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## PM101 Reflection

Our original Beli product vision was focused on restaurant discovery via personalized recommendations. We also packed in the ability to “find, share, and track,” hoping to do it all. This semester, we determined that our MVP should focus on tracking, which will later enable sharing with friends.

We shifted to tracking for two reasons. 1) We discovered a clear *unaddressed* pain, plus emotional resonance (e.g., warm memories from travel, or FOMO about the latest restaurants). Most people don’t review restaurants but “track” via Excel, Google Maps, or Instagram, which generates pride and excitement but is hacky and cumbersome. 2) The fun of sharing and discovering restaurants that we want to enable long term isn’t possible without the data aggregated via tracking.

I’ve learned that the common attribute across great products is their ability to not just fulfill user needs, but in doing so, evoke emotional responses by changing the game for their early adopters. Any product can achieve the table stakes attributes of reliability, consistency, and usability, etc. if they really try, but without that emotional connection, you’re unlikely to build a product that will change your industry.

In the discovery process, Team Beli did a great job of recruiting and engaging unbiased test subjects who fit our persona. We got good at approaching strangers who had dining on their mind, filtering out “non-Foodies” quickly with objective questions, and getting strong engagement (for example, the vast majority of our Lo-Fi subjects texted regularly with us). Our wireframing approach was also strong. We didn’t stray from common conventions when we didn’t have to, but innovated when we did (relative rankings) through a diverging/converging process that put our diverse perspectives to work. We were quick to learn the best practices of wireframe testing, staying open-ended, non-explanatory, and probing.

However, our Lo-Fi process could have been more efficient, in terms of decision-making and execution. Because we probed multiple actions (finding, sharing, and tracking -- both past and future experiences), we struggled to choose the “right” route. In retrospect, there is no “right” route; that’s why you test! We needed to commit to a test and move on if it failed, but our fear of investing time to yield “useless” results slowed down our process overall. Execution-wise, we learned the importance of making tests foolproof for subjects. In our first test, we got little engagement and unintuitive partial results. Simple nudges such as texting our subjects at the same time everyday fixed that, showing us that running good process is worth the time and effort.

We also learned certain lessons of the “Mom Test” the hard way. To understand how people find restaurants, we asked them to reflect on the last time they dined out and tell us how they

found the restaurant. In customer interviews, people were able to do this. However, in our real-time Lo-Fi testing at TimeOut Market, most people wouldn't do this on the spot – they reverted to generalities or told us what they *would* do, not what they did. We tried a couple variations of this test to solve for it, but should have cut our losses earlier and used the time for a different Lo-Fi test, relying on deep-dive customer interviews for those insights instead.

I've learned that great PMs engage in rigorous, well-designed discovery to ensure that they build the *right* thing, not the *most* things. After reading *The Build Trap*, I realized that the “constant iteration” in organizations I've seen shouldn't have been celebrated as “fast-moving, action-oriented” culture -- they just built constantly because they'd gone through the motions for discovery and never figured out what they were supposed to build. A good PM is creative enough to design “old school” approaches such as Wizard of Oz tests, without keeping busy (and annoying their engineers) building expensive technology that collects dust. Moreover, good PMs don't build easy solutions to their user's specific needs; they build to get hired for their user's “job to be done,” which helps them build less obvious but more powerful solutions.

What I'd experienced, but not understood before PM101, is that a good PM sets themselves up to succeed by finding a “good fit” in terms of who they are and what the organization values and offers to PMs. I interned as the sole PM at a small startup, reporting to an experienced PM founder, which gave me less autonomy but fortunately maximized my procedural learning from someone with a strong product vision and point of view. However, if I were an experienced PM looking to own product strategy, that could be a poor fit. As a self-described “big picture” person and “general manager” type, I now know I'm more likely to flourish as a product founder or early-stage PM, than a specialized PM at a large company.