product

focus

Top 10
Product Management Tools
2020

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This Product Focus report identifies the tools used by product managers and product marketers to help them do their job based on data from an extensive survey completed in January 2020 by 1,115 product people.

Tools are available to help across a wide range of activities. They include general office applications like Word and Excel, but this report focuses on software tools specifically designed to help companies manage their products. We call these 'Product Management Tools' and share the top 10 recommendations and the top 10 in use in 2020.

Product Focus is a global leader in product management and product marketing training for technology-based products. As global experts and Europe's leading provider, our goal is to help individuals and businesses deliver world class product management.
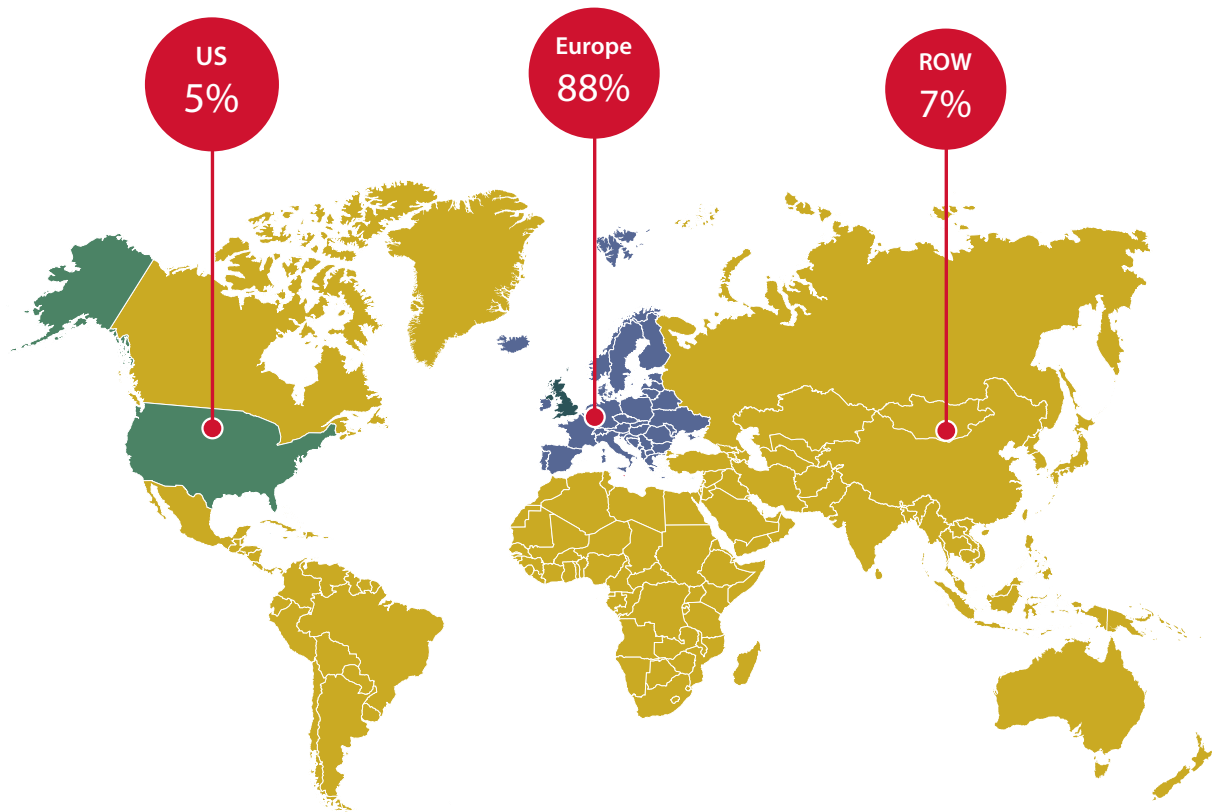
We hope this report will help you understand what's available in the market and find the right tools for your business.
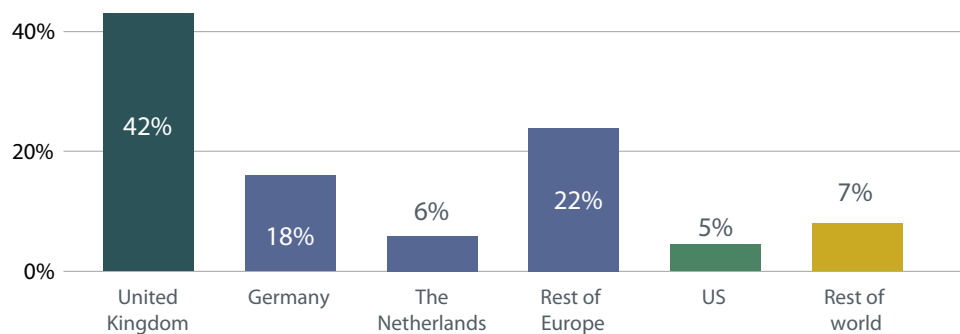
Contents

Insights from across the world

Thank you to the 1,115 people who took part in this year's survey. You can download the results of the survey from our website. Most were from the UK and Europe (88%), but we had significant numbers from the US and elsewhere.

US 5%

Europe 88%

ROW 7%

50 countries and 661 companies are represented

United Kingdom 42%	Germany 18%	The Netherlands 6%	Rest of Europe 22%	US 5%	Rest of world 7%

To the best of our knowledge, the information contained in this report was correct at the date of publication (Mar 2020). Product Focus Ltd takes no responsibility for decisions made based on the information in this report.

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A multitude of tools

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Executive Summary

Our survey showed there is a huge range of tools used by product managers and product marketers. Just under 300 were mentioned. Some target many different activities, while others have a narrow focus. And, as the product management and product marketing roles vary from company to company, so the activities that need to be supported can be very different.

So which tools do product managers use?

Generic office tools like those in Microsoft Office and Google Docs are still, by far, the most used. However, there are a growing number of tools targeted at specific product management activities. We call these 'Product Management Tools' and reveal the top 10 currently in use (see the logos below).

Generic office applications have their place, but Product Management Tools offer several benefits:

- Streamlining and automating common product management activities e.g., recording, tracking and prioritizing requirements

- Helping communication, alignment, and collaboration across different departments, timezones, and geographies e.g., a single location to store, access and share product information

- Pushing product managers into examining the importance and benefit of what may be new activities e.g., analyzing the success of newly released features

- Helping product managers to standardize and use best practice e.g., in how they create roadmaps
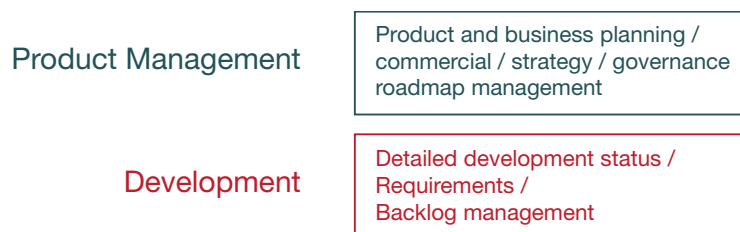
Choosing which tools to use?

As most tools are available on a trial basis, we recommend that you try them before committing. We also believe that:-

- To get the real benefit of many tools requires the full buy-in of all involved. The tool must become a habitual part of working for product managers and their virtual team

- Successful introduction is dependent on pre-planning. We provide a short checklist in the

- It's easy to become confused when reading different vendor websites. All seem to have all the answers and many are only aimed at software products. This report helps sift through the many choices and identifies the top 10 product management tools currently used by our survey respondents

Tools for Product Management, tools for Development

From our discussions with Product Management teams, it's clear that many have adopted the tools they use because they are already in use elsewhere in the business, often in the Development or Engineering department.

Whilst there are benefits to having the same tool as developers, having a common tool isn't always the best way to go. Development-led tool selection will mean having tools that are great at detailed requirements management, but might not be the best for product managers working on product and business plans at a more strategic level.

Product Management

Product and business planning / commercial / strategy / governance roadmap management

Development

Detailed development status / Requirements / Backlog management

Tools Overload and Exhaustion

On our training courses, when the topic of tools is brought up, it's often met with a collective groan from delegates. The issue is not that the tools are not useful but the sheer number that product people can be required to interact with every day. Two quotes that summarize the situation: "We've got too many tools! Everybody uses their favorite tool, and if you want to work with them, you need to learn it." and "The highest cost for most tools is the time it takes you to learn it!"

Conclusion

This year's survey reveals that given the ubiquitous, ready availability and familiarity of generic office tools like Microsoft Office, many product managers turn to them as the easy option. However, new tools to help product managers are being used in most businesses.

Our experience is that many tools are introduced by other parts of the business (e.g., Jira by Development) and used by product managers because they are already there. That's fine. However, we believe that product management should also review the tools they use to see if there are opportunities to save time, improve work quality, and increase product management effectiveness across the business. Also, having a universally used tool that everyone buys into is a much better option than multiple non-standard tools spread across the business.

Selection and implementation

Our experience is that many companies use (or at least try out) multiple tools.

We recommend a structured approach to assessing and implementing tools and have provided the checklist below to help:

1) Tools help automate and improve efficiency, so implementing a tool to speed up an existing, poor way of working isn't the best approach. First, assess your ways of working and understand the improvements you would like to make

2) Set clear objectives and expectations for what the tool will deliver - remember that it will take time and effort to bed-in

3) Define the templates and working practices to be supported by the tool and how these will align with product governance

4) Decide who will be creating content using the tool, who will be reading the content provided by the tool and who will be the administrators

5) Plan how the tool will share data or integrate with current IT systems

6) Assess current solutions and preferences:
   - are existing in-house tools suitable, or can they be adapted to support how you want to work?
   - do you want a single tool to cover a broad range of activities or tools that focus on specific problem areas?

7) Test and trial tools to see what data will need to be captured and to get agreement on the format needed

8) Establish plans for training current employees and how you'll handle new starters

9) Build a communication plan for how the tool will be rolled out

10) Understand the costs for implementation (and secure budget), including
   - the number of users of each type (e.g., editors, read-only access, administrators) and their licensing fees
   - training
   - configuration and integration effort

11) Carry out your final due diligence before making your vendor solution. For example:
   - support availability
   - how mature is the tool and how trustworthy is the company
   - whether you're happy with a SaaS solution or want to install a solution behind your firewall to keep data secure and not have to rely on external internet connections

Outputs to suit your needs

A key part of any implementation is integrating your tools with existing systems to minimize re-keying. Another crucial aspect is configuring their output to show information needed by stakeholders. Most come with predefined standard templates that can be changed to suit your situation. Some examples of the wide variety of outputs are provided below.
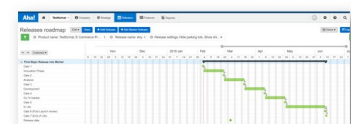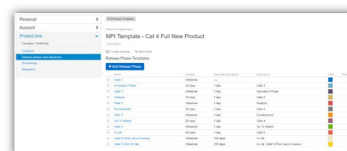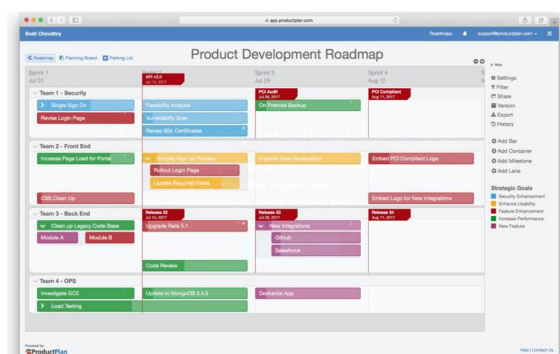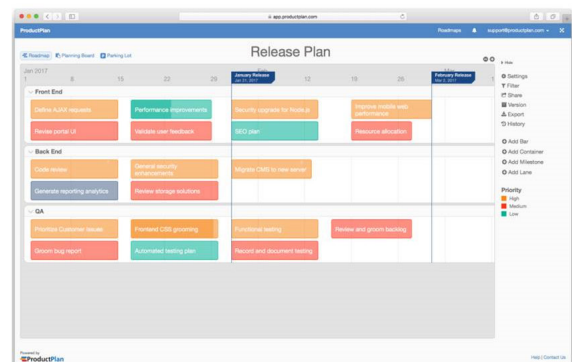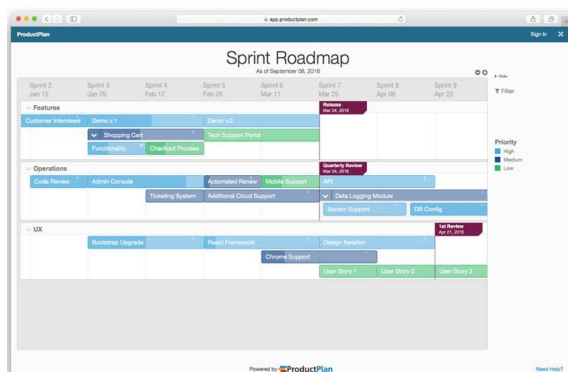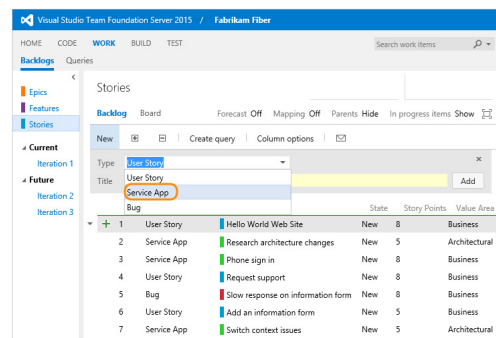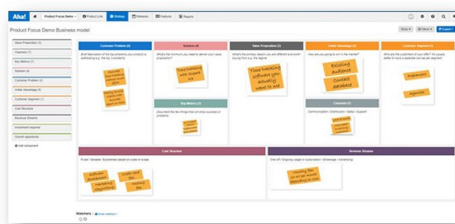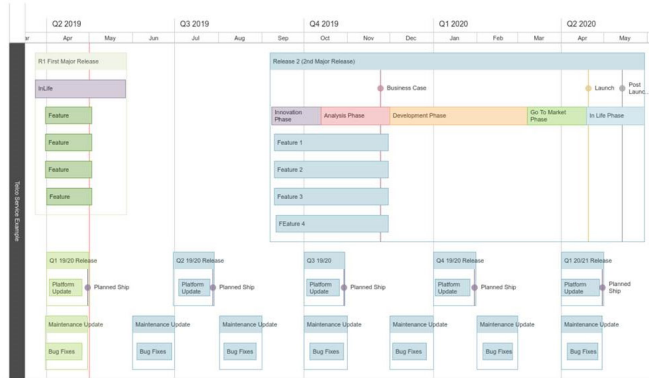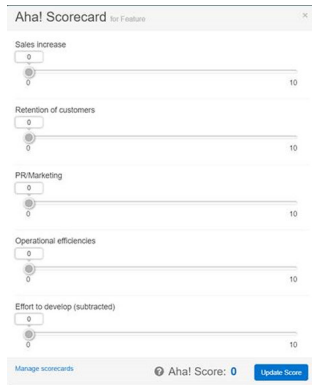
The tools survey

Based on a survey that took place in January 2020, this report uses data from 1,115 product managers and marketers from more than 661 technology-based product companies. 88% of respondents were from Europe, and 36% are Heads of Department, Directors or VP level.

The survey asked the following questions about using tools for different activities.

1. **Product Strategy:** What do you use to document product strategy, analysis, and opportunities?
2. **Getting Insight:** What do you use when collecting, sharing, and testing ideas and insights from customers, the market, competitors, and internal teams?
3. **Tracking Requirements:** What do you use when documenting and tracking requirements?
4. **Prioritization:** What do you use when prioritizing ideas, requirements, and features?
5. **Roadmapping:** What do you use when creating roadmaps to present and share release information?
6. **Creating Mock-ups:** What do you use when creating mock-ups such as prototypes, wireframes, and screen designs?
7. **Project Management:** What do you use to project manage e.g., internal rollouts, development, launches, trials, and marketing plans?
8. **Metrics and Analytics:** What do you use when measuring the impact of new features and successes?

Many product management roles do not include all of the above activities, and the graph below shows the percentage of all respondents who answered each question.

The top 10 is based on the overall number of mentions of a tool across all questions. It excludes generic office, design, project management tools etc., to focus on tools targeted specifically at product managers and their activities.

What activities are tools used for?
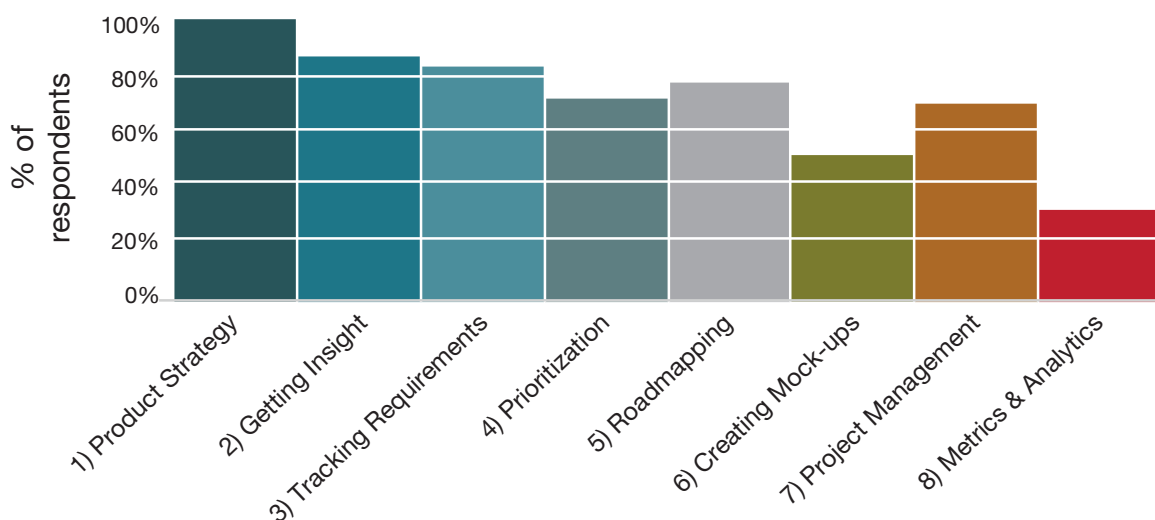
Results

Without a doubt, there are many Product Management Tools from which to choose. The selection of one or more tools is going to be dependent on your current and future requirements.

One approach is to "cherry pick" tools that are best in class for specific tasks e.g., roadmapping or requirements management. With this approach, there is a need to ensure simple integration (ideally automated) between the chosen tools. Another approach is to look for a good all-round tool, which works for most product management administration tasks.

While our Top 10 Product Management tools have not been around for many years, they've matured quickly. They are proven in many different companies, each with their unique way of working.

This is the fifth year in which we have produced this report, and we've seen several changes over the past 12 months:

1. Most companies use one or more Product Management Tools in their business.

2. The Microsoft Office suite continues to dominate.

3. Aside from Atlassian's Jira and Confluence products, the market is highly fragmented - just under 300 different tools were mentioned in the survey, with Aha! leading the way.

Before we show our analysis of the answers to questions about which tools are used for different product management and product marketing activities, it's interesting to see the tools that people would actually recommend to their peers. The graph below is based on answers to the question:

Is there a tool you would definitely recommend to product managers?
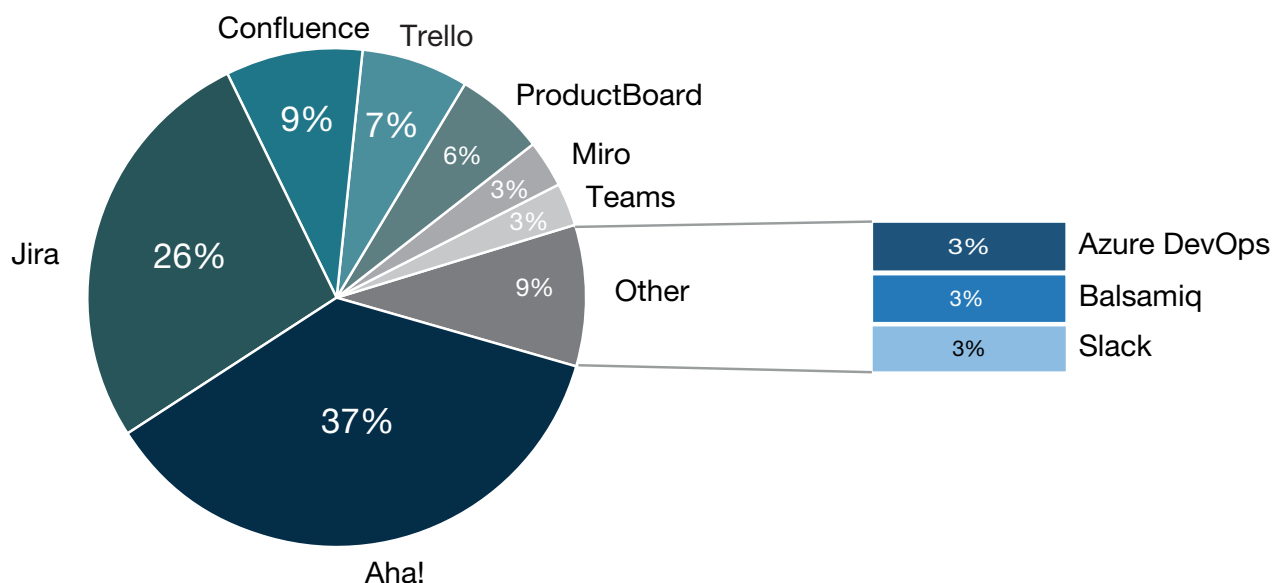
Tools for different activities

1) What do you use to document product strategy, analysis and opportunities?
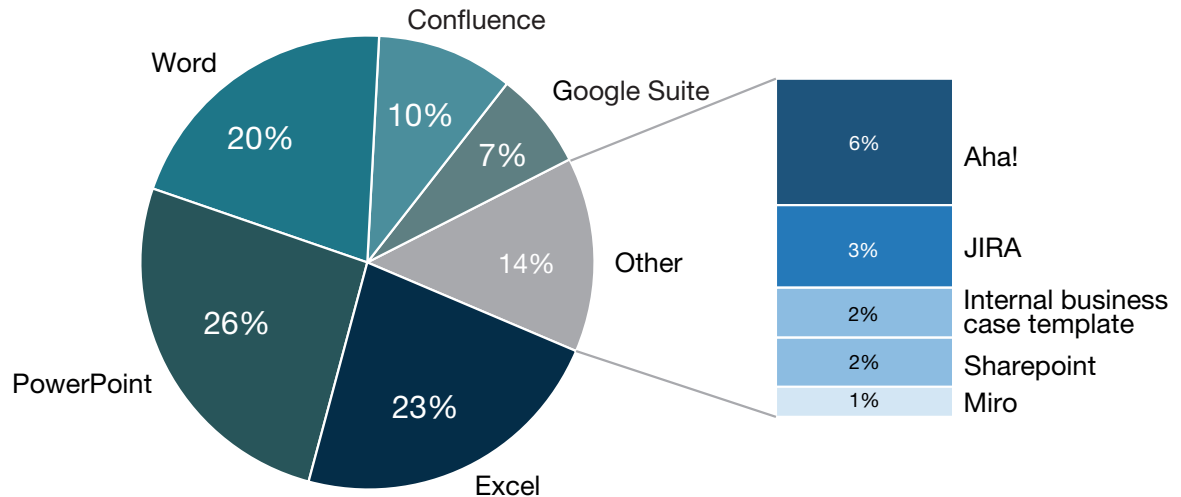
2) What do you use when collecting, sharing and testing ideas and insights from customers, the market, competitors and internal teams?

3) What do you use when documenting and tracking requirements?
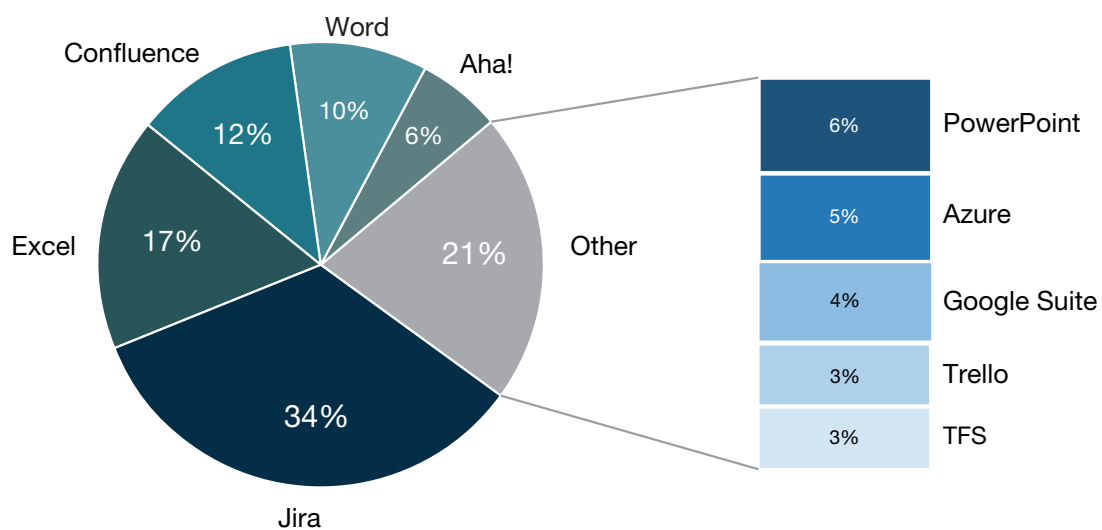
Pie chart:
- Jira 34%
- Other 21%
- Excel 17%
- Confluence 12%
- Word 10%
- Aha! 6%

Other breakdown:
- PowerPoint 6%
- Azure 5%
- Google Suite 4%
- Trello 3%
- TFS 3%

4) What do you use when prioritizing ideas, requirements and features?

Pie chart:
- Jira 35%
- Excel 29%
- Other 15%
- Aha! 11%
- Confluence 5%
- Trello 5%

Other breakdown:
- Azure 4%
- PowerPoint 4%
- Google Docs 3%
- Word 2%
- Google Suite 2%

5) What do you use when creating roadmaps to present and share release information?

Pie chart:
- PowerPoint 45%
- Excel 17%
- Aha! 11%
- Jira 6%
- Confluence 6%
- Other 15%

Other breakdown:
- Google Suite 5%
- Word 4%
- Roadmunk 3%
- Trello 2%
- ProdPad 1%

6) What do you use when creating mock-ups such as prototypes, wireframes and screen designs?

Pie chart:
- Sketch 11%
- Adobe Suite 9%
- Balsamiq 18%
- InVision 20%
- PowerPoint 22%
- Other 20%

Other breakdown:
- Figma 6%
- Visio 4%
- Axure 4%
- Zeplin 4%
- 3D 2%
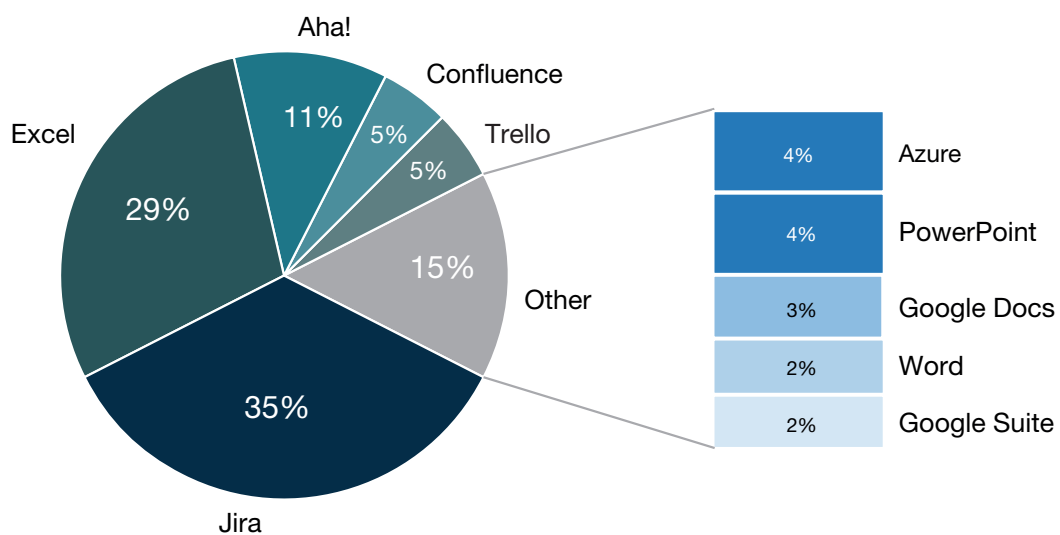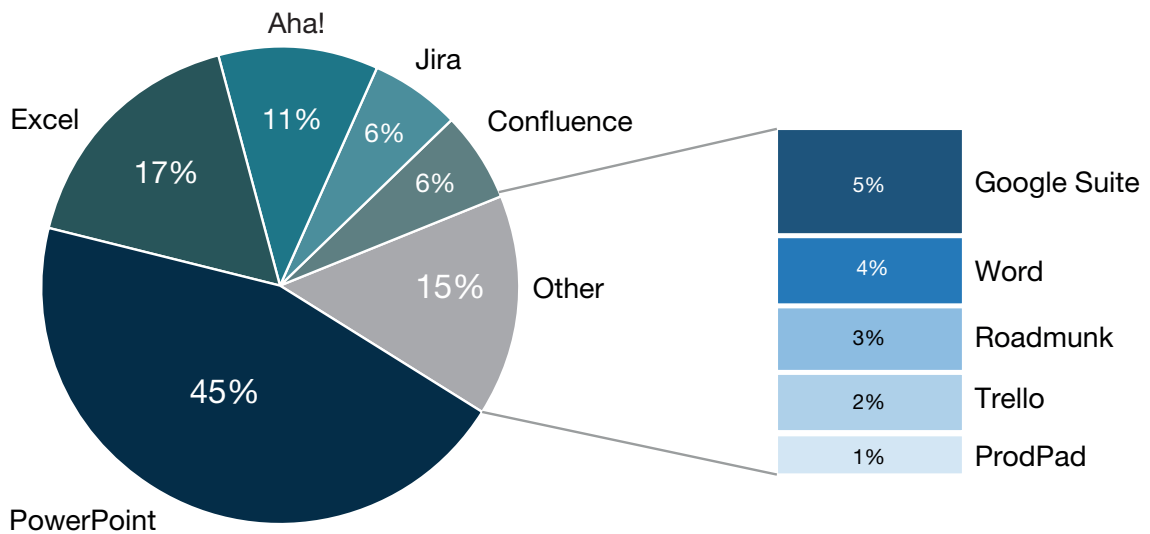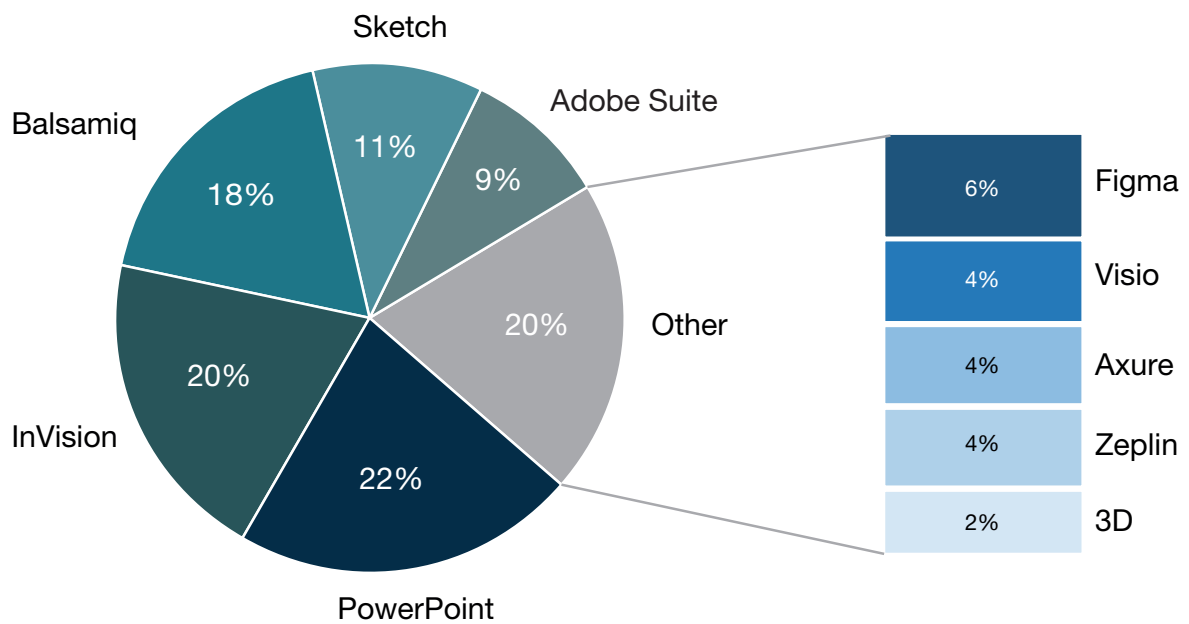
7) What do you use to project manage e.g., of internal rollouts, development, launches, trials and marketing plans?
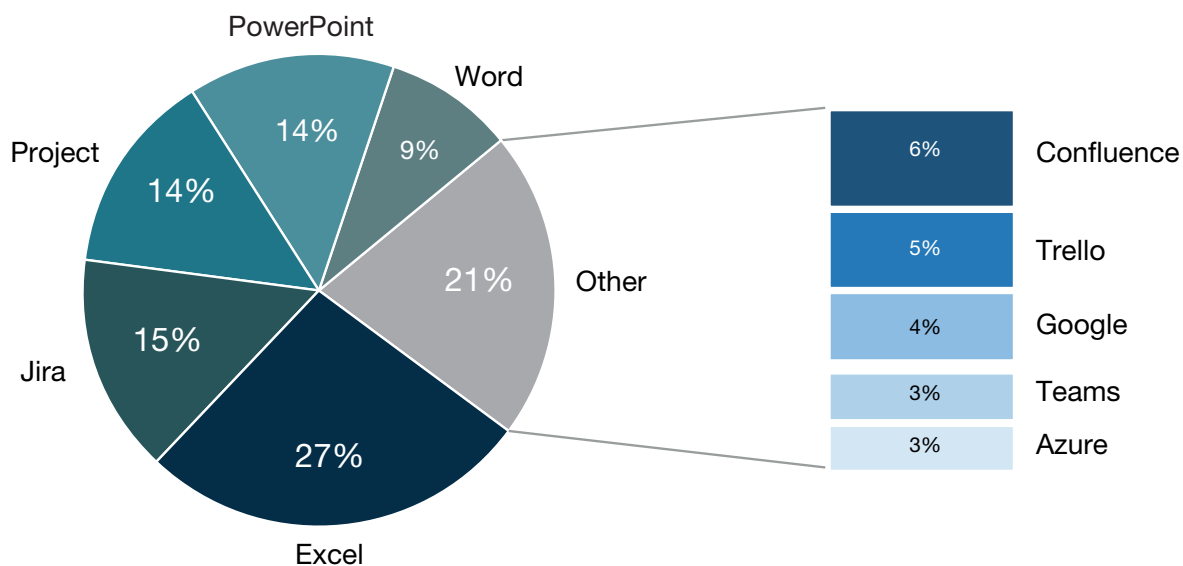
8) What do you use when measuring the impact of new features and successes?
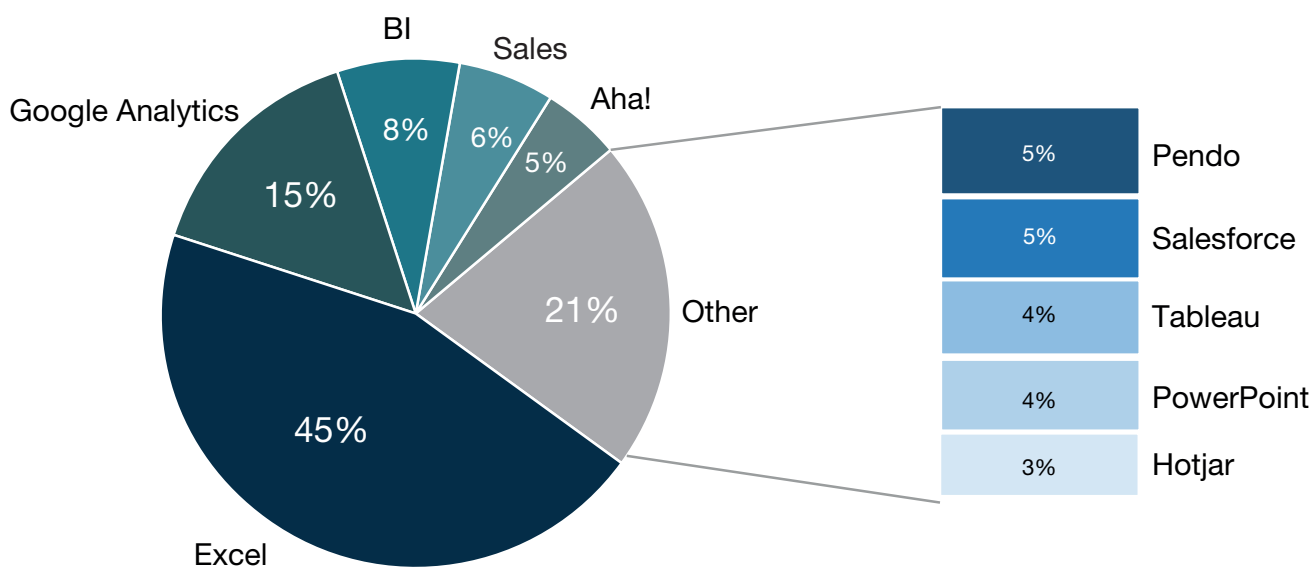
Top 50 Tools

The following chart shows the top 50 tools (of any description) mentioned by product managers in their survey responses. These range from generic office applications to tools for project management, visual design, storage, development management, surveys, presentations, and personal productivity.

In the top 50, the first 6 tools, shown in the pie chart, represent over 70% of the mentions by product managers. The rest are listed in order by the number of mentions.

Pie chart:
- PowerPoint 18%
- Jira 13%
- Word 9%
- Confluence 7%
- Aha! 6%
- Other 27%
- Excel 20%

Bar chart (Other breakdown):
- Google Suite 4.1%
- Trello 2.2%
- InVision 2.0%
- Project 1.8%
- Balsamiq 1.5%
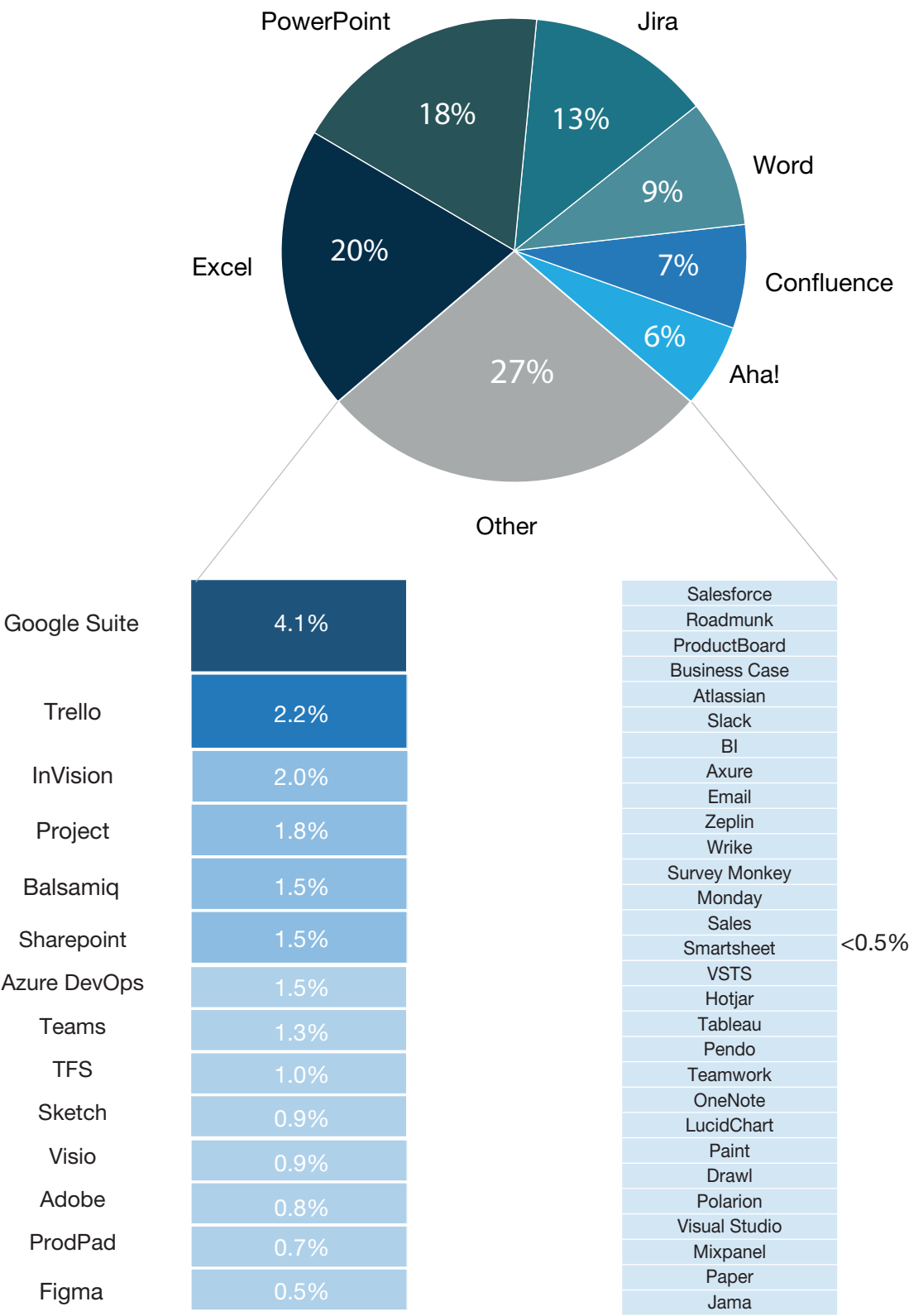- Sharepoint 1.5%
- Azure DevOps 1.5%
- Teams 1.3%
- TFS 1.0%
- Sketch 0.9%
- Visio 0.9%
- Adobe 0.8%
- ProdPad 0.7%
- Figma 0.5%

<0.5%
- Salesforce
- Roadmunk
- ProductBoard
- Business Case
- Atlassian
- Slack
- BI
- Axure
- Email
- Zeplin
- Wrike
- Survey Monkey
- Monday
- Sales
- Smartsheet
- VSTS
- Hotjar
- Tableau
- Pendo
- Teamwork
- OneNote
- LucidChart
- Paint
- Drawl
- Polarion
- Visual Studio
- Mixpanel
- Paper
- Jama

Top 10 Product Management Tools

The 2020 survey identified the top 10 most widely used Product Management Tools, based on the overall number of mentions of tools targeted wholly or partly at product managers or product management activities.
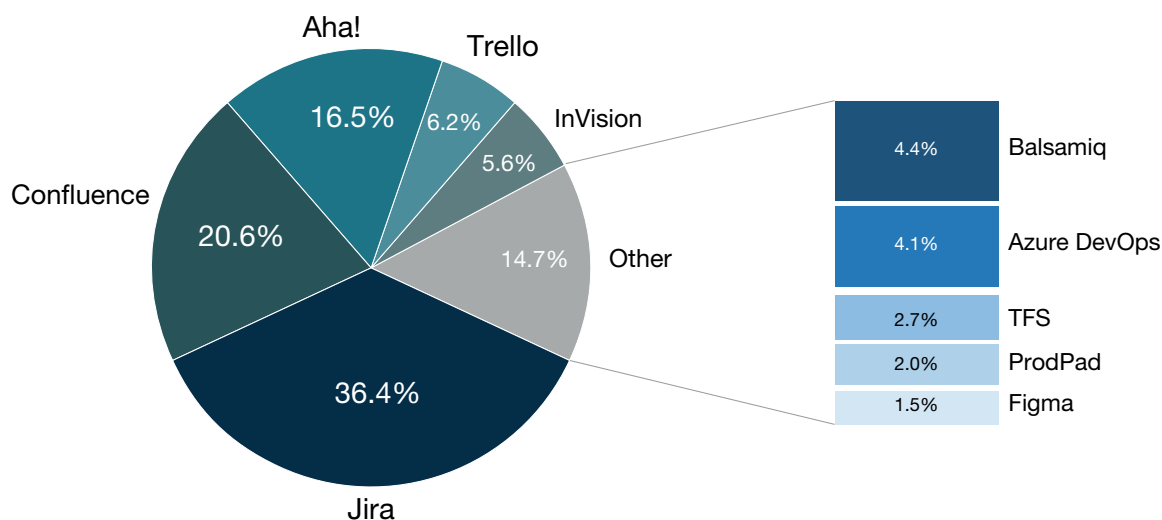

Each tool should be evaluated against your current circumstances and needs. If you are looking for a tool built primarily for product managers, then Aha! and ProdPad are strong candidates. Others, such as Jira with Confluence, are intended to manage a broad range of activities associated with bringing products to market. Finally, there are products focused on particular activities such as task planning and design like Trello, InVision, and Balsamiq.

Tool adoption

The graph below shows the use of tools in businesses using different development approaches. It shows a clear link between the use of Agile and the use of tools. Perhaps this reflects the fact that proper alignment and communication across teams are fundamental to making Agile work.

Development Methodology vs Product Management Tool Utilization
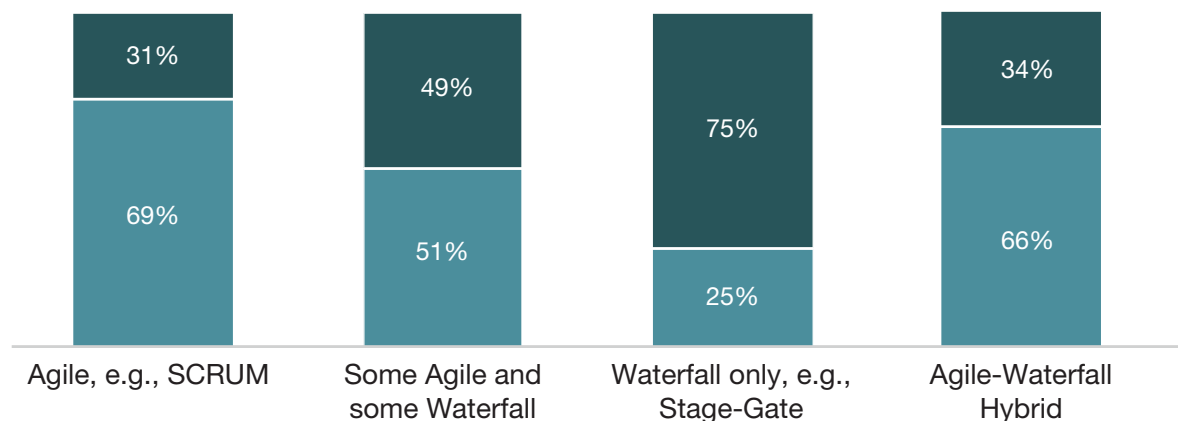
Case Study

Descartes - Aha! Implementation

Introduction

Descartes, a global company, provides cloud-based solutions to businesses with significant logistics and supply chain needs. Their solutions include messaging services, transportation and fleet management, e-commerce fulfillment, forwarder and broker operations, global trade intelligence, and customs filing. Stephanie Redl, Head of the Office of Product Management, and internal champion for Aha! at Descartes talks about her experience integrating the tool in a global business.

Background

Aha! was initially selected to improve internal and external visibility of product roadmaps – providing a single and up-to-date source that was easily accessible. Now, a few years in, Aha! has helped their geographically-dispersed product teams unify their approach to more than just roadmaps.

Before Aha!, firefighting was a daily activity, often eating into time that should have focused on more strategic activities. Stephanie explains, "We have many products and product managers working in dynamic environments, which means lots of roadmap changes. We needed to have one standardized approach and location for maintaining, reviewing, and sharing the latest roadmap."

The Ideas portal in Aha! was another big draw for Descartes. The portal would give them a structured way to reach out to their customers and allow them to view, add or comment on product ideas, without the usual email slog.

The Implementation

Aha! was implemented across Descartes 4 years ago, but struggled with broad adoption of the tool and standardization between users.

Recognizing the opportunity in having a product like Aha!, Stephanie decided to give the product managers, "an easy start, a reference product to show how it's done." She set up one of her own products in Aha! to serve as a step-by-step guide on how to use Aha! correctly. From this starting point, she developed more structured training programs, standardized the associated processes, and became the central point of contact for any changes requested for Aha!.

"I still use it for reference a lot of times," explains Stephanie. "Because I know it very well, it's easy to come up with examples of how strategy connects to a single release/feature/idea. I would recommend not using a dummy product with dummy content, but rather something that connects to real life and is easy to understand for anybody looking at it."

Throughout the process, Stephanie has found the Aha! support team to be responsive and helpful. They have carried out training courses for users and their Customer Service Manager (CSM) still meets with Stephanie regularly to go through queries.

"The support team are former product managers who understand what you are saying. The documentation provided by Aha! is useful – they relate it to the product manager's role, and it's structured around the activities that a product manager does," Stephanie explains.

Case Study continued...

The integration with Descartes' R&D system (Azure DevOps) is still a work in progress. Currently, it works for some of the product managers, but others are still manually having to clean up the backlog before they can use the automated synchronization. The hope is that once integrated, the product team can utilize Aha! as a 'control room' with everything at hand, rather than jumping between R&D systems, emails, chats, and word documents, etc. But, with 100s of product managers and R&D staff globally, the roll-out will take some time.

The Outcome

The initial expectations that Descartes had for Aha! have been met. Once a year, they hold a large conference in Florida, which is an excellent opportunity for the product teams to share roadmaps with customers. Previously, this would take a significant effort to ensure that all roadmaps were up-to-date and consistent. Now, product managers can use the same information from Aha! and be confident it's up to date and consistent in its formatting. This has allowed the product teams to showcase the benefits to the broader business, which has also increased the engagement and utilization of the tool.

In the short term, it has already proved to be a big time-saver for the product teams. As Stephanie explains, "The ability to create presentations at the click of a button rather than spend days putting together a PowerPoint has helped in reducing the time spent firefighting."

In the longer term, the aim is to get the integration with R&D completed. Once this happens, there will be a common platform for the organization.

In March of this year, Descartes implemented the Ideas Portal module. While still early days, many colleagues internally, such as Sales and Support, have been utilizing it. They find it a lot easier than sending emails, as Stephanie notes, " they like its transparency and the fact that they can see updates. It's not just a black-hole into which their comments disappear."

Descartes has significant growth through acquisition. Having their processes held centrally will also make on-boarding product teams from other companies (something that previously took a lot of training) much easier. Stephanie states, "The unintended consequences of implementing Aha! is how it has helped us not only save time but become more productive and cohesive as a function."

Conclusion

While Aha! has proved successful in meeting their initials aims and expectations; Stephanie has learned that, in a company the size of Descartes, establishing clear governance and structure right from the beginning of the process is of paramount importance. If someone had held this responsibility from the start of the implementation, she feels they would have been further down the road and have seen the benefits realized quicker.

Descartes has seen some clear benefits from using Aha! With the annual conference providing positive feedback on the change and with other teams (like Sales and Support) using the Ideas portal, the tool has helped them save time and become more visible as a function, internally and with customers.

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