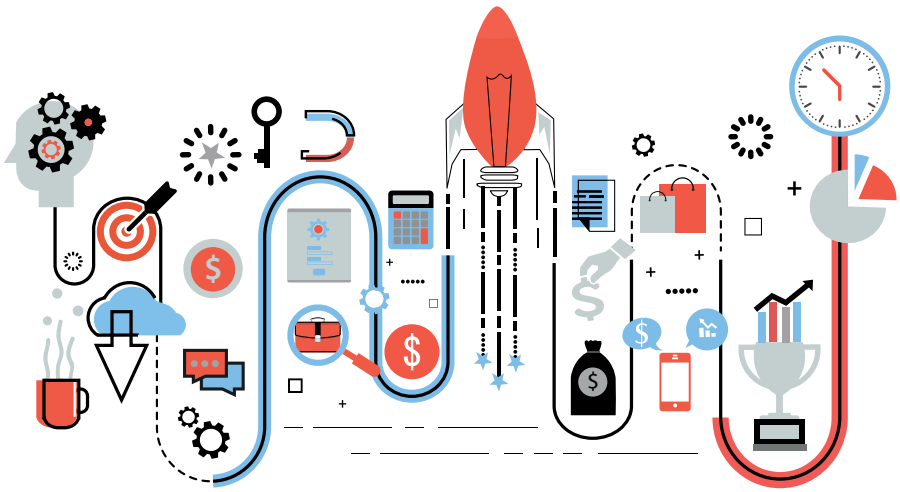

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FULL STACK DILEMMA IN STARTUPS

Today, Indonesia is a hotbed for e-commerce startups. With 2017 forecasted growth of 5.1%, we can expect to see more startups. The thing is, we cannot easily predict which ones will thrive and which ones will die. As the Y Combinator co-founder Paul Graham once said: "What I tell founders is not to sweat the business model too much at first. The most important task at first is to build something people want. If you do not do that, it will not matter how clever your business model is." The thing is, deciding what people want and when to start marketing often takes a village—especially when the founders do not see eye to eye.

Founders can be broadly divided into two types: Technical and non-technical. Technical founders are usually engineers, which are also called full-stack founders. Non-technical founders are likely marketers, which are also called front-end founders. These two group do not always have the same mindsets on many issues. One issue is that of the "full-stack." in startups with only one technical founder, usually full-stack dilemma occurs, when coding is the only thing that matters, according to Luke Fitzpatrick, who teaches startup entrepreneurship at Sydney University.

Graham wrote that in many cases, the best founders are full-stack developers. Fitzpatrick, however, thought that there are risks with that structure. Fitzpatrick coined the term "wavelength conflict," to refer to the conflict between front-end non-technical marketing founders and technical founders, as they think on different wavelengths.

Nietzsche summed it well: "It is not conflict of opinions that has made history so violent but conflict of belief in opinions, that is to say conflict of convictions." Thus, the founding model options are: (A) having technical founders only, or (B) having both technical and non-technical (marketing) founders. While which founding model is better is still debatable, having both front-end and technical co-founders has three key advantages:

1. It allows pre-launch marketing done by front-end co-founders at least three months in advance, while the technical co-founders are working on finalizing the product before the launch date. This would allow for a more synchronous performance.
2. A well-designed site with intuitive functionality and compelling web copy greatly affects user experience. The bare-bone minimum viable product (MVP) may be enticing to a technical audience but would not attract non-technical customers.
3. Many full-stack developers have the so-called "hacker mentality," where they combine codes and release them as something new, which can be a buggy product. By doing pre-launch marketing, they have more time to test the products for bugs.

In conclusion, worry not about the business model at first. Fret more about who are the co-founders, as they make important decisions about the business. Whenever possible, combine both technical and non-technical founders, to allow for marketing and technical activities to work together in creating a sustainable startup.