

# **Becoming the Leader You Can Be, in a Changed Technology Industry**

**Lena Reinhard**

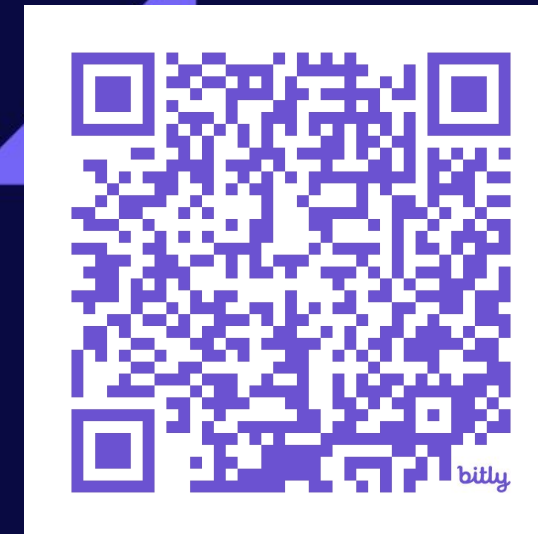
**VP Engineering, Leadership & Executive Coach, Facilitator**

LeadDev New York, September 2024

# Leading in a Changed Tech Industry

- Dealing with changed roles
- Leading your team through uncertainty
- Handling the hype
- Rethinking your role

[bit.ly/engleadershipreport](https://bit.ly/engleadershipreport)



## The Engineering Leadership Report 2024

We asked 1,100+ engineering leaders how their roles are evolving in response to a rapidly changing economic landscape in 2024. [Here's what we found.](#)

**84%**

**of leaders' roles changed**

*"How have your role and responsibilities changed over the past 12 months?"*

**"Filling in  
for more positions at once."**

— Advanced engineer

*"How have your role and responsibilities changed over the past 12 months?"*

**"I got assigned an entirely new role on top of my already demanding role."**

— Engineering Manager

*"How have your role and responsibilities changed over the past 12 months?"*

**"Started to code."**

— Engineering Manager

*"How have your role and responsibilities changed over the past 12 months?"*

**"I have a slightly wider scope, but it is because I am pushing for a Staff Engineering role."**

— Tech Lead

*"How have your role and responsibilities changed over the past 12 months?"*

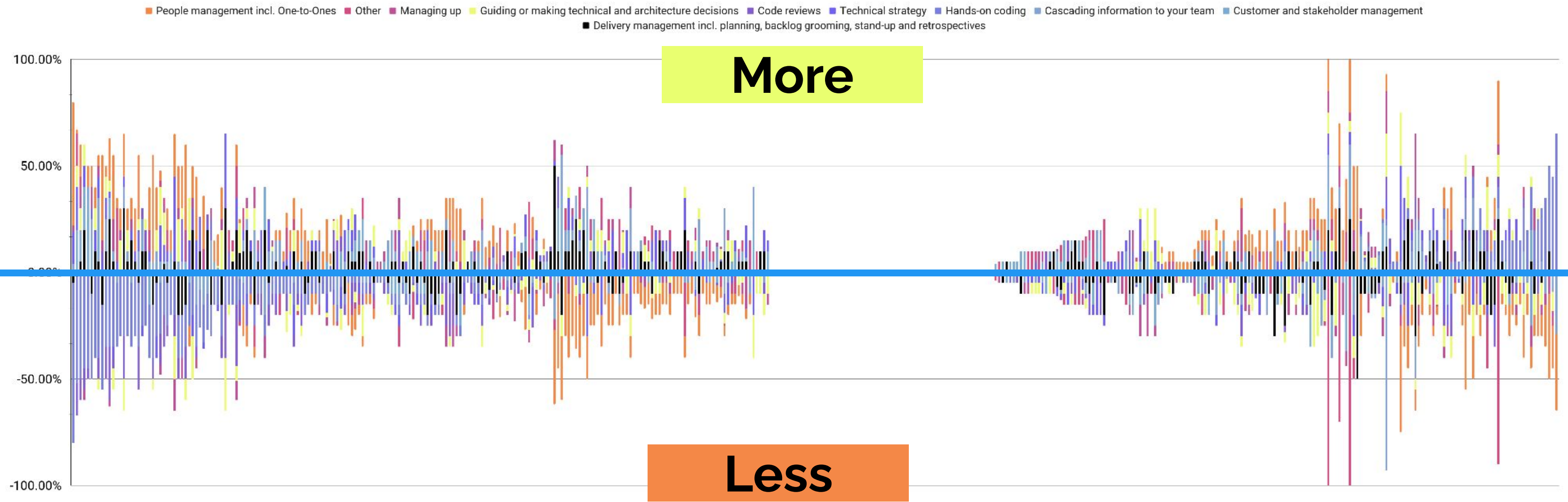
**"Complete chaos."**

— Engineering Manager



# 85% of engineering managers spend their time differently

"What % of your time would you typically spend on the following tasks?" - Line Managers, now vs. 12 months ago



# Many leaders work in very broad roles and are responsible for

- People management, mentoring, development
- + Technical leadership, incl. strategy, decisions
- + Delivery management, with some product & project management
- + Hands-on coding

## **Eierlegende Wollmilchsau, *noun***

Ei·er·le·gen·de woll·milch·sau ['aɪ̯e̯ˌleːgə̯də 'vɔlˌmɪlçˌzaʊ]

*Egg-laying wool milk pig: A person, thing, or a solution to a problem that's supposed to only have advantages, satisfy all needs and requirements - but exactly because of that, it's not real*

# Many leaders work in very broad roles and are responsible for

- People management, mentoring, development
- + Technical leadership, incl. strategy, decisions
- + Delivery management, with some product & project management
- + Hands-on coding

***It's very, very* difficult to impossible to do all of these well at all times without burning out.**

Recommendation #1

# Get really good at managing up

## Make this a priority when

- A lot is going on & changing
- Your role is very broad/new
- Your team's scope has changed, they're in a new/less known business area
- Your manager isn't the greatest
- You want to get your manager out of your business
- You want better 1:1s with your boss

## It means:

- Own your (and your team's) work and its progress, make it visible
- Understand & speak to your boss's needs
- Make sure you're on the same page

Recommendation #1

# Get really good at managing up

## How to:

- Speak business: "What x means for the business, how it connects to our goals"
- Share information & context weekly: Progress, risks, important info
- Iterate over time:
  - What's been useful?
  - What do you wish you'd known sooner?

*Like managing "down", it's a process!*

Handling role changes

## How To Manage Your Boss (With A Free Communication Template!)

Middle Management - Line Management - Guide - Communication - Executive Leadership Jun 2, 2022 - Written By Lena Reinhard

One of the best things you can do to manage up and actively manage your boss is to push information to them. Instead of relying on your boss "pulling" information from you, you provide regular updates to them: you "push" information and take ownership of giving them context.

I found that providing regular updates to your boss is an incredibly powerful tool. It gives your boss context, helps them make decisions, helps shape their impressions and perception of your work, and, over time, builds trust. In addition, it helps you manage expectations, and provides visibility into your and your teams' work. It also means that you're taking ownership, signals that you're on top of things, and is a really powerful tool for managing alignment.

In this post, I provide considerations for managing up through status updates, and provide a template that you can use to get started with sharing information more regularly with your boss.

### Consider This For Getting Started:

- **Optimise for higher-frequency and quick iterations, over extensive and irregular updates.** I regularly hear from leaders who struggle with sharing regular updates because there's so much that they want to say, and so little time. I understand that! Resist the urge to share *all the things*, and instead focus on sharing a few things more regularly.
- **Know your audience and tailor what you share to their interests.** What do they care about? What motivates them? What are their pain points? You can ask your boss, or just test some things out.
- **When in doubt, keep it short.**
- **Convey what's between the lines, focus on context and painting a picture, not just sharing information.** Don't reiterate information that's already available elsewhere. For example: It may be visible from your company's goal tracking system where your teams are at on goal accomplishment. What's likely not visible there is:

- What risks are entailed?
- How confident are you that you'll hit those goals?
- What's your projection?
- And what makes you think that?

[bit.ly/pushing-information](https://bit.ly/pushing-information)

# 48%

of engineering managers have  
more direct reports

*“How have your role and responsibilities changed over the past 12 months?”*

**“The teams are now  
bigger than before.”**

— Tech Lead



*“How have your role and responsibilities changed over the past 12 months?”*

**“We lost most of our team, so our workload has tripled per individual.”**

— Software Engineer

*“What tech industry trends are you concerned about?”*

**“Focus on shipping faster.”**

— Manager of Managers

*“What tech industry trends are you concerned about?”*

**“Reduced focus on diversity and culture now that ‘times are tough.’”**

— Engineering Manager

Recommendation #2

# Help your team navigate uncertainty

## Make this a priority when

- A lot is going on & changing
- Your team has been in reactive mode a lot
- Your team's scope has changed, they're in a new/less known business area

## How to:

- **Connect your team to the big picture:** "What does x mean for us?"
- **Help them find agency:** Vision, mission, "how we work" (processes, rituals), propose investments tied to business impact, "circles of influence" exercise
- **Get creative at finding/creating growth opportunities** (those may be less exciting than before): "Soft" skills, working with stakeholders, mentoring, knowledge sharing

**39%**

**of leaders are  
more concerned about job security**

*"How have your role and responsibilities changed over the past 12 months?"*

**"I was laid off."**

**— Engineering Manager**

*“What are currently the most challenging aspects of the hiring process?”*

**“Being ghosted by companies.”**

— Tech Lead

*“What are currently the most challenging aspects of the hiring process?”*

**“It feels like there is a general trend away from my preferred role of Engineering Manager to Tech Leads, so there are fewer opportunities.”**

— Engineering Manager



*“What tech industry trends are you most excited or concerned about?”*

**“Increased expectation that managers are hands-on.”**

— Engineering Manager

*"How have your role and responsibilities changed over the past 12 months?"*

**"Shifting goal posts for performance reviews so that no one exceeds expectations and raises need not be given."**

— Tech Lead

*“What are currently the most challenging aspects of the hiring process?”*

**“The question if the grass is  
actually greener somewhere else.”**

— Manager of managers

On average,  
every line manager went through

**3.96**

large organizational changes

Recommendation #3

# Find/build community

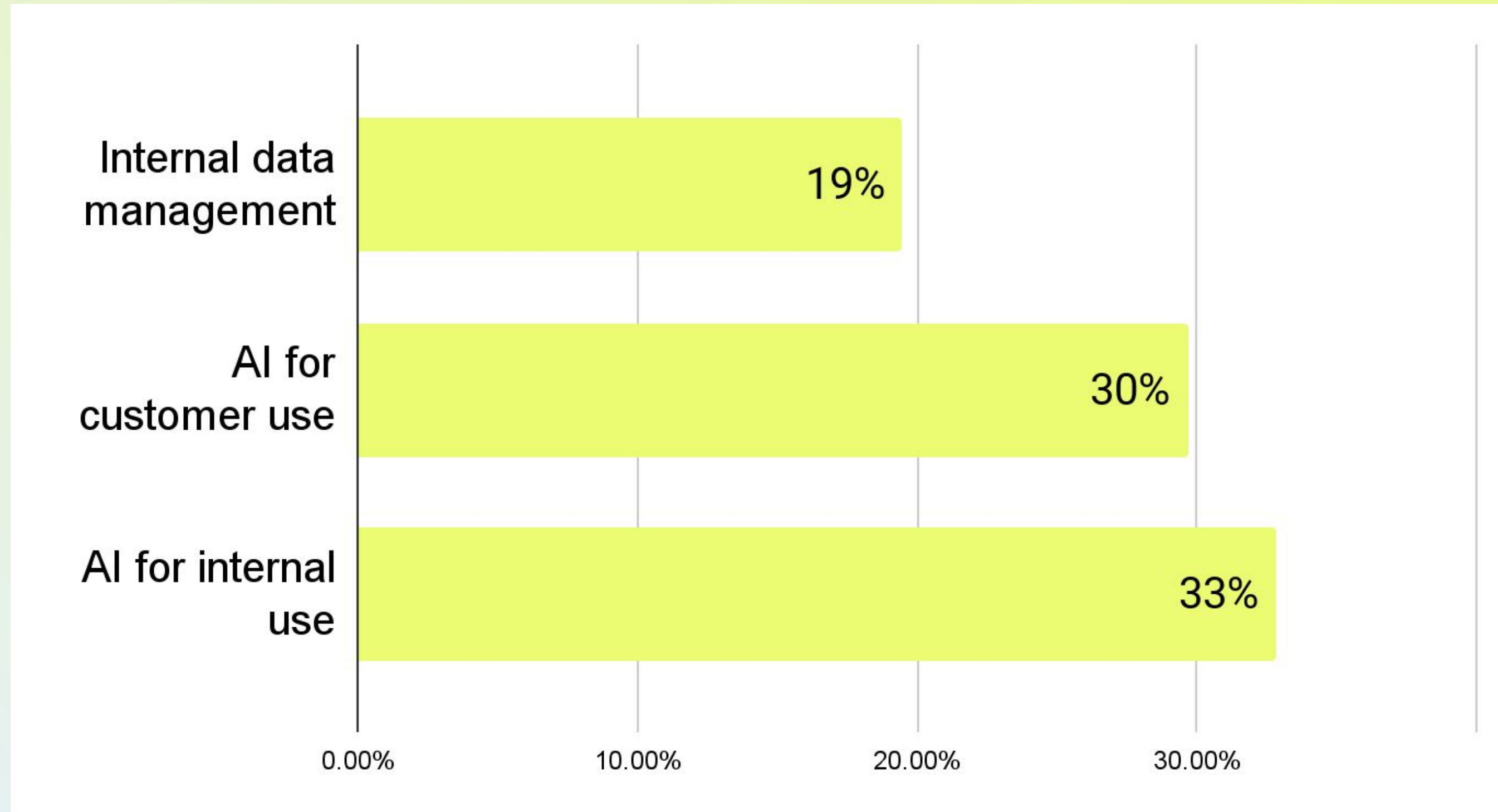
## Make this a priority to

- Get a "reality check"
- Move past "is it me?"
- Feel less alone
- Check the green-ness of the "grass on the other side"
- Learn from those who came before you

## How to:

- Host a dinner/remote lunch or meet-up in your area
- Listen to podcasts
- TODAY: Join roundtables, speed coaching, or build a manager voltron!

# Companies prioritizing data & AI topics



# Product Roadmap: "Something with AI"

# Product Roadmap:

**"Something with AI"**

**"Something with VR"**

**"Something with NFTs"**

**"Something with machine learning"**

**"Something with the blockchain"**

**"Something with crypto"**

**"Something with social media"**

**"Something with mobile phones"**

**"Something with the internet"**

**"Something with personal computers"**



# Product Roadmap: "Something with Y"

1. It's the next big thing, says your boss
2. And TechCrunch
3. You hear it's where all VC is going now
4. Your customers are asking for it, or will ask for it any day now
5. And your investors
6. And your board
7. Your competition is probably already on it
8. Your employees are asking about it
9. You will need to do have it if you want to raise more money
10. Every conference has sessions about it
11. While you ~~wasted~~ spent thinking about it, your competitor posted on LinkedIn that they're working on it
12. Your boss is asking when you'll ship it

There's a spectrum between  
***"move fast and break things"***  
***"ask forgiveness, not permission"***  
***"sense of urgency"***  
***"bias to action"*** and  
***"never doing anything."***

Driven by fear of missing out, many companies frantically race after the "next big thing" (and the next, and the next, and...).

*“What tech industry trends are you concerned about?”*

**“Organizations prioritizing shortcuts as quick-win revenue generation (Boeing, on a smaller scale).”**

— Manager of engineers

**The tech industry has a long history of terrible impact on humanity at large:**

From poor user representation, to genocides, to data centers alone consuming the equivalent of a top-10-energy-consuming-countries.

**Many of the people and societies that are paying the price for our decisions already don't live close to us in this room.**

**The places where the brunt force of tech's vast environmental impact is already happening are far away from here.**

**We're shielded from the impact of our decisions. That doesn't mean we aren't responsible.**

Recommendation #4

# Don't believe the hype, trust the heed

**Make this a priority when**

"Everyone is doing Z, we should too"

**Ask:**

- "How might \$trend help us solve business/customer's problems?"
- "What business/user problem are we trying to solve?"
- "How short-term vs. long-term viable is this?"
- "What are privacy, security, or societal issues associated with it?"
- "How would we mitigate the risks?"
- "How much \$\$\$ is this worth to explore?"

*“What are your biggest concerns regarding Generative AI?”*

**“Management will overly  
rely on the hype.”**

— Advanced Engineer

*“What are your biggest concerns regarding Generative AI?”*

**“Friction with top management, as they will expect everything to be delivered even faster.”**

— Manager of managers



“The tech industry” isn’t  
just happening to us:  
**Everyone of us is**  
**“the tech industry”**

Recommendation #5

# **Remember:**

**Software development is an act of representation.**

**Our technology is not neutral. We aren't neutral.**

With every button design, line of code, deployment; with every piece of feedback, every delegation, every promotion, every question, every decision:

**We take a stance.**

Recommendation #5

# **Remember:**

**Software development is an act of representation.**

**Our technology is not neutral. We aren't neutral.**

With every button design, line of code, deployment; with every piece of feedback, every delegation, every promotion, every question, every decision:

**We take a stance.**

In this changed technology industry,  
**what kind of leader  
will *you* be?**

**Lena Reinhard**

VP Engineering, Leadership Coach, Facilitator, *Leadership Confidential* Host  
[bit.ly/lenaletter](http://bit.ly/lenaletter)

**Lena Reinhard**

**VP Engineering, Leadership & executive coach, Facilitator**

**Host, *Leadership Confidential* Podcast**

[bit.ly/eng-productivity](https://bit.ly/eng-productivity)

[lenareinhard.com](https://lenareinhard.com)

*“What tech industry trends are you most excited or concerned about?”*

**Loss of people-centric companies. The industry has become brutal and inhumane**

— Engineering Manager

*“What tech industry trends are you excited about?”*

**“AI for the C-Suite. Let's replace 'em with an LLM. Those can explain their decisions.”**

— Software engineer

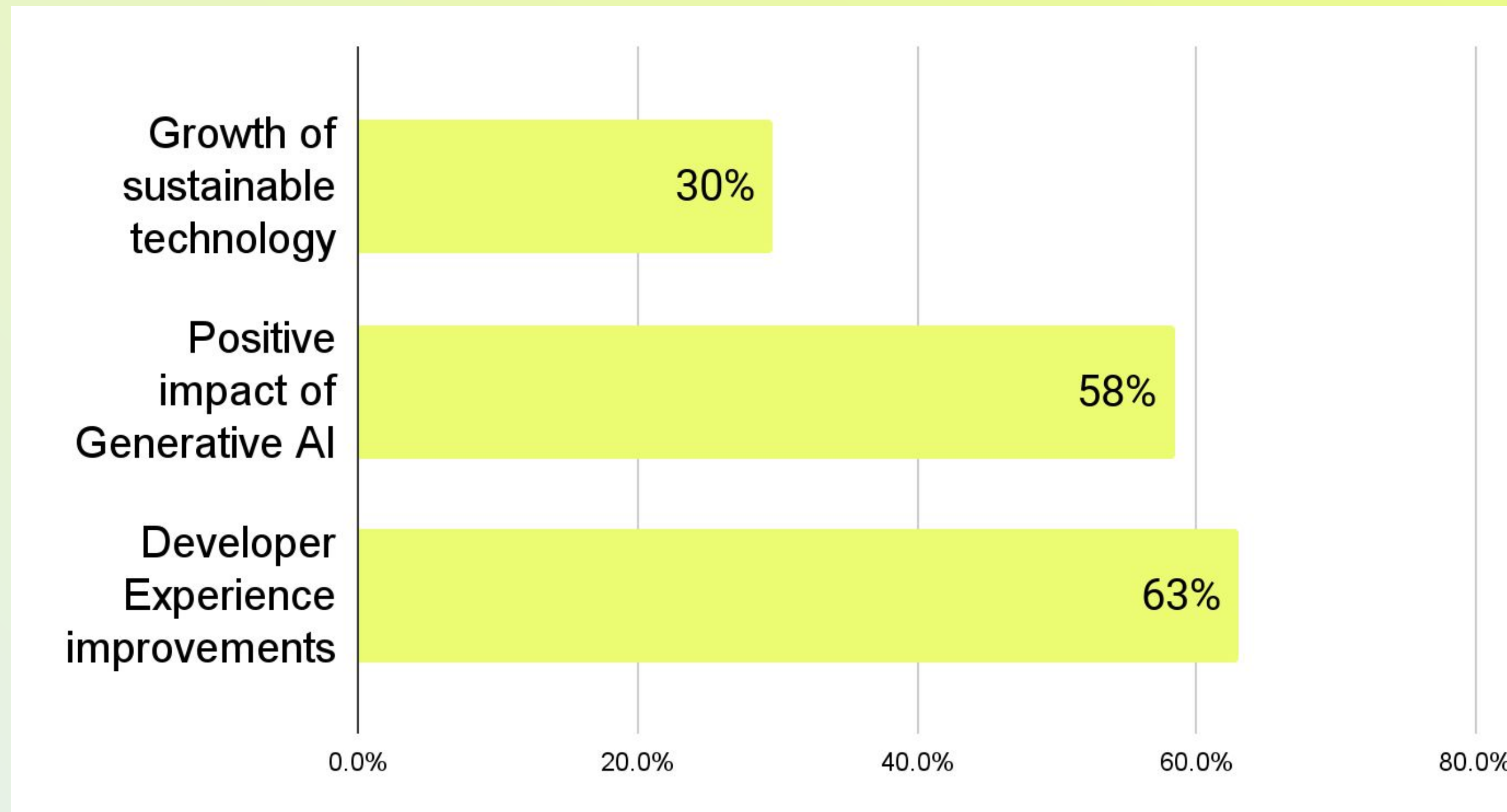
*“What type of work are you and your team(s) prioritising in the next 12 months?”*

**“Sheer stupidity.”**

— Advanced engineer



# Trends engineering managers are excited about



# Trends engineering managers are concerned about

