University of Maryland
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Mastering the PM Interview
FAQ

What is a Product Manager?

1. A product manager is the intermediary between the customers, engineers, and designers. They facilitate product and feature development. This is a customer focused role as the Product Manager is seen as an advocate for users.
2. Product Management
   a. The practice of strategically driving the development, market launch, and continual support and improvement of a company's products
   b. "Product management is the glue that holds together all the various functions and roles across a company that speaks different languages," adds Ken Norton, Product Partner at GV (previously Google Ventures). "It's like the universal communicator in Star Trek—a hub of communication between all these different groups. A product isn't going to be successful without that glue holding those teams together." This underscores the greatest challenge for product managers—that the job is not just about the hard skills outlined earlier, but more about the soft skills of persuasion, negotiation, storytelling, vision setting, and communication.

What are the usual tasks/responsibilities of a Product Manager?

1. The role of a Product Manager is to figure out what the customer's need is (and which need is most urgent/important), and define the solution/feature that will fulfill the need,

while the designers are there to figure out how a user should interact with the solution/feature and engineers are there to build it out! - Annie Fang

2. "Product managers are responsible for guiding the success of a product and leading the cross-functional team that is responsible for improving it. It is an important organizational role — especially in technology companies — that sets the strategy, roadmap, and feature definition for a product or product line. The position may also include marketing, forecasting, and profit and loss (P&L) responsibilities."

For further information on the roles of a Product Manager:
https://www.aha.io/roadmapping/guide/product-management/what-is-the-role-of-a-product-manager

3. Key Tasks:
   a. "Defines the product vision, strategy, and roadmap."
   b. "Gathers, manages, and prioritizes market/customer requirements."
   c. "Acts as the customer advocate articulating the user's and/or buyer's needs."
   d. "Works closely with engineering, sales, marketing, and support to ensure business case and customer satisfaction goals are met."

Further information on the key tasks of a Product Manager:
https://280group.com/what-is-product-management/roles/product-manager/

What is a day in the life of a PM intern?

- Typical day as a Microsoft PM intern:
  - No day was the same! But here's an example day:
    - Meeting with engineers early morning (b/c of time zone difference) to discuss my 18-page functional spec
    - Time to dive into the feedback I received from my engineers and keep updating my spec
    - Meeting with my mentor (who's a PM) and my team lead to figure out next steps in this project
      - Analyze customer scenarios and our current offerings to create gap analysis

- Meeting with entire team (engineers, PMs, and architects) to discuss the current state of project, what everyone has done, and action items for the week
    - Note: the typical format would be PMs explaining roadmap, architect describing plan, engineers responding if it's feasible and presenting what they've done, and PMs advocating for what customer is looking for
- Lunch break!
- Time to work on my Figma prototype and test multiple user scenarios
- Attend a fun intern workshop or event & respond to all my emails

Here's more examples:

https://medium.com/@stervy/day-in-the-life-of-a-google-product-manager-3eb6d34a6904

https://radiant-brushlands-42789.herokuapp.com/medium.com/exponent/everything-you-wanted-to-know-about-being-a-new-grad-program-manager-a1d6f9724758

What are the differences between product, program, and project managers?

1. Product Manager
    a. "Play a strategic role setting the overall product direction."
    b. "Focus on satisfying and anticipating users' needs."
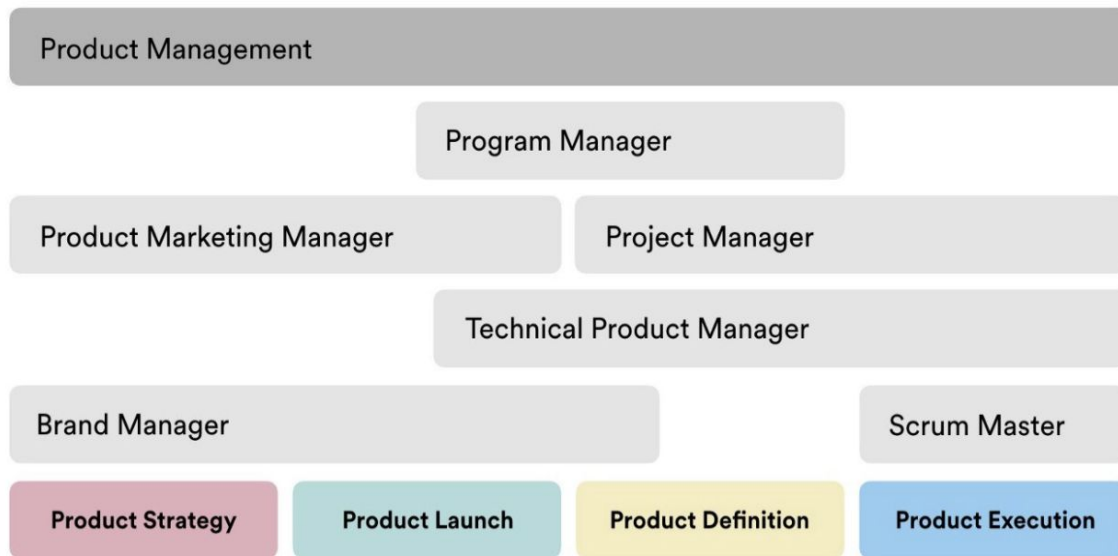   c. "Responsible for generating value for their customers."
2. Program Manager
    a. "Oversee a group of dependent projects to reach the program goals."
    b. "Focus on integrating the deliverables into the organization operation."
    c. "Deliver benefits incrementally during the course of the initiative."
3. Project Manager
    a. "Manage the scope and are responsible for delivery, budget, resource allocation, and quality."
    b. "Every project is a temporary endeavor, it's not recurring tasks."

c. "Oversee and manage the development of the project by mitigating risks, and managing issues."

	Product Management	Program Management	Project Management
Definition	Product Management is the practice of strategically driving the development, market launch, and continual support and improvement of a company's products.	Program Management involves coordinating the interdependencies among projects, products, and other important strategic initiatives across an organization.	Project Management involves managing teams responsible for fulfilling the project and achieving its deliverables.
Main Responsibilities	Serves the end users Creates product roadmap Creates strategy for product (e.g., includes enhancements and upgrades) Supports product life cycle stages	Implements strategies and measure success Oversees a group of dependent projects to reach the program goals Aligns with long-term business objectives	Develops timeline and project milestones Organizes workflow and resource allocation Provides on-time and within budget project completion
Timeline	It can never be considered complete since your user is always evolving with different needs.	Expands beyond the completion of its projects to the long-term program execution.	A temporary endeavor with a defined start and end date.

Product Management			

	Program Manager		

Product Marketing Manager		Project Manager	

	Technical Product Manager		

Brand Manager			Scrum Master

Product Strategy	Product Launch	Product Definition	Product Execution

[Source](#)

For more information on the differences between the three roles:

https://medium.com/pm101/the-difference-between-product-program-and-project-management-64e2f1ee4f01

https://www.productplan.com/product-management-vs-program-management/

https://www.projectmanager.com/training/the-difference-between-a-program-manager-and-a-project-manager

How to transition from a Technical/Software Engineering role to a Product Manager role?

1. "Software engineering is one of the most common starting points when transitioning into a product management role. Because product management lies at the intersection of business strategy, product design, and technology, software engineers with an understanding of how modern software is designed and built can have a tangible advantage as product managers."

2. "There are multiple different, equally valid ways to transition into product management from software engineering. As a software engineer, you've acquired a keen understanding of how modern software is built and shipped. **To become a product manager, it's key to supplement that understanding of technology** with rich communication skills, an eye for good design, and a perspective on product strategy / industry trends."

Further information on transitioning from a Software Engineering role to a Product Manager role: https://blog.tryexponent.com/transition-software-to-product/

What are other non-traditional technology roles?

1. Project Manager
2. Technical Writer
3. User Experience Designer
4. User Interface Designer
5. Product Designer
6. Information Architect
7. Mobile Designer
8. SEO/SEM Specialist
9. Marketing Automation Manager
10. Business Analyst
11. Technical Recruiter
12. Operations Manager
13. System Administrator
14. Software Quality Tester
15. Tech Support Specialist
16. Software Sales Representative

For more information on non-traditional tech roles:

1. https://www.forbes.com/sites/laurencebradford/2017/03/07/16-tech-careers-you-can-land-no-coding-required/#2c7dbb6226af
2. https://www.themuse.com/advice/tech-company-jobs-no-coding-required

What is user-centered design?

1. PMs use a lot of user-centered design thinking like designers when it comes to the earlier stages of research/customer interviews; here is a great resource for user research and a highly recommended book for customer interviews!
2. "User-centered design (UCD) is an **iterative design process** in which designers focus on the users and their needs in each phase of the design process. In UCD, design teams

involve users throughout the design process via a variety of research and design techniques, to create highly usable and accessible products for them."
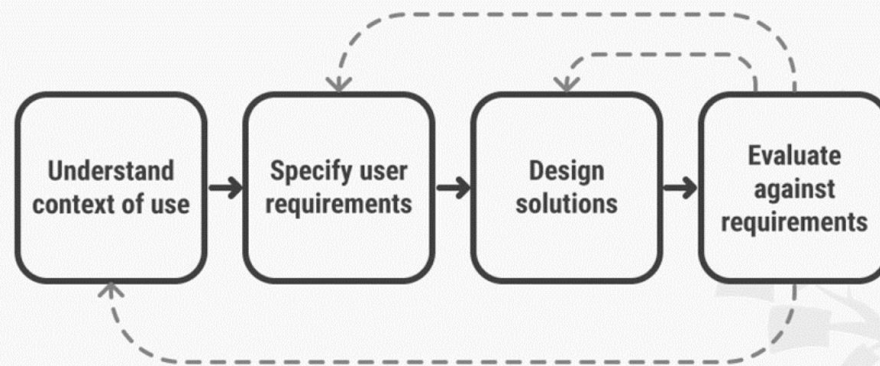
User-centered design is an iterative process where you take an understanding of the users and their context as a starting point for all design and development.

3. "Generally, each iteration of the UCD approach involves four distinct phases. First, as designers working in teams, we try to understand the context in which users may use a system. Then, we identify and specify the users' requirements. A design phase follows, in which the design team develops solutions. The team then proceeds to an evaluation phase. Here, you assess the outcomes of the evaluation against the users' context and requirements, to check how well a design is performing. More specifically, you see how close it is to a level that matches the users' specific context and satisfies all of their relevant needs. From here, your team makes further iterations of these four phases, and you continue until the evaluation results are satisfactory."

4. Another important aspect of user-centered design is designing for all users! Read here about the history of biased design processes that resulted in products that excluded groups of users, especially historically marginalized groups of people.

For further information on user-centered design:

Take CMSC434 - Introduction to Human-Computer Interaction

https://www.nngroup.com/articles/author/don-norman/

https://www.interaction-design.org/literature/topics/user-centered-design