

ROADMAP PRIORITIZATION



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INTRODUCTION

Before a startup writes their first line of code or wires their first capacitor to a breadboard they must decide what functionality will exist in the beta version or prototype. In doing so, numerous trade-offs must be assessed. In fact, this activity of prioritizing the product roadmap never ends.

This assignment is designed to help you apply two different methods to prioritize the features for the first/next version of your product.

Prerequisite Content: *This assignment leverages content viewed in the video titled "Tools for Focus and Priority".*

RECAPPING KEY CONCEPTS

Since prioritizing a product roadmap is all about assessing trade-offs, the two methods described in the video and used for this workshop represent methodical ways of conducting such an assessment. Just remember that this is not an analytical exercise with points values assessed and weighted average calculations. Rather, the two methods are simply tools for helping the management team see things more clearly to help make difficult trade-off decisions.

PRIORITY CATEGORIES

This method starts with business-related priorities such as winning more deals, improving gross profit margins, increasing scalability or reducing customer churn. The various possible features, capabilities and engineering efforts are put into these categories. Just remember that sometimes you have to take a couple of steps to figure out the proper category. For example, an engineering effort that improves product stability will make customers happier, which in turn reduces churn.

- It is possible that a specific feature, capability or engineering effort could help achieve multiple business priorities
- The various priority categories don't necessarily carry equal priority. Therefore, the objective is not to select a specific number of features from each category to derive your roadmap.

TRADE-OFF MATRIX

This method uses an X-Y grid to help visualize specific trade-offs between two variables. The most common variable used are as follows:

- **Value** – revenue potential or competitive differentiation
- **Effort** – resources or time

- **Risk** – of being able to accomplish per the desired specification

Features, capabilities and engineering efforts are then placed onto the grid. Additionally, to get even more complete visibility or help with difficult debates, it is possible to use more than one grid, each trading off different variables. This can be especially helpful for the “tough debates” (see graphic below).

The following grid example demonstrates the way to evaluate the various quadrants when value and required effort are evaluated against each other.



DON'T FORGET THE SANITY CHECKS

- **Functioning Product?**
If you just scoped your first release (MVP or V1.0) and you only deliver the features you prioritized using the above exercises, will your product be functional?
- **Logical?**
Whether you just scoped your first release or an enhancement release (ie – v2.0), will the new features make sense if released together? There might be some features that didn't rank high on the priority scale but, if combined with a feature that did, make for a much more impactful marketing story and customer experience.

ASSIGNMENT

1. Using the template provided (or your own version), identify at least 3 business-related priorities and place at least 10 product features, capabilities or engineering efforts into the appropriate category.
 - Decide if any of the business-related priorities are more important than the others
 - Highlight the features or efforts that initially seem high priority for the first/next version of your product

2. Using the template provided (or your own version), select two variables and create a trade-off grid. Place the same 10 product features, capabilities and engineering efforts onto the grid.
 - Highlight the features or efforts that initially seem high priority for the first/next version of your product. If your selections are different than when you used the priority category method, reconcile to come up with your final proposed priorities for the first/next version of your product.
 - If necessary to assist the debate, create a second grid that introduces a different variable.
3. If any feature or effort on your final list is optional (ie – nice to have), notate it as such

ADDITIONAL READING MATERIAL TO SUPPORT THIS ASSIGNMENT

- Article: "[Prioritizing Your Product Roadmap](#)"

POST-ASSIGNMENT RECOMMENDATION

One More Sanity Check – Cycle Time

After selecting your list of prioritized features and doing the first two sanity checks mentioned above, determine how long it will take to deliver everything on the list. Assuming the answer is longer than you can afford to wait, decide if anything can be dropped from the list for this particular version. This is a common dilemma that every product manager and/or engineering leader goes through.

On-Going Exercise

At a minimum, conduct an exercise such as this each time your engineering team is approaching the end of a given product release in order to maintain momentum. Better yet, each time you prioritize a specific product release, spend a little time initially prioritizing the next release after that. Things will change by the time you actually start working on that next release but allowing the engineering team to understand what is possible/likely to come next might affect the way they implement features and capabilities for the near-term release.

See templates on the following pages

PRIORITY CATEGORIES

TRADE-OFF GRID

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PRIORITIZED FEATURES, CAPABILITIES, EFFORTS

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____
11. _____
12. _____
13. _____
14. _____
15. _____