

Navigating the Product Journey: Lessons for Enterprise Teams

A bunch of clichés, quotes, movie and popular culture references for Product Management.





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About Me



Jumping off The Cliff

“An entrepreneur is someone who jumps off a cliff and builds a plane on the way down”

- Reid Hoffman, LinkedIn Co Founder

- Started as a Programmer in 2002
- Survived Lehman Brothers - 2008
- Took the leap of Faith in 2011
- Built some amazing Software and sold it to some of the world's largest banks.
- Made lot of mistakes and learned from them.

My Co Founder at Inbotiqa always likes to say “An entrepreneur is someone who jumps off a cliff and builds a plane on the way down” . It's a quote from LinkedIn Co Founder - Reid Hoffman .

I am a movie buff so when I heard that quote this is the image that came to my mind. For non James Bond fans, this a still from the first scene in Golden Eye. I am not Bond but when I hear that quote that this is the scene I remember. So little over a decade ago I took the leap of faith and learned a lot of lessons along the way.

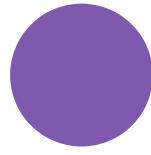
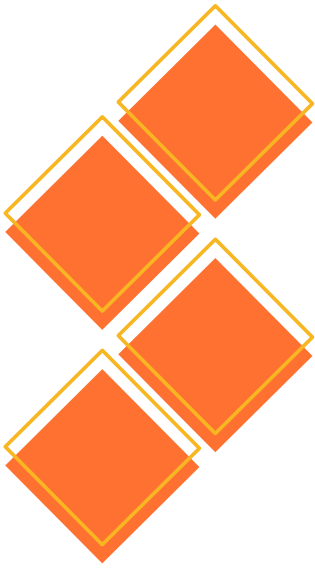
In the next few minutes I will quote a few more people, books or movies to help you think about things you should be doing or considering when building your product.



Definitions

Project vs Product





Project

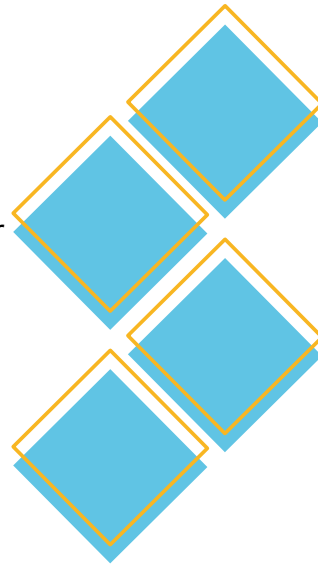
- A project in business and science is usually defined as a collaborative venture, often involving research or design, that is carefully designed to achieve a particular **goal**.

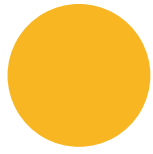




Product

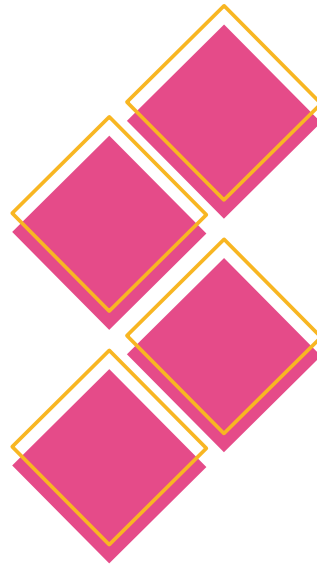
The term product is defined as “something produced by work or effort” or as “the result of an act or process” and has its origin in the Latin verb produce(re), **‘make exist’**.





Difference ?

- While products are designed to meet the needs and desires of customers, projects are established to achieve specific goals or objectives.
- The primary focus of a **product** is to **generate value and revenue**.
- A **project** is focused on **achieving a desired outcome or solving a particular problem**.





Team

It all Starts with a Team



Grit Spit and a Whole lot of Duct tape

- Ideas
- Leadership
- Research & Development
- Tools
- Team work, Hard work & Smart work



Unlike Bond, though you don't just take control of an airplane. You have to build one. Like these penguins from Madagascar 2 and that takes mostly Grit and a lot of effort and resourcefulness. What I also love about the penguins from the movie is how these unlikely birds can pull off some seemingly impossible tasks. As Product Manager or Developers many of you are on a similar journey.

One more important thing is that to build great products you need a great team. By team, I mean not just people whose CVs look good. It's about finding a set of people who understand the vision and are genuinely interested in working together to get it across the line..




Lets start Coding?

Great! Now we have a
team let's start coding.

OR

Is there something else
first?



Existential Questions aka Requirements

- Why are we doing this ?
- What is the problem we are solving ?
- Why does it matter ?
- Why is this important ?
- Who is doing this already ?
- Can we do it better ?
- Buy vs Build



What does Master Oogway represent. For me he represents wisdom that provokes thought. One of the important things about building a great product is challenging assumptions and really probing deep into the product that you are building.

Ask yourself existential questions. Not questions like Who created Humans or Is there a God. But questions that are important to existence of your product or business.

1

Features Driven by Purpose

Move from
I want a **Feature** to do **Action**
To
Given **User** with **Persona** Provide **Ability** to perform **Action** so
that **Outcome** can be achieved.
OR
Given (**Persona**) when (**Action**) then (**Outcome**)



When building software most business users will not talk about a problem that needs solution. Rather they think of a solution that they think will solve a problem and provide a feature request based on their understanding of the solution.

Using the approach of identifying Person, Ability and Outcome we can dive deeper into the feature request and help surface the real problem that needs solving.

This is essentially moving the Behaviour Driven Development applied earlier in the lifecycle to requirement specification or Acceptance Criteria

e.g. Actual conversation with Project Manager in Context of Jira.

I want to download all Tasks in excel.

And What do you plan to do after that?

I will use Excel Filters to check Tasks for each Team Member and then reach out to them on what is due today.

Feature requested -> Download All Task List.

Actual Solution -> Saved Filter with Due = Today.



OK Requirements Done Now can we Code ?

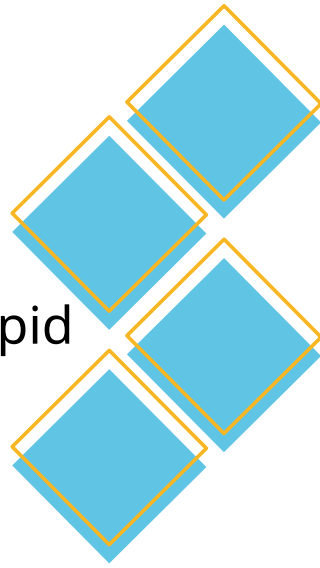
Remember SDLC?
Did you do Design and
Architecture ?



2

KISS

- Keep It Simple and Stupid



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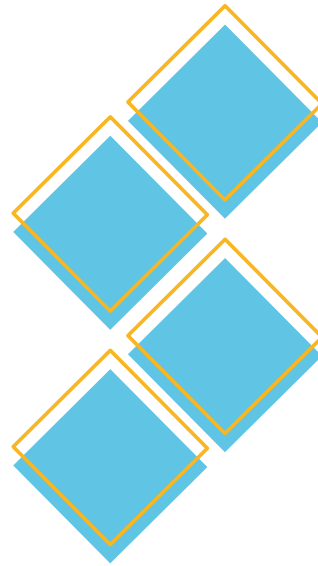
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3

Design Principles & Design System

- How does one pick the ideas most relevant to the Product ?
- The **Purpose Driven design principles** act as a “sieve” in a funnel to **filter ideas and requirements** for the product.
- **Value vs Noise**
- [Material Design by Google](#)
- [Apple Design](#)
- [Fluent UI by Microsoft](#)



Now that I have hopefully highlighted the importance of good design, I think it is very very important that as a team you establish a bunch of principles or guidelines which are important to your product or company. The design principles will act as a “sieve” in a funnel when you and team come up with ideas or you get suggestions from customers about things to build in the product. A lot of great and bad ideas will be coming your way. How do you pick what you spend your time on. That is where these design principles can help make the decision.

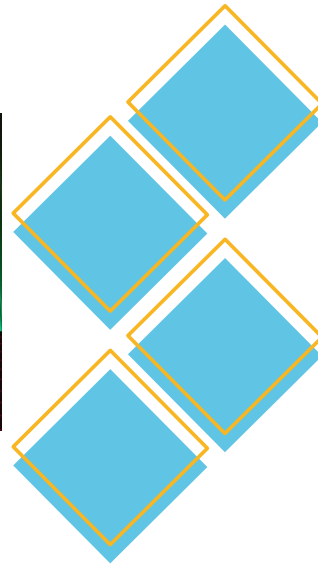
Also depending on what you are building, and which target audience are you building for you should pick a design system that makes most sense for that customer base.

5

Smoke screen and mirrors



OR The Art of the Possible



aka Fake it till you make it.

In the early stages you will often meet customers who ask about specific features that you don't have. Maybe you have not thought about those features, or they take time and effort to build. Perhaps you don't have the time or budget to build them. Yet as an Product Team you know it is important to showcase something to move the project forward. In such scenarios you could build something quickly that may not actually do the job but do enough to convince the customer that you can build something soon enough.

I am not saying one should tell blatant lies though. The thing to remember here is you should only promise what you know can be delivered. So, before you start putting together your illusion, do some research and start thinking about possibilities.

By the way this one is from "The Great and Powerful Wizard of Oz"



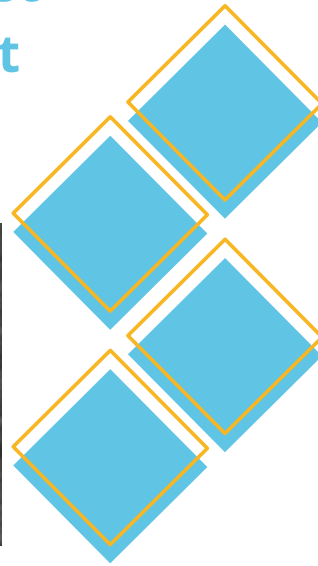
The Art of the possible

- Research before development
- UI Design – Use Rapid Prototyping / Design tools
 - e.g. Figma, InVision
- Quick and Dirty Proof of Concepts (More like Quick and Neat)
- Use No Code / Low Code platforms or frameworks like Streamlit
- Developer Demos



6

**I haven't failed - I've just
found 10,000 ways that
won't work.**



I admire Edison as an inventor, but even more as a businessman and hustler. This quote or something to that effect has been attributed to him in context of his invention of Lightbulb. The invention of the lightbulb was a process that took nearly a century, and it didn't begin with Edison. There were several other attempts before him most notably by British scientist Sir Humphry Davy. Most previous designs were either too expensive or too inefficient. Then came Edison who learned from mistakes of his predecessors as well as his own and in time created the first practical light bulb and he had the entrepreneurial hustle to get the backing to see it through as part of an electrical system that could power light bulb as we know today.


The point is don't worry too much about making mistakes. Learn from your mistakes. Keep a log of things that didn't work, vague ideas that were offered to you. Diligence is important here to getting it right. In our own product a whole bunch of features were nowhere in our list when we started but they became the mainstays of our product because they worked for our customers.

One more thing – by feedback I am not talking about asking customers to fill a survey. I would suggest a more direct and time-consuming approach. Talk to them, meet them. Invite them to test your experimental solutions. The more you listen, the better and more relevant ideas will pop up.



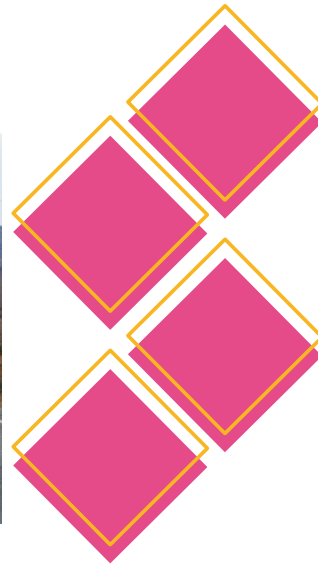
Requirements and Design Done!!

Let's start Development
Sprints ?



4

But “It’s a Marathon not a Sprint ?”



Building a great product takes a long while and effort. I know these days software professionals and products are built by delivering changes in small sprints. I think sprints are a great way to make useful progress, but I am using this reference in the traditional sense of the usage in running. In a 100 meter sprint a runner goes all out for 10 seconds and then the race is done. Whereas running a marathon is literally running a distance that is 420 times more. Most marathon runners run at a calm but steady pace to get there. That is how products also need to be built. You may choose to break down work in smaller sprints but one should design and plan the work with the longer-term view in mind.

By the way – for the uninitiated that is a still from the movie Forrest Gump where the protagonist does a run from the east coast to west coast of the USA and back. Your Journey in building a Great Product could perhaps feel less like a Marathon and more like Forrest Gump’s run.



Marathon as several Sprints

Breakdown a Large Development into logical chunks that can be covered in 2-3 week sprints

- UI Design – Break down into screens
- Data Model
- High Level Architecture
- Proof of Concept for Integrations
- Feature Development






Monoliths to Microservices

- Monoliths end up as “If it works don’t touch it”
- Microservices are like Lego blocks

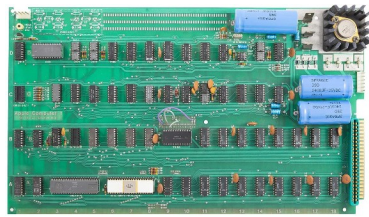


Monolith to Microservices

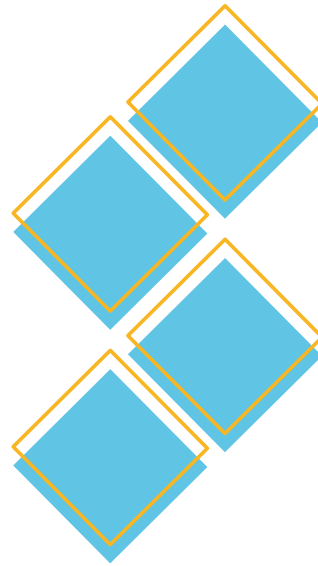
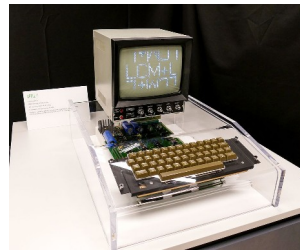
- Standards based integration (HTTP, SMTP, MQTT)
 - Loose Coupling (Message Queues, RESTful services)
 - Infrastructure as Code (e.g. CloudFormation, Docker, Kubernetes)
 - Automated Testing
 - Deployment Pipelines
 - Documentation
 - Dependency Management
- 

7

Done is better than Perfect



Apple I in 1976

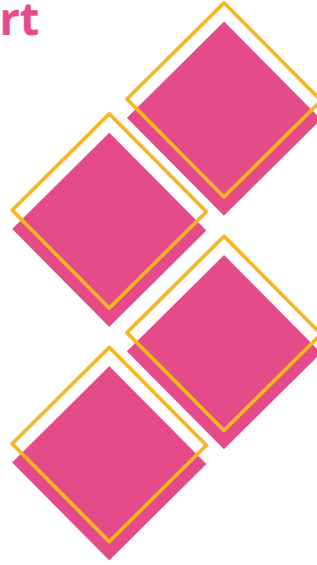
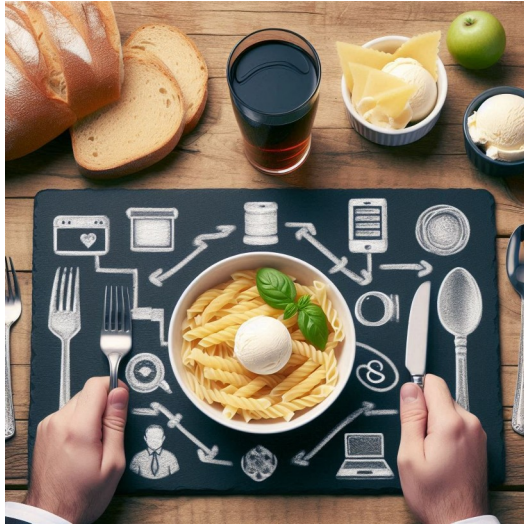


The story goes that when Apple received their first order for PCs their client, a computer retailer named Byte Shop, was expecting the thing on the right, but what Apple was really selling was the circuit board on the top. Obviously, an ugly looking product that was far from usable by end users. However, the retailer Byte had all the other parts that could be clubbed with that circuit board to create a PC. In short, his ugly looking circuit board got the job done and paved way for the much more successful and well-known Apple II PC and the company we all know today.

The point is that as a one would always want to get the perfect product out there, but in the quest for perfection one might end up losing on opportunity to go the market quickly or get feedback from customers. Don't worry if the MVP looks a bit ugly or has some not so obvious bugs. If it works for most part, launch it. You can continue improving it later.

8

Main course before Dessert





Main Course before Dessert

Therefore

- Requirements and Requirements before Development
- Testing before Production Deployment
- Usage before Analytics
- Real Data before AI Insights
- Documents / Data before Retrieval Augmented Generation



Product

Grit Spit and a whole lot of Duct tape

- Team and Team Work

Design Principles

- Define Principles
- Use Design Systems

Keep it Simple and Stupid

- Focus on User experience early on.

Art of the Possible

- Use Wireframes or Prototypes to gather feedback early

Summary

Existential Questions

- Why, Who and What before How?


Its a Marathon not a Sprint

- Learn from Mistakes and previous work
- Larger work to small chunks

Main course before Dessert

- Data before AI
- Usage before Analytics

Done is better than Perfect



Thank You
Questions ?



References

- <https://adaptmethodology.com/blog/product-vs-project-understanding-the-differences/>
- <https://martinfowler.com/bliki/GivenWhenThen.html>

