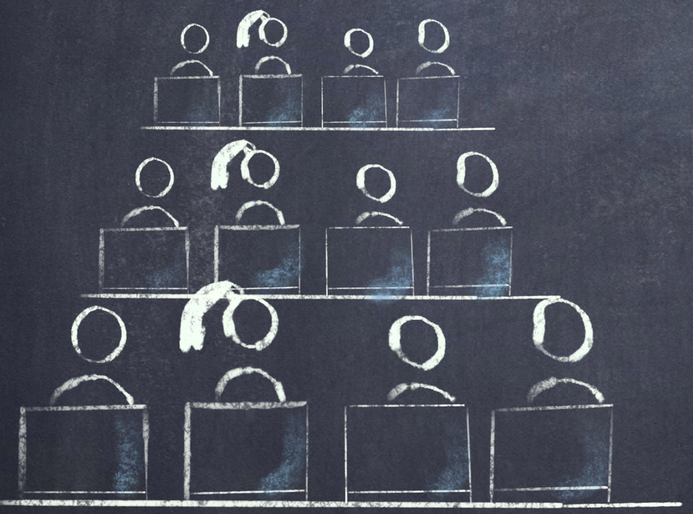
Product Discovery for Engineers

How Often Do Software Engineers Meet Customers?

Product Discovery & Cynefin

We need to understand a problem, ideate, validate assumptions, experiment and learn



And Software Engineers could bring a lot of value here

Complex

Product Development is here

probe-sense-respond

Emergent Practice

Complicated

But we often handle it as it was here

sense-analyse-respond

Good Practice

A group of business experts analyzes a problem and comes up with a solution

Confusion

Chaotic

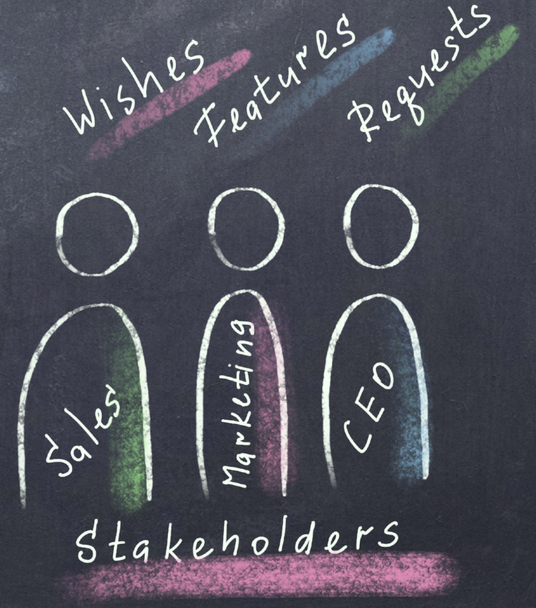
act-sense-respond

Novel Practice

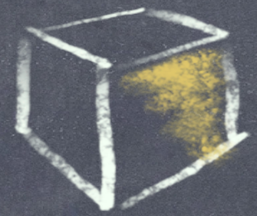
Clear

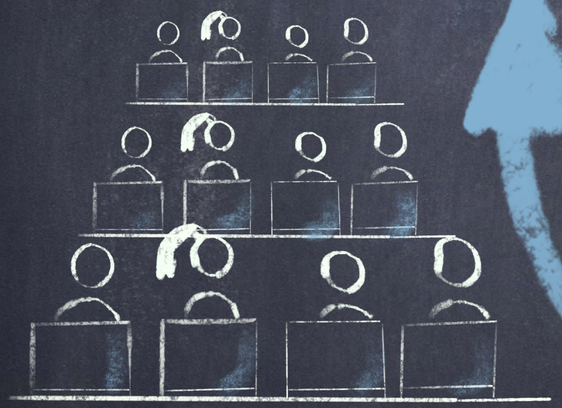
sense-categorize-respond

Best Practice



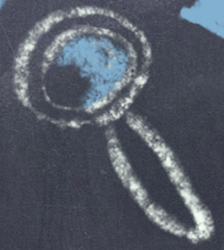
Continuous Discovery & Delivery

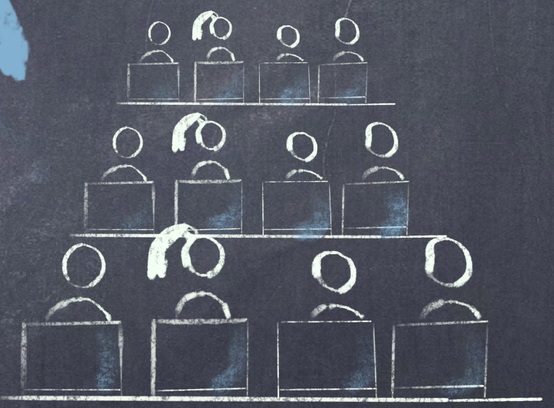




Continious Discovery

Continious Delivery





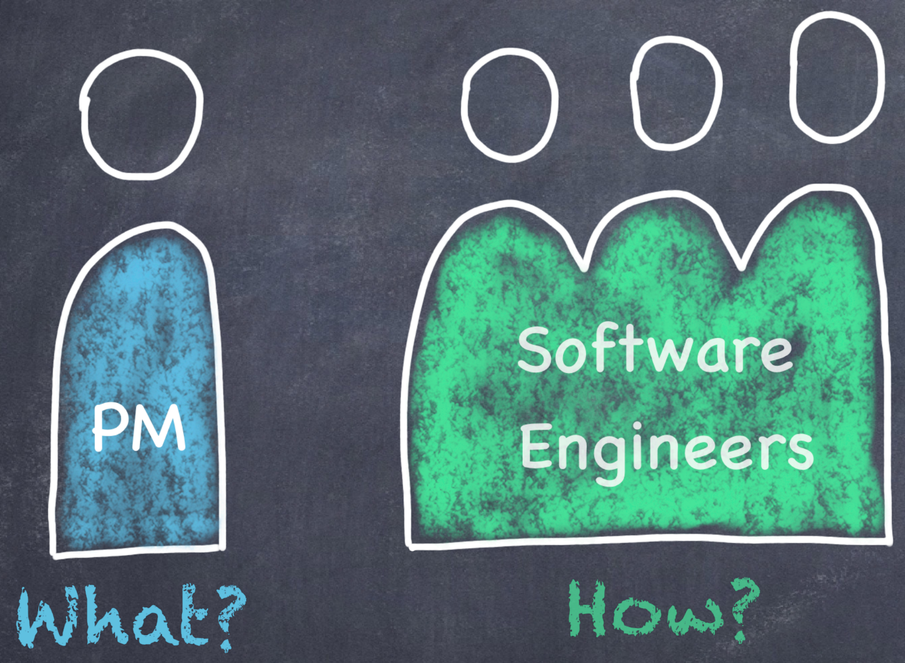
Engineers are almost not involved here

BUILD THE RIGHT THING

BUILD THE THING RIGHT

Engineers are actively involved only here

Roles Accountabilities Shift



Traditional Approach

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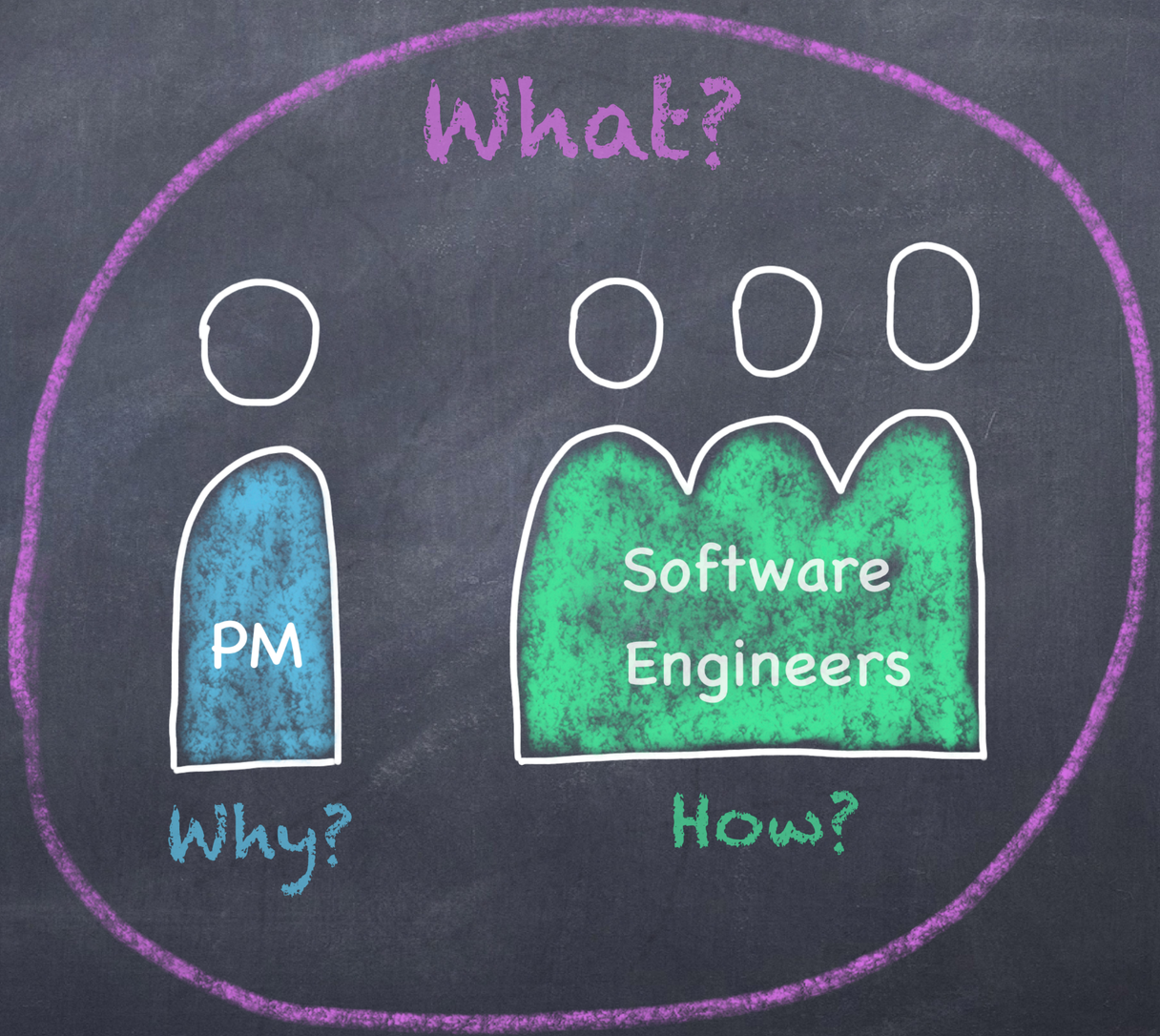


Why Involve Engineers in Product Discovery?

Diversity of perspectives helps generate different ideas

"If you want to have good ideas you must have many ideas.
Most of them will be wrong, and what you have to learn is which ones to throw away"

Linus Pauling

Many different ideas

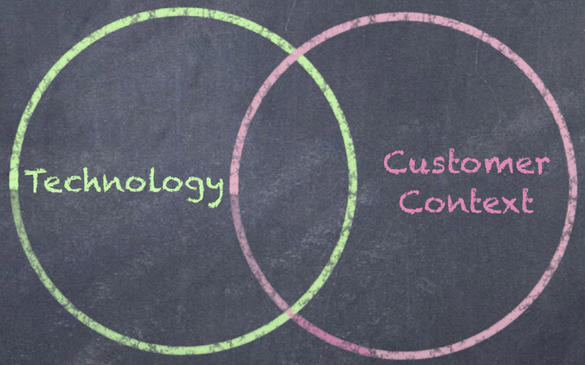
Why Involve Engineers in Product Discovery?

Engineers Often Generate The Best Solutions

Why?

Well, maybe not exactly ...

However they do have a depth of knowledge about what is possible with technology



But they need to build up a depth of knowledge about customer context too

Credits to Teresa Torres

Why Involve Engineers in Product Discovery?

Engineers Often Ask Disconfirming Questions

The engineers excel at seeing the flaws in ideas

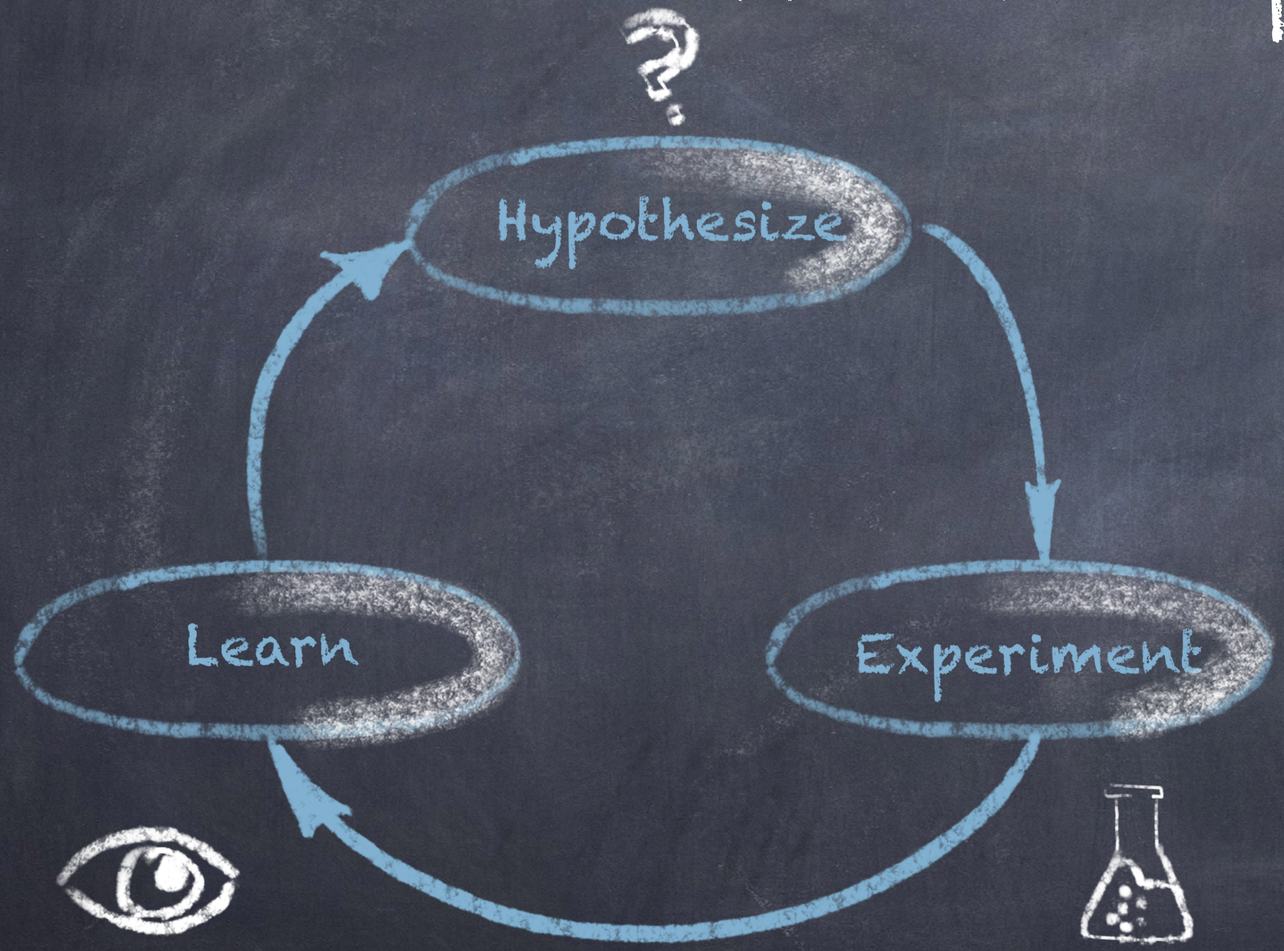
It's a skill they practice regularly catching errors or edge cases in their code

The Masters of Critical Thinking

Credits to Teresa Torres

Why Involve Engineers in Product Discovery?

Engineers Bring an Analytical Mindset to Product Experiments



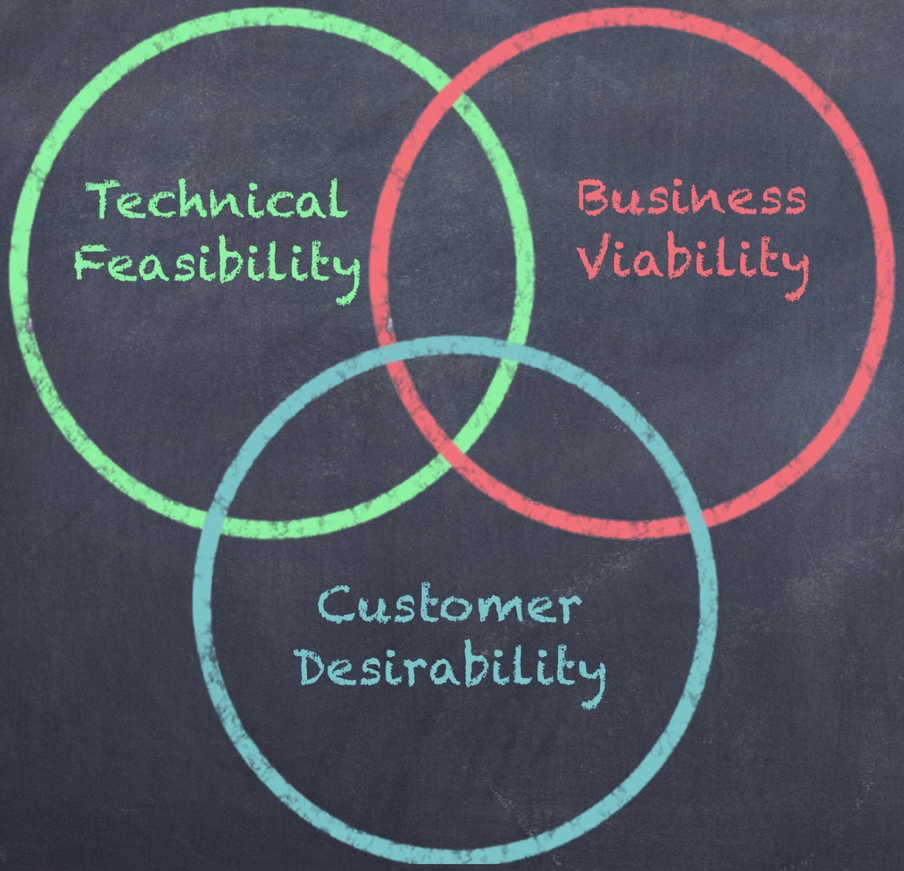
They have analytical minds that help:

- Craft the experiments
- Evaluate experiment design
- Interpret the results

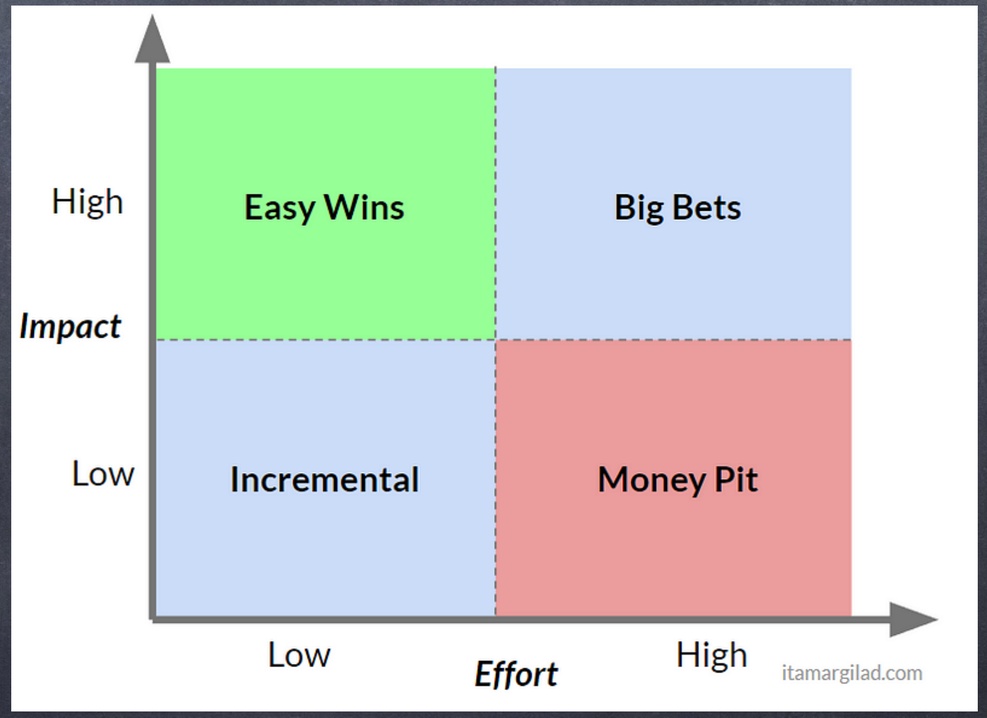
Credits to Teresa Torres

Why Involve Engineers in Product Discovery?

Engineers Can Quickly Assess Technical Feasibility



"How can we implement this technically?"



Why Involve Engineers in Product Discovery?

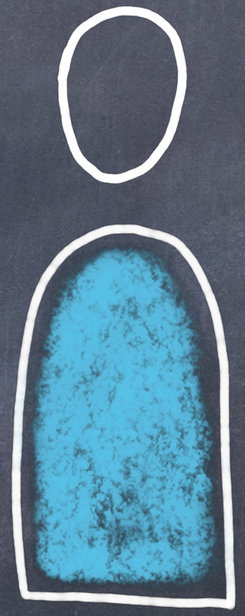
Engineers will have more empathy for customers and feel more engaged

Possible Objections

To Involving Engineers in Product Discovery

"Engineers are too valuable and expensive resource"

"Should not the engineer be writing code?"



"They don't have time"

"Who will develop?"

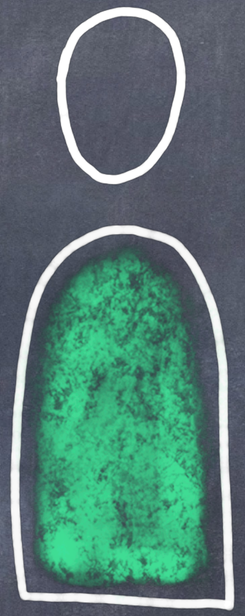
By Management

Possible Objections

To Involving Engineers in Product Discovery

"They dont understand the customers' context"

-> Help engineers understand it



"Their ideas are not really viable"

(which actually means "Mines are better")

-> Plan experiments and test both ideas

By Product Managers

"It is mine!"

Possible Objections

To Involving Engineers in Product Discovery

-> Step-by-step

-> Socialize Product Discovery

-> Educate

-> Find enthusiasts

By Software Engineers

"We are here to write a code!"

-> Start small, one pilot team

-> Help the engineers realise that AI will eventually replace those who want just code

How engineers can build empathy with the customer?

Create
Empathy Map

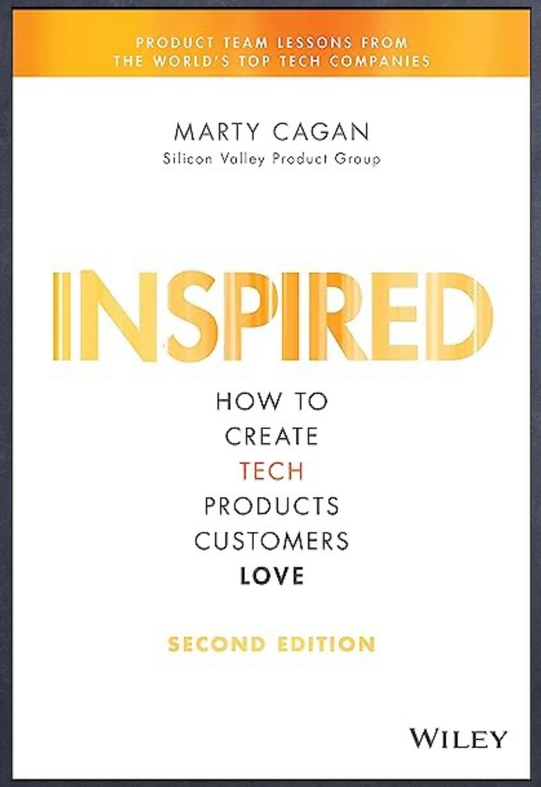
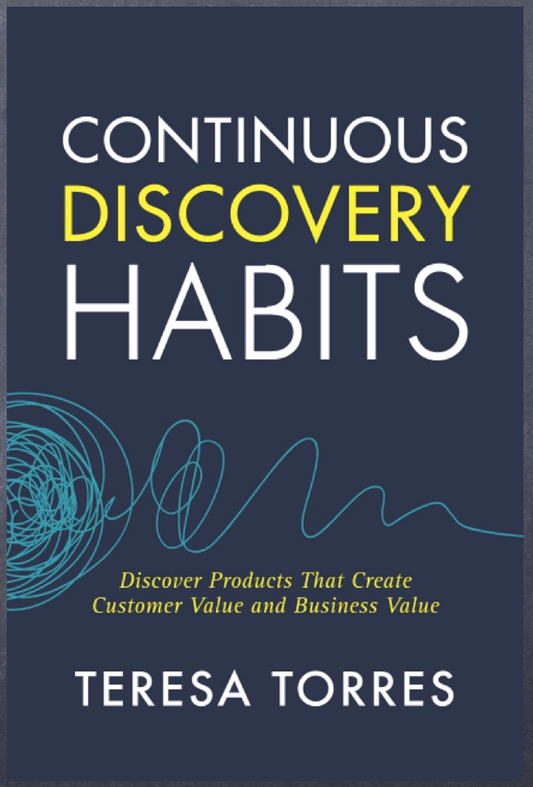
Go to
Call Centre

Watch
user session
recordings

Listen to
user interview
recordings

Understand who is
your customer
(ICP, Persona)

Observe a colleague
using the product

Talk to real
customer 👀

Further reading