# Navigating the twilight zone
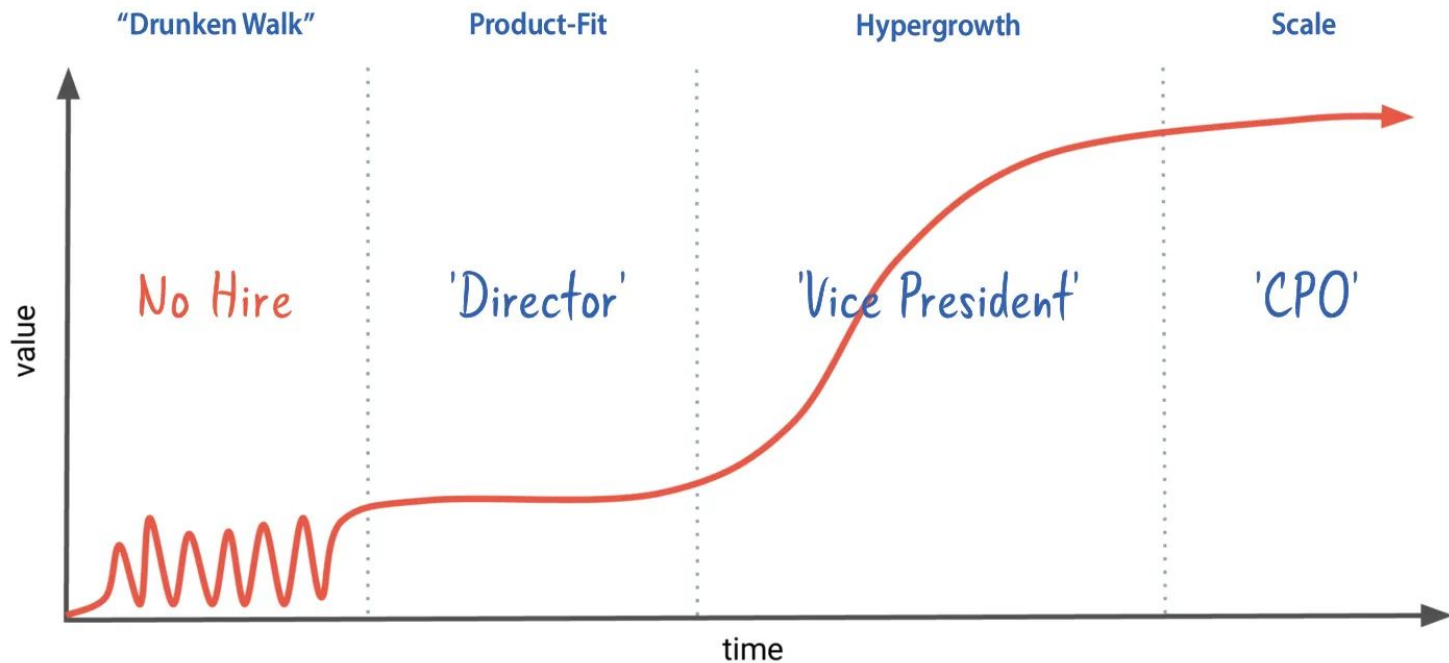
Susana Lopes
@susanavlopes

ProductTank Brighton
6th Oct 2022

# Product leadership changes with each phase



By Nikhyl Singhal in The Skip

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# Product leadership changes with each phase

| | Director | Vice President | Chief Product Officer |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Stage** | Recent product-market fit ("Series A", ~20 engineers) | Early hypergrowth ("Series B", 30-50 engineers) | Mid hypergrowth ("Series C", 50+ engineers) |
| **PM Leader's Obsession** | Product details and customers | Scaling company and PM org | Innovation, expanding product line Hiring executives |
| **Deliver** | Predictable process, roadmap | PM organization running planning | New products adjacent to market leading ones |
| **Team size & leadership** | PMs: 3-5 PMs No managers, Director manages ICs | PMs: 6-10 PMs VP manages 2-3 Mgr/Dirs | PMs: 15+ PMs CPO manages 3+ PM Dir/VPs Might manage other functions |
| **Expertise** | Introduce PM function to company Product execution Recruiting, managing small team | Hiring and team building Annual planning Contributions to Executive team | Innovation at scale Changing culture that "works" Managing execs, non-PMs |

By Nikhyl Singhal in The Skip
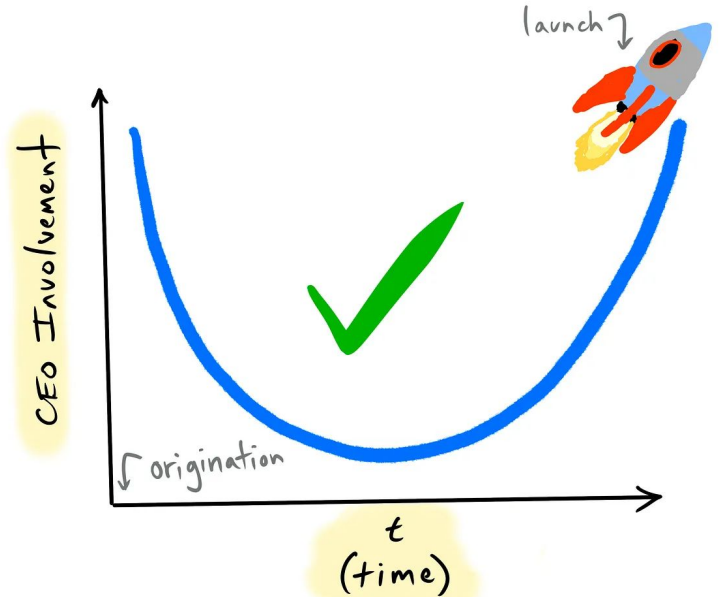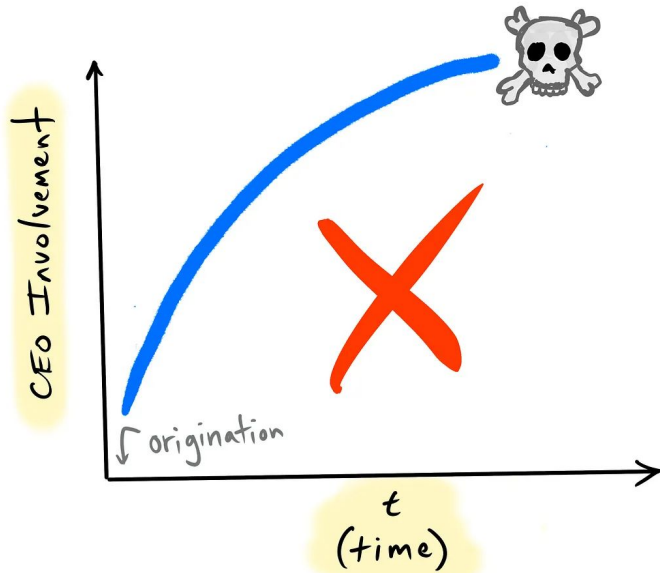
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# Start-up VP // Director of Product

- Good at going from 0 to $20MM

- Coaching teams, setting up processes

- Still executing

- Huge founder dynamics

- Product Strategy is finding product/market fit, rapid experimentation

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# Founder-PM fit

# "You're shopping for founders."

Quote by Lindsey Jayne

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# Founder involvement

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# Delegation poker



Delegation poker by management 3.0

# Core product management activities

Product vision

Product strategy

Problem discovery and validation

Problem prioritisation

Solution discovery and validation

Delivery execution
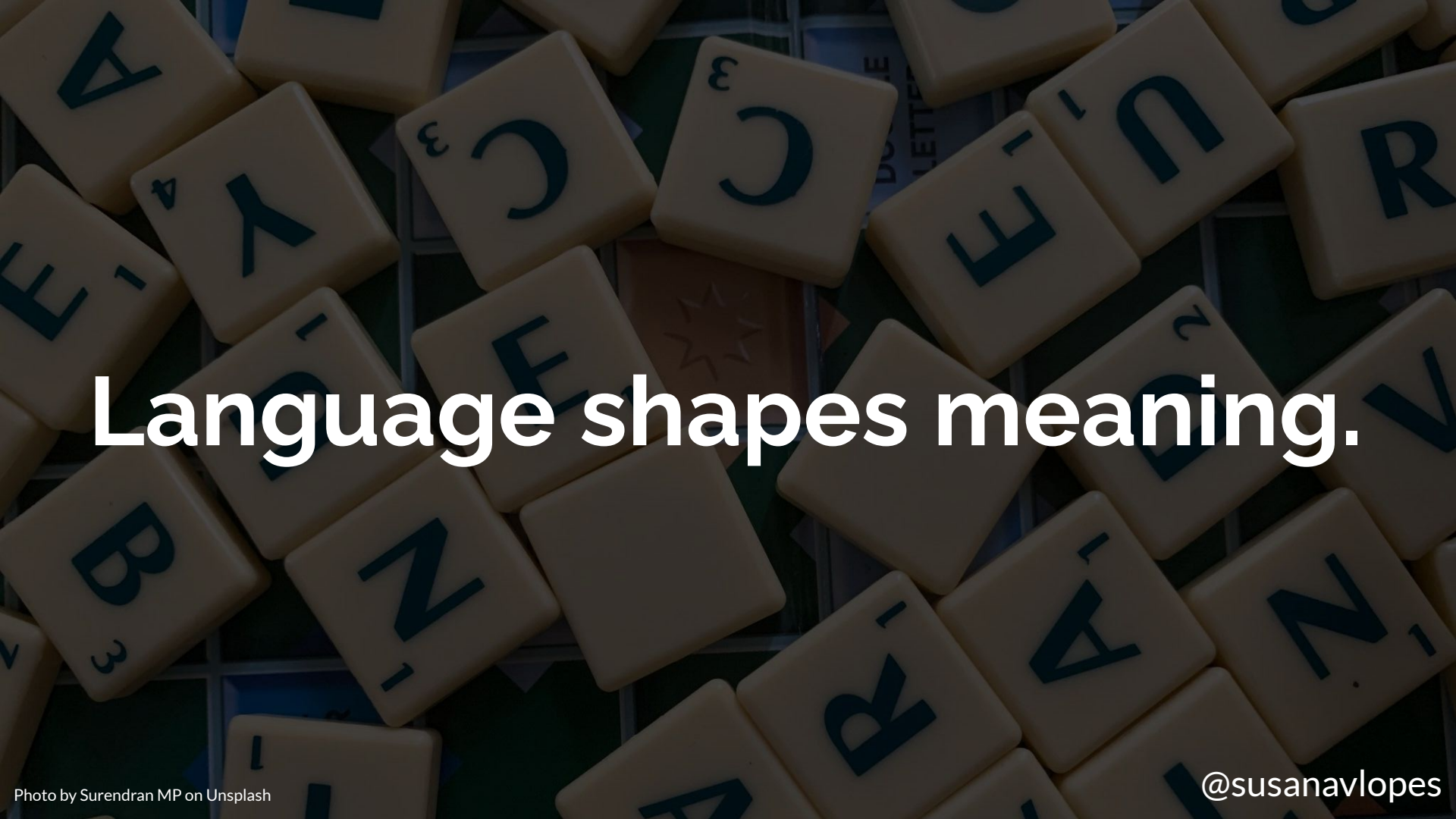
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# Are your values aligned?

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# Finding your leadership voice to ensure cultural fit

- What are your values as a leader?

- What am I strong in?

- What am I committed to?

- What do I believe in?

- What won't I compromise on?

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# Shared vision

# My PM doesn't get it.

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# Language shapes meaning.

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Extract the vision From their head

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Past decisions have the vision baked in

Photo by Fermin Rodriguez on Unsplash

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# Vision artifacts or *"Visiontyping"*



### Written narrative

Press Release FAQ [on Medium](on Medium).



### Storyboarding

Airbnb [storyboarding](storyboarding) for host experience



### Video

Google's [Tilt Brush](Tilt Brush) Vision Video

# A vision provides meaning

Work through these questions with your founder:

- What change in the world do you hope this product will bring about?

- What makes you proud/will make you proud to work on this product?

- What's the most rewarding part of what you get to do?

# A vision changes the world

- What is the product's significant purpose that will motivate team members on a deeper, intrinsic level?

- What impact will our product have on affecting positive change in the world, or reducing negative change?

- How might our product be remembered by our grandkids' generation? What mark will we leave?

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# Vision Sprint

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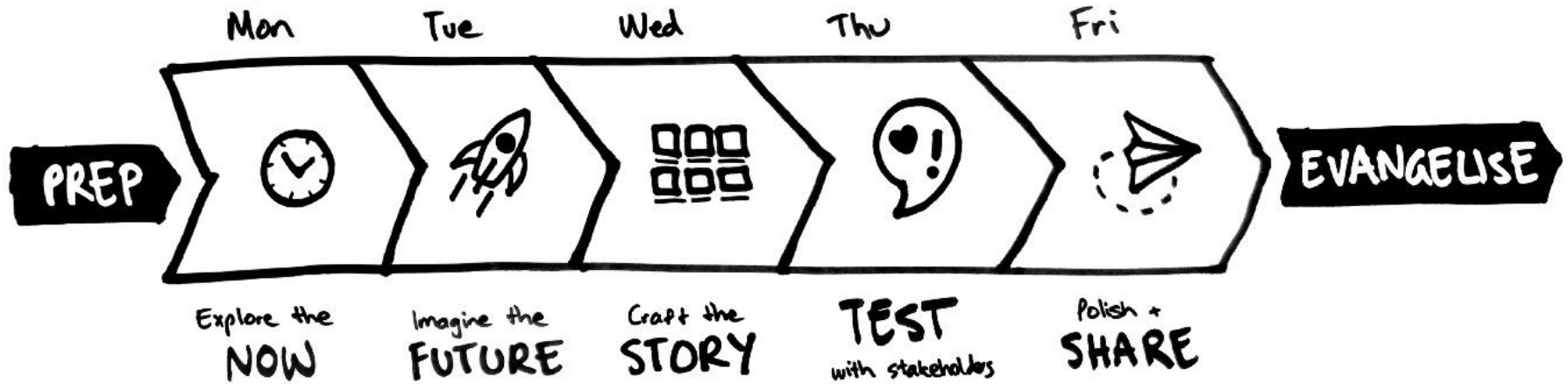
# A Visiontype enables

- Validating value of / demand testing the vision with customers and prospects
- Selling the vision to investors
- Sharing the vision with customers rather than the roadmap
- Informs overall architecture strategy

Though you can't validate feasibility and usability, as it's too zoomed out. The teams will do that work at a smaller scale.

# Surviving the ride

# In early stage SaaS, product strategy is the business strategy

# Time is always running out.

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# Dealing with the short fuse

- Inherent uncertainty about what is the best strategy.

- Optimise for speed of learning.

- Co-create roadmap with founder.

- Roadmap needs to be *short*!

- Be clear on timeframes for different bets.

# Founders might not agree. It's not your job to mediate.

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Expect the founder to change their mind.

Photo by Nathan Dumlao on Unsplash

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# Understand the change

- What context are you missing? What's changed for the founder?

- Start ups are very vulnerable to signals the market values.

- What *proof points* does the market need?

    ○ Growth? Margins?
    ○ Frequency of transactions?
    ○ Larger total addressable market (TAM)?
    ○ What bets is the founder raising on?

**Proof points work**

**Core vision work**

# Navigating the Twilight Zone

- Assess PM-Founder fit: on ways of working and values

- Your number one job is to get the vision out of the founder's head

- Your second job is to get a clarity on the business strategy from the e-team

- Co-create the roadmap, and keep it short term

- Be ready to bin it based on new market signals

# Navigating the twilight zone

Susana Lopes
@susanavlopes

Slides: susanavideiralopes.com/writing