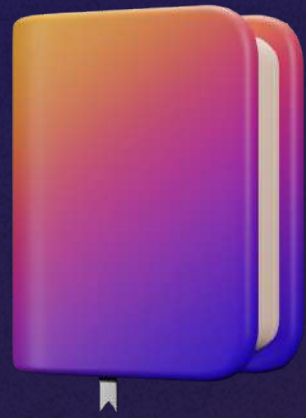hyno™

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A Detailed Guide to Evaluating Founding Engineers for Startups.

by hyno

How would you know if you have found the right founding engineer for your startup? Here is a Hyno Guide to your questions.

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Introduction

As we see a lot of startups budding around the world, there are a lot of terms that we encounter daily. Let's talk about one such term, "Founding engineer." Who is a founding engineer? A founding engineer is generally the first employee that a tech startup hires.

Also, the first three hires are typically called Founding Engineers. Additionally, a founding engineer is not someone who is the startup founder themselves. But they are a part of the founding team. So, how do you find a founding engineer for your startup? Let us dive in a little deeper.

Cost of Bad Hires

According to a Career Builder study, one bad hire can cause companies to bear losses of up to an average of $17000. This can be huge when you are running a startup. Additionally, you may need to invest in their training or face delays within the project deadlines.

This is crucial to understand as a startup environment is volatile and unpredictable. The new employee may wear many hats before settling into their responsibilities. So, how do you ensure a quality founding engineer within a startup environment? By putting up an evaluation framework to ease the hiring process at your startup.

how bad hires impact your organisation ?

1 Almost three quarter of companies who made a bad hire reported an average of

$14,900
wasted in money

2 The cost of bad hire is upto

30 %
of the **employee's wages for the first year**

3 ## 74 %
of the employers stating they **hired wrong person for the job**

4 Actively disengaged employees in the united states costs businesses anywhere from $450 billion

$500 billion
lost in productivity

5 ## 34 %
cfo's said that not only the bad hires cost them productivity but managers have to spend ## 17% **of their time**

supervising poorly performing employees.

Who is an Exceptional Founding Engineer?

Firstly, there are a lot of qualities that contribute towards making a candidate an excellent founding engineer. This section discusses the required factors to find the perfect fit for your tech startup.

Experience levels

A significant degree cannot replace real-scenario experiences as a software engineer. A lot of learning generally happens in a practical situation full of problems. Hence, a founding engineer should have 5-10 years of work experience as a software engineer. Look for people who bring a vast range of experience within the software development arena. They could have worked as interns or decided to be freelancers for a while. However, where they gained the experience might hold a lot of consequences, but the ability to tackle ambiguity

Ability to take ownership

A great founding engineer always looks forward to working on projects end to end. The capability to own their projects makes them stand out amongst the crowd. They want to own the entire process of kickstarting the project to deliver it to the client.

Handling Ambiguity

Working at a startup is all about this: working with ambiguity. To spot a great founding engineer, look at their ability to operate independently. Since you don't own a team, they must work on the projects autonomously with their vision. They would just need an idea to execute, and then they can create an MVP and scale it with time. There would also be scope creeps, which they should be able to handle along with tight deadlines and buggy results.
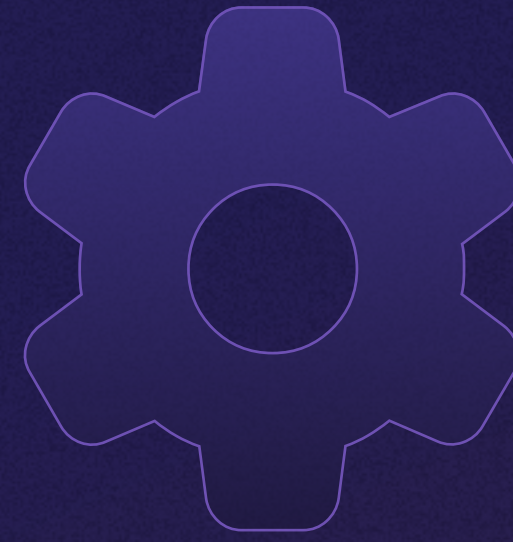
Multitasking

Multiple hats are generally used as a synonym for someone who works at a startup. A great founding engineer will know that he will have to take up a lot of responsibilities apart from his own. And this means that the list of duties would change from hour to hour, not day to day.

As a result, his day might look like taking customer calls and writing code intermittently, amongst many other things. Thus, if he can balance these responsibilities, he would make a great founding engineer.

Enhanced pace

It is essential to understand that a startup needs to work at a lightning-fast speed. There are a lot of things to be done at any given moment. Hence, a skillful founding engineer should be able to work under pressure to bring the decided vision to life.

A founding engineer doesn't need to have all these qualities simultaneously. But, you should be able to assess whether they can take up the daily life challenges that come out of thin air within a startup environment.

Responsibilities of a Founding Engineer

Product Management

A founding engineer envisions and guides the product roadmap, engaging with customers for improvements.

In the absence of a requirements document, they may review resumes until a recruiter is onboard.

Customer Support

A founding engineer must dedicate time to customer support, engage with communities, and address inquiries about issues or new features.

Collecting user feedback and promptly handling technical issues with an observability stack is crucial.

Conducting Business

Even if a founding engineer has much past work experience, he will gain new exposure to the startup environment. This includes raising funds, sales, marketing decisions, and beyond. Even if he does not have to create a sales pitch, he must sell the product and discuss the company's vision.

He should be able to support the team in getting the product to the market. A founding engineer will be able to learn a lot of things. Hence, he should be prepared to pick up new skills outside his existing skillset.
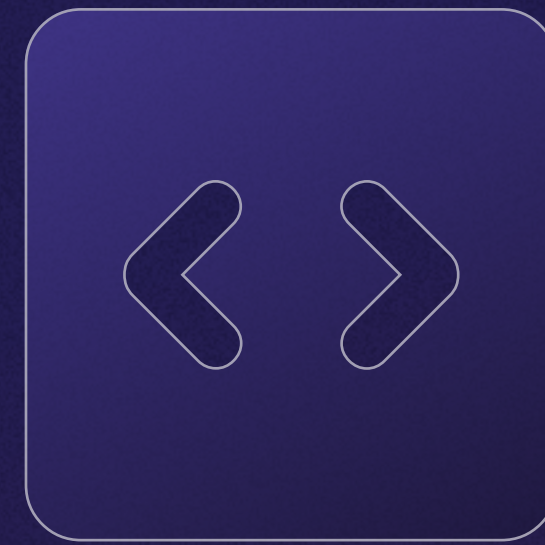
Engineering

The ability to get down to coding and write every line of it is what a founding engineer needs to do. The most important contribution he can make to your startup is to increase the number of product tests to execute. He will have to build pillars of the startup on which the company will rest in the future.

At the same time, a founding engineer should be able to establish a delicate balance between quality and speed. He must be able to make decisions regarding the in-house building vs. purchasing the third-party components. So, while being a founding engineer, he will also be a project manager, DevOps leader, and customer experience manager wrapped into one person.

People Operations

A founding engineer oversees recruitment, shapes company culture, and actively engages in discussions on employee engagement and decision-making.

They set the tone through actions, handling numerous daily inquiries, both direct and indirect.

Conducting Interviews

A general interview happens first with the startup's founder. With primary communication, you can gauge if the candidate is the right fit for further rounds. Gradually, with the demonstrated parameters, you can filter out the correct candidates if you do the assessment.

At Hyno, we conduct interviews and screening rounds to vet the candidates intensely before you can interview them. We use all the earlier parameters to ensure they undergo our rigorous screening process. We also ensure they are suitable candidates to work within a startup environment.
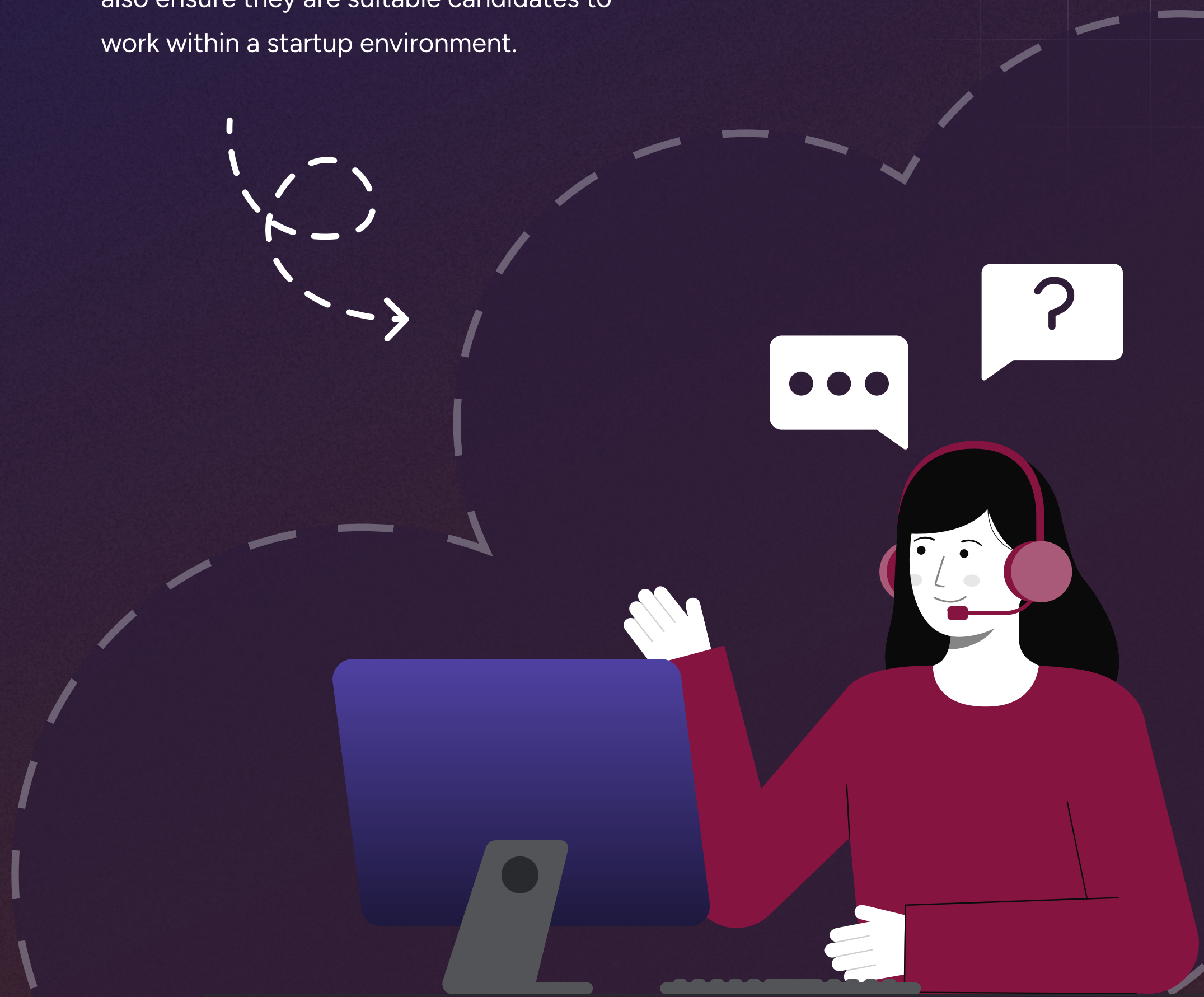
Skills to Assess while Building an Evaluation Frameworks

There are two types of skills that you should look for in a potential candidate. They are technical skills and soft skills. Let us check each skill you should assess when hiring a founding engineer for a startup.

At Hyno, we have a lot of parameters you should look for when hiring a founding engineer. Let us understand it in detail:
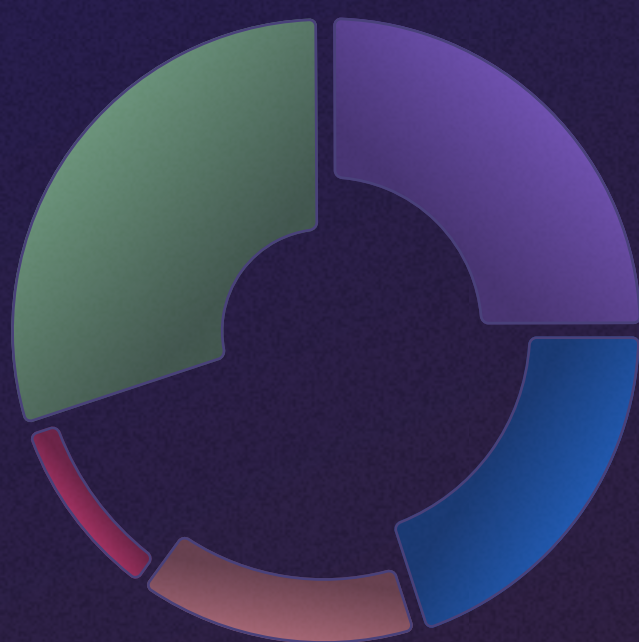
Tech Skills

Tech skills are skills that a founding engineer must have to work in the tech environment. At Hyno, we have a set of parameters to measure the candidate's ability to be a founding engineer, and we rate each parameter out of 5 stars.You can download an <u>interview evaluation template</u> here to ensure seamless evaluation. We have divided tech skills into two categories:

a) Perception analysis

Perception analysis assesses how well the aspiring founding engineer can understand the problem statement. Hence, we have four parameters to check the perception analysis for a candidate.

Problem understanding efficiency

The foundational skill of a prospective founding engineer is identifying and resolving problems within a startup. Problem understanding is crucial with the startup's unpredictability and rapid decision-making. During evaluation, the candidate works on a real-life situation. This helps you assess his analytical capabilities and ability to provide effective solutions for the given problem.

Pie chart rates real-world skills – identify, analyze, solve.

30% : Finding Effective Solutions

25% : Analyzing from Different Angles

20% : Identifying issues

15% : Tech Environment & Fast Decision-Making

10% : Real-Life Problem Example

Analytical Skills

As the candidate understands the issue, you assess his analytical skills and their capacity for devising and implementing effective solutions. Evaluation should include testing their ability to navigate escalating problem complexity. Additionally, he must develop scalable solutions and bring out creative problem-solving approaches.

Analytical Mastery: Deconstructing Key Skills

40% : Investigating and Analyzing

30% : Navigating Problem Complexity

30% : Creative Problem-Solving
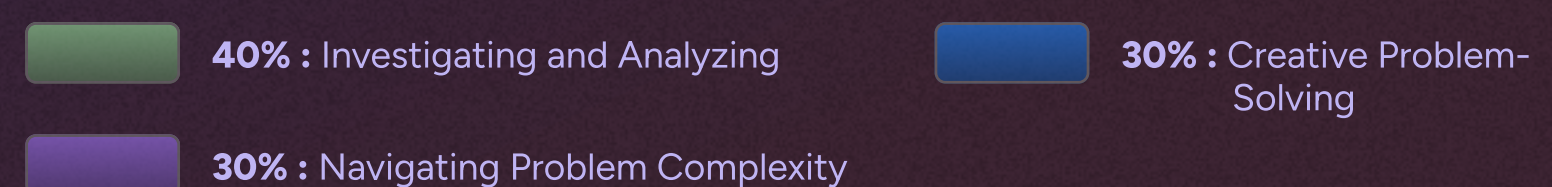
Algorithmic Knowledge

It's crucial to assess the aspiring founding engineer's understanding of diverse algorithms. Testing their algorithmic knowledge involves evaluating their ability to comprehend and navigate computational problems. They should determine the most suitable algorithmic approach for the problem statement. The candidate's chosen approach changes the problem resolution.
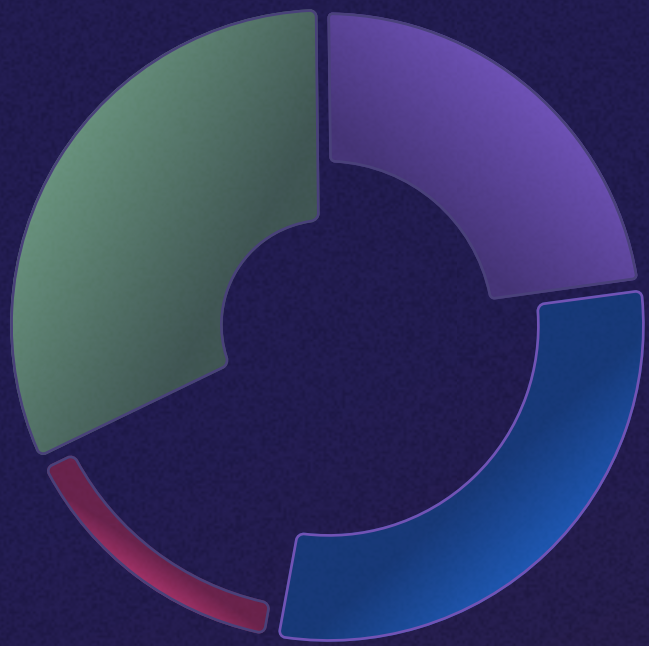
### Algorithmic Proficiency Evaluation

32% : Understanding Computational Problems

30% : Determining Appropriate Algorithmic Approach

23% : Navigating Algorithmic Solutions

15% : Versatility in Algorithmic Applications

Trade-Off Analysis

Can a founding engineer evaluate both positive and negative aspects effectively? Balancing conflicting factors, such as functionality and performance trade-offs, is key. He should also consider that increasing functionality impacts performance. The candidate should navigate these contradictions and implement an optimal solution. Moreover, he should see that the solution should not give rise to new problems.
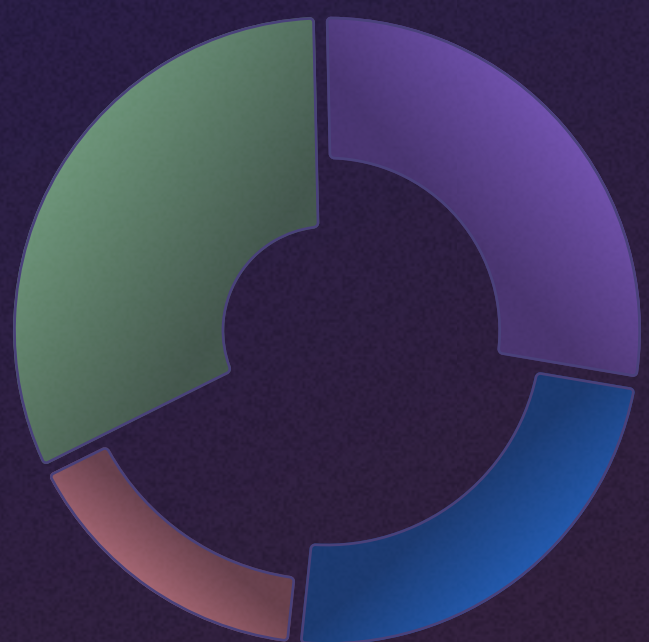
Strategic Decision-Making: The Art of Trade-Off Analysis

32% : Balancing Conflicting Factors

24% : Evaluating Negative Aspects

28% : Evaluating Positive Aspects

16% : Finding Optimal Solutions

b) Code Implementation Analysis

After finding a solution, can the candidate write the code according to the visualized solution?

Hence, even with the coding, there are parameters to see if the code implementation would be effective and successful. Hence, there are five factors to assess the code implementation and its analysis. Let us go through each:

Speed

The speed of solution implementation is as crucial as its correctness and creativity. This assessment evaluates the candidate's ability to swiftly develop accurate code that adheres to coding requirements. It should solve the entire problem, and avoid creating new ones.

Code Accuracy

When there is a clear vision of the problem and the best solution, that clarity is reflected in the code. The accuracy of the code defines the skill set of the aspiring founding engineer. This should include syntax accuracy and logical code implementation for the problem sustainably for future use and references.

Code Readability

A great developer/aspiring founding engineer knows the value of well-documented code. They understand the importance of transparent thought processes and logic. Thus, they ensure that the code is easily understandable. Check if the code syntax is well-defined.

Code Maintainability

Can he maintain the code in modular format? Will the code remain reusable in the future? If the candidate develops a well-organized and maintainable code, he is close to being an ideal candidate. Additionally, does the candidate know which libraries and functions to use to solve the problem?

Code Coverage

Code coverage helps you understand how much of the source code has undergone testing. A perfect candidate should apply comprehensive test cases while considering critical functionality. Examine if the code is stable and robust. Does the code bring the required results? He should test his code relentlessly to ensure it is perfect from all the testing best practices.

Proficiency of a candidate to consider in code implementation analysis while hiring.
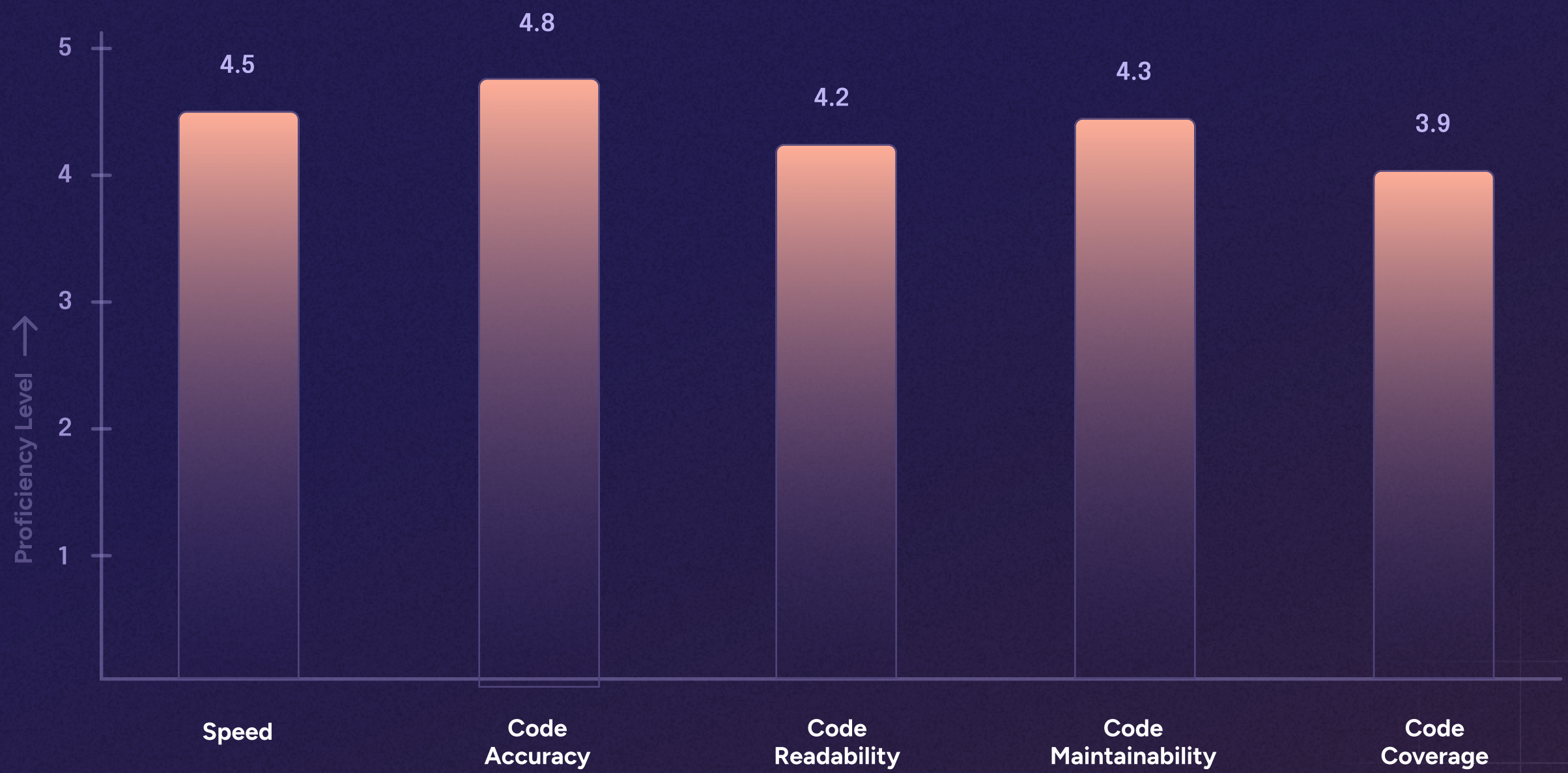
The changing proficiency levels of each skill define a potential candidate. And at Hyno, we ensure that we help you find only those engineers that score beyond 4 for each skill.

Soft Skills

Assessing a candidate's soft skills includes more than just how they choose to communicate or how fluent they are in their language. But there are a lot of other factors to consider when you hire a founding engineer. Let us look at each of these:
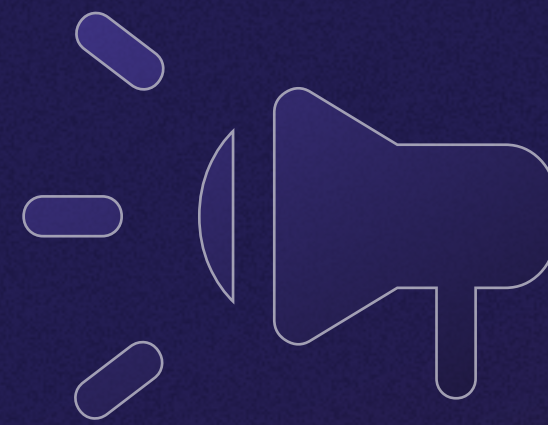
Past Project Experience

This parameter helps you understand what kind of work experience the candidate brings from his past projects. They should be able to explain their experience and highlight their achievements and contributions.

He should describe the project, the problem, and how he or his team arrived at the solution. An ideal candidate should be able to demonstrate his learnings and insights that he can apply in the future projects.

Technical Communication

The ability to comprehend and communicate with technical and non-technical team members about a highly technical topic is called technical communication. He should be able to highlight and explain the issues within the product using various analogies.

When he can explain the code in complete detail using diagrams or other formats for explanation, that's when you have found the right candidate.

System Design

As your startup scales and you get more users onboard, your product should expand with time. It should be able to accommodate the increasing user requirements. The product should offer an optimized user experience.

Hence, the future founding engineer should be able to design robust systems that can scale over time for increased usage.

Product Sense

The aspiring founding engineer should be able to look at the larger picture, understand the customer needs, and translate the solution into code. Is he able to understand the ever-changing market trends?

Does he know his users and their ideal behavior? As a founding engineer, he should be able to nail the product strategy using quantitative insights and creative solutions.

Soft Skills

As a founding engineer has to deal with various people within and outside the organization, he should communicate effectively. He should be able to communicate well with the team members and address and resolve communication issues.

Creating and Decoding Evaluation Reports

Every parameter in the abovementioned list gets a score according to the candidate's performance. According to the score he receives, you decide whether he is a suitable fit for your startup.

Interview report

Hyno generates a report after thoroughly analyzing a candidate's experiences and skill sets.

You can download a sample report

Download here

Making Informed Decisions

The report generated after carefully screening each candidate helps you understand their abilities, strengths, and skills. Every startup is different, and skillset requirements change from company to company.

A candidate may not fit startup-A but may be the perfect fit for startup-B. Hence, according to the varying skills and expertise in the generated report, you can see if the candidate is the right fit.

Based on the candidate's interview report, you can make an informed decision as the report contains a detailed view of a candidate's skills and experiences. You can easily identify if they can become a successful founding engineer.

Our vetting process
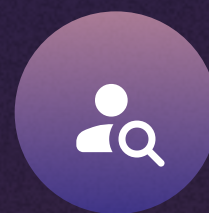
Candidate Screening :
Carefully evaluate each candidate's abilities, strengths, and skills.

Customized Skill Assessment :
Tailor the assessment to match the specific requirements of your startup

Fit for Startup Evaluation :
Assess how well a candidate aligns with the unique needs of your startup

Informed Decision Making :
Utilize the detailed interview report to make informed decisions about a candidate's potential success as a founding engineer in your startup.

Conclusion

Finding the perfect founding engineer takes effort, but the payoff is immense. Their technical expertise and early involvement can shape your product, team, and company's future.

Carefully consider the above points to attract a talented and passionate individual who becomes a true partner in your startup journey. If you are looking to hire a pre-vetted founding engineer, don't hesitate to contact us here.