Brandwatch

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Engineering career tracks

In order to facilitate discussions about career progression, we have **career track grids** for you. This document is intended for you to understand what they are, how to use them, and how to contribute to them.

There's a detailed walk through on how to put together your own career tracks, plus a career development exercise using them, in this book.

The grid

Brandwatch Engineering Career Tracks		
Level	**Individual Contributor Track**	**Management Track**
1	Junior Engineer	
2	Engineer	
3	Senior Engineer	Engineering Manager
4	Staff Engineer	Senior Engineering Manager
5	Senior Staff Engineer	Director of Engineering
6	Principal Engineer	Senior Director of Engineering
7	Senior Principal Engineer	VP Engineering
8	*Undefined*	SVP Engineering
9	Chief Technology Officer (CTO)	
	Explainer	

On the **first sheet** in the tracks document you'll see the grid above. It is intended to be an indicator of roughly:

- **What career progression in a track looks like.** A Junior Engineer can be promoted to Engineer, then Senior Engineer, then Staff Engineer, then Principal Engineer on the Individual Contributor track.
- **What the equivalent roles are** in other tracks for roughly the same amount of experience.

- **A yardstick for compensation**. For example, a Senior Engineer should be compensated roughly the same as other Senior Engineers in different disciplines, and a VP Engineering and Principal Engineer of similar experience and impact should also be compensated roughly the same.
- If a manager's team size is small, then progression can be a slow fork rather than jump from one role to another.
- In reality, a person may ride both tracks (i.e. they can be a high impact IC as well as managing some people).

The tracks

Management Track	**Engineering Manager (L3, L4)**	**Director of Engineering (L5, L6)**
Influence	Leads a team from the front, delegating to empower. Is someone that others want to work for. Makes their team a better place. Influential for their communication skills as well as their technical ability.	Influences all staff in their subdivision. Ensures that their teams are efficient and deliver great projects. Debates and discusses future technical and product direction. Works with their VP Engineering to make sure that the division is going in the right direction.
Consensus building	Is able to examine, discuss and prioritise their team's work with technical and non-technical staff. Interacts daily with team members, delivery managers and product managers so that their team builds the right thing for the company to a high quality.	Can build consensus between senior staff, inside and outside their subdivision. Can ensure that multiple teams are moving in the right direction.
Conflict resolution	Is able to resolve conflict for their team in two ways: firstly, by debating and critiquing the roadmap to ensure things are delivered in the best possible way; secondly, by working with team members to resolve interpersonal issues.	Is able to listen and understand the multitude of needs for the subdivision and pick the best direction for us to go in. Is able to push back and rework ideas. Is able to offer advice and diffuse difficult technical and interpersonal issues across individuals and teams.
Communication	Able to navigate multiple forms of communication: technical discussion, mentorship, roadmap priorisation and motivating others. Able to be the right person for different people depending on the situation.	As L3-4, but is additionally communicating regularly with peers in other parts of the business (e.g. commercial), and potentially externally. Comfortable writing and speaking to a larger audience.

There is a separate sheet for each of the career tracks. Each of these sheets is a grid, consisting of levelled roles across the top and competencies down the side. These are not specific checkboxes to tick in order to unlock a promotion. Instead, they are meant to serve as a guide to yourself and also your manager when having regular discussions about your progression within the company.

Here are some tips to help you when looking at the grid in relation to your role.

- Remember that no list, framework or track is perfect. They are an attempt to help define levels, but no one will fit perfectly. First, locate yourself on the track. Then:
- Identify areas where you are strong and areas where more development is required, or opportunity exists.
- Don't try to change and improve everything at once. Be smart and pick hotspots or logical bite size pieces that make sense to you.

- Document the areas you'd like to improve in with your manager and go and work on them.
- Discuss how you're getting on regularly with your manager.

As you're working towards goals, remember to:

- Seek feedback from your manager and your peers.
- Seek opportunities to work on the development areas that will help you progress. Don't wait - just ask!
- Help us improve the career tracks by feeding back to us how they could be better. We want to make them work best for all of us.
- Treat them as a compass, not a straightjacket.

The levels

Yes, there are levels. Yes, they are numbered. This is for a few reasons:

- It enumerates progression.
- It shows that seniority, accountability and impact increases as the level increases.
- It helps align the two tracks of progression.
- It will allow us to better map levels to salary bands, making salary progression more clear.

The levels are not there for:

- Comparing people to other people. Nobody is "better" than anyone else because of their level. They just have different roles and responsibilities.
- Determining who has the power to make or override a decision.

Straddling two tracks: **It's possible**

Since we are fortunate enough to employ some fantastically capable people, it may be the case that we have managers who are also contributing at a high level as an individual contributor. For example, we could have an Engineering Manager with a small team that still spends a majority of their time writing impactful, innovative and mission critical code at the level of a Principal Engineer.

In this case, that person should take the job title that is most senior and most descriptive to the rest of the organization. For example, it could make more sense for that Engineering Manager in the example above to be a Principal Engineer instead, since that's the level that they actually contribute at. The EM job title is masking their true seniority and signposting.

If you think that this is you, then speak to your manager.

Graduate versus Junior

In the career tracks we have the Junior Engineer level for those that are just getting started in a discipline. We also have staff joining straight out of education who have the Graduate title. However, we use both interchangeably, and they mean the same thing with regards to where they are in their development.

Top of the IC track

We currently have *undefined* in the highest position in the IC track. This role exists, but we have yet to define it clearly. It is a rare role in the same way that Google famously has the "Level 11" Google Fellow role for Jeff Dean and Sanjay Ghemawat, the creators of the Search technology, MapReduce, BigTable, TensorFlow, and so on. More work needs to be done here to make it clear how to get there.

Management track nuances

Since promotion within the management track is dependent on positions in the org chart being available or created, we may also offer a promotion within the same role.

For example, an Engineering Manager could be promoted to Senior Engineering Manager with tenure, and likewise for Director of Engineering to Senior Director of Engineering.

Comma notation

Sometimes there will be multiple people with the same job title that will use a comma notation. This is in the form:

Job Title, Functional Area

This makes it clear which particular functional area a person is associated with. For example, at the time of writing, James' job title is:

SVP Engineering, Applications

What this means is that he holds a VP Engineering role in the Applications division. The comma notation attempts to make it more obvious what exactly a person works on.

Subtle variations

It may be the case that there are subtle variations to job titles in reality when compared to the tracks. For example, if you are working on networking then it may be the case that you have the job title "Senior Network Engineer", however the traits are the same that we would expect from a Senior Engineer in the Systems track.

Big variations

It may be the case that a discipline within our department has a large variation in how their tracks are implemented. For example, maybe there are multiple IC tracks for QA depending on what that person is working on. Or perhaps there are multiple Systems tracks. That's fine. If that's the case, then the leaders within that discipline should create their own extension of the generic tracks. A bit like forking code. As long as the progression for IC and management uses the same levelled steps, then it can contain whatever details that the discipline wants to get across, such as mastering some piece of technology, or looking after some particular part of our data centers.

Feedback

If you have feedback on the career tracks, or would like to help make them better, then let your friendly VP Engineering know. We can improve them together.