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BECOME A GREAT PRODUCT MANAGER IN 6 MONTHS

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE

by

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with additional commentary by other Berlin based Product Leaders

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Introduction

by Elicia Hermitt

The Product market is booming, and with it the demand for more Product Managers continues to grow. I recently collaborated with Tiziano Nessi, Senior Product Manager, to investigate three key skills within Product and how they can help those in the space become great Product Managers in just 6 months. This guide also includes some of our Product Top Tips from 2021 to get a wider view on each individual topic.

Introduction

by Tiziano Nessi

Dear Junior Product Manager, here are the things I wish I knew about these skills when I started my journey in Product...

After more than 4 years of Product Management, I see a recurring episode happening over and over. We get the chance to become an Associate Product Manager (PM) only because we hold a Scrum certificate. Whilst this Agile framework is very important, there is more to know if you want to create a bigger impact, faster.

In the following report, I will share deep dives into 3 skills, together with some practical examples, which will help any Product Manager to position themselves as irreplaceable and will speed up the positive impact they can have on the product and therefore the users.

I wish I knew about these skills when I first started my journey in Product, so I have helped create this guide to help those starting out.

Beyond Scrum and market knowledge, what skills are needed for an associate PM?

I ran several surveys on LinkedIn targeting product managers, this resulted in more than 50 answers. They were asked what skills they wished they had when they started in Product. The results: User-Centric Approach (32%), Data Analytics (27%), and Communication (18%). These key areas will be explored in the following paper.

Which skill did you wish you had when you started working in product?

Part 1: User Centricity

Product-led businesses and Product Leaders are rapidly switching to a more user-centric approach, based on the understanding that everything they deliver needs to have the user's needs at the centre. Features that are shipped without the user in mind might look good as vanity metrics (download numbers, number of features shipped) whilst failing to add any value at all. So how can Product Leaders ensure they are user-centric?

Client-centric companies are 60% more profitable compared to companies not focused on the customer.

- Deloitte

Value proposition Canvas (Osterwalder, Pigneur: Value Proposition Design, 2014)

The Value Proposition Canvas is a great framework. You start broad and look at the customer's "everyday" routine. Don't focus only on your product domain. You should start mapping from the moment your target users wake up to when they go to bed. The Value Proposition Canvas is a framework to understand and ensure that there is a fit between the "product offering" and the "market needs".

To use this framework, you need to capture the jobs, pains and gains of the users, then connect them with the "solution" or value provided by your product. Follow the next steps to fill out this framework. Completing the customer profile is by far the most important asset you create.

Customer Profile

Customer Jobs:

This describes what your customers are trying to get done.

- Functional jobs: the act of performing a task (clean the dishes)
- Social jobs: Looking good or reaching a certain status (dress to impress)
- Emotional jobs: Reaching a certain feeling (financial security)

Customer Pains:

These are what makes the customer annoyed or fail the job. When writing these pains, try to be as specific as possible. For example; "It's annoying to use excel because it is so slow to work with large files" is not specific enough because we don't know when it starts to get annoying.

Try to be precise and find out how many minutes it takes before it starts to get annoying so you can create a better solution. A more precise pain would be, "After X minutes Excel is annoying because Y."

Customer Gains:

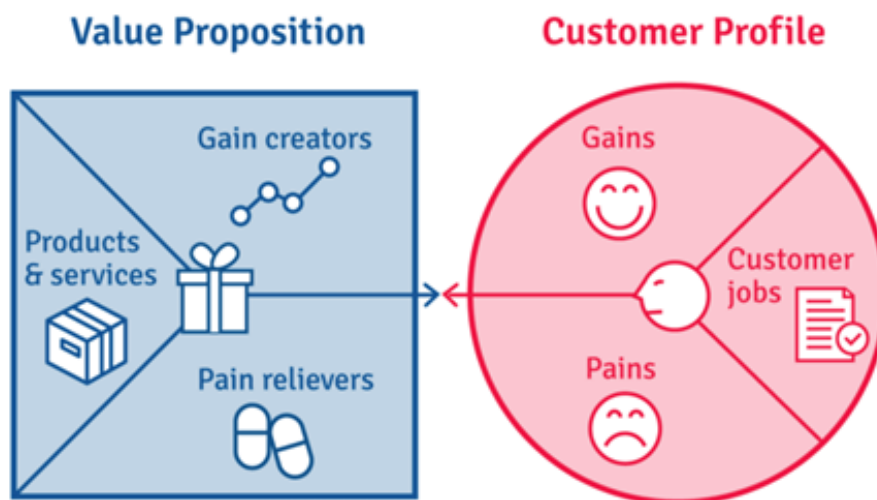
This is all about the desired outcome your customers are seeking. It is essential to split the thought process into 4 different sections. Functional gains, social gains, positive emotions and savings (time, money, effort). Again, try to be as precise as possible.

When you have collected the jobs, pain and gains, prioritise these by severity, then connect them with the value provided by your product. To do this, use the value map.

Value Map

The value map describes the "features" of your product in a structured way. It breaks down your value proposition into 3 categories.

- **Product and service:** This is a list of all the functionalities your value proposition offers. It goes beyond the product itself, for example a 24/7 call centre support, would be included as a service.
- **Pain relievers:** Describe how the functionalities relieve the customer pains. When using this framework, connect the customer pains with the functionality that could be pain relievers.
- **Gain creators:** How your product creates value and helps the customer to thrive. Connect customer gains with the gain creators' features visually. This will clarify which are your strongest value propositions.



Picture from - B2b international

User Centricity: A Summary

So to summarise the key takeaways so far to accelerate the path to become a strong Product Manager by using a user-centric approach:

- Think about what happens before, during, and after the user performs a job related to your product
- Create functional, emotional and social jobs
- Be precise when noting pains and gains
- Prioritise jobs, pains and gains by severity
- Connect your different value proposition with the customer profile

What other Product Leaders Say About User Centricity



"Finding customers and validating problems fuels solution discovery. Knowing what matters to customers helps position, price, and promote your product."

Prasad Gupte, Director of Product at Babbel

"We bring value to our customers by solving problems, not by shipping features. Challenge your roadmap. Ask 'what problem am I solving and what value does it bring my customer.' If you're not sure, rethink your approach."

Sam Love, Chief Product Officer at wefox



"Take time to learn who your prospects and customers are and speak with them regularly. Only then will you be able to discover a solution that works for many."

Alexandru Dina-Gargala, Head of Product at expendo

"Especially in a B2B environment - do not mix up customer and user. Usually the customer or buying centre purchases your product whereas the user works with it."

Alisa Maas, Principal Product Manager at Körber Digital.



Part 2: Leveraging Data

Another big part of positioning yourself as a key member of the Product team as a Junior Product Manager (PM) is knowing how to leverage data. Know what goal you need to achieve to become an indispensable PM. This information is mostly linked to KPI data and is a tangible number you can show to your boss or other stakeholders.

However, setting up goals can be much more complex as there are many different terms and ways of doing it, from OKR, to OMTM to KPI, business KPI, and so on.

For Junior PM's you can start simple with a North Star Metric (NSM).



Why North Metrics (NSM)?

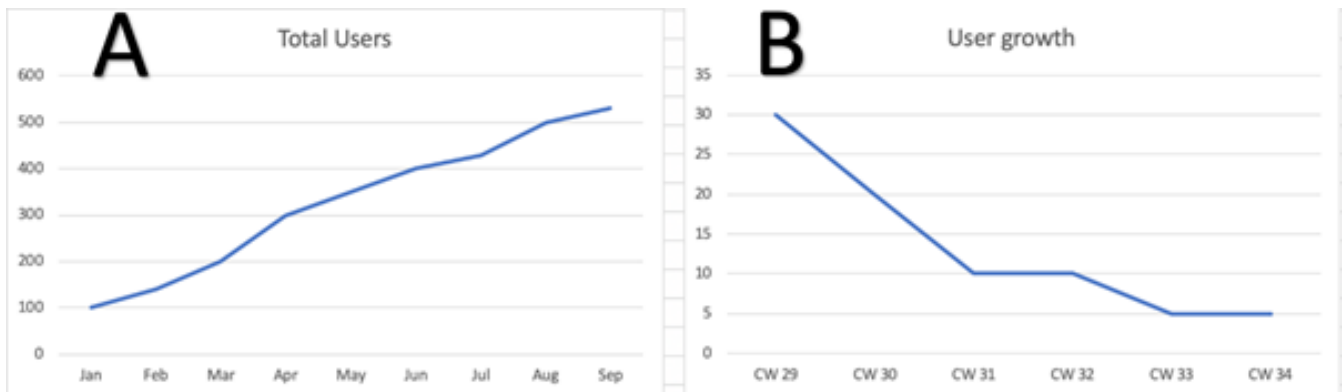
NSM is the one measurement that's most predictive of a company's long-term success. To qualify as a "North Star," a metric must do three things: lead to revenue, reflect customer value, and measure progress. It is also a metric that should be easy to calculate and understood by multiple departments. This concept was invented by Sean Ellis, a growth guru (S. Hedge, 2018).

It needs to be something that provides value for the customer too, therefore it cannot be a vanity metric. A VM is a number that is not bringing any value to the customers, and it lacks guidance on what to do next. This is normally a great number to show to executives, but it can be dangerous if used as an NSM. VMs are metrics such as the number of users, followers, and apps downloaded. They don't show the behaviour of the users, only their size. As an example, measuring the total number of users can be dangerous as you miss out on what is happening "now" in terms of growth. By looking at the total number, you can't understand the true impact of things like ad campaigns, A/B testing, and new messaging.

Focusing on VMs can lead to a focus on the wrong value lever which therefore drives Product development in the wrong direction.

Compare your North Star Metrics Over Time

Which business is doing better, A or B?



This is actually the same company. Do not always calculate the total of your NSM, it is better to measure period-over-period (as in picture B). By doing this you break down your performance in a manageable time frame and can learn from your most recent activities. Focus on week-over-week and month-over-month, to truly understand what methods and campaigns work well for your NSM and what doesn't have an impact.

When you have this overview cleared up, show it to your boss, and make them aware of your impact.

Data Analytics: A Summary

So to summarise the key takeaways so far to accelerate the path to become a strong Product Manager by leveraging data analytics:

- Use the North Star Metric as your go-to-metric framework
- NSM must be able to: lead to revenue, measure progress, reflect customer value
- Compare period-over-period to understand the impact of your experiments



What other Product Leaders Say About Data Analytics



"Test ideas on real users interacting with the product. It makes it easier to gather honest feedback from the people who use the product regularly to avoid tunnel vision."

Maria Mryasova, Director of Product at IPONWEB.

Don't be afraid to challenge the status quo, dig into problems, experiment, understand your audience. Be a relentless data cruncher to gain meaningful insights."

Yoav Yeger, Head of Product at Wunderflats



"Make sure to observe your target person's behaviour. Use tracking, let them share their screen or follow them for a day in real life (with their consent of course!)"

Karla Schönicke, Head of Product at Skyland Weal

"Observe users using your software. Often they tell you one thing but do something else, not because they want to fool you but because they don't realise and leave out important info."

Benjamin Ramhofer, VP of Product at Data4Life.



Part 3: Communication

In Product Management communication is fundamental to success. Here are some top tips for Junior Product Managers looking to make a difference, fast.

Build your Roadmap with the Team

Focus on improving internal communication with your core team. This core team includes the product team, but also engineers, designers, and data scientists who are working on your product. You all play a key role in the success or failure of the product, and you should all feel the same commitment to growing the North Star Metric.

As Marty Cagan says: "If you use a developer just to code, you are only using 50% of their potential."

This means that engineers must be included in strategy work, this is key if you want to reach your goals faster. Remember you are a team and you all work for the success of the end-users, not to develop features and to please stakeholders.

Present your user research/product discovery to the team regularly, as well as the product NSM update. When creating the roadmap include the designer and (at least) the Tech Lead, and make sure they are actively participating in crafting the product strategy. As a PM you should empower and make the engineers and designer aware that the overall team is responsible for the roadmap and consequently the user's success. They bear as much responsibility for growing the NSM as the PM does and it's important they feel as though their voice, ideas, and input are valued and heard.

Therefore, communication alone is not enough, you need to create a collaborative environment, where the strategy is crafted by the product trio: PM, designer, tech lead (Torres: Continuous Discovery Habits, 2021)

Understand your peers' personalities

To make sure that the team has the opportunity to participate in the strategy work, you need to know that everyone has different communication preferences and personalities. When planning a strategy or roadmap discussion, allow every team member to have enough time to prepare for it - not everyone can work well spontaneously.

To understand the most efficient way to talk, work, and be successful with your teammates, you can use the 16 Personalities Test. This helps you to understand that the way you and your team functions, communicates, thinks, and works. You and your other team members might have completely different personalities and that's why you struggle to communicate efficiently. Therefore, if you want to build more trust with your team, and get more out of them, adapt your style to help the team shine even more.

There are many different personalities, and it's important to adapt to different team members.

Based on the 16 Personalities test mentioned above, Tiziano Nessi's personality is:



A Campaigner (ENFP) is someone with the Extraverted, Intuitive, Feeling, and Prospecting personality traits. These people tend to embrace big ideas and actions that reflect their sense of hope and goodwill toward others.

[Find out what your personality type is here.](#)

Championing Communication: A Summary

So to summarise the key takeaways so far to accelerate the path to become a strong Product Manager by championing communication:

- The PM is only one part of a team. Use your full team to build the strategy
- Stress to the product trio that you are all equally responsible for the success of the product
- Collaboration > Communication
- Everyone is different. Use the 16 Personality Test to improve your team productivity



What other Product Leaders Say About Communication



"Good communication skills are a hallmark for a good Product Manager, and it starts with listening. The more you listen, the more ideas, insights, and information you will collect."

Saurabh Shah, Director of Product Management at Market Logic Software.

"Make conscious effort to note subtleties in personalities of the people you work with. This allows you to keep in mind their preferences and working styles, resulting in more effective communication."

Parth Das, Head of Product & Operations at DECA Games.



"I found that PM's can create high performing teams by encouraging interpersonal relationships, chipping away at silos, and facilitating the right conversations."

Merissa Silk, Chief Product & Technology Officer at fundingport

"People will remember you from the crises you had to solve. They will not only remember how you dealt with it, but especially how you behaved, communicated, and treated your team and customers during the crises."

Thomas Kasemir, Chief Product Officer at Productsup



Summary

Here are all the key points covered in the previous report to give you a snapshot of the key skills every great Product Leader needs to succeed.

User-Centricity

- Think about what happens before, during, and after the user perform a job related to your product
- Create functional, emotional and social jobs
- Be precise (X minutes) when noting pains and gains
- Prioritise jobs, pains and gains by severity
- Connect your different value proposition with the customer profile

Data Analytics

- Use the North Star Metric as your go-to-metric framework
- NSM must be able to: lead to revenue, measure progress, reflect customer value
- Compare period-over-period (i.e., week-over-week) to understand the impact of your experiments

Communication

- The PM is only part of a team. Use your team to build the strategy
- Stress to the product trio that you are all equally responsible for the success of the product
- Collaboration > Communication
- Everyone is different (thank god) use the 16 personality test to improve your team productivity

Thank you to Tiziano Nessi for submitting this content to Maxwell Bond for publication and to our other Product Top Tips contributors included in this guide:



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