

Intro to Product Mindset

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Who this is for

The intended audience for this material is leaders who are looking to get more leverage out of their tech investments, but whose organizations haven't yet either transitioned from traditional software delivery methods to user-centered design, or who are still early on their journey toward these product approaches.

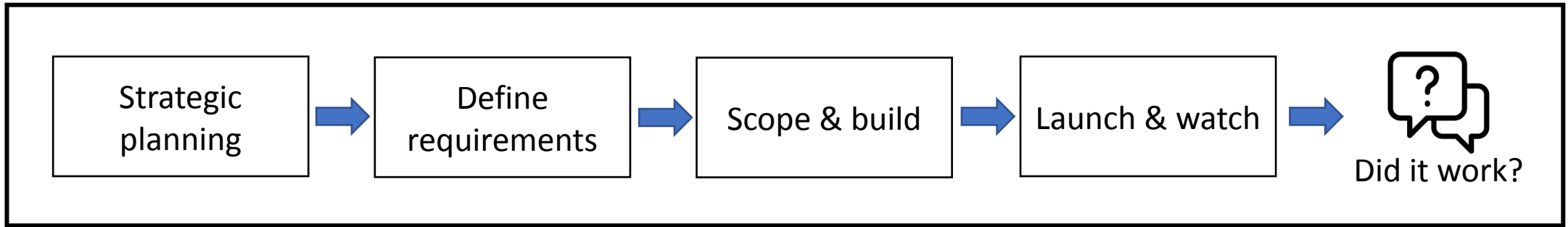
This document attempts to provide a high level intro to product, how seasoned product teams operate, and how thoughtful leaders can set them up for success. It is meant to help leaders become familiar with a few key concepts, and offers resources for further reading and engagement.

Topics covered in this presentation

- Legacy approaches to building products
- Definition of modern products
- Critical foundations for team success
- Helpful resources

Legacy approaches to building products

Legacy product development approaches are unsuitable for modern business problems



(Notice that in the legacy approach, engineering work precedes learning)

Typically, teams tasked with execution in this environment tend to be waterfall, or at best “agilefall”

Behaviors typically associated with legacy approaches can be counter-productive

Behaviors

- Leadership defines the why, what, and how
- Big bets are made based on judgment, assumptions
- Current customers have outsized influence on priorities
- Delivery teams lack business and user context
- Feature scope is based on “use it or lose it” capacity
- Delivery teams juggle work across multiple domains
- User experience design is done by committee
- Observability of outcomes is limited



Outcomes

- Build the wrong stuff
- For the wrong people
- At the wrong time (or sequence)
- Cause mistakes, rework & defects
- Take too long to create value
- Overbuild the solution
- Don't know if it's working

The net result is that the enterprise tolerates massive waste in the name of planning & efficiency

There is a better way, and it's already pretty well-defined. Bold organizations, especially those born in the Internet era, have embraced a Product Mindset that they believe creates more value faster, with less risk and waste.

This mindset is all about creating **Empowered Product Teams** that can operate like **Lean Startups.**

Note:

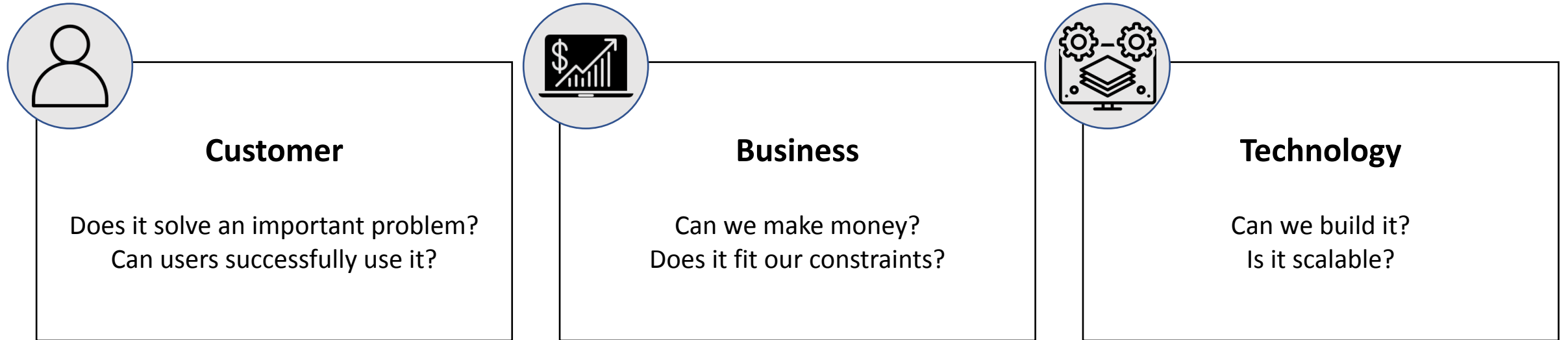
See Marty Cagan/SVPG for more on Empowered Product Teams.

See Eric Reis or Jeff Gothelf for more on Lean product.

Definition of modern software products

(there are many ways to define “product”)

Product = Customer x Business x Technology

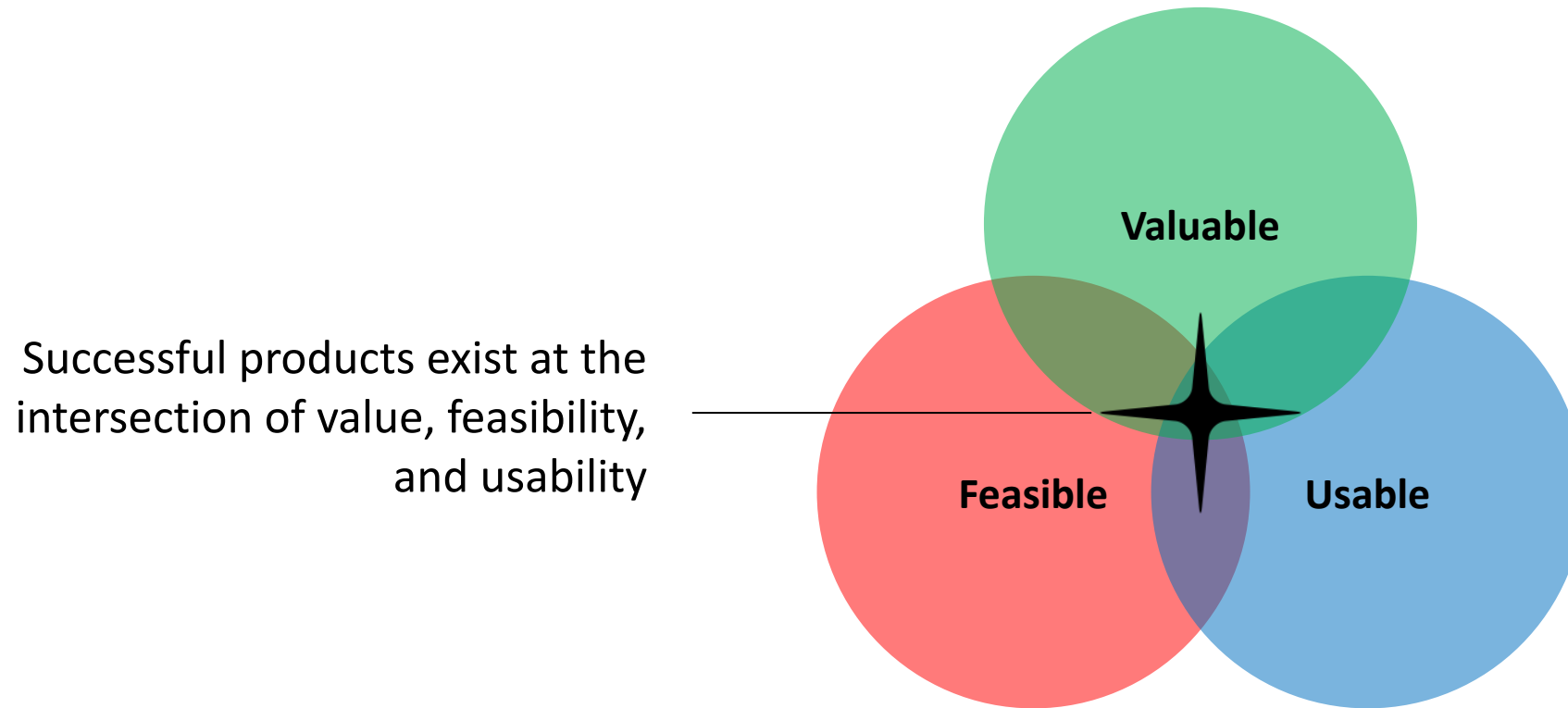


If your team isn't solving for all 3, they're not building products

Source:
Adapted from Marty Cagan/SVPG

Stated slightly differently ...

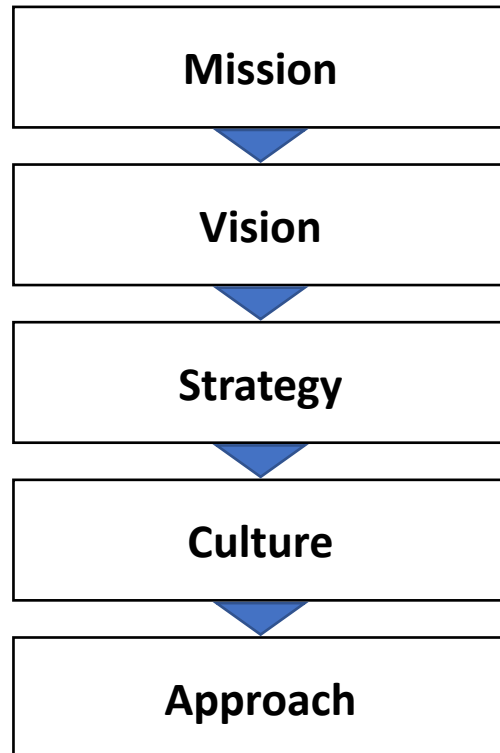
The role of a product is to **change user behaviors** in order to **drive business outcomes**



Notice how small this intersection appears to be

Critical foundations for team success

Before teams start building solutions, it helps to set a foundation for success



Why does our org/group/team exist?

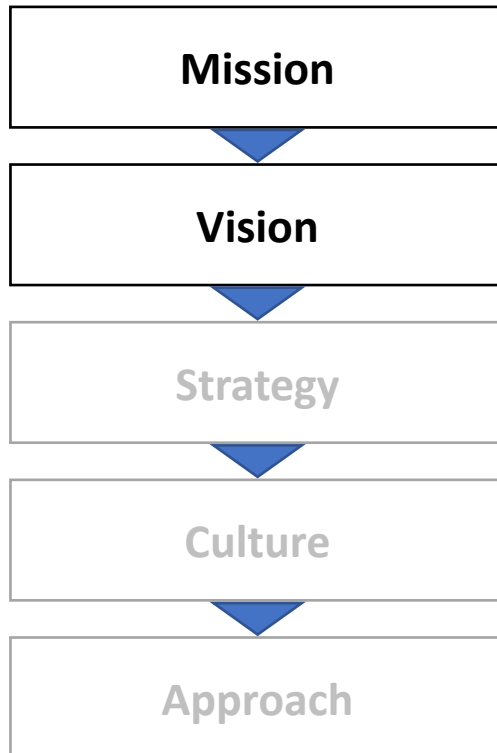
What will be true when we achieve our goals?

What should we work on to realize our vision?

How might we create an environment where people can do great work?

How should the team work?

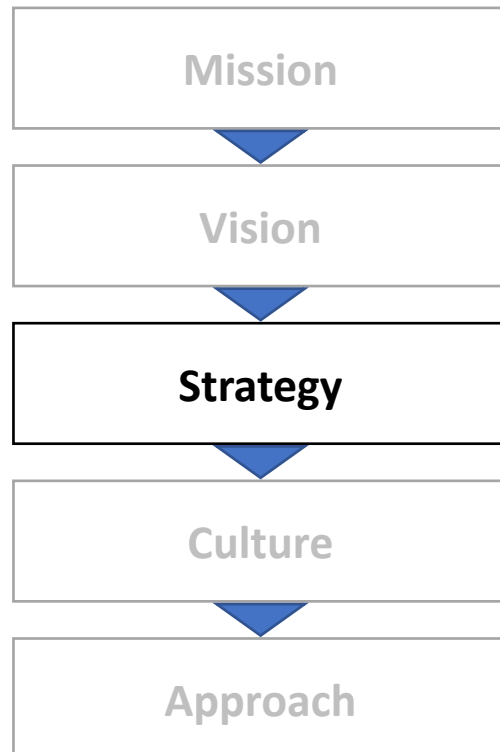
Mission and vision are critical for the organization to navigate



Mission and vision aren't happy talk or marketing speak. They're the **north star** by which the organization navigates, making sure all initiatives clearly align to the same ultimate **outcome**.

(much has been written on compelling company missions and visions so we'll skip that part for the purposes of this overview)

Product strategy is the sequencing of product investments, in alignment with prioritized opportunities that best help realize the vision



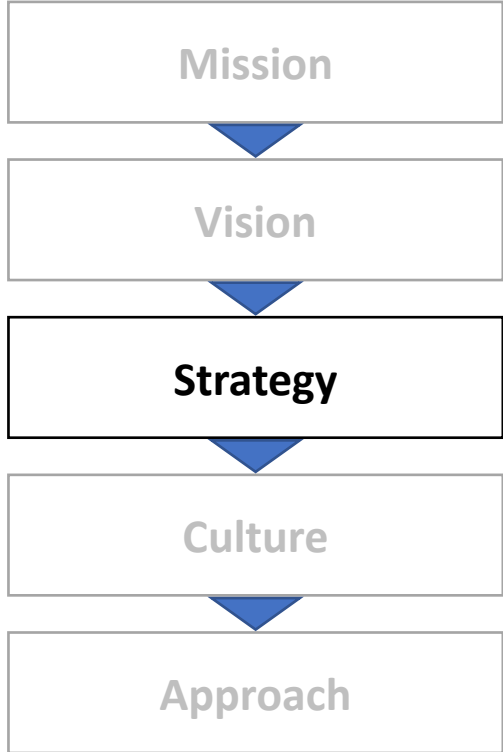
*Product strategy is **the path** the organization takes to **reach the vision**.*

This can be thought of as a **roadmap**, but one ideally constructed as a series of challenges* standing between the company and its vision, rather than as a series of products and features.

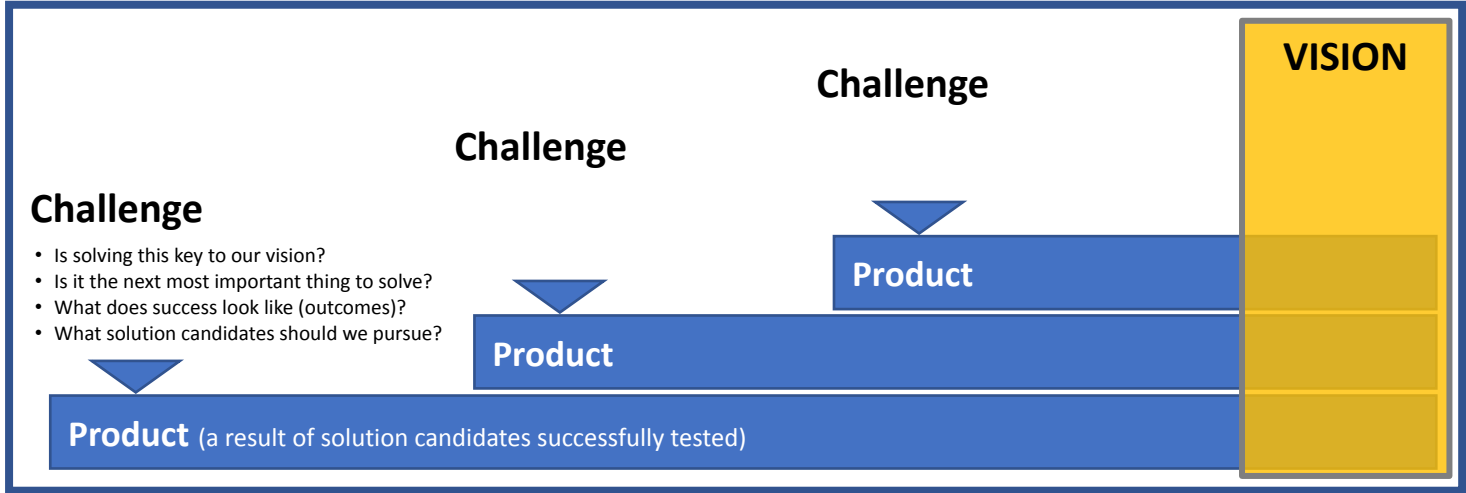
Why? Because any planned features, prior to performing learning via product discovery and experimentation, are likely to be based on **assumptions** which are merely placeholders for **validated learnings**.

*A challenge is simply a customer, business, or technology problem re-stated as a need.

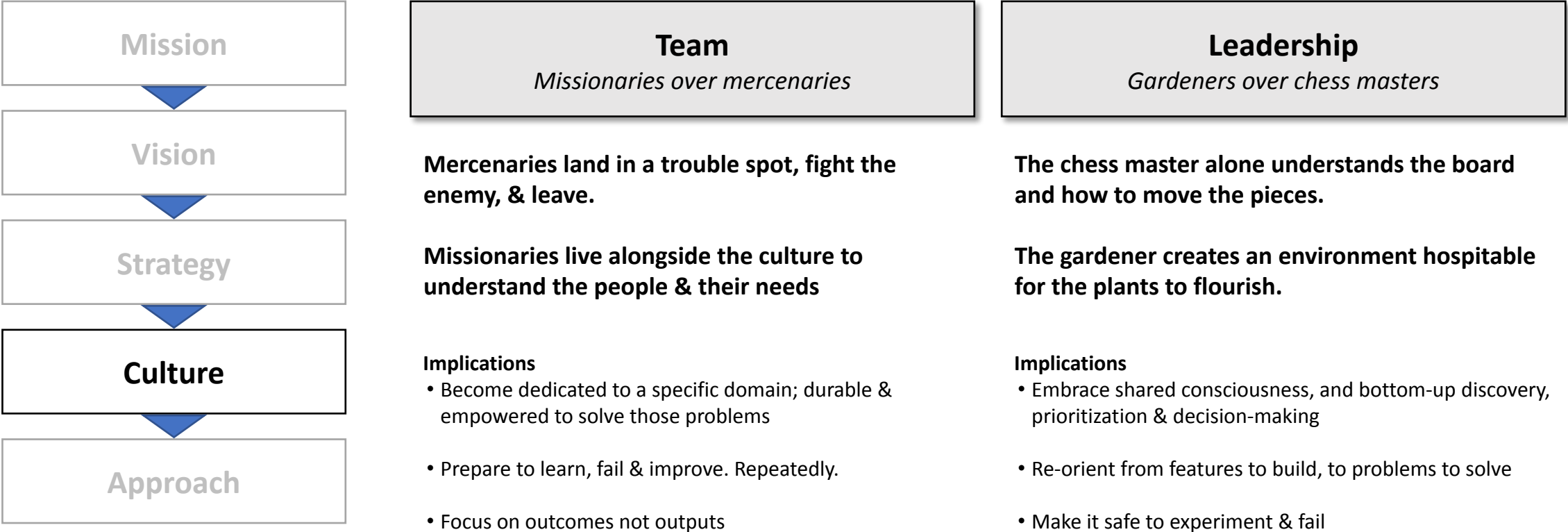
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Challenge-based roadmaps tend to be more useful for plotting product strategy than feature roadmaps.

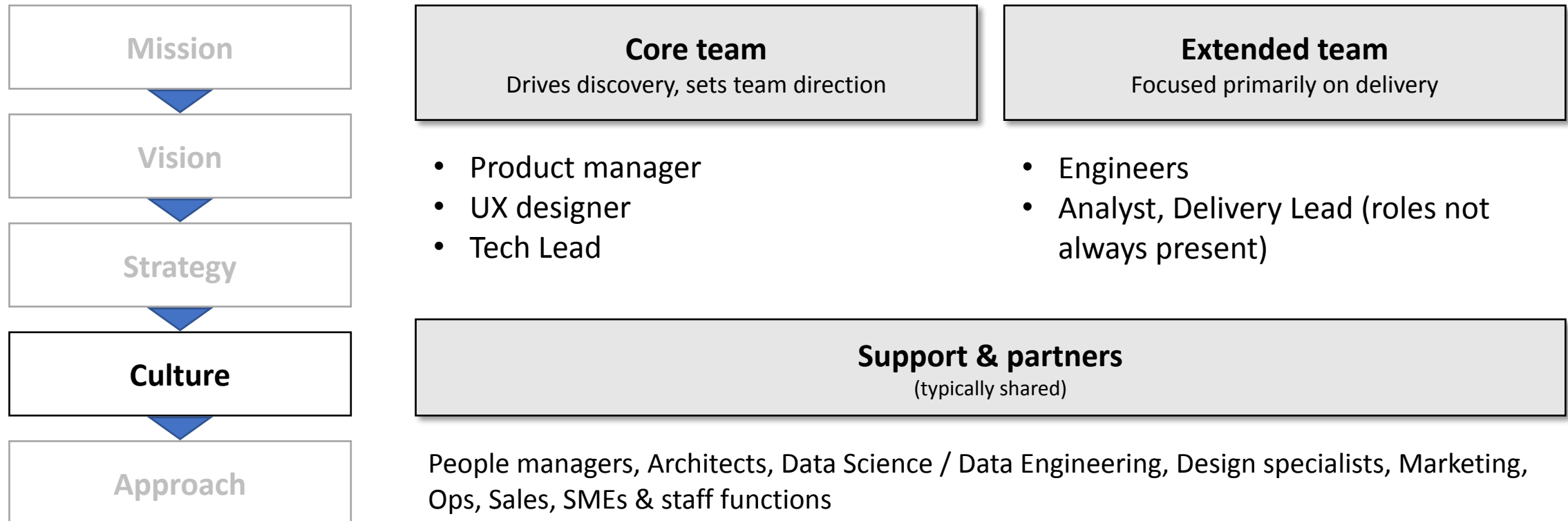


Product won't be successful unless the principles of the organization evolve to support it



Source:
Missionaries / Mercenaries analogy adapted from John Doerr
Gardeners / Chess Masters analogy adapted from Gen. Stanley McChrystal, Team of Teams

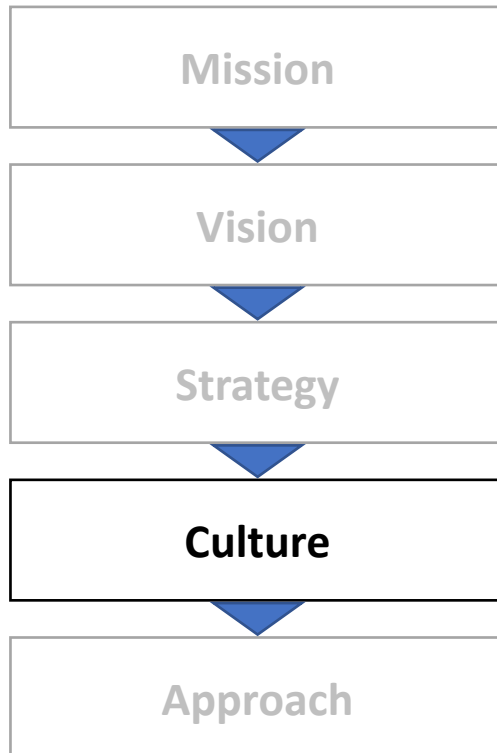
Organizational support also includes careful consideration of staffing, both for the team and their ecosystem



KEY TO SUCCESS

Establish clear responsibilities, competency standards, role selection criteria & interaction models for all

The Product Manager role is the lynchpin

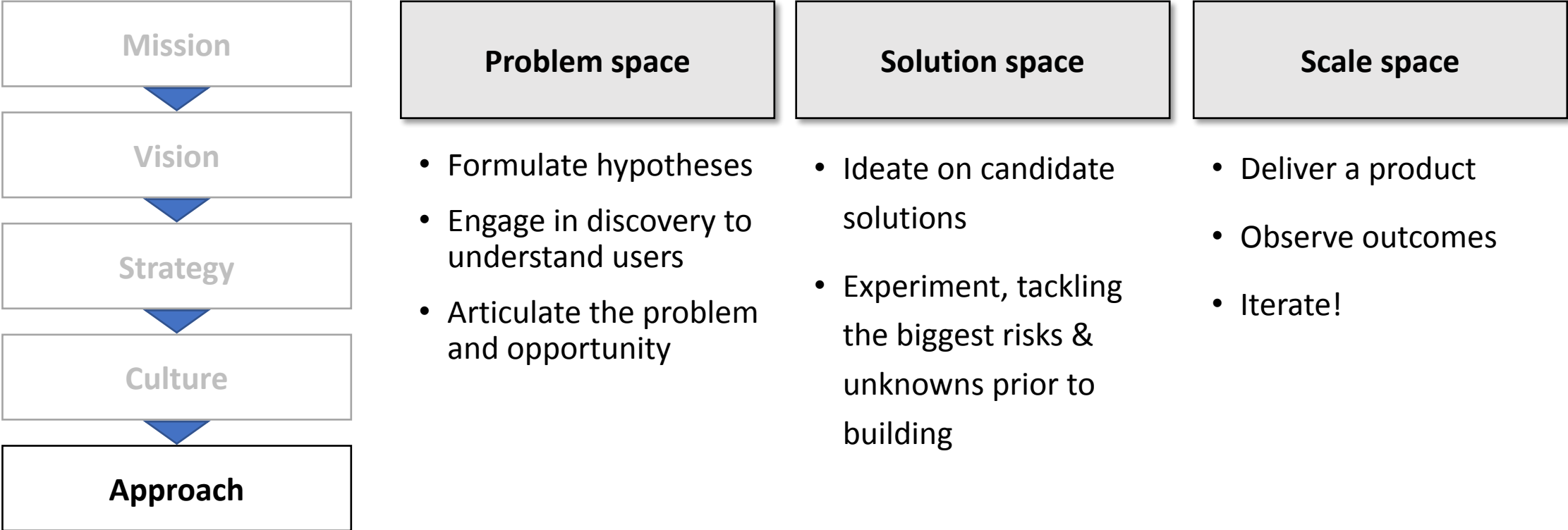


In legacy organizations, the PM typically serves as backlog administrator and executor, as well as part time business rep and design liaison. There is little time available for strategy, discovery, or outcomes measurement that allows for continuous iterative improvement.

The user-centric product approach enables (demands) a new target PM competency profile

- **User** - deeply knowledgeable about the target consumer, interacts with users regularly (ideally every week), evangelist for user problems and potential solutions
- **Business** - understands value drivers, able to put rough valuations on features, understands conceptually how relevant models & policies work, knows how user behaviors lead to business outcomes
- **Technology** - conversant in the organization's current and target tech stack/data & how engineers' skills align, able to estimate LOE with reasonable reliability without help
- **Industry** - familiar with the primary and emerging competitive set, keen observer of industry developments, SWOT expert, able to spot trends

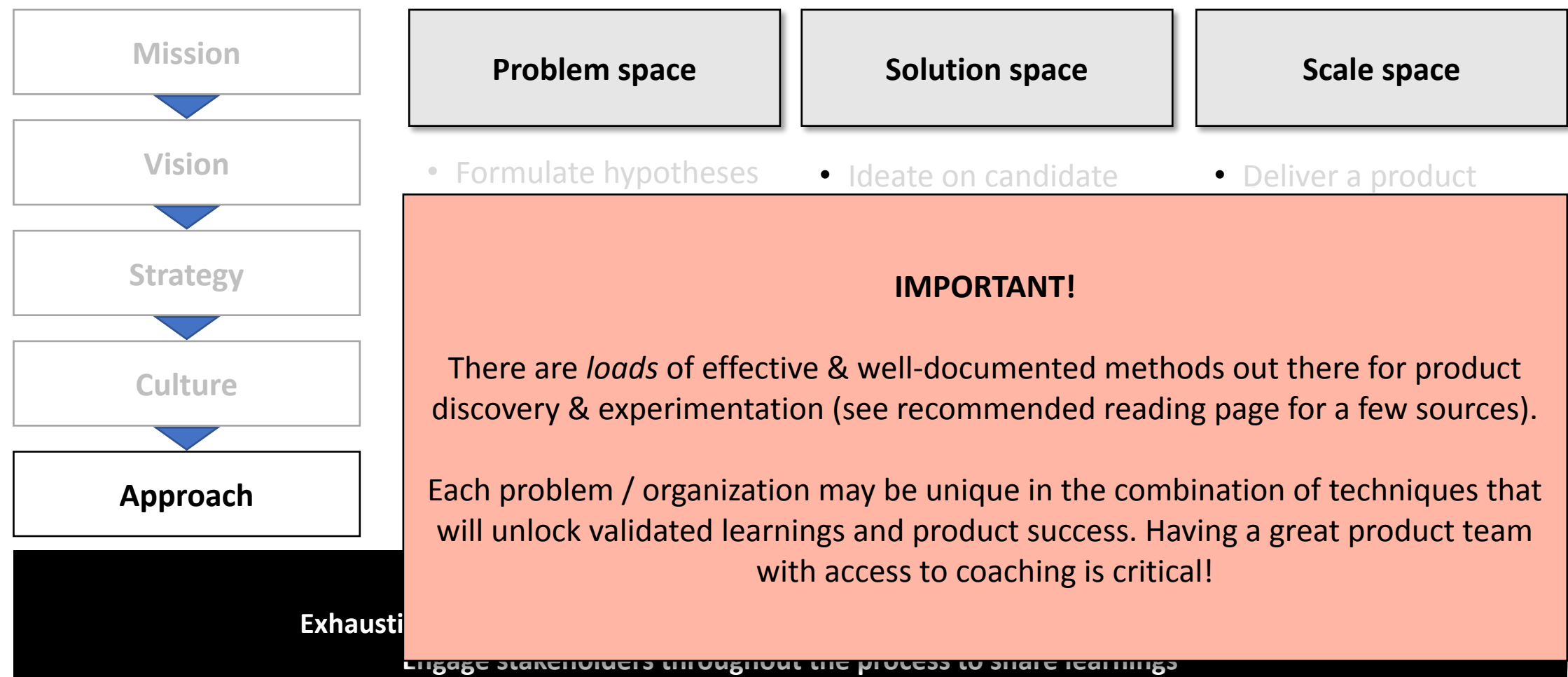
Great product teams obsess over learning – successful delivery requires dedicated focus in the problem, solution, and scale spaces



KEY TO SUCCESS

Exhaustively define the problem space before progressing to the solution space
Engage stakeholders throughout the process to share learnings

Great product teams obsess over learning – successful delivery requires dedicated focus in the problem, solution, and scale spaces



Where should you start?

Well, that depends on organizational acceptance & maturity.

I'm evangelizing to a skeptical leadership audience

- Facilitate a retrospective on a recent failure – how might a product mindset have yielded different results?
- [Re]introduce leaders to the product mindset, ask what would need to be true to adopt it
- Seek support for a single pilot

Leadership has bought in but we're not sure where to start

- Align on a good candidate problem for a pilot with agreed-upon objectives and guardrails
- Make sure you have a clear problem statement
- No cutting corners on staffing, techniques, and leadership support!

We're already practicing, but we want to level up

- Assess what could improve
 - Strategy
 - Org design / staffing
 - Team practices
 - Outcomes orientation
- Involve the teams in the current / future state definition, and path to closing gaps

KEY TO SUCCESS

Bring in expert practitioners or product coaches as needed

Contact me with questions



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(There's a lot more to the story! I also have loads of helpful stories to share about successes and failures experienced while trying to execute on a product mindset)

Helpful resources

Recommended reading



- Marty Cagan – **Inspired** (book), SVPG Insights (blog)
- Eric Reis – **The Lean Startup** (book)
- Jeff Patton – **User Story Mapping** (book), Articles (blog)
- Teresa Torres – Product Talk (blog)
- Rich Mironov – Product Bytes (blog)
- Jeff Gothelf – Lean UX (book)
- Melissa Perri – Writings & Updates (blog)
- Daniel Pink - DRiVE (book)
- Daniel Coyle – The Culture Code (book)
- Christina Wodtke – Radical Focus (book)
- Felipe Castro – The Beginner’s Guide To OKR (eBook)
- John Doerr – Measure What Matters (book)
- David Epstein – Range (book)

I recommend the books in bold font as core to the product management canon