

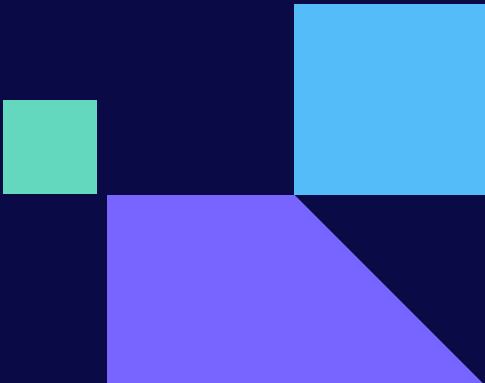


The Engineering Leadership Report 2024

We asked 1,100+ engineering leaders how their roles are evolving in response to a rapidly changing economic landscape in 2024. [Here's what we found.](#)



In collaboration with
Lena Reinhard

A collection of decorative geometric shapes in the bottom right corner, including a teal square, a light blue square, and a purple triangle.

A note from the editors

There was a growing sense of unease amongst the ranks of engineering leaders and managers as we rounded into 2024. The vibes were off, but we didn't have any data to back up how engineering leaders were feeling about the state of the industry, so Lena Reinhard and I decided to produce this report.

We wanted to understand how much stress engineering leaders were under as a result of widespread layoffs, constant reorgs, rampant generative AI hype, and the end of zero-interest-rate exuberance.

The results were striking, painting a picture of engineering managers working more hours than before and balancing an ever-changing list of priorities. Previously solid career ladders have lost rungs, leaving people feeling stuck and less positive about their future prospects than before.

It's not all bad news though. There is plenty to be excited about, and with constraints comes a need for focus and results. Good leaders can start to really focus on what matters for them, their team, and their organizations, rather than just riding out a difficult period that has been coming for a while now. How will you respond?

Scott Carey

Editor in Chief, LeadDev



The question, “What does leadership mean?”, and “What kind of leadership do organizations need?”, has been an important throughline in my career. Wanting to hear what it means now in a yet-again changed industry was one of my motivations for working with LeadDev on this survey.

The leaders who graciously shared their insight with us spoke to one of the most difficult challenges of our work: the duality of power.

- On the one hand, many of us are in positions of power, through formal titles, informal power, subject matter expertise, tenure, or our connections.
- At the same time, many leaders at some point feel quite powerless and are negatively impacted or struggle themselves. With organizational changes, difficult bosses, sexism, racism, and other discrimination.

Lately, many leaders in this space have been feeling much more reactive and powerless to larger changes around us.

While this is true, we are also in a position to shape companies, the way they work, and, in consequence, this industry. Through your actions and decisions every day, you are one of the people who shape – intentionally or unconsciously – what *good* technical and people leadership is through how you give and receive feedback, communicate and run your meetings, how and what you decide, who you delegate important projects to, whose work you praise, who you hire, and promote.

“Culture is the behavior you reward and punish,” wrote Jocelyn Goldfein. Your decisions and actions matter. Use them to leave a positive impact on this industry.

Lena Reinhard

VP of Engineering, Leadership Coach and Mentor, Facilitator,
and Host of the Leadership Confidential Podcast



Questions answered in this report

Away from the bold headlines and anecdotes about an industry facing a downturn, we wanted to gather the data to answer questions like:

Leading in organizations

- How *exactly* have organizations been changing?
- How are they organized now?
- What do reporting structures look like?
- What do they prioritize?

Being and becoming a leader in 2024

- What have those organizational changes meant for the role of engineering leaders?
- How has it impacted where leaders spend their time?
- How do leaders grow in their careers?
- What is it like to interview for a leadership role today?

Industry trends and outlooks

- What trends are leaders most excited and concerned about?
- What influence is AI having on teams and leaders?

A note on the usage and meaning of “leadership” in this report

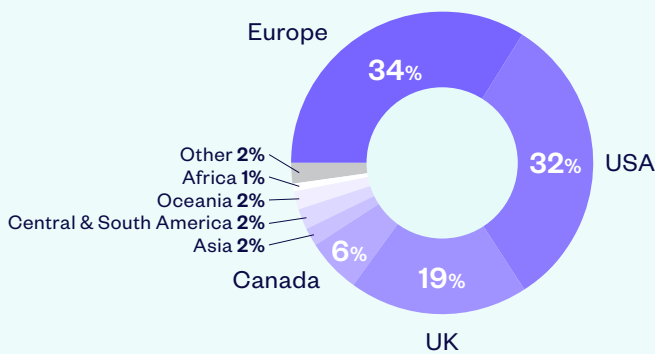
In this report, we use the terms “leader” and “leadership” regardless of formal title or role to describe providing guidance, direction, coordinating, and communicating to help a group/business achieve a goal. “Technical leaders” are those primarily focused on directing technical systems, while “people leaders” are those focused on systems of humans.

Methodology

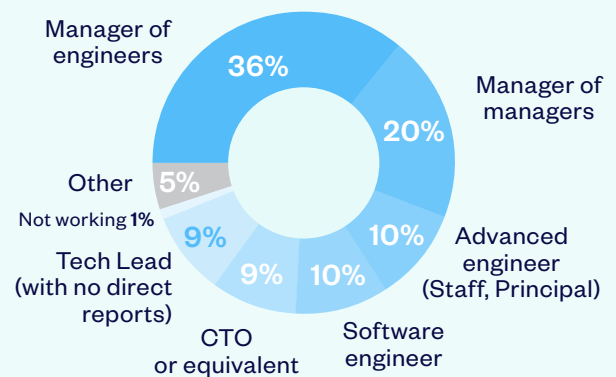
1,107 people responded to this survey, which was conducted between 20 March–12 April 2024

Respondents

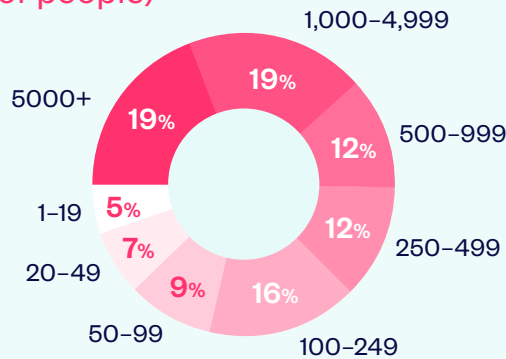
Location



Job role



Company size (Number of people)



Results may vary by up to +/- 2.9%. Our editors analyzed an additional 602 qualitative data points for this report.

The data has statistical significance, but also some limitations:

The respondents came primarily from Western countries. Many Asian and African countries are existing players and hugely influential in the tech industry, or are becoming more influential. Similarly, there are lots of successful tech companies in Central and South America, Oceania, and the Middle East. Our data currently doesn't represent this.

5 key takeaways

35%

of engineering leaders are working longer hours than before, and just **7%** are working less.

84%

of respondents' roles and responsibilities changed over the past 12 months. **63%** report having a wider scope than before. **41%** of managers have taken on more direct reports.

44%

of respondents have reckoned with layoffs.

39%

of engineering leaders are worried about job security.

Of the companies that have made management cuts this year, **66%** have slashed middle management, and **80%** at large companies.

66%

1. How companies are changing

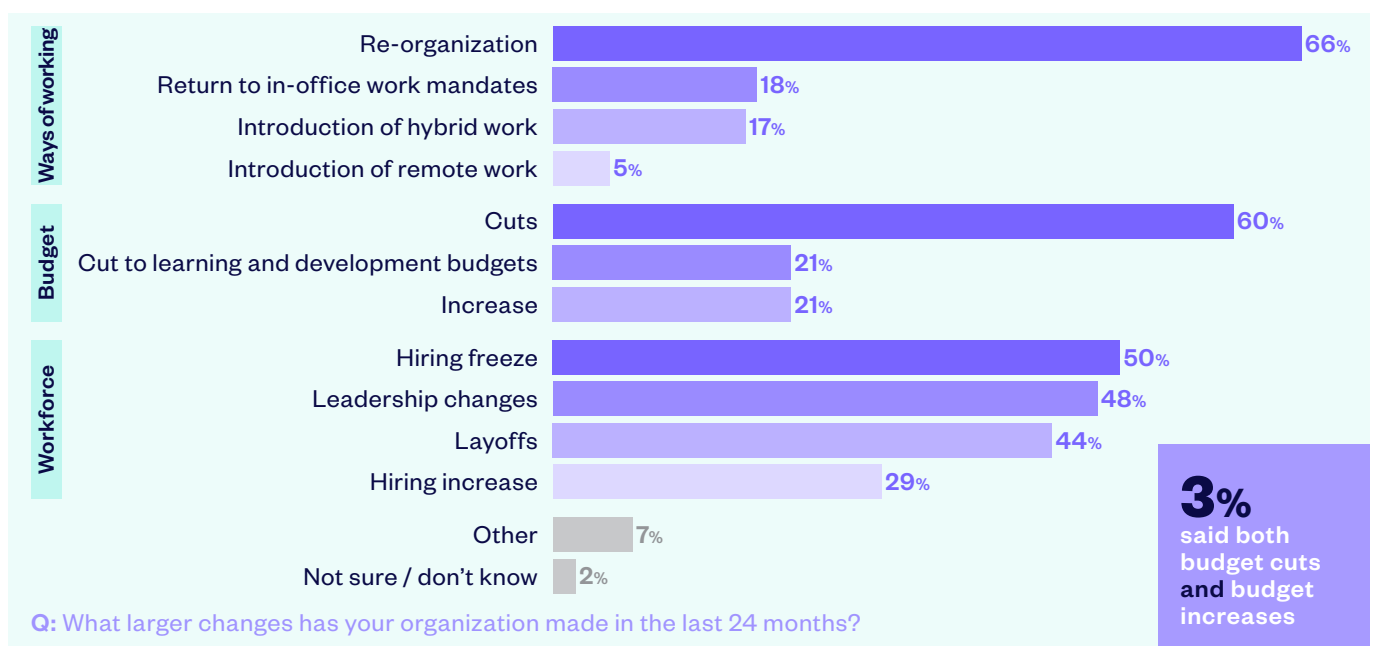
Summary

- Organizations that changed the number of managerial roles were **67%** more likely to have cut middle managers.
- **44%** of respondents have had to reckon with layoffs.
- Priorities have largely stayed the same through the turmoil, but **63%** of respondents are focusing on cost optimization, productivity, and efficiency.

Over the past 24 months, the amount of change in organizations has been vast. There has been an unprecedented wave of layoffs across the industry, with budget cuts and hiring freezes soaring as the zero-interest-rate era came to an end, and many of you returned to the office in some regard.

54% of respondents reported four or more larger changes over the past year, and 18% managed through six or more larger changes. Those organizational changes weren't always going in just one direction either: 7% of respondents reported that their company enacted both layoffs *and* hiring increases during this period, and 3% had seen budgets get both cut and increased during that time.

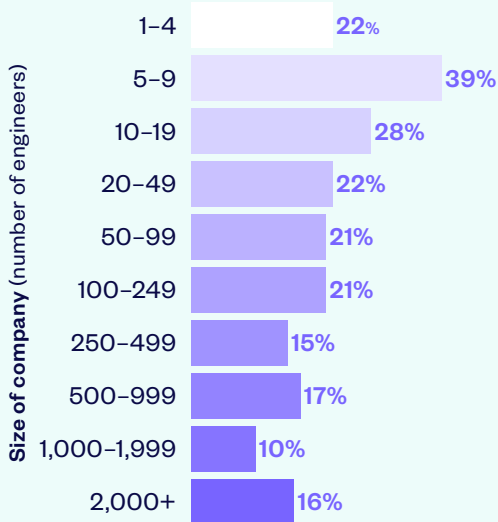
All of this organizational change is hugely disruptive for engineering leaders, who are tasked with reshaping their teams to meet these changing circumstances. Take Spotify, where CEO Daniel Ek admitted to investors in April 2024 that the streaming company's December 2023 round of layoffs "did disrupt our day-to-day operations more than we anticipated."



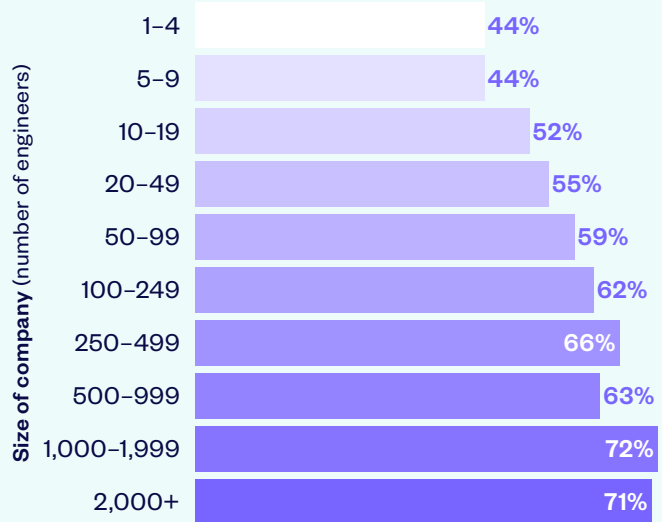
1. How companies are changing

As the market corrected for the end of zero interest-rates and over-exuberance, larger companies were far more likely to implement budget cuts and hiring freezes on engineering departments. On the flip side, smaller and growing companies with less than 1,000 employees more frequently reported hiring and budget increases.

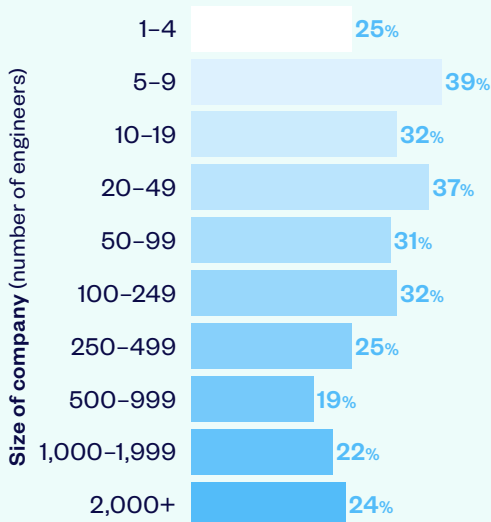
Budget - Increase



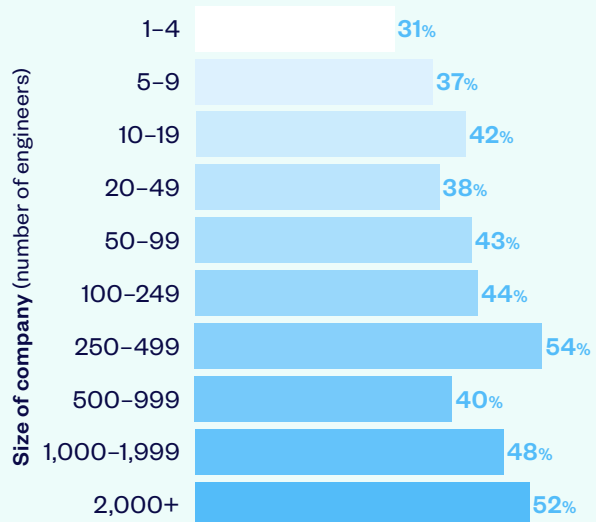
Budget - Cuts



Workforce - Hiring increase



Workforce - Layoffs



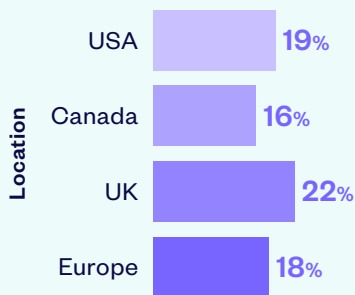
Q: What larger changes has your organization made in the last 24 months?

Budget and workforce changes

The shape and size of teams have changed dramatically over the last two years for many of you, with 66% of respondents going through some form of re-org, 48% experiencing leadership changes, and 44% dealing with the fallout from layoffs.

These changes have hit US companies the hardest, where layoffs have been experienced by half of respondents, compared to 40% in Europe and 46% in the UK.

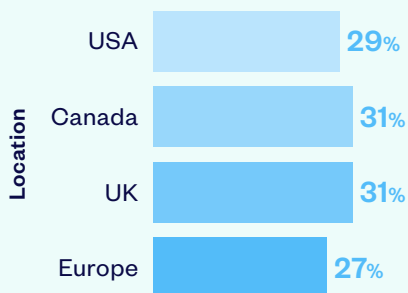
Budget - Increase



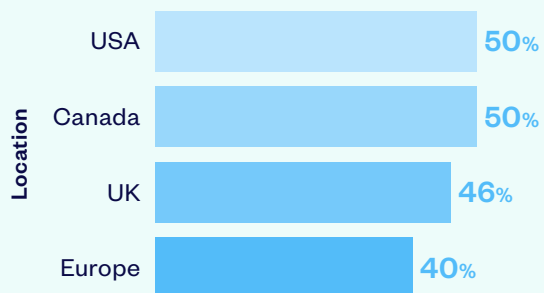
Budget - Cuts



Workforce - Hiring increase



Workforce - Layoffs

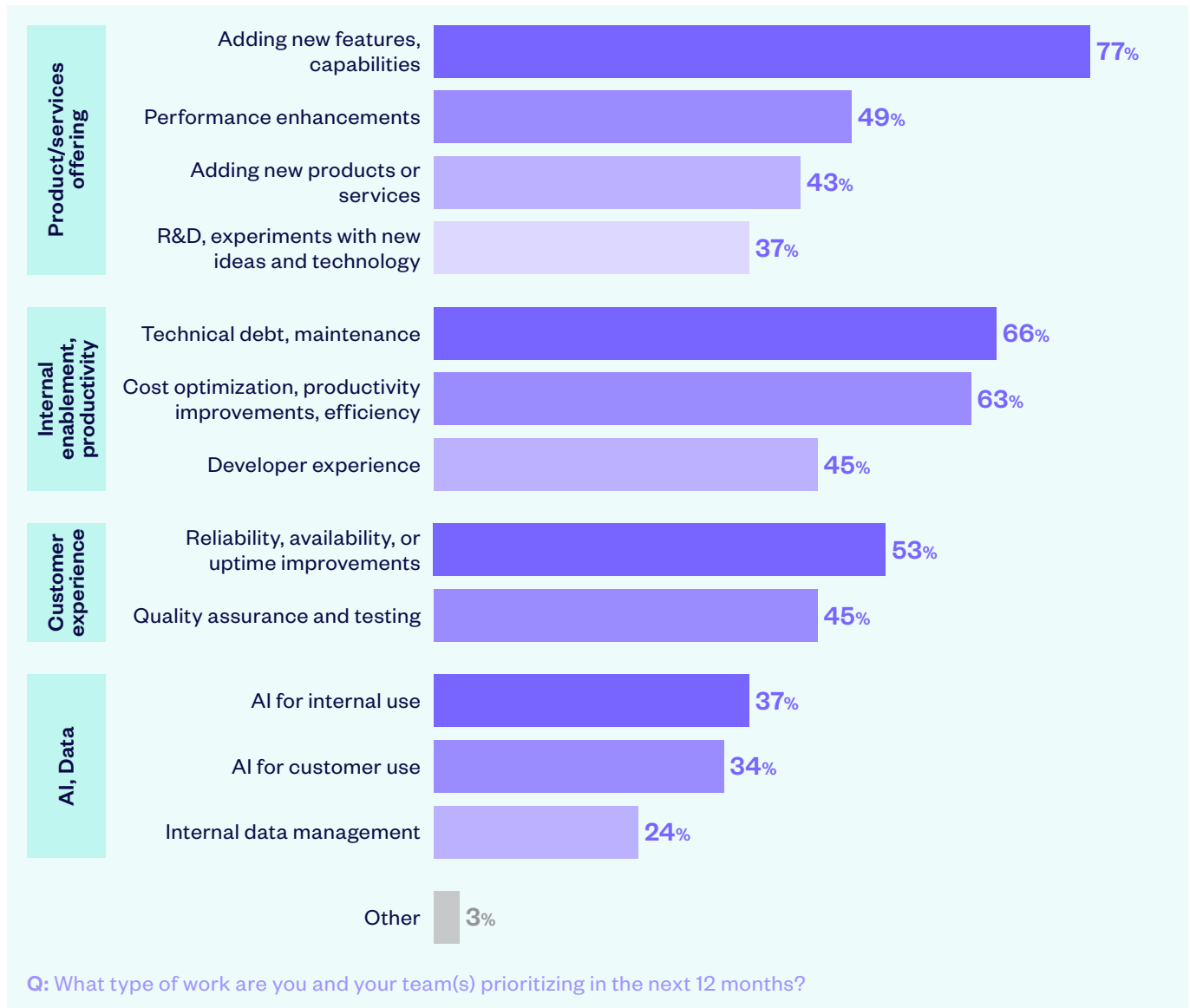


Q: What larger changes has your organization made in the last 24 months?

How companies' priorities are changing

All of this change has naturally filtered down to the priorities of you and your organization. However, the job of engineering appears to be much the same as it always has been.

77% of respondents said building new features is their biggest priority right now, followed by tackling technical debt and maintenance at 66%.



After that, it gets interesting, with 63% of respondents saying that cost optimization, productivity, and efficiency are the biggest priority right now, as organizations grapple with the economic downturn.

Developer experience was down at 45%, with research and development (R&D), and adding new products proving more tricky to get on the roadmap, at 37% and 43% respectively.

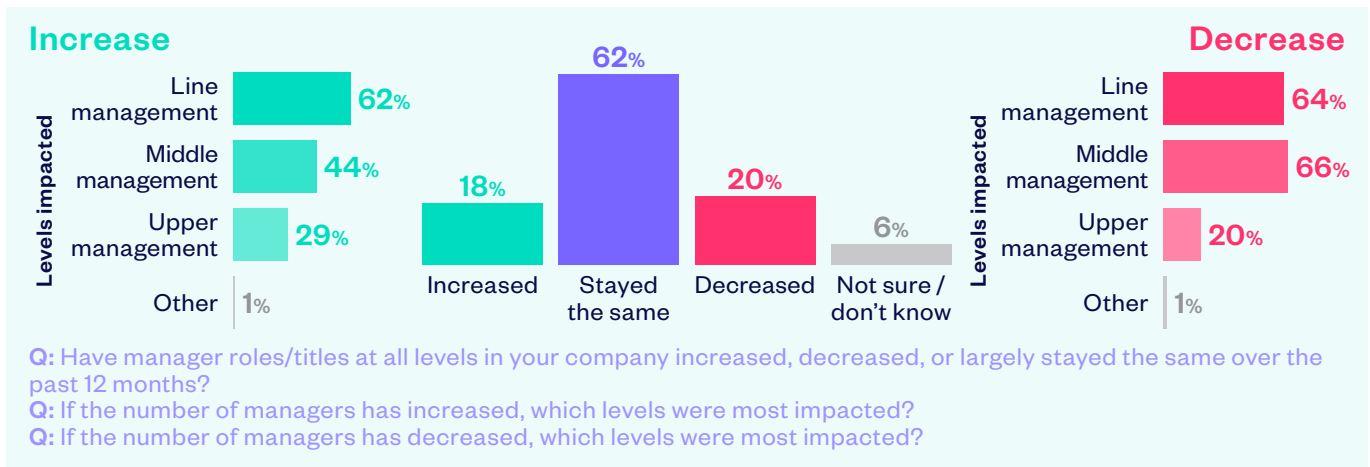
The new shape of management

Management increases and decreases in different places

Manager roles at all levels have increased in 18% of companies, but decreased in 20%. Of the organizations that changed the number of managerial roles/titles, 67% were more likely to have cut middle managers instead of making an increase.

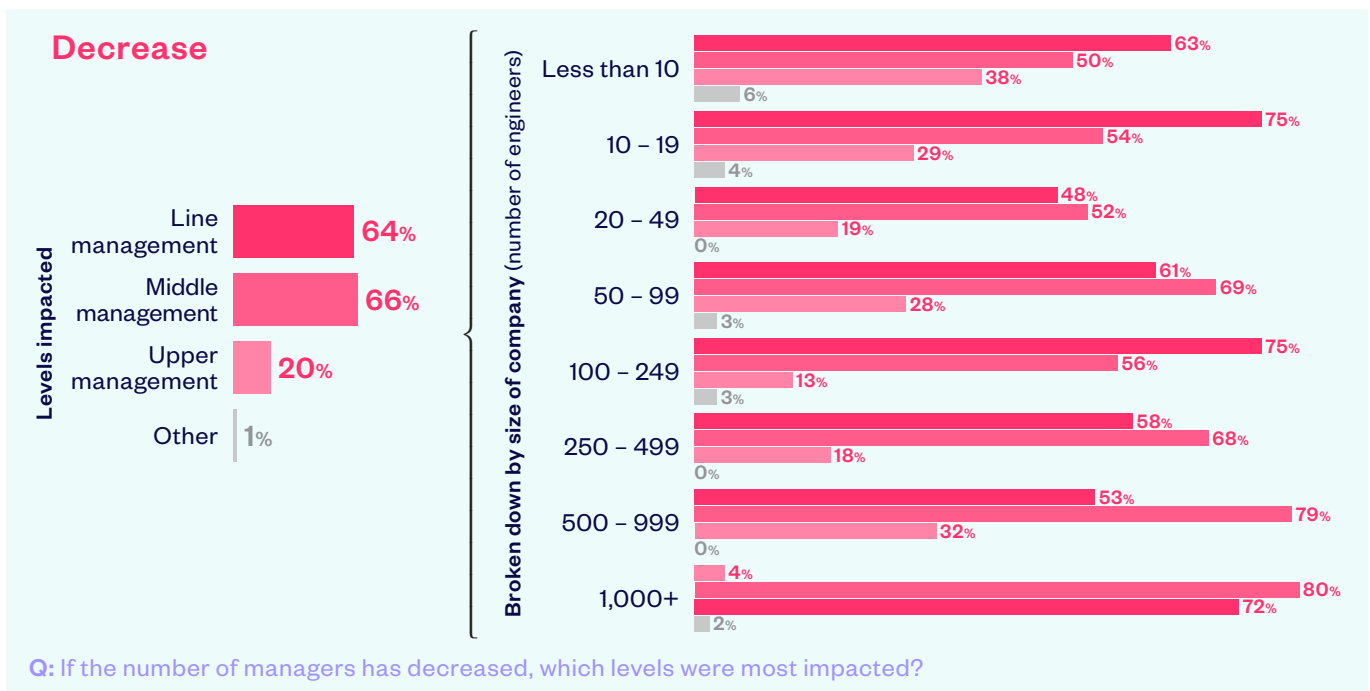
Out of the companies that increased manager roles, 62% were line managers, and 44% middle management.

Of those that decreased manager roles, 64% were line managers, and 66% middle managers.



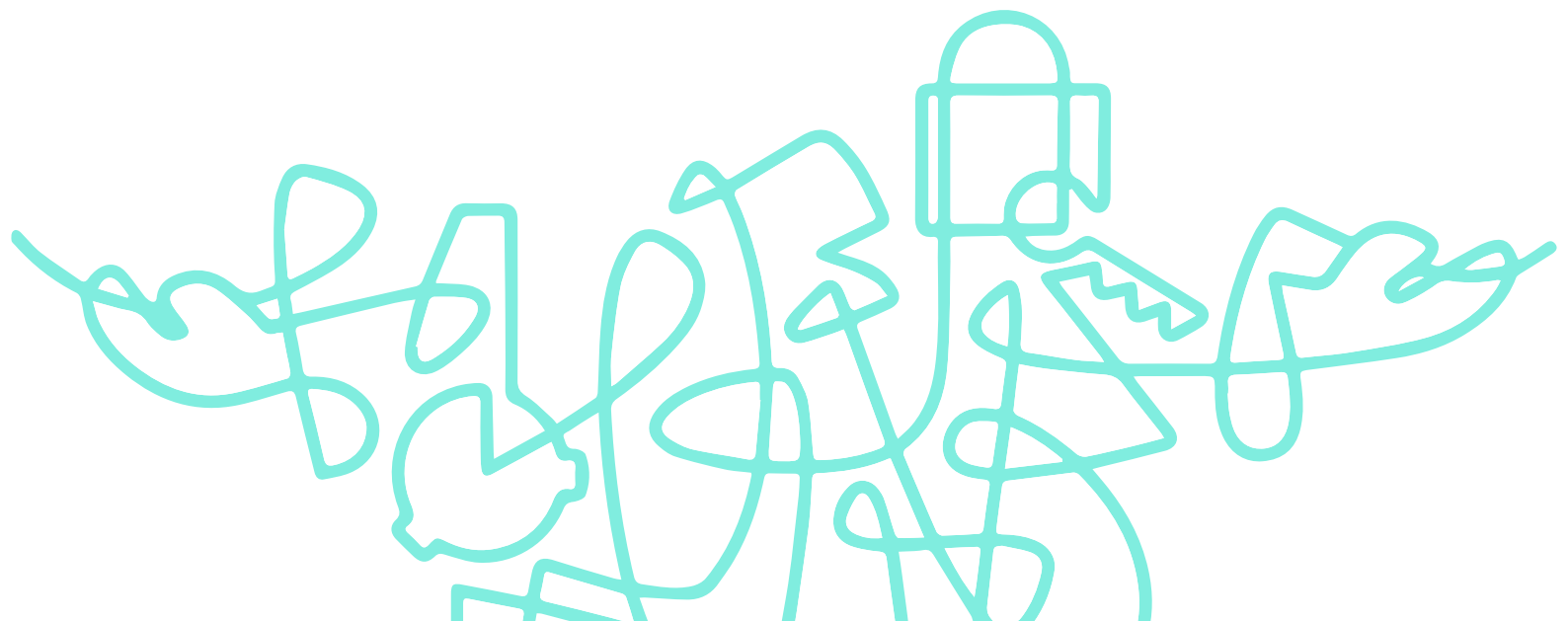
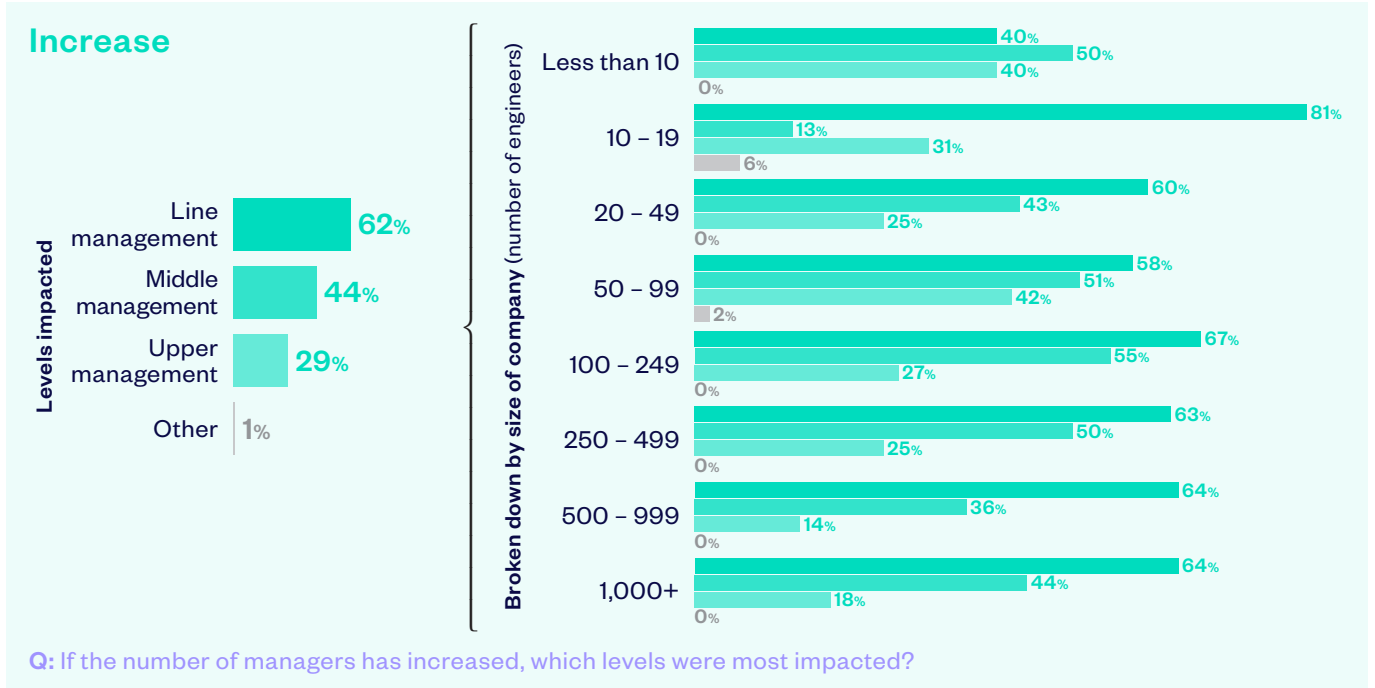
Management changes based on company size

At companies with more than 500 employees that decreased the number of managers over the past year, 80% had cut the number of middle managers, while companies of less than 50 only cut middle management 52% of the time.



Management changes based on levels

On the other hand, out of the organizations that continued to hire for management roles over the past year, most were adding line managers and middle managers, rather than senior hires.



2. Being and becoming an engineering leader

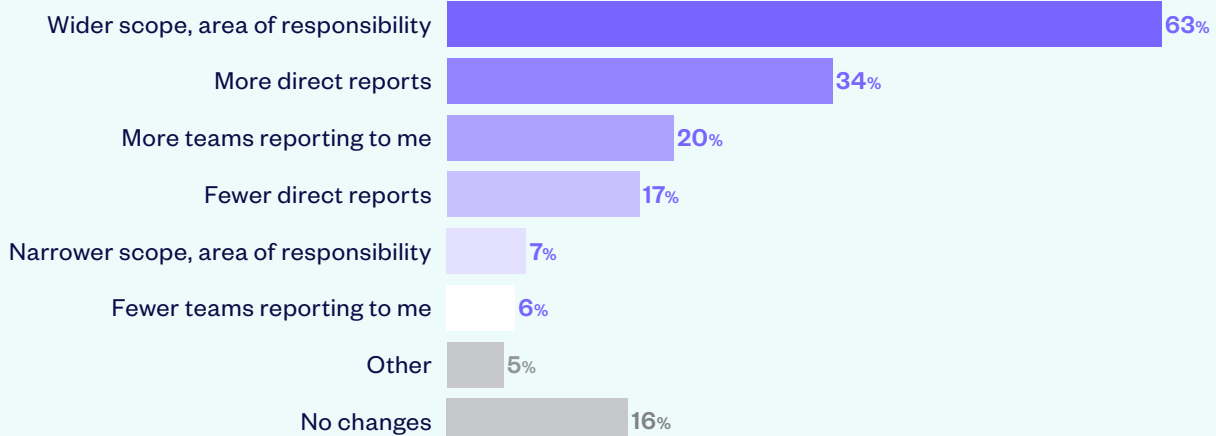
Summary

- Engineering leaders are being asked to do more than before, with **71%** of respondents reporting an increased scope or broader remit.
- **35%** are working longer hours than before, and just **6%** working less.
- Finding suitable positions is proving challenging for **59%** of respondents.

How engineering leaders spend their time

These organizational changes have left managers with broader remits: 71% of respondents at all levels reported an increase in their scope, such as a wider area of responsibility, more direct reports, and/or more teams under their purview. Only 18% reported a decrease in their scope.

34% have more direct reports than before, and 20% have more teams reporting to them. Just 17% report having fewer direct reports and 7% have a narrower scope than before.



Q: How have your role and responsibilities changed over the past 12 months?

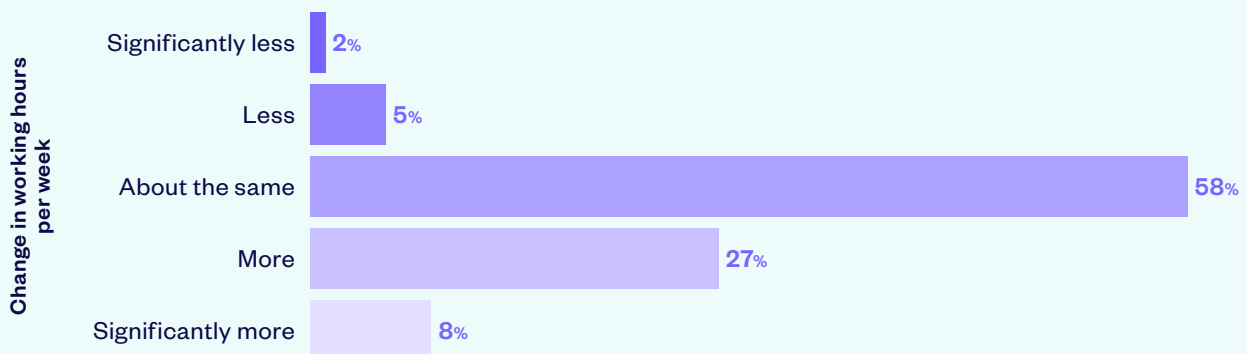
2. Being and becoming an engineering leader

In terms of who is taking on these reports, engineering managers have taken on the most, at 48%, with directors and above taking on more reports in 37% of instances.

	Software engineer (e.g. junior/senior/full stack developer)	Tech Lead (no people management)	Manager of engineers	Advanced engineer (e.g. Staff, Principal)	Manager of managers	CTO or equivalent
More direct reports	13%	18%	48%	5%	40%	34%
Fewer direct reports	5%	13%	13%	13%	13%	13%
More teams reporting to me	5%	5%	17%	5%	45%	33%
Fewer teams reporting to me	4%	5%	5%	2%	8%	7%
Wider scope area of responsibility	56%	62%	60%	73%	66%	64%
Narrower scope, area of responsibility	9%	7%	6%	5%	6%	6%
Other	2%	6%	6%	8%	3%	7%
No changes	29%	22%	15%	15%	10%	10%

Q: How have your role and responsibilities changed over the past 12 months?

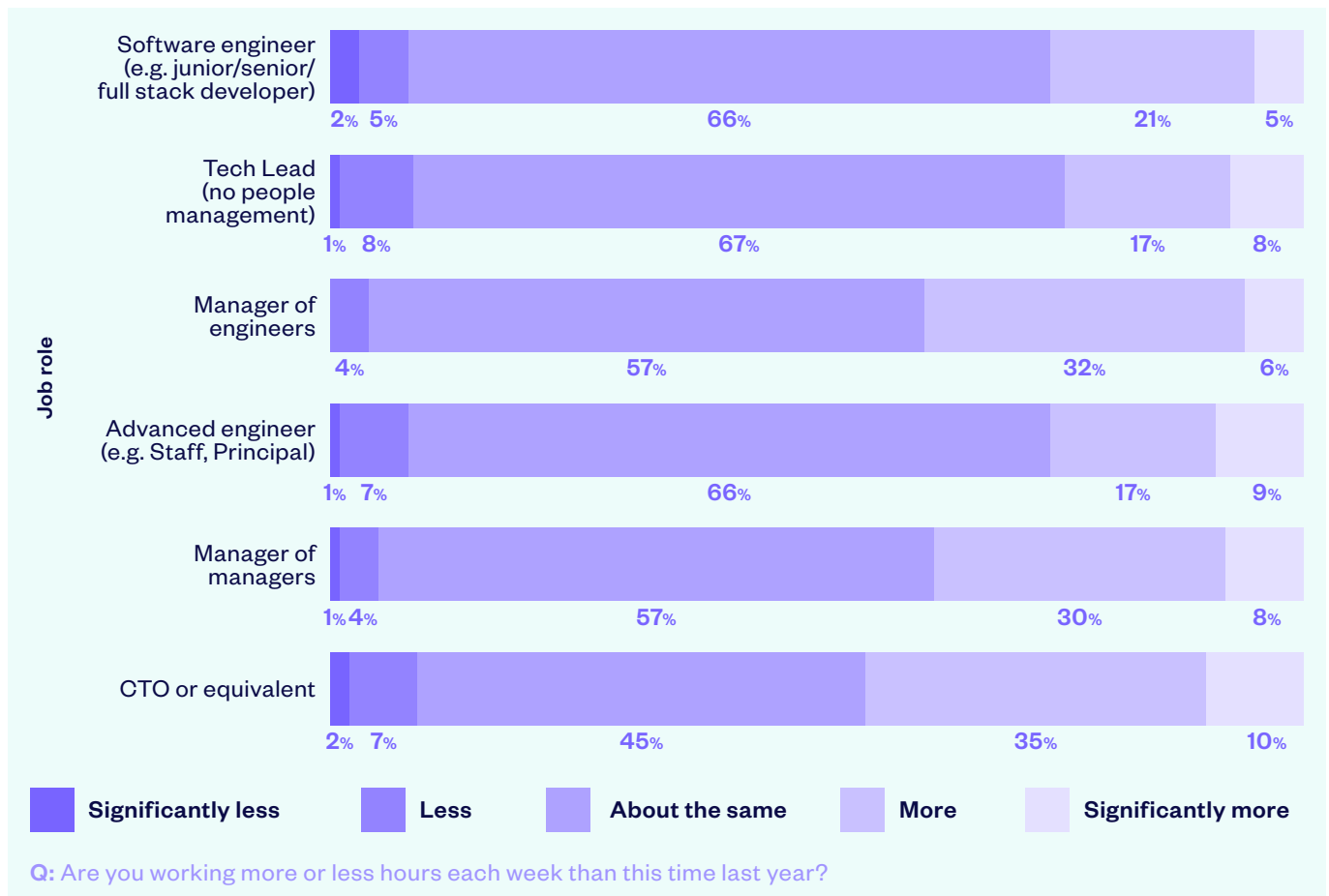
Naturally, this has had an impact on their work-life balance, with 35% of engineering leaders working longer hours than before, and just 7% working less.



Q: Are you working more or less hours each week than this time last year?

2. Being and becoming an engineering leader

CTOs are the most likely to be working more or significantly more (45%), followed by managers and managers of managers, both at 38%. Developers are working longer hours 26% of the time, and tech leads and Staff+ engineers just 25% of the time.



2. Being and becoming an engineering leader

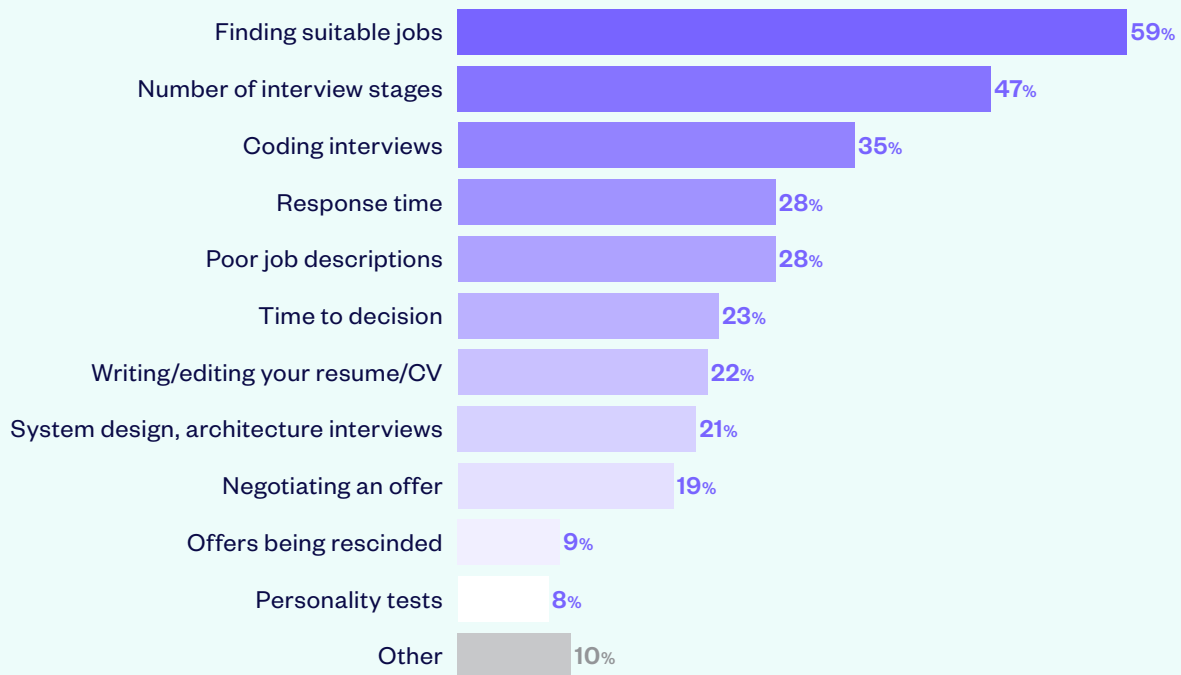
Despite all of these organizational changes, how engineering leaders spend their time – from people management to hands-on coding – hasn't changed all that much. While some individuals saw their roles change a great deal, the overall task mix was relatively unchanged.

	Mean amount of time being spent on each task		
	Breakdown of time 12 months ago	Current breakdown of time	Change
People management incl. 1:1s, feedback, career development	15.7%	15.4%	-0.3%
Delivery management incl. planning, backlog grooming, stand-up and retrospectives	13.2%	13.7%	+0.5%
Customer and stakeholder management	8.3%	9.6%	+1.3%
Cascading information to your team	7.4%	7.3%	-0.1%
Hands-on coding	14.9%	12.7%	-2.2%
Technical strategy	9.1%	10.4%	+1.3%
Code reviews	6.6%	5.5%	-1.1%
Guiding or making technical and architecture decisions	8.3%	8.7%	+0.5%
Managing up, e.g. 1:1s with and reporting to your boss	6.6%	6.4%	-0.2%

Q: What % of your time each week do you currently typically spend on the following tasks? 12 months ago, what % of your time would you typically spend on the following tasks?

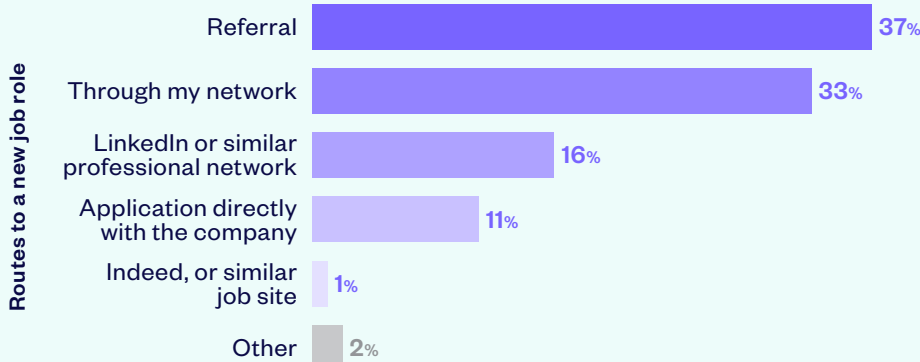
How interviewing for leadership roles is changing

For those looking for new roles in this tricky market, finding suitable positions is proving the most challenging, with 59% citing this as the most challenging aspect of the process, followed by the sheer number of interview stages at 47%. Only 9% cited cases of offers being rescinded, but 28% were frustrated by response times. In addition, many respondents added comments explicitly calling out a pattern of being ghosted by companies.



Q: What are currently the most challenging aspects of the hiring process?

Even as the hiring market for engineering leaders has changed, a good old-fashioned referral is still the most promising route to a new role (37%), followed by using your network (33%). When looking at which sites were most helpful for job searches, LinkedIn was down at 16% and Indeed all the way down at 1%.



Q: Which of the following approaches do you currently consider most promising to help you secure a job offer?

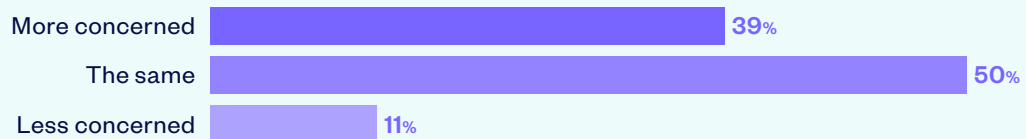
3. Industry trends and outlooks

Summary

- **39%** of respondents are more concerned about their job security than last year.
- Generative AI is more of a priority the higher up the career ladder you go.
- **50%** are worried about a recession.

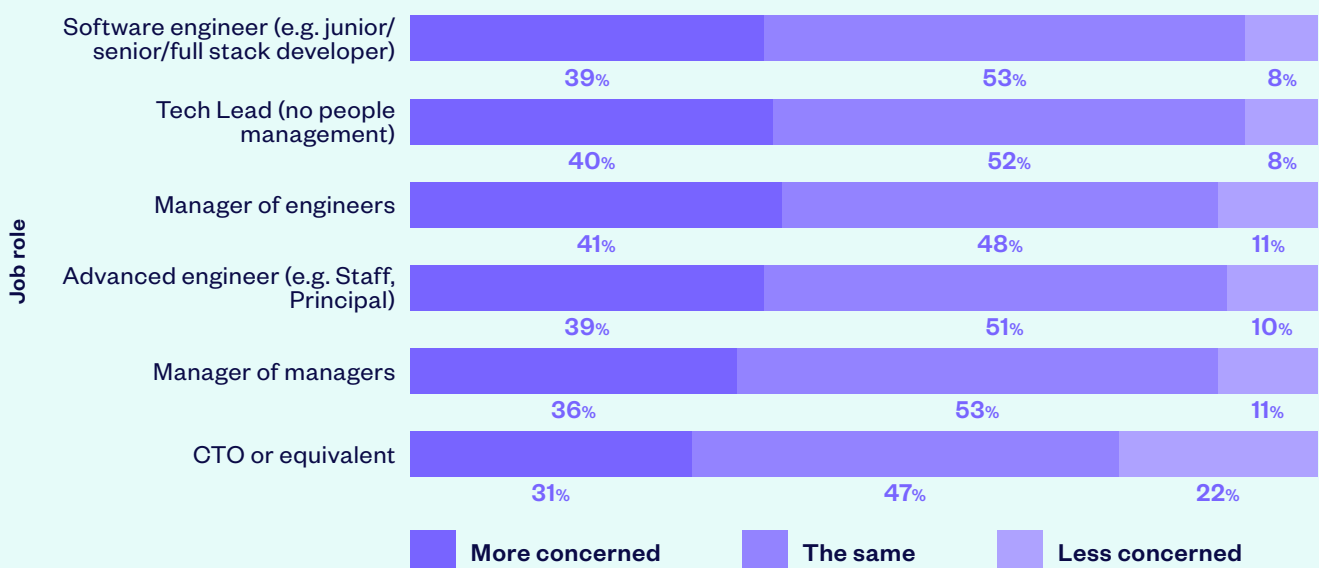
A spotlight on salary and job security

All of this has led to 39% of engineering leaders feeling more concerned about their job security than they were at the same time last year, and just 11% are less concerned.



Q: Are you more or less concerned about your job security than at this point a year ago?

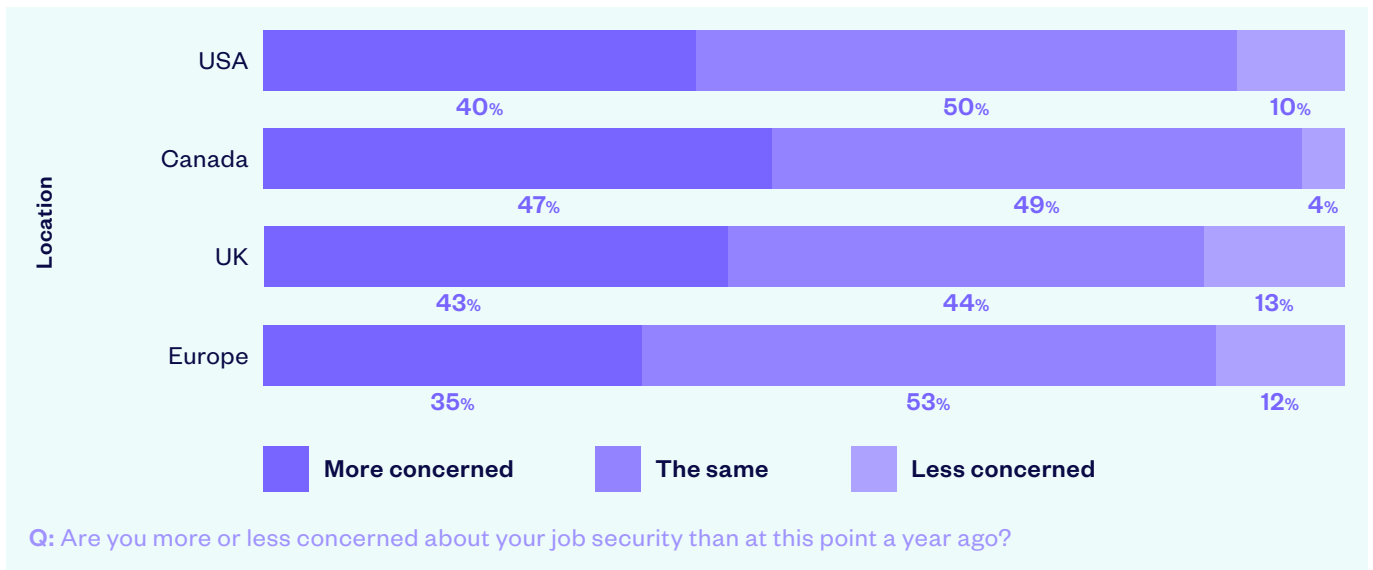
This sense of increased concern was pretty consistent at 40% across software developers, engineering managers, and staff+ roles. The least worried folks sit at the top, where only 31% of CTOs reported feeling more concerned about losing their job than last year, and 22% feeling more secure than before.



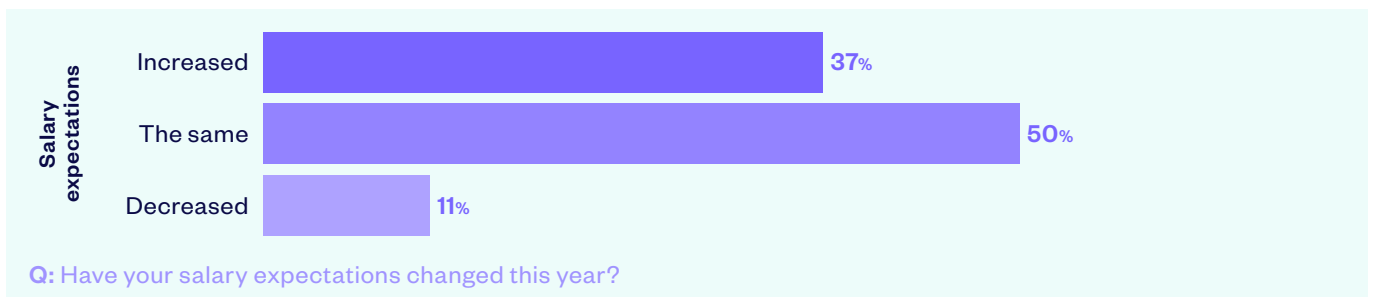
Q: Are you more or less concerned about your job security than at this point a year ago?

3. Industry trends and outlooks

Geographically, these concerns are the most pronounced in Canada (47% more concerned), the USA (40%), and the UK (43%) than in Europe (35%).



Despite this general sense of pessimism, 37% of respondents still expect their salary to rise this year, and just 11% are expecting a salary cut.

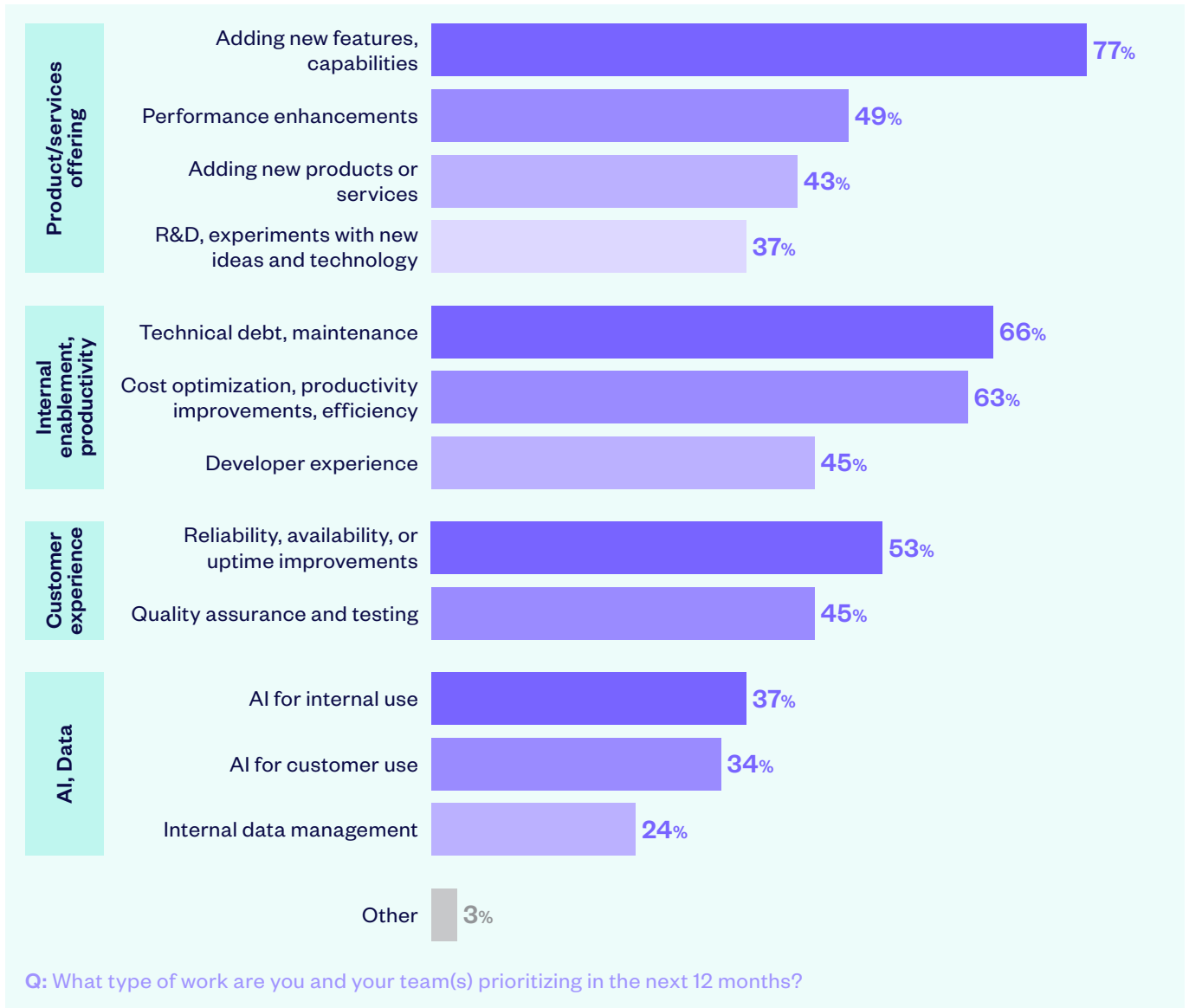


Individual contributors are the most likely to expect a raise this year (52%), followed by CTOs (39%), with line and middle managers less optimistic at 34%.



Deep dive on AI

Despite the recent hype, using AI to improve internal processes (37%) and for customer use (34%) were some of the lowest priorities for the next 12 months among respondents.

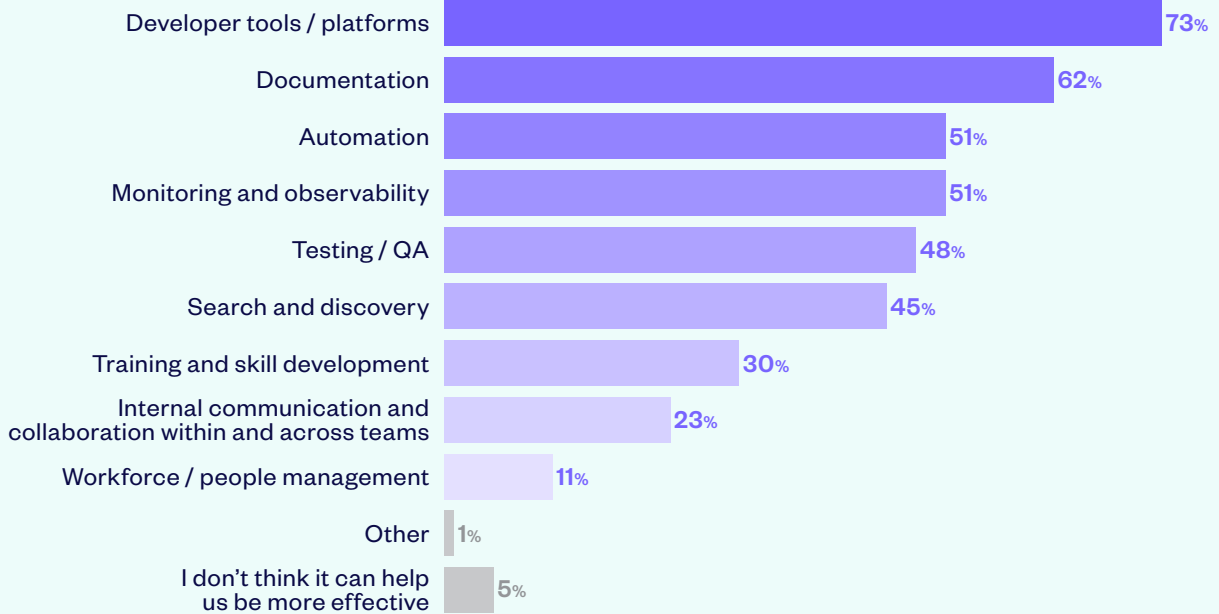


There's also a clear difference between how many higher-level leaders prioritize these AI investments, with 38% of advanced engineers, managers of managers, and CTOs or equivalent citing them as a priority. Meanwhile, 28% of software engineers, tech leads, and managers of engineers have this work slotted as a priority.

While AI may not be a high priority just yet, there is some optimism amongst engineering leaders that it can be a powerful tool. 58% of respondents say they are excited about the positive potential impact of generative AI, second only to optimism about developer experience improvements. On the flip side, 41% were concerned about the negative impacts of this technology.

3. Industry trends and outlooks

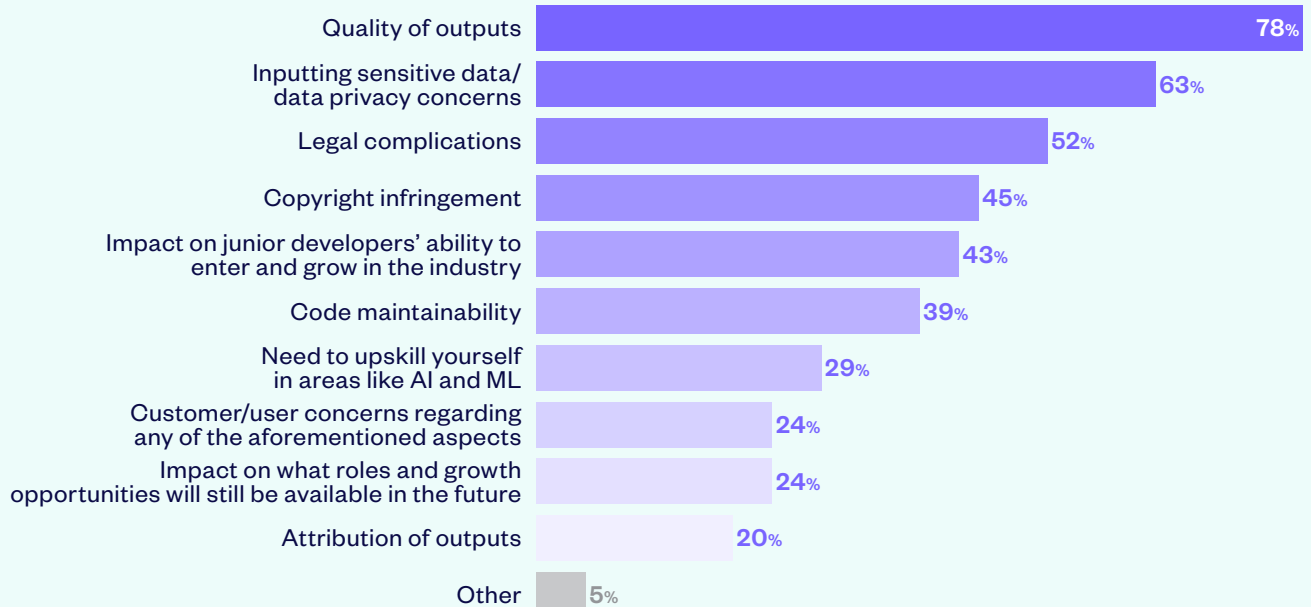
Drilling down, engineering leaders are most excited by the potential of generative AI-powered tools to improve the effectiveness of their developer tools and platforms (73%), streamline documentation (62%), improve monitoring and observability (51%), and in automation (51%). Only 5% think generative AI can't help them be more effective.



Q: In which areas do you think Generative AI-powered tools could help you and your team(s) be more effective?

Concerns about generative AI

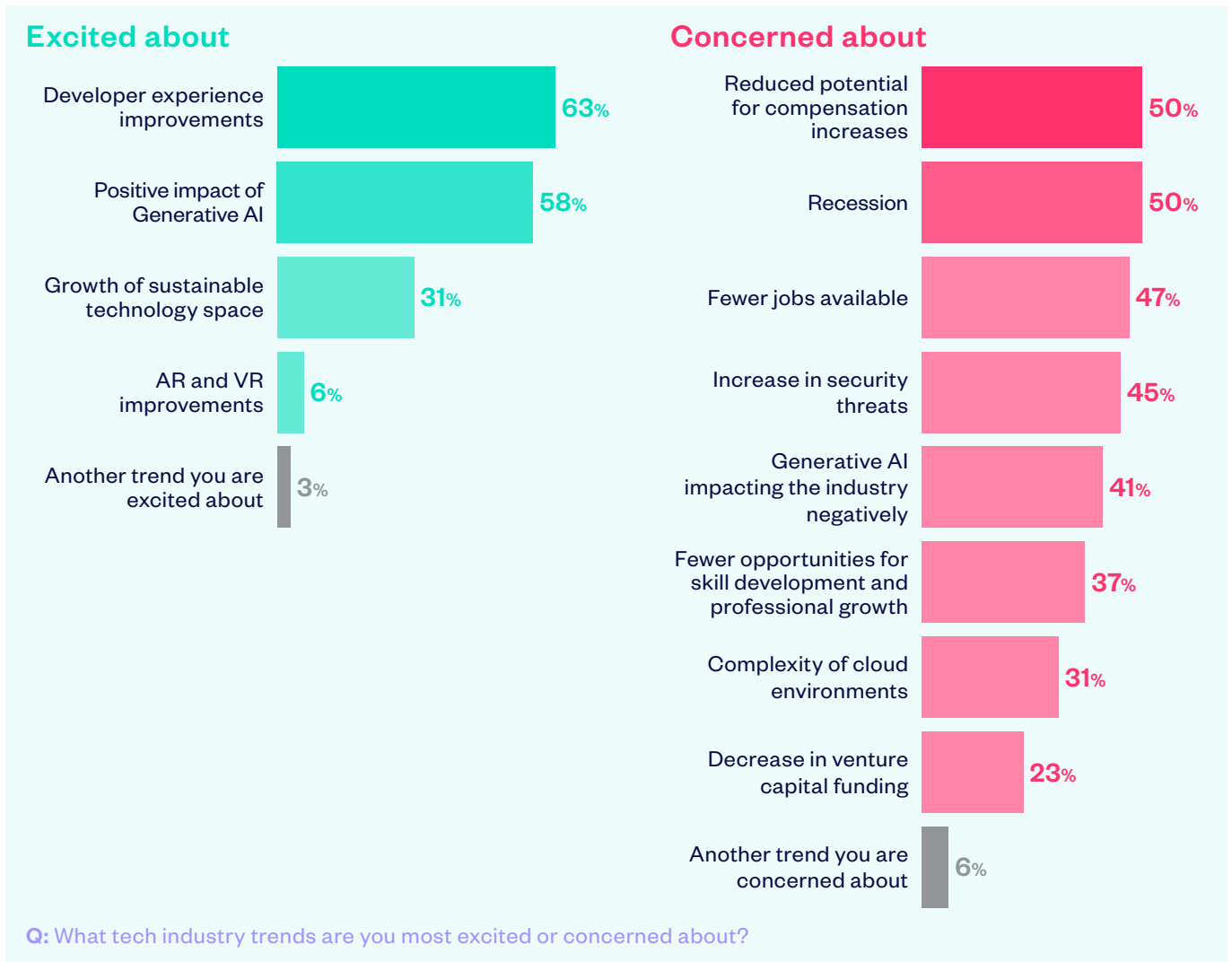
The biggest concerns center around the quality of outputs (78%), inputting sensitive data (63%), legal complications (52%), and copyright infringement (45%). Only 3% have no major concerns about generative AI.



Q: What are your biggest concerns regarding Generative AI?

Industry outlook

In terms of general areas of concern, economic nervousness dominated the responses, with 50% of respondents worried about a recession and reduced potential for compensation. In addition, we saw a pattern in added comments of concerns about global developments like political challenges and wars, as well as concerns about the impact of AI in general on humanity, and regressions in how companies treat their employees.



Final thoughts

Overall, we found that things are not as dire as many headlines have suggested and that there is plenty of nuance in these results depending on location, company size, and roles. It's not all doom and gloom, and it's not that "no one in tech is hiring anymore." It depends.

The rate of change in companies remains high, and will likely continue in the future. Organizations also continue to have *many* priorities, even smaller companies with just over 10 employees. This can be both a necessity for many companies to keep up, as well as a daily challenge for teams that are told that everything is important at all times.

A huge factor in how leadership roles have changed as part of these organizational shifts is the mode their organizations are in. Many larger companies are focused on cost optimization to correct inflated valuations and unsustainable growth during the pandemic. In these organizations, leadership roles have become fewer and broader, likely to fill gaps after layoffs. Meanwhile, smaller companies are still hiring, even if to a lesser degree, and need leaders at many different levels.

Engineering leadership roles have been only loosely defined for a long time, and appear to be even more in flux now. Many individuals reported quite significant shifts in how they spend their time and what they focus on. At the same time, middle management hasn't "evaporated", as has been rumored. This level has been most affected by leadership layoffs, with many of those in larger companies. This also means that growing into middle management roles is likely to remain more challenging than in previous years.

Still, many companies see a need for middle managers, especially as they're growing in size and complexity. Leaders, both technical and people leads, continue to be the glue that hold many organizations together, constantly adapting to changing business needs.

What this means for you as a leader

It looks like the uncertainty about the future of technology leadership may remain for the next few years, as the industry continues to respond to global and political developments, policy shifts in various regions, economic trends and conditions, as well as changes in the industry itself, such as around AI. As a leader in this space, it may therefore be worth considering the following for you, as well as for the leaders and other people you work with:

Own your career growth and development

Our survey shows that companies are investing less in employee growth due to cuts in development budgets and retention efforts. The majority of leaders we heard from learn and grow their careers through their own initiative. Find or be a mentor, read books or follow industry and leadership newsletters, participate in training.

Invest in building genuine connections

“Networking” has sometimes been frowned upon in engineering. But in times of uncertainty, it’s important to find people who you can be open with about what excites and challenges you, who you can learn or get advice and support from, and to whom you can bring the same.

Learn to speak about business impact

Many engineering leaders were never trained on how to think about and shape business value through engineering work. This skill is crucial for setting stakeholder expectations, justifying necessary investments, and aligning them with company goals. Learn to speak the language of finance departments, and to convey the business impact of the work that you and your teams are doing.

Create visibility for the people around you

A key role of leaders is in understanding the state that our teams and organizations are in, so we can adapt accordingly. If you’re not using qualitative and quantitative metrics already with your teams to help them understand and improve how they’re doing, now is a good time to start.

Get good at managing up

In this constantly evolving industry, stay well-connected to your boss and other business leaders and take ownership of making sure you're on the same page as them. Share with them on a regular basis (weekly is a good starting point!) how you and your teams are doing, what risks you're seeing, and your priorities. This is a great way to support alignment, but can also help you convey to them regularly the impact of your work.

Identify ways to grow your skill set when upward mobility is limited

Even though fewer middle management roles may be available in your area for the time being, you can still expand your skill set. Look around you for places to contribute, such as leading larger initiatives and programs that span multiple teams or domains; growing your coaching and mentoring skills; improving your technical skills in selected areas; partnering more closely with business stakeholders; and improving productivity together with your teammates.

Watch out for signs of overwhelm and burnout in yourself and others

The work of holding teams and organizations together during times of high change is important, but can also be intense and tiring, especially if expectations are unclear or shifting. While organizational pressure and job insecurity are high, it can also be difficult to set boundaries around your own and your teams' work. Watch out for yourself and the people around you.

