20 Principles Every Product Manager Must Know

**1.The Fourteen Product Questions**  
If you can clearly articulate the following fourteen steps, you will have a thorough understanding of this industry. Give it a try:

【Product Value】What problem does the product solve, and what user need does it fulfill? To what extent can it be resolved?

【User Scenario】What is the primary usage scenario of the product? Can you briefly describe the core user scenario?

【User Targeting】How do you define/locate the target user group for the product?

【Market Prospects】What is the market potential of the product? Is it a Blue Ocean, Red Ocean, Long Tail, or a Sunrise/Sunset industry?

【Competitive Analysis】Who are the competitors, including both explicit and implicit ones? What are the product’s competitive barriers?

【Substitutability】Can the product be easily replaced by other solutions?

【Product Features】What are the main business modules and core functions of the product? Why are these features necessary?

【Business Model】What is the product’s business model? What corresponding revenue model does it employ?

【Product Risks】What potential risks might the product face? How can possible issues be addressed?

【Key Challenges】What obstacles might arise during the product’s development? What is the core(contradiction/challenge)?

【Metrics and Data】Implement thorough product data tracking and analysis, and quantify standard product metrics.

【Product Roadmap】Plan the product roadmap meticulously, designing the requirements/features for each version.

【Product Lifecycle】Estimate the product lifecycle, define the duration of each stage, and develop corresponding strategies.

【Product Execution】Mobilize all available resources to drive the successful implementation of the product.

The Growth Drivers of a Product Manager  
A product manager’s growth comes from: practice, trial and error, learning from experience, and iterating through repeated attempts. Therefore, both 【an environment that allows trial and error】 and 【a sincere heart unafraid of making mistakes】 are extremely valuable.  
A crucial prerequisite is that you must first thoroughly understand the product—otherwise, practice and experimentation become ineffective.

If you are fortunate enough to be in such an environment, then even when facing complex market conditions, skepticism, and hesitation from all sides, never give up the resolve to “try one more time” and the courage to “fight relentlessly.”

**3.The Core Competence of a Product Manager**The most critical competence of a product manager—yes, I’m referring to 【competence】, not just 【skills】—is the ability to 【identify problems】 and 【solve problems】. Every other skill serves these two core capacities.

You might say product managers need to conduct research, analyze data, delve deeply into the industry, and so on—all of that is aimed at uncovering what issues exist in the current product. Similarly, product planning, design, technical understanding, prototyping, writing PRDs, creating product documentation, and more are all skills used to solve problems.  
Even capabilities like commercialization planning, user growth, and brand exposure are skills a product manager can possess—if they’re needed to tackle corresponding challenges.

Therefore, the 【Product Manager】 is a role with the fewest inherent limitations. Its very purpose is to solve problems 【by all means possible】—provided, of course, one has the ability to identify issues and a clear sense of the product’s goals.

1. **Start from User Thinking**  
   It’s not about seeing things from just one user’s perspective (your own), but from the perspectives of all users—or at least the majority. That’s why building a solid seed user group is essential for C-end products, and why SaaS product managers should frequently engage with customers and immerse themselves in the front lines. The underlying goal is always to deeply understand users and the business.

Being able to shift into the user’s perspective at any time also means being able to switch back to the product designer’s perspective at will. That’s what makes a product manager—otherwise, you’d just be a user.

**5.Tracing the Origin of Product Decisions Is Crucial**As a product manager, one essential mindset is to consistently trace back to the origins of product decisions. Why was a feature initially created? What problem was it meant to solve? Why was it designed in a particular way? What was the underlying logic? These are critical questions that must be clearly understood.

On the surface, tracing back seems to be about finding the starting point, but its true purpose is to uncover the product’s fundamental goals and essence. A product or feature is designed to deliver value to users—a value that is often reflected in outcomes. Tracing back, therefore, involves moving from results to process, and from process to motivation. It is a reverse-engineering of requirements. Though it works backward, the goal is to clarify the purpose and value, and to understand the logic behind how needs were addressed throughout the process.

However, tracing back isn’t only about reverse-engineering the product—it also requires examining the context of the requirement across time. A requirement without context is meaningless.

**6.The Essential Qualities of a Product Manager**A product manager always keeps an evolving product architecture diagram in mind; they also continuously refine an effective product roadmap.  
A product manager consistently uses and reflects on the product—anytime, anywhere.  
A product manager must remember that every product iteration should bring the product closer to the overall business objectives.  
Every communication by a product manager should be actionable, effective, and unambiguous.

**7.Valid User/Customer Needs Matter Most**  
If you come across a successful app with a smooth experience, don’t simply attribute its success to great user experience. Always remember: valid user/customer needs are the “1”, while user experience—including interaction and visual UI—are the “0’s” that follow.  
First, fulfill usability for the user/customer at the lowest feasible cost. Then, through continuous iteration and optimization, you can achieve ease of use.

**8.**Analyzing Competitors****  
The value of analyzing competitors: ****Learn from them → Surpass them → Outprofit them****.  
First, understand their business model and draw inspiration where appropriate. Then, through continuous product iteration, strive to outperform them. Ultimately, achieve greater commercial success than your competitors.

**9.Product Manager Workflow**  
Keep these principles in mind:  
Never make impulsive promises to business stakeholders — when it comes to execution, your head will explode. Always communicate clearly with the business.

Product architecture isn’t about looking cool or sounding impressive in reports. It must be built on thorough analysis of the industry and business. If you’re unsure, use business processes to connect the dots.

When organizing requirements, always remember:  
For which users, under what circumstances, to accomplish what tasks, and for what purpose?

Product features serve both business stakeholders and end-users.  
The ultimate goal of features for business stakeholders is to streamline operations, while features for end-users aim to enhance usability.

Module flowcharts and PRDs must be clear and validated in advance.  
Remember: a minor product change during the process can lead to a major launch delay.

Data never lies—if it seems misleading, it’s likely due to a lack of analysis.

**10.Product Managers Understanding Technology**Keep in mind that a product manager’s understanding of technology isn’t about becoming an architect themselves —  
It’s about grasping the logic behind technical implementation.

**11. The Value of a Product Manager**  
To thrive within an organization, the most important thing is to demonstrate your value — only then will the organization value you.  
The core value of a product manager lies in decision-making and proposing solutions.  
But remember:

If a solution fails to gain user acceptance, its value is zero.

If a solution isn’t implemented, its value is also zero.

If a solution leads to critical flaws in product logic, its value remains zero.

1. **The 12 Principles of 12YJ**

A PM must first be a power user of their own product.

Always view, experience, and think from the user’s perspective.

User experience is a complete and non-reusable process.

Focus on effectiveness—don’t build useless features; focus on quality—don’t build unthoughtful features.

Discover and micro-innovate based on existing needs—do not invent needs.

Deciding what not to do is often more important than deciding what to do.

Users are difficult to educate—adapt to users rather than attempting to change them.

Focus on the majority of users, outperform competitors on key points, launch quickly, and iterate continuously through practice.

Provide users with a consistent and predictable experience.

If unsure what to do, start by learning how others have done it.

Treat users like beginners—don’t make them think or choose; anticipate their needs in advance.

Do not give users what they don’t want — any unnecessary feature is a burden to them.

**13.**Product Managers Should Engage in Customer Support****  
When users encounter problems, they turn to customer support. This is where you gain clear insight into their most pressing needs.  
If you can’t even address users' pain points, building more features is just wasted effort.  
Ask yourself: Have you actually talked to users?

**14.Spend at least twice as much time clarifying requirements as drawing prototypes**Stop spending all your time on prototypes! (Saying this for the Nth time   
Once you clarify the requirements, prototyping becomes much clearer.  
If you jump straight into prototyping, the endless holes and revisions later will far exceed your imagination.

**15.Product Competence Helps in Handling Situations Correctly**A product manager’s ability to understand users, assess the external environment, and evaluate feature feasibility… all involve a certain probability of being accurate. Improving these probabilities largely depends on product competence.  
The best way to enhance product competence is to build good products. Beginners should start by deconstructing existing products thoroughly.

Competence and experience are like two wings that we must continuously strengthen and accumulate—they propel career growth:

Competence means knowing how to make sound decisions, often supported by a personal decision-making framework or model.

Experience enables us to minimize errors in problem-solving through continuous learning, reduce time spent on issues, and improve efficiency.

1. **The Essence of Product**At its core, a product is defined by business logic that dictates how code instructions interact with a database—performing operations such as read, add, modify, and delete.  
   Architecture design involves organizing this logic and these commands, enabling a technical perspective to clearly outline the structure and flow of data—even before a product form or concept exists—through the mindset of an implementation model.
2. **The Most Challenging Skill for a Product Manager: Insight**Insight is primarily reflected across these five dimensions:

****Observe More**** — Broaden your perspective by exploring three new things every day.  
****Ask More**** — Dig deeper by always asking "why" at least three times.  
****Reflect More**** — Build connections by thinking through the underlying logic.  
****Explain More**** — Teach others to deepen your own understanding.  
****Practice More**** — Test theory through action—practice validates truth.

1. **User experience (UX) is about "making a product better", not "making it survive".**A product stays alive based on whether it’s useful and solves users’ problems.
2. **Don’t give users a product that even you don’t use.**As a product manager, you should use your own product—and those of competitors—on a daily basis. If even you don’t use it, what right do you have to ask users to use your product?
3. ****A Full Bottle Doesn’t Rattle — Learn to Listen****  
   You must learn to listen to outside voices—don’t get trapped in your own thoughts and overthink in isolation.

**These are the 20 suggestions.**  
Every product manager may understand them, but how many actually put them into practice step by step?  
It’s like having tons of resources sitting idle in your cloud drive while you waste time bragging in so-called “product groups.” What’s the point?

A seed’s most critical stage is germination.  
After it sprouts, some seeds need special fertilizer—others just need a little nourishment to grow.  
Similarly, in the growth of a product manager, practice and execution are essential.  
Gradually, you will develop your own product methodology—and from there, excellence will follow naturally.