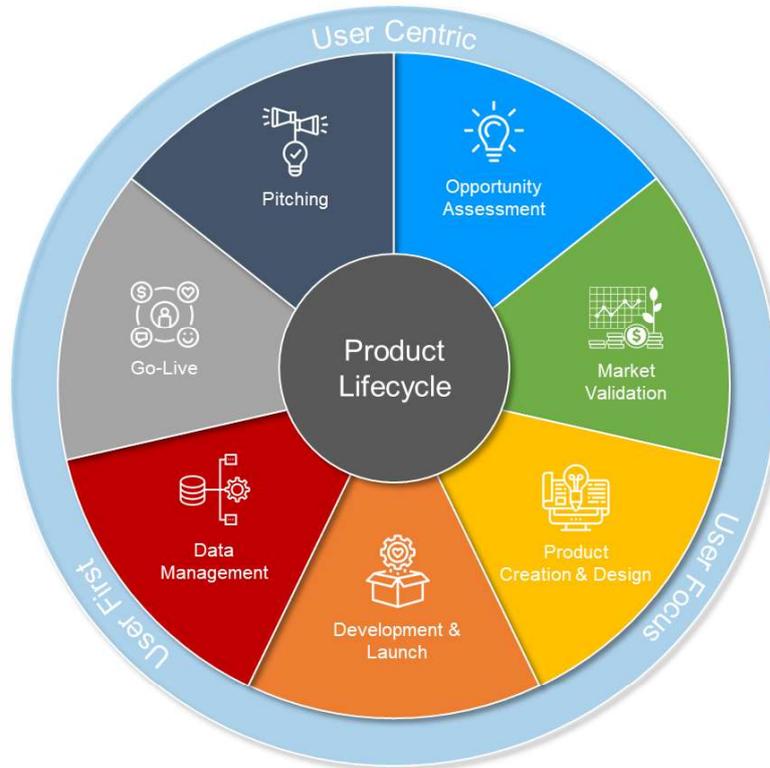


# Product Management

## User Centric Mindset along the Product Lifecycle



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## Abstract

This book is dedicated to product managers who want to build products users love. It is about a user first mindset and creating products in order to solve problems, identify needs and to simply make the life of your users easier. The most successful products and companies are addressing exactly those points. Therefore, this book focuses on the user along the whole product lifecycle and conveys how to setup and change your mindset to a user first mindset. In addition, this book is equipped with many examples, tools, frameworks, methods and processes you can leverage within your daily life. Based on practical insights, you will get a full picture on the whole product lifecycle from identifying and assessing an opportunity, conducting market research, creating and designing your product, the whole management of the development process and launch of your product, data management, tasks during the go-live of your product, and, certainly, pitching your product. Furthermore, each chapter consists of exercises including the respective solutions, as well as key takeaways.

With main focus on the software industry, this book is a perfect fit for people who want to become a product manager, new to the role of a product manager, seasoned product managers who want to understand more about user focus, as well as entrepreneurs. In addition, you will find some differences between a product manager in a start-up and a corporate world.

This book is optimized for reading as an e-book with internet access, since I provide some links to external resources which will navigate you to different websites for a deep dive and additional materials. In addition, the goal of this book is not to describe each and every aspect in detail, but to equip you with the necessary insights and tools in order to create products user love.

I'm sure you gain a lot of learnings throughout this book with practical as well as research relevant insights and tools you can incorporate in your daily life as a product manager, but also to improving your interpersonal skills in a professional as well as private life. The content is based on my more than 20 years of professional experience in creating more than 150 software products within a corporate world and as an entrepreneur, as well as insights I gained throughout my research. I wish you a lot of fun and look forward to get in touch with you!

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## Introduction

Welcome to the fascinating world of Product Management. One of the most interesting and versatile job on earth. A heartfelt thank you for buying this e-book. I'm sure you will gain a lot of knowledge and get many insights about Product Management. Product Management is from my point of view the most critical aspect of the success of your product and due to the many touchpoints you have, it is one of the very critical of your organization in general. If you think about the most successful companies, what do they have in common? The cornerstone of their success and the foundation for growth is based on outstanding products. E.g., iPhone and Mac from Apple, Windows from Microsoft. In this e-book, you will learn how to be user centric along the complete product lifecycle including several insights from different companies, get many tips & tricks and some quizzes in order to strengthen your acquired skills. In addition, you will learn many aspects relevant for your Product Manager career, such as different methods & taxonomy on a practical as well as on a scientific level. As a Product Manager, you must learn each and every day about the different aspects which will affect your product. Therefore, you need to have a broad knowledge about several disciplines, but you also need to be an expert at a specific domain. Being a generalist is definitely good, but in today's world, you also need to be an expert in a particular field. There are hundreds of very good and interesting e-books and courses about that. This e-book is one of it and I hope you gain a lot of insights. So, let's start and become a great Product Manager!

This e-book is especially relevant for:

- Early-career professionals within product management or any product support role with one to five years of experience
- Professionals who want to transition to product management
- Seasoned product managers who want to gain additional insights and views

In addition, the focus is on:

- Big corporations
- Startups
- Entrepreneurs
- Industries within the technology industry with focus on software, hardware, networks, and e-commerce

## What is Product Management?

Let's start with a quick explanation what Product Management (PM) actually is. PM has become more popular and even more relevant in the last years. However, the idea of the tasks and jobs to be done by a PM initially started in 1931 by Neil McElroy, who worked at this time at Procter & Gamble and graduated from Harvard. Actually, he came up with the idea of a brand man and brand management. How did he come to this idea? One of the reasons was, that he saw an information gap between the different departments. E.g., the marketing team did know much about the user and their behavior, their needs and problems their users are facing. The engineering team, on the other hand, did not know anything about the user and focused on the product rather than the business value. This information gap needed to be closed and this is exactly what PM is all about. Focus on the user, solving their problems, and provide business value while creating an outstanding product. The goal of this new concept was also that the brand man should focus on the brand itself. Therefore, a brand man was responsible for managing the sales, the product holistically, and the promotion of it.

The new concept was a great success and is still valid today. Talk to users, understand their problems and needs and communicate it internally to all the teams you are working with. We will come later in this e-book to a section where you can see with which teams you actually work and what are your tasks as a PM.

Let's have a look how the brand man concept evolved. P&G, the company Neil McElroy worked at, is operating in the hardware industry, especially back then. In the software industry, Microsoft was the first company which introduced this concept as they developed MS Excel. However, they called it program management, but with regards to the responsibilities, it was actually the same thing. Google picked up this concept and made it finally a huge success. They provided a PM training and the participants of this training became either successful entrepreneurs, went to other companies or became very senior leaders at Google.

What did you learn so far? One of the most critical aspect of your role. It is all about listening to your users, understand the problems and actually have a focus on the user and the solution. If your solution is a crap, no one will use it, that's a fact. Think about how you would behave. Why would you use a product which is not addressing your needs and solving your problems? A second point I want to emphasize is, that you have to translate the problems of your users to your development team and actually provide a solution for the mentioned problems. How you can translate these problems, communicate and prioritize it, is part of this e-book and I will provide you some tips & tricks as well as best practices in order to reach your goals.

Some final remarks before we go into more detail. Talking to your customers does not replace a product vision. Talking to your customers does not mean asking them what they want, but

understanding their needs and problems. Nothing will happen somehow magically. A lot of work and also ground work, communication and many iterations are needed in order to deliver a successful solution. You cannot buy some woods, nails and a hammer and somehow magically a table appears. There needs to be a person who can write a concept, prioritize what to do and where to start, have a complete picture in mind. That's you, the Product Manager. You are the one with the discipline and knowledge to take all of that information and decide which problems to be tackled first. Always remember your users and the problems you are solving and that everything is a process. There is never a sentence like "this product is final".

### **Key takeaways**

- In 1931 Neil McElroy came up with the idea of a brand man and brand management in order to close the information gap between the marketing and development teams.
- At this time, a brand man was also responsible for managing sales, the product holistically, and the promotion of it.
- Microsoft was the first company which introduced this concept as they developed MS Excel and called it program management, but it was actually the same thing.
- Google picked up this concept and made it finally a huge success by providing a PM training, while the participants of this training became either successful entrepreneurs, went to other companies or became very senior leaders at Google.
- PM is about focusing on the user, solving their problems, and providing business value whilst creating outstanding products.

### **External resource**

Harvard Business School: [American Business, American Business, 1920-2000: How It Worked - P&G: Changing the Face of Consumer Marketing](#)

## Product Manager

This chapter introduces you to the role as a Product Manager. It also includes the different touchpoints you have and emphasizes the diversity of the role, as well as a section about the notion of lifelong learning and why it is especially relevant for a Product Manager. Furthermore, the different aspects of industries and markets will be introduced to provide you guidance where to focus. This chapter closes with an exercise and a wrap-up.

## Understand your role

What is your role as a PM? First of all, there is not the one specific and clear answer to that. This is simply due to the fact, that the role is differently interpreted by the various companies. If they are small companies or big corporates and also in which industry they are operating. E.g., at a startup, you have much more touchpoints with e.g., sales, promotion, product economics, and you also have the advantage to bring your products much faster to the market. Why is that? If you are working in a big company, you work with many more stakeholders which actually can and sometimes will heavily influence your product. These can range from sales, marketing, your legal department and also the release strategy of your company. All of these alignments and communications will consume a lot of your time. However, there are definitely core principles of a PM which are the same, no matter which kind of organization you are working in. Ok, where does PM, your role, actually sits? You might have seen this several times and it can briefly explain your role in one image. You are working in the intersection of technology, business and user experience.

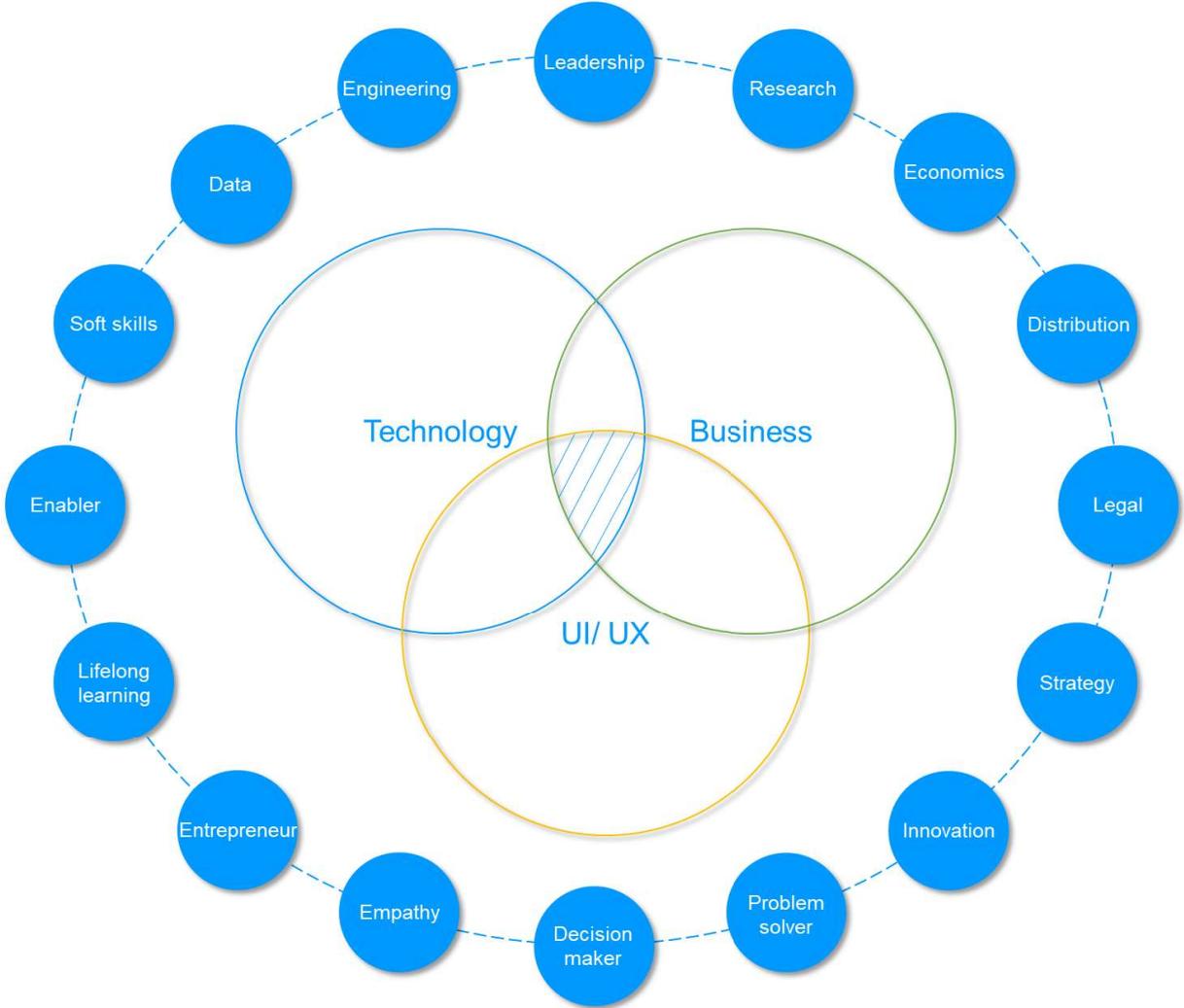


Figure 1: Product Manager role and exemplary skillset

However, just saying working in the intersection of technology, business and user experience is not sufficient and it needs to be enhanced with at least the topics mentioned around those circles:

**Leadership:** You must show leadership with regards to your product, the market, the teams you are working with, and your behavior in general.

**Research:** You must understand the principles of user, market and competitor research, but also research with regards to methods and scientific approach. Be able to identify and validate trends about markets and technologies as well as changes in user behavior.

**Economics:** Be familiar with the total cost of ownership (TCO), what are the operating costs of your business, being able to create business cases, and judging investments. Have an understanding about the product economics, how to calculate them, what are the KPIs you have to fulfill in order to have an economic successful product?

**Distribution:** Understand how to promote and sell your product. What are the different channels that can leveraged?

**Legal:** A basic understanding of the legal requirements, data privacy, what is allowed and what isn't with regards to, e.g., competitor research.

**Strategy:** An understanding and know-how about defining a strategy for your product but also your business in general.

**Innovation:** Be a thought leader and know how to make use of innovative topics but also judge if this innovation is suitable in order to solve a problem.

**Problem solver:** Understand the needs and problems of your users and be able to find a solution to solve it.

**Decision maker:** All day long you have to make decisions which are good for your team, your product, your company and yourself. Some decisions are not that easy and comfortable to make, keep your integrity.

**Empathy:** Sit yourself in the shoes of your users. Show empathy towards your team and your stakeholders.

**Entrepreneur:** Behave, act and be an entrepreneur. It is your product, you are responsible for it. Be an entrepreneur of your product with all relevant characteristics.

**Lifelong learning:** Build up knowledge each and every day, be ready for lifelong learning, since the world around you is so fast. If you stop learn, your competitors will pass you. We will emphasize on this in the next section.

Enabler: Enable everyone in your organization to be part of the product, enable innovative thinking. Make sure to identify yourself and motivate others to identify with your product.

Soft skills: Your job is to communicate a lot with many stakeholders, soft skills are a very essential tool. Show and improve your emotional intelligence. You are responsible to have a high morale within your team. Morale does never show up in a budget. If you have low morale, for every \$1 you spend, you get about 20 cents of value. If you have high morale, for every \$1 you spend, you get about \$3 of value.

Data: A very important topic especially today. You need to have a good understanding how to collect data, make use of it, set metrics and measure it.

Engineering: Have at least a basic understanding how a product will be developed. You don't need to have a great coding background, but you need to have an understanding what is needed in order to create your proposed functionality, product and solution.

In addition, as a PM, you have different responsibilities which we will cover throughout this book and take a closer look at it. Coming back to the core principles of a Product Manager, no matter the size of the company you are working. These are the following:

1. Big picture to ground truth

- a. You need to be able to see the big picture, the whole story of your product. How it can solve your user's problem, the importance of your product within the market, who are your competitors and what are the characteristics of their product. Why is your product better? What about the product economics, how is the market evolving in general? Which potential innovations can disrupt my product?
- b. The ground truth is to think about what does the teams I'm working with need to fulfill their job? Is my backlog clean and structured? Is it correct that this button is red instead of blue? Certainly, some aspects need to be detailed out with the respective teams, but it is your job to make them aware of that. In addition, you also have to bridge the gap between the big picture and the ground truth by, e.g., asking myself if this new functionality fit into the whole story?

Two examples from my daily work. In the morning I had a meeting with my design colleagues and talked about a functionality which solved a big pain point of our users and needed to be shipped urgently. Directly after this meeting I went on to a workshop in which I had a 30-minute slot to pitch my product in front of a fortune 500 CEO, two CIOs and my manager. After that, I looked into reported bugs from our users and created some test cases in the evening.

The second example. My day started with a meeting with our legal department since we wanted to collaborate with a new partner and the contract needed to be setup. Directly afterwards I had the chance to demo my product in front of about 800 people incl. our CIO and more than 6.000 watching live online. Afterwards I went on for a customer presentation and polished my backlog.

## 2. Inter- and intracompany and -team communication

a. You have to be able to communicate outside your company with potential customers and users, actual customers and users, partners, the press and so on. But also intracompany with the different departments. It is really important that you have some knowledge (the more the better) about the work of the different teams. E.g., you need to have some sense of user experience (UX) and user interface (UI), you need to know what the legal team is doing and especially how your development team is working. And the most important part, you need to know and understand what the different teams need from you. What are their needs? This is a fundamental attitude to have empathy about your users and the people you are working with. It is one of the most important point of a PM and it separates great PMs from good PMs.

b. You have to be the first point of contact outside and inside your team if there are questions about your product. Pitch your product and vision also internally within your company. Inter-team communication sounds simply but is so important and furthermore, it gives your product and yourself great visibility. Enhancing your network and find potential departments to work with in order to leverage synergies and improve your product. You have to be able to articulate what needs to be done, where the product should be in the short-, mid- and long-term and so on. Motivate your team. Be there for your team. Protect your team. Earn trust.

3. Regarding earning trust. This is also reflected in the third core principle which is leading without authority. You as a PM will most probably not have the authority of managing a team with regards to be the superior. You are responsible for the product, but not about people management. So, the engineers have their engineering manager, the designer their design lead and so on. But how do you get actually the whole team working on something you identified as relevant? That's exactly a huge part of your role. You have to earn their trust and respect. This will not happen magically. Here are some examples how you can lead without authority:

- a. Show your expertise: If you don't have it yet, no problem. You have just identified a weak point, work on that. Develop expertise in your discipline, industry and in the best case, both. This book is one step to develop expertise in your discipline. Using your expertise can have a huge influence to your team. It implies that you are so experienced that people want to listen to you, even if they don't have to.
- b. Your relationship: Build and nurture relationship with your team, other teams, different areas, departments and even partners and companies. Each new aspect can have a big impact sometime in your career. In order to get a meaningful relationship, you can also think about to share some activities, etc. The people are simply more inclined to listen to you. A factor which I have mentioned before in this context is emotional intelligence. It consists of four parts. First, self-awareness, second, self-management, third, social awareness and, finally, relationship management. In short, being able to understand and manage your own emotions and be able to recognize those around you.
- c. Be an active listener: This plays a bit into the game of emotional intelligence. Be an active listener by listening carefully what your colleagues are saying, elaborate on that, give feedback.
- d. Share ideas: Raise your hand if you have an idea in a meeting or if colleagues are facing an issue and need help. Brainstorm with them and help them to overcome their blockers.
- e. Include everybody and everybody needs to be valued within the team: No one can fight a battle alone. Everyone needs to be involved. Each and everybody must have the chance to say something. Be open, curious and never block somebody but think about their perspective, why do they have this opinion, etc. Only then, you will have the chance to create a great product. Value the team. Think about the different experts you are working with. With a very high probability you will never be such an expert in a subject as your teammates, since they are working on a day-to-day basis in this particular area. You don't have to be a world class designer or engineer. Certainly, you should have knowledge and, in some cases, deep knowledge, but it is more important that your teammates have this deep knowledge. You will not design the UI, code the whole app or software, your teammates will do. Give them the freedom to work on it and find a solution. Never tell them how to do something, but why and what. E. g., explain from a business point of view **why** this functionality is needed, **what** should be accomplished, **what** should happen if the customer

executes an action. But don't say **how** to use this algorithm or this design in order to fulfill the need or solve the problem. You give guidance, but no step-by-step explanation. Please check the link in the external resources what Steve Jobs thinks about managing people.

- f. Asking for help is no sign of weakness: It shows that you want to improve. You identified a weak spot and you cannot handle it by your own. This is how you grow your expertise but also on a personal level. Don't be shy, ask your supervisor or expert colleague, maybe they can show you how to overcome this hurdle and this kind of framework can be leveraged in case of any similar issues you face. If your supervisor is rude, go on and get another job. The world is full of amazing opportunities.

#### 4. Know your user

- a. This is one of the most fundamental principle you should consider and focus on. Knowing your user. Knowledge about the user of your product is the most critical part. This was already the case in the past, it is in the present and it will be in the future, no matter which technology or new paradigm will arise. You need to know
  - i. what are the jobs to be done of this user?
  - ii. what are the problems this user is facing?

I will emphasize on that very often in this book and you find dedicated sections about that.

#### 5. Stakeholder Management

- a. It doesn't matter how big your company or the company you work for is, you will have to manage your stakeholders. These stakeholders can be divided into:
  - i. Internal, e.g.,
    1. Engineering
    2. Design
    3. Sales
    4. Marketing
    5. Business Development
    6. Legal

7. HR
8. Internal sponsors
9. PR & Communication
10. Your supervisor

ii. External, e.g.,

1. Customers
2. Users
3. Partners
4. Press
5. Sponsors

- b. If you want to know how to identify key stakeholders. Please check the external resources for a reference to a Harvard business review article.

6. Be there for your team

- a. You will have many touchpoints with your engineering and design team. But it doesn't matter who it actually is, what matters is, that you are there for your team. With this I mean:
- i. Be there if there are open questions. Make sure that your engineers understood your requirements before they build the product.
  - ii. Give constructive feedback and don't just say I like it or I don't like it. Explain why you like it and what exactly is the difference between what you envisioned and what was actually built or if you are working with another team like legal or sales, tell them constructively if you see it differently. The team and you are only improving in the long term if you explain why you see it differently.
  - iii. Protect your team. If someone wants to blame your team, e.g., because of not delivering on time or the functionality is not as expected. Think about your role. You are the product manager. You are in close collaboration and you are the responsible person. Make sure, that this will not happen and if it happens, have the courage to acknowledge that you missed it. This will happen at someday in your career. It matters how you respond to it. At first you might feel embarrassed. That's fine.

No one likes it. But that's a lesson learned, reflect on that, fix it, improve it, and make it better next time, this is how you earn trust and how you personally grow.

- iv. Never ever micromanage. This will never scale, you will never earn the trust of your team, and you will never have a great working team.

Consider, you are the only person who has a 360-degree view on the product. You know all relevant aspects of your product. Make use of it and build a great product your users love.

### **Key takeaways**

- Product Management is a versatile, important role and is one of the most crucial pillars of the success of a product.
- A great product manager must have knowledge in many different areas and a deeper knowledge in at least one discipline.
- As a product manager you have many different touchpoints within and outside your organization.
- A great product manager has always the user in mind.
- While some of the tasks between a PM at a startup and a corporate world differ, some principles are relevant in both worlds: Focus on the big picture and the ground truth, inter- and intracompany and -team communication, earn trust within your team and in front of your stakeholder, know your user, be a great stakeholder manager, and be there for your team.

### **External resource**

Harvard Business Review: [Five Questions to Identify Key Stakeholders](#)

Harvard Business School Online: [Influence without authority](#)

Harvard Business School Online: [How to be an effective leader at any career stage](#)

Harvard Business School Online: [Emotional Intelligence](#)

Laplante, N. L.; Laplante, P. A. and Voas, J. M. (2016): Stakeholder Identification and Use Case Representation for Internet of Things Applications in Healthcare. IEEE Systems Journal, Volume 12, Issue 2.

McKinsey: Product managers for the digital world

Steve Jobs: Managing people

## Lifelong learning

Lifelong learning is one of my favorite topics, which I practice each and every day. If you do not learn anything new, each day, you will be no longer necessary in the future. And with future I mean the near future if you look at the pace the world has. Especially in the current days and in the topic, you are interested in. Think about it like swimming against the current of the river. If you do nothing, the river controls where you go. You fall back. You have no control. If you swim against the current, you have complete control and you can influence where you go. It can be exhausting, but that's what separates the people who want to achieve something from those who let themselves go.

I recently read a research paper (Hildebrand, D. S. (2008)) about the following five benefits of lifelong-learning (LLL) which are from my point of view very coherent and accurate:

- It sharpens the mind. LLL or also called continuous learning helps to keep the mind sharp and improves memory. Learning in general has beneficial effects on the brain.
- It sharpens the confidence. Sometimes, when someone has not stepped out of their routine for a while, they haven't taken on a new challenge or really applied themselves to learning something new, they may find the experience a bit daunting. With LLL this fear is more easily overcome. LLL helps to gain confidence in ability to learn and to share the information with others. Gain confidence in who we are and what we have to offer.
- It sharpens the interpersonal skills. Opportunity to socialize can help to greatly improve our interpersonal skills. When we are learning, we are engaged in life and in those around us. When we share what we know, we help others learn and further enhance our relationships.
- It sharpens the career opportunities. For anyone who has aspirations of moving their career to the next level and since you are reading this book, it's obvious that you are such a person. Not only can learning enhance the skills we already have, it provides the opportunity to learn a new skill or trade and improve chances of career growth.
- It sharpens the ability to communicate. Learning generally employs the skills of reading, listening and writing. Skills which are essential to the ability to communicate. Enhancing

these skills, improves our ability to pitch a product, compile a marketing report, give a department presentation or even speak in front of a big audience and executives. All of them are very relevant for you as a product manager.

It doesn't matter in which career level you are or what you want to achieve. All 5 aspects are very heavily influencing your career. LLL for you as a PM is in my point of view an absolute must. Think about your product and what potential competitors can try to get your product out of the market, which technology they can leverage, which new business model they can establish. If you do not check on a very regular basis what's happening around you, you and your product will be eaten by your competitors. With competitors I mean well established companies and even more relevant, startups.

Here are some tips which helps me to stay on track regarding lifelong-learning. I opt-in in relevant topics about product management, business, AI and certainly news around technology overall. There are plenty of sources for that. In addition, I regularly take courses within those topics, but also which are not in this area, like art, history, etc. Since it will simply help you to get different perspectives and ideas on how to solve problems. Furthermore, I read different research papers, and certainly do a lot of different ML projects. Mainly small ones, but it helps me increasing my knowledge in this area immense. In addition, I set goals about the topics I want to learn and when I want to accomplish it. In order to get there, I blocked some days in a week and a specific timeframe. It is important to focus on the desire and nurture LLL to reap its many benefits. This can have many different facets and helps you to adapt in this fast moving, sometimes crazy and chaotic world we live in. Embrace the many benefits of LLL and make good use of it. We only have a brief time on this planet.

### **Key takeaways**

- If you do not learn anything new, each day, you will be no longer necessary in the future.
- If you want to be a great product manager, lifelong learning is a must.
- Lifelong learning sharpens the mind, confidence, interpersonal skills, career opportunities, and the ability to communicate.

### **External resources**

Hildebrand, D. S. (2008). The powerful benefits of lifelong learning. Winnetka, California; USA, Retrieved 2011 Sep. 30.

## Exercise

What are the different stages and the order of the product lifecycle?

- a. Create & design your product, managing the development process & launching your solution, assess opportunity, validate a market, data management, deliver your solution, pitch your solution
- b. Assess opportunity, validate a market, create & design your product, managing the development process & launching your solution, deliver your solution, data management, pitch your solution
- c. Assess opportunity, validate a market, create & design your product, managing the development process & launching your solution, data management, deliver your solution, pitch your solution
- d. Pitch your solution, assess opportunity, validate a market, create & design your product, managing the development process & launching your solution, data management, deliver your solution

What are the important questions to ask to assess an opportunity?

- a. Why
- b. What
- c. Where
- d. How
- e. When
- f. Who
- g. All of the above

What is a good way to follow-up on your idea?

- a. Write, draw or code my ideas out
- b. Get my ideas out of my head to see it on a surface which is not in my mind
- c. Step back & share it
- d. Writing it down has the advantage to come back and reiterate much better

# How to validate a market?

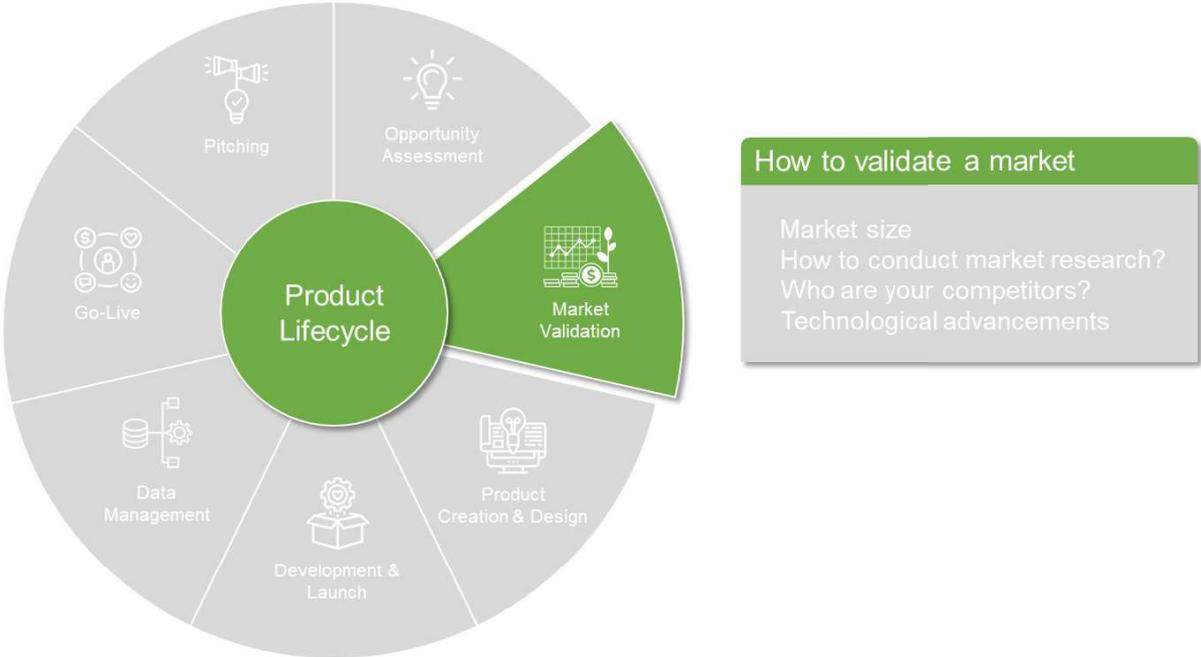


Figure 10: Product Lifecycle - How to validate a market?

As you have already learned many things about the identification of a problem and solving the problems of your users, you will dive into the business and research part of your work. In this chapter, you will learn more about a market evaluation and research, how to conduct competitor research, and to get an understanding about the technological advancements which also heavily influences your product not just on a technological but also on a business level. This chapter also includes exercises and closes with a wrap-up.

# Managing the development process & launching your product

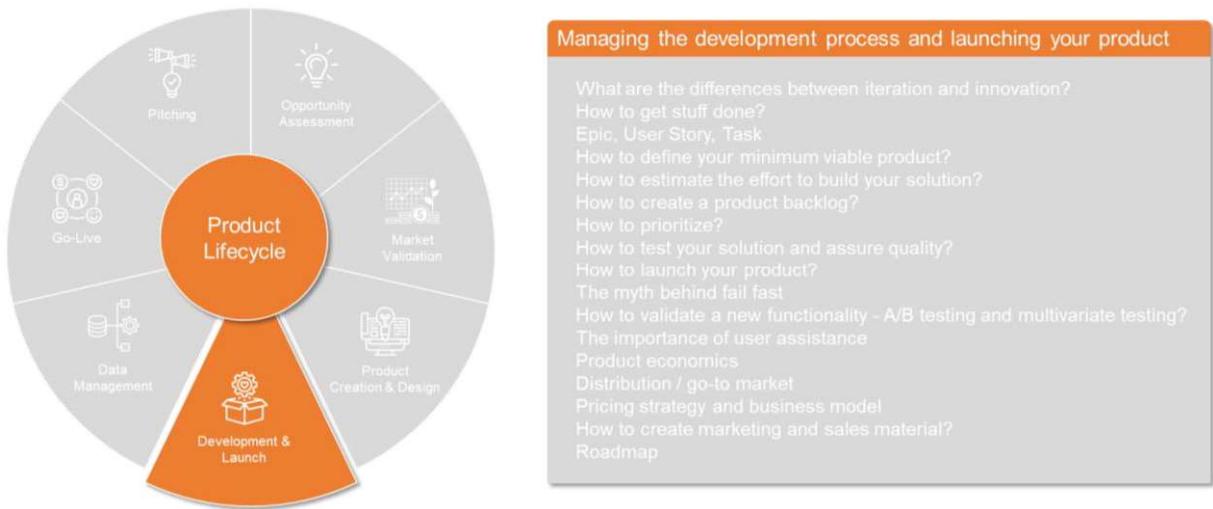


Figure 15: Product Lifecycle - Managing the development process and launching your product

In this chapter, you learn the different aspects of the development process and launch of your product. This phase builds on the foundation you established before with regards to your research, definition of your solution, and validation. You are going to build and ship your solution. You will learn the differences of an iteration and innovation, how to create and manage your product backlog incl. estimations, how to approach the market with your very first product, what things you need to consider regarding your product economics, how to distribute your product, how to create a roadmap, and many more things. This chapter also includes several exercises and closes with a wrap-up.

There are a lot of interesting topics to learn, so let's dive into it.