Product Discovery

How Modern Teams Build Great Products

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Product discovery is the process of closely understanding what your users' problems and needs are, then validating your ideas for solutions before starting development.

The four phases of product discovery

1. Learn and understand user needs

2. Define direction and decide priorities

3. Ideate solutions and prioritize development

4. Create and test prototypes

1. Learn about users and understand their needs

Instead of focusing on a specific product or feature idea, think about the broader problem (or group of problems) that you're aiming to solve, and use this to inform your user research.

Run customer interviews, organize user stories into themes, create journey maps, and form a close relationship with a group of users.

2. Define direction and decide on priorities

Take a step back and prioritize the most important problems for users. Patterns should start to emerge from research, one or two problems will up up again and again in different user stories.

Once you've identified what these are, the next step is to refine them into hypotheses and choose one to build around.

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If we start adding in light animations of the DE Characters demonstrating encouragement upon interaction, then students will feel more willing to keep trying and spend more time in our products.

HYPOTHESIS

3. Ideate solutions and prioritize development initiatives

Get creative and start thinking about what a new product idea might look like. Encourage your team to brainstorm without limits at first, then gradually narrow down to the best ideas.
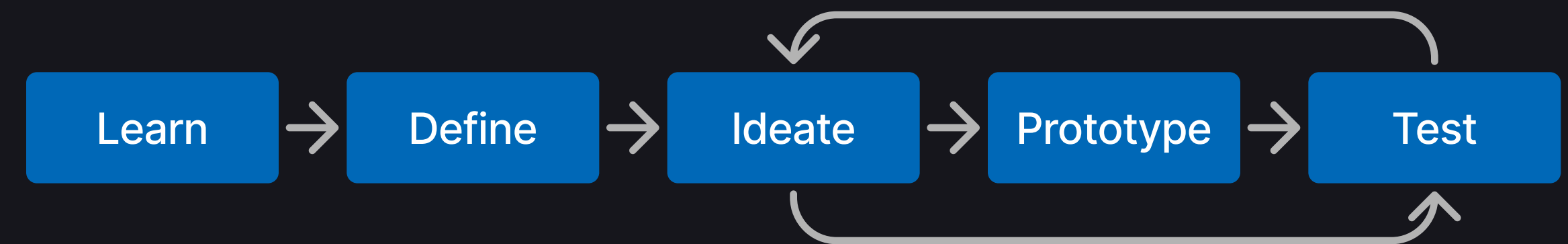
Once you've narrowed your ideas down to a shortlist, you can use a prioritization framework to assign scores for predicted value and feasibility, as a way to assess the viability of each.

○ Does it align with business goals?

○ Is it relevant to your target audience?

○ Do the numbers add up?

○ Are people asking for it?

○ Would it be stupid not to do it?

4. Create prototypes and test with your users

The final stage for of product discovery. It's time to create a prototype and get some customer feedback.

The only people who can definitively show you whether an idea is valuable enough to progress to product delivery are your users.

| Learn | → | Define | → | Ideate | → | Prototype | → | Test |

This stage of the process typically cycles through itself several times, allowing you to test multiple iterations and concepts.

Benefits of Product Discovery

Reduced Risk and Cost

Cutting corners with user research to expedite product development is a massive and expensive risk. You're betting on assumptions about what users want or need from a product.

Product discovery gives you <u>validation</u> on whether something needs to exist before spending time and money building, polishing, and marketing it. It makes you more agile, not less.
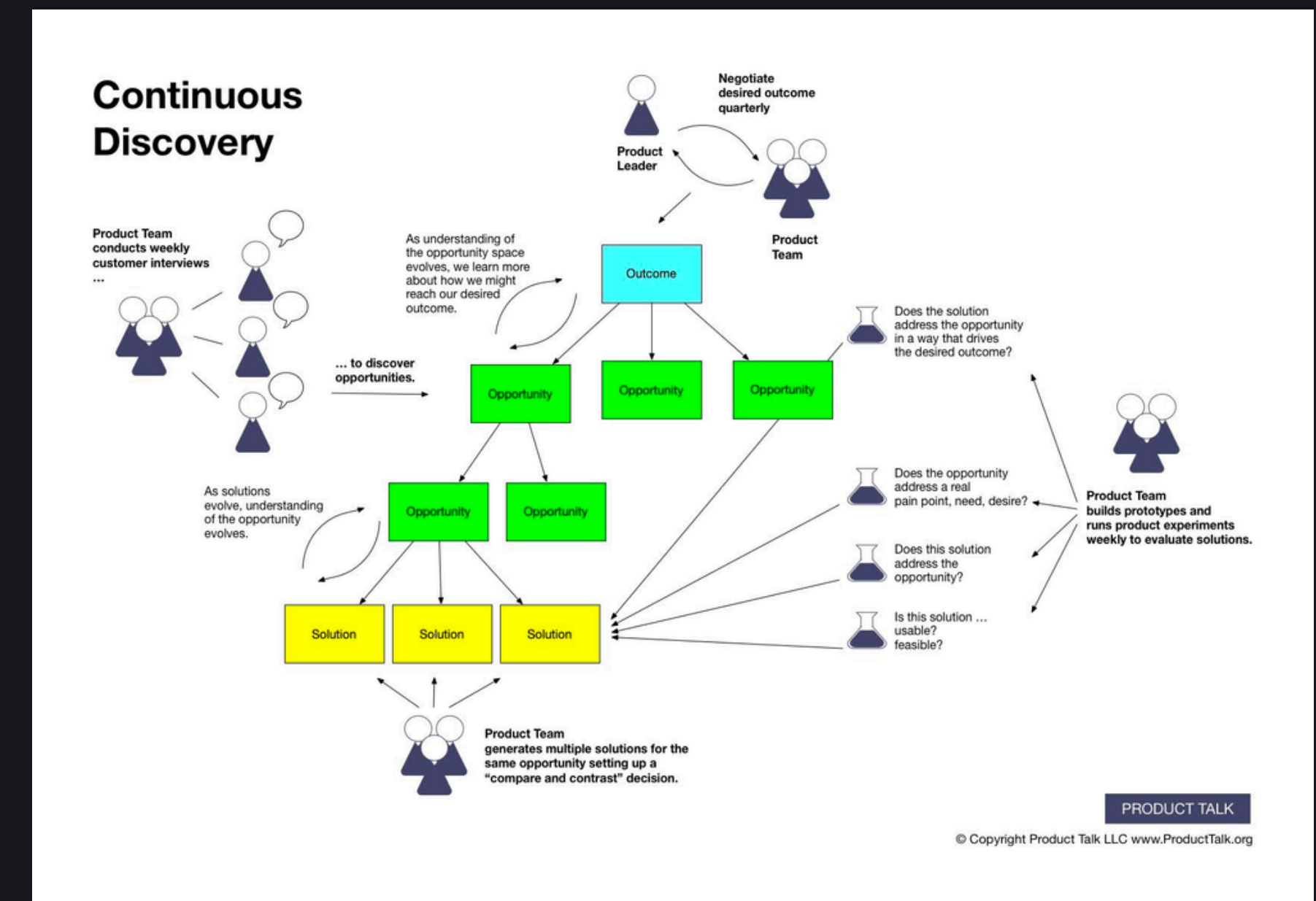
Products Will be More Innovative

By incorporating customer viewpoints from the beginning, product discovery inspires your team to challenge their own assumptions and think outside of the box when making product decisions.

In addition to producing more innovative solutions, product discovery also validates product-market fit for ideas and initiatives before they're built.

Continuous Product Discovery

What is Continuous Product Discovery?

Continuous product discovery involves seeking customer feedback regularly. Insights are gathered not only at project kickoff but also through ongoing customer communication across the development lifecycle.

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at a minimum, weekly touchpoints with customers by the team building the product, where they're conducting small research activities in pursuit of a desired product outcome.

— TERESA TORRES

Why *Continuous* Product Discovery?

1. Evolve products with changing customer needs

2. Bring clarity to backlog prioritization

3. Increase confidence in decisions

4. Align customer and business goals

5. Avoid assumption-based development

Five habits of Continuous Product Discovery

1. Focus on Outcomes Over Outputs

2. Visualize What You Know

3. Continuous Interviewing

4. Mapping the Opportunity Space

5. Prioritize Opportunities, Not Solutions

Getting Started with Continuous Product Discovery

1. Commit to a Continuous Mindset

2. Assemble Your Product Trio

3. Automate Your Discovery Process

4. Improve Your Research Questions and Techniques
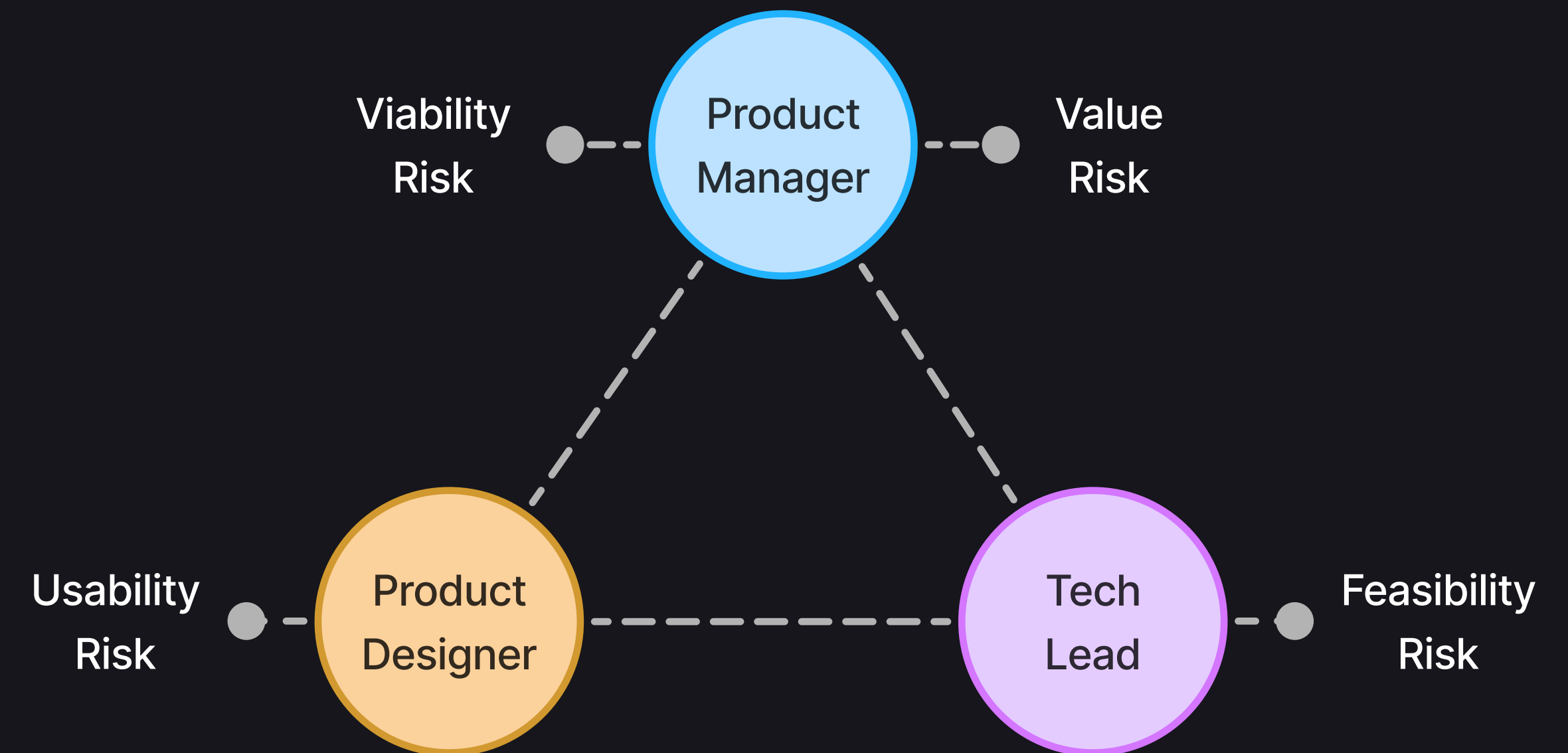
Commit to a Continuous Mindset

It is important to understand that discovery is not confined to a specific phase but rather an ongoing journey that runs concurrently with delivery. You're always delivering, and you're always discovering.

It's not just about discovering what people need, then creating a solution (output-focus). It's about keeping a particular goal in mind—be it customer satisfaction or monthly recurring revenue—and continually testing assumptions to help you reach those objectives (outcome-focus).

Assemble Your Product Trio

The Product Trio consists of a Product Manager, a Product Designer, and a Technical Lead.

This trio conducts continuous research together and creates a shared understanding of customer needs and opportunities. They should be empowered to run their own interviews, without the need for a centralized research team.

Automate Your Discovery Process

Block off a weekly recurring time for discovery. Start with as little as 30 minutes. This way it's built into the schedule, rather than a spontaneous occurrence.

The goal is to reduce the need for your product team to be involved in the logistics. Ideally, they just show up during the weekly scheduled time, ready to ask the right questions.

Improve Your Research Questions and Techniques

As you increase the frequency of customer interactions, you also need to improve their effectiveness.

- Be Curious

- Avoid Leading Questions

- Listen First, Ask Second

- Avoid Jargon

- Test Your Questions

Tips for Successful Continuous Product Discovery

- Commit to a continuous mindset, not discovery dogma

- Discovery is for learning, not confirming

- Automate logistics, not love

- Embrace progress, reject perfection

- Discovery is a tool, not a phase

Product Discovery Principles

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Instead of getting hung up on fancy techniques, focus on internalizing the principles of product discovery. Once you understand why you're doing it, the rest will follow easily.

SEBASTIEN PHLIX, PRODUCT MANAGER AT N26

Failure is a Friend

Failure is okay, it's at the center of the product discovery process. Assumptions being proven wrong is a learning step.

The key is to properly analyze each failure and continue exploring towards a solution. Cling to an original idea and you'll get left behind.

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Be prepared to feel both excited and scared. If you're not at least a little bit scared, then you're unlikely to achieve big things for your business, product, and team.

LAURA HAINES, PRODUCT MANAGER AT CANVA

Give Yourself Enough Time

As product development has become more agile, the expectations of company leads and stakeholders for fast progress has increased too.

A new feature is much less likely to impact your key metrics if you don't spend enough time understanding the problem.

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One of the most common product discovery pitfalls is not doing it because you 'don't have time.'

SEBASTIEN PHLIX, PRODUCT MANAGER AT N26

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It's essential to set up a clear and repeatable process you can follow every time. Figure out which discovery techniques work well for your product, and draft each step before you start so you can wrap it up efficiently

ARJEN HARRIS, HEAD OF PRODUCT AT MAZE

Users are People Too

By taking a relaxed, informal approach to conversations with users, you'll be able to make the most of the time you have with them.

The best user interviews are the ones that flow naturally

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When it comes to running interviews, you have to be a bit more fluid than just reading from a script. If people don't feel like it's a genuine conversation, they'll hold things back.

NADINE KRISHNAMURTHY-SPENCER, PRODUCT MANAGER AT WE ARE WITH YOU

Validate Everything

You don't just want to have a solution ready for development—you also want evidence to validate that it's the right one for your users.

Validate your work along the way. Don't be afraid to drop a feature or refocus on other areas of value based on the results.

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We thought if we inspired users with other use cases during project creation, they would create more projects. So we designed a prototype and ran a test. The result? Customers hated it! We quickly realized we were complicating a simple flow without adding any value.

ARJEN HARRIS, HEAD OF PRODUCT AT MAZE

Discovery is Never Done

As the industry and our users advance so too do their needs. In order to ensure we're continually providing value, we need to continually discovery what their needs are.

Discovery and delivery can and should run in parallel. When a solution moves from discovery to delivery we can begin the discovery process for new problems.

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Since product discovery activities don't necessarily imply any development work, you can always run discovery in parallel to delivery. If you have user interviews booked every week, you're actually always doing product discovery.

POL NARBONA, PRODUCT MANAGER AT CANVA

Product Discovery Techniques

Techniques for Continuous Product Discovery

There are many different techniques to choose from, the ones you opt for depend on your research objectives, business resources, and product strategy.

1. Customer Interviews

2. Product Analysis

3. Competitor Analysis

4. The Five Whys

5. Prototyping

6. Usability Testing

Customer Interviews

To understand customer needs, conduct direct interviews to ask questions and gather real-time context.

Customer interviews offer **qualitative** results, letting you understand customers' motivations and struggles.

- Write a List of Questions

- Leave Ideas at the Door

- Start Simple, Then Get Deep

When to use

Conducting interviews to learn more about the user and understand them better can happen at any stage of the product lifecycle.

Product Analysis

Quantitative data coming from product analytics is often used to measure performance after a launch. However, it can also provide inspiration for and inform decisions throughout the lifecycle.

Keep in Mind

Quantitative data on its own can be interpreted in many different ways. Always compare insights from data analysis to what your users are telling you.

Use qualitative and quantitative data to provide context for one another.

When to use

Use analytics at all stages of product discovery. You should look at your data to inform decisions as you: *Learn*, *Define*, *Ideate*, and *Prototype*.

Competitor Analysis

Build a map of strengths, weaknesses, and feature lists of your competitors

Use this to spot gaps in what's available on the market. Borrow what works and conduct further research to develop a solution that fixes what doesn't.

When to use

Competitor analysis is typically conducted during the learn and understand stage of product discovery.

When to use

Use this method during the *define* stage to get closer to a hypothesis and problem statement that you can further test through other methods.

The Five Whys

The five whys help you identify the root cause of problems. It helps you develop a hypothesis that can be tackled in a holistic way, rather than fulfilling individual feature requests without a clear overall product vision.

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Going through the five 'whys' as a team, we reach a mutual understanding of what question we need to answer and what the best approach to answer it would be.

PHOEBE DYLOCO, RESEARCH LEAD AT ASANA.

Prototyping

The goal of product discovery is to validate a hypothesis before you start the development process. A prototype should be easy to tweak, iterate, or scrap if needed, based on customer feedback.

Many Shapes and Sizes

Prototypes come in many forms, from low fidelity sketches to high fidelity interactive experiences. The fidelity of prototype should align with the test being run.

When to use

During the **prototype** and **test** stages. Anytime you need to understand how your users will interact with your tool before spending too much money and time on development.

Usability Testing

Evaluate how easy your users find it to use your product. Present users with test scenarios and tasks they need to complete on your platform. Gather insights based on behavior and comments to make usability improvements.

More than just Moderated

Unmoderated usability testing allows users to complete tasks without a facilitator present, while recording their audio, video, and screen.

Live usability tests ask users to complete tasks on the live product, allowing you to validate experiences, or discover unknown issues.

When to use

When you launch a new product or feature, or implement design changes. It's also good practice to conduct usability testing regularly as part of continuous product discovery.

Q&A