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TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 01 **BEYOND DISCOVERY: THE ART OF POTENT CUSTOMER LISTENING FOR PRODUCT TEAMS**
Oji Udezue, Chief Product Officer, Typeform
Ezinne Udezue, Chief Product Officer, WP Engine
- 06 **HOW TO LEVERAGE AI THROUGHOUT THE PRODUCT MANAGEMENT LIFE CYCLE**
Christine Itwaru, Principal, Strategy, Pendo
- 11 **LESSONS FROM 15,000 EXPERIMENTS**
Andres Glusman, CEO, DoWhatWorks
- 13 **BIASES IN PRODUCT DECISION-MAKING**
Avantika Gomes, Group Product Manager, Figma
- 17 **BEST PRACTICES IN ENTERPRISE PRODUCT MANAGEMENT**
Dan Olsen, Author, The Lean Product Playbook
- 21 **THE PRESENT AND FUTURE OF AI**
Tarun Chopra, VP of Product Management Data and AI, IBM
- 25 **MOVING TO THE PRODUCT OPERATING MODEL**
Marty Cagan, Partner
Silicon Valley Product Group

- 30 **HOW TO CRAFT A PRODUCT SALES PITCH THAT WINS DEALS**
April Dunford, Chief Executive Officer, Ambient Strategy
- 33 **THE SUPERPOWER OF PLAY**
Diana Tobey, Senior Design Director, Play Lab IDEO
- 36 **LEARNING WHEN TO JUMP**
Danie Karaplis, Product Leader
- 38 **PRODUCT INFORMATION: EXPENSIVE, CHEAP, OR PRICELESS?**
Matt Reiner, Customer Advocate, K15t
- 41 **THE CHALLENGES OF B2B AND B2B2C PRODUCT LEADERSHIP**
Laura Marino, Chief Product Officer, TrueML
Jessica Sweeney, Transformational Product Executive
- 45 **ADAPTIVE PRODUCT STRATEGY: HOW TO PLAN WHEN ALL PLANS KEEP FLYING OUT OF THE WINDOW**
Nadya Zhexembayeva, Founder & Chief Reinvention Officer, Reinvention Academy
- 48 **BETTER TOGETHER: HOW COLLABORATION BETWEEN PRODUCT AND ENGINEERING TEAMS CAN FUEL GROWTH**
Shadi Rostami, Senior Executive VP of Engineering, Amplitude
- 51 **360° STRATEGIES: RESILIENCE IN THE FACE OF UNCERTAINTY**
Chris Butler, Group Product Manager, Google

✓ **BEYOND DISCOVERY: THE ART OF POTENT CUSTOMER LISTENING FOR PRODUCT TEAMS**

Oji Udezue, Chief Product Officer, Typeform

Ezinne Udezue, Chief Product Officer, WP Engine

Session Overview:

Join product leaders Oji and Ezinne Udezue as they explore the untapped power of 'Customer Listening'—the ongoing art of tuning into real-time customer feedback from diverse channels beyond the initial discovery phase. Drawing from their experiences leading product at high-growth technology companies, and sprinkled with insights from their upcoming book, Oji and Ezinne will unveil strategies to harness continual customer chatter effectively, offering a fresh perspective on driving product growth in today's tech landscape.

Key Points:

- Customers are talking whether or not you want to listen.
- Listening is learning
- Listen, Synthesize, Act
- Make it easy, make it a habit
- Drive ownership across the organization
- Listening drives delight - you want your customers know you're paying attention, and acting on it.

Notes:

What is Customer Listening?

Customer listening is understanding and analyzing the feedback and sentiments of your customers to improve products, services, customer experience, and overall strategy.

Think of customer listening as the ongoing art and science of tuning into real-time customer feedback from diverse channels beyond the initial discovery phase.

Why does customer listening matter?

At every stage of the product life cycle, people are talking about your product.

Once you've found decent product market fit, people will chatter about your product in productive ways. If you can efficiently listen to what your customers are saying, you'll get great information that will help you improve your product.

- ✓ This is especially true for early stage products that are driven by feedback from your target customers. In fact, you could say that for early stage products, product strategy is entirely based on customer feedback.

If you're in B2B SaaS, your product is a key Go To Market (GTM) asset. The customer journey, onboarding, even support are all often accounted for in your product. To help your product evolve as a GTM asset, you need to listen to your customers.

Listening is learning, and it's one of the most important things you do as a product manager.

Contrasting Customer Discovery and Customer Learning

Customer discovery is forward looking and helps you learn more about strategic opportunities. It is often mapped against known problems and drives Product-Market Fit.

You use customer discovery when you have a tactical or strategic problem space you want to map and understand to improve its workflows.

Customer listening is diagnostic of your existing solution. When you listen to people share what they feel about your product, it exposes opportunities for improvement. The information you get is high resolution, and it drives customer delight.

In order to have effective customer listening, you need to find a high signal-to-noise ratio and process the information you get quickly.

Things to consider when customer listening:

Hearing what is not said

A quote from Peter Drucker embodies the Art of Product management: "The most important thing in communication is hearing what isn't said."

Listening goes beyond what your customers say. You can't take customer feedback word for word. Listen for the needs behind the words.

That means look for the patterns that indicate real needs. Those needs can exist at multiple levels from the entire product down to a single feature. Needs can also exist across multiple gaps and segments.

As You Listen

Remember that customer listening is something anyone can do. To be successful consider the following things:

Identify core needs as you listen. Try to find out what your customers are really trying to say.



Look for customer sentiment. How your customers feel about your product and company can be an indicator of problems down the road. Listen for the gaps that customers identify - things missing from your product.

Chatter about your product can be high resolution. You'll hear sentiment about your entire product and you'll also hear sentiment about a feature you just released. You'll have to decide how you want to deal with that varying level of detail.

As you scale your customer listening efforts, velocity becomes important. As you scale, your listening channels expand and can have high volume. You'll have to figure out a way to process all that information or resort to sampling. The good news is with that increased volume, you're able to react quicker if you're prepared. You can ship something one day, and the high volume of feedback provides you with sufficient information to react the next day.

Feedback can be noisy so you need to synthesize the customer chatter to get a high signal-to-noise ratio. This helps you pull the useful insights out from the information that may not be as helpful.

What to Listen To:

Most software companies have two kinds of channels: direct channels and proxy channels.

Direct Channels

Direct channels allow you to hear directly from customers. Some examples of these channels are:

- Churn feedback - why people stopped using your product
- NPS Verbatims - when you ask people for an NPS score, ask why they gave you that score. That information can be helpful.
- Reviews from places like G2, the App store, or other markets where your software is available.
- Social Media Chatter - what people are saying about your product on the socials such as X (the network formerly known as Twitter), Facebook, or TikTok
- Community - Bring frequent users and early adopters together in a virtual community to get an insight into their view of your product's good/bad points
- Bug Reports - good for companies whose customers are developers.

Proxy Channels:

Proxy channels filter customer feedback through other teams such as customer support, sales engineers, account managers, or partners if you have a platform.



Keep in mind that feedback coming from proxy channels is synthesized and interpreted by the people you're getting the information from. Sample some calls people in these channels are having with clients so you can get a sense of how they interpret the feedback they hear. You don't have to do 10 channels at once. Decide which channels of feedback are most helpful, and most important and focus on those as a starting point.

How to operationalize Customer Learning:

You can sum up the three core steps to customer learning as LISA:

Listen - What you're listening to

Synthesize - How you're synthesizing

Act - What action you want to take

Here's a bit more detail behind that:

Collect

Harvest data from your sources to a centralized system so that you can deal with it.

Clean

Extract a sample that is relevant and actionable. You need to do this to bump up the signal-to-noise ratio. For example, if you use Gong, set it up so that it identifies calls with certain words (i.e. "let me take that to product") which will send links to those calls to Slack.

Weight

Order by the impact the information has on your users. Decide which feedback to pay more attention to. Pick the sources that are more reliable, useful, and trustworthy.

For example, if you have an overbearing customer, first realize that the fact there is a loud voice is a signal of something. Then remember that successful companies have more customers in their future than in their past. With that in mind, decide whether you should listen to your past at the cost of the future.

Listen to the people who represent your future, which are typically people who fit your Ideal Customer Profile (ICP).

Triage

Regularly process feedback to get down to the key info. Bring feedback in and categorize it into different categories (positive, negative) then a team could monitor and deal with it accordingly. Prioritize actions based on capacity. You may find it helpful to decentralize triage so that it doesn't all fall on one person or team.

- ✓ Another approach is to schedule specific triage discussions (meetings) to take specific actions.

Assign

Decide who is going to address the feedback and signals you're getting. Give actions to members of your team.

Report

Gather feedback reactions to the changes.

New Opportunities with listening:

As technology evolves, there are several new opportunities to make listening better, easier and more effective.

Leverage AI - analyze sentiment more effectively

Segmentation - A more detailed audience picture

Localization - Listen in all your markets consistently

Connect qual to quant - Marry up chatter with analytics. It's becoming possible to tie together information about what customers are doing (quantitative) with why they did it (qualitative).

Engage at scale - Treat users as individuals, personalize responses. We've been listening, but have not been replying, but there are capabilities coming.

For more information:

Visit Oji and Ezinne's website [Productmind.co](https://productmind.co)

Find out more about their new book about Product Management for product led growth (yet to be titled) at <http://howtoplg.com>

✓ HOW TO LEVERAGE AI THROUGHOUT THE PRODUCT MANAGEMENT LIFE CYCLE

Christine Itwaru, Principal, Strategy, Pendo

Session Overview:

The product manager role has already transformed significantly in recent years – from an engineering-adjacent position focused on shipping features, to a cross-functional driver of business outcomes. AI promises even more change for the role. But what will that truly entail? How can product managers harness the full potential of AI—from discovery to launch and beyond—to get better at their jobs and drive outcomes for their companies? Christine Itwaru, principal strategist at Pendo and Mind the Product, will explore how product managers can leverage AI to: * Get product discovery insights faster * Make more informed product decisions * Build the right features, faster * Drive better retention, engagement, and growth.

Key Points:

Product people are facing a lot of change right now.

AI represents the biggest change most product people will face in their career.

Product people shouldn't be afraid of AI, but look for ways that it will augment your role in all phases of the product management life cycle.

Notes:

AI and change for Product Managers

There is a lot of anxiety going on in the world around AI.

You see all kinds of posts about AI on LinkedIn. News outlets constantly have good and bad stories about AI, and conversations about AI are quite frequent in just about every social setting.

As a Product Manager you constantly face changes. During times of change, you face the challenge of what to do next. And most of the time, you're taking a chance, based on the data and information you have on hand.

Even teams given a solution to deliver face uncertainty. While the work itself seems certain, they're uncertain what value (if any) the work will provide.

New tech and new tooling is everywhere. You need to decide what's good for you and what will help you out, even though the prevalence of new tools can lead to cynicism.

✓ When Generative AI first exploded via ChatGPT, something felt different. It was a sign that things were about to change in the world. We were all trying to figure it out, and we're subconsciously waiting for AI to show us we're on a journey and AI is not just something that's disrupting tech.

McKinsey estimated that Gen AI will add \$2.6 - \$4.4 trillion per year to the global economy. Product Managers will help push that forward, as well as put some boundaries around it.

The true role of the PM has undergone a shift over the last 100 years. Product Managers and the, product team is in the center of the business and can now influence business goals - retention, growth. That translates into work for the product team.

Yet all that said, AI is the biggest change that you'll experience in your career.

To react to that change, product people need to embrace AI as a partner.

The Impact of AI through the Product Management Life Cycle:

Keeping business outcomes in mind, here's a look at the impact of AI tools on the work of product managers and product teams in each phase of the Product Management Life Cycle.

Phase 1: Discover

This phase is about getting into understanding mode. You're trying to understand your user's pains and the opportunity that exists in your addressable market.

Ask the right questions based on the outcomes you want to see.

For example, if you want to reduce churn by x%, you'd ask questions like:

- Where are the pain points for users who are churning? Where are they getting stuck or dropping off?
- What is stopping these users from achieving their goals?
- What are general trends in feedback that point to increased frustration?
- What do typical user workflows look like for customer segments who are churning?
- Do we see some of our superusers or those who are highly satisfied engage in certain behaviors? What are they?

It takes time to get these answers, and then your product team needs to manually synthesize and analyze the answers to these questions. Tools are emerging to pull data sources together to synthesize and get ready for validation with more confidence.



How AI helps in this phase:

- Tools that allow you to pull all of their data sources together and save time so you can move on to the next stage of the lifecycle.
- Identify patterns across multiple data sources faster so that you can decide across those data sources
- Provide actionable recommendations and evidence to justify proposed investments

Big Win

Faster Alignment around pain customers feel and opportunity in the market. This is a great thing for teams who struggle to get engineering, product and design on the same page.

Phase 2: Validate

This phase is about marrying data across sources and activities so that you can determine which options will be best to move forward with. Those multiple sources include user interviews, prototype usage, support tickets, and customer feedback.

How AI helps in this phase:

- Quick analysis of validation data points
- Make building potential solutions faster and easier than ever before. Large Language Models like GPT-4 help teams write better code with less explicit instructions
- Enable teams to test multiple prototypes at once

Big Win:

You get time back. AI helps your product team analyze and act on feedback quicker giving the team more certainty.

Phase 3: Build

This phase is about cross-functional engagement with Product Marketing Manager, Finance, Sales, etc. while also helping your immediate product team (engineers and designers) keep focused. You also need to protect the roadmap during this phase.

Focus with immediate team (engineers & designers)

How AI helps in this phase:

- Speed up backlog refinement by drafting user stories and acceptance criteria in a consistent, easy to consume form for engineers.
- Map product's codebase and quickly suggest how feature changes impact the product. You're able to incorporate testing earlier which allows you to shorten your QA process and move faster during this phase.

Big Win:

Consistency in managing work for your team leads to Effective Communication

- ✓ with your product team and gives you time back to communicate effectively with other teams. You also experience less scope creep as you share plans earlier and you have data to align with everyone consistently.

Phase 4: Launch

You should communicate with product marketing regularly, so this phase is about working with product marketing to determine monetization of products and new features as well as complete your strategy for release and launch.

You're also letting users know what's coming asap, how it will impact their day-to-day and add value, and how to use it.

How AI helps in this phase:

- Fuel automated smart releases. You'll be able to determine the timing of your releases with more confidence and aid activities of other teams.
- Automatically create dashboards and reports to track adoption and impact to business goals.
- Enable product led growth mechanisms for any product launch which will help you identify which features or products make sense to highlight based on behavior.

Big Win:

Making sure customers, sales, and customer success align about what's coming out the door.

Phase 5: Evaluate

This phase is about performing a deep analysis of what's working and what's not as well as creating transparency to continue to get buy in. Between usage data, feedback, support tickets, and polling, you've got a lot of information to look at while determining what to do next.

How AI helps in this phase:

- Auto-determine what is and isn't working and provide recommendations on what to do next
- Create dashboards to match up release performance with business outcomes and goals

Big Win:

As you continue product releases, you'll get product, engineering, and design aligned to all the feedback and data that informs your next move. You'll also experience more certainty and evaluation will take less time as you iterate.

Phase 6: Iterate

In this phase you use the capabilities mentioned earlier to make more data informed decisions, generate changes and updates faster, and share progress across the business



How AI helps in this phase:

- Get product discovery insights faster
- Make better product decisions
- Build the right thing faster
- Personalize from day one
- Fuel continued success

Big Win:

As you iterate through the process you'll experience alignment, time savings, and improved communication.

For More Information:

[The Playbook for AI-enhanced Product Management](#) from Pendo

✓ LESSONS FROM 15,000 EXPERIMENTS

Andres Glusman, CEO, DoWhatWorks

Session Overview:

It's hard to believe but 80% of tests do not move the needle. So how do you set yourself up to beat the odds and drive growth? Andres Glusman will share insights gleaned from analyzing over 15,000 split tests from the world's top brands to help you confidently run experiments. Andres is the CEO and Cofounder of DoWhatWorks and was formerly led Product and Growth at Meetup.

Key Points:

Only 10 - 20% of AB tests provide results that move the needle.

To make the best use of experiments when your win rate is so low, you need to:

- Set expectations and goals thoughtfully.
- Measure speed to win, not speed to launch.
- Gather data before you test to beat the 20% benchmark.

Before you use AI with your tests, gather data on what works.

Notes:

The problem with A/B Testing

50% of people actually are above average, but 80% of people think they are above average. This indicates that people are bad at estimating. This mindset extends to when people try to optimize their website they overestimate their effectiveness.

In fact most people just guess.

Rigours Product Managers run A/B experiments, unfortunately the percentage of experiments that actually move the needle is between 11 - 20%.

That means that growth teams waste most of their AB testing time and effort. They keep doing it because when they do get it right, the results are worth the effort.

So if you know that only 1 in 5 (at best) of your experiments produce results, what do you do? You could ramp up volume to overcome the low win rate, Of course you can only run so many experiments.

The hard part is not getting a test out the door (except for some teams), it's getting enough data to get statistically significant results. Especially if you're in B2B SaaS.

✓ So you need to work on your win rate.

You also need to gather data on what works. In other words, talk to other companies who are doing experiments and find out what they're trying and what worked.

3 Lessons You Can Use Today

Lesson 1: Set goals & expectations thoughtfully.

When you decide to test, realize only 1 - 2 experiments out of 10 will win and set your expectations accordingly

That means you need to think about the timing of your tests and how many tests you're prepared to run.

Lesson 2: Velocity helps, but measure it correctly.

Speed to launch was the initial focus, but the better focus is speed to learn. Even better is speed to win.

Average speed to win is going to be 3 - 4 months. Think about how to bring that to smaller chunks.

Lesson 3: Beat the 20% benchmark

Gather data before you test

Add & subtract Sometimes the best optimizations are talking something away. If you're in the business of removing features you'll win more than when you add.

Context matters - it depends on where in the experience you are, customers you're talking to, industry you're in. There will be patterns, but there is no universal truth.

Final thoughts

The path of experimentation is a series of stages:

- Guess
- Test
- Velocity <- This is where the industry is at currently.
- Get data
- Know what works <- You should focus here.
- AI

You can't do AI without data on what works. Right now AI is garbage in, garbage out.

You should focus on knowing what works prior to trying AI.

✓ **BIASES IN PRODUCT DECISION-MAKING**

Avantika Gomes, Group Product Manager, Figma

Session Overview:

Our success as PMs hinges on our ability to make smart decisions every day. However, decision-making is rife with cognitive biases - the first step is to understand the different types of bias in order to correct them. In this talk, I'll talk through a few frameworks on how to make good, unbiased decisions. I'll share some real-life product examples that I've faced where biases have been in play, and how we approached it.

Key Points:

Product decisions are complex.

Your success hinges on your ability to make good decisions.

There are several biases that can impede good decision-making. Being aware of these can help maximize your chance of success.

To reduce the impact of biases:

- Make your inputs as objective as possible by refining your questions and reframing how you look at the results.
- Make your decision-making process more inclusive of people who might offer different perspectives.
- Constantly evaluate the outcomes of your decisions and course correct based on the results.

Notes:

When you typically think of product decisions, you think about the big ones, such as what's the problem, what's the right solution and should we launch this.

But It's not just the big decisions. Every day decisions such as what persona should we focus on or how should we sequence this can make a big difference.

Unfortunately, with all those decisions, your decisions aren't always as rational/logical as you'd like to think. There are several biases that can impede good decision-making.

Your success as a Product Manager hinges on your ability to make good decisions every day.



Confirmation bias:

"I'll see it when I believe it."

You notice data that confirms your belief. This bias is common when you do research or run experiments.

How confirmation bias shows up in user research:

- What people say they'll do doesn't always match what they actually will do. Users are positive in user research, but will they actually use your product?
- It's easy to cherry pick user testimonials that support practically any decision. What else did users say?

How confirmation bias shows up in data:

- Using vanity metrics such as board notes created that don't lead to any meaningful impact. Ask yourself if a particular metric increasing is a good thing.
- Paying attention to numbers that aren't relevant to the overall product.

Availability or selection bias:

This bias is when you reach for information that is most easily available but it can give you a skewed picture of the world. The information most available to you is your own opinions or beliefs.

To address this bias, remember the Product Management adage: "You are not your user."

Selection bias comes in when you're not talking to a representative sample of your entire user base and the people you're talking to don't represent the people you're building for.

Sunk cost fallacy:

This bias is where you believe you can't afford to change your mind.

When you spend a lot of time/money on something you're going to be inclined to make it work.

How do you overcome biases?

Acknowledge biases:

To combat biases, you first have to acknowledge that they exist and that they're impacting your decisions. When you do that, think about how the biases show up for you.

Inputs coming into decision:

Decisions are only as good as the information you use to make them.



User research is a huge source of bias if not done correctly. The way you ask questions matters. Don't ask users to predict what they will do. Instead, ask them to describe what they have done.
Who you recruit matters. Make sure your user research participants reflect your Ideal Customer Profile.

How you interpret results makes a difference. Don't cherry pick the information you get from your user research.

Even though data seems like it should be objective, it can also introduce cognitive bias. Don't assume that you should ship an experiment if the related metrics are going up. That may not be a sign that your product is doing what it's supposed to do.

When you review experiment data, reframe your product assertions as hypotheses. This will provide some signals that you may be wrong.

And when you review data from experiments actively seek to disprove what you believe rather than prove what you believe to already be true.

Influential stakeholders such as executives can introduce bias through their opinions (aka highest paid person's opinion). All input from stakeholders is good information, but it should never trump the user's voice.

Process of making the decision:

When making decisions, seek different and contradictory opinions. Consider what perspectives will be helpful when deciding who to include in discussions.

The different contexts coming from a diverse group of people will bring in different contexts, and, help catch blind spots.

An alignment scale allows you to blind vote on how you're feeling about a discussion topic. (FigJam has this feature). You can dig in with people that like/hate ideas.

Explore a range of options before committing to a particular approach. This allows you to discuss trade-offs. If you don't do this, you'll get attached to an idea and won't see flaws.

Outcomes of the decision:

Consistently challenge and evaluate your decisions. Learn from them.

It's helpful to have processes to check in features after you launch them. If some features don't serve user needs, deprecate them.



Product decisions are complex:

Difference between products no one uses to ones that stand the test of time.

A bias is a mental shortcut brain working on intuition You can hone that intuition if you learn from your decision and adjust your approach.

✓ **BEST PRACTICES IN ENTERPRISE PRODUCT MANAGEMENT**

Dan Olsen, Author, The Lean Product Playbook

Session Overview:

Product management has experienced tremendous growth over the last several years, but much of the product advice available is from companies building products for consumers (Business-to-Consumer or B2C). There are important differences between creating B2C products and creating Enterprise products, also known as Business-to-Business or B2B. B2B2C companies face similar challenges.

Enterprise product managers and product teams face distinct challenges such as

- The loud voice of Sales influencing product priorities
- Important clients demanding specific solutions
- Struggles in applying an MVP (minimum viable product) mindset
- Having to meet the needs of both buyers and end users
- Inflexible product release deadlines
- Prioritizing product work and creating a product roadmap given all the above

Do one or more of those symptoms sound familiar? What is an Enterprise product team to do?

Come hear Product Management author, trainer, and consultant Dan Olsen share his advice on Best Practices in Enterprise Product Management.

Dan will share relevant advice from his bestselling book The Lean Product Playbook.

Key Points:

- Enterprise Product Management differs from B2C product management. The top 4 Product Management challenges specific to enterprise product and how to solve them are:
- Clients dictating specific solutions - start with problems before solutions.
- Sales influencing product priorities - be strategic: say now or not now.
- Inflexible product release deadlines - be realistic about scope and time tradeoffs
- Struggling to apply an MVP mindset - prioritize the puppies

Notes:

Most materials about product management assume a B2C context. Building products in a B2B setting, also known as enterprises, have some key differences.

Those differences are best described by a set of enterprise Product Management challenges.



Clients dictating specific solutions:

It's quite common for B2B software companies to have a big customer say "we need you to build feature x for us." Those types of requests usually don't end well.

When this happens, your product team starts in the solution space instead of starting in the problem space.

Problem Space vs Solution Space:

The problem space defines a customer problem, need or benefit that the product should address. For example, "It's too hard to share photos with my friends".

The solution space defines a specific implementation, or design to address the customer needs. For example, a mockup for an app or building the actual app.

The idea is to separate the problem space from the solution space so that you can make sure you understand the problem before you create a solution.

One reason 80 - 90% of products fail is because people jumped into solution space without trying to figure out the problem first.

This happens because most of the product team lives in the solution space. Developers develop and designers design. It falls to Product Managers to define which means they should make sure that the team spends the appropriate time in the problem space.

When you're handed a solution to deliver, use 5 why's technique to bring discussion of solution back to the problem. To get that conversation started ask "what problem will that feature help us solve?"

Sales influencing product priorities:

In a B2C setting the main roles working on the product are Product, UX, and Developers. The team also has to work with business and marketing.

All of those folks are present in a B2B setting, but you also have Sales. Sales has a lot of influence because they're trying to sell your product.

Sales will always say your product has a feature when asked because they are incented to do that.

Unfortunately, saying "yes" to every request from customers and prospects is NOT strategic. You're not applying a strategic filter.

To address this, you need to apply a product strategy, which at its core means saying No to bad ideas and even some good ones that aren't directly aligned with your product strategy.



Inflexible Product Release Deadlines

Product development has a “Iron triangle” of variables comprising scope, time, quality, and resources

If you try to lock down all four variables, things will get out of balance, so you need to flex at least one variable.

No one will cut quality. Resources are constrained in the short term since no one is just sitting around. Even if you found someone, they need time to get up to speed.

That means In the short run, the only levers you have are Time and Scope.

On top of all that, B2B organizations focus on the Magical Dates of B2B Software - which are the ends of the quarter. The end of quarter is magical because that's how teams have structured their roadmap.

This fixed date mindset is a terrible mix with the uncertainty inherent in software development.

So that leaves scope as the main lever you have, and an MVP Mindset will help you make the most out of the scope lever.

Struggling to apply an MVP Mindset:

Minimum Viable Product (MVP) is a controversial topic because there are so many perspectives of what a MVP is.

MVP can be describe along this scale:

- Something a customer can read to learn about the product (landing page)
- Something a customer can see what the product will look like (Mockups)
- Something a customer can interact with (Interactive prototype)
- Something a customer can use (Alpha or private beta product)
- Something a customer can buy (Publicly available product)

To help get agreement onto what people are talking about, Dan identified three different interpretations of MVP:

- MVP - Live working product
- MVP Prototype - representative of what product would be
- MVP Scope of Functionality - Thoughts/Documents - real purpose of MVP determine what is in and what is out.

At its core, MVP is a mindset. For every milestone, what is the minimum required functionality that is enough. In other words, what can we say “no” to?

If no sounds too harsh, say “not now” or “not for this release”.

- ✓ To get alignment about what's in scope, use a one page product roadmap that shows what features fit into particular versions lined up with your products key benefits.

Without the clarity that comes from this one page artifact, it's hard to get alignment.

Teams often make two mistakes with MVPs.

- Over scope MVP - This happens when influential people see that something was left out, and get irate about the feature being left out. So team gives in and includes it, thus increasing the scope and endangering the timeline. This is like throwing spaghetti at the wall and seeing what sticks.
- The non viable MVP - Team includes a subset of functionality that doesn't result in a delightful, usable, reliable solution. This is a symptom of "Just an MVP" being used as an excuse to cut corners.

To avoid these mistakes, you need to make sure you include necessary features in each version and only those features that result in a functional, reliable, usable, and delightful product.

✓ THE PRESENT AND FUTURE OF AI

Tarun Chopra, VP of Product Management Data and AI, IBM

Session Overview:

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has exploded as one of the most talked-about technological developments over the last several years – especially within the last 12 months. But what does it mean for the products we're managing today? What evolution can we expect over the course of the next year... or next several years?

In this fireside chat, we'll discuss all of this and more with Tarun Chopra, a product leader instrumental in creating and developing IBM's next-generation AI platform, Watsonx, a revolutionary leap forward in the world of AI for businesses.

Key Points:

AI is here to stay, and it's transformative.

Big topics coming up around AI in the enterprise are how to operationalize it and how to govern it.

To learn about AI, pick a particular aspect of AI and dig deep, and then broaden out your knowledge about the rest of the subject. You don't have to be an expert in everything.

Embrace AI, leverage it, it's going to be a fun ride.

Notes:

Has it surprised you to see the interest in AI explode?

AI in the enterprise space has done well in the last 5 years. Generative AI has brought AI from data scientists to more lines of business.

This is a good thing for the field. Even better, topics like ethics and governance are becoming more prevalent.

How do you see AI affecting Product Managers and Product Leaders?

From the Product Manager perspective - AI provides augmentation of product management skill sets. AI helps unload some of the mundane tasks so Product Managers can focus even more on listening to customers.

From the Product Leader perspective - AI helps with several use cases such as

- Automating end to end workflows



How do you see AI affecting Product Managers and Product Leaders?

From the Product Manager perspective - AI provides augmentation of product management skill sets. AI helps unload some of the mundane tasks so Product Managers can focus even more on listening to customers.

From the Product Leader perspective - AI helps with several use cases such as

- Automating end to end workflows
- Automating customer success and service
- Improving security
- Increasing digitization

With all these use cases, you need to consider

- How you incorporate AI into those use cases while thinking about governance and operationalization.
- Separating the fact from the fiction
- Setting the right expectations of what AI can do and can't do.

Applying AI properly then lets you focus on the first, second, and third most important thing, which is spending more time with customers.

Are you seeing misconceptions about how AI should be applied?

Yes. The best way to combat that is to learn about Generative AI.

Product leaders need to bridge the chasm between asking Chat GPT a couple questions and applying AI in the enterprise world. There's a sizeable gap.

You need to provide information about how to use AI to guide your customers. As a product person, you need to get educated about AI so you can educate your customers.

Primarily, that's because operationalizing AI in a customer's environment is tough. Clients rarely have the skills to do AI work. All the organizational hoops for implementing software in the organization apply to AI as well.

What are your recommendations for Product Managers to get AI knowledge?

The good thing is there is no shortage of information. The bad news is that some of it is accurate and some of it is not.

To guide your education, pick your lane. Decide where you want to focus. Don't try to master everything. The Gen AI space has a lot of places to focus. Tarun focuses on operationalizing AI. (as an example)

So pick a topic to dig deep into and then learn a bit about the rest of the areas. Form T-shaped knowledge about the topic.



Could you share some of the work you've done with Watson X?

IBM approached AI by creating an ethics board that reviews every product being enhanced with AI.

This board established a set of principles they base their review on. Some of those principles are:

- Is the product fair (have we removed as much bias as possible)
- Does the product have robust security and is it built from an ethical perspective?
- Does the product have Transparency - can I explain where data is coming from?
- Does the product ensure Privacy - can you explain how data is getting used and for what purposes? Do you know the input/output of the model and can you explain how you took those actions?

Keep in mind that models are not deterministic. You can ask the same question twice and get different answers.

Watson X took those principles into consideration when building out its three components:

- AI
- Data
- Built in Governance - explain, risk management, audit, compliance

What are your recommendations to ethically start working on AI in your product?

Depending on your company's size, have some principles you agree on. Have some framework that identifies what you stand for. How you bring AI in and how you involve customers. Customers are looking for trusted and ethical partners.

Build principles from the ground up when going from experimentation to operationalization

Those principles could be a point of differentiation.

How can you separate Signal from the Noise in AI?

Don't chase the tail, don't just react to market news. Know what your product stands for, what value you bring, your differentiation. Home in on that piece.

Know what your company and your product stands for. Be clear on your Value proposition and differentiation to determine what news to pay attention to.

What will the next year, 5 years, 10 years bring with AI?

AI is here to stay.

Work we're seeing now has been going on for the past 10 years.

Productivity and cost is a big topic.

✓ Companies will look to AI to address skill shortage.

There will be vast improvements in automation, customer success, customer support coming soon.

Governance and regulation are going to be big topics.

Large language models will become a commodity. They won't be where the innovation is. The differentiation will come from how you get value out of those technologies and operationalize it.

How can AI supplement my work as a product manager? How does it impact my day to day?

The key is to embrace AI. People who embrace AI will make it to the next level.

Product people are inundated with too much information and too many dashboards. Conversational AI can help summarize the data from those dashboards and make information more accessible.

There's value in being able to ask informational questions and get trusted answers. Summarization can be very helpful.

Need to determine how to use it and where to use it. Avoid the hype.

What is the one big takeaway?

Sheryl Sandberg said when you get a ticket to a rocket ship, don't ask what seat number.

AI is transformative. Every board level conversation is starting with AI.

Have a strong point of view on value proposition and differentiation and how AI fits in.

Embrace it, leverage it, it's going to be a fun ride.

✓ MOVING TO THE PRODUCT OPERATING MODEL

Marty Cagan, Partner, Silicon Valley Product Group

Session Overview:

With more new competitors than ever, with more new disruptive technologies than ever, and with continually increasing expectations from customers, most companies today know they need to learn to work like the best tech-powered product companies. But what does that really mean? Following some specific process? Moving to Agile? Implementing OKR's? Embracing Lean Startup techniques? In this talk we'll start by defining what the product operating model is, and what's involved in moving to this model, and most importantly, what can a company do once they've moved to this model, that they could never have done before?

Key Points:

The Product Operating Model describes how your company can change to be more like the best tech companies.

The Product Operating Model has 3 Product Dimensions: How you build, how you solve problems, and how you determine what problems to solve.

The Product Operating Model has 4 Competencies: Product Manager, Product Designer, Tech Lead, and Product Leadership.

The Product Operating Model has 5 Product Concepts: Product Strategy, Product Teams, Product Discovery, Product Delivery, and Product Culture.

Notes:

The Product Operating Model - is a new name for the difference between the best product companies and the rest.

The most common question Marty gets is "how can my company change to be more like "the best? How can they move to the product operating model?

What is the Product Operating Model?

An operating model is not a process. It's a conceptual model.

If you look at how strong product companies implement their product development, you see a common set of principles.

Tough to differentiate between product principles and good stuff to do.

The Product Operating Model comprises 3 dimensions, 4 competencies, 5 concepts and 20 principles.



3 Product Model Dimensions:

Dimension 1 - How You Build (continuous delivery)

How often does each product team release?

If you're not releasing every two weeks, you can't take care of your customers like you need to, and you can't do the rest of the dimensions.

Companies worked on this for several years ago as they adopted agile.

The key to this dimension is how you build, test, and deploy solutions in consistent, frequent, small release vehicles

Dimension 2 - How You Solve Problems (Product Discovery)

Two common types of teams are feature teams and empowered teams.

Feature teams implement solutions defined by others

Empowered teams are given a problem to solve. The team comes up with the best solution to solve the problem.

Empowered teams building the skills to do continuous discovery: try out ideas, experiment, find a solution that addresses four risks (viable, valuable, usable, feasible)

It's easy to take a feature request and have a discussion to reverse engineer the root problem to solve and the measure to success. If you can do this, you can get to an outcome-based roadmap.

The next question is are those the most important problems to solve?

A company is going to live/die based on the choices it makes. Problems it wants to solve; challenges it chooses to address.

Dimension 3 - How You Decide Which Problems to Solve (Product Strategy)

Feature team companies don't have a product strategy. Rather, development staff are allocated to different business units. This is sometimes referred to as "peanut butter" product strategy.

Best product companies are good at deciding the few things that will make a difference to a company.

This is the most impactful dimension of the product model.

4 Competencies (roles):

There are 4 Competencies that will be new for companies moving to the product operating model. The biggest reason for transformation failure is not taking these competencies seriously.



Product Manager

The Product Manager is responsible for the value and viability of what the product team builds, and is ultimately accountable for the results of the product team. Product Managers make sure what the team builds is worth building.

A Product Manager in feature teams is usually closer to project management.

A Product Manager in an empowered team focuses on solving problems.

The product owner is a subset of the overall Product Manager job related to delivery. Being a true Product Manager is a hard job.

Learn enough about the rest of the business and related constraints to tell when something you build is viable for the entire business.

You also need to know about the customer so you can determine if your product is valuable. That means the customer believes the thing you built is sufficiently better than what they have that they will buy it.

Behind every great product, you'll find someone that knows the customers, the data, the business, and the industry, working tirelessly to create value for the customer and for the business.

If you've done your job in product discovery, backlog refinement is fairly easy

If you're in a feature team company and want to move to a product operating model adopt the skills to know customer, data, the business, and the industry trying to create value for customers and business

Product Designer

The Product Designer is responsible making sure whatever is built is usable, and is concerned about how customers experience the value of the product.

Design is not just what it looks like and feels like; design is how the product works. This role focuses on the entire experience (not just user interface)

In a feature team, you most likely won't see a designer so the product manager may act as a designer also.

Ideally, your team has both a strong product manager and a strong product designers. If you try to do both yourself, you're signing up for a lot of work.

Engineers

The tech lead ensures the feasibility of what the team builds, and has overall responsibility for delivery.

- ✓ If a company has all of its engineers as contractors, it's probably a sign that the company doesn't understand the role of engineers.

Engineers need to engage in discovery work with product designer and product manager. They need to be in the room where it happens. Nothing is more important than an empowered engineer. Engineers are not just there to code. They're there to come up with the right solution.

Product Leadership

Product Leaders are the manager of Product Managers, manager of Product Designers, and manager of Engineers.

Product Leaders enable and empower the product teams with coaching and strategy.

The product operating model depends on product leadership. Product Leaders address the challenges that Andy Grove pointed out "What gets in the way of good work? There are only two possibilities: The first is that people don't know how to do good work. The second is that they know how, but they aren't motivated."

Empowered product teams need to have a strategic context in which they make informed product decisions. Netflix understood this when they established the principle of Lead with context, not control.

5 Product Concepts:

Product Strategy

Product Strategy is the most impactful concept to a company. This is where you decide which problems to go do discovery on.

To create a proper product strategy you need to Immerse yourself in insights from:

- Customers
- Data
- Technology - things that are just now possible.
- Industry - what's going on in your particular part of the world that you can use to help solve customer problems

Product sense - recognition that you've immersed yourself in insights.

Product Teams

- Small
- Durable
- Cross Functional
- Empowered with problems to solve
- Accountable with results

The nature of how people work together is important. Innovation relies on Product Manager, Product Designer, and Tech Lead working to solve a problem together.

- ✓ Product, Designer and Tech Lead bring different skill sets to the table. All those skill sets are necessary,

The PM is looking at implications for marketing, sales, finance, etc.

Product Discovery

Be able to quickly and inexpensively determine whether a product idea is worth building

Principle: assess product risks.

Product Delivery

If it hurts, do it more often.

Deliver at least once every two weeks.

Principle: small, frequent, uncoupled releases

Continuous deployment is the key to quality and velocity - best way to get your product in the hands of your customers.

Companies should instrument your product (telemetry). Product model depends on collecting data about your product.

Product Culture

See Jeff Bezos - fail early and iterate until you get it right.

Principle Learning over failure

What does transformation really mean?

Transformation means changing how you build, how you solve problems, and how you decide which problems to solve.

If you want to compete against the strong product companies, you have to do transformation as described above.

✓ HOW TO CRAFT A PRODUCT SALES PITCH THAT WINS DEALS

April Dunford, Chief Executive Officer, Ambient Strategy

Session Overview:

We all love a good feature, but to win business, we need to craft a story around why our product's features matter to buyers. In this session, we will explore how to move beyond boring, undifferentiated product walkthroughs to a sales pitch that makes it obvious why buyers should choose your product over the competition.

Key Points:

Buying is hard. Buying your product, especially if you're in B2B, is likely worse than buying a toilet.

Strong Positioning = Strong Sales Pitch

A strong sales pitch has the following structure:

- Insight: Identifies something we've identified about the market
- Alternatives - describes the pros and cons of existing solutions.
- Perfect world description (that matches what your company does)
- Value - organize the features around your differentiated value.

Notes:

Buying is Hard

Selling is hard. But Buying is also hard.

Most things people buy in businesses are difficult to buy.

Buying a toilet can be hard, especially if you're not familiar with selecting a toilet. Buying your product can be way worse..

Before prospects buy, they need to figure out what matters so they can make a short list.

Buyer asks for a demo and sales puts customers in the wind tunnel of features.

If the buyer makes a poor choice, bad things happen.

The easiest, lowest risk is to do absolutely nothing when shopping for software. What we have is fine.

40% - 60% of B2B sales purchase processes end in "No Decision" (some would say the number is as high as 80%)

- ✓ It's not because the status quo was better. It's because the person who is trying to decide couldn't figure out their options.

Buyers want our help. In a sales meeting, they want perspective on the market and help navigating alternatives.

Want to build a pitch that answers the question "why pick us over the alternatives?"

Positioning answers the question "Why Pick us?" so strong Positioning = strong sales pitch.

Strong position has 5 components:

- Competitive alternatives
- Distinct attributes
- Differentiated value
- Best-Fit customers
- Market Category.

Most great positioning does not survive the jump to sales so we need to translate positioning into a sales pitch.

Sales Pitch Structure:

In the Setup, start with Market Insight, describe the alternatives and then paint a picture of a perfect world. Then with the follow-through you explain how your product meets the perfect world setting which is your differentiated value.

Example: Help Scout Customer Service Software. Specifically designed for digital products. Insight: for Digital products customer services is important because it's one of the few times you interact with customers. Help Scout built their product accordingly.

Most sales pitches are a product walkthrough that lists a bunch of features. The new sales pitch offers a sales narrative.

Structure of the Sales Narrative

- Insight: Identifies something we've identified about the market
- Alternatives - describes the pros and cons of existing solutions.
- Perfect world description (that matches what your company does)
- Value - organize the features around your differentiated value.

Inputs to each of the above comes from positioning.

If you get agreement that your description of the perfect world matches their expectations, you got them if you can show that your product brings the perfect world.

**See How to Ensure Success:**

- Sales needs to be heavily involved, but you don't want to include the entire sales force or take them away from selling for too long.
- Test and tune with one sales rep first, then roll out to the others.
- If it fails-go back to your positioning.
- The pitch changes only when the positioning changes.

For more information:

aprildunford.com

Positioning:

[Obviously Awesome: How to Nail Positioning so Customers Get It, Buy It, Love It.](#)

Sales Pitch:

[Sales Pitch: How to Craft a Story to Stand Out and Win](#)

✓ THE SUPERPOWER OF PLAY

Diana Tobey, Senior Design Director, Play Lab IDEO

Session Overview:

Play is a superpower that empowers us to redesign the world. Learn why play matters, the mindsets and behaviors that create the conditions for play, and ideas for bringing more play into product teams to fuel creative thinking.

Key Points:

Play is innate, work is a learned behavior. Play matters because it prepares you to face the unexpected in an unpredictable world.

The opposite of play isn't work, it's boredom. If your team is stuck in a rut, change the rules of the game.

Six techniques to unleash the superpower of play.

For Product Strategy - Persona Tarot Cards, System Board Game

For Feature Development - Bad Reviews and AI Roleplay (and Props)

For Team Rituals - Creative Workouts and LEGO Retrospective

Notes:

If necessity is the mother of invention, play is its father.

Why Play Matters

Play is core to the human experience. It's also core to the experience of many animals. Why has play survived millions of years of evolution?

Rewards of play can be the difference between life and death. Brown bear cubs who play more in their first year have a better chance of survival in every subsequent winter..

Play helps survival because it is the key to lifelong learning.

Play prepares the player to face the unexpected in an unpredictable world.

Sticking to the one right answer mentality puts us at a disadvantage. Play opens your mind to take chances. Need more play to face an unpredictable world.

Creating the conditions for play

The power of play - tweaking the rules of play drives people to change behavior.

What are the rules of the game that we're playing and when does it make sense to change those rules?



There are rules you should follow and rules you should break.

You should follow social rules governing how you play together. Physical and psychological safety.

It's ok to break the rules of the game you are playing. Rules of the game themselves are things that should be malleable. Example house rules in UNO,

There is a lot of value in identifying constraints which don't need to be constraints.

What are the stated rules of product management if it were a game? What you're trying to get to (outcome)?

Unstated rules: there isn't a lot written about unstated rules. What is the meta game that you and your team are playing?

Are there unstated rules of engagement that might hold your product team back? How can you be better equipped to handle a changing world?

The opposite of play isn't work; it's boredom.

If your product teams feel like they're stuck in a rut, consider changing the rules of the game.

Unleashing the superpower of play:

When you talk about incorporating play into your product, the first word that may come to your mind is "Gamification" this is not the end all be all of bring play into product

Disney introduced leaderboards - led to increased incidents, culture became competitive.

Possibilities of play example: Glitch - collaborative multi-player game. Game centered on players being able to chat with each other. A couple of years later they pivoted and changed the rules of the game, turning their product into Slack.

Slack has shown there is room for play in product.

Here are some technique to insert play into different aspects of product management.

Product Strategy:

Persona tarot cards - These cards help you understand how a feature makes you feel when you use it. To do that ask people during user research what kind of



help they want from your product. The tarot cards represent different personas they could pick from.

In a world where - In this technique, users tell you they want the product experience to feel more like talking to their best friend, what might you change / do differently?

System Board Games - this technique helps you understand the moving elements of the world today. Games are a great way to map out systems. Think about how you would invite stakeholders to help you draw a picture of the product game you're playing and identify areas for improvement.

Feature Development:

Bad Reviews from the future - Think about the human aspects of your users. What are some things your product may unintentionally do to cause your product to lose trust with your customers? To use this technique, imagine a feature you're working on after you ship it gets low reviews. Consider what the most likely reason is. Do this with your team.

Roleplay - Don't just roleplay the role of devil's advocate. Asked high schoolers to role play as AI. Gave adults "Cringe cards" were trying to learn the line between what is acceptable or not coming from AI. Don't underestimate the power of props. Silly String cans renamed as Creativity in a Can.

Team Rituals:

Creative Workout - Creativity is a muscle, so it's helpful to start any brainstorm with a creative warm-up One such warm-up is the Creative Workout. Take two categories that are completely unrelated and then mash them up. Creative workouts generate laughter.

LEGO retrospective - Instead of listing out went well, do differently have people use Legos to build something that represents the answer for went well, do differently.

✓ **LEARNING WHEN TO JUMP**

Danie Karaplis, Product Leader

Session Overview:

When someone says “jump,” should you say, “how high?” or ask “why?” Here, we'll dive into the real-world challenges product managers face every day. Ever wondered how to tell if a new feature request is a one-off whim or something worth building? We'll explore how to make that call, guide customers in the right direction, and strike that tricky balance between catering to big customers and not getting bogged down with low-value features. It's all about taking smart risks and delivering value.

Key Points:

When you get a feature request, ask questions to find out what problem this feature is trying to solve.

Regular touchpoints with other teams can foster a sense of trust and collaboration as long as you speak in their language.

Work within your organization to implement a product-driven roadmap using empathy and leading through change. Seek to understand what leadership is going through, speaking the different languages spoken in your org. Sell to leadership to get the opportunity to try change.

Notes:

This talk is about Working in B2B and how to balance between catering to big customers and not getting bogged down with low-value features

Sales Driven Roadmap

If you work in B2B company, you've probably experienced some of these scenarios:

- Sales says that a prospect won't buy unless we get this feature, or we already told a prospect that we had a feature.
- A High profile customer says they won't renew unless a feature gets included.
- CEO hears some topic and says we need to get that feature into our product. Example: AI.

These scenarios all lack discovery. No conversations to understand the root problem. What outcome do they seek?

You need to talk to the folks with the request and flip the script to get them to identify the root problem.

- ✓ What can happen if we sing every time a loud customer requests a song (see slide) Something a high-profile customer requests may not be useful for your entire customer base. You end up in the Assembly line.

The goal in this scenario is to sell more. Sales prioritizes short-term goals and as a result the product team incurs long-term debt.

Product Driven Roadmap:

Delivering value through research, collaboration, and experimentation.

How to shift from sales driven to more outcome driven.

It's bringing in all aspects of the organization and a holistic approach. This is where the best solutions come from.

Making the Change:

Get leadership on board making sure there's a culture shift brings success. It involves educating the leadership team about what Product Management is. They may have different expectations/understanding of the role..

Provide context and education - Empathic Persuasion. Need to speak the language of the people you're trying to educate. Position things in a way that makes sense.

One feature request, sparked digging in and lead to a brand new opportunity. Each different constituency needs a different language.

Talk differently to sales compared to engineering, compared to execs. One way to learn how to talk to sales is sitting in on sales call. Talk differently to sales compared to engineering, compared to execs. One way to learn how to talk to sales is sitting in on sales call.

The Solution Symphony:

Managing product development is like composing a symphony, balancing high-stake customer demands—the soloists—with the overarching product strategy or the orchestral ensemble to create cohesive and harmonious output. The goal is to integrate authoritative customer inputs into the broader product symphony, ensuring the final composition resonates with the market.

Product and product management is a symphony. Make sure all the instruments are in tune with each other. Make sure they all know their role

✓ **PRODUCT INFORMATION: EXPENSIVE, CHEAP, OR PRICELESS?**

Matt Reiner, Customer Advocate, K15t

Session Overview:

When growing a product company, we're often focused on the typical business resources required: human resources, development tools, and customer support. This talk looks into the massive hidden resource of information that's created, shared, and discarded throughout the product development process. If we're not careful, too much, or too little of it can make or break the team. Learn what information investments you can make to empower your organization and enable your users.

Key Points:

It's common for organizations to run into issues all over the place all caused by information that's Missing, Disconnected or Misunderstood.

To capture valuable information you need to consider:

- Where information lives
- Information Anatomy
- How to find problems
- How to fix problems.

Notes:

Information that users need to know how to use the product is getting lost in the product development cycle.

Have you ever sold a feature that doesn't exist? Or released a feature that doesn't meet user needs?

Is it because of the product team version of the telephone game?

The tools that product teams think they are using to make the process smoother actually become information sinks.

There's one place where information is still accessible to everyone - email. But it's not well suited for this.

Everybody and nobody is to blame.

So it's helpful to look at ways to capture valuable information.



Where Info Lives:

There's a variety of ways to figure out where information is.

There's information that different teams create. Distinct pieces of information that come out of specific teams.

Could look for valuable information by looking at the tools you're using (Jira, Confluence, etc.) But then you wonder where is our internal documentation? It ends up being everywhere.

Look at the type of information you create in every part of the process. There will always be outliers (for example sales enablement not created as part of product development life cycle, but is it considered a part of the product.

Info Anatomy:

We need to know what the information looks like. Some information is important, some is garbage.

There are some types of info that stand out, such as insights. We have sparks of insight, and then we forget to write them down.

Lifecycle is full of twists and turns because of decisions, yet we forget to note them down.

Feature Set and Feature Scope (limitations) - Somebody nailed down what should be in the feature set, but often they don't need to note what cases are not applicable.

If you don't note things that are in/out of scope, you get bugs that aren't relevant.

What information is valuable now, that is not valuable later UI Mockups, test plans, Tech specs, pull request comments.

Things that are valuable long term - what does the UI actually say. Product documentation, limitations, Don't save all information.

Finding Problems:

Count - ask for information, and count the number of steps to get it. Tools to go to, people to ask, updates needed. The steps involved will unpleasantly surprise you.

Patterns - patterns of pain. "We missed something" " hours on support cases" sales engineers keep bugging me for info on setting this up. Listen for complaints of pain. Queue to ask Why are they asking.

- ✓ Response - Stop responding to emails with tailored emails. Respond with links with existing info. Then think about why they asked. Did your response answer the question?

Fixing Problems:

Give people **open access**: read access for all, edit access if possible quick access to editors. This is product information, not HR information. People having access when they need to know something. When people can make edits when they notice an issue, the info doesn't get update.

Dynamic Information We deal with static information, Where it gets dangerous is when info becomes dynamic they copy info from one place and uses it in another. Need to make dynamic information: Linking (old way); more current way: Dynamic Connections. (Goes along with single sourcing information)

Databases - Use databases in notion, confluence, to organize similar types of information

Take out trash - most of your information is worthless. Don't archive things. If it's old, stale, out of date it's ruining productivity, so delete it. To do that, follow the links. Also, group information ahead of time. Create a place for info at the beginning of a release. After the release has been there for a bit go back and delete it.

Work regular cleanups into your process. Perhaps take a hackathon to clean up your confluence.

✓ THE CHALLENGES OF B2B AND B2B2C PRODUCT LEADERSHIP

Laura Marino, Chief Product Officer, TrueML

Jessica Sweeney, Transformational Product Executive

Session Overview:

Building for consumers differs from building for large enterprises, and many of the product management best practices developed around B2C are much more difficult to apply in B2B. In particular, the design-deliver-measure and learn feedback loop is much slower. In most cases, the buyer and users are different people, the volume of customers is lower, and enterprise customers cannot absorb new functionality and innovation quickly. Given those challenges, how do we create an effective feedback loop for enterprise software? And how can we, as leaders, make the hard decisions that need to be made relating not just to the products we manage, but the people we're leading?

Key Points:

B2B differs from B2C so there are some differences in product management.

Pay attention to what your customers need to do with your software when you release a new version. You may find that you have to slow your delivery cadence down. That doesn't mean that engineering still can't have fast feedback cycles.

Understand the differences between people at your customers. Know who your buyer and users are. You need to delight your buyer and satisfy your users.

Notes:

Enterprise product management differs from B2C, and most Product Management material is focused on B2C. So Laura and Jessica wanted to touch on the unique aspects of enterprise product management with some stories from the trenches.

Frequent Releases

Enterprise software customers aren't ready to absorb changes on as frequent a cycle as you see in a B2C environment.

Fast releases have an impact on enterprise customers training their staff and changing business processes. So some B2B companies find they have to do a seasonal release cadence, such as quarterly or once a year.

✓ Jessica worked on a company that made software used by universities to track research. Key stakeholders were librarians. Those librarians produced a guide at the beginning of the year on how to access the resources. They would throw a fit if the UI changed in the midst of the school year. Laura had to understand the customer environment in which they were working and would only release her product once a year to the market.

Make sure you include contextual inquiry during discovery. Figure out what your personas have to do with the software once you release it. Share that answer so that people know why you may have a longer Build Measure Learn cycle.

If your customers constrain how frequently you can release, you can still benefit from short feedback cycles by separating engineering releases from releases to the market.

When you have less frequent releases, you're putting more changes in and those releases become more complicated. It's all about managing the tradeoffs. This is what alpha and beta programs are for. Partnered with a key customer in innovation cycle where you do every 2 week releases on a new, risky product so that you can get rapid feedback.

Manage your risk by finding some customers who can absorb rapid changes and put more emphasis on internal QA.

Lack of Data for Experiments

Because B2B software has longer feedback cycles and fewer customers, you rarely have a sufficient amount of data for A/B testing.

In B2B you need to trade off the amount of data and speed with deeper validation internally. This may mean that A/B testing may not make sense for B2B products.

Customers are Invested in Your Success

Customers are more invested in the success of B2B software companies. They want the company to stick around because they are highly reliant on your software to support key business processes.

Limelight health - sells to places like Principal. Principal believed Limelight health was critical to their success. Limelight could work with PFG in a partnership mode. That meant Limelight could do Design Sprints with Principal. Limelight could bring customers into the innovation process.

When Proxy Channels Become Gatekeepers

Some B2B Product Managers have difficulty connecting directly with their customers because their proxy channels (primarily sales) become gatekeepers.

✓ There is no “ride along” in the enterprise deal. You don’t get to tag along on the sales call. Given all the players involved in a sale and the sales cycle. The thing you can do is figure how you as a product solve someone's problem who is being a gatekeeper. How would you having contact with a customer solve their problem?

If the sales team is having trouble getting a customer to buy, give them access to the product manager to help move the sales along.

Client Success - rewarded by keeping customers happy They get nervous when someone has access to customers. In that case, understand the status of the customer. If Customer is unhappy, it may not be the right time to talk to them. Sometimes if a customer is not happy, they may not be feeling the love, in which case giving them the attention of the product team would help them feel the love.

Figure out where you add value to stakeholders and customers and use that to create a partnership.

Inputs from multiple people at a customer

How do you address the issue when a bunch of different people from the same customer are asking for changes?

Bring the people together and discuss your thoughts with them on what your priorities are so you can make it visible to them about how things are going to roll.

When deciding how to prioritize, think about who your buyer is. The person responsible for making purchasing decisions is almost never the person using the software.

In a B2B setting you have to delight your buyer, and you have to satisfy your users. So you need to be clear about the relationship between different departments in your customer.

Swimming with Whales

Some big customers are really important. They will be references for your software company from now on. But that doesn’t mean they get to take over your roadmap..

Laura was applying for the CPO role at a FinTech and hearing stories about a big customer asking for all kinds of features.

Once she came on, she talked to engineering about all the projects going on. She found out that 18% of all engineering/product work was a custom development for this single big customer.

✓ Laura sat down with the executive team and said this is not sustainable. If we continue this, we'd become a custom development shop. The executive team knew this, but hadn't seen the data. Sales team loved the customer because of promised data.

The company ended up deciding to "fire" the customer. Once they fired that customer, they could refocus the teams.

Data made the difference to make the call. You won't win the argument on emotion.

✓ **ADAPTIVE PRODUCT STRATEGY: HOW TO PLAN WHEN ALL PLANS KEEP FLYING OUT OF THE WINDOW**

Nadya Zhexembayeva, Founder & Chief Reinvention Officer,
Reinvention Academy

Session Overview:

In this talk, I will share insights from my research, teaching, and experience at the executive table to show the new business landscape. We will explore challenges and solutions for turning the new fast-moving, volatile, uncertain business environment into a competitive advantage for your product management career, your team, and your organization.

Key Points:

The world is becoming increasingly more volatile.

Our current approach to strategy is not well suited to deal with a volatile world.

Organizations need to move from Deliberate Strategy to Emergent Strategy.

Three hacks you can use to move to Emergent Strategy include:

- Goals in ranges
- Budgets with fewer limits and freedom within those limits
- 3 - 6 month strategic plans.

Notes:

Companies are failing at Strategy

99% of people go to great lengths to avoid something new. This happens with companies as well.

Some company statistics:

- 88% of Fortune 500 companies are gone over 60 years.
- 50% of S&P 500 Companies will be gone by 2027
- 44% of today's industry leaders held that position for at least 5 years, down from 77%

Some employee statistics

- 23% of employees are thriving
- 59% of employees are quiet quitting
- 18% of employees are loud quitting

How do we deal with this situation? The problem is we're using tools developed for a different context.



What is strategy?

Strategy is about the few key choices we make for the company/product.

There are two strategic frameworks.

Deliberate School of Strategy

How strategic choices are made: deliberate school of strategy. Includes three key decisions.

- First decision is where you are now (Point A) Market share, positioning.
- Second Choice - Where do we want to land. Point B.
- Third Choice - how are we going to get there

The deliberate school of strategy says you need to make all decisions at once and then use those decisions to form an annual and quarterly plan.

The founder of this school is Michael Porter.

This approach doesn't work in a volatile environment.

Emergent School of Strategy

The emergent school of strategy uses a much shorter time frame - quarters instead of years. Perhaps the best way to describe this school is: "The most important part of every plan is planning on your plan not going according to plan"

Product Managers work in an emergent school of strategy, while most of the organization lives in old school.

So why is the Emergent School a better choice these days?

We're getting unusual disruptors (example COVID, weather events, Tech layoffs or bank failures). We're getting more frequent 1 in a 100 year events.

To put it quantitatively, Accenture Global disruption index between 2011 - 2016 grew by 4%. in 2017 - 2022 the index went up by 200%.

Three hacks to make agile strategy the norm:

First Hack: Go from goals in a singular feedback to goals as a range. There is a psychological effect team doesn't feel defeated). Range gives the team the motivation to keep going. The range also allows for healthy agreement.

Second Hack: Go from a Detailed Budget to fewer key limits on freedom within the limits.

Third Hack: Go from a Traditional 5 - 10 year's strategic plan to 3-6 month strategic plan.

✓ Further Information:
[STELLAR Agile Strategy Canvas Workshop](#)

✓ **BETTER TOGETHER: HOW COLLABORATION BETWEEN PRODUCT AND ENGINEERING TEAMS CAN FUEL GROWTH**

Shadi Rostami, Senior Executive VP of Engineering, Amplitude

Session Overview:

Product and engineering teams are critical to business growth today. The only problem? They don't always see eye to eye. In this fireside chat or keynote session, Amplitude SVP of Engineering Shadi Rostami will discuss why these teams occasionally conflict and how to best bridge the gap to increase the company's capacity to win. The audience will walk away understanding the value of aligning product and engineering teams, how to create this alignment and forge a joint team culture, and what successful growth outcomes look like. Shadi will also share advice and insights on how optimizing your product development teams can boost efficiency in a time when everyone is seeking to increase ROI.

Key Points:

How you structure your team matters.
Prioritize iteration and innovation as you scale.
Prioritize outcomes over outputs.

Notes:

The Challenge

A common belief in the product community says Product managers think about what and why and engineering teams think about how. That's not how it should go. The Product Team, including product, engineering, and design should think about all three as a group.

So how do you go from the silos to a collaboration (empowered) model?

Will explain three lessons for making product and engineering more collaborative.

Lesson 1: How you structure your team matters

Common industry expectation is that the product team has the triad. (Product, design and engineering) and that collaboration happens at all levels.

The Product Manager acts as the general manager of the business. The designer focuses on experience; The engineer focuses on building the solution.

The engineer chimes in with what is possible and what is not. The Designer chimes in about what the workflow should look like.

✓ But there's another dimension. The Product Manager also needs to think about the rest of the organization - marketing, sales, finance, and legal for example. They monitor how aligned their product strategy is with corporate strategy and connectivity with the rest of the organization.

Once you have your product triad, you can form teams that focus on a particular area of the overall product, These teams are customer facing and are vertical. You may also have platform teams.

Engineers need to be on a customer call once a week. They need to understand the customer. Engineers make a lot of tradeoff decisions.

Lesson 2: Prioritize iteration and innovation as you scale

You'd expect that as you add more engineers, your innovation scales linearly. What you actually get is that it's a curve. You reach a point and then as you keep adding more it decreases.

What you want is that it levels out at some point.

Culture of iteration - Think Big, Iterate Often.

Thinking big is important so that you don't fall into an incremental trap.

Instead of thinking about iterative steps alone, look at if there's new ways to solve the problem.

Customer development partners - if you're building a solution and don't have 1 - 3 customers who will be partners to give you feedback. If you can't find that, don't build that feature.

Number of rituals important to maintain a culture of innovation.

Every all hands do a product demo.
Slack channel for feature releases.

Hackathon has resulted in new feature ideas.

Lesson 3: Prioritize outcomes over outputs

How are you moving on your north star

Even though you're focusing on outcomes, output is still important.

Principle - ship fast so you can get fast feedback. The job does not end at shipping. You need to determine if you got the right outcome. What are the measures you're trying to improve?

✓ Every week the Head of Engineering and CPO sit with a team to discuss how metrics are moving. What are you doing to improve?

Couple of mistakes they've made: Quarterly planning and set quarterly metric led to people to get a short-term focus. If you do this, you need to do something else to encourage folks to think longer term.

Another mistake is the approach to define metrics. Picked revenue but that may not be the best thing to focus on because it drove the team to focus on very large organizations. Realized they should have focused on several paying customers instead of revenue.

When you start a new product, you may not want to structure that team the same way as all the other product teams working on established products.

Think about what you're optimizing for and make decisions. Give the new product team the freedom to make decisions that allow them to optimize on speed.

Mix qualitative and quantitative information to understand how you're doing with metrics.

Measuring developer experience:

When you consider the developer experience, it may influence the future speed of your team. Advocate for thinking about how to improve the developer experience.

✓ **360° STRATEGIES: RESILIENCE IN THE FACE OF UNCERTAINTY**

Chris Butler, Group Product Manager, Google

Session Overview:

When "strategy" is just a list of projects we are going to do we lose the ability to match against the world's uncertainty and complexity. If we don't consider the full strategic picture, we find that the environment quickly becomes hostile and we will try to play catch up constantly. By taking a 360° view of our strategy we not only become more resilient but will find that we can thrive more effectively. In this talk Chris will introduce the concept of the 360° strategy, how to build one, how it evolves, and how it keeps up with a changing environment.

Key Points:

Build a 360° view, to see what you will and will not do.

Working strategies provide signals that your strategy is working.

Aspirational strategies provide signals that your strategy could be working.

Abandoned strategies are things we failed to do.

Bizarro Strategies show what your competitors are doing.

Notes:

Most organizations are failing at product strategy. They create a document showing a list of products and leave it at that. This is the starter strategy.

Orgs exist in complex times and environments need strategies to be more resilient in these worlds

Law of requisite variety - The larger the variety of actions available to a control system, the larger the variety of perturbations it can compensate.

Said another way: To exist in a complex environment, you need to create strategies that help people adjust as time goes on.

360° Strategies

Create a 2x2 to display the four strategies based on these scales:

Certainty (x-axis): Balance very certain vs highly uncertain

Do/Not Do (Y-axis): Important we do vs important we do not do.

This model creates a way to think of strategies based on a relationship between uncertainty and importance.



Working Strategies

Certain, important things we do - starter strategy.

There should be signals we're doing the right thing. OKRs, metrics that matter.

Aspirational Strategies

Highly Uncertain, Important that we do.

These strategies are hypotheses that this will work.

What do we want to do more of that we're uncertain about?. We don't know if it will work, but planning on trying it.

Create a vision of the future.

Become hypothesis things we believe to be true.

What are the signals that tell us this could work?

Looking for leading metrics that are special to our use case.

Have to invent new metrics. Need to figure out metrics that will move the needle.

Abandoned Strategies

Certain, Important that we do not do.

These are strategies shown not to work. This includes Institutional knowledge gained from internal stakeholders.

It also may shed light on things people are doing in the marketplace that didn't work for them.

Should talk about what we will not do more than what we are.

Build governing constraints that keep people from doing these things.

Bizarro Strategies

Uncertain, Important that we do not do.

"Fluff" - reason that a strategy is bad. "Best In class" strategy not a strategy to be best.

Test - what would worst in class look like?

The opposite of Singapore airlines (International flights primarily) is Southwest. (Regional airline with no hubs. What are the things that this particular



believes about the world?

Named after bizaro superman: Strategy that is the opposite of you should be valid.

"Even over" statement - decision model for your team. Example is agile manifesto. Between these things, we'll choose this one.

Provides a way to judge if things are in line with our strategy.

Evolution of Your Strategy

Creates a network of concepts.

Strategies move and change over time.

When do we evolve our strategy?

Aspirational Strategies should become Working Strategies. Should balance things we're learning and what we're doing.

New ideas should go into Aspirational and Bizaro. the opposite of your strategy should be valid.

Sometimes Working Strategies need to be abandoned. Maybe we're building something that is no longer valuable.

Understand how others decide. (look at who they hire, who they partner with _ what are the strategies that are working for them, would improve your strategy.

But there are a lot more questions to answer...

When are our strategies no longer valid?

Chronos time and Kairos time Chronos - something we do at certain times. Kairos - event based.

Need to have a regular mechanism for reassessing strategy (scenario planning, war gaming) and realize that when you see assumptions changing, you should get back together and adjust strategy

How many things should be on this. Not sure there's a good number. Whatever makes hard decisions easier is the right amount of complexity. The ones that make hard decisions easier.

PMs should usability test our own documents more often.

What is the right specificity? Ambiguity in strategy is helpful . Ambiguous

✓ enough to see how their work helps that strategy but not so broad that anything does.

Not so specific that they are work items. if things can go in a backlog, it's not a strategy

This model Isn't a framework to solve everything.

We should consider how these strategies work together.

Abandoned Strategies - principles. Bizzaro - how we decide.

