

PRODUCT AND CUSTOMER

# Product Management Foundations

*Cagan · Cooper · Perri · Torres*

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PAPER 01 / 02

A Furtherance reference compendium on the intellectual traditions behind organisational design, leadership, execution, and culture.

IN THIS PAPER

This paper opens the Product and Customer series in Furtherance's reference library. It covers the foundations of modern product management – the shift from shipping features to creating outcomes for customers. The question it answers: what actually makes a product team effective, and how should it work?

Cagan defines the empowered product team; Cooper grounds product in designing for user goals; Perri names the output-obsessed “build trap” and how to escape it; Torres turns customer discovery into a continuous habit. The through-line: measure products by outcomes, and keep teams close to customers.

Marty Cagan Inspired, 2008 · Empowered, 2020

Modern product management · Silicon Valley Product Group

CORE THESIS

Great products come from **empowered product teams** given **problems to solve**, not roadmaps of features to build. Such teams run continuous **product discovery** – de-risking value, usability, feasibility and viability – alongside delivery, and are measured by **outcomes**, not output.

FRAMEWORK

| Distinction                | Meaning                                     |
|----------------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| Empowered vs feature teams | Given problems to solve vs features to ship |
| Discovery vs delivery      | De-risk what to build vs build it well      |
| The four risks             | Value, usability, feasibility, viability    |
| Outcomes over output       | Judge by results, not features delivered    |

METHODOLOGY

Practitioner synthesis from senior product roles and advisory work across technology companies.

SIGNIFICANCE AND CRITIQUE

The defining voice of modern product management. The critique: the model assumes a degree of organisational maturity and a technology context that not every firm shares.

Alan Cooper The Inmates Are Running the Asylum, 1999

Interaction design · personas and goal-directed design

CORE THESIS

Design for the user's **goals**, not the engineer's convenience. Cooper founded interaction design and introduced **personas** – research-based archetypal users – as a tool to keep design anchored to real human needs rather than an abstract “elastic user”.

**FRAMEWORK**

| Idea                 | What it provides                        |
|----------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| Goal-directed design | Design from the user's goals backward   |
| Personas             | Research-based archetypes to design for |
| Interaction design   | A discipline distinct from engineering  |
| The elastic user     | The danger of designing for “anyone”    |

**METHODOLOGY**

Design practice, drawn from software and interaction-design consulting.

**SIGNIFICANCE AND CRITIQUE**

Founded interaction design and gave the field personas. The critique: personas are often misused – invented without research, they mislead rather than guide.

**Melissa Perri** *Escaping the Build Trap, 2018*

*Product strategy · output vs outcome*

**CORE THESIS**

Organisations fall into the **build trap** – measuring success by the **output** they ship rather than the **outcomes** and value they create. Escaping it requires product strategy, a product operating model, and maturity in how product is managed.

**FRAMEWORK**

| Element                    | Meaning                                        |
|----------------------------|------------------------------------------------|
| The build trap             | Valuing features shipped over value created    |
| Output vs outcome          | Activity vs the result that matters            |
| The product strategy stack | Vision □ intents □ initiatives □ options       |
| Product operating model    | How the organisation is set up to create value |

**METHODOLOGY**

Practitioner and consulting work on product organisations and strategy.

**SIGNIFICANCE AND CRITIQUE**

The sharpest articulation of the output-versus-outcome problem at the organisational level. The critique: the treatment is oriented to consulting engagements and larger organisations.

**Teresa Torres** *Continuous Discovery Habits, 2021*

*Product discovery · the opportunity solution tree*

**CORE THESIS**

Discovery should be a **continuous habit**, not a phase: regular customer touchpoints, a mapped set of **opportunities**, and constant assumption testing keep daily work connected to a desired **outcome**.

FRAMEWORK

| Practice                    | What it does                                      |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| Weekly customer touchpoints | Keep discovery continuous, not episodic           |
| Opportunity solution tree   | Outcome → opportunities → solutions → experiments |
| Assumption testing          | Test the riskiest assumptions before building     |
| Outcome-based teams         | Anchor the team to a measurable outcome           |

METHODOLOGY

Practitioner coaching distilled into a repeatable discovery practice.

SIGNIFICANCE AND CRITIQUE

Operationalised product discovery into concrete, repeatable habits. The critique: the cadence and discipline it demands are more than many teams sustain.

Synthesis

| Contribution | Focus      | Key idea                       | Register        |
|--------------|------------|--------------------------------|-----------------|
| Cagan        | Team model | Empowered teams; discovery     | Practitioner    |
| Cooper       | Design     | Goal-directed design; personas | Design practice |
| Perri        | Strategy   | The build trap; outcomes       | Consulting      |
| Torres       | Discovery  | Continuous discovery habits    | Coaching        |

FOR THE OPERATOR

Product management foundations reframe the discipline around outcomes and customers – empowered teams solving problems (Cagan), designing for user goals (Cooper), escaping the output-obsessed build trap (Perri), and building continuous discovery habits (Torres). For the operator: measure products by outcomes, not features shipped; put empowered teams close to customers; and keep discovery continuous. The next paper sharpens the lens on what customers actually want – Jobs-to-be-Done.