# Twitter Thread by Pat Kua



**Pat Kua**
@patkua

## I've heard the phrase, "We don't need a tech lead", from a number of engineers in my career. My response to this ■

Firstly, it almost always sounds like "We don't need a *stinkin'* tech lead", which isn't very helpful

When I ask why don't need a tech lead, I'm offered examples which sound reasonable such as, "We are senior engineers and can solve problems," or "We don't need to be told what to do," or, "We're an agile team."

Their answers seem to indicate that either they don't fully understand what a tech lead does, or they give examples of bad tech leads

If I had a bad tech lead, maybe no tech lead would be better too ■

I think back to a team I was working near (not on, but close enough to observe). The team had some of the strongest and most experienced devs in the company, as the problem they were dealing with was extremely complex. As an ad-hoc team, there was no tech lead

One thing I noticed about this team? Lots of arguing about how to tackle problems (each one had very strong opinions about how to deal with certain aspects like monitoring, testing and saving data) but not a lot of progress

In High Output Management, Andy Grove says that a key part of a manager's role is to make sure decisions get made. I don't see this exclusive to managers, but all leaders.

Teams waste a lot of time if they don't agree on *how* a decision gets made, before trying to make decisions.

This does not imply that leaders need to make the decision, but they need to make sure a decision gets made.

Another way I see empowered teams is that a leader has distributed their decision making authority in teams, often implicitly, about how and what decisions the team can make.

This is a huge win, because the leader doesn't have the pressure to "make correct decisions" because that's impossible in fast changing environments

Anyway, back to the topic of a tech lead. A team doesn't necessarily need a tech lead if the team is taking care of all the important technical aspects and can agree.

But what happens if the team isn't taking care of an aspect? Maybe they don't realise it's important, they forget about it, or assume someone else will take care of it? This is why organisations nominally have the tech lead role... for accountability.

Some organisations/people see accountability as blame, but it doesn't have to be. It can also be a mechanism for resilience (backup) or quality (independent view).

Great tech leads aren't in the limelight or always actively leading. In fact, most great tech leads get to work as a developer most of the time because the team is taking care of things... but they step in when they notice gaps appearing, or when the team can't find a way forward

Without someone in the team to look out for this, aspects are neglected until it becomes an emergency (■ tech debt!) or topics are escalated to someone outside of the team ■■ for mediation

A great tech lead doesn't only focus on aligning the team on technical topics. They should be influencing others outside to champion technical topics

You know that afternoon you got to clean up the messy build? Or that week you got to rewrite some ugly part of the system. Product Managers or other managers don't simply gift time unless they understand the value of where that time will go.

Who does that? Typically a tech lead

I don't think that every team needs to have a tech lead role (at least not full-time), but every team certainly needs technical leadership