



Distributed Is Different

Part 1: Why “Distributed”?

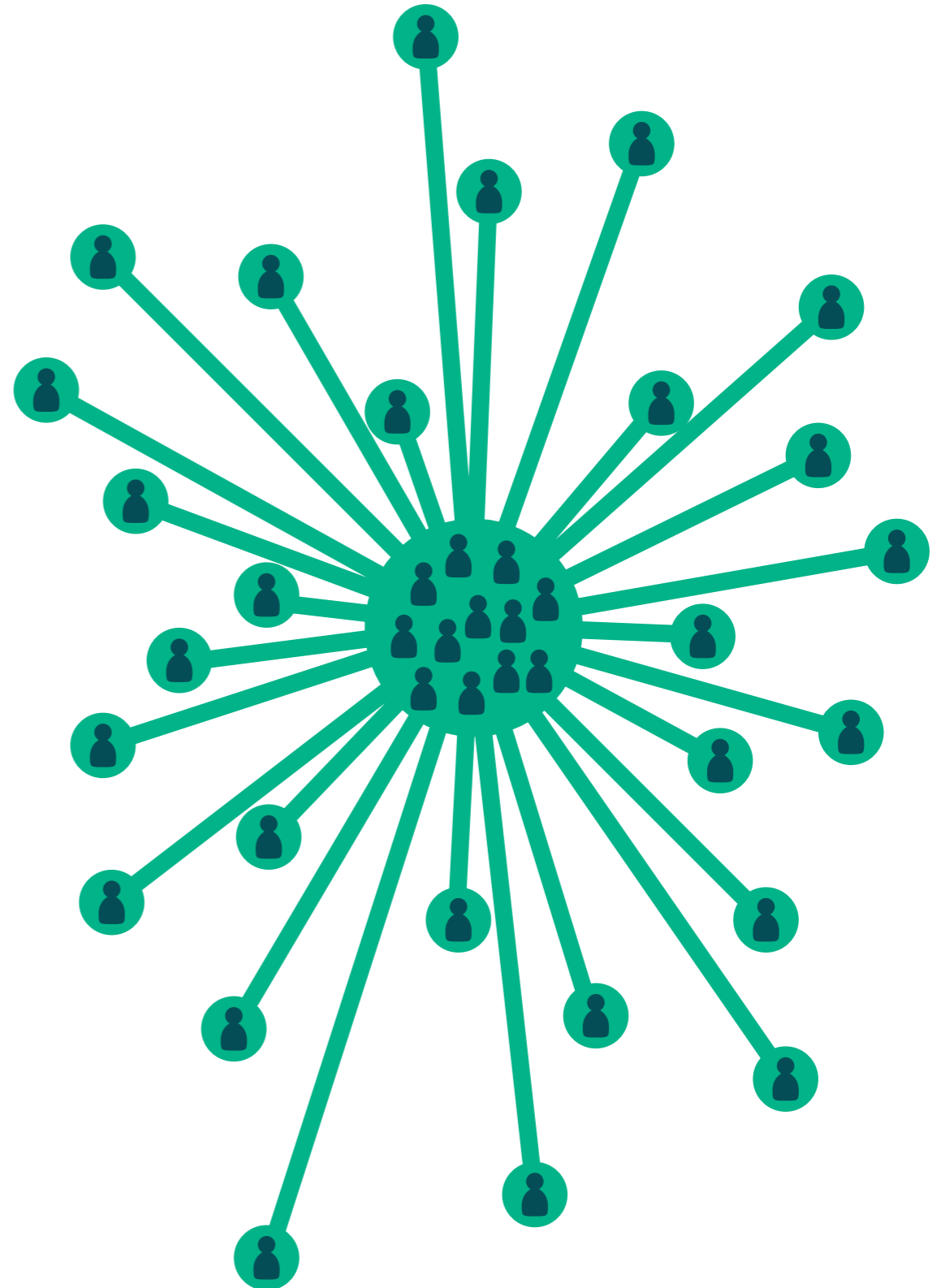
Why not just say “Remote”?

Most organizations say “remote” to describe people working in any arrangement outside a typical, centralized office environment.

Sometimes “remote” is accurate: there might be a headquarters or home office where a lot of people work, and smaller numbers of people who work elsewhere.

“Remote” implies that there is a **center** of operations somewhere and some – or all – people are **separate** from it.

This terminology can lead to a feeling of people being on the **fringes** of important things near that center.



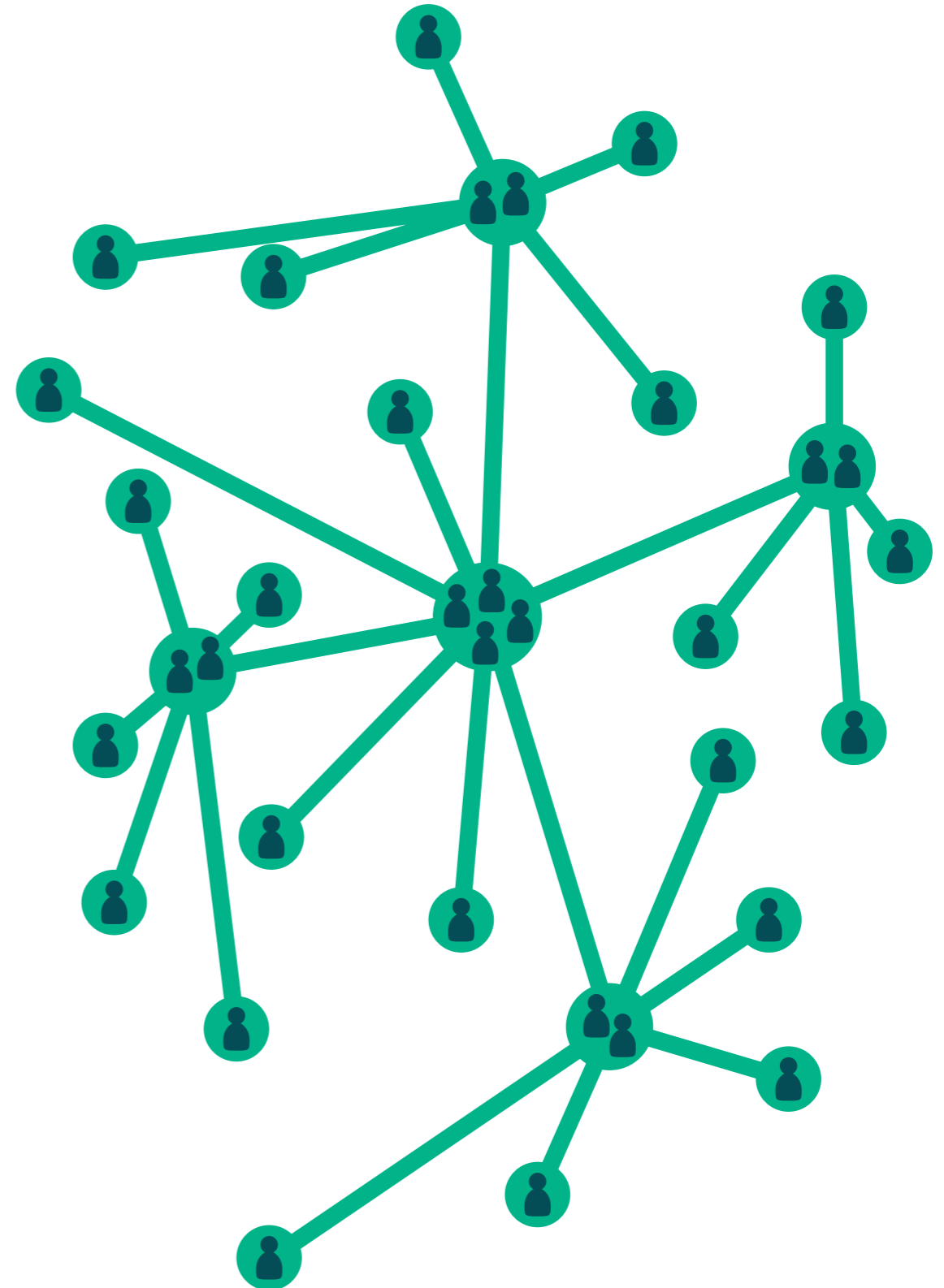
How about “Decentralized”?

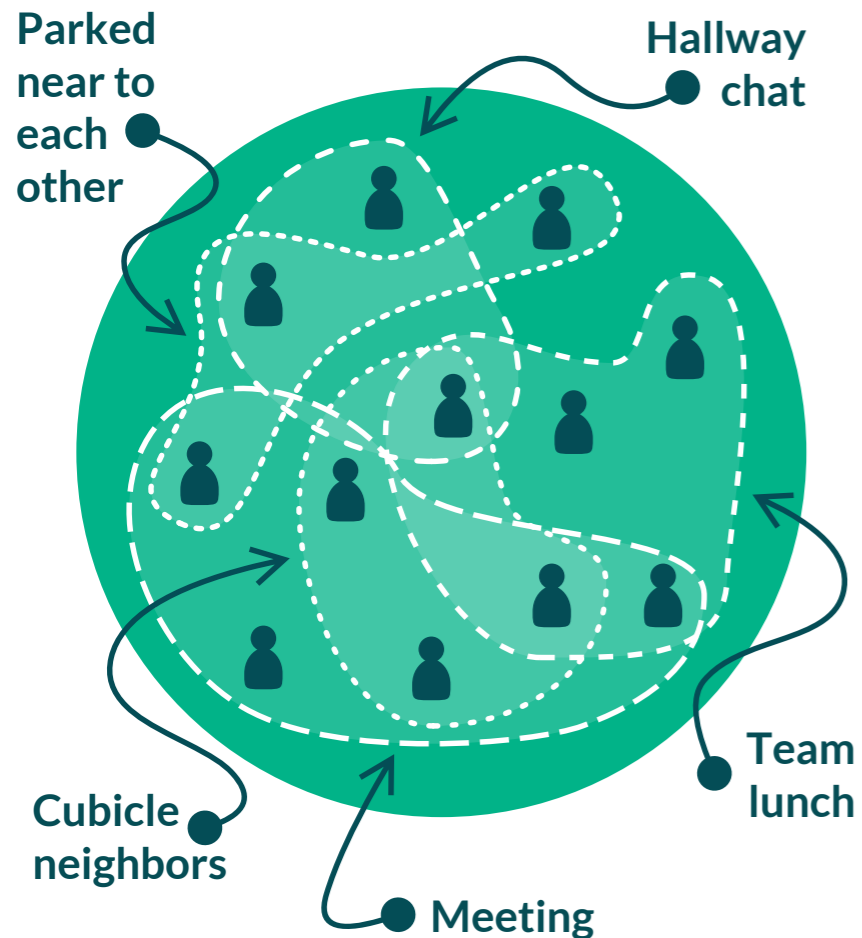
Some “remote” organizations are really a decentralized model, having multiple locations where people working on common things can report or work together.

Note that this isn’t the same as co-working spaces that cross business concerns: it’s more like self-contained satellites with a mix of in-office and remote people.

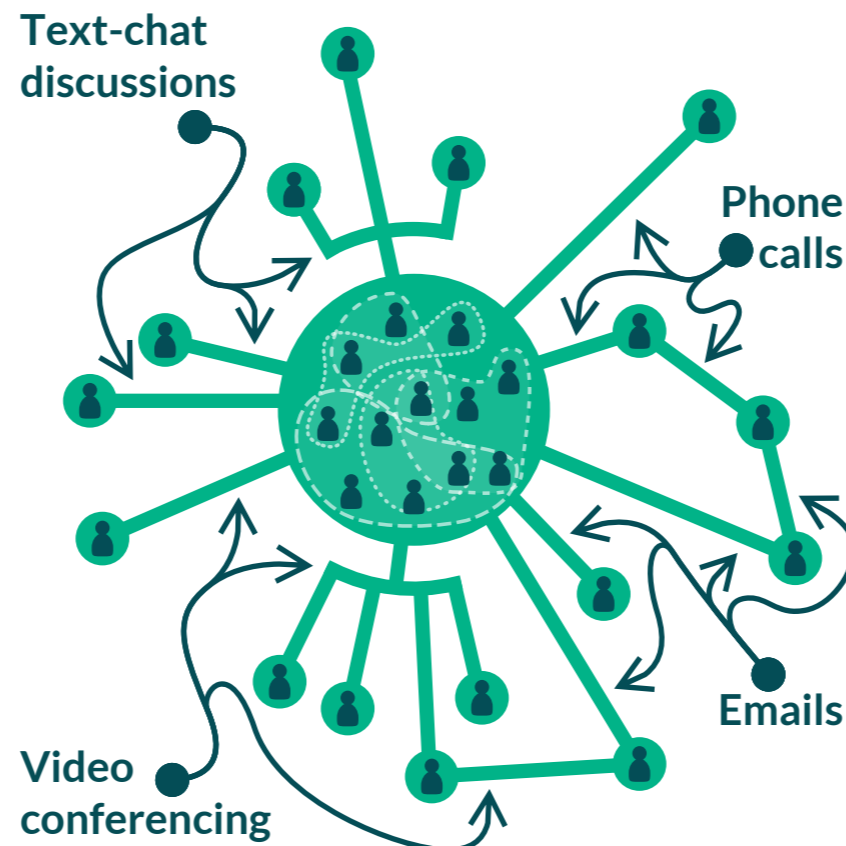
“Decentralized” implies a **collection** of centers with people connected to them, but those local centers are **remote** from each other.

This terminology can lead to a feeling of people being in **silos**: their local center is a smaller organization living on the **edge** of the larger organization.

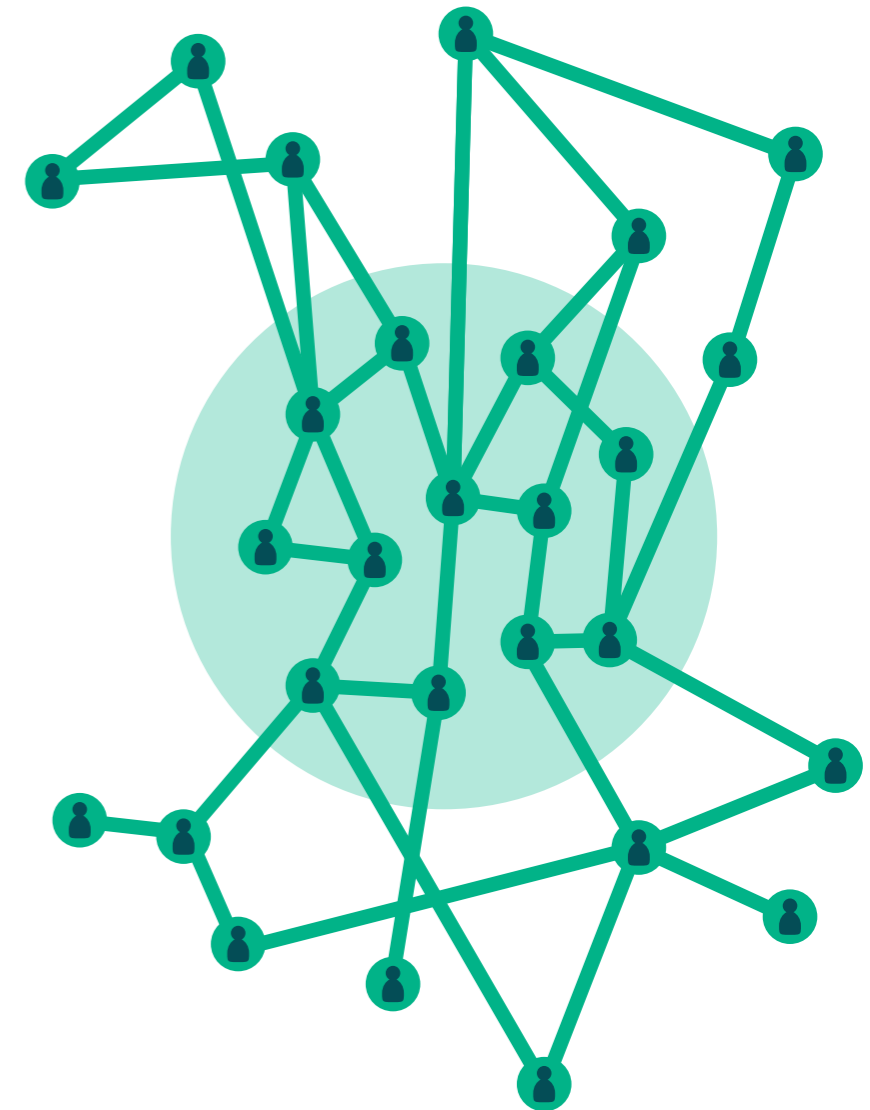




Both “remote” and “decentralized” groups have a similar issue: in-person people get lots of automatic opportunities to interact.



Meanwhile, the not-in-the-office people are limited to interaction opportunities that have to be explicitly initiated by someone.



Interactions often shift to “remote-first” behaviors: otherwise, remote people are often disenfranchised and disempowered.

We ♥ Distributed

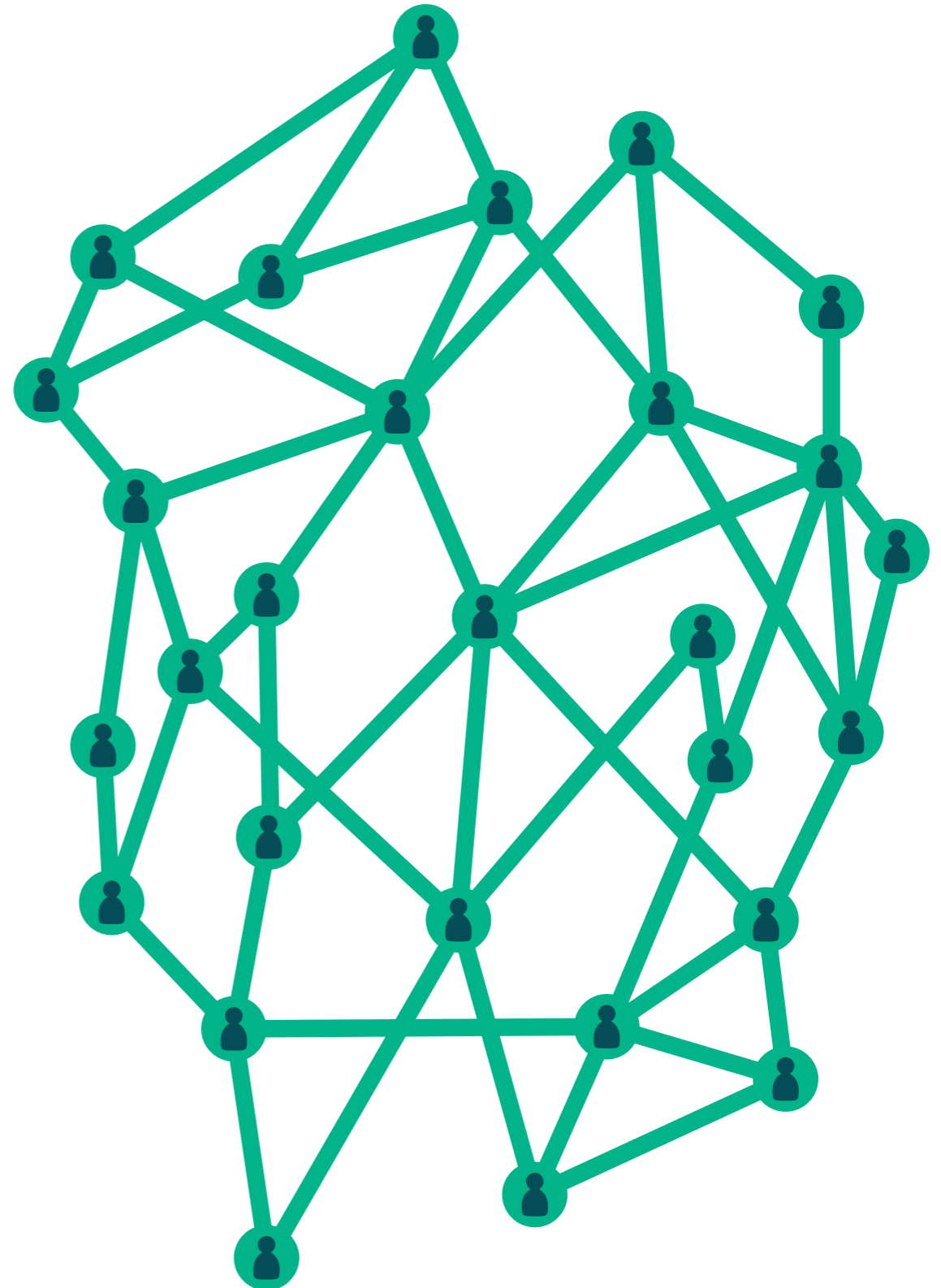
In a distributed environment, there aren't centralized locations organized around business concerns: people mostly work apart, from wherever they want.

There isn't a single core, there aren't “branch offices” where specific things happen, communication happens consistently for everyone, and almost never in-person.

“Distributed” means that people are equally engaged with **no center** to be distanced from.

This terminology can lead to a feeling of **balanced inclusion** with less fear of being left on the fringes.

But it can also lead to **inadvertent isolation**: without the routine contact of in-person spaces, connections that aren't well maintained will atrophy.

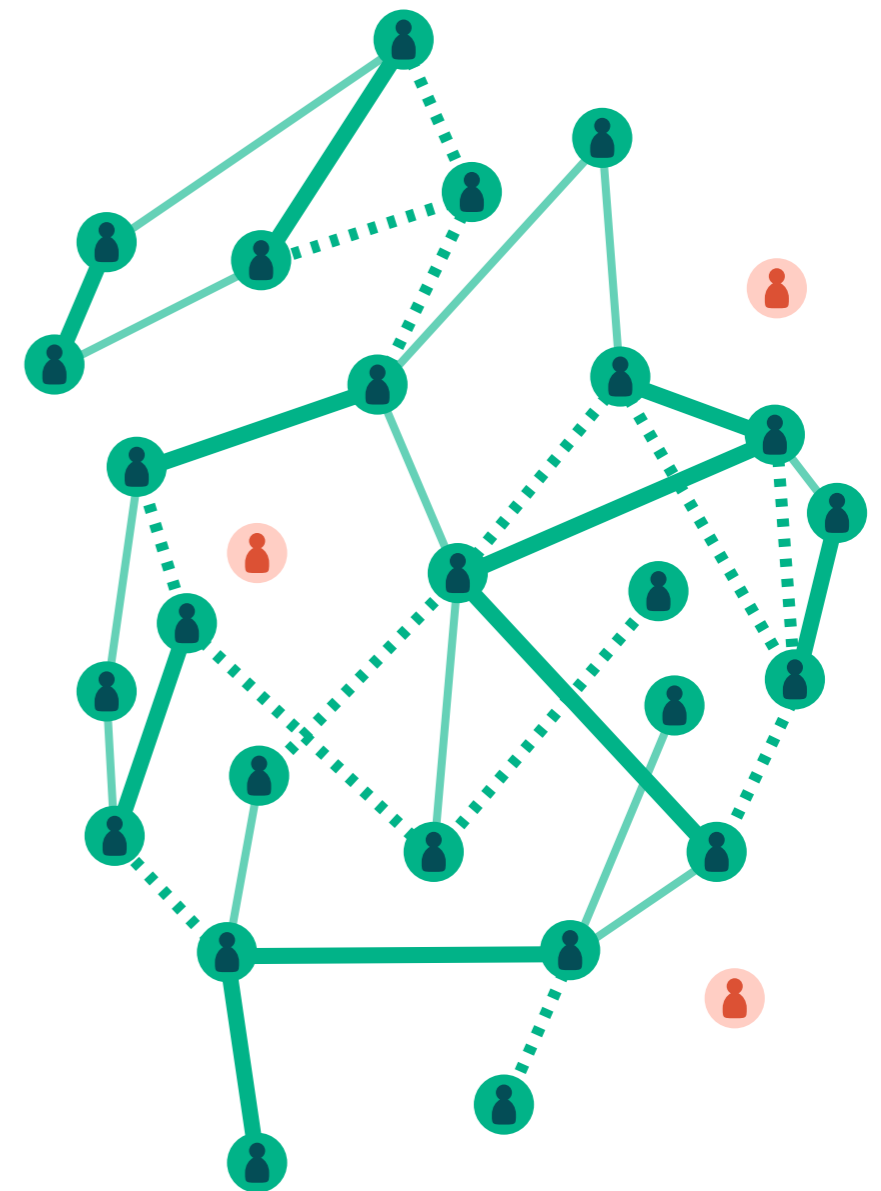


Constrained Interactions

When we communicate and interact with each other, there’s so much more than just pure language happening between us:

Facets of Interaction	In-Person	Video Chat	Audio Only	Text Chat	Email
Words/pure language	●	●	●	●	●
Intonation/subverbals	●	●	●	◐ emoji	◐
Pacing/delivery variance	●	●	●	◐	○
Precise interjection	●	◐	◐	◐	○
Microexpressions	●	◐	○	○	○
Broad body-language	●	◐	○	○	○
Eye contact	●	◐	○	○	○
Ad-hoc concurrency	●	○	○	◐	○
Gaze-tracking	●	○	○	○	○
Concentration estimation	●	○	○	○	○
Microgestures	●	○	○	○	○
Positional sound	●	○	○	○	○
Touch/haptics	●	○	○	○	○
Spacing/proxemics	●	○	○	○	○
Common peripheral stimuli	●	○	○	○	○
Searchable content	○	○	○	●	◐
Asynchronous participation	○	○	○	●	●
Referenceable artifacts	○	◐ recordings	◐	●	◐

Without proactive practices and habits, the evolution from in-person to distributed interactions can result in the loss of group cohesion: our connections fade out or break down.



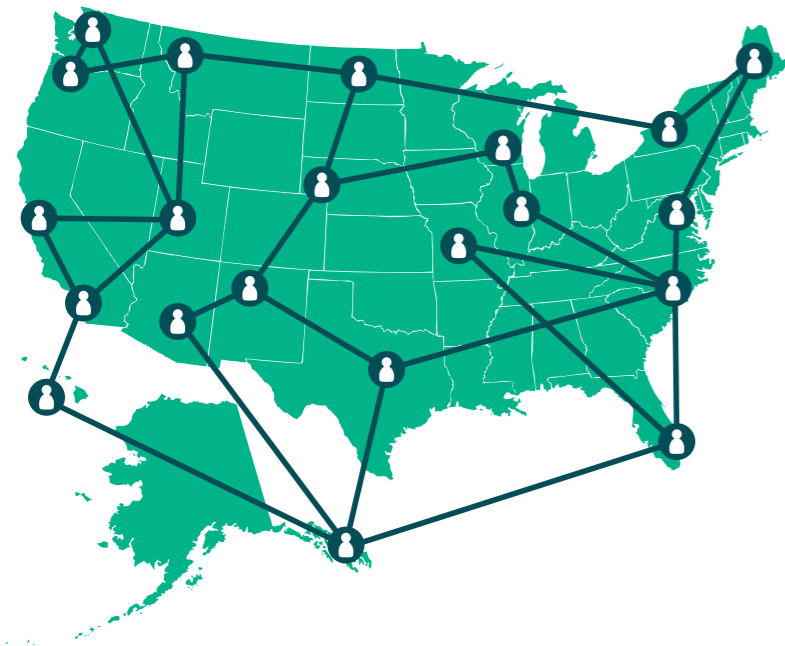
Well then, why do it at all?

Why would any organization start the evolution from in-person, work through remote and decentralized structures, to end up in a distributed environment where interactions are so constrained and connections so prone to atrophy?

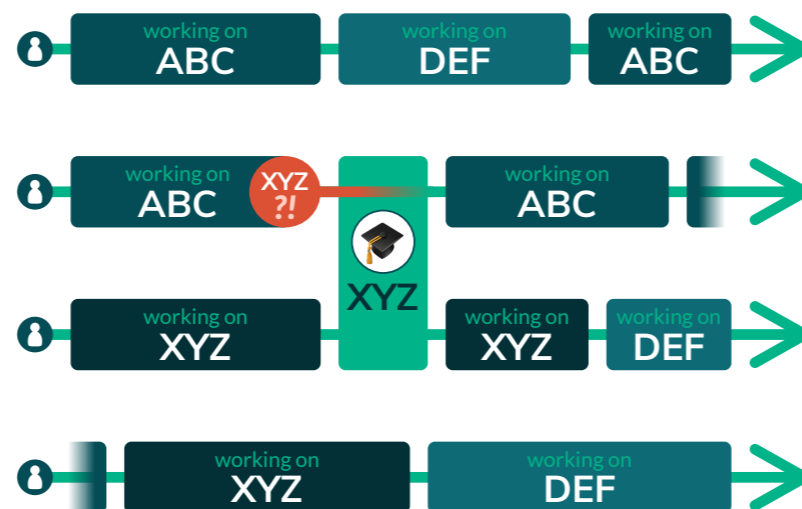
Here are a few key reasons:

(excluding things like pandemics requiring people to do so)

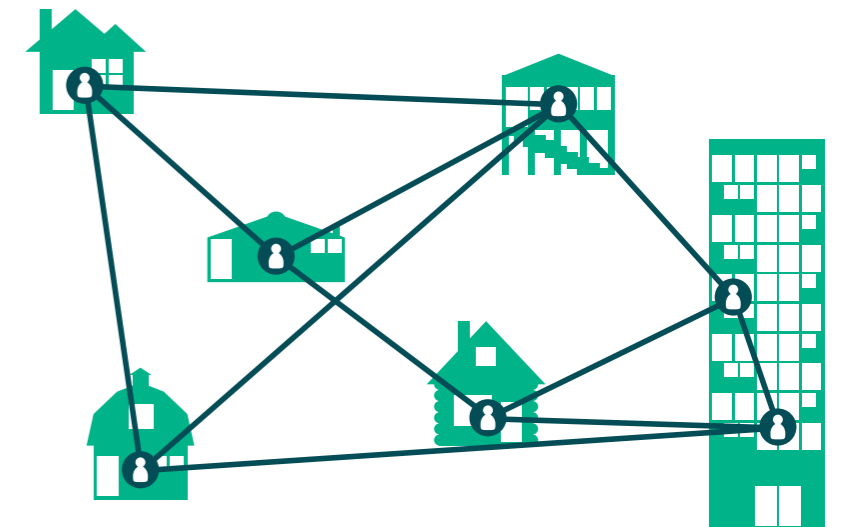
Finding the *right person* for the job doesn't have to mean picking from people *right here*. Distributed means a *nation-sized talent pool*.



People can do more when they are loosely-coupled, with distributed resources and fewer interruptions, *working asynchronously*.



We're human beings with *lives beyond work*. Distributed lets people live and work where they want, often with no daily commute.



Making distributed work, work.

Distributed environments have their benefits and their challenges. The other parts of this guidebook aim to help you build the skills and habits that will let you get the most out of your distributed work:

Part 2

Your Space & Tools

Your Internet connection, physical working spaces and your brain, video and audio conferencing tips, and getting the most out of text-chat.

Part 3

Distributed Challenges & Counsels

How to practice being your best boss, making the most out of your superhero cape, making implicit things explicit, being a great beginner, and building lasting knowledge artifacts.

