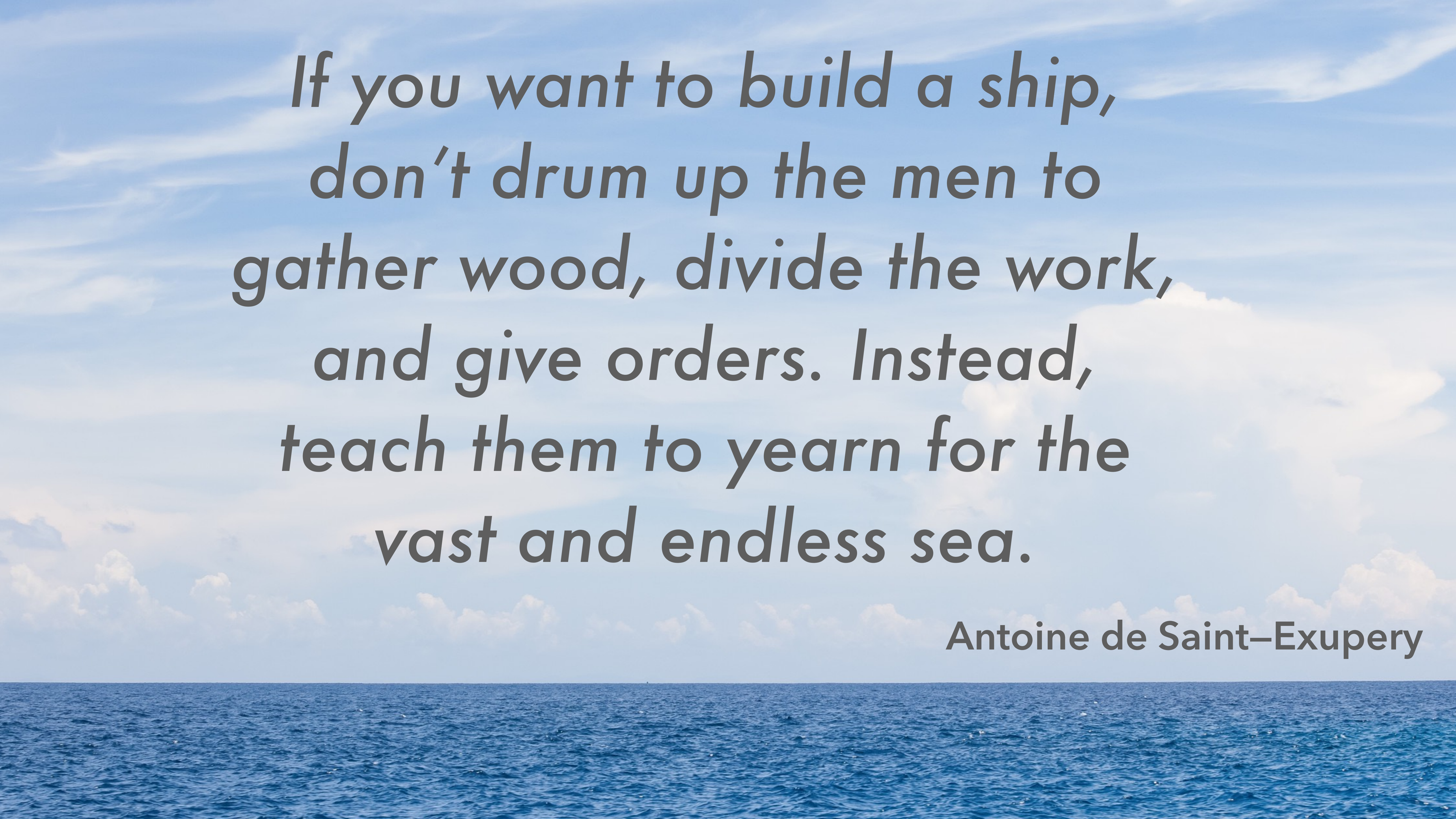


# Ownership Culture

Managing in the Superstar Economy

Noah Putnam // October 2023





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

Antoine de Saint-Exupery

**INSIGHT**

The value is in the tail



# Developers code less than one hour per day

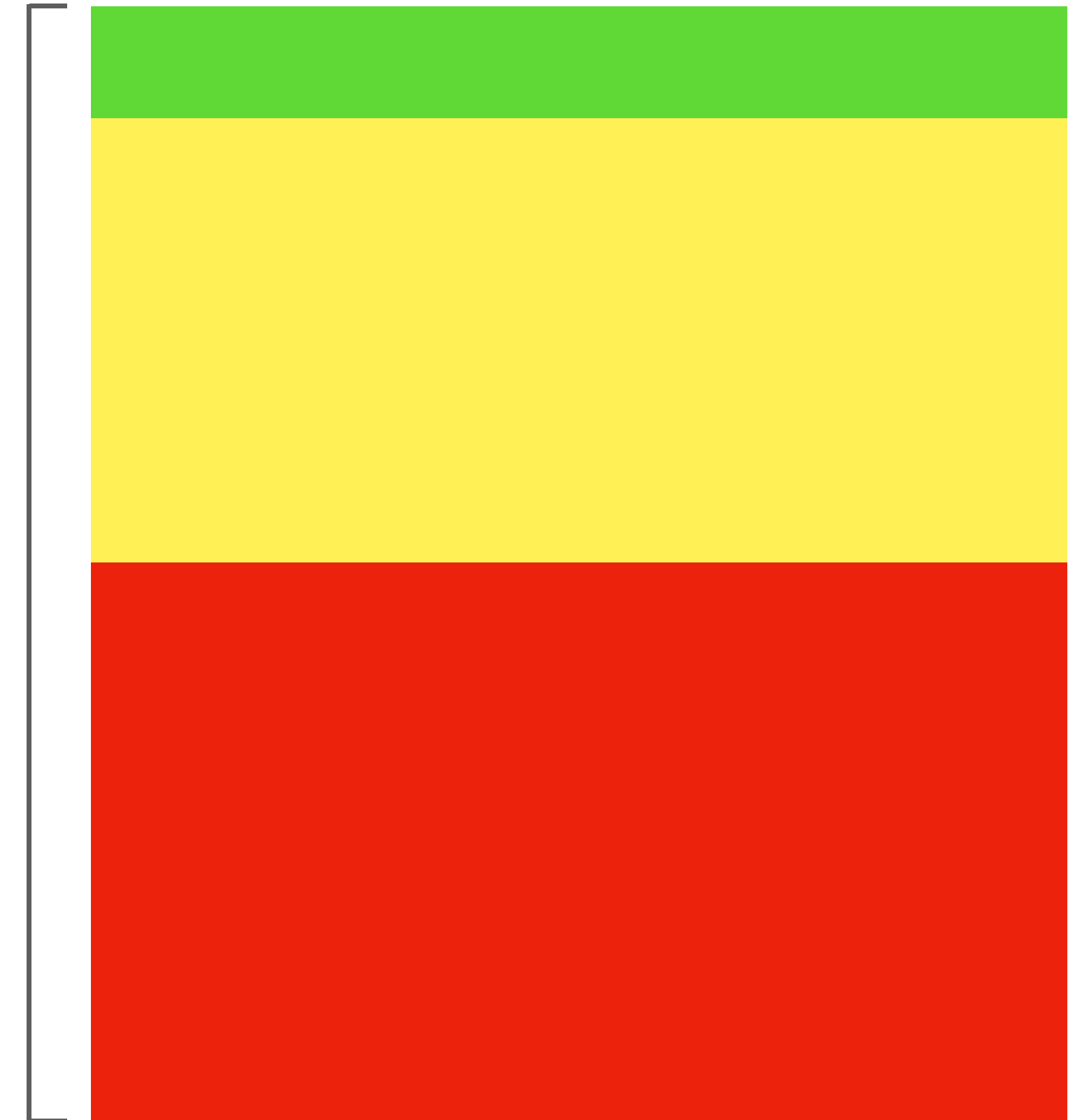
Based on data from 250K+ developers in our global community, **developers code 52 minutes per day** — about 4 hours and 21 minutes during a normal workweek from Monday to Friday.<sup>1</sup>

## Code time global percentiles<sup>1</sup>



## Engineer Net Contribution to Repository

*Productivity Percentile*



## **THESIS**

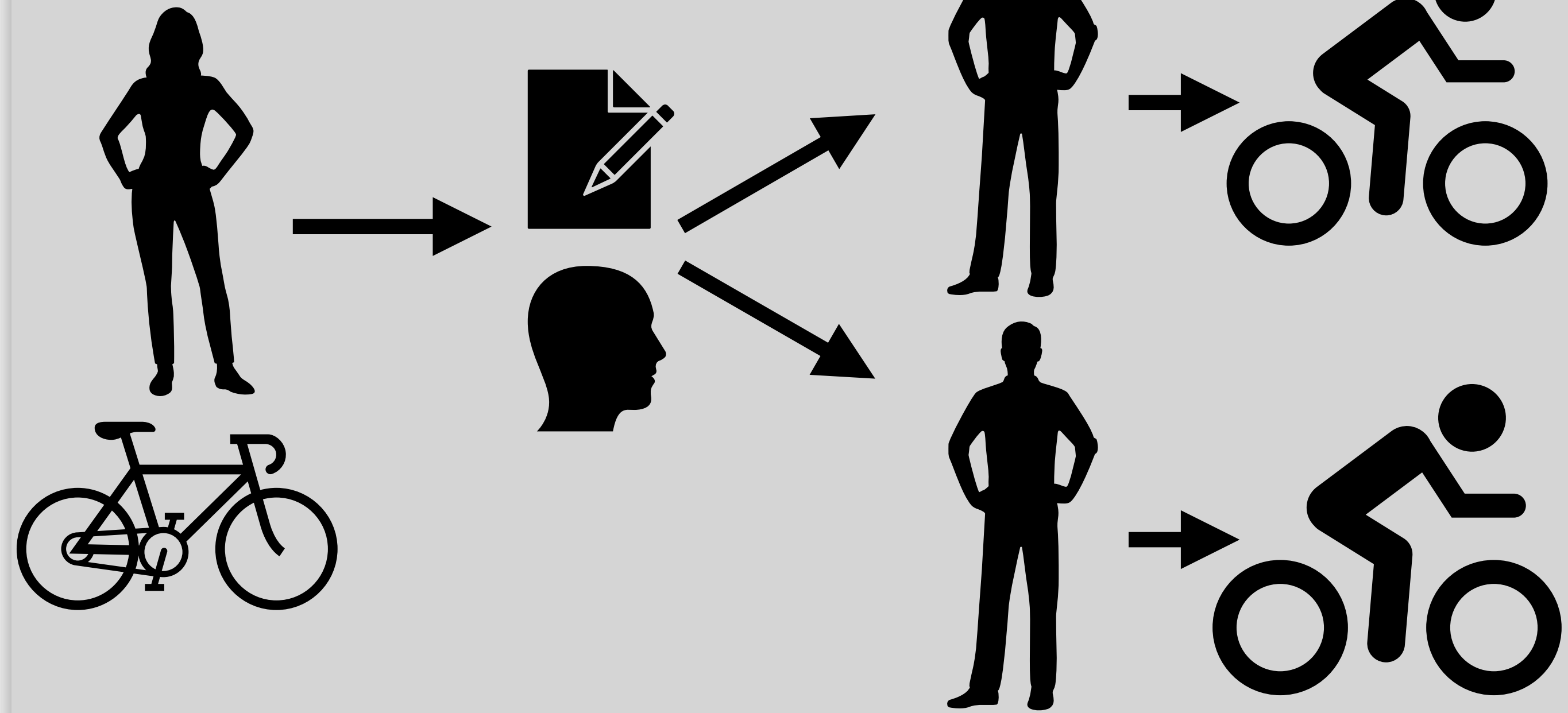
The best people crave ownership. Most jobs are terrible at giving it to them

# Ownership culture exists when...

- Team members have **broad authority** and **accountability** over the part of the product they work on
- Team members feel like they regularly make **meaningful decisions** in the course of their work
- Team members **take pride** in the product and the features they work on
- Team members are **never surprised** by a manager's decision or opinion

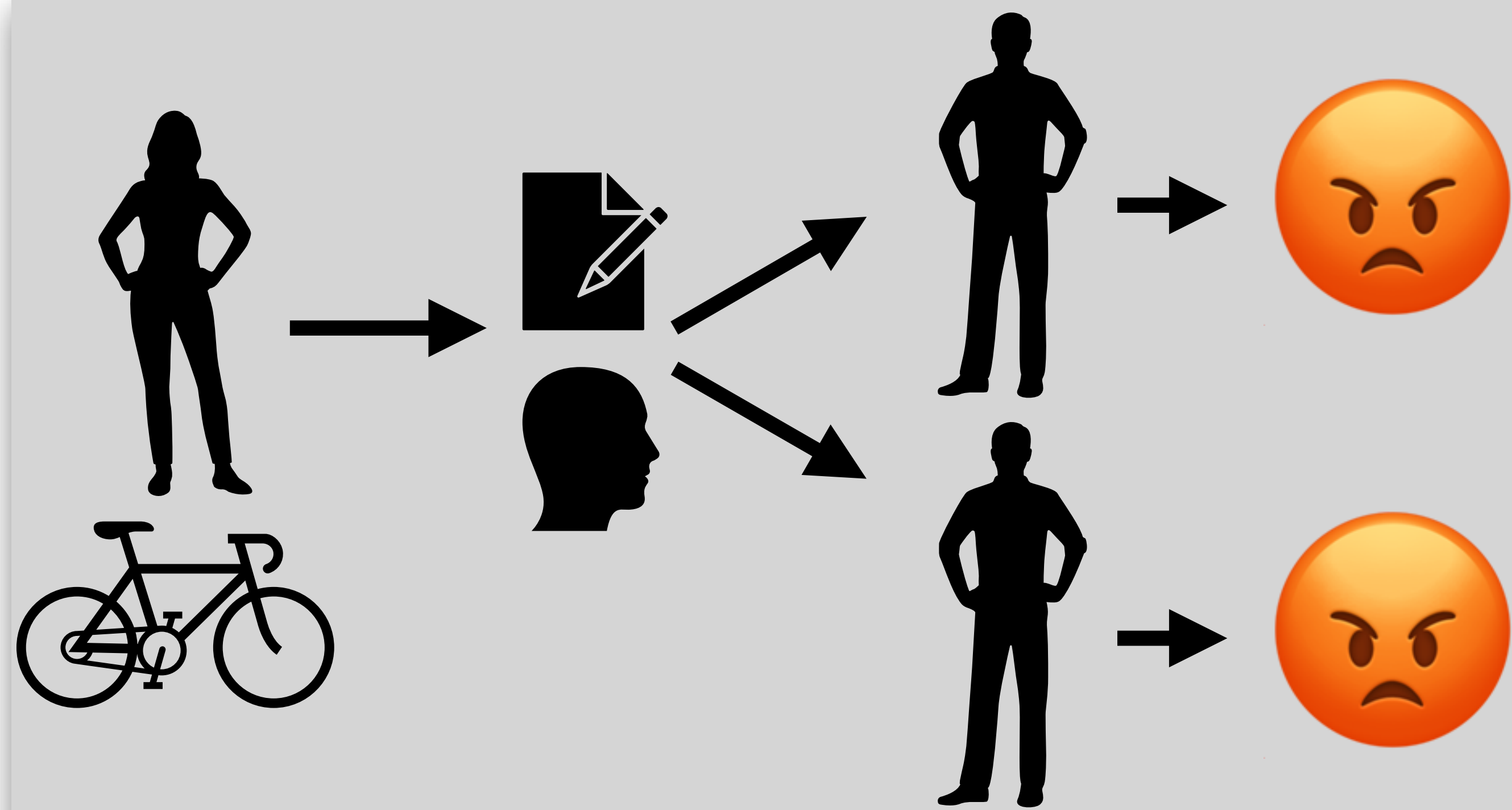
## SCENARIO

Implementing a  
new process



## SCENARIO

Implementing a  
new process

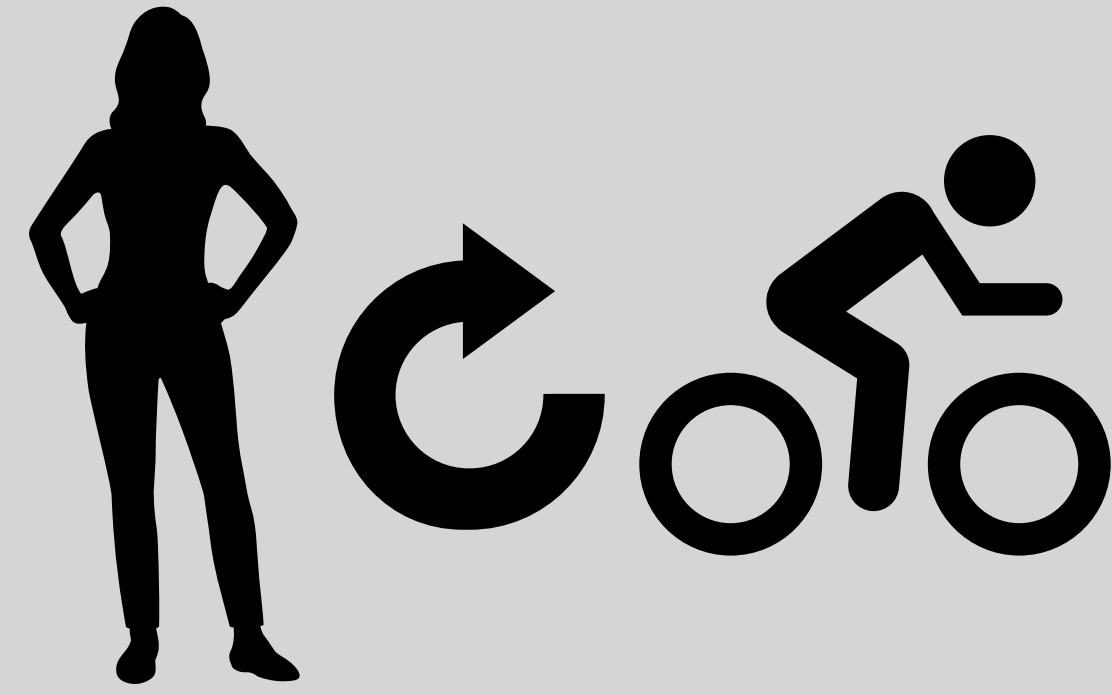


- Not respecting people's ownership
- No limit on number of process changes
- Places burden of testing process on entire team



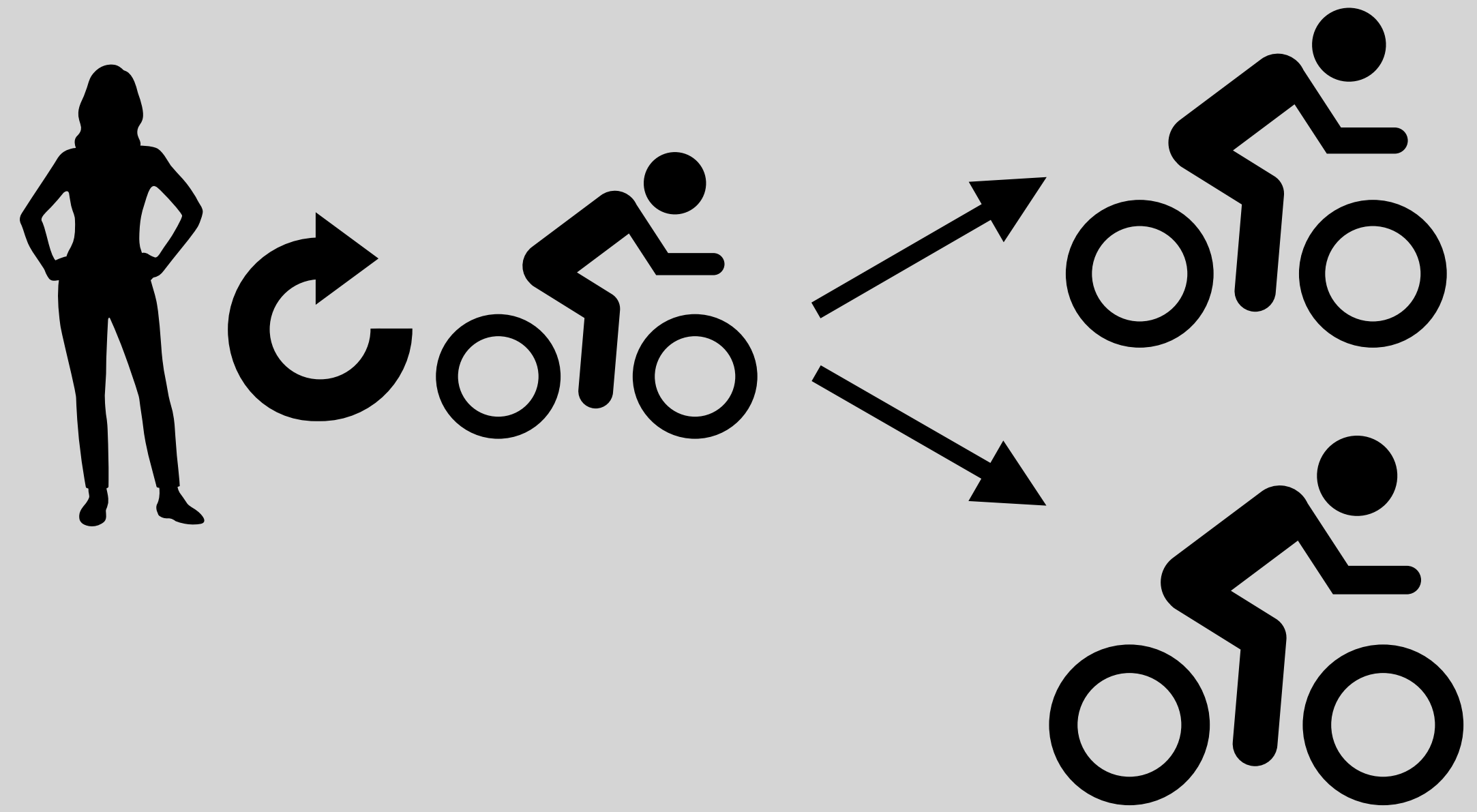
## **SCENARIO**

Implementing a  
new process



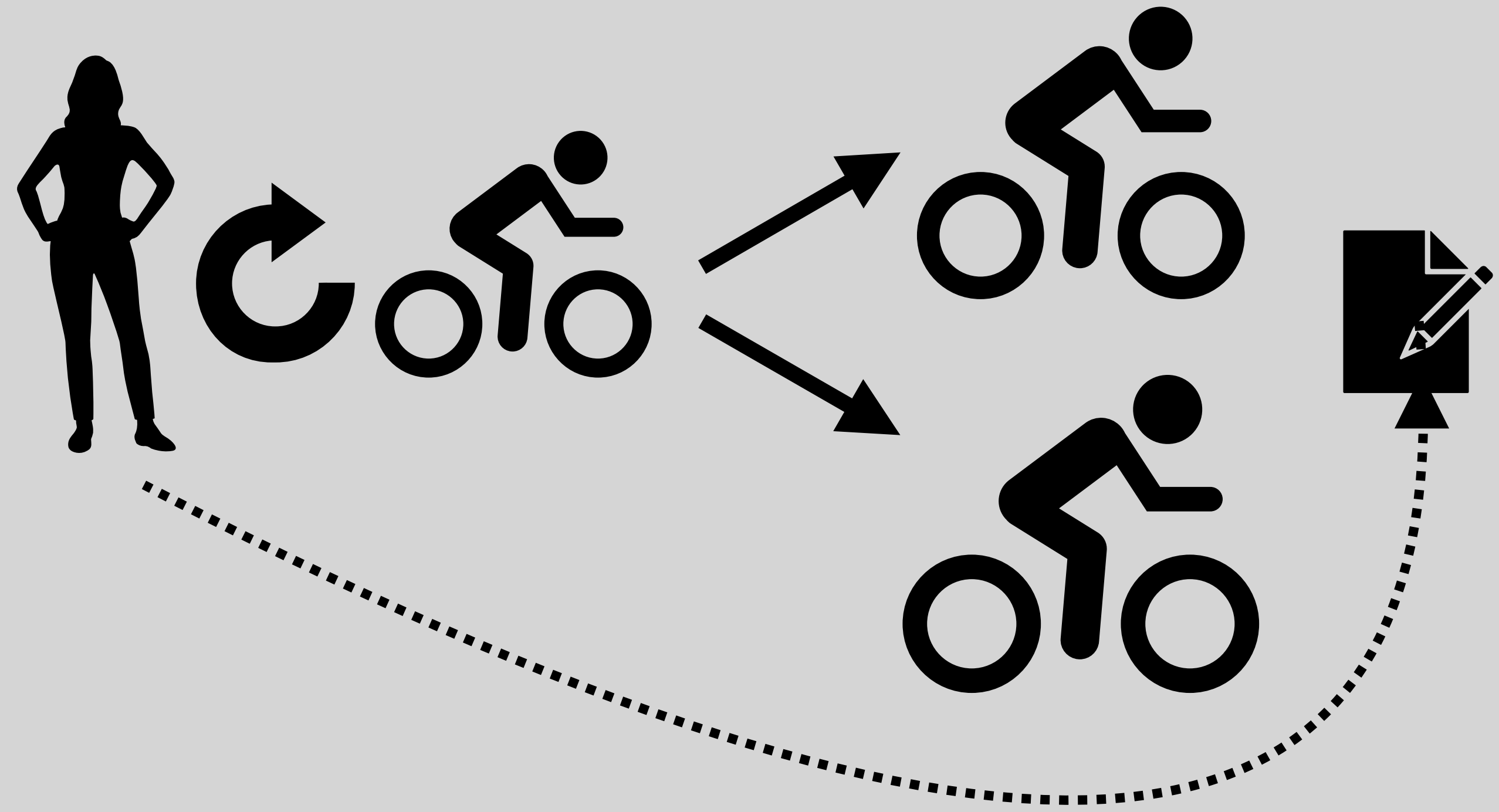
## **SCENARIO**

Implementing a  
new process



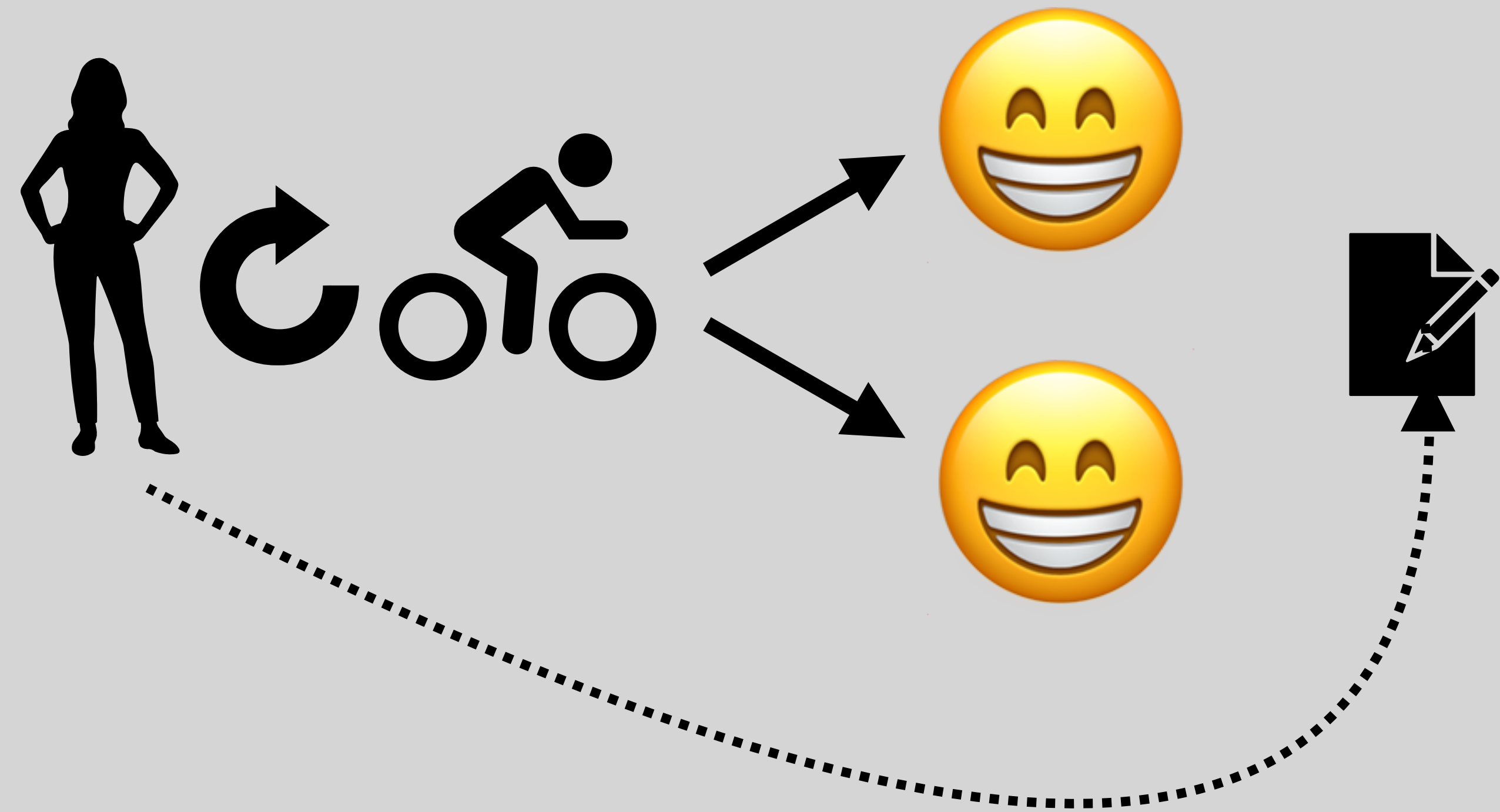
## **SCENARIO**

Implementing a  
new process



## SCENARIO

# Implementing a new process



- Lead by example + have skin in game
- Give people ownership over whether they follow or not
- Docs reflect the policy as practiced, not as originally conceptualized

## **QUESTION**

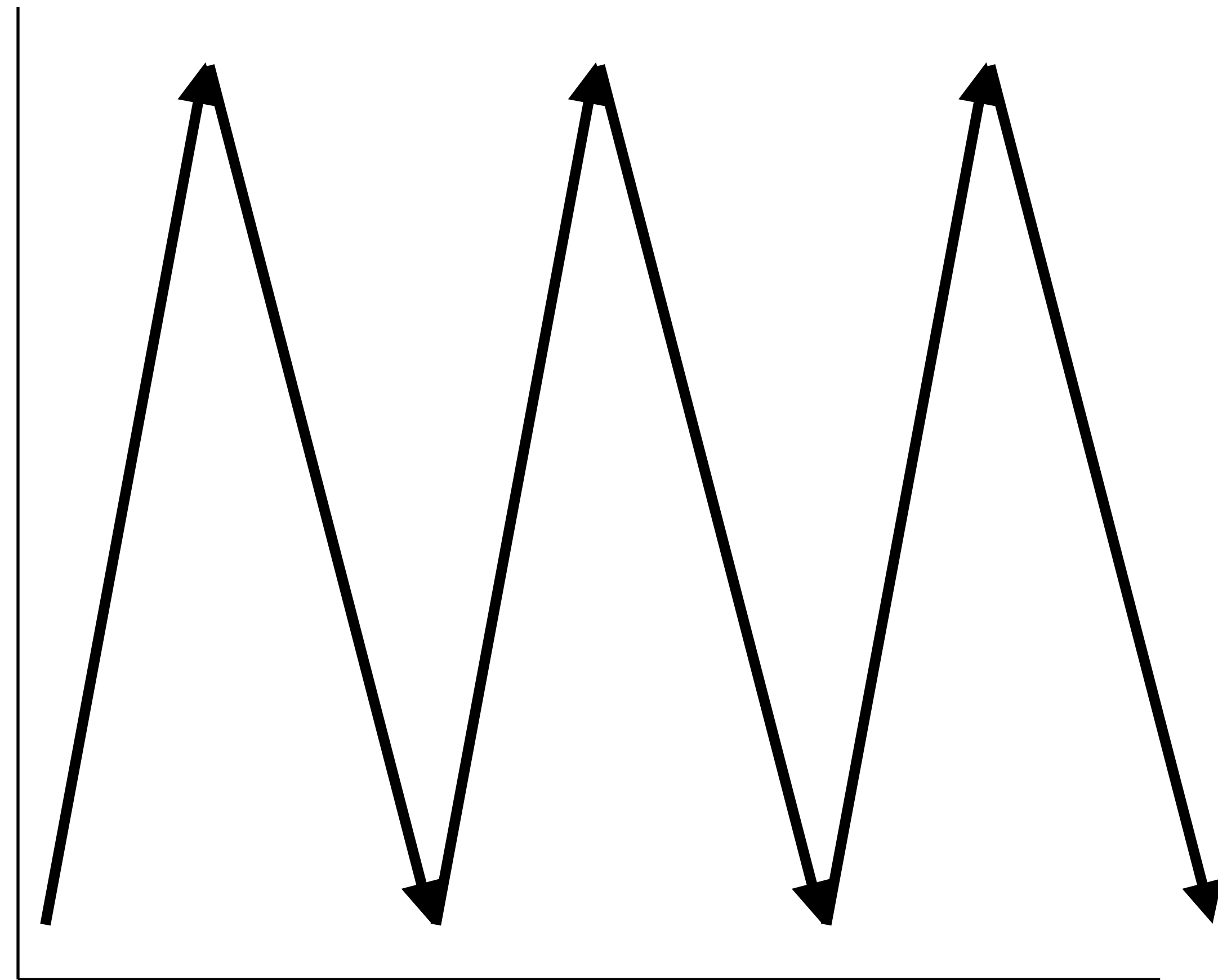
Where do managers fit in?

## **MANAGER ROLE**

1. Earn leadership capital
2. Spend it to get the job done



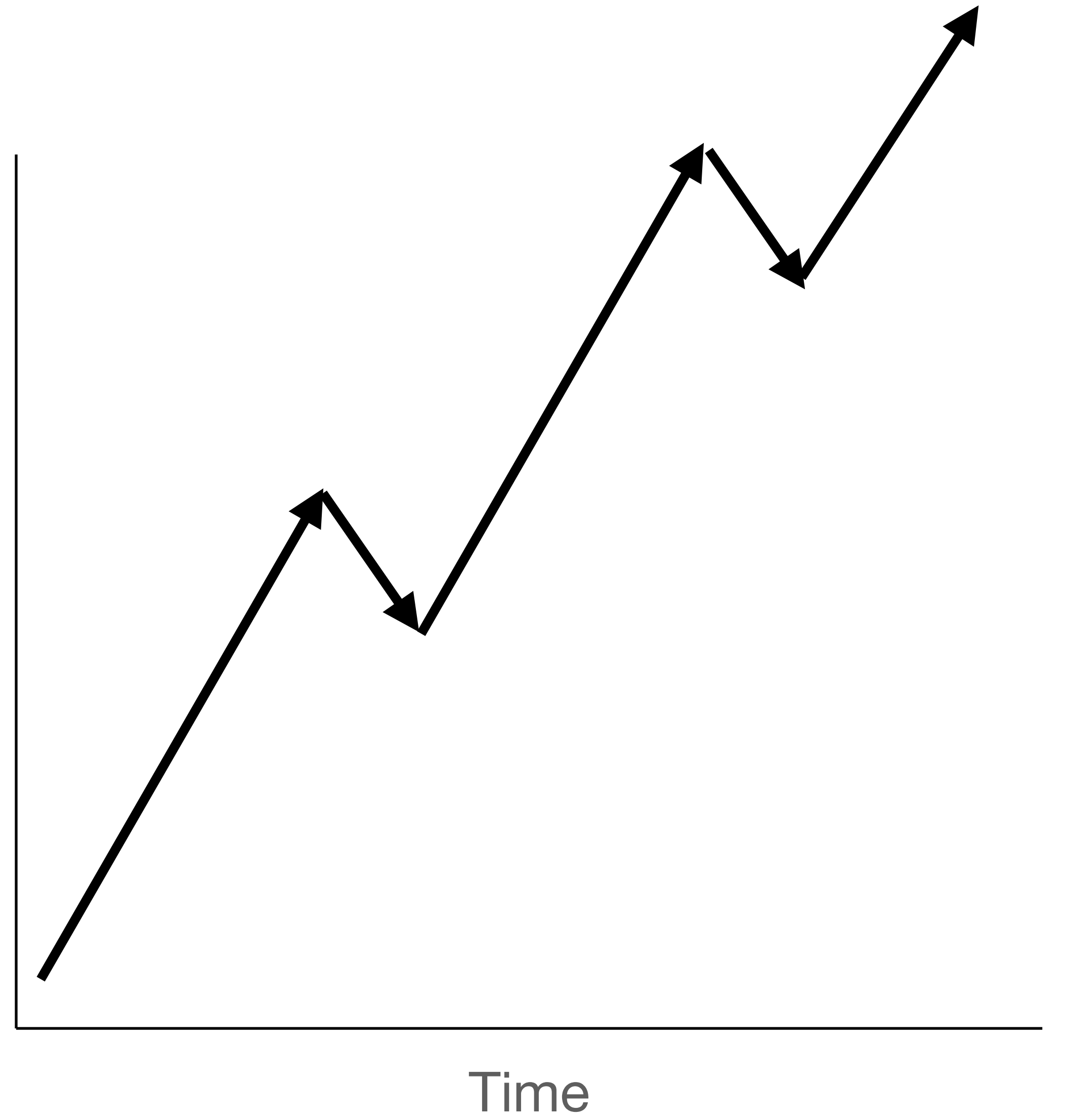
Leadership  
Capital



Time



Leadership  
Capital





# You *earn* leadership capital when...

- You **give credit** for a win to a team member
- You take **personal accountability** for a loss
- You **persuade** a team member to go your way
- You **take negative feedback constructively** from a team member
- You let someone overrule you on a question related to their **sphere of ownership**

# You *spend* leadership capital when...

- You take a **risk** on a project
- You implement a **new process** for others to follow
- You give **negative feedback** to a team member
- You **overrule** a team member on a decision related to something that they own
- You **don't build consensus** when making an important decision

**AUTHORITY ≠ ORG CHART**

**AUTHORITY = LEADERSHIP CAPITAL**

## **QUESTION**

How do you deal with people who don't want to buy into ownership culture?

# Ask yourself...

- What is your balance of leadership capital with them?
- Is this your fault for not communicating clearly? How could you have managed them differently to achieve better results?
- Does this person have the potential to be an A player?

Feedback should **always** be given in private

## **INSIGHT**

“Talent” is highly dependent on the cultural context – but it’s mostly fixed within that context

- The Animal Test
- Trust your gut, but know your biases
- Be terrified of growing the team

## **MANAGER ROLE**

1. Earn leadership capital
2. Spend it to get the job done



## **MANAGER ROLE**

0. Define the job

1. Earn leadership capital

2. Spend it to get the job done

- Embrace repeating yourself
- Write important things down
- Manage each stakeholders' vision  
individually

# More Resources

- [OG Netflix Culture Deck](#)
- [The Hard Thing About Hard Things - Ben Horowitz](#)
- [High Output Management - Andy Grove](#)