USC Marshall
School of Business

MOR-499 (2 units)
Product Management I – Essentials and Frameworks

Fall 2025

Professor Gordon Ho
E-mail: gordonho@marshall.usc.edu
Office Hours: Available by Appointment

Class days: Wednesdays, 2-5:50pm
(For 8 weeks only; class concludes week 8)
Classroom: HOH 114

Note, this is the first of two Product Management Courses (each 2 units).   Product Management I – Essentials & Frameworks will be offered this Fall '2025 for 8 weeks (1st 8 weeks of the semester).   Product Management II – Execution & Prioritization will be offered in Spring '2026 (also for 8 weeks).

COURSE DESCRIPTION OF PRODUCT MANAGEMENT I:

As companies manage rapid technology changes and the explosion of AI, they must increasingly rely on effective product teams and their product managers to define their products' strategy, align stakeholders around a product vision, and ultimately ensure the delivery of the product on-time and on-budget. The responsibility for achieving successful product outcomes falls on the product manager role. This introductory course, Product Management I, focuses on understanding the role of product managers within organizations, which includes aligning teams, liaising with a variety of stakeholders, managing strategic-market fit, leading diverse stakeholders, and driving the highest return on investment (ROI) outcomes. This course highlights the leadership role of product managers and the strategy frameworks they can apply to various stages including minimum viable product (MVP) conception and commercialization.

By utilizing readings, case studies, and particularly guest speakers and their real-world product examples, we will showcase best practices in product leadership, with a specific focus on technology-oriented firms and the applications of AI. Our course will demonstrate how product managers must adopt a high-level strategic perspective, encompassing various domains such as technology, design, finance, and marketing, like that of a CEO. However, unlike a CEO, they lack formal authority to command key stakeholders within these domains. Instead, they must effectively manage a diverse team of engineers, designers, financiers, marketers, and executives to bring the solution to fruition. Successfully navigating this process requires developing a strategic viewpoint and acquiring skills to address managerial and organizational challenges.

Unlike other courses focusing on elements of new product development, software coding or project management, this introductory course focuses on the discipline of product management and the associated frameworks to drive the highest value outcomes.   These frameworks of the product-market fit management pyramid, jobs-to-be-done, business model canvas, ICE scoring model and more, all serve to provide structure and processes for the successful product manager.

Our follow-on course, Product Management II: Team Alignment & Strategy Execution, will focus further on the application of these frameworks to achieve team alignment, prioritized product roadmaps, and the execution of strategies in agile environments.

This course distinguishes itself through the following key features:

(a) Strategic and Managerial Focus:
Our primary emphasis lies in exploring strategic and managerial issues associated with product management. We delve into the nuances of overseeing diverse domains and effectively managing stakeholders to drive the best measurable outcomes.

(b) Technological Innovation Emphasis:
In today's dynamic landscape of modern digital industries, technological advancements play a pivotal role in product management strategies. While the knowledge shared in this course applies to both tech and non-tech products, we place particular emphasis on technology development, preparing you for the ever-evolving digital era.

(c) Integration of AI and Generative AI:
The rise of generative AI, exemplified by tools like ChatGPT, has revolutionized the field of product management. Recognizing its significance, we incorporate hands-on experience with this cutting-edge tool throughout the course. You will develop practical skills and gain insights into the product management of AI-powered features as well as how to best leverage generative AI in your product management activities
(d) Speakers from industries
We will invite multiple product managers and associated stakeholders to share real-world case studies and illustrate key learnings including AI best practices. Students gain a firsthand understanding of the challenges, successes, and lessons learned directly from industry experts.

By the end of this course, you will possess the strategic vision, managerial acumen, and technical proficiency necessary in product management .

In summary, this course delves into the evolving role of product managers, emphasizing their growing influence across diverse sectors such as technology and beyond. By blending theoretical frameworks and real-world case studies, students will acquire both theoretical knowledge and hands-on experience essential for a role within any product management environment.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

The goal of this course is to equip students with a comprehensive understanding of product management strategy and its application in the digital era, while providing them with hands-on experience. By the end of the course, students will be able to:
1. Utilize strategic frameworks and analytical tools to assess market dynamics, identify key stakeholder needs, and formulate well-informed product strategies aligned with business objectives and market opportunities.
2. Apply strategic analysis, data, dashboards and prototyping to facilitate rapid decision making and product optimization.
3. Participate in case studies involving stakeholder management, product-market fit, priority setting and use of productive & ethical AI to gain practical experience in various aspects

of product management.

4. Ensure entire product team utilize a common, customer-centric mindset and insights driven approach to achieve successful product results.
5. Practice methodologies for fostering innovation within product management, including rapid prototyping.
6. Apply AI tools and solutions to improve the efficiency, productivity, and innovation of the product teams' output.

By the end of this course, students will have gained theoretical knowledge and practical experience, enabling them to make informed decisions, drive innovation, and create value as effective product managers in today's dynamic and technology-driven business environment.

REQUIRED COURSE MATERIALS

See Course Materials Supplement towards end of this Syllabus document for listing of current materials including reading & video links.

Harvard Business Publishing Course pack:
IMPORTANT: E-Book Reading: Several e-book links are listed in the Syllabus (& Brightspace) that will require access to the O'Reilly Media system. These e-book links will show a landing page where you will see an area labelled [View Online, Full text availability O'Reilly Online Learning]. Follow instructions to click "Institution Not Listed" and enter your USC email address.

Alternatively, you can pre-register for access to the O'Reilly system as follows:
Visit: https://www.oreilly.com/library-access/#.
1) Click institution not listed on this page, and input your USC email (if it doesn't work, try your USC Marshall email).
2) You can then create an account which can be used to access the e-books.

Brightspace : Other course materials may be posted to BRIGHTSPACE, including additional required and supplemental reading. Students are responsible for having sufficient technology to access BRIGHTSPACE. If you have any questions or need assistance with Brightspace, please contact the Marshall Help Desk at 213-740-3000 or HelpDesk@marshall.usc.edu.

GRADING

The components of the final course grade will be weighted as follows (subject to change pending addition / deletion of assignments which will be clearly conveyed to the class):

Individual class participation (including week 5 in class ELC exercise – 5%)	**15%**
Guest Speaker Assignments (Question Submittals, Takeaways & Assignments) (via Brightspace)	**25%**
Individual Assignments (below)	**50%**
Assignment 1: Alongside AI Case – Managing differing stakeholders through AI strategies and Ethical AI considerations. (due week 3)	*25%*
Assignment #2: Disney Case Simulation – A Product Manager simulation where teams develop & prioritize recommendations based on various data	*25%*

outputs and resource constraints. **(due Week 6)**	
Final Reflections **(due Finals Week)**	*10%*
Total	***100%***

CLASS PARTICIPATION (15% of total grade)

In-class participation grade consists of the following components:

- Participation in in-class discussions and any Brightspace written discussion guides.
- Responding to Background survey surveys before Week 1
- Participating in the ELC Stakeholder Alignment Exercise week 5 which is 5% of participation grade) Students will be organized into groups of 4 where they will each be given a product scenario and the role of a Product Manager, Engineer, UX/Designer and AI / Data analyst. Roles will be rotated through the exercise.

Guidelines for participating in in-class discussion

A course that incorporates the frequent use of case analyses to illustrate the practical application of concepts and practices requires the student to thoroughly prepare cases and actively offer the results of the analyses and conclusions as well as recommendations during each class session. Our expectation and that of your classmates is that you are prepared for all classes and will actively participate in and meaningfully contribute to class discussions.

In-class participation is also a critical part of this course's learning experience. Cold calling may take place to encourage active participation and to gain multiple perspectives and points of view, thus lending itself to the richness of the learning experience. In-class participation grading will be based on students' demonstrated willingness to participate and the quality of the comments expressed, rather than quantity. While some students are far more comfortable than others with class participation, all students should make an effort to contribute meaningfully.

The evaluating of in-class participation is based on relevance, quality of analysis, value to the discussion, and clarity.

GUEST SPEAKER ASSIGNMENTS (Via Brightspace) (25% of total grade)

Guest Speaker assignments require students to do assigned reading pertaining to the guest speaker and submit assignments, questions, and/or class takeaways on Brightspace to facilitate in-class engagement.

Submitted assignments for the guest speaker are important to facilitate productive engagement during the in-class discussion. Submittals will be graded on timeliness, relevance to any assigned guest speaker readings, and incorporation of class concepts.

Late Submissions: By default, for all assignments, the point total for late submissions will be reduced by 20% for each day late. However, special circumstances (i.e. medical emergency) can be considered with prior approval by the professor.

Explanations of Individual Assignments: (note, assignments will be submitted via Brightspace).

- **Assignment #1**: **Case Analysis – Alongside AI Case**: Alongside is a mental wellness AI app and chatbot that provides youth grades 4-12 with personalized and clinical-based engagement to address mental health issues.   This case focuses on applying the jobs-to-be-done strategy framework, creating a business canvas, and providing recommendations on future strategies for the platform.   Future strategies must account for AI trends, ethical uses of AI, and the core mission of Alongside.   (Due on Week 3)

- **Assignment #2: Disney Case Simulation:** For this simulation, the Instructor will assign teams. Students will participate in a product management simulation where teams will develop and prioritize solutions based on various data outputs and resource constraints.   The pre-work assignment, a product requirements document (PRD) will be submitted individually while the in-class simulation will take place in groups with our Disney guest presenter.   Individuals will be asked to write-up and submit their post simulation takeaways which include managing through resource constraints and different stakeholder priorities. (Due on Week 6)

Individual Case Study assignments will be graded with the following rubric.

Quality & Persuasiveness of Analysis / Response (30%); Comprehensiveness of Response (25%); Incorporation of Class concepts (20%); Support & References (15%); Writing Clarity / Logic: (10)%.

Assignment #2 will include a **Peer Feedback evaluation**:   Each member of every group will be given a survey to assess the engagement and contribution of each member during the exercise. The feedback gathered from the survey will play a contributing role in determining each student's final project score. Note, peer feedback will include both a numerical score (1-5) and explanatory feedback of each peer rating.

Late Submissions: By default, for all assignments, the point total for late submissions will be reduced by 20% for each day late. Note, exact due dates for assignments will be specified in Brightspace and also by the Instructor in class.   However, special circumstances (i.e. medical emergency) can be considered with prior approval by the professor.

FINAL REFLECTIONS ASSIGNMENT (10% of grade). Students will provide a 1 page final reflections summary of their class key learnings and how they plan to apply these learnings in their future coursework, clubs, internships, and/or any other initiatives.   Final reflections assignments will be graded based on Incorporation of Class concepts (40%); Support & References (25%); Future Application Example (25%), Writing Clarity / Logic: (10%)

ADDITIONAL COURSE GUIDELINES

Brightspace
BRIGHTSPACE is the primary method of communicating with you. In addition to course materials, I will post any syllabus updates and information about class sessions, including preparation requirements. E-mails sent to the class originate from the Brightspace system. You

should check BRIGHTSPACE daily for any new information posted relevant to upcoming sessions.

Please be sure your e-mail address and account settings in Brightspace are correct and that your BRIGHTSPACE account settings forward your messages to your preferred internet provider (IP) account such as your USC e-mail address, AOL, G-Mail, Hotmail, etc.

If you have any questions or need assistance with the Brightspace Course Pages, please contact the Marshall HelpDesk at 213-740-3000 or HelpDesk@marshall.usc.edu

Technology requirements   You are responsible for ensuring that you have the necessary computer equipment and reliable internet access to complete this course. Marshall has site licenses for a variety of software that students can access free of charge. A list of available software is located here. You are invited to explore what lab or loaner options exist. Contact the Marshall HelpDesk (213-740-3000 or HelpDesk@marshall.usc.edu) if you need assistance.

Technology policy
Please do not use personal communication devices, such as cell phones, during class. Cell phones should be turned "off" or placed on "vibrate". Personal videotaping faculty lectures is not permitted due to copyright infringement. Use of any recorded or distributed material is reserved exclusively for the USC students registered in this class.

AI Policy: The appropriate use of AI (e.g., ChatGPT) is encouraged in this class. Learning to use AI is an emerging skill and I welcome the opportunity to meet with you to provide guidance with these tools during office hours or after class. Keep in mind the following:
AI tools are permitted to help you brainstorm topics or revise work you have already written.
If you provide minimum-effort prompts, you will get low-quality results. You will need to refine your prompts to get good outcomes. This will take work.
Proceed with caution when using AI tools and do not assume the information provided is accurate or trustworthy. If it gives you a number or fact, assume it is incorrect unless you either know the correct answer or can verify its accuracy with another source. You will be responsible for any errors or omissions provided by the tool. It works best for topics you understand.
AI is a tool, but one that you need to acknowledge using.
   Please include a paragraph at the end of any assignment that uses AI explaining how (and why) you used AI and indicate/specify the prompts you used to obtain the results and what prompts you used to get the results. Failure to do so is a violation of academic integrity policies. Be thoughtful about when AI is useful. Consider its appropriateness for each assignment or circumstance. The use of AI tools requires attribution. You are expected to clearly attribute any material generated by the tool used.

No Recording and Copyright Notice
It is a violation of USC's Academic Integrity Policies to share course materials with others without permission. No student may record any lecture, class discussion or meeting without prior express written permission. The word "record" or the act of recording includes, but is not limited to, any and all means by which sound or visual images can be stored, duplicated or retransmitted whether by an electro- mechanical, analog, digital, wire, electronic or other device or any other means of signal encoding. I reserve all rights, including copyright, to my lectures, course syllabi and related materials, including summaries, PowerPoints, prior exams, answer keys, and all supplementary course materials available to the students enrolled in my class whether posted on BRIGHTSPACE or otherwise. They may not be reproduced, distributed,

copied, or disseminated in any media or in any form, including but not limited to all course note-sharing websites. Exceptions are made for students who have made prior arrangements with DSP and me.

<u>Retention of Graded Coursework</u>
Final projects and any other graded work which affected the course grade will be retained for one year after the end of the course if the graded work has not been returned to the student.

OPEN EXPRESSION AND RESPECT FOR ALL

An important goal of the educational experience at USC Marshall is to be exposed to and discuss diverse, thought-provoking, and sometimes controversial ideas that challenge one's beliefs. In this course we will support the values articulated in the USC Marshall "Open Expression Statement."

Academic Integrity

The University of Southern California is foremost a learning community committed to fostering successful scholars and researchers dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge and the transmission of ideas. Academic misconduct is in contrast to the university's mission to educate students through a broad array of first-rank academic, professional, and extracurricular programs and includes any act of dishonesty in the submission of academic work (either in draft or final form).

This course will follow the expectations for academic integrity as stated in the USC Student Handbook. All students are expected to submit assignments that are original work and prepared specifically for the course/section in this academic term. You may not submit work written by others or "recycle" work prepared for other courses without obtaining written permission from the instructor(s). Students suspected of engaging in academic misconduct will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity.

Other violations of academic misconduct include, but are not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, fabrication (e.g., falsifying data), knowingly assisting others in acts of academic dishonesty, and any act that gains or is intended to gain an unfair academic advantage.

Academic dishonesty has a far-reaching impact and is considered a serious offense against the university. Violations will result in a grade penalty, such as a failing grade on the assignment or in the course, and disciplinary action from the university itself, such as suspension or even expulsion.

For more information about academic integrity see the student handbook or the Office of Academic Integrity's website, and university policies on Research and Scholarship Misconduct.

Please ask your instructor if you are unsure what constitutes unauthorized assistance on an exam or assignment or what information requires citation and/or attribution.

Statement on University Academic and Support Systems

Students and Disability Accommodations:

USC welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. The Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) is responsible for the determination of appropriate accommodations for students who encounter disability-related barriers. Once a student has completed the OSAS process (registration, initial appointment, and submitted documentation) and accommodations are determined to be reasonable and appropriate, a Letter of Accommodation (LOA) will be available to generate for each course. The LOA must be given to each course instructor by the student and followed up with a discussion. This should be done as early in the semester as possible as accommodations are not retroactive. More information can be found at osas.usc.edu. You may contact OSAS at (213) 740-0776 or via email at osasfrontdesk@usc.edu.

Student Financial Aid and Satisfactory Academic Progress:
To be eligible for certain kinds of financial aid, students are required to maintain Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) toward their degree objectives. Visit the Financial Aid Office webpage for undergraduate- and graduate-level SAP eligibility requirements and the appeals process.

Support Systems:

Counseling and Mental Health - *(213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call*
Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline - *988 for both calls and text messages – 24/7 on call*
The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (formerly known as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline) provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, across the United States. The Lifeline consists of a national network of over 200 local crisis centers, combining custom local care and resources with national standards and best practices. The new, shorter phone number makes it easier for people to remember and access mental health crisis services (though the previous 1 (800) 273-8255 number will continue to function indefinitely) and represents a continued commitment to those in crisis.

Confidential Advocacy, Resources, and Education Center (CARE-SC) *(213) 740-9355(WELL) – 24/7 on call* Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender- and power-based harm (including sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and stalking).

Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title IX (EEO-TIX) - *(213) 740-5086*
Information about how to get help or help someone affected by harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants.

Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment - *(213) 740-2500*
Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

The Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) - *(213) 740-0776*
OSAS ensures equal access for students with disabilities through providing academic accommodations and auxiliary aids in accordance with federal laws and university policy.

Revised 2/21/25

Outline of Class Sessions (note: material/speakers subject to change)

Class Session	Date	Topics	Advanced Required Readings	Deliverables and Due Dates
Module I: Product Management Overview & Stakeholder Management				
1	8/27	Overview of Product Management, Roles, and AI in Product Management	Brightspace Materials	Submit background survey (sent via email & on Brightspace)
2	9/3	Managing Teams to Achieve Strategic Product-Market Fit: Shared Goal of Stakeholders	*Brightspace Materials* **Guest speaker** – Andrew Skotzko, Founder, Make Things that Matter	*Guest Speaker exercise*

Class Session	Date	Topics	Advanced Required Readings	Deliverables and Due Dates
3	9/10	Stakeholder Management, Collaboration and Negotiation: Engineers & UX – core product management team	Brightspace Materials **Guest Speaker:** Melissa Mueller, Founder, Designery LA	Discussion Board Questions
4	9/17	Stakeholder Management Part 2 & Negotiation Best Practices Includes the new AI stakeholder.	Brightspace Materials; **Guest Speaker –** Alongside (AI Wellness app) co-founder, Scott Freschet	Assignment #1: Alongside AI Case
Module II: Product Management: Processes and Strategy				
5	9/24	Product Management Frameworks including Jobs-to-be-done and Business model canvas	Brightspace Materials	
6	10/1	Product Management Simulation – Develop & Prioritize Recommendations based on various data outputs and resource constraints.	Brightspace Materials **Guest speaker:** Alif Khalfian (VP, Product Strategy, Disney Interactive)	Assignment #2: Disney Case individual write-up Meet at ELC for simulation
7	10/8	Managing Effective Technology Development Using Team-based User Story Software Mapping Processes	Brightspace Materials Guest Speaker: Rich Criado, VP Product, Fanatics	Discussion Board Questions
8	10/15	Startup Product Management and Class Review	Brightspace Materials **Guest Speaker – Patrick Lee,** Founder, Rotten Tomatoes (or other founder)	Discussion Board Questions, Final Reflections Submissions
	10/15	Final Reflections Submission		

Course Materials Supplement (note: material/speakers subject to change)

Module I: Product Management Overview & Stakeholder Management

Week 1: Overview of Product Management and Roles of Product Managers

Assignments:

- Read assigned reading materials (below)
- Background survey due before class starts (link available on BRIGHTSPACE)

Questions: This class session will explore the following questions:

- What are the objectives of this course?
- What is an overview of the product management function?
- What are the key responsibilities of a product manager?
- What is AI Product Management and how AI is impacting product management?
- Why is product management important in organizations?

Learning Outcomes: By the end of this class session, students should be able to:

- Understand the objectives of the course and the professors' expectations of the students. Describe an overview of the product management function.
- List the key responsibilities of a product manager.
- Understand AI Product Management and how AI is impacting product management
- Explain the importance of product management in organizations.
- Differentiate different roles in the domain of product managers: project managers, program managers, product managers, and technical product managers

Readings:

ProductPlan, What is Product Management   Retrieved from https://www.productplan.com/learn/what-is-product-management/#what-is-product-management   [Please skim this comprehensive overview]

Cagan, M and Nika, M. (2024, April 16). AI Product Management.   Silicon Valley Product Group.   Retrieved from https://www.svpg.com/ai-product-management/

Horowitz, B. (2012, June 15).   Are You a Good or Bad Product Manager? Retrieved from https://a16z.com/good-product-manager-bad-product-manager/

Cagan, M. (2017, December 4).   The Four Big Risks.   Retrieved from https://www.svpg.com/four-big-risks/

Productfolio website (summarized from Lewis Lin's book, Decode and Conquer) What is the Circles Method? Retrieved from   https://productfolio.com/circles-method/

Week 2: Managing Teams to Achieve Strategic Product-Market Fit: Shared Goal of Stakeholder

Guest Speaker: Andrew Skotzko (Founder, Make Things That Matter; Product advisor)

LinkedIn: https://www.linkedin.com/in/andrewskotzko/

Assignments:

- Read assigned reading materials (below)
- Guest speaker exercise prep 9am on Monday Jan 15 (submission on BRIGHTSPACE)

- Please check out the speaker's podcast: https://podcast.makethingsthatmatter.com/

In-Class Exercise: Product-market fit exercises including customer discovery, problem & solution identification.

Questions: This class session will explore the following questions:

- What is product-market fit and why is it important ?
- What are some management strategies to rapidly achieve product-market fit?
- How to utilize AI for improved customer discovery and product-market fit attainment?
- How does the product manager assess the potential incremental value & risks associated with AI-powered solutions?
- How to manage teams for rapid prototyping and delivering a Minimum Viable Product (MVP)?
- How to achieve team consensus on the market opportunities and best value propositions?

Learning Outcomes: By the end of this class session, students should be able to:

- Explain the importance of product-market fit for a successful outcome and solution.
- Apply different management and research strategies, including AI, to rapidly achieve product-market fit
- Lead and motivate diverse teams to optimally achieve product-market fit.
- Learn to assess and develop value generating AI-powered solutions while managing new AI generated risks.
- Manage disagreements and achieve consensus on potential market opportunities and best value propositions.
- Evaluate different methods for measuring product-market fit.
- Understand the role of rapid prototyping and the Minimum Viable Product (MVP)

Readings & Videos:

Andreesen, M. (2007, June 25). *The only thing that matters.* Retrieved from https://pmarchive.com/guide_to_startups_part4.html

Olsen, D. (2017, July 13). *The playbook for achieving product-market fit* 43:36 [Video file] and summary text. Retrieved from https://www.mindtheproduct.com/the-playbook-for-achieving-product-market-fit/

Lenny's Podcast, *Build better products with continuous product discovery*. Interview with Teresa Torres, Video 48.17 Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9RFaz9ZBXpk **[Watch 36:20 – 41:10 for Teresa Torres tips on interviewing]**

Hansen, Michelle (2021, July 23). Deploy Empathy: A Practical guide to interviewing customers. Dotsquare LLC. Part 6 Excerpt, How to talk so people will talk" [On Brightspace].

GOTO interview (2022, November 22). Interview with Michelle Hansen on Deploy Empathy. Video – Watch 4:11 – 10:50 Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RRp_NwBmcXw

Recommended
Zhang, J. *Don't Serve Burnt Pizza (And Other Lessons in Building Minimum Lovable Products* First Round Capital Retrieved from https://review.firstround.com/dont-serve-burnt-pizza-and-other-lessons-in-building-minimum-lovable-products

Saladi, S. (2023, June 22). *5 strategies to conduct effective customer interviews for better product insights* mind the product website; Retrieved from https://www.mindtheproduct.com/5-strategies-to-conduct-effective-customer-interviews-for-better-product-insights/

Week 3: Stakeholder Management, Collaboration and Negotiation: Engineers & UX

Guest Speakers: Melissa Mueller (Founder, Designery LA; Product Management & UX Leader)

LinkedIn: https://www.linkedin.com/in/memueller/

Assignments:

- Read assigned reading materials (below)
- Guest speaker question submittal due at <u>9am on Monday Jan 22</u> before class (submission on BRIGHTSPACE)

Questions: This class session will explore the following questions:

- What is stakeholder management, and why is it important in product management?
- How can we identify and prioritize stakeholders for a given product?
- How can we communicate and collaborate effectively with engineers and UX designers to agree on key customer needs and jobs to be done?
- How product managers can use prototypes and AI to enhance MVP iteration.
- Why focusing on outcomes vs output is important?

Learning Outcomes: By the end of this class session, students should be able to:

- Understand why a focus on measurable outcomes is critical.
- Understand the importance of stakeholder management in product management
- Learn how to identify and prioritize stakeholders for a given product
- Understand different stakeholder perspectives and how to manage them effectively to achieve strong outcomes
- Develop topline understanding of prototype development and AI tools for enhancing the MVP process.

Readings and Videos:
<mark>Alongside AI Case Study (for Week 4 write-up)   [In Harvard Casepack]</mark>

Beram, S. (2022, July 21). Stakeholder Management: An Introduction and Beginner's Guide for Product Managers Medium Retrieved from https://medium.com/codex/the-ultimate-guide-to-dealing-with-stakeholders-for-product-managers-35732ad2a83

Zhuo, Julie (2013, August 15). *How to Work with Designers* Retrieved from https://medium.com/the-year-of-the-looking-glass/how-to-work-with-designers-6c975dede146

Cagan, M (2007, October 31). *Product Management vs. Engineering* Retrieved from https://www.svpg.com/product-management-vs-engineering/

Chaitan. (2020, March 11) Medium. Summary of Joshua Seiden's "Outcomes over Output". Retrieved from https://feelinspired.medium.com/outcomes-over-output-by-joshua-seiden-9282dd2a5fb4

Knight, Will. (2024, February 8.) AI is Rewiring Coders' Brains. Yours May Be Next. Wired.   Retrieved from https://www.wired.com/story/fast-forward-ai-rewiring-coders-brains-github-copilot/#:~:text=The%20CEO%20of%20GitHub%20says,technology%20will%20replace%20human%20coders

Week 4: Stakeholder Management Part 2 & Negotiation Best Practices

Guest Speaker: Alongside Co-Founder, Scott Freschet (AI Wellness App)
LinkedIn: https://www.linkedin.com/in/annejhunt/

Assignments:

- Read assigned reading materials (below)
- Guest speaker question submittal due at <u>9am on Monday Jan 29</u> before class (submission on BRIGHTSPACE)
- Individual Assignment 1 due before class starts (submission on BRIGHTSPACE)

Questions: This class session will explore the following questions:

- How can product managers effectively communicate and align with founders and executives to ensure strategic alignment and support for product initiatives?
- What are the key considerations and strategies for managing stakeholder expectations within the finance domain, such as budgeting, cost analysis, and return on investment (ROI)?
- How can product managers collaborate with marketing teams to develop successful product launch plans, market positioning, and customer acquisition strategies?
- How to best align teams around AI-powered opportunities?

Learning Outcomes: By the end of this class session, students should be able to:
- Demonstrate the ability to develop and implement stakeholder management strategies that align with organizational goals and foster support from founders and executives.
- Apply financial analysis techniques to evaluate and communicate the financial viability and value proposition of product initiatives to stakeholders, including finance teams.
- Develop a comprehensive understanding of marketing principles and techniques, and effectively collaborate with marketing teams to develop and execute product launch plans and marketing strategies.
- Foster effective cross-functional collaboration and communication with design teams, integrating user-centered design principles into the product development process and delivering superior user experiences.
- Understand the importance of stakeholder management in product management
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Readings and Videos:

Lenny's Podcast, *Build better products with continuous product discovery*.   Interview with Teresa Torres, Video 48.17   Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9RFaz9ZBXpk   [Watch remainder of this video which was assigned in Week 2]

Kagan, Marty (2018) *Inspired* Chapter 56: Testing Business Viability [on Brightspace]

Voss, Chris (2021, December 6) Top 10 Most Powerful Negotiation Tips;   Video 18:41.   The Black Swan Group. Retrieved From https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V-IVYaRJ9Ow   [Note, you can ignore the promotional message in the video]

Davies, S. Retrieved from: https://www.samuelthomasdavies.com/book-summaries/business/never-split-the-difference/

Product HQ *Product Manager vs. Product Marketing Manager: What's the Difference?* Retrieved from https://producthq.org/career/product-marketing-manager/product-manager-vs-product-marketing-manager/

Shaw, J. (2023, September 26). Half of PMMs say AI has raised expectations of product marketers.   Product Marketing Alliance.   Retrieved from https://www.productmarketingalliance.com/ai-increased-pressure-product-marketing-teams/

Module II: Product Management: Processes and Strategy
Week 5: Product Management Frameworks including Jobs-to-be-done and Business Model Canvas

Guest Speaker: Microsoft speaker or Hans Yang (GM, Microsoft for startups; former product lead at Zynga, Yahoo, BCG)
LinkedIn: https://www.linkedin.com/in/hanscyang/
Assignments: Read assigned reading materials below & prepare for ELC Simulation

Questions: This class session will explore the following questions:

- How can the identification of customer needs be effectively integrated into the framework of product management?
- How to achieve team alignment around customer needs and your product proposition utilizing a value proposition canvas and other tools
- How to conduct appropriate competitive analysis and incorporate learnings into the team's product strategy?.
- How to manage and prioritize the creation of competitive differentiation within the product team?
- What is the "Jobs to be Done" framework and how it can be applied to the product management process?

Learning Outcomes: By the end of this class session, students should be able to:

- Lead a product team to identify customer needs and their integration within the framework of product management
- Manage the creation of a business model canvas to achieve alignment within the entire product team
- Lead and manage competitive analysis and differentiation in developing a successful product strategy.
- Evaluate different methods for conducting competitive analysis and identifying opportunities for differentiation.
- Managing and prioritizing team goals to achieve competitive differentiation
- Apply the concept of the Minimum Viable Product (MVP) by leading teams to create and iterate on different prototypes
- Utilize the "Jobs to Be Done" JTBD framework to enhance organization alignment around Develop a framework for considering pricing and business models in the context of customer needs analysis

Readings and Videos:

Rachitsky, L. (2019, April 10). A Three Step Framework for Solving Problems. Retrieved from https://uxdesign.cc/how-to-solve-problems-6bf14222e424

Rachitsky, L. 1 pager Product Requirements Document (PRD) Template. https://docs.google.com/document/d/1541V32QgSwyCFWxtiMIThn-6n-2s7fVWztEWVa970uo/edit

Lipton, D. Gain a Competitive Edge with an App Review Analysis. Toptal. Retrieved from https://www.toptal.com/product-managers/analytics-manager/gain-a-competitive-edge-with-an-app-review-analysis

Maurya, Ash. (2019, January 19th). Lean Canvas framework. What is the right fill order for a lean canvas. Retrieved from https://blog.leanstack.com/what-is-the-right-fill-order-for-a-lean-canvas/

Mohanty, S. *Build Products That Solve Real Problems with This Lightweight JTBD Framework* First Round Capital Retrieved from https://review.firstround.com/build-products-that-solve-real-problems-with-this-lightweight-jtbd-framework

Lenny's Podcast. (2023, August 24). The Ultimate Guide to JTBD. Interview with Bob Moesta, co-creator of Jobs to be Done Framework. Read Transcript on Brightspace or Watch Video, 1:10 Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xQV7HVyAJjc

Recommended:

Christensen, C; Hall T; Dillon, K; Duncan, D. (2016, September) *Know Your Customers' "Jobs to Be Done"* Retrieved from https://hbr.org/2016/09/know-your-customers-jobs-to-be-done

Class Week 6: Product Management Simulation – Develop & Prioritize Recommendations based on various data outputs and resource constraints. Location: Experiential Learning Center (ELC)
Guest Speaker and Simulation Host: Alif Khalfan (VP, Product Strategy, Disney Interactive & Games)
LinkedIn: https://www.linkedin.com/in/alifkhalfan/

Assignments:

- Read assigned reading materials (below)
- Individual assignment #2 (Disney Case analysis) due before class (submission on BRIGHTSPACE)

Learning Outcomes: Develop proficiency in interpreting customer usage data, using AI to generate customer insights, developing product solutions, and managing diverse stakeholder perspectives and getting aligned around product priorities.

Overview: Students will participate in a product management simulation where they will attempt to interpret product data, recommend potential solutions, utilize AI to uncover additional customer insights, and practice situational analysis and stakeholder management. The pre-work assignment will be submitted individually while the in-class simulation will take place in groups with our Disney guest presenter. Individuals will be asked to write-up and submit their post simulation takeaways.

Setup: All students will be provided a pre-work assignment that should be completed individually and submitted prior to the in-class simulation.

Simulation: During the simulation, additional information and events will be provided. Additionally, participants will be given decision opportunities with resultant outcomes impacting the simulation.

Deliverable: Each student will be given pre-reading that will be used to create a a PRD that will be submitted individually before the simulation exercise. During the simulation exercise, teams will be expected to share their collective insights from the reading and the real-time information provided by the speaker. Team will be tasked with delivering a set of Product Priorities / Roadmap and a Summary of the Discussion including agreements and friction points

Readings:

Gilad, I. Idea Prioritization with ICE and The Confidence Meter. Retrieved from: https://itamargilad.com/the-tool-that-will-help-you-choose-better-product-ideas/

Additional Pre-Read materials for the Disney simulation will be provided week prior to this class.

Week 7: Managing Effective Technology Development Using Customer Journey Maps, Competitive Analysis & AI Tools

Guest speaker: Fanatics speaker or Rich Criado, (VP Product, Fanatics Game Studios & iCasino) [on zoom]
LinkedIn: https://www.linkedin.com/in/richcriado/
Assignments:

- Read assigned reading materials (below)
- Guest speaker case study due at 9am on Monday Feb 19 before class (submission on BRIGHTSPACE)

Questions: This class session will explore the following questions:

- How product managers can utilize journey maps to help uncover user pain points and opportunities for product improvement?
- How product managers can utilize journey maps to identify competitive points of difference
- How to Manage and Apply a User Story Mapping Process within organizations?
- What is "confirmation bias" and how to manage product teams to minimize various bias ?
- How to facilitate team innovation through joint understanding of customer journeys and behaviors?
- How to incorporate product differentiation into the product management process?
- How can AI be used to help generate customer journey maps, competitive analysis & prototypes.

Learning Outcomes:

- o   Understand how to utilize journey maps to improve product strategy
- o   Analyze and define use cases and jobs to be done to ensure team product alignment
- o   The benefits of a User Story Mapping process to a product management team
- o   Recognize and manage confirmation bias and other bias that can occur in product teams
- o   Apply effective management techniques to facilitate productive concept development, prototyping, and validation within product teams
- o   Apply AI teachings to generate customer journey maps, competitive analysis & prototypes.

Readings:

Welman, J (2023, May 10). One-on-one with Fanatics Betting and Gaming CEO Matt King, SBCAmericas. Retrieved from: https://sbcamericas.com/2023/05/10/fanatics-betting-matt-king-interview/

GiBrightspaceons, Sarah (2018, December 9) *Journey Mapping 101* Nielsen Norman Group Retrieved from https://www.nngroup.com/articles/journey-mapping-101/

Cagan, M. (2007, October 1).   *Prototype Testing* Silicon Valley Product Group.   Retrieved from https://www.svpg.com/prototype-testing/

Babich, N. (2017, November 29) Prototyping 101: The difference between low-fidelity and high-fidelity prototypes and when to use each. Retrieved from: https://blog.adobe.com/en/publish/2017/11/29/prototyping-difference-low-fidelity-high-fidelity-prototypes-use

Patton, Jeff (2014) *User Story Mapping*, O'Reilly Media.   Chapter 5, You Already Know How. https://uosc.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/discovery/fulldisplay?context=L&vid=01USC_INST:01USC&search_scope=MyInstitution&tab=LibraryCatalog&docid=alma991044167888003731 [steps on creating a Story Map]
Note on how to access this information: (1) click on the link above, log in with your USC ID for the USC libraries; (2) click on 'O'Reilly Online Learning' which is the search result provided on the USC Libraries page, and you'll be taken to the O'Reilly page (3) Click on "Institutions not listed?"; (4) type your USC email; (5) you'll be taken to the German version of this book. Search for the book title in the search box on that webpage, and you'll find the English version.

Module III: Start-up Product Management
Week 8:   Startup Product Management and use of AI

Guest Speakers: Start-up speaker (i.e. Patrick Lee, founder of Rotten Tomatoes) with focus on AI market
LinkedIn: https://www.linkedin.com/in/rottendoubt/
Assignments:

- •   Read assigned reading materials (below)
- •   Guest speaker question submittal due at 9am on Monday Feb 26 before class (submission on BRIGHTSPACE)
- •   Individual assignment #4 due before class (submission on BRIGHTSPACE)

Questions: This class session will explore the following questions:

- •   What are some best practices in startup product management?
- •   How can we use rapid prototyping and iteration to quickly test and refine product ideas?
- •   How can we use AI to improve the agile development process?
- •   How can we measure and track the success of a rapid prototyping and experimentation process?
- •   How can product managers utilize ChatGPT or other AI models to improve their effectiveness?
- •   What are the principles of agile development methodologies, and the role of a product manager?

Learning Outcomes: By the end of this class session, students should be able to:

- •   Better understand the applications of product-market fit for startups and new product launches
- •   Understand the principles of agile development methodologies and how AI can enhance agile.

- Learn how to use agile development methodologies to rapidly prototype and iterate on a product
- Understand the importance of experimentation in product development
- Learn how AI is being used to enhance the productivity of product managers and product teams

Readings:

2025, ProductHQ. What Does a Startup Product Manager Do.   Retrieved from https://producthq.org/career/startup-product-manager/

Ahuja, Bhaskar (2022, May 5) Product Management For Early-Stage Startups.   Forbes.   Retrieved form https://www.forbes.com/councils/forbesbusinesscouncil/2022/05/05/product-management-for-early-stage-startups/

Rachitsky, L (2023, December 1). The future of AI in software development. Interview with Inbal Shani, CPO of Github. Retrieved from: https://www.lennysnewsletter.com/p/the-future-of-ai-in-software-development

Vasserman, M. (2023, August 10). Canny.   *7 product managers used ChatGPT. Here's what happened. Retrieved from: https://canny.io/blog/7-product-managers-used-chatgpt-heres-what-happened/*