



Managers - The Missing Manual

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Disclaimer

This talk is **not** about **bashing managers** ...

It's about **understanding** them better and hence being able to
collaborate better

If I talk about managers, I normally mean **non-technical managers**

Most of what I will say is probably true for other **non-technical people**
that you encounter in your project, including **customer representatives**

Take what I say with a **grain of salt**. I'm not the expert. I just had the
opportunity (and often the pleasure) to work with a lot of managers and
become a part-time manager myself.



Being a Manager

Being a manager is a **really strange job**

You are the **boss**, you are the **face** of the company / project / ...

You have the biggest **salary**, the flashiest **car**, the big **corner office**, the assistant, ...

You yield the **power**, you have the **responsibility**, ...

But you are **not actually doing any (real) work**

Manager and Work

I'm not saying that managers do not work hard

Some of them **work hard ... really, really hard**

But they normally do not work on the **core activities of a company**

The manager of a car company does not actually build cars.

The manager of a news paper does not write articles or print news papers

The manager of a software team does not write code

A software team
without managers

A Team without Managers

Imagine a software team without any managers

This might work

Depending on the managers you have, it might even work better

It might work for some time

But it will probably not work long-term

Not with a large team

Not with complex non-technical challenges

There are examples of this. We call them Startups.

Managers
without a team

Managers without a team

But now imagine a software team without developers

A painting company without painters

A hospital without doctors and nurses

This cannot work

This organisation fails immediately



Being a Manager

The job of a manager might **sound easy** and like the **ideal job** to have.
Ever **dreamt of being the boss** of your team, company, ...?
But they are actually **poor creatures**.

They are **responsible** for delivering a software project, running a
company, ...

Customers, shareholders, ... **scream** at them if there is a problem and
hold them **accountable**.

Being a Manager

But they **cannot do anything themselves** and directly about the issue.

They do not code, they do not design, do not build cars, pick carrots, ...

They are completely **dependent on their teams**.

They have to make **important decisions** that determine the success of a project, but they do not have a deep **understanding** of the **domain** and the **implications** of their decisions.



Being a Manager

Being a manager must be a very **frustrating job**

You are the face of the project, company, ...

Deep inside, you know that **you are not actually doing anything**

Deep inside, you know that **you are replaceable**

You have to **pretend** to be the boss and to know the answer to everything

Deep inside, you are **scared** that some day, somebody will actually realise that

Manager vs. Leader

Intermezzo:

Managers vs. Leaders

There are hundreds of books on this topic

I do not have the ultimate answer

There is one big difference for me

The **leader** of a team is able to do the **same things as the team members**. A lead developer is a developer.

The **manager** of a team is **not necessarily able to do the same things** as the team members. The manager of a development team is not necessarily a developer.



So now...

What should we do with managers?

Do we actually need them?

Should we pity them? Should we envy them?

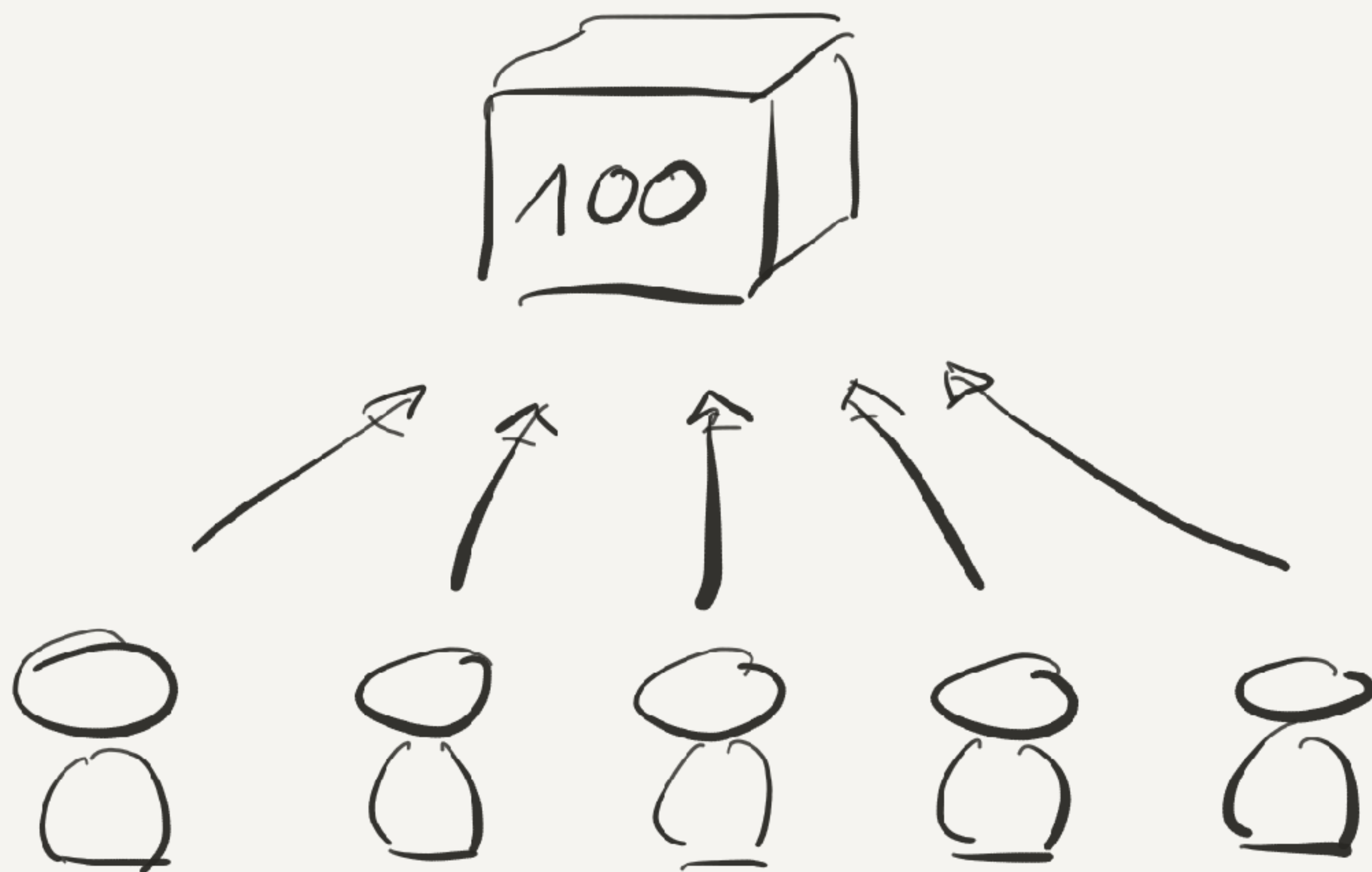
Do they get the big salaries, because they have such a frustrating job?

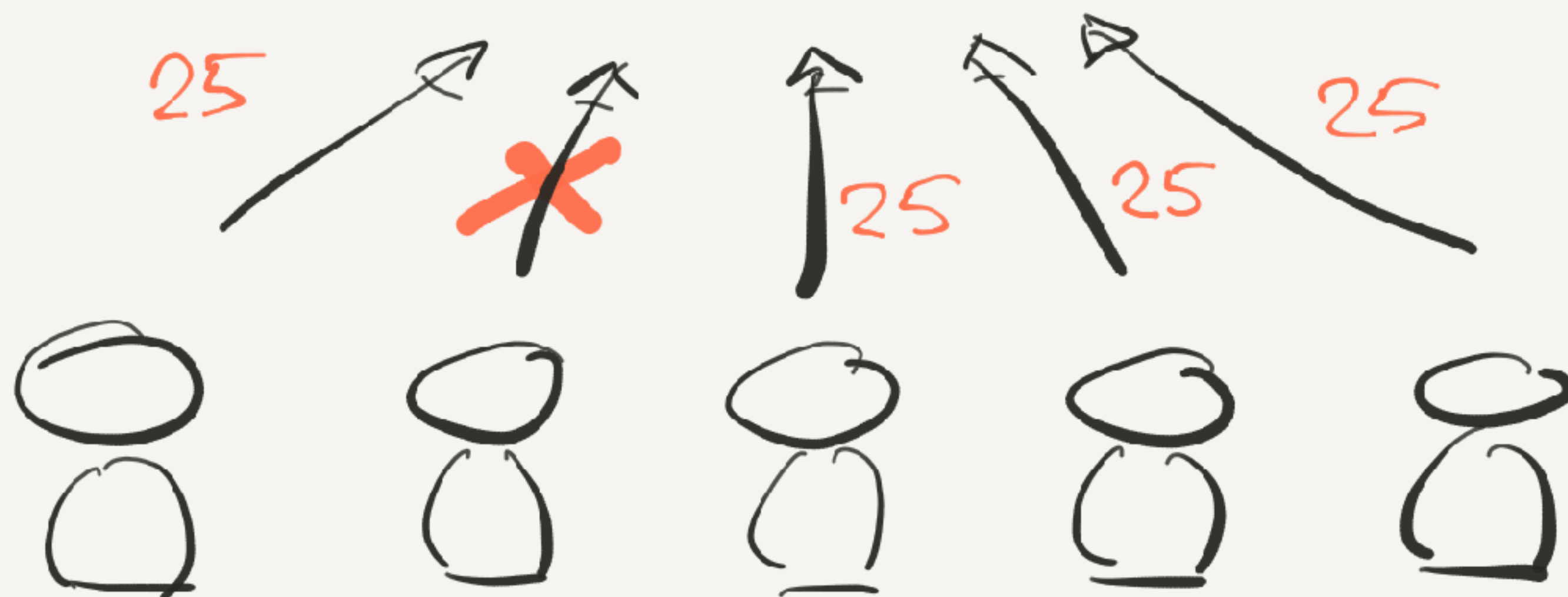
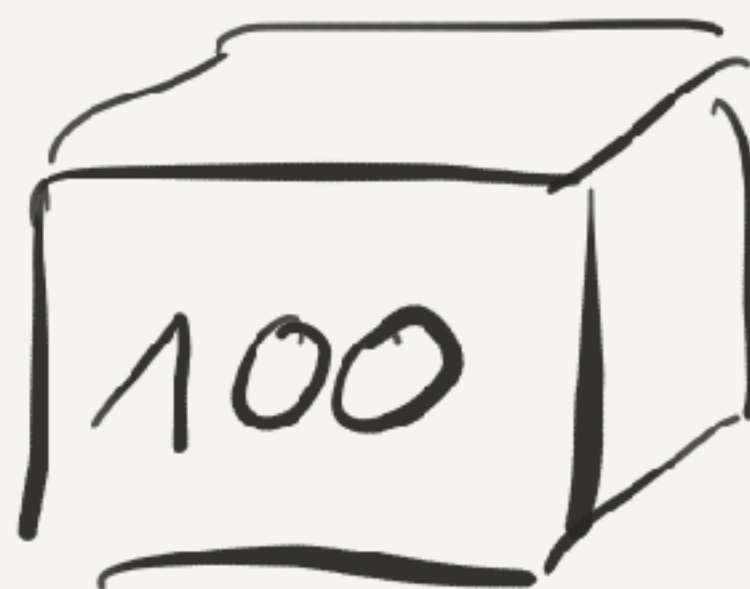
Should we fire all of them?

Should we try to teach them a real job?

The Job of a Manager

Hypothetical Situation





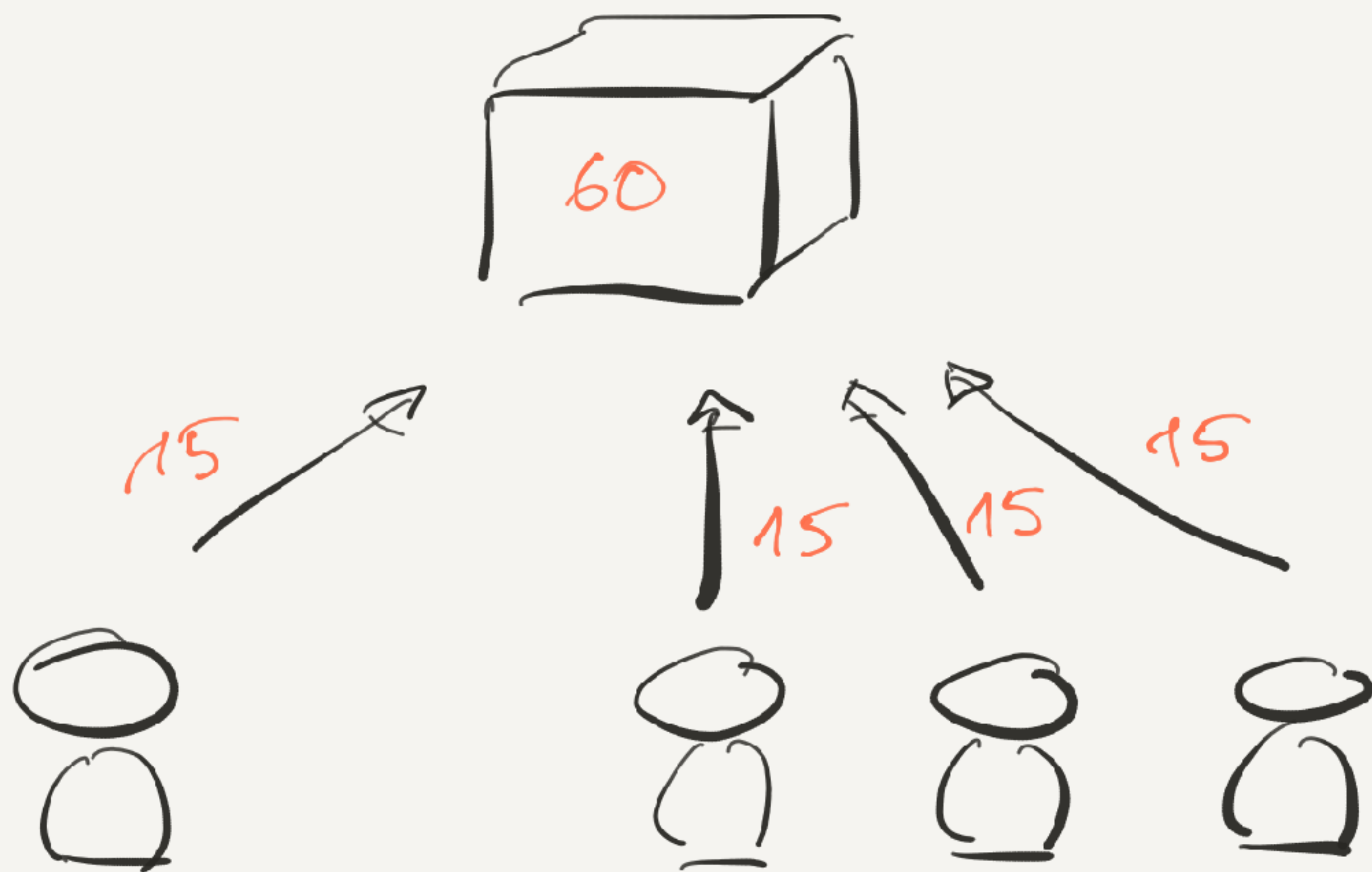
Thought Experiment

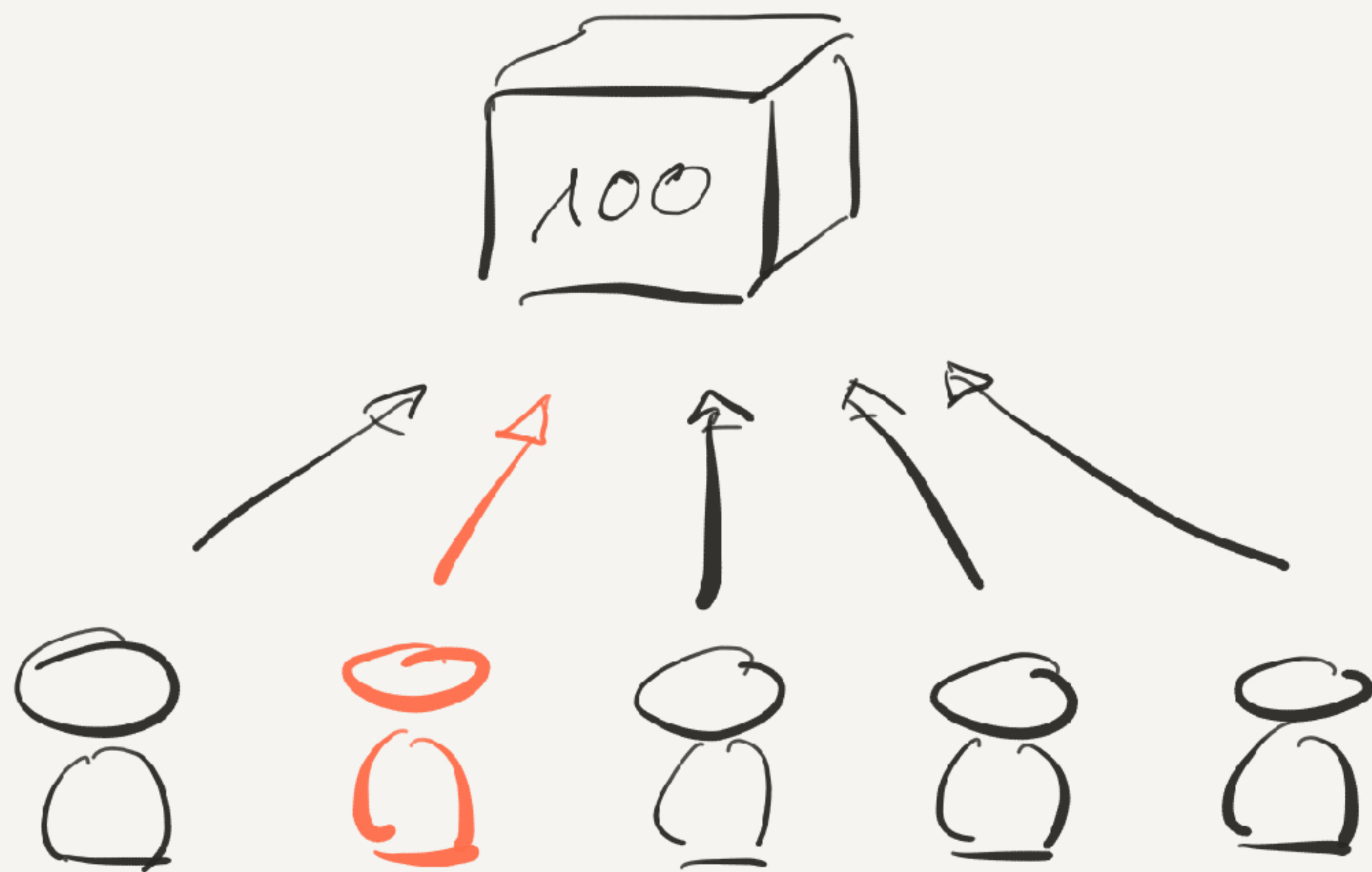
Imagine you have a team of 5 people. This team is able to produce 100 units per month.

4 people in this team produce 25 units each per month. 1 person does not produce anything.

What do you do?

You fire the person that does not do anything.





Thought Experiment

What if I told you, that the 4 person team now produces 60 units per month (15 units per person).

Would you still fire the 5th person?

What salary do you pay the 5th person?

After all, even though she does not produce any units herself, she is somehow responsible for 40 units per month (compared to the 15 of the other people).

Thought Experiment

Which person is more valuable?

Which person contributes most to the output?

Which person is replaceable?

The 4 people need the 5th to be really productive.

The 5th person needs to other 4 people to deliver value.



The Job of Manager

The job of the manager is **not the same as your job**.

If it were, we would call the person a developer, designer, ...

The productivity/output of a manager can often not be measured by looking at the output of the person itself.

You have to look at the **output of the whole team**, ...

That's what makes it **hard** to qualify the contribution of the manager.

That's what makes it hard to distinguish **good and bad managers**.

Good and **bad** managers



Orchestra Conductors

A manager is a bit like the **conductor of an orchestra**

He is the **boss**, stands in **front of the orchestra**, fiddles around with a **stick** and tells everybody what to do

But **he does not make a sound**.

The **musicians** make the sounds using their **instruments**.

On the detail level, the conductor does not make a sound.

On a higher level, you could say that the **conductor does produce sounds**, and the **orchestra** and all of its **musicians** are his **instrument**.



Itay Talgam:

Lead like the great conductors

TEDGlobal 2009 · 20:51 · Filmed Jul 2009

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An orchestra conductor faces the ultimate leadership challenge: creating perfect harmony without saying a word. In this charming talk, Itay Talgam demonstrates the unique styles of six great 20th-century conductors, illustrating crucial lessons for all leaders.



The Job of a Manager

A good manager is a **multiplier**, an **enabler**, a **catalyst**

He or she **enables other people to do their job** as good as possible

Efficiency, productivity, effectiveness, orchestration, direction, ... **of the team**

A good manager organises, orchestrates, defines a **vision**

A good manager encourages, discourages, enforces, motivates, ...

A good manager acknowledges other people's **skills** and **expertise**
and **lets people do their job**



Developers and Managers

Why do developers often **think very little** of managers?
Even good managers...

We do not **understand** what managers do.

We do not **understand** what drives them and what their goals are.

A lot of **misconceptions...**

Managers are **experts**

Managers are **professionals**

Managers are Experts

Managers are smart people, they know a lot of stuff and have a lot of experience

They are **experts** and **professionals**

... just **not in the same field** as you are.

Managers **care**

Managers care

Good managers **care about things** ... deeply

They are often just **not the same things** that you care about

Maybe they even **are the same**, but you have not **realised** it

Trust

Trust

Important aspect of the relationship between team and manager

Very **dynamic** thing

Hard, because it's hard to judge if the other party is doing a good job (for both parties)

Good relationship between manager and team can look **very differently** depending on the people involved

An **inexperienced, chaotic team** requires a **strong, military-style manager**

An **experienced, self-organising, empowered and mature team** requires a manager that trusts the team and **gets out of the way** as much as possible ...

Maybe even **no manager** at all?



Respect and Understanding

Respecting the **knowledge** and **expertise** of people is important, even if you do not understand it

Understanding **how somebody ticks** and **what they care about**, is the key to good communication and a successful collaboration

Trust is also very important, but it's often enabled by the previous points

This is really hard

How can you trust somebody who **does not trust you**?

How do you know if somebody is **good** or **bad**, if you do not understand them or know what they actually do all day?

How do you differentiate between a **stupid decision** from a manager (because he does not understand you) or a **good decision** by a manager that you do not understand.

Talking to managers



Scotty (Engineer):

Captain, the warp engine is down. The last manoeuvre was too much for it.

Kirk (Manager):

I need warp speed as soon as possible. We have to chase down the Klingons. How long will it take you to fix it?

Scotty:

At least 48 hours.

Kirk:

That's too long. You have 8 hours.

Scotty:

OK, Jim. I'll do it in 4.



Challenges by Managers

This is not how it works in real life.

If you say it takes 48 hours, it probably takes 48 hours. As an estimate. Maybe it's even more.

Why is the project manager challenging you? Why does he not believe you? Trust you?

Challenges by Managers

Maybe there is a trust issue.

But mostly, you have to keep in mind that **this is part of his job.**

A manager always wants things faster, cheaper, in better quality, ...

It's OK to say no.

Often, it's actually really, really important to say no. (By the way: That's part of your job).

Even better is to **explain** the estimate, explain why you estimate it will take that much time, what options there are along with the implications / downsides of these options.

Make the **effort**

**Understand your position
and your responsibilities**

Explain things

Qualify your answers

Do not take things too **personally**

It's OK to say **No**

Simplify, reduce to the essence

Translate

Relate to things they **care** about

Do not **dumb it down!**

Communicating with Managers

Explaining things to managers can be difficult

Simplify things, **reduce** to the **core**, the **essence**

Translate things into a language that the manager understands, related to things the manager cares about

Do not “dumb things down”

You have to **simplify** and **abstract** things and maybe strategically leave things out

You are not talking to a person with less experience than you, somebody who is less intelligent and less knowledgeable than you.

You are talking to somebody with **experience** and **knowledge** in a **different field**.

Selective hearing
Selective memory

Yes, but

.....

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Side-Note: Psychology

This is a mine-field of psychological issues.

If you say 'yes' too often (and sometimes once is too often), the manager will assume that the answer is always yes.

If you say 'no' too often, the manager assumes that you are not flexible, imaginative enough.

The important thing is to qualify the 'yes' or the 'no'.

Depending on the manager, you have to be really careful here.

Selective Hearing

Selective Memory

Disease of the hearing apparatus or long-term memory, often found in managers and sales people

Affected individuals only hear parts of a sentence or they hear the full sentence, respond to it, but only recall very limited parts of the conversation from long-term memory afterwards.

Yes, but that would mean that ...

Micro Management

Micro-Management

Micro-Management is not always a bad thing

Very immature teams require close monitoring and steering

Most teams do not though and micro-management is
counter-productive

Also how is a manager supposed to micro-management
somebody that does things that the manager does not
really understand?



Excel, Powerpoint

Managers **love** Excel sheets

Excel sheets and the content therein is **how they see a project**

For you, a software project is code, builds, libraries, test environments, log files, bug reports, user stories

For a manager, it's velocity reports, burn down charts, project plans, estimations, staffing plans, expense reports, risk matrices, status reports

Excel, Powerpoint

They care about these things, because it is (the only) way they can grasp a project

Code does not tell them anything

It gives them the feeling to be able to grasp the project and steer it ... and it actually does

Managers and Teams have to find a good balance. Filling in Excel sheet does not make a team productive. But it allows teams to be more productive and effective overall.

As little as possible, as much as necessary.



Meetings

“I was not able to get any work done. I was in meetings all morning.”

- Anonymous Developer

Developers

Most developers (or designers, testers, ...) do not consider meetings (real) work.

They understand that meetings are necessary and can be very valuable.

They are necessary and often really helpful to enable good, efficient and effective work. But they are not work themselves.

Managers

Meetings are often the main tool for them to get work done.

Meetings for them is work. Everything else is just there to support meetings.

If a manager is lost, feels out of control, he or she sets up a meeting.

Paul Graham

**Maker's Schedule,
Manager's Schedule**

<http://paulgraham.com/makersschedule.html>

When the **sh**** hits the **fan**

Project in trouble

Scenario: Project is in trouble. Quality is not right, velocity is too low, progress is slow. Team is not happy, customer is not happy.

What do you do?

That depends on the problem? Work harder? Introduce a new tool? New guidelines? Switch to pair programming? Hire more people? Refactor? Speed up? Slow down?

Project in trouble

No general answer. But the point is that **you can do something.**

What does a manager do?

There might be things on his level that he can fix? Staffing? Eliminating obstacles?

Sometimes, the manager also falls into “panic mode”? Do something! Anything!

This leads to micromanagement, unproductive interference with teams, meetings, daily status reports

Manager sees a problem, but has no control over it. He does the only thing he does in order to get a clearer picture and establish the possibility to control the project.

This is usually not very productive.

But it's also really, really hard for managers in troublesome situations to just trust a team that does things you do not understand.

Management **Summary**

Summary

Cynical people might say that managers do not do any work and only complicate projects

But they **do have a role** and a really good manager is worth his weight in gold

They are a **different breed of animals** than you

They **speak a different language**, they **care about different things**

Summary

Learn **how they tick** and **what they care about**

Learn to **identify good** and **bad** managers

This will help you to:

... **get them out of your hair**, so that you can get any real work done.

... **leverage** their **skills** and **expertise**.

... **collaborate** with them to deliver **the best possible project**.

There is no **Manual**

Who is the **boss**?

Developers

Developers

Developers

Note to self:

Replace this by “**Managers, managers, managers**” when giving this talk to an **audience of managers**.



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