WHY MOST MANAGERS DON'T MANAGE

Why organizations get stuck in coordination – and how Management Architecture makes the difference

Colophon

Title	**Why most managers don't manage** *Why organizations get stuck in coordination – and how Management Architecture makes the difference*
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Foreword

This book was not written to help managers manage better.
It was written to reveal that much of what we call *management* today is, in reality, something else entirely.

That may sound like a semantic issue. *It is not.*

In many organizations, *manager* has become a title for people who spend their days coordinating, smoothing things over, keeping things together, and preventing things from getting stuck. That work is important. Often indispensable, even. But it is not management – it is mostly *coordination*. And that is precisely where the problem lies.

As long as coordination is mistaken for management, three things remain structurally invisible:

- what management really is
- what coordination actually entails
- and where the operational work pays the price for that confusion.

This book is written from that observation—and from the author's experience. Not from dissatisfaction with people. Not from an idealized image of organizations.
But from years of exposure to the same pattern, over and over again, in ever-changing contexts — and strikingly often in government organizations.

It is there, where public value must be delivered under political pressure, social expectations, and limited room for error, that you see the pattern most clearly. Not because people perform worse there, but because the system is unforgiving.

Managers become stressed. Coordination becomes personal. And the work on the floor becomes heavier than necessary.

This book does not diagnose individuals. It questions *roles* — based on the management architecture of the USM method (Unified Service Management), and based on Systems Thinking.

What happens when we view management as design work rather than intervention?
What happens when we recognize coordination as professional executive work, instead of packaging it as leadership?
And what happens to the real work—the work that needs to be done every day—when those roles are separated again?

The title of this book is deliberately provocative. Not to shock, but to bring up something that is rarely discussed explicitly. Because asking people to recognize *the true manager* requires something difficult of them: to stop *carrying* what should have been *designed* in the first place. This is not a technical intervention. It is a cultural one.

This book does not offer a step-by-step plan. No quick wins. No reorganization model.
It offers something else: a different way of looking at things. A way that can be uncomfortable, especially for those who recognize themselves in the coordination work described here. Not because that work is inferior — on the contrary — but because it has often had to carry too much for too long.

Those who read this book to be confirmed in their existing beliefs will be disappointed.
Those who read it to better understand what they really do may discover something valuable.

The question this book asks is ultimately simple — and anything but easy:

Do we want the true manager to stand up, so that coordinators and operators can get to work?

I will leave the answer to the reader.

Jan van Bon,
Chairman of the SURVUZ Foundation

Contents

Reading guide – How to use this book

This book is not a management manual. It is a **book for reflection**.

You will not find a step-by-step plan, quick wins, or a checklist for "better management tomorrow." What you will find is a coherent exploration of **three tasks** and the associated **profiles** (roles) that have become intertwined in many organizations, but which are structurally separated in the USM management architecture:

- managing ⇒ **manager**
- coordinating ⇒ **coordinator**
- executing ⇒ **operator.**

The aim of this book is not to correct people, but to make profiles **visible and distinguishable** again. This requires something from the reader: a willingness to temporarily suspend their own assumptions.

Who is this book for?

This book is written for people who recognize themselves in at least one of the following situations:

- You have the title of *manager*, but your days mainly consist of coordination, escalations, and "making sure things keep running."
- You are not formally a manager, but you are always called when things get stuck.
- You work in operations and notice that unclear steering make your work more complex than necessary.
- You are part of a management team and you experience unrest, despite acceptable figures.

The book is explicitly **not** aimed at beginners. It assumes experience. That is precisely why it can be challenging.

Three key techniques in this book

1.  The Countervoice

In this book, you will regularly encounter **The Countervoice**.

The Countervoice is not a caricature, not a 'bad manager', not *a straw man*.
The Countervoice represents **reasonable, experienced professionals** who recognize themselves in what is described, yet struggle to let go of approaches that have felt logical and justified for years.
The Countervoice does not defend power, but meaning, identity, and *raison d'être*.

He (or she) asks exactly the questions that many readers ask themselves but rarely voice aloud. The Countervoice is not an obstacle in the argument, but a guide through the resistance.

If you recognize yourself in the Countervoice, please read on. This is not a sign of failure, but of commitment.

2. The ongoing case: Public Services Agency (PSA)

There is one common thread running through the entire book: the **Public Services Agency (PSA)** case.

PSA is a national public services organization. It provides services that are essential to citizens and businesses, such as licensing, registration, changes, and support calls.

PSA is a fictional organization, but it has been deliberately composed of recognizable elements:

- a national public services organization
- multiple value streams (permits, changes, support calls)
- strong hierarchy
- growing process and chain roles

- political and social pressure.

PSA has historically grown as a **functionally organized organization**:
- departments with their own responsibilities
- teams with specialist knowledge
- and managers who are responsible for "their part".

In terms of the book "From Silos to Ecosystem"*,* PSA is a **classic siloed organization**: well organized within fragments, but weak in end-to-end cohesion.

The case is **not** told as a success story.
There is no 'happy end'.

PSA serves as an observation tool: *this is what happens when roles become blurred.*

The same people keep coming back in this case story, but their meaning shifts as the reader learns to look at things differently:

Mary

Department manager (title: manager, but in reality mainly coordinator).
Committed, capable, exhausted. Prototype of the reader.
Formally:
- she is responsible for her department
- she is part of the management team
- she has budget and personnel responsibility.

In practice:
- she spends most of her time coordinating
- she resolves transfer issues between departments
- she intervenes when work threatens to come to a standstill.

What Mary hardly ever does is:
- explicitly designing work agreements
- establishing repeatable boundaries
- structurally limiting exceptions.

Not because she doesn't want to, but because the system constantly forces her to adjust her practice.

Rachid

Senior employee. Informal process coordinator. Formally, he does not have a management position.

In practice:
- he knows how the work flows through the organization
- he gets called when something gets stuck
- and he connects teams that do not formally manage each other.

Rachid:
- coordinates
- plans across team boundaries
- and resolves structural noise through personal commitment.

He creates cohesion.

However:
- he has no explicit mandate
- no formal job description
- and no limits to his responsibility.

Rachid is therefore the embodiment of **informal process coordination**: crucial to the functioning of PSA, but entirely dependent on the individual and goodwill.
Rachid is the invisible glue that holds everything together, but without a mandate.

Lucy

Operator. She carries out the work.

She:
- processes requests
- assesses cases
- and works according to procedures that are often incomplete.

Lucy is steered from two directions:
- from **line** management hierarchy: planning, capacity, priorities
- from the **process** logic: lead times, dependencies, chain agreements.

For Lucy, there is no matrix, no abstract model.
There is only work that needs to be done today.

When agreements are lacking, priorities clash, or exceptions are not documented, Lucy is forced to improvise. Design errors result in moral pressure.

The management team (MT)

A collective responsibility without a design.

The MT of PSA consists of the heads of the various departments, including Mary. Formally, this is the body that bears overall responsibility: strategy, performance, priorities, and cohesion.

In practice:
- the MT discusses performance, figures, and incidents
- sets priorities
- and makes decisions about capacity, policy, and resources.

The MT is intended to be the place where:
- coherence is designed
- boundaries are established
- and direction is given to the organization as a whole.

In reality:
- the MT mainly responds to what is visibly going wrong
- it discusses escalations that have not been resolved elsewhere
- and distributes scarce resources: attention, capacity, political space.

The MT's agenda is dominated by:
- incidents
- complex changes (projects)
- exceptions
- and tensions between departments.

Not because the MT wants it that way, but because this is the only place where fragments still meet. What is visible in Mary individually happens collectively in the MT.

The MT:
- coordinates between departments
- corrects conflicting priorities
- and intervenes when work threatens to come to a standstill.

That is coordination work. But because this coordination work takes place at the highest level, it gains status, weight, and urgency. It is perceived as 'management', when in reality it is compensation for a lack of architecture.

The MT thus acts as the last safety net of a fragmented system.

The case study develops alongside the book. In the final chapter, it is explicitly traced back along the timeline so that you can review it again — now with different eyes.

3. ⚓ The anchor

Each chapter ends with a single sentence that captures the essence of the chapter. This allows you to quickly scan the book, reread it, or discuss it with others.

How to read this book

Linear reading is preferred.

Although the sections can be read independently, the structure is **deliberately sequential**:

1. **PART I – The confusion**
   Recognition, not solutions. Disruption is the goal.
2. **PART II – What management really is**
   Detaching from titles and reflexes. Management redefined.
3. **Intermission – About the name 'manager'**
   A breather. Identity has a say.
4. **PART III – The coordinator called manager**
   Naming what has always happened.
5. **PART IV – The operator: where the work comes together**
   Where the consequences land.
6. **PART V – When roles are right again**
   Not a promise, but a choice.

Those who skip parts run the risk of drawing conclusions without having experienced the underlying tension.

What this book does not ask of you

- You don't have to agree right away.
- You don't have to apply anything immediately.
- You don't need to change your organization.

What this book does ask is something more subtle—and more difficult: the willingness to look differently at work you have been doing for years.

One last tip

If you catch yourself thinking things like:

- *"Yes, but that's just how it works."*
- *"This just isn't possible for us."*
- *"But someone has to solve it."*

...then you are exactly where this book wants you to be.

Don't read faster, read slower.

This book does not promise a solution.
It promises clarity.

What you do with that clarity is up to you.

We recommend reading this book together with the USM publication "From Silos to Ecosystem". Getting rid of your silos requires a strategic repositioning of the concept of 'management'.

Management summary

Many organizations do not struggle with a shortage of management, but with a **confusion of tasks and profiles**.

What is referred to as *management* today is, in reality, mostly **coordination**: aligning, escalating, putting out fires, and ensuring that work continues despite a lack of agreements. That work is important, but it is not management in the original sense of the word.

The result is predictable:
- 'managers' are structurally busy – because they coordinate
- coordination becomes personal and undervalued
- and design flaws ultimately end up in the execution.

This book again makes one distinction clear: **managing, coordinating, and operating (MCO) are three different types of work** — with different responsibilities.
- Managing is not intervening, but **designing**: making agreements, boundaries, and responsibilities explicit so that the work can take place without constant intervention.
- Coordination is **steering** executive work — according to the line hierarchy or the logic of the process — that monitors consistency within those agreements.
- Execution is the professional **realization** of the work — where line and process management come together.

As long as managers continue to coordinate, the system remains silent — because the design receives too little attention.
As long as the system remains silent, the organization continues to run on heroism.

This book shows what happens when tasks and profiles are aligned again:
- management becomes calmer and gains strategic weight
- coordination becomes visible, limited, and appreciated
- operating is protected against structural noise.

The book does not offer a step-by-step plan or a reorganization model.
It offers something more fundamental: clarity about who does what work — and who no longer needs to do it**.**

The final question is unavoidable: *Do we want the true manager to stand up so that the coordinators can get to work?*

The answer is not a matter of conviction, but of choice.

PART I – The confusion

Why everyone thinks they are managing

What you are going to lose here

If you read this part seriously, you will lose something.

Not your job.
Not your experience.
But a familiar story.

You lose the idea that busyness is a natural part of management.
You lose the certainty that involvement is the same as control.
And perhaps you also lose the idea that what you do automatically means that you are managing.

This section does not offer solutions.
It undermines assumptions.

Anyone who reads on from here can no longer casually say:
"That's just how it works."

1 When do we actually call someone a manager?

More than 150 people work at the **Public Services Agency (PSA)**.

The organizational chart contains a striking number of positions with the word *'manager'* in them. Department manager, team manager, chain manager, service manager, information manager.

Sometimes it is difficult to see exactly who does what, but one thing is clear: there are managers galore.

Yet no one really feels comfortable with that title.

Newcomers quickly notice this. Here, 'manager' does not mean that you can calmly think about how to organize your work. It means that you are called upon when things go wrong. When something gets stuck. When pressure builds up.

In many organizations, **manager** has become a collective term for anyone who no longer does purely executive work. As soon as someone no longer performs every task themselves but influences the work of others, the label appears. Sometimes formally, sometimes informally—but always with the same connotation.

That feels logical.
And that is precisely why it is treacherous.

This book is not just about work that is poorly organized. It is about something that is more difficult to define: **what happens to status, influence, and identity when it turns out that many 'managers' mainly *coordinate***.

Because in many organizations, being a manager is more than just a role. It is a title. A position. A promise of significance.
And that is precisely where the tension begins.

In daily practice, **managing** and **bearing responsibility** have virtually become synonymous. Those who bear responsibility are called managers. And those who are called managers are expected to resolve everything that comes between people and work. Questions, tensions, exceptions, misunderstandings — they all find their way to 'the manager'.

This has created a title that says more about **expectations** than about **the type of work** that is done. Being a manager means being called upon.

Mary is a department manager at **PSA**. She is part of the management team (MT). She is held accountable for performance, figures, and incidents. Formally, she is responsible for one large department. In practice, her work is much more diffuse. She connects people, prioritizes ad hoc, resolves escalations, and prevents problems from becoming visible before they become politically sensitive.

She does this well.
And that is precisely why she is called upon more and more often.

Slowly, something paradoxical emerges. The better someone is at solving problems, the less clear it becomes **why** those problems keep recurring. The manager becomes the linchpin. Not because it was designed that way, but because it works.

The title *of manager* has thus imperceptibly shifted from an indication of **design responsibility** to an indication of **availability**.

The Countervoice

"But someone has to take responsibility, right?"

Indeed. But taking responsibility is different from managing.

Responsibility means ensuring that work **can** be done — not that you yourself have to bear everything that is not specified. Those who confuse responsibility with intervention become trapped in their own involvement.

And that is precisely where the confusion that this book seeks to expose begins.
Because as long as everyone who intervenes is called a manager, one question remains unanswered:
Who actually designs the work?

That question is uncomfortable.
Not because it shortchanges people, but because it shows how normal it has become for design to *be* lacking — *and compensated for on a daily basis*.

⚓ **A title does not make someone a manager.**

2 Why managers are structurally busy

At **PSA,** Mary's schedule is packed for weeks ahead.
Meetings, coordination sessions, catch-ups, progress discussions, escalations. Between appointments, she quickly calls a colleague, responds to messages, and joins a meeting that wasn't actually intended for her, but where "her presence is useful".

At the end of the day, she is tired.
Not because she hasn't done anything, but because it never feels **finished**.

Being busy is not an incident.
Being busy is a state of mind.

In many organizations, being busy is not a problem, but proof.
Those who are busy matter. Those who are indispensable have status.

This chapter poses an uncomfortable question: **what if that busyness is not a sign of leadership, but of structural role confusion?**

In many organizations, management busyness is seen as a logical consequence of complexity. The environment is changing, demands are increasing, dependencies are growing — so managers are busy. That story sounds plausible. And it is partly true.

But it does not explain why the same busyness repeats itself year after year. Or why busyness often increases, even when processes, systems, and reporting are improved.

What becomes apparent here is something else. Managers are structurally busy because **they are constantly organizing work that has not been planned in advance**.

When coherence has not been explicitly designed, it must be achieved *during implementation*. This is done through consultation, coordination, prioritization, and mediation. Not because people like to do this, but because the work cannot proceed otherwise.

This pattern is recognizable at **PSA**. Many matters are formally regulated: there are procedures, systems, and policy documents. Yet every day, questions arise that cannot be answered unequivocally:
* What is the priority now?
* When is something really urgent?
* Who decides when in doubt?
* What do we do when rules conflict?

These questions rarely end up in the system.
They end up with people.

And especially with people who supervise, have authority, or are accessibility.
Managers. Or rather, people with that *title*.

The Countervoice

"But isn't this part of the job? Isn't management about coordination?"

That is precisely the confusion.

Aligning is not a goal.
It is a **symptom**.

As long as work does not flow predictably through the organization, coordination will remain necessary. And as long as coordination is necessary, someone will be needed to take it on. That someone is usually called *a manager*.

The result is a curious mechanism. Managers solve problems that shouldn't exist — and they do it so well that no one wonders why those problems keep coming back.

Busyness thus becomes a sign of commitment.
Availability becomes a virtue.
And an empty schedule feels almost suspicious.

~ At **PSA,** it is noticeable that moments of relative calm often coincide with discomfort.
"Is something wrong?"
"Shouldn't I be somewhere?"
"Am I missing something?"

Calm is not experienced as a result, but as a risk.

This is not a personal problem.
It is **a cultural pattern**.

In organizations where management is primarily associated with intervention, doing nothing is quickly seen as negligence. Whereas it is precisely the lack of intervention that sometimes reveals what is structurally missing.

But we are not there yet.

For now, it is important to see something else: managers are not busy because they plan poorly or delegate too little. They are busy because **they are doing structural work that does not actually belong to them** — work that is only necessary because the system is silent.

As long as that is the case, the pressure will remain.
No matter how capable the manager is.
No matter how hard they work.

So the question is not how managers can become less busy.
The question is: **why does this work always end up with them?**

That question brings us to a more uncomfortable insight, which is the focus of the next chapter:

What does it say about an organization when managers become indispensable?

⚓ **Busyness is often the result of a lack of management, not leadership.**

3 Indispensable managers and vulnerable organizations

What does it say about an organization when managers become indispensable?

At **PSA**, it is not said out loud in formal meetings, but everyone knows it.

"Without Mary, things come to a standstill."

When she is not there, decisions are left undone.
Escalations take longer.
Departments wait for each other.
Tension mounts.

This is not a criticism.
It's an observation.

Indispensability sounds honorable.
In reality, it is a warning sign.
Not only for the organization, but also for the manager himself.

Indispensability is often seen as a quality. Someone who is indispensable must know a lot, be able to do a lot, and mean a lot. In performance reviews, it sounds like a compliment. In the corridors, it sounds like recognition.

But indispensability is an ambiguous concept.
Because organizations are not solo projects. They are designed to produce work, even when people change, are absent, or leave. As soon as the functioning of the whole becomes dependent on specific individuals, it is not a sign of strength, but of vulnerability.

At **PSA,** this vulnerability is visible in small signs.

Vacations are 'coordinated'.
Important decisions are postponed until someone returns.
New employees are told: "You need to talk to Mary, she knows how this works."

Slowly, knowledge shifts from the system to people.
And with it, the burden also shifts.

The Countervoice

"But you can't capture experience and knowledge, can you?"

That's right. Not everything can be captured. But that's not the point.

The problem is not that people have experience.
The problem is that organizations become dependent on that experience **because essential proceduers are lacking**.

Indispensable managers are rarely the result of exceptional complexity. They are the result of the fact that coherence has not been explicitly established. What has not been recorded must be repeatedly remembered, interpreted, and monitored.

That work is done in people's heads.
And minds are not scalable.

~ At **PSA**, Mary knows when something is really urgent.
She knows the sensitivities.
She sees where a decision will cause problems later on.
She corrects things before they go wrong.
Not because she has been assigned to do so, but because she can — and because no one else explicitly does it.

This is how indispensability is slowly built up. Not through ambition, but through repetition.

The danger of this lies not only in absenteeism or departure. It lies in the fact that problems **are no longer visible**. As long as an indispensable manager continues to intervene, the system appears to function. The disruption is absorbed before it takes shape.

That is reassuring. And precisely why it is risky. Because what is never visible cannot be discussed. And what is not discussed cannot be designed.

The Countervoice

"But someone has to intervene when things go wrong, right?"

Certainly. But intervention should never structurally replace design.

When managers become indispensable, it is a **warning sign** that the organization has started to run on implicit agreements. Agreements that are not laid down in writing, but are nevertheless observed — as long as the right people are present.

That feels efficient. Until it isn't anymore.

~ At **PSA**, dependence on a few key individuals has become so normal that it is hardly seen as a problem anymore.

New initiatives are guided by them.
Changes are coordinated with them.
Their agendas determine the pace of the organization.

The system adapts to people. Not the other way around.
And with that, the question shifts imperceptibly from *"how did we set this up?"* to *"who can solve this?"*.

That is the moment when management no longer designs, but **supports**.
Not because that is the intention, but because no one else is doing it.

This chapter therefore does not ask Mary a personal question. It asks PSA — and every organization that recognizes itself in this pattern — an organizational question: **Do we want our functioning to depend on indispensable people?**
Or do we want to understand why they have become indispensable?

That question is uncomfortable. But necessary. Because only when we dare to ask it does it become clear why organizations increasingly rely on consultation, coordination, and personal commitment.

And that brings us to the next chapter, which examines a familiar pattern: **What happens when everything becomes consultation?**

⚓ **Indispensability is a sign that the system is failing and that people are compensating for this.**

4 When everything becomes consultation

Why consultation does not solve the work, but replaces it.

When something gets stuck at **PSA**, the reflex is predictable.

A consultation is scheduled.
Sometimes an existing consultation is expanded.
Sometimes a new meeting, specifically "to discuss this properly."

It feels constructive.
Everyone sits around the table. Everyone is there. They coordinate.
And usually it helps. For a while.

Consultation is rarely the problem. The problem is what is replaced by this consultation. Because consultation not only keeps the work going — it also keeps **existing power relations intact**.

In the weeks that follow, the tension seems to ease. Agreements are made. Action points are noted. Everyone knows what is expected of them again. Until the next moment when the work starts to grind to a halt again — and consultation is needed once more.

In this way, consultation slowly becomes the dominant routine.

At **PSA,** there are now consultations for progress, coordination, escalation, chains, quality, capacity, and prioritization.
Some are structural, others temporary.
Some with regular participants, others ad hoc.

What they have in common is that they all try to do what the system does not do automatically: organize coherence.

Consultation is thus no longer a means, but a **replacement mechanism**.

The Countervoice

"But isn't consultation a form of collaboration?"

Collaboration is contributing together to a shared result. Consultation is just one way of organizing that — and often the most labor-intensive.

When collaboration becomes dependent on constant coordination, it is a sign that agreements are lacking. Not at the detail level, but at the level of work distribution, sequence, and decision-making.

At **PSA,** you see this clearly. In consultations, there is a lot of talk about *what* needs to be done, but rarely about *why* this needs to be discussed over and over again.

The question of how the work is designed remains unaddressed.

This has a logical consequence: decisions made in consultation have a short shelf life. They apply to this situation, with these people, under these circumstances. As soon as something changes — a new colleague, a different case, an external stimulus — the discussion has to be held again.

Consultation thus produces **temporary cohesion**.

The Countervoice

"But without consultation, don't you end up with silos?"

Isolation does not arise from a lack of consultation.
They arise because there are no shared procedures that apply across team boundaries.

In organizations where little is laid down, consultation becomes the glue. But glue wears out. It dries out, loses its effectiveness, and has to be reapplied again and again. That takes time, energy, and attention — especially from those who are already at the center of things.

These indispensable *managers* naturally become regular participants in more and more consultations. Not because they want to control everything, but because their presence speeds up the process. They know the context. They can make decisions. They ensure that the conversation does not derail.

And again, that seems like a quality.
Until it becomes structural.

When everything becomes a consultation, something subtle but profound happens. The organization loses its memory. What was agreed today has to be explained again tomorrow. What was decided yesterday only applies as long as everyone still remembers it.

The system learns nothing. People remember everything.

~ At **PSA,** this leads to a growing sense of fatigue.
Not because people don't want to cooperate, but because cooperation has to be reinvented over and over again.

Every consultation requires preparation.
Every coordination requires concentration.
And every decision without assurance requires repetition.

Peace and quiet become scarce.
Attention becomes fragmented.
Overview becomes personal.

This chapter shows that consultation is not the enemy — but it is a **poor substitute for design**.

As long as work is not organized in such a way that it can take place *without* constant consultation, consultation will continue to grow. And as long as consultation grows, managers will remain busy. Not because they want to be, but because the system needs them to be.

This concludes Part I. We have seen:
- how 'manager' became a title
- why managers are busy
- what indispensability means
- and why everything becomes consultation.

The conclusion has not yet been reached. But it is now in the air.

In the next chapter, we cautiously spell it out:

Why does this feel normal—when it isn't?

⚓ **Consultation replaces design when arrangements are lacking.**

5 Why this book starts off awkwardly (and cannot be otherwise)

Anyone who reads this book up to this point may get the feeling that something is going wrong.
Too much consultation. Too busy managers. Indispensable people. Work that has to be coordinated over and over again.

And yet, for most people, it feels **completely normal**.

At **PSA**, this way of working is rarely openly questioned.
On the contrary.

Being busy is seen as commitment.
Being available is seen as responsibility.
Consultation as cooperation.
And indispensability as quality.

That is no coincidence.
It is **culture**.

In many organizations, busyness is a socially accepted response to complexity. Those who are busy are apparently doing important work. Those who are always available demonstrate leadership. Those who solve problems before they become visible protect the organization.

These are understandable reflexes.
And they are rewarded.

The Countervoice

"But that's just how it works in organizations."

That's true — but only because we've set it up that way.

What is happening here is that behavior is being confused with necessity. Because everyone does it this way, it seems inevitable. Because it is familiar, it feels logical. And because it is valued, it is rarely questioned.

But familiar is not the same as functional.

At **PSA,** you can see how this pattern reinforces itself.
New managers quickly learn what is expected of them.

Not through formal instructions, but through observation.
They see who gets recognition.
Who is consulted.
Who is seen as 'strong'.

These are not the people who design boundaries.
These are the people who **step in**.

That's how involvement becomes a role.
And availability becomes an identity.

The tricky thing is that this pattern is morally appealing. No one wants to be the one who withdraws when things get tough. No one wants to say, "We're not going to solve this now". Certainly not in a public organization, where social consequences are tangible and mistakes quickly become visible.

The Countervoice

"But we work with people, not schedules, right?"

That is precisely why this is so persistent.

Because the work affects people, people take it personally. Because it's exciting, intervention is rewarded. And because it feels morally right, the system is pushed further and further into the background.

Slowly, the question *"How did we set this up?"* disappears.
And is replaced by: *"Who can solve this?"*

That is the moment when confusion becomes structural.

What has become apparent in Part I is not a collection of separate problems. It is a single coherent pattern:

- titles have shifted
- expectations have grown
- and design has been replaced by consultation.

Not because someone decided it should be that way.
But because it worked — until it no longer did.

This chapter therefore ends not with a judgment, but with a tipping point.

Because once you see that this pattern feels logical **because** it is social, not because it is functional, space is created for another question. Not an accusatory question, but a fundamental one:

If this feels so normal — what are we actually doing when we think we are managing?

That question marks the end of Part I.

This book is not going to say that managers are superfluous.
It will do something more difficult: show that **much of what is now called 'management' is, in reality, coordination**.

That insight is painful.
Not because coordination is inferior, but because it **lacks the status, mandate, and narrative associated with the title 'manager'**.

⚓ **This book is not about working better together, but about stopping compensation.**

The end point of Part I

Reflection – PSA
What happened here because management was absent, but was assumed to be present?

If you have read this far, you will have seen that:
- management is often confused with busyness and involvement
- indispensability is not a strength, but a sign of system failure
- consultation and coordination arise where design is lacking.

At the end of this section, nothing has been resolved.
That is intentional.

As a reader, you have not been given a new model.
No other title.
No method.

What you do have is recognition—and a slight sense of disruption.

A question that lingers:

If this is what we call management... what are we actually doing?

That question naturally leads to **Part II — What management really is**.

That's where the unraveling begins.

In **Part II**, we let go of the obvious. Not to reject it, but to examine it. We put titles, expectations, and routines aside for a moment and take a fresh look.

Not at who does the work.
But at **what management really is**.

PART II – What management really is

Breaking free from titles, hierarchy, and reflexes

What you will lose here

In this part, you lose freedom of action.

Not because you are allowed to do less, but because not everything falls under 'management' anymore.

You lose the right to intervene without a plan.
You lose the self-evident nature of ad hoc decisions.
And you lose the comfortable vagueness in which specification and realization overlap.

This part requires precision.
And precision excludes.

Those who continue here can no longer solve everything that visibly goes wrong.
And that is precisely the intention.

6 What is management, apart from job and title?

What remains of management when you remove title, hierarchy, and power?
→ Management is the advance design of conditions within which work can take place.

After Part I, many readers are left with an uncomfortable feeling.
If all this is not a coincidence — the hustle and bustle, the consultations, the indispensability — what do managers actually do when they manage?

~ At **PSA,** this is not an abstract question.
Mary officially holds a management position.
She is on the MT, manages a department, and has budget responsibility.

But when she takes an honest look at her week, she sees one thing above all else: she is constantly busy **making sure that today runs smoothly**.

She resolves bottlenecks.
She mediates between teams.
She decides on exceptions.

That feels like responsibility.
But is it management?

When you let go of job titles and hierarchy for a moment, something becomes clear: management is not a position, but a **specific type of work**. It is work that is not part of the process, but above it. Not executive, not coordinating, but **creating conditions**.

Management is not about *what* happens today, but about *the context in which* it happens tomorrow.

The Countervoice:
"But I am ultimately responsible. So I have to intervene, don't I?"

Final responsibility does not mean that you have to solve everything yourself.

It means that you are responsible for the **structure** in which others do their work. As long as that structure is lacking, intervention remains logical — but it is not management, it is compensation.

⚓ **Management is not a title, but a design activity.**

7 Why management is design work

Why does management start with structure rather than people?
→ Because cohesion does not arise from action, but from established choices.

~ At **PSA**, design sounds uncomfortable to many managers.
As if it were about schedules, models, or consultants.
When in reality it's about something very mundane: **working agreements that remain in place**.

At PSA, many agreements are implicit.
Everyone 'knows' how things work.
When something is urgent.
Who to call when things get stuck.
What to do when rules conflict.

That knowledge lives in people, not in the system.

The result is predictable: as soon as the situation deviates slightly, coordination is needed. And that coordination requires time, energy, and attention — especially from managers.

Management is the work that **translates** this **implicit knowledge** into **explicit boundaries**. Not to regulate everything, but to prevent repetition.

The Countervoice:
"But we work with professionals, not machines."

That is precisely why design is necessary.

Professionals need room to maneuver **within clear boundaries**. Where those boundaries are lacking, every decision becomes personal — and every exception becomes political.

Designing is not distancing yourself from the work.
It is ensuring that the work does not have to be reinvented every day.

~ When a problem recurs at **PSA**, it often becomes personal.
"Who was in charge of this?"
"Why wasn't this flagged?"
"Couldn't this have been coordinated?"

Rarely is the question asked: *how did we actually set this up?*

Management does not start with people.
Management starts with **structure**.

Designing is about making choices that don't have to be made over and over again:
- how work is connected
- where transfers take place
- which sequence is leading
- and who is allowed to manage what.

Without a design, every situation is new.
And every new situation requires coordination.

The Countervoice

"But we're not architects, are we? This isn't a drawing board."

Design is not a blueprint.

Design is about making coherence explicit. As soon as that coherence is lacking, *coordination* arises automatically.
Not because people like it, but because otherwise the work cannot be done.

At **PSA**, there are policies, routines, and guidelines.
But there are hardly any explicitly **agreed routines** that define how work actually flows through the organization.

The result: everyone organizes their own coherence.

That feels like commitment.
In reality, it **is** design poverty.

⚓ **Without design, any guidance is temporary.**

8 What management focuses on: design, cohesion, and cause

Management is often recognized by its interventions.
By making decisions.
Visible action when things get tough.

But that is precisely where the confusion begins.

What is visible feels like control.
What is audible feels like leadership.
And what is urgent automatically seems to be a management issue.

This chapter makes one clear distinction: **management does not focus on what arises, but on what needs to be repeatable.**

Setting boundaries: deciding what does not need to be decided over and over again

Setting boundaries is not a policy activity.
Nor is it an abstract exercise in advance.

Setting boundaries means making explicit:
- what is fixed
- what is predictable
- and what is not up for discussion every time.

A good set of boundaries prevents the same question from coming up again and again — in consultation, in escalation, or in improvisation.

~ At **PSA**, many boundaries are implicit.
Mary expects teams to "know how things should be done," but nowhere is it specified:
* how priorities are determined
* when exceptions are allowed
* whether or who decides when interests clash.

The result is predictable: questions come back anyway, but now as a problem.

The Countervoice

"But we can't determine everything in advance, can we?"

That's right. But setting boundaries is not about carving everything in stone.

It's about **deciding what doesn't need to be decided over and over again**.

Without boundaries, there is no freedom, only noise.

Designing coherence instead of solving incidents

Where boundaries are lacking, attention naturally shifts to incidents.
What goes wrong today demands attention today.

In the **PSA** management team, this looks like this:
* cases that get stuck
* citizens calling
* teams that contradict each other.

Within PSA, the word 'boundaries' evokes resistance. It sounds like restriction, like control. Whereas daily practice shows something else: the lack of boundaries does not lead to freedom, but to **permanent negotiation**.

Take the concept of 'urgency'.
Each team has its own definition.
What is urgent in one department is "difficult but not urgent" in another.
The result is not flexibility, but escalation.
And escalations always end up with managers.

Everything requires a response.

The MT discusses these matters carefully, with commitment and seriousness.
But what the MT does here is **achieve coherence**, not design it.

Every time an incident is resolved without explicitly stating the underlying agreement, the system is confirmed as it is.

The Countervoice

"But if we don't resolve it now, it will get stuck."

That's true.
And that is precisely why this pattern is so persistent.

Management is confused with rescue here.
But rescue is temporary. Design is structural.

Symptoms are signals, not commands

Symptoms have a compelling force. They demand action. They make discomfort visible.
But a symptom is not a command.

When an employee at **PSA** has to go the extra mile to complete a case, it seems like an individual problem:
* lack of experience
* excessive workload
* or insufficient coordination.

But every time this happens, it points to the same thing: a missing or unclear agreement in the design.

This may seem like a personal problem, but it is a design signal.

Management does not start by solving that one case, but by asking why this type of case repeatedly requires improvisation.

Those who continue to solve symptoms are postponing the real problem.

What this requires of management

Management should therefore not focus on:
- today's incident
- this week's escalation
- or the pressure of the moment.

Management focuses on:

- patterns
- repeatability
- and predictability of work.

This requires something more difficult than intervention: **not acting immediately**.

The Countervoice

"But then nothing will happen, will it?"

On the contrary. It is precisely by not intervening that the shortcomings of the design become apparent.

That moment — when you hear the system creaking — is not a failure of management, but the beginning of it.

Management does not focus on what is causing friction today, but on what will no longer cause friction tomorrow.

It designs coherence before people have to realize it.

⚓ **Coherence requires design, incidents only require attention.**

9 Separation of duties as a design principle

Many organizations talk about roles.
About responsibilities.
About who is 'in charge' of what.

But as long as it is unclear **what type of work** belongs to which role, that conversation remains superficial.

Separation of duties is not an HR tool.
It is a **design principle**.

It makes it explicit that:
- specifying work is different from realizing it
- deciding is different from executing
- and designing is different from solving.

As soon as these types of work become intertwined, control becomes invisible.

Specifying and realizing are different responsibilities

Specifying means:
- determining *what* the work should deliver
- under what conditions
- and within what limits.

Realizing means:
- carrying out the work
- coordinating
- planning
- and ensuring that the result is actually achieved.

~ At **PSA**, these two forms of work are constantly intertwined.

Mary sets priorities **while** also intervening in the implementation.
Rachid coordinates work **without** explicit agreements.
And Lucy gets work done **while** having to make decisions that should actually have been laid down in advance.

This feels efficient.
But it makes responsibilities unclear.

The Countervoice

"But someone has to decide when there's friction, right?"

That's right. The only question is: when should that decision have been made?

Within the **USM Management Architecture,** separation of duties is therefore not an organizational choice, but a **fundamental design principle**. The tripartite division of Manager–Coordinator–Operator (the MCO formula of USM) forms the basic backbone of this.

Separation of duties works recursively

Separation of duties is not a one-time separation between management and execution.
It works **recursively** throughout the entire organization (Figure 1).
- The manager specifies, the coordinator realizes.
- The coordinator specifies, the operator realizes.

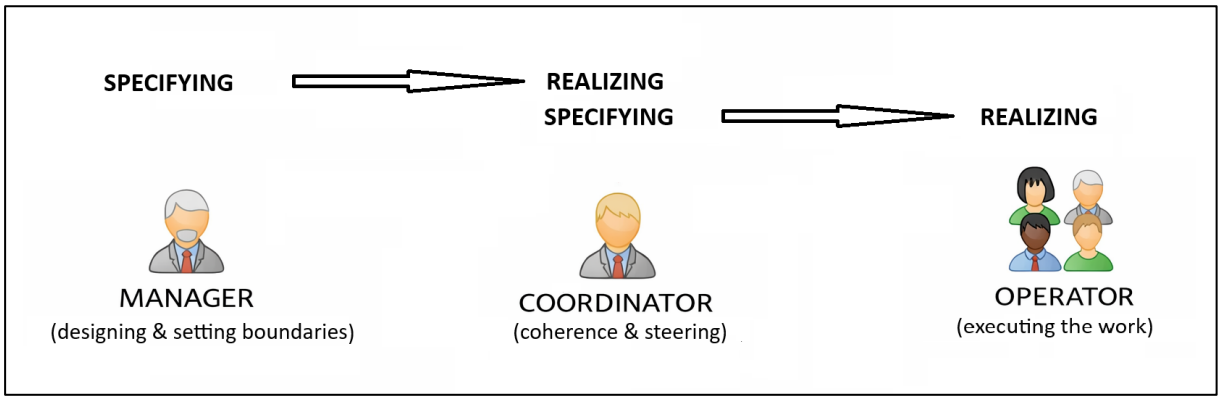


Figure 1. The repeated application of the principle of 'separation of duties' to the tripartite division of manager-coordinator-operator (the MCO formula of USM)

It is always the same principle, applied at a different level.

~ At **PSA**, this clarification is missing.

This creates confusion:
* managers do coordination work,
* coordinators make design decisions,
* operators improvise on structural questions.

This may seem like a personal problem, but it is a design issue.

Where there is no separation of duties, roles become blurred.

Why separation of duties causes tension

Separation of duties sounds rational.
In practice, it feels uncomfortable.

It means
- that you can no longer solve everything yourself
- that you have to wait until agreements have been made
- and that problems sometimes have to become visible first.

The Countervoice
"But that slows down the work."

That's true — temporarily.

But without separation of duties, speed is bought at the price of structural noise.
The work continues, but the pressure remains.

Separation of duties is not a delay in work, but an investment in repeatability.

Separation of duties makes it clear who is responsible for what — and who no longer needs to be.

⚓ **Specifying and realizing should never be part of the same role.**

10 Matrix organizations as a logical consequence

A second management principle concerns the distinction between the dimensions of process and line.

- **Line** refers to the hierarchical structure of teams within the organization. This is also known as 'the org-chart'. Traditionally, organizations have primarily managed along the line. Each organization devises its own team structure and thus its own 'line'.
- The **process** represents the logical sequence of activities that must take place from the moment the organization is triggered to deliver a performance until the completion of the work involved. For service organizations, a single universal, integrated, and comprehensive process model applies, which is laid down in the USM method.

The line can only oversee the work **to a limited extent**, up to the boundaries of the team involved. The process, on the other hand, provides **end-to-end** insight into all activities involved in a performance. For this reason, organizations are increasingly focusing on process-based working.

Managing an organization's activities along both the line and the process is called **matrix management** (**Fout! Verwijzingsbron niet gevonden.**). Organizations that use m atrix management are called **matrix organizations**.

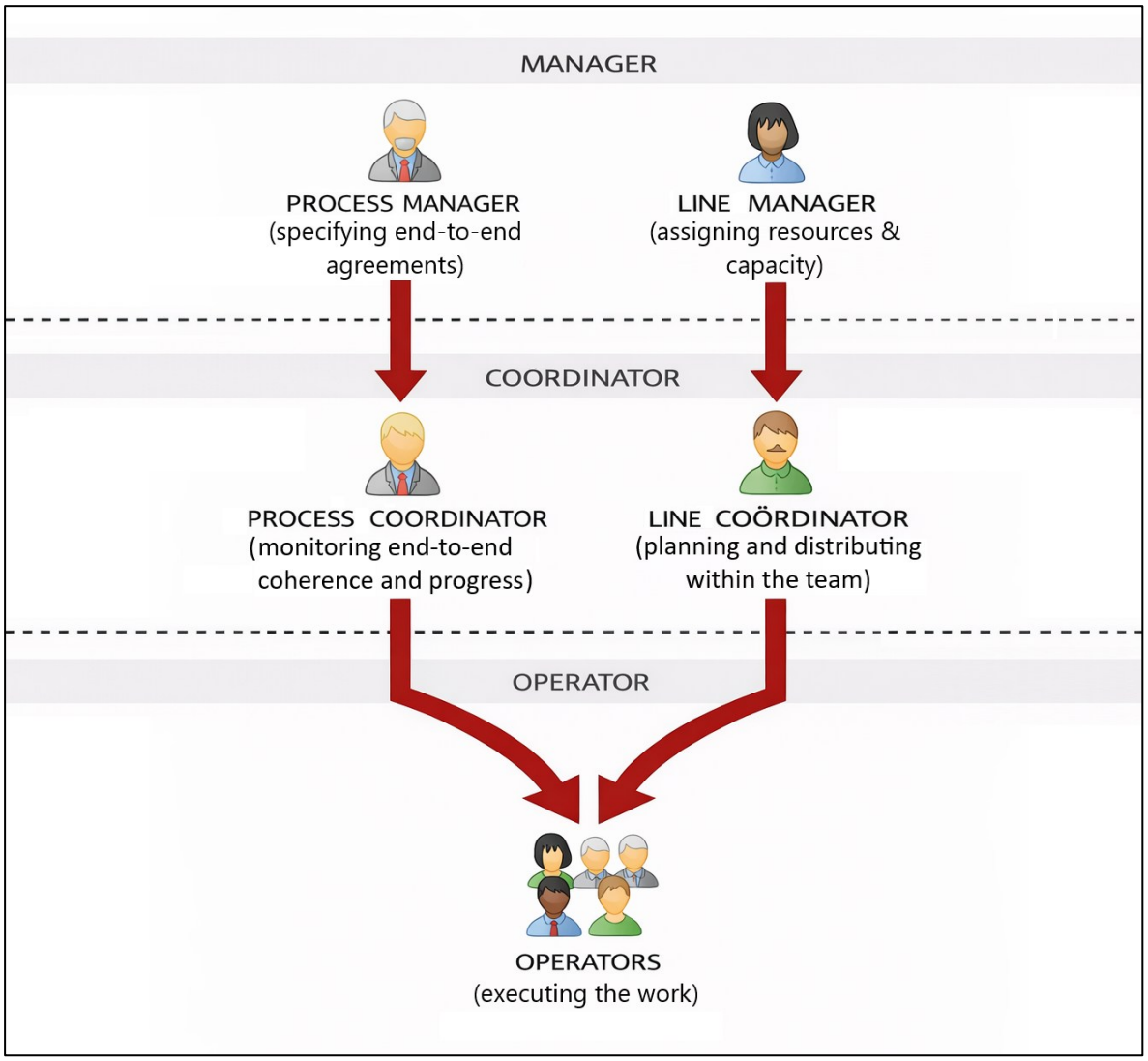


Figure 2. Matrix management: management based on both process and line.

Along the line, the **line manager** *specifies* and the **line coordinator** is responsible for *realization*.

Along the process, the **process manager** *specifies* and the **process coordinator** is responsible for *realization*.

In both cases, the coordinator *specifies* the work that is then *realized* by the **operator**.

The operator has no choice between line and process.
Everything that is specified must **come together** in a way that **is feasible**.

The Countervoice

"But in practice, those roles are intertwined."

Exactly.
And that is not a human error, but a design flaw.

As long as separation of duties and matrix management are not explicitly applied, roles will continue to blur. And as long as roles blur, people will continue to compensate. This book is not a plea for stricter rules, but for a purer design.

Only when this principle is recognized and accepted does it become clear why so much 'management work' is actually coordination work — and why that becomes unsustainable in the long run.

~ At **PSA**, Rachid realizes that he only steps in when the work is not coherent across team boundaries. Rachid recognizes himself in the role of process coordinator.

Mary realizes that she has exclusive authority within the execution of work by her own department. She recognizes herself in the role of line coordinator.

This may seem like a personal problem, but it is a design signal.

⚓ **Matrix management is not a choice, but a consequence of process-based working.**

11 What if line and process collide?

What if management via line and process leads to a difference of opinion?
→ Then the outcome is determined by the distribution of power.

~ At **PSA**, Rachid and Mary notice that the organization has not officially specified which of them has the most management authority in the event of a difference of opinion.

In practice, everyone does what Mary decides. Mary has been working at PSA much longer and is held in higher regard because she manages a large department. Rachid can at most raise a warning finger about effects that go beyond the boundaries of the department. Usually, he is only proven right after the fact.

Because the differences of opinion sometimes lead to unpleasant situations, Mary and Rachid decide to jointly submit the question of formal management authority to the MT.

In the daily execution of work through process management and line management, conflicts of interest and opinion can naturally arise. This leads to a conflict in the steering of the operator.

It must always be crystal clear to the operator which of these steering styles determines what work needs to be done.

The organization therefore chooses its own balance of power between these two forms of steering: does the line coordinator have more say in the prioritization of the operator's work, or does the process coordinator have more say in this (Figure 3)?

To avoid conflicts in steering, an organization makes an explicit decision regarding which form of steering dominates: *is the organization **line-based** or **process-based** in the steering of the operators' work?*

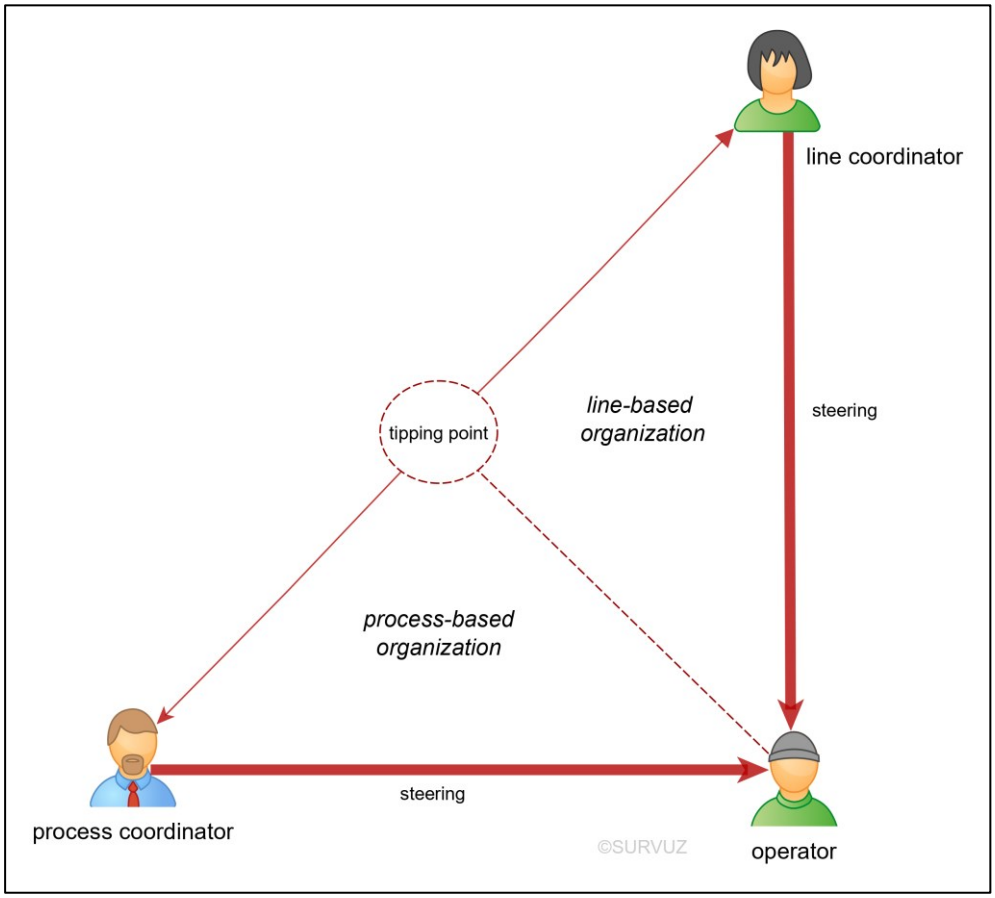


Figure 3. The power balance between the process coordinator and the line coordinator determines the nature of the organization: process-based or line-based.

Once the organization has determined this balance of steering power, the escalation pattern in the event of a clash of views is immediately settled once and for all.
This is clear to all involved and therefore prevents escalations.

If, despite the established division of steering powers, the process coordinator and line coordinator involved still disagree on the deployment of the operator, **escalation** follows.

The established balance of power then determines exactly the path along which the escalation proceeds (Figure 4).

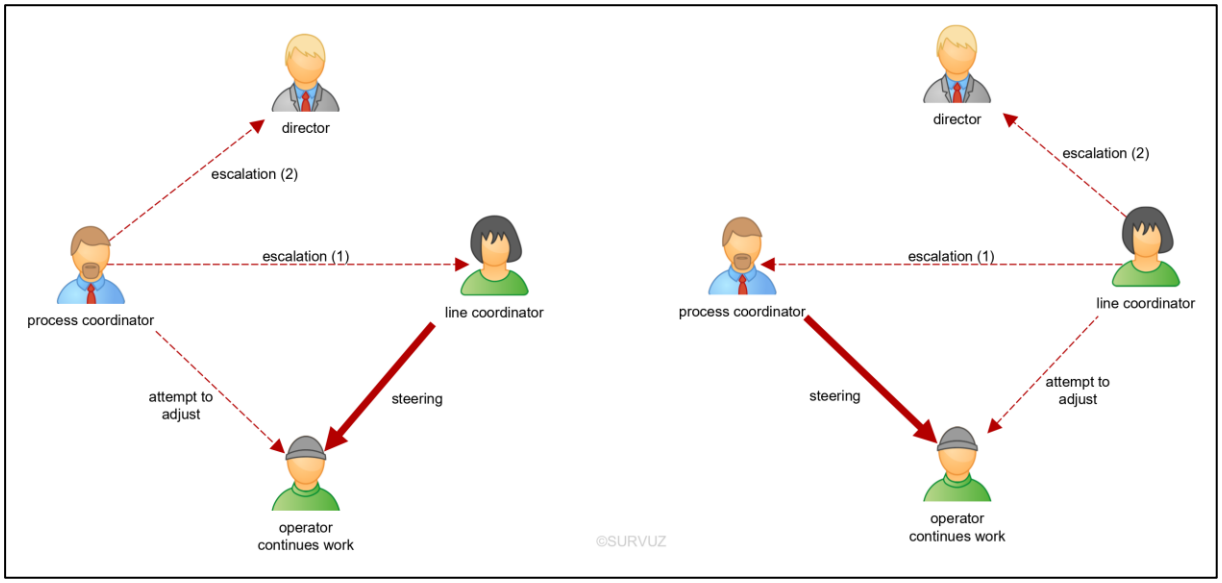


Figure 4.The nature of the organization, whether line-based (left) or process-based (right), determines how escalations proceed.

If the process coordinator in a *line-based* organization disagrees with the line coordinator's management, the process coordinator escalates.

If the line coordinator in a *process-based* organization disagrees with the direction taken by the process coordinator, then that line coordinator escalates.

In this way, the organization is able to avoid the majority of all escalations by clarifying in advance which coordinator has which decision-making authority.

⚓ Where line and process collide, there is a lack of explicit design.

12 When inaction is professional

When is non-intervention better management than intervention?
→ When the system learns to speak instead of the manager.

On a Friday afternoon, a disruption occurs at **PSA** that Mary would normally deal with immediately. She knows who to call. She knows how to fix it.

This time, she doesn't do it. Not out of indifference. But out of choice.

She lets the system speak.
Rachid sees the problem and jumps in — as usual.
The question of steering power that both of them brought up with the MT is still there — untouched.

The result is uncomfortable. The problem becomes visible. The conversation becomes more heated. Not about who failed, but about why this could happen.

The Countervoice
"But then it looks like I'm shirking my responsibility."

Failure to act is only negligent if there is no plan to fall back on.

If that plan does exist — or needs to become visible — inaction is sometimes the most professional thing a manager can do.

Managing requires decisions that **allow others to work without you**. That means establishing boundaries, even if they cause friction. And accepting that not everyone will agree with them right away.

At **PSA**, that is exciting.

Decisions are visible.
They have consequences.
Intervening feels safer.

But intervention does not change anything structurally.

Not intervening feels like negligence. Especially in an organization where commitment is measured by availability.

Yet it is precisely this restraint that is sometimes necessary to reveal what is missing. As long as managers continue to compensate — and thus mainly coordinate — the system remains silent.

The Countervoice:
"Then it looks like I'm failing."

That is precisely the tension.

Inaction is not passivity.
It is a conscious choice to let the design speak for itself.

~ At **PSA**, this is the tipping point.

Here it becomes clear that management requires more than just commitment.
It requires distance from incidents — not from people.

And that concludes Part II.

⚓ **Not intervening is leadership when it makes the system visible.**

The end point of Part II

Reflection – PSA

Which design choices were never explicitly made at PSA, and who structurally compensated for this?

If you have read this far, you will have seen that:
- management is not intervention, but design
- ad hoc action always indicates a lack of boundaries
- peace is an administrative result, not personal happiness.

You now know:
- what management really is
- how little it resembles what the average manager does on a daily basis
- and why that is not a personal failure.

That realization requires breathing space.

That is why we now have an **interlude chapter** about the title of *manager*.
Only then can the next question be asked:

If this isn't management, then what is it?

And with that, we open **PART III – The coordinator called a manager**.

INTERLUDE – About the title 'manager'

Why does this redefinition of management strike such a sensitive chord?
→ Because title, status, and income have come to coincide with coordination work.

What you stand to lose here

It is not a model that is at stake here, but an identity.

You may lose a title that gave you stability.
Or the narrative with which you explained your role until now.
Or the recognition that came from visible intervention.

This part offers nothing in return.
No new name.
No alternative label.

Only the question:
what work do you really do — and what does that mean for how you see yourself?

Those who continue reading here choose not to look away.

About the name 'manager'

Up to this point, this book has discussed work, roles, and design.
About specifying and realizing. About separation of duties. About coherence.

All of that is still relatively safe.
It's about *the system*.

But now comes an inevitable question, which is no longer about the organization, but about the reader: **What does it actually mean to call yourself a manager?**

In many organizations, 'manager' is not a job description, but an **identity**. The title stands for influence, responsibility, meaning. For participating at a different level. For being heard.

That makes this question uncomfortable.
Not because the analysis is incorrect, but because it touches on something that is rarely made explicit: **status**.

If managing really boils down to designing boundaries — and not to the daily realization of work — then that means that many people who call themselves managers are actually doing something else. Not less important work. But *different* work.

Coordinating.
Aligning.
Ensuring that things continue.

That work is essential.
But it is not what is traditionally meant by the title 'manager'.

The Countervoice
"So now you're telling me I'm not a manager?"

No.
This book does not tell you who you are. But it does tell you what management is.

It simply shows that **title and work do not coincide**. That is something else.

The pain lies not in the distinction, but in what it reveals. Because when title and work diverge, questions arise that have long been postponed:

- Where do I get my legitimacy from?
- Am I needed because of my position, or because of my actions?
- What remains when I am no longer the one who solves problems?

These are not organizational questions.
These are **questions of identity**.

Many organizations avoid these questions by not asking them. By maintaining titles, even when the work changes. By calling everyone who bears responsibility a 'manager', regardless of the nature of that responsibility.

That seems friendly.
It isn't.

It pushes tension forward. It perpetuates role confusion. And it forces people to derive meaning from busyness, indispensability, and visibility.

The Countervoice

"But without that title, I lose influence."

Maybe.
But perhaps you'll mainly lose a story that no longer makes sense.

And stories that no longer fit sooner or later become a burden.

This book does not ask you to relinquish responsibility. It asks you to define your position more clearly. To recognize what work you *really* do — and what work you no longer need to do. And what work might finally get the attention it always deserved — but never got.

That is not a demotion.
It is growing up.

Those who read this interlude and decide to continue will no longer read as outsiders. They read as a participant.

⚓ Title and identity become detached as soon as work turns out to be different than expected.

PART III – The coordinator called manager

The work that happens everywhere, but is never called that.

What you are going to lose here

In this part, you lose a heroic role.

You lose the idea that cohesion is created through personal commitment.
You lose the romance of indispensability.
And you lose the justification that "someone has to do it."

This section shows that coordination is essential — but management is not.

Those who continue reading here will no longer confuse coordination with management.
And can no longer see themselves as both savior and designer.

13 What do you actually do all day?

When is management coordination?
→ When it focuses on alignment and progress, not on design.

~ At **PSA,** Mary is rarely asked this question directly. But it is constantly in the air. In conversations with colleagues, in reflection sessions, in her own head at the end of a long day. What *am* I actually *doing*?

Her schedule is full. Meetings, coordination, brief interventions. She steps in when things get stuck, calls when something threatens to go off the rails, makes connections between decisions taken elsewhere. She is visible, approachable, involved.

But when she reduces her work to its essence, she sees something remarkable: virtually nothing she does changes the structural organization of the work. She ensures that things continue **today**. But only within the boundaries of her own team.

That is *coordination* — the constant alignment of work that does not come together naturally. It is necessary work as soon as cohesion is lacking. Not because people fail, but because the system is silent.

~ At **PSA,** this happens everywhere. Not as an assigned role, but as an implicit expectation.

As soon as work affects multiple teams, as soon as transfers are vague, as soon as priorities clash, coordination arises naturally.
And whoever has an overview gets the work.

That person *is* often *called* a manager.

The Countervoice

"But without that coordination, everything will come to a standstill."

Exactly. That's not a counter argument. That's the point.

Coordination doesn't arise because people are doing things wrong, but because there is a lack of cohesion.

~ When Mary describes her work at **PSA**, she rarely uses the word 'manage'.

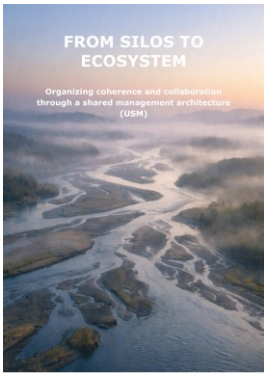
She says she 'coordinates' things, 'switches gears', 'makes sure things keep moving'. She talks about bringing people together, clarifying expectations, balancing priorities.

She is constantly engaged in:
* weighing priorities against each other
* connecting people
* smoothing out expectations
* putting exceptions into context.

It is intensive work. Important work. And visible work. But it is not management work. It is **coordination**.

⚓ **Coordinating is realizing cohesion, not designing it.**

Intermezzo – From silos to role confusion



Anyone who has read the book "From Silos to Ecosystem" will recognize the pattern that becomes apparent here.
Organizations are described there as a collection of fragments: departments, domains, teams — each with its own logic, its own goals, and its own optimizations.

That book emphasized how this affects service delivery, collaboration, and chains.
In this book, we look at another effect of exactly the same fragmentation: **what it does to roles and self-images**.

Each fragment has a leader — with the title 'manager'.
Someone who is responsible for 'his' or 'her' piece.

But as soon as that fragment has no obvious embedding in a larger whole, a problem arises. The manager of the fragment cannot suffice with managing in the sense of setting boundaries and designing. After all, there *is* no overarching design within which that fragment functions.

And so something predictable happens.

The manager of the fragment simultaneously becomes **a coordinator**. He coordinates with other fragments. Resolves transfer problems. Arranges exceptions. Keeps everything together. Not because he aspires to do so, but because otherwise the work would come to a standstill.

What became apparent in "From Silos to Ecosystem" as a **structural cooperation problem** appears here as **a structural role confusion**.

The Countervoice

"But if I don't keep my fragment together, no one else will."

Exactly. That is not a personal failure.
It is the logical consequence of an organization that consists of silos.

As long as fragments are primarily managed as independent units, their leaders will be forced to switch between managing and coordinating. Not because they don't understand their role, but because the system forces them to do so.

This book therefore identifies the same problem as the previous one, but from a different angle:

As long as we continue to manage silos, we cannot expect clear-cut roles.

The transition from silos to ecosystems is not just an organizational task.
It is an **architectural prerequisite** for separating management, coordination, and execution again.

Only when cohesion no longer needs to be organized personally can the manager stop coordinating — and start managing again.

"From Silos to Ecosystem" describes why organizations fragment; this book shows what that fragmentation does to roles, status, and identity.

14 Coordinating is not managing, but it is also not executing

Coordination sits uncomfortably between two worlds.

It is not execution. The coordinators do not carry out the work themselves.
But it is not management either. The coordinators do not design the work.

Coordination focuses on:
- progress
- alignment
- timing
- keeping work together that would otherwise fall apart.

It is executive work, but not at the object level.
It is executive work **at the level of cohesion**.

~ This is clearly visible at **PSA**.

Every day, Mary decides who tackles what first, which request takes priority, which team has to wait a moment.

That feels like deciding, and therefore like managing.
But her decisions do not change the structure that makes these considerations necessary time and again.

She keeps the work going.
She does not change the system.

The Countervoice
"But I do make decisions, don't I?"

Yes. But they are decisions **within** the system, not **about** the system.

That distinction is crucial — and rarely made explicit.

~ At **PSA,** Mary decides the order of work.
Not because she wants to, but because otherwise the work would stagnate.

Those decisions feel heavy, but they don't change the way the work is organized.

That is the hallmark of coordination: it keeps the work going, but **does not change the system**.

⚓ **Coordination supports the work, but does not control it.**

15 Two forms of coordination that we confuse

Why is the distinction between line coordination and process coordination crucial?
→ Line coordination organizes people, process coordination organizes coherence.

At **PSA**, two forms of coordination are constantly confused.
Often carried out by the same people, without the difference being mentioned.

The first form is **line coordination**. This concerns people: deployment, availability, division of tasks within a team. Mary does this as a matter of course. She looks at who has capacity, who is stuck, who can temporarily take over something. This work is necessary — but by definition limited to her own department.

Then there is **process coordination**. This is not about people, but about work: sequence, transfers, coherence in the value stream. At PSA, this work is often done informally, by people like Rachid. He "knows the chain", gets called when things get stuck, connects teams that don't find each other on their own.

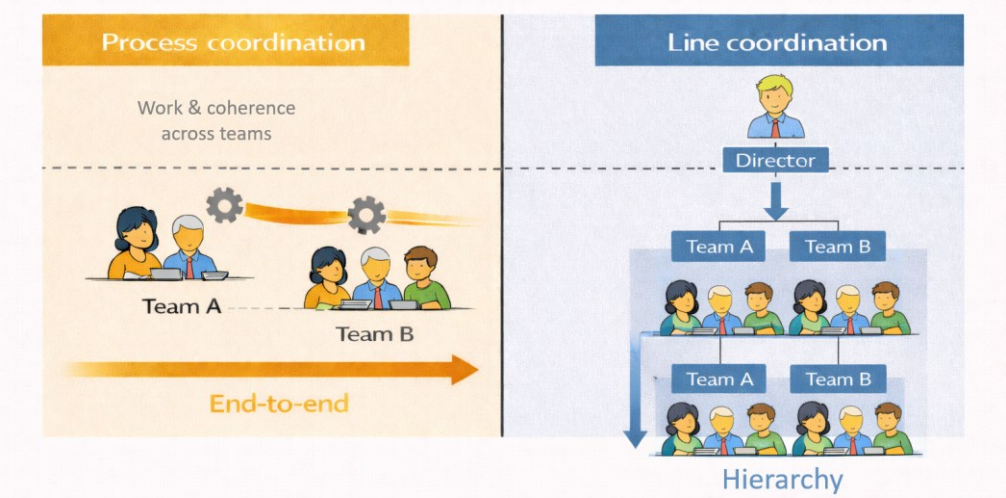


Figure 5. Line coordination and process coordination are two different perspectives on the same thing. Work & coherence is different from people & capacity.

The problem arises when these two forms of coordination are mixed. A team coordinator is expected to plan their own team's work while also maintaining end-to-end consistency across other teams involved in a process or a value stream. This is structurally unsustainable, inevitably creating authority conflicts.

Reflection — PSA

Looking back at PSA, something becomes painfully clear.
Rachid did not become important because he had power, but because the system made him necessary. Where cohesion is not designed, an informal coordinator will naturally emerge.

The Countervoice
"But don't we work in a matrix?"

Formally, perhaps. Functionally, no.

⚓ **The line manages people, the process manages work.**

16 Why line coordination can never be end-to-end

Why can a team never control a value stream?
→ Because value streams, by definition, run through multiple teams.

A service starts with the customer and ends with that same customer. In between, there is an **end-to-end workflow** that almost always crosses multiple teams. Nowadays, this is also called *a value stream*. No single team oversees the entire stream.

The Countervoice
"But my team is responsible."

Responsible for a **contribution**, not for the entire stream.

Line coordination can never be end-to-end because, by definition, it stops at the team boundary (Figure 6). Anyone who thinks that a team controls an entire service is in reality only controlling a fragment — and optimizing that fragment at the expense of the whole.

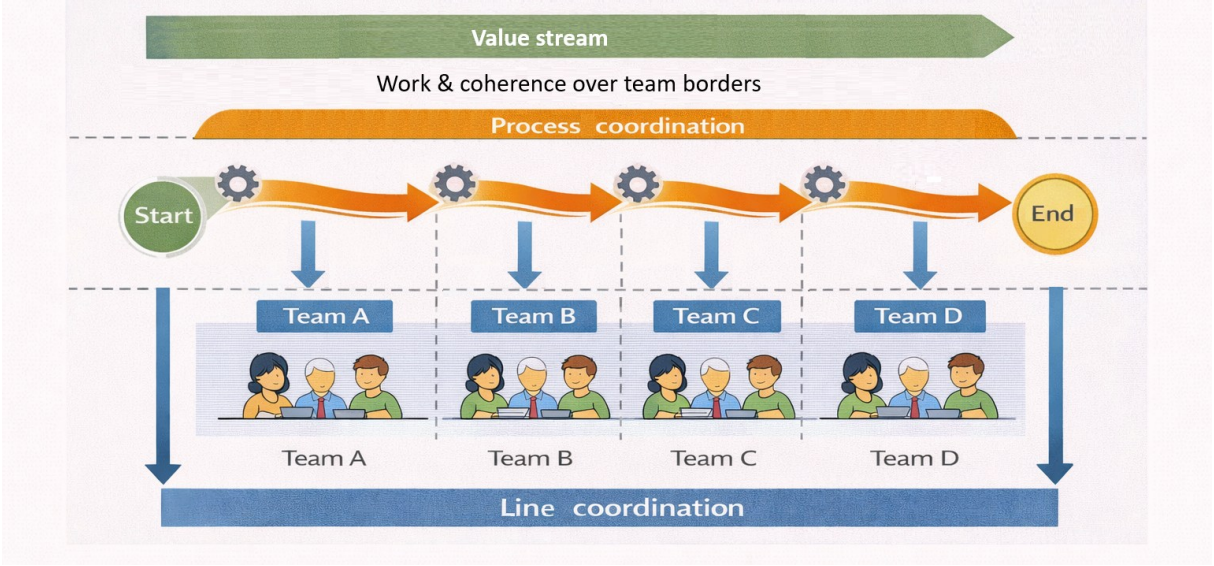


Figure 6. Line coordination cannot control the value stream because only process coordination controls end-to-end.

At **PSA**, you see this every day. Every team works hard, but the turnaround time for the service remains unpredictable. Not because people are doing their jobs poorly, but because no one is managing the cohesion.

A persistent misunderstanding at **PSA** is that teams "deliver the service".
This is understandable: the customer calls the team, the request is with the team, the output comes from the team.

But value streams work differently.

⚓ **Value streams do not stop at team boundaries.**

17 From coordinating to compensating: why managers support the system

Coordination is normal work.
As soon as work becomes interdependent, someone has to coordinate, plan, and connect.

This is not a weakness of an organization, but a fact of collaboration.

The problem does not arise with coordination itself, but when coordination **is used structurally to conceal design flaws**.

Then coordination turns into compensation.

Coordination as necessary executive work

In **PSA,** coordination is visible everywhere.

Mary coordinates projects and prioritizes other work within her department.
Rachid coordinates work between teams, monitors lead times, and ensures that cases do not remain unattended.

This is legitimate work:
- it connects dependencies
- it prevents stagnation
- it enables collaboration.

As long as coordination is
- is temporary
- feeds back into design
- and is limited by agreements...

it fulfills its function perfectly.

Coordination **supports the work**, but does not control it.

When coordination turns into compensation

At **PSA**, something else happens.

The same adjustments keep recurring.
The same exceptions have to be resolved over and over again.
And the same tensions keep surfacing.

However, nothing will change in terms of the underlying agreements.
What was temporary becomes structural.
What was supportive becomes fundamental.

This may seem like a personal problem, but it is a design signal.

Coordination is no longer a response to design, but a replacement for it.
And that comes at a price.

Why compensation is shifting upward

Compensation rarely stays in one place for long.

When coordination becomes structural, it moves up in the organization.
Not because someone decides it should, but because that is where:
- there is escalation power
- formal responsibility is felt
- and moral pressure converges.

~ At **PSA,** this means that Mary intervenes more and more often.
Not because she wants to, but because she is called upon when things go wrong.

The MT also takes on this role:
* it distributes scarcity
* it resolves conflicts
* it makes ad hoc decisions.

This is how compensation is **referred to as management work**, when in fact it is coordination work.

The silent shift in roles

This is where a fundamental shift is taking place.

Managers continue to be called *managers*, but they are doing less and less management.

They:
- do not design boundarieas
- make few structural choices
- but ensure that the system continues to run today.

The Countervoice
"But isn't this just leadership?"

It feels that way because it *is* visible.
But visibility is not a criterion for management.

What is happening here is not leadership in design, but leadership in compensation.
And as long as managers compensate, the system remains silent.

The closed loop

This pattern reinforces itself.
- Design is lacking → coordination picks up the slack.
- Coordination becomes structural → compensation shifts upward.
- Managers compensate → problems remain invisible.
- Invisibility → design fails to materialize.

The loop closes.

No one fails.
Everyone does what is necessary.
And yet nothing changes.

Coordination only becomes problematic when it has to carry what should have been designed.

At that point, management disappears not because it is abolished, but because it **is replaced by compensation**.

⚓ **Where design is lacking, coordination moves up and management disappears.**

18 The revaluation of coordination

What changes when we finally call it coordination?
→ Then management finally becomes possible again.

Naming coordination is not a semantic exercise.
It is a structural intervention.

Coordination as an explicit profile makes three things possible:
1. Management can design again.
2. Coordinators receive recognition without heroism.
3. The system becomes audible.

And that is the prerequisite for real change.

When **PSA** cautiously begins to make process coordination explicit, something remarkable happens.
Not immediately calm.
First, tension.

Because naming means setting boundaries.
And limiting means that someone else no longer has to do something.

The Countervoice

"So I have to stop helping?"

No. You have to stop structurally carrying what should have been designed**.**

⚓ **In a good design, coordination connects what has already been agreed upon.**

The end point of Part III

Reflection – PSA

Who achieved coherence here, and why was it coordination rather than management?

If you have read this far, you have seen that:
- coordination is necessary as soon as work becomes dependent
- much 'management work' is in fact realization
- personal commitment masks structural design flaws.

At the end of this section, something has become irreversible.

As a reader, you now know:
- what work you do
- what that work is called
- and why it was never intended to be management.

That is not a judgment.
It is clarity.

But clarity has consequences.
Because if this is coordination, then the following question inevitably arises:

What does this mean for the work that is actually being done?

That question opens **PART IV – The operator: where the work comes together**.

And there it becomes clear who pays the price as long as roles blur.

PART IV – The operator: where the work comes together

Working within agreements

What you stand to lose here

Here you lose distance.

You lose the comfortable perspective from above.
You lose the idea that problems arise "lower down in the organization".
And you lose the assumption that flexibility is always a virtue.

This section brings the consequences of design flaws back to where they land: in everyday work.

Anyone who reads this section seriously can no longer say, *"They'll manage, won't they?"*

19 What is operator work, really?

What does it mean to be an operator in a designed system?
→ Operator work is the expert execution of agreed-upon actions.

~ At **PSA**, the word *operator* is hardly ever used.
People talk about employees, professionals, implementers.
As if execution is self-evident and does not require a specific profile.

Lucy notices this every day.
She works at PSA in a team that handles requests.
She has no management title, no coordinating role, and no seat at the MT table.
Yet her work is anything but simple.

Her work does not consist of a single action, but of a series of choices:

- how she plans her work
- which requests she tackles first
- when she deviates from the standard
- and when she considers escalation necessary.

She does not "just execute".
She **realizes** the work.

Operator work is the expert execution of agreed actions within a designed system. It requires craftsmanship, concentration, and judgment — precisely because not everything can be explicitly defined.

As soon as the system malfunctions, it becomes clear how much thought this requires.

The Countervoice
"But operators just execute, don't they?"

That idea only holds true as long as the system works.

As soon as agreements on how work is done are lacking, it becomes clear how many professional decisions operators make every day to keep the work going at all.

⚓ Operator work is the expert execution of agreed actions within a designed system.

20 Working at the intersection of line and process

Why is the operator always in a matrix?
→ Because execution depends on both line and process.

~ For Lucy, work at **PSA** never comes from just one direction.

On the one hand, there is the **line**:
* her team
* her commitment
* her available time
* her immediate supervisor.

On the other hand, there is the **process**:
* the sequence of steps
* the transfer to other teams
* the requirements of the value stream.

These two forms of control come together at the operator (Figure 7).
Always.

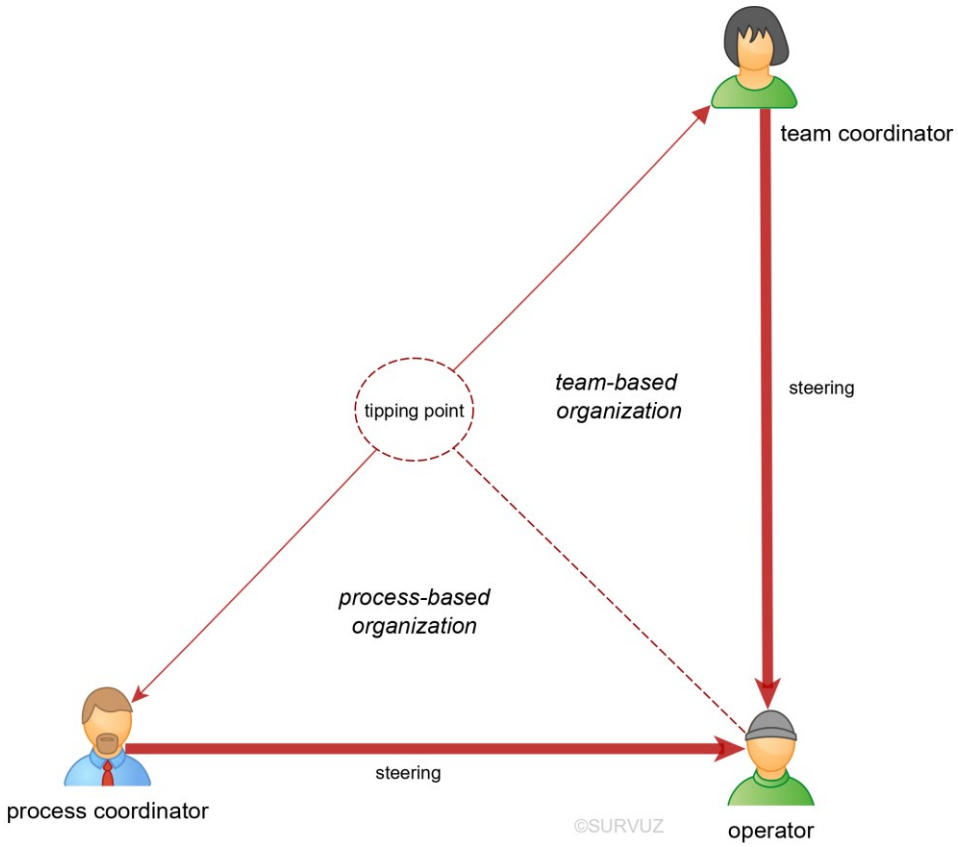


Figure 7. Line and process management converge at the operator. It must be clear to the operator which form of steering determines the sequence of work.

~ For Lucy, it does not matter whether an agreement stems from hierarchical line management or from process logic. What matters is whether those agreements are **consistent**.

At **PSA**, this is often not the case.
Both assignments are logical in themselves — and impossible together.

The Countervoice

"But operators have to be flexible, don't they?"

Flexibility without coherence is not flexibility.
It is contradiction.

When line and process do not reinforce each other, the operator is given two tasks at once, each of which is logical on its own — but together they are impossible to carry out.

When we revisit **PSA** from the perspective of Lucy's work, what was previously hidden becomes visible.

The tension described in Part I as "busyness" appears here as daily improvisation.

What was resolved at the top was felt at the bottom.

⚓ **All control comes together in the operator's work.**

21 Agreements are not suggestions

Why can the operator only work professionally within clear agreements?
→ Because craftsmanship can only exist within predictable boundaries.

~ At **PSA**, we often talk about "space for professionals".

In practice, for Lucy, this means that many things are not explicitly laid down.
She has to assess for herself what the priorities are.
She has to decide for herself how strictly rules are applied.
Decide for herself when something can be done "in between other tasks".

That seems like trust. But it feels different.

Without clear agreements about how work is done, every deviation becomes personal.
Every choice has to be explained. Every mistake feels like failure.

That is not autonomy. That is a moral burden.

The Countervoice
"But we don't want robots, do we?"

Standardization does not take away craftsmanship.
It **protects** craftsmanship.

Agreements on how work is done are not a straitjacket, but a demarcation: they clarify where professional space begins — and where it ends.

If something goes wrong in the value stream, it is rarely directly linked to design choices.
The problem first appears during implementation.

~ For Lucy, at **PSA**, that means:
* extra work
* extra explanation
* extra recovery
* extra stress
* and sometimes guilt.

This may seem like a personal problem, but it is a design signal.

Missing boundaries are filled in with improvisation and extra effort.
Conflicting priorities are resolved with overtime.

The system seems to function, but only because operators fill in the gaps.

The Countervoice
"But they don't see the whole picture, do they?"

Exactly. And that's why it's unreasonable for them to bear the consequences.

As long as operators continue to compensate, design flaws remain invisible. What is never visible cannot be discussed — and therefore cannot be improved.

⚓ **What has not been designed is solved with improvisation.**

22 Why operators don't improve the system

Why is structural improvement not the responsibility of the operator?
→ Because identifying problems is not the same as being responsible for them.

At **PSA**, Lucy can spot exactly where things are going wrong.

She knows which steps are unnecessary, where information is missing, and where transfers are problematic.

Yet she is not the one who changes the system.

And rightly so.
Operators provide **signals**, not solutions.
Operators should be involved in improvements – but they are not responsible for the system.

Improvement requires:
- overview
- decision-making power
- and design responsibility.

The Countervoice
"But don't they know best what can be improved?"

Knowing is not the same as being responsible.

When operators would make structural improvements:
- they compensate for design flaws
- they normalize inadequate boundaries
- and the need for management decision-making disappears.

A healthy system uses signals from operations to *design*, not to leave the burden there.

The operator may, of course, make suggestions for improvement. The more, the better. You can even expect that from the operator in a systematic way. But that does not make the operator *responsible*.

⚓ **Improvement requires design responsibility, not operational involvement.**

The end point of Part IV

Reflection – *PSA*

Which design errors resulted in extra work, doubt, or moral pressure?

If you have read this far, you have seen that:
- design errors always end up in daily work
- operators solve problems they did not cause
- flexibility is often a response to unclear agreements on how work is done.

At the end of this section, it has become clear:
- where the work really happens
- who bears the consequences of role confusion
- and why execution needs protection.

In many organizations, execution is implicitly seen as the lowest level. As if thinking happens at the top and doing happens at the bottom.

The reality is the opposite.

The operator is **in the middle** — at the intersection of everything that is conceived, coordinated, or neglected above. This is where line and process come together. This is where management and coordination are tested in practice. This is where it becomes clear whether the design is correct.

The operator is not the end point.
The operator is the anchor of reality.

And that is precisely why the system can only mature **if management, coordination, and operation each take their own place**.

The question that now inevitably follows is not a technical one, but a fundamental one:

What happens if we take this seriously?

That question opens **PART V – When roles are right again**.

PART V – When roles are right again

What happens when the system takes over.

What you will lose here

In this part, you lose a familiar form of control.

You lose the feeling of being needed because you intervene.
You lose the visibility of solving problems.
And you may also lose the pace you were used to.

What replaces it is quieter.
Less heroic.
And harder to explain.

Those who continue here accept that management is not a stage, but a design discipline.

23 What changes when managers stop coordinating?

What happens when managers literally take their hands off the work?
→ Problems become more visible, but finally manageable.

The first thing that changes at **PSA** is not the structure.
It is the behavior.

Mary intervenes less.
Not because she is less involved, but because she has started to look at things differently.
She no longer automatically joins every meeting where something is amiss.
She no longer resolves incidents "because it's faster".
She refers questions back: not to people, but to agreements.

The effect is immediately noticeable. And uncomfortable.
Problems don't disappear. They become more visible.

The Countervoice
"See? Now things are going wrong."

That is a misconception.

What is becoming visible here was already going wrong — only until now it was **being carried by people**. By coordination. By improvisation. By good intentions.

When managers stop coordinating, they stop **compensating**.
And with that, the system gets its first chance to speak.

At **PSA**, after a few weeks, Mary notices something unexpected: her calendar is emptier.
Fewer meetings.
Less coordination.
Less urgency.

But the decisions that remain carry more weight.

Meanwhile, Rachid is getting busier and busier. His help in planning work is increasingly recognized and appreciated — because people simply need someone with an overview.

The decisions are no longer about today, but about tomorrow.
Not about who solves something, but about **what is fixed**.
Not about people, but about structure.

The Countervoice
"But now I can no longer show how hard I work."

That's right.

Management is becoming less visible. But visibility has never been the measure of value.

True management means making choices that only have an effect later on. That requires calmness — and it does not tolerate heroism.

⚓ **Management becomes quieter when the system carries the work.**

24 What coordinators gain when their work is recognized

What happens when coordination gets its own profile?
→ Clarity, boundaries, and professional authority.

~ At **PSA**, Rachid is given an explicit profile for the first time: *process coordinator*.

No additional hierarchical power.
No bigger title.
But clarity.

His work does not change significantly. His position does.

He no longer has to fix everything. He no longer has to jump in everywhere. He no longer has to be morally responsible for problems he cannot solve.

The Countervoice
"But won't that create extra layers?"

No. We are creating **clear job profiles**.

What disappears is the illusion that someone can do everything at once: manage people, oversee processes, and design systems. What returns is professional boundaries.

As soon as a coordinator role is more clearly defined, the manager and operator roles also benefit from the increased clarity.

~ By explicitly positioning Rachid as a process coordinator at **PSA**, many ad hoc questions disappear from Mary's work.

Escalations are reduced to design signals instead of urgent decisions.
Mary intervenes less, but can no longer postpone design choices.
Her work becomes calmer, but more demanding in terms of content.
This is management in its purest form.

With an explicit process coordinator, Lucy has one dominant management logic per work situation.

Conflicting signals disappear before they reach her.
Lucy has to improvise less in response to structural ambiguity.
Her craftsmanship is protected from design flaws.
She does not work any less hard, but she does work with greater certainty.

⚓ **Coordination becomes easier when she no longer has to compensate.**

25 What operators gain when the system becomes reliable

What changes for operators when roles are clear?
→ Peace of mind, craftsmanship, and reliability — without heroism.

~ At **PSA,** careful experimentation is underway with explicit process coordination and clear agreements on how work is done.
Not everything changes immediately.
But something stands out.

Lucy has to improvise less.
She has to doubt less.
She has to defend what she does less.

The work doesn't get easier — but it does become more predictable.

The Countervoice
"But won't the work become boring?"

What disappears is the noise.
What remains is craftsmanship.

When the system supports the work:
- it creates space for quality
- craftsmanship increases
- and the need for heroism disappears.

Not as a goal, but as a consequence.

~ For Lucy, the work at **PSA** is changing subtly, but fundamentally.

She receives fewer conflicting signals.
Fewer exceptions.
Less moral pressure.

Because she can refer to agreements, Lucy has to explain her choices less often.
Not to individuals.
Not to improvisation.

Reliability is not the enemy of meaning.
It is the prerequisite for it.

⚓ **Good management enables craftsmanship without heroism.**

26 Why is responsibility shifting from people to structure?

At **PSA**, responsibility was with people. With Mary, with Rachid, with Lucy. Not formally, but in practice.

In the new situation, responsibility is shifting to agreements. To boundaries. To the design of the work.

In organizations, responsibility is often made personal.

- Whoever is addressed *has* responsibility.
- Whoever intervenes *takes* responsibility.
- And whoever is available *bears* responsibility.

That feels logical, but it is misleading. Responsibility that is structurally assigned to people is usually an indication that it **cannot land anywhere else**. Not because people fail, but because the design is silent.

The Countervoice

"But then people hide behind rules, don't they?"

Only if the design is poor.

Good structure does not remove responsibility—it **shifts it to the appropriate level**.

That does not mean that people become less important.
It means that they no longer have to bear burdens that were never theirs to bear.

This is clearly visible at **PSA**.

As long as process coordination was implicit, the following happened:
* Mary was held accountable for results she could not control.
* Rachid became dependent on personal relationships to keep work going.
* Lucy had to make choices that should have already been made.

Everyone did 'their best'. And that is precisely why the system remained intact.
Responsibility was everywhere, but nowhere explicitly assigned.

If everyone is responsible – nobody is responsible.

For many organizations, this shift feels like a loss.
Less personal control. Less visible decisiveness. Fewer heroic stories.

The Countervoice

"But then no one will feel responsible anymore."

The opposite is true.

When responsibility is embedded in structure, it becomes verifiable, repeatable, and discussable. People remain responsible for their work, but no longer for the failure of the system.

⚓ **Good structure shifts responsibility to where it can be managed.**

27 What does this require of managers' self-image?

Why are heroic stories disappearing?
→ Because the system is taking over the work.

This is the most difficult chapter.
Not conceptually, but personally.

~ For many managers at **PSA**, this shift feels like a loss.
Of influence.
Of visibility.
Of feeling needed.

Mary recognizes that.
Less intervention sometimes feels like less meaning.
As if her value diminishes now that she is no longer involved in everything.

The Countervoice
"So what's left?"

Exactly — *that* is the question.

What remains of leadership when fires disappear?
When heroism becomes unnecessary?
When peace is no longer an achievement, but the norm?

~ In the new situation at **PSA,** fewer people are mentioned by name.
Less "she saved the day", less "he solved it".

Mary is mentioned less.

Not because she does less.
But because the system carries more weight.

Hero stories are symptoms. They point to exceptions that have become the norm. In a mature organization, exceptions are rare — and therefore not a source of status.

The Countervoice
"But then no one will see what I do anymore."

That's right. But it wasn't about you.

What was visible was never the real work.
The real work was in **what was prevented**, not in what was solved.

Heroic stories disappear when:
- exceptions are no longer the norm
- fires no longer need to be extinguished structurally
- and success is no longer personal.

⚓ **Mature organizations do not need heroes.**

28 The real price of role purity

What does it cost to actually implement this?
→ Status, informal power, and comfortable vagueness.

PSA is reaching a point where choices can no longer be postponed.

Functions must be reassessed.
Titles discussed.
Expectations adjusted.

Not everyone feels comfortable with this.

Some experience it as a loss.
Of status. Of influence. Of familiar routines.

The Countervoice
"Can't we just do this halfway?"

No.

Role purity is not optimization.
It is a fundamental choice.

Those who choose this path can no longer return to busyness as a virtue or improvisation as a system.

At **PSA,** the nature of Rachid's work changes.
He no longer has to jump in everywhere. He is invited in advance to contribute his ideas.

His role is now defined.
His responsibility is clear.
That feels lighter — even though the work is no less complex.

For Lucy, the pace changes.
Less noise.
Less explanation.
Less moral pressure.
Not because everything is perfect, but because the system no longer forces her to compensate.

Predictability emerges for teams.
Not as rigidity, but as a basis for improving together.

When can you say: management is back?

Not when everything is running smoothly.
Not when everyone is satisfied.

But when:
- agreements support the work
- coordination is supportive
- operation is protected
- and managers are involved in design rather than intervention.

Then management is back on track.
Not loudly. Not heroically. But effectively.

⚓ **Management returns when the system carries the work.**

The conclusion of Part V

Reflection – PSA

What would happen at PSA if no one compensated for this anymore?

If you have read this far, you have seen that:
- clear roles do not make the work easier, but they do make it calmer
- responsibility shifts from people to structure
- management only becomes visible when compensation stops.

This section offers no promises. No end goal. No success story.
It shows what happens when you are consistent. And that is enough.

This brings the book to its final question.

Not: *Can this work?*
Not: *Is this more efficient?*
But: *Do we actually want this?*

Do we want:
- fewer heroes
- less visible hustle and bustle
- less personal dependence?

Do we want power to shift from individuals to structures?
That responsibility no longer coincides with intervention?

The Countervoice

"And if we decide not to?"

Then that is also a choice.

But at least then we know what we are preserving — and who pays the price for it every day.

This book does not end with a model, a step-by-step plan, or a promise.
It ends with clarity.
- Managing is designing.
- Coordinating is executive work on cohesion.
- Operator work is professional implementation within agreements.

Anything that deviates from this is not a coincidence. It is a choice.

The only question is: **who dares to make it?**

This book does not accuse managers.
It asks one question of the system in which they have come to function:
"What is the difference between a manager, a coordinator, and an operator?"

Roles can be fulfilled temporarily by one person, but never simultaneously.	
Manager	→ specifies, designs, sets boundaries, fulfills preconditions
Coordinator	→ creates cohesion, plans, coordinates, directs
Operator	→ executes within agreed boundaries

The course of the PSA case

Here we describe – in retrospect – the timeline and the tension arcs that were visible throughout the book (Figure 8). Relive the case, but now through the eyes of someone who has read the book.

Why the MT is stuck

The PSA MT is aware of the pressure. Members feel that they are constantly "putting out fires" and have little time for structural improvement.

Yet the pattern hardly changes.
There are three reasons for this:

- **Visibility -** Incidents are visible and urgent. Design work is quiet and slow.
- **Collective responsibility -** Design requires explicit choices that create winners and losers. Coordination keeps everyone on board.
- **Moral pressure -** In a public organization, inaction feels like negligence.

The MT therefore implicitly chooses **realization over specification**.

The Countervoice

"But if we don't take this on, it will harm citizens.
We can't just ignore this, can we?"

That's right.
And that is precisely why this pattern is so persistent.

The MT does what is necessary to keep the system functioning *today*.
But as long as it continues to do so, the system will continue to produce the same behavior *tomorrow*.

PSA's MT is not the cause of the problems. It **amplifies** them.

Everything that is unclear lower down in the organization

- comes together here
- is discussed here
- and is temporarily resolved here.

This makes it seem as if the MT is 'in control'.
In reality, the MT bears the weight of an organization that functions without an explicit management architecture – and it doesn't take the time to repair this.

The woodcutter with the blunt axe.

The role of the MT in the transition

When PSA cautiously begins to clarify the separation of duties and other management principles, the role of the MT changes dramatically.

The MT:

- stops solving structural noise
- makes explicit what does and does not belong in the MT
- focuses on design questions rather than incidents.

At first, this feels like a loss:

- less visible action
- less direct influence
- fewer 'hero moments'.

But it is precisely here that management becomes possible again**.**

In summary, the MT of PSA:
- consists of competent and committed managers
- functions as a collective coordinator
- and structurally compensates for a lack of cohesion.

Not because it fails, but because the system offers no other way out.

As long as the MT continues to coordinate, the organization cannot learn to design.

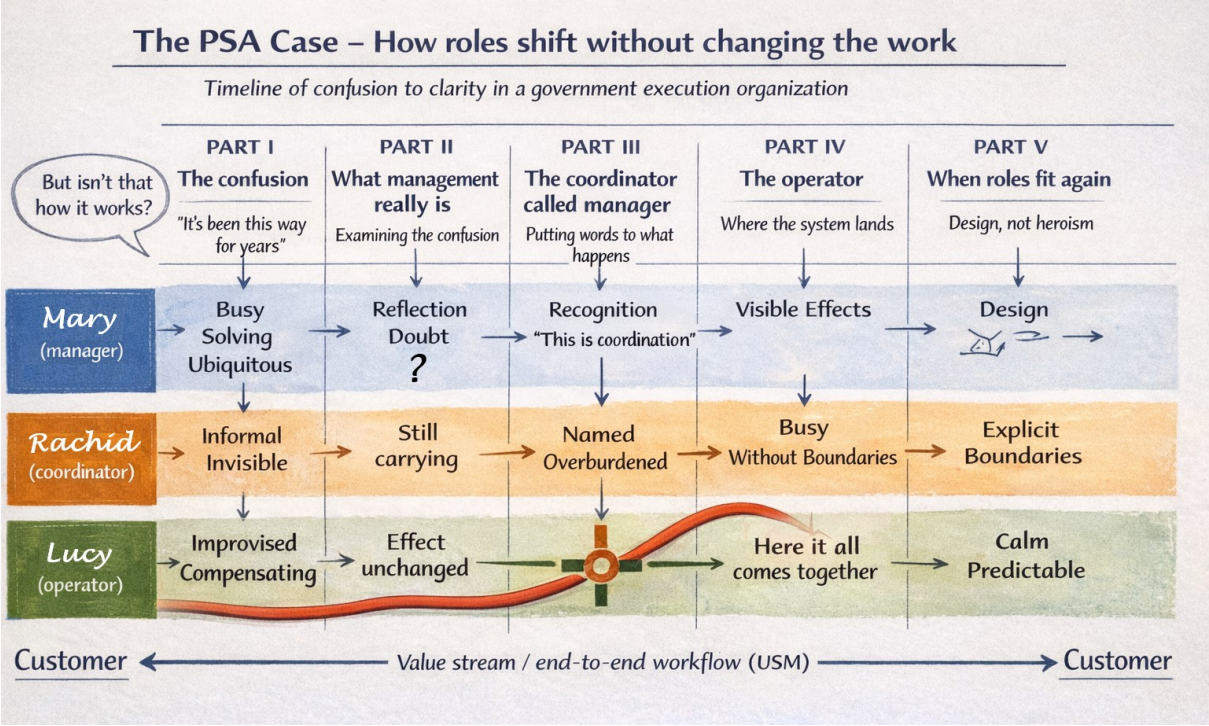


Figure 8. The course of the PSD case

Phase 1 – The confusion *(PART I)*

"As it has been for years"

What happens
- Managers are busy.
- Consultation increases.
- Indispensable people emerge.
- Work remains undone until someone intervenes.

Tension

Why does this feel logical, but not right?

Case focus
- Mary is praised for her dedication.
- Lucy is increasingly picking up on exceptions.
- Rachid is being called more often outside his role.

Everything works — but only through personal commitment.

Phase 2 — What management really is *(PART II)*

"Initial reflection"

What happens
- no immediate change
- but new questions
- silence instead of action.

Tension

If this isn't management... then what am I doing?

Case focus
- Mary deliberately chooses not to intervene on one occasion.
- A problem becomes visible instead of being solved.
- The MT senses unrest, but cannot identify it.

The case **slows down**. This is deliberate.

Phase 3 – The coordinator called manager *(PART III)*

"Tipping point"

What happens
- Coordination work is identified.
- The difference between line and process coordination becomes apparent.
- Tensions are given voice.

Tension

If this is coordination... then who is managing?

Case focus
- Rachid is explicitly recognized as process coordinator.
- Mary recognizes her own work as coordination.
- Line coordination never appears to be end-to-end.

The illusion of 'overseeing everything' disappears.

Phase 4 – The operator *(PART IV)*

"Shift in perspective"

What happens
- Effects of role confusion become apparent.
- Work pressure is reduced to design errors.
- Operator perspective becomes central.

Tension

Who actually pays the price here?

Case focus
- Lucy experiences less peace than expected.
- Her improvisations prove to be system-supporting.
- Reliability proves more important than flexibility.

The moral weight shifts upward.

Phase 5 – When roles are right again *(PART V)*

"Choice, no end"

What happens
- Management stops compensating.
- Coordination becomes explicit.
- Work becomes more predictable, but more exciting.

Tension

Is this really what we want?

Case focus
- Mary loses visible busyness, gains design responsibility.
- Rachid gets a limited profile, no heroic role.
- Lucy works more calmly, but within stricter agreements.

Not a success story, but **a principle choice**.

Epilogue

What this book has not done.

This book has not introduced a new management role.
It has not added a competency model.
It has not offered a step-by-step plan.

That is not an omission. It is a choice.

What this book has done is to reveal what often remains hidden: that many organizations do not get stuck due to a lack of commitment, intelligence, or involvement, but due to **a lack of design**. And that this lack does not remain abstract, but manifests itself in roles, identities, and daily work pressure.

Anyone who has read this book up to this point has probably recognized something.
Perhaps in Mary.
Perhaps in Rachid.
Perhaps in Lucy.
Perhaps in the MT.

And possibly in themselves.

Recognizing this is not a weakness. It is an indication that you are at the heart of the system this book is about. Outsiders do not need to read this book. This book is written for people who have been trying to keep the work going for a long time.

But this is also where the line is drawn.

As long as those involved continue *to compensate*, the system does not need to change.
As long as coordination compensates for the lack of design, *management* remains invisible.
As long as busyness serves as justification, calmness remains suspicious.

This book does not invite you to work harder, cooperate better, or hold smarter meetings.
It invites something more difficult: to **stop doing what perpetuates the system**.

That does not require courage in the classical sense.
It requires precision. Restraint. Design discipline.

Perhaps that is the most uncomfortable conclusion: that many problems are not solved by intervention, but by **refraining from it** — until the right level at which a choice must be made becomes visible.

Management architecture is not an abstract field.
It is the way in which we decide who is responsible for what — and who is not.
It is the boundary between work that is supported by people and work that is supported by agreements — and by the system.

If this book has left you with anything, hopefully it is this insight:

Organizations do not become more human through greater personal commitment,
but by structures that do not force people to rise above their role.

What you do with that insight is no longer up to the author.
That is up to you.

Why most managers don't manage

Many organizations are not stuck due to a lack of commitment, involvement, or talent.
They are stuck because no one knows exactly **who does what work—and why**.

What is often called *management* today turns out to be mainly **coordination** in practice: aligning, escalating, adjusting, putting out fires. Necessary work, but not management.

The result is recognizable:
- managers are constantly busy, but experience little peace of mind
- coordination becomes personal and unlimited
- design flaws ultimately end up in the execution.

This book reemphasizes one distinction: **manager, coordinator, and operator** are **three different profiles** associated with **three different types of work:** this is the MCO formula of the USM Method.
Those who fail to explicitly design this distinction inadvertently create chaos.

Using a continuous case study from a government organization, this book shows:
- how coordination turns into compensation
- why that work always ends up with 'managers'
- and how Management Architecture makes the difference between heroism and repeatability.

This is not a book about better cooperation.
It is a book about stopping compensation.

For managers, directors, and professionals who dare to look at the system—and their own role in it.

Curious about how the USM Method can help you set up an effective service strategy, inspired by *practices* from popular frameworks but based on *architecture* and *systems thinking*?

⇒ **Read the USM Wiki, the USM portal, the USM book**

Chaos cannot be solved with more coordination. It can only be solved with structure.

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