



Successful product development : from dream to reality

Agile Entrepreneurial Product Development & Management

AlpRocket – Empowering Ideas for Success
By Berardino Turchi & Sanja Fabio

The increase of international trade and the delocalization of manufacturing considerably accelerated during the last decades. This in turn requires greater reactivity and flexibility to stay in the game.

The companies are still in the midst of transformation impacting significantly the business world. Explosion of social media, auto-piloted vehicles, big data, robotization, artificial intelligence, evolution of legal and regulatory framework, new ways of purchase and sales, arrival of a new generation of talent and consumers, increase of labor costs and investment, and decrease in profitability; plenty for any company to adapt to.

The creativity and the innovation will not be enough. Management of the product development and the new products life cycle as well as the search for and the management of talents will be two other challenges of the companies of tomorrow. Companies of today must prepare!

The first step is to detect their customers' needs before the customer himself. And to translate that understanding into a « vision product » supported by a substantial and adapted investment.

PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT & MANAGEMENT

The product development is a perilous exercise; companies have to invest time and valuable resources without any guarantee of success. They may completely misread the future requirements, by design or type of service or product they bring to bear.

An intense focus on such a product development process is no more a luxury, but the main and current activity of Product Manager.

Facing increased personalisation of product and the multiplication of technologies, the size of product portfolios explodes. 50 % of the current sales of a company is generated by products launched on the market during the last five years. But only 10-15% of these new products generate profits over a 5-year period.

In all sectors, the product life is ever shorter. Copies arrive faster and faster cutting the advantages of an « innovative product ». The technological innovation is more expensive, and conditions a longer return on investment. But the market does not wait.

« The companies forget what it means to make great products. A serious problem emerges if the product people are driven out from the decision-making process. Sales & Marketing People should not take over from Product People ».

Steve Jobs
Design & Product Development Manager

The product development and management became more a role of marketing and communication managers, obsessed by the packaging, the price, the promotion and the trademark rather than the development of product. They believed the customer would be duped with a flashy packaging of a mediocre product. Even today, many companies still do the same. Product Management was everything but the innovation, the development and the management of products and especially added value for the customer. Since a few years, the entrance to the digital technology repositioned the Product Management at the crossing of the technology and the marketing.

The development of products consists in modifying the existing products or creating new still non-existent products on the market in order to maintain their positioning with regard to the competition.

Nevertheless, companies still have issues with product development, and in fact:

- Profiles, objectives and responsibilities of Product Manager are not enough defined.
- Methods and processes of product development are non-existent, ineffective or too complex.
- Weak coordination and communication between various departments and services within the company (Siloed Management Approach).
- Lack of understanding of customers and a real concern about their problems.
- Too much focus either on the innovation or on the marketing, but not enough on the launch and the commercialization of new product.

Too many products are developed to satisfy the interest of the people within the companies or departments, rather than to answer the specific needs of external market.

There are 3 types of « Thinking » within companies of any sizes and any areas of activity combined: « Technology Thinking », « Problem Thinking » and « Outcome Thinking ». Today, 85% of companies, situated in « Technology Thinking », are in a stage of slumber, chronic

survival or close death. These are not interested in search of needs and in the resolution of problems of customers. Other companies, with talented Product Managers, position in a « Disruptive Vision Product », such as: SpaceX, Powerwall, Hyperloop, Cargo Sous Terrain, Helix, Baidu, Airbnb or Google Car.

But the main objective is to develop the added value to the customers. This is the true objective of the Product Management and the process will have to become more professional, agile and entrepreneurial. This is why it is key to focus on « Problem Thinking & Outcome Thinking » versus « Technology Thinking ».

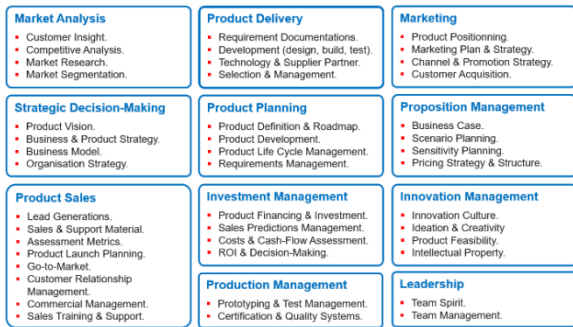
PRODUCT MANAGER

But why do certain people want to be a Product Manager? There are several reasons in that:

- Change things and have influence within the company.
- Get involved very early in the process of development of products.
- Collaborate and communicate with all departments and services within the company.
- Develop recommendations and support the CEO in the decision-making, acting as his/her right hand with the product focus.
- Be the voice of customer (VOC) finding real solutions to their problems.

But, today, which are the problems of Product Manager? Without Product Manager, the Product Management is often shared between different departments: R&D, engineering, sales, marketing, purchasing, manufacturing and finance. Each stakeholder uses its influence to develop the product in his direction. And the customers are often forgotten. There is no real vision or product strategy, and generally the user experience is bad.

The role of Product Manager is not a role for a junior. It is a key-role for a person with experience versatile, social and connective skills. The Product Manager is and has to become the « sheep with 5 legs » at the heart of company activities, coordinating and working with a wide number of departments and services, with direct line to CEO or the Steering Committee members. He/She responsibility exceeds the management of the life cycle of products. This function in full evolution is really at the heart of the company strategy.



Picture 1: Multi-focus of a Product Manager.

A successful Product Manager manages the product portfolio, adapting it to the market and anticipate the future needs.

He/She is an inspirer and an interlocutor who knows how to define a problem, finds a solution and drives the optimal development of product under his/her responsibility. He/She is a natural leader and a good negotiator and communicator (Picture 1).

ROCKETLIFECYCLE™

The management of product development is an organizational function handling the planning, the forecasting, the production and the commercialization of a product in all stages of their life cycle.

The concept RocketLifeCycle™ is at the intersection of 6 domains: innovation, marketing, sales, research and development, manufacturing and users. In fast-changing economic and societal models, the innovation is the key factor of success of companies for the development of a new product. Hence, the necessity of creating and developing a « Core Competency » (Picture 2) concentrated on the innovation and the marketing totally managed by Product Manager with links and direct contacts with 4 other domains (R&D, manufacturing, sales and users).



Picture 2: Core Competency - Innovation & Marketing.

An effective product development process has to include several key stages adaptable to the size, the culture and the sector of the company (start-up, SME and multinational): Leadership, Market

& Competition, Governance & Strategy, Innovation & Technology, Product Development Strategy, Financing & Investment, Planning & Roadmap, Sourcing & Manufacturing, Training & Support and Product Launch (Picture 3).



Picture 3: 10 modules - Rocket Levels.

In practice, some of these stages can or must be followed in parallel according to the size and the type of company.

So what added value does it bring to the company and to the customers? What are the advantages of the concept RocketLifeCycle™?

By using the concept RocketLifeCycle™, the Product Manager will be able to:

- Apply an agile and lean working methodology, shortening time to market and cutting costs compared to the traditional methods.
- Integrate a fast-paced culture of start-ups and a way of thinking of orientation and results within the company.
- Reduce the complexity of product development process and increase the design and engineering efficiency.
- Avoid the high failure rates by applying the most effective methods to support the new product development.
- Act faster to strategic and operational moves of competitors or market shifts with product innovations.
- Capture more customers and keep their loyalty with deep understanding of their needs and behaviors.
- Move faster with rapid prototyping and integrated system from start to finish.

It helps set a clear strategy and good cross-functional processes of decision-making to meet the key organisational objectives.

EXECUTIVE PROGRAM & TRAINING

This training with its approach RocketLifeCycle™ encompasses key stages of the product development, from its conception to its market launch, via multiple tools and models confirmed

in the business world and in companies from all sectors (Pictures 4 and 5).



Picture 4: Secondary sector.



Picture 5: Tertiary sector.

It helps Product Manager to make the most informed decisions regarding expenditures, financing, investment and return on investment. The participants will develop skills related to the various aspects of the job of Product Manager with a vision of product and entrepreneurship.

This training is addressed mainly to executives, (CEO, VP, Director and Head), or other management, below, interested in the development and management of products and facing challenges of globalization and market complexity, internationalization and increasing digitalisation of their business.

- Product Manager.
- Sales & Marketing Manager.
- Business Development Manager.
- Product Development Manager.
- Project Manager.
- R&D - Engineering Manager.
- Innovation Manager.
- Brand Manager.
- Digital Marketing Manager.
- Operations Manager.
- Investment & Finance Manager.
- Category Manager.
- Purchasing Manager.
- Supply Chain Manager.
- Manufacturing Manager.

The training will be delivered only by entrepreneurs, company directors and national

and international professionals recruited with regard to their rich and varied work experience, the originality of their teaching methodology and their educational qualities.

Their innovative teaching methodology assures a personalized teaching in an interactive and dynamic environment.

This professional training is adapted and compatible with professional activity full-time or part-time allowing participants to combine studies and work.

The program is created as 10 consecutive modules including diploma thesis on their company case. The participants also have the possibility of following a number of single modules according to their professional background in order to update their knowledge and widen their skills. The candidates will have the opportunity to apply concepts transmitted through case studies, individual and group work.

The complete training lasts 24 months, and the courses will take place every two weeks a Thursdays-Fridays and Saturday morning or in alternation on Friday and Saturday during the day. As mentioned above, the participants can choose 2-3-4 modules at the same time according to their needs, and every module lasts 2-3 months.

This partial or complete training is and will be offered within:

- A University of Applied Sciences and Arts of Western Switzerland in the form of CAS/DAS/MAS.
- An American university in the form of Executive Education Program.
- The different public and private structures.
- Directly within the companies in Switzerland.
- The company training centers in Switzerland.

COACHING & MENTORING

While preparing your diploma thesis or going through continued education and training, we propose you a period of personalized coaching and mentoring within your company so that you as Product Manager can :

- Be a better leader of products, and learn to think more strategically.
- Improve and strengthen the relations between the various departments.
- Integrate and improve better his/her skills within the company.

- Increase the efficiency of communications within the team.
- Establish and set up various actions to reach the goals.
- Move stage by stage following the process, and measure the progress.
- Measure and improve the key indicators of product performance.
- Better synthesize the ideas for delivery product and better quality.
- Avoid the high rates of failure in product development.

Our Product Manager clients significantly increased their skills, their effectiveness and productivity thanks to this personalized support within their company. They are convinced that this program generated multiple return on their initial investment.

In our next article, we shall examine more in detail, through the module « Rocket Level 1 - Leadership » (Picture 3), the profile, the skills and the key capabilities of a Product Manager.

AUTHORS & CONTACT



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