

From Feature Factory to Outcome-Driven Organizations

A Comparative Case Study Analysis of Organizational Transformation in B2B SaaS

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Abstract:

B2B SaaS organizations frequently exhibit a pattern in which software features are delivered at pace while measurable customer value fails to keep stride - a phenomenon that Cutler [1] has termed the “feature factory.” Although prescriptive frameworks for continuous discovery and outcome-based product management are well established in the practitioner literature, empirical accounts of how organizations navigate the transition from output-driven to outcome-driven operating models remain comparatively sparse. This paper addresses that gap through a comparative case study analysis of four organizations - ING Bank Netherlands, John Deere Global IT, Getty Images, and an anonymized B2B workflow technology provider - each of which successfully disrupted entrenched feature factory dynamics. Drawing on published transformation accounts and, in one case, direct practitioner observation, the analysis identifies three categories of critical intervention: the reallocation of accountability from delivery scope to measurable outcomes, the institutionalization of continuous discovery as a structural rather than discretionary practice, and the systematic management of product risk prior to development commitment. The findings suggest that sustainable transformation is contingent on structural changes in governance and decision rights, and cannot be achieved through process adoption or training programs alone.

Keywords: Outcome-based product management, Continuous discovery, Organizational transformation, Product operating model, Feature factory, B2B SaaS, product strategy, Comparative case analysis.

1. INTRODUCTION

A recurring challenge in B2B SaaS product development is the divergence between delivery activity and customer value creation. Organizations operating in what Cutler [1] describes as a “feature factory” mode tend to exhibit high throughput - tickets close on schedule, roadmaps appear well-populated, and teams demonstrate consistent velocity - while customer-facing outcomes stagnate and business metrics remain largely unchanged. The difficulty is not one of insufficient effort but of misaligned measurement: success is defined by what has been shipped rather than by what has improved.

Attempts to address this misalignment frequently begin with symbolic rather than structural change. Roadmaps are relabeled as “outcome roadmaps,” teams are exhorted to “think like owners,” and agile ceremonies are supplemented with workshops on customer empathy. In the absence of corresponding changes to decision rights, accountability structures, and planning governance, such interventions tend to produce short-lived results. The language shifts; the underlying operating model does not.

1.1 The Research Gap

The practitioner literature offers a reasonably coherent account of what outcome-driven product management should look like. Cutler’s [1] 2016 analysis characterized feature factory behavior through a set of observable signals: teams measured on delivery speed rather than impact, roadmaps constructed as feature queues, and outcome measurement treated as an afterthought to execution. Torres [2] articulated continuous discovery as a practice in which product teams maintain weekly customer contact and deploy the Opportunity Solution Tree to structure the relationship between desired outcomes and investigative activity. Cagan [3] proposed a four-risk framework - addressing value, usability, feasibility, and viability - as a systematic approach to product validation before development resources are committed.

These frameworks are well represented in practitioner discourse. What remains less thoroughly documented is the process by which organizations move from awareness of such frameworks to their sustained institutional embedding. Existing scholarly research has examined agile adoption at scale [4] but provides insufficient granularity regarding the specific governance mechanisms and structural conditions that enable durable shifts from output to outcome measurement. This paper addresses that gap through comparative analysis of four documented organizational transformations within software operations technology contexts. The analysis attends to the following questions: What structural changes were necessary to enable the transition? What measurable outcomes confirmed that transformation had occurred? Through what mechanisms did discovery practices become embedded rather than contingent on individual initiative? And which features of successful transformations proved transferable across organizational contexts?

1.2 Theoretical Foundation

Three bodies of practitioner and academic literature inform the analytical framework applied in this study. Taken individually, each addresses a distinct dimension of the problem. Considered together, they illuminate why transformation initiatives so frequently stall, and what structural conditions appear necessary for them to take hold.

Recognizing Feature Factory Patterns: Cutler's [1] framework locates the feature factory problem in the domain of governance rather than execution capability. The critical distinction is not between teams that work hard and teams that do not, but between teams whose accountability is attached to delivery outputs and teams whose accountability is attached to measurable outcomes. Feature teams, in this framing, receive solutions from roadmaps constructed at a remove from the customer and are evaluated on implementation fidelity: was the specified capability delivered on time? Empowered product teams, by contrast, receive problem statements and are held accountable for whether relevant metrics moved.

This distinction has two implications for understanding transformation. First, it explains why process-level changes rarely produce lasting results: teams will optimize for whatever they are formally measured on, and relabeling planning artefacts does not alter the underlying accountability logic. A team instructed to behave as product owners while being evaluated against velocity and sprint completion has received contradictory signals; the measurement tends to govern behavior. Second, it surfaces the governance question that any transformation initiative must resolve: which actors hold the authority to determine which problems are worth solving, and on what basis can that determination be revised in light of new evidence?

Moe, Dingsøyr, and Rolland's [4] research on large-scale agile transformation reinforces this view, finding that organizational structure and the distribution of decision-making authority - rather than the adoption of particular methodologies - were the primary determinants of whether agile practices generated measurable improvement. Teams capable of executing agile ceremonies with fidelity could nonetheless remain embedded in feature factory dynamics if accountability remained tied to output delivery.

Continuous Discovery as Practice: Torres [2] argues that outcome ownership is structurally fragile when teams lack regular access to customer insight. Without sufficient information density, teams are poorly positioned to challenge assumptions embedded in inherited roadmaps or to propose alternative approaches grounded in evidence rather than inference. The practice Torres advocates involves weekly customer contact conducted by the team responsible for building the product - not delegated to a separate research function - on the grounds that this cadence generates the ongoing understanding necessary to make evidence-based decisions under normal delivery pressures.

The Opportunity Solution Tree provides structural scaffolding for this practice: desired outcomes occupy the apex of the framework, customer opportunities are mapped as subordinate nodes, solutions are explored only after opportunities have been validated, and experiments are designed to test specific assumptions before significant development commitments are made. This sequencing is consequential because it interrupts the most common failure mode in product development: the confident resolution of the wrong problem. Teams that collapse the distance between outcome and solution - moving directly from a stated goal to a preferred intervention without investigating the opportunity space - tend to reproduce feature factory patterns beneath a layer of outcome-oriented vocabulary.

Torres [2] further distinguishes between discovery volume and discovery quality, observing that early-stage discovery sessions are frequently too broad or too narrowly confirmatory. Teams develop the capacity to ask questions calibrated to specific opportunities through iterative practice, which means that discovery as an institutional capability matures over time rather than arriving fully formed. This observation has implications for how transformation progress should be assessed: the presence of regular customer sessions is a leading indicator, whereas the quality of insights those sessions generate constitutes the more meaningful lagging measure.

Managing Risk Before Building: Cagan's [3] four-risk framework identifies the categories of uncertainty that most reliably undermine product outcomes when they are addressed too late: value risk (the possibility that customers do not want the thing being built), usability risk (the possibility that customers cannot use it effectively), feasibility risk (the possibility that the engineering team cannot build it within the constraints available), and viability risk (the possibility that the organization cannot sustain it commercially). In output-driven operating models, these risks tend to surface during execution, after development resources have been committed and organizational direction has been set. The cost of late discovery is characteristically high: course corrections require rework, stakeholder confidence erodes, and teams learn to manage problems quietly rather than surface them as legitimate planning inputs.

Outcome-driven teams, by contrast, treat these risk categories as assumptions to be tested through lightweight investigation before meaningful resources are committed. This reorientation changes the nature of the planning conversation - shifting it from schedule and scope management toward evidence and validation - and also changes the criterion for planning completion. A team operating within this framework has not finished planning when it has specified a solution; it has finished planning when it has reduced the four risk categories to a level that justifies development investment.

The three frameworks converge on a single organising principle: sustainable improvement in product outcomes requires that the team closest to the customer problem holds both the authority to determine what should be built and the responsibility for generating and interpreting the evidence that informs that determination. When authority and evidence generation are distributed across different organizational actors - solutions arriving from one source, validation expected from another - feature factory dynamics tend to reassert themselves regardless of the terminology applied to the planning process.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1 Case Selection Strategy

Four cases were selected to represent distinct organizational contexts within software operations technology, each offering a documented instance of transition from output-based to outcome-based operating models.

Case A (Practitioner Account - Anonymized B2B Workflow Provider): This case is drawn from the author's direct experience at a large-scale operational technology company operating in the auto industry. The organization managed a regulated, partner-facing workflow domain characterized by significant ecosystem dependencies and a commercial imperative tied to processing efficiency. The case is anonymized in keeping with standard practitioner research conventions and is presented as illustrative rather than causally definitive. Its inclusion is justified by the depth of access it affords: first-hand observation of planning sessions, direct engagement with roadmap and discovery artefacts, and unmediated knowledge of operational metrics - workflow completion patterns, partner adoption rates, and support interaction volumes - that are not available in published accounts of comparable transformations.

Case B (ING Bank Netherlands): An enterprise financial services organization employing approximately 3,500 headquarters staff, which in 2015 undertook a comprehensive reorganization from traditional functional departments into approximately 350 autonomous squads grouped into 13 tribes. The case is extensively documented in publicly available materials, providing detailed accounts of both the transformation process and its measured outcomes. [5,6]

Case C (John Deere Global IT): A large-scale information technology organization serving both internal business units and external customers, which had prior experience with scaled agile frameworks before

undertaking a more thoroughgoing transformation oriented explicitly around “speed to outcomes” rather than process compliance. [7]

Case D (Getty Images): A digital media company whose transformation history offers an unusually clear contrast between a failed comprehensive waterfall project and a subsequent successful transition to agile, discovery-led delivery - making it a particularly instructive case for examining what distinguishes successful from unsuccessful transformation attempts. [8]

Cases were selected against four criteria: documented transition from output-based to outcome-based measurement; reported measurable business outcomes; sufficient published or observational detail regarding structural changes and governance mechanisms; and a software operations technology context sufficient to enable cross-case comparison.

2.2 Data Sources and Analysis

Case A: The primary data source is the author’s direct practitioner participation. This encompasses first-hand observation of planning and governance sessions, access to roadmap artefacts and discovery documentation, and direct knowledge of operational metrics accumulated over the course of the transformation. Consistent with practitioner research of this nature, the account is retrospective and is subject to the interpretive limitations inherent in single-observer reporting. Organizational confidentiality is protected through anonymization.

Cases B, C, D: Data were drawn from published case studies, practitioner interview accounts, organizational reports, and available academic analyses. For ING Bank, primary sources include a McKinsey Quarterly case study [5] and Agile Business Consortium documentation [6]. For John Deere, the primary source is Scrum Inc. case documentation [7]. For Getty Images, the primary source is a Planview transformation account [8].

Analytical approach: Cross-case analysis was conducted with reference to four comparative dimensions: the structural interventions undertaken, the governance mechanisms established, the measurement approaches adopted, and evidence of transformation durability over time. The diagnostic framework presented in Table 1 was developed as an analytical instrument grounded in observable artefacts and behaviors, with the intention of minimizing reliance on subjective cultural assessments that would be difficult to compare systematically across cases.

2.3 Diagnostic Framework

The diagnostic framework developed for this study categorizes observable signals along seven dimensions that distinguish output-driven from outcome-driven operating models. The framework was designed to be grounded in artefacts and behaviors that teams generate in the normal course of their work, rather than in survey-based assessments of culture or mindset that are not reliably available across all four cases.

Dimension	Output-Driven	Outcome-Driven
Planning	Feature lists with dates	Problem statements with metrics
Team metrics	Velocity, completion rate	Adoption, workflow improvement
Decisions	Solutions arrive externally	Teams shape solutions via discovery
Discovery	Occasional research	Weekly customer interaction
Learning	Post-launch validation	Experiments inform sequencing
Risk	Surfaces during execution	Addressed during planning
Accountability	Did we ship?	Did we move the outcome?

Table 1: Diagnostic Signals

3. CASE ANALYSIS: TRANSFORMATION PATTERNS

3.1 Case A: B2B Workflow Provider - Risk-Led Discovery in a Regulated Context

Starting Conditions: The organization operated a workflow process in a regulated B2B domain in which cycle times substantially exceeded customer expectations. A strategically significant partner segment had indicated that faster processing would serve as a condition for expanded commercial engagement. Despite several years of roadmap planning oriented toward workflow improvement, the organization had not delivered meaningful change; the breadth of the roadmap had generated interdependencies that precluded incremental delivery. Planning and review cycles were oriented around project milestone completion rather than workflow performance or partner adoption.

Transformation Approach: Rather than attempting to improve the existing roadmap, the product team challenged its foundational premise. The objective was reframed: from completing a predefined transformation program to reducing processing time sufficiently to unlock partner-driven growth. Applying the Opportunity Solution Tree methodology, the team identified the single highest-leverage bottleneck, guided by operational data and direct engagement with partner contacts.

Evidence Before Features: The team approached the validated opportunity through a structured risk reduction sequence prior to any development commitment. Value risk was addressed through direct meetings with high-volume customers and lightweight demand testing across the broader customer base. Usability risk was investigated through sessions in which operational users worked through proposed workflows using live examples, surfacing adoption-relevant issues before development began. Feasibility constraints were established in consultation with engineers, integration specialists, and compliance experts, who shaped the solution approach within the boundaries of technical and regulatory reality. Viability was confirmed through cross-functional alignment across finance, operations, legal, and sales, ensuring that the proposed solution was consistent with revenue objectives and operational capacity. This sequence represented a material departure from prior planning practice, in which these conversations had characteristically followed rather than preceded development commitments.

Pilot and Scale: Initial deployment was scoped to operationally mature customers with sufficient context to provide meaningful feedback. Iteration on discovered friction points was rapid, and the resolution of issues identified in early deployment reduced the onboarding burden for subsequent customers. As key partners adopted the new workflow and expressed support publicly, broader adoption accelerated without requiring further active intervention.

Measurable Outcomes: Following broad availability, a substantial proportion of the relevant partner segment adopted the new workflow within months. Processing performance improved significantly relative to baseline, approaching the threshold identified as commercially significant by the strategic partner segment. Support interactions increased during the pilot phase, as anticipated when established workflows are modified, but subsequently declined below baseline as discovered issues were resolved.

Durability Indicators: Several months after the initial transformation, the organization applied an equivalent approach to a distinct product domain without external prompting. Discovery practices had been incorporated into standard planning operations. Roadmap reviews were structured around outcomes, with solution discussions deferred until the relevant opportunity had been characterized through evidence.

Critical Success Factors: The regulated context of Case A placed particular demands on the risk management dimension of the transformation - explicit engagement with all four risk categories was essential rather than optional. The partner ecosystem structure required careful sequencing from pilot to scale, with early adopters selected for their capacity to generate useful feedback rather than for their commercial scale. The most consequential shift was in the locus of decision-making authority: teams with proximity to the customer were empowered to shape solutions on the basis of accumulated evidence, rather than inheriting specifications from planning processes conducted at a remove from customer reality.

3.2 Case B: ING Bank Netherlands - Enterprise-Scale Structural Reorganization

Context and Scale: In 2015, ING Bank Netherlands undertook a reorganization of approximately 3,500 headquarters staff from traditional functional departments into roughly 350 autonomous squads grouped into 13 tribes. The transformation was explicitly conceived as structural reorganization rather than process overlay, and was informed by models from technology companies including Spotify, Netflix, and Google. [5,6]

Transformation Approach: The radicalism of ING's approach was apparent from its initiation. All affected employees were placed "on mobility" and required to reapply for positions within the new structure. Selection criteria were explicitly weighted toward organizational mindset and cultural fit rather than technical knowledge or experience. This signaled, with considerable clarity, that the organization regarded substantive change as a requirement rather than a preference, and that incremental adjustment within existing roles would not be sufficient. [5]

Governance Mechanisms: Each squad was required to articulate its purpose and define the client impact metrics against which its work would be assessed prior to commencing activity. Tribes employed quarterly business reviews in which squads documented achievements, recorded learning from both successful and unsuccessful initiatives, and set objectives for the following quarter - all made available transparently across the organization. Portfolio wall planning and cross-squad daily stand-ups provided the mechanisms through which inter-squad dependencies were identified and coordinated within tribes. [5]

Measurable Outcomes: The Digital Platform tribe's Net Promoter Score moved from -30 to +30 within a year of restructuring. Employee engagement scores improved substantially. Time-to-market improved as release frequency increased. [6]

Critical Success Factors: The ING case demonstrates that comprehensive structural reorganization can achieve substantial results when executive commitment is consistent and selection for organizational fit is treated seriously. It also illustrates the cost of that approach: the disruption involved in requiring all employees to reapply demands considerable organizational tolerance for uncertainty and significant resource investment in managing the transition. The governance mechanisms ING established - particularly the transparency of quarterly business reviews and the clarity of squad-level outcome ownership - represent patterns with potential for transfer to organizations pursuing less radical transformation approaches.

3.3 Case C: John Deere Global IT - Goals-Led Scaling

Context and Challenge: John Deere's Global IT group had prior engagement with scaled agile frameworks but had not achieved the outcomes leadership sought. Two-month release cycles and Program Increment planning had reproduced what leadership characterized as "mini-waterfall" patterns beneath a surface of agile ceremony. [7]

Transformation Approach: Rather than prescribing revised processes, leadership articulated "improve speed to outcomes" as an enterprise objective and decomposed it into three measurable sub-goals: speed to understanding, construed as organizational sensitivity to customer needs; speed to decision making, construed as reducing the latency between identification of a requirement and commitment to a course of action; and speed to execution, construed as time to market while preserving quality. Teams were given significant discretion in determining how to achieve these goals, with the consequence that local adaptation was encouraged within a shared directional frame.

Measurable Outcomes: The transformation produced a reported 165% increase in output volume alongside a 63% reduction in time-to-market, with documented return on investment exceeding 100% within the measurement period. Notably, the transformation extended organically beyond the IT group: manufacturing floor teams requested agile coaching, and the operating principles developed in IT entered broader organizational vocabulary. [7]

Critical Success Factors: The John Deere case offers evidence that the articulation of outcome-oriented goals, combined with genuine team autonomy in their pursuit, can produce more durable results than the prescription of specific methodologies. The decomposition of a broad goal into measurable sub-goals provided directional clarity without constraining local adaptation. The organic extension of the model beyond IT validates the proposition that demonstrated performance tends to be a more effective driver of adoption than mandated compliance.

3.4 Case D: Getty Images - From Failed Waterfall to Discovery-Led Delivery

Context and Failure Pattern: Getty Images' "Web Vision" project, initiated in 2005, ran substantially beyond its planned timeline and delivered performance outcomes below expectations. The project engaged more than twenty teams and approximately 150 staff. Even features requiring only three to four days of development effort involved a minimum lead time of three months, owing to the release scheduling and requirements definition processes in place. The information technology organization experienced the characteristic feature factory tension: teams were working at capacity while business stakeholders remained unsatisfied with the rate of meaningful delivery. [8]

Transformation Catalyst: A single team, responsible for search functionality, transitioned to Scrum independently of any organization-wide initiative. The team established a product backlog and conducted sprint reviews. Within a month of beginning, stakeholders reported visible working software - the first such evidence in an organization accustomed to long periods of invisible development activity preceding eventual delivery.

Scaling Pattern: The Search team's visible results constituted a demonstration of the model's viability that proved more persuasive than advocacy could have been. Other teams observed that discovery-led incremental delivery had outperformed comprehensive upfront planning in both timeline and stakeholder confidence. Sprint lengths shortened progressively as teams discovered that higher-frequency review cycles accelerated their learning. The organizational focus shifted from requirements delivery toward stakeholder visibility and continuous outcome validation. [8]

Critical Success Factors: The Getty Images case illustrates that transformation need not begin with organization-wide initiative. A single team operating a demonstrably superior model can create conditions for organic adoption, provided its results are visible and its approach is accessible to other teams. The contrast between the failed Web Vision project and the successful transformation is instructive: the difference was not in the level of effort or the caliber of individuals involved, but in the mechanisms by which success was defined, measured, and made visible.

4. CROSS-CASE FINDINGS: COMMON TRANSFORMATION PATTERNS

4.1 Decision Rights Shifted from Hierarchy to Teams

Across all four cases, the most consequential change was not the adoption of a particular methodology but the redistribution of decision-making authority from senior hierarchy to teams operating closer to the customer. In Case A, this shift was manifested in the displacement of centralized roadmap planning by team-level problem definition grounded in operational evidence. At ING Bank, each squad was charged with documenting its purpose and agreeing on the metrics through which client impact would be assessed; squads assumed responsibility for daily activity management, while tribes maintained alignment through transparent quarterly business reviews [5]. At John Deere, leadership defined "speed to outcomes" as an enterprise objective and decomposed it into measurable sub-goals, while teams retained discretion over the means of achievement - an arrangement that reduced decision latency as authority migrated toward execution [7]. At Getty Images, the transition from requirements-driven waterfall to team-level product ownership altered the governance of scope and approach decisions, affording teams the authority to adapt in response to stakeholder feedback gathered through iterative demonstrations [8].

What each of these cases required, though in different forms, was reciprocal commitment: from executive leadership, acceptance that agreed features might change in response to discovery; and from teams, acceptance of accountability for outcomes rather than merely for delivery throughput.

4.2 Discovery Became Continuous Through Structure, Not Training

In none of the four cases did regular customer contact become routine primarily through cultural advocacy or training programs. In each case, it became routine because organizational structures were established that made customer contact operationally necessary and rewarded its outputs.

In Case A, weekly customer sessions acquired the status of standing practice because continuous evidence flow was a prerequisite for making credible planning decisions under delivery pressure. At ING Bank, squads were evaluated against client impact metrics, which made customer understanding a condition of demonstrating progress; tribes documented learning from both successful and unsuccessful initiatives in quarterly reviews that were available transparently across the organization [5,6]. At John Deere, “speed to understanding” was an explicit and measurable enterprise goal, such that demonstrating customer sensitivity was embedded in how teams were assessed rather than being treated as supplementary good practice [7]. At Getty Images, the cadence of monthly stakeholder demonstrations created a structural forcing function - teams required real feedback to show meaningful progress - and, over time, teams independently shortened sprint cycles as they discovered that higher-frequency feedback accelerated their learning [8].

The evidence across cases also supports Torres’ [2] observation that discovery quality develops through repetition. Teams in early stages of practice tended to generate insight that was either too broad or insufficiently tied to the specific opportunity under investigation; the capacity to ask well-calibrated questions emerged through sustained engagement with the practice rather than being immediately available.

4.3 Risk Surfaced Earlier Through Explicit Frameworks

In all four cases, risks that had previously surfaced during execution - after resources were committed and direction set - were instead addressed during the planning phase. This change was not self-executing; it depended on the availability of explicit frameworks that gave teams and stakeholders shared vocabulary for naming and discussing uncertainty.

In Case A, the four-risk framework provided a common language that changed the character of planning conversations. Rather than requests for additional time grounded in vague discomfort, discussions became structured around the question of which risk category warranted the next investigative action. At ING Bank, the requirement that squads document purpose and impact criteria before commencing work created natural early visibility into unresolved assumptions; portfolio wall planning and daily inter-tribe stand-ups established mechanisms through which cross-squad dependencies could be surfaced before they reached the critical path [5]. At John Deere, explicit organizational goals for “speed to decision making” and “speed to execution” generated standing conversations about what was impeding progress, rather than allowing impediments to accumulate unacknowledged [7]. The Getty Images case is particularly instructive in this regard: the contrast between the Web Vision project, in which risks materialized late and proved costly to address, and the subsequent transformation, in which sprint-based review cycles surfaced issues while they remained tractable, provides direct evidence of the timing effect [8].

A consistent observation across cases is that the specific frameworks employed mattered less than the existence of shared vocabulary that normalized the expression of concern. In contexts where raising a risk was culturally interpreted as obstruction or insufficient commitment, risks tended not to surface until they became unavoidable. Where frameworks provided a legitimate register for articulating uncertainty, teams used them.

4.4 Measurable Outcomes Validated Transformation

In each case, the credibility of the new operating model was established not through the advocacy of its proponents but through early measurable improvements in customer-facing metrics - distinct from the delivery metrics, such as velocity and completion rate, that had previously defined success.

In Case A, workflow performance improved to a degree that approached the commercially significant threshold identified by the strategic partner segment, and partner adoption scaled rapidly following broad availability. At ING Bank, the Net Promoter Score for the Digital Platform tribe improved from -30 to +30 within a year of restructuring, accompanied by substantial improvements in employee engagement [6]. John Deere documented a 165% increase in output alongside a 63% reduction in time-to-market, with return on investment exceeding 100% within the measurement period [7]. At Getty Images, features that had previously required three months of elapsed time from specification to release - despite involving only three to four days

of development effort - became deliverable within monthly sprint cycles, with visible increments available for stakeholder review throughout [8].

In all four cases, the transformation spread beyond its point of origin once these results became visible. ING's model influenced adjacent business units; John Deere's operating changes were requested by manufacturing floor teams that had observed IT's results; and Getty Images' initial squad became an internal reference point for other teams seeking to replicate the approach. This pattern is consistent with the proposition that demonstrated effectiveness is a more reliable engine of adoption than mandated process change.

4.5 Transformation Required Structural, Not Just Process Change

Across all cases, the transformations that produced durable results involved changes to governance structures - to decision rights, measurement systems, and accountability arrangements - rather than to operational processes alone. Cases in which new practices were layered onto existing structures without corresponding changes to governance produced limited or short-lived improvement.

In Case A, the most consequential structural change was the reorientation of planning review cycles: agenda sequencing placed outcome evidence prior to solution discussion, and questions of organizational evidence preceded questions of delivery status. At ING Bank, the transformation involved a comprehensive reorganization in which all affected staff were placed on mobility and required to reapply for positions, with selection criteria explicitly weighted toward cultural and organizational fit rather than technical experience alone - a structural signal that the organization regarded the change as categorical rather than incremental [5]. John Deere's transformation was explicitly described as holistic, extending beyond development teams to encompass infrastructure, operations, and business partner relationships, with the intent of ensuring that the conditions of outcome-oriented working were present across the full value chain [7]. At Getty Images, the failed Web Vision project had operated within the organization's existing hierarchical decision structure; the subsequent transformation required substantive changes to how decisions were made and by whom, rather than modifications to the ceremonial structure of delivery [8].

The evidence from these cases suggests that the durability of transformation is a function of whether the underlying governance architecture has been altered. Process changes create temporary conditions that tend to erode under delivery pressure; structural changes alter the incentives and constraints within which teams operate, making the desired behaviors self-reinforcing rather than dependent on sustained external effort.

5. PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

5.1 Actionable Guidance for Product Organizations

The comparative findings across four cases suggest several practical orientations for organizations seeking to move from output-driven to outcome-driven operating models.

Diagnostic assessment should precede intervention. Observable signals - what is measured, what is rewarded, what determines funding allocation - are more reliable indicators of the prevailing operating model than organizational self-descriptions. Organizations that assess their current state through this lens are better positioned to identify where structural rather than process change is required.

Discovery time must be protected through structural means. Where customer contact and experimental activity are treated as desirable but discretionary, delivery pressure consistently displaces them. The cases examined suggest that discovery becomes reliably embedded only when it is made structurally necessary - through measurement against outcome metrics that require customer evidence, or through planning processes that cannot proceed without it.

Risk management should be made an explicit planning discipline. Teams benefit from shared frameworks that provide legitimate vocabulary for surfacing assumptions and uncertainties as planning inputs rather than as admissions of inadequacy. The specific framework matters less than its consistent use and the organizational signal it sends about the legitimacy of raising concerns.

Transformation is most reliably initiated at the scope of a single team with a single well-defined outcome. The evidence across cases suggests that organic spread driven by visible results tends to be more durable than adoption imposed through organizational mandate.

5.2 Limitations and Future Research

This analysis examined documented transformations in four specific organizational contexts - a regulated B2B workflow domain, enterprise banking, large-scale IT operations, and digital media. Case selection was based on the availability of sufficient documentation to permit comparative analysis rather than on controlled sampling designed to ensure representational breadth. The extent to which findings generalize to consumer product contexts, platform businesses, or infrastructure-oriented organizations cannot be determined from the present evidence.

The reliance on published accounts and retrospective practitioner documentation introduces limitations familiar to case study research of this kind: verification of reported outcomes is not always possible, and materials selected for public dissemination may systematically underrepresent evidence that contradicts the prevailing narrative of success. Case A, while benefiting from direct observational access, is subject to the interpretive limitations of single-observer retrospective reporting and cannot be externally validated without compromising organizational confidentiality.

A further constraint is that all four cases examined were characterized by supportive executive leadership and sufficient organizational resource to sustain transformation investment. The conclusions drawn may not extend straightforwardly to organizations facing severe resource constraints, actively resistant leadership cultures, or regulatory environments that impose additional constraints on the pace or character of structural change.

Future research would benefit from focused attention on organizations that initiated transformation and did not sustain it, with the aim of distinguishing between conditions that are necessary and those that are merely facilitating. Quantified analyses of the relationship between discovery investment and outcome movement across multiple contexts would strengthen the evidential basis for investment recommendations. Longitudinal examination beyond a two-year horizon would provide evidence on whether the structural changes described in these cases generate durable institutional capability or whether erosion occurs as organizational memory of the transformation recedes. Finally, the specific mechanisms through which discovery practices become institutionally embedded - rather than remaining dependent on individual practitioner commitment - merit more systematic investigation than the present cases support.

6. CONCLUSION

The evidence assembled across four organizational cases converges on a conclusion that is both consistent with the theoretical frameworks discussed in Section 1.2 and arguably underappreciated in implementation practice: product organizations do not escape feature factory dynamics through the adoption of new vocabularies or the provision of training in agile methodologies. They escape through deliberate changes to the governance structures that determine who holds decision rights, what is measured, and how accountability is distributed.

The four cases examined span markedly different organizational contexts - a regulated partner-facing B2B workflow, enterprise banking, large-scale industrial IT, and digital media - yet exhibit a common pattern. In each case, measurable improvement in customer-facing outcomes followed from three categories of change: the redistribution of decision-making authority to teams with proximate customer knowledge; the institutionalization of discovery as a structural practice rather than a discretionary activity; and the displacement of risk discovery from the execution phase to the planning phase through explicit frameworks and shared vocabulary. In each case, transformation persisted because it produced visibly better results than the model it replaced, and those results created conditions for organic extension beyond the initial point of intervention.

Product organizations facing this challenge must resolve a governance question before a methodology question: which actors hold the authority to determine what problems are worth solving, and how are those actors held accountable for whether those problems are actually resolved? The cases suggest that where this question is answered in favor of teams closest to the customer, and where that answer is reflected in measurement systems and planning structures, the conditions are established for sustained improvement. Where authority and accountability remain misaligned - where teams are measured on outputs while being

asked to deliver outcomes - the feature factory dynamic tends to reassert itself regardless of the sophistication of the frameworks nominally in use.

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