Growing future leaders

Nurturing Team Leads as a path to managerial succession
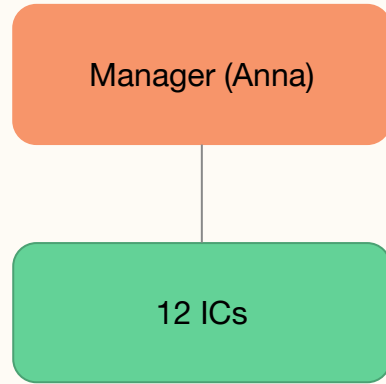
Anna Kurylo

LeadDev Berlin 2023
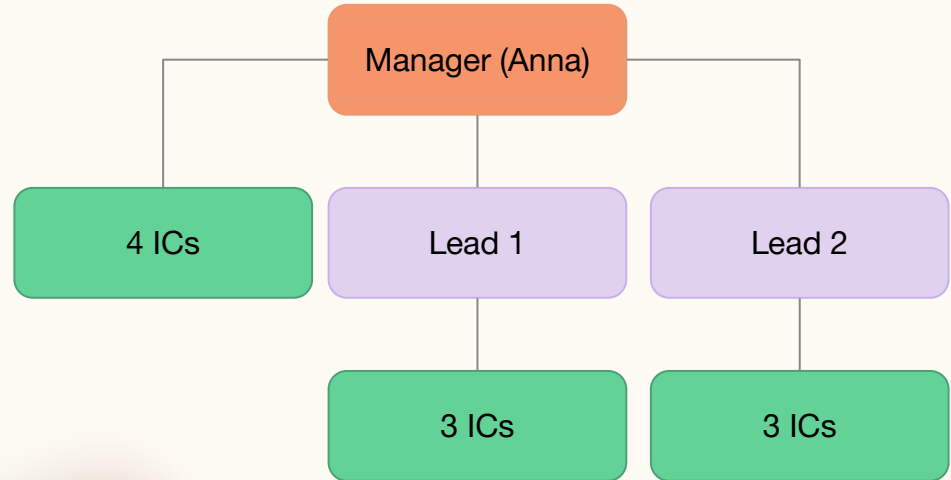
@bluebirrrrd

bit.ly/GrowingLeadersLeaddev

From

To

Manager (Anna)

12 ICs

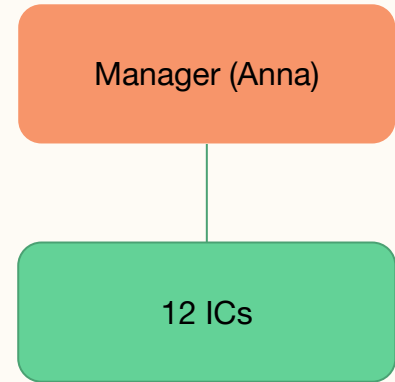Manager (Anna)

4 ICs

Lead 1

Lead 2

3 ICs

3 ICs

How it started

12 direct reports

People manager, scrummaster, driving business outcomes

Hiring pause just announced

Career conversations in progress: "What can I start doing now, so I can become a leader later?"

Manager (Anna)

12 ICs

"So what do I do now, resign?"

Options

1

Split the team, and get a peer or reporting manager

Closely coupled team, and with hiring paused, no option to backfill

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2

While working on #1, create a team lead role

A good way to gain experience before fully committing to the manager role

Preparation

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Step 1: Choosing a team lead

The ideal candidate for my team:

- is trusted by the team
- helps and mentors others
- they can be smoothly removed from their previous role

and most importantly…

Has interest in people management

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Lesson learned #1
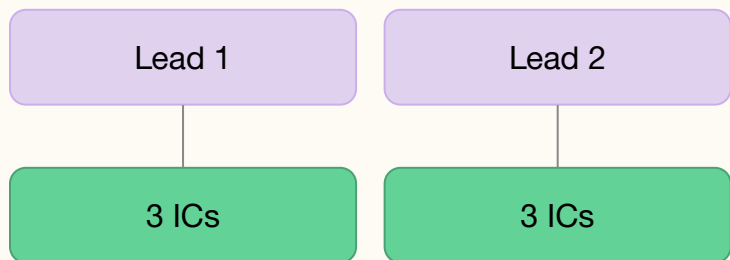
Don't make promises you can't keep

Step 2: choose a team to lead

Include:

- (Ideally) people a lead has already mentored or worked with
- Similar or related technical knowledge could be useful, but not required

Exclude:

- Low performers

Lead 1	Lead 2
3 ICs	3 ICs

Step 3: prepare the team for the transition

Talk to potential leads to make sure they're still interested

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Define clear responsibilities

- Everyone should know the point of contact for each issue type

The responsibility split

Manager

Skip-level 1:1s: monthly + ad-hoc

Bureaucracy: PTO, promotions, relocations etc

Financial topics: salary adjustments, bonuses, expenses

Together

Quarterly P&D conversations

Hiring

Lead

Weekly 1:1s, mentoring, coaching

First point of contact for blockers

Reduced IC workload

Lesson learned #2

Get leads involved in the process

Step 4: give your leads the skills they need

If you can, send them to leadership training:

- Internal training at your company, if available
- Giving and receiving feedback
- Crucial conversations (conflict management)

Have / help them find a mentor

Offer practical resources to help with new responsibilities

- leaddev.com
- "Become an Effective Software Engineering Manager" by Dr. James Stanier

# Step 4: give your leads the skills they need (Part 2)

Pass the information about the people they'll lead

- Performance and development goals
- Things you recently worked on together
- Do not share: any confidential information, finances (depends on your organization and how you set things up)

Step 5: announce the change

Approximate structure:

1. Why the change is happening
2. What is happening (X is stepping into a role of a team lead)
3. The updated team structure
4. Responsibilities
5. Congratulations and reassurance
6. Keep the door open for questions
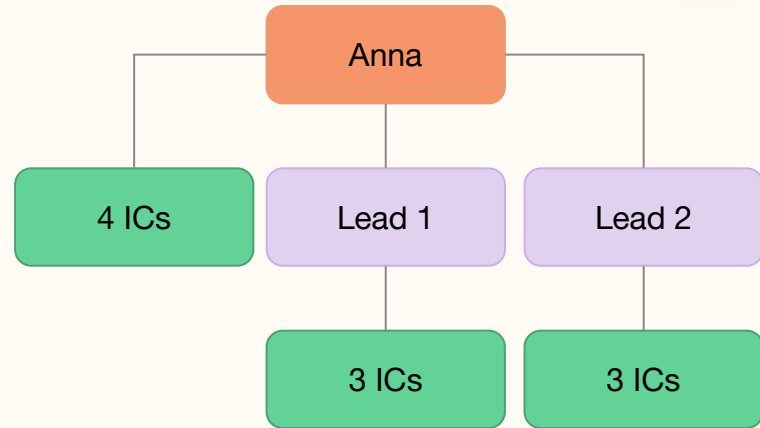
Supporting your lead(s)

In the first weeks after introducing team leads

Be available

- Have leads schedule their first 1:1s
- Extend your 1:1s with leads, and update the frequency of the calls with your skip-levels
- Keep your calendar open for ad-hoc calls with anyone on the team

Check in regularly

- In your 1:1s with leads, the focus is on 2 things: on their personal development, and on helping them help their team
- Ask the team for feedback and suggestions

As the leads grow

Get them promoted if you can! If not, here are some possible stretch goals:

- Expanding performance reviews: delegate goal setting
- Visibility on the higher level: QBRs, project and leadership calls
- Open the salary structure and collaborate on financial decisions (if possible within your organization)

The outcomes

For the team members:

- More focused attention on their goals
- (For those who gained a lead) someone more hands-on to discuss both technical and people topics with

For leads:

- An opportunity to explore management before fully committing
- Gaining skills to set them up for success in the next role

For me as a manager:

- More manageable people management workload
- Experience mentoring leaders
- Successors

3 things you should take away from this talk

1. Be intentional in the way you set up your team structure, and in the way you communicate it

2. Set your leads up for success by giving a clear scope and introducing responsibilities gradually

3. Be available to help, and adjust when necessary

Thank you!

Anna Kurylo

@bluebirrrrd

linkedin.com/in/bluebirrrrd