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Field Guide preview

Chapter One: Busy Is Not a Business

Explore the opening chapter, worksheets and completed examples.

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Chapter 1

Busy Is Not a Business

Chapter 1 of the book. Name one owner for every product, write down which customer each serves and what it promises them, and settle who decides each disputed choice before anyone makes a promise. Instruments: worksheets 1 and 2.

Ask a product team how the quarter went and you'll hear about output: features shipped, tickets closed, dates met. That is real work, and all of it is easy to count. None of it says whether a customer's week went better, or whether the company will earn anything extra for the effort. Activity keeps excellent records. Results happen outside the building, and somebody has to go and look.

Worksheet 1 is the product page: one product you already sell, on one sheet. It names the customer and the situation, the job and the promise, everything the customer actually receives, the owner, the results you expect for the customer and for the business, and the next decision with its evidence and its date. Worksheet 2 is the authority map. Somebody has to approve a new product, change its scope, promise a customer a date, grant an exception or end an offering. Which person, exactly? And who has to be heard before they do?

Skip these two pages and the product still gets managed. It gets managed by whoever spoke last — the salesperson with an order at risk, the engineer holding a maintenance bill nobody priced, the executive who took a large customer's call this morning. Everyone stays busy. Nobody can tell you whether the work paid.

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE WHEN IT IS MISSING

- The product review is a list of what shipped and when, and no customer is named in it.
- Ask who owns the product and you get a department, a committee or a job title.
- Operations learns about a new customer promise from the sales announcement.
- A delivery date reaches a customer before engineering has seen the scope.
- The product's description stops at the product — no setup, no support, nothing about what happens when it ends.
- Projects are under way in every department, and nobody can say what any of them will return.
- Bad news reaches the leadership meeting after the decision it could have changed.

The tell is a roadmap full of finished work and nobody who can name the customer it was for.

IN THE BOOK

Chapter 1 opens with a distributor of aftermarket parts where a private-equity firm put me in as chief executive. The company was missing its sales targets as its costs climbed, and projects were running everywhere with nobody able to say what any of them would return. We stopped the spending and the projects with no line to revenue, sorted the work into three lists — stop, start and continue — and let the 80/20 numbers point to what to simplify and which prices to raise. Work nobody chose is a leader's problem, and the chapter puts it on your desk. Counting activity proves the work moved, not that it deserved to. The chapter sets out three scoreboards — the team's, the customer's and the business's — and treats the link from a better day for the customer to a better result for the business as a claim to test, never a given. You name one owner for every product, with a written boundary around what that person decides and a dependable route for everything above it. Two instruments carry the chapter: the product page (a one-page account of a product, from the customer it serves to the decision it needs next) and the record of who decides what. Obligations — safety, security, privacy, accessibility, the law and signed contracts — stay outside every commercial argument. For the company as a whole, the chapter adds one number, the vitality score, which measures how much of this year's sales comes from products less than three years old. Dispatchwell's photo-ordering feature shipped on time and demonstrated beautifully, and six weeks on, most technicians were still calling the branch and reading out part numbers.

Your call, their call
Your call. One named owner for every product and the limits of what each decides without you, the decisions that still come to your desk, and the scoreboard the company keeps. **Their call.** Worksheet 1, the product page, with its evidence and the next decision dated, and Worksheet 2 drafted row by row for you to confirm.

Its Do This list, as a checklist:

- Put one person's name against every product the company sells, and record the decisions each can make without coming to you
- Get the product page for one product from its owner, all six parts on one sheet, and read it before any other report on that product
- Collect the five most recent things the team shipped, each with the customer behavior it changed, and treat every blank as a question to answer
- Name the person who decides each of these: a new product, a change of scope, a customer's delivery date, an exception for one customer and the end of an offering
- Go through twenty support cases, returns or service calls on that product yourself, not a summary of them
- Take one discrepancy, such as a standard product that needs an engineer on every order, to your next leadership meeting

WORKED EXAMPLE

Suppose, for illustration, that Priya Raman, Dispatchwell's head of product management, wrote the page for what the company actually sells: repair parts, sold out of forty branches to 5,000 active accounts for $600 million a year. She wrote it after the photo-ordering feature's first six weeks, starting from the three scoreboards in figure 01-01. On the team's, a clean win. On the customer's, almost nothing had changed. And the business's was blank, because nobody had tied the feature to a single repeat order.

Where the page earned its keep was the results line. Priya had to write the link down as a claim: if technicians can order the right part without a round of phone calls, they'll buy from Dispatchwell more often, and their owners will steer more spending its way. Three things would have to be true, and she knew none of them yet. Is finding the right part a serious problem for these customers? Does the feature help? Does their spending depend on it? So the next decision on her page wasn't another feature. It was what to learn first, who would learn it and when the team would come back to the question.

Her page exposed an average that was hiding something, too. A three-technician contractor may never open the app. A regional service company running 150 technicians may need it badly. A single usage figure across both describes neither, so the measure had to be split by kind of customer before anybody read it again.

Suppose, too, that Tom Halloran filled in Worksheet 2 for Halloran Service in an afternoon. He is the owner, and the product job is his as well, so most rows end with his name. That's fine. What the sheet changed was the column beside his name — the people who must be heard before he decides — and one row that the chapter's list doesn't have.

Whose scoreboard	What it counts	What it says about the photo-ordering feature
The team's	Features shipped, tickets closed, dates met	A clean win
The customer's	The right part, found once and on site when the job needs it	Unchanged for most technicians
The business's	Repeat orders and a bigger share of spending from accounts that order every week	Unknown

Fig. 01-01: Three scoreboards at Dispatchwell. The team kept the first one, and it was the only one of the three that couldn't say whether the work paid.

WORKSHEETS

The chapter's work fits on two pages: what the product is and what it promises, and who decides what about it.

Worksheet 1

The product page

Puts one product you already sell on a single page, from the customer it serves to the next decision it needs. The product owner drafts it, and the leader they report to reads it first.

The product

1. Customer and situation. Specific enough that two people reading this line would pick out the same customer.

Which customer, in which situation

2. Job and promise.

The job the customer needs done

The result your offering promises them

3. Whole offering. Everything the customer receives, not only the thing itself.

The product, its setup and delivery, the support behind it, and what happens when it's retired

4. Owner.

The owner, by name

The decisions the owner can make alone, and where everything else goes

5. Results and the link. Write the link as a claim that evidence could prove wrong.

What should be different for the customer

What should be different for the business

The link you believe connects the two

6. Next decision.

The decision this product needs next

The evidence that would improve it, and who will get it

The date it will be made

Dispatchwell's version

Priya filled in the page for the parts Dispatchwell sells, not for the photo-ordering feature, because a feature only makes sense against the promise of the whole offering. Her customer line was still too wide, and she marked it so: it covered a three-technician contractor and a regional service company running 150 alike, and Chapter 5 is where Dispatchwell chooses between them. Her results line carries the claim, marked as unproven. And the next decision is about evidence, not another build.

Part	Dispatchwell's page
Customer	Technicians and dispatchers at service companies, ordering parts when equipment fails on a job
Job and promise	The right replacement, found the first time and at the job when needed
Whole offering	The parts, the counter, the ordering site and app, branch delivery, returns, and what happens if an account leaves
Owner	Priya Raman, head of product management, with conflicts she can't settle going to the chief executive
Results	Customer: fewer wrong parts and second trips. Business: repeat orders, a larger share of spending. Link: a claim, not yet a finding
Next decision	Is finding the right part the problem worth solving? Evidence: use split by kind of customer, a month of returns, an hour at a branch counter. Due at the next monthly product review

WORKSHEET 2

Who decides what

Gives every contested product decision one decider, the people heard first, and the place it goes when it can't be settled there. The product owner drafts it with the leader they report to, and everyone named agrees to their row.

The decisions. Fill the first five rows in this order: approving a new product · a material change in scope · a delivery date promised to a customer · an exception for one customer · ending an offering. Use the blank rows for the arguments your company keeps having. One person per box, never a department.

Decision	Who decides	Consulted first	Escalates to

What nobody trades. Name who can stop a promise or a release on grounds of safety, security, privacy, accessibility, the law or a signed contract.

Who can stop it, and on what grounds

Unwelcome news. A good owner can say "we don't know yet" and raise bad news early, while there is still time to change the decision.

How a "we don't know yet" reaches the owner — who says it, to whom, and with what plan to find out

Everyone who will carry a decision's consequences is consulted before it, not told after
Every person named has seen this page and agreed to their row
The page has a keeper and a date for its next review

> **Halloran's version**
> In a company Halloran's size the owner often keeps the product job, as Tom has. Tom decides four of the six rows himself, so the escalation column is mostly a dash. His afternoon paid off in the consulted column — the branch managers and technicians who would deliver a new offering are heard before Tom approves it, not after — and in the last row, which the chapter's list doesn't carry. That row has no backup yet, and Chapter 3 shows what that costs on the day the supervisor is out.

Decision	Who decides	Consulted first	Escalates to
A new offering, such as a preventive plan	Tom Halloran	The branch managers and technicians who would deliver it	—
A material change in what a standard job covers	Tom	The branch managers and senior technicians	—
A visit date promised to a customer	The dispatcher	The technician who will make the visit	The branch manager, if no qualified technician is free
An exception for one customer	Tom	The branch manager whose crew does the work	—
Ending an offering	Tom	Branch managers, sales and the customers affected	—
A part above a technician's purchasing limit	The supervisor	The building's owner, who must agree to the charge	No one named yet

RUNNING IT WITH THE TEAM

Chair this first session yourself if you run the company or the business unit, so everyone sees what the product room is for. Bring the product owner and one person each from engineering, service or operations, sales and finance. Ninety minutes is enough. Ask the product owner to arrive with Worksheet 1 already drafted and twenty real records already read — support cases, returns or service calls. Nobody writes the page from a blank sheet in the meeting.

Take the page in order. I'd spend the most time on the customer line, because a vague customer makes every line after it vague. On the whole offering, ask service and operations what the customer gets that the description leaves out. On the results, have one person say what should change for the customer and a different person say what should change for the business, then see whether the two answers meet. If they don't, you've found the first piece of missing evidence, and it goes on the next-decision line.

Then Worksheet 2, one row at a time, with a name in every box. When two people each believe they decide something, don't settle it by volume. Write down the dispute, name who will settle it and by when, and move on.

Open by saying that nobody is being graded today on what shipped. What matters is whether anyone can tell if it worked. Close by reading the next decision aloud with its evidence, its owner and its date, and by confirming every name on Worksheet 2 — the names are your call, and the room should hear you make it. Afterward the product owner sends both pages to everyone whose work they touch, and brings the product page back, updated, to the next monthly review.

What goes wrong the first time? A market gets written where the customer should be. A committee lands in the owner box. Somebody writes "grow revenue" on the results line, and it connects to nothing a customer would notice. And the room argues about authority in general instead of filling in the rows. In a small company the owner can draft both pages alone in an afternoon, then read them to the two or three people who do the work and change whatever they correct.

THREE QUESTIONS FOR MONDAY

1. Which customer's day changed because of the last thing your team shipped, and how do you know?

2. Who in your company can promise a customer a delivery date, and who finds out afterward?

3. What decision does your product need next, and what evidence would make it a better one?

BEFORE YOU MOVE ON

You should now have, on paper:

- Worksheet 1 for one product, all six parts on a single page
- The link between the customer's result and the business's result written as a claim, with the evidence that would test it
- Worksheet 2 with a person's name, not a department, against each of the five decisions
- The people who carry each decision's consequences named as consulted before it is made
- The next decision dated, with an owner for the missing evidence
- One discrepancy listed for discussion at the next leadership meeting