One Knight in Product - E122 - Sophia Hoefling

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SPEAKERS

Jason Knight, Sophia Hoefling

Jason Knight 00:00

Hello, and welcome to the show. I'm your host, Jason Knight, and on each episode of this podcast, I'll be having inspiring conversations with passionate product people. Now, when it comes to inspiration, sometimes we all need a little bit of help. If you follow me on Twitter, you'll know I'm a passionate advocate for mentorship. In the first quarter of this year, I've mentored 76 different people, but I've come to realise that I just don't scale. Because of this, I have teamed up with a buddy to help more mentors and mentees find each other. If you want to find out more check out https://oneknightinproduct.com/mentor, where you can sign up to be a mentor, and mentee, or both. That's https://oneknightinproduct.com/mentor. On tonight's episode, we talk about creating a Wizard of Oz startup to prove product market fit and using the insights you've gained along the way to inform your very own yellow brick roadmap. We talked collaborative product discovery, making sure we take all of our stakeholders along for the ride and whether we need to expand the classic product trio. We also considered life centred design, making more ethical product decisions which consider the impact on everyone and what to do when our customers couldn't care less how ethical we are that we want to be better anyway. For all this and much more, please join us on One Knight in Product.

Jason Knight 01:15

So my guest tonight is Sophia Hoefling. Sophia is an entrepreneur, product leader, former basketball player and keen skier... I'll try not to hold that last part against her. So first started out as an early metaverse pioneer scanning hotels and museums for VR startup before heading into a variety of product roles most recently Head of Product for Babbel before getting bored of working for someone else and starting their own company. instead. Sophia is passionate about life centred design, considering the holistic impacts of our product decisions and also wants to make sure that we're not just doing product discovery, but doing it collaboratively. Hi, Sophia, how are you tonight?

Sophia Hoefling 01:46

Hey, Jason. I'm doing great. Thank you.

Jason Knight 01:49

Well, it's good to have you here. Right. So first things first, you are the co founder and head of product at Saiga. So what problem or problems does Saiga solve for me?

Sophia Hoefling 02:00

So Saiga is an early stage startup from Berlin and we are developing a personal digital assistant that takes up all kinds of private life admin work for people. So booking doctor's appointments, applying for parental benefits, buying train tickets for next family vacation reserving restaurants, this list goes on and on. We believe that people have spent way too much time on these things time, they could rather spend time with their family with their friends or following their hobbies. And what is probably even worse is that managing and doing all of this life admin work creates a lot of mental stress and sometimes even anxiety. People are afraid of missing the deadline for applying for something. They feel stupid because they often don't really know how to do something, you know, like taxes in Germany, it's incredibly complex. people procrastinate, life admin work, and then feel even worse about it. Or a lot of people like first time parents or expats in a foreign country, they often don't even know what there is to do. And, yeah, by building this personal digital assistant that supports you with all of that, we hope that we ease that pain and give back a little bit of time, but also, yeah, more mental space to people.

Jason Knight 03:16

But you touched on it there just a little and it was something I thought when you were talking about this kind of magic box that sorts out all your problems is that people have lots of different types of problems. And it can have lots of different types of tasks. And you've got to presumably build something to do all of those different things. And it sounds like there's potentially some almost like, like, you can't just have one thing that does them all, right? You have to start building and customising things to do different types of tasks. So is that kind of tricky to prioritise what types of tasks you can actually help people with? Or is it a fairly easy thing for you to kind of just wrap these up?

Sophia Hoefling 03:52

No, it is difficult. But yeah, we're building this horizontal product we had at the beginning, when we set out we were like, Okay, should we start with kind of one vertical and do that really well? Or do we directly go horizontal? And then we figured out, it's probably better to start out horizontally, because people have all these different things, everyone is different. And it's not about just doing certain aspects, but also keeping track all of that. So yeah, we set out to go abroad right from the beginning. And what we're doing right now is eventually we want to automate many of these things. But that's obviously impossible to do right from the start. So

right now we have this product, which is basically an app that you can use to delegate work to us. And then we have a team of personal assistants sitting there in the background and doing things for you...

Jason Knight 04:43

Behind the curtain!

Sophia Hoefling 04:45

Exactly. It's this kind of Wizard of Oz kind of product at the moment and at the moment. We're still in this phase where we're also asking people to just hand in everything they have. So we really learn what are the things that come up most frequently, and then, kind of getting a better idea. We realise, okay, this is probably something we should get into in terms of automating things.

Jason Knight 05:09

But I'm just thinking. So you've obviously, you've set this up in Germany, which is a country which has lots of very strict privacy laws maybe above and beyond the GDPR laws themselves. I used to work for a German company, and we were very hot on all things privacy and personal data related. Is it tough to get people to hand that data over to you? Because presumably, they need to hand you some very personal details, and maybe even social security numbers and things like that to actually get some of the stuff done? Like, has that been easy to get people to do?

Sophia Hoefling 05:37

Yeah, that's a great question. That was one of the big worries we had at the beginning that people would not hand anything in. And now we're super surprised that people hand in everything. It feels like, okay, as long as it solves a problem, people are super open, they share a lot of data with us, they share very private things that I was super surprised about with us. But I think we have to keep in mind that these are also early adopters. So we have only 40 customers right now, most of them kind of work in the product world themselves. They're kind of really excited about this product. So I think the more we go mainstream, the more we will have to deal with this issue. And obviously, we're trying to kind of build a product that really secures your data in the best way, right from the start.

Jason Knight 06:26

Yeah, and there's always a pivot at some point to start some kind of identity theft type organisation if you really want to. But you've talked about then you're 40 customers, which obviously means you're still very much at that point where you can kind of do some of that Wizard of Oz stuff. Yeah. And I guess the question that you're presumably asking yourself, as

I'm gonna ask you, as well as like, Is there gonna be a tipping point? Do you already have that in your mind, like the tipping point, but you can't do everything manually anymore? And that you have to have that automation? Are you basically just seeing how it goes?

Sophia Hoefling 07:01

Yeah, I think a little bit of both. We believe that currently, we're building a lot of structures to make sure that our assistance, like the manual work becomes more and more efficient. And by that, I guess, we will already kind of get to a point where it feels like, Okay, if you have to, I don't know, apply or get a new driver's licence, if you do it yourself, it probably takes you half an hour to figure out what you need to do. Yeah, kind of scroll through all this government pages to get the right information. Once we've done that one time, and kind of noted down the process is probably only takes us five to seven minutes or so. So there is some efficiency gain already through, let's say, operational excellence. But yeah, I think this will only become a scalable product. If we automate some things in the background. Our objective actually is that by the end of this year, we will have automated quite a lot of things in the background. But we're also working towards a tool that helps you a little bit more help yourself and you find kind of all kinds of journeys and information, curated about how to do life at men, you can save all kinds of documents and information in our apps. So it turns more to a product and not simply a service with kind of an interface.

Jason Knight 08:26

That's fair enough. And obviously, it'd be interesting to see when you do get to that tipping point and what decisions you have to make at the time. But before you did this, you had experienced a number of areas you were working in product management, you were working in interaction design, that you had a stint in customer experience business development. So you've got quite a broad set of roles in your background and broad areas of experience. So did that make then moving into entrepreneurship and founding your own company... Quite a natural, easy step for you or was it kind of a struggle moving from maybe more of a structured company with product management practices in place and having to do it all yourself basically?

Sophia Hoefling 09:05

Yeah, I think my background, yeah, where I held various different roles helped me a lot in, yeah, and now kind of getting into CO founding my own company. I mean, I also I wasn't part of founding Saiga. Right from the beginning, I joined as a late co founder when we kind of pivoted and started out something new...

Jason Knight 09:25

A hostile takeover!

Sophia Hoefling 09:27

Exactly. No, it definitely helped a lot that I — in my very first job, I joined a startup, we were kind

Exactly. No, it definitely helped a lot that I... in my very first job, I joined a startup, we were kind of eight people still sitting in the universities. I was there when we basically had to figure out everything pricing, what exactly is the product we're offering? What are the kinds of use cases where we get to kind of the technology that was developed as part of a PhD project? How do we get it out? So that helped a lot. And yeah, I think now it still is a struggle. I worked for Bumblebee for like an 800 People company before, we had all this tooling, all these kind of specialised roles, and then you can basically get back to zero. And it's like, as a product person, you're suddenly a data analyst. You're a customer support person, you have to do all user research yourself write the copy for the product. So it is a different thing. But yeah, I guess it is what what I enjoy more than kind of working in these established companies where everything is already in place. I think it always excites me, if there if you build something on the green field.

Jason Knight 10:38

So how many people have you got in the company right now?

S **Sophia Hoefling** 10:41

We are around 30 people, I think.

Jason Knight 10:44

So you're getting there... you'll have your 800 people in all your processes soon.

S **Sophia Hoefling** 10:50

That's true!

Jason Knight 10:52

Okay, so actually, one thing I did notice when I was Googling Saiga, to do a bit of background research is that apparently Saiga is also the name of the world's weirdest antelope. And I wondered if there was any special meaning behind the choice behind that name? Or you know if the antelope thing came into it? Or if it means something else in German? Like, what's the story behind the name?

S **Sophia Hoefling** 11:13

That's a good question. And actually, we don't yet have a good story around it, I think, our CEO and co founder, he decided for that name, because he felt that sounded good. And yeah, there was a free domain for it

Jason Knight 11:27

Ah the classic consideration!

Sophia Hoefling 11:30

Yeah. And it sounds like, yeah, no one really knows this animals. So we were like, Okay, we're gonna head for that. But we're starting a rebrand project and a week from now, with an agency in Berlin. And we already told them, like, we need a story for that. At the moment, we're always asked by all of our customers and don't really have a story. So we still need to beat that retrospectively.

Jason Knight 11:53

Okay, you can get loads of Antelope origin stories, in there. It's gonna be a good one. Now, one of the things you've written about before and you're passionate about in general, is the concept of life centred product development, as opposed to user centred product development. Now, I'm sure there's gonna be a bunch of UX researchers out there now spitting out their coffee, the thought of not looking directly at users for a minute, but what exactly is life centred product development? And why is it so important to you?

Sophia Hoefling 12:24

Yeah, I think what I mean, with life centred product development is probably what other people call sustainable product development, or maybe ethical product development. And what I mean is that you do not only consider your users when you develop a product, but you also consider the people who build the product, the people who are affected by other people using the product. So basically, the society and the whole environment. So also non human beings when developing products. And that also means that you consider not only the time of your product being used, but also Yeah, the the production time and the afterlife of a product. And I think it matters, or it's important that companies move towards this direction. Because I think this pure focus on the user costs a lot of pain led to kind of the ecological crisis that we're in right now, I guess, partly. And yeah, I think now, now, it's the time to think about, okay, if I'm developing a product, what is happening if the product is not used anymore for hardware products, that plays a big role, but I think for software as well, like if, if you store a tonne of data for a customer, and then they stop using the product, but you continue to store it, you need energy to store this data. So I think it's important that people start considering all these cases. And because I think also our kind of customers and users are becoming more and more aware of these factors, and favouring brands and products that really advocate for minimal harm to society and the planet. So I think now is the time that we move away from this pure focus this addiction almost to kind of look at the user and kind of.. yeah, widen up our view.

Jason Knight 14:15

But it's interesting, actually, because you said yourself there that users themselves are kind of getting a bit more aware of this. And maybe they're themselves thinking about the impacts of the things that they're buying the things that they're using. And in a way, it almost feels like

you could spin this and it's still focused on the user, as long as the user cares about that, I guess. But obviously, some users don't care about that. So what do you do about them?

Sophia Hoefling 14:40

Yeah, that's, that's a great question. I think as a company, you can maybe push your users towards the Educate them...

Jason Knight 14:49

The Benevolent Dictator!

Sophia Hoefling 14:51

Yeah, exactly. But yeah, I think as a company, you have a lot of responsibility, and you can, I think there are companies who showed like that Gotta go on. Yeah, for example. I mean, this is not a digital company. But there are these companies that clearly take a stand on something. And then suddenly, I think now a lot of people are wearing Patagonia cloth, those who don't care too much about the environment, but they turn it into a really strong brand. So I think maybe you start with those users who believe in, in life centred sustainable ethical product development. And then yeah, build a strong brand, build a strong product, and then kind of branch out.

Jason Knight 15:32

No, absolutely. But when I think about customer centricity, I mean, the classic example is always Amazon, you know, and Jeff Bezos and his customer first everything, and they could even email him directly and go and standby and so on until that problem was solved. So putting the customer at the heart of everything, and it's not hard to argue that, for example, with Amazon, that that comes at the expense, or can come at the expense of, say, the environment, in the sense that, like, if someone's getting their things delivered in four hours or something like that, you know, there's a kind of a rush on for that. And it's not necessarily going to be delivered in the most sustainable way. We've all seen the packaging, we've all seen the stories as well around things like employees that are being monitored for their toilet breaks and being kind of pushed to the limit. And I think even some suicides that certain points like, is it possible, in your opinion for a company that is, quote unquote, customer obsessed to be customer obsessed, without basically breaking everything else, as in their employees and the planet?

Sophia Hoefling 16:31

Yeah, that's, that's a great question. And I think with Amazon, yeah. It's it's always hard to say kind of retrospectively, if they would have done it differently, would they be similarly successful or not? I guess it might slow you down a little bit. But I think I think about it as a kind of long term game, because I feel Yes, now they became very successful. But now kind of the voices

are also rising, where people say like, No, I'm not ordering from Amazon anymore. I live in Berlin. This is a very kind of left city in terms of the people living here. And he's more and more people say like, No, I would never ordered from Amazon, I think this pure customer focus can then kind of turn into something where at some point people, yeah, avoid using your product, because it costs so much time. So I'm convinced that in the long run, it definitely is the better strategy. In the short run, yes, maybe you, you are faster, you get more people on board, if you're not life centred if you purely focus on on the users. But I think there's also from a government perspective, so that they will at some point and come at the restrictions in certain ways. And yeah, we see that with Amazon. We see that now with all these delivery companies in Germany, I'm sure you have them in the UK as well, with gorillas and all that, that they started out, they exploit the employees and then kind of at some point politics realises okay, we need to do something about it. And then it basically forced more and more to become life centred. So why not doing it right from the start?

Jason Knight 18:14

So people are going to have to get used to waiting a little bit longer for their packages, or paying a bit a bit more for their food is the long and short of it, I guess.

Sophia Hoefling 18:21

Yeah, exactly. And yeah, and I think there's also kind of technological solutions for things like with Amazon or kind of Zappos. Zalando is kind of a big online clothing storage in Germany, where they, yeah, for them, it was also kind of customer first, you can order as much as you want, and you can send everything back at no cost. And that led to people kind of ordering crazy amounts of clothing, and then sending it back, obviously had a huge ecological footprint. And I think now they realised, okay, we need to change something about it. They got very bad press. And now they're, yeah, they're working with these fitting companies developing kind of software that helps you find the right size. So I think it is this thing where there are solutions, and that there are more and more technical solutions. And maybe yes, it takes a little longer it requires you to think a little bit around the corner. But I guess it's worth doing that.

Jason Knight 19:23

But are there any frameworks or approaches that you take then or that you recommend to try and put this into the heart of your product design, product development process? Like, it's all very well saying that these are good ideas, and we can all agree, or we at least can both agree that that will that these are good ideas, but how do you turn that into action when you're thinking about your next company or your next product or your next feature that you're delivering?

Sophia Hoefling 19:49

Yeah, I think that the way how I always think about it is how can you consider all stakeholders and with stakeholders, I don't mean kind of the internal ones only, but really, this kind of environment, society, users, producers, how can you consider all user groups? And how can

you consider all product life stages? This is a bit like the mental model that I usually have in mind. And then, in terms of considering stakeholders, I think it's always helpful to if you do kind of a journey map, yeah, think about okay, so the impact on the user, in this step, the impact on the environment on society? Yeah, go a little product in that respect. This is something I guess that helps. And then maybe rephrase your considerations. If you think about a product needs to be desirable, feasible, viable. When you think about desirable then maybe ask the question, which user need can we fulfil with the solution? And where should we maybe make a trade off in terms of convenience, ease of use, or efficiency, which does not undermine the contradicting need of any other stakeholder? Or... I don't know, in terms of feasibility, you can ask how can we build the solution with minimum harm to the environment and without exploiting any service providers or suppliers in the process? And with viability, you can ask, How can we turn this into a solution that is profitable for our business, even if we consider all the external costs. So this is something that usually helps me a lot, then in terms of user groups, I think this is something where you, especially kind of now founding a startup, you tend to only think about the people that you want to target right now. But then kind of taking the next step and thinking, Okay, who could misuse a product? Yeah, it's always kind of a helpful question to ask, because I think no company sets out to build something that is kind of misused. I don't know, YouTube definitely didn't want any of kind of these super harmful videos to be on their platform. But they also didn't consider that from the start that obviously, it could be used in that way. And therefore they didn't set anything in place to kind of restrict the platform in that sense, I think, yeah, that is something that one could do. And then in terms of considering all product life stages, there is this concept of circular economy, as compared to linear economy, where you really think about, okay, how do we make sure that the resources we take somehow kind of reused at a later stage again, and it's not kind of this throw away? linear process where you take something, you build something, and if the product isn't used anymore, it just goes? Nowhere? And, yeah, I guess they're kind of 1000s of good resources on how to kind of consider or kind of implement integrate the circular economy concept into your development process.

Jason Knight 23:00

Yeah, it feels like a lot of it is also down to the fact that people want to be really optimistic about the things that they're building. And they don't want to think about the bad things that could happen or the bad results that they could have. So this is where you kind of get that concept of like, I mean, it's not quite the same, but like, writing pre mortems and stuff, you try and work out like how things went wrong. Like they obviously didn't go wrong yet. But like, at least try and get yourself in that headspace that things did go wrong before they go wrong. Because otherwise, everyone's just sitting there. Like you say, YouTube, it should have been obvious to anyone that's ever been online, that there's going to be a lot of hate videos and horrible other stuff on them. And the same with social media and all these other things. And it's obvious, obviously now, in hindsight, but if you think about it, it's kind of obvious anyway, right? So yeah, at least trying to put that safety net in in the first place. And or at least acknowledging it or like with a penetration test sitting down and saying, Well, we accept the risk or whatever else, but it's just, yeah, I don't think there should be any excuses for people not at least trying to think around a little bit more holistically.

Sophia Hoefling 23:59

Yeah, totally. And I think what you just said that, that's a good idea to to write a post mortem,

and think, yeah, because usually, you just write them in the way like, this is the ideal way, when we're super successful. This is how the world is gonna look like if everything goes well. Yeah. And then yeah, maybe take a step to the left and say, like, Okay, now we write it in a way if things are not going the way how, how we desire. Yeah, that's a cool idea.

Jason Knight 24:25

You don't have to share it with anyone. If you don't,

Sophia Hoefling 24:28

Exactly! You shouldn't read it to investors.

Jason Knight 24:34

Now, another thing that you wrote about fairly recently, and I know that you're keen to talk about and it's kind of a hot topic for you at the moment is the concept of collaborative product discovery. Now, obviously, product discovery itself is a hot topic at the moment. It's something there's a lot of books come out about. There's loads of articles, blog posts, videos, everyone's talking about it these days. I want to talk about the benefits of speaking to customers and obviously, hopefully that doesn't clash with the customer obsession. So this life obsession thing. But what do you specifically mean by a collaborative product discovery?

Sophia Hoefling 25:06

Yeah, with collaboration, I mean, that a multi skilled cross functional team is somehow working together synchronously or in a somehow coordinated manner to complete a task in support of a shared objective. And I think it's often confused or kind of mistaken with cooperation, where single group members are assigned a portion of the problem and support each other to somehow achieve their individual sub goal. And I think cooperation is usually a lot easier, you just kind of divide and conquer

Jason Knight 25:42

Pass back and forth.

Sophia Hoefling 25:43

Yeah, yeah.

Jason Knight 25:45

Little mini waterfalls.

Sophia Hoefling 25:46

Exactly that that's what I just wanted to say. But I think it doesn't really work. In terms of discovery, there was this time in the good old waterfall days where there was this business person kind of defining a problem handing it over to a designer, then the designer developed a solution and then handed it over to an engineer. And I guess that might see more efficient at the beginning, you probably don't have all these long discussions that you now have in the Agile cross cross functional, collaborative world. But you're also... you discover all these problems, too late information get lost. And you don't have this chance to kind of counter correct when you figure out while working on the solution, or this is actually the we didn't really phrase the problem correctly. Then it's hard to get back. So I think this, this was the reason why then kind of a lot of people move to agile, which is all about kind of collaboration in cross functional teams. But I feel that yeah, while while everyone tries to work collaboratively, it is super, super hard to get it right. And therefore it is something that should get a bit more attention.

Jason Knight 26:55

But when we're talking about getting people together, and we just talked about that kind of classic product trio of product managers, and designers and engineers, or are we talking about an even wider group than that, and getting people from all around the company involved, like, who should be involved in that collaboration?

Sophia Hoefling 27:11

Yeah, that's a good question. I think, yeah, first and foremost, it should be this product trio, driving all discovery decisions, kind of being the ones who do like everything in terms of discovery and take the most important decisions. But I think there's three years should make sure that they involve the rest of the product development team, or squat into making sure that kind of engineers also have the chance to kind of at ideas, kind of point out problems and the product. But yeah, of course, stakeholders across the company, play a huge role as well. And definitely, customers. And I think this is also something where it's about, yeah, really thinking about co creation with customers, and not just yeah, here and they are doing a usability test.

Jason Knight 28:03

Yeah, that makes sense. And I was thinking that she was you were talking about stakeholders, the idea that in B2B land, like where I am, there's always gonna be a bunch of other people talking to customers talking to users all the time, there's going to be customer success teams, there's going to be sales teams, there's going to be account managers, There's gonna be loads of other people having those touch points. Now, they're not traditionally in the product trio. But I guess we still want to get some of their feedback into the process as well. So likely, you've got any hints and tips on how to do that, like how to make sure that you're getting just the right

amount of feedback back from those people. And I guess crucially, that you don't just end up in a feature factory situation where you're just working all the stuff that they say, in order, like actually making that a proper input to discovery.

S **Sophia Hoefling** 28:44

Yeah, yeah, that's a great question. So I think that there's different ways of how to include them at Saiga. We, just two weeks ago, ran a discovery or design sprint. And there we had three people from our, like, operations team. So the people, the the assistants who actually do the workflow was, yeah, exactly. That was it. We had them involved, because we wanted to make sure that whatever we come up with is really something where they say like, oh, yeah, we really see that in our day to day work. This is a problem. This is a valuable solution. And that's sometimes Yeah, not super easy. They have never done a design sprint before. Some of the methods are kind of something that I'm familiar with them. But yeah, making sure you you explain it, you help them kind of think more in terms of problems and not solutions. And then it's super helpful to have them there. But of course, then you also need to set up ways to continuously involve them like and in our case, we sit down as a product development team once a week with two of these assistants and just openly. Yeah, interview them about the price. problems they have. And yeah, this helps a lot. We try to settle them, not only sit there, and yeah, and listen kind of secondhand, what they, they say about the customers, but yeah, to do some of the tasks ourselves, for our customers, I guess this is something that helps a lot. And yeah, giving them a lot of easy channels to give feedback, just kind of a Slack channel, making the hurdle as low as possible to send over information, I think it's so easy to say like, Okay, if you have a great idea about a feature, then here is this forum that you have to fill out, like, describe the problem, describe why it matters. And I think this is the work that product teams need to do. And your stakeholders, they should just kind of provide the raw data, let's say, and not have to learn how to do product development.

Jason Knight 30:57

Yeah, they've got jobs already. But this collaboration all sounds wonderful, and obviously completely agree with it. But there's also a lot of research around the communication overload that could be introduced, when you start to get bigger and bigger teams this way, we get the two pizza team kind of concept. And all of those different ways that people talk about, for example, the more people you add to the team, you're kind of exponentially increasing the number of lines of communication and the complexity of the group and all that stuff. And some people, it may be less discovery oriented organisations already think that discovery sounds like something that takes a little bit too long, because I just want to build some stuff. So doesn't adding all these extra people just make it take even longer?

S **Sophia Hoefling** 31:37

Yes, I think it does.

Jason Knight 31:41

And how do we get these people to not complain about that?

S Sophia Hoefling 31:44

Yeah, I think, I guess it leads to longer processes, and maybe less features, but the right features, eventually, that really solve a problem. They think this is always the difficult thing that you then need to explain kind of to the people that want to speed things up to say like, yeah, of course, we can kind of develop these five things super quickly, and do not talk to our assistance before into some more users before. But then we're not reducing the risk of building the wrong thing. And therefore, I think it's about finding the balance. Of course, you you shouldn't kind of slow things down too much. I believe there's also this risk and discovery that you talk to too many people and you go back and forth. And I think it's helpful to kind of think about it, yes, it will take longer, but we also need to timebox ourselves, because otherwise, yeah, it's easy to get lost in this process of constantly counter correcting. And, yeah, obviously, designers often really, really want to get it right and get to the kind of perfect solution. And I think it's often the role of the product manager to say okay, guys, yes, of course, we could now take three more turns. But at some point, we need to get something out. So how about we timebox and we set our deadline for Friday, next week, we should have something there, and then work iteratively afterwards to kind of correct it and get it better?

Jason Knight 33:11

Absolutely. But it's fair to say that not everyone is getting to do as much product discovery as they might want. But that's not an uncommon thing that you see up on the internet and all over the place. And maybe some aren't getting do any at all. They don't even being allowed to talk to customers. So if people are in a situation like that, what advice would you have to kind of get that discovery flywheel going? If it's not even spinning, or barely spinning at all? Are there any kind of top tips from your vendors to help people might get going?

S Sophia Hoefling 33:44

I think what is helpful in these situations is try not to kind of set up the perfect discovery process where you go into kind of each and every step into a lot of detail. Because that might be overwhelming if you like certain people, like your manager doesn't really believe in discovery. And then you say yeah, but now I have to do kind of three weeks of this work to kind of get the concept, right, like start small start with kind of some smaller things, maybe interview one customer at first to kind of validate a problem. And yeah, do do one experiment for a solution you have. I think this is something that helps. And then maybe kind of get your your managers or those people that don't give you the time to do discovery, get them into the process and show them because I think this is something that I experienced, experienced quite often. When you constantly kind of have this manager who says like, oh, I have this great idea. Can we do this? And then kind of get this person in a room to like okay, cool. Let's let's try to understand the problem and brainstorm solutions and then have this person see, oh, there are five solutions and actually mine It's okay. But there's one that seems even better. I think this can really be this aha moment yet where people realise okay, that there is maybe it's worth to do more discovery. And I think that the other thing is that why don't you have the time to do discovery because this is what I constantly hear from product managers from designers, I think it's often because then delivery is maybe not running smooth enough. And it's about sitting

down with the team and also seeing like, okay, how can we make sure that all the delivery work doesn't take too much time of the lead engineer, the product manager, the designers are the people that are usually part of this product trio? How can the team become a little more self organised? How can I don't know how can you build up a design system, so kind of getting a concept like finalising it to get it development ready is much faster than always starting from scratch. So sitting down talking about that to kind of free up some of the time that is usually getting lost in delivery?

Jason Knight 36:08

Yeah, I think one of the things that I've been reflecting on more recently is that whole delivery focused product management, and not even the fact that it's a feature factory, but just the kind of constant need to be involved in the creation of the software and kind of marshalling people and moving people along and kind of being almost like a project manager. In those small cycles. I think it's, you know, like you say, getting back to that self organising teams and getting people to actually do that, as a group, rather than it all falling on the product manager. I think that's absolutely crucial.

Sophia Hoefling 36:39

Yeah, and maybe also thinking about kind of having roles in the companies that support that. So in the first startup I was working for, we were developing hardware and kind of two different sets of software. And then we introduced the role of a programme manager who really helped with kind of all this release management, making sure, okay, we're releasing the software, is it compatible with the hardware and all these things? And I think, yeah, before that, that was always kind of something that the PMs had to do on the site. So yeah, how can you make sure that you free up the team that should get enough time for discovery by maybe introducing those roles, or product operations or something like that?

Jason Knight 37:24

Oh, let's not get into a process people debate at this part of this part of the interview! But no, I think that's actually a really valid point. Like, if you do need people to do certain things, then get people to do those things. Yeah. Like I've seen too often product managers be the kind of safety net, they're just kind of there to just cover the things that no one else is doing. No one else wants to do, as well. That's cool and all. But again, if you're gonna hire product managers, you probably want to be doing some product management. And where can people find you after this, if they want to find out about life centre design, or collaborative discovery, or maybe even try and shoot some hoops of you?

Sophia Hoefling 38:04

I am on Medium. I'm writing a blog on Medium. I'm on LinkedIn, I guess this is always the first kind of location to the best channel to reach out to me. Yeah, these two things I guess.

Jason Knight 38:18

We'll get you on Twitter soon.

Sophia Hoefling 38:20

Yeah, I should get there.

Jason Knight 38:24

All right, well, I'll make sure to get that in the show notes. And hopefully, you'll get a few people heading your direction. I'll also make sure to link in the articles that you've posted about collaborative discovery and life centred design so people can have a little read of those as well. Well, it's been a fantastic chat. So obviously really happy we finally managed to make it happen. It's been a long time coming this one, but we got over the line. Obviously, we'll stay in touch. But yeah, as for now. Thanks for taking the time.

Sophia Hoefling 38:50

Thanks, Jason. That was fun. Have a great day.

Jason Knight 38:55

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://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.