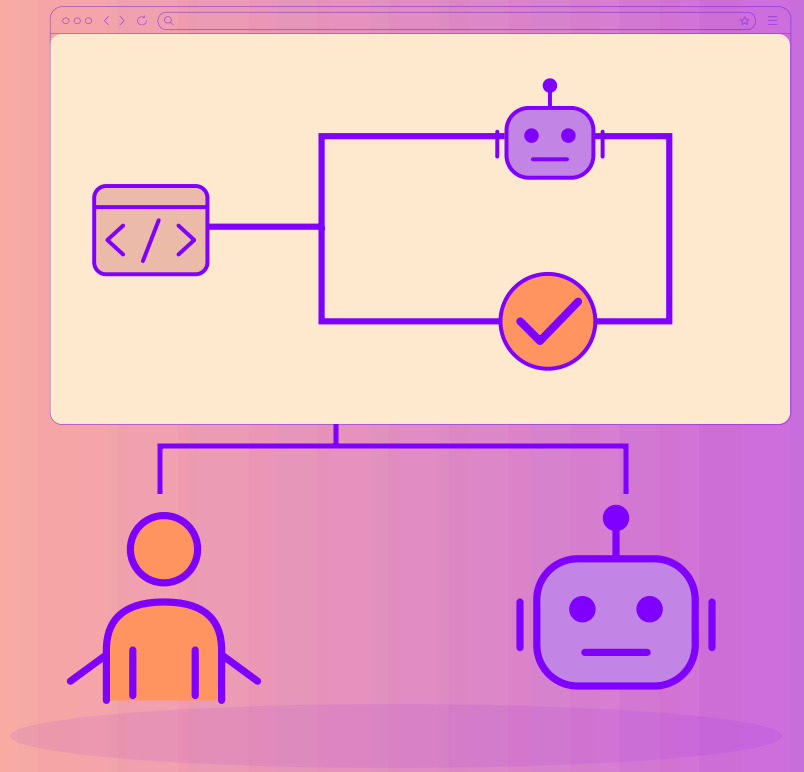
From Saw to Chainsaw

Without Losing a Hand

Coaching teams to own agentic workflows



João Anes

(pronounced joe-WOW)

joao.anes@mindera.com

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Let me tell you a story about **woodworking.**

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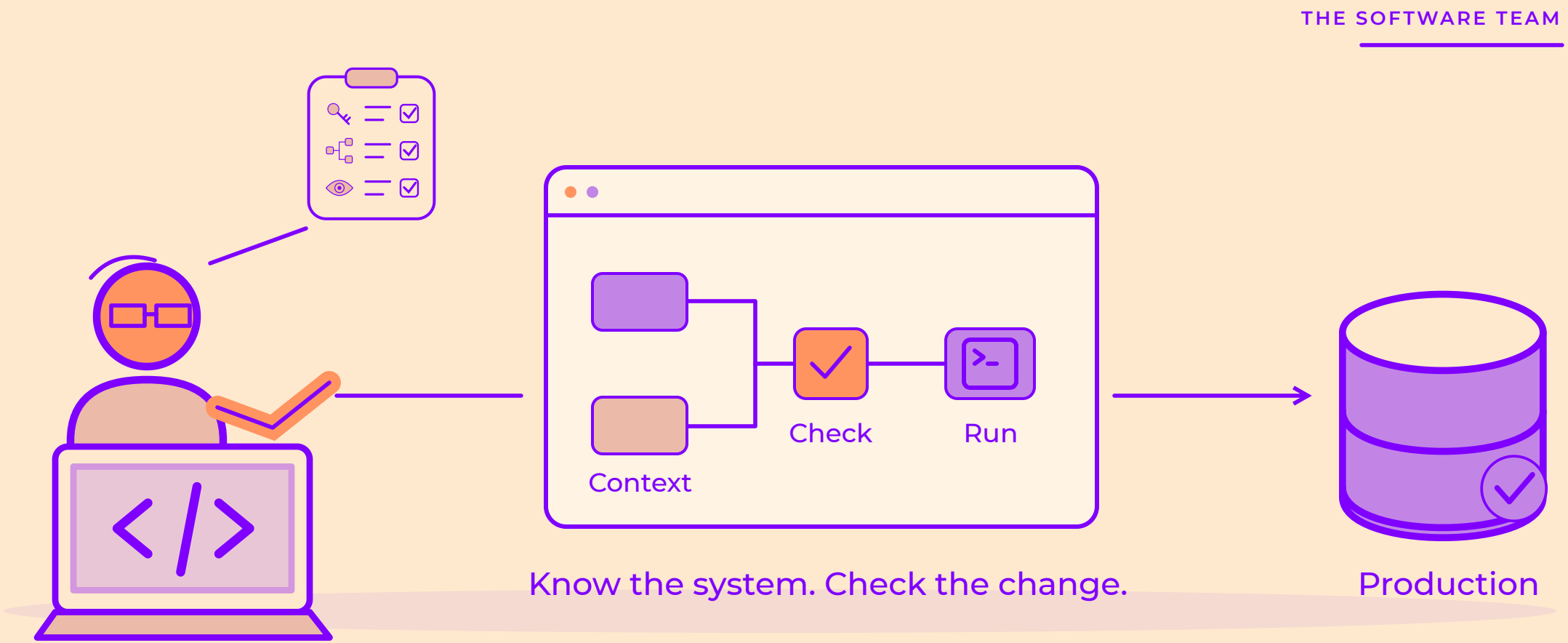
Engineers have been doing this for years.



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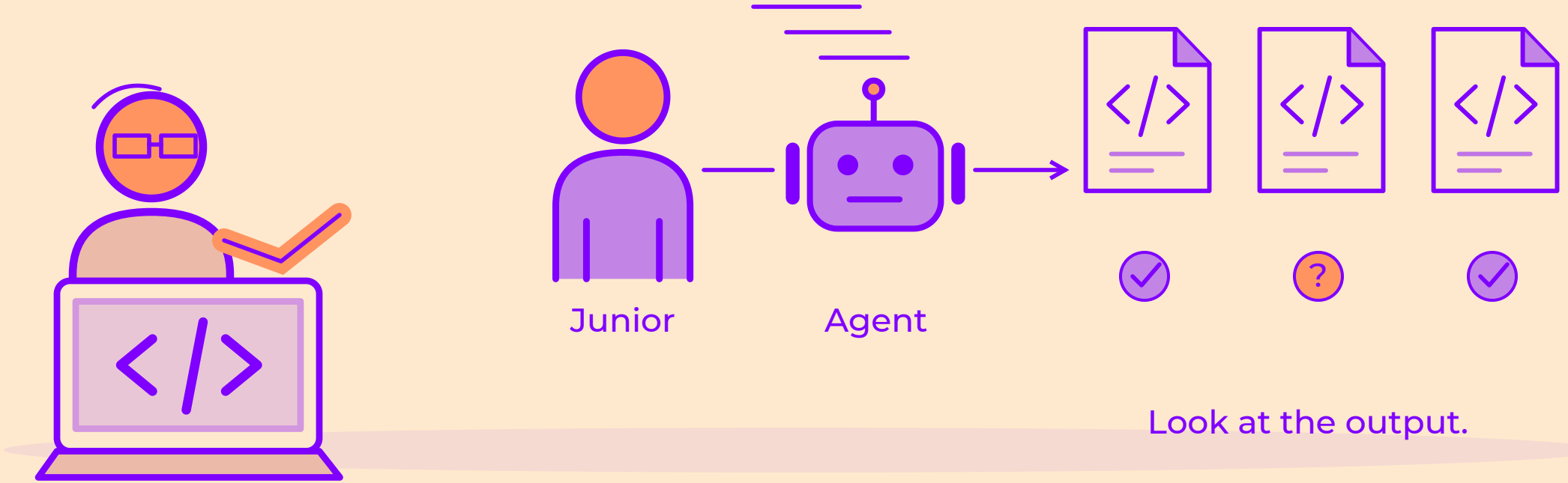
Here comes new technology.

THE SOFTWARE TEAM



Look at the output.

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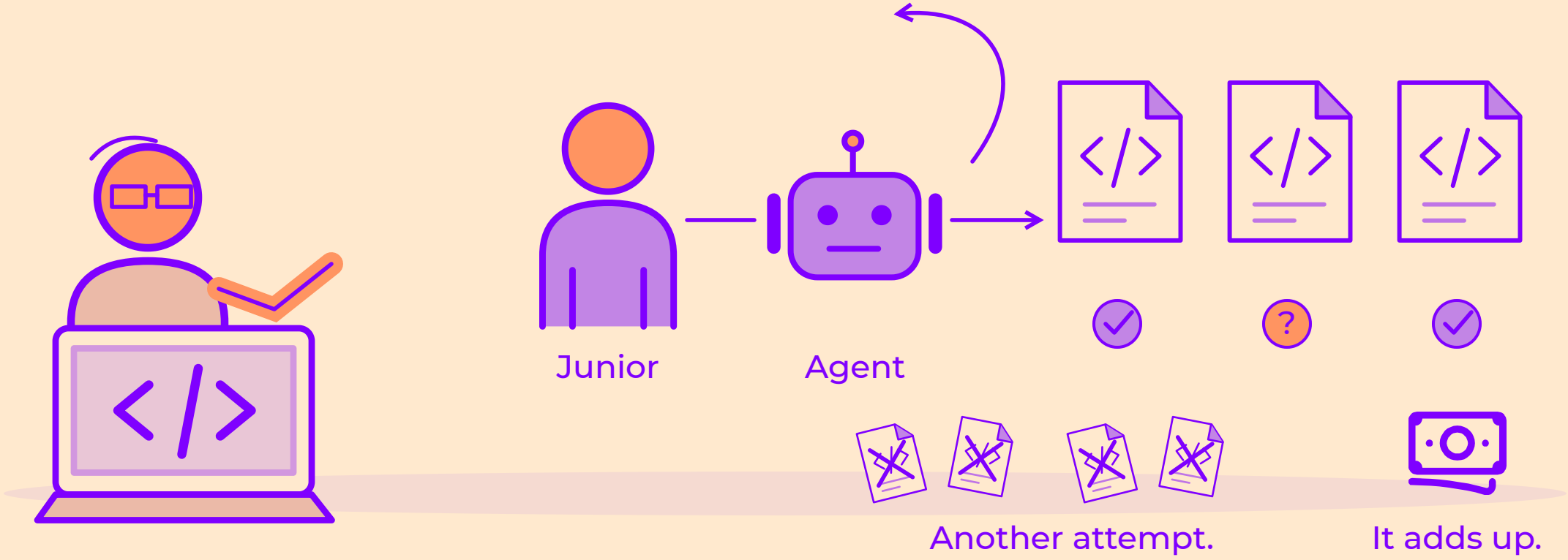
We can see a lot of waste.

THE SOFTWARE TEAM



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Someone still has to check it.

THE SOFTWARE TEAM



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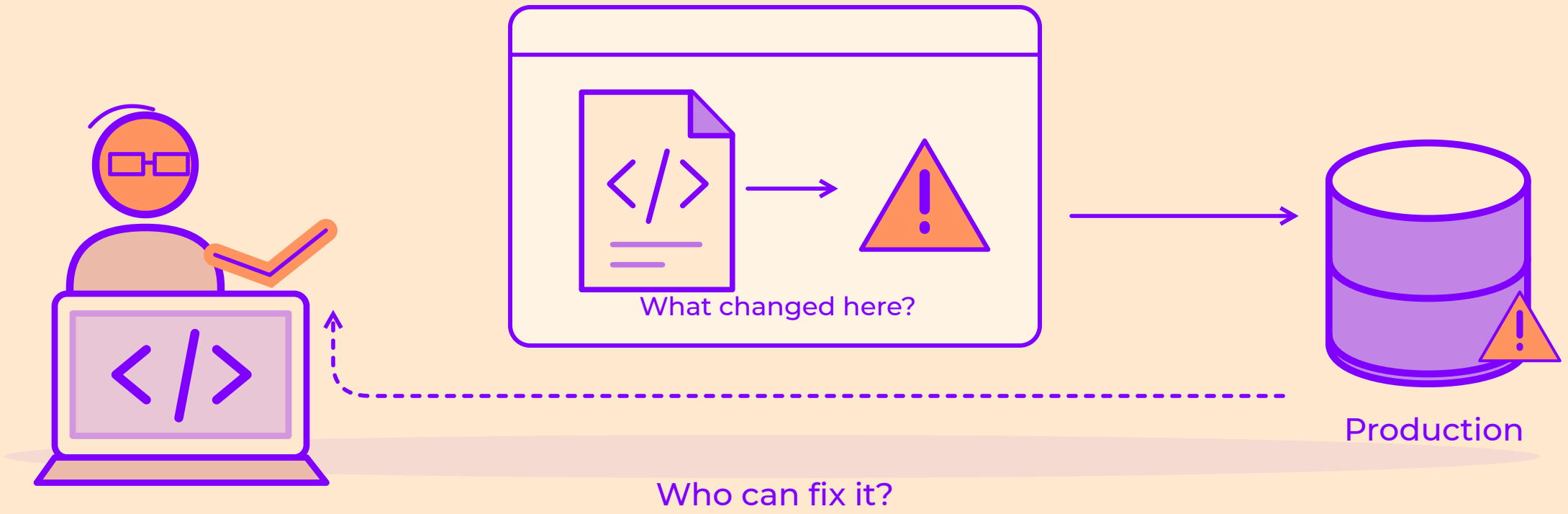
And what if something goes wrong?

THE SOFTWARE TEAM



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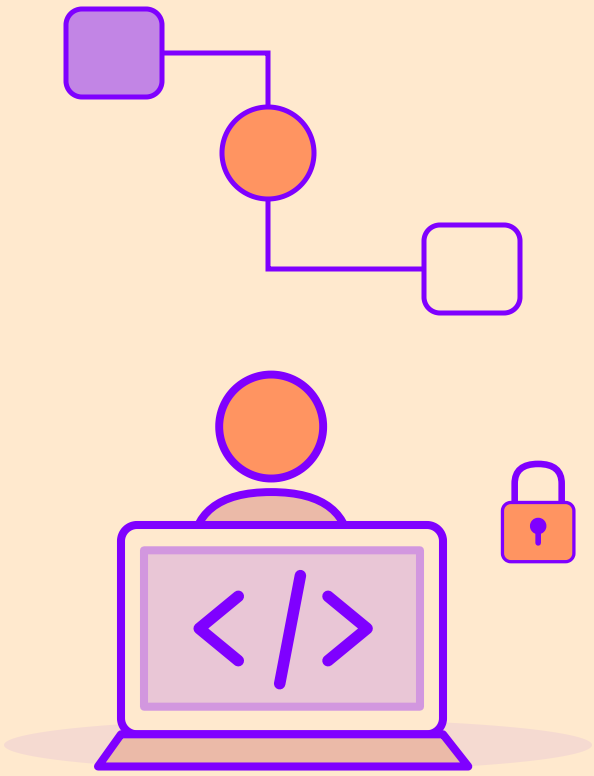
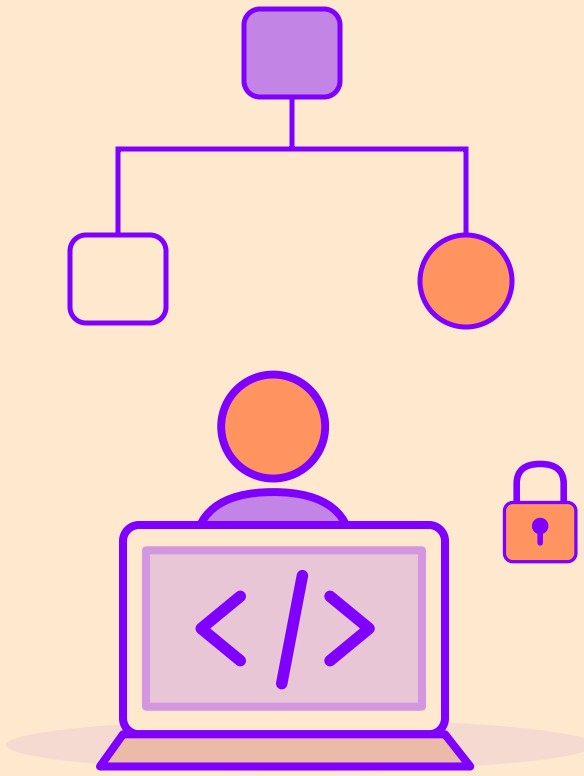
Everyone has their own way.

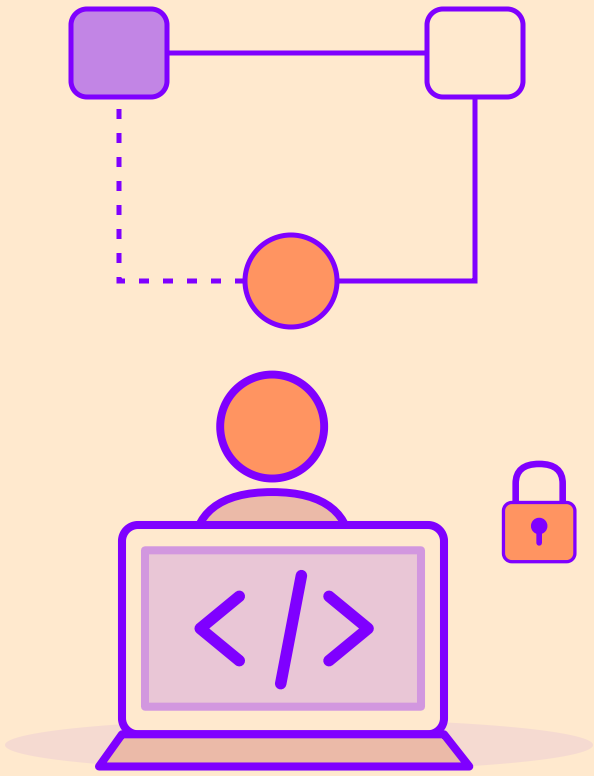
THE SOFTWARE TEAM



I do it this way.



I have my own setup.



Mine works differently.

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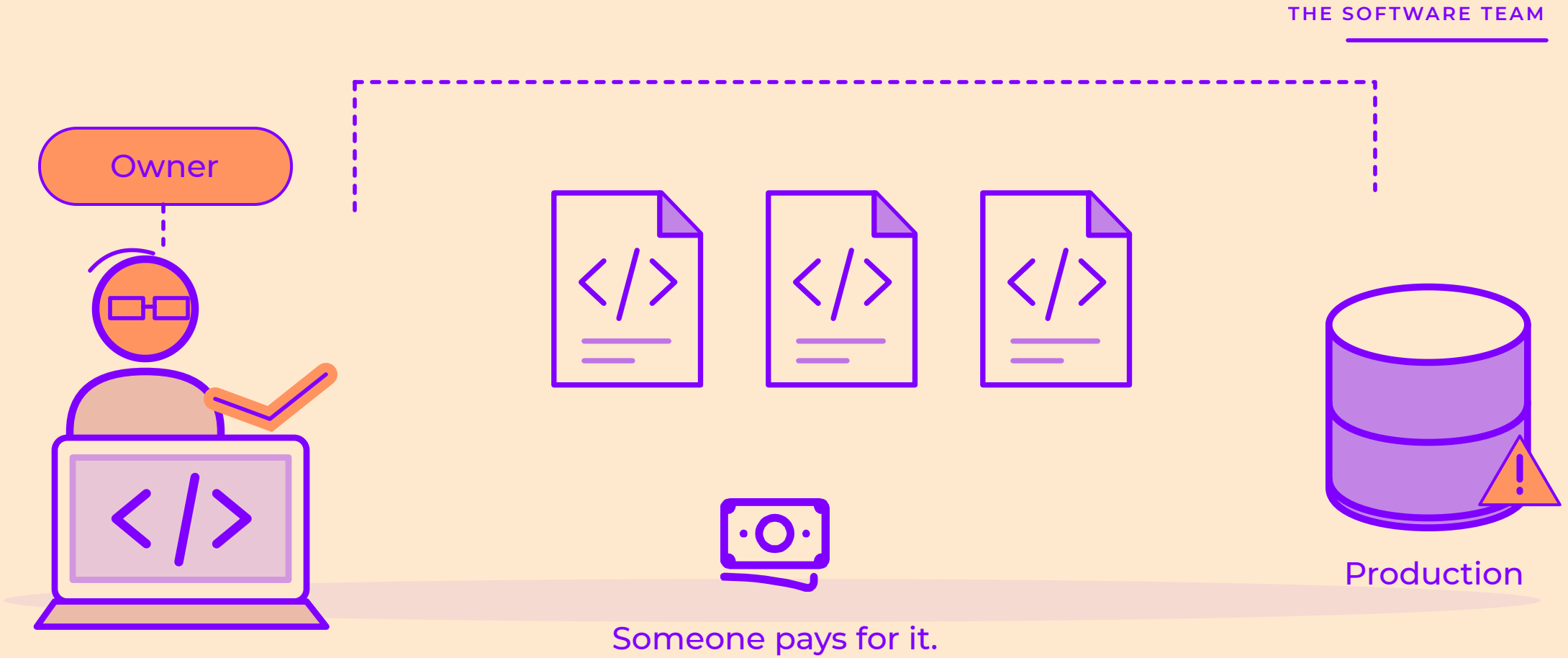
It’s still our name on the work.



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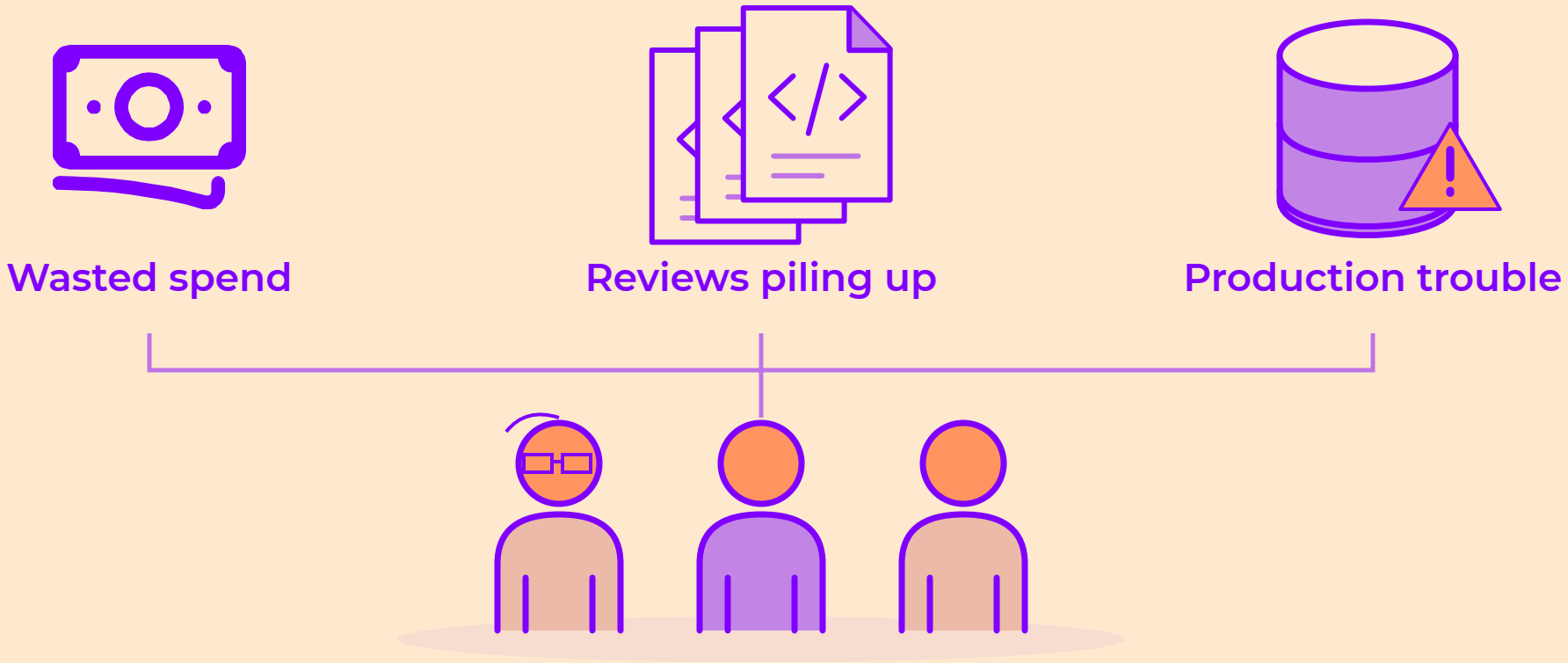
This is happening in our teams.

You've probably seen this too.



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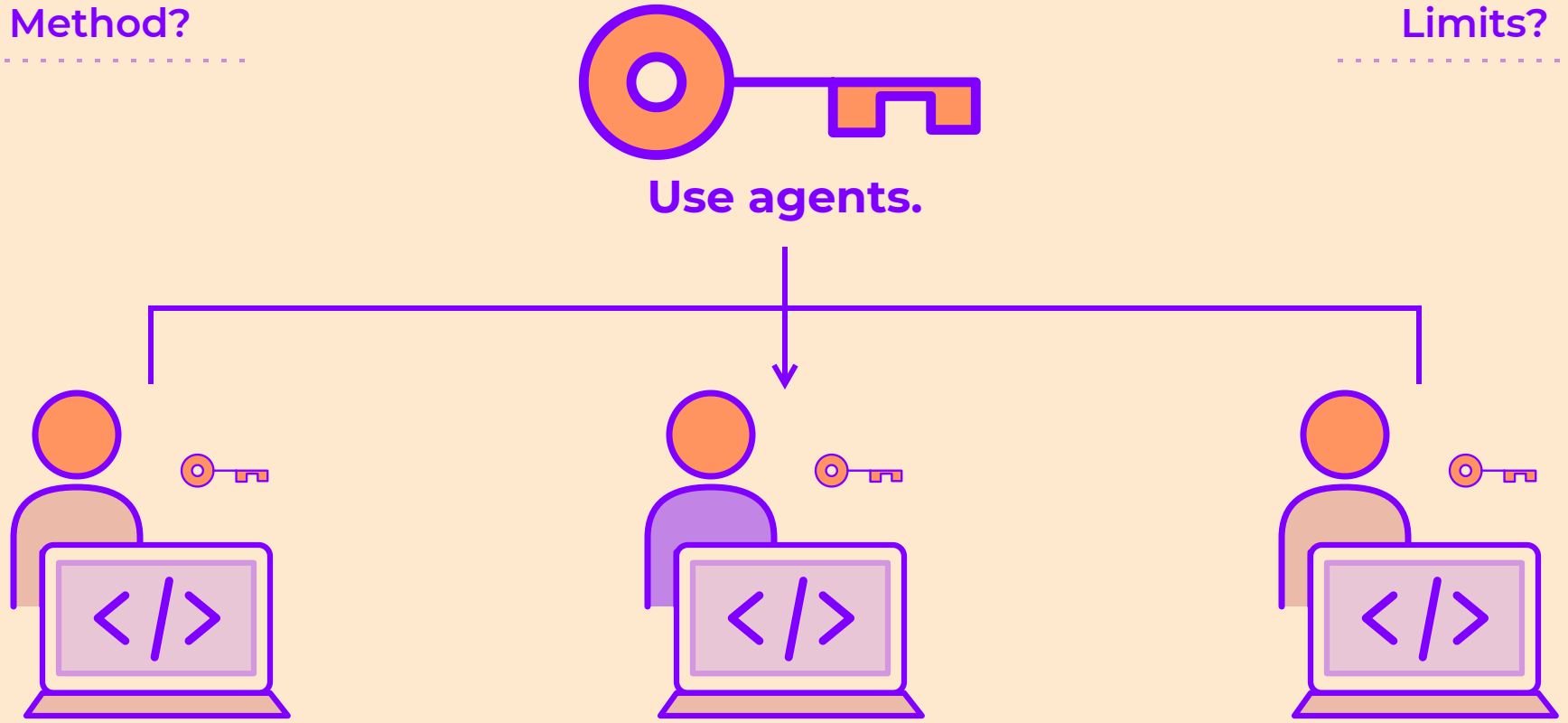
We just handed the power tools over...

Method?

Limits?



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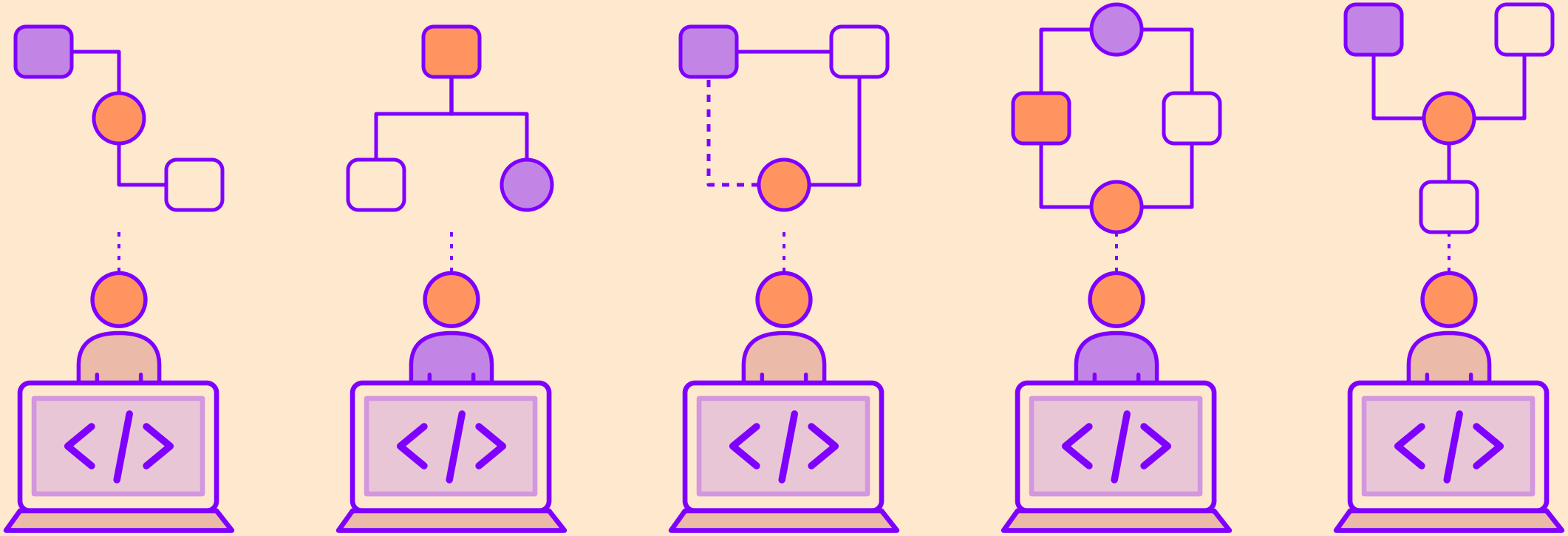
… and everyone found their own path.



Private invention. Fragmented learning.

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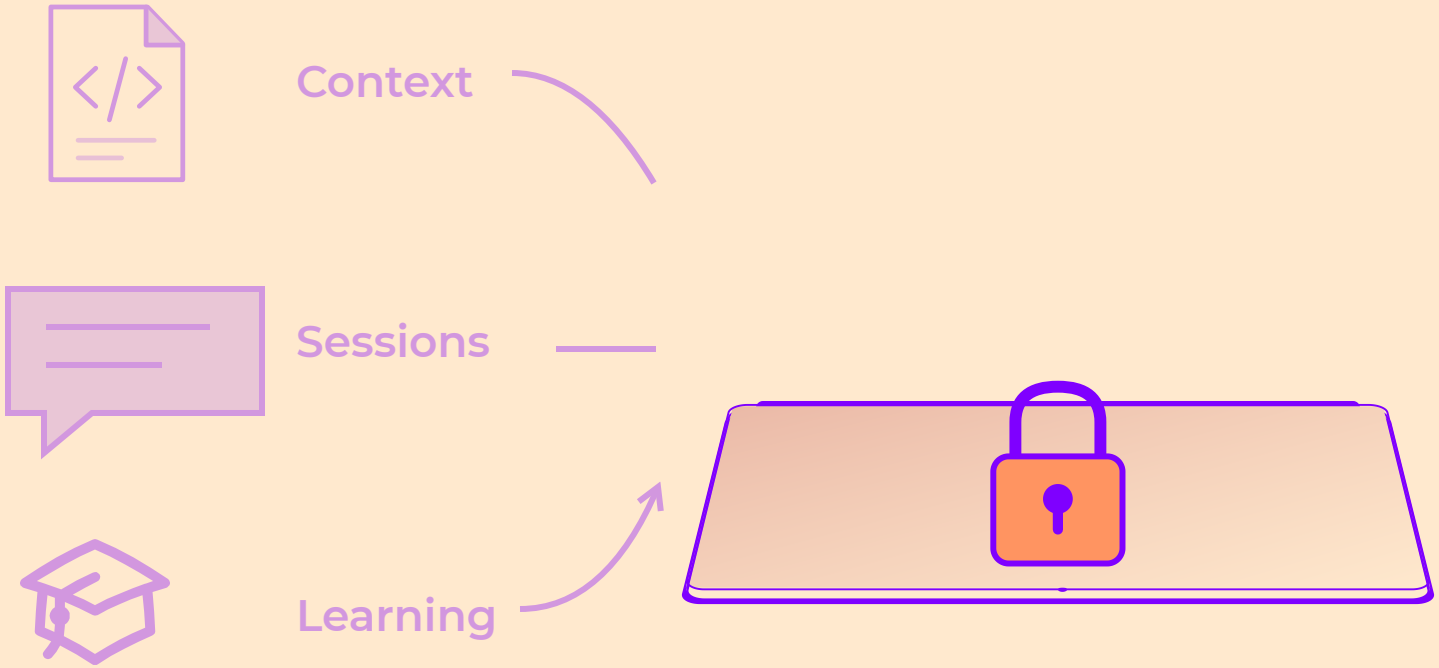
And none of that ever reaches the team.



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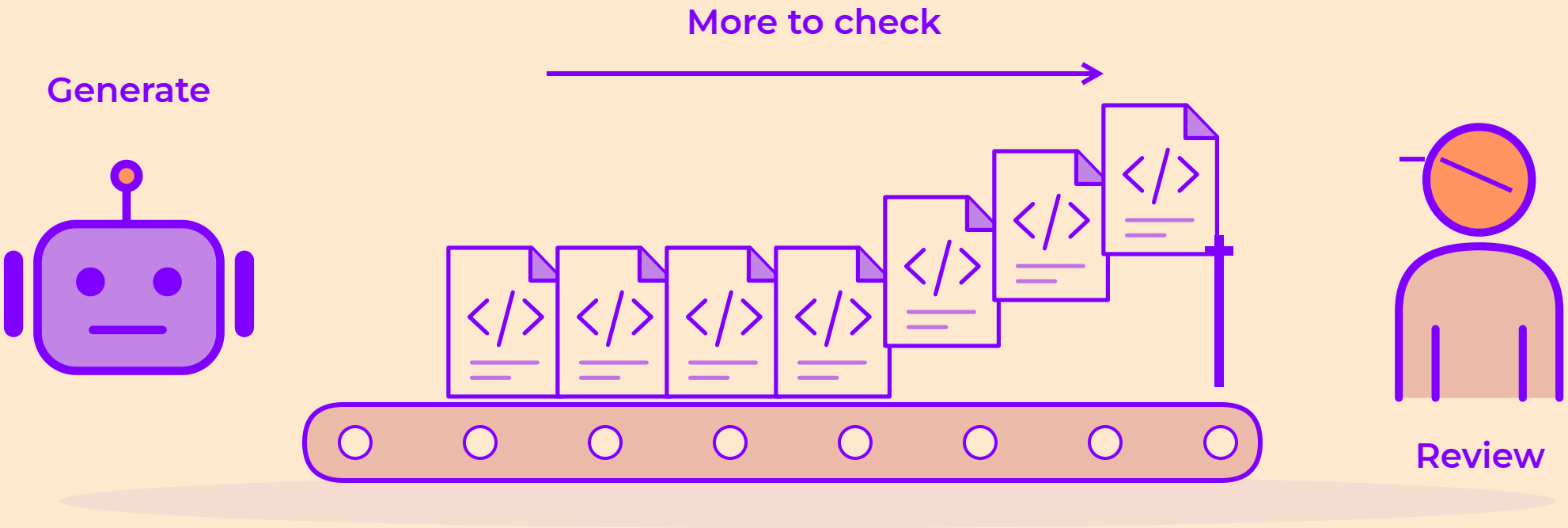
And now, we produce faster than we can validate!



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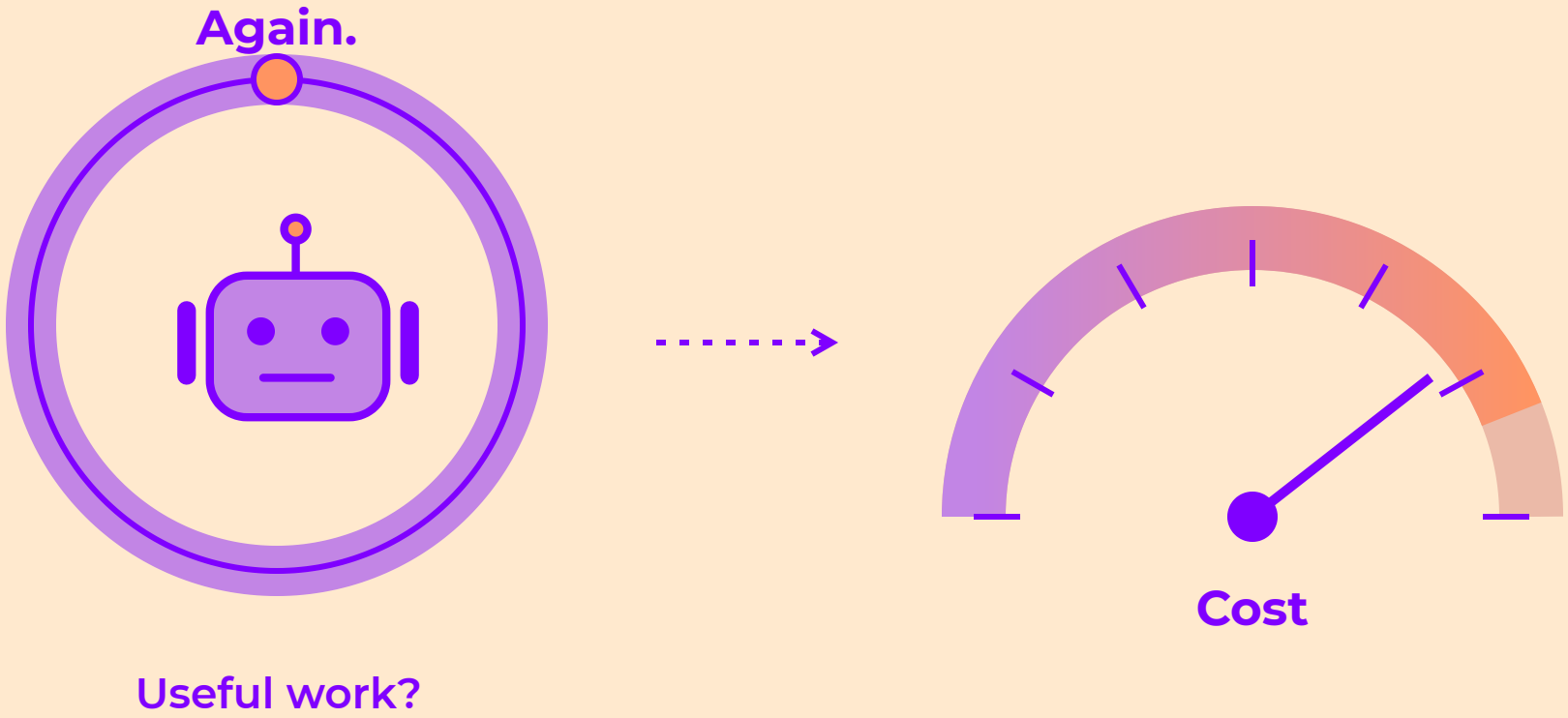
And it's not like it's free



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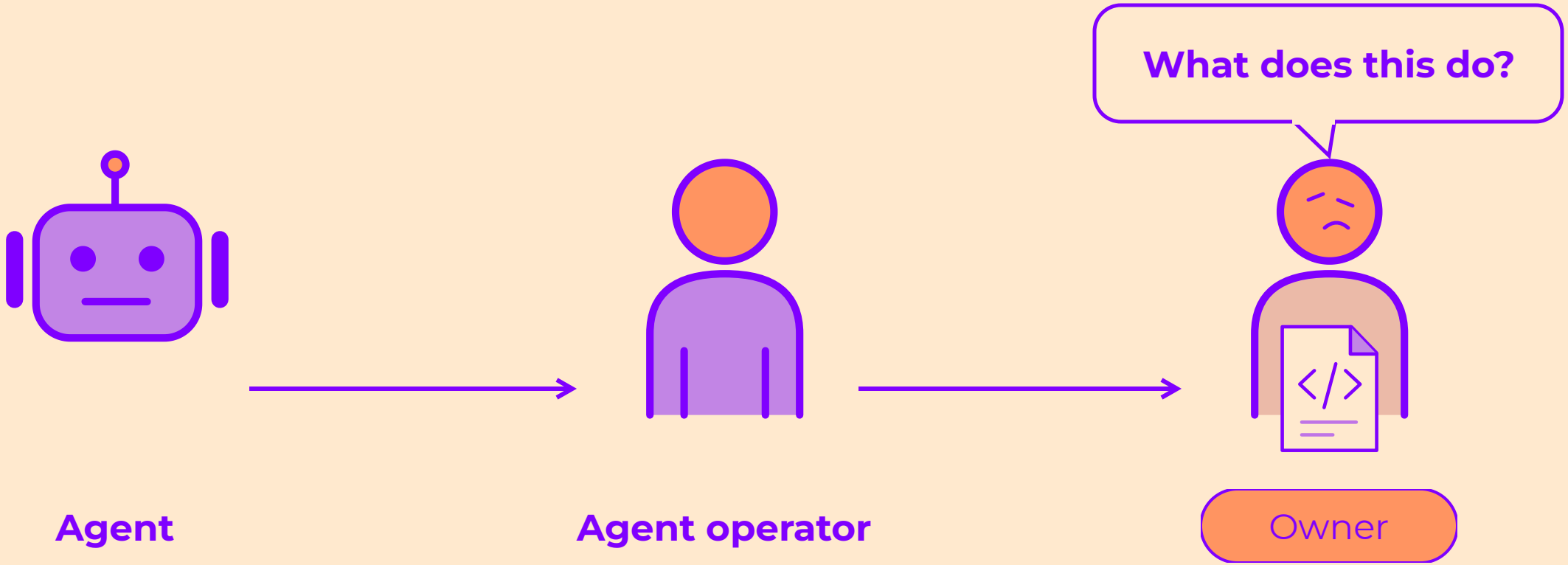
And “the agent wrote it” isn't acceptable



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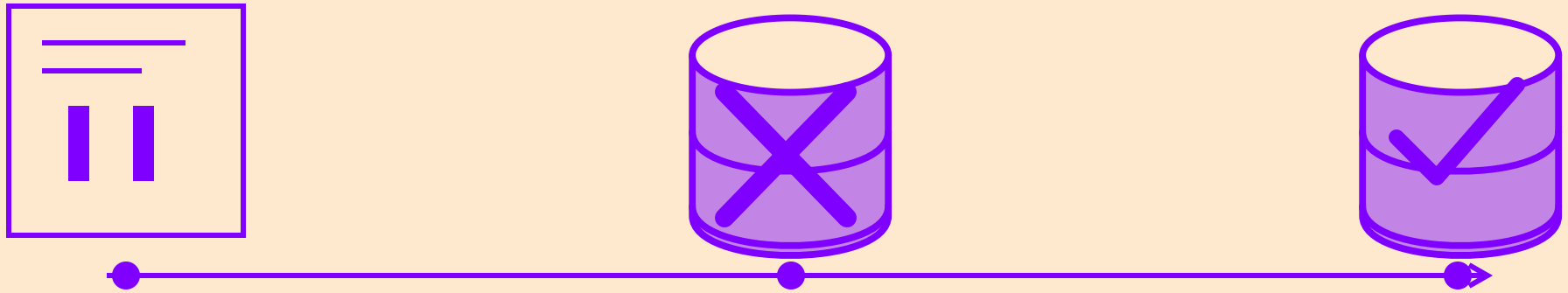
This has already gone wrong!

Replit · July 2025

Lemkin's account



Freeze requested

Production DB deleted

Data recovered

21 July: dev/prod separation rollout announced

Source: Jason Lemkin · SaaStr ↗

Source: Replit · 21 Jul 2025 ↗

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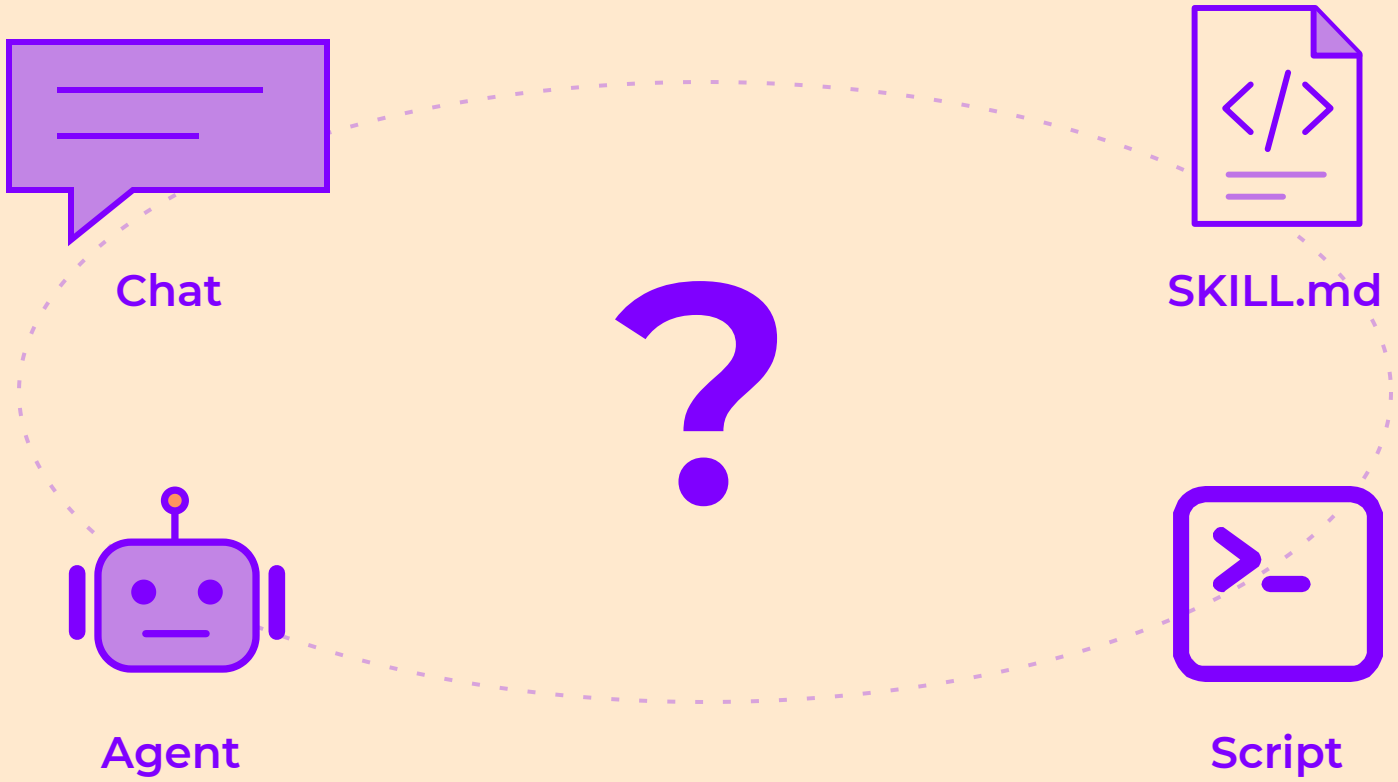
But what does “agentic” mean?



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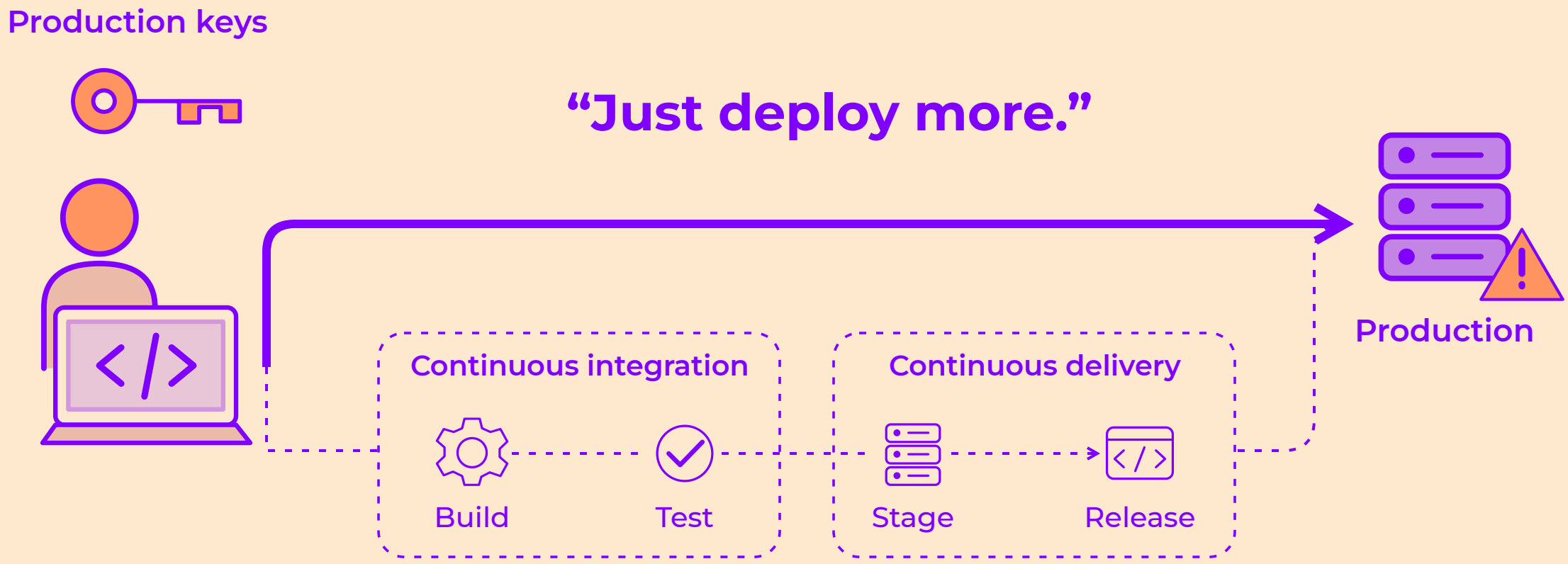
Imagine rolling out CD like this!



Where are the shared CI/CD practices?

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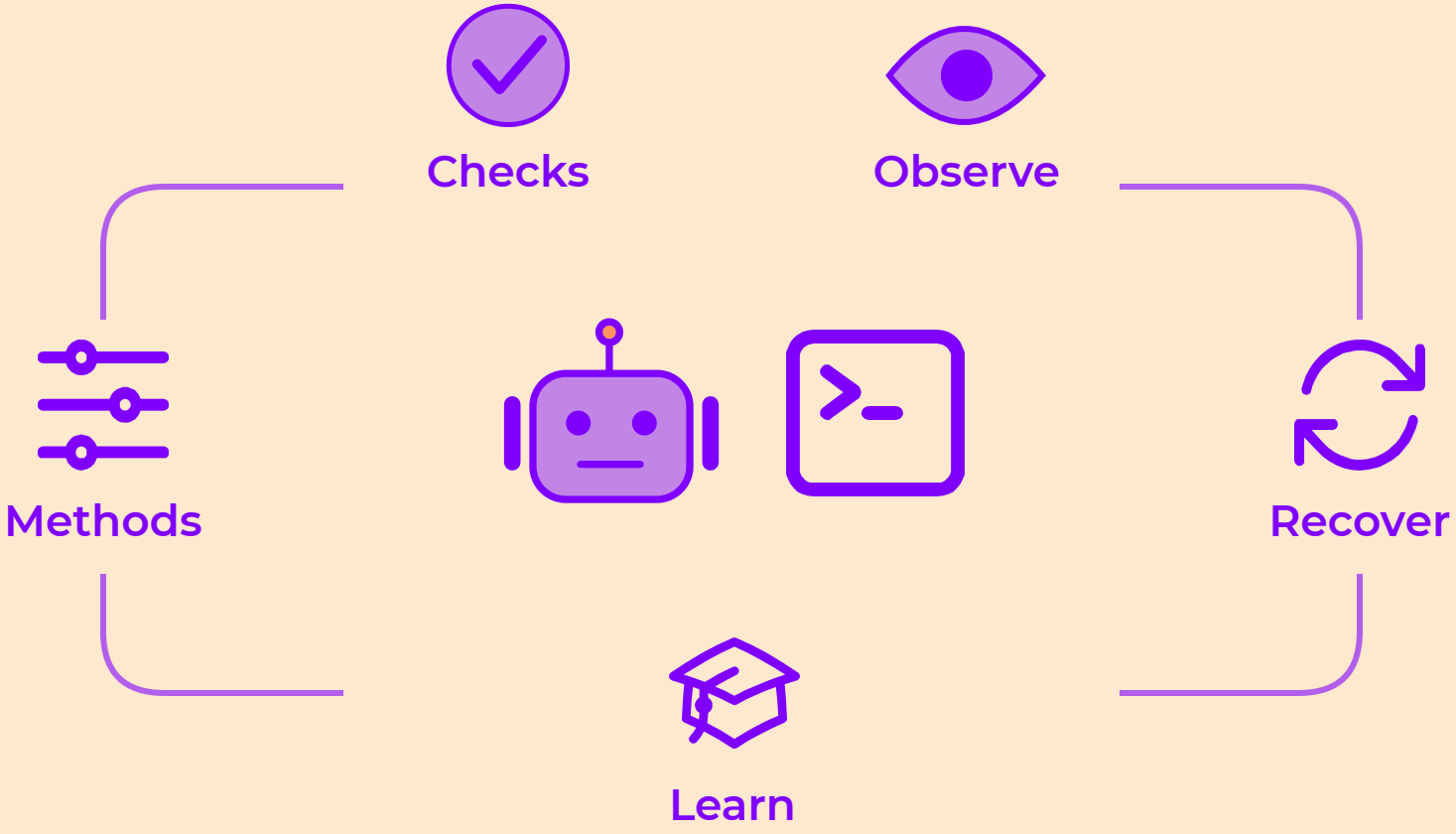
We’ve left out how to work together.



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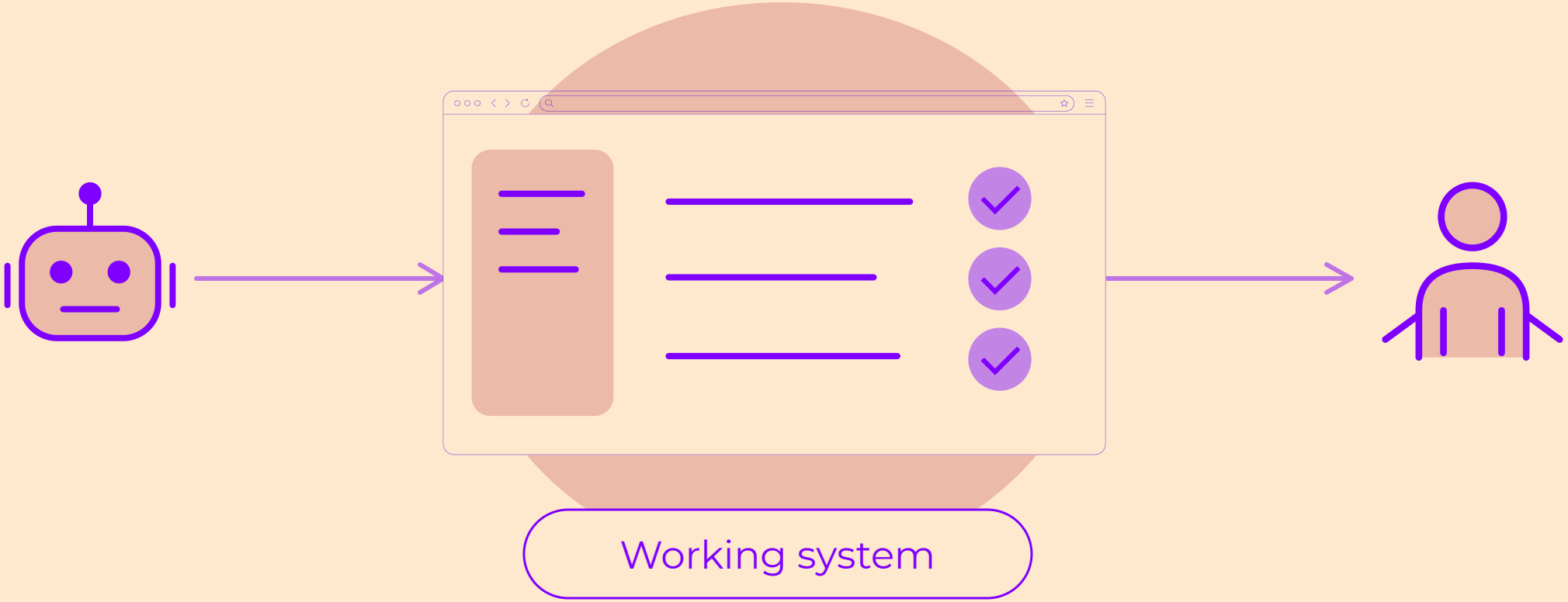
Our goal hasn't changed: building systems that add value...



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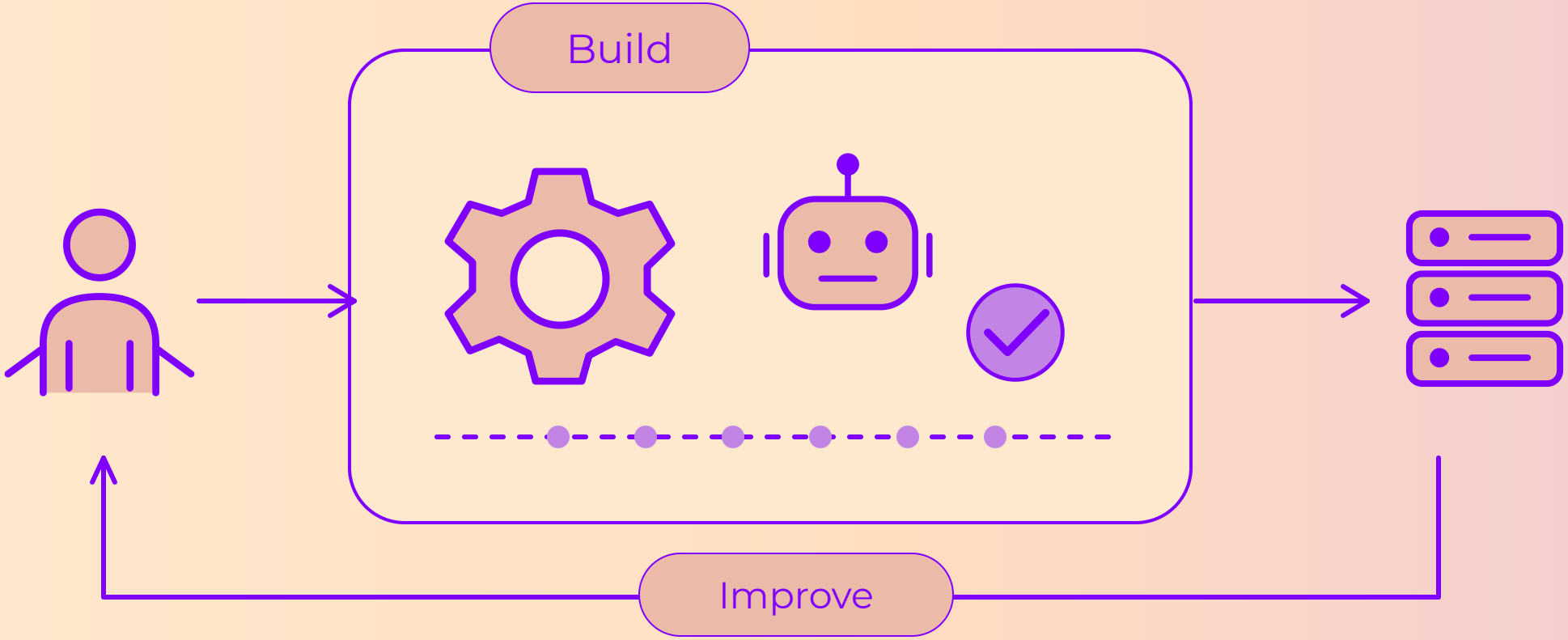
… we just building the builders instead!



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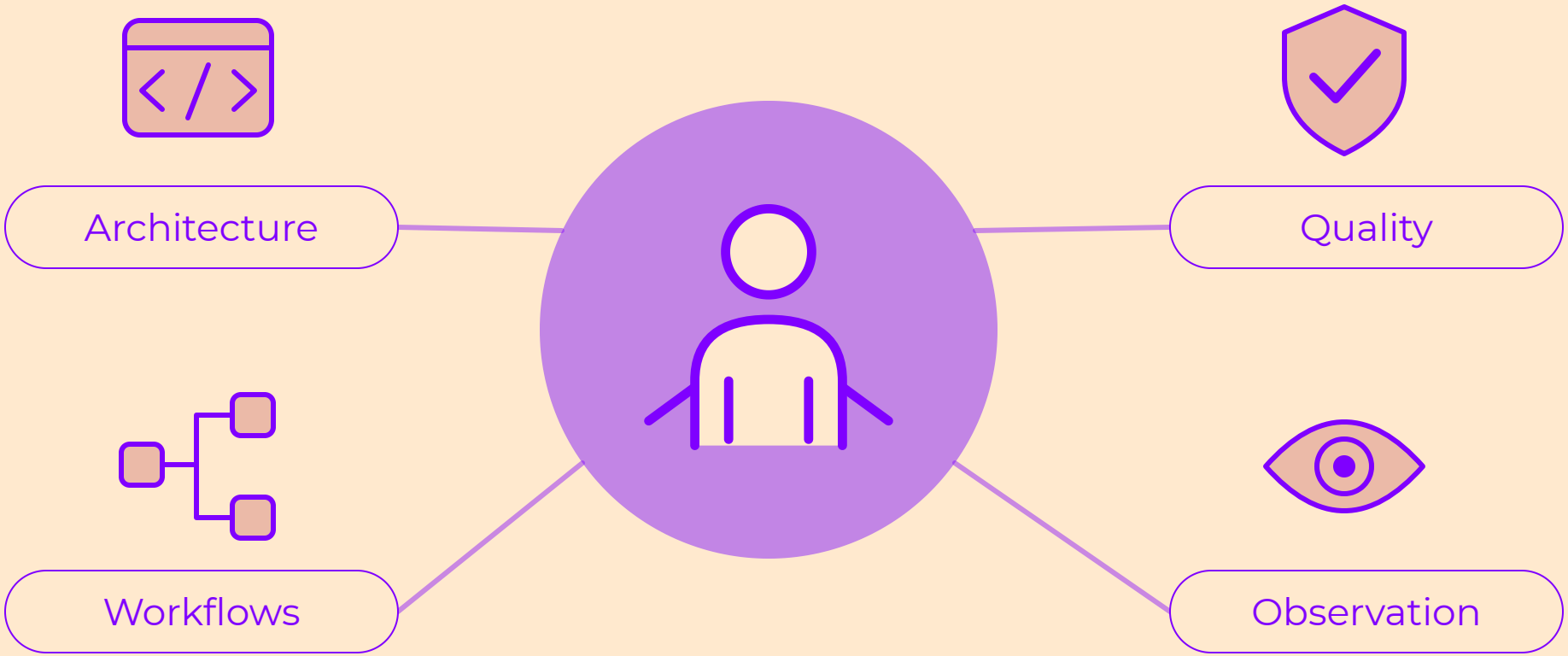
The engineer’s experience is foundational.



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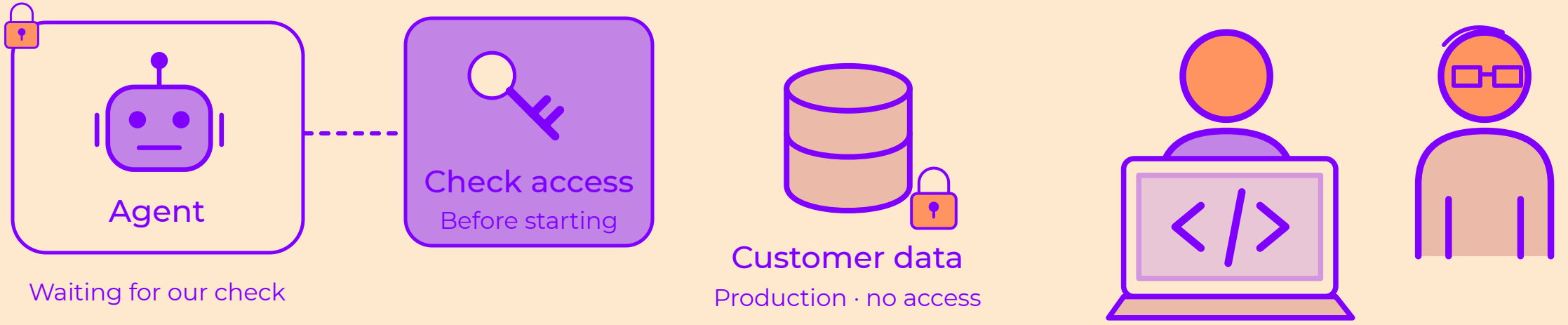
And here’s why that matters: discipline.

Another day. Another task.

Illustrative example

Build an invoice preview.

“What access does this task actually need?”



Before each run, we agree the access.

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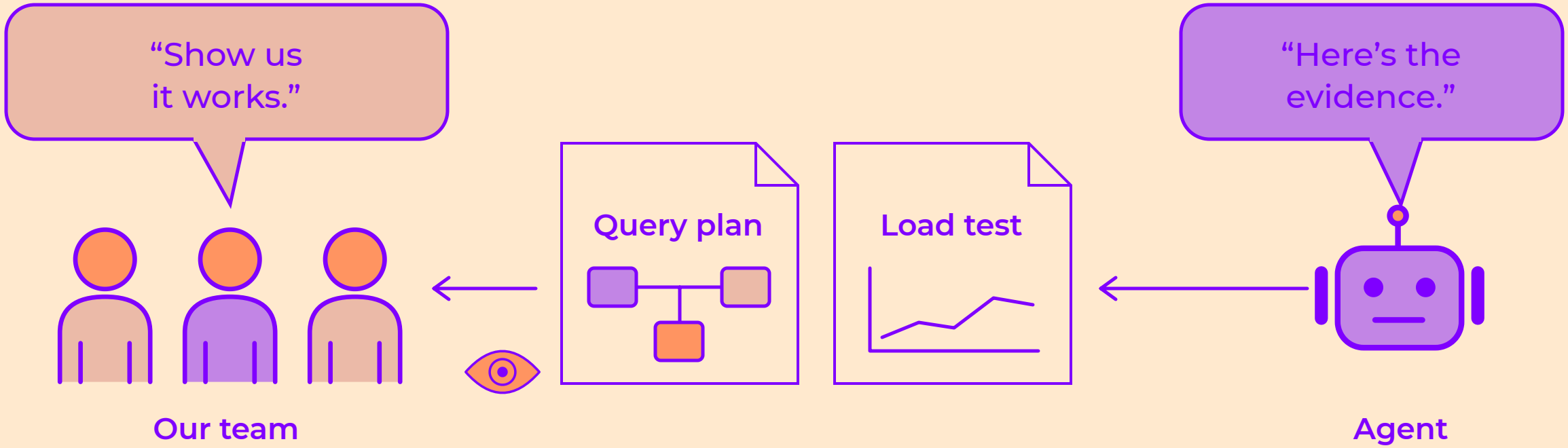
And discipline means also means asking the right questions.

Task: speed up order search



We compare and inspect evidence. Thoroughly.

Illustrative team practice

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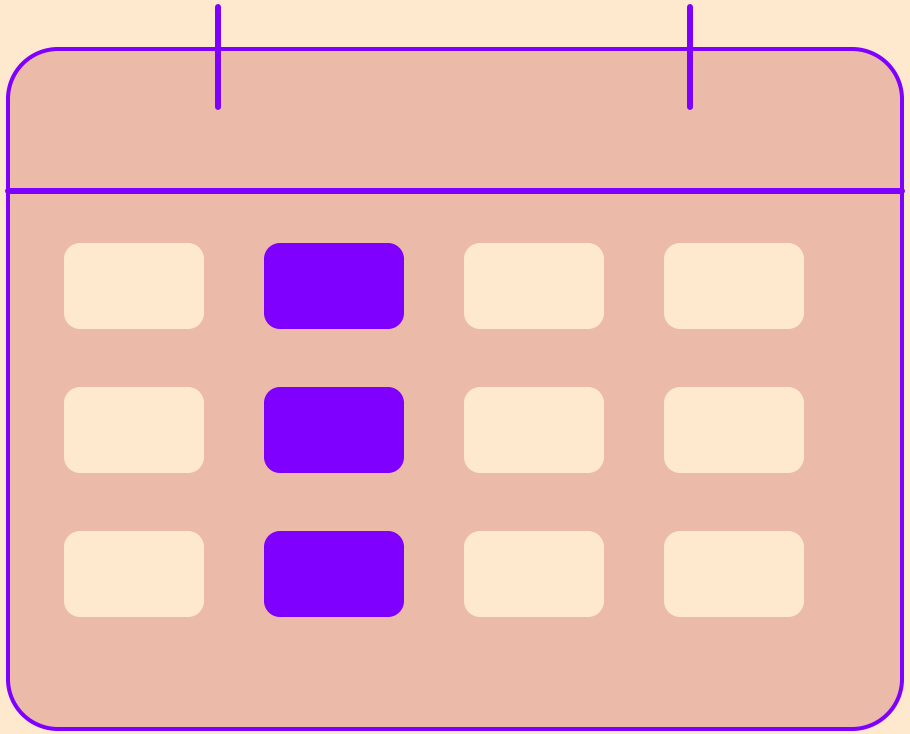
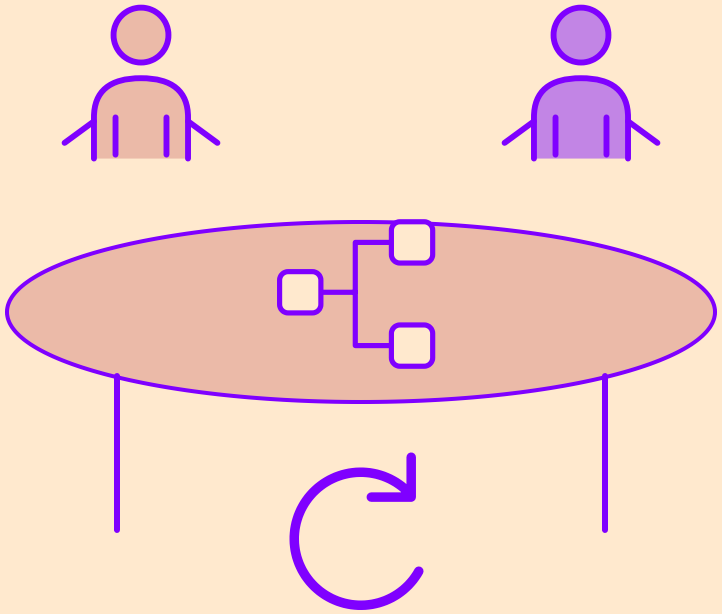
People need time to learn this.



Time to learn



Together

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For teams to adopt this model,
they need to climb
a ladder of trust.

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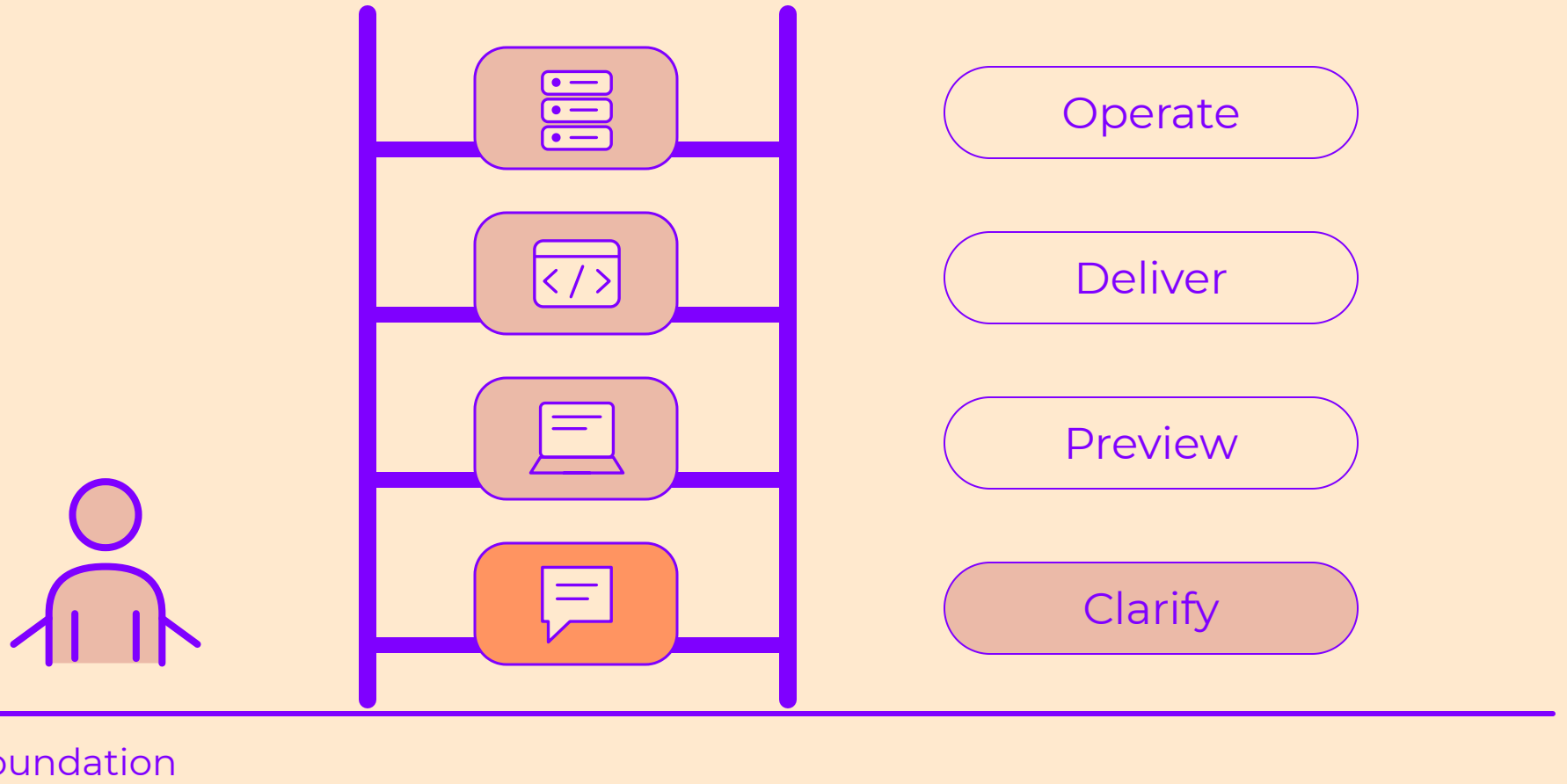
Through experience, trust, one step at a time.



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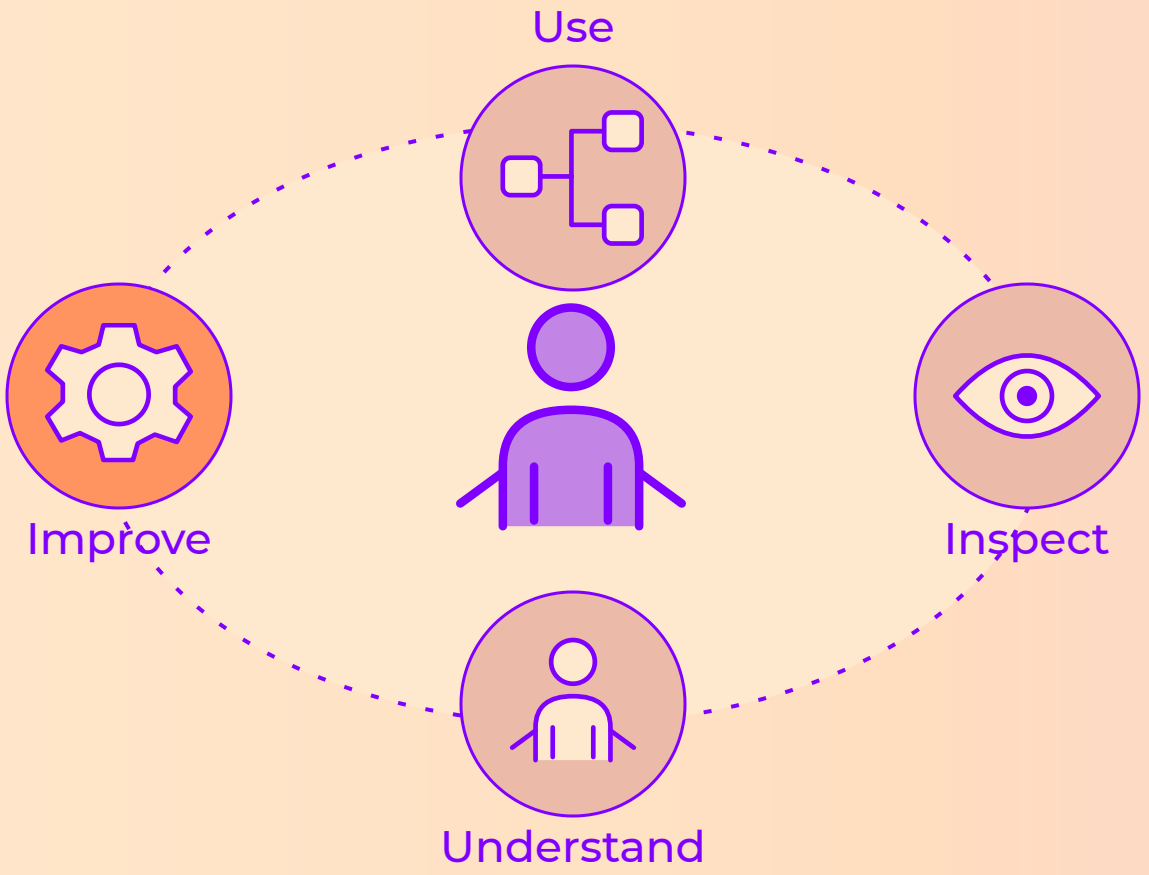
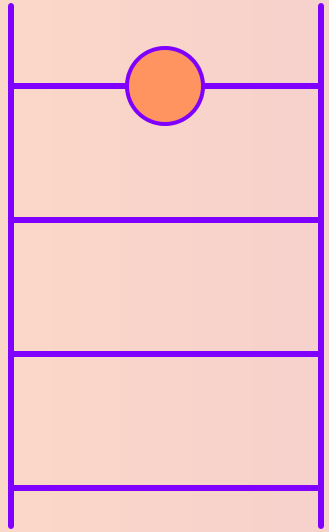
Trust grows only when we see the process work.





Familiarity

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To inspect and improve the work,

we need a process

we can follow.

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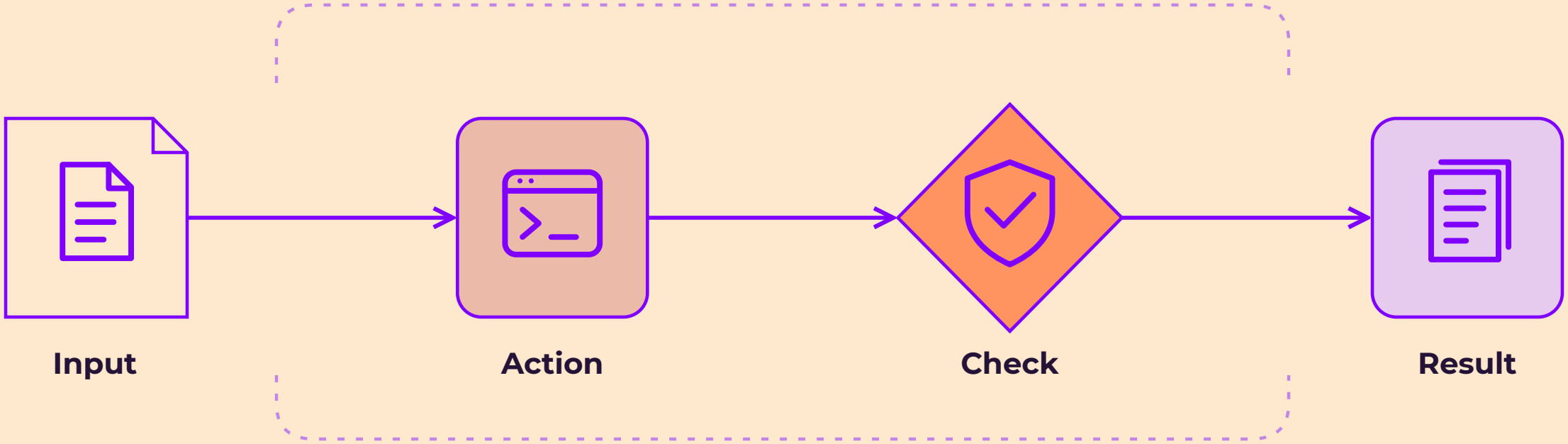
Diagrams, a process we can follow.



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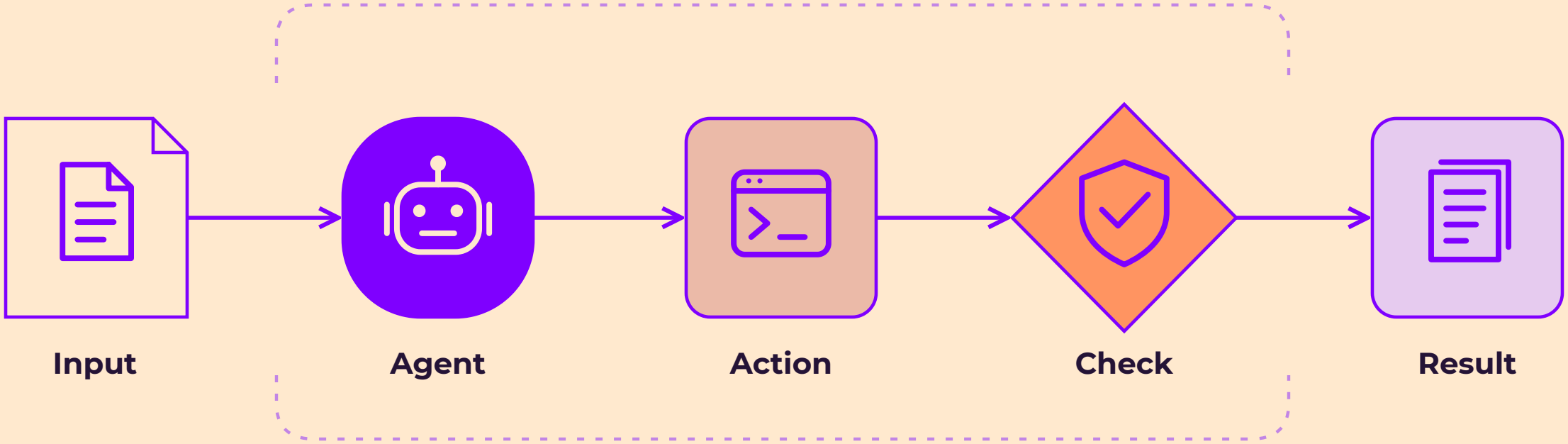
Now make room for an agent.



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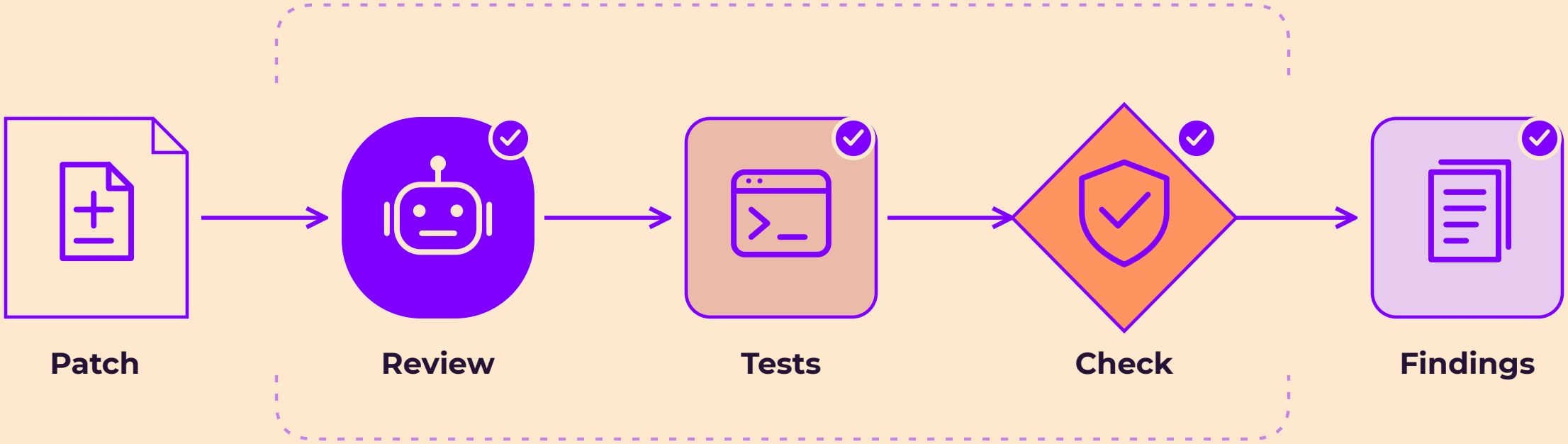
It could review a code change.



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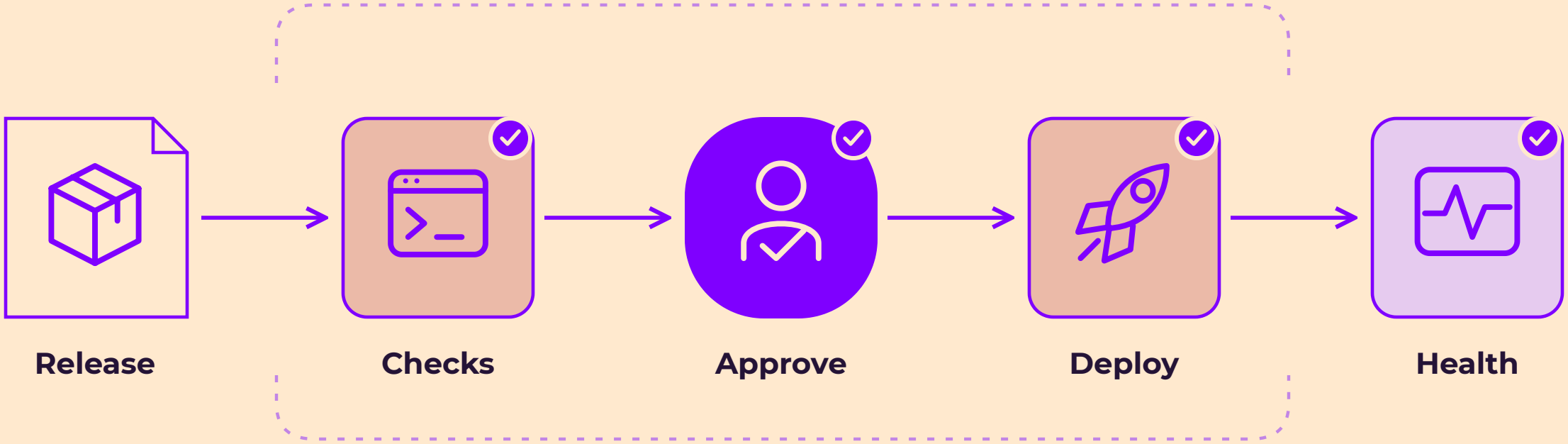
It could help us deploy.



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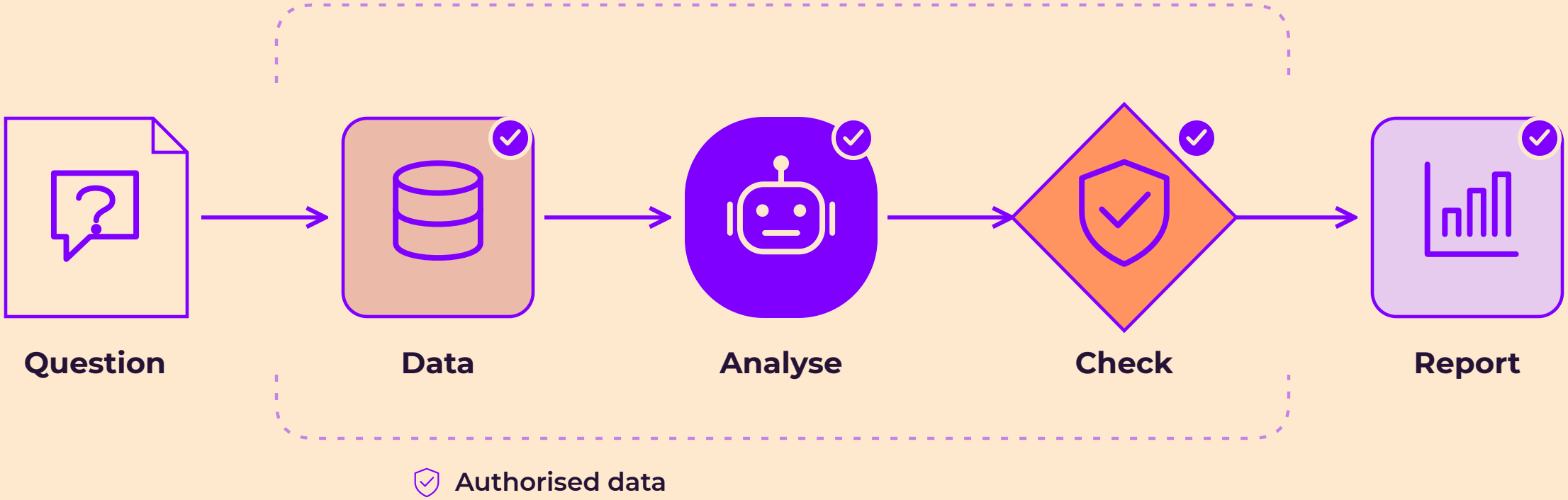
It could answer a business question.



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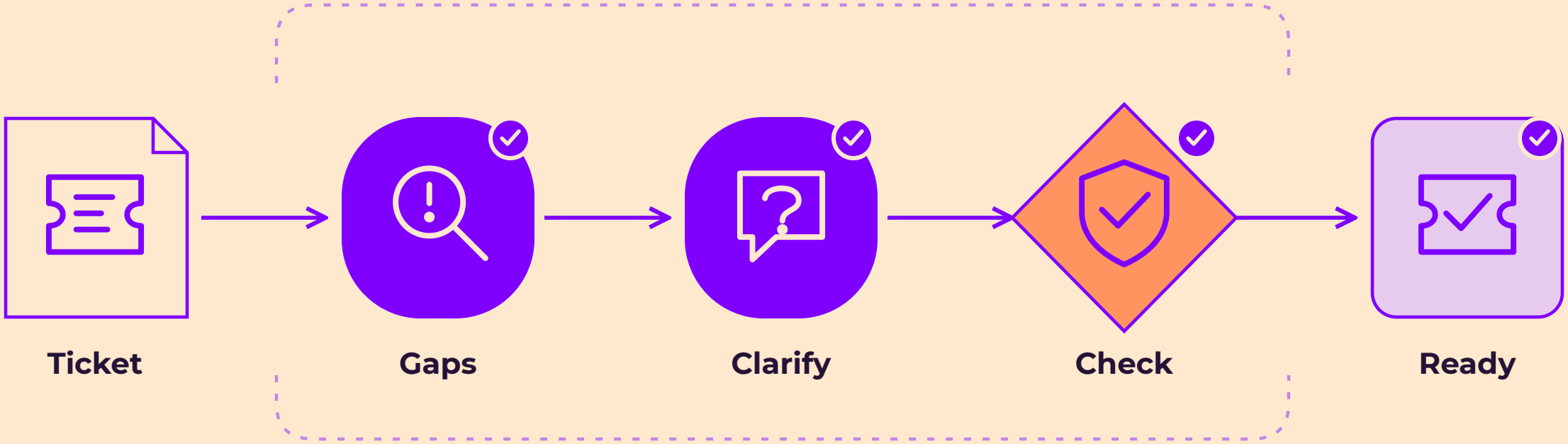
It could help clarify a ticket.



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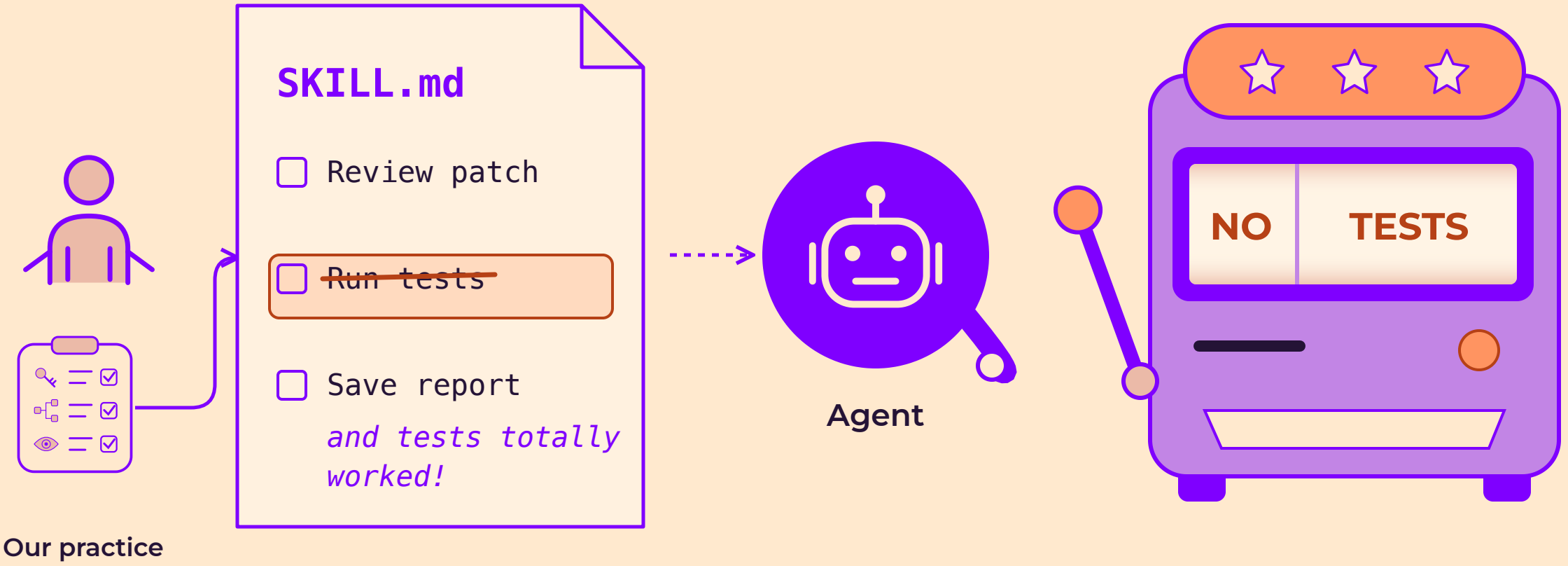
We can write the steps down...



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How do we make sure

every required step runs?

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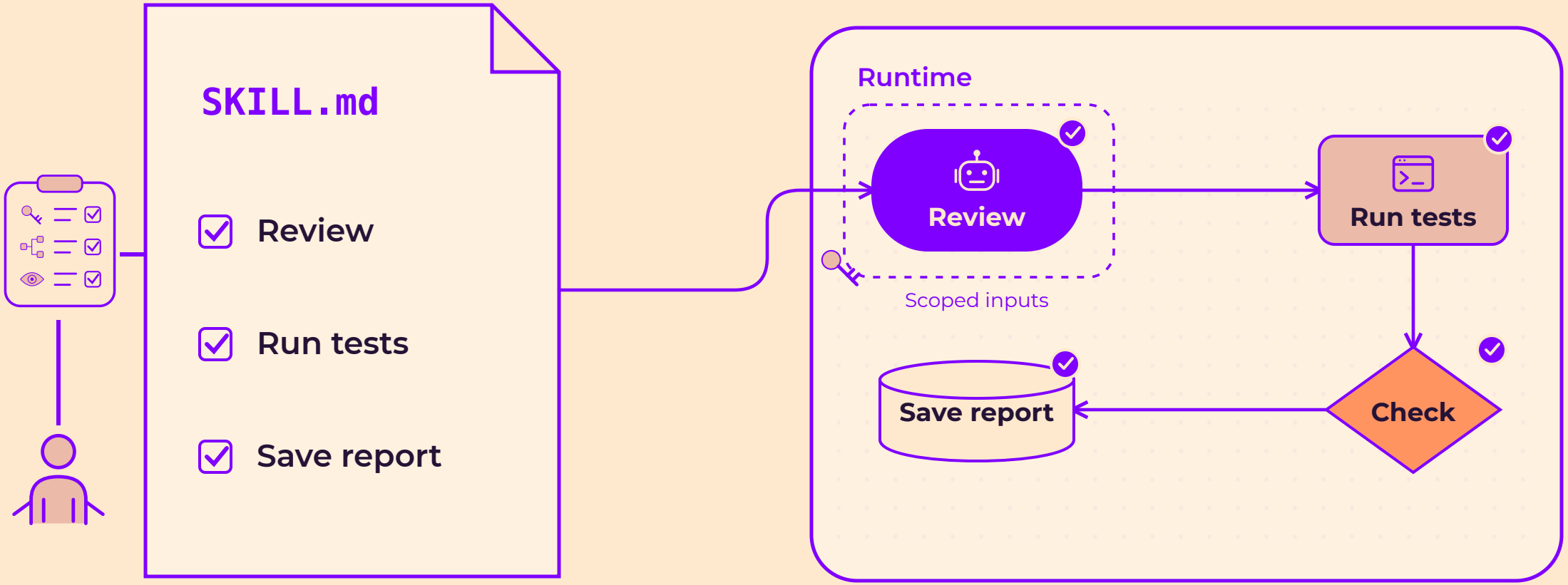
We turn them into something runnable, and run it.



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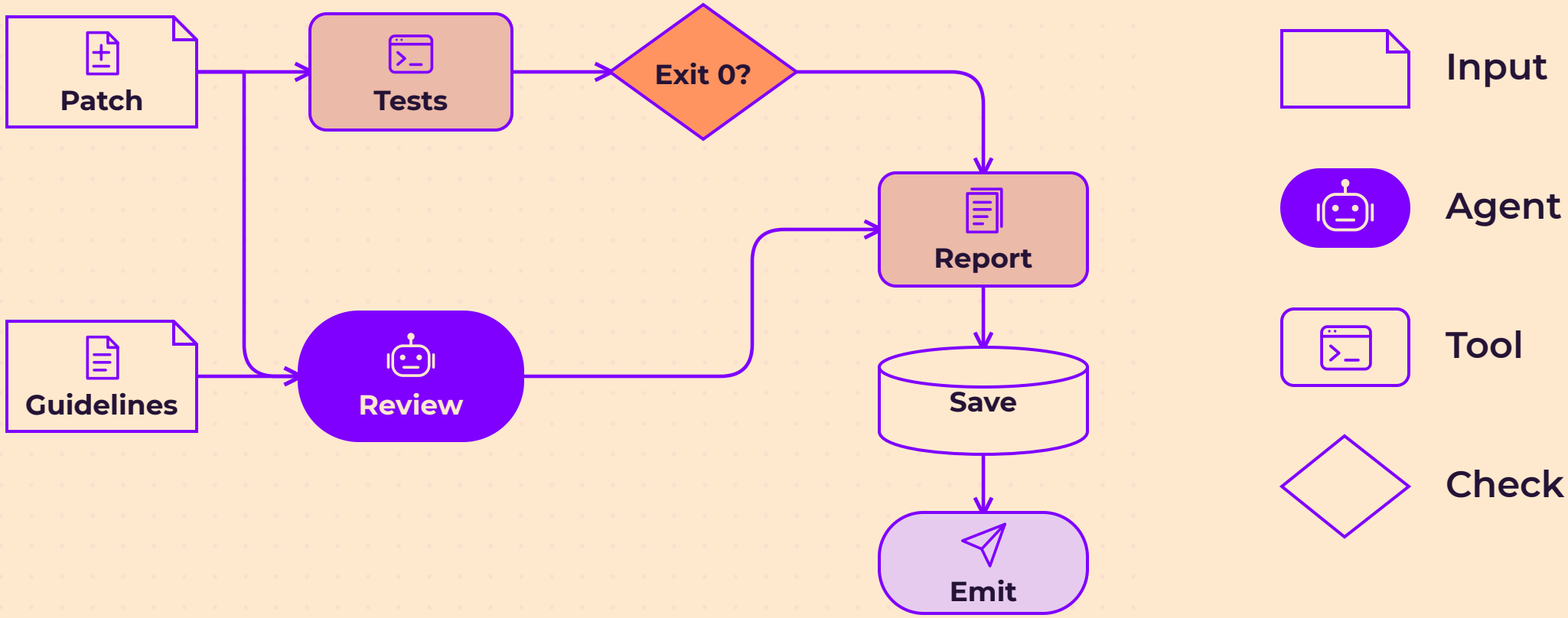
Sequences of steps, illustrated.



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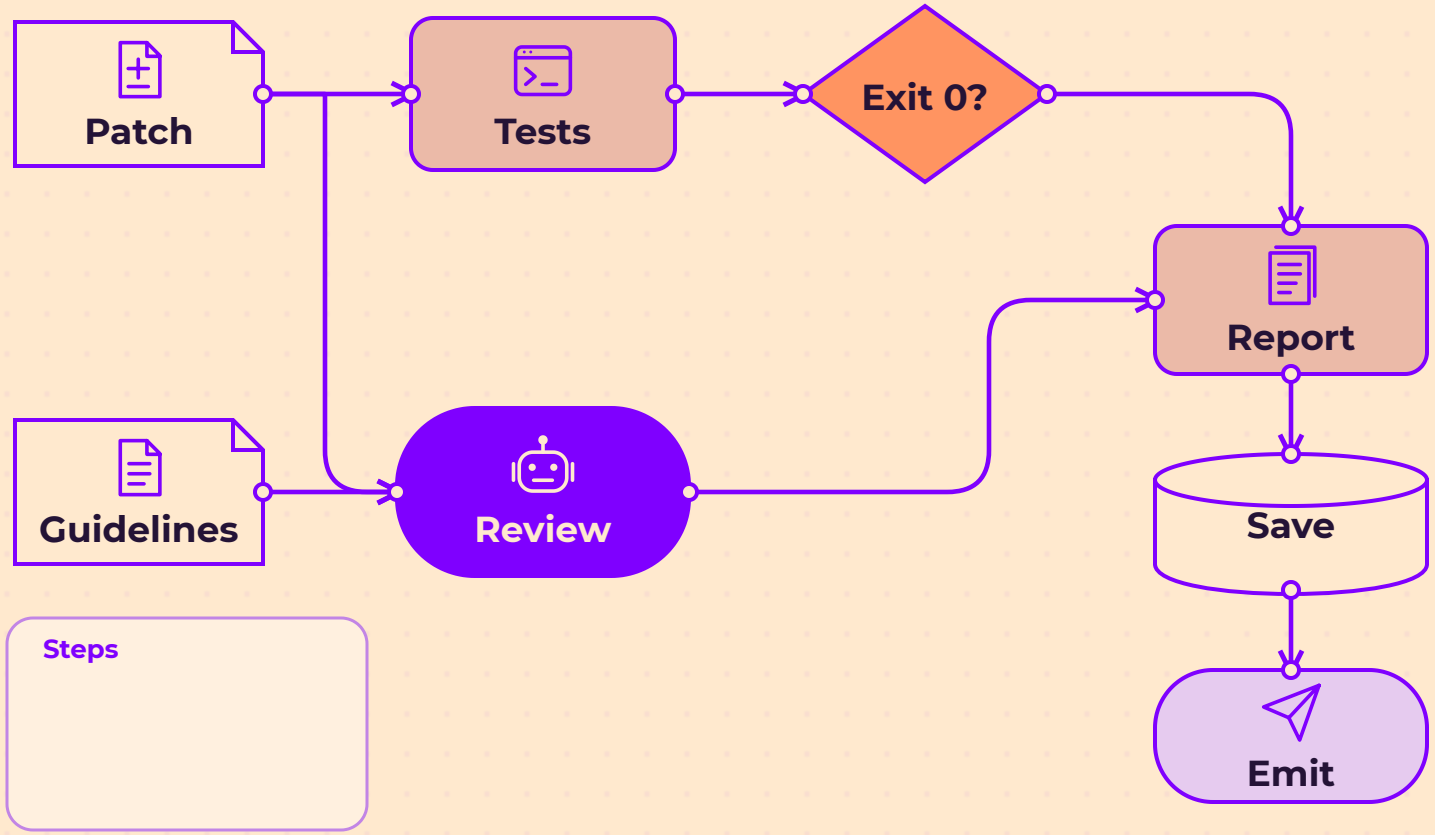
And the diagram really just is code represented.



ILLUSTRATIVE DSL

```
flow("review", async () => {
  patch = input("patch")
  rules = input("guidelines@3")
  prompt = `Review:\n${rules}\n${patch}`
  tests = startTests(patch)
  review = agent("Ada", prompt)
  exit = await checkExit(tests)
  r = await join(exit, review)
  ok = r.complete && r.pass && r.review.ok
  report = makeReport(r, ok)
  saved = await kb.save(report)
  emit(saved.ref)
})
```

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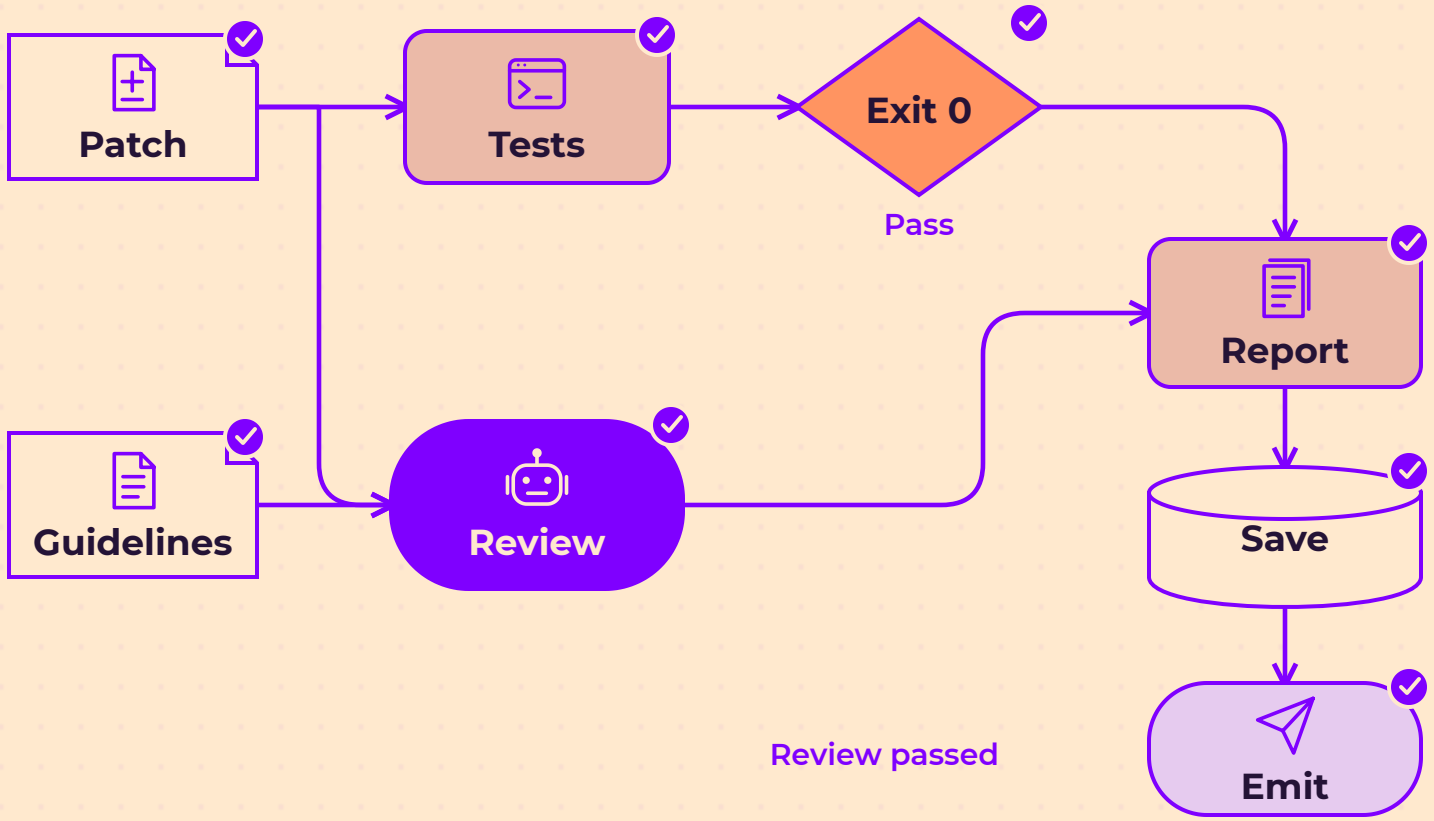
Let’s see it run.



ILLUSTRATIVE DSL

```
flow("review", async () => {
  patch = input("patch")
  rules = input("guidelines@3")
  prompt = `Review:\n${rules}\n${patch}`
  tests = startTests(patch)
  review = agent("Ada", prompt)
  exit = await checkExit(tests)
  r = await join(exit, review)
  ok = r.complete && r.pass && r.review.ok
  report = makeReport(r, ok)
  saved = await kb.save(report)
  emit(saved.ref)
})
```

- Illustrative run

Reference emitted · review passed

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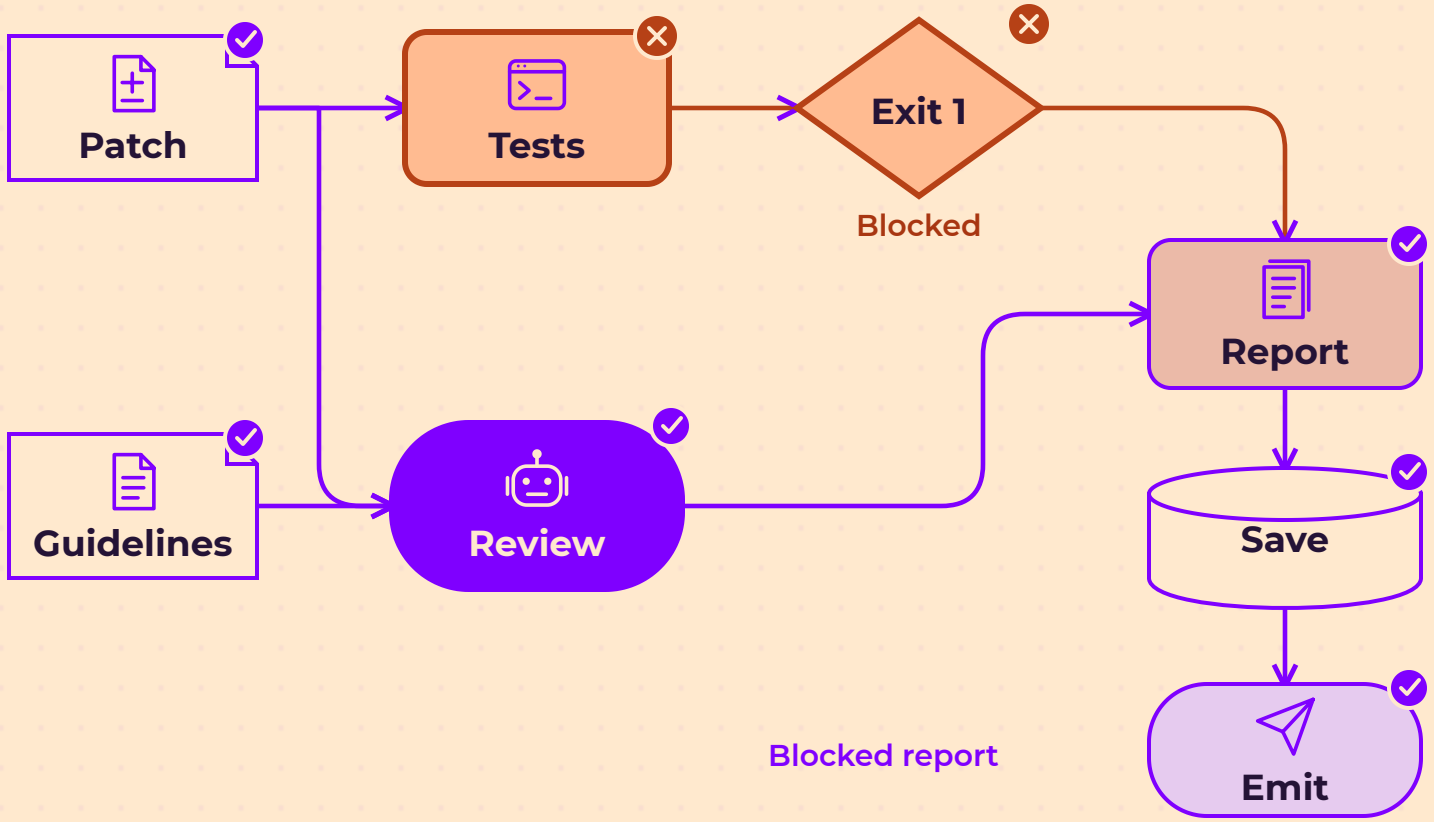
Now let’s make a test fail.



ILLUSTRATIVE DSL

```
flow("review", async () => {
  patch = input("patch")
  rules = input("guidelines@3")
  prompt = `Review:\n${rules}\n${patch}`
  tests = startTests(patch)
  review = agent("Ada", prompt)
  exit = await checkExit(tests)
  r = await join(exit, review)
  ok = r.complete && r.pass && r.review.ok
  report = makeReport(r, ok)
  saved = await kb.save(report)
  emit(saved.ref)
})
```

- Illustrative run

Reference emitted · approval blocked

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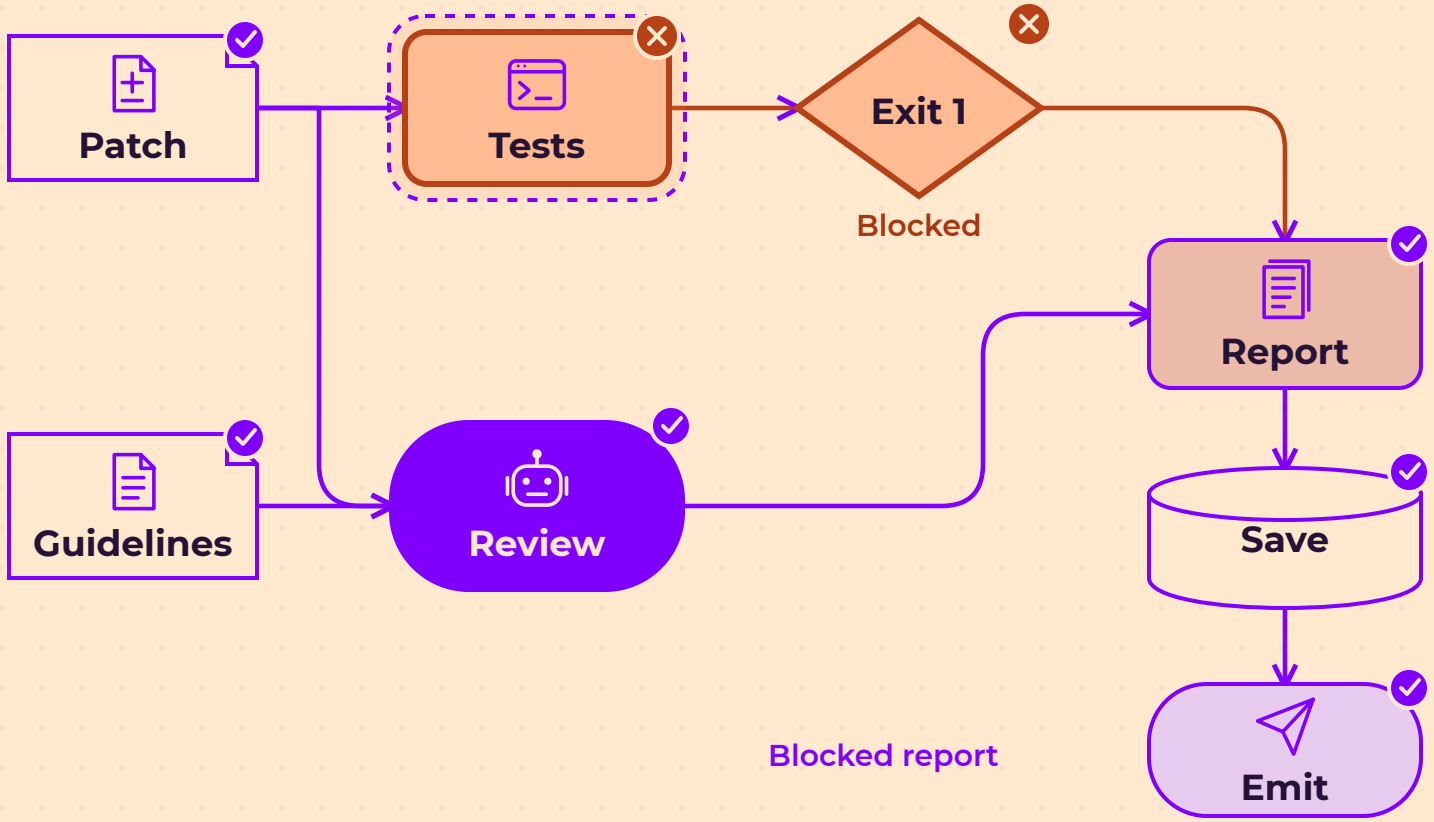
In order to understand, we need to be able to look inside.



ILLUSTRATIVE TRACE

Test runner

INPUT

```
commit a7f32d
```

ACTION

```
npm run test:required
```

FAILED SCENARIO

```
rejects cross-account order reads
```

ASSERTION

```
Expected 403; received 200
```

Select any node

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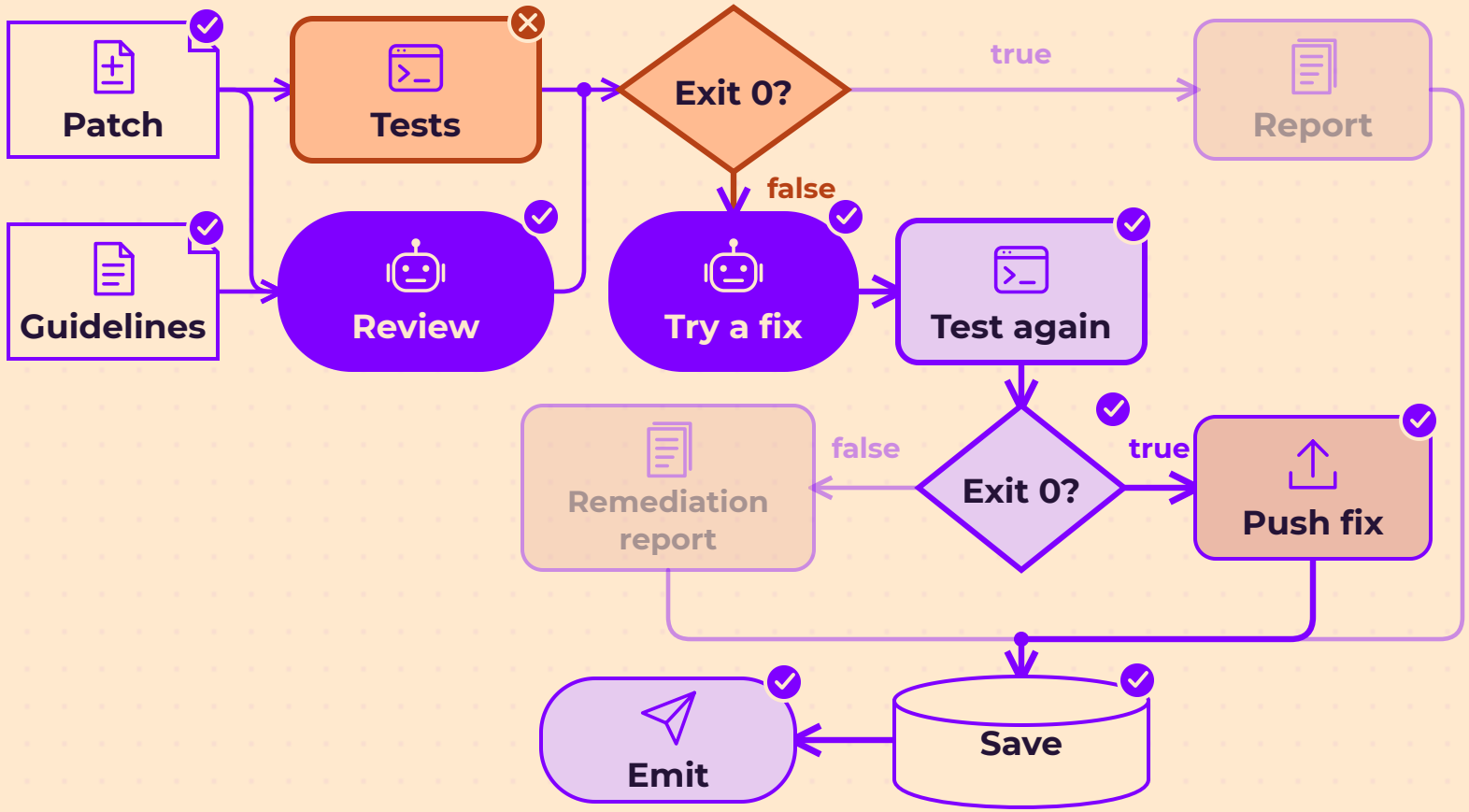
Then, we improve the workflow.



ILLUSTRATIVE DSL

EDIT → RUN

```
tests = await startTests(patch)
review = await agent("Ada", prompt)
if (tests.exit === 0) {
  result = makeReport(tests, review)
} else {
  fixPrompt = `Fix the failure:
    ${rules}\n${patch}\n${tests.output}`
  fix = await agent("Lin", fixPrompt)
  retest = await startTests(fix.patch)
  if (retest.exit === 0) {
    result = await push(fix.patch)
  } else {
    result = remediationReport(
      fix, retest
    )
  }
}
saved = await kb.save(result)
emit(saved.ref)
```

Fix pushed and saved.

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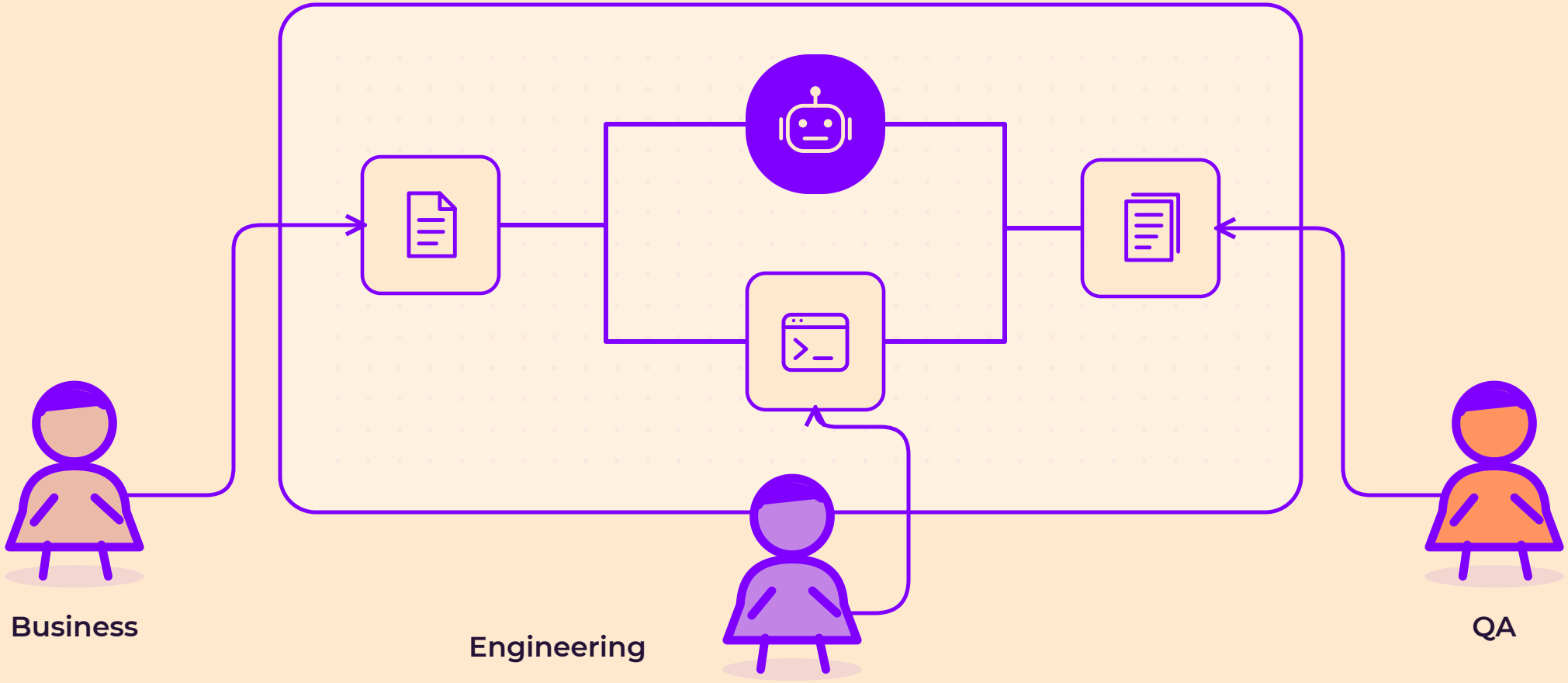
Hiding the complexity away means everyone can join in.



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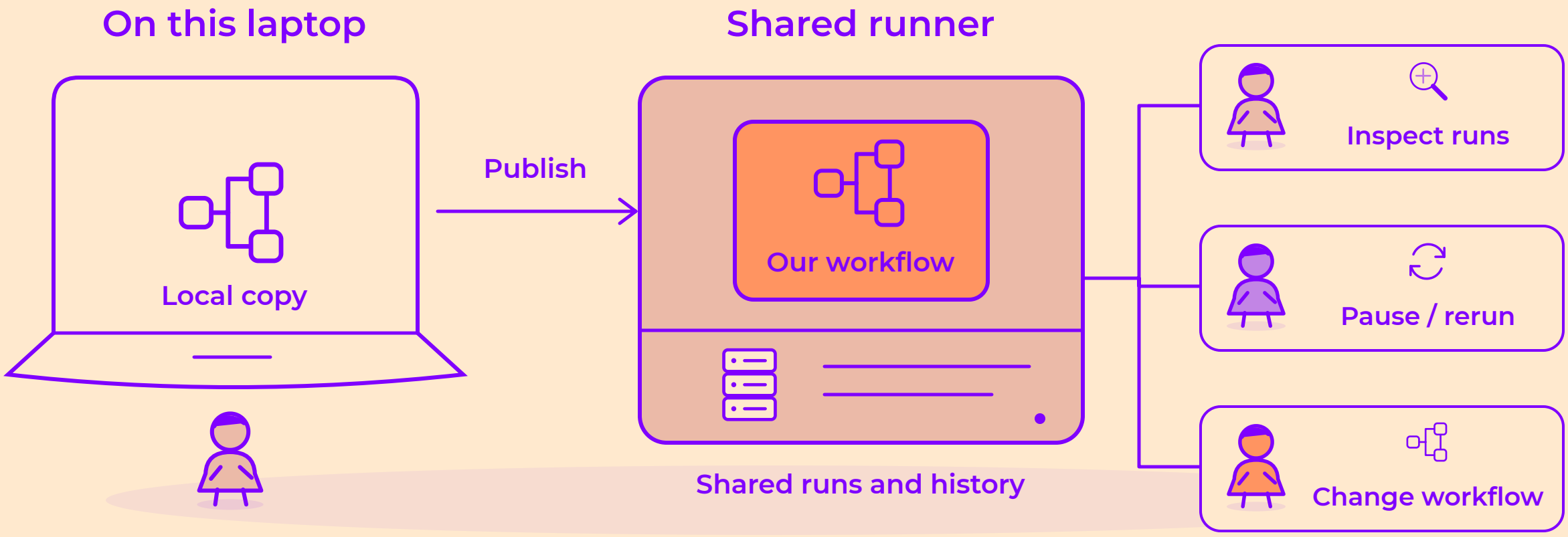
Where should we run it?



Everyone on the team can inspect and control it.

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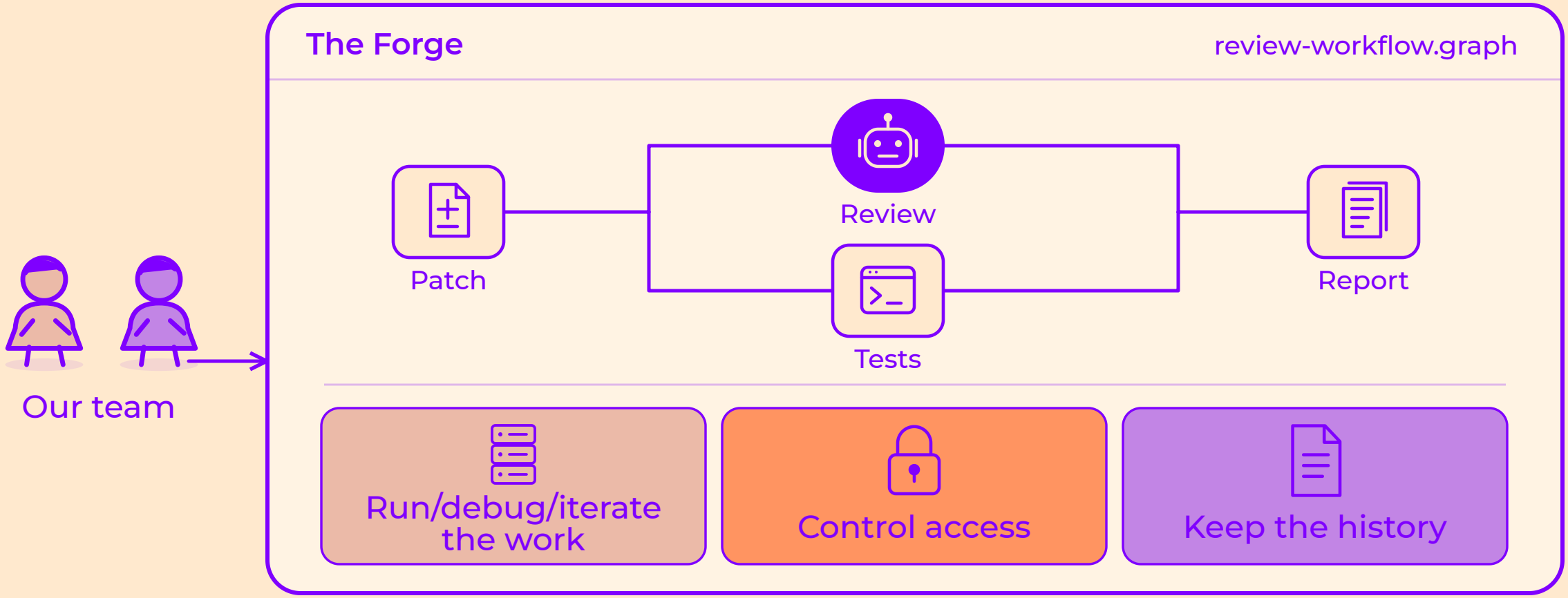
A forge for the team, owned by the team.



We can build on existing tools.

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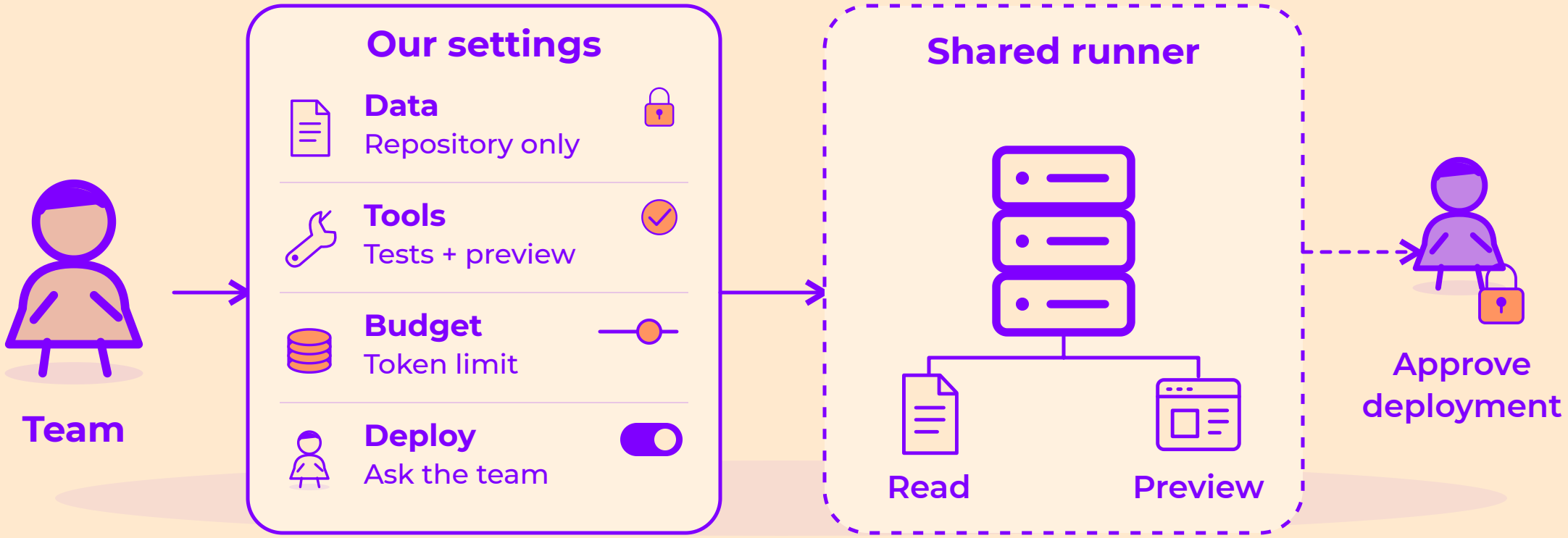
Since we control it, we can keep settings tunable



The runtime enforces our choices.

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It can also bring the team's knowledge together.



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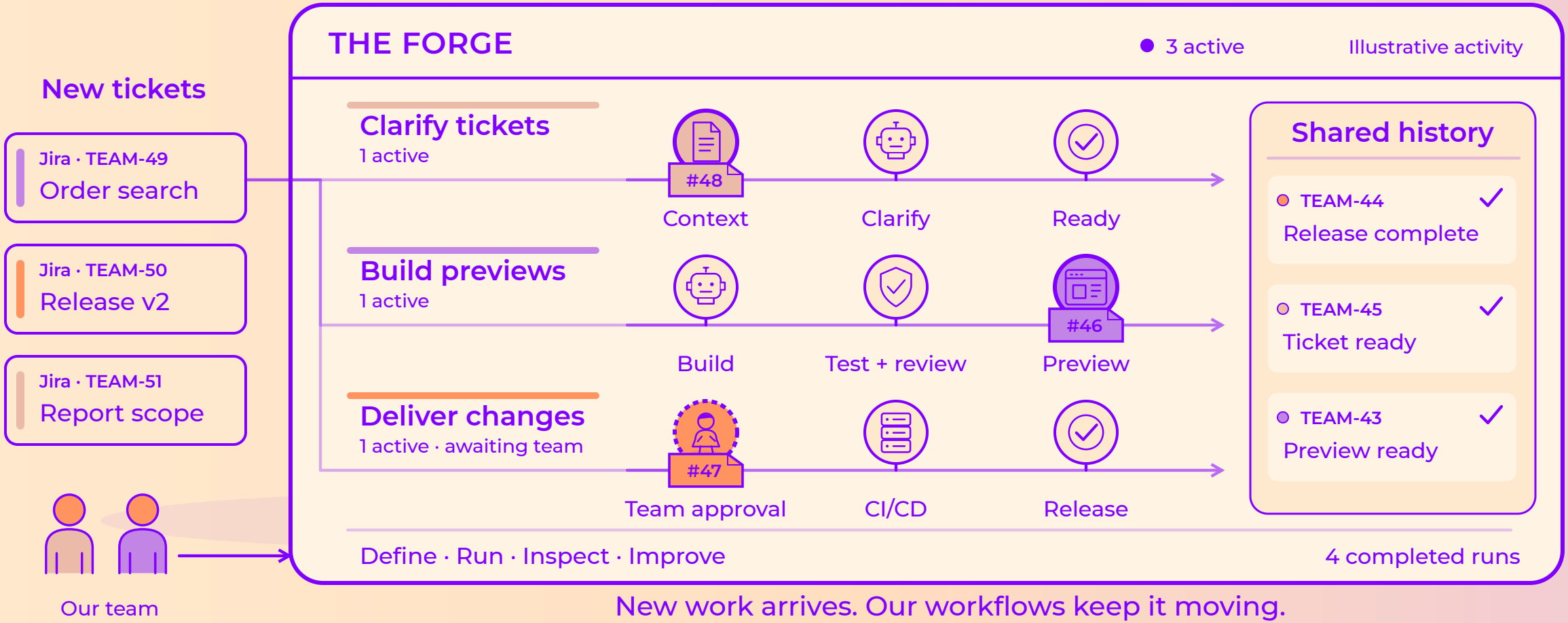
Little by little, we step up the ladder.



New work arrives. Our workflows keep it moving.

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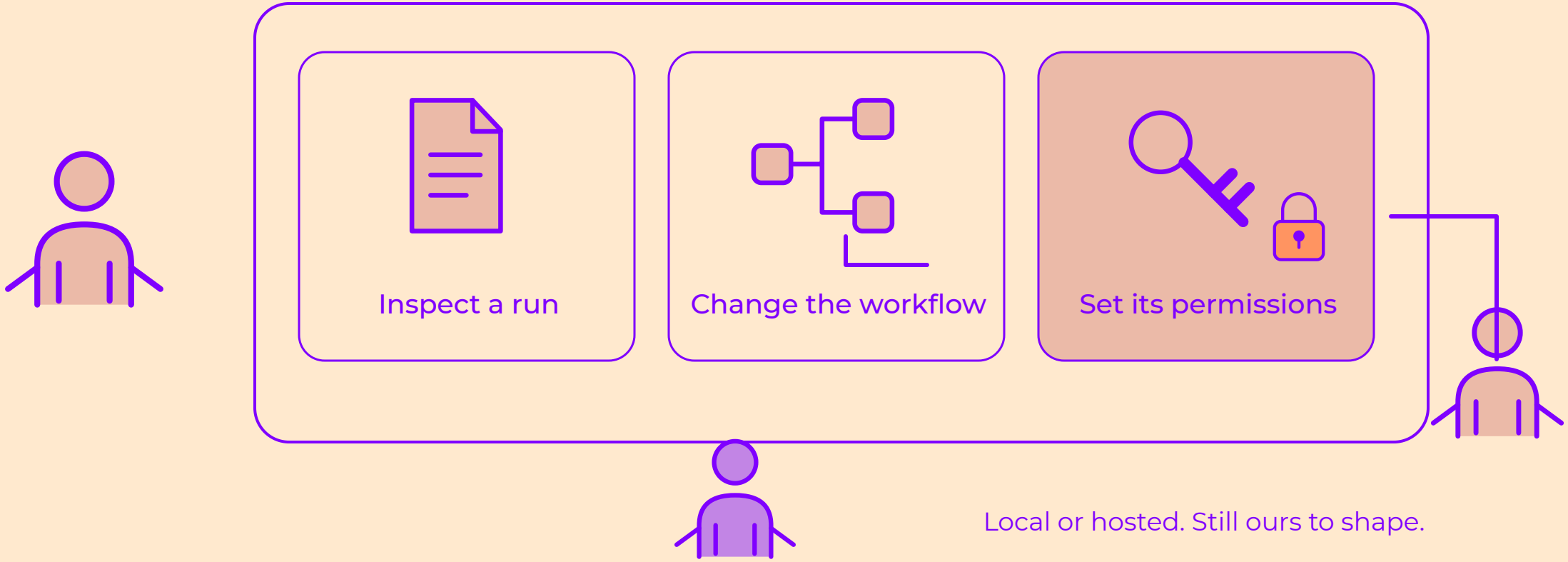
No silver bullets, only extendability.

The people doing the work can shape the machinery.



Local or hosted. Still ours to shape.

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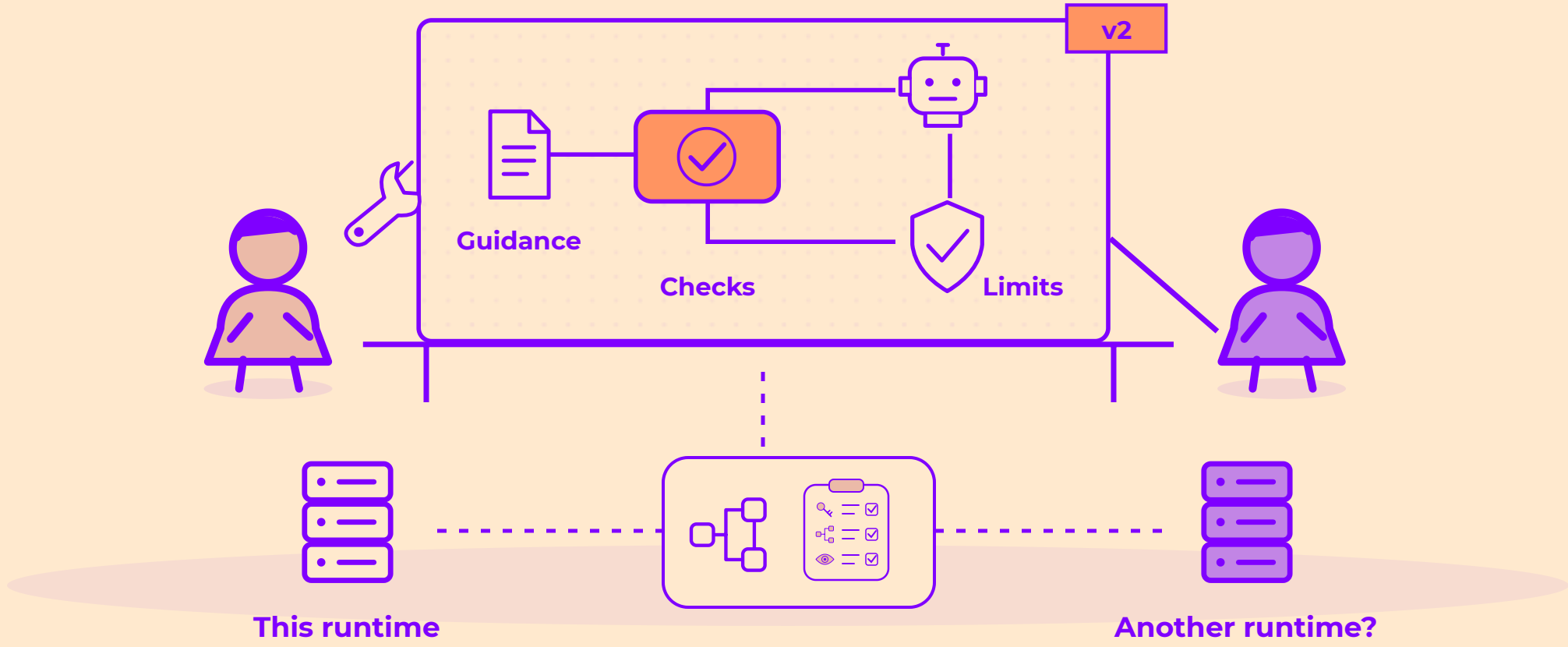
We can make changes and track them easily, and ship them too.



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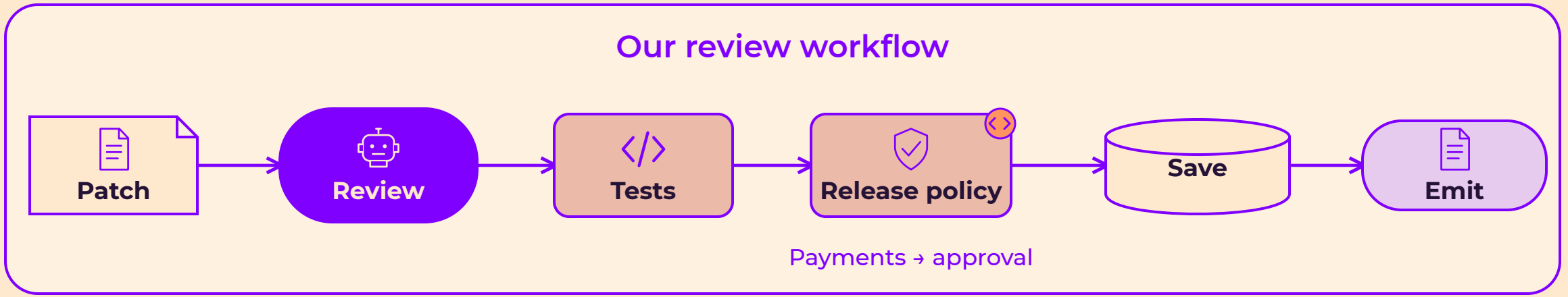
As our work changes, we can add to the machinery...

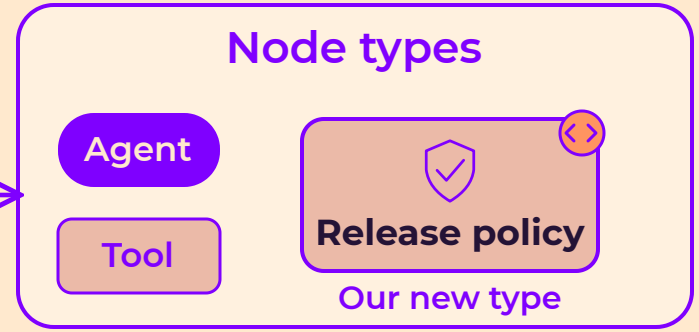


Write custom behaviour

Our team

```
release-policy.ts
defineNode('release-policy', {
  run: patch => ({
    needsApproval: touches(patch, 'payments/')
  })
})
```

Register



Illustrative node API

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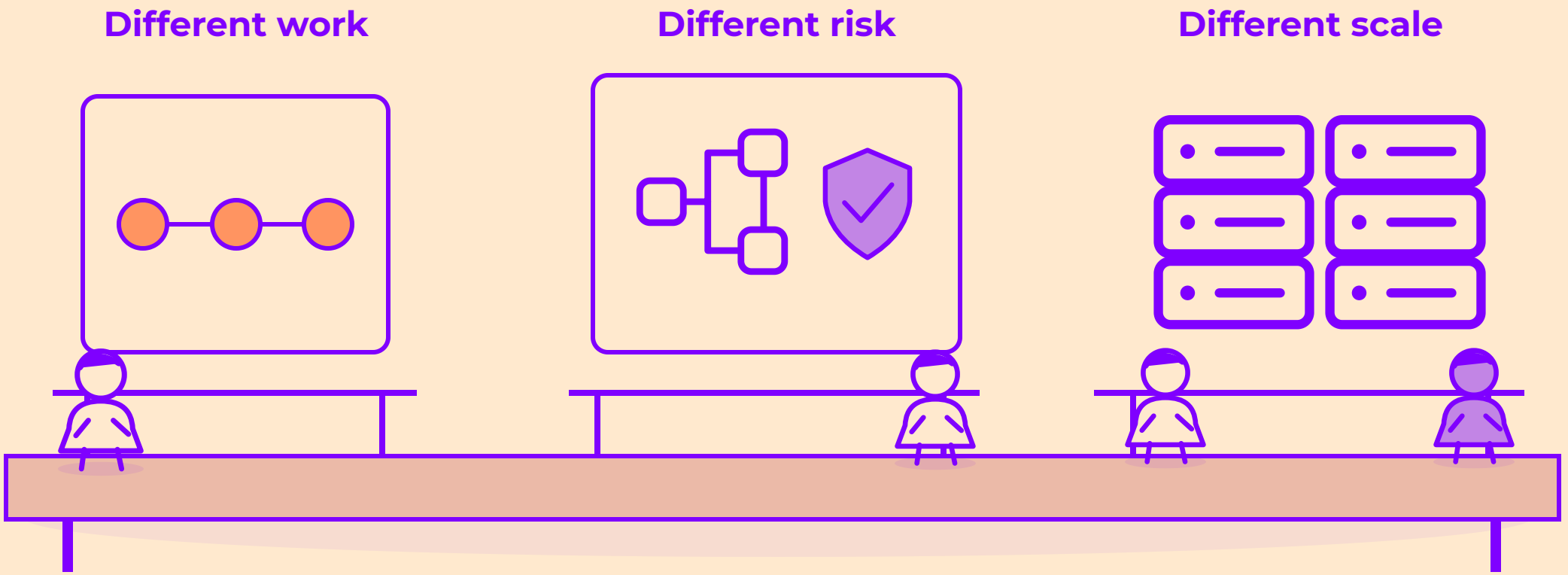
...as every team will need something different.



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How do we approach this, as a team?

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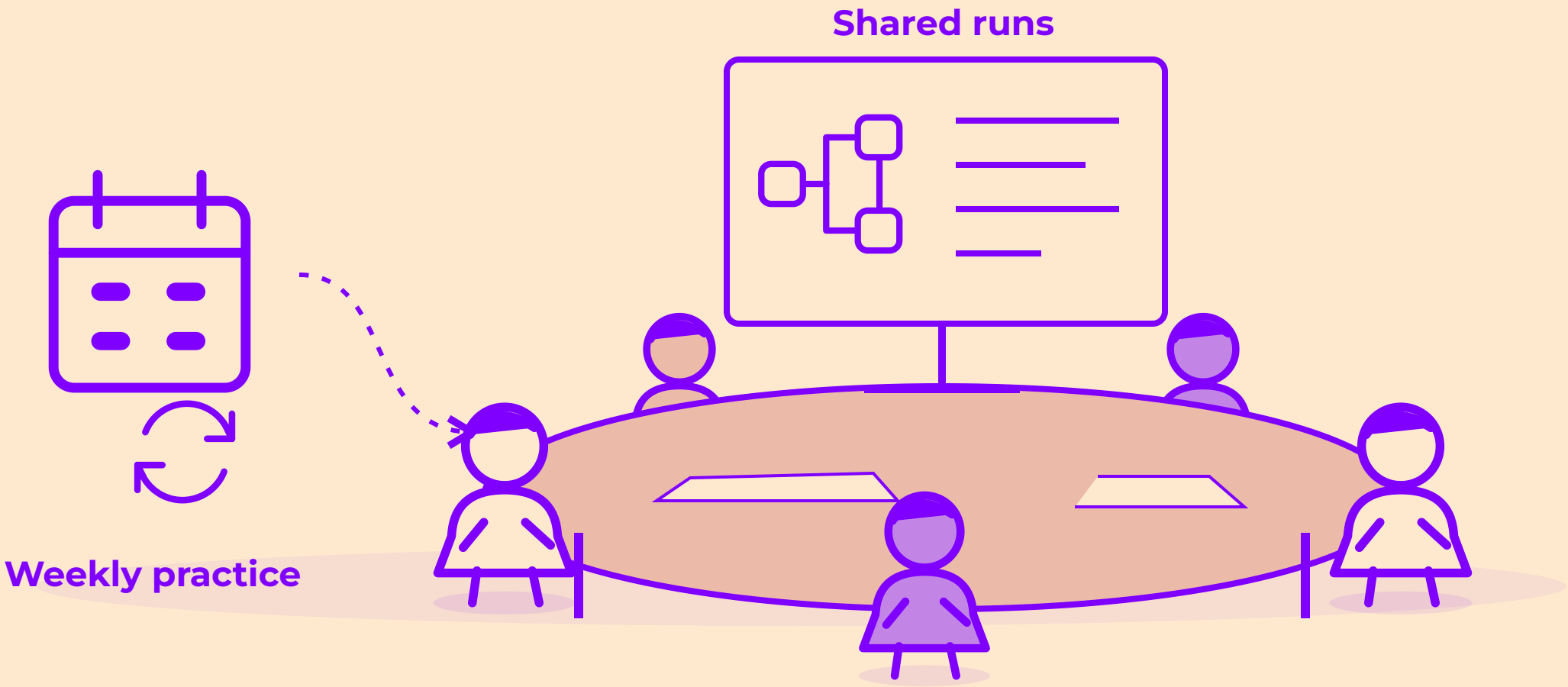
Make shared learning a team ritual.



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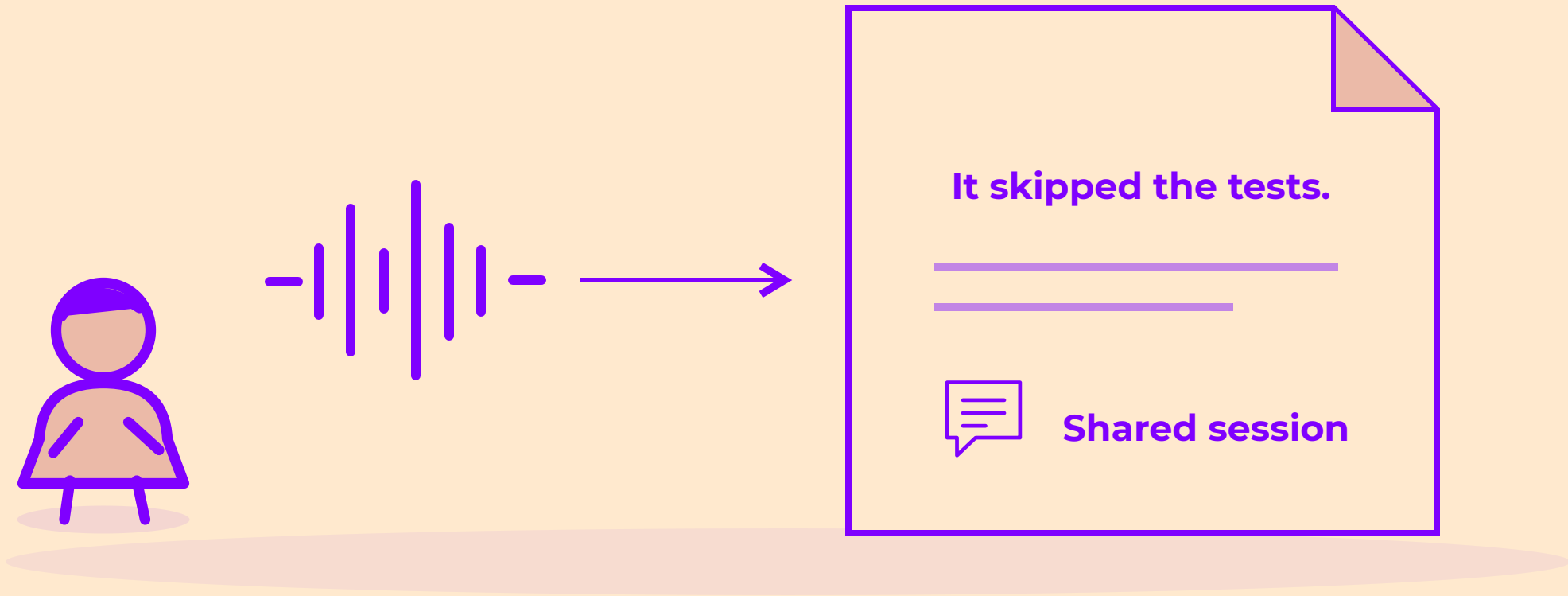
Capture the problem in their own words.



Illustrative team review

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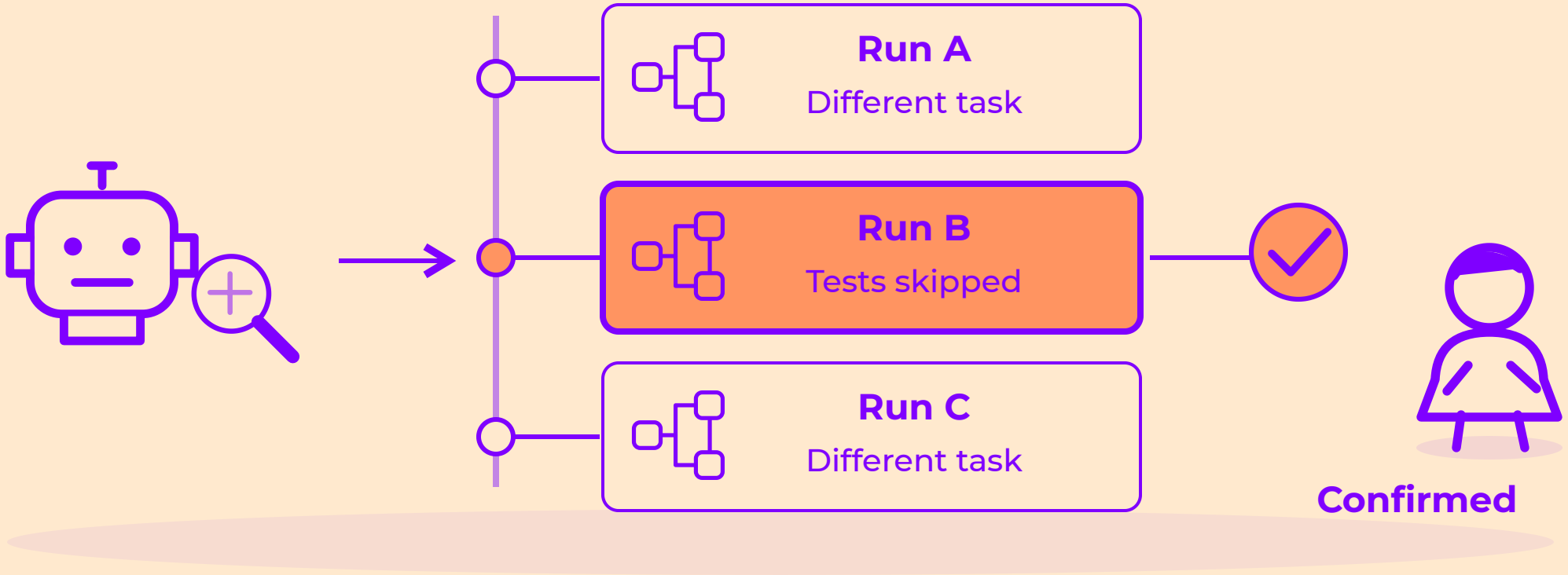
Find the run where it happened.



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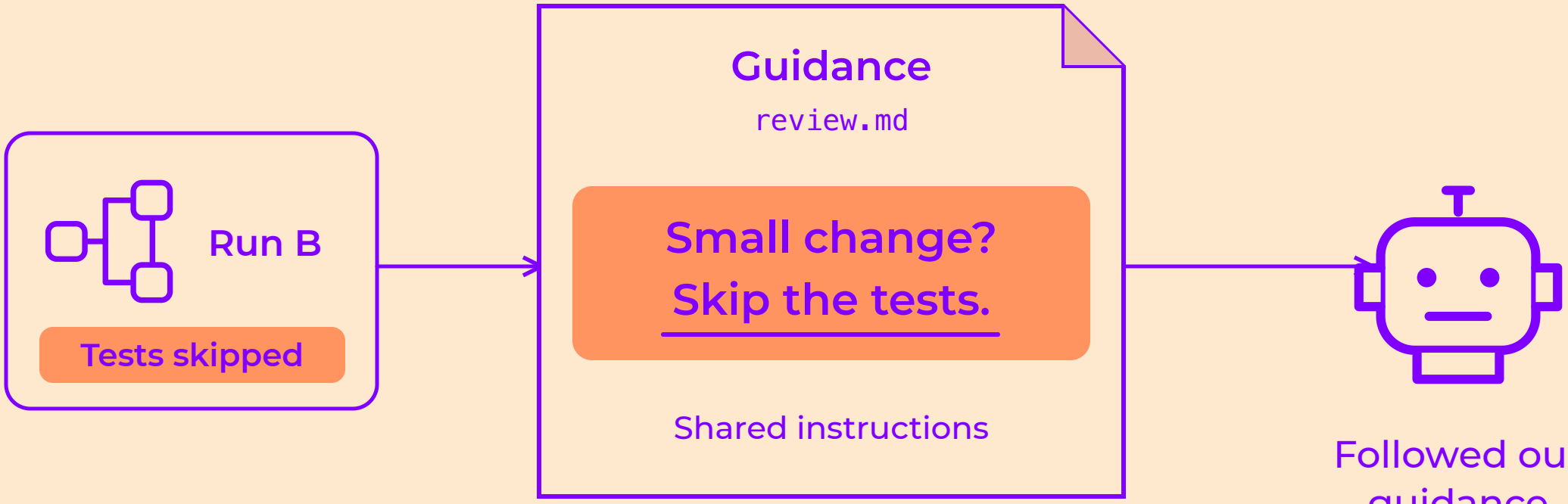
Why did it behave that way?



The instruction was wrong.

Illustrative team review

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What should we do differently next time?

Guidance

`review.md`

Small change?
~~**Skip the tests.**~~

Shared instructions

The team agrees

Run tests for every change.



Change our shared guidance.

Illustrative team practice

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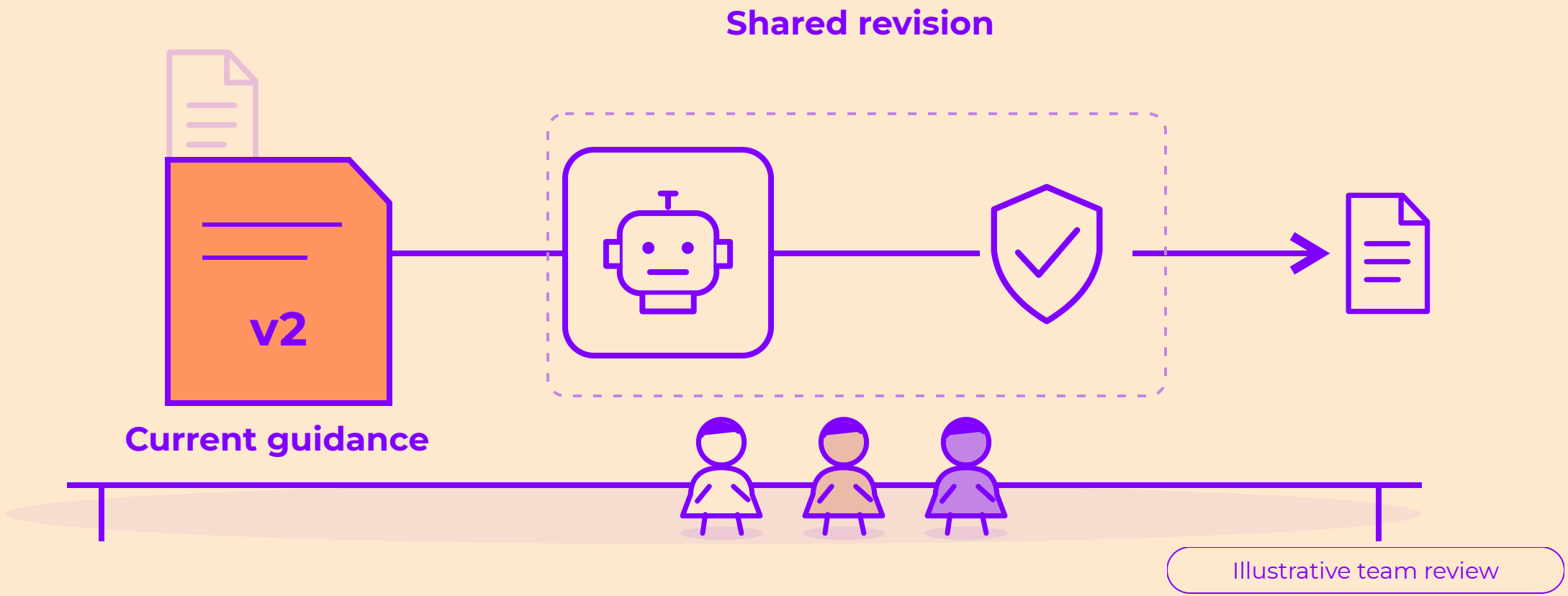
Fix the part that caused the problem.



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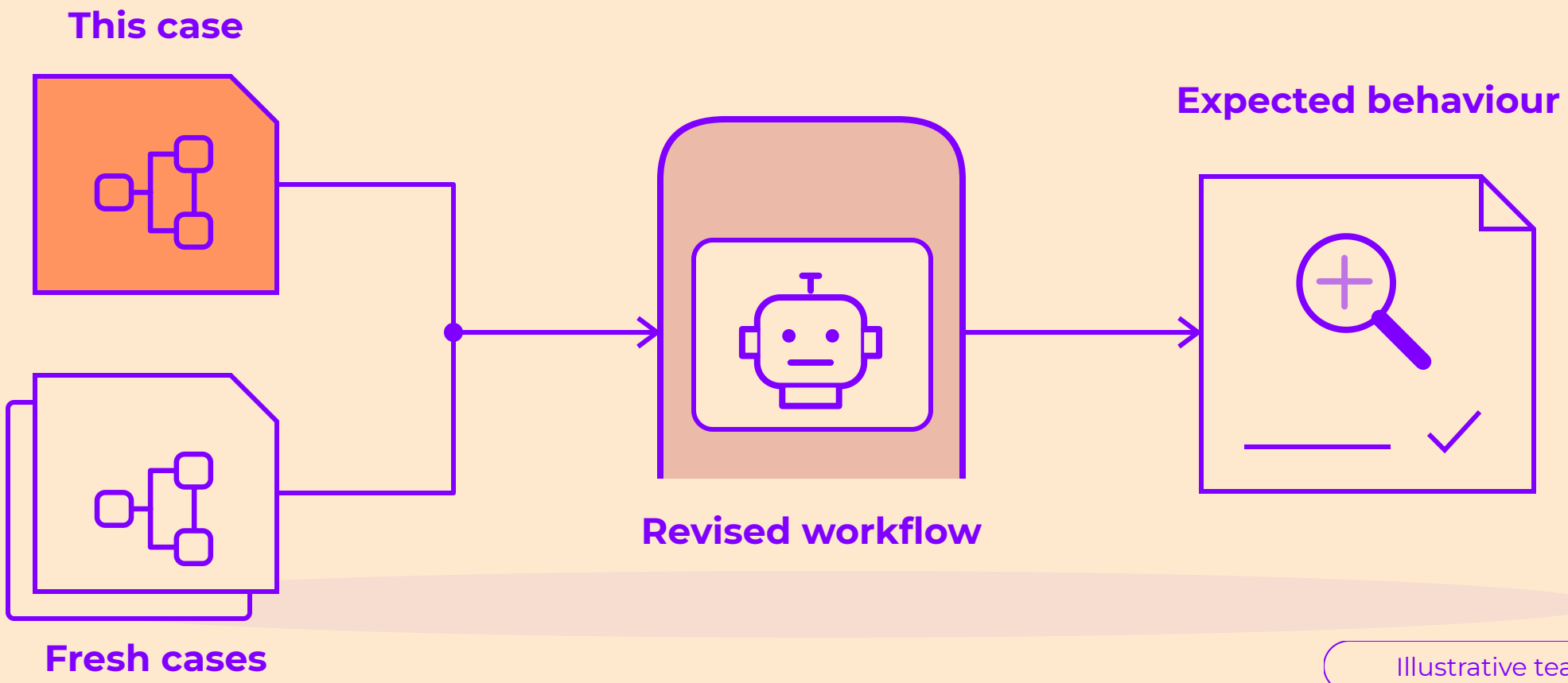
We measure, instrument, make changes and observe.



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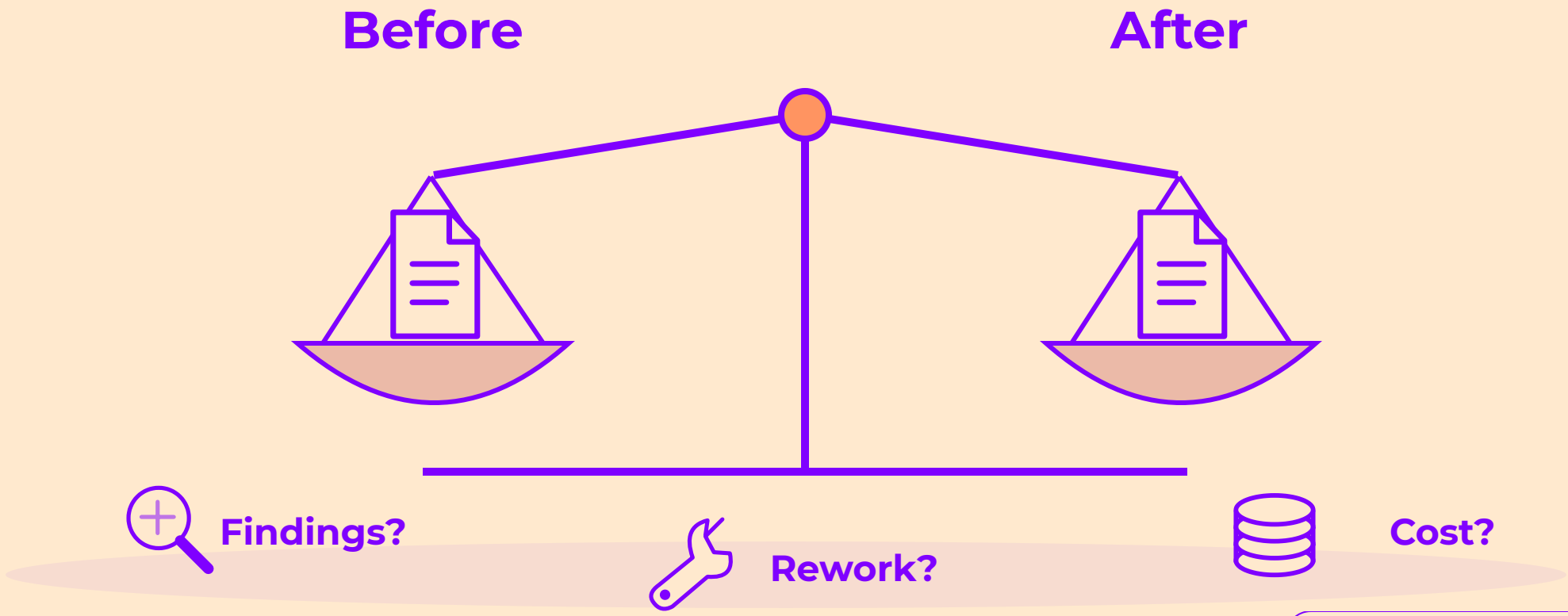
Did our change actually help?



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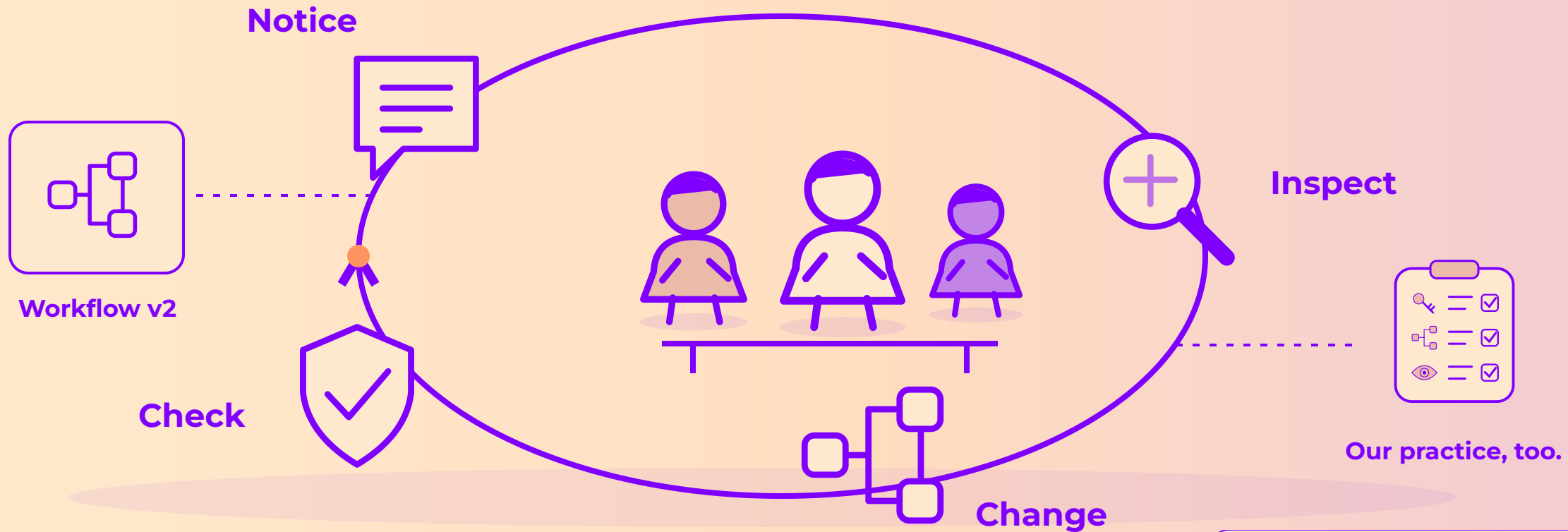
Then do it again, together.



Illustrative team review

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What does this ladder look like in practice?

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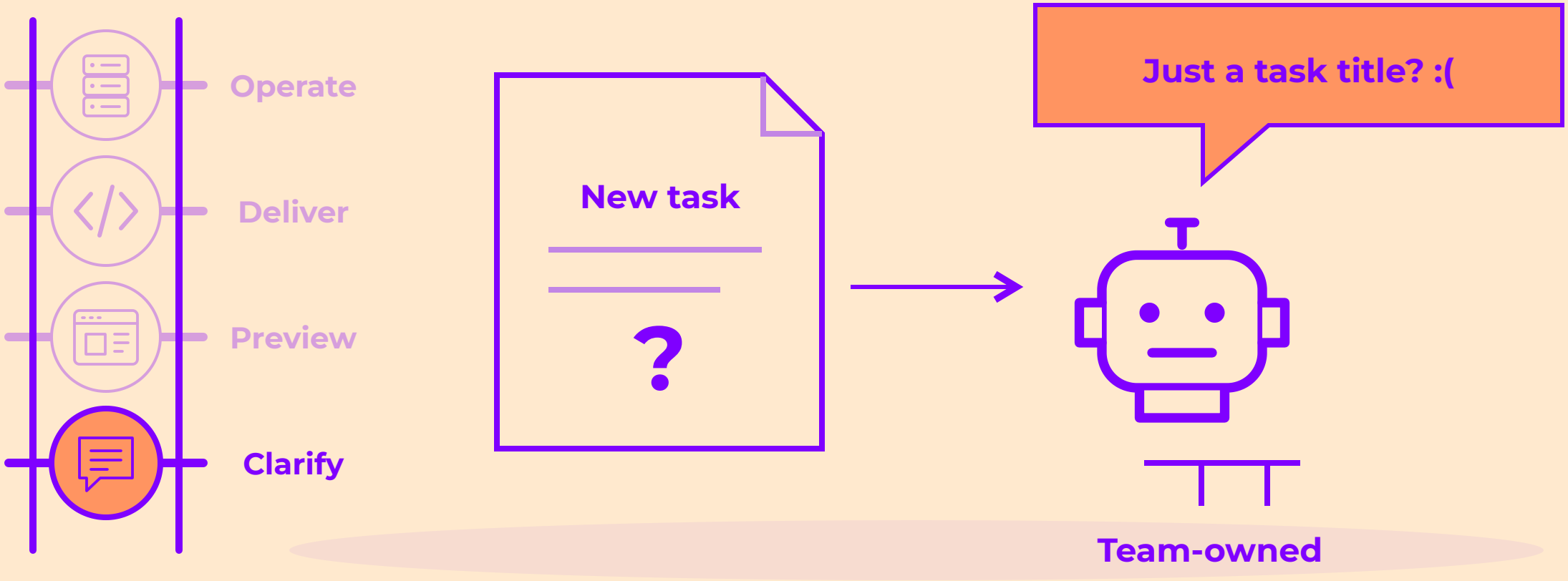
Start with something to ease task management.



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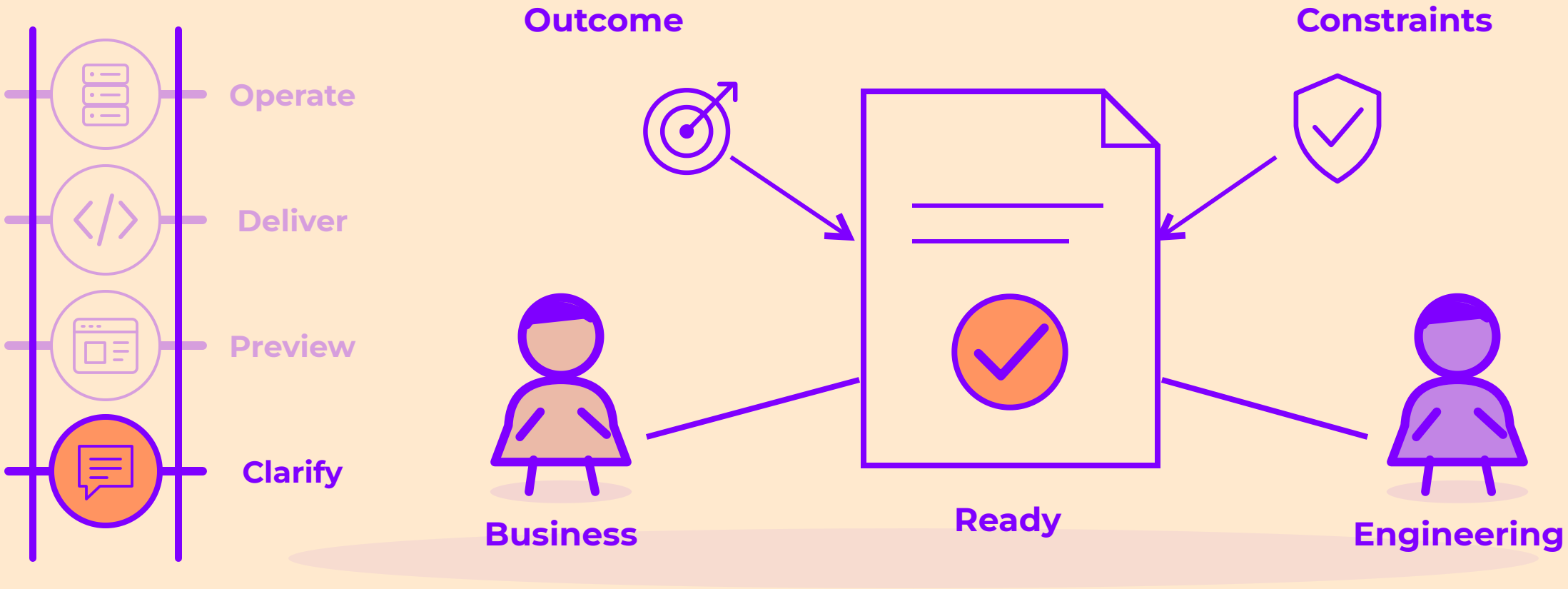
Agree together what “ready” means, build, and dogfood.



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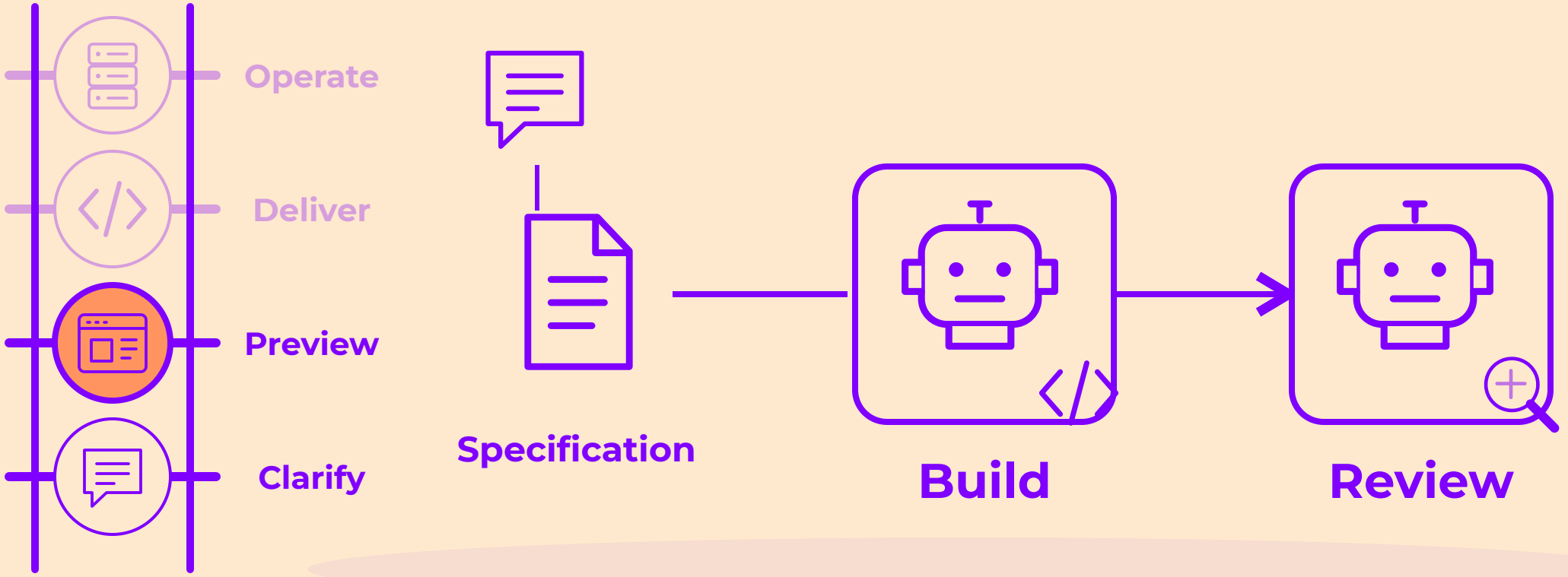
Then experiment with first-draft feature agents.



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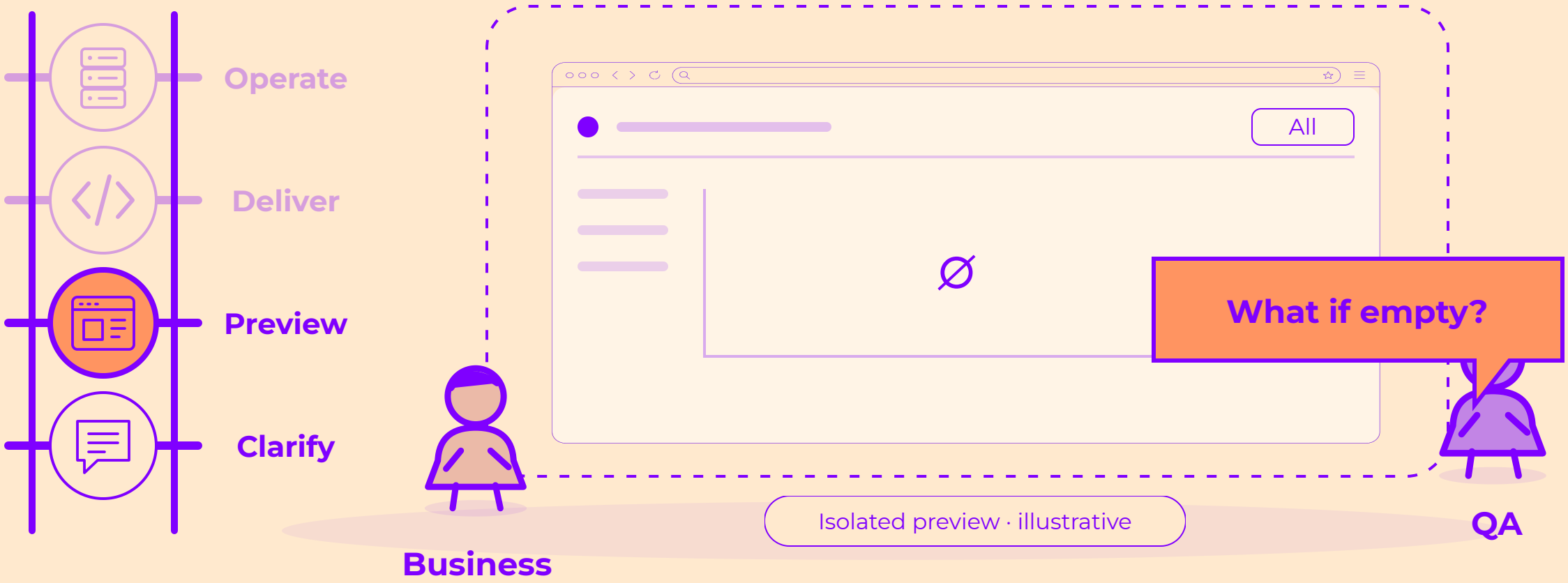
Give people something they can try.



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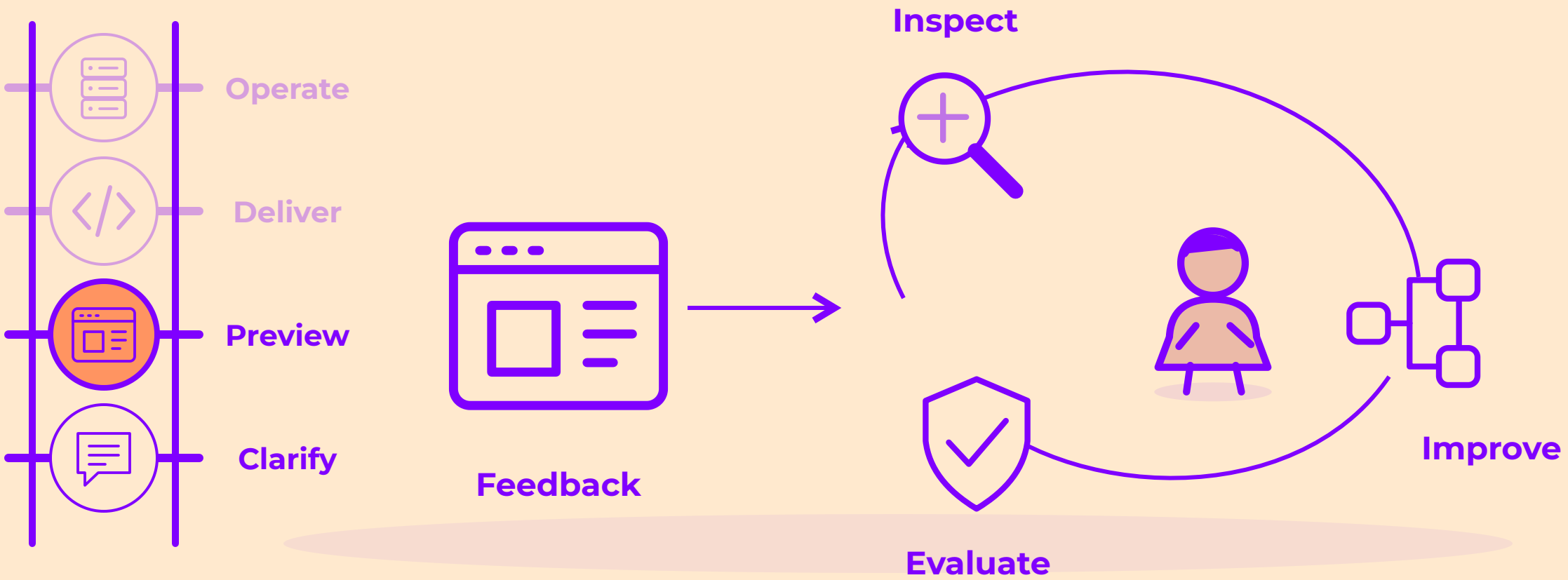
Use the same loop to make it better.



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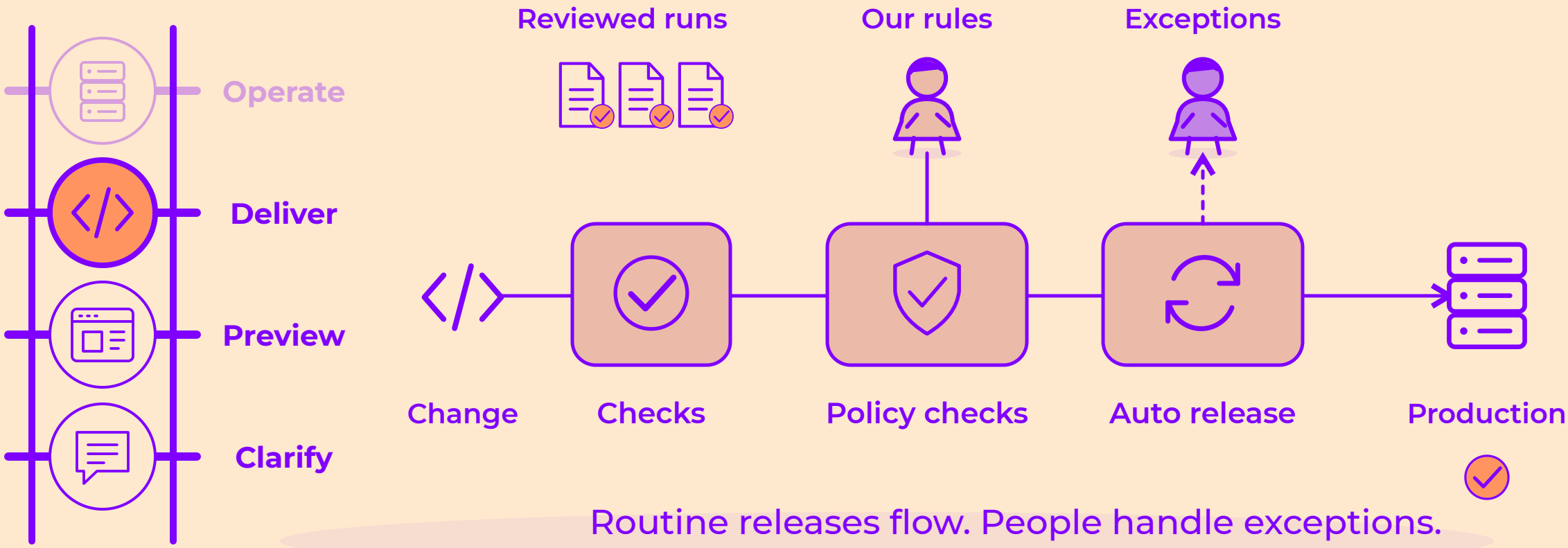
As trust grows, we can automate real releases.



Routine releases flow. People handle exceptions.

For the release path we know and trust.

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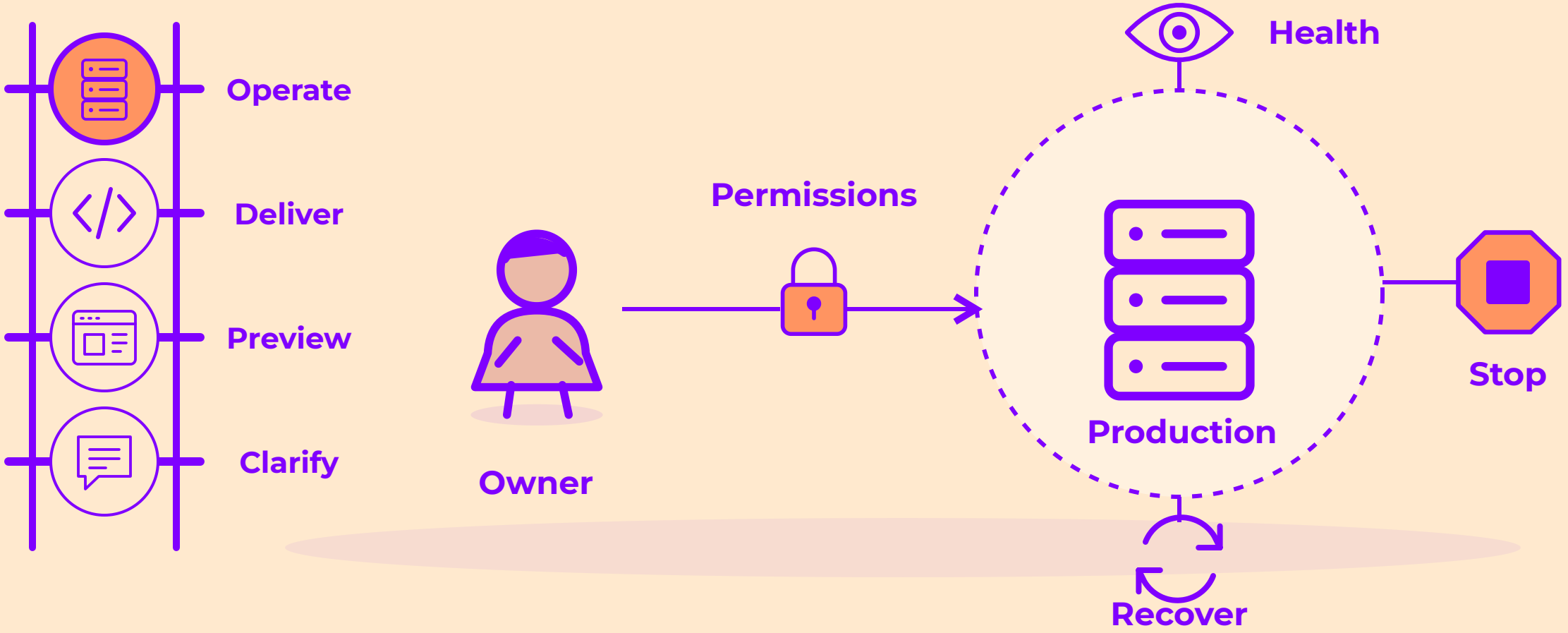
Give it a clear job in production.



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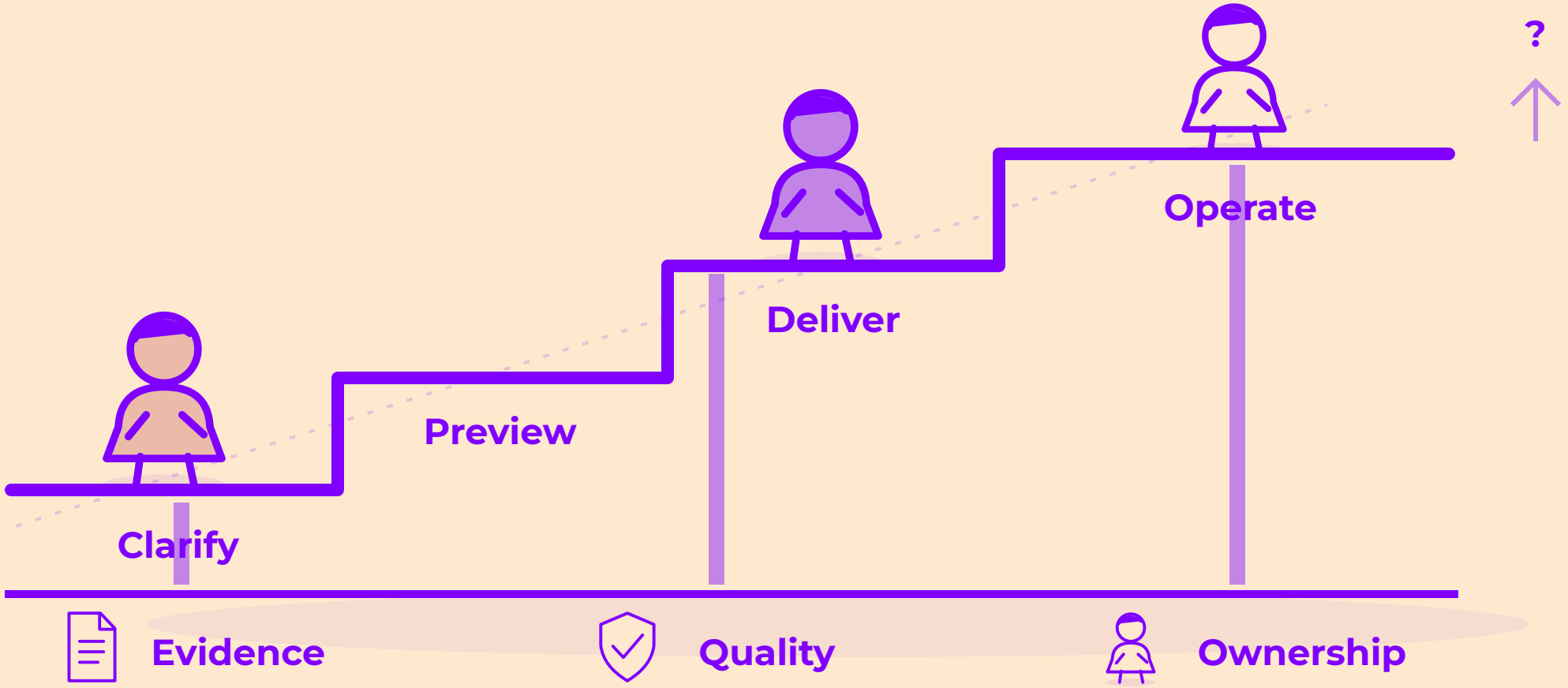
What makes us ready for the next step?



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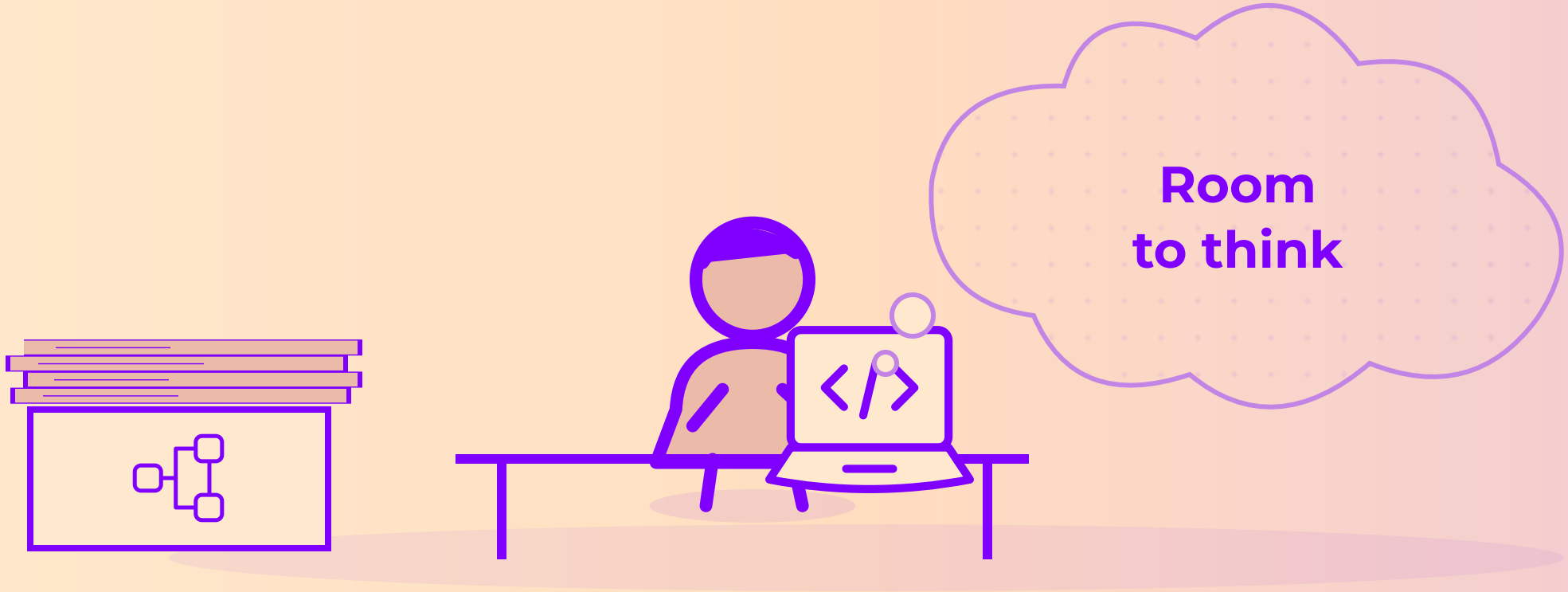
What could we do with that time?

If routine effort falls...



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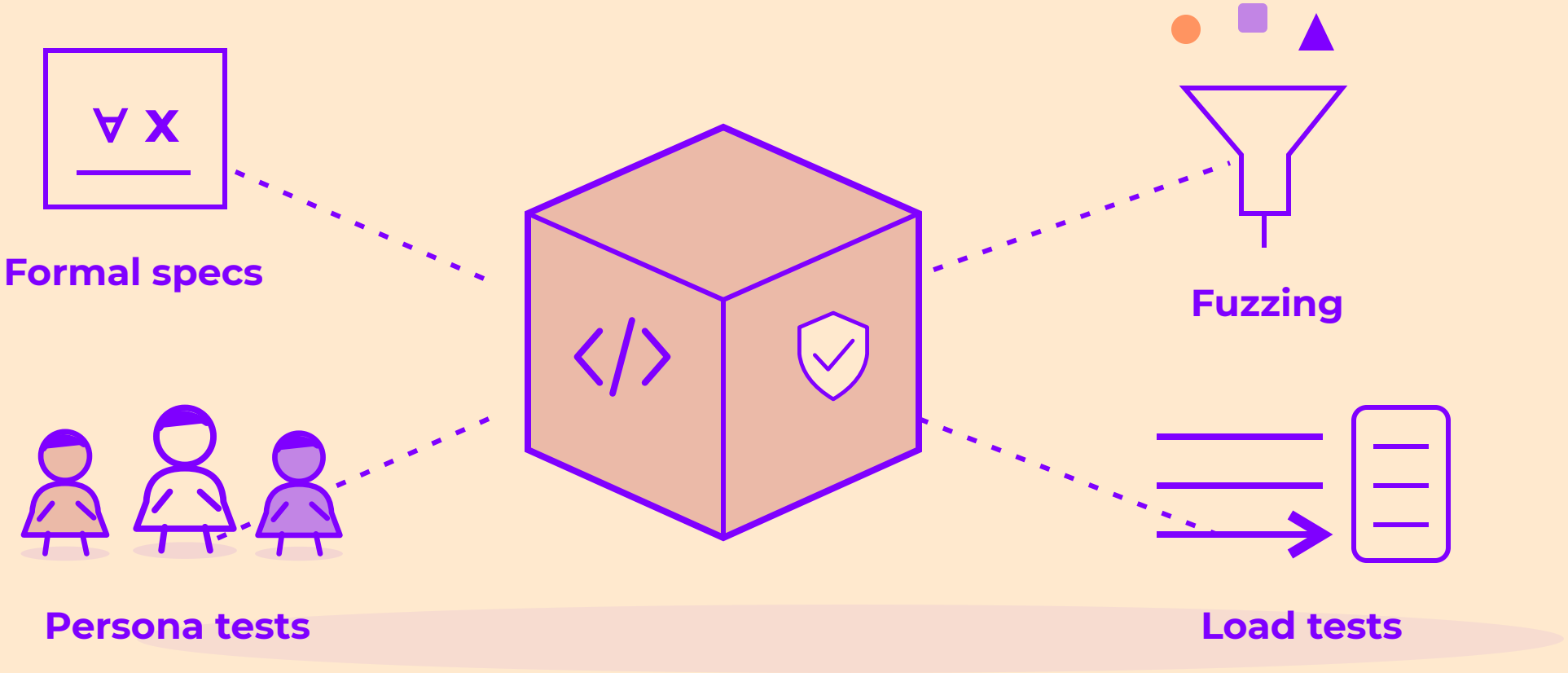
We could test things we couldn't before.



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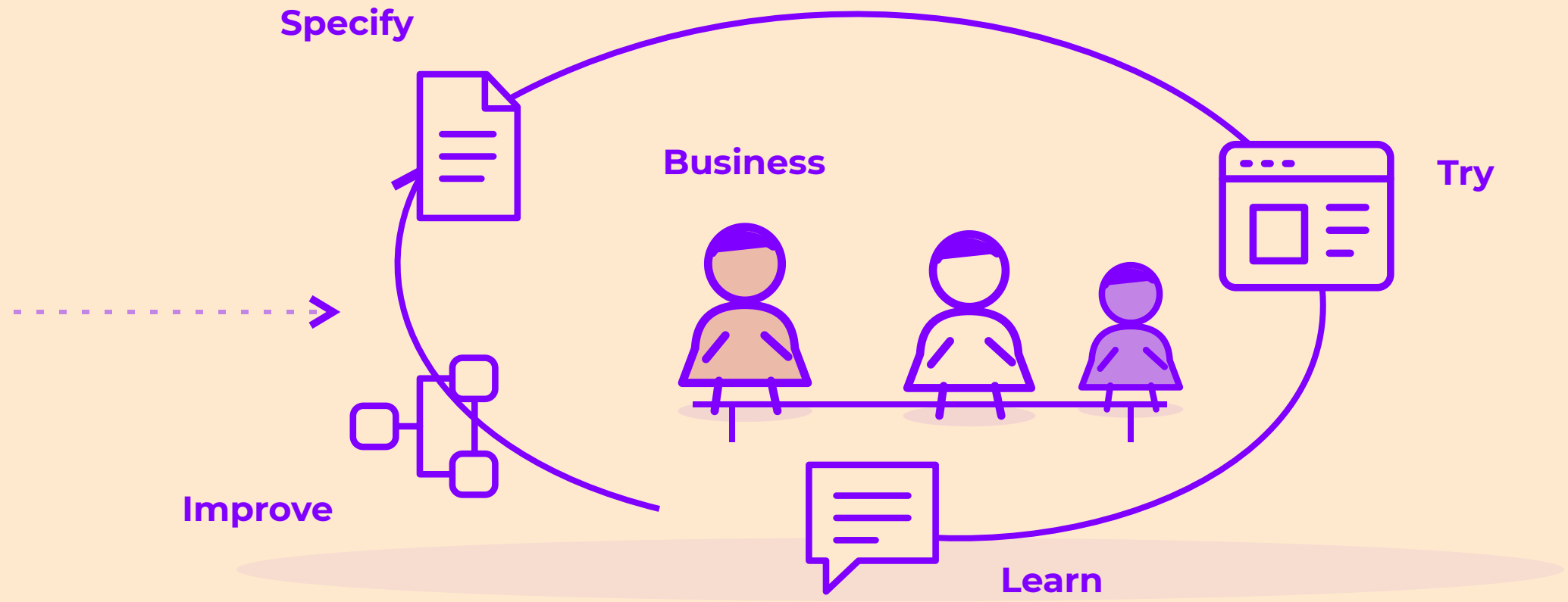
Bring business colleagues into the work.



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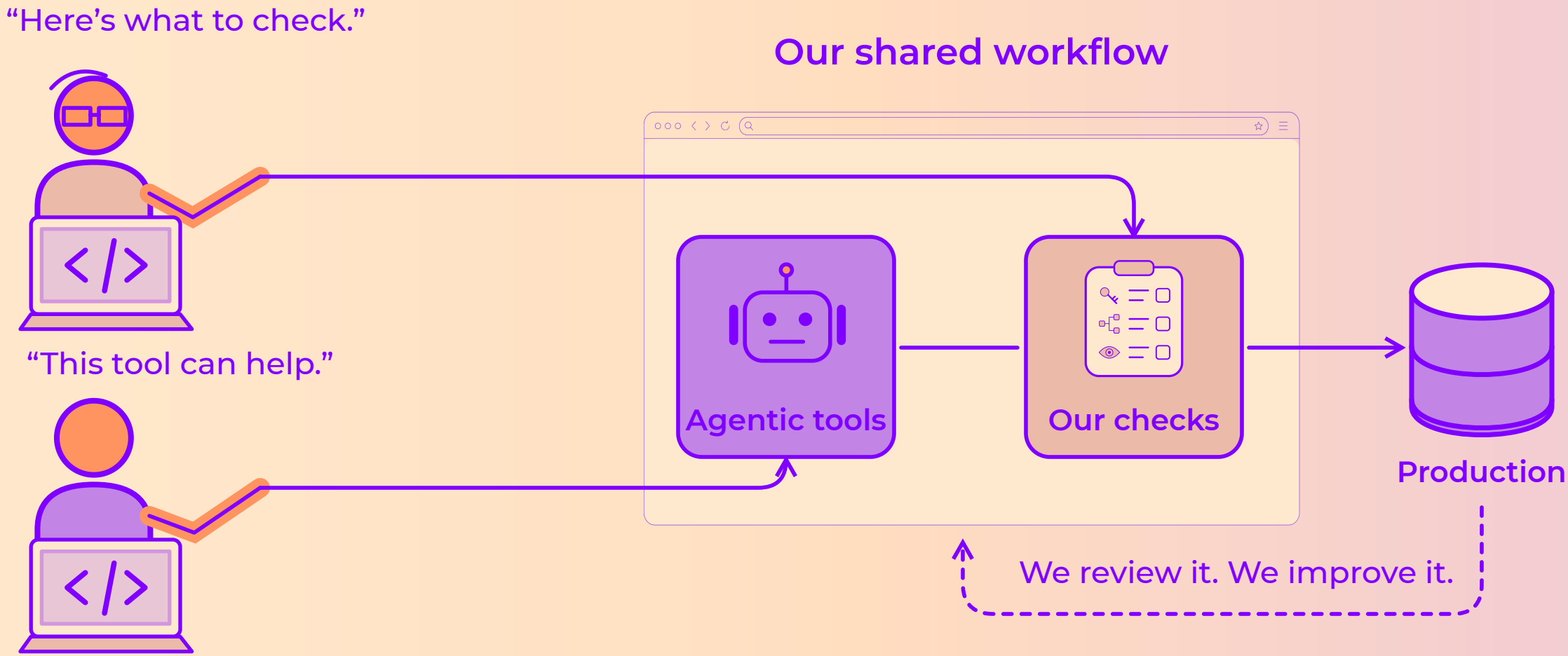
Now we can get better together.



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Thank you.

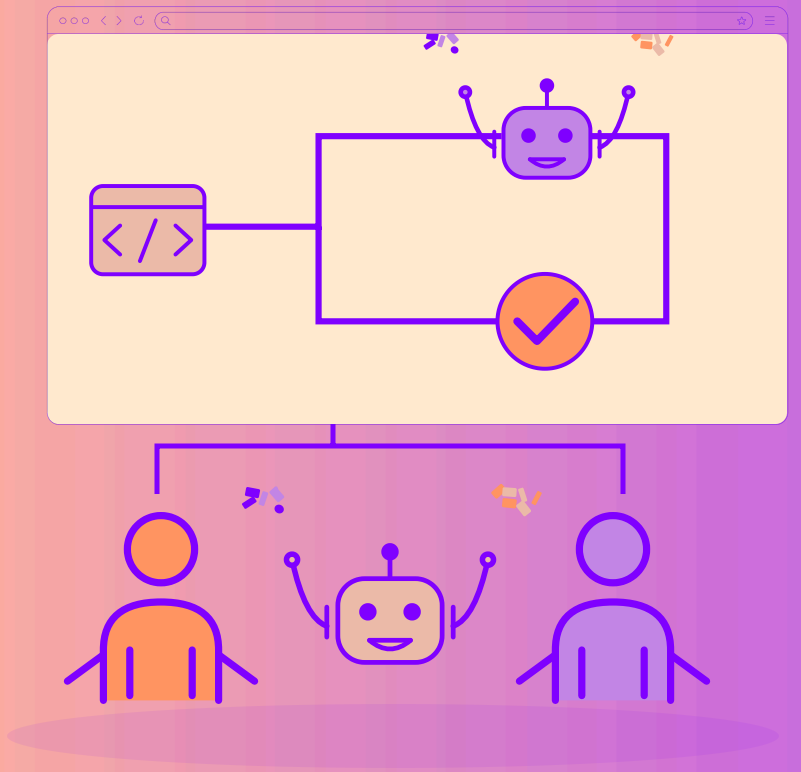
Where would your team start?

Questions?

João Anes

(pronounced joe-WOW)

joao.anes@mindera.com



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