

Behavior-First AI, Better Async Execution, and the Governance Question

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This brief covers behavior-first AI adoption, faster async execution patterns, and recent case studies on governance, trust, and community-centric product design. It also highlights how the PM role is shifting toward builder fluency and which books and repo tools are worth exploring.

Big Ideas

“If you start with tools, you’re going to fail.” [1]

- **AI adoption is a behavior-change problem.** Barry O’Reilly cites 85% GenAI project failure and 83% transformation failure when companies make adoption about tools instead of how people do their best work [1]. His example: if your best thinking is verbal, use transcription to turn conversation into drafts instead of forcing everything through a prompt window [1]. **Apply it:** redesign one core PM workflow around your natural working style first, then pick the tool.
- **AI works best as a team amplifier.** O’Reilly cites research showing teams using AI got 3x better ideation outcomes, and recommends leading indicators such as meeting readiness (1-10), decision velocity, and time moved from admin to creative problem-solving from roughly 20% toward 40% [1]. **Apply it:** use AI in live strategy sessions to pressure-test ideas, not just to draft after the meeting.
- **Governance affects product integrity.** Eric Ries argues great companies stay trustworthy only when mission is structurally protected from investor and organizational pressure [2]. One practical signal: whether the mission is embedded in the corporate charter, not just in a values statement [2]. **Apply it:** treat governance as part of product due diligence

when evaluating employers, founders, or major trade-offs.

Tactical Playbook

- **Reduce async latency with better specs.** Replace the Jira ticket as source of truth with a short spec covering context, non-goals, examples, edge cases, and open decisions [3]. Require engineer playback before build starts, and split discovery/spike work from delivery tickets when the task is still ambiguous [3]. Batch questions into one document rather than drip-feeding them across Slack, then use fixed overlap meetings, live sprint planning, and regular 1:1s for the hardest topics [4, 5, 6]. **Why it matters:** in distributed teams, every unclear sentence can add a full day of delay [3].
- **Measure and role-model AI adoption.** Before a decision meeting, ask how prepared the group feels on a 1-10 scale; then track decision velocity, decision advantage, and whether more time is moving from admin to higher-order problem solving [1]. Leaders also need to create safety by showing their own workflows: Progyny's CEO framed AI as a way to elevate, not eliminate, people, and shared how he used meeting transcription and synthesis [1]. **Apply it:** instrument behavior change before trying to prove ROI in hours saved.

Case Studies & Lessons

- **Trust moats need structural protection.** FedMart built customer trust with lowest-price discipline, capped 14% margins, higher wages, and no supplier bribes, but investor pressure pushed the company toward short-termism; after Saul Price was forced out, the business was liquidated within seven years [2]. Costco later preserved similar values with stronger governance protections, while Anthropic has used a long-term benefit trust plus public benefit corporation structure to protect its mission [2]. J&J shows the opposite failure mode: its Credo put patients first, but scandals still emerged when financial incentives dominated [2]. **Lesson:** if trust is part of the product, encode it in governance and incentives—not just slogans.
- **Reddit treats friction as a feature.** The product gives maximum space to nested comments, keeps the UI dense and utility-first, and relies on community curation plus moderators rather than a personalized algorithmic feed [7]. **Lesson:** optimize for the interaction loop that creates value—even if that means sacrificing some speed or polish [7].

Career Corner

- **The PM role is becoming more builder-like.** Sachin Rekhi argues PM and design roles are converging: PMs with UX intuition and designers with customer focus are meeting in the middle, with PMs using code and

agents to iterate, validate, and scope ideas [8, 9]. His caveat is useful: PMs should not ship production code if that turns them into another engineering bottleneck [9]. **Apply it:** get fluent enough to prototype and test independently, while keeping production quality ownership clear.

- **A sharp interview question:** ask whether the company’s mission is in its corporate charter. Ries says the question itself often exposes whether the organization has legally encoded its mission and can push the discussion upward [2].

Tools & Resources

- **A book stack organized by PM job-to-be-done.** Lenny Rachitsky’s latest list groups classics by strategy, product success, product org, execution, and leadership, while limiting the set to three books per category and mostly titles older than 10 years [10]. Useful starting points: *Good Strategy/Bad Strategy*, *The Mom Test*, *Continuous Discovery Habits*, *Inspired*, and *Scaling People* [11]. If reading time is the blocker, his habit suggestion is simple: 10 minutes before bed [10].
- **For PMs working directly in repos:** Product Compass recommends Codex as a chat-first entry point with a file tree, visual diffs, manual session compression, and a second-model perspective on the same repo [12]. Keep agent instructions in one `CLAUDE.md` covering strategy, workflow, and progressive disclosure, then point `AGENTS.md` at it as the source of truth [12].

Sources

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