

2026

Survey of the Product Management Profession

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Introduction

Product management is a profession people commit their careers to. In this year's survey **43%** say they've been managing products for over a decade, and **72%** say that seeing the impact of their work matters more than anything else. That dedication comes through clearly.

We conduct an annual survey asking product professionals about their roles, salaries, daily activities, and major challenges. This includes product people at every level: from Junior Product Manager to Chief Product Officer; and related roles like Product Marketers and Product Owners.

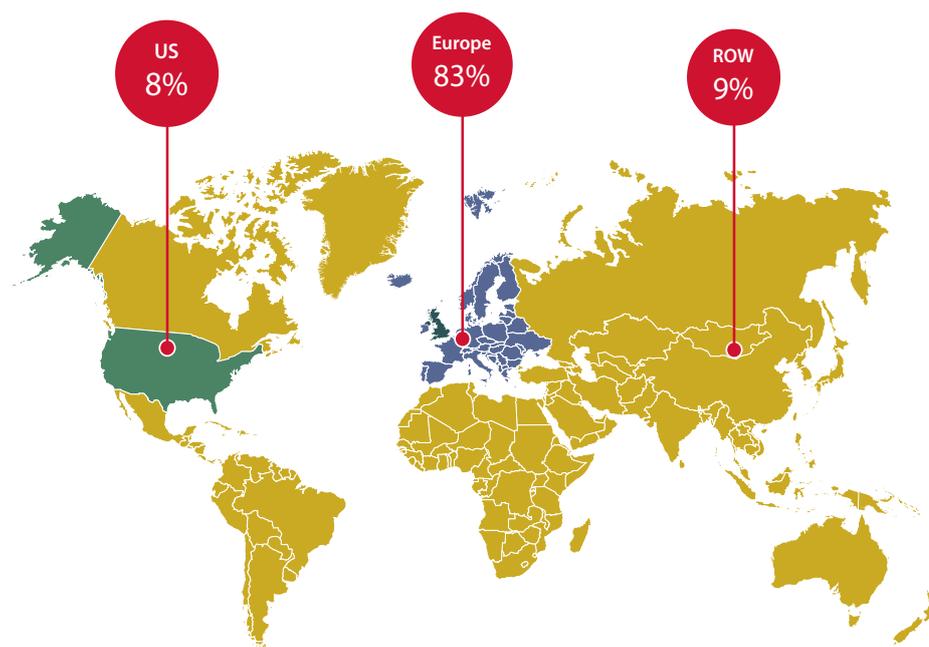
This year, **677** people from **40** countries participated. Most respondents were from Europe (**83%**), but we also had a significant number from the US (**8%**) and other regions (**9%**). All responses were collected between October 2025 and January 2026.

These insights provide a benchmark to help you better understand your role and product management within your company. In many areas, the survey results reflect common practices, not necessarily best practices.

Thank you to everyone who took part. Your responses shape this report and resulted in a £6,770 donation to charity. We're grateful for your time and your insight.

Wishing you success,

Eddie Pratt Managing Director, Product Focus



Highlights

01 Unclear roles kill deadlines

Unclear roles aren't just frustrating. They're expensive. Those with clearly defined responsibilities hit deadlines **78%** of the time. When roles are unclear, that drops to **48%**.

At the same time, **34%** of product professionals report having no clear primary metric. No scoreboard. No shared definition of success.

When ownership is blurred and success isn't defined, reliable delivery is harder to achieve.

02 The customer and strategy gap

71% say they don't spend enough time with customers and that figure rises to **75%** among the Heads and Directors.

Those responsible for setting direction report the greatest customer time deficit. Meanwhile, **33%** report a weak or missing company strategy.

With poor strategy and losing sight of customers, you might be running in the wrong direction.

03 AI is driving productivity more than outcomes

AI adoption has surged, with **69%** using it frequently or very frequently. **97%** report improved productivity.

But only **64%** report improved product outcomes e.g. faster time to market.

AI improves productivity. It does not guarantee better outcomes.

04 Influence is an organizational design choice

When Product reports to a CPO, nearly **80%** say it is seen as a leadership function. When reporting to Engineering or Sales, that falls to around **50%**.

Reporting line is strongly associated with perceived authority.

The closer Product sits to executive ownership, the more it is seen as leadership.

What emerges from this year's data is clear. High-performing product teams are not distinguished by how much AI they use, but by how well they operate. Leaders remove ambiguity in roles, define meaningful metrics, invest in helping their teams prioritize, set direction, and stay close to customers.

AI is increasing productivity across the profession. However, it hasn't removed the need for expertise or accountability. **85%** of product managers use their expertise to validate AI output, and while nearly all report personal productivity gains, far fewer see improved product outcomes.

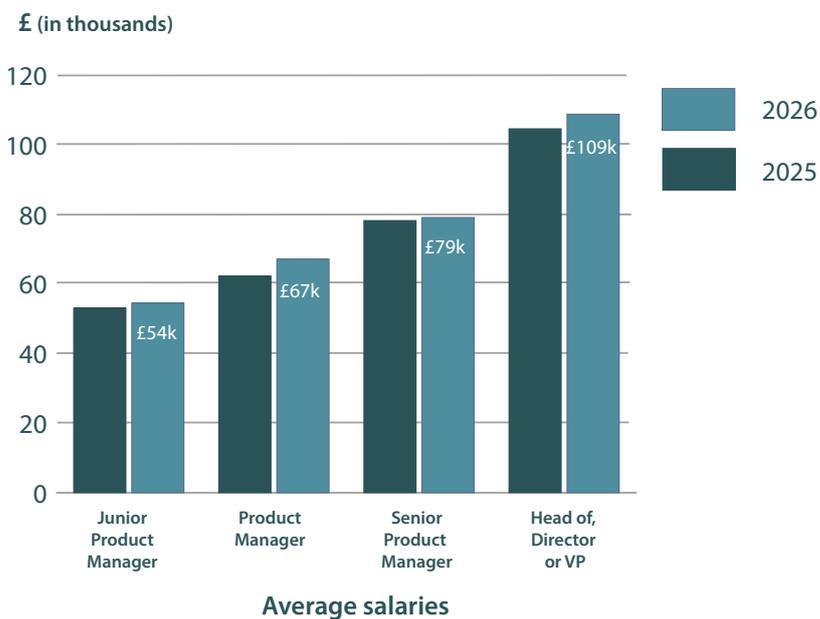
AI can accelerate execution. Knowing what's worth executing and delivering it well still takes skilled product managers.

What we get paid

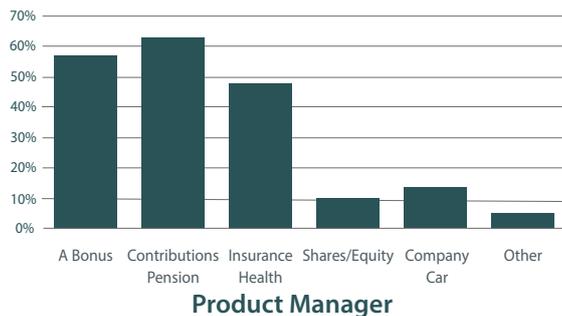
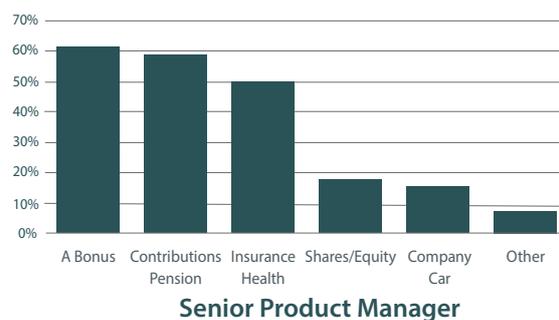
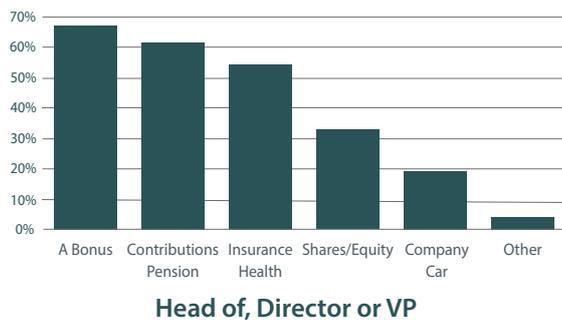
3.8%

is the average salary increase from 2025 to 2026 across all currencies

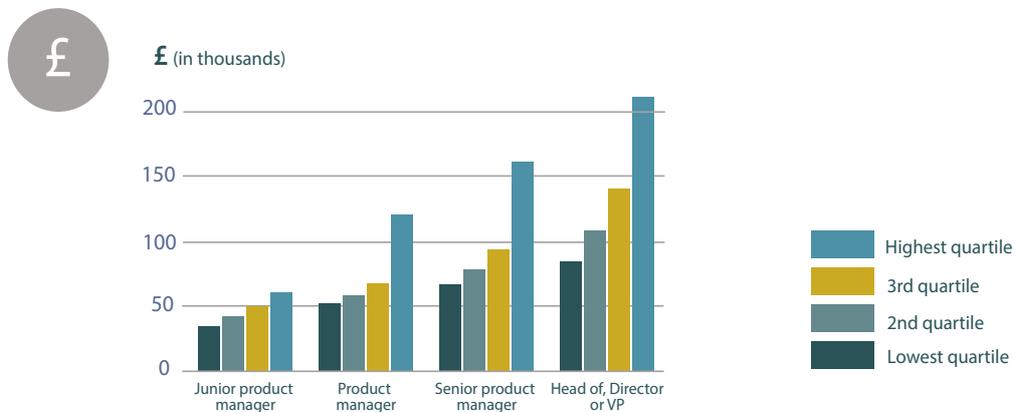
Salary inflation surpassed the previous year's increase of 2%. Note: those paid in \$ are on average paid more than those paid in £ or €.



What's in the full package?



Salaries across the world



Collated from all those that responded in £



Collated from all those that responded in \$



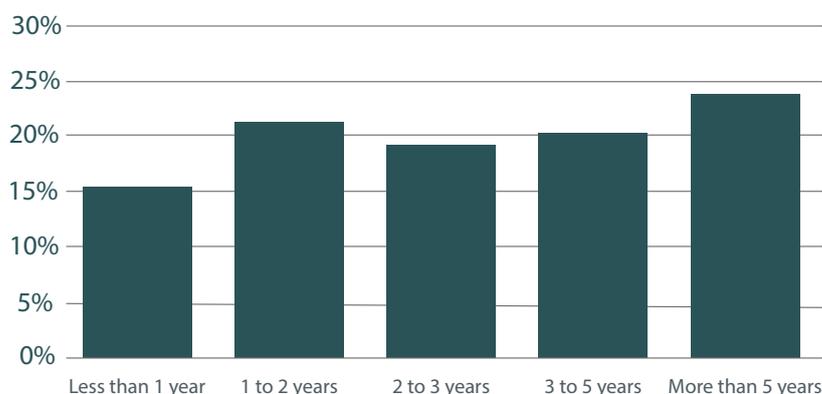
Collated from all those that responded in €

Our role and background

3

is the average number of years respondents have been in their **current** role

About 23% of respondents have been in their current role for 5 or more years, up from 18% last year.



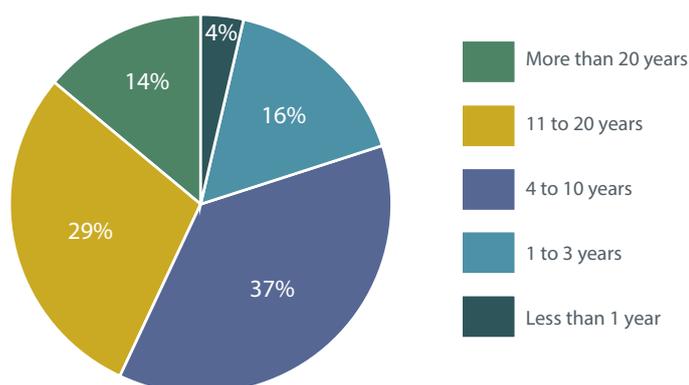
How long have you been in your current role?

Total years managing products

80%

of respondents had more than 4 years' total experience managing products

People build a career in product management. 43% have more than 10 years' experience managing products.

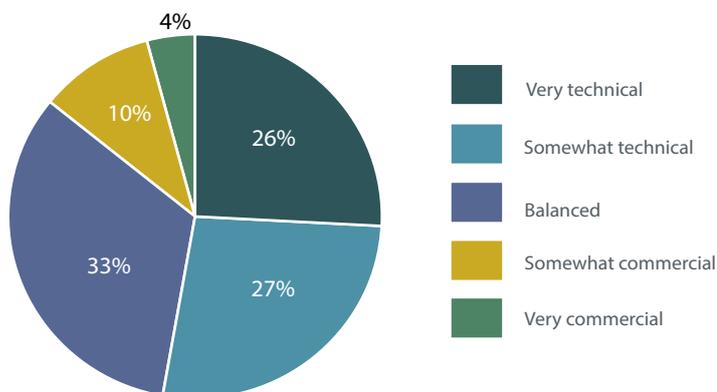


How long have you worked in jobs managing products?

Our background

33%

of respondents say they have a balanced background



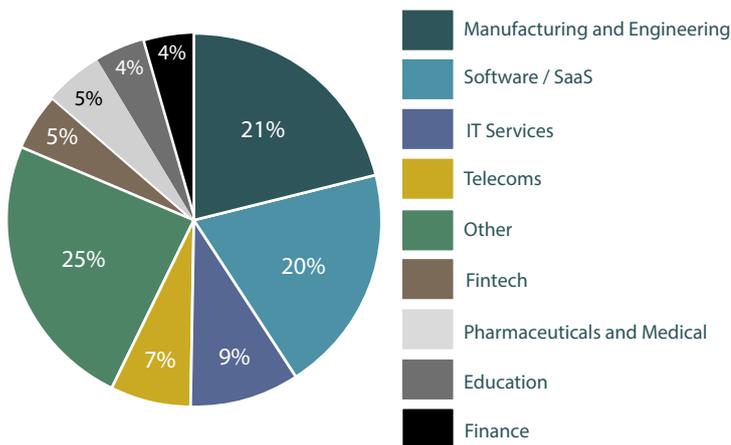
How would you describe your background?

53% of product managers said they come from a technical background, a 3% increase from last year.

Industries that we work in

21%

of respondents work in Manufacturing and Engineering



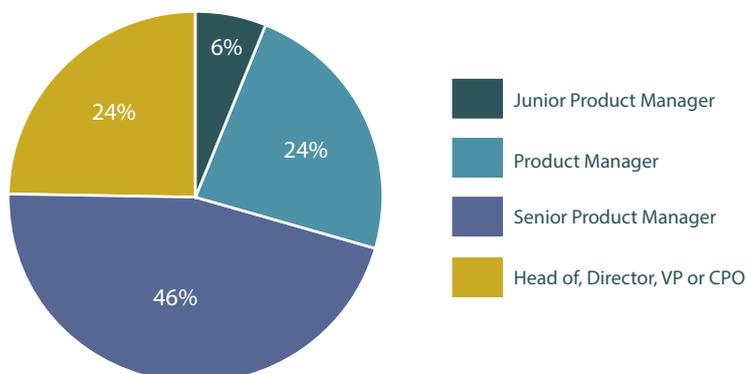
Which industry do you work in?

Product management is a great transferable skill, allowing you to work in many industries.

Seniority levels

24%

of respondents classed themselves as Head of, Director, VP or CPO



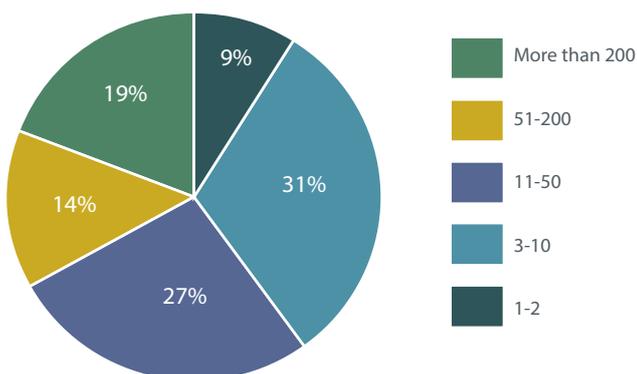
41% of respondents manage a team of product people.

Based on your experience and position in your company, do you consider yourself to be a...

Product Managers in your company

33%

of respondents work in companies with more than 50 people in product management



Team size doesn't predict success. What matters is whether you have good product management foundations and apply them in the workplace.

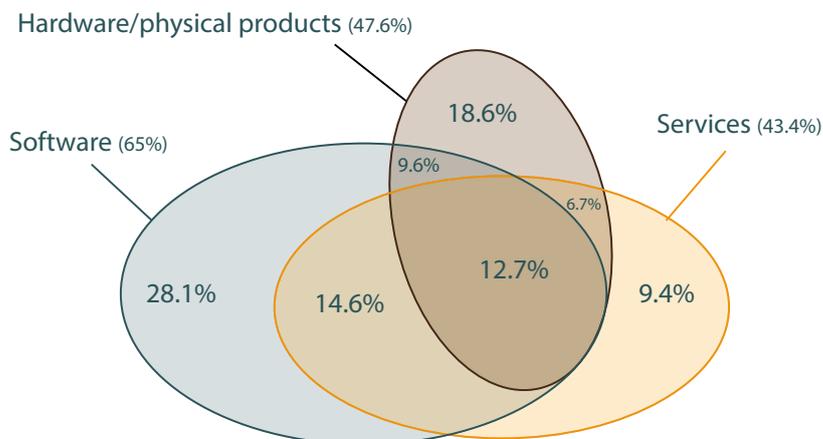
How many people work in product management or product marketing in your company?

Our products and customers

65%

of product people
manage software-based
products

12.7% of product people manage complex products that include all three elements: software, hardware, and services.



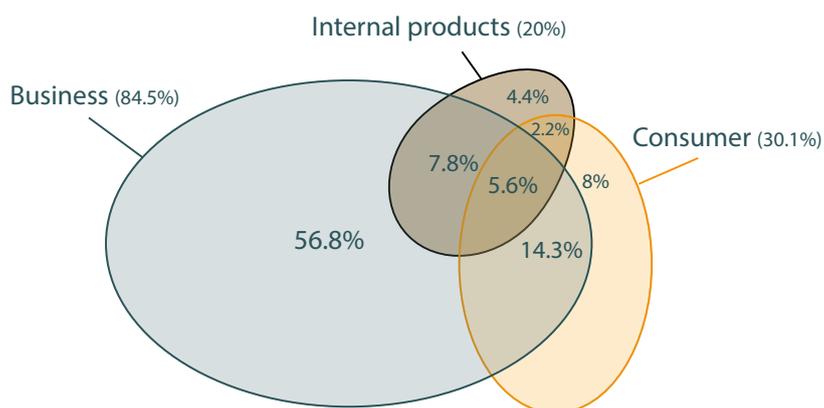
Are your products software, hardware/physical, or services provided by people?

Types of products

84%

of survey respondents
manage products sold to
businesses (B2B)

20% of product managers work on internal products, to support internal business activities.

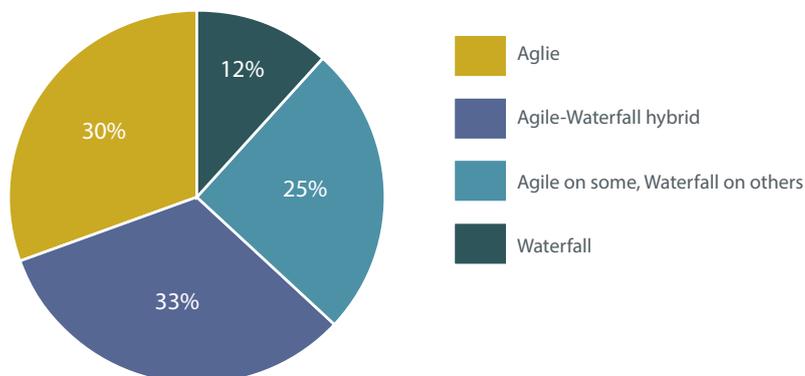


Do you work on products sold to businesses, to consumers, or on internal products?

How we develop products

88%

of companies use a mixture of Agile and waterfall development approaches



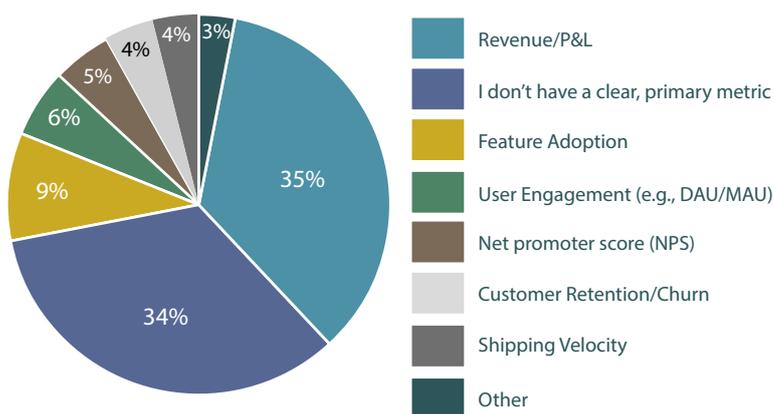
An Agile-only approach was used by 30% of respondents, up from 28% last year.

What best describes the development approach used in your company?

Primary metric

35%

or respondents are revenue focused



34% of survey respondents have no primary metric to aim for, which is a real shock.

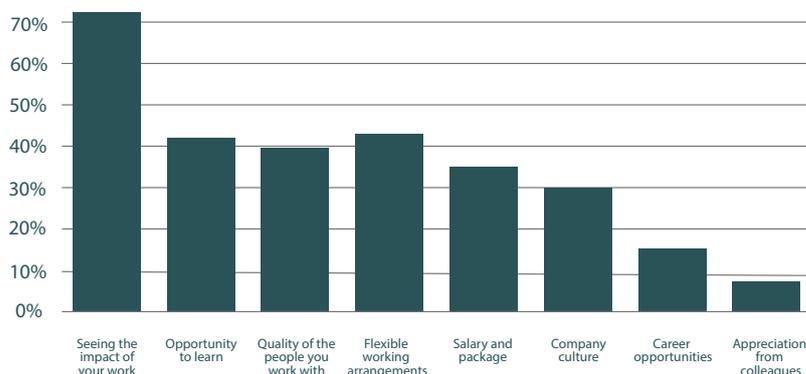
What primary metric are you held accountable for?

What we value

72%

of respondents said seeing the impact of their work matters most

Impact trumps salary. PMs are intrinsically motivated by seeing their work matter.



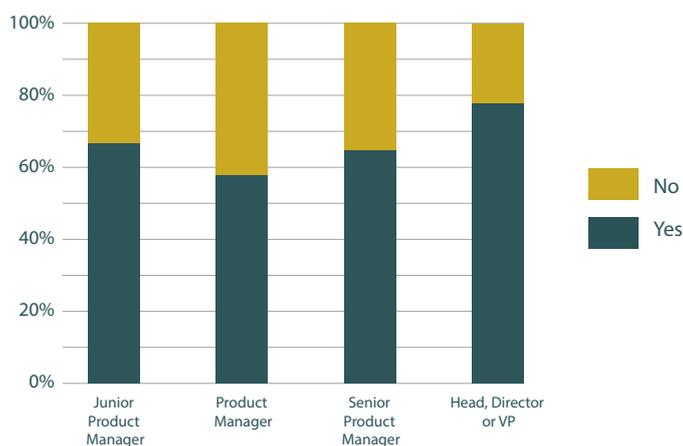
What do you value most at work?

A leadership role?

67%

of respondents believe that product management is a leadership role in their company

We firmly believe that great product management can be a powerful leadership role in any business.



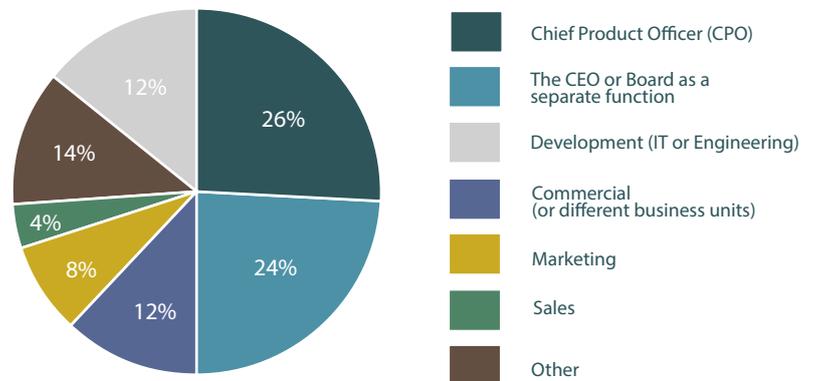
Is product management seen as a leadership role in your business?

Reporting

26%

of product management organizations report directly to a CPO

Where PMs report to impacts their perception: when they report into CPO level, 80% see product management as a leadership role. This drops to about 50% when they report into Development or Sales.

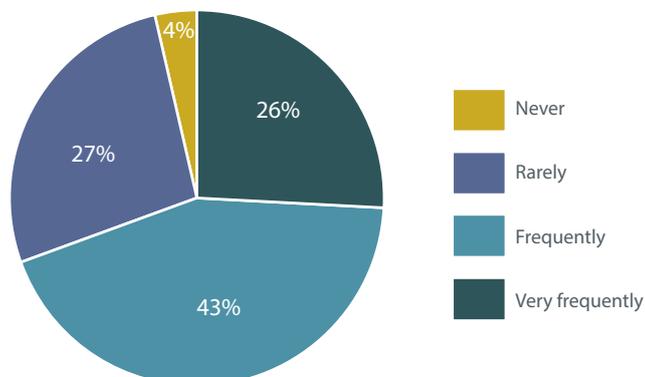


Where does your area report into?

AI usage

69%

of respondents use Artificial intelligence frequently or very frequently



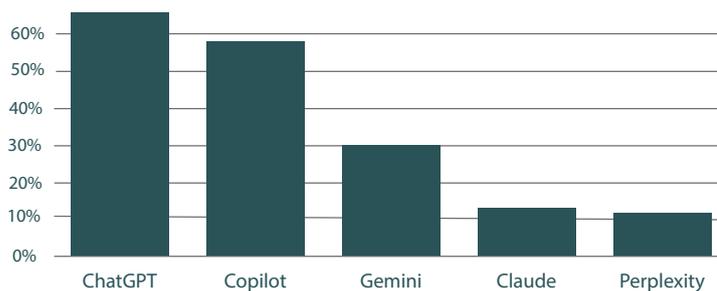
How frequently do you use AI?

Frequent AI usage now totals 69%, an increase from 49% last year. Meanwhile, 27% of respondents say they rarely use AI.

AI chat users

66%

of AI users regularly use ChatGPT



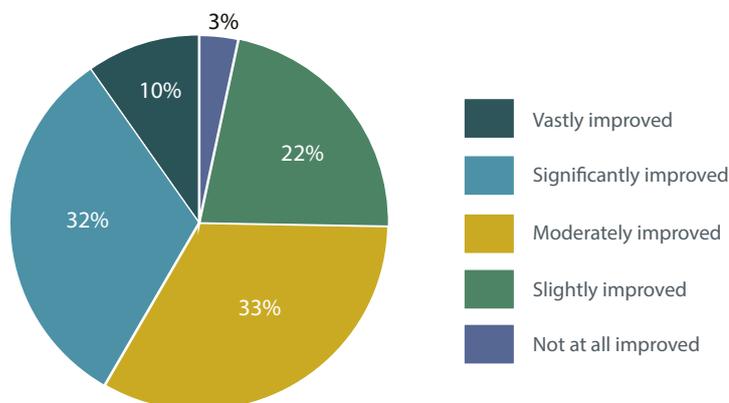
Which AI tools do you use regularly?

22% of AI users use 3 or more tools. Additionally, 52% of ChatGPT users also use Copilot.

Productivity with AI

32%

of respondents say that AI tools have significantly improved their personal productivity



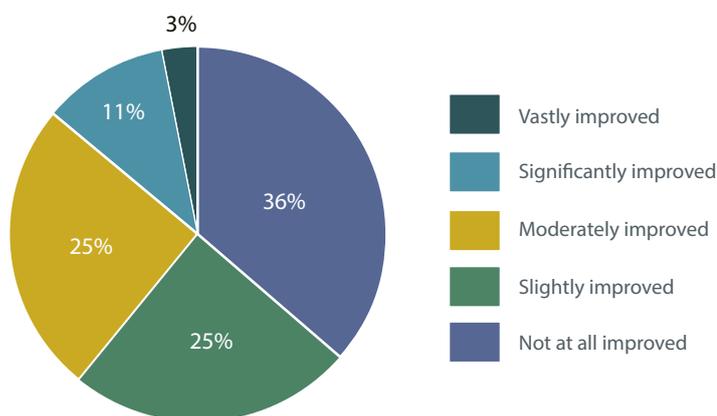
Has AI improved your personal productivity?

A total of 97% have had some improvement in personal productivity from using AI, with 10% saying you've had vast improvements.

Product outcomes with AI

64%

of respondents say AI tools have improved their product outcomes



Has AI improved your product outcomes?

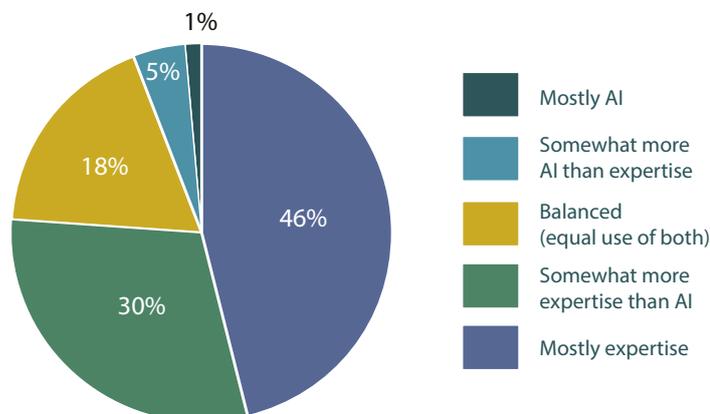
Interestingly, where 97% had improvements in personal productivity, there's a lag with only 64% experiencing improved product outcomes e.g. more revenue, faster time to market.

AI and judgement

76%

of respondents are still relying on their Product Management expertise

The majority rely on their own product management expertise more than AI. However about 6% are relying more on AI than their own expertise.



How much do you rely on your own product management expertise?

AI results validation

85%

of respondents use their expertise to validate AI responses.

Many are using multiple methods to check AI outputs. It's essential to validate the output from AI, especially when the stakes are high.

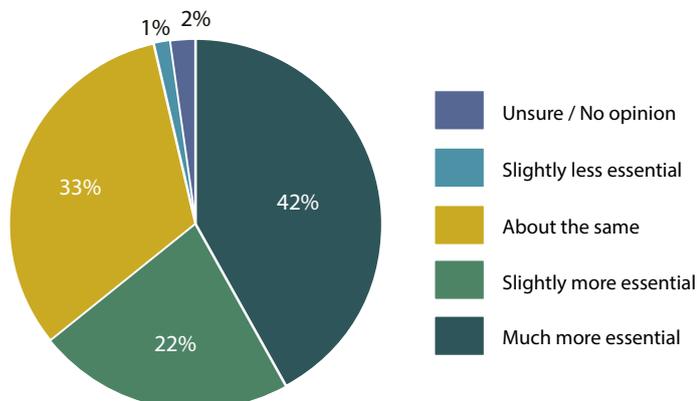


What precautions do you take to validate AI?

PM skills relevance with AI

64%

of respondents say that Product Management skills are even more essential in the age of AI



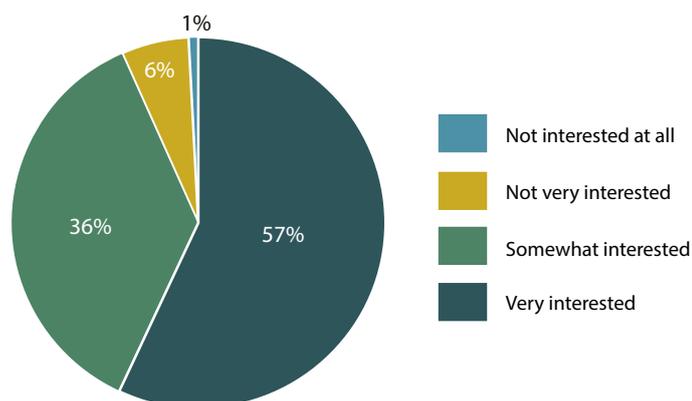
Only 1% think PM skills are less essential in the age of AI. Product managers need these skills to appraise and validate AI output.

Are product management skills still essential in the age of advanced AI chat tools?

Desire to learn AI

93%

of respondents would like to learn more about AI tools



There's a lot of passion to learn about using AI. Our view is that product skills come first, with AI where it matters. It needs to be that way, otherwise you can't judge the quality and correctness of AI output.

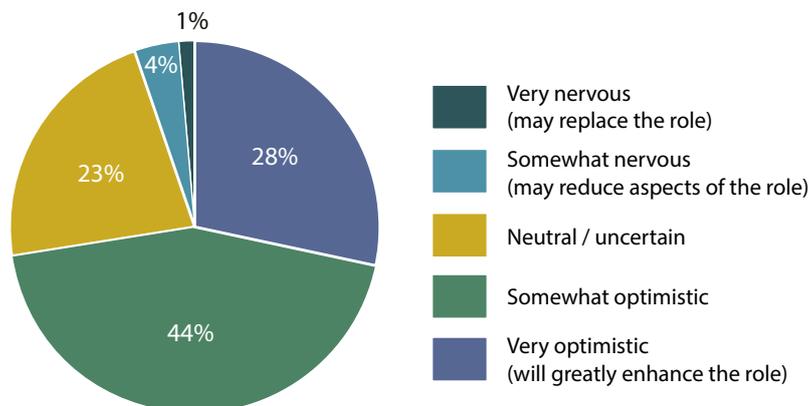
Are you interested in learning about AI?

AI optimism

72%

of respondents are optimistic about the long-term impact of AI

The majority are optimistic about the impact of AI on their roles, with only about 5% being nervous about it.



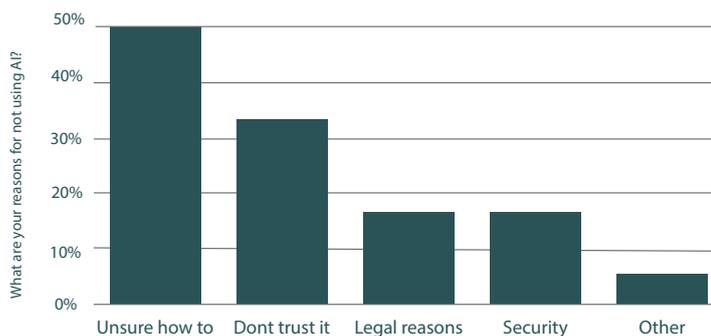
How do you feel about the long-term impact of AI on the product manager role?

Barriers to AI use

50%

of respondents who aren't using AI are just unsure how to use it

About 33% don't trust AI and 17% say legal or security issues are barriers to using it. It's critical to have company approval to use AI, to protect yourself, your customers, and your company.



What are your reasons for not using AI?

When AI goes wrong

Do you have any examples of how AI has led to mistakes or poor product outcomes?

1 Hallucinations and fabricated information

AI invents competitors, fabricates statistics, creates fictional sources, and presents false content with full confidence.

“ Doing market research, the AI chatbot made up a competitor. When asking for details on it, it only in the end admitted it was a fictional competitor. ”

2 Using AI output without validation

AI drafts go unreviewed and become official documents, marketing copy, or product specs; often with serious errors.

“ ChatGPT created drafts of documents for some colleagues, then no one read them carefully, and the drafts became ‘real documents’ until a Senior read them... They were full of nonsense. ”

3 Inaccurate research or analysis

AI produces unreliable market sizing, misses key competitors, and generates figures it cannot explain or back up.

“ Using AI to provide a competitor analysis and our top 4 competitors were left off the list! ”

4 Wrong recommendations

AI selects wrong products, misses critical properties, and suggests code with security vulnerabilities.

“ A colleague asked AI to suggest the best product in our portfolio, to meet the specifications. Unfortunately, AI picked the wrong product, leading to a loss of time. ”

5 Overcomplication and loss of signal

AI generates verbose, buzzword-heavy content that nobody reads, undermining its productivity promise.

“ Poor product requirements full of buzz words that meant nothing and confused things more. ”

6 Outdated or poorly sourced information

AI draws on stale data and low-quality sources without flagging recency or reliability concerns.

“ AI still recommends products and solutions of companies in the Telecoms industry that do not exist anymore. ”

7 Translation and data processing errors

AI mistranslates documents, miscalculates results, and misattributes actions in meeting summaries.

“ The output sometimes has incorrectly calculated survey results making the outcome look much more inflated than it actually was. ”

8 Presenting material with false confidence

AI never says “I don’t know”; it invents instead. Over-reliance degrades independent analysis skills.

“ In general, AI is always giving a convincing answer, even if it’s not true. This is a major pitfall. ”

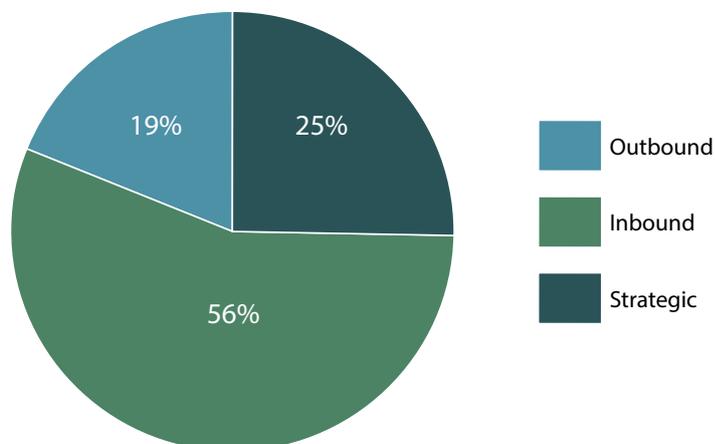


- The worst scenario was consistently an inexperienced PM who didn't verify their AI output.
- Those reporting no issues universally cited habitual verification and cross-referencing practices.

How we spend our time

25%

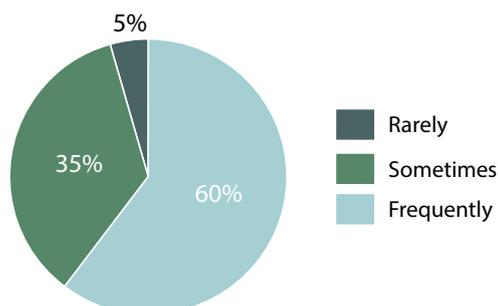
of you spend most of your time on strategic activities, like determining the right problems and products to pursue



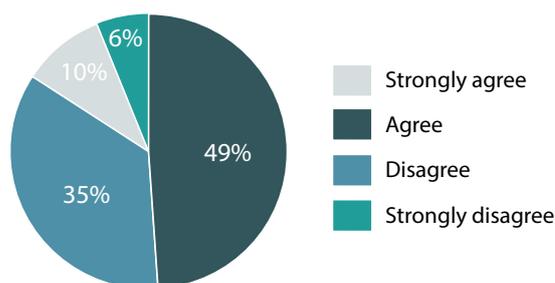
60% frequently spend time on unplanned activities. 41% feel they don't have clearly-defined roles – a major issue.

Which activity do you spend the most time on?

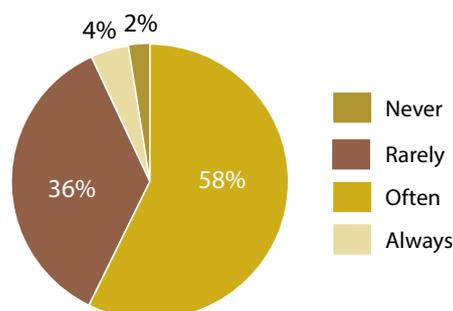
How often do unplanned activities disrupt your schedule?



Do you feel your role and responsibilities are clearly defined?



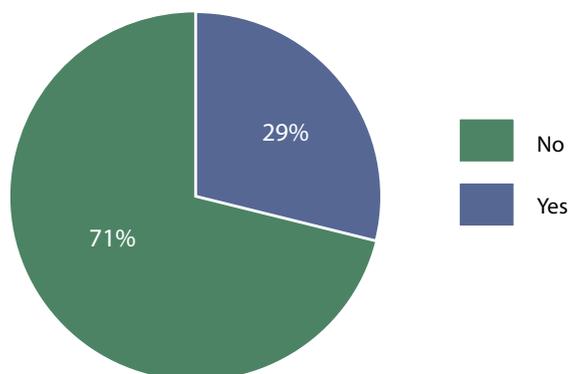
How often do your projects meet their deadlines?



Time with customers

71%

of respondents say that they don't spend enough time with customers or understanding the market



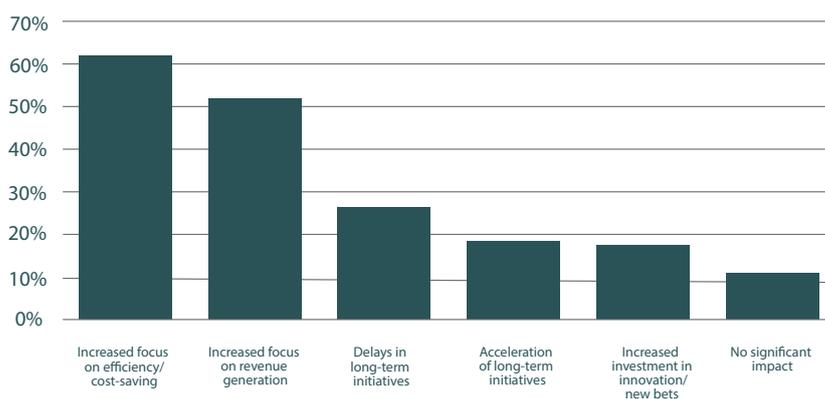
Also, we note from those who strongly agree that they have clear roles and responsibilities: 41% say they spend enough time with customers, 12 percentage points higher than the average 29%.

Do you feel you spend enough time engaging with customers and understanding the market?

Current economic climate

62%

of respondents are increasing their focus on efficiency and cost-saving



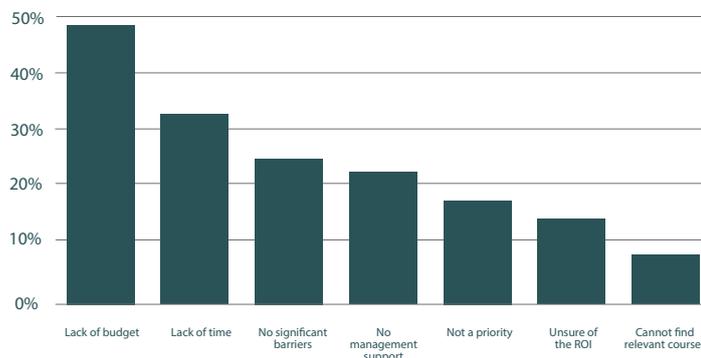
About 52% are driving revenue growth and only 11% say the current economic climate has no significant impact on their product strategy.

How has the current economic climate affected your product strategy?

Training and development

48%

of respondents say that a lack of available budget is preventing them from getting training



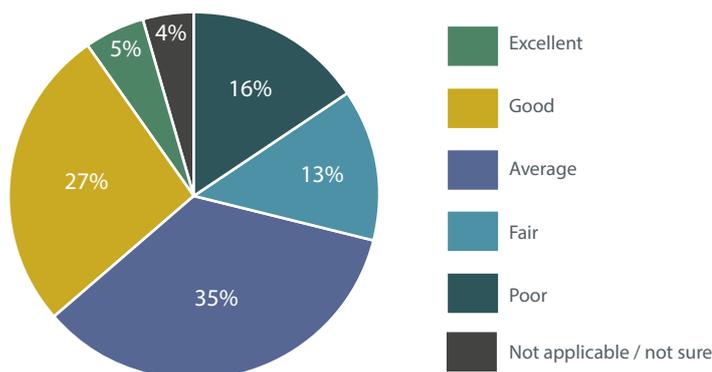
23% say that there is no management support for training initiatives.

What is the biggest barrier preventing you or your team from getting product management training?

Development opportunities

32%

of respondents rate development opportunities as better than average or excellent



It's fantastic to see that organizations creating thoughtful development opportunities for their PMs, with 5% hitting the 'Excellent' mark.

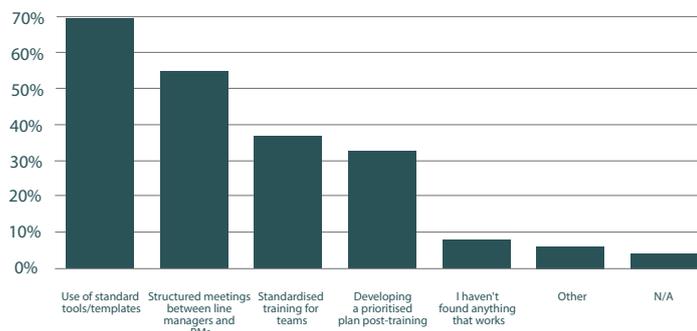
How would you rate the professional development opportunities for product managers in your organization?

Embedding product skills

33%

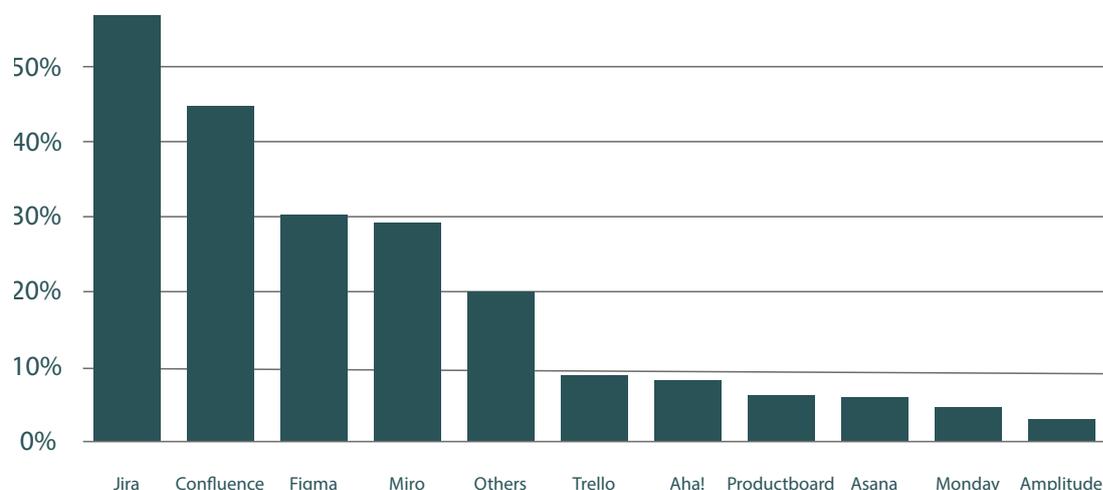
of leaders develop post-training plans, to embed skills in the workplace to drive business impact

Using standard tools/templates (69%) is an effective approach. But best results for embedding new product skills requires all three elements: training and tools, structured manager / PM meetings, and a post-training activation plan.



As a Leader, what have you found most effective for embedding better product management skills and behavior to drive business impact?

Top 10 recommended tools



We asked people to pick three tools that they would recommend to other product managers (we didn't include general AI chat tools as we cover them in depth in another part of the report). The chart above shows the top 10 most recommended. We give a short description of each on the next page.

The Future – what's next?

These are the tools PMs use and recommend today. But three forces are shaping the tooling landscape:

1. **Commoditizing AI "brains"**: OpenAI, Anthropic, and Google are competing to supply raw intelligence through large language models. PMs are already using multiple: **52%** of ChatGPT users also use Copilot and **22%** use three or more! The smartest model might matter less than where it's embedded.
2. **Workflow owners adding AI**: Atlassian and others are embedding AI directly into systems that already hold product data. With Jira recommended by **58%** and Confluence by **46%**, they're the de facto standard in enterprise. Major competitive advantages are distribution and workflow, not the model.
3. **AI-native builders emerging**: Tools like Loveable and Replit (not mentioned by survey respondents, but worth watching) speed the path from idea to working prototype. For software PMs, that means moving from specs to something interactive within hours. Prototypes accelerate discovery, surface assumptions early, and strengthen collaboration. They are not production code, but tools that can help PMs clarify value, test flows, and align stakeholders before committing engineering resources.

The real battle isn't who builds the smartest brain. It's who embeds it seamlessly into the daily workflow: Discover ⇒ Define ⇒ Design ⇒ Build ⇒ Ship ⇒ Learn.

As the landscape reshapes, PMs may shift from writing documents to defining constraints, intent, and orchestrating AI agents. Two hurdles stand out from this survey:

- **The trust gap**: **85%** of PMs validate AI output using their own expertise; **33%** cite lack of trust as a barrier.
- **The outcome gap**: **97%** report higher productivity, but only **64%** see better product outcomes.

Vendors are racing to make AI seamless inside workflows. The challenge now is building trust and closing the gap between shipping faster and shipping value, as PMs move from creators to orchestrators.

Top 10 tools explained



Jira

Jira is part of the Atlassian suite of products and is used to plan, track, and manage agile and software development projects.



Confluence

Confluence, also from Atlassian, is aimed at teams that need a secure and reliable way to collaborate on mission-critical projects.



Figma

Figma is a collaborative interface design and prototyping tool.



Miro

Miro is an AI-powered collaboration platform that helps teams move faster from idea to outcome.



Trello

Trello is a visual collaboration tool that enables you to organize, prioritize, and track projects in a flexible way.



Aha!

Aha! Roadmaps describes itself as a complete product management suite to set strategy, prioritize features, and share visual plans.



Productboard

Productboard is an integrated tool to help product managers build roadmaps, prioritize features, centralize feedback, and validate ideas.



Asana

Asana is a web and mobile application designed to help remote teams organize, track, and manage their work.



Monday.com

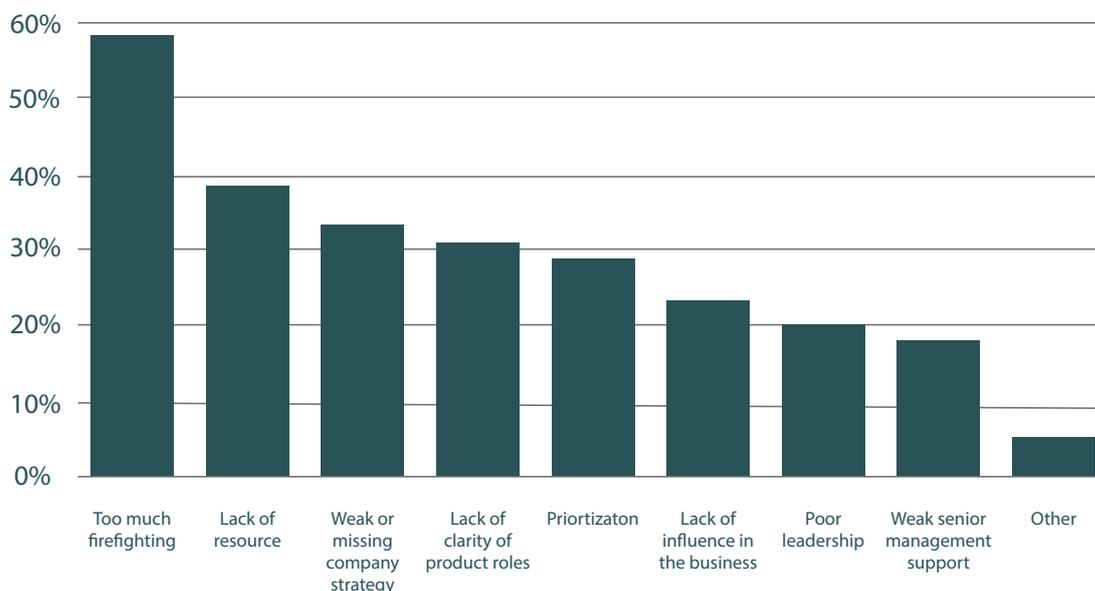
Monday.com provides a wide range of templates for different workflows, including agile workflows for software development teams.



Amplitude

Amplitude is a product analytics platform designed to help teams track analyze and optimize user behavior insights.

The big issues we face



The big issues – “The why” behind some of the challenges

Many of the top challenges you report appear every year, but our latest data gives us some interesting insights:

1. Firefighting may be influenced by your environment

While about **60%** of us are constantly reacting to unplanned work, it isn't just bad luck—it may be the environment. Firefighting levels varied by industry: Automotive reported **76%** whereas SaaS reported **57%**. Methodology matters too: teams using waterfall reported hitting deadlines only **44%** of the time compared to **69%** for Agile teams.

2. The “Execution Tax” of unclear roles

Role ambiguity isn't just a morale issue; it kills delivery. PMs with clear roles reported hitting deadlines **78%** of the time. When roles are unclear, reliability creates a massive “tax,” dropping deadline achievement to **48%**.

3. The strategy gap is a “Metric Vacuum”

33% of PMs report weak company strategy, but shockingly, **34%** also have no clear primary metric for accountability. PMs who report weak company strategy are 15 percentage points more likely to lack a clear primary metric (**44%** vs **29%**). It's difficult to prioritize effectively if you aren't measuring success.

4. Influence may be an organizational chart problem

Struggling with influence? It might be your reporting line. When Product reports to a CPO, **80%** reported product management being seen as a leadership role. This plummets to **50%** when reporting to Sales or Engineering.

5. The seniority paradox

We assume leaders can fix these problems, yet they're starved of time. **75%** of Heads/Directors even reported spending insufficient time with customers—a worse deficit than the Junior PMs (**59%**).

These aren't unsolvable problems. They're organizational choices. We can help you tackle these challenges through our [training courses](#), [leadership support](#), and [resources](#).

Which skills will be important?

In the survey we asked respondents about the skills that they think will be most important for product managers to develop over the next two years.

We analyzed hundreds of written comments to identify the most common skills mentioned. They fell into two categories – ‘soft’ skills and ‘hard’ product management skills.

‘Soft’ skills

Customer empathy and understanding

Strategic thinking and vision

Communication and influence

Prioritization and decision making

Stakeholder management

Critical thinking and problem-solving

Adaptability and resilience

Emotional intelligence

Leadership and collaboration

Innovation and creativity

‘Hard’ skills

AI proficiency – understanding and use

Data analysis and literacy

Market research and analysis

Business and financial acumen

Technical acumen

Product strategy and roadmapping

Efficiency and time to market

Go-to-market and positioning

Regulatory and geopolitical awareness

Project management and delivery

“With the advent of AI: critical thinking, customer empathy, stakeholder management across multiple departments. AI can do the easy jobs – PMs add value to complex tasks.”

“Harnessing AI to their advantage but continuing to demonstrate the human value add.”

“Getting closer to the market and understanding the real needs of customers. Separating signal from noise. Really understanding how your business works.”

“Knowing when to trust and use AI or not.”

Product Activities Framework

Clarifying and explaining what product management does is a key challenge for many product people.

Our Product Activities Framework can help with this. It identifies all the product-related activities that need to take place in any company with products.

Use it to sort out which product roles own each activity, to evangelize what product management does, and think about where you need to make improvements.

You can download our infographic with a detailed description of each activity by signing up for our [Toolbox](#) at our website.



[Product Activities Framework](#)

Stop firefighting

... and deliver world-class product management



Public training courses

- **Essentials:** Product Management and Product Marketing
- **Advanced:** AI-Powered Product Management; Driving Product Growth
- **Leading:** Leading Product Management
- Build the skills, tools, and confidence to excel in your role
- Live online or in locations across Europe



Private training for your team

- Improve team performance with private training in-person or live online
- Get the whole team using consistent best practice approaches
- Use our online toolbox to access resources and tools when you need them
- Customizable to your context for maximum relevancy and impact



Leadership support

- Learn how to manage a product management function, department, or team
- Coaching to assist leaders as they establish and improve their product management
- Executive briefings to explain the value of product management to your senior team
- Product Focus Catalyst service to help you turn training into business impact

Learn best practices and improve performance with the European leaders

If you'd like to discuss product management
training, or how we can support your
product management function,
please contact us:

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