



Collaboration in neurodivergent teams

March 2018

Neurodiversity



Life Goal

social conformance

knowledge

action

art

power

1. Neurotypical Disorder **90%** (roughly)

2. Autism Spectrum Disorder(s) **1.5%** (1 in 68)

3. Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder **5%** (1 in 20)

4. Bipolar Disorder **2.5%** (1 in 40)

5. Psychopathic Disorder(s) **1%** (1 in 100)

Common Occupations

employees

scientists & engineers

entrepreneurs

artists

executives & politicians

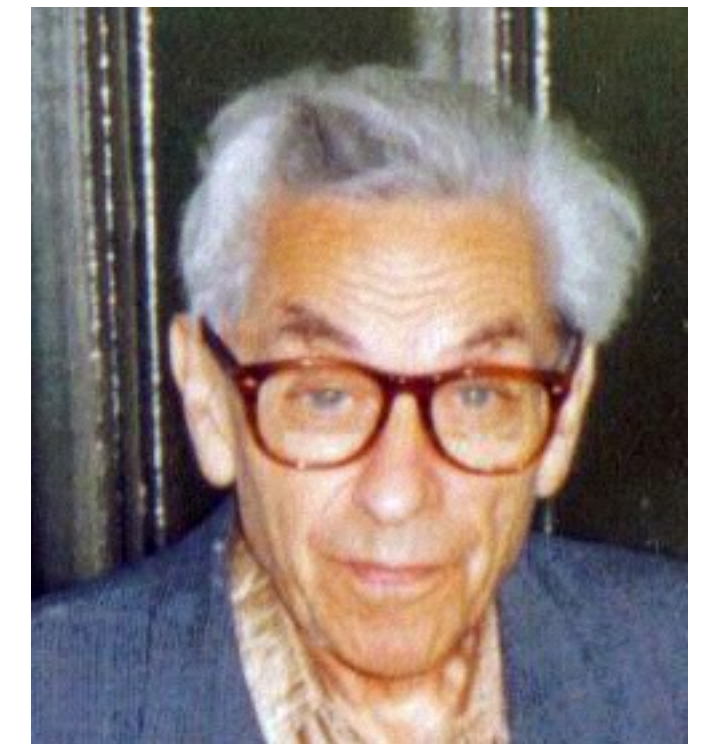
creativity = knowledge + art + action

Neurodiversity – The core of creativity: <https://ciic.s23m.com/2017/01/26/ciic-off-melbourne/>

One example of autistic collaboration – Paul Erdős

In an appropriate environment, in this case a self-selected subset within the mathematical community, **an autist is enabled and not disabled.**

- *Erdős utmostly believed mathematics to be a social activity, living an itinerant lifestyle with the sole purpose of writing mathematical papers with other mathematicians.*
- *He was known both for his social practice of mathematics (he engaged more than 500 collaborators) and for his eccentric lifestyle.*
- *He spent most of his life as a vagabond, traveling between scientific conferences, universities and the homes of colleagues all over the world.*
- *He would typically show up at a colleague's doorstep and announce "my brain is open", staying long enough to collaborate on a few papers before moving on a few days later. In many cases, he would ask the current collaborator about whom to visit next.*
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul_Erd%C5%91s



Other autists are loners and yet others prefer to collaborate only with a small trusted circle of peers. They all produce valuable knowledge artefacts and unique artistic output, but **they can only thrive in a supportive environment that values neurodiversity.**

[N is a Number : https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wN4yLPPvRBg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wN4yLPPvRBg)

Culture is constructed one trusted relationship at a time

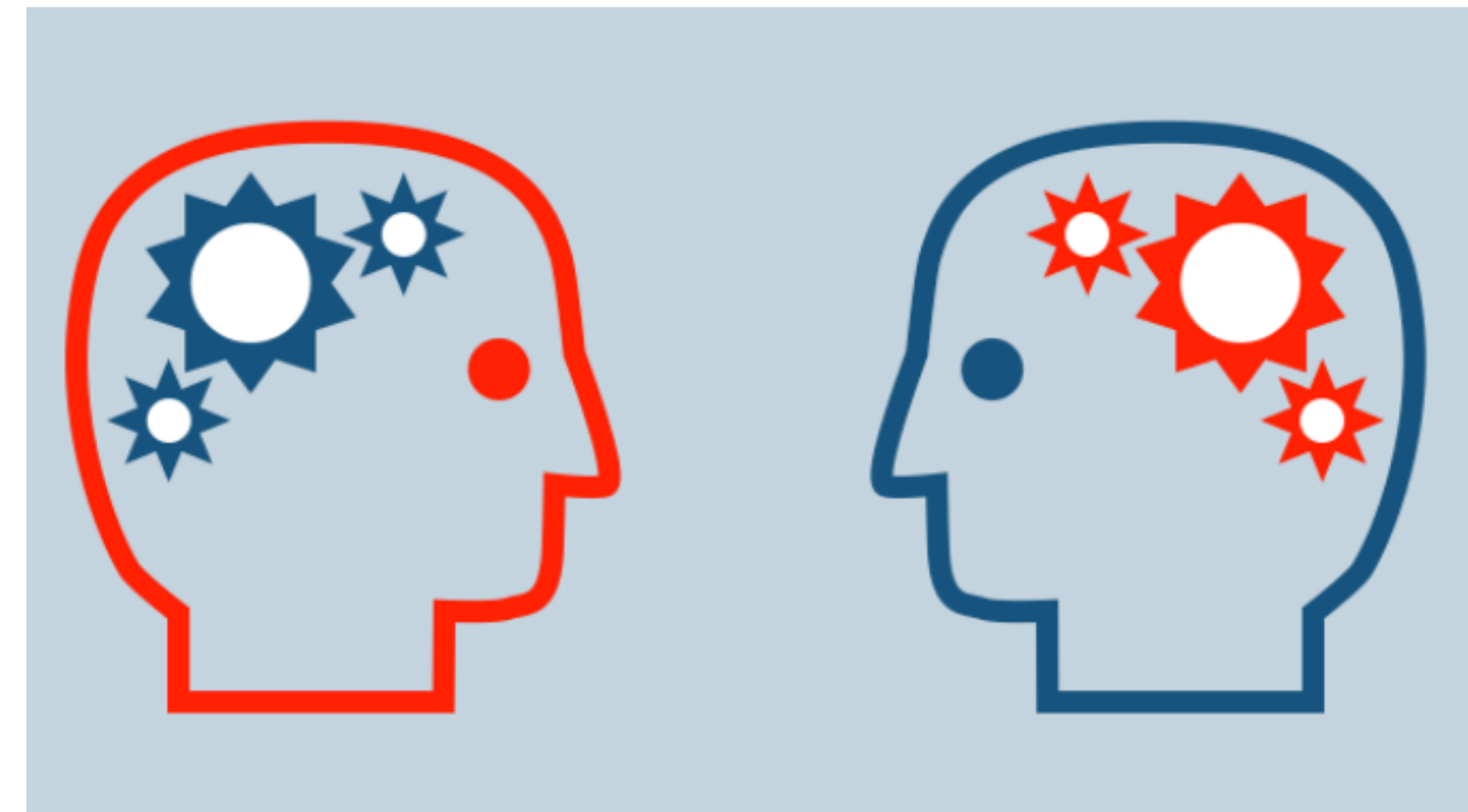


David Sloan Wilson @David_S_Wilson · Mar 18

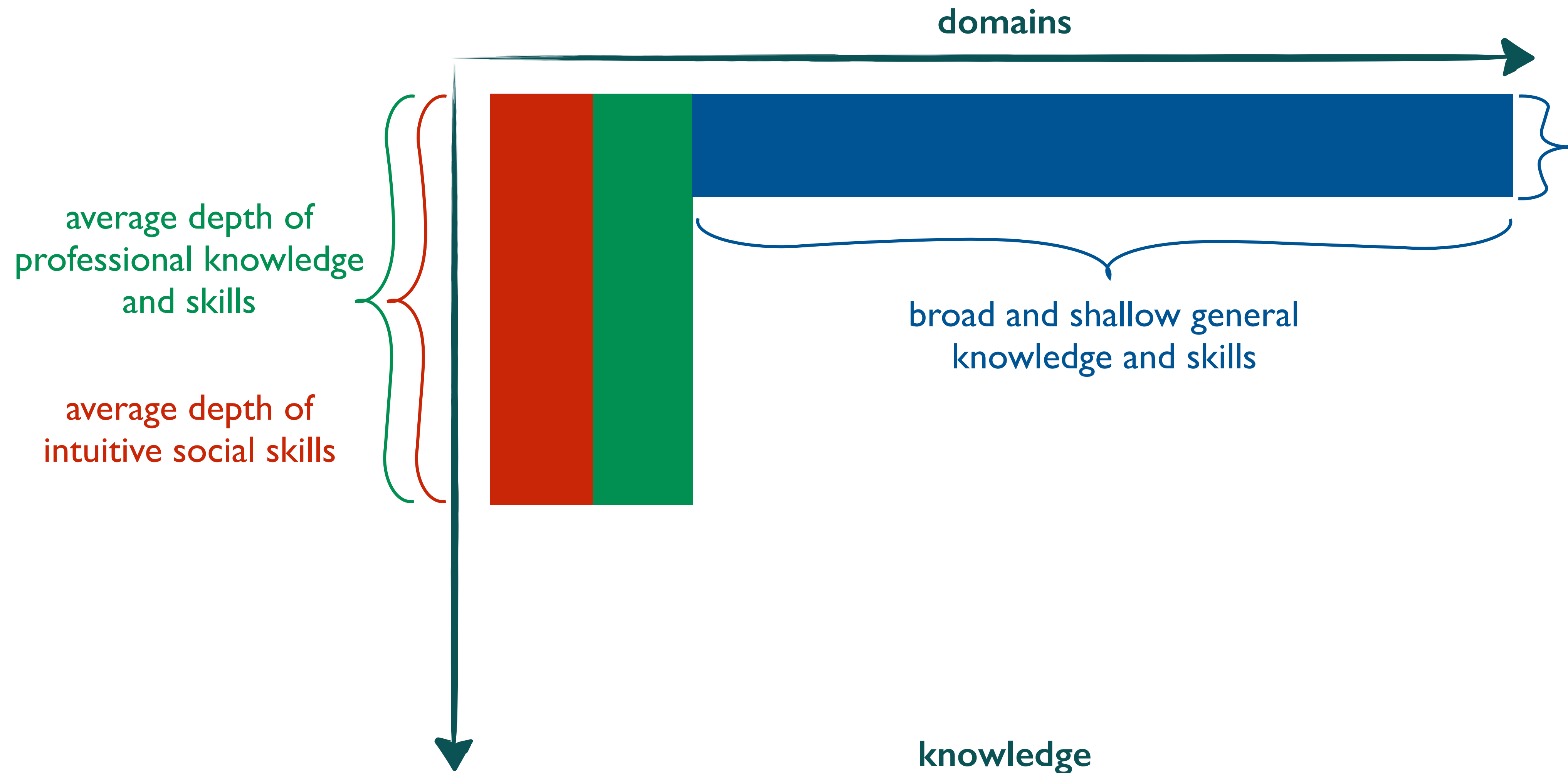
There is a lot to be said for thinking of a pair as a group, complete with its own culture.

Geoffrey Miller  @primalpoly

Every long-term relationship, whether lovers or friends, becomes its own two-person subculture, with its own dialect, myths, rituals, ethics, and aesthetics. The better matched the people, the weirder that subculture ends up looking to everyone else.



Neurotypical knowledge and skill profile



Autistic

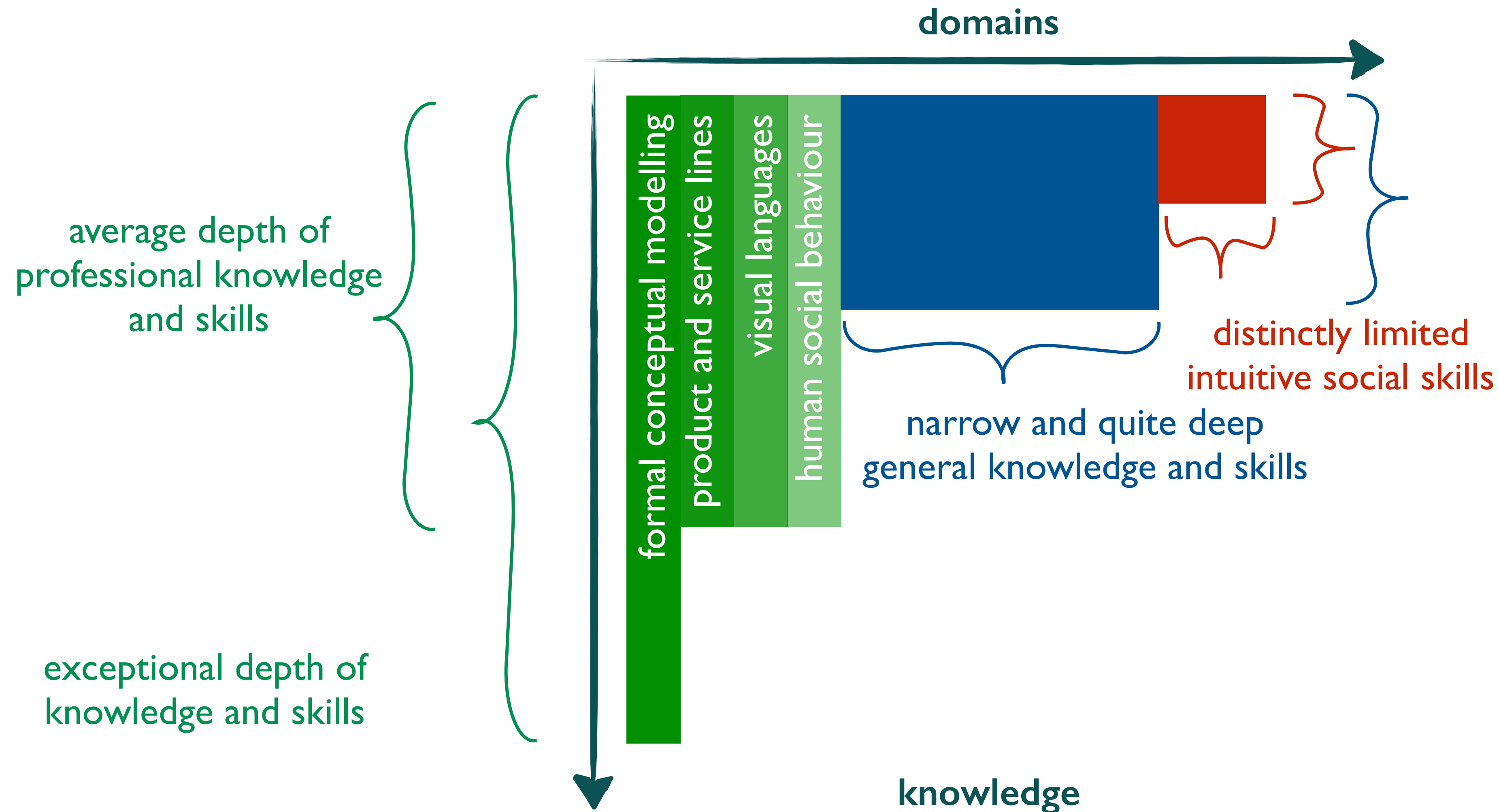


Collaboration

If you are a software professional,
you likely have a few **autistic traits**,

... and there will be
at least one aspie or autistic on your team!

Example of an autistic knowledge and skill profile



Trust building

Autistic

1. **Based on experienced domain-specific competence**
2. When young assumes everyone is telling the truth
3. When older can become very cynical
4. **Can be fooled by people** who appear to be logical but **who have no scruples fabricating evidence**
5. Is slow in learning to read social cues, and can't do so in an environment of sensory overload

Neurotypical

1. **Based on socially transmitted reputation**
2. Quickly learns that deception is part of the social “game”
3. Is proficient in the social “game”, and may even enjoy it
4. Relies on social [non verbal] cues to detect deception
5. **Can be fooled by fake social cues**, even if these are in conflict with the evidence at hand

Making friends

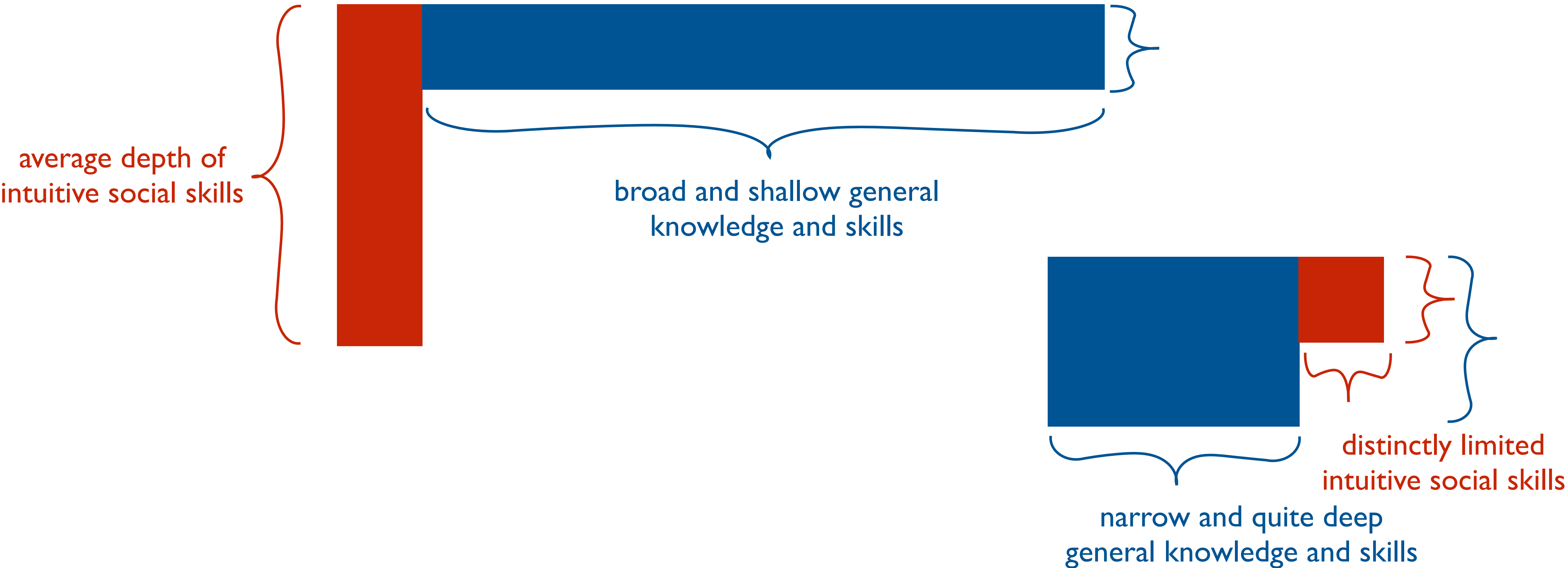
Autistic

1. Search for people with shared interests, **usually online**
2. Confirm a shared interest
3. Start having fun by knowledge sharing
4. Explore what can be achieved with joint capabilities and capacities
5. **Embark on significant joint projects to have more fun**

Neurotypical

1. Approach people who look attractive or have a high social reputation, **often in a group setting**
2. Use smalltalk to start a conversation
3. If an emotional bond is established, spend more time together and do various things together
4. **Spending time together is more important than what the time is spent on**

The smalltalk challenge

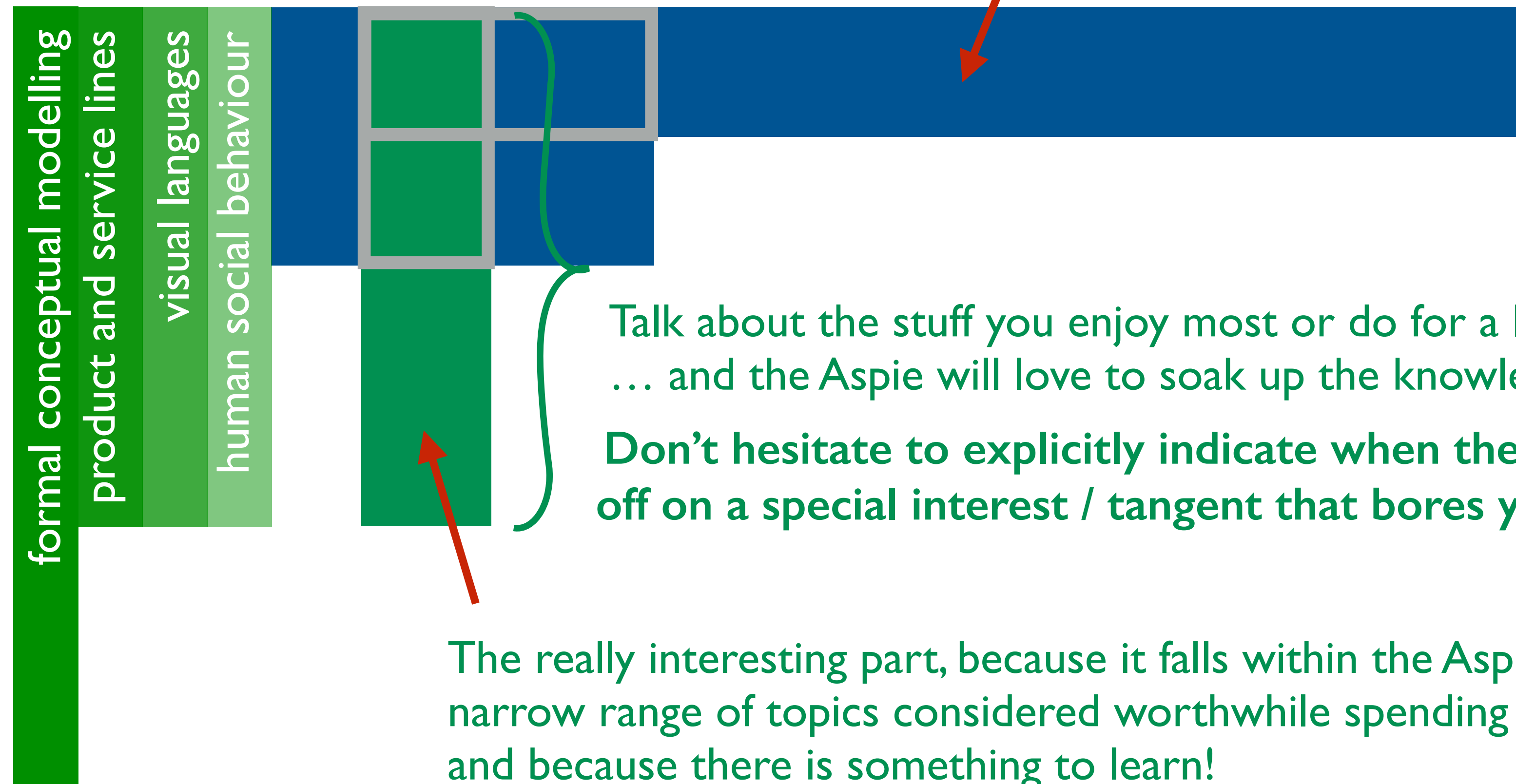


The smalltalk solution

overlap

Rugby, soccer, gossip about “important” people, and the typical range of smalltalk topics ...

Don't go here :-)

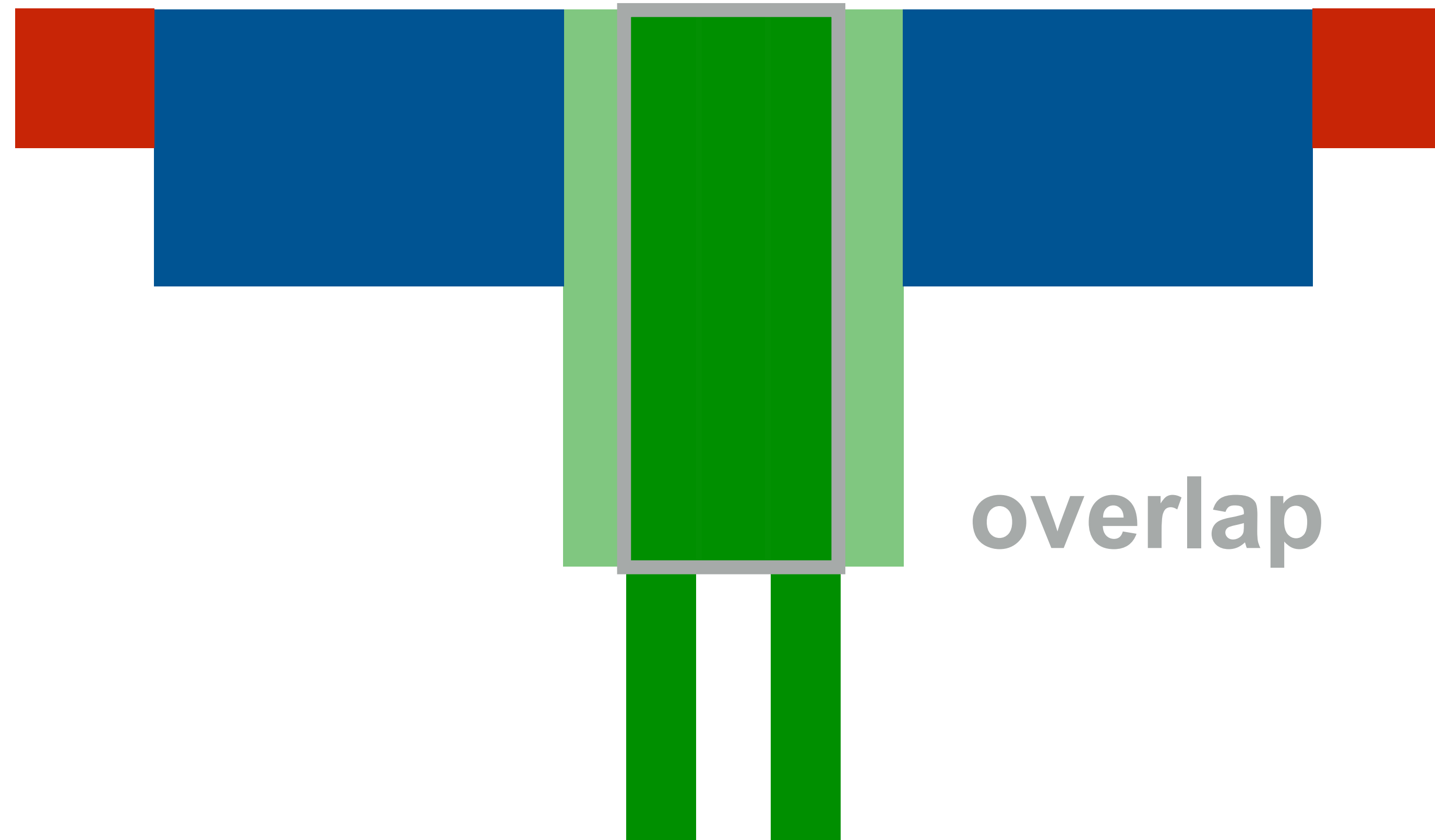


Talk about the stuff you enjoy most or do for a living ... and the Aspie will love to soak up the knowledge

Don't hesitate to explicitly indicate when the Aspie goes off on a special interest / tangent that bores you to death

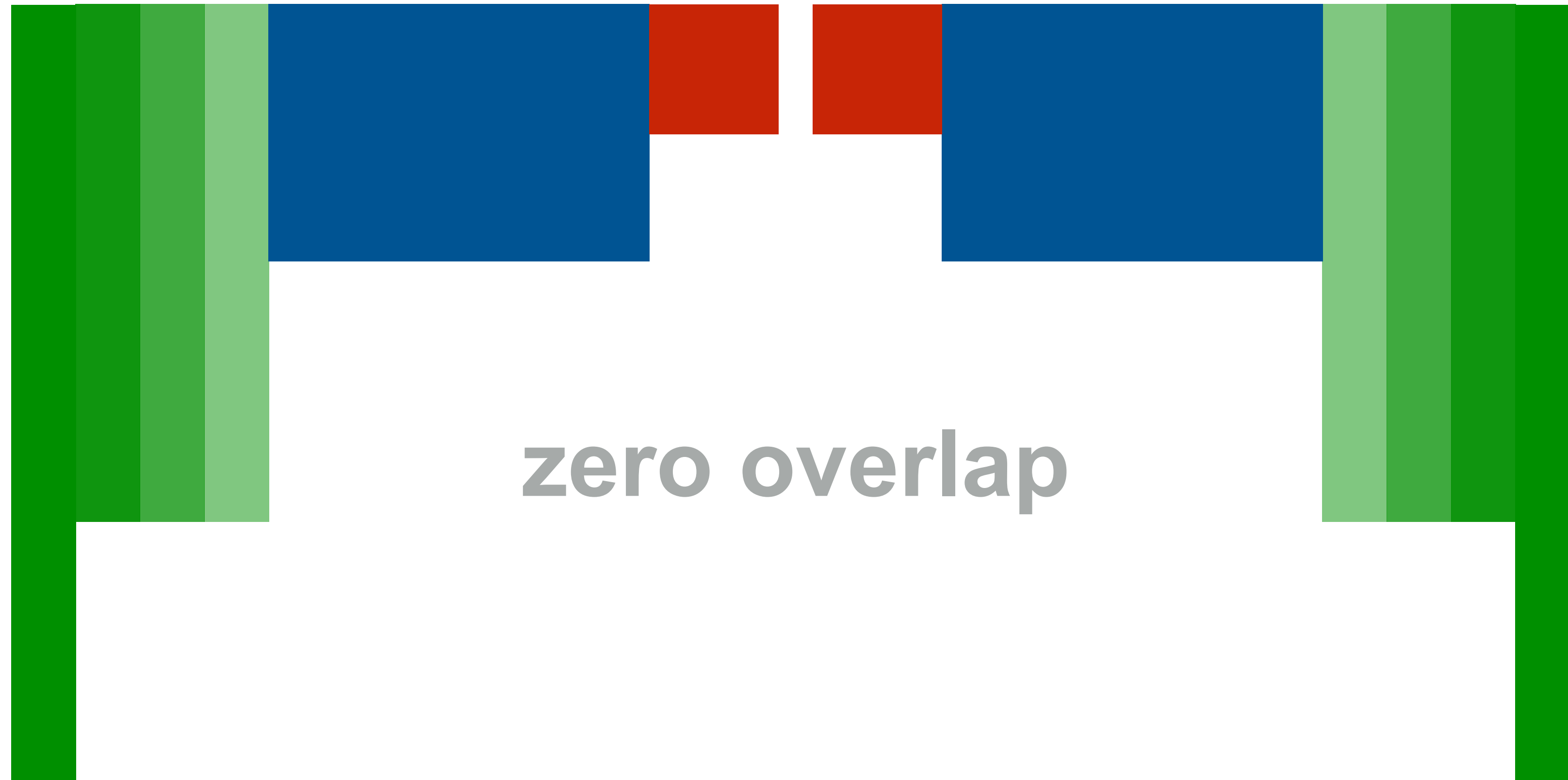
The really interesting part, because it falls within the Aspie's narrow range of topics considered worthwhile spending time on, and because there is something to learn!

Common form of **Aspie & Aspie** collaboration



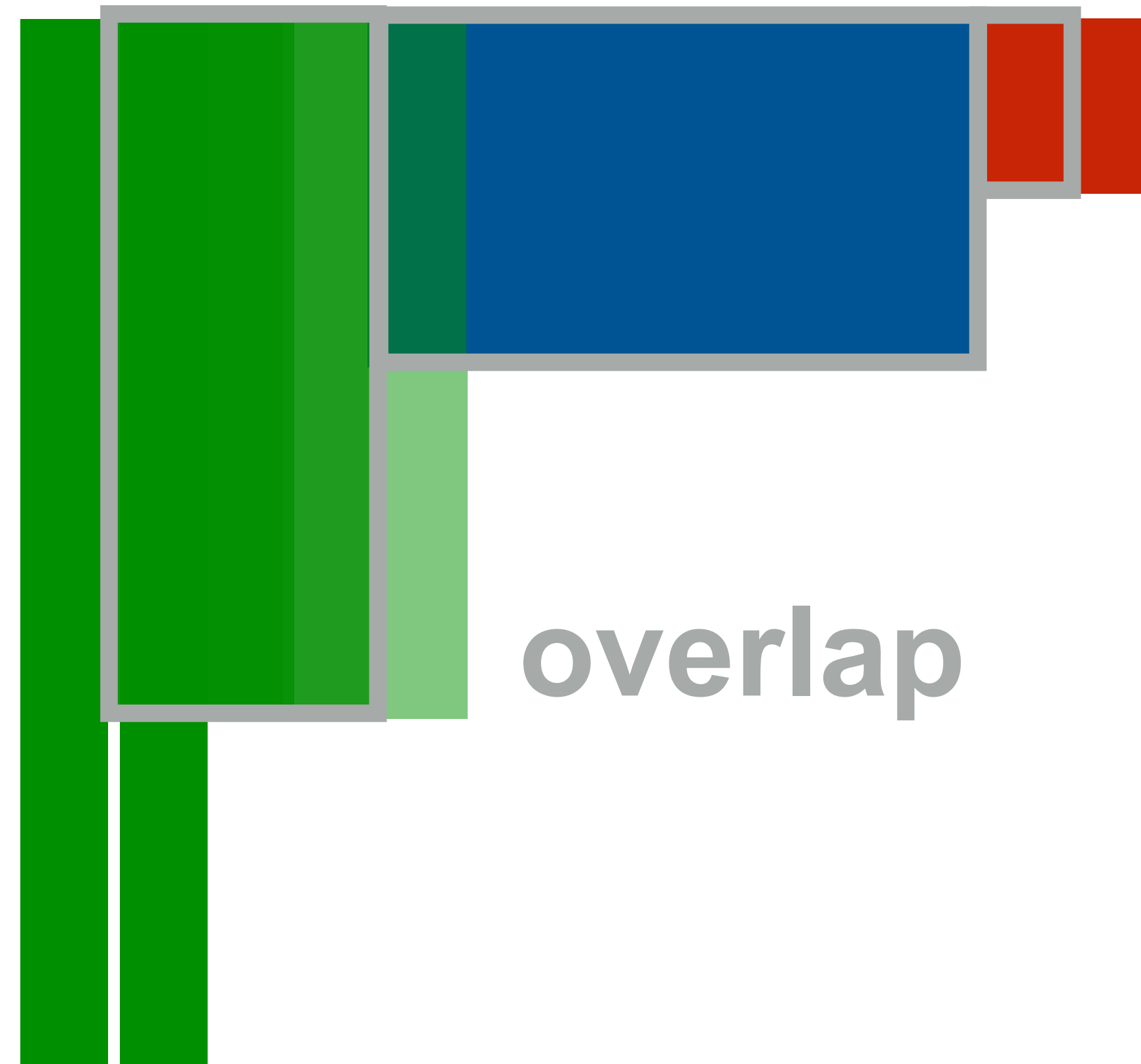
no social skills required :-)

Complete Aspie & Aspie disconnect



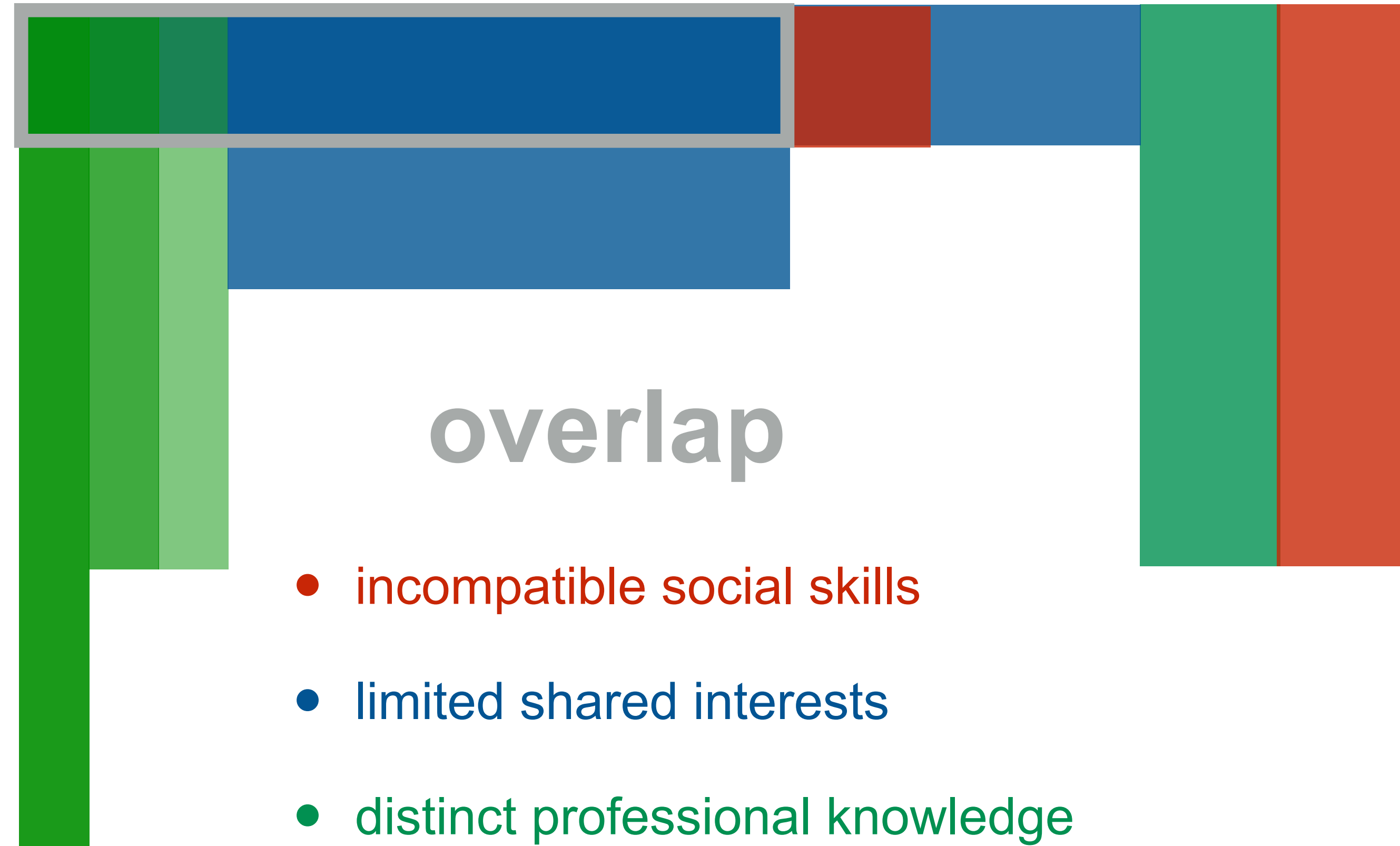
zero overlap

Rare Aspie & Aspie mind-meld



Common Aspie & Neurotypical “collaboration” attempt

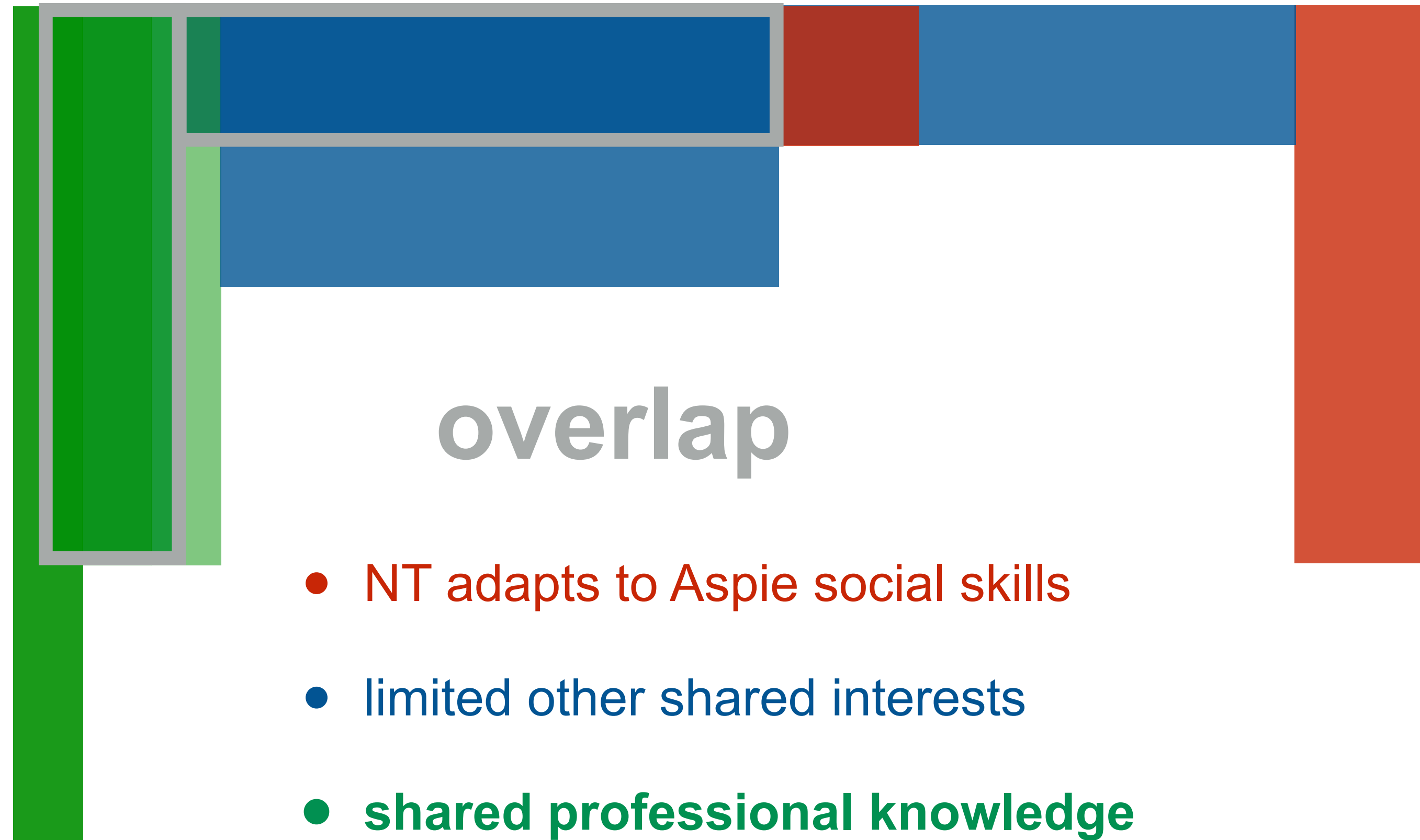
From the Aspie’s perspective
there is nothing to learn :-)



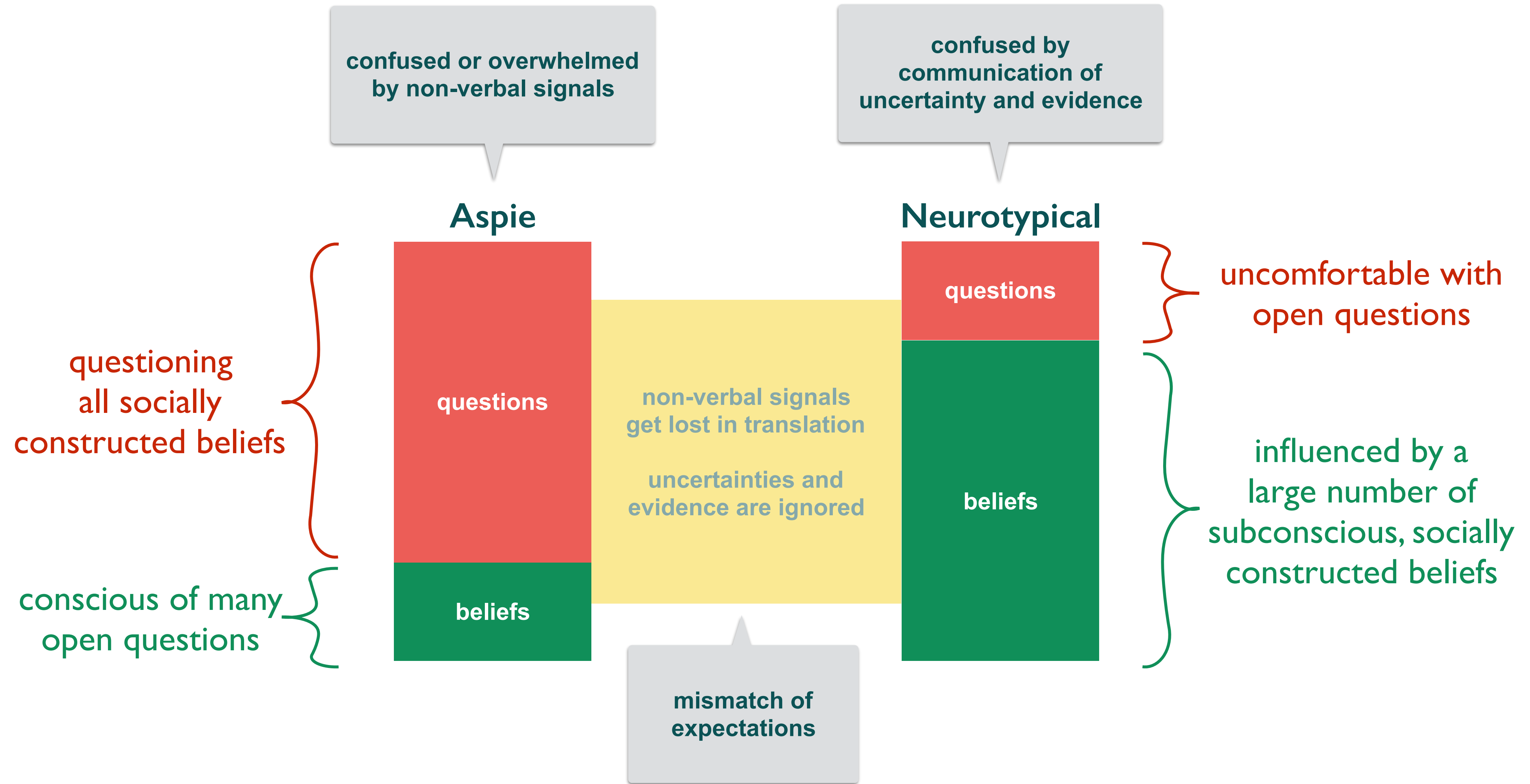
Mutually enjoyable **Aspie & Neurotypical** collaboration

The Aspie interface to the NT world

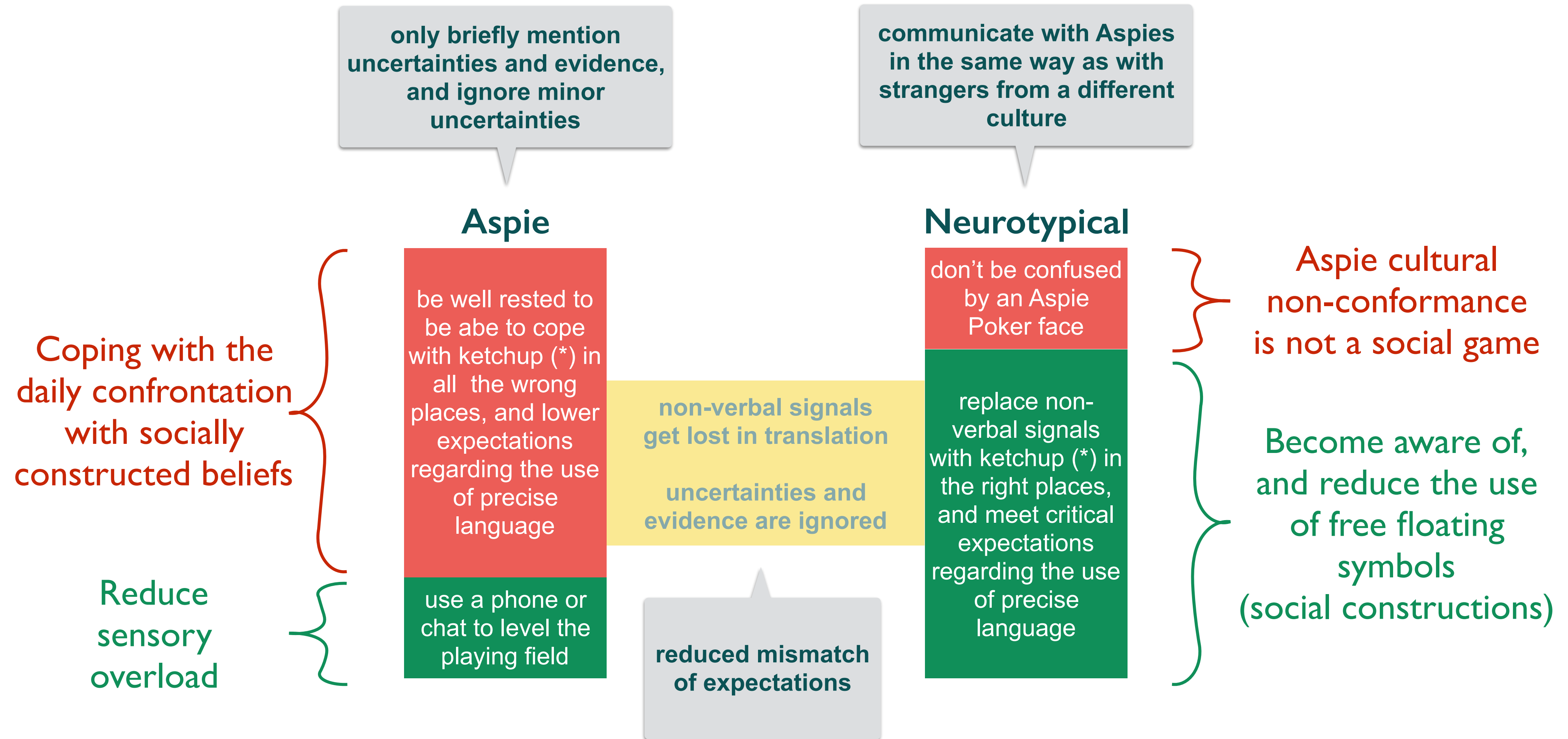
Sharing of experience
& mutual learning :-)



Sources of misunderstandings



How to minimise misunderstandings



(*) Explanation: Sarah Hendrickx, *Talking about autism, happiness and wellbeing*, <https://youtu.be/LRSazCQQNnA>

Thank you!

S23M

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Nothing beats capturing the knowledge flow of leading domain experts to co-create organisations & systems that are understandable by future generations of humans & software tools.

