The Product Manager dilemma

INNOVATING vs OPTIMIZING

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Who am I?

Boris Golden

Founder & CEO

Now Director of Product
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*

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

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

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?

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 2\textsuperscript{nd} 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
Weight of product/tech legacy

None to confined  None to high
Method

Discover

Execute
Area explored

Unknown ~known
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?
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