DevOps is a Foreign Language

(or why there are no Junior SREs)

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Open Source Advocate @ Altinity

"Learning Kubernetes doesn't take 3 days, or 3 months. It takes 3 years"

— Kelsey Hightower, 2017

About Me

- 3/4ths of a degree in Linguistics
- 15+ years in tech, with many hats
- ClickHouse and Observability Expert (SME)
- Open Source Advocate at **Altinity**
- Co-Organizer for the **Open Source Analytics Community** / Conference

What are we going to talk about?

- Linguistics 101 in 8 minutes
- Krashen's five hypothesis
- What can we do better?

How many words do eskimos* have for snow?

The cow is in the red big barn.*

It's raining cats and dogs…

What is a language?

A language is a structured system of communication that combines syntax, grammar, and vocabulary with the cultural, historical, and social contexts in which it is used. It is not merely a set of rules or symbols but a living, evolving tool that shapes and is shaped by the people who use it. **Language encodes cultural knowledge, values, and worldview, serving as a medium for expressing identity, fostering community, and transmitting traditions across generations.**

Human Brains

Amazing at learning languages...

... until puberty

Native Languages

All children have the capacity for natural language, and will learn one simply from exposure.

Ground Rules

All natural languages are equally expressive.

Mocking or disparaging natural languages is unacceptable.

Disclaimer

Written languages are not natural languages.

Constructed languages (like Java or Esperanto) — are not natural languages.

How is this relevant to the SDLC?

What command do I use to see which version of docker is installed?

```
➜  ~ docker --version
Docker version 27.1.1, build 6312585
➜  ~ docker version
```

How do we know this?

Also, does a bootcamp grad know how to Ctrl-C?

How we learn

How we learn DevOps

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My Hypothesis

Successful software practitioners require an abundance of implicit (cultural) knowledge — which may not even be acknowledged in the learning journey.

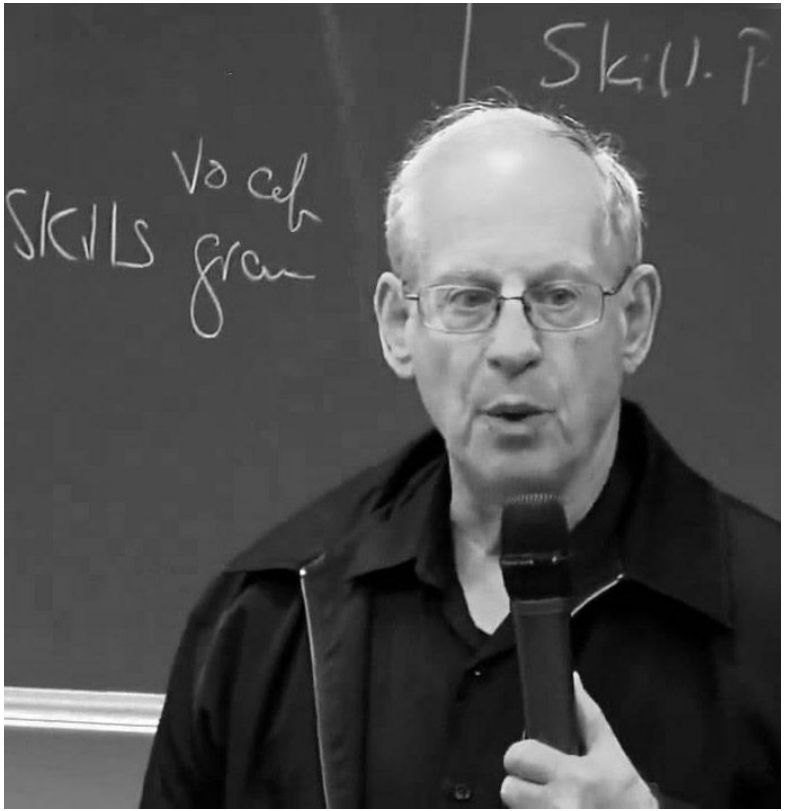
What is Second Language Acquisition?

What is Second Language Acquisition?

The study of the process by which adults learn new languages after puberty

Stephen Krashen

Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition (1982)



Krashen's Theory

1. Acquisition & Learning Hypothesis
2. Comprehensible Input Hypothesis
3. Natural Order Hypothesis
4. Monitor Hypothesis
5. Affective Filter Hypothesis

I. Acquisition / Learning Hypothesis

Acquisition / Learning Hypothesis

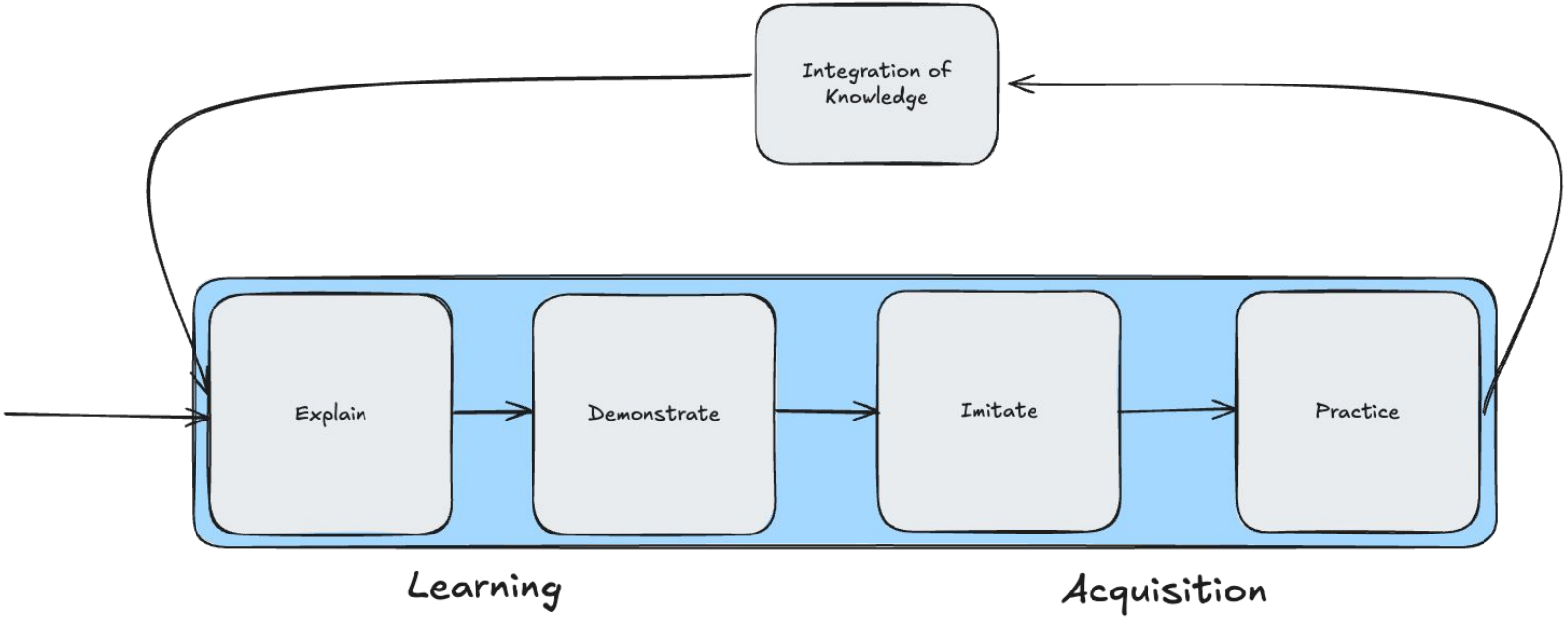
Humans learn best by combining theoretical learning with real-world knowledge acquisition

Acquisition / Learning

EDIP Learning

1. Explain
2. Demonstrate
3. Imitate
4. Practice

Acquisition / Learning



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Embrace practical experiences

Choose real goals that allow you to apply your theoretical learnings.

II. Comprehensible Input Hypothesis

Comprehensible Input Hypothesis

Humans learn best when exposed to new inputs of size i+1, where i represents already familiar concepts.

El pintor coloca el lienzo sobre el caballete en el estudio.

The painter places the canvas on the caballete in the studio.

Start with basics

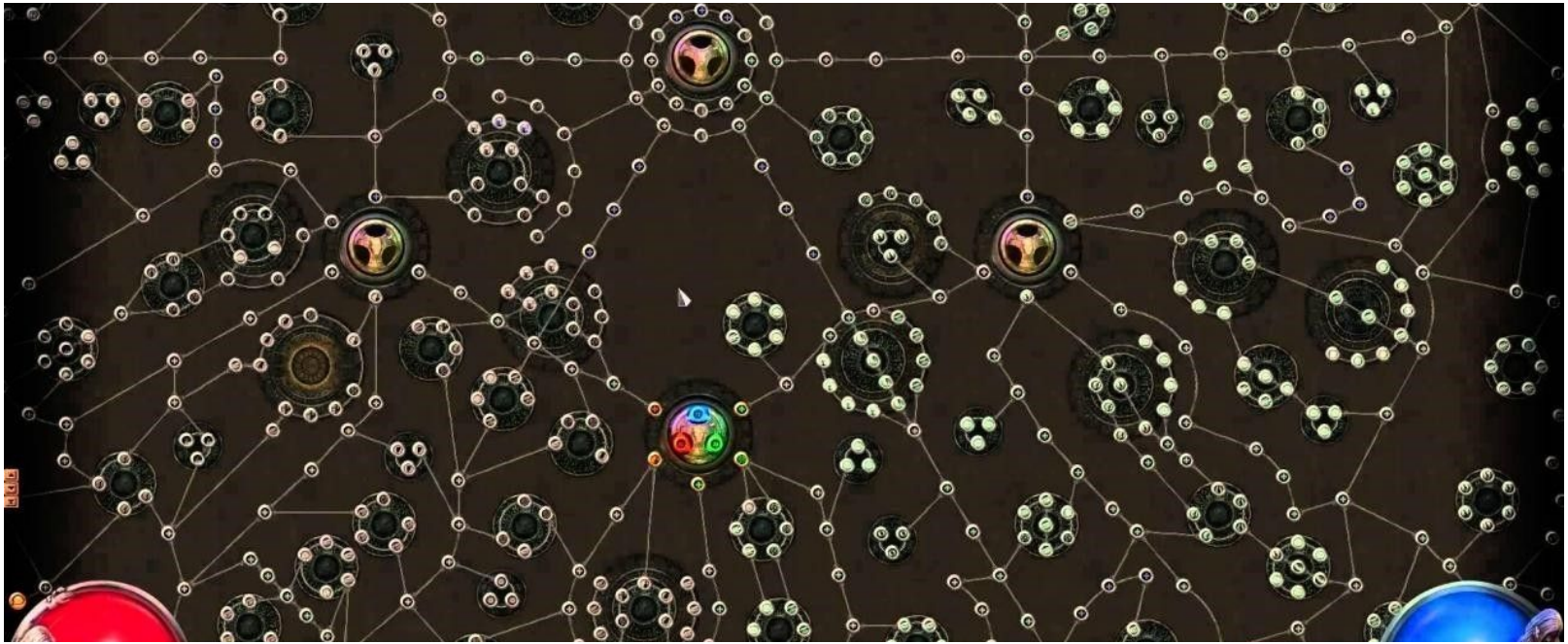
Start small and simple, then iterate.

III. Natural Order Hypothesis

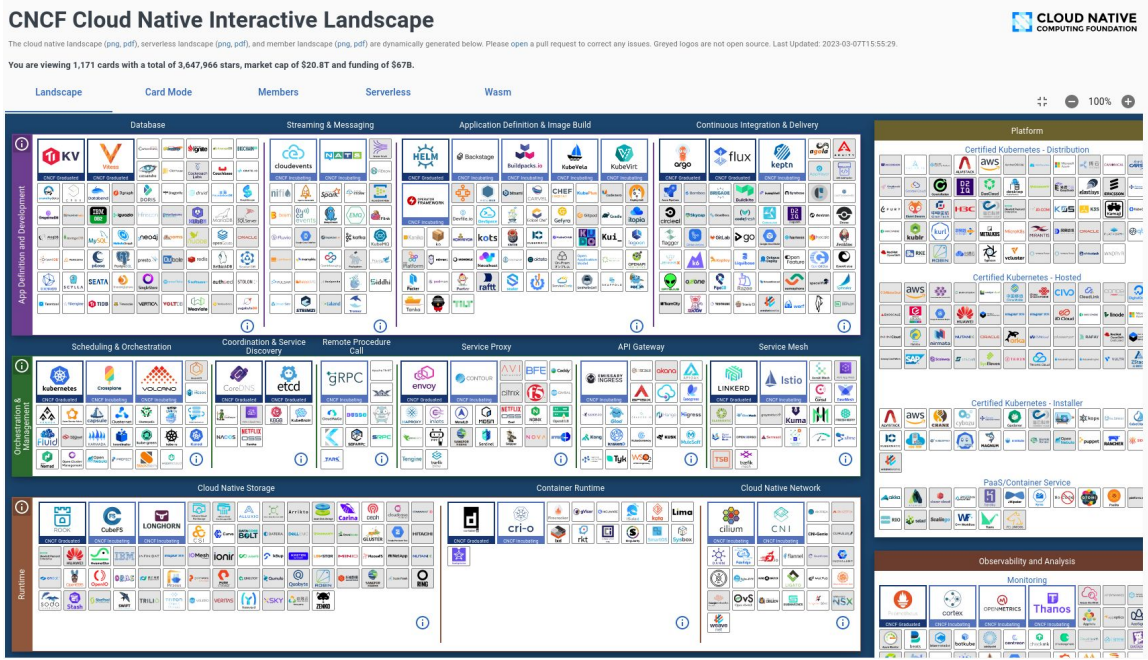
Natural Order Hypothesis

There is a natural progression for learning complex systems like languages.

Natural Order Hypothesis



Natural Order Hypothesis



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Natural Order Hypothesis

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Seek Mentorship

Find individuals who have trodden a path through the tall grass and can lead the way.

IV. Monitor Hypothesis

Monitor Hypothesis

Learners will self-correct, but when feedback is too frequent or too strict, it hinders progress.

It's all about feedback loops

Not too strict, not too permissive

Not too fast, not too slow

Don't be afraid to admit when you don't know the answer.

Don't be afraid to try.

V. Affective Filter Hypothesis

Affective Filter Hypothesis

***Motivation* and *mood* are the strongest filters on our ability to learn.**

Acknowledge Limitations

Humans are humans. Do not assume they will always behave the same way or be at their best. We're building sociotechnical systems.

Know your "why"

Knowing why you are trying to learn a new skill can help keep you motivated.

So what can we do about this...

as learners?

Tips for Learners

1. Combine theory with practice
2. Start small, then iterate
3. Seek mentorship
4. Try things, seek feedback
5. Know your why

Stay positive

You've got this!

So what can we do about this...

as the people building tools and platforms?

Work in, and provide, a safe (blame-aware) environment

Psychological safety is paramount.

Embrace early adopters

Early adopters are your brave pioneers. Embrace them and learn from them.

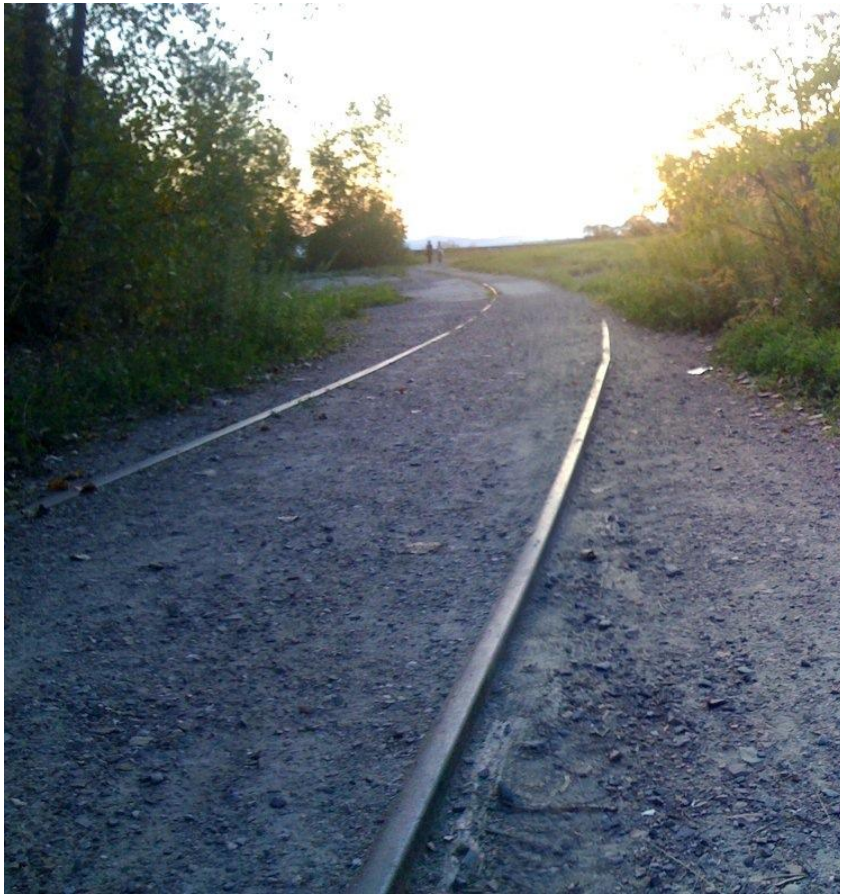
Design for accessibility

Provide context and meaningful feedback to any action.

Meet users where they are

Let users make mistakes without it hindering their forward progress if it doesn't need to.

and offer a trodden path…



or at least one free of major obstacles…

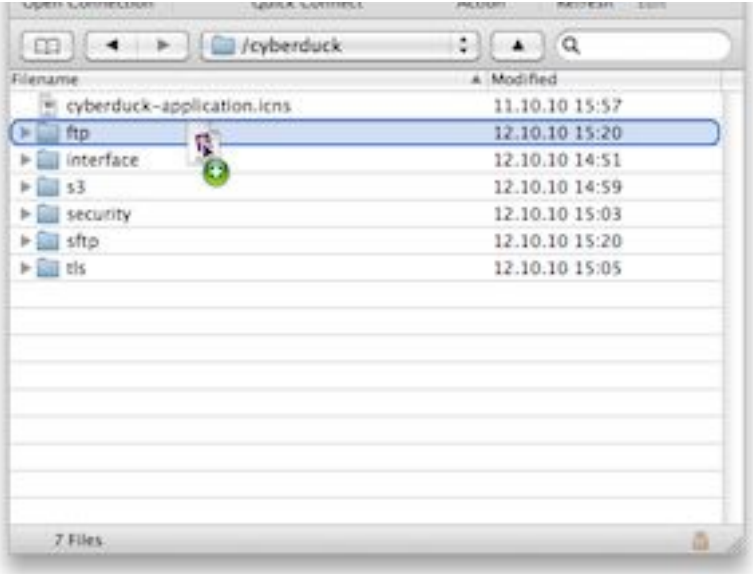
"Platform Engineering reduces the depth of the stack for developers"

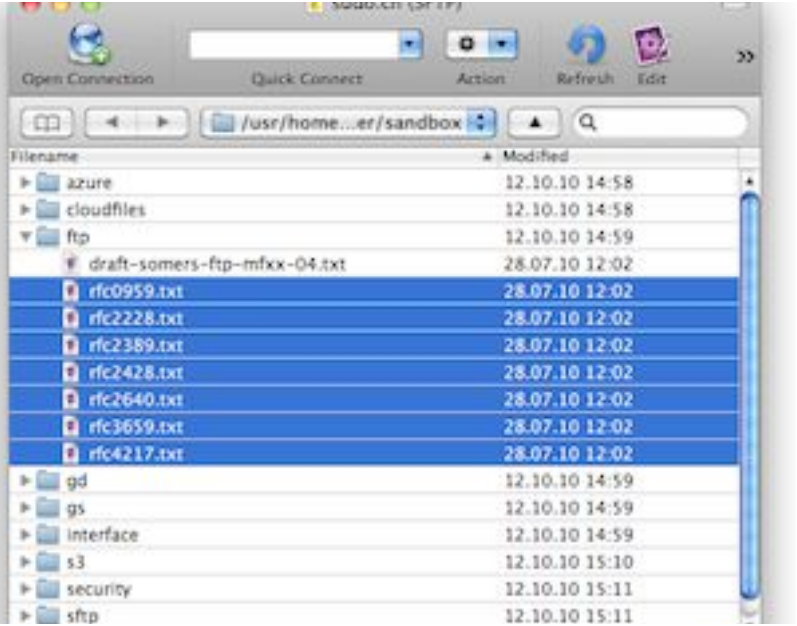
- Hazel Weakly

We already had this figured out before

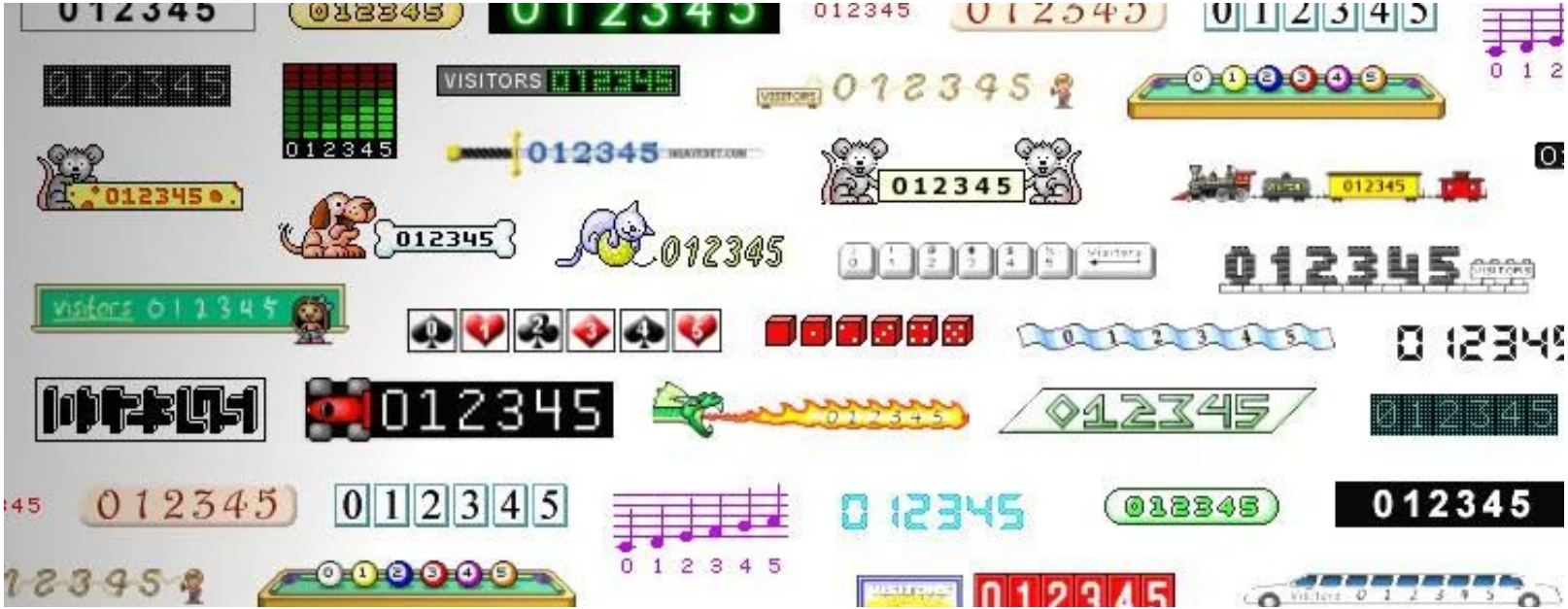
My first platform:

CI/CD:


/cyberduck
Filename
Modified
cyberduck-application.icns 11.10.10 15:57
ftp 12.10.10 15:20
interface 12.10.10 14:51
s3 12.10.10 14:59
security 12.10.10 15:03
sftp 12.10.10 15:20
tls 12.10.10 15:05
7 Files


Open Connection
Quick Connect
Action
Refresh
Edit
/usr/home...er/sandbox
Filename
Modified
azure 12.10.10 14:58
cloudfiles 12.10.10 14:58
ftp 12.10.10 14:59
draft-somers-ftp-mfxx-04.txt 28.07.10 12:02
rfc0959.txt 28.07.10 12:02
rfc2228.txt 28.07.10 12:02
rfc2389.txt 28.07.10 12:02
rfc2428.txt 28.07.10 12:02
rfc2640.txt 28.07.10 12:02
rfc3659.txt 28.07.10 12:02
rfc4217.txt 28.07.10 12:02
gd 12.10.10 14:59
gs 12.10.10 14:59
interface 12.10.10 14:59
s3 12.10.10 15:10
security 12.10.10 15:11
sftp 12.10.10 15:11

Observability:



Let's make this fun again.

Connect with me

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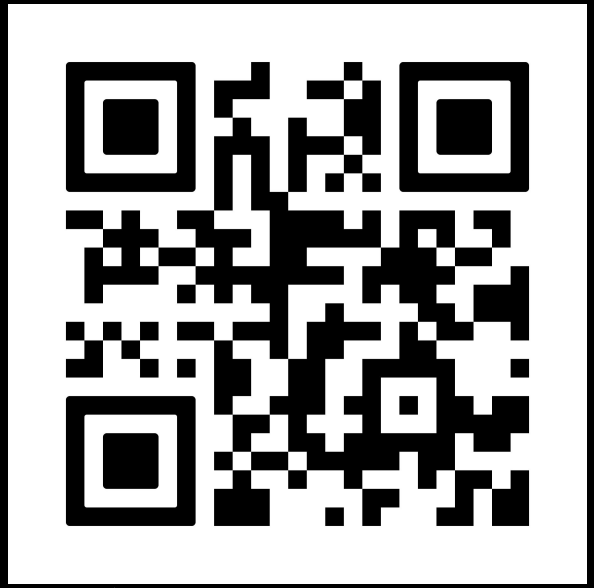
💬altinity.com/slack



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