

# Is Product Management Obsolete?

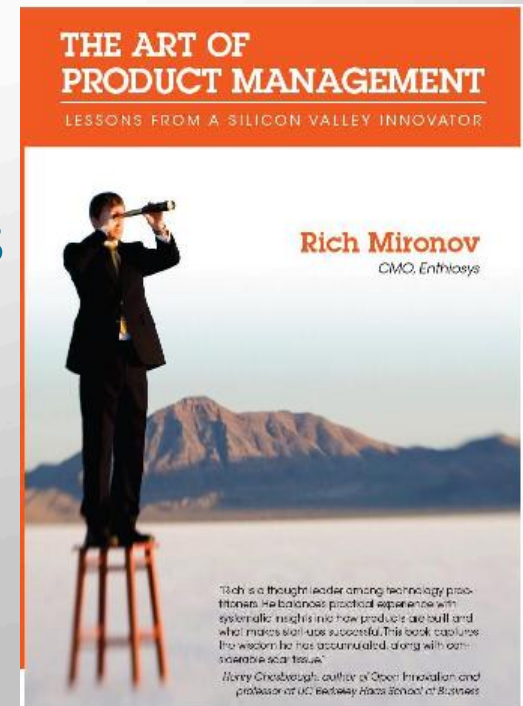
Rich Mironov  
SVPMA  
August 6, 2014

# ABOUT RICH MIRONOV



- Veteran product manager/exec/strategist
- 6 startups as “product guy” or CEO
- *The Art of Product Management*
- SVPMA board, first Product Camp, first agile product manager/owner tracks

[www.MIRONOV.com](http://www.MIRONOV.com)



# CHALLENGE: OTHERS (RE)DEFINE PARTS OF WHAT WE DO



## Tool Sets and Methodologies

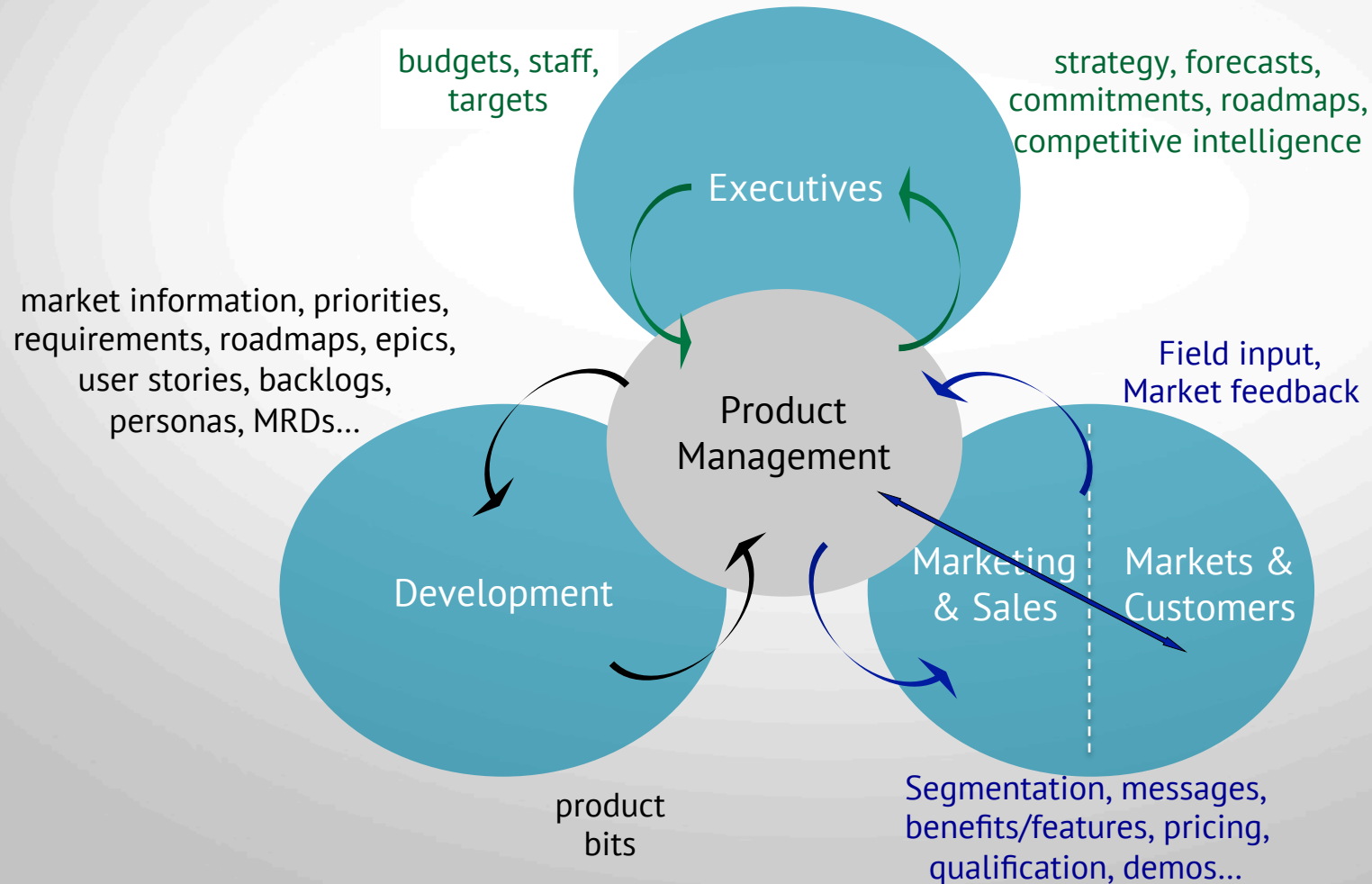
- Lean Startup
- Lean UX
- Agile Product Ownership
- Crowd-Sourced Roadmaps

We struggle to explain overall value of product management

# RIGHT TOOL FOR RIGHT PROBLEM?



# WHAT DOES A PRODUCT MANAGER DO?





# HOW PRODUCT MANAGERS ADD VALUE



- Drive\* whole product strategy and revenue
- Make\* hard trade-offs among complex choices
- Communicate and align around (current) plan

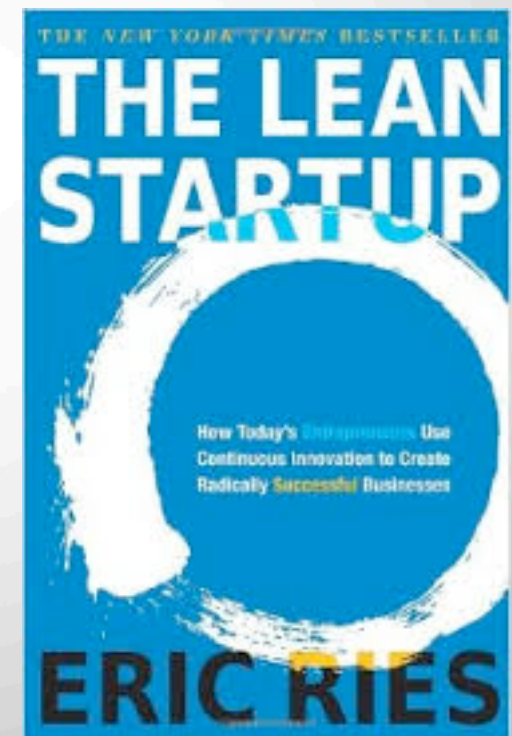


- \* We collaborate but it's not a democracy
- \* Get the smartest people/ideas into the room
- \* Take personal responsibility for market outcomes

# STARTUPS ARE DIFFERENT FROM ENTERPRISES



- Looking for product/market fit
- Organizationally simple
  - < 8 people
- Founder is Chief Product Officer
- Often following Lean Startup



“Companies are not larger versions of startups...

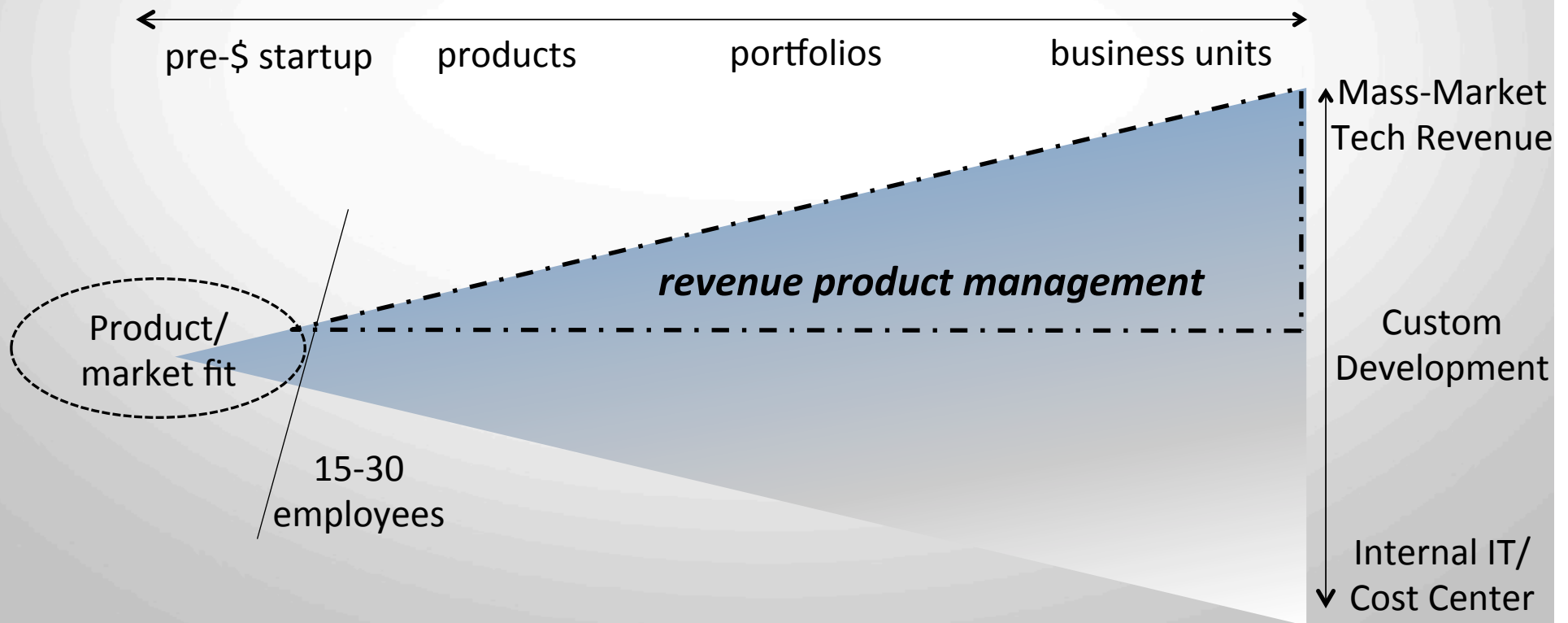
A **startup** is a temporary organization designed to search for a repeatable and scalable business model. A **company** is a permanent organization designed to execute a repeatable and scalable business model.”

- *Steve Blank*





# WHERE DOES PRODUCT MANAGEMENT BECOME CRITICAL?



# THINGS START TO FALL APART WHEN...



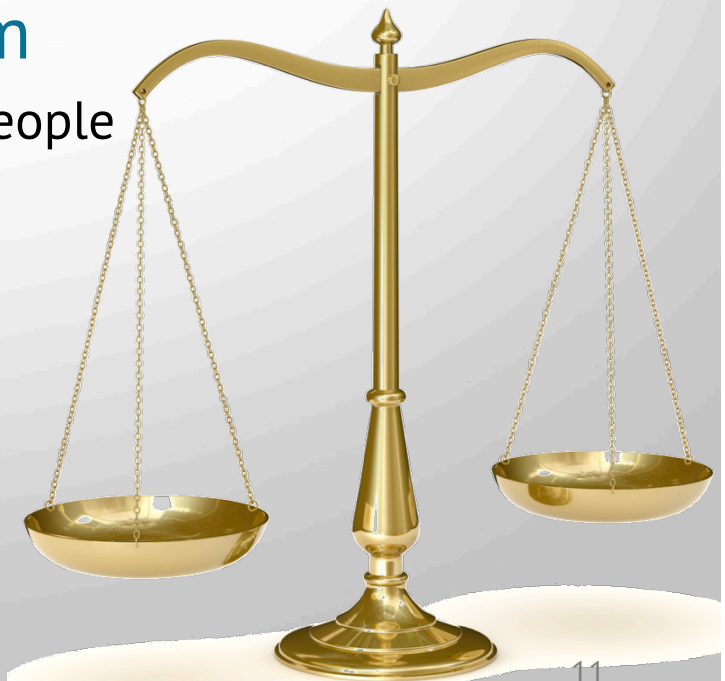
- 15-30+ people
- Development sits apart from Sales/Marketing
- Confusion about plans, dates, priorities
- Everyone has a good idea, a customer input, a helpful insight, an urgent fix...



# EARLY PRODUCT MANAGEMENT VALUE



- Keeper of the (current) plan
  - Backlog, strategy, target segment, actual features...
- Named person to buffer dev team
  - *Especially* from founders and early sales people
- Framers of trade-offs
  - Calls BS on magical thinking



# REVENUE COMPANIES HAVE NON-STARTUP PROBLEMS



- $N^2$  communication cost
- Need for more (predictable) revenue
- Infinite list of customer requests
- Investment decisions vs. current products



# OVER-PIVOTING FABLE



Hungry, impatient man on street full of restaurants...

- Every restaurant has a 20 minute table wait
- After 10 minutes, the hungry man gets frustrated, leaves, and puts his name in at next restaurant
- He eventually dies of hunger

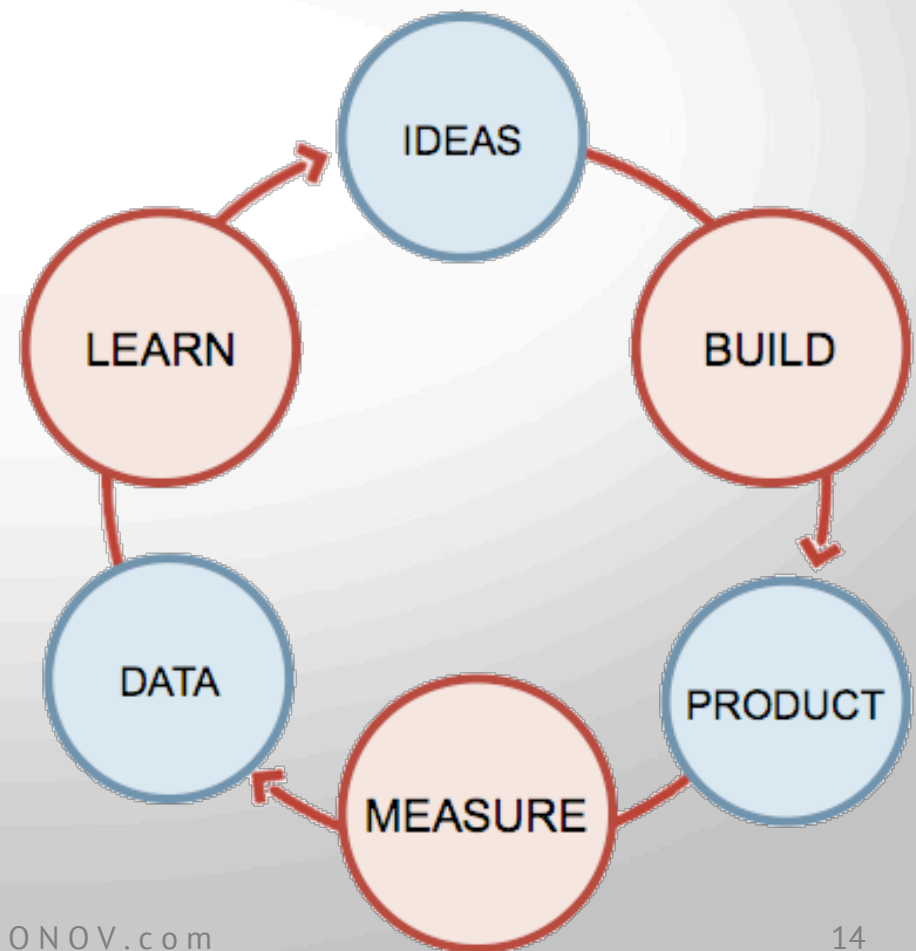




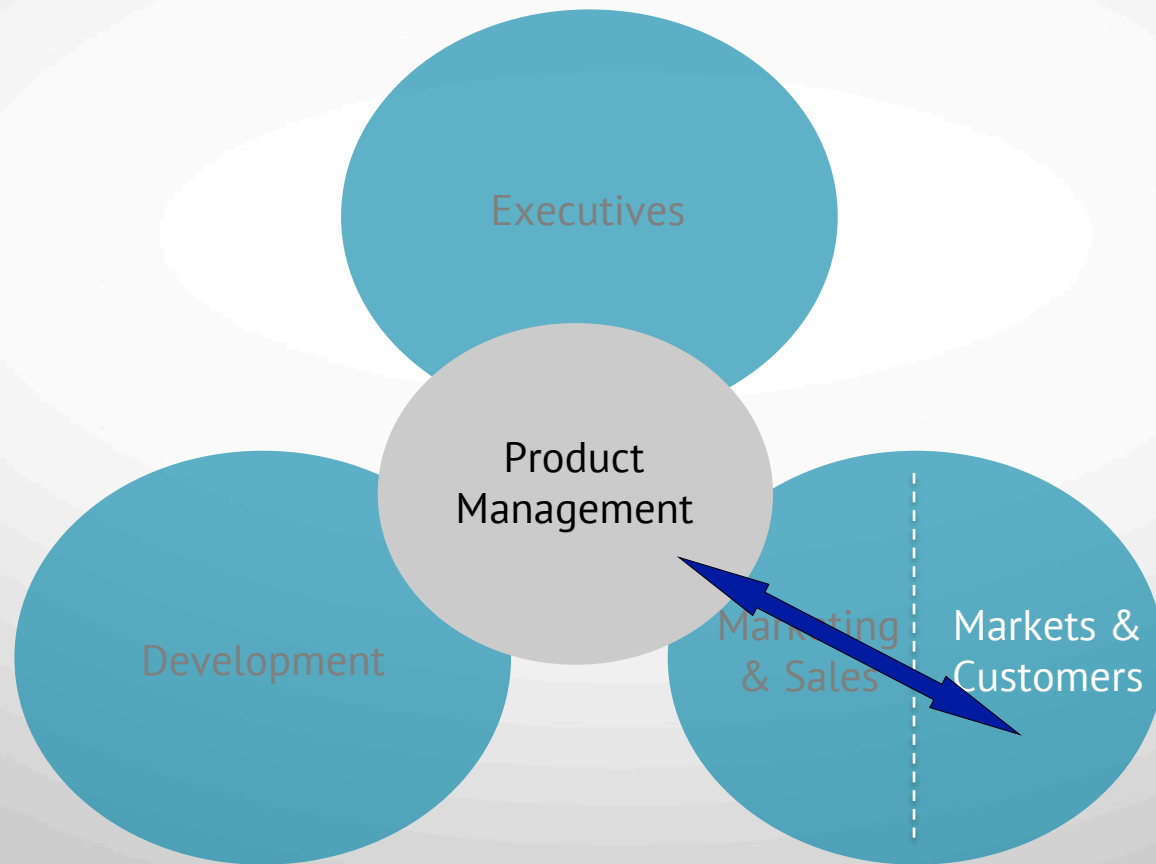
# I ♥ LEAN STARTUP



- Devotion to Build-Measure-Learn
- Fanatical focus on data-driven market validation
- *“Will they buy it?”*



# LEAN STARTUP



# I ♥ LEAN STARTUP, BUT...

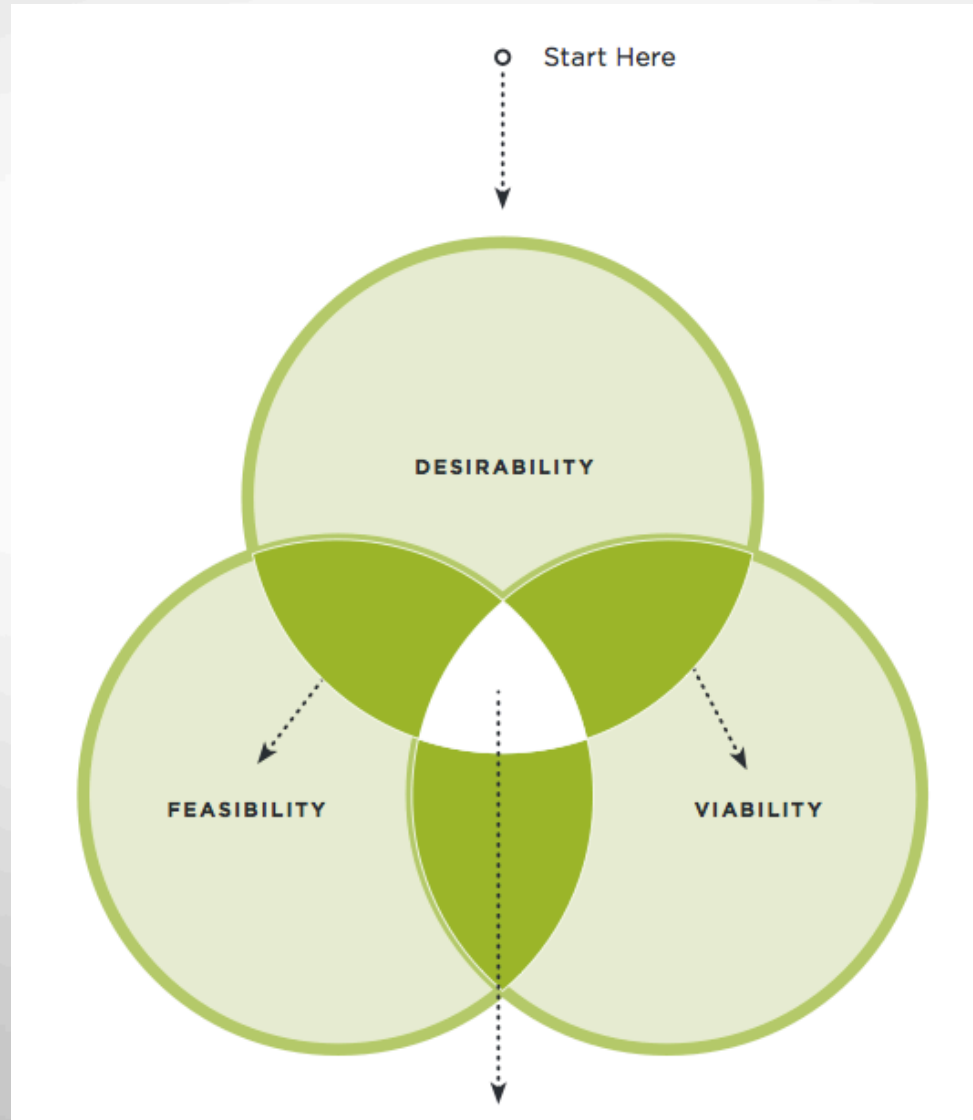


WHAT'S GREAT?	TYPICAL GAPS (NEED for PM)
Data-driven process <i><b>informs opinions</b></i>	Wrong tool for existing markets and performance products
Focus on what customers will buy	No help on portfolio decisions
Fastest possible learning/validation	Encourages short-term thinking (strategy follows product)
Least technology, not development-led	Assumes we can build it, encourages technical debt

"The reason that God was able to create the world in seven days is that he didn't have to worry about the installed base."

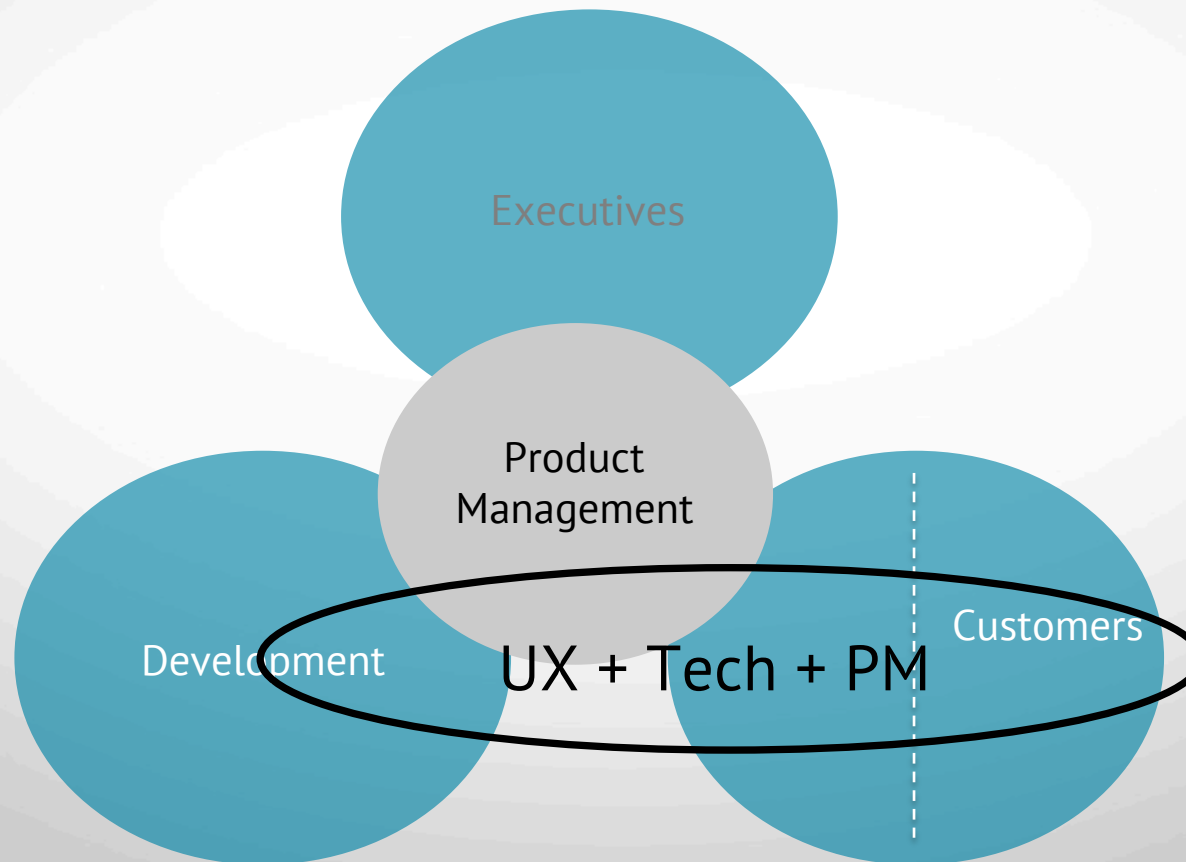
- Enzo Torresi







# LEAN UX



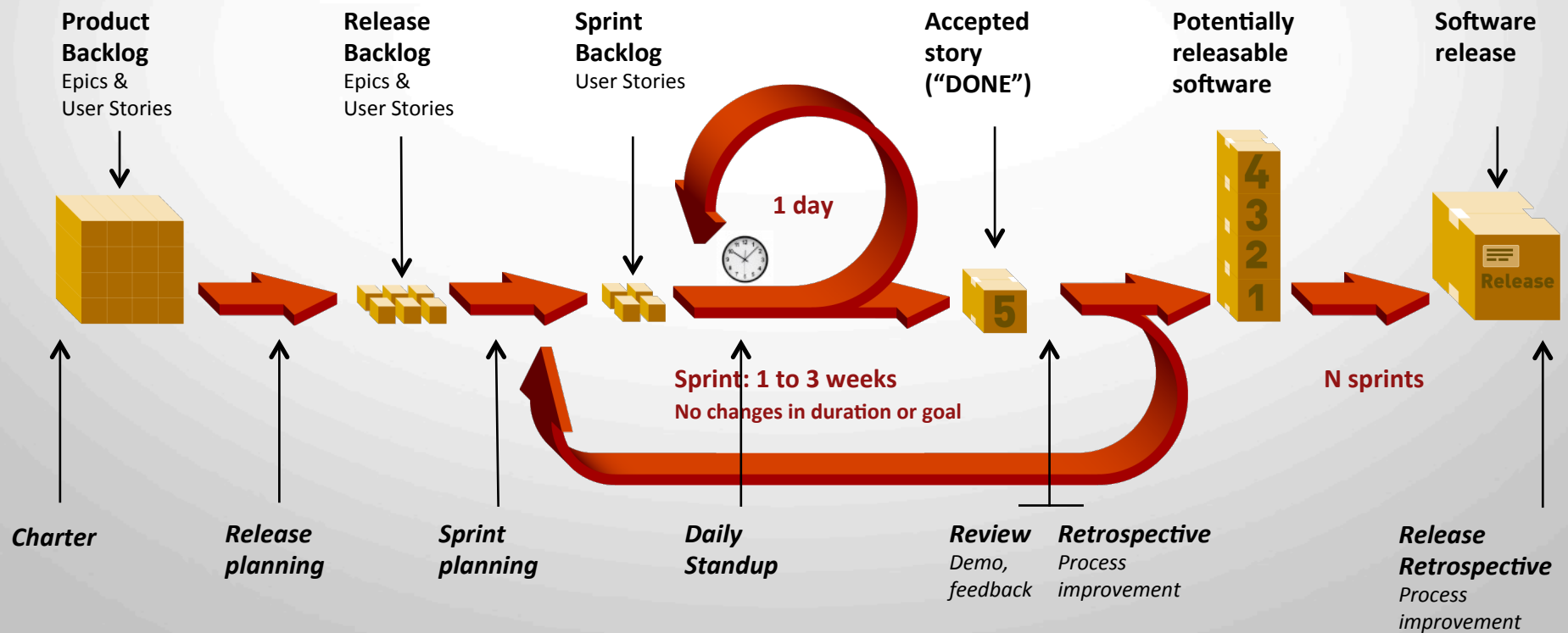
*“Do these customers have this problem? How can we solve it?”*

# I ♥ LEAN UX, BUT...



WHAT'S GREAT?	TYPICAL GAPS (NEED for PM)
Collaborative team: UX and PM and Dev	Product managers often don't show up (or not invited)
Deep UX expertise in understanding users, processes, problems	Assumes correct segment/customer, goals, strategy
Mix of qualitative, quantitative research	Hard-nosed economic view: worth investing in this problem or segment?
Hypothesis/process-driven	Passionate driver/owner: UX seen as outside advisor/expert

# AGILE METHODOLOGY WITH SCRUM



# I ♥ AGILE PRODUCT OWNERSHIP



- “...represents ***the customer’s*** interest in backlog prioritization and requirements questions... available to the team ***at any time.***”
- Intense sprint-level focus: stories, backlog, prioritization, acceptance
- Feeds the hungry agile beast

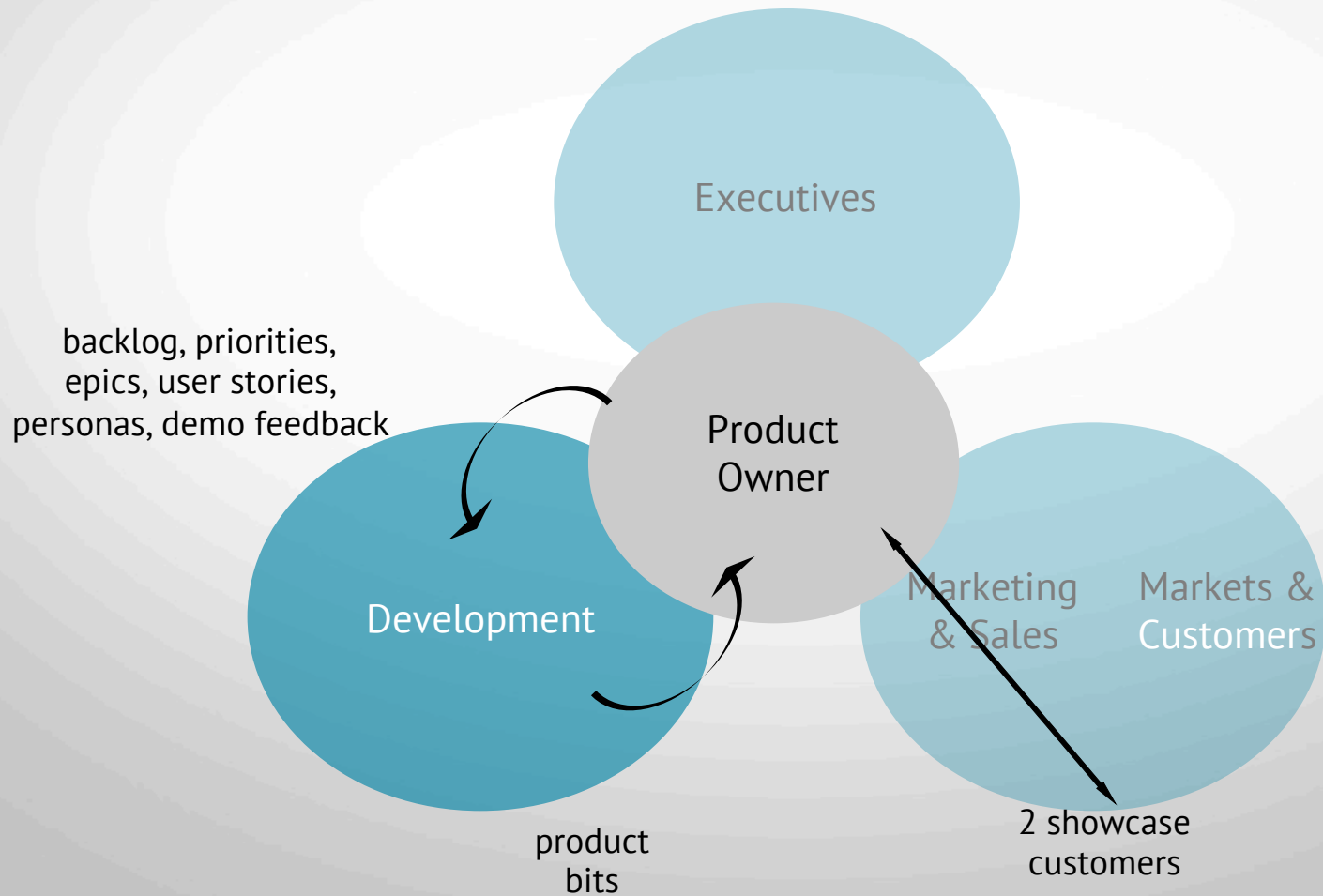
# FEEDING THE AGILE BEAST



Steam engine  
“fireman” needs  
to shovel coal  
constantly,  
otherwise the  
train will stop



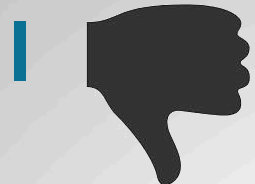
# 'small p' PRODUCT OWNER



# I ♥ AGILE PRODUCT OWNERSHIP, BUT...



WHAT'S GREAT?	TYPICAL GAPS (NEED for PM)
Deep collaboration with development team	Training/coaching at story level, not product or portfolio or business
Granular enough to get right software bits	Fully consumes PO, no cycles left for broad market input
PM steering at sprint level (early course corrections)	Development-driven, development-hired, so most POs lack market skills
Highest value first, more frequent value delivery	Depends on “business decider” or strategic higher authority



# I CROWDSOURCED ROADMAPS



ASSUMPTIONS/EXCUSES	INPUT CAN BE USEFUL...
Customers really know what they want/need	Some products are community-driven (open source)
Collective thinking can be strategic	Some products have trivial purchase intent (soft drinks)
Participants are representative of segment, don't game voting	Strategic curator must balance against other inputs, stakeholders
Following competitors is a product strategy	Don't crowd-source your pricing strategy

# TOOLS AND ROLES

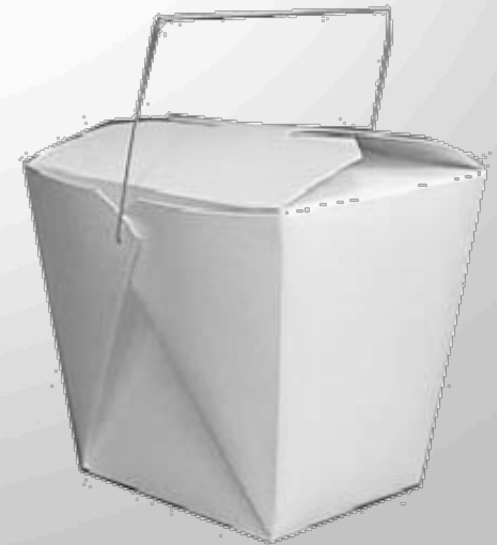


- Lean approaches are outstanding for customer validation. Learn and apply them!
- Agile/scrum needs full-time product ownership. But beware declining market focus
- ~~*“I am the CEO of my product”*~~ →  
*“I collaborate with the smartest kids in the building, and make the best answers stick”*

# TAKEAWAYS



1. Enterprises are not startups
2. Learn and use best tools for each problem
3. Don't be dogmatic
4. You need a product strategy
5. Organizations still need to be understood, led, coaxed, managed, buffered, motivated, calmed down



# CONTACT

Rich Mironov, CEO  
Mironov Consulting  
233 Franklin St, Suite #308  
San Francisco, CA 94102



[Rich@Mironov.com](mailto:Rich@Mironov.com)



[RichMironov](#)



[@RichMironov](#)