



The Product Discovery Playbook



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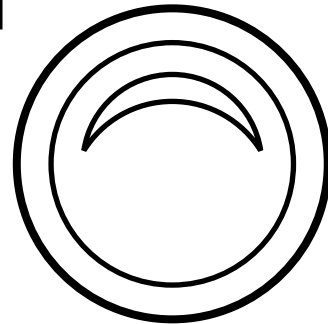
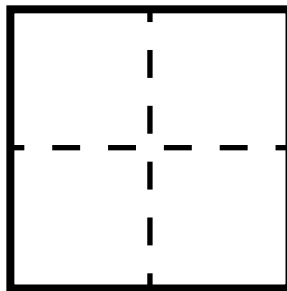
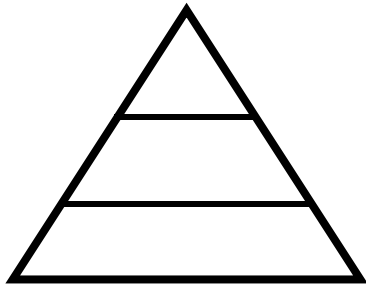
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CHAPTER 1

The fundamentals of product discovery

Why risk building the wrong products or features? With product discovery, you can ensure you're on the right track.

› “There is nothing quite so useless as doing with great efficiency something that should not be done at all.”

Peter Drucker

What is product discovery?

When we say “product discovery,” we’re typically referring to the process of understanding customers’ pain points, identifying potential ways you could solve those problems, and validating whether the product you’re going to build will solve those problems.

Product discovery

A process that helps product teams refine their ideas by deeply understanding real user problems and then landing on the best way to solve them.

Gaining a deep understanding of problems and opportunities before you set out to solve them helps reduce risk and uncertainty around investing time and money. It also gives you a solid foundation from which to launch and grow your product and business once you’re ready.

Why you need to be doing product discovery

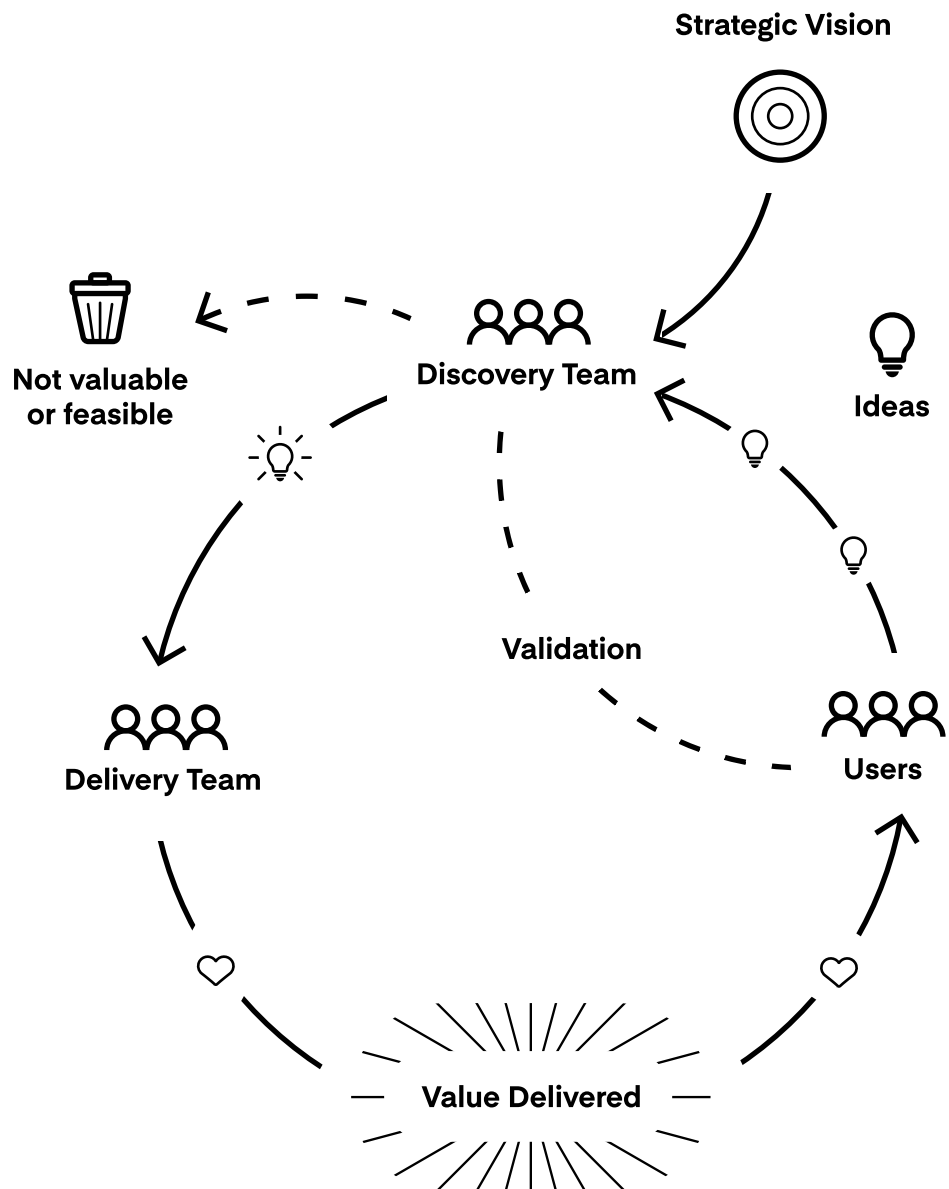
Consider the typical responsibilities of a product manager:

- ◆ Processing inputs like feedback and feature requests
- ◆ Generating feature ideas based on user needs and strategic considerations
- ◆ Prioritizing the most valuable ideas, pushing them to the dev team’s backlog
- ◆ Discarding low-value or infeasible ideas

As you complete this audit, note which tools or platforms are used to collect information. You’ll likely find a smorgasbord of emails, Google Docs, internal communication tools, note-taking apps, and department-specific tools like Salesforce and Intercom.

Once you have a holistic overview of your insights landscape, assess them against the problems you are trying to solve for customers. Can you identify trends and patterns in all the collected inputs that help you better understand what’s working for users, and what isn’t? Are you able to identify the needs of a certain type of customer? Are you now able to quickly find all insights related to a specific feature idea or user need?

These are all important questions you should aim to answer.



Adapted from [Kevin on Code](#)

But there's a problem:

Most startups spend more time focused on solutions rather than problems—but developing solutions in full before sharing them with users is risky and expensive.

Users have complex needs with subtleties even they may not fully grasp. Teams who don't take the time to understand the problem they're solving risk biasing their work towards their internal perspectives over true customer needs, or biasing towards well-understood solutions that still may not be usable or useful.

Data from CB Insights shows 42% of failed startups cite a lack of market need as the top reason behind their failure.

Either way, building the wrong thing is expensive — yet many teams only discover they've made a false assumption about what users really need after launching a new product or feature.

That's where product discovery comes in

Product discovery doesn't replace product delivery—it complements and precedes it.

Here's how the legendary Marty Cagan describes it:

“First, you need to discover whether there are real users out there that want this product... Second, you need to discover a product solution to this problem that is usable, useful, and feasible.”

Marty Cagan

Why you need to be doing product discovery

See if any of these sound familiar:

- ◆ Features you spent a lot of time on in the past that ended up having fairly low usage among your target customer base
- ◆ Times where users might have told you "Hey, you built feature B but what we really needed was feature A..."
- ◆ Entire products that were a flop

Product discovery can keep you from repeating the mistakes of the past. By investing more in researching and validating your ideas upfront before sending them to delivery, you avoid wasting time and money building products customers don't want or need.

Who should be involved in product discovery?

The best product discovery doesn't happen in a vacuum. You should aim to involve the entire product team and key stakeholders from your organization in product discovery efforts from the very beginning.

Tim Herbig recommends breaking your discovery team into three groups:

- ◆ **Permanent collaborators:** Product managers, UX designers, user researchers, and engineering leads
- ◆ **Temporary collaborators:** Developers, product leadership, customer support staff, sales
- ◆ **Supporters:** Executives, other product teams, infrastructure teams

While permanent collaborators drive ongoing discovery efforts, temporary collaborators and supporters may be more involved in particular steps. For example, key executives may attend kickoff meetings but would not be involved in prototyping sessions.

Involving the right people from across the organization in product discovery helps unlock insights that might otherwise be missed and empowers the core product team to access the customers and resources they need to validate their ideas.

When should you do product discovery?

The short answer: constantly.

At Productboard, we're big proponents of using continuous product discovery to reduce the risks around every product and feature we set out to build (read more on continuous discovery in a later chapter). Instead of treating product discovery as a one-and-done task or switching back and forth between discovery and delivery, we encourage teams to adopt a structure where the two processes can overlap and intertwine with each other.

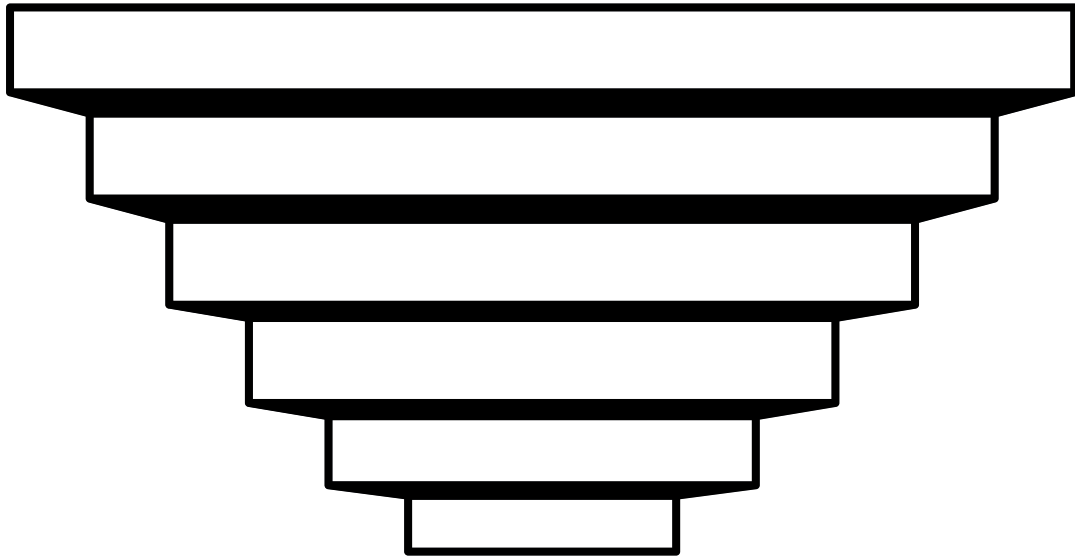
If you're not doing product discovery, you should be. If you are doing discovery, read on to discover how you can do it quickly, effectively, and build the right products in less time.

Product discovery is about more than just tools and frameworks

While popular tools and frameworks like Lean Startup and Jobs to Be Done can be useful for lending structure to a sometimes-messy process, they are only a small part of successful product discovery.

Other important factors:

- ♦ **Psychological safety:** Team members must feel empowered to share thoughts, ideas, and opinions—regardless of how controversial—without fear of losing their jobs
- ♦ **Team structure:** Leadership must empower teams with both tooling and an organizational infrastructure that allows for both open-ended discovery and focused delivery to happen in parallel
- ♦ **Clear outcomes:** Successful product discovery begins with defining outcomes you'd like to achieve (we talk more about this later in this ebook!)



CHAPTER 2

A step-by-step guide for conducting product discovery

Product discovery is about promoting an environment of learning so you can improve your product incrementally and consistently.

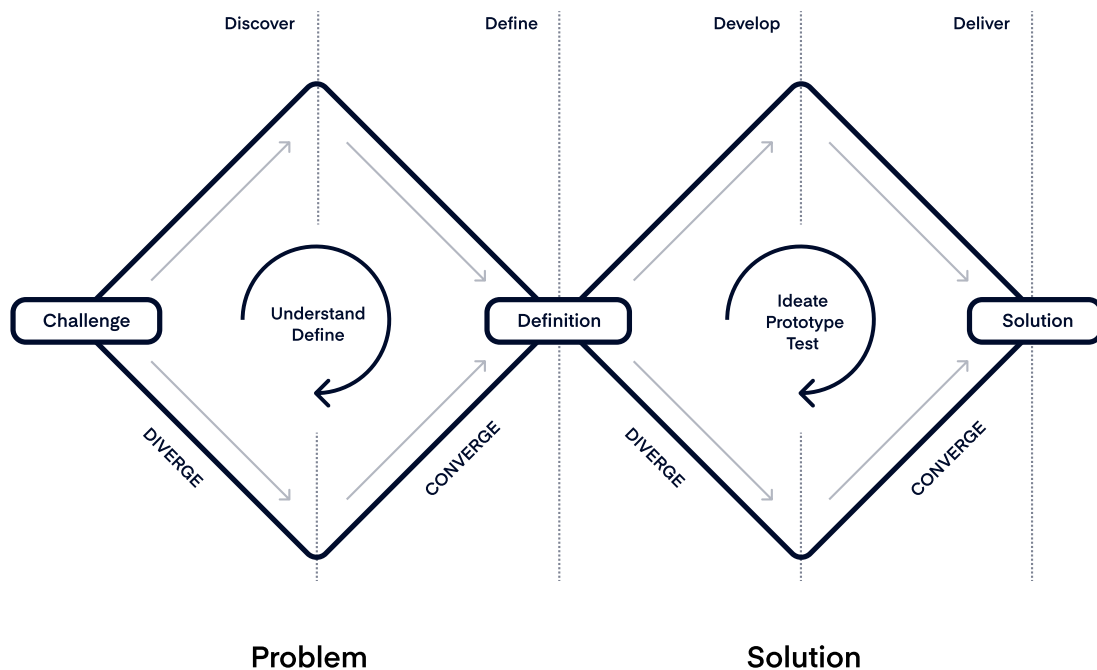
For new product teams, the product discovery process can feel like a bit of a mystery. There's no worksheet you can fill out or a box you can check.

While there's definitely an element of art to successful product discovery, the process itself is fairly concrete. Product discovery is about finding smart ways to mitigate risk, turning those techniques into habits, and building a process that works for your team and company.

How we do product discovery at Productboard

Here at Productboard, we use the popular Double Diamond approach to understand customer needs and explore innovative ways we can solve their problems.

Teams first begin by exploring the problem space — talking to customers and prospects and exploring user needs before nailing down the precise problem users are experiencing. Once teams understand how customers feel and how they're currently tackling those problems, they propose potential solutions and validate their ideas before landing on a valuable solution.



The double-diamond approach to product discovery

The four phases of product discovery

1. Uncover the underlying challenges
2. Interpret your findings and re-frame the problem
3. Identify creative solutions
4. Collect feedback and validate your solutions

Do we need to do product discovery for every product or feature?

Not necessarily. The goal of product discovery is to reduce uncertainty—therefore the amount of time you spend researching problems and solutions should depend on how much uncertainty surrounds your chosen problem.

If you're familiar with Productboard, you might assume that after building roadmapping solutions for over 5 years we'd know pretty much everything there is to know about roadmaps. Not true. We spent many hours running discovery around some of our recent timeline roadmap enhancements—particularly the most granular aspects like how features and objectives shown on the same timeline should interact.

We conduct discovery for pretty much all major features (and many minor ones) even though we're generally familiar with our market. Senior product manager Philipp Krehl sums up the problem well in his post for Mind The Product: "If the uncertainty you face is too high, start with product discovery and not with product delivery."

STEP 1

Uncover the underlying challenges

Product discovery begins not with the how, but the why. Products can only be successful when they solve a burning user problem, so you should begin by understanding the underlying challenges and struggles your potential customers face. Only then can you clearly define the problem you're solving.

This early phase is about taking a big step back, questioning your assumptions, and finding out what the need really is. Sometimes that might mean starting with a problem or opportunity, but frequently you're starting with a popular feature request or solution idea.

Let's say Productboard was working on ways of helping mid-market companies to better understand their customers' burning pain points. Our problem hypothesis might look something like the following:

》 *Mid-market companies often struggle when trying to communicate with multiple audiences at once.*

We might consider starting with some of the following qualitative product discovery tools:

- ◆ **Existing qualitative inputs:** Support tickets, transcripts from sales calls, past user research, feature request forums, and customer emails are all filled with valuable insights on the challenges prospects and customers face every day.
- ◆ **Customer interviews:** Speak to existing Productboard customers about their everyday challenges surrounding customer interviews.
- ◆ **Competitive research:** Reach out to users of competing products to ask about how those products aren't meeting their needs, or demonstrate how competitors' products are already solving similar problems.
- ◆ **Observation:** Use screen-sharing tools to observe users as they perform customer interviews, looking for places where they struggle.
- ◆ **Direct outreach:** Communicate with customers in person, over the phone, or using customer communication tools to ask why they're performing certain actions in our system.
- ◆ **Journey mapping:** Illustrate the steps people currently take to solve their problem, along with how they feel at various points along the way.
- ◆ **Focus groups:** Hold conversations with current or prospective customers to understand their attitudes about customer discovery.

STEP 2

Interpret your findings and re-frame the problem

As we progress through each discovery activity, we'll uncover more information about the problems users face. As we isolate specific problems, we aim to distill our learnings down to one single sentence that covers the entire problem that can attainably be solved. Going back to our mid-market example, the broad challenge can be re-framed and narrowed down to the following:

⌋ *Mid-market companies experience limitations with Productboard's public Portal when trying to communicate with multiple audiences at once.*

At this point, we can begin to understand the scale of the problem, and narrow down which problems are worth solving:

- ◆ How big is the pain that these users are experiencing?
- ◆ How much value will tackling this pain create for them?
- ◆ How does this value compare to other problems we might tackle?
- ◆ Which problems should we prioritize, and which should we set aside?

Distilling your problem statement down to a single sentence helps you clearly communicate the challenges users face to your team, helping to keep them aligned around a common cause. If you formulate the problem loosely, it will be difficult to keep everyone focused.

STEP 3

Identify creative solutions

Now you have a clear understanding of your users' needs and the problem you're trying to solve, it's time to get creative. Once again, it's time to head back into divergent thinking, listing out all your ideas and potential ways you might solve your customers' burning problems. Sometimes this might involve brainstorming entirely new products or features, but oftentimes we're merely checking our assumptions on a feature that can only take on a few different forms.

- ◆ Team brainstorming
- ◆ Mind mapping
- ◆ Storyboarding
- ◆ Crazy 8's
- ◆ "How might we" questions

After ideas are proposed, your team can gauge their potential impact and value, assess any risks around feasibility, then prioritize which to prototype and present to customers. Marty Cagan identifies four big risks in product management:

- ◆ **Value risk:** Will our customers buy this solution? Will our users actually use it?
- ◆ **Usability risk:** Can our users figure out how to use our proposed solution?
- ◆ **Feasibility risk:** Can our engineers build what we need with the time, skills, and technology we have?
- ◆ **Business viability risk:** Will this solution also work within the various other aspects of our business?

If any unknowns around these questions still remain, you should capture them as hypotheses or open questions that must get resolved throughout the remainder of the discovery process. Questions around value will be answered in the next discovery phase by speaking with customers. Other questions will need to be answered by working with internal teams: design teams can assist with usability questions, engineering with feasibility, and legal, marketing, and sales with business viability.

For our mid-market example, we might consider the following solution:

》 *Let's enable customers to build multiple Portals so they can share/validate their ideas with each of their audiences differently.*

STEP 4

Collect feedback and validate your solutions

Now we're finally ready to present our proposed solution to customers and stakeholders. The goal: to build and demonstrate the smallest possible thing that will help you understand whether users would use a particular solution to solve their problem.

At Productboard, we're big fans of using prototypes to quickly bring ideas to life. Prototypes come in many different forms, from whiteboard sketches to high-fidelity interactive mockups. The type of prototypes teams choose to build depends on what they are trying to learn, what needs to be tested, and what open questions they still have.

To test this, we could build a low-fidelity interactive prototype of a tool that lets customers create multiple Portals so they can tailor their communication to each of their different audiences. We could demonstrate our proposed solution to both customers and internal stakeholders to gather feedback and determine whether our solution is feasible, viable, and valuable. If feedback is positive, the prototype itself can serve as a feature spec when the feature is sent along to the delivery team, saving additional effort down the road.

The goal of product discovery? Mitigating risk

The goal of product discovery is not necessarily to ship features. Rather, it's to promote an environment of learning that will help you prioritize the most learning for the least amount of effort, helping you consistently and incrementally make your products and features better.

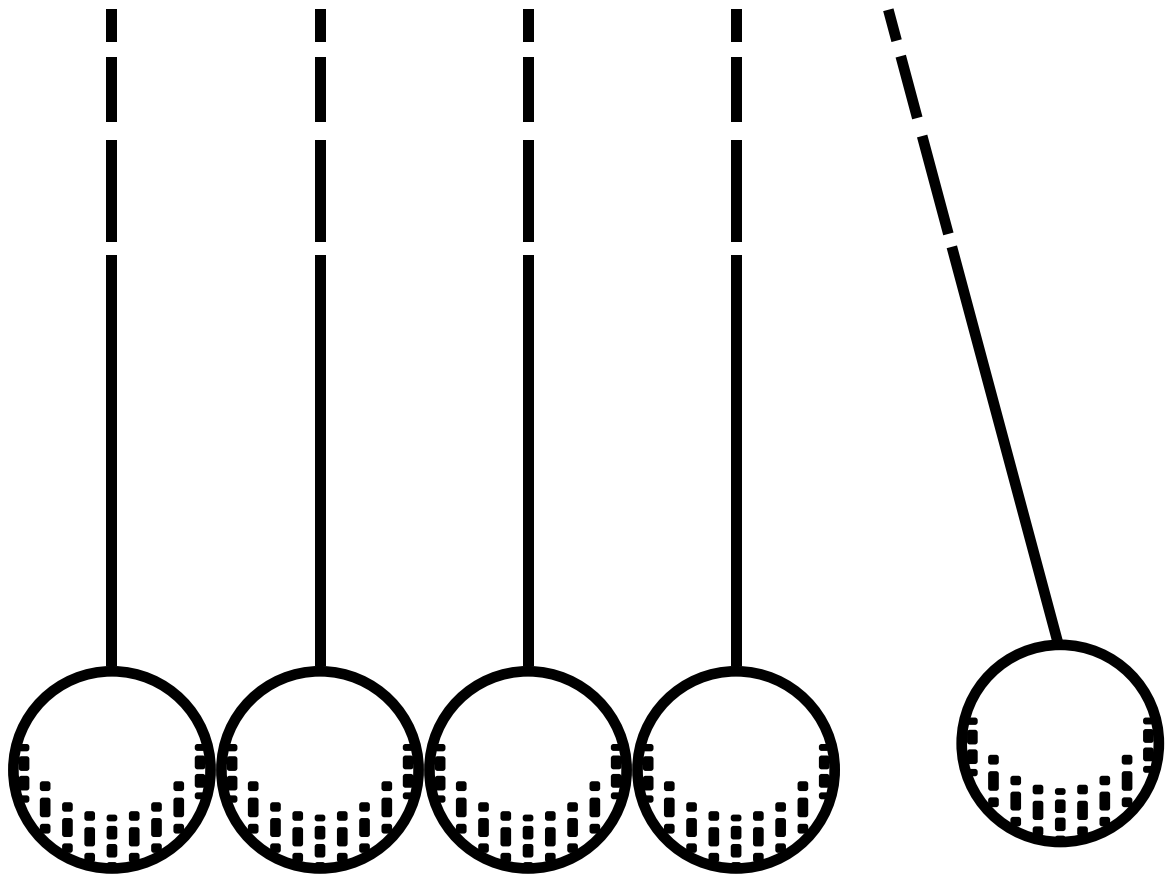
Ask yourself: what's the smallest thing we can do today to learn something new that would guide us in making decisions?

By using this framework and following its steps, product teams can create an environment of continuous learning that leads to truly excellent products.

Remember: the discovery process isn't always smooth. Product discovery isn't a linear process of going through two diamonds before arriving at a solution—it's an iterative process that changes as you learn more about user needs and reduce uncertainty.

At Productboard, we regularly have teams exploring the problem and solution space at the same time, or teams jumping back to the beginning as they learn more about the underlying problems users face. After all, the product team wants to be sure that they deliver the right thing to users.

(In case you were wondering, we did end up launching the ability to create multiple Portals in Productboard as a real feature!)



CHAPTER 3

How do you know if product discovery is working?

How do you know if you're doing product discovery well? How can startups measure the outcomes of the discovery process? And how should product managers communicate those benefits to executives and stakeholders?

While the product development process fits neatly into a box, product discovery often feels more fuzzy.

Sometimes teams lack product metrics to guide their efforts or have unclear goals, and find themselves stumbling through customer interviews and shipping code without first validating its value. Meanwhile, executives, stakeholders, and existing customers all jockey for position on the roadmap.

It's no wonder so many teams—particularly those new to the process—struggle to understand how to track their product discovery efforts.

The good news? You *can* set specific outcomes for product discovery—outcomes you can use to measure your success, optimize your process, and justify spending precious time on to your stakeholders.

Leading vs. lagging indicators

When you have a learning mindset, you succeed whether your ideas end up solving user needs or not. Both results provide equal insight into what the right path could be. But assigning precious product, design, and development resources to “learning” can be troublesome at best and misleading at worst.

Here's why: The most concrete measure of the benefits of product discovery is high adoption and engagement rates for all new features and great qualitative feedback from users. But these metrics are all *lagging* indicators of product success—they can only tell you whether a product or feature *you've already built* is well-received, and they don't provide any context that can help your team get there faster next time.

Instead, teams should look to measure product discovery success using leading indicators—quantifiable metrics you can measure as you progress through each cycle of the discovery process.

One great example of a leading indicator for product discovery: **how quickly you're learning**. Measure the number of days between discovery activities and work to reduce that cycle time.

“A high-performing discovery team should hit their outcomes at a higher rate than a low-performing discovery team and that rate should grow over time as their discovery practice improves.”

Teresa Torres

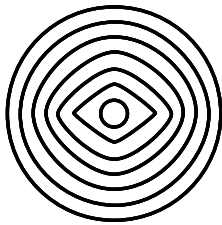
Speed of learning leads to speed of decision making. The faster you can make decisions, the faster you can deliver value to customers—and the better off you'll be as a company.

4 steps to measure the value of product discovery

STEP 1

Get clear as an organization on your product discovery goals

Before plowing ahead with the discovery process, you should be clear on what decisions you need to make as a company and what insights you need to inform those decisions.



At Productboard, we think of planning product discovery like an onion. The outermost layer represents your overarching business goals, like helping product managers understand and prioritize what to build. Each subsequent layer breaks down into smaller and smaller chunks—the second layer, for example, might be quarterly product goals like enabling mid-market companies to better utilize our software.

Each new layer demands different questions and levels of discovery—you can't begin to peel away one layer until the previous one is completely removed. Teams who try to shortcut the process often encounter “unintentional pivots”—they either try to peel away too many layers at once and forget the problem they were originally trying to solve, or they fail to define “enough” and spend far too long on discovery.

As you begin your discovery efforts, make sure you're entering each phase with a clear goal along with a sharp understanding of how that goal will impact your larger business. This will keep your efforts focused and help you make forward progress.

STEP 2

Measure your product discovery velocity

Successful product discovery is about both speed and direction. The faster you learn, the faster you can deliver great products—but you also need to ensure your discovery efforts are tracking in the right direction to avoid wasting time or over-investing.

Agile teams talk about development velocity—but in product discovery we can also track **learning velocity**.

Begin by measuring how often you're performing each activity that leads to validating or invalidating that idea. For example:

- ◆ How many days has it been since your last customer interview?
- ◆ When was the last time you demonstrated a prototype for stakeholders before it was ready?

Look to continuously reduce the time between each activity.

Another good metric to track: **how long it has been since you last threw out an idea**. At the end of every discovery cycle, you have three choices: either you can build your solution, throw out your idea, or keep learning. Measuring how many ideas are killed at the discovery stage gives you a leading indicator of how well the process is working.

This doesn't encourage spending more time on failure as some might think. Instead, it celebrates discovering when we *shouldn't* build something—an outcome often more valuable in discovery than finding the perfect solution since it saves time spent building the wrong features.

STEP 3

Make sure individual discovery activities are time-bound

All the unknowns that encompass product discovery make it a difficult process to plan or predict. Going back to our onion analogy, it's impossible to know how much work each layer entails until you've peeled all the layers covering it.

Luckily, there's a straightforward solution to this that product teams already use every day: **timebox individual discovery activities** (not your discovery process as a whole!). This technique is particularly useful when launching new products or entering new markets.

For startups, timeboxing bounds your imagination. After all, it's far easier to determine which of a near-infinite number of possible ideas are the most important when you can only fit a small number in your allocated time.

For enterprise, timeboxing helps build trust and credibility with stakeholders. You quickly learn how many activities you can get done in a particular amount of time, reducing their perceived risk of spending time on discovery.

If you reach the end of a discovery cycle and you're still facing risks, you can choose to either spend a second timebox on the discovery activity or pivot to a new direction.

STEP 4

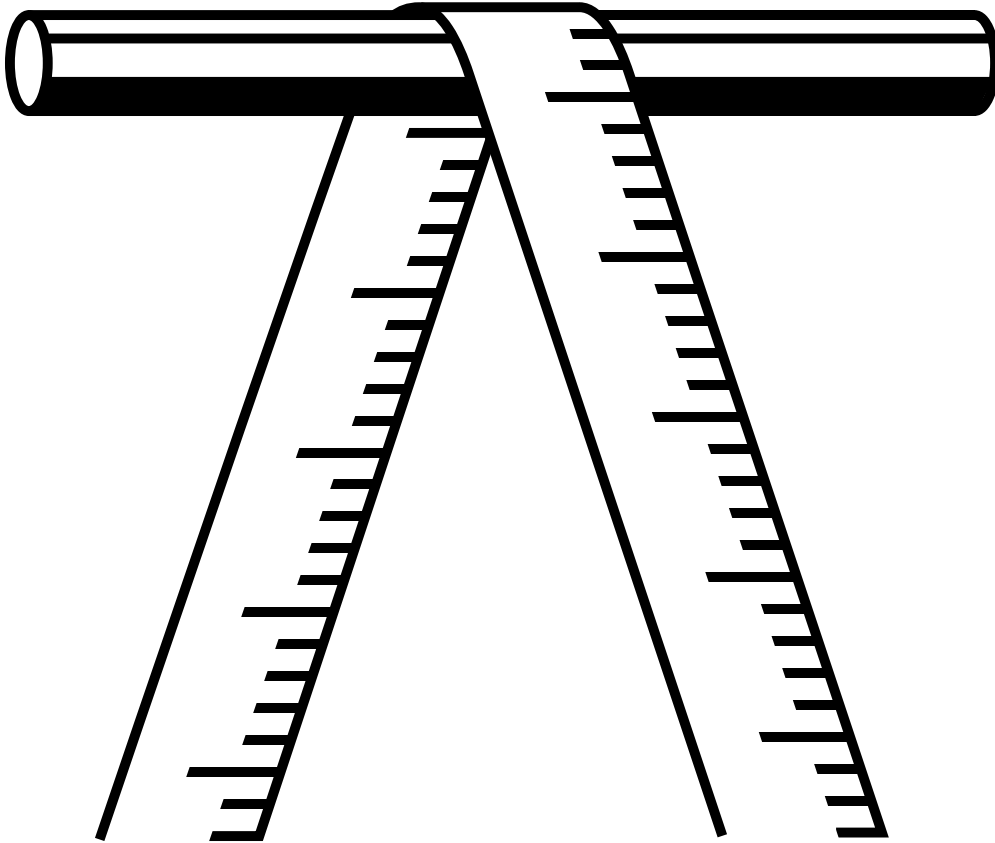
Use retrospectives to optimize your discovery process

Retrospectives aren't just for development work—they're also a great opportunity to uncover the pitfalls in your discovery process and drive continuous improvement.

During your next team retrospective, ask some or all of the following questions about your discovery efforts:

- ◆ **Was there anything we encountered that we didn't expect?** Were any proposed feature ideas poorly received by prospects or customers? Did we make any false assumptions around product feasibility? Which parts of our hypotheses were wrong—and which did we get right?
- ◆ **How could we have uncovered these unexpected learnings sooner?** Is there a smaller version of our idea we could have demonstrated earlier? Should we have involved anyone else in early discussions around feasibility?
- ◆ **What concrete changes can we make to our discovery process to avoid running into the same problems again?**

Asking these questions shifts much of the risk from the development phase into the discovery phase, uncovering potential pitfalls earlier and helping you improve your rate of learning over time.



CHAPTER 4

Tailoring product discovery to your organization

Fast-growing startups, established enterprises, and those in between face different product discovery pressures and challenges.

As companies grow and products mature, the problems teams face around identifying and validating new product ideas change—and best practices must adapt to accommodate those challenges.

Just because an organization is more substantial doesn't mean they are doing product discovery better.

The good news: while the approach to product discovery might change as companies grow, the techniques and tactics for discovering innovative products and features largely remain the same. Whether you're a fast-growing startup exploring your market or an established team seeking to optimize discovery across your organization, here's everything you need to know.

Common product discovery pressures facing startups vs. enterprises

Startups

Sustainability

Short financial runways often require startups to experiment and iterate quickly to discover a valuable solution for their market.

Finding discovery prospects

Without an established customer base, startups must turn to alternate sources for idea validation.

Avoiding assumptions

Startups often base product direction on their experience and assumptions about customer needs instead of concrete data.

Enterprises

Risk aversion

Established teams often avoid "risky" product discovery activities in favor of development work proven to pad earnings, generate press-worthy news, or gratify investors.

More stakeholders

Dozens or even hundreds of people involved in the decision-making process makes establishing new discovery processes sluggish and cumbersome.

Protecting brand

Sales teams, support staff, and executives layered between product teams and customers often discourage direct contact, fearing it might damage their reputation and revenue.

How to do product discovery as a startup

For early-stage companies, product discovery is all about reducing the risk of running out of time and money before finding product/market fit. Discovery helps them allocate resources towards what matters and find product/market fit in a fast, cost-effective way.

Instead of starting with an idea and aiming to validate whether it can be a success, founders should start with a specific group of customers they'd like to serve and a rough problem they'd like to solve, then use product discovery techniques to eliminate risk and uncertainty around how to solve that problem.

Early-stage companies should spend at least 25-50% of their time on product discovery.

Here's how you can hack your discovery process when building an all-new product:

Start where your prospective customers already spend time

Most startups aren't pioneering an all-new market—there are many prospective customers already using competing solutions to solve their problems that you can tap into to validate or invalidate your ideas before building.

To validate your ideas, begin where your prospective customers are already spending time.

Social media, private industry communities, trade shows, and offline meetups are all great places to talk with your ideal customers about their burning problems. You can also consider reaching out directly to competitors' customers to ask what problems aren't being solved by their current solution.

Say we rewind the clock to a time when Productboard hasn't been built yet, but spreadsheets exist. To learn more about customer needs, we'd try to understand what product managers are doing in spreadsheets today and the kinds of problems they run into using them—feedback all over the place, unclear source of the truth, hard to make decisions with, doesn't translate into a roadmap easily—then solve for those.

Fire bullets, then cannonballs

Startups fall into a common trap. They come up with a brilliant idea for a product—an idea that solves what appears to be a burning problem for a far-reaching audience. They frantically begin designing and coding an MVP, emerging months later to share their masterpiece with the market.

But customers are fickle, and many of these ideas (and businesses) don't survive first contact with a market. Startups realize they had been building the wrong product from the beginning, and the cycle begins again with their next big idea.

Instead of concentrating resources into one single bet—firing cannonballs, as author Jim Collins describes—**founders should first calibrate their line of sight by taking smaller shots.**

》 “The ability to turn small proven ideas (bullets) into huge hits
》 (cannonballs) counts more than the sheer amount of pure innovation.

Jim Collins

Going back to our Productboard example, we might eschew detailed prototypes in favor of showing prospects potential mockups along with other real-world artifacts like competitors' products or features. This lets us quickly understand our customers and market without spending precious time building a product that may turn out to be a failure.

Avoid becoming an opinion-driven company

Typically, product-driven founders and CEOs have a lot of opinions on what the product should be. Some have great instincts—but a good many products end up being driven more by hubris than truth.

In this situation, you should make sure you're walking the CEO through the discovery experience. Include them in discussions and discovery activities, but make it clear the product direction should be driven based on data and learnings rather than opinions.

Intercom has an excellent product principle when it comes to this: stay opinionated but flexible. You can build a solution and have an idea of the best way your customers can use it, but also build in flexibility so your customers can use it in the way that best suits their needs.

How to manage product discovery within enterprise organizations

Product discovery in large companies is more heavily weighted towards validation. Enterprise organizations can be more deliberate and risk-averse around innovation efforts. Teams must contend with more stakeholders to align and more proxy layers between you and your customers. Many companies are also managing discovery across a portfolio of products and business groups—from newly-introduced products through the maturity cycle to an aged product's eventual decline, discovery must be an ongoing process.

Can product discovery be valuable for mature products?

Absolutely. Most literature discusses product discovery at the introductory stage, where iteration and validation are essential to making sure you match market needs.

But product discovery is equally valuable for more established products. During the growth stage, discovery efforts can help you remain mindful of competitors and other factors. Once your product has matured, discovery keeps your product engaging. And if your product is in decline, discovery is essential in understanding how to provide customers with alternatives.

Here are a few ideas for bringing a discovery mindset to your organization:

Avoid silos by bringing the right people together early

Enterprise organizations commonly “innovate” by launching corporate innovation labs, discovery teams, and other special teams. The problem with this siloed approach is that new discoveries end up confined to a small group instead of benefitting the wider organization.

Avoid siloing your product discovery efforts by bringing the right people together from the beginning. Design, development, support, marketing, and sales representatives should all be involved in both ideation and validation, with product leadership acting as the glue bringing everyone together. For example, a designer might help interview or observe users testing a prototype, or a developer might have early knowledge of feasibility risks others might miss.

Keeping decision-makers in the loop from the beginning will be crucial for earning organizational buy-in and building alignment around your efforts and avoiding proxy layers forming between you and your customers.

Think about discovery opportunities as a portfolio of small bets

Enterprises typically have dozens, if not hundreds of competing priorities and objectives within their walls. Without organizational buy-in, your product discovery efforts can be halted before they have the chance to grow.

For each new discovery project, aim to generate some rough idea of the opportunity size, then prioritize your biggest opportunities around your overarching business goals. Say you were aiming to increase retention by improving product usability—you might prioritize discovery efforts that analyze how users interact with prototypes over conducting interviews.

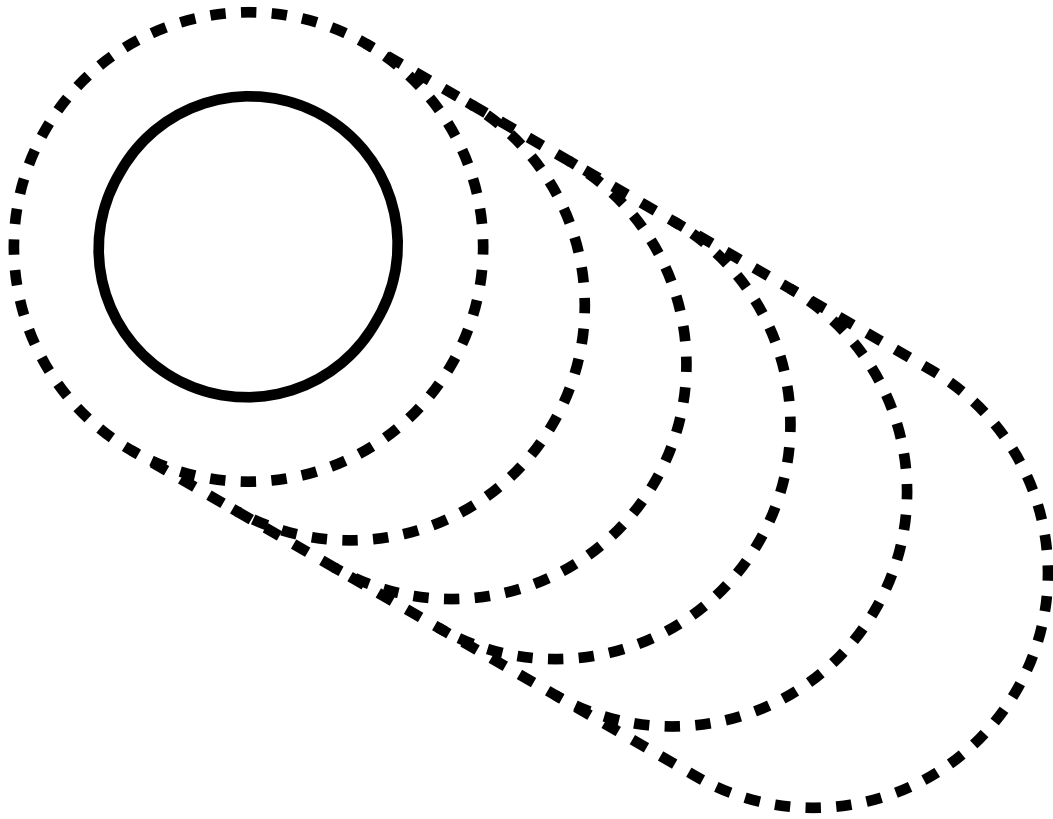
By thinking about your efforts as a portfolio of bets rather than a single project that cannot fail, you'll uncover the most valuable opportunities to pursue and simplify prioritization of those efforts against product delivery work.

Mitigate brand and revenue risk

Startups are often forced to shoot for the moon, but enterprises have the luxury of a built-in customer base for testing new ideas. Of course, that doesn't mean haphazardly rolling new ideas out to production.

Marty Cagan suggests a few techniques for mitigating risks to reputation and revenue during product discovery:

- ◆ Run A/B tests with a limited number of exposed customers
- ◆ Consider running invitation-only live tests when validating new features
- ◆ If necessary, utilize a formal customer development program under NDA
- ◆ Beta programs enable product teams to get feedback from a small group of customers before going fully out to market



CHAPTER 5

Building better products through continuous product discovery

The most effective product teams constantly identify, test, and validate new ideas throughout a product's lifetime—without sacrificing product delivery. Here's how you can build a continuous product discovery practice in your organization.

Discovery isn't just a box you can check—product teams can unlock greater value in their work by uncovering new ideas and testing their value in an ongoing process.

Continuous product discovery is the sustained process of identifying, testing, and validating ideas as part of a product team's everyday work.

Instead of working to uncover valuable product ideas before building a solution, teams should create a sustained practice of rapid experimentation and discovery. By making incremental changes over time, teams can bypass long software delivery cycles and solve real user problems in less time.

Why you need to do continuous discovery

Practiced correctly, continuous product discovery makes your product team more efficient and impactful. It's easier to keep the entire organization aligned around your product vision and strategy, deliver new features and products with confidence they'll be well-received by customers, and achieve Product Excellence.

Can remote product teams still do continuous discovery?

The short answer: absolutely.

There's a common misconception among product managers that teams need to be colocated to be effective. But given the right remote-work environment and toolset, discovery teams can thrive—even when they're scattered across different countries and timezones.

Product management coach Tim Herbig sheds light on how remote product teams can make continuous discovery work:

- ◆ Motivate team members to further improve the product
- ◆ Sell your vision and roadmap to stakeholders more easily
- ◆ Avoid losing the history of discovery efforts as projects change, teams are rearranged, and employees leave your company

How we do continuous discovery at Productboard

At Productboard, we think of continuous discovery like a wedge. Teams begin at the wide end of the wedge, with a broad range of possible ideas they could tackle and directions they could head.

At the other end of the wedge, you have a business or product goal you're trying to achieve. For example, one of our internal objectives might be to increase the customer retention rate for small businesses using Productboard, with a goal of increasing our retention rate by 10%.

For each idea or discovery activity we undertake as we move down the wedge, we continuously ask two questions:

- ◆ Are we meeting this outcome?
- ◆ If not, how can we iterate towards that outcome?

Over time, the answers to those questions yield a framework for performing discovery activities, collecting insights, and distributing that learning across the organization in real-time.

Make collecting and sharing insights an organization-wide effort

In the typical organization, the people who interface directly with customers outnumber product managers 20 to 1 or higher—and they all have valuable input to share.

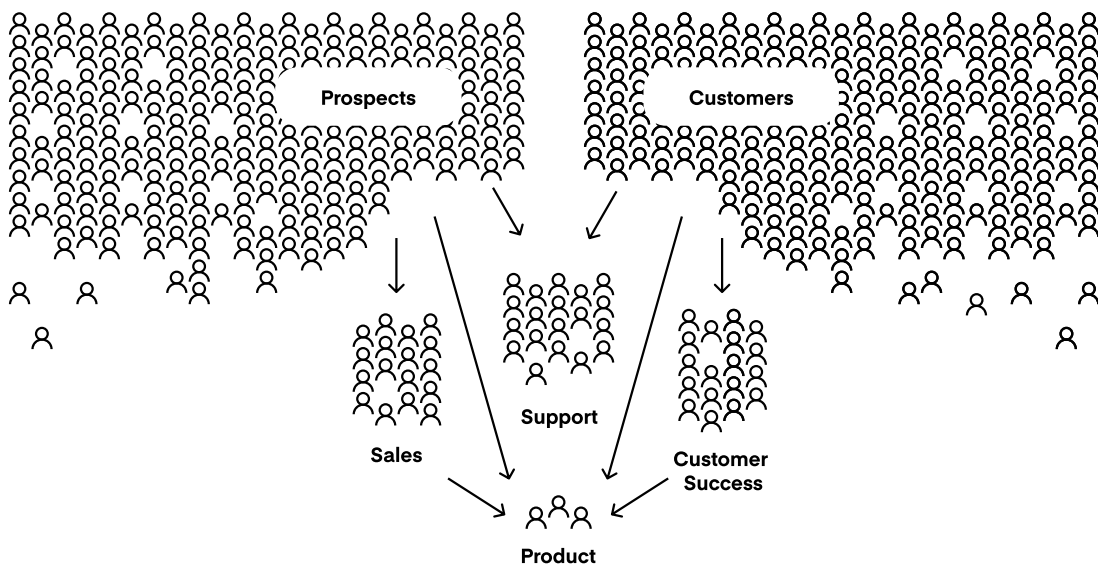
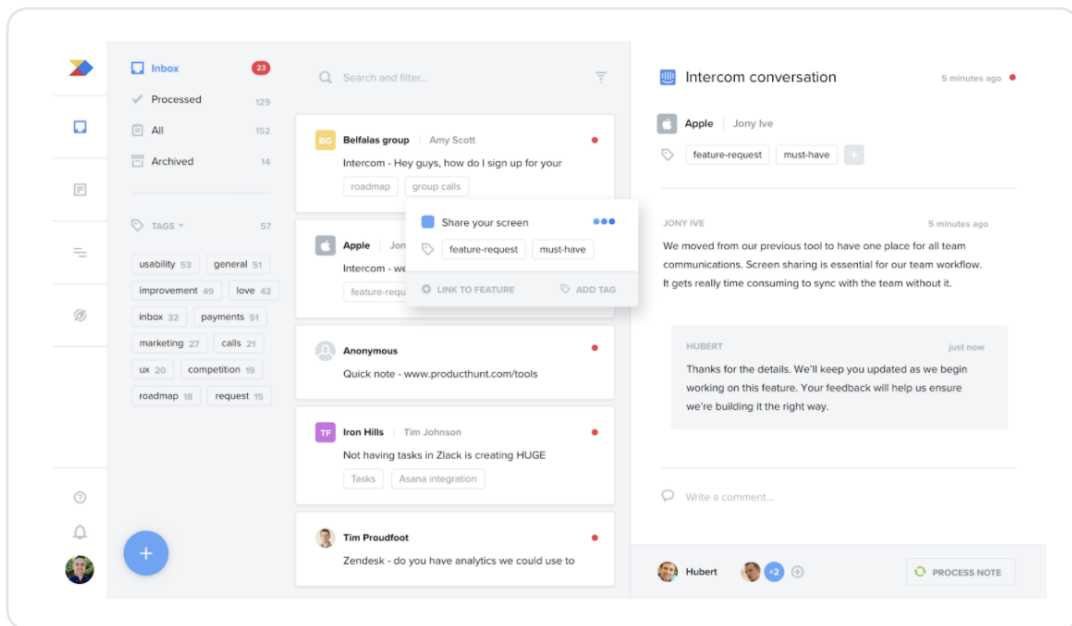


Image via [Productboard](#)

The problem? **Many struggle to scale that feedback collection loop beyond the walls of the product team—especially when it comes to product discovery.**

In an effort to combat this, we use our own product management system to centralize product ideas, requests, and feedback from many sources, log them in a single searchable repository, and help identify trends around what users really need. This avoids having the product teams become the bottleneck for discovery efforts.



Once we've collected our product discovery insights in a central location, product leadership works to share those insights across each product team. Say you have multiple teams using continuous discovery to learn about the same group of customers, but those teams are executing on different features or products. By collecting all your learnings in a central location, all teams can benefit from the discovery work being performed by other teams.

Three reasons to share product discovery insights throughout your organization:

- ◆ Motivate team members to further improve the product
- ◆ Sell your vision and roadmap to stakeholders more easily
- ◆ Avoid losing the history of discovery efforts as projects change, teams are rearranged, and employees leave your company

Perform small activities regularly to help you learn faster

Making a habit of performing bite-sized discovery activities can help early-stage startups lacking dedicated product discovery resources to continue learning over time.

Teresa Torres discusses the power of co-creation and regular interactions in [her 2017 talk on continuous discovery](#):

》 *“We make product decisions every day. We don’t want them to be guesses ... When you can get fast answers, you stop guessing and you start learning. This is how we get to great products.”*

Our advice to fast-growing product organizations: Don’t overthink your discovery efforts. Here’s where to start:

- ◆ How might you talk to prospective customers every week?
- ◆ How might you talk to current customers every week?
- ◆ How can you demonstrate a new prototype every week?
- ◆ What’s one discovery experiment you can run every week?

Further reading

- ♦ C. Todd Lombardo and Aras Bilgen's book [Product Research Rules](#) speaks to some of the common pitfalls and the importance of an insight-making mindset.
- ♦ Marty Cagan, founder of Silicon Valley Product Group, has written extensively about [discovery versus delivery](#), [the four big risks](#), and [learning fast versus failing fast](#) on the SVPG blog.
- ♦ Serial entrepreneur and advisor Alexander Cowan wrote a short handbook on customer discovery—the first half of product discovery—[on his blog](#), with helpful templates for interviews and building personas.
- ♦ Tim Herbig shares how there's no one "right" approach to product discovery on the [Amplitude blog](#).



About Productboard

Productboard is a customer-driven product management system that empowers teams to get the right products to market, faster. It provides a complete solution for product teams to understand user needs, prioritize what to build next, align everyone on the roadmap, and engage with their customers. Productboard is easy to use, enables company-wide collaboration, and integrates into existing workflows. Over 3,000 organizations around the world use Productboard to build excellent products.

Learn more at productboard.com