

# Strategic Prioritization

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*A cascade of decisions  
from product strategy to backlog*



# Büşra Coşkuner

No BS, all action - Making abstract theory tangible and applicable to your situation.

## Product Coach, Trainer, Educator

for product leaders, product managers and product teams

Level-up your product management game to make business with products that customers love



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# What is "Prioritization"?

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*Preferences?*

*X > Y decisions?*

*Sequential order of items  
"First work on X, then Y,  
then Z"?*

*Trade-offs?*

## 3 activities to consider before making a prioritization decision

*On strategic and tactical level*

*Not linear!  
Go back and forth again and again!*

### Categorize

- Organize items into buckets (or "clusters") to answer a question and label the clusters
- Or assign an item to an existing category

### Filter

- Setting criteria that must be met
- Rejecting items that don't meet these criteria
- Reducing number of items

### Sort

- Putting items into an order
- Evaluation based on "ROI" (Return on Investment) but R and I need to be first defined and aligned on

Prioritization decisions  
e.g. "Build" vs. "experiment" vs. "reject"  
Do now vs. do later vs. delegate vs. don't do  
etc.

# Different levels you can apply activities on

*Prioritization as a matrix exercise*

**Categorize**

- Strategic Objectives (Long-term)
- Mid-term outcomes (e.g. roadmap, OKRs, etc.)
- Market positioning
- Target customer segment
- Opportunities, pain points, needs, desires, etc.
- Ideas, new features, improvements, iterations, new products, requirements, legal, etc.
- Experiments, interviews, prototypes, split test, analysis, etc.
- Epic, story, task, tech debt, design debt, etc.
- Deadlines vs. open discovery
- ...

**Sort**

**Filter**

# Scoring

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*How much Return on Investment?*

# Scoring

	Criterion 1	Criterion 2	Criterion 3	Effort	Confidence	Score
Feature A	1	2	0	4	80%	$\frac{\text{Sum}(C1, C2, C3)}{\text{Effort}} * \text{Confidence}$
Feature B						
Feature C						

Or Theme A, B, C  
Or Initiative A, B, C  
Or Experiment A, B, C  
Or Hypothesis A, B, C  
Or Opportunity A, B, C  
Or Outcome A, B, C  
Or...  
You get the idea

RICE: Reach Impact Confidence Effort  
PIE: Potential Importance Effort  
Impact-Effort  
Importance-Uncertainty  
Risk-Urgency  
Reversibility-Damage  
Any other custom criterion...

# Weighted Scoring

	Criterion 1	Criterion 2	Criterion 3	Effort	Confidence	Score
<b>Weight</b>	0.4	0.2	0.1	0.3		
<b>Feature A</b>	1	2	0	4	80%	$\frac{\text{Sum}(W1*C1, W2*C2, W3*C3)}{W4*Effort} * \text{Confidence}$
<b>Feature B</b>						
<b>Feature C</b>						



*Or Theme A, B, C*  
*Or Initiative A, B, C*  
*Or Experiment A, B, C*  
*Or Hypothesis A, B, C*  
*Or Opportunity A, B, C*  
*Or Outcome A, B, C*  
*Or...*  
*You get the idea*

*RICE: Reach Impact Confidence Effort*  
*PIE: Potential Importance Effort*  
*Impact-Effort*  
*Importance-Uncertainty*  
*Risk-Urgency*  
*Reversibility-Damage*  
*Any other custom criterion...*

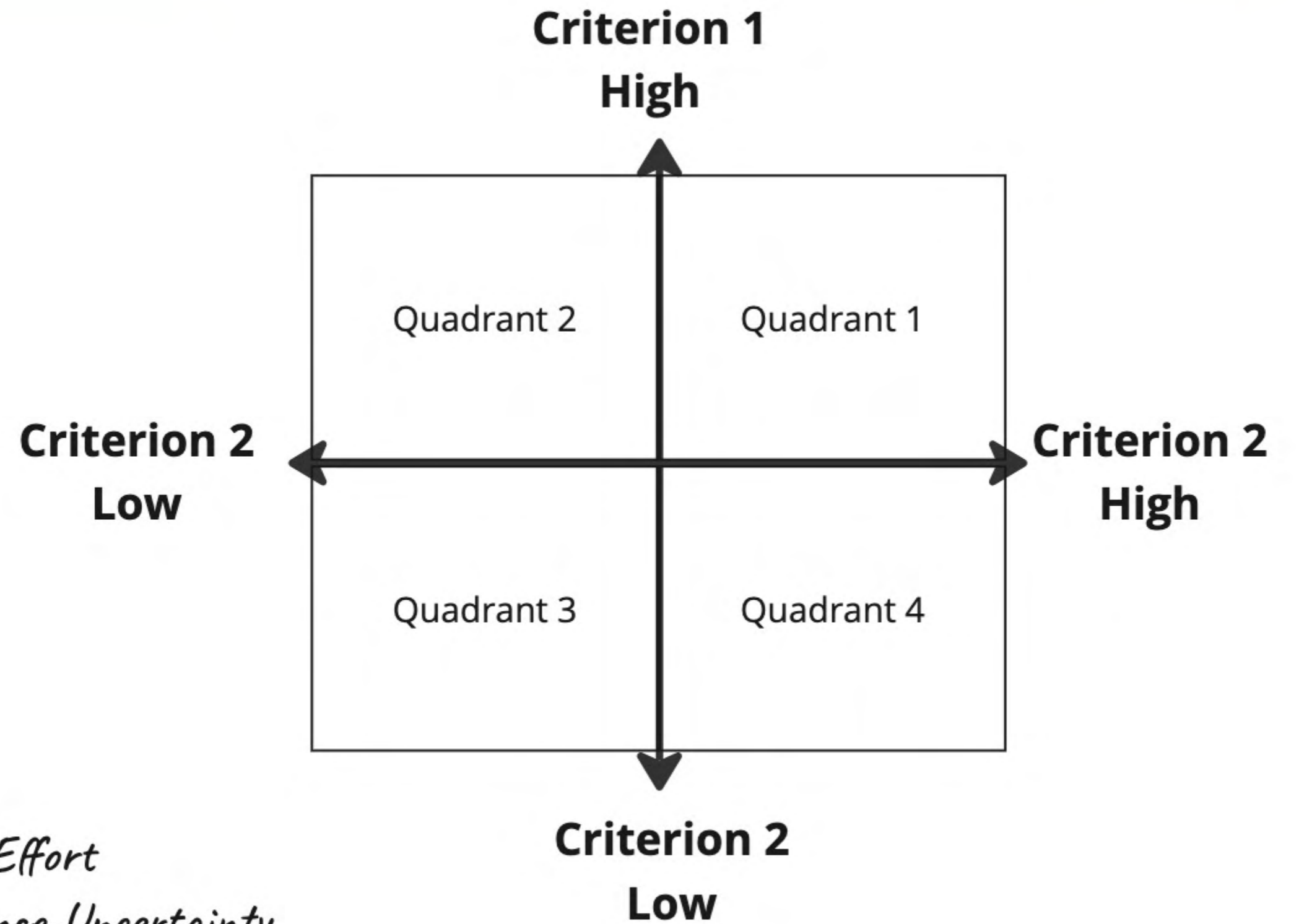
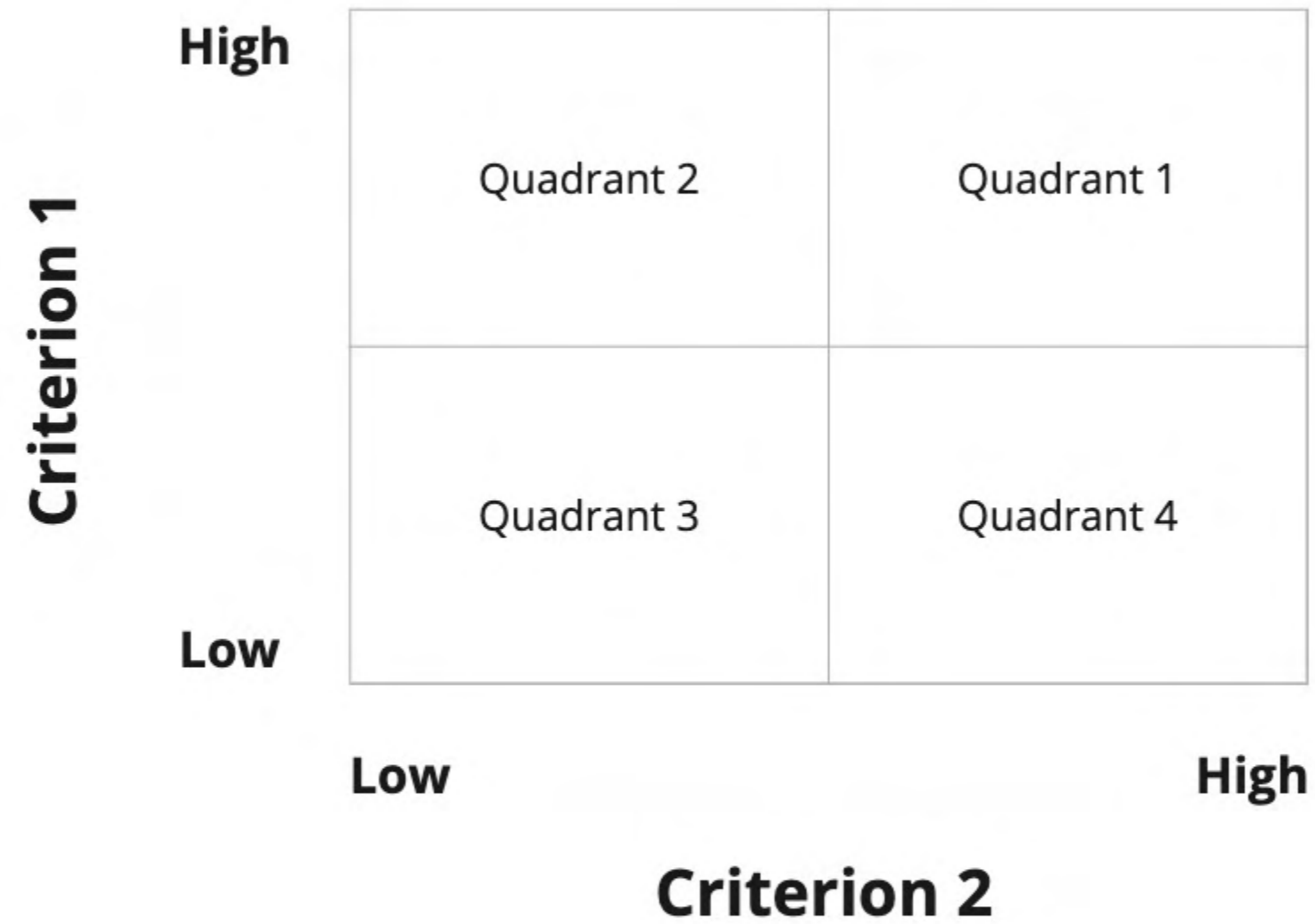


# 2x2 Matrices

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*Comparison & relationship building*

# 2x2 Matrices



- Impact-Effort*
- Importance-Uncertainty*
- Importance-Urgency*
- Risk-Urgency*
- Reversibility-Damage*
- Any other custom criterion...*

# Ruling out

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*In or out?*

1. Define overarching goals
  - a. business objectives
  - b. roadmap outcomes
  - c. OKRs
  - d. Quarterly One Metric That Matters per team
  - e. North Star Metric
  - f. Growth vs. Engagement vs. Monetization
  - g. ...
2. Assess which strategic or tactical Opportunities or Solutions (OoS) pay into the overarching goals for the time horizon you are planning
3. Dismiss all OoS that are not paying into the overarching goals

Alternative: Combine with bucketing/categorization

1. Use a research method that helps you organize OoS into categories, e.g. KANO, Impact Mapping, Pirate Metrics, Assumption Map, etc.
2. Set your main focus-category or sort them in descending priority based on the overarching goals
3. Assess which strategic or tactical OoS pay into the highest priority category for the time horizon you are planning
4. Dismiss all OoS that are not paying into the highest prioritized categories

# Example: Binstack

*Or Initiative, Theme, Experiment,  
Hypothesis, Opportunity, Outcome, or...*

*Assess:  
Significant impact on the  
attributes?*

*Most important*



Attribute 1  
Attribute 2  
Attribute 3  
Attribute 4

*Least important*

Feature A

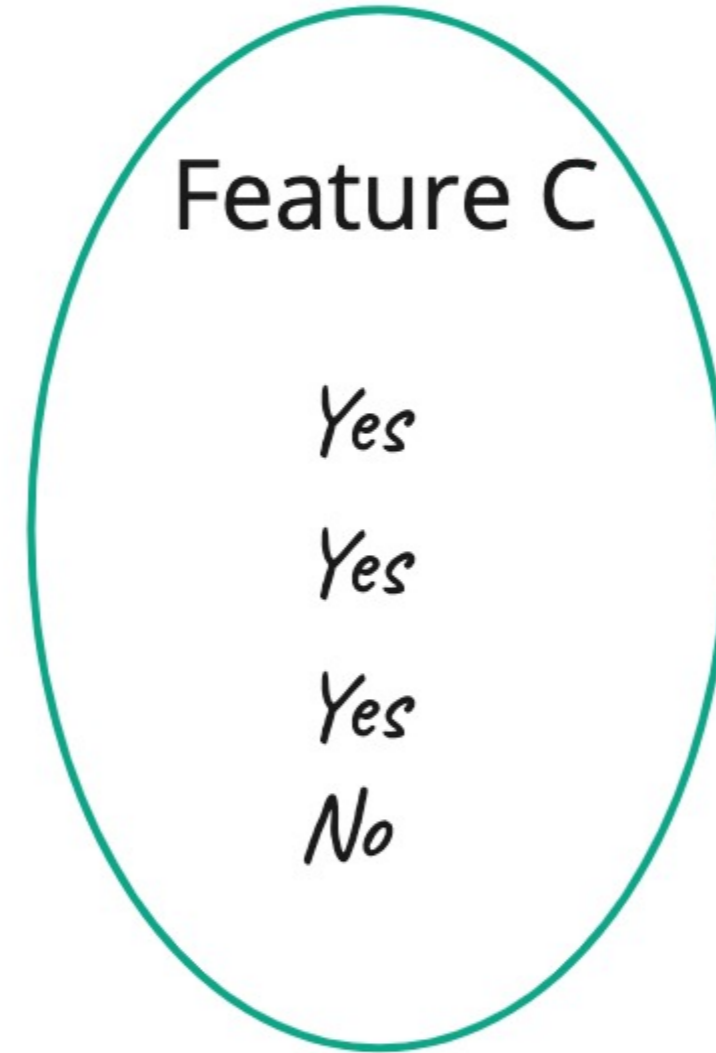
Yes  
Yes  
No ✗  
No

Feature B

No ✗  
Yes  
Yes  
Yes

Feature C

Yes  
Yes  
Yes  
No



WINNER

*Or if you're very strict: Find another feature  
that contributes to all 4 attributes!*

# Calculation

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*Potential business results*

# Calculation

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- Business cases / forecasts
- "Back of the envelope" calculation, e.g. Fermi estimation
- Traction model by Ash Maurya
- ...



*Marty Cagan*

"Every good product strategy begins with this focus:

*'Good strategy works by focusing energy and resources on one, or a very few, **pivotal objectives** whose accomplishment will lead to a cascade of favorable outcomes.'* – Richard Rumelt

If the leaders are not willing or able to make these choices, then the product strategy is doomed from the start."



# Start with Strategy

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*What is our focus this year\*?*

*\*or the time horizon you want to look at*

# Filter: What doesn't pay into our strategic objectives?

## Yearly Planning

- Business Objective 1: Grow market share
- Business Objective 2: Fulfill more demand
- Business Objective 3: Grow revenue per customer

*How much does the idea or theme pay into the Business Objective?*

*Or better: Outcomes!!!*

- Theme A**
- Theme B**
- Theme C**

B. Obj 1	B. Obj 2	B. Obj 3	Effort	Confidence	Score
1	2	0	4	80%	Score

*Or Fermi estimate, business cases, etc.*

# Filter: What doesn't pay into your strategic objectives?

## Yearly Planning

Business Objective 1: Grow market share

Business Objective 2: Fulfill more demand

Business Objective 3: Grow revenue per customer

*Or initiatives, milestones, ...*

*Most important*



Business Objective 1

Business Objective 2

Business Objective 3

Product  
Outcome A

*Yes*

*Yes*

*No*

Product  
Outcome B

*No*

*Yes*

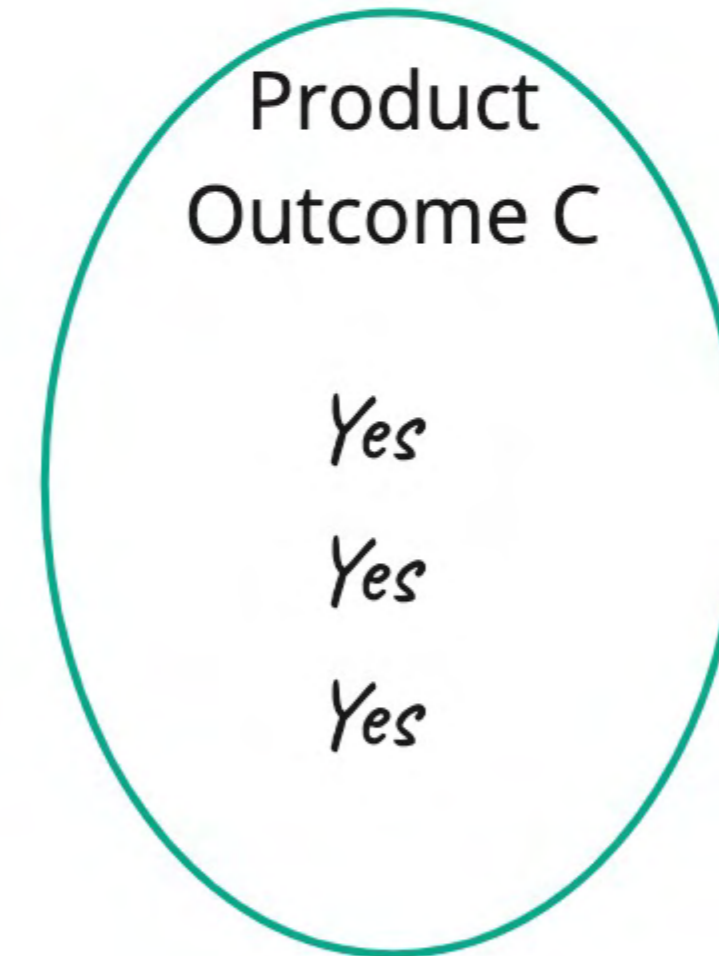
*Yes*

Product  
Outcome C

*Yes*

*Yes*

*Yes*



*WINNER*

*Least important*

# Filter: What doesn't pay into our quarterly OKRs?

## Quarterly OKRs

- Objective 1: Create a happy customer base
- Objective 2: Grow mobile advertising
- Objective 3: Reduce time to experience the core value for new users

*How much does the idea or theme pay into the OKRs.  
Or Outcomes on the roadmap.  
Or strategic milestones.  
Or... You get the idea.*

	Obj 1	Obj 2	Obj 3	Effort	Confidence	Score
Theme A	1	2	0	4	80%	Score
Theme B						
Theme C						

*Or Fermi estimate, business cases, etc.*

## Filter: What doesn't pay into our quarterly OKRs?

### Quarterly OKRs

Objective 1: Create a happy customer base

Objective 2: Grow mobile advertising

Objective 3: Reduce time to experience the core value for new users

*Or Theme A, B, C*  
*Or Initiative A, B, C*  
*Or Experiment A, B, C*  
*Or Hypothesis A, B, C*  
*Or Opportunity A, B, C*  
*Or Outcome A, B, C*  
*Or...*

*Most important*



Objective 1

Objective 2

Objective 3

Feature A

*Yes*

*Yes*

*No*

Feature B

*No*

*Yes*

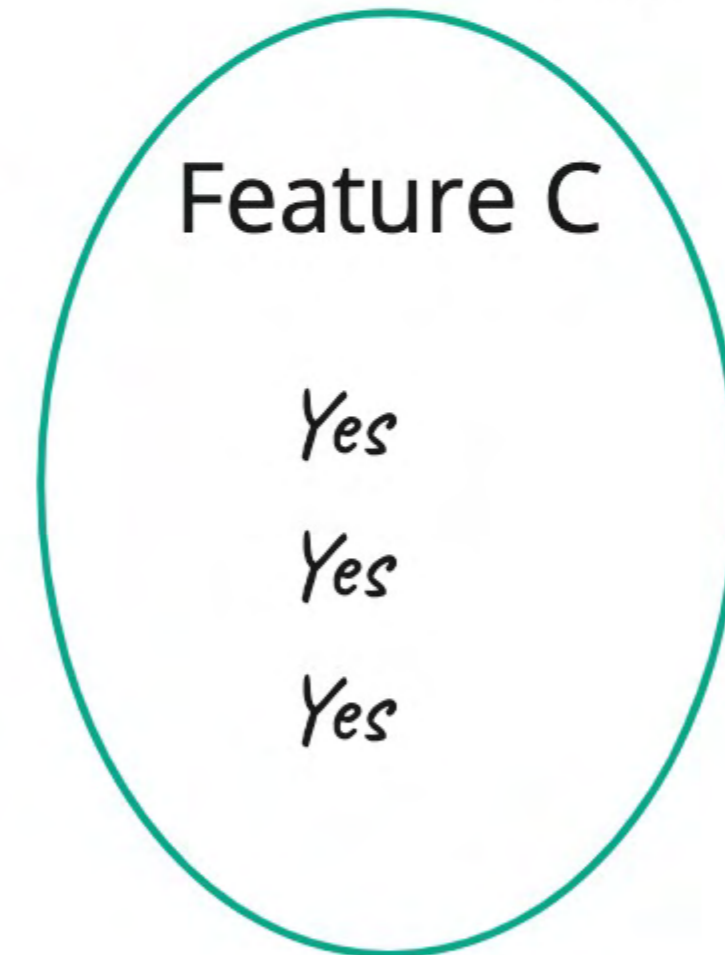
*Yes*

Feature C

*Yes*

*Yes*

*Yes*



*WINNER*

*Least important*

# **Filtered list of OoS that pay into strategy**

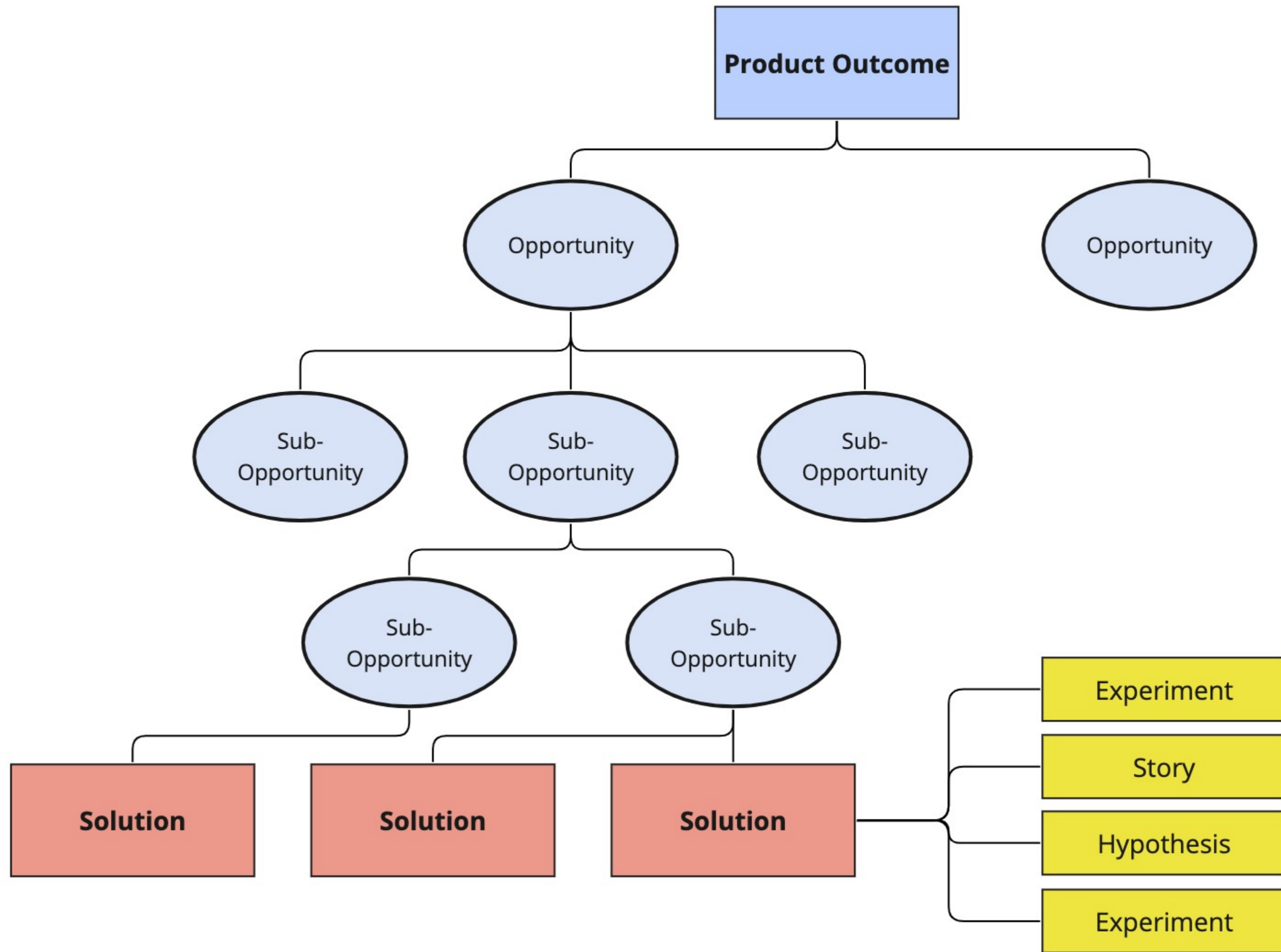
**What about OoS from  
discovery & research?**

**Follow the same logic.**

**Filter against strategic impact!**



# Example: Opportunity Solution Tree

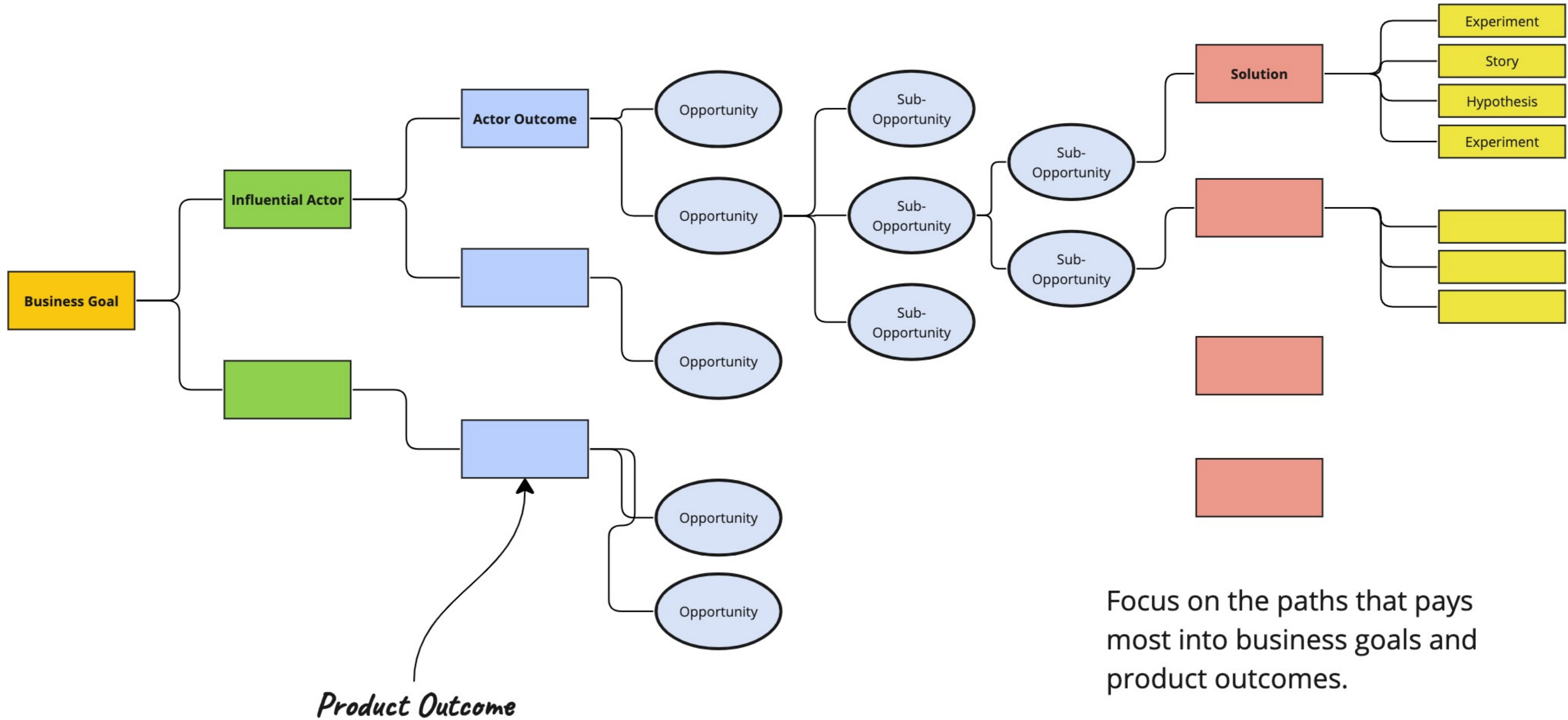


1. Which Opportunity pays most into Product Outcome?
2. Which Solution pays most into serving the customer opportunity?
3. Focus on those paths.

Advanced:  
Derive from Business Outcomes!



# Example: Impact Mapping



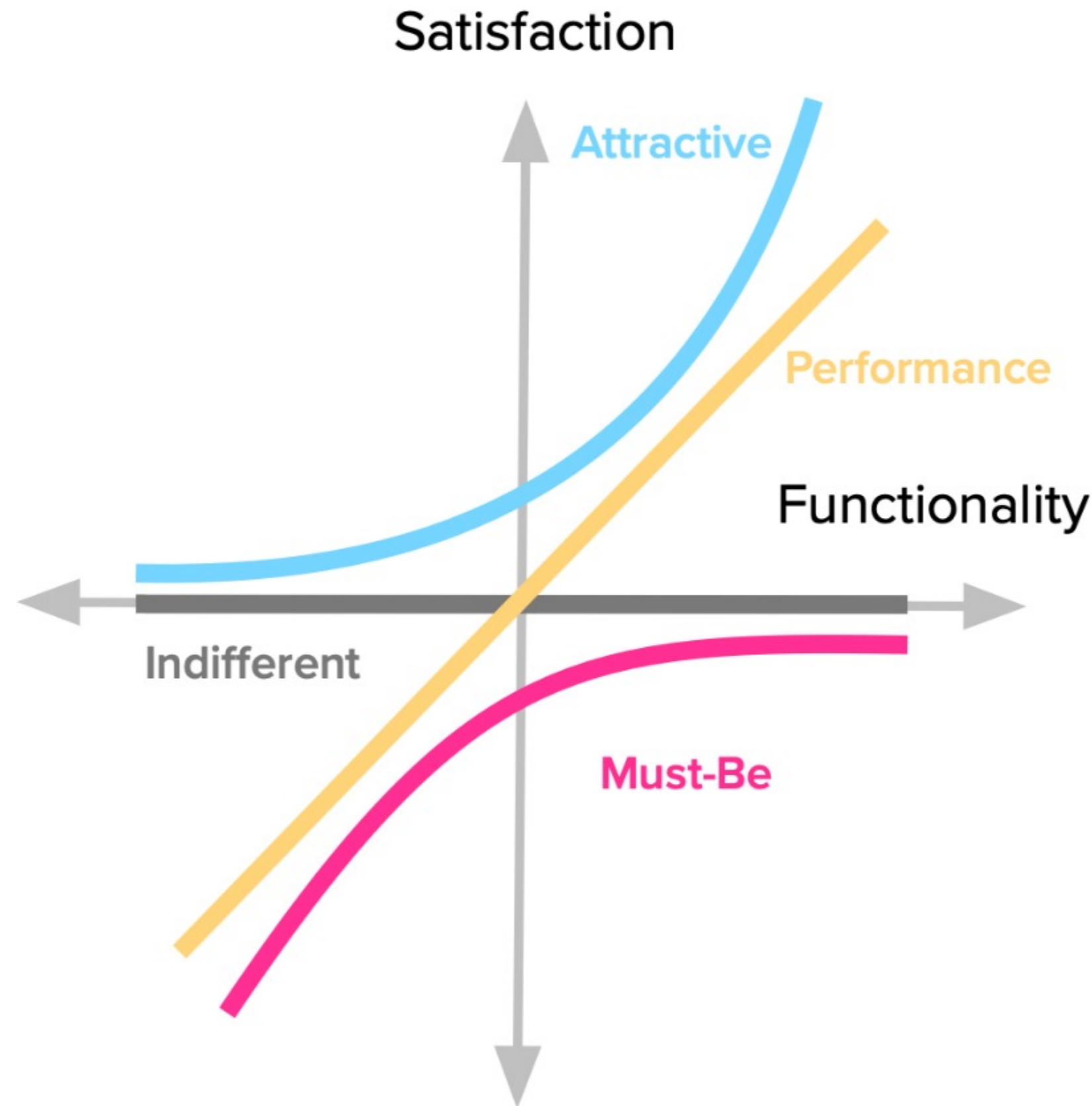
Focus on the paths that pays most into business goals and product outcomes.

**Or use categorization**

# Example: KANO

Calendar product

Business goal: "Create an AI strategy for our company"; Focus Persona "Busy Product Manager"



## "Delighter"

- AI detects the other person's free times that match with yours and suggest best times to meet
- **AI optimizes your calendar based on your goal (e.g. maximize time for deep work)**

## "Satisfier"

- Ease of creating and editing the meeting
- Adding a meeting from different sources (e.g. from email)
- Viewing other people's calendars (e.g. colleagues, partner, etc.)
- **AI suggests who you should invite to the meeting**
- ...

## "Dissatisfier"

- Creating a meeting in the calendar
- Changing details of the meeting
- Having the 1 day, 1 week, 1 month views
- ...

**Filtered list of OoS,  
from internal and external  
channels,  
that pay into strategy.**

# Apply prioritization method

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*Whatever you prefer*

# Some well known prioritization techniques and what they help with

*On strategic and tactical level*

## Categorize

KANO

Impact Mapping

Pirate Metrics

Assumption Mapping

MoSCoW

Impact/Effort

Reversible vs. damage

## Filter

OKR-payback

Business objective-payback

Binstack

KANO

Impact Mapping

Opportunity Solution Tree

Opportunity Scoring

Pirate Metrics

## Sort

Buy a Feature

RICE, ICE, PIE, etc.

Risk vs. Urgency

Impact/Effort

Opportunity Scoring

Any scoring or weighted scoring

# Check your confidence

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*Because prioritization is more about confidence  
than about a score*



## Example: ICE Scoring

	<b>Impact</b>		<b>Confidence</b>		<b>Ease</b>		
<b>Idea 1</b>	8	x	0.5	x	6	➔	Experiment
<b>Idea 2</b>	2	x	3	x	3	➔	Reject
<b>Idea 3</b>	7	x	3	x	8	➔	Build
<b>Idea 4</b>	8	x	7	x	2	➔	Find the smallest solution to solve the problem → Ideate

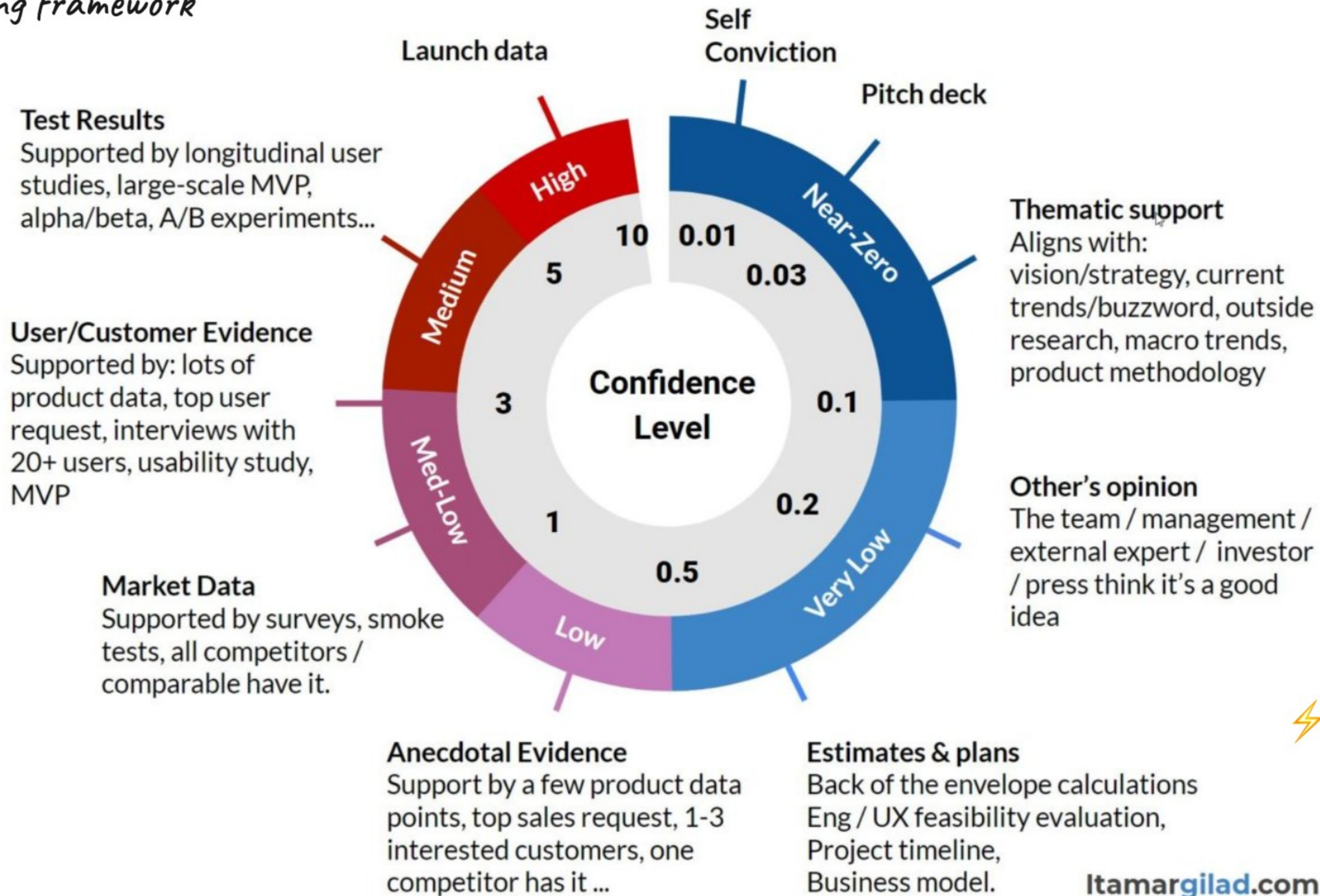
## Any other prioritization method

*Also works with ruling out, calculations and matrices*

<b>Ideas</b>	<b>Criterion 1</b>	<b>Criterion 2</b>	<b>Criterion 3</b>	<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>Confidence Level</b>	<b>Prio Score</b>
<b>Idea 1</b>					<b>0.8</b>	<b>= Subtotal * Conf. Level</b>
<b>Idea 2</b>					<b>0.3</b>	
<b>Idea 3</b>					<b>0.1</b>	
<b>Idea 4</b>					<b>1.0</b>	

# How to set confidence?

Take an existing framework



⚡ Adapt for B2B!

# How to set confidence?

*Or create your own system*

	<b>Random internal idea</b>	<b>Colleagues's favorite without supporting insights</b>	<b>Important competitors have it</b>	<b>Market Research suggests</b>	<b>Has a couple of evidence points</b>	<b>Has run experiments on production</b>
<b>Confidence Level</b>	<b>0.5%</b>	<b>0.5%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>50%</b>	<b>80%</b>

**Idea**                      **Impact**                      **Confidence**                      **Ease**

8                      x                      30%                      x                      6



# Result: Categories

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<b>Ideas</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Criterion 1</b>	<b>Criterion 2</b>	<b>Criterion 3</b>	<b>...</b>	<b>...</b>
<b>Idea 1</b>	<b>Plan to build</b>					
<b>Idea 2</b>	<b>Experiment</b>					
<b>Idea 3</b>	<b>Rejected</b>					
<b>Opportunity 1</b>	<b>More data needed</b>					
<b>Opportunity 2</b>	<b>Explore</b>					

# List of categorized backlog items (OoS)

# Sort it!

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*What goes into execution?*

# Backlog prioritization...

---

*... is art.*

Input for your prioritization:

- Is there anything to de-risk?
- Are deadlines forced on us (e.g. regulations)?
- Are there research questions that need to be answered urgently?
- What is left over from the last cycle?
- Politics? Satisfying specific stakeholders?
- Do we need to iterate on specific solutions?
- Have we done the after-launch-analysis on the feature already?
- How much space do we have to start something new vs. continue on our work?
- Well.... the prioritization-score (don't be obsessed with the score!)
- How much delivery vs. discovery is planned in (seek balance)?
- How much tech debt do we need to address?
- ...
- ...
- INTUITION - what does your gut say?



# Backlog prioritization...

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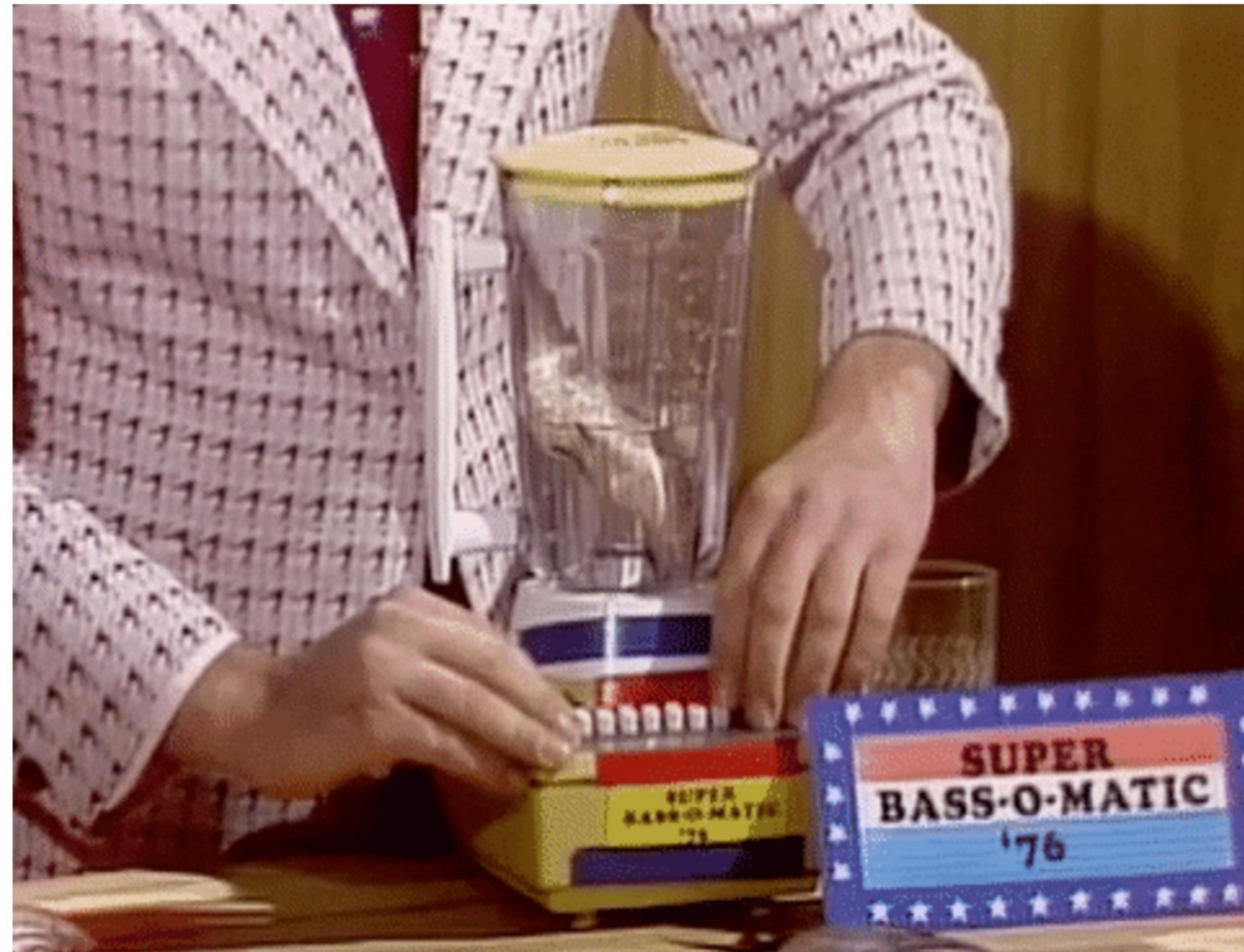
*... is art.*

And then blend it...

... it's gonna be fine 😊

# Thank you!

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*Works well in heavily stakeholder driven environments*


# MOSCOW




Must  
Haves



Should  
Haves



Could  
Haves

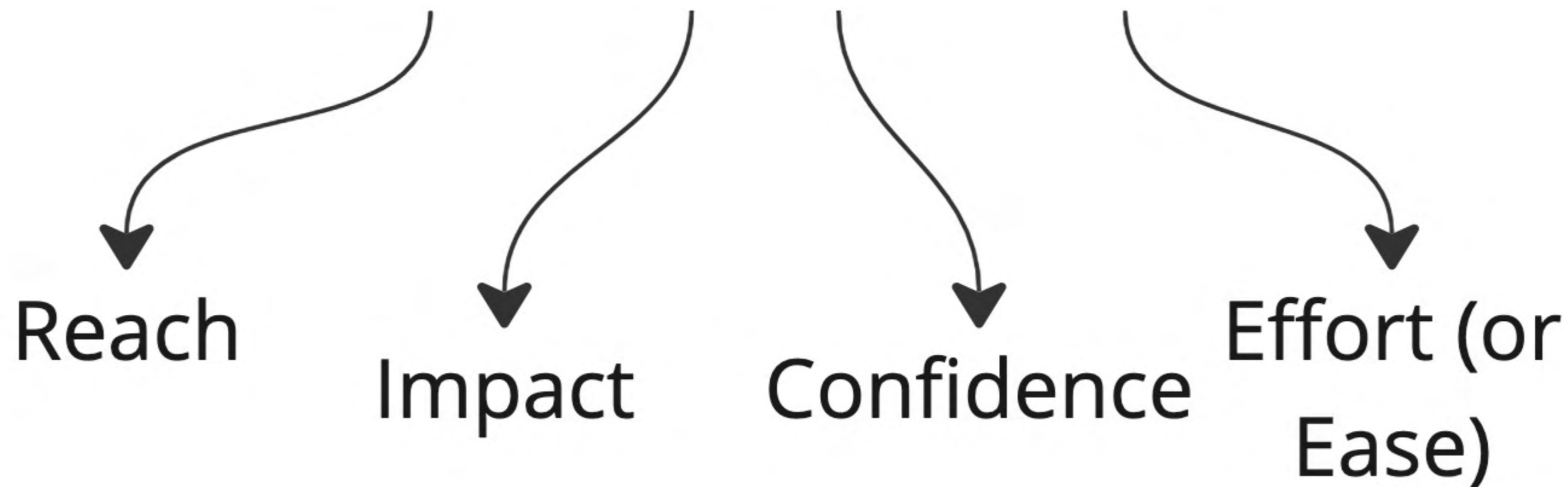


Won't  
Haves / Dos

*It's about the conversation, not the dish.*

*Good to start mindset shift towards questioning confidence and bringing evidence to the conversation.*

**(R)ICE**



# RICE *by Intercom*

- **Reach** = Calculation of how many people will be affected by that feature in a given time?
- **Impact** = Intercom scores the impact of a specific feature on an individual person level on a scale from 0.5 to 3 (0.5, 1, 2, 3)
- **Confidence** = Percentage value to score features based on your research data or lack of it (50%, 80%, 100%)
- **Effort** = Total amount of time a feature will require from all team members in person-months.

$$\frac{\text{Reach} \times \text{Impact} \times \text{Confidence}}{\text{Effort}} = \text{RICE Score}$$

# ICE

- **Impact** = How impactful do we expect this initiative to be?
- **Confidence** = How confident we are that this initiative will prove our hypothesis and deliver the desired results?
- **Ease** = How easy is this initiative to build and implement? What are the costs of the resources that are going to be needed?

Score each from 1-10.

Impact x Confidence x Ease

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3

OR Impact x Confidence x Ease = ICE Score

*really doesn't matter*

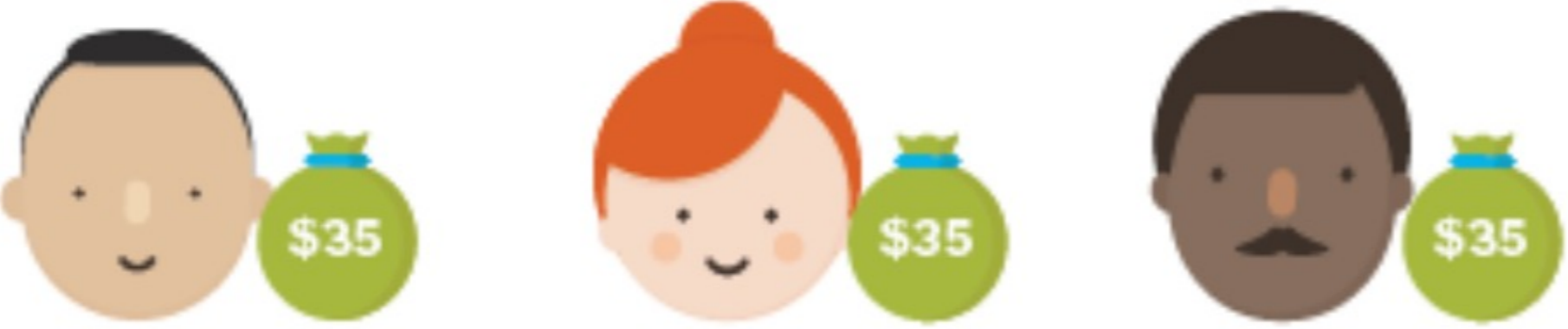
# RISK assessment







1. *Assumption Mapping*
2. *Risk vs reward*
3. *Risk vs. Urgency*
4. *Reversible or not*
5. *Likelihood vs damage*

*Works well in heavily stakeholder driven environments.*

*Works also as a user research method.*

# Buy A Feature



Features	Price	 \$35	 \$35	 \$35	Total Required	Bought?
	\$35	20	0	10	-5	No
	\$50	5	0	0	-45	No
	\$70	10	35	25	0	Yes

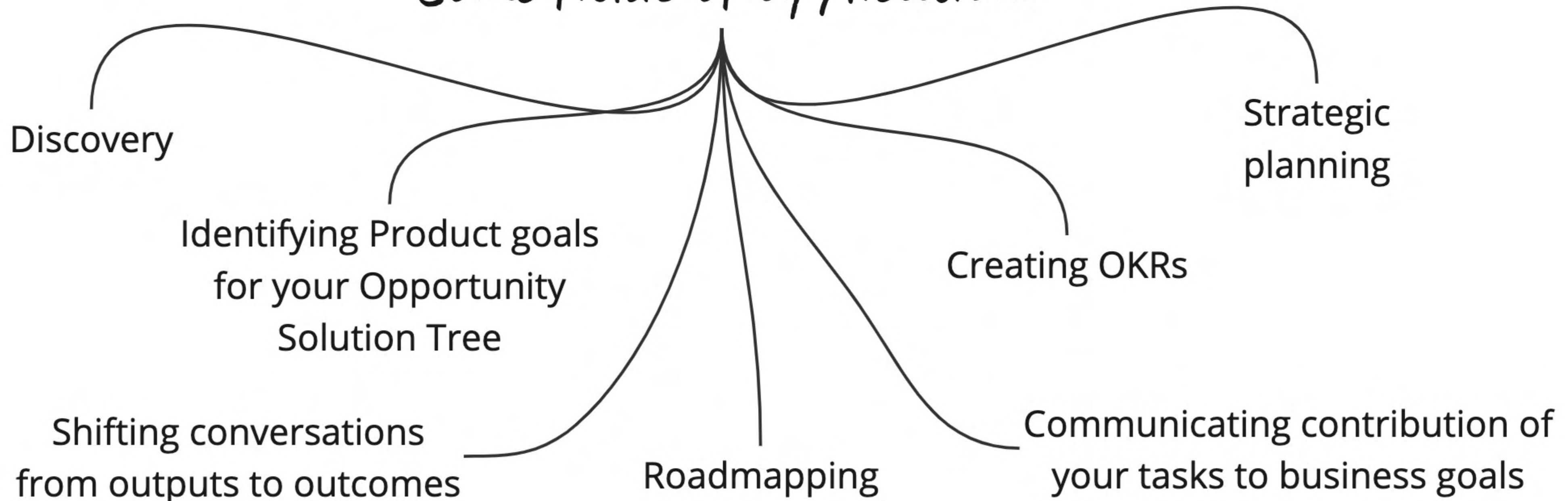
*image by Strategyzer*



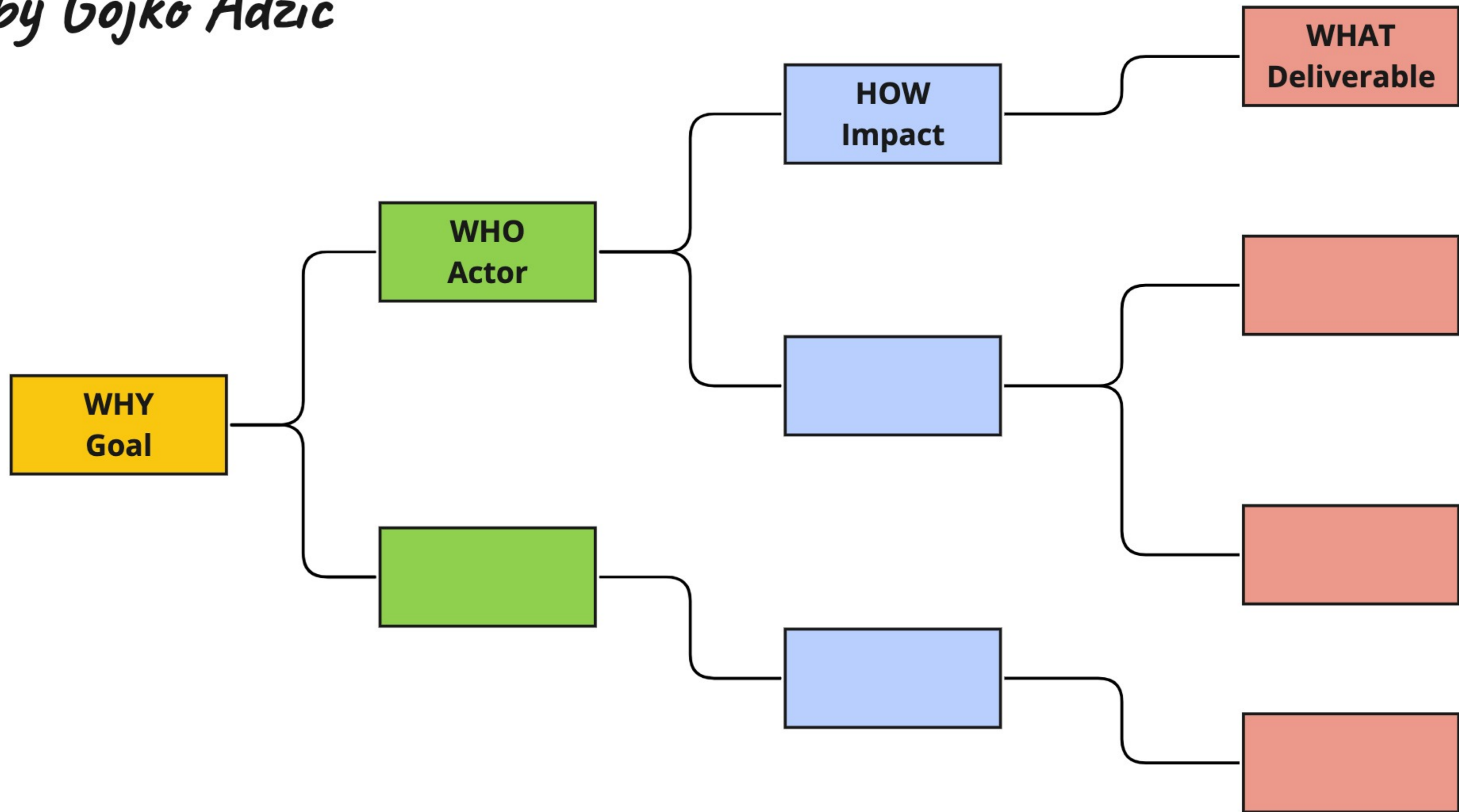
*Focus on ideas that connect to user outcomes and contribute to higher level business goals*

# Impact Mapping

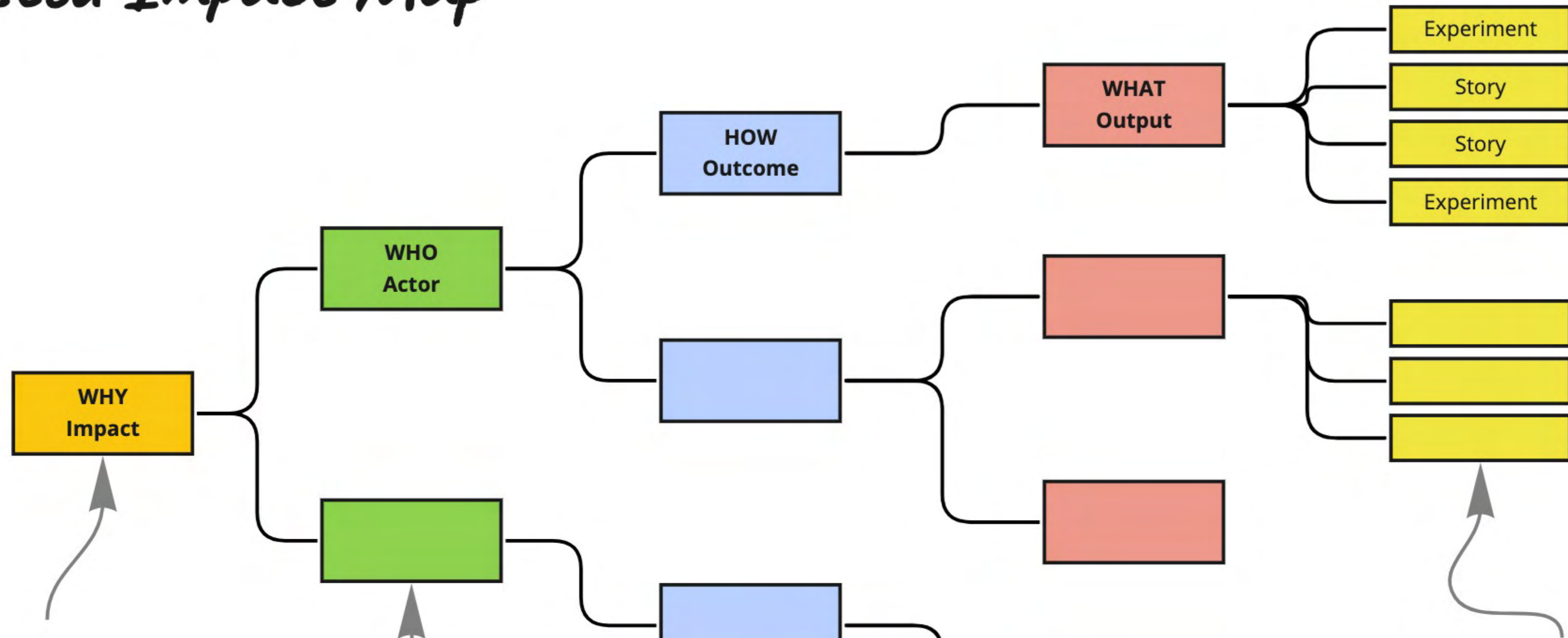
*Some fields of application:*



# Original Impact Map by Gojko Adzic



# Adjusted Impact Map



Ask:  
Which business or higher level product goal are we trying to achieve?

Ask:  
Who has pos. or neg. impact on achieving the goal?

Ask:  
Which behavior do we need from the actor so that we achieve our goal?

Ask:  
How might we help/make the actor to change behavior so that we achieve our goal?

Ask:  
How confident are we that offering [OUTPUT] to [ACTOR] will lead to [OUTCOME] so that can achieve our goal? Do we need to increase our confidence level? If yes, how?

# Binstack

*Most important*



Attribute 1  
Attribute 2  
Attribute 3  
Attribute 4

Feature A

*Yes*  
*Yes*  
*No*  
*No*

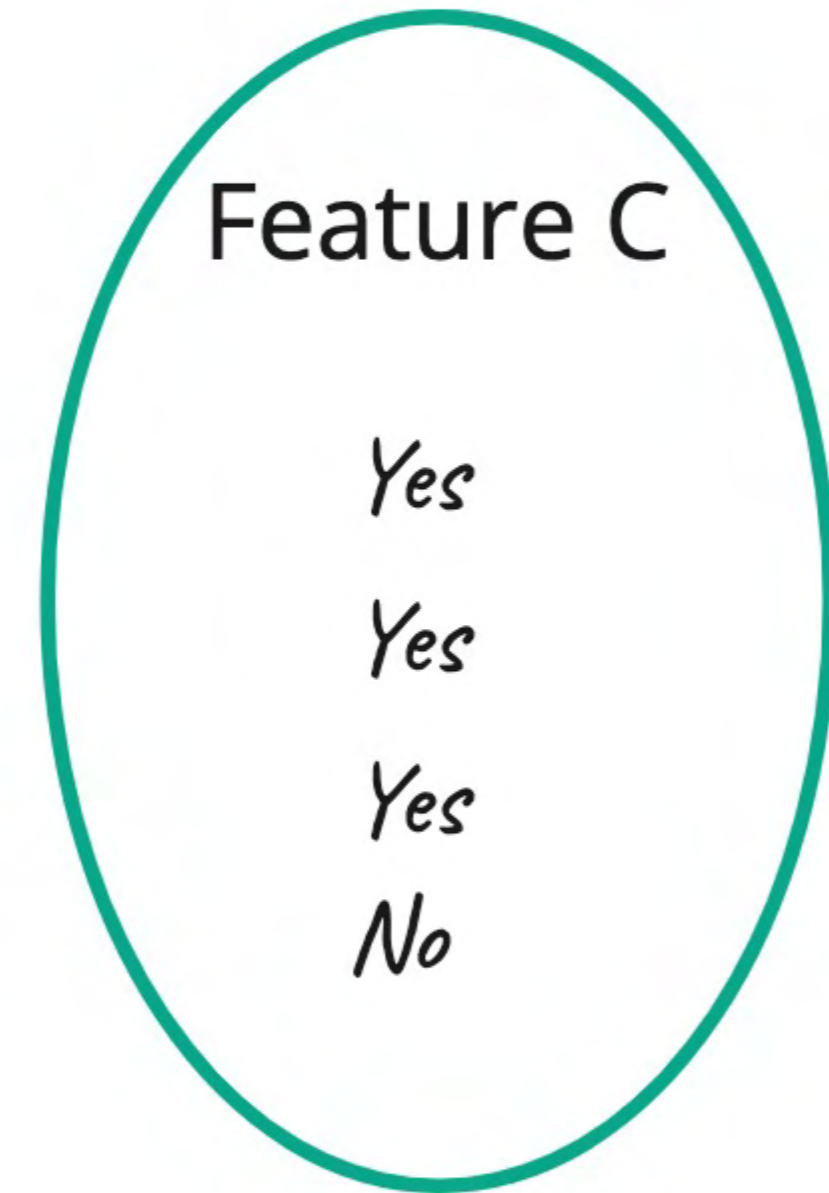
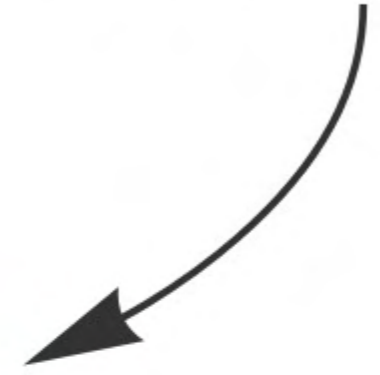
Feature B

*No*  
*Yes*  
*Yes*  
*Yes*

Feature C

*Yes*  
*Yes*  
*Yes*  
*No*

*Check: Significant impact  
on the attribute?*



**WINNER**

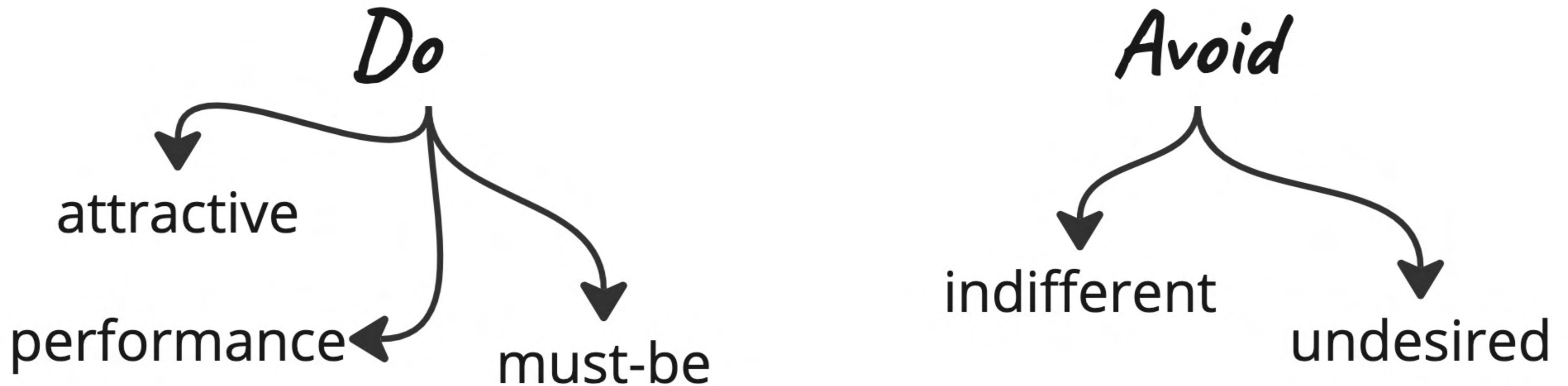
*Least important*

*Or find another feature that  
contributes to all 4!*

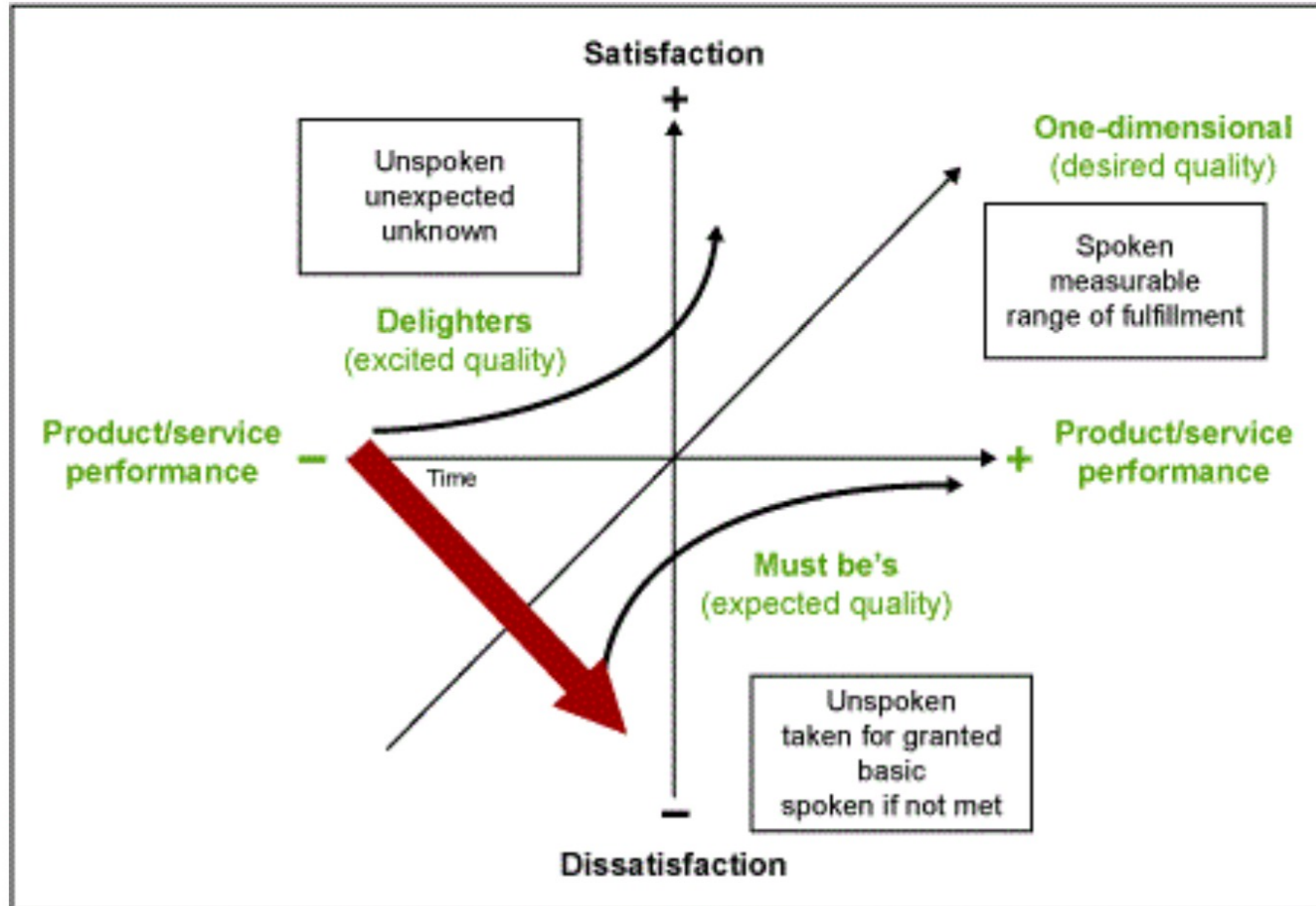
*Eliminate what's not needed.*

*Focus on real differentiators and stay competitive.*

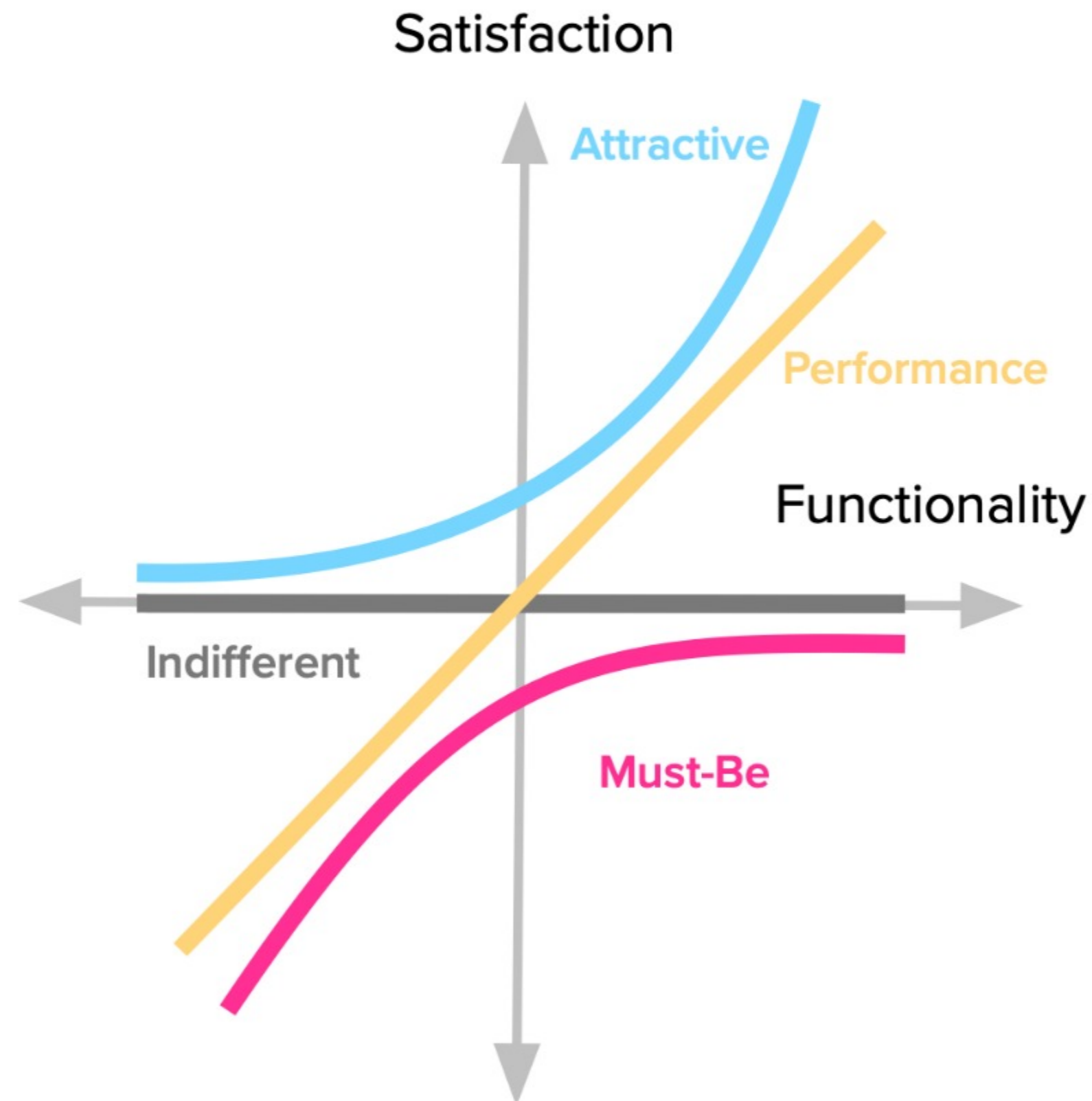
# KANO



# KANO



# KANO



*by Folding Burritos*

## *"Delighter"*

Not having solutions that fulfill excitement needs doesn't make your customers unhappy but your product doesn't create wow-reactions either. Implement delighters to differentiate yourself.

## *"Satisfier"*

You compete on these needs on a daily basis. The better you fulfill these needs the more competitive you are. If you solve these needs in a bad way, your customers will be dissatisfied and switch the product.

## *"Dissatisfier"*

Not fulfilling these needs will make you lose customers and drop conversation immediately. Fulfill these ideally in a way that you can turn a basic need into a delighter.

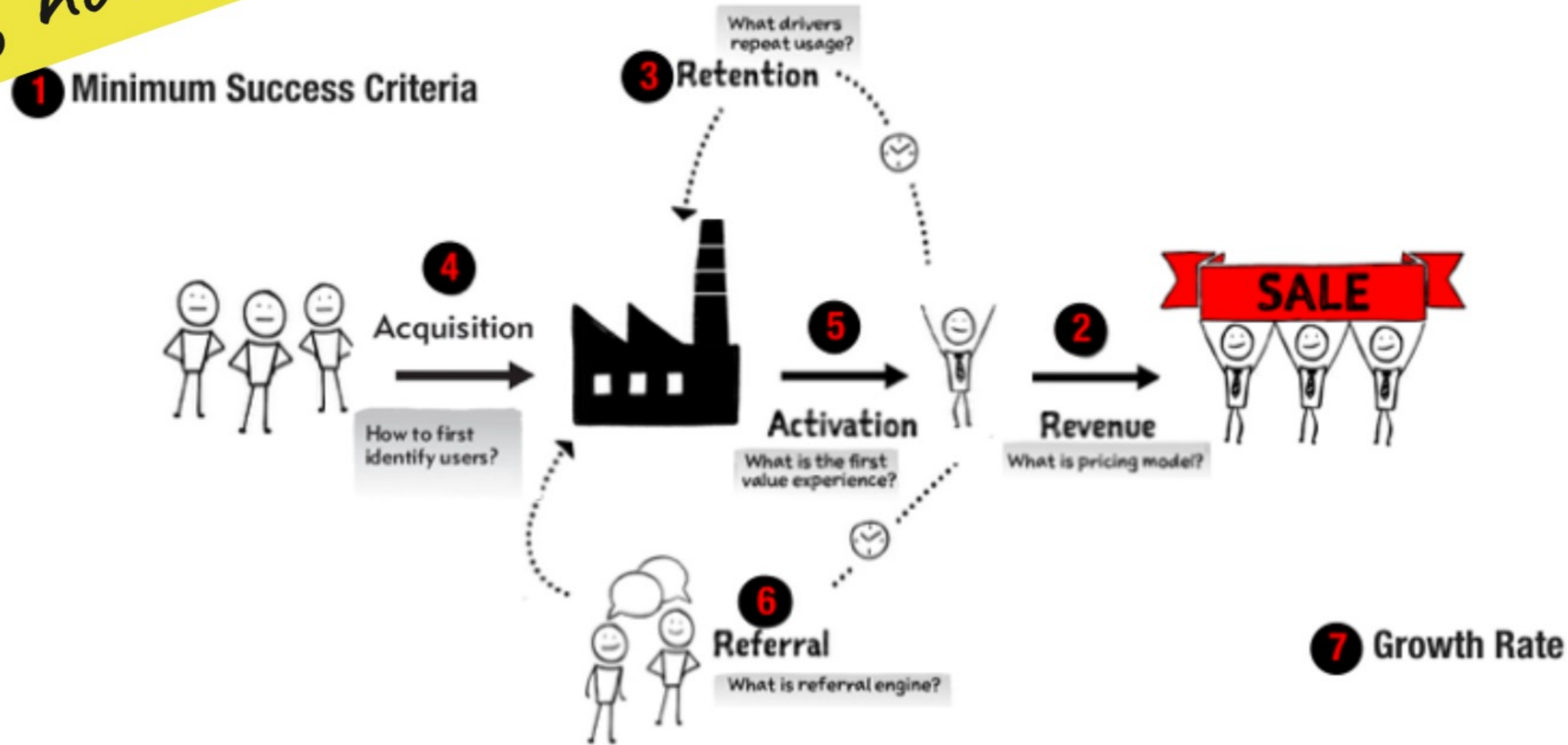
The repurposed

# PIRATE METRICS

AARRR!



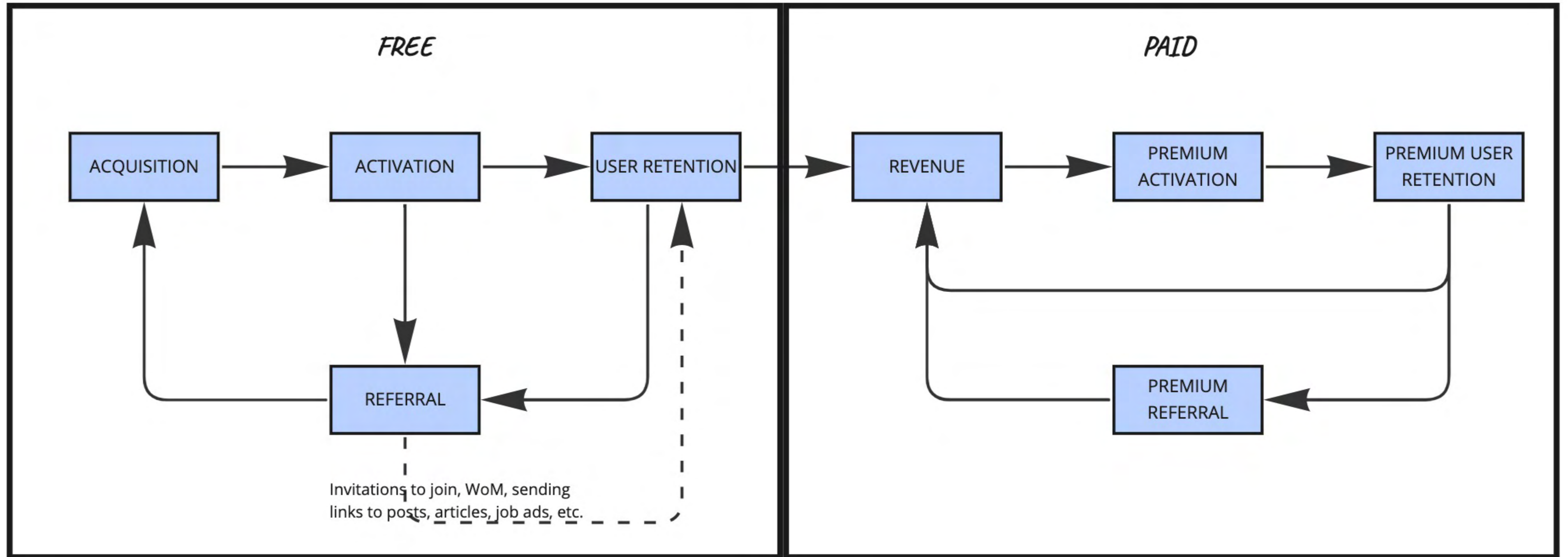
*It's a flow, not a funnel*



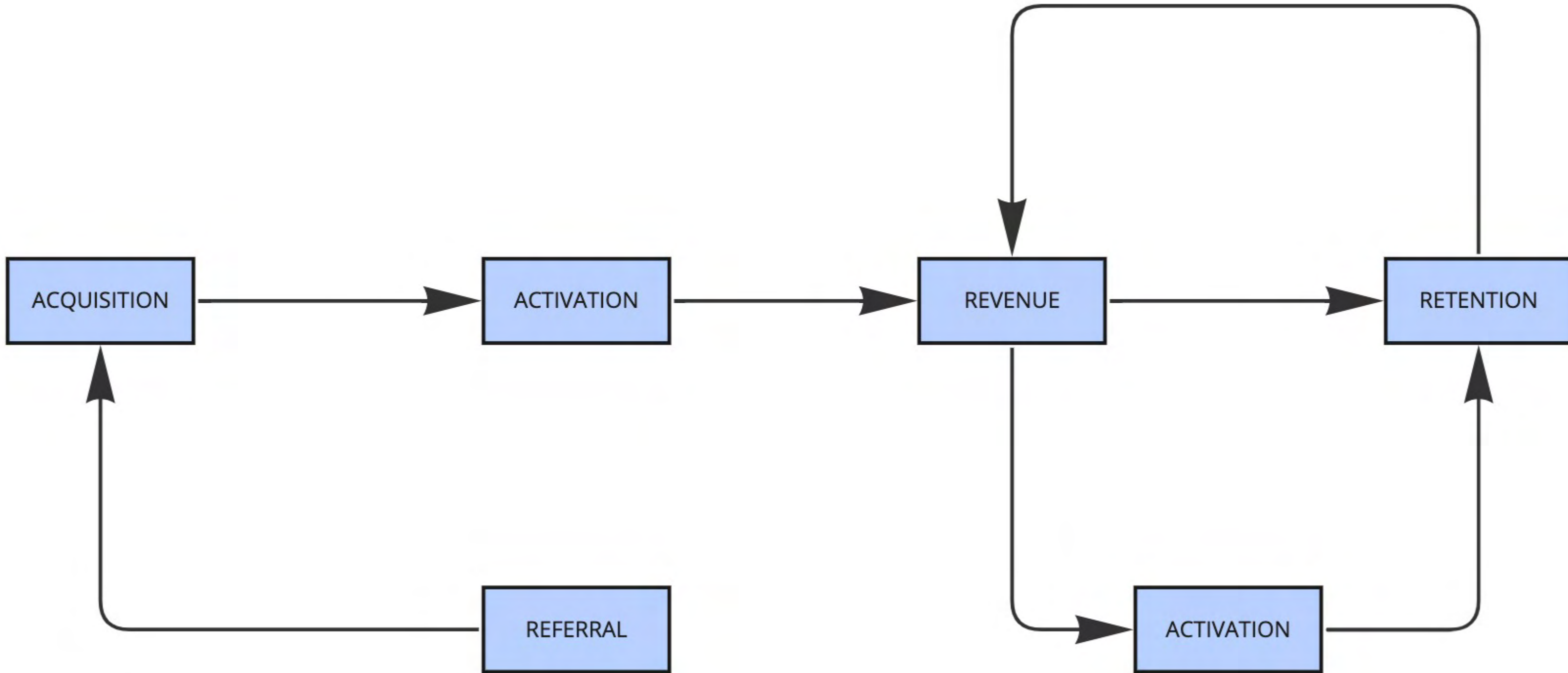
THE CUSTOMER FACTORY BLUEPRINT *by Ash Maurya*



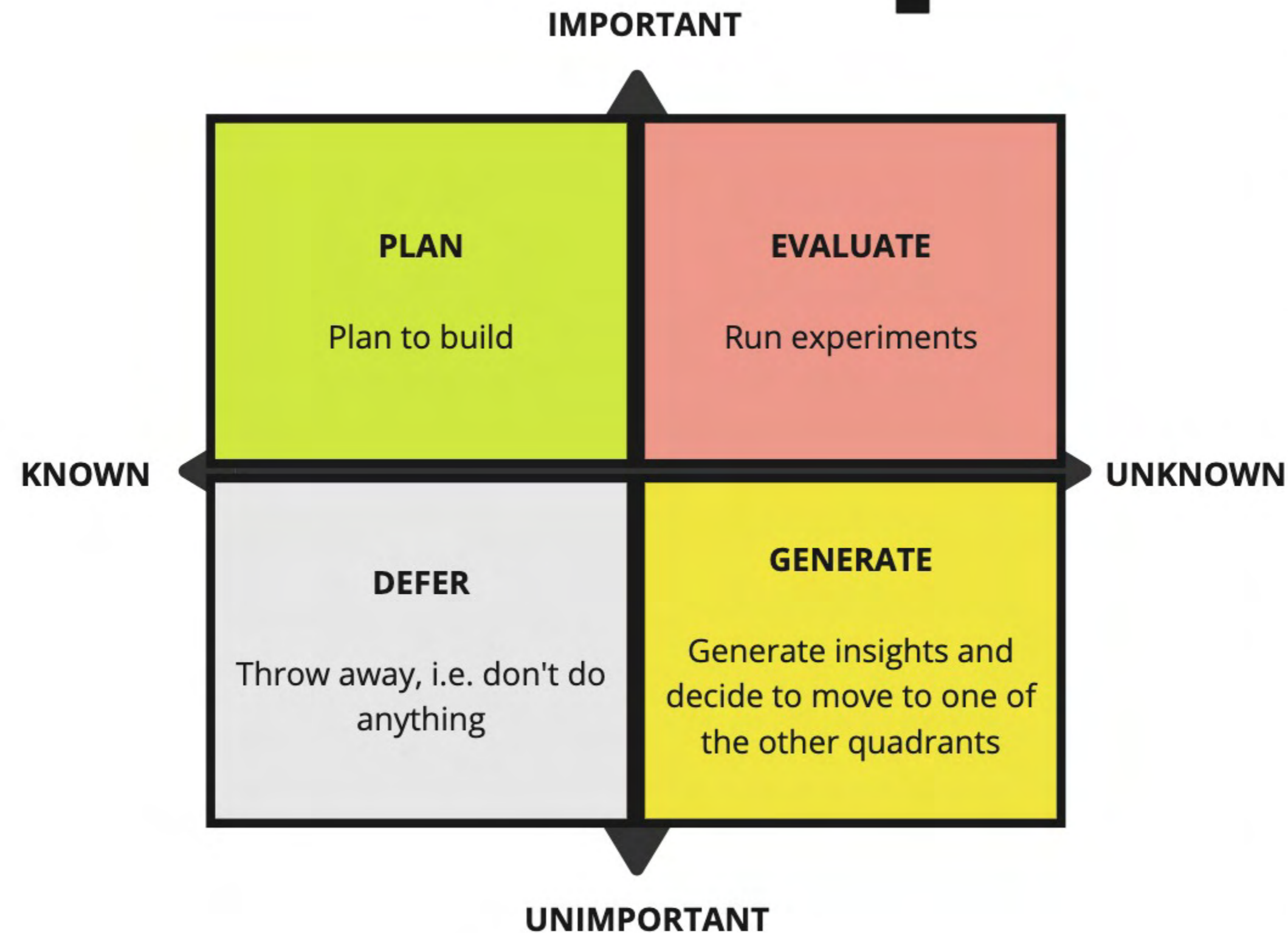
# AARRR Flow Example LinkedIn (simplified)



# AARRR Flow Example Therapy Platform



# Assumption Map



## Plan:

Check if you trust in the evidence you've collected. If yes, plan to execute on the assumption.

## Defer:

Dismiss the assumption.

## Evaluate:

Run experiments to gather evidence. The more evidence, the better you'll understand if it's really important or not, and how to de-risk the situation.

## Generate:

Generate more insights without spending too much time on it, e.g. analysing existing data or through quick data generation. Is the assumption really unimportant? Then move to "Defer". Is it actually important? Then move to "Plan" or "Evaluate". Most of the time you'll end up deferring.

# Risk vs. Reward

<b>REWARD</b>	High	<b>Plan to do</b>	<b>De-risk or plan to do</b>	<b>De-risk</b>
	Medium	<b>Plan to do or dismiss</b>	<b>De-risk, plan to do or dismiss</b>	<b>De-risk or dismiss</b>
	Low	<b>Dismiss or plan to do</b>	<b>Dismiss or de-risk</b>	<b>Dismiss</b>
		Low	Medium	High
		<b>RISK</b>		

Do green if worth it.

Avoid red and dark orange.

Check yellow.

Text in boxes show viable options in the most viable order.

## My opinion:

- Don't do any low reward unless they are strategic or continuous improvements.
- Be curious about high risk-high reward because here are big bets that can make a real difference
- Low risk-high reward sound like quick wins but be careful to not turn the product into a Swiss army knife. Stay focused!
- Anything that is medium reward is worth analysing and then deciding to de-risk, plan to build or dismiss BUT stay focused on the high reward topics.

# Risk vs. Urgency

<p><b>High Risk</b> <b>Low Urgency</b> → <b>Plan de-risking</b></p>	<p><b>High Risk</b> <b>High Urgency</b> → <b>Start de-risking</b></p>
<p><b>Low Risk</b> <b>Low Urgency</b> → <b>No de-risking needed</b></p>	<p><b>Low Risk</b> <b>High Urgency</b> → <b>Analyse and make decision</b></p>

# Reversible vs. damage

How consequential/risky is the change?

<b>Low</b>	<b>Analyse available data</b> —> Use available data, experience and instinct to decide to <u>move fast or test gradually</u>	<b>Move fast</b> —> Use experience and instinct to decide on the spot; check effort and <u>decide to build, test, or not.</u>
<b>High</b>	<b>Analyse before making a decision</b> —> <u>Take your time</u> before making a decision, do lots of research, if possible run proxy-experiments	<b>Analyse and experiment</b> —> Review data, run experiments, and decide quickly on next steps (build, change, or kill)
	<b>No</b>	<b>Yes</b>

Is the change easily reversible?

# Likelihood vs. damage

*or damage*

		Impact			
		0 Acceptable	1 Tolerable	2 Unacceptable	3 Intolerable
		Little or No Effect	Effects are Felt but Not Critical	Serious Impact to Course of Action and Outcome	Could Result in Disasters
Likelihood	Improbable Risk Unlikely to Occur	Green	Yellow	Yellow	Orange
	Possible Risk Will Likely Occur	Green	Yellow	Orange	Red
	Probable Risk Will Occur	Yellow	Orange	Orange	Red