

Roadmap Prioritization: A Product Survival Kit

The tactics you need to build a product roadmap to success
and reduce the risk of prioritizing at your own peril.



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Introduction

Organizations need a clear line of sight into their strategy for success, and roadmaps play a pivotal part in the product development and delivery processes. A strong roadmap can offer:

- **Transparency into the most important areas of focus that will contribute to business goals**
- **Asynchronous communication between teams to help them prioritize**
- **A clear statement of intent — documenting a path to revenue for an entire company to follow**

In contrast, a poorly-constructed roadmap can lead to miscommunications, poor handoffs, and costly delays in product delivery. In order to prevent a risky investment in products that a majority of your customers could never even use, prioritization is an early and effective place to begin building a strong roadmap. This can give your organization:

1. A critical starting point for cross-functional inputs into the product development process
2. Ease the tension derived from difficult decisions on what to build first
3. The best opportunity to calculate the risk and return on investment in certain initiatives before it's too late to change course

An early step in developing a winning roadmap is **prioritization**. In this guide, we'll equip you with a prioritization toolkit centered around building a clear product vision with desired outcomes, and just as importantly, how to put all of these steps into an actionable prioritization framework that can build organization-wide consensus.



CHAPTER 1

Roadmap prioritization: Where to begin

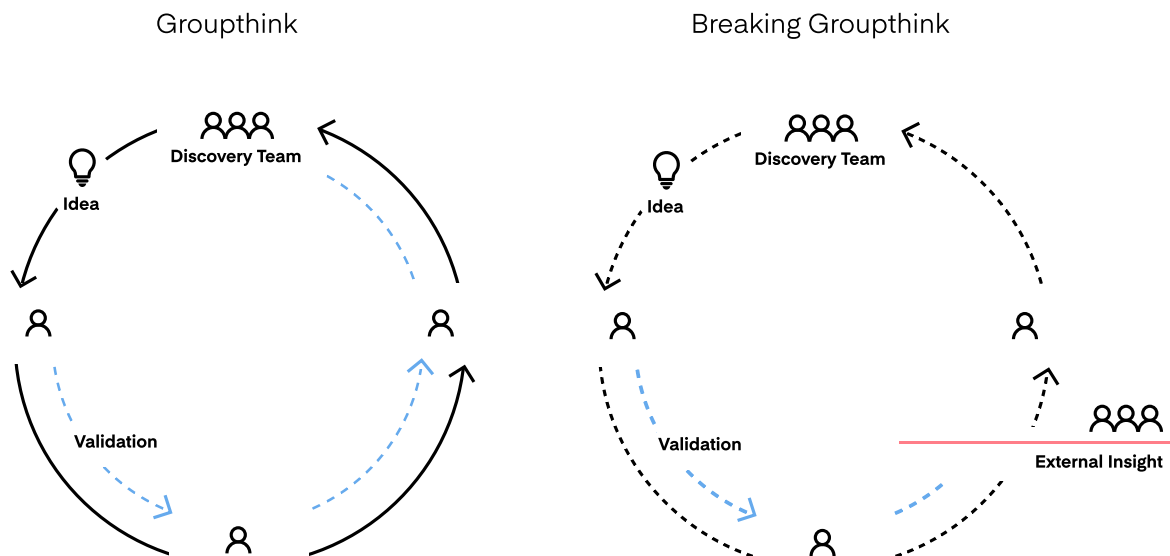
Human behavior tells us that it's our tendency to default to certain patterns when it comes to prioritization and decision-making. Oftentimes, this manifests itself as:

1. Focusing on self-interests

Economist Adam Smith pointed to self-interest and competition as two predominant factors in shaping the economy. When it comes to product development, the combination of economics and an eye on competition can influence prioritization at the expense of building with a wider range of factors in mind.

2. Groupthink

We also tend to favor the views of the smartest (or loudest) person in the room, which can bias decisions in one direction. A diversity of viewpoints during the prioritization process will ensure that the roadmap has incorporated your company's vision (more on this below).



3. Anchoring

Defined as the process of seeding a thought or concept that will later influence one's actions. In product, companies can often anchor their decisions to the will of the loudest stakeholder or customer, regardless of whether it serves the needs of the entire user base. Putting processes in place to make sure there's data to support those (in many cases both compelling and valid) product needs will ensure that the build is for the many, not the few.

Look for feedback from across the company and be intentional about removing biases along the way. With an understanding of these behaviors, you've accomplished an important first step to keeping your prioritization process as objective as possible.



CHAPTER 2

Defining your product vision

In order to avoid the missteps that might have plagued your roadmap prioritization in the past, it's pivotal to have a vision that provides transparency into the direction your product is headed and why.

There's no denying that defining a product vision is complicated — there are multiple stakeholders with even more viewpoints, and whether you're a leader or individual contributor, the common thread is the vision that is re-communicated through your roadmap.

What makes a functional product vision? Consider this “AAA” of factors:

1. Alignment of (product) interests

Your product vision doesn't need to be visionary, but rather a functional way to provide transparency into your future roadmap and the line that can be drawn directly back to the business from those decisions. Therefore, if a feature doesn't line up with your overall vision, it can be easily deprioritized with minimal cross-functional friction.

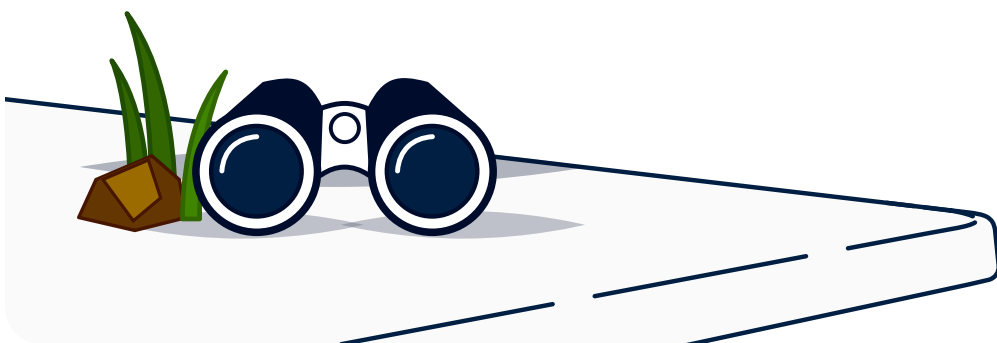
2. Ability to show your work

Without supporting data, you may not get very far in defining your product vision. In order to prepare for the inevitable questions and feedback regarding your vision, it's best to incorporate qualitative (e.g., prospect and customer insights, community feedback) and quantitative (e.g. churn data, outstanding feature requests, overall customer health) data into your decision-making processes.

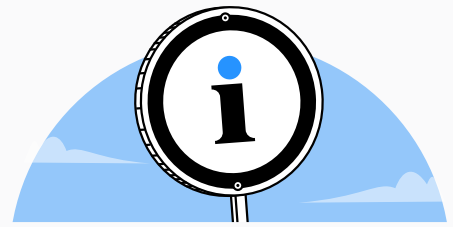
3. Accountability

A vision also helps companies keep an eye on product prioritization because, as we note above, our behavioral instincts tend to lead us towards satisfying our own needs and ideas first. There's no satisfaction being told you cannot receive what you want or need right now, but when it's backed by transparency alongside a healthy dose of qualitative and quantitative data, stakeholders can better understand it was a decision not taken lightly.

Now that you have a product vision in place, you're ready to construct a framework to effectively prioritize your build.



Product Prioritization in Action: GSoft



When Montreal-based GSoft's rapid growth saw its office vibe suffer, the company created an employee experience platform to solve this problem for everybody: Officevibe. Officevibe now helps teams around the world form better relationships by sharing honest feedback.

From Officevibe's earliest days, GSoft teams strived to make every product decision with this core value in mind: "listen to understand." Product managers reached out directly to users for feedback when GSoft was small.

But as the customer-facing teams attached to Officevibe grew bigger and bigger, the platform's product team ironically learned less and less about what customers needed. Missing a central place where customer feedback could directly shape product decision-making, GSoft saw Officevibe's:

- ♦ Product managers waste time searching multiple channels for feedback
- ♦ Account managers lack clarity on roadmaps, missing chances to reassure customers
- ♦ Team face a dip in morale as its meaningful, customer-centric strategy unraveled

Determined to help teams across the Officevibe platform share and solve customers' problems collaboratively, GSoft turned to Productboard and saw productivity and prioritization skyrocket.

2x increase in customer feedback contributed

GSoft has seen the volume of its Productboard notes nearly double since it adopted the platform one year ago

8.4/10 overall employee engagement

GSoft saw a .8-point increase among Officevibe product team members over the last six months, ever since they started working actively on product management objectives in Productboard

8.6/10 personal growth score

GSoft's Officevibe product team members report huge increases in their senses of mastery and purpose over the last six months of using Productboard, resulting in a 1.4-point increase in overall personal growth

2hrs/week saved per maker

GSoft product managers working on Officevibe now save roughly two hours per week each with Productboard as their product management platform



GSoft

"I saw a really big increase in engagement with my team, because now we have the same way of doing things," Co-Founder and Director of Product Guillaume Roy says. "Before, every product manager did their own thing, but now we're all on board with a process that we built together. Once we helped everyone share the same workflow, it tightened the team. We have way more fun sharing ideas based on the feedback we get, and we all follow the same process to prioritize."

Read the full GSoft story [here](#).



CHAPTER 3

Picking a prioritization framework

There's no need to go into the prioritization process from scratch, as many frameworks have already been developed to support companies and products of all sizes. The [most common frameworks](#) include:

- ♦ Value vs. Complexity Quadrant
- ♦ The Kano Model
- ♦ Weighted Scoring Prioritization
- ♦ The RICE framework
- ♦ ICE Scoring Model
- ♦ The MoSCoW method
- ♦ Opportunity Scoring

For the purpose of this kit, we're going to hone in on two lower-lift frameworks — Value vs. Complexity Quadrant and the ICE Scoring Model. More on these two below.

Value vs. Complexity Quadrant

What is it?

A value vs. Complexity Quadrant is a prioritization framework that takes the form of a matrix, a 2 x 2 grid with "Value" plotted against "Complexity."

How to use it

Quantify the value and complexity of each feature, update, fix, or another product initiative.

How to define it

Value is the customer and business benefits derived from the feature. For customers, that can come in the form of time saved or workflows improved. For the business, that can often be a simple ROI for the time and resources spent on building versus the benefit to the company's bottom line.

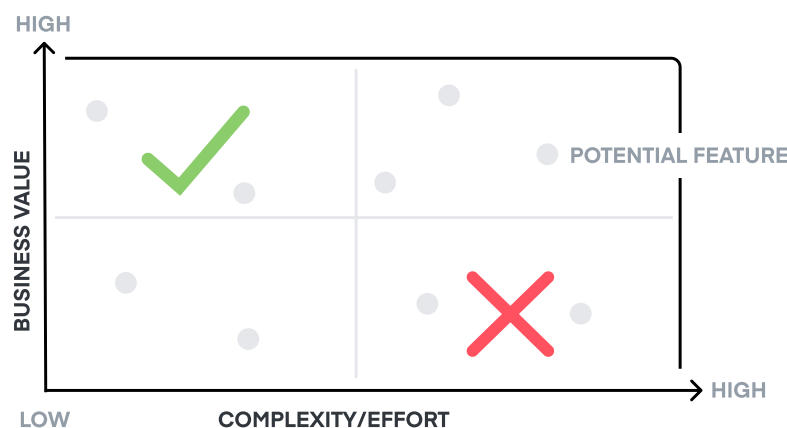
Complexity is what it takes for your organization to deliver this feature. It's not enough that we create a feature that our customers love. The feature or product must also work for our business. Can you afford the cost of building and provisioning the feature? Operational costs, development time, skills, training, technology, and infrastructure costs are just some of the categories that you have to think about when estimating complexity.

How it's calculated

If you can get more value with less effort, that's a feature you should prioritize.

Value/Complexity = Priority

This criteria makes up the quadrants that help you prioritize the set of features to build first, next, and last (or not at all).



The ICE Scoring Model

The ICE scoring model is a helpful starting point if you're easing into prioritization initiatives.

What is it?

The model was popularized by Sean Ellis, the person credited for coining the term "growth hacking." It was initially used to score and prioritize growth experiments but later became popular among the product management community. As you may have suspected ICE is an acronym, standing for:

Impact – what is the estimated impact of this deliverable?

Confidence – are we confident this deliverable will support our business goals?

Ease – can we justify the amount of time and internal and external resources it will take to build and implement?

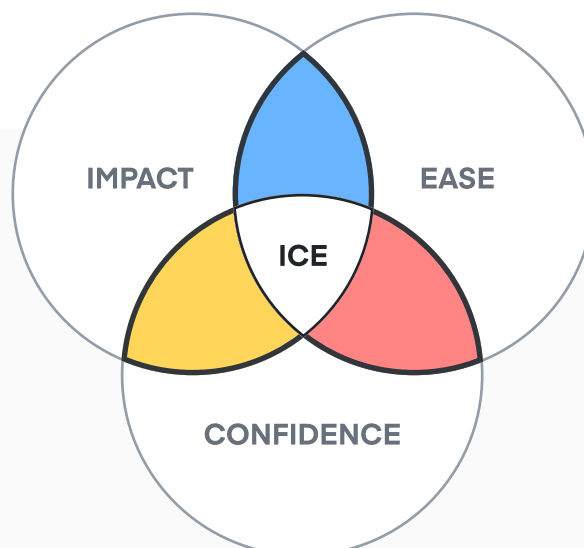
How to use it

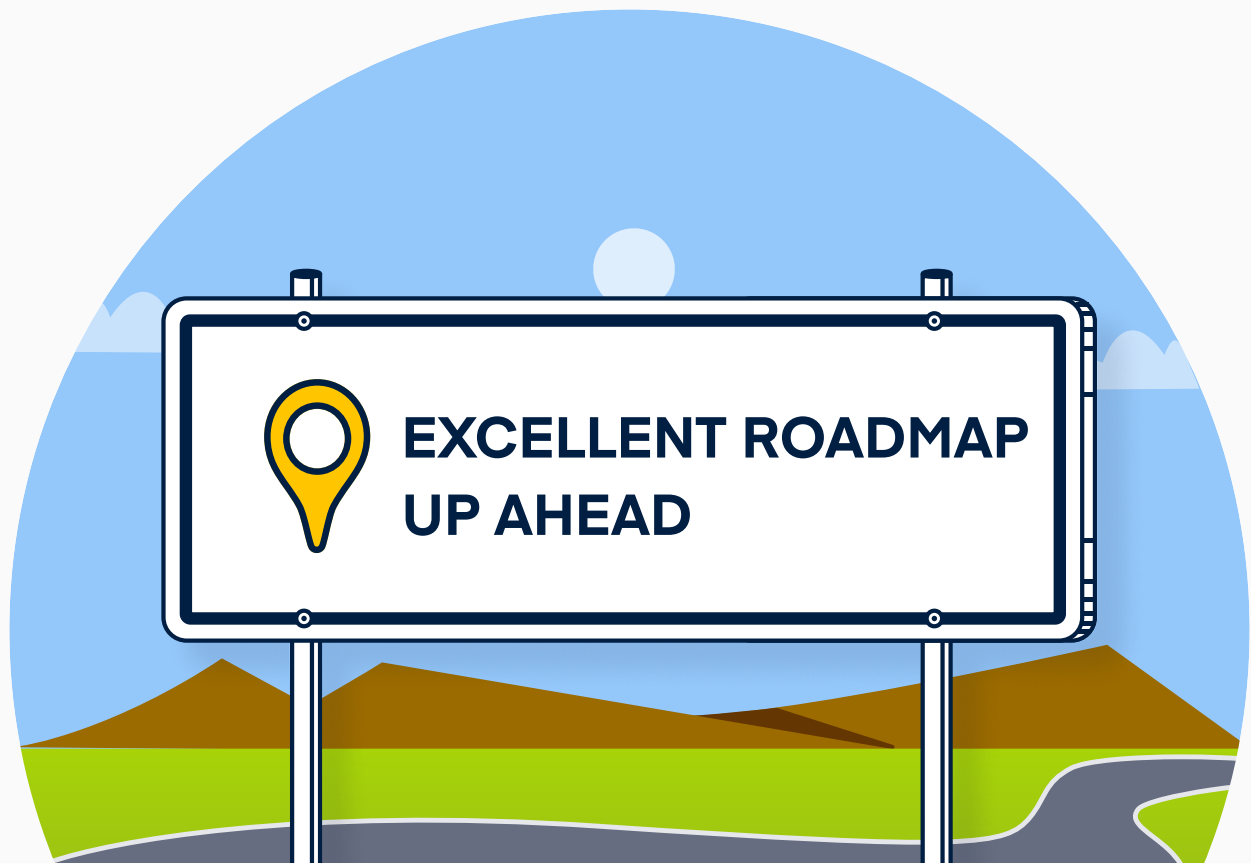
Each of these factors is scored from 1–10, and the total average number is the ICE score.

*Stay consistent — make sure to define what your ICE rankings and scoring mechanisms mean to your business before you dive deep into the process.

How to define it

The ICE model is intended to offer a high level prioritization framework in less time. More data-intensive frameworks exist for those purposes.





CHAPTER 4

Putting everything in motion

Now it's time to put all of the pieces together towards prioritizing your product roadmap. With your framework findings in place, you can communicate the most pressing product development needs for your organization, backed by qualitative and quantitative data.

Here's how you can implement this repeatable process:

1. **Gather feedback** from your key stakeholders
2. **Qualify and quantify** that feedback, taking cues from what we know about behavioral economics into account
3. **Select a framework** that fits your needs (start simple and grow in complexity as those needs evolve)
4. **Conduct a retrospective** on your findings and consider revisions to your data gathering and frameworks for your next cycle

What we **learned**

Prioritization is a critical component of building a product roadmap that achieves its goal of better aligning stakeholders throughout your company.

By taking a step back to **understand your organization** and their motivations, synthesize your **product vision**, and select and **implement a framework(s)** that fits your current needs, you'll be cementing a prioritization strategy that will pay future dividends towards building an effective product roadmap.

Effective roadmap prioritization
is ~~a pipe dream~~ possible w/
Productboard — [Try it out](#)

