Valve Handbook for newcomers

Are Flat Organizations Viable?

VALVE

Short Story

1996
Valve was formed

1997
Half Life started over

1998
Half Life

1999
Team Fortress Classic

2000
Counter Strike

2003
Steam

2004
Half Life 2

2007
Portal, Team Fortress 2

Short Story

2008
Left 4 Dead

2009
Left 4 Dead 2

2011
Portal 2

2013
Dota 2, SteamOS

Today
Worth - 2.5 to 8 billion
VR - In progress
Employees - 360 - 400

VALVE ORGANIZATIONAL CHARTS

(AS ENVISIONED BY EMPLOYEES)

Diag. 1

Diag. 2

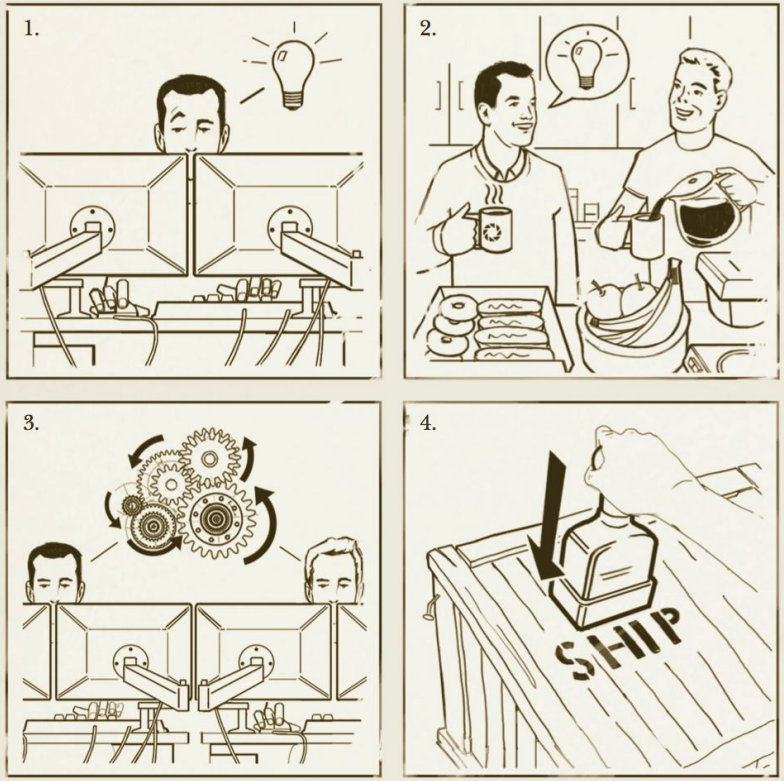
Diag. 3

Diag. 4

Diag. 5

* *"I'm the noob, coffee anyone?...Hello?"*

Fig. 3-1 Method to working without a boss



step 1. Come up with a bright idea
step 2. Tell a coworker about it
step 3. Work on it together
step 4. Ship it!

Roles

Fig. 4-1

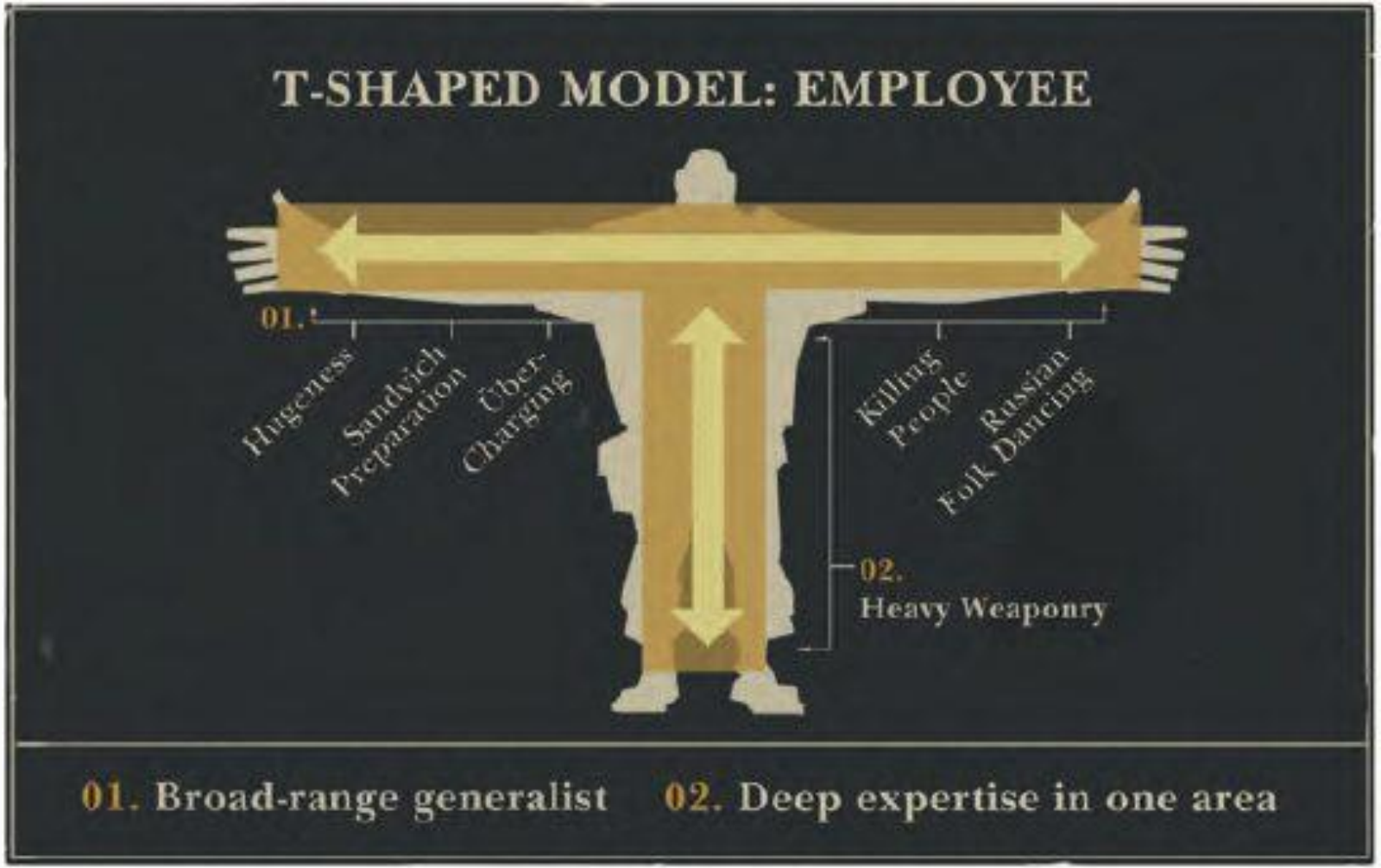
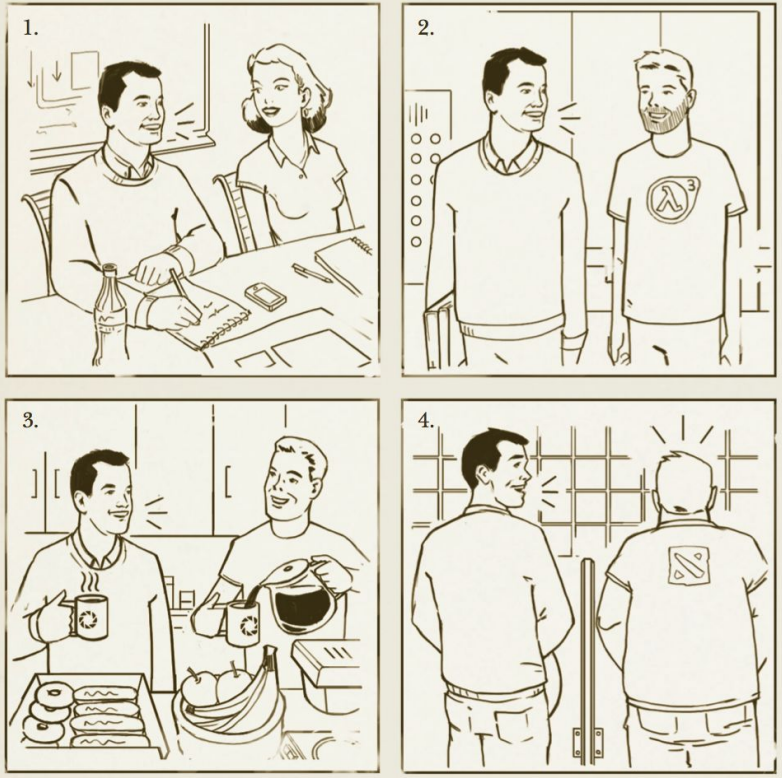

T-SHAPED MODEL: EMPLOYEE
01.
Hugeness
Sandwich Preparation
Uber-Charging
Killing People
Russian Folk Dancing
02.
Heavy Weaponry
01. Broad-range generalist
02. Deep expertise in one area

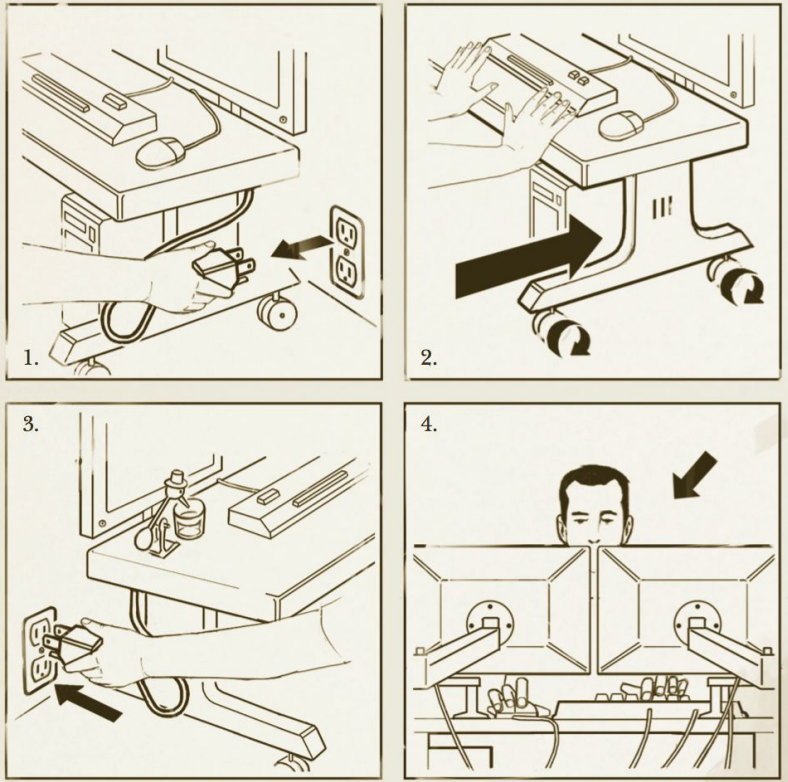
Fig. 5-2

Fig. 2-4 Methods to find out what's going on



step 1. Talk to someone in a meeting
step 2. Talk to someone in the elevator
step 3. Talk to someone in the kitchen
step 4. Talk to someone in the bathroom

Fig. 2-2 Method to move your desk



step 1. Unplug cords from wall
step 2. Move your desk
step 3. Plug cords back into wall
step 4. Get back to work

Fig. 4-2

Hiring

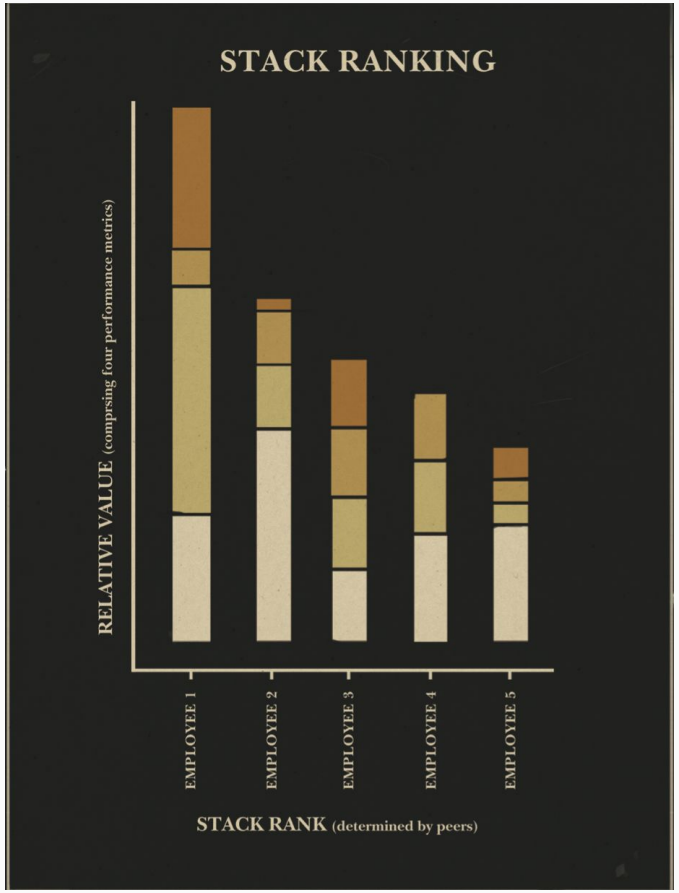
Fig. 5-1

Your peers and performance

Peer review (360)
Yearly

Stack ranking:

1. Skill/Technical level
2. Productivity/Output
3. Group Contribution
4. Product Contribution



Mistakes

Mistakes are OK

When mistakes are analyzed, fixed and prevented in future.

Mistakes are not OK

When mistakes are constantly repeated.

When people cannot work without the boss.

What is Valve *NOT* good at? (Valve)

Helping newcommers

Mentoring people

Disseminating information internally

Finding new discipline people

Long term estimations

Hiring traditional talents

What is Valve *NOT* good at? (The Guardian)

A pseudo-flat structure

Fire non-useful employees

Decisional power groups

Structurelessness easily “becomes a smokescreen for the strong or the lucky to establish unquestioned hegemony over others”. By putting rules and structures in place, you make it clear and transparent how the group or organisation works

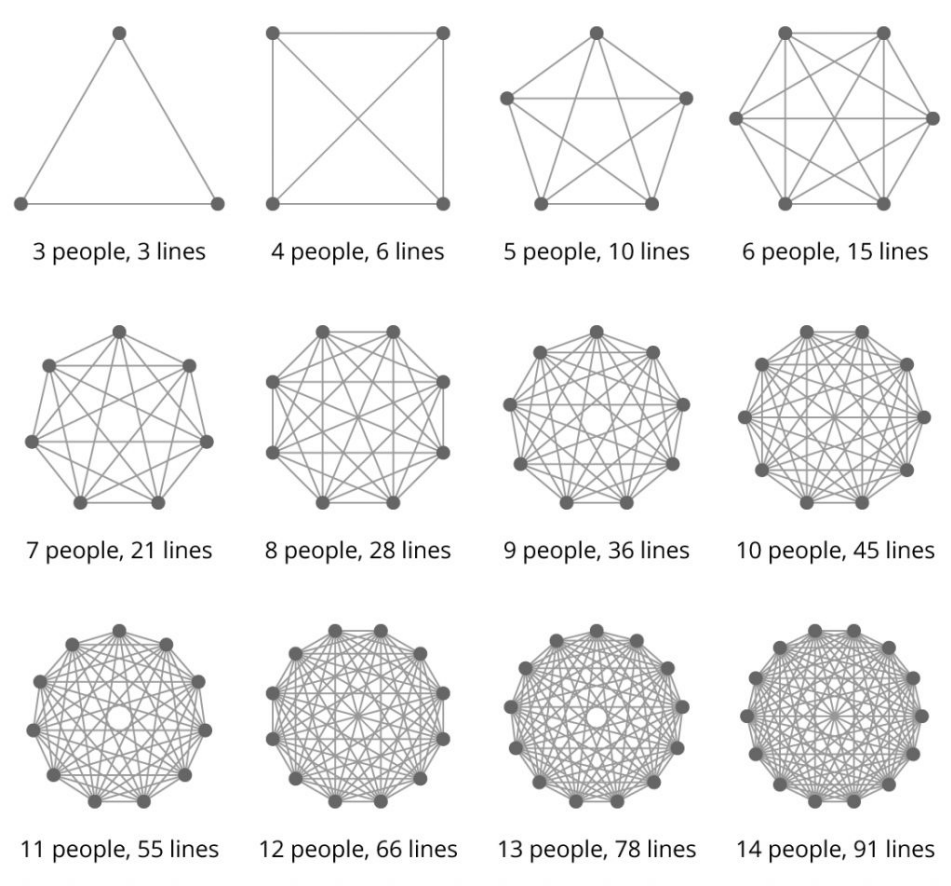
What is Valve *NOT* good at? (Lighthouse)

GitHub, Buffer, Medium, Treehouse & Zappos

You can’t manage everyone yourself

Waste time re-inventing the wheel

Mess, mess is everywhere



Fun citations

Gabe Newell—Of all the people at this company who aren't your boss, Gabe is the MOST not your boss, if you get what we're saying.

Manager—The kind of people we don't have any of. So if you see one, tell somebody, because it's probably the ghost of whoever was in this building before us. Whatever you do, don't let him give you a presentation on paradigms in spectral proactivity.

Q.A. & References

Official valve books 1999 - 2016
https://www.valvesoftware.com/en/publications
No bosses, no managers: the truth behind the ‘flat hierarchy’ facade
https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/jul/30/no-bosses-managers-flat-hierachy-workplace-tech-hollywood
Nails in the Coffin: Why a Flat Organizational Structure Fails
https://getlighthouse.com/blog/flat-organizational-structure-fails/

That's all Folks!