

THE NEWEST RELEASE

PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT WARRIORS

FROM SURVIVING TO THRIVING
PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

SASKIA VAN DER GEEST

**“If product
development works,
the whole team is
happy.”**

A MESSAGE FROM SASKIA VAN DER GEEST



For all the Product Development Warriors out there.

I love product development. I love the challenge of working with all the different specialists, the sales geniuses, the marketing masterminds, the operations wizards, the supply virtuosi, the technology mavens, and making all their amazing craft come together to deliver a beautiful solution for a client. The thrill of the journey to get to launch is exciting and invigorating. It is a fantastic feeling when it all comes together seamlessly.

Unfortunately, it often doesn't. In many organisations this has become the norm:

My boss wants us to deliver new products
faster, better & cheaper,
and I'd like us to do that too,
but we're already working 60hrs/week
and I don't know how I can go any faster.
I'd love to do things better!

But it does not have to be that way.

I wrote this book for you. To bring the fun back into product development.

I know you love to do your job better. And you can. It is easier than you think. There is a formula to it.

Enjoy!

Saskia

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THE WARRIOR

Meet Lisa. Lisa leads the product development team for a medium size New Zealand manufacturer. Lisa lives near the factory with her two children and hardworking partner. She works full time. A bit more than full time, often the evening hours as well, once the kids have gone to bed. There is so much to think about.

After uni Lisa started as a technologist and over the years she has changed companies only a few times. She joined this company last year and has been in the role for a year. She has a great team of 5 technologists, some who have been with the company for many years and two 'juniors' who are only a few years out of university and are enthusiastically gathering experience. The team have a lot of projects on the go and there is continuous pressure from the other departments to deliver faster.

Lisa reports into the Operations Manager who loves process improvement and is always looking for ways to make things go smoother, more efficient. Lisa values how he is challenging her and the team to be the best. If only she had time to work on the solutions properly.

Lisa relies on her manager to tell her the business strategy. But somehow that always seems to be still in the making or in the process of a refresh? To make do she just takes the urgent projects that the sales manager and marketing manager put on her plate and makes sure the team gets those done as fast as possible. It feels quite messy. Everything is always urgent and last minute. She has asked the marketing and sales managers a few times to get a better understanding of the strategy. But they are always so busy and overloaded. It is hard to get a good sense of direction out of them.

She would love to develop the products faster, better (with less re-work and factory trials needed) and more profitable. And above all she loves to bring back the fun. Innovation is supposed to be fun right? But somehow the fun has gone out of it?

In her car on her way home after a long day Lisa is worrying. She worries about her team. Can they change? Do they have it in them to be Product Development rock stars? And what about herself? Can she lead them? She is still learning. Does she have the skills? Does she have the energy?

It feels like a battle.

When I spoke to Lisa, she told me about the problems she faces. She said:

"It's stressful. The workload is high. I'm working 60 hours per week and still not getting through it all. Hardly making a dent in it really. It is our normal. Managing a team that is working those hours is stressful as well. My team are grumpy, and I can see why. This is not healthy and it's definitely not fun.

Luckily, the team are great people, who really do care and want to do a good job. There are no slackers. It's just soul destroying for them and for me that we can never seem to do a good job.

The products we create are ok and we do get them out on time. But don't ask how. I don't know how to stop it. The pile of new projects that we're yet to start is massive, and there is also the pile of process improvements ideas the factory team likes to get done. And I agree that those would make a fantastic difference. And then there is the Quality

pile of work, things that we really should improve, customer complaints that need looking into urgently and urgent sales request for samples to take to customers.

It is impossible to focus on one thing and do it well. We often get pulled away from our projects to help out in production (since we know the lines well and need little training to jump in), and there's always piles of meetings to go to: production, QA, sales & marketing, management, health & safety. Sales is for ever asking where the new products are. They want us to go faster. They're frustrated and I get that, I'd love to give them a straight answer they can trust, but things keep moving.

Marketing seems just as overloaded as we are and are often late delivering the project briefs or the artwork that we need. It always comes down to the last minute and then it's a frenzy panic to get everything into production and out of the door. I don't know how it always becomes such a last-minute rush, but it does. And to top it off my manager keeps asking me for overviews and plans and timelines. I'd love to do that, but when?

I often wonder: Can I do this? Do I have the energy for this battle? I worry about my team, can they do it? Are they missing skills? You know, that 'if I would hire someone from Apple, would that make a difference?' thought. I know it wouldn't, the Apple guy would also just wear down. I wonder what I'm missing. What am I not seeing?

To be honest, some days I really wonder why I'm doing this. There must be easier jobs and I don't know how much longer I last. I really do it for my team. I love creating new products and I want to make their lives easier. Product Development should be fun. What am I doing wrong? I love to do things better!"

Talking to Lisa and the many other Lisa's out there breaks my heart. You are all fantastic awesome passionate people. And you are doing a great job, with a great crew, you're paddling so hard, but you're in a powerful stream and it doesn't matter how hard you all paddle, you're just in the wrong boat (tools, not company!) Which is hard to see when you're in the midst of a white-water river with some big rapids coming up.

As an outsider I have an advantage. I can see from the side of the river what's going on. And I don't just see you, I see many different teams, from all sorts of companies and industries. And I can see who is having fun and who isn't. It is not the people that make the big difference. It is the tools they're using – the kind of raft they're in.

Product development doesn't have to be so hard. It can be fun (just replace your raft with a jetboat!) The good news is the solution is straightforward and easier than you think. There is a formula to it.

Once you are in that jetboat, you will find that you

- Get time back in your day: things will go easier and smoother, which means an hour back in your day, that equates to 2 days per month or a month per year. That is time that you can focus on other parts of your business (or to go mountain biking of course!)
- and an aligned team, who are engaged and armed with knowledge to tackle projects in an effective, efficient way. Using simple visual tools to give you the overview and insights to manage and control the flow of work so the team can deliver their best work.
- Which you will see back in better products and better margins. The results my clients are getting: 30% more margin, halved lead times, 60% down on customer complaints... that equates to valuable dollars and time back into your pockets!

**“Let’s make all of
your development
projects make a lot
more money - and
have more fun at the
same time!.” – invitation
by Allen Ward, MIT professor
& pioneer of LPPD**

FIVE STATES OF PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

Over the years I've worked with many companies and have seen many different versions of New Product Development 'rafts'. I group them in 5 categories:

Hours	NPD state	ROI
😊	Rocketing	+++
😐	Release - freedom	+
😬	Rising	0 / +
😞	Requested structure	-
😡	Messy	--

Starting at the bottom there is the **MESSY state**. This is often where the company once started as a start-up or when working on its first inhouse developed product. It starts with a lot of fun and excitement, there is no process to follow so you make it up as you go, learning from others and just sheer enthusiasm and grid gets you there. It is typically combined with a lot of 'back to the shed', number 8 wire, and 'kitchen bench' trials. No one takes note of the many hours that go in, lots is done in the evening or 'side-hours'. Working out the Return On your Investment (ROI) is pretty much impossible. And that might be good, as the ROI is probably not pretty, but it got the new news out in the market and hopefully the sales in. The next product will be an improvement and go quicker. Right?

Then there are the companies that realise that to do Product Development more often they might need some sort of a process. They **REQUEST A STRUCTURE**. Typically, someone in the team gets landed with the job of 'write up a process' and they do a bit of digging and about 80% of companies around the globe ended up with a Stage-Gate (or Phase & Gate or 'Waterfall') style process. Process in place, job done. Tick. On to the next job.

The team begrudgingly uses the process to some extent and some meetings are put in place. It comes down to each 'project lead' on how close the process is used. Fast forward several months and most companies find that although the team now all use the same process to manage their projects not much else has changed. Product development is still unpredictable, trying to get an overview and control it gobbles up way more hours out of your day than you like, the product launches still cause last moment stress for the company and although no one is measuring properly, general consent is that ROI is poor.

Then a tiny move happens: Someone gets frustrated.

And the frustration gets them to dig deeper, learn more about New Product Development, wonder what other companies are using, what other industries are doing. They start reading up and sharing some of their reading and learning. And if that learning meets a listening ear in the management team a little seed is planted. And depending on the soil (the company mindset, the managers mindset) and regular watering of new ideas the seed starts to grow. It is a fragile process.

This little seed takes the company on a learning journey, investigating different processes and tools, trying them out, testing and learning. And slowly the process improves, the smiles go up, there is a new energy in the team, and you find yourself thinking about the bigger picture and less about the detail. It is **RISING**. And the ROI of new products starts to improve.

“If PD works the whole team is happy”

And magically, your manager learns they can trust you and the team to run the projects. He no longer needs to micromanage. It feels like a **RELEASE - FREEDOM!** He now surprisingly finds himself with time to focus on the other parts of his role. The communication is flowing, learning is noticeable, the launches are predictable, the team is engaged and enjoying the learning and impact they are having, and the pipeline of new products looks great. Freedom!

“Most valuable is Saskia’s (and now our team’s) commitment to results.

Product Development is now self-sustaining and ongoing. For me, as CEO, it means I can confidently move my focus to other parts of our business.” - Matthew O’Brien, CEO Kiwicare.

By now the team is on a roll, and not just the Product development team, the wider company is. Innovation, learning and improving has become a new mindset for the company. And it is showing, in the product range, the product quality, on the faces of your team and in the ROI. It does not matter anymore if someone in the team, or even the manager, leaves, it’s now part of the company’s DNA. The organisation just can’t help itself but learn, improve, find faster better ways. And you find you are in demand from an unexpected angle: people want you to share what you are doing. The outside world is noticing the difference. It is energising. Awards are rolling in. Product development is **ROCKETING**. And its shows in the ROI.

QUESTION: Where in this model are you and your team? Which state describes your situation best?

**“Culture eats strategy
for breakfast”**

- *Peter Drucker*

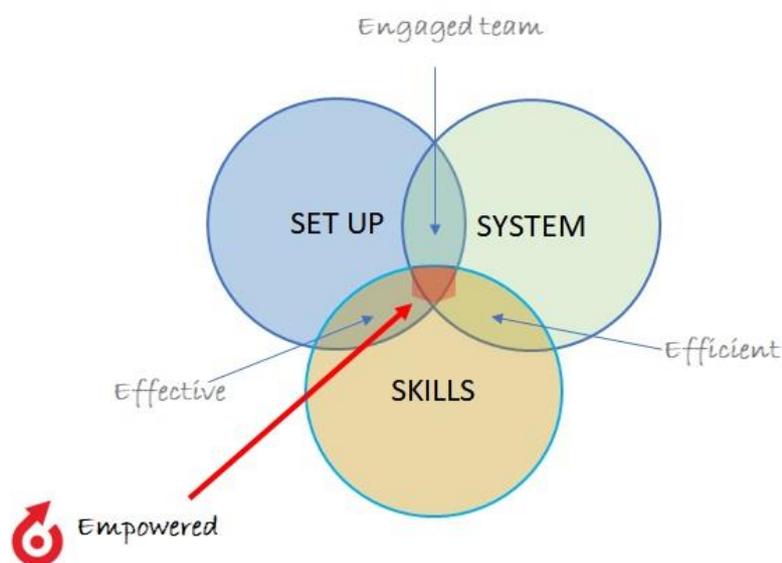
HOW DO YOU GO A LEVEL UP?

Rocketing sounds good. **How do you get there?**

I have learned you can't just change to Rocketing in one go, it is a more gradual process. And it is not just about process.

Whilst process has impact, it does not work without the right culture & teams behind it.

It takes a few things to fall in place. I break them into 3 main themes: **Set up** (the company mindset around Product Development), **System** (processes), and **Skills**. I think of these as dials on a safe – it's takes a bit of adjusting to get each dial to fall into its right spot to unlock the safe and open a world of goodness – an empowered team that's ready to thrive!



The dials explained:

SET UP is the company mindset around Innovation. Innovation is an organisations life blood. It is what keeps the company alive, ahead of its competition, and, if done well, it creates a good return for the shareholders. It also engages the team (anyone want to work for Apple? Or Tesla? Sounds good right?) and it keeps the team onboard.

I have learned that for a company to do well in Product Development, there needs to be a keenness to learn. Afterall it is NEW product development. We are going to do something new, that we have never done before. Which means we will have to learn.

I find that the organisation's attitude to learning comes right from the top. If the company leaders love learning, they will encourage it and you will hear it in their line of questioning. If they are asking 'why' often, you are on a good start.

I have also learned to walk away when this keenness to learn is missing from the leadership team. If you are not interested to learn, how can I make a difference? (and how will you improve?)

Gallagher's, the Hamilton based fence security company, is lucky in that learning is part of the company's DNA. When a horse called Joe took too much of a liking to using a car as a scratching post, owner Bill Gallagher Senior scratched his head for a solution. He devised a cunning electrical circuit that delivered a shock whenever the horse rocked the vehicle. This quickly cured the problem and sparked the idea for his electric fence invention. Son Sir William Gallagher still sits on the Board of the company and continues to ask for the learning. It is one of the 'secret ingredients' in why the company is so quick to learn and why they keep improving their innovation process. No surprise the company features in Katherine Radeka's "High Velocity Innovation" book.

With the learning mindset in place, the next step within SET UP are relatively easy to adjust – this includes the organisational set up, of where Product Development lives in the organisation chart, the reporting lines and KPI's.

As Roger Johnson, senior VP product design & engineering for Keurig Dr. Pepper states in High Velocity:

“the rich mindset and environment for your teams is critical to establish a culture of innovation. Strategies can be copied, but execution is a differentiator. Execution is driven by culture.”

SYSTEM is all about the processes and systems to get Product Development flowing. I help teams to design a process that works for them. The outcome is almost always a combination of tools (like Lean, Agile, Stage-Gate, etc) that together work for the team. The first things I tackle are aligning the Product Development strategy with the business strategy to make sure we are working on the right projects. Focus. Second, I help the team to create an overview of the Product Development pipeline. Having an overview of what is being worked on and what stage each idea is in, helps to reduce a lot of unnecessary communication and gives anyone down the line a 'heads-up' of what work is heading towards them. No one likes surprises when it means more work, right?

Key to any system is the team's buy-in. They need to know about it, understand why it is there and what it aims to achieve and be happy to play by its rules. Imagine what our road intersections would look like if no one would know what the red light means!

SKILLS is all about having the right people on the team, having the right mix of skills within a team and being up to speed on the latest thinking and tools. With some of the systems in place, the team will be focused on a smaller number of projects, which means they have time to learn and to do their job well. To really dot the i's and cross the t's – which means less chance of things coming back to us later as process errors, customer complaints or re-work.

On the intersections of the dials is where the magic starts to take place.

With a good **SET UP and SYSTEM** in place you will find the teams **engagement** improves. The team want to be there, they know they are working on the right projects, in the right order, with the right tools. It creates visibility and understanding and trust and an engaged team that wants to be there and do a good job. With trust comes a sense of control.

With the **SYSTEM in place and the SKILLS** to do the work, you gain **efficiency**. You can be the best wood chopper but with a blunt axe, you are not efficient. Experienced skilled people know when to take a break to sharpen their axe and when to take a conscious short cut and what the risks are.

And with a good **SET UP and SKILLS** you get **effectiveness**. You want to leave the specialist to do what they are good at without micro-managing them. With a good SET UP the team know the goal and the rules. They have the skills to get there in a smart, effective way.

"Cognitively engaged people naturally push themselves to maximum capacity without detrimental levels of stress". – Sean Thomas, Tima.

Get all 3 dials in the right place and magic happens: **With great skills, set up, and a good system comes empowerment**. You will have an empowered team that is ready to get innovation **ROCKETING**.

It's what makes a great sports team like the All Blacks such a treat to watch: great skills, great systems, great set-up (culture) – it is a team that is engaged, effective, continuously looking for better competitors, looking to perform better and up its game. It is no longer just about the process; it is an empowered team that is ready to rock the world.

With all 3 dials 'clicked' in place you will have a team that can lead itself and will continuously improve. And, as a bonus, as a manager, you will be nicely surprised to find you have time to focus on the other parts of your role and help the other business teams and your suppliers, which in turn will multiply the returns.

Companies like Gallagher's, Toyota and USA based innovation consultancy IDEO, who are on top of their game, like the All Blacks, are continuously looking to improve. Have you noticed how they are all very generous in sharing what they know? By sharing they will receive questions, and from the questions they in turn learn and improve.

Another way of explaining this model: I love running. Always have. When I am planning to run a big event like a marathon, it can be hard to get motivated sitting on my cosy couch. But when I have my mind set on that goal, I can picture the event setting (a beautiful track with the Remarkable Mountains as backdrop) and I have a training plan which breaks the runs into weekly bite size pieces and a coach who knows me and how to train efficiently and some buddies who will keep me on track and join me for those hard long runs towards the end. It becomes easy to feel empowered, to call yourself a runner, and to rock that event.

“Innovation almost never fails due to a lack of creativity. Innovation almost always fails due to a lack of discipline.”

Larry Keeley – Ten Types of Innovation

THE PERSONAL TRAINER EFFECT

Can I do this on my own? Sure. It starts with a seed. Start reading, start sharing your learning, see where you find a listening ear within the management team. Find some of my favourite books and a guiding check list on page 20 & 21.

Can I hack the process and go through the 5 states of Product Development quicker? Sure can.

It is like learning a new sport. You can learn it yourself, do the reading, watch the videos, etc. But with a coach it just goes much quicker. I call it the '**personal trainer**' effect. It's a bit like when you sign up with a fitness centre: Because you've got a meeting with a personal trainer you will get out of bed at a ridiculous early hour of the day and get to the gym. And because the coach has the expertise and experience, you will get fitter, faster, injury free.

Do you have to? No. Does it help? Yep, why else would Les Mills be doing so well?

Here are the two approaches:

The DIY approach	With a coach
Start with learning, read the books, invest in getting training from different specialists (Lean, Agile, Stage-Gate, etc).	Faster – A coach has already done the learning, will give you the summary version and it will be specific to Product Development (most of the Lean and Agile experts do not focus on Product Development and have little Product Development experience).
Try out the different techniques and tools, learn, see what works for your team.	Faster – A good coach has done it many times for many different organisations in many different industries. They have tried it, tested it, and know what works when and how to implement it successfully.
SET UP - get the mindset of the organisation focused on Product Development	Lots easier – this is extremely hard to do when you are inside the organisation. Even when you are the CEO or owner of the business. It is here where an outsider has a big advantage, because they can see the trees and the forest.
Get your team aligned on the strategy, on the process and the tools	Faster, easier – People listen differently when an outside expert comes in. I can say the same thing you say, but when I say it, it has more impact.
Tune the dials. Iron out any complications	Hard to do by yourself and a lot easier when you have a sounding board, to discuss options and gain new ideas, directions that you may not have considered otherwise.

Which option to choose? That depends on you and how you see the value. Do you want to get Product Development going faster, better, more profitable, more predictable, without the levels of stress that it currently takes?

What is it worth to you? Do you want to get there in a few years' time, or get there quicker?

Do you want to do it all yourself, on top of your current workload, or have some help and have a lot of fun along the way? Is that worth a bit of investment?

How much gains will you make? By having an empowered team that is ready to rock?

Imagine the hours you will have back in your day when you have a clear overview of the projects in the pipeline, know the stage each project is in and when they will launch.

To know your team is making good progress on the projects that will drive your company towards its goals, great quality products to excite your customers.

I can tell you love that. I know because **I know you love to do things better.**

And **I can give you time.**

Remember that jet boat?

- Get time back in your day: project flow will go easier and smoother, which means an hour back in your day, that equates to 2 days per month or a month per year. That is time that you can focus on other parts of your business (or to go mountain biking of course!)
- Having an aligned team, who are engaged and armed with knowledge to tackle projects in an effective, efficient way. Using simple visual tools to give you the overview and insights to manage and control the flow of work so the team can deliver their best work.
- Which you will see back in better products and better margins. The results my clients are getting: 30% more margin, halved lead times, 60% down on customer complaints... that equates to valuable dollars and time back into your pockets!

"Within 3 months of working with Saskia, our Product Development team's team spirit went from NPS-50 up to 33."

Justin Riley, CEO, Barkers of Geraldine

"We launched the first product (AQM65) which followed the new Product Development process on the market with a 10% price increase and 20% cost down."

- Mark Templeton, CEO Aeroqual,

The choice is yours.

**“Now is the time to
sharpen your axe.
Are you ready?”**

WORKING WITH SASKIA

I help to get your team moving up the levels towards RELEASE & ROCKETING

Over 3 months, I work with you and your team in a programme that includes a mix of training, workshop exercises and 1-0-1 coaching of key players. It includes monthly 1-day in-house sessions, followed by weekly coaching sessions. From my experience, the combination of 1-day intensive training focussed on Product Development, followed by weekly 'check-in' mentoring sessions works well to make sure the new learnings are tried, tested and stick before adding more new tools/habits into the mix.

Generally, it takes three months to take a team from one state of Product Development up to the next. And after those 3 months I am out. I do not want to hang around, my aim is for your team to own Product Development and lead it proudly. If after a period your team is ready to take it up another level, I will be honoured to help. I love helping teams take their craft to the next level.

Interested? Give me a ring or flick me an email.

*“Saskia’s mentoring is working, as a first indicator:
We are 60% down on customer complaints vs. last year”
Gina Gray, R&D manager, Quality Foods Southland*

“Our ISO 9000 auditor said this is one of the best examples of an organisation actively using a Product Development process.” – Mark Templeton, Aeroqual

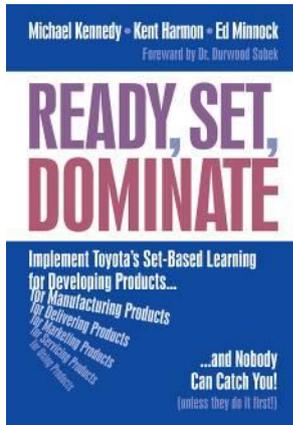
If you'd like to learn more, just give me a call (021-68 49 68) or flick me an email [here](#) to set up a chat.

PRO TIPS

Remember that the job of a leader is to create more leaders –
Robin Sharma, Humanitarian & Leadership Missionary

- (1). **Coach your teammates.**
- (2). **Send them articles.**
- (3). **Teach them tactics.**
- (4). **Fuel their growth.**
- (5). **Encourage their strength.**

RECOMMENDED READING TO FASTTRACK PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT.



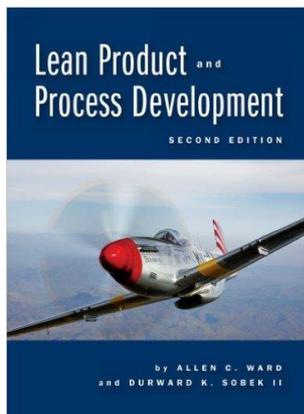
Lean NPД basics - Novel style - features F&P Appliances:

“Ready, Set, Dominate” by Michael C. Kennedy.

This book is a great intro into Lean Product Development. It is written as a business novel, making it a very easy read. It describes two business cases of companies implementing Lean PD. One of those companies is our very own F&P Appliances, making this book an even more intriguing read.

This book is available from:

<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/1892538407/karelsofw-a-20>



The Lean New Product Development classic - text book style:

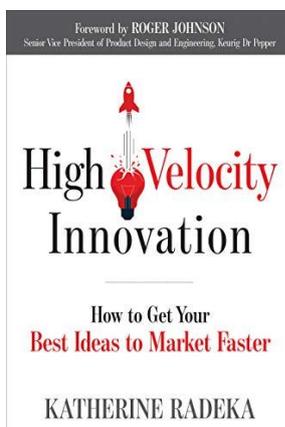
“Lean Product & Process Development” - 2nd edition - by Allen C.

Ward and Durward K. Sobek II. This is the book by Allen Ward, the MIT professor who 'developed' Lean NPД as we know it now. This book is THE classic to read. It is more of a textbook, so bit harder to get through maybe, but this 2nd edition comes with several business cases which makes it a bit easier. It is one of those books where you can just look up one topic, read it and leave the rest of the book for later.

Amazon sells it: <http://www.amazon.com/Lean-Product-Process-Development-Allen/dp/1934109436>

or buy it

here: <http://www.lean.org/Bookstore/ProductCatalog.cfm?ss-term=allencward>



High Velocity Innovation by Katherine Radeka.

Her 2nd book, but the better one. Read this one first.

My favourite book at the moment. It spells out several widely used Product development processes, their pros and cons and Radeka’s recommendations. And it features two New Zealand companies: Gallagher’s and Trimax.

Its available on Kindle and Audio book and hardcopy:

<https://www.amazon.com/High-Velocity-Innovation-Market-Faster-ebook/dp/B07PJLHDF1>

CHECKLIST

- Do you and your team know the business goals & strategy for the next 3 – 5 years? Make it visual.
- Do you know where new products will help the business to reach those goals? Add to the strategy picture.
- Create an overview of all the ideas for new products that float around the organisation.
- Align the senior leadership team on the priority of the projects.
- Create an overview of the projects in the pipeline and the stage they are in.
- Agree on deliverables, decision points and a team to decide when/if a project can go into a next phase.
- Is the team smiling?
- Is the pipeline of projects flowing smoothly?
- Are you measuring?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Saskia helps organisations to design better products/services faster. She specialises in improving productivity to help your team deliver a consistent flow of new products 'faster, better, and more profitable'.

Saskia has a passion for progress and an obsession with implementation. She is driven to help people to deliver great work. She loves seeing teams deliver their craft together beautifully.

Saskia has a very practical approach, with a people lens. She makes the complex easy. It gives you time back in your day, so you can do your job better.

Born in the Netherlands and based in Queenstown, New Zealand, Saskia is backed by the rare mix of a Master's degree in Industrial Design Engineering from Technische Universiteit Delft (one of the best in Europe) and a marketing degree and has worked as a speaker, trainer, coach, facilitator, mentor with many of the top national companies over the past 20 years.

CONNECT: www.vandergeest.co.nz or find Saskia on [Linked-In](#)
Read my latest product development thinking [here](#).

YOUR PEERS, COMPANIES I'VE WORKED WITH:



**Book a time with
Saskia now so
we can set the
next 3 months up
to be the best
ever.**

Feel free to share this book with a friend.

