

So, You Want To Be a PM?

Course Overview

This class is meant to equip students who are considering careers in Product Management (in some ways a “part two” of Professor Paul Canetti’s “Introduction to Product Management” class) with an understanding of what it’s actually like to be a PM and how to best position yourself to get a job as one after leaving CBS.

Since PM is often referred to as being “the CEO of a product,” it’s not surprising that students are interested in this as a potential post-CBS career path. The reality of being a PM is in many cases different than the image- not controlling a lot of resources, leading through influence not authority, stakeholder management, etc. Of course, it’s also a pretty great job for the right student with the right mindset and expectations going in.

But it’s important that students get a strong understanding and experiential exposure to this function and its role in the organization. Even if they decide against moving into PM as a career, many of the concepts and approaches covered in this class will help them in whatever path they choose. Indeed, even companies as large as Walmart are training hundreds of their Bentonville employees from various functions on “product management mindset.”

By taking this class, students will come away with a strong understanding of what a career in product management will entail. The course will develop a life-long learning mindset for students interested in careers in PM.

Course Objectives

1. Strengthen students’ understanding of the Product Management function in the firm, through examination of core concepts, PM responsibilities, and real-world experiential examples of what it’s like to be a PM.
2. Provide students with frameworks and strategies to understand proven approaches to spotting product opportunities, building and launching successful products, managing a product portfolio and managing the product lifecycle
3. Equip students with strategies, frameworks, and tactics for managing the four key internal components of product management: Prioritization, Communication, Listening, and Leading Through Influence Not Authority
4. Increase students’ likelihood of success in getting hired on as PMs with specific guidance on sought-after traits, pathways to hire, typical hierarchies, etc.

Proposed Syllabus

Product Management: Unpacking common misperceptions

What does it actually mean to be a product manager in an organization? In this module we'll cover the critical role that concepts like prioritization, communication, active listening and a specific type of leadership play for PMs.

- Defining the role of PM
- Product's role in translating strategy → goals → objectives → tactics
- Prioritization
- Defining product success
 - "Outcomes versus Outputs"
- Managing stakeholders//Communications
- Leading through Influence, not authority

Managing the Product Team

More than just about any other role, the PM works across the entire organization, fielding multiple inputs and driving the firm forward. An examination of some of the critical connections and how to navigate them effectively.

- An examination of product orgs / tech org structures generally
- Managing a product team
 - Typical roles, responsibilities
- Product management vs. project management, product marketing, program management
- How to work effectively with engineers
- How to work effectively with designers
- Working with business stakeholders

Building Products Around User Need

It's critical for PMs not to lose sight of their north star: building products that solve a clear user problem and raise willingness to pay.

- Identifying users' needs
- Jobs To Be Done
- Lean Start-up strategies and tactics
- How to use qualitative and quantitative research
- Fundamentals of sound experiment design
- Test and learn: culture and practice

Product Management Secret Sauce: Building Delight

More and more, across categories and bleeding into B2B and other categories, the products that delight users gain a competitive advantage over those that don't prioritize that aspect.

- Defining delight in different contexts
- The psychology and philosophy of product delight
- How to build delightful products
- The BFogg model and efficacy of triggers
- The dangers of delight

Product Management: Tools of the trade

How does a PM actually get the job done? What tools does she need to understand and work with every day?

- Managing the process
 - Agile, waterfall
- Requirement documents: what they are and how to write effective ones
- Roadmaps: what they are (and aren't) and how to build and manage them
- Task management tools
- Bug tracking tools
- Github
- Resources to stay current

Getting a Product Management Job

How to approach the application process and how to present yourself as an attractive candidate as well as key questions to ask. NOTE: Even though "getting a job" is a discrete part of the syllabus here, we will weave job-related discussions and lessons throughout the course.

- Career ladders within PM
 - Typical titles, experience levels
- Application best practices
- Resumes
- Building experience through internships, personal projects
- Interview strategies
- Different types of employers for PM roles

Reading List

Class 1:

- [Product Success](#), by Marty Cagan, Silicon Valley Product Group, May, 2016

- [What Distinguishes the Top 1% of Product Managers from the Top 10%?](#) Quora thread
- [Outcomes Over Outputs](#) by Josh Seiden (Webinar)
- [Exerting Influence Without Authority](#) by Lauren Keller Johnson, *Harvard Business Review*, February, 2008
- [“Vision Vs Strategy.”](#) by Marty Cagan, Silicon Valley Product Group, 2014

Class 2:

- Reviewing the org charts of Twitter, Apple, Facebook, Uber (TheInformation.com; subscription-required--I will provide)
- [“Embracing Agile”](#) by Darrell Rigby, Jeff Sutherland, Hirotaka Takeuchi, *Harvard Business Review*, May 2016
- [“Negotiation Skills for Product Managers”](#) by Brett Twestzky, Medium.com, July 2017
- [“How to Work With Engineers.”](#) Julie Zhuo, Medium.com
- [“Good Product Team, Bad Product Team”](#) by Marty Cagan, Silicon Valley Product Group, 2014

Class 3:

- [“The Lean Startup: Innovation Through Experimentation”](#) Eric Ries (video)
- [“Know Your Customers’ Jobs To Be Done”](#) by Clayton Christensen, et al, *Harvard Business Review*, September 2016
- [“The Difference Between Qualitative and Quantitative Research.”](#) Saul McLeod, Simply Psychology
- [“Using Experiments to Launch New Products”](#), By Jeff Fossett, Duncan Gilchrist, and Michael Luca; *Harvard Business Review*, November, 2018
- [“The Surprising Power of Online Experiments.”](#) by Ron Kohavi and Stefan Tomke, *Harvard Business Review*, Sept/Oct 2017

Class 4:

- [“10 Psychological Drivers That Engage Users and Support Product Growth.”](#) by Nate Moch (video)
- [BJ Fogg on Tiny Habits](#) (video)
- [“Why Delight Matters: The Case for Building Thoughtful and Clever Product Experiences”](#), by Melody Koh, Better Every Day, March, 2018
- [“Intuit’s CEO on Building a Design Centric Company.”](#) by Brad Smith, *Harvard Business Review*, Feb 2015
- [“Digital Addiction: How Technology Keeps Us Hooked”](#) by Riain Ali, Emily Arden-Close, John McAlaney, The Conversation, June 2018

Class 5:

- [“How to Write a Painless Product Requirements Document.”](#) Jerry Cao, Medium
- [Product Roadmaps: An Essential Guide](#), by Richard Holmes, Department of Product
- [“When Agile Goes Awry and How to Fix It.”](#) by Lindsay Gregory and Neel Doshi, *Harvard Business Review*, Oct 2018
- [“How Github Conquered Google, Microsoft, and Everyone Else.”](#) by Cade Metz, Wired, March 2015
- [“What Machine Learning Can Do For Your Business”](#) By Yael Gavish, Medium, July 2017

Class 6:

- [“Find, Vet, and Close the Best PMs. Here’s How”](#) by Todd Jackson, *First Round Review*
- [“How to Break Into Product Management.”](#) by Melanie Lei, Free Code Camp, February 2018
- [“My First Two Weeks as a PM at Bumble”](#) by Niki Agrawal, Medium, 2020
- [Product Management Career Ladders at 8 Top Tech Firms](#), by Sachin Rekhi
- [“Off The Rails: Balancing Seniority and Impact in Product Roles”](#) by Ken Norton, August 2016
- [The Ultimate List of Product Management Interview Questions](#), by Gabriela Araujo, Product School, July 2019

ASSIGNMENTS/METHOD OF EVALUATION

Your grade for this course will be based on the following:

40% of your grade will be based on the final group presentations.

The rest of your grade will be based on the following:

- **15%** class attendance
- **25%** class participation (contributing to classroom conversations in a productive constructive way)
- **20%** class preparedness (scoring well in online questionnaires based on readings and previous classroom discussions)

Participation Coming to class, being attentive, and actively participating are expected and will account for more than half of your grade. User experience is a participatory discipline. Asking questions, challenging assumptions, and inspiring others are all part of the process. An active classroom will simulate what it is like to work on a product team.

REQUIRED COURSE MATERIALS

Throughout the sessions, various case studies, articles, videos, podcasts, and other materials will be assigned as required content to discuss in class.

CLASSROOM NORMS AND EXPECTATIONS

Because of the small number of sessions, attendance at all sessions is required. As they will take place in the evening, eating in class is allowed. No use of phones, tablets, wearables, computers, or other internet-enabled devices allowed in class. Active participation is encouraged.

INCLUSION, ACCOMMODATIONS, AND SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS

At Columbia Business School, we believe that diversity strengthens any community or business model and brings it greater success. Columbia Business School is committed to providing all students with the equal opportunity to thrive in the classroom by providing a learning, living, and working environment free from discrimination, harassment, and bias on the basis of gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or ability. Students seeking accommodation in the classroom may obtain information on the services offered by Columbia University's Office of Disability Services online at www.health.columbia.edu/docs/services/ods/index.html or by contacting (212) 854-2388.