Mind the gap, and how to ensure product management is part of your business strategy


Art by Marie Fredriksson

It is the time of the year when many like me are closing one yearbook to open a new one, and when doing so at least I starts to go through things that no longer is needed or could be recycled into something new. The other day I found a presentation I had done a while back, where I went through the differences and challenges between the Development role of a Product Owner in an Agile organisation versus the role of a traditional Strategic Product Manager. It struck me that the presentation I had done is still very relevant, but back then it was more on how to adopt, the new role of a Product Owner into an Agile development organisation, and where to place the strategic product decisions, marketing activities and product life cycle management.

I experienced during a few years, that the role of a Product Manager with its responsibilities slowly but surely was replaced by Product Owners, whose focus mainly is upon product backlog management, user stories and sprint deliverables as part of the development organisation. A strategy that I would say works excellent short term to manage immediate product development, but no organisation could run their business long term without a plan, or a map of where to go and what to do on a strategic level.

If you are in the midst of reengineering your organisation perhaps this article could be of interest for you?

Crossing The Chasm
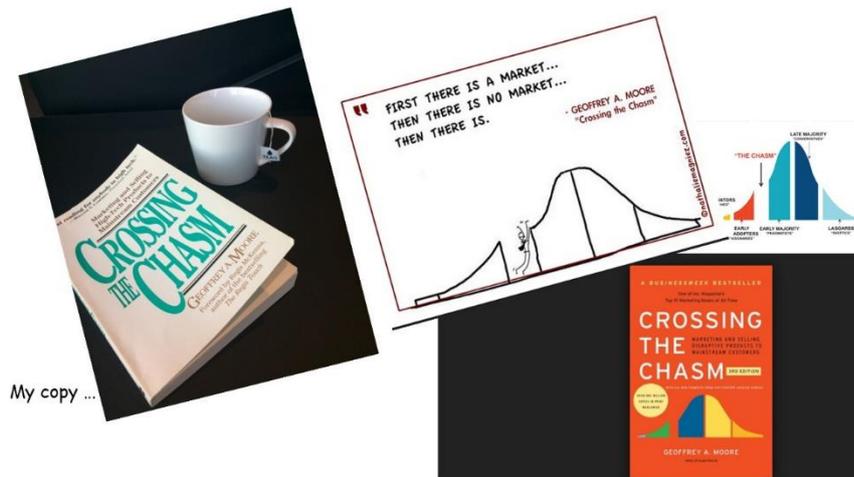
During the same time as part of my research for my presentation, I re-read an old favourite of mine, "**Crossing the Chasm**" by **Geoffrey A. Moore**, a book I read for the first time in the late nineties when I was working as a product manager for a large corporation.

For me and many of my product management colleagues, this book became our guide into the secrets of product lifecycle management. The book has been revised and updated since I first read it, but when turning the pages of my old copy and see my notes scribbled on the side bar, I realize that the same concept still applies. I'd say that the main questions and challenges haven't changed, it's just that some of the answers have evolved over time and some of the examples in my old copy makes me smile knowing what we know today. A book as relevant now as it was back then!

The term "**Crossing the Chasm**" implies the challenges any company face on their way to transit their technology from serving innovators, or early adopters of their products to reach a broader market of mainstream customers. The process helps you to acknowledge that there is a huge difference and discrepancy in the demands of your innovators, early adopters, and the needs of your early or late majorities. The process of knowing how to cross the chasm or mind the gaps is not something that just happens out of thin air, it is not something you will be given for free; it is something you will have to work for to get to where you want to be, and that is regardless of if you are a startup or an established company.

Development Product Owners versus Strategic Product Managers

I will end this article by sharing how I see the responsibilities shared between the two roles:

Product Owners focuses are to:

- Take tactical product decisions,
- Manage the product backlog and refines requirements into user stories,
- Be part of the development team, sprint planning etc.,
- Drive tasks and activities through the sprint process.

While the focus for a Product Manager is to:

- Make strategic product decisions,

- Manage the whole product portfolio,
- Be responsible for the product roadmap, long term life cycle management,
- Develop and manage the product strategy, and product performance tracking,
- Do financial and sales forecasts, business case management, pricing,
- Manage stakeholders internal as well as external,
- Do market research, manage customer and sales feedback,
- Competitive research, managing suppliers etc.

In a product organisation I would say that both roles are equally important, but with the different skillsets, and from my experience this is not one and the same person doing all tasks and activities. No one could do it all.

Closing words

To be clear this is not a scientific paper, but I think many companies and organisations in their eagerness to adopt, at the time, to new agile development methods and processes forgot how to paint with the big brushes. The strategic life cycle management was replaced by product backlogs, user stories and sprint planning to manage current operations.

Meaning that many lost their strategic map during that journey, and without a map you have no way of knowing how to take a product nor your organisation from one segment to the next, and the possibility of falling between the gap is immense. So, if I could give you one good advice for the road it would be to remember how to paint with the big brushes!

My name is **Marie Fredriksson** I am both a business consultant and the owner of fredriksson & AB, and I am open for new assignments so if you need an independent consultant, please let us get in touch, either send me a DM or an email to marie@fredriksson-och.se.

Merry Christmas & Happy New Year, Marie Fredriksson