

Technical Leadership Career Ladder

A few words of guidance:

- Technical Leads begin at level L5.
- At levels L5 and L6, tech leads can transition into the IC role seamlessly (T5/T6) and vice-versa.
- Each level builds on the criteria from the preceding level. A L7 must also meet all the criteria for a L6.
- For a given level, meeting the specified number of years of relevant experience is not strictly required. However, every year short is harder to account for concerning promotions or hiring. Years of relevant experience are important in establishing a track record since it takes time to assess the significance of long-term decisions. Time served in industry or academia cannot stand alone. Your experience should also be relevant to level criteria.
- The criteria for each level are guides, not strict requirements. Excellence in one criteria may counter-balance weakness in another. It is common for individuals to spike their performance to higher levels either temporarily or on individual criteria.

Level	Title	Knowledge & Experience	Leadership & Influence	Organizational Impact
T5/L5	Senior Eng / Technical Lead	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spends 40-80% of time as recognized engineer at level T5 or above. • Recognized technical expert in at least one part of the product. • Explains team components to a useful level of detail or points to someone who can. • Proposes technical strategies for a subset of projects for one team. • Breaks down complex tasks or projects for junior team members. • Reviews all RFCs and design documents from own team. • Maintains up-to-date awareness of all ongoing projects for one team. • Maintains up-to-date awareness of adjacent projects from other teams. • Effectively communicates with leads of other teams towards progress on cross-team projects. • Supports EMs and PMs in maintaining a coherent view of a team's progress in tracking systems. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develops, updates, and advocates for the technical direction of a project. • Communicates the technical strategy with the team and the rest of the organization. • Encourages healthy debate between team members and drive the decision-making process. • Takes on distractions to allow the rest of the team to work more effectively. • Serves as point of contact for other teams during cross-team strategy making. • Strives to be responsive and capable of making fast decisions, keeping momentum behind projects. • Reliably jumps in and refines decisions which may not be in-line with the goals of a project, typically armed with a more sound solution. • Demonstrates engineering best practices by example. • Proposes updates to engineering best practices within a team. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicates/synthesises work progress of team towards PMs. • Assists PMs and EMs into setting priorities for a team's assignments. • Assists PMs and EMs to coordinate the definition of the technical roadmap, especially to balance business strategy with implementation constraints and balance implementation strategy / constraints with staffing. • Identifies "orphan" issues or product areas and points them out to PMs and EMs.
T6/L6	Staff Eng / Senior Technical Lead	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spends 30-60% of time as recognized engineer at level T6 or above. • Recognized technical expert in multiple areas of the product. • Recognized track record supervising and onboarding junior engineers and interns. • Keeps up to date with technical advancements in the industry. • Helps teams create "theories" and structures that enable people to rapidly understand and make meaningful updates to products. • Maintains an up-to-date map of experts on all topics and product areas under responsibility. • Maintains up-to-date awareness of ongoing projects for two or more teams. • Systematically scrutinizes RFCs and design documents for implementation costs and unintended consequences. • Proposes technical strategies for cross-team projects. • Identifies and supports projects that increase team work efficiency or productivity. • Maintains and synchronizes a coherent view of a team's progress in all relevant tracking systems. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Typically 2 years of experience in a technical leadership position. • Delegates responsibility for areas of the codebase or project to capable and appropriate team members. • Predicts obstacles in development and proactively proposes contingencies. • Identifies patterns in business and support cases and proposes technical initiatives to address them coherently. • Assists EDs and TDs in assessing technical and organizational risks. • Proposes contingencies and alternate strategies to lower previously identified risk. • Sets engineering best practices within a team in alignment with organizational standards. • Maintains and uses an active network of horizontal contacts throughout the organization to work around limits in the formal communication structure. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Independently sets priorities for a team's projects and communicates them to the organization. • Independently proposes significant parts of the technical roadmap. • Maps out "orphan" issues or product areas, identifies their business impact and assists PMs and EMs in designing an organizational strategy for them. • Helps educate PMs in developing an accurate technical understanding of the product. • Assists EMs in the definition of hiring schedules and requirements for job openings. • Assists EDs in the definition and formation of new engineering teams. • Identifies impedance mismatch in the boundaries between teams and points them out to EDs and TDs. • Identifies systematic incoherences in communication and/or tracking systems and points them out to EMs and PMs.
<p>• Below level 6, tech leads are expected to spend a significant portion of their time on IC responsibilities. At levels above 6 tech leads specialize in cross-team leadership.</p>				
L7	Staff Tech Lead	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spends 15-40% of time as recognized engineer at level T6 or above. • Maintains awareness of progress and blockers on projects from multiple teams. • Identifies alternate technical strategies with different execution risks for complex projects. • Scrutinizes design initiatives for redundancy and synergies across teams. • Maintains an up-to-date map between teams and projects / products with interactions/dependencies. • Maintains an up-to-date map of orphan product areas and their impact on the product and organization. • Articulates technical strategies around a multi-quarter timeline and taking organizational impact into account. • Develops and executes gradual/smooth corrections of strategy to respond to changing business needs. • Uses formalized processes to develop, promote and execute organizational changes with support from stakeholders. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Typically 5 years of experience in a technical leadership position. • Uses input from TLs and PMs to articulate technical direction over multiple product areas. • Independently assesses execution risk on certain cross-team projects and communicates assessments to product and management. • Delegates the development of technical strategies to capable and appropriate tech leads. • Develops and executes strategies to migrate multiple teams to new frameworks, APIs, technologies or engineering best practices. • Develops and executes strategies to sunset cross-team projects or product components. • Sets engineering standards across multiple teams. • Arbitrates differences in technical strategy across teams, or between product and engineering. • Maintains a healthy work relationship with all tech leads in multiple product areas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifies and helps resolve strategic incoherence between eng teams, or between multiple PMs whose strategies share eng teams. • Proposes and coordinates, together with EMs, evolutions in the scope of responsibilities for existing teams. • Proposes and coordinates, together with EDs, the formation of new teams to support critical investments. • Proposes and coordinates, together with EDs, organizational strategies for re-homing of orphan product areas and projects. • Identifies possible adjustments to PM processes to better integrate with engineering processes. • Identifies and advocates for high-risk, high-reward technical investments towards EDs, product and the executive team.
L8	Senior Staff Tech Lead	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spends 5-25% of time as recognized engineer at level T6 or above. • Delivers technical reviews of research activities on high-risk, high-reward projects. • Periodically publishes strategic overviews that identify how the company is reshaping the industry. • Provides input on status and progress on previously established OKRAs. • Develops and promotes organizational processes to manage technical strategies. • Reviews and co-authors updates to organizational processes proposed by EMs/EDs and TDs. • Assists the authoring of technical updates for board briefing documents. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Typically 8 years of experience in a technical leadership position. • Accountable for the alignment between the technical strategy of eng teams and the product roadmap. • Develops and executes technical action plans to react to sudden changes in business requirements, with support from EDs for staffing. • Occasionally directs a dedicated team of engineers to intervene incidentally on exceptional situations. • Delegates the development of cross-team and cross-product technical strategies to adequate TDs and staff/principal engineers. • Proposes updates to the definition of department-wide OKRAs. • Proposes adjustments to the organization's technical governance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Derives likely staffing requirements per technical area over multiple quarters from technical strategies, in collaboration with EDs. • Proposes adjustments in the mapping of EMs to engineering teams based on results and technical alignment. • Establishes priorities in the execution of organizational changes in the composition of teams. • Arbitrates effort investments between competing strategies. • Suggests organizational acquisitions and off-shoots to increase coherence in technical strategy.
L9	Principal Tech Lead	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Previously recognized as engineer at level T6 or above. • Develops and promotes organizational processes to manage technical leadership. • Develops and promotes organizational processes to manage organizational changes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Typically 12 years of experience in a technical leadership position. • Accountable for a subset of engineering OKRAs. • Shapes and communicates updates to the organization's technical governance. • Directs a dedicated team of engineers to explore high-risk, high-reward technical strategies. • Communicates on progress and strategy to the executive team and the company's board of directors. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analyzes the strategic implications of organizational acquisitions and off-shoots and coordinates their implementation.