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TELL ME YOUR TROUBLES

Product Discovery from Troubleshooting to Product-Market Fit

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CREDENTIALS

- Different Roles
 - Sales/Marketing <-> Engineering department head
 - Single team embed <-> Head of Product
- Different Team Management
 - Individual Contributor <-> Hiring Manager
 - Small team (1 DR) <-> Department Head (21 DRs, two levels)
- Different sizes of company
 - 30 <-> 94,000 (~800 in IT)
- Different Business Pressures
 - SaaS product <-> Internal business applications
 - Direct sales of development time <-> Development to create services efficiency
- Different business structures
 - VC funded startup <-> Privately owned <-> Publicly traded
- Different technical challenges
 - Mainframe forklift <-> Startup “greenfield”
 - Monolith <-> Microservices
- 15+ years in Product Management



Interactions
Solutions tools
Processes
WE BUILD ~~SOFTWARE~~ frustrations
TO ALLEVIATE ~~PROBLEMS~~ Unmet needs
FOR ~~USERS~~ customers people
IN EXCHANGE FOR MONEY

tell stakeholders
document build confidence

BUT HOW DO ~~WE KNOW~~
THAT WE ARE SOLVING
THE RIGHT PROBLEMS?

that will move our metrics for the right customers
that will make money

TALK
TO
USERS

A stylized illustration of a hand in shades of blue and teal, holding a glowing yellow lightbulb. The lightbulb is surrounded by several yellow puzzle pieces, suggesting a process of discovery or problem-solving. The background is dark blue with some white speckles, and the right side of the image has a white, torn-paper-like edge.

LET'S EXPLORE THAT TOGETHER

- Discovery Goals
- Hypothesis and Problem Statement Formulation
- Participants
- Interviews
- Surveys

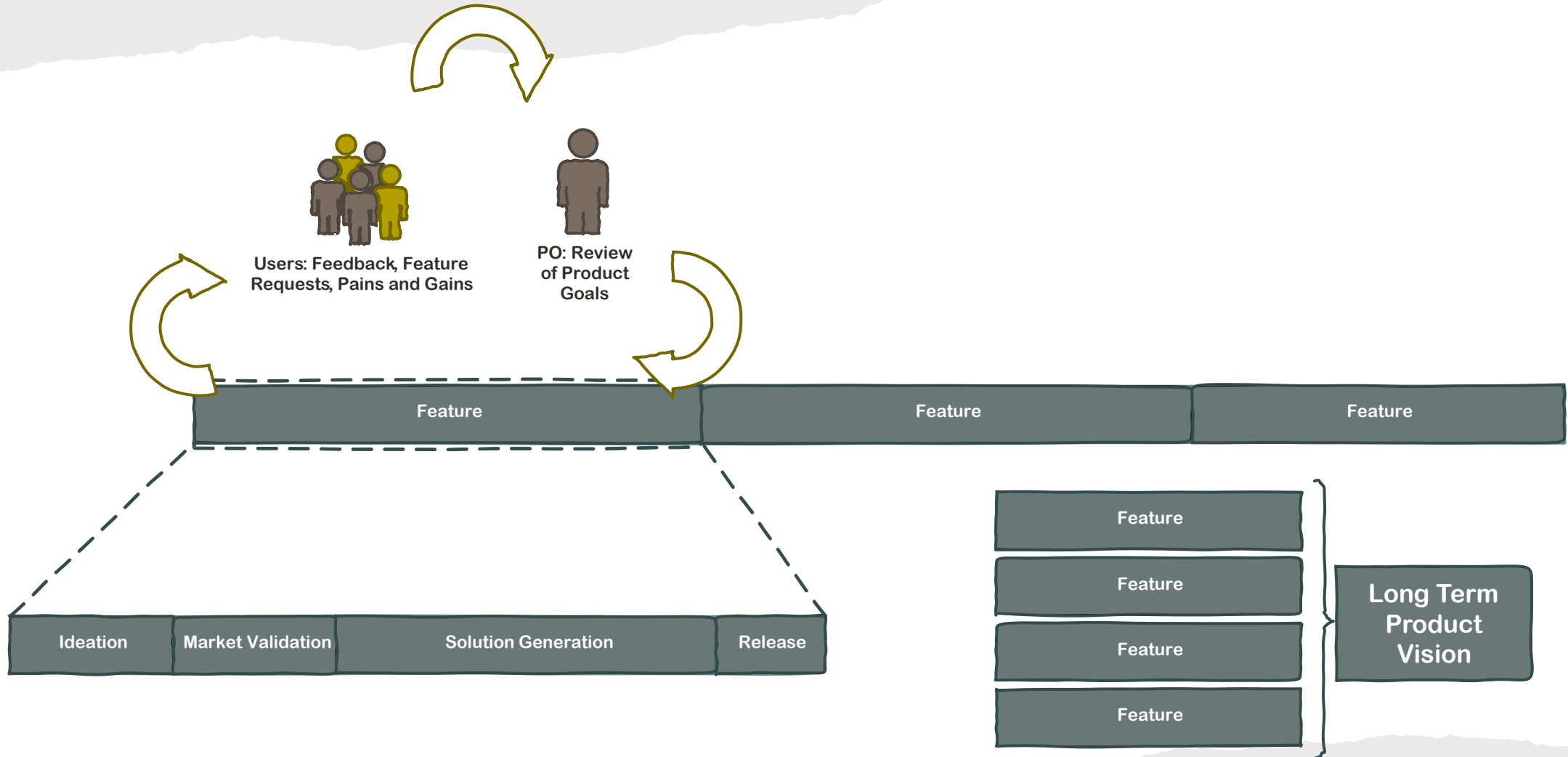


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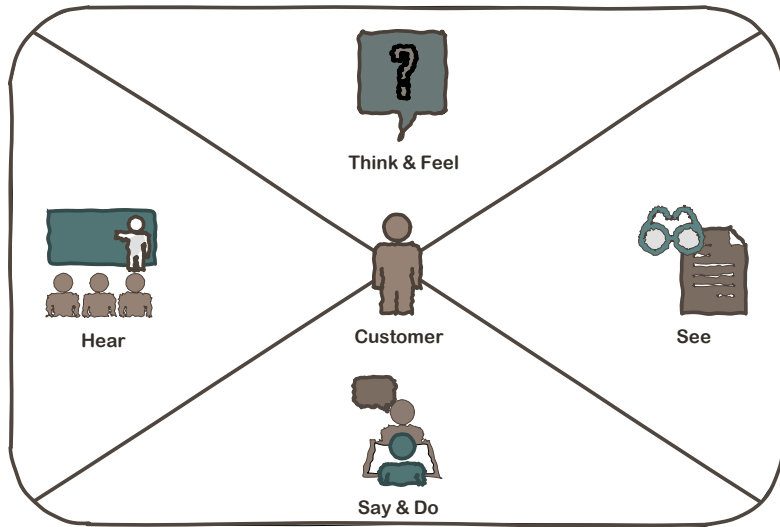
Discovery Goals

WHAT ARE THE PRIMARY AREAS YOU
WOULD LIKE TO FOCUS ON?

WHERE WE WANT TO END UP

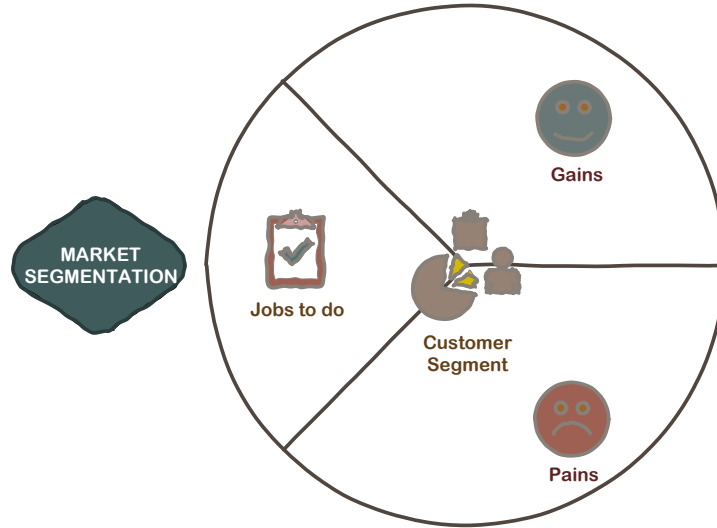


Who they are Customer Empathy Map



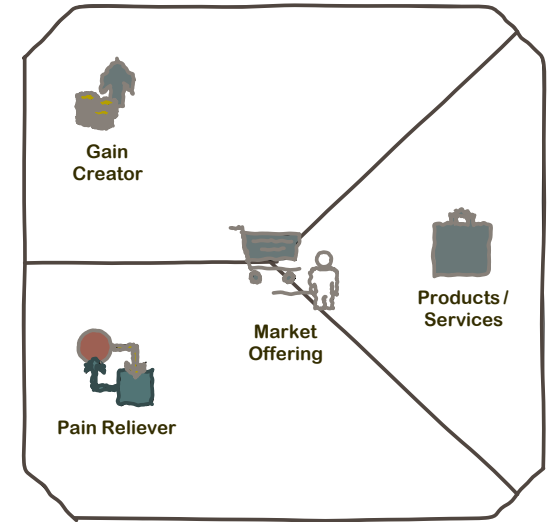
Techniques
Empathy interview with question map or 5 whys approach, **Problem (or explorative) interviews**, AEIOU observations, Customer Journey Mapping

What they need Customer Profile

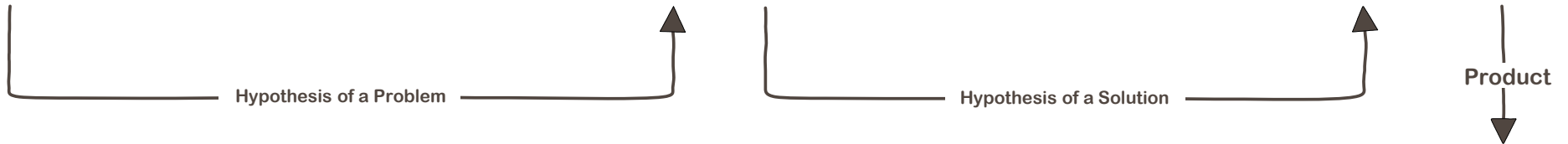


Techniques
Customer Journey Mapping, User profiles, Personas, Trend analysis, Context mapping, Test and learning cards, **hypothesis testing**

What we have Value Map



Techniques
Structured usability test with a paper prototype, **Solution interview**, Emotional response cards, Testing prototypes or service blueprint



LANDSCAPE OF PRODUCT MANAGEMENT

WHAT BRINGS YOU HERE TODAY?



I HAVE AN EXISTING PRODUCT AND MARKET

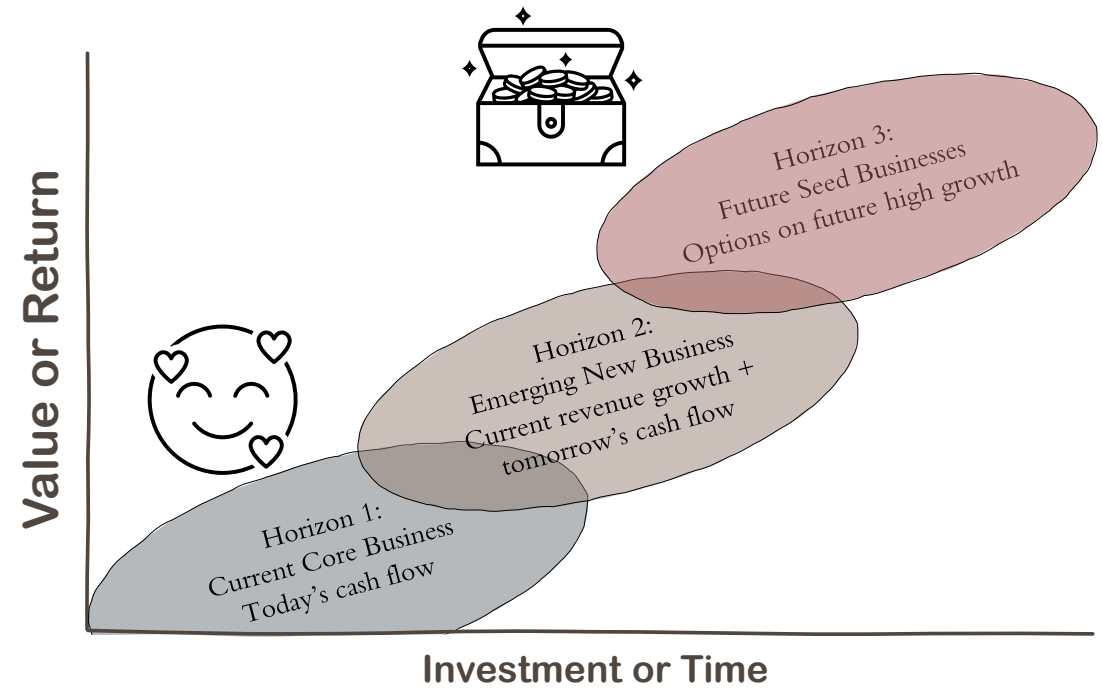
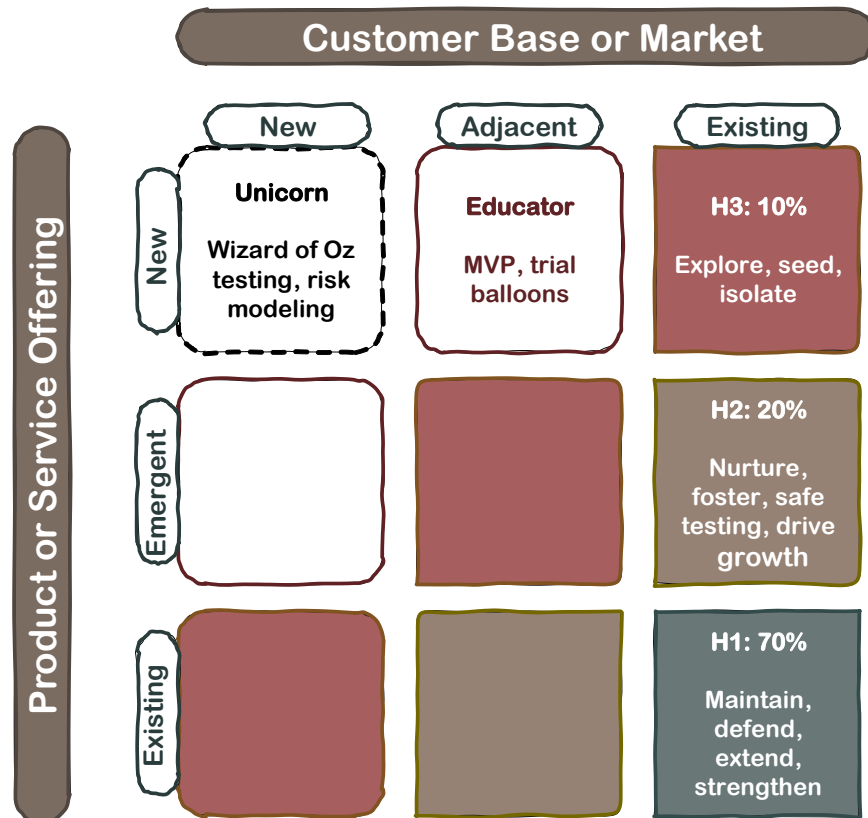
- Existing customer base
- Some sense of segmentation
- Opportunity to iterate from existing product/solution
- Risk comes from upsetting a big customer
- Goals are incremental: more usage, more licenses, more add-ons, more efficiency, fewer tickets
- Question: will they be **happier** if we solve this problem (csat)

I AM LOOKING TO FIGURE OUT A NEW PRODUCT

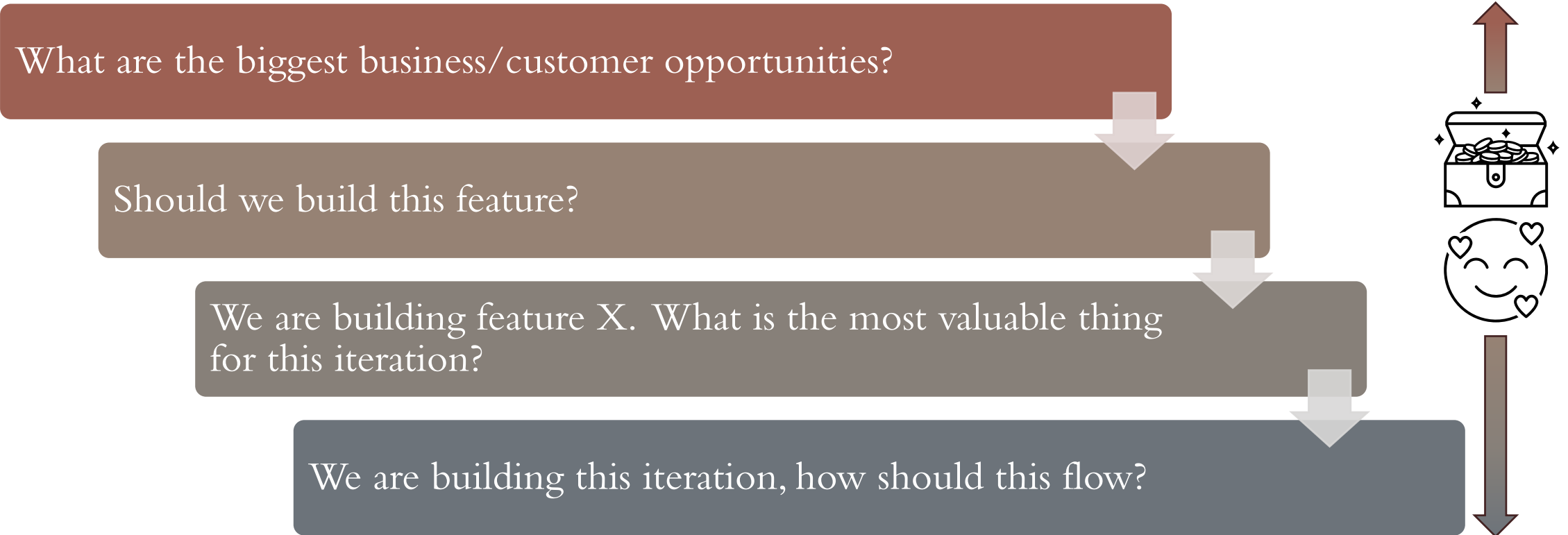


- No existing customer base or not looking to serve that base, uncertain segmentation
- Opportunity to penetrating new markets or introduce new product to existing market (or both)
- Risk comes from missing the fit between product and market
- Goals are net new: new customers (either net new or taking share), new offerings
- Question: will they be **willing to pay** to solve this problem (tam)

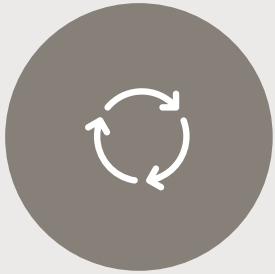
IF WE LOOK AHEAD SIX MONTHS,
WHAT DO YOU HOPE IS DIFFERENT?



LEVELS OF QUESTIONS WE ARE ASKING



WHEN TO TALK TO USERS



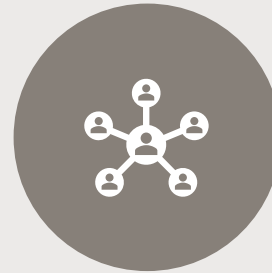
You are going to learn something
(that will change your trajectory)



You can test something
(that will change your trajectory)



You are building a culture of customer-centricity



You are building customer (and account manager) trust

WHEN YOU SHOULDN'T TALK TO USERS

- It won't change what you are working on
- You lack legitimacy in the conversation
- You don't have anything to talk to them about
- It will create undue retention risk
- You can't actually build what they want



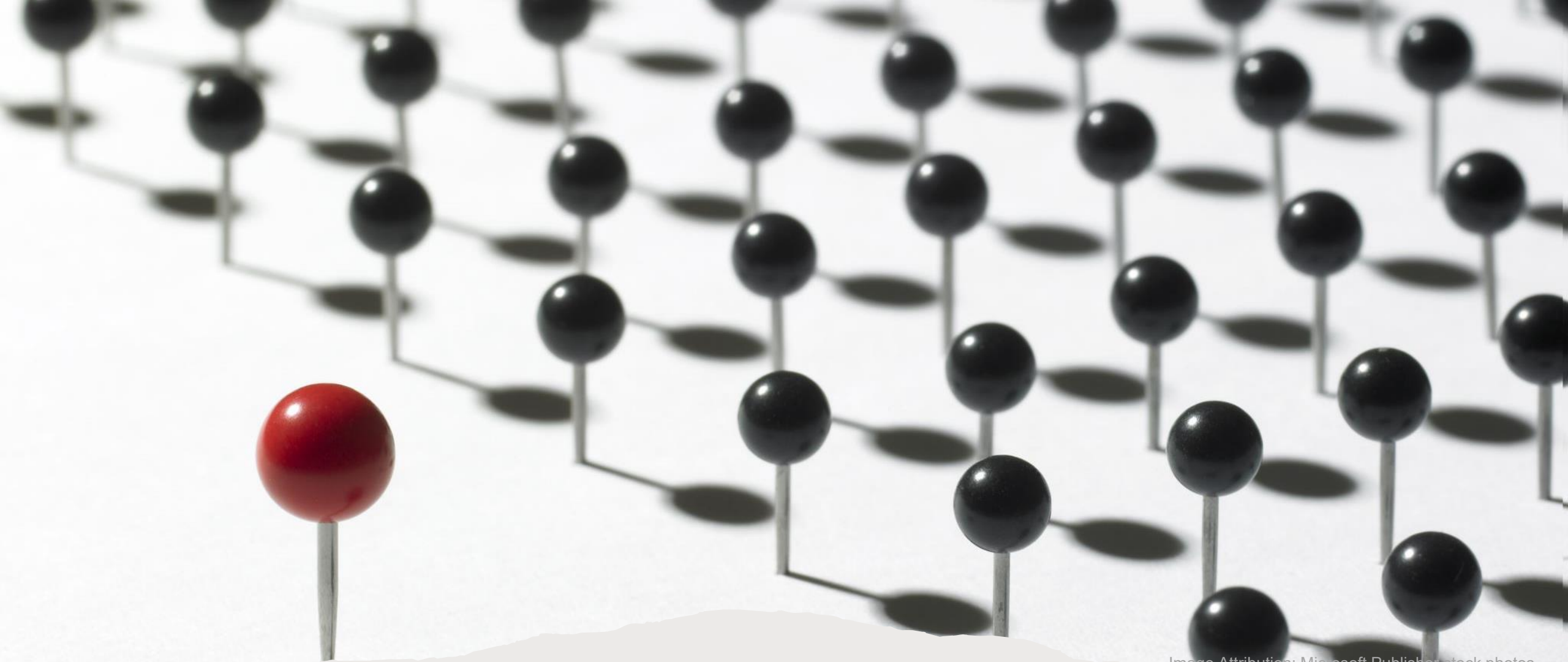
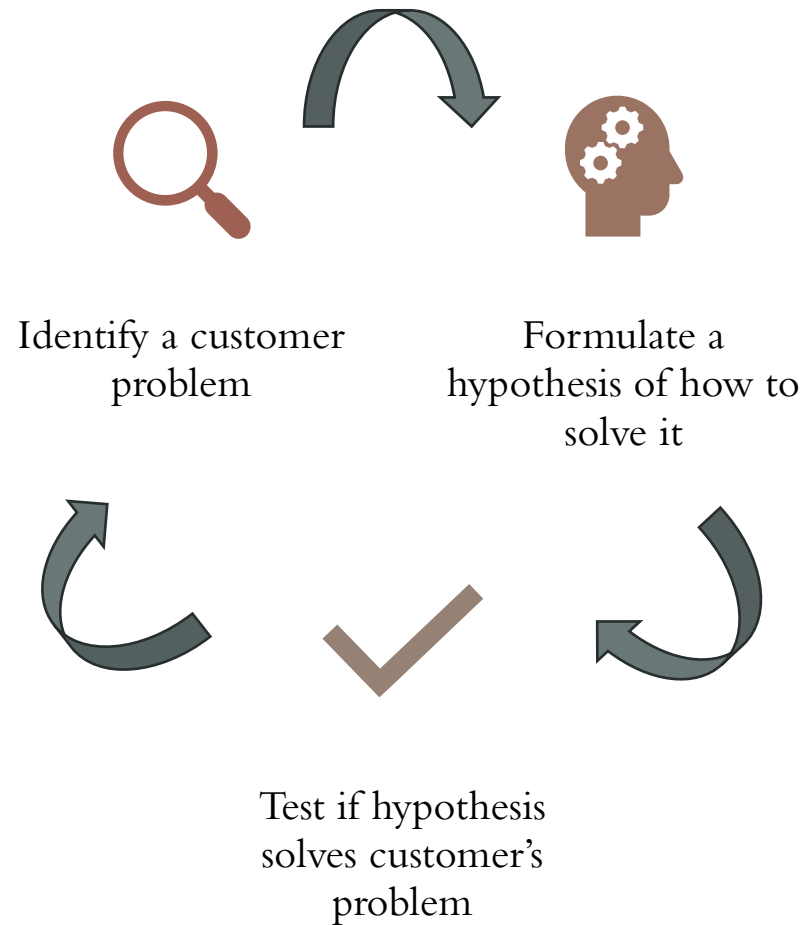


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Hypothesis and Problem Statement Formation

THIS IS ALL PART OF THE PROCESS

PROBLEM / HYPOTHESIS IS CIRCULAR



- Most of the time the starting point is
Stakeholder asks for a specific feature (now with AI)
We need to make a specific customer (segment) happy
Customer ticket
- Things Changes
As we test we learn things
That changes our understanding of the problem
That changes our hypothesis of a solution
That changes what questions we ask people

FORMULATE A PROBLEM STATEMENT

- Centers the conversation on something that can be provably resolved
- Organizes the process of discovery
- Creates clarity for what we are trying to accomplish
- Opens up possibilities for new ideas and directions
- Creates focus and a guiding light

As a type of user

I want to complete a job

But limitation I am facing

*Because description of the system
impeding the user*

Which makes me feel emotion

HYPOTHESIS STATEMENT

We believe that *proposed solution*

for *type of user*

Will achieve *benefit*

We will know we are successful when *outcome*

- Specific, repeatable user actions to understand expected, measurable customer behavior
- Every solution is built on a set of assumptions
- The goal is to be as explicit as possible in your assumptions
- Hypothesis testing is testing assumptions
- An untested assumption will hurt you

WHAT I AM HEARING YOU SAY IS...

Less Expensive

- Problem Interviews
- Solution Interviews
- Customer Games
- Surveys

I think you
have this
problem

Tell me more
... why does
it hurt

I do have that
problem.... except

More Expensive

- Paper Prototypes
- Wizard of Oz
- Functional Prototype
- MVPs

I have this idea
that may solve
your problem

Tell me more...
what does and
doesn't work

That's interesting,
it may solve my
problem... except

CHOOSING THE RIGHT TEST

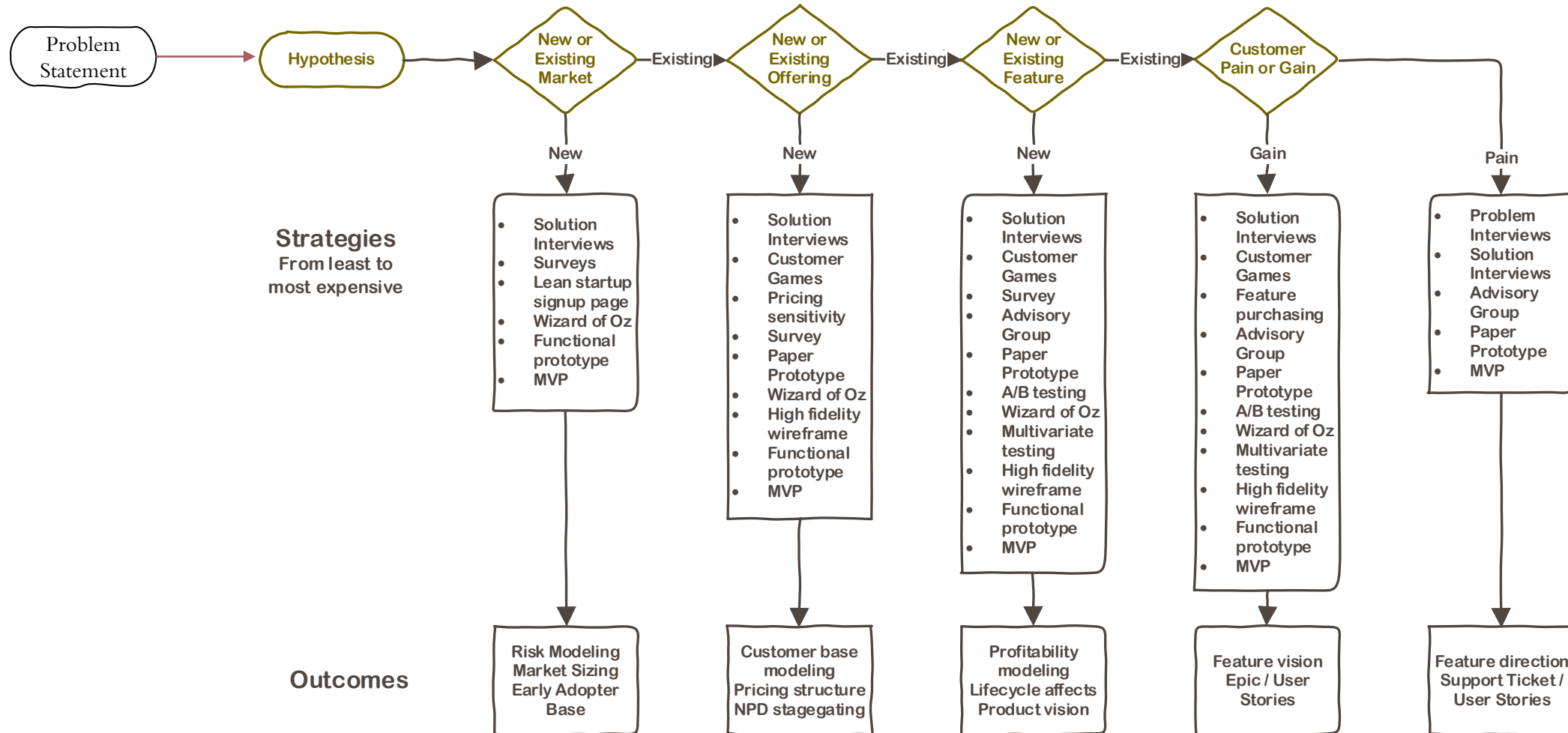


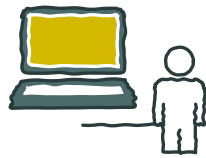


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Participants

WALLS KEEP PEOPLE OUT;
BOUNDARIES SHOW THEM WHERE THE DOOR IS

WHAT IS A “USER”



User

- Interacts directly with the software
- Looking for increased efficiency in their assigned tasks
- Gains and Pains are software or process interactions



Customer

- Makes purchasing decision
- Looking to reduce costs or increase value for the organization (B2B) or themselves (B2C)
- Gains and Pains are budget



Decision Maker

- Owns process flows and decides what problems users are solving with software
- Looking for organizational efficiency
- Gains and Pains are process flows and business needs



Stakeholders

- Has non-binding opinions on process, purchasing, and other decisions
- Looking for high level alignment
- Gains and Pains are structural

GATHERING PARTICIPANTS

- Identify a good cross-section from different sizes, segments, and types of customers
- Talk to enough people that you feel like you are finding patterns but not so many that you aren't learning anything new... 5-10 is usually a good starting place
- Directly talk to who is managing the customer to understand what services/products they are using, their relationship with the company, nuances of their communication style
- Look at their usage data and patterns in the software before you talk to them
- Be prepared with next steps on engaging with them and always ask if you can chat with them again even if the conversation goes poorly

WHAT MAKES A GOOD PARTICIPANT



They have the
problem you are
testing



Happy enough you
can't damage the
relationship



Unhappy enough they
productively engage in
problem identification

ADVISORY GROUPS

- Represent a cross-section of markets across a single interaction type
- Used to test a single hypothesis
 - Should we enter this market? – Stakeholders
 - Should we focus on this product? – Decision Makers
 - Should we explore this epic within this product? – Customers
 - Should we build this feature within this product? – Users
- Seek out both “loud” voices and a balanced perspective
- Set expectations of participation, frequency, and outcomes early



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Problem and Solution Interviews

CAN YOU TELL ME MORE ABOUT WHAT'S
BEEN ON YOUR MIND?

INTERVIEWS FOR HYPOTHESIS TESTING

PROBLEM INTERVIEW

- Open ended questions
- Specific descriptions of when they encountered the problem
- Express empathy but not resolution
- Explore the area around the stated problem

SOLUTION INTERVIEW

- Starts with agreement on the problem statement
- Offers solutions
- Explains trade offs
- Tests for market agreement on price and value compared to other alternatives

INTERVIEWS FOR HYPOTHESIS TESTING

PROBLEM INTERVIEW

- Welcome
 - Introduction
 - Set the Stage
 - Psychological Priming
- About Them
 - Demographics
 - Goals
- Tell me about the last time (repeat)
 - Open ended questions
 - Why was that painful?

SOLUTION INTERVIEW

- Verify problem
- Summarize marketing message
- Describe solution(s)
- Describe limitations
- Get them to make tradeoffs
- Describe sales model and pricing (or cost)
- Numerical rating

USER INTERVIEW TIPS



Set the stage
that you may
ask dumb
questions



Focus on user
behavior, not
system actions



Listen to user's
dreams, but
don't start
brainstorming
solutions



Watch out for
cognitive biases



Stay open and
actively
listening



“What I hear
you saying is
X.” Or “I
believe what
you are trying
to do is Y.”



Look for
common
language and
start noting it
as part of your
ubiquitous
glossary

CUSTOMER GAMES

- Remember the Future
- Story Telling
- Purchase a feature
- Brainwriting
- Start your day
- Show and Tell

STRUCTURE IT INTO A WORKSHOP

- Create a visual structure of what you want to accomplish
- Start with an ice breaker to help folks learn the software and get into the right frame of mind
- For ever topic have time for folks to add their own ideas in their own words
- Group ideas together
- Force rank ideas using 2x2 matrix or dot voting
- Have clear outcomes at the end and next steps

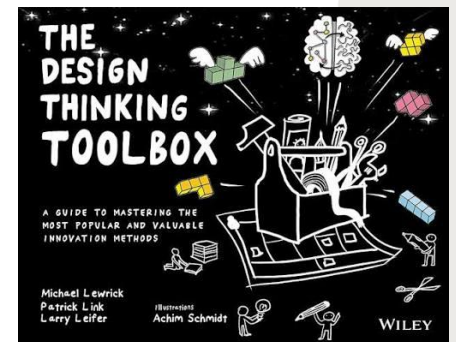




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Surveys

I VALUE YOUR INSIGHT, EVEN IF IT IS
TOUGH TO HEAR

GOALS OF A SURVEY



Identify areas of the application to dig deeper on (Quant->Qual)



Force rank features for customer prioritization (pure Quant)



Test a specific feature or figure out adoption issues (Qual->Quant)



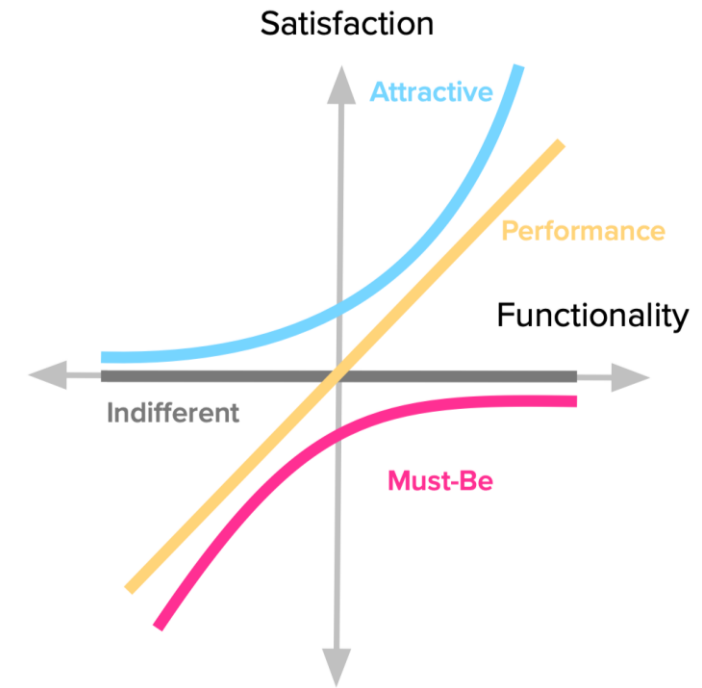
Generate a list people to use for other processes

THE QUANTITATIVE SHIFT

- Move what “what problems” to “how many experience them”
- Mitigate the “loudest voice” bias
- Trigger in the context of the application/action
- Create sample size confidence

FORMULATING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

- Use clear, standardized multiple choice options
- Keep it short to protect data quality
- Focus on behavior (what they have done) over speculation (what they want in the future)
- Use neutral phrasing (rate your experience with this feature)
- Try Kano-style question pairs
- If you have a researcher/UX-er use them, always bounce questions off someone internally

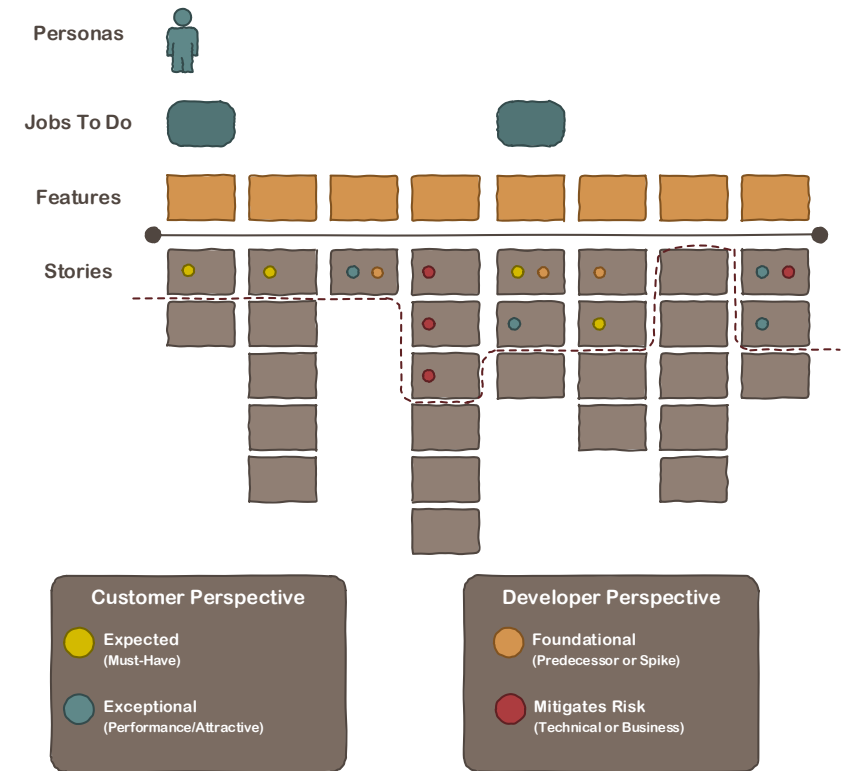


Dysfunctional
(feature absent)

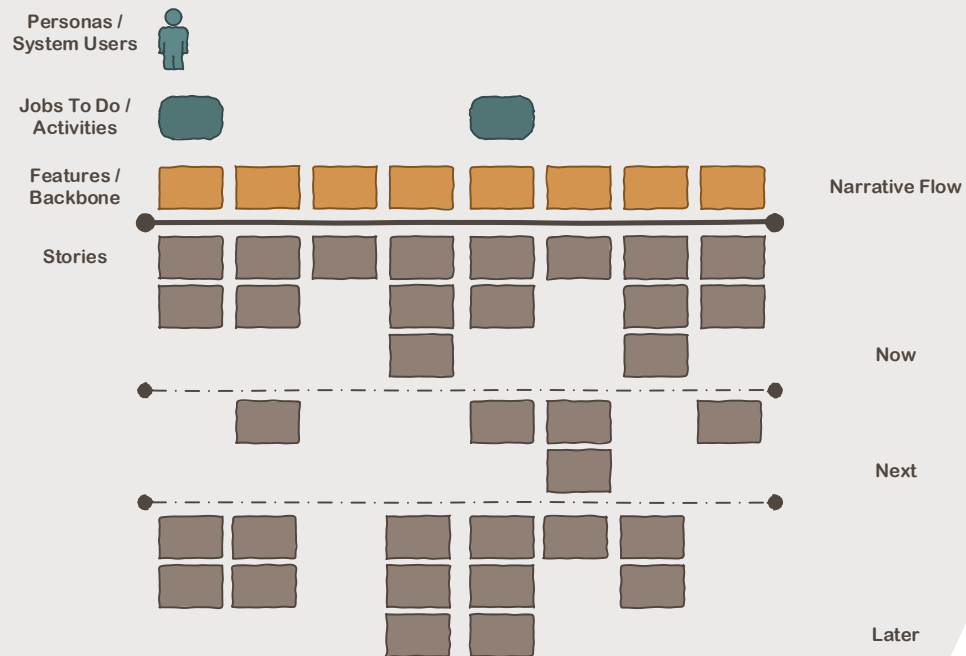
	Like it	Expect it	Don't Care	Live With	Dislike
Like it	Q	A	A	A	P
Expect it	R	I	I	I	M
Don't Care	R	I	I	I	M
Live With	R	I	I	I	M
Dislike	R	R	R	R	Q

CONSUMING DATA FOR FEATURE DECISIONS

- Map out the entire feature
- Use simplified Kano to add internal knowledge
 - Support constraints
 - Technical constraints
 - Wider understand of customer base
- Find a thin cut and get to a feedback loop
 - Prioritize based on your organization's priorities
 - Gain customers
 - Reduce risk
 - Protect existing customers
 - Explore new markets



SLICE OUT VIABLE RELEASES



- Look for span of functionality, not end to end features
Think about what you can learn at each delivery
Each delivery is an opportunity to mitigate against risk
Able to use a feature end to end and provide feedback
- Name the target outcomes and impact for the slice
Vet approach with users and developers for holes
Identify product success metrics
- Different approaches at different points in the release cycle
Opening game: vet the product with users and validate performance
Mid game: enhance existing functionality and leverage feedback loops
End game: assess release readiness and refine product edge cases
- Communicate, communicate, communicate



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QUESTIONS

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