

2019

PRODUCT
MANAGEMENT
INSIGHTS REPORT

Introduction

Since 2015, Alpha has surveyed product managers to study the evolution of best practices in digital product management. Our first annual Insights report painted a picture of a role that lacked definition, let alone a widespread conception of best practices. Product managers reported not having a sufficient impact on a company's overall strategy and not having the tools and resources that they needed to do their best work.

Our 2019 Insights report paints a different picture. We found some notable long-term trends that highlight the maturation of a field that is becoming more advanced and coalescing around a standard set of best practices. We identified three important trends in this year's data.

First, we found that experimentation and user research have increasingly become a core part of a product manager's role. 34% of product managers conduct user research on a daily basis, and analytics preoccupy 58% of product managers on a daily basis. User feedback is a primary source of product and feature ideas, and product managers are increasingly applying experimentation and data analysis to make smarter decisions.

Second, despite the clear increase in adoption of experimentation in recent years, there are still major barriers to implementing it at scale. Reflecting on the past year, 80% of product managers reported not spending enough or any time running product experiments, and 86% of product managers did not spend enough or any time talking to customers.

These findings highlight the growing recognition that continuous experimentation is an aspiration that requires cultural shifts which cannot be made overnight. Our research provides further insights on what might be preventing product managers from applying these best practices.

Lastly, the day to day role of a product manager is becoming more strategic. Over the last few years, product management has shifted from a highly tactical, project-based role to a more strategic role. 80% of product managers surveyed reported strategizing on a daily basis, and 89% of product managers report that they are responsible for setting the roadmap.

Top Findings for 2019

Staying in touch: One-third of product managers conduct user research on a daily basis. 69% of product managers report being responsible for customer interviews, an increase of 10% since the 2017 report.

Never enough: Even though product managers say direct customer feedback is the best source of new ideas; 86% say that they don't spend enough time talking to users.

Red tape: Instead of experimentation and iteration, 60% of product managers report spending too much time on internal politics.

Fail to plan: 57% of product managers say they don't spend enough or any time roadmapping. The number one wish for product managers at startups is to have a clearer product roadmap and company strategy.

Plan to fail: You can't always plan innovation. The biggest wish for product managers at companies over 10,000 people is more opportunity for experimentation.

Hype cycle: 40% of product managers say they are using AI or machine learning, up 7% from last year. But, despite the hype, only 2% say they are using Blockchain.

Introduction







Moreover, product managers are often the liaison between teams and key stakeholders across their organizations. 23% of product managers indicated that they want to spend more time collaborating with internal stakeholders, which represents a significant increase from last year’s study.

In this year’s report, we’ve expanded our research to include insights about networking opportunities and the adoption of emerging technologies. There are now more conferences, resources, and tools than ever before to help product managers do their best work. Increasingly equipped with these resources, product managers have never had a better opportunity to apply modern best practices. The field that just a few years ago was often misunderstood and ill-defined, is now rich with opportunities to learn, network, and work smarter.

Survey Methodology

The 2019 Product Management Insights survey was conducted by Alpha in November 2018. 253 digital product managers completed the study. The objective of the study is to take a pulse of the industry and uncover modern product management practices. This report includes the complete results of the survey along with commentary.

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Respondents

Our respondents represent a diverse cross-section of product managers with a weighting towards startups and large enterprises.

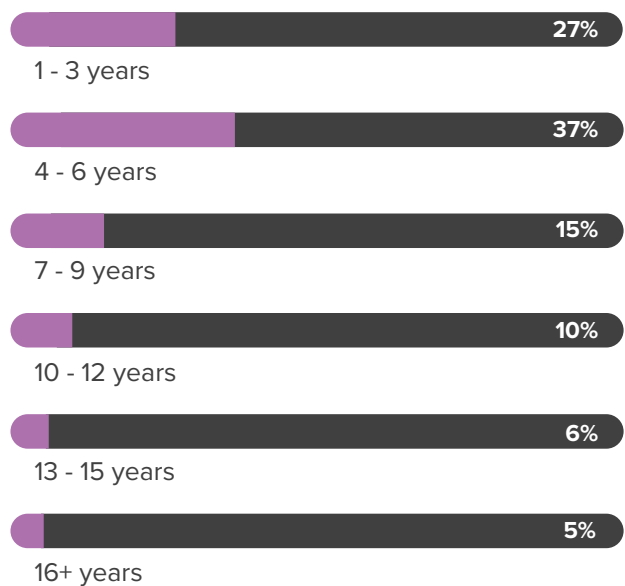
Company size



Most product managers surveyed had between 1 and 6 years of experience, which is consistent with last year's report.



Experience

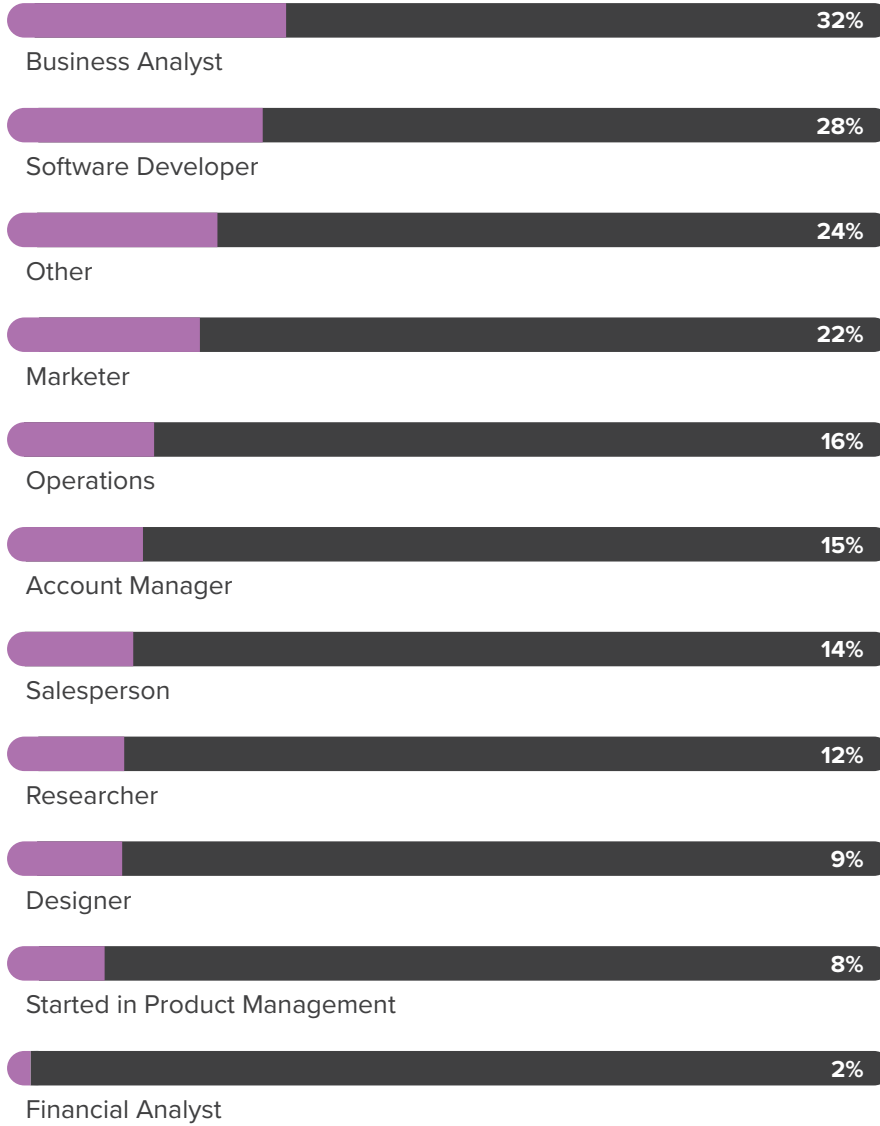




Respondents

Because product management is still a relatively nascent field, and one that requires many different skill sets, it's no surprise that its practitioners come from a variety of backgrounds.

Prior Role



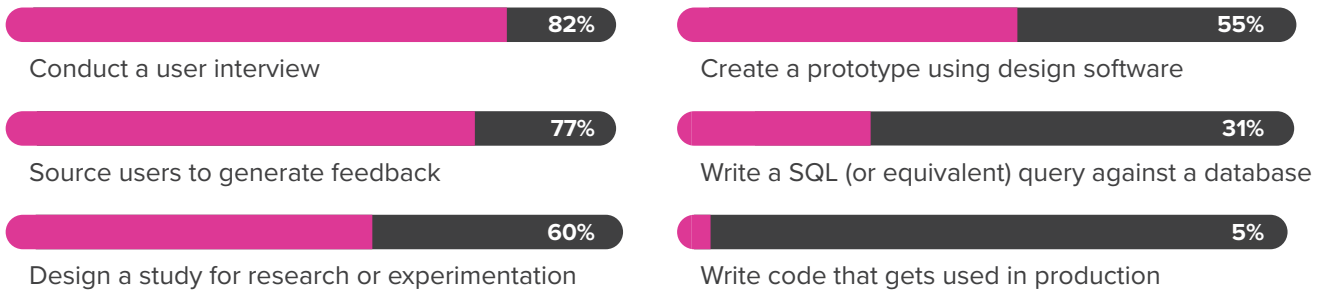


Activities

High-performing product managers understand their users' needs and communicate with teams across their organizations on a regular cadence. They test frequently, iterate rapidly, and set the direction for their organization by writing user stories and devising roadmaps. In practice, product managers had mixed success in 2018.

82% of product managers reported conducting user interviews on at least a quarterly basis and 77% source users to generate feedback, which represent slight increases from last year's survey. Significant majorities also design studies for research or experimentation and create prototypes using design software on at least at a quarterly cadence. Very few write code.

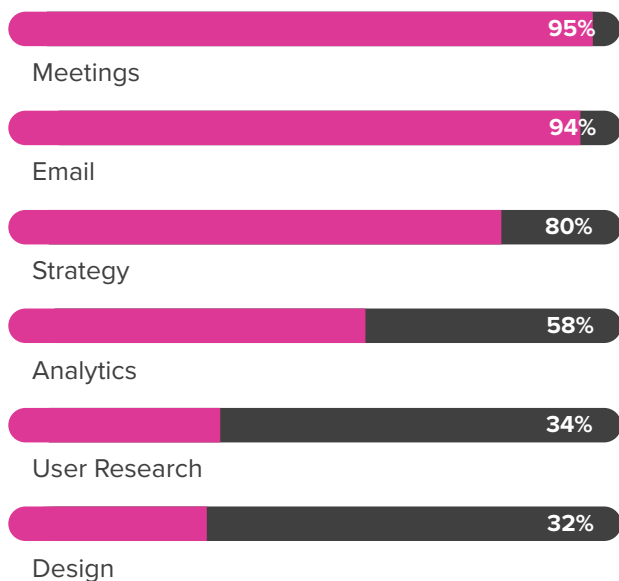
Quarterly Activities



80% of product managers reported strategizing on a daily basis. Nearly all product managers say that they attend meetings and use email every day. Analytics preoccupy 58% of product managers on a daily basis, and 34% of product managers conduct user research on a daily basis.



Daily Activities





Activities

The product managers surveyed report being responsible for setting their roadmap, writing user stories, and conducting customer interviews, the latter of which increased 10% since the 2018 Product Management Insights Report.

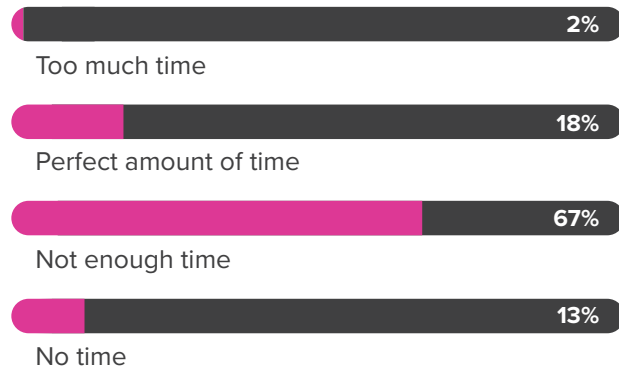
Responsibilities



80% of product managers lamented that they don't spend enough time running product experiments despite the fact that more than three-quarters of product managers conduct user interviews and source users to generate feedback on at least a quarterly cadence. The lack of time spent running product experiments may reflect the growing recognition that continual experimentation is an aspiration, but one that requires cultural shifts which don't happen overnight.



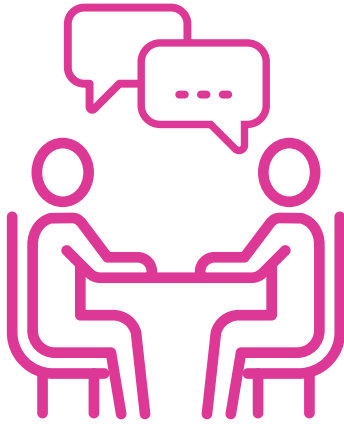
Experimentation



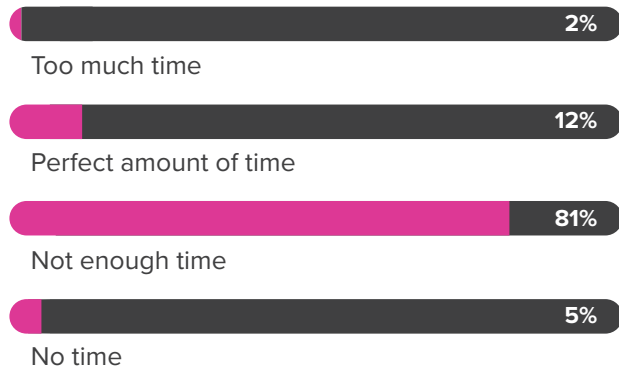


Activities

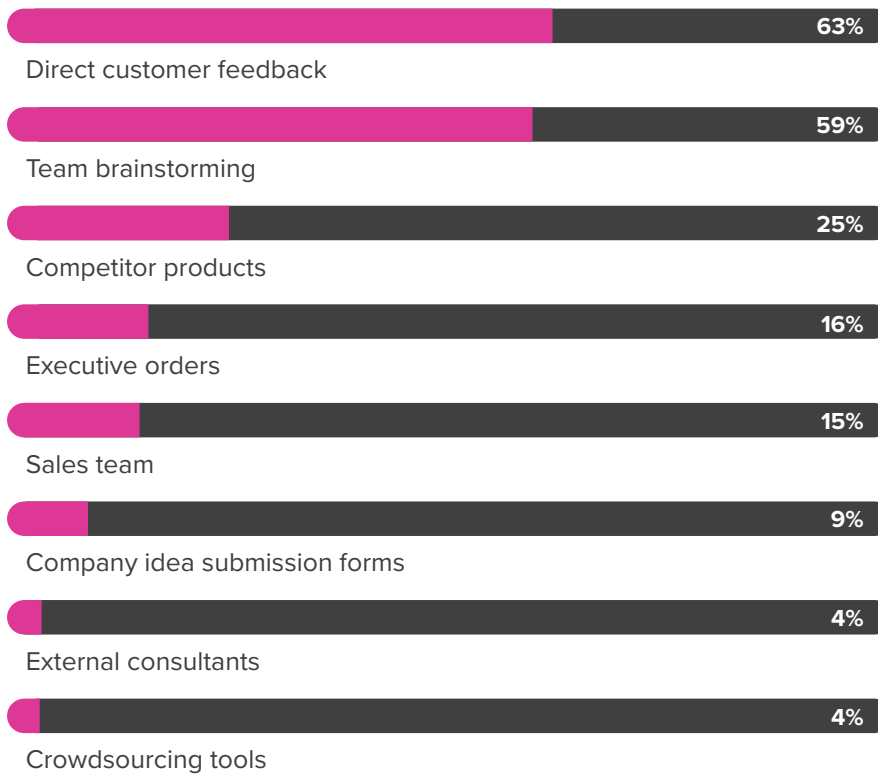
86% of product managers say that they don't spend enough time talking to users. This may be due to the growing realization of how important it is to talk to customers, or the fact that it can be very difficult and time consuming to actually do it.



User Interviews



Source of Best Ideas



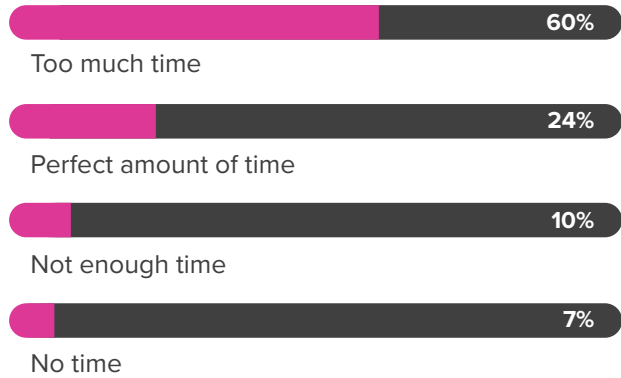


Activities

Product managers may not be spending adequate time on experimentation and user discovery because they spend too much time on unproductive attempts to influence the organization. 60% of product managers reported spending too much time navigating internal politics.

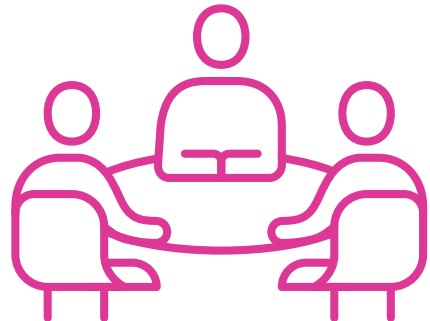
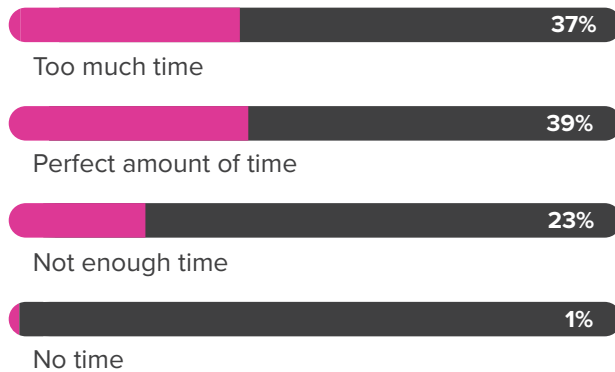


Internal Politics



Our annual reports have consistently shown that most product managers collaborate with several stakeholders within their organizations. While you'd be hard pressed to find a product manager who wants to spend more time dealing with internal politics, 23% indicated that they want to spend more time collaborating with internal stakeholders. This represents a significant increase from last year when only 9% reported that they did not spend nearly enough time dealing with stakeholders. Conversely, 37% said that they spend too much time, suggesting that the field is still divided on best practices for dealing with internal stakeholders.

Collaborating with Internal Stakeholders



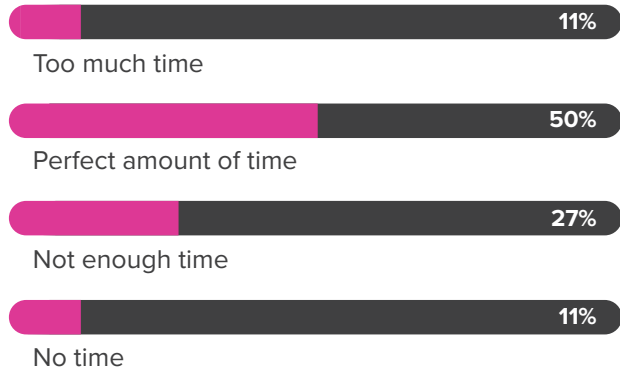


Activities

Half of product of managers reported spending the perfect amount of time writing user stories. While 38% said they do not spend enough time, 11% thought they actually spent too much time on them.



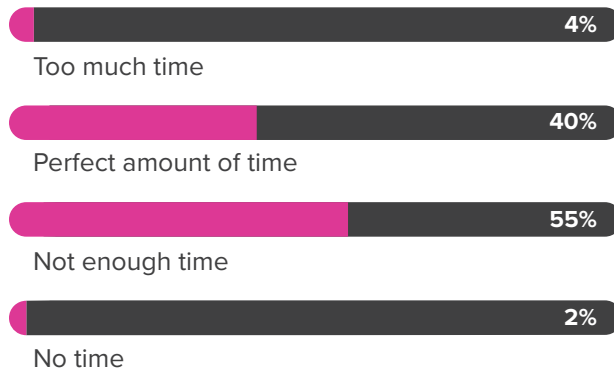
Writing User Stories



While roadmapping and user stories are not one and the same, they often go hand in hand. Roadmapping best practices emphasize the importance of basing future goals on the shortcomings highlighted in user stories. However, the observed correlation between writing user stories and roadmapping is low, suggesting that product managers have the opportunity to level up their roadmapping and goal setting by planning based on user stories.

Only 40% of respondents said that they spend enough time on roadmapping and goal setting, while 57% say they do not spend enough time.

Roadmapping and Goal Setting





Activities

It's worth noting that product managers with more experience report having more confidence in the time they spend in their goal setting process.

Roadmapping and Goal Setting by Experience

Experience	No time	Not enough time	Perfect amount of time	Too much time
1 - 3 years	1%	54%	41%	3%
4 - 6 years	2%	58%	35%	4%
7 - 9 years	0%	65%	35%	0%
10 - 12 years	8%	40%	40%	12%
13 - 15 years	0%	44%	56%	0%
16+ years	0%	38%	54%	8%



Collaboration

Product managers collaborate with a variety of teams and stakeholders within their organizations. We asked our respondents to rate the importance of collaborating with each of them.

Innovation departments elicit tepid praise from product managers, with 39% of respondents reporting that collaborating with them was “adequately valuable.” Nonetheless, this represents a 2% increase from last year. There was a 2% decrease in the number of respondents who rated collaborating with innovation teams as “not at all valuable.”

Innovation



Conversely, engineering teams are consistently considered extremely valuable, with 83% of respondents ranking them at least a 7 out of 9.

Engineering



While not quite as many respondents ranked collaborating with design or prototyping teams as highly as engineering teams, their value as partners is uncontested. 68% rated them as “extremely valuable.” This was a 15% increase from last year, highlighting the growing importance of UX and hinting at the increased adoption of rapid prototyping.

Design





Collaboration

Only a slim majority—53%—of respondents rate collaborating with research teams “extremely valuable.” However, this represents an increase of over 15% from last year and an over 30% increase since we began collecting data on this in 2016.

Research



Product managers at larger companies in particular emphasize the importance of collaborating with research teams. This is evidenced by the proportion of product managers at larger companies who ranked research teams highly.

Value of Research Team by Company Size

Company Size	Rating			
	6	7	8	9
0 - 500 employees	10%	18%	17%	17%
501 - 1,000 employees	8%	24%	20%	8%
1,001 - 5,000 employees	10%	13%	17%	27%
5,001 - 10,000 employees	9%	27%	18%	18%
10,000+ employees	17%	17%	12%	19%



Challenges

Product managers highlighted lack of resources, internal politics, unclear roadmaps, and lack of opportunity for experimentation as challenges in 2018 and opportunities for improvement in 2019.

Lack of resources is a chronic issue for product managers, while internal politics is seen as less of a challenge than it used to be. As the role of product managers is better understood, it seems that it is increasingly easier for product managers to navigate internal politics, but not necessarily to secure resources. In 2015, product managers reported internal politics as the biggest challenge, but by 2017 lack of resources became the most pressing concern, a trend which has continued through 2018.

Most Significant Challenge in 2018



Smaller companies are forced to contend with a lack of resources more so than larger companies. Larger companies face more resistance instead from internal politics.

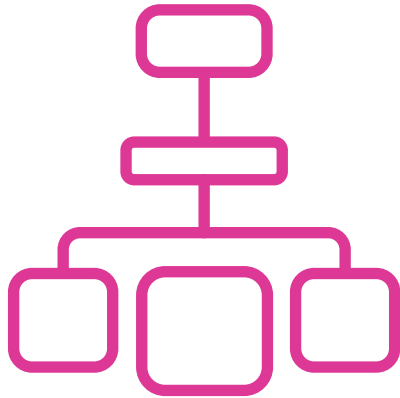
Most Significant Challenge in 2018 by Company Size

Company Size	Internal Politics	Lack of Resources
0 - 500 employees	21%	42%
501 - 1,000 employees	42%	33%
1,001 - 5,000 employees	31%	31%
5,001 - 10,000 employees	50%	30%
10,000+ employees	41%	28%



Challenges

Product managers want a clearer product roadmap and company strategy. Resolving internal conflicts ranks low (10%), suggesting that while it is an important blocker, product managers think they can add more value by having a clearer company roadmap, acquiring more resources, and experimenting more.



Biggest Wish for 2019



The need for a clearer roadmap is of greater concern for smaller companies, which makes sense given the near limitless possibilities for a new company and the significant amount of uncertainty that comes with that. Meanwhile, product managers at larger companies expressed a need for opportunity for experimentation.

As the age old saying goes, the grass is always greener. It's clear that while large companies have the advantage of a more well-defined path to success, they are limited by internal red tape. And while startups often better foster a culture of experimentation, the uncertainty can be challenging.

Biggest Wish by Company Size

Company Size	Clearer roadmap	More experimentation
0 - 500 employees	38%	19%
501 - 1,000 employees	25%	25%
1,001 - 5,000 employees	32%	2%
5,001 - 10,000 employees	27%	9%
10,000+ employees	23%	35%

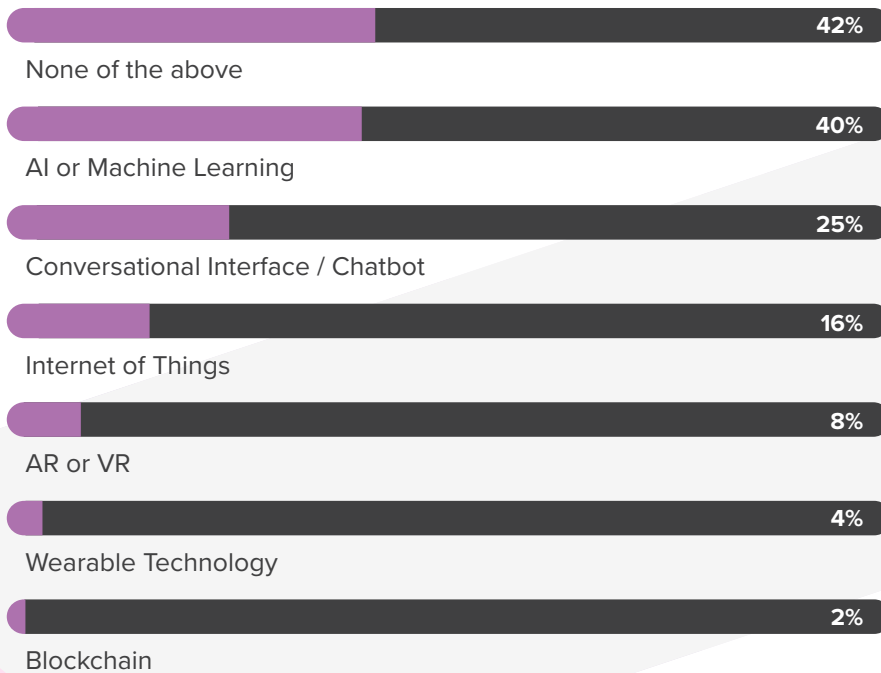


Tools

Product managers rely on a wide range of tools and technologies to move their products forward. We asked respondents about tools for prototyping and roadmapping along with other tools that enable rapid experimentation.

New technologies such as artificial intelligence and machine learning offer great promise to reshape the way companies build products. 40% of product managers report incorporating them, a 7% increase from 2018. However, an even greater share (42%) reported that they have not incorporated any emerging technologies. This data indicates that we are still early in the adoption cycle of these powerful technologies.

Emerging Technologies



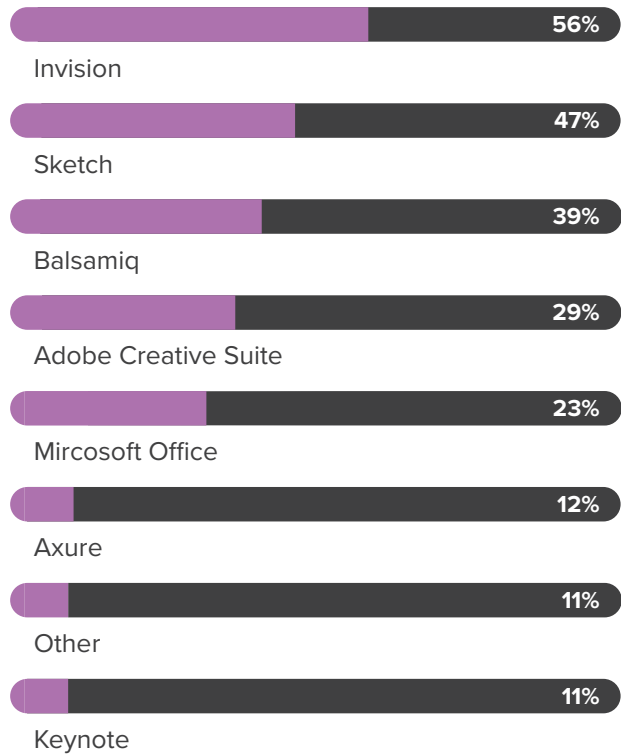


Tools

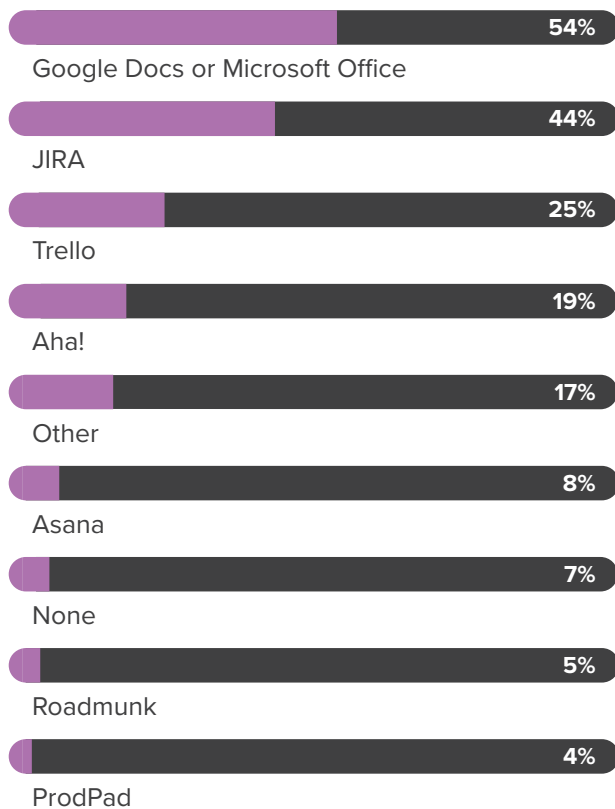
InVision remains the most popular prototyping tool, increasing in usage from 31% in 2016 to 56% in 2019. Sketch has similarly seen a big increase in adoption by product managers over this period while Balsamiq has remained consistent.



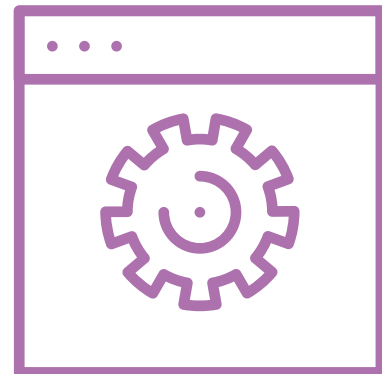
Prototyping Tools



Roadmapping Tools



Google Docs, Microsoft Office, and JIRA are the most common roadmapping tools

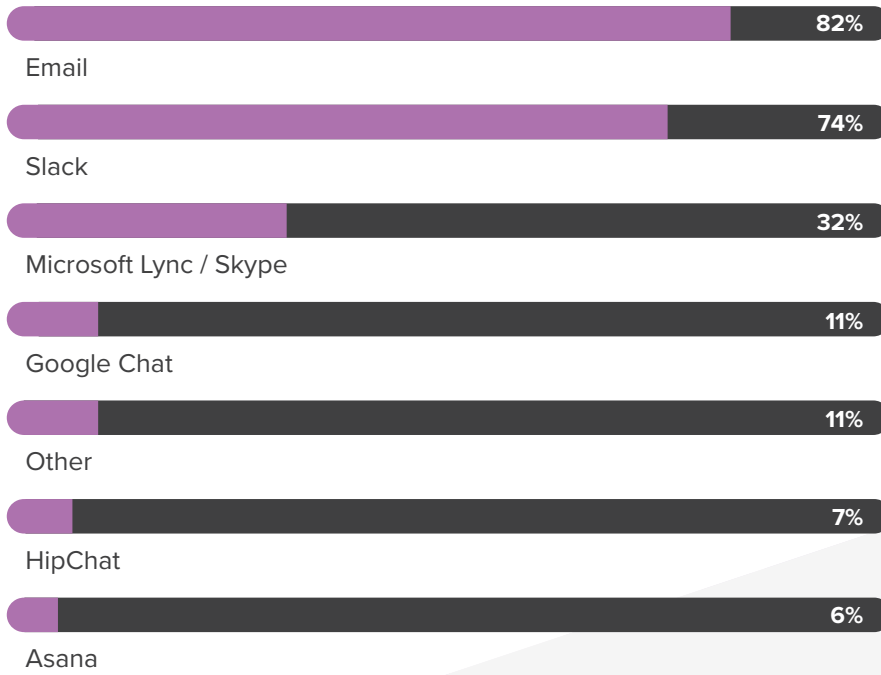




Tools

Slack is the second most popular tool—behind only email—for internal communication. This represents a 7% increase from last year.

Internal Communication Tools



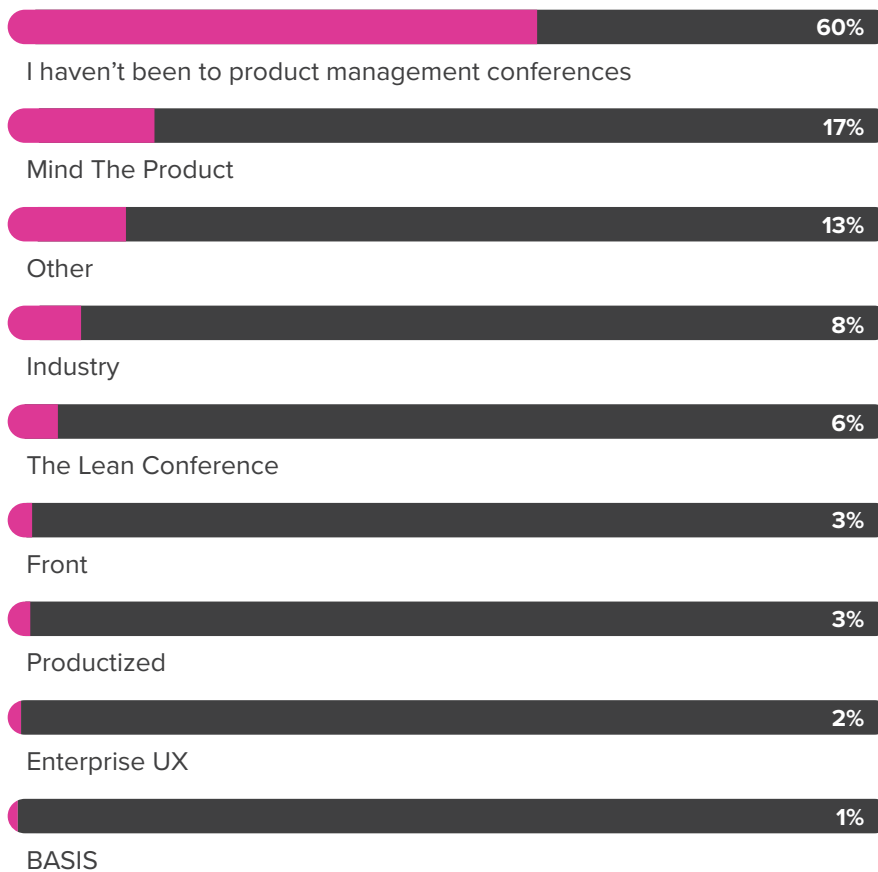


Resources

Product management best practices are now more widely accepted, so people feel the need to keep up more, especially as the quality and availability of content has proliferated.

Although there are now more high-quality product management conferences than ever, 60% of respondents report not attending any of them. This may be a result of product managers' struggle for resources or the lack of standardization of the role. As the field continues to evolve, we expect to see conferences continue to improve their agendas and become a more popular source for professional development.

Conferences

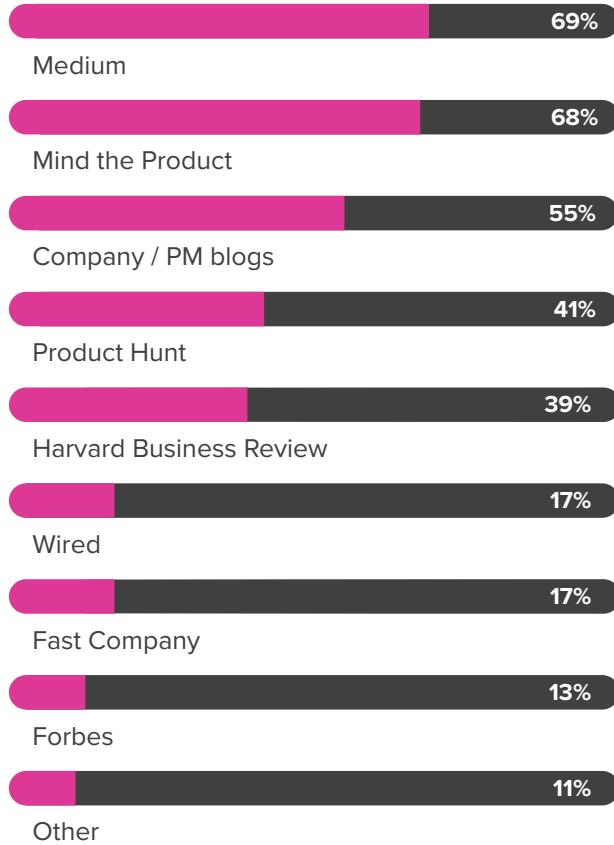




Resources

Medium and Mind the Product are the most widely consumed resources for the latest in digital product management, just as in the 2018 Report.

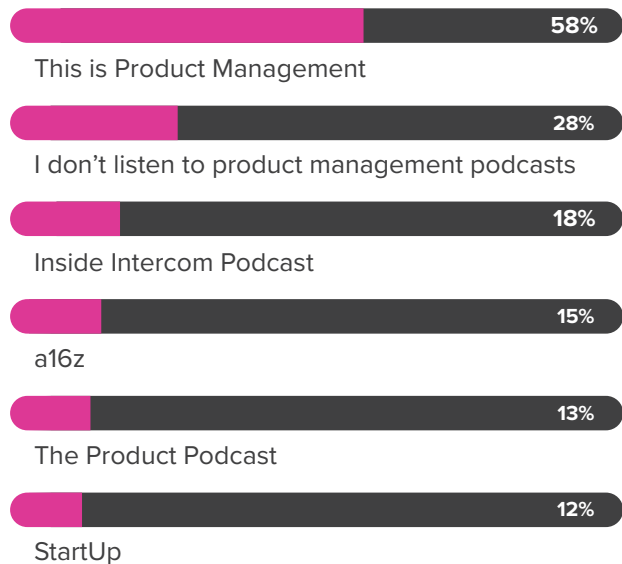
Publications



Over 70% of respondents listen to podcasts. 58% listen to This is Product Management.



Podcast

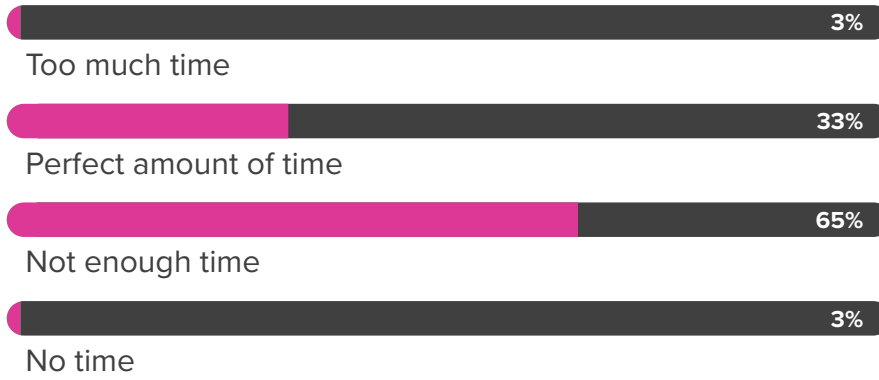




Resources

It's encouraging that 65% of product managers acknowledge that they do not spend enough time keeping up with best practices and techniques.

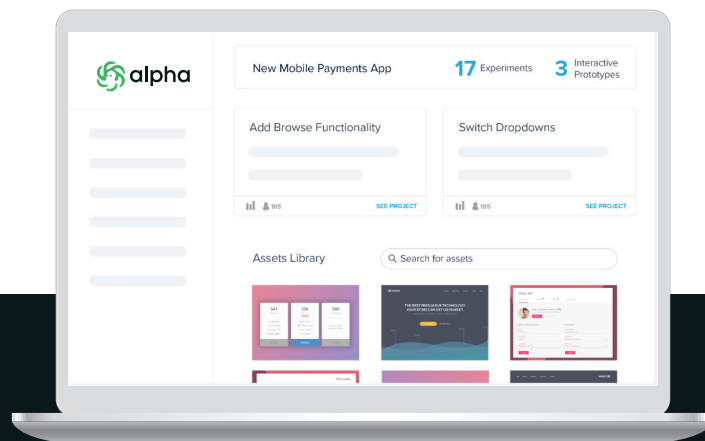
Professional Development





Get on-demand user insights.

Alpha's platform enables management teams to make data-driven decisions about products, users, and new markets.



Test

Start quickly by submitting nothing more than plain English questions.



Learn

Generate reliable feedback within days from target users.



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Optimize and refine concepts with follow-up tests and prototypes.



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Deliver powerful reports and presentations to key stakeholders.

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