

# READY STEADY GROW

**BY LISA HAGEN & CHRIS KINCANON**

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## CULTIVATING EMPOWERED, HIGH-PERFORMING PRODUCT TEAMS

*Ready Steady Grow* is your guide to building high-performing product teams. Lisa Hagen, a seasoned Product Coach, and Chris Kincanon, an experienced Technology Leader, understand that successful products come from teams with the clarity, autonomy, and support needed to innovate, make an impact, and feel great about their work.

We recognize that many product development professionals are eager for change but may not know how to initiate that transformation. You've likely read about the importance of empowered teams, but understanding the path to achieving that can feel daunting. *Ready Steady Grow* offers a clear and simple approach to help you build the strong foundation your team needs to excel, adapt, and stay engaged.

Whether you're leading, working within, or supporting product development, this book provides practical steps and straightforward advice to help your team do its best work while enjoying the journey. If you're looking for a better way to see your team thrive, *Ready Steady Grow* will give you the required tools to make real change happen, no matter where you're starting from.

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# 01

## THE NEED FOR A GROWTH PLAN

### MAPPING THE LANDSCAPE

Imagine a team that feels unstoppable—aligned, empowered, and is constantly delivering results that customers love. Teams like this don't just happen by chance. They're built with intention, equipped with the right tools, and supported every step of the way. Whether you're at a small startup or a large company, the secret to product and business success lies in building teams that understand their customers, can innovate quickly, and remain resilient through change.

But let's be real: it's not easy. Misalignment, inefficiencies, and burnout can sneak in, draining the energy of even the most talented people. You've likely seen it before—a team with great potential gets bogged down in endless meetings, pulled in too many directions, or finds itself stuck in a cycle of busywork. Without getting to the root of what is causing these issues, frustration mounts, opportunities slip away, and as a result, team morale starts to drop.

Even at the organizational level, the value of empowered teams is recognized, but often leadership is uncertain how to bring them to life. The symptoms are easy to spot—delayed launches, missed revenue, rising turnover—but the actions needed to remedy these challenges are not as obvious.

### THE READY STEADY GROW APPROACH

The Ready Steady Grow approach is a framework designed to help product development teams identify the root causes of the challenges they face and offers a flexible plan to cultivate empowered teams. Your team will not only overcome obstacles, but also grow stronger and more capable over time.

A crucial aspect of **Ready Steady Grow** is its emphasis on continuous improvement. Through regular reflection, feedback loops, and outcome-focused metrics, your team stays aligned with delivering results that drive business success. Whether you're scaling a small startup or steering a large enterprise, **Ready Steady Grow** provides the necessary clarity and structure needed to navigate the complexities of building and sustaining product development teams.

You might be wondering, "Will this really work for us?" ... the answer is yes! **Ready Steady Grow** is designed to be flexible and adaptable, guiding your team's growth in ways that fit your specific needs and challenges.

In the following chapters, we'll explore six characteristics of teams that consistently deliver exceptional results. We will provide actionable strategies that nurture your team by examining the growth stages teams typically go through. Whether you're a team leader or an individual contributor, these strategies are designed for you, offering practical steps to understand where your team stands and what steps you need to take to keep moving forward.

## **SETTING THE RIGHT EXPECTATIONS**

Before we dive in, it's important to set some expectations about what this book will and won't cover. You won't find detailed breakdowns of specific tools or methodologies like Agile, Scrum, or OKRs here. We're not going to walk you through continuous discovery or high-performance delivery, or get into the details and definitions about specific roles. While those elements are valuable and our Resources chapter provides recommended reading on those topics, this book focuses on something even more fundamental—the core growth principles that will make any tool or methodology truly effective. The **Ready Steady Grow** approach builds a powerful culture and mindset that amplifies the impact of whatever tools or processes you choose. Modern product development requires these underlying principles—like team empowerment, customer focus, and an outcomes-driven approach—to drive success.

So, what exactly do we mean by a "product team"? A product team is a cross-functional group that typically includes product managers, designers, engineers, and sometimes marketing or support roles, all working together to build and deliver a product. Throughout this book, we'll use the terms "product team" and "product development team" interchangeably, as both refer to this collaborative group focused on delivering value to customers and the business.

Lastly, you can read **Ready Steady Grow** cover-to-cover for a full

understanding of the framework, or focus on individual chapters as standalone resources. Think of each chapter as a “seed” that you can plant and nurture independently. Our incremental approach allows you to gradually build a thriving and resilient team. Change doesn’t happen all at once, whether it’s developing a clear vision, refining customer engagement strategies, or shifting your focus to outcomes—you can give your team the space they need to fully absorb and implement each concept.

## **CULTURE GROWS THROUGH ACTION**

While you won’t see “culture” explicitly called out as a specific seed of success, it’s an inevitable outcome of the practices we’ll discuss throughout this book. Culture isn’t created by hanging values on the wall or repeating mantras—it’s built through the choices and actions your team takes every day.

Just as no two gardens will look exactly alike, the culture that develops in your team will be unique to your environment. Transparent decision-making, clear communication, trust, and fostering autonomy will naturally lead to the emergence of a positive culture. How that culture takes shape will reflect your specific team dynamic, challenges, and goals.

Tending to the six seeds of the **Ready Steady Grow** approach will not only improve your team’s performance but will organically shape a culture that is uniquely suited to your environment, fostering growth and innovation in ways that fit your team.

## **ALIGNMENT WITH INDUSTRY EXPERTS**

The **Ready Steady Grow** approach isn’t just based on our experiences; it aligns with the best thinking in the product development industry. Thought leaders like Marty Cagan, Jeff Patton, and Teresa Torres all emphasize the importance of empowered teams, a deep understanding of customer needs, and delivering products that bring real value. Companies like Spotify, Netflix, and Atlassian have mastered these principles by creating environments where teams can innovate and adapt quickly. **Ready Steady Grow** draws from these proven best practices, offering you a clear framework that’s designed to help your team achieve similar levels of success. We’re not rehashing old ideas; we’re giving you a roadmap informed by the strategies that are most effective across the industry. At the end of the book, you’ll find a list of books that have inspired us and provided much of the foundation for our own views, along with deeper insights into the topics we discuss.

## OUR PHILOSOPHY

At the core of the **Ready Steady Grow** approach is a simple belief that the best teams—and the best products—are built by people who are empowered, motivated, and set up to do their best work. To be clear, we're not just talking about what teams should aim for; we're showing you how to get there.

The chapters ahead provide practical steps to turn these big ideas into daily practice. Your team will not just aspire to greatness but they will actually achieve it. By cultivating the Seeds of Success, you're setting your team—and your entire organization—on a path toward sustainable growth and innovation.

As you continue reading, think about how these principles can transform your own team. Imagine the possibilities—what can you do today to create a thriving environment of success, innovation, and purpose?

# 02

## SOWING THE SEEDS OF SUCCESS

### YOUR BLUEPRINT FOR TEAM GROWTH

Throughout our careers, we've had the opportunity to build, coach, and lead product teams across a variety of industries. In doing so, we've discovered a common set of traits that deliver high performance, bring innovation to products, and drive business results. We call these the Seeds of Success. These form the roots of the **Ready Steady Grow** approach.

When nurtured, these seeds enable teams to consistently deliver meaningful results. They create environments where team members are engaged and aligned with organizational goals. Cultivating growth requires deliberate effort, ongoing reflection, and a willingness to embrace difficult changes. With the **Ready Steady Grow** approach, these challenges can be transformed into opportunities for significant long-term success.

### THE SEEDS OF SUCCESS

While these seeds are universally applicable, they are also designed to be flexible and adaptable to the unique dynamics of your team and organization.

- 01. Strategic Alignment** A well-defined vision not only aligns your team's efforts with the organization's broader goals but also ensures that every action contributes to a cohesive strategy. This alignment maintains a clear direction and prevents wasted resources on initiatives that don't support the company's mission. It ensures that both



the team and the products they develop drive the organization forward, resulting in consistent progress and strong market positioning.

- 02. Customer Focus** Keeping the customer at the center of every decision allows your products to solve real problems and deliver meaningful outcomes. This customer-centric approach leads to higher customer satisfaction, loyalty, and advocacy, ultimately driving revenue growth and enhancing the organization's reputation. By consistently meeting customer needs, your products stay relevant and competitive in the market.
- 03. Team Empowerment** Empowerment is more than just a concept; it's about giving your teams the autonomy and accountability they need to take ownership, make informed decisions, and innovate without unnecessary constraints. Empowered teams are more motivated, creative, resilient, highly productive and better at problem-solving. This autonomy fosters a sense of ownership and pride in the work, which reduces turnover and builds strong organizational culture.
- 04. Execution Excellence** A great vision and strategy only matter if executed effectively. Cultivating a culture where operational rigor is the norm ensures that your team consistently delivers high-quality outcomes and reliable, efficient, product launches. This excellence in execution not only builds customer trust but also strengthens the organization's ability to scale and adapt to new challenges.
- 05. Proactive Engineering** Embedding technology leaders early ensures alignment between product goals and technical capabilities, fostering innovation and enabling rapid iteration. Strong technology foundations allow your team to build scalable, reliable, and adaptable products that can grow with market demands. This alignment between tech and product ensures that innovations are practical and can be implemented efficiently.

**06. Outcomes Driven** It's easy to get caught up in activity, but what truly matters is the impact of that work. Aligning efforts and focusing on measurable outcomes ensures that every action efficiently drives meaningful progress rather than a justifying activity for activity's sake. An outcomes-driven approach leads to better resource allocation, and a stronger bottom line.

## THE GROWTH PATTERN OF THE SEEDS

Guiding a product team through its growth journey requires a deep understanding of your team's development stages and the unique dynamics of your organization. Without this, even the most dedicated efforts can feel like you're not making any progress and you risk implementing strategies that miss the mark, leading to wasted effort and missed opportunities for meaningful growth.

You need to be honest about your team's strengths and areas for improvement. This level of transparency isn't always easy, but it's where meaningful growth begins. It's also important to align your team's development with the broader reality of your organization. If your company lacks a clear vision or operates in a rigid, top-down structure, it will inevitably impact how far you can take empowerment. This doesn't mean change is impossible—just that you need to set realistic goals and adapt your approach accordingly. By recognizing both your team's potential and the organization's context, identify what's achievable and drive progress in the areas where you have the most influence.

Bringing others into this process is essential. Gaining perspectives from team members, peers, and other stakeholders gives you a well-rounded view of where your team stands. Collaborating in an assessment process not only enriches the evaluation but also fosters a sense of shared responsibility and alignment. When everyone is involved in understanding where the team is and where it needs to go, it strengthens the collective commitment to growth.

Product teams evolve through a series of growth stages, with each stage laying the groundwork for the next. As your team progresses, the lessons, skills, and practices developed in earlier stages become the foundation for continued growth and higher performance. We've identified five critical stages that teams typically move through:

### **Planting: The Initial Phase**

The Planting phase is full of potential and excitement, but it's also marked by a lack of direction and structure. Teams are forming, and while goals and processes are still taking shape, this stage offers a prime opportunity to set clear objectives, establish strong foundations, and channel the initial excitement into building momentum. Without these basics, the team will flounder, wasting energy on tasks that don't contribute to long-term success.

### **Sprouting: The Developing Phase**

As the team starts to take shape, roles become clearer, and basic processes are established. Communication improves, but productivity remains inconsistent as members adjust to the new structure. This stage is an opportunity to refine workflows, strengthen collaboration, and build a cohesive way of working that will drive consistent performance. While the team is more organized than in the Planting stage, there's still a long way to go to build a cohesive, high-performing unit.

### **Blooming: The Advanced Phase**

In the Blooming phase, the team has developed a solid foundation of processes and collaboration. Productivity is more consistent, and the team begins to see tangible results from their efforts. This phase is characterized by growing confidence as the team aligns more closely with business objectives and starts to deliver more impactful outcomes. It's a time to leverage the team's strengths and sustain their performance for ongoing innovation and achievement.

### **Pollinating: The Collaborative Phase**

At this stage, the team is highly effective, driving innovation and collaboration across the organization. Operating with autonomy, they tackle complex problems head-on and continuously refine processes. This phase presents a powerful opportunity to expand their influence beyond their immediate group, sparking creativity and cooperation across departments. Their success not only elevates their own performance but also sets a standard for others through a culture of excellence in the organization.

### **Harvesting: The Optimized Phase**

In this final stage, the team operates at peak performance. They consistently deliver top results realized by the organization at large, setting new standards for others to follow. They don't just meet standards—they set them, continuously refining processes and driving innovation. Their success becomes self-sustaining as they mentor and inspire other teams to reach similar heights. They are key contributors to shaping the company's strategic direction and future growth, reaping the rewards of long-term success.

## **EMBRACING CHALLENGES**

Every team will face setbacks, delayed growth, and even moments of regression. These challenges are critical opportunities for learning and improvement. It's easy to overestimate your progress or overlook areas that need attention, but doing so can undermine your success. The teams that push through these obstacles with resilience and a commitment to continuous development are the ones that thrive.

## **CONNECTING THE SEEDS TO YOUR TEAM'S SUCCESS**

Your team's growth depends on nurturing the six seeds—**Strategic Alignment, Customer Focus, Team Empowerment, Execution Excellence, Proactive Engineering, and Outcomes Driven**. Focusing on these elements isn't just about fine-tuning processes; it's about building a team that can innovate, adapt, and elevate your organization. Whether you're addressing current challenges or preparing for future opportunities, these seeds form the roots that will support and sustain your growth.

Engaging in an honest, collaborative assessment of the growth stages of each seed does more than guide your next steps—it amplifies your team's voice and influence within the organization. Presenting a clear, evidence-based understanding makes your case for change or investment more compelling. Clarity empowers you to advocate effectively for the resources and strategic shifts needed to move forward.

As we explore each of these areas in the upcoming chapters, you'll gain practical insights and strategies to understand where your team is and what steps are needed to advance. Regularly engaging in reflective practices as your organization becomes more agile, your team will be adaptable, and equipped to navigate challenges with confidence and purpose.

Growth requires a plan, and with the **Ready Steady Grow** approach, you have one.

**“*READY STEADY GROW* HELPED  
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BETWEEN STRATEGY AND  
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MORE MEANINGFUL RESULTS.”**

**– D. HARPER  
ENGINEERING MANAGER**

## **MAP YOUR TEAM’S GROWTH**

Get a clear picture of where your team stands and where you want to go. [Download our Product Team Maturity Model or use the Miro template](#) to easily assess your team’s stage of growth. Whether you do it on your own or with your team, this tool will help you chart your path forward.



# 03

## STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT SEED 1

### GOALS? WHAT GOALS?

Building impactful products that solve real problems and drive business success starts with a clear, compelling vision and a strategy that aligns actions with broader goals. Vision defines the destination—the future state you aim to create. Strategy is the roadmap that guides your team there, breaking down the journey into clear objectives and actionable steps.

However, maintaining clarity in vision and strategy can become challenging as your company grows, acquires new customers, or navigates changes like mergers or shifts in market conditions. What begins as a strong direction can become diluted by competing priorities, emerging challenges, or the temptation to chase every new opportunity. This drift causes product teams to lose focus, leading to distractions, feature creep, or initiatives that don't meaningfully contribute to the original goals.

Without strong strategic alignment, even the most talented teams can struggle to stay on course. A clear vision and well-defined strategy act as guardrails, directing efforts that are purposeful and aligned with what truly matters.

Strategic alignment involves making tough choices and setting priorities. Vision and strategy work hand in hand, guiding decision, iteration, and action toward your long-term goals.

In this chapter, we'll explore how to establish and maintain these guardrails, helping your team navigate the complexities of product development with clarity and purpose. No matter what phase your company is in, understanding how vision and strategy evolve is essential to maintaining focus and driving sustained success.

## THE GROWTH STAGES OF STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

As your team grows, faces new challenges, or continues on its path, staying aligned with the company's vision becomes even more crucial. With a complex product, more stakeholders, and a fast-changing market, keeping everyone on the same page can get tricky. That's why it's so important to keep refining your strategy to ensure it stays relevant.

Empowered teams understand the vision and use the strategy to guide their actions. They stay focused and feel confident innovating. Alignment keeps the team on track and sparks new ideas that directly support the company's goals. With a clear direction, your team is better equipped to seize new opportunities and handle any unexpected challenges.

### Planting Stage

In the early stages, the team is primarily focused on getting tasks done, with only a limited awareness of the importance of having a clear vision. The absence of a well-defined vision leads to scattered efforts and a lack of cohesion. Strategy, if it exists at all, is minimal and not aligned with broader objectives. The team often finds itself reacting to immediate needs rather than working toward long-term goals.

### Sprouting Stage

As the team moves forward, they start to see the value in aligning their work with the company's overall vision. While some are beginning to grasp this, not everyone is fully on board yet. The strategy is still mainly task-focused, but the team is starting to connect what they do each day to the company's bigger goals, though they're still figuring out how to do this consistently.

### Blooming Stage

At this stage, the team clearly understands how their work fits with



the company's vision. The strategy is more focused, helping guide decisions and making sure daily efforts support the company's long-term goals. However, there are still some inconsistencies in fully aligning their actions with the bigger picture. The team is on the right track, but there's still room to better connect their work to the company's overall objectives.

### **Pollinating Stage**

The team's alignment with the company's vision now extends beyond their group, influencing other parts of the organization. The strategy is flexible, guiding efforts across teams and ensuring decisions support the company's goals. The team is proactive, staying ahead of trends and challenges. Collaboration is key, with diverse inputs shaping how their work fits into the broader vision. While the team is starting to be recognized for delivering impactful results, there's still a need to refine how consistently this alignment is maintained across all efforts.

### **Harvesting Stage**

In this mature stage, alignment with the company's vision is deeply ingrained in the team's culture, driving innovation and keeping them in tune with market trends and company goals. The strategy evolves as the team learns, ensuring they remain agile and responsive. The team operates with a high level of autonomy and is recognized as a leader within the company. However, continuing to nurture this alignment and adapting to new challenges will be key to sustaining their success.

Take a moment to reflect on where your team currently stands in terms of strategic alignment. Are your daily practices, decision-making processes, and overall team mindset in sync with the company's vision and strategy? Think about how well the vision and strategy are understood across your team. If you asked each member to explain these key elements, would their answers align? Understanding where you are now is crucial for your team's growth and future success.

## **THE POWER OF STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT**

Strategic alignment transforms vision into action. A compelling vision sets the direction, but it's the strategy that aligns every effort. This alignment is essential for maintaining momentum and ensuring that every step your team takes is purposeful and directed toward the same end.



A clear and compelling vision paired with a focused strategy is the foundation of any successful product team. Too many companies mistake vague, generic statements like “being the best in the industry” for a strong vision. These statements might sound impressive, but they lack the actionable clarity your team needs to move forward with purpose.

A clear vision creates a vivid and concrete picture of the future—one that your team can rally behind. It’s not just about setting a direction, but about inspiring your team to push boundaries, innovate, and make decisions that align with your long-term goals.

A good strategy is not static; it evolves as you learn more about your customers and the market. It requires constant alignment and adaptation; you need to keep your end goal in sight while allowing your team the flexibility to adjust. This dynamic combination of vision and strategy is a powerful engine for innovation and success that drives your team forward with clarity and purpose.

Apple is a prime example of this alignment in action. They defined a vision to create user-friendly technology products that enrich everyday life. This drove a strategy that focused on seamless integration across their product ecosystem, cutting-edge design, and ease of use. When developing the iPhone, for example, Apple’s strategy prioritized a device that embodied their vision of simplicity and functionality. Features like Handoff, AirDrop, and iCloud were designed to enable the iPhone to work seamlessly with other Apple devices, alleviating a problem that plagued other devices at the time. While the operational procedure was, no doubt, complex, users know that Apple products will work effortlessly with other devices. By staying true to its vision and strategically aligning its efforts, Apple has maintained its position as a leader in the marketplace.

Strategic alignment requires both discipline and flexibility, allowing you to adapt to new information and changing market conditions. A well-aligned strategy isn’t just about following a plan—it’s the process of identifying the right problems to solve. The result is not just a product that meets customer needs, but one that sets new standards and drives meaningful business outcomes.

## **THE COST OF POOR STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT**

When a clear vision and strategy are missing or misunderstood, teams struggle to align their efforts with the company’s overall goals. Resources are wasted

when departments and individuals are pulled in conflicting directions resulting in missed opportunities and initiatives that fail to advance the company's core objectives.

One of the most common pitfalls is feature creep—when extra features are added that seem appealing but don't actually support the broader goals. Worse, without a clear strategy to guide decisions, teams might chase every new idea or market trend, resulting in a product that tries to cater to everyone but resonates with no one.

Externally, the impact can be just as damaging. Declining customer satisfaction and weakened competitive position are common consequences when strategic alignment is lacking. Teams that focus solely on execution without a guiding strategy may build well-crafted products that miss the mark with customers. Over time, this disconnect erodes trust within the team and customers, making it harder to regain momentum and market share. These risks highlight why a strong vision and strategic alignment aren't just important—they're essential. They provide the foundation on which successful products are built, driving both immediate success and long-term growth.

## TECHNIQUES FOR CULTIVATING STRONG STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

It's easy to lose sight of the vision in the midst of day-to-day tasks, or perhaps it was never entirely clear. These techniques will help you clarify your vision and strategy, ensuring they stay relevant and adaptable as your team moves forward.

- 01. Keep Vision in Regular Conversations** Effective alignment requires more than just occasional updates or yearly goal-setting. It demands ongoing, intentional communication that integrates the vision and strategy into the daily routine of your team. Whether you're leading or contributing, consistently linking back to these in daily stand-ups, team discussions, and one-on-one conversations ensures that everyone remains focused on how their efforts contribute to the broader goals.

Even if the vision or strategy isn't fully clear, discussing your current understanding can lead to greater clarity. Sometimes, expressing initial thoughts can spark necessary discussions to refine and solidify the team's direction. The key is making sure the vision is a driving force that shapes decisions and actions across the team.

Maintaining alignment requires open dialogue. Every team member's input is valuable, and creating opportunities for feedback and discussions about strategy is essential. Regular check-ins and feedback loops keep everyone on the same page. Building a collaborative culture and sharing stories that bring the vision and strategy to life—such as customer successes or product impact examples—helps the team connect emotionally with their goals and stay motivated to innovate.

### KEYS TO SUCCESS

**Transparent Decision-Making:** In empowered teams, every significant decision is explained within the context of the vision and strategy. This transparency builds trust and keeps the entire team aligned with the overall goals.

**Open Forums for Dialogue:** High-performing teams create spaces for open dialogue where members can ask questions and offer feedback on the vision and strategy. Informal check-ins and focused discussions are more effective than large-scale events, fostering genuine engagement.

**Regular Vision and Progress Updates:** Leaders should provide consistent updates on strategic goals, while teams should communicate their progress towards them. These updates need to be clear and accessible to keep everyone informed and aligned.

## **02. Foster Cross-Functional Collaboration**

Strategic alignment is often hindered by silos and disconnected efforts within an organization. To address this, fostering cross-functional collaboration is crucial. By breaking down barriers between teams and encouraging collaborative work, you ensure that various perspectives and expertise contribute to the alignment of your vision and strategy.

Start by creating opportunities for cross-functional teams to collaborate, such as joint planning sessions, regular inter-departmental events and shared initiatives. This approach aligns diverse teams around common goals and ensures that everyone is working towards the same objectives. Encourage open communication and share insights across teams to foster a unified understanding of the strategic vision.

Additionally, establish team project groups to tackle strategic

initiatives. These teams should include members from various departments, providing diverse perspectives on problem-solving and strategy execution. By integrating varied viewpoints and expertise, you enhance the team's ability to comprehensively align their efforts with the overall strategy and adapt effectively to changes.

Regularly assess and adjust collaboration efforts based on feedback and outcomes. Solicit input from team members about what is working well and what could be improved in terms of collaboration and alignment. This ongoing evaluation helps refine the collaborative processes and ensures that strategic alignment is maintained.

### **KEYS TO SUCCESS**

**Structured Collaboration Opportunities:** Facilitate regular meetings and joint planning sessions involving multiple teams to ensure alignment on strategic goals and initiatives.

**Cross-Functional Teams:** Form teams with members from various departments to address key strategic initiatives, integrating diverse perspectives and expertise.

**Continuous Feedback and Adjustment:** Regularly gather feedback on collaboration efforts and refine processes as needed to enhance alignment and effectiveness.

## **03. Adapt Your Strategy to Evolving Conditions**

It's important to recognize that what worked yesterday might not work today, so your strategy must be flexible and evolve as new insights emerge. High-performing teams understand that staying ahead in a constantly changing environment requires an ongoing commitment to learning and adapting.

Maintaining this adaptability requires a regular disciplined approach to reassessing strategy. Encourage your team to stay informed about industry trends, customer feedback, and internal performance data. Be prepared to adjust —whether it's reprioritizing projects, refining processes, or exploring new opportunities.

Implementing strategic alignment checkpoints can help your team assess whether their current efforts align with both short-term goals and the broad vision. These checkpoints provide opportunities to

pivot when necessary, ensuring that your team remains nimble and capable of driving meaningful business outcomes.

### KEYS TO SUCCESS

**Strategic Alignment Checkpoints:** Regularly assess your strategy to ensure it aligns with both current market conditions and long-term goals. Use these checkpoints to make adjustments as needed.

**Responsive Decision-Making:** Empower your team to make decisions that adapt to new insights while staying aligned with the overall vision, ensuring flexibility without losing focus.

**Continuous Learning:** Encourage your team to stay informed about industry trends and internal performance, fostering a mindset of adaptability that keeps your strategy relevant and effective.

## REFLECTIVE PROMPTS FOR IMPROVING STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

If you're looking for ways to integrate these techniques or want to make sure you're on track, these reflective prompts can be a great help. They're designed to keep your vision and strategy front and center, guiding your team's actions with their overall goals. Each prompt comes with a real-world example, illustrating the impact of strategic alignment. You can use these questions as conversation starters in team meetings, planning sessions, or one-on-ones to keep everyone aligned and working towards a shared objective.

## »» Is Your Vision Driving Decisions?

In a fast-growing startup, the leadership team had a clear vision: making data processes easier for non-technical users. However, as the company expanded, their focus began shifting towards quick revenue opportunities that compromised that original vision. For instance, a significant partnership resulted in a highly customized product that, although profitable, complicated their offerings. Was chasing short-term gains eroding the very vision that had fueled their early success?

### ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

- » *Are our daily activities aligned with the vision, or are we drifting off course?*
- » *How often do we reference our vision when making key decisions?*
- » *Do all team members understand how their work contributes to the vision?*

### QUICK WINS

**Vision Check:** In your next team meeting review a recent decision and discuss how it aligns (or doesn't) with the vision. Empower your team by ensuring everyone understands the rationale behind decisions and how they connect to the vision.

**Immediate Realignment:** Identify one ongoing activity that has drifted from the vision's core objectives and realign it. Encourage collaboration by involving cross-functional team members.

**Vision Reminder:** Reiterate the vision at the start of every meeting this week. A quick reminder can help keep the team focused on outcomes that align with broader goals.

## »» Is Your Strategy Adaptable?

A mid-sized software company built its reputation by quickly responding to customer needs. But as they grew, they began sticking too closely to a fixed roadmap, believing their well-laid plans would keep them ahead. When a competitor released a game-changing feature, the team found themselves unable to shift gears quickly enough and missed out on a major opportunity. It became clear that their once-agile approach had become rigid, and it cost them. This wake-up call pushed the company to rethink how they approached strategy. It required flexibility and openness to change so they could move fast when the market demanded it.

### ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

- » *How quickly can we pivot our strategy in response to new information?*
- » *Are we regularly reviewing and updating our strategy based on market feedback?*
- » *Do we have mechanisms in place to learn from failures and successes?*

### QUICK WINS

**Immediate Market Review:** Hold a 30-minute session this week to identify any market changes that might require a strategy pivot. Empower your team to actively participate in these discussions, ensuring they feel ownership over the strategic direction.

**Empower Rapid Decision-Making:** Implement a system for fast-tracking minor strategic adjustments. Empower teams to make quick decisions on small changes without extensive approvals, encouraging a more nimble mindset and allowing for faster response to shifting circumstances.

**Adaptation Culture Boost:** Share a recent success story of a team adapting to new information. Use this to encourage a mindset that values flexibility over rigid planning, keeping the focus on outcomes rather than processes.



## »» Are We Communicating Effectively?

At a large enterprise, a promising initiative to expand into emerging markets quickly stalled due to widespread miscommunication. Different teams interpreted the strategy in conflicting ways, leading to duplicated efforts, missed deadlines, and wasted resources. Confusion grew as teams worked toward competing objectives. Leadership recognized the issue and launched a series of workshops and briefings, providing teams with an opportunity to ask questions, align their efforts, and clarify the strategy. These discussions not only brought the teams back into alignment but also improved cross-team communication, preventing future misunderstandings and allowing the initiative to regain momentum.

### ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

- » *Do all team members feel informed about the vision and strategy?*
- » *Are there gaps in understanding that could lead to misalignment?*
- » *How often do we engage in open communication about our strategic direction?*

### QUICK WINS

**Instant Strategy Survey:** This week, send out a short survey to assess the team's understanding of the current strategy. Use the results to address any gaps immediately, ensuring that every team member feels empowered to contribute.

**Quick Alignment Update:** Schedule a 15-minute meeting to provide a strategic update, clarifying any recent changes. Without taking up too much time, reinforce alignment and collaboration across different roles.

**Regular Update Briefings:** Establish a regular cadence for strategic updates from leadership. This could be a monthly newsletter, a dedicated segment in team meetings, or periodic emails highlighting key strategic points. Consistent and scheduled reinforcement keeps the vision and strategy top-of-mind without overwhelming the team.



## FINAL THOUGHTS

A clear vision and strong strategy serve as your team's compass and guardrails. They help cut through the noise, aligns your team, and reduces common issues, wasted effort, and decision paralysis. If you understand and promote these elements your team will work cohesively and effectively.

As your team evolves and market conditions shift, your vision and strategy should evolve too. Regularly revisiting and refining these elements—perhaps through quarterly reviews or during retrospectives—ensures they remain relevant and actionable. This ongoing alignment helps your team navigate changes with clarity, seize new opportunities confidently, and maintain momentum through goals.

When team members see how their daily work connects to the larger vision, it fuels motivation and commitment. They're not just checking off tasks—they're actively contributing to a bigger picture that benefits both the customer and the business. This shared understanding enhances collaboration and creates a sense of shared purpose and excitement.

By embedding alignment with a clear vision and strong strategy into your team's culture, you create an environment where everyone contributes to innovation and impactful decisions. When all team members are clear on the direction and goals, products consistently meet—and even exceed—market expectations. Every team member plays a crucial role in driving success; they can turn challenges into opportunities and excel together.

# 04

## **CUSTOMER FOCUS** SEED 2

### **IT'S NOT ABOUT YOU, IT'S ABOUT THEM**

It's easy to say the customer is at the core of your work, but when product decisions are driven by internal opinions, deadlines, or trends instead of real customer insights, that commitment quickly unravels. True customer focus means embedding a deep, empathetic understanding of your customers into every aspect of product development. When the customer truly guides your decisions, you're not just meeting their needs; you're anticipating them and creating products that resonate on a deeper level.

To achieve this, your team needs to cultivate a mindset rooted in curiosity and empathy. This means going beyond surface-level feedback and fully immersing yourself in the world of your customers—continually engaging with them, asking the right questions, and genuinely listening to what they're telling you. It requires the entire team to empathize with pain points, frustrations, and desires, and use those insights to drive every decision you make.

This approach involves regular user interviews, usability tests, and diving into customer support interactions to uncover unmet needs. Your team must

challenge their own assumptions, seeking out insights even when they're unexpected or uncomfortable. Without this approach, you risk making decisions based on preconceived notions without validating them with real customers.

To build products that exceed expectations, customer focus must be more than just a claim—it needs to be part of your team's culture. This chapter will challenge you to rethink your approach to customer engagement, making it a continuous, integral part of your process.

## THE GROWTH STAGES OF CUSTOMER FOCUS

These stages highlight how customer focus can develop, shaped by factors like team experience, market dynamics, and company culture. You might already have an integrated approach to customer engagement, or you might see opportunities to advance your practices, culture, and mindset. Understanding these stages will help you identify areas for growth and ensure that customer focus remains at the heart of everything you do.

### Planting Stage

At the Planting stage, the customer is often an afterthought. Your team might rely on assumptions or limited interactions, leading to decisions that aren't grounded in what customers actually need. Feedback is sporadic, and your understanding of customer desires is superficial. The result is a product that misses the mark, with features that don't resonate or solve real problems.

### Sprouting Stage

As the team matures, so does its interaction with customers. There's a growing recognition that understanding customer needs is crucial, but efforts remain inconsistent. Feedback might be gathered, but it's not fully integrated into decision-making. Your team is starting to see the value in direct engagement but struggles with turning insights into actionable strategies. This leads to uneven progress.

### Blooming Stage

Customer focus is now driving product development. The team actively seeks out feedback and uses it to inform decisions. There's a noticeable shift toward building features that directly address customer needs. While engagement is strong, the challenge is fully aligning the entire team around these insights, which can result in occasional missteps.

### **Pollinating Stage**

A customer-centric mindset is woven into the fabric of your team's culture. Decisions are made with customer needs in mind, and feedback loops are robust and continuous. The team proactively anticipates customer needs by actively monitoring industry trends, analyzing customer behavior and feedback, and leveraging data insights to predict future requirements. Cross-functional collaboration enhances your ability to deliver products that truly meet customer demands.

### **Harvesting Stage**

At this stage, focus on customers is a defining feature of your team's identity. Continuous engagement with customers drives every aspect of product development. Insights are quickly turned into action, and your team is highly responsive to changes in customer behavior and market conditions. Your product becomes a market leader, consistently delivering exceptional value to customers.

As you think about these stages of growth, take a moment to assess where your team stands in the journey toward truly understanding and focusing on your customers. Look at your daily routines, how you make decisions, and your overall approach. Are you really putting customer feedback at the heart of your product development? Or are there areas where you could improve?

Consider how these changes could make a difference in your product development and help you move closer to meeting your customers' needs. Your ongoing commitment to understanding your customers will help you grow and succeed.

## **THE POWER OF GENUINE CUSTOMER FOCUS**

When your team is customer-focused, the results can be extraordinary; users become loyal advocates who feel heard and valued. Consider Airbnb: in its early days, the company recognized key pain points for both hosts and guests, such as inconsistent booking experiences and poor accommodations. To address these concerns, Airbnb introduced features like secure payment systems and verified reviews, which provided transparency and reassured guests about the quality of their stays, and protected both parties from potential fraud. They also implemented a robust support system, offering tailored assistance to ensure any issues were swiftly resolved. These customer-centric solutions didn't just solve immediate problems—they redefined the entire process, making it more reliable and trustworthy. By focusing on these

critical user needs, Airbnb transformed their platform into one that users could rely on, turning them into enthusiastic advocates and driving the company's rapid growth.

Customer focus not only drives innovation but also significantly reduces risk. When your decisions are grounded in customer insights, you minimize the chance of developing products that fail to resonate. This alignment ensures that every feature and iteration addresses real user problems, increasing the likelihood of success. Products created with this level of customer focus meet and exceed expectations, driving deep loyalty and long-term success..

A key to achieving this is establishing continuous feedback loops with your customers. It's not enough to gather insights at the beginning of the product development process; you need to consistently engage with users throughout the lifecycle of your product. By doing so, your team can refine and improve based on evolving needs, ensuring the product remains relevant and valuable over time. You're not just delivering a product—you're offering a solution that makes a difference.

## **THE COST OF IGNORING CUSTOMER NEEDS**

On the flip side, neglecting customer needs can lead to significant setbacks, no matter how well-intentioned your efforts might be. Take the case of Google Wave. Launched in 2009 with the goal of revolutionizing communication and collaboration, it was packed with advanced features like real-time editing and rich media sharing. However, these features didn't address any specific pain points that users had expressed. Instead, the complexity of the product left customers confused and overwhelmed, as they struggled to understand how to use it effectively. Google's focus on technical innovation came at the expense of usability and meeting actual user needs. As a result, adoption rates were low, and within two years, Google Wave was discontinued—a stark reminder of what can happen when a product loses sight of its customers.

Many software features end up going unused, highlighting the risks of developing products based on assumptions rather than genuine customer insights. This disconnect can lead to wasted resources, missed opportunities, and financial losses, all while producing a product that struggles to gain traction. More critically, it can erode the trust customers have in your brand and the utility of your product, making it more challenging to regain their confidence and loyalty.

To avoid these pitfalls, it's crucial to foster a culture of customer empathy within your team. By truly understanding your users' experiences, frustrations,

and desires, you can uncover opportunities for innovation that others might miss. This empathy drives not just the creation of better products but also the cultivation of long-term relationships, turning satisfied customers into repeat buyers and advocates for your brand.

## TECHNIQUES FOR CULTIVATING STRONG CUSTOMER FOCUS

It is essential to keep customer perspectives front and center. The following techniques are designed to help you stay focused on what matters to them, even as internal pressures and busy schedules arise. By implementing these practices, you'll maintain relevance and strengthen your competitive edge.

### 01. Consistent Customer Engagement

Consistent customer engagement ensures your team remains closely connected with the people who use your product. Instead of relying on occasional surveys or quarterly interviews, aim for ongoing, meaningful interactions. This means regularly reaching out to understand their stories, pain points, and needs, and integrating these insights into your product development process.

This might involve regular user interviews where team members hear directly from customers about their challenges. It could also include observing customers using your product in their own environments, uncovering needs they may not even realize they have. This continuous dialogue makes customer feedback a driving force in shaping your product development. Your team will gain customer insights by engaging with your customers' perspectives, leading to solutions that prioritize customer needs—beyond mere assumptions.

#### KEYS TO SUCCESS

**Regular User Engagement:** Schedule ongoing conversations with a diverse range of users to gather deep qualitative insights. Don't just listen—act on what you learn.

**Diverse Perspectives:** Engage with different customer segments to avoid a narrow focus. This diversity in feedback helps in understanding the broader market needs and trends.

**Customer Advisory Boards:** Form strategic groups of key customers who can provide ongoing feedback and guidance. This helps ensure your product evolves in line with their needs.



## 02. Let Data Drive Insights

In a customer-focused culture, data becomes a powerful tool for uncovering valuable insights. Instead of viewing it as numbers, treat data as a window into your customers' experiences. By analyzing how users interact with your product, you can identify key patterns and trends that highlight their preferences and pain points. For instance, feature usage data can reveal which parts of your product are popular or overlooked, while customer feedback provides rich context and deeper understanding that pure metrics might miss. Together, these insights help you set success metrics that genuinely reflect your customers' needs.

Interpreting data goes beyond just recognizing trends; it involves understanding the story behind the numbers. For example, a spike in feature usage might signal interest, but without context, you may overlook why customers are using it and how it fits into their overall experience. Combining quantitative data with qualitative feedback and observations offers a fuller picture, enabling you to make decisions that not only address what users are doing but also why they're doing it. This balanced approach helps you create products that drive meaningful improvements and enhance overall satisfaction.

Continuous learning plays a crucial role here. As you gather and analyze data, it's important to regularly revisit and refine your understanding of customer needs. This ongoing process ensures that your product evolves in response to real insights and changing user expectations, helping you make meaningful improvements and drive overall satisfaction.

### KEYS TO SUCCESS

**Clear Metrics:** Establish success metrics that reflect what matters most to your customers, and track these diligently to measure impact.

**Balance Qualitative and Quantitative Insights:** Combine quantitative data with qualitative feedback to gain a comprehensive understanding of customer experiences and needs, ensuring well-rounded and informed decision-making.

**Continuous Learning:** Regularly analyze data from different customer segments to identify trends and tailor your approach to meet diverse needs.

**03. Cross-Functional Team Collaboration** Customer focus works best when it's a shared responsibility across the entire organization. When cross-functional teams are all aligned around the same customer-centric goals, the impact can be powerful. If this isn't something you're already doing, imagine the difference it makes when designers and engineers sit down together to discuss insights from the latest customer interviews, or when product managers and support staff collaborate to spot patterns in user feedback.

This kind of collaboration impels customer insights into every part of product development. A cross-functional team might come together to analyze customer feedback and decide to prioritize features that will have the biggest impact on user satisfaction. Cross functional teams work when they work toward the same goals and they're united in making those goals a reality. This approach aligns efforts and makes the product development process more cohesive and effective.

 **KEYS TO SUCCESS**

**Collaborative Planning:** Involve representatives from product, design, engineering, and customer support in strategic planning to ensure all perspectives are considered.

**Knowledge Sharing:** Facilitate regular cross-functional meetings to share customer insights and discuss their implications for product development.

**Autonomy and Accountability:** Empower teams to make decisions based on customer needs while holding them accountable for the outcomes.

## REFLECTIVE PROMPTS TO ENHANCE CUSTOMER FOCUS

For teams using these techniques or those seeking a clearer path forward, the following prompts offer a chance to explore customer focus in great depth. Each prompt is crafted to ignite meaningful discussions within your team, helping you pinpoint areas for improvement. Alongside the prompts, you'll find actionable steps to guide you in making concrete changes. Whether it's refining a process, improving communication, or adjusting your strategy, these resources are designed to ensure your team remains closely aligned with your customers' needs and expectations.



## »» Are We Solving the Right Problems?

At a major tech company, the product team eagerly developed new features they believed would drive user engagement. Despite these efforts, user adoption remained disappointingly low. After conducting in-depth interviews, they discovered they had been solving problems users didn't prioritize, while overlooking key pain points that truly impacted the customer experience. This oversight not only led to wasted development resources but also delayed progress on more critical features. The team had to realign their efforts, shifting focus to the most pressing customer needs, which eventually led to a significant improvement in user satisfaction and product success.

### ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

- » *What specific customer problems does our product address?*
- » *How do we validate that these are the most pressing issues for our users?*
- » *Are there emerging needs we're not currently addressing?*

### QUICK WINS

**Roadmap Reassessment:** Re-evaluate your product roadmap with fresh insights from customer interviews. Prioritize features that address the most critical and validated customer pain points, removing or delaying those that don't directly contribute to solving high-priority issues.

**Impact-Based Prioritization:** Review ongoing initiatives and rank them based on their potential to solve your users' most pressing problems. Shift resources toward the tasks that provide the most immediate and meaningful value to your customers.

**Continuous Discovery Loop:** Implement regular user research sessions, such as customer advisory groups or frequent feedback touchpoints, to keep your product team aligned with evolving customer needs and ensure future efforts stay focused on the right problems.

## »» How Effectively Do We Listen to Our Customers?

At a mid-sized SaaS company, rising customer churn became a growing concern, despite the team's belief that they had an effective feedback process in place. After conducting an internal audit, they uncovered the core issue: while they gathered customer feedback regularly, they rarely followed through with meaningful action, and customers weren't seeing any visible improvements based on their input. This lack of responsiveness led to frustration and eroded trust. After overhauling their approach to not only gather feedback but also act on it quickly and communicate those changes transparently, the company saw a significant turnaround in customer retention and renewed loyalty.

### ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

- » *What channels do we use to gather customer feedback?*
- » *How timely and responsive are we to the feedback we receive?*
- » *Do we close the loop by informing customers how their input influenced our product?*

### QUICK WINS

**Create a Feedback-to-Action Loop:** Develop a system to not only collect customer feedback but also track and communicate the changes made in response to it. Let customers know when their input has directly influenced product improvements.

**Prioritize Actionable Feedback:** Identify and act on the most common and urgent feedback first. Small, quick wins can show customers that their voices are heard and lead to immediate improvements in customer satisfaction.

**Regular Customer Communication:** Set up recurring updates—whether through newsletters, product announcements, or in-app notifications—to keep customers informed about how their feedback is shaping the product. This fosters transparency and reinforces their trust in your company.

## »» Is Customer Focus Driving Our Culture and Decisions?

In a fast-growing startup, customer focus was declared a core value, but it often took a backseat to aggressive timelines and launching new features. As customer satisfaction dropped and users left for competitors, leadership realized this misalignment was eroding trust and stalling innovation. To turn things around, they shifted to a customer-driven approach, prioritizing customer insights in product decisions. Timelines were adjusted to balance speed with in-depth user research, and teams integrated customer feedback into their workflow. This change led to more relevant product improvements, better retention, and a stronger connection with users.

### ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

- » *Do team members at all levels understand and value customer focus?*
- » *How often do customer insights influence key decisions and strategies?*
- » *Are we celebrating and rewarding customer-centric behaviors and successes?*

### QUICK WINS

**Customer-Centric Metrics:** Develop and track metrics that reflect customer satisfaction and impact, and prioritize in your product strategy.

**Balanced Timelines:** Adjust project timelines to include time for thorough customer research and feedback integration, balancing speed with a deep understanding of user needs.

**Feature Evaluation:** Implement a process to assess new features based on how well they address customer needs, not just on novelty or alignment with timelines.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

When you prioritize your customers' needs, you're going beyond delivering features—you're solving the right problems. The benefits of this approach are clear: stronger customer relationships, increased loyalty, and a product that stands out in a competitive market. This is how you deliver value.

Challenges can arise, though, when assumptions or internal opinions start to overshadow customer insights. Even when the highest-paid person in the room believes they know best, or if it's been a while since you've spoken directly with customers, there's always an opportunity to realign. Rather than seeing these moments as setbacks, view them as chances to refocus.

To truly innovate and stay ahead, get out there and talk with your customers. Let their voices inspire your next move. Whether it's reconnecting with them through direct conversations or analyzing fresh data, the key is to stay attuned to their evolving needs. When teams are empowered to act on real insights, they can make bold decisions that not only meet customer expectations but also push boundaries, leading to breakthrough products and experiences that set your brand apart. Every interaction with your customers is an opportunity to learn, adapt, and deliver something extraordinary.

# 05

## **TEAM EMPOWERMENT** SEED 3

### **MICROMANAGEMENT: THE FAST TRACK TO FAILURE**

An empowered team is entrusted with meaningful problems to solve and the authority to make impactful decisions. A common misconception is that delegation equals empowerment, but without the authority to make decisions, teams end up following order. In contrast, empowered teams are authorized to use their skills and abilities to deliver tangible results. The shift from following instructions to taking ownership drives innovation and makes teams more adaptable.

For empowerment to flourish, there needs to be an environment of trust and collaboration between leaders and team members. Leaders set the vision and provide context, while the team has the freedom to determine how best to achieve those goals. Striking this balance between guidance and autonomy gives teams the space to develop creative solutions, take smart risks, and deliver real results. It creates a setting where everyone feels valued, engaged, and invested in the success of the product. Teams that have the freedom to contribute meaningfully, build a deeper sense of ownership and are motivated to innovate across the board.

Empowerment is not a one-time initiative; it's an ongoing journey that adapts as your team and organization evolve. Understanding its different stages and the impact it can have on your team and product is key to reaching your team's full potential. If you make empowerment part of your everyday approach, you set the stage for innovation, flexibility, and long-term success.

## THE GROWTH STAGES OF TEAM EMPOWERMENT

Team empowerment is frequently discussed but rarely fully realized. It's one thing to talk about giving teams autonomy and ownership, but putting it into action requires structure, commitment, and the right level of support. Without these, what's called "empowerment" can easily fall short of its potential.

The stages outlined here are meant to help you recognize the difference between superficial gestures and genuine autonomy. As teams advance through these stages, they progressively take on greater ownership, transitioning from following directives to actively driving meaningful outcomes.

### Planting Stage

At the outset, empowerment is more theoretical than practical. Teams might be assigned tasks and given limited decision-making power, but they lack the context and trust to truly own their work. Leadership may dictate solutions rather than problems to be solved, leaving teams feeling like they're executing orders. Autonomy is minimal, and the focus is often on completing tasks rather than achieving meaningful outcomes.

### Sprouting Stage

As the team starts to mature, there's a shift toward greater autonomy, but it's often within a limited scope. Teams might be trusted to choose how to execute their tasks, but they're still focused on outputs rather than outcomes. Leadership begins to provide clearer objectives and more context, but the team may still struggle to fully own their decisions. The seeds of empowerment are planted, but the team is still learning to trust its own judgment.

### Blooming Stage

Empowerment starts to take root as teams are given meaningful problems to solve, rather than just tasks to complete. They're provided with the necessary context, including the product vision, and are encouraged to take ownership of the outcomes. Leadership offers support and guidance, fostering a culture where teams are

motivated to innovate and continuously improve. The focus shifts from delivering outputs to achieving impactful results.

### **Pollinating Stage**

At this stage, empowerment is deeply embedded in the team's culture. Teams are trusted with full ownership of their work, including decision-making and accountability for results. They not only solve complex problems but also drive innovation that aligns with broader business objectives. Leadership provides a clear vision and strategic direction, while the team autonomously navigates the path to success. Cross-functional collaboration is strong, enhancing the team's ability to deliver high-impact solutions.

### **Harvesting Stage**

In the final stage, empowerment is not just a practice but a defining characteristic of the team's identity. Teams operate with high autonomy, consistently delivering exceptional results and driving continuous innovation. Every member is fully engaged and takes ownership not only of their work but of the team's overall success. Leadership's role evolves into one of support and mentorship, as the team confidently drives the business forward. Empowerment becomes a cornerstone of the organization's culture, contributing to sustained competitive advantage.

As your team moves through these stages, they'll build the confidence and independence to excel and emerge as key contributors within your organization. It's worth taking a moment to consider: Is your team genuinely empowered, or are outdated practices and limited autonomy holding them back? Reflect on your current situation and think about where you want to be.

## **THE POWER OF TEAM EMPOWERMENT**

Empowered teams approach challenges with confidence, surpass expectations, and create meaningful impact. Their ability to make decisions swiftly is strengthened by the clear guardrails provided by a well-defined vision and strategy, as discussed in Chapter 3 on Strategic Alignment. This clarity gives teams the freedom to act without getting bogged down by unnecessary approvals. Their agility keeps them responsive and adaptable, which is crucial in a fast-moving market.

Team members who feel empowered also develop a deep sense of ownership and accountability. When they know their work is valued and directly



influences the business and its customers, they become more invested in its success. Rather than blindly following orders, they take responsibility for delivering tangible outcomes—whether it's improving customer satisfaction or driving revenue. This results in higher-quality work, greater commitment to seeing projects through to completion, and fewer delays, fostering continuous improvement.

In this environment, cross-functional collaboration flows naturally, leading to more creative and well-rounded solutions. When teams work together across departments, they can tap into diverse perspectives and expertise, fueling both innovation and more effective problem-solving.

By giving teams the freedom to shape their work, you also help them grow professionally. Autonomy encourages team members to develop new skills, seize opportunities, and advance within the organization. This not only keeps top talent engaged but also strengthens the team's ability to tackle future challenges with confidence.

A compelling example is Netflix's "freedom and responsibility" principle. Netflix empowers its employees to make decisions aligned with the company's goals without the need for over-management. Teams are trusted to choose which features to develop and how to execute projects. This trust enables them to act swiftly, adapt to changes, and consistently push boundaries. By fostering an environment where employees are trusted to make meaningful decisions, Netflix has maintained its leadership in the entertainment industry, continuously delivering top-tier content and staying ahead of market trends in part due to the autonomy it gives its teams.

## **THE COST OF A LACK OF EMPOWERMENT**

When teams are assigned tasks without real decision-making power, it leaves them feeling disengaged and directionless. Micromanaging, over-managing, or limiting autonomy not only slows progress but also stifles creativity and innovation. This approach creates an environment where teams disengage and the organization suffers the effects.

Without genuine empowerment, a team's potential remains untapped. Instead of focusing on solving meaningful problems, they get caught up in bureaucratic processes, waiting for approval or clarification. This inefficiency wastes both time and resources, while also draining the energy and enthusiasm of the team. Valuable opportunities for improvement or innovation are often overlooked because team members don't feel they have the support or authority to act. The business suffers as critical issues are passed up the chain of command



rather than resolved directly.

A lack of empowerment also poses a significant risk to employee retention. Talented professionals who want to make meaningful contributions, when they aren't trusted to do so, often seek other opportunities. High turnover not only leads to the loss of key skills but also disrupts team dynamics, creating a ripple effect of lower morale and reduced performance among those who remain. Disengagement can leave teams feeling stagnant and unproductive, undermining long-term success.

Another serious consequence is the decline in customer satisfaction. When teams aren't empowered to act swiftly or address customer concerns, delays and uninspired solutions result. Over time, this erodes trust and loyalty, as customers turn to competitors who respond more effectively to their needs. As discussed in Chapter 4 on Customer Focus, maintaining a customer-centric approach is crucial to long-term success, and without empowerment, teams are hampered and will fail to prioritize and address customer feedback dynamically.

The costs of poor empowerment are significant: missed opportunities, wasted potential, and a stagnant environment. In contrast, effective empowerment fosters a culture where teams are motivated to innovate and are well-equipped to deliver results.

## **TECHNIQUES FOR CULTIVATING STRONG TEAM EMPOWERMENT**

These techniques are designed for both team members and leaders, providing practical steps to strengthen team empowerment across your organization. By putting these strategies into action, you'll establish deep roots for lasting success and inspire meaningful change throughout your teams.

- 01. Strengthen Trust and Autonomy** Trust is essential for fostering empowerment. When teams know they are trusted to make decisions and have freedom in how they approach their tasks, they become committed to delivering impactful results. Leaders build this trust by setting clear goals, offering the right context, and then stepping back to let teams determine the best course of action. In return, team members take responsibility for their work, proving their reliability and reinforcing the cycle of trust. This mutual confidence drives greater collaboration, creativity, and performance.

To be effective, empowerment involves clearly communicating the “why” behind decisions and allowing teams to figure out the “how.” It’s essential to balance autonomy with support—team members should have the freedom to take initiative and innovate, while leaders provide guidance and context. This creates a culture where feedback and clarification are actively sought and used for continuous improvement.

Encouraging calculated risks is also a crucial aspect of empowerment. Cultivating a culture that views failures as learning opportunities, rather than setbacks, fosters innovation and experimentation. When teams know they have leadership’s trust, they are more likely to push the boundaries of what’s possible and drive meaningful progress.

### **KEYS TO SUCCESS**

**Delegate Strategic Decisions:** Empower your team by assigning problems that align with strategic goals, not just routine tasks. Trust everyone to contribute to devising and implementing solutions, fostering a sense of ownership and engagement.

**Risk as a Learning Tool:** Encourage taking calculated risks and emphasize that failure is a valuable part of the learning process.

**Contextual Decision Support:** Ensure ongoing context for decision-making by clearly communicating how actions align with the company’s broader vision.

## **02. Encourage Cross-Functional Collaboration**

When collaboration extends across functions, it combines the unique strengths and perspectives of various disciplines. Cross-functional collaboration unites product management, design, engineering, marketing, and other critical areas to approach challenges from different angles, resulting in creative and effective solutions. Empowered teams thrive in this environment. This cross-functional approach breaks down silos, enhances communication, and promotes dynamic and efficient delivery of solutions to complex problems.

To promote collaboration, establish regular opportunities for team members to connect—whether through cross-functional workshops, integrated project teams, or shared planning sessions. Open dialogue and shared ownership of outcomes encourage

every function to contribute meaningfully. This level of engagement fosters trust and improves communication, helping teams work together more cohesively and achieve greater success. Integrating cross-functional collaboration into daily practices builds a dynamic, innovative, and empowered team environment.

### KEYS TO SUCCESS

**Unified Team Goals:** Make sure all cross-functional teams are working toward common goals that tie directly into the bigger picture for the business.

**Regular Cross-Function Check-Ins:** Schedule regular meetings where team members from different areas can talk through challenges and share their insights.

**Celebrate Different Strengths:** Acknowledge and appreciate the unique skills and perspectives each function brings to the team, and make sure everyone feels valued for their contributions.

## **03. Enable Continuous Learning and Adaptation**

Empowered teams thrive when learning is part of their daily routine, allowing them to refine their skills and adapt to evolving needs. High-performing teams actively seek feedback from stakeholders and use that input to adjust their strategies and stay aligned with changing priorities.

Regular retrospectives play a crucial role in this process. These sessions give teams the space to reflect on what's working, where they've faced challenges, and how they can improve going forward. A culture that values knowledge sharing and encourages experimentation, boosts creativity and maintains growth.

Developing a growth mindset is essential. When teams approach every challenge as an opportunity to learn, they stay agile and ready to enhance their skills and deliver stronger results. Leaders play a critical role here as well, leading by example through continuous learning and advocating for ongoing professional development. When learning and adaptation are embedded into everyday operations, teams are better equipped to face new challenges and consistently achieve high-impact results.

## KEYS TO SUCCESS

**Clear Learning Pathways:** Provide team members with well-defined development paths, offering resources and guidance that align with their individual growth needs.

**Immediate Feedback Loops:** Set up systems that enable teams to receive and act on feedback in real-time, allowing for quick adjustments and continuous improvement.

**Promote Reflective Practices:** Cultivate an environment where learning from successes and setbacks is a shared value, helping the team grow and improve with every experience.

## REFLECTIVE PROMPTS TO STRENGTHEN TEAM EMPOWERMENT

These reflective prompts encourage you to dive deeper into empowerment and identify areas where your team can grow. Given that many teams and organizations misunderstand what empowerment entails, these questions are designed to uncover opportunities for improvement. Whether you explore them on your own, with your teammates, or alongside your leaders, they'll guide you in bringing empowerment into your team's everyday culture.

## »» Is Your Team Truly Empowered to Make Decisions?

In a growth-stage company, the leadership team believed they were empowering their teams with an outcomes-based roadmap. Unfortunately, teams quickly discovered that each idea, solution, and small change required multiple levels of approval, leading to delays and dampening the creative energy that had fueled their early success. Recognizing the need for a shift, the teams began to take a more proactive role. They sought clarity on the company's vision and goals, asking for more context rather than approval. With this newfound understanding, they started making independent decisions, pushing boundaries, and finding new ways to drive their projects forward. This shift not only reduced micromanagement but also sparked a wave of creativity and speed, enabling teams to innovate and execute with far greater agility.

### ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

- » *How often do team members make decisions independently, without needing approval from leadership?*
- » *Are team members confident in their ability to take ownership of their work and outcomes?*
- » *Do team decisions align with the company's vision and strategic goals?*

### QUICK WINS

**Identify Decision-Making Bottlenecks:** Review recent projects to pinpoint where approvals have caused delays, and determine areas where teams can be given more decision-making authority.

**Empower Teams with Guardrails:** Provide clear vision and strategic boundaries so teams can confidently make decisions within those limits, without needing leadership approval at every step.

**Align Decisions with Strategy:** Regularly share the company's strategic goals to help teams make decisions that are in line with broader business objectives.

## »» Is Your Leadership Style Fostering or Hindering Empowerment?

In a mid-sized tech company, leaders found themselves deeply involved in the day-to-day operations, overseeing every detail and inadvertently limiting their teams' initiative and problem-solving capabilities. This hands-on approach led to a culture where team members felt restricted and hesitant to take ownership of their work. Recognizing the negative impact of this micromanagement, the leadership team made a conscious shift. Instead of issuing directives, they focused on setting a clear vision and providing the necessary context, allowing teams to make decisions independently. This change not only eased control but also sparked a surge of innovation and accountability, as teams were now trusted to own their projects and see them through to success.

### ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

- » *Do leaders in your organization provide clear vision and direction, or are they more involved in managing the details?*
- » *How often do leaders support team decisions, even when they differ from their own preferences?*
- » *Are leaders actively coaching and mentoring the team to build confidence and skills?*

### QUICK WINS

**Identify Micromanagement Habits:** Take note of situations where leaders may be too involved in day-to-day tasks. Address these habits by encouraging leaders to delegate more effectively.

**Enhance Coaching Skills:** Offer leadership training focused on coaching and mentoring, helping leaders shift from managing every detail to supporting team autonomy.

**Recognize Independent Successes:** Create opportunities to celebrate and highlight team decisions that lead to successful outcomes, reinforcing trust and empowerment across the organization.

## » Are You Continuously Building Trust Within Your Team?

In a large international corporation, teams experienced varying levels of trust—some departments thrived on collaboration, while others were weighed down by miscommunication and mistrust. Leadership realized these trust issues were hurting productivity and morale. To address this, they initiated open dialogues across teams, allowing employees to express concerns directly. These conversations helped pinpoint areas where transparency was lacking and where leaders needed to support their teams. Through regular check-ins, clear communication, and demonstrating follow-through, the organization began rebuilding trust, which ultimately improved collaboration and performance across departments.

### ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

- » *Do team members feel trusted by their leaders and peers in both day-to-day tasks and larger projects?*
- » *How is trust demonstrated in everyday interactions, such as giving feedback, sharing ideas, and decision-making?*
- » *What are the potential barriers preventing trust from growing within the team?*

### QUICK WINS

**Host Open Discussions:** Hold open discussions where team members can share feedback on trust in a safe environment, encouraging honest communication.

**Model Trust-Building Behaviors:** Demonstrate trust by giving teams autonomy to make decisions and being transparent in how leadership decisions are made.

**Consistent Check-Ins:** Reinforce trust by regularly checking in with team members, offering support, and ensuring that actions align with promises.



## FINAL THOUGHTS

Empowering teams is a journey that requires commitment from both leaders and team members. It's not always a smooth process—teams and organizations evolve, and changes in leadership or dynamics can create setbacks. But the key is persistence, even when the path forward isn't immediately clear. Many individuals have never experienced real autonomy in their work and may be hesitant to break away from long-standing habits or processes. That's where steady, intentional progress makes all the difference.

It takes trust, clear direction, and a willingness to embrace ownership to transform a team. Leaders provide the guardrails through a well-defined vision and strategy, but it's the team that steps up, takes responsibility, and drives the outcomes. When they are given the autonomy to make decisions, solve problems, and act with purpose, the results are more meaningful and aligned with the company's goals.

Over time, as this approach takes root, you'll see stronger collaboration, better results, and a more resilient organization. Empowerment may take time, but its impact lasts. Keep moving forward, embrace the challenges, and know that the shift toward team autonomy is well worth the effort.

# 06

## EXECUTION EXCELLENCE SEED 4

### IDEAS ARE EASY. EXECUTION IS EVERYTHING

Execution is where strategy turns into reality. Building upon the first three Seeds of Success—Strategic Alignment, Customer Focus, and Team Empowerment—Execution Excellence ensures that the groundwork laid in those areas leads to measurable outcomes that propel your business forward.

Streamlined processes help teams maintain momentum, but flexibility allows them to pivot when necessary—whether in response to customer feedback, market shifts, or new insights. Execution excellence strikes the right balance between efficiency and adaptability, enabling teams to execute at a high level while staying nimble enough to seize new opportunities as they arise.

With endless tasks and competing demands, it's easy for teams to lose focus. But when priorities are clear and aligned with strategic goals, your team can avoid getting distracted by busywork and focus on what really drives value for both customers and the business. (We'll dive deeper into the distinction between outcomes and outputs in Chapter 8.)

Execution excellence also hinges on continuous, iterative improvement. Instead of waiting for a perfect plan, high-performing teams act quickly, learn from real-world feedback, and make necessary adjustments along the way. This approach accelerates results and ensures that resources—whether time, talent, or budget—are allocated effectively. By refining processes based on what's working and what's not, your team can maximize its impact while minimizing wasted effort. Thoughtful resource management is key to staying focused and improving both short-term performance and long-term success.

While execution excellence demands clear priorities and efficient processes, the process should never overshadow real outcomes. As we will demonstrate, the goal isn't to follow a rigid playbook, but to deliver true value and measurable results, even amidst the complexities of modern product development.

## THE GROWTH STAGES OF EXECUTION EXCELLENCE

The journey toward execution excellence involves a gradual shift from scattered efforts to streamlined, outcome-driven work. As your team moves through each stage, they'll refine their processes, become more aligned with strategic goals, and build the confidence to deliver. The following stages will help you assess where your team stands and identify practical steps for guiding them to higher levels of performance. Each stage reflects not only an improvement in execution but also a commitment to collaborative problem-solving. By understanding these stages, you can help your team work smarter, more efficiently, and with greater impact, driving your business forward.

### Planting Stage

Execution is often scattered. Teams might operate without clear workflows, leading to inefficiencies and duplicated efforts. The focus is typically on getting tasks done, not necessarily achieving meaningful outcomes. Processes are minimal or inconsistent, and team members may lack a unified approach. Work becomes reactive, with teams constantly putting out fires rather than moving toward strategic goals.

### Sprouting Stage

Basic processes begin to form. There's a growing recognition that structured workflows are crucial for improving efficiency and coordination. However, these processes are still in their infancy and may not be consistently applied. The team starts to shift its focus from mere task completion to achieving more defined outcomes, but prioritization remains a challenge. Continuous improvement

is acknowledged, but the mechanisms to support it are still being established.

### **Blooming Stage**

Execution gains momentum as workflows become more refined and widely adopted. Teams increasingly focus on outcomes, with a conscious effort to streamline processes and eliminate inefficiencies. Collaboration across functions strengthens, leading to alignment and a cohesive approach to achieving goals. Continuous improvement practices and regular reviews drive adjustments that enhance performance and keep the team aligned with strategic objectives.

### **Pollinating Stage**

Execution is characterized by strong coordination and a laser focus on impactful outcomes. Workflows are well-defined and optimized to minimize waste and maximize productivity. Teams collaborate seamlessly, drawing on their collective expertise to drive innovation and consistently deliver high-quality results. Continuous improvement is embedded in the team's culture, with feedback loops and iterative processes ensuring that execution remains aligned with evolving market needs and business goals.

### **Harvesting Stage**

Execution Excellence becomes a competitive edge, with the team operating at a level that sets them apart. Precision and efficiency define their work, with optimized workflows and a deep commitment to continuous improvement driving sustained success. The ability to execute with excellence is no longer a goal—it's a key factor in consistently delivering impactful outcomes that drive the organization forward.

We've seen teams that move through these stages develop not only the skills but the mindset required to consistently turn strategy into meaningful results. Reflect on where your team is today—are they stuck in reactive patterns, or are their efforts contributing to measurable progress? By targeting the next stage in their development, you can streamline execution, increase their sense of ownership, and create a culture where achieving excellence isn't just an aspiration, but the standard.

## **THE POWER OF EXCELLENCE IN EXECUTION**

Workflows help teams stay organized, but to truly be efficient and effective,

workflows need to be adaptable to your team's strengths and capabilities. By embracing flexibility within their processes, teams can overcome obstacles easily and respond to changing customer needs or market conditions with agility.

Teams that excel in prioritization understand that success isn't about doing everything—it's about doing the right things. By keeping priorities aligned with both customer needs and business goals, teams avoid getting bogged down by busywork and instead focus their energy on efforts that generate real value. This ability to regularly reassess and adapt priorities in response to market shifts or customer feedback keeps teams on track, delivering high-quality products that keep the business ahead of the competition.

When efficiency is paired with adaptability, teams can do more with less. Execution excellence means striking a balance between maintaining momentum and staying flexible enough to pivot when necessary. Teams that excel in this area make the most of their resources—whether time, talent, or budget—by focusing on initiatives that drive the greatest impact. This approach leads to more timely product releases, improved customer satisfaction, and reduced waste, keeping the organization competitive while consistently delivering value.

Regularly evaluating and refining their processes, teams become more efficient over time, learning from both successes and setbacks. This commitment to iteration ensures execution remains effective in the short term while continuously evolving to meet future challenges. The result is a team equipped to deliver meaningful, sustained results over the long term.

## **THE COST OF POOR EXECUTION**

Poor execution creates a ripple effect across the entire organization. When teams follow processes without fully understanding their purpose, they may be busy completing tasks, but the work lacks real impact. This task-oriented approach keeps teams in a cycle of activity, often missing opportunities to deliver results that move the business forward.

A significant consequence of poor execution is the loss of adaptability. Teams constrained by rigid processes or unclear priorities find it difficult to react to changing customer needs or market shifts. Instead of adjusting when necessary, they remain tied to outdated methods, lagging behind more agile competitors who are quicker to seize new opportunities and navigate challenges.

This lack of flexibility also hinders innovation. When teams feel compelled to stick to predefined processes, their ability to take risks, experiment, or improve how they work diminishes. Over time, this stifles growth and fosters an environment where team members feel disconnected from the company's broader goals. The result is decreased engagement, increased frustration, and an inability to produce work that feels meaningful.

Perhaps most damaging is the erosion of trust—both from customers and within the team. Missed deadlines, uninspired results, and a lack of responsiveness chip away at customer confidence, while internal teams may start doubting their own ability to succeed. This cycle of disengagement and missed opportunities leaves teams feeling stuck, unable to deliver the innovation and value needed for long-term success.

## **TECHNIQUES FOR CULTIVATING EXECUTION EXCELLENCE**

No matter where your team is on the path to Execution Excellence, these techniques will help you refine and strengthen your approach. Whether you're starting to build more efficient processes or refining a well-established workflow, these strategies offer practical, actionable steps to elevate your team's effectiveness. By incorporating these methods into your everyday work, you'll equip your team to adapt, prioritize, and deliver meaningful results with consistency.

### **01. Simplify and Streamline Processes**

Execution excellence starts with clear, efficient workflows. When processes are streamlined, everyone understands their role and how to collaborate effectively, reducing confusion and improving coordination. While having documented processes is important, it's equally essential that these workflows become second nature in your team's daily routines. The aim is to allow teams to focus on delivering impactful results without needing constant guidance or oversight.

For example, well-defined workflows help your team move swiftly and consistently, ensuring alignment across the board. As these processes become more intuitive, teams spend less time figuring out next steps and more time executing tasks that directly contribute to results. Over time, this reduces the impulse for micromanagement, empowering leaders to focus on strategic direction while allowing the team to operate with autonomy.

It's also important to regularly review and refine these processes. As your team and business grow, evolving workflows ensures they remain relevant and effective. By continuously improving how your team works, you'll find they're able to adapt to new challenges without losing momentum—delivering higher-quality outcomes with greater efficiency.

### KEYS TO SUCCESS

**Document Processes Clearly:** Ensure that all workflows and procedures are well-documented and easily accessible to every team member. This clarity reduces confusion and ensures everyone follows the same steps.

**Regularly Review and Refine:** Schedule periodic reviews of your processes to identify and eliminate inefficiencies. Engage the team in this process to gather insights and suggestions for improvement.

**Eliminate Bottlenecks:** Actively identify and address bottlenecks that slow down progress. This might involve reassigning tasks, adjusting workflows, or investing in tools that automate repetitive tasks.

## 02. Embrace Flexibility in Workflows

The pace of technology advancements makes flexibility crucial. Teams that adapt quickly to new information, market shifts, or evolving customer needs are better positioned to keep their work relevant and impactful. Embracing flexibility means creating workflows that allow your team to pivot smoothly without losing momentum.

For example, when unexpected customer feedback surfaces, an adaptive team can shift priorities and adjust their approach without derailing their overall progress. This kind of flexibility stems from fostering a mindset where change is viewed as an opportunity rather than a setback. Teams that engage in scenario planning or cross-training are often more resilient, better equipped to handle surprises, and more likely to stay on track.

Integrating real-time feedback into your workflows is a key aspect of maintaining this agility. By staying connected to feedback from customers and stakeholders, teams can make immediate



adjustments that ensure their efforts remain aligned with strategic goals. This adaptability not only improves the quality of their work but also keeps the team energized, as they see the tangible results of their responsiveness.

### **KEYS TO SUCCESS**

**Foster a Flexible Mindset:** Encourage your team to embrace change and view it as an opportunity for growth. This openness to adjustment will help them remain adaptable and focused, even when plans shift.

**Integrate Real-Time Feedback:** Set up mechanisms that allow your team to gather and act on real-time insights. Immediate adjustments based on feedback will keep workflows aligned with your overall goals.

**Prepare for the Unexpected:** Equip your team to anticipate and respond to changes through scenario planning, cross-training, or regular discussions. Readiness for the unexpected ensures your team stays proactive and resilient.

## **03. Prioritize High-Impact Work**

It's easy for teams to become overwhelmed by endless tasks, requests, and distractions. To maintain Execution Excellence, teams need to prioritize high-impact work—tasks that directly contribute to strategic goals and deliver value to the customer and the business. This requires focus and discipline to prevent low-priority items from derailing progress.

Effective prioritization ensures that your team is focused on work that matters most. For example, when teams are faced with competing demands, clear prioritization helps them make informed decisions about where to invest their time and resources. This approach avoids the trap of “busyness” for the sake of it and ensures that every task is driving toward key outcomes.

To achieve this, leaders and teams should regularly revisit their goals and adjust priorities based on new insights, feedback, or shifts in the market. This continuous evaluation helps teams stay aligned, enabling them to focus their efforts where they will have the greatest impact.

## KEYS TO SUCCESS

**Identify High-Impact Work:** Define what constitutes high-value work for your team. Align tasks with the organization's strategic goals to ensure that efforts are focused on what matters.

**Regularly Reassess Priorities:** Make it a habit to revisit priorities frequently, ensuring they reflect current customer needs, market conditions, and feedback. Adjust focus as necessary.

**Eliminate Distractions:** Actively remove low-priority tasks or distractions that don't contribute to key outcomes, helping the team maintain focus and momentum on high-impact work.

## REFLECTIVE PROMPTS TO BUILD EXECUTION EXCELLENCE

Excellence in execution is often found in the small, overlooked details. These reflective prompts are designed to help you challenge your current practices, question what might seem like established truths, and uncover hidden opportunities for improvement. Use these questions to spark deeper conversations within your team and to rethink how you approach your work. The insights you gain can lead to meaningful changes that elevate your team's performance and impact.

## » Are Your Processes Aligned with Strategic Goals?

At a fast-growing SaaS company, teams found themselves constantly busy, but leadership noticed that progress toward the company's key goals was slower than expected. Upon closer examination, they realized many of the processes in place—originally designed for a smaller organization—no longer aligned with the company's broader objectives. Teams were spending time on tasks that, while necessary at one point, didn't directly contribute to the most critical business outcomes. By streamlining workflows and focusing on processes that directly supported growth goals, the company was able to improve productivity and drive more impactful results.

### ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

- » *How closely do your current processes support the strategic objectives of your organization?*
- » *Are your workflows designed to advance the most critical goals, or are they merely keeping the team busy?*
- » *How often are processes reviewed to ensure they remain relevant to your evolving strategy?*

### QUICK WINS

**Conduct a Process Audit:** Review your key processes to assess their alignment with strategic goals. Identify and address any misalignments.

**Set Regular Review Intervals:** Establish a routine for evaluating and refining processes to keep them aligned with strategic objectives.

**Align Processes with Outcomes:** Ensure that each process is designed with the end goal in mind, focusing on driving outcomes rather than just completing tasks.

## »» Is Feedback Being Used to Improve Execution?

In a global financial services firm, leadership realized that although feedback was being gathered from team members and clients, it wasn't being used effectively to improve execution. After revamping their feedback mechanisms to include actionable insights and making adjustments based on this feedback, they saw a sharp increase in team efficiency and customer satisfaction. Execution improved as the team became more proactive in identifying and addressing issues based on the feedback they received.

### ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

- » *How often is feedback being gathered from your team, and how quickly is it acted upon?*
- » *Does your team have a clear process for incorporating feedback into their workflows?*
- » *Are there recurring bottlenecks that could be solved by better leveraging feedback?*

### QUICK WINS

**Build Actionable Feedback Loops:** Ensure that feedback from team members is directly tied to specific improvements in execution.

**Act Quickly on Feedback:** Prioritize quick implementation of feedback to address bottlenecks and inefficiencies.

**Evaluate Feedback Effectiveness:** Regularly review how feedback is being used to make tangible improvements in execution.

## »» Are Your Workflows Adaptable to Change?

In a fast-growing startup, being able to pivot quickly was key to staying competitive. At first, the team thrived with flexible workflows that let them adapt fast. But as the company grew, those workflows became more rigid. They worked well for onboarding new team members but were too inflexible when a competitor launched a new feature. The team found it hard to keep up, delaying their own product updates and missing out on market opportunities. Recognizing this bottleneck, they took a hard look at their processes and began incorporating more flexible structures. By empowering the team to adjust workflows on the fly, and building in feedback loops, they regained the agility they needed. Soon, they were not only catching up to competitors but also releasing new, innovative features faster than ever, reestablishing their position in the market.

### ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

- » *How easily can your team adjust workflows in response to unexpected changes or new opportunities?*
- » *Are there mechanisms in place to gather real-time feedback and incorporate it into workflow adjustments?*
- » *How prepared is your team to pivot quickly when market conditions or customer needs shift?*

### QUICK WINS

**Introduce Flexibility into Workflows:** Evaluate and adjust your workflows to ensure they are adaptable to changing conditions.

**Strengthen Feedback Loops:** Implement mechanisms that allow for real-time insights to be quickly integrated into workflow adjustments.

**Train for Agility:** Provide training and resources to help your team become more agile and responsive to changes in the business environment.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

Execution excellence transforms strategic plans into meaningful results by guiding your team to focus on the right work, executed efficiently and with clear intent. Consistently delivering outcomes that move your business forward while maintaining high standards of quality and fostering continuous improvement is the goal.

To achieve this, workflows should align with your team's strengths and adapt to the unique dynamics of your organization, with governance ensuring consistency and alignment with broader goals. Prioritization frameworks must be tailored to your team's specific needs and evolve as circumstances shift. Staying curious, observant, and open to iteration based on real-world feedback will keep your team agile and effective.

Imagine the possibilities when your team is fully focused on execution excellence: consistently meeting strategic goals, adapting swiftly to changes, and setting new standards for impactful results in your industry. In contrast, teams that struggle with inefficiencies that slow progress fall behind. By embracing these principles, your team can move beyond today's challenges, lead with confidence, and drive sustained success.

# 07

## **PROACTIVE ENGINEERING** SEED 5 **FUTURE-PROOF OR FUTURE-PROBLEMS?**

The most effective product development starts by involving technology leaders from the very beginning. Too often, technical insights are brought in too late, resulting in gaps between the product's vision and what the technology can actually deliver. When engineering leaders are an integral part of the strategic conversation from day one, you ensure that technical feasibility and innovation are not just add-ons but central to your strategy.

In successful organizations, technology leaders are more than just executors—they serve as strategic partners who challenge assumptions, guide critical decisions, and bring fresh ideas to the table. Their involvement in shaping the company's direction anchors every decision in a deep understanding of technical possibilities, driving both innovation and alignment with broader business goals.

Cross-functional collaboration is essential for laying a strong engineering foundation. When Product, Project, and Engineering teams operate as a cohesive unit, sharing goals and perspectives, the results are transformative.



This kind of collaboration leads to faster, informed decisions, fewer misunderstandings, and an innovative product strategy.

Creating a culture that thrives on feedback and quick iteration is what sets top teams apart. In this chapter, we'll explore how to combine these elements—early leadership integration, cross-functional collaboration, and a focus on rapid iteration—so that your engineering efforts align with your strategic goals and drive fruitful results.

## THE GROWTH STAGES OF PROACTIVE ENGINEERING

Building a proactive engineering approach isn't always a straight line. Every step you take brings you closer to fully integrating technology into your overall strategy, showcasing your team's growing confidence and ability to use technical know-how to drive success. But the journey can have its twists and turns—and that's perfectly normal. Along the way, you might face shifting priorities, new technologies, or changes in how your team works together. These factors can sometimes push you forward or cause a brief step back. Knowing where you stand in the process and understanding what's impacting your progress allows you to adapt and provide the support your team needs at each stage.

### Planting Stage

At this stage, engineering is often treated as a separate entity, brought in late in the process to execute on decisions made by others. The focus is on immediate needs, with little consideration given to long-term strategy or scalability. Collaboration between Product, Project, and Engineering teams is minimal, leading to misaligned goals and frequent rework.

### Sprouting Stage

As the organization begins to recognize the importance of integrating engineering earlier in the process, engineering leaders start to be included in strategic discussions. However, their involvement is still somewhat limited, and collaboration across teams is inconsistent. The focus shifts from executing tasks to aligning engineering decisions with product goals.

### Blooming Stage

Engineering leadership becomes an integral part of the strategic planning process. Cross-functional collaboration is stronger, with Product, Project, and Engineering teams working together to align their efforts and ensure that engineering decisions support long-term

goals. A culture of rapid feedback and iteration begins to take hold, leading to more innovative and adaptive product development.

### **Pollinating Stage**

At this stage, engineering is fully integrated into every aspect of the organization's strategy. Engineering leaders are not just participants but key drivers of innovation, working closely with other leaders to shape the company's direction. Cross-functional collaboration is seamless, and a strong feedback-driven culture enables rapid iteration and continuous improvement. The engineering approach is robust, scalable, and fully aligned with the company's vision.

### **Harvesting Stage**

The organization's proactive engineering efforts are a well-oiled machine, providing a significant competitive advantage. Engineering is a core part of the company's culture, driving innovation, efficiency, and scalability. The organization is able to rapidly adapt to changes in the market, continuously improve its products, and deliver exceptional value to customers. This stage is characterized by a strong alignment between engineering, strategy, and business goals, leading to sustained success and industry leadership.

Are your engineering leaders fully integrated into strategic discussions? Is your organization leveraging engineering as a core element of its success, or is it still viewed as a service to the company? For some companies, this proactive engineering culture may be solid, ingrained in the culture from the start. For others, the shift from seeing engineering as merely supporting the business to recognizing it as the engine powering the company may be just beginning. If you find yourself in the latter, here are some compelling reasons and advice why a shift in mindset is critical for sustained success.

## **THE POWER OF PROACTIVE ENGINEERING**

By integrating engineering leaders from the outset, technical feasibility and innovation are built into your strategy from day one. Proactive involvement avoids the misalignments that often arise when engineering decisions are made too late, and product goals aren't always aligned with what's technically possible.

When engineering leaders are fully embedded in the core leadership team, they become key players in shaping the company's direction. They challenge assumptions, introduce new ideas, and ensure that every decision is backed

by a deep understanding of technical capabilities. This integration accelerates innovation, making it possible to explore groundbreaking ideas and implement them effectively, giving your product a significant competitive advantage.

Cross-functional collaboration is another powerful aspect of proactive engineering. Imagine a scenario where Product, Project, and Engineering teams are fully integrated, working together from the earliest stages of development. This level of collaboration not only prevents costly rework but also leads to faster decision-making and a more cohesive product strategy. By aligning these diverse teams under shared goals, you reduce misunderstandings and foster a more innovative and efficient development process.

A culture of rapid feedback and iteration is also crucial. In a feedback-driven environment, teams share early work, gather input, and make quick adjustments. This approach speeds up time-to-market—and keeps it competitive by evolving in response to real-time insights. By embracing a proactive engineering culture, your team is equipped to deliver consistent results.

## **THE COST OF A REACTIVE ENGINEERING APPROACH**

Neglecting to build a proactive engineering culture comes with significant risks. When engineering leaders are brought in too late, or are not involved at all, misalignments between product goals and technical realities are almost guaranteed. This often results in ideas that are technically infeasible or require extensive rework down the line, leading to delays, increased costs, and missed opportunities for innovation.

Consider a scenario where a product team brainstorms new features without input from engineering leaders. The result is a list of ideas that are exciting but not technically viable. The team may invest significant time and resources only to realize that their efforts need to be redone or, worse, abandoned. This kind of inefficiency not only hampers progress but can also lead to frustration and burnout within the team.

When teams work in silos—Product, Project, and Engineering each focused on their own deliverables—the lack of integration creates communication breakdowns. Decisions are delayed, misunderstandings are common, and the product strategy becomes fragmented. This disjointed approach stifles innovation and leads to a product that fails to meet its full potential.

A reactive engineering approach also undermines the ability to iterate quickly.

Without a culture of rapid feedback, teams are slow to adapt to changes in the market or customer needs. This lack of agility can cause your product to fall behind competitors, lose relevance, and ultimately, fail to achieve its strategic goals. The cost of poor execution in this area is not just missed opportunities but also a loss of market position and customer trust.

## TECHNIQUES FOR CULTIVATING PROACTIVE ENGINEERING

Whether you're just beginning your growth journey or fine-tuning your approach, these techniques will help you strengthen this critical foundation. No matter your role on the product team, these strategies are designed for you to implement with your team, ensuring that your engineering efforts support innovation, collaboration, and alignment with your organization's goals.

### **01. Embed Engineering Early and Consistently**

Integrating engineering leaders from the very beginning of the product development process is essential for ensuring that your projects are grounded in technical reality from the outset. When engineering leaders are involved in the initial brainstorming sessions, they can identify technical challenges and opportunities right away, which allows the team to make informed decisions that align with both technical capabilities and strategic goals. This early involvement also helps to avoid costly rework later in the process by ensuring that ideas are not only innovative but also technically feasible.

Maintaining this engagement throughout the project lifecycle is just as crucial. Engineering leaders should be regularly consulted as the project evolves, providing ongoing guidance to keep the team on track. This continuous input ensures that the technical aspects of the project remain aligned with the broader vision, and allows for timely adjustments that keep the project moving forward efficiently. For instance, regular checkpoints with engineering leaders can help steer the project away from potential pitfalls and toward solutions that drive long-term success.

To make this integration work, it's important that engineering leaders balance their roles between strategic planning and hands-on execution. This dual focus allows them to stay connected to the project's goals while remaining grounded in the technical realities of the team. By embedding themselves in both the big picture and the day-to-day details, engineering leaders can effectively bridge

the gap between strategy and execution, ensuring that the project delivers on its promise.

## KEYS TO SUCCESS

**Early Engagement:** Ensure engineering leaders are integral to initial brainstorming and planning sessions, allowing them to guide the project from the very start.

**Ongoing Contribution:** Maintain regular checkpoints and updates where engineering leaders can continue to provide insights as the project evolves.

**Balanced Focus:** Encourage engineering leaders to divide their attention between strategic planning and hands-on execution, ensuring they remain connected to both the goals and the technical realities of the team.

## **02. Foster Cross-Functional Ownership and Collaboration**

Cross-functional collaboration is vital for breaking down silos and fostering a culture of shared responsibility across Product, Project, and Engineering teams. When these teams work together as a cohesive unit, they create a unified vision that drives the project forward with clarity and purpose. This collaboration leads to faster decision-making, fewer misunderstandings, and ultimately, stronger products that are better aligned with both technical and business goals.

Creating collaborative teams starts with establishing shared goals that everyone is committed to achieving. When members from different departments work together daily, they build trust and a sense of collective ownership. For example, regular joint planning sessions where all voices are heard ensure that decisions are made with a holistic understanding of the project's needs. These sessions not only foster open communication but also help to identify and address potential challenges early, keeping the project on track and aligned with the overall vision.

Promoting shared responsibility within these teams is also key. Successes and challenges should be shared across the team, creating a culture where everyone feels accountable for the outcome. This collective accountability motivates each team member to contribute their best and collaborate effectively. When everyone feels responsible for the project's success, the result is a

more cohesive and innovative product development process that delivers better results.

## KEYS TO SUCCESS

**Create Collaborative Teams:** Form cross-functional teams that work together daily, ensuring shared goals and regular communication to build trust and drive ownership of outcomes.

**Facilitate Open Communication:** Implement regular joint planning sessions and problem-solving meetings to ensure that all voices are heard and decisions are made with a holistic view of the project's needs.

**Promote Shared Responsibility:** Foster a culture where successes and challenges are shared across teams, creating a sense of collective accountability and motivating everyone to contribute their best.

**03. Build a Culture of Rapid Feedback and Iteration**  
A strong engineering foundation is built on a culture of rapid feedback and iteration. In today's fast-paced market, the ability to quickly gather feedback and make adjustments is crucial to stay competitive. Embracing a feedback-driven culture where teams are encouraged to share early work and iterate rapidly allows for continuous improvement and results in products that are aligned with strategic goals.

To cultivate this culture, it's important to normalize the sharing of early-stage work. Teams should be encouraged to present prototypes, rough ideas, and incomplete designs without fear of criticism. This openness to feedback fosters a collaborative environment where potential issues can be identified and addressed early, preventing costly revisions later on. For instance, regular "show and tell" sessions where teams present their work-in-progress can be an effective way to gather diverse feedback and iterate quickly.

Establishing formal feedback loops is also essential. Structured processes like peer reviews, customer feedback integration, and retrospective meetings ensure that feedback is not only collected but also acted upon in a timely manner. These loops help teams to continuously refine their work, leading to a more polished final product. Prioritizing quick iterations based on this feedback allows



teams to make small, incremental improvements that add up to significant advancements over time. Teams stay agile and responsive by embracing rapid iteration, delivering high-quality products that meet the evolving needs of the market.

### **KEYS TO SUCCESS**

**Normalize Early Sharing:** Encourage teams to share prototypes and early-stage work within and across teams to gather diverse feedback and surface potential issues early.

**Establish Formal Feedback Loops:** Implement structured feedback processes like “show and tell” sessions, peer reviews, and customer feedback integration to ensure timely, relevant, and actionable insights.

**Prioritize Quick Iterations:** Emphasize the importance of making small, rapid adjustments based on feedback, enabling continuous refinement and leading to more innovative and successful products.

## **REFLECTIVE PROMPTS TO BOLSTER PROACTIVE ENGINEERING**

We understand that making a significant shift toward proactive engineering can sometimes feel like a big step, or perhaps you’ve implemented these techniques but aren’t yet seeing the desired results. To refine your approach and fully embrace proactive engineering, take a moment to reflect on these examples and questions. These prompts are designed to kick-start your progress and guide you toward an impactful and aligned engineering practice.



## »» Is Engineering Aligned with Your Strategic Vision?

At a mid-sized tech company, the engineering team was excited to jump into developing a new feature based on a customer request. While the feature itself was technically impressive, it soon became clear that it wasn't aligned with the company's broader strategy of streamlining the core product for ease of use. As a result, the feature ended up overcomplicating the user experience, and the team realized too late that significant resources had been diverted from more important initiatives. This misalignment not only delayed progress on higher-priority goals but also created friction between teams as they worked to refocus on the company's long-term vision.

### ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

- » *How well does your current engineering strategy support your organization's strategic objectives?*
- » *Are engineering decisions driven by the long-term vision, or are they reactive to short-term needs?*
- » *How frequently do engineering leaders participate in strategic planning and vision-setting sessions?*

### QUICK WINS

**Align Your Engineering Strategy:** Conduct a quick review of your engineering roadmap to ensure it aligns with the company's long-term vision. Adjust priorities as needed.

**Involve Engineering Leaders Early:** Make it a priority to include engineering and technology leaders in your next strategic planning session.

**Set Up Regular Alignment Meetings:** Schedule brief, recurring meetings to review and adjust engineering decisions in line with evolving strategic goals.

## »» Is Cross-Functional Collaboration Driving Innovation?

At a growing software company, the Product, Engineering, and Project Management teams found themselves working in silos, with little communication or shared ownership of projects. As deadlines loomed, conflicting priorities emerged, leading to frequent delays and misunderstandings. One high-priority project suffered significant setbacks because teams were operating independently instead of as a cohesive unit. Miscommunications about features and timelines caused confusion, which slowed progress and led to a final product that felt disjointed. This highlighted the need for better cross-functional collaboration to drive innovation and align everyone toward shared goals.

### ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

- » *Are your Product, Project, and Engineering teams working together as a cohesive unit?*
- » *How often do cross-functional teams engage in joint decision-making and problem-solving?*
- » *Are there any existing silos that hinder collaboration and innovation?*

### QUICK WINS

**Regular Cross-Functional Meetings:** Establish weekly or bi-weekly meetings where all relevant teams can align on priorities and share updates.

**Create Shared Goals and Responsibilities:** Develop shared goals or objectives that align with both technical and business outcomes, ensuring all teams are working toward the same end.

**Foster Collaborative Workshops:** Organize workshops or problem-solving sessions where teams can address challenges together, promoting mutual accountability and teamwork.

## »» Is Your Culture Feedback-Driven?

At a large enterprise, product development had always been a drawn-out process, with teams reluctant to share their work until they felt it was nearly perfect. This cautious approach resulted in over-engineered products that didn't always match customer needs. After a major product launch fell short of expectations, it became clear that waiting too long to gather feedback was holding the company back. By the time customer insights were factored in, the product was already too far along to make meaningful changes. This experience underscored the need for a more feedback-driven approach, allowing for earlier input and quicker adaptations to stay aligned with the market.

### ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

- » *How frequently does your team share prototypes and seek feedback during the development process?*
- » *Are feedback loops formalized and embedded into your workflows, or are they ad-hoc?*
- » *How quickly does your team iterate based on the feedback received?*

### QUICK WINS

**Institutionalize Early Feedback:** Start by scheduling regular “show and tell” sessions where teams present work-in-progress and gather immediate feedback.

**Formalize Feedback Loops:** Implement a simple peer review process or customer feedback session at key stages of development.

**Encourage Quick Iterations:** Set a goal to make at least one significant adjustment based on feedback after each review cycle.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

Embracing proactive engineering transforms how your organization views and leverages technology. The key benefits of this approach are profound: by integrating engineering leadership into strategic decision-making, fostering cross-functional collaboration, and creating a culture of rapid feedback and iteration, your team can drive innovation, accelerate time-to-market, and align every technical effort with your broader business goals.

Contrast this with a typical IT mindset, where engineering is often seen as a support function, focused on maintaining infrastructure and reacting to issues as they arise. In such environments, engineering decisions are made in isolation, disconnected from the company's strategic vision, leading to missed opportunities and slower progress. This reactive approach keeps engineering on the sidelines, limiting its potential to drive real business value.

Shifting to a mindset where engineering powers your business requires a cultural change, but the rewards are significant. By viewing engineering as a core element of your company's success and embedding it into every facet of your strategic planning, you position your organization to not only keep pace with the market but to lead it.

# 08

## **OUTCOMES DRIVEN** SEED 6

### **BUSY OR PRODUCTIVE? THERE'S A DIFFERENCE**

Are you focused on outcomes, or are you just checking off tasks? In the rush to launch features and meet deadlines, product teams are constantly asked to look into this or that initiative. But how often do you pause and ask why? Do you know what the outcomes are and what is intended to be achieved? How are you measuring success? These are the critical questions that can shift your focus from mere activity to impactful results. It's not just about solving problems—it's about solving the right problems in ways that work for your customers and your business.

Too often, teams equate activity with achievement. They hit deadlines, roll out features, and check off tasks, but they fail to ask the most important question: is this making a difference? Being outcomes-driven means consistently focusing on the impact of your work. Every action, project, and feature should be tied to specific, measurable goals that align with your business objectives and resonate with what truly matters to your customers.

While it's easy to start asking these questions today, the real challenge is

maintaining this focus when you're surrounded by deadlines, roadmaps, and competing priorities. That's why it's crucial to grasp the power of focusing on outcomes—not just as a one-time effort, but as a continuous mindset. This chapter will arm you with the understanding and tools you need to stay centered on what truly drives success, even when the pressure is on.

In the end, it's not about how much you do; it's about what you accomplish. By keeping your focus on the outcomes, you ensure that your work isn't just busywork—it's work that makes a real difference for your customers and your business.

## THE GROWTH STAGES OF BECOMING OUTCOMES DRIVEN

Growth in becoming outcomes-driven begins with a fundamental understanding of what we mean by an outcome: a measurable change in customer behavior that creates business value. It's not enough to deliver all the features on a roadmap if they don't drive any meaningful results. The real question is, are you making a difference that matters? These phases will help you assess where you might be on the spectrum of being outcomes-driven. With this understanding in hand, you'll be better equipped to identify where to focus and what steps to take to continue driving growth toward a truly outcomes-focused mindset.

### Planting Stage

Initially, the focus is largely on activity. Teams are busy, completing tasks, launching features, and meeting deadlines, but the connection between these efforts and the actual business impact is weak. Success is often measured by outputs—how much work gets done—rather than the outcomes those activities generate. There's little emphasis on whether these actions align with customer needs or business goals.

### Sprouting Stage

As the organization grows, an emerging awareness of the importance of outcomes over outputs takes hold. Teams start to recognize that it's not enough to simply get work done; what matters is the impact of that work. Metrics and KPIs begin to play a role, but they often focus on surface-level indicators rather than deep, meaningful results. While there's a shift towards thinking about outcomes, the focus remains split between activity and impact.

### Blooming Stage

A clear shift towards prioritizing outcomes begins to take shape.

Teams tie their efforts more directly to specific, measurable business goals, with a stronger emphasis on customer impact. KPIs are refined to focus on metrics that truly reflect success—like customer retention, satisfaction, and behavior changes. This stage is marked by growing alignment between what teams do and the results they achieve, leading to more strategic and impactful work.

### **Pollinating Stage**

Outcomes-driven thinking becomes embedded in the organizational culture. Every project, feature, and initiative is designed with clear outcomes in mind, and success is consistently measured by the impact on both customers and the business. Cross-functional teams collaborate to ensure that their efforts align with key outcomes, using data-driven insights to guide their decisions. The focus is on delivering results that matter, with teams fully accountable for the impact of their work.

### **Harvesting Stage**

An approach focused on outcomes becomes fully ingrained and serves as a strategic advantage. The organization consistently delivers transformative outcomes, setting benchmarks in the industry. Goals are sophisticated and directly tied to business performance and customer success, enabling the organization to anticipate market shifts and respond with precision. Teams are empowered to innovate and execute with the confidence that their efforts will lead to meaningful, measurable results.

With those markers in mind, take a moment to reflect on where your team currently stands. Do you see room for improvement? Imagine what it would be like if your focus shifted from merely completing tasks to truly driving impactful outcomes. How would your work change if you prioritized results over activity? By concentrating less on the volume of work and more on the value it creates, you can transform your team's efforts into meaningful progress that not only meets business goals but also strengthens your connection with customers. The path to becoming outcomes-driven is a journey, and recognizing where you are on that journey is the first step toward meaningful growth.

## **THE POWER OF AN OUTCOMES DRIVEN APPROACH**

The true power of an outcomes-driven approach lies in the metrics you use to gauge success. Not all KPIs are created equal—KPIs that measure impact, not just activity are what matter. When your team focuses on outcomes, they move



beyond superficial metrics and start driving value. For example, Netflix doesn't just track how many viewers tune in; they analyze how content drives long-term engagement and retention, ensuring that their efforts lead to sustained business growth.

This focus on outcomes fosters a culture of continuous improvement. By consistently refining metrics and approaches based on feedback and results, your organization stays aligned with strategic goals and remains adaptable to changing market conditions. This iterative process ensures that your team isn't just meeting targets but is continuously enhancing its impact, leading to more innovative solutions and deeper customer loyalty.

Moreover, industry experts highlight the importance of a holistic measurement approach that integrates both quantitative and qualitative insights. While quantitative KPIs provide clear numerical goals, qualitative measures offer a nuanced understanding of how your work impacts customers and the business. By blending these perspectives, your team can ensure that every action is aligned with delivering meaningful, lasting outcomes, keeping your organization agile, customer-focused, and ahead of the competition.

## **THE COST OF NOT FOCUSING ON OUTCOMES**

The cost of ignoring outcomes can be profound, affecting everything from team morale to market relevance. When teams focus solely on outputs—checking off tasks, launching features, hitting deadlines—they risk losing sight of the bigger picture. This tunnel vision can lead to wasted resources, as efforts are poured into projects that don't move the needle in meaningful ways.

Over time, this narrow focus erodes your connection with customers and stifles innovation. Without a culture of continuous improvement, teams may become complacent, failing to iterate on their work based on real-world feedback. This lack of adaptation can lead to products and features that don't resonate with users, resulting in declining customer satisfaction, lower engagement, and ultimately, a loss of market share as competitors who focus on outcomes take the lead.

Ignoring the importance of holistic measurement further compounds these risks. Relying solely on quantitative KPIs can provide a skewed view of success, missing the broader picture of customer experience and satisfaction. Without integrating qualitative insights, organizations may overlook critical feedback that could guide them toward more impactful innovations. In the long run, this approach leaves your organization stagnant, unable to adapt to changes in the market or meet the evolving expectations of your customers.

## TECHNIQUES FOR CULTIVATING OUTCOMES DRIVEN CULTURE

These techniques are designed for you to apply either on your own or with your team. They'll help you identify gaps, spot areas for improvement, and, crucially, reinforce the definition of outcomes to ensure your efforts are always driving real impact. Use these strategies to keep your focus sharp and your work aligned with what truly matters.

### 01. Define and Align Clear Outcomes

The foundation of an outcomes-driven culture is clarity—your team must understand precisely what they are trying to achieve and how their goals align with the broader objectives of the organization. Without this clarity and alignment, efforts can easily become fragmented, leading to activity that doesn't contribute to meaningful progress.

Clear outcomes provide direction and purpose. They answer the essential questions of “what” and “why” your team is working on something. When teams know exactly what outcomes they are expected to achieve, they can focus their efforts on the activities that will move the needle. This prevents the common pitfall of teams getting lost in a sea of tasks that may keep them busy but don't lead to significant business impact.

To practice this effectively, start by working with your team to establish specific, measurable outcomes that align with your overall business goals. These outcomes should be communicated clearly and regularly, ensuring that every team member understands their importance. Additionally, it's critical to map these outcomes to the broader organizational strategy. Regularly reviewing how your team's work supports the company's strategic goals will help maintain alignment and ensure that everyone is rowing in the same direction. By setting priorities based on these outcomes, your team can avoid distractions and focus on what truly matters, ultimately leading to greater success.

#### KEYS TO SUCCESS

**Establish Specific Outcomes:** Clearly define the specific, measurable outcomes that align with your business goals. This clarity ensures everyone knows what they're working toward and why it matters. For example, instead of focusing on launching a certain number of features, focus on increasing customer retention by a certain percentage.

**Map Outcomes to Strategic Goals:** Regularly review how these outcomes support the broader organizational objectives. This could involve monthly or quarterly check-ins where you reassess priorities to ensure alignment with the company's evolving business goals.

**Set Priorities:** Rank outcomes based on their strategic importance. This helps your team focus on the most critical goals, avoiding distractions from less impactful tasks. This might mean choosing to delay a lower-priority project if it doesn't directly contribute to your top outcomes.

**02. Encourage Regular Review and Adaptation Cycles** Continuous improvement is essential to an outcomes-driven culture. It's not just about setting goals and forgetting them—it's about creating an environment where regular reflection, feedback, and adaptation are integral to the process. This approach ensures your team remains agile and responsive, constantly refining their efforts to better meet the needs of your customers and the market.

Regular reviews are crucial because they provide the opportunity to assess whether your efforts are driving the desired outcomes. These reviews should go beyond just checking if tasks are completed; they should focus on evaluating the impact of those tasks. This is where the concept of "outcome reviews" comes into play—periodic check-ins that focus on whether the outcomes you've set are being achieved and, if not, why. These sessions should be collaborative, involving the whole team in the discussion to gather diverse perspectives and insights.

Adaptation is the next step. Based on the insights gained from these reviews, your team should be ready to make necessary adjustments. This might mean changing tactics, reprioritizing efforts, or even redefining the outcomes themselves if they no longer align with current market conditions or customer needs. Encouraging a mindset where these reviews are seen as opportunities for growth, rather than just assessments, fosters a culture of continuous learning and improvement. By embedding regular review and adaptation cycles, you create a culture that not only achieves its goals but also continuously evolves to meet new challenges.

### KEYS TO SUCCESS

**Schedule Regular Outcome Reviews:** Implement regular check-

ins—perhaps monthly or quarterly—to review progress toward your defined outcomes. These reviews should be opportunities to assess whether your efforts are delivering the desired impact, not just box-ticking exercises.

**Adapt Based on Feedback:** Be open to adjusting your outcomes based on feedback from customers, market conditions, and team insights. For instance, if a feature isn't driving the expected user engagement, don't be afraid to pivot and focus on a different strategy that better meets your objectives.

**Iterate and Improve:** Encourage your team to see these reviews as opportunities for learning and improvement. This mindset fosters a culture where continuous growth is the norm, and no failure is final—only a stepping stone to greater success.

### **03. Integrate Data-Driven Decision Making**

In an outcomes-driven culture, decisions shouldn't be based on intuition alone—they need to be grounded in solid data. Integrating data-driven decision-making into your team's processes transforms how they approach their work, ensuring that every decision is backed by evidence. This approach not only improves accuracy but also builds a more resilient strategy that can adapt to real-world insights.

To effectively integrate data-driven decision-making, begin by identifying the key metrics that will best measure the success of your outcomes. These metrics should be directly tied to your business goals and should focus on the impact, not just the output. For example, rather than simply tracking the number of features released, focus on how those features improve customer satisfaction or retention.

Regular data analysis sessions should become a core part of your team's workflow. These sessions allow the team to track progress, identify trends, and make informed decisions based on real-time insights. This practice ensures that your team remains agile, adapting their strategies as needed based on the data at hand. Additionally, it's important to provide your team with the necessary training and tools to become proficient in data analysis. When your team is equipped to interpret data effectively, they can make decisions that are not only informed but also impactful, driving the outcomes that matter most to your organization.

By integrating data-driven decision-making, you empower your team to make informed choices that lead to more significant and measurable outcomes, ensuring that every action contributes to the bigger picture of business success.

### KEYS TO SUCCESS

**Identify Key Metrics:** Determine which metrics will best measure the success of your outcomes. These should be directly tied to business goals and customer impact. For example, rather than measuring the number of new features released, focus on how those features influence customer satisfaction or retention rates.

**Regularly Analyze Data:** Implement routine data analysis sessions to track progress and identify trends. Use these insights to guide decision-making and refine your strategies, ensuring that your actions are based on solid evidence rather than assumptions.

**Train Your Team:** Provide your team with the necessary training and tools to become proficient in data analysis. This might involve workshops on interpreting data or using specific analytical tools. Empowering your team with these skills ensures they can effectively use metrics to drive their work, making every decision more impactful.

## REFLECTIVE PROMPTS TO BECOME OUTCOMES-DRIVEN

There's no shortage of advice out there on why outcomes matter more than outputs. But these prompts are crafted to help you pinpoint where you and your team currently stand in your outcomes-driven journey. They're meant to provoke the right questions—questions that will help you and your team figure out how to take the next step in your growth. Whether you're reflecting on these individually or discussing them as a team, use them to map your progress and uncover new ways to align your efforts with meaningful, impactful outcomes.

## » Is Your Team Truly Focused on Outcomes, Not Just Activity?

In a mid-sized tech company, a product team realized that while they were completing a lot of tasks, those tasks weren't necessarily driving meaningful outcomes. They were busy, but not necessarily productive in a way that mattered. After a deep dive, they found that many activities were more about checking boxes than making a real impact. The team shifted their approach, linking every task to a clear outcome, which led to more focused efforts and significantly better results.

### ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

- » *Are your team's daily activities clearly linked to specific, measurable outcomes that align with your organization's strategic goals?*
- » *How often does your team review the impact of their work to ensure it's driving meaningful change rather than just completing tasks?*
- » *Does your team prioritize projects that have the greatest potential for significant impact, or are they more focused on completing as many tasks as possible?*

### QUICK WINS

**Clarify Outcome Alignment:** Make sure that each project or task is explicitly tied to a specific outcome. Regularly communicate how these outcomes support broader business objectives.

**Shift Focus to Impact:** Encourage your team to think critically about how their work contributes to desired outcomes. Implement regular reviews to assess whether their efforts are making a tangible difference.

**Prioritize Strategically:** Guide your team in prioritizing tasks and projects that have the potential to drive the most significant outcomes, rather than simply completing more tasks.



## »» Are Your KPIs Measuring Real Impact?

A global retail company discovered that many of its KPIs were giving the illusion of progress but weren't measuring the impact on customer satisfaction or business performance. For example, they were tracking the number of new features added to their e-commerce site but not whether those features were increasing conversion rates. By auditing their KPIs and focusing on metrics that measured customer behavior and business growth, the company was able to align their efforts more closely with meaningful outcomes.

### ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

- » *Do the KPIs your team tracks provide a clear indication of how their efforts are affecting customer behavior and business performance?*
- » *Are there any metrics that may give the illusion of progress but don't truly measure meaningful impact?*
- » *How regularly does your team review and adjust KPIs to ensure they remain relevant and aligned with strategic outcomes?*

### QUICK WINS

**Audit Your KPIs:** Review your current KPIs to ensure they are directly linked to outcomes that matter, such as customer satisfaction, retention, and business growth.

**Eliminate Vanity Metrics:** Identify and remove any metrics that don't reflect true progress or impact, focusing instead on those that provide actionable insights.

**Regular KPI Adjustments:** Establish a routine for revisiting and refining KPIs to ensure they stay aligned with evolving business goals and customer needs.



## »» Is Your Team Balancing Short-Term Gains with Long-Term Outcomes?

A financial services firm found that its focus on short-term gains, such as quick wins in sales, was undermining its long-term growth strategy. The team was so focused on hitting immediate targets that they neglected to consider the long-term impact on customer relationships and brand loyalty. After reassessing their approach, they began to balance short-term and long-term outcomes, leading to sustainable growth and a more loyal customer base.

### ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

- » *How often does your team prioritize quick wins over sustainable, long-term outcomes?*
- » *Are short-term achievements celebrated at the expense of long-term success, or is there a balance between the two?*
- » *Does your team consider the long-term implications of their decisions, particularly in terms of customer impact and business growth?*

### QUICK WINS

**Evaluate Decision-Making:** Reflect on recent decisions and assess whether they were driven by short-term needs or aligned with long-term outcomes. Adjust decision-making processes to better balance immediate results with future goals.

**Focus on Sustainable Growth:** Encourage your team to think beyond immediate gains and consider how their work contributes to long-term success. Develop strategies that support sustained impact rather than temporary achievements.

**Reinforce Long-Term Thinking:** Regularly discuss the importance of long-term outcomes in team meetings, and recognize efforts that contribute to enduring success, even if they take longer to realize.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

Outcomes-driven thinking is the foundation of delivering real value. It's easy to get caught up in shipping features and hitting deadlines, but the real measure of success is whether those efforts make a difference. Focusing on outcomes drives meaningful impact. It's about making sure that what you're doing truly matters—to your customers and your business.

This focus on outcomes brings together everything we've covered. Empowered teams don't just choose their own path—they own the responsibility of delivering results that count. Innovation isn't valuable unless it drives outcomes that enhance customer satisfaction and loyalty. Execution Excellence isn't just about efficiency—it's about ensuring that what you deliver creates real impact.

Imagine shifting from simply completing tasks to ensuring every project, every decision, is directly tied to improving customer experience and driving business growth. The satisfaction that comes from knowing your work is making a tangible difference is unparalleled.

As the final of the Seeds of Success, outcomes-driven thinking is what pulls everything else together. It turns ideas into impactful products and activity into results that push your business forward. Keep this mindset at the forefront, and you won't just meet expectations—you'll exceed them, delivering value that resonates with your customers and propels your organization ahead.

# CULTIVATING SUSTAINABLE GROWTH

## YIELDING THE RESULTS OF READY STEADY GROW

As you nurture the Seeds of Success, you'll notice cultural shifts right away. A culture built on transparency, trust, and empowerment gives your team the freedom to take risks, try new ideas, and deliver meaningful results. Without the safety to experiment and sometimes fail, progress can stall and creativity fades. But when your team feels supported and trusted, they'll have the confidence to push boundaries and explore new solutions.

Creating an environment where teams collaborate easily, stay aligned around common goals, and take ownership of their work builds a thriving culture. Empowered teams not only solve problems more effectively but also take pride in their accomplishments. They become more engaged, motivated, and better equipped to handle challenges.

Keep in mind, your team's culture will develop uniquely, shaped by the decisions you make each day, the values you uphold, and the techniques you use, like cross-functional collaboration, continuous learning, and strategic alignment. Over time, this approach fosters collaboration, sharper customer focus, smooth execution, and lasting success.

By embedding these principles, you're setting your team up for growth and resilience—giving your organization the ability to lead with purpose and confidence.

## ANTICIPATING AND OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

As you start applying the **Ready Steady Grow** approach, you might encounter some resistance. That's completely normal—change can be tough for any team. What matters is how you tackle these challenges directly. Here are some common concerns you might face and practical ways to respond:

- » *“We’re too busy to implement these changes.”*  
Response: Time is always tight, but investing in these changes now will save time and resources in the long run. Start with just one area that’s causing the most pain and build from there. It’s about working smarter, not harder.
- » *“Our current process works fine—why change it?”*  
Response: Our current process has brought us this far, but to continue growing and staying competitive, we need to evolve. **Ready Steady Grow** isn’t about changing everything—it’s about fine-tuning what we do well and addressing areas where we can improve.
- » *“We’ve tried similar approaches before, and they didn’t work.”*  
Response: Previous attempts might have fallen short, but what’s different here is that **Ready Steady Grow** is tailored to our specific challenges. It’s adaptable and meets us where we are, helping us grow sustainably.
- » *“Leadership won’t support these changes.”*  
Response: If leadership is hesitant, start small by focusing on one area where you can demonstrate quick value. Success in this area will build the case for broader adoption and support from leadership.
- » *“This sounds too theoretical—how does it apply to our daily work?”*  
Response: While the approach is grounded in solid principles, it’s also very practical. By improving specific areas like customer focus or execution excellence, we can streamline our processes, reduce rework, and better meet our deadlines.

## TAKING ACTION: YOUR PATH TO SUCCESS

Throughout this book, we've provided a roadmap for improving your product development by nurturing and empowering your teams. The **Ready Steady Grow** approach outlines the key elements found in high-performing teams across industries, organizations, and products.

The journey doesn't end here—it's just the beginning. Building and sustaining a high-performing organization requires continuous commitment from everyone involved. Whether you're leading a team or contributing as a key member, your role is vital in shaping the future of your organization.

Each of you has the agency to drive change from within. Advocate for regular reflection, engage in feedback loops, and commit to delivering results that benefit your customers and the business. This isn't just about making improvements today; it's about laying the groundwork for sustained success. By focusing on continuous improvement and being patient with the process, you'll start to see both immediate gains and long-term growth.

The techniques and reflection opportunities we've provided are your actionable steps, your plan. These are things you can start implementing today. We know there's a better way to work—one where you and your team are empowered, aligned, focused on delivering customer-centric products, and consistently producing your best work.

Now, the next step is in your hands. Identify an area where your team could benefit the most and start there. And if you're still unsure about where to begin, [give us a call](#). We'd be happy to talk through your specific situation and help you get started on the right path.

# 10

## RESOURCES & FURTHER READING

### TOOLS TO KEEP YOU MOVING FORWARD

#### INFLUENTIAL WORKS AND THOUGHT LEADERS

Throughout the journey of creating *Ready Steady Grow*, we've drawn from the work of many thought leaders and experts in the product development field. The resources listed here have shaped our thinking and provided deeper insights into the topics we've explored in this book. Whether you're looking to expand your knowledge, dive deeper into specific areas, or find additional inspiration, these books are invaluable companions on the path to building high-performing teams and successful products. We encourage you to explore them for a richer understanding of the ideas and practices we've discussed.

##### **Foundational Principles**

- » *Inspired: How To Create Products Customers Love*: Marty Cagan
- » *Empowered: Ordinary People, Extraordinary Products*: Marty Cagan with Chris Jones
- » *Escaping the Build Trap: How Effective Product Management Creates Real Value*: Melissa Perri

##### **Strategy and Measurement**

- » *Measure What Matters: How Google, Bono, and the Gates Foundation Rock the World with OKRs*: John Doerr
- » *Outcomes Over Output: Why customer behavior is the key metric for business success*: Josh Seiden
- » *Continuous Discovery Habits: Discover Products that Create Customer Value and Business Value*: Teresa Torres

### **Team Dynamics and Culture**

- » *Radical Candor: Be a Kick-Ass Boss Without Losing Your Humanity*: Kim Scott
- » *Team Topologies: Organizing Business and Technology Teams for Fast Flow*: Matthew Skelton and Manuel Pais
- » *It Doesn't Have to Be Crazy At Work*: Jason Fried and David Heinemeier Hansson

### **Decision-Making and Change**

- » *The Hard Thing About Hard Things: Building a Business When There Are No Easy Answers*: Ben Horowitz
- » *Thinking, Fast and Slow*: Daniel Kahneman
- » *Switch: How to Change Things When Change Is Hard*: Chip Heath and Dan Heath

### **Innovation and Systems Thinking**

- » *Hooked: How to Build Habit-Forming Products*: Nir Eyal
- » *Thinking in Systems*: Donella H. Meadows
- » *Accelerate: The Science of Lean Software and DevOps: Building and Scaling High Performing Technology Organizations*: Nicole Forsgren, PhD, Jez Humble, and Gene Kim

## **RESOURCES TO EMPOWER AND INSPIRE**

Explore the resources we're creating to support you, now [available on our website](#). This section offers valuable tools, templates, and insights to enhance your product development journey. Be sure to also [keep up with our blog](#) for the latest articles and best practices, designed to inspire and inform you as you build high-performing teams and successful products. Dive in and discover how these materials can help you thrive!



**“SOMEWHERE ALONG THE WAY,  
WE LOST TOUCH WITH OUR  
END-USERS AND IT SHOWED  
IN OUR WORK. *READY STEADY  
GROW* HELPED US GET BACK TO  
LISTENING TO OUR CUSTOMERS  
AND BUILDING THINGS THAT  
MATTER TO THEM.”**

– J. MARTINEZ  
SENIOR PRODUCT MANAGER

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

For more exercises, templates, and practical tools to help your team work better and stay aligned, [visit our website's resources section](#)—designed to give you everything you need to apply the strategies from *Ready Steady Grow* right away.



# ABOUT US

We understand the unique challenges of product development because we've lived them. With experience across startups, scale-ups, and large organizations—including healthcare, edtech, and public safety—we've helped teams streamline workflows, break down silos, and bring innovative products to market faster.

We help companies overcome common barriers, from improving team collaboration to modernizing outdated processes. Our focus is on delivering value to your customers and helping your teams excel, no matter the complexity of the environment. Whether you're adapting to new technologies or refining your team dynamics, we provide the practical experience and insight to guide you every step of the way.

## COACHING

Our tailored support helps you navigate challenges and reach your goals. Whether you're leading a product or contributing as part of a team, our coaching focuses on refining strategy, improving execution, and enhancing your performance.

## TRAINING

We train teams to excel in the fundamentals of product development. Our sessions focus on practical skills like customer discovery, prioritization, collaboration, and building a culture of continuous improvement, ensuring your team can ship the right products, faster.

The practical guidance offered in *Ready Steady Grow* is just the beginning. If you're ready to take the next step on your journey, [book a complimentary consultation call](#) with us to discuss your challenges and goals. We are committed to helping you and your team produce their best work and achieve exceptional results.

**WHEN YOU CHOOSE READY STEADY, YOU'RE GAINING A PARTNER WHO UNDERSTANDS THE CHALLENGES YOU FACE AND KNOWS HOW TO DRIVE REAL, LASTING SUCCESS.**

# OUR FOUNDERS

DECADES OF EXPERIENCE, BOUNDLESS PASSION



**Lisa Hagen**  
Product Coach

With twenty years of experience in product management and leadership, Lisa has held senior positions across B2B companies in various industries.

She has built successful product teams in startups and transformed product management in large organizations, adopting the empowered product team model. Lisa is passionate about customer-focused strategies and works closely with teams to foster innovation, drive product excellence, and create lasting impact for both the business and its customers.

She is dedicated to empowering teams to tackle tough challenges and consistently deliver value.

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**Chris Kincanon**  
Technology Leader

With over twenty years of experience in technology leadership, Chris Kincanon excels in architecting scalable systems and managing high-performance technical teams.

He has a proven track record in both startups and Fortune 500 companies, driving innovation and aligning technology with business goals. Chris is passionate about leveraging cutting-edge technologies to solve complex problems and enhance operational efficiency.

He is dedicated to empowering teams to deliver robust solutions that delight customers and drive business success.

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