

Fictional demonstration

Calibrating an early engineering manager role

I'd define this as a manager who helps a small engineering team deliver and develop, with enough technical judgment to work closely with senior engineers. The founder needs to agree on that balance before sourcing. Otherwise, the team could assess a strong technical lead against an unstated people-management expectation.

The assumed role

This fictional API software company has seven engineers and a CTO acting as their manager. It is considering its first engineering manager. The scenario, interview responses and completed assessment below are invented demonstration material. They do not describe an actual person, client or hiring decision.

Example role charter

Area	Agreed example scope
Team ownership	Manage seven engineers; establish individual development conversations and clear delivery ownership.
Technical contribution	Review design tradeoffs with senior engineers and participate in incident learning. This is not the principal architect role.
Decision authority	Own team planning within approved priorities. CTO retains architecture exceptions, compensation and headcount approval.
First 90 days	Understand existing commitments, agree on a planning routine and document individual development priorities.
Work outside the role	Company-wide technical strategy, all recruiting execution and a second team are not included in this brief.

Evidence to seek

Look for examples of managing engineers, changing a delivery plan when assumptions failed and making a technical decision more clear. Ask what the person owned, what others owned and what evidence changed their view. Familiarity with the exact tool stack is useful context; it should not substitute for the agreed role evidence.

Calibration before interviews

The founder, CTO and recruiter should agree on two examples of acceptable evidence for each criterion. They should also identify what would be missing. Use the same core questions and record relevant evidence before discussing an overall recommendation.

Example interview scorecard

The four criteria below concern the work in the charter. Record the response and its limits before assigning a rating. Keep confidence separate from the rating so a fluent answer does not appear more complete than it is.

Criterion	Core prompt	Evidence to establish
Delivery planning	Tell me about a commitment that became unrealistic. What did you change?	Constraints, an explicit tradeoff, communication and a reason for the revised plan.
Coaching engineers	Describe a person whose development needed a change in approach.	A specific need, the manager's action, follow-up and what they learned.
Technical judgment	Walk through a design or incident decision you challenged.	Relevant alternatives, failure modes, operating consequences and the person's own contribution.
Decision ownership	When did you and a CTO disagree about team priorities?	How authority was resolved, what was decided and how the team received the decision.

Rating guide

Rating	Interpretation
1	Specific evidence conflicts with an essential part of the agreed role.
2	Relevant evidence is present but a material gap needs follow-up.
3	The response establishes the agreed role evidence with a concrete example.
4	Evidence meets the bar and shows sound judgment across changing constraints.
Not established	The interview did not provide enough relevant evidence to rate this criterion.

A missing answer is not automatically a rating of 1. Record why evidence is missing and decide whether another question would resolve it. Do not average the ratings into an automatic hiring decision.

Recording rule

Each interviewer records evidence independently before the debrief. Notes should concern work examples and decisions relevant to the role. Avoid personal impressions that do not explain how the person would do the work.

Completed fictional assessment

Criterion	Rating	Example evidence and remaining question
Delivery planning	3	Response describes cutting a low-priority feature after an integration dependency slipped. Explains stakeholder agreement; effect on later commitments needs follow-up.
Coaching engineers	Not established	Response discusses team ceremonies but provides no individual development example. Ask for a specific coaching case.
Technical judgment	3	Response compares rollback with a forward fix and names a recovery risk. CTO should probe who owned the final decision.
Decision ownership	2	Response explains escalation to a CTO but does not explain the resulting authority agreement. Clarify the person's decision rights.

Example debrief decision

Hold the overall assessment open for one focused follow-up. Delivery and technical examples are relevant to the charter. Coaching evidence is missing, and authority remains unclear. The completed scorecard supports a further conversation; it does not establish that the person should be hired or rejected.

Follow up with a clear owner

The CTO should ask for one individual coaching example and one disagreement about decision authority. The recruiter should explain the purpose and timing of the follow-up. The founder should resolve any disagreement about whether this role is primarily a manager or a technical lead before the debrief resumes.

Example interview plan

Use a short role discussion to confirm scope, followed by separate management and technical conversations. Assign each scorecard criterion to an interviewer and collect independent notes. Add another conversation only for a named evidence gap, rather than repeating the entire process.

How advisory support would fit

I could help calibrate the charter, write the prompts and review whether the assessment collected useful evidence. The company owns the hiring decision. Active sourcing, interview delivery and reference checks would require separately agreed scope.

Next step

Have the founder and CTO review the charter and rating guide together. Resolve differences about ownership before using the scorecard in a live search.