

The Three Foundational Pillars (Ladders) of Engineering Success

Technical Expertise • People Leadership • Project Delivery

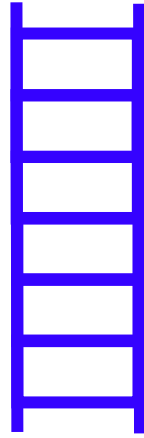
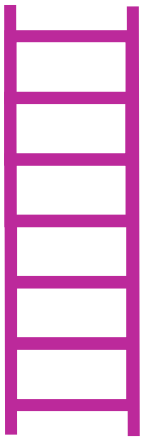
Dr Jennifer Fishburn
Director, Materials Engineering & Labelling, ResMed

15 October 2025

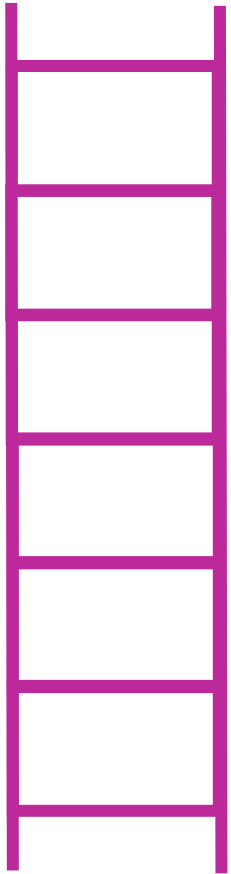
The promise....

The Three Foundational Pillars (Ladders) of Engineering Success

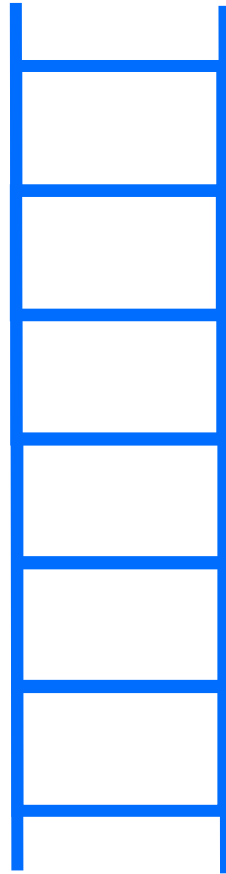
- Explore how the ladders differ and the unique opportunities in each
- Discover how your career can flex and evolve across them over time
- Gain insight into influencing change, embracing growth, and aligning your path with values & ambition



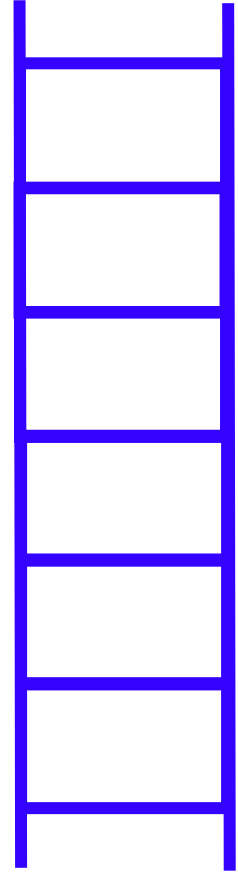
Three pillars (ladders) of Engineering Success



Technical
Expertise

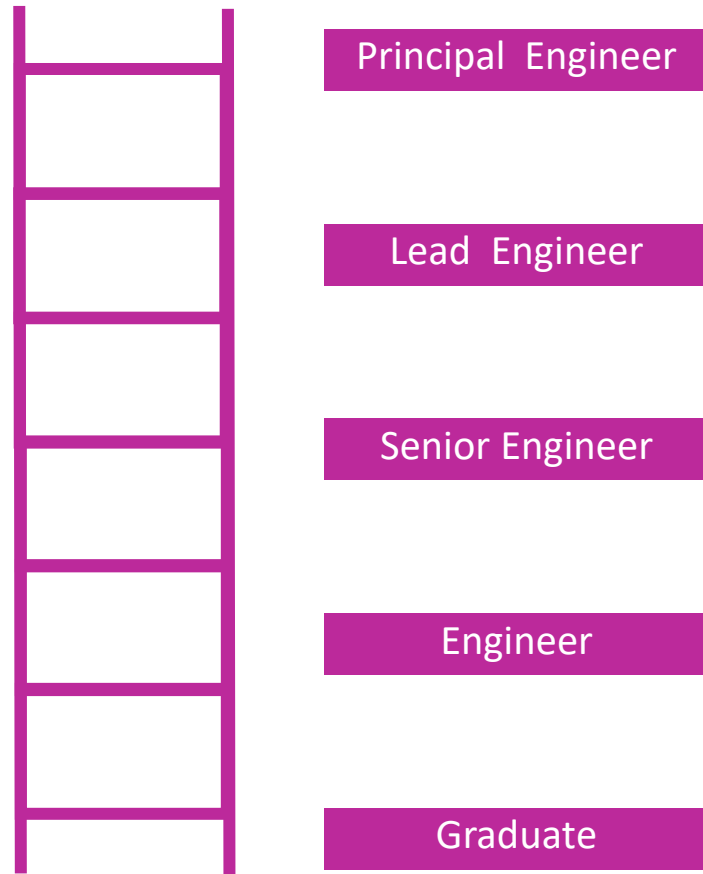


People
Leadership



Project
Delivery

Technical Expertise – what gets rewarded?



Technical
Expertise

Then

- **Success = *Technical mastery (ONLY)***
- most knowledgeable individual
- “*correct*” design, model, or analysis
- independent, siloed

Now

- **Success = *IMPACT* → (*Technical mastery ++*)**
- Risks, trade-offs, commercial acumen
- Collaboration, communication, influence
- Being a multiplier

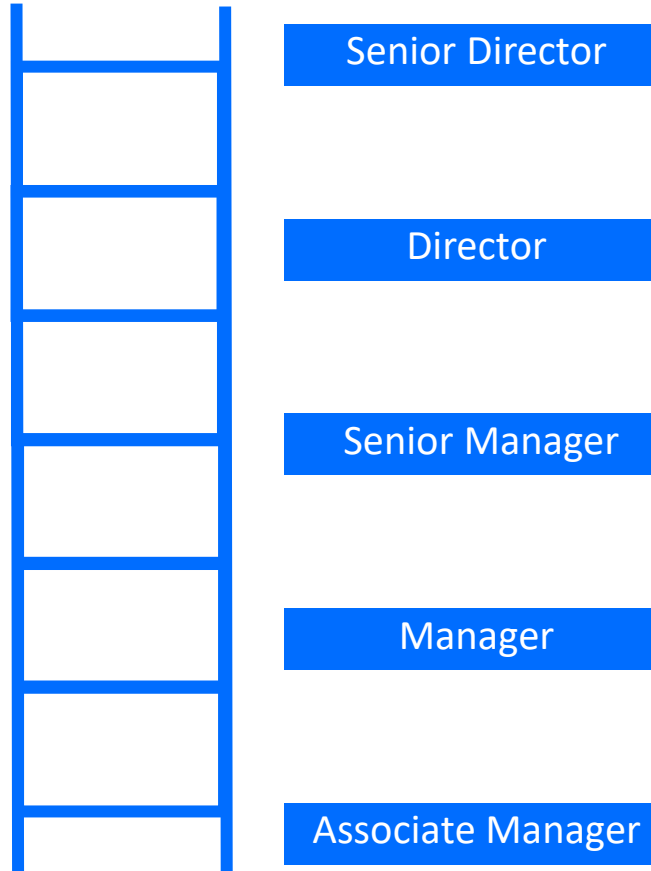
The difference?

The addition of Impact Behaviours and Soft skills!

People Leadership – what gets rewarded?

Then (and sometimes now...)

- **Success = *Command & Control***
- Outputs
- Top- down directive, “Boss”
- *Micromanagement*
- Distance and “professionalism”
- Minimal career development
- Failure is unacceptable
- Extrinsic (money) motivation



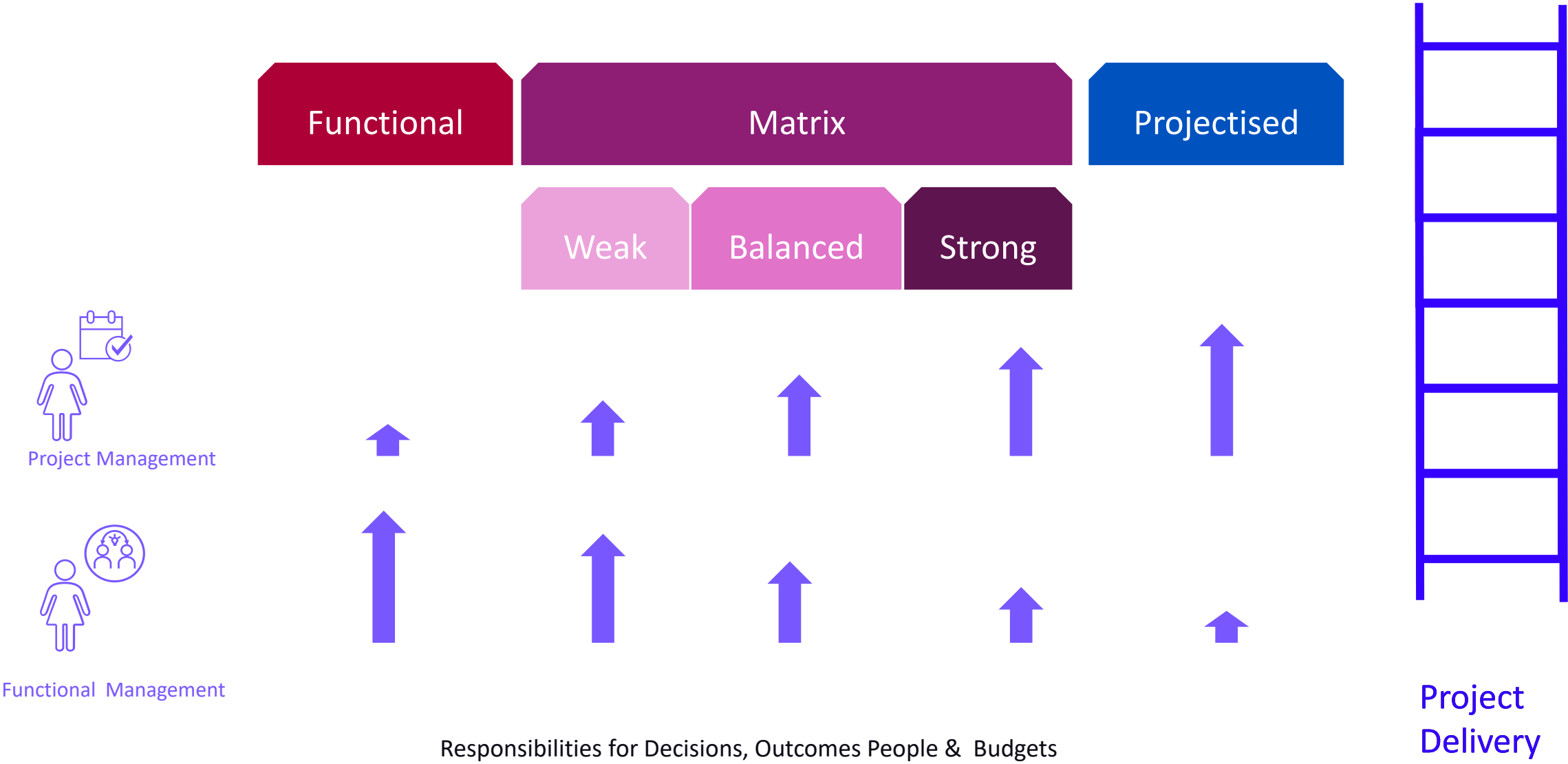
People
Leadership

Now

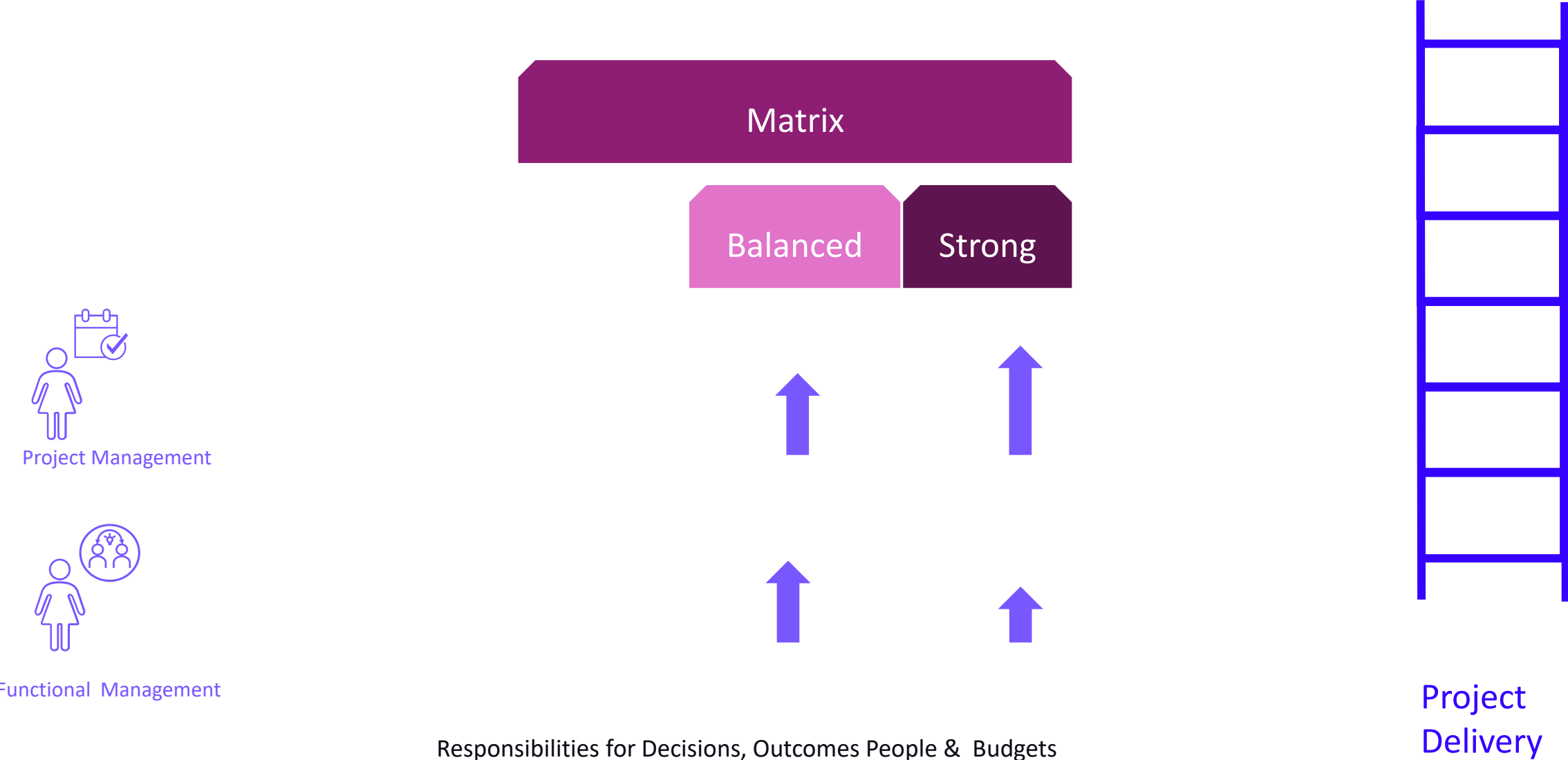
- **Success = Empowered teams**
Autonomy, Mastery, Purpose
- *Outcomes*
- Leading through context
- Coaches and Trusted mentors
- Culture building, adaptive, servant leadership
 - Psych safety, empathy and vulnerability
- Active Career development
- Failure as a learning cycle

The difference?
The addition of Impact behaviours and Soft skills!

Project Delivery – Different PMO models



Project Delivery – Different PMO models

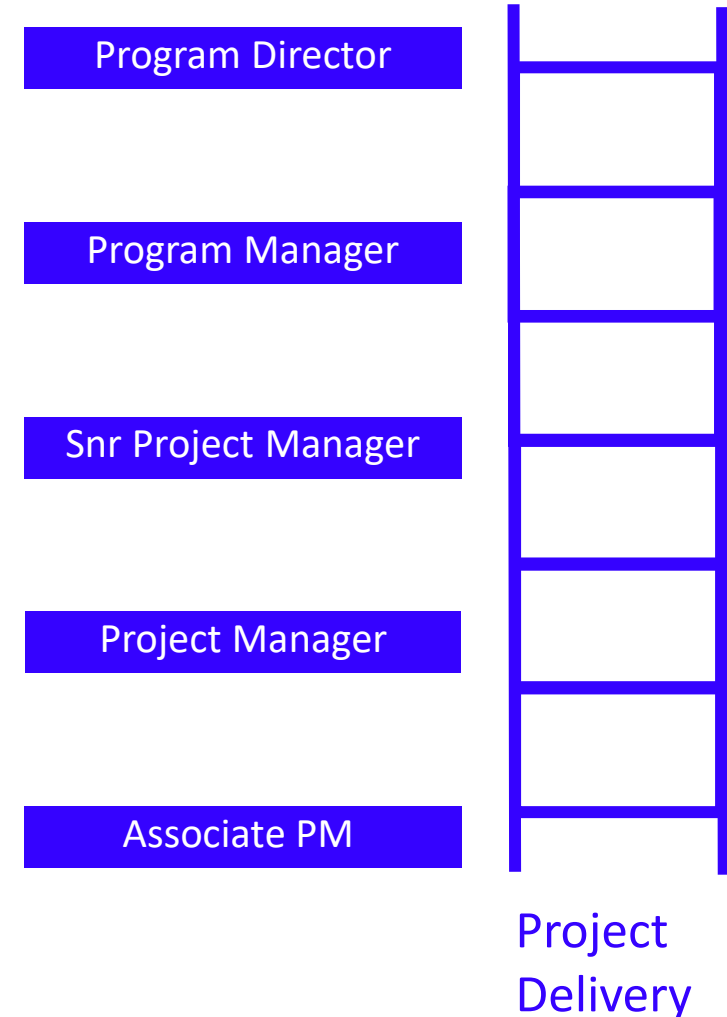


Project Delivery – what gets rewarded?

Then (and sometimes now...)

- Output focussed - On time / on budget / in original scope .
- Command-and-Control Management
- Hierarchical, transactional communication
- Functional or Projectized PM as either Co-ordinator or Driver
- Immoveable Milestones

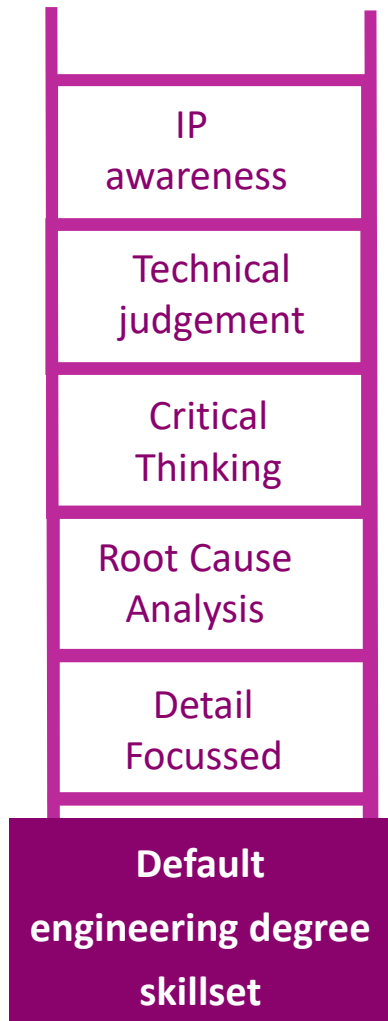
- Now
- Value focussed (outcomes)- RIGHT product at the RIGHT time at the RIGHT cost.
 - Cross functional Culture creation (XFT Coach)
 - Balanced/strong matrix - PM as orchestrator and flow enabler
 - Early, continuous team informed de-risking / risk burn-down
 - Narrative and contextual comms for mixed audiences
 - Able to cope with and carry valuable ambiguity



The difference?

The addition of Impact behaviours and Soft skills!

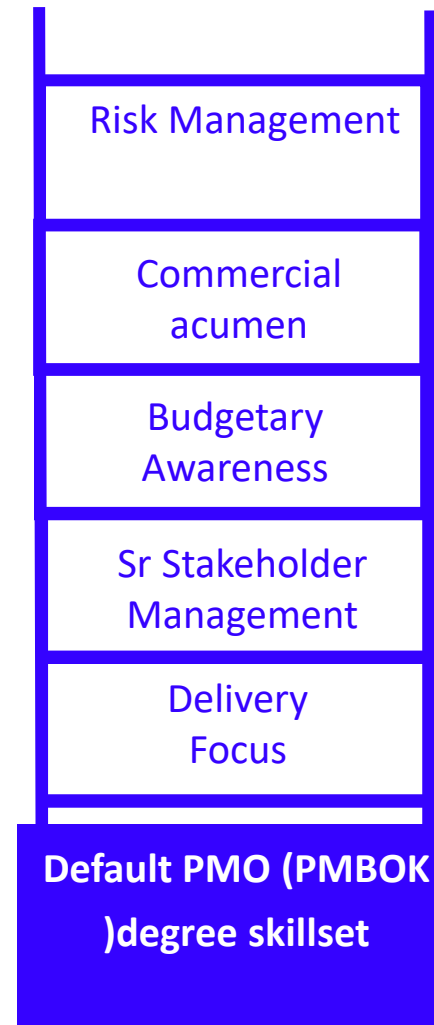
When you lean in to behaviours and skills in each pillar.....
.... It creates a springboard for your impact in any pillar...



Technical
Expertise



People
Leadership



Project
Delivery

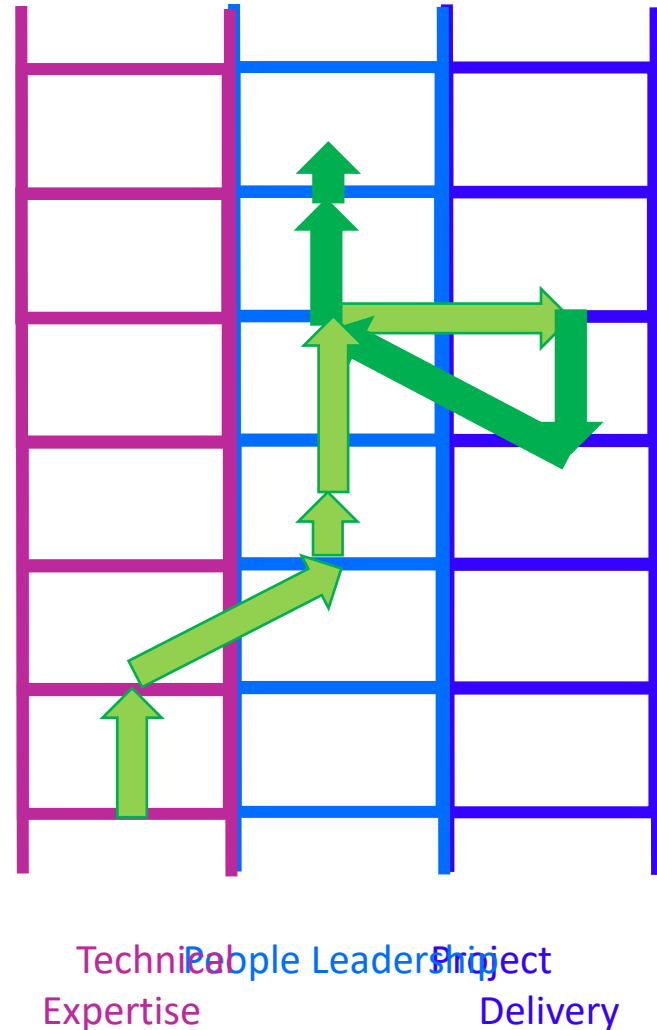
Intentional growth in and Learning agility across creates;

- **Better** Empathy
- **Better** Teams
- **Better** Culture
- **Better** Decisions
- **Better** Outcomes
- **Better** Career Progression

The further up you go, the more awareness and capability from the other ladders is needed for impact.

Turns out it's often a lattice, not a ladder!

My own (20 + year) career trajectory.....



1. Senior Scientist
2. Reliability & Metrology Manager
3. Technology Services Manager
4. Group Manager, MEMS & IC Engineering
5. R&D Program Manager
6. Senior Project Manager, Masks
7. Senior Manager, Materials Engineering
8. Director, Materials Engineering
9. Director, Materials Engineering & Labelling

What does your lattice look like?

Where do you want to go next?

Top 3 other learnings....

No. 1. 'Be a round-about not a stop sign'...

Stops progress

Single path

Delay

Frustrating



Language of a stop sign...

"No, because..."

"I'd like to but I can't"

"Not really my problem"

Top 3 other learnings....

No 2. **'Do the job you want'....**and (often) they'll give it to you...



Demonstrate by doing the role you want.

Don't just ask to be promoted into a new role

SHOW them how good you are.

N.B. You have to also be doing a great job of the work you're responsible for

Top 3 other learnings....

No 3. 'B.F.I' ... Most valuable tool I've found for Effective Confrontation...

HOW DO YOU CONFRONT SOMEONE EFFECTIVELY?



EFFECTIVE CONFRONTATION

Simon Sinek's Effective confrontation model

BFI / FBI/ IBF (Doesn't matter), but I prefer BFI

(Very Specific) **B**ehaviour

Feeling it creates in you

Impact it will have in the future

Then be quiet. (Be okay with the silence)

Repeat as needed.

Reading list I recommend ...

... for people in any pillar, anywhere on the lattice...

- Radical Candor — Kim Scott
- Drive — Daniel H. Pink
- FBI feedback article — Simon Sinek
- Multipliers — Liz Wiseman
- The First 90 Days — Michael Watkins



Thank you!

Questions?

