

Voice of the Executive:

How Engineering Principals Can Strengthen Mid-Level Leadership Bench Strength

January 2026



Brands We've Impacted





From Data to Action

6 Key Recommendations From 2025+ Roadmap

- 1 Invest in development and leadership
- 2 Support middle managers
- 3 Expand talent ecosystems
- 4 Embed quality-of-life into culture
- 5 Embrace outcome-based work models
- 6 Deploy AI responsibly and strategically



“If nothing changes in how we develop mid-level leaders, what risk does that create for your firm over the next three years?”

Key Findings:
**Where Leadership Bench
Strength Breaks Down**

Communication

- “Absolutely essential...we aren't being systematic about developing it.”
- Common breakdowns: missed handoffs, conflict avoidance, unclear expectations.

Bench-strength implication:

Weak communication limits leaders' ability to scale themselves and develop others.



“Which of these breakdowns is most costly for your firm right now—and why?”



Initiative & Ownership

- Inadvertently reward compliance over initiative
- Team waits for information/hesitates

Bench-strength implication:

Without ownership, firms stay dependent on a small group of overextended leaders.

“What signals might your firm be sending — intentionally or not — about decision-making and risk?”

Trust & EQ

- Advancement requires these
- Our development doesn't prioritize it

Bench-strength implication:

Promotions stall or fail when trust is underdeveloped.



“Where do trust or EQ gaps show up first—in teams, clients, or leadership transitions?”

Quick Recap:

- Communication limits scale
- Cultivating Ownership determines momentum
- Trust accelerates (or blocks) succession



Reality Check: Why Bench Strength Breaks Down in Well-Run Firms

“We’re Busy Being Irreplaceable—Not Building What’s Next”

CONSTRAINTS

- Time and capacity pressures
- High-performing technical leaders staying ‘irreplaceable’
- Leadership development treated as episodic, not systemic

Strategic Reflection

- What are we currently rewarding most in our leaders: technical execution, problem-solving, or developing others?
- Where are our next-generation leaders struggling most to step up—and what is actually within our control to address?
- If nothing changes, what is the cost to our succession pipeline, client continuity, and growth over the next three years?

Insight to Action

- Moving beyond one-off courses to supported application (coaching, mentoring, feedback loops)
- Using performance feedback as a development signal, not just an evaluation tool
- Avoiding 'assessment reports on the shelf' by tying insights to measurable action

Continue the Conversation



- **Encore Presentation:**

Bring this strategic conversation to your leadership team.

- **1:1 Strategy Discussion:**

If your organizations is taking action in the next 30-90 days.

tidycal.com/leadwellconsulting/30-minute-meeting

APPENDIX



Confidence & Decision-Making

- Some have hesitation
- Others move too brisk without sufficient context/buy in
- Both extremes create risk

Bench-strength implication:

Without gauged decision-making, firms remain bottlenecked at the top or absorb unnecessary execution risk.

Big-Picture Thinking

(& business sense)

- Firms expect strategic thinking, yet most mid-level leaders are trained only for project delivery.
- Technical precision is rewarded early; enterprise thinking is expected later.

Bench-strength implication:

Firms risk promoting strong doers who struggle to lead beyond their own work.

