Ready Steady Grow

Successful products are created by teams that have the clarity, autonomy, and support to innovate, make an impact, and take pride in their work. These empowered, high-performing teams build products customers love and drive real business success. They adapt quickly, make decisions confidently, and consistently align their efforts with business goals.

Drawing from decades of experience, we've identified growth patterns that reliably build these empowered teams. This maturity model acts as your blueprint, helping you assess where your team stands, spot key areas for improvement, and guide your team through meaningful transformation.

Whether you're leading a team or part of one, this assessment provides a framework to stay aligned, foster empowerment, and achieve exceptional results.

We understand that every team and organization has its own unique nuances. Book a complimentary call with us to discuss where your team is now and where you want to go—we'll offer tailored advice to help you get there. For more in-depth insights, download Ready Steady Grow, which includes exercises and techniques designed to improve how your team works.

Stages of Product Team Growth

We've pinpointed five critical growth stages, each representing a distinct phase in a team's development, complete with its own set of challenges and opportunities.

LEVEL 1 — Planting *Initial Phase*

Teams are forming, and while goals and processes are still taking shape, this stage is full of potential. It's a prime opportunity to set clear objectives, establish strong foundations, and channel the initial excitement into building momentum.

LEVEL 2 — Sprouting *Developing Phase*

Roles and processes begin to take shape, and communication improves. The team is finding its rhythm, though productivity remains uneven as everyone adjusts to the new structure.

This stage is an opportunity to refine workflows, strengthen collaboration, and build a cohesive way of working that will drive more consistent performance.

LEVEL 3 — Blooming *Advanced Phase*

Teams now have clear processes, strong collaboration, and aligned goals. Productivity is consistent and directly supports business objectives, leading to impactful outcomes.

This stage is where the team's confidence grows as they see tangible results, and momentum builds for continued success. It's a time to leverage the team's strengths and sustain their performance, ensuring ongoing innovation and achievement.

LEVEL 4 — Pollinating *Collaborative Phase*

Teams are now 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 collaboration across departments.

Their success not only elevates their own performance but also sets a standard for others, fostering a culture of excellence throughout the organization.

LEVEL 5 — Harvesting *Optimized Phase*

Teams are at their best, consistently delivering top results and exceeding expectations across the board.

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 of excellence.

At this stage, the team's influence is profound, impacting the entire organization.

They are key contributors to shaping the company's strategic direction and future growth, solidifying their role as architects of long-term success.

Product Team Maturity Model

Our maturity model identifies six essential elements, or 'seeds,' of team growth, each progressing through distinct stages. Success indicators at every stage guide you in refining these areas, ensuring your team matures effectively and consistently delivers impactful results."

Foundational Seeds of Success	Planting — Initial Phase	Sprouting — Developing Phase	Blooming — Advanced Phase	Pollinating — Collaborative Phase	Harvesting — Optimized Phase	North Star & Success Markers
These six foundational seeds are critical—each is a core element that drives a team's growth and success.						Keep the North Star ★ central, and these indicators ✓ will guide you in staying on the right path and achieving success.
Strategic Alignment — A clear, well-understood vision acts as the team's North Star, guiding every decision and action. A solid strategy isn't just a roadmap; it's a set of guardrails that define priorities, focus efforts, and empower the team to say 'no' to distractions. Strong leadership ensures alignment with business goals, driving innovation and collaboration while keeping the team relentlessly focused on delivering real value to customers.	The vision is unclear, leading to directionless activity and reactive decision-making without alignment to larger goals.	Alignment with the vision begins, but it's not well understood. Strategy is task-focused, with growing recognition of connections to broader goals.	The vision is well-defined and influences daily decisions, aligning team efforts with broader goals, though some inconsistencies in application may remain.	Alignment with the vision influences other parts of the organization, guiding cohesive, cross-functional efforts and clear decision-making aligned with business objectives.	The vision is deeply ingrained, driving continuous innovation and alignment across the organization, with the strategy evolving through ongoing learning and adaptation.	**★ Our vision isn't just known; it's lived, driving every instinctive decision.** ✓ **Aligned Decisions:** Every decision is a deliberate reflection of our shared vision, ensuring that our actions are consistently aligned with our long-term strategic goals. ✓ **Purposeful Acceleration:** The team moves with unwavering clarity and speed, driven by a vision that not only guides us but transforms obstacles into catalysts for meaningful growth.
Customer Focus — True customer focus means deeply understanding what customers need—not just what you think they want. Too many companies rely on assumptions instead of engaging directly with customers. Product managers must be relentless in gathering real feedback, ensuring the team stays aligned with evolving needs. Continuous engagement isn't just a tactic; it's the key to driving innovation, staying relevant, and gaining a competitive edge.	Customer focus is minimal, with decisions based on internal assumptions rather than real customer insights, leading to solutions that often miss the mark.	Teams start recognizing the value of customer feedback but engage sporadically, so insights are gathered but not consistently influencing product decisions.	Customer engagement becomes regular and structured, with insights increasingly guiding product decisions and prioritization through established feedback mechanisms.	Teams continuously engage with customers, and feedback loops are well-integrated, ensuring that customer insights directly influence product decisions and validation processes.	Customer focus is deeply embedded in the company culture, with ongoing research and feedback driving decisions, innovation, and alignment across the org to deliver exceptional value.	**★ We understand and meet real customer needs, not just assumptions.** ✓ **Active Engagement:** We prioritize deep, ongoing interactions with customers, ensuring that our responses are rooted in genuine needs rather than assumptions or guesswork. ✓ **Needs Alignment:** Every product decision is meticulously guided by a profound understanding of customer behavior, ensuring our solutions consistently resonate and deliver true value.
Team Empowerment — Empowerment goes beyond autonomy—it's about trusting teams to tackle meaningful challenges. Many companies think delegation is enough, but real empowerment involves setting clear objectives and trusting teams to determine the best approach. Strong leadership is crucial, relying on the team's competence and character. Truly empowered teams innovate, make smart decisions, and drive significant business outcomes.	Teams have minimal autonomy, executing tasks decided by higher-ups, which leads to low motivation and a lack of ownership.	Some autonomy is granted, but significant decisions remain top-down, with initial but limited cross-functional collaboration.	Teams have clear goals and are given autonomy to achieve them, with structured cross-functional collaboration and strong support from product managers.	Teams enjoy high autonomy and accountability, with ingrained cross-functional collaboration and proactive problem-solving supported by strategic product managers.	Empowerment is fully embedded, with teams having complete ownership, high agility in decision-making, and continuous organizational support for innovation.	**★ Teams are trusted to solve meaningful problems autonomously, driving innovation and impact.** ✓ **Autonomy with Accountability:** Teams make independent decisions aligned with clear goals. ✓ **Problem-Solving Ownership:** Teams proactively tackle challenges, focusing on finding solutions rather than following prescribed answers.
Execution Excellence — Execution isn't just about completing tasks—it's about achieving precise, impactful outcomes. Too often, processes overshadow results. True excellence demands ruthless efficiency, with streamlined workflows and ongoing discovery ensuring products stay aligned with market needs. Prioritizing impact over routine, and leveraging collaboration, leads to superior outcomes.	Informal and undocumented methods dominate, leading to inconsistent results and inefficiencies.	Basic structures and organized workflows emerge, improving coordination and reducing inefficiencies.	Well-defined workflows are followed, with strong coordination and continuous improvement enhancing efficiency.	Cross-functional collaboration is robust, with seamless teamwork and rapid iteration through continuous discovery and delivery.	Execution excellence is ingrained, with highly efficient, adaptive workflows and teams continuously optimizing for consistent, exceptional results.	**★ Execution is about achieving precise, impactful outcomes with efficiency and focus.** ✓ **High-Level Collaboration:** Teams work seamlessly together with clear communication. ✓ **Streamlined Processes:** Workflows are efficient, adaptable, and aligned with market needs.
Proactive Engineering — Proactive engineering integrates technical leadership from the start, ensuring that innovation and technical feasibility are central to product development. By embedding engineering into strategic discussions and fostering cross-functional collaboration, this approach turns engineering from a support function into a key driver of business success, adaptability, and innovation.	Treated as a separate entity, engineering is brought in late, leading to misaligned goals and frequent rework, with a focus only on immediate needs.	Strategic discussions start to include technology leaders, though their involvement remains limited. Collaboration begins to align with product goals.	Cross-functional collaboration strengthens as engineering becomes integral to strategic planning. Rapid feedback and iteration start to shape development.	Engineering leaders now help shape the company's direction. Seamless collaboration and a feedback-driven culture enable continuous improvement.	Fully embedded within the organization, the engineering team drives continuous improvement and innovation, enabling quick adaptation and delivering high-impact results.	**★ Engineering is a strategic partner, driving innovation and aligning technical capabilities with business goals.** ✓ **Early Integration:** Technology leaders are involved from the initial stages of planning, ensuring technical insights shape strategic decisions. ✓ **Collaborative Innovation:** Engineering, product, and project teams work together seamlessly, using shared goals to drive innovation and efficiency.
Outcomes Driven — Success is measured by real, measurable changes in customer behavior that drive business impact. Outcomes reveal true value—like increased retention—while metrics track progress. KPIs are more than numbers; they're vital indicators of business health. Prioritizing outcomes ensures meaningful results for both customers and the business, with clear metrics guiding decisions, ensuring accountability, and keeping teams aligned with key goals.	Understanding of outcomes and metrics is minimal, with teams focusing on feature delivery without a clear connection to customer behavior or business results.	Teams begin incorporating basic metrics, starting to connect features to customer behavior and business outcomes, though the process is still developing.	A structured approach to metrics and outcomes is established, with regular tracking of KPIs and a clearer link between features and business impact.	Outcomes are deeply integrated, with cross-functional teams aligning metrics and outcomes and emphasizing continuous feedback and understanding of customer behavior.	An outcomes-driven culture is fully embedded, using advanced analytics to refine strategies, with outcomes guiding decision-making and strategic planning organization-wide.	**★ Success is measured by real, transformative outcomes, not just activity.** ✓ **Outcomes Over Output:** Actions prioritize significant customer behavior changes and business impact. ✓ **Strategic Metrics:** Metrics are directly linked to key outcomes, ensuring alignment with organizational goals and driving success.

How to use this assessment:

1. **Assess Your Team:** Begin by honestly evaluating where your team currently stands across the five stages of growth. Reflect on the characteristics, challenges, and opportunities at each stage.
   Grab a 🐛 and mark current state for each stage & seed:
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2. **Identify Your Goals:** Next, determine which stage you'd like your team to reach. Consider the specific areas of growth and skills that need development. We recommend setting your goal within two stages of your current state.
   Grab a 🦋 and mark your ideal state for each stage & seed:
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3. **Create a Plan:** Use insights from the stages to build a targeted plan. Keep the North Star in focus, and use the Success Markers as guideposts. Start by nurturing one foundational seed to drive meaningful growth.

4. **Foster Collaboration:** Involve your team in the process to ensure everyone understands their role in your growth journey. Encourage open communication and a mindset of continuous improvement.

5. **Track Progress:** Revisit the model regularly to track your team's progress. Adjust your strategies as needed to address new challenges or opportunities.

6. **Reflect and Adapt:** As your team evolves, use the model to reflect on successes and setbacks. Adapt your approach to maintain progress and keep your team on the path to excellence.

Helpful tips:

- **Involve Key Team Members:** Engage the right team members to ensure a balanced and accurate assessment.
- **Be Honest:** Evaluate your team's current stage truthfully to set realistic growth goals.
- **Embrace Nuance:** The model may not capture every complexity—adapt it to suit your team's specific needs.
- **Focus on Progress:** Use the model as a continuous improvement tool, not a one-size-fits-all solution.
- **Set Realistic Goals:** Start with achievable targets within the next two stages to keep your team focused and avoid overwhelm.
- **Regular Check-Ins:** Periodically revisit the model to track progress and adjust your approach as needed.

Reflect & Capture Insights

Use this space to jot down your key takeaways, thoughts, or any action items that arise as you explore the maturity model. Consider what you've learned about your team's current stage, what steps you can take next, and any challenges or opportunities that stand out. This is your space to capture ideas, reflections, and plans for moving forward.

Discover the Path to Team Excellence

Explore our methods in depth with *Ready Steady Grow*. This this guide offers practical advice, hands-on exercises, and case studies. Aligned with industry experts, it helps your team overcome misalignment and deliver quality results faster.

For more information, visit our website or schedule a complimentary call with us today.