challenging research norms

positioning qualitative research to succeed

meena kothandaraman
@meena_ko

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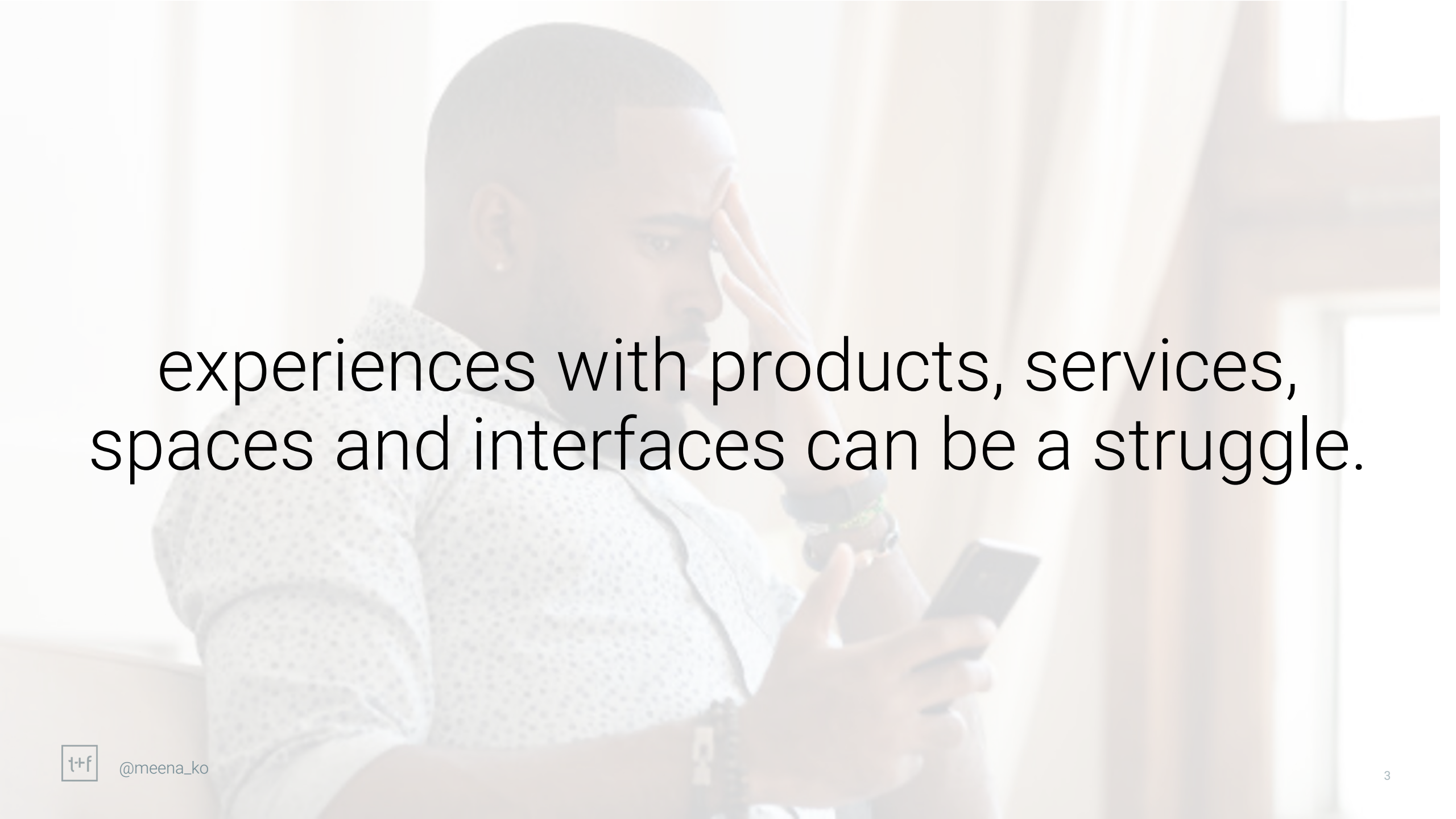
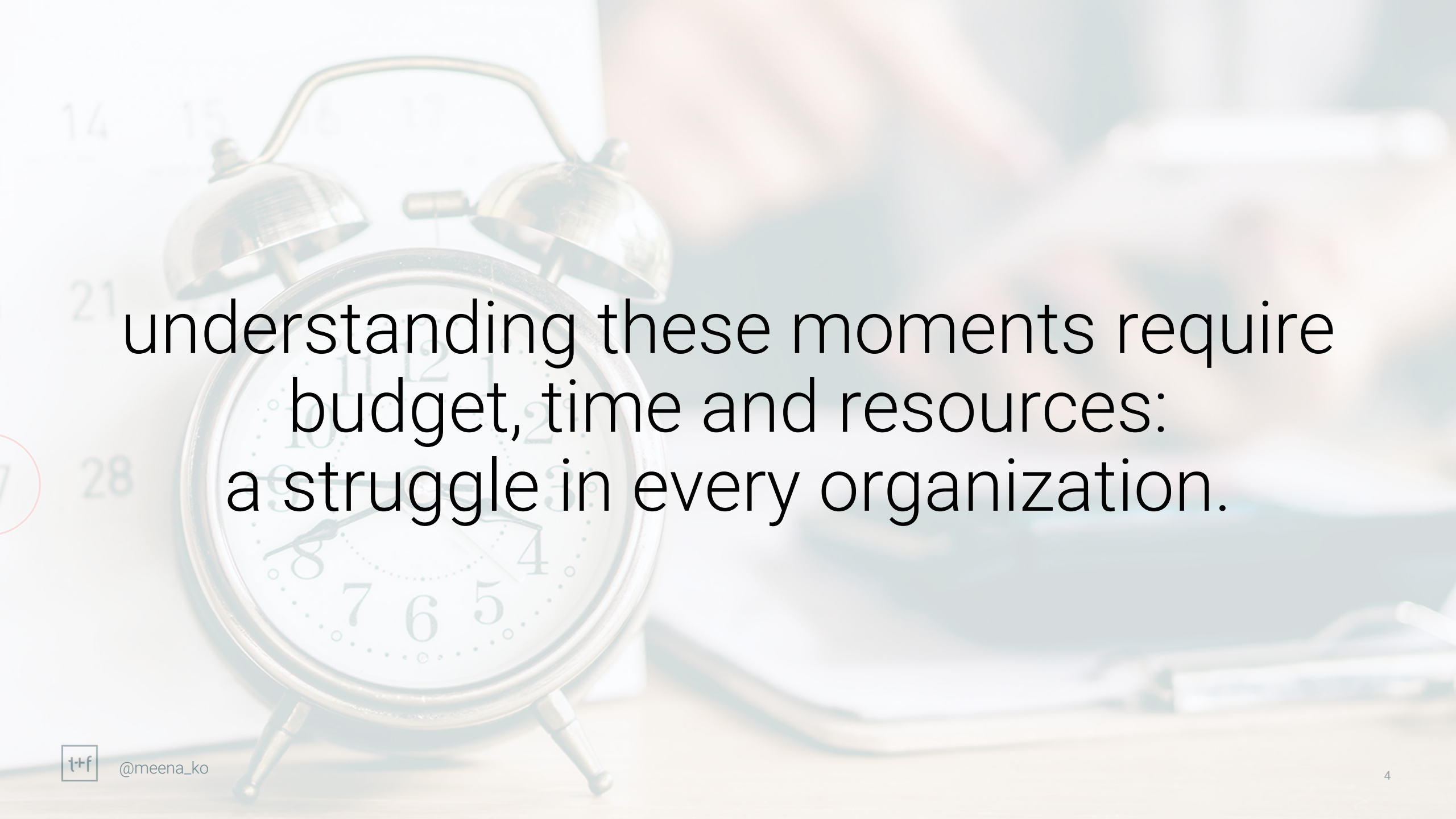
twig + fish

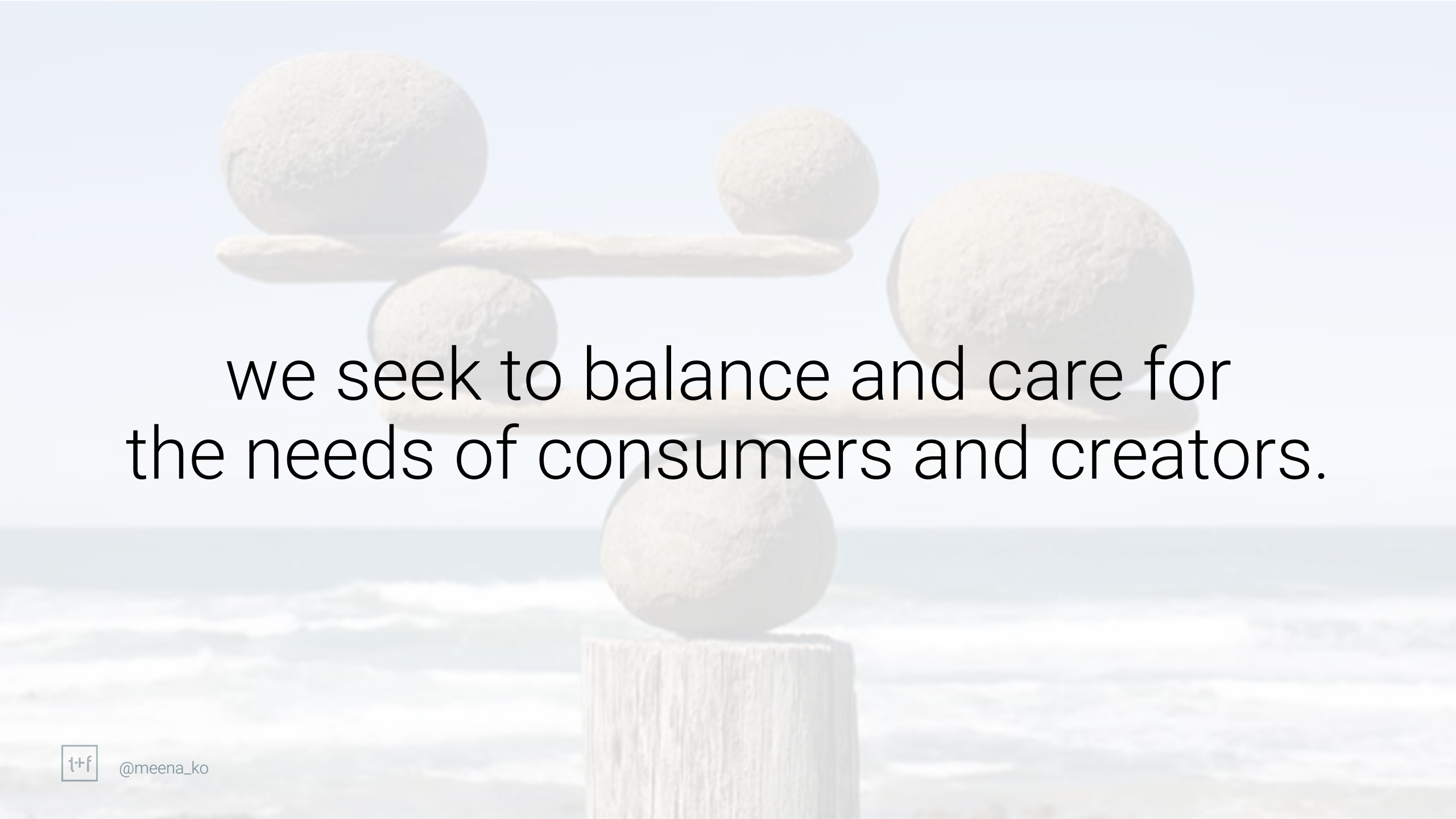
greetings + thanks



experiences with products, services, spaces and interfaces can be a struggle.



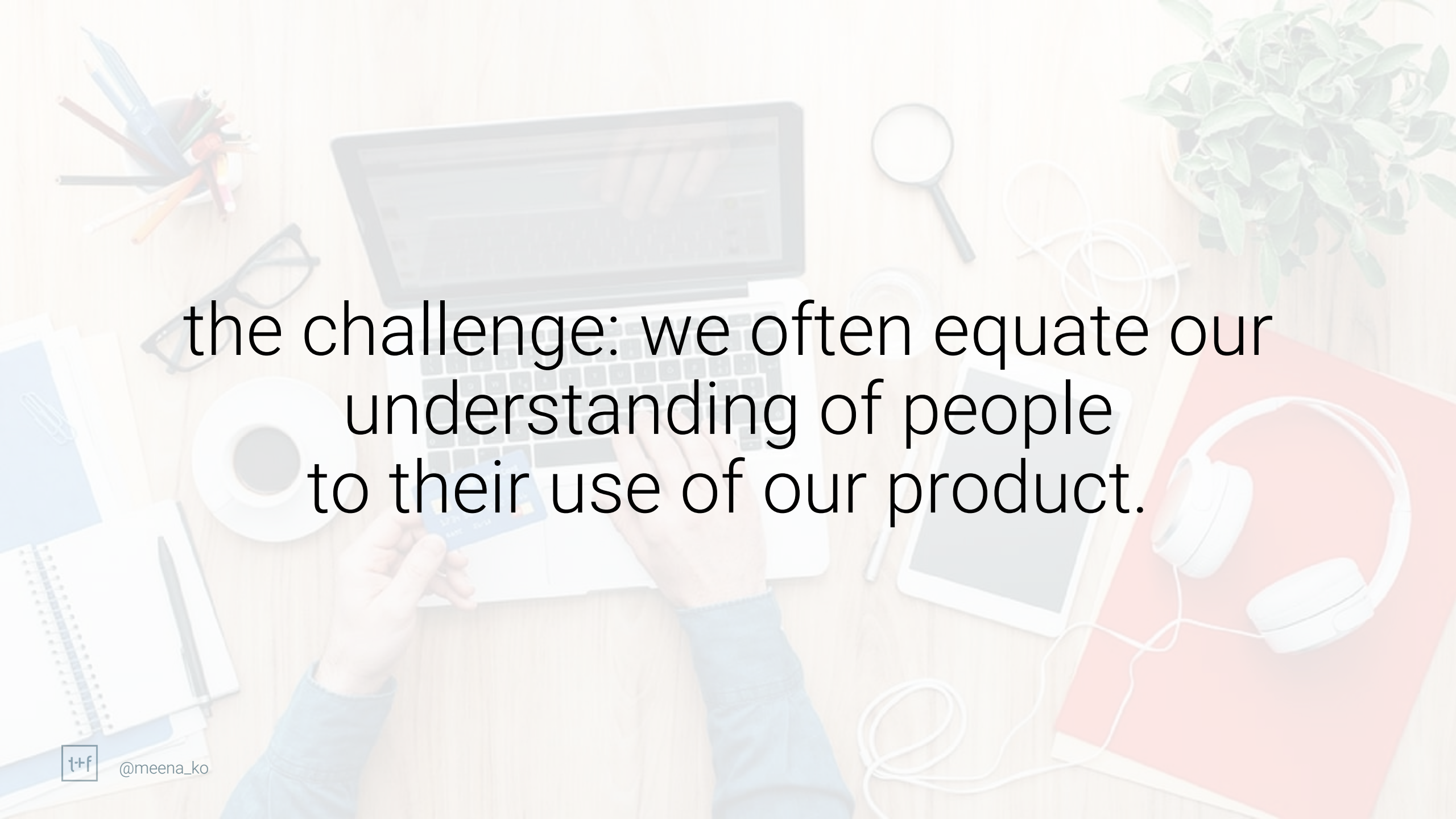
understanding these moments require budget, time and resources: a struggle in every organization.



we seek to balance and care for
the needs of consumers and creators.

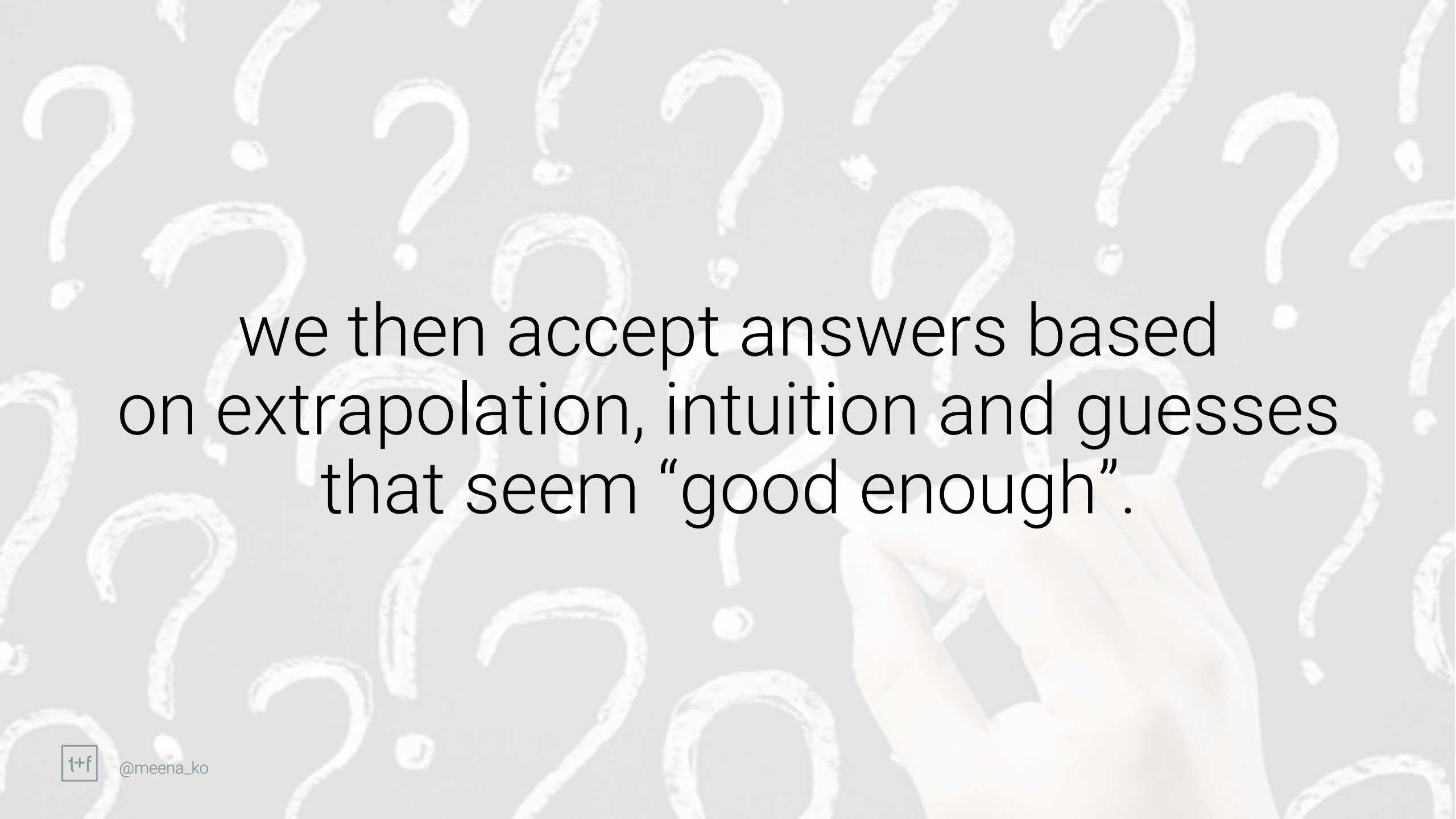
these moments also leave us with a steady stream of questions needing answers.

questions are often about
people and product.



the challenge: we often equate our understanding of people to their use of our product.

in doing this, we disconnect ourselves from people.


we then accept answers based
on extrapolation, intuition and guesses
that seem “good enough”.

“good enough” acts as a proxy to feeling connected, but with low confidence answers.

reduced connection + confidence is then seen in the products we build .

how can we deepen connections and bolster confidence when designing anything…

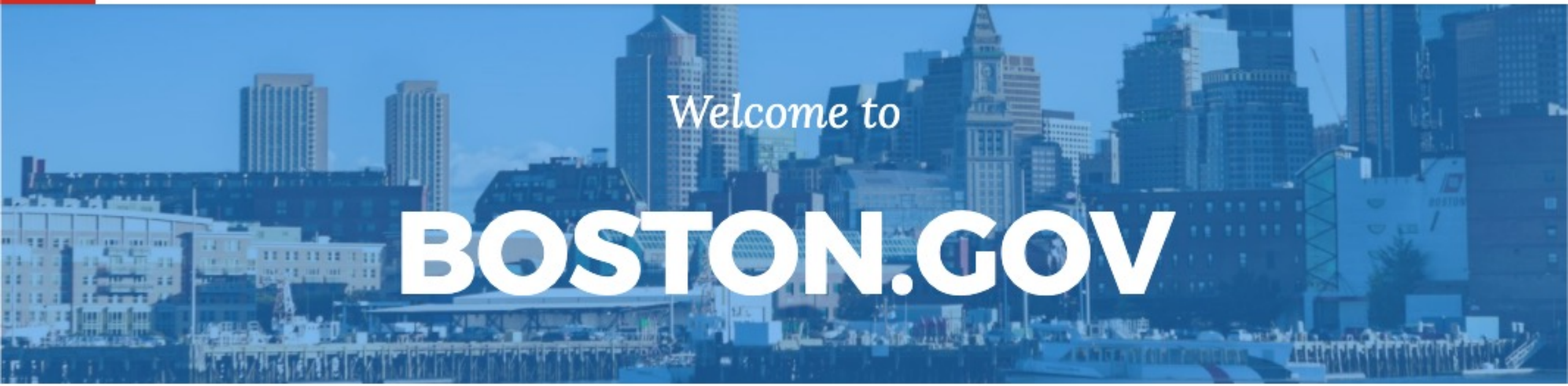
…while deepening our connection to consumers and inspiring teams to feel confidence in what they create?

this is the service that qualitative research can provide to the organization.

twig + fish

look for takeaways and reflect on your own organization’s approach.

structure and transparency
lead to confidence and connection.



THURSDAY, APRIL 7

COVID-19 VACCINE INFORMATION

We have vaccine

COVID-19 TESTING SITES

We've partnered with

CITY HALL OPERATING HOURS

Boston City Hall is

TRASH AND RECYCLING

Pickup is on a

PARKING METERS

Parking meters are running on their

the twig+fish five-phase learning process.

1 ALIGN

organize questions and study intent

2 PLAN

recruit and create protocol

3 GATHER

capture and debrief data / stories

4 ANALYZE

synthesize and deconstruct insights

5 APPLY

develop final findings deliverable

create language around gathering and socializing human learning.

the City of Boston sought to understand how City information was obtained in some neighborhoods and cultural groups.

why weren’t residents using the City of Boston website?

1 ALIGN

organize questions
and study intent

the question quickly became –

Does the City of Boston website create a sense of trust and confidence?

typical solutions would begin by asking designers to increase the trust and confidence characteristics of the website –

OR

ask residents why they didn't use the website as an information source.

1 ALIGN

organize questions
and study intent

How do residents determine if information is trustworthy and generates confidence?

Definition of trust and confidence from resident stories about interactions.

Highest confidence.

How do residents determine if information from the City is trustworthy and generates confidence?

Definition of trust and confidence from resident stories about City interaction.

Increased confidence.

How can the City of Boston website generate a sense of trust and confidence?

No definition of trust and confidence from the resident point of view.

Information based on intuition and guesses.

Low confidence.

Not primed for ideation.

Does the City of Boston website create a sense of trust and confidence?

Little contribution to meaningful improvements.

unpack the confidence in existing knowledge and connect the human story to the team.

2 PLAN

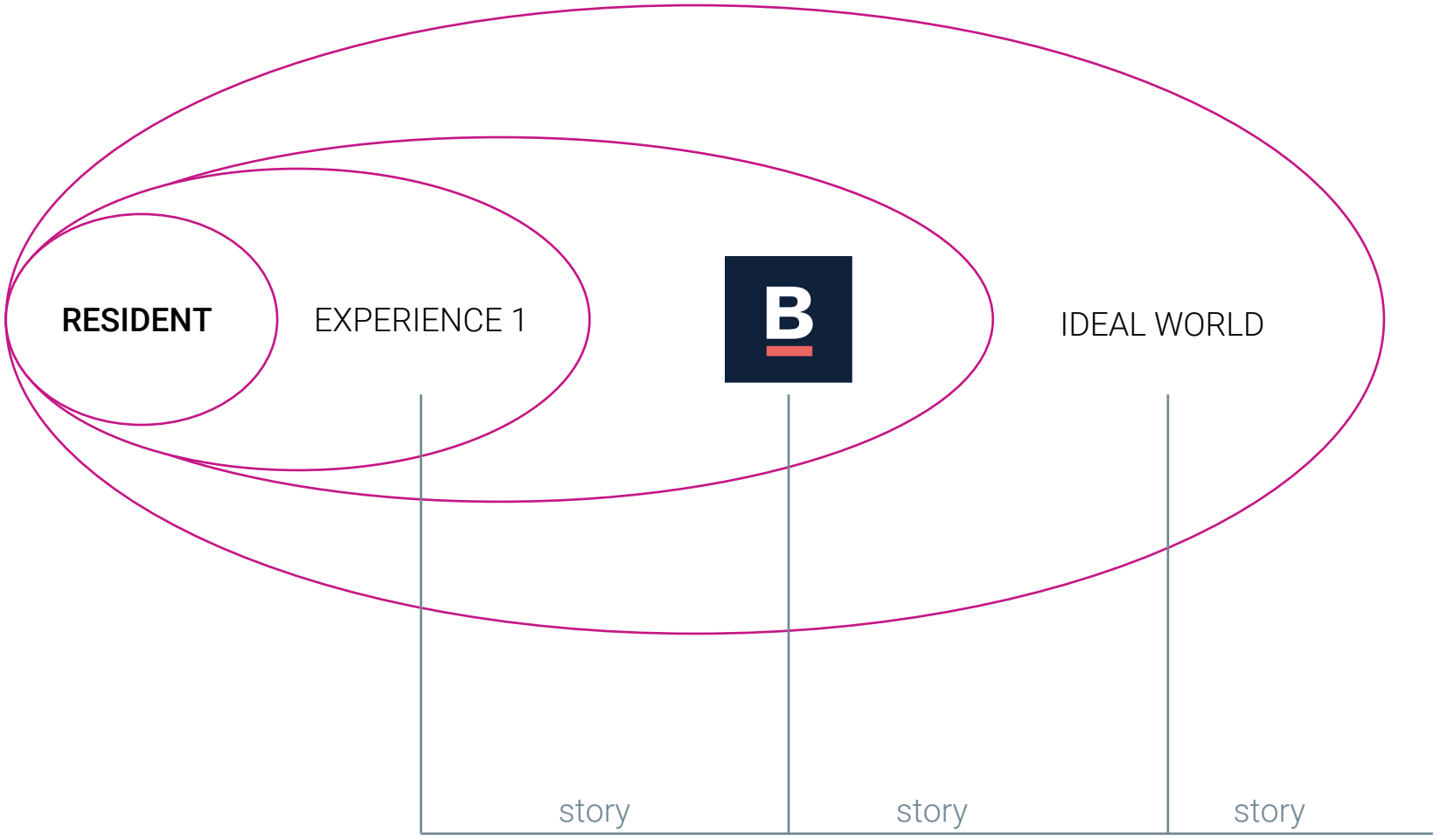
recruit and
create protocol

STUDY OBJECTIVE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS	
THE STUDY what the learning will look like	

present the ideal and then the constrained study design – and call out what is lost to show the impacts of constraints.

3 GATHER

capture and debrief data / stories

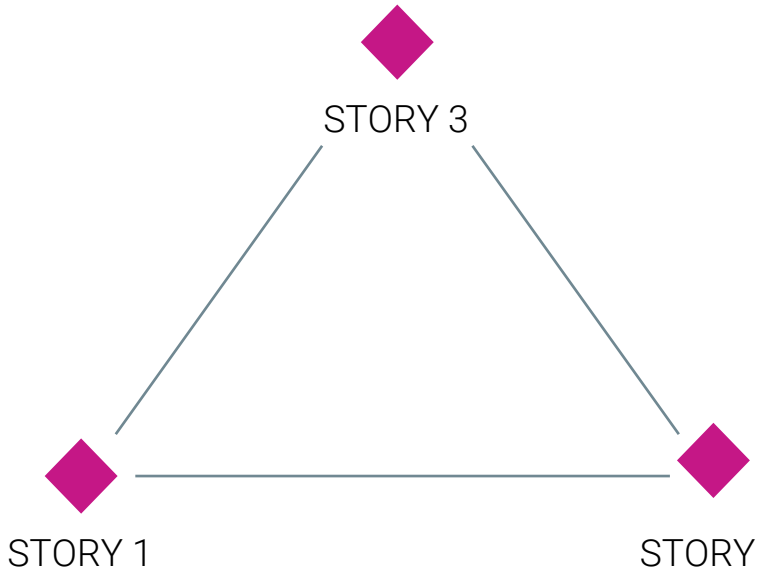


use activity-based protocols to generate stories that evidence patterns.

4 ANALYZE

synthesize and deconstruct insights

“ I trust information when it is presented in simple language, , bite sized pieces and can be translated to….



“ With something new to me, I prefer personal guidance from my son to avoid going in the wrong direction. I trust him…

“ The Facebook group I belong to has someone who makes sense of City information using language that I trust and understand…

don’t reduce rich data to numbers – it is about the variety of data, and how that variety provides inspiration to the team.

5 APPLY

develop final findings deliverable

resident deconstruction of trust and confidence characteristics

inspiration based on attitudinal and emotional resident recounts

evidenced resident experiences

connection and confidence

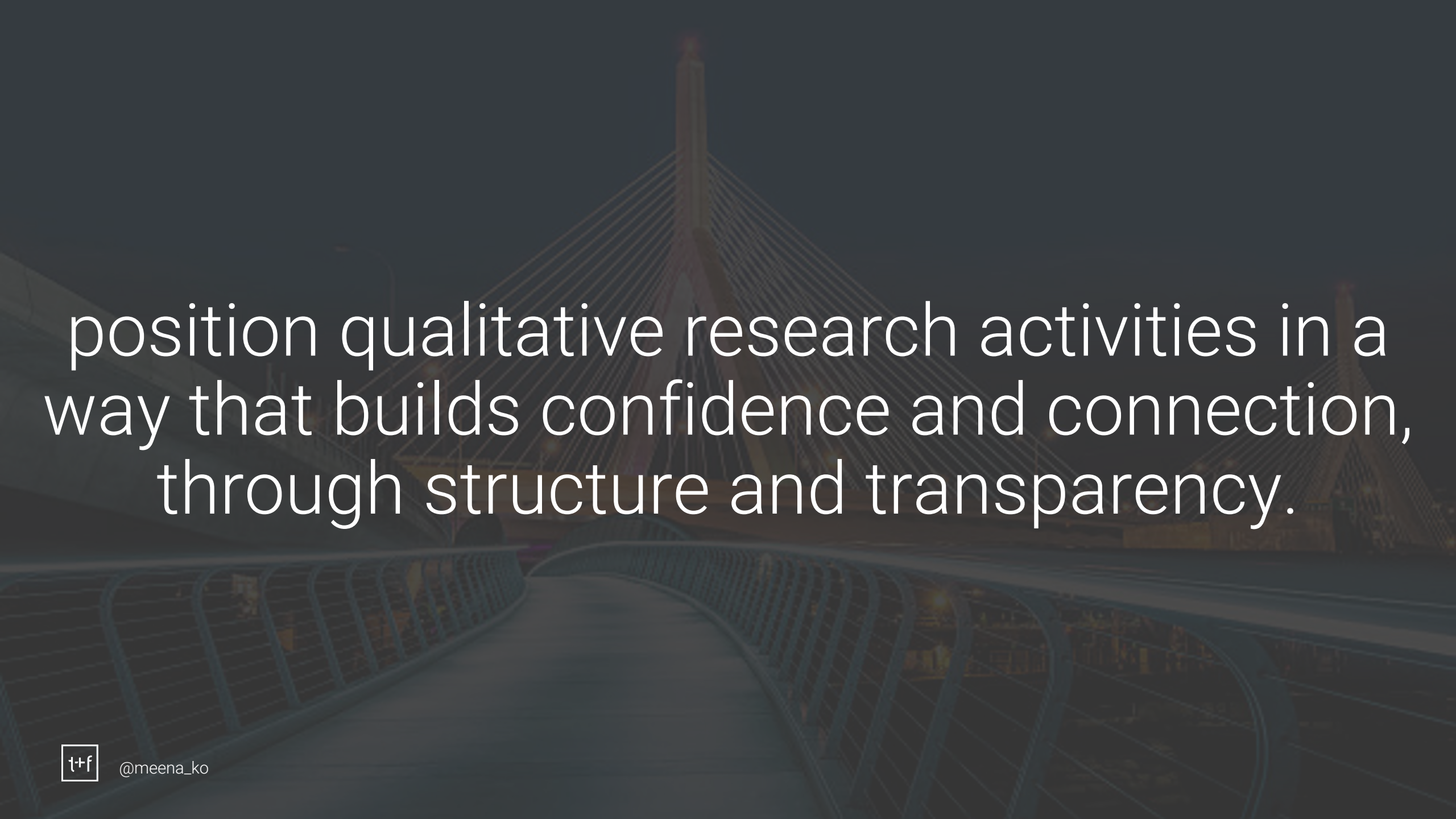
YIELDED HIGH CONFIDENCE TO PRIME THE DESIGN TEAM FOR IDEATION:

“HOW CAN THE CITY OF BOSTON WEBSITE GENERATE A SENSE OF TRUST AND CONFIDENCE?”

socialize and leverage the human story to bring meaning to what is created.

the City of Boston confidently
incorporated human stories
to improve its services to residents.

is ”good enough”
an option when designing products?


position qualitative research activities in a way that builds confidence and connection, through structure and transparency.
t+f
@meena_ko

thank you.

MEENA KOTHANDARAMAN
meena@twigandfish.com
@meena_ko

twig + fish

Thank you to the City of Boston, and to Bentley University HF780 Mar2019 for this discussion.