



5 stages of content debt.

Building a solid foundation for AI and automation.



A man with a white beard and glasses is shown in profile, looking out over a city at night. He is wearing a dark jacket and has a white earbud in his ear. The city lights are visible in the background, and there are some blue bokeh lights in the foreground. A red rounded rectangle contains the text.

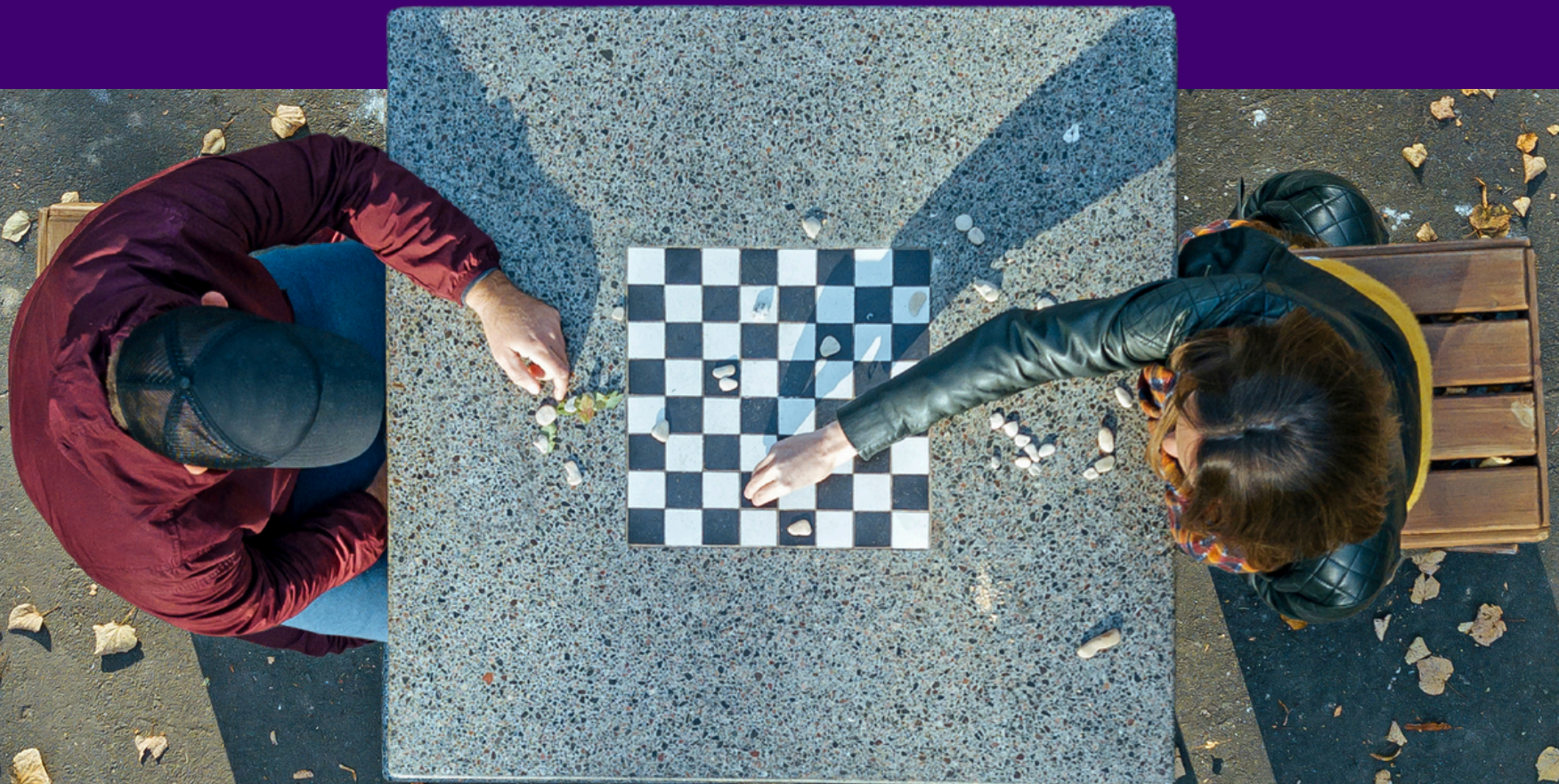
Stage 1: Denial

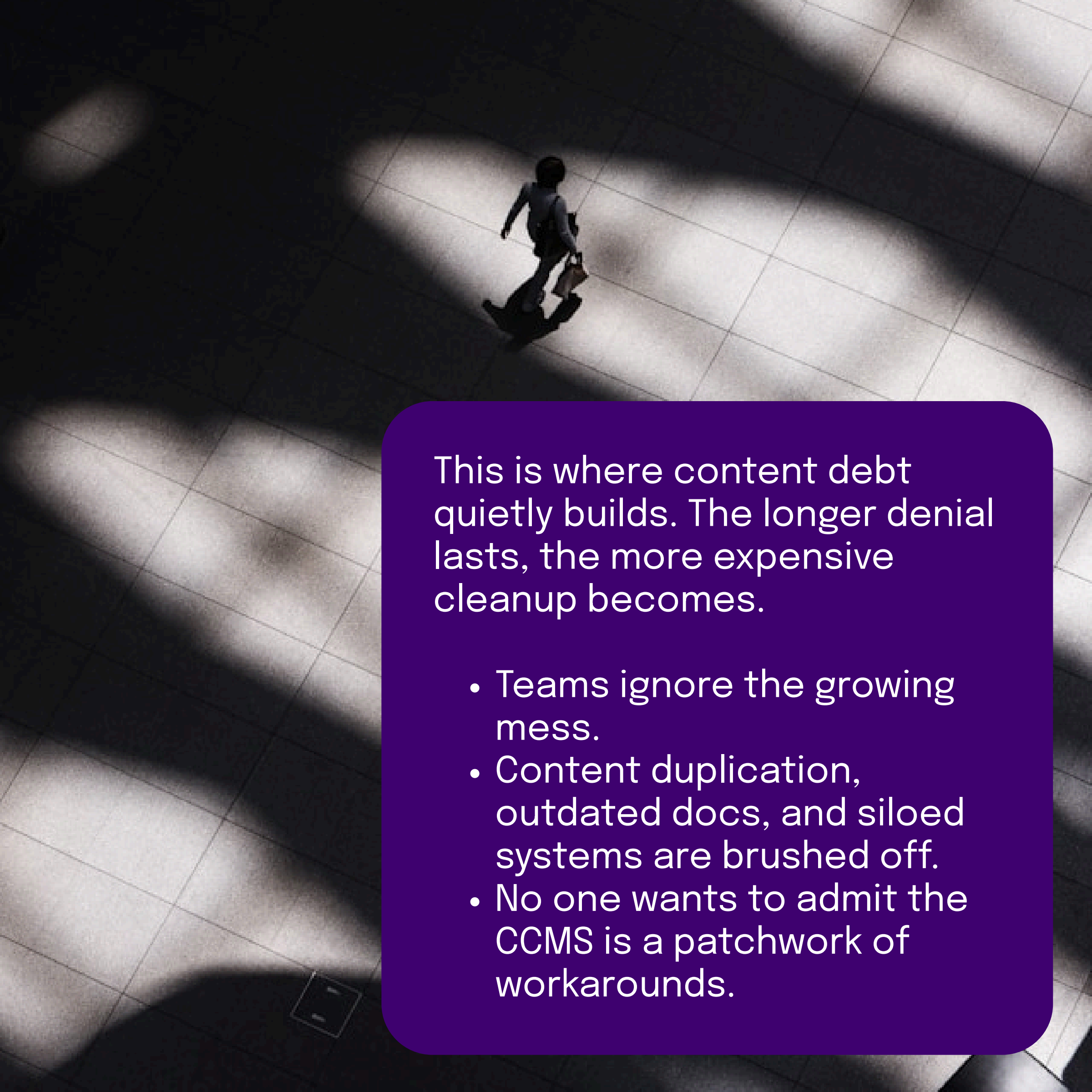
Our content is fine.
We just need better
search.

The harsh reality of Content Debt.

Content debt (akin to technical debt) refers to the future rework you'll have to do because you took shortcuts or let content quality slip.

It accumulates over time: outdated docs, inconsistent style, missing metadata – all the little content issues that seem “okay for now” but become big obstacles later.



A high-angle, black and white photograph of a person walking away from the camera down a long, empty hallway. The floor is made of large, light-colored square tiles. The lighting is dramatic, with strong shadows cast on the floor, suggesting light coming from above. The person is carrying a bag and is walking towards the end of the hallway.

This is where content debt quietly builds. The longer denial lasts, the more expensive cleanup becomes.

- Teams ignore the growing mess.
- Content duplication, outdated docs, and siloed systems are brushed off.
- No one wants to admit the CCMS is a patchwork of workarounds.

Stage 2: Frustration

Why can't we find anything? Why does every update take weeks?



Productivity drops. Teams feel stuck. The cracks are now visible across departments.

- Authors waste time hunting for reusable content.
- Review cycles drag.
- Translation costs balloon.
- Compliance teams start raising flags.



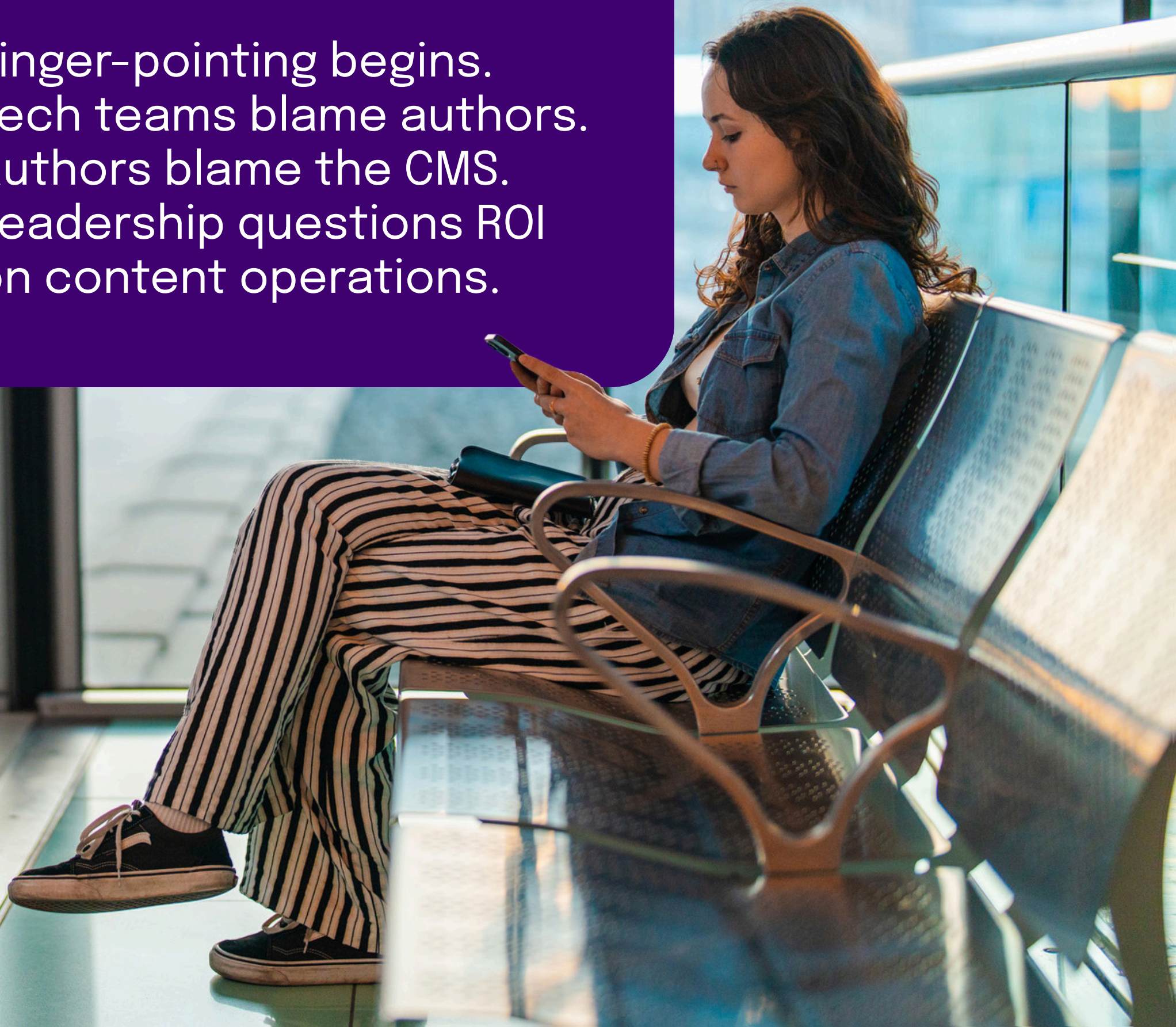
A woman with curly hair is shown in profile, looking down. She is wearing a pink, ribbed, long-sleeved top. The background is blurred, showing another person's face and dark hair. A bright pink rounded rectangle is overlaid on the bottom right of the image, containing white text.

Stage 3: Blame

It's the tools. It's the process. It's the people.

This is often the turning point. Either the organization doubles down on duct tape, or starts looking for a scalable solution.


- Finger-pointing begins.
- Tech teams blame authors. Authors blame the CMS.
- Leadership questions ROI on content operations.



A person with their hair in a bun, wearing a red sweater and dark pants, stands on a wooden fence at night. They are holding a phone in their right hand and looking out over a city with bokeh lights. The scene is set against a clear blue sky.

Stage 4: Acceptance

Okay. We need a better way to manage this.



This is where structured content and component reuse enter the conversation. DITA, metadata, and governance start to matter.

- Teams acknowledge the debt.
- Content audits begin.
- Leadership starts budgeting for transformation.

Stage 5: Action


Let's fix this before it gets worse.



This is where transformation happens. Content debt gets paid down. Teams scale faster, collaborate better, and deliver smarter.

- Organizations invest in structured content platforms like Tridion Docs.
- They define content models, reuse strategies, and governance.
- Content becomes an asset, not a liability.



A blurred background image showing two men sitting at a wooden table in a modern office or co-working space. The man on the left is wearing a brown sweater and a headset, looking down at a laptop. The man on the right is wearing a grey t-shirt and a headset, also looking at a laptop. There are several laptops on the table, and a water bottle is visible on the left. The overall atmosphere is professional and collaborative.

If your organization is stuck in stages 1–3, it's time to move.

RWS Content Technologies help you break the cycle and build a future-ready content foundation.

How the RWS Content Tech stack makes it work

- **Tridion Docs:** enterprise CCMS for DITA components, versions, variants, and omnichannel publishing.
- **Fonto One:** friendly structured authoring for SMEs with tracked reviews.
- **Contenta:** S1000D publishing suite for A and D CSDB workflows.
- **Propylon:** regulatory and legal content with Microsoft 365 authoring and temporal change management.
- Integrations: eQMS, EDMS, RIM, PLM, analytics.

