

Optimizing Software Development at Large Companies

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Some Common Scenarios

BUSINESS LEAD

“Our tech team is really slow. They never execute to spec. They’re always saying no.”

“We plan so much but only get to execute a few things and we have to compromise so much that the final product isn’t even all that good.”

“I spend all this time prioritizing stuff for the team but there’s still no predicting when anything will get done.”

PRODUCT LEAD

“Our tech team asks for specs but never bother to execute to spec when you give it to them.”

“We spend so much time spec’ing stuff that never gets executed.”

“We never have time to work on our core product. All our resources go into doing some random thing that the business wants.”

DESIGN LEAD

“Our tech team sucks. We can’t do anything cool.”

“That one project took 8 rounds of wireframe review with 16 people. Then 6 additional rounds of design review with the same 16 people. ”

“I just spent 20 minutes talking to 5 people about what color the submit button should be.”

TECH LEAD

“The business guys have no idea what it takes to build anything and they don’t care. They’re always just onto the next buzzy thing and we always have to hack it together on short notice.”

“Those product guys have no idea what they’re doing. Their specs are contradictory and full of holes.”

“They want pixel perfect? Every design comp I get has a new set of image sizes, fonts, column widths and spacing and usually different by a pixel or two.”

EVERYONE

“They need to involve us sooner. We’re always the last to find out.”

“We have too many meetings.”

“I need to be kept in the loop. Who knows what will get agreed to if I wasn’t there.”

PROJECT MANAGEMENT LEAD

“We have not been able to commit to a process because every time we make a plan, the business comes up with something else that’s more important and has to be done immediately.”

“We have no idea what’s happening in tech. It’s a total mystery what will get completed when.”

“Our product team hands us the “specs” and we work with tech to figure what we can build.”

Common Causes

- Communication issues
- Too many projects
- Lack of clear business goals
- Micromanagement of team
- Product/Business not understanding technology framework
- Weak performers

Some Best Practices for Success

Explain Why

- Why do you want to do what you're asking?
- What do you hope to achieve?
- Create a culture of thinkers

Understand Your Platform/Team

The limitations of your platform/team should not keep you from considering an idea but...

- Know the platform you're working with, what it's optimized to do and what it does not do well or at all
- Know the strengths and weaknesses of the members of your team

Empower Your Experts

- Respect their roles
- Learn to let go
- Focus on results
- Feedback privately

Focus Your Efforts

- Focus on projects and features that will actually deliver on your business goals
- Stay within your area of expertise; find best of breed partners
- Reduce the number of projects. More projects to evaluate means less time to execute.

Optimize for the team you have

- Following universal standards for specs/process is not always practical or efficient
- Right size your specs for your team
- Try to get people to improve but work around their strengths/weaknesses

Remove Obstacles/Distractions

- Remove weak performers
- Limit access to the people who do work
- Instead of asking the same questions all the time, know what your team is working on and make an effort to remember details

Celebrate Successes

- Thank your team
- Ask their opinion on the final product
- Find out how they think things could have been done better
- Pause on your feedback on all the other things you want the product to do

Thank you.

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