



STRATEGIC BRIEF | July 2026

Identifying leadership potential in the EMS industry

From Technical Expertise to Leadership Capability

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1. Introduction: The challenge of talent identification

In electronics manufacturing, managers are often promoted based on their technical expertise. While technical know-how is an important prerequisite, it is not sufficient on its own to successfully lead employees, teams, and complex manufacturing processes. Particularly in the Electronics Manufacturing Services (EMS) industry, management decisions can have a significant impact on productivity, quality, on-time delivery, and a company's long-term resilience.

This briefing explains why electronics manufacturing companies should identify and systematically assess leadership potential early on. Instead of basing promotions primarily on past technical performance, a competency-based approach is recommended—one that recognizes leadership as a competency in its own right. The goal is to identify and strategically develop leadership potential even before a formal appointment, using appropriate criteria and observable behaviors.

2. Economic relevance for EMS companies

In electronics manufacturing, management decisions have a direct impact on operational stability, productivity, and the ability to reliably meet complex customer requirements. Inappropriate appointments to leadership positions can not only hinder team development but also lengthen decision-making processes, weaken knowledge within the company, and exacerbate operational bottlenecks.

Especially in an environment with high cost and competitive pressure, it is therefore crucial to identify leadership potential early on and to systematically assess suitability for a leadership role. Crucially, it is not only a person's technical expertise that matters, but also their ability to share knowledge, delegate responsibility, and sustainably improve a team's performance.

3. The “expert paradox” in technical organizations

In EMS companies, high-performing engineers, purchasing managers, production planners, or quality specialists are frequently promoted to management positions. Technical excellence is a key success factor – however, it alone does not automatically prepare individuals for the demands of a leadership role. This phenomenon is often referred to as the “*Expert Paradox*.”

Analyses and experiences from corporate practice show that transition from technical expert to leader is associated with two key challenges:

- **Lack of leadership skills:** Technical excellence does not automatically replace the ability to lead employees. Without targeted development of leadership skills, many new managers struggle to delegate tasks, develop teams, and effectively transfer responsibility.
- **Solving problems themselves instead of delegating responsibility:** Many former specialists continue to perform operational tasks themselves, instead of empowering their team to develop solutions independently and take responsibility.

The consequences for companies can be significant: On the one hand, an experienced specialist is missing in their previous role, and on the other hand, the new manager does not fully reach their potential. This can negatively impact collaboration, decision-making processes, and team development.

4. The paradigm shift: Redefining success

To identify leadership potential in electronics manufacturing early on, a broader understanding of success is required. Technical performance remains important, but it is not sufficient on its own to assess leadership potential. Effective leadership does not arise solely from a formal position, but primarily from the ability to build trust and credibility, provide guidance, and empower others.

While the success of a specialist is primarily measured by their own professional performance, the success of a manager is mainly reflected in the performance and development of their team.

Dimension	Success as a specialist	Success as a leader
Performance measure	Own performance, technical quality and goal achievement.	The team's results, as well as its performance and development potential.
Core focus	Technical expertise and direct problem solving.	Empower employees, delegate responsibility, and promote collaboration.
Influence	It is based primarily on expertise and experience.	It is based on trust, communication, and the ability to motivate and develop others.

5. Early indicators of genuine leadership potential

- Leadership potential in electronics manufacturing can often be identified based on typical behaviors even before a formal promotion.
- Responsibility beyond one's own area of responsibility: The person recognizes process gaps or potential for improvement early on and takes responsibility, even if these do not fall within their direct area of responsibility.
- Focus on team success: The shared success of projects and customer orders takes center stage – personal recognition takes a back seat.
- Clear and trustworthy communication: Information is conveyed in a comprehensible, respectful and transparent manner, even under time pressure.

- Remaining composed under pressure: In critical situations, such as material shortages or schedule deviations, the person remains calm, weighs options and makes well-founded and comprehensible decisions.
- Development of other employees: Knowledge is actively shared, colleagues are supported and encouraged in their development, instead of defining oneself through exclusive expert knowledge.

6. Focus Analysis: Knowledge Transfer as a Sign of Natural Authority

In electronics manufacturing, specialized knowledge is often a key success factor. At the same time, there is a risk that critical knowledge remains concentrated in the hands of individuals, leading to dependencies. Therefore, an important characteristic of leadership potential is the willingness to actively share knowledge and empower others.

A valuable indicator is the level of trust and credibility within the team: If colleagues regularly seek a person's advice and confidently implement their recommendations, this speaks to their professional credibility and personal influence. From a strategic perspective, active knowledge transfer helps reduce dependencies on specific individuals and strengthens the organization's resilience and scalability. Potential leaders therefore view knowledge not as a personal competitive advantage, but as a resource that gains value through sharing.

7. Practical recommendations

To strengthen long-term competitiveness, EMS companies should strategically improve their selection and development of managers:

- Early leadership development: Preparing potential leaders for their future role through training, coaching, or project responsibility even before a promotion.
- Extended selection criteria: In addition to professional qualifications, leadership skills, communication skills, trust building and observable behaviors should also be systematically included in the selection process.
- Mentoring and structured feedback procedures: Use mentoring programs as well as 360-degree feedback or peer feedback to better assess leadership potential, knowledge transfer and acceptance within the team.

8. Conclusion

Technical excellence is a crucial foundation for success in electronics manufacturing. However, successful leadership requires additional skills – particularly the ability to develop employees, delegate responsibility, and foster collaboration.

Leadership potential can often be identified even before a formal promotion. An important indicator is whether colleagues voluntarily seek a person's advice, trust their professional and personal assessments, and perceive them as competent both professionally and personally. Similarly, potential leaders are characterized by their willingness to openly share knowledge, support others in their development, and prioritize shared success over their own indispensability.

For EMS companies, this means viewing leadership not merely as the next career step for technically successful employees, but as a competency in its own right that should be identified early and developed strategically. A structured selection and development process can help to better identify leadership potential, promote knowledge transfer, and sustainably strengthen the company's long-term competitiveness and resilience.

Further reading:

Gallup – State of the Global Workplace. The study regularly demonstrates the relationship between leadership quality, employee engagement, and business performance.

About the author

Dirk Kaussen is Founder and Managing Director of EMS Strategy Group. With around 40 years of experience in the electronics industry — including founding and managing his own electronics manufacturing company in Germany — he brings deep expertise in manufacturing processes, EMS partner selection, supply chain stability, relocation projects, and risk management. His approach combines practical solutions with a direct connection to industrial reality.

About the EMS Strategy Group

EMS Strategy Group supports industrial enterprises in the strategic advancement and optimization of their electronics manufacturing operations – from high-level planning to operational execution. Our core expertise lies in the strategic relocation of manufacturing volumes to European EMS providers, the establishment of new production capacities, and the expansion of existing manufacturing structures.

Furthermore, we design resilient supply chain frameworks, conduct comprehensive risk assessments, and guide dual-sourcing strategies to secure and fortify supply chains. Upon request, we manage projects closely until a successful serial production ramp-up is achieved.

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