

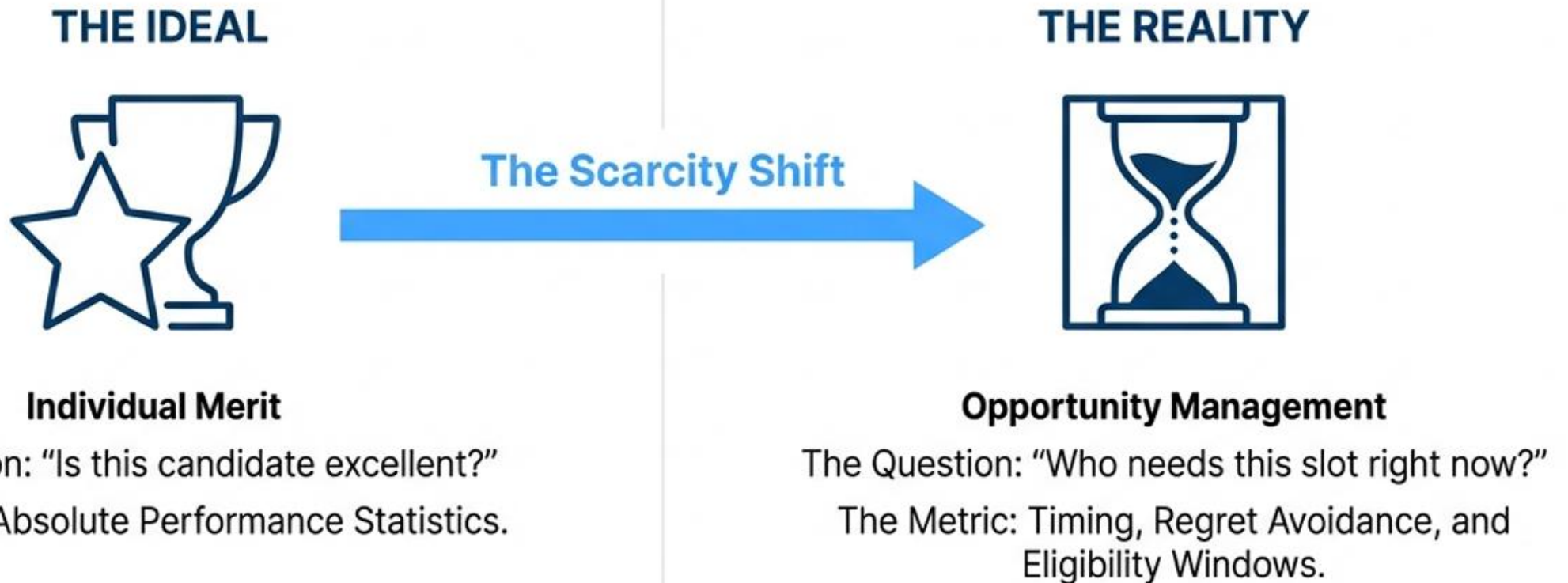


The Question Problem

Lessons in System Design from the NFL Hall of Fame

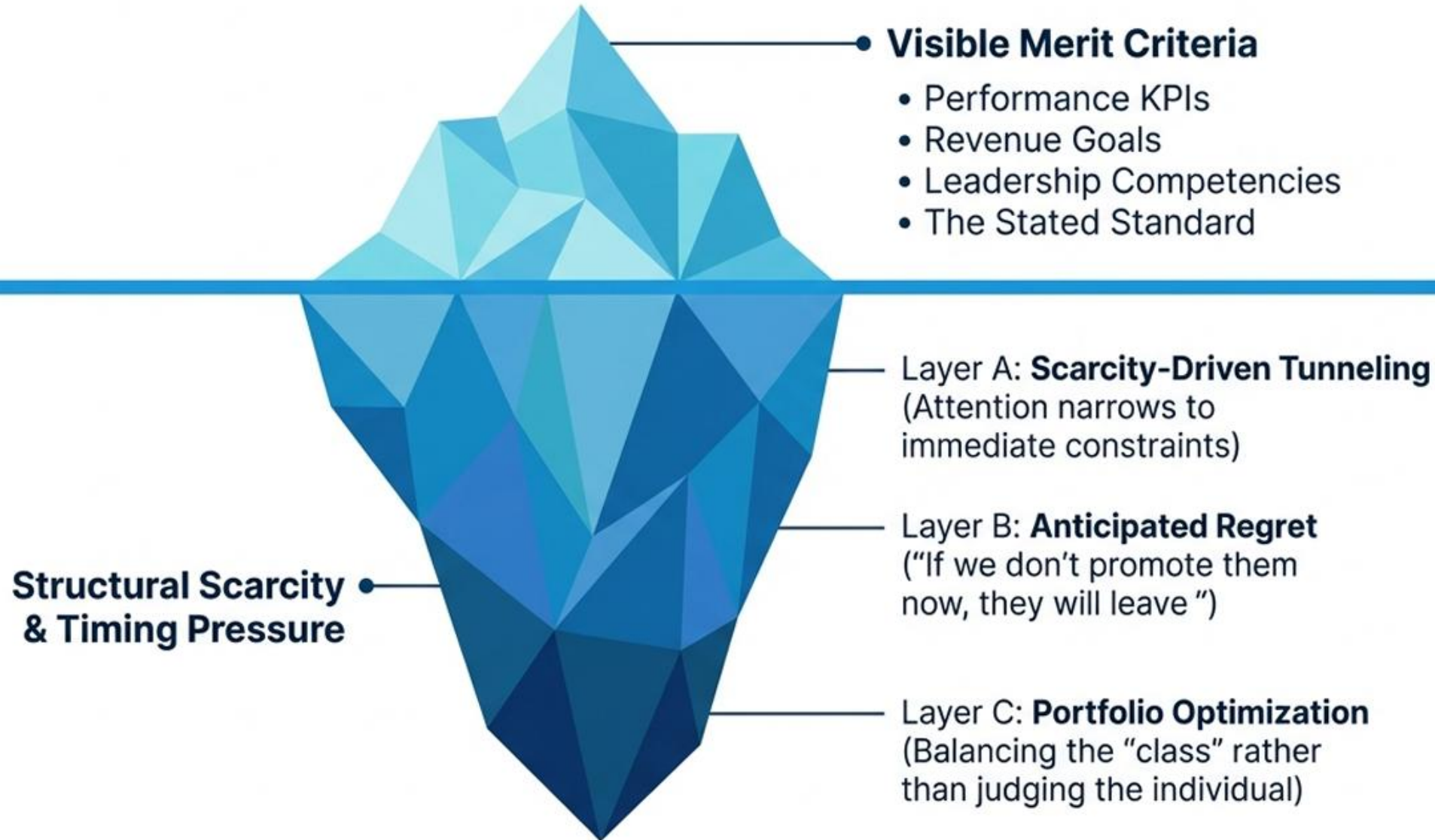
The Shift: From 'Best' to 'Urgent'

When Bill Belichick, a 6-time Super Bowl winner, was passed over, it wasn't bias. It was triage.



Key Insight: Scarcity transforms evaluation. It forces good people to answer the wrong question

The Architecture of Scarcity



The Hall of Fame tries to fix this with categories (Coaches vs. Players), but categories just relocate the problem. The structural incentives remain submerged

The Hidden Cost of Scarcity

When structural pressures override merit, organizations face two specific downstream risks



Metric Distortion (Data as a Shield)

Rationalizing the Political: Evaluators know they are making choices based on scarcity, so they use data to justify decisions post-hoc

The Behavior: Score inflation in early rounds to keep options open. “Safe” candidates are prioritized over “Complex” candidates to preserve optionality



Retention Risk (The Fairness Gap)

Trust Collapse: High-performers accept losing to better candidates. They do not accept losing to “timing” or “politics”

The Behavior: When outcomes look arbitrary because the optimization criteria are hidden talent exits not because of the result, but because of the opacity

Diagnostic Cheat Sheet

Identifying Scarcity Dynamics in Your Organization

Symptom (What you see)	Real Problem (The Mechanism)	The Wrong Question (Current State)	Structural Fix (The Design Solution)
"Safe" hires/promotions; innovative candidates consistently stalled.	Consensus seeking due to scarce slots.	"Who is the least risky use of this slot?"	Create separate tracks for "System Builders" vs. "Individual Contributors."
High-performers leaving just before promotion cycles.	Anticipated Regret / Timing pressure.	"Who has waited the longest?"	Implement rolling eligibility or "pause" provisions to remove "now or never" pressure.
Constant debates about "fairness" despite clear KPIs.	Artificial Scarcity / Category boundaries.	"Which bucket do they fit in?"	Allow variable class sizes based on absolute merit thresholds.

Stop Answering the Wrong Question

Most controversial decisions are not caused by bad people or bad data. They are caused by systems that force good people to answer the wrong question

The debate shouldn't be about the candidates. It should be about whether your structure is capable of producing coherent outcomes

Take the Evaluation System Audit

A 5-minute diagnostic to map the hidden incentives in your hiring and promotion cycles

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