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PRODUCT MANAGER

The Product Manager is a role in SAFe® the Scaled Agile Framework. As a member of the Agile Release Train (ART) leadership team, they're responsible for optimising the value that the Train delivers. Ultimately, this makes them accountable for delivery of the outcomes of products and services.

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WHAT IS A PRODUCT MANAGER?

The SAFe Product Manager is responsible for delivery of value of the Agile Release Train (ART). They do this by defining and supporting the building of desirable, feasible, viable, and sustainable products that meet customer needs over the product-market lifecycle.

The Product Manager is often referred to as the Chief Product Owner.

EXPECTATIONS OF PRODUCT MANAGER

Develop and Communicate the Product's Goal

All products and services have goals. It's the Product Manager's responsibility to understand and communicate how Features will achieve goals for the organisation, its stakeholders and its customers.

Manage the scope and delivery of value

Make decisions on what work gets done now, and what work gets done later. Understanding what is of value to the organisation and to clients is the way Features get prioritised. These decisions of the Product Manager are made transparent through the Program Backlog of the Agile Release Train (ART).

Manage stakeholder feedback

Fast feedback allows plans to change so that value is always delivered. The Product Manager manages feedback to build empathy and an understanding of their needs and then realise it through Features in the Program Backlog.

Manage Product Owners

Together, the Product Manager and Product Owners deliver the Features and Stories, elicit feedback at the Iteration Review, and determine what are the most valuable outcomes that the ART can deliver each PI.

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Manage the budget

- Invest in Program Increments (PIs) and team Iterations that will yield the right impacts and outcomes for the organisations, stakeholders and customers.
- Invest in features that will create specific outcomes and impacts, not deliverables.

Measure value (OKRs/KPIs) early and often

- Measure impacts and outcomes of Features implemented, not deliverables and activities.
- Measure outcomes and impacts using frameworks like Evidence Based Management (EBM).

Engage stakeholders, clients, and customers

- The highest priority is to satisfy the all types of clients through early and continuous delivery of valued products and services.
- Good customer experience is reinforced by engaging them to provide feedback early and often. This will enable the Scrum Team to continuously improve product delivery and the quality of their products.
- For the Product Manager to succeed, people must respect his or her decisions regarding the work that the ART. These decisions should be visible in the content and ordering of the Program Backlog.
- A functional product that is fit-for-purpose is the primary measure of progress. A product or outcome only half-done is of no value to a client, users or stakeholders.

Work as a member of the Product Management Scrum Team

- The Product Manager is an important leadership role in the ART and has critical working relationships with the Release Train Engineer (RTE) and with the ART's Product Owners.
- The Product Manager is accountable for delivery and the Features done by the ART, not the RTE.
- No one is allowed to tell the teams on the ART to work from a different set of outcomes.

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Manage the ART's Program Backlog

- The Product Manager is responsible for the Program Backlog, including its Features, availability, and ordering. Ensure the Product Backlog is visible and transparent to everyone.
- The program Backlog is an ordered list of all the Features that might be needed in the product and is the single source of any changes to be made to the product. It constantly evolves as changes are identified to meet the needs of users, clients and stakeholders.
- A mature, productive and efficient ART understands its product and the Program just as well as its Product Manager.

Work closely with the RTE

- Work closely with the RTE to help cause change that increases the productivity of the ART so they can deliver more to stakeholders with higher quality, less effort and less waste.
- Elicit the support of the RTE to help stakeholders understand and enact Lean-Agile practices and empirical product development.

KEY OUTCOMES

- Prioritisation of work by value. Value-based metrics regarding delivery.
- The ART and its teams have an Increment of work that meets the Definition of Done each Sprint – a concrete stepping stone toward the PI Objectives.
- Stakeholder, clients and end-users have visibility of the status of items they have asked for (has it started?) and when it is forecast to be delivered.
- An understanding of the capacity and economic cost of the ART's work.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

- Take responsibility for the success of the product. A good Product Manager makes the decisions about the product and doesn't act as a proxy for another senior manager.
- Explain to your stakeholders why you're delivering using SAFe. Agile isn't a hype, nor is it something you 'do'. It's a mindset. It's a set of values and principles which guide you. SAFe is the framework that will help them structure feedback and see results early and often. The RTE is responsible for assisting the Product Manager with this activity.
- Simplicity – the art of maximising the amount of work not done – is essential to "building the right product" and "building it right".

- Understand that more analysis doesn't (necessarily) make the product better. Releasing features and getting feedback from their use is a faster way to understand what people will use.
- Be 'product oriented' instead of 'project oriented'.

COMMON OBSTACLES TO AVOID

- The Product Manager is one person, not a committee. The Product Manager may represent the desires of a committee, stakeholders and multiple-clients' needs, in the Program Backlog, but those wanting to change a Feature in the Program Backlog or its priority must address the Product Manager.
- Watch out for turning the Product Manager into a proxy for someone else who makes the decisions.
- Manage delivery of work through the Program Backlog over handing out work, writing backlog items for specific teams or individuals, or trying pre-determining how much team members should complete to meet a predetermined fixed, future milestone.