

# Engineering Leadership Operating Review



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A structured conversation for finding the operating conditions that help - or hinder - engineering performance.

## DESIGNED FOR

Engineering leadership teams reviewing direction, decision flow, delivery conditions and capability.

# How to use this review

This is not a maturity model and it is not a score to optimize.  
Use it to make assumptions visible, compare perspectives and  
choose one operating constraint worth changing.

## 01 Prepare

Invite 4-8 leaders with different views of the engineering system. Ask each person to score the questions independently.

## 02 Compare

Discuss the widest scoring differences first. The disagreement often contains more information than the average score.

## 03 Evidence

Use recent decisions, delivery examples and team signals. Avoid scoring from aspiration or policy documents alone.

## 04 Choose

Select one constraint, one observable signal and one 30-day experiment. Do not create a transformation backlog.

### SCORING GUIDE

|                                                                      |                                                                                  |                                                                          |                                                                              |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>1</b><br><b>Mostly unclear</b><br>Answers depend on who is asked. | <b>2</b><br><b>Partly defined</b><br>Some repeatable practice, but inconsistent. | <b>3</b><br><b>Working</b><br>Clear enough to guide most real decisions. | <b>4</b><br><b>Strong</b><br>Visible, trusted and improved through feedback. |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

# Direction

## *Can people connect engineering choices to outcomes that matter?*

## DIAGNOSTIC QUESTIONS

SCORE EACH STATEMENT / 1 UNCLEAR / 4 STRONG

|    |                                                                             |                                                                                                 |
|----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 01 | Leaders can explain the few outcomes engineering is expected to influence.  | <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3 <input type="radio"/> 4 |
| 02 | Trade-offs between speed, resilience, quality and cost are explicit.        | <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3 <input type="radio"/> 4 |
| 03 | Teams understand the context behind priorities, not only the priority list. | <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3 <input type="radio"/> 4 |
| 04 | Technology choices can be traced to a strategic intent.                     | <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3 <input type="radio"/> 4 |
| 05 | Leadership messages remain coherent across functions and levels.            | <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3 <input type="radio"/> 4 |

## EVIDENCE EXAMPLES - REPLACE WITH YOUR OWN

01

**Recent portfolio choice**

Example: investment moved from feature growth to reliability after churn and incident evidence.

02

**Stopped work**

Example: a roadmap item was explicitly paused to protect an agreed strategic outcome.

03

**Team explanation**

Example: separate teams describe the same reason behind the top priority.

04

**Trade-off decision**

Example: a written choice favors resilience over short-term delivery speed.

# Decisions

*Can the right decisions be made at the right level with enough context?*

## DIAGNOSTIC QUESTIONS

SCORE EACH STATEMENT / 1 UNCLEAR / 4 STRONG

|    |                                                                                  |         |
|----|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|
| 01 | Decision rights are clear enough for people to act without repeated escalation.  | 1 2 3 4 |
| 02 | Cross-team decisions have a visible owner and a useful time horizon.             | 1 2 3 4 |
| 03 | Leaders distinguish decisions that need alignment from those that need autonomy. | 1 2 3 4 |
| 04 | Important decisions record assumptions and expected signals.                     | 1 2 3 4 |
| 05 | Teams can challenge a decision using evidence without reopening everything.      | 1 2 3 4 |

## EVIDENCE EXAMPLES - REPLACE WITH YOUR OWN

01

### Escalation pattern

Example: three decisions moved upward despite having a named team owner.

02

### Decision waiting time

Example: elapsed time from an issue being raised to a usable cross-team decision.

03

### Repeated debate

Example: the same boundary or priority is reopened in several forums.

04

### Ownership rework

Example: completed work is reversed after an approver appears late.

# Operating system

*Does the environment help teams coordinate, learn and deliver?*

## DIAGNOSTIC QUESTIONS

SCORE EACH STATEMENT / 1 UNCLEAR / 4 STRONG

|    |                                                                                |                                                                                                 |
|----|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 01 | Team boundaries reflect meaningful outcomes or capabilities.                   | <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3 <input type="radio"/> 4 |
| 02 | Dependencies are actively reduced, not only coordinated.                       | <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3 <input type="radio"/> 4 |
| 03 | Planning and governance expose constraints instead of hiding them.             | <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3 <input type="radio"/> 4 |
| 04 | Feedback from customers and operations reaches decision makers quickly.        | <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3 <input type="radio"/> 4 |
| 05 | Metrics support learning and action rather than reporting performance theatre. | <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3 <input type="radio"/> 4 |

## EVIDENCE EXAMPLES - REPLACE WITH YOUR OWN

01

### Dependency map

Example: one customer outcome requires coordinated work across four teams.

02

### Flow variation

Example: comparable work takes five days in one area and thirty in another.

03

### Governance forum

Example: a review reports status but cannot remove the constraint it exposes.

04

### Operational loop

Example: recurring incident themes never reach planning or investment decisions.

# Capability

*Is the organization becoming more able to handle the next challenge?*

## DIAGNOSTIC QUESTIONS

SCORE EACH STATEMENT / 1 UNCLEAR / 4 STRONG

|    |                                                                                 |         |
|----|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|
| 01 | Critical capabilities are named in terms of work the organization must perform. | 1 2 3 4 |
| 02 | Leaders can distinguish a skill shortage from an operating constraint.          | 1 2 3 4 |
| 03 | Learning is connected to real work and strategic needs.                         | 1 2 3 4 |
| 04 | Communities and technical leadership multiply expertise across teams.           | 1 2 3 4 |
| 05 | External support transfers capability instead of creating dependency.           | 1 2 3 4 |

## EVIDENCE EXAMPLES - REPLACE WITH YOUR OWN

01

### Capability gap

Example: a strategic need is repeatedly delayed because no internal group owns the capability.

02

### Learning in work

Example: a team pairs with experts during delivery, then owns the next iteration.

03

### Internal mobility

Example: critical knowledge spreads through rotations or active communities.

04

### External dependency

Example: a partner remains the only group able to modify a core system.

# Scorecard and synthesis

| Dimension        | Score | Evidence | Most important difference |
|------------------|-------|----------|---------------------------|
| Direction        |       |          |                           |
| Decisions        |       |          |                           |
| Operating system |       |          |                           |
| Capability       |       |          |                           |

## 01 Constraint

Which operating condition creates the most repeated cost or delay?

## 02 Pattern

Where does this constraint show up in more than one part of the system?

## 03 Choice

What must leadership stop, start or make explicit?

## 04 Signal

What observable behavior or outcome would show useful movement?

# A 30-day operating experiment

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Choose the smallest leadership or operating change that can reveal whether your diagnosis is useful. An experiment is a way to learn, not a disguised rollout.

## 01 The constraint

What repeated behavior or outcome are we trying to change?

## 02 The hypothesis

If we change this operating condition, what do we expect to become easier?

## 03 The move

What will leaders do differently for the next 30 days?

## 04 The boundary

What is deliberately outside this experiment?

## 05 The signal

What will we observe weekly? Include one qualitative and one quantitative signal.

## 06 The review

When will we decide to continue, adapt or stop?