Google’s head of AR software quits, citing “unstable commitment and vision”



Enlarge / Product photography of the Google Glass wearable.

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Google’s head of operating system and software platforms for augmented and mixed reality devices, Mark Lucovsky, has left the company after months of turmoil for the company’s mixed reality projects and staff. He publicly announced his departure in a tweet on Monday:

> *I have decided to step away from my role at Google, where I was Senior Director of Engineering, responsible for OS and Software Platform for AR and XR devices. The recent changes*

> *in AR leadership and Google's unstable commitment and vision have weighed heavily on my decision.*

It's unclear exactly which leadership changes he's referring to, but it seems possible or even likely that he's talking about the recent departure of Clay Bavor, who had led Google's XR work since 2015. Bavor left the company in March of this year.

Google was one of the pioneers of mass-market AR when it piloted Google Glass with developers in 2013, but things have been rocky of late. The company killed Glass, brought it back as an enterprise-only product, then killed it again. Rumors swirled that the tech giant was working on a new AR product called Project Iris, but it was reportedly canceled this year amidst a wave of company layoffs.

A report from Insider claimed that Google had shifted its focus to "creating software platforms for AR that it hopes to license to other manufacturers building headsets." For example, it has been working on an Android-based XR platform for use in a product that Samsung plans to produce. Google said during its I/O conference in May that it will announce more details about this partnership with Samsung sometime before 2024.

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You can see how those sorts of changes might leave someone like Lucovsky adrift. His career as an operating systems lead spans decades. He first achieved widespread recognition for his work on Windows NT back in the '90s. He later worked at Meta (then called Facebook) as the lead for that company's efforts to build an augmented reality OS. He left in a furor over that company's ethics controversies in 2021. He's been at Google since then, but it became a relatively short stint.

As for what he's planning to do next, Lucovsky was not specific. "Moving forward, I am eager to explore opportunities

that allow me to further advance Augmented Reality technology and its intersection with generative AI," he wrote in a follow-up tweet. "I approach the next chapter with enthusiasm and anticipation for the exciting possibilities ahead."

Lucovsky probably won't have much trouble finding somewhere to land. Even as Google has struggled to find its focus in augmented reality, some competitors have made big commitments. At least for the time being, Meta remains as focused on XR as ever, though it seems unlikely Lucovsky would return there. Meanwhile, Apple plans to launch Vision Pro and visionOS to consumers early next year, and AR developers have just started building apps for the platform. Apple expects it to be a slow rollout, but its commitment to long-term investment in the space seems clear.

There are ongoing AR projects at Microsoft and Amazon, and of course, numerous VC-backed startups are working in the space.

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