Table of Contents

Preface

What does product management mean within government?

Associate Product Manager

Product Manager

Product Leadership

Product management handbook

This is a white label product management handbook for government digital services. Product management can be a vague profession, unclear to those of us doing it and misunderstood by our colleagues. Some aspects of our role may be legitimately difficult to write about but a lot of our knowledge is suitable to be made explicit through documentation. The first version of this handbook was created by Scott Colfer as an attempt to document the role of product management for the Ministry of Justice. This white label version has been created shared by Scott to see if the handbook has value for other government digital services. Much of this handbook is based on the work of others and their willingness to share, so it is important to repay the favour - hence publishing this handbook in the open.

Built with thanks to

- Markdown - text formatting syntax used when writing content
- Minimal - used as the theme for the site
- Jekyll - generates the site
- GitHub Pages - free hosting for the website

Contributing

We'll keep this simple and improve if/when there are contributors :) Until then, some simple stuff to get things going:

- when contributing to this repository, please first discuss the change you wish to make via issue with the owners of this repository before making a change
- opportunities to generalise this handbook to make it useful to a wider audience without losing its core value are very welcome
- useful additions based on things you've found useful are particularly welcome
- additions for the senior product manager and lead product manager sections are particularly welcome.

If a code of conduct becomes useful then I'll probably use something like the contributor covenant.

Author

Scott Colfer

Licence

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

Acknowledgements

- Hat tip to everyone who's Tweets, posts, books, training, and conversations have informed the content of the handbook
- Thanks to the Ministry of Justice's community of product managers for using and testing the early, context-specific versions of this handbook.

Licence

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

This is a human-readable summary of (and not a substitute for) the license.

You are free to:

- **Share** — copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format
- **Adapt** — remix, transform, and build upon the material

The licensor cannot revoke these freedoms as long as you follow the license terms.

Under the following terms:

- **Attribution** — You must give appropriate credit, provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made. You may do so in any reasonable manner, but not in any way that suggests the licensor endorses you or your use.
- **NonCommercial** — You may not use the material for commercial purposes.
- **ShareAlike** — If you remix, transform, or build upon the material, you must distribute your contributions under the same license as the original.
- **No additional restrictions** — You may not apply legal terms or technological measures that legally restrict others from doing anything the license permits.

Notices:

- You do not have to comply with the license for elements of the material in the public domain or where your use is permitted by an applicable exception or limitation.
- No warranties are given. The license may not give you all of the permissions necessary for your intended use. For example, other rights such as publicity, privacy, or moral rights may limit how you use the material.

Where did this handbook come from?

Product management can be a vague profession, unclear to those of us doing it and misunderstood by our colleagues. Some aspects of our role may be legitimately difficult to write about but a lot of our knowledge is suitable to be made explicit through documentation. The first version of this handbook was created by Scott Colfer as an attempt to document the role of product management for the Ministry of Justice. This white label version has been created shared by Scott to see if the handbook has value for other government digital services.

Context is everything. This handbook is intended to help us understand what product management looks like within public services - rather than claiming to describe the entire product management profession.

Product management is a big topic. This handbook is meant to be the beginning of a conversation, not the final word - it'd be great if this handbook looked different a year from now because we have used it, tested it, and improved it based on our experiences.

The main gaps in this version are more detailed guidance for senior product managers and lead product managers, along with more work to link directly with the capabilities and levels of mastery required of our profession

Sharing is important. Much of this handbook is based on the work of others and their willingness to share, so it is important that we do the same. Hence publishing this handbook in the open.

Who is this handbook for?

This is intended for government digital services. It'll probably be a close-fit for UK product management communities working to the digital, data and technology role description but will hopefully be of use for local authorities and international government digital services too. Shout if you find it to be of use in any other contexts.

Please consider improving the value of the handbook - we only know what we know, so it'd be great to get the insight of others. Please comment on this document if you spot a way to improve it. This could be something you find helpful that you'd like to add, or a refinement to something already in here. Anything that you think will make it more valuable. You can comment and suggest improvements via Github.

About the author

Scott Colfer is a product leader with over a decade of experience working on products and services with a social mission, ranging from startups to large enterprises, and spanning commercial, non-profit, and government sectors. Scott is Head of Product for the Ministry of Justice, proudly supporting the digital transformation of the UK's public services.

Online profile - Twitter

Product management is responsible for value

Our teams require at least three perspectives if they are to work well:

Value - Workflow - Quality

This is true of delivery teams, management teams, and leadership teams.

Product management's focus is optimising value, and so is most useful to an organisation when we are given responsibility for value. We need to understand workflow and quality but equally need to acknowledge that they are not our strengths and that others will be better at them than us. We're only useful as a profession when we understand our relationship with other professions.

Value	Workflow	Quality
Value professionals are responsible for improving the value of things but still need to understand workflow and quality	Workflow professionals are responsible for the workflow of teams and departments but need to understand value and quality	Quality professionals are responsible for the quality of things but need to understand value and workflow
Value professions include product management, business analysis, economic analysis, portfolio management	*Workflow professions include delivery management, project management, programme management*	*Includes lots of professions, all those that 'do' and 'build', e.g. developers, technical architects, designers, communication, training, service desk*

Reading: Roles in production systems *Melissa Perri, Dan North, Joshua Arnold, Georg Fasching*

We run things like mini-businesses

Let's explore what it means to be 'responsible for value'.

Product managers run 'things' like they are mini-businesses, with the goal of optimising the value of that 'thing'. The 'things' we work on tend to be public services or features of public services. Our role is to increase the value of services and features by focussing on outcomes (not outputs).

Product managers make promises to solve problems (not commitments to specific solutions or features). People tend to think about problems through existing solutions so organisations need people who are passionate about problems over solutions, and focus on outcomes over outputs.

Organisations sometimes discuss problems through solutions, which may lead to solutions being agreed that don't solve the real problem (or solve the wrong problem). The product management profession provides a space to focus on the problem to be solved, agnostic of the specific solution.

Teams and team members can sometimes get stuck in their own specialisms, and can benefit from someone who is focussed on the overall, common goal that allows prioritisation of time and effort.

Reading: The First Principles of Product Management *Brandon Chu*

We manage the value of public and staff services

A 'product' is something that is manufactured, purchased, owned and used by a customer. Think of a bar of soap: it is a 'true' product in this sense.

Product management in government is applied to public services and features of public services, not products. *This move from genuine products to services is shared by lots of product managers, who find themselves providing services via the internet instead of physical goods. Think about the move from renting DVDs from Blockbuster to the market-domination of Netflix, for example.*

We hear a lot about 'end-to-end' public services but what does that mean in practice? Several people have already provided us with excellent ways to understand this. Here are three principles to help us think about 'end to end services', based on posts published by Louise Downe and Kate Tarling.

Principle 1: a service helps a user to do something that needs to be done

To a user, a service is simple. It's something that helps them to do something - like learn to drive, buy a house, or become a childminder. It's an activity that needs to be done.

This isn't always how government sees a service. Government sometimes sees services as discrete transactions that need to be completed in a particular way, like 'Statutory Off Road Vehicle Notification (SORN)'.

'Learn to drive' describes a service. 'Statutory Off Road Vehicle Notification (SORN)' describes a transaction.

Reading: Good services are verbs, bad services are nouns *Louise Downe*

Principle 2: a service name starts with a verb

A core principle of Agile and Lean theory is that services should seek to maximise value. Services should be judged not on their adherence to cost and delivery schedules, but on their delivery of value.

When a service name starts with a verb like 'Learn to drive' it tends to focus the attention on value. It describes a thing a user needs to do.

When a service name starts with a noun like 'Statutory Off Road Vehicle Notification (SORN)' it tends to focus on a transaction. It describes something the government does.

Reading: Good services are verbs, bad services are nouns *Louise Downe*

Principle 3: Use the term 'service' accurately and sparingly

Lots of our 'services' aren't really services. 'Learn to drive' is an end to end service. The elements needed to learn to drive probably think of themselves as services in their own right. However, none of them independently meet the overall

need to 'learn to drive'. So they are not service, they are a part of a service, or a 'feature' of a service.

Services A service helps a user to do something that needs to be done. It also helps government achieve policy intent on behalf of its citizens with whom it has a social contract. Services are best identified as verbs (visit the UK), rather than nouns (biometric residence permit).

The following are not services - they are things that help to build services:

Features Often the things we work on are just one step in a service. These are called features, and examples include:

- applying for a visa
- applying for a licence
- granting or refusing permission.

Capabilities and activities

A capability is having all resources required to carry out a task – such as skilled staff and specialist tools – and also considers capacity and maturity. Appointment booking, for example, is a capability that requires:

- an appointment booking system, which may be a technical capability
- physical locations or phone support to host the appointments
- a process for changing or cancelling appointments.

Activities are the things people do in relation to using a service, including:

- finding out how something works
- calling people for help
- applying for something.

Technology

'Technology' means the digital systems, products, tools, hardware and applications we build, maintain and buy. Technology exists to support activities and capabilities – and enables us to deliver faster, clearer, simpler services.

Data

Data means the actual information that's either generated by or used to carry out activities and services. Use descriptive words for data, such as 'National Insurance number', and avoid acronyms.

Reading: Creating a common language to describe services *Kate Tarling*

This helps us to understand where product management is most useful, and where it it less useful. Public services and features of public services in which value is measured by outcomes for users are places where product management is value. Capabilities like technology where value is measured by the service level of the technology are places where product managers should acknowledge that they are not the experts, since the focus is on quality and workflow. Professions like IT Service Management may be much more capable of working in these delivery conditions.

The title of 'product management' can obscure what it is that we do. Logic would dictate that if there is a product . . . and it is managed . . . then that person is a product manager. However, there are at least three contexts for management - value, workflow, and quality - and product management describes the management of one of those contexts: value.

Origins of the role of Product Manager

Why are we called 'product managers'? Product management has existed since at least the 1930s and grew from 'brand management'. Companies like Proctor and Gamble had many brands of the same product and had typically focussed on their market leader and ignored the others. They decided to start running each brand like a mini-business in its own right, led by a brand manager, and profits increased as a result. Product managers looked after genuine products, like soap, when the profession started, hence the title 'Product Manager'.

Reading: The History and Evolution of Product Management *Martin Eriksson*

The Scrum Framework published in 2002 took the Agile Manifesto for Software Development, and tried to define what Product Management looked like when purely applied to a software development team. The resulting role is called 'Product Owner'. This role is useful for junior Product Managers working in Scrum teams but does not cover the full scope of product management. Unfortunately, many people confuse the Product Owner role and the Product Manager role, which can sometimes pigeon-hole product management within software development teams. In reality, product management is a business strategy role that optimises the overall value of a 'thing': this is as likely to involve marketing and communication as it is to involve a software development.

Reading: The product manager is dead. Long live the value manager *Scott Colfer*

We have publicly available role descriptions

You can find and use product manager role descriptions and career pathway published on GOV.UK.

These product manager role descriptions and career pathway were created by UK government's Heads of Product between August and November 2016, using feedback from their communities to help incrementally improve them during this time.

These role descriptions suggest that product management requires seven essential skills:

1. **Product ownership** - Uses a range of product management principles and approaches. Captures and translates user needs into deliverables. Able to define the minimum viable product and make decisions about priorities. Writes stories and acceptance criteria. Capable of working with a range of specialists in multidisciplinary teams.

2. **Product lifecycle perspective** - Understands the different phases of product delivery and is able to contribute to, plan or run these. Able to maintain a product or process through the delivery phases, through to live and into retirement. Able to lead a team through the different phases of the delivery lifecycle. Can maintain and iterate a product over time to continuously meet user needs. Understands and is aware of incident management and service support so that products are built effectively.

3. **Agile working** - Is aware of and understands agile methodology and how to apply the agile mindset to all aspects of their work. Has the ability to work in a fast paced, evolving environment and utilises an iterative method and flexible approach to enable rapid delivery. Unafraid to take risks, willing to learn from mistakes and appreciates the importance of agile project delivery for digital projects in government. Able to ensure the team has a situational awareness of what each other is working on and how this relates to practical government objectives and user needs.

4. **User focus** - Understands users and can identify who they are and what their needs are based on evidence. Able to translate user stories and propose design approaches or services to meet these needs and engage in meaningful interactions and relationships with users. Puts users first and can manage competing priorities.

5. **Problem ownership** - Understands and identifies problems, analysing and helping to identify the appropriate solution. Is able to classify and prioritise problems, document their causes and implement remedies.

6. **Strategic ownership** - Focuses on outcomes, not solutions. Is bold - develops ambitious visions and strategies. Gets the organisation and team to buy-in. Translates the vision into prioritised deliverable goals.

7. **Operational management** - Able to manage the operational process of designing and running a product or service throughout its entire life-cycle.

Able to implement best practice in new product or service development and knows how to plan and operationalise the stages of new product or service development. Able to overcome operational constraints to deliver a successful product or service. Works closely with other operational delivery teams.

We can measure our performance in each of these capabilities using our level of mastery:

- **Awareness** - Has knowledge of the skill and an appreciation of how it is applied in the environment
- **Working** - Applies knowledge and experience of the skill, including tools and techniques, adopting those most appropriate for the environment
- **Practitioner** - Shares knowledge and experience of the skill with others, including tools and techniques, defining those most appropriate for the environment
- **Expert** - Has knowledge and experience in the application of this skill. Is a recognised specialist and advisor in this skill including user needs, generation of ideas, methods, tools and leading or guiding others in best practice use.

These role descriptions are not infallible and not set in stone. They are published on Github and we can submit requests to change them if we see ways to improve them.

The career pathway for product managers

The career pathway for product managers is: Associate Product Manager → Product Manager → Senior Product Manager → Lead Product Manager → Head of Product Management

We can think of this as two main stages of our career, with smaller steps in between: product management, and product leadership.

Product management

The journey to become a product management practitioner, taking our level of mastery from awareness, to working, to practitioner. A strong product management practitioner will have learned and understood the core concepts of product management - not just at the level of practices but also the underlying principles, allowing both application and innovation. During this stage in our career we are likely to be focussed on 'delivery' teams.

Associate Product Manager Associate Product Manager is a training role. Associates are moving from awareness to working level product management. Associate are associated with a more senior product manager and focus on the tactical concepts of product management. This is where a lot of the basic, tactical skills of product management are first learned and might involved helping a small feature team to prioritise user needs and help them translate them to actions for the team using a backlog. The Scrum Product Owner role is a helpful model for Associate Product Managers to use.

Product Manager Product managers move from working to practitioner product management. Product Managers are often responsible for the overall value improvement of a feature of a public service (often a software feature), or (more rarely) an end-to-end public service or staff service. Product Managers take responsibility for broader product strategy by defining the problem statement and value proposition, building a vision for an improved, future value proposition, and creating the strategy for how to get there. We may provide this product strategy to an Associate Product Manager, who will help the team to figure out what this looks like in practice, and provide challenge where needed. This is where a lot of the strategic skills of product management are first learned.

Product Leadership

We don't suddenly learn some magic new product management skills when we become a Senior Product Manager. We learn all of our core product management skills within the Associate Product Manager and Product Manager roles. Senior, Lead and Head of Product Management are about learning and adding leadership skills to our abilities, and this is at the heart of what the move from practitioner to

expert mastery means. We still have the ability to 'get our hands dirty' and use our product management skills, but they're often used to apply product management at scale or to promote product management through example. We're increasingly likely to be managing value within middle-management or leadership teams, rather than delivery teams. We're also responsible for the performance management, support and development of the members of our profession.

We're often working in space in which we have influence, not authority: we're being asked to support business strategy and digital transformation but are not solely responsible for the outcomes and often not playing a lead-role in this work. This means that the 'soft-skills' of teaching, mentoring, coaching and facilitating are hard. Our colleagues responsible for workflow are likely to have more mastery than we have within our profession, and may become key allies in our professional development.

Senior Product Manager Senior Product Managers can be thought of as 'group product managers'. They manage a group of 'things' that share commonalities, users, or interdependencies. For example, there may be a grouping of things around sign-on, and a Senior Product Manager might provide the overall value strategy for 2-5 things in this space. Senior Product Manager is an interesting point in our career pathway, as it is the tipping point between product management and product leadership: we're still expected to work directly within delivery teams, but also expected to work with our Lead Product Manager to influence and support overall strategy for our business unit and our profession.

Lead Product Manager Lead Product Managers can be thought of as 'heads of product'. They head-up an entire area of product management. Currently this is often implemented according to our internal organisation, so we have a Lead Product Manager for each of our agencies/delivery arms/programmes, responsible for the overall value of our work for that area of the business. In the future it may be that we divide our portfolio around different value propositions such as public-facing services, staff-facing services, core technology, and consultancy, with a Lead Product Manager heading up each area. Lead Product Managers are product leaders, taking the product manager skills they learned in delivery teams and applying them within management and leadership teams. They're likely to be responsible for the value strategy for 3-10 delivery teams, embeded with a management or leadership team and are less likely to work directly within a delivery team. They are also a leader for their own product management community.

Head of Product Management Our implementation of Head of Product Management might often be described as 'Director of Product' elsewhere. Product management is often described as a role which is about influence, not authority. Head of Product is no different:

- Head of Profession: The space where you have clearest responsibility and authority is that of the product profession itself. You are responsible for the the performance of the product management profession and the product managers within in. This includes owning and improving the role of 'product manager' itself, plus the recruitment and performance management of product managers. You are the most senior representative of the profession,

responsible for making sure that it meets the needs of our colleagues - which sometimes requires challenging assumptions about the role and supporting the use of other professions.

- Head of Product: Product managers within government are responsible for the value of public services or the features of public services. You are a senior representative of value strategy in your role as Head of Product. Government is still unfamiliar with product management and its application outside of delivery teams, within management and leadership teams (we are seeing our first Directors of Product and Chief Product Officers being hired in government departments). As a result of this, you will need to seek opportunities to support and influence value strategy at an organisational level and are unlikely to be given clear authority.

Reading:

- Busting a digital myth: the naturally gifted product manager *Lois Schonberger et al*
- Product Management Job Titles and Hierarchy *Martin Eriksson*

Tool: Product management career pathway diagram

The following diagram is an attempt to summarise product management career progression, to help us locate where we are now and where we'd like to go next.

Product Management
From Awareness to Expertise
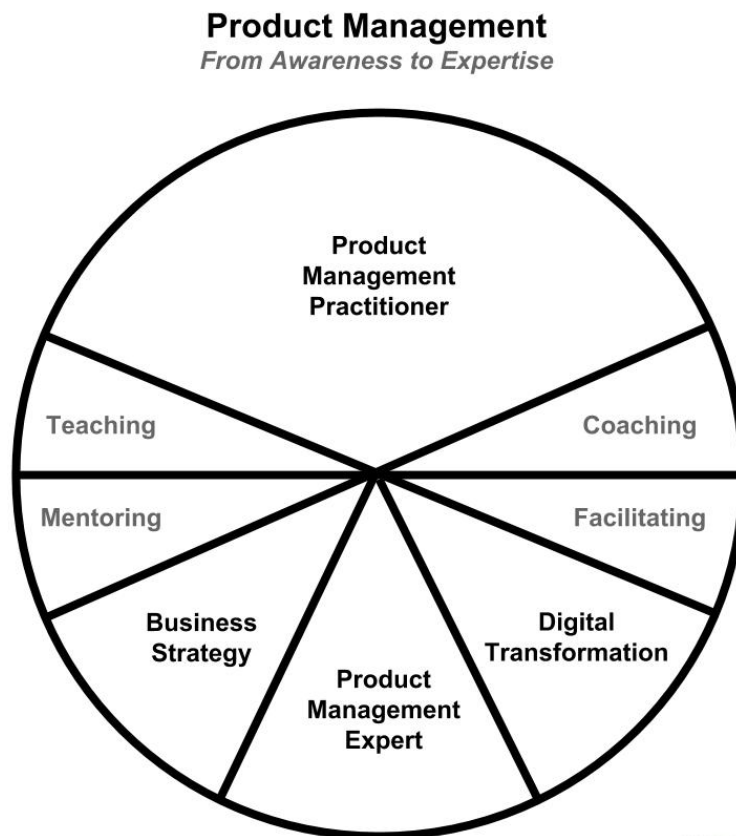
Adapted with thanks from the Agile Competency Framework by the Agile Coaching Institute

Let's look at the sections of the diagram and explore what they mean:

Product Management Practitioner The Associate Product Manager and Product Manager roles increase our mastery of the product management capabilities from awareness, to working level, to practitioner. We will have learned and understood the core concepts of product management - not just at the level of practices but also the underlying principles, allowing both application and innovation.

Product Management Expert The ability to 'get our hands dirty', continuing to manage products, with a focus on promoting product management craftsmanship through example and teaching by doing. Also expertise in applying product management at scale. We need to develop broader leadership skills too:

- Business Strategy - The ability to apply business strategy and management frameworks to employ agile as a competitive business advantage such as Lean Start-Up and Lean Enterprise, product innovation techniques, flow-

based business process management approaches, and other techniques that relate to innovating in the business domain

- Digital Transformation - The ability to facilitate, accelerate and (as appropriate) lead organisational change and transformation. This area draws on change management, organisation culture, organisation development, systems thinking, and other behavioral sciences.

The value of product management expertise, business strategy and digital transformation is often released via 'soft skills' such as mentoring and teaching, coaching and facilitating. Workflow professionals may often be the experts in these skills within our teams, but the skills remain important for product managers too.

- Teaching - The ability to offer the right knowledge, at the right time, taught in the right way, so that individuals, teams and organisations use the knowledge for their best benefit.
- Mentoring - The ability to impart your experience, knowledge and guidance to help develop other product managers.
- Coaching - The ability to act as a non-directive coach (with the coachee's interest determining the direction, rather than your own expertise or opinion).
- Facilitating - The ability to act as a neutral process holder, guiding and individual's/team's/organisation's process of discovery, holding them to their purpose and definition of success.

Training in the core, tactical principles and skills of product management

Associate Product Manager is where some of us start our career as a product manager, and where we learn the core, tactical principles and skills of product management. It can also be thought of as 'Trainee Product Manager' since it's a role for us to learn 'on the job'.

Associate Product Manager/Trainee Product Manager is where we learn how to take a large vision and medium-sized missions, and work with a team to create and prioritise small, achievavle goals. And to help a team break these goals into small, actionable jobs to be done. The Product Owner role within the Scrum framework describes the tactical product management skills required within a development team and as such provides a helpful model or Associate Product Managers to work from.

Associate Product Managers may start with a general awareness of product management tactics but are expected to develop rapidly, gaining working-level skills (i.e. can genuinely add value to a team) within six to twelve-months (ideally). The Associate Product Manager and the host organisation both need to commit to learning and development if this is rapid development is to be feasible.

Good conditions for rapid development of an Associate Product Manager include:

- association with a Product Manager or Senior Product Manager, ideally the person who owns the overall vision for the product/service on which the Associate Product Manager is working
- initially placement on a mature team, in the development phase (referred to as 'Beta' within government services); Associates initially placed in the exploration phase (inquiries, discoveries, or alphas) may find this tricky, since even mature teams find this phase tricky
- given the chance to rotate across teams on different product/services, for different users, in different phases of the product lifecycle (as their skills and confidence develops)
- provided with regular coaching and mentoring (ideally having a 1:1 every fortnight), and able to access training and development quickly and easily.

We need to view Associate Product Managers as a large investment of time and effort in order to build excellent Product Managers as the future (rather than viewing them as a cheap version of a Product Manager).

The GOV.UK role description for Associate Product Managers is great, clearly setting out expected skills, and the level of expertise required in each of these skills.

Work with agility

One of the biggest influences on the way we work is the Manifesto for Agile Software Development, published in 2001:

> We have come to value:
>
> - Individuals and interactions over processes and tools
> - Working software over comprehensive documentation
> - Customer collaboration over contract negotiation
> - Responding to change over following a plan
>
> That is, while there is value in the items on the right, we value the items on the left more.

The manifesto is only a few lines long but is important because it allows us to focus on doing what is most valuable, instead of just sticking to cost and delivery schedules. If we focus on problems and are agnostic about solutions, we can do the least work possible to meet the needs of our users, and optimise the value of our products and services. We often describe this as **making promises to solve problems, not commitments to specific solutions or features**.

> The Waterfall model was based on taking a point-in-time snapshot of the information we know and using it to create a long-term plan that we would adhere to. The Agile insight was that we should change our notion of what features will create business value over time as more information becomes available [...] Agile approaches added a time dimension where previously there was none.
>
> *The Art of Business Value by Mark Schwartz*

Reading:

- The Manifesto for Agile Software Development
- Agile is Dead (Long Live Agility), *Dave Thomas*
- The Agile Manifesto for Public Services, *Scott Colfer*

Training:

- Digital and agile awareness course, GDS Academy: 1-day introductory course for anyone in government
- Digital and agile foundation course, GDS Academy: 10-day foundation course for government employees working in a multi-disciplinary team.

Make use of the Scrum framework

The Scrum framework takes the Manifesto for Agile Software Development and interprets it as a framework for developing, delivering, and sustaining complex products. Scrum was published in 2002 by some of the authors of the Manifesto for Agile Software Development. The Scrum Guide is published online.

The Scrum framework is helpful for Trainee/Associate Product Managers because it:

- is lightweight and easy to understand
- requires a Product Manager to be a key member of a Scrum team (it calls this person a 'Product Owner')
- explains the point of a Product Owner, and how the Product Owner works with the teams though artifacts (like the backlog) and ceremonies (like review).

Here are some key sections of the Scrum Guide for product managers:

- The Product Owner
- The Sprint
- Sprint Planning
- Daily Scrum
- Sprint Review
- Sprint Retrospective
- Product Backlog
- Sprint Backlog
- Increment
- Definition of Done.

There is a *lot* written about Scrum.

Reading:

Roman Pichler has written particularly extensively on Scrum, examples include:

- What's the difference between a product manager and a product owner?
- Sprint review tips for product owners
- Agile Product Management with Scrum

Also:

- Product Owner Anti-Patterns, *Stefan Wolpers*

Training:

- Working level for product managers, GDS Academy: 3-day course that shares some of the core Scrum concepts, contextualised for government
- Certified Scrum Product Owner course, Roman Pichler: 2-day course on Scrum Product Ownership that leads to a professional certificate in Scrum Product Ownership from the Scrum Alliance

- Smart Scrum Product Ownership, Jeff Patton and Jeff Gothelf: 2-day course that leads to a professional certificate in Scrum Product Ownership from the Scrum Alliance but takes a more flexible approach to Scrum.

Make use of the Government Service Toolkit

Many of us work joined the Civil Service to work on public services because of the mission set by the Government Digital Service, to build public services so good that people want to use them. The Government Digital Service (GDS) has turned this mission in to a toolkit that has been adopted across government, and gives us the space to improve the lives of the public by focussing on their needs.

GDS took The Lean Startup and adapted it for the context of working on public services within the Civil Service. The Lean Startup provides a scientific approach to creating and managing new products and services in order to get those products/services into users' hands faster. In turn, the Lean Startup is based on lean manufacturing, design thinking, customer development, and agile software development. GDS took all of this and created the Government Service Toolkit. The Government Service Toolkit is a great shorthand for what Lean Startup, lean manufacturing, design thinking, customer development, and agile development means when working on public services. It's a great tool for us all but particuarly useful for Associate Product Managers looking for a practical way to begin their development.

Key sections of the Government Service Toolkit include:

- Government design principles - including the famous 'start with user needs'
- Digital service standard - the 18-point standard that government services must meet
- Service manual, guidance on how to research - design and build services that meet the Digital Service Standard
  - this includes the common phases of agile government service development: discovery - test your assumptions about the problem; alpha - testing assumptions about the solution and looking for problem/solution fit; beta - build the thing and test it works; live - test that the thing you built is being used, is useful, and it can can have its value continually optimised; retirement - stop a thing because it's no longer being used or no longer useful (or both).
  - the type of team we're often a part of
- Service assemssment, what happens at a service assessment, and checking if you need a service assessment
- Technology code of practice - the set of criteria to help government design, build and buy better technology.

The Product Manager role develops the strategic principles and skills of product management

Product Manager is where we step-up and develop the strategic skills of product management, having developed our tactical skills in something like an Associate Product Manager role. We are often responsible for the overall value improvement of a feature of a public service (often a software feature), or (more rarely) an end-to-end public service or staff service.

Product Managers take responsibility for broader product strategy by defining the problem statement and value proposition, building a vision for an improved, future value proposition, and creating the strategy for how to get there. We may provide this product strategy to an Associate Product Manager, who will help the team to figure out what this looks like in practice, and provide challenge where needed.

The GOV.UK role description for Product Managers is great, clearly setting out expected skills, and the level of expertise required in each of these skills.

Training:

- Product Management, General Assembly - 10-week evening course (2 evenings per week), or a full-time, 1-week intensive
- Product Management Foundations, Mind the Product - 1-day course

Make use of the Lean Startup

We own the strategy for our product (as well as the tactics) in our role as product managers. Scrum and the Product Owner role are great for learning the basic product management tactics required as an Associate Product Manager, but Scrum is tactical. Scrum gives us the backlog to work with (which is awesome) but doesn't help us to develop opportunities in the first place, or provide tools to develop a strategy for optimising the value of our products and services.

The Lean Startup method by Eric Ries is a great at helping us understand how to develop opportunities, then optimise the value of product and services:

- The Lean Startup method was published in 2011 and comes from lean manufacturing, design thinking, customer development, and agile development
- The 'pivot' is at the heart of the Lean Startup: pivots represent the option to rapidly build, test and learn so that we can fail quickly and cheaply
- The method is characterised by an extremely fast cycle time, a focus on what customers want (without asking them), and a scientific approach to making decisions
- The method is most applicable for areas of extreme uncertainty, bringing strategy to extreme uncertainty through:
  - Validated learning
  - Rapid build-measure-learn feedback loops
  - Accountability (measure, manage, and prioritise).

Lots of **The Lean Startup** method now sounds obvious. This is in part because it's had a huge influence in the years since it was published and underpins how lots of organisations work. More specifically, it was an influence on the Government Digital Service which was being developed around the same time as it was published - you can see lots of The Lean Startup method implied in the GDS Service Toolkit.

Reading:

- The Lean Startup, *Eric Ries*
- The Lean Startup for Product Managers, *Scott Colfer*

Simplicity - the art of maximising the amount of work not done - is essential

The point of validated learning, rapid build-measure-learn feedback loops, and accountability is to help us spend the least time and money possible to meet the needs of our users through a compelling product or service. The aim of every increment of our product/service is to create the minimum, viable product/service.

Minimum viable product

The concept of 'minimum viable product' has been used and abused over the last few years, so let's return to source and see what it originally meant. The Lean Startup helped to make the concept popular:

> The Minimum Viable Product is that version of the product that enables a full turn of the Build-Measure-Learn loop with a minimum amount of effort and the least amount of development time.

We talked about an increment in our guidance for Associate Product Managers - it is the work done during a sprint which takes your product/service one step toward a vision. Our goal as product managers is to use validated learning and accountability within a rapid build-measure-learn feedback loop (e.g. a sprint) to prioritise the least work needed in order to meet our sprint goal. Our continual challenge is for each increment to produce the minimum, viable product/service needed to meet our sprint goal. What is acceptable for minimum and viable will change during the lifetime of the product/service as it grows in maturity and number of users.

Continuous Delivery and DevOps

'Continuous delivery' describes a software development culture that get changes (experiments, features, bug fixes) into production or in the hands of users safely and quickly in a sustainable way. This requires closer working between development and web operations, which has since been labelled 'devops'. Continuous integration is a critical aspect of continuous delivery, which means working in small batches and using automated tests to detect and reject changes that introduce regression.

'The Phoenix Project: A Novel about IT, DevOps, and Helping Your Business Win' introduces 'The Three Ways', a description of the values and philosophies that guide DevOps processes and practices.

'The First Way is about the left-to-right flow of work from Development to IT Operations to the customer. In order to maximise flow, we need small batch sizes and intervals of work, never passing defects to downstream work centres, and to constantly optimise for the global goals (as opposed to local goals such as Dev feature completion rates, Test find/fix ratios, or Ops availability measures). The

necessary practices include continuous build, integration, and deployment, creating environments on demand, limiting work in process, and building safe systems and organisations that are safe to change.'

'The Second Way is about the constant flow of fast feedback from right-to-left at all stages of the value stream, amplifying it to ensure that we can prevent problems from happening again or enable faster detection and recovery. By doing this, we create quality at source, creating or embedding knowledge where we need it. The necessary practices include 'stopping the production line' when our builds and tests fail in deployment pipeline; constantly elevating the improvement of daily work; creating fast automated test suites to ensure that code is always in a potentially deployable state; creating shared goals and shared pain between Development and IT Operations; and creating pervasive production telemetry so that everyone can see whether code and environments are operating as designed and that customer goals are being met.'

'The Third Way is about creating a culture that fosters two things: continual experimentation (which requires taking risks and learning from success and failure), and understanding that repetition and practice is the prerequisite to mastery. Experimentation and risk taking are what enable us to relentlessly improve our system of work, which often requires us to do things very differently than how we've done it for decades. And when things go wrong, our constant repetition and daily practice is what allows us to have the skills and habits that enable us to retreat back to a place of safety and resume normal operations. The necessary practices include creating a culture of innovation and risk taking (as opposed to fear or mindless order taking) and high trust (as opposed to low trust, command-and-control), allocating at least twenty percent of Development and IT Operations cycles towards non-functional requirements, and constant reinforcement that improvements are encouraged and celebrated.'

Reading:

- The Phoenix Project: A Novel about IT, DevOps, and Helping Your Business Win, *Gene Kim, Kevin Behr, George Spafford*
- The Product Managers' Guide to Continuous Delivery and DevOps Suzie Prince
- Why Continuous Delivery and DevOps are Product Managers' Best Friends Suzie Prince

Make promises to solve problems, not commitments to specific solutions and features

Focussing on problems is what helps us to do the least work possible to meet the needs of users. If we really understand users' problem and are usefully agnostic about solutions then we can be flexible enough to always do the least work possible to meet our users' needs.

A gap in the market does not always mean there's a market in the gap

Identifying a problem is not sufficient, we need to make sure that it's a problem worth solving for our users. As product managers, we need to help our teams continually ask these questions about the problem we want to solve:

- Is it pervasive? Who specifically has the problem and does it affect lots of people?
- Is it urgent? Do those people need the problem to be solved right away or can they wait?
- Is it complex? Are people able to solve the problem for themselves or do they need someone else to solve it for them?
- Is it valuable for users? How painful is the problem for them and would they be willing to change their behaviour and use a new or different solution?
- Is it valuable for your organisation? Will solving the problem save more money than it costs to build the solution?

We have a compelling problem when you can answer 'yes' to all of these questions.

We are likely to reframe our problem several times during the product lifecycle and may even change our primary user. This is important and valuable as we refine the scope of our problem to be feasible to solve. We'll often find that we start with a massive problem space and refine this to something with a narrower focus but greater feasibility of being solved. We might find that the problem is not ready to be solved and that we need to pause or cancel our product/service.

Reading: The Practitioner's Guide to Product Management, *Jock Busuttil*

Problem/solution fit

We can start looking for the right solution once we understand our problem, with the goal of achieving 'product/solution fit'. The Design Council has famously used a 'double diamond' diagram to explain how we initially find problem/solution fit, and Jock Busuttil has refined it further.

Reading:

- The Design Process: What is the Double Diamond?, *Design Council*

- [Find the tipping point in your research](#), *Jock Busuttil*

Always be optimising value

Our job as product managers is to work with our teams to continually optimise the value of our products and services - by ensuring that we keep and improve our problem/solution fit for our users - through the minimum, viable product possible. This is the goal of every iteration of our product/services. How do we do that?

We have some key tools that help us with our product strategy:

A problem statement should form the initial leap of faith for every product idea, then be refined and improved throughout the life of our products/services. Melanie Cannon from DWP has written helpful [guidance](#) on how to write a problem statement.

Value proposition, business model canvas, product vision, and product roadmap are some of the most critical strategic tools we use day to day:

- a value proposition is where our organisation's offer meets with our users' needs, explaining how our solutions fit with users' problems - a [value proposition canvas](#) is a tool that can help to create a value proposition
- a business model canvas describes how 'profitable' your value proposition is today, defining it in terms of value and cost - it looks at the overall operating model and helps us understand opportunities to optimise value - a [business model canvas](#) is a tool to help create a business model
- a product vision describes our goal in terms of the value of the product/service in the future - the estimated value the product will have in the future should justify the invesment of money, time and effort that we want to make - a [product vision board](#) is a tool to help us create a vision
- a product roadmap describes the steps needed to be taken from today (as described in the business model canvas) to the future (as described in the vision) - the roadmap makes promises to solve problems, not commitment to solutions or features - it is a flexible planning tool that should be reviewed and updated regularly as we learn more about our product/service

We should run a regular product strategy meeting to review all of the above (in addition to the teams more frequent sprint ceremonies).

Reading:

- [Value proposition canvas](#), *Strategyzer*
- [Business model canvas](#), *Strategyzer*
- [Product vision board](#), *Roman Pichler*
- [How to build product vision in 5 minutes](#), *Ilya Leyrikh*
- [Product Roadmaps Relaunched](#), *Todd Lombardo et al*
  - [summary of key themes](#)
- [Roadmap principles](#), *UK government product community*
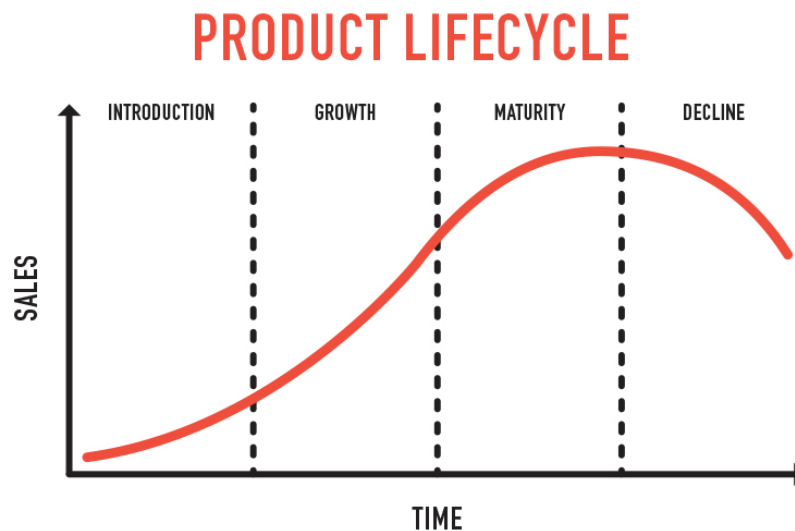- [Product roadmaps in 5 easy pieces](#), *Scott Colfer*

Training:

- [Strategyzer workshops](#)

- [Product strategy and product roadmap](), *Roman Pichler*

Product lifecycle

Our strategy will be strongly influenced by where our product is at in its lifecycle.

The above diagram is a standard description of a product lifecycle, and if you imagine that 'sales' is more likely to mean 'adoption' when working in government then it works for us. The GDS service standard takes us to somewhere around 'introduction' or early 'growth' but we often forget about the rest of the lifecycle:

- Introduction: initially, we're looking to define the core features of our product in order to find problem/solution fit, so lots of the work will be focussed on development. As we get data that increases our confidence in the software's features our focus will move to resilience (e.g. infrastructure, information security, service desk, etc) and the skills needed in our team will become more diverse.
- Growth: Once our service is resilient, our focus will be on increasing adoption. This may require marketing, communication, training and operational skills just as much as it requires development skills (maybe even more so).
- Maturity: Once our service approaches its maximum possible adoption then we look to optimise its value over time. New features is one aspect of this but we also need to prioritise innovation, service improvement, and technical debt.
- Decline: We need to review the vision, roadmap and business model canvas for our product/service throughout its lifecycle and at some point the value proposition will weaken to the point where the product/service should be retired. This may be because a business process or policy has changed significantly, a key technology has improved, a 'competitor' has a better offer (and lots of other reasons). Here we need to continue to meet the needs of users until they have moved to the new solution.

Prioritisation and metrics

All of our work as product managers comes to life in the act of prioritisation. Our job is to lead our teams in prioritising the work that is most valuable. As we've seen in this guidance, value is context specific, depending on this like what problem we're solving, who we're solving it for, who our client is, and what stage of the product lifecycle we're in. We can use the business model canvas to define what's valuable today, our vision to define what's valuable in the future, and our roadmaps to define what we think is valuable between now and then.

We can use data (often known as 'metrics') to measure value, set goals, and inform strategy - in other words, to help us prioritise our work. A lot is written about prioritisation but it's still something of a 'dark art'. Framing goals as hypotheses with pass/fail criteria helps us to bring more rigor to this process.

Reading:

- Product Prioritisation by the Numbers, *Kate Bennet*
- Deciding on priorities, *GDS Service Manual*

Here are a couple of tools we can use to get going with prioritisation:

- Prioritise today: impact vs effort is commonly used to evaluate options immediately in front of us. Here's a guide to impact vs effort priorisation from Andy Wicks. Here's a useful article called Why Prioritization by Impact/Effort Doesn't Work by Itamar Gilad to help avoid some of the pitfalls of this approach.
- Prioritise over time: we will need to prioritise different types of work as our product matures. Here's a guide to the different types of work required by a mature product from Barry Overeem.

Metrics (or data) is most useful when it leads to action. They should run through our vision, roadmap, business model canvas, and backlog. Metrics (or data) is most useful when it leads to action, e.g. it helps us to test a hypothesis about how to improve the value of our product/service, or helps us to prioritise an area for improvement. DWP has shared how they identified their key metrics for a service, and the GDS Service Standard contains a lot of advice on key performance indicators.

People are our competitive advantage

Product are only valuable if they're being used. This requires as much understanding of people as it does of technology and product management. In fact, technology is (often) simple; people are (often) complicated. Nikki Lee shared a thread of Tweets that summarises this well:

- "So my first Product Management Hot Take on government systems is that it doesn't matter how great your idea is if you can't build and deploy it to users."
- "We don't talk about it all that often, but a lot of product management in an organization of size is *politics*. What are the power structures in place? What are the rules, both written and unwritten? Who made those rules? What did they want?"
- "Doing this effectively requires empathy, strong communication skills [...] It /also/ requires a deep understanding of whatever it is you're proposing."

We improve the value of our products and the value of our product management by empowering and empathising with people.

Teams ('including 'stakeholders')

Team composition - The agile team onion is a model for teams in large organisations, helping them to understand the full range of people in their teams and the value of each level of involvement. Used with your delivery manager and team, it will help to define the expectations of everyone in the core team, as well as the expectations of collaborators (who occasionally support the work of the team) and supporters (stakeholders who can remove blockers).

Agile team onion

@ewebber

TACIT
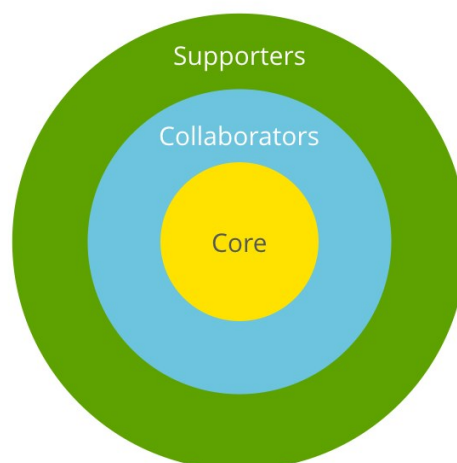
Team functionality - The five dysfunctions of a team helps us to understand the kind of behaviour that indicates that our teams are dysfunctional. Typical indicators of a dysfunctional team are: inattention to results; avoidance of

accountability; lack of commitment; fear of conflict; absence of trust.

Reading:

- The Agile Team Onion, *Emily Webber*
- The Five Dysfunctions of a Team, *Patrick M. Lencioni*
- Stop saying 'the business', start saying 'our business', *Jeff Patton*

Users

Our entire way of working on digital services in government gives us the opportunity to understand the needs of our users before we try and solve their problems. Our guidance for Associate Product Managers includes a section on the Government Service Standard that outlines a lot of this.

Discovery helps us to start all of our products by understanding the needs of our users, so that we can do the least work possible to solve their problems. This is how we optimise the value of public services. Discovery is a critical phase for our products and introduces lots of the concepts and approaches that we'll use throughout the lifecycle of the products we work on.

We focus on services that solve problems for users, and make promises to solve these problems (over making commitments to particular solutions or features), something that requires us to understand what a service is.

Reading: How the discovery phase works, *GOV.UK*

Training: Introduction and basic training days for user research for government services, *GDS Academy*

We build services for all users

Government builds services for everyone in the UK: if someone is entitled to something, we make sure they get it. Accessibility therefore becomes more important for public services then it can be in private services. GDS has published guidance on accessibility and shared an accessibility reading list.

Reading:

- Accessibility guidance, *GDS*
- Accessibility reading list, *GDS*
- Accessibility posters, *Home Office*

It's OK to say 'no'

Our responsibility is to optimise value. If a proposal for action provides little confidence that it will improve value then it's our job to question further - and sometimes, we'll find that there's a better opportunity. It's our responsibility, along with other professions like business analysis and portfolio management, to help our colleagues to re-prioritise work based on return on investment when we can see better alternatives. Sometimes this means saying 'no' - constructively, based on analysis of assumptions underpinning investment proposals - but 'no' nonetheless. We need to work with other value-focussed professions to create an organisational culture where this is OK and actively rewarded.

Product leadership puts our product management skills to work at a larger scale by developing our business strategy and digital transformation skills

Product leadership within public services

We learn all the core product management skills within the Associate Product Manager and Product Manager roles. Senior, Lead and Head of Product Management are about learning and adding leadership skills to our abilities. We're now expected to work at a larger scale, amongst a complicated set of value contexts, possibly in an enterprise setting that's undergoing significat change.

This is the heart of what the move from practitioner to expert mastery means for many product leaders working on public services. We still have the ability to 'get our hands dirty' and use our product management skills, but they're often used to apply product management at scale or to promote product management craftsmanship through example. We're increasingly likely to be managing value within management and leadership teams, rather than delivery teams. We're also responsible for the performance management, support and development of the members of our profession. We're often working in spaces where we have influence, not authority: we're being asked to support business strategy and digital transformation but are not solely responsible for the outcomes and often not playing a lead-role in this work. This means that the 'soft-skills' of teaching, mentoring, coaching and facilitating are hard. Our colleagues responsible for workflow are likely to have more mastery than we have within our profession, and may become key allies in our professional development.

As product leaders we need to remain brilliant at both the basics of product management and of leadership. Every now and then a flash of inspiration is needed and will emerge, but what our profession and our organisation needs from us most of the time is excellence in the basics that keep everything going:

- Product leaders will not always be the best product manager in the profession since we should aim to hire hiring people better than us - but we should remain an excellent product manager, none the less
- We should be the strongest product leaders in the profession, and lead by example.

The career pathway to date has prepared us for this. We are now a visible, first point of contact for the profession, so need to live up to the expectations of that role but recognise that we must share leadership amongst the profession in order to avoid being a bottleneck, and to release the true value of the profession as a whole.

The emergence of product leadership

'Product leadership' is something that's emerged as a valuable role in the last 2-3 years. Mind the Product has introduced a Leadership Forum, and organisational improvement was a key theme of the 2018 Mind the Product conference in London. Mind the Product has now introduced a quarterly product leaders meetup to its London events, aimed solely at Heads of Product, Product Directors, and Chief Product Officers. Summer 2017 also saw the release of a book on Product Leadership, much of it generated through insights from Mind the Product's international network of product leaders.

Reading:

- The Rise of Product Leadership, *Brian Crofts*
- Product Leadership, *Martin Eriksson et al*

Product leadership in the Civil Service

Simon Wardley (business intelligence professional & creator of Wardley 'Value Chain' Mapping) has made the following provocative statement about leadership in general:

> Almost all companies are clueless on strategy, it's all meme copying and gut feel. There's an entire field yet to be discovered, to be understood. It's a wonderful time.
>
> - Twitter, 11 Jan 2018

More specifically, John Manzoni (Chief Executive of the Civil Service) has challenged leadership in the civil service to improve to meet the needs of a complex, multidisciplinary government context:

> We need leaders with empathy, who can manage their teams through transformation and encourage continuous improvement. Leaders with broader experience, who are effective in a complex, multidisciplinary world, who lead with their hearts and their guts, as well as their heads, who see the big picture. Leaders whose instincts - developed through experience - are collaborative; who are used to working across boundaries, confident beyond their own professional area, and inspire and empower their teams - building on the commitments in our Leadership Statement.
>
> - Civil Service transformation speech, 24 Jan 2018

We have a need and an opportunity to help shape product leadership and in doing so to help shape Civil Service leadership.

Reading: A civil service fit for the future, *John Manzoni*

A note on product leadership roles and career progression

Product leadership is in its infancy. Product leadership roles and career progression is highly variable as a result. Associate Product Manager to Product Manager is a fairly consistent career pathway but, in all honesty, all bets are off from that point onwards. Use and implementation of Senior Product Manager, Lead Product Manager, and Head of Product is highly variable for a lot of reasons, here are just a few:

- if an small-medium organisation produces a single product and only has a few Product Managers then their career progression and use of roles might be Associate Product Manager --> Product Manager --> Head of Product
- if an organisation is medium-sized and/or produces more than one product then it may have internal groupings that require Senior Product Managers (sometimes called Group Product Managers), and use of roles and career progression might be Associate Product Manager --> Product Manager --> Senior Product Manager --> Head of Product
- if an organisation is Enterprise sized and/or has several business areas then it might have a Lead Product Manager who acts like a head of product for each business area, each of which has its own groupings, and use of roles and career progression might be Associate Product Manager --> Product Manager --> Senior Product Manager --> Lead Product Manager --> Head of Product. The Senior Product Manager in this context is comparable to the Head of Product in the small organisation with a single product.

You only need to take a look at the Mind the Product Jobs board to see this variation.

What's the point of this observation? This handbook will focus on product leadership as a single 'thing' and share guidance that's (hopefully) useful whether you're a Senior Product Manager, Lead Product Manager, or a Head of Product - with limited space dedicated to Senior Product Manager, Lead Product Manager, and Head of Product as individual roles.

Keep being brilliant at the basics

You should be brilliant at the basics of product management tactics and strategy learned to this point in your career. The skills you learn as an Associate Product Manager and Product Manager provide you with the all the basics you need as a product leader - your challenge is to apply them at scale, in abstract settings.

The training available to you may become narrower as your expertise develops, with general courses diminishing in value (except as an occasional refresher). A few learning providers offer training for more senior product managers looking to develop their expertise:

Mind the Product Training: Mind the Product is the largest and oldest community for product managers and began offering training in 2017. Mind the Product Training offers courses in topics like user story mapping, product roadmapping, stakeholder mapping for product leaders, visual thinking for product people, continuous product discovery, and user research interviews.

Jam Workshops: Jam is an annual product conference and like Mind the Product they have started offering training. Current workshops include 'design sprints done right', and 'using jobs to be done for better product strategy'.

General Assembly: You may wish to increase your awareness of how other professions in your team function, and General Assembly has a range of classes and workshops that may be of use.

Develop expertise in business strategy & digital transformation

Remember our career development diagram? It helps us to understand that when we move from product management to product leadership, we need to start focussing on our generall leadership skills. Working on public services within digital and technology teams within UK government, 'leadership skills' can often mean two things in particular:

Business Strategy - The ability to apply business strategy and management frameworks to employ agile as a competitive business advantage such as Lean Start-Up and Lean Enterprise, product innovation techniques, flow-based business process management approaches, and other techniques that relate to innovating in the business domain.

Digital Transformation - The ability to facilitate, accelerate and (as appropriate) lead organisational change and transformation. This area draws on change management, organisation culture, organisation development, systems thinking, and other behavioral sciences.

There are many resources out there to help with developing our expertise when it comes to business strategy and digital transformation but three of particular value are:

Lean Enterprise by Jezz Humble, Joanne Molesky, and Barry O'Reilly provides essential guidance across business strategy, digital transformation, and (to some extent) product management expertise. They take the concepts of The Lean Startup and explain how they work in an enterprise setting.

The Art of Business Value by Mark Schwartz focusesses on business strategy. The book is intended to help define the role of Chief Information Officer in a modern, value-driven organisation where technology is becoming less important than the outcomes it helps deliver, but in doing so provides lots of tools to help us work out what 'value' actually means in the context of government.

An Introduction to Wardley Maps by Simon Wardley provides an introduction to the eponymous value chain mapping tool that Simon developed to help organisations build their business strategy. This video featuring Simon also provides a useful introduction. Simon provides the story of developing Wardley Mapping in this post.

Additional reading: Why product people should care about business strategy, *Roman Pichler*

Develop expertise in teaching, mentoring, coaching and facilitation

The value of product management expertise, business strategy and digital transformation is often released via 'soft skills' such as mentoring and teaching, coaching and facilitating. Delivery Managers may often be the experts in these skills within our teams, but the skills remain important for product managers too.

Teaching - The ability to offer the right knowledge, at the right time, taught in the right way, so that individuals, teams and organisations use the knowledge for their best benefit.

Mentoring - The ability to impart your experience, knowledge and guidance to help develop other product managers.

Coaching - The ability to act as a non-directive coach (with the coachee's interest determining the direction, rather than your own expertise or opinion).

Facilitation - The ability to act as a neutral process holder, guiding and individual's/team's/organisation's process of discovery, holding them to their purpose and definition of success.

There are many resources out there to help with developing our expertise when it comes to teaching, mentoring, coaching and facilitating, but these are particularly valuable:

Building Successful Communities of Practice by Emily Webber contains the model on which many government departments have designed their communities of practice - you can see a recent summary here. Emily's community maturity model can measure improvements in the strength of our profession.

Everyone needs a coach by Kate Leto and Barry O'Reilly is a useful article for those new to coaching and mentoring; it provides and introduction to the difference between a coach, a mentor, and a consultant, and the possible value of each.

Executives and safety (get it done individuals can be toxic in agile environments) by Chris Matts

Hard skills vs. soft skills Kate Leto and Martin Eriksson

See the bigger picture

You need to be aware of all the dimensions of leadership and make sure they're in balance. Georg Fasching is an executive coach who has developed a leadership model to help us find this balance.
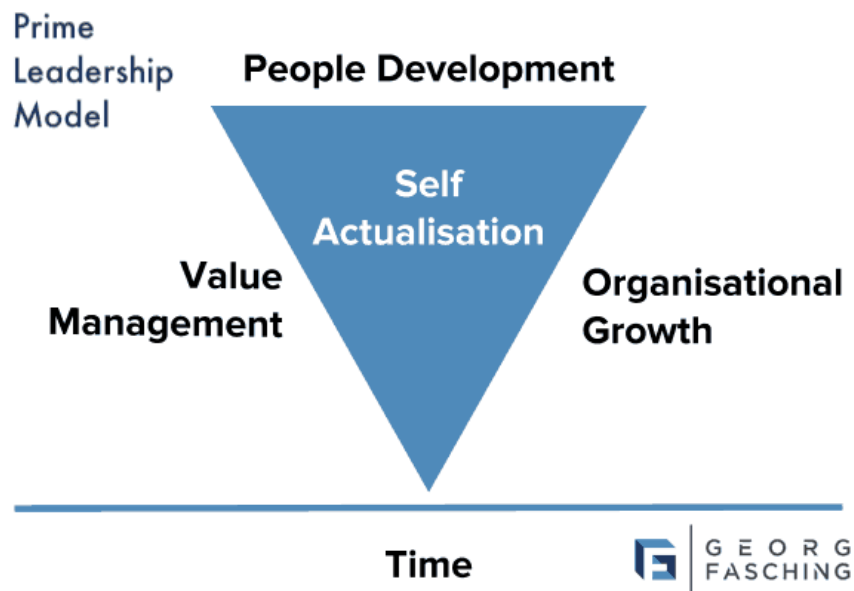
Georg talks about what the dimensions mean in a general sense in his introductory post.

Scott Colfer (Head of Product, Ministry of Justice) has personalised this model and attempted to contextualise for product management in his own team in this post.

Improve public services, one step at a time

We're in the midst of a huge amount of work to transform government. Government is massive, complex and over 800 years old, so how do we transform it? The answer is: **focus on changing one small thing at a time, and eventually it will add up to big change**.

The shift towards end-to-end services that truly meet the needs of the public and civil servants will take time to achieve: it's a long-term and challenging target condition. We are starting a process of innovation in conditions of uncertainty, so we cannot know in advance how we will reach this target condition. It's up to us, and everyone else working within public services, to run a series of experiments that allow us to make small changes, quickly.

Tools like the 'plan-do-check-act' cycle help us to run these experiments and make small changes quickly. Here's a summary of the cycle:

- Plan. Recognise an opportunity and plan a change.
- Do. Test the change. Carry out a small-scale study.
- Check. Review the test, analyze the results and identify what you've learned.
- Act. Take action based on what you learned in the study step: If the change did not work, go through the cycle again with a different plan. If you were successful, incorporate what you learned from the test into wider changes. Use what you learned to plan new improvements, beginning the cycle again.

We can apply these small improvements to our teams, our service areas, our profession, our business units, and public services as a whole.

This general approach to improvement, applied to multiple levels of an organisation, is often referred to as an improvement 'Kata' (a Japanese word that's been taken and used to refer to a basic pattern that is used to improve our mastery of something). It does not tell us what to do, it just tells us how to improve. You can find a video explaining Kata here.

The improvement Kata is suited to conditions of uncertainty, but is also suited to helping us to avoid burn-out. Government is 800 years old and one of the largest organisations in the country - if we each try to change it, at scale, on our own then we will burn out. The improvement Kata helps us to balance the need to help government improve, with the need to set realistic targets: as long as we are focussing on improving one thing every few weeks then we can be proud that we're doing our job well.

We may want to work more closely with areas of our organisation beyond 'delivery teams', like procurement and portfolio. They are both places where prioritisation and investment decisions are made based on value - things that product management does well and should step-up and support. Change management is another area of the organisation that we should work more closely with: continuous delivery and continuous integration are integral to our way of

working and are (in effect) modern methods of change management. Lean Enterprise dedicates a section to translating continuous delivery for traditional, enterprise Change Management process.

Reading:

- Transforming a 150-year-old government agency, *Tera Atlas*
- Why Enterprise Agile Teams Fail, *Sam McAfee*

It's still OK to say 'no'

Our responsibility is to optimise value. If a proposal for action provides little confidence that it will improve value then it's our job to question further - and sometimes, we'll find that there's a better opportunity. It's our responsibility, along with other professions like business analysis and portfolio management, to help our colleagues to reprioritise work based on return on investment when we can see better alternatives. Sometimes this means saying 'no' - constructively, based on analysis of assumptions underpinning investment proposals - but 'no' nonetheless. We need to work with other value-focussed professions to create an organisational culture where this is OK. We also need to give the profession as a whole permission to work in this way.

Senior Product Manager can often be thought of as a group product manager

Use and implementation of product leadership roles like Senior Product Manager can vary a lot, as we've previously noted. We're going to take a look at what Senior Product Manager might look like in an enterprise with mutliple business areas.

Senior Product Managers can be thought of as 'group product managers'. They manage a group of things that share commonalities, users, or interdependencies. For example, there may be a grouping of things around sign-on, and a Senior Product Manager might provide the overall value strategy for 2-5 things in this space. They're likely to have a Lead Product Manager for their business area.

Senior Product Manager is an interesting point in our career pathway, as it is the tipping point between product management and product leadership. We're still expected to work directly within delivery teams, but also expected to work with our Lead Product Manager to influence and support overall strategy for our business unit and our profession. We'll need to maintain our ability to work in a delivery team in the ways we've learned as an Associate Product Manager and Product Manager, but increasingly need to develop your product leadership skills in order to focus on the needs of the broader organisation.

The GOV.UK role description for Senior Product Managers is great, clearly setting out expected skills, and the level of expertise required in each of these skills.

Lead Product Manager can often be thought of as a 'head' of product for an area of the business

Use and implementation of product leadership roles like Lead Product Manager can vary a lot, as we've previously noted. We're going to take a look at what Lead Product Manager might look like in an enterprise with mutliple business areas.

Lead Product Managers can be thought of as 'heads of product' for an area of the business. These areas are often the clients we work for, so we might be leading all of the in-house software development for a single programme, department, or delivery agency: we're responsible for the overall value of our work for that client, building an overall value proposition that helps us to priortise opportunities. We're also responsible for leading the product management community in our area of the business. We probably spend less and less time working directly in delivery teams, and more and more time working with management teams and with functions from the broader operational teams. Lead Product Managers will report in to the overall Head of Product.

The GOV.UK role description for Lead Product Managers is great, clearly setting out expected skills, and the level of expertise required in each of these skills.

Head of Product: have empathy, avoid dogmatism

Use and implementation of product leadership roles like Head of Product can vary a lot, as we've previously noted. We're going to take a look at what Head of Product might look like in an enterprise with mutliple business areas.

Product management is often described as a role which is about influence, not authority: Head of Product is no different. You are likely to have at least two version of your role when working in government, one of which you will give you some authority, and the other in which you will need to seek influence:

1. **Head of Profession** - The space where you have clearest responsibility and authority is that of the product profession itself. You are responsible for the the performance of the product management profession and the product managers within in. This includes owning and improving the role of 'product manager' itself, plus the recruitment and performance management of product managers. You are the most senior representative of the profession, responsible for making sure that it meets the needs of our colleagues - which sometimes requires challenging assumptions about the role and supporting the use of other professions. This role is similar to all other heads of profession

2. **Head of Product** - Product managers in government are responsible for the value of public services or the features of public services. You are the most senior representative of value strategy in your role as Head of Product. Government is still unfamiliar with product management and its application outside of delivery teams, within management and leadership teams (we are seeing our first Directors of Product and Chief Product Officers being hired in government departments). As a result of this, you will need to seek opportunities to support and influence value strategy at an organisational level and are unlikely to be given clear authority. This is covered to some extent by the head of product role description on GOV.UK.

Our job is to improve the value of public services. Our scope is often the digital, technology, or data features of these services. It is important to remember this when thinking of the value of our work - it often needs to sit in a much larger context, and we need to be conscious of optimising one feature of a public service at the cost of passing a problem downstream to an operational team. If optimising a feature of a service does not show a real improvement in overall value for users of that service then we should question whether it's the right thing to do.

In all of this we need to **have empathy and avoid dogmatism**. Many digital teams are large enterprises, the departments they're sat within even larger. We work in multiple contexts at once - if you can't work with organisational complexity then government in 2018 is not the right place for you to pursue your career. As Head of Product you need to acknowledge these different contexts, retain focus on our unique selling point as a profession (improving value through value strategy), be aware of our limits, and seek opportunities to:

- Support and influence value strategy at the organisational level, work with Heads of Business Units to empower Lead Product Managers to do the same at a local level within their own business units
- Work with, support, and learn from the other value-focussed professions so that we all align to similar goals and make the most of our time and expertise
- Work with, support, and understand more about the professions focussed on workflow and quality, so that you don't over-optimise for your own profession and allow a narrow view to blind you to bigger goals.
- Most importantly, work with central leadership and leadership of local business units so that the product professions really helps your organisation to accomplish its missions.

What we needs is principles & trust, derived from clear visions that help us understand user-focussed objectives. What we don't need is dogma, and we avoid dogma with empathy. The Agile Manifesto for Software Development describes this as "**individuals and interactions over processes and tools**".