



# How to Unleash Success in Your Localization Career

A comprehensive guide to career-elevating formulas for how to develop the right skills and knowledge within localization and beyond.



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## Introducing Hristina Racheva

As the Head of Localization at Skyscanner by day and a localization career coach and mentor by night, Hristina Racheva is on a mission to get everyone excited about localization and give international users the experience brands aspire to create.

With more than ten years of experience in localization and translation, she helps businesses and individuals succeed in their global journey. Thank you to Hristina for lending us her expertise to help build this localization career guide.



# Move On Up

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## Furthering Your Localization Career

Whether you're just starting out or ten years into your career, it's never too late to shape yourself for success. Being strategic about furthering your career requires cross-team collaboration, building authority, and staying relevant.

# How to Progress In Your Career

The more senior you become, you are expected to have a broader impact within your organization, develop an executive voice, lead others, and gain the support of stakeholders. Career development is a strategic approach.

You want to speak about your achievements — even better if you can get others to talk about them — but identifying one's own strengths can be a challenge. Let's talk about self-promoting and congratulating yourself for your capabilities.



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**Position  
Yourself  
Strategically**

**Build  
Authority**

**Remain  
Competitive**



# Position Yourself Strategically

Localization managers interact with many stakeholders on a daily basis. You have to continually work to cultivate those strategic relationships.

Here is how you can position yourself as a contributor, ally, or partner to those in other disciplines:

- ✓ **Pair with Other Disciplines**
- ✓ **Help Other Disciplines**
- ✓ **Learn about Other Disciplines**

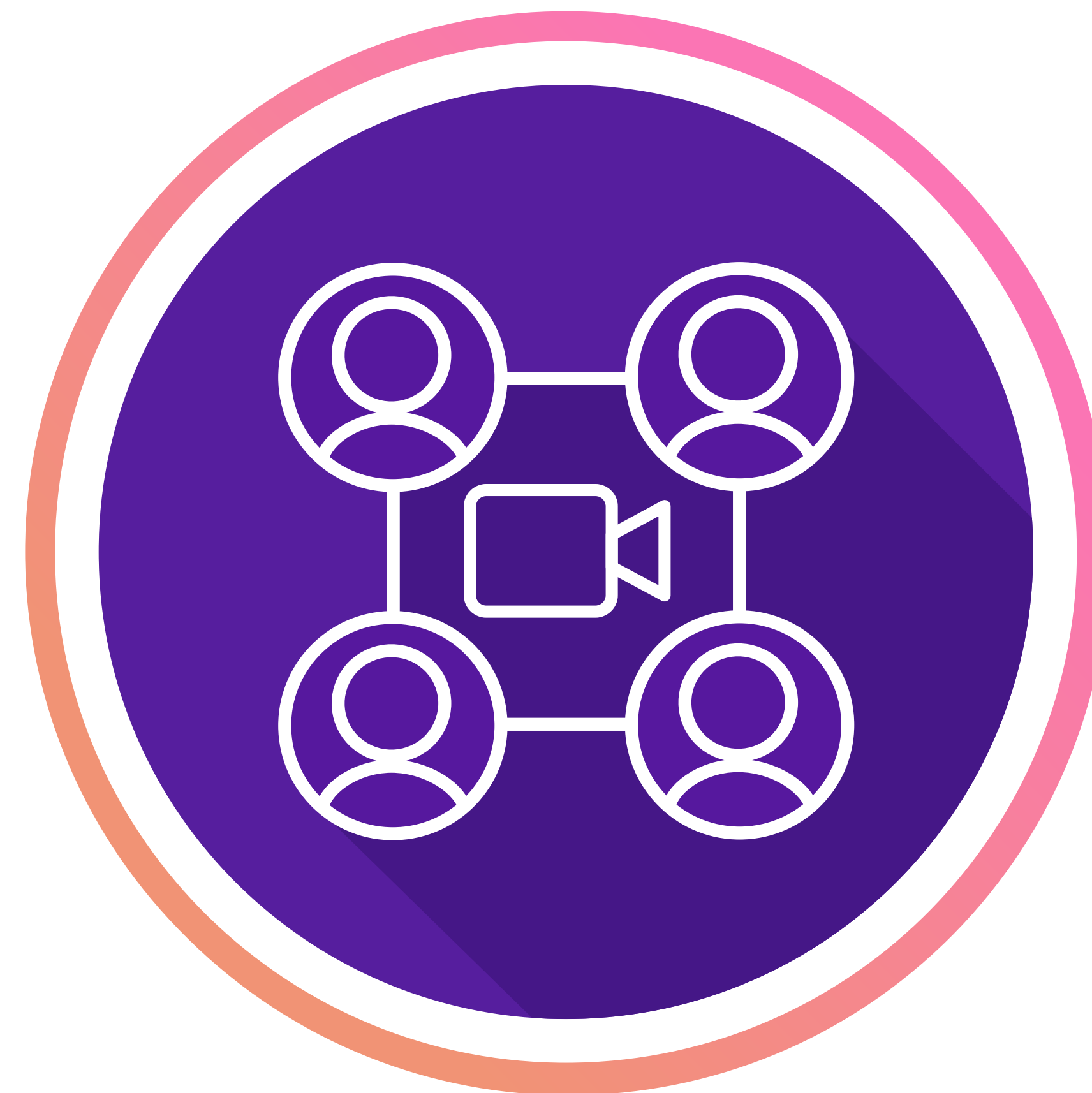


Photo by Nothing Ahead from Pexels

## **Pair With Other Disciplines**

You will find that other teams experience similar issues and feel the same way about particular challenges as you do. Try to be more involved with those in disciplines outside of your own by supporting each other.

This increases the opportunity to collaborate and learn from each other — not necessarily technical skills, but the opportunity to problem solve and approach challenges creatively. This will create a fantastic opportunity for you to grow and cultivate valuable relationships with people outside of your team.





**Connect the dots for other disciplines by sharing your insights. Sharing inspirations or challenges that both parties are experiencing can create an excellent opportunity for creative solutions.**

## **Help Other Disciplines**

Being part of a localization team gives you a unique position: visibility over the whole organization. You know what projects are happening, what strategies the company is using, the direction your industry is headed, and more.

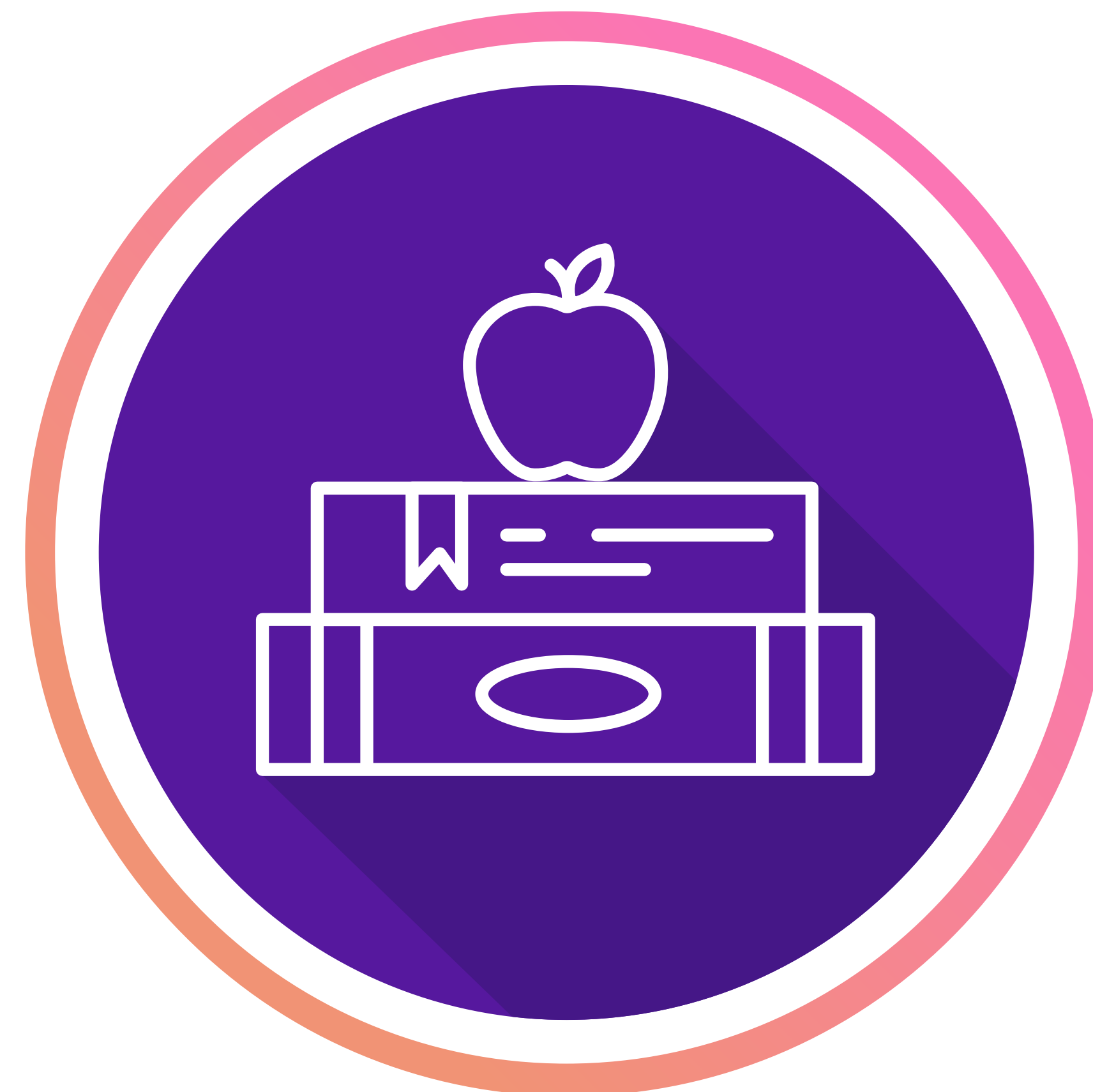
With this special advantage, connect the dots for other disciplines by sharing your insights. Sharing inspirations or challenges that all parties are experiencing can create an excellent opportunity for creative solutions. It's essential to look beyond your day-to-day tasks to how you can benefit the organization as a whole. Ultimately, this helps you articulate a localization strategy for the company, positioning yourself as an ally with cross-functional values.

## **Learn About Other Disciplines**

Grow your knowledge about other disciplines by finding answers to questions like:

- ✓ **How do they fit into the business as a whole?**
- ✓ **What projects are they currently working on?**
- ✓ **What goals and challenges do they have?**
- ✓ **What strategies do they utilize?**
- ✓ **What are some ways I can support them?**

Learning the organization's direction, strategy, competitors, future vision, industry position, and how various departments collaborate will help you become a more well-rounded expert within the company as your career advances.





**Position  
Yourself  
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# Build Authority

Now that you know how to position yourself strategically, it's time to build authority.

As a thought leader and expert in your industry, here are some ways to help you prove yourself within your organization.



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## **Ideas**

### **Identify Opportunities**

Look for an area of need or a problem that is not being addressed, and step up to help.

### **Surface Learnings**

Whenever you learn something new, think about how you could apply this knowledge to your role and the teams inside and outside your discipline.

### **Promote Team Successes**

Promote your work and your team's work every occasion you have — we will go into this a bit deeper in the next chapter when we talk about buy-in.

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# Remain Competitive

Opportunities to further your career can arise at any time, so it's important to stay ready.

Even when you're not looking for a new gig, you can remain competitive throughout your career by keeping your resume updated and by doing professional development.

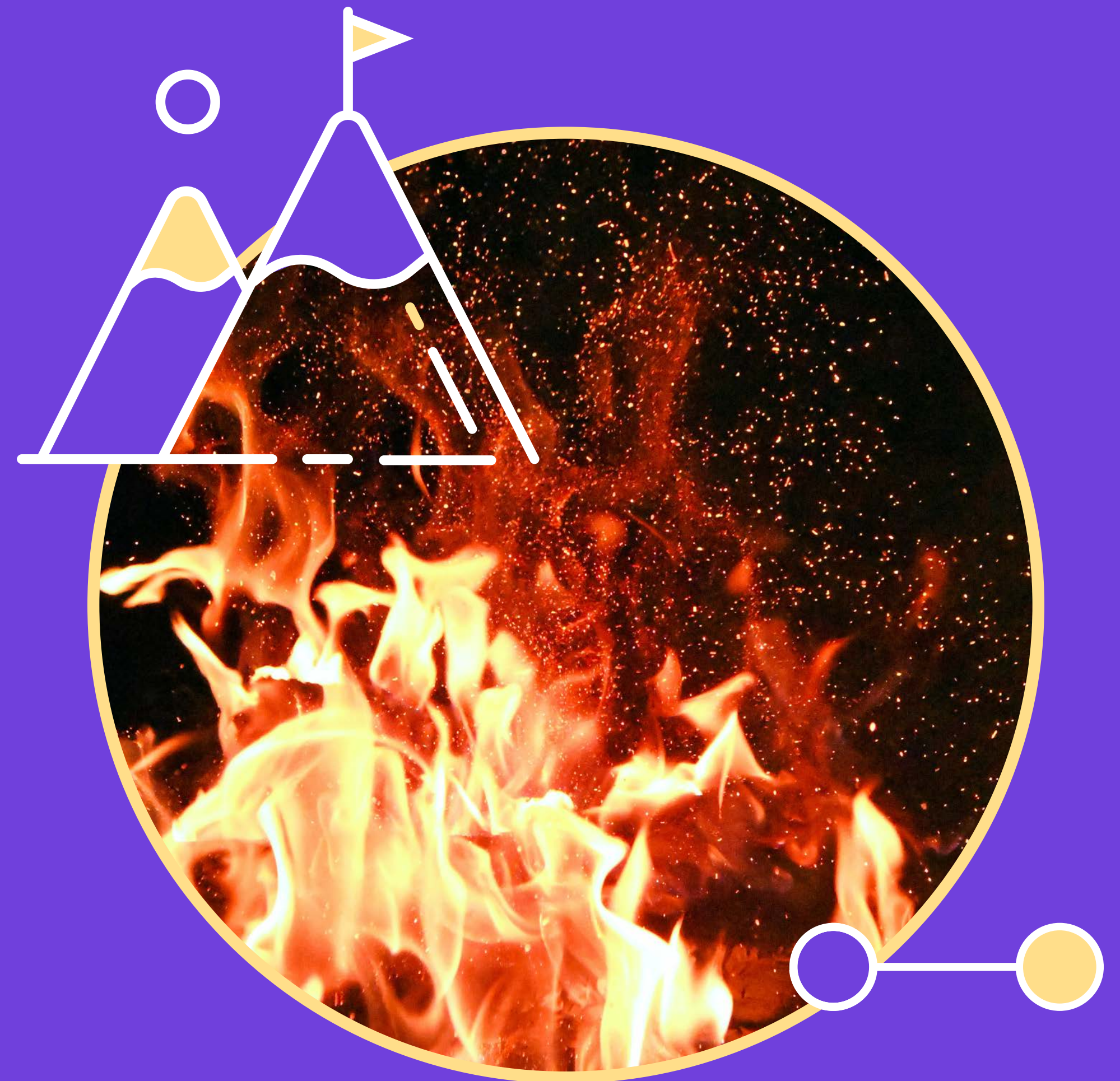
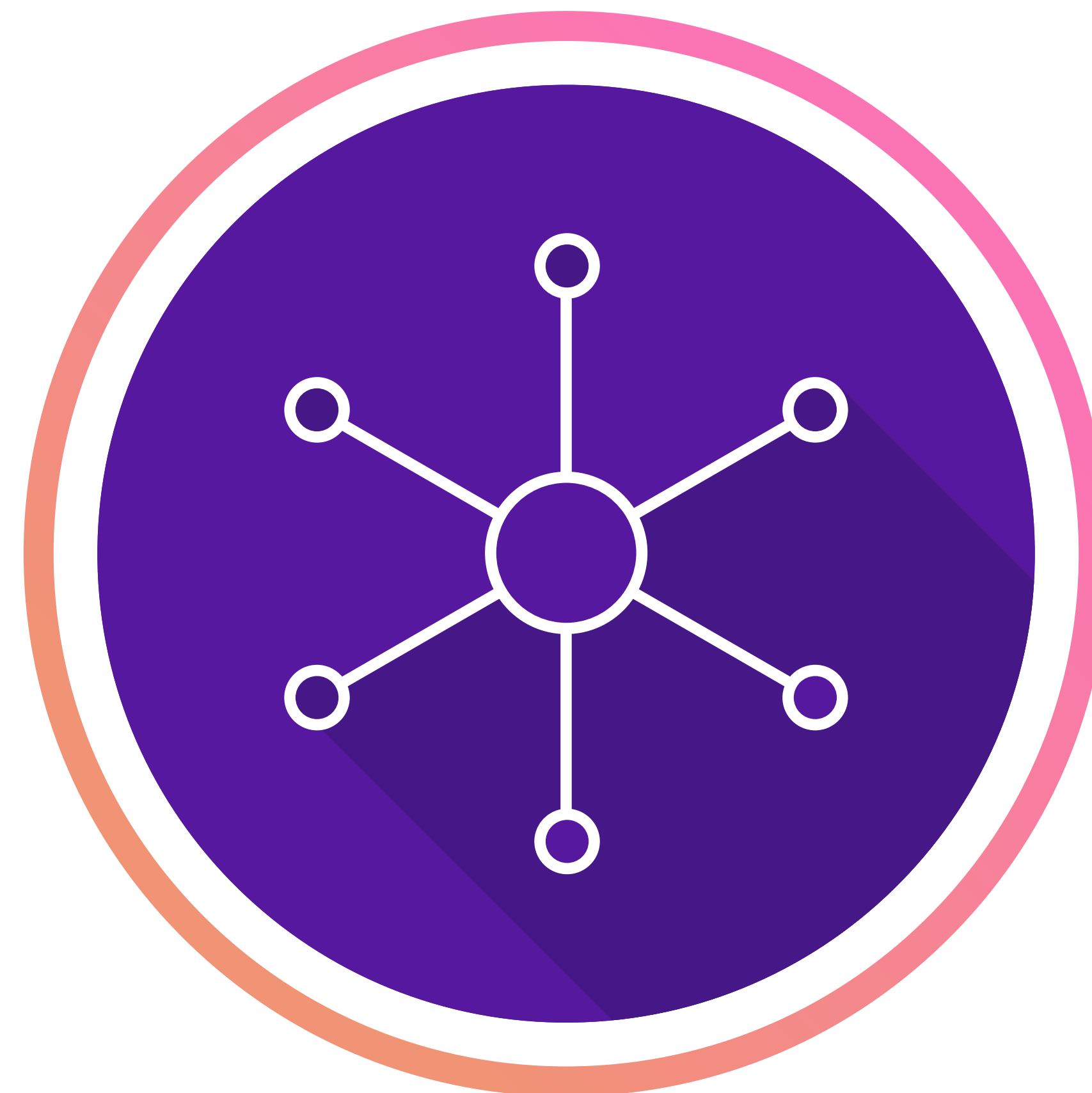


Photo by Adonyi Gábor from Pexels

## **Networking: Quantity vs. Quality**

Build connections to rely on and learn from through networking. Within these relationships, you can ask for help — get other professionals' insights on challenges you face, recommendations for tools, feedback on your resume, and more.

Not sure where to begin? Start on LinkedIn and search for people with job titles similar to yours. Then, connect with them to follow their work. The same can be said for Twitter and other social forums. In a time when we can't all quite get back together in person, forging new relationships online will help build a foundation for a more interactive future.







## Showcasing Your Achievements

Even if you aren't applying for jobs currently, it's always a good idea to keep a master resume and update it regularly. Keep a collection of all your achievements, praises, feedback, awards, projects, successes, and presentations. This will make it easier to create a custom resume specific to the role you are applying for when an opportunity arises.

It is also important to remember that a resume isn't your job description. Rather, it's a way to showcase what you've achieved as an individual. Instead of making a list of your responsibilities, always craft your resume focused on the impact and the differences you've made from those achievements and projects.



## Interview Preparation

When you talk about your experience during an interview, remember, it's all about impact. Articulate your contribution and its outcome. What was the result of your work? What difference did your efforts make on the team or the company? You can talk about how you contributed to a team, but be confident and make sure to talk about *you* as an individual.

And ask questions — not for the sake of asking questions but to learn. Ask about the team, what tools they use, their achievements, strategies, challenges, and upcoming plans. Listen to the interviewer's responses to your questions and turn them into an opportunity to talk about your experience. For example, you can talk about how you've also worked through similar challenges and how you solved similar problems.



# The Buy-In

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## Working Cross Functionally as a Localization Manager

Raising awareness and getting buy-in for localization needs to happen at all levels of the organization, across all disciplines, and at all times. Let's look at how to strategically get your entire organization on board for your localization initiatives.

# The Buy-In

A wide range of team members must incorporate localization into their strategy and vision and adhere to localization processes. Instead of getting one-off support from the leadership, the buy-in should take on the “Horizontal Buy-In” approach, which considers how to engage with various levels and disciplines on a daily basis.



Photo by fauxels from Pexels



## Tips for Buy-In

**1**

Build strategic and intentional relationships with your stakeholders. Often, informal and personal relationships can lead to strong connections, which are great for collaboration with people from other disciplines or teams.

**2**

Let the stakeholders know your purpose, what you wish to get out of your buy-in pitch, why they should care, what the outcome will be, and what they can do for you. This helps them understand your “why” and vision.

**3**

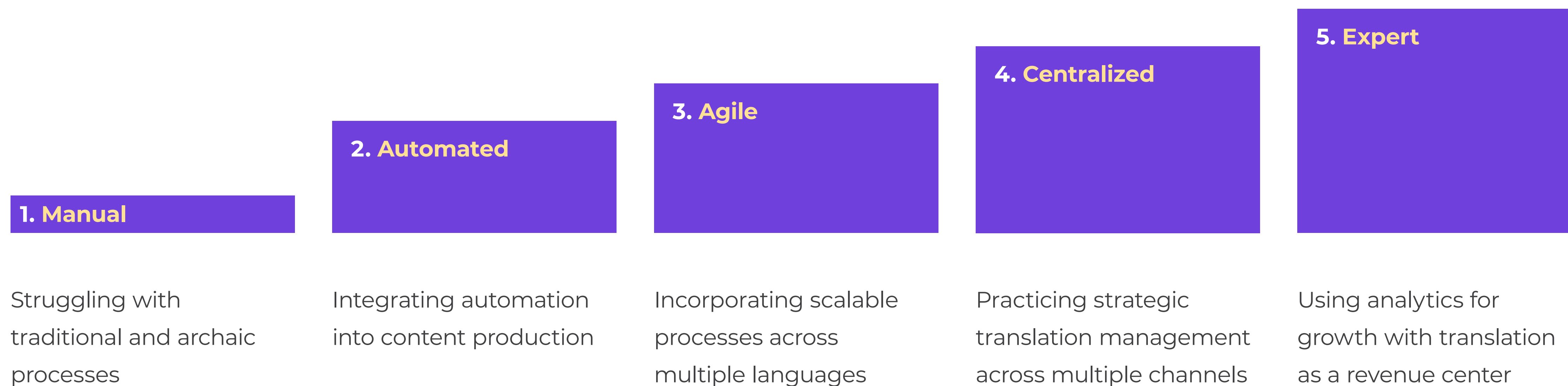
Be clear and concise when presenting to your stakeholders and asking for their support. They don’t need all the details, and they will ask questions if they want to learn more.

**4**

Be prepared for pushback. Don’t be discouraged if there is pushback, as it might come in the form of questions to help the stakeholders better understand how they can help — it’s not always indicative of disagreement.

## Localization Maturity Model

The value of moving up in the Localization Maturity Level is that your organization will be able to achieve more — faster and cheaper. Where does your brand currently stand in the Localization Maturity Model? [Learn more about how you can jump to the next step here.](#)



### Focus on the Impact of Localization

When presenting the localization strategy to leadership for buy-in, you want to avoid focusing only on things pertaining to localization (ie. tools, processes, setup). Your leadership team cares about the outcome of localization initiatives. They will want to know things like:

- **What impact will your localization efforts have on the international customer experience?**
- **Will investing in a new locale drive revenue?**
- **What impact will implementing a strategic localization strategy have on the business?**

Remember that localization itself isn't your end goal but a means to support the business. That's why it's critical to tie your strategy into the company's overarching goals, vision, and strategy.

### Present-Forward vs. Future-Back Approach

The present-forward approach looks at what is not working right now, current challenges, and strategies to fix it. The future-back approach is about thinking of the future and painting the big picture. Think about what the ideal localization state would be for the organization and what the ideal localization strategy will look like X years from now.

Start from those big picture goals and walk your way back to build a process to achieve them. This way of thinking allows your team to break free from the limitations you are facing right now and open up your mind to what is possible.



# Influence Without Authority

“Influence without authority” refers to the ability to make others act, behave, or think without having any power or right over them. Developed by Matt Tse of Atlassian, the next section details three “plays” localization managers can test to interact with others and create influence without authority.



Photo by fauxels from Pexels

## The Buy-In



**Psychologist**



**Pitcher**



**Activist**



## Psychologist

### Purpose

Understand the motivations and context of who you are trying to influence and collaborate with.

### When

- New situations: Newly hired at a company, new team, new projects, change of stakeholders
- Times of conflict: Misalignment in a project or friction between team members

### How

- Build trust and discuss ideas in a safe environment through one-on-one meetings.
- Get to know your stakeholders better and learn their “why” through background reading.
- Get social with your team and stakeholders to build a personal relationship with them.



## The Buy-In



### Purpose

Explore and try different ways of framing ideas.

### When

To communicate ideas and find the right frame:

Refine your ideas and generate excitement and interest for your ideas

### How

- Use interactive and informal visuals such as whiteboards, posters, workshops, screenshots, or wireframes to present your potential ideas.
- Brand your approach by putting a name on it so others can reference it.
- Use an elevator pitch, a very concise and powerful way to share ideas.



### Activist

## Purpose

Create large movements by regularly sharing stories, perspectives, and facts.

## When

- Driving significant change: Cultural change, new product, new industry trend
- Working company-wide: Collaborating with outside teams

## How

- Be relevant. What's in it for them? Repeat and apply to their context.
- Paint a vision of the future by partnering with a design team to present your thoughts visually.
- Generate energy and excitement around you, but remember to approach with patience as this isn't an overnight process.

# Change the Narrative

Getting buy-in is not just about putting your presentation or strategy forward and getting support from leadership. It's about how you position your localization team and its efforts. It's about educating your stakeholders on how they perceive and talk about the role and impact of localization — hence the need to change the current narrative.



Photo by fauxels from Pexels



## **At its core, localization is about enabling users with different native languages to use your product the same way your English-speaking users do.**

Often, the organization focuses on the efforts of only the localization team to translate their product or service. But in fact, everyone plays a role in providing the best international user experience. Localization is “how,” and the experience is “what,” which is the ultimate outcome everyone is working toward.

Before asking for buy-in, help your stakeholders change their perspective — they are not supporting the localization team for the sake of helping the team; they are ultimately doing it for the business. Everyone is doing it together, not just the localization team.

# Make Localization Fun

Localization is a fun, fascinating, and ever-evolving topic. It encompasses a rich diversity of nationalities, cultures, traditions, behaviors, languages, and more.

It's an industry that's experiencing rapid growth, so it's time we bring others aboard and bake localization into the overall company strategy.



Photo by Andre Furtado from Pexels



## **How can we lean on the relatable side of localization to increase support and buy-in?**

Build curiosity and engagement around localization elements that are already familiar to your team. From there, you can drive the conversation about what you need from stakeholders.

One of the compelling ways you can do that is by hosting fun, organization-wide activities. For example, you can create and share a pop quiz about the localization work your company does to gauge how plugged in your colleagues are. Or make it a tradition to share blog posts or quick, interesting facts about other countries and their cultures. You will be surprised by how many people appreciate those efforts and find them eye-opening.

**Pop Quiz**

**Blog Posts**

**Polls**

**Fun activities**

**Puzzles**



# From the Ground Up

## Building a Localization Team

Building a team requires the foundation of a strong team culture. In today's remote world, it's more important than ever that teams embody shared values to create a safe space for collaboration, efficiency, and psychological safety. This chapter discusses successful onboarding, team collaboration, ways your team can learn and grow together, and more.

# Onboarding

Research shows that systematic onboarding brings new employees up to speed 50% faster. This enables them to start contributing to desired team goals more quickly and efficiently.

For this reason, onboarding is an integrated team effort. Getting a new employee up to speed should be a priority across teams so the business can continue towards its goals.



Photo by RODNAE Productions from Pexels

## **Your Role as a Manager**

Onboarding requires a well-rounded process to navigate its complexities and make for smooth sailing. The entire team has a hand in supporting the new hire, but the biggest impact on the new employee's success will come from the hiring manager.

It's important for hiring managers to understand what the new hire needs to accomplish and how it will be done (skills, resources, connections, tools).



**Understand  
their challenges**



**Make them  
part of the team**



**Connect with  
key stakeholders**



**Help them  
get early wins**



## **Understand Their Challenges**

Even as an experienced professional, onboarding can be hard for a new hire. They are working on establishing new relationships, adapting to a new company culture, and perhaps learning about an entirely new industry.

It's important to reassure them that learning is more critical than doing in the early days. Make sure the new hire understands how they will be evaluated and discuss long-term goals and expectations so that you're aligned on their career development.

**Early wins are a powerful way for incoming employees to build confidence and credibility.**



## Make Them Part of the Team

The sooner the new team member builds effective working relationships with their peers, the better. Ensure the team understands the reason for the hire and what role they will play. Encourage the team to get to know each other on a personal level.



## Connect Them with Key Stakeholders

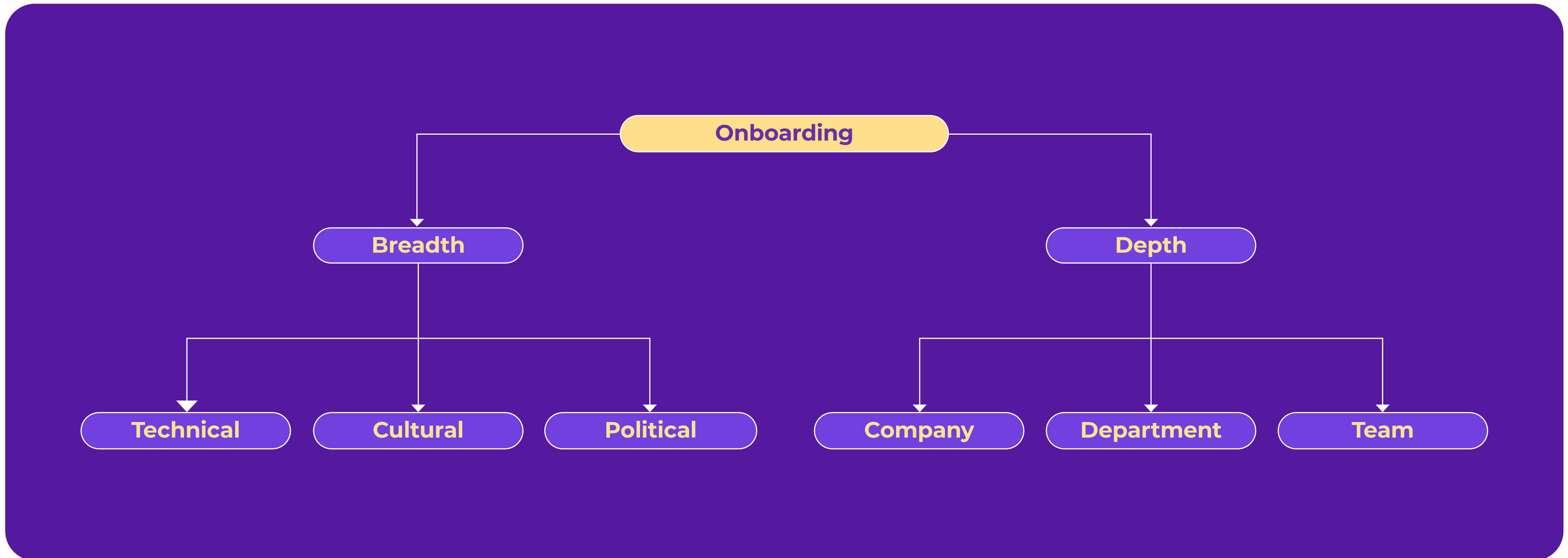
Connections within the organization can help new hires adapt to the new culture and perform more effectively. Create a list of names and make introductions for them. It's also helpful to include brief notes on each connection and explain why it's relevant.



## Help Them Get Early Wins

Early wins are a powerful way for incoming employees to build confidence and credibility. Build an onboarding plan with a list of all tools, processes, and responsibilities the new hires need to know, and keep them focused on the essential work they should prioritize.

## Onboarding is Multidimensional





## **Breadth**

### **Technical Learning**

Share the fundamentals of your business such as products, services, customers, technologies, and systems.

### **Cultural Learning**

Through cultural learning, help the new member of the team adapt to the attitudes, behavioral norms, and values that contribute to the unique character of the organization.

### **Political Learning**

Provide guidance to understanding how decisions are made, how power and influence work in the organization, and whose support they will need most.

## **Depth**

### **Company Structure and Strategy**

Talk about the company vision, where the localization team fits in with this vision, and the teams you collaborate with the most often.

### **Department Structure and Strategy**

Make an introduction to the department that the localization team is part of and help them learn the common goals, how you collaborate, who the leads are, their roles, and more.

### **Localization Structure and Strategy**

Share the current team setup and strategy and explain why it is done that way. Providing history and background is helpful to paint the whole picture and build a sense of belonging.

# Learn Together

A team that learns together grows together. Here are ways you can learn together as a team:

- ✓ **Schedule time for learning**
- ✓ **Knowledge sharing**
- ✓ **Localization learning**
- ✓ **Non-localization learning**
- ✓ **Cross-functional sharing**
- ✓ **External speakers**

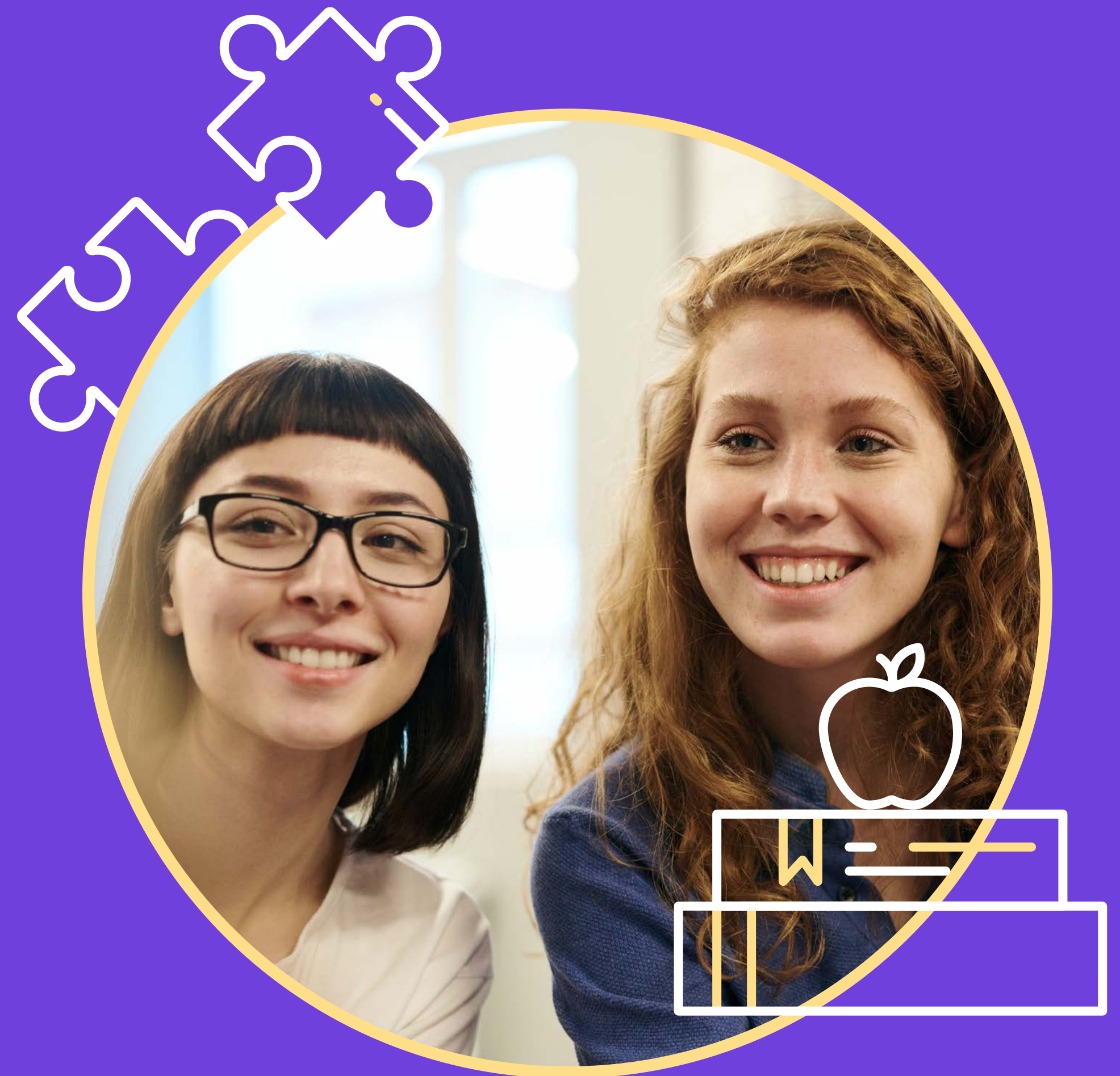


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# Grow Together

To grow together, identify the following with your team:

- ✓ **What's holding us back?**
- ✓ **In what areas should we pay closer attention?**
- ✓ **Where are we already doing great work?**

It's incredible to see how the interaction and energy change when you start with that in mind. Approaching a task with the intention of helping someone and having heard their personal story of growth and self-awareness is powerful.



Photo by Pixabay from Pexels



## Team Psychological Safety Assessment

Psychological safety refers to knowing that:

- ✓ **When I make a mistake, it will not be held against me**
- ✓ **It is easy to bring up problems and tough issues**
- ✓ **People are accepting of each other even if they're different**
- ✓ **It is safe to take risks**
- ✓ **It is easy to share opinions and be candid with each other**
- ✓ **It is easy to ask team members for help**
- ✓ **My unique talents are valued and utilized**

Studies show that psychological safety allows for moderate risk-taking, speaking your mind, and creativity — just the types of behavior that lead to breakthroughs.

It's essential to recognize that even if you think there is a high level of safety in your team, other members may not. By asking anonymously, see if your team members strongly disagree, disagree, agree, or strongly agree to the items on the left.

If there are “strongly disagree” or “disagree” answers, it's likely that your team would benefit from discussing the concept of psychological safety, exchanging ideas on how to increase it, or bringing in a professional for a team workshop session.

## **Develop a Culture of Feedback**

Many companies do not have a strong feedback culture, if any at all. What makes receiving feedback so hard? The process strikes at the tension between two core human needs:

- 1. To learn and grow**
- 2. To be accepted**

As a result, even a seemingly benign suggestion can leave you feeling angry, anxious, poorly treated, or profoundly threatened. Getting better at receiving feedback starts with understanding and managing those feelings.

### **Truth Triggers**

The advice seems mistaken, unhelpful, or simply untrue — you feel indignant and wronged.

### **Relationship Triggers**

Set off by feelings about the giver — How would it feel if it came from another?

### **Identity Triggers**

The feedback conflicts with the core belief of who you are, therefore, you feel off-balance and defensive.



Once you get to a place where you understand each other's triggers, you start asking more helpful questions:

- **What can I do differently that will have the most significant impact on my success?**
- **What is preventing me from growing in my career?**
- **What skill could I learn that will help me improve in my role?**
- **What should I do more to have a bigger impact?**
- **Is there anything I should stop doing?**



# Improve Together

By doing regular team health checks, teams should be able to:

- ✓ Increase trust and psychological safety
- ✓ Have better relationships between teammates
- ✓ Create a culture of constructive criticism and feedback
- ✓ Raise issues and fix them quickly
- ✓ Feel comfortable sharing their feelings frequently



Photo by fauxels from Pexels

## **Track your team's performance on the following categories and develop specific follow-up actions:**

### **Alignment**

The squad understands the “why” behind what they are doing and has agreed on clear roles and responsibilities

### **Psychological Safety**

Members can ask for help, there are regular and constructive debates, and mistakes are treated as learning opportunities

### **Customer Satisfaction**

Regularly delivers value and acts on customer feedback

### **Focus**

Focuses on most impactful work and limits work in progress

### **Process**

Regularly takes time to reflect and make improvements, has high quality documentation, and has effective meetings

### **Motivation**

The team members are positive about being part of the team, have sufficient autonomy, and do work that is meaningful to them

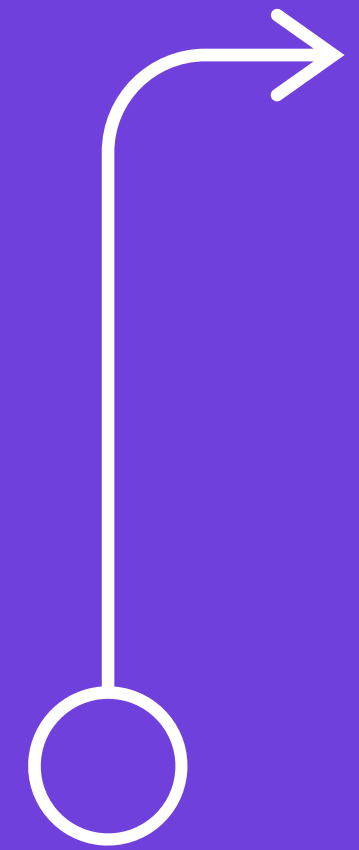
### **Distribution of Work**

Distributes work fairly and evenly and minimizes knowledge silo



# Q&A

with Hristina Racheva



How to Unleash Success in Your Localization Career



**Q.**

**What is your take on the future of human translation roles as machine translation technology progresses?**

**How could human translators be successful and show their value in the age of MT?**

**A.**

There are cases where machine translation is helpful and even the only solution at times, but there still is undeniably a place only for human translators. Marketing materials and any user-facing content — like products and applications we use on a daily basis — require translators' touch. The UX writers and designers put a lot of effort into optimizing user experience, and the translations must also be aligned.

Additionally, translators have an excellent understanding of different cultures, markets, and users. On top of their expertise in language, this unique strength is an invaluable insight that can guide critical decision-making in an organization. I believe translators can provide this vital hybrid role in the future.

Q.

**What are some practical ways to handle pushback in our efforts to support the localization program?**

A.

First, focus on what is essential for the business. We are not doing localization for the sake of localization — we do it for our users. Everyone deserves the same experience wherever they are and whatever language they speak. So aligning this sense of purpose with your stakeholders is a great way to encourage localization efforts.

Another trick I find effective is bringing in real-life examples. Find out what the users are struggling with when something is not optimized by collecting direct feedback such as comments on social media and reviews from your applications. I find it impactful as it creates empathy and makes the issue very personal.

Q.

**What tips do you have for choosing regions and languages in the localization program?**

A.

A good starting point is to think about how the currently available languages disturb the user experience in your market. Prioritize your options by looking at market attractiveness and brand strength by asking yourself questions like:

- **Are there opportunities for industry growth in the market you are going for?**
- **What is the long-term outlook like there?**
- **What is your market share already, if you have any?**
- **What's the competitor landscape?**
- **Is your product relevant for the users in that market?**



Q.

**Any tips for choosing tools for localization?**

A.

I begin by doing my own research to understand what's on the market and the key players. After narrowing the list down to a few, I sometimes reach out to the localization managers in my network or on LinkedIn that have used the tools to hear their opinions. During this process, I am often surprised to find out the benefits and downsides I have not encountered in my initial research. Then, I go to my stakeholders and external partners to learn about their needs and preferences to weigh them into my decision.

Q.

**Tell us about your transition from working as a translator to a localization manager.**

A.

After a few years of working as a Bulgarian translator, I found myself without many opportunities and not enjoying the translation work. When I came across an opportunity to apply to be a localization manager, I went for it, and fortunately, I got the position. I believe it was thanks to my previous customer and language experience. I very much enjoyed the exposure to diverse disciplines and the highly dynamic environment in this role.

The takeaway: Be honest with yourself about what you like or dislike doing, or what you are good at and not so good at. If you find it hard to enter the industry or not enjoying what you do, don't be afraid to explore other roles. Localization is so multi-disciplinary and cross-functional that skills from other positions are easily transferrable!

Q.

**How do you become an authority being an introvert?**

A.

Start small and do it in a way that feels natural for you. For example, writing about your experience is a good way to talk about something without being in the spotlight. Or start with recording your presentations instead of presenting them live. Maybe you can begin with working 1:1 or in smaller groups. You could use Slack or any other internal chat to have quick conversations, share something relevant, and build relationships with others. Over time, you'll get there.

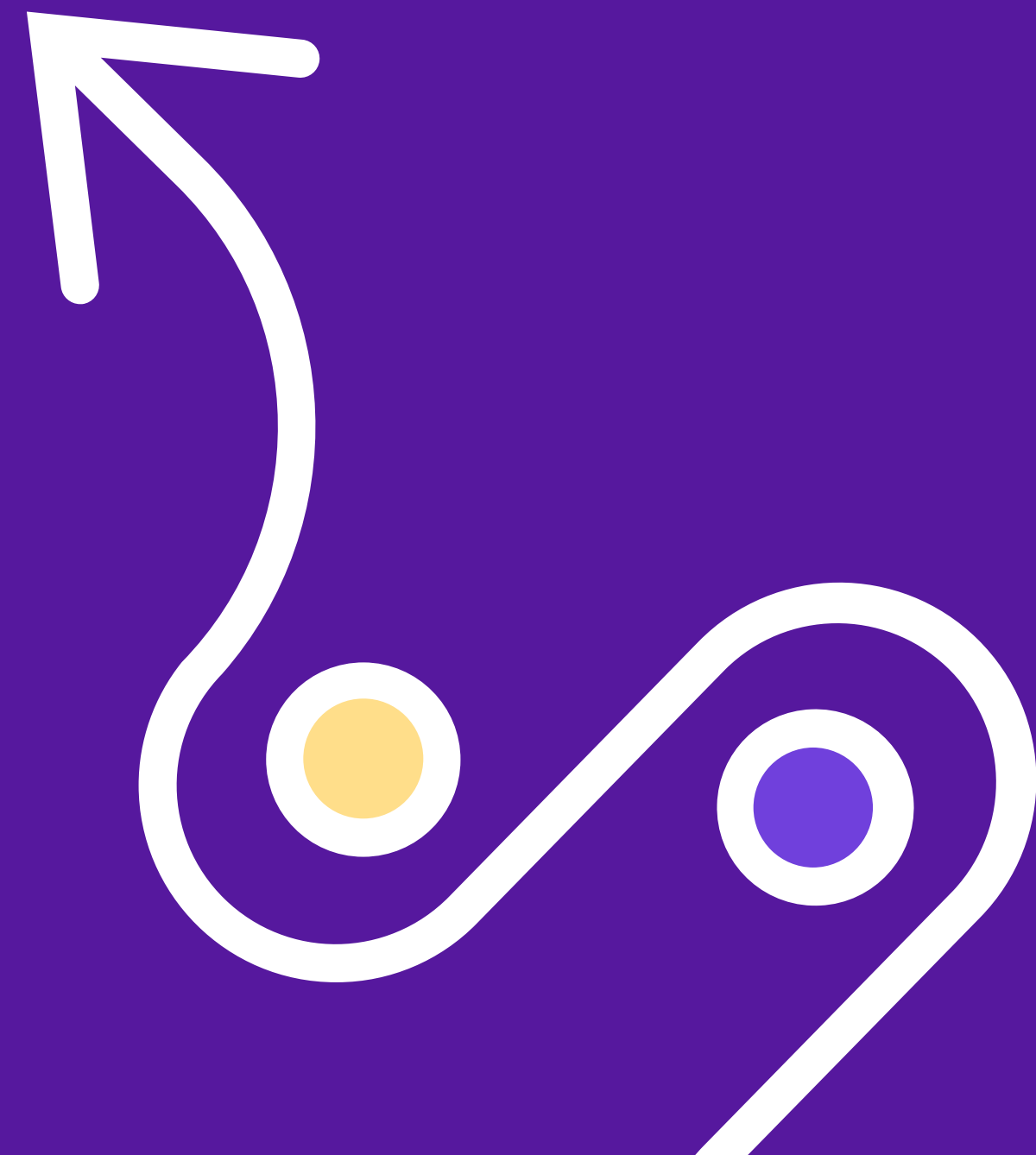


## Additional Resources

[The Loc Coach Resource Hub](#)

[Locawise: Book Time with Hristina](#)

[Hristina on LinkedIn](#)



## About Smartling

Smartling is an innovative language technology and services provider that powers some of the world's top global brands to localize multilingual content across all devices and platforms.

Smartling established Enterprise Translation Cloud, a data-driven approach to localization, which enables its customers to achieve higher quality translation at a lower total cost. A global company with employees throughout the US and Europe, Smartling is the platform of choice for hundreds of B2B and B2C brands, including IHG, Shopify, Momentive (SurveyMonkey) and Lyft.



[smartling.com](https://smartling.com)