Product or Project? Oh, my, it’s both!

Bringing a Product Mindset to Project-based Teams
Product or Project?

Oh, my, it’s both!

Bringing a product mindset to project-based teams.
#noprojects

But – I do project work!
#noprojects = 😊
#noprojects

proDUCTS > proJECTS
Olaf Lewitz
@OlafLewitz

Replying to @lunivore
@lunivore @CatOliv let's continue to work on that then...:-) #noprojects

12:24 AM · Nov 24, 2011 · Tweetbot for iOS

@susanalmon
"Making projects work..." - more again of doing the wrong thing righter. #NoProjects
allan kelly  
@allankellynet

Replying to @JariLaakso
I thought it was @SteveSmithCD or @joshuajames sometime in 2013 but it looks like @OlafLewitz & @flowchainsensei predate that. My June 2013 presentation @PAMSummit was the 1st time "proto" #NoProjects but lacked the tag

3:19 PM · Mar 22, 2019 · Twitter Web Client
“This is fundamentally what #noprojects is. The approach, structure, tactics, and techniques available to successfully deliver continuous change. At its core, #noprojects is predicated on the alignment of activities to outcomes, measured by value, constrained by guiding principles, and supported by continuous-delivery technologies”

Evan Leybourn & Shane Hastie
#noprojects: A Culture of Continuous Value
#noprojects:

- the alignment of activities to outcomes,
- measured by value,
- constrained by guiding principles
- and supported by continuous-delivery technologies
proDUCTS > proJECTS
“#noprojects is a movement and a philosophy. It is not a “thing” and it is definitely not a methodology or a brand. It represents a set of principles, practices, and ideas that any organisation can apply. It doesn’t have to be adopted as is; in fact, we want you to take these ideas, examine them for their applicability in your own context, use those which make sense in your environment, experiment with them, and adapt them as needed.”

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#noprojects: A Culture of Continuous Value
Call to action

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Definition of a Project

“A project is a temporary endeavor undertaken to create a unique product, service or result. A project is temporary in that it has a defined beginning and end in time, and therefore defined scope and resources.”

www.pmi.org
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www.pmi.org
Project

“... and all must be expertly managed to deliver the on-time, on-budget results, learning and integration that organizations need.”

www.pmi.org
The Case Against Projects

Why projects are not optimal, according to #noprojects

- Bring additional overhead costs
- Focus on the wrong things
- Constraints
- Team impacts
Projects have additional overhead costs

- Startup tasks, repeated for every project (charters, strategy, kickoff, set up environments,...)
- PMO and project admin
- Team creation
- Project tracking and reporting
- Closing tasks (tech cleanup, transition to support or maybe client)
Projects have incorrect focus

- Tracking of activity, not value
- Projects are output focused: tasks, deliverables, signoffs
- Focus on delivering project, the work, defined as tasks
- Budgets and schedules
Breaking features into tasks too early

- Focus on tasks, estimates. May not be spit correctly because of a lack of understanding, stories need to be broken out to do work (later)
- This is a problem (breaking up a project into tasks too early)
- Lose sight of product-level view
- Opportunities lost for more coherent ideas (e.g. across all features)
Constraints – time/ cost/ schedule
Iron Triangle

• No flexibility to alter path, adjust to market needs
• Might build the wrong things even if it’s built right
• No allowance for learning (talk to customers)
• Missed opportunities to achieve the best outcomes
• End result may not achieve the customer’s goal if the initial assessment of the problem wasn’t correct and there was no learning or adjusting during the project

@susanalmon
Project tracking

When you do project tracking using a Gantt chart

• False sense of security in timeline
• Once presented to execs, seen as factual, to the task level
• Change not welcome (tasks or dates) which may result in inferior solution to the problem we’re trying to solve (stick with what we started with instead of adapting to new ideas)
Teams

• Project teams exist for the duration of the project, going against the common belief that teams must be stable and work long-term on a product.
• Project teams need startup time to understand the project, the business problem, getting to know each other and the client.
The failure comes from wrapping a project construct around product delivery that is inappropriate for what you’re trying to deliver.
Continuous Delivery

“Products are vehicles of value. They deliver value repeatedly to customers and users, without requiring the company to build something new every time.”

Melissa Perri
The Build Trap
“As Evan and Shane describe here, #noprojects is capability based: capabilities to take action, to probe, to demonstrate value delivery, to learn, and to decide what action to take next. “

Allan Kelly (preface)
#noprojects: A Culture of Continuous Value
What’s a project-based team to do?

- Are we missing out on a better way of working?
- Are we doing our work ‘wrong’?
Project team dilemma

• So what do we do about being in this ‘other’ group, where projects are a fact of life, a way of doing business, going against popular opinion?
• Should we feel bad about the work we do? Of course not but I still feel like I was resisting/ rejecting what ‘they’ are saying.
• Can any of this apply to us?
Oh, my! It’s a project AND a product!
Defining moment

• A project (from company perspective) can also be a product (from client perspective)
• The product was there all along, I just hadn’t noticed. I’d been distracted by the project focus

“So, by focusing on the project, we lost sight of the product. And by focusing on the product, we lost sight of the value.”

Evan Leybourn & Shane Hastie

#noprojects: A Culture of Continuous Value
The Problem I Thought I Needed to Solve

(Agile) PM
- Budget
- Schedule
- Reporting
- ...

Scrum master
- Sprints
- Backlog
- Scrum
- ...

Team
Remember my call to action?

“...we want you to take these ideas, examine them for their applicability in your own context, use those which make sense in your environment, experiment with them, and adapt them as needed.”
Getting the OK

Susan Almon @ #agile2019 #accww #womeninagile @susa... · Aug 3
Thanks @shanehastie for our hallway conversation about #noprojects and my idea about #whenprojects @ #accww #Agile2019

Shane Hastie @shanehastie

Replying to @susanalmon
Thank you! It’s great to see ideas being built on, extended and improved.

2:40 PM · Aug 3, 2019 · Twitter for iPhone

#whenprojects
I’m calling it #whenprojects
Careful to consider the difference between "No" and "When"
So, what is #whenprojects?

The premise is that we all have to work within our contexts, making the best of where we are. Those of us who do project work can learn from the #noprojects research and have better outcomes for our customers.
Not “no #noprojects”
Why #whenprojects?

Because there will always be projects (in my business at least) so let’s make the best of it
Reasons for projects

- Clients who don’t have access to software development teams and just need ‘one thing’. They may be private or government. They may also need maintenance and support contracts and possibly have plans for future releases but don’t want to or can’t get a team of their own.
- New startup with no dev staff. Want a product to test the market (learning and earning release). Don’t know anything about software or development, need to be coached to understand product owner role, possibly even product management techniques.
- Companies with internal shared services, pools of dev teams or internal dev teams for hire
What now?

If #noprojects is proDUCTS > proJECTS
Then
#whenprojects is bringing a product mindset to project-based teams

But what is a product mindset?
Product Mindset

- Product strategy and vision
- User needs (personas)
- Market needs
- Learning focus
- Metrics
- Focus on value
- Outcomes over output
Project and Product Goals

**Project**
- Budget
- Schedule
- Scope
- Status
- HR
- Invoicing
- Staffing
- PMO
- Project docs

**Product**
- Value
- Features
- Agility
- Personas
- Market needs

- Client needs
- Team needs
- Delivery
- Working software

#whenprojects
@susanalmon
Making a project more product-like

Project
- Budget
- Schedule
- Scope
- Status
- HR
- Invoicing
- Staffing
- PMO
- Project docs

Product
- Value
- Features
- Agility
- Personas
- Market needs

Client needs
Team needs
Delivery
Working software
Project Delivery

- Customer meets with agency
- Problem is defined (is research done?)
- Solution is proposed
- Talk, talk, talk
- Contract, SoW (Defines: Problem? Proposed solution? List of tasks?)
- Delivery team engaged
- Delivery team meets with client to discuss needs, some docs provided
- Project kicks off
- Work, work, development
- UAT
- Transition to client
- Team disbands

@susanalmon
Product Delivery

- Problem defined, may be something from an earlier release
- Research done
- Metrics defined
- Work, work, development, scrum
- Sprint reviews
- Focus on sprint goals
- Client acts as PO (define process/ training/ coaching)
- Team keeps working on the product roadmap features
- Continuous delivery
Adapting projects

What can we change in the areas identified by #noprojects?

• Additional overhead costs?
• Focus on the wrong things?
• Constraints?
• Team impacts?
Client as Product Owner

• The client must be the Product Owner and may need coaching/support if the role is new
• High interaction with project team
Changing: Additional Project Costs

- Governance and project start and end tasks remain but we can look for ways to streamline.
- There will always be a budget.
- With flexibility to make changes to how work is done (i.e. order set by customer PO), there will be more discussion and visibility around when work will be completed. Not just following the Gantt chart. By making work visible, status is easier to see and communicate.
Changing: Focus

- Add customer as product owner so team has continuous product view (customer may need coaching support in this role)
- Customer PO must be able to make decisions on scope (i.e. swap this for that, drop items)
- Less focus on reporting to customer because of high engagement
The Shape of a Product-Project

Monitor Progress and Risk
Changing: Constraints

• Iron triangle: Time/ cost/ schedule
• With high client involvement, waste is reduced (rework, wait time)
• With ability to adapt and make changes, scope can be negotiated so best features are built. Not every item identified in the beginning will still have value at the end. Lowest priority items may not be needed.
Does the SoW change?

- What comes with the SoW?
- Market research?
- Persona definitions?
- Positioning statement?
- Evaluation criteria (helps define metrics)?
- Any changes needed?
- Who on the team knows what to do with this info?
Changing: The Project Team

Heidi Helfand’s *Dynamic Reteaming* gives ideas on working through team changes.

Internal practices and processes reduce newness.
Starting a project

Team focus on product with PO sharing product vision

Product based, not task based (line items from SoW must be brought to feature level)
After the Project

• Transition to support
• Supporting the product (SLA)
• Engage support as early as possible
Changes for the client

• At the end of the project, provide them with a roadmap, with all potential future features that were discussed. They can use this to plan for future work.
• Provide a list containing every item that was dropped, with a reason because there will be no team to remember. This is like a product decision log.
• Metrics monitoring instructions
Next?

For me, continue to work on this #whenprojects model. As a consultant, always working with customers, principles of product management are always applicable.
Next?

I just joined Deloitte Canada and will see how (not if) my ideas fit there.