THE BEST PRACTICES SERIES

How to Collect Feedback From Colleagues and Internal Stakeholders

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In most B2B companies, it is universally acknowledged that Executive and Sales teams can have outsized influence in shaping the product roadmap. This is despite the fact that customer-facing teams, like Support and Success, have crucial insights into customer needs. While you may not regularly have time to speak directly with each customer, each of your teams — from Marketing to Operations — can offer regular customer insights worth considering.

Objectively processing feedback from different teams is just part of the challenge. Simply gathering and wrangling customer feedback from every internal stakeholder — especially in a dispersed organization — is a whole other challenge. Having strategies to gather, analyze, and act on this feedback, however, is fundamental to assuring you're building a product that not only satisfies the company vision, but also meets customer needs.

What kind of feedback will it get you?

Feedback from Sales may come in the form of lost sales or missed sales opportunities, while Support may focus on maintenance issues, bugs, oft-requested feature enhancements, or requests from particularly irate customers.

You will need to turn this anecdotal feedback into facts and figure out any trends in the pool of data points. Ideally, you're able to receive consolidated feedback from a particular department (e.g. Sales Win-Loss reports) or even deeper analysis of the data (e.g. Support received 10 times more complaints about a particular feature distributed across specific tiers of customers since the last upgrade).

Your other main challenge will be to separate the emotions associated with the feedback from understanding the root cause. This means that just because a customer gave a passionate plea for a new feature — and that plea was relayed by a Salesperson who needs to make their quota — doesn't mean that the feature needs to fit into your plans. Their urgency doesn't need to drive your urgency.

The Facts

Collecting the Feedback
Easy. Support and Sales are already speaking with your customers, so they have the feedback. You can make it easy for them to share that info with you.

Analyzing the Feedback
Moderate to Difficult. Once you have the feedback, it may take some work to wrangle and massage the data in order for it to become meaningful.

Reach
Broad & Deep. Depending on the breadth and depth of the customer-facing parts of your organization, you may have access to a lot of on-the-ground customer intelligence.

Scalability
It Depends. Depending on your method for capturing the feedback, this can either be a highly scalable process, or an extremely tedious one.

Cost
It Depends. Feedback can be captured very inexpensively (via conversations, emails, or even post-it notes), yet doing so in a more systematic and transparent way may require investing in a dedicated system.

Pros and Cons

PROS

- **You already communicate with colleagues.** Feedback should, in theory, be easier to collect from people that you communicate with regularly and with whom you have a working rapport.

- **Access to a broader group of customers.** Depending on the size of the customer-facing parts of your organization, you'll have access to a broad cross-section of your customer base.

- **Colleagues share customer stories.** You can effectively gather anecdotes from customer-facing employees and use them to infer trends.

- **Ability to get both qualitative & quantitative feedback.** If you get your team in the habit of bringing you "quantified qualitative feedback," you'll be able to support your facts with stories and supplement your stories with facts. Doing so enables you to make more intelligent decisions about where to invest in your product.

CONS

- **Frustrated colleagues.** Without proper communication, teams who deal with customers on a day-to-day basis may feel unheard by the product team, who tend to operate on a monthly or quarterly cycle.

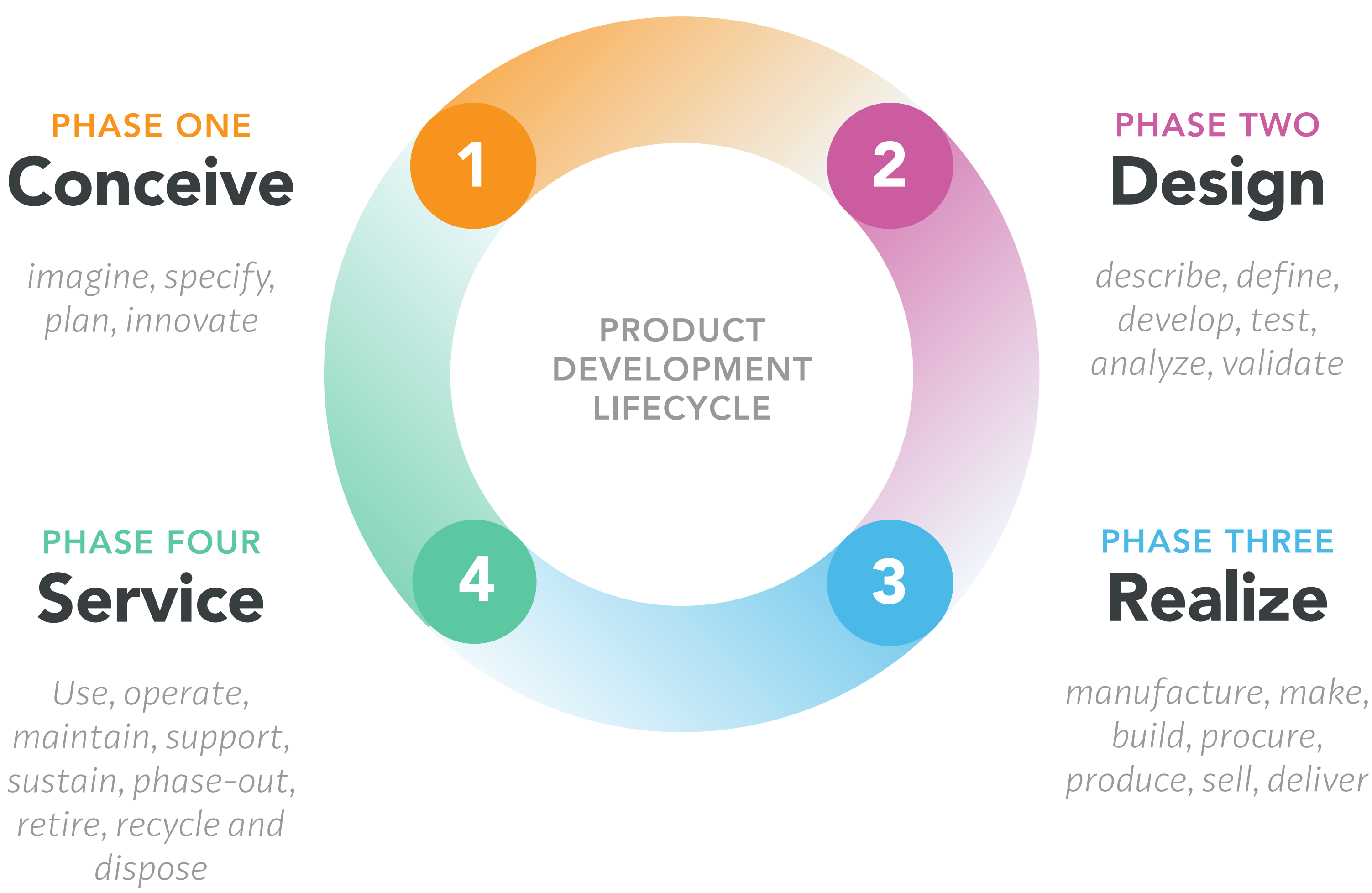
- **Feedback can get lost in translation.** Even with the best of intentions, often what the customer is asking for is different than what actually gets relayed to the Product Manager. Furthermore, internal stakeholders may come to you with proposed solutions, such as "our customers need feature X," when it's ultimately up to you to understand customer pain before trying to solve it.

- **Feedback overload.** If not gathered in an organized manner, the product team can get overloaded with feedback that's not always in line with the areas they're focused on during a given time frame.

- **Unused Feedback.** Without a practical, scalable feedback system, input from colleagues can get lost or stuffed into an ever-growing backlog.

Using Indirect Feedback Throughout the Product Development Lifecycle

At what point(s) in the PDLC will this type of feedback be most useful?



Indirect feedback and feedback from colleagues is helpful throughout the Product Development Lifecycle.

1. As you're investigating options for new product or features, mine the feedback from internal stakeholders and look for trends. Identify which team the feedback came from and follow up with the person who reported the feedback, and if it's relevant, speak directly with the customer(s) or prospect(s) who voiced the issue.

2. As you design, develop and build out the product, solicit feedback from your internal stakeholders. They may be able to serve as a proxy for your users. Just be aware of the biases they might bring to the table.

3. Feedback from Sales throughout the sales process is invaluable. They are the ones who can give you the most immediate feedback on a new feature or product. What are prospects reacting to when they hear the sales pitch or see the product firsthand? What objections do they have?

4. Your Support and Services teams have firsthand experience with customers using the product. Take that feedback and incorporate it into future updates.

Best Practices & Pro tips

HAVE A SYSTEM OF RECORD: WRITE THE FEEDBACK DOWN

The only way you can keep track of customer feedback is if it's documented. It's that simple. Those in-passing conversations, lunchtime pow-wow sessions, and the feedback shared at happy hour? Unless they get written down, they might as well have not happened. Scribbled post-it notes, Slack messages, and two-line emails may be better than nothing, but these methods are not scalable. Consider adopting a practical, centralized system that will allow you to capture all of your feedback in one place.

ESTABLISH A FEEDBACK SYSTEM

It does not matter what you use to collect customer feedback, as long as everyone in the organization knows the acceptable methods for submitting it. It might be as simple as asking your colleagues to send feedback to a dedicated email address or having them fill out a short web form. Or, it could be a more involved procedure, like completing a weekly feedback form or entering specific details into JIRA. (An aside: for the love of Pete, do not force people who want to give feedback to do extensive data entry. That's a surefire way to stifle the urge to submit customer feedback. Make it as easy as possible for colleagues to share feedback with you.)

GET FEEDBACK ON THE FEEDBACK

Many organizations hold a bimonthly feedback meeting where customer-facing and product teams discuss specific feedback. Meetings like this can be used to contextualize the feedback and supplement dry analytics with specific anecdotes while giving you the opportunity to ask follow up questions. Also what is aligned with product strategy so what requests may or may not make it on the roadmap.

LET YOUR COLLEAGUES KNOW WHAT TYPE OF FEEDBACK YOU WANT

Make it easier for your colleagues to gather customer feedback by ensuring they have a clear sense of your organization's overall goals and priorities (e.g., long-term and short-term strategy, OKRs or other goals, and product vision statements). Use this to establish a framework for the relevant types of feedback you seek.

MAKE FEEDBACK AN ONGOING PROCESS

Soliciting feedback from internal stakeholders should not be an event — it should be a continuous conversation. A conversation, of course, is a two-way street: if you regularly communicate your product strategy and goals and share updates, colleagues from across your organization can provide you with the most relevant customer feedback.

To Sum It All Up

Feedback from stakeholders within your organization can be extraordinarily valuable. To make the most of it:

- Let your organization know what constitutes appropriate feedback.
- Keep everyone informed about how to submit feedback and how it will be used
- Use the feedback you receive how you said you would, and communicate the results to your organization.
- Solicit feedback from across your organization, not just from one team.
- Balance the internal perspective with customer feedback you receive from other channels.

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