




## DEMYSTIFYING THE PRODUCT AND PLATFORM MINDSET

### Abstract

The transformation of enterprises to platform-driven, product-led, and user-centric organizations calls for changes across several levels. These include change in organizational structure, team taxonomy, governance focus and approach, as well as engineering philosophy and methods. For a successful transition, the changes must also cover the underlying ways of working adopted by teams along with their mindset.

This viewpoint examines the platform-product mindset and discusses key practices that can help teams evolve for this cultural shift.



The Need For Enterprises To Become Customer-Centric, Product-Led, And Platform-Driven	03
Paving The Way For Change	03
Demystifying The Product And Platform Mindset	04
Pillars Of The Product And Platform Mindset	04
1. Solve Customer Problems	05
2. Focus On Time-To-Value	06
3. Own It, End-To-End	07
4. Innovate And Evolve	08
Summary Of Characteristics	10
Conclusion	11
References	12



## The Need for Enterprises to Become Customer-centric, Product-led, and Platform-driven

Enterprises across the globe are accelerating their digital journeys to compete with digital natives. There is also an urgency to transform their offerings and ways of working, along with adoption of AI, in order to become more agile and derive greater value from their investments.

Over the years, technology has been more of an enabler rather than a mainstream business driver. Hence, technology investments were often unaligned with business imperatives, which led to sub-optimal value realization. Today, as technology adoption (specifically AI-led digital technology) gains centerstage, it is delivering on its promise and helping enterprises achieve better business outcomes.

But, to reap the rewards, enterprises must evolve. To truly unlock the AI advantage, they must transform into customer-centric, product-led, and platform-driven enterprises. Here is why:

- Today's consumers want businesses to know them, be where they are, and respond quickly to their needs, passions, and pains with empathy. This presents an opportunity for organizations to use AI when designing customer experiences and become **customer-centric**.
- Customer-centric organizations must rapidly innovate and iterate to respond to customer demands quickly. This calls for a data-first AI-led approach that can help them get ahead of the competition. To do this, a **product-led** approach is the way forward.

- With the advent of AI and expanding technology portfolios, business leaders are keen to extract greater business value from their digital transformation investments. For this, enterprises must redesign themselves into **platform-driven organizations**.

## Paving the Way for Change

*"The culture of a company is the sum of the behaviors of all its people." – Michael Kouly, former CEO of Reuters and leadership advisor*

To derive higher returns from their digital investments and create human-first experiences, organizations must replace traditional operating models with more evolved ones. They should measure success based on the value delivered to the enterprise itself and its users. Such value must be continuous and incremental with user feedback and usage data seeding the evolution roadmap through intelligent AI.

*What does such organizational change mean at the team level?*

Rather than measuring success as an outcome based on 'timely delivery to specifications' (which are often not adaptive), teams measure success on the 'value delivered, continuously and incrementally, for all stakeholders'.

Teams and individuals in such outcome-oriented enterprises must demonstrate high levels of customer empathy, innovation, experimentation, end-to-end ownership, as well as the ability to deliver with **autonomy, adaptability, agility, and accountability**.

*But why does this call for a cultural change?*

For the evolved model to succeed at the organizational level, a **fundamental change is needed in the way teams think, behave, and deliver results**.

Here is a closer look at the nature and scale of change that teams must undergo when adapting to an evolved operating model.



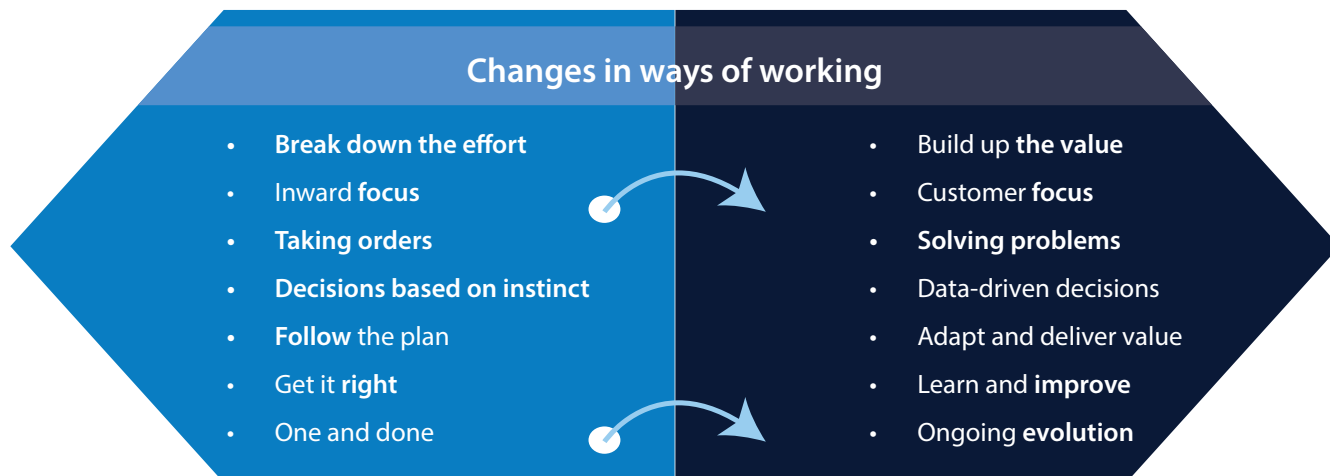


Figure 1 – How enterprise teams in the evolved model must change their ways of working

## Demystifying the Product and Platform Mindset

Having understood the need for cultural change and how it manifests itself in the ways of working and team/individual behaviour, let us now look at the 'product mindset'. This is integral to driving transformation at the enterprise level and fostering 'platform thinking', which is vital to scale, evolve, and sustain business operations with high agility.

**Product mindset** refers to a holistic approach that involves continually and incrementally delivering value for customers, focusing on the business needs of the organization, and evolving for long-term value generation. It lies at the intersection of user centricity, business viability, and technical feasibility.

As products scale, engineering teams sometimes struggle to manage costs arising from increasing technical debt, transformation fatigue, slow speed to market, and inability to cope with technology innovations and scale at the desired pace. To ensure they are able to accelerate, scale, and follow a long-term approach, teams are encouraged to embrace platform thinking.

*Platform thinking helps enterprises keep pace with innovation, scale to meet evolving business needs, and build a more flexible base for long-term growth.*

Enterprise teams need a clear vision for the platform's growth plan, expansion strategy, and modernization approach. They must also closely track the performance of the platform and continuously evaluate this against their business goals.

## Pillars of the Product and Platform Mindset

Similar to the Agile Manifesto, the product-platform mindset also has its own manifesto or set of fundamental principles. While each organization may articulate these differently, the essence lies in the four pillars depicted in Figure 2.

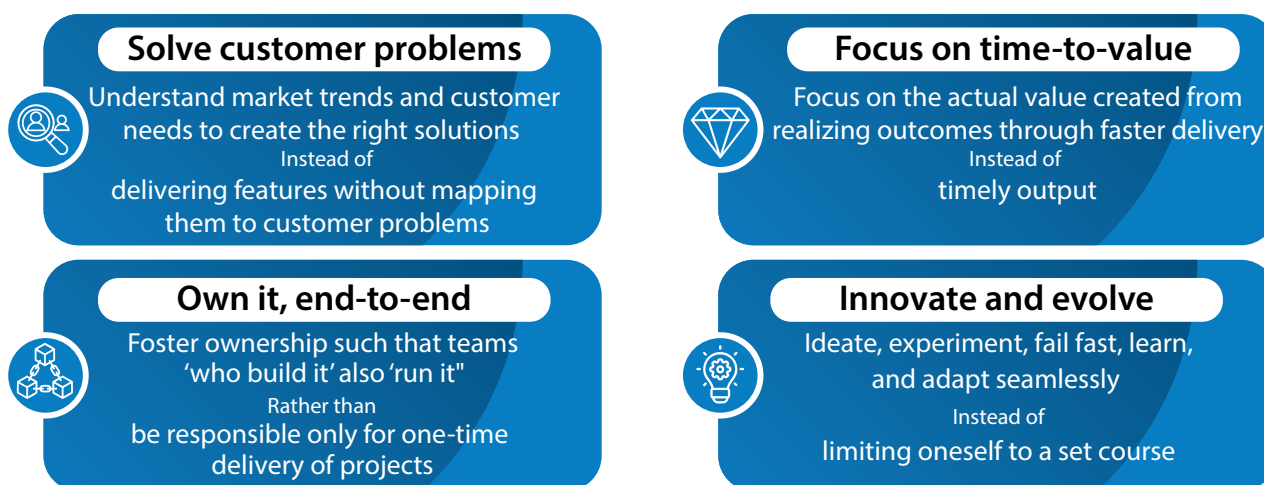


Figure 2 – The four pillars of the product-platform mindset

Let us explore each of these pillars in detail along with the frameworks, tools, methodologies, and behaviours that teams can leverage to ensure value to customers and the organization.

## 1. Solve customer problems

*Understand market trends and customer needs to create the right solutions, instead of simply delivering features without first mapping them to customer problems they solve.*

A successful product is one that delivers value to customers, even before they request for it. Exceptional product teams focus on proactively discovering and meeting customer needs, apart from solving stated problems. Such teams study how users can benefit from a product in the future in addition to their current preferences and challenges. These product teams must ask pertinent questions such as:

What are the issues being faced by the different target user personas?

- How does the product help solve the customer’s problems?
- How can we evolve the product such that customers continue to use it in future and newer customers get onboarded?
- How does the product help meet the goals of the company?

Merely building products out of what seem like good ideas, without adequate market research and value mapping, can lead to negative consequences. For instance, to stay competitive, product teams may fall into a ‘build trap’ where they release new features periodically without identifying the value, if any, that will be derived. Operating in this ‘feature factory’ mode often proves to be counterproductive. It escalates the development and maintenance costs of the product without delivering any real value to the user or the business.

Kodak is a classic example of a company that suffered from the ‘build trap’. In 2007, Facebook was gaining popularity and users began checking for status updates, browsing other user profiles, and uploading photos online. In the same year, Kodak set up an innovation team to understand the market demand for their photography offerings. While the innovation team found that digital photography was the way forward, Kodak failed to listen and adjust their strategy. Instead, they focused on improving their point-and-shoot cameras, i.e., building more and more features that fewer and fewer users wanted. Unable to cope with the market disruption triggered by digital cameras and, soon, smartphones, Kodak filed for bankruptcy in 2012.

FRAMEWORKS, TOOLS, AND METHODS	BEHAVIOURAL CHARACTERISTICS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Enable user-centric decision-making by leveraging techniques like design thinking, the 5 whys, and the Jobs-to-be-Done framework for customer needs.</li><li>• Avoid build traps by staying focused on user adoption, seeking early feedback, building and releasing incrementally using methodologies like agile/DevOps, adopting canary releases, and performing A/B testing.w</li><li>• Prevent product bloating and incidents of HiPPO (highest paid person’s opinion) by conducting detailed research and gathering actual market insights.</li></ul>	<p>Characteristics that demonstrate intent to solve customer problems are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• High degree of customer empathy and curiosity</li><li>• Active listening</li><li>• Focus on research and analytics</li><li>• Data-driven mindset</li><li>• Interviews and surveys</li></ul>

### Keeping users in the center – An Infosys case study

A top Infosys client was struggling to provide a seamless employee experience to its geographically distributed workforce due to high dependence on legacy systems. They faced challenges such as sub-optimal processes in employee engagement (across the entire hire-to-retain lifecycle) as well as fragmented and delayed communication about key events and announcements, leading to employee dissatisfaction. There was also a lack of personalization and awareness about organizational policies and guidelines.

Infosys adopted a human-centric design approach to create a unified employee experience platform with hyper personalization for the client. We organized product ideathons, enabled advanced telemetry and observability on Net Promoter Score, prioritized features based on value to users, etc., while demonstrating high user empathy. The team focused on solving user problems rather than conceptualizing and developing features in isolation. At times, this required a graceful shelving of features during interim incremental planning, making it a truly adaptive approach.

The user-centric solution enabled 10x reduction in clicks for some processes and 80% improvement in turnaround time. It improved the accuracy of search results, with easy access to desired information for users. It also increased access to organization-wide news by 70%, contributing to a more satisfied and productive workforce.

Figure 3 – An Infosys case study on solving customer problems

*“The build trap is when organizations become stuck measuring their success by outputs rather than outcomes. It is when they focus more on shipping and developing features rather than on the actual value those things produce.” – Melissa Perri, Escaping the Build Trap: How Effective Product Management Creates Real Value.*



## 2. Focus on time-to-value

*Focus on the actual value created from realizing outcomes through faster delivery, instead of timely output delivery.*

Traditionally, teams work relentlessly towards meeting operational goals such as delivering requirements on time as per defined quality standards. In due course, such teams tend to lose sight of the actual business objectives and expected value. 'Time-to-market' is an oft-used parameter to measure success that can restrain flexibility, compromising the organization's ability to deliver incrementally or reprioritize requirements based on the actual value that releases deliver.

In a product-platform approach, teams seek to understand early on what the desired outcome from a task is and the impact it should create. Understanding why something needs to be done in addition to what, how, and by when is crucial for development efforts to align with the value to be delivered. Thus, teams will need to monitor progress against the volume of output on a time scale as well as the flow of value.

### Value-centric approach for natwest – An Infosys case study

For NatWest, Infosys helped implement a value-centric transformation program. After identifying the organizational value streams, the client then sought to align funding (finance) with operations and people (development value streams) to enhance solution delivery.

Teams were grouped to achieve a flow of value with a focus on long-term strategic delivery. Lean portfolio management principles from the Scaled Agile Framework (SAFe) provided guardrails to reduce administrative burden, simplify governance, and adapt the annual budget process. It also dynamically adjusted value stream budgets, creating an outcome-focused approach. This ensured investment funding was delivered based on continuous and early feedback on current initiatives, ensuring the right work got done at the right time. (Read more)

The outcome-focused approach allowed NatWest business leaders to simplify or replace historic bottom-up project prioritization processes. Infosys also leveraged OKRs, a useful framework that helps enterprises establish overall business goals/metrics and then break it down for teams that are responsible to help achieve these goals.

Figure 4 – An Infosys case study on the value-centric approach

*"So often, people work hard at the wrong thing. Working on the right thing is probably more important than working hard." – Caterina Fake, American entrepreneur and businesswoman*

#### FRAMEWORKS, TOOLS, AND METHODS

- Focus on value delivery instead of timely delivery along by leveraging periodic retrospectives, value realization measurement and methods, data-led decisioning on key performance indicators (KPIs), objectives and key results (OKRs), and minimum viable product (MVP) development.
- Use frameworks to help prioritize work based on value. A recommended framework is Cost of Delay. It focuses on the trade-off between the value to be captured from a product release versus the time it takes to deliver. Another popular framework is must-have, could-have, should-have, won't-have (MoSCoW).

#### BEHAVIOURAL CHARACTERISTICS

To adopt an outcome/ value-driven approach, teams and individuals must embrace:

- Customer empathy
- Quantitative measurement techniques
- Data orientation
- Prioritization
- Stakeholder management





### 3. Own it, end-to-end

*Foster ownership such that teams who ‘build it’ also ‘run it’, rather than be responsible only for one-time delivery of projects.*

Enterprises that are structured around functions often have siloed teams that carry out ‘build’ and ‘operate’ activities. Discretionary spend is typically allocated to ‘build’ projects and non-discretionary spend to ‘keeping the lights-on’ activities. Such models, while historically relevant, are no longer useful.

In today’s digital age, technical and business teams must work with agility in close collaboration if they are to achieve common organizational goals and deliver value. These goals are usually business objectives aligned with revenue targets, customer adoption/stickiness, and market expansion, and help enterprises stay relevant and competitive.

Fostering a culture of end-to-end ownership encourages accountability in teams. When teams are persistent, autonomous, and accountable, they think in the long term, design for scale and resilience, and deliver better outcomes and faster value. In case of failure, they avoid moving blame and instead focus on lessons learnt and opportunities for improvement.

FRAMEWORKS, TOOLS, AND METHODS	BEHAVIOURAL CHARACTERISTICS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Cultivate end-to-end ownership by standing up teams that are integrated across development and operations.</li><li>• Involve the team in decision-making around products and conduct hackathons to ideate for product features to be added to the backlog.</li><li>• Establish reward and recognition programs to encourage those who demonstrate ownership and pride of workmanship.</li></ul>	<p>To demonstrate end-to-end ownership, teams must have</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• High risk-taking appetite</li><li>• Adept risk management skills</li><li>• Continuous cross-skilling and upskilling with a high degree of learnability</li><li>• Open communication</li><li>• Room to speak up fearlessly</li><li>• Psychological safety</li><li>• Collective ownership</li><li>• Pride of workmanship</li></ul>

#### End-to-end ownership – An integrated approach

Several Infosys clients are choosing integrated development and operations teams to optimize costs and improve ownership and accountability with a focus on outcomes.

For a large Australian telecom company, Infosys played the role of a strategic partner to stand up cross-functional, autonomous, and persistent teams that had end-to-end ownership of the products they worked on. The product’s OKRs kept them focused on value delivery and outcomes, continually and incrementally. This has enabled on-demand deployment, improved time to market, and streamlined handovers, thus reducing outages and revenue leakage for the client.

Figure 5 – An Infosys case study on end-to-end ownership

*“It is amazing what you can accomplish if you do not care who gets the credit.” – Harry Truman, former US President.*



## 4. Innovate and evolve

*Ideate, experiment, fail fast, learn, and adapt seamlessly, instead of limiting oneself to a set course.*

Enterprises that want to stay ahead of the competition and deliver value to customers must continually innovate and evolve. To stay relevant, they need to adopt new ways of working and also ensure that customers perceive value from all their products and services. Thus, adopting emerging technologies like AI and AI-led operating models is a business imperative.

This requires teams to continuously experiment with ideas and applications for the benefit of users and the enterprise. Teams must develop an increased appetite to experiment, fail, learn from past failures, and scale.

### INNOVATIVE MARKETPLACE SOLUTION – An Infosys case study

For one of the fastest growing Fortune 200 logistics providers, Infosys built a digital freight management platform that not only accelerates their revenue growth by enabling expansion but also enhances the experience of customers, carriers, and drivers through several innovative digital products.

The platform includes capabilities like predictive pricing, dynamic capacity, loyalty management, consumerization, self-service BI, and more. This was made possible by continuous innovation and leveraging emerging technologies such as AI/ML, chatbots, Google Duplex, AR/VR, voice integrations, and RPA.

The new ways of working for the team included a keen focus on the MVP approach, product mindset adoption, data-driven product development, design-led product with extensive user research, hackathons, and ideathons.

The approach also included setting up a central digital organization for building the platform and integrating the APIs and other digital services built by different business units. This platform-led approach has enabled scalability and rapid development.

Figure 6 – An Infosys case study on innovation and experimentation

“Innovation distinguishes between a leader and a follower.” – Steve Jobs, founder of Apple

FRAMEWORKS, TOOLS, AND METHODS	BEHAVIOURAL CHARACTERISTICS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Create a culture of experimentation and innovation by developing team ideas into proof of concepts and encouraging periodic idea submissions via hackathons and other contests.</li><li>• Encourage zero sprints dedicated to innovation and periodic presentation of ideas by team members to product management leaders.</li></ul>	<p>To foster a culture of experimentation and innovation, teams and individuals must have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Curiosity</li><li>• Capacity for ideation and brainstorming</li><li>• High risk-taking appetite</li><li>• Adept risk management skills</li><li>• Psychological safety</li><li>• Ability to embrace failures gracefully</li><li>• Ability to retrospect and improve</li></ul>





## Summary of Characteristics

With this understanding of the product-platform manifesto, organizations can enable a cultural change within their teams to transform into customer-centric, product-led, and platform-driven enterprises. It is important to note that while it may take time to truly adopt and embrace such major changes in mindset, it will eventually deliver enormous benefits and become the default way of working. The mindset shift must be developed gradually using a multi-pronged approach that includes training, coaching, mentoring, leadership messaging, and more.

The diagram below shows the different attributes that teams and individuals must imbibe and demonstrate to successfully develop a product-platform mindset.



Figure 7 – Team characteristics for an effective platform-and-product mindset

“The greatest discovery of all time is that a person can change his future by merely changing his attitude.” – Oprah Winfrey, US television producer

A person in silhouette is standing in front of a large digital screen. The screen displays a grid of sticky notes, some of which are pink and some are yellow. The person appears to be interacting with the screen, possibly moving or organizing the sticky notes. The background is a bright, out-of-focus window with a grid pattern.

## Conclusion

The ways in which enterprise teams work are evolving from linear and sequential as in the waterfall approach to the agile way that is iterative and incremental. Enterprises must adopt an outcome-focused, human-first, and AI-led approach with product-centric value delivery to achieve impactful and tangible business outcomes from technology investments.

Teams that are entrusted with creating scalable and sustainable solutions and products can benefit from using the product and platform thinking approach. This includes demonstrating a high degree of end-to-end ownership, technical acumen, customer empathy, outcome focus, ownership, innovation, and agility. Such teams should strive to solve customer problems instead of merely delivering features, focus on time to value over time to market, and foster end-to-end ownership rather than being responsible only for one-time delivery of output. They will also need to ideate, innovate, experiment, fail fast, learn, and adapt in place of sticking to the set course of action.

The approach to transitioning to customer-centric, product-led, platform-driven AI-first enterprises is built on the core of such platform and product thinking. Enterprises, teams, and individuals must embrace this change to compete and thrive in today's agile and digital world.





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