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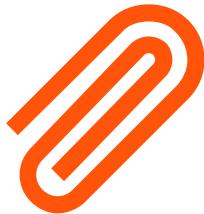
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The Top Trends for Product Management in 2021

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Agenda

1. Essentialism in Product Management

2. Product Mentorship

3. Whole Product, Revisited

4. Antifragility

5. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

6. COVID Recovery (BONUS Trend!)

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Only 23% of PM Leaders Control Product Strategy

Control of PM leadership over product strategy
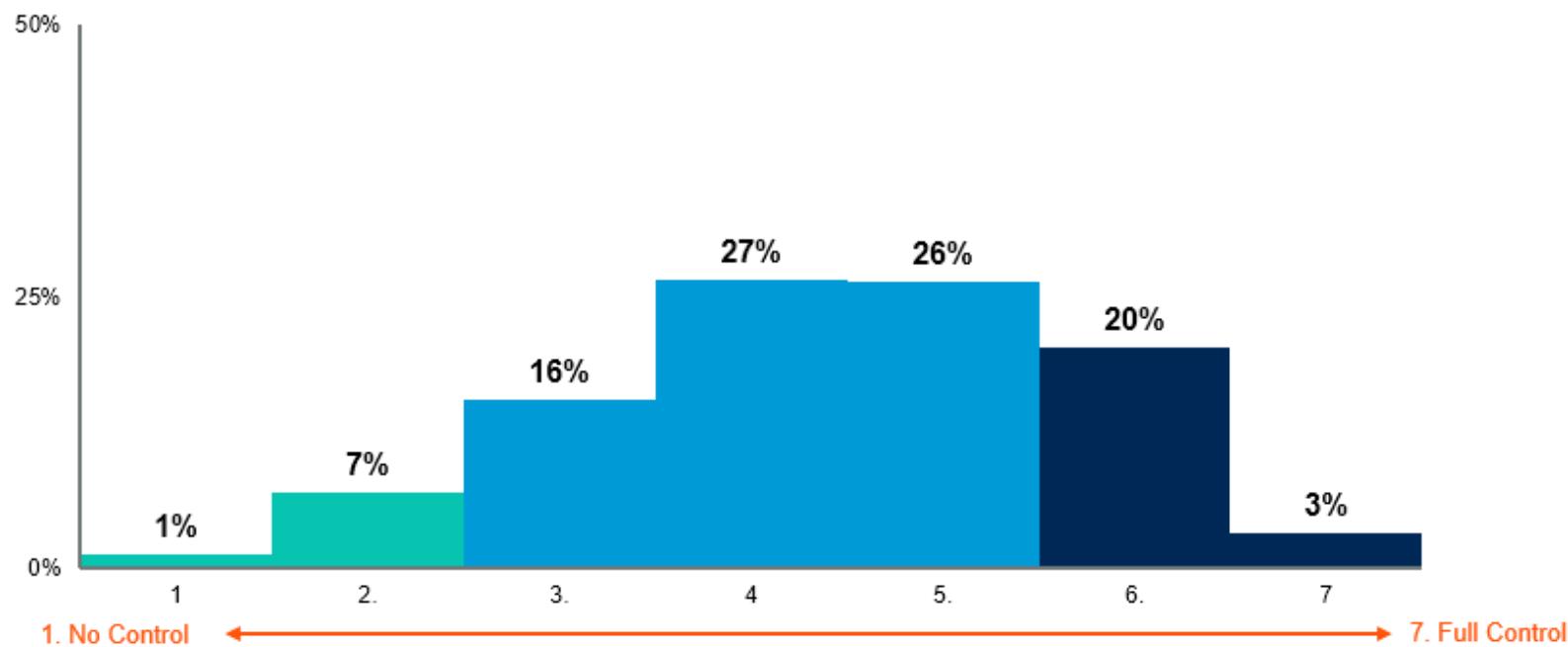
n = 316, , All respondents, Excluding Don't know
B13. How much control do you have over the product strategy?
Source: Gartner Product Management, 2020 (2nd Annual) Survey
ID: 20002

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Product Management 2021

EMPOWERMENT

6

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1

Essentialism in Product Management

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Essentialism in Product Management

Activity Importance

Activity	Score
Optimize Life Cycle Events	~2.6
Harness Disruption	~2.8
Invest in the Right Tools	~2.8
Package Products for Best Impact	~2.8
Size the Market Opportunity	~2.95
Price Products for Best Impact	~3.0
Innovate Product Management Approaches	~3.05
Measure Business Unit Performance	~3.1
Manage Evolution and Innovation	~3.1
Manage Product Launch	~3.1
Analyze the Competitive Landscape	~3.2
Collaborate to Drive Business	~3.25
Differentiate Products	~3.35
Achieve Financial Objectives	~3.4
Improve Cross-Departmental Collaborations	~3.4
Communicate Product Value	~3.4
Invest in Strong Teams	~3.45
Accelerate Time to Market	~3.5
Prioritize Product Investments	~3.6
Build Compelling Customer Experiences	~3.7
Know the Customer	~3.9
Create the Product Strategy	~4.1

Source: Gartner Product Management Score Assessments, 2019-2021, *n=554*

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Essentialism in Product Management

Activity Importance

When **everything** is important, **nothing** is important.

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Essentialism in Product Management

- Product teams tend to run very lean, with little room for additional capacity

- Product Management is traditionally a "jack of all trades" profession

- PMs are constantly being pulled in multiple directions, and most of them are equally"important"[1]

- People tend to forget, a "jack of all trades" is also a "master of none"

[1] Gartner Product Management Score Assessments, 2019-2021, *n=554*

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Essentialism in Product Management

PRODUCT TEAMS MUST FOCUS ON **DOING THE RIGHT THINGS** OVER **DOING THINGS RIGHT**

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Essentialism in Product Management

- Essentialism Questions to Ask:

  - "Is this the **very most important thing** I should be doing with my time and resources right now?"[1]

  - "Will this activity or effort make the **highest possible contribution** toward my goal?"[1]

- This will leave gaps and identify weaknesses in the organization – this is a **healthy** discovery process opening opportunities to improve.

- Product teams begin to become true **teams** of **specialists** (Prod Mgr, Prod Owner, ProdOps) supporting one another, not siloed generalists trying to do everything for everyone

[1] Greg McKeown, *Essentialism: The Disciplined Pursuit of Less*

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2 Product Mentorship

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Product Mentorship

- If essentialism will identify gaps, how do we make sure they're filled?

- How do we ensure that decisions being made through the process have the right context to drive useful outcomes?

- Moving toward outcome-based metrics from internal objective metrics, how do we empower people to have impact?

Product Managers must become the "product mentor" to other teams to empower them and to refocus on customer value.

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Product Mentorship

– Empowering others to make tactical decisions allows product managers more time for strategic work

– Sense of ownership on tactical teams increases quality and motivation

– Reinforces the importance of driving customer outcomes over basic/vanity/internal metrics

– Product Managers truly begin to own the holistic customer experience

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"Whole Product" Revisited

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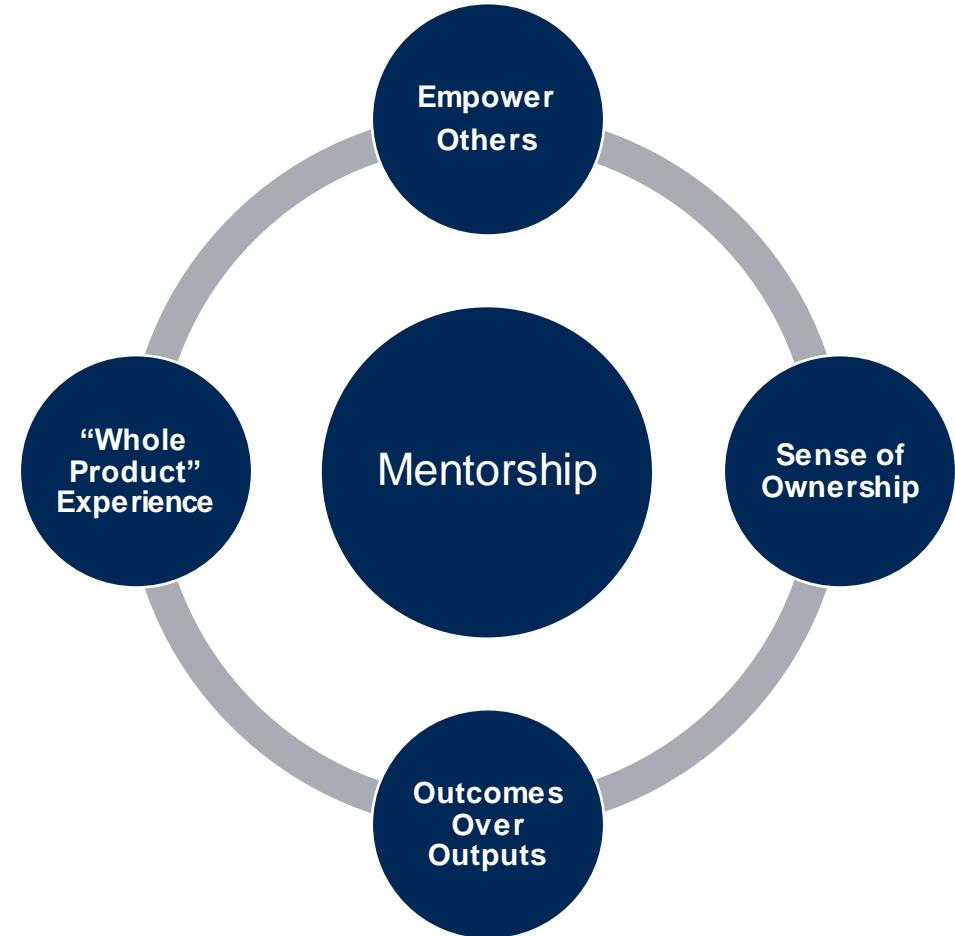
Whole Product, Revisited

- For nearly 40 years, the concept of a "whole product" has existed[1]

- It has had occasional resurgences over the years[2]

- It still seems to be a novel concept for many and a struggle for most

The "Product" is not just the "product"… It's the entirety of the customer experience.

[1] Levitt, Theodore (1983), *The Marketing Imagination*, Simon & Schuster

[2] Moore, Geoffrey (1991), *Crossing the Chasm*, Harper Business Essentials

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Whole Product, Revisited

- PMs up to recently have focused on the "core product" and its direct dependencies

- Increasingly, PMs are being asked to engage beyond this "core" at every step of the process

- As PM becomes more strategic, visibility into the "whole product" experience is critical

- Active collaboration grows in importance the further out we extend our influence and authority

Whole-Product[a] Concept
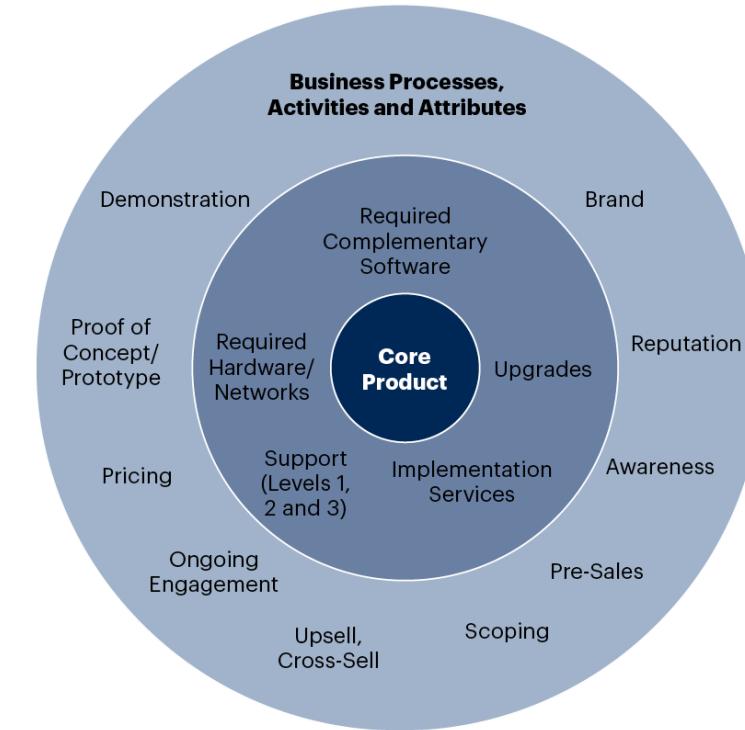
Source: Gartner

[a] "Whole product" means: 1. The core product you make, 2. Everything that is needed for customers to have a compelling reason to buy and for their needs to be met, 3. The customer experience (It includes both tangibles and intangibles.)

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Source: Why Product Managers Must Adopt Whole Product Thinking, Alan Antin & Neil McMurchy (G00728439)

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Whole Product, Revisited

- Not enough to merely "deliver" information to stakeholders

- Frequent, brief checkpoints ensure alignment across the customer experience

- Data-driven insights from all parts of the business are necessary for success

- OKRs must be aligned to the product goals, otherwise teams are at odds

- Exposure to technical complexity by business stakeholders (and vice-versa) improves overall collaboration, less "finger-pointing"

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Antifragility

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"...the robust or resilient is neither harmed nor helped by volatility and disorder, while the antifragile benefits from them."

Nassim Nicholas Taleb, *Antifragile*

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The Spectrum of Fragility

Fragile

Susceptible to Adversity

Avoid, Retrench, Resist

Resilient

Dealing With Adversity

Survive, Absorb, Recover

Agile

Adapting to Adversity

Respond, React, Flexible

Antifragile

Improve With Adversity

Learn, Adapt, Grow

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Antifragility for Product Managers

To build anti-fragility into product teams, product managers have to come from a **holistic perspective** of how strong teams think, behave, operate and deliver.

Antifragility: A Product Manager's Approach to Rebound and Accelerate Opportunities, Gartner 2021

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Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion

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Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion in the Profession

Age[1]

Baby Boomer 10%	Gen-Z 2%
Gen-X 39%	
Gen-Y 49%	

Gender[1]

Female 18%	NB / Other 0%
Male 82%	

Race[2]
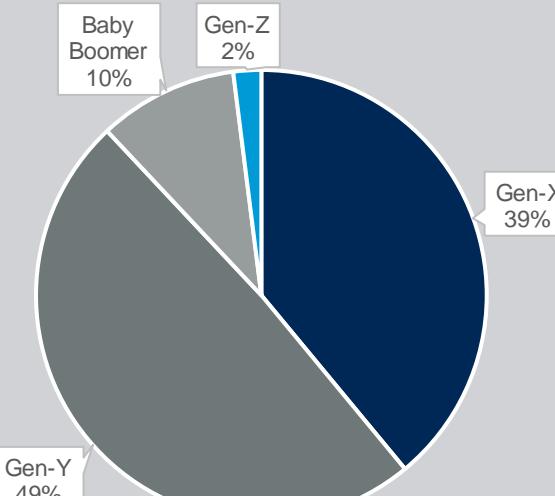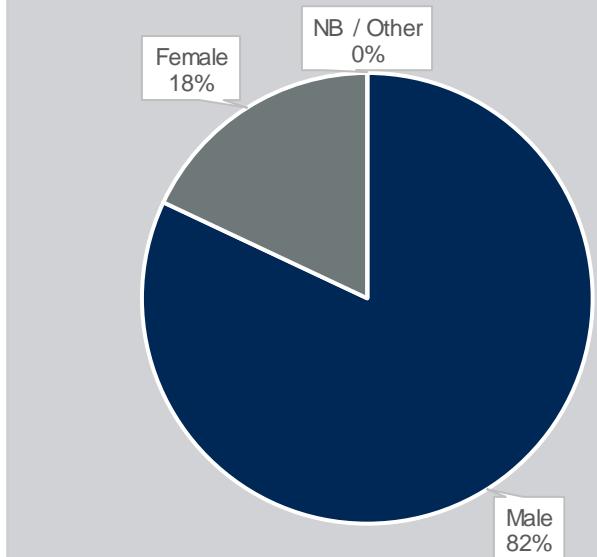
Multi-Racial 3.6%	Other 3.1%
Hispanic/Latinx 5.7%	American Native 0.6%
Black 5.8%	Pacific Islander 0.2%
Asian 21.8%	White 59.2%
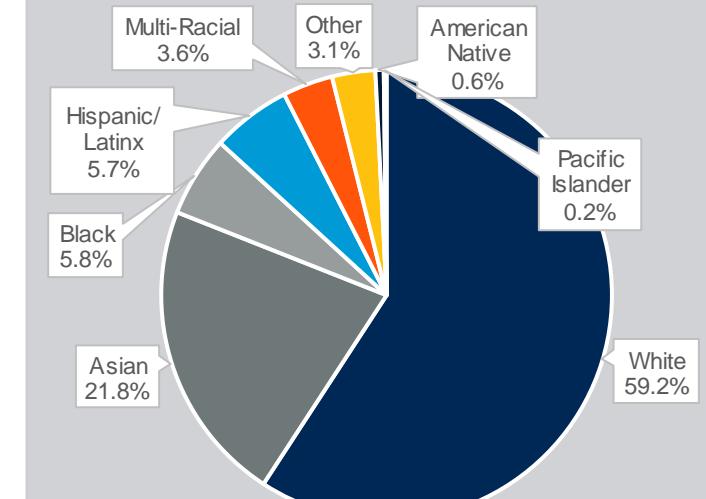
Sources:
  1: 2021 Gartner 2nd Annual Product Management Survey
  2: ProductPlan 2021 State of Product Management Report

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Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion in the Profession

Accessibility

Representation

Authenticity

Challenge Assumptions

Engage Locally

Diversity of Backgrounds

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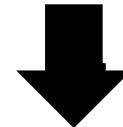
Diversity of Ideas

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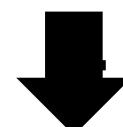
Greater Customer Value

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Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion in Our Work

- DEI has become an important factor in buyer and user consideration

- Product capabilities, design, and messaging reflect internal biases – intentionally or unintentionally

- Focusing solely on the "Voice of Customer" might miss the "Voice of Society"

- Diverse customer inputs are equally important as diverse product teams

- Consciousness of how our products affect customers' own DEI efforts

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COVID-19 Pandemic Recovery

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COVID Recovery (BONUS Trend!)

- Business Impacts:
  - Shifting to short-term investments risks long-term strategy
  - Successful adaptation shows agility (or antifragility!) actually works
  - Shifts in buyer behavior driving changes in markets and products

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The "New" Remote Work Reality

- Leading through influence remotely

- Managing transparency

- New methods of communicating and collaborating with stakeholders

Share of Remote in the Total Employee Base, Worldwide, 2019-2024
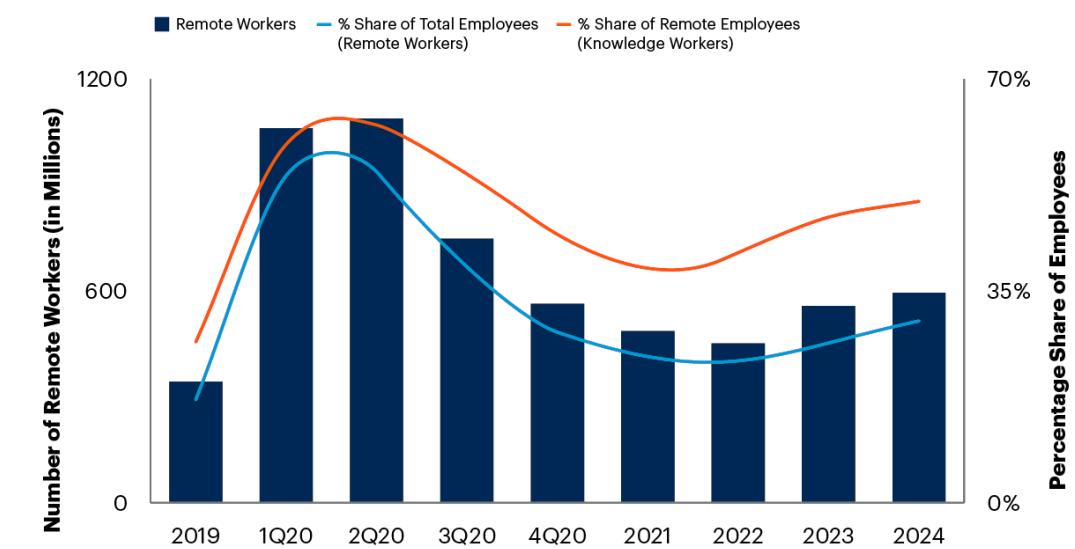
Source: Gartner
Note: See forecast methodology in Note 1 for information on base data.
734548_C

Source: Forecast Analysis: Remote Workers Forecast, Worldwide, Ranjit Atwal, Anna Griffen, et al (727672)

Ask your questions

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Top Priorities for Tech & Service Providers: Leadership Vision for 2021

Emerging trends, expected challenges and next steps for tech product managers in 2021

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