Geneva Graduate Institute

Master of Advanced Studies (MAS) in International Relations

Final Assignment

PRODUCT DIPLOMACY

A Toolkit for High-Impact Innovation and Product Work

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1 Abstract

This paper examines the use of modern diplomacy tools to address existing challenges and enhance the effectiveness of innovation and product work. It represents one of the first empirical studies in this field. By tackling the key hurdles of novelty, transformation, and power dynamics, Product Diplomacy, as introduced and defined in this paper, offers a promising approach. A qualitative survey of 45 innovation and product professionals reveals that they are open to using modern diplomacy tools more systematically. They acknowledge the benefits of improving alignment, stakeholder engagement, and decision-making. The positive experiences reported by survey participants who applied multiple Product Diplomacy tools suggest these tools have the potential to significantly increase success rates in innovation and product work. Concerns about practical relevance, resistance, transparency, misuse for office politics, and time constraints can be mitigated with training, tools, and increased knowledge. The paper hence suggests bundling tools for the skill of influencing people under the umbrella of Product Diplomacy to increase awareness, focus and clarity. The "Product Diplomacy Toolkit" developed and applied in this paper aims to provide a valuable foundation for applying these tools more systematically, increasing efficiency and effectiveness. The study's implications suggest that organizations in both business and governmental contexts should incorporate Product Diplomacy as a strategic tool to make a significant difference in innovation and product work, thereby building high-impact products.

2 Introduction

2.1 Context

Tech titans like Apple, Google or Amazon have revolutionized how people around the world access information, book travel, or buy products. Despite their distinct product offerings and market positions, many technology companies share a core approach to innovation and product development. The Silicon Valley Product Group ("SVPG") has identified a common denominator in how many successful technology companies approach innovation and product development. These companies excel at both, innovation culture (product discovery) and

execution culture (product delivery).[1] The SVPG captures this concept with the term "product operating model", which "is about consistently creating technology-powered solutions that your customers love, yet work for your business".[2] According to Cagan, the core principle of this concept stresses that successful solutions must satisfy four criteria:[3]

1. Valuable: products must deliver value, ensuring customers are willing to buy them or users actively choose to engage with them.

2. Usable: users must be able to intuitively understand and navigate the product's functionalities.

3. Feasible: the product's development must be achievable within the organization's existing timeframe, skillset, and technological capabilities.

4. Viable: the solution must demonstrably align with and benefit the various aspects of the organization or business.

Cagan emphasizes, that the product operating model applies to all companies who are powering their products and services with technology, and it extends beyond just pure technology companies.[4] It applies hence to any organization in both governmental and business contexts that leverage technology to drive product innovation and execution. This increased focus on digital transformation and technology-driven products has given the innovation and product function a more prominent role across organizations. The rise of Chief Product Officers driving product, innovation, and digital transformation reflects this shift. The 2023 CPO Insights Report predicts a surge in P&L-owning CPOs at Fortune 1000 companies, increasing from 30% in 2023 to 70% by 2028.[5]

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[1] Cagan, "Innovation vs. Execution."

[2] Cagan, *Transformed*, 7.

[3] Cagan, "The Four Big Risks."

[4] Cagan, *Transformed*.

[5] Count, "2023 CPO Insights Report."

Besides the term "product operating model" coined by the SVPG, there are other concepts such as "Design Thinking" or agile frameworks like "Scrum" used in the industry for describing methods for innovation and product development. In this paper we're using SVPG's term "product operating model" or "product development" to describe how modern organizations drive product innovation and execution. While the core principles of the product operating model are familiar to professionals in both governmental and business context, translating this knowledge into effective adoption presents significant challenges. This paper explores whether and how tools of modern diplomacy can aid in this process.

However, diplomacy is often seen as a political activity that is secretive and indirect in communication, prioritizing "fine words" over transparency. One could believe that diplomacy simply adds fuel to the political fire, making it seem incompatible with Innovation/Product work, which thrives on transparency, communication, lateral leadership and collaboration. These are valid concerns. We therefore delve deeper and ask: how might we use tools of modern diplomacy in innovation and product work to achieve full alignment with the entire C-suite, removing barriers and frictions to facilitate the development of high-impact products?

Regarding office politics, Wyatt and Doldor put it clearly: "There's no escaping office politics".[6] They emphasize that networking, building relationships, and influencing others are critical in any workplace. Avoiding politics can result in missed opportunities and relationships necessary to get things done.[7] Diplomacy is not equivalent to office politics, which are primarily about power and authority. Diplomacy aims to maintain positive relationships, foster mutual understanding, identify shared goals, and cultivate trust.[8] While any method can be misused to drive one's own agenda, we want to find solutions that address the above mentioned "How Might We" question. We hence understand diplomacy as a strategic and structured approach

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[6] Wyatt and Doldor, "Office Politics Don't Have to Be Toxic," 1.

[7] Wyatt and Doldor, "Office Politics Don't Have to Be Toxic."

[8] London, *Principled Leadership and Business Diplomacy*.

to achieve shared goals and positive outcomes. Applying such an approach requires energy and time. This investment is justified if it increases the chances of success, making a significant and much-needed difference for governments and businesses in today's complex and fast-paced world.

2.2 Research and methodology

This paper, one of the first empirical investigation in this field, employs a qualitative research approach to investigate how innovation and product professionals utilize methods of modern diplomacy in their work. To ensure participants were relevant to the research, the survey, based on purposive sampling, targeted individuals who met the following criteria:[9]

- Mandatory: Experience in innovation and product work.

- Optional: exposure to the C-suite.

With a total of 45 participants meeting the criteria, the qualitative research reached saturation.[10] Participants were exposed to the Survey, which included five tools of modern diplomacy, and were asked open-ended questions to elaborate on whether, how, and why they had already applied each tool (the "Survey"). If they had applied it, they were to describe what went well and what challenges they faced, and if not, to explain why they hadn't used it yet. Additionally, they were asked to indicate how helpful the application was, or, if they hadn't applied it yet, how helpful they believed the application could be. These questions were accompanied by a request to explain, in an open-ended manner, why they provided that indication.

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[9] Anderson, "Presenting and Evaluating Qualitative Research."

[10] "What Is Data Saturation in Qualitative Research?"

Profiles	Internal Staff			External Experts		Total
	With C-suite exposure		Without C-suite exposure	With C-suite exposure		
	Product Leaders (a)	Senior Product Managers (b)	Product Team (c)	Experts (d)	Entrepreneurs (e)	
Absolute	22	12	5	5	1	45
Relative	49%	27%	11%	11%	2%	100%
Organizational context						
Small (1-50 employees)	5	1	1	n.a.	1	
Medium (51-250 employees)	7	2	3	n.a.	0	
Large (> 250 employees)	10	9	1	n.a.	0	

(a) CPO, Head of Product, VP of Product, etc.

(b) Senior Product Manager, Lead Product Manager, Innovation Manager

(c) Product Designer, Engineer, Product Marketing Manager, Product Content Manager, etc.

(d) Product Coach, Product/Innovation Expert or Advisor, Academic professionals

(e) Entrepreneur, Co-Founder with product responsibilities

Figure 1 · Survey Participants

Participants stem from small tech and non-tech companies, all the way up to current or former employees of tech titans, giving the survey results a broad and relevant perspective. Nearly half (49%) of participants were Product Leaders. A significant majority (89%) of the survey participants had direct exposure to the C-suite, enhancing the data's relevance to the research. This paper presents findings derived from the Survey based on inductive, thematic coding (see Appendix A for the original, unprocessed version incl. thematic analysis). The themes are presented in descending order of frequency, based on survey participant input. To illustrate these findings more concretely, selected survey participant inputs (in their original version, incl. spelling errors) will be presented and highlighted in *italics,* angle brackets, and grey.

2.3 Problem to solve: the three key hurdles

Even though e-commerce titan Amazon, founded in 1994 by Jeff Bezos, exemplifies the product operating model's successful application for over two decades, the concept itself and its consequent adoption remains novel for many companies today. This novelty can lead to tension within organizations since new approaches often face resistance from stakeholders who favor the status quo. The CPO Insights Report also highlights a potential "tension in the C-suite"[11] as the CPO function expands. CPOs and other C-suite members often have differing

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[11] Count, "2023 CPO Insights Report," 6.

perspectives on the CPO's role, needs, and responsibilities. This highlights a key challenge: bridging the gap between the model's proven effectiveness and its widespread adoption.

The adoption of the model necessitates a company- or organization-wide transformation. It opens traditional silos, impacting every department from sales, marketing to finance, and even manufacturing. This applies not only to businesses but also to organizations in governmental and humanitarian contexts. For example, the ICRC's recent evaluation of innovation identified "lack of clear organizational strategy for innovation", "lack of senior management buy-in", "silos and territorialism across different parts of the ICRC" and "[…] rigid organizational structure of the ICRC and the resulting lack of connectedness and tensions across different parts of the organization" as barriers for innovation.[12]

The adoption also includes a shift towards "lateral leadership"[13] that marks a significant departure from traditional hierarchical structures. Koçak and Herbig emphasize that leaders no longer manage vertically, but collaborate across functions and with different stakeholders, using influence without formal hierarchical power.[14] According to London, this transformation demands significant adjustments from the C-suite, and every employee, requiring them to embrace ambiguity and potentially redefine the power frameworks within their organizations.[15]

The product operating model's core principle of empowering employees and hence reframing power from the "control over outputs towards the control over outcomes"[16] can trigger suspicions especially among the C-suite. This reframing may be perceived as a threat to their traditional authority. As a result, they might associate empowerment with a loss of control and power, potentially hindering the model's adoption within their organizations.[17]

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[12] "Evaluation of Innovation at the ICRC 2018-2023," 4.

[13] Kühl, Schnelle, and Tillmann, "Lateral Leadership."

[14] Koçak, "NEW LEADERSHIP DYNAMICS IN THE INFORMATION AGE"; Herbig, *Lateral Leadership*.

[15] London, *Principled Leadership and Business Diplomacy*.

[16] Gilad, *Evidence Guided*, 181.

[17] Gilad, *Evidence Guided*.

The following themes were identified from the Survey in which participants were asked about the roadblocks in product development and management within their organizations:

1. Organizational and leadership challenges
2. Expertise and knowledge gaps
3. Communication and collaboration issues

> *«Competing or unclear priorities within the organisation»*

> *«Lack of understanding of what product management means / what product thinking is / how outcome-driven product development works.»*

> *«Output-focus, over-emphasis on opinions rather than data, mistrust between management and the product org.»*

From the analysis in this section, three key hurdles emerge that must be addressed to unlock the product operating model's full potential:

1. Novelty

Lack of knowledge, experience and ownership, unclear roles and responsibilities, issues with trust or empowerment.

2. Transformation

Resistance to change, challenges with legacy systems, unclear processes.

3. Reframing of power dynamics

Fear of losing power, unclear priorities, communication breakdowns, decision making struggles, misaligned goals.

For any CEO or professional in the innovation and product area, this represents a particularly challenging starting position.

The journey requires building trust, fostering relationships, and effectively influencing stakeholders across all levels, especially between product/innovation teams and the C-suite.

To overcome the three key hurdles, the skill of "Influencing People" as per Ravi Mehta's competency model is crucial and serves as a prerequisite in addition to the more technical skills of "Product Execution", "Customer Insight", and "Product Strategy".[18] There is an abundance of specific resources available for mastering the technical skills. The same cannot be said for the skill of "Influencing People" in innovation and product work, a core objective of diplomacy.[19] When asked about their future usage of diplomatic methods in innovation and product work, survey participants identified the following themes:

1. Interest in systematic application and learning
2. Current unconscious usage and familiarity
3. Practical concerns and scepticism

«Would love to have a framework on how to integrate these [methods] in a more structured way, rather than just doing it naturally on the job…»

«Responding to this form has made me realise that I use some of these methodologies unconsciously but that if systematised they could have a greater impact. They are interesting and fundamental tools for a product leader, and I plan to learn more about them and implement them systematically.»

«The approach and methods are sound but require a change of corporate culture, which must be sponsored and championed from the top of the organisation.»

2.4   Desired outcome

"I was tired of the day-to-day reality of evangelizing product management […]. I was tired of sitting in conference rooms arguing with executives about our product strategy […]. Sadly, this is the work of a product executive."[20] This paper seeks to contribute to the field of innovation

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[18] "How To Become a Peak Product Manager."

[19] London, *Principled Leadership and Business Diplomacy*.

[20] Torres, *Continuous Discovery Habits*, 17–20.

and product management by providing solutions for addressing widespread frustrations and inefficiencies experienced by many professionals. It aims to build awareness of how diplomatic skills and tools can help bridge gaps and foster a shared understanding of the needs and cross-organizational responsibilities involved in innovation and product work, with a particular focus on the C-suite.

Based on a practical application case, readers shall be equipped with knowledge and frameworks that allow them to apply the tools elaborated in this paper in their work efficiently and effectively.

The terms "Product Diplomacy" and "Product Diplomat" serve as umbrella terms encompassing the diplomatic skills and tools needed to successfully overcome the three key hurdles within both government and business contexts.

2.5   Target group

This paper is primarily intended for innovation and product leaders, such as Chief Product Officers (CPOs), Heads of Innovation. These professionals hold significant influence within their organizations and play a pivotal role in overcoming the three key hurdles. Innovation and product leaders align stakeholders' expectations, especially those of the C-suite, with whom they need a trust-based relationship. They ensure the product vision and strategy match the overall business strategy. Securing buy-in from diverse stakeholders is crucial for effective product strategy implementation.[21]

C-suite members, especially CEOs, gain valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities associated with unleashing the power of innovation and product work within their organizations. This paper helps them identify necessary actions for themselves and their innovation and product leaders.

While the C-suite and product leaders play a crucial role in adopting the product operating model, the diplomatic skills and tools described are valuable for all members of a product

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[21] Cagan, *Transformed*.

organization, including product managers, designers, and engineers. By applying these skills, all members can help overcome the key hurdles.

Given the target group, this paper assumes readers have a foundational understanding of the product operating model. For a deep dive into this subject, the [SVPG webpage](#) is a valuable resource.

3   From Diplomacy to Product Diplomacy

This section starts with a concise overview of diplomacy, then explores business diplomacy, from which "Product Diplomacy" is derived.

3.1   Diplomacy

Our traditional understanding of diplomacy is rooted in the realm of foreign relations. Merriam-Webster defines diplomacy as "the art and practice of conducting negotiations between nations".[22] Diplomacy is hence viewed primarily as a tool for protecting a nation's interests. According to Bišofa, this is achieved by assigning representatives, like ambassadors, to act on behalf of their home country and carry out its foreign policy objectives in other countries.[23] This traditional understanding of diplomacy has broadened in recent times. Today, as Leira emphasizes, diplomacy extends beyond nation-states and political entities to encompass a wider range of actors working at various levels – local, regional, or global – and may work independently of or alongside governments.[24] The boundaries between professions are dissolving as diplomacy becomes according to Constantinou et al. increasingly "trans-professional"[25]. This means that individuals from diverse backgrounds, not just traditionally

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[22] "Definition of DIPLOMACY."

[23] Bišofa, "Concept and Transformation of Diplomacy."

[24] Leira, "A Conceptual History of Diplomacy."

[25] Constantinou, Cornago, and McConnell, *Transprofessional Diplomacy*, 1.

diplomatic professions, are actively incorporating diplomatic skills into their work. As a result, the concept of diplomacy gets used across professional boundaries by a wider range of actors.

3.2 Business diplomacy

Business diplomacy, as explained by London, uses the same principles as traditional diplomacy. It involves identifying and valuing shared goals. Business diplomats use tact and understanding to foster trust and cultivate strong relationships. This is a crucial mindset for navigating the complexities of the business landscape.[26] Business diplomacy revolves around the company and its employees, who act as the primary diplomatic players. According to Kesteleyn their core mission is to secure the company's profitability, ensuring its long-term viability.[27] As per London, "Diplomacy works well for leaders implementing change and trying to gain commitment and involvement from members of an organization. […] it helps to develop better interpersonal relationships, convince others of a preferable course of action, and give advice and coaching to coworkers. Diplomacy is important when others' commitment is required".[28] On this subject London believes that mastery of diplomacy, a skill that can be learned and trained, should be a cornerstone competency for businesses.[29] Saner confirms that to effectively manage diverse stakeholders, achieve strategic goals and drive desired business goals, the C-suite needs to cultivate and disseminate diplomatic knowledge throughout the organization.[30] Research from Alammar and Pauleen finally "demonstrates the practicability and applicability of business diplomacy in management and business [… and]

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[26] London, *Principled Leadership and Business Diplomacy*.

[27] Kesteleyn, "Introduction: Business Diplomacy."

[28] London, *Principled Leadership and Business Diplomacy*, 49.

[29] London, *Principled Leadership and Business Diplomacy*.

[30] Saner, "Business Diplomacy Management: A Core Competency for Global Companies"""; Henisz, "The Dynamic Capability of Corporate Diplomacy."

suggest that business incorporate business diplomacy as a strategic tool at the managerial and organizational levels".[31]

3.3   Product diplomacy

A modern understanding of diplomacy goes beyond its traditional association with protecting a nation's interests. According to Barston this is exemplified in terms such as "humanitarian diplomacy", or "logistics diplomacy".[32]

To lay the groundwork for a clear definition of Product Diplomacy, we begin by outlining key differences to traditional diplomacy leveraging Hocking's framework used to analyse the differences between "State-centred and Multistakeholder Diplomacy".[33]

3.3.1   Key differences

	Traditional diplomacy	Product Diplomacy
Context	States hold absolute and unquestionable power in determining results.	Lateral leadership. No hierarchical authority or power relations.
Forms	Government-driven pursued through bilateral and multilateral channels.	Driven by innovation/product leaders and individual contributors within a product organization.
Participants	Exclusive. "Professional diplomatic guild".[34]	Open.

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[31] Alammar and Pauleen, "Business Diplomacy in Practice," 14.

[32] Barston, *Modern Diplomacy*.

[33] Hocking, "Multistakeholder Diplomacy: Forms, Functions, and Frustrations.," 18–19.

[34] Hocking, 17.

Main role	"Diplomat as gatekeeper"[35].	Diplomat as facilitator, intrapreneur and advocate.
Functions	Cultivating relationships with other countries while safeguarding and promoting the nation's best interests.	Defining and executing product vision and strategy. Lateral collaboration and communication. Defining and promoting interests of the product operating model.
Location	Beyond national borders.	Mainly inside company or organization but beyond silos.
Representation pattern	Government-driven	None. Thought leadership for the product operating model.
Rules	Well-defined norms of conduct (protocol, immunity, confidentiality).	Limited formal code of conduct. Transparency.
Communication patterns	Bureaucratic and procedural.	Transparent, open and inclusive.
Collaboration patterns	Exclusive but relations with stakeholders possible in form of multistakeholder diplomacy. Focused on consensus, democracy (if	Inclusive. Collaboration with stakeholders in lateral leadership context mandatory.

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35 Hocking, 18.

	applicable) and compromise.	In context of operational product teamwork: not focused on consensus, democracy, or compromise.

Figure 2 · Key Differences between Traditional and Product Diplomacy

Product Diplomacy follows lateral leadership principles. In the product operating model, actors work without formal authority, relying on collaboration and influence to align with the C-suite. Cross-functional teamwork ensures products meet client needs, align with the business strategy, and resonate with stakeholders, securing essential buy-in. While product and innovation leaders play a pivotal role, any individual contributor can and should embrace the spirit of a product diplomat. Unlike gatekeepers, product diplomats are facilitators who emphasize that departmental boundaries are dynamic spaces for interaction. They foster collaboration and demonstrate intrapreneurial spirit to drive product development and secure stakeholder buy-in.

Securing buy-in for their product vision and strategy is a significant challenge for innovation and product leaders. They must define and consistently advocate for the strategic context and interests of the product operating model throughout the company.

Product diplomats focus on their own organization and customers, leveraging external learning and networking to enhance their impact. Unlike traditional diplomats, their main role is not external representation. However, product and innovation leaders should actively seek collaborations with third parties and establish themselves as thought leaders.

Product diplomats work in less structured contexts with limited formal codes of conduct but must adhere to internal company culture and codes to gain trust. Communication patterns differ significantly. Traditional diplomacy follows bureaucratic norms and hierarchical structures, while Product Diplomacy thrives on openness and inclusivity. Transparency and fostering open dialogue are the cornerstones for product diplomats.

Collaboration is crucial to both traditional and product diplomacy. However, Cagan emphasizes that day-to-day operational collaboration within product teams differs significantly in three aspects:[36]

Aspect 1 · "collaboration is not consensus".[37]

Unlike traditional diplomacy, which strive for consensus-based decision-making, the product operating model embraces Jeff Bezos' "disagree-but-commit"[38] principle. This principle prioritizes alignment over absolute agreement. The goal is to develop a shared understanding of "what" needs to be done and "why", allowing for quicker decision-making.[39] The product operating model in that sense fosters collaboration even when starting points diverge.[40]

Aspect 2 · "collaboration is not democracy."[41]

Product teams usually don't vote on decisions but leverage each member's expertise. For customer experience decisions, the product designer leads. Business constraints are guided by the product manager, and technical aspects are driven by the tech lead. In case of conflict, experimentation resolves issues.[42]

Aspect 3 · "collaboration is not about compromise".[43]

Compromise can lead to inferior user experiences and a product that fails to deliver value, signifying a collective loss for the team and business.[44] The product operating model fosters collaboration where product managers, designers, and engineers combine their expertise. This

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[36] Cagan, *Transformed*, 91.

[37] Cagan, 91.

[38] Rossman and Euchner, "Innovation the Amazon Way," 18.

[39] Rossman and Euchner, "Innovation the Amazon Way"; Herbig, *Lateral Leadership*.

[40] London, *Principled Leadership and Business Diplomacy*.

[41] Cagan, *Transformed*, 91.

[42] Cagan, *Transformed*.

[43] Cagan, 92.

[44] Cagan, *Transformed*.

structure prioritizes shared understanding of problems and solutions over complete consensus. By leveraging strengths and expertise, the team identifies solutions that address all constraints without unhealthy compromise.

Overcoming the three key hurdles necessitates close collaboration with the C-suite on overarching organizational issues. Therefore, product diplomats, in contrast to the three aspects described above, must prioritize building consensus, employing democratic principles, and demonstrating a willingness to compromise in their efforts to navigate these challenges.

3.3.2 Product diplomacy definition

Based on the context of continually evolving patterns of diplomacy elaborated herein, we define Product Diplomacy as follows:

Product Diplomacy equips innovation leaders, product leaders, and the C-suite with tools from modern diplomacy. These tools empower them to build bridges across the C-suite and throughout the entire organization, advocating for, and facilitating the adoption of effective innovation and product ecosystems, ultimately resulting in the creation of high-impact products.

4 Bridging theory and practice: diplomatic tools

This section bridges the definition of Product Diplomacy to actionable insights in the form of diplomatic tools adapted for innovation and product work to overcome the three key hurdles. Each tool is presented with its diplomatic context. To illustrate their application, we'll use a hypothetical case study introduced in this section. This case study reflects a typical situation based on survey participants' inputs regarding the biggest roadblocks they encounter in their organizations, such as:

«Misguided attitudes towards the Product function; feature factory mentality; tech leaders actively resisting the product org.»

«Having the Commercial Team pushing product decisions rather than coming to the Product team with requests.»

«No Accountability: Lack of a clear and proper division of responsibilities around product development and management. Everyone is responsible for the product, but no one is accountable for it.»

We'll introduce frameworks to illustrate how Product Diplomacy tools can be applied efficiently. In Appendix C you'll find the "Product Diplomacy Toolkit" including all the frameworks used in this paper. The practical application, limitations and benefits are derived from insights of the Survey and literature. According to Barston, it's important to remember that, while each tool is presented individually, diplomatic practice, and by extension Product Diplomacy, often involve the synergistic combination of these elements to achieve success.[45]

INFLUENCE & NEGOTIATION

BUILDING COMPETENCIES · Build strong, unified teams equipped to achieve your goals.

NEGOTIATION · Find commitment on issues of mutual concern.

CO-OPTATION · Gain the support of potential opponents by involving them in the decision-making process.

MULTISTAKEHOLDER MANAGEMENT & ALLIANCES

MULTISTAKEHOLDER DIPLOMACY· Treat stakeholders as partners. Facilitate equitable participation of all parties concerned.

COALITION BUILDING · Group those who share your goals to get immetdiate support for your initiative.

SHUTTLE DIPLOMACY · Let stakeholders share their thoughts and concerns in an informal setting first for smoother navigation.

PRODUCT DIPLOMACY TOOLS

RELATIONSHIPS & COMMUNICATION

Authentic Relationship Building · Understand and use the power of networks.

Communication Management · Maximize communication impact through strategic planning and consistency.

Active Listening · Build trust and demonstrate respect, creating a foundation for productive collaboarion.

Building Trust · Demonstrate your integrity and reliability on a foundation of transparency and inclusion.

PROCESSES

Establishing Rules · Propose clearly defined rules to provide a sense of security, clarity, and direction to all stakeholders.

ADVOCACY

Strategic Advocacy · Convert target audiences to supporters.

Figure 3 · Product Diplomacy Tools Overview
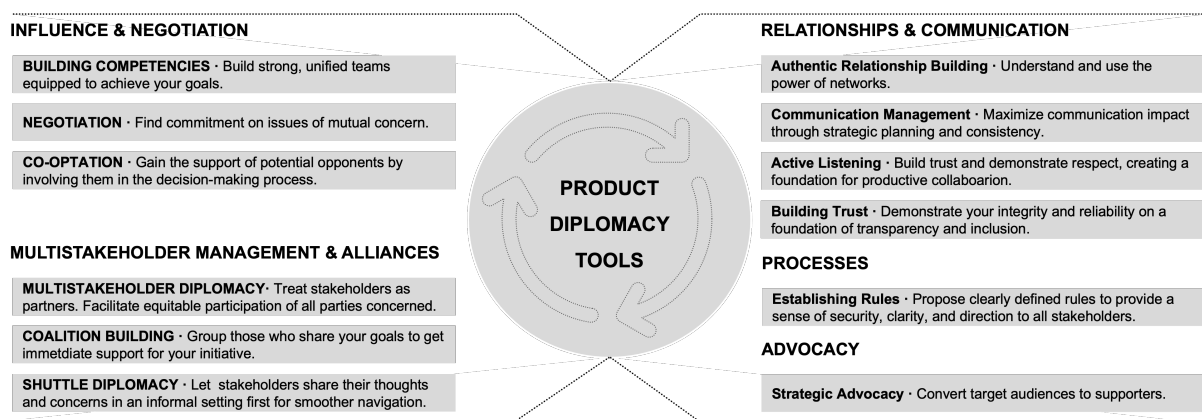
While many diplomatic tools exist, some are not well-suited or, especially in the case of "counter-diplomacy"[46] even counterproductive to the product operating model. Therefore, this analysis excludes tools like secret correspondence, signaling, official visits, coercive diplomacy, or reliance on clandestine behavior.

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[45] Barston, *Modern Diplomacy*.

[46] Barston, 48.

4.1   Case study

EcoForge's sales growth is stagnating at 0.5% annually. This falls short of shareholder expectations for double-digit growth, putting pressure on the CEO to deliver swift turnaround. EcoForge's innovation and product development is conducted in a feature factory mode[47], prioritizing a high volume of features (outputs) over their corresponding value to customers and business impact (outcome). This approach involves directly assigning product and feature ideas to the product team and the corresponding IT and design resources for execution. This emphasis on quick wins aligns with the CEO's and CSO's priorities, allowing them to maintain control, demonstrate progress through output volume, and address client and shareholder pressure.

Employees are encouraged to contribute product and feature ideas, resulting in a high flow of requests. A key challenge is the lack of a structured process for analyzing, prioritizing, and deciding what to build and, more importantly, what not to build. This leads to several issues:

- Unrealistic expectations: everyone expects their ideas to be seriously considered, but with limited resources and without clear criteria, frustration arises.

- Unclear ownership: responsibilities and accountabilities for decision-making and execution are undefined.

- Conflicting priorities: decisions are made on a case-by-case basis influenced by the opinions of randomly selected people. This leads to long meetings and inconsistent prioritization, often resulting in a focus on quick solutions without a clear understanding of the underlying customer problems.

- HiPPO (Highest Paid Person's Opinion) bias: final decision-making rests with the CEO. This is in EcoForge's CEO interest as it grants control and the ability to steer product direction, even though it risks micromanagement.

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[47] Moore, "Changing How You Solve Problems."

The executive board of EcoForge meets bi-weekly to take major decisions ranging from financial and HR-matters up to introduction of new rules and procedures.

Within EcoForge, the executive board views Ava, the CPO, primarily as the head of project management tasked with organizing the execution of ideas.

This highly informal feature factory approach is a source of frustration for the CTO, the CMO, and especially Ava:

- It triggers team frustration and high fluctuation within marketing, IT and product teams.

- It leads to inefficiencies and wasted development efforts.

- It creates confusion as there is no clear direction on what products or features are developed and why.

They see the current output-driven development model as a key contributor to EcoForge's stagnating growth. To address this, Ava wants to trigger the following changes:

- Change from an output to an outcome driven development model.

- Structured, evidence-guided prioritization by introduction of the ICE Score framework.

4.2 Relationships & Communication

A core aspect of diplomacy involves cultivating and managing relationships with diverse stakeholders. This requires building trust and using appropriate communication strategies to foster interaction and engagement.

4.2.1 Relationship Building

According to London, effective diplomats understand the power of networks.[48] Networks as a form of horizontal cooperation create shared value, foster collaboration, and build bridges to break down silos. These are crucial elements in a landscape where traditional hierarchies are fading, and lateral leadership prevails.

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[48] London, *Principled Leadership and Business Diplomacy*.

Application

According to Wijers some find the concept of strategic networking off-putting, believing relationships should develop organically. While fostering genuine connections is paramount in Product Diplomacy, a proactive approach can complement this natural process.[49] However, to force interactions is the wrong approach. Genuine interest and willingness to listen to and help others is what counts. Looking beyond your immediate circle is crucial. By breaking out of your bubble and seeking connections in new environments, you broaden your perspective, foster flexibility, and, as Wijers emphasizes, prepare yourself for unforeseen opportunities and challenges.[50]

Ava's approach:

AUTHENTIC RELATIONSHIP BUILDING · Understand and use the power of networks.	
Your strategy to nurture your network proactively:	**Your strategy to seek connections outside your immediate circle:**
Dedicated time reserved in my schedule each week to plan networking with internal and external people: • Monday, 11:00am: 1h networking planning for the week. • Wednesday and Thursday lunch time reserved for networking meetings.	• I cultivate a list of groups and topics outside of my immediate environment that I come across in professional and private live. • Each week I reserve 2 hours in my schedule to research and discover one item on my list.

Figure 4 · Relationship Building Framework

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[49] Wijers, *Managing Authentic Relationships*.

[50] Wijers.

4.2.2 Communication management

Clear and positive communication across multiple channels is paramount in diplomacy. This includes transparency, timeliness, and consideration in messaging, with the ability to be both persuasive and adaptable. As emphasized by Wijers, effective diplomats are adept at leveraging both formal and informal communication channels.[51]

Recognizing the importance of informal communication is crucial for influencing behavior, as it allows for deeper connections and a nuanced understanding of stakeholder perspectives.[52] Barston notes that modern diplomacy values side diplomacy, which fosters interactions beyond formal meetings.[53]

Application

Product diplomats embrace the concept of side diplomacy. They allocate time daily to reach out to internal and external contacts for casual connections, fostering organic interactions. For more formal communication, Bullion emphasizes the importance of strategic planning and consistency.[54] By establishing predictable rhythms, channels, and messaging, product diplomats can cultivate habits that keep people engaged.

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[51] Wijers.

[52] Wijers.

[53] Barston, *Modern Diplomacy*.

[54] Bullion, "The 4Cs of Stakeholder Management for Product Executives."

Ava's approach:

COMMUNICATION MANAGEMENT · Maximize communication impact through strategic planning and consistency.	
What (Content): The message you want to convey. • The Product Team works transparently and takes client and stakeholder inputs into consideration.	**Who (audience): The audience you want to direct the message to.** • Everybody within EcoForge.
How (Delivery): Your most appropriate channel for the message and audience. • 30mins open calls, based on a pre-defined agenda to share data-driven updates and insights. • Incl. audience FAQ and recording.	**When (Timing): Consistency and timing for your communication to maximize impact.** • Consistently at the same place and time to establish a habit: on the first Wednesday each month at 04:00pm on Zoom.

Figure 5 · Communication Management Framework [55]

Note to Ava's open call strategy: Cagan stresses that open-call meetings shouldn't be used for initial product idea presentation, as this can be counterproductive. Instead, they are best for presenting ideas backed by evidence, data, or high-fidelity prototypes that have already secured stakeholder buy-in regarding their viability.[56]

4.2.3   Active listening

Diplomats prioritize attentively understanding stakeholder concerns. According to Alammar's study, this involves:

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[55] Bullion.

[56] Cagan, *Transformed*.

- Demonstrating relational empathy: diplomats actively seek to understand and value others' viewpoints, even those they may disagree with. This collaborative approach strengthens relationships by creating new ways to interact.

- Focused attention: giving the speaker their full attention.

By actively listening, diplomats build trust and demonstrate respect, laying the foundation for productive collaboration.[57]

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[57] Alammar and Pauleen, "Business Diplomacy in Practice."

Application

Derived from Alammar and Pauleen's study, Ava focusses on the key questions of the following framework during her conversation with the CTO:[58]

ACTIVE LISTENING · Build trust and demonstrate respect, creating a foundation for productive collaboration.	
Shared pressures: what are the common challenges and pressures faced by all parties involved? • High fluctuation in IT and product teams.	**Mutual interests: address the motivations of the other party. What are the potential rewards for the individual you are speaking to?** • Motivation: reduce frustrations of IT people. • Rewards: lower fluctuation.
Desired outcomes: what results or goals do we all strive to achieve? • Structured, data-driven prioritization for feature and product development minimizing waste.	**Realistic expectations: whose expectations are relevant to this situation, and how realistic are they?** • CEO and CSO need to be convinced.
Uncertainties: Summarize the speaker's message in your own words to confirm understanding: • *"In essence. You're saying…"* • *"If I understand you correctly…"*	**Differences: transform differences into constructive forces that strengthen the relationship. List the differences here:** • CTO would prefer a framework other than the ICE Score.

Figure 6 · Active Listening Framework[59]

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[58] Alammar and Pauleen.

[59] Alammar and Pauleen.

4.2.4   Building Trust

At the core of successful diplomacy lies trust. According to London, diplomats consistently demonstrate integrity and reliability by keeping promises and treating everyone with respect. They avoid exploiting others and recognize that trust is crucial for facilitating desired change.[60] In an environment of low trust, people are more likely to put up strong defenses against anything that is novel, transformative or reframes power, even if everything is based on factual ground.

Application

The success of innovation and product leaders/managers is rooted on the foundation of transparency and inclusion. Product diplomats embrace an open approach, readily sharing insights, data, and prototypes with colleagues across departments. This includes inviting participation in user testing, encouraging constructive/critical feedback, fostering a culture of continuous learning and improvement, or inviting stakeholder to meetings where they can express their expectations from the product team. Building strong relationships with key stakeholders such as sales and customer success teams is particularly crucial. By engaging in conversations with both existing clients and prospects, product diplomats reinforce a product-led sales approach while they build bridges to sales and customer success teams. The involvement of top-level executives is vital. Engaging them in data-driven workshops empowers them to understand which opportunities to pursue and, most importantly, which to avoid.

This commitment to transparency and inclusion is balanced with mindfulness for everyone's time. Product diplomats excel at efficiently sharing information and gathering feedback, ensuring valuable insights are exchanged without creating unnecessary friction.

Ava's approach:

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[60] London, *Principled Leadership and Business Diplomacy*; Wijers, *Managing Authentic Relationships*.

BUILDING TRUST· Demonstrate your integrity and reliability on a foundation of transparency and inclusion.	
How you share insights, data, and (high-fidelity) prototypes. • Monthly, 30mins open calls, based on a pre-defined agenda to share data-driven updates and insights.	**How you create strong relationships with key stakeholders.** • Encourage the CSO to involve product team members in client-facing sales calls to provide valuable technical information. • Debrief after calls to exchange insights and improve.
How you involve the C-suite • C-suite encouraged to participate in the monthly calls. • Dedicated summary of call afterwards provided to the executive board.	**What is your secrete sauce for building trust?** • We respect everyone's time by embracing strict time management, allowing participants to leave events whenever necessary.

Figure 7 · Building Trust Framework

4.3   Processes
4.3.1   Establishing Rules

According to Barston, the diplomat in its function as a facilitator proposes rules, which stakeholders discuss and refine until a consensus is reached.[61] Clearly defined rules provide a sense of security, clarity, and direction for all stakeholders. A significant advantage of clear rules is their ability to streamline processes. Once established, they provide clarity and save valuable time by minimizing unproductive discussions.

Application

Examples of such rules include:

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[61] Barston, *Modern Diplomacy*.

- Agreeing on a common methodology for feature or product prioritization, such as the ICE Score framework.

- Establishing a shared vocabulary for innovation and product work ensuring consistency and a common language. This minimizes friction caused by misunderstandings from different definitions or frameworks.

Ava's approach

ESTABLISHING RULES · Propose clearly defined rules to provide a sense of security, clarity, and direction to all stakeholders.

The rule you want to introduce.	Why (Problem it addresses).
Introducing an innovation and product management glossary and toolbox to be used across EcoForge.	- The lack of structured methods or the use of personal ones leads to translation frictions. - Inconsistent vocabulary results in time-consuming, inefficient, and frustrating conversations, potentially steering projects in the wrong direction.
Your best guess of how it provides clarity If everyone shares the same vocabulary and applies the same tools/frameworks, misunderstandings and frictions can be minimized.	**Who (stakeholders)** - C-suite - Everyone contributing to innovation and product work at EcoForge.

Figure 8· Establishing Rules Framework

Survey results

Among survey participants who actively applied the tool (64% of participants), the survey found a positive perception of its value: 72% rated it as helpful to very helpful (21% somewhat helpful, 7% not helpful).

Thematic findings

Limitations	Benefits
• Inconsistent application and resistance. • Dependence on leadership buy-in. • Potential negative impacts on agility and creativity.	• Improved decision-making and clarity. • Enhanced collaboration and stakeholder management. • Positive impact on organizational culture.
«Even if he [CEO] were to agree to a process, if the output of the process doesn't suit his expectations, then he would very likely brush off the process and revert back to his opinions»	*«Transparent and engaging way to bring everyone on the same page»*
«it can be a time-consuming process; it can reduce agility; it can be less inclusive than desired; decision might be diluted as a result of compromises; over-reliance on rules can stifle creativity and innovation»	*«Clear guidance, less assuming, less changes late in the process»*

Figure 9 · Survey Results: Establishing Rules

4.4 Multistakeholder Management & Alliances

Product Diplomacy requires the ability to consider and harmonize multiple, often conflicting perspectives. This includes stakeholder viewpoints and interests that may differ significantly from those of the product diplomat.

4.4.1 Multistakeholder Diplomacy

According to Frendo, "multistakeholder diplomacy is an innovative diplomatic method aimed at facilitating the equitable participation of all parties concerned in discussions on and debate over a particular issue at stake. It is based on the principles of mutual recognition and trust

and on shared expertise and information".[62] In any product development environment, managing stakeholder expectations is a significant challenge. Stakeholders, with their own agendas based on diverse needs and priorities, rarely have perfectly aligned interests. Each group will naturally try to influence the situation to their advantage. Therefore, neglecting stakeholder views and failing to involve them throughout the process can lead to suboptimal results. However, as Cagan emphasizes, it's crucial to avoid viewing stakeholders as clients telling you what to do. This approach often leads to a "feature factory" mentality, where teams simply build what they're told.[63] Instead, Product Diplomats should treat stakeholders as partners to discover viable solutions.

Application

Inspired by the framework of the Project Management Institute[64], stakeholder analysis is essential for which innovation and product leaders should involve their entire team.

Step 1 · Stakeholder profiles: create profiles for each internal stakeholder (in Ava's case the executive board), using the following framework:

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[62] Diplo, *Multistakeholder Diplomacy - Challenges and Opportunities*, vii.

[63] Cagan and Jones, *Empowered*.

[64] "Stakeholder Management."

Figure 10 · Stakeholder Profile Framework

Step 2 · Effort prioritization: Based on the stakeholder analysis matrix[65] categorize each stakeholder and define the level of effort required to secure the achievement of your objective.
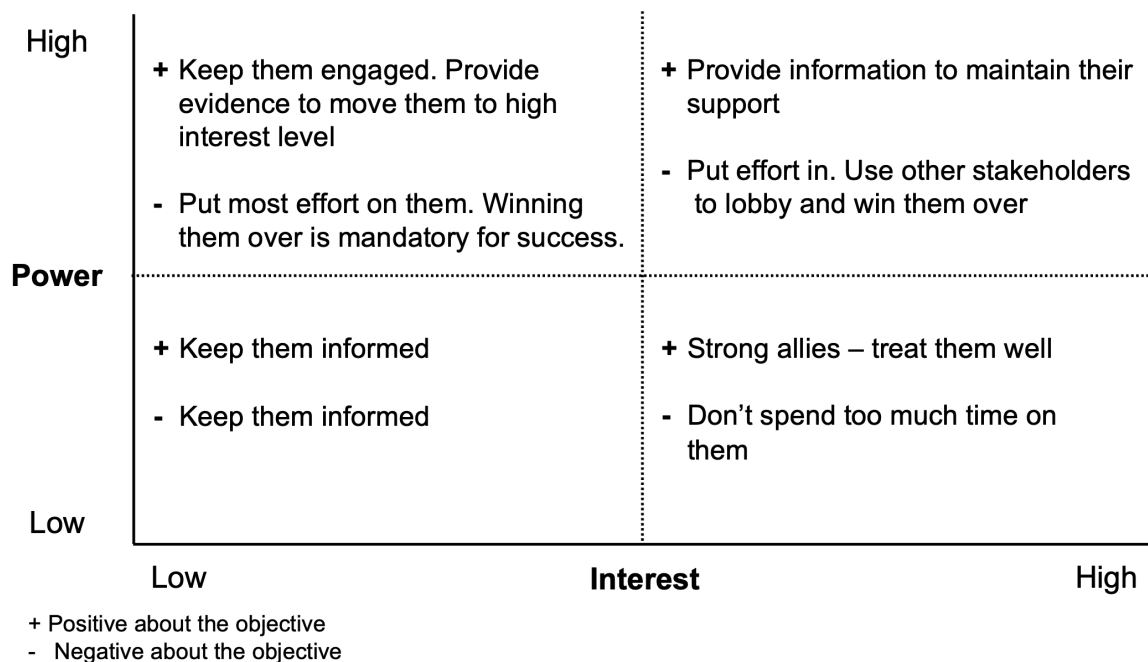
Figure 11 · Stakeholder Analysis Matrix [66]

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[65] "Stakeholder Management."

[66] "Stakeholder Management."

By taking the time to understand the stakeholders, Ava increases the chances of achieving the objective faster. Regardless it is mandatory for product diplomats to establish direct lines to top-level executives, especially the CEO. Without trust and buy-in from the CEO, the introduction of the product operating model is questionable.

Survey results

Among survey participants who actively applied the tool (77% of participants), the survey found a positive perception of its value: 88% rated it as helpful to very helpful (9% somewhat helpful, 3% not helpful).

Thematic findings

Limitations	Benefits
- Power imbalance and decision-making control. - Complexity. - Dependency on organizational context.	- Enhanced alignment and collaboration. - Informed decision-making and efficiency. - Building trust and buy-in.
«At the end of the day, key issues are decided by a very small group of people (less than 4).»	*«Very helpful as in a large organization like Google you need to understand people and team agendas to get things done.»*
«This is politics. I prefer working in smaller companies where this step is not much required»	*«It is key to align new product work with overall company strategy in order to generate further buy-in and commitment from the broader organisation.»*

Figure 12· Survey Results: Multistakeholder Diplomacy

4.4.2 Coalition building

According to Barston diplomats build coalitions with those who share their goals so that they get immediate support for an initiative.[67] A typical example in the innovation and product

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[67] Barston, *Modern Diplomacy*.

context are pilot teams who serve as a controlled environment to test, refine, and demonstrate the effectiveness of a system or initiative.[68] Such coalitions offer several benefits: controlled learning within the pilot team allows for experimentation and refinement, the executive board and other teams can observe and gain buy-in, and the pilot team provides valuable evidence of the system's effectiveness, supporting broader implementation.

Application

Ava's approach

COALTION BUILDING· Group those who share your goals to get immediate support for your initiative.	
Your goal(s)	
• Change from an output to an outcome driven development model. • Structured, evidence-guided prioritization with ICE Score framework.	
List of who shares your goal	**How you build the coalition**
• CTO • CMO	• Shuttle Diplomacy

Figure 13 · Coalition Building Framework

Survey results

Among survey participants who actively applied the tool (80% of participants), the survey found a positive perception of its value: 86% rated it as helpful to very helpful, the highest rate of all tools investigated (6% somewhat helpful, 8% not helpful).

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[68] Cagan, *Transformed*, 222.

Thematic findings

Limitations	Benefits
• Political concerns.	• Building support and alignment.
• Practical challenges.	• Effective decision-making.
	• Supporting innovation and implementation.
«This is politics. I don't like it. It makes thing less transparent. »	*«In my experience at Google I often tried to have some groups actively support my goals and be vocal about it.»*
«A lot of efforts and likely too formal for my org.»	*«Effective, less time-consuming measure – especially with c-level members. Almost a requirement to start an initiative.»*

Figure 14 · Survey Results: Coalition Building

4.4.3 Shuttle Diplomacy

According to Berridge and Lloyd, the term shuttle diplomacy originates from the diplomatic style of Henry Kissinger applied in the resolution of the October War of 1973 in the Middle East.[69] It describes a negotiation style where a mediator acts as a bridge. According to Gottardi and Mezzetti, the mediator meets with each party repeatedly and individually, holding private discussions. Through this dynamic process, the mediator helps each party understand the potential benefits of an agreement, articulate their concerns, encourages them to reconsider their initial stances.[70] Lombardo et al. emphasize that this style allows for solution finding in case parties refuse other parties in the negotiation and facilitates each party to keep face.[71]

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[69] Berridge and Lloyd, *The Palgrave Macmillan Dictionary of Diplomacy*.

[70] Gottardi and Mezzetti, "Shuttle Diplomacy."

[71] Lombardo et al., *Product Roadmaps Relaunched*.

This approach allows stakeholders to share their thoughts and concerns in an informal setting first. Additionally, the product diplomat can tailor the communication style to each stakeholder's specific needs and preferences. These one-on-one discussions allow according to Lombardo et al for smoother navigation of any dynamics or personal feelings before they become broader issues.[72]

This approach is particularly valuable for higher-stakes issues like the one described in the case study. However, it is also recommended for lower-stakes situations involving fewer stakeholders. Beyond information exchange, shuttle diplomacy fosters interaction and engagement, allowing for multi-perspective consideration.

Application

Ava's approach:

SHUTTLE DIPLOMACY· Let stakeholders share their thoughts and concerns in an informal setting first for smoother navigation.			
Overall objective you want to achieve: Identify the root causes of EcoForge's stagnating growth and develop solutions collaboratively. To achieve this, we require the executive board's commitment to empower the team comprising of CTO, CMO and Ava to (1) start a structured "Find the Root Causes" initiative, to (2) dedicate focused time and to (3) involve other people on a need to have basis.			
List your stakeholders in the sequential order you will be communicating with them.			
Done	Who (stakeholder)	What (objective)	How (Delivery)	When (incl. repetition)
☐	CTO and Ava	Alignment on objective. Build coalition.	Lunch	Week 26

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[72] Lombardo et al.

☐	CMO and Ava	Alignment on objective. Build coalition.	Coffee break	Week 26
☐	CTO, CMO, COO	Alignment on objective	To be defined by CTO and CMO	Week 27
☐	COO and Ava	Bring issue on agenda of CEO's and COO's weekly meeting.	Call	Week 27. Repetition in Week 28.
☐	COO, CEO and Ava	Alignment on objective	Physical meeting during weekly CEO/COO meeting.	Week 29
☐	CEO, CSO and Ava	Alignment on objective	Video Call meeting	Week 29
☐	CEO and Ava	Put issue on executive's board agenda for approval.	Video Call meeting	Week 29. Repetition in Week 30.

Figure 15 · Shuttle Diplomacy Framework

Survey results

Among survey participants who actively applied the tool (38% of participants), the survey found a positive perception of its value: 76% rated it as helpful to very helpful (12% somewhat helpful, 12% not helpful). Of the participants who didn't apply Shuttle Diplomacy actively, only 18% believe it could be helpful. Shuttle Diplomacy is hence the most controversial tool with the lowest application rate among the five tools investigated. However, those who did use it mainly in large companies rated its value highly.

Thematic findings

Objectives survey participants try to achieve

- Building consensus and alignment.

- Facilitating communication.

- Managing complex decision-making processes.

Limitations	Benefits
• Time consumption.	• Enhanced alignment and buy-in.
• Complexity and lack of transparency.	• Improved communication and understanding.
	• Enhanced success.
«Time and resistance to change»	*«The CEO and most parties appreciated the direct approach outside of a larger group where they felt happier to discuss their objections in a more friendly manner.»*
«This needs a lot of empathy and energy, as not all relevant colleagues have the time and motivation to really try to understand, get explanations and learn (Yes and Mindset is key), that's why culture and mindset are the biggest roadblock»	*«Being able to look at the same objective with different lenses for each c-suite member and understand their needs and expectations»*

Figure 16 · Survey Results: Shuttle Diplomacy

4.5   Influence & Negotiation
4.5.1   Building Competencies

According to London Diplomats are committed to continuous learning, actively seeking feedback to refine their skills and knowledge base.[73] While a solid understanding of their own

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[73] London, *Principled Leadership and Business Diplomacy*.

business is crucial, Alammar and Pauleen's study emphasizes that business diplomats need an additional layer of knowledge. They must develop expertise in external factors that can influence their success such as other countries' regulations, cultures, or business practices.[74] While a strong understanding of their own organization is essential, product and innovation leaders, like diplomats, need a broader knowledge base. They require a deep understanding of the business landscape, extending beyond the internal operations. This includes fluency in core business functions such as finance, marketing, sales, and legal considerations.[75] This breadth of knowledge equips innovation and product leaders to make strategic decisions, navigate complex situations, and manage stakeholders effectively. Ultimately, the innovation or product leader is no longer just a voice in the executive team: they become a key partner to the CEO, ensuring long-term viability and success of the business.[76]

Application

Ava takes ownership of her professional development, actively seeks opportunities to enhance her knowledge and skills. She strives to be a role-model and show to EcoForge what she and her teams are capable of.[77] Ava equips her teammates with the necessary knowledge to succeed, enabling them to demonstrate their ability to deliver results to the organization. She is also mindful that not everyone will be equally enthusiastic about tackling significant challenges beyond their core responsibilities.

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[74] Alammar and Pauleen, "Business Diplomacy in Practice."

[75] Cagan, *Inspired*, 41–49.

[76] Count, "2023 CPO Insights Report."

[77] Cagan, *Transformed*.

Ava's approach:

BUILDING COMPETENCIES· Build strong, unified teams equipped to achieve your goals.		
Learning resource(s) we provide to the teams to deliver consistency:		
• EcoForge's product glossary and toolbox		
List individual learning and networking items to be included in personal OKRs.		
Name	**OKR item(s)**	**Training or Networking**
Ava	Objective: Align product strategy with CEO	• INSEAD or IMD Strategy Programme to speak the CEO's language.
Peter	Objective: Accelerate design on demand revenue growth.	• Access to UX community.
	KR1: Launch 2 revenue-specific experiments to get insights on revenue growth drivers.	• Product Design course.
Sarah	Objective: Know EcoForge's future growth drivers.	• Strategic foresight course.

Figure 17 · Building Competencies Framework

4.5.2   Negotiation

While a deep dive into negotiation theory is beyond the scope of this paper, we'll focus on providing product diplomats with actionable insights from diplomacy to navigate negotiations effectively. Based on Weibel's definition, a negotiation is "a joint decision-making process whereby the representatives of the concerned parties meet in order to try to find an arrangement on an issue of mutual concern".[78] Product leaders and managers face constant negotiation challenges: from securing resources and establishing rules to aligning product vision/strategy with overall business strategy. Before entering any negotiation, product

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[78] Weibel, "Negotiation Workbook & Toolbox," 10.

diplomats know their counterparts (or stakeholders), have established authentic relationships, have built bridges through trust and have gained the needed knowledge competencies to engage in the negotiation at hand.

Application

Ava follows Weibel's approach:[79]

NEGOTIATION· Find commitment on issues of mutual concern.			
(1) Take-off: Prenegotiation			
Your field observations			
Lack of structured prioritization leads to frictions and is a key contributor to EcoForge's stagnating growth.			
Why negotiate	**Objectives**	**With whom**	**How**
Agree on the introduction of a companywide prioritization framework.	Agree on one framework (ICE Score).	CTO and CMO	Invite CTO and CMO to a "Friction Reduction" workshop.
(2) Cruising: Negotiation			
Differences	**Revisions**		**Solutions**
CTO would prefer another framework.	• Structured comparison of a list of frameworks defined by CTO, CMO and Ava.		ICE score evaluated as best framework: it helps evaluate ideas objectively based on their potential impact on the desired outcome (Impact), ease of implementation (Ease), and confidence in

[79] Weibel, 14–16.

		achievement (Confidence).[80] However, according to the CTO, it's also the framework that requires the most effort to implement.
(3) Landing: Implementation		
Final Give & Take	**Implementation Details**	**Debrief and celebrate!**
• Framework gets introduced with a pilot team first to optimize implementation effort.	• CTO puts together a cross-organisational pilot team. • Ava informs the Executive Board. • CMO advocates for it in the Marketing team.	• Debriefing meeting with CTO and CMO organized by Ava. • After debriefing, the team celebrates with pizza and beer.

Figure 18 · Negotiation Framework [81]

Following the negotiation, product diplomats debrief with their counterparts to discuss what worked well and identify areas for improvement in future negotiations. Finally, they ensure the agreed-upon outcome is executed effectively.

The negotiation phase ("cruising") can be challenging. Appendix B offers insights from seasoned diplomatic negotiation experts to help navigate these situations successfully.

4.5.3 Co-optation

According to London, co-optation is a strategy to try to gain the support of potential opponents by involving them in the decision-making process. Diplomats use this tool for example when forming committees. The goal is to get the critics on board by giving them a stake in the

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[80] Gilad, *Evidence Guided*.

[81] Weibel, "Negotiation Workbook & Toolbox."

decision-making process. By being directly involved, those who might initially oppose the plan gain a different perspective. Their role shifts from simply criticizing to sharing responsibility for the objective. However, co-option also carries risks. Critics might simply refuse to participate, leaving the original opposition intact. Even worse, according to London they might participate with hidden agendas, acting as "naysayers" who constantly undermine progress.[82]

Application

Ava's approach:

CO-OPTATION · Gain the support of potential opponents by involving them in the decision-making process.	
Your decision-making challenge	
Hiring a new product manager who embraces the product operating model.	
Opponent	**Reasons for opposition**
• CSO	• Reframing of power dynamics.
Your Strategy	**Your Risks**
• Include those resistant to the product operating model in the hiring process. • Allow them to share their perspective, assess candidates' suitability, and ultimately "own" a piece of the success.	• Refusal to participate, leaving opposition intact. • Hidden agenda: "naysayer" to every candidate. • CSO constantly undermining progress.
Your Risk Minimizer	**Your Decision**
• Persistently objecting to qualified candidates can damage the CSO's internal reputation. • Excluding CSO from the process can have even worse effects, as the CSO	• Risk can me managed. • CSO to be included in process.

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[82] London, *Principled Leadership and Business Diplomacy*.

may be tempted to undermine the new hires' work.	

Figure 19 · Co-Optation Framework

4.6 Advocacy
4.6.1 Strategic Advocacy

According to UNICEF, "Advocacy is the deliberate process […] to directly and indirectly influence decision makers, stakeholders and relevant audiences to support and implement actions that contribute"[83] to the achievement of the desired objective. Or as Bochenek puts it short, "Advocacy is a process that aims at converting target audiences to supporters".[84] Within organizations, product development is a constant advocacy challenge as almost all stakeholders have an interest to influence the overall product direction. In product literature, authors such as Torres or Cagan refer to this as "Product Evangelism"[85]. Literature on product evangelism often lacks detailed analysis of strategic implementation. Also, the term "evangelism" is negatively connotated with a passionate, confident and enthusiastic mindset which, according to Wijers, can backfire because "people can get tired of what they perceive as pushy and perhaps dominating"[86]. This paper therefore opts for a more neutral, structured advocacy approach as used in diplomacy.

Application

Effective advocacy leverages the key diplomatic tools described in this paper. We'll use Schultz's key questions framework for developing an advocacy strategy[87] and put it into action in 6 steps based on Ava's challenge.

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[83] "Advocacy Toolkit," 3.

[84] Bochenek, *Advocacy and Organozational Engagement*, 37.

[85] Cagan, *Inspired*, 151.

[86] Wijers, *Managing Authentic Relationships*, 210.

[87] Schultz, "Developing Advocacy Strategy."

Step 1 · Objectives: What do you want?

OBJECTIVE· Start with a clear outline of knowing exactly what change you want to achieve.	

Basic problem	
• EcoForge's current idea selection approach dominated by informality and opinions, is heavily time consuming, leads to development of the wrong things, hindering us from pursuing better opportunities.	

Key elements of the problem	**More detailed problem statement**
• High number of involved people in the decision-making process.	• Developing the right features and seizing the best opportunities are crucial for our success.
• Uncoordinated stakeholder requests directly to the development team disrupt workflows and lead to misaligned priorities.	• However, our current idea selection process, plagued by uncoordinated requests and undue HiPPO influence, lacks a clear and structured workflow.
• HiPPO decide based on opinions.	
• Lack of a consistent, structured workflow.	• This is leading to wasted time on the wrong products and features and missed opportunities.

Workflow factors behind the problem	**Long-term changes to address the problem**
• Lack of structured prioritization process.	
• Lack of consistency.	• Shift focus from what gets built (outputs) to what gets achieved (outcomes).
• Insufficient buy-in from the C-suite, sales and customer success.	• Empowerment of product teams so that they can discover outcome-driven solutions that are valuable, usable, feasible, and viable.
	• Introduction of clear and structured solution prioritization process that can be

	run by product leadership while stakeholders are kept in the loop.

Short-term advocacy focus points

What will help to solve the problem?	**What kind of support will it generate?**
• Buy-in from the C-suite, case studies, best practice examples, pilot experiments, role modelling.	• Support from the C-suite. • Broad support from engineering, marketing and partially sales and customer success.

What opposition will it generate?

- According to Gilad[88], the following opposition must be expected:

  o Accustomed to having significant power over product decisions, top-level managers (especially CEO and CSO) and stakeholders fear giving up power and control.

  o Worry that a more structured approach might slow development.

  o Fear that a structured process might lead to analysis paralysis, getting stuck in overthinking.

Derive and define the Objective

Empower product teams with outcome goals and facilitate a collaborative prioritization process using the ICE Score to ensure our company prioritizes products and features that maximize impact and capture valuable opportunities that bring EcoForge to double-digit growth.

Figure 20 · Advocacy - Objective Framework

Step 2 · Audiences: Who can give it to you?

By referring to the tools explored in the Strategic Multistakeholder Diplomacy section previously, we can identify the key players and how we must deal with them:

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[88] Gilad, *Evidence Guided*, 181–83.

```
High
      + Chief Operations Officer          + Chief Technology Officer
        Keep them engaged. Provide evidence to    Provide information to maintain their
        move them to high interest level           support

      - Chief Sales Officer               - CEO
        Put most effort on them. Winning          Put effort in. Use other stakeholders
        them over is mandatory for success.        to lobby and win them over
Power
      + Rest of the top-level executives   + Chief Marketing Officer
        Keep them informed                        Strong allies – treat them well

      - Minorities in production entities  - Chief Financial Officer
        Keep them informed                        Don't spend too much time on them
Low
        Low              Interest              High

  + Positive about the objective
  -  Negative about the objective
```

Figure 21· Advocacy - Strategic Multistakeholder Matrix

Next, we must explore the mechanism of change. This involves understanding how the intended changes can be made and how stakeholders can support. Once we understand these pathways, according to UNICEF, we can define opportunities for us and our partners to provide targeted support.[89] To identify these pathways, we'll utilize Bochenek's "Stakeholder and Influencer Mapping" process focusing on the stakeholders in the high power grids:[90]

MECHANISM OF CHANGE· Understand how the intended changes can be made and how stakeholder can support.				
Who	**COO**	**CSO**	**CTO**	**CEO**
Why do they care?	Wants growth but doesn't like micromanagement and change.	Fears loss of control and speed.	Likes it because it addresses existing needs.	Wants quick wins to show results. But also wants valuable opportunities.

[89] "Advocacy Toolkit."

[90] Bochenek, *Advocacy and Organozational Engagement*, 121.

				Fears loss of control and power.
How do they take decisions?	Major decisions: executive board.			
Which channels do they use?	Prefers physical meetings.	Chat, Prefers V-Call	Chat, Prefers V-Call	Email, Prefers physical meetings.
Who influences them?	CMO, CTO, CPO	CEO	CPO	CSO, COO
How can we convince them?	Physical conversation with CMS and CTO.	CEO to convince CSO.	n.a.	Compelling narrative and CEO-connected expert.

Figure 22 · Advocacy - Mechanism of Change Framework

Step 3 · Message: What do they need to hear?

Messages according to Schultz often use a two-component approach: appealing to the stakeholder's sense of right and wrong, along with demonstrating how the issue benefits them directly.[91]

[91] Schultz, "Developing Advocacy Strategy."

MESSAGE· Appeal to the stakeholder's sense of right and wrong and demonstrate how the issue benefits them directly.

Summarize the advocacy message in 3-4 sentences following the UNICEF formula.[92]

Statement: why the change is important.	Evidence: clear, understandable facts. and figures
• Our current product development and feature prioritization approach limits impact.	• EcoForge's sales growth is stagnating at 0.5% annually.

Example: concrete illustration to make the issue real.

Market data show companies using outcome driven product development incl. structured prioritization achieve double-digit growth:

• Amazon (AMZN) revenue CAGR of last 5 years: 19.8%[93] [94]

• Trainline (TRN, independent rail platform) forecasted CAGR of 15%.[95]

Goal: highlight the desired outcome.	Action: specify the action needed to achieve the goal.
• Product teams empowered with clear outcome goals. • Collaborative product and feature prioritization with ICE Score.	• Executive board to be aligned and convinced.

Your primary message

Our current output driven product development and feature prioritization approach limits impact. Market data show companies like Amazon or Trainline using outcome driven product development incl. structured prioritization achieve double-digit growth, compared to EcoForge's stagnating single-digit performance. Let's empower our product teams with

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[92] "Advocacy Toolkit."

[93] "Revenue CAGR (5y) For Amazon.Com Inc (AMZN)."

[94] Cagan, "The Product Model at Amazon."

[95] Research, "Has Trainline (TRN) Run Out of Steam?"

	clear outcome goals and let's introduce the ICE Score to collaboratively prioritize products and features for maximum impact.
Supporting secondary messages	
Who	Tailor the message further for each stakeholder with a secondary message providing targeted explanations that are most persuasive for them. Choose the words so that they resonate with both minds and hearts of each stakeholder.
CEO	*This isn't about you taking a backseat. Your leadership is central to setting the strategic direction. You'll define the outcome goals the teams strive to achieve, empowering them with the flexibility to choose the best patch. This shift lets you focus on the big picture, ensuring the teams deliver impactful results aligned with your vision instead of you micromanaging quick wins. Let's take Napoleon III. According to Kissinger, he got stuck focusing on quick wins and flashy actions to impress people and forgot about the bigger picture. That's why France ended up in strategic paralysis under Napoleon III's rule.[96] We want to focus on viable long-term sustainable outcome not quick wins to generate double-digit growth.*
CSO	*We believe in taking a structured approach to development, focusing on solutions that truly meet our client's needs. Rushing to create something might not be the best fit for their specific challenges. Research from an external expert, former senior leader at Google and Microsoft, shows that teams using structured approaches can lead to ten times better results with less wasted effort.[97] We'll still work closely with you to define outcome goals, freeing you to focus on the bigger picture while we handle the details.*

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[96] Kissinger, *Diplomacy*.

[97] Gilad, "Stop Obsessing Over Development Velocity, Focus on This Instead."

COO	*Micromanaging output goals slows us down. Let's empower product teams with clear outcome goals and enabling fast iterations to accelerate progress. This frees you to focus on leadership while the product team handles the details.*

Figure 23 · Advocacy - Message Framework

Step 4 · Messengers and action: Who do they need to hear it from and how best get the message delivered?

The impact of a message can shift depending on who delivers it. Schultz suggests identifying the most credible messengers for each stakeholder group:[98]

- Experts: technical credibility

- Authentic voices: personal experience

- Influencers: make people want to listen

Leveraging the stakeholder and influencer insights from Figures 10 (Stakeholder Profile Framework) and 22 (Mechanism of Change Framework), we develop a messenger strategy aligned with UNICEF's advocacy tool 9:[99]

MESSENGER STRATEGY· Identify the most credible messenger for each stakeholder.

	COO	**CSO**	**CTO**	**CEO**
Messenger Influencer of the target audience.	CTO + CMO + external expert	CEO + external expert	CPO + external expert	COO + external expert
Position Messenger's stands	CTO/CMO: Drive the objective.	CEO: Wants valuable opportunities and growth.	CPO: Drives the objective.	COO: Wants growth.
	External expert: advocates for the evidence guided way of product development. Shares a common touchpoint with the CEO.			

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[98] Schultz, "Developing Advocacy Strategy."

[99] "Advocacy Toolkit," 49.

Power	CTO: High	CEO: High	CPO: High	COO: High
Level of influence over the target.	CMO: Low			
Knowledge	CTO: High	CEO: Low	CPO: High	COO: Low
Level of knowledge about the issue.	CMO: High			
Credibility	CTO: High	CEO: High	CPO: High	COO: High
Credibility of the messenger to the target audience.	CMO: High			
	External expert: high			
Access to the messenger	CTO: V-Call anytime	CEO: V-Call anytime	n.a.	COO: Physical meeting once a week
How and when can advocate interact with messenger?	CMO: V-Call anytime			
	External expert: CEO with direct relation. Access via V-Call.			
Access to target	Step1: CPO has V-Call with CTO and CMO. Step2: CTO + CMO have physical meeting with COO	Step 1: COO has personal meeting with CEO. Step 2: CEO has V-Call with CSO	n.a.	COO has physical meeting with CEO.
How and when does messenger interact with target?				
	External expert: CEO proposes an internal executive board workshop with the external expert.			
Action	CTO + CMO: Focus:	CEO:	n.a.	COO: Focus:

What shall the messenger do?	secondary message and reduced friction, higher satisfaction and less change in IT and Marketing (less fluctuation). Propose workshop with external expert.	Focus: secondary message with emphasis on higher growth. Propose workshop with personally known external expert.		secondary message emphasizing on higher growth and less change (less fluctuation). Proposes workshop with external expert that is personally known to CEO.
	External expert: showcase measurable results tied to structured approach at renowned companies like Google or Microsoft.			
Risks Risks of engaging messenger.	CTO + CMO: May get convinced by COO to keep status quo (no change).	CEO: May be influenced by CSO to keep status quo.	n.a.	CEO: May get convinced by COO to keep status quo.

Figure 24 · Advocacy · Messenger Strategy Framework

Step 5 · Resources and gaps: What have we got and what do we need to develop?

Effective advocacy builds on existing assets. Schultz suggests inventorying past efforts, partnerships, alliances, staff skills, connections, information and to identify any gaps.[100]

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[100] Schultz, "Developing Advocacy Strategy."

RESOURCES AND GAPS · List what you have and what you need.	
What you have. • Coalition of the like-minded: CTO, CMO and Ava • CMO and CTO influencing the COO. • COO influencing the CEO.	**Gaps.** • Supporting resources and time. • Additional budget
Necessary action. • COO key person that needs the most attention. • We must move COO to the high interest level.	**Necessary action.** • Gaps need to be addressed and approved in the executive board.

Figure 25 · Advocacy - Resources and Gaps Framework

Step 6 · Monitoring: How do we begin and how do we tell if it's working?

To initiate the advocacy strategy, we'll maintain focus on the overall objective, establish measurable goals, and establish a consistent communication flow that fosters routine and delivers early wins to build momentum. Mirroring the product operating model and leveraging on Doerr's insights[101], we establish OKRs with emphasis on high-leverage and outcome-oriented Key Results ("KR"). Inspired by Wodtke[102], weekly progress reviews with the core advocacy team will allow us to celebrate achievements, identify areas for potential adjustments, and ensure we remain on track for long-term success.

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[101] Doerr, *Measure What Matters*.

[102] Wodtke, *Radical Focus*.

OKRs · Establish measurable goals and a consistent communication flow that fosters routine and delivers early wins to build momentum.

Objective	Empower product teams with outcome goals and facilitate a collaborative prioritization process using the ICE Score to ensure our company prioritizes products and features that maximize impact and capture valuable opportunities that bring EcoForge to double-digit growth.

KR Measurement

Missed: result not achieved (identifying missed goals early allows for timely course correction. Encouraging early admission of challenges creates a psychologically safe space and ensures issues are caught when corrections are most effective).	**Made great progress:** result is not fully achieved yet, but significant progress has been made.
Done: result is achieved.	**Hit stretch target:** result is achieved with significant outperformance.

Outcome-Oriented Key Results To be revied in the executive board each quarter.		Owner	Status
KR1	Alignment on executive board level.	CPO	Missed.
KR2	Structured ICE Score prioritization process by December 31.	CPO	Made great progress.
KR3	Shifted from stagnant growth to 0.5% growth quarter-over-quarter.	CEO	Not yet started.
This week's core-team (CPO, CMO, CTO) priorities To be reviewed in the core team each week.			
P1	CTO and CMO shifted COO to higher interest level by end of week.	CTO	Done.

P2	Green light for workshop with external expert received from CEO by end of week.	CPO	Done.
P3	ICE Score pilot team found and instructed by June 30.	CPO	Hit stretch target.

Figure 26 · Advocacy · OKR Progress Review Framework

Based on the OKRs, the core team can begin implementing the advocacy strategy, with constant monitoring, publicly showing and celebrating progress towards achieving the desired outcomes.

Survey results

Among survey participants who actively applied the tool (51% of participants), the survey found a positive perception of its value: 91% rated it as helpful to very helpful (9% somewhat helpful, 0% not helpful). Of the participants who didn't apply Strategic Advocacy actively, 45% believe it could be helpful and another 36% believe it could be somewhat helpful.

Thematic findings

Objectives survey participants try to achieve

- Building buy-in and changing mindsets.
- Data-driven advocacy.
- Enhancing collaboration and communication.

Limitations	**Benefits**
• Resistance and organizational challenges.	• Alignment and consensus/buy-in.
• Understanding and communication obstacles.	• Positive outcomes and adoption.
• Time and effort constraints.	• Enhanced support and influence.

«I'm not sure. I see the danger of this method in the fact that it is manipulative. If the diplomat is convincing, even bad solutions can be convincing.»	*«I launched major features in Gmail that required multiple executives' sign-off. We prepared (although less formally than you describe) for these sessions considering compelling arguments that address their needs.»*
«Most obvious answer here is enormous amounts of time and effort from me which takes away from functional and strategic leadership opportunities.»	*«Alignment on higher level goals (more sales, better products, fewer product issues)»*

Figure 27 · Survey Results: Strategic Advocacy

4.7 Where Product Diplomacy is likely to fail

According to London, when interacting with powerful stakeholders who prioritize their own agenda, product diplomats may need to adapt their strategies. One approach involves highlighting superordinate goals: overarching objectives that resonate with all parties. Alternatively, product diplomats can demonstrate patience and trust in a gradual shift. Over time, with consistent reinforcement and clear value delivered, stakeholders may become more receptive.

Equally, evangelizing the "right way of working" with excessive confidence, enthusiasm, or passion can lead to failure for two main reasons: First, as Torres points out, there is no single "right way of working".[103] Second, excessive evangelism can jeopardize any diplomatic effort, as people may perceive it as pushy.

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[103] Torres, *Continuous Discovery Habits*, 415.

5   Conclusion - Product Diplomacy making a difference?

According to the Survey, participants are open or positive to using Product Diplomacy tools more systematically. From practical experience, they acknowledge the potential benefits from improving alignment, stakeholder engagement, and decision-making. One could argue that innovation and product leaders/managers are natural diplomats, as they already use such tools, albeit mainly in an unconscious, non-systematic manner. With 67% of survey participants having applied three or more of the five tools of modern diplomacy they were exposed to, and 83% of them finding these tools helpful, there is a preliminary indication that a conscious and systematic approach to applying Product Diplomacy tools may lead to higher chances of success. A larger-scale study can solidify these promising initial findings and provide even stronger evidence for this association.

However, concerns remain. Study participants worry about practical relevance, potential misuse for (toxic) office politics, resistance, transparency and time constraints. The Survey participants' suggestions for alternative approaches, including evidence-based approaches, transparency, relationship-building, advocacy and education align with Product Diplomacy tools:

«Convincing with evidence (I guess not surprising given I wrote a book about it :-).»

«Maximise transparency with C-suite on the "big picture" through frequent communication and lean reporting. Show frequent and fast progress, highlighting wins as well as risks and mitigation plan.»

«IMHO, only education will do the magic. As long the C-suite lagging behind in knowledge of the digital space and the leadership needed to overcome them, this problem will stay. The main driver though is the CEO, forcing to bridge between C-suite members.»

Regarding the political connotation, Wyatt and Doldor's encourage leaders to "push back against the view that politics can only be used for self-gain, and reframe it as a tool for building

connections, accessing opportunities, and getting things done".[104] Time constraints can be addressed with training, easy-to-use tools, and increased knowledge. These elements can improve efficiency by making tool application quicker, more natural in the flow of work, and ultimately, more effective. This paper, along with the "Product Diplomacy Toolkit" in Appendix C, represents a first step in that direction.

In conclusion, bundling tools for the skill of Influencing People under the umbrella of Product Diplomacy increases awareness, focus and clarity providing a valuable foundation for training, best practice exchange, and application. The positive experiences reported by participants who applied multiple Product Diplomacy tools suggest these tools have the potential to make a significant difference in innovation and product work, thereby building high-impact products.

6   Taking the concept forward

The findings of this paper, supported by survey participant inputs, highlight the value of further developing the concept of Product Diplomacy. The next steps for development include:

1. Knowledge dissemination: make the paper publicly accessible to gather expert and user feedback to inform further development and support a larger-scale study.

2. Collaboration: find partner(s) in academia or business to refine and disseminate the concept.

3. Practical application: fine-tune the concept with organizations in both business and governmental contexts. Transfer the toolkit into a digital experience.

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[104] Wyatt and Doldor, "Office Politics Don't Have to Be Toxic."

7   Appendix A: Survey

- Timeframe of Survey: 17.04.2024 – 16.05.2024

- Number of Survey participants invited via LinkedIn or Email: 135

- Number of Survey participants: 45

- Conversion rate: 33% (reasons for non-conversion: not known)

- Qualification verification: to ensure data quality and accuracy, participants were invited based on their professional experience in innovation or product work (purposive sampling targeting participants based on relevant characteristics[105]). Qualification verification was conducted by cross-checking participant email addresses against the original invitation list. This confirmed that the participants possessed the relevant background, contributing to the overall reliability of the data and the validity of the conclusions drawn. The author can be contacted to discuss this process if necessary.

- Method: Qualitative survey. Participants were exposed to the Survey, which included five tools of modern diplomacy, and were asked open-ended questions to elaborate on whether, how, and why they had already applied each tool. If they had applied it, they were to describe what went well and what challenges they faced, and if not, to explain why they hadn't used it yet. Additionally, they were asked to indicate how helpful the application was, or, if they hadn't applied it yet, how helpful they believed the application could be. These questions were accompanied by a request to explain, in an open-ended manner, why they provided that indication.

- Saturation reached after 42 survey participants based on the following criteria:[106]

  o   Recurring themes noticed: new data didn't bring up new themes or ideas.

  o   No new data: confirmed what is already known.

  o   Rich data: each theme with multiple examples supported.

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[105] Anderson, "Presenting and Evaluating Qualitative Research."

[106] "What Is Data Saturation in Qualitative Research?"

- Full understanding: prediction of participants' next inputs possible.

- Consistency: the data shows consistent patterns.

- Inductive, thematic coding analysis: the analysis employs an inductive approach, drawing themes and insights from an examination of survey participant inputs.[107] The themes were derived with the support of ChatGPT 40 applying the following prompt framework. The results were subsequently analysed and reviewed by the author:

  - *Based on the following qualitative inputs, make thematic coding of max. XY themes and rank the themes based on the number of inputs. Make sure to use each input only once.*

- Survey and input platform used (method of recording data): Google Forms

- The Survey also included a quantitative component, where participants rated their experiences on a scale from 1 (not helpful at all) to 5 (very helpful). Due to the relatively small sample size of 45 participants, this quantitative data cannot be considered statistically significant. However, these ratings provide supplementary insights alongside the rich qualitative data gathered from the open-ended questions. They offer a preliminary indication of participant sentiment towards different tools, which can be explored further in future research.

- Data Privacy: The results of the survey are used for this master's thesis. Individual survey responses are kept strictly confidential and anonymized. Individual responses are not linked to email addresses or names.

In the following sections, the original, unprocessed survey responses incl. thematic analysis is presented. Participant email addresses have been removed to ensure anonymity. These responses are presented without any corrections for grammatical errors, clustering, or interpretation, reflecting the raw data collected for this study.

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[107] Vears and Gillam, "Inductive Content Analysis: A Guide for Beginning Qualitative Researchers."

7.1 Survey Intro

Product leaders and managers in many organizations navigate a challenging landscape. They encounter roadblocks such as:

- Tension in C-suite (divergent views regarding the Product Leader's / the Product Organization's role).

- Waterfall development processes (e.g. focus on project/output work instead of product/outcome work).

- Prioritization informed by opinion - rather than data-driven (e.g. HiPPO driving decisions).

Witnessing these common roadblocks firsthand, I've become increasingly interested in finding solutions. My master's thesis at the Geneva Graduate Institute (globally known for its focus on Diplomacy) analyzes how methods of modern Diplomacy can be applied to overcome roadblocks faced by innovation and product leaders and managers, particularly at the intersection with the C-suite.

This survey explores how innovation and product leaders and managers use methods of modern Diplomacy and assesses their effectiveness. Your insights are key to building bridges between the C-suite and product teams, ensuring alignment on expectations and product development realities. Such alignment facilitates high-impact products addressing both client and C-suite needs.

Completing the survey should take no more than 10 minutes of your time. I appreciate you feedback by Wednesday, May 16, 2024.

Tokens of appreciation: To express my appreciation for your participation, I'd like to offer the following:

- Free Negotiation Toolkit: a copy of the Negotiation Workbook & Toolbox from the Centre of Experiential Negotiation and Applied Diplomacy (CENAD). Equip yourself with practical negotiation tools for your daily product work.

- Master Thesis: a copy of my master's thesis on the application of modern diplomacy in product work (available upon completion).

** Data Privacy **

The results of this survey are being used for my master's thesis at the Geneva Graduate Institute. Your survey responses will be kept strictly confidential and anonymized in the final reported results. I will never link your individual responses to your email address or name.

To ensure the quality of the data and prevent automated responses, I am collecting email addresses from participants. Your email address will only be used to verify your participation and will not be associated with your survey answers in any reports.

7.2   About You
7.2.1   Your Organizational Context

Which size category best describes your organization?

Your Organizational Context
45 responses

- Small (1-50 employees)
- Medium (51-250 employees)
- Large (more than 250 employees)
- Not applicable (e.g. for Product Coaches and Experts)
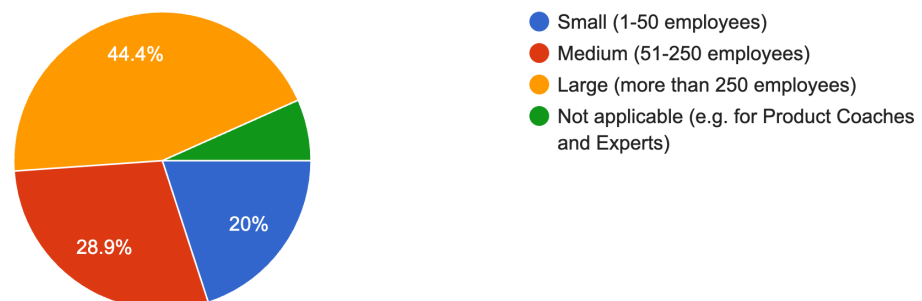
7.2.2 Your Function / Expertise

Your Function / Expertise
45 responses
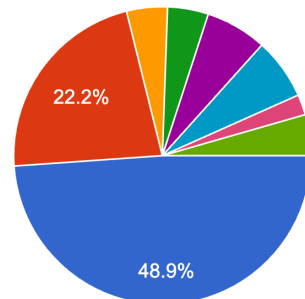
- ● Product Leader (CPO, Head of Product, VP of Product, etc.)
- ● Senior/Lead Product Manager (with C-suite exposure)
- ● Product Manager (without C-suite exp…
- ● Innovation Manager
- ● Product Team member (Product Desig…
- ● Product Coach, Product/Innovation Ex…
- ● Entrepreneur or Co-Founder (with pro…
- ● Product Coach, Product Expert or Adv…

7.2.3 C-suite Composition

Is product leadership part of the C-suite of your organization?

C-suite Composition
45 responses
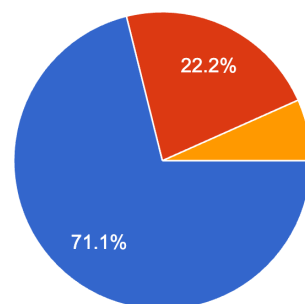
- ● Yes
- ● No
- ● Not applicable (I'm a Product Coach or Expert)

7.3 ROADBLOCKS

Biggest roadblocks (45 responses)

Beyond resource limitations (we all suffer that...) what is the single biggest roadblock you encounter when working on product development/management in your organization?

N°	Input
1	A mixture between lack of ownership, lack of expertise and too many people voicing their opinion

2	I am answering from the view of our clients: Trust and culture, ie. the product team being empowered to discover and develop a great product vs. just delivering on features
3	Low digital majurity of the organisation. We are still a legacy company with a long learning curve.
4	Ability to deliver and responsiveness
5	Design refinements right before launch by the CPO
6	Speed of industry
7	Technical delivery roadblocks. Our tech team is underperforming, for various reasons: 1- legacy stack that the team doesn't understand or master 2- lack of strong technical leadership
8	Absolute majority still don't know the difference between product vs project.
9	No Accountability: Lack of a clear and proper division of responsibilities around product development and management. Everyone is responsible for the product, but no one is accountable for it.
10	Prioritization by opinion - rather than data-driven
11	Overlapping / unclear / changing jurisdictions with 20 product teams
12	None
13	Leaders focusing on the wrong metrics as a result of a lack of trust/knowledge about how products are built. For example, focusing on revenue too early, or focusing on 'scaling' without any indication of PMF. As a result, product initiatives can fail and the company never learns or adopts the product mindset.
14	Short term priorities evolution
15	Information sharing between groups with different expertise, and different experience or knowledge of the fields they are contributing alongside.

16	To make all stakeholders understand and agree on one product vision & roadmap AND stick to the decision (not sticking to the decision is in this case a big problem and sign of uninformed decision making)
17	Having the Commercial Team pushing product decisions rather than coming to the Product team with requests.
18	We're a marketing-sales organisation transitioning to being a product-sales organisation. The biggest pain comes from communications, process, and understanding between the functions involved.
19	Founders not willing to come to terms with reality VS their wishes
20	Lack of Priorization or constant re-priorization
21	Focus on short term financial goals and process optimisation vs real -and new- customer needs..
22	Focusing too quickly and too strongly on a solution and not paying enough attention to the underlying problem
23	Alignement
24	1. Differing Priorities 2. Communication Breakdowns 3. Decision-Making
25	We think and work so much and too much in terms of the feasibility and profitability of new products and too little in terms of customer desirability.
26	Erratic CEO behavior, lack of role clarity, tensions in the C-Suite
27	of course in smaller organizations there are many roadblocks but that is why they hired me. Big ones are competing priorities and especially for managing the budget, influence of every single client. Other are dependencies on key individuals, which is affecting speed of execution. It is even impossible to create roadmap or any process. And this also all results in bad communication
28	Output-focus, over-empasis on opinions rather than data, mistrust between management and the product org.

29	*Product validation and discovery
30	Misguided attitudes towards the Product function; feature factory mentality; tech leaders actively resisting the product org
31	Boldness of the c-suite
32	The CTO not wanting to get involved into business decisions. CEO demanding to work on his ideas just because they're his.
33	as working within a regulated organisation, the role and responsibility of "product" was new and not understood, thus the value product create was not visible.
34	complex org-chart and politics
35	lack of (goal) alignment
36	The ability of the team to commit to one specific product
37	Competing or unclear priorities within the organization
38	Balancing bold innovation without risking a well established commercial business
39	lack of understanding of what product management means / what product thinking is / how outcome-driven product development works
40	Lack of urgency
41	Culture / Mindset & Team Empowerment
42	Understanding from the rest of the leadership of the time it takes to build a product
43	Budgeting and release of funds for projects
44	Clarity of responsibilities with roles with potential overlapping scopes; conflicting views for prioritizing the right topics to focus on; lack of skills in the product C-suite representative.
45	Overhead (inefficiency) & lack of people who do take decision

THEMES

Organizational and leadership challenges (17 inputs)

1. Leadership and strategic direction issues: 13, 19, 21, 24, 26, 27, 30, 31, 32

2. Complex organizational structure and politics: 11, 34, 37, 44

3. Lack of ownership/accountability: 1, 9, 36, 45

Expertise and knowledge gaps (14 inputs)

1. Lack of digital maturity and technical leadership: 3, 7

2. Misunderstanding product management: 8, 39

3. Trust and culture issues: 2, 18, 41, 42

4. Prioritization and decision-making: 10, 16, 20, 22, 29, 38

Communication and collaboration issues (13 inputs)

1. Communication breakdowns and information sharing: 15, 18, 27, 28, 35, 40, 23

2. Differing priorities and lack of alignment: 14, 16, 23, 35

3. Stakeholder involvement and influence: 5, 17, 28

Not qualified (1 input): 12

7.4 DIPLOMATIC METHODS

The following sections will introduce you to five diplomatic methods. You will receive a brief definition of each method. Following the definition, you'll be asked to consider whether you would apply, or have already applied, that method in your product work.

7.4.1 Diplomatic Method 1/5: Establishing Decision Rules

The Diplomat in its function as facilitator proposes rules, which stakeholders discuss and refine until a consensus** is reached. (Source: London, Principled Leadership and Business Diplomacy). Clearly defined rules provide a sense of security, clarity, and direction for all stakeholders.

** Please note: we're referring to consensus to be reached with the C-suite / the top-level executives. Opposed to product teams who apply the "disagree-but-commit" framework (not focused on 100% consensus) for the operational day-to-day work.

In your organisation, do you or did you establish new rules together with the C-suite (e.g. a feature prioritization rule/process)?

45 responses
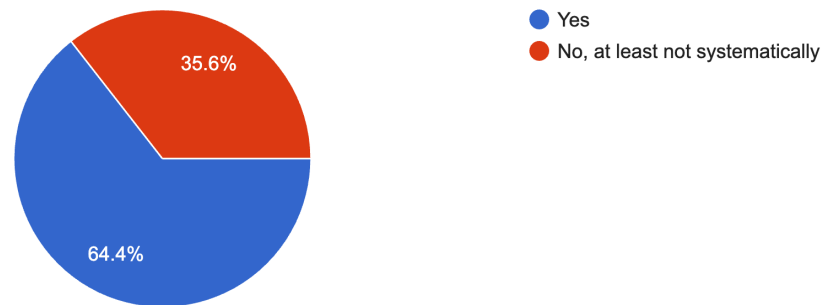
- Yes
- No, at least not systematically

35.6%

64.4%

If yes, how helpful was it? If no, how helpful do you believe it could be?
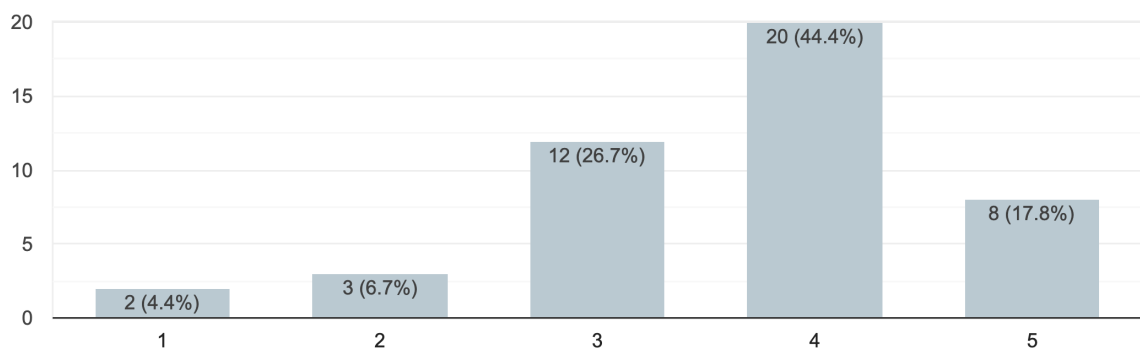
45 responses

1 = Not at all helpful | 5 = Very helpful

Why? Please explain (45 responses)

| 1 | The answer would actually be "partially". Some rules have been established, but then they can also be broken again by the C-Suite so in general, they are only reliable as long as they last |
| 2 | I am answering from the view of our clients: When we come into client projects we start with laying the groundwork similar to that. It helps to align stakeholders and expectations |

3	Our C-level is too far away to understanding product
4	Introduced ProCo Governance committee which enabled good business decisions
5	The rule was to join the backlog refinement meeting where we discuss and estimate tickets. If there is no feedback, the ticket will be done like that.
6	Having rules in place sets a clear guideline
7	My biggest challenge in prioritization is with the CEO who is a typical Hippo. Even if he were to agree to a process, if the output of the process doesn't suit his expectations, then he would very likely brush off the process and revert back to his opinions.
8	New process revealed problems, that were hidden before
9	Still very early to measure results. However, the discussion itself was helpful as it brings the topic up for discussion, which is always better than not addressing the elephant in the room.
10	Clear roles and responsibilities make collaboration much easier
11	strategic initiatives impact north star metics which impact the products on a team level to be worked on (within a jurisdiction) - helps a lot when deciding what to do and what not to do
12	No needs
13	With rules or processes things become more tangible for top-level executives. In my experience, they tend to focus on outputs, and applying this technique is likely to give them the outputs they need without undermining outcome-based product work.
14	North star vision is clear and well adopted by all the C-Suite. Short-term priorities are driven by projects and short term revenues. Facing too many changes on short-term priorities, we agreed to finally develop our capabilities to address a part of these short term priorities at first while staying in the product vision, but dedicating more development power by batches on a specific set of features on a specific period. Which means being able to exclude some expected evolutions as part of those batches, in the

	interest of the strongest highest priorities. Finally this help us allocate best our ressources/deliver quickly on what matters most, and it offers a clear visibility to everyone on choices to be done while not compromising the long term vision. A good compromise from my point of view.
15	It was helpful to have a C-suite member in the decision making process because it allowed us to move forward with the new rule immediately following the design sprint (related to website and application design, and IA). Having a C-Suite member present also helped the team understand the positioning of the product in real time.
16	Transparent and engaging way to bring everyone on the same page
17	While we follow the process and we discuss until a consensus is reached, the weight of each department's opinion is not equal.
18	Needs and priorities often conflict, but aligning on a single rule or principle cuts through and at the least gives everyone something to point at.
19	Highly dependent on the stability of the business and maturity of all decision-makers
20	Setting the scope and expactation helped to gain consensus and not to question certain decisions again
21	Aligning on set of rules with C-level beforehand is key in corporation innovation -since many established corporate processes are not well-suited for innovation management (eg. rigid resource planning processes vs experimentation-driven processes)
22	Because then every single solution no longer has to be discussed subjectively.
23	They neded up switching back to their old ways
24	I see the following potential pitfalls of such an approach: it can be a time-consuming process; it can reduce organization's agility; it can be less inclusive than desired; decision might be diluted as a result of compromises; over-reliance on rules can stifle creativity and innovation

25	Diplomacy too often achieves consensus through compromise. In innovation work and product development, clear decisions are needed at some point. To do or not to do.
26	Note: I replied "No" in the first question, but the second question wouldn't let me proceed without an answer, even though it wasn't applicable.
27	I was actually asked to do this. I suggested just a simple method that is easy to apply in smaller teams and it seemed to have effect.
28	At Microsoft we introduced the role-based ACID model (approver, contributor, information-giver, decider), it did help expedite some decisions, but didn't solve the systematic issues. On the flip side I found that deciding based on evidence can be very powerful.
29	This can be helpful but I believe in a small organisation you should have the flexibility to deviate (ofcourse with the correct explanation) from the process. People tend to follow the process and then are going to adjust their own idea/feature request to the process in the hope it will be placed on the roadmap. By adding to much process steps it will take away the innovation within product development especially when there is no clear product validation/discovery in place. It can for sure help but the process should not be leading.
30	We have tried to establish a set of rules between product and the CTO but the CTO actively not followed the agreed upon rules.
31	Because then the hippo effect could be reduced, but probably not eliminated.
32	I was forced somehow to provide a list of feature and all the C-levels, besides the CTO, were voting for the features. This has happened because the CEO was always changing the focus on a weekly/monthly basis. I don't think this is the best approach because it doesn't necessarily focus on business/product outcome.
33	Helpful yes, but does not help for tensions, agility or becoming more data-driven

34	We first agree on principles that would be used to make decision and then use such a framework to make actual decisions. That allows to create good alignments.
35	will provide clarity and alignment
36	We abolished consensus and replaced it with consent.
37	If the leadership team is not on board and on the same page, things go haywire. This is the starting point of most culture initiatives in the orgs that i work with.
38	We just started to draft the rules. I assume that it will be helpful but can't say for sure yet
39	I would expect it to be somewhat helpful, but seen more as project-related, so that at the next opportunity C-suite members will fall back into old patterns. Establishing decision rules permanently / structurally is likely to be a longer process.
40	Enhanced prioritization
41	With a clear set of rules for prioritisation and clear processes with check gates, we could manage Stakeholders much better. It also helped to bring all on the same page (context sharing) and NOT Product people are enabled to start building up a product mindset
42	It worked, but there was little trust in the process
43	C-Suite is more concerned with order intake and revenue, less concerned about product details
44	I had a prioritization process in my previous teams and it's very helpful in ensuring structured discussions and avoid that the loudest person in the room gets all the resources. Unfortunately, my boss (CPO) does not see the value of this and it not ready to drive the discussion with the C-suite.
45	Clear guidance, less assuming, less changes late in the process.

THEMES

Limitations (22 inputs)

1. Inconsistent application and resistance (10 inputs): 1, 3, 7, 19, 23, 25, 30, 31, 33, 44

2. Dependence on leadership buy-in (7 inputs): 9, 13, 18, 26, 37, 42, 43

3. Potential negative impacts on agility and creativity (5 inputs): 24, 25, 29, 33, 42

Benefits (22 inputs)

1. Improved decision-making and clarity (10 inputs): 6, 10, 11, 20, 28, 34, 35, 38, 40, 45

2. Enhanced collaboration and stakeholder management (8 inputs): 14, 15, 16, 20, 21, 34, 37

3. Positive impact on organizational culture (5 inputs): 2, 8, 11, 22, 41

Not qualified (1 input): 12

CONTEXT SPECIFIC RESULTS

Organizational Context	Application: Rules established together with the C-suite | not systematically done	Value: Helpful or very helpful | somewhat helpful | not helpful, not at all helpful
All	**64% | 36%**	**72% | 21% | 7%**
Small	78% | 22%	86% | 14% | 0%
Medium	69% | 31%	44% | 44% | 11%
Large	50% | 50%	90% | 10% | 0%
Experts	100% | 0%	100% | 0% | 0%

7.4.2 Diplomatic Method 2/5: Strategic Advocacy

"Advocacy is the deliberate process […] to directly and indirectly influence decision makers, stakeholders and relevant audiences to support and implement actions that contribute" to the achievement of the desired objective. (Source: United Nations Childern's Fund UNICEF, Advocacy Toolkit).

Or to put it shot: *"Advocacy is a process that aims at converting target audiences to supporters."*

(Source: Bochenek, Advocacy and Organizatoinal Engagement).

Drafting an advocacy strategy requires among others:

(1) Defining…

- The objective of the strategy.

- Which audiences/stakeholders you need to address.

(2) Understanding…

- how the intended changes can be made.

- How stakeholders can support.

- What messages they need to hear, who they need to hear it from when and how.

(3) Measuring progress and success.

In your organization and in your function, do you use Strategic Advocacy to convert target audiences (e.g. the C-suite) to supporters?
45 responses
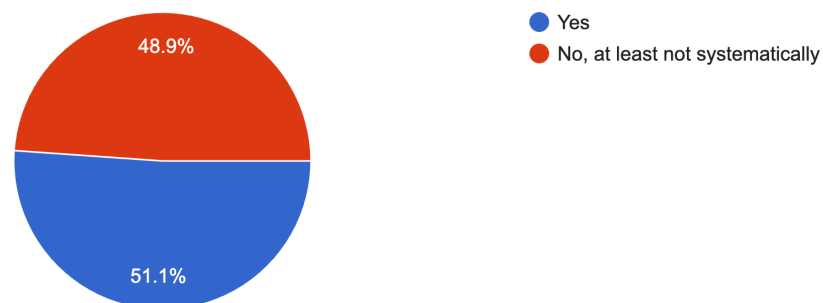
(A) Strategic Advocacy applied

Can you share an example of an objective you reached or are currently trying to reach by using

Strategic Advocacy? (23 responses)

| 1 | I am answering from the view of our clients: THere are often stakehodlers like marketing and sales that are neutral to Product Management, ie. they don't care much, or maybe are even skeptical. There it pays off to clarify the why -- what is in it for them if they support a good product team |

2	Gorwing our inhouse design capacities to accelerate digital change.
3	Headroom Analysis with different adoption of products and the direct revenue impact thereof for the business
4	Gaining buy in for annual product strategy. I typically share the content in 1:1 with various stakeholders, I gather their feedback and answer their concerns/questions so that they support the plan I'm sharing
5	Pivoted project over 3 versions while introducing data-driven approach, where data is available to everyone in company (creating transparency).
6	I have used it several times. I had to use strategic advocacy for example to convert executive leaders into supporters of the innovation ambition matrix, which helps to allocate innovation resources to the product portfolio and to a short- and long-term product strategy. To do this, I introduced them to the concept and periodically showed them our product portfolio and our efforts using the matrix, through a series of workshops.
7	Modification of the product roadmap process - higher focus
8	Visibility on feature planning, enabling people to share ideas.
9	I am founding and leading a new product marketing function. That requires me to basically install the purpose of our function in the wider organisation through advocacy and negotiation
10	Changing the mind of a founder by leveraging customers as advocates of their own needs
11	Built network of internal supporters when building mobility business line at Baloise. Main approach was about creating a set of storytelling materials about our vision and goals in Mobility and being as outspoken and transparent as possible with the rest of the organisation.

12	I convinced my team to move from a solution oriented approach to a more problem orinted culture.I set up some proceses we tested it and it worked, now the adoption is going well
13	Securing adequate funding for the Bank's digital transformation efforts to drive digital adoption by customers
14	Use of agile sprints for product and engineering teams to improve collaboration, efficiency, and delivery predictability.
15	I launched major features in Gmail that required multiple executives' sign-off. We prepared (although less formally than you describe) for these sessions considering compelling arguments that address their needs.
16	We are making a big change in our product, this will take away some user value but will eventually bring user value and will mitigate a big risk for our organisation. This required us to convince MT and our customer succes team of our idea. First we started off with mapping the goals, beliefs and the concerns of all parties and drafted a plan on how to address those. Then we create a message and start thinking about how to get it across, since this was not an overnight change. We carefully drafted a communication plan (including presentations, meetings, one-on-one's) to get our idea accross. Now we are in the middle of executing that plan but, so far we already convinced 50% of the MT.
17	I introduced crypto fees on customers' withdrawals. I've involved the necessary departments and brainstormed about the problem and potential solutions, created the objective to generate profits instead of loss, built it, communicated, launched.
18	I specifically work out the persons interests and see how my proposal meets them. I pitch individually when necessary
19	Culture shift/change. Need to get people throughout the org on board, and do so via shared language and objectives, communicated during workshops

20	Freeing product managers time up for more product discovery
21	Applying the solution to the benefits of other stakeholders
22	Sounding Board: In big and complex product development project, we set-up a sounding board with representatives from different departments / expertises as a forum to gather non binding inputs and feedbacks
23	Approval of roadmap of a new product line

THEMES

1. Building buy-in and changing mindsets (9 inputs): 1, 4, 6, 10, 11, 15, 16, 17, 23

3. Data-driven advocacy (7 inputs): 2, 3, 7, 9, 18, 20, 21

2. Enhancing collaboration and communication (6 inputs): 5, 8, 12, 14, 19, 22

Not qualified (1 input): 13

What went well? (23 responses)

1	Alignemnt on higher level goals (more sales, better products, fewer product issues)
2	The right people start to listen.
3	Better understanding for C Suite on how product solutions help their business
4	I get to answer their concerns in 1:1 much more easily than if I were to present the strategy in an exec team meeting with all stakeholders together. That allows for the formal presentation to the exec team to be more of a formality rather than a high stakes meeting.
5	We were on the same page
6	It is now adopted and accepted as a strategic framework in the company.
7	2 months only for validation and implementation
8	Some people embraced it and good ideas came out of it.

9	Building alignment and understanding. Product marketing basically does this by default, so installing this function in the organisation build a whole pile of operational and organisational alignment around the things we hold to be important.
10	Customers as advocates is quite ideal as they are a powerful stakeholder to capture founders'attention.
11	We managed to gather a handful of great internal supporters who were key in delivering our vision (ie help with operationalisation of new partnerships, due diligence, etc..)
12	They saw the value
13	When the outcome is clearly defined and well communicated getting support is easier
14	Presenting a business case (from my previous experience) with clear benefits and metrics helped to justify the importance of sprints from a strategic standpoint.
15	This type of preparation is very helpful and makes convincing others more actionable.
16	Mapping out the goals, concerns and beliefs of our audience
17	Everything in terms of discovery and delivery
18	the approach works.
19	The workshops
20	Identifying the target aufience
21	Yes
22	As the governance was cleary defined and it was clear, that the Sounding boad has no decision power but can influence product decisions by feedback and sharing their perspective, we could involve Stakeholders and due to the fact, that they were well informed, we could make them to Ambassador for the project / new product
23	When you get them, its all very smooth and accelerate the impact.

What challenges did you face and how do you plan to overcome them next time? (23 responses)

1	It's often abstract and a vague promise -> trust building takes time
2	The value is not yet fully understood.
3	Industry differences and the lack of externally shared cases with projects
4	It works rather well.
5	Regular dialogue
6	It took some time for some to understand the importance of diversifying the types of innovation (core, adjacent, transformational) and what to expect from each type in a given period of time. Next time I think I myself would be more consistent and more convinced that this is essential.
7	change management at team level ; development of self-management at team level
8	It's hard to grab the interest of everyone with these processes. My next approach would be to mask them with some gamification elements.
9	Most obvious answer here is enormous amounts of time and effort from me which takes away from functional and strategic leadership opportunities.
10	One of the founder thinking he "knows better" and refutes customer needs even when they are expressed in front of him by customers themselves. I plan to overcome this by having more overwhelming evidence if possible, and by calling out his opinioons
11	Main challenge was about choosing well your battles as you can easily spend lots of time building a community of supporters, but reality is that only a few will be willing to actively support at the end of the day. So making sure you do this efficiently is key.
12	They tend to go back to their old habits, so i still don't have 100% adoption on the new process
13	Aligning various parts of the org to the common goal, making sure contributing teams do not function in silos.
14	Balancing competing priorities and perspectives

15	People are not always predictable, and executives may surprise you with an objection or POV you haven't considered.
16	* Creating a communication plan for an audience you not fully get -> Make sure we better understand the audience before we think about communication and our message
17	I had to learn everything related to crypto fees structure based on every cryptocurrency that we provide our customers with. However, our payments departments should've done it.
18	it takes time
19	Buy-in from senior leadership and getting the rest of the org to walk the talk.
20	Old mindset within the product org (e.g. we are just told what to build, we do not have time for discovery) is self-restricting and a bigger hurdle than convincing commercial stakeholders
21	Identifying the needs of other stakeholders related to the new solution
22	Making sure relevant perspectives are integrated was easy, making sure that Soundingboard Member have a certain hierarchy was more challenging
23	Hard to get them especially over GVC- try to avoid to have such conversation virtually.

How helpful have you found using "Strategic Advocacy" for achieving your objective?

23 responses
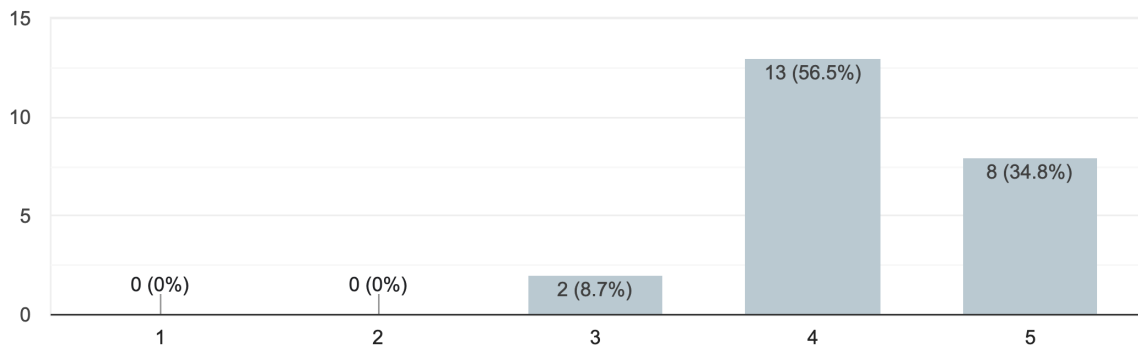
1 = Not at all helpful | 5 = Extremely helpful

(B) Strategic Advocacy not systematically applied

In your experience, would the diplomatic method "Strategic Advocacy" be helpful in overcoming roadblocks in the product work?

22 responses
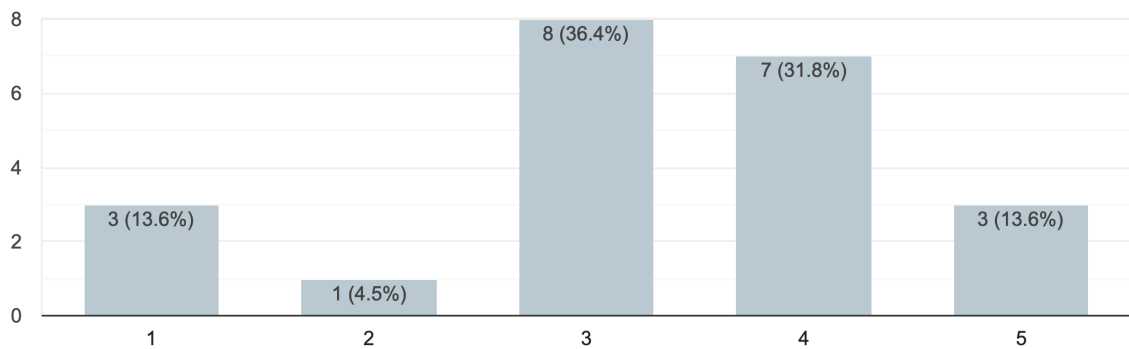
1 = Not at all helpful | 5 = Very helpful

Why? Please explain. (22 responses)

| 1* | Of course it would be helpful. The problem we face is not the method, it's the fact that decisions are under threat to be either questioned or undone again. |

2*	Time consuming but builds consensus
3*	We were a startup with very open communication and all had the same goals. There was no need for it.
4*	As the organization is going through a tough time, they seem to be more open to trying out new things and ways of working. So, for the time being, in our context, we didn't have to push too much towards this new way of working. This could also be due to the fact that some leaders who were at the organization previously have already invested a lot of time and effort into this, hence less convincing is required now.
5*	As an experienced product manager, you probably apply this strategy automatically. It is very effective, but systematic application is too time-consuming.
6*	if the C level could help re-organize the and loosed the problem of jurisdiction, it could help,
7*	Not relevant
8*	Yes, I think that there is a need for C-Suite members to understand the reasoning and work that has gone into proposing a change or requesting support. This would provide a clear sense of what the roadblock is, what is required to achieve it, and why the C-Suite should be on board. At times, C-Suite members can have rather inflexible expectations and commitment to their own ideas, and I believe that advocacy would aid the process of securing their understanding and support.
9*	On an individual PM level yes, but not systematically across the organization. I interpret this more as an individual tool for the "political" games
10*	To be adapted to a complex organizational structure (with lots of stakeholders) and the commitment to stick to it (and not to revise decisions based on gut feeling or c-suite discussions)
11*	I'm not sure. I see the danger of this method in the fact that it is manipulative. If the diplomat is convincing, even bad solutions can be convincing.

12*	We try to involve our customers in product development through so-called "focus groups" and use them as multipliers.
13*	Same as before
14*	It seemed to work at certain cases, but after much strife and disagreement any proposition coming from our group was viewed negatively or with suspicion from the outset.
15*	At least to win the CEO or the trusted person. Risk is still here if mot all convert to suppoters, that bissed thinking of the hippo will make the decision.
16*	unclear how this would be applicable
17*	Without knowing the details it is hard to say.
18*	It can be helpful (or even necessary) on case-by-case basis to advocate for certain topics, but I do not see it as a systematic startegy.
19*	My answer is directly related to the answer regarding the biggest roadblock (1st question): Where the understanding of product management is not on a high level or not widely distributed, the preferences and experiences of individuals and their relationship to each other are more important in determining whether or not you can assert your own understanding. It therefore seems promising to start strategically with precisely these individual people.
20*	People have fears that need to be overcome
21*	Onboarding key stakeholders is essential to confirming and achieving strategic product objectives
22*	I would ensure alignment early on and awareness about the needs of each stakeholder.

THEMES

Limitations (45 inputs)

1. Resistance and organizational challenges (15 inputs): 1*, 8*, 10, 10*, 11, 12, 14*, 15, 16, 19, 20, 4*, 15*, 18*, 25*

2. Understanding and communication obstacles (13 inputs): 1, 2, 13, 22, 9*, 11*, 19*, 20*, 21*, 22*, 24*, 28*, 26*

3. Time and effort constraints (8 inputs): 5, 9, 14, 18, 21, 2*, 5*, 27*

Not qualified (9 inputs): 3, 6, 7, 8, 13* 17, 23, 6*, 17*

Benefits (17 inputs)

1. Alignment and consensus/buy-in (8 inputs): 1, 9, 3, 5, 12, 13, 14, 22

2. Positive outcomes and adoption (5 inputs): 6, 8, 11, 15, 18

3. Enhanced support and influence (4 inputs): 2, 4, 10, 23

Not qualified (6 inputs): 7, 16, 17, 19, 20, 21

CONTEXT-SPECIFIC RESULTS

Organizational Context	Application: Strategic advocacy applied | not systematically applied	Value: Helpful or very helpful | somewhat helpful | not helpful, not at all helpful
All	51% | 49%	91% | 9% | 0%
Small	78% | 22%	86% | 14% | 0%
Medium	46% | 54%	100% | 0% | 0%
Large	35% | 65%	100% | 0% | 0%
Experts	100% | 0%	67% | 33% | 0%

7.4.3 Diplomatic Method 3/5: Coalition Building

Diplomats build coalitions with those who share their opinions so that they get immediate support for an initiative. (Source: R.P. Barston, Modern Diplomacy and London, Principled Leadership and Business Diplomacy).

Practical examples are pilot teams: these teams, composed of early adopters who share your vision, can test the new method/process/technique immediately. This allows the broader organization to observe the results and gradually become familiar with the approach before it gets expanded to the broader organization.

In your organisation and in your function, do you use Coalition Building?
45 responses

If yes, how helpful was it? If no, how helpful do you believe it could be?
45 responses

1 = Not at all helpful | 5 = Very helpful

Why? Please explain (45 responses).

1	It very much helps to spread ideas and changes and doesn't feel like one group of people (or even just a single person) is forcing something onto the rest of the organization.
2	In my experiences at Google I often tried to have some groups actively support my goals and be vocal about it. It again starts with finding similar goals
3	We always so "No involvement" "No Commitment". It is essential to have the right people being part of something bigger.
4	Helps to annex roadblocks!
5	I believe this method works very well in bigger companies, but again, we were just 20 people and out of those 8 product or devs
6	Remove early roadblack and customize products
7	It always helps, but it's not a magic bullet when confronted with a Hippo CEO.
8	This is politics. I dont like it. It makes thing less transparent.
9	It is helpful to create some momentum and progress, or otherwise, we risk being in discussions forever. The way I am using it now is to work very closely with design and go from an idea/insight to a prototype super-fast. This then allows us to have a more productive discussion with the C-suite later on.
10	effective, less time-consuming measure - especially with c-level members. Almost a requirement to start an initiative.
11	small pilot product teams are formed with staff across teams to broaden the effect - this helps bring the knowledge to several teams
12	Not relevant
13	The company I work for is peculiar in that most of the leaders are literally fans of the CEO (as he is a famous coach), which gives a lot of weight to his opinions. In the end I was able to build coalitions with only one or two colleagues. That helped, for example, to institute a north start metric in the company, but failed when we tried to get the

	company to focus on fewer initiatives to have more impact, rather than many initiatives with little impact each.
14	we aften experiment with a limited group, nevertheless I think it excludes the larger group from the early innovations, which is not well received
15	The product team I am a part of is often performing trial runs of new features or feedback measures, and these certainly help to illustrate the possibilities for new business or improvements that can be made to the product. This is especially helpful when gathering preliminary data that could be used in multiple areas, such as capturing user data to understanding user drop off rates. This can bring together LXD, sales and marketing in coalescing around the problem from multiple angles and promote more holistic solutions.
16	I experience this right now in developing a completely new software solution. Haveing the right ppl on your side in anticipation to a decision will make the actual decision in a best case almost obsolete because in the run up it's already very clear what the tendency will be
17	We introduced "Delivery Teams". These are cross-department teams that take ownership of a project from every aspect. Conversations are happening on specific channels and it's down to each department representative to make sure that everything goes smooth in their field.
18	I work extensively with the Head of Product to build a better product function. Recognising that the effectiveness of that broader organisation both requires our separate teams but also has an influence beyond it, acting in a unified fashion has enabled us to deliver quite extraordinary transformation.
19	I can usualy rally 2 out of 3 founders or the majority of board members behing evidence-backed decisions

20	Experience of change or direction is powerful (instead of having theoretical discussions); however to be careful: how other teams or team members experience a potential parallel structure
21	In corporate innovation, getting to quick, early wins driven by entrepreneurial employees is a great strategy to generate internal buy-in.
22	If something is unknown, it naturally has many opponents. But if something is exemplified in a small circle, it is no longer unknown to others.
23	it gives you the support you need to push for new things
24	Pilots, beta launches, MVPs, PoCs are all important ways to get buy-in from the larger org, customers, etc. Working with believers can help move the dial faster. Important to manage: 1) bias in results and 2) risk of stagnation (getting your thing beyond early adopters)
25	It is also similar to our focus groups and we have a community of 60 banks with whom we develop or test new topics together.
26	Only applied coalition building on a very informal level. With mixed success. I believe it can be a powerful method.
27	So i created Pilot team for same project i did advocacy for, and i involved people from different teams. I got immediate support and there was cultural shift and immediate cross team coalition. It helped me a lot to move forward. Less risk, immediate adjustment of the process etc...
28	This is a core strategic tool. I didn't use it systematically, but I've seen it put to use very effectively.
29	This is really helpful in cases where there is no consensus or it is difficult to get consensus. By building a coalition you can sharpen your ideas/message and you get support in an unclear situation. On the other side coalitions will only work for the

	organisation when members of the coalition challenge each other and be honest, otherwise you will get a party of yes-man.
30	It was possible to start small, build a new successful process and then advocate it to the rest of the organisation.
31	Getting a coalition supporting from bottom up, helped many initiatives to survive.
32	I haven't used it
33	IMHO, coalition is politics and to be avoided: as a C-suite anyone is committed to the cause and not to the coalition
34	We use consensus based decision making to agree on things.
35	As Product, you always need a strong coalition to make the value add tangible and visible within the company.
36	I believe all major intiaitives must be carried by a coalition
37	Building small pockets of success would be great.
38	I work with some open-minded product managers and leaders to show what a new and empowered setup can look like
39	Precisely for the reasons mentioned in the explanation: it is easier to get immediate support, faster to start working on something and getting to results, thus easier to convince (with results) skeptics.
40	A lot of decisions are taken by consensus - at least to some extent - hence a coalition is helpful in the discussion
41	In digital product development it is key to habe strong coalition with tech, marketing, sales department. Especially Tech is key, as in the end of the game you are depending of enough technical ressources for a fast delivery and iteration of product / product increments
42	Having supporters will help drive the decision

43	Testing of new product ideas, particularly those with some complexity, require a multidisciplinary team approach, applying diversity of viewpoints and skills. Forming such a team early and with sufficient capacity to apply necessary focus would be highly beneficial.
44	It makes decision making much faster. However, a concern that I have is how it impacts the politics in the company and the quality of the decisions (e.g., supporting a decision just because of being part of a coalition).
45	A lot of efforts and likely to formal for my org.

THEMES

Limitations (12 inputs)

1. Political concerns (8 inputs): 6, 7, 8, 13, 20, 29, 33, 44

2. Practical challenges (4 inputs): 5, 14, 26, 45

Benefits (30 inputs)

1. Building support and alignment (12 inputs): 1, 2, 3, 4, 11, 18, 23, 31, 35, 39, 41, 42

2. Effective decision making (10 inputs): 9, 10, 15, 17, 24, 25, 30, 34, 36, 40

3. Supporting innovation and implementation (8 inputs): 16, 21, 22, 27, 28, 37, 38, 43

Not qualified (3 inputs): 12, 19, 32

CONTEXT-SPECIFIC RESULTS

Organizational Context	Application: Coalition Building applied | not systematically applied	Value: Helpful or very helpful | somewhat helpful | not helpful, not at all helpful
All	**80% | 20%**	**86% | 6% | 8%**
Small	67% | 33%	100% | 0% | 0%
Medium	77% | 23%	50% | 30% | 20%
Large	95% | 5%	100% | 0% | 0%

Experts	33%	67%	100%	0%	0%

7.4.4 Diplomatic Method 4/5: Shuttle Diplomacy

The term Shuttle Diplomacy originates from the diplomatic style of Henry Kissinger applied in the resolution of the Vietnam War of 1973 in the Middle East:

"In practice mediation operates through shuttle diplomacy: the mediator [the Diplomat] goes back and forth between parties, meeting them in private. The mediator [the Diplomat] helps each party to gradually discover (privately) her value from settlement and re-assess her bargaining position, while also proposing the terms of the deal." (Source: Gottardi, Shuttle Diplomacy).

Through this dynamic process, the Diplomat helps each party understand the potential benefits of an agreement, articulate their concerns, encourage them to reconsider their initial stances while keeping face.

In your work, do you use Shuttle Diplomacy?
45 responses
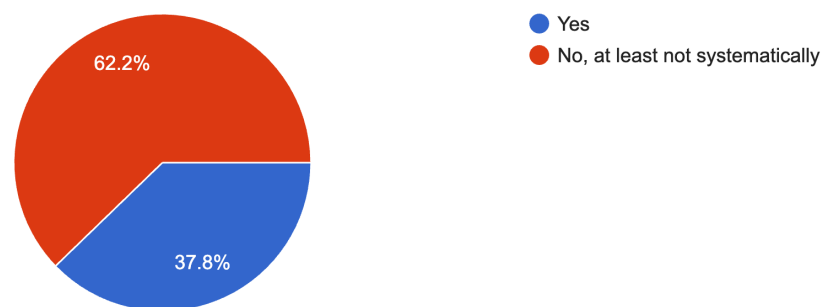
(A) Shuttle Diplomacy applied

Can you share an example of how you applied Shuttle Diplomacy? (17 responses)

1	We had one feature, that would remove some users from our marketplace, if they did a certain behavior 3 times. Marketing wanted it to be more strict and Operations to be less restricive. By talking to both parties in private and showing them the benefit of the company, we could agree on that number

2	Before intorlducing what-why-how chain of process change (new product department) approving all argumentation with CEO, so we are on the same page
3	To bring about a compromise between two "hostile" editorial managers with regard to further product development
4	I prepare the global alignement meeting in one-to-one exchanges with most of the C-Suite stakeholders, being sure to listen to them also to promote their opinion in global meeting
5	We run a "Product Control Board". A C-Level and Director/Head meeting to discuss roadmap, current and new features and present business cases.
6	Product marketing is the very definition of this strategy. I frequently back and forth between marketing, sales, or product to close gaps and misunderstandings.
7	I use it on every important strategic decision, the latest example is whether to specialize the product on an industry vertical or to keep it generic/configurable with a higher effort but allowing to address a wider market. 1:1 meetings with board members, foounders, other c-levels as well as other leadership members and employees that are involved in the matter for a) getting a sense of the general sentiment around a topic and possible options and b) influencing 1:1 towards finding common ground, so that the I can then promote decision meetings where most people will bring the already discussed scenario forward
8	Buy-in for change in tech-strategy
9	It's commonly used when refining a requirements document, navigating between business, technology, operations and internal control teams before everyone signs off on the PRD
10	transitioning the product into a platform
11	Get the company behind the product vision

12	You present the same idea from specific angle for different teams. Applying knowledge about which metrics / things certain team cares about it is easier to sell them on the same idea.
13	I work as a consultant. Most of the stakeholder management we do is shuttle diplomacy
14	Achieving focus on outcomes and metrics instead of feature list as c-level briefing towards the company
15	When defining a product strategy, share and gather feedback from different department leads (C-Level) and made them contribute over feedback and challenging. Things that were critised or not understood could be cleared before a board would make a decision or approve that product strategy
16	Product team established a business case to perform the development and production ramp-up of a new, complex system. Objective was to secure funding approval for the project. The process involved several versions of the submission for approval, including negotiation with the C-Suite.
17	Align Eng and PM

THEMES

1. Building consensus and alignment (7 inputs): 1, 3, 4, 7, 12, 14, 17

2. Facilitating communication (6 inputs): 6, 8, 9, 11, 13, 15

3. Managing complex decision-making processes (4 inputs): 2, 5, 10, 16

What went well? (17 responses)

1	It went well :D
2	99% of my message and arguments were accepted
3	Best compromise for the product could be found
4	I generally get validation of most of my propositions

5	Early feedback on ideas and their viability.
6	Literally just translating requirements for different audiences.
7	It worked to convince some key stakeholders, when they realized their opinion was minority in the decision meeting.
8	Being able to look at the same objective with different lenses for each c-suite member and understand their needs and expectations
9	It helps to have everyone commited to the starting point and expected outcome.
10	individual consultations
11	The CEO and most parties appreciated the direct approach outside of a larger group where they felt happier to discuss their objections in a more friendly manner.
12	You show you care about this team and people that work for a certain team. You show that you made you due diligence.
13	it sometimes works
14	Addressing the intent with my peer, our COO
15	We achieved to define a Product Strategy that in the end was supportet by the board and approved by the CEO
16	The product team worked well together and eventually achieved the objective, resulting in the launch and successful execution of the project (still ongoing)
17	You hear both voices and can address the different issues

What challenges did you face and how do you plan to overcome them next time? (17 responses)

1	Since the conversation started with their view, there was no challenge to overcome.
2	Keep going. There is no shortcut.

3	very time-consuming, but would act in the same way next time
4	NA
5	Arguing can get excessive and the meetings can get derailed easily. Stricter meeting structure could help with that.
6	Pure fatigue. It's a nonsense strategy that patches over bad organisational culture.
7	Some stakeholders try to bring up the discussion points prematurely towards a larger group, before I had the chance to address it 1:1 with every party involvd. In general as soon as I have identified stakeholders with this preference, I transparently ask them to allow me to brief everyone before bringing the topic up.
8	Time consuming ; let c-level members convince their peers
9	Time consuming for the mediator (product manager). Too much reliance on the PM. Implementation gaps are possible
10	time and resistance to change
11	The time is not always available to reach out to all parties in a corporate setting.
12	It takes a lot of time, central decision making would help a lot on this.
13	its a pain and a waste of time.
14	The product org still has the confirmation bias and only slowly recognizes the changes and good intents from their commercial peers to empower their data-driven product practices
15	This needs a lot of empathy and energy, as not all relevant collegues have the time and motiviation to really try to understand, get explanations and learn (Yes and Mindset is key), thats why culture and mindset are the biggest roadblock
16	Not all financial parameters were adequately included by the product team (cost escalation, cash flow details, phasing of resource hiring, etc.), resulting in some

	backwards and forwards negotiations with the C-Suite. The template for submission for approval was improved.
17	When they are together afterwards they change their mind - having stuff documented helps a lot. E.g. meeting notes.

How helpful have you found "Shuttle Diplomacy" in overcoming roadblocks?

17 responses
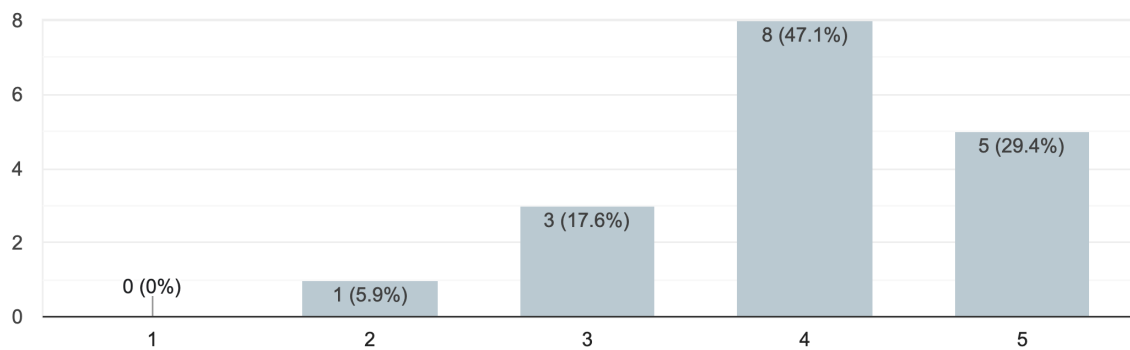
1 = Not at all helpful | 5 = Extremely helpful

(B) Shuttle Diplomacy not systematically applied

In your experience, would the diplomatic method "Shuttle Diplomacy" be helpful in overcoming roadblocks on the product work?

28 responses
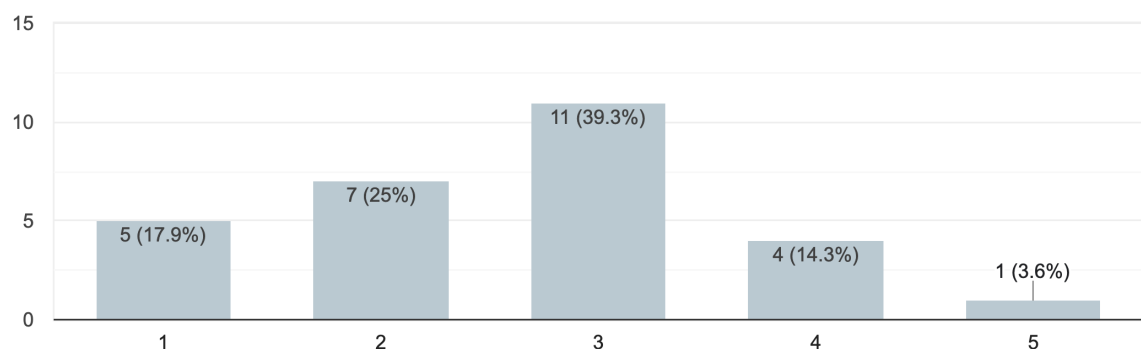
1 = Not at all helpful | 5 = Very helpful

Why? Please explain. (28 responses)

1*	It very much depends whom we're shuttling back and forth from; sometimes it can actually work to bring the two parties to the same consensus, (i.e. a member of the C-Suite and a team), but there is still the rest of the organization to consider.
2*	Not sure how helpful this might be -- I think consensus in the open is more effective
3*	Too much gets lost in translation
4*	too time consuming
5*	Not sure
6*	My challenges haven't involved getting two different parties to agree.
7*	The way I understand this is that it would not be helpful if I am involved in direct conflict with the other party. But this method could be useful when you are mediating a conflict between two other parties. An example of that could be: tech doesn't want to implement a complex design because it is difficult to maintain afterward, whereas design feels the complex design is essential to provide the best possible UX. However, even in such a setting, I would at least start with getting all the parties in a discussion together. Only when the discussions together are so unproductive that we are not reaching anywhere, I may consider something as shuttle diplomacy method. I had previously used it in a different context to address conflicts between two of my co-founders at my previous startup.
8*	I do not have insight into those processes at my org.
9*	Not relevant
10*	I think it is indeed important background work for product leaders, since a lot of the work is change management. I think it is a fundamental tool.
11*	Shuttle Democracy sounds like a very useful method, as an impartial third party playing the part of a mediator during a disagreement could deescalate any undesirable behaviors that harm the product development process. One of the difficulties I see here is in finding someone who is knowledgeable enough about the product and has the

	strategic mind to communicate that value in many different ways. With proper experience and skills, such a person would be an incredibly useful asset, yes.
12*	I think this is a natural ability a PM should have. Otherwise it's very difficult to align interests and find a solution which is a win-win fpr everyone
13*	I would prefer direct communication between teams vs resorting to a mediator (I believe it is more effective generally speaking)
14*	I can well imagine that this method can be helpful. However, it also seems to be rather time-consuming.
15*	Have not really used it yet
16*	I see this role as similar to the role of the bridge builder described by Jean-Philippe Hagmann. This role can be successful in connecting the innovators with the line, the development.
17*	See above
18*	Yes, in organizations that rely heavily on negotiation to get things decided. This is not the case in many modern product companies.
19*	It can be very helpful when two parties are not agreeing with each-other and feel that they are not taken seriously by the other party. In these situations having a shuttle would help to take out the angle of the situation (9/10 emotion) and come to an agreement. People are afraid to loose face and when this is prevent by using shuttle diplomacy this is extremely helpful and will give you the desired outcomes.
20*	Too tome consuming?
21*	I just use communication
22*	Too slow for organisation that need to act quickly in todays age
23*	This is an intransparent and non-institutionalised way of stakeholder management that I don't think will be successful in the long run.

24*	If the message is out of my control, it can be hard to get everyone really on the same page. While the benefits of hearing from "insiders" like shuttle diplomats can be strong, I fear the downsides are a big risk.
25*	My impression is that such roadblocks are also very much based in unconscious organizational, cultural biases, but that the mentioned method is particularly successful when each party is aware of a conflict. It seems to me that there is sometimes no awareness of the problems at all. This method in my impression starts at a later point.
26*	This method lacks transparency
27*	Very time consuming
28*	Especially to overcome the barriers that some people have regarding the fear of losing face.

THEMES

Limitations

Based on inputs "what challenges did you face" and "Why not systematically applied – marked with *" (27 inputs)

1. Time consumption and efficiency (14 inputs): 2*, 3, 4*, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14*, 20*, 22*, 27*

2. Complexity and lack of transparency (13 inputs): 1*, 3*, 6, 6*, 7, 13*, 15, 17, 18*, 23*, 24*, 25*, 26*

Not qualified as limitations, but as benefits (7 inputs): 7*, 10*, 11*, 12*, 16*, 19*, 28*

Not qualified (11 inputs): 1, 2, 4, 5*, 8*, 9*, 14, 15*, 16, 17*, 21*

Benefits

Based on inputs "What went well?" and as benefits qualified inputs from above (24 inputs)

1. Enhanced alignment and buy-in (9 inputs): 2, 3, 4, 7, 9, 11, 15, 19*, 28*

2. Improved communication and understanding (8 inputs): 5, 6, 8, 10, 12*, 14, 16*, 17

3. Enhanced success (7 inputs): 1, 13, 16, 7*, 19, 11*, 15*

CONTEXT-SPECIFIC RESULTS

Organizational Context	Application: Shuttle Diplomacy applied | not systematically applied	Value: Helpful or very helpful | somewhat helpful | not helpful, not at all helpful
All	38% | 62%	76% | 12% | 12%
Small	56% | 44%	40% | 40% | 20%
Medium	23% | 77%	67% | 33% | 0%
Large	40% | 60%	100% | 0% | 0%
Experts	33% | 67%	100% | 0% | 0%

7.4.5 Diplomatic Method 5/5: Strategic Multistakeholder Diplomacy

"Diplomatic method aimed at facilitating the equitable participation of all parties concerned in discussions on and debate over particular issue or issue at stake. It is based on the principles of mutual recognition and trust and on shared expertise and information." (Source: DiPLO, Multistakeholder Diplomacy, 2006).

In our product context, stakeholders are individuals **outside** the product team who represent key areas of the business (e.g. CEO, CFO, CHRO), hold specialized knowledge, or represent a vital group. (Source: Cagan, Transformed).

In your product work, do you strategically consider the different perspective of stakeholders by analyzing their power, interests, and positions on key issues?

45 responses

- Yes
- No, at least not systematically

24.4%

75.6%

If yes, how helpful was it? If no, how helpful do you believe it could be?
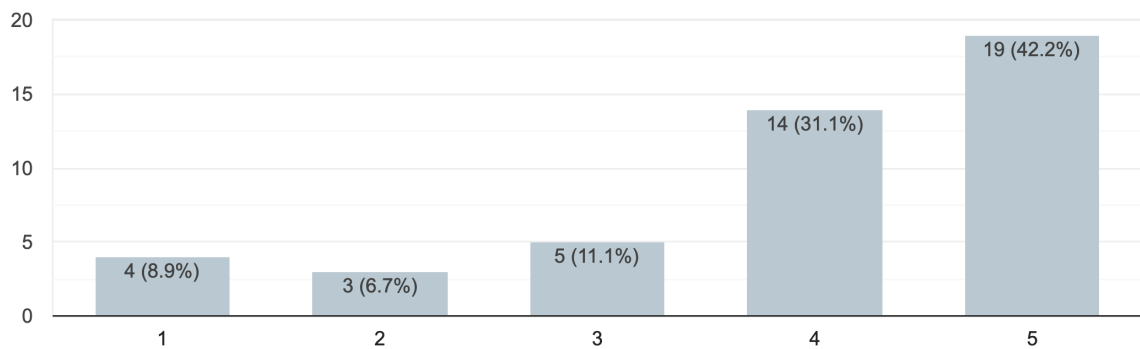
45 responses

1 = Not at all helpful | 5 = Very helpful

Why? Please explain. (45 responses)

| 1 | It would be very helpful - like all the other examples, as long as the outcomes, results and decisions are reliable. At the moment, there is too much power and leverage at an individual level still, that too many people become stakeholders who shouldn't be when it comes to product. |
| 2 | Often product folks have only influence and not power. Most of the power is with other groups, so absolutely it helps to influence them |

3	It is almost impossible to get all the right people at one table.
4	promotes all views being heard
5	We had company OKRs so the goals of each team where very transparent and we agreed on product impact before taking the goals into the new quarter.
6	Different level of expertise and very different on how I promote the product
7	At the end of the day, key issues are decided by a very small groupe of people (less than 4).
8	This is politics. I prefer working in smaller companies where this step is not much required. For sure you need this in companies like Swisscom, PostFinance, SBB etc, to survive.
9	In my opinion, diplomacy is all about give and take. Listening to others' opinions is the least one can do to give. So, it is always helpful to listen to the people in power within the organizations to understand their point of view. This also allows the stakeholders to think of me as someone on their side versus someone against them. Although, along with listening, I would still provide my honest feedback and comments to the stakeholders. In general, in my way of working, I also practice the "disagree but commit" method as I rate momentum more important than direction. From my personal experiences, direction can be corrected, but momentum, once lost, takes more time to generate again.
10	It's very helpful or even more a requirement if all stakeholders know each other and what their interests/ goals are to find a consent/ prioritize interests or goals and to define the most succesfull strategy for the product
11	stakeholders need to be on board for a project
12	X
13	I do this more on an intuitive level. I don't plan to do this, but I naturally take the perspective of others. My intention is not always to convince others and implement

what I want but to really integrate other perspectives. Often the other perspectives will add up and if they don't add up then they will reinforce the current state of the idea or issue being discussed. I firmly believe that this is fundamental and that decisions that are made in this way are accepted and better executed. They are integrated. It is true that this makes everything take more time, but I think it is time well spent because in the future there tends to be fewer changes and communication breakdowns.

14	I definitively think that is is essential. A good proposition at C-Level cannot consider the product perspective only.
15	This is a vital consideration for product development, because it cannot only be the product team who believe in and want the product to succeed. The importance of internal stakeholder buy-in is fundamental to the successful introduction of the product to market once the product team has completed their work. Understanding the positions of these stakeholders can also help the product team to communicate with them more effectively and provide them with relevant knowledge that will aid their work in moving the product to market.
16	I think this is very crucial and I had to learn this in the beginning as a PM. If you don't do it, the boomerang will hit you very fast. In the end, you can have the greatest idea but if it doesn't cover the interest of some key stakeholders, you will always live under scrutiny with your product
17	It helps us allocate the limited resources in the most efficient way. The pitfall is that since Product is the one accommodating, Product led initiatives can be left behind.
18	I push peers to understand other functions rather than requiring them to bend to their context
19	You don't build a product for the product team, you bulild a product that's viable for all stakeholders (customers, investors, board, employees)
20	It's important, but also dependent existing power play within c-suite.

21	It is key to align new product work with overall company strategy in order to generate further buy-in and commitment from the broader organisation.
22	It is not unusual for an stakeholders group to put obstacles in the way of a project if it has not been consulted. This method helps to prevent this.
23	It brings focus and alignment
24	Stakeholder management is paramount in large orgs.
25	Sounds too much like a tea party to me ;-)
26	see above
27	as our product is very specific, deep knowledge in technical aspects of the product are crucial, so our CEO who is our main scientist and our CTO were key persons
28	It's imperative to understand the point of views and interests of all involved. It's not the same as trying to satisfy all of them (which rarely works) or even giving everyone a vote (which definitely doesn't work).
29	It is helpful to get your idea across. By not taking into account the intrest and position of your audience, you will not get the buy-in for a certain feature/roadmap. If people feel acknowledged and they have the feeling that their ideas/needs are taken into account, you have a big change of succes.
30	It creates goodwill as all parties feel listened to and that their concerns are taken seriously.
31	If it is a top priority, its possible to push, but the expectation for fast ROI are much higher.
32	Because most of the time they have ideas that aren't backed up by data, yet they really know that the customers needs them.
33	This worked best IMHO, it brings a sense of belonging and control to everybody. Roles of responsibility though need to be defined within this process

34	Very helpful as in a large organization like Google you need to understand people and team agendas to get things done.
35	Absolutely key for alignment
36	We're too small to target full stakeholder groups.
37	Critical to understand everyone's perspectives; the difficulty comes from wanting the stakeholders to feel heard but still being able to go in directions other than the ones they highlight.
38	This helps a lot with creating buy-in to build the right team and secure the funding for it
39	Just having background knowledge about the interests, goals and problems of a stakeholder in relation to a product-related topic can change the tone and course of a conversation - even if no direct reference is made to this knowledge. Empathy is just as helpful here as empathy for the user.
40	When dealing with stakeholders it's best to keep away from these metrics and focus on tangible benefits within their field for the organization.
41	In the context of discovery initiatives, primar research I did great experiences by also interviewing internal stakeholder with decision power. We treated them like a user group so that we could better balance the need of the business with the needs of our customers
42	Most people dont really get a say. Only a few do
43	The product team did not have all of the necessary insight and experience related to a product of this complexity and value. Stakeholders from other business divisions with the appropriate experience proved invaluable.
44	It's critical to consider the interest of stakeholders and adapt the approach according to the power level (e.g. stakeholder matrix). With this, it's possible to achieve the right

	level of contact and keep them in the loop according to their interests without creating risks to the initiatives.
45	Not sure how helpful it is - because many decision are done with people which are multi location it is tirck to get all together (even virtually)

THEMES

Limitations (12 inputs)

1. Power imbalance and decision-making control (6 inputs): 1, 7, 20, 25, 32, 42

2. Complexity (3 inputs): 3, 6, 45

3. Dependence on organizational context (3 inputs): 8, 36, 37

Benefits (30 inputs)

1. Enhanced alignment and collaboration (12 inputs): 2, 4, 5, 9, 11, 18, 21, 23, 24, 35, 38

2. Informed decision-making and efficiency (10 inputs): 10, 14, 15, 16, 19, 22, 33, 39, 41, 43

3. Building trust and buy-in (9 inputs): 9, 13, 17, 28, 29, 30, 31, 34, 44

Not qualified (3 inputs): 12, 26, 27

CONTEXT-SPECIFIC RESULTS

Organizational Context	Application: multistakeholder diplomacy used | not systematically used	Value: Helpful or very helpful | somewhat helpful | not helpful, not at all helpful
All	**77% | 23%**	**88% | 9% | 3%**
Small	67% | 33%	100% | 0% | 0%
Medium	67% | 33%	75% | 13% | 13%
Large	84% | 16%	88% | 12% | 0%
Experts	100% | 0%	100% | 0% | 0%

7.5 Other Approaches

Are there any other approaches you use to tackle roadblocks in your product work especially at the intersection with the C-suite? (30 responses)

1	I personally don't have a direct intersection with the C-suite, so I can't really comment. From what I observe, two tactics seem to work quite well. Either scream the loudest, or bring arguments, reasons and facts that are so thought-through and extensive, that the C-Suite feels intimidated and don't want to admit that they lack the knowledge, so they commit instead.
2	Concise Short and Longform reading. Async distribution of ideas
3	No
4	Radical condor/trasnaprency (see Netflix culture).
5	direct exchange with C level in Feedback call - anonymous feedback - feedback through manager
6	None
7	product vision; data analysis
8	Consider product as one key angle of the corporate strategy but being sure to consider other key aspects of the enterprise strategy since the start. For me a good 'product' proposition is a product proposition that make senses within the current enterprise strategy, and cannot ignore other contraints (such as short term revenues)
9	Non-violent communication - seeking to understand and build relationships
10	I think to show client orientation in general is key. I'm not at all saying, that you should only build what a single client wants. It's more about showing that you're in constant dialogs with clients, you know your market, you know the needs and based on this you can create solutions which are broadly marketable and also get support from C-level.
11	Just direct and honest feedback. Acknowledging expertise and help refine ideas with Product in mind.

12	Pure, blunt honesty given and required.
13	The approach I use the most is transparent sense-making and adapting the coommunicatino style to the stakeholders, then using all stakeholders as "sounding board" so that they make ideas their own.
14	More personal involvement (eg. in shared steering boards)
15	Maximise transparency with C-suite on the "big picture" through frequent communication and -lean- reporting. Show frequent and fast progress, highlighting wins as well as risks and mitigation plan.
16	Using the DACI decision making framework
17	Data-informed customer value driven communication with C-suite may help avoid the HiPPOs in the room. Expectation management is also crucial
18	Wir starten kein Innovationsprojekt mehr ohne einen „Sponsor" aus der Führungsebene. Dieser soll vor Beginn überzeugt sein vom Thema und jederzeit für Entscheidungen zur Verfügung stehen. (Original answer in German, English translation generated by DeepL here: We don't start an innovation project anymore without a "sponsor" from the management level. This person should be convinced of the topic before the start and be available to make decisions at any time.)
19	No, I've come to see our company's particular roadblocks as insurmountable.
20	Transparency might not be the main diplomacy attribute but i like to have open conversations but it does work so i insist on workshops. Executive Alignment Workshops: Keywords: Alignment, Workshop, Strategy, Vision, Priorities
21	Convincing with evidence (I guess not surprising given I wrote a book about it :-). Also reframing the problem can help.
22	Ideation, tech talks, common understanding

23	Using qualitative and quantitative data to decide on a course of action, or insights from market research.
24	Having external partners on board, or potential customers before showing it to c level
25	I address them and generate a brainstorming meetinf
26	IMHO, only education will do the magic. As long the C-suite lagging behind in knowledge of the digital space and the leadership needed to overcome them, this problem will stay. The main driver though is the CEO, forcing to bridge between C-Suite members
27	Focusing everyone on the common goal, exciting everyone about the shared journey ahead, stating expectations clearly and addressing conflicts candidly
28	Referring to data (usage data, user research); referring to strategic artefacts (especially helpful if these artefacts had been greenlighted by the same stakeholders in the past); referring to the way generally favored (product-led) companies do work as a kind of a „higher authority" argument.
29	Buy-in from the CEO. When having a strong CEO that understands and backs up 'Product' a lot of Roadblocks can be eliminated over his power and by having a lot of autonomy, down side, buy in of Stakeholders is less deep and somehow limited
30	By pass the people :-)

THEMES

1. Strategic/evidence-based approaches (8 inputs): 7, 8, 16, 21, 22, 23, 27, 28

2. Transparent communication (7 inputs): 4, 5, 11, 12, 15, 20, 25

3. Relationship-building and advocacy (4 inputs): 5, 9, 10, 14

4. Education (3 inputs): 2, 13, 26

5. collaborative and supportive methods (3 inputs): 18. 24. 29

Not qualified (5 inputs): 1, 3, 6, 30

7.6 Future Usage

In light of your brief introduction to five diplomatic methods in this survey, how likely are you to integrate such methods more systematically into your product work?

45 responses
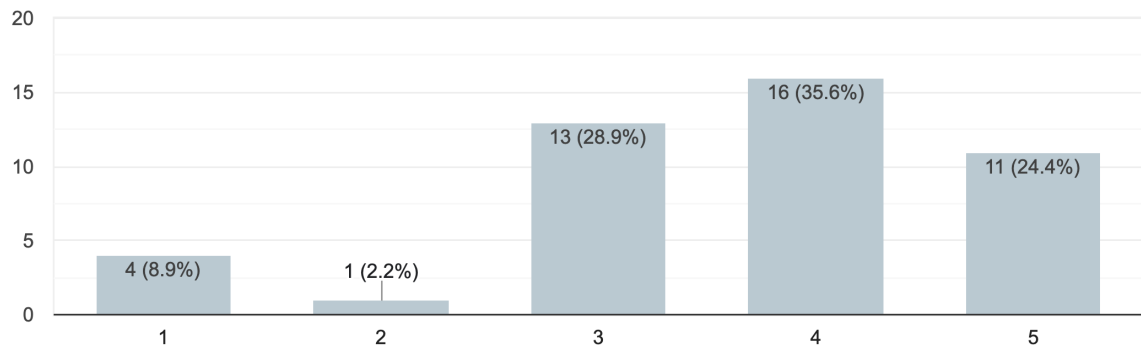
1 = Not likely at all | 5 = Very likely

Why? Please explain. (45 responses)

1	I'm not in a position to apply them, but I will definitely take note and apply them elsewhere.
2	Nice way to think about diplomacy + product
3	Some of them should be part of a system. As stated at the beginning... baby steps
4	already use some - others useful to think about
5	Anything to make the work more efficient.
6	Need to research more but keen to use a systematic approach for all as it will help optimize the approach used
7	It will depend on the organizational context. Given what I said about how it's basically a small group of people who really matter in my last company, I'm not sure I would need to introduce other more sophisticated diplomatic techniques.
8	See my arguments above. Less politics.

9	All the methods are interesting, and I am sure that I am already applying some of those without being conscious about the underlying science behind them.
10	due to time issues
11	this acted like a benchmark analysis when building a product - how do other successful products achieve the desired results? In terms of diplomats, some of those strategies might be well suited for product work
12	Not relevant
13	Responding to this form has made me realise that I use some of these methodologies unconsciously but that if systematised they could have a greater impact. They are interesting and fundamental tools for a product leader, and I plan to learn more about them and implement them systematically.
14	I think I apply them already, with a 'simpler' description of it probably
15	I think that these methods are very promising for integrating product teams into the larger organizational context. I believe that product teams are seen as siloes that may not think about the connection of their work to other, less "exciting" areas of the business. Diplomatic methods would be very useful in building consensus and agreement both inside and out of the product team space.
16	Overall I fully agree that integrating such methods systematically can help a lot. However I often also observe that many situations can't be solved with such a system as a backfall. Very often things happen much faster and you need to act intuitively right. Being able to read the room is in this case a very important point / skill, which allows you to more spontaneously pick whicjever (diplomatic) method might be appropriate to that specific situation

17	I guess such methods would surface naturally but knowing that there is in fact structure and approach behind them can help refine their application. Also, having specific relatable examples is a great aid.
18	I don't consider them strategies to be discretely employed. That feels like I'm fighting the organisation rather than operating within it.
19	I am already familiar with most of the methods and already use them, although I didn't know they're common in dipomatic work. But at its core, product leadership is very much about being "in the middle" between the market, customers, investors and other stakeholders and enabling the best possible decisions.
20	We already try to include such methods - can be applied more professional and systematically. Product work is also people work, so these kind of methods facilitate understanding and involving key stakeholders
21	Would love to have a framework on how to integrate these in a more structured way, rather than just doing it naturally on the job (which reflects my experience in most cases).
22	I don't consider all methods to be equally useful. But this survey reminded me how important it is to involve different stakeholders.
23	It has been an eye opener on some techniques i can use
24	I already use all of them and plan on doing so going forward
25	We already use similar methods in some cases, because we can't do without them.
26	Scale doesn't apply, I'm not in a position to apply any such method.
27	Because i did in the past and it did work well. But every company needs tailor made approach. I am lucky where i am now and we have very collaborative and flat environment
28	I need to read more to see if they are different from what I'm already familiar with.

29	You are not always busy with how to convince your audience, but you are much more focused on getting things done. By convincing your audience, getting buy-in and give the people the feeling that they are involved, you will get things done in an easier way;)
30	Looking back, some of these approaches worked really work even without having so much experience in applying them. Working more with them will probably yield better results.
31	Its worth trying something new
32	I would definitely love to have a systematic approach in applying all the mentioned methods due to the fact that I think it would facilitate b3tter collaboration
33	If it makes sense practically, I am open to apply
34	Helps to deal with internal politics.
35	Interesting approaches, will use some of them
36	No change
37	I'm familiar with all of them already, and utilize them in different situations as necessary.
38	I am a social scientist and have been using these methods. It is very insightful to see that they have a name and this alone will remind me to use them even more going forward.
39	Theory and practice: Knowing the effectiveness of these and other methods, I would choose a higher level on the scale; knowing that there is little time and focus available in everyday life to systematically and consistently keep applying such methods, I'll stick with the medium rating.
40	I understand the idea of "fighting fire with fire" in the sense that you try to battle corporate politics with political methods. However, I personally strive for more focus

	on the tangible business oriented challenges at hand in line with the business objectives for the corporation; instead of further fueling the political arena.
41	I never thought about this, but actually I see a lot opf overlapp between the methods presented in this survey and (maybe) unconcsious efforts to achieve buy-in for Product / Product Teams
42	I'm convinced. Just need to allocate time and energy to it to save some in the long term
43	The approach and methods are sound but require a change of corporate culture, which must be sponsored and championed from the top of the organisation.
44	It would be great to have more context on what is behind which method and how to apply it efficiently. Thank you for sharing!
45	Today we do it unstrucured and intuitive - i could make sense to apply it more aware

THEMES

Interest in systematic application and learning (19 inputs)

1. Need for systematic approach and frameworks: 3, 6, 20, 21, 32, 44

2. Potential for improved collaboration and efficiency: 15, 16, 17, 29, 33, 35

3. Learning and exploration: 23, 27, 30, 31, 34

4. Acknowledging benefits: 19, 24

Current unconscious usage and familiarity (16 inputs)

1. Already using: 4, 19, 20, 24, 25, 37, 38, 45

2. Unconscious application: 9, 11, 13, 30, 39

3. Familiarity with methods: 1, 28, 34

Practical concerns and skepticism (10 inputs)

1. Context-dependent usage: 7, 18, 26, 40

2. Skepticism and doubts: 8, 10, 22

3. Concerns about implementation and culture change: 43

Not qualified (2 inputs): 12, 36

OVERALL TREND

Total number of survey participants: 45

Number of unique survey participants who applied three or more methods: 30 (67%)

Out of which unique survey participants found these methods helpful/very helpful: 25 (83%)

8 Appendix B: Negotiation expert insights

Insights from seasoned diplomatic negotiation experts to successfully navigate challenging situations:

Weibel[108]:

- Use the power of a "No": well prepared and structured negotiators know about the potential consequences of saying No to a proposal and they use this ability to secure the overarching outcome to be achieved.

- Move beyond repetition: "If you are in a whole – stop digging!". If you repeat your position, you dig yourself deeper down and you will never get out of the whole with the risk that the negotiation fails.

- Strategic breaks: proposing or requesting a break is a tool that is always available and provides several benefits: it allows for critical reflection on the discussion, creates opportunities for side diplomacy, and offers valuable time to clear your head, talk to your team and potentially develop new strategies.

Niggli[109]:

- Authenticity over flattery: avoid flattery because this tactic can backfire, alienating some parties and ultimately eroding trust. Instead, demonstrate respect for all the parties at the table.

- Vision instead of technicalities: when negotiating with top-level executives, prioritize alignment on the overarching vision. While technical details are important, focusing on them initially and with the wrong audience can lead to unproductive discussions. By establishing a shared vision at the outset, you create a strong foundation for productive collaboration on technical specifics later, likely with the appropriate people.

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[108] Weibel, "International Negotiation Techniques and Capacity-Building: Meeting Skills and Escaping Pitfalls."
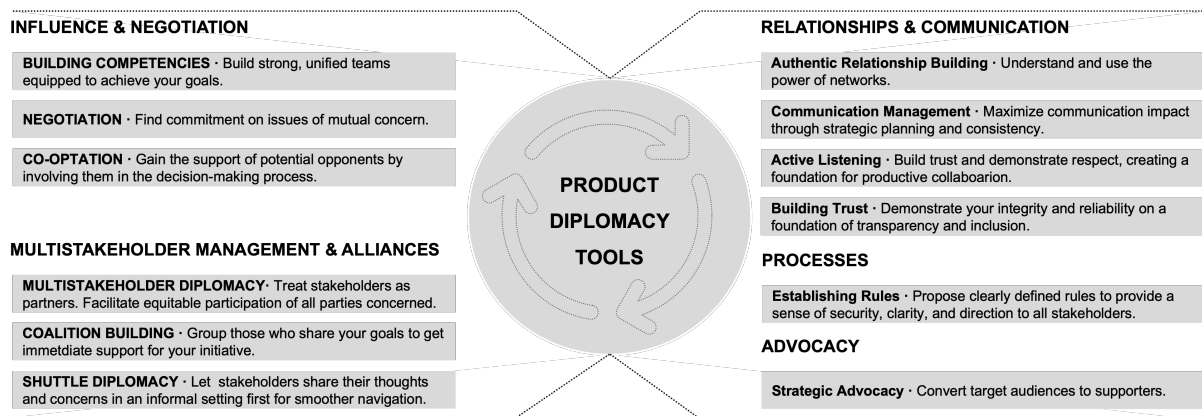
[109] Niggli, "Mediation in Trade."

- Try to make everybody equally unhappy: even though this may seem counterintuitive, effective negotiation involves achieving a fair outcome where all parties make some concessions and leave the table "equally unhappy". The goal is to find a solution that addresses everyone's core needs while acknowledging that not all points can be fully met.

9   Appendix C: Product Diplomacy Toolkit

The following sections present the tools utilized in this paper. The explanation for applying them are provided through the case study elaborated in this paper. These tools serve as a foundation for applying Product Diplomacy to address professional challenges in innovation and product work. It is important to acknowledge that success ultimately stems from the actions, mindsets, and conversations of the individuals who use these tools, rather than solely from the frameworks themselves. They offer guidance and checklists, allowing individuals and teams to effectively organize their thoughts to create sound strategies.

Tools overview

INFLUENCE & NEGOTIATION

BUILDING COMPETENCIES · Build strong, unified teams equipped to achieve your goals.

NEGOTIATION · Find commitment on issues of mutual concern.

CO-OPTATION · Gain the support of potential opponents by involving them in the decision-making process.

MULTISTAKEHOLDER MANAGEMENT & ALLIANCES

MULTISTAKEHOLDER DIPLOMACY · Treat stakeholders as partners. Facilitate equitable participation of all parties concerned.

COALITION BUILDING · Group those who share your goals to get immetdiate support for your initiative.

SHUTTLE DIPLOMACY · Let stakeholders share their thoughts and concerns in an informal setting first for smoother navigation.

PRODUCT DIPLOMACY TOOLS

RELATIONSHIPS & COMMUNICATION

Authentic Relationship Building · Understand and use the power of networks.

Communication Management · Maximize communication impact through strategic planning and consistency.

Active Listening · Build trust and demonstrate respect, creating a foundation for productive collaboarion.

Building Trust · Demonstrate your integrity and reliability on a foundation of transparency and inclusion.

PROCESSES

Establishing Rules · Propose clearly defined rules to provide a sense of security, clarity, and direction to all stakeholders.

ADVOCACY

Strategic Advocacy · Convert target audiences to supporters.

Relationships & Communication

Authentic Relationship Building

AUTHENTIC RELATIONSHIP BUILDING · Understand and use the power of networks.	
Your strategy to nurture your network proactively:	Your strategy to seek connections outside your immediate circle:

Communication Management

COMMUNICATION MANAGEMENT · Maximize communication impact through strategic planning and consistency.	
What (Content): The message you want to convey.	**Who (audience): The audience you want to direct the message to.**
How (Delivery): Your most appropriate channel for the message and audience.	**When (Timing): Consistency and timing for your communication to maximize impact.**

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[110] Bullion, "The 4Cs of Stakeholder Management for Product Executives."

Active Listening

ACTIVE LISTENING · Build trust and demonstrate respect, creating a foundation for productive collaboration.	
Shared pressures: what are the common challenges and pressures faced by all parties involved?	**Mutual interests: address the motivations of the other party. What are the potential rewards for the individual you are speaking to?**
Desired outcomes: what results or goals do we all strive to achieve?	**Realistic expectations: whose expectations are relevant to this situation, and how realistic are they?**
Uncertainties: Summarize the speaker's message in your own words to confirm understanding: • *"In essence. You're saying…"* • *"If I understand you correctly…"*	**Differences: transform differences into constructive forces that strengthen the relationship. List the differences here:**

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[111] Alammar and Pauleen, "Business Diplomacy in Practice."

Building Trust

BUILDING TRUST· Demonstrate your integrity and reliability on a foundation of transparency and inclusion.

How you share insights, data, and (high-fidelity) prototypes.	How you create strong relationships with key stakeholders.
How you involve the C-suite.	How you respect everyone's time.

Processes

Establishing Rules

ESTABLISHING RULES· Propose clearly defined rules to provide a sense of security, clarity, and direction to all stakeholders.

The rule you want to introduce.	Why (Problem it addresses).
Your best guess of how it provides clarity.	Who (stakeholders).

Multistakeholder Management & Alliances

Multistakeholder Diplomacy

Stakeholder Profile

Photo	

Name _____

Position _____

Reporting to _____

Top 3 priorities
1 _____
2 _____
3 _____

Influence network
Influencer _____

Your relationship and context
☐ Formal   ☐ Informal
Do's _____
Don'ts _____

Communication Style
Preferred meeting style
☐ Physical ☐ Video call   ☐ Call   ☐ _____
Responds best to
☐ Email   ☐ Voice message ☐ Chat   ☐ _____
Responsiveness
>1 week ●————————————● 24 hours

Access and Availability
☐ Direct access   ☐ Indirect access via_____
Specific physical office days _____
Recurring decision making meetings _____
_____

Decision-Making Style
Intuition driven ●————————————● Data driven
Story driven ●————————————● Logic driven
Reflective ●————————————● Impulsive

OBJECTIVE YOU WANT TO ACHIEVE
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

POWER MAPPING
Power
In relation to your objective
Low ●————————————● High

Personal Interests
In relation to your objective
Low ●————————————● High

Position
Support for your objective
☐ Negative   ☐ Positive

Stakeholder Analysis Matrix

High

+ Keep them engaged. Provide evidence to move them to high interest level

- Put most effort on them. Winning them over is mandatory for success.

+ Provide information to maintain their support

- Put effort in. Use other stakeholders to lobby and win them over

Power

+ Keep them informed

- Keep them informed

+ Strong allies – treat them well

- Don't spend too much time on them

Low

Low   **Interest**   High

+ Positive about the objective
- Negative about the objective

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112 "Stakeholder Management."

Coalition Building

COALTION BUILDING· Group those who share your goals to get immediate support for your initiative.

Your goal(s).	
List of who shares your goal.	**How you build the coalition.**

Shuttle Diplomacy

SHUTTLE DIPLOMACY· Let stakeholders share their thoughts and concerns in an informal setting first for smoother navigation.

Overall objective you want to achieve:

List your stakeholders in the sequential order you will be communicating with them.

Done	Who (stakeholder)	What (objective)	How (Delivery)	When (incl. repetition)
☐				
☐				

Influence & Negotiation

Building Competencies

BUILDING COMPETENCIES· Build strong, unified teams equipped to achieve your goals.

Learning resource(s) we provide to the teams to deliver consistency:

List individual learning and networking items to be included in personal OKRs.

Name	Training	Networking

Negotiation

NEGOTIATION· Find commitment on issues of mutual concern.			
(1) Take-off: Prenegotiation			
Your field observations.			
Why negotiate	**Objectives**	**With whom**	**How**

(2) Cruising: Negotiation		
Differences	**Revisions**	**Solutions**

(3) Landing: Implementation		
Final Give & Take	**Implementation Details**	**Debrief and celebrate!**

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[113] Weibel, "Negotiation Workbook & Toolbox."

Co-Optation

CO-OPTATION · Gain the support of potential opponents by involving them in the decision-making process.

Your decision-making challenge.	
Opponents.	**Reasons for opposition.**
Your Strategy.	**Your Risks.**
Your Risk Minimizer.	**Your Decision.**

Advocacy

Strategic Advocacy

Sept 1 · Objectives: What do you want?

OBJECTIVE· Start with a clear outline of knowing exactly what change you want to achieve.	
Basic problem.	
Key elements of the problem.	**More detailed problem statement.**
Workflow factors behind the problem.	**Long-term changes to address the problem.**
Short-term advocacy focus points.	
What will help to solve the problem?	**What kind of support will it generate?**
What opposition will it generate?	
Derive and define the Objective.	

Step 2· Audiences: Who can give it to you?

MECHANISM OF CHANGE· Understand how the intended changes can be made and how stakeholder can support.			
Who			
Why do they care?			
How do they take decisions?			
Which channels do they use?			
Who influences them?			
How can we convince them?			

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[114] Bochenek, *Advocacy and Organozational Engagement*.

Step 3 · Message: What do they need to hear?

MESSAGE· Appeal to the stakeholder's sense of right and wrong and demonstrate how the issue benefits them directly.

Summarize the advocacy message in 3-4 sentences following the UNICEF formula.[115]

Statement: why the change is important.	Evidence: clear, understandable facts and figures.
Example: concrete illustration to make the issue real.	
Goal: highlight the desired outcome.	Action: specify the action needed to achieve the goal.
Your primary message.	

[115] "Advocacy Toolkit."

Supporting secondary messages.	
Who	Tailor the message further for each stakeholder with a secondary message providing targeted explanations that are most persuasive for them. Choose the words so that they resonate with both minds and hearts of each stakeholder.

Step 4 · Messengers and action: Who do they need to hear it from and how best get the message delivered?

MESSENGER STRATEGY· Identify the most credible messenger for each stakeholder.

Who				
Messenger Influencer of the target audience.				
Position Messenger's stands.				
	List external experts/authentic voices/influencers			
Power Level of influence over the target.				
Knowledge Level of knowledge about the issue.				
Credibility Credibility of the messenger to the target audience.				
	External experts/authentic voices/influencers			
Access to the messenger How and when can advocate interact with messenger?				
	External experts/authentic voices/influencers			
Access to target How and when does messenger interact with target?				

	External experts/authentic voices/influencers			
Action What shall the messenger do?				
	External experts/authentic voices/influencers			
Risks Risks of engaging messenger.				

Step 5 · Resources and gaps: What have we got and what do we need to develop?

RESOURCES AND GAPS · List what you have and what you need.	
What you have.	**Gaps.**
Necessary action.	**Necessary action.**

Step 6 · Monitoring: How do we begin and how do we tell if it's working?

OKRs · Establish measurable goals and a consistent communication flow that fosters routine and delivers early wins to build momentum.

Objective

KR Measurement

Missed: result not achieved (Identifying missed goals early allows for timely course correction. Encouraging early admission of challenges creates a psychologically safe space and ensures issues are caught when corrections are most effective).	**Made great progress:** result is not fully achieved yet, but significant progress has been made.
Done: result is achieved.	**Hit stretch target:** result is achieved with significant outperformance.

Outcome-Oriented Key Results To be quarterly revied.	Owner	Status
KR1		
KR2		
KR3		

This week's core-team priorities

To be reviewed in the core team each week.

P1		

P2			
P3			

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116 Doerr, *Measure What Matters*; Wodtke, *Radical Focus*.

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Usage of Large Language Models (LLMs):

For this paper, the following LLMs were used:

- Gemini

- ChatGPT 4.0

The LLMs were used for the following purposes:

- Correcting grammatical errors.

- Ensuring sound and flow of sentences are good.

- Clustering survey results. To ensure utmost accuracy of clustering results, both Gemini and ChatGPT 4.0 were employed in parallel.

LLMs were not used to create content, knowledge or data. All statements generated by the LLMs were (as far as possible) reviewed and verified by the author for accuracy and originality.