



# **Start with an exit in mind: How to be effective by being selfish as a staff engineer**

**Adam Berman, Head of Engineering @ Semgrep**

# Hi, I'm Adam Berman


Head of Engineering @ Semgrep

From San Francisco

Ultimate frisbee, XC skiing

Five month old puppy at home

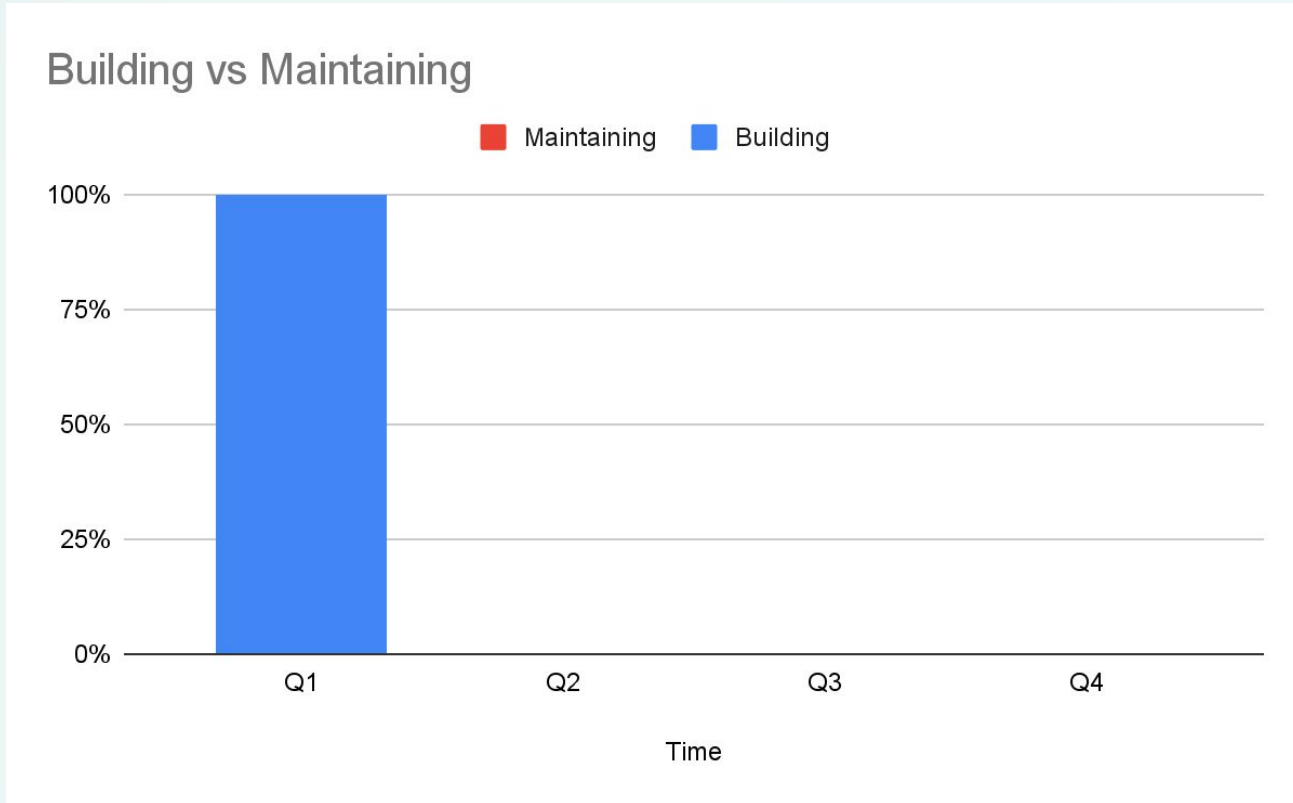




GREED.

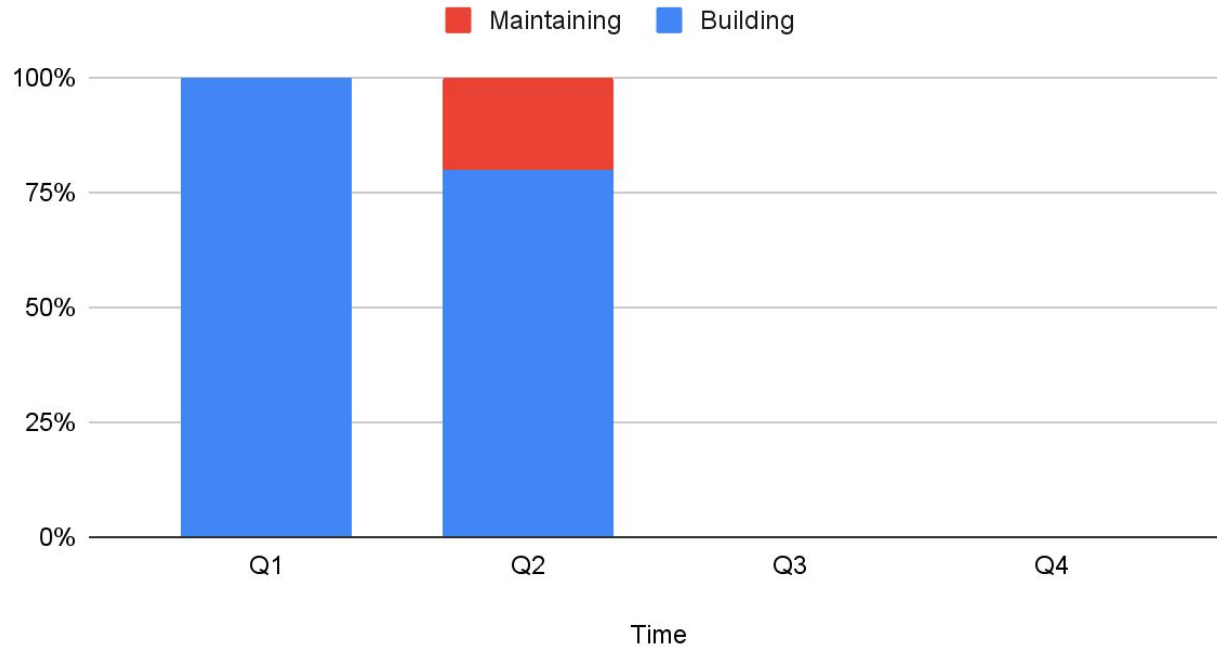
**A brief story...**

# A brief story...



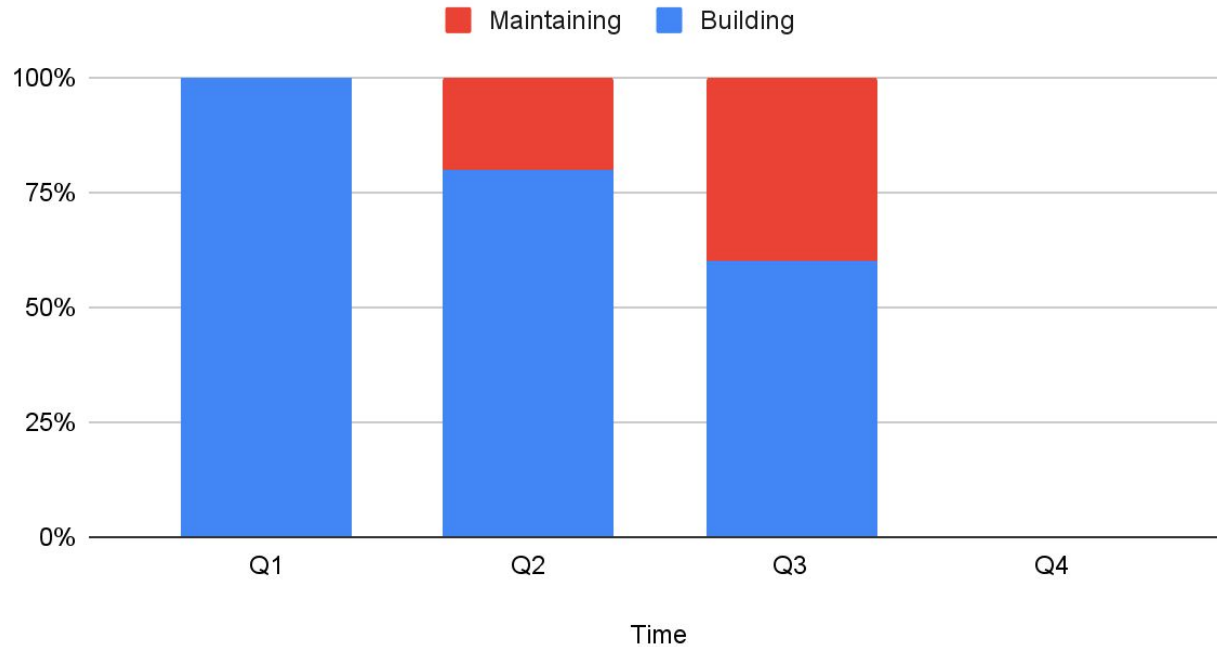
# A brief story...

Building vs Maintaining



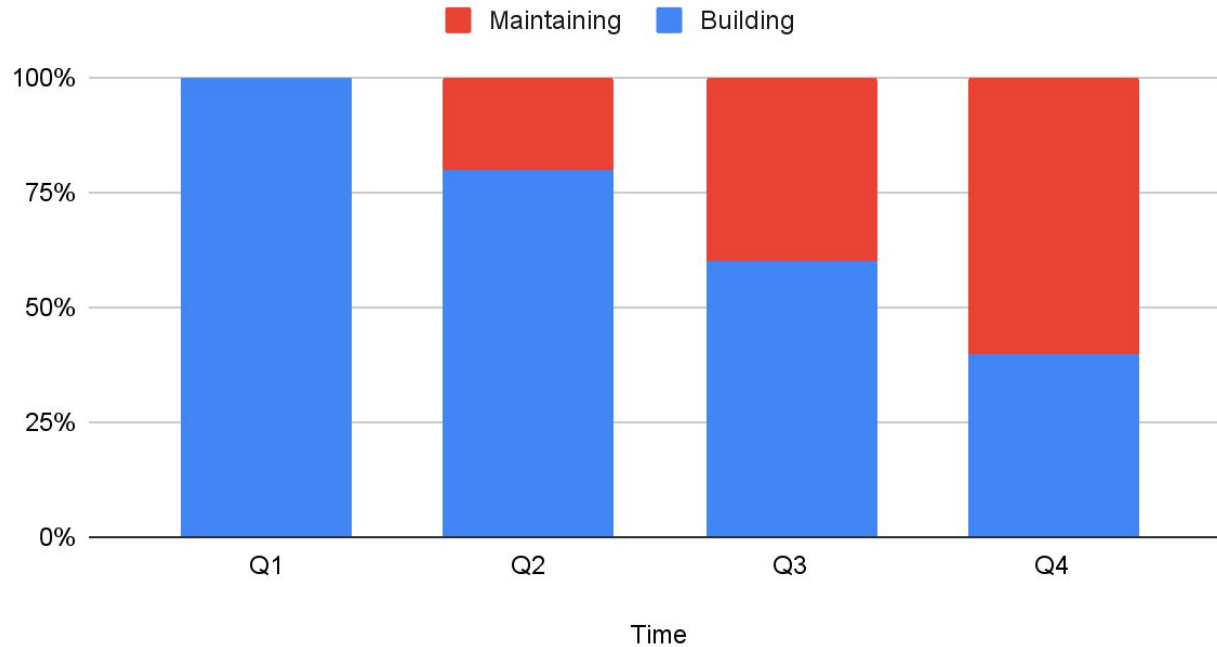
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Building vs Maintaining



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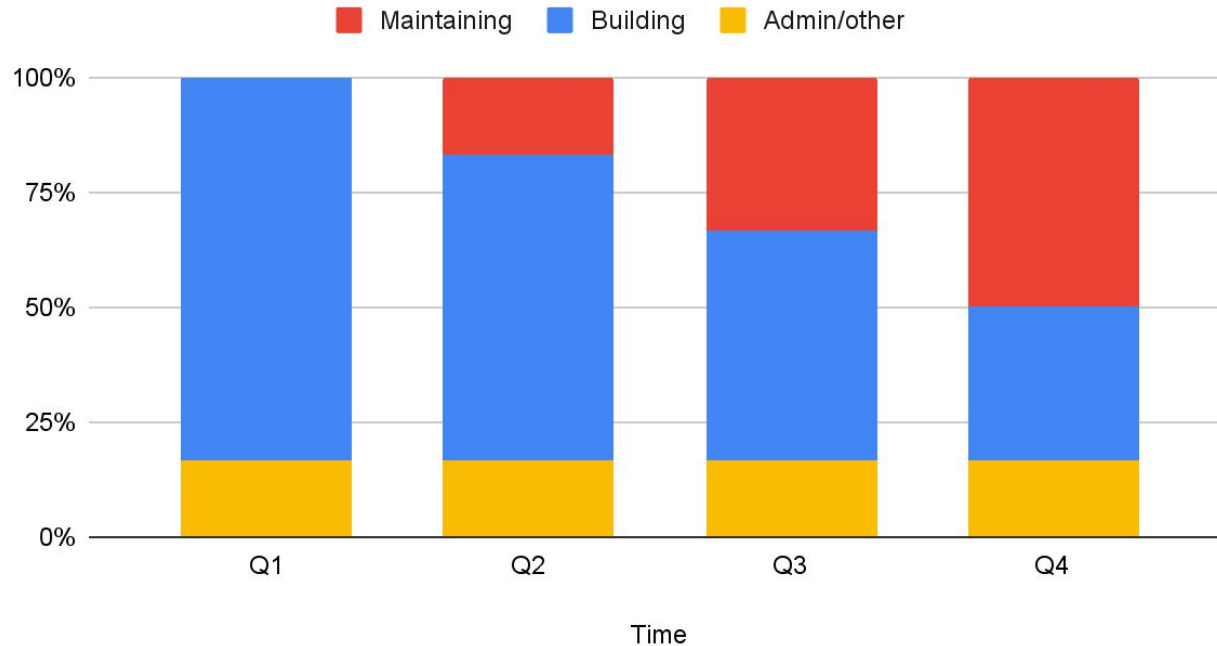
Building vs Maintaining





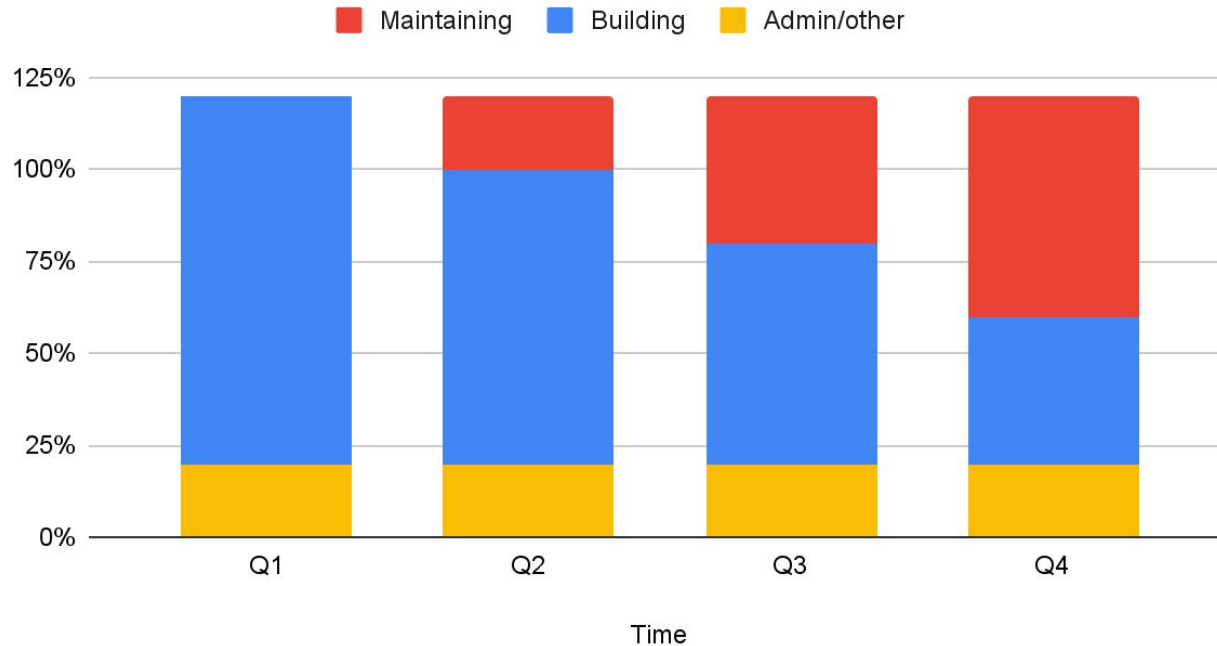
# A brief story...

## Building vs Maintaining



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## Building vs Maintaining



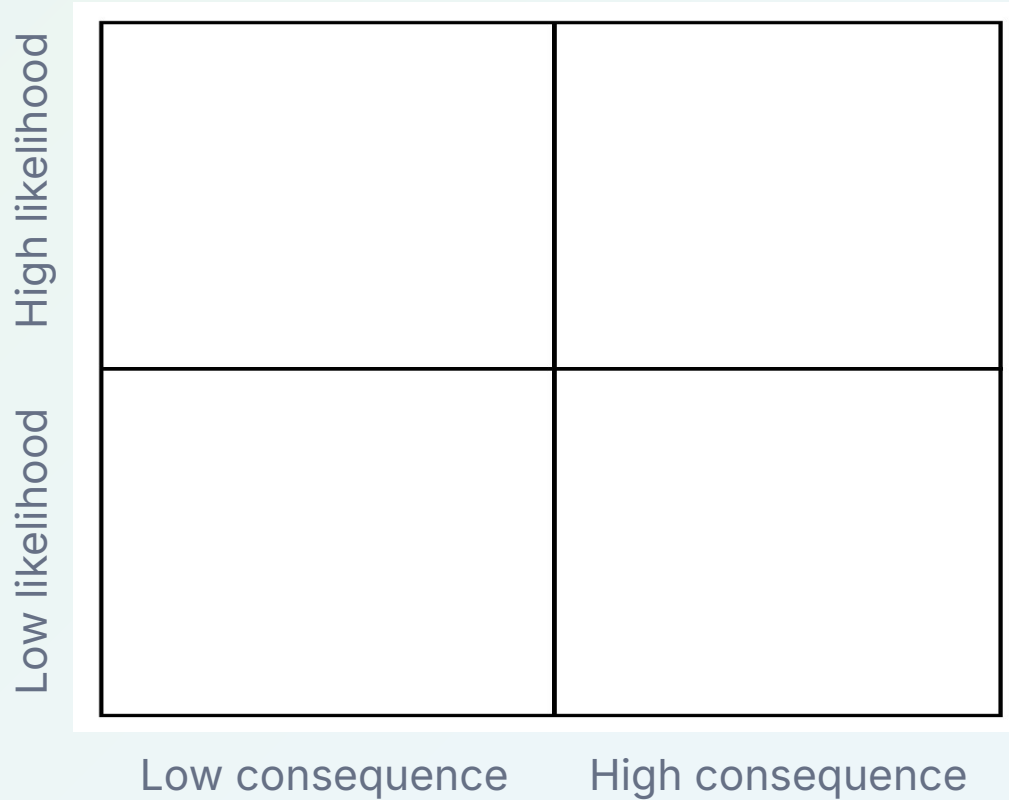
# **This is bad!**

- For you!
- For your team!
- For the business!

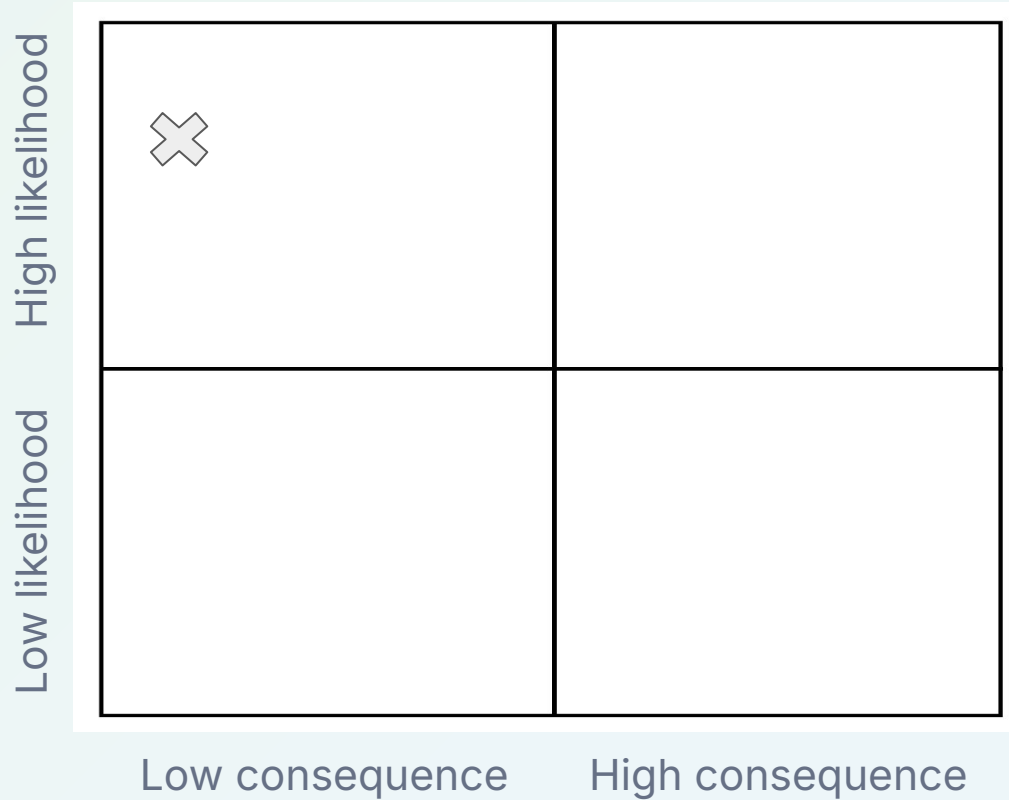
A man with dark hair and a slight stubble, wearing a white t-shirt, is shown from the chest up. He has a thoughtful or slightly skeptical expression, looking off-camera to the right. The background is dark with a decorative, lattice-like pattern. The lighting is soft, highlighting his face.

IT'S MY TURN TO  
TAKE A SELFISH

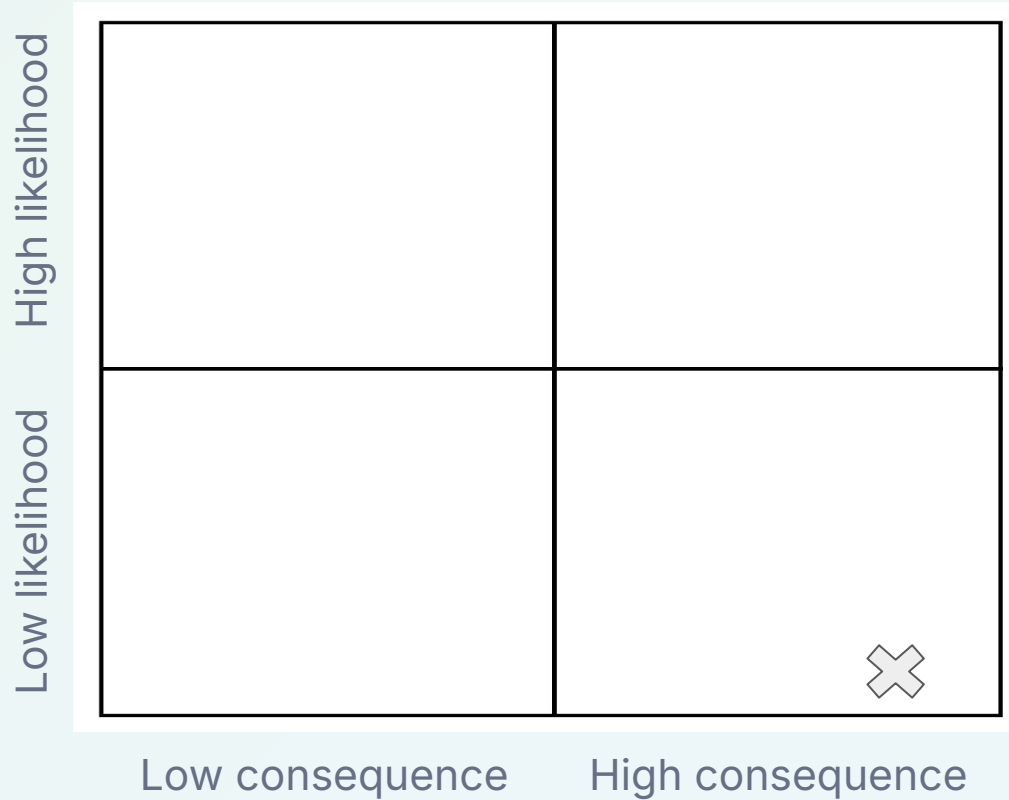
# Risk framework



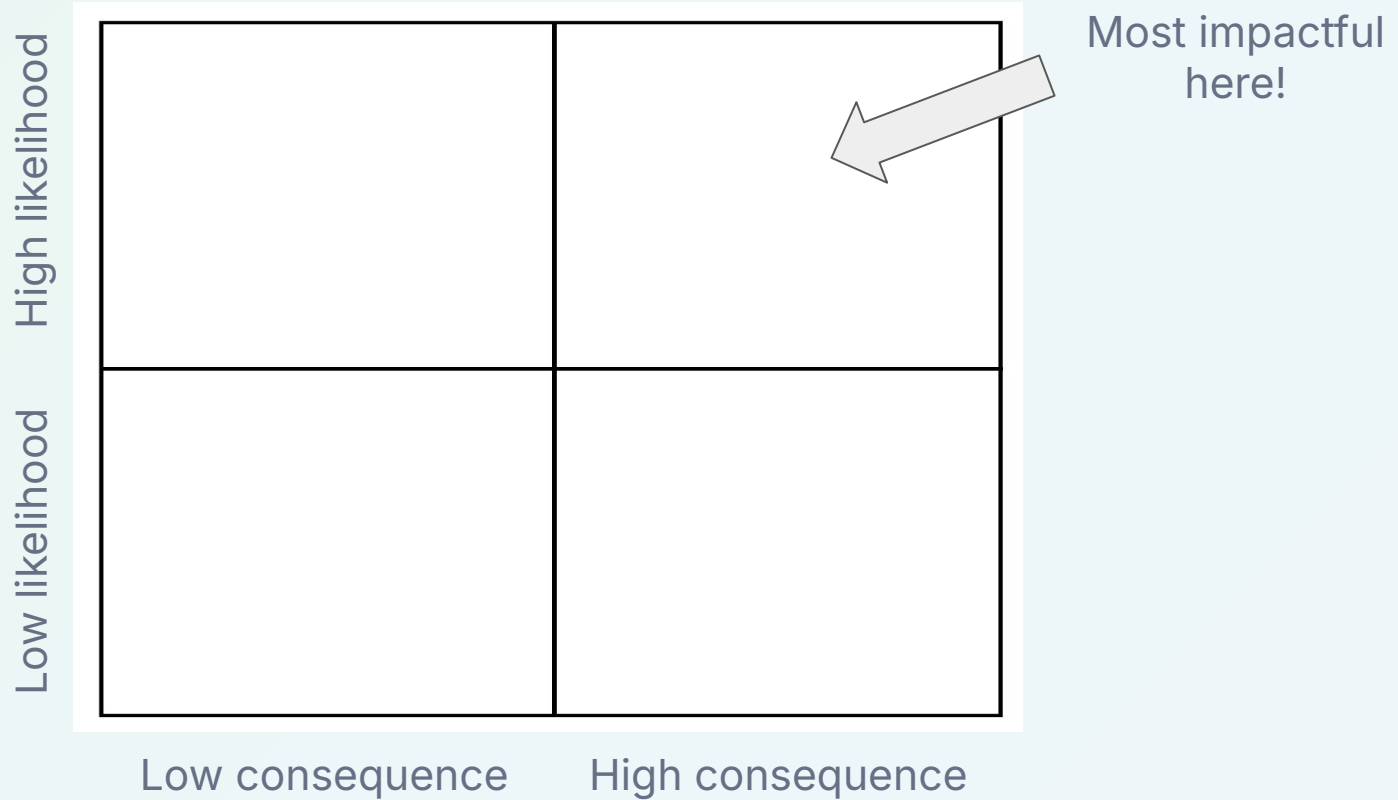
# Risk framework



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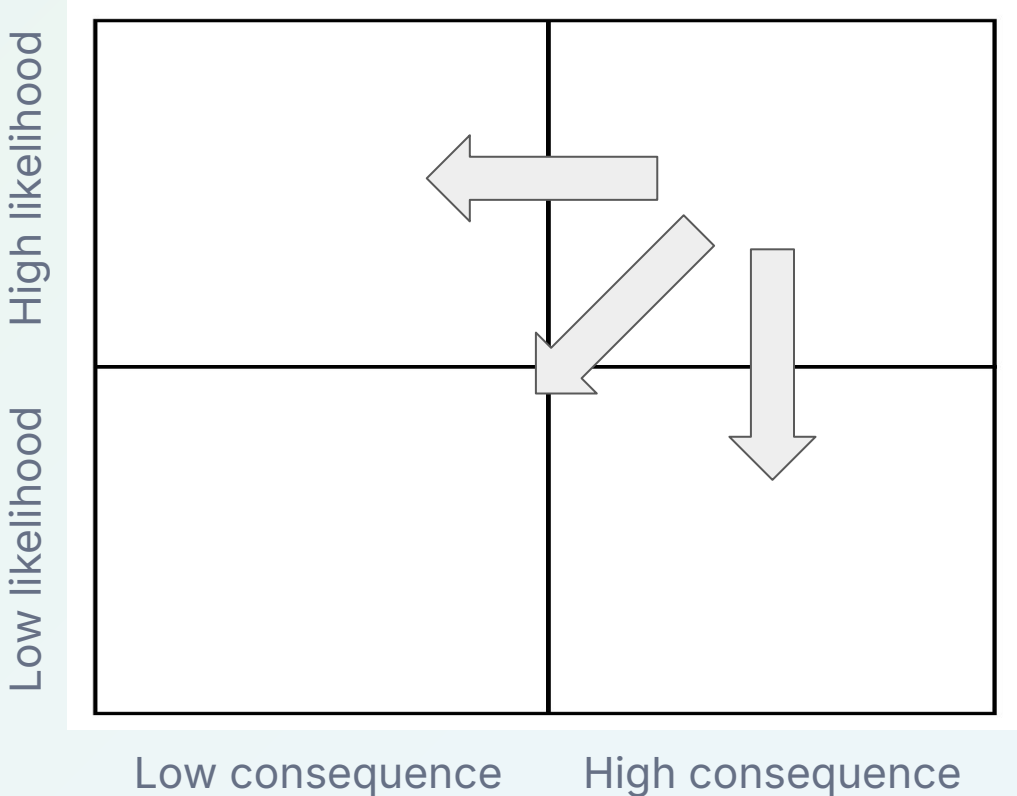


# Risk framework





# Risk framework



# Your four main options

- 1.** Bootstrap a new team  
Example: product hypothesis proves successful
- 2.** Give away to someone else  
Example: new system technically de-risked
- 3.** Press pause  
Example: internal tool is good enough
- 4.** Wind down  
Example: long term maintenance burden seems too high

# Evaluating your options at the beginning

For your next project, what would have to be true to choose an option?

- Bootstrap a team
- Hand off
- Press pause
- Wind down

# Evaluating your options at the beginning

For your next project, what would have to be true to choose an option?

- Bootstrap a team → high upside, somewhat clear path
- Hand off → defined upside, technically de-risked
- Press pause → realized value, low risk of long term maintenance
- Wind down → value too low, technical risk or long term costs too high

## Note: pressing pause is hard

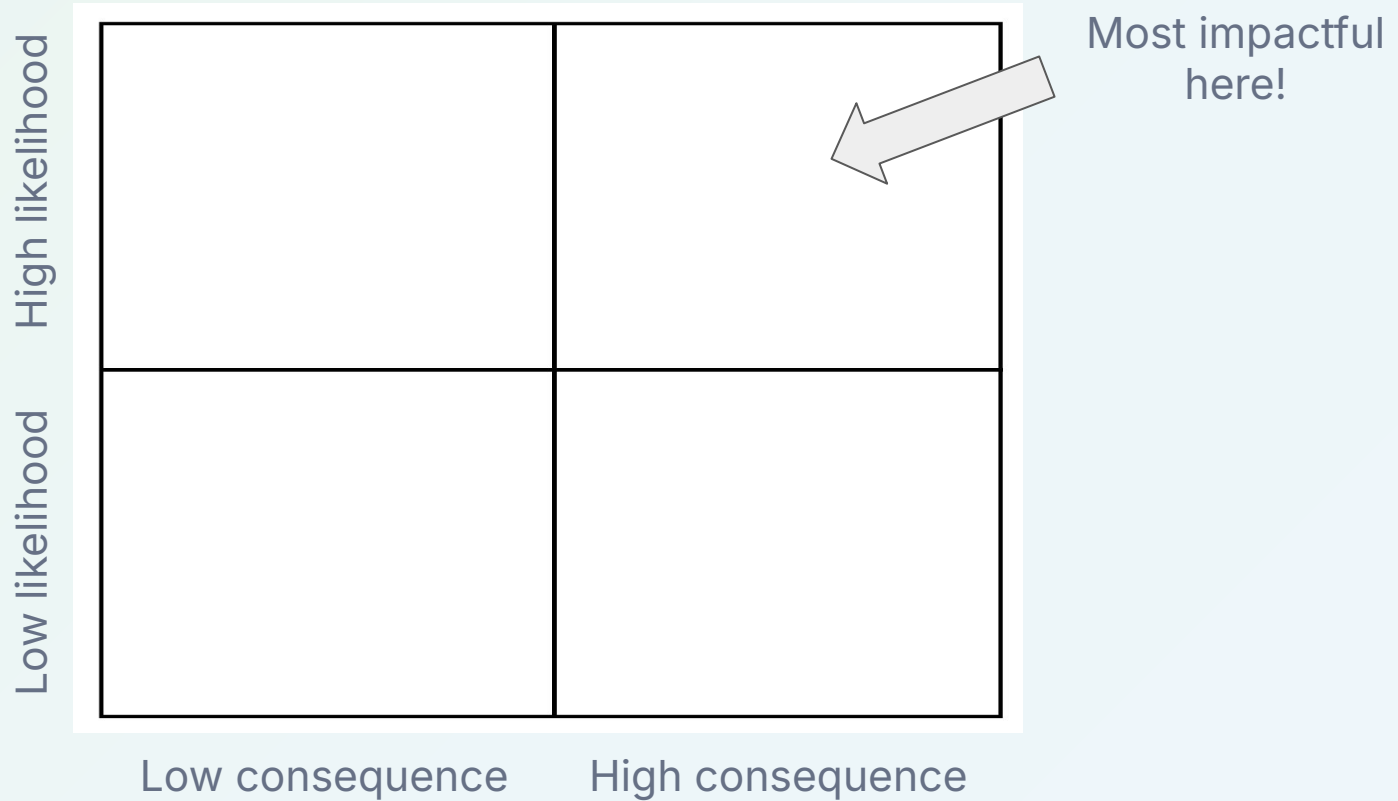
- Requires buy-in from peers and leadership
- Winding down *feels* hard, but is often the right choice
- If nobody else can own it long term, you probably should not either

# Managing up

This won't work without buy-in from eng leadership

- Help them understand your vision
- Talk to them early about different exit scenarios
- Get curious and ask for their help mapping the project to business outcomes - what conditions would need to be met to free up other resources to bootstrap a team or hand off?
- **Help them understand opportunity cost of not moving on to the next project - what is the business giving up as you're accruing maintenance responsibilities?**

# Risk framework





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