



THE PLAYBOOK

The Map

A capability map for a small team. Who can actually do what, where the single points of failure are, and how to cross-train on purpose rather than during an emergency.

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One page, twice a year

The tool: the team capability map

The thing an org chart cannot tell you

An org chart shows who reports to whom. It says nothing about whether the business can survive a fortnight without any particular person, which is a considerably more useful thing to know.

In a team of six, most owners could name roughly what everybody does. Very few could answer the question that actually matters: for each thing this business needs done, how many people can do it alone?

That number is usually one, more often than anybody expects, and nobody discovers it until somebody is ill, resigns, or takes the holiday they are owed.

A capability map is one page that answers it. It takes about forty minutes to build the first time, it is reviewed twice a year, and it is the most direct tool I know for the key-person risk that sits under most small businesses.

THIS IS NOT A PERFORMANCE TOOL

Everything in chapter four is about keeping it that way, because the moment it becomes an assessment of people rather than a map of coverage, the entries stop being honest and the map becomes worse than useless.

What a capability map shows that a headcount does not

A simple grid. People down the side, the things the business needs done across the top, a level in each cell.

PEOPLE DOWN THE SIDE, WORK ACROSS THE TOP

	Client comms	Reporting	Billing run	Deploys	QA review
Ana	3	2	1	0	2
Sam	1	3	3	1	0
Priya	0	1	2	3	1
Tom	2	0	1	1	3

one person deep, nobody else

0 cannot do it 1 with help 2 alone 3 can teach it

Figure: the column with one dark cell and nothing else is the risk. It is invisible on any org chart.

Two things become visible immediately, and neither is visible any other way.

The single points of failure. A column with one capable person and nothing else. This is the reason to build the map at all. It is not a hypothetical risk; it is a specific column with a specific name in it.

The people carrying too much. A row with several high entries is somebody the business leans on heavily. Usually they are the person everybody says is brilliant, and usually they are closer to leaving than anyone realises, because being the only one who can do things is exhausting in a way that is easy to mistake for thriving.

Choosing the skills that matter

The most common way this fails is choosing the wrong columns. Too many, too vague, or too aspirational.

List what the business actually needs done, not what people know. Not "Excel". "Produce the monthly client report." Not "communication". "Handle a difficult client conversation." The column is a job the business needs doing, phrased so that you could watch somebody do it.

Between eight and fifteen columns. Fewer and it is not useful; more and it will not be maintained. If you have thirty candidates, you are listing tasks rather than capabilities, and you should group them.

Include the unglamorous recurring things. The billing run, the payroll submission, the renewal calendar, the compliance filing. These are precisely where single points of failure hide, because they happen monthly, they always work, and exactly one person knows how.

Leave out anything nobody would miss. If nothing breaks when this is not done, it does not need a column.

The test for a column: if the only person who can do this left tomorrow, would we notice within a month?

Four levels, and only four

Resist five levels, resist percentages, and resist anything that looks like a score out of ten. Four is enough to make decisions and few enough to fill in honestly.

0 **Cannot do it**

No shame attached and it is the most common entry on any honest map. Most people cannot do most things.

1 **Can do it with help**

Would get there with somebody available to ask. Useful in a crisis, not sufficient for coverage.

2 **Can do it alone**

The level that counts. This is what coverage means, and it is what you count when reading columns.

3 **Can teach it**

Can do it and can bring somebody else to level two. This is what turns a map into a plan.

The distinction between one and two is where people are tempted to be generous, and generosity here is expensive. A one recorded as a two produces a coverage number that is wrong in exactly the situation you built the map for.

The honest test for a two: **could they do it, correctly, this week, without asking anyone?** If the answer needs a qualifier, it is a one.

Filling it in without it becoming an assessment

This is the chapter that decides whether the map is accurate, and accuracy is the only property that matters.

Have people fill in their own row first. Self-assessment, then a short conversation where you compare notes. People are generally reasonable about this when it is clear what it is for.

Say what it is for, out loud, before anyone fills anything in. The exact words matter: this exists so that nobody is the only person who can do something, and so that we can plan who learns what. It is not going into anybody's review.

Then never use it in a review. Once is enough to destroy it. People will record twos where the honest answer is one, because a one now reads as a weakness rather than a gap, and you will have manufactured exactly the false confidence the map exists to prevent.

Normalise the zeros. A map with no zeros in it is a map somebody has flattered. Point at your own zeros first if you are the owner, and mean it.

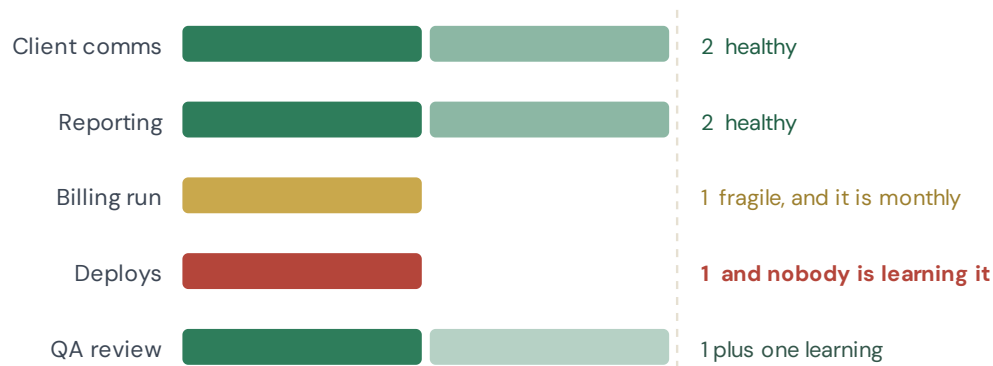
ON THE PERSON CARRYING EVERYTHING

Whoever has the most threes will feel proud of that row, and they should. The conversation to have with them is not about reducing their scope. It is that being the only person who can do something is a ceiling: nobody gets promoted out of a job only they can do, and turning some of those threes into teaching is how they get the next thing.

Reading the gaps

The map is filled in. Now stop reading it by person and read it by column, because the columns are where the decisions are.

HOW MANY PEOPLE CAN DO EACH THING ALONE



Two people who can do a thing alone is the working definition of covered. One is a person who cannot take leave.

Figure: the same data read by column rather than by person. This is the view that produces decisions.

Count the twos and threes in each column. That is your coverage number. Two is the working definition of covered. One is a person who cannot take leave. Zero is something the business needs done that nobody can currently do, and that happens more often than you would think, usually after somebody left.

Then weight by how often it happens and how bad it is if missed. A single point of failure on something quarterly and recoverable is a note. A single point of failure on the monthly billing run is this quarter's priority.

Pick two gaps. Not eight. The map will show you more than you can act on, and a plan to close everything closes nothing.

Cross-training on purpose

Cross-training in most small businesses happens during an emergency, which is the worst possible time to learn anything.

The map turns it into a plan, and the plan is smaller than people expect.

Match a three to a zero or a one. The person who can teach it, and the person who is going to learn it. Name both, in writing, with a date by which the learner should reach a two.

Learn it by doing it, with the expert watching. Not a walkthrough, not a document, not a recorded session. The learner runs the actual billing run while the person who normally does it sits alongside. Then they run it alone while that person is available. Then they run it alone.

Write the procedure as you go, and let the learner write it. The expert cannot see what is confusing any more; the learner can see nothing else. The document that comes out of this is better than anything the expert would have written, and it is a byproduct rather than a project.

Then prove it with an absence. The learner runs it for real while the expert is on leave. **Until that has happened you have a plan, not coverage.**

Two gaps per quarter is a realistic pace for a small team. That is eight a year, which is enough to move a map substantially in eighteen months.

Keeping it alive

Most capability maps are built once, admired, and never opened again. Four habits keep it real, and they cost almost nothing.

Review it twice a year, in the same slot each time. Not quarterly, which is more often than skills genuinely change and turns into an administrative chore. Twice is enough.

Update it when somebody joins or leaves, immediately. A leaver removes a row and often creates a zero column that nobody has noticed yet. That is the single most valuable moment this map exists for.

Use it when planning who does what. If it only comes out at review time it will drift. If you glance at it when allocating a project, it stays current because it is useful.

Let people update their own row when something changes. Somebody who has just reached a two on something should be able to say so without waiting six months, and having that be normal is what keeps the whole thing honest.

THE ONE NUMBER WORTH TRACKING

Columns with a coverage of one or zero. Count it at each review. If that number is falling, the map is doing its job. If it is not falling, you built a document rather than a plan.

One page, twice a year

The value here is not sophistication. It is that the question gets asked at all, in a form specific enough to act on.

Eight to fifteen columns of things the business needs done. Four levels. Filled in honestly because it is explicitly not an assessment. Read by column rather than by person. Two gaps chosen per quarter, closed by pairing somebody who can teach with somebody who will learn, and proved by an absence.

What you get is the ability to answer a question most small business owners cannot: if this person were away for a month, what would stop?

And there is a second benefit that tends to arrive quietly. People like having a visible path from a one to a two to a three. Career progression is the most consistently cited reason people leave, and a capability map is one of very few tools a business with no learning budget can offer that makes progression concrete.

The page overleaf is the grid. Fill in your own row first.

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Team capability map

Person	Capability →
Coverage	
count of 2s and 3s	

Levels. 0 cannot do it · 1 can do it with help · 2 can do it alone · 3 can teach it. The honest test for a 2: could they do it correctly this week without asking anyone?

Columns are things the business needs done, not skills people have. Read by column: coverage of 1 is a person who cannot take leave. Close two gaps a quarter, and prove each one with an absence.