Lean UX Crash Course: Key Concepts for Business Professionals

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Business enterprises for web-based products, applications, and software operate in a fast-changing field where bringing a new product to market or responding to changes in a market quickly is needed to be competitive. Many startups do not have the time and funds to pursue long, detailed research and design sprints and model themselves after the book *The Lean Startup* by Eric Ries (3). An Agile business model concentrates on fast delivery of a working product, whereas UX (User Experience) research methods tend to spend more time and resources researching and testing a design before moving on to the next step of product development or its final release (1). UX is a discipline of user-centered design (also called human-centered design) where research, testing, and insights from cognitive behavioral science, data analysis, and product prototyping come together to evolve a technology product by considering the needs, tasks, goals, and emotions of the people who are going to use the product. Instead of fulfilling a company owner's vision for a product, user-centered design seeks to start with the product from a human perspective and evolve the design rather than fulfill a pre-planned final product (3). UX teams form a set of hypotheses and test them to see if changes to the design make a product works well and make it desirable for their target users (3). Lean UX is a more recent term to describe the concepts of user-centered design working within an Agile business model by having knowledgeable teams make use faster, cost-efficient research and design methods (3).

What is Lean UX?

• Focus should be on the user / human-centered in the design process (1) (2).

• Work should be iterated quickly in short cycles to give feedback to the various teams on a project (1) (3).

• Companies should use cross-function teams of developers, designers, and stakeholders in the majority of decisions for the product (3). Achieve successful collaboration between designers and developers through six factors: 1) Close proximity to each other in their work space, 2) Engaging in early and frequent communication, 3) Having shared ideation and problem solving, 4) Crossing over of knowledge and skills between the teams, 5) Co-creation and prototyping together and 6) Making joint decisions (2).

• Decide on metrics for success and use data to learn about real user behavior during the steps of the design process to know if design changes are beneficial (3).

• Avoid ambiguity about who the "customer" is regarding commercial value versus who the "user" is that the design must support (1).

• Lean UX teams that have had the most success in an Agile work environment cut back on time spent on writing documentation and formal usability reports (5).

• Lean UX should still engage in live user research for products (5).

What Lean UX is NOT:

• You get what you pay for: using Lean UX is not guarantee of usability in a design. Research and design sprints may be too short to find all the problems in a design. There is a lack of large-scale studies conducted across various organizations that may point out the flaws or weaknesses of Lean / Agile methodology teams (1).

• Be careful to not create contradictory demands that pit the design team and the developers against each other; it is optimal to pair multi-disciplinary teams to collaborate toward common goals (2).

• Lean UX is not a sales model and can be negatively impacted by being hindered by traditional business sales model methods. People making management decisions need to understand the roles of the UX team within their company to avoid negative impacts on the product (4).

• An Agile business model still benefits from having a dedicated UX team rather than contractors or part-time employees that work for other companies; team members splitting their time between multiple companies can become exhausted or run into scheduling conflicts with their time (5).

Tips for Lean UX Success

• The concept of “best practices” is not universal; what “best practices” are is contextual and pursuing a method while ignoring the needs of the problem or needs of a project can be harmful (3).

• It can be hard to know if it is beneficial to work ahead on a project, concurrent sprints of research can lead to confusion; it is better to see what learned in a section of research and then build on that knowledge (5).

• Validate questions and design elements with your customers early and continually to keep learning about how your product can be its best (3).

References

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