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Unit 1: Foundations of MVP and Lean Startup

Learning Objectives

1. Explain what is an MVP and why startups need it?

2. Discuss the pros and cons of building an MVP at start-ups.

3. Differentiate between conventional business models and the Lean Startup method as coined by Eric Ries.

4. Illustrate the Build–Measure–Learn approach and relate it with iterative product development.

5. Study international and Indian startup case studies which got their MVPs launched to test market demand.

6. Redress misconceptions about MVPs and explain their strategic role in lean product development.

7. Explain the significance of agility and swiftness in adaption within startup lifecycle using examples from industry.

Content

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1.0 Introductory Caselet

From Frustration to Function: Rachit's Lean Leap

Rachit, a 24-year-old engineer from Pune was fed up of inefficiencies at local grocery delivery services. Orders would get, delayed inventory would be old and customer service was nonexistent. Instead of complaining, he saw a business opportunity. Inspired from startup blogs and podcasts, Rachit thought of 'GroFast', a hyperlocal delivery app which claimed to deliver fresh groceries in just 30 minutes.

Rather than developing an app with all the bells and whistles, he applied the Lean Startup method. Rachit made a simple prototype on WhatsApp and Google Forms. Customers could order, and he filled requests by partnering with a handful of nearby vendors. This early iteration wasn't automated or integrated into an app, but it allowed him to validate demand and experiment with delivery logistics.

Customer feedback immediately surfaced two pain points: Not enough payment options and variable delivery times. Rachit leveraged the feedback to iterate on the offering. Working with a fellow local app developer, he built out a minimalist mobile app and included rudimentary GPS tracking. Orders were picking up, customers liked the product and investors were starting to take an interest.

Rachit's is not a story of overnight success, but rather, lean experimentation. Beginning small, listening to users and iterating quickly on his product, GroFast evolved from a chat idea into a growable platform. His path is a clear manifestation of MVP thinking — build an experiment,

measure user reaction over time and iterate to learn. Rachit discovered that success isn't perfect but a forever process of problem-solving informed by actual user need.

Critical Thinking Question

If you were in Rachit's shoes, how would you decide what components to focus on for the next version of GroFast app and why?

1.1 Introduction to Minimum Viable Product (MVP)

1.1.1 Definition and Purpose of MVP

A Minimum Viable Product (MVP) is that version of a new product which allows a team to collect the maximum amount of validated learning about customers with the least effort. The idea is a core principle of lean startup methodology and promotes early testing, quick feedback, and rapid iteration.

Key Points:

• Core Definition:

An MVP isn't an unfinished, crappy product. It is a completed, though reduced scope version of your product that will allow you to test key assumptions about users needs and market fit.

• Strategic Goal:

An MVP exists to prove (or disprove) a business hypothesis with minimal investment before building the full product. On the early stage it's not so much about revenue as it is about education.

• Customer Feedback Integration:

The MVP is released to a limited number of target users to measure their interactions, gather feedback and gain insights into real behavior. These lessons provide direction for future product development.

• Risk Reduction:

MVP aims to reduce the risk of end-developing a product that nobody wants. By validating assumptions early on, startups can also save time and money by not investing in dead-end features.

• Iterative Design:

Delivery of the MVP adheres to the basic rinse and repeat cycle of Build–Measure–Learn, in which each cycle validates and refines the product with evidence in place of assumptions.

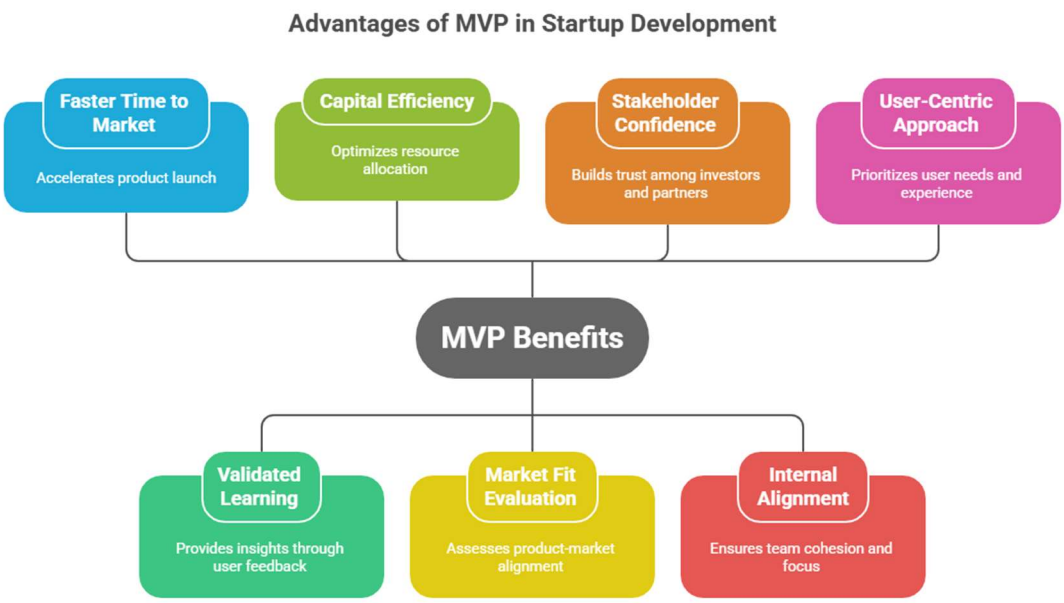
• Examples:

o Dropbox's MVP was a video of product usability, prior to the tool being created.

(the mvp of airbnb was a site to rent out air mattresses in their own apartment to see if travellers would be willing to stay in a stranger's home)

1.1.2 Benefits of MVP in Startup Development

MVPs provide a process for startups to roll out a product, test assumptions, and iterate from real feedback. The approach enables lean resource management, market fit and agility.



Key Points:

• Faster Time to Market:

MVPs allow startups to get a bare version of their product in the market top speed and receive real user feedback weeks if not days after they thought it up.

• Validated Learning:

It's a learning opportunity each time you launch an MVP to test customer behavior, preferences, pain points and feature viability. This kind of feedback is incredibly important for iteratively improving your product and business.

• Capital Efficiency:

Due to limited financial resources startups were short of budget. MVP development saves money by not over-investing in unproven concepts, just concentrating on the features which users want for real.

• Market Fit Evaluation:

MVPs provide an way to validate product-market fit in the early stages of development. In the event that a product isn't working for users, the team is able to pivot or change the offering before a lot of time has been spent in investment.

• Stakeholder Confidence:

A MVP that have found success around users and user engagement data can make an appeal to investors or potential strategic partners as well; traction takes away a lot of risk.

• Internal Alignment:

An MVP clarifies the key issue and its solution to the team, helping create alignment on product, marketing, technical or user experience teams on what the immediate goals and priorities are.

• User-Centric Approach:

They can also build empathy for their users Startups often use MVPs to develop empathy with their users, so that user feedback goes directly into shaping future development which can lead to higher (long term) user satisfaction.

1.1.3 Common Misconceptions About MVP

Even though it has been well adopted, the MVP concept is still misunderstood by a lot of startups, which results in their wrong strategic maneuvers. This is so important to understand in terms of MVP strategy.

Key Points:

• MVP is not a prototype:

A prototype is a visual or functional model that can be thought of as an early, experimental pre-production version used to test and perfect a concept. An MVP, on the other hand, is a real product used by real users. It works on its own, to the greatest extent possible, and can be tested in nature to see how it is received.

• MVP is not low quality:

Some founders mistakenly think MVPs can be bad or broken. Yet the minimum must also be functional and valuable, or no one will use it, and derive any knowledge.

• MVP doesn't mean it's a finished product:

An MVP is frequently confused with a product launch. In fact it is a test tool and not the destination. This process is expected to continue through feedback and learning.

• MVP has a name but it doesn't mean get less features to the market = good:

The MVP should have just the right features to satisfy early customers and validate a proposed engine of growth. Taking too much off could render it meaningless; overloading the thing could defeat the whole purpose.

• MVP is not only for tech products:

While software-born, MVP thinking can be applied to any number of industries — retail, services and manufacturing both included; even in education where it's often implemented at scale but still pivots on assumptions that aren't evidence based.

• MVP does not ensure success:

However, MVPs mitigate risk, but don't ensure market success. Where it works is when the startup learns and adapts quickly from MVP implementation.

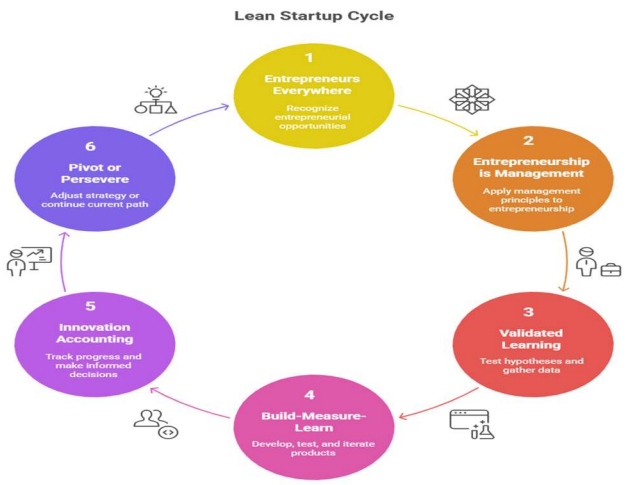
Did You Know?

"The Minimum Viable Product was thought to be popularized by Eric Ries, I think he hatched it but Frank Robinson dubbed the term in the early 2000s." Robinson said that it is the "simplest product you can build in order to get us to team maximum validated learning." This history makes it clear that MVP isn't just a startup fad, but a deliberate product approach based on customer discovery and data-driven decisions."

1.2 Eric Ries and the Lean Startup Approach

1.2.1 Principles of the Lean Startup

Lean Startup, a methodology based on validated learning and iterative product development is all about fast iteration and experimentation. It is intended to assist new ventures in establishing sustainable businesses under conditions of extreme uncertainty.



Key Points:

• Entrepreneurs Are Everywhere

The Lean Startup methodology takes as a premise that the practice of entrepreneurship is not solely to be found in Silicon Valley. And it can flourish anywhere — in any part of the world, sector, or organizational type (corporate or NGO or government).

• Entrepreneurship is Management

Where traditional management theorists regarded start-ups as smaller versions of large companies, lean startup considers them to be something completely different." Lean Startups as a form of adaptive management The Lean Startup is a new approach being adopted across the globe, changing the way companies are built and new products are launched. Since Startups have (also) high uncertainty, they learn a lot, customers change.

• Validated Learning

One of the primary beliefs is that startups are trying to learn how to build a sustainable business, not just good products and technologies. All of a startup's efforts should be targeted toward learning in this way.

• Build–Measure–Learn

This is a loop that constituites the act cycle in Lean Startup. First teams put a MVP into market as quickly as possible, then measure user feedback and decide whether to persevere or pivot. This step is what enables startups to iterate quickly, informed by data instead of assumptions.

• Innovation Accounting

The traditional accounting system looks at revenue, profit, and the ROI of investments: things that simply don't matter in the early years of an early stage startup. Innovation accounting monitors progress by setting learning milestones, measuring customer behavior and focused on process improvements.

• Pivot or Persevere

Simply put, Startups need to ask themselves if what they are doing (at that moment) is providing them fuel for growth. If feedback indicates that traction is lacking, or if key assumptions are flawed, entrepreneurs need to decide whether to pivot (make a fundamental change to their business model) or persevere (optimize the current business model).

1.2.2 Importance of Agility and Adaptation

One of the basic principles in Lean Startup is agility. It's shorthand for a startup's capacity to adapt quickly to feedback, new market conditions or different customer behavior. A lack of agility can kill big, well-funded startups if they suffer from ossified thinking or tardy responses.

Key Points:

• Responding to Market Feedback

Agile startups are designed to incorporate and respond to customer feedback. This needs a feedback mechanism at all stages of product development. An agile team quickly reacts on this feedback in the next iteration or release.

• Short Development Cycles

Agile is manifested through: Sprints – rapid, iterative development cycles with teams producing working product versions in days or a week rather than months. These are the cycles that allow for a startup to go through constant development and stay in line with evolving market demands.

• Fail Fast, Learn Faster

In a Lean Startup, failure is not only "OK," it's celebrated as an essential learning step. Startups are urged to experiment with bold ideas, figure out what doesn't work and pivot early rather than continue to head in wrong directions.

• Real-Time Decision Making

Data-driven insights and relationship to real-time analytics are at the heart of Agile startups. They shun the inactivity of waiting on extensive market research or an annual strategy review. Rather, they use "live data" user feedback to make small decisions one step ahead.

• Team Culture and Communication

Agility is more than a process, it's an attitude. It needs to bring cross-functional teams together that communicate and are aligned around the needs of the user. Seamless transition among roles, priorities and tools is where some lean startups outshine bureaucratic organizations.

• Adaptation in Competitive Markets

In fast-growing sectors like technology, health care or digital services, adaptability to change can be the difference between market leadership and irrelevance. The Lean Startup is built on a philosophy of continuous iteration.

1.2.3 Lean Startup vs. Traditional Business Models

The Lean Startup methodology defies most of the conventional business wisdom in three important ways: how products are built, how markets are entered, and what constitutes progress. Classic approaches imply foreknowledge; Lean Startup implies uncertainty.

Key Differences:

Aspect	Lean Startup Model	Traditional Business Model
Product Development	Starts with MVP to test hypotheses	Full-featured product before launch
Customer Feedback	Collected continuously during development	Collected after launch
Planning Approach	Iterative, flexible planning	Fixed business plans and long-term forecasts
Risk Management	Risk is embraced and tested early	Risk is minimized through upfront planning
Funding Usage	Invested gradually after validation	Large upfront capital investments
Failure	Seen as a learning opportunity	Often avoided or penalized
Market Research	Based on real-time user interaction	Based on pre-launch research and assumptions
Decision Criteria	Data-driven, based on user behavior	Based on financial projections and intuition

Key Points:

• Time to Market

Lean Startup is the practice of getting a working MVP in front of people as quickly as possible and iterating based on usage. Traditional thinkers will wait until a complete product is finished before cutting code and testing, creating risk if customers don't react favorably upon release.

• Flexibility in Strategy

Most traditional businesses are change-averse thanks to sunk costs and non-flexible planning. Lean Startups are designed to adapt based on what they learn, making them better positioned to adjust.

• Customer-Centric vs. Product-Centric

Lean Startups emphasize learning from customers and are more willing to ignore team opinions and maintain product imperfection before launching.

• Validation vs. Assumption

Lean demands valid learning, while traditional may be based on a learning that comes (if at all) after the fact of significant investment.

Did You Know?

"One of the lesser-known facts about Lean Startup methodology is that **it was inspired by Toyota's lean manufacturing system**. Eric Ries adapted principles such as "just-in-time production," "eliminating waste," and "continuous improvement" to fit the startup context. This crossover from industrial manufacturing to entrepreneurship redefined how businesses are launched, particularly in the software and digital sectors."

1.3 Build–Measure–Learn Framework

1.3.1 Build: Creating the Prototype or MVP

The "Build" phase represents the first stage of Build–Measure–Learn feedback loop in Lean Startup methodology. Its focus is on making a stripped-down version of the product, often called the Minimum Viable Product (MVP), with just enough features to validate assumptions and get real user data. The phase is not to build perfect but to have something viable that can be placed in front of real users as soon as possible.

Build Phase Key Components to Consider:

• Identify the Core Hypothesis

• Startups must first decide what key assumption or business hypothesis they want to test before constructing.

• It may have to do with customer intent, payment frequency, product concept or central feature value.

• Example: Dropbox's fundamental hypothesis was that people would desire to sync files across devices effortlessly.

• Define MVP Scope

• MVP will be simplified to the leanest minimum, that validates its primary assumption.

• Resist scope creep and feature bloat in the novelty."Voices" During everything that came before you had to offer a lightweight but polished application.

• The MVP needs to work, and continue to have some functionality or utility for users.

• Speed of Execution

• Time to construct should be minimized. The aim is to get a product into users' hands as fast as possible.

• In tech products, this could involve using open-source tools, no-code platforms or existing APIs.

• Types of MVPs

• Landing Page MVPs

perhaps =These are one-page Web sites that test user interest in a product idea, "Interest Testers," by getting willing users to commit-–sign up–or pay-–pre order.

o Example: Buffer was originally a landing page to present the idea of the product accompanied by a form where one could sign up for more information. If a user clicked "Plans & Pricing," they were greeted by a message stating that the product wasn't ready yet, giving the brother-sister duo an indication of interest.

• Wizard of Oz MVPs

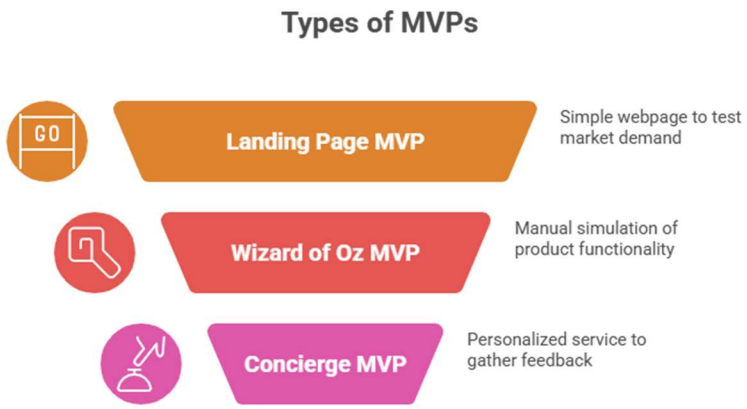
o From user's perspective the product is working fine but things are being done in manual way at backend.

o Example: Zappos creator Nick Swinmurn tried out the concept by taking photos of shoes at local mall shoe stores and putting them online. When someone bought a pair, he would order the shoes manually and ship them himself.

• Concierge MVPs

o Startup companies provide the service to a small number of users manually first in order to gauge the market before developing technology.

o Example: Wealthfront started with manual investment advise to a handful of users before it learned what people really wanted and then automated the service.



• Explainer Videoso These are brief clips that would show how a product will work to gauge user interest or capture pre-launch sign ups.

o Example: Dropbox built a 3-minute video on how their product would work.

This video resulted in an explosion of sign-ups before even building the real product.

• Team Involvement

• Product, design and engineering need to all work together.

• In a start-up, it's common for the same people to wear more than one hat in order to be able to iterate faster.

• Customer persona and use case clarity should guide early product decisions.

• Set Success Metrics

• Articulate what success of this MVP will look like.

• These could be online users, per-day users, conversion rates or qualitative user feedback from early testers.

• Risks and Constraints

• The process of building an MVP is generally a dance between speed and legislated stability.

• Over-build and you spend too much time, under-build and have something not strong enough to glean insight.

• even early MVPs should at least lightly address security, usability, and legal compliance.

• Pilot Testing

• MVPs can be tested in small, controlled settings prior to full release.

This fine tunes bugs and restores faith before it is in the public eye.

1.3.2 Measure: Collecting and Analyzing Feedback

Next, once the MVP is live, comes measuring how users are using it. The aim is to amass actionable, data-based response that says whether or not the MVP solves the user problem and confirms (or disconfirms!) the initial hypothesis. It's not just numbers, but insight to be gained from measurement.

Critical Components of the Measure Phase:

• Deciding on Metrics o Rather than vanity metrics, "actioable metrics" should be the focus.

o Actionable metrics include:

➢ Conversion between counts (such as visitors and sign-ups)

➢ Rate of retention (e.g., users that return time on time)

➢ Churn rate

➢ Customer lifetime value (CLV)

➢ Net promoter score (NPS)

• What we Need" - Analytic Tools Used o Use of Analytics Tools: ▯ We use multiple analytics software such as:

➢ Google Analyti c s (user flow and behavior)

➢ Mixpanel (event-based tracking)

➢ Hotjar (heatmaps and user behavior)

➢Amplitude (product analytics) o These tools allow you to see where users drop off, engage, and fail to convert.

• Customer Feedback Mechanisms

o Direct user feedback is invaluable. Use:

➢ In-app surveys

➢ Customer interviews ➢ Feedback forms

➢ User testing sessions o See not only what users do, but also why they do it.

• A/B Testing o Perform tests to compare the performance of different versions of product features or designs.

o Great for testing pricing models, CTA placements, or different onboarding experiences.

• Cohort Analysis o Assess batches of users by when they began using the product.

o Shows you if things are trending up over time, and whether improvements are actually effective.

• Stay away from Vanity Metrics o Numbers such as, total number of downloads, raw traffic or social likes may seem appealing but they do not serve much strategic value.

o Consider instead, measurements that relate to user action and business value.

• Event Tracking o You can track events that are important to your business or application.

➢ "Signed up"

➢ "Completed onboarding"

“Feature X usage” o Aids in identifying the customer journey and identifying pain points.

• Measure Learning Outcomes

o Determine whether the MVP served to validate the initial business hypothesis.

o You may need to compare with both a quantative and qualatative view.

• Feedback Loops and Reporting o Keep key insights up-to-date in a written format.

o Communicate learnings across teams, to ensure synchronicity for the next cycle.

1.3.3 Learn: Iteration and Pivoting

"Learn" is the last step of the Build–Measure–Learn cycle. This means that you will need to analyze it, measure how users interacted with the MVP, and after making a strategic choice – weather to keep improving (persevere) or change direction (pivot).

Topics to Highlight in the Learn Phase:

• Compile Insights o Evaluate the information gathered in "Measure.

o Look for patterns such as:

➢ Repeated customer complaints

➢ Exit points on the journey of life

➢ Unexpected feature usage

• Test the Hypothesis o Compare insights with your original business assumptions.

o Was your hypothesis supported, was it not-support, or partially-supported.

• Pivot or Persevere Decision o Pivot is making a structured correction or change to a vision.

o Types of pivots include:

➢ Zoom-in pivot: Have one feature in focus.

➢ Zoom-out Pivot: Diversify the value proposition beyond its current focus.

➢ Customer Pivot: Change your target customer.

➢ Platforming: Conversion from a product to a platform, and vice versa.

➢ Technology Pivot: Change the technology.

q Perseverance refers to the continuation of moving up along the critiquing-towards-heaven diamond riding on feedback and engagement.

• Iterative Development o After we decide, go back to "Build" with a new understanding. * The pattern starts all over with a new MVP, metrics change or goals are shifted.

• Learning Velocity o Startups need to learn faster than they would if they were anywhere else.

o Learning velocity is how fast a team can test, analyze and pivot.

• Team Alignment

o Cross-department learning: By sharing learnings across departments, product, design, marketing and support teams are all empowered to build on learned facts instead of making assumptions.

• Write Down Lessons Learned o Keep a "Learning Journal" or product development ledger.

o This helps prevent history from repeating itself, and has the added advantage of making staff training easier.

• Case Example

o Instagram started as Burbn—a feature-laden app that included location check-ins and gamification. The team adjusted to user feedback, changing their attention exclusively to photo sharing that users liked best.

• Scaling After Learning o When product-market fit has been validated and the core assumptions are proven, then the team can start scaling development work, marketing spend, as well looking for broader market traction.

1.4 Global MVP Examples

1.4.1 Amazon – Online Bookstore to Global Marketplace

And Amazon is a textbook example of beginning with an MVP and iterating towards a global marketplace. Books, Jeff Bezos, Amazon's founder, once said, were a perfect test case for e-commerce because they are so universal and standard in format. In 1995, Amazon's MVP was simply a primitive website that displayed only books and wasn't very well crafted (poor design) either, with mattress-like client side resources which required users to think a lot while interacting, had manual backend fulfillment processes etc.

Key Elements of Amazon's MVP:

• Single Product Focus

o The MVP was books alone because they are easy to ship, have a ISBN system and there is already strong demand of them.

o This enabled Amazon to prove the concept of online sales and logistics operations.

• Manual Processes

o Orders were manually processed. Inventory was purchased on a just in time basis, keeping initial costs low.

o No warehousing and heavy infrastructure was planned as of now.

• Customer Feedback Loop

o Early adopters contributed information in the form of reviews, ratings and multiple purchases.

o This information informed other product-categories and site changes down the road.

• Iteration Over Time

o And, as more people used the platform, Amazon expanded to sell music, DVDs and electronics; later it allowed third-party sellers to hawk goods alongside its own product listings from around the world.

o The business model transformed into a scalable system, merged with automation (bots), recommendation engines and logistics management.

• Learning Outcome

o Amazon's early MVP served as a means to test user reliance on online payments, back-end shipping logistics and ease of use in an all-new digital e-commerce platform.

o Interims reward success – and from this initial success came the growth of the Amazon ecosystem: AWS, Kindle, Prime.

1.4.2 Facebook: From Campus Network to Social Giant

The story of Facebook's Beginnings as an MVP, the importance of niche when growing your product | The lesson to learn in feature rollouts. "Thefacebook," as Mark Zuckerberg called it, went live only for Harvard students in 2004. The MVP was just a bare bones profile directory that could upload pictures and information and connect with others over the closed university network.

Key Elements of Facebook's MVP:

• Limited Market o Launched to only Harvard students. This closed users group has proved to be an efficient way of getting feedback and monitoring adoption.

o It created exclusivity and viral network effects among a predefined set of users.

• Back to Basics o The MVP featured ability to create a profile, browse other profiles and connect with the friends.

o Original version did not have photo albums, news feed or ads.

• Organic Growth

o After success on Harvard, it expanded to other Ivy League schools and then all universities in the U.S., and then globally.

o Each growth phase also expanded scalability testing and iterative improvement.

• User Feedback and Data o New features were developed based on user actions, including the creation of groups, photo tagging and timeline.

o The feedback loop has now become the core of Facebook's product development.

• Scalable Infrastructure

o The MVP stage made sure the back-end infrastructure could scale as the user base was increasing dramatically.

This paved the way for Facebook's future offerings such as Messenger, Marketplace and

Meta integrations.

1.4.3 Airbnb – Testing with Air Mattresses

7

One of the most referenced MVP case studies is Airbnb's origin story. In 2007, at a large design conference in San Francisco, co-founders Brian Chesky and Joe Gebbia needed to pay their rent. They found out that hotels were full and offered to rent the floor of their apartment complete with air mattresses plus breakfast: "AirBed & Breakfast" was thus conceived.

Key Elements of Airbnb's MVP:

• Immediate Market Need o The MVP addressed a real pain: lack of accommodations during events. o it was an experience play, rather than a complete hotel alternative.

• Manual Operations

o Bookings, payments and communication was manual initially.

o This decreased tech dev costs and opened opportunity for quick iteration.

• Simple website o A simple website was constructed which listed the apartment, photos and booking details.

o Visitors could see the list and book via email.

• User Feedback

o Initial guests provided input on comfort, cleanliness and trust.

o This played a role in the system of reviews, policies on guests, and safety procedures.

• Learning and Expansion

o The MVP showed people were willing to book in the homes of strangers, a previously perceived risk/unscaleable concept.

o The idea spread to other cities, resulting in funding and app creation.

• Iterative Additions

o Functionality such as secure payments, user verification, host guarantees and mobile applications were added to the platform as it scaled.

1.4.4 Uber – First Ride in San Francisco

Uber launched in 2009 as UberCab, an “MVP” (minimum viable product) created to address the frustrations around undependable taxi services and non-ubiquitous cabs. Travis Kalanick and Garrett Camp made a simple app that allowed people in San Francisco to hail a black car. The point was to see whether you could make ride-hailing work through a cellphone.

Key Elements of Uber’s MVP:

• Single City Rollout o San Francisco was selected because of its population density and tech friendly end user market.

o Geographic Restriction was integrated to enable controlled experiments.

• High-End Initial Offering

o The MVP targeted getting spiffy cars with professional drivers into the hands of users — not positioning Uber as a taxi alternative, but an exclusive service.

• Basic App Functionality

o The basic functions were location tracking, ride-request and fare-estimation.

o Cashless transactions were done using the credit cards integrated in the app.

• Manual Dispatch and Coordination

o For one, much of what now happens with driver dispatch in the early years was essentially coordinated manually under-the-hood.

• Feedback-Driven Enhancements

o Riders vented about drivers not being able to find rides and issues with the app. o This helped fine-tune sorting algorithms, route optimisation, UI/UX.

• Scalability and Pivoting o Expanding to Lower-Cost Options After victory in the luxury segment, Uber explored lower-cost options like UberX.

o Over time, that service had grown around the world and into a multi-modal transportation offering.

“Activity: MVP Exploration and Simulation”

Learners will be divided into small groups and assigned one of the MVP examples—Amazon, Facebook, Airbnb, or Uber. Each group will study the startup’s MVP strategy and simulate the creation of a similar MVP for a new product or service. They will define the core problem, list features for their MVP, describe how they would test it with users, and identify key metrics for feedback. The activity will conclude with a presentation where each team shares their MVP plan and anticipated learning outcomes. This hands-on simulation encourages learners to apply Lean Startup principles to practical contexts.

1.5 Indian MVP Examples

1.5.1 Zepto/Kirana Kart – 10-Minute Delivery MVP

Zepto, which was originally called Kirana Kart when it came to market in 2020, is one of India's better-known quick commerce MVPs. It was started during the Covid-19 pandemic by two Stanford dropouts, Aadit Palicha and Kaivalya Vohra. The 10-minute delivery was an experiment to see if it was possible and whether Indians in metros wanted hyperlocal service.

Key MVP Features and Insights:

• Narrow Product and Geography o The MVP was limited to milk, bread, eggs — products that are quickly perishable in a specific neighborhoods in Mumbai.

o Orders delivered from joint local shops, thereby reducing initial warehousing demand.

• Manual logistics setup o Back of the house was partly manual with courier personnel coordinating through messages and calls while customers placed orders in the most basic app.

• User-First Delivery Promise o The basic belief was that sub-nimble (less than 10 min) delivery would influence user loyalty and usage.

o Feedback confirmed that speed was a key competitive differentiator.

• Operational Issues o Early problems were around routing optimization, and delivery what took forever for delivery, or would arrive with the wrong parts. o These were worked out with micro-warehouses or "dark store" in subsequent versions.

• Rapid Iteration and Scaling

o The team Rede Started as Zepto and scaled to multiple major cities in India by focusing on real-time inventory, fulfillment tech & logistics infrastructure o Post early success the team has rebranded it to Zepto.

1.5.2 Zomato/Foodie Bay - Restaurant Listings

Before it went on to be a food delivery giant, Zomato was originally known as FoodieBay and as an MVP launched in 2008 by Deepinder Goyal and Pankaj Chaddah. The first product addressed a straightforward problem: access to digital copies of restaurant menus that were not online or were out-of-date.

Key MVP Features and Strategy:

• Menu Discovery as First Level of Focus o FoodieBay had started by uploading restaurant menus in PDF format for office workers in Delhi NCR.

o The MVP was aimed at users who used to order food and had no access to current menus.

• Manual Collection of Data o The team had manually gathered restaurant menus documents and scanned them.

o The MVP did not run on real-time, no user reviews or mobile app integration was there at the beginning.

• Simple Web Interface o It had a search index of restaurant listings showing the name and location with an image of the menu.

o It didn’t have advanced filters, delivery or booking options.

• User Behavior and Validation o Fast user growth and returning traffic demonstrated clear need for menus to be easily reached.

o The group solicited feedback to find out what other features users wanted — such as reviews and photos.

• Pivot and Expansion o FoodieBay was later rebranded to Zomato, implementing user-generated content, mobile apps and food delivery in later years.

o Its transformation from job listing to multi-service offering attests to a successful MVP pivot.

Other Indian MVP success stories on the rise.

Besides popular names such as Zepto and Zomato, there are also several Indian start-ups that have developed successful MVPs which validated their idea before they took it forward to the next level.

Examples of Notable Emerging MVPs:

• Ola (Cab Booking) o When Ola first started, it had a call-based booking model with users calling in to avail rides and cabs getting dispatched manually.

o There was no app in the first MVP; it aimed to see if users would prefer scheduled taxis as opposed having to hail them.

• Dunzo (Hyperlocal Tasks) o Dunzo was founded as a WhatsApp-based concierge service in Bengaluru.

o Users would send tasks via message — pick up groceries, deliver a package — and the founders did them themselves to determine demand for “errand outsourcing.”

• Razorpay (Payment Gateway)

o Razorpay introduced their first version of payment processing (an MVP) for startups and small companies.

o It promised easy integration and clear pricing to address pain points in payment gateway complexity and onboarding.

• Kuku FM (Audio Content Platform) o Key Insight: With Kuku FM the team tested MVP entirely, dedicated to vernacular audio storytelling that solved the problem of no regional-language podcasts.

o It launched a few audio series in Hindi and monitored engagement before growing into a full platform.

Both of these companies began with zero money and manual operations, testing one core user behavior or assumption before broadening their service.

“Activity: Creating a Local MVP Blueprint”

Learners will work in small groups to identify a common local problem—for example, late-night food access, errand running, or service discovery. They will design an MVP solution using minimal resources such as WhatsApp, Google Forms, or a simple webpage. Each group must define their hypothesis, MVP features, method of validation, and plan for collecting feedback. They will then present their MVP blueprint to the class, explaining how they would iterate based on user responses. This activity helps students translate theoretical MVP concepts into actionable, real-world strategies.

1.6 Summary

6 ❖ Minimum Viable Product (MVP) is the most basic version of a product which enables startups to validate assumptions and receive feedback from users with little resources.

❖ The objective of an MVP should be to validate business model hypotheses early, shorten time-to-market, and iterate rapidly based on real customer responses.

❖ MVPs have several advantages such as cost savings, faster validation, risk reduction and better stakeholder buy-in.

❖ The Lean Startup methodology, initially introduced by Eric Ries, prioritizes learning through experimentation and iterative product releases.

❖ The Build–Measure–Learn feedback loop is a Lean Startup fan favorite because it's how teams manage their work based on user behavior and feedback from metrics.

❖ Large companies like Amazon, Facebook, Airbnb and Uber started with MVP's taking care of 1 Clear problem w/ least number of necessary features.

❖ Indian startups like Zepto, Zomato, Ola and Dunzo also employed MVP strategies by initially using low technology tools to test ideas before scaling.

❖ MVPs are not things with no functionality because they're "Should be good enough to test out the idea and learn."

1.7 Key Terms

5 Minimum Viable Product (MVP) – The smallest thing we can build that lets us quickly make it around the Build/Measure/Learn loop to gage user response.

Lean Startup - A practice for developing businesses and products, which aims to develop products by adopting a combination of business-hypothesis-driven experimentation, iterative product releases and validated learning.

Build–Measure–Learn – A feedback loop for startups to learn whether they should change course or produce more.

Pivot – a structured course correction designed to test a new fundamental hypothesis about the product, strategy, and engine of growth.

Validated Learning – The learning that results from measuring value (in terms of user behavior or other gauge) and gaining knowledge of your real users that either validates or invalidates an assumption in a business model.

Innovation Accounting – A term referring to a collection of metrics that are used to track progress in an uncertain super early stage startup as opposed to traditional financial metrics.

Concierge MVP – A type of MVP where services are done from the hand, pretending to be an automated tool to test with no full development.

Vanity Metrics —Shallow statistics (e.g. app downloads, likes) that don't offer insight into how to act next.

Actionable Metrics – A metric which can be influenced and which influences the end user, long term behavior.

User Feedback Loop – The method for receiving, analyzing and responding to user insight in order to make a product or service better.

1.8 Descriptive Questions

What is a Minimum Viable Product (MVP) and what is its purpose in startup development?

Explain three main advantages of an MVP in startups.

Discuss the fundamental concepts of Lean Startup method by Eric Ries.

Explain the Build–Measure–Learn framework and how it contributes to incremental product development.

What Is Lean Startup and How It Differs From Traditional Business: Explanation with Examples

Discuss how Amazon implemented the MVP to evolve from an online book seller to a global website.

Look at the MVPs that Airbnb implemented in its early-stage launch.

Compare and contrast the MVP strategies early-stage Facebook and Uber used.

Consider how even Indian startups like Zepto, Zomato have leveraged MVPs to test market's need.

Explain how actionable metrics and validated learning apply to product pivots.

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1.10 Case Study

"QuickBasket: The MVP That Made More Than Groceries"

Introduction

QuickBasket is an imaginary startup from Bengaluru which originated as a hyperlocal grocery delivery company in the time of COVID-19. With the core team of 2 software engineers and a retail operations expert realizing potential in the inefficiencies rooted within online grocery platform; especially in tier-2 cities where big players were unable to adapt to local quirks. They aimed to experiment with whether customers would opt for a low-cost, rapid delivery service for daily essentials purchased from local stores.

Background

QuickBasket was conceived after Ananya saw that elderly neighbors had difficulty getting essentials delivered consistently. Minimum order values were high, deliveries took quite a lot of time and also restricted themselves only to semi-urban areas. Instead of rolling-out a full-fledged app, the team launched an MVP on WhatsApp and Google Sheets to take orders, tied up with 10 Kirana stores in neighbourhoods and brought on-board delivery personnel as freelancers with pay-per-delivery model.

Four weeks in, the MVP had successfully processed more than 1,000 orders across four neighborhoods. They collected feedback through phone calls and forms upon delivery to iterate on timing of deliveries, payment methods and what's available on the truck. Excited by the early traction, they built a rudimentary mobile app with GPS and online payment functions.

In general, QuickBasket followed the Build–Measurement–Learning process and reflected the Lean

Lean Startup concepts including fast iteration, validated learning, and the minimum viable product.

Problem Statements with Solutions

Issue No.1: Extremely high Delivery Failures in Few Locations

Challenge Too many reships because of wrong addresses,Gated communities that don't allow access or customers simply not available.

• Solution: The group implemented a live order tracking and delivery window selection function within the app. They also developed a back-end tool to identify "frequent failure zones" and adjusted delivery times accordingly. Within two weeks, these modifications decreased failed deliveries by 40%.

Issue 2: Friction on Payments from Cash Reliance

• Challenge: More than 60 percent of its customers initially wanted to pay via COD, which meant delays and other reconciliation headaches with freelance-based delivery people.

• Solution: QuickBasket lured users to use UPI by providing ₹10 discount and cashback on pre-paid orders. A digital wallet feature was also implemented. As time went by, prepaid orders reached 75% leading to positive cash flow and minimal delivery times.

Problem 3: Inaccurate Inventory at Kirana Store Partners

• Challenge: Partner stores frequently had "out of stock" on the shelves after orders were committed, leading to cancellations or substitutions that annoyed customers.

• Solution: The startup installed a daily inventory sync process, on which users can update their available stock every morning through a simple mobile link. They also trained store staff to handle the updates and paid them a small monthly incentive for their reports, delivered by memopads at each site.

Case-Related Questions

How did QuickBasket use MVP to validate its early business idea?

How did the startup apply the Build–Measure–Learn framework to overcome those challenge?

Determine which one of the 3 problems had the most influence on the customer experience and elaborate for your answer.

Talk about how QuickBasket equated manual v/s tech during the MVP phase.

Assuming that QuickBasket wanted to pivot, what other customer segment and/or service might they implement with their current infrastructure?

Conclusion

The story of QuickBasket is an example of how a startup uses MVP thinking and Lean Startup principles to narrow in on real market needs without spending precious investor capital. By launching with a straightforward, low-cost solution and incrementally iterating on feedback

from customers, the team was able to validate demand, streamline operations and scale the service over time. The case also showcases the agility, user and data feedback, and decision-making needed to develop a sustainable venture under uncertain conditions.a

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Unit 2: Design Thinking as an Innovation Framework

Learning Objectives

1. Define Design Thinking and describe its five key stages in the context of product and service innovation.

2. Apply the Empathize–Define–Ideate–Prototype–Test framework to real-world startup challenges.

3. Analyze how Design Thinking principles align with MVP development for lean and user-centric innovation.

4. Evaluate tools like Empathy Mapping, Customer Segmentation, and Trendscape Analysis to gain deeper user insights.

5. Identify how prototyping bridges ideation and MVP execution in agile product cycles.

6. Examine global and Indian examples of design-led innovation to understand the strategic role of iterative design.

7. Integrate user-centered validation techniques into MVP testing to refine offerings based on feedback.

8. Distinguish between conventional product design and Design Thinking-led development, using case study comparisons.

Content

2.0 Introductory Caselet

2.1 5 Stages of Design Thinking

2.2 Relationship Between Design Thinking and MVP Management

2.3 Tools for Empathy & Market Insights

2.4 Case Studies in Design-Led Innovation

2.5 Summary

2.6 Key Terms

2.7 Descriptive Questions

2.8 References

2.9 Case Study

2.0 Introductory Caselet

"Designing Disha: A Mobile Solution for Rural Health Medical access"

Disha HealthTech is a social start-up hailing from Gujarat that sought to make health information more accessible in rural areas. The team observed that in many low-income areas, particularly among women, health problems were untreated because of lack of knowledge and logistical difficulties. Instead of creating a generic health portal, the founders put Design Thinking work — finding actual needs before you build anything — into practice.

They started with field interviews in five villages, watching how women used mobile phones and talking to them about their health-seeking behavior. Insights showed that most of the users were more comfortable with voice than text, and trusted information when it was coming from community health workers. The team distilled these learnings into one core problem: "Rural Women Lack Accessible, Trustworthy Health Information."

They then brainstormed some solutions, including SMS tips, chatbots and voice messages. By using rapid prototyping, they designed a low-fidelity prototype of an offline mobile app with prerecorded health advisories in the local language. It was piloted with a handful of women through smartphones given to them by local ASHA workers. Feedback led to a few refinements: clearer audio, shorter messages and an option to be able to call a real health worker.

Today, Disha HealthTech has more than 20,000 users and provides health content in regional dialects and connects the users to verified care providers. Their victory shows how empathy, iterative testing and user participation are essential in meaningful innovation.

Critical Thinking Question

How did Design Thinking enable Disha HealthTech to circumvent the pitfall of creating a product that users would not adopt, and what would have been the impact of moving from "Empathize" directly to "Test"?

2.1 Five Stages of Design Thinking

2.1.1 Empathize – Understanding User Needs

The Empathize is key stage of Design Thinking. It entails knowing the users inside out — their backgrounds, motivations, environments and barriers without making assumptions. This stage helps to ensure that the solution is a response to real human needs.

Empathize Key Components of the Stage:

• Observation and Engagement

· Designers witness users in situ to discover tacit behaviours or pain. o This means… Professional observation, shadowing, ethnographic research or contextual inquiry.

o One possible source of qualitative information is that you talk to users which could be in the form of interviews, focus groups or simply informal chats.

• Empathy Maps

o Methods such as empathy maps help organize understanding, turning what users say, think, do and feel into manageable categories.

o This can help to conceptualize the distance between words and what's actually felt, or done.

Avoiding Bias and Assumptions Designers are discouraged from forming judgment or projecting their viewpoints in the game.

o There should be alertness to finding user needs that may not fit with first hypotheses.

• User Personas

o From this data user personas are designed.

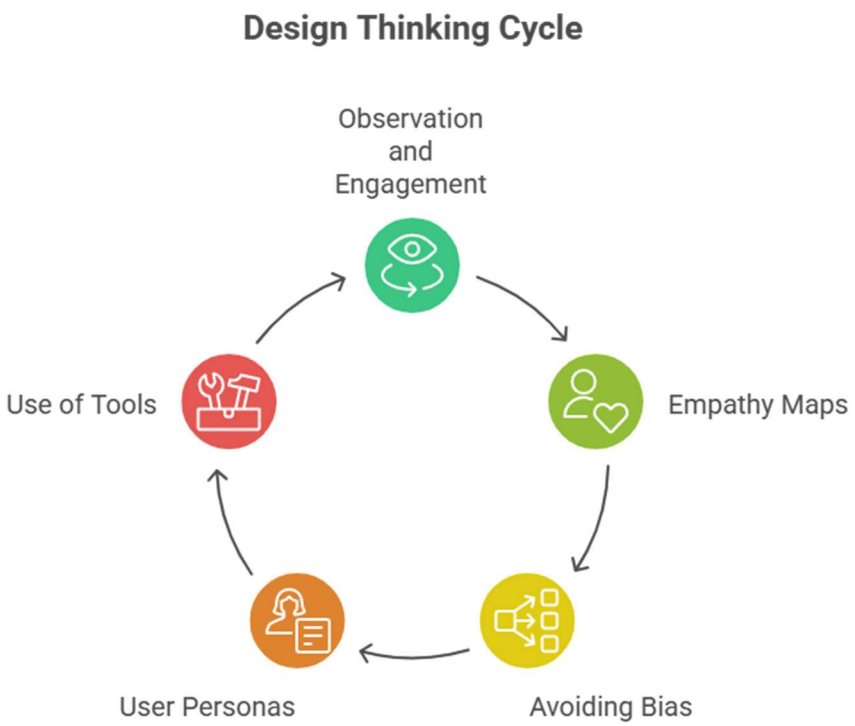
o These are made-up figures of the ideal user focusing around goals, frustrations and behaviors.

• Tools o Field Notes, Empathy Mapping, Diary Studies and Audio Video Recording Observation Check List.

o Designers can utilize mobile ethnography or photo journaling in which users record their activity every day.

• Application Example o A team in healthcare could spend days with senior patients at home, watching them go through the paces of a medication routine.

o The findings can reveal potential problems with packaging or memory recall, which can influence the ultimate design direction



2.1.2 Define – Framing the Problem

The Define phase consolidates the findings of the Empathize stage to regarding make sense what is really wrong. It's not just simply listing challenges, but you actually write a problem statement for it that is human-centered and actionable and focused.

Main Components in the Define Stage:

• Research Synthesis o Take such research, quotes, patterns and behaviors from the Empathize phase.

o Employ clustering techniques like affinity mapping to find the themes and user pain points.

•User Needs o Translate user quotes in to needs.

o For instance, a sentence like: I don't know which bus to take", suggests the need for clear spatial sound, real-time transportation information.

• Point-of-View (POV) Statement o A POV is a structure that puts the problem in the user's context by mashing up their persona, need and insight.

o Format: "User X needs Y due to Z" o Example: "A time-poor commuter requires an efficient method of discovering bus times, as they frequently alter paths with no indication."

• Problem Reframing

oProblem specifications are frequently adjusted after additional analysis.

o Reframing helps to make sure the team is solving the correct problem as opposed to one it assumed initially.

• User Journey Mapping

o A device that aids in visualizing each and every step of the user journey within current system / product / service.

o Firstly, this map uncovers the rough patches where users get lost, upset or blocked.

• Design Criteria

o Develop design principles or success criteria in relation to the problem definition that a solution should meet.

• Application Example

o In the case of developing a rural youth web–job portal, considering that the challenge is "lack of jobs" may be too abstract.

o A reframe POV could be: “Rural grads need job boards in regional languages because English-based listups are a pain-point for them.”

2.1.3 Ideate – Generating Creative Solutions

It’s focused on generating as many ideas as possible—a broad spectrum of potential solutions—without judgment. It stimulates the being creative, to diverge, and think wild before it gets very selective on what is a feasible idea.

Essential Components of the IDEATE phase:

• Divergent Thinking

• Encourages quantity over quality initially.

• The greater the number of ideas that emerge, the more likelihood a novel solution occurs.

• Methods such as brainstorming, brainwriting, mind mapping, SCAMPER, and role play.

• Example: In a project to reduce food waste a team brainstormed over 100 ideas which included smart fridges, community composting apps, and dynamic pricing at supermarkets.

• No Judgment Zone

• In order to encourage creativity, ideation ought to be without judgment.

• They document every idea, no matter how impractical it may seem to be.

• For instance: At one ideation session for a new wearable physical health device, team members proposed developments that ranged from mood-sensing fabric to hands-free drone medication delivery, none of which were cast aside during brainstorming.

• Cross-Disciplinary Participation

Having a combination of people on the team (designers, engineers, marketers, actual users) gives you different viewpoints.

• For example: Prototypes for a student well-being platform drew on perspectives from both software developers and university counselors, yielding ideas that teamed technical feasibility with emotional support features.

• Idea Clustering and Grouping

• After generating lots of ideas, you categorize them according to themes or the likelihood that they can be pursued.

• Aids in the detection of combinations or hybrid solutions.

• Example: A transportation project generated ideas about information, incentives and infrastructure. They fell into three buckets: tech-driven commuting, nudges of behavioral change and urban design transformations.

• Selection Techniques

• Dot Voting: Team members vote on ideas they think are strongest.

Example: In a sustainability hackathon, attendees engaged in a dot voting process to select five ideas from over 50 for evaluation based on potential user/impact.

• I-E matrix: The ideas are evaluated on the projected impact and on ease of implementation/results obtained. Example: In a redesign of customer onboarding process, matrix helped in prioritizing the small UX fixes that have a high potential impact on customer satisfaction.

• F _D V lens: Ensure that the ideas are Feasible, Desirable and Viable.

For example, one fintech startup evaluated a new savings product using FDV - while it was desirable to users and feasible in the market, it ultimately was infeasible within current infrastructure and sidelined.

• Idea Expansion

• From here, some ideas are taken to concept statements or pictorials in order to visualise the solution.

• Example: A remote-learning tools team created a storyboard that visualised how a virtual tutor would help students during homework sessions to map out interactions and user pain points. • Application Example

For a challenge related to public transportation, ideation could lead to digital signage as well as ride-sharing incentives.

• These are later reviewed for feasibility and UX impact.

• Example: A city transit authority brainstormed solutions like gamified rider reward apps, buses with dynamic routing and community-run bike stations. The latter were evaluated on a feasibility-impact matrix, with the app piloted initially.

2.1.4 Prototype – Creating Representations

Prototype is creation of simplified models of product, system or service for generating ideas, testing assumptions, or understanding user needs through low-fidelity interaction. Such representations can be anything as naïve as layout sketches to dynamic run-time simulations, depending on the maturity of the idea and purposes at hand of testing. The beauty of prototyping is that it enables you to transform an idea from a verbal notion into something tangible; something that can be seen, touched and evaluated—before too many dollars have been spent on finalization.

Essential Elements of The Prototyping Stage:

• Low-Fidelity Prototypes

Thes are early, ineexpensive models which can be made at a rapid pace to try out basic general ideas and look.

• This might be hand-drawn screens on paper, post-it note flows & journeys, cardboard interfaces or basic digital wireframes.

• With these prototypes, teams can see structure and information hierarchy of an application without being distracted by design.

• Being so malleable, they are conducive to rapid idea generation and iterative design.

For example, for a banking app, a paper prototype might use static model versions of major screens including — log-in, account summary and transfer funds and gathering feedback early on layout and logic.

• High-Fidelity Prototypes

These are more developed and interactive prototypes that are much closer to the final product in look and feel.

They could also be elements with responsive design, clickable components, transition animations and mock data.

• High-fidelity prototypes; These type of prototypes are usually created with digital tools, and serve as representations for user testing or stakeholder presentations as well as for visual design validation.

• Typography, iconography and colour palettes can also be introduced at this point to measure emotional accessibilities and userability.

• For example, a high-fidelity prototype of an e-commerce app could enable users to browse products, add items to a cart and then run through a checkout process—under controlled testing circumstances.

• Iterative Approach

Prototyping is also not linear--it's an iteratively journey of wading through ideas!

• Teams construct a prototype of the app, test it with users, analyze the results and tweak their design.

• It iterates, the design gets closer to what users want and reduces the risk of expensive mistakes when it is implemented in full.

The speed of iteration is dictated by things including test results, feedback from the team, and development limitations.

• A mobile health care app, for instance, could undergo multiple iterations as users discover problems around navigation or the clarity of language.

• Rapid Experimentation

Fast prototyping helps quickly validate hypotheses, usability flows, and user journey pain points.

• It allows teams to test experimental solutions in parallel, and data driven decisions based on direct user interaction.

• It tends to find issues with assumptions you might not discover from interviews or surveys alone.

• For example, by comparing two onboarding flows for a job-matching platform, you could discover which version leads to more completions or fewer drop-offs with a rapid prototype.

• Storyboarding and Service Blueprints

These are tools that help to map the customer experience over time, across various touchpoints, including emotional and transactional dimensions.

• Storyboarding employs a frame sequence to depict a story from the user's perspective, keeping focus around context and evolution of interaction.

• Service Blueprints illustrate how all the components of a service function including both front-stage activities (those facing both users and back-stage) and back-stage activities, i.e. those that where the systems staff undertake work.

• These representations assist with aligning team knowledge, indicate service gaps, and highlight alternate plans.

• A team working on a ride-hail app designs a journey map of how users go from booking to being dropped off, while the service blueprint delineates such elements as in-app notifications and driver matching and payment.

• Fail Fast, Learn Fast

The purpose of prototyping is not to create final designs, but rather to reveal design flaws and information gaps early on.

• The early failures even in prototypes are a welcome step since they are the savior of catastrophic failures after launch.

• Feedback at this time is critical when it comes to optimizing user flows, challenging assumptions and preventing wasted development.

• For another — for example, a prototype that uncovers confusion over a subscription model in a news app lets the team pivot to a clearer paywall strategy before the launch.

• Use of Tools

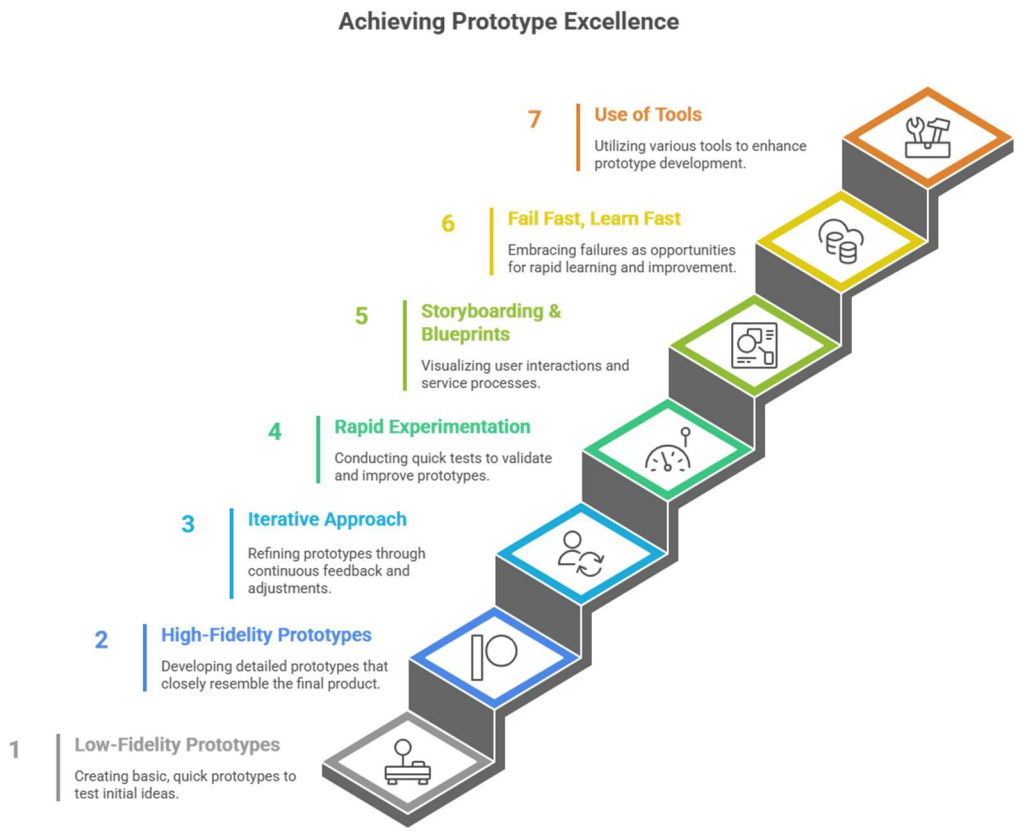
There are a variety of tools to enable you to generate prototypes quickly and in an agile, suited to the product (digital or physical).

"For digital products the likes of Figma, Adobe XD, Sketch and InVision are tools that enable collaborative, scalable design and testing.

“These platforms have functionality such as component libraries, version control and live sharing for real-time feedback.

• For physical goods, tools could be 3D printers, a foam modeler or maybe even role-play scenarios (by bringing up some obviously fake props) to test out settings or interactions.

In the development of a smart thermostat, a team could create one physical model in foam and scratch-build parts; while designing the mobile app simulation for their physical prototype created in Figma to test user settings and feedback mechanisms.



• Application Example

Imagine a squad of people building an app that connects people to share extra food, in an effort to cut down on waste.

• The first prototype could be a clickable wireframe of how users take photographs of surplus food, input information and view requests.

• Testing could indicate that users are uncertain about the logistics of a pickup, leading to the addition of scheduling tools.

• More prototypes would iterate on the strongest experience at onboarding, simplify iconography, and test notification timing to make sure the app feels intuitive and trustworthy before deployment.

2.1.5 Test – Obtaining Feedback and Iteration phases of development efforts and design thinking).

Test: In this final phase, we test working prototypes or nearly viable solutions with real users to measure their usability, desirability and success. The aim is not only to confirm strong points of a design but also to reveal the issues, barriers and gaps in-between expectations and actual real user behavior. It is a learning activity in that regard.) And so, testing is not the final exam for the product; rather its the calibrator and harbinger of ongoing refinement.

Principal Features of the Testing Stage:

• User Testing Sessions

User testing consists of conducted sessions (structured or semi structured) during which participants of the target population use the prototype in a realistic, but not yet final product.

• These sessions can take place in actual labs, simulated virtual environments or in natural settings that mimic how products are actually used.

• Observing gestures, navigation and user hesitation points and identifying visible frustration-stricken emotions, confusion or joy.

•The goal is to identify usability barriers and to check whether the expected interactions represent what user wants.

• It might be that in a test for an online banking prototype, facilitators would notice whether users have difficulty finding the “transfer funds” button or abandon tasks.

• Feedback Collection

Collecting user feedback is crucial to most good understanding how well design works, even when (as we are watching) the user smashing on something.

• Approaches include direct, face-to-face interviews, paper-based questionnaires, performance and usability surveys or an open debrief after a trial.

• This includes quantitative data (such as satisfaction ratings) and qualitative insights (including emotional reflections).

•Reading through you'll see the focus is to find out if the prototype does in fact solve for that fundamental problem and also how users feel about their experience.

A food delivery prototype might work, for example, but interviews could indicate that cluttered menus make users feel overwhelmed, pointing to an emotional barrier to adoption.

• A/B Testing

To compare performance, A/B testing presents one of two versions of the same experiment to different groups of users.

• This method is very useful when comparing alternative designs to choose the best or tweaking details such as button labels, layout of a page or wording on call-to-action.

• Performance is evaluated based on predetermined criteria such as conversion, engagement, or task completion performance.

• For instance, an ed tech company may experiment with two on-boarding flows — one a tutorial and the other without — to see which leads to more course completions.

• Behavioral Metrics

In addition to self-reported opinions, it is also important to examine how a user really behave during the interaction.

• Critical measures include how many times the user clicks, time spent on task, errors made, drop-off by step of process and successful completion.

•Those statistics can unveil friction points that people may not directly describe when you ask them questions but nevertheless indicate underlying issues.

• For instance, when testing a mobile health-tracking app, users abandoning registration repeatedly at a high rate can indicate that the form is too long-even if no one complains about it.

• Refinement Loops

Testing is iterative and informs one's earlier design for ever better designs.

• User behavior and user feedback provide insights that are used to adjust prototypes, interface flows or service concepts as a whole.

• This might involve going back to the ideation phase for new ideas or returning to prototyping to prototype different designs.

What we're aiming for is progressive learning, where, each round of testing it becomes more usable, clear and aligned with users' expectations.

• For instance, if they learn that users tend to ignore a notification feature in a productivity app, the design team can iterate to serve up reminders in a more prominent or context-sensitive manner.

• Test Multiple Scenarios

Tests across different conditions are made to make sure the solutions found are general and inclusive.

• Participants must belong to a variety of demographic, literacy and cultural backgrounds in order to find differences in interpretation or understanding.

• Also, consider to test prototypes on different devices types, operating systems and/or keeping different environments (e.g., noisy environment, low bandwidth).

• This avoids overfitting to a small group and scales well to the solution.

• For example, younger mobile-first users testing an e-commerce platform might be driven by speed and convenience; whereas older desktop users may have greater concern with the clarity and trustworthiness of payment options.

• Application Example

Take a mental health app prototype for example.

• Testing might uncover that while users access the chatbot for immediate assistance, they are not willing to interact with it when facing sensitive issues as they perceive it to be a depersonalized tool.

• They can feel obligated to take long pauses before replying or using chatbot-powered features at all.

• Post-session interviews may reveal that some users would want the ability to escalate to a human counselor.

• Building on this learning, the prototype could be developed to feature streamlined chatbot scripts for use in everyday circumstances and clear pathways to access human support only where necessary.

"Activity: Practicing the Five Stages with a Real-World Problem"

Divide learners into teams and present a real-world design challenge, such as "Improving the experience of online education for students with poor internet access." Each team will apply all five stages of Design Thinking over a structured 90-minute workshop. In the Empathize phase, they conduct quick peer interviews; in Define, they create a POV statement. Ideate is done via brainstorming sticky notes, followed by sketching low-fidelity Prototypes. The final stage involves testing with a peer group and noting improvements. Teams present their design journey and key learnings at the end.

2.2 Relationship Between Design Thinking and MVP Management

2.2.1 Aligning MVP Development with Design Thinking Stages

MVP development and Design Thinking are closely related because they both value iterative learning, a user centred design approach and reducing waste. Integrating the phases of Design Thinking into the principles of MVP development will help to ensure that what they are building works, but also solves a real, validated problem. This alignment can prevent the dangers of overbuilding or trusting untested assumptions alone.

Key Points of Alignment:

• Position → Validate Problem and Potential Features for the MVP

• In Design Thinking, the Empathize phase is about getting out and engaging directly with users -- for example, interviewing them or observing people on the street -- to understand their real pain points and unfulfilled needs.

• When developing an MVP, this means that the core of product will be built on ground truth (e.g pain points) and not just internal assumptions. And all that empathy is the reason why startups don't waste time and money building features users don't value.

• Example: Prior to building their MVP, Dropbox validated through user research that people felt significant frustration in managing synchronizing files between many devices. This problem validation helped them to frame their MVP around “easy local drive syncing” instead of trying to include disparate features like advanced sharing or collaboration tools.

• Define → Problem Framing for MVP Scope, etc.)

• Once the user pain points are uncovered, the Define stage is about making sense of insights in order to express a problem statement. This transparency empowers teams to define an MVP and decide what the key features are that need to be tested.

• For MVP development, scoping is extremely important since the scope will help avoid creep and that resources are focused on validating the riskiest assumptions. Examples of success criteria: adoption rates, completion of tasks -psysjominator amp; conditions_of_desire

• Example: Airbnb initially framed its problem as a struggle with obtaining affordable, short-term lodging in big cities. Rather than try to launch an all-in-one travel platform, the team initially scoped its MVP down to a barebones website that allowed hosts to post photos of their spare rooms. This narrow structure helped to keep the MVP focused and testable.

• Ideation → Solution Exploration for MVP Concepts

• Design Thinkings Ideate phase values creating as many possible solutions – from very practical to incredibly creative. What that means for MVPs is exploring different angles in which the core problem could be resolved before settling on a viable approach.

• By cultivating divergence, teams decrease the odds of prematurely converging on a sole solution, thereby increasing the propensity for creativity. Selected MVP concept has to consider desirability, feasibility, and viability.

• Example: As Uber founders brainstormed ways to solve transportation, the ideation process included things like ride-pooling systems, pre-scheduled shuttles and on-demand private cars. The MVP use case—requesting a black car via mobile app—was selected because it was something that could be easily tested in San Francisco, and something that early-adopters wanted: convenience.

• Prototype → Early MVP Representations

• In Design Thinking, prototypes are simplified models used to test features of the user's experience before investing in full development. These prototypes are the first approximation of the product that are inexpensive and can showcase what the product will do.

• Prototypes can range from sketches to clickable wireframes to simulated task flows. They enable teams to test user interaction, usability and value proposition without heavy investments in infrastructure or engineering.

• Example: Long before building a real platform, the founder of Zappos tested his idea that people might buy shoes online by launching a crude website full of product images. The back-end was completely manual — when someone would order, he'd buy shoes from a store and ship them out himself. This prototype was a substitute MVP and could prove demand to develop with little resources.

• Test → Tiger Team Iterates with MVP and User Feedback

• Test: In this phase we verify whether the MVP, or its prototypes, are indeed solving the specific user problem. Users are engaging with the solution, and teams are getting feedback through usability studies or behavioural metrics or direct interviews.

In MVP development, testing is not simply about verifying or falsifying assumptions but also spotting holes in the user experience and opportunities to hone the product. Depending on the feedback, teams may choose to continue with their current direction, change towards a new direction or iterate with changes.

• Example: For mental health app Wysa, MVP testing found that users did not mind using chatbots driven by AI, but the majority of them couldn't depend on it as their sole source of support. Your feedback brought us to evolutions, such as optional human access upon request strengthened trust and adoption.

The alignment of MVP development with the Design Thinking stages helps teams to organize a step-by-step path, guaranteeing that each product creation phase is fundamentally linked with user needs. Empathy leads to context, problem definition focuses effort, ideation generates creativity, prototyping decreases risk and testing prevents mediocrity. This brings down the degree of waste and would make it possible to ship products, which actually do something instead of just something.

2.2.2 Prototyping as a Bridge Between Ideas and MVPs

Prototyping is an essential connection between abstract thinking and the execution of actual MVP's. It allows ideation to move into solid forms, through which ideas can be tested and interactions experienced prior to a fully developed product.

Role of Prototyping in the Management of MVP: Key Functions:

• Visualizing Abstract Concepts

o Prototypes turn into one of a kind unrefined concepts to visual and interactive designs-sketches, wireframes or mockups.

o This minimizes confusion while maintaining stakeholder expectations.

• Testing Value Proposition

o A prototype enables teams to validate user flows, messages, or features that address specific use cases without having to build the whole MVP.

o For instance, a paper prototype of a grocery app can replicate ordering and delivery alternatives.

• Faster Iteration Cycles

o The testing prototypes are faster and cheaper to produce than MVPs.

o This allows for 1+ rounds of testing and iterating to decide on a final MVP design.

• Validating Design and Functionality o Early testing with prototypes exposes ease of use, interface confusion, unfulfilled needs.

o These insights are used to determine what features should be built as part of an MVP.

• Mitigating development risk o Prototyping ensures that teams do not find themselves on a point of no return by validating assumptions early.

o For instance, the prototype shows that the users do not like navigation flow, so it may be fixed before any code is implemented.

• Feedback Loop for MVP Prioritization

o If it tests well in prototypes, its features are added to MVP. o These with little user interest can be eliminated, which helps keep the MVP lean.

Did You Know?

"While prototyping is commonly associated with product design, the concept also applies to services, policies, and even business models. Companies like IDEO and the Stanford d.school have used service prototypes—such as role-playing or physical space mock-ups—to test ideas in retail banking, education, and healthcare. This expands the use of prototyping far beyond screens and interfaces."

2.2.3 Iteration and User-Centered Validation

Iteration and user-validation are the feedback mechanisms of Design Thinking as well as MVP management. They are there to make sure that product development isn't linear but instead, it's consistent with learning and adaptation.

Foundational Iteration and Validation Practices:

• On-going Feedback o Real user feedback is collected (interviews, analytics, surveys or usability tests) after launching a MVP or prototype.

o It tries to establish if the solution is actually what users need.

• Designing feedback in o The feedback the product teams can use to adjust UI design, tweak features or rework flows.

o For instance, if a feature gets skipped a lot - maybe it is redundant or wrongly placed.

• Learning Loops o Iterative process that more or less follows a Build–Measure–Learn mode, where each tycles bring better and improved iteration versions based on learning from the last cycle.

o This leads to constant improvement as opposed to one-time perfection.

• Early Detection of Flaws

 Incremental testing reveals usability problems, technical obstacles or unresolved content early on, before launch.

o These early discoveries prevent significant loss and providing a better product–market fit.

• User as Co-Creator

o Validation isn't limited to observation. Design suggestions from users are frequently received, and thus they become co-designers.

o This will lead to higher engagement and increased relevancy of proposed solutions.

• Incremental Development

o Instead of developing the full product from end-to-end – each part is released and tested iteratively.

o This would ensure better efficiency through allocation of resources according to user's actual interest.

• Testing across multiple scenarios o Validation is not only about the perfect user, but also with users from other age ranges, contexts and levels of technological abilities.

o This guarantees that the solution is robust, not only on perfect circumstances.

2.3 Tools for Empathy & Market Insights

2.3.1 Empathy Mapping for User Understanding

Empathy mapping is a joint exercise that takes user research and puts it into a visual where these are all translated into how users think, feel, say, and do in certain situations. It isn't a substitute for rich personas, but an additive method to help ground raw insights from interviews and observations into something that's more concrete and therefore easier to discuss. Empathy maps consolidate qualitative user data into cohesive components that enable teams to collectively and empirically understand the user's experience. This common understanding has the affect of diminishing bias, bringing cross-functional teams into alignment and grounding design decisions in reality instead of assumption.

Key Components of Empathy Mapping:

- Four Quadrants: Say, Think, Do, Feel

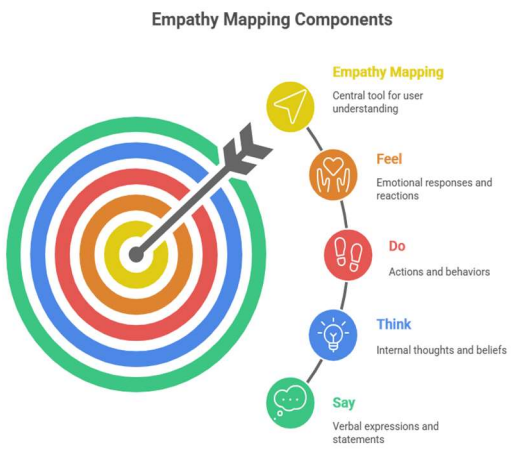
- The empathy map is divided into four quadrants, which describe various aspects of the user experience.

- Say Say captures in verbatim quotes, as in direct quotes during interviews or usability tests. These show what users are willing to say and give very clear hints on priorities and pain points.

- Think represents internal thoughts or assumptions that users may not express. These are deduced from hesitations, gestures or contradictions between what they say and what they do.

- Document more of what you see your child do. They tend to frequently disclose a space between what is said and done.

- Feel is about the emotions that drive decisions – frustration, anxiety, excitement or trust. Feelings are read between the lines, in a body language or context.



savings (Say), many say they worry about getting hit with unexpected bills (Think). They could be monitoring the app daily to watch small purchases (Do) even while they continue to exhibit anxiety over long-term stability (Feel). Quadrant yourself to gain a complete perspective on user's views/behavior toward money.

• User-Centered Approach

• The creation of an empathy map is devoid of any references to the lived realities of a user. It prevents speculation by basing insights on real evidence (from interviews, observations, diary studies or ethnography).

• This mitigates the effect of team bias or preconceived ideas, and making decisions is based on actual user insights rather than assumptions.

• Example: In designing a public transit application, instead of assuming that users desired a lot of route optimizations, because we empathized with the user from direct observation, we saw that most riders wanted reliable alerts to be informed about delays and clear exit guidance when they are in stations.

• Clarifies Unmet Needs

One of the great aspects of empathy mapping is being able to visualise contradictions across quadrants. If what people say and do are at odds, it's likely that deeper pain points exist.

• These disparities can highlight unwillings, secret blocks and untapped innovation opportunities.

• Example: In a test of a fitness tracking app, users described how much they liked keeping track of their workouts (Say), but it turned out that after the first week few actually opened up the app (Do). This juxtaposition suggested that the app was not doing a good job at maintaining motivation, with inspiration to gamify and introduce social accountability.

• Builds Team Alignment

• Empathy maps are typically a team exercise and are often done in workshops that include people who design, build, market, and study products. Collecting the research findings into a common framework that all parties can use to accurately represent what they believe users need.

•This avoids the silo effect of perception across teams and teams are all aligned with a shared vision of user.

• Example: For a project about retail e-commerce, marketing teams led first with promotional offers, while designers led with the idea of checking out simply. Developing an empathy map demonstrated that users are most concerned with the security of payment (Feel). Having this common understanding, both of us got around simplifying and bringing secure payment flows into prominence and less emphasizing on promotions.

• Used Before Ideation

• Empathy maps work best when developed after the Empathize phase and before Ideation in Design Thinking. At this juncture, raw research has taken place and the empathy map systematises its findings into a usable form for brainstorming solutions.

• If you start ideation with a user-grounded map then ideas are based on real problems and opportunities rather than guesswork or internal benchmarks.

• Example: While building a student learning platform, we learned that though students "SAID" they wanted wide course libraries (and we should meet this need) what they really "FELT" was overwhelmed and didn't know where to start. That insight informed the ideation process, all leading to personalized learning paths and recommendation engines.

• Example Use Case

• When designing a job-seeking app, development process observed users saying nice things about the app's usefulness (Say). Yet, upon closer inspection, we found that they often gave up in the middle of a task (Do). Further inquiry revealed that users frequently found application steps to be overwhelming (psychological reactance) – and this despite the fact that they considered the app had potential for helping them find a job (Think).

• The empathy map surfaced these conflicts and led the design team to streamline the interface—shrinking down the number of fields on one hand, while including progress indicators on another. This adaptation effectively increased the completion rates of tasks and lowered users' frustration.

2.3.2 Segmentation for Targeted MVPs

Segmentation - This refers to the partitioning of your target market into like-minded groups. The instrument is crucial in the shaping of MVPs for target audiences facilitating the improvement of product – market fit and early adopters.

Key Aspects of Market Segmentation:

1

• Forms of Segmentation o Demographics – Which includes age, gender, income and education. o Geographic: Location, climate, urban/rural. o Psychographic: Lifestyle, values, interests.

o Behavioral: Purchase Behaviour, Consumption rate and patterns, Brand Loyalty, Benefits sought.

• Facilitates Focused MVP Design o A clear segment helps startups focus on features that really matter to a group's specific pain points.

o Example: A college student productivity app might feature tweaking, a business one could focus on privacy and scheduling.

• Minimizes waste o Rather than designing for an expansive, ambiguous audience, segmentation reduces frills and results in meaningful outputs.

• Improves Messaging and Onboarding

o Knowing the segment enables us to customize the product's language, images and onboarding flow that works best to engage users.

Promote Testing and Learning o MVPs can be launched to 1 segment at time, so startups can compare Adoptions rates vs. feedback per user group.

• Customer Persona Integration

o Segmentation supports accurate type personas that reflect the tastes, fashions and behaviours of target audience people.

• Use Case Example — A fintech startup formed a user segment around income and realized that they should prioritize bill payment reminders for their low income users, resulting in an MVP that first solved only this need.

2.3.3 Trendscape Analysis for Emerging Opportunities

Trendscape analysis is a technique for scanning and interpreting social, technological economic and cultural trends to reveal emerging user needs and innovation opportunities. This enables teams to predict market movements and shift MVP development in line with new demand.

Key Practices in Trendscape Analysis:

• Scanning External Forces o Watches for macro-industry trends, such as in climate change, remote work or AI adoption.

o Takes into account micro trends, like a surge in interest in mindfulness apps or the plant-based diet.

• Trend Signals Sources o Media news, academic papers, social media activities, patents, market reports, tech conferences and startup ecosystems.

• Trends Classification o The classification of Trends is:

▪ Immediate: Immediate user behavior changes or requirements.

▪ Coming up: What near-term breakthroughs will probably break wide.

▪ Beyond: Long-term signals are still fresh, often speculative.

• Mapping User Impact

o Teams analyze the impact of each trend on targeted user sieves.

o For instance, the Gen Z's preference of sustainability might induce MVPs woven around upcycling, local sourcing or zero waste packaging.

• Ideation Trigger o Trendscape maps are work to use as idea generators—spots whitespace opportunities, and pivot points.

• Market Differentiation o Trend-aware MVPs help startups to market themselves against the followers who react after mass adoption.

• Example — Use Case o A wearable tech company noticed the rise of the "quantified self" movement and released an MVP that monitored hydration levels—this was a feature few wearables had at the time.

2.4 Case Studies in Design-Led Innovation

2.4.1 IDEO and Human-Centered Design

IDEO are one of the first firms who have been credited with popularising Human-Centered Design (HCD). The firm is built on the belief that innovation develops from a deep understanding of the user, fast generation of concepts, and iteration through explicit structured testing in real-life contexts. With a mix of empathy, innovation, and deep market knowledge, IDEO has invented some of the most iconic products in the consumer goods sector as well as breakthrough services for healthcare patients and students.

Key Insights from IDEO's Approach:

• Empathy-Driven Process

The design process at IDEO starts with their immersion in the user's world. They are watching the daily motions, interviewing and surfacing unmet needs — which may not be expressed explicitly.

• This strategy moves the conversation from technological or business limitations to human experience, making it certain users can actually connect with a solution.

• Example: After being hired to redesign medical equipment for children, IDEO consulted with young patients and their families to learn how it feels to be afraid or stressed while staying in a hospital. This resulted in childfriendly MRI room designs that were painted to resemble pirate ships or space adventures, thus reducing anxiety and the intimidating impact of the experience.

• Multidisciplinary Teams

• Curious City, a project produced by and for WBEZ-FM in Chicago (also an organization of Core77-awarded journalists), pairs reporters with questioners, much as IDEO does. This is beneficial for the design process, as a multiplicity of viewpoints on the same subject may be approachd.

• Example: In working with Bank of America on developing better savings habits, IDEO merged them behavioral psychology and financial design. The team conceived of the "Keep the Change" program — all purchases would be rounded up, and the difference automatically transferred into savings. This initiative had a substantial effect on savings rates and garnered millions of new customers.

• Rapid Prototyping Culture

• Central to the IDEO thing is building physical prototypes quickly. These are tried out in the world to see which ones produce immediate results that help refine solutions.

• Prototypes may be basic, like models made of cardboard, or they could be full-fledged pilot programs. The idea is to have quick learning and quick adaptation.

• Example: For a redesign of ATM machines, IDEO built cardboard ATM machines to role-play use. People were invited to give them a try at a controlled pace etc and they would uncover the pain points of navigation /accessibility that we could then address prior to full development.

• Notable Projects

• Shopping Cart Redesign: In what became one of IDEO's most famous projects, the team re-designed the iconic shopping cart with safety and efficacy in mind. The concept included modular baskets, upgraded child safety seating and improved manoeuvrability, demonstrating how HCD can transform everyday products.

Healthcare in Developing Countries: IDEO co-created accessible, low cost and scalable healthcare solutions for a partner with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. One was creating neonatal incubators with car parts — cheaper, simple to repair devices for use in rural hospitals.

• Oral-B Kids Toothbrush: IDEO overhauled the children's toothbrush by watching how kids gripped and used it. Rather than making a miniature version of a grown-up toothbrush, they designed the thicker handle so it was easier for small hands to grip, greatly increasing usability.

• PillPack Pharmacy Service: IDEO worked on early design of PillPack, a prescription drug delivery service that pre-sorted prescriptions in convenient packets for consumption. This disruption simplified confusing, convoluted drug regimens and would eventually result in Amazon acquiring PillPack.

• Scalable Methodology

•IDEO has codified its practices of Human-Centered Design into frameworks, toolsets, and teaching programs that allow others all over the world to apply design-led innovation.

• They have not only been applied in companies but also NGOs, government programs and universities.

• Example: IDEO. org, the nonprofit wing has used HCD to develop clean water solutions, financial inclusion tools and education programs in developing countries. Their HCD Toolkit is an open-source resource and it has been downloaded by thousands of organizations around the world to solve social problems.

2.4.2 Apple – Product Development Through Design Thinking

Apple is probably the most prominent case in which Design Thinking has been integrated with product development, as well as corporate ethos. Its method under Steve Jobs, and honed further by Jony Ive, is a playbook on how to turn complicated technology into products that feel natural, beautiful and indispensable, thanks to a focus on user-centered design, iteration and collaboration across disciplinesEDITORIAL: It had been since 2004 that I last used an iPod. Apple's ongoing commitment to design as a competitive lever not only sets its products apart, but has made the brand itself synonymous with elegance, quality and invention.

Key Lessons from Apple's Practice:

• User Experience First

• Central to Apple's approach is a willingness to focus on user experience. The question that we ask when we are making design decisions also steers in the same direction: "How would we make this easier, clearer or more delightful for the user?

This dictum also guided us in the integration of hardware, software and services. Apple doesn't start with the engineering spec and slap a design on top of it; it starts with understanding user frustration points, reimagining what the interactions ought to feel like.

• Example: Apple focused on touch-based interaction instead of stylusdriven systems that prevailed at the time when it was designing the iPhone. Centered around the user's natural gestures of tapping, swiping and pinching, Apple introduced a fundamentally intuitive experience that would transform the smartphone market.

• Simplicity and Minimalism

• Apple´s philosophy of "simplicity" is not a matter of taking things away, it´s a matter of avoiding complexity that shouldn´t be there. Especially in regards to physical and graphical interface.

• Hardware is stripped back to it's simplest form, interfaces aren't over crowded and instruction isn't clunky. Every feature must have a purpose, it should benefit the product and enhance either usability or delight.

• Example: The iPod's click wheel made it possible to navigate thousands of songs with just one hand, rather than requiring a bevy of buttons or complex navigation. The first iPhone accomplished the same thing with only one physical button for navigating instead of a series of nested menus, replaced by an elastic touch interfaace that could be different things in different situations. • Iterative Prototyping

• Apple is famous for creating and testing hundreds of prototypes before a product goes to market. This process continues, involving testing materials, tweaking gestures and testing screen sensitivity to make sure the minutia meets our standards.

Prototypes range from physical models to extensive software builds exploring animations, icon placement and micro-interactions.

• Example: The Apple Watch was many Apple Watches before it came out, with the many permutations of strap materials and screen brightnesses and feedback mechanisms like the Taptic Engine. All prototypes were evaluated for user comfort, usability and emotional affect on users.

• Seamless Ecosystems

• One of Apple's strengths when it comes to design thinking is its emphasis on building a cohesive ecosystem. Each product is engineered not only to work well on its own, but to also work in unison with others.

It results in an consistent and intuitive cross-platform experience.

This kind of ecosystem thinking has engendered brand loyalty and minimized friction for people who switch between devices. For instance, when a user buys one Apple product, the whole design motif is to draw people into buying more and staying within the system.

• Example: This makes it possible for a user to start an email on a MacBook, continue writing the message on their iPhone and finish on an iPad without having their work interrupted. The seamlessness between devices is built into the design, and that's the way Apple intended it to be.

• Design-Led Product Teams

• Unlike many tech companies, for which engineering reigns supreme, Apple values design as much in developing products. Designers are deeply engaged in conversations around strategy and product from day one, which means usability and beauty don't come as an afterthought.

• This marriage of design and engineering creates solutions where technology is molded to serve human needs, instead of requiring human accommodation.

• Example: The unibody MacBook was designed in close collaboration between industrial designer and engineer. With the laptop's all-aluminum body that was machined out from a single piece of metal, Apple raised the bar for laptop design in terms of aesthetics and flex resistance.

2.4.3 Asian Paints – Customer-Centric Innovation

Asia Paints, India's biggest paints and coatings company, has seen a radical transformation over the last two decades. Formerly known as a producer of paints and coatings for industry, it repositioned as a design-led provider of solutions tailor-made for customers. This transformation was based on Design Thinking principles of empathy, service innovation, ecosystem creation and customer-in-use. It was this rodeo, where a push beyond products allowed Asian Paints to redefine home decor, design and even lifestyle branding.

Key Moments of Change In Asian Paints' Design-Led Push:

• Consumer Research at Scale

• Asian Paints leaned heavily on ethnographic research, visiting households in urban and rural India to learn how people feel about their homes. Instead of just confining themselves to skin-deep color likings respondents held, researchers examined how people emotionally related to home decoration as well as the practice of painting.

Insights showed us that repainting a home was meaningfully linked to life events, such as weddings, festivals or having a new child. It was not just regarded as a functional activity, but an emotional renewal of inner space.

• Example: In smaller towns, families associated repainting with preparations for Diwali. Which is why Asian Paints designed such marketing campaigns and services around cultural events—so that it would have greater emotional relevance with the consumers.

• Service Innovation

• In the past, painting was a mess for time-poor Indian anti-managers who risked using unlicensed “cowboy” painters and were personally inconvenienced with painting rear-enders (late finish, paint on your shoes) when they wanted to chill out. Asian Paints leveraged the methodology of Design Thinking to completely rethink the service journey and eliminate those pain points.

• The company introduced Safe Painting Services, a service for end-to-end painting. It included professional painters certified by Asian Paints, furniture & floor protection, protective covering for your furniture and floors, seamless online payment process, post service cleanup & customer satisfaction adhering to a 45+ checklist.

• Example: A family that employed Safe Painting Services wouldn’t have to haggle with any local painters or fear that they’d spill anything on the furniture during their job. Instead, the service turned painting into an effortless and reliable experience worthy of a premium.

• Digital Color Tools

• Asian Paints developed digital platforms and mobile apps, to combat the indecision consumers often felt when selecting colors. Users could see how various tints would look on their walls prior to making choices through these tools.

• The app allowed customers to take pictures of their rooms, try different color combinations, and even get suggestions based on popular palettes or themes. There were also booking features for clients to book appointments through the platform.

• Example: A young couple who is redecorating their living room can mix and match pastel blues, off-whites and accent walls on the fly in a virtual world before making a decision, minimizing 24 years upon entering the market of uncertainty that comes with any choice while simultaneously building confidence in your brand.

• Design Studios

• The Indian paint manufacturer Asian Paints developed physical Colour Ideas Stores and Beautiful Homes Studios, spaces where customers could talk to experts, explore curated decor themes and see full room designs in the flesh rather than simply choose between paint swatches.

These studios were designed to allow for immersive experiences, showcasing how paints, wallpapers and furniture can be used in real-life situations. Consultants were trained to lead homeowners through the design process, turning buying paint into a design-led lifestyle decision.

• Example: A family that wants to renovate their dining room could visit a Beautiful Homes Studio and see several decor packages. Instead of simply picking a wall color, they might be shown matching lighting, curtains and even furniture suggestions — reducing friction in the decision-making process while enhancing the role that the brand plays.

• Integrated Ecosystem

• Asian Paints grew beyond paints to a complete home décor and lifestyle universe. It provided wallpapers, water proofing products, furniture, modular kitchens and designing services etc under one roof to home buyers.

• The company had developed itself into an authority in lifestyle, as it shaped the paints business and offered products, services, and advice.

• For example, a homeowner who is today engaged with Asian Paints can envision complete home transformation end-to-end through one brand – from choosing paints, wallpapers, furniture & décor accessories to choosing certified professionals for design and execution. This unified ecosystem will end the fragmentation, bringing in a level of convenience and confidence which were previously missing in India.

2.4.4 Tesla – Agile Prototyping and Design Thinking

Tesla is perhaps the greatest case study for applying Design Thinking to challenging sectors like automotive and energy. Its method combines a visionary concept with realistic, gradual method steps which are proven by ongoing user involvement and iterative prototyping; as well as seamless integration of hard- and software. By thinking of cars not as mere vehicles, but rather as platforms for user experience that evolve over time, Tesla has upended both the design and ownership models for automobiles.

Some of the Highlights in Tesla's Design Strategy:

• Prototyping at Scale

• Tesla's early vehicles were, in a way, prototype at scale: They were testbeds for new technologies to come. The Tesla Roadster (2008) was a limited production car using the Lotus Elise chassis.

on repurposed Lotus Elise chassis. As limited as it was, this allowed real-world testing to provide key feedback on electric vehicle performance, battery management and customer requirements.

• Lessons from the Roadster were carried over to the Model S, with improvements in battery range, charging infrastructure and interior design gleaned from feedback and actual usage.

• Example: Problems found in Roadster prototypes, like overheating battery packs and inadequate range under real-world conditions, causes Tesla to rethink the design of battery pack system for Model S -- this time basing it on modular cells instead of big bricks -- with far more reliability and cleaner manufacturability.

• Direct Customer Input

• Tesla leans heavily on real-time data collection and direct contact with customers. Cars are continually broadcasting driving data, and it can be then combed for notices of performance problems, driver preferences and possible improvements to safety.

• Furthermore, Tesla actively communicates with its customers via online forums, social media and in-app feedback mechanisms. This direct pipeline ensures customer pain points and feature requests find their way into the design cycle rapidly.

• For instance: Owners often asked for more advanced parking-assist features. Tesla eventually did so with a software update which allowed vehicles to park themselves (Autopark) and checkout of one's parking space in a manner that is not controlled manually, pulling up to where you are in the driveway really.

• Bold Vision, Incremental Delivery

• Tesla's long-term vision is all-electric autonomous mobility, but instead of waiting to perfect the whole system, they roll out partial versions of that vision and then iteratively improve.

• Autopilot started as a driver-assistance system that could help keep a car in its lane and automatically adjust to traffic. It has also been improved with abilities such as Navigate on Autopilot, traffic light recognition and Smart Summon, all based on millions of driving hours harvested in the real world.

• Example: Tesla rolled out a “Full Self-Driving Beta”, or FSD, to some users who were confident enough to test early features. This is part of a strategy at Tesla in which the automaker to continually refine its drive algorithms using real-world driving data and slowly march closer to "full self-driving."

• Hardware-Software Integration

• Tesla, unlike incumbent automakers, thinks of cars as software-defined platforms. Hardware is sold with the future in mind, enhancing its capabilities incrementally through software updates, sometimes years after it has been purchased.

• This bundling changes the nature of ownership and makes a Tesla vehicle more rather than less valuable over time.

• Example: When a hurricane hit Florida in 2016, Tesla remotely increased its cars’ battery capacity for some of the vehicles through an over-the-air software update to help people evacuate. Likewise, updates have also added entertainment apps, beefed up safety features and improved acceleration — all without asking the user to purchase a new car.

• Disruption Through Simplicity

• Why We’re Stuck in the Technology of the 1980s At Tesla, we design our products to achieve maximum clutter reduction and ease of use. Physical buttons and dials are superseded by big central touch screens, voice commands, and software-based controls.

• This simplicity not only streamlines design and production processes but will mean interfaces can be completely redesigned and improved upon through software updates – ensuring the experience never becomes dated over the life of the car.

• Example: The Model 3's dashboard is almost totally bereft of physical controls, save for the steering wheel and two multifunctional scroll buttons. Almost everything else, including climate control and navigation, is controlled via a 15-inch central touchscreen. This extreme simplification was controversial at first, but has come to define Tesla's brand identity.

"Activity: Reverse-Engineer a Design-Led Innovation"

Learners will choose one company from the case studies (IDEO, Apple, Asian Paints, Tesla) and analyze how it applied the five stages of Design Thinking—Empathize, Define, Ideate, Prototype, Test—in a real innovation. They will map out each stage based on available public data and present their analysis in small groups. This exercise enables students to connect theory to practice and observe how design-led strategies unfold in industry-leading contexts.

2.5 Summary

❖ Design Thinking, the user-focused methodology for solving problems that has five steps: Empathize, Define, Ideate, Prototype and Test is used for innovation through structured innovative process.

❖ The Empathize stage in human-centred designing makes designers to deeply understand the user needs by observations, interviews and emotional insights.

❖ Define: Distilled user insights develop into a clear, actionable problem statement; The Problem Statement provides the launching point for focused solutions.

❖ The Ideate phase encourages divergent thinking and creativity to come up with a wide range of possible solutions, then it takes these many ideas and converges them into the best, most tactically plausible solutions.

❖ The prototyping process where it has converted abstract concept into the reality for early user experience, so that we can analyze for strengths and weaknesses before full scale...UILT[13]. III.

❖ Test stage acquires external feedback with prototypes to iterate and realign a product-price fit.

❖ Design Thinking is very closely related to MVP Management, as it drives lean and agile product development with empathy, validation and rapid learning loops.

❖ Tactics such as Empathy Mapping, Segmentation and Trendscape Analysis surface insights on trends for user behavior and new market opportunities.

❖ Real life success stories of how some companies like IDEO, Apple, Asian Paints and Tesla has adopted Design Thinking to rule the world by breaking new ground and is creating waves.

2.6 Key Terms

Design Thinking An approach to problem solving that includes studying and getting to know your user, coming up with ideas around their experiences based on insights from understanding them more deeply through research, building the best possible prototype early and often.

Empathy Mapping – A visual representation of what people say, think, do and feel used to help teams grasp user motivations and pain points.

Problem Statement – A succinct statement describing a user problem and how the world currently solves that problem (to guide ideation of potential solutions).

Ideation - A phase of thinking, where teams develop numerous possibilities in all scenarios with no evaluation.

Prototype – A working model of a product or service used to test which features are useful and collect feedback in advance of full development.

User Testing – Testing prototypes or MVP with real users to get feedback, validate assumptions and generate improvements.

Human-Centered Design (HCD) – A design methodology that ensures the needs, behaviors, and constraints of users are taken into account at every stage of the product life cycle.

Segmentation : Breaking down a target market into segments which have either common characteristics (such as demographics), needs or behaviors, to more effectively address specific needs.

Trendscape Analysis – Searching for macro and micros trends and looking out for opportunities to innovate and market shifts.

MVP (minimum viable product): A tiny version of a product that is developed with basic features to test out ideas and collect feedback directly from the first users.

2.7 Descriptive Questions

Describe the five phases of Design Thinking, and use specific examples from the product or service development to demonstrate each phase.

How does the Empathize phase inform the following phases of a project?

Explain how prototyping can be used to mitigate risk and improve users experience in the design of products.

What is the relationship between developing an MVP and stages of Design Thinking? Provide industry examples.

How crucial is segmentation when architecting focused MVPs? Explain using an existing or hypothetical example.

Contrast the use of Design Thinking at Apple and IDEO. What effect do their methods have on innovation?

Discuss how 'Asian Paints' leveraged design-led innovation to transcend selling a product to providing an experience of service.

Explain what " Trendscape Analysis is" and how it helps make decisions about early stage of innovation.

Describe the role that user-centered validation plays in iterative product development. Why do startups need it?

Develop an empathy map for student using a online education platform, and provide a problem statement based on it.

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2.9 Case Study

"Redesigning Healthcare Access: IDEO's Design Thinking Journey in Low-Income Communities"

Introduction

Access to quality healthcare in low-income urban areas remains a major global challenge. In partnership with a nonprofit health provider, IDEO.org set out to improve maternal health service usage in underserved Kenyan neighborhoods. Despite the availability of public health clinics, expectant mothers often avoided prenatal checkups due to social, emotional, and logistical barriers. IDEO applied its Human-Centered Design (HCD) methodology to understand these challenges, redefine the problem, and co-create meaningful solutions.

Background

IDEO's interdisciplinary team began with field visits to urban settlements in Nairobi. They observed clinic operations, interviewed patients, and followed the daily routines of expectant mothers. They discovered that women often feared judgment, lacked transportation, and were confused about what services were offered. The existing system focused on technical delivery rather than user experience.

Instead of proposing a digital solution upfront, IDEO took the Design Thinking route, starting with empathy. Using tools like empathy maps and user journey mapping, the team uncovered hidden needs—trust, dignity, convenience, and community support. These insights shaped their iterative prototyping process.

Over several months, the team developed and tested solutions such as friendly waiting areas, mobile check-in kiosks, SMS reminders, and community-based care ambassadors. Each idea was prototyped at small scale, tested with users, and refined based on feedback.

Problem Statements and Solutions

Problem 1: Low Clinic Attendance Due to Social Stigma and Fear

- Insight: Many women avoided clinics due to fear of being judged for age, number of children, or perceived carelessness.
- Solution: IDEO helped redesign the clinic space to feel more welcoming and nonjudgmental, and trained staff in empathetic communication. They also created community ambassador programs where women promoted prenatal care through peer support.

Problem 2: Lack of Clear Communication and Service Awareness

- Insight: Women did not know what prenatal services were available or when to seek care.

- Solution: The team co-designed visual clinic guides, printed in local languages with illustrations. They also introduced SMS-based educational reminders synced with pregnancy stages.

Problem 3: Missed Appointments Due to Logistical Barriers

- Insight: Transportation cost and long wait times were key deterrents.
- Solution: A mobile pre-check-in system was piloted via basic mobile phones. Women could schedule appointments and receive real-time updates on queue times, reducing waiting hours and improving attendance.

Case Questions

1. How did IDEO apply the five stages of Design Thinking to uncover and address the underlying barriers in maternal healthcare access?
2. What role did prototyping and iteration play in ensuring that the solutions were viable, desirable, and feasible?
3. How did the team integrate user feedback during the Test phase, and how did it influence the final solutions?
4. Discuss the relevance of empathy mapping in this case. How did it shift the team's perspective on what the real problems were?
5. If IDEO wanted to scale this solution to a different region or country, what new steps would they need to take to ensure contextual relevance?

Conclusion

This case illustrates the transformative impact of Design Thinking in public health innovation. By leading with empathy and involving users throughout the process, IDEO was able to co-create sustainable solutions tailored to the emotional, cultural, and practical realities of expectant mothers in underserved communities. The success of this initiative highlights the power of human-centered innovation, iterative development, and cross-disciplinary collaboration in solving complex social problems.

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Unit 3: Problem Framing, Personas & Market Fit

Learning Objectives

1. Understand the strategic importance of problem framing in innovation and product development.
2. Identify the consequences of poor problem definition and how it can derail MVP and business success.
3. Utilize the Jobs to Be Done (JTBD) framework to find out what users really need and care about.
4. Develop customer personas including demographic, psychographic and behavioral attributes for an MVP feature design.
5. Run competitive analysis to help identify feature gaps, benchmark features and uncover opportunities of differentiation.
6. Create visual persona boards that mix in JTBD insights with directional input from cross-functional teams.
7. Develop and refine good statements of the problem in line with business objectives and substantiated customer need.

Content

3.0 Introductory Caselet

3.1 Importance of Problem Framing

3.2 Jobs to Be Done (JTBD) Framework

3.3 Consumer Personas

3.4 Competition Analysis

3.5 Persona Boards

3.6 Articulating Problem Statements

3.7 Summary

3.8 Key Terms

3.9 Descriptive Questions

3.10 References

3.11 Case Study

3.0 Introductory Caselet

"Misreading the Market: The Story of EduFast's First Pivot"

Bangalore-based edtech startup EduFast has introduced a mobile platform that provides crash courses for competitive examinations. It believed students would appreciate video-based learning lessons that are short, to the point and act as supplements to their offline coaching. They invested heavily, building a slick app and hiring subject experts, then launched with aggressive digital marketing. Nevertheless, after the initial install, engagement saw a significant fall-off after week one.

The team got frustrated and started snooping around. They interviewed people and watched how they used the system.

To their surprise, they discovered that most people who would be well-served by the product weren't starving for content — they were drowning in it. The challenge for students was not what per se, but rather how to manage their time effectively and receive personalized support. It wasn't that people experienced "too little short form learning," but that they found it to be hard to organize studying and identifying what was most important.

EduFast had framed the problem incorrectly. They teams relied on Jobs to Be Done framework and developed new user personas. One insight seemed to stand out: "When I'm a month away from my exam, what I want is a clear daily study plan that adapts to my weak topics." That led them to their pivot — turning the app into a smart scheduler and performance tracker, with embedded micro-learning. In a few months, engagement began to surge and subscriptions rose.

What they learned was that having the best product didn't matter, it was about solving the right problem for the right person.

Critical Thinking Question

As part of the EduFast product team, how could uniform adoption of theJTBD framework and persona development have helped your company avoid falling into this trap so you could be successful sooner?

3.1 Importance of Problem Framing

3.1.1 Why Defining the Right Problem Matters

Defining the problem right is how successful products get built and startups are made. When teams have clarity around the real user pain point, they are able to focus their creativity, resources and strategic choices on ideas that are actually useful. Without the right problem framing, teams end up solving for things that are of low relevance or priority—at the cost of wasted effort, misaligned goals, and mediocre products. By contrast, a sharp problem becomes the north star that aligns your team's efforts and convictions, motivates creative thinking and assures product-market fit.

The Importance of Defining the Right Problem:

• Guides Solution Design

A well-posed problem is like a strategic compass. It makes sure those features that product teams are going to design really truly solve the problems the user has, rather than tossing in nearly shiny functions that don't actually get used. Example: Instead of creating dozens and dozens of filters in a food delivery app, focusing on the problem "users can't quickly discover dishes according to cravings" led instead to solutions like visual browsing or curated menus.

- It Is Time Saver and Money Saver

Clear definition of problem prevents the team from wasting time solving wrong problems. This minimizes the likelihood of over-engineering products for misunderstood needs.

Example: Startup building a smart fridge was initially laser-focused on solving complex inventory tracking and storage questions — except when they reconsidered the real problem "people forget what's about to expire." The answer became plain, timely alerts.

• Eliminates Scope Creep and Waste

When the problem is ambiguous teams add features at random, hoping to 'hit a home run.'

Well-defined problem keeps us on the right track - Read: Avoid wasted development.

Example: Rather than building a Swiss-army-knife of a wellness app, this team oriented around the problem "users are seeking help to stay hydrated." The result was a niche water-tracking app with strong engagement.

• Improves Team Alignment

[...] Having a shared and well-understood problem statement means that everyone, designers to engineers to marketers is on the same page. This confluence results in quicker decision making and greater consistency in product development.

For example: Slack coalesced its team around the problem "teams are constantly losing information to scattered communication," which lent itself to a design that better enabled channeling messages rather than simply creating another email alternative.

• Promotes the Kind of Innovation that Matters.

Innovation comes from addressing and solving the deep-seated user problems, rather than applying band-aids to surface level problems. When problems are defined correctly, the door is opened to breakthrough thinking.

Example: Uber is not simply about digitizing taxi booking; they tackled the deeper need, “I want a predictably priced and trustworthy ride without having to wait or haggle.” This insight reshaped urban transportation.

• Encourages Empathy

To articulate the problem we need to put ourselves in the shoes of a user — and truly understand how they act, feel, and what hurts. It's a combatant of "anal penetration" and supporter of user-centered thinking. Example: When the design firm IDEO revamped hospital stays, they began by following around patients for hours, observing that fear and confusion — not mere wait times — were the main problems to solve.

- Enhances Communication

By having a clear problem statement the easier is to sell / pitch ideas, raise funding, get alignment between stakeholders and receive focused feedback from users. What problem the solution seeks to solve is known to everyone. Example: A pitch that begins “millennials can’t achieve homeownership despite stable incomes” is a lot more straightforward than one that starts with “we built a real estate app using AI and blockchain.”

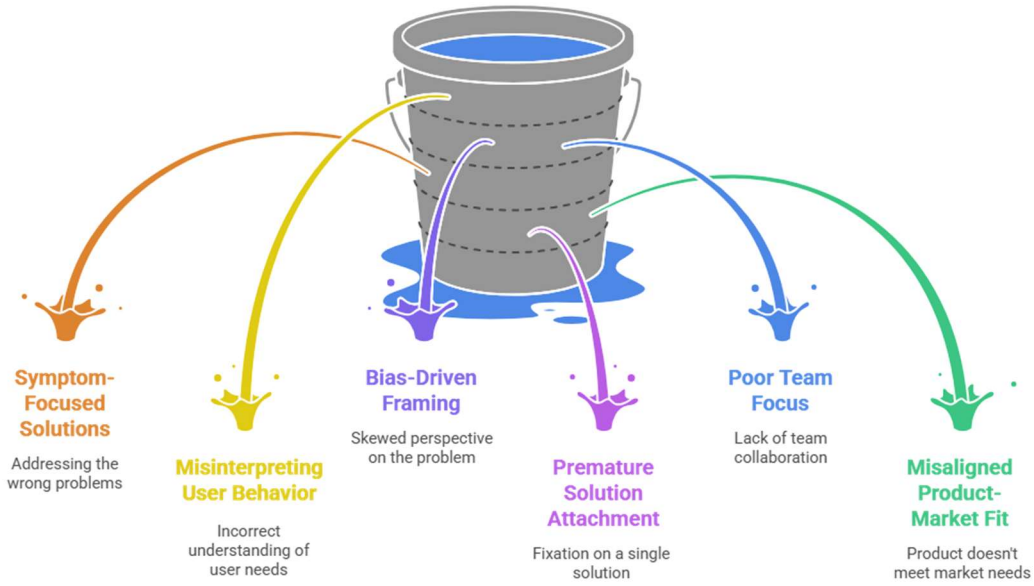
• Case Example

Airbnb’s breakthrough wasn’t in creating new lodging; it was in recognizing a subtle user need: “I want a local, affordable, and unique stay when I travel.” This understanding allowed them to distinguish themselves from hotels and bring together people who wanted real experiences with hosts. Their success shows how getting a handle on the real problem (not just the category) can unlock tremendous value.

3.1.2 Problems with Problem Definition

Not defining the right problem can cause even the most promising product ideas to falter. Many startups and product teams fail, not because of creativity or technical incompetence, but because they defint the user problem incorrectly to begin with. Underlying causes are frequently unfounded assumptions, lack of research and user empathy, or even a bad problem definition. The consequence of this is that teams are solving the wrong problems, funding projects and product launches under the wrong assumptions, which leads to products that don’t meet real needs.

CommonF_ails andR_esults:



- Constructing Solutions for Symptoms, Not Causes

Teams can treat symptoms or surface-level issues and neglect the root causes of suffering. This approach results in Band-Aid solutions without the addition of any long-term value.

A ridesharing app, for instance, might do better reducing wait times by flooding the area with more drivers despite the throughput fallout, when in reality the issue is that some riders don't feel safe using its service — nothing to do with efficiency or profitability and something a safety feature might address better than operating lax oversite of background checks.

• Misunderstanding of User Postures

Misunderstanding user feedback or behavior can lead to solutions with the wrong assumptions.

For example, if people are leaving some website, a team might assume it must be missing features. But further investigation could find that instead, consumers are confused and want less complexity, not more.

- Framing That's Tilted by a Bias

In practice, founders often map their own experiences and background to users as if they are one of them, therefore defining problems in terms of what appeals to them instead of focusing on the user needs.

A founder who has deep technological knowledge can have the feeling that users need sophisticated customization when they in fact want everything to work out of the box with a clear default.

- Premature Attachments of Solution

Teams can sometimes become infatuated with an idea they are passionate about without first verifying if it solves a real problem.

That way you are quickly engaging in a bad habit of backfitting the problem to match the solution. A typical example is to make a blockchain-based app only because this technology is trending, even if it does not offer any added value to the application's users.

- Lack of Focus from the Team and Collaboration

Ambiguous or too fuzzy problem statements disorient teams and lead to misalignment. If all stakeholders don't share an understanding of the user need, then different departments may have to go up to bat for their own goals. For instance – the marketing team may be pushing a product saying that it's easy to use, whilst the development time are implementing complex features that don't equate to easy for its users.

- Product–Market Fit Misalignment

No matter how beautifully designed the MVP is, if it doesn't solve for the right problem, it will not work. Misalignment has a detrimental impact on adoption, feedback and iterations.

A budgeting app might seem to have incredibly detailed analytics and charts, but if the real problem is that users can't remember to track their expenses every day, then simplicity and automation may matter more than visual insights.

• Case Example

Juicero, a prominent start-up, is an object lesson in bad problem definition. The company created a hightech juicer that connects to Wi-Fi, presuming users actually wanted a smart kitchen device. But the actual user priority was ease and affordability. The answer — costly equipment to squeeze juice from premade bags of pulp, which resulted in a long cleanup process that the company was starting to do for its own customers — didn't solve an urgent problem. When customers discovered they could simply squeeze the packets by hand, it became apparent that the product wasn't functional and failed in the market.

Did You Know?

"Research by CB Insights reveals that 42% of startups fail because there's no market need for their product—a direct result of misidentifying or poorly framing the core problem. Many teams start with a solution in mind and skip the problem discovery stage, assuming that their

idea will resonate without validation. This highlights the importance of structured problem framing before building anything."

3.1.3 Linking Problem Framing to Product-Market Fit

For any new company or team making something, getting a product to match what people want is a deal. This is called Product-Market Fit. But it occurs when you've built a piece of dogma with the ability to actually satisfy some kind of need that a host of people have and they want to use, and continue using. You can not get here without having first known what problem you were trying to solve. "If you have no understanding of the problem, then teams are clueless and they cannot solve for what people actually need, how they behave and why some things matter more to them than others," he said. Product—Market Fit is what teams are hungry for, and problem solving is how you get it. It serves as a channel of the voice of the leads and finally it can be transformed into a usable product – one which is validated, meaningful for users!

Key Relationships between Problem Framing and PMF:

• Identifies the Customer's Pain Point at its Core

PMF starts with finding a genuine, tangible pain point that users really want resolved. When you don't have this clarity, you are developing products in the dark.

For one, it wasn't merely a provider of cloud storage; it solved the problem: "I want to be able to access my files and keep them in sync across devices effortlessly." This obvious pain ensured strong product-market fit.

- Even a Polished MVP Will Miss the Mark If You Mischaracterize the Problem

A beautiful, perfectly functioning product that solves an unimportant or irrelvant problem will not be adopted by users.

An app that lets users monitor fitness metrics may flop if the desired audience is more interested in motivation and habit formation than sophisticated tracking.

• Prioritizes List of Features to Drive

Once a problem is well understood, product teams can zero in their MVP on addressing the most pressing and painful parts of it - not boiling the ocean.

For example, Airbnb's early MVP didn't prioritize features like reviews or advanced search filters—it prioritized enabling people to list and book cheap spaces as a solution to their immediate problem of finding short-term lodging.

- Facilitates Focused Value Propositions

If the problem is clearly framed, then your team should be able to tell a great story about why I want to use your product, because you understand my pain intuitively. This allows you to gain better traction before crossing the chasm by drawing in an early market that loves your solution. Canva took off so quickly because it solved the problem: “I want to design, high quality graphics without having to know anything about design.” This specific framing allowed for a clear and compelling value proposition.

- Enables Iterative Learning Faster.

A well-defined problem observes as a measure with which teams can experiment MVP's against success, user feedback and engagement. It is this that helps enable faster learning cycles and smarter pivots.

If the core problem of an app is articulated as “users want help creating better morning routines,” then each test and iteration can be judged on how well it has served to solve that challenge.

• JTBD and Personas matching

By framing problems around the job-to-be-done for the user, your product becomes a natural part of that person’s life and fills real functional and emotional needs.

A budgeting app built with “I want to feel in control of my money without stress” in mind speaks not only to financial goals, but also the human need for confidence and clarity.

• Clear Product Messaging is supported

When the problem is well-defined, marketing and communication actions are sharper and more convincing. Teams are able to explain with precision what problem they solve and why it is a problem worth solving.

Notion, for instance, didn’t brand itself “the all-in-one workspace” by listing features but by solving the problem: "Work and knowledge are scattered across too many tools."

• Case Example

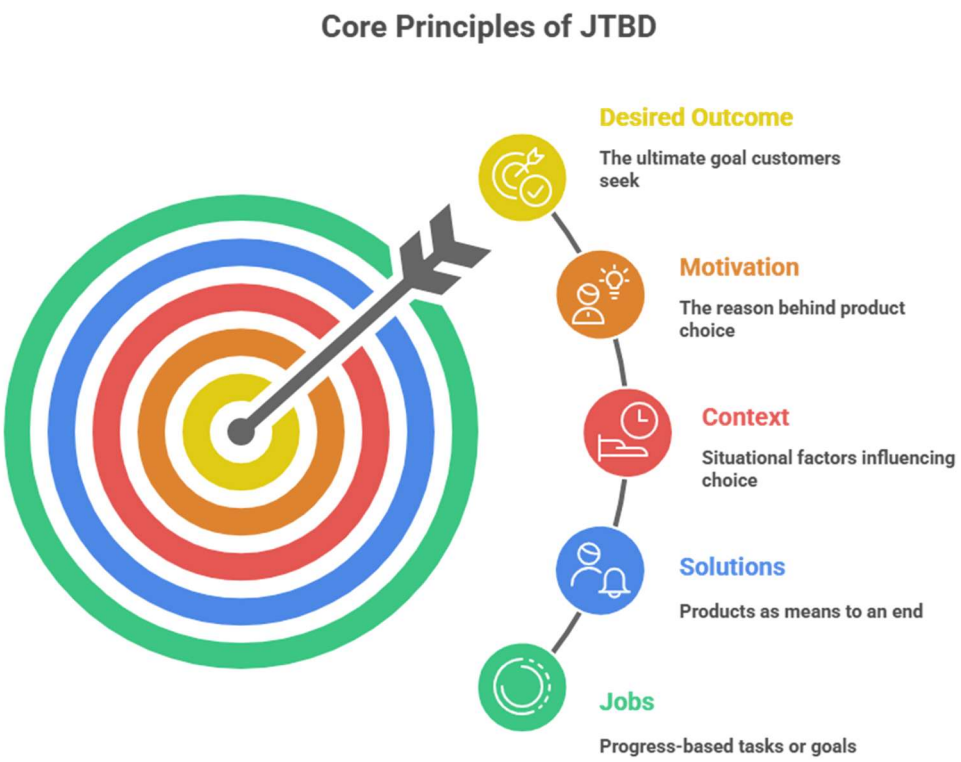
Slack also is a wonderful example for how problem framing led to product-market fit. Not that the product was ever positioned as simply another messaging tool. Rather, it was created to address what Biter wanted to see fixed: “Team communication is fragmented and ineffective across channels.” This positioning enabled Slack to home in on its nail (its quenching user problem) quickly with integration, simplicity and search—issues that succinctly identify the needs of the market and caused company adoption to skyrocket.

3.2 Jobs to Be Done (JTBD) Theory

3.2.1 Introduction to JTBD

The Jobs to Be Done (JTBD) methodology is a great way to think about and understand customer behavior. It's not about demographics or product-based segmenting, but rather the "job" a customer hires a product or service to do. The key insight is that people do not simply buy products; they "hire" them to make progress in specific situations.

Core Principles of JTBD:



- Jobs are Progress-Based

o A "job" is the progress a person is trying to make in a particular situation.

o This could be functional (complete a task), emotional (reduce anxiety), or social (look competent).

- Customers Hire Solutions o JTBD sees the product as a means to an end.

o For example, a customer may hire a fitness app not just to track workouts, but to feel accountable and motivated.

• Context is Key o The same user may hire different solutions depending on context.

o Example: To get a quick meal, one might hire a food delivery app during a workday, but cook on weekends for emotional satisfaction.

• Uncovering Motivation o JTBD explores the “why” behind the purchase.

o It goes deeper than features or pricing to uncover the desired outcome, which often reveals unmet needs.

Why JTBD Matters for Startups:

• Focuses on Outcomes o Helps founders shift from thinking about products to thinking about customer progress.

• Enables Innovation o Reveals white space in the market—opportunities to serve unaddressed or poorly understood jobs.

• Applicable Across Industries o JTBD has been used in sectors like healthcare, education, banking, and software to design user-centered innovations.

• Aligns Product and Market Fit

o A clear job statement helps in designing value propositions, MVPs, and product roadmaps that resonate with real needs.

Types of Jobs:

- Functional Jobs – Specific tasks users want to complete.
- Emotional Jobs – How users want to feel while or after using the product.
- Social Jobs – How users want to be perceived by others.

Example:

- A person buys noise-canceling headphones not just for sound quality (functional), but to feel focused (emotional) and appear professional during calls (social).

3.2.2 Identifying Core Jobs, Pains, and Gains

The key to using JTBD effectively is understanding a user's core jobs, pains and gains. Instead of getting hung up on user demographics or preferences, JTBD is all about what users hope to accomplish, the barriers they must overcome and the value they are seeking. This disciplined approach enables teams to create products that address real problems, integrate into a user's existing experiences, and leverage use cases without friction.

Core Job Identification

The first step is to figure out what the user is trying to fundamentally achieve (their "job"). It's no longer just about tasks or features, but about larger-scale progress or change that they (in a particular context) are trying to attain.

- Concentrate on where you want to get next.

Start by asking: What is the user trying to accomplish? What causes this job to be needed?

For example, users don't just need an alarm app — they want to wake up refreshed and on time for work if they've slept in. There's also the larger job of training up morning routines well.

• Use Job Statements

Frame job insights in an explicit format: "When I'm [situation], I want to [job] in order to [outcome]. This helps explain the job and hook it into context.

Example: “When I’m studying for an exam, I like to find a study plan that is customized so it helps me stay focused on my weak areas.” That includes the setting, reason and what should happen.

• Contextual Inquiry

Watching users in context will yield behavior patterns you wouldn’t have gotten from a survey and interviews about user habits, triggers and workarounds often uncover internal motivations.

For instance, observing how students study might help a product team identify that more time is spent organizing notes than actually learning — exposing an unmet job to “quickly gather relevant materials.”

Identifying Pains (Barriers and Frictions)

Once you've found the job, it's important to know what pain points are making users struggle to get that job done as effectively or comfortably as possible. "There are a lot of innovation opportunities in these bottlenecks."

• Pain Points

These are the pains, inefficiencies or emotional drivers that people have with existing solutions.

Illustration: A user gets frustrated that their budgeting app crashes frequently or needs data to be entered manually — both functional pains.

• Types of Pain

• Time: The job is slow to run.

Example: Extortionate upload times in a content-sharing application.

• Emotional: It is anxiety inducing or stressful.

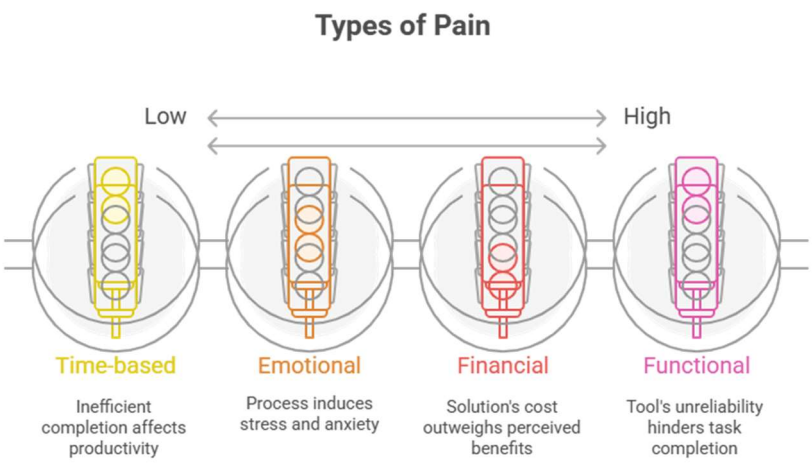
Example: A tax-filing app with jargon that doesn’t make sense.

• Financial: The price of the solution is too high for the benefits it delivers.

Example: A Freemium photo editor with some minimal features in the free version.

• Functional: The tool fails to get the job done well or consistently.

Example: A fitness tracker that does not log steps or heart rate properly.



• Pain Indicators

Keep an eye out for low engagement numbers, abandoned accounts, regular user complaints or users who have started building their own hacks and workarounds.

Example: If your users are compelled to move over to spreadsheets after attempting to use task management app, it is indicative of unfilled functional gaps.

• Example

Users might not be dropping out of language learning apps due to the sheer volume of content, but how the pacing does not align with their learning approach. This combines emotional pain (feeling overwhelmed) and functional pain (inflexibility).

Stakeholder Gains (Desired Outcomes and Benefits)

“What are the Gains our users we’re working to achieve – these can be both, functional and emotional.” These expectations influence how users assess a product's value.

• Functional Gains

These are features that add utility like speed, automation, control (or power), ease of use.

Example: A note taking app that categorizes notes by topic – automatically, reduces handling and confusion. • Emotional Gains

These could include a sense of confidence, less anxiety or an increase in power.

Example: A goal-tracking app with a feature that celebrates small wins can cultivate a sense of achievement and momentum.

• Social Gains

These describe how users wish to be perceived in their own personal networks—productive, informed, modern, skilled.

Example: Members who design content for tools like Canva share their creations, and they get that lovely social validation of doing something creative.

• Value Drivers

Highs help determine the key features or benefits that will most attract users and be featured in product messaging.

Example: An app that helps you choose the best times for appointments and get them booked automatically, based on your schedule to reduce decision fatigue, is providing emotional utility as well as functional features.

• Example

For an app to consolidate your productivity system (to-do lists, calendars, reminders) in one place you benefit on an emotional level (peace of mind), a functional level (less switching between tools) and maybe even social level (people perceiving you as well-organized).

Prioritizing Jobs

There are simply not equal opportunities to "work" out there. Teams must decide which jobs are most likely to result in impact and the creation of value.

• Frequency

How frequently does this task occur in the user's life?

Example: Checking email is often; setting up a new phone is infrequent. • Importance

How important is this task to the user's objectives or well-being?

Example: Controlling monthly spend is higher priority than app theme personalization.

• Satisfaction

What's not working in the current solutions?

Example: Workarounds like spreadsheets or sticky notes might have to suffice for users—a signal of no tool doing the job well.

• The greater the value a product can provide, while also being commonplace and unsatisfactory, is an indication of innovation potential.

For example, the task of "easily recording daily health habits" is one that's widespread and crucial to well-being and yet often ill-served by existing products. A well made product that could be focused on this is a market.

Frameworks to Use:

Teams can use structured tools, such as the ones below, to systematically identify and prioritize these insights.

• Value Proposition Canvas: This template allows users to draw the user's jobs, pains and gains together on one sheet while aligning them with "gain creators" and "pain relievers."

• Switch Interviews, or Outcome-Driven Questions: Inspect why the end user switched from an old product to a new product.

• Customer Journey Mapping: Follows the customer from start to finish of their experience in getting something done, highlighting crucial pain points and emotional highs and lows.

3.2.3. Applying JTBD to Product and Service Innovation

The JTBD framework is not limited to research, by the way; it's also a crucial tool in product development, service design and go-to-market strategy. By recognising what users are seeking to achieve in given contexts, teams can make more intelligent decisions about what to build, how to articulate value and the way their product should advance over time. This means that innovation is tied to real user needs, not guesses or features comparisons.

Application Areas of JTBD:

MVP Design and Feature Selection

JTBD is especially helpful in MVP mastery, where the product needs to solve a real user problem with minimum functionality.

• Lean Product Focus

This is where JTBD can help you determine what core functionality you really need in order to help users make headway. This makes it possible for teams to scratch everything that does not need their attention and building around the most critical job.

Example: Calendly went really narrow with their MVP and concentrated on solving one job—"scheduling meetings without back-and-forth emails." It did not strive to outcompete full-feature calendar apps, it nailed this single job first.

• Feature Overload Is Unnecessary

By sticking to the core job, teams prevent themselves from adding features that don't actually help users complete their job. This results in a cleaner UX and quicker development.

Example: If the most important job to be done with budgeting is helping users manage their monthly expense, a budgeting app may forego including investment tracking and just do it well.

Product Messaging and Positioning

JTBD informs how products are messaged to users, influencing language on marketing, sales, and onboarding.

• Outcome-Based Language

Job to do messaging is centered on the desired outcome, not just a product spec.

Example: Rather than saying “Buy our memory foam mattress,” a company would say “Get your best night’s sleep” — putting the job and the result on show.RELATED: How Far Have We Really Come? • Clear Differentiation

With product being positioned around how well it does the job, it’ll be easier to stand out from competitors. Example: Zoom centred itself around “making video calls frictionless,” not a pitch of advanced video features — instead zeroing in on reliability, speed and ease of use.

Customer Onboarding and Retention

JTBD also informs onboarding flows and retention mechanics to make sure users get the support they need to get the actual job done.

• First-time use leave UsersInitiatives should get users to achieve a meaningful job right away which will lead to increased adoption and reduced churn.

Example: Notion makes basic page creation and templates easy to get started with, helping users see value quickly by organizing notes or tasks.

• Job Milestones

The user journey can be looped through job completion “lodestones” — touchstones that ask the user where they are and how close to completion. Example: In a workout app, reaching the first workout or hitting a weekly goal could serve as job milestones that would then trigger encouragement or unlock new features.

Innovation and Product Roadmapping

JTBD enables long term innovation by creating new ways for people to be served, better or more widely. • Expand Job Coverage

Once a team solves the core job, it can expand to adjacent jobs that users typically attempt to solve next. Example: A project management app that starts with managing tasks may later add time tracking or collaboration tools as users want to manage a fuller range of what’s on their plates.

• Job Bundling

Related tasks can be "collapsed" into a single experience to improve user retention and perceived value. Case-in-point: Uber’s strategy of combining ride-hailing with food delivery in a single app enables users to accomplish multiple jobs — commuting and eating — without having to switch apps.

• Innovation On The Service Layer

JTBD insights can also enhance the service experience, and not only touchpoints of the product. By minimizing friction in the user path, businesses offer more enjoyable and seamless experiences.

Sample: Amazon's 1-click checkout makes short work of the job "buy a product quickly without fuss," improving their end-to-end service layer.

Examples Across Sectors:

• Spotify

JTBD: "While I'm listening to music in my commute, feel music to be personalized and help me relax or focus." This work shapes playlist curation, Spotify's offline mode and AI-assisted personalization.

• Duolingo

JTBD: "When I'm learning a language casually, I want bite-sized lessons that keep my attention." This position helps design features such as gamification, short lessons and streaks.

• LinkedIn

JTBD: "When I need to grow in my career, I want to present my skills and find leads for new jobs." Key to this jobs core are features such as profile endorsements, job alerts and networking recommendations.

Key Benefits:

• Champion of Customer-Centric Design

More of that design thinking must be based upon genuine user jobs, not on fictitious features and internal drives.

• Compatible with Long-Term Differentiation

If a business continuously aligns with changing user jobs, it avoids becoming irrelevant and is able to evolve ahead of its competitors.

• Boosts Product-Market Fit by Aligning with Real Use Cases

JTBD guarantees products actually fit with the way users exist in context, feel motivated, and are driven to adopt and stick.

• Enables the Team to Align Across Design, Development and Marketing

Everybody is pulling the oar in the same direction of helping the user to get a job done, so you have very good unity of strategy and execution on the product.

3.3 Consumer Personas

3.3.1 Defining Personas for Target Segments

Personas are like user profiles that are actually based on information from real people. They help us see what different kinds of users are like in the group of people a startup wants to sell to.

Personas are really useful because they show us what users need and want and what makes them happy or unhappy. This makes it easier for us to make products and services that people will actually like.

When we use personas to make decisions about what to do with our products we are using facts about users of just guessing what they want. This helps everyone on the team understand the users better and come up with ideas that are more relevant, to what the users actually need. Personas help teams make things that people will really like by thinking about what the users want and need. Effective personas allow startups to move beyond vague notions like "millennials" or "techsavvy users" and instead focus on specific behaviors and goals that influence product use.

Steps to Define Personas:

- Gather Qualitative and Quantitative Data

The foundation of effective personas lies in real-world research. Teams must collect data from multiple sources, including interviews, surveys, usage analytics, and ethnographic observations.

For example, a food delivery startup might conduct interviews to learn why users switch apps, while also analyzing app usage patterns during peak hours.

- Look for Common Challenges, Motivations, and Decision-Making Patterns

Analyze the data to identify common themes among users -what motivates them, what they find difficult and how they decide.

For example, users might often explain that they select the express checkout due to lack of time, the reason being that speed and convenience are very important to them.

- Develop Key Segments

Users should be clustered by common characteristics or the work they are trying to get done: first-time users, power users, price-sensitive purchase drivers, convenience drivers.

Each piece represents different behavior patterns that can be used to craft personas. Example: A fitness app could develop one persona for more casual exercisers, and a separate one for hard-core athletes who monitor performance data.

- Create Persona Profiles

A holistic persona is a comprehensive reflection of key attributes affecting product usage. The personas are fictitious, but all of them should have a very credible and realistic feeling, based on real user insights.

A robust persona profile will often contain:

• Name and image (Fictional avatar): A fabricated personal information to personalize the persona.

- Age, gender, location and occupation: Helpful context but should not be a primary determinant of design.

- Goals and motivations: What they are attempting to accomplish with the product.

• Frustrations and pain points: Main blockers or frustrations with current solutions.

• Preferred channels or platforms: Where they engage (e.g., mobile vs. desktop, social media platforms).

• Technology comfort level – how much hand-holding or intuitive the UX should be.

- Direct quotations from interviews: The user's voice, the user's mind-set.

Example Persona:

- Name: Sneha, 27,Professional Working Girl

- Goal: Eliminate time for grocery shopping in a busy work week

- Pain Point: Frustrated by delivery lags and buggy apps that keep her moving in slow motion

• Quote: “If it doesn’t work in one click, I’ll delete the app.”

- Best Platform: Mobile app in between bites at lunch

- Tech Comfort: Very comfortable with mobile apps, but demands speed and responsiveness
- Make Sure the Persona is Relevant

Personas need to be rooted in actual user behavior, not established from team assumptions or simply stereotypes. Biological characteristics such as age or gender should never be the only defining features.

For instance, if we assume that all users over 50 are not good with technology then we would find the stereotype; and here actual data of usage could indicate that many in this group are very high performers.

- Rank Your Personas

In product development, you want to identify the key persona in the early stages of your MVP because that's where users who are happy with it would likely come from: this is the hypothesis.

Secondary personas can be recorded for future planning, but spreading attention too thin might diluting product-market fit.

For instance, if you're creating a budgeting app for freelancers, your main persona might be "independent workers dealing with unpredictable income," and secondaries could be full-time employees.

- Persona Use Across Teams

Personas are not limited to the design team; they should be shared and used across the organization to inform decisions at every level:

- Design teams rely on personas to craft interfaces that match user behavior and expectations.

- Marketing teams use them to write targeted copy, select ad channels, and plan campaigns that resonate with specific user motivations.

- Product managers use persona goals and pain points to prioritize features and plan roadmaps that deliver real value.

For example, knowing that a persona prefers minimal onboarding, the product team might skip lengthy tutorials and opt for tooltips during first use.

- Validation and IterationPersonas are not static—they should evolve as new user data becomes available or as market trends shift. Teams must continuously validate personas through user testing, feedback, and analytics.

If a significant number of new users start coming from a previously underrepresented segment, it may indicate the need for a new persona or an update to existing ones.

Example: A note-taking app may discover that a growing user base is composed of university students, prompting the creation of a new persona centered around academic use cases.

3.3.2 Behavioral, Demographic, and Psychographic Traits

Building effective user personas takes an intimate understanding of the user in several ways. Three main dimensions: behavioural, demographics and psychographics combined construct the total user profile. Each dimension of the model represents different aspects of how people think, act and decide; by focusing on these dimensions teams can design with emotional resonance as well as functional utility.

Behavioral Traits

Behavioural characteristics refers to the way that people use products, services or technology. These findings are valuable for the customized user experience, feature creation and help/guidance plans.

• Usage Frequency

Categorizing users as daily, weekly or occasional allows an understanding of their level of engagement and what functionality they may use.

Example: A productivity app provides power task automation, but simple features for casual use.

• Digital Literacy

Knowing if users are a newbie, intermediate or advanced level of technology user can shape onboarding, interface complexity and help content.

Example: A finance planning app could come with step-by-step wizards for newbies, but better keyboard shortcuts and power user tools for those further down the track.

• Habits of Mind or Thinking Styles

There may be impulse buyers (those who purchase quickly, based on emotion) or users may be research-driven (taking their time to compare). Some like a trial period before committing; others are married to known brands. Example: An e-commerce site might show reviews and ratings for a research-driven user on the platform, while nudging an impulse buyer with urgency based-messaging (for example: last few days for sale).

• Channel Preference

Whether a customer prefers mobile, desktop or in-store channels, it also enables optimization for that mode of interaction.

Example: Travel booking service might offer a simplified mobile interface for users who book last minute flights on-the-go.

- Position in Product Life-Cycle Stages

Whether the user is blind or hearing-impaired, a first time visitor - returning user, an active or lapsed user also defines how their experience needs to be shaped.

Example: New users might require onboarding, while existing users want personalization according to past activity.

Demographic Traits

Demography Demographic characteristics are countable attributes such as age, income, and location. While they're not complete in and of themselves, these details frame a context and present a dose of realism to personas.

- Age, Gender, Income, Education And you feel…?

These are things which can and do impact price sensitivity, language and even feature interests. Example: A fitness app would use gamified language and visual elements for younger users but focus on health tracking and analytic tracking features for older, working professionals.

• Location – The location of these places is important as well.

Urban users might have access to faster internet, be more dependent on delivery and have other lifestyle needs compared to rural users.

Example: An online grocery service could offer express delivery in metro areas but the focus is on stock availability and offline access in small towns.

- Occupation and Type of Work

When and how a user interacts with a product is influenced by his job.

Example: An office worker might want to peruse during lunch time, while a freelancer may use tools with no rhyme or reason throughout the day.

• Family Structure

Marital status and parenthood are two of those categories; after all, single users may have very different needs in terms of finance, time management, entertainment and education than users who are married or single.

Example: A budgeting app could offer shared expense tracking for family users but saving goals for singles.

Psychographic Traits

Psychographic characteristics are part of the user's frame of mind, inspiration, life-style and principles. This is an important dimension of establishing emotional connection and brand alignment.

• Lifestyle

The way a user lives — active, minimalist, eco-sound or driven by their career — impacts what they're looking for in a product.

Example: An environmentally-conscious user may favor brands that are eco-friendly and use zero-waste packaging.

• Personality

Being risk-averse, optimistic, tech-savvy or detail-oriented makes users see trust, design and usability in a different way.

For example, advanced settings and customization options would be appreciated by a detail-oriented user, whereas a casual one prefers simplicity and automation.

• Hopes and Goals

Knowing whether users are seeking self-improvement, financial wellness, convenience or personal expression informs the creation of compelling features and messaging.

Example: A language learning app would then promote daily streaks and level-up badges for users who are heavily self-improvement and achievement focused.

• Pebbles and Boiling Points

Understanding what users find annoying or appealing — such as waiting, confusion, or FOMO — can help to shape UX design and customer support.

Example: A platform for booking events might alleviate FOMO by reminding people and sending them early access notifications if they're the type who hates to miss out. • Buying Motivators

Discounts, community validation, exclusivity, or personal touch might be significant motivators for various groups. Example: A fashion platform could provide tailored product recommendations and display "influencer picks" to appeal to users who seek individuality and validation.

Combining the Three:

Strong user personas combine both behavior and demographic/psychographic characteristics to paint a realistic character sketch. This multi-faceted vision allows, on the one side that the product design as well as marketing and communication activities will be highly aligned with what real users experience.

Example Persona:

- Raj, 32, Freelancer What do people around you think of the way you dress?

•Behavioral Traits: Self-identified as a safe buy, he demos first and buys later; prefers month-to-month over annual commitments.

- Demographic Characteristics: Resident of Mumbai, middle-class, single. Works at home with a schedule.

• Psychographic: Values independence and control; has little patience for steep learning curves.

Works great with stuff designed with flexibility and user-friendlyness in mind.

Use in Persona Development:

- Makes sure personas are three-dimensional rather than flat or stereotype based

And overlapping the three dimensions prevents you from just creating generic or dumbed-down personas not based on actual behavior.

• Assists in bringing together features, tone of voice, UI design and user journeys in line with predicted expectations.

You will have a tech savvy, goal oriented user who wants to be onboarded fast and reach core functionality immediately but you can also find a less confident one that needs cinnamon rolls.

• Enables deeper segmentation for A/B testing, campaign targeting and onboarding optimization Different personas can be tested with different feature flows or marketing messages, resulting in better product performance and higher marketing ROI.

3.3.3 Using Personas for MVP Validation

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Personas are not just design tools but strategic one for MVP planning, testing and validation. They inform choices on what features to build, how to message value and make sense of early feedback.

How Personas Guide MVP Validation:

- Feature Relevance o MVP features should align with the goals, jobs, and frustrations of the primary persona.

o Example: If a persona struggles with time management, your MVP should test whether a scheduling feature helps solve that pain point.

- Testing Hypotheses o Personas clarify what assumptions you're testing.

o For instance, you might assume that "Persona A values convenience over customization." MVP results from user tests validate or refute that.

- User Recruitment for Testing

o Personas help in identifying and recruiting representative testers for beta or usability testing.

o You can match participants to persona profiles for targeted feedback.

- Data Interpretation o When analyzing MVP test results, persona goals help contextualize behavior.

o If users drop off at onboarding, is it due to tech hesitance (a persona trait) or unclear UI?

- Prioritization of Feedback o Personas help filter what feedback is most relevant.

o Feedback from the primary persona carries more weight than edge-case users during early MVP iterations.

- MVP Pivot Decisions o If the MVP doesn't perform well with the primary persona, it's a signal to pivot or iterate— either redefine features or revisit the problem framing.

- Cross-Functional Alignment o Product, marketing, and design teams can use the persona's needs and language to align messaging, feature development, and onboarding strategy.

- Use of Persona Boards o Visual persona boards can be displayed in workspaces or collaboration tools to keep teams user-focused during sprints.

Example Application:

- A financial app MVP is built for "budget-conscious young professionals".

- Persona testing shows that users need goal-based saving tools, not generic expense tracking.

- The MVP evolves based on persona validation, shifting the product roadmap toward micro-saving features.

"Activity: Persona Creation and MVP Alignment"

Learners will conduct mock interviews with peers acting as users from a given startup concept. Based on the insights gathered, they will create a detailed persona profile including behavioral, demographic, and psychographic traits. Each group will then identify 2–3 MVP features that align directly with their persona's core pain points and goals. The

class will present how these features validate key assumptions and what metrics they would track to measure persona fit. This exercise will help learners bridge the gap between abstract user research and actionable MVP decisions.

3.4 Competition Analysis

3.4.1 Identifying Direct and Indirect Competitors

Understanding the competitive landscape is not limited to identifying well-known rival brands. Startups must assess all the solutions users turn to—whether similar in form or not—that address the same user need or fulfill the same job to be done. Competitors come in two major categories: direct and indirect, and recognizing both types is crucial for building a product that differentiates meaningfully and stands out in a crowded market.

1. Direct Competitors

Direct competitors are who created and sell a similar product / service to the same customer type. These businesses normally operate in the same sector, with similar business models and solving roughly the same underlying problem in a very similar way.

- Provide equivalent products/ services for the same customer cohort/ problem subsets.

These are the competitors that you call to mind first because they resemble your product or service in value or structure.

Example: Zomato and Swiggy offer delivery of restaurant food in Indian cities through mobile apps. They cater to urban individuals with limited time yet in need of access to a quick meal.

• Compite Same category, have similar features and positioning

There is an overlap in pricing models, user experience, functionality and even marketing messages. Example: Ola, Uber compete head on in the ride-hailing segment, providing app-based cab-hailing with similar quality of services and rewards.

Indirect Competitors

Indirect competitors might not even look like your product, but they do the same user job in a different medium, channel or experience. These is because they may be alternatives that remain suitable for users, even if you fall off their industry barrier.

- Address customers job in different ways, formats, or industries

Some times indirect competitors solve the same user need, but in a completely different fashion (that perhaps is more simpler, cheaper or easier to get).

Example: A meditation app such as Headspace indirectly competes with YouTube meditation videos, Spotify playlists for wellness or even your local yoga class, all of which are designed to provide stress relief or mindfulness in different ways.

• Might not seem like direct threats but can steal users anyway

This competition may be ignored by analysis for resemblance solutions only. However, they can draw a lot of market buzz — particularly if they are free, more convenient or the user is already doing it anyway.

Example: A financial planning app might be indirectly competing with Excel spreadsheets or physical budget journals, something some users prefer for their familiarity.

Key Considerations When Identifying Competitors

To truly be able to map your competitive space, we should stop thinking about what our product looks like and start thinking more about what our user is trying to accomplish.

- What job does the user hire the product for?

Knowing the job clarifies who else is attempting to help users get it done.

Example: With a job of “track daily habits,” competitors could be habit apps, paper journals and smartwatches with reminders for our habits.

• Are people switching back and forth between your product and a competing one (digital or not)?

Competition through substitution is frequently seen in user behavior.

Example: A team collaboration tool may be a competitor of email chains, Google docs or WhatsApp groups if its users have the habit of moving back and forth between them to perform the same task.

- Are new startups emerging that are entering the space with adjacent value propositions?

Such innovations that focus on the same user goals from a different perspective need to be observed in good time.

Example: A health-tracking app may face new rivals in wearables or AI chatbots that dispense tailored wellness tips.

Tools for Mapping Competitors

Having a systematic way of finding your competitor will help you to see the market more clearly and would also avoid gaps.

- Competitor Comparison MatrixA chart that shows products side by side to compare features, price points, strengths, and weaknesses.

This is great for comparing direct competitors directly.

- Mapping of the Substitution User Journey

It does this by mapping each step of a user journey, and then identifying alternative paths the user could take at every step.

Example: In “meal planning,” a meal delivery app may be competitive with cooking blogs, local tiffin services or frozen meal kits.

- JTBD Overlap Charts

A graphic to show how various products solve the same job. This helps us to identify not just competitors, but white space opportunities.

EXAMPLE:Multi- purpose solutions are sprouting up for “organizing team tasks” such as Trello, Asana and even Notion — all shaped by slight angle what if.

• What Search Engines (and App Stores) Could Be Doing

Searching related keywords, app categories and their users review enables startups to uncover both obvious and non-obvious competitors.

Example: Looking for “habit tracker” in app stores will show you competition in health, productivity and wellness — each solving a related job but with different depth.

3.4.2 Benchmarking Competitor Offerings

Benchmarking is the process of systematically evaluating competitors to understand what features, design choices, and strategies have become industry standards—and where opportunities for innovation still exist. Rather than copying competitors, benchmarking helps startups identify what users now expect by default, what is currently overused, and where differentiation can offer real value. It also allows teams to avoid blind spots by learning from the strengths and weaknesses of others in the space.

Key Areas to Benchmark:

- Product Features

Start by analyzing the functionality offered by competitors. Look for both common and distinctive features to identify baselines and innovation gaps.

- What are the core and unique features of competitor products?

These include both essential functions and any standout differentiators.

Example: Most language learning apps offer flashcards, but Duolingo's gamification through streaks and leagues sets it apart.

- Are there commonly expected “must-have” functionalities?

These are features users now assume will be present, such as search filters in e-commerce apps or dark mode in productivity tools.

- User Experience (UX)

Assess how competitors structure their user flows—from sign-up to task completion—and identify pain points or delightful interactions.

- How intuitive is their onboarding, navigation, and task flow?

Example: Canva’s onboarding quickly gets users designing with minimal friction, making it widely praised for ease of use.

- Are users praising or criticizing specific elements in app reviews or forums?

This also makes it easier for you to notice specific UX issues or valuable experiences that emerge continuously, such as quick loading times and minimalist designs. • Pricing and Monetization

Know how your competitors are pricing their product, and develop an understanding on how users react to your competition's pricing strategy.

- What kind of models do they employ — freemium, subscription, pay-per-use?

Example: Spotify operates a freemium ad-based model, as opposed to Headspace which is only available on subscription. This impacts user perceptions about how they will be able to access and use the value.

- Does your target customer sector have any price sensitivity?

"If something is even a few bucks, there has to be a lot of perceived value in it for budget-constrained individuals," he said. It helps figure out where that line is.

• Design and Branding • 870 gains—your design is just as important of a moment on race day.

Try to identify the visual language, tone and branding your competitors are using — and how customers are reacting to it.

• What dominant visual style, tone and message do they broadcast?

Example: Notion has a slick, minimalist look and relaxed, few-frills wording that looks to target productivity-minded users.

- Is there a single design language users equate with trust in that market?

For instance in finance applications, users might like interfaces that look professional and steady and not too playful or experimental.

• Marketing Strategy

Study how competitors generate, convert and keep users across channels and communicate the value of their product.

- Which channels are they concentrating on — Instagram advertising, influencer collaborators, SEO? Example: D2C brands generally lean hard on Instagram and influencer marketing, while B2B tools focus on SEO and LinkedIn content.

- How are they positioning the value proposition?

Rivals might be speed, savings, convenience or fit with your lifestyle. Knowing these stories will better help you fine-tune your own message.

• Customer Feedback

Direct user feedback is a goldmine of information when it comes to competitors' strengths, weaknesses and underserved needs.

- View reviews, social media commentary and product forums to learn what users consistently like and dislike.

For example, if many users complain about a fitness app being deficient of wearable integrations, the pattern will probably point toward an opportunity for your product.

- Patterns of satisfaction and dissatisfaction can help teams see which features are truly being used rather than causing friction or confusion.

Tools for Benchmarking:

- Strength, Weakness, Opportunity, Threat (SWOT) Analysis

Apply this timeless model to evaluate where every competitor stands in the marketplace and make strategic discoveries.

Example: A competitor has strong brand recognition (Strength), but their app is slow (Weakness), creating an opportunity for faster alternatives to gain a foothold (Opportunity).

- Comparison Table of All the Models

Develop visual matrixes of salient features relative by competing to see them overlap and white space. Example: You might compare three health apps and learn that all can track calories but just one also provides sleep pattern analysis.

- G2, Capterra, Google Play and App Store ReviewsHad best it is not uncommon to read a bad review on any of the above sites due to usability problems, bugs or showstopper features. They also help validate what real-world competitors look like.

- Using Competitor Products in Usability Testing yourself

Teams can experience competitors up close, taking note of friction points and flow design, to gauge how well each product solves its supposed job.

For instance, if you are testing three language apps, it may emerge that one app has a slicker registration flow while another does a better job of engaging users with gamification.

Good benchmarking isn't about copying — it's about knowing the market baseline,

spotting trends in user wishes and doing smart things to stand out. That makes twice as sure that product development is based on competitive reality rather than internal assumption.

Did You Know?

“Many startups benchmark only within their own product category, but some of the most valuable insights come from indirect competitors or parallel industries. For example, Netflix once benchmarked features from Spotify (like personal recommendations) even though they serve different markets. Cross-industry benchmarking can help unlock features or ideas that your direct competitors haven’t considered yet.”

3.4.3 Gaps and Differentiation Opportunities

After mapping and benchmarking competitors, the next strategic step is to identify gaps in the market and opportunities for differentiation. This allows startups to position their Minimum Viable Product (MVP) in a way that meets user needs more effectively—or in a way that feels distinct and more appealing. Differentiation is not always about offering more features; often, it's about solving a problem more clearly, more accessibly, or with more empathy than existing solutions.

Identifying these gaps helps founders avoid copying the competition and instead focus on unique value delivery. It also highlights underserved markets or overlooked pain points that may represent a significant opportunity for innovation and traction.

How to Identify Gaps:

- Unmet User Needs

The most frequent and efficient user journey that leads to market gaps is one where users continually ask for something and don’t receive it. You can achieve this by looking at your competitor reviews, product forums and user feedback.

- Study competitor reviews and comments for common user complaints or requests

Example: If people who use several budgeting apps frequently say they can’t connect more than one bank account, that’s a hint at an integration hole.

- Seek out Adrian’s favourite features users would love to have and don’t yet have

Example: In the language learning category, perhaps there are a lot of apps that don't allow you to have practice conversations in real time, which could be an opportunity.

- Ignored Segments

Many startups are targeting the mainstream user instead, neglecting some communities in the process.

- What user groups don't have a good solution out there?

These could be users in non-English speaking areas, older users who require simplified UI's and remote rural users with poor internet connectivity.

Example: So many fintech apps are built on a model for an urban user, and not thinking about rural users who are using USSD or SMS-based systems more.

- Over-engineered Solutions

Some products get bloated by attempting to cater to either too many use cases or too many conflicting use cases. Simpler, more targeted options can win over loyal user bases.

- It can be a source of differentiation through simple or focused product_processing combinations

Example: Zoom beat out more robust options such as Skype or Webex by providing a clean, fast and frictionless video calling experience — with a focus on one job done well.

- Lack of Emotional Attachment

Functional performance certainly matters, but users tend to gravitate toward products that also feel human or trustworthy or community driven.

• Competitors may win on function but lose out on personality, trust, or community features (Ideal: Dating app that makes it easier to share difficult things as you get to know someone better, example product: mental health app that offers emotional support and peer support in a space full of sterile clinical offerings)

• Experience Gaps

Sometimes even great products might have users that churn because they can't figure out how to use something, load too slowly on mobile or don't receive fast enough customer support. These are winning points through better user experience.

- Competitors do not provide seamless onboarding or mobile responsive or customer support Example: A design tool that loads faster, walks new users through more intuitively and offers live chat assistance can gain an advantage over slower, more complex competitors.

Types of Differentiation Opportunities:

A product or service can stand out in a number of ways. A startup doesn't necessarily have to innovate on all fronts — just one or two will do the job and provide competitive advantage.

- Division of labor 10.

Provide something the competition does not—or do a better job of in performance, reliability, or result.

Use case: A personal fitness app that connects with wearables to provide AI-based health advice would be more powerful than a basic tracker.

• UX Differentiation

Make the Product Easier, Faster, or More Fun to Use — through better design.

Example: A note-taking application that permits creating content through a drag-and-drop model and voice input might endear users who value fluid interactions. • Brand Differentiation

Establish an emotional link based on visual identity, voice, and community fit. Example: In a field of generic finance apps, targeting women entrepreneurs through inclusive messaging and storytelling might help a financial app rise above the rest.

• Business Model Differentiation

Innovate in how you charge for the product—through freemium tiers, bundling, or usage-based pricing—to reach untapped customer segments.

Example: Offering a lifetime license at a one-time cost for a niche productivity tool might attract users wary of ongoing subscriptions.

Example:

Canva vs. Adobe

Canva identified a key gap in the market: non-designers needed to create professional visuals easily. Adobe, while dominant, had powerful tools that required expertise. Canva's MVP offered simplified, template-based design with drag-and-drop functionality. Instead of competing on feature depth, it differentiated through accessibility, speed, and ease of use—making design available to a broader audience.

3.5 Persona Boards

3.5.1 Visual Representation of Customer Personas

Creating personas is an important step in figuring out what users need.. When we use persona boards to visualize them it makes things more real and easier to work with. A persona board is like a picture that shows us the main things about users, such as what they want to do how they behave what makes them frustrated and the situation they are in. It puts all this information in one place so it is easy for everyone to see and work together.

Persona boards are better than documents, with a lot of words because they help teams understand who the user is and remember this when they are talking about products making design decisions and planning features. This way the user is always the focus. That is what matters when we are creating something for them. These boards are especially useful in cross-functional environments where clarity, empathy, and alignment are critical.

By using visual storytelling, persona boards help teams empathize more deeply with the user, ensuring the product remains user-centric throughout the development process. They also serve as reference tools during sprints, brainstorming, and stakeholder presentations, helping everyone stay grounded in real user needs.

Key Components of a Persona Board:

• Profile Snapshot

A brief 'snapshot' part (to add some humanity to the persona).

• Name, photograph, age, location — and occupation (or way of making a living), income bracket

These are details that contribute towards providing the persona with a more human name and demographic context. Sample this: Raj, 32, freelance developer, based in Pune earns ₹80,000 a month. It's the smallest, slightest glimpse we have into what his lifestyle is and needs might be.

- Aims and Motivation

Conveys what the user wants to achieve—in life, and with the product.

- A description of user goals, personal or professional

Example: Raj wants to manage his work well so he will have time for personal development. That goal will help steer what features are potentially most important to you, such as calendar integration or focus timers.

• What is Annoying About It?

"This solution does not handle well: the problem.

- Pain points or challenges with existing solutions

Example: Raj's irritation with cluttered task managers that lack device sync. This is an opening for a unified cross-platform experience.

• Behavioral Traits

Explains how the persona uses technology, buys and consumes products.

• Tech buying trends, tech use behavior, favorite channels

Sample: Raj loves free trials more than a purchase decision and is mobile-first at productivity tools.

These observations have an impact on pricing models and on platform tuning.

• Quotes

Real quotes from user interviews that reflects how users were feeling, their tone of voice, and what set them off emotionally.

- Authentic, real language in interview-style phrases.

Example: "If the app doesn't make sense in the first five minutes, I uninstall it. This quote informs the product teams on what he expects in terms of onboarding and usability.

• Context of Use

Defines the who, what and how of this user-product interaction taking into account the context of real-world use.

• When, where and how user interacts with the product, if applicable

Example: On his phone while commuting, Raj spends a few minutes between client calls engaging with productivity apps. This concept highlights the requirement for rapid load times and intuitive interfaces.

Benefits of Persona Boards:

- Simple to Share Among Teams

Persona boards are visual and portable, so they can be easily used or consulted in meetings, planning sprints, design reviews and more.

• Assists with Design Thinking Workshops and MVP Planning

Persona boards are helpful in early stage workshop where teams generate and prioritize MVP's. They are a way of keeping conversations focused on what the real end user requirements are.

• Maintains Focus on Real Needs Where it Matters in Daily Decision-Making to Strengthen Development from a User-Centric Perspective

Everyone knows who their team is building for in this case, so the persona board being visible anywhere (digital or physical) serves as a constant reminder.

Tools for Creating Persona Boards:

Persona boards can be constructed with different design and groupware tools:

• Miro: Ideal for collaborative persona workshops by using sticky notes, templates and diagrams.

• Figma: For high-fidelity designs and sharing with the product team and designers.

• Canva:provides easy to use templates to build personas fast.

• Printed Boards: In colocated teams, physical boards put in workspaces are a good way to help focus users during sprints and discussions around the product.

3.5.2 Integrating JTBD Insights into Persona Boards

When we think about personas we usually look at things like the users age and background what they do and what makes them tick.. If we add Jobs to Be Done to the mix it is, like looking at things with a special lens that helps us see what the user really wants to achieve. This way we stop focusing much on who the user is and start thinking about what the user is trying to do. This helps teams make products that're more in line with what the user really wants. If we use Jobs to Be Done when we make persona boards startups can make profiles that're more detailed and useful and that show both what is going on with the user and what the user hopes to get out of it. Jobs to Be Done really helps us understand the users goals and what they are trying to accomplish with Jobs to Be Done. This integration not only improves design decisions but also strengthens product–market fit by ensuring every feature supports a meaningful job.

How JTBD Enhances Persona Boards:

- Job Statements

Clearly written job statements make the persona more action-oriented by focusing on the situations, motivations, and expected outcomes of product usage.

- Use a common format to insert the most important job phrases
- "When I am [situation], I want to [job], so I can [outcome].

Example: "While I'm traveling, I would like to hear focused playlists in order for me to unwind before work."

This provides all team members — design, product, marketing — with grounding to which they can connect their decisions.

Design Philosophy • Functional, Emotional and Social Jobs

These dimensions enrich each task description, as they tackle diverse motivational aspects.

• Task-oriented level: Deal with task-based goals.

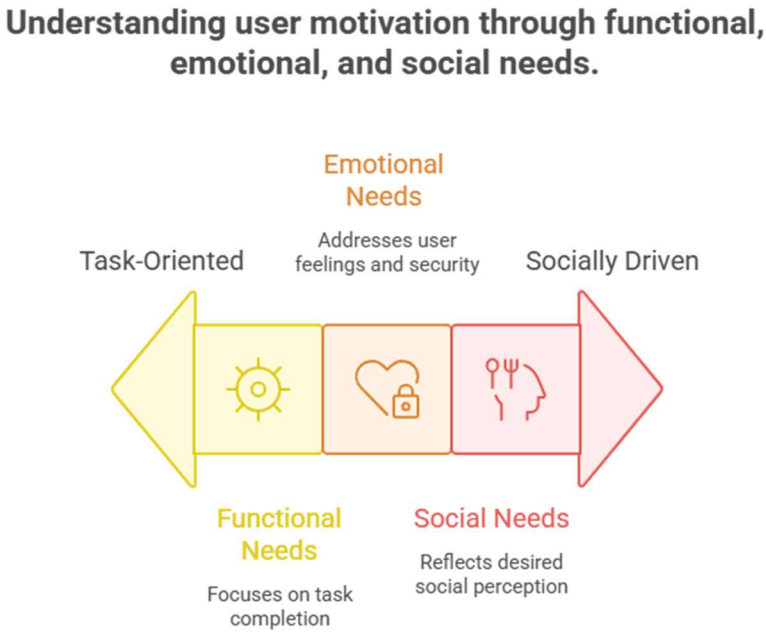
Example: "Track expenses fast" for a budgeting app.

- Emotional: Connected to the user's feeling during or after the experience.

Example: "Feel secure about my finances" is a show of trust and peace of mind.

• Social: is about how the user wish to be seen by others.

Example: "Be seen as organized and responsible" might cause a feature to be shaped, like exporting reports or sharing summaries.



- Pains and Gains from JTBD Mapping

This adds context by identifying what users are trying to avoid (pains) and what they hope to achieve (gains) while completing a job.

- Directly link what frustrates the user and what benefits they seek

Example:

Job: “Learn phrases quickly before a vacation”

Pain: “Too many complex grammar lessons in most apps”

Pros: “Confidence on traveling and speaking with locals”

Clearly mapping these onto the persona board assists in prioritising features for a MVP that addresses specific barriers and creates distinct benefits.

• Feature Relevance

The actionable persona boards are a bridge between the insight from JTBD and features of the products. It's a realistic representation of what would have happened at other companies with every single one of these jobs on product.

• Map which features in MVP map to the primary jobs and how Example: For a travel-based language learner, a direct job is preparing for travel; an associated feature in this case is "Quick Phrase Mode" • Identify assumptions Example: Assumed was that users want (what user need) vocabulary lists. The visual connection of this feature to the job statement on the board, also helps keep the user in mind.

Example:

Persona: Ananya, 29, Occasional Traveler

• Job: "Master phrases fast before a vacation overseas"

• Pain point: "Apps that take too long and focus on grammar drills for all eternity"

• Gain: "Travel To, You feel confident asking for directions or ordering food while traveling.

• Job of the Function: To learn the useful, relevant sentences

• Emotional Job: Lower stress for speaking in a foreign country

• Sociable Job: Look cool and independent in the eyes of buddies.

• Feature Connection: "Travel Mode" for in-flight use of essential phrases and audio guides

Putting all that information on one persona board gives the team what they need to build, test, and market with clarity — making sure what's built is directly tied to what the user needs to do.

3.5.3 Collaborative Persona Creation with Teams

Creating persona boards collaboratively enhances cross-functional understanding and ensures that insights are aligned across design, product, marketing, and engineering teams. When teams build personas together, they build shared empathy and ownership.

Steps for Collaborative Persona Creation:

• Workshop Format

o Conduct workshops involving stakeholders from various teams.

o Use sticky notes, whiteboards, or virtual tools like Miro to map user traits, goals, pains, and behaviors.

• Start from Research o Ground discussions in real data—user interviews, surveys, and analytics.

o Avoid assumptions or stereotypes by referring back to evidence.

• Group and Synthesize o Cluster similar behaviors or quotes to identify common traits. o Vote or prioritize which segments represent primary users.

• Integrate Inputs o Involve customer support, sales, and marketing teams who have frontline user knowledge.

• Create Board Templates o Assign team members to draft sections like “Goals” or “Context of Use.” o Finalize the board together for consensus and clarity.

Benefits:

• Promotes team alignment around customer needs

• Reduces siloed understanding of user goals

• Boosts adoption of persona boards in daily workflows

Collaborative persona creation not only improves accuracy but also increases buy-in, making personas more actionable across the product lifecycle.

3.6 Articulating Problem Statements

3.6.1 Structure of an Effective Problem Statement

A good problem statement should be concise and easy to read/handle.People are at the core! A Good Problem Statement is focused and clear. It steers clear of solutioneering and focuses on the user need, context and impact.

Problem Statement – Main Areas: Here are the key components of a problem statement:

• User Description o Who is affected by this issue? Reference persona insights.

• Context o Where or when does the problem occur? What is the triggering condition?

• Need o What does user want to accomplish but is having difficulty?

• Implication or Impact o So what if you don't fix the problem?

Standard Format Example:

"When [user] does [situation], they need to do so because of [why it matters]."

Example:

"For a freelance designer managing multiple clients, it's important to have a straightforward approach for keeping track of project deadlines — missing updates has the potential to harm one's professional reputation."

Best Practices:

- Turn to user pain not product features.
- Be cautious of statements that are too general or all inclusive.
- Make sure it is based on research, not assumptions.

A well-written problem statement becomes a design anchor, which keeps the team focused on the why behind an MVP and solution ideation.

3.6.2 Aligning Statements with Business Goals

To make a good problem statement you need to think about the user.. For new companies these statements also need to fit with the overall goals of the business. A problem is only worth solving if it helps the user and also helps the company grow get a position in the market

or make money. If the problem statement is not aligned with the companys goals it can cause teams to waste time and money on things that do not help the company achieve its goals. Problem statements, for startups must address user problems and contribute to the startups growth strategy. Aligning problem statements with business goals ensures that the product development process is both empathetic and strategic.

Ways to Align Problem Statements with Business Goals:

- Link User Needs to Market Opportunity

Focus on problems faced by a sizable or strategically valuable user segment, particularly those with growth or monetization potential.

- Choose problems that impact a sizable or high-value customer segment

Example: Instead of solving a niche issue for a small user base, a food delivery app might prioritize busy professionals in urban areas who order multiple times a week.

- Ensure that solving this problem could lead to repeat usage, referrals, or conversions

Example: Helping users reorder their favorite meals quickly could lead to increased frequency and higher lifetime value.

- Support Strategic Objectives

Ensure the problem aligns with the company's short- and long-term goals, such as increasing revenue, boosting retention, or strengthening brand loyalty.

- Identify how solving the problem contributes to revenue goals, retention, brand loyalty, or user engagement

Example: A music streaming platform aiming to improve retention might focus on the problem:

“New users struggle to find relevant playlists, causing early drop-off.” Solving this directly supports the engagement and retention objectives.

- Use OKRs and KPIs for Direction

Problem statements should set the stage for measurable outcomes. Aligning them with business metrics ensures progress can be tracked and evaluated.

- Ensure that the solution path informed by the problem statement can be measured through business metrics

Example: If the goal is to reduce churn, a relevant KPI might be the increase in onboarding completion rates or daily active users.

- Example metrics: Reduced churn rate, increased daily active users, improved subscription conversion, or higher Net Promoter Score.

- Avoid Mission Drift

While creative problem-solving is encouraged, it's important to stay focused on problems that fit within the product’s domain and brand vision.

- Don’t frame problems that fall outside the product’s scope or brand positioning—even if they seem interesting

Example: A fintech app that helps users manage their savings should avoid trying to tackle unrelated issues like fitness tracking, even if there's a perceived user overlap.

Illustration:

If the business goal is to increase subscriptions, the problem statement might be framed as:

“When trial users explore premium features, they need guidance on value and ROI because confusion leads to drop-off before conversion.”

This statement connects a user pain point—confusion during the trial phase—with a key business objective—improving conversion from trial to paid subscriptions. Addressing this problem might lead to clearer onboarding for premium features, better in-app messaging, or a more intuitive pricing page, all of which serve both the user and the business.

3.6.3 Iterating and Refining Problem Statements

A problem statement is not a fixed declaration—it evolves as the team uncovers more about user behavior, shifting priorities, or market dynamics. Initial assumptions may not hold true after user interaction or MVP testing. Continuous refinement ensures that the team is addressing the most accurate, relevant, and actionable version of the problem. Iteration also improves alignment across design, development, and business functions by keeping everyone focused on the latest validated understanding of user needs.

When and How to Iterate: • Post-User Interviews

User interviews often reveal insights that challenge the original assumptions in a problem statement.

- After initial MVP tests or interviews, revisit the problem statement

Example: If students say they are overwhelmed not by workload but by unclear assignment priorities, the problem may not be about time management in general but about organizing academic tasks.

- Does the pain point remain valid? Has a deeper or more urgent problem emerged?

New patterns might indicate a more critical user need that wasn't visible during initial framing.

- During MVP Development

Misalignment in product features or confusion among team members may stem from an unclear or misframed problem.

- If multiple features are being deprioritized or the team feels misaligned, it might be due to a poorly framed problem

Example: If the MVP includes five loosely related tools, it may indicate that the problem isn't welldefined enough to guide feature selection.

- Re-express the problem to reflect new user behavior or insights

Reframing might narrow the focus, such as shifting from "help users improve productivity" to "help remote workers track focused work hours."

- Introduce "How Might We" Questions

These open-ended prompts help reframe parts of the problem in ways that encourage ideation and uncover new angles.

- Use HMW prompts to reframe parts of the problem for better ideation

Example: "How might we help users feel confident in their purchase decision?" leads to different ideas than simply "reduce cart abandonment."

- These prompts often uncover emotional or experiential layers of the problem that weren't initially considered.

- Feedback from Stakeholders

Different roles within the team bring different perspectives to a problem, and collaborative refinement leads to a more comprehensive understanding.

- Product managers, designers, and marketers may interpret user issues differently

A product manager may focus on efficiency, while a marketer may notice trust issues during the sales journey.

- Refining the problem statement collaboratively ensures clarity across teams

This reduces friction during decision-making and ensures that all functions are working toward the same user outcome.

- Make Small but Specific Changes

Refinement doesn’t always require a complete rewrite—small, focused edits can significantly improve clarity and direction.

- Focus the context more narrowly

Example: Instead of “Users struggle with onboarding,” a refined version could specify “First-time mobile users struggle to complete onboarding in under 3 minutes.”

- Clarify emotional or social needs

Adding phrases like “to feel confident” or “without embarrassment” brings out the user’s internal motivations.

- Make the outcome more measurable

Statements that include measurable outcomes allow teams to define success more clearly during testing and validation.

Before and After Example:

- Before: “Students struggle with time management.”

This version is vague, broad, and lacks contextual details.

- After: “When college students balance academics and part-time jobs, they need a smart planner that adapts to daily schedule changes because missing deadlines adds stress and reduces performance.” This revised statement adds specificity to the situation, clarifies the user’s need, and defines the emotional and performance-related consequences. It also creates a clearer basis for designing and prioritizing features.

“Activity:Problem Statement Workshop”

Split students into small groups and hand each a short user research scenario or persona. Using the data provided, each group will draw a statement by following the framework of “When…they need…because…” Next, they will evaluate how well the proxy metric correlates with a test business outcome (e.g., increasing engagement, or more sign-ups). Teams will iterate through their statement with some peer feedback so that make sure it’s clear, focused and business aligned. Finally, each group will have describe their original and revised app, and why they decided to make I or not make changes. This exercise assists students to transition from knowing theorectically what a comma does to being able to apply this rule in real life.

3.7 Summary

❖ **Problem framing is the cornerstone to start-up innovation, which ensures that teams solve a well-defined, user-validated problem that contributes to the ultimate business goals.**

❖ **Bad PMF is a result of bad problem definition and leads to wasted resources, misaligned product features, and lack of achieving product-market fit.**

❖ **The Jobs to Be Done framework is useful for identifying functional, emotional and social motivations of users and disruptive innovation.**

❖ **Startups can develop MVPs that would deliver direct user value and remove the unwanted features by understanding core jobs, pains and gains.**

❖ **Consumer personas draw out behavioral, demographic and psychographic characteristics to give a human face to the actual users, guiding product choices with empathy and accuracy.**

❖ **Personas aiding in validating MVP by centering design and gathering feedback around the proper segments of the target audience as well.**

❖ **Competition analysis allows startups to identify direct and indirect competitors, benchmark core features, as well as find gaps and whitespace in the market.**

❖ **Persona boards visually capture persona information and JTBD insights for use across teams in a product development context.**

❖ **Effective problem statements are focused on the user, support business objectives, and evolve as more iterations and feedback is captured.**

3.8 Key Terms

1. Problem Framing – The process of clearly defining the user problem that a product or service aims to solve.

2. Jobs to Be Done (JTBD) – A framework that explains customer behavior by identifying the "job" they hire a product to complete.

3. Pains and Gains – Challenges users face (pains) and the benefits they seek (gains) when trying to get a job done.

4. Consumer Persona – A fictional yet research-based profile that represents a target user group's characteristics, goals, and behaviors.

5. Behavioral Traits – Patterns in how users interact with products or services, such as usage frequency and decision-making style.

6. Psychographic Traits – User values, aspirations, lifestyles, and motivations that influence product preferences.

7. Benchmarking – Comparing competitor offerings to evaluate features, user experience, and positioning.

8. Differentiation – Unique value propositions or experiences that set a product apart from its competitors.

9. Persona Board – A visual representation of a customer persona combining JTBD insights, traits, and usage context.

10. Problem Statement – A structured summary of a user's unmet need, framed in a way that guides product development and innovation.

3.9 Descriptive Questions

1. Explain why problem framing is essential in early-stage product development. Provide an example of a well-framed problem statement.

2. Discuss the common pitfalls of poor problem definition and how they can affect product-market fit.

3. Define the JTBD framework and explain how it differs from traditional demographic-based segmentation.

4. Describe the process of identifying jobs, pains, and gains for a user persona using JTBD.

5. What are the key components of a consumer persona? How do behavioral and psychographic traits enhance persona depth?

6. How can startups use personas to validate MVP features and prioritize user feedback?

7. Differentiate between direct and indirect competitors. How can identifying both influence product strategy?

8. What is benchmarking in competitive analysis? Describe how it helps uncover innovation opportunities.

9. Explain how a persona board integrates JTBD insights. What role does it play in cross-functional product development?

10. Describe the iterative process of refining a problem statement. How can it evolve after MVP testing?

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3.11 Case Study

"How Spotify Used JTBD & Personas to Refine Its Value Proposition"

Introduction

Spotify did not become popular just because it had a lot of songs. The thing that really made Spotify successful was that it figured out what people wanted and needed. Spotify looked at what people were doing. Why they were doing it. They made a list of the kinds of things that people were trying to accomplish when they used Spotify. By doing this Spotify was able to make its service better. Spotify is not a place to listen to music. It is a way for people to manage their mood be more productive find music and show others what they like. Spotify is a platform that helps people do all these things. The music streaming service Spotify is really good, at understanding what people want to do when they use it. This case study explores how Spotify used JTBD and personas to identify core user jobs, solve real problems, and differentiate itself in an increasingly competitive market.

Background

Launched in 2008, Spotify quickly disrupted traditional music consumption by allowing users to stream music on demand. However, as competitors like Apple Music, YouTube Music, and Amazon Music entered the scene, Spotify needed to go beyond functional access to songs and create emotional and contextual value for users.

To do this, Spotify turned to JTBD methodology and persona development. Rather than segmenting users solely by age or geography, it focused on what people were trying to achieve when they opened the app—whether it was staying focused, energizing a workout, discovering new artists, or relaxing after work.

Spotify used insights from usage analytics, user interviews, and emotional mapping to uncover the true drivers behind music consumption and redesign its product experience around those jobs.

Problem Statement 1: Users Felt Overwhelmed by Infinite Choice

JTBD Insight:

When I want to listen to music, I require assistance choosing something that matches my mood or activity; when it takes me no time extolling the virtues of myself in a way that leaves me instantly satisfied.

Pain Point:

With millions of songs to choose from, subscribers — especially new ones — were paralyzed by their options. Men and women were not able to make rapid decisions of what they wanted to listen based on the classical interface, which is guided by albums or artist names since it did not fit their everyday life (for example when driving or working).

Solution:

Spotify added personalized playlists such as Discover Weekly, Daily Mixes and Made for You. These were generated algorithmically by taking into account listening history, time of day, device and even context cues (for example whether the listener used headphones or speakers).

Persona Alignment:

• Name: Tara Age: 26 Profession: Young Professional

• Context: Listens to music on train to relax

• Job: Looking for mood-matching playlists with minimum fuss

• Feature Outcome: By pairing news snippets with calming music, “Your Daily Drive” takes one less decision off the busy mixed martial artist’s plate and helps her ease into her day.

Problem 2: Users Couldn’t Easily Find New Music They Enjoyed

JTBD Insight:

When it comes to music, I like finding out about songs that fit my taste so I can update my playlists and wow friends.

Pain Point:

Users tended to return to the same songs or artists, confounded by how to discover new music that they might actually like. Conventional recommendation engines often seemed impersonal or generic.

Solution:

Spotify optimized its algorithm through methods such as collaborative filtering, natural language processing and behavioral clusters. The two-hour Discover Weekly playlist, which launched in July 2015, was intended to surface songs tailored for an individual based on other users like them and listening history.

Persona Alignment:

• Persona: Jordan, age 21, in college.

- Context: Studies and socializes by playing music
- Job: Seeking new tracks to correlate with his changing mood

• Feature Outcome: Jordan lives for the Mondays when his Discover Weekly updates, and regularly shares what he has found with friends – increased social engagement.

PS3: Users Activity and Music Experience are not Coherent given Perhaps the most crucial one is that the users' music experience did not fit their activity.

JTBD Insight:

When I'm running or studying, I seek music that undergirds my activity without distracting me from it; subtly accelerates or calms me to help me stay in flow and be productive.

Pain Point:

Manual searching and toggling required from users, to find or switch between the playlists as per their needs. The app was not originally designed for contextually based listening, such as "workouts" or during focus sessions or relaxation.

Solution:

Spotify introduced activity- and mood-based browsing, so users could easily find playlists that fit categories such as Workout, Chill, Focus, and Party. It later added Spotify Running, which changed a song's tempo to conform with the listener's running pace.

Persona Alignment:

• Identity: Neha, 34, fitness freak and entrepreneur

• Context: Motivates herself to work out with music every day

• Job: Need music to match her intensity and help motivate her Sponsored These women all have individual fitness goals.

• Feature Outcomes: Neha paces herself; Spotify generates a beat-matched workout playlist for her on the fly—reducing friction, increasing stickiness.

Conclusion

Spotify smartly leveraged Jobs to Be Done and user personas. This helped Spotify shift from just a large library of songs to a friend that knows everything about you and your personal music tastes. If Spotifys music cohort helps get people through their days according to their temperaments and aims them at what they want with a friend, fine. Every insight into a Job to Be Done helped Spotify understand what people really wanted, and produce features that felt like they were created for them knew they were doing and became habit. Jobs to Be Done insights from Spotify has been really helpful when making these features. Through the combination of an understanding of user needs and business objectives, in this case retention, engagement and share-ability Spotify established a position as the leader in music streaming without needing to depend on owning content or being competitive around pricing alone.

Case Related Questions

1. How did Spotify use JTBD to shift from a content-first to a context-first product experience?

2. What role did personas play in Spotify's feature design and user experience strategies?

3. Choose one of Spotify's features (e.g., Discover Weekly or Your Daily Drive). What job is it solving? How does it align with both user goals and business objectives?

4. How might Spotify continue refining its value proposition using emerging user jobs (e.g., for podcasts, wellness, or education)?

5. Can you identify a potential new user persona Spotify could target? What job might this persona need help with, and what feature could support it?

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Unit 4: Creative Ideation and Concept Generation

Learning Objectives

1. Define and utilize several ideation methods (brainstorming, SCAMPER, mind mapping) for creating and organizing ideas.
2. Differentiate between divergent and convergent thinking and describe how they are related to creative problem solving and product development.
3. Use the Double Diamond to ensure your innovation process goes from identifying the right challenges through to delivering the solution.
4. Apply formalised creativity tools to shift from abstract ideas to something which can be actioned, increasing the quality of ideation.
5. Examine case studies of creative ideas and iterative improvements that resulted in successful product-or service-based innovation.
6. Play with the balance of expansive thinking and focused decision making, translate it into entrepreneurship or project settings."
7. Develop the skills to lead creative workshops or design sprints with proven methods and tools.

Content

4.0 Introductory Caselet

4.1 Ideation Techniques

4.2 Divergent vs. Convergent Thinking

4.3 Double Diamond Framework

4.4 Case Studies in Creative Ideation

4.5 Summary

4.6 Key Terms

4.7 Descriptive Questions

4.8 References

4.9 Case Study

4.0 Introductory Caselet

"From Leftovers to Logistics: How QuickFix Reimagined Urban Errands"

QuickFix started life as a concierge app for urban users (largely professional women) in their lives easier by scheduling home services like cleaning, AC repairs and laundry pickup. The founding team actually thought they could differentiate themselves in a cluttered space like Europe by having faster booking and better service partner reviews. But in early trials, the app did not catch on. For most users, either they did not download it, or if they downloaded it, they did not make a second booking.

Baffled by poor engagement, the team went into the field to interview users and rethink its approach. Rather than beginning with the generation of features, they started a series of structured ideation workshops that included tools such as SCAMPER, mind mapping, and divergent brainstorming. But to our surprise in one of the sessions, a user observation shined through:

"I hope there's someone who can just go pick up my dry cleaning or take my charger to a friend of mine."

This led to a reframing of the problem — from service aggregator to hyperlocal logistical errands.

The fresh concept, QuickFix Genie, was based on immediate task assignment for everyday unscheduled work. Two months after launching the MVP, order volume was three times larger. What began as a utility app that didn't quite cut it, transformed into a dynamic errands platform, driven through ideation tools that unearthed user need.

Critical Thinking Question

If QuickFix had only used traditional market research instead of creative ideation tools, what critical user insight might they have missed? How can divergent thinking during ideation challenge the team's initial assumptions?

4.1 Ideation Techniques

4.1.1 Brainstorming – Generating a Wide Range of Ideas

Brainstorming is a foundational ideation technique used across industries to unlock creativity and generate a broad spectrum of potential solutions. It is especially valuable in the early stages of product development or problem-solving, when the goal is to move beyond conventional thinking and surface as many ideas as possible. By creating an open, judgment-free environment, brainstorming helps teams explore unexpected directions, spark collaboration, and identify innovative possibilities that may not emerge through structured analysis alone.

A well-conducted brainstorming session is rooted in divergent thinking, where the emphasis is on the volume and diversity of ideas rather than their immediate quality or feasibility. The goal is not to select the best idea on the spot but to open up the creative space before narrowing down later through evaluation.

Core Principles of Effective Brainstorming:

• More > Better (At First)

At this point, it's go time – and volume is more important than how "good" (or realistic) the ideas are.

• The reasoning is that more ideas can generate a larger base for potential breakthroughs.

• Example: A team working on user onboarding would brainstorm a list of 50 ways to do that, from AI tutorials to funny animations, without filtering for feasibility.

• No Judgment

We must be able to express ourselves without judgment, which is part of the reason we need this group so badly. Unconventional ideas are even encouraged.

• The burden of judgment in idea generation may tend to stifle and inhibit creativity.

• Example: During a session on boosting app engagement, the idea that "a holographic assistant" might be an outlandish proposition could serve as the seeds of inspiration for a new feature, like a virtual guide.

• Wilds Ideas Welcome

Wacky suggestions also can prompt creative solutions or new ways to think about the problem.

• The concept of Kintsukuroi can help challenge preconceived notions and change attitudes, freeing up the flow of creativity.

• Example: During a brainstorming session for how to decrease cart abandonment, one person might propose "a teleportation-based delivery," which prompts the group to think through real-time delivery tracking and instant checkout experiences. • Build on Others' Ideas

Collaboration is essential. Even better – participants should listen, and then build on ideas by contributing additions or changes.

• Prompts such as "Yes, and…" develop energy and layered thinking.

• Example: One commenter proposes "badges for completing tasks"; another adds to it with "a leaderboard to induce some friendly competition."

• Keep Topic as the Focus

The session can be as creative as people want, it just needs a focus or problem.

• This keeps ideas timely and tied into the team's goals.

• Example: If the session will focus on increasing customer retention, then ideas around marketing outreach or loyalty incentives might be pertinent, but new product concepts would likely go off-topic.

Formats:

Various formats are used for brainstorming, which can be adapted to team size, character and the relevant process. The right format may improve participation and creativity.

• Solo Brainstorming

The participants' generate their own individual ideas, then group together to compare them.

• Reduces groupthink and ensures that quieter voices are heard.

• Example: Team members take 10 minutes to write their ideas in isolation before gathering with others around a table for sharing.

• Round-Robin

Players submit one idea at a time, taking turns to ensure everyone's voice is heard.

• Protects against those who are louder from dominating and gives everyone their turn.

• (For example: In a group of six, each person offers one idea per round for five rounds, or at least 30 original suggestions.)

• Silent Brainstorming"When you are in a meeting and everybody's loud, the only people whose ideas I am going to hear [are] the loudest people."

Thoughts are recorded quietly on sticky notes or digital platforms, posted and organized.

• Lowers the pressure, gives more thoughtful input and prevents initial discussion bias.

• Example: On Miro or Google Jamboard, team members anonymously submit ideas under categories like “Features,” “UX” or “Retention.”

Tools:

Physical as well as digital tools are available that assist brainstorming and facilitate an effective idea capturing and organization.

- whiteboards and stick notes

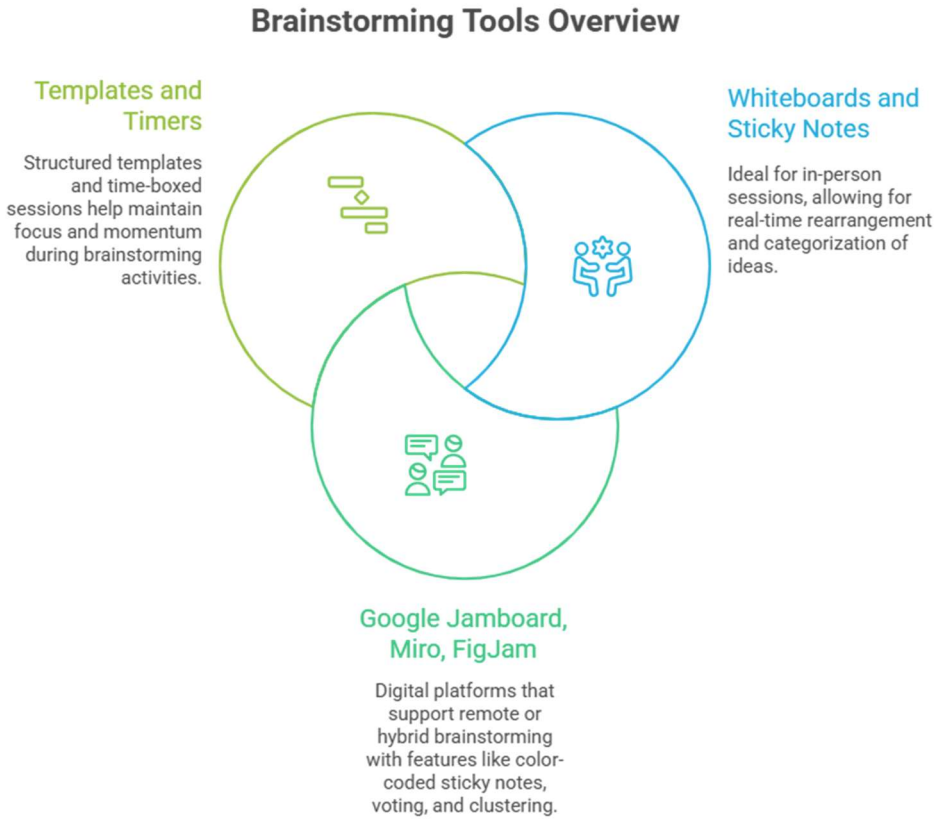
Great for face to face groups; cut - out and organize during live sessions.

- Google Jamboard, Miro, FigJam

Online resources that enable remote or hybrid brainstorming that offer virtual sticky notes with color coding, voting and clustering.

- Templates and Timers

Templates and sessions keep you focused, and your brain on task.



Example Use Case:

A startup looking to boost user engagement tosses together a brainstorm involving product managers, marketers, and UX designers. They start with the prompt: “How might we drive daily returning users to the app?”

- Ideas can vary from gamified check-in rewards, personalized daily content, AI-powered reminders, to social challenges.

- Aspects which are more progressive, such as “a digital pet that grows depending on how much one exercises” are also encouraged, they could be source of inspiration for future versions or hybrid a solution.

- These ideas then are later organized, discussed and narrowed down for the evaluation process but the brainstorming itself is open ended, exploratory, and without judgement.

4.1.2 SCAMPER Technique for Idea Transformation

How Does SCAMPER Work?SCAMPER is a step-by-step process, best used by a group in order to expedite innovative ideas or solutions using the framework. Instead of starting with a white page, SCAMPER is a way to get your thinking started: applying seven different lenses on the creative problem. Each lens challenges the team to consider things differently from before—they might be a product feature, a process, or how a user interacts. This is highly useful when iterating on your MVP or improving features which are under-adopted or low-engaging.

SCAMPER is particularly valuable in situations where radical ideas are difficult to generate, but incremental innovation can make a meaningful impact. It’s a practical tool that stimulates creative thinking through targeted prompts and is often used in collaborative sessions where team members explore variations together.

Each Letter in SCAMPER Represents a Prompt for Idea Transformation:

- S – Substitute

Consider replacing one part of the product or process with something else to achieve a better result or solve a limitation.

- What can you replace in the product, process, or business model?

• Example: In a food delivery app, replacing humans with AI chatbots as customer service agents who respond to any and all FAQs can reduce resource expenditure for response times down the cost helm.

• Example: In a tangible product, replacing plastic packaging with biodegradable material increases sustainability appeal.

• C – Combine

Combine at least two functions, features or ideas to yield a new one, or something that is more valuable.

• What combination of ideas, attributes or actions can be combined to get a new result?

• Example: Marrying music playlists with a workout tracking feature in a fitness app results in more immersive user engagements.

• Example: A to-do list app that integrates with your calendar for time-blocking techenson the art of planning.

• A – Adapt

Tweak the product by stealing from other environments, industries or user behaviors.

• Cupping every human the future has hands on: What can you nudge or steal from other industries?

• Example: An app for meditation reinventing mobile gaming gamification to help players be more consistent in their practices.

• Example: A banking app deployed progress bars and badges borrowed from education to stimulate savings behavior.

• M – Modify

Modify the dimensions, scale, appearance or function of an element to meet your requirements or enhance usability.

• Can you scale, shape or alter the function?

• Example: Adapting an e-reader interface to older users that reads books with larger text and also provides voice support.

)Example: A ride-hailing application that adjusts its user interface for use in low-bandwidth environments by providing a “light” mode. • P – Put to Another Use

Reuse a product, feature or process for a new use case or user segment.

• Is the concept applicable to some other situation?

- Example: A tool for managing to-dos repurposed by students and teachers to manage class assignments.
- Example: Recycling QR code-based menus provided by restaurants to create digital catalogs for pop-up retail stores.

- E – Eliminate

Identify parts that can be removed to simplify the product and reduce user friction or operational cost.

- What can be removed or simplified?

- Example: Eliminating the login requirement for first-time users in an e-commerce app to speed up browsing.

- Example: Removing underused filters in a search feature to reduce cognitive load. • R – Reverse/Rearrange

Change the order, layout, or direction of a process or feature to explore better configurations.

- Can the order be flipped or parts restructured?

- Example: In an online course platform, reversing the flow to show the outcomes before listing course content increases perceived value.

- Example: Rearranging the checkout flow so that address input comes after showing available delivery slots.

Benefits of SCAMPER:

- Encourages Incremental Innovation When Radical Ideation Is Difficult

It enables product teams to evolve existing concepts without needing breakthrough ideas from scratch.

- Helps Generate Ideas from Existing Products or Problems

By focusing on known issues or stagnant features, teams can find fresh angles to improve value.

- Ideal for Refining MVPs or Rethinking Features with Low Adoption

When specific features aren't performing, SCAMPER provides a structured way to explore why and how they could be improved or reimagined.

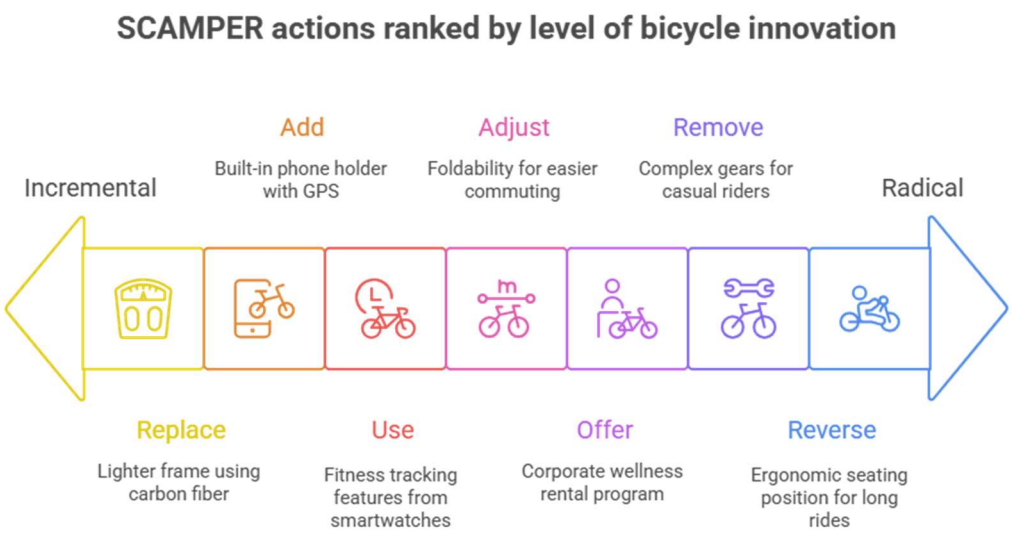
Example Application: Traditional Bicycle Product

A product team uses SCAMPER to explore ways to innovate on a traditional bicycle:

- Substitute: Replace steel with carbon fiber for a lighter frame.
- Combine: Add a built-in phone holder with GPS navigation.
- Adapt: Use fitness tracking features inspired by smartwatches to monitor rides.
- Modify: Adjust the design to include foldability for commuters.
- Put to Another Use: Offer the bike as part of a corporate wellness rental program.

- Eliminate: Remove complex gear systems for casual riders to simplify usability.

- Reverse/Rearrange: Reverse the rider's posture to create a more ergonomic seating position for long rides.



4.1.3 Mind Mapping for Visual Idea Exploration

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What is mind mapping? Mind mapping is a creative and logical means of note-taking and note-making that literally "maps out" your ideas. It enables teams to branch from a central idea and expand into an interconnected web of related ideas, themes, and solutions. While linear lists create rigidity, but over time mind maps offer relief and flexibility that pushes participants to think big and possibly uncover some un-thought of connections. This is particularly powerful at every early stage of ideation process, when you're not focused on decluttering rather expanding your thoughts even wider.

Mind mapping encourages divergent thinking (generating an array of ideas from one), but also allows for convergent thinking (connecting various thoughts to a center point). It may be employed by the individual for private brainstorming and in workshops to help a team converge on the entire ecosystem of an issue.

Core Elements of Mind Mapping:

• Central Node You start a mindmap with one word, sentence or question that is placed in the centre of your page / canvas.

• Example: For a health-based startup, the central node could be “Improving Sleep Quality.”

• This is to keep all stems connected back into the focal point!

• Branches

Lines of thick and bold branches shoot out from the central node to represent major themes or categories. These are the most important parts of the problem or opportunity.

• Example: For the sleep challenge, branches could help guide you in areas like environment, lifestyle, technology, diet and medical support. • Sub-Branches

Second and third branches extend from each primary branch with more specific or detailed concepts.

• For example, in a category environment may be subcategories noise reduction, room temperature control, light dimming systems and bedding quality.

• These layers are ways of unpacking tough problems into practical, managable ideas.

Advantages of Mind Mapping:

• Great for Visual Learners and Think In Pattern.

Viewing ideas in a visual, interconnected way enables participants to understand the big picture in a way that’s more intuitive than reading lists or paragraphs.

• Example: A design team about to tackle sustainability can immediately see how “packaging,” “supply chain,” and “consumer behavior” fit together.

• Identifies Affiliations and Artistic Hollows

The mind map allows for flow so the patterns of connection can bubble up where perhaps there were only vacuums before.

• Example: To map “urban commuting,” making safety and lighting infrastructure connections may spawn cross-departmental solutions.

• Makes it Easy to Handle Complex Issues in Smaller Groups

Big problems can seem insurmountable; mind maps break them down to small topics that you can lose yourself in.

• Example: A business brainstorming a “global market expansion” can cut that challenge into language adaptation, logistics, pricing models and legal frameworks.

Best Practices:

• Differentiate Categories and Ideas Using Keywords, Icons and Colors

Visual variation makes it easier for the brain to take in and remember ideas.

• For instance: Use branches of green leaves to indicate environmental factors; blue for technology; and red for pain points. • Keep Branches Short and Single-Topic (One Line One Idea)

interpretation.

• Example : Forgo "We will improve bus reliability by installing GPS trackers" in favor of real time bus tracking.

• Employ Free Association: Instead of Overthinking, Let Your Mind Wander

Mind maps are most effective when ideas can flow freely, with no filter, and without fear of criticism.

• Example: As you're mapping for "remote work," one sub-branch could unexpectedly run from home office

→ furnishings → ergonomics → subscription-based service for desks.

Application Example: Urban Ride Sky-bike The Problem: Commute to work in the city.

, "Improving Urban Commutes") and would have a mind map that is something like this: • Central Node: Improving Urban Commutes

• Branches:

o Affordability → public subsidies, shared ride passes, low-cost bike rentals o Safety → better lighting, women-only transport, emergency alerts o Environmental Impact → electric buses, bike lanes, carpool incentives o Convenience → mobile apps, real-time tracking, ride-sharing, smart scheduling o Data Integration → city dashboards, open APIs predictors traffic models

This non-linear exploration enables teams to explore how themes like convenience and data integration overlap, sparking ideas such as "predictive bus arrival notifications."

4.1.4 Other Structured Creativity Tools

Beyond brainstorming, SCAMPER, and mind mapping, there are several additional tools designed to structure creative thinking and make ideation more effective. These tools are especially helpful when teams get stuck or need to shift their mental models.

Notable Structured Creativity Techniques:

- Six Thinking Hats (Edward de Bono) o Each "hat" represents a mode of thinking:

1

➢ White: Facts and data

➢ Red: Emotions and feelings

➢ Black: Caution and risk

➢ Yellow: Optimism and benefits

➢ Green: Creativity and alternatives

➢ Blue: Process and control o Helps teams explore multiple perspectives systematically.

- Crazy 8s

o A fast sketching exercise where participants draw 8 ideas in 8 minutes.

o Emphasizes speed and visual thinking to break mental blocks.

- Reverse Brainstorming o Instead of asking "How do we solve this?", ask "How could we make this worse?"

o By identifying what would worsen the problem, teams can invert ideas into creative solutions.

- Role Storming

o Team members take on roles (e.g., customer, competitor, investor) and generate ideas from that perspective.

o Helps remove ego and fear of judgment while increasing empathy.

• What If Scenarios o Explore wild hypotheses: “What if our app could talk?”, “What if we only had one feature?”

These tools not only increase idea quantity but also enhance idea quality by challenging standard thinking patterns and team dynamics.

“Activity: Ideation Challenge Workshop”

To start we need to divide the learners into teams. Each team will get a product like a water bottle or a food delivery app or a digital calendar.

The teams have to use three tools to come up with ideas for their product: brainstorming and SCAMPER and mind mapping.

They should write down how their ideas change and then present one idea that they think is really good.

This idea should come from using all three of the tools

We should also ask the teams to think about how each tool helped them think about their product in a way.

The teams should look at how brainstorming and SCAMPER and mind mapping each helped them come up with ideas, for their product like the water bottle or the food delivery app or the digital calendar. This activity will help learners experience both structured and divergent thinking while comparing the effectiveness of ideation frameworks.

4.2 Divergent vs. Convergent Thinking

4.2.1 Divergent Thinking – Expanding Possibilities

Divergent thinking is really important for coming up with ideas. The goal of thinking is to think of as many ideas as you can without worrying if they are good or bad at first. This is different from types of thinking that try to find the best solution right away. Divergent thinking is about being open to new things and exploring different possibilities. It helps people and teams to think outside the box and come up with ideas that they might not have thought of otherwise. Divergent thinking can lead to exciting solutions that can be developed and improved later on. The divergent thinking process is very useful for problem-solving and it can be very helpful, in many situations. This approach is especially valuable in early ideation phases, when startups or product teams are still exploring directions for MVPs, features, or business pivots.

Core Characteristics of Divergent Thinking

- Volume of Ideas vs Immediate Validity

The question isn't if an idea is practical, but how many alternatives can be developed. The broader the pool of ideas, the greater the likelihood of finding breakthrough insights.

- Example: On designing a new ride-hailing app, the team does not stop with cars and bikes but also thinks in terms of drones, boats, carpools or even robotic delivery pods. While many of them might not be possible yet, they broaden the imagination.

- Space Free of Judgment

Safe Cognition breaks when participants do not feel safe to suggest radical or opposing ideas which in turn impedes divergent thinking. Premature judgment closes out creativity.

• Example: In a session on the how to make e-learning better, one participant proposes "AI avatars as personal tutors." Even if that sounds pie-in-the-sky, it could lead to features like interactive chatbots or peer-topeer mentoring.

- Lateral and Associative Thought

Many ideas are born by way of linking unrelated thoughts or changing viewpoints. Analogies, metaphors and emotional triggers are essential.

• Example: A team building a travel solution might look to dating apps as an inspiration, asking "What if planning a trip were like swiping for matches?" That could result in a feature where users swipe through recommended itineraries.

• Emphasis on Novelty

But the more bizarre or unconventional an idea is, the more valuable it can be to breaking us free from habitual patterns. Even far-out concepts can spawn more realistic inventions down the road.

• Example: When thinking about banking, someone suggests "What if the ATM machine gave us time instead of money?" And while symbolic, such a notion could enable services such as time-saving concierge features or instantaneous on-the-go personal banking services.

Divergent Thinking Techniques

• Brainstorming

Teams brainstorm ideas together in a way that emphasizes quantity over quality, deferring judgment.

• Example: A gaming company's revenue models might include ads, in-app purchases, premium passes and user-created content — or even NFT-based collectibles.

• Mind Mapping

Visually illustrates a core idea and branches outward so you can explore related categories and subcategories.

• Example: A project on "Healthy Eating" could lead to meal kits, apps, restaurants, wearables and then further branch into AI diet tracking, or social cooking groups.

• SCAMPER

Uses structured prompts (Substitute, Combine, Adapt, Modify, Put to another use, Eliminate, Rearrange) to stretch their thinking beyond existing ideas.

• Example: A bookstore could use SCAMPER to transition into an online subscription model, or pair sales with author podcasts, or cut out physical checkouts through the use of RFID-based automation.

• Creative Prompts

"What if?" or "How might we?" questions encourage breaking existing assumptions.

• Example: The question "What if the users designed that product?" in the fashion industry might be user-driven customization platforms like Nike By You.

Example in Action

A food delivery startup leverages divergent thinking to identify potential new growth opportunities: • Central Question: “What can we deliver other than food?”

• Generated Ideas:

o Grocery delivery to support daily household use. o Bring prescriptions to your doorstep for convenient care. o Drop off clothing to launder or dry clean for urban professionals. o Drop off misplaced items from home or office like, charger, keys.

o Act as a carrier of packages or important documents instead of using messengers.

But even as not every idea is acted on, some — such as Swiggy Genie in India — have turned into deft business pivots that show the power of beginning with open-ended, unfettered thinking.

Benefits of Divergent Thinking

• Fuels Innovation and Risk-Taking

It’s a way for teams to test out ideas without risk, and it often leads to disruptive innovations.

• Netflix’s transformation from DVD rental service to streaming giant was, during its initial stages — when the physical rental business still ruled the world — an audacious idea.

• Surfaces Unconventional or Disruptive Thinking

The best ideas are often the ones hatched from seemingly silly proposals.

• Example: The idea of updating car software over the air, first introduced by Tesla, used to seem radical but now is standard across the industry.

• Internal Team Creative Confidence Source

Nurturing all ideas This encourages the value of everyone’s contributions and make people more comfortable thinking out loud.

• Aids to Break Away from Mental Ruts and Existing Cognitive Systems

It’s a challenge to “we’ve always done it that way” thinking.

Example: Airbnb reimaged acommodation by moving from hotels to peer-to-peer, which at first seemed far too risky but unlocked massive market desire.

Do you know?

“Starting in the 1950s, when a psychologist named J.P. Guilford first coined the term 'divergent thinking,' divergent thinking was conceived as an alternative to traditional IQ tests which unbelievably measured only convergent thinking (on coming up with one correct answer for each question). His research revealed that creativity — measured as ideational fluency — was

not related to IQ, undermining the longstanding claim that intelligence alone is central to innovation. Divergent thinking has gone on to play a fundamental role in design thinking and innovation models."

4.2.2 Convergent Thinking – Narrowing Down Solutions

While divergent thinking seeks to explore ideas, convergent thinking instead offers clarity and structure to the idea generation process. It's the point at which teams discard the majority of ideas that have been generated for a program and zero in on those that are doable, feasible, strategically aligned. This ensures that resources are spent judiciously and among the promising ideas, some should be selected for prototyping, testing and execution.

Convergent thinking is directly related to logic, structured decision-making process, and analytical frameworks. Instead of squelching creativity, it "focuses" our work, pushing ideas from the whiteboard to execution.

Core Characteristics of Convergent Thinking

• Focused and SelectiveConvergent thinking narrows options by applying filters such as technical feasibility, cost, market fit or strategic relevance.

• Example: From a list of 40 ideas for an e-commerce app, the team can discard things like drone delivery (too expensive) and focus on features such as "real-time delivery tracking" that serve both customer desires and business needs. • Decision-Oriented

The aim then is to reach a combinatorial point, i.e., the one where a choice between one or few solutions from the full set of possible ones can be made.

• Example: A SaaS team is considering whether to invest in building a dark mode UI or building feature for better team collaboration and company choose the latter because it is something that high demand of enterprise customers.

• Analytical Skills

Trade-offs, risks and dependencies are analysed, and decisions made – intuition is not enough.

• Illustration: A healthtech startup looking to integrate wearables might weigh costs of sensors, regulations around data security, and the risks related to scaling before proceeding with a project.

• Review of the Structured Evaluation

Teams find themselves using formal tools—such as matrices, scoring systems, or priorities framework—to serve as barriers to bias and provide objectiveness.

• Example: A feature with the highest rank in impact vs. effort is bees of Q2 ideas that are nice to have, but resource and time consuming.

Convergent Thinking Techniques

- Dot Voting (Heat Mapping)

The team members slap stickers, dots or digital markers to vote for the ideas that interest them most. It's a popular choice that indicates the strongest runners.

• Example: During a brainstorm for the mobile wallet, dot voting shows “bill reminders” and “instant loan approval” are what click with the team.

• Effort vs. Npgsql vs Ntvs pull the most impactful allies to help when meting out bonuses in social and development challenges.

The axis represents 'impact' (user/business value) and 'effort' (time/resources). Quick wins stand out.

• Example: A streaming app maps features such as “offline downloads” (high impact, medium effort) and “AI-generated lyrics” (low impact, high effort). The matrix emphasizes downloads as a focus. • Feasibility-Desirability-Viability (FDV) Each idea examined throughout the lenses:

- Desirable: Does it address a significant user need?
- Feasible: Is it manufacturable with today’s technology and expertise?

• Feasible: Is it going to be economical for us?

- Example: For a language-learning app, “AI pronunciation coach” might score high on all three; “VR travel simulation” might score low on feasibility and viability.
- Idea Scoring Rubrics

Additional score criteria are dynamically added and a numeric rating is given for marked ideas (ie, on scalability, user appeal and revenue potential).

• Example: A fintech upstart rates features on a scale of 1 to 5. “Instant account opening” gets 18/20, and “crypto wallet integration” scores in at 10/20 so the choice is easy. • SWOT Analysis

Analysis of SWOT (Strength, Weakness, Opportunities and Threats) are done for every shortlisted ideas.

- E.g. to implement a referral program in a health app:

o Strength: Organic growth o Weakness: Risk of discount manipulation o Opportunity: User base will grow fast o Threat: Competitors can easily copy

Example in Action

A food delivery startup hosts a session of divergent thinking and comes up with 25 features to potentially increase customer loyalty and engagement. These include:

- Order streak gamification
- Subscriptions discounts
- Live kitchen video feeds • Drone deliveries
- Live tracking of your orders

• Personalised meal recommendations backed by AI

They work toward actionable solutions using convergent thinking tools:

- Dot Voting: The team votes and chooses “real-time tracking,” “subscription discounts” and “meal personalization” as their top picks.

• FDV Analysis:

o Real-time tracking - This feature is something that users want to have, is feasible due to GPS and possible with low-cost.

• Subscription discounts – attractive to heavy users, possible with current payment methods, feasible for increasing revenue.

o Drone deliveries – It’s sexy yet neither practicable nor profitable at this point.

- Effort vs. Impact Matrix: Real time reminder is labelled as a quick win (low effort, high impact), while personalization is medium effort but still important.

Ultimate Decision: The startup focuses on features like live order tracking and subscription discounts, part of its MVP roadmap to guarantee user value and business-value alignment.

Benefits of Convergent Thinking

- Keeps Teams from Getting Stuck in Analysis Paralysis

When it's crowded with ideas serves as clarity and direction.

- Helps in Proper Allocation of Resources

Time, money and talent are spent on solutions that offer the greatest return.

- Connects Ideas to Strategic Implementation

Guarantees that selected solutions meet both user and business requirements.

- Facilitates Collaborative Decision Making

Structured processes temper bias and ensure everyone’s voice is heard, leading to consensus.

4.2.3 Balancing of Divergent and Convergent Techniques

Real innovation doesn't arise from brainstorming random thoughts or selecting the most rational ones — it requires a balance of divergent and convergent thinking. Divergent thinking allows teams to brainstorm widely, whereas convergent thinking allows them to screen, consider and prioritise those ideas. Employed together and in rotation, these modes of thinking are what prevent creative fastballs from being thrown away and execution from being relegated to the safe or easy. The tension results in a process of innovation that is both imaginative and rigorous."

Importance of Balance

• Divergent and Without ConvergentIf teams diverge but do not reconvene, then they run the risk of generating idea upon idea without any results. This leads to idea overload, wasted resources and the team still being in exploration mode.

• Example: A startup has weekly brain storming meetings to "improve customer engagement" but never funnels a subset of ideas. After months, they had 200 suggestions but no clear road map — and wasted time and frustrations.

• (Convergent No Divergent And …) >

An overemphasis on convergent thinking squelches creativity and results in groupthink or copycat ideas. The team may jump too soon at what feels "safe."

• Example: An e-commerce business skips an open brainstorm and decides to optimize "discount coupons" because it worked once. They lack anything truly bold, such as subscription models, gamification or social shopping features that could have set them apart.

Strategies for Balancing the Two

• Design Thinking Modes

Models such as the Double Diamond (Discover → Define → Develop → Deliver) explicitly segment divergent and convergent phases.

•Example: During the Discover phase, teams do wide-ranging research and generate a set of insights. During the Define phase, they narrow down the highest priority problem. This pattern helps exploration and exploitation take turns. • Timeboxing

Balanced assignment of certain time slots to each mode prevents any stage from overtaking the other.

• Example: In the course of a design sprint, a team dedicates 90 minutes to generate as many app feature ideas as they can(cast the net wide), and then another 60 minutes scoring and shortlisting them (collecting data \/ making decision).

• Different Tools and Spaces Different tools promote the proper mindset for each phase. Divergency is creative - visual tools promotes divergence; convergency requires structured - analytical tools.

• Example: Sticky notes for brainstorming in Miro for divergence, then take those ideas and put them into a spreadsheet with scoring guide to be evaluated for convergence.

• Some have separate facilitators: one to inspire creativity, another to ensure structured decision-making.

• Feedback Loops

Iteration forms a positive loop between divergence and convergence. Teams diverge with wide exploration of ideas, converge through testing a few and re-open divergence with new learnings.

• Example: A team behind a travel app brainstorms 30 features, prototypes three of them, tests with users and discovers that “real-time local tips” is popular. They diverge once again to go create variants of the feature, but converge before launch.

• Visual Mapping

Assistant: Tools such as idea funnels, heat maps, journey maps and impact-effort grids can help teams visualize the shift from expansion to prioritization.

• Example: A hundred brainstormed ideas in an idea funnel go into a wide funnel, to be grouped into twenty themes and then filered down to five concepts that can be tested.

• Mindsets and Team Roles 17

Great teams are deliberately composed of imaginative thinkers who love divergence and is complemented by logical, analytical people with an affinity for convergence. Both are needed and recognizing the gifts of each reduces stress."

• Example: On a fintech product team, the designers and marketers lead divergence with flashy concepts for user engagement and product managers and engineers lead convergence by considering feasibility and cost.

Example Framework in Action

In a design sprint to develop an app for fitness tracking, that balance plays out step by step:

• Divergent phase: A team may perform user interviews and brainstorming to generate 50 ideas including AR-based workouts and gamified leaderboards.

• Convergent Phase: Out of dedicated voting and impact–effort matrix, they choose “personalized workout plans with AI coaching” as the best idea.

•Prototype and Test: They create a quick prototype and test it out with users.

• Re-Diverge: Feedback comes in that users also want social accountability, so the team brainstorms once more, coming up with add-ons like “friend challenges” or “shared progress boards.”

• Re-Converge: They converge again combining social accountability elements with the AI coach in the end roadmap.

This iterative tension helps to preserve balance in a solution that's creative (divergent creativy) and practical (convergent discipline).

Benefits of Balanced Thinking

• Encourages creative but practical solutions has facilitated the participation of designers and manufacturers who might not have otherwise felt confident in transporting passengers …… Change to "has encouraged Designers.

Ensures that the creative is based in reality and strategy.

• Creates Agile Teams That Can Experiment, Test, and Adapt Quickly

The cycles of Divergence and Convergence make teams adaptable without losing sight of useful change.

• Improves Collaborative Facilitation

By appreciating both divergent and convergent thinkers, the team harnesses varied accompaniments rather than fighting about process.

4.3 Double Diamond Framework

4.3.1 Discover – Understanding the Challenge

The Discover phase is the first diamond of the Double Diamond model. It is crucial for this phase to occur as it is the direction in which we need to go. We don't attempt to fix the issue in the Discover phase. Instead, we seek to understand as much as we can about the problem. We need to understand what is happening and why. The Discover phase is about trying to view things from all angles and remain open to new ideas. We did this by eating our own dog food. Try to view matters from their perspective. And we also have to question our own thoughts and concepts, about the problem. The Discover phase and the Double Diamond are things that matter. The Discover phase is a crucial part of this process. Discovering real-world behaviors, motivations and pain points helps make sure that the eventual solution is based in reality and empathy, not a guess.

Skating this stage, such that we react to symptoms rather than root issues, in turn increases the risk of wasting time and resources on features that did not address the market.

Objectives of the Discover Phase

- Reveal User Characteristics, Requirements and Motivation

Dive into the root cause of user behavior, not superficial data.

• Example: When researchers study a fitness app, they find out not only that people quit exercising after one month, but when the users lose their streaks, they feel guilty and less motivated. • Identify gaps between current solutions and real user needs

Search for mismatches — between what's on offer and what users need.

• Example: Many banking apps prioritize advanced investment features, but ethnographic research might find that low-income users just want to be able to trust their balance alerts.

- Confronting Assumptions of Team or Organisation

Teams start with lots of assumptions, that may or may not be as things actually are. Discover does not support or refute any of these premises.

•Example: A food delivery startup might think users long for "faster delivery," when the reality is that many care more about "real-time transparency about order status."

Key Techniques and Tools • User Interviews

Have one-on-one conversations to listen to users' stories, struggles, and desires in their own words.

• Example: A ridesharing app interviews its customers and discovers that the uncertainty of surge pricing is more of a hassle than long wait times.

- Ehtnographic Research

Witness how people behave and what they need in their natural environments.

- Example: Observing how families use smart speakers in their homes might lead to learning that children are heavy users, which then shapes design for voice recognition.

• Surveys and Polls

Collect big-data sets and provide a number on qualitative patterns found.

- Example: New data indicated that 65% would use a mobile application over a website when grocery shopping, supporting the shift to mobile-first design.

- Competitor and Market Analyses

Examine products in current use and their competitors to determine the strengths, weaknesses, and gaps in the market.

- Example: Maybe looking at meditation apps would show that while most have guided sessions, few target workplace stress, which could be an untapped niche.

• Stakeholder conversation • Point-of-view consultation • Workshops • Focus group interviews with stakeholders

Interface with business owners, product managers, and engineers to understand constraints & expectations.

• Example: A product manager may emphasize the importance of scale as a key constraint that will have an impact on how you design new solutions.

• Journey Mapping with the Users

Imagine where users are interacting with a task and where they get frustrated.

• Example: If you map the journey of a hospital patient, you might find bottlenecks at registration, not just during consultation.

Best Practices

• Inject Empathy and Open-Mindedness into Research

Engage actively and guide people toward not confirming something that's already in their minds.

• Resist the Pull to Recommend Premature Solutions---Lean into Exploration

Refuse to brainstorm too early. The Discover phase is not about designing the fixes; it is about collecting evidence.

• Visual Findings Reporting

Record and cluster insights in sticky notes, affinity diagrams or even digital boards (Miro or FIGJAM for example) so the team has it handy during future design debates.

Challenges

• Team Bias Can Result in Selective Hearing

“They could unconsciously be looking for information that confirms their beliefs.”

• Example: Dismissing a user complaint as a one-off instead of seeing it as larger pain point.

• Users May Not Be Able to Clearly Articulate Requirements

People frequently express problems as symptoms, not underneath causes.

• Example: A student says, “I procrastinate,” when the real problem is no structured reminders to direct them or hold them accountable!

• It can be data-heavy if not properly synthesized.

With dozens of interviews, surveys and observations teams can quickly get mired in raw data without ever getting to valuable insights.

- Solution: Group the results into themes or use things like affinity mapping.

Output of the Discover Phase

- A Wealth of Insights on Users

Uncooked and processed data on lived experience, behavior, and context.

• Evidence of Pain Points, Behaviors, and Unmet Needs

Clear explanation of what is lacking and where the opportunities are for what works now.

- Reframing Challenge in the Define Phase Foundation

A systematised insight to preparing for the next step of the Double Diamond, about tackling the right problem.

4.3.2 Define – Framing the Problem

The Define phase comes after the Discover stage in the Double Diamond model. This is where we take the information we found out and make sense of it. We make it into a problem that we can do something about. The Discover stage is about looking at lots of ideas but the Define phase is about narrowing it down. We get rid of the things that're not important find the things that are the same and make the problem clear. The goal of the Define phase is to take what we learned from the users and turn it into a problem that's, about people. This problem should be specific enough that we can do something about it but big enough that we can come up with new and interesting solutions. The Define phase is a part of the Double Diamond model and helps us to focus on the right problem. Without this step, teams risk solving the wrong problem or chasing symptoms instead of root causes.

Core Components of the Define Phase

- Insight Synthesis

Teams revisit the data collected from interviews, surveys, and observations to identify recurring patterns and contradictions. It makes sense of dispersed information.

- Example: In a transit project, many commuters cite anxiety not over the duration of travel but over unknowns about delays. It is the latter that will become a central theme for framing the problem.

- Clustering and Affinity cluster and categorize this information.

Matching feedback is aggregated visually to help uncover key pain points or trends. This is part of converting disparate insights into structured knowledge.

• Example: In creating a student productivity tool, sticky notes from the interviews might be organized into clusters labeled "time management," "motivation" and "overwhelming workload."

• Persona Refinement

Previously developed personas are infused with new insights that accurately capture the uncovered behaviors and motivations. This way at least the problem definition is validated against actual people.

• Example: A persona of "Ravi, 21, college student" can be narrowed to emphasize his use of mobile-first tools and his annoyance with apps that don't work offline.

- POV Statements

"Insights" are condensed into user-centered statements that described the fundamental need. These statements clarify who is the user, what does he want and the reason.

• Example: "If you're a busy parent, you don't have time to plan healthy meals for your family because of the time it requires and will let unhealthy takeout options run your shopping choices."

- How Might We (HMW) Questions ~ 11.

POVs turn into open-ended ideatio:n opportunities that help lead you in brainstorming – but also keep it open.

- Example: A POV about freelancers struggling to make ends meet with unpredictable income can instead become: "How might we help freelancers more effectively cope with fluctuating payments in order to build financial strength?"

Characteristics of a Good Definition of the Problem

- Grounded on User Insight: Not Assumptions

Problem statements should flow from evidence not team biases.

• Example: Instead of assuming that "users want faster delivery," research uncovers the actual problem statement — "users want real-time visibility into their order progress."

• Actionable and Nimble Cricket Risk signals have to be real time for the module to be effective: in this context, late feedback is bad feedback! Football The best wins are close-won victories-but you still need enough time to react!

Getting the right balance of these keep teams with focus but still free to be creative.

Example: “College students find it hard to stay motivated to revise every day” is specific, but broad enough to suggest gamification, AI reminders or peer accountability buttons.

- Business / Project Objectives Compliant

The specific problem must also be linked to the strategic objectives of the organisation.

- Example: If a subscription app is seeking to improve retention, a problem statement could be: “Trial users require better information on premium benefits as confusion leads to churn.

Benefits

- Aligns Cross-Functional Teams Around a Single Design Challenge

Everyone from product managers to designers works toward the same user-centered goal.

- Filters Out Noise and Focuses Resources

Helps avoid chasing every piece of feedback and instead prioritizes critical pain points.

- Sets a Measurable Target for Solution Development

A clear problem statement enables the team to measure progress against solving the identified challenge.

Common Pitfalls

- Relying on Surface-Level Symptoms Instead of Digging Into Root Causes

Teams risk framing vague problems like “students are distracted” instead of uncovering the underlying issue of “students lack tools to break study tasks into manageable steps.”

- Framing the Problem from the Company's Perspective, Not the User's

Statements like "we need to increase subscriptions" shift focus to business goals, whereas user-focused framing—"users need to understand the value of premium features"—leads to better solutions.

- Ignoring Outlier Feedback That Could Spark Innovation

Outliers sometimes reveal overlooked needs or niche opportunities.

- Example: A few early users requesting "offline mode" might represent a growing segment in lowconnectivity regions.

Output of the Define Phase

- Clear Problem Statement or POV

Example: "When young professionals commute long distances, they need ways to make productive use of time because wasted hours create frustration and stress."

- List of HMW Questions to Guide Ideation

Example: "How might we help commuters transform travel time into learning or relaxation opportunities?"

- Updated User Personas and Pain Point Summaries

Personas become sharper, capturing the refined insights that now guide the ideation stage.

4.3.3 Develop – Generating and Prototyping Ideas

The Develop phase is where teams start thinking of lots of ideas again after they have figured out what the problem is. Now they focus on finding different solutions instead of just understanding the problem. This part is much about trying new things. Teams come up with ideas draw them and make prototypes quickly. They often throw away ideas. Change them as they learn more. The Develop phase is not about making something that is finished it is, about making ideas that people can look at, test and make better. The Develop phase is really important for teams to find the solution. By prototyping early stages, teams mitigate risk and reveal usability problems before investing too much time and money in the designs.

Core Components

• Ideation Workshops

They generate as many solutions as possible, sometimes with the help of structured creativity tools like brainstorming, SCAMPER or Crazy 8s. Let the energy here be one of growth, not judgment.

• For example, a health care startup that is defining the problem as "the patients forget medication schedules" in a workshop might come up with solutions like reminder apps, smart pill bottles or family alerts.

• Ideation, Sketching and Storyboards

These visual methods let teams visualize how users would use a potential solution. Storyboards take situations and images that occur step wise, while sketches turn an abstract into something concrete.

For example, a storyboard for an app offering ride-sharing could depict a user who opens the app and specifies a destination receives recommendations on routesplitting between ride sharing and micro-mobility.

• How to Prioritize and Shortlist

After ideas are generated, they might be screened on feasibility stages, using techniques such as Feasibility–Desirability–Viability (FDV) to identify actual possibilities.

• Follow up from the brainstorm and decide which concept is best in curriculum or in terms of a learning objective – e.g., 20 concepts entered, eliminate smart pill dispenser for high manufacturing costs—short list a medication tracking with family notification because it's currently affordable, desirable solution and scalable Career Design Example: You have had trouble helping your child manage his/her medications to overcome their condition/symptoms.

- Low Fidelity Prototyping

The early designs are purposefully sketchy and prioritize function and flow over polish. Things like sketches on paper, wireframes or clickable mockups.

• Example: On a medication reminder app, the team sketches out on paper how reminders are established, what an alert looks like and how family members are alerted. These prototypes are then tested with actual patients to get feedback.

• Team Collaboration

Cross-functional collaboration makes ideas is real from design, engineering and business perspectives.

- Example: Designers draw schematic flows for an e-commerce checkout; engineers flag integration questions; and strategists evaluate revenue models.

Best Practices

• Promote Quantity Over Quality in Early Ideation Phase

More ideas simply offer more chances for outside-the-box breakthroughs. Filtering comes later.

- Leverage Timeboxing to Ensure High Energy and Pace

(Short "lively and focused" activities like 15-minute Crazy 8s sketching to help prevent over-analysis, maintain momentum, and keep everyone engaged.

- Provide a Haven for Wild Ideas

And even bad ideas can trigger good insights, if further developed by others.

- Enlist Actual Users in Input Sessions for Preliminary Sketches or Prototypes

Early user responses help gain valuable feedback and illuminate usability issues that are not always apparent from within an agency.

Output of the Develop Phase

• A Short List of 1-3 Most Promising Solution Concepts

Here's stuff that passes the desirability, feasibility and viability tests.

• Working Low Fidelity Prototypes Ready for User Testing

Examples include clickable wireframes in Figma or paper prototypes.

- Rationale for Selection of Historical Concept_^(3)

Teams keep note of why an idea was chosen and why others were thrown away, so that when the work moves on to the next stage, things make sense.

Tools Commonly Used

- Miro – useful for the collaborative ideation and mapping ideas.
- Figma, Balsamiq, Sketch, InVision -Wireframes and interactive prototypes.
- Paper, Post-its, Markers–To sketch quickly or do physical prototyping in the workshops.

Application Example

A food delivery startup frames the problem this way: "Users feel nervous as they have no idea where the order is after their order is placed." In the Develop phase:

- Ideation Workshop: the team comes up with ideas for each step-push notifications at every stage, live delivery maps, AI driven estimated times and chatbot updates
- Sketching/Storyboarding: The designers storyboard the user's flow of placing an order, viewing a real-time map of the delivery partner and receiving alerts as food is exited from a restaurant.
- Prioritization: With FDV, the team puts aside complex AI-based predictions for now but retains real-time maps and stage-adapted push notifications.

Prototyping: They make an elementary clickable Figma mock-up visualizing how users track their order.

- Collaboration: Engineers verify that GPS APIs exist, and marketers feature the capability as a trust-building differentiator.

Phase concludes with the development of a prototype for real-time order tracking, which later becomes an industry standard.

4.3.4 Deliver – Implementing and Testing Solutions

The Deliver phase is the part of the Double Diamond model. It is where we turn our ideas into things. We have already thought about lots of ideas in the Develop phase. Now we need to make them better test them and put them into action. This part is about making decisions and choosing what works best. The team takes the ideas we have been playing with. Turns them into things that actually work. We test these things with the people who will be using them to make sure they are good. Then we get everything to launch. The Deliver phase is not about getting things done. It is also about making sure that people will like what we are making and that it will be good for the business. The Deliver phase is an important part of the Double Diamond model and it is all, about the Deliver phase and how it helps us with the Deliver phase. The insights gained here often form the foundation for future iterations, making this stage cyclical rather than a one-time activity.

Core Components

- User Testing

Solutions are then tested with users through means such as usability tests, A/B testing and structured feedback sessions. The learned representations are acculumu- lated both qualitatively and quantitatively.

- Example: An e-commerce website tests 2 checkout flows (one page vs multiple steps) through A/B testing. The data demonstrates that one-page flow increases conversions by 18%.

• Iteration Cycles

Feedback is a natural part of the product. Changes are grouped using ratings, e.g. effort–impact matrix or MoSCoW (Must-have, Should-have, Could-have, Won't-have).

• Example: A ride-hailing app learns in pilot testing that users don't understand when drivers will arrive. Rather than going down the way of re-designing the entire interface, team puts in a small progress bar to make things more understandable without putting much effort.

• Pilot Launch

The MVP/solution is posted to a smaller, regulated group to test in the real world. That limits your risk before a full-blown roll-out.

• Sample use case: A fintech app rolls out its saving feature to 5,000 beta users. Their participation and retention levels determine if the feature should be rolled out to a broader base of users.

• Deployment and Handover

It also passes on finished designs and/or specifications to development, operations or production. Product teams are closely empowered, design intent is followed through in execution.

• Example: In a health care app, designers send wireframes with annotated workflows to engineers and work with compliance officers to help ensure that the app meets requirements under HIPAA.

• Impact Assessment

After launch, teams are measuring performance by tracking KPIs like engagement, conversion rates, retention and satisfaction. Such learning is then utilized to find product-market fit.

- Ex: A language learning app uses daily actives, lesson completions, and NPS to test whether their MVP is addressing the problem they've defined.

Challenges

- Surprising [Technical] Limitations

Some things end up being more challenging to make use of than seemed, due to limitations or interdependencies of systems.

• Exempli gratia: A startup that designs a real-time food order tracker may encounter inaccuracies in GPS readings is some geographical areas.

• Feedback Overload

Collecting feedback from users can yield a flood of feature requests, and it's challenging to identify which to build first.

- Example: A pilot creates hundreds of requests, but only high-frequency, high-impact items can be addressed in a first release.

• Difference Between Design Objective and Consumer Perception

What feels easy to the design team might not feel so easy for users.

Example: A banking application adds biometric login – more convenient, but users feel less secure than if they had to expressly enter a password, it requires follow up trust building messaging.

Best Practices

• Make Feedback Loops Short and Hands-on

Its fast testing and iteration cycles mean errors are set right soon after work on a product begins.

Employ Data Triangulation Collecting information in more than one manner helps to develop a fuller picture or provides validation of the results.

Balance qualitative (interviews, usability testing) and quantitative data (conversion rates, usage metrics) when evaluating whether or not to iterate.

• Learning Instead of Being Perfect

Deliver is all about the validation of assumptions, iterating and refining. The MVP is not a finished product, but rather it is one step toward sustainable innovation.

Output of the Deliver Phase

- MVP or Solution Ready

A product is (or will be, or was) available in beta or full launch.

- Post Launch Learning Documentation

Lessons learned from testing and early adopters are essential inputs to the next phase.

- A Roadmap for Future Installments

Teams capture improvements they plan to make, thoughts on scalability and what features they want for scaling out past six months.

Application Example

Example You have a music streaming startup, and you'd like maximize the number of songs users are discovering on the platform. In the Develop stage, they prototyped features such as AI playlists, collaborative friend-curated playlists and genre-based discovery feeds. In Deliver:

• User Testing: They test their three prototypes with a group of early adopters. Feedback AI playlists are fun – but we need clearer customization controls.

• Iteration: In this wake, they include a "like/dislike" feedback button in the prototype to observe and personalize real-time.

• Pilot Launch: They make AI playlists available to 10,000 beta users and monitor usage observed over two weeks.

• Execution: UI designs are finalized and shared with app developers, who are provided clear definitions on how data is provided and recommendation algorithms applied.

• Impact Assessment: KPIs demonstrate that AI-playlists boost session time by 25% and decreases churn rate by 15%, validating mapping to user needs and business priorities.

The Deliver phase concludes with a validated feature which drives engagement and lays the groundwork from which to scale new discovery tools in a future release cycle.

"Activity: Double Diamond Design Sprint Simulation"

Divide learners into teams and assign them a real-world challenge (e.g., "Improving student mental wellness" or "Simplifying city transport for elderly users"). Each team will run a **mini Double Diamond sprint** over a 90–120-minute session, moving through all four stages:

- **Discover**: Interview classmates or review given user research.

- **Define**: Formulate a clear problem statement and one “How Might We” question.
- **Develop**: Conduct a brainstorming session and create a low-fidelity prototype (paper sketches or slides).
- **Deliver**: Present the prototype and gather feedback from peers acting as users.

This activity will give learners firsthand experience of balancing **exploration and decision-making**, working through uncertainty, and understanding how structured design processes lead to actionable innovation.

4.4 Case Studies in Creative Ideation

4.4.1 Dropbox – MVP Validation through Simple Concept

Dropbox, an app by Drew Houston and Arash Ferdowsi in 2007, is one of those that illustrate how it’s possible to merge the idea validation as well production of the MVP into one creative process - even without creating a complete product. Rather than spending heavily up front building complex infrastructure, Dropbox validated the demand with some clever ideation and storytelling.

Critical Concepts Behind Dropbox's Ideation and Validation Strategy:

• The Problem:

o File transfer techniques in 2007 (USB stick, email attachments) were inefficient and cumbersome.

o Cloud storage had been “in disguise” fro years.

o Users often didn’t know they suffer from this design pattern until it was replaced by something better.

• Initial Idea:

o A basic folder that automatically synchronizes files across devices, with no need to take any action; it silently carries out its task in the background.

• Ideation Method:

o Drew Houston observed user behavior and felt personal pain points to uncover the root idea.

o Early brainstorming wasn't so much about features as an attack on what needed reducing – invisible syncing, zero setup.

- Creative MVP Approach:

o Rather than building an app that was functional, Dropbox created a demo video showing what the product would do.

o The video was aimed at an early adopting tech crowd on Hacker News and Reddit, showing how files would sync between devices.

o In 24 hours, the beta waitlist grew from 5,000 to 75,000 users.

• Why This Worked:

o The video neatly framed job to be done: "I want the same file on all my devices, without managing copies." o It addressed a very specific, painful problem — not an all-in-one solution.

o The MVP wasn't a product – it was a proven story.

- Results and Impact:

o The massive interest gave team the confidence to build out the infrastructure.

o With early feedback from these interested people, Dropbox could refine onboarding and syncing logic.

o The result was a product that grew to the point of becoming a worldwide service, serving millions of people.

Creative Ideation Insights:

• MVP doesn't necessarily have to be a product; it can be an experience simulation.

• The right story can validate demand more quickly than a coded solution.

- Resurrection of the ordinary leads to ideas that work globally and at scale!

4.4.2 Niramai – AI Based Breast Cancer Screening Technology

About Niramai (Non-Invasive Risk Assessment with Machine Intelligence) – Niramai is a Healthtech startup in India which is based out of Bangalore that integrates technical innovation with human-centric design to create new possibilities for preventing breast cancer and other types of diseases. This creative ideation process, started from deep cultural, social and medical concerns in breast cancer detection.

The Problem:

- Breast cancer is the leading cause of cancer deaths among women in India.

- Mammography, the traditional screening method, is expensive, invasive, painful, and often inaccessible in rural areas.

- Many women avoid screening due to discomfort or social stigma.

Core Insight and Ideation:

- Niramai's founder, Dr. Geetha Manjunath, recognized that traditional innovation wouldn't work for Indian socio-cultural settings.

- Ideation stemmed from a "jobs to be done" understanding:

o "I want to know I'm healthy without pain, embarrassment, or cost."

- The solution needed to be non-contact, privacy-sensitive, portable, and low-cost.

Creative Solution:

- Developed a novel thermal imaging technique paired with machine learning (Thermalytix).

- The tool detects abnormal patterns in body heat that indicate tumors, even before lumps are physically visible.

- It is non-invasive, radiation-free, and doesn't require the presence of a radiologist during scanning.

Ideation Process Highlights:

- Ethnographic Research:
  - Visits to rural health camps to understand why women avoid screenings.
  - Led to ideation around privacy, gender-sensitivity, and portability.
- Technology Adaptation:
  - Repurposed military-grade thermal imaging technology for civilian medical use.
- Prototyping & Testing:
  - Collaborated with hospitals and NGOs for pilot tests.
  - Iterated based on medical and patient feedback.

Results and Impact:

- The solution has screened over 100,000 women across India.
- Deployed in both urban hospitals and remote camps.
- Won multiple national and international awards for innovation.

Creative Ideation Insights:

- Innovation must fit the context—technological feasibility must match cultural and emotional realities.

- Listening to user fear and discomfort can uncover deeper problems to solve.

- Repurposing existing tech through creative lenses leads to breakthrough outcomes.

4.4.3 Swiggy Genie – Pivot and Innovation During COVID

During the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic, Swiggy faced a massive disruption. Food delivery, its core business, plummeted due to lockdowns and public fear. However, by listening to users and rethinking internal capabilities, Swiggy launched Swiggy Genie, a hyperlocal errand service—an excellent case of ideation through pivoting.

The Problem:

- Lockdowns restricted people from stepping out for essential errands.

- Many needed help picking up groceries, medicines, packages, or delivering items to family and friends.

- No mainstream platform offered on-demand, flexible pickups and drop-offs.

How the Idea Emerged:

- Through customer support logs and social media, Swiggy noticed an influx of non-food delivery requests.

- Internally, the logistics network was underutilized due to fewer restaurant orders.

- Ideation workshops explored the question:

“How might we leverage our delivery network for non-food needs?”

The Pivot:

- Within weeks, Swiggy launched Swiggy Genie.

- Users could book a delivery partner to:

o Pick up forgotten items o Deliver packages o Collect medicines or groceries

Key Creative Elements:

- Reframing Resources:

o Delivery partners became flexible errand agents.

o The same app interface was repurposed for a new service.

- Minimum Viable Rollout:

o Genie launched in limited cities with basic features.

o Iterations followed based on user demand (adding options like sender/receiver names, OTPs, cash collections).

- Risk-Tolerant Ideation:

o Swiggy adopted a “fail fast, learn faster” approach, willing to test rough ideas under high uncertainty.

Impact:

- Urban users quickly lapped up Swiggy Genie.
- Developed a new source of revenue during crisis.
- Helped instill confidence among customers by demonstrating flexibility and utility beyond food.

Creative Ideation Insights:

- Crisis can provide a push for creative turns.
- When it comes to innovation, hearing user pain points in real time is key.
- Sometimes, ideation is about thinking of something new--and sometimes it’s about seeing anew something you already have.

4.5 Summary

❖ Ideation methods such as brainstorming, SCAMPER (Substitute, Combine, Adapt, Modify/magnify addition or reduce), mind mapping and structured creativity tools enable one to create many possible alternative solutions in a less-detailed level of design.

❖ Divergent thinking forces the individual to consider as many options as possible, convergent thinking offers the chance to rule out unfeasible possibilities.

❖ A balance between divergent and convergent thinking should be struck in order to transition from creative ideation to tangible solution.

3

❖ The Double Diamond Model organizes the design process into four stages: Discover, Define, Develop and Deliver to maintain coherence and productivity in design thinking.

❖ The Discover phase: it includes user research and understanding the problem \(user needs\); Define synthesizes these information into clear problem statements; Develop focuses on ideating and prototyping; Deliver covers testing solutions.

❖ Applicable case studies such as Dropbox, Niramai and Swiggy Genie prove that creative imagination, contextual wisdom and liberal implementation can drive impactful innovations.

❖ It requires structured frameworks and real-time feedback loops to steer through uncertainty and connect products with actual user needs.

❖ The most successful innovations often don't come from creating a complex answer, but instead by knowing the problem deeply and figuring out how to play with it in dynamic ways.

4.6 Key Terms

Brainstorming – Technique in industrial group think which members withhold open criticism and generate ideas to be considered for all solutions.

SCAMPER – An approach to creativity that utilizes seven idea-mutation triggers: Substitute, Combine, Adapt, Modify or Magnify; Put to other uses; Eliminate; Reverse.

Mind Map – A graphic representation used to visually organize thoughts and concepts around a central theme.

Divergent Thinking – A thinking process that is multilinear and available with many possible starting points without being severely judgmental.

Convergent Thinking – Focused activity that evaluates and selects an idea as the best choice by a series of criteria to bring solutions or ideas about an exact problem.

Double Diamond The framework behind it is a four-phase model of project development (Discover, Define, Develop, Deliver).

How Might We (HMW) Questions – Problem-statement prompts that enable ideation based on a user need or challenge.

Low Fidelity Prototype - A basic, sometimes non-interactive prototype which is used to test concepts or idea in a cost and time-efficient manner.

MVP (Minimum Viable Product) – A version of a product with enough features to address the essential value proposition for testing among early use and adopters.

Creative Pivot -A change in product or service direction based on new learnings, and typically emerging from user feedback or a change in context.

4.7 Descriptive Questions

Discuss the relevance of Ideation in Innovation. How are methods such as brainstorming and mind mapping supportive of this?

Explain the SCAMPER approach and give an example of innovation in a product.

Distinguish between divergent and convergent thinking. Why should it be in balance while ideating?

Describe the four stages of The Double Diamond Framework. What do each of the phases in the innovation lifecycle mean?

In what ways is the Discover phase related to the quality of the final solution in a product development process?

Explain what role prototyping plays in the Develop phase. What impact does it have on the Deliver phase?

Illustrate with the example of Dropbox how can MVP discovery be validated without making a functional product.

What can we learn from Niramai's innovation in a culturally sensitive space?

What innovative use of its existing resources did Swiggy Genie resort to during a crisis? What are the ideation lessons from this case?

Map out a Double Diamond for something similar but very simple, like designing a reusable water bottle, and demonstrate how each of those phases within DD would go.

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4.9 Case Study

Introduction:

IDEO is a well known company that helps people design and innovate things. They are good at thinking about the people who will use the things they design. IDEO works on all sorts of projects like making healthcare and creating new consumer electronics. When IDEO designs something they do not just think about ideas. They think about how to solve real problems. The way they work is by using two types of thinking: thinking of lots of ideas and then narrowing it down to the ones. They use tools, like brainstorming making prototypes quickly talking to people to understand what they need. Something called the Double Diamond framework to help them do this. This case explores how IDEO integrates creative ideation practices to deliver scalable solutions in complex domains, including a real-world healthcare innovation project.

Background:

IDEO was approached by a major U.S. hospital network struggling with low patient satisfaction and staff burnout in their emergency departments (ED). While previous efforts focused on workflow digitization and faster processing, patient complaints and nurse attrition remained high. IDEO's task was not just to solve for operational efficiency but to reimagine the ED experience from a human-centered perspective.

IDEO started and led our human-centered project with an extensive discovery phase which included more than 100 hours of shadowing, empathy interviews, and environmental scanning. They utilized divergent thinking for exploring multiple solutions, and convergent approaches to reduce the options in actionable interventions applying under Double Diamond innovation framework.

Problem Formulation 1: Patients Do Not Feel Emotionally Comfortable in the Waiting Room

•Challenge: Patients were left feeling bored and anxious during their long wait times, a situation that led to negative reviews before the treatment had even begun.

• IDEO's Approach:

o Creative Thinking: Ideas were pitched that included ideas running from meditation pods to AI-enabled check-ins, whiteboard status displays, and ambient lighting shifts.

o Convergent :-ranked feasible ideas from dot voting and desire mapping.

• Solution: Established a "Welcome Concierge" desk with trained volunteers, monitors for live waiting times and calming environmental features (e.g., warm lighting, relaxing sounds).

• Outcome: Patient satisfaction in waiting area increased to 28 percent in three months.

Problem Statement 2: Staff and Patient Communication is a Failure

• Challenge: Patients felt as though they were being ignored or "in the dark" because of technical jargon and few status updates during their stay in the ED.

• IDEO's Approach:

o Divergent Thinking: Utilized mind maps and scenario-based role playing to generate potential solutions such as patient liaisons, info cards, mobile app tracking, and team huddles.

o Convergent Thinking: Judged what ideas could be both brought to scale and implemented easily across the departments.

• Solution: Developed "Care Cards"—colorized communication sheets detailing the functions of each member of the medical team, anticipated timelines and FAQs.

• Outcome: Decreased patient complaints about communication by 35% and improved relationship with the patient while in the ED.

Problem Diagnosis: Burnancing of Nurses for Repetitive Non-Medical Processes

• Challenge: Nurses felt overwhelmed by non-clinical demands, including status updates; paperwork, caring for anxious families.

• IDEO's Approach:

o Divergent Thinking: Generated solutions, including task handoff systems, digital dashboards, special support roles and AI scheduling tools.

o Convergent Thinking: Funneled down to low-cost, high impact ideas based on the feedback from nurses.

• Solution: Implemented a pilot role defined as the "Patient Experience Assistant", which was responsible for handling general questions, family updates and basic coordination.

• Outcome: Nurses experienced a 20% decrease in workload stress and improved family satisfaction scores.

Case-Related Questions:

In what ways did IDEO use divergent and convergent thinking in this project at each of the four phases of the innovation process?

Why is it important to research empathy while searching for the “true” challenge of the human-focused design thinking methodology?

Examine how the IDEO’s approach relates to the Double Diamond. _: Map solutions to a particular phase.

What types of ideation tools do you think that IDEO probably used, and how helped it to helping them refine their ideas?

How did low-fidelity prototyping and testing help in proving out toward solutions which could be developed?

Conclusion:

This case shows how IDEO’s systematic process to come up with ideas – ideation — can stimulate innovation that’s not only imagined, but feasible and scaleable. By oscillating between divergent exploration and convergent decision-making, IDEO was able to reset the problem, uncover human-centered insights, and deliver meaningful change in what is a typically arcane system. Their achievements highlight the value of organised creativity, empathy-borne research and iterative prototyping in contemporary innovation methodologies.

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Unit 5: Business Models and Value Propositions

Learning Objectives

1. Learn to understand the framework and strategic role of Business Model Canvas (BMC) in MVP building.
2. An examination of 9 key components within BMC and their corresponding lean startup execution.
3. Use the Value Proposition Canvas to connect customer's jobs, pains and gains with features of your product.
4. Develop business models and pricing schemes, closely linked to the user value and to the MVP's constraints.
5. Consider the attractiveness, feasibility and viability of MVP-based business models.
6. Evaluate how profitable and scalable your opportunity is with this simple analysis.
7. Utilise business design tools in order to facilitate the marriage of user needs with income, viable startup models.

Content

5.0 Introductory Caselet

5.1 Introduction to Business Model Canvas

5.2 Value Proposition Canvas

5.3 Connecting User Needs with Revenue Models

5.4 Structuring Business Models Around MVPs

5.5 Summary

5.6 Key Terms

5.7 Descriptive Questions

5.8 References

5.9 Case Study

5.1.2 Key Construct Components (9 Elements)

Articles The Business Model Canvas - 9 Building Blocks To Represent a business model use "Business Model Canvas" A business model is like a blueprint for strategy- and innovation-in-

practice. While you can think about each block separate of the others, they are linked - an adjustment in one'll force you to make changes elsewhere. For example, changing revenue streams (like moving from a subscription model to freemium) can impact customer relationships, cost structure and even needed resources.

Each block is basically a set of assumptions in a start-up. Entrepreneurs who are developing Minimum Viable Products (MVPs) must test these kinds of assumptions with experiments, interviews or prototype-testing rather than building out. In longer-standing enterprises, the BMC allows these managers to visualize interrelations and consider how strategic changes (e.g., using a new distribution channel or broadening the customer base) affect the overall business model.

Customer Segments (CS)

The incubator of business is customers. Without well-defined customer segments, value propositions tend to be nebulous or out of focus.

A customer segment is a unique set of individuals or organizations who: Seek value through the use of our products Are relative to one another, but different from others they are not similar to equivalent for all other offerings essentially we aim to serve them.

Segments may be defined by:

• Demographics: Age, gender, income (e.g., luxury brand target high-end consumers).

• Behaviorism: The majority on air-travelers and sporratic tourists in the airline industry.

• Geography: urban or rural markets (example:-telecom companies offering the customised plans).

• Needs-based segmentation: convenience shoppers vs. value seekers.

Startups usually start from niche markets and then broaden their horizons. For example, Facebook had first been intended as a resource for Harvard then expanded to the rest of the universities and finally the entire global community. This staged segmentation enabled them to perfect their product for early adopters and in anticipation of widespread adoption.

Example: Tesla’s early target market was wealthy, eco-friendly customers who would pay a premium for electric vehicles. As the company expanded, so did its appeal with the Model 3 capturing that wider middle-class market.

Biggest learning: Being very clear about who your customers are not is just as important as knowing who they are. Being focused allows startups to allocate their scarce resources efficiently.

Value Propositions (VP)

BMC Heart The heart of the BMC is the value proposition. It explains why, when asked to pick a company over another, clients are going with the former. In a nutshell, it's the answer to What unique value do we deliver and who has that problem or need?

Powerful value propositions intersect the Jobs to Be Done (JTBD) framework explicitly if not by name, focusing on what customers are struggling to get done in their lives. This involves three aspects:

- Customer pains: What are the challenges or annoyances being alleviated?
- Customer benefits – what is being added to or improved in the life of the customer.
- Jobs: The functional, emotional or social tasks that customers want to accomplish.

For example, Uber's value proposition is not "ride-hailing." Instead, it addresses:

- Pain: Annoyance of locating trustworthy taxis.
- The Benefit: Rides on-demand, cashless and trackable.
- Job: Relatively cheap, fast and easy to attain Transportation.

Example: Apple iPhone combines 3 value propositions in one– advanced technology (functional job), the esteem of peers and others (emotional job) and a beautiful friend or family picture that goes everywhere you go, your life synced with the iPad on your TV at home, you can even ask Siri to send pics from phone to virtual album in your livingroom….all with no setup time (ecosystem benefit).

For MVPs, the proposition with value should be specific and verifiable. Dropbox first proved its concept by creating a super crude single-minute video demo that just quickly exhibited how much less file-transfer sucked with cloud storage, long before it built the entire infrastructure.

Channels (CH)

Channels are the way in which a company delivers value to its customers and how it communicates with them. They have the double function of making people aware of the value proposition and allowing for its 'delivery'.

There are generally two categories:

- Digital mediums: websites, mobile applications, e-commerce platforms, social media initiatives.
- Offline: brick and mortar outlets, inhouse sales force, intermediaries or agents.

Case in point: Nike uses a mix of these two approaches — it's direct-to-consumer platform (Nike. com and SNKRS app) is creating awareness and driving sales, retail stores and sports partnerships help maintain the brand's offline presence.

Channels progress over time alongside your business. An online startup could start cheaply (perhaps with Instagram ads) to get noticed and then invest in a physical presence. "At the same time, traditional companies can digitalize their channels in order to stay competitive.

Key considerations for channels:

- What are the most efficient channels?
- Which ones offer the best customer experience?
- What is the synergy of channels (i.e., if we take two or more together, do they complement each other)?

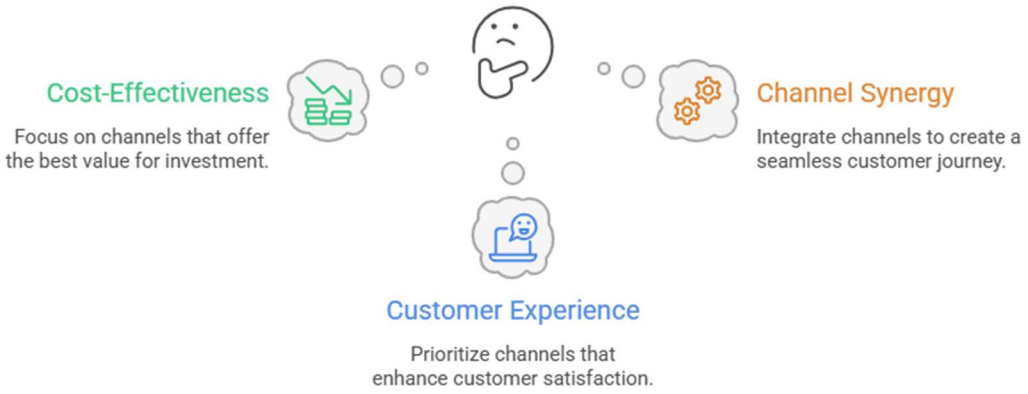


Figure: **Key considerations for channels**

Customer Relationships (CR)

Customer associations determine how the business interacts with its customers. These engagements impact adoption, retention and lifetime value.

Relationships can take several forms:

- Individual help: one-to-one sales aid (think real estate agents).
- Self-service: customers serve themselves (e.g., ATMs).
- Automated personalization: by algorithm (e.g.: recommendations on Netflix)
- User Communities: user-centric involvement (e.g., LEGO Ideas platform).

The decision on the type of relationship drives both cost and scalability. For example, one-to-one onboarding delivers a rich experience but is expensive; whereas automated onboarding scales better but can diminish personalisation.

For example: Amazon counterbalances automation (personalized product recommendations) with robust customer service (returns, refunds) to build trust.

Testing relationship strategies is a must for startups. For example, a SaaS company might test offering free trial support via live chat before switching to automated tutorials after demand increases.

Revenue Streams (R$)

Revenue streams are how companies get paid in return for the value they create. The issue is: How the company makes money on every customer segment?

Common revenue models include:

- Direct sale: Sale of products in the open market (e.g. retail).
- Subscription: periodic payments (e.g. Spotify Premium).
- Freemium: basic services provided for free, whereas users pay fees to access advanced features (example: LinkedIn).
- Transaction fees: those who take a cut on each transaction (e.g. PayPal).
- Licensing: via fee charging for the use of intellectual property (e.g. Microsoft Office).

Example: YouTube has multiple streams — advertising revenues, premium subscriptions and revenue sharing with creators.

The customer's preference to pay and the value they will get out of it has to be made an important part of your Revenue model. For such a test, trialling pricing early (even before you fully launch the product) can be a good way to see if anyone will actually pay. For instance, Buffer (a social media scheduling tool) ran a pricing test by setting up a simple landing page with subscription price tiers to gauge demand before coding out the full product.

Key Resources (KR)

Critical resources are the resources that an organization requires in order to deliver its value proposition, reach its market, maintain relationships with customer segments, and earn revenues.

These are of four kinds:

- Physical facilities: factories, retail outlets, servers, distribution networks.
- Intellectual capital: patents, brands, proprietary technology.
- Human resources: professional staff, expertise, leadership.
- Money: money (yes, I apologize for being repetitive here), credit lines, investors.

For example, Google's most important resources are intellectual (search algorithms and data) and physical (data centers). A consulting company, on the other hand, is mainly dependent on its manpower.

Startups need to know what the minimum is for testing an MVP. A food delivery startup may not need its own kitchens at the beginning; it leans onto partner restaurants (less resource drag) as it develops an app first.

Key Activities (KA)

Core activities are the crucial functions a business needs to perform in order to run well. These tasks have to contribute to provide the value proposition.

Examples include:

• Product development: design and code (For example, software startups).

• Marketing and sales: awareness and conversion.

• Operations: logistics, production, quality control.

• Platform management : preserving ecosystems (eg Airbnb ensuring trustworthiness between hosts and guests).

Example: For Netflix the most crucial activities will be to license content, produce original programming and sustain a high-quality streaming service. Fast-fashion supply chain management — producing and distributing designs quickly — is the thing for Zara.

Activities should be small enough, but not too trivial for MVPs. An edtech startup could concentrate only on building interesting video lessons and delay advanced feature like gamification until validation.

Key Partnerships (KP)

Few businesses are self-sufficient; partners complement and mitigate the risks of each other.

Key partnerships may include:

• Partnerships: while not direct competitors (e.g., Starbucks and Spotify coming together to offer a consolidated service).

• Joint venture new business development (e.g., Sony Ericsson in mobile phones).

• Buyer-seller relationships: guarantying access to resources (e.g., car companies with their parts suppliers).

Example: Spotify's relationships with record labels are important for licensing content, and its deals with Facebook and mobile carriers help broaden distribution.

Startups typically gain credibility and get to reduce their upfront investment cost in partnerships. This might lead fintech startups to cooperate with banks for compliance infrastructure instead of creating it themselves.

Cost Structure (C$)

The cost structure outlines all of the COSTS involved in operating the business model. Expenses must correspond to the main activities, resources and partners.

• Sunk costs: payroll, rent, building.

• Variable expenses: production, distribution, commission costs.

• Economies of scale: unit costs fall as the level of ouput/economies of scale (eg Amazon Web Services)

• Economies of scope: sharing resources across products (e.g., Google utilizing data infrastructure for search, ads and cloud services).

Example: Airlines have high fixed costs (planes, maintenance, pay for the crew), while ride-hailing platforms like Uber have much lower fixed costs but variable ones associated with marketing and customer acquisition.

For MVP, what's the Minimum Viable Cost Structure? Lean startups want to test their viability with least costs involved – sometimes outsourcing until they reach product-market fit.

Tip for MVPs: Hypothesis-Driven Validation

Every block of the BMC is a hypothesis that needs to be verified. Startups can validate assumptions through:

• MVP testing: building prototypes or small versions to collect feedback.

• User interviews and surveys: learn why customers are experiencing pain, what they'd pay for.

• A/B testing: experimenting with alternatives for features, pricing or channels.

Example: Airbnb proved its model by taking pictures of a couple of apartments in San Francisco and setting up a basic website. This tiny MVP validated assumptions about demand, willingness to pay and participation by hosts prior to scaling globally.

5.1.3 Application of BMC to MVP Development

The Business Model Canvas is really useful when we use it to develop Minimum Viable Products.

When we talk about Minimum Viable Products we are talking about building a version of a product to see if our main idea works.

The Business Model Canvas makes sure that we do not test our product without thinking about how it fits into the business.

This way the Business Model Canvas and Minimum Viable Products work together to help us create a product that people will want to use. This is important, because an MVP is not just to try and see if a product feature works, it's really more about testing the underlying assumptions behind your business model - who are the customers, how are we going to reach them, where does revenue come from and what does it cost?

With the BMC for MVP development, startups can escape the tunnel vision problem of exclusively concentrating on product-market fit rather than if what they're building has a financially and strategically sustainable business model. The BMC provides this holistic view, helping founders determine the assumptions to test first, allocate scarce resources and iterate their strategy based on what they have learned.

Why BMC Is Valuable for MVPs

BMC applied to MVP development, breaks the barrier between product testing and business strategy. Rather than treating an MVP like a standalone experiment, the BMC frames it within the context of business sustainability.

- MVPs aren't just about product-market fit.

The MVP in No One's World Many founders think an MVP only proves if a product solves a customer's problem. In fact it should also validate supporting assumptions – e.g. about pricing, distribution or partnerships for instance – if a decision is to be made as to whether the idea is commercially viable or not. For instance, the early MVP of Spotify didn't just confirm people wanted to stream music, it also tested customer acceptance of ad-funded free plans.

• The BMC ranks assumptions for testing.

Startup conditions are too uncertain to prevent trying something you don't believe in yet. The BMC exposes assumptions, on those can team sort the most risky out? For instance, if you're not sure about customer demand (value proposition), it ought to be validated before the decision is made to engage in partnerships or scale any channels.

- The BMC keeps us from tunnel vision.

If a group is completely about product features, they are likely blind to key issues like distribution or cost structures. With the requirement that teams complete all nine blocks,

the BMC promotes a more holistic systems view. That was crucial for Airbnb, which first validated demand by renting out air mattresses but also had to iterate through channels (Craigslist, later their own platform) and revenue models (service fees).

Applying BMC to MVP Development

The application of the BMC in reality consists of a systemic testing of assumptions over its nine blocks. The process is iterative: new rounds of MVP testing feed into an updated BMC, which stores with the next experiment.

Start with the Value Proposition

Value proposition by definition is the right stuff to start building an MVP. It's the key thesis: what is it that this product does for customers, and what problem does it solve?

- Define the core customer job-to-be-done (JTBD). For instance, Dropbox defined the job to be securely saving and sharing files across devices without friction.

- Make sure customer pains and gains cut across VPC. For Dropbox, the pain was crappy USB storage; the gain was easy access to files from anywhere.

- MVPs that test out the smallest version of this proposition. Dropbox de-risked demand with a simple demo video before the full product was developed, so they did not end up over-investing in infrastructure.

Define Customer Segments

After you have defined the value proposition, startups must inquire: Who is going to test this MVP?

- Find early adopters: These are the customers who will use products that are not perfect. Early adopters of Airbnb were cost-conscious event-goers, not those who generally stayed in mainstream hotels, for instance.

- If you are pushing through personalization, break the segmentation by geography (for local users), behavior (such as techsavvy users) or pain intensity (expecting urgent problems).

- Focus on test-friendly groups: For MVPs, segments that provide quick feedback are better than larger but more elusive markets.

By explicitly charting who the MVP's test customer is, founders avoid throwing resources all over the place. For example, a fintech app could begin by testing with university students before expanding to corporate professionals.

Clarify Channels and Customer Relationships

Channels dictate where the MVP is getting to early adopters, relationships influence how users engage with the company during testing.

- There is a requirement for cost effective channels to MVPs. Rather than massive campaigns, startups could depend on landing pages, email outreach or social media groups. Buffer tested demand by mocking up a super basic landing page (literally just text explaining the product) and tracking how many signed up.

- Customer relationships at the MVP stage should be a mix of support and scalability. Most startups are based on direct communication (emails, interviews) with their users. When they taste verification, the company can dial in on automation.

Example: Uber's initial go-to market was heavily personal in nature (e.g. street teams out recruiting drivers) and since automated driver onboarding through the app.

If Nothing Else, Establish a Revenue Stream (Even if it's Speculative)

Monetization has to be considered from the early days, even if it's not a part of the MVP itself. It is often more important to test willingness to pay than technical viability.

- Conceive a few pricing models: subscription, freemium, pay-per-use.

- Run pricing tests with surveys, fake checkouts or pre-sales.

- Confirm the customer belief in what your value proposition delivers vs. cost.

Example: Buffer validated its subscription by putting up a landing page of various plans and pitches on where pricing was dependent itself on who clicked, using that as evidence people actually wanted this before setting up payment handling.

When a revenue hypothesis was tested during MVP validation on startups it makes that traction is not built without monetization model.

Identify Key Activities and Resources

Some activities or resources are not required in the MVP phase. Rather, attention should be paid to minimal sets of these needed to test key assumptions.

- Key activities: prototype development, talking to customers and low-cost marketing campaigns.

- Key resources: heavily reliant on sometimes only a few resources like talent (founders, developers), limited budgets, generic technology.

- Avoid over-technicality and excess—fluff takes time away from more testing.

Example: Zappos' MVP did not lead to the construction of a complete e-commerce warehouse. Instead, the founder Nick Swinmurn tested demand by putting pictures of shoes up on the internet and then buying them from stores once their customers placed orders.

This approach has proven value proposition and customer willingness to buy without spending alot of money.

Track Costs

An MVP is useless if there is no money to test it. “Cost awareness ensures startups don’t run out of money before they achieve product-market fit.

- Estimate development costs: prototyping, hosting, design.
- Allocate some budget to marketing and customer acquisition, even at a small level.
- Factor in the cost of support if manual onboarding, or service delivery is needed.

Example: A lot of SaaS startups underestimate how much it costs to acquire a new customer. By making them part of 22 the cost structure block, entrepreneurs can judge these against potential revenue streams to confirm possible future profitability.

Involve Partnerships (If Needed)

Startups probably won’t have all the resources to develop an MVP and bring it into launch. Partnerships can help lower barriers and inject credibility.

- You can outsource specialist tasks (like design, development) to freelancers or contractors.
- Kickstarter and similar platforms enable testing of demand as well as crowdsourced funding.
- Early-adopters can be reached through distribution partners. For example, Spotify collaborated with Facebook to maximize the reach during its MVP stage.

As a lightweight founder at the MVP stage, collaboration should be light to keep flexibility but it can play an acceleration role of paramount importance.

Iterate and Update the BMC

The BMC is not static. MVP-test — after testing MVP, canvas needs to be revised because of the verified knowledge.

- Working assumptions (e.g., validated customer need) are included in the model.
- Any invalidated assumptions (e.g., discredited pricing models) are substituted with new ones.
- This feedback loop allows the business model to mature in parallel with product development.

Example: Twitter’s parent company, Odeo, centered around podcasting. When Apple launched iTunes podcasts, Odeo’s model was no longer viable. The company pivoted from the generalized focus on BMC to microblogging after testing the idea successfully internally.

In Practice: Case Studies

Startups in the wild are a guide to how applying a BMC drives MVP development.

• Dropbox: Proved by a demo video the worth of its value proposition. Other blocks such as channels (online) and revenue streams (freemium) evolved over time.

• Airbnb: Originally set out to validate customer demand by offering to do a test run, as in see if travelers would actually pay money to stay in the homes of strangers. Its revenue models (service fees) and partnerships (payment processors) only followed once its validation was done.

• Zappos : Began by experimenting to see if customers would purchase shoes on the internet. The MVP bypass warehouses as a resource and cost structure reduction, and also clarified demand.

These cases illustrate that it is possible to follow any block (mostly the value proposition) and gradually roll-out testing over the BMC, providing a systematic path from MVP to scalable business model.

Making of the Map Academic Insight: The BMC as HypothesisgetError!

The BMC often is referred to in the literature as a "map of hypotheses" that needs to be evaluated through iterative processes. When it comes to MPV development, one can easily view the canvas as a rigorous static document instead a flexible learning tool.

• Each block presents a hypothesis: We think that X customer segment has Y problem, and will be willing to pay for Z value proposition.

• MVPs are tests to validate or invalidate these hypotheses.

• Building over time makes those validated assumptions the cornerstone of a strong business model based on evidence.

This method is consistent with the working practice of the Lean Startup (Ries, 2011) which directs that a series of build–measure– learn iterations are carried out. The BMC makes sure these cycles are joined together not fragmented.

"Activity Build & Reflect – MVP Business Model Canvas

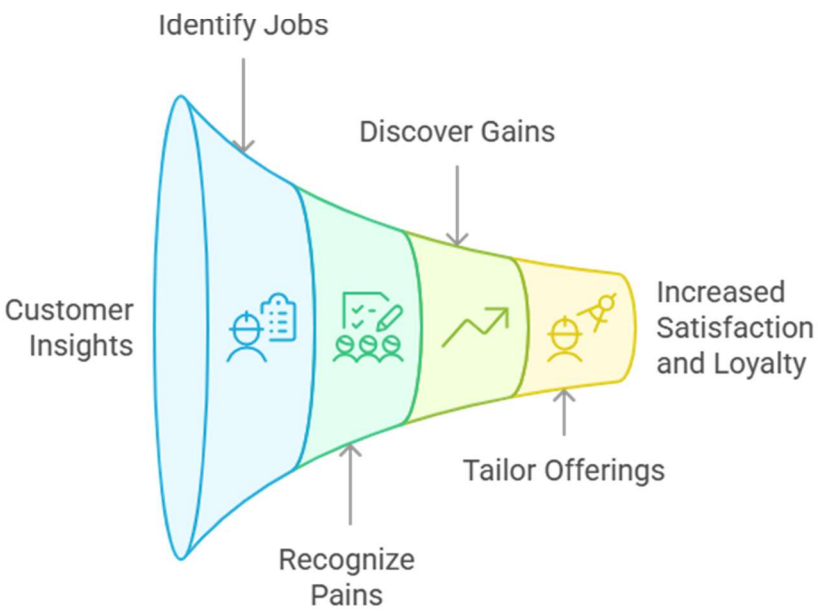
Divide learners into small teams. Provide each team with a fictional MVP scenario (e.g., a sleeptracking wearable, eco-friendly meal kit, or language learning app). Each team must draft a **Business Model Canvas** based on their MVP using a printable or digital template. They should focus on **filling all 9 blocks**, even if they contain hypotheses. After presenting their canvas, each group must identify **3 assumptions they would test first**, explaining why those are most critical. This activity helps learners

link MVP thinking to full business model validation and prepares them to align strategy with execution.

5.2 Value Proposition Canvas

5.2.1 Understanding Customer Jobs, Pains, and Gains

Developed by Strategyzer, the Value Proposition Canvas (VPC) is a laser-focused tool that assists startups in making clear how their product generates value for those who must use it. It is focused deeply on the customer's world: their jobs, pains, and gains. An idea of these 3 aspects is really required to be able to build products that address some actual problem.



Customer Jobs:

- Represent what customers are trying to accomplish in their personal or professional lives.

- Jobs can be:

o Functional (e.g., commuting, sending money)

o Social (e.g., appearing successful, gaining approval) o Emotional (e.g., feeling secure, avoiding stress) • Important to identify core jobs, side jobs, and unmet jobs.

- Ask questions like:

o What does your customer need to get done?

o What are recurring tasks they find difficult or time-consuming?

Customer Pains:

- Describe negative experiences or risks customers face while trying to get a job done.

- These include:

o Undesirable outcomes (e.g., delays, costs) o Obstacles (e.g., lack of tools, information)
o Fears and frustrations (e.g., privacy concerns, confusion)

- Look for:

o What frustrates users about current solutions?

o What prevents them from completing the job successfully?

- Prioritize severe and frequent pains—these offer higher value creation opportunities.

Customer Gains:

- Gains are the desired outcomes or benefits the customer hopes for or would be delighted by.

- Includes:

o Functional utility (faster, cheaper, more reliable) o Social benefits (recognition, credibility) o Emotional satisfaction (peace of mind, reduced anxiety)

- Think about:

o What would make the customer's life easier or more enjoyable? o What outcomes exceed expectations?

Application Tip:

- Use Empathy Maps and JTBD Interviews to extract jobs, pains, and gains directly from user conversations.

- Don't assume—validate each insight with real users.

Why It Matters:

- Without understanding customer jobs, pains, and gains, your MVP might offer features no one needs or values.

- This framework builds the foundation for product-market fit.

5.2.2 Mapping Value Propositions to Customer Needs

After customer jobs, pains, and gains are identified, the next step is to map the value proposition—your product features or services or benefits—to those areas. This aligns what the customer wants/needs with what you are providing.

Value Proposition Side of the Canvas:

• Products & Services

o A menu of what you can do to help your client get the job done. o May be physical products, digital tools, services, platforms.

• Pain Relievers o How does your product alleviate the specific customer pain.

o Must map back to the pay points uncovered earlier (165).

• Gain Creators o What happens in your product and how it enables specific customer gains.

o May contain surprising or "delight" aspects, not just essentials.

Mapping Strategy:

• For each pain, explain how your product eases or mitigates it.

• Demonstrate how your product brings about or enhances each of your benefits.

- Employ 1-to-1 or many-to-many relationships (one feature may fulfill more than one need).

Example:

For a food delivery MVP:

- Job: Get dinner during a busy workday.

- Pain: Waiting too long, cold food, limited healthy options.

- Gain: Hot, healthy meals delivered fast.

- Mapping:

o Product: App with pre-set meal options and instant tracking. o Pain Reliever: ETA tracker, hot packs.

o Gain Creator: Health-focused menus with customizable options.

Common Mistakes to Avoid:

- Focusing on features, not outcomes.

(E.g., "chatbot support" vs. "24/7 help that reduces anxiety")

- Overlooking emotional or social jobs.

- Assuming one-size-fits-all—different segments need different mappings.

Tools to Support Mapping:

- Post-it note boards (physical or digital)

- Customer feedback from surveys or interviews

- Competitor pain/gain comparison charts

Why It Matters:

- A well-mapped value proposition increases conversion, retention, and user advocacy.

- It ensures your MVP is user-centered, not feature-driven.

5.2.3 Aligning Product Features with Market Fit

Product-market fit occurs when your product's features deliver clear value that matches well-defined customer needs. Using the Value Proposition Canvas, startups can refine and prioritize product features that are truly meaningful rather than simply innovative.

Steps to Align Product Features with Market Fit:

- Prioritize Feature Development Based on Value Mapping

o Only build features that relieve pains or create gains tied to a real job.

o Avoid feature bloat—every feature must be mapped to a validated customer insight.

- Use MVP Testing for Validation o Create MVPs that isolate one or two high-priority features. o Test with real users to assess impact, usability, and desirability.

o Adjust product backlog based on feedback.

- Segment and Customize Value Propositions o Different customer segments may require different value propositions.

o Create multiple VPCs to avoid one-size-fits-all solutions.

o For example, a fitness app might emphasize community for one segment, and data insights for another.

• Quantify Value Through Metrics o Link features to measurable outcomes like NPS, retention rates, or usage frequency.

o Helps to identify which features drive growth or satisfaction.

• Eliminate Low-Value Features o Conduct feature audits after launch. o Identify what's unused or unappreciated despite development effort. o Kill or pivot these features to reduce complexity and improve focus.

• Feedback Loops and Iteration

o Use continuous user feedback, A/B testing, and product analytics to iterate on core features.

o Helps refine fit as customer needs evolve.

Example Use Case:

An early-stage budgeting app identifies that users want:

• Simplicity (Job)

• Confusion over financial jargon (Pain)

- Feeling in control (Gain)

Instead of building complex dashboards, they launch an MVP with:

- A single-screen visual savings tracker
- Tooltips explaining financial terms
- Automated savings nudges

These features directly align with jobs, pains, and gains—improving market fit.

Why It Matters:

- MVPs with good product-market fit scale faster and require fewer pivots.
- Prioritizing features based on VPC insights avoids resource waste and maximizes customer satisfaction.

5.3 Connecting User Needs with Revenue Models

5.3.1 Designing Revenue Streams Around MVPs

Designing effective revenue streams around MVPs is essential for validating not just the product's desirability but also its financial viability. A startup's early revenue model must align with the user's perception of value, while being simple enough to test and iterate.

Key Principles in Designing MVP Revenue Streams:

- Begin with the Value Proposition:

o Identify what specific value the user is willing to pay for.

o Tie revenue generation directly to core features, not auxiliary services.

- Match Revenue Stream to User Behavior:

o Understand how users prefer to engage—one-time purchase, recurring access, usage-based billing, etc.

o E.g., productivity apps often adopt a freemium or subscription model, while custom design services might use a project-based fee.

- Revenue Model Options for MVPs:

o One-Time Payment: Ideal for simple tools with finite value.

o Subscription-Based: Best for ongoing services (SaaS, content access).

o Freemium Model: Offers core value for free, charges for advanced features.

o Usage-Based (Pay-as-You-Go): Charges based on volume of use (e.g., cloud storage, delivery services).

o Ad-Supported: Generates revenue through advertisers rather than users.

o Commission-Based: Useful in marketplaces (platform earns a cut per transaction).

o Licensing Model: Revenue from IP rights (common in tech, media, health).

- Assumption Testing with MVP:

o Use MVPs to test which model works best with actual users.

o Run pricing experiments, fake door tests, or pilot programs with limited access tiers.

- Alignment with Customer Segments:

o Early adopters might pay more for premium access or speed.

o Cost-sensitive users may prefer delayed payment or performance-based pricing.

- Ease of Scaling:

o Subscription models typically scale better due to recurring revenue.

o Consider operational and technical requirements of each model (e.g., billing systems, refund policies).

- MVP Focus:

o Don’t aim for perfect monetization early.

o Focus on validating willingness to pay, not maximizing revenue.

“One of the earliest revenue experiments by LinkedIn involved offering premium subscriptions before many users even saw value in it. Despite skepticism, this early test revealed a niche

user base—recruiters—willing to pay for access to extended networks. This small discovery eventually evolved into LinkedIn's Recruiter Premium, which became its largest revenue stream, surpassing ads. Sometimes, the best-paying users are not the largest group—but the ones with urgent, high-value needs."

5.3.2 Pricing Strategies for Startups

Pricing is one of the most important decisions for a startup because it not only affects cash flow, product packaging and market saturation but also long term user acquisition strategies. And unlike legacy brands, startups don't have years of previous transaction data or existing customers whom the company can cheat out of their data via a bait and switch strategy. To them, pricing is a tool not just for cost recovery, but as a strategic lever to gauge market demand, customer willingness to pay and value propositions in the early days of finding product-market fit.

The struggle for startups is to find the sweet spot between all three at once:

Reasonable pricing for conservative customers of new marketplace entrants.

Sustainability for the company to break even and expand.

Positioning; a way the product is to be perceived relative to its competition.

Below are the key pricing tactics for startups with representative examples from a variety of industries.

Cost-Plus Pricing

This is the basic pricing method: a business determines what its costs are for manufacturing a product, and then adds that to what it believes will be profit in order to arrive at a price.

• Pro: Simple, clear-cut and easy to apply.

• Challenges: Tends to be decoupled from the user's perceived value, resulting in prices that are too low or too high.

Example: A food-delivery startup with a cloud kitchen business might set prices of meals using cost-plus pricing. If the cost of raw materials is ₹80 and you spend ₹70 on preparing/distributing it, then a 50% markup sets the price at about ₹225. While crude, this method ignores the depth of customers' willingness to pay for healthier or premium meals.

Takeaway: This is great to apply for physical products that have distinct production costs associated with them, but best for SaaS or digital goods where marginal cost approaches can just be ~0.

Value-Based Pricing

Value-based pricing prices based on what customers believe something is worth, not what it costs to make. Here you'll need to validate your idea with customers through interviews, surveys or willingness-to-pay tests.

• Pro: Ties pricing to value that customers received.

• Drawbacks: It can be time-consuming to collect data, and misestimates about perceived value can hurt adoption.

Example : Value-Based Model Like Canva, the online design tool. Small businesses and freelancers saw Canva as a way to avoid the expense of hiring designers, so they were willing to pay for premium features. Even though such a tool is relatively cheap for an additional user, the cost of the subscription is based on its value to the user rather than what it costs developers to produce.

Key takeaway: This model works well for SaaS, professional services and productivity tools where the delivery of value significantly outpaces input cost.

Penetration Pricing

Penetration pricing is the act of initially setting a price point for a product or service at a low level with few frills to get as much market share as possible in hopes of later product releases being purchased by the largest amount of customers. Once a steady following is built the prices can be raised accordingly.

- Advantages: Effective in crowded markets; lowers barriers for first-time adoption.

- Limitations: Risks anchoring customers to low prices, delaying profitability.

Example : Jio, the Indian telecom giant, exemplified penetration pricing by offering free data and low call rates at launch. This aggressive strategy disrupted the market, acquired millions of users rapidly, and forced competitors to lower prices. Later, Jio increased rates to sustainable levels.

Takeaway: Works well for startups in highly competitive or commoditized markets but must be managed carefully to avoid long-term dependence on low margins.

Skimming Pricing

Skimming pricing sets high initial prices, targeting early adopters willing to pay a premium, and then gradually reduces prices to capture broader segments.

- Benefits: It maximizes the revenue potential of early adopters and power users.
- Drawbacks: Could alienate customers for whom price is the deciding factor, or invite new competition.

For example: Tesla used skimming pricing when it released the Roadster [and] Model S at very high price points for out-of-the-gate wealthy early adopters. This approach enabled Tesla to create cash flow, establish brand cachet and fund future mass-market vehicles such as the Model 3.

Takeaway: Good for startups with innovative or niche products that provide clear differentiation but less so when markets are crowded and margins are slim.

Freemium + Tiered Pricing

You can choose to offer your service as freemium model, a free product with an upgrade and premium with added features. Subscription-based pricing also divides products into different plans, like the basic, professional and enterprise.

- Upside: Mass adoption — lowers the barrier to entry; monitizes “power” users.
- Limitations: Free customers can strain infrastructure and conversion rates to getting people even on paid plans remain low.

Example : Freemium is a model with which Spotify is synonymous. Its free plan, which was ad-supported, introduced users to the concept of streaming. A small percentage of those people converted to paying subscribers, who paid for streaming without ads and offline playback — an ongoing source of revenue.

Takeaway: It works great for SaaS, apps and media sites where the cost of distributing news is low but it has a high scalability.

Psychological Pricing

Psychological pricing uses consumer psychology to make prices appear more attractive. The most well-known example is the pricing of products at ₹99 instead of a flat ₹100 in order to give the impression of affordability.

- Pros: Boosts conversion rates, especially in B2C sector.
- Drawbacks: Less useful for B2B, or enterprise sales when decisions are data-driven.

Example : Flipkart and Amazon India fixed the price of products at ₹499 or ₹999, this plays with consumer's mind. Such strategies have changed CTR and Conversion Rate in Ecommerce.

Takeaway : Great if you sell consumer products, but better have a strong value proposition or it becomes manipulative.

Pay-What-You-Want (PWYW)

Customers choose how much they are willing to pay in PWYW systems. Trust is at the core of this strategy and goodwill, buying in and community are crucial ingredients for it to be successful — often seen most effectively in creative industries or models where donations fund growth.

- Pros: Creates broad community trust; can draw a large user base.
- Cons: Very unpredictable program revenue; not a financial sustainability play.

Example : The band Radiohead famously put out its 2007 album "In Rainbows" on a PWYW basis. Although some fans paid nothing, others paid generously, which resulted in both revenue and publicity.

Takeaway: A powerful expression of the ethos that's built into most brands, but not a long-term possibility for many startups looking to lock in predictable income.

Performance-Based Pricing

With performance-based pricing, you only make a payment based on the actions your audience takes – the number of leads generated, clicks delivered, or sales conversion.

- The upside: Attractive to customers as it mitigates their upfront risk.
- Downside: It requires powerful tracking mechanisms and a high level of trust between provider and client.

Example: Google Ads revolutionized pricing with its cost-per-click model. Advertisers were charged only when users clicked, which directly aligned cost with an easily measurable engagement.

Takeaway: Good for small service-oriented startups, but it does require careful contract definition to avoid disagreement about performance measures.

Considerations for Startups

When choosing a pricing strategy, startups must evaluate both internal economics and external market dynamics.

- Understand Customer Lifetime Value (CLV) and Customer Acquisition Cost (CAC). A sustainable model requires that CLV > CAC; otherwise, growth leads to losses.

- Test multiple price points. Use cohorts or A/B testing to understand price sensitivity.

- Leverage pricing research models. The Van Westendorp Price Sensitivity Meter is commonly used to identify acceptable price ranges.

- Stay flexible. Early prices are experiments; startups should not fear adjustments as data emerges.

Example: Netflix tested multiple pricing tiers in its early days to balance affordability with profitability. Its current pricing structure (basic, standard, premium) evolved from years of experimentation with customer willingness to pay.

Common Pitfalls

Startups often fall into traps when designing pricing strategies.

- Undervaluing the product. Especially in freemium models, startups may provide too much for free, reducing incentives to upgrade. Evernote faced this challenge with a low free-to-paid conversion rate.

- Overcomplicating tiers. Too many options confuse customers. Research shows that simple choices increase adoption.

- Frequent price changes. Startups that change prices without communication risk losing trust.

Transparency in pricing evolution is critical.

5.3.3 Market Opportunity Analysis

Market opportunity analysis is the process of evaluating the size, accessibility, and profitability of a given market segment to determine if it's worth targeting. For MVPs, this ensures that even if productmarket fit is achieved, the market is large enough to scale.

Steps to Conduct Market Opportunity Analysis:

- Define the Market:

o What industry and segment are you targeting?

o Who are the primary users and buyers?

- Estimate Market Size:

3

o TAM (Total Addressable Market): Total demand for the product or service.

o SAM (Serviceable Available Market): Portion of TAM your startup can realistically reach.

o SOM (Serviceable Obtainable Market): Market share you can expect to capture in the near term.

- Evaluate Market Trends:

o Analyze growth rates, emerging trends, and shifts in consumer behavior.

o Use sources like industry reports, government data, and competitor performance.

- Assess Competitive Landscape:

o Identify major players, pricing strategies, and product gaps.

o Look for underserved niches or pain points not addressed by incumbents.

- Analyze Customer Segments:

o Who are the most likely early adopters?

o What are their needs, spending patterns, and digital behavior?

- Regulatory and Operational Considerations:

o Are there legal, logistical, or compliance barriers to entry? o Can your MVP operate within these constraints?

- Revenue Potential:

o What is the average revenue per user (ARPU)?

o How often will customers repurchase or subscribe?

- Channel Viability:

o How easy or expensive is it to reach this market?

o Are online channels cost-effective for acquisition?

Example Scenario:

A language learning app targeting Indian teenagers must analyze:

- TAM: All smartphone-using students.
- SAM: Students actively preparing for English exams.
- SOM: 10% of SAM reachable via Instagram-based marketing.

Output of a Market Opportunity Analysis:

- A go/no-go decision on whether to invest further in scaling the MVP.
- Inputs for pricing strategy and business model validation.
- Better pitch data for investors.

Tools for Analysis:

- Google Trends, Statista, IBISWorld, industry whitepapers.
- Surveys, focus groups, competitor app reviews.

5.4 Structuring Business Models Around MVPs

5.4.1 Desirability: Customer-Centered MVPs

Desirability refers to whether customers truly want and need the product being developed. It is the first and most critical layer in MVP validation, as it tests the alignment between the user's problems and the product's promise. A business model built around desirability ensures the value proposition matches user expectations.

Key considerations for building a desirable MVP:

• Start by conducting in-depth customer research — interviews, observation and surveys— to learn about pain points, motivations and preferences.

• Create user personas to classify types of customers and identify those most likely to adopt early.

• Define your user jobs, pains and gains with the Value Proposition Canvas to develop prioritisation around what is important.

• Use explainer videos or prototypes to test desirability before committing to a full build.

• Cut out non-essential features and only include the 'must have' features in the MVP that solve an important user problem.

• Watch metrics like sign-ups, engagement and retention that indicate interest and usability.

Desirability-focused MVP examples:

• Dropbox proved interest by demonstrating demand with a video demo, before working on the product.

• Zappos introduced desirability testing by posting shoes online and manually buying them from stores as people placed orders.

Startups de-risk the process by building desirability first: solving the problem that they think others like them will care about, or organizing their experiences to better meet a need.

5.4.2 Viability: Financial Sustainability

Viability basically is whether the MVP and its associated business model can be sustained to continue providing revenue and profit. A market model is a viable one in which the value you create for users also creates sustainable operating, development or scaling costs.

Crucial financial viability elements for MVPs:

• Clarify early revenues: Does the MVP strategy depend on, for example, subscriptions and freemium upsell (or one-time payment)?

- Verify that your pricing strategy aligns with your customers' willingness to pay and perceived value.

- Determine CAC and CLV (at the risk of missing them — earlier the better when using simple assumptions).

- Develop a perspective on scalable monetization opportunities, including building recurring-revenue models.

- Monitor significant financial indicators when using a MVP:

o Conversion rate

o Churn rate o ARPU (Average revenue per user)

- Know your fixed costs vs. your variable costs, so you can plan for different growth scenarios.

Examples of MVPs validating viability:

- Spotify experimented with a free tier to acquire users, later touting a premium model.

- Canva was a freemium from the start, proving out viability through premium template purchases.

Viability means that the business is not only useful but also commercially sustainable, an important half-way point on your way to scale.

5.4.3 Feasibility: Resources and Capabilities

Viability is determining if the startup has the technical, operational and human capacity to deliver effectively on the MVP. It's about execution — whether the team can actually deliver the solution with resources at their disposal.

Key feasibility aspects in MVP planning are:

- Evaluate technical feasibility: Do you have the right tools, platforms, and developer capacity to develop an MVP with key features in it?

- Assess your operational needs: Can you scale up and deliver help, or fill physical product orders?

- Get to know your strengths and weaknesses as team—do you need co-founders, freelancers or strategic partners?

- Define external dependencies like 3rd-party APIs, logistics partners or legal approvals.

- Foresee the time and recourses for:

o Development o Testing and iterating o Customer care

- Lean into low-code/no-code tools or open-source platforms for faster development and early testing.

Real-world examples:

- Airbnb's early MVP consisted of manual coordination (emails to hosts) rather than an actual booking engine to validate feasibility.
- UrbanClap (now Urban Company) started out on that side of like backend scheduling was being done over spreadsheets, WhatsApp before they just essentially automated the same.

By getting validation of feasibility, startups make sure that they can actually deliver the value they are promising in a reliable manner and to scale.

5.5 Summary

❖ The Business Model Canvas (BMC) is a convenient one-page view of how a startup creates, delivers, and captures value, and this shapes MVP design and validation.

1

❖ The nine elements of BMC(customer segments, value propositions, channels, customer relationships, revenue streams,key resources,key activities,key partnerships and cost structure) should have a congruence design and validated by user feedback.

❖ The Value Proposition Canvas (VPC) extends this framework by associating products to customer jobs, pains and gains and shows if any solution matches directly with user needs.

❖ Adjustable revenue models for MVP concepts based on customer behaviour and their willingness to pay are to be tested: freemium, subscription or pay-per-use.

❖ Startups must apply value-based pricing strategies, rather than cost-plus approaches, to reflect the perceived worth of the MVP to different user segments.

❖ Conducting market opportunity analysis helps determine the size and potential of a target market, guiding product development and business strategy.

❖ A successful business model is structured around the three pillars of innovation: desirability (user need), viability (financial sustainability), and feasibility (resource capability).

❖ Early-stage startups must treat each business model component as a hypothesis to test, ensuring alignment between customer expectations and business outcomes.

5.6 Key Terms

2

1. Business Model Canvas (BMC) – A strategic tool that visually maps out the key components of a business model on a single page.

2. Value Proposition Canvas (VPC) – A framework that aligns customer needs (jobs, pains, gains) with product features (pain relievers, gain creators).

3. Minimum Viable Product (MVP) – The simplest version of a product built to test core hypotheses and gather feedback.

4. Revenue Streams – The income sources through which a business earns money from its customer segments.

5. Customer Jobs – Tasks, problems, or goals that customers seek to accomplish in their work or life.

6. Desirability – The degree to which a product solves a real user need or fulfills a customer want.

7. Viability – The financial sustainability and profitability of a business model.

8. Feasibility – The technical and operational ability of a team to build and deliver a product.

9. Freemium Model – A pricing strategy that offers core services for free while charging for premium features.

10. Market Opportunity Analysis – The process of evaluating a market's potential size, growth, and accessibility to guide product or business strategy.

5.7 Descriptive Questions

1. Explain the purpose and structure of the Business Model Canvas. How does it help startups align product and strategy?

2. Describe the nine key building blocks of the BMC and provide examples relevant to digital products.

3. What is the Value Proposition Canvas, and how does it support MVP development?

4. Differentiate between customer jobs, pains, and gains using an example of an online learning platform.

5. How should startups approach designing revenue streams around an MVP? Explain with real-world examples.

6. Discuss at least three pricing strategies suitable for early-stage startups and their pros and cons.

7. What is market opportunity analysis, and why is it critical before scaling an MVP?

8. Analyze the importance of desirability, viability, and feasibility in structuring a successful business model.

9. How can a freemium model be both a growth driver and a risk to financial sustainability?

10. Map the business model canvas for a fitness-tracking wearable startup targeting young professionals.

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5.9 Case Study

"How Netflix Adapted Its Business Model Canvas for Growth"

Introduction

Netflix is one of the most successful examples of a company that has continuously adapted its business model to respond to technological change, customer expectations, and competitive pressures. Originally founded in 1997 as a DVD rental service, Netflix transformed itself into the world's leading subscription-based streaming platform, later expanding into original content production and global markets.

The flexibility of Netflix is studied at its best when examined with the Business Model Canvas (BMC)-looking at how various segments, propositions and channels changed over time. By iterating on its BMC, Netflix turned from a small DVD service in the US to a global juggernaut serving more than 230 million members across 190+ countries.

Background

Netflix was founded in 1997, and its original business model focused on renting DVDs by mail — a service that rivaled the storefront video rental business led by Blockbuster. It was consumer convenience—movies delivered directly to people's homes, and without any late fees. Then, in 2007, as broadband penetration picked up, Netflix introduced its streaming service and moved from a logistics-heavy DVD model to one that was digital first.

This strategic change was a significant shift in its BMC:

•Customer base grew from national U.S.-based DVD renters to global digital consumers.

• Channels migrated from postal delivery to online streaming available on myriad devices.

• Revenue changed from pay-per-rental and distribution revenue to subscription-based recurring revenue.

• The critical capabilities shifted from warehousing to the digital backbone to content creation.

Netflix's flexibility was not without trade-offs. Its progression also included confronting key challenges on scalability, competition and customer satisfaction—each necessitating changes in business model.

Problem 1: From DVD Rental to Online Streaming

Challenge:

In the early 2000s, Netflix's DVD business was reaching the limits of its scalability and facing competition from Rising Blockbuster and other rental chains. As traditionally analogue-based consumer behaviour rapidly went digital, Netflix faced becoming irrelevant if it failed to wean itself off DVDs.

BMC Elements Affected:

• Channels

• Value Proposition

• Key Resources

Solution:

Netflix introduced streaming in 2007, allowing movies and TV shows to be watched instantly online. There were no distribution centers, and it all played into the ethos of wanting things in bite-size pieces. Through bundling with devices (Sony, Microsoft, smart TV makers) Netflix made its service available on a variety of platforms and even embedded with some home theater equipment making streaming easy.

Outcome:

The slikde set netflix as a pioneering force in digital streaming, well ahead of all the other players, and paved its path to grow globally with the idea. The value proposition was no longer "easy DVD rental" but "infinite on-demand entertainment."

Issue 2: Gaps in a Competitive Streaming Market

Challenge:

By the early 2010s, fellow competitors like Hulu and Amazon Prime Video —and then Disney+— emerged as rivals to Netflix. As the libraries of content became fragmented between platforms, Netflix faced losing customers to a rival with popular exclusive shows or films.

BMC Elements Affected:

• Value Proposition

• Customer Relations (Relationships)

• Key Activities

Solution:

In 2013, Netflix shifted its focus to producing original content with "House of Cards." By spending lavishly on exclusive shows and movies, Netflix established a differentiated value proposition: not only a source for streaming video content, but also the home of distinctive, award-winning entertainment.

Its core business also grew to involve script procurement, talent and content production — roles that historically belonged to studios. It also bolstered customer relationships; the company observed that its original series engendered loyalty and decreased churn.

Outcome:

In establishing itself as a creative force, Netflix has created global hits like Stranger Things, The Crown and Money Heist. That original content became the lynchpin of its competitive

advantage, stunning customers into submission until they stayed on even when competitors had competent third-party libraries.

Problem Statement 3: Scaling Internationally and Managing Costs

Challenge:

By the late 2010s, Netflix aimed to expand globally but faced two challenges:

1. Different cultural preferences and regulatory landscapes across markets.

2. Rising costs from content production and licensing.

BMC Elements Affected:

- Customer Segments
- Key Partnerships
- Cost Structure and Revenue Streams

Solution:

Netflix adopted a localization strategy by producing region-specific content (e.g., Sacred Games

in India, Dark in Germany, Squid Game in South Korea). It also leveraged partnerships with telecom companies for bundled subscriptions, lowering customer acquisition costs.

On the cost side, Netflix shifted toward subscription-based revenue models with tiered pricing. This included affordable mobile-only plans in emerging markets to expand its customer base without sacrificing profitability.

Outcome:

Localized content boosted global adoption, with hits like Squid Game driving worldwide cultural impact. Bundled partnerships and tiered pricing improved affordability and scalability. Although production costs remained high, global subscriber growth offset these expenses, reinforcing Netflix's leadership.

Conclusion

Netflix's growth journey illustrates the importance of dynamic business model innovation. By applying the BMC framework, it becomes clear that Netflix succeeded not simply by having a good product but by strategically adapting every element of its business model in response to market shifts.

- The move from DVDs to streaming redefined its channels and value proposition.

- Investment in original content enhanced customer relationships and key activities.

- Global expansion through localized strategies adjusted customer segments, partnerships, and revenue streams.

Ultimately, Netflix's ability to continually reframe its BMC enabled it to remain competitive, resilient, and innovative in a volatile industry.

Case-Related Questions

1. How did Netflix's changing value proposition and channels, moving from sending DVDs to streaming media online, transform them?
2. How did the production of content for itself enhance Netflix's competitive advantage under the BMC framework?
3. What obstacles did Netflix encounter when attempting to expand globally, and what strategy did it use to overcome these challenges in terms of customer segments and cost structure?

4. Could Netflix's business model remain sustainable in the face of new entrants (Disney+, Apple TV+)? Why or why not?

5. If you were a Netflix strategist, which block of the BMC would you prioritize for the company's future growth—value proposition, revenue streams, or partnerships? Justify your choice.

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Design Thinking & MVP Management

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Unit 6: Building and Iterating the MVP

Learning Objectives

1. Get introduced to the part played and of what no code solutions such as Carrd, Figma, Notion and ClickUp is capable when it comes to creating quick MVPs an landing page prototypes.
2. Value user feedback early on and use methodologies such as surveys, interviews, or usability tests to conduct user research.
3. Plan and implement cheap validation experiments like A/B tests, smoke tests, engagement metrics tracking.
4. Study real-time user data to understand whether you should pivot or persevere and follow validated learning.
5. Incorporate feedback through agile iteration cycles and feedback loops to constantly enhance the MVP.
6. Implement scalable feature development based on validated user behavior and performance metrics.
7. We were to take real use cases of pivot versus persevere decisions and let them inform our own product developemnt strategy.

Content

6.0 Introductory Caselet

6.1 No-Code Tools for Rapid Prototyping

6.2 User Testing and Validation

6.3 Experiments for MVP Validation

6.4 Pivot vs. Persevere Decisions

6.5 Integrating Feedback into Product Improvements

6.6 Summary

6.7 Key Terms

6.8 Descriptive Questions

6.9 References

6.10 Case Study

6.0 Introductory Caselet

SmartMeal: Howthis startup is helping working professionals tackle their daily nutrition issues on the clockMarch 09, 2015 SmartMeal one of the startups trying to help people maintained a health life style while going about their busy work schedules on a day-to-day basisSmartmeal officially kicked off with supportivefeatures-based MVP. It provided personalized meal plans, A.I.-generated grocery lists, calorie tracking and integration with fitness apps. The team constructed the prototype with a combination of Figma for design, Carrd for landing pages and ClickUp for internal task organization. Even with visually rich designs, and a working prototype, there was low user adoption post signup.

The founding team made the decision to run a two-week validation sprint. They conducted surveys, interviews and usability testing. The feedback revealed a key insight: most users were confounded by the complexity and simply wanted to answer the question, “What should I eat today”? feature. Through A/B testing, the team compared the original set of features with a pared-down version featuring only daily meal recommendations.

The simpler edition resulted in 40% more engagement with a higher emotional resonance as qualitative feedback revealed. This feedback loop resulted in a product pivot, wherein other features were pulled out into optional modules and the MVP of their core was turned into a barebones meal suggestion engine.

The case illustrates how rapid prototyping, early testing, and iteration can reveal what users really care about — and how overbuilding can obscure rather than reveal product-market fit.

Critical Thinking Question

What mistakes did SmartMeal make that could have been prevented when trying to avoid overbuilding their first MVP? What principles from Unit 6 should a startup follow to ensure that features set are addressing real user needs?

6.1 No-Code Tools for Quick Prototyping

6.1.1 Carrd – For When You Need to Create a Landing Page Quickly

Carrd is an intuitive and easy to use no-code platform for getting single-page sites, quick landing pages built. Perfect for early stage startups that want to validate MVP ideas with least efforts (less time, less money).

Key Features of Carrd:

- Drag and drop interface with templates that can be customized for fast setup.
- Mobile and desktop responsive design.
- Built in form integration (for collection of emails, signups for surveys, or early access registration)

• Third-party integrations (using Zapier, Mailchimp, Google Forms etc.).

• The ability to use and custom domains while managing SEO and meta data.

• Low pricing, including a no-cost tier as well as inexpensive premium plans.

Use Cases in MVP Context:

• Formulate smoke tests for ideas based on the value proposition. Publish a landing page with a product or service description.

• There should be an “Signup/Notify Me” button for interest collection and email list-building.

• Test one value proposition or CTA (Call-to-Action) against another in A/B testing.

• Host surveys, pilot offers or even fake-door tests (where users click to request a feature that’s not yet built) on Carrd.

Best Practices:

• Simplicit and crisp design - suggest focusing on clarity of what one is receiving.

• Use headliens and subheadings that call out the customer job or pain.

• Include trust signals like testimonials, partner logos or usage stats (having them).

And:• Make sure the CTA is working: use action oriented language such as "Start my Free Plan", instead of "Submit".

Real-World Example:

• A startup language learning app leveraged Carrd to test their MVP. They created a page that featured a quick demo video, copy with benefits and a beta tester sign-up form. 2,000 emails were collected in a week — delivering proof of interest before any backend existed.

Why Carrd is Good for Startups:

• No technical abilities are required.

• Promotes fast experimentation and hypothesis validation.

• Fosters a lean model for customer discovery.

6.1.2 Figma ~ Wireframe and UI/UX Prototyping

Figma is an interface design tool that enables multiple designers to collaborate in real-time. It's used by product designers, developers and entrepreneurs to develop wireframes, mockups and high fidelity prototypes without any code.

Key Features of Figma:

- Real-time collaboration, much like in Google Docs.
- Must be able to design, develop and hand off interactive prototypes with navigation flows, buttons, transitions & interactions.
- Rich templates and community resources, including thousands of UI kits, icon libraries and design systems.
- Comments and version control for team feedback without leaving the document.
- Cross-platform: works in your web browser or desktop app on Windows, macOS and Linux.

Uses in MVP Prototyping:

- Design low-fi wireframes for quick ideation and layout concepts.
- Develop high-fidelity prototypes that match the final deliverable.
- Build clickable prototypes without the need to develop back-end.
- Share prototypes with users, stakeholders, or developers to get feedback or validation on user flows.
- Perform usability testing by watching how users use Figma prototypes.

Best Practices:

- Begin with user flows and use cases, not screens.
- Utilize auto-layout and components for scalable, reusable design elements.
- Test with real users to validate UI changes before they are finalized.
- Connect remote user testing tools such as Maze or Useberry directly to Figma prototypes.

Real-World Example:

- A fintech startup designed an onboarding flow for their banking app MVP in Figma. They did remote testing with 15 users and found that on the PIN setup screen, 40% of users could not figure out what was going on, so it was re-designed before you ever started to write any code.

Why Figma is a Game-Changer:

- Saves development waste by visually testing ideas.
- Promotes UX thinking iteratively.
- Enables non technical founders to get involved with product design from the onset.

Did You Know?

"Figma was originally built as a browser-based alternative to desktop design tools like Sketch, but its real-time collaboration feature became its most defining trait. Interestingly, Figma's own MVP was tested with **design students** rather than professional teams to learn how new users interact with its tools. This early feedback helped them build a product with **exceptional onboarding and intuitiveness**, contributing to its rapid adoption among startups and enterprise design teams alike."

6.1.3 Notion - Documentation, Workspaces, Notes... and more!

Among collection of productivity and collaboration tools, Notion seems to stand out as the most adaptable tool for startups, small teams, or even large companies. Notion is an all-in-one workspace that lets you write, plan and share in one space note-taking, task management, databases-devs wikis, and collaborative writing. For early-stage startups and MVP-teams this is especially important as Tability will act like a "single source of truth" where everything about product development, user research, team operations is held in one place. This erases the burdens of handling siloed documentation, project tracking tools and communication.

Knowledge management has always been unusually difficult for startups. Ideas fall through the cracks in email threads, meeting notes get lost across docs and teams trip over themselves trying to bring user feedback into product decision making. Notion fills some of the gaps by providing a flexible, structured work environment in which teams can adapt workflows accordingly. This versatility is a reason why it's so heavily utilized in entrepreneur ecosystems, particularly as the MVP foundation to act fast and clearly when dealing with new business needs.

Key Features of Notion

Notion is quite versatile, but some features make it particularly useful to startups who want to get organized more and faster.

• Customizable pages and ot databases with many supported content types!

Teams can add text notes, tables with custom fields, Kanban boards, calendars and even embed media from the web. Consider a design startup that uses the pencil to sketch, annotate and timeline all on the same page for holistic management of projects.

• Templates for product roadmaps, user research repositories, meeting notes and design specs

Teams do not need to reinvent workflows, but instead can copy the prebuilt templates. A SaaS startup, for example, might leverage Notion's roadmap template to sync development sprints with release deadlines.

• Collaborative editing and tagging in real-time using @mentions

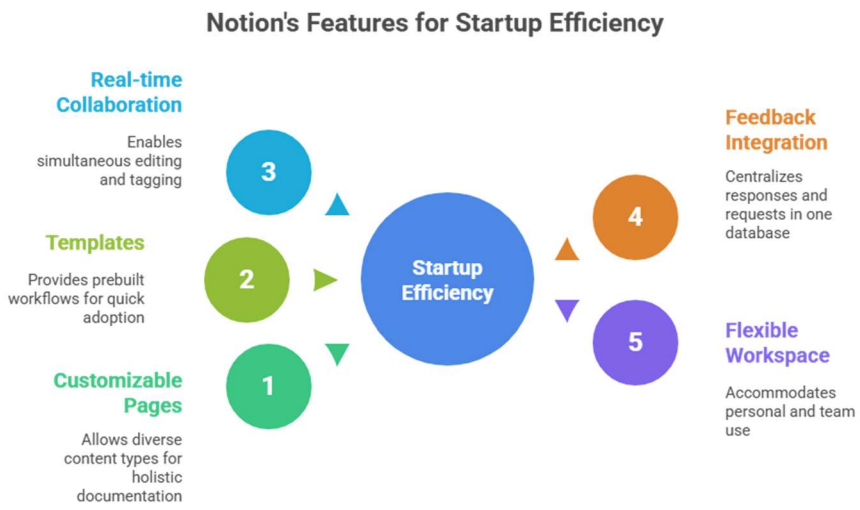
This brings together distributed teams at the same time. A product manager might tag a developer in a bug report, or a designer in a feedback thread -- for direct accountability.

• Unification of the feedback gathering, backlog keeping and feature documentation

Early MVP teams can gather survey responses, customer interviews and feature requests into a single database that links to backlog items.

• Adaptable workspace design with personal or team use

Notion works for keeping personal to-do lists and organizing large, cross-functional efforts by teams. For instance, a founder might maintain personal investor notes, while the larger team focuses on product specifications in shared pages.



Use Cases in MVP Workflow

To startups aspiring to fine-tune their MVP process, Notion is not simply a documentation tool, but rather an asset for the lean and rapid approach.

• Nude a meeting "live" by marking documents as favourites/requesting sequencing what are these for?

Value prop, target personas and MVP roadmaps can all be captured in a single place for teams to use. For example, a fintech startup can log all of the hypotheses it has around customer pain points alongside their tested counterpart and results from testing.

• User interview and survey result favorite tag and database templates

Insight can be tagged to topics such as usability, price sensitivity, or features. This way, qualitative data is normalized and tied to product decisions.

• Develop feature backlog and align to Agile sprints

Teams can set up Kanban boards or task boards to organize and prioritize features. A gaming startup, for example, should be able to track feature requests, assign them to sprints and monitor progress from an idea to a release.

• Share internal wikis and meeting notes

Rather than copying texts and pasting, teams can use a single source of truth that doesn't require exchanging dozens of versions of documents.

This eliminates the duplication and keeps communication consistent across distributed teams.

• Create a public changelog or knowledge base for early adopters

One way for a start-up to provide transparency is by recording changes and bug fixes, which can lead to trust with beta testers. For instance, an edtech startup could highlight weekly feature updates to indicate that the company listens to its users.

Best Practices

Having said that, as powerful as Notion is, you'll need to be thoughtful about applying it in order to get the most out of it for a startup.

• Join research with product decisions in relational databases

If an app is capturing user interview data, it can be associated with my backlog items. For example, a usability issue with navigation could be labeled and associated to the design fix directly in our roadmap.

• Establish Custom Templates for Repetitive tasks – such as sprint reviews or feature specifications which helps in reducing redundancy and aligns process. One example would be a template for sprint retrospective where the organization can standardize on how the team captures success, blockers and action items.

• Utilize Notion AI to condense extensive notes or turn them into action items

This makes it easier for the team to extract meaning from, say, large datasets or transcripts of meetings. A health care start-up, for example, could use AI summaries to summarize insights gleaned from 50 patient interviews.

• Simplify dashboards, do not overcomplicate

It's a mistake that too many startups make — creating overly complex workspaces. Better to keep it sime as much as possible for an MVP, so and clarity instead of coolness.

Real-World Example

There's a health-tech startup that makes for a good example of how Notion can serve the MVP flow. The company has done extensive usability testing, collecting a tremendous amount of feedback from patients interacting with its app. Each session was documented in a shared Notion database and classified by type of issue, including navigation issues, confusing medical terminology or technical bugs. And was linked in to the product roadmap so devs and designers can prioritize their fixes in a practical way.

That not only accelerated iteration, but it also helped the team get more aligned: designers really did know what usability issues were most pressing, and developers had explicit instructions tied back to feature work. "We were able to get higher quality prototypes out a lot faster, and have open communication with everyone involved," the startup said.

Why You Should Use Notion in Your MVP Early Teams

The overwhelming need for small startups to innovate at speed but still keep everything in house. Notion is a key part of that - it's our source of truth for documentation, planning and collaboration.

- Keep distributed teams in sync

Centralizing decisions, research and tasks in a single tool can help knowledge spread through remote-first startups. For instance, there is nothing stopping a team with members in India, the U.S. and Europe from working together seamlessly with no time-zone friction.

• Makes chances of communication error and loss of knowledge lower.

Notes from meeting, feature specs and research learnings are kept not behind one person making it easier to get them involved as well avoid losing their knowledge if they move on.

- Enables Transparency and Quick Reference for lean iteration.

This matchmaking of user research to product features helps startups make sure they are iterating based on evidence rather than guesswork.

6.1.4 ClickUp – Task and Project Management

ClickUp - Productivity Platform ClickUp is a new way to work and an all in one platform. It contains task tracker, project planning & time tracking, goal setting and collaboration feature and it's favorite of Hollystartup companies and people looking to MVP the idea. And rather than bouncing back and forth between spreadsheets, emails, and separate single-use apps, teams can use ClickUp as a single source of truth – but one with total transparency." By making it work how you already work, it can be as friendly to a small MVP team as it is to growing startups that need cross-department collaboration.

Centralized Task Management

• The layering of tasks, subtasks, and dependencies is clear.

Monumental acts of destruction can shatter large dreams, and also make enormous undertakings seem approachable.

ClickUp enables startups to transform big-picture goals into organized workflows. For instance, “Develop

MVP Prototype” could then potentially roll up into a larger work item, and have sub-work capture for something like “Frontend UI Design,” “Backend API Integration,” and “User Testing.” “So dependencies are there to ensure that testing can’t even start until the design and development work is done, and this helps make sure that the sequence of progression stays orderly (sequential).”

- Room for preference: Users can see in list form, Kanban or Gantt.

Different team members can view the same project differently and yet continue working in a consistent manner.

A marketing team could see a Kanban board of campaigns shear from “Draft” to “Live,” while a product manager spots the same work in a Gantt chart, ticking down due dates. With this freedom, everyone is able to do their work in the format they know - no data duplication needed.

• Tags and priorities are useful for keeping teams focused on what’s most urgent.

To-dos can be tagged high, medium or low priority.

For example, while you’re testing an MVP, fixing a critical bug in your login flow can be marked “urgent” while adding that nice-to-have optional dark mode can be marked “low priority.” Placing money where it will do the most good.

- Assignments and logs for accountability.

Every task is allocatable to team members and an audit history logs all modifications.

This prevents ambiguity. For instance in a startup design sprint. e.g., one UX whose bug reported it was sent to both designer and developer so you could see that when the fix/change are being made each party knows about such work needed.

Project Planning and Roadmapping

• Roadmaps bridge work and milestones.

“Timelines and dependencies make long-term planning visible [and] attainable.

Start-ups could map out product roadmaps, with milestones like “Beta Launch” or “Investor Demo.” To the SaaS group, this could serve as an infrastructure that prepares things on the back-end to launch said customer portal.

• OKRs (Objectives and Key Results) are the connection between day-to-day work and strategy.

Goals should reflect employees’ responsibilities in the workplace to be achievable.

For instance, if the quarterly goal is to “Get 500 beta users,” you’d be able to have subtasks like “Launch 5 ad campaigns” and “Onboard 50 testers per week” link directly to this goal in ClickUp. And the progress we make toward those goals will be measurable in real-time.

• Agile and Waterfall flexibility for variety of workflows.

Agile sprints or waterfall plans both work within the product.

A gaming startup might be running two-week Agile sprints with some backlog grooming and sprint reviews in ClickUp, while a hardware manufacturer might have Waterfall roadmaps with linear dependencies like prototyping → testing → compliance.

- Cross-functional coordination ensures that teams remain in lockstep.

Marketing, operations and sales roadmaps could also connect to product development.

Once a feature is on the roadmap, marketing lines up campaigns and customer success works on training materials. This synergy means no division works in silos.

Collaboration and Communication

- In-line docs and comments minimize the necessity to switch context.

Any notes, specs and feedback will be attached to tasks for some context.

A design team working on a new feature spec can simply work directly in ClickUp docs that are attached to the feature task. No longer flow through emails or alternative tools, all updates are linked to the original task.

- @Mentions and threaded conversations provide for clarity.

Team members can raise a red flag on a problem or assign micro-responsibilities.

At bugtesting, a QA specialist can mark up the developer directly with screenshots so that anything got resolved fast and no time has been lost for unprecised reporting.

- Chat and notifications maintain real-time communication.

Notifications for updates or deadlines help save information.

For distributed teams that work across time zones, these features let the team stay in sync. A manager in the U.S., for instance, gets real-time notifications when a developer oversees in Europe changes sprint priorities.

- Permissions protect private information.

Access can be limited by roles and projects.

This is important for the startup that's juggling investor updates or regulatory filings. Leaders can limit visibility of confidential investor updates and reports whilst making product tasks available to the entire team.

Time Management and Productivity Tracking

- Task effort is tracked through internal time tracking.

Users can log hours directly on tasks or utilize timers.

For instance, a dev ed on an API integration logs time automatically, allowing managers to gauge productivity and predict resource needs.

- Perspectives of workload prevent burnout.

Managers can see team capacity and rebalance work if necessary.

If the designer has more than one assignment, we can assign tasks to a different team member so all deadlines are respected without having to rush anything.

• Recurring features make routine work easier.

Routines such as the weekly sprint retro can be automated for example.

A recurring task might be created by a QA team for regression testing to execute before each release cycle, which can keep things consistent as well accountable.

- Reports and dashboards provide visibility.

Metrics display completion rates, missed deadlines and man-hours.

Then these numbers can help startups to spot inefficiencies. If reports tell him that 40% of our time is wasted supporting customers, leaders can make a call to add a dedicated resource for support so developers are unhinged.

Scalability and Customization

- Customizing fields to industry needs.

Sections for compliance, budgets or client approvals can also be included.

A fintech startup could add fields for monitoring “Regulatory Status,” while a creative agency might add “Client Review Stage” to align with project workflows.

- Automation cuts down on repetitive manual work.

'Rules' can be defined (e.g. 'notify manager when task is complete')

This is handy on MVP type teams where you need visibility over every little update. For instance, a design mockup that has been signed off can automatically trigger devs to queue the integration.

• Scale Across Departments: Embeddable scales across departments to eliminate silos.

Other teams can use the same workspace when adjusting views.

With Cross-team use Sales, marketing & product all work within shared ClickUp spaces meaning no one department is ever creating redundant workflows.

- Role-based permissions enhance governance.

Sensitive information is restricted to specific roles.

Investor-facing updates, compliances plans or employee reviews can be secure while product roadmaps are public for everyone to see.

Real-World Example

A mid-stage edtech startup leveraged ClickUp for the MVP journey. First, the team of five applied Kanban boards for keeping track on tasks assigned to develop learning-app prototype. While they did this, ClickUp's goaltracking feature helped them connect the dots between user acquisition campaigns and product development timelines. They also adopted workload views to coordinate distributed developers so that no one was overcommitted.

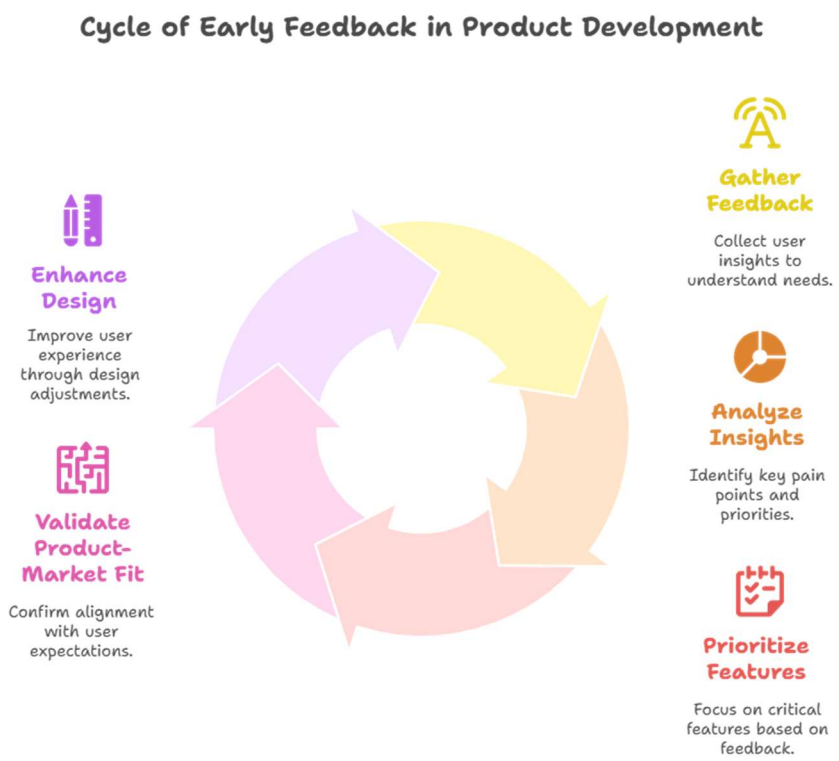
As they moved into more markets, the startup added custom fields to track “Localization Progress” for each country. Automation alerted the marketing teams when translations were done, ensuring campaigns corresponded to product readiness. Combining documentation, road mapping, and real-time communication helped the startup shorten cycles and gave them clarity between product, design, marketing teams.

6.2 User Testing and Validation

6.2.1 Significance of Early User Feedback

Just how important is that early user feedback in determining the success of an MVP. It's a way to validate that what you're building is genuinely useful to the people who will use it, reducing waste and giving startups a chance to iterate until they find something that works. Founders complete a seed round to validate assumptions, prioritise features and build their product before scaling.

The Big Reasons Early Feedback Matters



- Avoids dilution of aim from user requirements

The user behavior may often indicate very different expectations of what the customer problem might be that founders think they know. In such conditions, early feedback helps uncover potential pain points buried ahead in the process and keeps teams from building things that address the wrong problem. For instance, when Airbnb tested its initial model, it found that trust and security were more precious to travelers than mere price — thus the introduction of host reviews and secure payments.

• Associate better feature prioritization

User feedback makes it evident which features are mandatory and which should be freely available. By zeroing in on things that add immediate value, startups can prevent being spread thin. For example, Dropbox first passed over remote collaboration features and validated its core feature — file syncing that's imperceptible — based on feedback of it being what users urgently needed.

• Minimizes waste

Startups also save money by proving assumptions with users before scaling, rather than spending on features that will not be used. This strategy saves money and expedites development. Zappos, for one, proved demand for online shoe shopping with a bare-bones

site and photos before expanding to warehouses — eliminating wasteful infrastructure investment.

- Verifies direction of product-market fit

Preliminary user traction and qualitative feedback can validate whether the MVP is heading in the right direction. Teams can measure early adoption rates, churn levels and customer comments to determine if they should pivot or persevere. After negative feedback, Slack honed the failure of a game into its communication software.

• Reinforces the focus on user-centred design

Feedback in the design phase also helps check that interfaces, workflows and features harmonise with the way users do things. This results in higher adoption rates and less churn because customers believe that the product was made for them. Figma, for instance, co-created features with early design teams to build a tool that closely resembled real-world design processes.

Methods of Early Feedback

• User interviews

Interviews are excellent for gaining insight into motivations or frustrations, and opportunities. For instance, many fintech startups will interview potential users to find out the pain points with traditional banking prior to reveling their MVP features.

• Mockup walkthroughs

Users can be presented with click-through mockups, or wireframes to provide feedback on how the system will work before any code is written. A health care app, for example, can share mock-ups of its patient dashboard with doctors and make sure it all makes sense.

- Pilot test sessions

Interactive prototypes allow users to experience close-to-real-life experience, they enable the startups to watch users in action live. Game devs would frequently try out early builds on a few folks to see if mechanics were confusing or something didn't work right.

- Beta programs and pilots

Beta programs entail launching a, often feature-restricted version of its product, to a small subset of users willing to provide extensive feedback. Gmail, in its extended beta phase, gave Google the chance to smooth out usability and roll out features at pace with what was actually needed from users.

6.2.2 Conducting Surveys and Interviews

Both surveys and interviews are key tools for MVP validation because they enable startups to gather quantitative data from a larger number of people and qualitative feedback from

those individuals. Surveys expose broad trends, interviews reveal deeper motivations and help explain the context. Together, they help entrepreneurs vet assumptions about user behavior, feature demands and barriers to adoption.

Surveys

- Ideal for gathering quantitative data from a larger group promptly

Startups can access dozens or even hundreds of users at once via surveys – which is a lot easier to facilitate than interviews for measurable data. For instance, an edtech startup might deploy a survey to get a quick read on how many students would rather use mobile learning apps instead of desktop platforms.

• Feature preferences, pain points, demographic or behavioral patterns You'll likely want to identify which features your users value most and which are a source of frustration for them — particularly across different segments (e.g., specific demographic groups). A food service delivery startup, for example, could learn through surveys that younger users care most about speed of delivery and kick less on order accuracy as older users do.

• Must be short and organised- employ Leikert scales,open-ended questions and multiple-choicequesions.

Low-key design avoids over-surveying and ensure the quality of answers. Scales that go from "strongly agree to strongly disagree" help to quantify people's views, while a modest number of open-ended questions will capture more unexpected ideas. A SaaS business may ask users to rate ease of use on a scale of 1–5, followed by an open-ended question about what made the product difficult to use.

- Tools:Google Forms, Typeform, SurveyMonkey

Digital surveying solutions help you easily collect and analyse Data to generate visual reports. Typeform, for instance, helps startups build intuitive, conversational interactive surveys that get more responses.

For example, a mobile app startup might send out such a survey to early adopters immediately following beta testing.

Interview Techniques

• Depth in user needs, motivations, pain points = Interview depth you will not get from a survey Surveys don't unlock the reasoning for why users behave the way they do and startups can gain this. For example, if a fintech startup interviews customers and finds that they are reluctant to use its app because they don't trust it will secure their data, this may not come out clearly in a survey.

• Describe user stories, decision-making mechanisms, and emotional triggers in response to MVP prototypes or mockups

Interviews are a great opportunity to understand how people solve problems today and what emotional motivators drive those decisions. A health-tech entrepreneur might find that users choose empathetic language rather than clinical jargon when he asks them what apps they like, influencing the tone of product design.

• Held in person, by videoconferencing or over the phone

Various file types are available to work with users' schedules. Video calls are the most popular because interviewers can also read body language. For instance, a distant startup could schedule meetings via Zoom with beta testers from around the world.

• Formulate open questions in a way that does not lead the respondent

The questions should invite storytelling not just yes or no answers. Instead, try "Can you walk me through how you track expenses now?" offers more nuance than "Do you use an app to track expenses?" A proptech startup could find that users are using spreadsheets for a lot of different applications, which is an opportunity to streamline the process.

Best Practices

• Lead into interviews with context-derive ice-breakers

And asking simple, applicable questions at the beginning opens up and creates trust. For instance, an open-ended question like "Tell me about the last time you used a food delivery service" could make participants feel more comfortable talking about challenges without feeling put on the spot.

• Document (with permission) or transcribe responses

Recording your notes prevents you from losing information and allows multiple team members to review responses. A startup running

20 user-interviews could have transcripts, and be searching through the conversations for patterns of words/phrases such as "confusing," "slow," or "convenient."

• Search for patterns and inconsistencies in replies

Trends point to common needs, while contradictions suggest various sectors. For example, a productivity-app startup might learn that freelancers need basic task lists but enterprise customers require integrations, indicating the need for multiple tiers.

• Mix both methods — use surveys to identify trends, and interviews to drill into those developments

Surveys tell us what is typical; interviews help us understand why. A travel app company might test this concept further with surveys to validate that trip-planning tools are something people want, and then move on to interviews where it finds out that travelers also want collaborative planning with friends.

Purpose in MVP Validation

- Determine if the MVP matches user expectations

Initial surveys and interviews verify if the MVP is solving the problem it was designed to solve. For instance, Dropbox leveraged user conversations to confirm that people actually wanted seamless file sharing across devices.

- Reveal barriers to participation or adoption

Feedback is drawing attention to friction points which prevent large scale utilization. A ride-hailing company may find through interviews that users are hesitant about safety, leading to features like driver ratings and the ability for friends to share a trip.

- Leverage insights to guide product evolution and marketing messaging

Insights inform product as well as market positioning. Slack improved its messaging around "team collaboration" (as opposed to "messaging") after learning in user interviews that teams cared more deeply about productivity benefits than they did use-it-if-you-come-to the-party casual chat features.

6.2.3 Usability Testing Techniques

Usability testing is a formal process for measuring how easy users can interact with your product or MVP. It uncovers obstacles to provide a better task completion, validates design assumptions and reveals areas for improvement in the overall user experience. Startups minimize the risk of launching a product that annoys users or doesn't live up to expectations by testing before they're live.

Types of Usability Testing

• Moderated Testing

Such a testing is live, and the tester tells actions to be conducted. It lets teams watch body language, pauses and confused moments to discover more about the problems those users face. So a fintech startup that's testing its onboarding flow for new users might see "people pausing when they're asked to upload their ID," he said, as a signal of unclear instructions.

• Unmoderated Testing

Here, users engage with the product on their own, responding to predefined exercises and typically utilizing digital tools to measure performance. Although it scales easily, there's no opportunity to ask follow up questions in real time. For instance, an e-commerce start-up could use Maze to test how easily users can find a product and purchase it, about click paths and completion rates.

• Remote Testing

Moderated or unmoderated remote testing is also great for accessing users from different geographic locations. This approach enables teams to capture feedback across international markets without logistical considerations. For example, a language-learning app could rely on remote moderated testing to see how learners in various countries move through lessons and practice exercises.

• In-person Testing

Regular fieldwork and in-person sessions result in a depth of context mapping as participants testing the experience can witness both a digital and physical engagement. This is particularly important for mobile apps/hardware that are influenced by location, or hardware products. For instance, a wearable fitness tracker organization might conduct in-person tests to observe how easily users fasten the device and understand what a workout feedback app tells them.

Usability Test - aspects to consider

• User Tasks

Tests should include practical, goal-oriented actions which correspond to how real users behave. For instance, a travel booking service might instruct participants to “Book a one-way flight from New York to Los Angeles and select a window seat.” The realism is intended to provide collected data which reflects realistic usage pattern.

• Observation Metrics

In usability testing, it’s not just the success that we measure but the path users take to get there. Such metrics may comprise time to complete task, frequency of error, and navigation action. A productivity app will see that users spend twice as long as it planned to create a task list, and perhaps should simplify navigation.

• Post-Test Questions

Participants give a subjective feedback on clarity, difficulty, and satisfaction after solving tasks. These answers bring up issues which cannot be quantitatively justified. For instance, during a food delivery app usability testing, users may tell you that ordering was easy and they ran into issues at payment section so Zomato were able to refine the design.

Benefits

• Discovers UI/UX problems before the product is released

The ability to spot usability issues early allows teams to tweak layouts, labels and processes to get better results. Consider what a social media startup might learn from testing that users repeatedly overlook the “post” button because it’s placed too poorly on screen, and the error can be corrected at an early stage of design — before scaling up.

- Verifies the assumptions made in designing.

Usability testing checks to see if the design choices meet the expectations of real users. For instance, an edtech platform might think students prefer video instruction, but testing may reveal they are more engaged with interactive quizzes and lead to a design change.

• Increases conversion and retention by enhancing navigation and task flow

Seamless, intuitive experiences lower abandonment and increase retention. An online subscription service could see that users drop off at the payment stage because of confusing form fields; by simplifying that part, the startup increases both conversions and long-term retention.

• Integrate into Prototypes and MVPs

Usability testing is even more powerful in conjunction with interactive prototypes or early MVPs. Instruments such as Figma enable clickable prototypes to be tested without coding, which cuts the development price. Likewise, no code platforms enable startups to create functional MVPs that can be tested on real users. For instance, an edtech startup could develop a prototype lesson in Figma and see how students move through the material — then iterate on both content and interface before committing to full development.

6.3 Experiments for MVP Validation

6.3.1 Feature Validation T Theory Testing of a New Features Validation In this study, we performed A/B testing for the validation of new features and users perceptions (T2 in Figure 3).

A/B testing, also known as split testing, is a form of structured experiment that pits two or more options against each other to determine which option performs better under certain conditions. Abandon assumptions and gut feelings: A/B testing gives you empirical data through actual use, the best friend of startups finding their way to a MVP feature.

Core Components of A/B Testing

• Version A (Control)

The control is the most basic version of a feature or design, typically what exists at present. For instance, an e-commerce startup could use its current product page as Version A to test in terms of user engagement to a redesign.

• Version B (Variant)

One specific modification is applied to the variant individually and compared against control. This could be changing the color of a button, experimenting with different headline wording or even moving the position of a sign-up form. For example, a SaaS startup could test whether the button says “Start Free Trial” or “Get Started” resulting in more people signing up.

• Performance Metrics

A/B testing compares user responses to quantifiable results like clicks, conversions, bounces or time spent on page. A streaming service, for instance, could test two recommendation layouts and measure which generated more play rates for recommended content.

Use Cases for MVPs

• Testing two landing page headlines to find which one leads to more sign-ups

As headlines account for first impressions, early testing leads to more conversions. For edtech MVPs, this might be comparing "Learn Front-End Web Development in 12 Weeks" to "The Fastest Way to Learning JavaScript and HTML5."

• A/B testing two variants of a pricing page or onboarding flow

Pricing and onboarding have a direct impact on adoption and retention. For a productivity tool startup, this could mean A/B testing whether annual plans presented first generates more revenue than leading with a monthly plan offering, or if simplifying an onboarding process boosts rates of user completion.

• Testing and refining UI design decisions such as button placement or layout structure

Little changes in interface can make a big difference from a usability point of view. For example, a fintech app may test whether they get more usage of the "Transfer Money" button by having it on the home screen versus hidden behind an extra tap in a sub-menu.

Execution Tips

• Keep changes confined to a single variable at a time for accurate attribution.

Testing multiple variations at once makes it impossible to know what caused the result. It should test either button color or call-to-action wording—not both at the same time.

• Sample size: Make it statistically relevant with good numbers.

Small samples can lead to faulty results. For instance, if 20 of our users compare two onboarding flows, a difference of 5 users may not be indicative of a trend. Testing the stability up to hundreds of users in a test Run is guaranteed.

• With A/B testing platforms such as Google Optimize or VWO, Optimizely etc

These systems automate dissemination, monitoring and reporting by users. A travel booking company might use Optimizely to split the volume of visitors to two different checkout flows and then track which one is successful at lowering abandonment.

• Perform the test over a fixed period of time to eliminate timing bias

Testing must consider seasonal or daily changes in activity. For example, an e-commerce site that tests product pages should not confine it to holiday sale periods when people may be buying in a way that does not represent their behavior over time.

Benefits

- Enables data-based decision making during the development of the MVP

Teams can now test feature's based on real user action, instead of founder intuition. For example,

LinkedIn would experiment with A/B testing its homepage, trying to determine which version drove more engagement.

- Does not suffer from the need to rely on opinions or instincts

Startups often get wrong what users value most. A/B testing mitigates this risk by providing a proof of evidence. A news app may believe that customized headlines attract more clicks, but an experiment might show that people enjoy curated top stories instead.

• Leverages lean experimentation and rapid iteration

Quick, short experiments allow teams to iterate fast at a very low cost. For instance, Spotify is able to test new layouts for playlist recommendations regularly and optimize engagement without incurring significant redesign costs.

A/B testing(screaming copy, it's just screaming!)The purest form of reach is exposing each feature, design decision or piece of content to the brutality that is a cold hard A/B Test. This process directly supports lean startup - the approach of learning from data and iterating rapidly can make or break an MVP.

6.3.2 Smoke-Tests and LP Experiments

Smoke tests are a cheap and efficient means of identifying whether users are actually interested in a product or feature before you've built it. Startups can validate hypotheticals cheaply and fast by faking utility through landing pages, mock-ups or simple interface elements. The lessons that such experiments generate help teams make decisions about whether the best new ideas are worth full development and if not, which to abandon or rework.

Key Components of Smoke Testing

• A straightforward landing page or component on a website that introduces and explains a product or feature.

This is a light form of the concept, or just enough to give people context on how it can be used. For instance, Buffer started out by launching into a landing page just explaining what its social media-scheduling tool will be without even having the full product.

• A call-to-action (CTA) button like “Sign up”, “Pre-order” or “Join the waitlist”

The CTA is based on intent and it requires a user to do something to indicate interest. A fintech start-up could add a “Get Early Access” button on its landing page to see how many people are interested in trying its budgeting app.

• A service to track clicks, scrolls, sign-ups or other action people take with your tracking tools

Analytics tools such as Google Analytics or Hotjar can tell when the user interacts with a page. For instance, a gaming startup might track how many users scrolled to the pricing section and clicked “Preorder,” signaling interest in a game that hadn’t yet been built.

Common Applications

• Testing out a few different products to see what sticks

Startups can make landing pages for each different product idea and compare the engagement of users. A health-tech startup might experiment to see if users are more interested in a fitness tracking app, or a mental wellness companion app.

• Validating interest in some new feature (e.g., “Coming Soon” button going to feedback form)

The Teams app creates a “Coming Soon” button available for users to click; teams can then observe how many people try it out. In one example, Dropbox tried to gauge demand for new storage features by using dummy buttons that directed a user to a survey form.

• Explaining your solution through videos or mock-ups instead of building the final product

Value can be shared without any development work, such as Explainer Videos or clickable mock-ups. Dropbox’s initial demo video, for example, laid out how the product would function and user feedback from the video rounds of A/B testing confirmed the concept before infrastructure was even coded.

Best Practices

• Communicate value proposition in all simplicity

The product has a short time to engage users, so communications should be straightforward. A travel startup might write

“Plan your whole trip in minutes” instead of platitudes about “streamlining experiences.”

• A/B landing pages for different messaging or visuals Here is an example of how I personally have gained user insights by doing tests: If you do a quick google search for any subject, especially the news,you will see a million crappy ads Revenue Giants Does Fake News Fits in Their Ad Network?

But if you're testing different headlines, colors or layouts, still that's communication optimization. For example, an edtech startup could test "Learn Coding Fast" vs. "Build Real-World Coding Skills" to see which drives more sign-ups for their product.

- Monitor bounce rates and time-on-page to judge user attention

When users bounce early, it indicates the content that isn't clear or not engaging. For SaaS company you may notice from analytics that users are leaving once they have viewed pricing section, this means there is some problem with your pricing strategy or the way they're being shown.

• Gather end user emails or feedback for potential interviews

Collecting email addresses of interested users gives them a pool for further engagement. A startup experimenting with a meal subscription service might invite users who clicked "Join Waitlist" to interviews, iterating on features ahead of launch.

Benefits for MVP Validation

- Saves time and money by not wasting it on developing features too soon

Rather than spending months building, startups can rapidly validate interest. Zappos has taken advantage of this, putting pictures of shoes on the internet to verify demand before it built warehouses.

• quickly identifies high-interest concepts worth further pursuit

Engagement data shines a light on which ideas are resonating. If a ride-hailing upstart gets far more signups for carpooling than premium rides, for example, it knows where to direct technological development.

• Low cost- and low risk-testing of the market in real conditions.

Smoke tests copy reality without all the commitment. If it is a streaming service, it may test ads for a "student-friendly subscription plan" and track clicks before formally rolling out the pricing tier.

So smoke tests and landing page experiments are the most powerful tools in early-stage for startups. They're hard-to-deny evidence of demand in fact, and help to reduce wasted time, money and effort – which is why they are so hunting for testing hypotheses around product-market fit before investing substantial development resources.

6.3.3 Impact: Engagement and Conversion Metrics

Engagement and conversion style metrics are critical in understanding if an MVP is sticking with your ideal audience. They add a quantitive verification to the way you see users using your product, what they do and where they drop. For any startup, following these metrics

means that changes to product (improvements, pivots, or scaling up) are driven by data rather than gut feeling.

Key Engagement Metrics

- DAU/MAUC: Product stickiness and retention ratio

This measure indicates the frequency users return to the product. A high DAU/MAU is a direct reflection of strong engagement, such as on Instagram where users visit daily to engage. If a productivity app has monthly spikes but a lunchtime dip, that could mean there is not much everyday value.

• Session Duration: Shows time spent by users on the product / landing page

Longer sessions hold the promise of greater engagement, and indicate issues with usability when too much time dirties user-data. For instance, if a user takes too long to do an easy onboarding task it implies frustration not gratification.

• Page Views/Screen View per Session: Indicate usage of navigation by the user

Counting pages or screens visited by a user shows if one is browsing (few) or delving (many). As an e-commerce startup, you might want to see how many product pages users visit before checking out (indicating good engagement), while a learning app would hope that users spend more time on lesson page.

- Bounce Rate : High bounce rates mean that people are not seeing value promptly enough

A bounce rate that is too high means visitors are leaving and not taking the next step. It could look something like a fitness app who's users got to the homepage, but didn't end up signing up on its own, indicating that the value prop is unclear or not appealing.

Key Conversion Metrics

- Conversion Rate: The proportion of users who carry out a specific desired action (i.e. signup, subscribe, download)

This measure corresponds precisely to the power of an MVP in creating effects. For example, a company like Dropbox followed conversion of free sign-up to paid subscription closely as an indicator that their business model was validated.

- Click-Through Rate (CTR): Effectiveness of buttons, links or ads

The CTR indicates if visitors are reacting to calls-to-action. A food delivery startup might test CTR of “Order Now” versus “Get Food Fast,” to learn what wording results in more orders.

• Churn Rate: Represents the number of customers that no longer use the product after original interaction

Churn is a signal that may imply either discontent or 10 Overcome Trolling Hakkata also telos: dissent and Nonlinear advocacy of lastvalue on june 9, 2006 unlatches themain relay to turn off the systems completion con vective downward flux.showstack3 Fig. If a service sees significant numbers of users canceling after the free trial, it may suggest that the content or pricing is not compelling enough for those viewers to stay on.

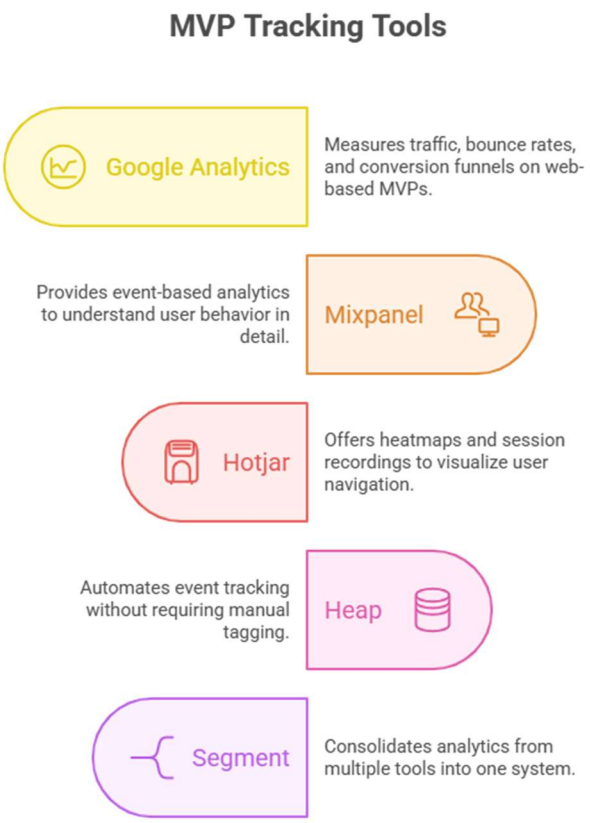
• Customer Acquisition Cost (CAC) -- How much it costs to purchase one paying customer.

CAC is marketing and sales tactics efficacy. A SaaS startup that spends $50 to acquire a customer who pays only $10 per month must ensure retention is long enough for the investment.

• Activation Rate: This is the percentage of people that do a key action within your app such as making an account or finishing the tutorial.

Activation is a way of demonstrating if users reach an early milestone of success. For instance, Slack would monitor if new teams sent 2,000 messages since that correlated with long-term retention.

Tools to Track



• Google Analytics

Great for tracking traffic, bounce rates and conversion funnels on webapp MVPs. An online marketplace, for example, could use it to monitor where people abandon transactions in the checkout process.

• Mixpanel

This thing gives you information about what happens when people use your stuff. Let us say you have a company that makes an app. You can use this to see everything that people do on your app. You can see how times people click on things and what they do. You can also see how often people come back, to your app to finish something they started.

• Hotjar

Hotjar provides heatmaps and session recordings to see how users interact with things. For example a SaaS tool can use Hotjar to figure out if users are missing out on features that are in the dashboard. This helps people understand how users are using Hotjar and the SaaS tool. Hotjar is useful, for seeing what users do when they use the SaaS tool.

• Heap

You can track events automatically without having to tag them. This is really useful when you want to see how people are using something, like a financial technology product. For example this product can automatically save every transaction or every time someone looks at a screen so you can look at all the data later. See what is going on with the usage model of this financial technology product.

• Segment

Segment is like a pipeline for your data. It takes information from lots of tools and puts it all in one place. For example a company that sells things online can use Segment to get a look, at what is going on. It can combine data from its website, app and the emails it sends to customers. This way the company can see everything that is happening in one view.

Application in MVP Validation

• Assists to prioritize enhancements and areas of removal

Numbers tell us what people like and what they do not notice. For example a photo sharing app can see that people really like playing with the editing filters.. They do not use the part of the app that lets them share with friends. This is a problem because the social sharing feature is what makes people want to buy filters. So the people who make the app know where they should spend their time and money. They should focus on the social sharing feature. Make it better so people will use it more.

• This feature shows if users get the Valued Player award if they find it useful and if they return to the Most Valued Player award

The engagement data is really clear and easy to use. If a lot of people sign up but then nobody uses it every day that means the thing is not good enough to make people want to come. The engagement data shows this kind of thing.

• This helps us plan what our next experiments should be or when we should add features to the product. We use this information to decide what to do with our product like what new things to try or what new features to add to the product. The information we get from this is very important, for the design of experiments or feature rollouts. It tells us what we should do next with the product and its features.

Some measurements show that new testing periods are starting. For example a travel booking site is seeing a lot of people leave the pricing pages without doing anything. So the travel booking site might try out layouts or discounts, on the pricing pages to get more people to book their trips. The travel booking site wants to increase the number of bookings made on their website.

Conversion and engagement metrics turn guesses into facts. Startups which track these consistently can iterate knowing they're building on evidence, as opposed to guessing early

on what will move the needle and decrease that ugly blind spot around the features being built not connecting with users.

"Activity: MVP Validation Experiment Design"

Choose one startup idea—either your own or a class case study—and design a **validation experiment** using one or more techniques covered in this section. First, create a simple **landing page** using Carrd or any no-code builder to present the product concept. Define a clear value proposition and a CTA like "Join the Waitlist" or "Get Early Access." Then, run a **smoke test** by sharing it with 15–20 target users and track conversions. Optionally, test two headline variations for A/B testing. Document the engagement metrics, user feedback, and improvement ideas based on the experiment outcomes. This activity helps you build real-world validation skills using minimal resources.

6.4 Pivot vs. Persevere Decisions

6.4.1 When to Pivot: Mismatches Tabletagny et al.,2005) would be excellent examples of XML publication declaration in aM&S standard specific for the media authoring, such as MPEG-21 (ISO/IEC 21000).

Pivot is considered change made to a business model when evidence reveals that the current path will lead it to dead end, although vision or larger out come remains same. Product-market fit Startups frequently find that their assumptions don't line up with reality on account of product features, customer needs or product monetization. Spotting these mismatches early is a matter of survival and it takes evaluating customer feedback, engagement data and competitive momentum.

Signs That a Pivot Might Be in Order

• Involvement of users low— many executives have a working product, but they're having trouble getting their customers to use it

And if the users sign up but don't keep coming back, it may be that the product isn't providing enough daily or weekly value. An instance is how Google wave offered sophisticated collaboration tools but soon lost interest because it was not clear of the use cases.

- Lack of understanding or interest by users in value-add proposition

It's a red flag when feedback repeatedly indicates that customers don't understand or don't care about the leading promise. A fitness app that positions itself as a lifestyle tracker might

learn that its users care only about counting calories, and could slim down to focus on those needs.

• High rate of people churning, which means that you're not delivering ongoing value

Churn is a powerful indicator of a bad fit. A subscription-based music app on which many of its trial users cancel within weeks, for example, may need to reposition itself as a free ad-supported service or bundle it with other services.

• Consistent negative feedback on a feature or use case

Identifier If one main feature is continuously the bane of your users, it means you're not attacking the right problem to solve. Early Twitter users, for instance, dismissed Odeo's podcasting concept as irrelevant which prompted the team to pivot into microblogging.

• The actual market size is less than estimated which limits the potential for growth

Start-ups may come to understand that the market they chose cannot scale. A local delivery service can run out of customers and end up expanding into a more generalized logistics or e-commerce business, for example.

• The results of competitor analysis indicate that similar solutions in this field already monopolize the market

Differentiation is tough if your market share is dominated by competitors. A photo-sharing app playing in the shade of Instagram, for instance, could pivot to a specialty focus on professional photographers as opposed to average joes.

• The monetization approach is not working, and the user refuses to pay or upgrade

The price or model might be off if free users don't convert to paying customers. LinkedIn had trouble making money until it built premium subscription and recruiter products.

• One user segment is more interested than the typical one and less expensive than a desired target group

Sometimes feedback reveals unexpected demand. Slack started as an internal tool for video game developers, but it quickly shifted course to focus on workplace teams when business users began engaging with the product in impressive numbers.

Types of Pivots

• Zoom-in Pivot

This happens when one aspect becomes more valuable than the product as a whole. Instagram transitioned from a full-featured check-in app called Burbn to be all about photo sharing, the feature users liked most.

• Zoom-out Pivot

If, on the other hand, a product is coming up too narrow in scope, broaden how it's defined to improve relevance. Netflix began by renting DVDs, but zoomed out to streaming media and then to creating its own content, in order to capture larger opportunities out there.

• Customer Segment Pivot

This means a change in targeting to another user group which scores with higher usage. YouTube originally started as a dating site but switched to general video sharing when it realized "there was no video available of either event."

• Channel Pivot

Startups are likely to reconsider the way that they offer their product or service. A web browser-based SaaS platform could pivot to one that's mobile-first if usage analytics show more visits through a smartphone. Spotify, for instance, bet heavily on mobile access as streaming consumption habits moved away from desktop.

• Technology Pivot

As a new tech stack can sometimes solve the exact same problem but more efficiently. Flickr's core team moved from multiplayer games to photo-sharing, where it repurposed its core technology to solve another problem.

Decision Tools

• Lean Canvas review

Going back to the Lean Canvas can also help to judge if assumptions around value propositions, customers and revenue streams are actually holding true.

• User testing analytics

Recorded sessions, heatmaps, Usage patterns can indicate where users are stuck or disengaging and give us a direction for things to change.

• Feedback loop patterns

Patterns of feedback over a series of actions provide evidence for or against current strategies. For instance, if there is a common request for an unreleased feature that could be a potential pivot.

• Innovation accounting numbers (e.g., CPA vs. CLV)

If you're paying more to acquire customers than they generate in revenue, the model is unsustainable. It's often this metric that causes startups to question who they go after or how they plan on making money.

When to Be Strong: Fit Improvement 6.4.2

Pivots are not the answer to every challenge a start-up encounters. A lot of times the MVP demonstrates enough traction to say ok this is really a sound core concept, albeit in need some work. Persisting is to keep persisting with the current approach, only now strengthening fit of the product through iteration, optimization and evidence-guided improvement. This way teams are able to iterate on actual user value and not throw away solid foundations.

5 Signs to Keep Pushing Through

• Users get the core benefit, come back again and again

If there is a clear use case and users return to the product, there's relevance of the product. For instance, WhatsApp had strong sustained usage from early on because its core value proposition — free, instant messaging — was easy to understand and consistently useful.

- QUALITATIVE: Product solving a real problem, qualitative feedback

Since during user interviews, surveys and usability testing you continually hear that the MVP solves a problem that has been a huge pain. Slack heard from teams that they naturally communicate better when using the tool, and it validated that its product is indeed solving a real problem.

• Important KPIs (activation rate, retention, NPS etc.) are trending upward.

Numbers that show more users make it through onboarding, or stick around week over week, or tell another user to use your product? Those are fit increasing. For instance, Netflix followed retention as an important signal, and month after month it got stronger; subscribers kept renewing in such numbers that it justified doubling down on streaming.

- Willingness of users to recommend and pay for the product

Referrals and willingness to pay are both good validn signals. Dropbox's early referral program indicated the potential for endurance as users excitedly referred the service to get more storage, a clear signal of satisfaction and advocacy.

- Incremental improvement through experimentation and usability tests

If some minor design or feature adjustments have a near uniform record of improving user experience, by all means keep trying. Airbnb, for example, iterated on its booking flow incrementally, and every new version increased conversions – a sign that getting it just right would lead to success.

- Scaling is possible for market reasons (demand, some unserved segments)

Perseverance even is reasonable when the market itself is growing. Shopify kept perfecting its own platform as demand for e-commerce soared, taking advantage of the environment rather than shifting gears.

How to Improve Fit While Persisting

- Employ feedback loops to continuously learn from users

Regular ways to hear from users — be it through surveys, NPS forms or customer interviews — are helpful in finding areas of improvement. Spotify is leveraging ongoing feedback to improve playlists and discoverability.

- Fix usability issues before adding new features

Mending friction in your navigation or user experience often carries more weight than tacking some of that extra atom onto a previous design. A fintech app that shaves a second or two off its payment process may have even greater retention impact than rolling out a new budgeting tool.

- A/B testing to improve onboarding/CTA/pricing

If not, then testing out of variations will ensure that the optimizations are driven by data. With its A/B tests, LinkedIn improved its onboarding process, simplifying the profile creation to make it easier for people to sign up and stay.

• Enhancing the value proposition communication (messaging, copy, visuals)

Even if it works as promised, an unclear message can stymie adoption. Canva optimized its landing page text in order to highlight speed and ease-of-use – so that a new user immediately understood the benefit.

• Enhance features according to common requests and verified needs

If you are building a castle (adding features), It needs to be build on demand, not assumptions. Trello grew into team collaboration tools after hearing from users that they wanted to use shared boards and integrations.

• Concentrate on metrics such as MAU, retention, CSAT and task success rates

Measuring engagement and satisfaction indicators helps to keep progress quantifiable. For instance, Zoom monitored usability task success rates to make sure users could “go or join a meeting in seconds,” which improved its product/market fit.

Strategic Focus Areas

• UX and UI Enhancements

Clearer designs and a better navigation enable users reaching their goals in an easiest way. In the beginning, Instagram optimized its photo feed design for easy scrolling and click-throughs.

- Impove performance

Having control over speed and stability directly determines the user's satisfaction. Amazon was always the fastest to invest in faster page load times that lead to higher conversions and retention.

• Onboarding Flows

Get users to value right away – A frictionless onboarding process is key for showing new users the utility of a solution in no time. Duolingo worked to streamline onboarding, allowing learners to do a lesson immediately rather than having to go through registration.

• Customer Support and Training

Trust is established by giving fast support and having clear guidelines. Freshdesk further refined its product/market fit by pairing a self-service knowledge base with live support, so that customers could succeedwith the product.

6.4.3 Pivot vs. Persevere Case Examples

Case studies provide useful lessons about startups and their choice to pivot or persevere. These cases show how data, user behavior and market signals inform decisions that shape long term success. Pivots are not about giving up vision but redirecting strategy, and persistence demonstrates dedication to iterating on a core idea that shows traction.

Pivot Examples

• Instagram: Burbn & photo sharing

Instagram originally started out as Burbn, a check-in app that was chock full of too many features like gaming elements, planning events and photo uploads. Low engagement also signaled that the product was confusing and unguided for its users. But the photo-sharing tool stole the hearts of our readers. Twitter's founders pivoted by scrapping everything else and concentrating solely on photo sharing, which immediately took off as Instagram's signature identity.

• Slack: From a doomed gaming project to workplace chat birthplace

Slack was built from an online game called Glitch that never found a sustainable early audience. Over the process, team developed an internal messaging tool to facilitate better collaboration. The investors saw the potential and asked the founders (but managed) to pivot into what is now Slack. Today, Slack is a household name around the world and one of many companies that has shown how a pivot can transform side tools into core businesses.

• YouTube: Video dating and the dawn of video-sharing for everything else

YouTube started out as a dating site based around video but there were very few early adopters. But the founders noticed all sorts of videos being uploaded and passed around. They made a pivot to general video sharing and in doing so unlocked a far larger market. This move turned Youtube into the leading global platform for video.

Persevere Examples

• Dropbox: Sharpening core file sharing value

Dropbox was met with skepticism early on as critics wondered if people really needed a cloudbased file-sharing product. Instead of pivoting, Dropbox stuck to its guns and focused on better showing value. They made a simple demo video to help explain the concept, kept onboarding groundwork to a minimum and created an incentive referral program for people who signed up. These changes drove big user growth while honoring the original vision.

• Canva: Committing to design with easy access

Canva has staked its identity on easy-to-use design tools for non-designers. Early growth was slow and steady rather than explosive, and there was a temptation to pivot into becoming exclusively B2B. But Canva doubled down on its dream of democratizing design instead. Gradually, with refined templates, features and flows, it was massified into a market-platform used by the whole world among individuals, teachers and companies.

Key Lessons from These Cases

• P ivots are motivated by confirmed mismatch between user requirements and product direction.

Instagram, Slack and YouTube only pivoted after data made clear that their initial models were out of sync with users' behavior. Each pivot refocused on areas that had real traction.

• Persistence happens with a good deal of user traction, though the growth is slow.

Dropbox and Canva show that when users come back time and again, pay or refer others to use the product, it is about making rampant improvements rather than starting over. Small changes can add up for big success.

• Both rely on data-driven insights, a deep understanding of the user and agile execution

Startups whether pivoting so continuing as is, will hear the voice of customer and do something iteratively in an lean startup approach. It's about distinguishing between transitory oh-ohs and permanent ah-has — and responding appropriately.

6.5 Learning From Feedback for Product Improvements

6.5 Continuous Learning Feedback Loops for Continuous Improvement

A feedback loop is an organized process for capturing, analyzing and acting upon user insights to improve a product. Feedback loops are essential in MVP development to guarantee that startups always learn, adjust and refine from real user actions and not mere assumptions. By baking continuous improvement into the development cycle, startups can kill bad features early, validate good features fast and steadily increase user satisfaction.

The essential architecture of a feedback loop

Collect

• Collecting feedback Begin by determining touchpoints throughout the user journey – onboarding, core feature usage, errors and support interactions. So, a fintech app can stick micro-surveys after a first payment to see if the experience felt clear.

• Environmental channels: voice of customer survey, NPS data inputs and outputs, support chat logs, social media mentions, app store ratings/reviews/feedback apps & partners. A travel booking app may consider using post-booking surveys alongside analytics to help spot if users drop off partway.

Take both – Active feedback (user-generated reviews/comments/surveys) and passive feedback (usage data/click heatmaps/churn metrics) are both necessary not just one or the other. For example, Hotjar heatmaps might show your users not seeing a button while direct comments reveal their confusion.

Analyze

• Grouping feedback into themes (usability, feature requests, bugs, performance and soaring over emotional responses) can help you to form structure. For a SaaS startup, perhaps this could be “slow loading” for performance and “lacking integrations” for features.

• Tagging systems follow patterns of recurring problems, indicating whether a single complaint is an isolated incident or part of a trend. If 20 users say their not finding there way around on mobile, that should be a focus.

• Frequency and severity in prioritization are types of considerations. It could be that a rare but critical bug occurs that prevents payment over a common and trivial UI request.

• Cross-examining what is said to be heard with a comparison and even confrontation of qualitative data with quantitative information increases robustness in decision-making. But if search people bitch and moan about a feature and then the analytics tell you that no one is using it, well duh!

Act

The insights with high priority are turned into actionatable product backlog items. A productivity app may have a sprint specifically for addressing login-related grievances.

• Telling users what is new creates loyalty. For instance, Duolingo frequently emphasizes in release notes that “this update includes bug fixes that learners asked for.”

• Reducing risk of failure by testing in tiny changes. Amazon does multiple controlled experiments when recommending updates to ensure better engagement follows the improvements.

Dynamic loops of feedback at work

• Slack

In-product feedback walls and triggers like prompts as inprompt-based surveys direct examples of this would be right after a feature launch, but well timed based on usage or when users are opened up to new features. These learnings get filtered into product roadmaps, resulting in continuous iterations that actually represent the real way teams are working.

• Amazon

Amazon's "Was this helpful?" prompt on product reviews gets fed into its recommendation algorithms.

Voting up reviews gives them an order of magnitude more weight, influencing future users.

• Airbnb

Airbnb relies on structured feedback from guests and hosts following each stay, which results in a continuous learning process. For instance, we've made booking flows clearer to help ensure people have a comprehensive sense of the cancellation policy. • Spotify

Spotify observes both passive listening behavior (skip ratio, playlist finish rate) and active survey feedback. When data indicated that users were skipping songs on curated playlists too frequently, Spotify adjusted its recommendation algorithms.

Best Practices

- Make sure gathering feedback is non-intrusive

Requests for feedback should not interfere with use. With LinkedIn, these endorsements are subtly solicited in our flow instead of as an interruption to their user experience.

• React on critical feedback, like bug and access issues at speed

Rapid response shows reliability. For example, Zoom rapidly addressed early complaints about security by prioritizing patches and openly communicating with users.

• Post-analyze feedback summaries, bridge them internally to teams and align the priorities

Centralizing feedback in reports ensures that engineers, designers, and marketing are aligned. This keeps decision-making from getting siloed, and accelerates improvement cycles.

6.5.2 Agile Iteration Cycles

Agile iteration is an approach that allows for flexibility and adaptability, and organizes product development into short, iterative cycles. Instead of getting the entire product ready before launching, teams iterate in sprints building or optimizing features as they learn from

user feedback. It's one of the reasons why Agile is so good at supporting MVPs (minimum viable products), that aim to validate assumptions as soon as possible, adjust to new realizations, and offer value incrementally.

Structure of an Agile Iteration

• Sprint Planning – work: The team decides which user stories or features will be the main focus of the next sprint (usually a week to two)

At sprint planning, the team looks at a Top X list of user stories ranked to meet customer needs. For instance, an edtech MVP would plan to develop the "student sign-up flow" and "quiz creation" feature during their first sprint so that there is a concentration on usability.

• Development Phase: Stories are built, coded and tested in sprint.

Tasks are executed in small steps, making sure that movement can always be taken and measured. A fintech application might then take this phase to sketch out its dashboard, integrate transaction tracking and run internal tests before exposing the feature to users.

• Daily Standups: Brief team meetings to get everyone on the same page, highlight blockers and facilitate teamwork

Brief standups (typically 10–15 minutes) enable team members to update each other on progress and things that are blocking them. For example, in case a missing documentation is blocking work of some developer and it can be fixed now then let's do it instead staring at the reviewing request.

• Review e Demo: New features are demoed to stakeholders or testers toward the end of sprint.

Show and Tell Teams demonstrate what's been built to elicit feedback immediately. For example a SaaS startup may have demoed our new billing system to a small subset of beta users, using the demo as an interim stage of validating that it is usable before rolling it out more widely.

• Retrospective: the team looks back at what worked, which didn't and how to make things better

This second phase enhances team learning and makes every iteration more productive. For instance, a gaming startup might see after the sprint completes that test cases were not comprehensive enough and decide to involve QA in this manner sooner in the next sprint.

Why Agile Fits MVP Development

• Enables incremental release of product value

Startups are able to roll out valuable parts of the product early, gain feedback, and iterate. Spotify did so by starting with a core streaming service and eventually adding in social and personalized features.

- Minimizes waste by building only what has been validated/feature complete

Agile incorporates customer feedback early and often, which keeps you from overbuilding. For instance, Airbnb iterated on their booking flow step-by-step by incrementally throwing away complicated features that were not essential to early users.

• Integrates feedback of previous rounds of development to the next cycle of development

Agile enables rapid learning loops. A health-tech app, for example, might experiment with a new appointment booking feature in one sprint and collect some early feedback on confusing time-zone settings so that they can fix it right away in the next sprint.

- Drives cross-functional work between design, engineering, marketing and customer support

Silos don't happen as agile teams are cross functional. For example, when Slack improved its own onboarding process, designers, engineers and support staff worked together to make sure new teams were set up for success.

Common Agile Tools

• Jira, Trello, ClickUp and Asana

Monitor and visualize the status of a sprint grand backlog as well as the individual tasks. For instance, a logistics startup might apply Jira to track stories related to delivery tracking functionality.

• "User stories" that use templates (like, "As a user, I want to…")

User stories convert needs into customer-focused objectives. One could be e.g. "As a user, I want to save the progress of lessons so it is possible to continue learning at another time." This framework means that development stay in line with actual needs.

Metrics for Measuring Agile Progress

• Velocity: How much work a team gets done per sprint

[Velocity indicates predictability of output and predicts future delivery]. 20 story point teams can do some long-term planning for bigger features.

• Lead Time: The time from an idea to the release of a feature

A lower lead time represents an efficient development. For instance, a fintech startup that's able to shrink lead time literally cuts in half its ability to respond to regulatory changes or customer requirements.

- Burndown Chart – A visual representation of remaining work.

Burndown charts plot remaining tasks as a function of time, making it easy for teams to detect delays early on. A mobile app team could notice the chart plateauing, indicating that there are hidden blockers to be cleared out now.

Example Use Case:

A language learning app could begin with a rudimentary vocabulary function. After trying it, they discover that users need the aid of pronunciation. They add audio examples and test user satisfaction next sprint.

Agile is not only a methodology — it's a way of thinking — in which delivery should be continuous and we should learn and adapt while doing so, making it great for MVP stage products.

6.5.3 Scaling MVP Features Gradually

Scaling MVP is not about building out the full product, but rather extending your product a little bit at a time with what you have learned. Rather, it's about depth of usage and customer satisfaction and technical readiness before we pile on more complexity.

Principles of Gradual Scaling:

- Begin by iteratively improving the critical feature addressing the major issue.

• Do not add new features, unless:

o The existing functionalities are very well adopted. o Users have spoken: there is strong evidence of that demand, via user feedback.

o Infra can contribute to scaling (e.g., no down time, steady performance).

• Focus on features that improve the user experience, minimize churn, or enable possible monetization.

Framework for Scaling:

• Validation Phase:

o Conduct usability tests for feature and analyze uses of analytics.

• Internal Beta:

o Gradually roll out to internal teams or a small set of users.

• Public Beta: o Gradually increase the target audience of the new feature.

• Full Rollout:

o Release the feature once it is stable, supportable, and hits success metrics.

Common Triggers to Scale:

- MAUs and DAUs on the rise.
- NPS (net promoter score) trends in the positive.
- Users requesting integrations, customization or power features.
- Market demand can change that will match core product direction.

Risks of Scaling Too Early:

- More technical debt and over head with maintenance.
- A packed house leading to a crowded user journey.
- Increased server load with risk of downtimes.
- Misfit with the product-market fit.

Examples:

- In the beginning, Airbnb was confined to a handful of cities and listings were individually vetted by the company. They slowly rolled out more features, such as Instant Book, multi-language support and dynamic pricing.
- Notion went from note-taking prototype to managing projects and collaborating with teams after confirming its simplicity and core appeal.

Incremental scaling allows the MVP to develop on its own, in-line with user demand without sacrificing reliability or making itself less clear just for being faster.

Knowledge Check 1

Choose the correct option:

1. **What is the first step in a feedback loop?**
   a) Act
   b) Analyze
   c) Collect
   d) Design
2. **Which agile phase includes showing new features to users?**
   a) Retrospective
   b) Sprint Planning

c) Demo

d) Daily Standup

3. **What tool helps visualize sprint progress?**

a) Flowchart

b) Burndown chart

c) Pie chart

d) Kanban

4. **Q4. When should features be scaled?**

a) After MVP launch

b) After validation

c) At project start

d) Before testing

5. **Which metric indicates user loyalty over time?**

a) Bounce rate

b) Churn rate

c) Retention

d) CTR

6.6 Summary

❖You have no-code platforms such as Carrd, Figma, Notion, ClickUp where you can quickly build a prototype and provide it to him without even knowing how to code ideal for MVP dev.

❖ Early user testing and validation by interviews, surveys, and usability testing to understand users' needs, to minimize developing waste and to guide the prioritization of features.

❖ MVP testing like A/B tests, smoke tests, landing page experiments provide rapid feedback on user behavior and interest.

❖ Key metrics—such as conversion, time on page, bounce rate— help to measure how well the MVP delivers to user expectations and decide about future iterations.

Pulsechecker #7 Getting the timing down for when to pivot (conclusion: you should not usually have a straight incline or decline product development trajectory) as opposed [to] knowing when its time is now and continue on, with proof that it is working.

❖ Feedback loops to drive continuous improvement: Gathering, analyzing user feedback – during and post MVP deployment and taking action.

❖ Fast, focused development cycle is more iterative and agile compared to typical enterprise approaches, allowing time for both raw feature development and refinement based on real-time learning and team retro-spective.

❖ Gradual scaling of MVP features allows sustainable growth and prevents overcomplexing, thereby preserving the track to user needs and technical possibilities .

6.7 Key Terms

MVP (Minimum Viable Product): The most stripped-down version of a product that can be created to test core assumptions and solicit user feedback.

No-Code Tools: These are software platforms that let people build apps, websites or workflows without programming.

Usability Testing: Technique for evaluating a product (or protoype) by testing it on users.

A/B Testing: A test where two versions of something (a product or element) are tested to see which performs better.

Smoke Test: A simple test to determine user interest in a product or feature before it is built.

Conversion Rate: The ratio of the users who take a desired action to the number that ever see it (e.g. sign up, purchase).

Pivot: A shift in product strategy without a change in vision (although it could be considered, but the learning that lead to the pivot will push you toward a new vision)탏.

Agile Iteration: A quick and constructive cycle of development which allows teams to construct, test, and tweak its features in an incremental way.

Feedback Loop: The cycle of collecting, analyzing and acting on user feedback to enhance the product.

Feature Scaling: Progressive unveiling of new or improved product features as the demand and system are prepared.

6.8 Descriptive Questions

What is the significance of no-code in fast MVP production? Show some ways that they help make prototyping much easier.

Explain how product design benefits when users get to use the product. What are the best ways of collecting it?

Compare A/B test and smoke test with regards to the validation of an MVP. When would each be a good choice to use?

What are the engagement and conversion metrics a startup must follow when an MVP rolls out?

Tell me about a startup that should pivot. What signals would suggest that a strategic shift is called for?

What are the components of feedback loops, which allow for continuous MVP iteration?

How does an agile iteration drive MVP development quickly and in the refinement phase?

What's the danger in scaling MVP features too fast? How to avoid learning the hard way Whattomy before you grow forn Is it down the road, To tell?

Sketch out the contrasts between perseverance and pivoting. What is a startup to do to make the correct choice?

What is the role of incorporating user feedback in product development to achieve the product-market fit?

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Answers to Knowledge Check

Knowledge check 1

1. c) Collect
2. c) Demo
3. b) Burndown chart
4. b) After validation
5. c) Retention

6.10 Case Study

Introduction:

QuickHire, a startup that aims to make hiring more efficient for hourly jobs The company's goal is to create an easier way for small businesses quickly find and vet workers without jumping through the hoops of traditional recruitment processes. The founding team was experienced in the space, but had limited technical resources. Instead of spending months or years building out the full product, they adopted a lean validation-first approach – using nocode tools and user testing & data-driven iteration cycles to mold their MVP. Their story is a great illustration of how mindful experimentation and feedback loops can drive to product-market fit without overbuilding.

Background:

The problem QuickHire set out to solve was apparent: small business owners in industries such as food service and retail faced challenges with turnover, lagging hiring and inconsistent quality of candidates. The founders had first imagined a full-featured platform offering job templates, applicant tracking, video interviews and onboarding modules.

But they slowed to validate critical assumptions before constructing it. They created a basic landing page explaining what the main solution is using Carrd. They used Typeform as well for capturing job seeker interest, and Notion to manage feedback. Early Figma design prototype was presented to job seekers and employers for usability observation. These proved useful to prototype usable product in a code-free way and make the user feedback faster as well as lowering risk during dev process.

Problem 1: Ambiguity in Prioritisation of Features from Multiple Stakeholders

• Challenge: Employers wanted to automate job post / seekers were interested in easy apply flows. The problem was deciding which side of the ball to construct first.

• Solution:

o Organized 10 employer and 15 job seeker targeted interviews.

o Conducted A/B tests on their landing page: one focused on employer wants, and the second focused on applicant ease of use.

• Result: The candidate-focused page converted at 2x rate. The team concluded to go with a mobile-first application experience as an MVP.

Challenge 2: Unproven Core Value Proposition

• Challenge: People weren't signing up even after learning about the advantages of QuickHire.

• Solution:

o Released a smoke test featuring a sign-up CTA taking users directly to feedback form.

o Gathered 60+ responses on expectations vs reality for users.

o Performed 5 usability tests using Figma mockups to iterate on copy and UI feature presentation.

• Outcome: Found that “instant job alerts” struck more of a chord than “smart matching.” Messaging/CTA was optimized accordingly for a 35% increase in conversions.

Problem Statement 3: Pivot or Persevere on Pre-Screening Feature

• Challenge: Employers did not use auto screening questionnaire for applicants during pilot testing.

• Solution:

o Engaged and completion metric tracked over two sprints.

o Discovered a 70% attrition rate at the questionnaire stage.

o Interviewed employers—many favored live-phone screening instead.

• Outcome: The feature was kicked lower on the priority list. They pushed through with a simpler scheduling aid which was adopted 3x as much.

Case-Related Questions:

How QuickHire leveraged no-code tools to validate their MVP?

What understanding got the team to focus on the job seeker side of platform first?

How did A/B testing and user feedback optimize messaging for users?

Why did QuickHire stick it out with some features and pivot away from others?

How did tracking engagement metrics help inform the QuickHire MVP roadmap?

Conclusion:

QuickHire's story is a great example of the benefits of lean experimentation and validation before engineering begins. By using no-code tools, doing early user testing, and iterating on evidence from data rather than predictions, the startup was able to avoid overbuilding, nail its value proposition and get early traction. This case brings to life the essential lesson of Unit 6: Test assumptions early, measure what matters and let real user behavior drive product decisions.

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Unit 7: Go-to-Market Strategy and Branding

Learning Objectives

1. Define a compelling Unique Value Proposition (UVP) that clearly communicates the MVP's benefits to early adopters.

2. Evaluate and develop competitive positioning strategies to differentiate the MVP in a saturated or emerging market.

3. Identify and prioritize the most effective marketing and distribution channels for early-stage growth.

4. Apply growth hacking techniques, referral strategies, and community engagement to acquire the first 100 users.

5. Develop core branding assets including logo, visual identity, and storytelling narratives that align with user values and market perception.

6. Understand the role of packaging and user experience design in influencing brand perception and customer trust.

7. Create and test basic visual assets and packaging prototypes as part of a go-to-market preparation for MVP launch.

Content

7.0 Introductory Caselet

7.1 Positioning the MVP

7.2 Channel Strategy

7.3 Acquiring the First 100 Users

7.4 Branding Principles

7.5 Packaging and User Experience

7.6 Hands-on Exercises

1 7.7 Summary

7.8 Key Terms

7.9 Descriptive Questions

7.10 References

7.11 Case Study

7.0 Introductory Caselet

From Code, to Customer: How BrewBean Got Its First Version of the Product to People. Started to Get Noticed Early On

BrewBean is a startup that is making a coffee machine that you can carry around. They were able to build a working model fast.. When the product was almost ready to be sold the team had a new problem. They had to figure out how to make BrewBean sound good how to make people know about BrewBean and how to sell BrewBean in a way that would make people who like things want to buy it. This is hard because there are already a lot of machines, like this for people to buy for their homes.

The team started by making an idea of what made their product special. They came up with this phrase: "Café-style coffee in under 3 minutes." This phrase told people that they could get coffee fast and easily. The team used this phrase to make web pages and run ads on Instagram. They also joined groups of people who like coffee to see what they thought. At the time they looked at what other companies that make smart coffee machines were saying. They noticed that most of these companies talked about how their machines could do things but they did not talk about how easy it was to take them with you. This helped the team figure out what made their product better, than the others. They realized that their coffee machine was special because it was portable meaning you could take it with you and that was something that the other smart coffee machines did not have. The team understood that this was their edge and it was something that they could use to make their product stand out from the rest of the smart coffee machines.

BrewBean paid a lot of attention to making their brand look simple but really cool. They made a logo and a product package that is black and not shiny. They also came up with a story, about being free to drink coffee wherever you want. This story really spoke to people who travel a lot and work on their laptops from places.

BrewBean did some things to get people to buy their product. They gave rewards to people who told their friends about the product. They also worked with a YouTuber who talks about lifestyle things. Then they started a campaign where people could pay for the product before it was available. This campaign was really successful. They sold 300 units in two weeks.

The first version of the product was not something that worked. It was also presented to the right people at the right time. BrewBean made sure that the product looked good and that the right people knew about it.

Critical Thinking Question

What strategic steps did BrewBean take to ensure their MVP stood out in a competitive market, and how did messaging and brand storytelling influence their early user acquisition?

7.1 Positioning the MVP

7.1.1 Defining Unique Value Proposition (UVP)

The Unique Value Proposition is the base of any startup. It is not a few words that sound good but a promise that tells people why the product is important what problem it fixes and how it is different from other things. A good Unique Value Proposition helps everyone understand what the product is about so the people making the product and the people selling it are all on the page. This means that the people building the product and the people marketing it are working together to tell the story, about the Unique Value Proposition.

Key Elements of a Strong UVP

• The product is easy to understand because it tells you what it does in terms without using complicated language or technical words that you might not know. The product description is straightforward and gets the point across so you can figure out what the product is, about. This is what clarity means for the product.

People should understand what they are getting away. For example Zoom says it gives "Flawless video, audio, instant sharing". This tells people what Zoom does without using words. Zoom is trying to make things simple for its users. Zoom wants people to know what Zoom is, about.

• What the thing does: It focuses on the problem that the thing solves. The thing is really good at solving this problem.

When we talk about the thing we are talking about how it solves the problem that the thing is supposed to solve. The thing is about solving this one problem that the thing is good, at.

Making statements does not make a big difference. For example a fitness app could say it helps you track your workouts. That is not very interesting. A better way to say it is that the fitness app gives you personalized workouts that're only 15 minutes long and you can do them anywhere you want. The fitness app provides personalized 15-minute workouts. This is more appealing, than saying the fitness app tracks workouts.

• What makes this special: This tells us why this is better or different from things that are similar to it. The idea of differentiation is to show people what sets this apart, from the options they have. This is important because it helps people understand why they

should choose this over something. Differentiation is a part of making a good choice so it is worth thinking about what makes this unique and special.

The main thing that the Unique Value Proposition must do is show the things about something. For example QuickHire did something from other hiring software. QuickHire focused on being fast and easy to use when it comes to finding people for jobs. This is what makes QuickHire stand out from hiring software. QuickHire is about speed and simplicity, for hourly job recruitment.

• User benefit orientation: Frames the value from the user's perspective

When you are trying to get people to use something do not just talk about what it can do. Talk about what they will get out of it. For example Slack does not say "we have lots of channels" or "we work with lots of tools". Slack says it will help people get work done and have to put in less effort. This way people know what they will actually get from using Slack.

Figure: Key Elements of a Strong UVP

Steps to Define a UVP

• First we need to talk to people and find out what they really want. We can do this by having conversations, with them asking them to fill out surveys and getting their thoughts and opinions. This will help us figure out what people are missing and what we can do to help them. We call this process user research. It is very important to understand the needs of the user.

• So what is the main thing that people want to get done and how does the basic version of our product help them do it?

• Narrow the UVP to one central promise rather than listing multiple benefits.

• I think we should try out Unique Value Propositions with a few people to see what they think. Doing A/B tests, on the pages where people first arrive's a really good way to figure out what works and what does not work for Unique Value Propositions.

• We should use words that tell us what to do and make us feel something. For example Duolingo says "Learn a language for free. This is something we can do. It makes us feel happy and excited about learning a language. Duolingos way of saying things is really good, at making us want to learn a language.

Examples of Strong UVPs

• Slack: “Be more productive at work with less effort.”

• Airbnb: “Book unique homes and experiences all over the world.”

• QuickHire: “Hire hourly workers in days, not weeks.”

Tips for Crafting UVPs

• When we talk about something we should not use words or complicated explanations. We should talk about how it can help people and how it can make them feel. This way people can understand what the benefits of the thing are and how it can affect their emotions.

• We need to keep making the Unique Value Proposition better based on what real users think of it. We should do this all the time to make sure the Unique Value Proposition is really good. The Unique Value Proposition has to be great so it's important to use real user reactions to make it better.

• Deploy the UVP consistently across websites, ads, investor decks, and emails.

“Harvard Business School research suggests that UVPs that tap into emotional outcomes, such as reducing anxiety or increasing freedom, tend to perform better than functional ones. Interestingly, in early MVP testing, Dropbox’s initial UVP wasn’t about file syncing—it was “Your stuff, anywhere.” This subtle shift from feature to benefit significantly boosted their early user sign-ups.”

7.1.2 Competitive Positioning in the Market

So the position of a product in the market is really important. This is because it shows how people see the product compared to things that are already out there. For products this is a big deal. It helps us figure out where the product can really succeed. This usually happens when the product does something that other products do not do. The goal of the product is not to be everything that every person wants. The goal of the product is to have a place in the customers mind that they will remember. Competitive positioning is what helps the product get that place. It is, about making the product stand out from products like existing solutions and be unique.

Steps to Define Market Positioning

• Conduct Competitor Analysis

To understand the market we need to look at the competitors of our product, which are the other solutions that are similar to ours. We also need to look at the competitors, which are the workarounds or substitutes that people use.

We have to check what makes them unique how much they cost, who their customers are and where they are weak.

For example Canva looked at Adobe. Saw that it was too complicated, for people who are not designers.

• Map the Market Landscape

To see the bad points of something we can use a special tool called a positioning matrix. This helps us think about things like how something costs versus how fancy it is or how much of it is automated versus how much we can make it our own. When we do this we can find areas where people are not getting what they need. For example a new product that offers resume checks using artificial intelligence could be a good option for people who do not want to pay a lot of money for a human coach but also do not want to use a basic free template. This product could be a choice because it is in the middle of these two options. The product is a viable product or MVP that offers artificial intelligence powered resume reviews, at a low cost.

• User-Centered Insight

Talk to people who use products that compete with yours to find out what bothers them. Ask them: "What do you like or dislike about the product you are using now?" If most people say they do not like how complicated it is, then your product can be better by being simple. This way your product can be more appealing because it is easy to use. People like things that're easy to understand and use so if your product is simple it can be a big plus. Ask users of competing products, about their experiences. Find out what they think about simplicity.

Positioning Tactics

• The Underdog Positioning idea is to appeal to customers that the big companies in the industry are not paying attention to. For example Robinhood came into the stock trading business by saying it was for people who were investing for the first time and felt like the traditional brokers were not for them. This way Robinhood was helping the Underdog customers the first-time investors, who felt left out by the big brokers. The Underdog Positioning that Robinhood used was very effective because it made these young people feel like they had a company that understood them and was, on their side.

• Niche Positioning: Help a group of people really well. For example Strava did not try to be for every person who likes fitness it focused on people who like to cycle and people who like to run which's what Niche Positioning is all, about serving a small group deeply like Strava does for cyclists and runners.

• Premium vs Affordable Positioning: Companies can compete with each other in two ways. They can focus on being really good or being really cheap. For example Apple focuses on making good products that look great and work well with other Apple things. On the hand budget phones focus on being affordable so people can buy them without spending a lot of money. This is how Apples premium positioning is different from budget phones. Apples premium positioning is, about the design and the ecosystem of Apple products.

Tools to Support Positioning

• SWOT analysis to assess strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.

• Positioning canvas to map product differentiation.

• Let us make a list to compare the features of our product to those of our competitors so we can see where our minimum viable product is better or worse, than theirs.

Example

Canva had a moment when it said it was the design tool for people who are not designers. It did not try to be better than Adobe Photoshop with a lot of features. Canva showed that it was easy to use and fast. That is how it got so many people to use it. Canva is really good at being easy to use. It is very fast that is why people, like Canva.

Key Takeaway

A strong position doesn't require beating every competitor; it requires owning a clear narrative that speaks to a specific audience better than anyone else.

7.1.3 Crafting the Right Messaging for Early Adopters

Early adopters are really important for the growth of a Minimum Viable Product. These people are okay with trying out products that're not perfect yet. They do this because they like things they are unhappy with what is available now or they get excited about new ideas. To get through to these people you need to talk about the problems they are facing and show them why your product is important now. You have to make them see that your product is an improvement from what they have been using. Early adopters are the key to making a Minimum Viable Product successful. They will try out your product. Give you feedback, which is crucial, for its growth.

Traits of Early Adopters

• Motivated by performance, novelty, or dissatisfaction with existing tools. Tesla early buyers, for instance, valued innovation over perfect infrastructure.

• I think what is really important is that things are unique and work quickly. People want to find solutions to problems that they are actually having than just looking at something that is really pretty. Value. Speed, because these things are more important, than having a polished design.

• Often active in niche communities such as Product Hunt, IndieHackers, Reddit, or specialized Slack groups.

Key Messaging Strategies

• Let us talk about why thiss important right now: We need to stress that things are not working the way they should be. QuickHire said something that really makes sense to

businesses. They do not have to wait for weeks to get people on board. This is because waiting for weeks is just too long and QuickHire is a solution, to this problem. QuickHire is saying that businesses should stop waiting weeks for hires because it is just taking too much time.

• Use headlines: People like it when you say something that means something to them. A health app might say, "Tired of confusing meal plans? Get daily recommendations from the health app." The health app should have headlines that talk straight to you and the health app should be relatable. The health app can say things, like this to make you want to use the health app.

• Use stories to sell the product: Tell people how the product came to be because of problems. The people who started Airbnb talked about how they rented out air mattresses in their apartment during an event to show that their idea was real and honest. They wanted to show that the product was born from something that really happened to them like the struggles they faced when they had to rent out those air mattresses. This is a way to make people believe in the product just like the people who started Airbnb did, with their story.

• Use proof early on: When people see what other folks think it helps build trust. For example Figma showed what its design team thought about the product in its early outreach campaigns and a few comments from beta testers can make a big difference. This is because social proof from beta testers and design teams like Figmas can really help people feel more comfortable, with the product.

Language Tips

• Be honest with people: Early adopters of things really like it when you are straightforward, with them. When you say "This is a version. We are making it better really fast" it makes the product look more reliable and trustworthy. The early adopters of things will appreciate the transparency of the product.

• Be bold: People who like ideas are drawn to innovation. They like to hear things like "Redefining hiring" or "The future of learning" because it sounds more exciting, than the way of saying things. Innovation is what gets them interested.

• Keep it simple: People like to read things that're easy to understand and to the point so short and clear writing is always better than long and complicated technical writing about the same things, like technical text.

Figure: Language Tips

Channel Alignment

• There are some places where people who like to try new things go to find them. These places are really good for launching things. For example if you want to reach people

who're really into technology you can try Product Hunt. If you want to reach people who are starting their businesses without any help you can try IndieHackers. If you want to reach people who like to try experimental things you can try BetaList.. You can try special forums that are just for your type of business like a forum for people who are into the same things as you. Product Hunt and IndieHackers and BetaList are all options, for different types of people.

Messaging Format Examples

• One-liner: “Turn your mobile photos into printable art in 30 seconds.”

• Short paragraph: “We built this app after losing hours managing interviews and schedules. Now, everything from posting jobs to onboarding happens in one place.”

7.2 Channel Strategy

7.2.1 Identifying the Right Marketing Channels

For Minimum Viable Products marketing channels are really important because they help a product get to the people who will use it first and get popular. When you are just starting out you do not have a lot of money or people to help you so you cannot try every marketing channel at once. The best marketing channels, for a Minimum Viable Product are the ones where the people you want to reach are already hanging out where it's easy for them to talk to you and where they can do something without it being too hard.

Key Factors for Selecting Marketing Channels

• Audience behavior: You need to know where the people you want to reach are spending their time whether that is on the internet or out, in the world. The people you are trying to reach your target users they are doing things online and offline. You need to understand what those things are. This will help you figure out where to find your target users. Your target users are the people you want to reach with your message so you need to know what they are doing. Where they are spending their time.

When you have a product like the MVP that's for businesses places like LinkedIn and special groups on Slack are probably better to use than Instagram.. If you have something like a fitness app that people use at home it is probably better to use YouTube or TikTok because that is where people who like fitness usually are. The MVP is a business product so it makes sense to use things like industry newsletters to reach people who might be interested, in the MVP.

• Type of product: Match the product to its natural ecosystem

A productivity tool for startups is really good at getting people to use it when it sends emails to them and does webinars. On the hand a fashion app is more likely to get

popular when it uses Instagram stories and teams up with famous people who have a lot of followers. The fashion app will probably get more people to use it when it is on Instagram and when famous people talk about it. A productivity tool for startups will do well when it does email outreach and webinars because that is what works best for a productivity tool, for startups.

• Cost and scalability: Balance speed with sustainability

People use things like search engines and blogs. Talking to the community to build something that lasts a long time with organic channels.. You have to wait for a while to see the results. On the hand paid ads on Facebook, Google or Instagram can bring people to your website really fast. However you have to keep an eye, on paid ads or you will spend all your money too quickly. For example QuickHire used organic community engagement first. Then they tried paid local ads. QuickHire did this because they wanted to see what worked best for QuickHire.

Types of Common Channels

• Owned media: Website, blog, email list

This thing gives you control that lasts a time. For example HubSpot was able to get a lot of people to follow them at the beginning because they put good inbound marketing content on the HubSpot blog. They did this so people would see how good the HubSpot blog is and want to come to the HubSpot website. The HubSpot blog had a lot of information that people wanted to read.

• Earned media: PR, reviews, and mentions

This is a way to get people to believe in you even if you do not have complete control over it. When a new company starts and gets featured on TechCrunch or Product Hunt the company can get a lot of attention from people if the story, about the company is interesting.

• Paid media: Social ads, influencer sponsorships, Google Ads

This is good for testing how messaging works quickly. For example a food delivery service that is just starting out might try running ads in one city to see if people are interested, in their food before they try to deliver. This way they can figure out if people really want their food delivery service before they spend a lot of money on it. A food delivery service can run ads in a city to measure how much people want their food before they try to make it bigger.

• Community channels: Slack groups, Discord servers, Reddit threads

This is really good for targeting a group of people. Figma did a job of getting popular early on by talking to designers directly in online forums and communities. Figma was able to

build a following because Figma was very involved with the designers, in these online spaces.

Frameworks to Use

• The Bullseye Framework by Gabriel Weinberg is a way to figure out what works. You start with a lot of channels for the Bullseye Framework, like twenty or more. Then you try out a few of them like five to see what happens with the Bullseye Framework. After that you focus on the one or two channels that are actually working well with the Bullseye Framework. This way you do not waste time and energy on channels that are not doing anything, for the Bullseye Framework.

• Customer Journey Mapping is really important. It helps us make sure all our channels are working together. We need to think about what people're doing at each stage. There is the awareness stage the consideration stage and the decision stage. Let us take a meditation app as an example of Customer Journey Mapping. This app can use Instagram ads to make people aware of it. Then it can use YouTube tutorials to teach people about meditation. Finally it can use email sequences to help people decide to download the meditation app. Customer Journey Mapping is, about using the right channels at the right time to help people move through these stages.

Focus for MVPs

Rather than spreading thin, early startups should focus on 1–2 high-potential channels that bring measurable results quickly. It’s more important to reach the right 100 users with strong engagement than to attract 10,000 passive visitors.

7.2.2 Online vs. Offline Channels

To really get a product there startups need to know how online and offline channels work. This helps them figure out the way to get their product to people based on what the product is, who their audience is and where they are located.

Minimum Viable Products often do well when they try out both offline channels to see which one works better for them.

Online Channels

• The advantages of channels are that they are cost-effective and scalable. Online channels are also measurable which is a plus. They are really suitable for trying out things quickly. With channels you can target specific groups of people like those with certain interests or demographics. You can also do A/B testing without spending a lot of money which's great, for experimentation.

• Examples:

I think social media is a way to reach people. For example LinkedIn is really good for businesses that sell software to businesses like B2B SaaS. On the other hand Instagram is perfect for lifestyle apps, especially the short videos they call reels.

* Social media is useful for things

* LinkedIn is good for B2B SaaS

* Instagram reels are good, for lifestyle apps

People use content marketing to show they are good at something. They write blogs. Make YouTube videos to teach others. For example Grammarly became well known because they made good content about writing improvement. Grammarly has a lot of information on writing improvement. This helps people trust Grammarly and think they are experts, on writing improvement.

o Email campaigns and webinars for nurturing leads. o Product launch platforms like Product Hunt or BetaList to tap into innovation-driven audiences.

Offline Channels

• Advantages: People really like the touch they trust you more and it works well for small local projects. When you meet people in person they usually start to trust you. This is because in-person interactions with the people behind the projects can make them feel more comfortable, with the local projects and the people who are running the local projects.

• Examples:

Events and trade shows are places to find people who like to try new things. These are the people who always want to be the first to have something. You can find them at events and trade shows where new products are shown. Events and trade shows are perfect, for meeting these adopters of new products.

People use flyers, posters or QR codes in locations. For example food delivery startups have placed posters in college dorms to get students to sign up for food delivery startups. Food delivery startups do this to capture student sign-ups, for food delivery startups.

o Retail partnerships or pop-up booths for hands-on demonstrations.

On campus there are ambassador programs that target student communities. This is a model that Facebook used when it was starting out and it worked well for them. Campus ambassador programs are a way to reach students. Facebook was very successful, with this model when they were first beginning.

How to Choose Between Them

• Digital- products, like apps and online marketplaces: The internet helps these products reach people quickly and we can easily see if they are making money or not.

• Local or physical products, like restaurants, delivery services and health tech: When you do things in person people are more likely to tell others about the physical products. This is because offline outreach can help build trust in the physical products and that is a powerful thing.

• Hybrid models are really useful because they bring together the best of both worlds. This is a way to do things. For example a wellness startup can have people come to local meetups in person and then use QR codes to get the emails of the people who come. These emails can then be used to add them to a community, about wellness. The wellness startup can use this community to keep talking to the people who came to the meetups.

Startups should also assess channel saturation—a crowded platform may not yield visibility unless the messaging or targeting is sharply differentiated. Testing small campaigns in both environments is often the best approach.

7.2.3 Building a Distribution Strategy for MVPs

So you want to get your viable product or MVP to the people who will actually use it. A good distribution strategy for your MVP makes sure that it does not just sit there. Actually gets to the right users and that these users are using it which helps your MVP get popular. For companies this strategy has to be flexible so you can change it if you need to and you have to be able to measure how well it is working because these companies do not have a lot of resources to waste. Your distribution strategy, for your MVP has to understand what your users are doing so you can make good decisions.

Steps to Build an MVP Distribution Strategy

• So who is the person we are trying to talk to with our website or product? We need to think about what kind of person will be using the things we make. What is their name? How old are they? Where do they live? What do they like to do? We have to know what our user is like so we can make things that they will like and find useful. Our user is the person we are trying to reach with our product.

To get it right you need to know your demographics, behavior and pain points. Let me give you an example. QuickHire figured out that small business owners, the ones in food service and retail were the people they should focus on first. These small business owners in food service and retail were the target, for QuickHire.

• Set channel objectives: Awareness, sign-ups, engagement, or referrals

Each channel should have a job. For example Instagram ads are really good at getting people to notice our brand while email follow-ups are better, at getting people to actually do something with our brand.

• You should pick one or two channels that work well for you after you do some research and think about how much money you want to spend on them consider what is best for your budget and what you found out from your research, on the primary channels.

Do not waste your time on things that do not work. If you have a financial technology company you should start by talking to people on LinkedIn and being a guest on podcasts that are about your industry. This is better than trying to reach a lot of people with ads on Facebook. A technology company or fintech company, should focus on talking to people who are really interested in what they do like people who listen to industry podcasts and people who are, on LinkedIn.

• Craft your message per channel using native formats

When you are talking to people on platforms you need to change the way you communicate. On Twitter you should keep your messages short and to the point like in Twitter threads. For Instagram you should use a lot of pictures and videos in your posts.. When you are, on LinkedIn you need to tell stories in a professional way that is what works best for LinkedIn.

• Set up basic tracking systems

To see how well something is doing you can use UTM links or referral codes. You can make custom landing pages. Let us say you have a startup. You are running two ad campaigns for the startup. The startup can then track which ad campaign, for the startup is getting more people to sign up for the startup.

• Establish a feedback loop

We need to find out where all the active users are coming from. Then we can make our strategy better.

If most of our users like 80 percent are coming from Reddit we should focus more on Reddit.

Of wasting our time and money on Facebook ads that are not doing well we should double down on Reddit.

This way we can get more out of our time and money because Reddit is where our active users are coming from.

• Plan for scale

When things start to take off it is time to think about growing the business. This can be done by making a list of email addresses getting in touch, with people who have shown interest before or starting a program that gets people to talk about the business.

Duolingo is an example of this. They got more people to use their service by asking users to tell their friends about it and invite them to join in.

MVP Distribution Focus

The goal is not to get something in front of a lot of people. It is better to have a group of people who really like the product. For products it is great to have the first 100 to 500 people who use the product and tell you what they think. These people help you figure out if the product is something that people will actually use. This is more important, than trying to get a lot of people to sign up when they do not really care about the product.

“Activity: MVP Channel Selection Workshop”

Let us think about a product that's already out there and try to come up with three ways to get it to the people who need it.

We will make a list of ten ways to do this using the Bullseye Framework.

Then we will pick the three ways that work best for the people who will be using the product.

The product is what matters here.

After that we will choose one or two ways that we think are really important for the product and explain why we would use them if we were really launching the product and making it available, to people who want to buy the product.

To start we will make a list of ten ways to get the product to people. We need to think about how to get the product to the people who want it. The product needs to be delivered to people in a way that's easy, for them.

We will make a list to figure out the ways to do this. The list will have ten ways to get the product to people. We will think about each way. How it can help get the product to people.

* Social media like Facebook and Twitter

* There is a website where people can go to buy the product the website is a place where people can buy the product easily.

* Ads on Google

* I will send emails to people who might be interested, in this the people who might be interested will get the emails. They can read the emails that I send to the people who might be interested.

* Partnering with companies to sell the product

* Making videos for YouTube

* Creating a page on Reddit

* Using Instagram to show pictures and videos of the product

* Asking customers to tell their friends about the product

* Writing articles for magazines

Now we will choose the three options that're the best match, for the people who are going to use the product.

We are going to choose media like Instagram to make videos and share them. We will also make videos for YouTube.. We will create a page on Reddit. We like YouTube and Reddit because they are good, for this. We will use Instagram and YouTube and Reddit for this.

We believe these three options are the best because the people who will be using the product are young. The people who will be using the product like to use the internet to find things. They like to watch videos on YouTube and look at pictures on Instagram. They also like to look at pictures on Instagram. The people who will be using the product like to talk to people who like the things as the people who will be using the product. So Reddit is a choice, for the people who will be using the product.

If we were actually going to launch the product I think we would use Instagram and YouTube.

We would make a video that shows the product and how the product works.

The video would be posted on YouTube.

Then we would take some pictures of the product. Post these pictures on Instagram.

Our message would say something, like "check out our product the product is really cool. The product can help you with this problem".

For example the message, on Instagram could be "are you tired of this problem our new product can help you watch this video to learn more". The video would show the product. How it works and it would be short and easy to understand. We think this would be a way to get people to try the product. This exercise allows learners to evaluate channel effectiveness based on strategic thinking, not assumptions.

7.3 Acquiring the First 100 Users

7.3.1 Growth Hacking Techniques

Growth hacking is when you use clever ideas that do not cost a lot of money to get and keep users really fast. For people who are just starting out with a Minimum Viable Product growth hacking is a way to get things moving quickly because they do not have a lot of money or a big team. Growth hacking helps them build momentum and see if people really want what they are offering before they try to get really big, with their Minimum Viable Product.

Core Principles of Growth Hacking:

• Experimentation over planning: Focus on iterative testing of messaging, targeting, and offers.

• We should use data over assumptions: we need to track each of our experiments to figure out what really works with our experiments.

• Automation and scalability: Use tools to automate repetitive processes and reach more people efficiently. Common MVP-Level Growth Hacking Tactics:

• Before a new thing is released some companies make a list of people who want to try it. They give these people treatment like letting them use it early or giving them a cheaper price if they sign up and tell their friends about it. For example Robinhood and Superhuman do this with their -launch waitlists.

• The thing about proof is that it really works. When you see that a lot of people are doing something you want to do it. So social proof embeds are an idea. They are like messages that say things, like "500 people signed up for this today" or "1000 people are already using this". This creates a sense of urgency and trust in proof. It makes you think that if many people are signing up for social proof then it must be good.

• When people are about to leave the website, exit-intent popups appear to collect email addresses or get feedback from users before they go away, from the landing page.

• Cold outreach with personalization: Send targeted DMs or emails to potential users with highly tailored messaging.

• Reach out to influencers who have a following that is exactly the kind of people you want to buy your stuff. These people are called micro-influencers. They can really help you because they talk to the same people you are trying to sell to.

Tools Used:

• Viral Loops, Mailchimp, Zapier, Hunter.io, Typeform

Example:

Dropbox offered extra storage space for referrals, creating a viral loop that drove millions of users without paid ads. The tactic combined utility and reward—key traits of effective growth hacks.

7.3.2 Referral Programs and Word-of-Mouth Marketing

Referral programs are a way to get your existing users to help you find new ones. You do this by giving them something in return for telling people about your product. This works well for new products because the people who use them first often know each other and can get other people to use the product too. Referral programs are especially good for products because these early users can tell their friends and family about the product, in a natural way.

Why Referral Programs Work:

• High trust: Users trust recommendations from friends over ads.

• Cost-effective: Reduces the need for paid acquisition.

• When a person joins a network they can tell their friends about it and this can cause a lot of people to join the network too so one user can lead to multiple people signing up for the same network.

Referral Program Design Elements:

• Clear reward structure: E.g., “Give $10, Get $10,” or “Invite 3 friends, unlock premium features.”

• The service has a simple way to share things with others. You can send them a link that you make or they can scan a code with their phone or you can just share it right in the app. This makes it easy to share things with the service.

• Two-sided value: Both the referrer and the new user benefit.

Word-of-Mouth (WOM) Drivers:

• This is a great experience: When the product fixes a problem that is really annoying and it does it very well. The product solves a problem and it does this effectively. It is an experience when the product does this.

• People like to think of themselves as unique. They want the things they buy to show that. They want to be able to say that they use products or things that are not used by a lot of other people. This is a part of personal identity, for users and it is what makes them want to buy certain products. Users want to be able to associate themselves with products that're new and different.

• Exclusivity: Invite-only launches or beta access drive curiosity and status.

Best Practices:

• Highlight social sharing options after key user milestones.

• Use referral dashboards to show progress and motivate continued sharing.

• We should say thank you to the people who tell others about us and, to those who liked us from the beginning the top referrers and the early people who supported us the early evangelists of our thing the top referrers and the early evangelists.

Example:

Morning Brew's email newsletter used a tiered referral system that rewarded subscribers with stickers, mugs, and even exclusive content. This approach grew their list from 100k to over a million.

7.3.3 Using Communities and People Who Try New Things First

We can get a lot from communities and people who try things first. These communities and people who try things first are very important for new ideas and products. Communities and people who try things first can help us understand what people like about new ideas and products. They can also help us figure out what people do not like about ideas and products. By working with communities and people who try things first we can make new ideas and products better. Communities and people who try things first are a great resource, for anyone who wants to create new ideas and products.

For people who are making products communities are a great place to start. This is because communities are like groups of people who really care about the things. They are not like advertisements that try to get everyones attention. Communities are small. The people in them are really interested, in what you are doing. This makes it easy for new companies to see if their ideas are good get feedback from people and get users who will really like their product without spending a lot of money. The people who start using the product first can become big fans and even help make the product better. They can tell all their friends about the product. Help it become popular on its own.

Types of Communities to Target

Interest-based: Reddit, Discord servers, Facebook groups around specific problems (e.g., productivity, fitness)

People who really care about something will join groups that talk about that thing. If you have a fitness app you can go to the fitness group on Reddit and start a conversation. You can share things like how to track your progress and give people templates to use.

This is better than saying "use my app" because it helps people and they will like that. The fitness app can talk to people in the fitness group, on Reddit.

Professional: Slack communities, LinkedIn groups, IndieHackers

These communities bring together people who want to achieve the things in their jobs. A company that makes software for businesses might share what it learns from trying out new ways to help customers get started in a special chat room where people talk about sales. This company wants to be seen as a part of the conversation about solving problems. For example IndieHackers is a place where new founders talk to each other and share their thoughts on the tools and business models they use. IndieHackers is a community where these founders can be honest, with each other.

Platform-specific: Product Hunt, Hacker News, Betalist, Makerlog

When you want to find things to buy some websites are really good for that. They are also great when you have something to sell. For example Figma is a product that people started using a lot quickly. This happened after Figma was talked about on Hacker News. The people who make things on computers tried out what Figma can do, like letting people work on designs together. Then they told people about Figma and that is how it became popular without anyone paying for ads. Figma is an example of how these kinds of websites can help new products, like Figma.

Geographic/local: Meetup.com groups, WhatsApp circles, co-working spaces

Local communities are a place for people to try out new things, especially things that are connected to where they live. For example a company that delivers food can talk to people at meetings or shared offices and give them a chance to try their service for free. This way the food delivery company can get feedback from these people. Make their service better. Local communities like these are really good for this kind of thing because they are made up of people who live in the area and can give good feedback on services, like food delivery.

Tactics to Engage Early Adopters

Be present, not promotional: Add value to conversations before pitching

People in communities do not like it when companies are too obvious about trying to sell them something. Startups should try to help communities by answering questions that people have sharing things that they know or giving people things that they can use. For example Notion shared templates that people could use to be more productive in threads, on Reddit rather than telling people to use the Notion platform.

When we do a launch in communities we should give the group members a chance to try it out first and then ask them what they think about it. This way the group members get to see the launch before anyone else and we get to hear their thoughts on it. We can

ask the group members for their feedback, on the launch. The soft launch is a way to get feedback from the group members.

When you ask community members to try out a version of something before it is released to everyone it makes them feel special. This is what QuickHire did when they asked business owners to test their new hiring tool. They said something, like "we need your help to test this tool" and people were happy to give it a try. This way QuickHire got to see how their hiring tool worked in the world.

I think it is an idea to have AMA sessions. You can host Ask Me Anything chats. This will help you explain your Minimum Viable Product and build authenticity. People will get to know you and your Minimum Viable Product. You can answer all their questions, about your Minimum Viable Product during these Ask Me Anything chats. This way you will build trust with them. They will think your Minimum Viable Product is genuine.

Being open and honest is really important for building trust. A new company that makes financial technology products could do a question and answer session, on LinkedIn with people who start their businesses. They can explain how their product makes accounting easier and ask people what they think about it.

We should get the adopters involved in making the product. The early adopters really, like being a part of the process when we are building the product. This is something that the early adopters love to do.

People who really care about something want to feel like they have a say in it. So when startups ask for opinions in polls or just let people talk about what they think they can work together with their community to make things. For example the people at Discord made a list of things they wanted to do. It was heavily influenced by what gamer communities were saying they wanted like the ability to have video chats, with each other.

Early Adopter Traits

Curious about new solutions

People are always looking for something. They want alternatives to the things that're already out there. For example the people who use Hacker News really like to try out tools for developers and see how they work. They like to test these developer tools and figure out what makes them tick. Hacker News participants are always on the lookout, for developer tools to test and dissect.

Forgiving of imperfections

People who buy things on know they might have some problems. They are okay with that long as they see that the company is doing something, about it. For example the first people who bought cars from Tesla did not mind that there were not places to charge

their cars. This is because they really believed in what Tesla was doing and thought it was an idea. The people who bought Tesla cars on liked the new technology and that is why they were willing to overlook some of the issues like limited charging infrastructure.

Willing to provide detailed feedback and testimonials

People who use things before they are popular spend a lot of time making products better. The people who started using Notion first wrote posts and made templates that everyone could use which helped tell others about Notion and made Notion more useful. Notion got better because of what these early Notion users did.

Community Engagement Tips

Start early—even during idea validation

It is an idea to talk to people before you start building something. For example a company that makes health technology can ask people what they think before they make an app. They can do this by asking questions in groups of people who're interested, in being healthy. This way the health technology company can see if people really want what they are making before they spend a lot of time and money on it.

Focus on reciprocity and transparency

When you want people to pay attention to your Minimum Viable Product or your MVP you should give them something first. This can be a guide or some useful information. You can also give them a tool to use. Do this before you ask them to take a look at your Minimum Viable Product.

You should also be honest with people about where your Minimum Viable Product's at. Let them know that your Minimum Viable Product is still, in the stages. This will help people know what to expect from your Minimum Viable Product.

Build relationships with moderators or key influencers within the group

Moderators are like the people who decide what gets seen. What does not. If you want them to like your posts you have to get them to trust you. This is really important because it can make a difference. Canva, when it was just starting out made friends with teachers who taught design. These teachers were of famous, in their own small groups so they helped Canva get its name out there.

Example

Notion’s Community-Driven Growth

Notion’s early growth came from deep engagement in Reddit productivity forums and Slack groups. The team didn’t just announce the product; they answered questions, shared templates, and supported users directly. Over time, this fostered a grassroots

network of enthusiasts who spread the word, created content, and built entire ecosystems around the product—long before Notion invested in traditional marketing.

7.4 Branding Principles

7.4.1 Creating a Distinct Visual Identity

A brand has its special look that tells people what it is and what it believes in. This look is made up of things like the logo, colors and fonts that the brand uses. It helps people know that it is really the brand when they see these things. When people see these things they know what the brand is about. For companies having a simple and easy to understand look makes it easier for new people to get it. It also makes people trust the brand more. It looks good on everything from the website to the product and even the slides that the company shows to investors. The brands look is important because it is what people see first and it helps them understand what the brand is, about.

Key Elements of Visual Identity

When it comes to the logo design it should be really simple. The logo design has to be scalable. The logo design must also be versatile.

The logo design needs to look good in black and white.

The logo design has to look good, on mobile. The logo design has to look good on the web.

A good logo for Most Valuable Player works well when it is small like on a computer screen and when it is big like on a billboard. The logo should be simple. Not have too many details. It should also have a balance of empty space around it. You should make a few versions of the logo like one with the words and the picture together one with just the words and one with just the picture. This way the logo will look good on things like buttons the screen that comes up when you start a program and profiles on media websites. For example the symbol for Airbnb is easy to recognize when it is small on a phone screen. The Nike swoosh is another example of a logo that looks good whether it is small or big like, on a tiny screen or a huge billboard.

When it comes to the Color Palette you should pick a few colors for your brand. You need to choose two to four core colors that you will use. The colors you choose can affect how people feel about your brand. For example the color blue makes people think of trust and the color green makes people think of health. So the colors you pick for your brand are important because Color Palette is a part of your brand.

To start pick one color for the palette then add one color that stands out and some neutral grays. Write down the colors using HEX, RGB or CMYK codes. Also make sure you have versions of these colors for when the app is used in dark mode.

Check that the colors you choose are easy to see for everyone people who do not see very well. This means buttons, warnings and links should be clear. For example if you use a color on a white background make sure the blue is dark enough to be easily seen, especially for calls to action.

Some apps, like those for health and climate often use green because it feels fresh and healthy. On the hand apps that deal with money like banks usually use blue because it seems safe and reliable.

The bank Monzo uses a bright color to draw attention to important parts of the user interface. This shows that using an bright color can be very effective, in getting users to notice what you want them to.

When we talk about typography we need to think about font families. These font families should look the same on all platforms. We also have to consider how easy it is to read the text and the tone that the font gives. For example the tone can be playful or serious or modern. The font families we choose for our typography should be consistent. They should match the tone we want to give whether it is playful or serious or modern typography.

When you are choosing fonts for your user interface you should pick a sans serif font that is easy to read. Then you can choose a fancy display font or a serif font for the headings.

You should not use many different fonts because it can be distracting to look at.

It is better to use fonts that most computers already have, like the fonts that Apple and Google use, such as San Francisco and Roboto.

These fonts are good because they are easy to read. They look good on all sorts of things like the user interface and the marketing pages and even the small text.

Companies, like Apple and Google show us that we can use one font for everything and it will look great.

Visual Consistency: Use design templates and brand guidelines for consistency across marketing, app UI, packaging, and social media.

Make the space between things, the grid, the icons and the pictures look the same. This way everything will look like it was made by you no matter who actually made it.

Create things that you can use again and again and make a list of colors and shapes that you like in your design tool. This will help your website pages, control panels and advertisements look the same.

For example Notion uses an simple design with not many colors. This shows that when you make things look consistent people will recognize you away whether they see your pictures, documents or social media posts.

The illustrations and motion also need to look the same so make some rules, for those things too.

Steps to Create a Visual Identity

Define your brand's personality (e.g., bold, minimal, premium, playful).

When you think about your strategy you need to think about what kind of traits you want to show. If your Unique Value Proposition is about being fast and easy to understand you should use colors that are really different, from each other make sure your pages are not too busy and use simple words.

You can make a list to help you remember what traits to use with what visuals. For example if you want to show that something is strong you can use geometric shapes. If you want to show that something is quality you can use a lot of space between things and subtle movements. This way you are not just making choices. You are making choices that fit with your Unique Value Proposition and the traits you want to show.

Gather visual inspiration from similar products or unrelated industries.

To make your reference boards really stand out you need to think about the tone you want to express. This is about the colors, the type and how everything is composed. Do not just look at what your competitorsre doing because if you do that you will probably end up looking just like them.

A company that does payroll services for businesses for example might get some ideas from news websites. These websites are really good at explaining things in an simple way.. They might look at apps that people use in their everyday lives, which often have nice illustrations that make them feel more friendly and approachable. This can help make complicated topics seem human and easier to understand.

Reference boards, for a B2B payroll service can use color, type and composition to express the tone they want.

Use design tools like Figma, Canva, or Adobe Express to prototype.

Let us create a system really fast. We need to make a basic things: a logomark, a main color and a secondary color a font for headlines and a font for the main text. We also need to make a things that people will interact with on the website, like a button, a card and a form field.

We should make a sample pages to see how all of these things work together. We can make a hero section, for the landing page a section that shows our prices and a screen

that shows what our app looks like. This will help us see how our design looks when it is used with content. We can test our logomark and colors and fonts and UI components like the button and card and form field in these sample pages.

Test multiple variations with users or team members.

Run tests that're only five seconds long and see what people remember. You should also do preference tests to figure out which one feels more trustworthy to people.. Do accessibility checks to make sure the call, to action is easy to read on a mobile phone. If the people who started hospitality companies think your brand seems techy and cold then you should change the colors and pictures to make it feel warmer like you want it to.

Create a brand board or style guide.

Put all the design things like the package logo files, which can be in SVG or PNG or PDF format and the color tokens and the rules for typography and the style for icons and some sample layouts, all on one page that your team can look at and follow.

Make sure to add some rules for what to do and what not to do with the package logo, like what the minimum size of the logo should be and that we should not stretch it and what backgrounds are okay to use.

Also include some details for the developers, like variables and tokens and states so they know what to do when they are working on the package.

This is really important because it affects the things that're significant to us. The reason why it matters is that it has an impact on our lives and the world, around us. It matters.

A strong visual identity is really important because it helps people recognize a product. It also makes it easier for new users to get started. This is a deal when people are trying to figure out what a new product is all about, in just a few seconds.

When the visuals are consistent and easy to understand it makes the design and development process a lot faster. This is because designers and developers can use the elements over and over again instead of having to make new decisions every time. This saves time and money. It also means that every new part of the product will look and feel like it belongs. The visual identity of the product remains the same.

• Trust and recall: When things look nice and match it is easier for people to remember the service and feel okay about doing things like signing up connecting a card or booking a service, with the service.

• Conversion and usability: When things are easy to see and use people can find what they need, like the conversion and usability buttons. Do what they want to do faster. This helps with conversion and usability because people are more likely to start using

something and keep using it when they can easily find the conversion and usability calls to action.

• Team velocity: When we have an idea of what our brand looks like and a library of components that everyone can use the team can work faster and agree on things more easily. This means that as we add features our brand still looks and feels the same, which is really important to us. Team velocity is about making things more efficient so designers and engineers can focus on creating new things instead of arguing about how they should look. Team velocity is key to making this happen by keeping everyone on the page, with our brand identity.

Practical example: A hiring MVP for hourly workers adopts a simple wordmark plus a bold accent color on action buttons, pairs a readable sans-serif for forms, and standardizes spacing and icon style in its design system. In user tests, recruiters complete job posts faster and recognize the brand across ads, emails, and the dashboard— evidence that a lean but distinct identity can drive confidence and task success from day one.

7.4.2 Narrative Identity and Storytelling

Your brand has a story that makes people feel something. This story is, about what your brand's what it believes in and why it is here. When you are just starting out telling your brand story helps people connect with you on a level before your product is fully developed. Your brand story is important because it is the heart of who your brand's.

Components of a Strong Brand Narrative:

• Origin Story: Tell us about the problem that made us think of a solution. What was the issue that led to the idea, for the solution. The problem that inspired the solution is really what we want to know about.

Vision: This is where you say what your brand thinks is important and where your brand is going. Your brand needs to be clear about what it believes in and what it wants to do. This helps people understand what your brand is, about.

Your brand should say what it thinks and where it is going so people know what to expect from your brand.

When you hear the stories that the founders tell it makes the company seem real. The founders of a company are the people who started it. When they share things that really happened to them it helps people see the company as more than just a name. This is what is called founder authenticity. The founders are the ones who make the company seem genuine, by talking about their own experiences.

• User Transformation: The product makes a difference in the lives of users. It helps users do things better and makes their life easier. The product is really good at solving problems that users have. This means that users can do what they want to do with the product. The product improves the life of users by making things simpler for them. Users can use the product to make their life better. The product is very useful, for users.

Figure: Components of a Strong Brand Narrative

Storytelling Formats:

• About Us page

• Founder videos/interviews

• Social media content (Instagram Reels, LinkedIn posts)

• Brand manifesto or landing page copy

Tips for Effective Brand Storytelling:

• Focus on clarity, not complexity.

• Keep the user as the “hero” of the story, with your brand as the “guide.”

• Make the thing people can understand. Use things that happen in life like when people get really frustrated or feel sad so users can say yeah that is, like what I feel.

Examples:

• The story of Airbnb began when two guys decided to rent out air mattresses in their place during a design conference.

• Headspace is trying to help people with something important. Headspace wants to help the world stress less sleep more and love better. This is what Headspace is about. Headspace really wants to make a difference, in peoples lives by helping them stress less sleep more and love better with Headspace.

Impact:

A good story can convert indifferent users into loyal advocates because it builds trust, meaning, and memorability.

7.4.3 Aligning Brand Values with User Expectations

So what are brand values? They are the ideas that a startup follows. These ideas help the startup figure out how to act what to say and how to make choices. Brand values are really important because they show what the startup believes in and what it wants to be.

It is really important to make sure these values are what the users actually care about. This is how you build trust with the users. You also get loyalty from the users. People think you are being authentic when you do this. The users need to feel like you are being real with them. That is what matters. Aligning these values with what the users care about's really the key, to all of this.

Steps to Align Brand Values:

• Think about what's important to you: This could be things, like trying new ideas making sure everyone is treated fairly taking care of the earth being honest or giving people the power to make their own decisions, like innovation, inclusivity, sustainability, transparency or empowerment.

• Think about the people you want to reach: What is really important to the people you are trying to talk to? For people in Gen Z things like taking care of the earth and doing what is right are deals. For people who work things, like getting things done on time and making sure everything works properly are really important.

• Make your values real: Do not just write down your values actually show them in what you do. If you say that you put the user first then you should show this in the way you handle customer support or design your user interface. This means that your values should be visible in everything you do in the way you treat your users, like the way you design things and the way you help your customers when they need it.

• Use values in messaging:

o Taglines (e.g., “Built with privacy in mind”) o Product copy (e.g., transparent pricing language) o Social proof and testimonials (e.g., impact stories)

Examples of Brand-Value Alignment:

• Patagonia really cares about the environment. They show this in the way they present themselves and in the way they do things. They make sure that Patagonia is involved in activism, in everything they do from how they market Patagonia to how Patagonia runs their business.

• Duolingo uses humor and games to help people learn. This is a part of how Duolingo teaches people new things. Duolingo thinks that learning should be fun. It includes humor and games, in its learning philosophy.

Outcomes of Alignment:

• The product makes people feel something. It builds connections with the users. This means the users really like the product. They feel good when they use it. The product helps to build a bond, between the users and the product itself which's the product.

When people find a brand that's like them they will stay with that brand. This is because the brand reflects who they are. Brands that do this have fewer people leaving them. The brand is, like a part of the people who use it so people stick with the brand.

Encourages word-of-mouth marketing by value-driven communities.

Brand values are really important. They are not something that looks nice. Brand values are the base that shows people what the brand is about and who the brand is for. The brand values tell people what the brand stands for and what the brand believes in. Brand values are a part of what makes a brand special and they help people understand what the brand is all, about.

“Activity: Branding Blueprint Exercise”

When we think about a company we need to think about what makes its brand special. We have to consider what matters to the people who will be buying the companys products. The companys brand is important because it is what the people who buy the companys products will remember.

To make a plan for the companys brand we have to figure out what the companys brand values are. The companys brand values are what will make the companys brand appealing to the people who will be using the companys products. We should try to come up with around three to five brand values, for the company. These brand values are important because they will help the companys brand stand out.

To get started we can create a logo for the company. Then we can choose some colors and fonts that we really like. We can use tools, like Canva or Figma to make the company logo and pick colors and fonts for the company.

The company needs a story that tells people what the company is trying to do and where the company came from. This story should be really short like three or four sentences. The company wants to make sure people understand what the company is, about. The story of the company is important because it helps people know what the company is trying to accomplish.

Lastly we have to think about how all of these things will look on the companys website or social media pages. We have to brainstorm how the logo and colors will be used in these places to make the company look good. This exercise helps learners internalize how brand identity elements are connected and implemented strategically.

7.5 Packaging and User Experience

7.5.1 Basics of Logo Design and Visual Systems

A logo is usually the thing people see when they meet a brand. The brand logo is what people remember. A visual system is like a plan that helps keep everything looking the same on all platforms. For companies like MVPs and early-stage startups it is really important to make good branding choices from the start. This means the brand logo and design should be simple, easy to remember and look good in situations. The branding should be able to grow with the company so it is important to make branding choices, for the brand logo and design.

Core Principles of Logo Design:

• Simplicity is really important because a simple design is easy to remember. When a design is clean and simple it is easier to recognize the simplicity of the design and recall the simplicity of the design. This is why simplicity is so good.

• Scalability: The image should look really good when it is small like when it's 16x16 pixels and used as a favicon and it should also look good when it is big like, on large banners.

• Relevance: The colors and icons you use should be the same, as what people think of when they hear about your product. The fonts should also look like they belong with your product and the tone you want your brand to have. Colors and fonts should match your product category and brand tone.

• Timelessness is really important: we should not use things that're popular now because they will look old very soon. This way Timelessness will always be good. Things will not feel outdated so quickly.

• A good logo is versatile. It should look nice in color. It should also look nice in black and white. The logo should work well with text. It should work well without text. A logo like this is a logo that can be used in different ways. The logo is versatile because it works with or without text and it works in color and, in monochrome.

Types of Logos:

• Wordmark (text-based): Google, Visa

• Lettermark (initials): IBM, HP

Icon or Symbol: Apple, Nike

Combination mark: Spotify, Adidas

Designing a Visual System:

• Color palette: Primary and secondary brand colors with purpose (e.g., blue = trust, red = energy).

• Typography: Pick one or two font families that you like. It is very important that the font is easy to read and that you use it consistently for the Typography. This means you should use the font families for all of your Typography to make it look nice and easy to understand.

• UI components: Buttons, form fields, notifications styled consistently.

• The pictures and drawings we use should be, like the tone of the product. For example if the product is fun and playful the pictures should be fun and playful too. If the product is serious and professional the pictures should be serious and professional.. If the product is simple and minimalist the pictures should be simple and minimalist as well.

Common Tools:

• Figma, Canva, Adobe Illustrator, LogoMakr

Practical Tip:

• When you are making something for your startup you should have a book of rules that says what everything should look like. This book is called a brand style guide. It helps make sure that your website, your app the slides you show to people when you are asking for money the boxes your products come in and the ads you pay for all look the same and look like they are, from your startup. This is important because it makes your startup look professional and people can recognize it easily.

People who study how our minds work have found out that when a company uses the colors and letters in all of their advertising more people remember who they are. This is a big deal because it can make a difference of up to 80%.

Some companies that are really successful did not spend a lot of money on their logos. Twitter is an example of this. They only spent $15 on their logo.

Coca-Cola is another company that did not spend a lot of money on their logo. One of their employees actually made it.

This just goes to show that what really matters is being clear about what you want to say and having a plan. It does not matter much how much money you spend on design when you are just starting out with a new company like, at the beginning stage.

7.5.2 User-Centric Packaging Principles

Packaging is not about getting the product from one place to another. It is a part of what your brand is all about. It shows people what your brand is like. This is really important for companies that sell things directly to customers, like startups that make products. The packaging is the thing people see when they get their product. It is a part of the experience of opening the box and it can affect how people think about your brand.

Packaging is a deal because it helps create a good or bad first impression of your brand and the product you are selling.

User centric packaging is about the people who use the products. It focuses on things like making the packaging easy to open and close. User centric packaging is really important because it makes people happy when they can easily get to what they bought.

User centric packaging focuses on:

* Making sure the packaging is easy to handle

* Helping people understand what the product is and how to use it

* Keeping the product safe inside the packaging

User packaging is good for the people who buy the products and for the companies that make them. It helps user packaging to get a good reputation when people, like the way the products are packaged. User centric packaging is a deal because it can make or break how people feel about a product.

• Clarity of Information: Product name, usage instructions, ingredients/components, QR codes.

• Ease of Use: Easy-to-open seals, resealable pouches, stackable boxes.

Emotional Appeal: Use of visuals, brand storytelling, personalized notes inside packaging.

Eco-conscious Design: Recyclable materials, minimal packaging, or sustainable inks.

Packaging Design Elements:

• Structure: Box shape, layers, compartments, inserts for added surprise.

• Graphics: Logo, brand story, illustrations, texture (matte/glossy).

• Typography: We should use fonts that're easy to read for the product information and the legal disclaimers. This is important for the product info and the legal disclaimers so that people can understand them. The fonts, for the product info and the legal disclaimers need to be clear.

• What is the first thing the customer sees when they open the box? What do they. Feel when they take the product out? Is it the product itself or the packaging that they notice first? The unboxing experience is really important because it is the time the customer gets to see and touch the product they bought. They want to know what the product looks like and if it's what they expected. The customer will see the product and the packaging. They will touch the product and the box. They will feel the weight of the product and the box. They will see all the details of the product and the packaging. The

unboxing experience is, about the product and what the customer thinks of it when they see it for the first time.

Key Considerations:

• For tech hardware → durability and protection.

• For skincare or food → hygiene, compliance, and aesthetics.

• For digital products (e.g., software cards, booklets) → messaging clarity and emotional branding.

Checklist Before Launch:

• Does the packaging of the product match the values of your brand, such, as being eco looking luxurious and having a minimalist style?

• Does this match what the people you are trying to reach really want from the target segments preferences of the target segment?

• Is it share-worthy for social media moments?

Packaging design must strike a balance between function, aesthetics, and brand coherence.

7.5.3 Role of Packaging in Customer Perception

When people buy something from you the packaging is usually the thing they touch. This is before they even try the product. The box or the bag that the product comes in tells people if your product is good, safe and worth the money. For companies the packaging does a lot of things. It keeps the product from getting broken when it's being shipped. It also tells people things about the product really quickly.. It helps people get started with the product in a way that is easy and fun. Packaging is, like the products impression. It is what people see when they get the product in the mail. The box or bag is what makes people think that the product is good or not. For companies packaging is very important. It helps people trust the company and want to buy from them.

The way things are packaged really affects how we think about them. Packaging is very important because it is the thing we see when we look at a product. It gives us an idea of what the product's like.

People often make decisions about what to buy based on the packaging of a product. For example if the packaging of a food product looks nice and clean we are more likely to think that the food is good and healthy. On the hand if the packaging looks old and dirty we might not want to buy the product.

The design and color of the packaging can also influence our perception of a product. Some colors can make us feel happy and excited while other colors can make us feel calm and relaxed. Packaging can also tell us about the quality of a product. If the packaging is expensive looking and well made we might think that the product is quality.

* The look of the packaging is important

* The color of the packaging is important

* The quality of the packaging is

Packaging influences perception of a product in many ways. It can make us want to buy a product or not buy it. The packaging of a product is like an impression. It can. Break our decision to buy something. Packaging is a part of how we perceive products, like Packaging. The Packaging of a product is very important because it affects how we think about the product and whether or not we want to buy it.

When you see something with a matte finish it looks really nice. Embossed logos are also very fancy.. When something has a magnetic closure it feels high end. All of these things, like matte finishes and embossed logos and magnetic closures make you think that luxury brands are really special. Luxury brands use these things to make their products look and feel expensive. Luxury brands want you to feel like you are getting something nice when you buy their products.

When you see something that is all done and put together it looks like something. This is because it is not easy to make something look that good if it is not really good. For example a box that feels soft when you touch it and has a part on it makes you think that someone thought a lot, about how to make it. Even a simple box can be nice if it is made in a way like a hard box that opens like a book. For example a company that sells watches directly to people made a change to the kind of box they use. They used to use a box but now they use a hard box with a special shiny finish. People really liked this box. They thought it was a gift and it felt like something expensive. The watch company saw that people were talking about how nice the new box was. They said it felt like a premium watch and that they liked giving it as a gift.

Trust and safety are important. Things like seals tamper-proof labels and certifications make people feel safe. They know that the watch company is serious, about trust and safety.

Security cues are really important because they make people feel better when they buy things like food, health products and cosmetics. When you see a band around a product or a sticker that shows if someone has opened it you know that it is still safe to use. You also feel better when you see things like statements that say the product is okay with the FDA or special marks like the CE mark or pictures that show if a product has things in it that some people are allergic to. For example a company that makes vitamins

added a seal to their products and a ring that says "sealed for your safety" and this really helped because people were not sending their products back as much because they thought they were open when they got them. The company found out that this change cut down on the number of returns by, than half.

Personality of the brand: Bright colors and fun typography = playful; black and gold = premium

The color and type and illustration style of something can really show you what a brand is, about.

If you have a tool that helps you get things done it might come in a mailer that is really colorful and has rounded letters.

On the hand a brand that makes high quality audio equipment might use a lot of black and metallic colors and have a very organized design.

For example Glossier uses pink pouches to show that they are a friendly and modern beauty brand.

A company that sells coffee might use brown paper and old fashioned letters and maps to show that they are authentic and care about where their coffee comes from.

When you look at a product that is packaged well it seems like it is worth more money. This is true even if the product inside the package is the same as a similar product that is not packaged as nicely. The packaging of a product can really change how people think about the product value. A product, with packaging makes people think that the product value is higher.

The price of something is affected by how heavy it's how it closes and how things are organized inside. When you have a tray or insert that holds all the parts, in place it looks nice and neat and things do not rattle around. This makes people think that the product is quality. For example a company that makes phone accessories used to put their products in plastic bags but then they switched to small sturdy boxes with special inserts that held all the parts in place. The company found that people were more likely to buy things when they were all packaged together in a neat box it looked like a complete set.

Case Studies

Apple does a good job with its packaging. When you open an Apple product it is like they want you to feel that this thing is special. They use simple boxes and bags but that is what makes the product inside feel so important. Apple wants you to think that the product is the important thing, not the box it comes in. This is why they do not put a lot of stuff in the box. They just put the Apple product and a few simple instructions. This makes you feel like the Apple product is something valuable. The simple packaging of

Apple products makes them feel more special than products from companies. Apple products are like a gift to yourself and the simple box is, like the wrapping paper.

Apple makes sure that the Apple product is the thing you see. They do this by keeping everything neat. For example the way the lid opens and closes is very smooth the material used is really good. The inside is organized in a way that is easy to look at. When you open the Apple product it is, like a show. This makes you feel excited to see what is inside. It also shows that the Apple product is made with care and attention to detail so you feel like you bought something really special not just an Apple device.

I really love the pouches. They are these pink bubble wrap pouches. The thing, about pouches is that they are made to be used again and again. This makes me want to share my pouches with my friends. The Glossier pouches are really fun to reuse.

The pouch is a way to protect things and it also makes a nice keepsake with the brand name on it. People can easily spot the pouch on media because of its unique color and the bubbles you can feel. This makes customers want to show it off which helps tell people about the brand. The fact that you can use the pouch again and again shows that the brand cares about being practical and responsible which is what the brand is, about.

The Dollar Shave Club has a funny way of writing things. They use humor to make their message more relatable.

When you look at what the Dollar Shave Club says you can see that they are trying to be funny and lighthearted. The Dollar Shave Club wants to make people feel like they are talking to a friend, not a company.

The Dollar Shave Club is good at using words to make people laugh and feel happy. This helps the Dollar Shave Club to be more likeable and fun. The Dollar Shave Club is all, about being funny and making people smile.

The boxes that things come in and the paper around them have sayings on them. These funny sayings make people happy before they even use the product to shave. The company uses the kind of humor in their advertisements and when you open the package. This makes people remember the brand and it makes shaving seem like fun. It also helps people, like the brand more. It does not cost a lot of money to do this.

Behavioral Impact

People really like to share things on media that come in nice packages. When something looks good customers are more likely to share products that're well-packaged on social media. This is because products that're well-packaged catch peoples attention and they want to show them off to their friends. So customers are more likely to share packaged products, on social media because it makes them happy.

When you see something that really catches your eye like a product with a texture or bright colors it can make you stop and take notice. For example a skincare company put an inspirational message inside the lid of their product. People loved it much that they took pictures of it when they opened the box and shared them online. The company was then able to use these pictures in their advertisements, which was really helpful, for them. This is a way for skincare products to get people talking about them.

When people have experiences with the packaging of a product they are more likely to tell their friends and family about it and they are also more likely to order from that company again. Positive packaging experiences really do increase the amount of word-of-mouth and the number of reorders that a company gets from its customers. This is because good packaging makes people happy with the product and the company and happy customers are more likely to come and shop again. Companies that have packaging experiences see a big increase, in word-of-mouth and reorders.

When you make it easy to get started with a product people can use it away. This is because the company has made the start up process simple. For example they might put a start card on top of the other things in the box. They might also include a code that you can scan with your phone to watch a short video that shows you how to use the product.

The company does this so that people can start using the product easily. When people can do this they are happy with the product. They like the brand that made it. For instance a company that makes home gadgets did something, like this. They put labels on the cables. Included a color coded diagram to help people understand how to use the product. This made it so that people did not need to call the company for help much. It also made people want to buy products from this company. The smart home gadget brand is an example of a company that makes it easy for people to use their products.

When a company that says it cares about the earth uses wraps it does not look good for the company. This is because the packaging does not match what the eco-brand is saying. It hurts the trust people have in the eco-brand. The eco-brand looks fake when it uses wraps. This is a problem, for the eco-brand because it wants people to believe it is really trying to help the earth.

When the message and the materials do not match people start to doubt. For example an eco-cleaning company made a change. They used to send their products in mailers but they switched to recycled kraft mailers. They also used soy inks to print the labels. The company even added a note inside the mailer that explained where their products came from. Customers really liked this change. They wrote reviews about it. Before the change some customers were sending their products back because they did not like all the plastic.. After the company made the switch they stopped getting returns for that

reason. The eco-cleaning company showed that they really care about the earth and that is what the customers liked about them. They liked the eco-cleaning company because of the kraft mailers and the soy inks and the note, about the supply chain.

Practical Design Considerations for MVPs

Protection and logistics

When you are sending something you need to use the right size box. This helps to reduce the weight of the box. It will not break easily. You can use a kind of box called E-flute corrugate. It is strong but not too thick.

If you are sending liquids or glass you need to be extra careful. You should put some cushioning inside the box to keep things from moving. You should also use seals or pouches that can stop leaks. This will help to prevent things from getting broken. It will save you money on shipping.

Information hierarchy

The front of the thing is where you put the stuff like what the product promises to do and what makes it so great. The side is for basics like how big it's what makes it tick. On the back or inside you should have instructions and who to call if you need help. It is also an idea to put a special code called a QR code that people can scan with their phone to watch videos that show them how to use the product. This helps people get started faster. Means you will get fewer calls for help, which is a good thing for the product and, for the people who have to answer those calls.

Accessibility and usability

People can read things easily when the words are big and clear. So it is an idea to use large letters for the important steps. We should also have ways to open packages, like tear strips or pull tabs. And it is helpful to have pictures to the words so everyone can understand what they mean even if they do not speak the same language. For example a company that makes supplements made the words on their labels bigger from 7 points to 9.5 points and they also added pictures. This helped because the company got questions from people about how to take the supplements. The supplement brand got questions, about how to take the supplements.

Sustainability and authenticity

When you are buying paper try to pick the ones that have the FSC certification. These papers are good for the environment. You should also look for water-based coatings and mono-material solutions. These are really easy to recycle.

When you tell people about the choices you make be honest and clear. For example you can say "this box is made from 100 percent recycled board and we printed it with algae ink". Do not say something is good for the environment if it is not.

You can also help people use things for a time. You can give them ideas, on how to reuse things. For instance you can say "you can store your cables in this box". This way the box will not be thrown away quickly.

Cost and MOQs

When you are just starting out you can use printing for the early runs of your product. This way you do not have to pay for plate fees. You can also use dielines so you do not have to pay for tooling.. You can use modular stickers for the different versions of your product, which are called variant SKUs. For example a company that makes candles did a test run. They used one box, which is called a master carton and they put different labels on it for the different scents. This let them test 500 candles, in scents without having a lot of extra candles that they might not need.

Compliance and data capture

Include required marks (barcodes/GS1, batch/expiry, safety warnings) and regional needs. Add a discreet QR for warranty registration or feedback, capturing emails and post-purchase NPS to close the loop between packaging and lifecycle marketing.

An MVP Packaging Playbook

Define the promise

What is the main thing that the customer needs to know about your product when they see it on a store shelf or when it arrives at their doorstep. You only have a few seconds to grab their attention with your unique value proposition or what makes your product special so that they understand what your product is all, about.

Prototype with speed

Mock up dielines in Figma or Adobe Express and print low-fidelity prototypes on a desktop printer to test scale, readability, and insert fit. Validate unboxing order with 5–10 users.

Pilot materials and formats

Test two substrates (e.g., recycled kraft vs. coated SBS) and two finishes (matte vs. gloss) against goals: protection, look, cost. Measure damage rate, unboxing NPS, and time to first use.

Instrument the experience

We need to add codes to our packaging so we can see what is working and what is not. We should put QR codes or short web addresses on the packaging. This way we can tell when someone signs up or watches a tutorial because of the packaging. We also want to know when someone visits the support page because of something on the packaging.

We have to track why people return things and if it is because of the packaging or if the item was damaged. This will help us figure out if the money we are spending on packaging is worth it. We want to know the return on investment, for the packaging.

Iterate and standardize

To lock in a system we need to think about a few things. First we have to figure out the rules, for placing the logo. We also have to decide on the colors we will use which we can call color tokens. Then there is the type scales, which's just a fancy way of saying the different sizes of text we will use.. We have to make some templates that we can insert into our design.

We should also build a way of doing things, which we can call a pack-out SOP. This will help the people who are putting everything together to do it consistently. It looks the same every time. The goal is to make the reveal something that we can repeat over and over no matter how many batches we make of the minimal system. This way the logo placement and color tokens and type scales will all be the same. We can insert the templates easily.

Examples Across Categories

D2C cosmetics

The small carton for our product is really cute. It is a color and it has our logo on it. The logo is special because it is foil-stamped. When you open the carton you will see a message that says "You look great today". Inside the carton there is also a pulp insert that helps keep the glass dropper safe. This means that the glass dropper will not break easily. As a result we have breakages. Also people like to share pictures of the message, on social media, which is really great because it means they like the message and they want to share it with others. The message "You look great today" is a part of this and people love taking pictures of it to post as user generated content of the inside message.

Electronics accessory

Rigid tray with labeled cavities, peel-and-read quick-start card on top, cable labels matching UI colors in the app.

Result: lower support contacts in first 7 days and higher attach-rate for add-on cables.

Coffee subscription

We have a bag for our coffee it is a resealable kraft pouch with a degassing valve. You can find out how our coffee company started on the back of the bag. There is also a QR code that you can scan to get to our brew guides. The brew guides show you how to make our coffee using methods. When people use our brew guides they can make coffee at home. This means they will want to buy our coffee again. They will also want to

share the brew guides with their friends. So we get orders, from our customers because they like our coffee and they can make it taste good at home with our resealable kraft pouch and brew guides.

Food and beverage

We have a carton that is ready to go on a shelf. This carton has a window cut out so you can see the product inside. The front of the carton has clear information about the nutrition facts. We also use tape on the mailers that we send directly to our customers. This tape shows if someone has tried to open the package. The result of using these cartons is that our customers trust us more and we get complaints, about things being broken or spilled when they arrive. The shelf-ready carton really helps with this.

Health and wellness

Opaque bottle for light-sensitive ingredients, child-resistant cap, large dosage icons, and an insert with a simple

3-step regimen. Result: higher adherence and reviews citing “clear instructions.”

Key tip

When you think about packaging think about it as a part of the product itself. It shows people what your brand is about. If you design the materials the way it is put together what it says on it and how you open it, on purpose then the packaging is really good. It does not just look nice it helps people understand the product it helps people trust the brand. It makes people want to use it again and tell others about it. Packaging is important because it is a part of the product and it shows what the brand values are.

“Activity: MVP Packaging and UX Sprint”

We are going to take a product and create a version of the product.

The product needs a logo.

We have to pick some colors for the product.

The logo and the colors will be used for the product.

We can use Canva or Figma to make the logo and choose the colors for the product.

Next we make a drawing of the product when it is all packaged up. The package needs to tell people what the product is. We have to put the name of the product on it. What makes the product good. We also have to say what we want people to do with the product next. We want to make it clear what the product is and what the product can do for them. The product name is important so people know what the product is.

When someone opens the package for the time they will see the product. The customer will feel happy when they get the product. We need to think about what the customer

will think when they see the product. The product is what the customer is waiting for. We should write a lines about the product and what it will be, like when the customer opens the package and sees the product for the first time.

When people want to share a picture of the product on media we should also come up with a sentence or two that people can use when they post about the product. This hands-on sprint is really going to help learners understand how packaging design and user experience go together to shape what people think of the product and the story behind it. The product and its packaging design are very important because they work together to create a feeling and tell a story, about the product.

Choose the correct option:

1. What is a key trait of a good logo?

a) Complex design

b) Heavy colors

c) Simplicity

d) Fancy fonts

2. What is essential in user-centric packaging?

a) Thick wrapping

b) High gloss

c) Clear info

d) Big logo

3. People always talk about Apple when it comes to premium unboxing Apple is really famous, for premium unboxing the way Apple does premium unboxing is just amazing.

a) IKEA

b) Apple

c) Walmart

d) Uber

4. What part of the packaging helps people trust the product?

a) Large size

b) Tamper seal

c) Bold fonts

d) Slogans

5. Brands that care about the earth should use:

a) Plastic wrap

b) Neon colors

c) Foam inserts

d) Recyclables

7.6 Hands-on Exercises

7.6.1 Designing a Logo for the MVP

When you are making a logo for your Minimum Viable Product you have to take the idea of the product and turn it into a simple picture that people will remember. The logo for your Minimum Viable Product is very important because it shows what your brand is about and it will be seen by customers on lots of things, like your website and the boxes your products come in.

Steps to Design a Logo:

• Get to know what kind of personality your brand has. Is your brand modern, classic playful bold, minimal or tech-savvy? Your brand is, like a person. It has its own style. Your brand can be modern. It can be classic. It can also be playful or bold. Maybe your brand is minimal. Maybe it is tech-savvy. You need to figure out what kind of personality your brand has.

• You need to pick the type of logo you want to use:

o Wordmark: A stylized text version of your startup's name (e.g., Google, Etsy). o Symbol/Icon: A representative shape or image (e.g., Twitter bird).

The combination type is really useful because it includes both text and an icon for example Spotify has this kind of thing.

• Color Selection:

o Choose colors based on psychology and market trends (blue for trust, orange for energy, green for eco-consciousness).

• Typography:

To make your text look good you should choose one or two fonts that're easy to read. These fonts should also fit with the tone of your Minimum Viable Product. For example

you can use a sans-serif font to make your Minimum Viable Product look modern. This will help people understand what your Minimum Viable Product is, about.

• Tools to Use:

o Canva, Looka, Figma, Adobe Illustrator

Tips:

• The logo needs to look good when it's really small like 16 pixels and when it is really big like 160 pixels so the logo design must be scalable the logo must be good at 16 pixels and the logo must be good, at 160 pixels.

• Design multiple versions: full logo, icon-only, monochrome version.

• I think it is an idea to get feedback from peers or try it out on some mock product visuals to see how it looks. This way you can get an idea of what the product visuals will be like when they are finished. You can make changes to the product visuals if you need to by getting feedback from peers, on the product visuals.

7.6.2 Building a Visual System for MVP Branding

A visual system is made up of design elements that look the same. These elements help your brand look good on all platforms. This means things like the colors you use the way your words look the pictures you use and how you lay things out. Your brand will look consistent when you use the visual system everywhere. This includes things, like color palettes, typography, iconography, imagery styles and layout principles for your brand.

Steps to Build a Visual System:

• Define Core Brand Colors:

o Choose 1–2 primary colors and 2–3 secondary/supporting tones.

o Ensure WCAG compliance for accessibility (contrast ratios for readability).

• Select Font Families:

o One for headings (bold and distinctive), another for body text (neutral and legible).

• Iconography and Illustrations:

o Use a consistent style (e.g., line icons, flat design, 3D render) across platforms.

• Design Rules for UI:

o Define button shapes, hover effects, and input field styles.

o Specify spacing, alignment, and margins for web/app elements.

• Create a Style Guide:

o Document brand tone, color usage rules, logo dos/don’ts, and grid systems.

Tools to Use:

• Figma (for component libraries)

• Adobe XD (for high-fidelity UI)

• Canva Pro (for brand kits)

Outcome:

A good visual system makes things look nice and professional. This helps people trust the brand. It also makes it easier for people to remember the brand because everything looks the same. A visual system like this is really important, for a brand. It reduces the things that bother people when they look at something. The brand becomes more recognizable. People are more likely to remember it.

7.6.3 Packaging Prototype for the First Launch

When you are making a product it is really important to make a sample of the packaging first. This is something you should do when you are still in the stages of making your product. You want to see if the packaging looks good if it is easy to use and what people think of it before you start making a lot of it. The sample packaging should be like the thing so people can try it out and see what it is like to get the product open it and use packaging, for your product.

Steps to Create a Packaging Prototype:

• Identify Packaging Type:

o Box, pouch, carton, or envelope depending on product type.

• First we need to draw the structure. The structure is really important because it is the base of everything. We have to make sure the structure is correct. The structure is what we will build on. So we need to get the structure right. Then we can add details to the structure. This is how we sketch the structure. We start with the structure.

o Draw die-lines (fold lines, cuts) and label all sides.

• First we need to design the elements. The visual elements are what people see when they look at something. We have to make sure the visual elements are nice and easy to look at. The visual elements include things like colors and pictures. We should choose colors that go well together and pictures that help people understand what the visual elements are about. The visual elements are very important because they help people, like what they see.

o Add your logo, product name, tagline, icons, and usage instructions.

o Include QR codes, URLs, or promotional codes if relevant.

• Print a Mock-up:

o Use paperboard, cardboard, or 3D tools like Origami Studio for digital testing.

o Alternatively, use free templates from websites like Packly or Pacdora.

• Conduct Usability Testing:

o Ask users to open and interact with the prototype.

o Observe confusion points, aesthetic appeal, and user delight.

Key Evaluation Questions:

• Does it fit with the brand values of the company which're to be minimal, premium and eco?

• Is the product durable enough for shipping or for people to buy in a store?

• Does the product make the unboxing experience better, for the customer when they open the product for the time?

A good prototype builds confidence for scaling and invites useful early feedback.

7.7 Summary

❖ when we are trying to position a Minimum Viable Product we need to figure out what makes this Minimum Viable Product special. We have to define a Unique Value Proposition for the Minimum Viable Product. This Unique Value Proposition for the Minimum Viable Product is like a statement that explains what is good about the Minimum Viable Product and what makes the Minimum Viable Product different, from products.

❖ Effective competitive positioning maps the product against existing solutions to identify whitespace and differentiation.

❖ Messaging for early adopters must be concise, emotionally relevant, and problem-focused.

❖ A good plan for a channel is to find the places online and, in the real world to connect with your first users. You need to figure out which digital platforms and which physical platforms are the way to reach your first users. This is a part of making a solid channel strategy that really works for your first users.

❖ To get your 100 users without spending a lot of money you can try things like growth hacking and referral loops and community outreach. These techniques are really helpful

for acquiring the 100 users at a low cost. The first 100 users are important and techniques, like growth hacking can help you get them.

❖ A companys visual branding system, which includes things, like the logo, the type of letters they use and the colors they pick helps people recognize the company and trust it every time they see it.

❖ Narrative branding leverages storytelling to form emotional connections and convey the startup's mission.

❖ When people buy something the way it is packaged can really make a difference. It can make the product seem quality. This kind of packaging can also make people want to show the product to others and talk about it. The packaging of a product is very important because it can make people think that the product is really good. User-centric packaging is what makes this happen. It is, about the user-centric packaging that makes people like the product more.

❖ Practical hands-on design activities like logo creation, brand kits, and packaging prototypes ensure MVPs are presentation-ready and user-aligned.

7.8 Key Terms

1. Unique Value Proposition: This is a statement that tells people what is special about a product. It explains how the product helps the user and what makes it better, than similar products. The Unique Value Proposition is important because it shows people why they should choose this product over others.

2. Positioning: This is the process where we figure out how our Minimum Viable Product stands out from other products made by our competitors. We do this by looking at what our Minimum Viable Product can do that others cannot so it can serve a group of people in a unique way.

3. Growth Hacking is a technique where you try a lot of things with marketing and the products you make to see what works best for your startup. You do this fast to find the easiest ways to make your Growth Hacking work, for your startup.

4. Referral Marketing is when people who already use a product tell others about it. They do this because they get something in return like a reward or a thank you. Referral Marketing is a way to get users by asking existing users to spread the word, about the product.

5. Identity: This is what people see when they think of a brand. It is the collection of things, like the brand logo the colors they use and the way they write things. These visual elements are used to represent the brand so people know it is them. The brand uses

these things on all platforms so everything looks the same. People can recognize the brand easily. The brand logo, colors and typography are all part of the identity of the brand.

6. Brand Narrative: This is a way to tell the story of the brand. The brand narrative tells people about the brands mission and the brands values. It also tells them about the brands journey. The goal of the brand narrative is to help people feel something for the brand. The brand wants to build connections with the users of the brand. The brand narrative is a tool for the brand to do this. It helps people understand what the brand is, about and what the brand stands for. The brand narrative is the story of the brand.

7. Packaging Design: This is about making the outside of a product look good. The packaging is like a wrapper or a box that holds the product. It should show what the brand is about and make people want to buy it. The packaging should also be easy to use. So packaging design is really important for products because it affects how people think about the product and whether they want to use it. Good packaging design helps people understand what the product is and it makes them like the product more. Packaging design is, about the product packaging.

8. Unboxing Experience: The process and emotional impact of opening a product for the first time, often designed to delight and impress customers.

9. MVP Distribution Strategy: A focused plan for selecting the right channels and tactics to get an MVP into the hands of early users.

10. Community Marketing: A user acquisition strategy that targets niche interest-based groups or communities to build advocacy and trust organically.

7.9 Descriptive Questions

1. Explain the key components of an effective Unique Value Proposition with an example.

2. So you have a startup. You want to know how your Minimum Viable Product, your MVP can stand out in a market that is really crowded. How can you make your Minimum Viable Product, your MVP competitive when there are many other products out there that are similar, to your Minimum Viable Product, your MVP?

3. When we talk about adopters what are three main things we should do to make messages that really speak to early adopters? We need to think about how to make our messages appeal to adopters. The three core strategies, for crafting messages targeted at adopters are important to understand.

4. Describe the Bullseye Framework for choosing marketing channels.

5. Discuss the differences between online and offline marketing channels for MVPs.

6. Explain the elements of a consistent visual branding system for MVPs.

7. Why is user-centric packaging critical to product perception and retention?

8. Detail the process of creating a hands-on packaging prototype for MVP launch.

7.10 References

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Answers to Knowledge Check

knowledge check 1

1. c) Simplicity

2. c) Clear info

3. b) Apple

4. b) Tamper seal

5. d) Recyclables

7.11 Case Study

"How Zepto Built Strong Branding and Acquired Its First 100 Users"

Zepto is a company that delivers groceries really fast. They said they can bring things to your door in 10 minutes. This is a deal because there are already a lot of big companies

like BigBasket, Grofers (now Blinkit) and Swiggy Instamart that do the same thing.. Zepto did some things differently. They had a cool brand and they knew exactly who they were trying to sell to. They also did some things to get their first 100 customers.

This story is, about how Zepto figured out how to make people know who they are how they made people like them and how they came up with ideas to make people trust them when they were just starting out with grocery delivery.

Background

Zepto was started in 2021 by two people who left Stanford. They began selling groceries in India when the pandemic was happening. People wanted to get things delivered to their homes quickly. They wanted to be able to count on the delivery.. People were not really loyal to any one company. Zepto thought that if they could deliver things fast and do it every time that would make them stand out. Other companies were trying to sell a lot of things and give people discounts.. Zepto wanted people to think of them as the company that gets things to you the fastest and is the most reliable. Zepto is, about speed and reliability.

The startup started with little to work with. It was working in cities like Mumbai. The startup had to make decisions about how it presented itself and how it reached out to people, in the community to get people to trust it and use it. The startup needed to get its users to like it and come back.

Problem Statement 1: Standing Out in a Crowded Market

Challenge:

There are already some names in grocery delivery like BigBasket and Blinkit. These companies have a lot of money to spend and people already know about them. So when Zepto came into the picture it had to find a way to stand out from the rest. Zepto had to do something to get people to notice it since it was new, to the grocery delivery scene. Zepto needed to make a name for itself in a market where BigBasket and Blinkit were already players.

Solution:

• They made a brand identity that is all, about the companys unique promise which is to deliver things in just 10 minutes this 10-minute delivery is what makes them different.

• The designers used simple visuals, with neon highlights to make the app screens and ads look really modern and fast. This helped the app screens and ads stand out from the designs of other companies.

• The company made sure that people knew how fast and reliable their service was every time they used it. They did this on the app store, when people first started using the service and when they sent messages to peoples phones. They wanted everyone to

know that the service was fast and worked well so they said it times in different places like the app store and the service itself.

Outcome:

The idea that Zepto could deliver groceries in ten minutes was really clear and the company had a unique style that people noticed. This helped Zepto get the attention of people who like to try things first. They were curious to see if Zepto could really deliver groceries in ten minutes. People started telling each other about Zepto because they were surprised and curious, about the ten minute groceries idea.

Problem Statement 2: Building Trust with Early Users

Challenge:

People who had never used the service before were not sure about it. They wondered if a small new company like this grocery delivery service could really bring them the groceries they needed in 10 minutes. If the customers did not trust the grocery delivery service they would think before trying it out. This is especially true for something, like grocery delivery service where it's very important that the groceries are fresh and that the grocery delivery service is reliable. The grocery delivery service had to find a way to make people trust them.

Solution:

• We started a test of our delivery service in a few neighborhoods. This was done to make sure that we could get everything to people on time and that they would be happy with our service. We wanted to show that we are reliable before we tried to do this in areas. This way we can work out any problems, with our service before it gets too big.

• Leveraged community engagement by offering early access to resident groups, housing societies, and student clusters.

• They wanted the first people to use Zepto to talk about their Zepto experience on social media. This way Zepto would get people talking about it naturally. That would create a lot of excitement, about Zepto.

Outcome:

People who used the service at first were really surprised when their orders showed up quickly it was like, within minutes. Then people started taking pictures of how their orders arrived and made videos of them opening the boxes and all of this started spreading like crazy online. This really helped Zepto because people who did not believe in the service at first became fans and this made the Zepto brand look very good and trustworthy.

Problem Statement 3: Acquiring the First 100 Users Without Heavy Discounts

Challenge:

Other companies usually gave discounts to get new customers but Zepto did not have a lot of money to spend on big sales. The team at Zepto had to find a way to get their 100 loyal customers without spending too much money. Zepto needed to be careful, with their budget.

Solution:

• We had a program that gave rewards to people who invited their friends or neighbors to join. This helped us get more people involved in the community.

• I made deals that only lasted for a short time like the "First 100 Orders Free Delivery" thing. This way people felt like they had to act and it helped us keep our costs from getting too high. We did this to create a sense of urgency with the free delivery campaigns.

• The main focus was on people who like to try things first like young professionals and students who are good, with technology. These people are more likely to try products and then tell their friends about them. They are the kind of people who like to share things with others like new products they have tried.

Outcome:

Zepto got its 100 users really quickly. What is important to note is that these users of Zepto were not just trying it out they actually came back to use Zepto again. Zepto users gave Zepto some useful feedback. This helped Zepto to make some changes and figure out if its plan, for growth was working for Zepto.

Zepto did a job of getting its first 100 users. This was not because they had a lot of money but because they were very clear about what they stood for they built trust with people and they were really good at talking to their community.

Zepto focused on one thing that made them different from others. They were very fast. This helped them stand out in a market where there were already a lot of companies doing similar things.

Because they did well at the beginning they were able to grow quickly investors became interested in them and people in the Indian quick-commerce industry started to recognize them.

This shows that when there are a lot of other companies around a new company like Zepto can still do well if they make sure that what they say about themselves how they present themselves and how they get their products to users are all consistent, with what users want from Zepto.

Case Related Questions

1. What made Zepto special was that it could deliver things to people in ten minutes. This was a deal because it helped Zepto stand out from other companies that were already well known. The ten minute delivery was something that Zepto did that other companies did not do. This is what made Zepto different from companies that delivered things. Zeptos ten minute delivery was very important, in helping it become popular.

2. So I was thinking about Zepto. How they managed to build trust with people when they were growing really fast in a field like groceries, which is pretty sensitive. How did Zepto do that? I mean it is not easy to get people to trust you when you are delivering something like groceries to their homes. Zepto had to figure out a way to make people feel safe and comfortable, with their service. They had to do it quickly because they were scaling really fast.

3. I do not think Zepto could have acquired its 100 users without emphasizing speed as the central brand promise of Zepto. The whole idea of Zepto is about how Zepto can deliver things to people. If Zepto did not make speed a big deal I am not sure people would have been interested, in Zepto. The speed of Zepto is what makes Zepto special so it is unlikely that Zepto could have gotten its 100 users without it.

Why or why not?

4. What cheap ways could Zepto have used to get its first group of users? Zepto could have tried some things to build its early user base. Zepto needed to find a way to get people to use its service without spending a lot of money. Some alternative low-budget acquisition strategies, for Zepto would be really helpful. Zepto had to think about how to get its user base to use its service and tell others about it.

5. In the long run, how sustainable is the “10-minute promise” as a differentiator in the quick-commerce market?

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Design Thinking & MVP Management

Design Thinking & MVP Management

ATLAS SkillTech University

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Unit 8: Storytelling, Digital Presence, and Scaling

Learning Objectives

1. Gain a strategic understanding of why storytelling propels MVP adoption, brand advocacy and user engagement.
2. To create and implement storytelling methods that will resonate with target customers, and espouse brand values.
3. Create and implement content marketing & social media strategies for startup growing.
4. Create and optimise high-performing landing pages that convert & engage users.
5. Leverage Carrrd, Wix and Shopify to build an online MVP business that can be scaled.
6. Collect user data and metrics to inform scale strategic decisions, retention strategies, and customer lifetime value (CLV).
7. Analysis and execution on growth loops: (viral, paid, content): take a project from MVP to self sustaining business.

Content

8.0 Introductory Caselet

8.1 Storytelling for MVP Growth

8.2 Content Marketing & Social Media

8.3 Digital Presence & Landing Pages

8.4 Scaling Strategies Post-MVP

8.5 Summary

8.6 Key Terms

8.7 Descriptive Questions

8.8 References

8.9 Case Study

8.0 Introductory Caselet

"From MVP to Movement: The story of FitNest's digital launch"

FitNest FitNest is a health-tech startup with a MVP for 1 personalised home workout experience designed for the busy rat professional. The product combined intelligent fitness bands with app-driven workouts, and was intended to fit the user's stress and energy levels. The MVP was good and data-driven, but in a crowded fitness market FitNest struggled to make waves.

Founders started to share health stories: a co-founder had powered through burnout with guided workouts, another had rehabbed post-injury strength on its own prototype of the product. And these anecdotes became the backbone of FitNest's brand storytelling. Their home page shifted from benefits to real transformation stories. The original tagline was changed from "Track your fitness smarter" to "Rewrite your wellness story."

They launched an Instagram campaign with storytelling reels, and added user-generated content and fitness challenges to the mix. A community formed around shared identity: 'modern professionals reclaiming health'. FitNest also emulated Carrd to make a mini-page for each of its campaigns, and built a waitlist with 4,000 pre-orders in six weeks. Story-forward, FitNest didn't only cultivate users — they fostered belonging.

Critical Thinking Question

How did FitNest leverage personal stories and digital storytelling to stand out with their MVP in a crowded market, and where the community / content fit into that in terms of driving that early traction?

8.1 Storytelling for MVP Growth

8.1.1 Power of Storytelling in Business

Story telling is one of the most powerful instruments in business today and particularly so if you are a startup at the MVP stage. Stories, unlike data or features, trigger emotion and are persuasive. They help bridge the chasm between what a product does and why it matters to users. In early stage startups, the role of storytelling is even more crucial as you do not have much brand lineage, budget or market reach.

• Differentiation:

o Features are not too different in crowded markets. An arresting origin story or a mission-driven narrative helps too.

o Example: The story around TOMS Shoes' "buy one, give one" was more powerful than the shoe itself.

• Vision communication:

o Stories provide a means for founders to articulate the long-term vision, helping to align users, investors and partners.

o Enables early adopters to contextualize themselves as part of a future journey.

• Influence and persuasion:

o Stories cut through story resistance and go straight to decision behavior, say cognitive scientists.

A story based on values and change increases the trust and loyalty of users.

• Internal alignment:

o The story isn't just for (potential) external end users—it's also to rally teams around common mission and vision.

The stories that are useful for MVP's are:

• Story of the founder – Beginnings and Challenges, First Break persuaded by Tandem_FACTORY

• User success story – Before and after experience of a user.

• Mission Motivated (Story) – "The 'Why' of the Product

• Problem Hire storyline – What is lacking in the market and how this product will meet that need

Did You Know?

"Research from the Stanford Graduate School of Business found that **stories are remembered up to 22 times more than facts alone**. In another study, 63% of people said they remembered a brand that told a compelling story, while only 5% remembered brands that only presented features. This explains why companies like Nike, Airbnb, and Warby Parker built loyalty early not through ads—but through storytelling."

8.1.2 Crafting Narratives That Resonate with Users

To be successful storytelling must hit at the core of the individual it`s aimed at. This whos are the users, what do they believe, care about and fear as well as what challenge they face on daily basis? MVP narratives are not just a matter of talking about the features in the product. They should tell a story where the user is the hero and the product is an aid to that hero's journey.

Principles to create a compelling narrative:

• Know your user deeply:

o Interview, survey or empathy map.

o Uncover repeating pains, wants, drives and their language.

• Define the user journey:

Before → Problem and frustration.

o Inflection Point → Finding your product. o Followed by → Transformation or enhancement = After.

• Build around emotion, not logic:

o Involved and affective stories are easier to remember and convey.

o Use empathic (e.g., "I was where you were"), inspiring narratives (e.g.," If I can do it, so can you") and/or community narratives (e.g.," You're not alone").

• Structure using a storytelling framework:

o Hook – Begin with something that will create tension, or mystery. o Challenge – Emphasize the difficulty that the user encountered.

o Resolution – Demonstrate how the product facilitated a change.

o CTA (Call to action) – Tell the user what to do.

• Use real people and testimonials:

o Authenticity matters. Stories that include real names, faces or video clips resonate more deeply than generic examples do.

• Be clear and relatable:

o Avoid jargon or corporate buzzwords.

o Use ordinary language and practical examples.

• Leverage platforms smartly:

o Instagram: Visual storytelling (Reels, Stories) o LinkedIn: Founder journeys and thought leadership o Website: Origin story, customer Testimonials, Product narratives • Landing Pages – Problem-Solution Transformation arc

Example Techniques:

• "Before and After" Scenarios:

Show the user's life before and after the product.

o Highlight emotional and practical changes.

• Mini-series or episodic storytelling:

o Split up a longer story into bite-sized posts or video to peak interest.

• Story-driven FAQs:

o Answer product related objections in a creative way by using storytelling type format.

Pitfalls to Avoid:

• Heroing the brand instead of the user.

• Being overly dramatic or inauthentic.

• Failing to take into account the user's context or values.

8.1.3 Storytelling as a Tool for Brand Loyalty

Storytelling also feeds users in, but its true power is for creating long-term loyalty. Users are in some very early phase of MVP, where they are considering ideas. A startup linked by shared beliefs, values and emotions is not just a recipient of attention — but advocacy.

How storytelling builds loyalty:

• Creates identity alignment:

o Users don't buy a product alone, they buy into a philosophy.

o Example: Headspace's stories are all about calm, balance and mental clarity, these themes appeal to users who want these values.

• Builds community:

o Stories resonate with us when they remind us of something we've all experienced.

o People begin to refer others because it's not only that the product works - but it means something again.

• Sustains engagement:

User stories (user spotlight, behind the scenes) that appear regularly to emotionally engage existing users."

o They are part of a journey.

• Inspires user-generated content (UGC):

o Users who relate to the story now begin to share their stories— these are what genuine testimonials and referral content is all about.

o UGC boosts social proof and reach.

• Strengthens brand memory:

o Most people will not remember features, but they can forget the way a brand made t hem feel.

• Provides mission consistency during turns or changes:

o As an MVP grows, story is what lets startups tell users how things have changed without scaring off early adopters—by putting it in the context of the mission.

Best Practices for Loyalty-Building Stories:

• Broadcast your milestones: product win, team struggle — even failures.

• Use storytelling-based polls, or feedback stories in product decisions with users.

• Ritualize stories (for example, "Founder Fridays," "User Spotlight Tuesdays").

• Enable users to share their own change stories in your platform

Example:

Notion created community-led storytelling — sharing testimonials from writers, freelances and start-ups — to gain emotional loyalty. These user stories were tutorials and testimonials in one – leading a core group of fans to naturally form thanks to some huge paid marketing spend.

8.2 Content Marketing & Social Media

8.2.1 Content Marketing Strategies for Startups

Startups can use content marketing to teach, inform and sell users vs disrupt with ads. It's particularly important for bootstrapped MVP-stage startups with tight budgets and early traction objectives.

Core Strategies:

• Educational Blog Posts:

o Post content that helps your users, such as articles on how to fix something or respond to a query. o Content may be in the form of how-to's, lists, comparisons or front-line user reports.

• SEO Optimization:

o Use keyword research to cater to search terms your users are already searching. o Long-tail keywords allow you to rank for more targeted inquiries with a greater chance of converting.

• Lead Magnets:

o Promote free value offers (ebooks, templates, and free trials) in return for an email or contact info.

o Assist in developing an email list for nurture campaigns.

• Email Campaigns:

o Send newsletters, product news and value added content.

o Use narrative or user prompt, to encourage involvement.

• Content Calendar:

o Schedule your posts weekly or monthly throughout all channels.

o Due to prevention of circular reasoning, consistency increases credibility and user habit.

• Repurposing Content:

o Transform a blog post into 20 social posts, infographics, or script the video.

• Call-to-Actions (CTAs):

o Each article should have appropriate CTA's at the end—download, subscribe, comment and share.

Powerful content marketing generates organic traffic, trust and reduces the decision cycle for early adopters.

8.2.2 Leveraging Social Media Platforms (Instagram, LinkedIn, Twitter)

For MVP (Meaning Viable Product) creators and founders, social media is a must-have these days to get more visibility, drive early users and validate concept. Neither platform is better than the other as they are built for different use cases and user behavior. A plan for Instagram, LinkedIn and Twitter(X) -Strategically showcasing your brand to increase awareness, drive engagement and create an allegiance community.

Instagram: visual storytelling for consumer interest

Instagram is the best avenue for aesthetically-driven products — namely lifestyle brands, consumer goods, fashion, travel & beauty. It's perfect for startups after millennials and Gen Z, whose purchasing decision is driven by look and feel and beats-per-minute storytelling.

Key Strategies:

• Show the product in action using Reels (50 words)

Reels are clips of short-form video content to grab attention in a hurry. Showcasing the basic function of your MVP — be it a skincare product or a mobile application — through a creative, fun Reel can exponentially amplify reach and engagement thanks to the current Instagram algorithm that is heavily favoring Reels.

• Promote behind-the-scenes content in Stories (50 words)

Authenticity sells. You could also share how team works, day-to-day updates or product building process on Instagram Stories. These ephemeral updates make your brand more relatable and create suspense, as well as trust with followers that share a sense of being on the journey.

• Use branded hashtags and UGC (User Generated Content) (50 words)

Action:Promote users so they post with your product using branded hashtags. Reposting UGC provides credibility and community. So, for example, a fitness startup may use #TrainWithXYZ and encourage users to post their workouts or experiences with your MVP.

Example:

A sustainable fashion startup, for example, can use Reels to demonstrate the cycle of recycled materials to fashionable clothes, and Stories to feature design by its team. Hashtags such as #EcoStyleWithUs encourage UGC that powers organic reach.

LinkedIn: Professional Networking for B2B MVPs Is your company ready to become an industry leader on LinkedIn?

LinkedIn is the BFF to founders of B2B products, SaaS and professional services. It offers credibility and exposure in a networked, professional framework — an ideal venue for (a business) story, discussion of an industry trend or outreach to investors.

Key Strategies:

• Sharing your product-building journey or success story (50 words)

Long-form storytelling is also welcomed on LinkedIn.

Founders that consistently share knowledge, failures, and learnings generate more engagement and personal branding which positively impacts the startup.

• Repurpose blog content as SlideShare or carousel posts (50 words)

Use LinkedIn's carousel feature to repurpose blog articles into visual slideshows. This helps promote content retention and sharing. For example, a blog post with carousel "5 Lessons from Building Our AI MVP" does better than just a link.

Example:

A B2B edtech startup that helped universities automate admissions might share a carousel post breaking down how they did it along with another post about lessons the founder learned when pivoting from the original MVP idea.

Twitter (X): For In-the-Moment and Collaborative Learning

Twitter – on Twitter, the rapid-paced and convo-centric medium is ideal for real-time engagement, product updates, thought leadership in tech/start-up ecosystem. It's a favorite of founders, investors and early adopters.

Key Strategies:

• Share micro-updates on MVP progress

Let your followers know how things are progressing and when you're pivoting products. For example, "Just pushed v0. 2) of our feedback system — now has audio!" provides them a reason to engage with your story.

• Participate in one of the forum's most populra discussions and founder threads

By taking part in the startup conversation or by creating threads such as "Building our MVP in public – Day 7: Things broke again…" you can expand your reach. Authentic, value-driven participation boosts visibility.

• Poll the audience or engage on Twitter

Some fast feedback tools such as polls can validate features along the way. For instance, "Which color scheme

do we use for our health tracker UI? encourages user participation and network strength of your MVP.

Example:

For example, a fintech startup might tweet out a thread that shares lessons learned from their beta testing," participating in #BuildInPublic style conversations, and use polls asking people to choose between feature sets on the next version.

Cross-Platform Best Practices

Regardless which platform you decide to home in on, bridging the gap between your brand's voice and engagement tactics will result in impact.

Best Practices to Follow:

• It is very important to make sure that everything looks and sounds the same so we need to maintain tonal consistency all the time when we are working with visual and tonal consistency. This means that visual and tonal consistency has to be a priority, for us.

To make your brand look good you should use the stuff everywhere. This means using the brand kit, fonts and colors for your logo on all platforms. This helps people recognize your brand. You should also make sure that the way you talk to people is right for who's listening. For example you can be casual on Instagram. You should be professional, on LinkedIn. Your brand should always look and sound the same so people know it is you, your brand.

• Use platform-native features

You should try using things that're special to each platform. For example use LinkedIn Polls, Instagram Stickers and Twitter Spaces. These things really help get people involved because they're what people like to use and they are also what the platforms like.

This means LinkedIn Polls and Instagram Stickers and Twitter Spaces are good to use. They make people want to interact with you. LinkedIn Polls and Instagram Stickers and Twitter Spaces are important for people and, for the platforms.

• You should get involved and do things instead of just sitting back and watching the Computer Systems happen, like, with Computer Systems you have to take action with Computer Systems.

Do not just. Then disappear. You should reply to the comments that people make on your posts. You should also participate in messages and repost the things that your community is sharing. This will help you make connections, with people. It will give you confidence. Making connections and having confidence is really important when you are trying to validate your Minimum Viable Product or your Minimum Viable Product. Your Minimum Viable Product needs to be validated. This is one way to do it.

8.2.3 Building Online Communities Around MVPs

An internet community gets to own the product vision. They are also the people who help create it, not the people who use it. This is really important, for something that is just starting out. When people who use the internet come together to help something grow it is a way for new products to get people to like them and stick with them.

Key Tactics:

• Create Exclusive Spaces:

o Use the likes of Discord, Slack, Telegram or closed Facebook groups.

o Give people access to VIP information, early access, beta testing etc in return of an email address.

• Nurture Two-Way Communication:

To help users we need to encourage them to ask questions about the odoo. We should also ask users to share what they do with the odoo. This way users can propose features for the odoo.

When something is not working we have to be quick and open about it. The people who start using the odoo early will appreciate it if we are honest with them, about the odoo.

• Community Content:

o Promote member spotlights, success stories and behind-the-scenes content.

o Host contests or challenges with rewards or shoutouts.

• Moderation and Culture:

To make your community a great place you need to set some rules that show what your brand is about.

You should also pick some of your users to be in charge and help spread the word, about your brand.

• Events and AMAs:

This option is for hosting question and answer chat sessions with the founders. You can also use it to host webinars. Additionally you can use this option to give product walk-throughs. The founders can use this option to talk to people live and answer their questions, about the products.

When people take care of a community well the users of that community become like helpers who make the product better and make sure it keeps going. This means that more people will naturally tell others about the product and fewer people will stop using it. The community and the product work together to make this happen.

"Activity Build a Micro Content Campaign"

Pick a fictional or real MVP startup idea and come up 7 day content plan with it. Include:

• 2 insightful blog titles with descriptions.

• I need to make three media posts for different websites. These social media posts are for Instagram and LinkedIn and Twitter.

I have to do this work on 05 February.

The social media posts should have headlines and a purpose, for Instagram and LinkedIn and Twitter.

• One community building proposal/theme (poll, contest, AMA).

• A short CTA for every post, or piece of content.

You can use free design tools, like Canva or Figma to make some sample pictures.

This is a way for students to see how content and community and social media strategies help a Minimum Viable Product grow.

The Minimum Viable Product needs these strategies to be working together and tailored to the Minimum Viable Product.

Students learn that when content and community and social media strategies are aligned and customized for the Minimum Viable Product they really support the growth of the Minimum Viable Product.

8.3 Digital Presence & Landing Pages

8.3.1 Best Practices for Landing Page Design

The landing pages of these companies are really well made to turn people who visit them into leads, testers or customers. When it comes to Minimum Viable Products, where money's tight the landing page basically becomes the main website. It has to show its value right away tell the user what to do and make them trust the company. The landing pages have to be good at doing this job because they are often the thing people see. The landing pages are very important, for Minimum Viable Products.

Essential Components for a High Converting Landing Page:

• Headline (First 3 Seconds Rule):

The unique value proposition is conveyed away. It would need to be, about what a subscriber would get out of the value proposition, not the features the unique value proposition offers.

o Example: “Make Your Photos into Stickers in Seconds.”

• Sub-headline

The headline has some details that help explain it. These details are like a frame, around the headline. The headline gets some framing to make it clearer.

The product is made for people who need help with something. It solves problems that these people have. The product is for them. It makes their lives a little easier, by solving these problems.

• Hero Section (Top Fold):

It has a picture of the product, like a screenshot or a video that explains what it does or a mockup of what the product will look like.

o A bold call-to-action (CTA) such as “Get early access” or “Join the waitlist.”

• Social Proof & Testimonials:

o Increases legitimacy and decreases perceived risk.

o Might be customer testimonials, star ratings, media mentions, or user numbers.

• Feature Highlights:

o List 3–5 key features with icons or images.

o Emphasize the benefits not technical jargon.

• Explainer Video (Optional but Effective):

A video that is thirty to ninety seconds long can really show people what the product does and why the product is important.

The product video improves the time people spend on the page. It also improves conversion rates of the product.

Call-to-Action (CTA):

o Evident, Screened, Consistent across sections.

We want our website to be easy to use and get things done quickly. So the buttons should say things, like "Sign Up Free" of "Submit". This way people know what they are getting when they click on the button. It is easy for them to sign up for our website. We like "Sign Up because it tells people that it is free and they can sign up which is what we want them to do.

• Form or Signup Area:

o Low entry fields (Name + Email for example).

o Use value-based button text (e.g. “Send Me the Invite”).

• Trust Builders:

o Add things like “Secure Signup,” “No spam,” or “Used by 500+ professionals.”• Mobile Optimization:

o More than 60% of traffic is mobile; layout needs to be responsive.

o The size of the button, font and its loading time are very important.

• Minimal Distractions:

o Refrain from full navigation bars or overly excessive outbound links.

o The purpose should be a single action per landing page.

Common Pitfalls to Avoid:

• Confused design or busy text

• Vague or weak headline

• Inconsistent branding from the rest of the startup’s digital fingerprint

• Requesting too much information from the start

Good landing pages are far more than just beautiful—they're conversion engines, striking a balance between immediacy and clarity…and catering to users psychology.

8.3.2 Conversion Optimization on Landing Pages

Conversion optimization concerns increasing the proportion of visitors to a webpage that take a desired action (convert), such as signing up or making a purchase, without increasing traffic. This is important for MVPs in the early stages where the acquisition budget is low.

Key Conversion Tactics:

• A/B Testing:

o Test with CTA, headlines, images or colorings.

o Different color of a button - which is distinctive from other elements of the page.

• Microcopy Enhancements:

o Tiny chunks of copy near forms or CTAs help alleviate doubt.

o Example: “We hate spam too” beside the email input.

• Progressive Disclosure:

o Do not dumb the visitor with information, give only as much is required.

o For instance, put technical specs farther down page, and summarize at the top.

• Visual Hierarchy:

o Use adequate typography sizes, spacing and color contrast to make user focus go into the right places.

o Main Message & CTA should be above the fold.

• Social Proof Dynamics:

o Live user amount ("4,213 people joined this month"), testimonials or partners’ logos creates trust.

Exit-Intent Popups:

o Fired when a user attempts to leave the page.

o Uses discount, ebook, waitlist or value-add to capture potential leads.

• Page Load Speed:

o Google’s own research indicates a second in load time decreases conversion rates by 7%.

o Reduce image and script sizes, by compressing them wherever possible.

• Personalization:

o Referral source-driven dynamic landing pages (e.g., ad campaign, influencer link).

o Personalize headlines or images by segment.

Measuring Conversions:

Monitor this using Google Analytics, Hotjar or Crazy Egg:

o Click-through rates (CTR)

o Bounce rates

o Scroll depth

o Time on page

o Form completion rates

Startups should strive for 10 – 25% conversion rates on early landing pages and learn from the data.

8.3.3 Tools for Landing Page Creation (Carrd, Wix, Shopify, Lovabl, Cursor, Bubble.io, Emergent.sh)

For MVPs (Minimum Viable Products) and for early-stage startups, being able to launch a landing page without begging developers is very important. Founders need to validate demand, gather leads or generate early revenues — all without spending weeks and thousands of dollars going though engineering. Fortunately, the nocode and low-code revolution has brought with it a variety of tools that enable even oneperson businesses to whip up professional landing page designs that can help drive conversions in mere hours. Whether you're growing your waitlist, promoting a product, or validating an idea through pre-orders—there’s a landing page solution for where you are in the process, for who is going to see your landing page, and for how much money you have to spend.

figure: Tools for Landing Page Creation

Carrd – Lightweight & MVP-Friendly

For getting your product out there quickly, it's hard to beat the speed of set up in Carrd which is why bootstrapped founders have adopted it like crazy. It's great for single-page sites and a bare-minimum MVP.

Examples: Waitlist, newsletter signup, single-product validation pages.

Key Features:

• No code needed: Grab and drop simplicity

Perfect for non-coders who want full creative freedom without a learning curve.

You will also have the ability to add a custom domain and use built-in form connections

Easily connect to Mailchimp, ConvertKit or Zapier for lead capture and automation.

Wix - Code Free DesignVMLINUX

Wix A visual rich design environment for pixel obsessives as well as founders. It would be appropriate for start-ups with strong brand and visual products.

Use Cases: Brand storytelling, visual MVPs (e.g. food, art, lifestyle).

Key Features:

• Drag-and-drop editor with advanced customization

Gives you more creativity than Carrd, perfect for showing of imagery and brand personality.

• Booking, Payments, Chat App Store

Intuitive add-on tools of trade for service-based MVPs.

• SEO tools and built-in analytics

Assists with Google search optimization and visitor analytics without third-party integrations.

Example:

An indie candle brand, say, can use Wix to display its products in resolution that's high more easily add the video from the founder and link directly into an order form.

Shopify – For Commerce-Driven MVPs

If you're testing a physical product, use Shopify to verify readiness for payment and shipping. It lets founders go from an idea for a product to a fully operational e-commerce page in just hours.

Use Cases Pre-orders, presales, D2C MVPs.

Key Features:

• Built-in e-commerce functionality

Includes checkout, inventory, shipping and tax settings.

• Apps ecosystem for upsells, reviews, loyalty, etc.

Facilitates the ability to boost conversions and social proof.

• Themes and landing page builders

You can build custom landing pages on top of Shopify with tools like PageFly or GemPages.

Example:

Something like a smart water bottle startup might use Shopify to run a pre-order campaign, monitor abandoned carts and test different price points.

Lovabl – AI powered Landing Page Generator for anything you like!

Lovabl is a new, AI-powered app that creates beautiful landing pages for your startup — automatically, based on your product's description. It is built for speed and founder-focused storytelling.

Example:

An edtech founder types "AI-powered note-taking app for university students" and within minutes, he'd have a full styled responsive landing page.

Cursor – Collaborative Tech MVP Page Builder

Cursor is the next-gen dev environment for building landing pages and docs together, in community with collaboration and versioning.

Example:

A Web3 startup with a crypto wallet MVP could use Cursor to keep a public changelog, roadmap and their waitlist in dev-friendly format.

Bubble. io- Interactive MVPs Beyond Landing Pages

Bubble is a no-code app builder, but many people use it to make dynamic landing pages that are powered by logic and forms, as well as interactivity.

Example:

An AI resume builder MVP could use Bubble to allow users to upload a resume and receive a sample review directly on the landing page.

Emergent. sh – AI-Powered MVP Builder

Emergent. sh is built by AI founders. It helps create landing pages, waitlists and demo flows suited to AI product launches.

Example:

For example, a startup with an AI content summarizer might embed a live demo and gather emails with Emergent. sh—all without code.

Tool Selection Tips

The right tool for the MVP should be based on your MVP's objective, complexity, target audience and what size team you have.

Consider the following:

• Start with your goal

If you want email signups — Carrd or Lovabl. For selling a product—Shopify. For interactive demos—Bubble or Emergent. • Match your skill level

Carrd and Wix are both beginner-friendly. Both Webflow and Bubble are higher powered, but you have to learn them.

• Budget matters

Carrd, Lovabl and Tally have free tiers. Shopify and Webflow can grow with you but will charge on a monthly basis.

8.4 Scaling Strategies Post-MVP

Scaling is one of the most pivotal times in a start-up's life. 2 Once you build and validate an MVP (minimum viable product), the question is then: Is the product ready for growth?—growth in both users and operations. Scaling too fast may lead to burnout, wasted money and customer dissatisfaction, and ultimately a flawed product. Accordingly, scaling should not be based on gut or skin-deep emotions but rather a bedrock of quality data. A data-driven scaling strategy allows startups to determine the maturity based on user behavior, business metrics and operational indicators. It allows resources to be used efficiently and product growth to be purposeful and sustainable.

8.4.1 Role of Analytics in Scaling Decisions

Scaling a startup is not an organic transition — it's the result of a data-driven process. During MVP (Minimum Viable Product) startups face great uncertainty: everything is very limited - resources, amount of users and no one can guarantee an assumptions on the product, market or monetization. Analytics provides the empirical foundation upon which startups can take stock of whether (or not) they are ready for scale, and which levers to pull in order to unlock growth that is sustainable. Instead of running on gut feel, founders can rely on the data to determine what's working, what's not and where they need to focus.

Startups can leverage data analytics in tracing down user behavior, further followed by product engagement, conversion flows and marketing success. It allows teams to see what is working and make scalable solutions for that, while also seeing what might need improvement before trying to scale. Consider a startup that has many users, but low retention — it should focus on fixing onboarding and engagement instead of scaling with paid growth.

Analytics help identify these trends and consider not scaling too early.

There are four types of analytics that can help guide scaling: descriptive, diagnostic, predictive and prescriptive. They each serve a different function in analyzing historical

performance, diagnosing issues, predicting outcomes and informing next steps. Startups have to get good at all four so the picture it represents of a business is complete.

Descriptive Analytics: What Has Happened?

Descriptive analytics aggregate historical data in order to identify patterns, trends and overall performance. It is the simplest form of analytics, but the cornerstone for all others. By monitoring your daily and monthly active users, bounce rates, acquisition channels or conversion rates, Startups can better understand how their users are engaging with the product – and if that engagement is growing or shrinking.

Descriptive metrics often include:

• Active users per day and active users per month:

These are indications of how many people use the product on a daily basis, or over the course of 30 days. A rising chart of DAUs and MAUs is a sign that user adoption is on the upswing.

• Conversion Rate:

This is the fraction of users that successfully do what you want them to (signup, purchase, etc.) High traffic, low conversion means that you need to do some work on your UX or value proposition.

• Bounce Rate and Session Duration:

Bounce rate is the percentage of people who instantly leave, and session duration how long they hang around. They show content relevance and usability combined.

• Churn Rate:

Quantifies the number of users who churn over time. High churn is a bad sign of retention or unfulfilled user demand.

Descriptive analytics gives startups any given time how they are doing, and helps compare the trend over time. If your DAU/MAU ratio is on the rise, you generally only want to scale up; this would indicate that your users are using the app more frequently, a good sign for scaling readiness.

Diagnostic Analytics: How and Why?

Once a startup knows what's happened, the next step is understanding why. Localise and diagnose utilisations: Diagnostic analytics takes a step further to dig down the user behavior to know where bottlenecks, fears or opportunities could be. It answers questions like "Why are users churning?" or "Why feature X is strictly worse than feature Y?" Key techniques include:

• Funnel Analysis:

Worth it for seeing users journey (sign up → onboarding → use → purchase). Stair steps down between levels can suggest grit in the experience.

• Cohort Analysis:

Which cohorts of users do over turn. For example, users signing up in January could potentially perform better than users acquired in April? and it might well be that there is some onboarding change between then and now.

• Segmentation:

Categorize users by demographic, behaviour or acquisition source to find any hidden trends. You might find that Instagram users are more likely to stick around than paid ads—that would suggest a product/audience fit.

Feature Adoption Rates:

This measure is the frequency that users use those functionalities. Low adoption probably means a feature is hard to find, confusing or unhelpful.

By focusing on the most important improvements, startups can diagnose insights. If 70% of people who sign up for your product abandon onboarding halfway through, the most important thing is not adding new features.

Understanding why users do what they do is critical to scaling up good practices.

Predictive Analytics: And Then What Happens?

2) Predictive analytics, which is a form of advanced analytics, uses AI and statistical algorithms to analyze historical data in order to make predictions about the future. It projects growth, churn and surges in demand along with likely revenues. Then teams can look into their crystal balls and allocate resources and plan strategy accordingly.

Common applications include:

• Churn Prediction:

Startups can identify users that are potentially risking churning by analyzing their behavior patterns, being proactive with preventive actions as early as sending reengagement emails or running promos.

• Revenue Forecasting:

Forecasting models that predict future revenue based on current growth rates, seasonality and user activity. It is helpful for budget and investment planning.

• Capacity Planning:

Prediction 3 tells us that startups can anticipate growth and scale infrastructure, such as servers or customer support in advance so they do not run into crashes or bad user experience.

• User Scoring:

Scoring users on event/activity engagement or purchase behavior can help pinpoint high-ltv customers and target retention strategies.

• Sales Forecasting:

Helpful for B2B MVPs — can predict deal closure based on historical sales funnel data and lead interactions.

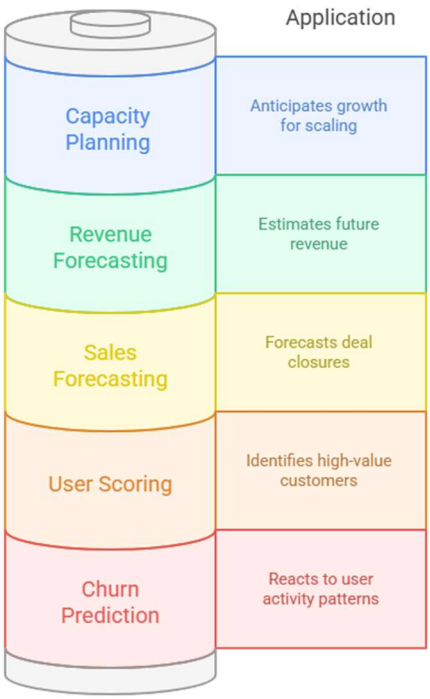

figure: Predictive Analytics

Predictive analytics allows data driven decision-making in the face of uncertainty. A mobile gaming startup, for example, might predict that a new game feature will drive up retention by 15 percent and subsequently roll the feature live to 20% of users as an initial step in validating the hypothesis.

Prescriptive Analytics: What Do We Do About It?

Prescriptive analytics goes a step further by prescribing an action based on the data. It frequently integrates outputs of predictive models and rules-based decision systems to drive optimization. This type of analytics is really useful for automating and making decisions at-scale.

Prescriptive insights might include:

• Targeted Onboarding:

For example, using predictive churn scores a startup may want to provide a simplified onboarding flow for users who are less engaged in the first 24 hours.

Pricing Adjustments:

For instance, if we had access to regional purchase data, a SaaS product could suggest that significant region-based pricing would help them convert more and make more money.

• Personalized Feature Suggestions:

If you're a productivity app and see that for its regular users your scheduling feature is the most popular, but they keep their external calendar unconnected then, this can be spicy advice.

• Automated Promotions:

An e-commerce MVP can automatically send cart abandoners a discount code for items they didn’t buy over a certain value.

Through the use of prescriptive analytics, start-ups can extrapolate scale up decisions around personalization and operations, that don't need to be scaled manually. This leads to better user experience and cheaper scale-out.

8.4.2 Models of Retention and Customer Lifetime Value

Business model is resilient: retention. So acquisition may be the exciting party trick, yet again, it’s retention that ultimately drives profit and brand advocacy and reduces marketing spend over time. Retrnenion models work toward keeping the user engaged, happy and sticky, while CLV (Customer Lifetime Value) calculates the money value of a user.

Types of Retention Models:

• Cohort Retention:

o Groups users given the same attribute, e.g. signup week and compares retention for the groups of users.

o Compares long-term retention rates between groups.

• Behavior-Based Retention:

o Commission user activities and interactions.

o Example: A user who uploads 3 files in their first week of using Dropbox is more likely to convert.

• Frequency-Based Retention:

o Response Frequency – Number of users who leave and come back o Feedback frequency.
o Use daily, weekly, monthly etc as the product types dictate.

Customer Lifetime Value (CLV):

CLV=(avg purchase value)x(purchase frequency)x(cust lifespan)

Why CLV is Critical:

• Helps in capping CAC proliferate.

• Provides the ability to project ROI on paid marketing spend.

• Identifies the most important customer segments.

• Guides upsell and cross-sell strategies.

Strategies to Improve Retention:

• Personalized Onboarding:

o Customized onboarding increases early engagement. oApps may guide users in-app, open a new browser window for email or display chatbot guidance.

• Triggered Communication:

o In-app activity (or lack of) that triggers emails or push notifications. o Example: “You never finished your profile — here’s why you should.”

• Gamification:

o Point systems, progress bars or achievement badges incentivise daily use.

• Value Expansion:

o Continuously add new features or benefits to keep planning exciting.

o Added document scanning to onboarding in Dropbox for greater stickiness.

• Community and Support:

o Robust customer service and an active community produce trust and habit.

High CLV Customers Tend to:

• Require less support.

- Are more likely to refer others.
- More readily accept changes in price.

Offer insightful product feedback.

On the scaling side it can boost retention, CLV, reduce churn, expand margins — in short make your MVP a viable business that's in the black.

With predictive analytics, you can make good choices in the face of uncertainty. Or if a mobile gaming startup "thinks a new game feature will increase retention 15%, they could put that out live to only 20% of people at first to test their theory," the company writes in its blog.

Prescriptive Analytics: What Should I Do?

And, prescriptive analytics takes data insights to the next level by presenting when actions are to be taken. It often combines predictions from models with rule-based decision systems to guide optimization. This is leverageable analytics that can be very useful in automating response, and scale up decision-making.

Prescriptive insights might include:

- Targeted Onboarding:

A startup, for example, can qualify users with low engagement in the first 24 hours towards an abbreviated onboarding flow, according to their predicted churn.

Pricing Adjustments:

A SaaS product might even infer region specific pricing based on purchase data so as to maximize conversions and revenues.

- Personalized Feature Suggestions:

If someone is heavily using the scheduling feature in a productivity app, that company might recommend calendar integrations to them for example but not ask them for their external calendar.

- Automated Promotions:

So, for instance, an e-commerce MVP could generate discount codes automatically for users with abandoned carts above a certain amount.

Prescriptive analytics enables startups to optimize personalisation and operational decisions at scale, with minimal need for extra manual work. This results in an improved experience for the user as well as a more efficient scaling mechanism.

8.4.2 Models for Retention and Customer Lifetime Value

Retention is your business model. And while new customers get things buzzing, retention is what boosts revenue and brand advocacy along with minimising marketing spend. Both retention models, and CLV aim to make sure that customers are engaged, satisfied, and loyal.

Types of Retention Models:

• Cohort Retention:

measures retention by cohorting users, for example on signup week.

o Demonstrates how well the various cohorts endure over time.

• Behavior-Based Retention:

o Drives for user actions and engagement.

o Example: A user who uploads 3 files in their first week on Dropbox is more likely to return.

• Frequency-Based Retention:

o Sees how frequently you have visited. o Depending on product category daily, weekly or monthly use.

Customer Lifetime Value (CLV):

CLV = (APV) × (Purchase Frequency) × (Customer Lifespan)

Why CLV is Critical:

• Cap Customer Acquisition Cost (CAC).

• Allows ROI prediction on paid marketing plans.

• Uncovers your most valuable customer types.

• Informs upsell and cross-sell strategies.

Strategies to Improve Retention:

• Personalized Onboarding:

o Custom on-boarding leads to better early engagement. o Users can be guided within of the application with tooltips, via email or through prompts in chatbots.

• Triggered Communication:

o Emails or push notifications based on in-app actions (or non-actions). o Example: “You haven’t filled out your profile — here’s why you should.”

• Gamification:

o Day-to-day Interaction is spiced up by with point systems, progress bars, or achievement badges.

• Value Expansion:

8.4.3 Growth Loops: Viral, Paid, and Content Loops

Growth loops are feedback loops that loop back, so an output of a previous loop becomes the input for next iteration in a progressive compounding manner. Loops are stronger than funnels: they don't just culminate in conversion but become self-reinforcing and continual at massive scale, as opposed to legacy funnel models.

Viral Growth Loops

They gameified user activity to drive user acquisition without additional marketing spend.

• Mechanism:

o User shares → new user joins and shares again

• Example: Dropbox gave away free space in the cloud to those who referred friends.

• Key Metrics:

o Viral Factor: Number of new users each user brings.

o Viral Cycle Time: The time that one cycle takes.

Success Factors:

• Built-in sharing incentives

• Most are frictionless when it comes to referrals (e.g. one click invites)

• Reciprocal value to sender and receiver

Paid Growth Loops

Include spending money to acquire users, who then produce enough revenue to pay for more acquisition.

• Mechanism:

o Social ads =$ ► new users = $ ► revenue= $►Re-invest.

• Channels:

o Google Ads, MetaAds, Influencer collaborations

• Optimization:

o Iterate on targeting and creatives o Monitor LTV:CAC ratio and payback periods

Risks:

• High CAC

• Scaling too fast without retention

Content Growth Loops

Use high quality contents to draw crows and convert them organically or SEO.

• Mechanism:

o Publish content → attract traffic → convert → users make/share more content

• Formats:

o Blogging posts, YouTube videos, podcasts, webinars

• Tools:

o Ahrefs, SEMrush, Google Search Console to track keywords and performance.

Content Loop Triggers:

• Instructive how-tos that direct traffic and decrease support overhead

• User generated content sites including Reddit, Quora and Product Hunt

Optimizing Growth Loops:

• Ensure alignment with user value.

• A/B test and optimize each step of the loop (e.g. increase share rate or lift in conversion).

8.4.4 Transitioning from MVP to Sustainable Venture

When you shift from an MVP to a business, though, it's a different world — away from testing ideas and toward scaling infrastructure, operations and most importantly, revenue. Now, it's about market readiness, operational maturity and capability of the team to scale.

Key Areas of Transition:

Product Maturity:

o Graduation from 'just about features' to reliable, easy to use and robust product.

o bug fixes and improvements on UX + add user request features.

Revenue Predictability:

o From beta or freemium to revenue generating situations like subscriptions, tiered pricing and transaction fees.

o Preparation of the billing process, Invoicing, Tax and Refund policy.

Customer Support and Success:

o Bring in onboarding specialists, customer success teams and a ticketing system.

o Design knowledge bases, help centers and feedback channels.

Operational Scaling:

o Document-- and work to make repeatable -- SOPs (Standard Operating Procedures) in Marketing, Sales, Onboarding, Development.

o Decentralized founders Scopes hires for cross-functional teams.

Tech Infrastructure:

o Youe need to upscale your backend to handle traffic load if you're serious.

o Implement DevOps, CI/CD pipeline and version control for code management.

Legal and Compliance:

o Protect IP (patentes y marcas),terms of service, privacy policy and consent form for users.

o Maintain compliance with data privacy (GDPR, CCPA as applicable).

Funding and Investor Readiness:

o Make the metrics, pitch decks, and DD docs for seed or Series A rounds.

o Show traction, unit economics and vision for the long run.

Team and Culture Building:

o Create Org Chart, hire Key Leadership Roles and Core Values Document.

o Foster a transparent, inclusive and execution-driven culture.

Because the successful transitions are when you go from “try things,” to “do it with precision” without losing the vision or empathy of what made you start.

Knowledge Check 1

Choose the correct option:

1. What is the purpose of a North Star Metric?

a) Customer profile

b) Team evaluation

c) Core product value

d) Revenue target

2. What metric helps determine how much can be spent to acquire users? a) Bounce Rate

b) CLV

c) DAU

d) Funnel Drop

3. Which loop requires high initial spend but offers scalable returns? a) Viral

b) Referral

c) Paid

d) Organic

4. What's the best strategy to reduce churn?

a) Paid ads

b) Daily updates

c) Personalized onboarding

d) Feature overload

5. Transitioning to a sustainable venture involves:

a) A/B testing

b) Canceling MVP

c) Scaling team, support, and infrastructure

d) Reducing pricing

8.5 Summary

❖ Storytelling is the backbone for MVPs growth by offering emotional appeal, simplifying complicated terms and bringing a genuine story to drive brand loyalty.

❖ Proven content marketing tactics: educational blog posts, lead magnets and email campaigns can help startups to acquire, engage and convert the first users without blowing a budget on ads.

❖ Use social media platforms (Instagram, LinkedIn, Twitter) strategically based on the audience behavior and for storytelling, building communities and engagement.

❖ The digital presence will begin with a high caliber, targeted and optimized landing page. things like copy>CTA>Social Proof>Mobile optimized will impact conversions.

❖ You're going to need some conversion optimization strategies (such as A/B tests, urgency signals, short forms and tracking your users' behaviors) to help you land more leads and retain them.

❖ Tail Card, Wix, Shopify etc allow you to place web page quickly without much complicated technique and budget for MVP promotion.

❖ From MVP to Scaling involves making decisions based on data, maximising retention and CLV and designing growth loops in order to have an acquisition machine.

❖ The move from MVP to operationalized business involves: operational scale, team scaling, infrastructure growing and customer success machinery.

8.6 Key Terms

Unique Value Proposition (UVP) – The specific benefit your product provides, what is available elsewhere and related to how users would come.

Landing Page – An independent web page created for a single purpose, such as Lead Generation or to sell a product.

Growth loop – A closed system where every interaction with users improves acquisition of new users (referral loops).

Customer Lifetime value (CLV): The estimated net revenue achieved from a customer during his entire relationship with the company.

Viral Coefficient = (The number of new users brought in by an existing user)/(Number of Existing User)

Call-to-Action (CTA) – A message that directs or encourages the visitor to do something, such as sign up, download or purchase something.

Retention Rate – The number of customers, who are retained over a period in contrast to the ones, who have churned out.

Content Marketing – A tactic of producing and sharing worthwhile content to draw attention and keep a closely related audience.

Conversion Rate Optimization (CRO) – The optimization of a landing page or website so that it generates more leads or sales.

Descriptive Analytics – Analysis of data that describes what has happened in the past.

8.7 Descriptive Questions

How does storytelling lead to people buying into the MVP and the brand, please cite examples?

Explain the elements that are essential for a landing page to convert. Why is each important?

Carrd: How do Carrd, Wix and Shopify compare?

Explain how free, viral, paid, and content loops differ from startup examples.

What are the metrics that a startup should track to decide on scaling post-MVP?

What are the best content and community strategies for startups to boost customer lifetime value?

Explain the role that social proof plays in landing page conversion optimization. Provide examples.

Explain how the models we learned such as cohort analysis can help guide marketing and feature development.

What changes are needed in the MVP to A Sustainable Business transition?

Illustrate the LTV:CAC ratio and its importance in growth-stage decision-making.

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Knowledge check 1

1. c) Core product value

2. b) CLV
3. c) Paid
4. c) Personalized onboarding
5. c) Scaling team, support, and infrastructure

Case Study

"From Stories to Scale: How Calm Used Narrative and Digital Presence to Build a Global Wellness Brand"

Introduction

Calm, the meditation and wellness app, started out as a barebones MVP offering guided meditations. With a crowded market and limited ability to differentiate on features, Calm had to distinguish itself not in what it did but rather how it felt when you were using. With the power of storytelling, content marketing and a targeted digital footprint, Calm became one of the most recognizable mental health brands in the world, going from an app concept to a $2 billion valuation.

Background

Originally founded in 2012 by Michael Acton Smith and Alex Tew, its first incarnations offered a handful of meditation sessions accessed from a clean, spare interface. And the MVP, though operational, never found robust user engagement in its first months. With the knowledge that product features alone would not propel growth, the founders began to focus on the emotional value associated with using their product: peace, clarity and relief from day-to-day stress.

They set out to create a brand that told stories of calming, with stories of personal transformation and ambient visuals. That went from a product to a movement — blog content, social media storytelling, sleep stories narrated by celebrities and a website that itself was an immersive calming experience.

Building itself a scalable engine for user acquisition and retention — through well optimized landing pages, smart social media outreach and always engaging its users with retention content. The tension between story, picture and number is higher in their journey from MVP to grown-up venture.

Problem Statements and Solutions

Problem 1: Undifferentiation in a crowded market It's difficult to make different without creating a new network only used for webmentions.

Challenge:

Calm vied with other mindfulness and meditation apps, including Headspace and Insight Timer. Its core feature — guided meditations — wasn't a proprietary one.

Solution:

So Calm shifted from product-first storytelling to emotion-first. It marketed itself as "the world's happiest app," and touted emotional benefits like improved sleep, reduced anxiety and better focus. Their "Daily Calm" series and Sleep Stories read by celebrities became linchpins of their content strategy. Helpful was made memorable by telling stories that users case studies and brand visuals, not just useful.

RIDLEY 17 Issue 2: Under-Enrollment and First Two Weeks of Class Drop Rate

Challenge:

Many would download the app out of curiosity and never return after an initial session.

Solution:

Calm used onboarding storytelling and progressive engagement to get the user back into the product.

Instead of just pushing all features at the user right from the jump, it used personalized notifications ("Tonight's sleep story: Blue Moon Lagoon") and soothing reminders tied to specific habits. They started an email newsletter that was a blend of science and mindfulness stories; getting it in the inbox built habit, while feeling good reinforced emotion.

Problem #3: Weak Digital Presence and No Conversion Funnel

Challenge:

The first few landing pages of Calm were generic and did not portray the emotional value prop, so it was getting a lot of bounce rates.

Solution:

Calm re-imagined their digital presence with a purpose-built, conversion-focused landing page. When people landed on the home page, it had dynamic images (even moving clouds and relaxing sounds), UVP messaging put front and centre and not much else. CTAs like "Start Your Journey to Calm" were aimed at the transformation, versus your technology. They content marketed: blog posts, Instagram stories and YouTube meditations — trust building before conversion.

Case-Related Questions

Calm: How feelings-driven storytelling defeated the MVP in the oversupplied market?

How calm drove user retention and engagement over time.

Find out what Calm does with landing page design and content strategy to drive more conversions.

What worked?

How did Calm devise a strong content loop, which they then leveraged to scale their user acquisition?

In what ways can non-« wellness startups » harness calm's manner of story-telling to build brand loyalty.

Conclusion

Calm’s transformation from a basic meditation app to a wellness powerhouse is just one of the best illustrations of how story telling, UX and digital marketing are intrinsically connected. Instead of positioning on features alone, Calm won loyalty by selling a feeling — in this case, calmness — and edited every instance that had to do with the company (branding, content marketing, landing page) so that it supported their message. Its success also demonstrates the ability of a MVP when powered by the appropriate narrative and presence, to transform into an international viable scalable business.

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Unit 9: Design Thinking for Life and Entrepreneurial Reflection

Learning Objectives

1. Use design thinking in life and business decisions/A scientific approach to decision making selves".
2. Use Odyssey Mapping to consider multiple alternative futures, what the branching pathways of lives could be.
3. Frame personal and career challenges through the lens of growth and creativity.
4. Conduct Personal Compass exercises for values, beliefs and guiding principles.
5. Think about how entrepreneurial mindsets — experimentation, empathy and resilience, to name three of the ten we teach — carry over into real-world decision-making.
6. Develop a life-as-a-prototype attitude, wherein you co-evolve your prototype in response to what you learn as you go.
7. Foster habits of reflection for sustainable career happiness and self-fulfillment.

Content

9.0 Introductory Caselet

9.1 Applying Design Thinking to Life

9.2 Odyssey Mapping

9.3 Reframing Life and Career Challenges

9.4 Personal Compass Exercises

9.5 Connecting Entrepreneurial Skills to Life

9.6 Summary

9.7 Key Terms

9.8 Descriptive Questions

9.9 References

9.10 Case Study

9.0 Introductory Caselet

"Beyond the Obvious: Aarav's Odyssey Map"

A 24-year-old engineering grad, Aarav had two clear options for his future — he could work in his father's logistics business or take up a secure software development job. However, neither felt fulfilling. Restless and ambivalent, he took a design thinking class that taught the idea of Odyssey Mapping. By taking the exercise, Aarav drew three sharply divergent 5-year life paths: one as a startup founder working in agritech, another as a digital nomad UX consultant, and yet another as a local business leader transforming his family firm.

The mapping exercise allowed Aarav to imagine not just careers but lives, trade-offs and the personal reasons behind each direction. It was the first time that he understood decision making as an act of creativity, rather than binary. So he started interviewing people down those avenues, to reframe the fear around failure and sharpen his own compass_ _he wanted a combination of adaptive space (autonomy), effect (impact) and a family (community).

Eventually, he prototyped a startup idea around rural supply chains and began working on it part-time while freelancing as a UX designer to have money coming in and flexibility.

Odyssey Mapping didn't give Aarav the "right" answer — it gave him a way to ask better questions. Design thinking didn't just enable him to make products — it helped him design a life of intent.

Critical Thinking Question

What entrepreneurial attitudes and ways of thinking sustain the process of reflection and how does Odyssey Mapping foster more mindful, explorative life decisions as opposed to traditional career planning?

9.1 Applying Design Thinking to Life

9.1.1 Life as a Design Problem

To see life like it is a design-to-be-solved entails taking one's career-path-seriously as if designing a complex problem in design or entrepreneurship. Instead of looking for a single "right" answer, people see many potential iterations of what life could be and remain open to ambiguity, uncertainty and change.

• Reframing Career and Life Questions:

o Not, “What should I do with my life?” ask “What might I try next?”

o Appreciate that life problems are typically “wicked problems”—they do not lend themselves to a singular solution, only navigating them creatively.

• Problem-Finding vs. Problem-Solving:

o Design thinkers start with defining the real problem and don't just come up with solutions.

o In life, individuals also frequently seek social roles (like stable employment, respect) without defining what is important to them.

• Life as Iteration:

o There is no one career trajectory or relationship pattern – people change, as do their values and desires.

o Design thinking sees life as prototyping, feedback, and realignment.

• Bias Toward Action:

o Progressing with low-commitment, small strides (experiments) is better than analyzing far-removed concepts.

o Ex: Volunteering in an area you have no experience in o Shadowing a professional o Side hustle.

• Accepting Ambiguity:

o Unlike problems for the school grounding or engineering, life seldom provides clear answers.

o Design thinkers tolerate and even celebrate failure as it is a starting point for discovery.

• Co-Creation and Collaboration:

o Feedback and joint reflection support life decisions.

o Life coaches, mentors, or peer groups are good co-designers.

When we frame life as a design problem, it suggests that if you’re waiting for clarity, you can stop waiting and start experimenting, testing and refining — treating life more like an experiment in which we never know whether our next step will work.

9.1.2 Using Empathize–Define–Ideate–Prototype–Test for Life Goals

The Design Thinking framework—commonly used to innovate products and services—can be adapted to personal growth, career navigation, and life decision-making. Applying the five stages to life goals makes abstract aspirations tangible and actionable.

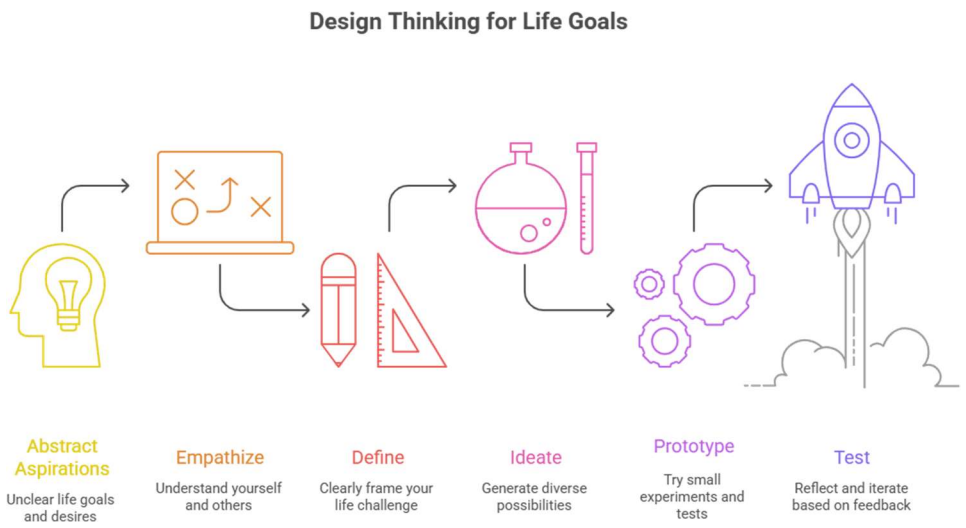

figure: **Design Thinking framework**

• Empathize (with Yourself and Others):

o Know your own values, fears, motivations and experiences.

o Use resources such as journaling, interviews, or mindfulness in order to develop self-knowledge.

o Get in the shoes of others on the paths you are wondering about by Informational interviewing others (talking to them) or seeing what their time and decision making is like.

• Define (Your Challenge Clearly):

o Combine your revelations into one specific life issue.

o Example: Rather than simply saying "I want to be successful," try breaking it down to "I want a career where I'm able to express my creativity without having to worry about being financially stable".

o Pose, "How Might I..." questions: "How might I get a job that leaves me energized and fits my values?"

• Ideate (Generate Diverse Possibilities):

o Generated ideas for how to obtain life satisfaction and suspend judgment.

o Use mind mapping, Odyssey Maps or 'wild ideas" sessions.

o Test out different futures: corporate job, entrepreneurship, freelance, sabbatical etc.

• Prototype (Try Small Experiments):

o Do not commit fully to the new direction of life, try it out first.

o Examples –Job shadow, volunteer, travel, work on a weekend project or take a course.

o These "lifestyle precedents" grant vision without the long-term risk.

• Test (Reflect and Iterate):

o Check in with yourself (how to you emotionally and physically respond) and receive feedback from others (mentors, peers).

o Did the prototype energize you? Did it correspond to that which you wanted?

o Take a new course depending on what you've discovered.

Leveraging the entire design thinking process enables people to escape from one-sided objective target setting, and instead develop a flexible iterative model for personal growth and fulfillment.

9.1.3 Aligning Personal and Professional Aspirations

They also reported that alignment leads to coherence, energy and purpose in life on a daily basis. It doesn't mean that perfect balance in life or work is necessary, but rather making decisions with intent where values, strengths and impact come together.

• Understand Core Values:

o Consider what is non-negotiable in your life (freedom, security, creativity, contribution, learning, family) etc.

o Use a value card or self-assessment ranking scale and some coaching prompts to help participants rank their values.

• Map Personal Aspirations:

o Travel, physical condition, personal relationships and mental health may all contribute to this.

o Untangle what it means with a "good life" ... outside of what your friends, culture, or industry tells you.

• Clarify Professional Drivers:

o What sorts of things do you like to solve?

o Where are you most energized or drained?

o What do you want to develop or be a master at?

• Find Overlap ("The Sweet Spot"):

o Find where personal and professional intersect.

o Example: Someone who values independence and creativity might resonate with freelance or creative entrepreneurship.

• Beware of Misalignment:

o A very well-paying job may be detrimental to mental health or family time.

o Early awareness of divergence makes mid-course correction possible.

• Integrate Life Roles:

o Professionals inhabit multiple roles: worker, parent, learner, citizen.

o Create deliberate time and boundaries to feed every role.

• Design Life Rhythms:

o Take a weekly view on balancing home projects with work targets.

o Assess from time to time: "Am I creating the life I want, or merely surviving the one that I have?"

• Use Feedback Loops:

o Find mentors, support groups, or ways to check on yourself.

o Track progress, measure fulfillment and examine tangible results.

Matching career and life ambition drives better decisions, less burnout and greater resilience - all of which are incredibly important for both professional success and personal happiness.

9.2 Odyssey Mapping

9.2.1 Concept of Odyssey Planning

Odyssey Planning is a design thinking approach that allows people to imagine and chart out different possible futures instead of locking them into a single, fixed path forward. The notion at its core is that, as an odyssey, life is a journey, and a process — one with roads that weave in and out and up for grabs that are always changing. Instead of seeking to discover the one "right" career or life decision, Odyssey Planning is about imagining three — and fashioning concrete 5-year life plans — while articulating,

investigating, and curiously reflecting on what a new path reveals about your motivating forces, fears, and values. This kind of planning is much more versatile, creative and fluid.

Purpose of Odyssey Maps

• Visualize Multiple Futures

Odyssey Maps are tools to help people escape the myth of one "right" future. By presenting three very different paths, people see some of the ways in which life can be flexible and open-ended.

• Example: A recent graduate can map the futures as a corporate professional, a startup founder or digital nomad. All of them have trade-offs and they have opportunities, but all are legitimate.

• Combine Career, Life and Personal Growth

While career maps concentrate primarily on occupations, Odyssey Maps also include relationships, health, hobbies and dreams in addition to professional aspirations.

• Example: A medical student might develop three future lives, one as a practicing physician, a second as a researcher and the third as an advocate for public health policy — each representing different lifestyle and personal consequences.

Structure of Odyssey Planning

• Scenario 1 – Current Path

Represents the path you are already on or one that you intend to follow.

• Example: A software engineer keeps going up one rung of the ladder, seeking to become a senior architect or manager in five years.

• Scenario 2 – Alternative Path

Assesses what you would do if the status quo disappeared or lost its appeal.

• Example: That engineer also has in mind for a possible next step to teach and mentor at a coding bootcamp if corporate work no longer feels satisfying.

• If toss does not matter, then look at Scenario 3 – Wild Card / Dream Path

Imagines a daring or radical alternative that sounds thrilling but scares you, seems too risky or is far from your current situation.

• Example: The engineer wants to become a travel blogger and develop digital tools for other remote workers while traveling the world.

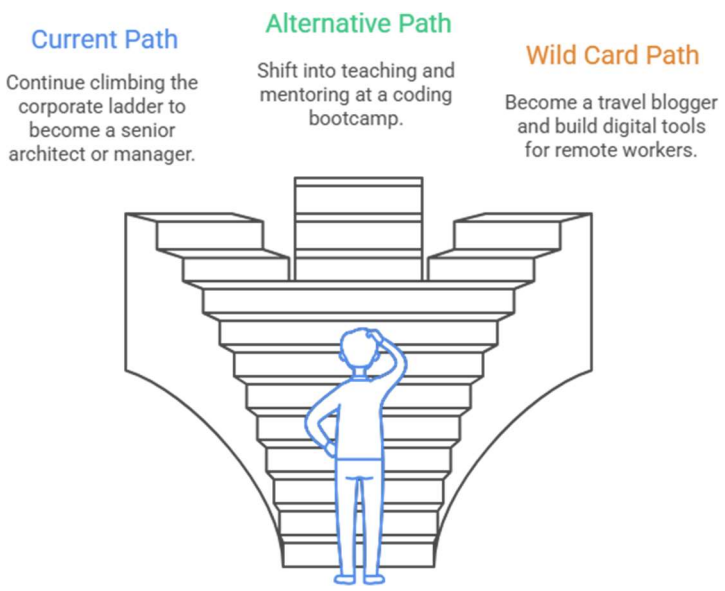

Figure: **Structure of Odyssey Planning**

Design Thinking Integration

• Idea generation – Builds multiple options, removing the fear of making the "wrong" choice.

• Prototyping – Small tests such as side projects, online courses or volunteer work can let you try out other paths before diving in altogether.

• Test and Reflect – Attending to how you feel about your energy, satisfaction, and growth informs better choices.

• Example: A career professional in marketing who has an idea for a startup could prototype the "wild card" path by freelancing part-time while maintaining full-time hours.

Visualization Format

• Timeline Representation

Each Odyssey Map represents 5 years of life, milestones, habits and goals.

• Example: Design certification in Year 1, launching a product in Year 3, mentoring others in Year 5.

• Creative Expression

Maps often contain drawings, words or symbols to represent not only plans but also the feelings and energy of these endeavors.

• Example: The person cobbling together the “wild card” path might draw mountains and airplanes to conjure up the adventurousness involved in becoming a global traveler.

Outcome of Odyssey Planning

• Reveals Core Values and Motivations

People who compare three different paths, for example, have frequently discovered repeating themes pointing to what they actually care about.

• Example: Math is math, and no matter what job he does, be it corporate work, teaching or travel blogging, the software engineer finds a constant reward: being able to contribute by helping people to grow through knowledge.

• Reduces Fear of Wrong Choices

Understanding that there are a number of rewarding futures to choose from can reduce anxiety about making one “best” choice.

• Encourages Iteration

Odyssey Planning reveals that life is not linear - paths can be retraced, combined and abandoned in accordance with new priorities.

9.2.2 Creating Multiple Life Path Scenarios

At its core, Odyssey Planning is about imagining many possible lifetimes. It encourages people to imagine futures that appear disparate, unusual or unpredictable — instead of following a linear “default” path defined by cultural, social or professional norms. The exercise is a departure from forecasting one future, and toward designing multiple alternatives — each of which would embody different values, aspirations, constraints. This routine cuts down on the anxiety of making a “right” decision, and gives permission to experiment, as well as insights into what’s really meaningful for an individual.

Three-Scenario Structure

• Current Path

But this is pretty much what you have got to look forward to for the rest of your life if you are staying in that groove. That is fairly predictive of expectations from where we stand now.

• An example: A teacher demonstrates educational progression by moving up from instructional to administrative roles within a school, seeking additional training certifications and maintaining community-based work.

• Plan B Path

My direct destination is as a second choice, in case traveling along the way I am already going would turn out to be a disappointment. It builds resistance by thinking about credible alternatives.

• Example: If the teacher decides he or she feels stifling in the school system, the next step might include working as an educational consultant, developing digital schools and platforms or joining an edtech company.

• Dream Path

A mission-forward, risk-taking vision that appears to be risky, unrealistic or straitjacketed. This is so people can express their deepest desires without being rejected.

• Example: The teacher dreams of starting a creative-writing retreat abroad, where education and travel and personal passion meet.

How to Build Each Scenario

• Use a 5-Year Timeline

Specify not only what work, education, relationships, lifestyle and location might look like year by year. Milestones make abstract futures concrete.

• Example: "Year 1: Start an online side hustle; Year 3: Transition to full time freelancing; Year 5: Publish a book."

• Celebrate Success, Failure, Fun and Challenge

Apply that possibility toward this path; and expect what might become difficult, as you consider the emotional ride.

• Example: Success on the dream path might look like running a small, successful retreat center, while challenges may be unstable income or acclimating to a new culture.

• Include Specific Milestones

Tie the scenarios to particular objectives so this doesn't devolve into a high-level hand-waving exercise.

• Example: "Start my own company," "Travel the world similar to when I worked remotely" or "Get my masters in sustainability."

Visual Aids

• Graphs, Drawings, or Mood Boards

Images are not only logic but also the passion of the moment.

• Example: Photos of cities and nature spots, coworking spaces in a mood board for someone mapping "travel while freelancing."

• Color-Coding and Symbols

Colour them in and resize to taste to convey levels of interest, risk or mystery.

• Example: Green for energizing goals, yellow for some question marks and red for things that feel draining.

Reflection Prompts

• What is the value of each path?

Some are about security or creativity or freedom.

• What are your trade-offs?

Each path also has its own costs — sometimes in financial uncertainty, time away from your family or a career dollar value that's not exactly where you'd like it to be.

• What way do you feel most excited about, even if it is riskier?

Energy is often a signal of how much you are attuned with your passion – even if it seems less 'practical'.

Embrace Contradiction

• It's O.K. for the three strands to be in tension — that's productive tension. What it reveals: What excites you, triggers your fear and draws you back.

• Example: One path is to scale a corporate ladder, another to do an academic pivot and a third to start a nonprofit. Rather than take things to battle against each other, "[the interviewing person] learns to literally see in such a way as if he or she could find something in each situation that means the same thing — for instance, power or influence."

Application-Based Examples

Recent Graduate Exploring Careers

Mid-Career Professional Facing Burnout

A finance professional sketches scenarios:

o Immediate Next Aspiration: Remain in investment banking and become a partner.

o Plan B: Transition to a job teaching money at a university or business school.

o Dream Path: Open a holistic center where financial literacy courses are also offered alongside mindfulness.

Visualising these choices, he realises that mentoring and welfare are common to all pathways.

Balancing Family and Career Parent.

PORTFOLIO A 9-to-5 parent maps three futures:

o Current career path: Corporate in house with familiy obligations.

o Plan B: Go part-time consulting for the flexibility\C4.

o Mission Alley: Pursue a business and social work pathway that is independent, family-oriented and based on community.

The workout demonstrates how family-tailored flexibility is a value, and provides her with an orientation to reframe even the notion of career preference through the lens of values.

9.2.3 Evaluating Feasibility, Desirability & Viability in Life Choices

Being aware of creating three Odyssey paths, the systematical analysis pro and contra follows. Motivated by product space design thinking, FDV could serve as a theoretical template for designing one's life. This review is not about predicting the one "correct" future; it's about making trade-offs plain and highlighting areas where even a little bit of prototyping can show you a lot, as well as reducing worry that we are going to "get it right this time". So, by asking concrete questions about resources, fit to values and long-run prospects, we're turning fuzzy hopes into more definite testable hypotheses.

Feasibility

• Essential Question: Do I have the resources to embark upon this life path now or soon? The word feasibility allows you to consider what your constraints are."

: money, expertise, time or family commitments.

• How to Evaluate:

• Reflect on what resources you have and which gaps you need to fill.

• Quesiton yourself: "What's a small way I can be prototyping that today?" or "What would I have to be or what would I have to do for that path to be one of the possibilities?"

• Application Example:

A corporate worker who secretly aspires to be a documentary filmmaker may want to do it, but feel stifled by obstacles to feasibility: too little in the way of savings, no experience with filmmaking and

demanding work obligations. She could begin with weekend video projects or short online courses, something she does on the side to see how it feels before leaving her job."

Desirability

• The Core Question: Is this truly the path in life that you want to keep going down and when all is said and done, does it align with your interests, passions, values?

In other words, likability is about whether the path forward feels thrilling and inspiring and personally meaningful.

• How to Evaluate:

• Contradict your long-held BS And consider what is actually true for you, the part of this journey that has any meaning to you and question something-that-social-media-inserted-into-the-mainstream-consciousness-about-how-you-have-to-have-this-bland-journey-pointlessness-or-you-would-be-fucked-up-for-life.

• Is this the version of my life where I'd feel alive, expressive and fulfilled?'

• Application Example:

Two paths: way (a) feeling snug and safe, path (b) feeling like a giant diamond suit of armor — but the diamond still hasn't turned into the 100% you need to stand up in front of an aud just go. A lawyer who contrasts her work for corporations with environmental advocacy understands that if the competition is scarcity, paper-pushing will always win. There's a bias in favor of advocacy, perhaps beginning from an even weaker position.

Viability

• Essential Question: Can you, in reality, afford this kind of lifestyle? A financially stable one, an emotionally secure one, a socially acceptable one - for the long run. Then there is the matter of stability — and whether a road could eventually be sustainable for sustaining the lifestyle that you'll want.

• How to Evaluate:

• Consider the effect on earning power, health and social networks.

• Ask : "Is this how I would want to spend 5–10 years of my life, or even more?" How you answer will tell you much.

• Application Example:

A teacher yearns to be a full-time travel blogger. They can probably get it off the ground as a side hustle, but how would they scale and maintain that effort? — whether they make enough to cover their living expenses, reliance on family and long- term savings for retirement.

Rating System

• How It Works: Use this three-axis grid to assess the options, rating each 1 to 10 on how feasible, desirable and viable it is.

• Visualization: You could take a simple radar chart, or spider graph, or even three side-by-side bars to compare how each approach rolls up.

• Example:

o Path A (corporate ladder): Feasibility = 9, Desirability = 5, Viability = 8.

o Route B (Entrepreneurship Route): Feasibility 6, Desirability 9, Viability 7.

o Path C (NGO Work Abroad): Feasibility 4, Desirability 8, Viability 5.

This visualization reveals what path scores "best," but also where there are gaps to fill in with experimentation.

9.3 Reframing Life and Career Challenges

9.3 ROLE OF REFRAME IN PROBLEM SOLVING 9.3.1 Value of the Reframe

Here's a few to get you up and going! Reframing: Reframing is only looking at things optimistically by redefining another way of considering what is present! Instead of thinking about difficulties as fixed or unchangeable, reframe alters our way of seeing which helps us ask different questions and in turn help others to sidestep their misguided assumptions. In design thinking as well as life design, reframing is a way to move from feeling stuck or closed in to seeing multiple ways forward. It turns the unsolvable into a thing you can play with, try on and apply to something new.

Techniques for Reframing

• Ask Different Questions

Transitioning from "Why is this happening to me? * Not "Can I learn something?" but rather, to * **"What is it that I can learn? transforms a problem from negative to positive.

• Use the "How Could I..." Questions Template

This "reverse engineering" create thinking process transforms defects into exciting places for creative exploration.

• Example: Sub "I don't know how to network" for "How could I meet people who have some of the same interests as me?"

• Rephrase Failure as Data

Failure flips ultimately into a prototype that taught the project team virtually everything it needed to understand.

• Example: If a side hustle fails to have financial return, it can be data around market fit, in the service of what, rather than should/ought to happen next.

Application in Career Decisions

• Layoffs as Opportunities

Rather than framing a layoff as a crushing blow, you could view it instead as an opportunity to explore different fields, or an experience that pushes you to earn additional credentials or even start your own business.

• Example: Midcareer worker reinterprets layoff as “the push I needed to finally pursue consulting,” eventually building a successful independent practice.

• Reframing Lack of Experience

“You can say, ‘I don’t have that amount of experience,’ or you could turn it around and say, ‘Well I bring a fresh perspective and I am adaptable.

• For example: A new graduate into a world of sustainability may not have years and years of experience but the possibility for value comes from being someone carrying new learnings from academic studies, along with the ability to bring the energy needed for innovative work.

• The sort of person caught between a safe job and full-time art might express that dynamic not as “job vs. passion” but just: “How do I incorporate creativity into my career and life?”

Outcomes of Reframing

• Assists with transitioning between activities and reduces anxiety

Looking at these as multisolution problems helps ease the pressure to get a single right answer.

• Encourage Experimentation and RiskApplying a new label to failure - learning - is discouraging the fear of trying out fresh, potentially bright, ideas.

• Empowers Self-Authorship

By giving people the opportunity to reframe, it allows them to choose their own paths based on their values and passions rather than society’s or culture’s templates.

9.3.2 Turning Constraints into Opportunities

Constrains are usually viewed as the barrier, something thats inhibits us from what we want or should be doing — money, time, right qualifications. But to design thinking, and

life design, constraints are not a barrier but an aspect of design. Rather than stifle, they focus creativity, refine priorities and inspire new creative directions. Many companies' — and their own day-to-day work — most innovative solutions are borne out of necessity and, when it comes down to it, that need means only being able to do more with less.

Positive Role of Constraints

•Compelling Clarity and Prioritization In a world of scarcity, constraints can bring clarity to what is truly most important.

• Example: A working professional with two hours after work to upskill focuses on a narrow online certification instead of flitting between several scattered courses.

• Resisting Analysis Paralysis It can be hard to know what to choose when we have so many choices. But constraints can filter out the noise and urge us to act.

• Example: A student who can't afford to study abroad investigates virtual exchange programs rather than endlessly discussing numerous overseas options.

Famous Examples

• Twitter – Developed as a side project at Odeo due to the team's inability to compete with iTunes by itself. Despite these technocratic and time constraints, they gravitated to the simplest messages possible, and thus rose up as a global platform.

• Bootstrapped Startups — Some startups don't raise venture capital and take a more scrappy, creative approach to survival. Dropbox, for example, opened with a basic demo video rather than creating an entire new product in order to establish demand while constrained by the bank account.

Challenges in life design

• External Constraints – Concrete constraints such as finances, location, family commitments or health issues.

Example: A person who can't move away because of family ties may concentrate on building a remote-first career.

• Internal Limitation – Mindset, psychological or mental blockages which hinder a person's actions e.g., self-esteem issues, lack of ability or identity-based beliefs.

• Example: A person who feels, "I'm too old to switch careers," can reframe that as, "My experience is an asset in this new field."

Turning Constraints into Creative Prompts

• Asks generative q= uestions that reframe problems as design opportun= ities.

• “How to try out this new interest if I only have 2 hours a day?”

• “What does high motivation, but no money able to accomplish?”

• Example: A parent juggling work and child care reframes 7 days of constraint as a design challenge: Try micro-learning (e.g., for 10 minutes a day) rather than or in addition to enrolling in an intensive course.

Tools to Navigate Constraints

• Design with What You Have

“Just bringing what you have and just using it, not waiting to be perfect.

• Example: Beginning a portfolio of designs with free tools, like Canva, and social media rather than waiting to save up for expensive software.

• Working with Graydon Doyle, introduced the SCAMPER Process Apply template prompts of structured creativity (Substitute, Combine, Adapt, Modify, Put to another use:) (Eliminate:) (Reverse:) towards the creation of better solutions in/for space.

• Example: Someone with a modest budget to launch a café pivots to instead create a “pop-up coffee stall” that they take to community events, as an experiment in proving the concept.

Mindset Shifts

• From “I can’t afford to go overseas for a semester” → “I can gain global exposure with online international programs or virtual internships.”

• From “I can’t switch fields” → “I could try my hand at freelancing or part-time volunteering in the new field while keeping my current job.”

These changes eliminate the sense of being cornered and allow for experimentation.

Design Challenge Framing

• Instead of thinking constraints are restricting, think of them as design challenges that require you to devise creative solutions.

• Example: Rather than say, “I don’t have enough savings to leave my job,” phrase the question more as in: “How can I test entrepreneurship rather than leaving my job for half-time employment?”

Application-Based Examples

Career Switch Under Financial Constraint

A marketing executive is looking to switch to UX design, but can't afford to leave her job. She turns the constraint into a challenge: "How do I build skills while working full-time?" She begins with free online courses, gains experience in volunteer projects and eventually lands a junior design role.

Geographic Limitation

A teacher in a remote town with few local opportunities reframes the constraint: "How can I make my impact broader without moving?" She is building her international student base by offering online tutoring, making location an asset by providing inexpensive high-quality lessons.

Health as a Constraint

Health feels like a ceiling on career for a professional with chronic illness. Through the magic of reframing, he creates a remote consulting practice that allows flexible hours and ample time for parenting. What used to be a barrier becomes an opportunity for creating a stable, self-directed career.

9.3.3 Developing Resilience Through Reframing

Resilience is often summarized by the mantra that people have the ability to 'bounce back,' but in reality, it is more than simply bouncing back. Resilience is not just about overcoming adversity. Reframing is one of the most effective ways to grow resilience, because it changes how we perceive setbacks and their effects. By redefining what is happening to us, we have an opportunity to see the meaning in it, move some energy and take productive action instead of losing This kind of mental training prepares you to deal with the uncertainty and complexity of life.

Link Between Reframing and Resilience

• Creating Distance from Emotional Impact

• Creating Distance from Emotional Impact

The bubble gives you an emotional space to think inside of when problems arise that is built for sense as opposed to can-reaction.

• Example: A botched job interview is not a consequence of personal failure; it's practice for the one that will be successful next time.

• Promoting Cognitive Flexibility

Resilient people can alter the way they look at situations, develop new goals and find alternate ways to get there when obstacles loom. Reframing supports this mental agility.

• Example: A business owner whose product doesn't work sees it as a view through which to see market need, and goes on to something else rather than quitting.

Resilience-Building Techniques Through Reframing

• Narrative Redesign

So... Redirect your self narrative from victim to victor.

• Sample swap: exchange "I didn't get into graduate school because I'm not good enough" for "This rejection has propelled me to professional experiences that will make my next application stronger."

• Control Mapping

This is to distinguish between the controllable and the uncontrollable. Focus your energy on what is in your control.

• Example: A manager leading a team whose project is stymied by external suppliers sees her frustration as a challenge to push in one or more areas I can control: "I have no power over supply chain problems, but I can communicate better with my stakeholders and build contingency plan schedules that are more flexible."

Long-Term Impact

• Reduces Burnout

When we are able to see setbacks as transient and instructive, rather than internalize stress as a permanent failure.

• Promotes Persistence

Reframing is what allows you to see obstacles as part of the process, which in turn allows you to persevere.

• Enhances Problem-Solving

Reframing the problem, is to a design problem and lends itself nice to creative thinking.

• Encourages a Learning Mindset

For entrepreneurs, the innovators and students of life re-framing is a method to turn the failure into feedback instead of evidence to insinuation.

Empathy in Reframing

• Considering Others' Viewpoints

Leaders can reframe by considering: “What pressures might the other person be under?” This leads to comprehension not more accusation.

• Bring the resistance a level higher up: A manager encounters resistance from a team member and reinterprets it as signaling other things — and that way, prevents the escalation of conflict by turning it into something to talk about.

• Self-Empathy

By having some compassion for yourself when you mess up, it gets a little easier to take criticism in general.

• Example: A rejected founder of a failed start-up fakes it till he makes it by mindfully pivoting around the loss with self-empathy: “That venture didn’t work out, but it gave me fundraising, pitching and team-building skills to take wherever I end up.”

Application-Based Examples

Career Setback

A midecareer professional is overlooked for a promotion. Instead of looking at that as a failure, she looks at it as an opportunity to grow skills and networks...and then apply those learnings in order to become qualified for a more senior job at another company.

Personal Challenge

An injured long-distance runner who can’t train. Instead of treating the end of his athletic career as a lost cause, he is focusing on refining his mental toughness with the help of swimming and yoga — all while improving his health.

Entrepreneurial Failure

A start-up founder faces a botched product launch. Why the hell do I feel like this – “Ideals are beautiful, but that’s not really possible for me.

entrepreneurship,” he re-writes it as “I now know what features the market does not need and I can pivot with a purpose. This maneuver is what allows him to attract investors to his next big idea.

9.4 Personal Compass Exercises

9.4.1 Identifying Core Values and Purpose

One arduous struggle.COre values, Purpose One of the most significant things that we can ever do is to establish what these are in our lives.Core values and personal purpose underpin just every aspects of living a fulfilling sustainable life. “What you take your lead from is your values, what you stand for as a community,” said Flynn, an internal compass that guides decisions, priorities and a northern star in vagueness. Unlike external achievements, which may change, values tend to be stable and bring ongoing

enjoyment in being congruent within oneself. When life and career decisions are made in congruence

if they are based around values and purpose, they can energise and mean something to us; if those choices violate these, people will feel dissatisfied or even burnt out."

What Are Core Values?

• Beliefs That Drive Behaviour

Core values are the complex beliefs that people hold about what really matters and that people use to direct and motivate their actions. They shape behavior and priorities.

• The most common values are autonomy, security, learning, service, innovation, balance, family creativity and impact.

• Application Example:

An autonomous entrepreneur would prefer to start a venture on their own rather than pursue an organizational career, even in the case of higher financial payoff in the latter.

Discovering Values

• Reflect on Peak Life Experiences

Think to a time in your life when you felt completely fulfilled or proud. These moments have a way of exposing what was at stake.

• Example: A student who was passionate about tutoring juniors in college might find service and growth

as key values.

• Identify Emotional Triggers

The intensity of those positive or negative reactions indicates what you truly care about.

• Example: The sense that you should but don't feel adrenaline, jealousy and anger when a colleague co-opts your work may reveal a core value of

fairness or recognition.

• Use Structured Tools

Value sort cards, a reflection exercise or guided coaching sessions can help to whittle down to a top 5 set of values.

• Consider a professional who uses card sort and learns that their highest values are family, freedom, learning, health and contribution.

Defining Purpose

• The Reasons Behind The Goals or Actions

It's direction beyond the hustle of short term gains. It's the explanation of why you want what you want, and your life and work means anything to you.

• Emerges from Recurring Themes

Purpose often comes from weaving together mostly disparate threads between life experiences, strengths, and times of providing meaning.

• For example, someone who has repeatedly experienced fulfillment from teaching, writing and mentoring might conceptualize their purpose as to foster the growth of others by sharing knowledge.

Values vs. Goals

• Values Are Internal and Enduring

These are the fundamental principles that apply to all stages of life.

• Goals Are External and Temporary

They can change or evolve, but they must be grounded in fundamental values.

• Application Example:

A life-long learner who is a professional may aim to earn a master's degree. Once it's earned, the degree is over, but our need to keep learning isn't, and that can motivate us toward new goals such as enrolling in short courses or writing research papers.

Conflict Resolution

• Clarifying Values Reduces Internal Struggles

Most warring issues are dilemmas between dual values (e.g., ambition vs. family, security vs. freedom). Values can also guide our decisions as we make trade-offs with less regret.

• Application Example:

A well-paid job abroad is rejected by a parent who values the presence of extended family more than money. By choosing family, they make a decision based on what really matters and that defuses resentment down the road.

Long-Term Benefits

• Enhances Resilience

When the going gets tough, you look to your values to motivate yourself.

• Reduces Burnout

The value-adjusted life helps to avoid the futile chase of external success.

• Builds Self-Authorship

Values let people create their lives on their own terms, and not from some externally prescribed direction.

• Application Example:

A value of service could ex- plain why some professionals that help to care for even the most difficult patients continue their work, seemingly despite the consequences.

9.4.2 Creating a Decision-Making Compass

A decision-making compass is a tool that serves as your own framework for navigating life so that you make decisions consistent with who you are and what you stand for. As a physical compass helps us find our way in unknown surroundings, so our personal compass provides direction in the face of uncertainty, complexity or competing choices. Rather than using pure reason, social pressure or outside guidance to make decisions the compass uses what matters most within. While he uses this tool for life-changing decisions—like career changes, moving, or relationships—it also can be used to help guide daily activities and priorities.

What is a Decision-Making Compass?

• Internal Guidebook The internal guidebook was not cut and dried, but a thing with flex heft. The only decision I had to make in concrete terms about how the story would unfold. It makes decision-making an exercise to readily scrutinize opportunities and establish boundaries as well as to avoid decisions that are likely regrettable.

• Application Example:

A professional whose moral compass points to family-first will simply reject all offers that involve copious international travel, even if it means a bigger paycheck.

Steps to Create Your Compass

• Chart 1 - List Top 5 Values with Definitions

Of your highest values, list them and then redefine them in straightforward terms.

• Example: Autonomy- freedom to work and live the way I want.

• Introduce guidelines or life rules

Those are marching orders you can convert to behavior.

• Example: “Say yes to curiosity,”. or "People over profit."

• Identify Non-Negotiables

These are lines you do not cross, no matter how tempting the reward.

• Example: turning down work that violates one's ethics, or not moving far from extended family.

• Put in Purpose Statements or a North Star

Briefly express in a few words the grand reason for your existence.

• Example: "Empowering others through knowledge," or "Creating solutions that enhance daily life."

Use of the Compass

• Consult Before Decisions

Evaluate opportunities (jobs, places to live, relationships, commitments) and see if a choice matches the compass.

• Example: Ask yourself, "Does accepting a job at this startup align with my values of balance, growth and creativity?" '

• Guide in Ambiguity

And if you're in one of those places where the conflicting advice is bouncing around your head, or the logic doesn't quite feel like enough, then it makes sure there's some integrity to why.

Visual Formats

• One-Page Summary

Keep it simple and easy to return to — a document with values, principles and purpose.

• Creative Visuals

Thought Bubbles, Tag Clouds or what about a directional compass with arrows pointing – to something of value (North ... Service, East .... Growth etc).

• Application Example:

One designer created a colorful, "value compass" poster for her office that keeps feature value in check by reminding her to weigh any new project against her values of creativity, balance and impact on the community.

Benefits

• Reduces Indecision and Decision Fatigue

As long as people can tailor their options to reflect their values, they will be off the hook from hours of pondering or comparing choices.

• Clear communications amidst uncertainty or stress

When the compass is confronted by external expectations (family, peers, society) it • Communications to/from clients in times of uncertainty or stress

The compass is what you rely on when expectations (with family, peers, and society as a whole) come at you from all directions.

• Reinforces Internal Locus of Control

Instead of seeking affirmation from others, they define their own path. Application-Based Examples

Career Decision

A young professional is juggling two possible job offers: one from a corporation that would pay well but require long hours to start, and another at a nonprofit offering mediocre compensation but an opportunity to make a meaningful impact. Her compass points of service, balance and learning pull her toward the nonprofit sector.

option, arming her with the courage to take what might seem like a risky decision.

Relocation Choice

A family considers a move abroad to pursue professional opportunities. Their true north is the family core, and stability for children. Financial enticements aside, one would never accept because it goes against their grain.

Entrepreneurial Focus

Funding or partnership proposals from startups that don't share the founder's values. That compass — invention, honesty and freedom — is what allows him to say no to deals that would compromise his vision over the long term.

9.0.1 CareerPath in Line with the Personal Compass

A career that aligns with one's internal compass (core values, guiding principles, purpose*) is not only fulfilling – it is sustainable.

On the other hand, misalignment frequently results in frustration, stress or overwork. Truly, a career that is compass-based does not involve nailing it on the "perfect job" in your first or second try. It's not, rather it's a process of perpetual reinvention, negotiation and alignment — making sure there is a professional fit with what matters most in your life. And this fulfillment at every level fuels perseverance, motivation and long-term happiness. Detecting Misalignment

• Recognizing Warning Signs

Indications that you're not include burnout, lack of motivation day after day despite success in the external world or outright dread prior to going into work. These sorts of beliefs are typically a sign that one or more of the three basic needs – for autonomy, creativity and connectedness – is not being honoured.

• Example: A marketer with a high score for authenticity feels drained creating campaigns to the public that they themselves do not believe in. But It's not as if you get the external win and that makes up for what goes on internally.

Questions to Evaluate Alignment

• Is my work energy-giving, or sapping?

Value-related work is usually energizing, even if it's difficult.

• Do I get to put my hobby horse and values into action every workday?

"Career alignment isn't just about skill — it's also about whether your values are playing out in the day to day.

• Am I giving up something that is necessary for immediate gratification?

And sometimes, financial pressures or prestige lead people down paths that are out of alignment with their internal compass.

• Application Example: A consultant applies these questions and recognizes that while a position would utilize her skills, it would compromise her value of balance — no time for family. That's a sign that change is required.

Designing for Alignment

• Job Crafting

You don't always have to leave a job to find alignment — you can redesign your current role. This means changing or adapting responsibilities, tasks, and/or partnerships to deliver on the values.

• Example: A software engineer who values creativity but is bogged down in mundane coding work negotiates to lead creative projects, reinvigorating interest.

• Parallel Projects

If the primary job doesn't align fully, side projects or volunteering can allow for self-expression through one's core values.

• Example: An accountant who is passionate about social impact volunteers for a nonprofit in order to express this value while ensuring their economic security.

Long-Term Vision

• Compass-Guided Planning

The kind of work you want to do, the skills you would like develop and even networking should be driven by long term values not immediate wins.

• Example: A recent college graduate with a sustainability and equity compass chooses to work for an employer in renewable energy as opposed to high-paying but misaligned sectors.

• 5-Year Pathways

The compass aids in defining purpose-driven milestones—such as becoming a world-leaders in inclusive design, changing industries or switching gears to lead a startup.

Saying No

• Protecting Alignment

A strong compass can also instill enough confidence to say no when opportunities present as shiny, but don't fit. No creates self-trust and saves energy for choices that are truly aligned.

• Example: A data scientist is given a lucrative job offer in surveillance tech and declines it based on her support for privacy and ethical concerns. (Though she does end up with a health tech job later that's more in sync.)

Micro-Alignments

• Small Adjustments Add Up

Even in less-than-perfect work, matching tasks on the margin to core values is restful and energizing.

• For example: A sales clerk is concerned about education. Ethan is forced to argue with himself not to take the gig as mindless drudgery, but to consider it an opportunity for him to grow in the area of working with people and bringing focus — at least until something more exciting comes along.

Application-Based Examples Mid-Career Pivot

A manager cannot shake the burnout, not even with a promotion. Gazing at his compass he sees, No creativity or freedom. He transitions to consulting where he has greater influence over the design of his projects and career.

Early-Career Realignment

A new college graduate lands a well-paid finance job only to find himself disenchanted. With her compass, she knows that service and balance have been lost. And then she switches to impact investing, in which financial skills are joined with social purpose.

Remaining in Role but Refashioning It

An overworked and burned-out healthcare worker redefines her job through service and connection. She grows in energy and purpose, without walking away from the profession.

"Activity: Create Your Personal Compass"

For everything there is a season, and this is about creating that compass so students can see where they stand personally on the subject. They will start by finding their 5 top core values and then enunciating each value in their own words. Then they will articulate a few guiding principles and a concise statement of purpose or "life mission." You will then use this compass to guide a decision in relation to your current career or life: "Which of the choices aligns most with my compass?" The exercise helps students begin to ground their decisions in what is meaningful for them, not what gets them external approval, which promotes both intentional and value-based living.

9.5 Connecting Entrepreneurial Skills to Life

9.5.1 Reflecting on MVP Journey and Learnings

The MVP journey reflection is more than just a measure of the business' success. It's a primer on how to make decisions, how to remain flexible, resilient, emotional strength and sense of purpose. The process of creating, testing and remaking an MVP is close to life—filled with all the tragicomedy of indecision.

experimentation, failure, and growth. While looking back on the journey, students internalize personal and professional ways of seeing that shape not only their entrepreneurially oriented career paths (Eimler & Mundt, 2009), but also how they make sense of a world full with challenges - as well as potentials.

Lessons from Uncertainty

• Operating with Limited Clarity

You don't build an MVP with 100% of data or certainty. Entrepreneurs need to get used to making decisions when all the data is already in but be ready to change their mind as new facts come up.

• Application Example:

Full stack developer A squad of students working on MVP for food delivery app realizes midway through that customers are interested in ordering masse (group) as opposed to

one by one. They don't hold out for perfect data; they pivot and maneuver with nimbleness, developing the facility to take bold action in the face of ambiguity.

Feedback as Growth

• Learning Through Iteration

"Feedback is the thing that makes the process of an MVP occur and it can be from customers or mentors or just your peers. It also imparts humility and the great value of listening while being critical without defensiveness.

• Application Example:

A designer learns that the prototype of her educational app is too complicated for kids.

But instead of fighting back, she simplifies the interface — and discovers that the product becomes more engaging. The experience illustrates the transformative nature of feedback as a means of development.

Emotional Regulation

• Managing Highs and Lows

MVP development is two steps back and little progress. Founders must learn to manage frustration, acknowledge incremental progress and stay in the zone.

• Application Example:

A single founder codes for a period of weeks, only to find that when he tests the product it's riddled with bugs. You could re-cast those follows as learning to pick yourself up and even out emotionally which of course applies to life challenges not skating related.

Dealing with Failure

• Failure as Data, Not Defeat

Most MVPs fail and in the process do show us something we should have learned, be it a missed need or inspiration, market opportunity created or mistake of your own design. You'll transform setbacks into what you've learned, as opposed to your failings.

• Application Example:

Fashion startup is launching MVP of custom-fit clothes, but it's not catching on. Before they give up, however, it finally occurs to them that the real issue isn't fit at all; it's delivery time. This center-switch gives a "second" iteration that is at some point more feasible.

Collaboration and Leadership

• Navigating Team Dynamics

Many MVP narratives are collaborations with a co-founder, customer or mentor. It is these sorts of experiences that build critical aspects of leadership; empathy, delegation and resolving conflict.

• Application Example:

A group of folks building a startup with diverse backgrounds bicker over the features to prioritize. They talk it out and gain respect for each other's opinions while elevating the cultural layer of their product, and team.

Clarity of Purpose

• The Core of "Why"is it for? And these reflections spill over from business into the self: What am I building at my life? Who am I becoming?

• Application Example:

A female wellness app founder, for example, wonders through some soul searching whether her higher calling isn't "building an app" but teaching others how to de-stress and live healthier. Such clarity reorients not only her product roadmap but also her own mission.

Application-Based Examples Student Entrepreneurship Challenge

A college team creates an MVP for a peer-to-peer book exchange. With the exception of an early flurry of rights inquiries, the accommodations are slow to gather steam. And in the process of reflecting, they come to understand the power of community engagement and to practice resiliency and problem reframing — qualities that they carry with them into a lifetime of working to provide meaningful service.

Corporate Intrapreneurship

Two) An employee creating an internal workflow MVP realizes 50% of the things he comes up with get shot down. Instead of getting derailed, he uses the incident as a stepping stone to become a better leader and more effective problem-solver before emerging as a game-changing innovation leader within the firm.

9.5.2 Entrepreneurship to Life Transferable Skills

Startup is associated with the entrepreneurship, however the expertise it produces are not only business functional. The journey of entrepreneurship is one where you face the unknown, play with limited resources and create value under pressure. These experiences accumulate a wealth of tools, which are useful learnings that can be applied elsewhere in life, such as personal, career, relationship and self development. Probing into these metaphor helps people understand that entrepreneurship is not only a company- it's a life style.

Problem-Solving

• The entrepreneurial setting – Entrepreneurs study how to understand user needs, test their assumptions and design innovative solutions under constraints.

• Life Application: These are the skills that apply to working out differences with others, changing routines or meeting unanticipated challenges.

• Example: A co-founder with talent in root cause analysis takes the same approach home when family conflicts persist—dug deeper, beyond accusing one another at face levels, to understanding the real need.

Resourcefulness

• When Not to Bootstrap: *If you're in an entrepreneurial environment, bootstrapped entrepreneurs typically win by being frugal with their time, money and skills.

Etymology Life applicatio This attitude is conducive to personal financial budgeting, time management, or creative problem solving.

• Example: If while bootstrapping, a startup's early marketing campaign is created on the cheap using free tools; an individual is resourceful when planning a wedding with next to no budget, but working with community support, doing-it-yourself (DIY) decorations and local vendors.

Communication

• Entrepreneurial Context: Pitching, negotiating with investors and storytelling refine clarity, persuasion and confidence.

• Life Application: The same tools work in relationships, boosting workplace power and sustaining expressions of emotions.

• Example: An entrepreneur who is accustomed to pitching investors uses those skills to fight for flexible work arrangements with her employer, making the case compellingly — and convincingly so on both sides.

Risk Management

• Entrepreneurship Context: Entrepreneurs are trained to tolerate uncertainty, experiment and learn from failure (rather than being defeated by it).

•Application to life: This attitude breeds the confidence to embark on passion projects, career changes or different paths in life.

• Example: A startup-founder has trained herself to process financial and reputational risk now makes a type of commitment when she hesitantly moves abroad for personal growth, even though the ground may not be soft undergirding her.

Vision and Goal Setting

• Entrepreneurial Context: Start-ups need a north star, a clearly defined mission (in simple words) and vision and milestones so you can be super focused.

• Application to life: a similar modeling can be used for career and life planning.

• Example: Just like the founder who sets quarterly goals for her product roadmap, an employee is setting yearly objectives (e.g., learning something new, getting healthier, building more relationships) that ladder up to long-term purpose.

Empathy

• Context of entrepreneurship: User-centered design is the art of listening to customers without being constrained by what they say.

• Use: Demonstrating empathy fosters emotional intelligence, relationships and trust in personal and professional settings.

• Example: An entrepreneur who has learned to do user interviews, is also applying the skill of listening to friendships, ask open questions and not presume anything and build relationships.

Application-Based Examples

Abandoning a good job and social entrepreneurship, a corporate-lider-to -be walks away. A backdrop in risk assessment and planning that she developed at a startup incubator allows her to frame finances, sketch out a transition road map and lean into uncertainty with a touch of swagger.

Application to Relationships and Family – Most Importantly, Communicating and Empathizing

A former company founder trained in pitching and user interviews applies those skills to de-escalating marital spats. By reimagining conversations about mutual goals, then endeavoring to listen more brutally than either of them ever heard as children, the couple is improvising new habits that work for both.

Sneaky and innovative ways to improve yourself

A would-be young professional and former student company operator discovers life hack solutions. Broke and city hopping to the gobs, he's also crafty when it comes to finding a place to stay, networking and finding work — like how startups boot strap themselves into traction.

9.5.3 Developing a Significant and Sustainable Path of Life

Life Design is also a sound frame to adopt for entrepreneurship, which requires exploration, willingness to be gritty and purposeful practice. A good and meaningful life is not scripted; it's a pileup of personal values, energy and impact that you try to live up to."

thrive yourself. So the same way that start-ups go through permutation upon permutation, until they strike upon something known as product–market fit, I believe that life itself can be a market we trade in as individuals: Try things out in your life and iterate once more to find "life–self fit" — practicing what you are and want to be experienced as on any given day.

The trick, they said, is to design on purpose: to prototype experiences and not give up on the work even as feedback comes in; and to constantly seek a balance between what's ambitious and what's sustainable.

Start with Values and Vision

• Grounding in Values

Just as a business starts with vision, people need to be clear about their life's vision, which has to be founded on values. It is the north star of decision making.

• Example: A graduate with a passion for sustainability writes the following aspiration: "To have a job that works to decrease others' impact on the environment and have work life balance." That causes her to seek green energy jobs, not just unstrung high paying ones.

Balance Growth and Stability

• • Burnout Doesn't Have to Be the Price of AmbitionThe fact that the majority of startups fail is not solely because they can't build a product. And people need to determine ways to balance their pursuit of goals with habits that promote health, rest and joy.

• Example in the application: sleep is scheduled as a core part of a packed schedule (of work, family exercise); independent entrepreneur growth stage has internalized understanding that managing energy is critical to sustained impact.

Design Feedback Loops

• Regular Reflection for Course Correction

Create systems for checking in with yourself (quarterly journaling, monthly touch points or accountability groups) to assess how you're doing and pivot if necessary.

• Example App: A customer has a peer-based life design group, which meets once per month and is convened by an observatory. It just happens to be that time when he

realizes the job he's in no longer aligns with his internal compass, and it has become time to see what else out there might be a better fit.

Practice Self-Compassion

• Grace Over Grit

Some of your experiments will fail, and that should be o.k. Rather than beating yourself over the head, empathize with yourself just as you would a frustrated cofounder.

• Application Example: A founder of a start-up has their side project fail and views this as a learning prototype, recognizing the process was one that provided resilience and skills for the next venture.

Align Life with Impact

• Linking What You Do with Larger Change

And there is also sustainable impact in the sense of life path — alignment of work and relations with the difference you are aiming to make in the world.

• Example: An idealistic health care worker who turns her life's work so that she can deliver services and mentor underprivileged students, linking the personal to the professional.

Application-Based Examples

Mid-career engineer with a bad case of wanderlust begins weekend side project by building productivity tool. Motivated by his own passion and satisfaction, he prefers the freedom to find solutions through his own efforts and exits into startups.

Balancing Growth and Well-Being

A shining, ambitious consultant shall be consumed by burnout. To forge that life compass, she draws a few lines: Work four full-throttle days, but save one for personal growth and family. That balance is what will keep her career chugging along.

Aligning Vision with Impact

An artist whose core values include creativity, as well as being a part of a local community, stops seeking attention by just "making" and starts hosting workshops for the kids on his block. There is a connectedness between personal happiness and societal contribution, the road being so "happy and fulfilling one."

"Activity: Life Design Sprint with an Entrepreneurially Driven Approach"

In this exercise, learners will complete a "Life Design Sprint" based on the principles they learned in their MVP Path. They will recognize a personal or career problem and engage the use of entrepreneurial tools: identifying their challenges themselves, ideate

3 solutions, design a small prototype, and seek feedback from peers or mentors. If the challenge is, say, “figuring out what meaningful work is,” that could mean they prototype by standing in someone’s shadow for a day in an industry they like or freelancing for a week. This workout is about helping students learn to think of life decisions not as high-stakes forks in the road but as testable, designable experiments—just like building a product.

9.6 Summary

ϖ Design Thinking belongs not just to product development but also to the design of one’s own life.

ϖ Treating life as a design experience allows for iteration, curiosity and creativity in the face of ambiguity or decision-making.

ϖ Odyssey Mapping:An Odyssey is a journey of exploration, it encourages the individual to investigate myriad possible futures and enables them to move beyond career paths that are linear or pre-defined.

ϖ Reconstruction of life and career adversity creates resilience, adaptability, and optimism for persons to transform their limitations into design possibilities.

ϖ The Personal Compass helps you make decisions that are consistent with your values, purpose and non-negotiables for the more intentional life.

• Entrepreneurial Exposure such as MVP can lead to transferable skills of problem solving, empathy, communication and experimentation.

ϖ Entrepreneurial skills – prototyping, iteration, feedback loops can be used to design a life that matters & works.

ϖ Designing Life is not a discovery of that one “correct” path, but the continual experimenting, refining and alignment of life to Identity and Purpose.

9.7 Key Terms

1. Design Thinking – A human-centered, iterative problem-solving approach focused on empathy, ideation, prototyping, and testing.

2. Odyssey Mapping – A structured exercise that helps individuals visualize and explore multiple 5-year life paths.

3. Reframing – The process of changing how a situation or challenge is perceived in order to discover new solutions or meanings.

4. Constraints – Limitations (financial, personal, social) that when embraced can stimulate creativity and innovation.

5. Personal Compass – A self-designed framework based on values, purpose, and guiding principles that directs decision-making.

6. Prototyping – Creating small, low-risk experiments to test ideas or potential life choices before full commitment.

7. Empathy – The ability to deeply understand another's perspective or one's own needs in a human- centered design process.

8. Transferable Skills – Competencies developed in one domain (e.g., entrepreneurship) that are applicable across life and career contexts.

9. Resilience – The capacity to recover, learn, and grow from adversity or failure.

10. Life Design Sprint – A focused activity using design thinking methods to prototype and test solutions for personal life challenges.

9.8 Descriptive Questions

1. How can Design Thinking be applied to major life and career decisions?

2. Explain the structure and purpose of an Odyssey Map. How does it support non-linear life planning?

3. What is the role of reframing in building psychological resilience during career transitions?

4. Describe how constraints can be leveraged creatively in life design.

5. Define a Personal Compass. What components should it include and how is it used in decision-making?

6. Discuss the emotional and cognitive benefits of prototyping life decisions before committing.

7. How do the skills gained from building an MVP translate into everyday personal decision-making?

8. In what ways can feedback loops be incorporated into personal growth or long-term planning?

9. Explain the importance of aligning personal and professional aspirations in sustaining life satisfaction.

10. How can entrepreneurial reflection lead to a more meaningful and sustainable life path?

9.9 References

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