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Thinking Personas in Agile Approach - Part 2

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In our previous article, we mentioned the concept of **{Persona}**, which is at the heart of modern business methods. In this article, we gather together the steps to be taken and the questions to be addressed in order to understand the **{Persona}** with all its layers.

Part 2: Drafting the persona

Every user has a story and we use user story formats to reveal the layers of **{persona}** in the context of his/her thinking, seeing, feeling and so on. Here it is:

> **“**As a **[**persona**]**,
>
> I want to **[**do something**]**
>
> so that I can **[**realize a reward**]”**

Let’s take the example of a 29-year old banker. He expresses his breakfast expectation as:

> ‘’As a banker in the rat race, I want to prepare my breakfast smoothie as quick and hassle-free as possible without fixing and cleaning the pieces so that I can be at work on time and make my breakfast on the go while staying healthy.’’

The rise of **‘’**on the go smoothies**’’** is not a surprise; it’s the result of prudent listening of lifestyle, mood and the act of the relevant **{persona}**.

If you don’t know the person you are talking to, you cannot expect to establish a real connection with them. A sketch of a persona should give you a clear, actionable and testable outcome. In order to do that, you need to

answer the steps below:

Who: So who is this person? In this phase, the age, or demographics, in general, are very superficial, we have to go deeper.

We try to understand a day in his/her life in a relevant context. What he/she thinks before going to the bed or when he/she first wakes up!

This is a semi-fictional character but it needs to be real, vivid and inspiring. Accordingly, we create a hypothesis on his/her problem with our area of interest.

What: What is his/her problem that is relevant to our issue? Here, the problem(s) of the persona and current solution(s) of him is being articulated. It's a phase of the hypothesis. So there are problem scenarios and alternative solutions to satisfy his/her needs. Only after we have a working view of the relevance of problem scenarios and an understanding of current alternatives, we can go ahead for our value proposition.

What if: In this hypothesis phase we offer value to the persona so that he can evaluate and decide if he/she will use it against the problem as a solution. Basically, if the value we offer serves more than the alternative(s) -solution(s) that is currently being used against the problem(s)-, we are on the right way. Otherwise, this means our product/service needs to be revised or failed (dropped?). As we are making assumptions here, we need to test them and prove that they are valid.

The graphic below gives the story in short until here:

ref: alexandercowan.com

So the story goes on with experiments as our value offer is not more than a hypothesis which needs to be tested.

Experimentation: Validity or relevancy of an assumption depends on the experimentations carried out in the real world. Observations and interviews are to test our value offer. We come to a conclusion as this is working or vice versa. The crucial point here is **listening to the user but not necessarily doing what the user exactly asks. Yes, we are methodical. We do experiments but we spare space for our intuition all along the way.** As H. Ford said well: If I had asked people what they wanted, they would have said faster horses.

Product/Outcome: Ideally, everything we develop as an outcome should be linked to a user story which depends on a validated customer problem scenario of a validated persona.

In conclusion:

According to the Lean Model of Eric Ries, to which we refer very much in Agile:
we **{hypothesize}**, **{learn}** and **{experiment}**. This motto is valid for persona hypothesis as well as being at the very core of creating a dynamic and adaptive process in business level.

> We are still selling the service/product to humans. Hence as humans are complicated, personas make them more simple, palpable and scalable. We can test our ideas through personas.

In other words, in the world of **{VUCA}** ‘always beta’ approach is very appreciable. So always sketch it, but be ready to revise it on the way.

Reference sources:

www.alexandercowan.com

Eric Ries speech: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fEvKo90qBns

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