

# Building Product Teams That Exceed Expectations

St. Louis Product Management Group - Jan 28, 2026

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When teams are **Empowered** and **Aligned**,  
they exceed expectations

# Defining the Terms

## Empowered

- Teams have authority to make decisions
- Ownership over how objectives are achieved
- Autonomy over roadmap and execution
- Accountability for outcomes, not just delivery

## Aligned

- Work ladders up to company goals
- Clear agreement on the most important problems to solve
- Shared understanding of priorities and tradeoffs
- Objectives are visible and reinforced across teams

# About Me



- 25 years experience building products
- 2 acquisitions & one IPO
- Company sizes from 15 to 50,000
- Product team sizes from one to a dozen
- Software Developer → Product Manager → Director of Product

# Career Timeline



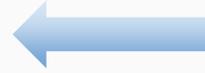
BS Computer Science



Software Developer  
Product Manager  
**\*Acquisition\***



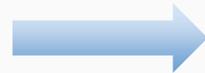
Adjunct Instructor



Product Manager



Product Manager  
**\*Acquisition\***



Director of Product  
**\*IPO\***



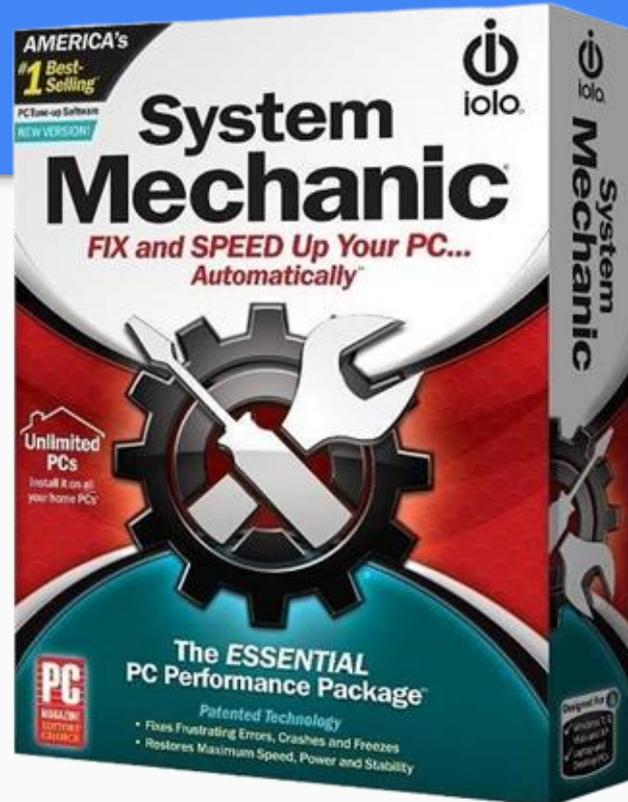
Director of Product



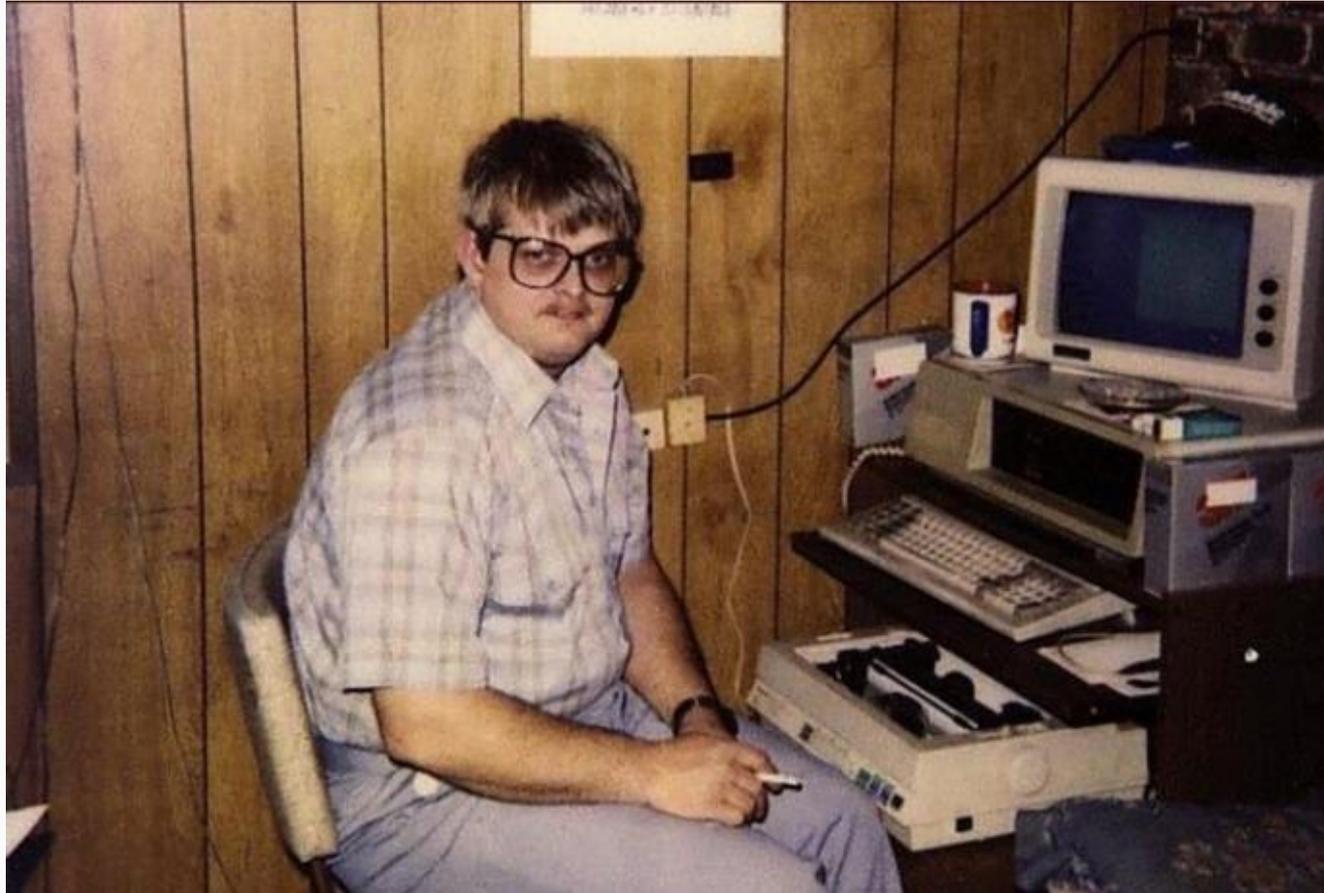


# iolo Technologies

- System utilities
- 2005 - 2014
- Founder owned
- Acquired in 2013
- 25 - 100 people
- B2C and B2B



## Early Product Market Fit



## Expanding Our Market



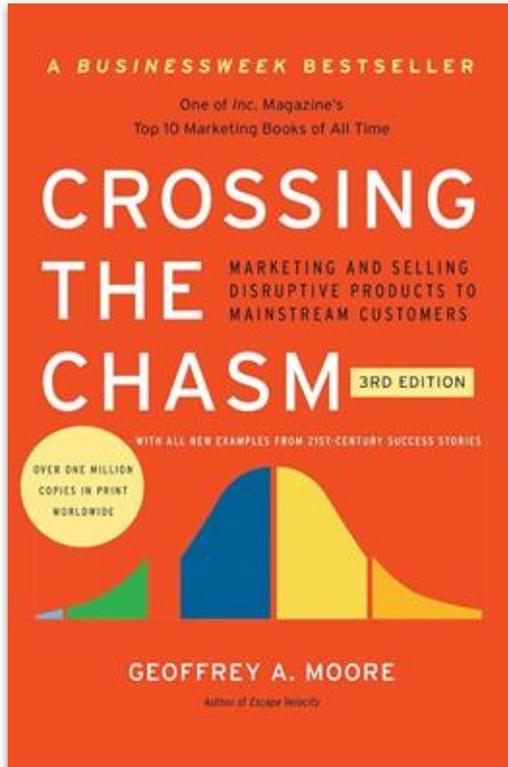


# Aisle411

- Indoor location for venues
- Walgreens, Toys R Us
- Failed pivot to Augmented Reality
- 2014 - 2017
- Dissolved in ~2018
- 15 people
- B2B



# Aisle411 Never Crossed the Chasm





# Label Insight

- Product attribution for CPG
- Data as a Service
- Walmart, Target, Instacart, FDA
- 2018 - 2021
- Acquired in 2021
- 100 people
- B2B



# Aisle411 and Label Insight Shared a Common Problem

## Retailers



- ✓ Product Market Fit
- ⊖ Big Budgets

## CPGs



- ⊖ Product Market Fit
- ✓ Big Budgets

# An Unexpected Accelerant

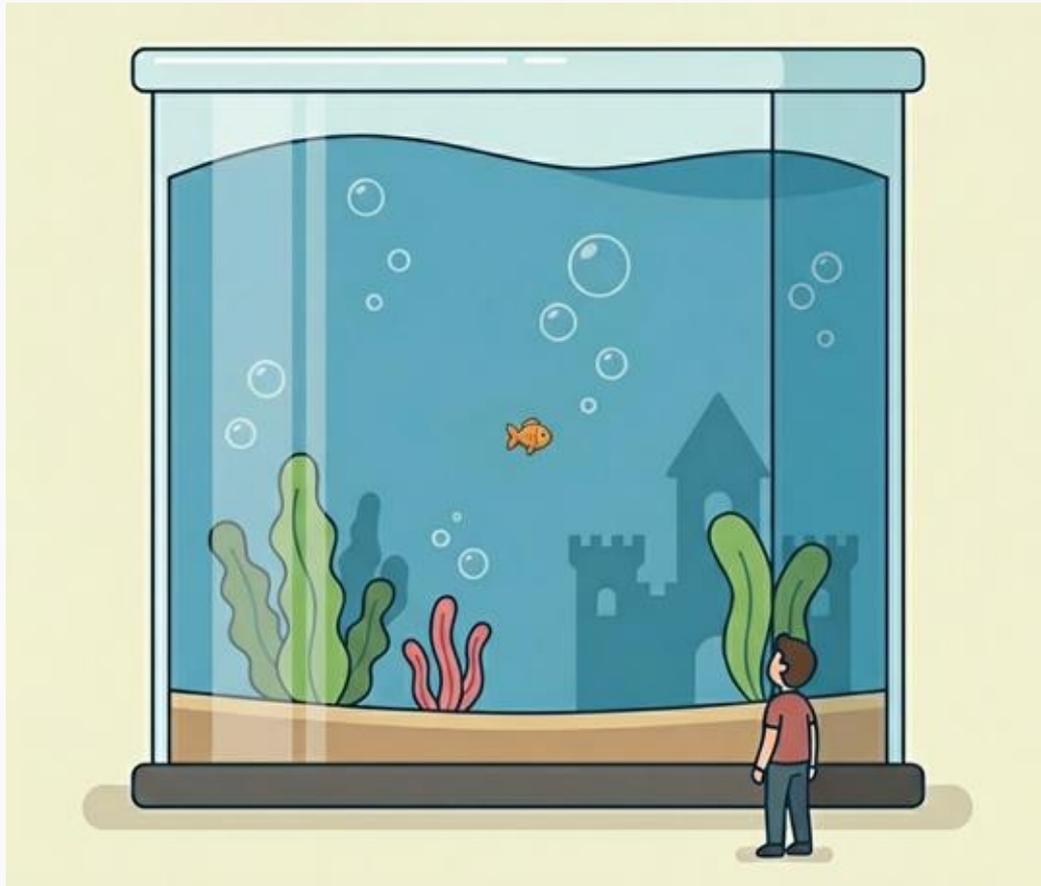


# NIQ

- Retail analytics
- Data as a Service
- Acquired Label Insight in 2021
- 2021 - 2025
- Global
- 50,000 people
- B2B
- IPO in 2025



# Finding Our Fit





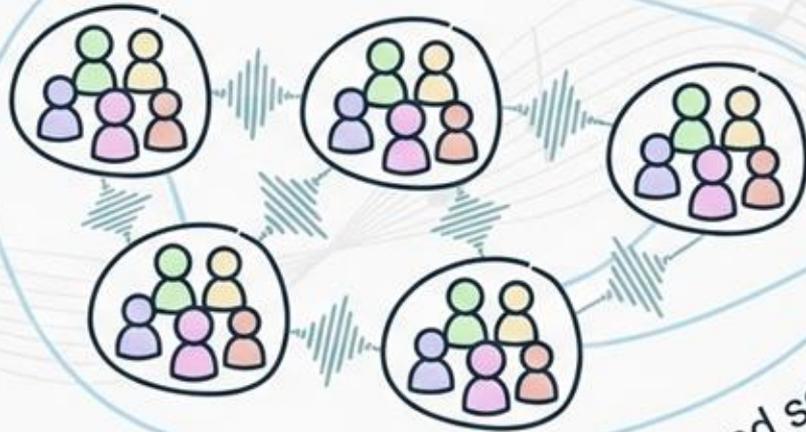
# KNOWiNK

- Elections Tech
- #1 electronic poll book
- 2025 - present
- 160 people



# Lessons Learned





Loosely coupled, Tightly aligned squads



# Unempowered Teams Become Delivery Machines Instead of Problem Solvers

NIQ



# Empowered Teams Drift Without Alignment



NIQ



When Teams Are **Empowered** and **Aligned**, They Exceed Expectations

NIQ



Achieve

**50%**

Automation by  
EOY





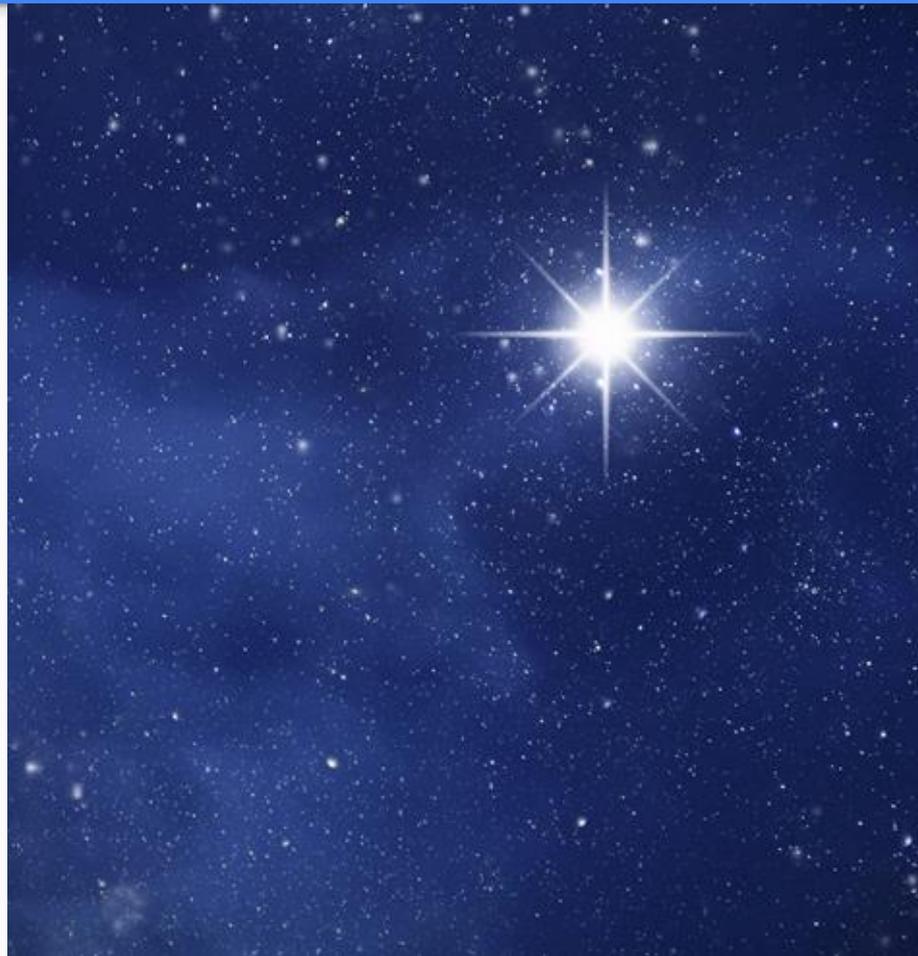
What do these have in common?



# How I Build High Performing Teams

## North Stars for Focus

- Objectives guide autonomous decisions
- Prevent teams from optimizing for the wrong problems
- Use **OKRs** or **OGSM** as teams scale



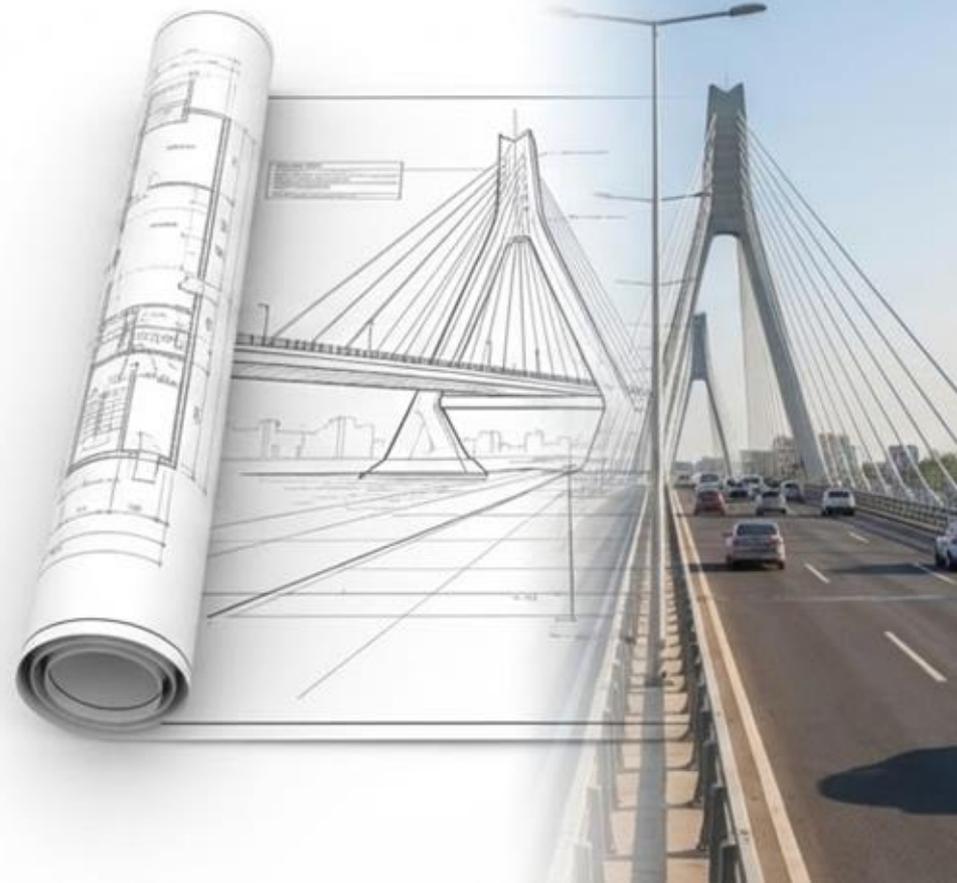
# Roadmaps Drive Impact, Not Features

- Align roadmap items to business outcomes
- Avoid over-planning too far ahead
- Adapt as priorities change



## Say / Do: Are We Delivering What We Planned?

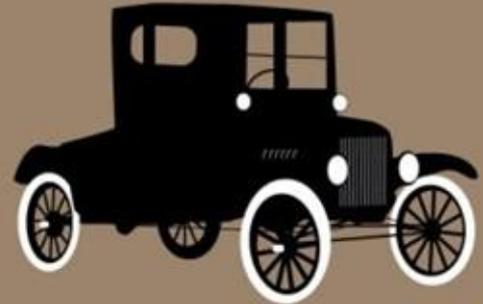
- Compare planned outcomes vs delivered outcomes
- Simple metrics keep teams accountable
- Reveals effectiveness of planning and execution



- Small durable teams with deep problem understanding
- End-to-end ownership
- Autonomy over roadmap and execution

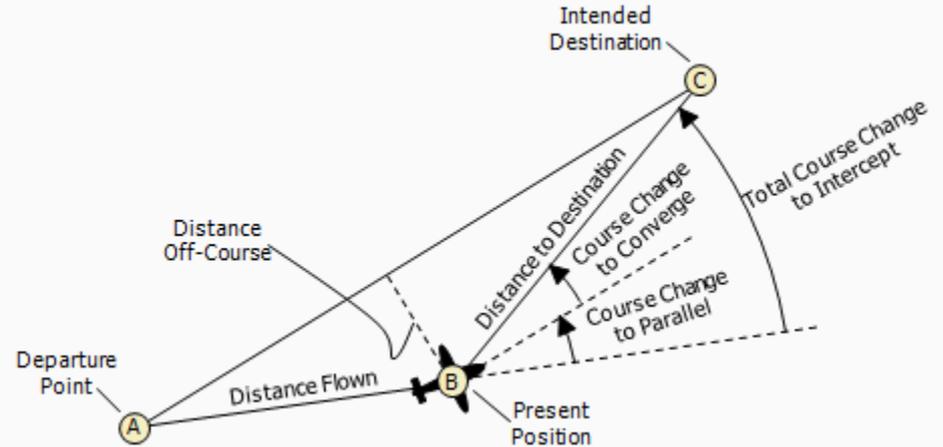
**IF I HAD ASKED MY  
CUSTOMERS WHAT  
THEY WANTED, THEY  
WOULD HAVE SAID A  
FASTER HORSE.**

- Henry Ford



# Stay on Track with Constant Feedback

- Regular stakeholder and customer input
- Early signals for course correction
- Prevents priority drift



# Key Takeaways



Questions?