Drive product growth with product roadmapping

PRODUCT ROADMAPPING

IN PRACTICE

PLANNING YOUR PRODUCT STRATEGY

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AKTIA
SOLUTIONS

Preface

As a product professional you will agree with me that product roadmaps can easily become a nightmare and they are the source of many of your headaches at work.

Perhaps you think you are using roadmaps wrongly or they are just a waste of time and a continuous source of arguments. But bear with me, Product Roadmaps serve a purpose.

Product roadmaps are central to product management work. But every week I hear how product managers still struggle with planning, creating, and communicating a compelling roadmap.

The Product Roadmap sits in the interface between product strategy and execution. It provides visibility, alignment, focus, and it is a communication tool.

However, you cannot achieve the benefits of product roadmapping unless you do certain things properly.

This book is based on my experience working with Product Roadmaps in different organizations and it will provide you with a practical approach to introduce (or improve) product roadmapping into your product organization.

After working with many product teams, I learned that there is no single best way to roadmap.

Because there are so many different types of products, companies and product managers, every roadmap is different.

As a product professional you must be clear about the purpose of product roadmaps: To clearly articulate where you're headed, and to show your strategy to your stakeholders in a compelling way.

In this book we'll talk about product roadmaps from two perspectives:

- *The process of discovering, designing, and building the roadmap*
- *The continuous process of managing, updating, and evolving the roadmap.*

You'll learn:

- *Product roadmap fundamentals*
- *Roadmap as a strategic tool*
- *How to design your roadmap*
- *How to manage your roadmap*
- *How to introduce and sell product roadmaps in your organization*
- *How to get started with product roadmapping, or relaunch your product roadmap*
- *How to improve product roadmapping with roadmap metrics.*

Why this Book?

The product roadmap is a very effective and necessary strategic tool, but in many cases its implementation is poor and causes friction and frustration.

The roadmap allows us to connect the product strategy and objectives with delivery in an agile and light way.

Its correct implementation goes far beyond a simple timeline with features. For that reason, I have written this practical book based on experience.

Here you can find everything you need to improve the product roadmap in your organization or to start from scratch.

This book is meant for companies developing software-based products or using software as an enabler of their product or service: market-facing B2B or B2C digital products and services, software products for internal use or embedded software.

Structure of the Book

The book is structured in five sections of three chapters each.

The first section is the most theoretical. But even though it is an eminently practical book, I think it is essential to start by exploring the product mindset and understanding the key role the roadmap plays and how it fits into the strategic fabric of the product organization.

In the second section we explore the fundamentals of the product roadmap from its fit into the strategic gear, the basic principles, and the benefits it brings to the modern product organization.

The third block is devoted to the actual artifact design, with a special emphasis on themes (or initiatives) and the most common design mistakes.

The fourth block is dedicated to roadmap management, including metrics to assess the effectiveness and performance of the roadmap. An aspect that in my opinion is given very little attention and is as important as a good design.

To finish, I offer you a method to effectively introduce the practice of product roadmapping in your organization, including an assessment to evaluate the current situation.

Enjoy!

Gerard Chiva

First Edition, October 2022

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Product Organization

Product Mindset

In my experience as a [Product Coach](), the greatest impact I have on my clients is to make them approach product development as an activity from the outside in rather than from the inside out.

Many companies are used to developing new products or features without considering the problem they solve for the customer. A solution is proposed from the point of view of the organization, which in most cases has nothing to do with the context and the needs of the client.

Product mindset means, above all, approaching new product development from the customer's standpoint. We must fall in love with the problem, instead of falling in love with the idea or the solution. That is the fundamental change to move towards a product mentality.
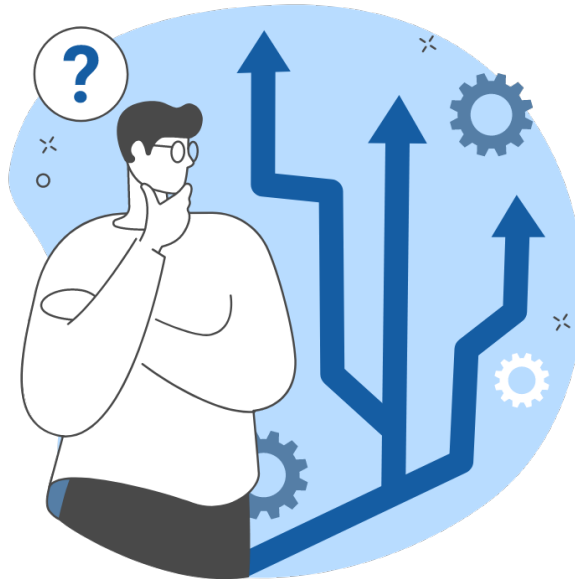
Agility Levels

When we talk about organizational agility, we must first be able to differentiate between the different levels of agility that exist.

In the management of an organization there are different levels of decision making. Known by some as 'flight levels.' The problem comes when we focus on the lowest level and forget about all the others.

Whenever agility topic comes up with my clients, I explain that true agility is not in operational excellence[16] or in adopting Scrum. True agility is in decision making. In short, it is about having options at a strategic level and from there being able to choose the opportunities to develop to improve the lives of customers and have a positive impact on the business.

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[16] https://aktiasolutions.com/the-age-of-agile-is-gone/

The Product Roadmap

As you will see throughout the book, the product roadmap is a tool to introduce, develop and accommodate a new product mentality.

I often refer to the product roadmap as *'the single source of truth'* because it is important to have a strategy and goals, but the roadmap is the artifact that ultimately helps driving product growth and connects strategy with execution.

How exactly does a roadmap make the product mindset a reality?

- *The roadmap smoothly integrates the practice of [product discovery][22] into the development process of a product.*
- *The roadmap makes visible all the stages of an initiative's path from its acceptance down to the market.*

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[22] https://aktiasolutions.com/product-discovery/

Roadmap Foundations

Product Strategy

In this chapter we will take an introduction to the concept of business strategy, specifically product strategy, and discuss the entry point to product roadmaps – the selection product goals.

It should be noted that the strategic decision-making process is based on solving design problems by proposing hypotheses and validating them iteratively and incrementally.

Figure 6 - Strategy hierarchy

Product Roadmap Fundamentals

Product roadmaps translate strategic decisions into actionable plans that provide direction for the development team and the other stakeholders. Roadmaps help everyone involved in making the product a success understand how the product is likely to grow and how this will affect their work.

The product roadmap can be an incredibly useful tool for implementing the [product strategy](https://aktiasolutions.com/elements-product-strategy/)[24] and aligning the stakeholders.

A roadmap communicates the "why" behind what you're building. It's a plan for your strategy. A roadmap is a high-level visual summary that maps out the vision and direction of your product, often over time.

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[24] https://aktiasolutions.com/elements-product-strategy/

Benefits of Product Roadmapping

You like it or not, if you want to successfully introduce product roadmapping in your organization, you will have to convince powerful people to collaborate and use it.

You will have to sell it.

Hence, you must be able to match key users' needs, problems and expectations with the value provided by the roadmap.

Even if the artifact is the same, you must be able to provide different information to each user segment.

In this section you will learn exactly that. How to put forward the value proposition of product roadmapping for the main roadmap personas: executives, engineering, sales, and marketing.

So, let's see what arguments we can use to convince them.

Roadmap Design

Designing your Roadmap

Your organization needs to have an explicit and shared understanding of what a roadmap means and how it is to be used. In the absence of this understanding, roadmaps are not only useless, but actively harmful.

This is perhaps the key success factor number one.

A roadmap is an alignment and communication tool. Hence, it must be useful for its different types of users (mainly business stakeholders, senior management, and engineering).

In our experience, the design of the roadmap should be a collaborative effort including key users.

Whenever a roadmap user looks at it, she must be able to easily find the information they are looking for and the answers to her questions.

Roadmap Design Mistakes

In this chapter we explore the most common mistakes in the design of a product roadmap:

- *Not involving stakeholders in the design process*
- *Carved in stone*
- *Absence of Product Strategy*
- *Too granular*

Theme Design

Themes are the main element of every roadmap. They allow to explicitly connect the strategy with the execution, linking the product objectives, the success metrics, and the development opportunities.
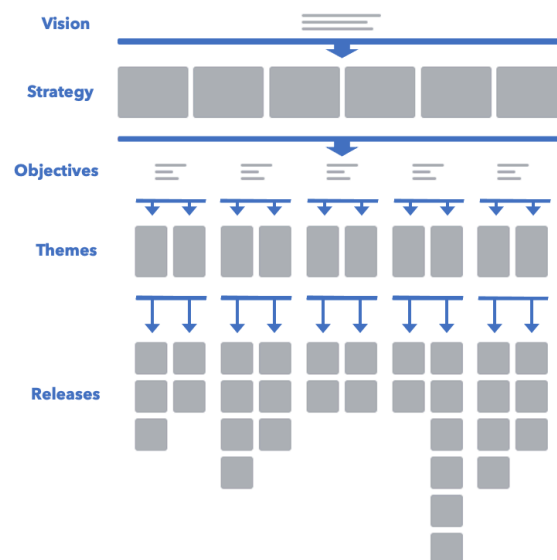
Figure 27 - Themes connect product goals with delivery

Roadmap Management

Roadmap Management

The product roadmap is not a fixed plan that is created once and then simply executed. It must be reviewed and adjusted on a regular basis.

In this chapter we will see how to define the appropriate review frequency, involve the right people, and use the right inputs to make the necessary changes.

Updating the Roadmap

When conditions in the environment change, your roadmap must change as well.

In this section we will review ways to manage both expected and unexpected change.

Successful companies revise their roadmaps on a regular cadence to reflect market changes and shifts in strategy or priority, while also allowing execution to proceed steadily between updates.

Product Roadmap Metrics

If one thing is conspicuous by its absence in most roadmap implementations, it is the metrics to monitor the performance of the product roadmap.

I recommend establishing a framework of metrics that allows you to improve the product roadmapping process and the strategic decision taking.

A product roadmap is so important that it has both upward (product strategy) and downward (product backlog) implications. Hence, we will not only measure the effectiveness of the artifact itself, but the implications around it.

Roadmap Implementation

Getting Started with Roadmaps

In this chapter we will see a method that you can use to introduce product roadmaps in your organization or to improve existing ones.

The method begins by assessing the current situation and investigating the needs and expectations of stakeholders. Then we define the implementation strategy, we get buy-in, and we finally define the initial implementation of the roadmap.

I suggest the following steps for getting started with product roadmapping in your organization:

1. *Evaluate current situation*
2. *Understand stakeholders*
3. *Decide implementation strategy*
4. *Get everyone on board*
5. *Validate a solution*
6. *Implement a Minimum Viable Roadmap*
7. *Continuous improvement*

Barriers to Adoption

In this chapter we review some of the barriers to product roadmap adoption that we usually find so that you can design mitigation strategies appropriate to your context.

Barriers of adoption are those forces that might prevent roadmap stakeholders from collaborating in its design and eventually using it.

Even stakeholders who might benefit from a product roadmap may choose the old way or non-consumption[49] in the face of these obstacles.

Therefore, it is important to find ways to reduce or eliminate them.

Some of the most frequent product roadmap adoption obstacles are the following ones:

- *Awareness*

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[49] Nonconsumption is the inability of an entity (person or organization) to purchase and use (consume) a product or service required to fulfill an important Job to be Done.

Product Roadmap Scorecard

Before you can decide where to begin with your product roadmapping effort, you must assess your current situation.

In addition to interviewing stakeholders, I recommend a more formal approach that allows you to objectively assess the key components of a product roadmap.

The purpose of this assessment is to provide you with a gist of your roadmap's unique strengths and areas for improvement.

The result of the scorecard will help you decide the implementation strategy and the specific areas of focus and/or improvement to convince the stakeholders.

The questions will tell you how well positioned you are in each of the following dimensions:

- *STRATEGY*
- *DISCOVERY*

About Aktia Solutions

Aktia Solutions was born in 2018 with the purpose to inspire a modern product mindset and practice in companies developing software-based products or services.

We are a boutique management consulting firm with a pragmatic business approach focusing on the most important opportunities for our customers today and setting the ground for future growth.

We work with you to achieve your strategic objectives in this fast paced and uncertain world, by helping you become a modern product-led organization.

We help you develop your product leadership, design a value-driven product organization, unleash new sources of growth, and make sure value reaches the market fast and effectively.

Product Leadership	Product Organization	Product Management	Product Development
Provide intent, inspire and develop talent	Design a flexible and adaptable value-driven organizational structure	Discover new sources of growth and make products customers love	Achieve operational excellence with Agile, Kanban and OKRs

About Gerard Chiva

Product Discovery and

Strategy Coach

I help companies build better products and executives to build leading product organizations

I am Managing Director of AKTIA Solutions, a Management Consulting Firm.

I collaborate with companies as Product and Strategy Coach.

I developed my professional career for the last 20+ years in roles related to technology. As an engineer, manager, consultant, Agile Coach, Product Coach and Executive Coach.

I have extensive experience, combining professional coaching, management, consulting, engineering, and entrepreneurship.

I have worked in different types of industries and different roles, giving me a broad perspective on how organizations work.

I am also an author, startup mentor and investor.

Driving Product-led Growth