

Putting down line management; returning to an individual contributor role

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Agenda

- Definitions / background
- When to change
- The benefits of each role
- How you could change
- How I found it

Background: me

- Many varied jobs / University
- ~~Web development-executive~~ Junior
- Mid -> Senior
- Senior -> Principal Engineer
- Staff Software Engineer SRE

Big change **looks** like: frontend -> full stack -> Cloud networking SRE

Biggest change **actually**: IC -> Management -> IC

Engineering Manager (EM): a definition

70%

- **Line management**
E.g. Career development, pastoral care
- **Team shape management**
E.g. Hiring, team health, productivity
- **Work planning (wide view)**
E.g. how it fits with the company aims

30%

- **Technical work**
E.g. code reviews, bug fixes, oncall

Individual Contributor (IC): a definition

100%

- **Technical work**

E.g. Code, code reviews, technical documentation

- **Technical leadership**

E.g. Technical proposals, supporting other disciplines, influencing decisions, mentoring / coaching

- **Technical problem solving (cross-company)**

E.g. Figuring out the biggest technical issues and how to address them

My talk is narrow....

- Only EM and IC career axis, there are much bigger work (and life!) changes

Anna Shipman's [blog](#) on finding your next job

Evaluate which track you're on

- Regularly
- Or (less perfectly), as a result of:
 - External stressor
 - Accidental chance
- A work diary can be really valuable

Signs it might be time to change

- No longer engaged / excited by work
- Becoming an expert at the 'wrong thing'
- Staying through fear of the unknown / you "can't"
- Your role no longer matches 'what it says on the tin'
- There is no 'next rung up'

Reasons to stay

- You really like the job you're doing
- Bad timing

What move to make? IC -> EM

- Opportunity to build leadership and communication skills
- Widen your view points, essential business awareness
- Very rewarding
- Increase and broaden your impact
- Potentially more money, more transferable

What move to make? EM -> IC

AKA 'put down line management'

- You miss the code
- You've forgotten how to 'do' code... but want to again!
- You don't want to focus on improving management skills
- You became an 'accidental' manager. [cont]

Accidental manager?

- Common situation
- Required for promotion?
- Structural change; EM to IC ratio
 - Gradual / inadvertent role change
 - Sudden structural change

Given there are two paths

- Make a choice, do it well
- Being on one track builds huge benefits for the other
- This isn't a 'once in a career' change
Excellent article on [Engineer < -> Manager pendulum](#)

How you can change (whilst staying)

- Same role, 'hidden' change
- Same role, but openly changing
- New role

How you can change (moving company)

- Same role
- New role

The big one: new role, new company

- Pick the right shaped company
- Allow talent teams and recruiters to work for you
- Use your network

Make the interview process valuable

- Regardless of the outcome
 - Skills practice
 - Career review / self appraisal
 - Interview practice
 - See 'into' other companies
 - **Feedback**

The hiring process

- Good questions to consider
 - What's expected? Over what timeline?
 - What support will they give you?
 - What are the possible outcomes?

The interview process

- You will need to prepare
- Large tech companies have some balance of
 - Coding interviews
 - System design interviews
 - Behavioural interviews
- Feedback (again)

My journey

- It said IC 'on the tin' and I had stagnated
- What changed?
- How did I find the change?
- How do I like my new role now?

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Conclusion

- Management and technical are two tracks, oscillating between them is great
- Review your **actual** role
- When changing, make the process valuable, not just the outcome

Thank you!