A KEVIN DUNCAN PLAYBOOK

Beyond the Roadmap

A fair response to the "kill the roadmap" movement, from someone who has run one in a regulated, multi-stakeholder environment.

THE CORE PROBLEM

The strongest argument against roadmaps deserves a fair hearing

My first playbook in this series made the case for outcome-based roadmaps. This one takes seriously the argument that roadmaps, done any way, are the wrong tool altogether.

Product researcher Teresa Torres made that case most influentially in her 2021 book *Continuous Discovery Habits*. Her argument, in short: a roadmap is a plan made with today's evidence, committed to before tomorrow's evidence arrives. Her alternative is a cross-functional "product trio", product, design and engineering, interviewing at least one customer every single week, and using that steady stream of evidence to populate a living opportunity solution tree instead of a fixed list of initiatives.[1]

It's a genuinely compelling argument, and it deserves better than the strawman treatment it usually gets from people defending roadmaps. Continuous discovery isn't lazy or unstructured. It's disciplined, evidence-heavy, and built around habits most teams claim to want but rarely practise. The honest question isn't whether it works. It clearly does, for teams that can meet its preconditions. The honest question is who can actually meet them.

> **This isn't "Torres is wrong."** It's "Torres is right, for a set of preconditions many regulated and enterprise product teams don't have, and here's what to do instead of pretending you have them."

READING THE FINE PRINT

What continuous discovery actually requires

Torres's method rests on preconditions that rarely get discussed as loudly as the method itself. A fair review of the book puts it plainly: the framework "assumes a degree of organisational stability and team autonomy that many product teams do not have," and weekly interviews specifically require "consistent access to users, a team with scheduling discipline, and a culture that tolerates inconclusive learning cycles."[2]

None of that is a flaw in the method. It's simply what the method costs. A product trio needs the standing authority to act on what it learns without re-litigating every decision through a governance committee. It needs a steady, permissioned supply of real customers willing to talk, every week, indefinitely. And it needs leadership comfortable funding a team whose output some weeks is "we learned this idea doesn't work," rather than a shipped feature.

> **Most teams that abandon the cadence do so for a mundane reason.** It usually isn't disagreement with the method. It's recruiting and scheduling friction grinding the weekly habit down until it quietly stops. That friction is far worse in some environments than others, and it rarely gets named as the actual cause.

REGULATED & ENTERPRISE REALITY

Where those preconditions break down

In a regulated industry, a multi-stakeholder ecosystem, or a large enterprise, the same review names the exact conditions that make weekly, autonomous, unstructured discovery genuinely difficult, not through unwillingness, but through the actual shape of the environment.[2]

- **User access is gated, not open.** Speaking to a customer about a live financial product often needs compliance sign-off, a suitability check, or a recorded line, none of which fits a same-week interview cadence.
- **Decisions are shared, not autonomous.** A product trio in a bank or government department rarely has unilateral authority to act on a single week's insight. Legal, risk, and multiple business lines have a legitimate seat at that table.
- **Planning horizons are externally imposed.** Budget cycles, regulatory change windows and board reporting often run in quarters or years, not weeks, whatever the discovery team learns in between.
- **Stability, not fluidity, is often the point.** A pension platform or a mortgage transaction system is not supposed to feel like it's continuously reinventing itself under the people relying on it.

TWO IDEAS, NOT ONE OR THE OTHER

The synthesis

01 Keep the outcome-based roadmap as the compass

The structure from this series' first playbook still does the job continuous discovery's own critics say discovery alone can't: it gives a regulated, multi-stakeholder organisation a shared, governable statement of where it's going, expressed in outcomes rather than features, that risk, compliance and the board can actually sign off on.

02 Borrow the cadence, not the autonomy Torres assumes

You don't need weekly unmoderated customer access to borrow the real habit underneath continuous discovery: a standing, protected slot for evidence to reach the team before a decision is finalised, not after. Fortnightly or monthly interviews, run through whatever compliance process your industry requires, still beat the alternative most regulated roadmaps default to: no structured customer contact between quarterly planning cycles.

PUTTING IT TOGETHER

A hybrid cadence

What this looks like on an actual calendar, for a product team inside a regulated financial services organisation.

CADENCE	TORRES'S VERSION	THE HYBRID VERSION	WHY
Roadmap	Replaced by the opportunity tree	Outcome-based, reviewed quarterly	Governable, board-ready, still outcome-led
Customer contact	Weekly, trio-led	Fortnightly or monthly, compliance-cleared	Respects gated access, still regular
Decision authority	Trio acts independently	Trio proposes, a named forum decides fast	Preserves shared accountability, avoids drift
Discovery artefact	Opportunity solution tree	Lightweight tree, feeding the quarterly outcomes	Keeps the useful tool without the weekly assumption

WHERE THIS BREAKS DOWN

Common pitfalls

- **Using "we're regulated" as a permanent excuse.** Some access is genuinely gated. Far more of it is just nobody having asked compliance what's actually possible.
- **Copying the weekly cadence anyway, and quietly abandoning it.** A cadence you can't sustain is worse than a slower one you can. Set the interval your organisation can actually keep, not the one that sounds most impressive.
- **Letting the quarterly roadmap ignore what discovery finds.** A hybrid model only works if the outcomes on the roadmap actually move when evidence says they should. Otherwise it's a discovery theatre bolted onto business as usual.
- **Treating the opportunity tree as optional homework.** It's the thing that makes the next quarterly roadmap review evidence-based instead of opinion-based. Skipping it quietly turns the hybrid back into a plain old roadmap.
- **Blaming the framework for an organisational problem.** If decisions never get faster than a quarterly cycle no matter what evidence arrives, that's a governance problem to fix directly, not a reason to abandon discovery.
- **Treating this as a permanent compromise.** As trust and track record build, the gap between this hybrid and Torres's original model can close. Aim to need fewer of these adaptations over time, not more.

THE CANVAS

Design your own hybrid cadence

Be honest about which of Torres's preconditions you genuinely lack, versus which you've simply never tested.

CADENCE	WHAT TORRES RECOMMENDS	WHAT WE CAN ACTUALLY SUSTAIN	WHY
Roadmap			
Customer contact			
Decision authority			
Discovery artefact			

THE AUTHOR

About Kevin Duncan

Kevin Duncan is a product and digital transformation leader with over a decade of experience delivering product strategy and large-scale change across financial services, government and consumer sectors in the UK.

He currently leads product strategy and transformation for the UK mortgage and property ecosystem as Product Director at Novus Strategy & Consulting, an environment where compliance, multiple stakeholders and shared decision-making are simply the operating reality.

This is a companion to his first playbook in this series, *Outcome-Based Roadmaps*, and is drawn from the same workshops.

Trying to make discovery work inside a regulated organisation?

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References

1. Torres, T. (2021) *Continuous Discovery Habits: Discover Products that Create Customer Value and Business Value*. Product Talk LLC.
2. Independent critical review of *Continuous Discovery Habits*, on the framework's organisational preconditions, published by Inigo Medina's reading library (2026).