

CASE STUDY

THE OBJECTIVE

Examine and evaluate product management function in a self-chosen tech company.

THE ASSIGNMENT

TLDR: Find a company, figure out how it's doing its PM, think and argue whether this is a good way given its own goals, and write it up.

There are common elements to product management across companies, but the product, company, and industry matter greatly to how things are done in any given company. Chart out and evaluate the product management function in one company: what are the roles and responsibilities of PM, how it fits the organization, how product strategy is formulated and articulated, and how it relates to product development process.

This requires:

1. Finding a company and agreeing with it about its participation
2. Interviewing informants from the company (at least 2-3, but enough to make solid conclusions), primarily from its PM function
3. Reporting data through the course survey
4. Evaluating the PM in the company
5. Writing up a 4-5 page case study

WHAT TO LOOK FOR WHEN FINDING AND CHOOSING A COMPANY

The purpose of the case study is to see one example how product management function is organized. For this, the likeliest candidates are those companies with recognizable PM organization. If the company has someone in a role with the word "product" in the title, it's probably an ok start. Other types of companies are ok, too, but they may require some creativity and more thorough analysis.

You'll need at least 2-3 interviews within a time frame of 2.5-3 weeks. This is quite prompt schedule, so don't bother with a company that appears to be slow to work with from the start.

Finally, you need a company that is open about the way it works and how it is organized. All data will be shared with others groups on the course, and this needs to be ok for the company. If needed, the company can be masked with a pseudonym.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW FROM THE COMPANY

Guiding questions (or research questions, if you will), are the following:

1. How Product Management is organized in the company: What is the role of a product manager and what role product management as a function has in the company?
2. What are the goals of the company, its product strategy, and what is its development stage (as a company and in terms of product(s))?
3. In what aspects are the organization and development process appropriate or inappropriate in terms of the goals and strategy of the company?

QUESTIONS TO ASK

The guiding questions are too broad in terms of conducting an interview, and they need to be split up into smaller ones. Ask at least the following ones. Answers to these questions are then reported through the course survey to a shared dataset. You can ask additional questions on top of these questions.

PM function & its role

- What is the PM org held accountable to?
- What are individual PMs held accountable to?
- What deliverables are PMs responsible for?
- What activities does the PM engage in (with a rough breakdown of time spent)?
- ... (additional questions)

PM & goals

- Is there a product roadmap? Describe it, and how it is formulated
- Is there a product strategy? Describe it, and how it is formulated
- What is the role of product strategy in company strategy?
- ...(additional questions)

PM & skills / capabilities

- What does the company look for in hiring a PM?
- How large is the PM organization?
- How many people in the PM organization hold a variant of the title "product manager"?
- What proportion of the PM organization has a technical/business/design degree?
- What executive the PM reports to?
- ...(additional questions)

Company profile

- Does the data apply to the whole company or part of it, e.g. subsidiary, division, business unit?
- B2B, B2C, B2B2C or other?
- Product type: software, hardware, service, what?
- Public, private, VC backed?
- If VC backed, approximately how much capital has been raised?
- How many fulltime employees does the company employ?
- How many engineers are there at the company?
- How many product designers are there at the company?
- ...(additional questions)