The Importance of a Furniture Products Roadmap

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Abstract

Products comes in many shapes and forms. It could be a physical object or a service. To develop new products a road map is a vital component to insure the product success, as it makes it clear for the developer and stakeholders to know how to get from one point to the other through the product development life cycle. There are essential components for the roadmap such as Business objectives, Timeframe, Themes and disclaimer. Market research is the corner stone that provides the essential data that outline the characteristics of a product. There are many types of roadmaps each of that type focuses on a certain aspect of the surrounding elements regarding the product. Theme based roadmap; you create it when you are grouping most important features that will be displayed in the future releases. Timed release based on releasing the product with new feature on a schedule. Golden feature roadmap focuses on one important feature in each release, market and strategy roadmap shows what markets you will purse. Visionary roadmap shows how to fit current and future industry trends to product releases. Matrix product roadmaps allow communicating various detail, features, markets, technologies, competitor's products on a time scale. Roadmap as a process consist of certain inputs and outputs. There are two types of road map internal and external, the internal can communicate product visions through the organizational and secure required resources and budget while the external focuses on giving business collaborators a high level over view of the product development plan.

Keywords"

Product, Strategy, Life Cycle, Marketing, RoadMap

Problem of the research

Not having a Clear roadmap for the product affects the outcome in undesirable way, as it will not direct all the invested efforts to the right direction which will probably lead to product failure.

Aim of the research

Is to high light the importance of making a roadmap to ensure a successful new product launch.
Research Hypothesis

To develop successful new product requires a roadmap that link all required processes, by making intensive analysis for the surrounding elements that provides insight to the developer, stakeholders and designer.

Importance of the research

Is to make sure that the investment made to the launch of new products will achieve the desired impact and fulfill company strategies.

Research method

Inductive approach

In an inductive approach to research, a researcher begins by collecting data that is relevant to the topic of interest. Once a substantial amount of data has been collected, the researcher will then take a breather from data collection, stepping back to get a bird's eye view of their data. At this stage, the researcher looks for patterns in the data, working to develop a theory that could explain those patterns. Thus, when researchers take an inductive approach, they start with a set of observations and then they move from those particular experiences to a more general set of propositions about those experiences. In other words, they move from data to theory or from the specific to the general. Figure 01 outlines the steps involved with an inductive approach to research.

Gather Data   >   Look for Patterns   >   Develop Theory

Fig. 1 Inductive approach

Introduction

In today's fast moving world, it's so important to cooperate with the ever changing variables of the market and economy and technology. It is so important to find the right balance between making a product that fulfill the customers need with the right price, correspond to the company investment strategies, and ensure the required return of investment "ROI". We all know that the main aim of any business is to generate money this will happen by providing products that will sell in by covering a large segment of the market. This will only be achieved by having a clear insight of the market by analyzing competition, new trends and keeping up with the new technologies and knowing the customer's needs.

Management, Stakeholders, development teams, designers and manufacturers should align their visions and effort to provide the required resources and it is done by having a clear roadmap that provide the essential main gates and a vision for the product life cycle. Roadmaps provides the manufacturer of insight that allows him to know when to withdraw a product from the market and when to introduce a new one. Roadmap indicates what modifications will be added to the existing products to ensure its existence in the market.

Terms and definitions

Product

is what you deliver to the customer it could be a physical object or a service and it's consider as the value that the customer receives in exchange for money. A product can be physical or virtual. Physical products include durable goods (such as cars, furniture, and computers) and nondurable goods (such as food and beverages). Virtual products are offerings of services or

experiences (such as education and software). A product may be a hybrid and include both physical and virtual elements. Hybrid products are becoming more common, as traditionally analog products are incorporating digital technology as a way to better reach and serve customers.

Customer
In sales, commerce and economics, a customer (sometimes known as a client, buyer, or purchaser) is the recipient of a good, service, product or an idea - obtained from a seller, vendor, or supplier via a financial transaction or exchange for money or some other valuable consideration in simple words, customer is the recipient of the value your product provides.

Stakeholder (corporate)

A group, corporate, organization, member, or system that affect or can be affected by an organization's actions.

What is a roadmap?

A product roadmap describes how you intend to achieve your product vision. It is your vision for how your product will help achieve your organization's strategic goals. A good road map inspires buy-in and over-delivery for your entire organization.

It is easy to think of a road map as a fixed and detailed plan etched in stone-and this is where product people find frustration set in. A traditional roadmap is not flexible enough for the lean agile methods many teams have adopted, and it is often light on the strategic context necessary for teams to understand the overall vision. That is why a relaunch is necessary.

A good Road is not so much as a project plan as it is a strategic communication tool, a statement of intent and direction, it focusses on the value you propose to deliver to your customers and your organization in order to rally support and coordinate efforts among stakeholders it may look simple but it is not easy.

A product roadmap is a plan for how your product is going to meet a set of business objectives. The roadmap details the direction of your product and the work that is required to get there. It is used to communicate the product direction and progress to internal teams and external stakeholders. Roadmaps also allow product teams to assess new requests for functionality against planned work.

Forms of product roadmap

Product roadmap comes in various forms, it's not a single artifact or one peace on paper as its main purpose is to make a clear understanding for all stakeholders about where we are going and why.

See Example Fig 02 Gantt chart, Fig 03 Kanban Board, Fig 03 slides spreadsheets
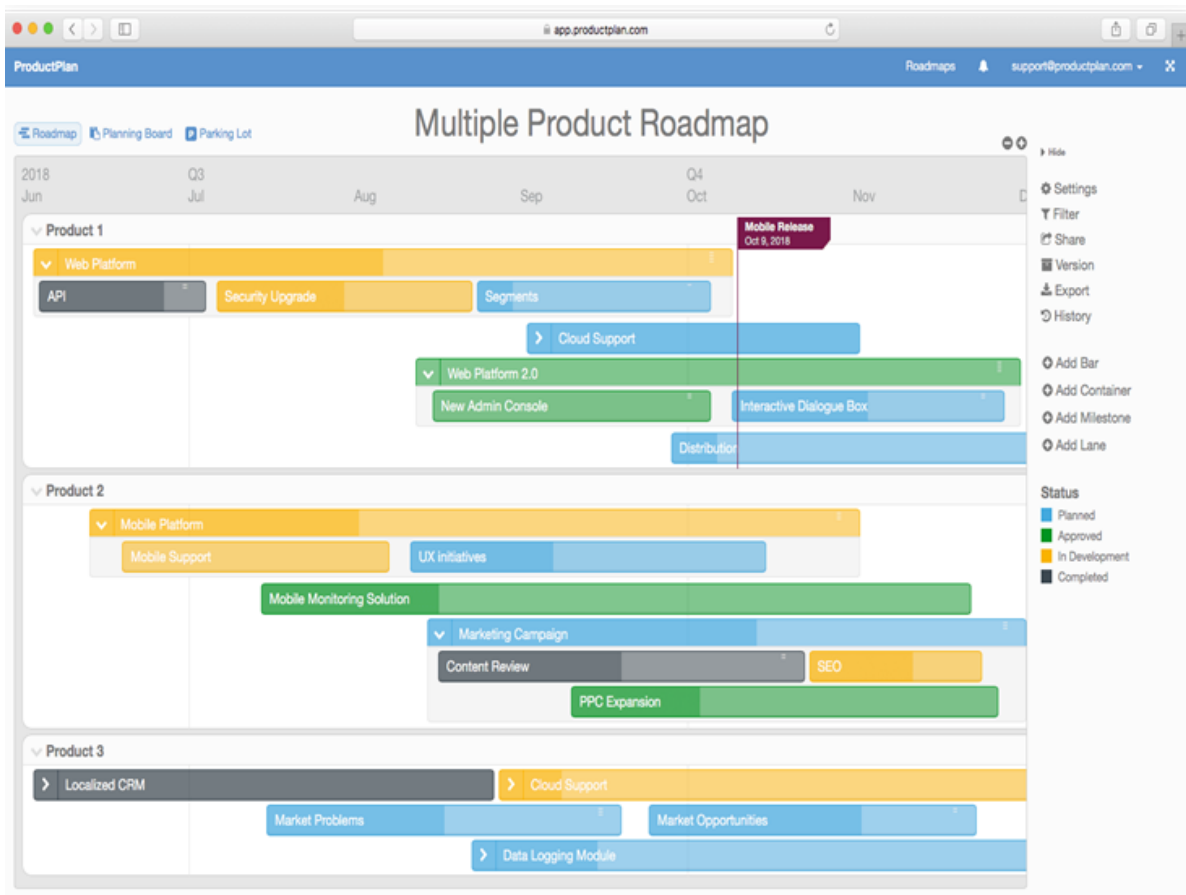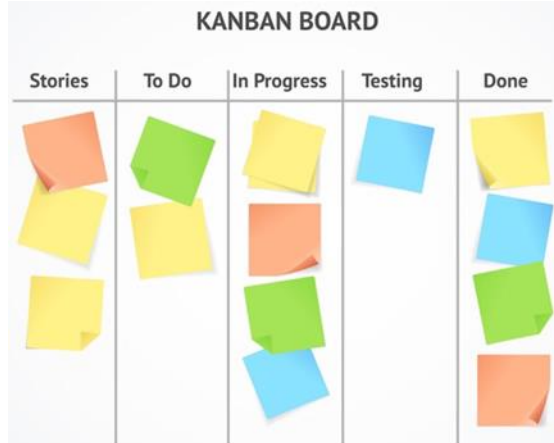
FIG. 2. GANTT CHART

FIG. 3. KANBAN BOARD

FIG. 4. SPREADSHEET

Road Map Components

Product road maps are just a simple chart with dates and features but a document that can effectively rally your troops around a plan needs to be more than that. It needs to tell the story of how product vision will be achieved and to monitor progress

Every product map is different, and how it will look like will depend on what information will be there and to whom. There are essential components to include when making an effective road map. There are primary components and secondary components.

Primary Components

Product Vision

Whether they call it, a mission a vision or purpose organizations usually have guiding principles that offer direction toward proverbial North Star. It is where you show who is going to benefit from the final outcome of the product.

Business objectives

What are the goals your product will accomplish? The outcome? What will be measurably different for your organization? These powerful questions will help you explain the reason of your road map in concrete terms, get stakeholders excited about the future and get the resources you need

Time Frames

Focusing on the dates as the primary measure of success divert attention from the iterative and uncertain process of innovation so critical in new product development. Broad timeframes like calendars, quarters or even now, next, and later, provide guidance and provide more flexibility.

Themes

Themes is the best way to organize the work and deliver it for your teams as it express customers' needs or problems, in particular it is very effective in guiding development of solution when it comes to features and functions.

Disclaimer

Most Roadmaps contains some sort of caveat just to make it clear that the content of the road map is subjected to change without noticing, this protect the product manager from any broken promises. It also makes it clear to the customer that change is possible and likely to happen.

Types of roadmaps

There are two types of road maps internal and external both serve a purpose. The primary internal objective of a road map is to gain organizational alignment so that resources and budget allocations can be planned to enable effective execution. The main components of the product roadmap consist of 1) a defined time frame, 2) a solid understanding of market events or deadlines that will drive deliverables, such as the underlying sales cycle or product seasonality, 3) specific product, product capabilities, or theme based over a period of time, and 4) associated development activities or resources impacted or requirement.

The internal product roadmap may also be the result of, or heavily influenced by, the product definition some project plan activities for the current release. Very often, the desired scope of envisioned capabilities to be delivered, in the current targeted time frame, fare exceed the team's human resources or budget, and so a prioritization exercise will be needed for what is delivered now –versus what can be deferred. Required prioritization may go so far as to further define a set of phases for future work, which become additional short term and possibly longer-term aspect of roadmap.

For the industries or products, especially those sold business to business, an external version of the roadmap may be required for customers. This is often the case where product affects a major operation or a strategic capability of the purchasing company. Customers typically want to be sure that the organization will continue to invest in the product, and product roadmap are often used as a means to measure the pace of investment.

External version typically contain much less detail than the internal roadmap and can be much less committal on specific dates. The most common representation depicts a high-level set of planned release milestones, in presentation slid format, and often used to support internal or external communication- generally face to face.

Product managers need to exercise caution when it comes to developing, executing and communicating aspects of a product external roadmap. It is wise to embed a disclaimer that the information represented is the best view of the product's direction given current information and it is subjected to change without notice. Many customers perceive the roadmap as a commitment and if the direction changes, it can cause some difficult situations to be ensued.

The second caution is that roadmap information is confidential and not to be disclosed. Even when roadmaps are clearly labeled confidential. Expect that elements of the information will "somehow" end up in the hands of the competition.

The last caution relates to distribution across the sales channel. The external document should not be freely disbursed, but tightly controlled by the product management organization. It is not uncommon for the sales channel to latch onto ''selling'' future capabilities of the current product, and the roadmap becomes the reason to initiate a new conversation with customer.

Commonly used road maps

There are many types of road maps that fit different products, below are some suggestions to how to present your vision and strategy for both your team and stakeholders:

Theme-based product Road map

You create this road map by grouping your potential prioritized feature list into themes Fig 5,6. With a theme-based roadmap, the product team groups its goals and plans into high-level strategic categories on the roadmap called themes.

Using this top-down approach, the team will prioritize, at most, a few major themes on its roadmap. Under each theme, the roadmap will include one or more epics (bodies of work to serve the theme). Each epic will consist of the relevant features and stories needed to complete that epic.

Theme-based road maps are useful because they help keep your product from feature creep, where stakeholders constantly want to add new features. Using themes allows you to decide whether to add a feature, based on whether it is related to the theme or not.
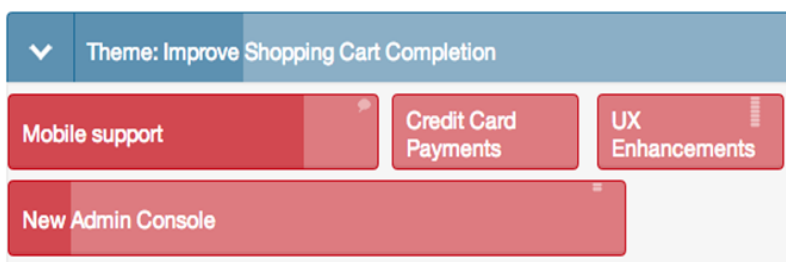

FIG. 5. THEME BASED ROADMAP, EXP. 01   **FIG. 6. THEME BASED ROADMAP EXP.02**

Timed Release product road map

The concept behind this type is to launch the new versions of the product on a consistent schedule that does not change. For example, the company will release a new product every six month to do that the company will have to plan ahead the features that they will include in the

new product with the period set fourth and if a feature does not make it in this launch, it simply goes into the next launch. It works well if the team is doing agile development. Example fig 7
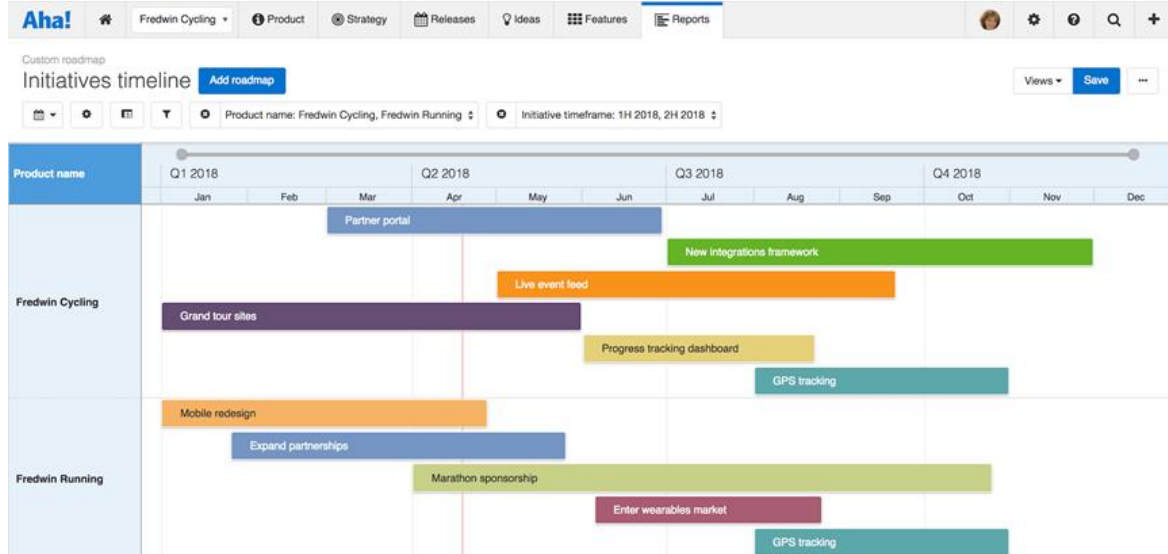

Fig7. Time Release Roadmap

Golden feature roadmap

The focus in this road map is on one important feature in each release, the new release cannot be released until the golden feature is released. This feature can be accompanied with other minor features this is a good strategy because it provides focus for product development and make a very clear marketing message. See fig 08
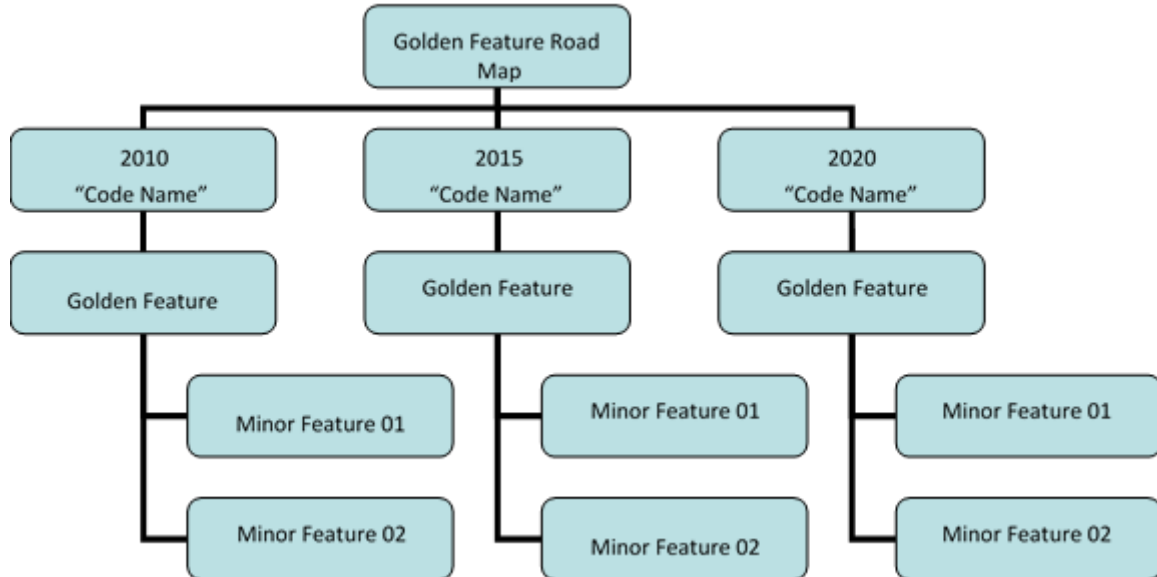

Fig. 8. Golden Feature Roadmap

Example for a furniture with a golden feature

DE-CI Furniture Company Base in Cairo, Egypt introduced the market with a smart table named the "Dot-table" what makes it different is that it combines smart feature that without it's just an ordinary table. See Fig 09

Fig. 09.DE-CI Dot Table

The smart feature included

- USB Charging port
- Wireless charging
- Adjustable height
- Integrated Speakers
- Ambient Lighting
- Temperature Sensors
- Humidity Sensors
- Battery Reserve
- Voice Assistant

Market and strategy road map

This Roadmap helps paint a picture of what markets you will be pursuing and how you will do so. They can help you align resources across the company and obtain funding for all the work that needs to be done. See Fig 10

	Year one	Year two
Markets	Health care	Financial Manufacturing
Partner	XYZ Company	
Build in-House		2.X Release
Acquire		Data Analytics

Fig. 10. Market and strategy Roadmap

Visionary Roadmap

Visionary roadmap allows for painting a broad-brush view that shows industry trends and how they fit into the long-term vision for your product or products. This type of road map provides few details but link industry trends to your product's evolution over time to create a picture of

where you are heading. Visionary road maps give the context and reason for particular product choices. See Fig 11
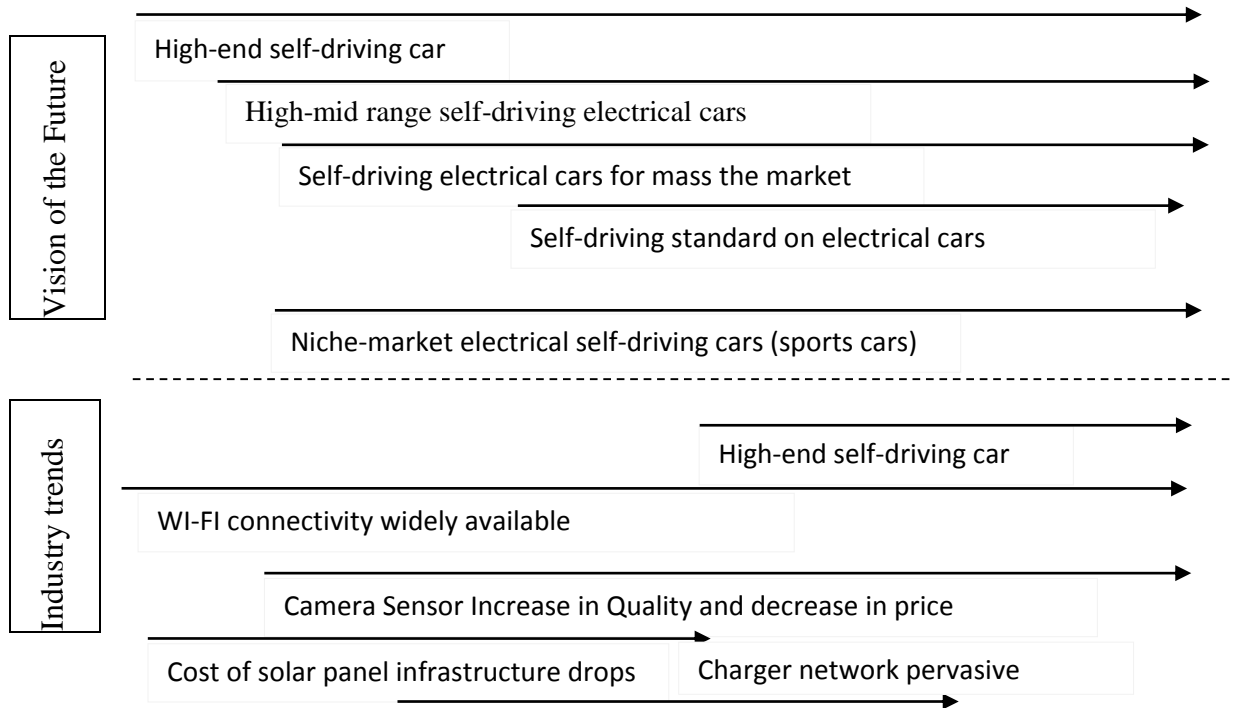
Vision of the Future

High-end self-driving car

High-mid range self-driving electrical cars

Self-driving electrical cars for mass the market

Self-driving standard on electrical cars

Niche-market electrical self-driving cars (sports cars)

Industry trends

High-end self-driving car

WI-FI connectivity widely available

Camera Sensor Increase in Quality and decrease in price

Cost of solar panel infrastructure drops   Charger network pervasive

Fig.11 , Visionary Roadmap

Matrix product Road Maps

Matrix Product roadmaps like in the figure below allow you to communicate information about many products and the corresponding details. They show what will be released when, the targeted market, and the competitor and technology trends. If you are briefing marketing, or even the entire company, the matrix product road map allows everyone involved to understand the context of how a set off products comes to market, each department is more capable with its job when it understands the whole picture of how and when a product is coming to the market. See Fig 12

Quarterly and Two Year Matrix Road Map

	Q1 2010	Q2 2010	Q3 2010	Q4 2010	2011	2012
Code Name or product Name						
Target Market						
Major Features or Theme						

Technology Trends						
Competitor's Products						

Fig. 12. Matrix product Roadmap

Roadmap inputs and outputs

The roadmap is a process of inputs and outputs presented as the following: See Fig 13

INPUTS	OUTPUTS
*Product vision/strategy *Product requirement or product backlog (alternate Agile approach) *Development Plan	*Internal product roadmap *External product roadmap (Optional)

Fig. 13. Roadmap Process inputs and outputs

Results of the study

According to the study the importance of the Roadmap was revealed and the result are as the following:

-Product roadmap acts as a bridge between the product vision and strategy and it links all the stages to give the developer an over view of the product development and how it will reach in the future state.

-Product roadmap is a living document and interactive plan, its components are flexible to change as per the surroundings that affect the product, this changes could be related to market demand, technological advancement, adaptation of a new strategy, new production technology…etc.

-Product roadmaps could be for a short term or long term depending on the type of the product and the type of market it serves.

-Product roadmaps could be for one or multiple products linked in a strategic value.

-The primary objective of roadmap activities is to gain organizational alignment so that resources and budget allocation can be planned to enable effective execution.

-The Main Components of the Roadmap consists of; Product Vision that include a solid understanding of the market and deadlines that drive the deliverables such as underlying sales cycles and seasons. Business objectives that shows what will be different in this product and to get all the stakeholders excited to secure the required resources and activities. Timeframe that focuses on the dates. Themes that defines the product capabilities over time. Disclaimer to make sure that everyone on board understands that this plan is flexible and is subjected to change.

The internal product roadmap may also be the result of, or heavily influenced by the product definition and project plan activities for the current release. Very often the desired scope of envisioned capabilities to be delivered in the current time target far exceed the team's human resources or budget, and so a prioritization exercise will be needed for what is delivered now versus what can be deferred.

For some industries an external roadmap is required to communicate the future vision of the company with other business partners but this kind of roadmaps are usually high level and does not include any binding dates.

There are several types of roadmaps, which communicates the product vision and development over a certain period and show how the surrounding factors will be adopted in the product new releases. The type will be selected according to the product nature and plan of the product that show for how many years the product will be in the market, what major themes and features should be added to the product.

Conclusion

Roadmap is a vital document that ensure that all stakeholders internal and external are on the same page, and are aware of the high-level plan for the product, which is vital to allocate required resources in advance, it is important to choose the right type of format of roadmap according to the product nature and business strategies.

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