

# Role and Influence

The IC trajectory beyond Staff

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How your work, and your influence, change with level





# The IC path

Hidden in this: **the scope of problems grows.**

- The meaning of “IC” gets fuzzier.
- People are a **part of the system** – teams, stakeholders, users, customers, etc.
- A growing expectation to **identify problems of any sort** and work with others to fix them.

# The IC path

Jr. Eng → Sr. Eng → Staff → Sr. Staff → Principal → Distinguished+

Work with people

Lead a dependent team

Build a team

Lead an independent project

Co-lead an org

Construct teams

Understand business aspects

Initiate programs

Drive strategy

Nothing is “out of scope”



# The Four Disciplines

# Every job has four groups of skills

The core **technical skill** (software engineering, UX, litigation, etc)

**Product management:** Figuring out *what* needs to be done and *why*. Building the narrative and strategic vision. Prioritizing and sequencing.

**Project management:** Figuring out what needs to happen and making sure it does. Herding the cats and making order out of chaos.

**People management:** Finding the right people for the job and turning them into a team. Building them and their careers.



# From a personal perspective

These jobs have NOTHING to do with what's on your business card. The higher your level, the less they connect.

You won't be equally good at all four; you won't like them equally; your preferences will change over time.

## ***Exercise:***

*Discuss your first thoughts about all four and have a friend watch your emotional response as you discuss them. Look for where you get excited.*

# From a team perspective

Every team needs leadership of **all four types**.

You need to know which roles you're able to step into, and advocate from those perspectives.

Your combo shapes the kind of influence you have:

- Just engineering: Hyperspecialist (and your influence wanes)
- + Other tech skills (beyond eng): Bridge and communicator
- + Product mgt: Become a strategic leader, shape direction
- + People mgt: Become a mentor to the company, the person IC's turn to
- + Project mgt: Become an operational leader, drive execution



# The Fifth Discipline

# Adult Supervision

With experience comes good sense. Engineers make excellent **adult supervision**.

What makes engineers good adult supervision?

- You aren't freaked out, because **you've seen this before**.
- All engineering splits into **product engineering** (how things should work) and **safety engineering** (how things might fail). Experience makes you more conscious of the latter.
- You learn this
  - ... more at big companies than startups: need experience of **risk mattering**
  - ... from **maintaining systems over time**
  - ... from **diversity of experience** (and I *don't* just mean eng experience!)
  - ... from **understanding more about people**

# Conclusion

Understanding your role explains how you can influence

- Every level at Staff+ represents a different *job role*
- Growing scope of problems you think about
- Your voice as a product, people, and project leader
- Your experience at dealing with things going wrong