What´s Hot in Product Roadmapping?

Key Practices and Success Factors

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Abstract: **Context:** Organizations are increasingly challenged by dynamic and technical market environments. Traditional product roadmapping practices such as detailed and fixed long-term planning typically fail in such environments. Therefore, companies are actively seeking ways to improve their product roadmapping approach. **Goal:** This paper aims at identifying problems and challenges with respect to product roadmapping. In addition, it aims at understanding how companies succeed in improving their roadmapping practices in their respective company contexts. **Method:** We conducted semi-structured expert interviews with 15 experts from 13 German companies and conducted a thematic data analysis. **Results:** The analysis showed that a significant number of companies is still struggling with traditional feature-based product-roadmapping and opinion-based prioritization of features. The most promising areas for improvement are stating the outcomes a company is trying to achieve and making them part of the roadmap, sharing or co-developing the roadmap with stakeholders, and establishing discovery activities.

This summary refers to the paper *What´s Hot in Product Roadmapping? Key Practices and Success Factors* [MTL19c]. This paper was published as full research paper in the Proceedings of the International Conference on Product-Focused Software Process Improvement (PROFES).

Keywords: Product management, Product roadmap, Roadmapping, Product discovery, Innovation

1   Problem Statement and Objective

In general, the purpose of a roadmap is to provide essential understanding, proximity, direction and some degree of certainty regarding the planning of a journey [KS01]. Currently, the product roadmaps of many organizations cover long time horizons and concrete products, features or services together with precise release dates. This approach works well in market environments that are predictable, stable and reliable. However, through increasing market dynamics, rapidly evolving technologies and shifting user expectations, coupled with the adoption of lean and agile practices, it becomes almost impossible to predict which products, features or services will satisfy the needs of the customers and the organization. Thus, companies are increasingly struggling with their ability to create reliable product roadmaps. It seems that the traditional process of product roadmap creation does

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not fulfil its purpose anymore [MTL19b]. The goal of our research is to identify currently applied practices, challenges and success factors with respect to product roadmapping. It also aims at understanding how companies succeed in improving their roadmapping practices in their respective company contexts.

2 Results

Our study revealed that those companies that have already implemented fairly modern product roadmapping practices treat different timeframes differently with respect to the detailing level and the type of items in the roadmap. Companies that show a high level of successful product roadmapping are able to change or update their roadmaps in a way that stakeholders trust these changes and can reliably use the roadmap for their tasks. Frequent ad hoc adjustments usually occur in organizations where products or features are planned in detail over a long-time horizon. This typically leads to a decrease in reliability and trustworthiness of the roadmap. Reliability and trust can be seen as indispensable for the acceptance and successful usage of a product roadmap. Many companies have already a good understanding of success factors for roadmapping processes in dynamic environments, but they are currently struggling with overcoming key challenges. The findings of this study have been used by the authors to develop the so-called DEEP product roadmap maturity model with which practitioners can assess their current product roadmapping practices and identify potentials for an effective improvement of their product roadmapping practices [MTL19a].

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