One Knight in Product - E102 - Jonathon Hensley

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SPEAKERS

Jason Knight, Jonathon Hensley

Jason Knight 00:00

Hello, and welcome to the show. I'm your host, Jason Knight and on each episode of this podcast, I'll be having inspiring conversations with passionate product people. If that sounds like the sort of thing you want to stay aligned with, you can head over to OneKnightInProduct.com, where you can sign up to the mailing list, subscribe on your favourite podcast app or follow the podcast on social media, and guarantee you never miss another episode again. On tonight's episode, we talk about the crucial importance of alignment throughout the organisation to give you the best chance possible of creating successful products. We speak about some of the barriers to alignment, some of the ways you might overcome them, and some of the problems we might expect to see when we don't. We also wonder about companies that try to succeed while pushing cognitive dissonance and inconsistent motivations to pursue simultaneous opposing agendas... as if that would ever happened in real life. For all this and much more, please join us on One Knight in Product. So my guest tonight is Jonathon Hensley. Jonathon's an avid cook who says he started out in digital at age 14 before spending at least some of the next 26 years living the dream and ending up on Portland Business Journal's "40 Under 40" list of business professionals, Jonathan is CEO of digital product agency Emerge, where he hopes to help companies with their digital transformations, and a self described accomplished writer and speaker. But speaking of writing, Jonathon's here tonight to talk about alignment. Now, he's not an astrologer, he's talking "Alignment", his new book, which aims to overcome internal sabotage and digital product failure. Hi Jonathon, how are you tonight?

Jonathon Hensley 01:30

I'm doing wonderful. Thanks so much for having me on the show, Jason.

Jason Knight 01:33

No problem. excited to have you here. So, first things first, "Alignment". Now I've got that sitting in front of me and I was expecting you to be aligned and have it sitting in front of you as

well.

Jonathon Hensley 01:46

I've always got a copy.

Jason Knight 01:49

Just want to make sure that we're aligned on the book to start with. But the book came out in March this year. How's the reception been so far?

Jonathon Hensley 01:56

The reception of the book has been wonderful. I think it has really hit a chord with two types of audiences. Really one is... the first level has been organisational leaders who are really trying to understand what they need to do differently as leaders to drive successful transformation and deliver on their digital products and strategies going forward. And the second one has been product teams that have been struggling to come together to generate successful product outcomes, where they've been working to solve problems and communicate them through the organisation. They're continuously running into these challenges and both groups have just had an incredible connection to the topic of alignment. And it's just been a joy to be engaged in these conversations with these different groups and leaders that are out there, doing their best to put great products into the world

Jason Knight 02:51

Yeah the constant dance, right? But was it aimed at one of those groups specifically to start with, and it just kind of resonated with the other or were you originally aiming at both of those sets of people?

Jonathon Hensley 03:02

It was actually by intention. When I first started writing the book and getting interested in what I thought the book needed to be. It started off with, really, from a leadership point of view. But the more people that I interviewed and the more product teams I talked to, it was really apparent from the very beginning that whether you're a product manager that maybe new to product management, or you're an experienced product designer or engineer, that they were missing a really critical tool on how they could talk about things upstream through the organisation, or cross functionally to other groups in their company and how to get them on board with the product work that was at hand. And so very quickly, I realised I had to create something that could really resonate and support both sides of the conversation.

Jason Knight 03:51

Yeah, makes a lot of sense. And obviously alignment's really critical and we'll talk a bit about

Yeah, makes a lot of sense. And obviously alignment's really critical and we'll talk a bit about some of those specifics in a minute. But I guess one thing that would be interesting to know is if, so far, you've had any specific feedback, either a review or someone who reached out to you afterwards or just someone you bumped into who happened to have read it somehow that... any feedback that really hit the spot for you and made you really feel that it was... that you'd really made a difference.

Jonathon Hensley 04:15

Well, a couple months ago, I was working on a project and just happenstance that somebody came into the room and said, "You know, I've heard about your book. And I've been stuck in the same place for 18 months on our project. And we have not been able to figure out why. And it wasn't till we started to actually understand alignment, the way that it's been defined by you in the book that we were able to really for the first time understand what was holding us back". And I've had a few conversations like that now where it's really... alignment I think is something that people intuitively or instinctually think that they understand and are operating with and yet has been one of those things that has really never been unpacked so that people can understand what it is and how it applies not just themselves, but to organisations and also when it comes to establishing or maintaining market fit. And that has just been game changing. And it is so exciting to see somebody find that moment where they're like, "Ah, now I can see this problem in a different way. And I can see a path to solving it".

Jason Knight 05:28

Yeah, absolutely. I think that idea that you can, in any small or large way, just say something or lay something out and just get that kind of feedback that you've changed someone's life. I mean, obviously want to change as many people as possible. But yeah, just step by step one by one, you're, you're making the world a slightly better place, right? In the working world at least.

Jonathon Hensley 05:46

One good product at a time.

Jason Knight 05:48

Exactly! Yeah, we can't fix everything at once. Right?

Jonathon Hensley 05:50

Yep.

Jason Knight 05:51

But how come you decided to write a book about this stuff? I mean, you're obviously passionate about it is something that you've got a strong interest in. But it's no mean feat to write a book

J   Jonathon Hensley   06:01

Well, it became really important for me, after having done this for 25 plus years, I have seen so many great ideas, and great product leaders and teams struggle and fail. ,And it's, it's the norm, right? I mean, great, you can have a great idea. But if you lack execution, it doesn't matter. And if you have poor execution, and you... no matter how well you can establish market fit or with an idea, you're not going to be able to deliver on people's expectations. And if you have great execution and a bad idea, well, it's just a bad idea. So there's got to be a conversation around, you know, how do you navigate that more effectively? What are some of the signs and what are some of the impacts? And there's incredible people focusing on "How do you create empower teams?", "How do you think about continuous discovery?", "How do you think about empathy and engagement with customers?", and all of that are incredibly important tools of the trade of creating great products. But there's this underlying theme across everything, when you see when things are either broken, which is this issue of misalignment. And so seeing that failure and understanding kind of the statistical relevance of that, I mean, we're talking, depending on what you look at, if it's anywhere between 70 and 92% of digital transformation and product initiatives are failing or underperforming, you're talking billions upon billions of dollars of missed opportunity for products and services that have incredible value if they could find the connection with their audience. And so that really inspired the need to like, well, let's unpack this. I mean, my own curiosity drove the need for the book in the beginning. And I decided in the beginning, I was going to write about my own experience and how what I had seen and experienced that could overcome that. And then quickly, I realised there's something else that needs to be done here. And what I started doing is looking for product leaders, and product teams around the world who were beating the odds, who consistently were able to create successful products, whether they're internal B2B products or consumer products, and really tap into that insight about what was the nuanced difference between how those teams and individuals were operating, that allowed them to deliver these great products? And that really just became the the fuel that was necessary to get through the undertaking of writing this book.

Jason Knight   08:34

Yeah, well, again, it sounds like a very valuable experience for you to do that. And obviously, presumably, helped frame your own thinking as well. And having those interviews and having those discussions to try and work out what makes this stuff tick. But let's talk about alignment then. So... it kind of sounds simple, in a way, right? Like, everyone probably thinks they know what being aligned is. I mean, you touched on this a little bit earlier. And you're obviously not going to say it's simple, because you wrote a book about it. So when we're talking about alignment, what are you specifically talking about in the context of the book, like, how do you define alignment? Specifically?

J   Jonathon Hensley   09:10

Well, I think, you know, when you think of alignment again, you know, it's one of those things that seems simple, as you said, in its essence, but it really has to be broken down and unpacked. And so in the book, we talk about alignment in four ways. The first one is really

unpacked. And so in the book, we talk about alignment in four ways. The first one is really understanding individual alignment. So how does an individual understand how their work contributes and matters? How do they make a difference? That's really important when you think about team engagement, performance, understanding the ability for having people in the organisation that can solve great problems that you know, and so individual alignment becomes essential. The next part is team alignment. How does a team come together and integrate their unique disciplines, experiences and perspectives to solve a shared problem. And that's essentially what we're doing right? We're creating teams and saying this is a problem worth solving. And we're going to build a product and service around that problem that can solve this need for a particular audience. And so if that team isn't aligned, you're already giving yourself a huge hurdle to overcome in being able to create an effective solution. The third part of alignment that we look at in the book is this idea of organisational alignment, which really deals with how do we align the product work that we're doing with the vision of the company, its strategic priorities, and the available resources and constraints that that organisation has in order to solve that problem. And so that's really important when you think about how much energy can be spent in developing a product. But if not, actually, given the organisational support necessary, those teams are being asked to do incredible feats with little to no support necessary to actually drive the success. And so I think it's really important that that's aligned all the way through. And that has to make its way to the very top of leadership. And there's a very key set of roles and responsibilities to that product success that comes from leadership that oftentimes is delegated away, where you see mistakes happen. And the fourth one is market alignment, you know, or more often referred to as market fit, but this really understands with, do I understand my customers? Do I understand their their needs? And most importantly, those unmet needs? And what are those motivators and behaviours that are repeatable, that I can build a successful product around to understand what it's going to require to be successful going forward? And so when we talk about alignment, we're looking at all four, collectively, not any one of them separately. And that becomes a significant advantage for the teams and organisations that are able to look at that in a systematic way. So they can build better products and better teams.

Jason Knight 12:05

Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. And I want to dig a little bit more into that in a sec. But before we do that, the book is here to help us make sure that we're aligned in all those ways, as you say, but what are some of the obvious warning signs that you've seen in the work that you've done when you go to a company and you can see that they're not aligned? Like, are there any kind of early warning signals that you can look at and say, "oh, yeah, there's, there's some work to do here"?

Jonathon Hensley 12:31

You know, we see all the time, I would say warning signs that pop up almost immediately. And you can identify these just within a few minutes, they're not difficult to bring to the surface. And I think the more experience you have in product, the easier they're probably to suss out pretty quickly. A couple of those just as an example, for everybody listening is, first off, what's the vision for your product? Right? What is that objective, that Northstar that you're aiming towards? A lot of times in product strategy that's left to be something purely aspirational, or it's really a goal. It's not really a vision, per se at all. But great product visions are not just aspirational, they have to be clear about what the intended destination is, and they have to be

measurable in some way. You have to give teams and organisations an ability to understand how they're making progress. That way you can run better experiments, better approaches to MVP and Lean product development and all the things that follow. And so very quickly, you can assess, is there misalignment potentially in play within the organisation just by looking at that one very simple piece that is so essential for teams to have. Another one you run into is... What approach are they taking, you know, is the actual cultural dynamic of the organisation? Many organisations are still very much, you know, engineering led, or they're led by the idea of the idea. And they're not actually very clear on the problem that they're solving. And the impact of that problem on the customer that they're targeting. And that's a big warning sign that is easy to identify very quickly. And so we need to start with that idea of, of living in the customer's shoes and falling in love with the problem and not with our ideas.

Jason Knight 14:27

Yeah, 100% like problem space vs solution space. Right?

Jonathon Hensley 14:30

Absolutely. 100%. I think great alignment starts with immersing ourselves in the problem space. And that's when we get to really unleash the creative potential of our teams. And everybody gets to then be a participant. I think one of the other things that you see is when you have a lot of really brilliant engineering teams or design teams, and they're just being handed requirements, they're not actually being able to solve problems.

Jason Knight 14:53

Feature factory type stuff.

Jonathon Hensley 14:54

Exactly. Those are easy warning signs to pick up on that something is misaligned.

Jason Knight 15:00

But it's fair to say that some companies seem almost like not necessarily okay with that, but they kind of just put up with it, they still continue to keep information in silos, they seem to keep muddling through. And I'm sure that their results aren't as good as they could be, or at least that's the cliche and... not that we hope that that's the case, but it would kind of validate some of the things we're saying right? Maybe they even just think it's, that's just how companies work. And it's too hard to fix that type of thing. Do you think it's really possible for a company to have true success if they just allow this misalignment to fester over time?

Jonathon Hensley 15:35

I think that they can get by if they've had a success, and they can ride that wave of success for a period of time. But I think eventually, the market will catch up with them, and they will find themselves hurting tremendously. And I think a lot of what you see now where companies are getting by, is because there's a sea change happening. And it's been happening for a while, this isn't going to surprise, I think a lot of people listening to this have that the old command and control model of organisations that came from the industrial era is going away. It's not how things work anymore. When you talk about, you know, wanting to have more agility, more speed, employees are our most important, you know, resource and asset. And so we need to empower them. All of the things that come from... don't come from a traditional command and control model, they come from a servant leadership approach to organisation design that enables great solutions to be developed. And I think that's where you see the most successful companies are creating their version of what that looks like to enable the incredible gifts of, and talents of people versus this old world model of command and control, which just doesn't work with the speed of technology and the way that products are needed to be created now.

Jason Knight 16:59

Yeah, I remember going to a Marty Cagan Ask Me Anything session recently, and someone asked him the question, like, "are all teams ready to be empowered?" And I think the point that he raised, which kind of touches on similar themes is like, there's this kind of lack of leadership and lack of alignment in some of these areas, which means that these teams are setting themselves up to fail from the off, right? Because they don't have that alignment. They don't have the context. And they're kind of either not empowered at all and back to the feature factory, like you say, or they're empowered, but with basically no direction. And that basically just means that they, y'know, they're kind of just being left to fend for themselves, like in the wilderness, right? Which doesn't really feel like it's going to give very good outcomes.

Jonathon Hensley 17:41

Yeah, I mean, I love Marty's work. He has.. his books are wonderful. And I've had an opportunity to attend a few of his events over the years. And it is true, a lot of teams and organisations are not truly ready to be empowered. And, you know, there's this misconception that happens, I think, with a lot of material. But you know, just on that topic of, well, "I'll read the book, I'll pass the book out to my teams, and then embrace this. And somehow, we're all empowered. And we all know how to do all these things differently". And, you know, it's like anything, it's hard work. It requires a lot of change. And in researching alignment, one of the things that we really unpacked and had and discovered was kind of some of the new skill sets that had to be fostered in digital leaders, that can really create significant change. And those skill sets have evolved tremendously from what they used to be. And they're nuanced. And it's really critical that either an up and coming leader or an existing leader is willing to look at that skill set, that what has made them successful and thrive in their career may not be the same set of skills that is going to help them be successful going forward. And it will certainly help them, but if they can embrace these new skill sets, they're exponentially increasing their opportunity to be successful.

Jason Knight 19:07

Yeah, 100%. But what are some of the worst examples you've seen in your work, or maybe the

interviews you've done, of misalignment in companies that you're aware of, and that you could share anonymously or otherwise? Like a really concrete example of where being misaligned is just really, really, really driven a terrible result?

Jonathon Hensley 19:28
Well, boy, only one story huh?

Jason Knight 19:33
Just the worse one

Jonathon Hensley 19:34
There's quite a few. Well, one, one that really comes to mind is in some of the work that I was doing, many years ago, we came into ... it was a global manufacturing company. And there was just the kind of the very traditional structures of... everybody was very much in a fear driven culture situation that they had to control their fiefdoms, their budgets, their organisational influence. And because of that, this particular product was really important to the entire business. But there was no alignment across the functions of the business. And there was no clear understanding of how their contribution, alignment mattered to the big picture of the organisation. And so when we were working with them, it was just so clear that there was this constant sabotage and misunderstanding of product taking place. And one of the most, you know, I think, onerous things that was happening was ego was driving critical decisions. And continuously challenging what had already been known. So there was no clarity. So every time that they would make a step forward, they had to shift. And it created an incredible amount of rework, which cost an incredible amount of money, time, turnover of team members, not just from the teams, but leaving the company altogether. And so at the end of the day, because leadership at its highest level hadn't set that clear vision that was measurable, it just splintered into 10-15 different directions. And it was an absolute nightmare of an experience. And, you know, people were upset, rightfully so their jobs were on the line. They were not proud of the work that they were doing. And we were really in a triage situation. It wasn't the point of innovation was far beyond possible at that point. It was how do you mitigate the damages?

Jason Knight 21:52
Yeah, survival?

Jonathon Hensley 21:53
Yeah, there's a lot of, you know, companies that have lived that or are living that right now.

Jason Knight 21:58

Yeah, well, hopefully, some of those will read the book. Just trying to think of examples for my career. I definitely remember working at one place that was undergoing a global product transformation. But all of the local... it was a big company, and then all of the local offices were still being individually P&Led, based on what they sold locally, which wasn't the things that their global teams wanted them to sell. So they were kind of having to fight against themselves to some extent, because they were being rewarded on doing one thing, but also at the same time being very explicitly told by global management to do the other thing. And it kind of feels that situations like that should be so avoidable. Like, I can look at that and in two minutes think whichever of those two things is right, they can't both be right. And, I don't know, it just feels like that should be a thing that highly paid managers or even consultants to come in, should be able to at least have that discussion, and make people choose, rather than try and get people to have that cognitive dissonance where they're trying to do two things that are opposing each other at the same time.

J Jonathon Hensley 22:58

Yeah, it's amazing. When you think about those, you mentioned just how they're incentivized different, you know, groups based not on the overall goals, but on, you know, kind of individual areas of performance. It's so common that that happens. I mean, one of the conversations that I must have 5-10 times a week, is everything that you do as an organisation ladders up to one thing, or it needs to if it doesn't today, which is customer lifetime value. That's what you're in business for. And so when your org incentives and your models and your trainings and all your things are in a siloed structure, and you're not cross functionally educating your teams about how they impact the overall customer experience, or how they contribute to it, maybe is a better way to say it, then you're breeding a ground for misalignment inevitably. And I think that you see it in very small ways, really quickly as well. It doesn't have to be big things. But one thing that was really interesting in the research as well as the work is how much attention great product leaders spend on this idea of a common language. Because one thing about a common language that I think is most important to emphasise is not that we all generically understand for example, something like customer experience, but do we as a product team have the same understanding of what that means? What does that actually mean? That to mean... so, common language has to be based in this shared understanding. And if we have a shared understanding, we have a foundation for better communication, faster collaboration, more iteration in the product, you know, cycle, more feedback loops, essentially, us product people, we all love our feedback loops, we want as many as possible, and you have to create an environment in the organisation and with customers where there is a fast flywheel of feedback and communication happening. And that communication gets distorted if there's not a common language and shared understanding that's happening, then you can see that happen, you know, dramatically take place. What I love is when you see leaders, whether it's at a startup or you know, a Fortune 100 company, and they understand that, and this is one of those key differences, and they start to build a common language through empathy, right? Which is just something that is so important to understand, you know, doesn't matter if you're the CEO of a 60,000 person company, or a six person company, you need to start to understand how people are interpreting these things. So that you can make sure that you set up a framework for communication and collaboration. And that just becomes so important. And then that can ladder up to all of these other things like customer lifetime value, making sure you truly are focused on the right things at the right time, understanding those product value drivers that need to be in place when you're creating better solutions.

Jason Knight 26:09

Now, that makes a lot of sense. But when we're talking about communication, then there's this old cliche about, you have to tell someone something seven times or 14 times or however many times you have to tell them, you have to tell them a lot of times to make sure that they're actually on the same page as you actually have some chance of being aligned with you. Now, I'm assuming the book isn't just that simple, just tells you to do seven times and then you're done. And actually, one of the things I was talking about a talk recently was this kind of idea that as soon as you stop talking to someone about something, your alignment automatically starts to drift. A little bit. Not like instantly, but it's definitely starts to atrophy until the next time you tell them. But of course, you can't constantly tell them because if you're constantly telling people stuff, you're not actually getting any work done. Just spending all your time communicating. So how do we find a good balance between over communicating and under communicating to keep aligned?

Jonathon Hensley 27:03

I love that question. So it's anything like, its... alignment is like a muscle, right? It's only... you have to work out, you have to, you have to use it. And you're not going to be able to maintain it without continuing to do that exercise and to make that effort. And so when it, you know, communication is one aspect of it, I love when I can see how alignment is created and maintained through not just communication, but actually in the way that we collaborate and create systems and processes as well. You know, these things can easily get siloed, right, we've all created the documentation that lives somewhere, you know, in like Google Drive or something, and then never, never actually gets used or seen again. And it's really important that we really think about knowledge management. So knowledge management being this thing that we really have to spend some time working on as product teams, because knowledge can naturally just... and not with any intention, other than just people are moving fast or bigger teams, that it naturally can get siloed within individuals not even functions of an organisation. And we have to take very careful effort of managing the knowledge and insight that we have. So we can not only protect alignment, but really ensure that we are increasing the competency of the team as a whole. And so you know, one really simple thing that I love to see teams do, and I'll ask a product team to do as an exercise quite often is, tell me all the user flows in your product? And what's the intended outcome of that flow? And I can tell you that nine out of 10 times, the product team is stumped. They have bits and pieces of it. But no one has ever really been able to just look at the product holistically and understand what are the major flows? And what's the intended outcome? It's not complicated. But when you are trying to say, well, we should innovate here, or we should do that there. What's the ecosystem? It's a complex environment, what are we touching? What are we doing? When we start to have those kinds of artefacts or tools at our disposal, we can very easily facilitate the ongoing conversations necessary to maintain and strengthen alignment without having to feel like we're stuck always communicating and repeating ourselves without moving forward.

Jason Knight 29:38

Yeah, I guess one argument could be that because of the lack of alignment that these people are having to run around like headless chickens all the time, and they don't have time to create that documentation. Another thing that I've reflected on myself is that having all of that documentation and shared understanding is absolutely fantastic, but that in itself kind of

atrophies on its own as well, right? Because you put some documents in In a repository, that's your knowledge base. Two years later, you've got 15 different versions of a document about a thing, you want to go and look it up or show it to a new joiner, and they don't know which one to look at, they don't know what's deprecated or what's still live. You almost need like a full time librarian to just be in charge of this stuff so that they can maintain some kind of rigour because, to me, it almost feels like having this big, unlimited repository of stuff is actually, in some cases harmful, because you can't see the wood for the trees.

J **Jonathon Hensley** 30:31

It is a careful balance. I agree. But I think that, like anything, the high performing product teams, they have a discipline. And that discipline is really important. And I think that there's this saying around fail fast and fail often. As an example. And it's a very... the original intent of it is beautiful. The way it's interpreted by many is incredibly dangerous. And this goes directly to your point of, we have to have an environment where we are experimenting, and we can adapt quickly and iterate. That's really important. But we cannot do that carelessly. And so I would say there's a balance in that you don't want to over document things, you don't want to over systematise, and process, don't take away the creativity of your product teams. That would be the worst thing you could do. Because they're incredible. I mean, they're there to solve problems. I think what has to be balanced is understanding is that there's a baseline of knowledge that all team members benefit from. So I'm not asking designers to become engineers, or engineers to become designers or business analysts or this role or that role, but understanding what's the commonality? And every role, in my opinion, at least, needs to understand the foundational flows of a product, the intended outcomes, and with a clearer definition of the problem that the product is solving, the impact of that problem on the customer, and where the organisation is trying to go with it. These are just fundamentals. So can you over document or over communicate those things? I don't think so. I think what you have to be careful about is how far you're gonna take that to the extent of trying to make everyone an expert in everything. And that's really not the intention.

Jason Knight 32:34

Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. And I think as you say, it's all about getting that balance, right. As most of this stuff seems to be to be honest. But if you're the leader of a company struggling with alignment today, and you've kind of touched on some of these types of people that you've met in the past and the problems that they're having, but let's imagine that were some imaginary leader, some imaginary struggling company, struggling with alignment issues, you tried a few things that didn't work... it's a really hard problem. You don't know what to do next. Now, obviously, they can go and buy your book and find out what to do next. But if there's like a Jonathon Hensley, top tip for the first thing to try, or at first thing that you could try to try to get your team's somewhat back on track. What's that magic bullet?

J **Jonathon Hensley** 33:18

Well, I always go back to where it has to start, which is, do we actually have a well defined product strategy? I think there's this misnomer that we can do great things built on top of crumbling foundations. And you just can't do that, you know, you have to really look at to the

beginning of the process, or the beginning of where the current iteration of the product started and look at it holistically. You have to be really honest, you have to I mean... it's a gut, it's a really big gut punch for a lot of companies to do that and say, "how much did we invest to get here?" And it's tricky, but it takes a leader who can look at it really honestly and go, "Okay", so they have to look at and say, "why did we get here? Why did we make the decisions we made? What did we know? And what do we know now that's different? Based on what we know what decisions would we make that are different going forward, versus trying to brute force it and continue to push that initiative forward?" And it requires that brutal honesty, because otherwise, you know, whether you have a dashboard that shows you all your metrics, and you're looking at it and everything looks green, but you're losing money, something's not right! I mean, it's broken. And so there has to be these really honest assessments of it's not about an individual. It's not even about the team, but holistically as an organisation that's making that investment. What do you have to do? And you have to look at the foundation first. I think from there, you can start to really then understand okay, well, guess what this team needs more support. We're asking them to do something, they're not really supported or empowered to do... great, let's focus on that problem and go to work on solving that. Maybe it's an issue of, we made some hypothesis about the customer, and they were wrong. And we're not acknowledging that, we don't have the feedback loop in the process that we need to in order to clearly make sure that we're adapting this. New competition came to the market, we really never anticipated that the switching costs from one solution to our solution would be so significant that it would be a barrier to growth in the market. I mean, there's so many reasons that can then be unpacked. But usually they can be tied to something that happened at a foundational moment that needs to be assessed.

Jason Knight 35:48

Yeah, I think that self reflection and brutal honesty is actually part of the problem though, right? Because not everyone's actually prepared to look deeply into the abyss and see what's coming back at them right? Like it's something that a lot of people would probably rather just put their fingers in their ears, close their eyes, sing a happy song, and just like we said earlier just kind of assume it's part of the cost of business.

Jonathon Hensley 36:10

Well, I think it's a really interesting point, you bring it up about... I mean, a lot of leaders are great leaders, because they're able to make hard decisions with little amounts of information. And they've got good instincts, good intuition. They know how to rally a team and get people organised. And that's great. Those are characteristics that help make great leaders. But in product, those same leaders also have to have, they have to have the business acumen, they have to have a certain degree of design thinking acumen, they have to have a certain amount of technology acumen to be successful. And they have to be able to step back out of their own shoes and lead with a point of empathy. So they can really make the right decisions. It is challenging, but I think that the leaders that understand that and can accept that the same thing they would expect of their team, they need to demonstrate, which is you know what, my assumption was wrong. I made a mistake. We need to now evaluate, how do we solve it now that we understand the problem in this way, or what's the next way we could approach solving this, based on our unique insights and experience and resources now that we know this approach doesn't work? There has to be that that give and take and when that hubris gets

involved, it's dangerous. And you see this written about and talked about in so many ways. You know, I loved the... there's a book called The Way Google Works. And this is one of the things that they wrote about in the book, right? The how the highest paid person in the room cannot be the loudest voice of driving the decision.

Jason Knight 37:54

Don't tell them that.

Jonathon Hensley 37:55

It's, you know, but we've all experienced it in some form or fashion. And it does, it gets in the way. What's more important? A great product that gets to a critical outcome or your opinion winning the day? And I think that's where you see, I think the teams that are consistently outperforming and overcoming the odds, they do lead with with that mentality consistently.

Jason Knight 38:20

100%, couldn't agree more. And where can people find you after this, if they want to talk to you about anything alignment related, maybe find out a bit about the book or just anything in general about product or strategy?

Jonathon Hensley 38:32

Well if anybody listening would like to reach out, please visit EmergeInteractive.com, we've got a huge number of resources available for product folks that are interested. You can certainly also reach out to me on LinkedIn, I would love to hear from you and always happy to connect and talk.

Jason Knight 38:49

Excellent. I'll make sure to align that with my show notes and hopefully we can get a few people coming your way. Well, that's been a fantastic chat. So obviously really happy to spend the time with you talking about some of the thorny issues about organisational alignment. Hopefully we can stay in touch but, as for now, thanks for taking the time.

Jonathon Hensley 39:06

Thanks so much for having me, Jason.

Jason Knight 39:10

As always, thanks for listening. I hope you found the episode inspiring and insightful. If you did

again, I can only encourage you to hop over to OneKnightInProduct.com, check out some of my other fantastic guests, sign up to the mailing list or subscribe on your favourite podcast app and make sure you share with your friends so you and they can never miss another episode again. I'll be back soon with another inspiring guest but, as for now, thanks and good night.