



Stanford eCorner

Defining Success Upfront

Julie Zhuo, *Facebook*

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Video URL: <http://ecorner.stanford.edu/videos/4699/Defining-Success-Upfront>

Julie Zhuo, vice president of product design at Facebook, explains the importance of visualizing success before beginning work on a project and how it can help teams avoid the tendency to define success along the way with vanity metrics. The question to ask is, “How will we know if we’ve solved this problem?” Zhuo says. “What would be different in the world?”



Transcript

- So let's say that we built this, we've validated that it's something that people want, or we think, you know, there's enough reason to believe that that it's a you know, something that is a real problem and then that's something that is worth solving. So now we build it and we put it out there, but even actually before the thing is out in the world, in fact, even before maybe we have a full prototype, the question for us to ask is well, how will we know if we've solved this problem? You know, like, what would be different in the world what with, you know, if we fast forward and now this thing that we've done is out there, how will we know if we should be happy, if we should be excited, if we think it's, you know, it didn't live up to our expectations, what exactly should our expectations be? And I think this is a really really important question to ask up front. Too often what ends up happening is we have this idea and then we build it, and we launch it into the world, and then results come in, you know, we're looking at, like, the dashboards, we're looking at how many people are downloading it and what they're saying and, you know, there's tons of data points that we're trying to, you know, interpret and put together but it's hard at that point in time to then be very very objective about did we solve the problem because a lot of, you know, our natural inclination is to read into the good things that people are saying and to kinda consider all of that effort to have been worth it, right, and that that, there's biases that kinda come from when, you know, you're already looking at data and you're trying to interpret whether or not it's good or bad. It's much better before you launch to have figured out, you know, what constitutes success for you, so that you can, you know, go into the launch with that understanding and as results come in, you can map it to your previous you know, this was my criteria for whether or not we've solved the problem, or whether this was successful. And so what we do here is we want to make sure that we set measurable goals and metrics, and measurable is really key. Measurable doesn't always mean like numbers or data, but it does mean, you know, there's a criteria where if I did this thing, and I got this result, I know what to make of that result. So for the example of groups, you know, we wanted to help people solve the problem of helping them find, you know, other people to talk about their interests with. We ended up building a Groups Discover dashboard. What does success look like for us? So before we launched, we determined that well, if we were successful at actually helping people solve this problem, we would see that more people are then discovering, you know, groups that they're interested in, and joining them. But not just joining, because you know, I could make a giant button flash and make it red and I'm sure more people would click on it and more people would join, like that doesn't really count, right.

What really matters is that they join these groups and these groups are actually meaningful to them. Which means that if we, you know, fast forward a couple months, three months let's say, and then we look back, these people are still using those groups and they're active engaging, meaning they're, you know, talking with other people, they're reading the content, they're sharing content, they're liking, they're commenting, you know, we want to know that people are joining groups that are actually valuable for them and that they're spending time on.