Square Software Engineering Career Ladder

This document contains the software engineering career ladder at Square. Here is how you should read it:

• **Each level builds on the criteria from the preceding level.** An L4 must also meet all the criteria for an L3.

• Engineers and Engineering Managers can exist at the same Square Level with different job criteria. Becoming an EM is not a promotion—it's a different role. Some criteria are shared between ICs and EMs at the same level.

• Software Engineers begin at L3. Engineering Managers begin at L5.

• For a given level, **meeting the specified number of years of relevant experience is not strictly required**. However, every year short is harder to account for with respect to promotions or hiring. Years of relevant experience are important in **establishing a track record** since it takes time to assess the impact of long-term decisions. Time served in industry or academia cannot stand alone. Your experience should also be relevant to level criteria.

• Every engineer should eventually reach at least L6 at a pace roughly inline with experience guidelines.

• We promote individuals to the next level after they demonstrate consistent performance at that level. While they do not need to meet every single criteria of the next level to be promoted, they must meet the Scope & Impact criteria.

• We expect engineers at every level to share and practice the values stated in the Engineering Handbook.

• In this document, team refers to an engineer's immediate team; organization refers to the group under a GM or Core Lead in orgs that don't have GMs.

Engineering Level 3

A new engineer with potential

Typical Experience:	Engineers typically acquire the skills, knowledge, and experience necessary to meet the expectations of this level by earning a related Bachelor's degree. Typically a person's first full-time engineering job.

Software Engineer Criteria	
Scope & Impact	• Writes, tests, and documents code according to Square Engineering standards and practices.
Technical Execution	• Debugs and fixes issues in development, test, and production.
	• Participates in software design for features and bug fixes under direct supervision.
Ownership	• Serves as on-call first responder for software their team owns.
Collaboration	• Asks for help as appropriate and learns from it.
	• Contributes to team activities and collaborates within the team to solve problems.

Engineering Level 4

A solid contributor

Typical Experience:	Engineers typically acquire the skills, knowledge, and experience necessary to meet the expectations of this level with a relevant Bachelor's degree and 2 years of relevant industry or academic experience.
Software Engineer Criteria	
Scope & Impact	• Designs, develops, ships, and maintains features with guidance from more experienced engineers.
Technical Execution	• Improves the development experience at Square by enhancing development tools, test coverage, and/or code structure.
	• Implements code that is clear, concise, tested, and easily understood by others
Ownership	• Is responsible for the entire lifecycle of their code: development, test, production, and subsequent fixes and improvements.
Collaboration	• Performs code reviews that follow the standards and practices of the eng handbook and that are recognized by their team as helpful.

Engineering Level 5

A new manager

Typical Experience:	Engineers and managers typically acquire the skills, knowledge, and experience necessary to meet the expectations of this level with a relevant Bachelor's degree and 5 years of relevant industry or academic experience.

Engineering Manager Criteria	
Scope & Impact	• Manages a team, typically consisting of 4 to 5 direct reports. • Must have the maturity to manage ICs at higher levels than themselves.
Prioritization & Execution	• Drives execution by organizing team work, setting goals, and holding the team accountable. • Monitors and escalates issues with team pace. • Empowers team members to own their work. • **[Shared]** Prioritizes and values unowned or undesirable work that enables the team to move faster.
Technical Excellence	• Is accountable for the technical output of the team. • Upholds a high technical bar while making pragmatic tradeoffs.
Leadership & Collaboration	• Sets direction for the team on a regular cadence in partnership with their manager. • Collaborates with stakeholders including customers, product managers, and others in development and execution of the team's roadmap. • Communicates strategy, rationale, and progress within the team and to external stakeholders. • **[Shared]** Works with their team and adjacent teams to solve problems. Escalates problems that have wider scope.
Team Building & Hiring	• Resolves interpersonal and technical conflict within the team. • Hires for their team (by collaborating with recruiters, defining roles, sourcing, taking candidates to hiring bar, selling their team and Square, etc). • **[Shared]** Conducts engineering interviews.
Coaching & Development	• Coaches, provides timely, actionable feedback, and invests time in career development of team members; e.g., via 1:1s and aligning employee growth with opportunity. • Responsible for recruiting, performance reviews, performance management, promotions, and career planning in partnership with their manager.
	[Shared] = Criteria shared between IC & EM at this level

Engineering Level 5

A strong independent contributor

Typical Experience:	Engineers and managers typically acquire the skills, knowledge, and experience necessary to meet the expectations of this level with a relevant Bachelor's degree and 5 years of relevant industry or academic experience.

Software Engineer Criteria	
Scope & Impact	• Independently responsible for the entire lifecycle of projects or features including eng design, development, and deployment.
Technical Execution	• Improves code structure and architecture in service of testability and maintainability. • Writes, co-writes, and reviews design documentation. • Is highly proficient in one or more technical areas.
Ownership	• **[Shared]** Prioritizes and values unowned or undesirable work that enables the team to move faster
Collaboration	• **[Shared]** Works with their team and adjacent teams to solve problems. Escalates problems that have wider scope.
Team Building	• Assists and teaches other engineers on an individual basis. • Participates in the hiring process (by submitting referrals, meeting candidates, attending recruiting events, presenting externally, or writing for the Corner). • **[Shared]** Conducts engineering interviews.
	[Shared] = Criteria shared between IC & EM at this level

Engineering Level 6

A strong independent manager

Typical Experience:	Engineers and managers typically acquire the skills, knowledge, and experience necessary to meet the expectations of this level with a relevant Bachelor's degree and 8 years of relevant industry or academic experience.

Engineering Manager Criteria

Scope & Impact	• Manages a team or two, typically consisting of 4 to 8 direct reports, or even larger if necessary. • Ownership includes product or platform features. • Independently responsible for all aspects of people management. • Has demonstrated ability to successfully lead people, teams or projects multiple times in different contexts.
Prioritization & Execution	• Works with team members to define what success looks like so that the positive impact for customers is clear; sets goals, defines metrics, and tracks progress. • Clarifies ownership and decision making for the team. Delegates ownership of tactical decision-making but maintains responsibility as tiebreaker where necessary. • **[Shared]** Crosses team and service boundaries to solve problems. • **[Shared]** Monitors and adjusts team pace to instill urgency for success but protect from burnout.
Technical Excellence	• Able to represent and be accountable for the technical output of the team, either through personal experience or strong communication lines with senior engineers.
Coaching & Development	• Independently responsible for coaching, development, and career management: setting performance expectations, career planning, performance reviews, managing low performers, compensation reviews, promotions, and terminations. • Resolves interpersonal and technical conflict within and outside the team. • **[Shared]** Works through others. Lifts the skills and expertise of those around them. • **[Shared]** Advises manager with insights and recommendations to improve the team.
Leadership & Collaboration	• Communicates and organizes cross-team goals and projects. • Can lead and function effectively in the face of uncertainty and ambiguity. • **[Shared]** Builds relationships with stakeholders including customers, product managers, cross-functional partners, and external partners. • **[Shared]** Contributes to defining strategic direction, planning the roadmap, escalating issues, and synthesizing feedback to ensure team success. • **[Shared]** Ensures that knowledge is shared amongst the team and does not position themselves or others as a single point of failure.
Team Building & Hiring	• Independently plans and executes changes to team staffing in service of company goals: identifying gaps, defining roles, and managing team size. • **[Shared]** Recruiting participation increasingly becomes filling open engineering headcount for Square, not just for positions on the immediate team.

[Shared] = Criteria shared between IC & EM at this level

Engineering Level 6

A team leader

Typical Experience:	Engineers and managers typically acquire the skills, knowledge, and experience necessary to meet the expectations of this level with a relevant Bachelor's degree and 8 years of relevant industry or academic experience.
Software Engineer Criteria	
Scope & Impact	• Leads or significantly contributes to medium-to-large feature releases; usually multi-person projects that cross engineering team boundaries.
	• Is a clear expert in one or more technical areas.
Technical Execution	• Is recognized for high quality, impactful technical contributions.
	• Participates in the design review process, seeking and providing constructive criticism.
	• Demonstrates ability to succeed in a wide range of complex situations across multiple axes: e.g. scale, uncertainty, interconnectedness.
	• **[Shared]** Monitors and adjusts team pace to instill urgency for success but protect from burnout.
Ownership	• Estimates and manages project timelines and risk.
Leadership & Collaboration	• **[Shared]** Crosses team and service boundaries to solve problems.
	• **[Shared]** Builds relationships with stakeholders including customers, product managers, cross-functional partners, and external partners.
	• **[Shared]** Contributes to defining strategic direction, planning the roadmap, escalating issues, and synthesizing feedback to ensure team success.
	• **[Shared]** Ensures that knowledge is shared amongst the team and does not position themselves or others as a single point of failure.
Team Building	• Mentors multiple engineers, primarily L4 and L5.
	• **[Shared]** Works through others. Lifts the skills and expertise of those around them.
	• **[Shared]** Advises manager with insights and recommendations to improve the team.
	• **[Shared]** Recruiting participation increasingly becomes filling open engineering headcount for Square, not just for positions on the immediate team.
	[Shared] = Criteria shared between IC & EM at this level

Engineering Level 7

An organizational leader

Typical Experience:	Engineers and managers typically acquire the skills, knowledge, and experience necessary to meet the expectations of this level with a relevant Bachelor's degree and 12 years of relevant industry or academic experience.

Engineering Manager Criteria

Scope & Impact	• [**Shared**] Demonstrated success leading large, strategic, or complex areas that have clear impact to the success of Square.
	• Manages multiple teams and managers, or has a track record of influencing and delivering projects with company-level impact and priority.
Prioritization & Execution	• Works with managers to define their team's goals by clarifying and maintaining consistency with larger organizational goals.
	• [**Shared**] Stays aware of changes around the company to anticipate and prevent obstacles from hindering team performance.
Technical Excellence	• [**Shared**] Ensures technical designs are properly evaluated for important projects and advises teams to improve execution.
	• [**Shared**] Influences senior leaders on engineering strategy
Leadership & Collaboration	• Represents goals, metrics, and successes to senior leadership for all teams reporting into this manager.
	• Works with and through managers to set team vision, mission, and strategy and the positive impact for customers.
	• [**Shared**] Uses negotiation and patience to collaborate with other senior leaders, ensuring progress and setting the example for others.
	• [**Shared**] Collaborates across teams and disciplines to solve problems and resolve technical debates.
Team Building & Hiring	• Plans the growth of their organization and scales the team.
	• [**Shared**] Recruiting participation increasingly becomes sourcing, selling, and closing offers for managers, senior ICs, and/or tech leads.
Coaching & Development	• Coaches new engineering managers and technical leads, for succession planning and growing the organization.
	• [**Shared**] Mentors other senior engineers or managers on strategy, collaboration, influence, execution, and other aspects of leadership

[Shared] = Criteria shared between IC & EM at this level

Engineering Level 7

An organizational leader

Typical Experience:	Engineers and managers typically acquire the skills, knowledge, and experience necessary to meet the expectations of this level with a relevant Bachelor's degree and 12 years of relevant industry or academic experience.
Note:	The work of L7+ individual contributors differs qualitatively from that of earlier levels. Significantly more time is spent on non-coding activities and it will require a conscious shift in career goals and way of working. Many, if not most, engineers will prefer to stay at L6.

Software Engineer Criteria

Scope & Impact	• [**Shared**] Demonstrated success leading large, strategic, or complex areas that have clear impact to the success of Square.
	• Sets architectural direction for the broader organization and helps evolve systems toward it.
	• Has a track record of influencing and delivering projects with organizational impact and priority; may have management responsibilities for a small number of direct reports.
Technical Execution	• Breaks down complex projects into simple systems that can be effectively built and maintained by less experienced engineers.
	• Demonstrates ability to quickly analyze and resolve tactical issues across a wide variety of areas.
	• Has deep technical domain knowledge of Square. This can cover apps, services, systems, or frameworks.
	• Designs and implements systems and frameworks that can succeed long term.
	• Is considered an expert by peers and is recognized for high quality and quantity of hands-on technical contributions.
Engineering Strategy	• Defines technical strategy and executes to improve products, infrastructure, processes, or organizations.
	• [**Shared**] Influences senior leaders on engineering strategy
	• [**Shared**] Ensures technical designs are properly evaluated for important projects and advises teams to improve execution.
Leadership & Collaboration	• [**Shared**] Uses negotiation and patience to collaborate with other senior leaders, ensuring progress and setting the example for others.
	• [**Shared**] Collaborates across teams and disciplines to solve problems and resolve technical debates.
	• [**Shared**] Stays aware of changes around the company to anticipate and prevent obstacles from hindering team performance.
Team Building	• [**Shared**] Mentors other senior engineers or managers on strategy, collaboration, influence, execution, and other aspects of leadership
	• [**Shared**] Recruiting participation increasingly becomes sourcing, selling, and closing offers for managers, senior ICs, and/or tech leads.

[Shared] = Criteria shared between IC & EM at this level

Engineering Level 8

A company leader

Typical Experience:	Engineers and managers typically acquire the skills, knowledge, and experience necessary to meet the expectations of this level with a relevant Bachelor's degree and 15 years of relevant industry or academic experience.

Engineering Manager Criteria	
Scope & Impact	• Manages an organization that directly impacts Square's success. The organization can consist of multiple teams, high impact teams, emerging teams, or teams of large size / scope; direct reports typically consist almost entirely of managers.
	• Ownership includes multiple features, tools, or infrastructure.
	• **[Shared]** Impact affects many teams, many customers, and/or a percentage of revenue.
Prioritization & Execution	• Effectively prioritizes work across teams to maximize impact on the company's success.
	• May own budgeting for their projects, both from a people allocation standpoint and from a dollar standpoint.
	• **[Shared]** Influences teams across Square to achieve broader company goals as well as team goals within their organization.
Technical Excellence	• Works with other leads to set policies and processes that span Engineering.
	• **[Shared]** Recognizes, influences, and/or resolves critical issues that may affect the company direction.
Leadership & Collaboration	• Works with senior leadership and/or the executive team (Core) to align the division's team vision, mission, and strategy with the company as a whole.
	• **[Shared]** Leads the organization to success with little guidance or direction from senior leadership and/or the executive team.
	• **[Shared]** Actively contributes to broad business strategies, decisions and processes.
	• **[Shared]** Collaborates with other L8s and teams to influence meeting broader company goals.
Organization Building & Hiring	• Designs their organization to maximize impact and respond to the changing needs of the business.
	• Builds autonomous teams that can function without high levels of oversight.
Coaching & Development	• **[Shared]** Serves as coach and mentor across all of engineering.

[Shared] = Criteria shared between IC & EM at this level

Engineering Level 8

A company leader

Typical Experience:	Engineers and managers typically acquire the skills, knowledge, and experience necessary to meet the expectations of this level with a relevant Bachelor's degree and 15 years of relevant industry or academic experience.

Software Engineer Criteria

Scope & Impact	• Develops architecture, libraries and systems with company-wide impact.
	• Has and continues to build a track record of strategic work with company-wide, sometimes industry-wide, impact.
	• **[Shared]** Impact affects many teams, many customers, and/or a percentage of revenue.
Technical Execution	• Influences teams across Square to achieve broader company goals as well as team goals within their organization.
	• Is widely seen inside and outside of Square as an expert in the engineering discipline.
Engineering Strategy	• Synthesizes technical designs and architecture in order to advise teams, inform buy vs build decisions, and evolve Square's architecture.
	• **[Shared]** Recognizes, influences, and/or resolves critical issues that may affect the company direction.
Leadership & Collaboration	• Has and continues to build a track record of success in leading and coaching large project teams.
	• Displays exceptional technical leadership and technical problem solving skills.
	• **[Shared]** Leads the organization to success with little guidance or direction from senior leadership and/or the executive team.
	• **[Shared]** Collaborates with other L8s and teams to influence meeting broader company goals.
Organization Building	• Represents Square as an external spokesperson, networks with people outside Square in related fields.
	• **[Shared]** Works with other leads to set policies and processes that span Engineering.
	• **[Shared]** Actively contributes to broad business strategies, decisions and processes.
	• **[Shared]** Serves as coach and mentor across all of engineering.

[Shared] = Criteria shared between IC & EM at this level

Engineering Level 9

An industry leader

Engineering Manager Criteria

Scope & Impact	• Management is largely strategic and implemented through direct reports who are managers, senior managers, and directors.
	• Ownership includes a broad strategic asset at Square.
	• Impact and decisions affect the entire company.
Prioritization & Execution	• Works with directors and managers to create and adhere to a budget for the organization.
	• Communicates strategy and process decisions made by executive team to disseminate to their organization.
Technical Excellence	• Finds opportunities to improve the entire org, through process, product, tools, or people.
Leadership & Collaboration	• Manages relationship with executive team and assists with managing relationship with the Board.
	• Ensures teams within organization are collaborating successfully to execute on company goals.
Company Building & Hiring	• Influences organizational design across the company to minimize friction and maximize productivity.
	• Plans headcount for the organization and oversees allocation to best achieve goals of broader team.
Coaching & Development	• Coaches new directors and senior engineering managers.