

A pixelated screenshot from a Super Mario Bros. level. The scene shows a multi-tiered platform structure. At the top, a Goomba enemy is on the left and a Koopa is on the right, with a heart icon above them. The middle section features a large gap where the floor has collapsed, leaving a single brick block in the center. A Goomba enemy is standing on this brick block. The bottom section consists of a solid base with several ladders on the sides. The text "Level Collapse" is overlaid in large white letters, and "(and How to Rise Out of It)" is overlaid in smaller grey letters below it.

# Level Collapse

(and How to Rise Out of It)



# AI-powered convenience: The evolution of Scan & Go

Staff writer

Jan. 31, 2024 | 3 min read

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Discover how Scan & Go gives Sam's Club members a seamless checkout experience

# What we'll learn

- How flight levels show us know where to work
- How to identify level-collapse behaviors
- What causes level collapse
- How to find the right level at which to work
- What activities need to happen at each level

# Why do we care?

- Improve employee engagement
- Improve organizational agility
- Improve flow of value
- Enjoy our own work as leader-managers!

# State of our workplace

## People

Middle managers lowest in performance and productivity compared with upper managers, front-line workers and individual contributors

79% of middle managers say they are at risk of burnout.

Middle managers are 46% less satisfied with their jobs than senior executives are.

People feel little connection between their daily work and the company's strategic objectives.

## Flow

Workers now spend two full days a week on email and in meetings.

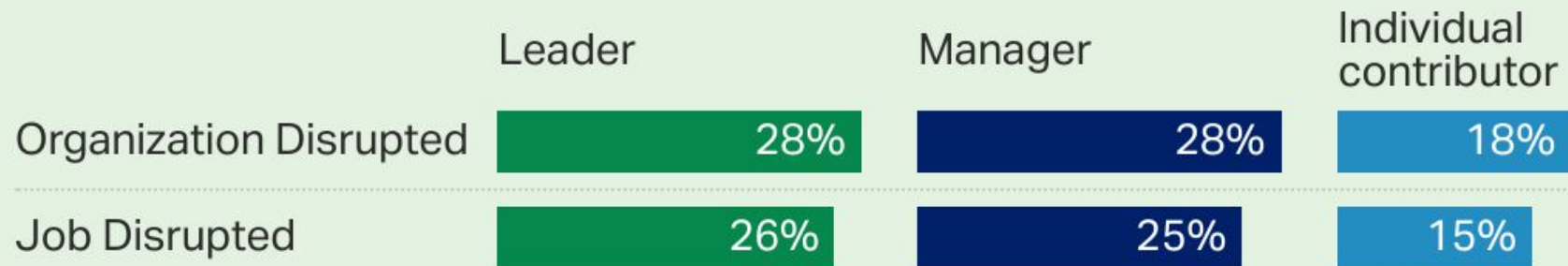
We typically have no end-to-end systematic management of flow.

Dependencies are killing flow and delivery time.

Companies lose 15% in productivity from poor collaboration.

# "Extensive" Disruption by Job Level

In the past year, to what extent has your organization/job changed in a way that has been disruptive?



WF Q3 2023, U.S. Employees; Leader MOE:  $\pm 5$  points, Manager MOE:  $\pm 4$  points, Individual Contributor MOE:  $\pm 2$  points

GALLUP®

## PERCENTAGE OF WORKERS WHO TYPICALLY FEEL TENSE OR STRESSED DURING THE WORKDAY BY WHETHER THEY ARE MICROMANAGED



Overall

**48%**

A horizontal bar chart for the 'Overall' category. The bar is divided into two segments: a blue segment on the left representing 48% and a light gray segment on the right representing the remaining 52%.

Not Micromanaged

**36%**

A horizontal bar chart for the 'Not Micromanaged' category. The bar is divided into two segments: a red segment on the left representing 36% and a light gray segment on the right representing the remaining 64%.

Micromanaged

**64%**

A horizontal bar chart for the 'Micromanaged' category. The bar is divided into two segments: a red segment on the left representing 64% and a light gray segment on the right representing the remaining 36%.

**A leader who believes that he can make a positive difference through continual personal interventions is usually deluding himself .**

A leader who believes that he can make a positive difference through continual personal interventions is **usually deluding himself** .

**He thereby takes over things other people are supposed to be doing** , effectively dispensing with their efforts, and multiplies his own tasks to such an extent that he can no longer carry them all out.

Helmuth Von Moltke

(c. 1889)



A leader who believes that he can make a positive difference through continual personal interventions is **usually deluding himself** .

He thereby **takes over things other people are supposed to be doing** , effectively dispensing with their efforts, and multiplies his own tasks to such an extent that he can no longer carry them all out.

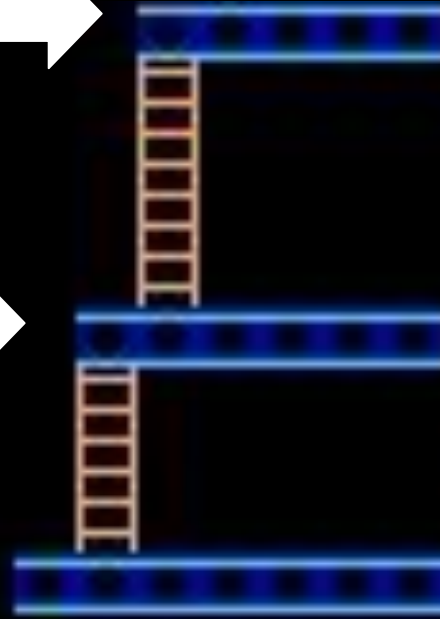
The demands made on a senior [leader] are severe enough as it is. It is far more important that **the person at the top retains a clear picture of the overall situation** than whether some particular thing is done this way or that.

## Level Collapse



**When managers work below their intended organizational level, neglecting higher-level strategic and coordination responsibilities for lower-level operational tasks.**

(or here) →



You should be working here →

You're working here →

# Flight Levels



**a *thinking model* that helps you find out  
where in an organization  
you have to do what  
in order to achieve the results that you want**

Flight Levels

# FLIGHT LEVELS



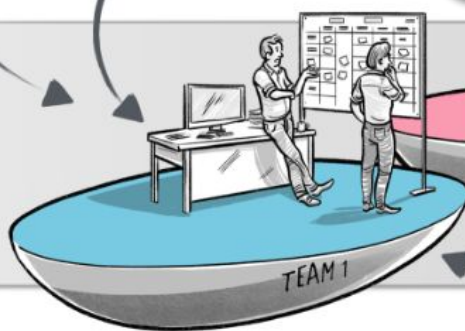
**Level 3:  
Strategy**



**Level 2:  
Coordination**

## Activities:

- Visualize the situation
- Create focus
- Establish agile interactions
- Measure progress
- Operate and improve



**Level 1:  
Operational**



*How to Recognize*

— THE SYMPTOMS OF A —

LEVEL  
COLLAPSE

- Managers consistently doing work that should be delegated
- Lack of long-term planning or strategic thinking
- Team members feeling directionless or unsupported

1 WHO are we empathizing with?

GOAL

2 What do they need to DO?

Your team

Their best work

7 What do they THINK and FEEL?

I know how to do my  
job!

I have no motivation.

I need a new job.

6 What do they HEAR?

"Just do this"

"Do it by this date"

"Do more"

3 What do they SEE?

Another org change

Managers in my meetings

Work appearing without context

4 What do they SAY?

"Why are we doing this?"

5 What do they DO?

Only the work that someone has given me

Keep quiet

# Diagnostic questions:

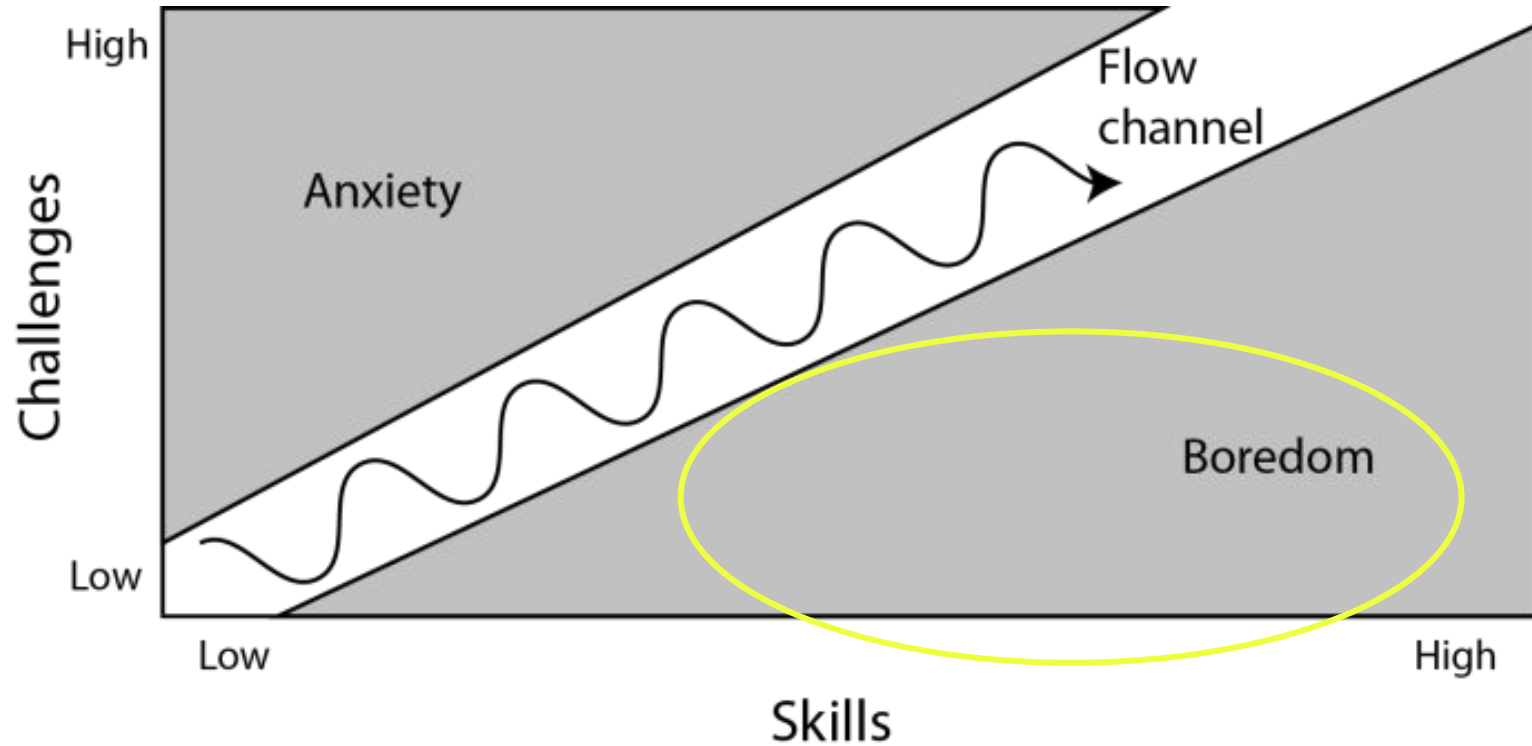
## How often does your manager (or do you)...

- Provide clear direction on long-term goals and strategy?
- Engage in day-to-day operational tasks?
- Give your team the autonomy to make decisions within their area of responsibility?
- Discuss the broader organizational context of your work?
- Give guidance on how your work aligns with company objectives?
- Spend more time on immediate tasks or future planning?
- Talk about your professional development and career growth?
- Invite others to pair on work?
- Focus more on *how* to do the work or *why* you do it?

# What impacts motivation?

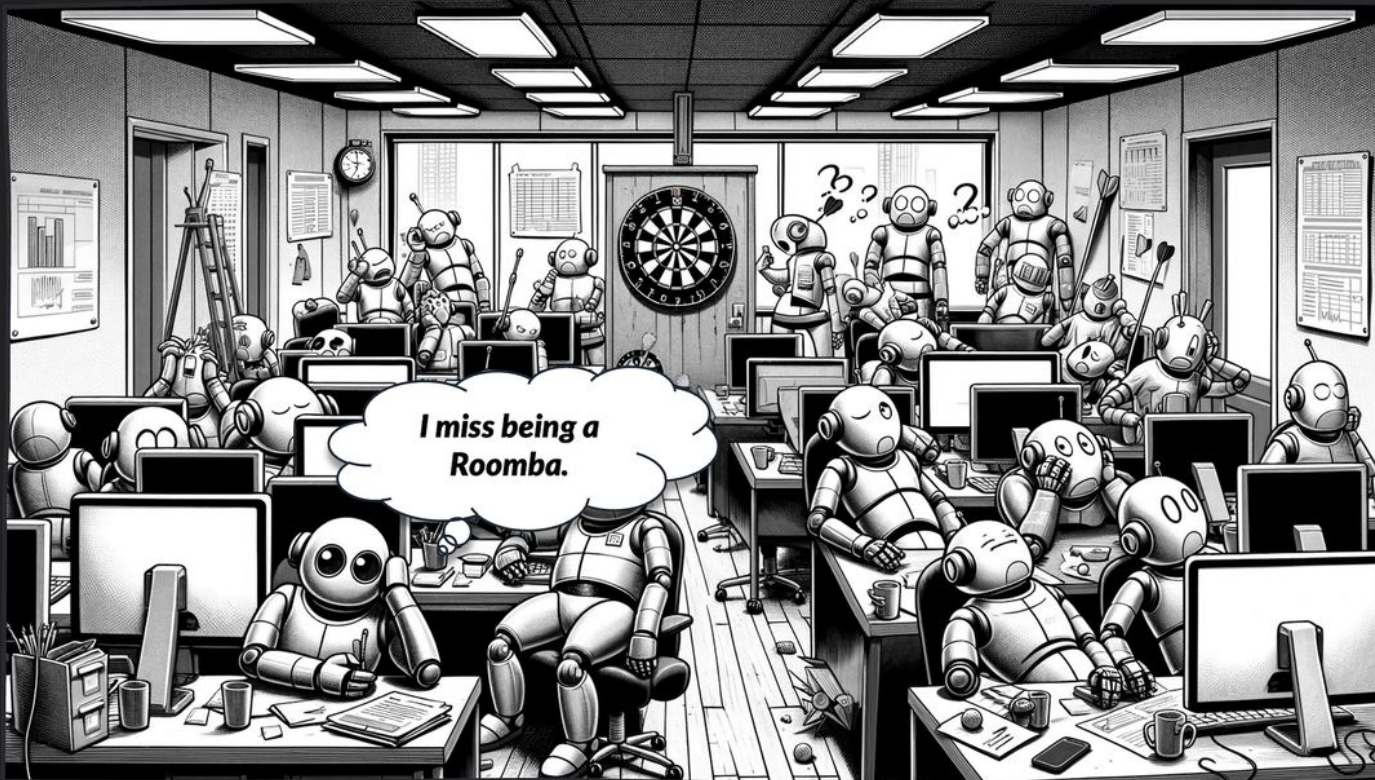
| Motivation levels<br>(total motivation factor)      |              | Yes | - | No | = | Difference |
|-----------------------------------------------------|--------------|-----|---|----|---|------------|
| I HAVE THE<br>ABILITY TO<br>MAKE<br>DECISIONS ON... | Where I work | 41  |   | 18 |   | 23         |
|                                                     | When I work  | 41  |   | 13 |   | 28         |
|                                                     | How I work   | 42  |   | -6 |   | 48         |

# Flow Channel



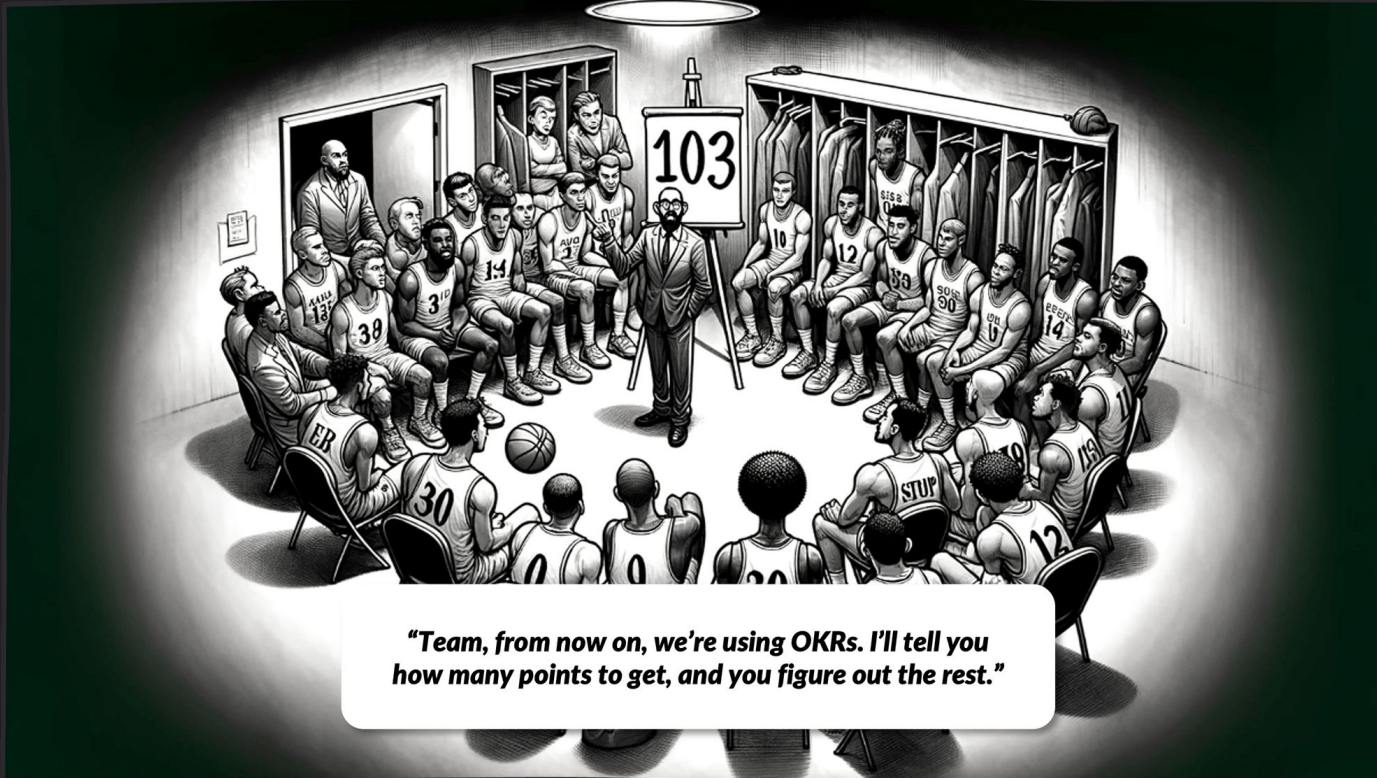
# Causes of Level Collapse

# Organizational culture and expectations



<https://www.factor.ai/research/my-employees-are-demotivated-what-should-i-do>

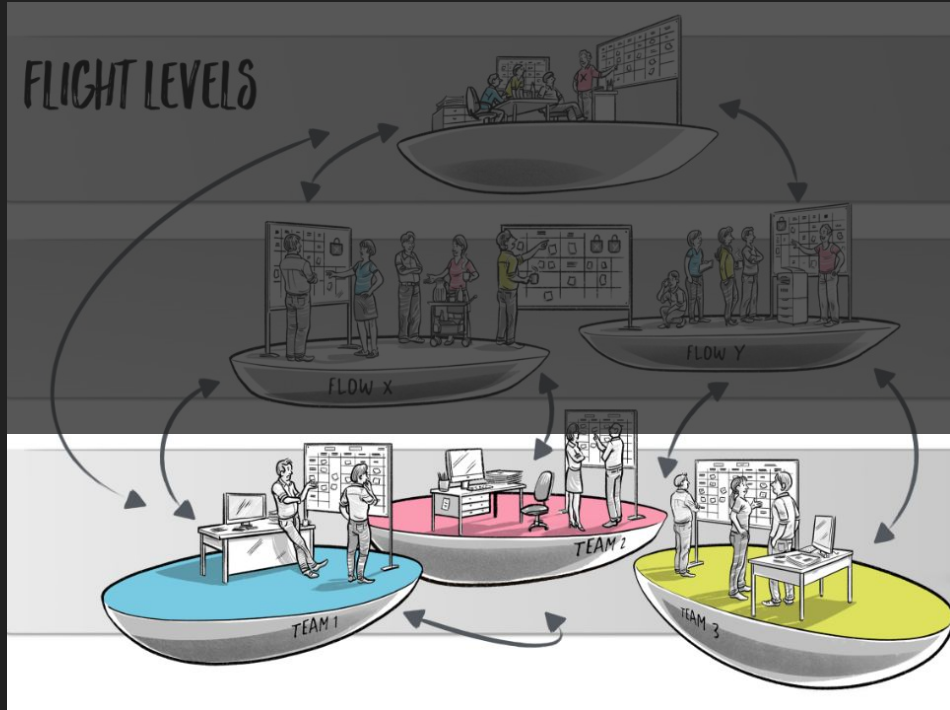
# Competency mismatch (aka Peter Principle)



# Wait! Isn't this simply micromanagement?

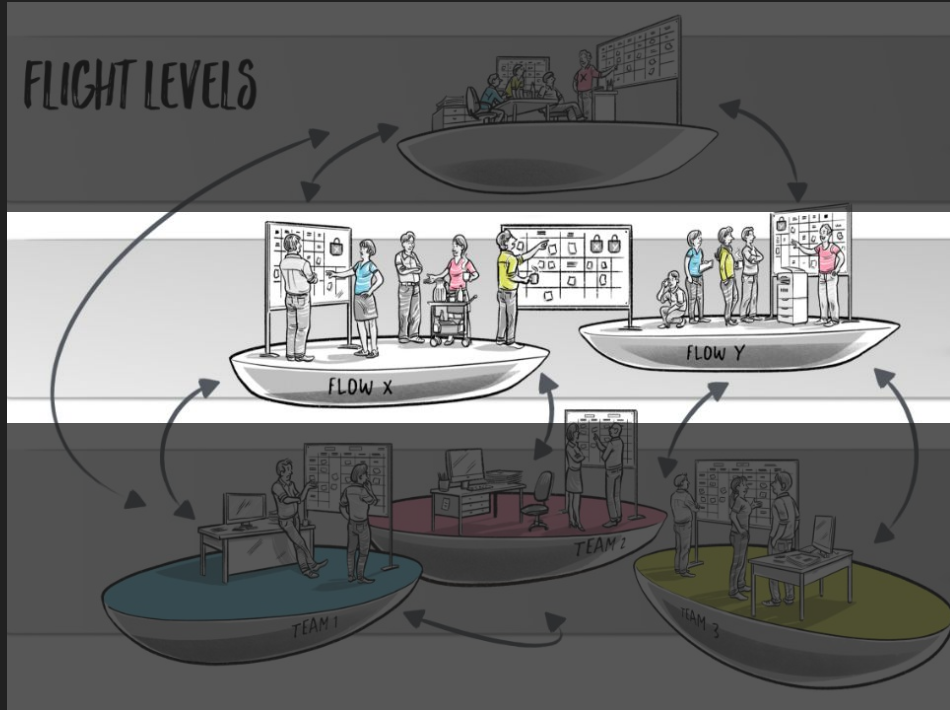
|                                      | <b>Micromanagement</b>                                 | <b>Level Collapse</b>                                                                                               |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b><i>Scope of focus</i></b>         | Involves excessive control over subordinates' work     | Neglect of higher-level responsibilities                                                                            |
| <b><i>Intent</i></b>                 | Desire for control or perfectionism, role expectations | Unintentionally, due to comfort with lower-level tasks or uncertainty about higher-level roles                      |
| <b><i>Impact on subordinates</i></b> | Directly stifles subordinates' autonomy and growth     | Deprives them of necessary higher-level guidance and support                                                        |
| <b><i>Org level</i></b>              | Occurs at the supervisor-subordinate level             | Any management tier, affecting entire departments or organizations                                                  |
| <b><i>Skills involved</i></b>        | Over-application of lower-level skills                 | Failure to develop or apply higher-level management skills.                                                         |
| <b><i>Solution approach</i></b>      | Focuses on trust-building and delegation               | Involves reorienting managers to their appropriate level of responsibility and developing strategic thinking skills |
| <b><i>Nature</i></b>                 | Viewed as an individual manager's flaw                 | Systemic issue, reflecting organizational culture or structure                                                      |

# Level 1: Operational



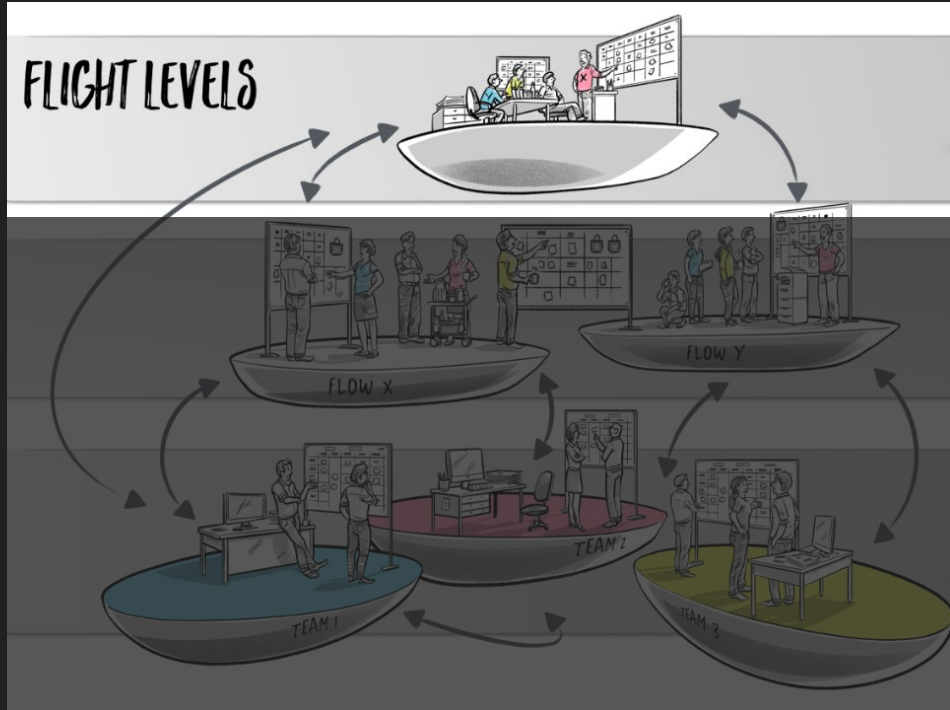
- Product/service fitness for purpose
- Flow management
- WIP management
- Employee engagement/motivation
- Blocker clustering
- Delivery-time scatterplots

# Level 2: Coordination

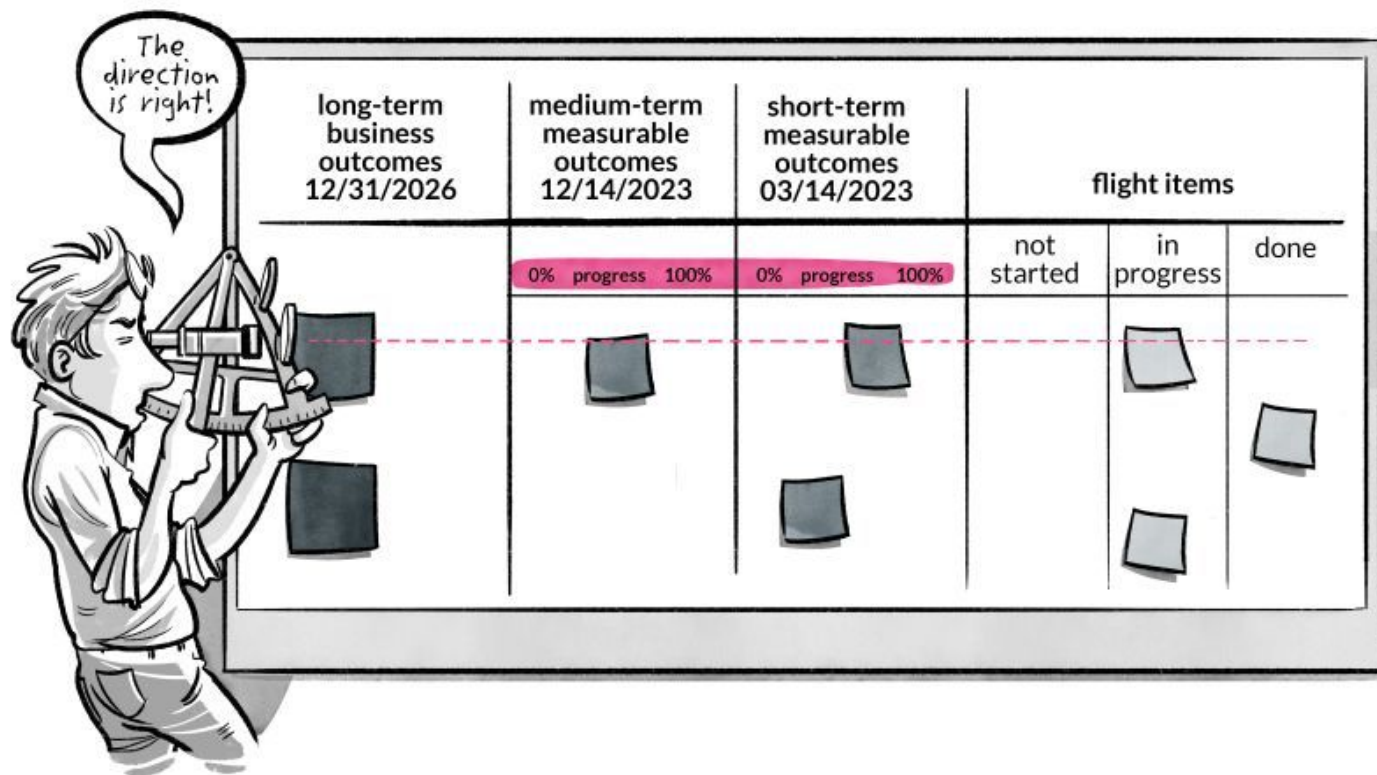


- Product/service vision
- Product principles
- Value stream management
- Blocker clustering
- Dependency management
- Reservation systems
- Operations Review
- Cumulative-flow diagrams
- WIP management

# Level 3: Strategy



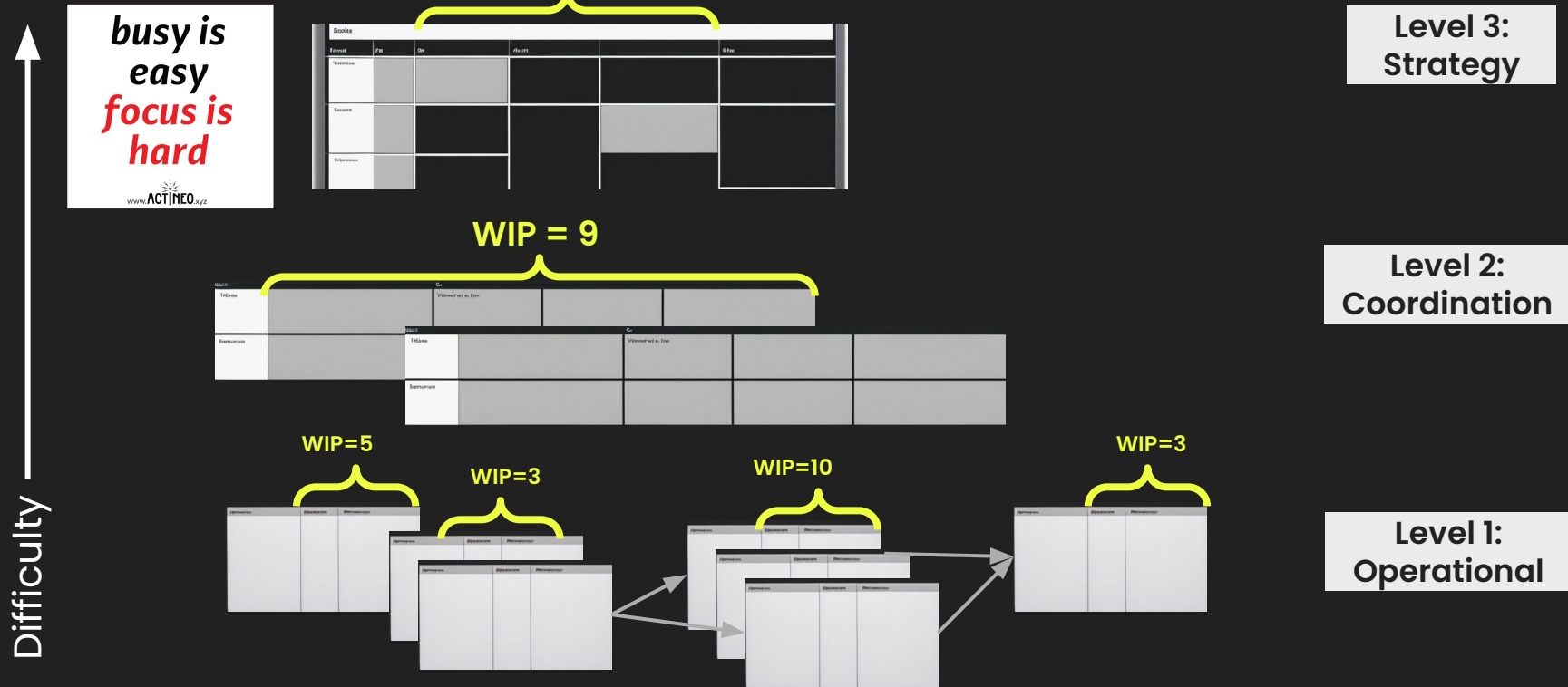
- Organizational WIP (initiatives, programs)
- Thinking in bets, experiments
- Return on Investment (ROI)
- Market share
- Customer Lifetime Value (CLV)
- Employee engagement scores
- Strategy deployment
- Outcomes orientation



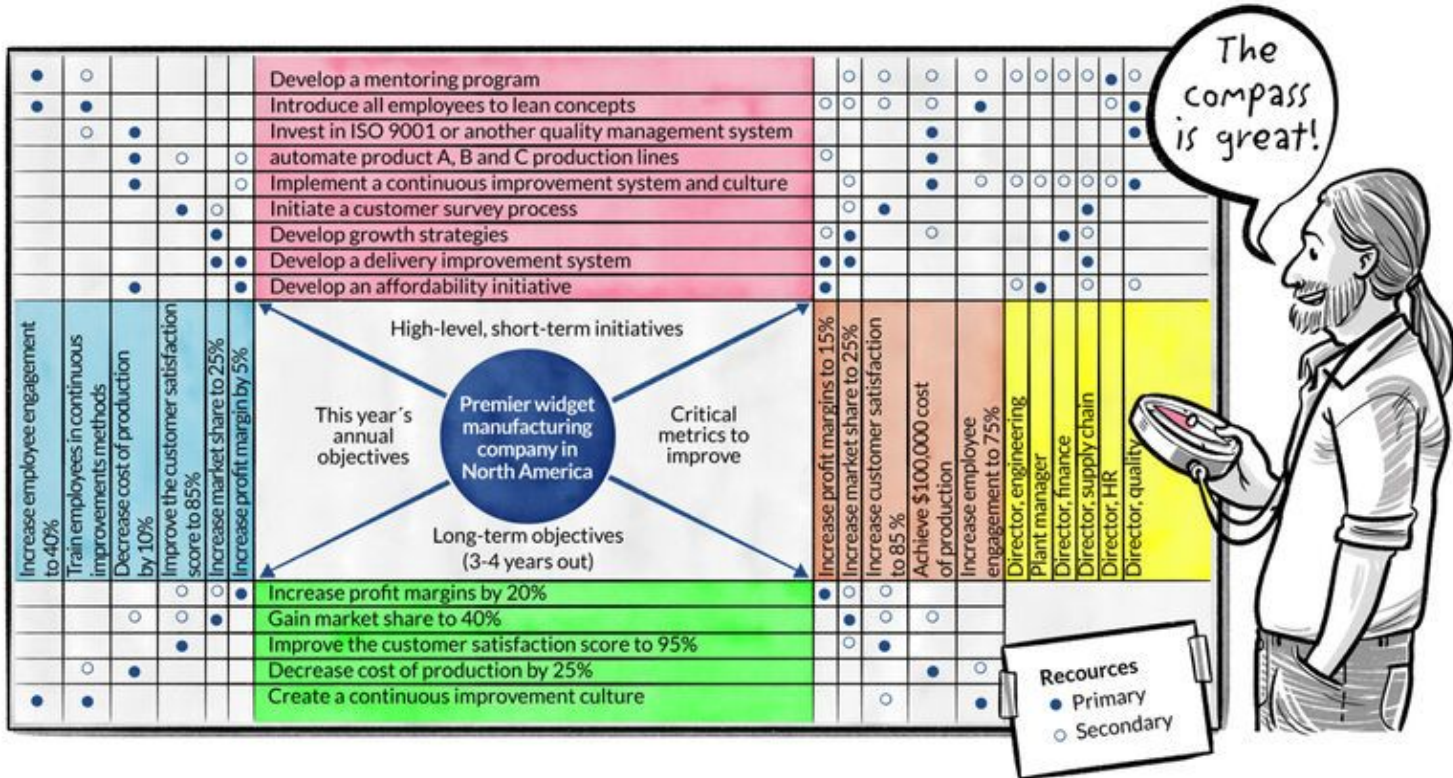
**You must limit the work where you want  
the effect, the value and the benefits of  
WIP limits to be realized.**

Klaus Leopold

# Limit WIP at every level to create balance, flow



# Strategy Deployment (Hoshin Kanri)



# Communicate: Share vision and what you know

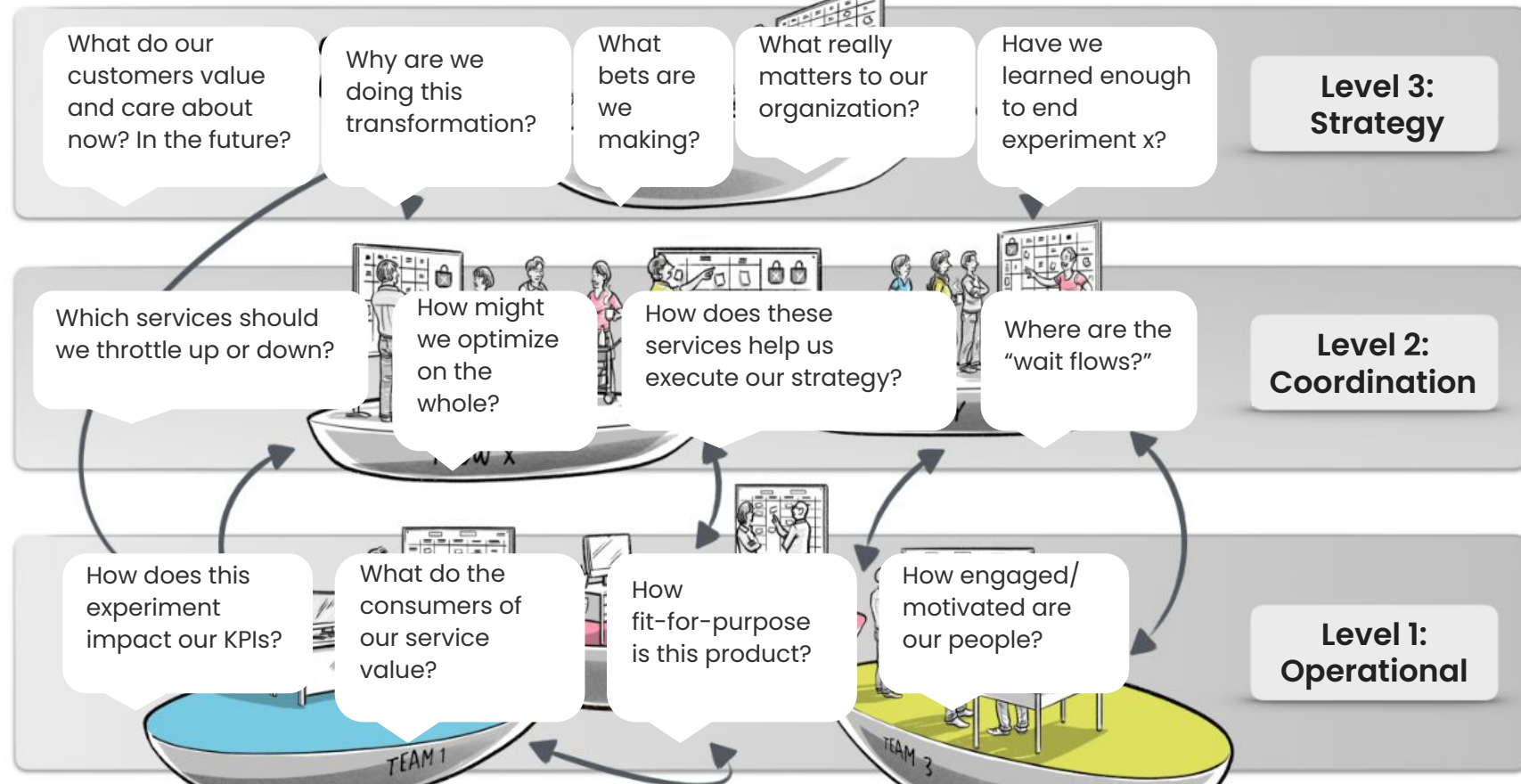


# Make freedoms and constraints explicit

|                      |                                             |                                                                     |                                      |
|----------------------|---------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <b>Title:</b>        |                                             | <b>Owner:</b>                                                       |                                      |
| <b>Context</b>       | The critical challenge or opportunity is... | <b>Team</b>                                                         | The people and skills we need are... |
|                      |                                             |                                                                     |                                      |
| <b>Intent</b>        | Our goals are to...                         | <b>Boundaries</b> Our freedoms and constraints to experiment are... |                                      |
|                      |                                             | <b>Freedoms</b>                                                     | <b>Constraints</b>                   |
|                      |                                             |                                                                     |                                      |
| <b>Higher Intent</b> | This helps the business to...               | <b>Plan</b>                                                         | The hypotheses we will test are...   |
|                      |                                             |                                                                     |                                      |

 Backbriefing A3 Karl Scotland Ltd

# Right questions at the right levels

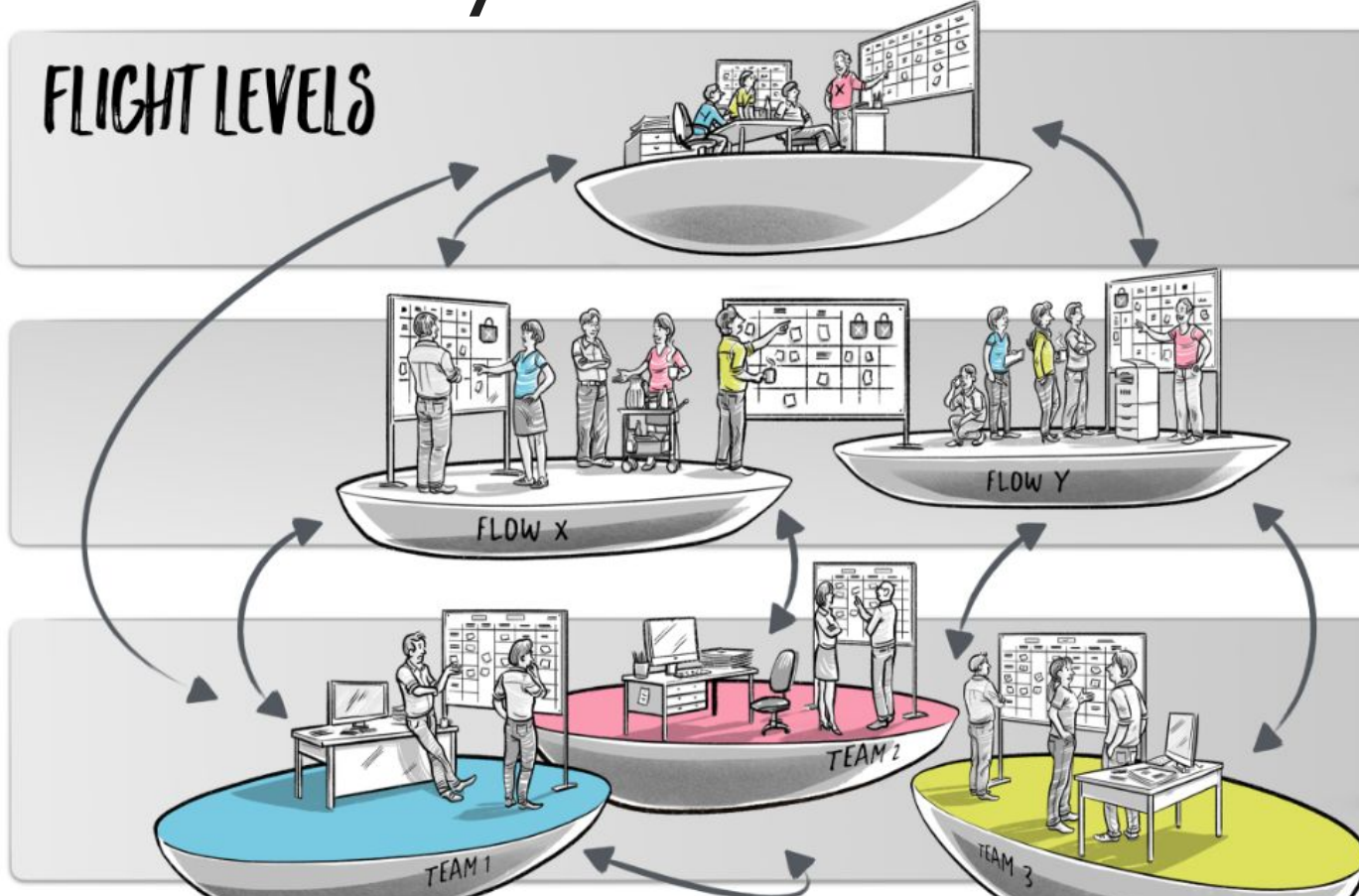


# Culture: From Leader-Follower to Leader-Leader

|          | Default Frame                              | Reframe                                                         |
|----------|--------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|
| The Boss | Has answers                                | Sets direction                                                  |
|          | Gives orders                               | Invites input to clarify and improve                            |
|          | Assesses others' performance               | Creates conditions for continued learning to achieve excellence |
| Others   | Subordinates who must do what they're told | Contributors with crucial knowledge and insight                 |

# Push Authority to Information

FLIGHT LEVELS



Authority

Information

# Refactor your Meetings Interactions

**Flight Levels Activity Canvas**

Activity

Date:

Version:

|                                                                           |                                                      |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Why are we doing this activity?                                        |                                                      |
| 2. What is the outcome?                                                   | 4. What information do we need?                      |
| 3. What decisions are we making?<br>Who do we need to make the decisions? | 5. What is the step-by-step process of the activity? |

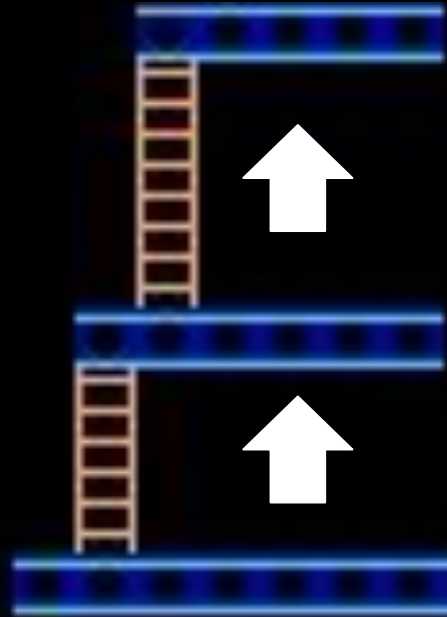
Designed by: Flight Levels GmbH  
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**FLIGHT  
LEVELS**  
ACADEMY

# Yokoten: Bridging



**Takeaways for  
tomorrow:  
Work up a level**



# Work “up a level”: Product Management

| Instead of...                              | Try                                                                            |
|--------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Prioritizing the product backlog           | Creating explicit policies for optimal economic outcomes (e.g., cost of delay) |
| Accepting or rejecting the team's work     | Connecting the team with your customers, telling their stories                 |
| Telling people what solutions to build     | Defining the problems to be solved                                             |
| Feeding a tool with “sprint goals”         | Communicating product principles                                               |
| Looking at what you’re building <i>now</i> | Thinking strategically about what to build <i>next</i>                         |
| Declaring work “done” when released        | Validating experiments in production                                           |

# Work “up a level”: Flow Management

| Instead of...                                               | Try                                                                                 |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Monitoring output (e.g., velocity)                          | Giving the team a way to measure <i>outcomes</i>                                    |
| Requiring people to conform to the work-management tool     | Ensuring coherence between higher-level metrics and team metrics; refactoring tools |
| Insisting on compliance to "standards" and "best practices" | Creating space for people to share with others (yokoten)                            |
| "Backlog management"                                        | Analyzing wait flow, end-to-end flow, blocker clustering                            |
| Asking when it will be done                                 | Dynamically forecasting with data                                                   |
| Focusing on your team's immediate tasks and deadlines       | Managing flow and limiting WIP of the next higher-level board                       |
| Reporting status                                            | Creating information radiators                                                      |

# Work “up a level”: People Leadership

| Instead of...                                       | Try                                                                                                                      |
|-----------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Approving timesheets and expense reports            | Letting others approve timesheets and expense reports (or figuring out ways to not need approvals)                       |
| Scheduling and feeling obligated to attend meetings | Thinking!                                                                                                                |
| Working alone                                       | Pairing, working cross-functionally                                                                                      |
| Asking people what their goals are                  | Making your goals (and your manager's goals) explicit and transparent; understanding impact of individual vs. team goals |
| Communicating the <i>what</i>                       | Communicating the <i>why</i> behind the what we're doing                                                                 |
| Monitoring people                                   | Creating an environment in which people can work at their best                                                           |
| Pushing/forcing change                              | Assessing the environment to learn what are people being incentivized to do                                              |
| Telling people "this is a safe place"               | Assessing and quantifying how well you actually create psychological safety                                              |

# Questions to ask yourself

How do we measure and incentivize people?

Do people have the tools to do their jobs?

How well do we build in time to reflectively improve?

What kind of behavior does our funding model lead to?

When do we commit to fixed dates and why?

Are our people overburdened? How would we know?

How are teams structured and how do they interact?

**If you want to build a ship, don't drum up the people to gather wood, divide the work, and give orders. Instead, teach them to yearn for the vast and endless sea.**

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry  
(Flight Levels practitioner)



# Sources and Resources

<https://mattphilip.wordpress.com/level-collapse/>

