



# Behind the Curtain

Two Sides of Senior  
Leadership

**Let's say you're at a  
crossroads.**

**You need to make a  
decision.**

Should you....

**...continue with the  
individual contributor  
track or pivot towards  
management?**

**Let's fast forward and  
see what your future  
could look like...**

# Emily Samuels

Spotify

Senior Staff Engineer

# Leemay Nassery

Spotify

Senior Engineering Manager

Let's set the foundation

# Individual Contributor Track Expectations

**Principal Engineer**

**Senior Staff Engineer**

**Staff Engineer**

**Senior Engineer**

**Junior Engineer**



# Engineering Management Track Expectations



**Senior Director of  
Engineering**

**Director of  
Engineering**

**Senior Engineering  
Manager**

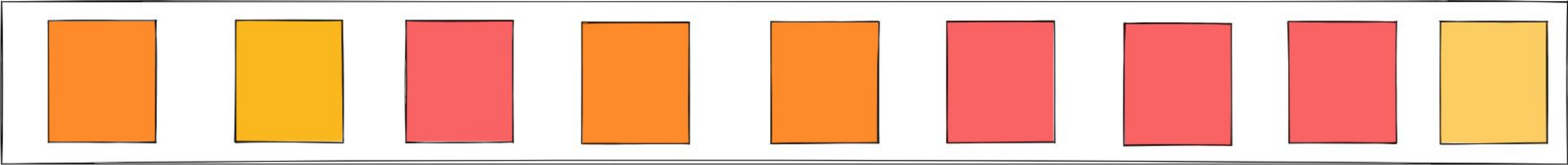
**Engineering Manager  
1 & 2**

**Alright, so what problems  
are we solving here?**

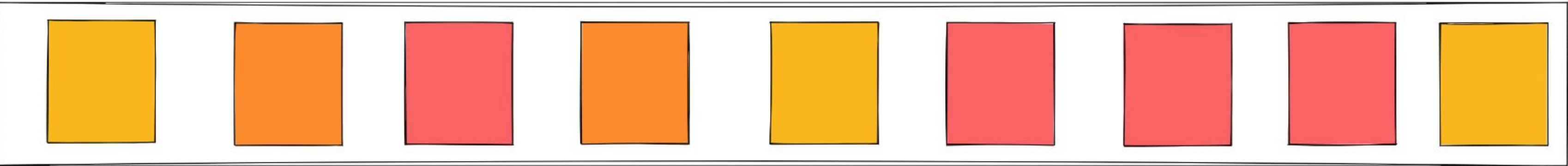
# Individual Contributor Focus Areas

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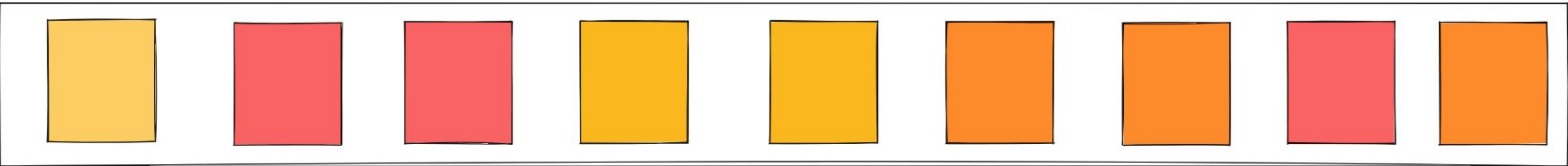
Principal Engineer



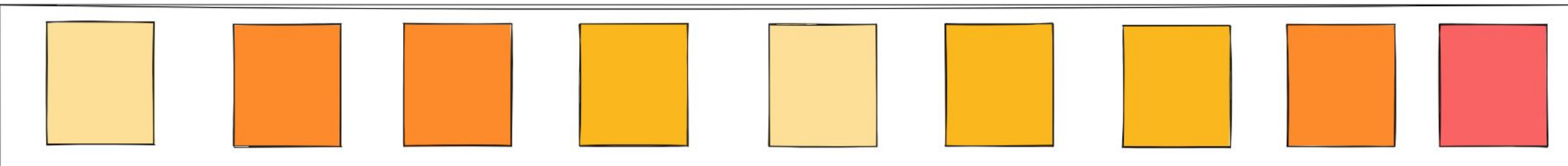
Senior Staff Engineer



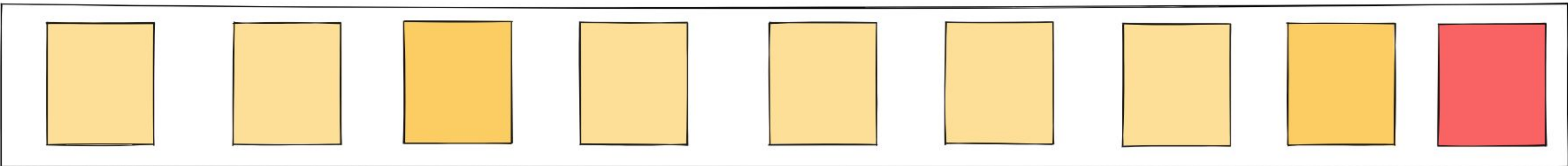
Staff Engineer



Senior Engineer



Junior Engineer



Staffing & Hiring Strategy

System Design

Engineering Practices

Product Vision

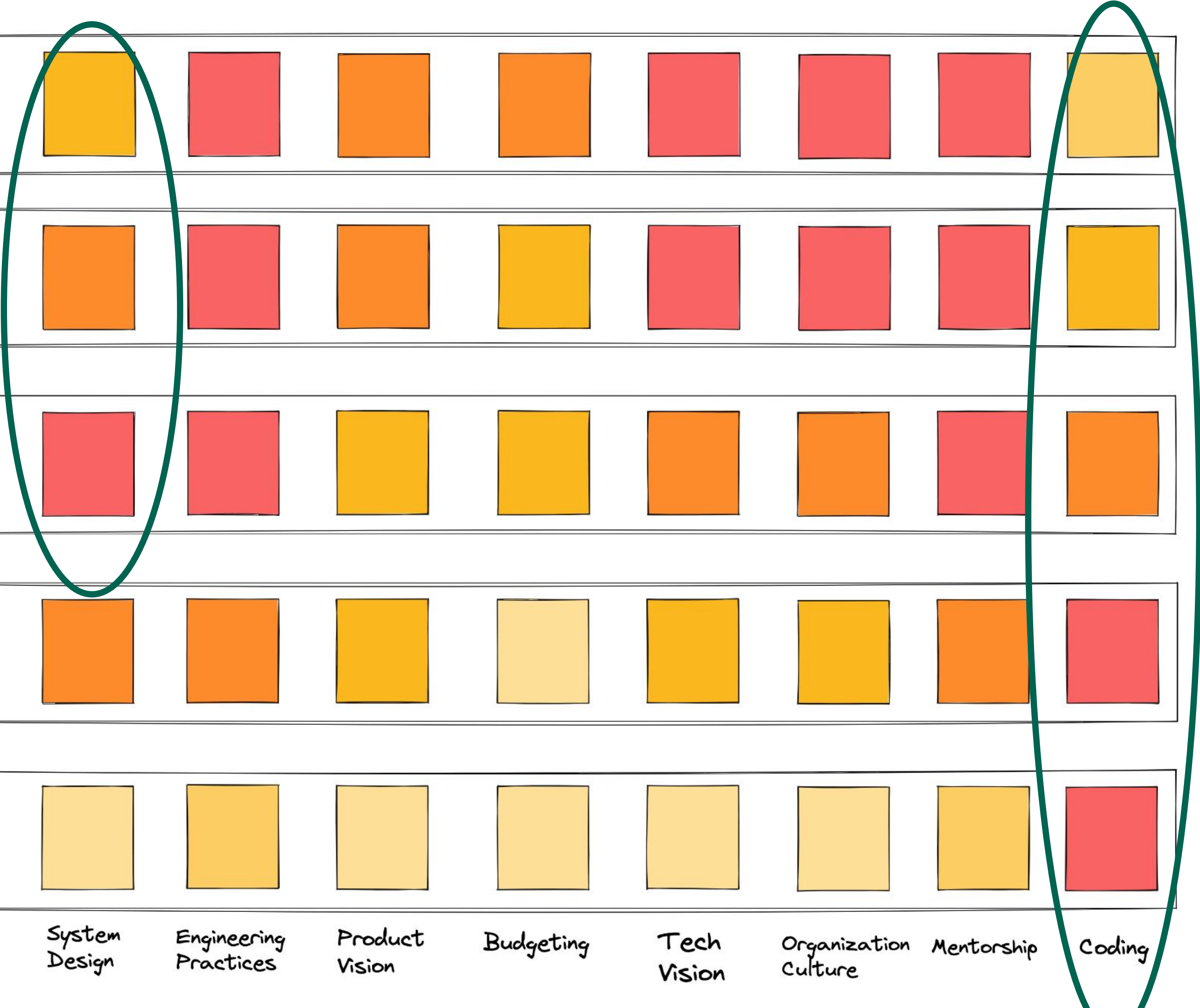
Budgeting

Tech Vision

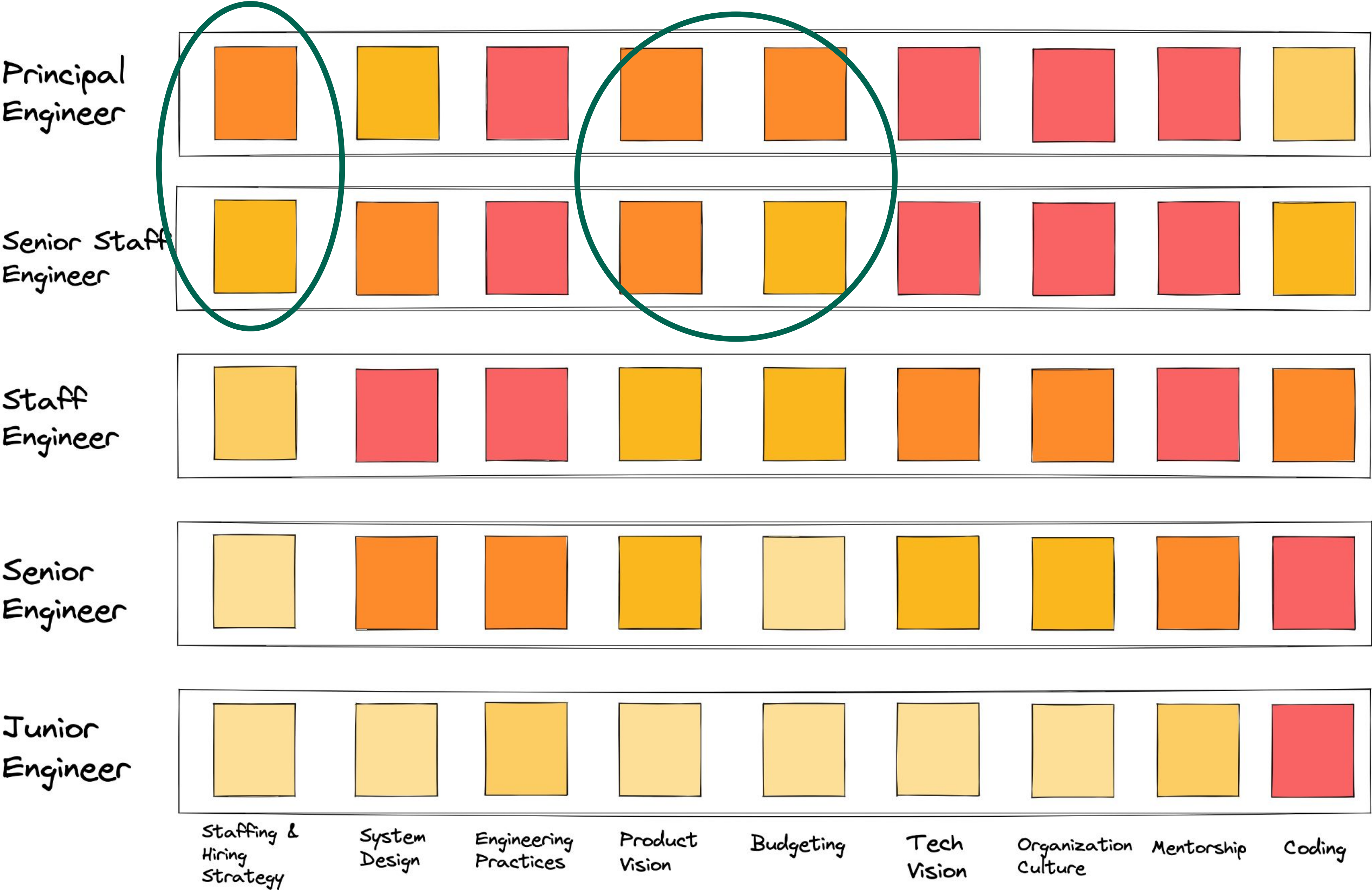
Organization Culture

Mentorship

Coding

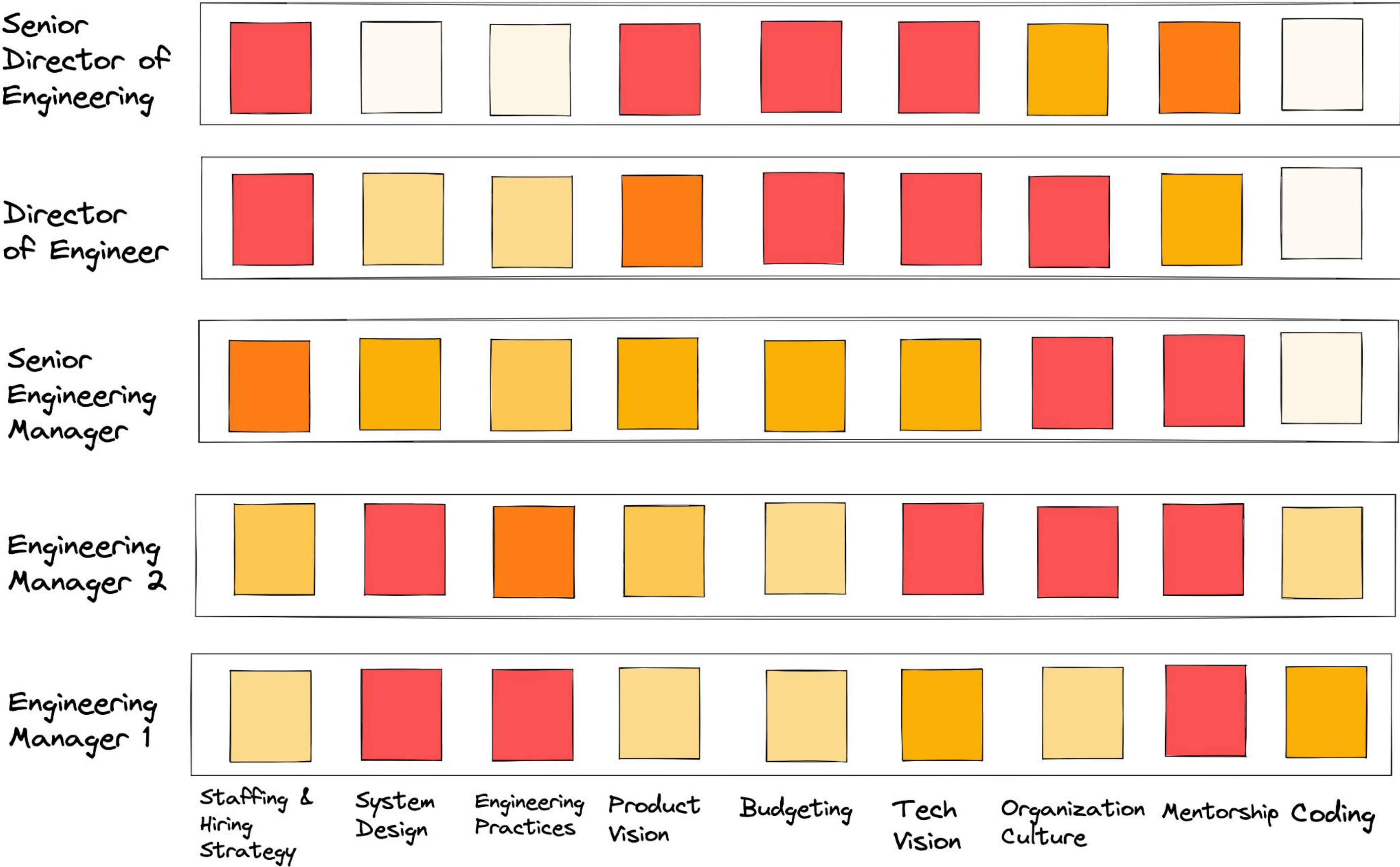


# Individual Contributor Focus Areas



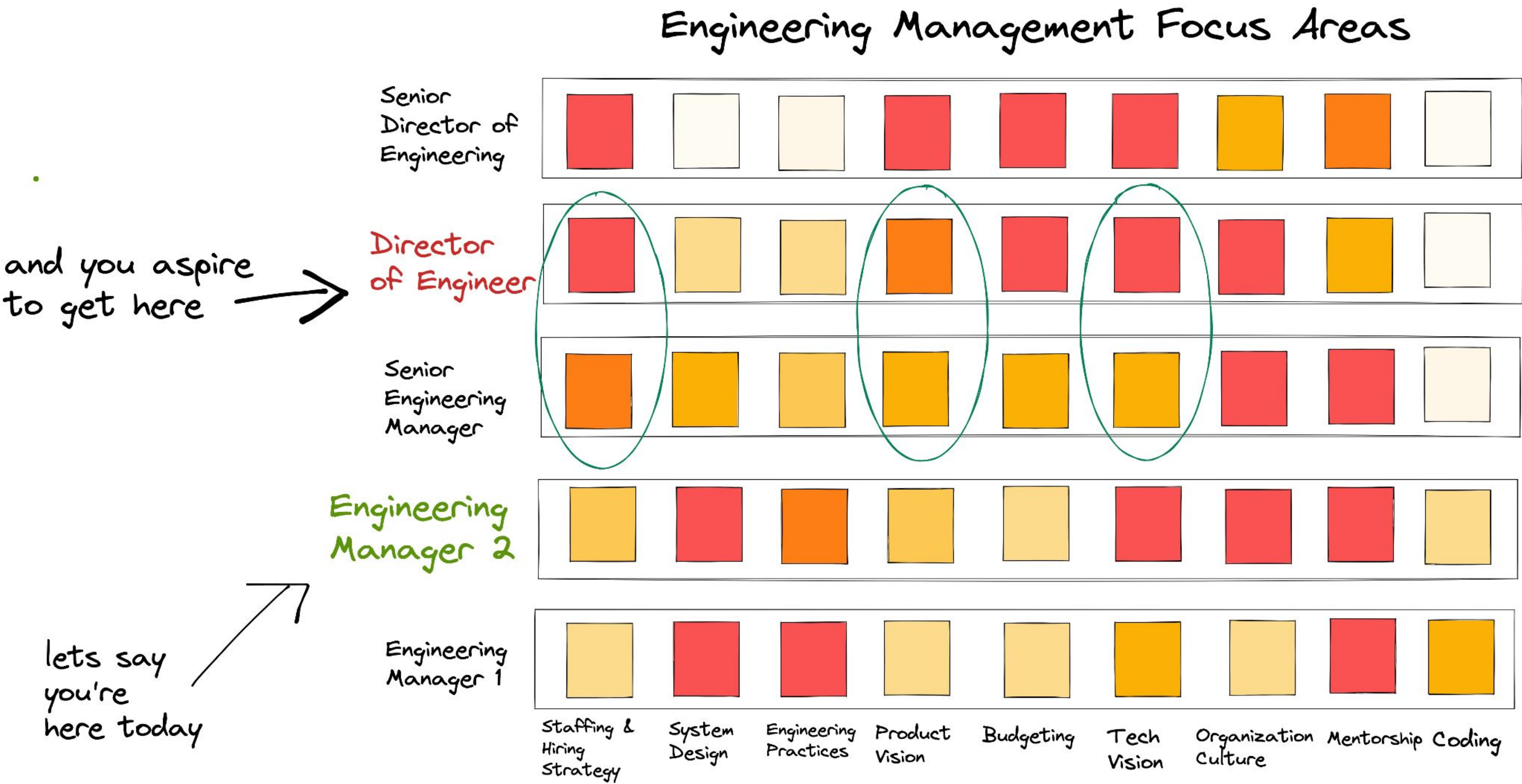
# Engineering Management Focus Areas

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**Represents focus areas and how it changes as you progress into the senior leadership role.**

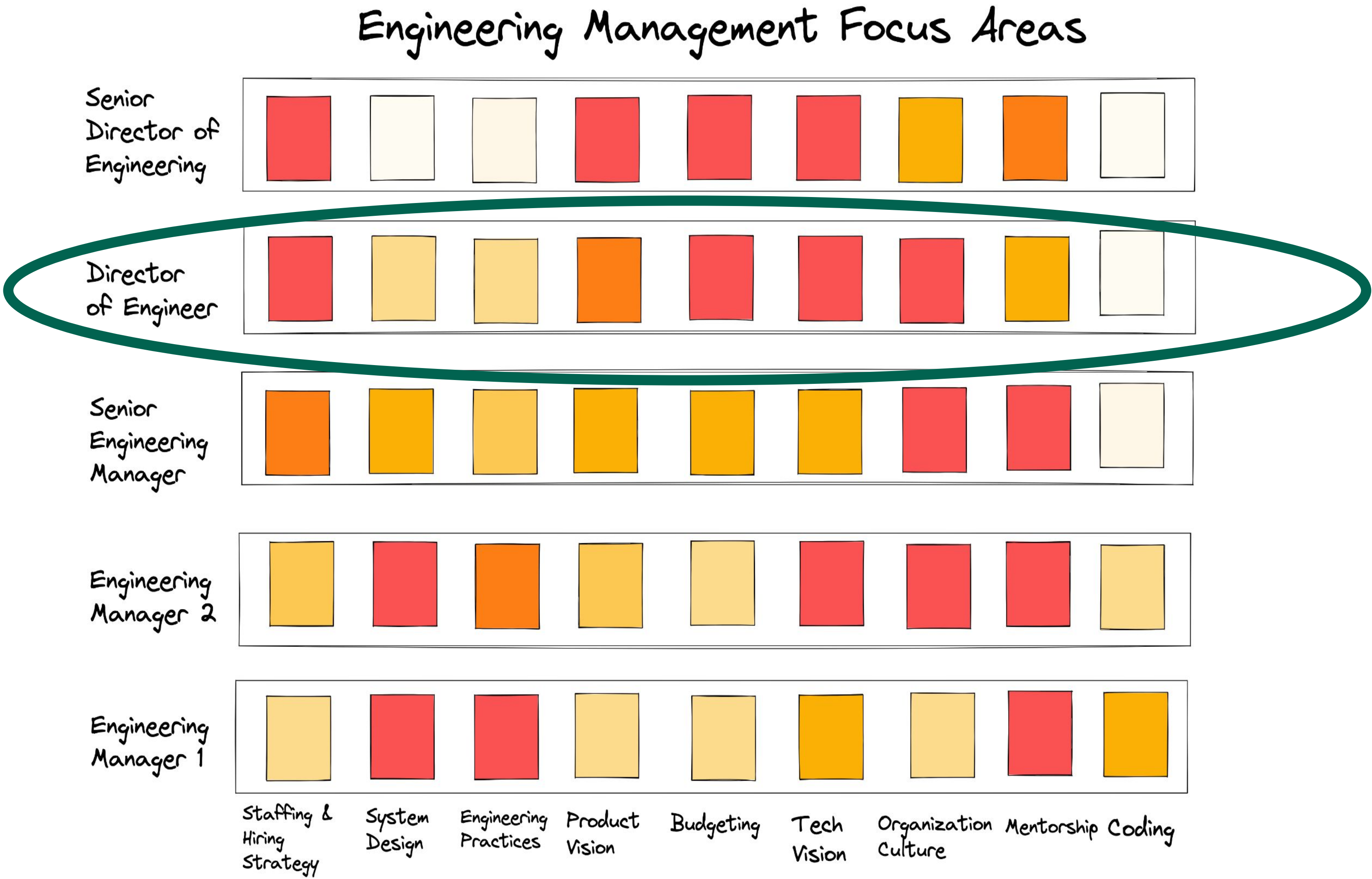
Two things to take note of here...



This isn't a talk about promotions, but also, *it kind of is.*

See what you should be doing now in order to get to the next level.

Start building those skillset now.



**Glimpse into your future if you do decide to take on the management side of the leadership track.**

The intersection between product and engineering start to collide, your influence will scale beyond engineering.

# Behind the Curtain



# What's Changed



# The bigger your organization is, the more your job is to nudge, inspire, and influence.

People will follow your lead not because of your title, but how well you motivate them.

In practice, you need to get much better at persuasion.

So much of behavior is incentives, if you want to make change happen learn what those incentives are.

**There's no turbo speed button.  
You need to be patient. Change  
takes time. The feedback loop is  
longer.**

Developing a long-term product, organizational and tech vision takes time, there isn't an equivalent of a quick PR.

The delay between an action and seeing a result takes longer.

# The bets you take are larger. The blast radius increases.

Stakes are higher!

Rolling back your changes is more difficult.

How do you know if a decision you made was right?

As a manager, if you make a mistake it effects  
dozens of people.



# Problem scope increased

Bigger impact across a larger part of the company

# What to do is less defined

Expectations are more nebulous  
**I have more say in what I work on**

**Earlier promos happened organically, later promos required more intentional work**

# New Perspective



- **Wider company view**

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- **Lead through other people**

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- **Lead through other people**
- **More future focused**

# Being able to create the organizational culture I wish I had when I was an engineer

Promote certain behaviors, discourage others.

Infuse a bit of **humor into everything** we do

Celebrate **whenever** possible.

It's not just about retention of paying customers but also **retention of team members**. Do not take your team for granted.

# Challenging



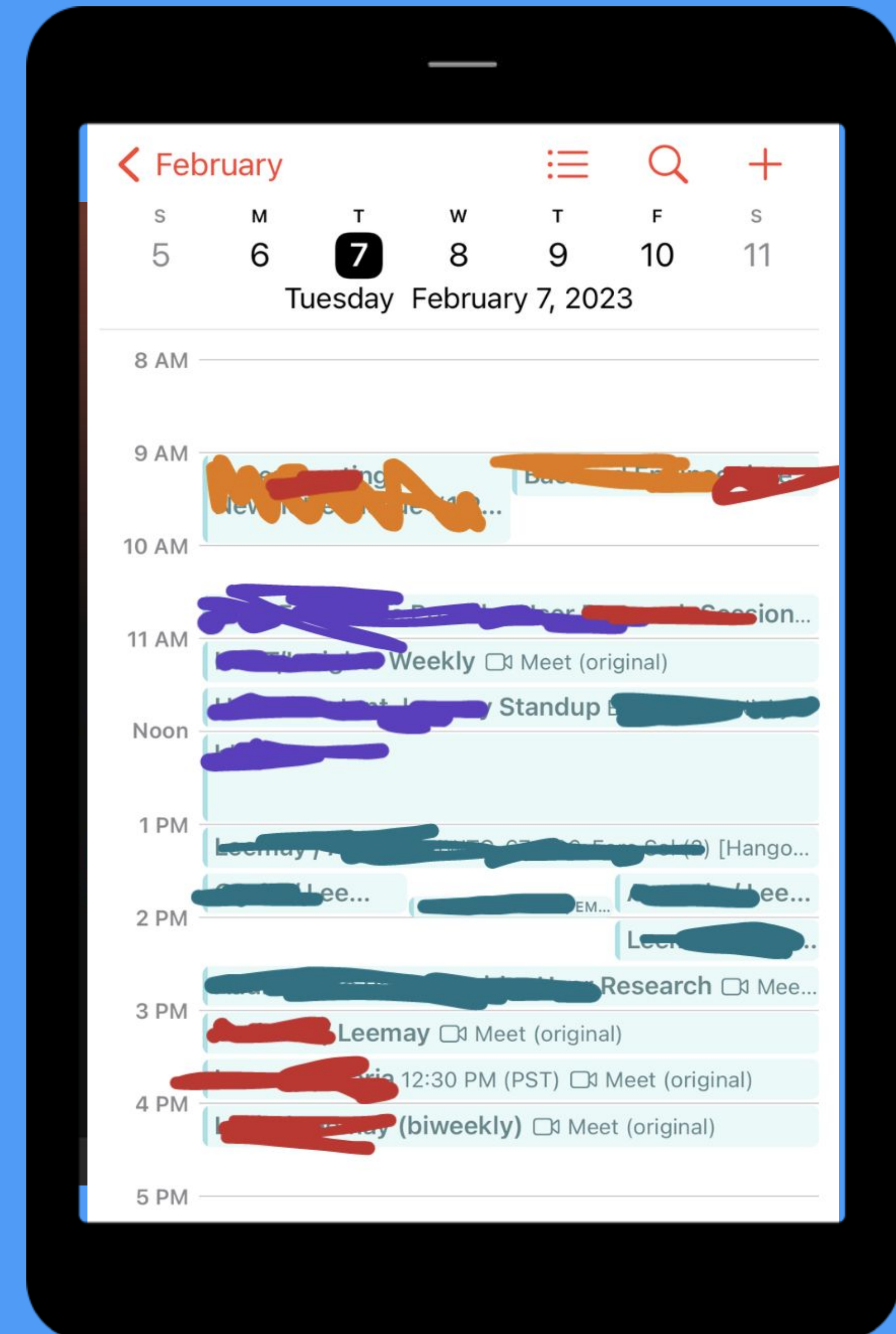
# Time and energy are both finite resources and also, your most valuable resources

It's a daily challenge to ensure you're spending time on the right things that will help your team, company and of course, yourself.

Being a leader does not mean you're in meetings all day.

Leaders need time to think too.

You need to protect your time and your energy.



# Prioritizing problems is the most important thing we do

*(right after hiring and retention)*

there are 10 problems here, what's the most severe one?  
and are we addressing that?

make decisions with less information.

the hardest thing we do is make decisions *(and pick the right metrics)*.

# People are more complex than engineering systems

we see things from such a small window.

help them grow by elevating the bar FOR THEM.

dare to be surprised.

# Are you the right person to take an organization to the next level?

sometimes an org needs a visionary, someone bold and courageous, other times it may need someone who can improve reliability or engineering practices, bring a calming presence to the team, reduce chaos.

you can be flexible, and adapt for what the org needs but will you enjoy it? are you the right leader for the organization?



- **Delegating is hard**

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- **Less hands on**

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- **Less hands on**
- **Starting over**

- **Less connected to a team**

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- **Voice carries more weight**

# Final Takeaways



The challenges, regardless  
of level or track, are  
actually the same

Are you learning?

Are you having novel experiences?

Are you building new skills?

Have you been working on the same thing for  
10+ years?

Are you working on things that matter?

# You need to start planting the seeds for your future, now

What do you want to do 5 years?

Spend time learning new skills that will be seeds for your future, it will give you a better chance of reaching your goals.

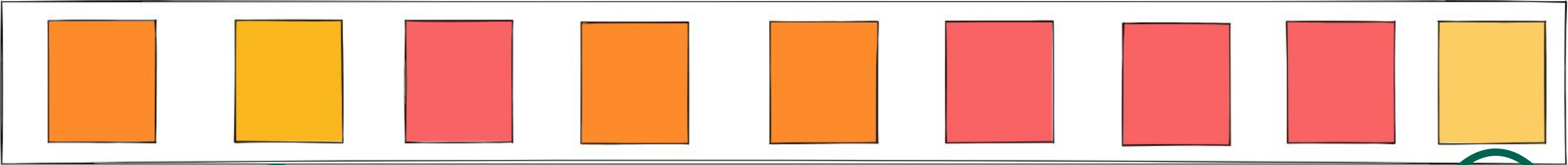
*If you fail to plan, you plan to fail*

**What will you give up  
and what will you  
gain if you go to the  
next level?**

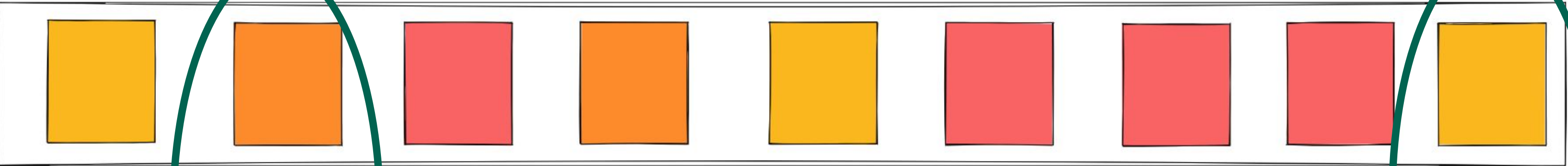
What problems will you focus less  
on and what things will require  
more of your attention?

# Individual Contributor Focus Areas

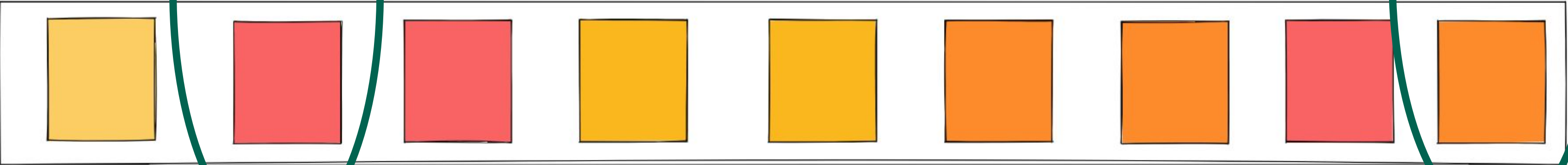
Principal Engineer



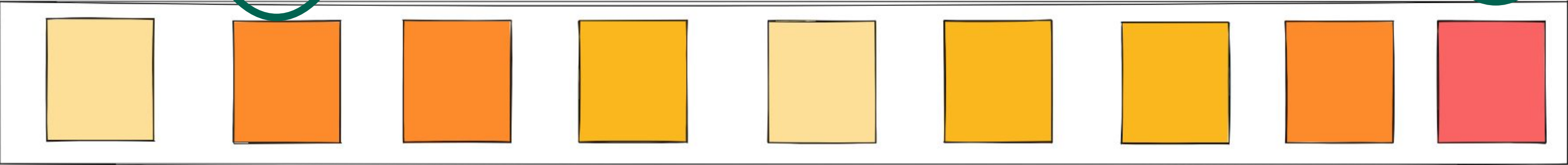
Senior Staff Engineer



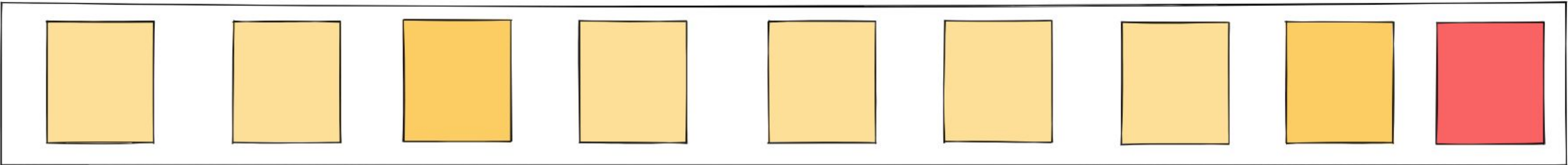
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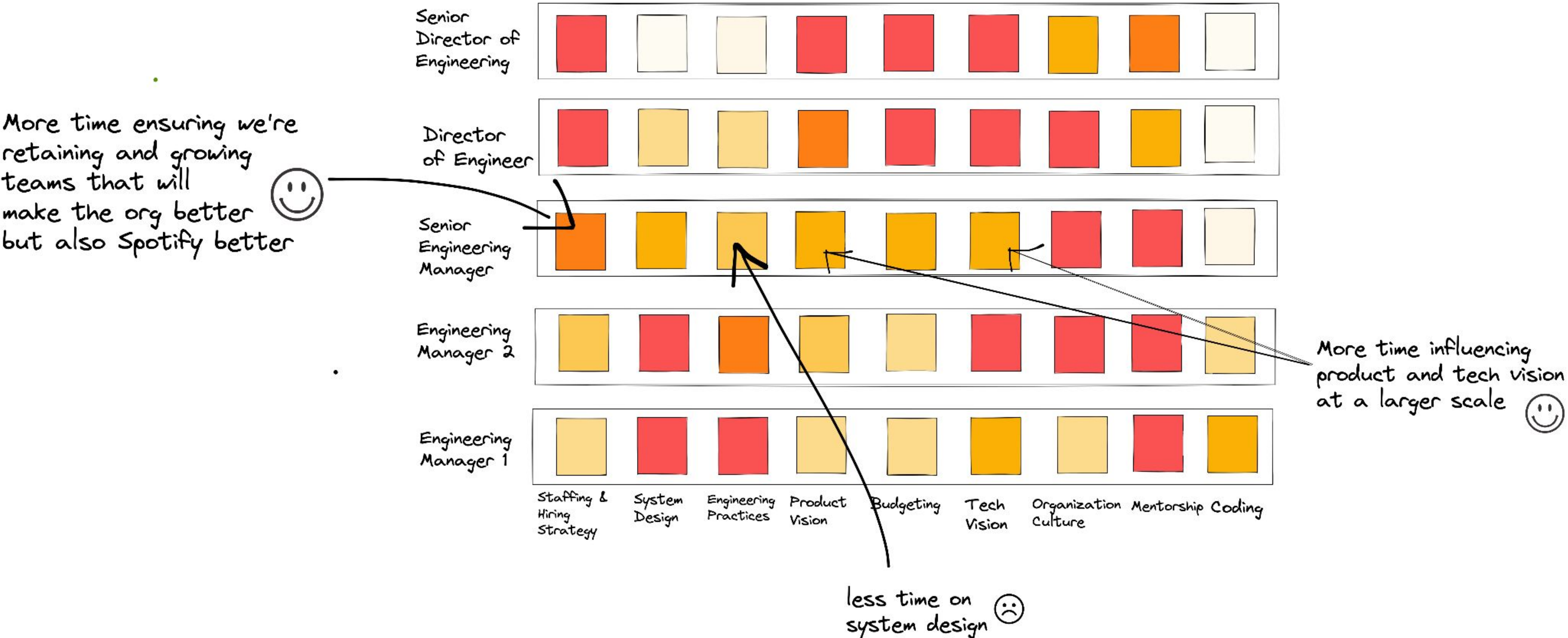
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Coding Culture

## Engineering Management Focus Areas



Unsure what choice to make?  
Then optimize for what's  
*interesting.*

What do you think is interesting, not what anyone else thinks is interesting? What kind of new skill would be interesting to you?

*You will never regret doing the more “interesting” option.*

