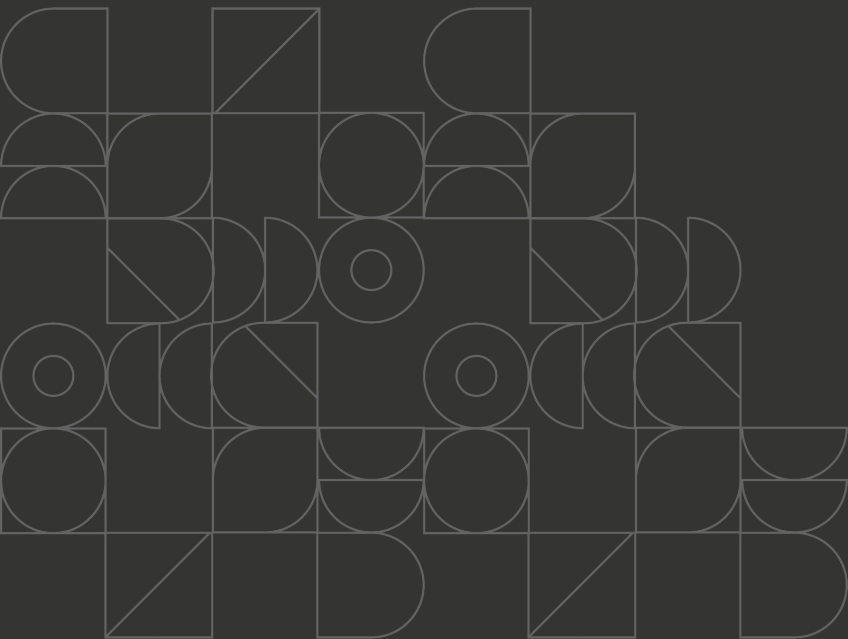


So what does a product manager do, exactly?

Women of Silicon Roundabout | Nov 23 2023



Maya Kaczorowski
Chief Product Officer |  **tailscale**



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she/her

@MayaKaczorowski



tailscale

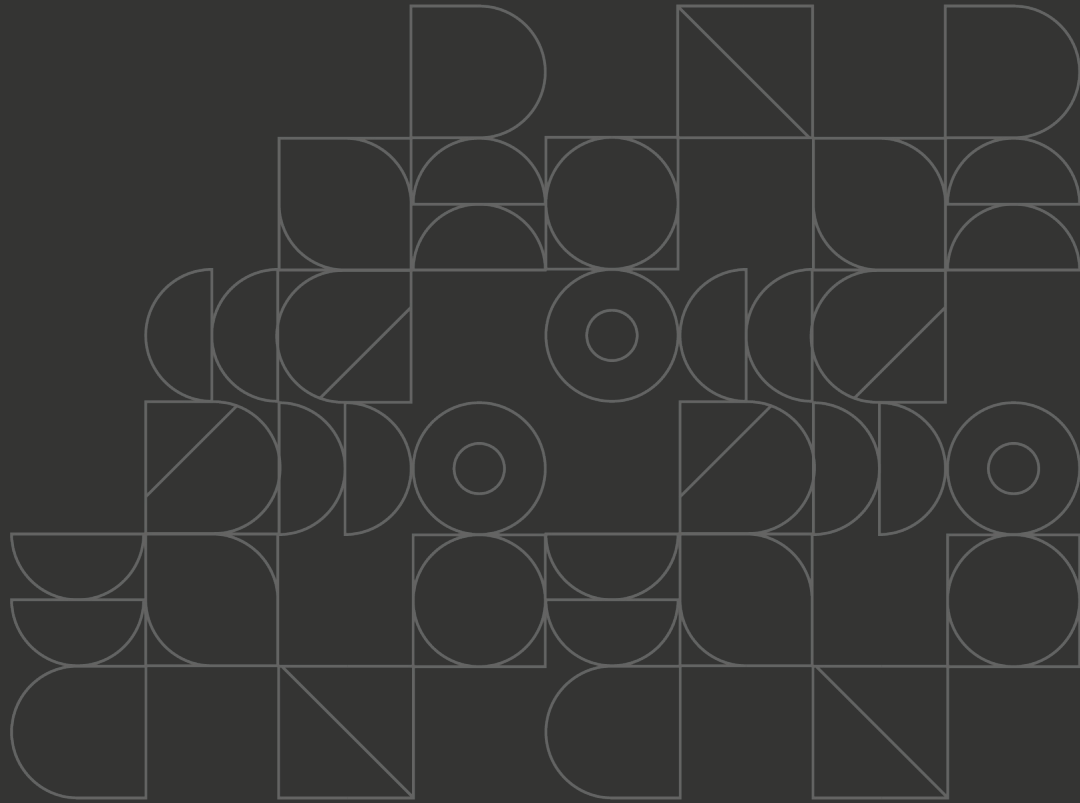
Chief Product Officer

Agenda

- Role and responsibilities
- Building a great product
 - Customer needs
 - Engineering needs
- Working cross-functionally
- Is product management right for you?



What is a Product Manager?



Different products, users, and companies

Product

Enterprise

Consumer

Software

Hardware

Digital

Tactical

VS

User

Builders

End users

Company

Startups

Large companies

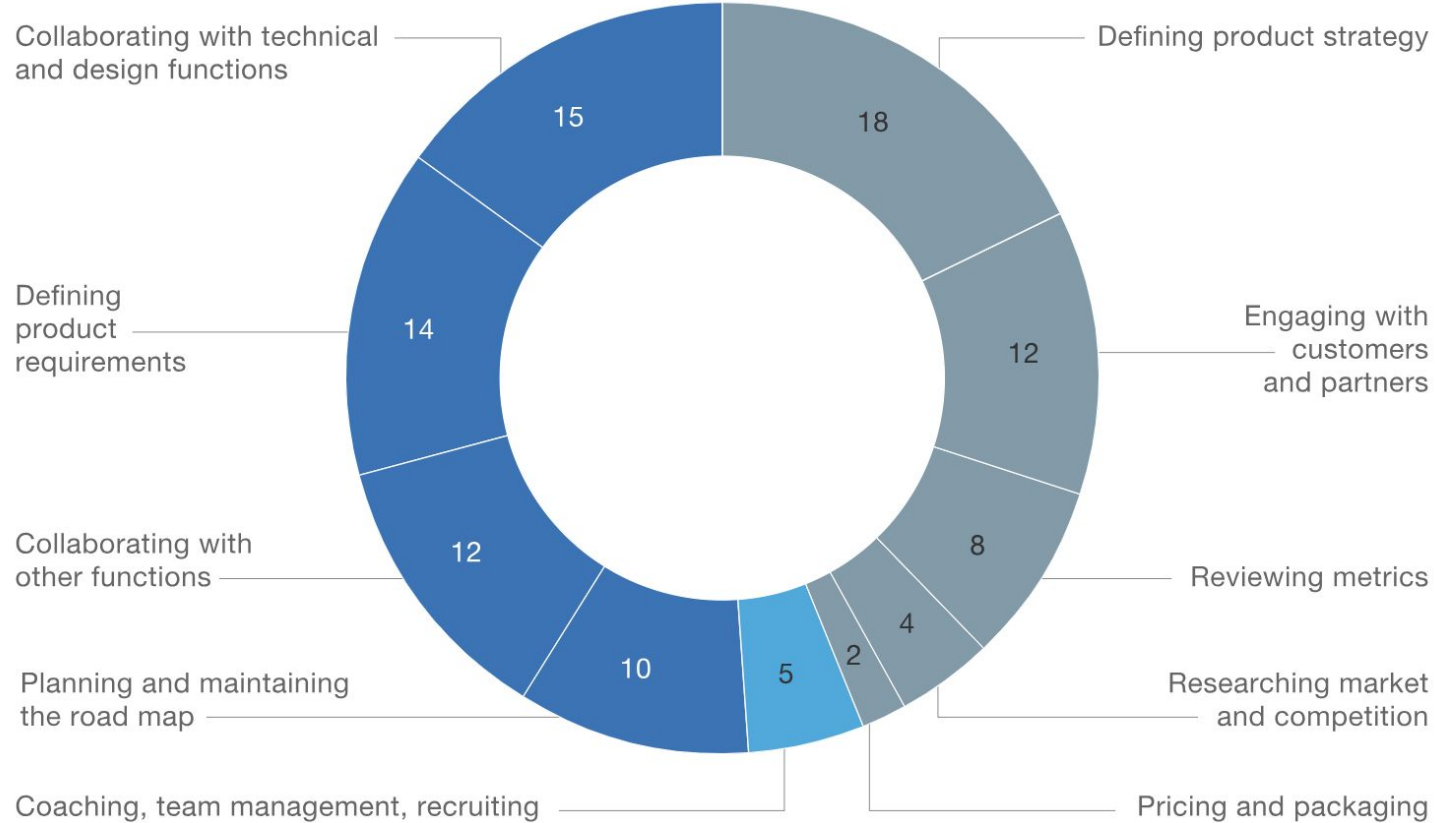
A Product Manager's role is to...

- Identify and solve the customer's underlying need
- Understand, define, and ensure requirements are met
- Act as the interface between teams
- Manage the development of the product, from end to end

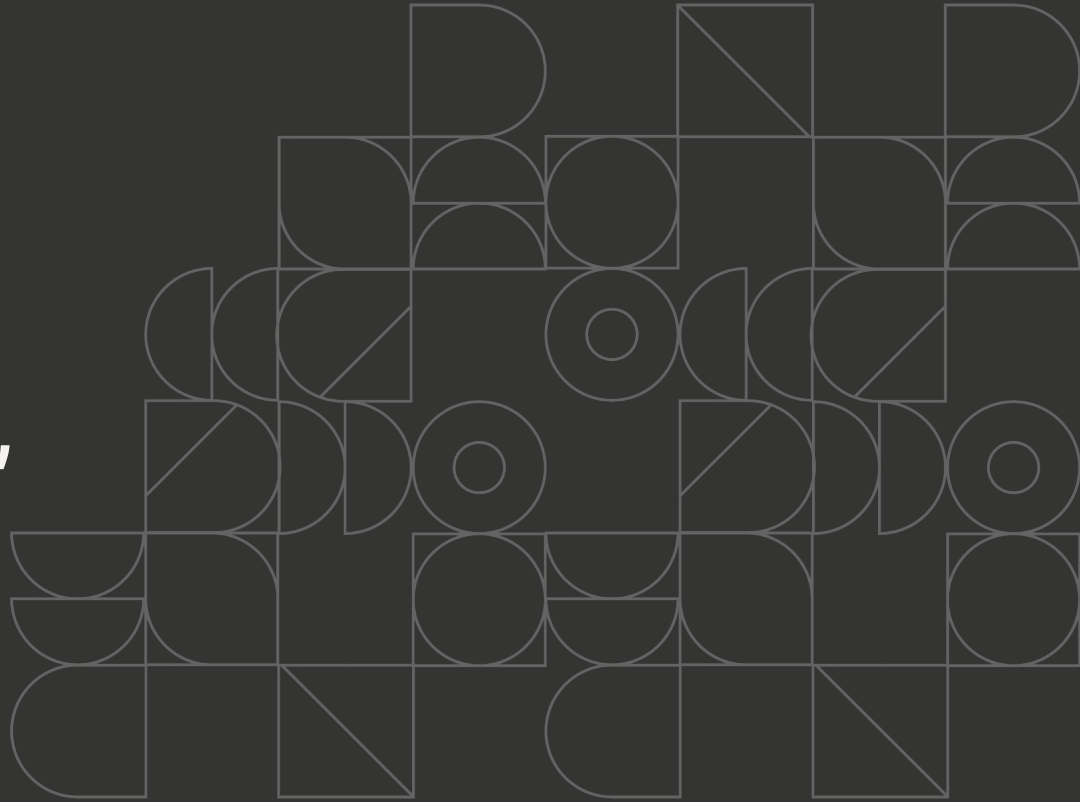
There's no such thing as a typical day

- Customer meetings
- Writing: PRDs, strategy, blog posts, documentation
- Team syncs, 1:1s
- Planning: roadmap, backlogs
- Analyzing data

Typical time spent by product managers,
average % of time spent on each activity across respondents



**Building a product,
end to end**



The ultimate goal when building a product is...

To meet the customer's
underlying needs, and help
them accomplish their
critical user journey

and

To build a product that finds
product market fit, i.e. the
customer is willing to pay
for the product

Critical user journeys (CUJs)

A critical user journey is a task a user is trying to accomplish with your product.

To oversimplify, these can be written in the form:

As a user, I want to complete a task, so that I can achieve my ultimate goal.

CUJs can be broad or specific

A CUJ is both the **broad set of tasks** for why a user chooses this specific product, e.g.,

- As a developer, I want to SSH into my production server, so that I can debug my application.
- As a parent, I want to share my child's allergy information with their school, so that they can be treated in the case of an emergency.

And the **smaller set of tasks** a user needs to complete to use this product to meet their specific needs, e.g.,

- As a security admin, I want to see which users have access to my network, so that I can perform an audit.
- As a student, I want to add a new person I just met at school to my contacts, so that I can text them later.

These are **new features**.
Inputs to product strategy.

These are improvements on **existing features**.
Inputs to improving the existing user experience.

CUJs can be for frequent or infrequent tasks

A toothbrush CUJ is frequent and important. The user will do it again and again. And again. Maybe every day. It's got to be super easy.

- Send a message
- Take a photo

A pivotal CUJ is infrequent and important. The user will do it once in a while, but at a crucial point in their customer journey. It can make or break their decision to keep using the product, and their trust in the product.

- Choose a pricing plan
- Delete your account

Gathering customer needs

How to gather requirements

- Customer interviews
- Data
- Existing customers and new prospects

Get to the “why”

- Getting the customer requirements != understanding customer needs
- Problems, not solutions

The answer is not always a product

The goal is to meet a customer's needs

This can also be: reassurance, understanding, explanation, etc.



Backlogs

Why do you need a backlog?

- To understand which customers want which features
- To prioritize features
- To ensure you build the right functionality for a feature

Prioritization

- Number of customers
- Types of customers: Are they your ICP?
- Prospects vs. existing customers vs. lost deal reasons
- Difficulty



Defining an MVP

MVP = **Minimum** Viable Product

- Solves the problem
- Can have rough edges
- Alpha / Beta / GA phases



Building the product

- Tracking progress
- Predicting a timeline
- Customer commitments



Engineering requirements

- Testing
- Monitoring
- Refactoring / readability
- Tech debt



Launches

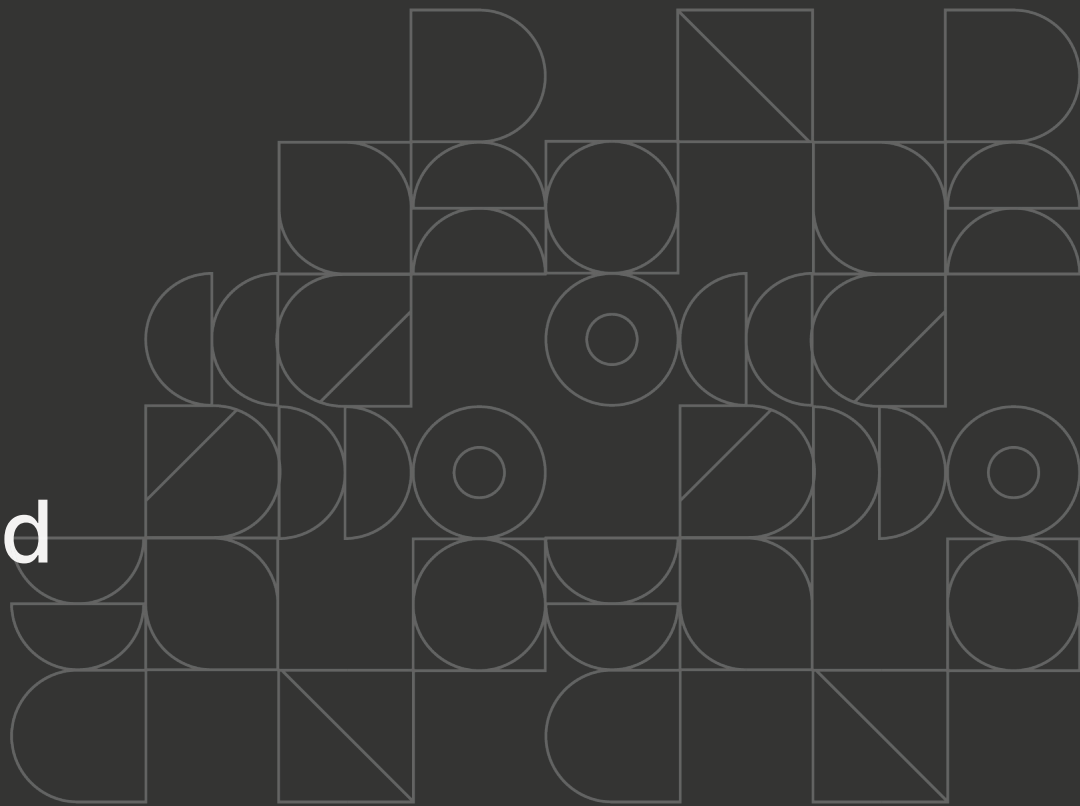
- Launch checklists
- Launch phases: availability, support expectations

Release != launch

- Software releases
- Marketing events

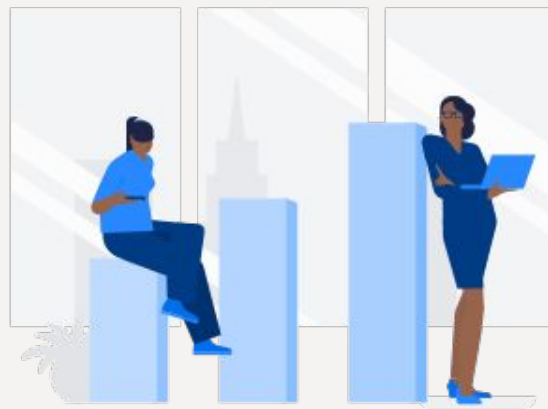


Building a *great*
product, end to end



Product Market Fit

- Product *satisfies* the market
- Target customers are buying and using the product
- 40% of customers would be “very disappointed” if they could no longer use the product



Launch and iterate

- Address bugs or common issues
- *Quickly* improve and address concerns

Need

- Great feedback process
- Data



Experimentation

Why?

- Get feedback even earlier

Figure out how to do experimentation

- Not the same for B2B and B2C
- Apps: TestFlight
- Web: A/B testing



Pricing

Very hard to get right

- Much more complicated topic
- You could spend infinite time on just this

Making changes

- Minimize cost of change / one-way doors
- Make change positive

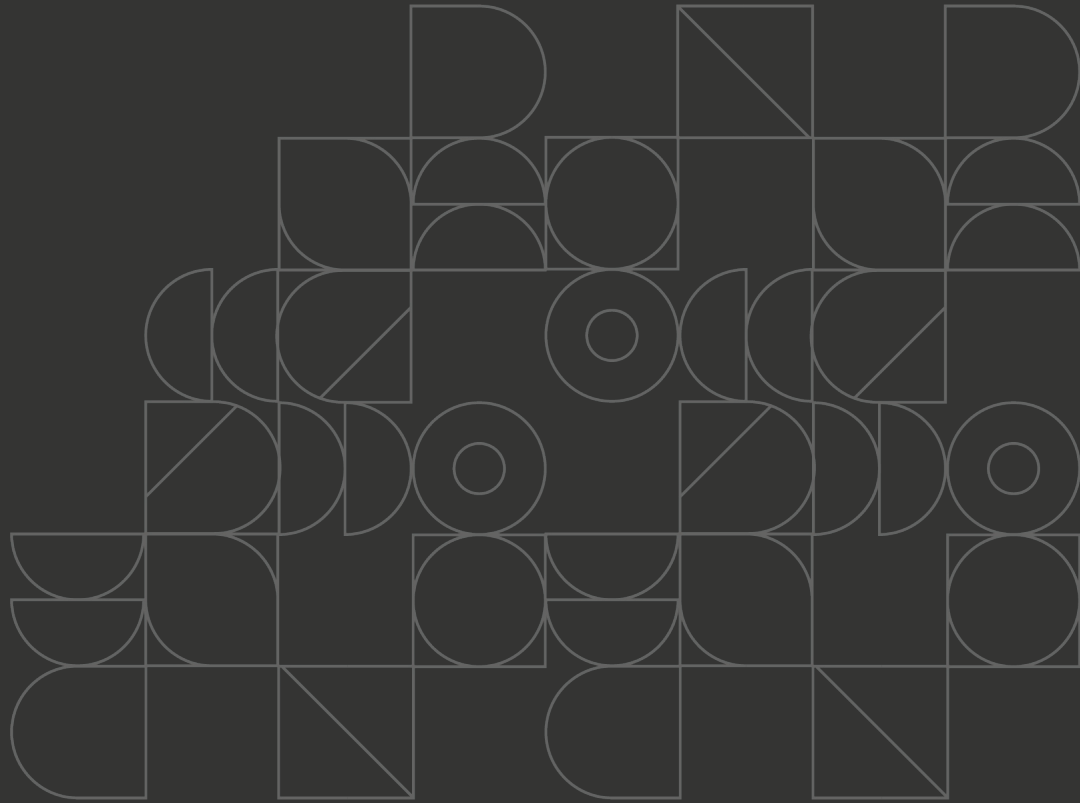
Product fundamentals



Product fundamentals

- Process: feature discovery, feature prioritization, user feedback, launches
- Strategy: vision, mission, CUJs, JTBD, competitive analysis, differentiators, partnerships
- Roadmap
- Customer feedback: interview guide
- Style guides or requirements: launch phases, API/ CLI, naming, pricing

**Working cross
functionally**



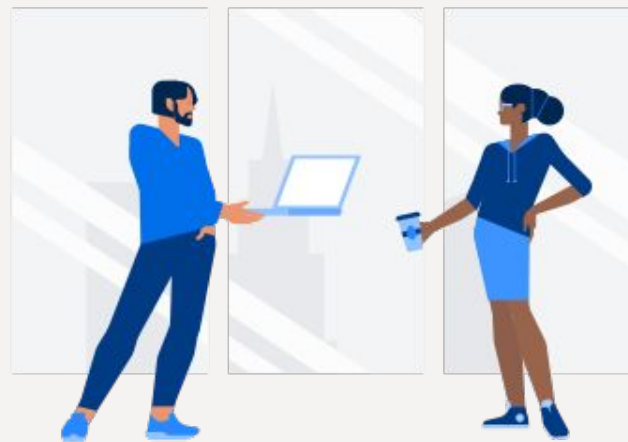
Engineering, Product, and Design (EPD)

- Triad that should work closely together
- No one function dominating
- Joint planning



Other functions

- Docs
- Solutions
- Sales
- Marketing
- Partnerships
- Research
- ...



Communication internally

- Single place with status
- Regular updates
- Clear and consistent
- OVER COMMUNICATE

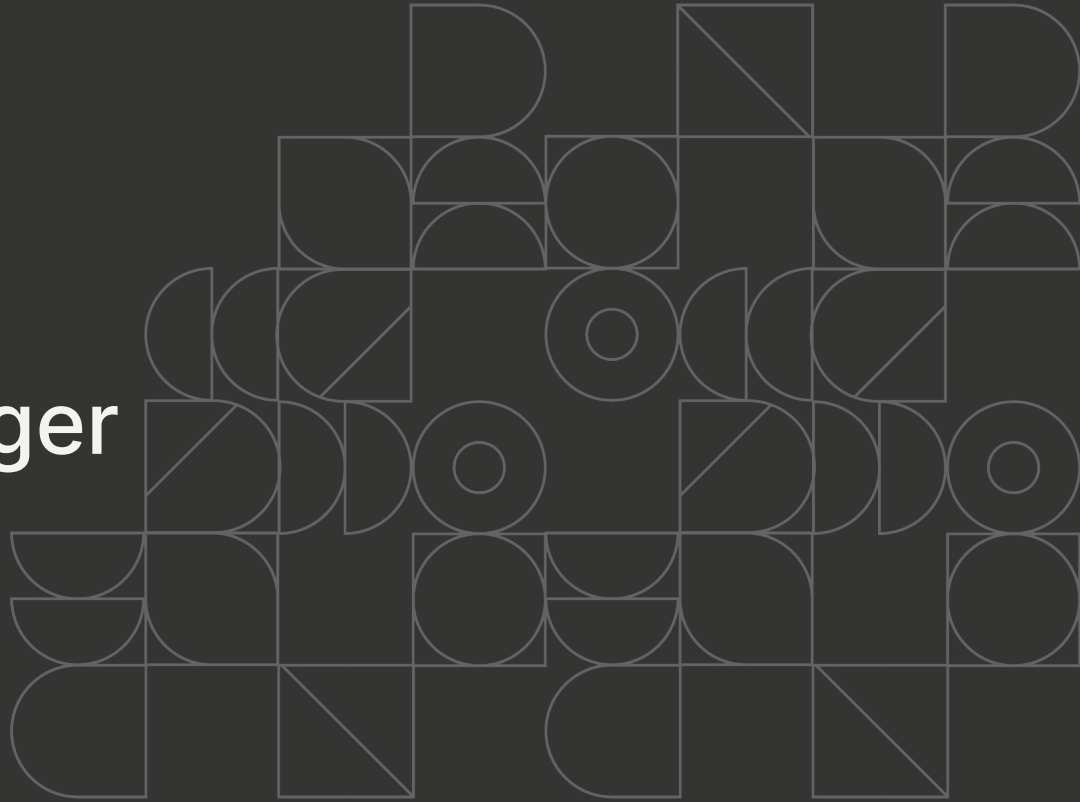


Make things easily editable

- Your job as a PM is to unblock things
- Make it easy to edit docs, write blog posts



**Is a Product Manager
job right for you?**



What skills you need

- Qualitative & quantitative analysis
- Synthesizing
- Communication
- Detail oriented
- Balancing multiple competing priorities

What companies look for

- Technical understanding
- Customer empathy
- Solving tough problems
- Working cross-functionally

Typical interview process

- Case study
- Experiential interview

Summary

- Product Managers solve customers' underlying needs
- Product Managers are the glue holding an organization together
- Product Managers are flexible — no two roles are the same

