

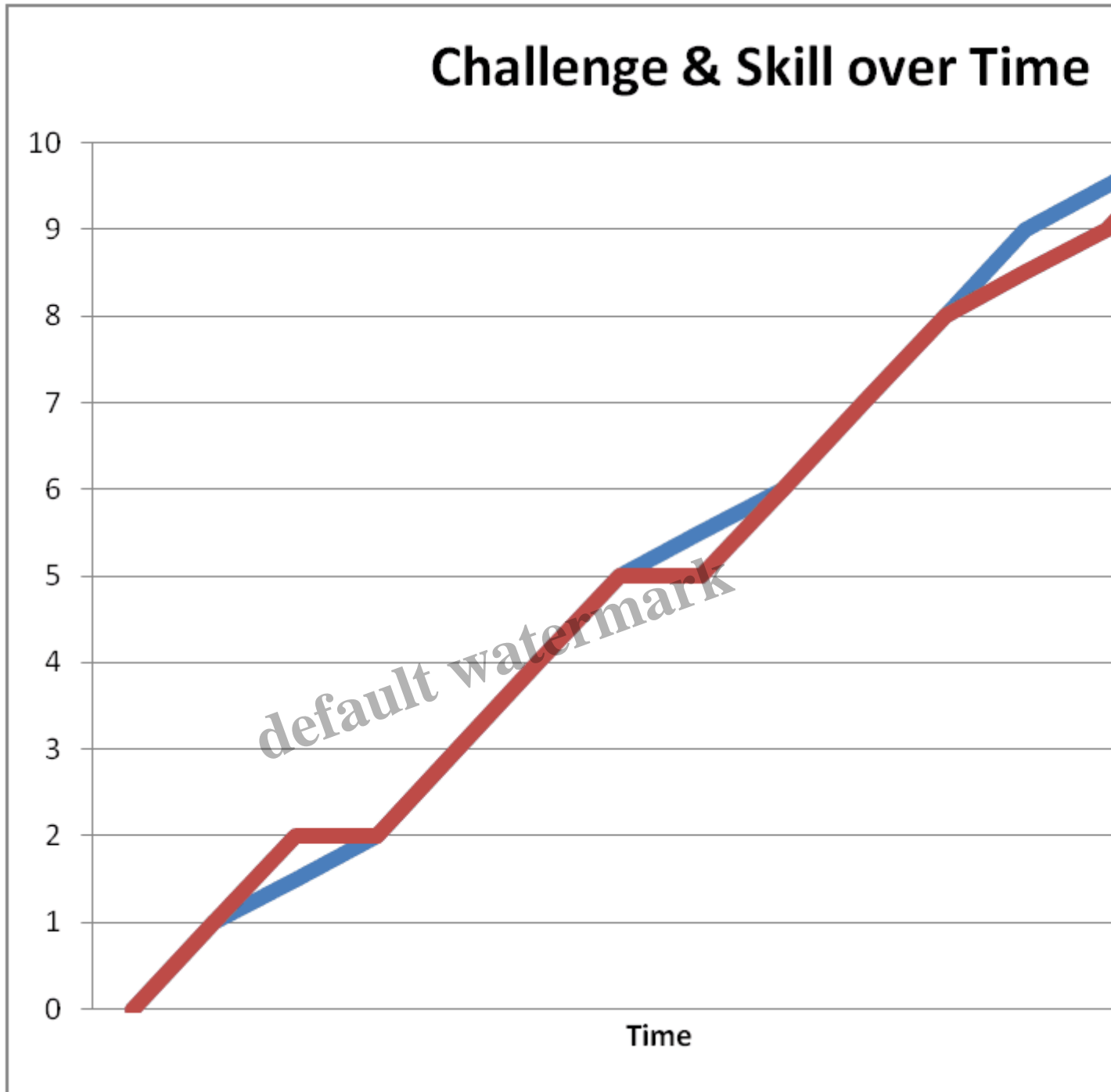
The Flow Shift and Bounce

Description

This is more a thought and possibly even a question to those who know more than me about the Flow concept. I have spoken about Flow in the past and use it as a core principle to engaging long term design.

However, recently it occurred to me that long term exposure to extremes in frustration or boredom, could alter our perception of flow.

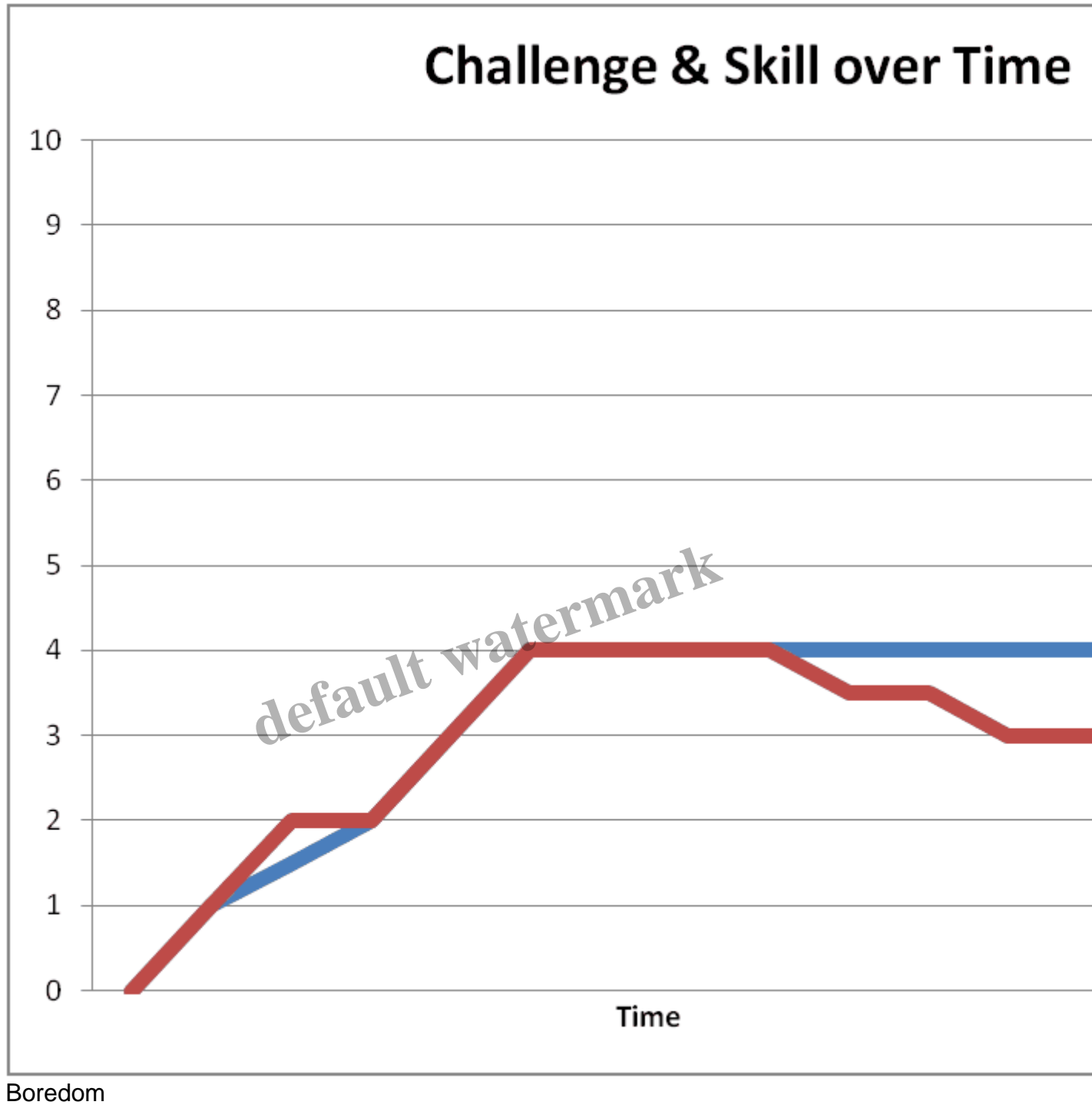
For instance, you spend months in the boredom phase. You have little to no challenge. It seems reasonable that you would need to boost the level of challenge to help improve engagement and in turn try and get closer to this idea of flow. Below is the "ideal" mix of skill and challenge as described in flow theory – only this time plotted against time.



Ideal Flow

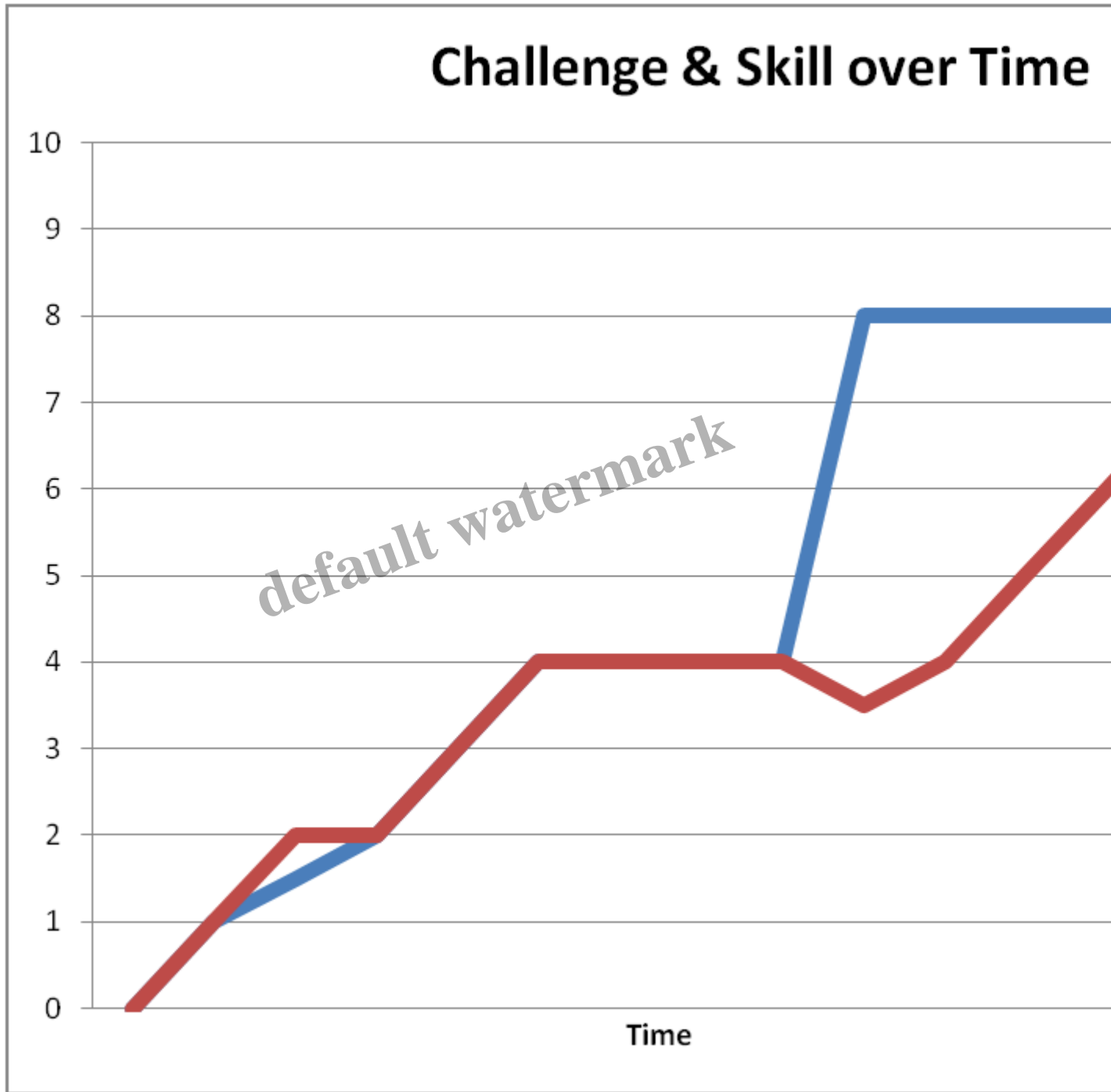
Now, if the challenge levels off, the likelihood is that your related skill level will begin to level off or possibly dip a little (due to lack of being pushed to develop it).

Challenge & Skill over Time



According to flow theory, this would put you smack bang into the boredom area. But what happens if you are suddenly challenged, surely this should be welcomed with open arms? The trouble is (as far as I can see and have observed), if the challenge is too far out of your new “bored” zone, you may actually struggle quite badly. Like a muscle that has not been used much, you have to build up the challenge – not suddenly ramp up. Overuse a muscle suddenly and it will get damaged.

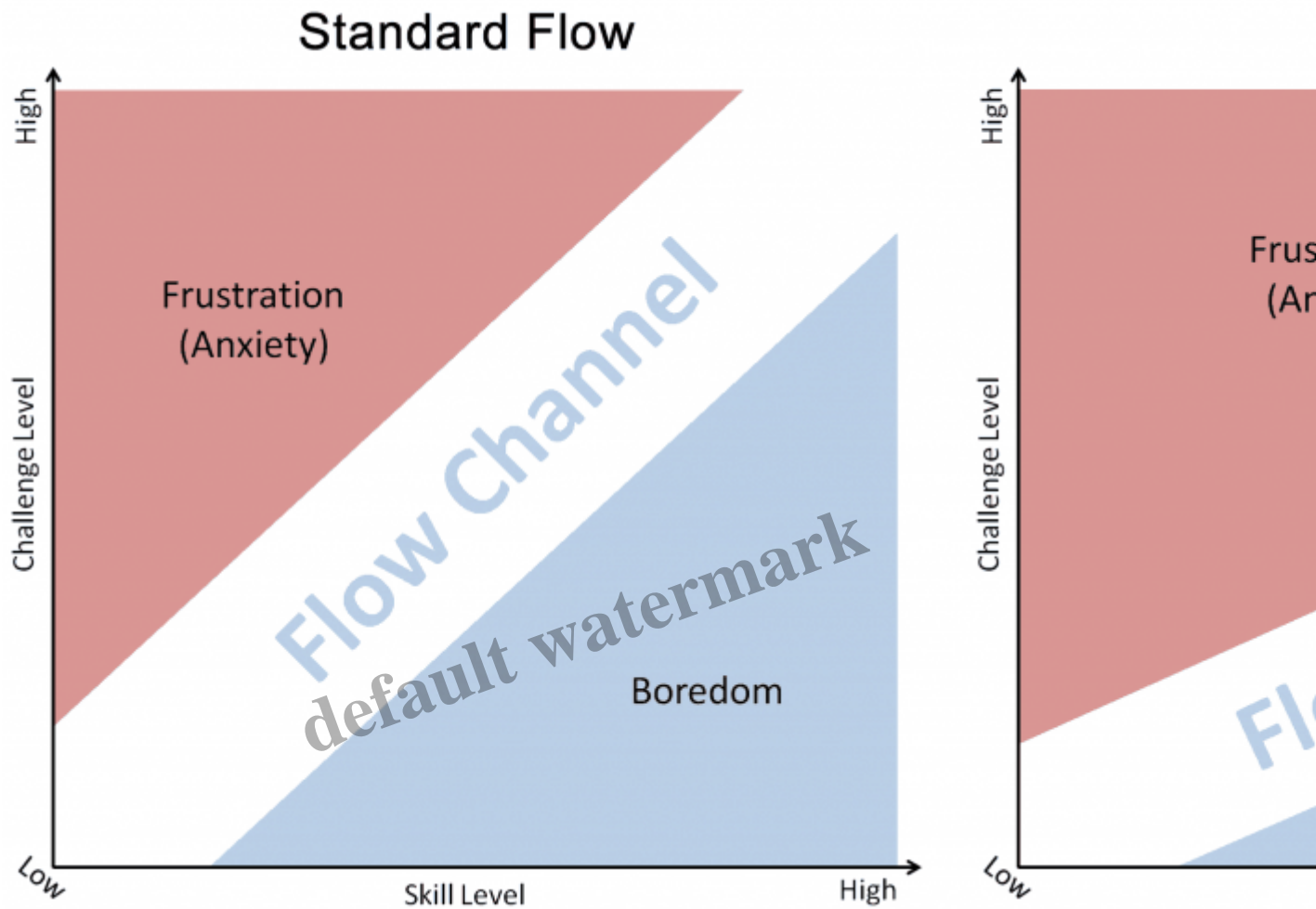
Below to can see what I mean. The challenge rises, but you need to warm your skills up before you can start to match the new level of challenge. This would actually put you into the frustration area of Flow – the challenge is rising faster than your skills can manage.



Flow Bounce

This is what I mean by the Flow Shift Bounce. Your boundaries between boredom and frustration shift if you are in one or other for a length of time. Sudden changes in challenge will cause your skills to have to bounce back. That is not always possible in a short space of time.

You could visualise it a bit like this. Whilst your skills warm up, the relative challenge you need to be in flow is much lower than it would have been if you had not had the challenge slump in the first place.



Before and after Flow Shift

As I say, this is me thinking out loud, but I wonder if there really is something in this!?

Category

1. Gamification

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Author

andrzej-marczewski

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