

Engineering Manager Essentials

A Strong Foundation for Effective EMs



Welcome

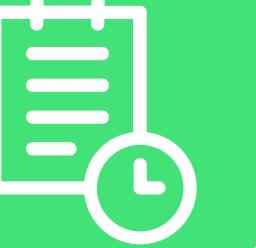


Introductions

Who



Agenda



Timing



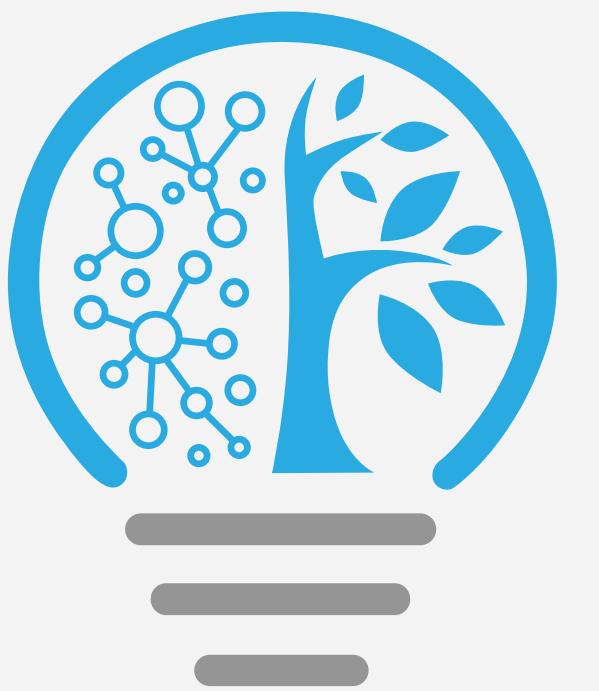
Takeaways





Who

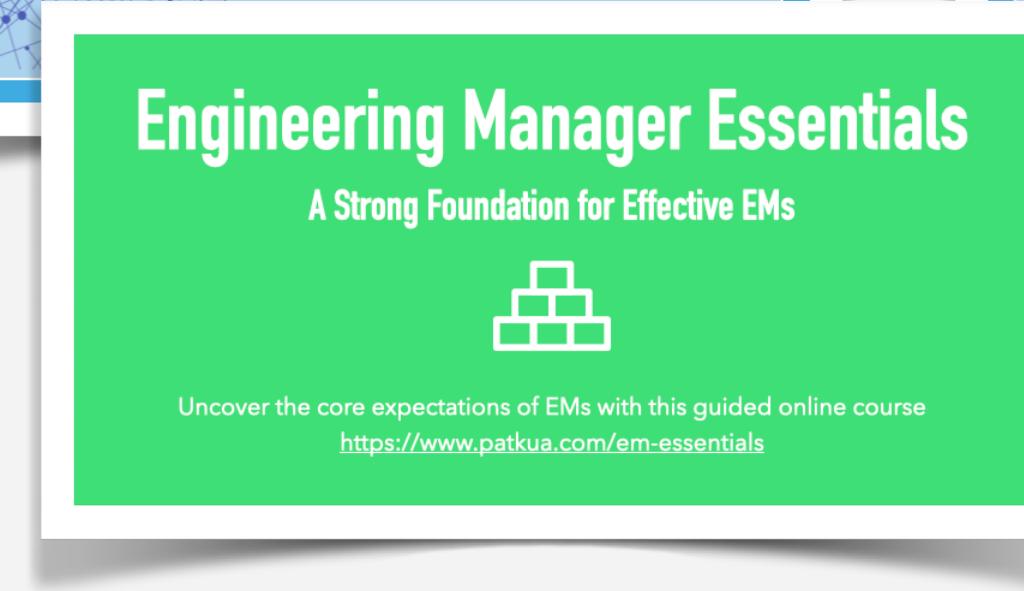
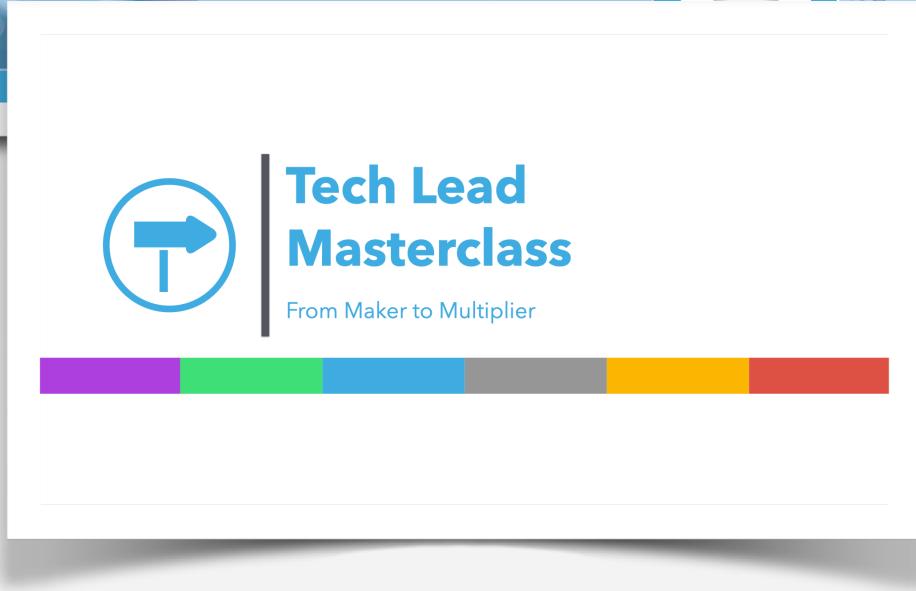
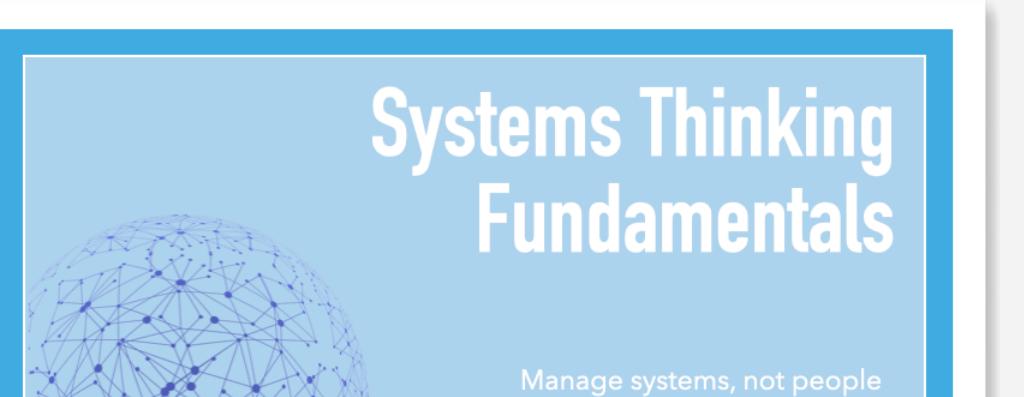




TechLead ACADEMY

Training

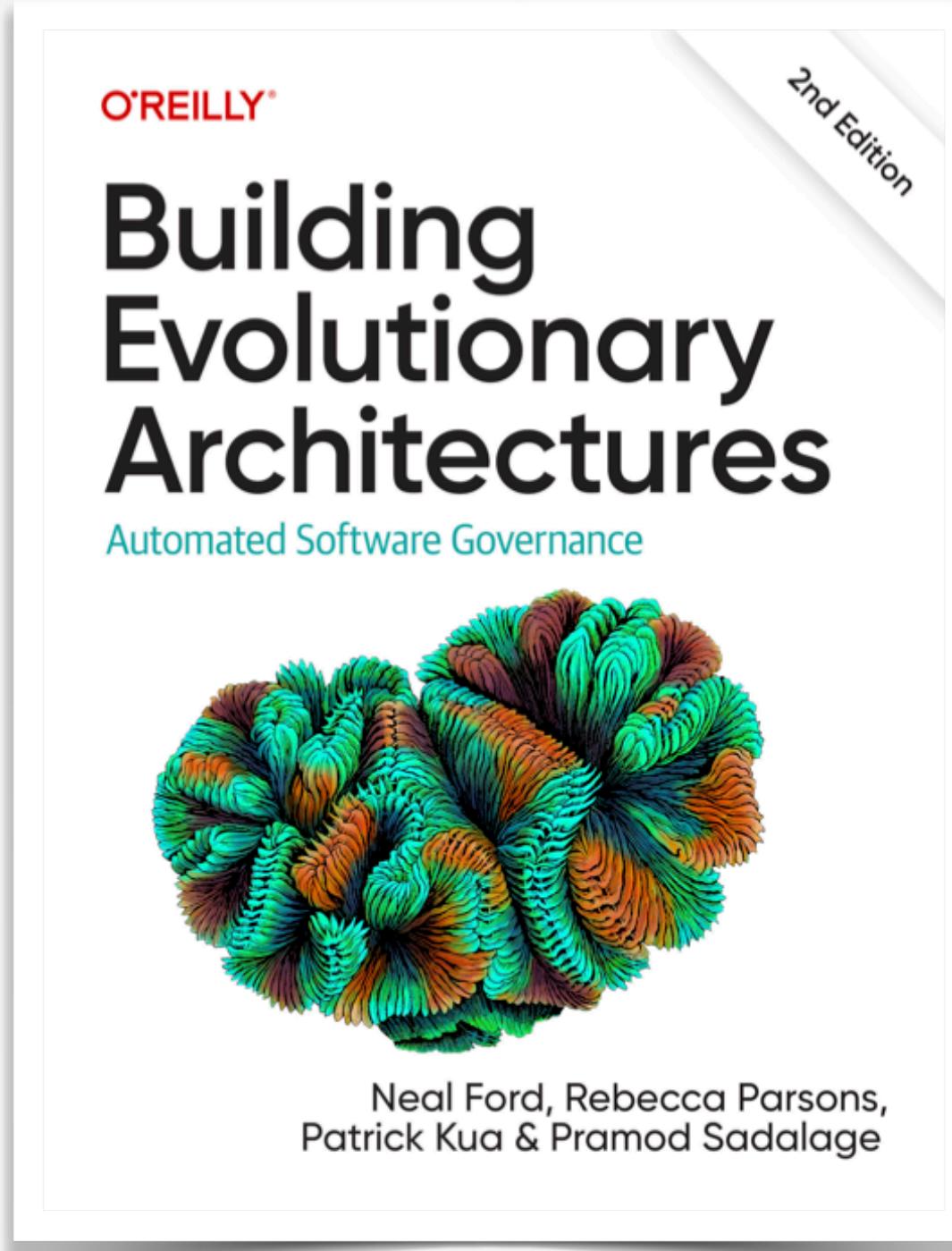
e.g. TLs, EMs, Staff+



@patkua



20+ years experience



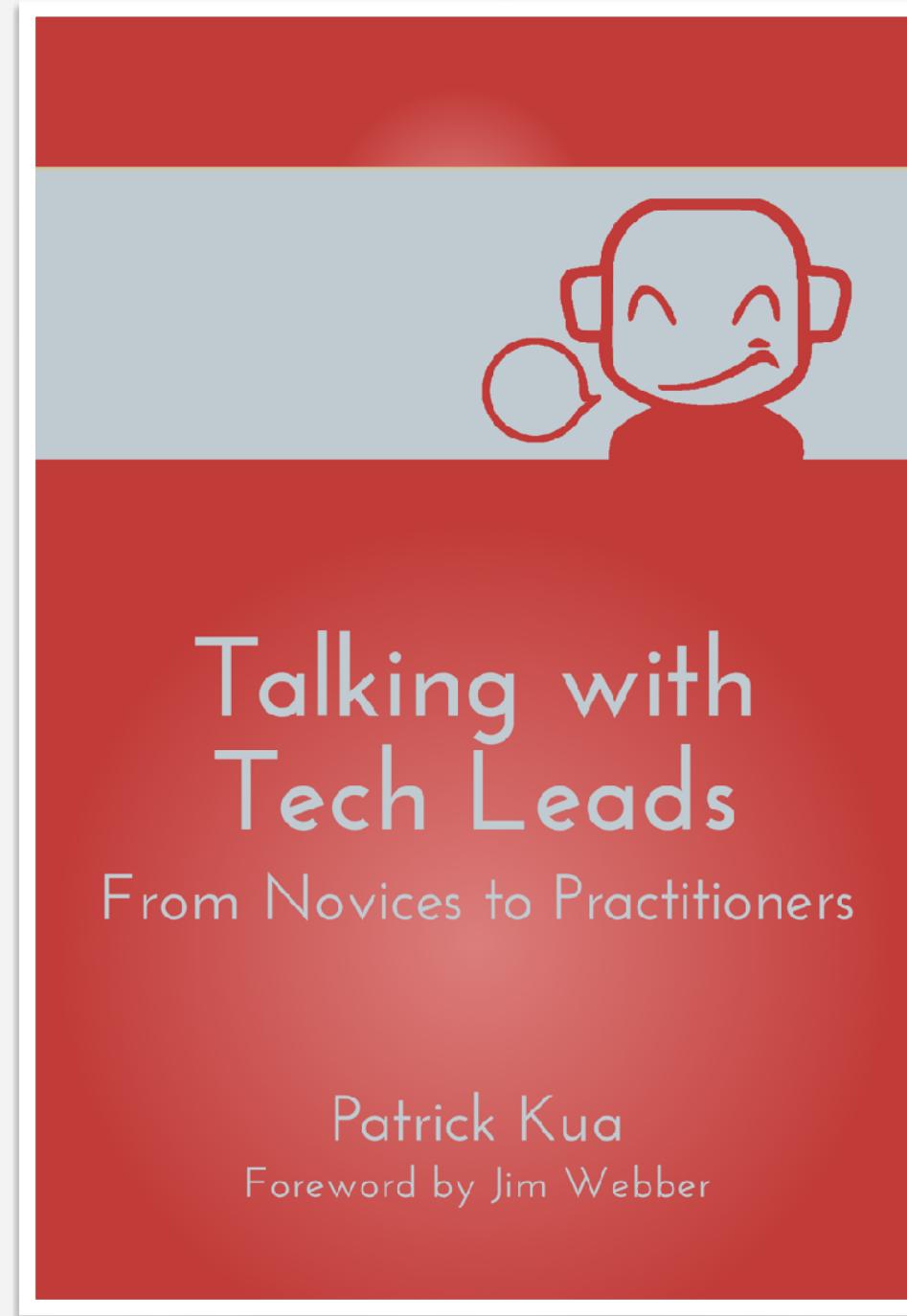
O'REILLY®
2nd Edition

Building Evolutionary Architectures

Automated Software Governance



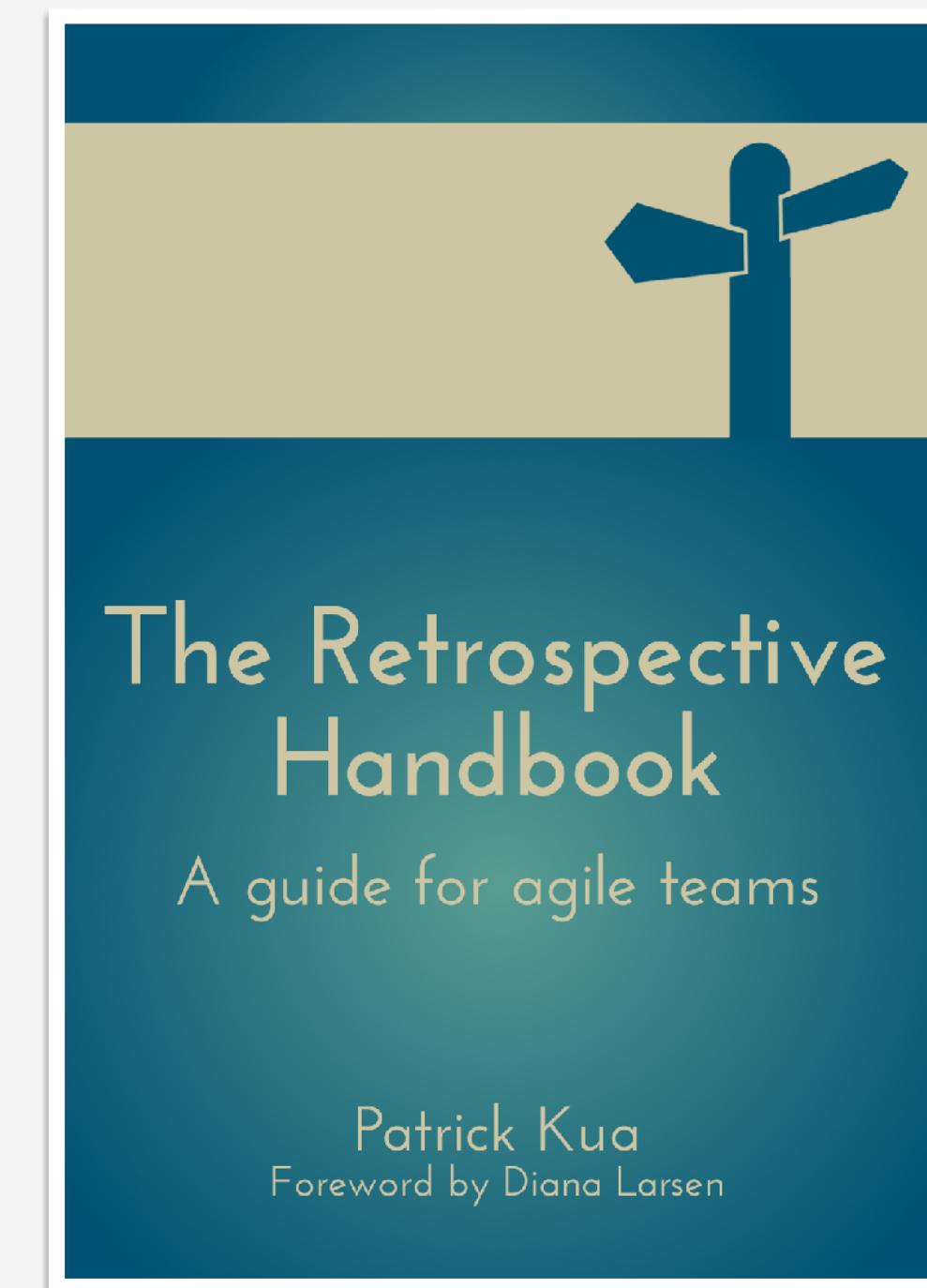
Neal Ford, Rebecca Parsons,
Patrick Kua & Pramod Sadalage



Talking with Tech Leads

From Novices to Practitioners

Patrick Kua
Foreword by Jim Webber



The Retrospective Handbook

A guide for agile teams

Patrick Kua
Foreword by Diana Larsen

thekua.io/evolarch

thekua.io/twtl

thekua.io/retrobook

#Architect #Developer #Coach #Leader #CTO

#Life-long learner #Author #Speaker

@patkua



Podcast



Newsletter



<http://managingmanagers.tech>

@patkua

<http://levelup.patkua.com>

techlead.academy





Agenda

Hopes &
Concerns



Hopes & Concerns
(Recap)



Action
Plan

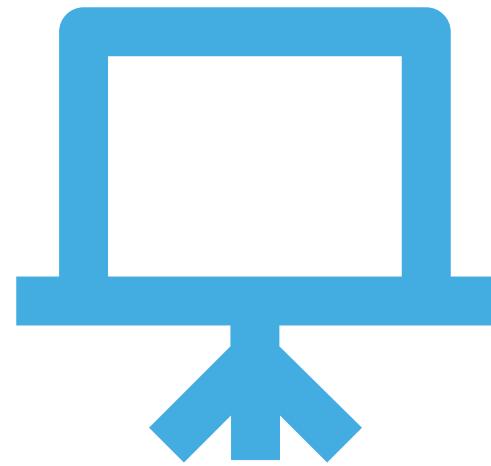




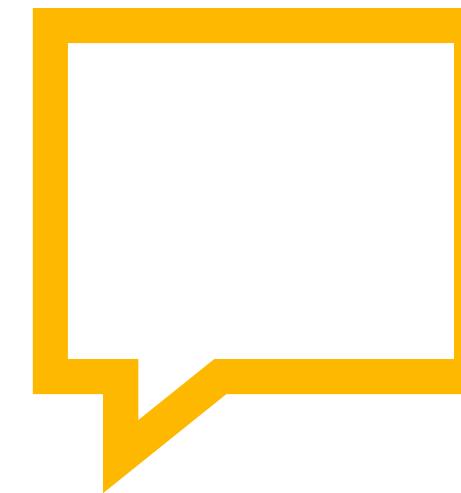
How we are going to work

Mixture of Styles

How we are going to work



Lecture



Discussion

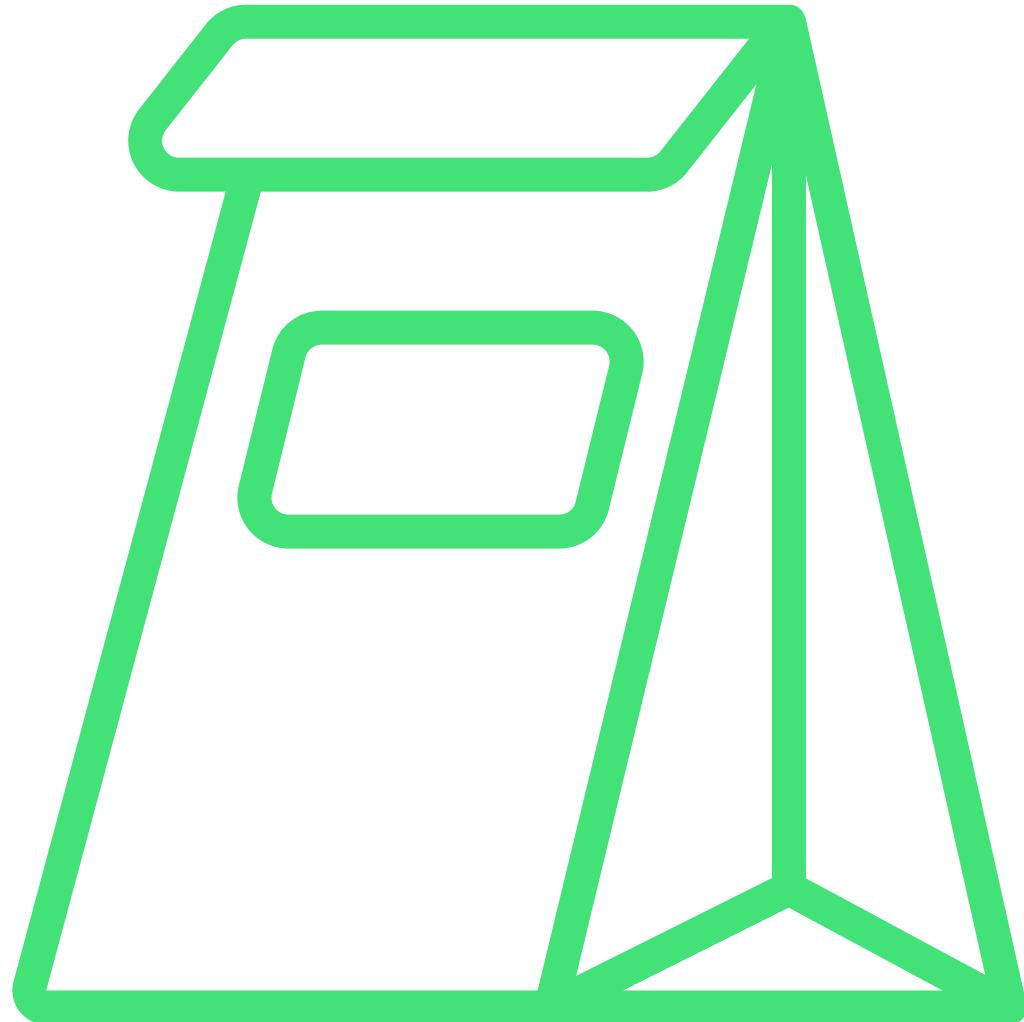


Hands on Exercises



Learning from
each other

Take-Home Artefacts



- ▶ Slides
- ▶ Handouts
- ▶ Recommended reading list
- ▶ Photos from workshop



Hopes & Concerns

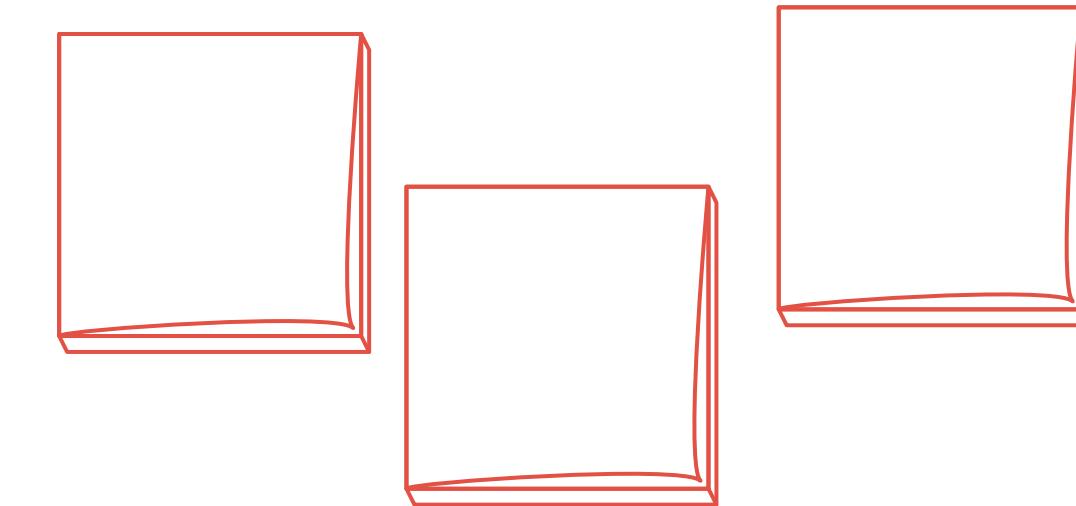
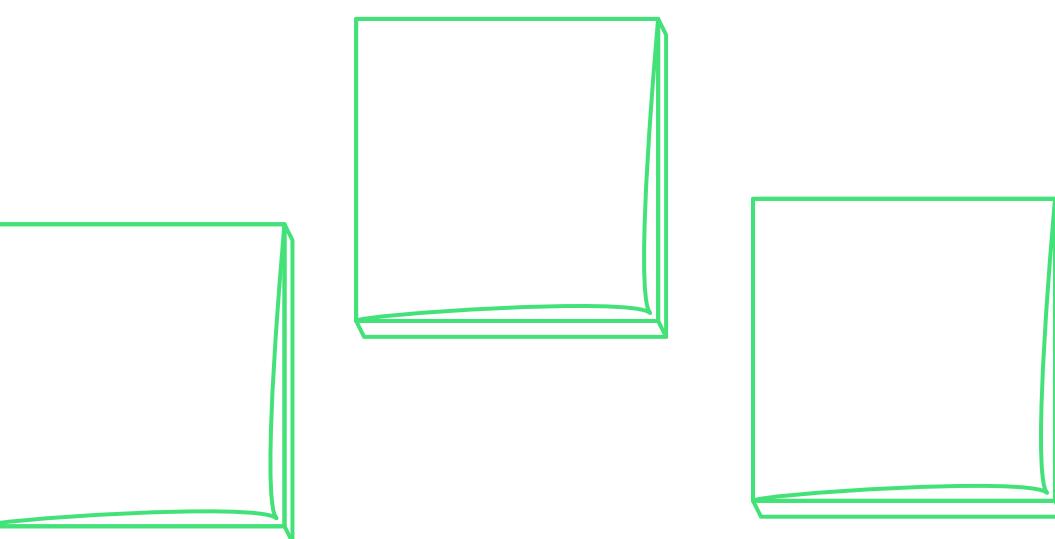


EXERCISE

What is **one hope**
you have about learning
to be an effective
engineering manager?

What is **one concern**
about the engineering
manager you want
addressed?

Write each on a separate sticky note and
add your name/initials to the corner of the sticky note



Exploring the EM role



What is an Engineering Manager?

- ▶ A role **responsible** for managing **people**
- ▶ A role **accountable** for the **outcomes** of one (or more) technical team(s)



What is an Engineering Manager?

- ▶ A role **responsible** for managing **people**
→ “Does the task”
- ▶ A role **accountable** for the **outcomes** of one (or more) technical team(s)
→ “Ultimately answerable, but may delegate the work”



What is an Engineering Manager?

“Managing People”

- ▶ A role **responsible** for managing **people**
- ▶ A role **accountable** for the **outcomes** of one (or more) technical team(s)

*“Managing the System”
(which produces outcomes)*



EM Focus

Technical

e.g. Architecture/design decisions, fixing tech debt, writing code, etc

Team

e.g. Hiring/firing, people management, team building, etc

Process

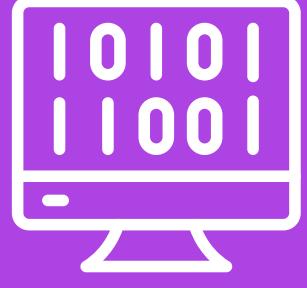
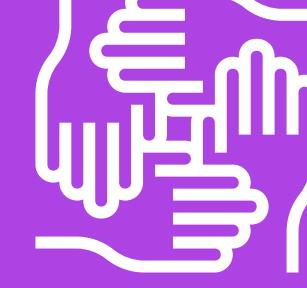
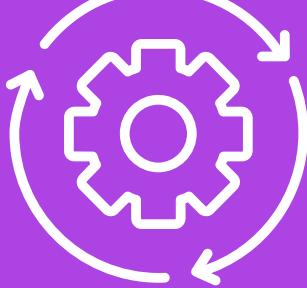
e.g. Kanban/Scrum/XP, incident management, internal “admin”

Product

e.g. Customer research, internal stakeholder management, feature planning, etc

Ratio of time/energy - “it depends”

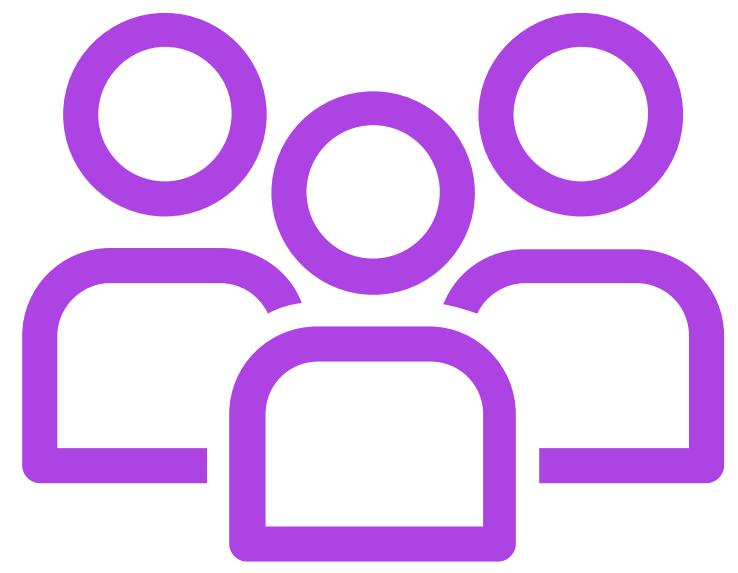


	 Technical	 Team	 Process	 Product
1. Tech Lead EM	★★★★★	★★	★★	★
2. Team Lead EM	★★	★★★★★	★★	★
3. Delivery EM	★★	★★	★★★★★	★
4. Product EM	★★	★	★★	★★★★★
5. Lead of Leads EM	★	★★★	★★★★★	★★

<https://www.patkua.com/blog/5-engineering-manager-archetypes>

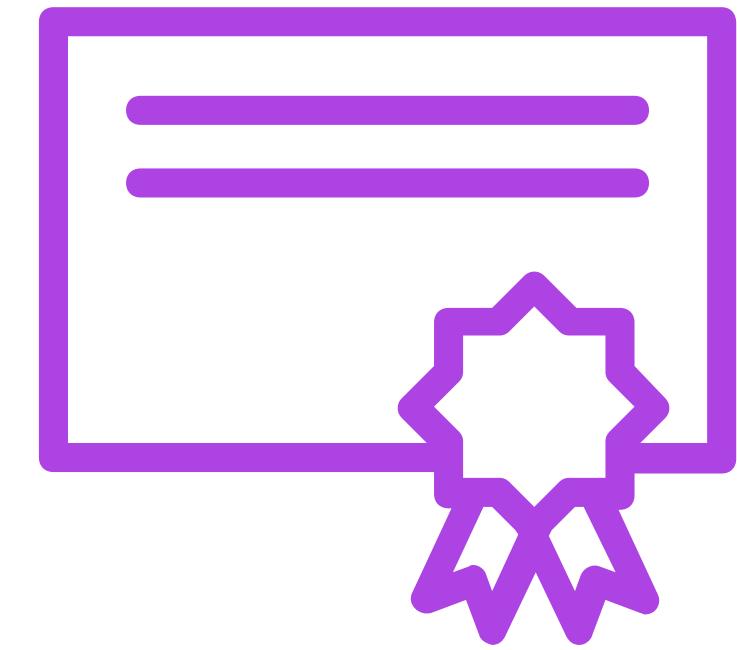
Exploring the EM role

Why does it depend?



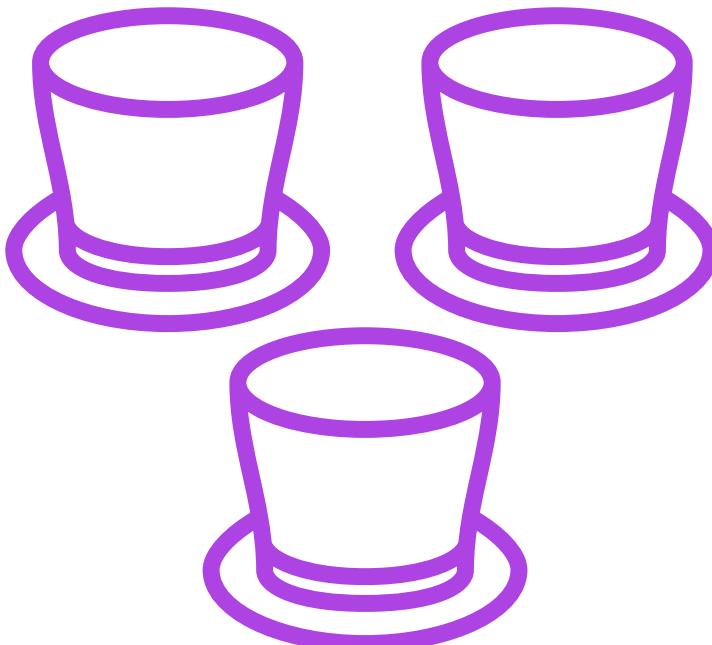
Team size

e.g. 2-3 vs 7-8



Experience

e.g. First-time
vs Experienced



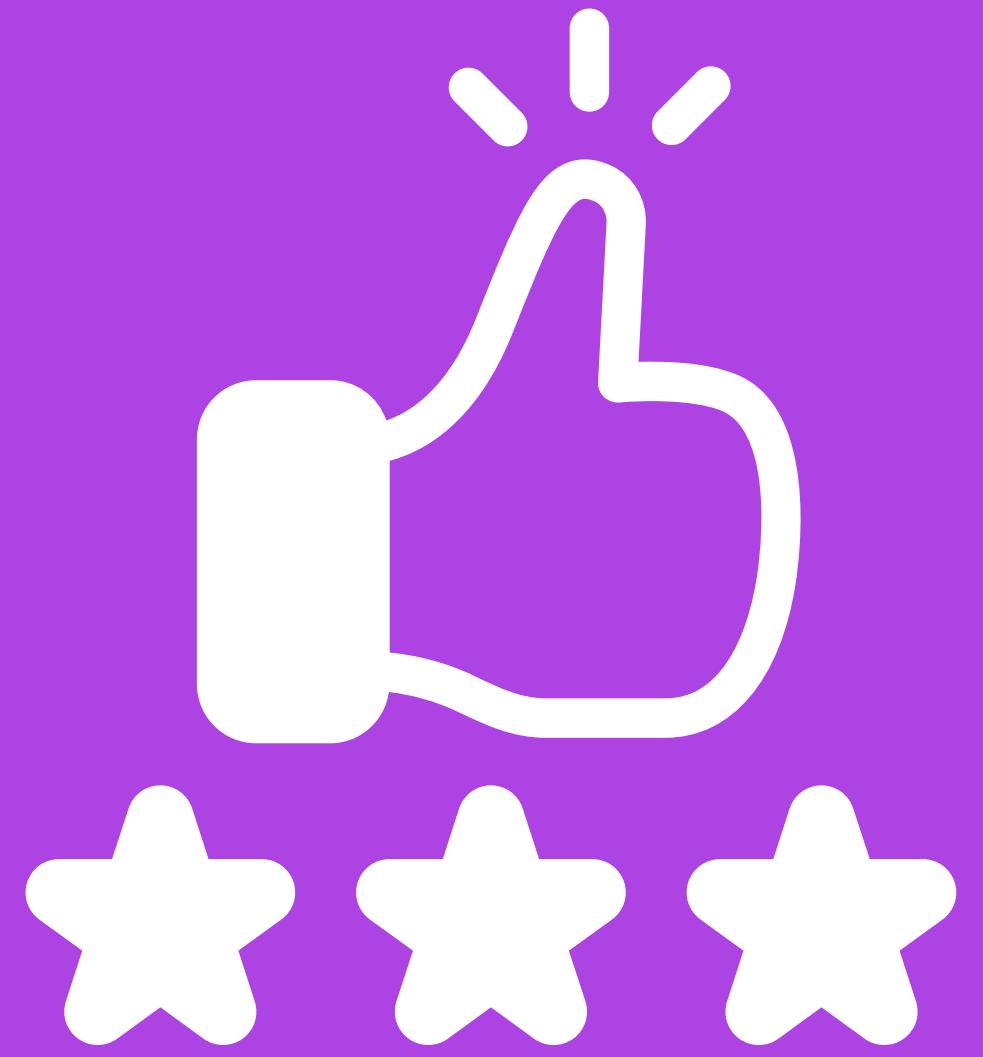
Other roles

e.g. Tech Lead,
Product Manager, etc



Organisation

e.g. Different names,
domains, etc



What does “good”
look like?

Exploring the EM role

The Holiday Test

Can you take 1-2 weeks of holiday?
(Without responding to messages and things falling apart)

EM Test

Business
Value



People
& Team

Product
Quality

Doing well across three dimensions

EM Test

10 questions to ask



1. Is your team **regularly delivering value** (to customers and the business)?
2. Is the team delivering a **quality** product?
3. Are people on your team **growing**?
4. Are people on your team **engaged** and contributing to their fullest?
5. Do **people outside of the team** (e.g. peers, other departments) enjoy working with you?
6. Are stakeholders/your manager **well-informed** and find you communicate well?
7. Does your team pass the "**Holiday Test?**"
8. Does your team **support each other** in their day-to-day work?
9. Is your team continually **improving**?
10. Do team members proactively solve issues and take work **without being asked**?



Let's take the test



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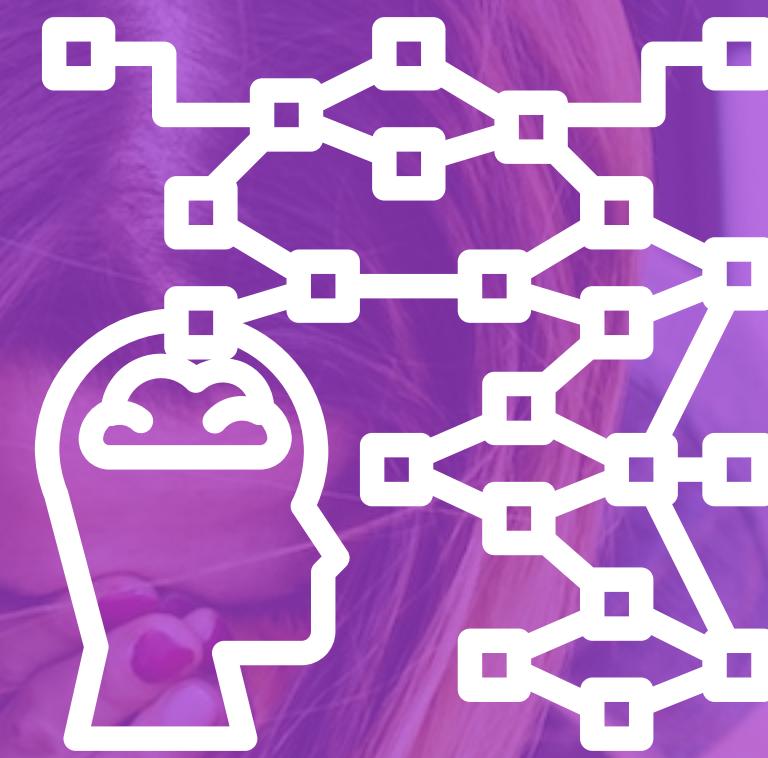
Why is it so hard?



Different role



New skills



No “right”
answers

Exploring the EM role

Fundamental Shifts

FROM

TO

Doing to Enabling

Code to Communication

Deep Work to Context Switching

Certainty to Crafting Clarity

Dopamine to Oxytocin

Exploring the EM role



Questions?



Managing the Team





Strengths



Coaching



Feedback



High Performing Teams



Productivity & Deadlines



Strengths



Learning about your group strengths

Pick **three words** from this list that best describe your personal strengths

Write one sticky note for each word (three in total)

Achiever

Activator

Adaptability

Analytical

Arranger

Belief

Command

Communication

Competition

Connectedness

Consistency

Context

Deliberative

Developer

Discipline

Empathy

Focus

Futuristic

Harmony

Ideation

Includer

Individualization

Input

Intellection

Learner

Maximizer

Positivity

Relator

Responsibility

Restorative

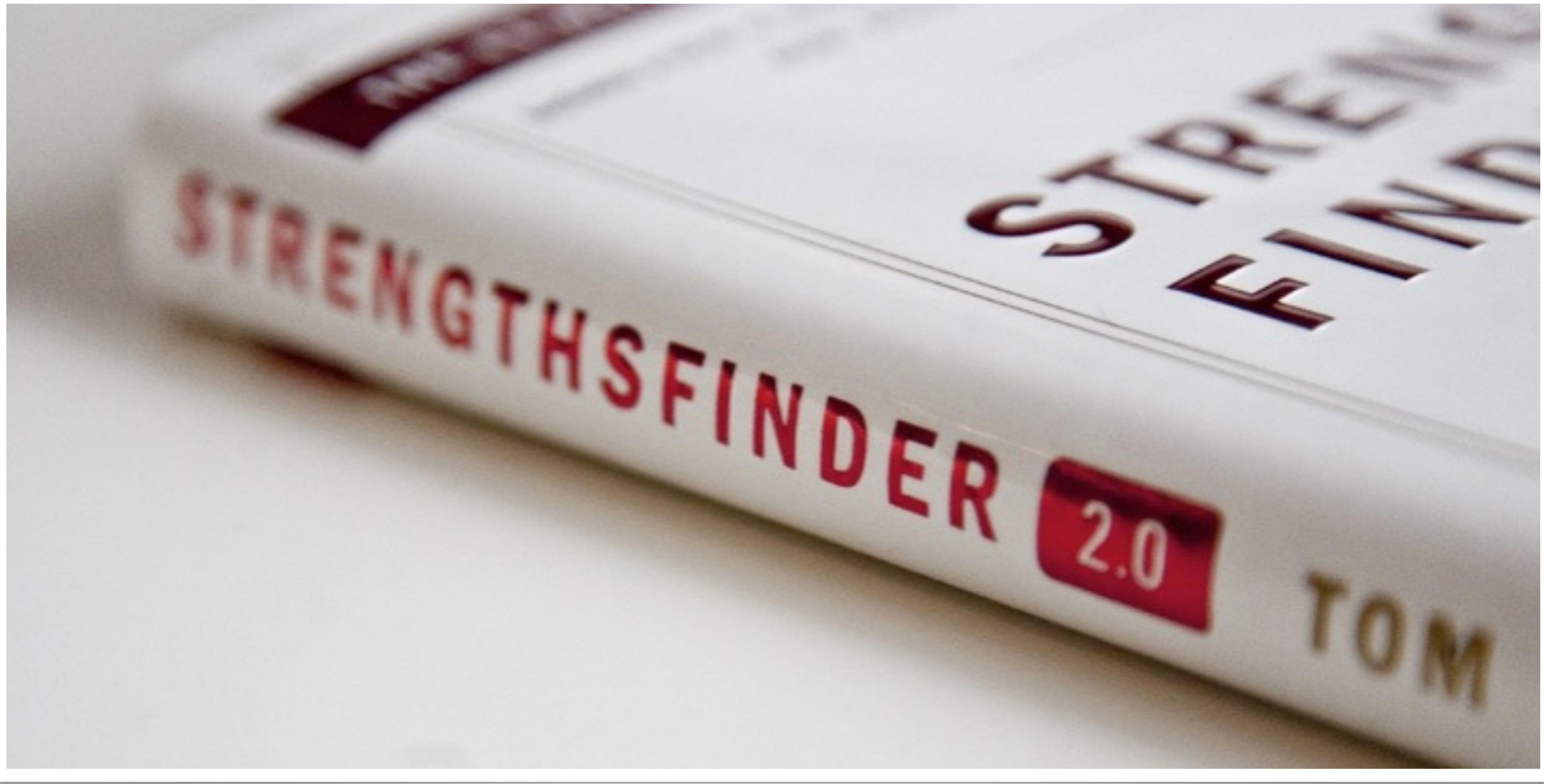
Self-Assurance

Significance

Strategic

Woo





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Executing

Achiever
Arranger
Belief
Consistency
Discipline

Deliberative Focus
Responsibility
Restorative



Relationship Building

Adaptability
Connectedness
Developer
Empathy
Harmony

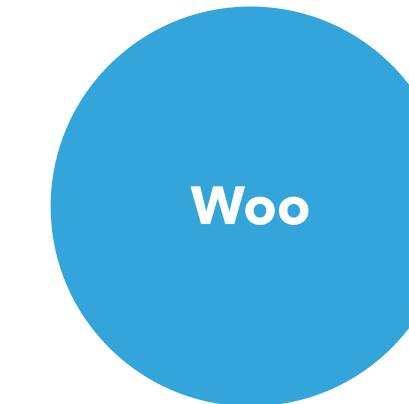
Includer
Individualization
Positivity
Relator



Influencing

Activator
Command
Communication
Competition

Maximizer
Self-Assurance
Significance
Woo



Strategic Thinking

Analytical
Context
Futuristic
Ideation

Input
Intellection
Learner
Strategic



Adaptive Leadership



EXERCISE

Discuss the distribution of strengths across your group.

Come up with two scenarios:

- 1) A scenario where your group strengths would be **particularly useful**
- 2) A scenario where your lack of group strengths would be **challenging**

Coaching



What is a coach?

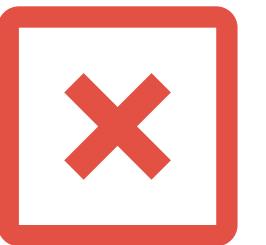


Coach

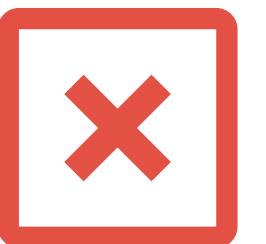
Leadership
Mode



Subject
Matter Expert



Offers Advice
or Instructions



Mentor



Teacher



Coach Mentor Teacher

One who
“has been there before”



Coach

Mentor

Teacher

Share knowledge for
“known task/activity”



Coach

Mentor

Teacher

Unlock person's
potential



Why you should coach

- Reduce dependencies
- Tap into team's potential
- High employee engagement
- Gather new information/insight





Coaching Toolbox

Active
Listening

Questions

GROW



Active Listening

- ▶ Listening with no solutions
- ▶ Listening for words
- ▶ Listening for intent
- ▶ Paraphrasing
- ▶ Comfort with silence



Paraphrasing

- ▶ “Did I understand you right?”
- ▶ “Let me confirm I understood you. I heard ...”
- ▶ “I heard you say ... Did you mean ...?”



Active Listening - Listen For

Observations



Feelings



Opinions



Questions

“How do you think
we should run code reviews?”

Open

“Should we do pair
programming?”

Closed



Questions

“How has your week
been so far?”

Relationship-Based

“What are the
benefits of Rust?”

Fact-Based



Questions

“On a scale of 1-10, where 1 is not at all, 10 is perfect, how would you rate the quality of your team’s output?”

Scale-Based



Questions

“Imagine you had no constraints. What would the perfect solution look like to you?”

Futuristic



Questions

“What can *you* do or influence?”

Scope Focused



**Coaching
to**

**G
R
O
W**





Coaching Exercise

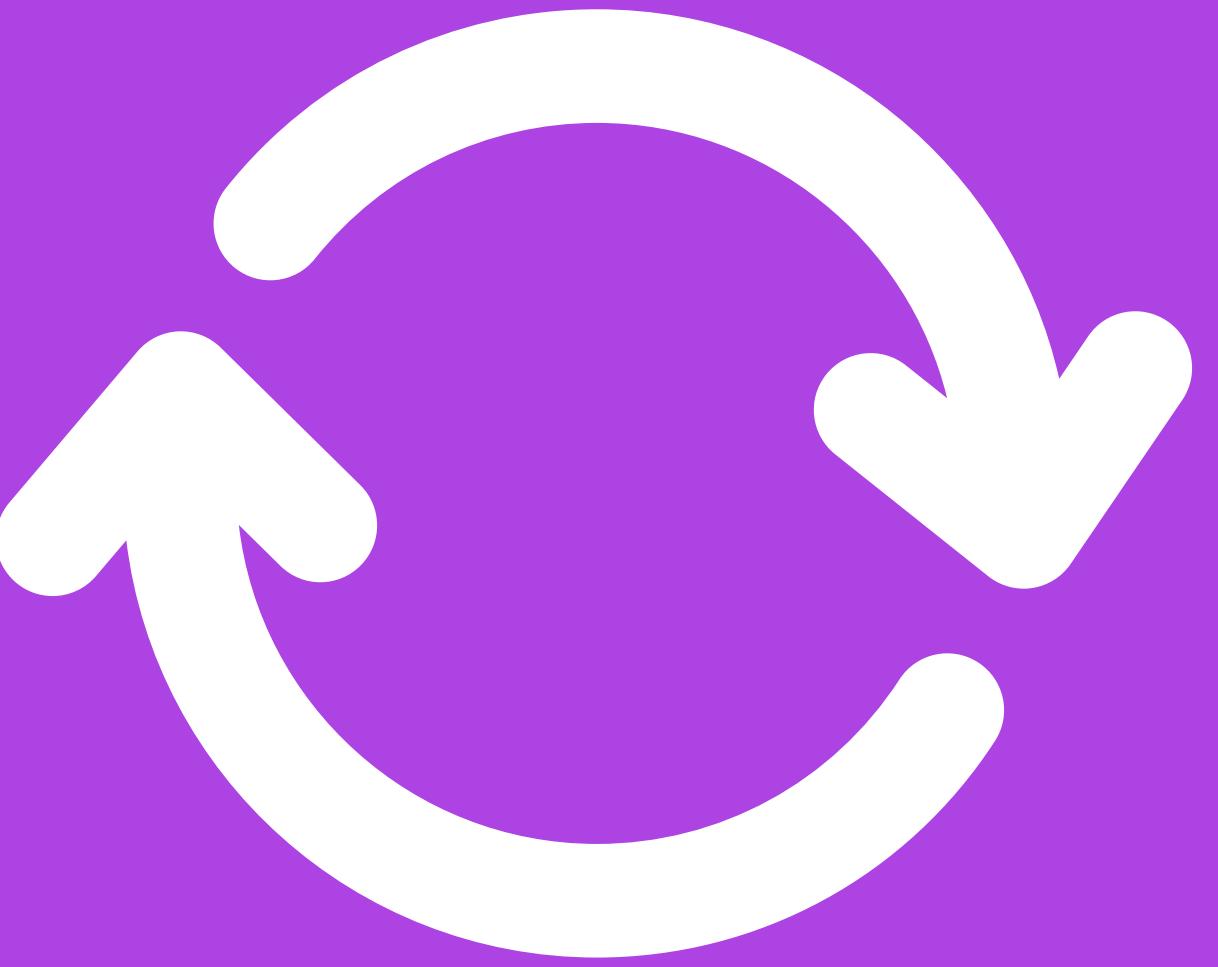


Exercise

- 1** **(2mins) Preparation.** Think about a situation you are uncertain of and could talk through with someone else. Write down a 2-3 few sentences
- 2** **(2 x 10mins) Peer-Coaching.** In pairs, one will be a coach and the other the coachee. The coach will practice the tools we just covered. After 10 minutes you will swap roles.
- 3** **Debrief.** We will discuss your experience



Feedback



Thoughts on Feedback

What do you think when
you hear the term?



Thoughts on Feedback

*Here it
comes...*

*What do they *really*
think of me?*

**What do you think when
you hear the term?**

*Oh, oh. What
have I done?*

*No news is,
good news*

*I'm. not sure
how they are
going to react*



Ineffective Feedback

- ▶ Default of what we experience
- ▶ New skill for ***everyone***
- ▶ Not taught, not practiced



Your Default Approach

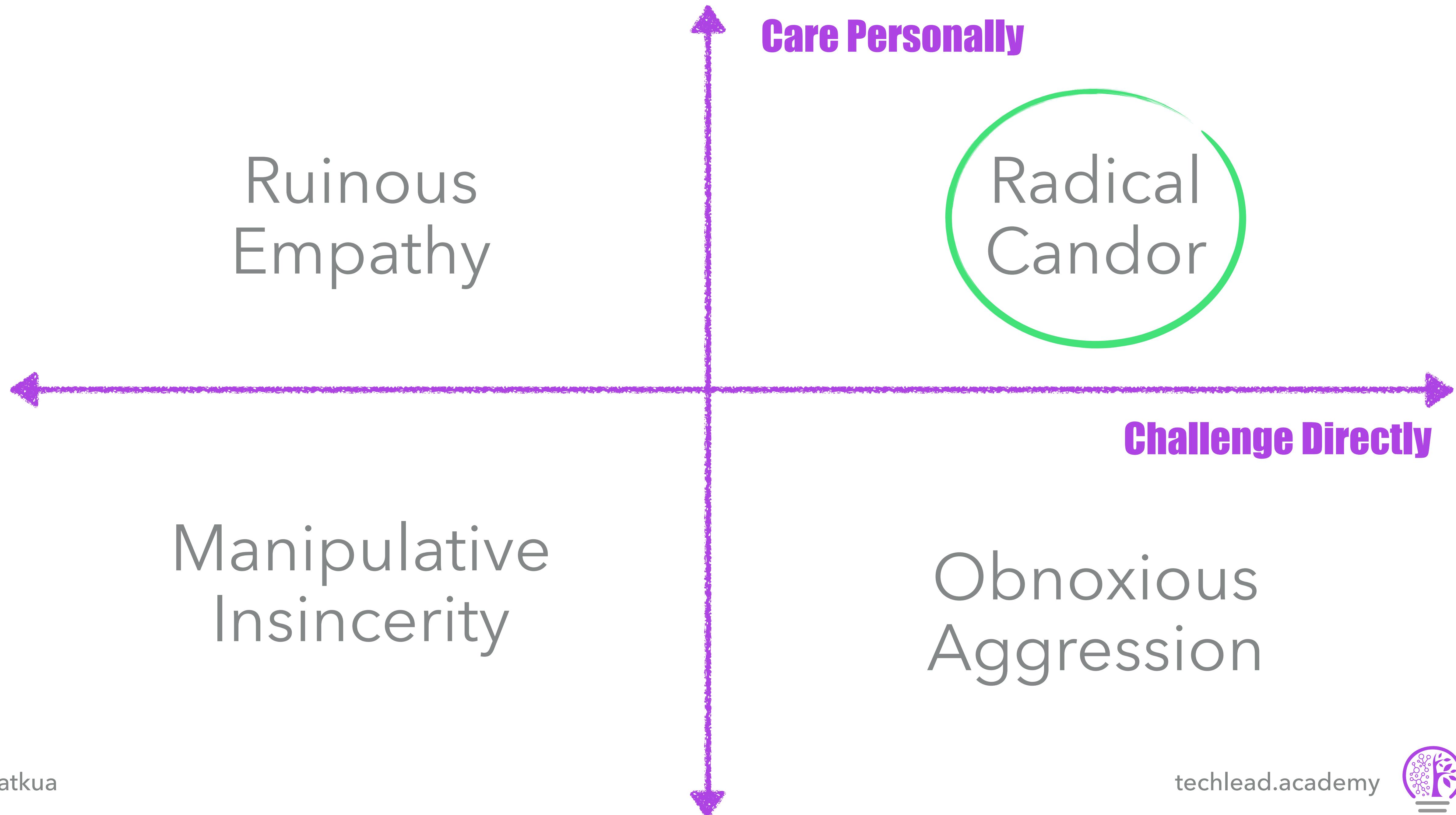


Exercise

Think of a recent situation where you had an opportunity to offer feedback to someone.

Write down your feedback on a piece of paper
(You will not be asked to share this)





*“Are you being **nice**
or being **kind?**”*



Effective Feedback

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Ineffective or Effective



Ineffective or Effective

“You’re rude”



Ineffective or Effective

“In your presentation yesterday, you used a simple metaphor that helped everyone including the PM to understand it”



Ineffective or Effective

“In our team meeting yesterday, I noticed that you interrupted Charlie four times while they spoke.”



Ineffective or Effective

“You did a great job”



Ineffective or Effective

“You are always tardy
(never in time for team meetings)”



Effective Feedback

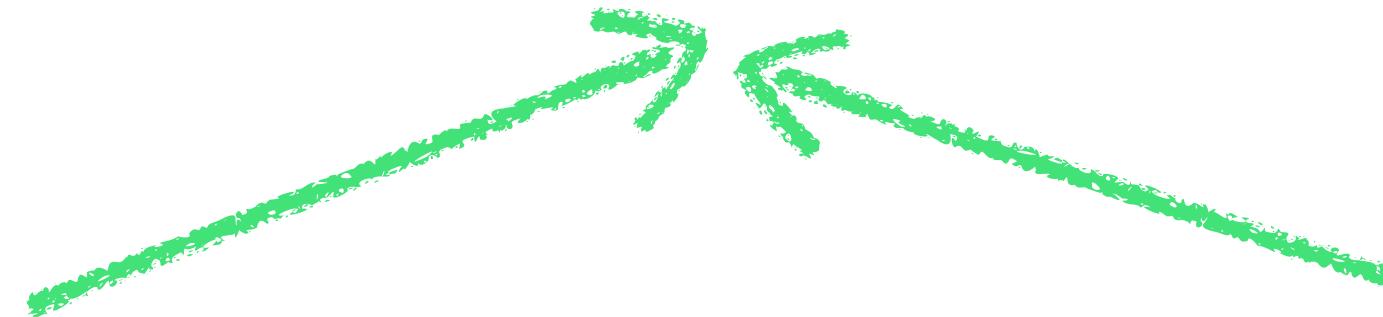
When you receive feedback, what do you ask yourself?

What I can do more of? What can I do differently?



Effective Feedback

is about the behaviour/output, not the person



What I can do more of? What can I do differently?



Effective Feedback

serves two purposes

- ▶ Strengthening confidence (do more)
- ▶ Improve effectiveness (do differently)



Effective Feedback

serves two purposes

- ▶ Strengthening confidence (do more)
- ▶ Improve effectiveness (do differently)

of the recipient



Feedback Formula

Situation
Behaviour
Impact





Situation, Behaviour, Impact

“You’re absent minded”

Last week, I noticed you started four tickets but didn't complete them.

I had to complete them, making me feel like I was cleaning up after you.





Situation, Behaviour, Impact

“You did a great job”

For the feature you were leading, you completed it on time, with excellent quality. You proactively reached out when you needed help and gave daily updates, which gave me confidence in your progress.



Some Tips

- ▶ Be as specific as possible
- ▶ Use “I-language” for impact
- ▶ Don’t YOLO feedback
- ▶ Offer feedback in person (then maybe VC)
- ▶ Make it a discussion





Exercise

Practice

Revisit the feedback you previously wrote down. Rewrite this based on what we have just learned

Remember SBI and its two purposes:

1. Strengthen confidence
2. Improve the effectiveness



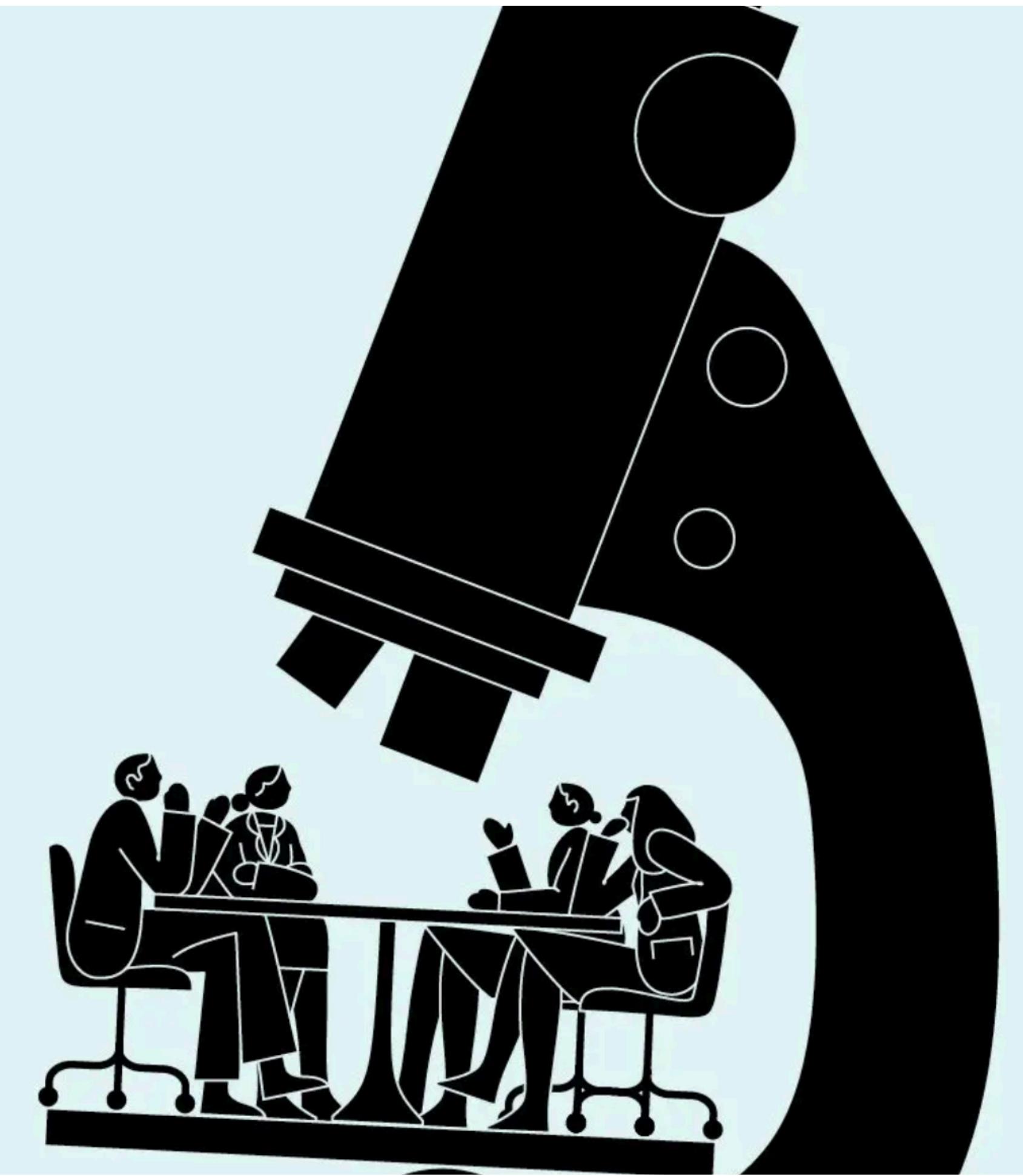
High Performing Teams



THE WORK ISSUE

What Google Learned From Its Quest to Build the Perfect Team

New research reveals surprising truths about why some work groups thrive and others falter.



Best Team

Hypothesis:

We will have the best performing team if we have the best and brightest people working as a team



*A system is never the sum of
its parts; it's the product of
their interactions*

- Russel L. Ackoff

(Systems Thinking Business Consultant)



What interactions are important?



Project Aristotle

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Exercise



Project Aristotle

On a flipchart, put the five elements and brainstorm ideas what you can do to improve each of them.



Productivity & Deadlines

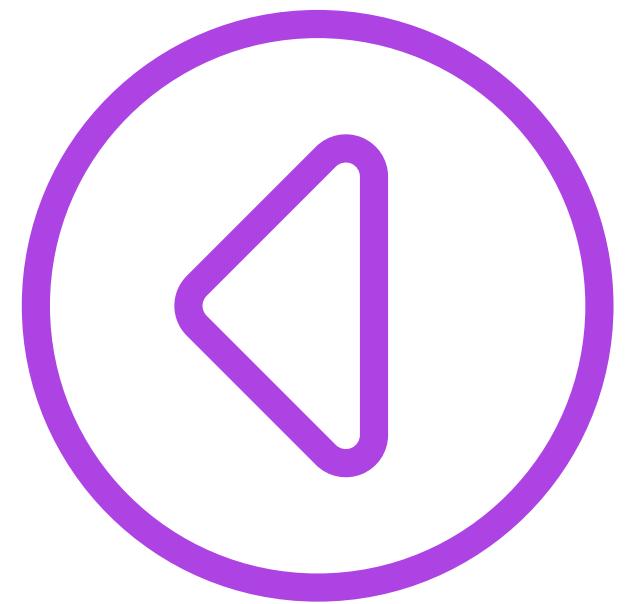


What “friction” exists?

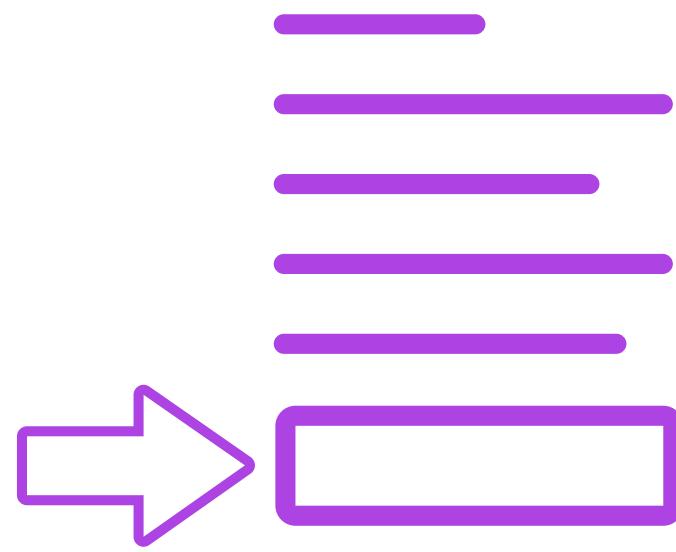
- ▶ **Tooling** - e.g. lots of manual steps required
- ▶ **Process** - e.g. lots of waiting for approvals
- ▶ **Workflow** - e.g. constant interruptions
- ▶ **Design/Architecture** - e.g. Difficult to understand/tech debt



MVP Practices



Retrospectives

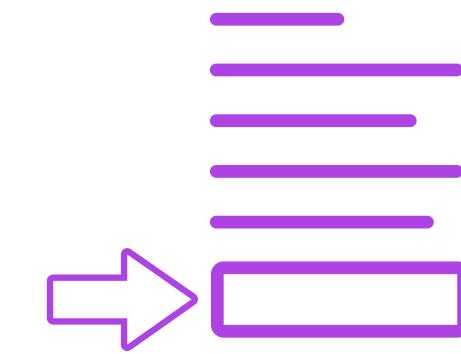


Contingency



Pre-Mortems

Contingency



Time

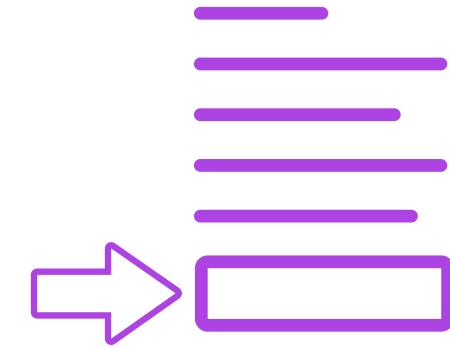


Planned work

Known
Unknowns



Contingency

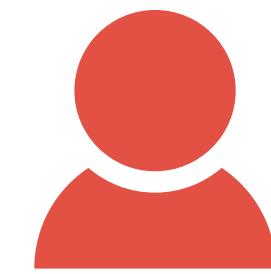


Capacity



Planned, focused work

Firefighter



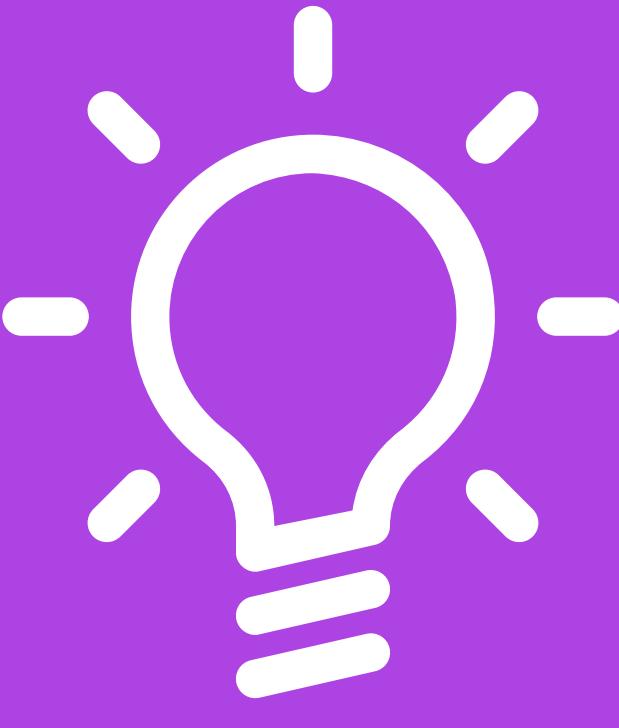
Interrupt,
emergencies,
etc

Pre-Mortems



- ▶ Imagine the future “end-state” (futurespective)
- ▶ What might have gone wrong?
- ▶ What did you do to avoid this?





Exercise

Pre-Mortems



Read the scenario brief.

Discuss in your groups three things that might go wrong and put an action plan on what to do about it





Questions?



Managing Yourself





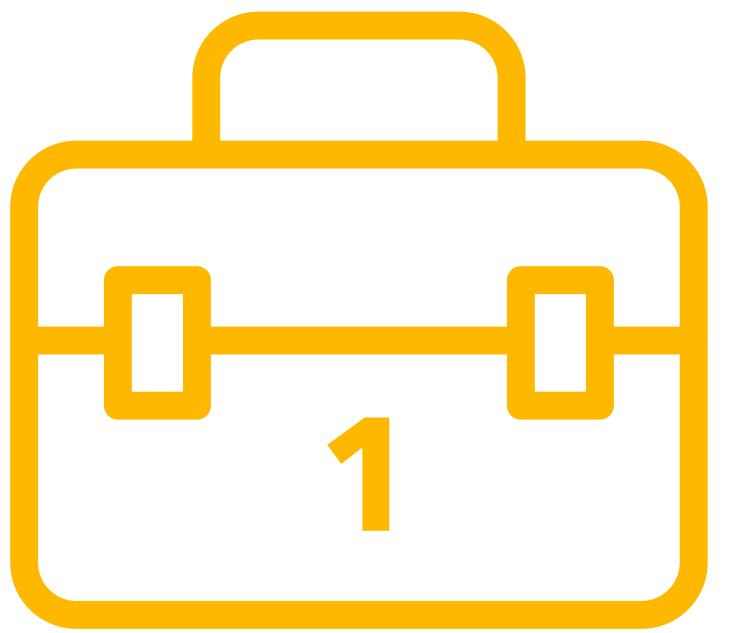
Oxygen Mask Rule



Your Support Network



Personal Priorities



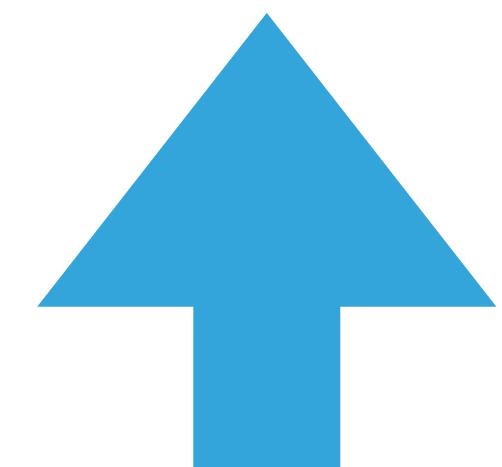
Oxygen Mask Rule



Your Support Network



Personal Priorities



Managing Yourself



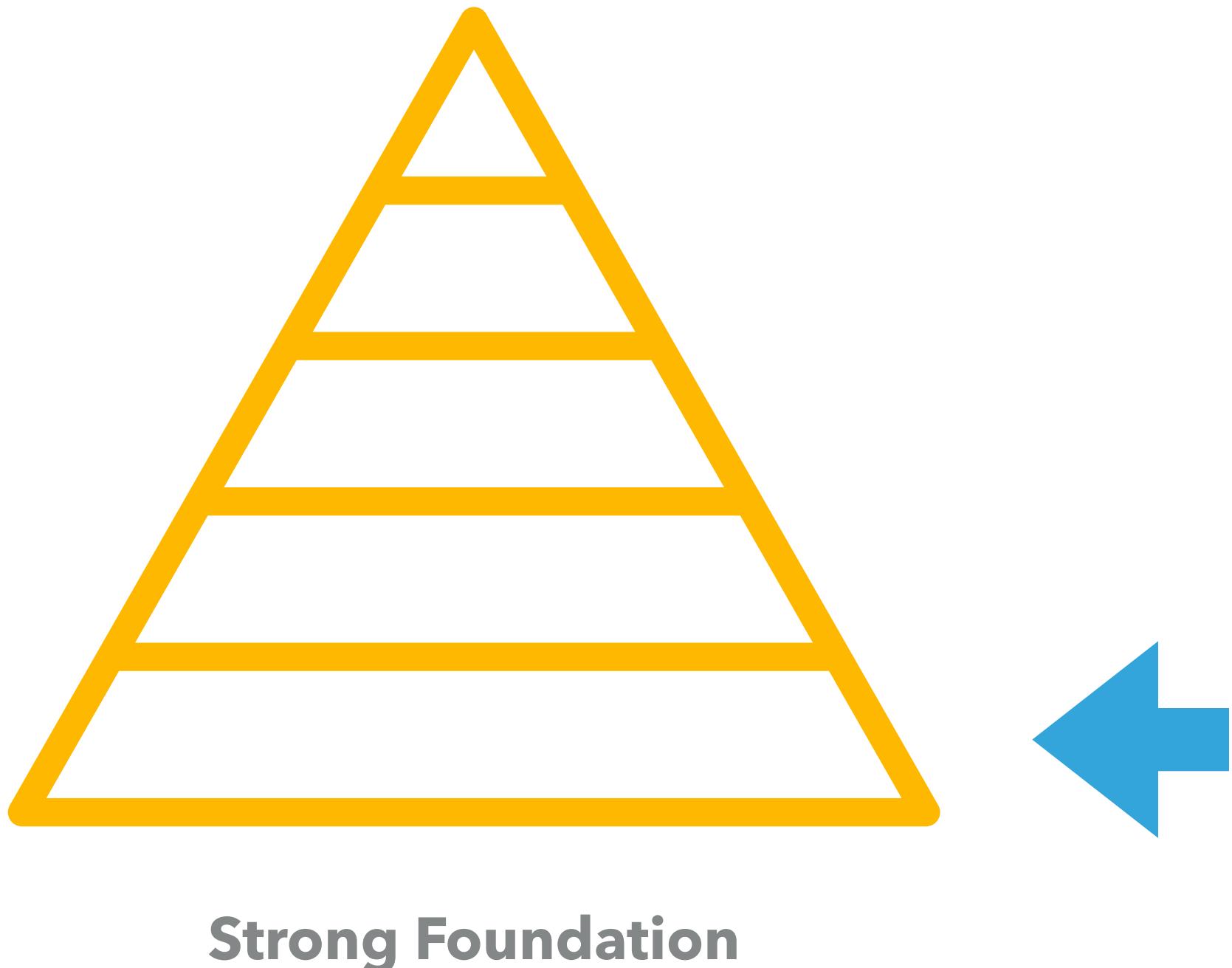


Oxygen Mask Rule

*"Put your mask on,
before helping others"*

Managing Yourself

The Basics



- ▶ Sleep
- ▶ Exercise
- ▶ Nutrition
- ▶ Work-Life Balance
- ▶ Mental Well-Being



The Stoic Manager



Control

Your Actions

Your Words

Cannot Control

Other's Interpretation

Other's Reactions



The Stoic Manager



Control	Cannot Control	No Influence
Deliberate Actions	Influence	Country Law
Review Communication	Offer Feedback	Past Actions

Focus Here

Managing Yourself

Best Effort

“Let It Go”





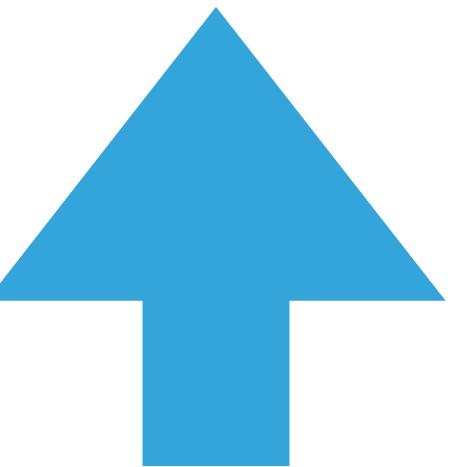
**Oxygen Mask
Rule**



**Your Support
Network**



**Personal
Priorities**



Managing Yourself



Your Support Network

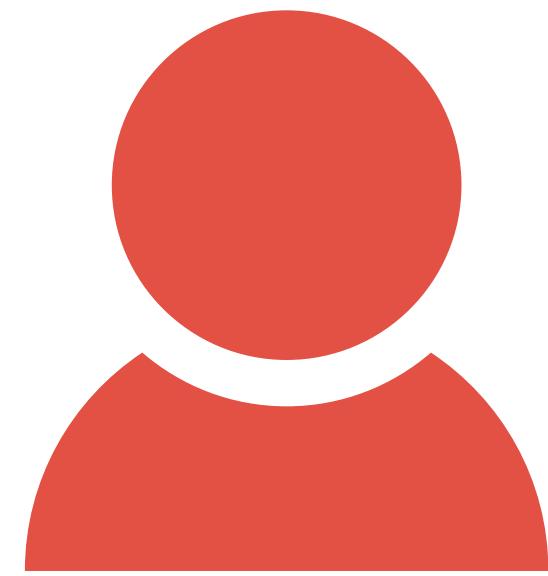
Why?

- ▶ Remove “loneliness”
- ▶ Opportunity to vent
- ▶ Gather honest feedback
- ▶ Gather new ideas
- ▶ Open doors/connections

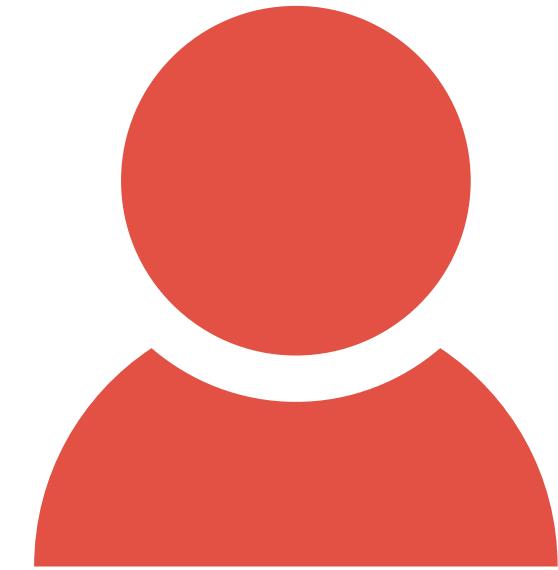




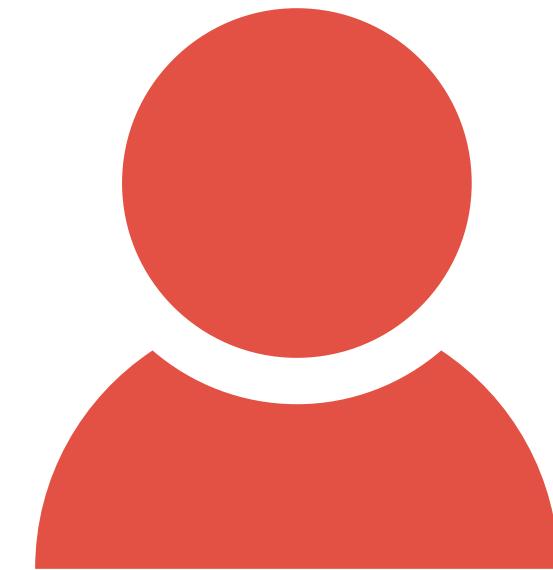
Your Support Network



Team Member



Manager



Partner

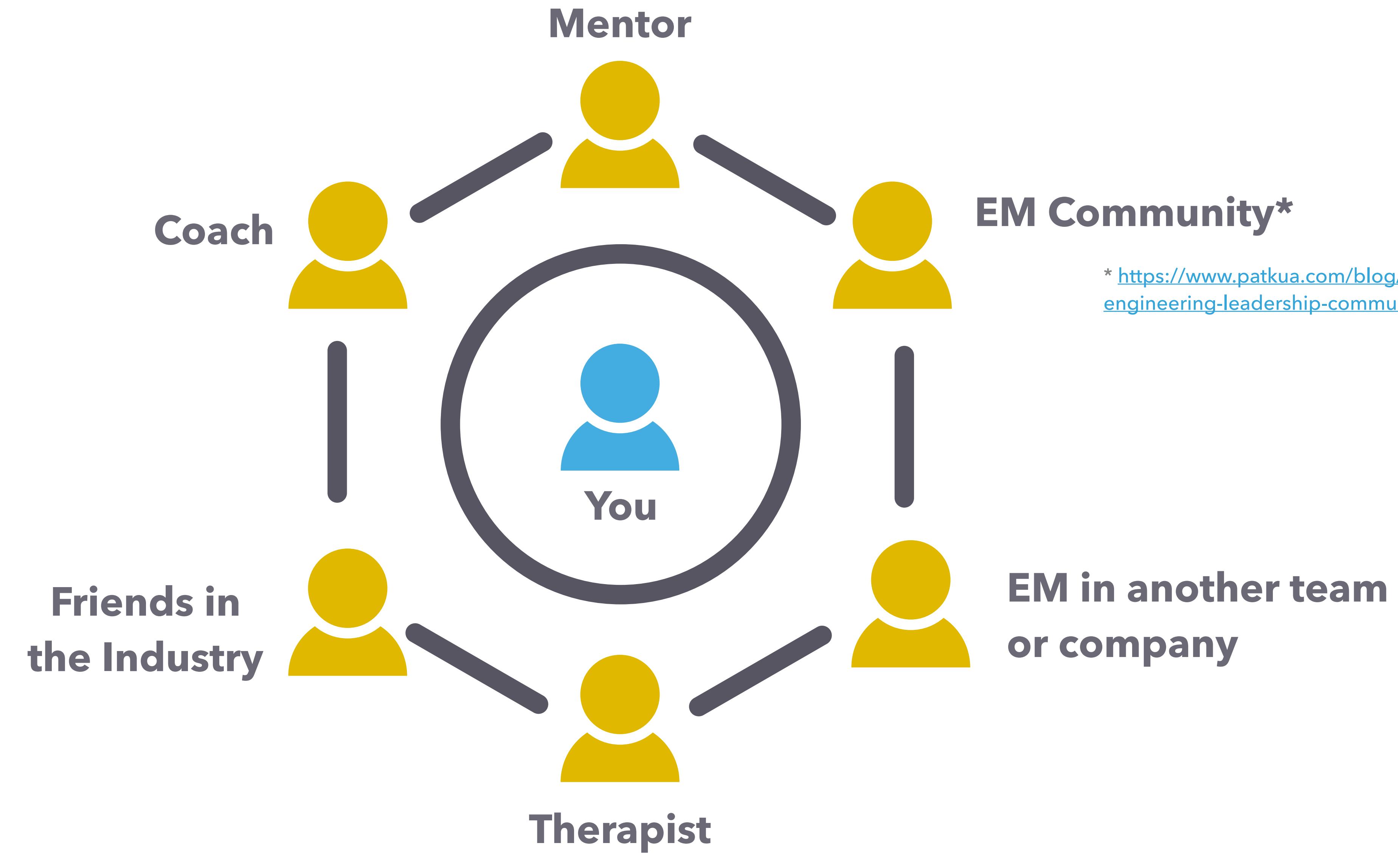
Managing Yourself

- ▶ Confidentiality
- ▶ Safety
- ▶ Too close



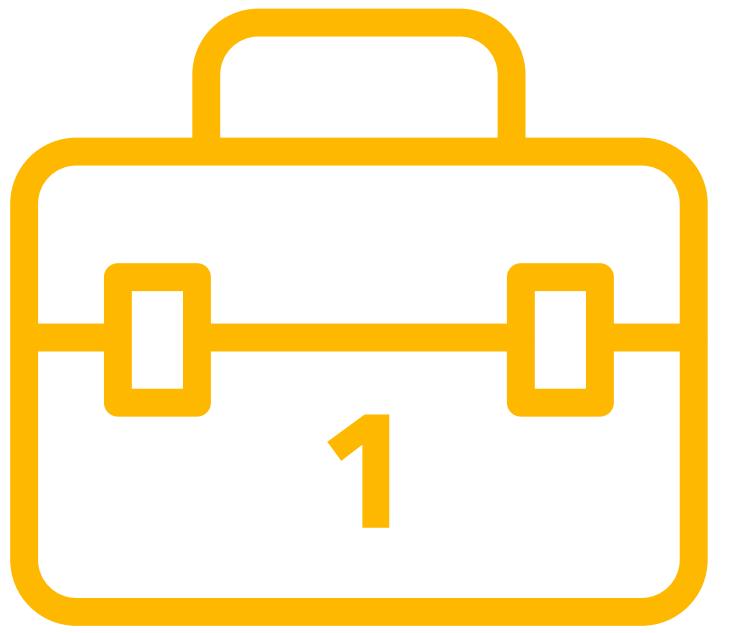


Your Support Network



* <https://www.patkua.com/blog/software-engineering-leadership-communities/>





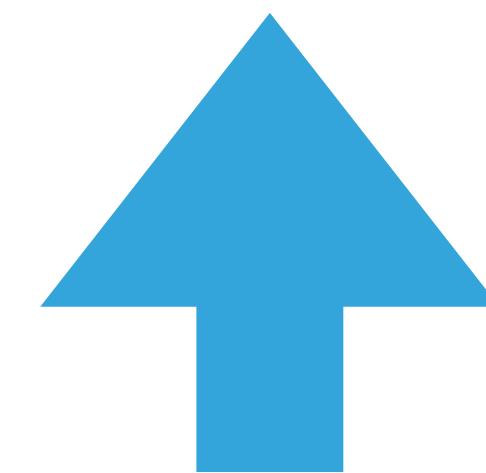
Oxygen Mask Rule



Your Support Network



Personal Priorities

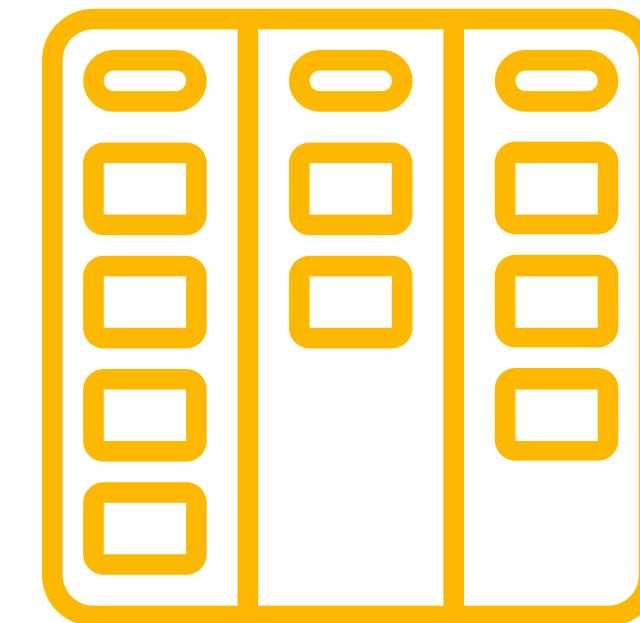




Personal
Priorities

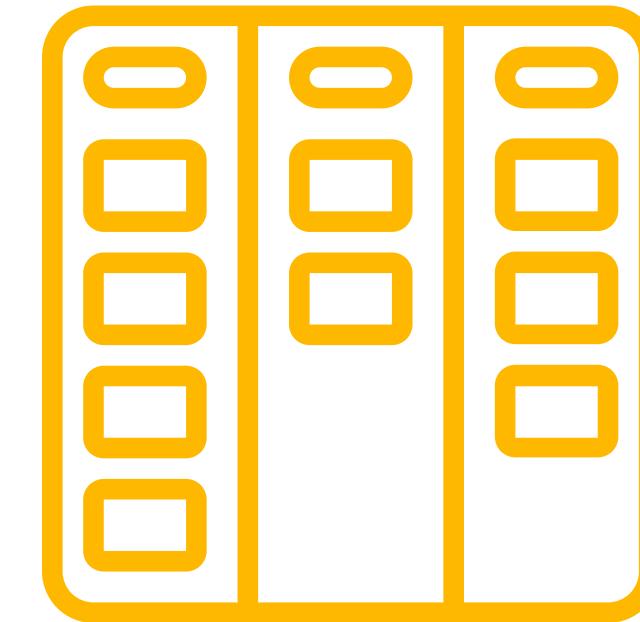
Two Work Queues

Team Work



Kanban

Your Work
(EM Work)



Scrum

XP

LeSS

Shape Up

Modern Agile

Your Personal Priorities



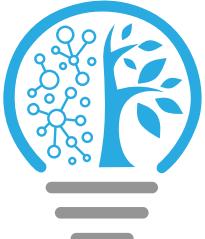


Personal Priorities

Your Personal Priorities

The Golden Rule

There will **always** be more work than time. Focus on the **most impactful** work





Personal Priorities



Time
Management



Prioritisation



Art of
Saying No

Managing Yourself

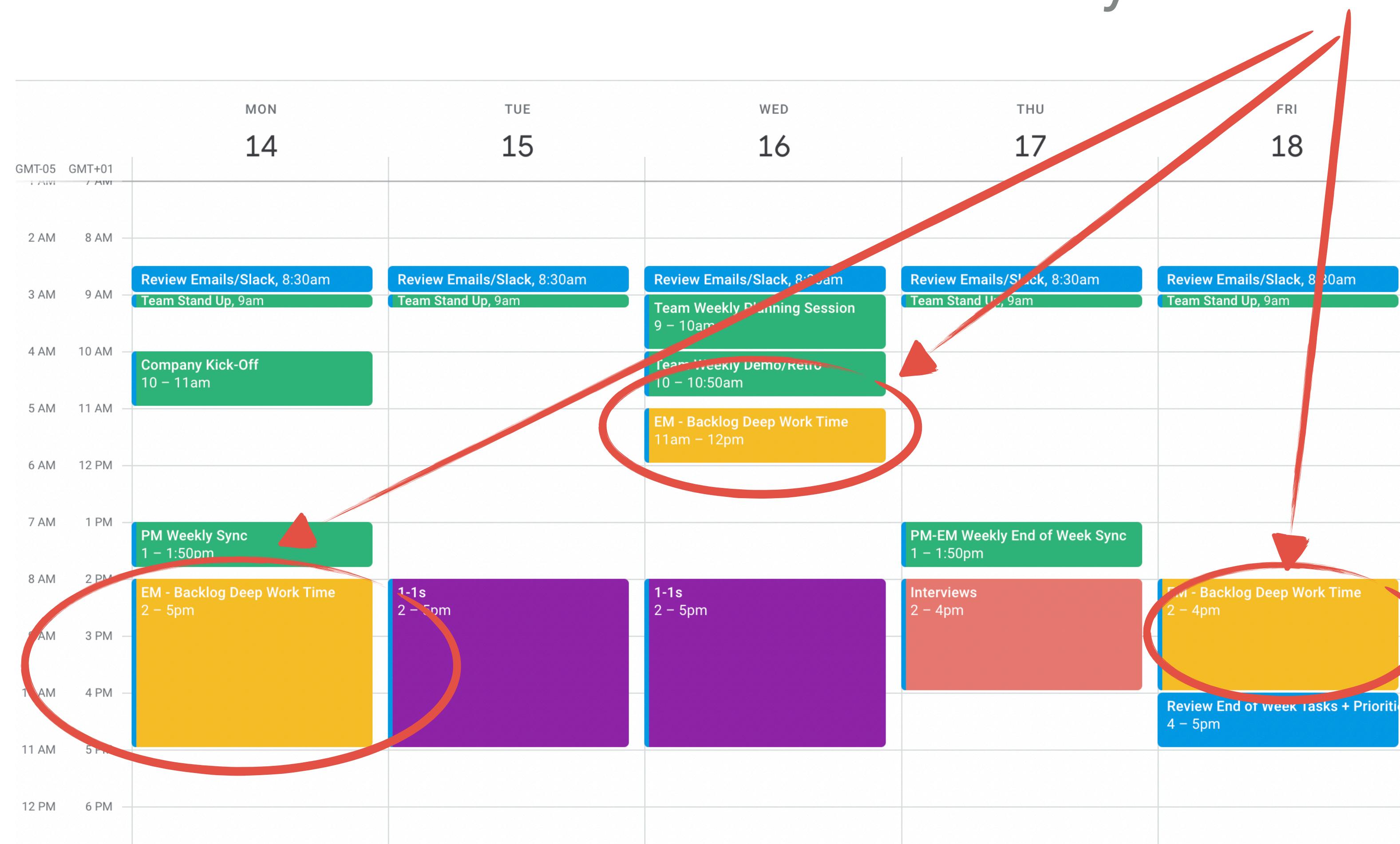




Personal Priorities

Time Management

Heuristic: Min ~20% should be focused on your EM work queue





Personal Priorities

Prioritisation

Establish (and stick to) your own task tracking system

The image shows a digital task tracking interface with a light gray header and a large orange central area. The interface is organized into five vertical columns:

- Backlog (Ideas, Request, etc)**:
 - What's our approach to managing tech debt?
 - Identify growth opportunities for next 6 months
 - Prepare quarterly team engagement survey
 - Review Senior Software Job Spec based on feedback from recruiting review
 - Quarterly check-in with the EM test (10 questions)
- Weekly Repeating**:
 - Weekly status report
 - Review team metrics for insight
 - Prepare for weekly planning and retro
- This Week's Priorities**:
 - Complete review for Kai
 - Complete review for Chandler
 - Complete review for Robin
 - Set up user shadowing/interviewing session for team in next month
 - Follow up with Director Product (Denver) on actions from recent OKR planning session and decide what to do
 - Find out what's blocking Story #150 (it's been "In Dev" for 3 weeks now)
- Current Focus**:
 - + Add a card
- Completed**:
 - Complete review for Finn
 - Complete review for Dee
 - Complete review for Stevie
 - Review recruiting pipeline with recruiting partner
 - Set up meeting with EM from the platform team
 - Reach out to 5 EMs from high-growth companies to set up potential 1-1s





Personal Priorities

Art of Saying No

- ▶ “No, not yet.”
- ▶ “Let me check my calendar”
- ▶ “Which task is more important to first finish?”
- ▶ “I can’t help you with this, but X can”
- ▶ “I could help you quicker, if you prepared X”



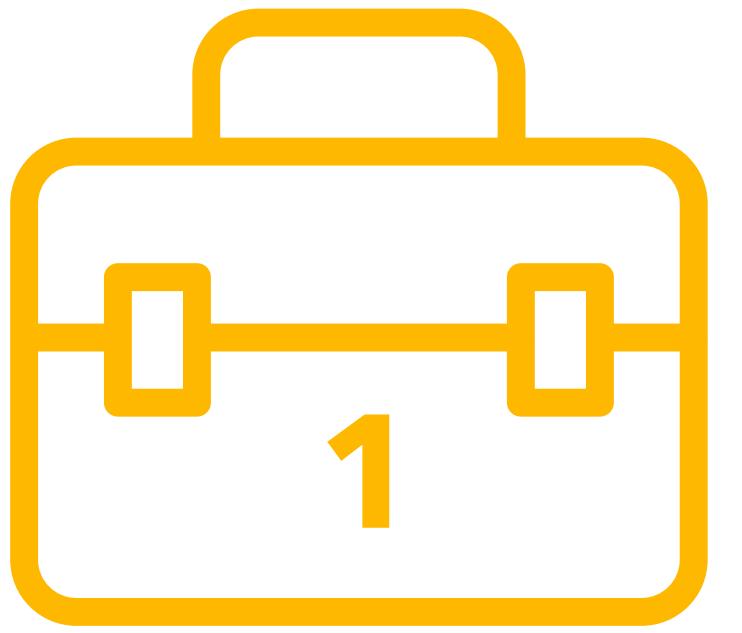


Personal Priorities

Your Personal Priorities

If you don't prioritise your time,
others will do it for you... but you
won't have the impact you want





Oxygen Mask Rule



Your Support Network



Personal Priorities



Questions?





Agenda

Hopes &
Concerns



Hopes & Concerns
(Recap)



Action
Plan



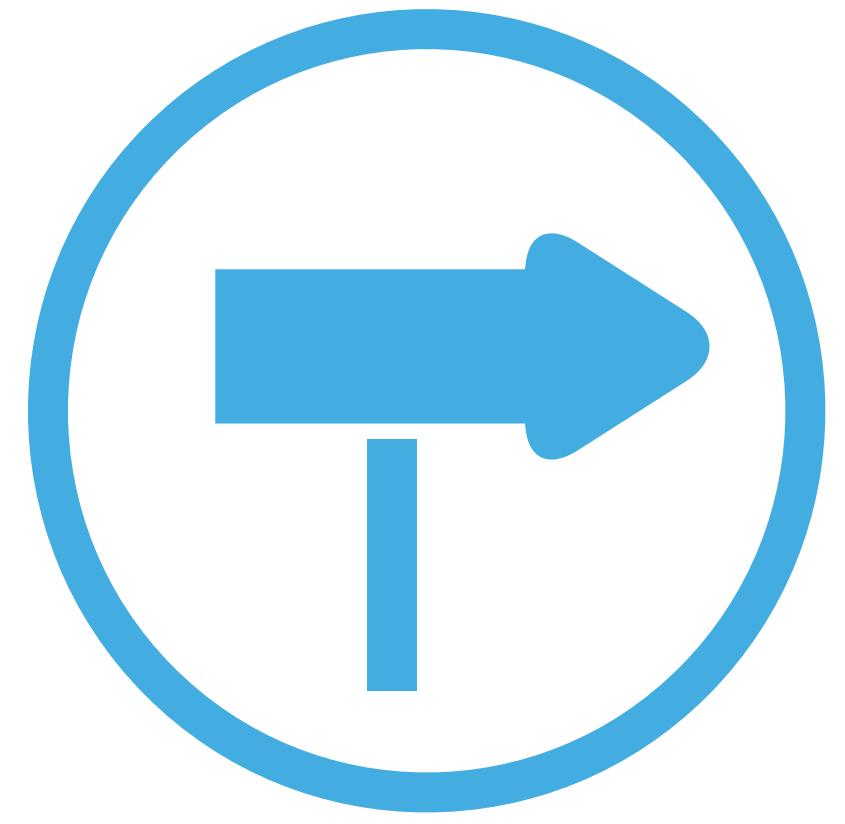
Hopes & Concerns

Recap

If your hope has been fulfilled, or your concern addressed, please remove it from the wall

EXERCISE





Action Plan

“Never stop learning because life
never stops teaching”



Example Actions

Taking learning further

“Watch a conference talk
about active listening in
the next 3 weeks”

Example Actions

Taking learning further

“Pick one architecture book
to read in the next 3 days”

Example Actions

Taking learning further

“Read (selected) book in
the next three months”

Example Actions

Taking learning further

“Write a book summary
and share with three
colleagues/friends”

Example Actions

Taking learning further

“Meet 4 people for a coffee/tea I don’t normally talk to in the next 3 weeks”

Example Actions

Taking learning further

“Complete a first draft
tech vision in the next 3
weeks”

Example Actions

Taking learning further

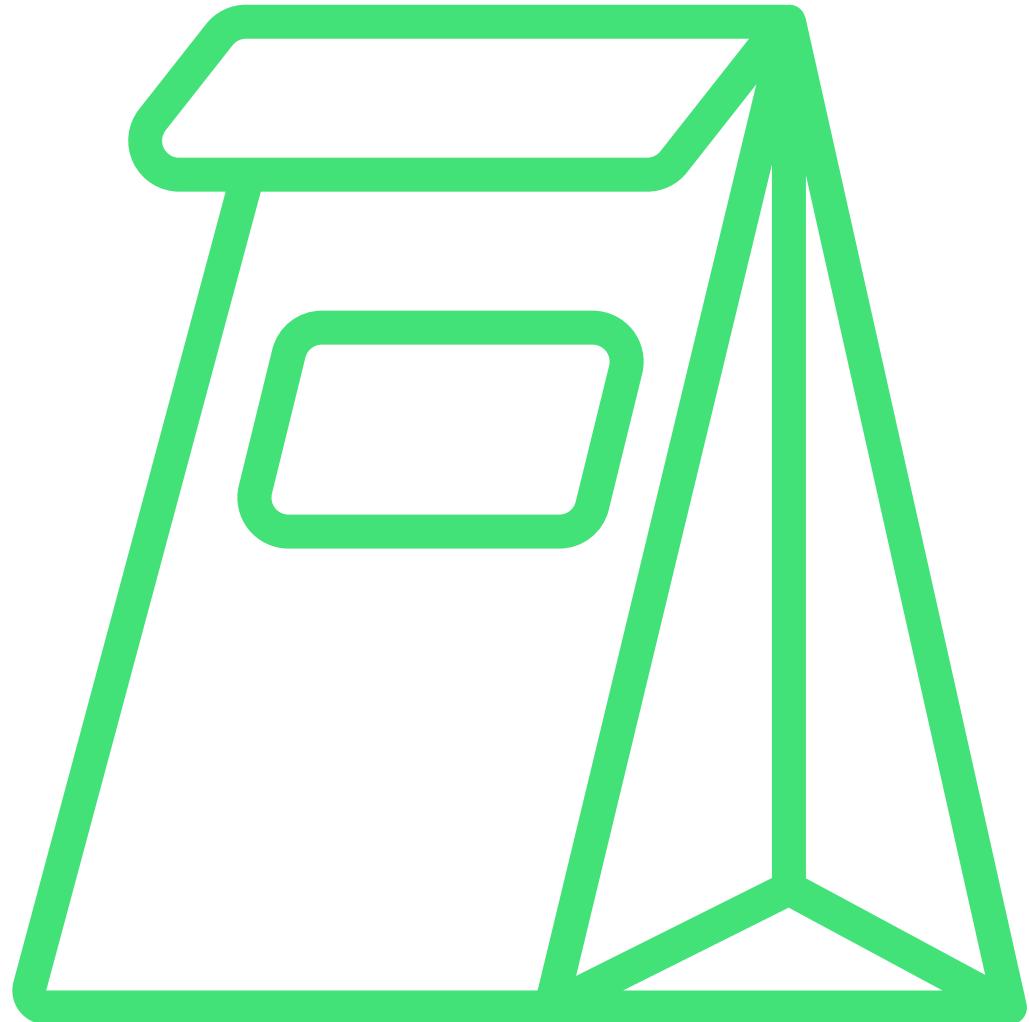
“Review my calendar and group fragmented activities in the next 3 days”

SMART Actions

Taking learning further

- **Specific** - Be concrete ("use a verb - e.g. do/read/write/talk")
- **Measurable** - When do you know you're done.
- **Attainable** - What results can realistically be achieved, given available resources and time?
- **Relevant** - Does this help you with your own goal?
- **Time-related** - When? Already given

Take-Home Artefacts



- ▶ Slides
- ▶ Handouts
- ▶ Recommended reading list
- ▶ Photos from workshop



Great technical leadership
requires more than just great
coding skills.

```
1 > TechLead  
2 .Journal()  
3 -  
4  
5
```

techleadjournal.dev

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Tech Lead Journal

Tune in for great technical leadership and excellence wisdom! Subscribe at techleadjournal.dev.

Listen Score

LS **31**

Global Rank

TOP **5%**



X **LISTEN
NOTES**



> TechLead
.Journal()
-

FEEDBACK IS A GIFT!



<https://forms.gle/jdyCrmS8oEwhFtjSA>

Thank you!

pat@patkua.com

The end of the workshop but your journey continues...

The End

@patkua

techlead.academy

