Product Thinking in Acquisitions

DITAP Refresh

June 12, 2025

Agenda

- Project background
- Research plan
- Key findings
- Incorporate feedback

Project background

Background

DITAP
- Delivery of digital services course
- Created in 2014
- Undergoing refresh and updates
- Create two new adaptations:
  - DITAP Essentials
  - Product Thinking in Acquisitions

Research plan

Research information

- FAC-P/PM and FAC-COR professionals
- Email request for participation
- Participants scheduled interviews via calendly
- Interviews conducted via zoom

Good morning!

My name is Kelly Smith and I'm a Senior UX Strategist on the DITAP Refresh project. I work for CivicActions, a government contracting company. As part of our work, we are creating a new adaptation of the DITAP Curriculum, aimed specifically around product thinking in digital acquisitions. I'd love to speak with you, if you're interested, to get your feedback in terms of what this should - and shouldn't - include. I imagine this interview will take between 20 and 30 minutes, and your input will be vital in helping us develop the curriculum for this next adaptation. If you're interested in speaking with me via a Zoom interview, please use the link below to schedule the interview. If you aren't interested in participating, no further action is needed from you. Thank you for your consideration, and I hope to speak to you soon!
Thank you,

Kelly Smith
Senior UX Strategist
DITAP Refresh Team | CivicActions

Schedule your interview with me!

Research stats

- 11 participants
  - CMS, USDA, and IRS
  - 7 women, 4 men
- 30-minute sessions
- 5 questions

Research goals

To answer:

- The most challenging aspects of working on a digital acquisition;
- The information our participants have now that they wish they had when they worked on their first acquisition;
- The top three things participants think every PM needs to know about the digital acquisition process;
- What it means to lead with a product mindset; and
- How do participants evaluate demos and collaborate with vendors?

Key findings

Results

What are the most challenging aspects of working on a digital acquisition?

- Role definitions (~38%)
- Understanding expectations (~15%)
- Standard contract language (~12%)
- Digital services definitions (~9%)

What are the most challenging aspects of working on a digital acquisition?

Other 26.5% — 9
Digital services definition 8.8% — 3
Standard language 11.8% — 4
Role definitions 38.2% — 13
Underst… 14.7% — 5
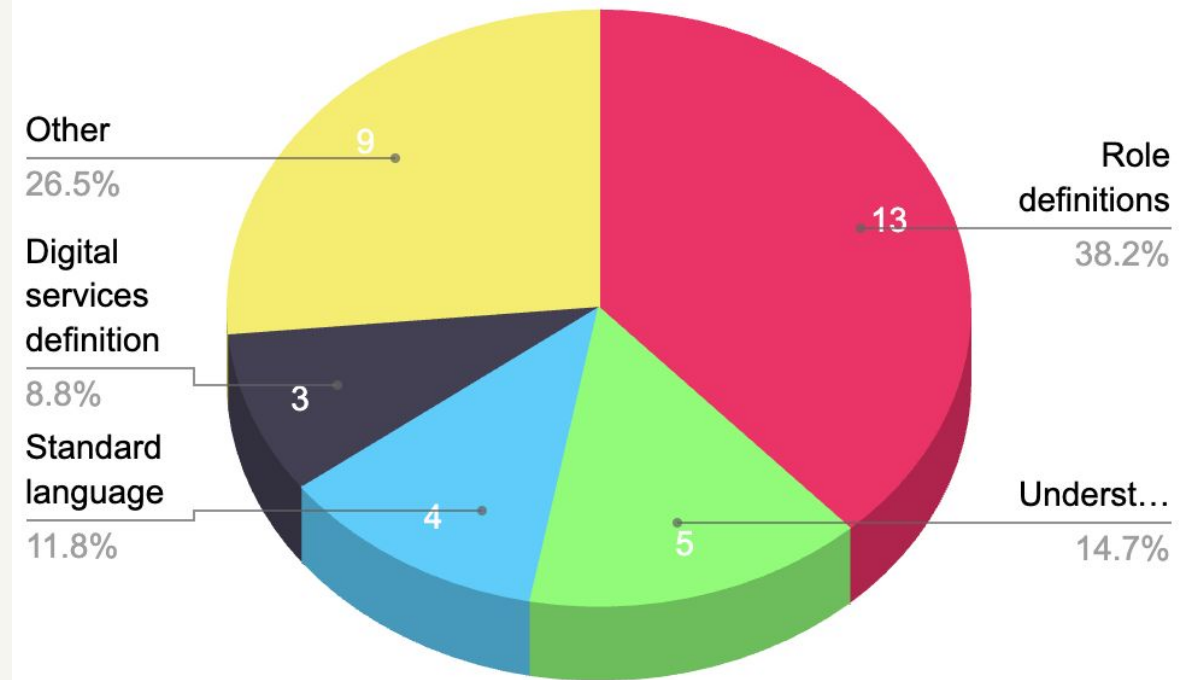
Results

What information do you have now that you wish you had when you worked on your first acquisition?

- More resources (35%)
- Team dynamics (30%)
- Standard contract components (20%)
- Underperforming teams (15%)

What information do you have now that you wish you had when you worked on your first acquisition?


- More resources — 7 — 18.9%
- Team dynamics — 6 — 16.2%
- Standard contract compon… — 4 — 10.8%
- Other — 17 — 45.9%
- Addressi… — 3 — 8.1%
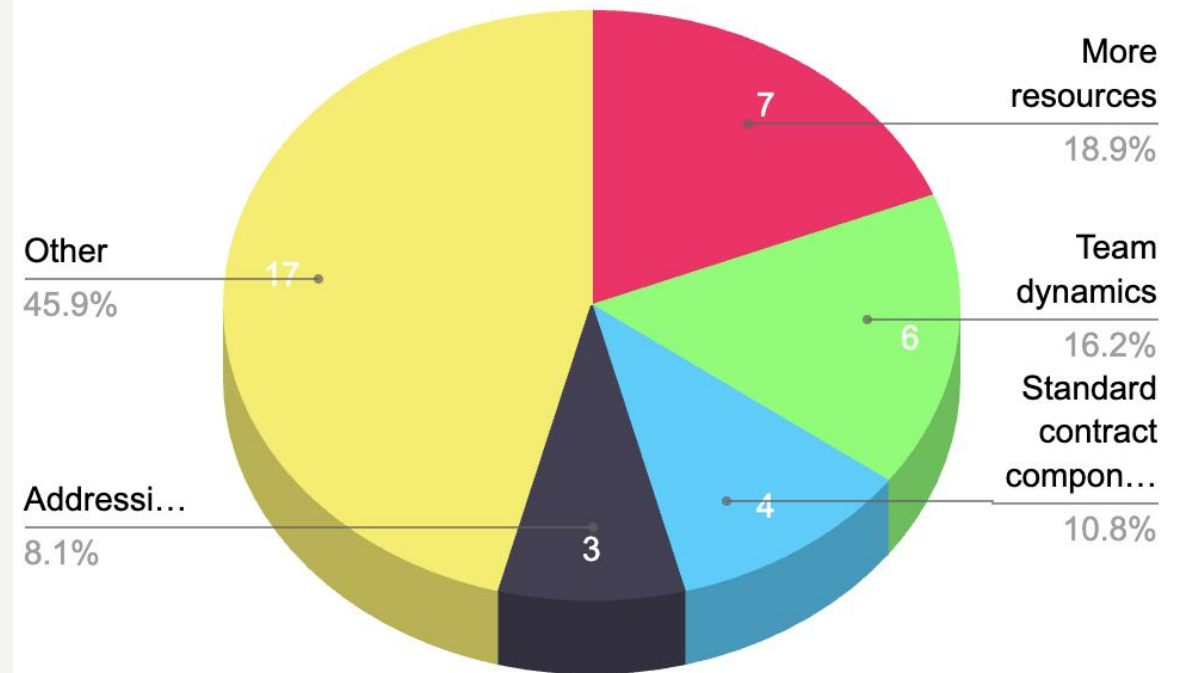
Results

What are the top 3 things you think every PM needs to know about the digital acquisition process?

- Clear definitions (~36%)
- Standardization (~20%)
- Flexible & compliant (~12%)
- Unbiased evaluations (~12%)

What are the top 3 things you think every PM needs to know about the digital acquisition process?

Other 20% — 5

Unbiased evaluati… 12% — 3

Flexible & compliant 12% — 3

Clear definitions 9 — 36%

Standar… 5 — 20%
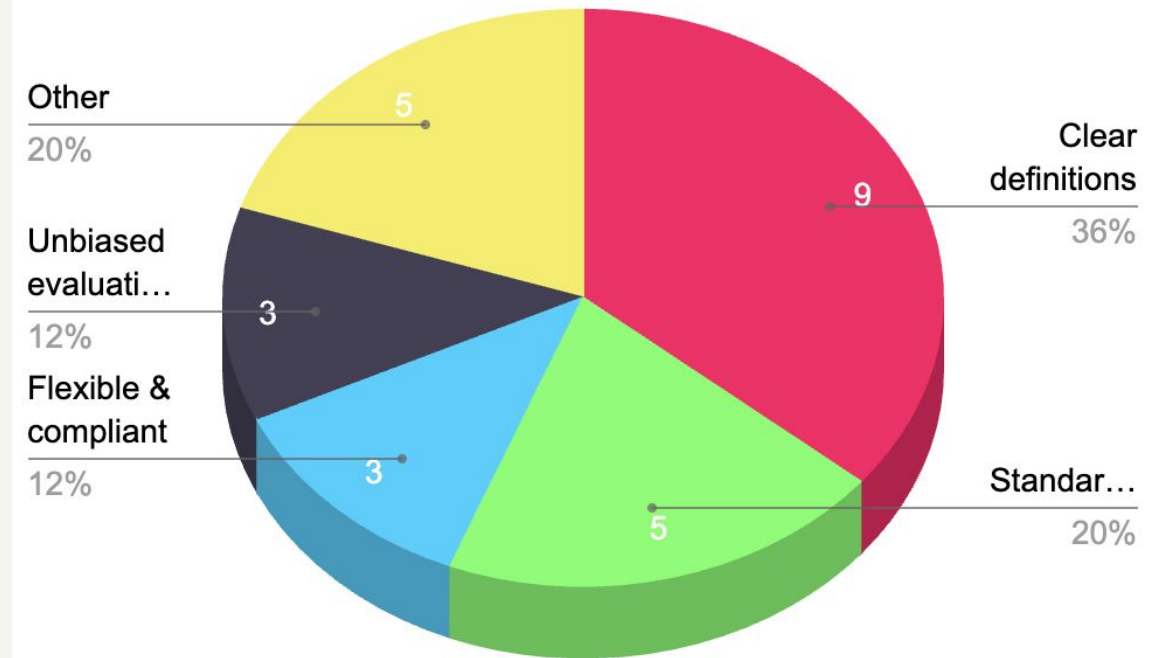
Results

What does it mean to you to lead with a product mindset?

- Outcomes over processes (~35%)
- Customer–focused (~22%)
- End results (~17%)
- Innovation vs repurposing (~13%)

What does it mean to you to lead with a product mindset?

Other 13%

Innovation vs repurpos… 13%

End results 17.4%

Outcomes over processes 34.8%

Customer-focused 21.7%
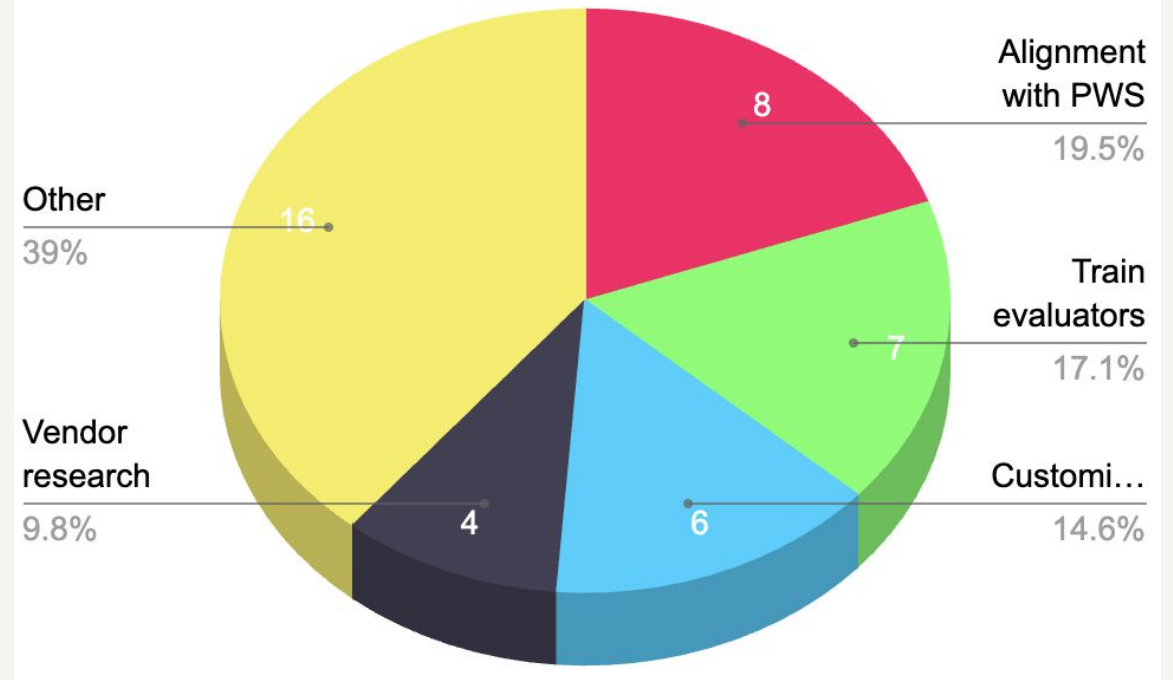
Balance | Openness | Care

Results

How do you evaluate demos and collaborate with vendors?

- Alignment with PWS (~20%)
- Train evaluators (~17%)
- Customization (~15%)
- Vendor research (~10%)

How do you evaluate demos and collaborate with vendors?

- Alignment with PWS 19.5% (8)
- Train evaluators 17.1% (7)
- Customi... 14.6% (6)
- Vendor research 9.8% (4)
- Other 39% (16)

Notable quotes

What are the most challenging aspects of working on a digital acquisition?

- You have to remember that the people writing the proposal information are writing every 5-6 years; it's not something that creates muscle memory.

_____

- Challenges are often completed by an agency's A-team, but that's not ends up doing the work. You have to fully understand the role of each team member to know if it's a true skill match.

Balance | Openness | Care

Notable quotes

What information do you have now that you wish you had when you worked on your first acquisition?

- Teams are interdependent: If one team member or practice area starts to fall over, it causes everyone to fall over.

_____

- That success can look, at first, like failure – like an initial MVP that misses the mark, but pivots and iterates along the way – it started as a failure, but that failure led to its ultimate success

Balance | Openness | Care

Notable quotes

What are the top 3 things you think every PM needs to know about the digital acquisition process?

- They're still focusing on the how-to instead of asking what you want this vendor to deliver. Focus on the outcomes, not how they get there

_____

- If you focus on the "how", you end up doing the work to fit the contract rather than designing the contract to fit the customer need.

Notable quotes

What does it mean to you to lead with a product mindset?

- Understanding the value to the customers – just being the best in a certain arena doesn't mean you'll provide the best value to the customer.

_____

- Focus on the outcome: what is this thing meant to do? Who does it serve? What makes it work well?

Balance | Openness | Care

Notable quotes

How do you evaluate demos and collaborate with vendors?

- They have to take what we need and design around it, not take our needs and fit it into a pre-designed solution.

_____

- Show me how this works, don't tell me how it works. Tell me why your solution is better than any others I will receive.

_____

- I can tell in 2 seconds if it's a canned (or AI) response. I want to know that you've customized it for my needs; that you're not just rage-applying.

Balance | Openness | Care

Incorporating feedback

How can we incorporate the feedback?

- Share feedback with SMEs
- Enhance existing curriculum content
- Build new training content
- Standardize as much as possible
- Be consistent
- Use standard industry language
- Clearly define team roles

Questions?