

The Product Manager dilemma

INNOVATING vs **OPTIMIZING**

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Who am I?

Boris Golden



Founder & CEO

pealk

Now Director of Product

viadeo 

I want to tell you 2 stories...

What it typically means for a product guy to...

Innovate / Create a new product

Optimize an existing product

Cool subject because product role is...

Key!

Fuzzy...

Ill-understood (FR)

Heterogeneous

→ Different realities behind
being a product person (even at a given
seniority level)!

DISCLAIMER

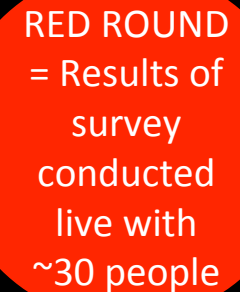
These slides do not contain
any « hard truth »

Intended to be:

Food for thought

+

A trigger for discussions

A red circular graphic containing text.

RED ROUND
= Results of
survey
conducted
live with
~30 people

Shared concepts/vocabulary

Innovate / Create a new product

Your work is to create a product/feature that does not exist yet (possibly part of a bigger product already existing)

Manage / Optimize an existing product

You are responsible for a product already existing: managing it (run, perf, etc), optimising it and making continuous evolutions

Their jobs look very similar

Tools

Methods

Responsibility

Skills & Experience

People they interact with

Etc.

4 product roles = 4 « product hat mix »

Director of Product = 33-33

Product Advisor = 60-40

Entrepreneur = 80-20

Startup Mentor = 90-10

What I've seen around me

Excellent « Innovating » Product people turning
into the worst « Managing/Optimising » Product
people ever

And the exact opposite!

But also:

product people that were able to innovate in
their own startup but not in bigger companies

Meet Cindy

Product Manager & 1st employee @ Innoovy

Startup, 10 employees

Mobile app for recruiters

\$500K in seed funding from BA

~No revenue

Focus on product/market fit

Meet Kevin

Product Manager, Premium users @ WeDoBiz

1'000 employees

Still a « startup » spirit

Founded 15 years ago

\$50M in funding from VCs

\$150M+ revenue

Focus on growth & revenue

Let's be Manichaeian!

Cindy is
innovating

Kevin is
optimizing

What about **you**?

Our daily product job is of course
a mix of Cindy & Kevin's stories 😊

Both are different, none is better!

What's yours?



Survey:
~80% of
voters for
Optimising

And which one
would **you** prefer
if you could choose?

A red circular graphic containing survey data.

Survey:
~90% of
voters for
Innovating

Of course in practice...

Most Product people do both at the same time
(it's like project vs product: clear difference in
theory, product/project mix in practice)

+ Hard job to choose between the two in a
roadmap to deliver maximal impact 😊

Now:
How similar do you
think the 2 jobs are?

A red circular callout containing survey data.

Survey:
~90% of
voters for
« Similar »

However, in my
opinion/experience...

The two jobs are very different
+ it takes a very different person
...to be good at...

Innovating / Creating a new product

VS

Optimizing an existing product

Why?

Different phases in the product lifecycle:

Creating



Managing
(incl. Optimising)

(for sure, you can innovate in the 2nd phase too)

Previous ProductTank: PM = CEO of Product

It's just like for CEOs:

start phase <> growth phase

in terms of:

- Daily job
- People

A few reasons why...

Strategy

Goal

Product-Market
fit

Impact
on KPIs

Risk of failure

High

Low

Impact on business

High
Not likely

Moderate
+Likely

Malleability of the « framework »

High

Low

Metrics of success

Generic KPI with
subjective scale
+ Qualitative

Quantitative

Context

How people see what you do

Cool & Exciting

Useless/WTF

OK

« Run »

Processes, roadmaps, etc...

Too much
could hurt

Are OK

Visibility

Day/Week

Month/Year

Money

Not enough
(but it's OK)

OK

People working for you

Not enough but
motivation++

OK

Product work

Agility

Speed

Methods

Weight of product/tech legacy

None to confined

None to high

Method

Discover

Execute

Area explored

Unknown

~known

Profile

Main qualities

Product vision

Out of the box

Challenging

Rigorous

Agile methods

Follows the path

Attitude

Challenges

Mercenaire

Data-driven

Pushy

Team Player

People-oriented

KPI-driven

Obeying

Mindset

Explorer

Manager
« Péchu »

Now: after this talk, who has changed his mind and now believes those 2 jobs are very different in practice?

Excellent:
Most of
audience
changed
their mind!



Final words: I agree...

It's a bit caricatural 😊

But the most important things are:

The conversation we're having together
+ Making you understand why it's probably more
different than what you thought initially!

THANK YOU