Customer discovery for a startup developing a service for people with diabetes

The one where I helped a product team talk to customers

An early-stage startup developing a service for people with diabetes needed help answering the questions:

*"Who is our customer? What problem are we solving for them?"*

Scenario

- The start-up's product team wanted to learn about how to *talk to customers* to ensure their product was grounded in real user needs.

Task

- I took the product team through one iteration of the **Customer Discovery** framework and helped them build their own customer development blueprint.

I helped the product team articulate **customer and product hypotheses**

CUSTOMER DISCOVERY

STATE HYPOTHESES

DESIGN EXPERIMENTS

TEST HYPOTHESES

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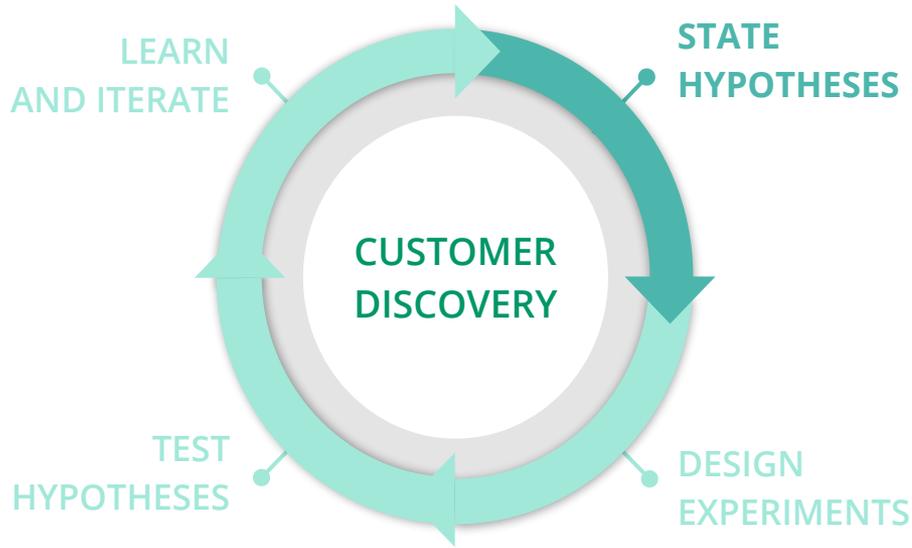
Outcome

Team **alignment** and a list of prioritized customer and product **hypotheses.**
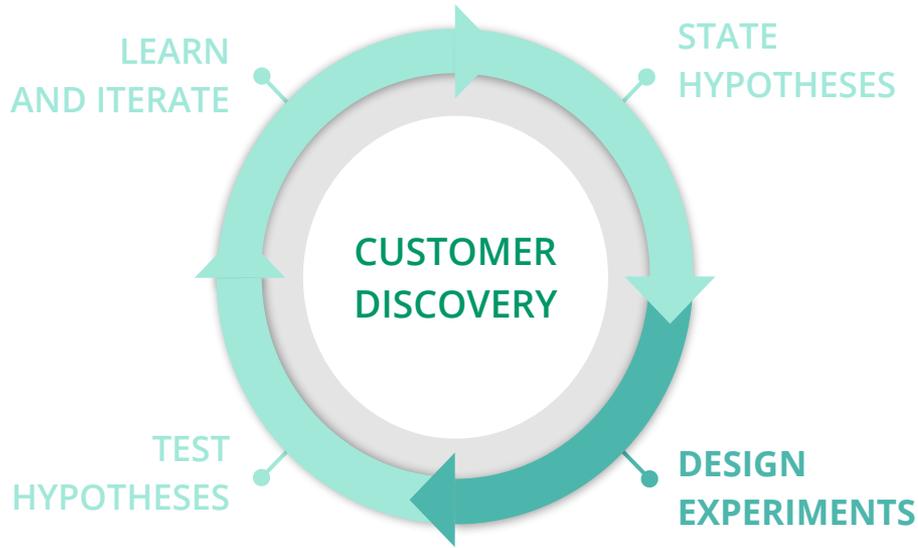
Challenge

Defining **specific** hypotheses that could be tested through customer interviews.

- Hypotheses evolved from "*people with diabetes are dissatisfied with their current health*" to "*people who have been recently diagnosed with diabetes feel confused about what makes their glucose levels fluctuate during the day*".

I ran **skill building** activities on how to conduct effective customer interviews

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Outcome

Customer **interview strategy** and **topic map.**

Challenge

Staying **focused** on "must-ask" questions.

- The team was interested in exploring a range of topics that, while interesting, would not help them test their hypotheses.

I conducted **customer interviews** to test customer and product hypotheses

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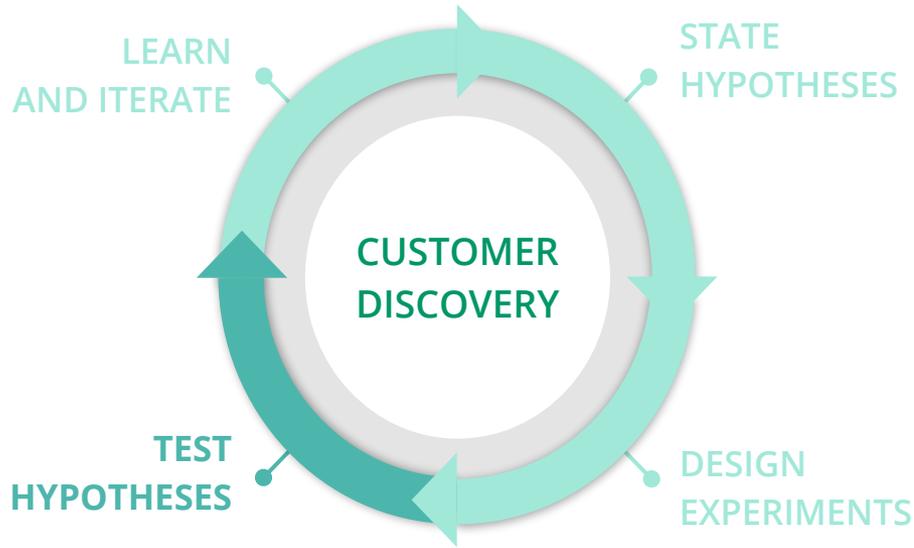
Outcome

The team gradually joined in and, by the end of the process, felt **confident** conducting insightful interviews independently.
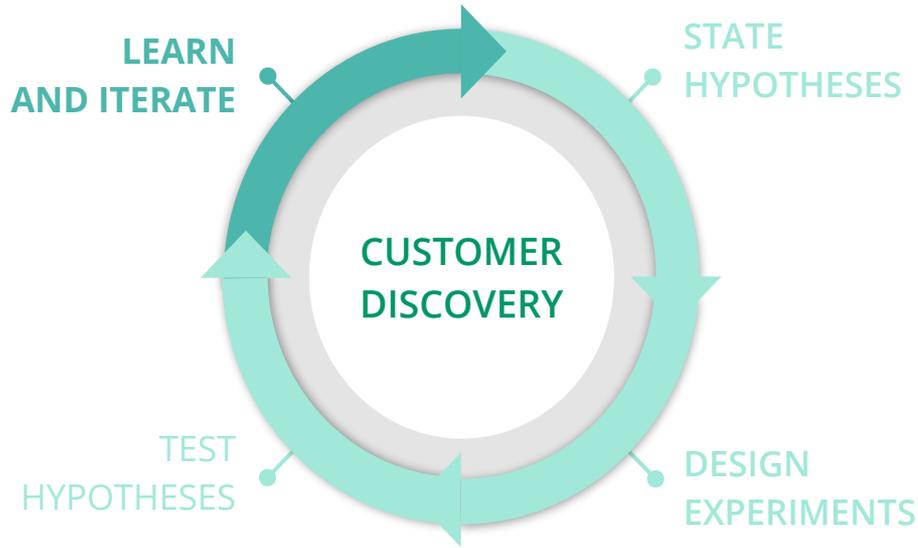
Challenge

Avoiding **generic, hypothetical and leading questions.**

- The team often slipped into sales-pitch mode by asking questions like *"would you say a product like this would help you do X, Y and Z?"*

The Problem > My Approach > Lessons Learned

I **analysed interview data** and identified preliminary customer segments

Outcome

Customer segments and early data patterns were used to refine hypotheses for further customer discovery iterations.

Challenge

Managing **frustration** when clear patterns didn't emerge right away.

- The team learned that customer development can be an ongoing effort which runs alongside (and not only prior to) product development.

The fine balance between 'standing my ground' as the methods expert and letting the client experiment with their own ideas, even when it meant making mistakes.

- At times, the product team questioned the proposed method.
  - *"Why do we need so much time for 'Stating Hypotheses'?" "Why do we need time for sense-making between interviews?"*
- Where the team felt strongly about a vague hypothesis or hypothetical interview questions, I encouraged them to explore those anyway, and then reflect on the results.
  - The team learned why vague hypotheses are hard to test and how asking hypothetical questions can lead to biased or shallow responses.
- Action learning and ongoing feedback proved successful.
  - The team appreciated the opportunity to try their ideas and felt that they learned more by actually making mistakes.

"The main learning for me was around how to ask good questions. It is incredible how much more you can learn by asking about specific events in the past, instead of generic or hypothetical questions. Now I feel a lot more confident conducting interviews and eliciting actionable insights." - VP of Product