

Engineering Leadership Trends Heading into 2026

Lessons from conversations with
Engineering Leaders navigating the AI era



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3 Things Engineering Leaders are Focused on going into 2026

1

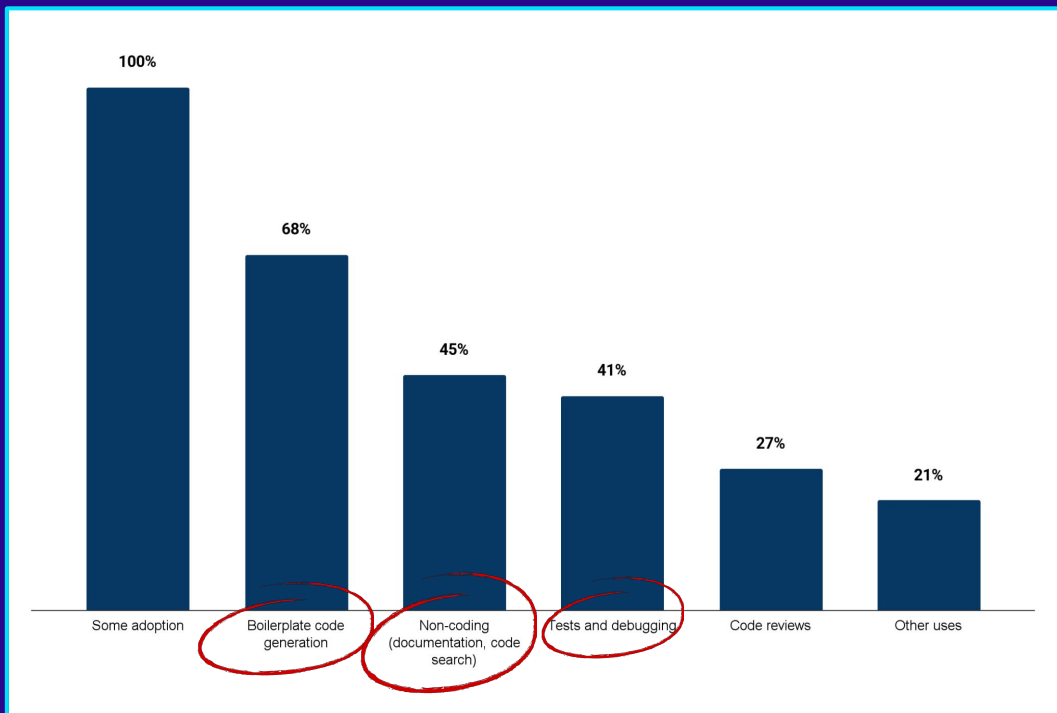
Pacing AI adoption, with an eye on trust and ROI

1 Pacing AI adoption, with an eye on trust and ROI

- Different companies are at different points of the adoption curve. There is no right answer.
- Some use cases are low-hanging fruit, but more complex uses are team-dependant.

1 Pacing AI adoption, with an eye on trust and ROI

*Tech Teams Today:
AI adoption among
engineering teams*



1 Pacing AI adoption, with an eye on ROI and trust

- Different companies are at very different points of the adoption curve. There is no right answer.
- Some use cases are low-hanging fruit, but more complex uses are team-dependant.
- ROI is still a big question mark; most teams are still working on adoption as a first step.

1 Pacing AI adoption, with an eye on ROI and trust

"AI is the bricklayer, and every dev is evolving into this new '*architect*' role."

— **Lalit Kundu, Co-Founder @ Deltty.ai**

"To have good ROI, AI will have to be more than just a better version of StackOverflow."

— **Anoop Deoras, Amazon**

46%

*say ROI of AI
tools will be
top-of-mind in 2026*

1 Pacing AI adoption, with an eye on trust ROI and trust

“AI Code is getting better, but still far from being production-grade.”

— **Nan Guo, SVP Engineering @ Zendesk**

"It's absolutely mandatory to have a human in the loop for 100% of an AI's work"

— **Ivan Hearnden, VP of Eng @ Branch**

66%

*face 'AI trust' issues
within their
engineering teams*

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Pacing AI adoption, with an eye on trust and ROI

2

Building ownership into their distributed setup

2

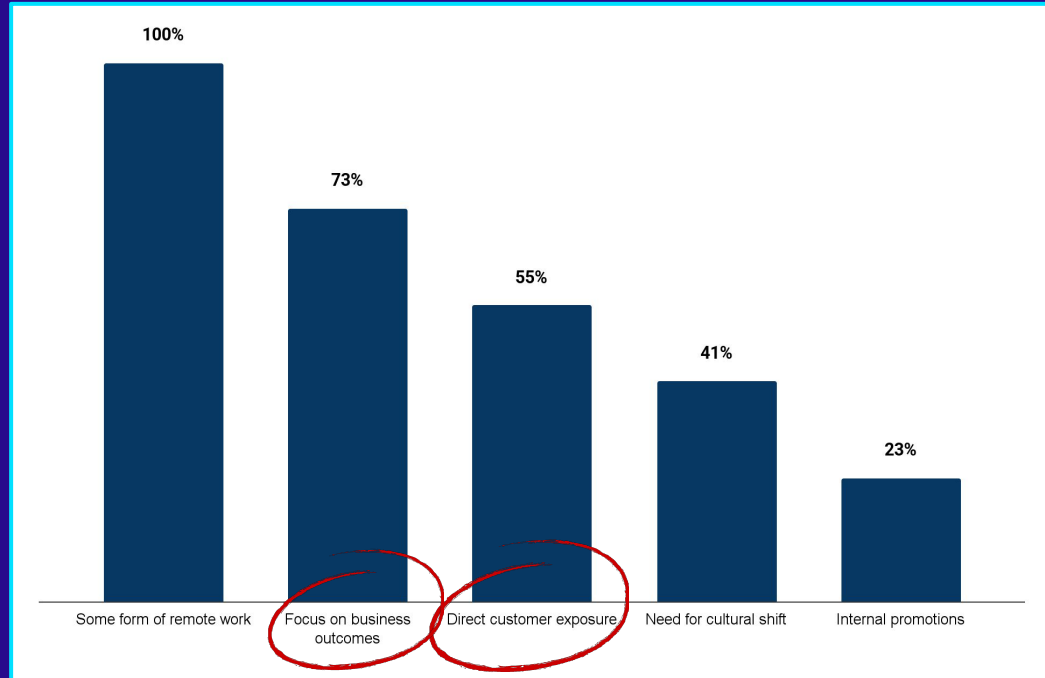
Building ownership into distributed setups

- Some form of remote/hybrid is now default, but culture and connection need to be intentional.
- The shift to remote has changed how teams are managed and evaluated.
- "Great distributed teams are not tracked. They are trusted."
- Standout teams are those who treat problems like they own them. For managers, this means that autonomy and clarity matter more than any velocity metric.

2

Building ownership into distributed setups

Tech Teams Today:
Changes from
remote-work
adoption



2

Building ownership into distributed setups

*"You can't tell somebody **what to do and how to do it**. You can give them one of the two, but you can't give them both."*

— **Robert Gonzalez, VP of Engineering at SugarCRM**

*"As a manager, you have to care about every single member of your team in three dimensions: **mastery, purpose and autonomy**."*

— **Gene Linetsky, CTO at Embroker**

73%

are focused on ways to shift from traditional engineering metrics to business outcomes

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Pacing AI adoption, with an eye on trust and ROI

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Building ownership into distributed setups

3

Staying closer to the work, without micromanaging

3

Stay close to the work. No micromanaging.

- "Management is 99% about discerning signal from noise."
- Data is key, but the most effective leaders aren't buried in dashboards.
- They are getting their hands dirty: experimenting with tools, shipping internal prototypes, and staying hands-on with what their teams are navigating.
- It's not about being the smartest in the room—it's about understanding enough to lead with empathy and clarity.

3

Stay close to the work. No micromanaging.

51%

*of leaders (incl. VPs/CTOs)
maintain some level of technical
engagement*

- *Occasional coding*
- *Deep code reviews*
- *Designing systems*
- *Technical workshops*

"Even senior engineering leaders should still write code. It's how you **understand the reality** and cut through the hype."

— Kevin Roche, CTO @ Wellthy

"I can get it done myself, but I have to resist that urge and remember that **with the proper direction they can go a lot farther** than me."

— Arun Shankar, Eng Director @ Tubi

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*The original version of this
presentation had 7 things!*

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Thank you!



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