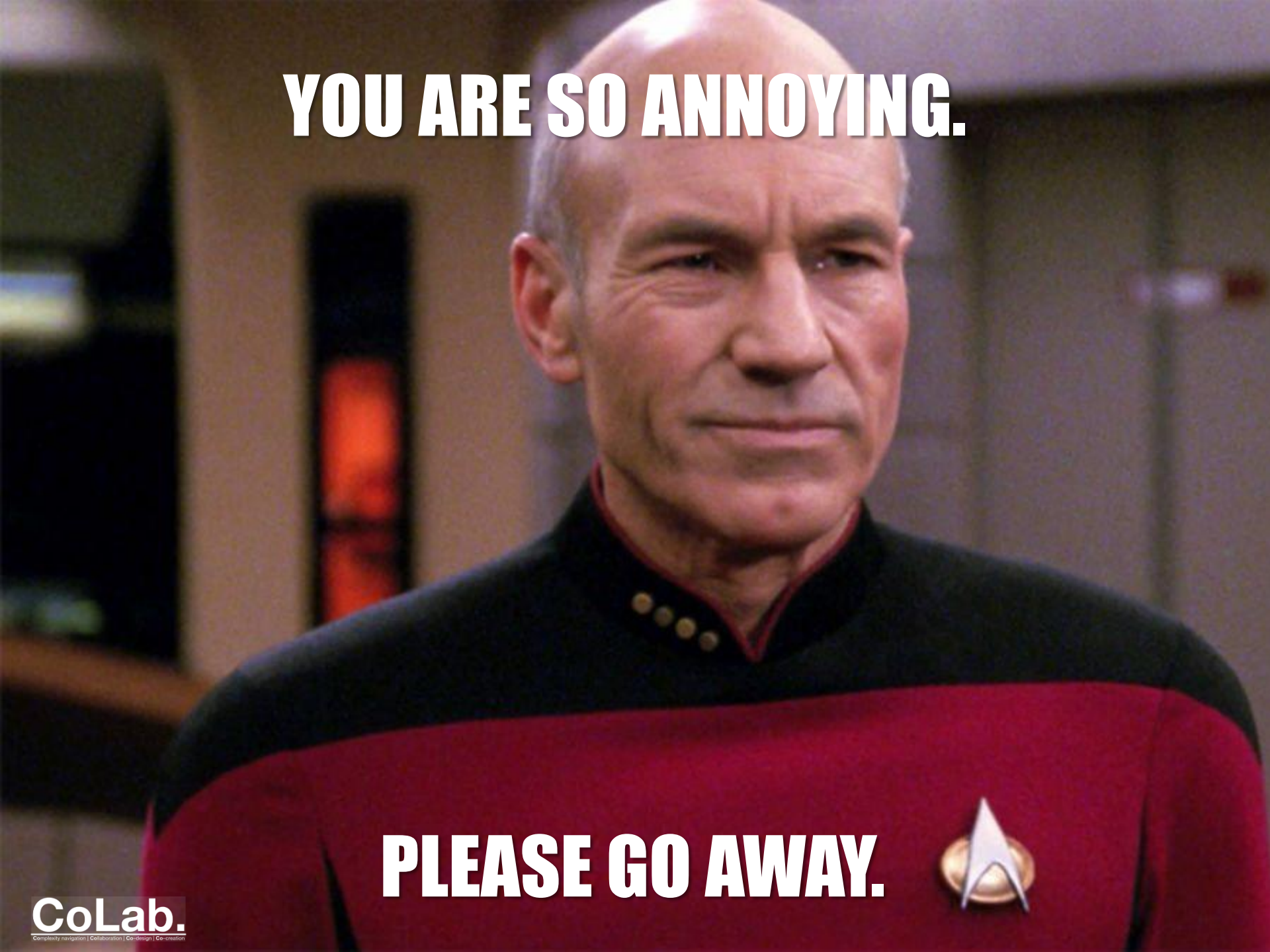
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sahSAMj8OIY

CoLab.
Complexity navigation | Collaboration | Co-design | Co-creation

CLUES THAT PEOPLE MIGHT THINK YOU'RE A JERK...WITH JEAN LUC PICARD.



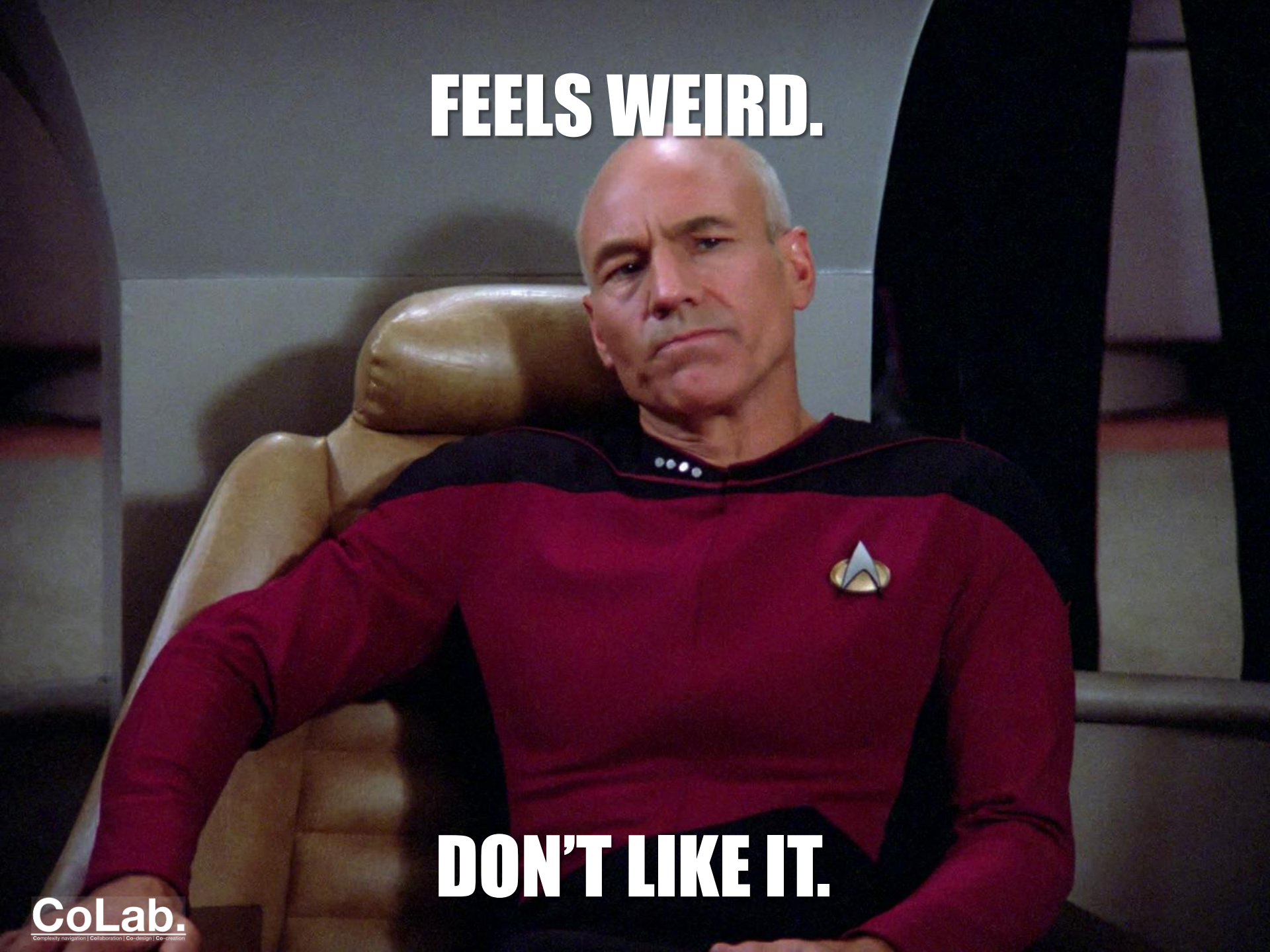
CoLab.
Complexity navigation | Collaboration | Co-design | Co-creation



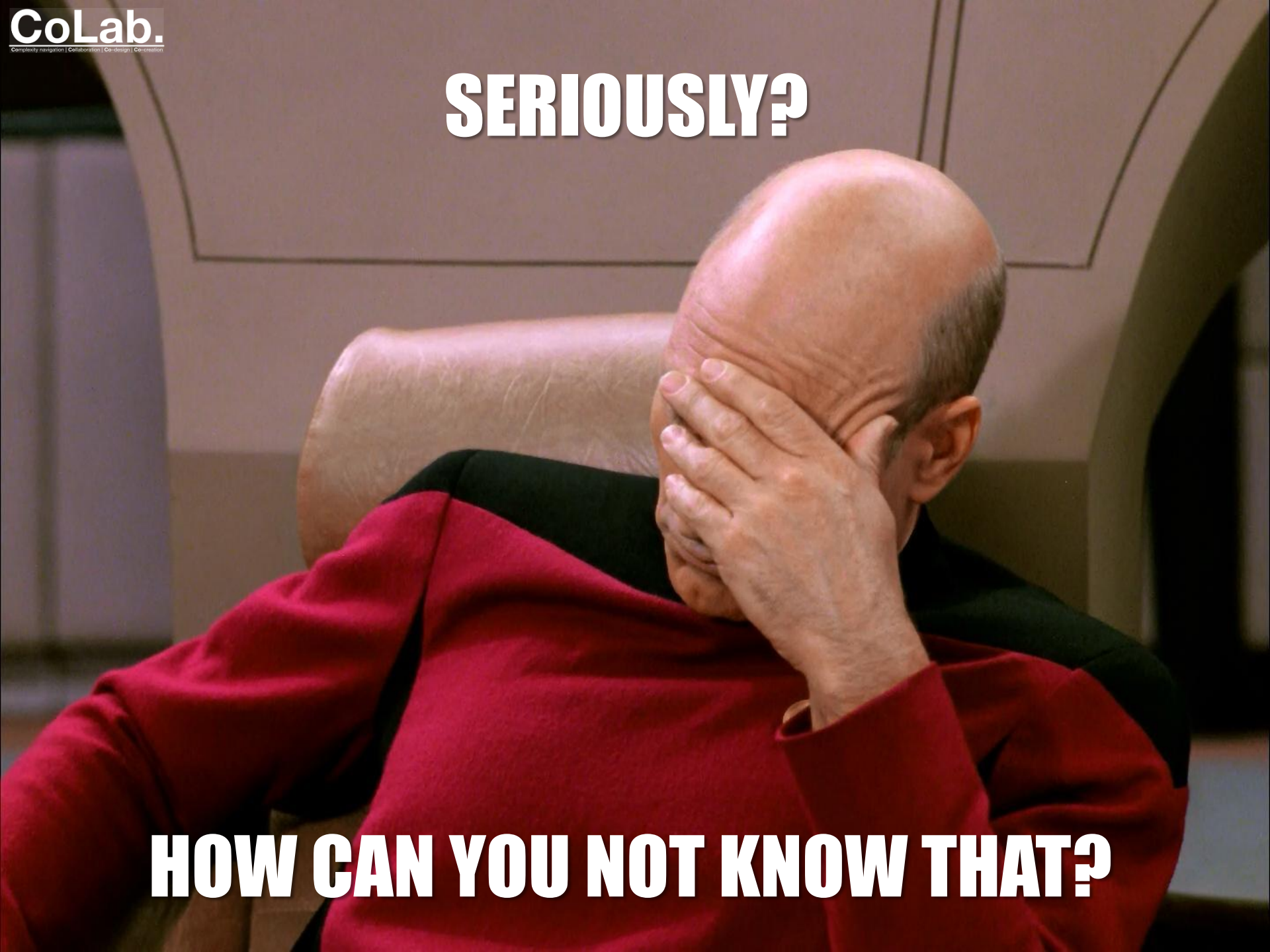
CoLab.
Complexity navigation | Collaboration | Co-design | Co-creation

CoLab.
Complexity navigation | Collaboration | Co-design | Co-creation

CoLab.
Complexity navigation | Collaboration | Co-design | Co-creation



CoLab.
Complexity navigation | Collaboration | Co-design | Co-creation


CoLab.
Complexity navigation | Collaboration | Co-design | Co-creation
SERIOUSLY?
HOW CAN YOU NOT KNOW THAT?

We're focused on answers.
We never seem to have time.
We don't know the right questions to ask.
Fear. We may not have the answers.

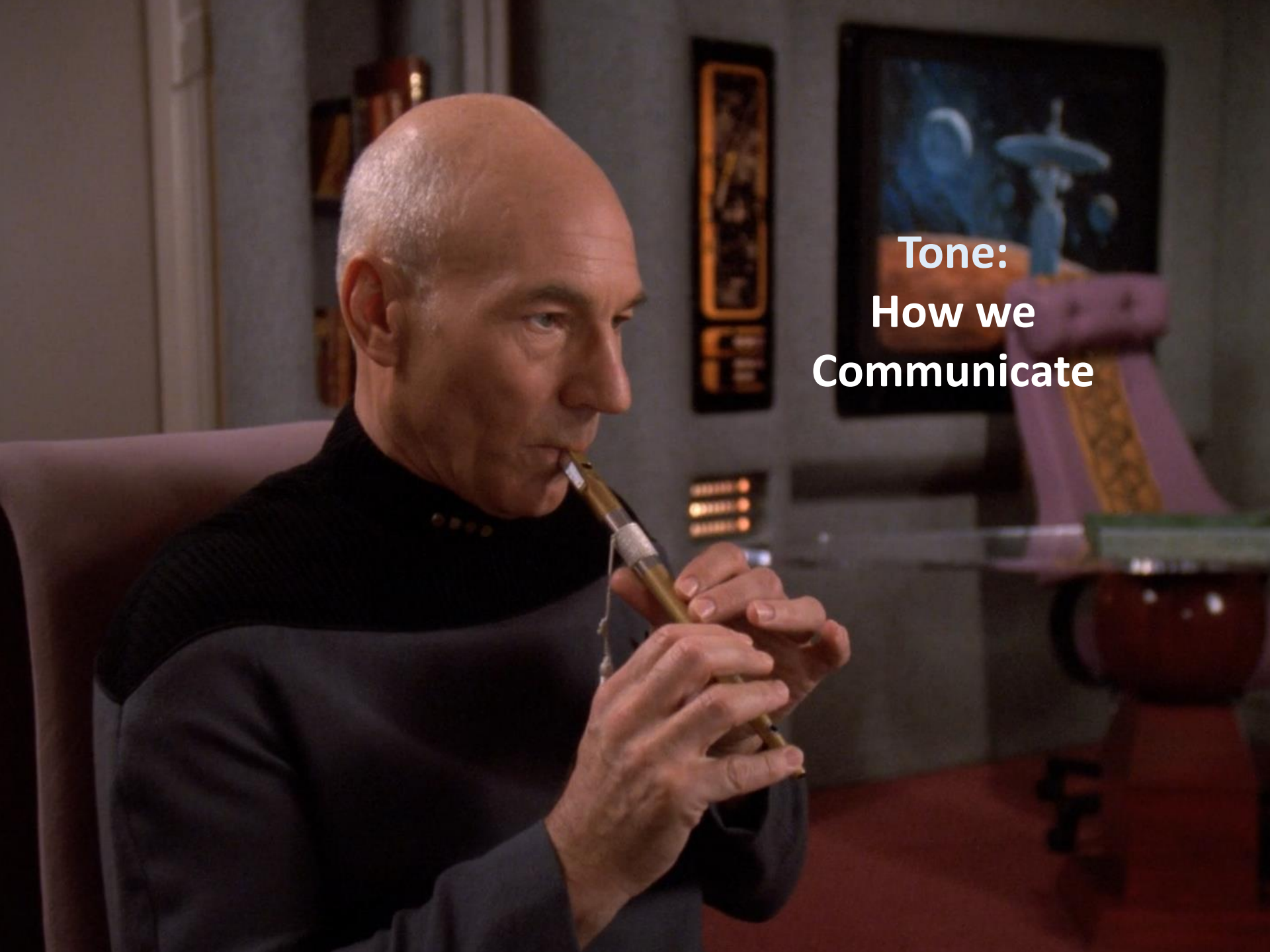
CoLab.
Complexity navigation | Collaboration | Co-design | Co-creation

CoLab.
Complexity navigation | Collaboration | Co-design | Co-creation

CoLab.
Complexity navigation | Collaboration | Co-design | Co-creation

What Questions Ask of Us…

TONE	CONTENT	INTENT
Listen.	Be comfortable with not knowing.	Trust.
Use our beginner's mindset.	Have the ability to say that 'it doesn't have to be that way.'	Be willing to answer, not just ask.
Use curiosity in lieu of judgment.	Check that your questions do not include assumptions.	Allow others' feelings to be expressed without attempting to 'fix' them.


Tone:
How we
Communicate

CoLab.
Complexity navigation | Collaboration | Co-design | Co-creation

Appreciative Interview

Pair up and take turns sharing a story of a time when you had either great success or great challenge with questions – asking or answering. (5 min each = 10 min)

In fours, relay your partner's story & share insights. (10 min)

- Sit **face-to-face** and **knee-to-knee** for the interview
- Ask about the **context**
  - When, Where, Who, How
- DO NOT share your own experience
- Collect **details** of the journey:
  - Status quo, barriers, action, reversals, powerful discoveries
- Try to find a **moment** that sums up the drama and the deeper **meaning**
- Take time to **explore** root issues and the conditions or assets made the success possible.

CoLab.
Complexity navigation | Collaboration | Co-design | Co-creation

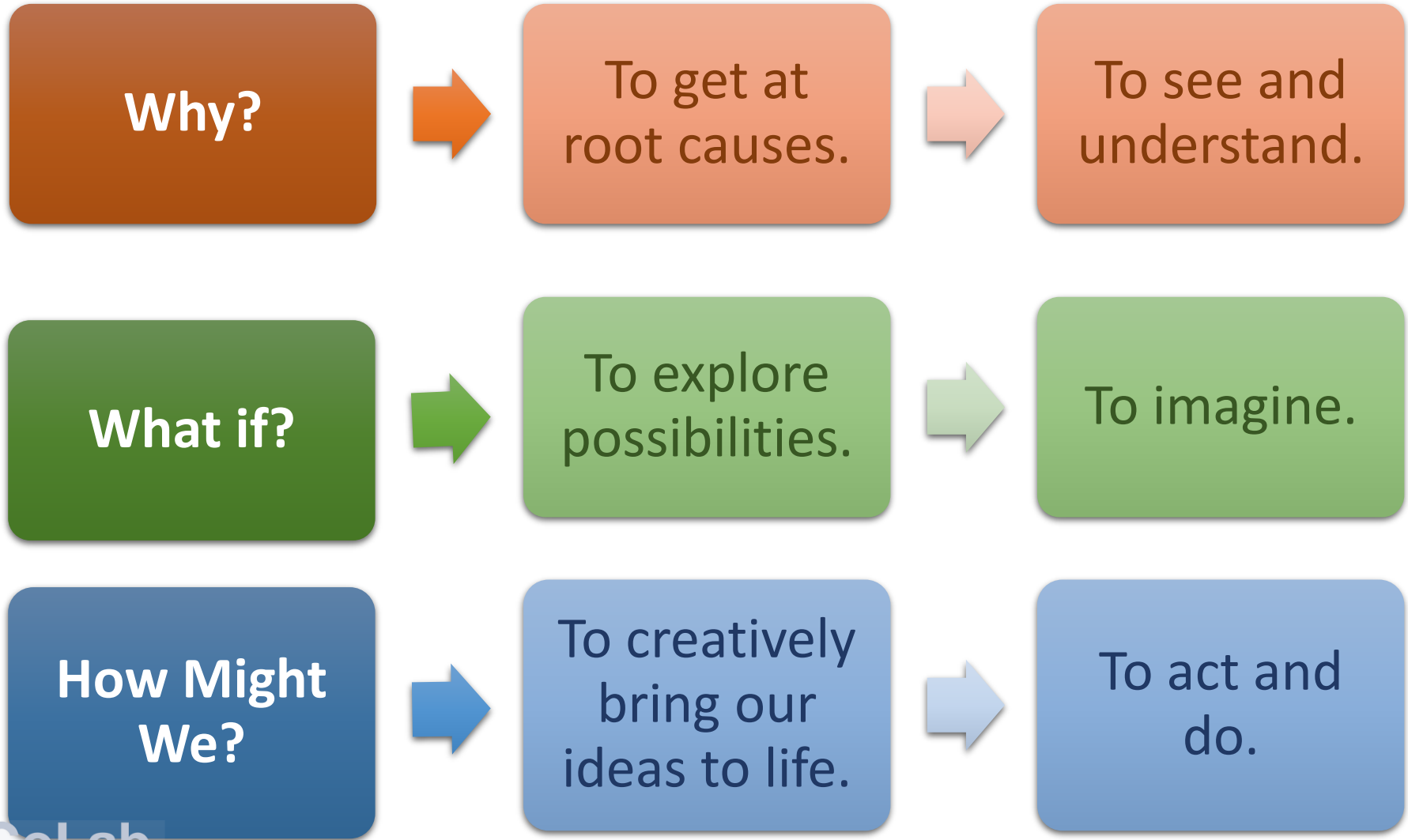
Closed & Open-Ended Questions

- Find a **partner**.
- Each choose a fairy tale **character** – keep it **secret**!
- **Take turns** asking questions, trying to uncover which fairy tale character your partner chose.
- For each **closed-ended question** you ask, your partner gets a point.
- For each **open-ended question** you ask, you get a point.

CoLab.

CoLab.
Complexity navigation | Collaboration | Co-design | Co-creation

Systemic Design: Main Question Types



CoLab.
Complexity navigation | Collaboration | Co-design | Co-creation

Types of Thinking

Asking questions involves three types of thinking:

Divergent	Convergent	Metacognitive
Broadening, open, creative	Narrowing, focusing, synthesizing	Reflective, thinking about thinking
What if I think differently about this?	*Where should I focus my energy?*	*Why am I asking that?*

CoLab.
Complexity navigation | Collaboration | Co-design | Co-creation

CoLab.

Strategic Questioning – Fran Peavey

Creates Motion	Enables the structure of the conversation to move from the static to the dynamic.
Creates Options	Looks for alternatives, asking what is possible.
Avoids 'why'?	Such questions ask people to defend or justify their position, or talk about the present in terms of the past.
Digs Deeper	Avoids 'yes/no' answers and binary thinking (closed questions).
Empowers	Enables someone to further develop their own ideas.
Asks the 'unaskable'	Challenges the values and assumptions on which something is based.
Is simple, not compound	Addresses one thing at a time, and minimizes the need for analysis.

Check your BAAPPS

- Bias Check
- Abstraction Level
- Ambition Level
- Point of View
- Positive Wording
- Solution-Free

CoLab.

Brainstorming in Questions

Question Focus: The Future of Vacationing

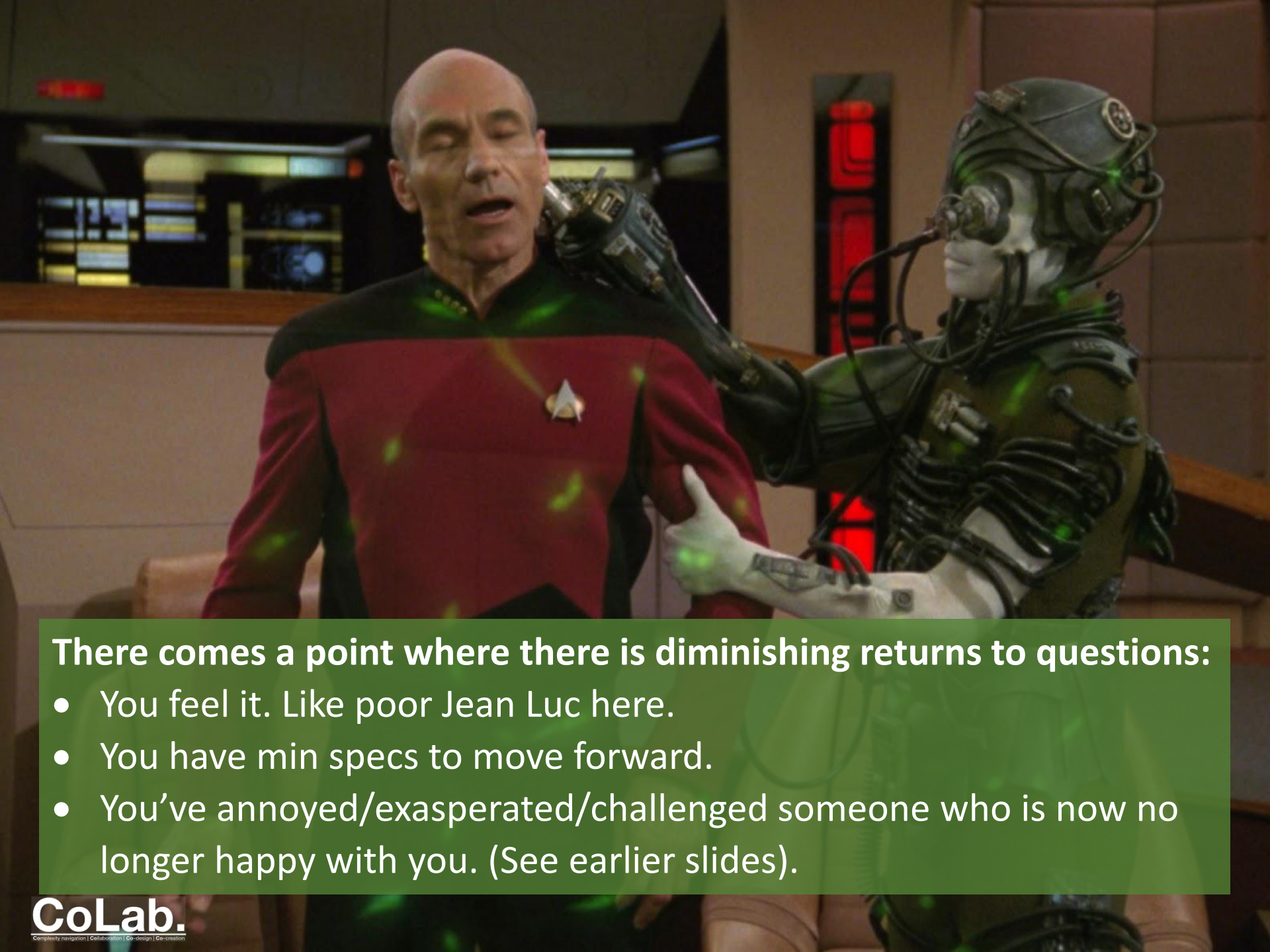
Individually brainstorm as many questions as you can related to the focus area. Number your questions as you go. (2 x 5 min)

Individually, identify open and closed-ended questions. (2 min)

In pairs, work together to prioritize your questions. Name the rationale for why you prioritized them in that way. (5 min)

In groups of four, debrief:

- How was it to brainstorm in questions?
- Did your priority questions come towards the beginning, middle, or end of your brainstorming? Do you notice any patterns related to your priority questions?
- What did you find helpful in this activity? What made it challenging?



There comes a point where there is diminishing returns to questions:

- You feel it. Like poor Jean Luc here.
- You have min specs to move forward.
- You've annoyed/exasperated/challenged someone who is now no longer happy with you. (See earlier slides).

CoLab.
Complexity navigation | Collaboration | Co-design | Co-creation

CoLab.
Complexity navigation | Collaboration | Co-design | Co-creation

Vuja De...?

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B7LBSDQ14eA

Work with people who want and are open to challenge, for whom learning and exploring is vital.

Ask more receptive questions.

Question thyself.

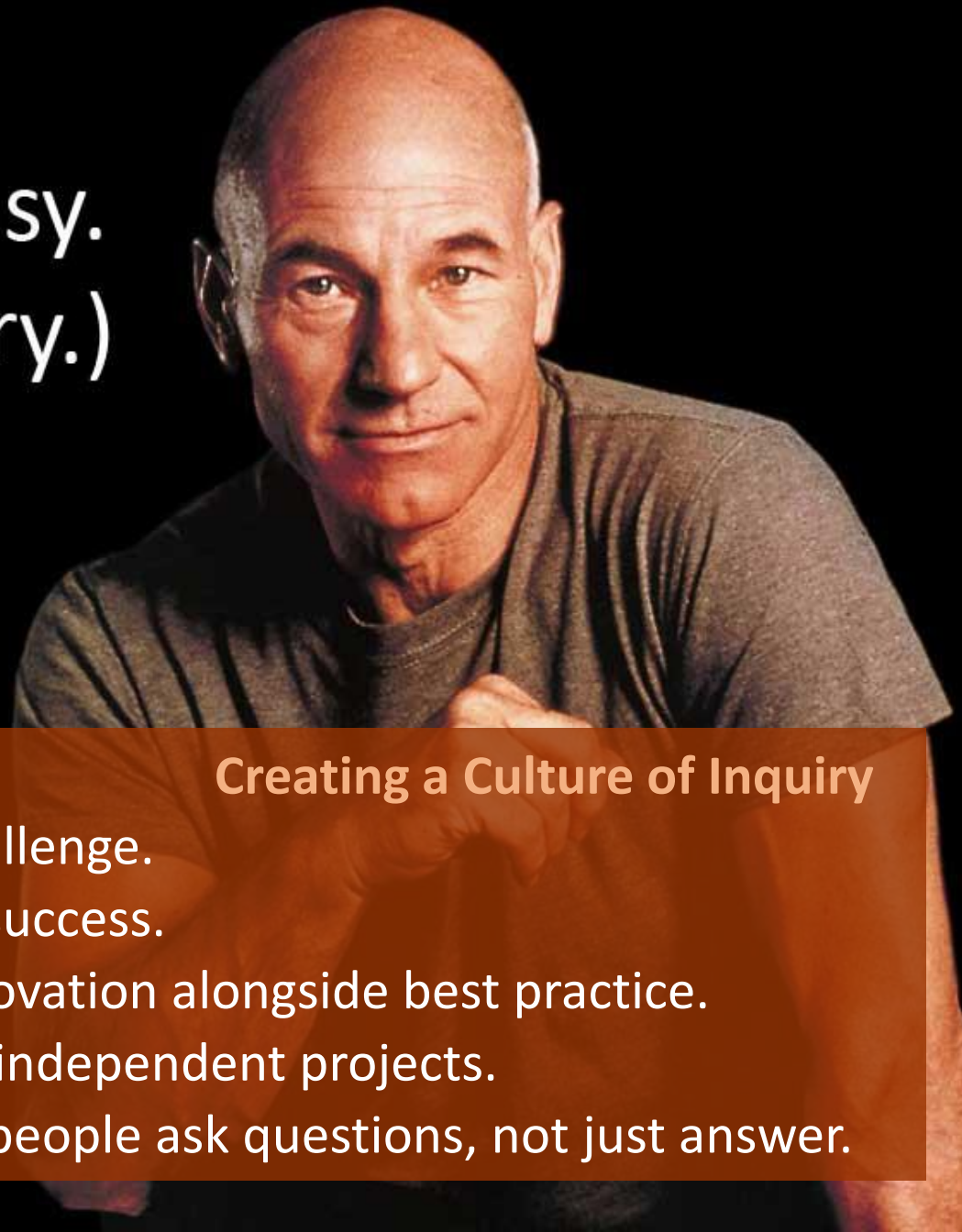
Become a hacker. Work the system. Bwahahahaha.

CoLab.

Complexity navigation | Collaboration | Co-design | Co-creation

CoLab.
Complexity navigation | Collaboration | Co-design | Co-creation

Picardin' ain't easy. (But it's necessary.)

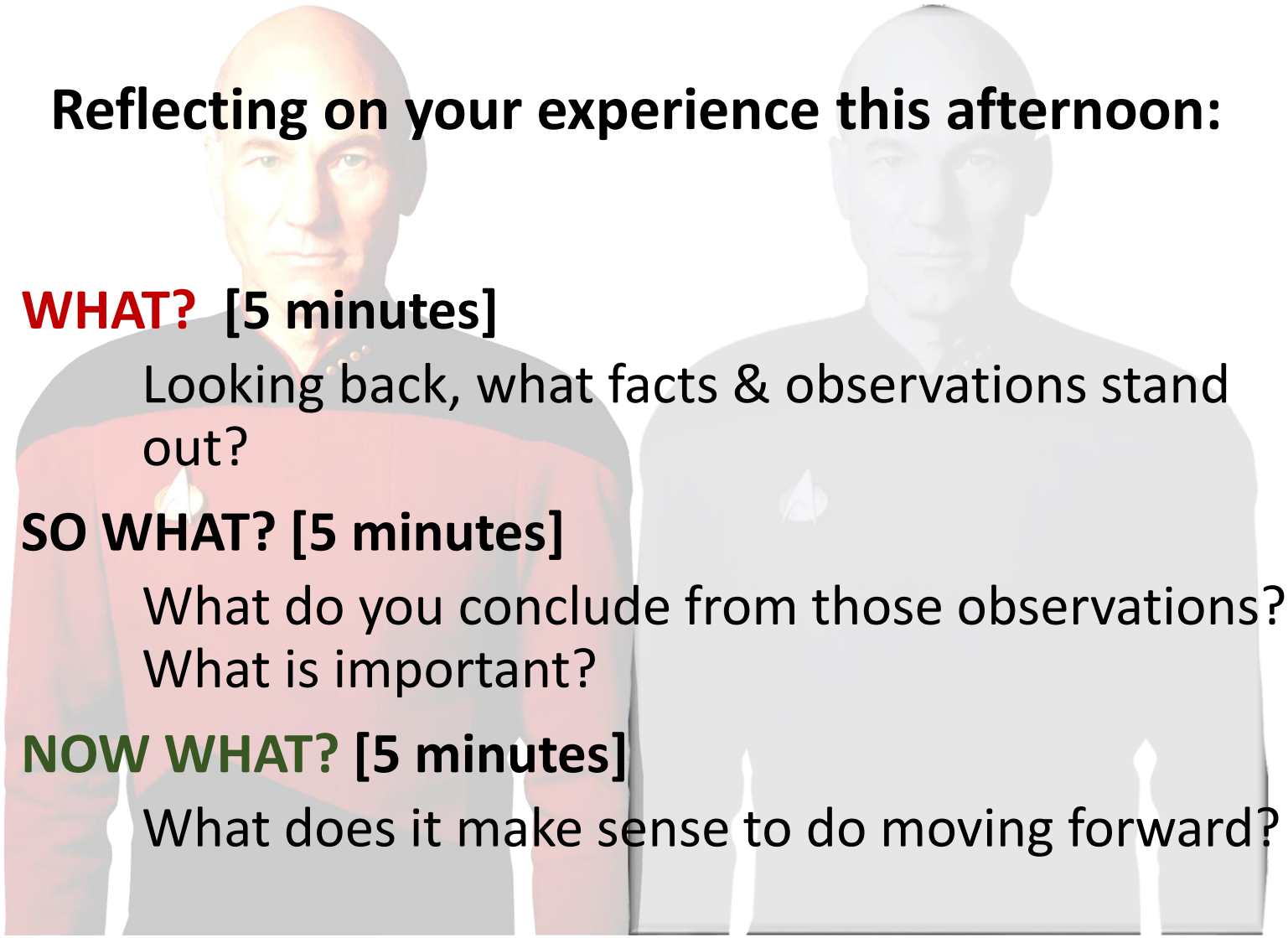


Creating a Culture of Inquiry

- Walk the talk.
- Invite questions, invite challenge.
- Reward learning, not just success.
- Resource learning and innovation alongside best practice.
- Enable people to work on independent projects.
- When hiring, look at how people ask questions, not just answer.

CoLab.
Complexity navigation | Collaboration | Co-design | Co-creation

Closing Reflection



Reflecting on your experience this afternoon:

- **WHAT? [5 minutes]**

  Looking back, what facts & observations stand out?

- **SO WHAT? [5 minutes]**

  What do you conclude from those observations? What is important?

- **NOW WHAT? [5 minutes]**

  What does it make sense to do moving forward?

CoLab.
Complexity navigation | Collaboration | Co-design | Co-creation

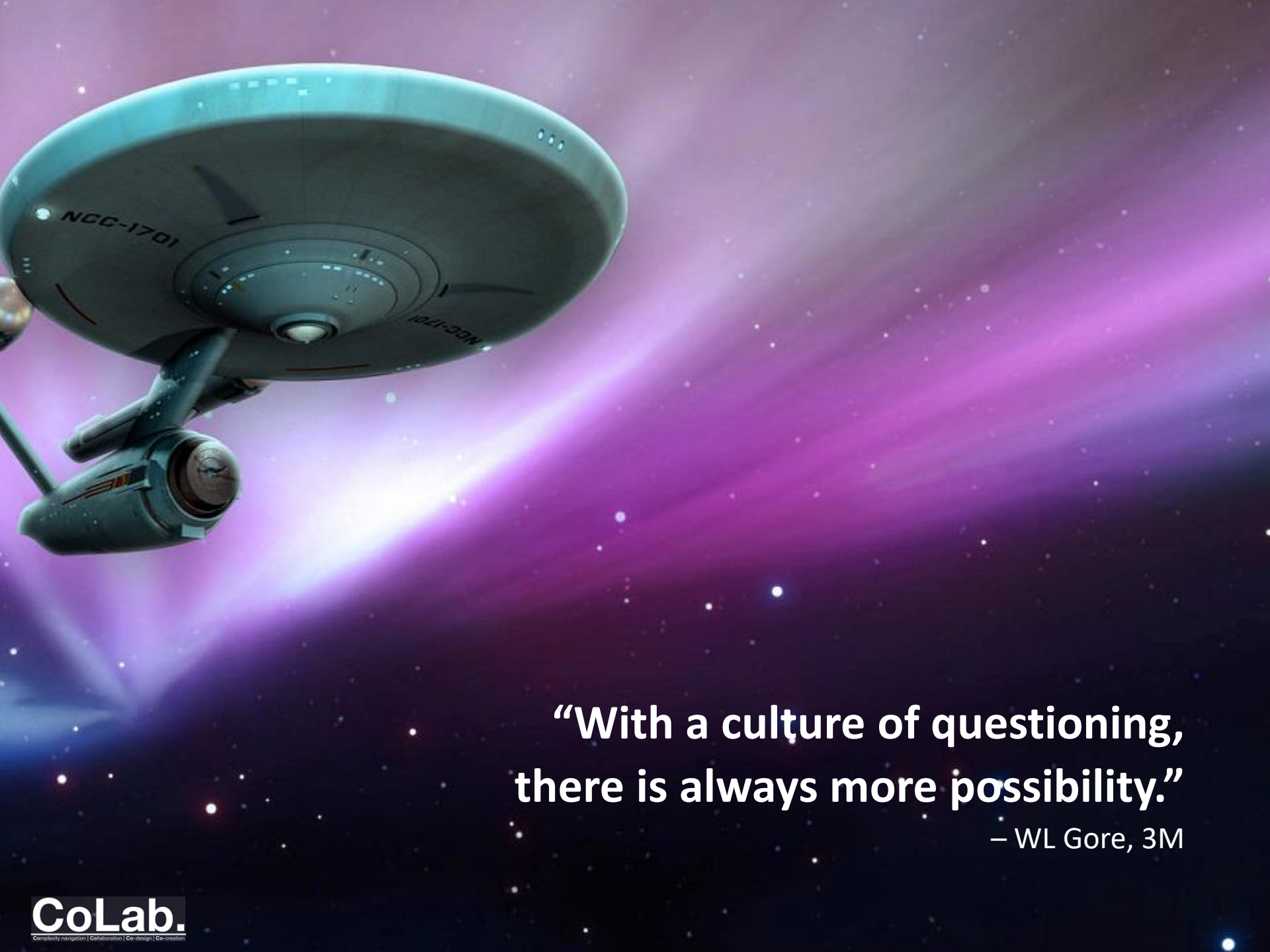
Homework

How might …[choose one or come up with your own]

- Captain Picard
- Harry Potter
- Wonder Woman
- Willy Wonka
- JK Rowling
- Your Supervisor
- Your kid

…tackle the challenge of _____?

➢ **Brainstorm questions from their perspective…**



“With a culture of questioning, there is always more possibility.”

– WL Gore, 3M

CoLab.

Complexity navigation | Collaboration | Co-design | Co-creation