Revamping the Development Process can shorten the development time, increase quality, produce predictability in schedules and deliverables, and ensure your product or service is successful in the marketplace.

Why Development efforts fail. Leadership has a huge impact on the development effort, and of course the skill of the Team is critical. However, the root cause for a failed development effort is almost always the Development Process.

So if you want to improve the results of Product Development, you need to improve the Development Process.

A tool. The Development Process is a tool for efficient execution. Improving the process brings about a faster, smoother, less likely to fail, less likely to require rework, and less expensive initiative.

Why consider reviewing your Development Process? The creation and delivery of products and services is at the heart of a company’s sustainability and growth. Optimizing the Development Process to consistently and efficient accomplish this is a huge advantage over those companies who struggle with this.

If you’re a startup, you can’t afford to miss your entry into the market. If you’re a mature company, you need to compete with new entries, new technologies, the changing market, and the needs of your customers. Other costs, such as customer support, back-office IT systems, distribution channels, sales training, and even advertising dollars, are all directly affected by your Development Process.

As a consequence of Improving Product Development, you will beat your competition, increase sales, decrease customer support costs, minimize development expenses and delays, and ensure the product created is the product needed.
Revamping the Development Process will result in:

- **Faster Development Cycles**
  This is the “speed” of development. If your company development cycle time is 8 months, and your competitor is 12 months, then in two years you will be a generation ahead of your competition. *“Out cycling” your competition is one of the most important aspects of winning in the marketplace.*

- **Higher Quality**
  Quality product introductions can make the difference between a successful launch or economic disaster. Does the product or service perform as the customer expects it to? Is it supportable? Can you bill it? Is it easy to use? Are the defects discovered along the way, at the end of development, or worse, by the customer? Are the defects manageable? Are the original “feature requests”, “requirement documents”, “to-do lists”, clear and unambiguous or subject to interpretation? *Quality isn’t just about testing, but preventing mistakes, defects and false starts in the first place.* It’s a lot less expensive to minimize errors then to test and fix, or redo to work later.

- **Predictability of Schedules and Deliverables**
  Meeting schedules can bring confidence and predictable outcomes … missing them creates uncertainty, stalled rollouts and launch plans, and costly restarts. The most common, and misused question for Development is “When is it going to be done”? Misused because “It” and “Done” are often subject to interpretation. *Being able to predict a completion date and what is delivered is all about getting everyone on the same page with respect to the definition of “It” and “Done!”*, and being clear on the steps, risks, and mitigation strategies to get there.

- **Hitting the Market with the right product and service**
  When the development effort is complete, will the market buy the product or service? Will it beat the competition? Have you been out-cycled? Is it too little or too late? How do you KNOW it will be successful? Does your product development process give you the opportunity to re-align the product, without having to “adjust” the schedule? *Making “The right product” part of the development process is crucial for a good ROI.*
The Development Process – Considerations

The development process varies based on size and skill of team, nature of leadership, project scope, stage of company, target audience, etc. However, there are aspects of Development that are common across companies and industries.

Here are just a few examples of our thinking relative to what should be incorporated into an optimized Development Process.

**The “What”**. The single most frequent cause, and difficult to recover from, failure, is the lack of a clear, unambiguous, and complete definition and understanding of what is to be accomplished and the goal or purpose of that “What”.

**The “Schedule”**. The traditional approach to a development effort is to add up the time to create all the pieces and steps, put some safety multiplier on it, and whoosh, a schedule. This can work so long as you know what all the pieces really are, and there are no discoveries along the way, and your initial guesses were right. There are alternatives that are much more accurate and reliable.

**The “Chunk size”**. Determining the size of a piece of work is crucial to minimize risks of defects, schedule issues, personnel changes, changing needs and fast development cycles.

**Quality**. Quality doesn’t mean Perfection, but must be “manageable”. Understanding where and how to draw this line is extremely important in your development process.

**How do you know? Are you sure?** These are important questions to ask about what you are building, who is it for, what problem is it solving, and what is the need? Do you need a better mousetrap or a whole new thing?

**Are we ready?** How do you know the product and service is ready to launch and deliver to customers. Should you conduct a “Beta”? Your development process needs to have the right measures to help you.

**Allocation of resources**. How hard should you run the team and for how long? How do you recover from employee attrition? When should you use contract help?
Summary:

Bottom line: If you want to improve the results of Product Development, you need to improve the Development Process. This is the first and perhaps only step you’ll need.

How HeadScratchers can help?

Mike Kallet, Principal of HeadScratchers, has 30 years of experience creating products and services within a variety of industries and development processes. He has worked with numerous product teams to create and implement optimized Product Development Life Cycles resulting in successful launches and award winning products.

Revamping the Development process is a customized, hands-on, roll up the sleeves, put it to work engagement. It is geared toward the Development Teams and their Leaders who are responsible for creating, developing, or modifying products and services.

HeadScratchers can:

- Assess your development process and give you objective feedback.
- Help you set appropriate goals for your development process.
- Work with your teams to create and/or modify your development process so you can achieve the four results outlined above.
- Help apply it to projects that are already in process.

Revamping the Development Process doesn’t have to be a big project. It often can be accomplished in weeks. The cost of changing your process is small compared to the benefits you gain. It easily pays for itself during the first project. Additionally the costs you save downstream are very significant. How costly is it if your product development effort fails to deliver on its next generation service, or the first rollout of a new product? How much will you spend on customer support if your product or service has defects, or doesn’t work as your customers expect?

Make 2006 the year your Development Team delivers phenomenal results. HeadScratchers can help you do this. Contact us at:

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