

The Software Engineering Manager Role:

Responsibilities and Skills

- Define the manager as a force multiplier and bridge: connecting technical execution, people leadership, and business outcomes
- Preview the core competency model: people, process, technology, and strategy
- 2026 emphasis: AI fluency and delivery-system ownership
- Central challenge: creating results through other people, not personal output
- Practical, evidence-backed training for technical leads and senior developers



The Manager vs. The Maker: Redefining Your Value



- Maker schedule: deep focus on technical work



- Manager schedule: high availability and constant context switching



- Value shifts from personal output to team throughput, retention, and technical health



- Player-coach trap: staying in code blocks team ownership



- First 90 days: diagnose, transfer judgment, shift from doing to enabling

People Leadership: The Foundation of the Role



- Build an environment of psychological safety, accountability, and clarity



- High-quality weekly 1:1s: employee-driven agendas, coaching questions, and growth follow-through



- Structured delegation with context: why it matters, who cares, what could go wrong



- Specific, timely, behavior-anchored feedback using the SBI model



- Watch participation, energy, workload balance, and relationship quality as leading indicators



Feedback and Coaching: Developing Engineers



- Coaching builds independent judgment; sponsorship creates visibility and opportunity



- Performance conversations: observation, impact, curiosity, shared improvement plan



- Growth plans rooted in real work and stretch assignments



- Specific positive feedback accelerates development as much as corrective feedback



- Ask questions first: debug the mental model, not the symptom

DEVELOPER GROWTH STAGES

A Field Guide



SAPLING

Learning and building foundations



FLOWERING STEM

Expanding impact and influence



FRUITING BRANCH

Creating lasting value and mentoring others



CULTIVATE • GROW • FLOURISH

Driving Technical Strategy and Managing Technical Debt



- Guide direction, not every decision: review designs, enforce standards



- Maintain a debt register: deliberate, inadvertent, or bit rot



- Prioritize with RIVER, RICE, or WSJF frameworks



- Allocate 15–20% sprint capacity as a non-negotiable debt budget



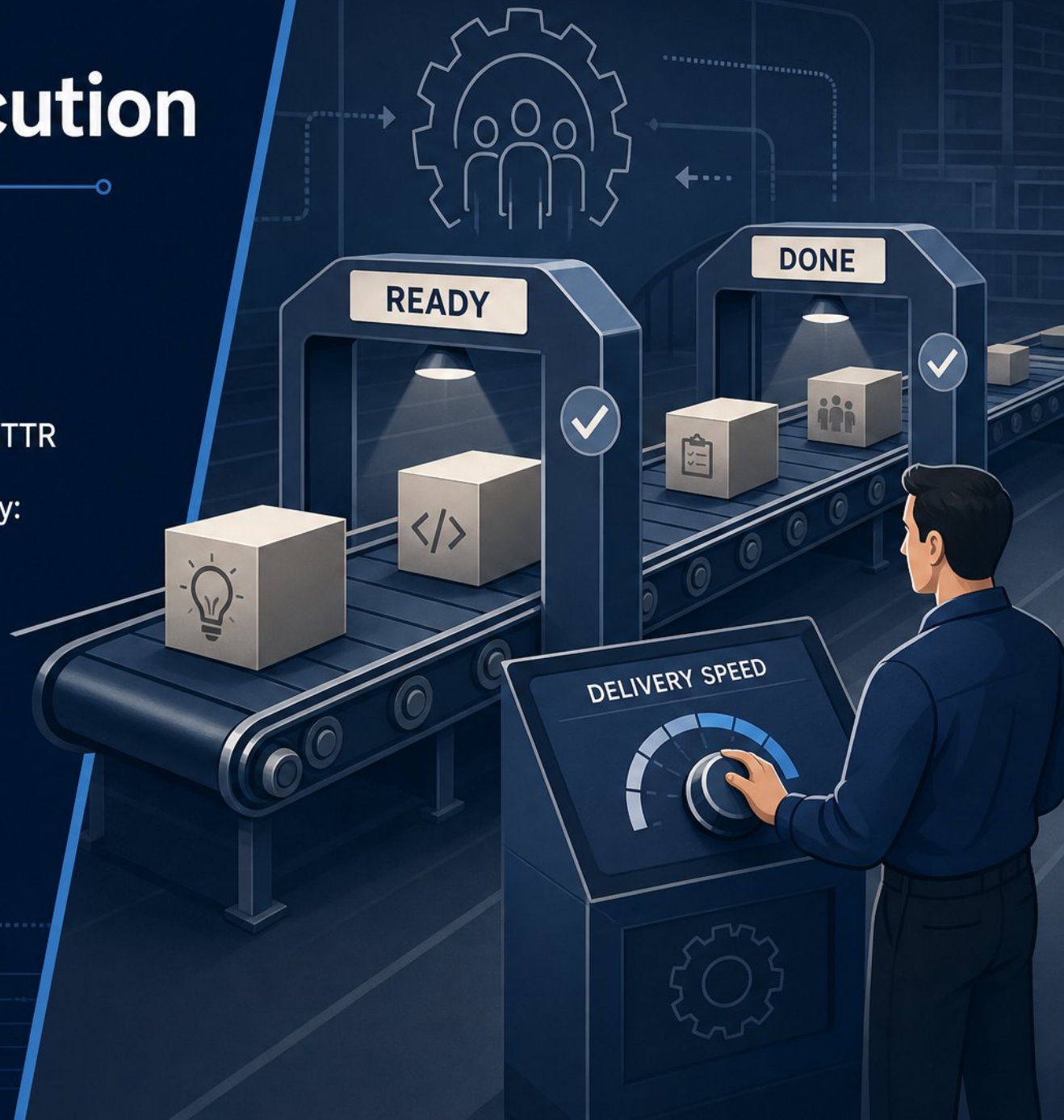
- Frame quality work as risk reduction or cost avoidance for stakeholders

**TECHNICAL
DEBT**



Process and Delivery Execution

- Own the delivery system: predictable sprints, clear ready/done definitions
- Track DORA metrics: deployment frequency, lead time, failure rate, MTTR
- Add SPACE for human sustainability: satisfaction, performance, activity, communication, efficiency
- Avoid the velocity trap: speed without well-being leads to burnout
- Use metrics to inform, not rank—investigate patterns, keep team-visible



Delivery Metrics in Practice:

DORA, SPACE, and Human Signals



- DORA and SPACE together form a diagnostic system: DORA measures speed, SPACE measures sustainability



- Add 2026 outcome signals: focus density, PR cadence, ticket-touch ratio, blocker recovery, after-hours patterns



- Diagnose with Burnout Rocket, Frustrated Artist, and Silent Slog scenarios



- Build a combined scorecard tracking speed, stability, well-being, flow, and friction



- Use the measurement ladder: start with DORA, add SPACE once delivery is stable



Stakeholder Communication and Executive Influence



Tailor updates by audience: executives need progress, risk, health



Lead with the conclusion; use BLUF and the Pyramid Principle



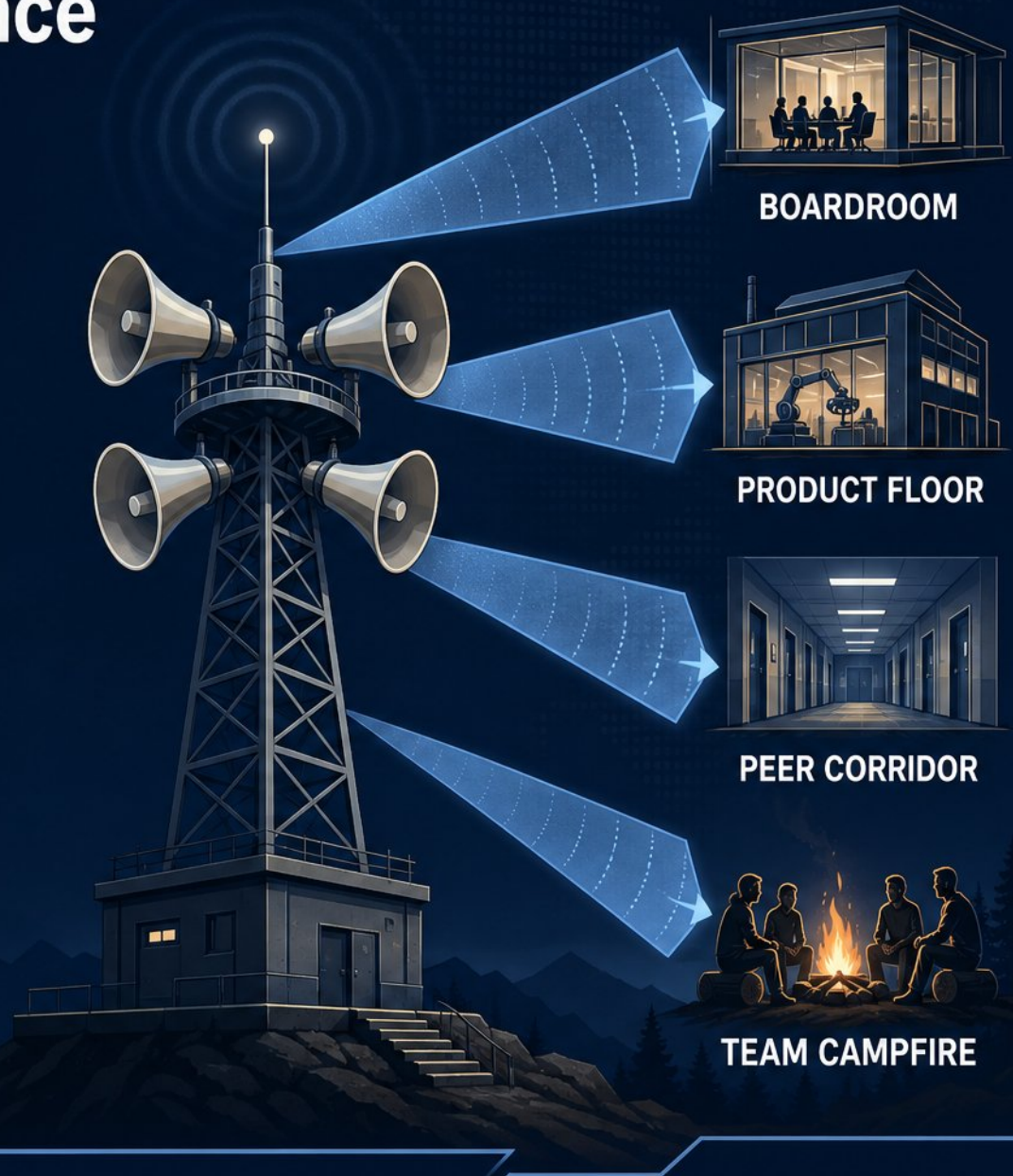
Translate engineering work into business outcomes: revenue, cost, risk, speed



Build a rhythm: weekly written updates, bi-weekly briefings, monthly reviews



Never surprise leadership with a Red; surface problems early with a plan



Scaling Teams and Organizational Design



- Conway's Law: software mirrors team communication structures



- Shape teams for target architecture (Inverse Conway Maneuver)



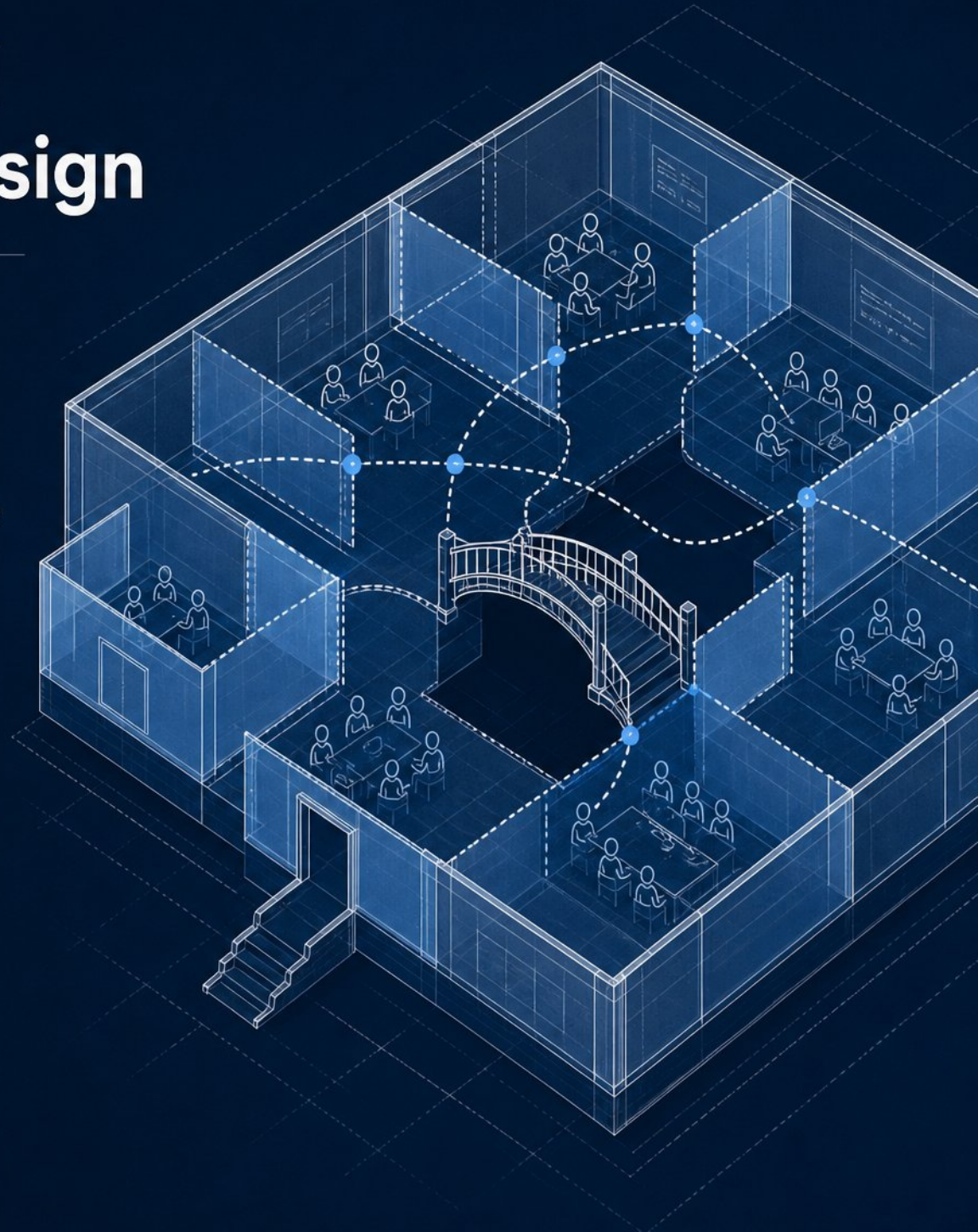
- Reorg debt: audit code ownership and knowledge after restructures



- Team Topologies: use stream-aligned and platform teams to cut cognitive load



- Watch org debt signals: cognitive overload appears before metrics decline



The Manager's Toolkit: 1:1s, Reviews, and Career Ladders



- Structure 1:1s: obstacles, growth, feedback, action items



- Reviews: specific evidence, calibration, avoid vague narratives



- IC ladder by scope: Senior systems, Staff direction, Principal strategy



- Management is not the only path to seniority or influence



- Use skip-levels for team health, not to undermine managers



Hiring and Onboarding: Building a High-Signal Process



- Build structured interviews with consistent rubrics to reduce bias



- Use panel interviews and calibration calls for shared ownership



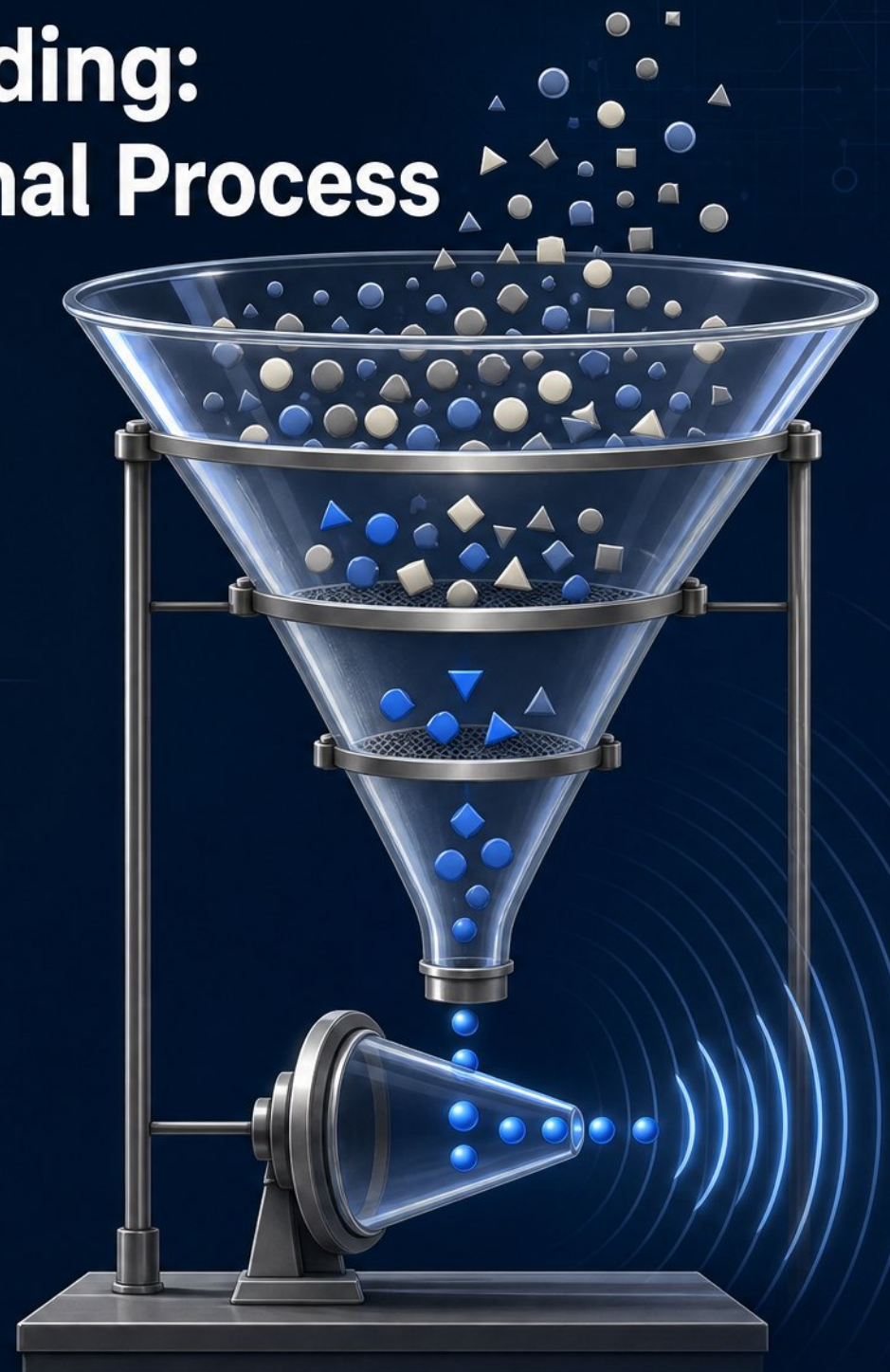
- Define clear expectations, pair teammates, and connect work to goals



- Track time-to-first-PR and early feedback to improve onboarding



- Balance current gaps with AI-assisted engineering judgment



Handling Crisis and Conflict Resolution



- Distinguish task, relationship, and process conflict



- Only task conflict is potentially productive



- Diagnose drivers: surface needs behind positions



- Address pinch points before they become crunches



- Use private talks, then facilitated dialogue



- Incident response: root cause, impact, options, owner



Leading Through Organizational Change and Uncertainty



- Absorb executive pressure, translating it into actionable context



- Communicate proactively: explain the why, separate fact from rumor



- Fix structural conflicts by clarifying roles and decision authority



- Provide direction and define success, even amid ambiguity



- Partner with your manager early on messy problems



Roadmap to Leadership: Your First 90 Days and Beyond



- 30-60-90 plan: listen, contribute, lead



- Create a handover ledger with owners and dates



- Find mentors and sponsors for your career



- Use AI as leverage, not a replacement



- Management isn't for everyone—senior IC is a valid path



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