

One Knight in Product - E160 - Itamar Gilad

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SPEAKERS

Jason Knight, Itamar Gilad



Jason Knight 00:00

Frameworks, frameworks everywhere and yet we still have people complaining they can't work out what to build next. My guest tonight says he has the answer, or at least an answer. But before we get to that answer a brief aside to mention that this episode is sponsored by Skiplevel. So we're gonna help you answer an important question that you struggle with communicating with dev teams understanding technical terminology and concepts. A while back on episode 98 of this podcast I hosted Irene Yu, the founder of Skiplevel. Skiplevel is an on demand training programme that helps professionals and teams become more technical in just five weeks, all without learning how to code, you can learn a knowledge and skills you need to better communicate with devs and become more competent in your day to day role with the skip level programme. So you can head over to <https://www.oneknightinproduct.com/skiplevel> and use referral code. OKIP, to support this podcast. You can check the show notes for more details. All right back to the episode and an interview where I speak to someone who's tasted the fruits of success at some of the biggest tech companies around but walked away realising he still had a lot to learn about how to apply their best practices to the rest of the product world. He's got a lot to say about evidence based idea prioritisation and making sure you really focus on goals rather than features. So without further ado, let's get going, mn One Knight in Product.



Jason Knight 01:19

So my guest tonight is Itamar Gilad. Itamar's as a product management coach, speaker and author who says he hates hype. So I'm going to preemptively commit to not hyping this interview in advance. Sorry, Itamar. Itamar's passionate about the principles and mind models that drive product management and once had a job as a language editor for a local newspaper. But he's now trying to help translate the Rosetta Stone of product management, through his consulting and speaking to trying to get us all to in place evidence guided development of supercharging human judgement with the GIST framework. Oh, maybe it's GIST, you know, like a GIF. Hi, Itamar, how are you tonight?



Itamar Gilad 01:50

Very good. Thank you for inviting me.



Jason Knight 01:53

No problem. It's good to have you here. And I'm looking forward to well, actually, that's a good first question. Is it GIF or GIFT in your world? Which way would you go?



Itamar Gilad 02:00

I pronounce it GIST. I didn't actually realise that there were two pronunciations, and they're both correct until I started using the word.



Jason Knight 02:09

Well, there you go. So it's just not guessed this, okay. It's important to get these things right. We don't want to get into a holy war is the most important thing. All right. So first things first, you are a product coach at product front, which I believe is your own consultancy. So what sort of work? Are you getting involved in day to day with product front? And who are you doing it for?



Itamar Gilad 02:28

So I do a few things. I train product teams and product leaders. I teach them strategy and mostly teach them what I call evidence guidance, product development, which is I guess, the stuff we're going to talk about soon. Oh, yeah, I also coach like yourself. And I also try to write I try to devote a lot of time to writing. So I have a newsletter. And I'm also working on the book. This is like a full year project. Now.



Jason Knight 02:56

Hot take! Well, not that hot a take if it's 4 years, I guess. But how's that book coming along?



Itamar Gilad 03:00

It's, you know, it ebbs and flows. But recently, it picked up a bit again, so I'm hopeful that I'm starting to see an end to it. But it will be a few months into making steel at least.



Jason Knight 03:13

Well, something to look forward to as we get towards the winter time again, I guess. But what type of companies then are you working for? Is it primarily with startups? Or have you got like an enterprise play as well? Or is it like a big mix? Like, where's your sweet spot?



Itamar Gilad 03:26

It kind of varies, I think mostly it's scale ups and larger companies, but I do the startup, and I enjoy working with startups a lot. As you probably know, it's a lot more fun. So I'm very interested to learn there. It's easy for them to pivot and change things. Mostly I work with product organisations that already exist. And companies that do have a product organisation, they're not just like, you know, massive scrum safe house, they just going to start understanding what product is. So a product organisation that exists but they want to kind of uplevel the game, they want to move a little bit more in a direction of lean, agile product discovery, using evidence correctly, you probably are familiar with the scenario.



Jason Knight 04:11

Yeah, absolutely. I think it's interesting, actually, that talk about the early startups as well, because one thing that I've heard consistently from a bunch of people that I spoke to, as early startups, quite often need a lot of this stuff, but they're not necessarily in a position to pay for it yet. So as you start to go up through the scale up and into the larger companies, that's when they're actually prepared to commit money to it. But I guess it's interesting, though, because if you're talking about the medium, the small to medium companies, you've obviously got a lot to say there with the maybe a lot more impact that you can make, in theory, because you've got this company that maybe not quite so set in its ways. It's not got the big structures and the big processes, but you're also talking to big companies. So do you feel that the techniques that you're using do really translate to those bigger, sort of let's call them enterprises or is that more of an incremental change that you can make to those organisations?



Itamar Gilad 04:59

So I have the benefit of working in all of those I worked in some startups, I worked in scaleups. And I worked in a couple of big enterprises, Microsoft, Google, even IBM in my early days. And a lot of what I teach is based on large company issues. And I find there's some set of universal problems that exists across the board. And that's kind of what that's I think, what we're all trying to do, we're trying to find frameworks that are kind of applicable across the board, but then we help clients kind of adapt them to their situation. So definitely, if I teach just to start up, I would tell them to Tony down, reduce the amount of process by like, 90%, super lightweight. While if I work with an enterprise, especially a more traditional company, we will have to work through it much, much slowly, there are a lot of more participants involved is a lot more existing process to integrate with. So very different stories. But still, I think the frameworks the principles apply across the board.



Jason Knight 06:07

Well, that's a good story, a motivational story for companies large and small. But he just talks about how you are Google and obviously, Google are one of the big tech Titans. And actually, I think you spent a couple of years coaching after, I think after you've worked in a couple other companies, you then took a couple years to do some coaching back in like 2008. And then

when 2010, you went onto Google, and kind of gave up the coaching for a bit, which you've obviously returned to, but was that a case of like, coaching wasn't for you at the time? Or was it just that Google was such a fantastic opportunity, and something that you just really wanted to get into? Yeah, a bit of both.

 Itamar Gilad 06:41

And to be honest, I didn't make it very well in coaching at the time. Partly because I didn't know that much. I mean, when you teach you need to think also have a good basis of knowledge. And by that time, I wasn't, I didn't have that much to teach, honestly. And then Google came along. And that sounded like a great opportunity. But always, at the back of my mind, as I was working as a product manager, I was always interested in what else is there out there. And you know, we're all talking about the creative economy. Now. It's a big hype. So I was always interested in other types of projects. And eventually, after 20 years of doing engineering and product, I felt it's time to make the switch after I've done Google, and here I am.

 Jason Knight 07:28

Well, I was gonna say, because you worked as a product or rather programme manager and Microsoft back in the day, a bit before that, obviously, then you worked in some startups, you then went to Google, which is, obviously a really huge kind of exemplar company, in some ways, like lots of people look at the practices of the big tech companies, and maybe even Microsoft these days and try to emulate those. But I think it's fair to say that Microsoft and Google have traditionally had very different cultures. And there's also been a bit of a kind of a push back in some circles against some of the maybe the excesses of Google culture as well, because they've got so much money, they can just about do anything. And they give such amazing perks. And lots of as with Twitter, as with some of the other big tech firms that there's a kind of almost like these are just luxury roles to some extent, which I don't 100% by but there is some of that kind of pushback out there. Would you say that your coaching that you do these days is much more informed by your time at Google? Or is it really an amalgamation of all of the time that you spent across all these different companies.

 Itamar Gilad 08:28

After I left Google, or when I was leaving Google, I felt I had it all figured out. I mean, I worked. I worked on a billion user product. I was there at Gmail, and before that on YouTube, so I knew everything. The first few years of coaching were actually such a great, great school. For me, that's where I worked with startups. That's where I started trying out things that work for me in Google, and I realised I need to adapt it. And I also adopted a lot of things within us at Google. I mean, Google is not like, it's a great company to work for. But I actually wrote an article about this big tech is not an exemplar of how things have to be done. Like they didn't figure out the template for success. They've figured out something that works for them. Yeah, specifically. And it's very different. If you go to Netflix, or to Amazon, or to Google, each one of these companies is very different. So when people look at this company and say, Hi, I want to work like the like big tech, pick one, and then I'll show you why. Most of the things they do may not apply to you. Yeah, what I do recommend for people to do and that's what I try to teach is copy the principles. I mean, these companies, invest in people, empower teams, really value the

customers, everything they do is about the customer experiment, are willing to change their opinion, like senior people are willing to change their opinion given data. These are the sorts of things you want to do in your company, honestly, the process itself how you do it, it could be in a working backwards like Amazon or it could be leading with context like Netflix or it could be the Google way. That doesn't matter. Probably you will create your own process anyway. So adopt the principles, understand the frameworks, and then follow up with the end, people tend to do the opposite. They read the book. You know, what we need, we need the six page, you know, press release frequently asked question process of Amazon that's in fashion now. Yeah, it's called Working backwards, right? No, you don't need this specifically, you need to understand the the context behind it the reasoning, and then ask yourself, how does this apply to me?



Jason Knight 10:47

Yeah, it's funny, I was doing a talk with a company this morning. And they were asking about OKRs. And whether OKRs are still good, or whether they're out of fashion or something like that. And I think my answer is probably very similar to what you said, in a way, it's like people that start with OKRs. And just try and just replace what they had and not change any of the ways that they work, but just change all their KPIs to OKRs, or just all their tasks that you need to do into okay, I was kind of missing the point. And that the whole point of OKRs isn't that you've got this call template to put stuff in, but it's the way that you get to them. And they kind of miss all that stuff out. So completely agree with the concept of like to try and work out what they're really doing, rather than what they've ended up or the expression of how they've done it. But do you think that some of the criticism of the big tech companies when it's kind of like, everyone's kind of overprivileged and pampered and there's all this talk about, say, for example, with Twitter, like how they're all kind of lazing around again, I don't buy that. But do you think there's anything to? I mean, again, you touched on it in that article about, like, they've basically got infinite money, most of these companies, so pretty much infinite money, and they can kind of maybe take risks or carry weight that other companies can't like, Do you think there's anything to that?



Itamar Gilad 11:55

Absolutely. I mean, there's an awful lot of waste inside these companies. And I'm not talking about just products and stuff. That's, that's company culture. And if it's works for them, that's fine. Yeah, I do think that, because they have such deep pockets, they are in a position to create a lot of projects that will fail the end to invest a lot in these projects, and then kill them. Eventually, after a few years, we tried, it didn't work out, let's move on. Sometimes it it kind of hits them back, like I was in Google during Google Plus. So sometimes, when you do a really big strategy to build a really big strategy around some of these ideas, you are, you're paying a very high cost. But in general, that's one way they're doing it. And I think a lot of big companies are actually now paying attention. And I'm saying this, because I'm getting a lot of traction with people from Google and from other companies. They're very interested in better ways of working and kind of figuring out what will work before you build, I don't know 100 person project around it and work for a year and a half. How can we actually find evidence earlier? How can we actually test things? How can we pivot, so they're just as interested in build, measure, learn and discovery is a lot of there's other companies that were consulting,



Jason Knight 13:15

that makes a lot of sense. Or hopefully, you can continue to steer the ship from your new position now side of the company, but talk about that new position in the coaching and the way that you're trying to help people and teams today, talking to conferences, fighting the good fight, trying to spread the word. One of the things you talk about is prioritisation and your use of the ice framework, which is impact confidence and effort. But before we talk about the framework, you've got an interesting little twist, or I think is your little twist anyway, which is the confidence metre, which is a lovely little dial that goes from like point 01, all the way up to 10. To kind of represent the confidence you have an idea of and point 01 is self conviction. So it's just some idea that you've had and you've got no idea at all outside of your own head all the way up to 10, which is like you've actually launched it and you've got some real world data from it. Now, how did you come up with that? And I guess also, how has it helped you in your work?



Itamar Gilad 14:07

Alright, good. So the motivation, I think is obvious. Anyone who's worked in tech as in that overconfident product manager, overconfident executives that comes in and say we must build this never happens. Yeah. Why? Why must we? Because it's the trend in the industry now, because I think it's a great idea. And I'm a First of all person because us as a committee of smart people, we sat together and concluded it's a great idea, because the leading competitor has one of those. And those are all forms of evidence. I mean, I don't discount them. The question is, what is the weight compared to if we tested this with a customer if we ran, I don't know, a fake door test. And no one actually very few people actually clicked on the thing that says, let me know when this is ready. You If we conducted 20 interviews, and no one actually is super excited, what does that mean, compared to our opinions and the opinions of you know, the industry? So it's not that we are saying, don't listen to managers don't listen to the team don't listen to opinions, we're saying, Give those things a little bit less weight. And when I say a little bit, I'm actually think saying a lot. For me, the scale is exponential. Yeah, exactly. The motors, I mean, in my scale, if you look at it, at the very top of the confidence, metre is like AB experimentation, this is really hard test to succeed. So that, for me is about 1000 times more important or has more weight than one person's opinion. Yeah, that person might be an expert. Maybe their opinion weighs a little bit heavier. But the AB experiment is actually a much more, much more of an acid test, to test the idea. So that's kind of the the inception story, it took me a few iterations to come up with this exact model. I tried. I had another article before that, where I tried to create a confidence score. So through trial and error, and then I published it, and no one actually found it interesting. I wasn't very famous back then. Oh, I didn't have a lot of followers. I'm not very famous now.



Jason Knight 16:21

You're famous to me, Itamar!



Itamar Gilad 16:24

Thank you! You're famous too I mean, I see you feature a lot on my LinkedIn and Twitter.



Jason Knight 16:32

Sorry about that.



Itamar Gilad 16:32

So anyway, and then later on, when I came up with juice, people discovered that article and that became my most read article about the confidence metre and how to combine it with ice to create evidence guided prioritisation.



Jason Knight 16:47

So is that something that you used while she was still kind of working day to day within companies? Or was that something that you came up with as part of your coaching and then help teams to use it since you did that.



Itamar Gilad 16:59

So I think I already started using the concept of confidence, without actually putting numbers in it just as a sense. When I was working at Google, we had one particular feature. And it took a long time and had a lot of ups and downs, we had to iterate a lot on it. But eventually, when it launched, it was pretty impactful. And we were pretty happy with the result. And throughout this dis project, initially, I just came with an idea. I was the one with the self conviction, and everyone in the company were like, you know, what? Not such a great idea. We tried similarly. Why are you so sure that this is a good idea. And I was the product manager, and this was in June? And I said, I don't know. And then my team was willing to help. So we did data analysis of how users behave. And we found supporting evidence. We did interviews, and we found supporting evidence, then we came to management and we say, Hey, here's some supporting evidence, give us some funding for this project. So they said, Okay, looks interesting, continue, here's a little bit more headcount. And then we started doing usability tests and building it and iterating. And I realised that what was happening there is that I was forced, because of the scepticism and the wisdom of my teammates and my manager, I was forced to present evidence and the evidence actually boosted my confidence in the idea and everyone's confidence in the idea to the point where at some point, my manager said, You're not thinking big enough, this feature needs to launch across all the Gmail apps, this shouldn't be one of our biggest launches ever make it a big deal. And I was able to convince the Android team at the time who was controlling the Gmail team with evidence again, that this is a really cool idea to work on, and so on. So the idea, by the way, if you're interested is the Tabbed Inbox it's kind of maybe you guys don't love it.



Jason Knight 18:55

I think I turned off my sets. I'm very, I'm sure some people love it.



Itamar Gilad 18:59

Yeah, it's a feature. If you don't know it, it's kind of categorises your email to social promotions and primary, which is the stuff you usually interested the few other categories that are, you can turn them on. And it's designed for kind of more passive Gmail users, not people like yourself who probably know how to filter messages very effectively, not people want to touch every message and P zero Inbox Zero practitioners, regular people. And for them, this was a very important feature. Yeah, at least based on our date. So anyway, this long process kind of taught me to be a little bit more humble and to rely much more on evidence. And later on, it was a matter of codifying this into a framework that is usable across projects, essentially.



Jason Knight 19:50

Yeah, and one thing I like about the confidence metre is the way it tries to put a name or even like a story to the confidence scale because one criticism that you see about numeric prioritisation frameworks like ICE or RICE or some of the other ones that you can add up and use to try to do some kind of prioritisation on a list of stuff is that you're putting kind of numeric quantitative rigour on top of a bunch of opinions and guesses like, you know, the effort is probably a guess, the impact is probably a guess, that confidence is probably a guess. But at least with the confidence metre, you're trying to put some kind of story around like exactly what confidence means. But do you think that, in general, it's fair to have that criticism of these like numeric frameworks that some people seem to think you can just pop a bunch of numbers in and just get your strategy out the back? Or is there a rebuttal to the idea that these numbers are just basically codified guesses?



Itamar Gilad 20:47

So let's begin at the basis. I think you need prioritisation at some level. Even if you don't call it personalization. If you, you do a double diamond, you go out you interview customers, you you form problems, hypothesis opportunities, whatever you want to call them. And only then you start thinking of ideas, you'll always have more than one idea. And other people will come from the side and give you other ideas that are not in your problem space, and you need to deal with them. So you're doing privatisation either way, even if you don't call it. Second, I think things like ice where you're putting numbers on impact confidence and ease, it's really mixed bag. There's a lot of value in it, and is also very detrimental value or like you can really derail yourself if you're using it the wrong way. Yeah, and let me explain. I see a lot of value in asking the three questions, which are, what's the impact? Which means how much is this idea going to contribute to the goal. And it's really important to have a measurable goal, you know, an outcome, second NHS, and initially, it's a guess later on, when you start testing it, it's a much more kind of educated guess. So it's not a bad thing to try to guess on a scale of one to five or one to 10. As long as you're using confidence, then there's ease, which is the opposite of effort, typically. And that's another guess. And it's a guess we have to make at some point. It's never accurate. None of these guesses are accurate. But it also improves as we start building versions of the product. And we understand the complexity more. And then there's the confidence, which is the counterbalance. And that's the genius of Sean Ellis for coming up with the ice model initially for marketing experiments, but also very useful, I think, for product. And he said, let's put a number that says how show are we actually that we're going to have this impact with this level of ease. Especially the impact is like, you can think that something is a

nine out of 10. It turns out to be a minor three later. So there's a really risky area. So I find tremendous value in asking these three questions, because I see people go into a room and have a prioritisation debate that rages on for hours, sometimes days, sometimes weeks. And then someone comes in say, Okay, what's the impact of these ideas? What's the ease? And what's the confidence? And that cuts the discussion in like really massively. Everyone's forced to kind of detach from their emotions from the love of the ideas or their opinions, and really answer these three questions. And at the end of the day, you have a much more kind of grounded discussion. Just at this level, it's worthwhile doing, I think, the last part that we should really be worried about is the multiplication of the three, or to come up with a high score. I think that's over simplistic. That number, the ice core is the best kind of weak hint as to which ideas you want to test first. You should not definitely never build anything just based on ICE score and just say, is ice core. Let's build this thing in? Absolutely. That's a mistake. I think Shawn is himself doesn't think that's the way it's supposed to be. It's just a hint, you need to use judgement as well.



Jason Knight 24:05

Yeah, well, I guess informed judgement is always better than just guessed based judgement. And yeah, I think from my perspective, as well, I've always looked at the numeric frameworks of which there are many as a kind of a starting point, I think, actually your point around almost treating it as a loop and revisiting the scores as you go and seeing which way the arrows are pointing, like, are you getting more or less competent? Or, as a whole? Is this more or less of a good idea than it was when you started? And I guess the trajectory of those changes can also really inform like, how bad how badly wrong it's going right? And like how much you need to really check yourself so yeah, I definitely think it's a part of it. But I also agree with some of the people that are with you from just now like it's not just kind of put it in, turn the handle and just go like that's if only things were that simple, right?



Itamar Gilad 24:55

Yeah, people love magic solution. There's no magic sauce.



Jason Knight 24:59

We can just mix it with some OKRs. And we'll be fine. Right?



Itamar Gilad 25:02

And I think the point you made is very important. I don't think it's a one time exercise you need to keep rescore the idea every time you run an experiment, every time you learn something new, is the impact higher or lower is the is higher or lower. Now, based on that we know what we know. And what's your level of confidence? How much more confidence did you gain. And that's important because sometimes are really challenged with experimentation. You know, they don't have the infrastructure. They don't have the time that the dog doesn't let them experiment. But sometimes even if they experiment, they don't learn, they build, they measure they don't learn. It's like thumbs up looks good. Let's go on. If you do the Ice exercise every

time after you run an experiment, it forces you to really ask these questions again, not just does it look good, but how good does it look? Is it really still the high impact idea with thought? Is it still more fun? Maybe we have better ideas. Let's pocket this one. So that's why I suggest rescoring just as you said.



Jason Knight 26:02

No, I think it's a it's a good shout. Let's see if we can get some people doing that. But you can't talk about prioritisation without talking about roadmaps. I know that you're not a fan of roadmaps per se. And it seems like obviously, these days, quite a lot of people aren't. But you've got an antidote to all of this stuff anyway, which is the just framework, which you've written about, you give talks about mentioned earlier. But for those living under a rock, we're talking about goals, ideas, step projects, and tasks. So what's a simple walkthrough of those four areas and what they enable for decision making within the product development process?



Itamar Gilad 26:40

So this is one of my insights from Google. Like, when I came to Google, I was interested to understand what makes Google so successful, or at least made it it's just okay, I was right, that's just okay as exactly OKRs and hard work and engineering and brilliant people. Yeah, it's not any of that. I mean, the work with Googlers are fantastic. But there are people I mean, I work with, I see great people in every company I work with. And it's not just the high quality of people, but they're doing something different. And what it took me a while, but I realised that what they're doing different happens on four levels. One, they're much more goals driven than they are Feature Driven. And it's, it's changing, it may have changed, it's maybe more so in the past than it is now I don't know, you need to ask the car and Google Googler. But there was this deep sense that we need to do something good for the users in a measurable way and something good for the business. And we should format these things at OKRs. And that's really what we're trying to launch over the course of the year, not the set of features necessarily, but the set of outcomes. Yep. And that's what some people call the outcome based world map itself. I'm not going to paint Googlers in all rosy colours, there's a lot of output focus, as well as in some areas, but at least I got the sense in general, at the time I was working there. And the second thing is they're willing to consider any idea. It's not just the idea of the manager, or they're there. They're willing to look at many ideas. And early on in Google, there was this concept of let 1000 Flowers bloom, give more ideas a chance, which is a very scientific approach as well. I mean, in science, you don't know which ideas or which theories are right, you just need to test and see what works. So that gave me the basis of the second layer, which is about idea privatisation using ice etc. And then the third level was how evidence driven things were like, if you could present data, you could overturn the decision of Senior VP. Theoretically, yeah. Let's not overstretch it, but people were very reactive to date are very kind of positively reacting to data. If there was no data, opinions ruled, and usually the most senior person's opinion, made a decision. So but if you did come up with the data that really was delivered. And the last thing was that in Google, I didn't see this heavy handed kind of agile work where the rituals and standard tickets within write on a ticket. It was agile, it was really agile, where did do iterations but the team was much more engaged team was part of this whole journey, including the goals including ideation, including prioritisation of ideas, etc. So that was the last layer the task or the team worked as layer. And then when I left Google, I was thinking I have all these ideas, but I need to put it to use to allow people to have access to

them. So eventually, that morphed into JSTOR, which is a framework I'm beta shame, there's too many frameworks See? And it's kind of a modular framework as well. I mean, you need to look at your organisation say, what's most broken? Yeah. Because there's breakage everywhere. Is it about the goals, we're not actually talking goals, we're talking about output constantly or things. So start with the goals layer and develop your metrics, trees, develop your Northstar metric, pick a few and say, These are the goals for the year for the company, pick a few and say, These are the goals for the team. Work with that. And that really will shield you from all this barrage of ideas that keep coming your way, you know, from sales, from marketing from customers, you say these are the goals. But it's actually a trick I learned at Google, like one time, we had this brilliant idea for how to integrate Gmail with Google Photos photos was picking up, you know, after the aftermath of the collapse of Google Plus, Google Photos was one of the spin offs, it's really succeeded. I still use it a lot. And I think it's a brilliant photo app. Yeah. So we're thinking Gmail, let's integrate with them. Let's do this cool integration. So we set up a meeting with some PMS from the photos team. And I presented the idea. And there was junior pm there, very small guy and said, Listen, all Northstar metric, it didn't use the word Northstar metric. But our key metric is the number of photos created for I don't remember exactly what it that's what we're optimising for. Your idea doesn't align with that. So it's not going to be prioritised. I'm telling you in advance. And that was such a powerful statement. It just stopped me in my tracks. And I was like, I totally understand what these people are optimising for. And I totally understand why they don't want to pick my idea. I think it's powerful. But many companies are missing this identity. Many teams are missing this identity, everything is a good idea. Because they didn't define their goals.



Jason Knight 31:57

That's interesting, actually, because I just finished reading build by Tony Fadell. And one of the things that he talked about, because he worked, obviously, at Apple, then he went and started nest, and then nest got acquired by Google. And he was telling a story of part of his book around how he was trying to do much the same as it sounds like you were trying to do like he was desperately trying to get some buy in from other Google teams to get some stuff done. It didn't align with their goals. And he obviously had the additional problem of being like an outsider, and not really part of the Google family, etc, etc, etc. Now, obviously, I'm not going to say that any of the decisions were wrong, because I wasn't there. And I don't know the different ebbs and flows and things that could have been impacting their decisions. But it feels like at some point, there might be some time where that Google Photos goal is less important to Google than the thing that you were looking at. But then if we're fully empowering our teams, and like enabling them to be fully self sufficient and make those decisions based on their objectives, do you think that that may be sometimes means that as a whole, the whole company misses out on opportunities that perhaps it would have been better to pursue?



Itamar Gilad 33:04

It's definitely possible. I mean, what you really want to achieve, and I'm borrowing here from Netflix is to have the teams strategically aligned the team, the different parts of the company strategically aligned with tactically independent, so not every decision would need to go through 50 layers of approvals sideways and upwards, which was the case when I worked in Microsoft, by the way. There's a famous blog post by former Microsoft engineers said, every change I need to make in the code, every feature had to be approved by 13 different people

from different teams. So Netflix is trying to avoid this. And I think Google is trying to avoid it as well. And you avoid it by creating a mission and Northstar metric for every one of the business units or product areas as they're called. And then you're trying to create a submission for each part of the organism, sub organisation down to the team. And as much as possible the teams need to pursue their mission. But being aware of the Northstar metric, one level above, right, yeah. So sometimes the right thing to do is to put your others to decide and collaborate on someone else's ideas like the Android team did with the Gmail Tabbed Inbox that I told you, because that is the best way to achieve your overall goals. If you get to this position, you're in a good place. So yeah, maybe there was some missed opportunity there. But trying to create a pan Google strategy that everyone needs to comply with would have been a total nightmare. And we all work for companies that try to do these things.



Jason Knight 34:40

Oh, yeah. But you talked in your blog recently, and we mentioned earlier about how big tech companies, they all have their own share of problems, but they've got, again, this kind of almost infinite money to experiment and take risks and do things that many or probably most other companies can't really do. And that's obviously brilliant for them like they can as you You touched on earlier, they can spin up projects and let them fail. And they can do this. And they can do that. But do you think that some of the techniques that you champion, for example, the just framework, you know, getting people focused on outcomes, making sure that they're giving, like you say, getting 1000 flowers to bloom and giving all ideas a fair shot, working really small and making sure that everyone gets together and collaborates around the tasks? And all of the stuff that we've touched on? Do you think those techniques have a legitimate home in these companies, maybe smaller, fairly dysfunctional? Early startups or mid startups? They're the feature factories, the sales lead organisations where everything's a commitment, and everything's been done based on deals, there's no real strategy in place or anything like that. Yeah, we hear about these companies all the time. Obviously, there's a spectrum of ways of working and all that stuff. But do you think that, for example, the just framework works for a company that is heavily in the mire of the feature factory in the sales dead motif? Or do you feel that there's some interim stage that they need to get to before they can start to reap the benefits of an approach like that?



Itamar Gilad 36:00

First off, I think feature factory and sales driven or sales lead is, is a Venn diagram, these are two huge circles, that have an overlap, but they don't necessarily are exactly the same thing. So let me try to split them. The feature factory, which I think is the even more common problem, and it's really huge, and that existed also in Google. And sometimes it's a times in Gmail, I felt like I've worked in the feature factory, because it changes, sometimes with a manager or with an attitude or with imperative, a corporate mandate, makes you a feature factory all of a sudden. But it exists also at the level of the startup, sometimes, sometimes the founders just think they're building a feature factory to just, you know, churn out the product they have in mind. And that's a mistake as well as differently. It happens in scale ups when they start hiring executives from the outside. And these people start treating the development team as a feature factory. So they're, the problem is that everyone's trying to optimise for maximum efficiency. They're trying to pick the best idea based on some heuristics and market research and some opinions and shreds of data. And then build the most efficient, like funded,

build the most efficient project around it, put people get them to execute perfect, agile and launch the hell out of this thing. And that's a series of terrible optimizations. And the just framework is trying, which is, of course, based on many other frameworks on you know, Kaga and then lean startup and design thinking, it's not really that original.



Jason Knight 37:46

Don't say that. No one will want to buy it!



Itamar Gilad 37:48

Well, it's my own kind of version of it, let's just call it that. So it's taught it tries to really push against all of these things, it tries to really, at the Gold level, say, no outputs, outcomes and use metrics. And the idea of level, not just this one idea that you all fall in love with, here's, we need to have at least three to five years per key result. At the experimentation at this step level, I call it steps because experiments I think, is too narrow. How do we test these things in the fastest cheapest way? And then how do we analyse the results and invest only in the things that have traction? And then at the task level? How do we get engineers and designers not just to work in this, you know, repetitive sprints or whatever? Pushing tickets to the downstate? How do we get them to actually focus on experimentation and learning just not just on output? And I think this has a home in a variety of feature factories, and it's kind of the antidote in my mind. The self driven org, a bit harder. That's usually very typical large b2b, very slow, very dependent on a few customers very reliant on the sales force. Yep. I still think there's a home there as well. Same model much slower. But you don't need to run as fast as a b2c company just need to run faster than your competitors, in a sense. And in this organisations, they tend to invest huge amounts into big projects that based on what they think is very strong evidence, customer demands. Yep. And often it's just one customer or a couple of customers, or maybe the most problematic customers that the CEO took with setting the tone. Oh, yeah. And we're building project after project based on this, what I consider anecdotal evidence. If there's just one customer said this, unless that customer is really like 50% of your income, you really need to think about the general case, not just build a wall set of one offs that are very expensive to build, and then maintain them just for that one customer that might end up not buying or not even using that thing. So you will need evidence guided in these companies just as much as the other ones, but you need to tone it down a bit. Yeah,



Jason Knight 40:15

I think I might also argue that if you're a product company with 50% of your revenue in one customer, then you're probably setting yourself up for quite a lot of trouble. Yeah, going ahead birth, you should probably diversify your revenue streams a little bit. But you recently talked about principles over process, you kind of touched on it earlier, as well. And now obviously, we all want to be flexible and adaptive and have growth mindsets and all that good stuff. But if you had to pick one principle that you live or die by something, you insist on something that you think is the most important thing that people should stick to, even if they couldn't stick to anything else. What would that principle be?



 Itamar Gilad 40:48
Just the one?

 Jason Knight 40:49
Well, you're a product guy. You got to you got to prioritise?

 Itamar Gilad 40:52
Yeah, I usually talk about four. But I'll try to pick from the for our customer focus, which is lacking in so many companies. Oh, yeah. Evidence, guided decisions, adaptive planning, so not just sticking to a roadmap, but actually trying to create adaptability to new information, and empowering teams, which obviously, I stole from multi. All of these principles underlie, in my mind, all the good methodologies that we, that's what they all have in common. They all are pushing for these things out of this. I think it's really hard. I think customer focus is really, like, if you're really customer focused, and we're willing to really create value for your customers, not just for your business, that unlock so many other things. So I think if that's missing, that's what I would start with from

 Jason Knight 41:52
the get go so far. So Jeff Bezos, customers, everything should have worked for Amazon. Where can people find you after this, if they want to find out more about confidence metres or the jest framework or maybe even chat a little bit about how to use their Google inbox.

 Itamar Gilad 42:06
So on my website, <https://www.itamargilad.com>, Ita Mar, gi la dee da.com, where you will send the link anyway. You can edit this in post, if this was redundant, you can sign up to my newsletter, and then you'll get all the articles plus access to the tools. So the confidence metre is a spreadsheet as I have a bunch of other templates there for just plus a series of ebooks, including about OKRs and stuff. So this is kind of the gateway. If you sign up to my newsletter, that's yeah, that's my commercial plug. I'm also pretty active on LinkedIn and Twitter, I assume you will share those links as well.

 Jason Knight 42:50
Absolutely.

 Itamar Gilad 42:50
And I love to engage with the community. So please don't be shy. Reach out, tell me what you like or don't like about my my ideas. And let's exchange.



Jason Knight 42:59

And we'll all learn together. Well, I'll make sure to link that all into the show notes. And hopefully you're gonna a few people heading in your direction to find out more. Well, that's been a fantastic chat. So obviously really grateful you could spare the time to talk about some interesting and important issues. Obviously, we'll stay in touch but yeah, as for now. Thanks for taking the time.



Itamar Gilad 43:17

Thank you very much.



Jason Knight 43:20

As always, thanks for listening. I hope you found the episode inspiring and insightful. If you did again, I can only encourage you to hop over to <https://www.oneknightinproduct.com>, check out some of my other fantastic guests, sign up to the mailing list or subscribe on your favourite podcast app and make sure you share your friends so if you and they can never miss another episode again. I'll be back soon with another inspiring guest but as for now, thanks and good night.