“It’s Like Coding in the Dark”

The need for learning cultures within coding teams

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Catharsis Consulting, 2022

Let’s start with a familiar story

People are always looking for clues to whether or not they are in a safe place for learning.

Code that works requires continual learning.

Learning Debt: when learning is necessary but discouraged, so developers' learning becomes hidden, covert, and unhappy.

“Coding in the Dark” study

Reflective: 25 in-depth interviews with developers.

- *prompts: collaboration, feedback & review, and barriers*

Real problem-solving: “search observations”: talk-out-loud as developers worked on an active, real task.

→Thematic analysis over these

30+ hours of conversation.

Table 1: Participant Characteristics

Gender		Employer		Experience	
Male	15	Large tech company	10	Junior	9
Female	8	Code Bootcamp	3	Mid-career	10
Nonbinary	2	Startup	8	Senior	6
		Large tech company (internship)	4		

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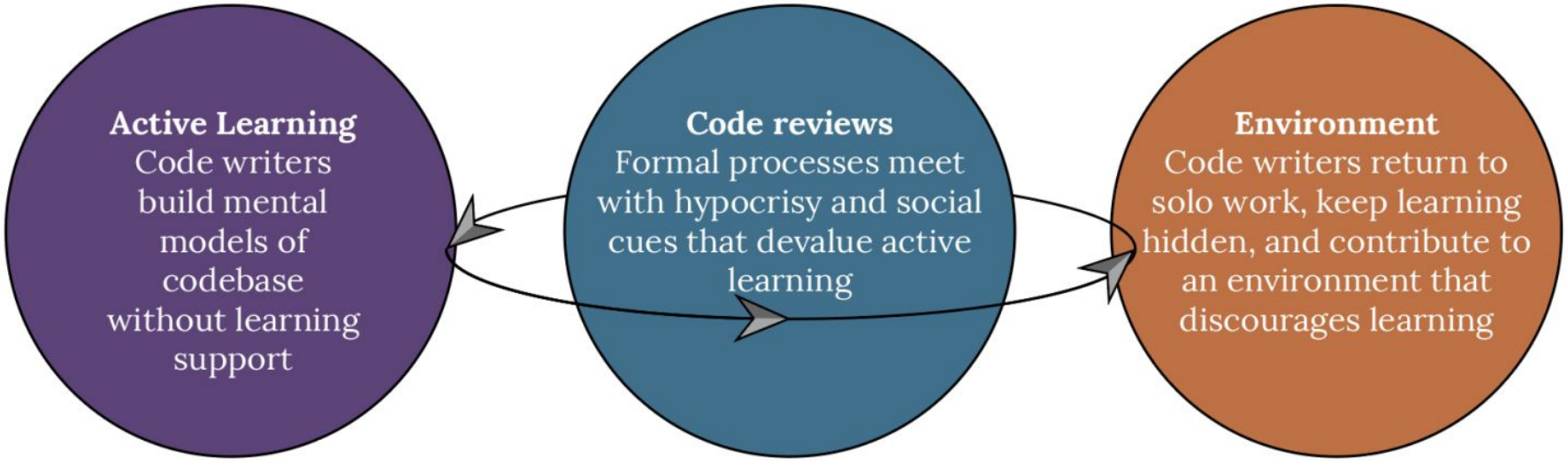

A Learning Debt Cycle

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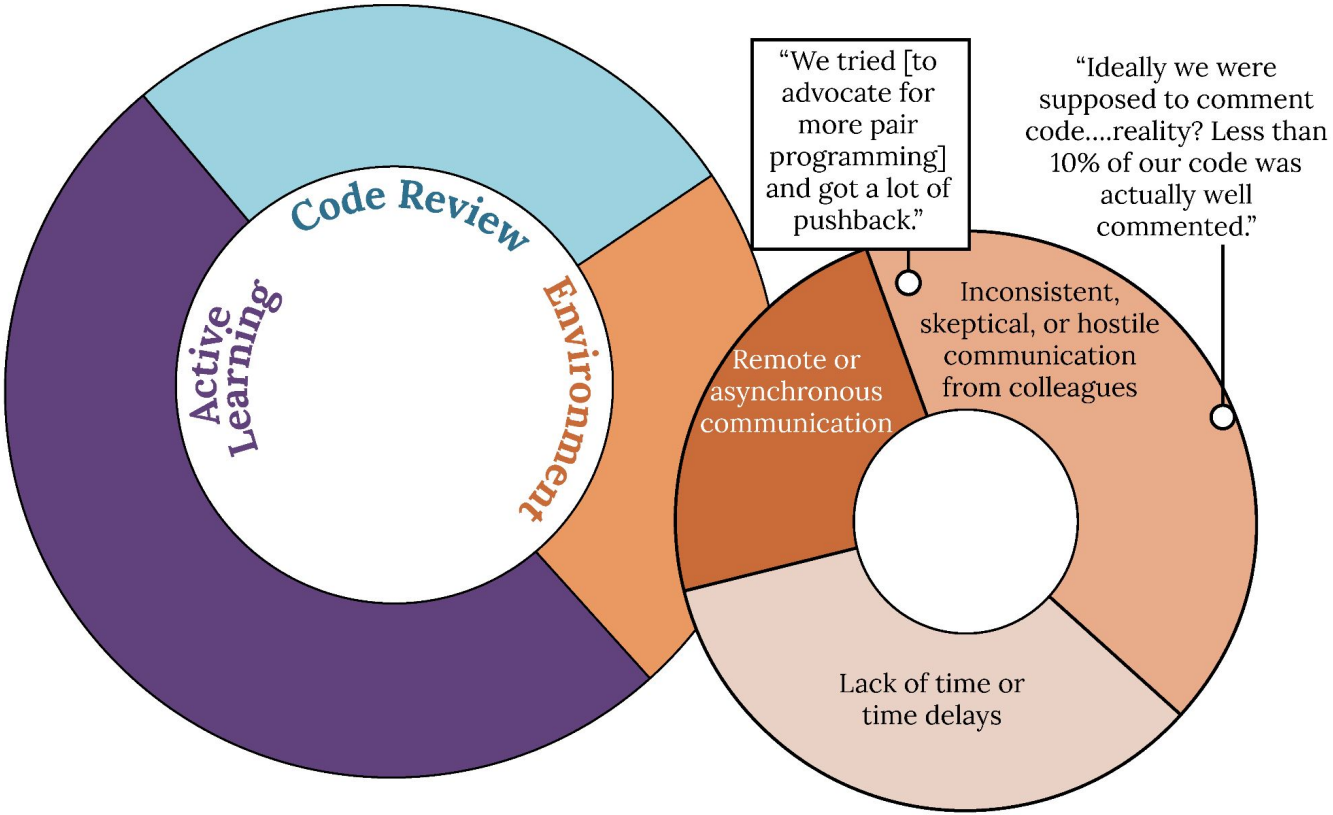

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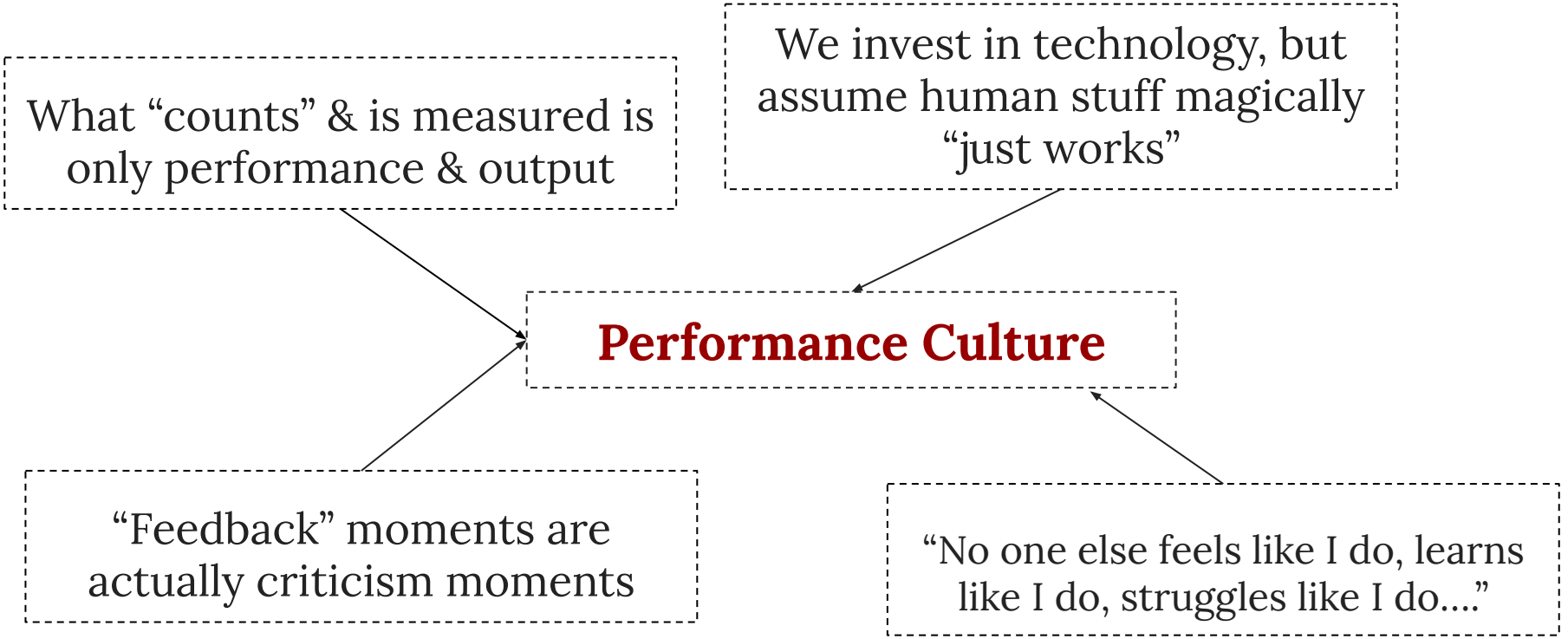
If learning matters so much, why is it so hard to create learning culture?



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A key paradox of sustainable learning:

It looks worse before it gets better

People are always looking for clues to whether or not they are in a safe place for learning.

Code that works requires continual learning.

If we care about learning, our environment needs to protect it (measure, recognize, reward)

Signals of an authentic learning culture

People can exercise agency: Co-create definitions of “success”

People can develop: Developmental feedback is separated from defending performance

People can reflect & pass on knowledge: Documentation “counts”

People can celebrate and affirm: Support work & learning is celebrated