



Product Management - External

Product Management is a practice within an organization that spans the *strategy and execution* of the full product lifecycle. When successful, the organization experiences validated product market fit through growing product adoption, effective cross-functional coordination, and predictable delivery of new features and updates.

The history of product management is long and has evolved tremendously over the years. Its inception dates all the way back to Proctor and Gamble in the 1930s as the “Brand Man”. The origin of product management has customer centricity and aligning business goals at its core. However, the implementation of the practice in organizations has shifted as industries changed and has had dramatic impacts on the role of a product manager. From being a part of the marketing organization to going very close to product development and part of the technical organization. Only in the last 10-15 years has product management been shifting into its own function (not reporting up through technology or marketing) within organizations such that products built with customer centricity are directly aligned to business vision and goals. As Mind the Product states, this makes product management “internal as well as external evangelists of that vision, and gives them the independence necessary to make tough prioritization calls.”

The role of the product manager, and the name of the role itself (product owner, scrum master, TPM, etc), can vary greatly within an organization. It is often influenced by the size of the organization, the industry, the organization's choice of agile framework and the career history of senior leaders.

The following is an articulation of how Focused Labs views the role and responsibilities of a product manager, as well as the core principles and practices we deploy when doing product management with clients.

The Product Manager's Role & Responsibilities

Product managers are responsible for *identifying customer needs, defining product requirements, aligning work with business outcomes, and overseeing the product development process*. They work with cross-functional teams, including executive leadership, engineering, design, marketing, and sales, to ensure that the product meets the market demand and is delivered on time and within budget. Additionally, product managers are responsible for setting *product strategy, conducting market research, and analyzing data* to inform product decisions. Overall, **the product manager's goal is to create and deliver a successful product that meets customer needs and drives business growth.**

For more details, Reforge has done a great job of breaking the Product Manager's role and responsibilities down into its most generic form.

Principles First

A principle is a fundamental truth or belief that guides decision-making and behavior. The following are the beliefs that guide Focused Labs product managers in their approach to product development.

- **Outcome-driven** - We believe in identifying and measuring the success of a product based on the impact it has on the desired outcomes, rather than just the number of features or releases. It prioritizes identifying and solving customer problems that align with business goals.

- **Working Software Above All Else** - We believe that the most reliable and effective feedback comes from an application deployed to production. Therefore, we pursue small, incremental releases to create short feedback loops. Our ability to be highly effective agile project managers, regardless of our seniority as product managers, enables us to deliver reliably.
- **Cross-functional Collaboration** — We believe that effective product management requires close collaboration with cross-functional teams, including engineering, design, marketing, and leadership. Product managers should be able to work effectively with these teams to ensure that the product meets its goals.
- **Continuous Improvement** — We believe that no product is ever truly "done". By reviewing customer feedback and data, product managers should be able to identify opportunities for improvement and make necessary changes to the product.
- **User Centricity** — We believe that everything starts and ends with the user. Product managers are responsible for representing the voice of the customer and making sure that the product meets their needs.
- **Agile Mindset** — We believe in the Extreme Programming (XP) agile framework because of its efficacy in delivering high quality software predictably. Product managers are familiar with other agile frameworks and are able to adapt them to the needs of the organization alongside XP.
 - We also acknowledge that the Extreme Programming guidance has not been updated to provide clear and consistent guidance for the roles of product management and design in a cross-functional software development team. We may at times make strategic adjustments to our practices and processes to more effectively enable modern product management to be embedded in our cross-functional development teams.
- **Data-driven Decision Making** — We believe in using data and insights to make informed decisions about the product. Product managers are able to interpret data and use it to drive product strategy.