

Chapter 2

Definition of Product Management

Defining the Product Management Domain and the Foundations of the *Blackblot PMTK Methodology*TM

2.1 Introduction

The *Blackblot Product Manager's Toolkit*[®] (PMTK) is a comprehensive set of models and professional templates which constitute a complete product management methodology that illustrates notable best practices and processes to help create successful market-driven products.

At the very core of the *Blackblot PMTK Methodology*TM are two foundation rules which govern the entire methodology.

This chapter defines product management and presents the logic and rationales of how the two *Blackblot PMTK Methodology*TM foundation rules are derived.

2.2 User and Buyer

At the heart of the product management domain are the user and the buyer entities whose motivations can be illustrated with the following example.

A sand bucket and shovel is a child's toy. Before buying this product, the child's parents check the sand bucket and shovel for safety, price, and reliability. More than likely the parents' main interest in the sand bucket and shovel is the effect that the product will have on the child.

The parents buy the sand bucket and shovel and give them to the child who plays with them at the beach. The child will use the sand bucket and shovel to move sand, dig a hole, carry water, and more. The child's interest in the sand bucket and shovel is all about what they can do with this product.

From this example it is apparent that the parents are the *Buyer* entity of the product. The buyer is focused on the product's value which is derived from the benefits that the product provides in exchange for money. From this example it is also apparent that the child is the *User* entity of the product. The user is focused on

the product's functionality. The user's only concern is what they can do with the product.

2.3 Core Disciplines

The user is focused on the product's functionality. Companies build product functionality for the users through an activity called *Product Planning*. Product planning is based on having the *Customer Advocacy* skill, which means knowing the customers well so that the company can build the required product functionality for the users.

The buyer is focused on the product's value. Companies provide buyers with information about the product's value through an activity called *Product Marketing*. Product marketing is based on having the *Business Value* skill, which means knowing the product's business value well so that the company can inform potential buyers about the product's value.

Product Planning is defined as the ongoing process of identifying and articulating market requirements that define a product's feature set. Product functionality for the users is built by means of product planning processes.

Product Marketing is defined as outbound activities that are aimed at generating product awareness, differentiation, and demand. The product's value is presented to the buyers by means of product marketing activities.

2.4 Concept of Product Management

Every product simultaneously offers functionality for the user and positive or negative value for the buyer. Because the product's functionality and value are created together and depend on each other, the product planning and product marketing disciplines that build the product's functionality and tell about its value are also tightly connected. Together, the product planning and product marketing disciplines are called *Product Management*.

More elaborately, because the product's implications, functionality, and value are mutually dependent, the product planning and product marketing disciplines that represent the mechanisms for building product functionality and articulating its value, are inextricably linked. The union between product planning and product marketing activities is collectively referred to as *Product Management*.

The succinct definition of *Product Management* is an occupational domain which contains two professional disciplines: *Product Planning* and *Product Marketing*. The slightly expanded definition is that product management is an occupational domain that is based on general management techniques (a collection of activities in the areas of decision-making, employee motivation, and process application that

lead and direct a business organization) that are focused on product planning and product marketing activities.

The definition of product management is extremely critical to the consistent application of the product management profession. That leads to adopting the definition of product management as a core tenet of the *Blackblot PMTK Methodology*[™], hence the *Blackblot PMTK Methodology*[™] first foundation rule that “*Product management is comprised of product planning and product marketing.*” It is noted that not definitively separating the two disciplines of product planning and product marketing will result in a confusing overlap which causes unclear job descriptions and responsibilities in product management.

2.5 Problem Space and Solution Space

People’s worlds are divided into problems and solutions. Problems are needs or difficulties which are answered with solutions. For example, staying warm in cold weather is a need and thermal clothing is the solution. Communication from a distance is a need and a mobile phone is the solution.

It is possible to philosophically categorize all the problems that people have as conceptually belonging to a big *Problem Space*, with all the related solutions grouped into one big *Solution Space*.

The problem space is about business and consumer problems. The solution space is about products and technology which solve those problems.

The user and the buyer are focused on solving their respective problems. Therefore, the user and the buyer are in the problem space. Product management is focused on the user and the buyer, so product management is also in the problem space.

Products and technologies belong to the solution space. Engineering is focused on products and technologies and as a result engineering is in the solution space.

More elaborately, within the *Blackblot PMTK Methodology*[™], the problem space is defined as the conceptual market realm in which the problem (difficulty, a situation that requires change) resides. The solution space is defined as the conceptual product realm in which corresponding solutions (answers, anything that removes or controls the difficulty) to the problem reside.

The problem space and the solution space are abstract. However, the problem and the solution themselves can be actual or perceived and they can also be tangible or intangible. For example, the problem could be inefficient work (actual or perceived) and the solution could be to use faster machines (tangible) or apply better processes (intangible).

From a colloquial standpoint, the problem space relates to the world of business and consumer challenges and motivations—it is all about needs (states of felt deprivation). The solution space relates to the world of products and technology—it is all about the offerings that satisfy needs.

The user and the buyer are respectively focused on their quest for functionality and value. They are not focused on the product or technology. Accordingly, the user and the buyer reside in the problem space and therefore product management, which addresses the user and the buyer via the product planning and the product marketing disciplines, is also in the problem space.

These realizations are the rationale for the *Blackblot PMTK Methodology*TM second foundation rule that “*Product management resides solely in the problem space.*”

By inference and exclusion, product management’s counterpart is *Engineering*, which resides in the solution space. This is because the products and technologies reside in the solution space. Engineering is focused on products and technologies. Accordingly, engineering resides in the solution space.

2.6 Blackblot PMTK MethodologyTM Foundation Rules

The aforementioned logic shapes the *Blackblot PMTK Methodology*TM *Foundation Rules* which are:

1. Product management is comprised of product planning and product marketing.
2. Product management resides solely in the problem space.

The *Blackblot PMTK Methodology*TM *Foundation Rules* identify, define, and explain the core concept of product management and are the very basic principles that the *Blackblot PMTK Methodology*TM is built upon.

2.7 Adjusted for Reality

The preliminary step to elevating the discipline and the profession of product management is to have a clear and succinct explanation of what product management is and what the role of a product manager is. It would also be helpful if the substantiated explanation were memorable and persuasive.

The fully rationalized methodological foundation rules of product management are correct but to overcome entrenched beliefs and static business cultures, often needed in the interim is a more flexible and broad definition that will find appeal with many. Precision is going to give way in the interest of overwhelming clarity.

The interim definition of product management should reflect what arguably is the most critical and primary activity which resides at the very core of product management. The key activity that is most identified with product management is product planning. This primarily hinges on the methodological argument of problem space and solution space relative to product management, as stated in the *Blackblot PMTK Methodology*TM second foundation rule.

The interim definition of product management would therefore be:

Product management is a market-focused corporate activity that uncovers potentially profitable market problems and communicates them in proper format to the company's product developers who then specify and build solutions to those problems.

If such is the case, then the derived interim definition of a product manager would be:

A Product Manager is a market expert who seeks potentially profitable market problems and describes them to product developers.

These interim definitions clearly convey that product management and the product manager are by far and only a market-focused activity and role, not a project, product, or technology-focused activity and role.

Furthermore, these interim definitions also embody and reiterate the critical arguments that (1) product management is a specialization, not a generalization, and that (2) product management is autonomous and not part of marketing or engineering.

It is possible to augment the interim definitions with supporting clarifications. This would mean adding statements such as “*Product management owns the problem and product development owns the solution*” or “*Product managers describe customer needs and the developers respond with product features.*”

For individual guidance, the product manager's credo is “*You're not managing a product. You're managing the problem which the product solves.*” This statement succinctly conveys that the role of a product manager is to deeply understand the market problem that needs to be solved and then to articulate every facet and nuance of that market problem to the development team.

Finally, it is important to describe what product management is but even more important, given all the confusion and misinterpretation that abound product management, to explain what product management is not. Product management does not include responsibilities that strictly belong to other areas such as product development, software development, project management, program management, system/product architecture, product design, user experience, product manufacturing, product logistics, product launches, release management, profit and loss accountability, etc.

2.8 Summary

The *Blackblot Product Manager's Toolkit*[®] (PMTK) is a market-driven product management methodology.

The *Blackblot Product Manager's Toolkit*[®] (PMTK) product management methodology's two foundation rules are its methodological foundation. They are also the solid basis for the product management domain's entire body of knowledge.

The Product Manager's Toolkit®

Methodologies, Processes, and Tasks in Technology

Product Management

Steinhardt, G.

2017, XVII, 207 p. 34 illus., 2 illus. in color., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-3-319-49997-0