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Aligning Product Responsibilities — Don’t Forget the Organization’s Culture

By Chris Meering, Clifton Gilley, David Yockelson

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By Analyst(s): Chris Meering, Clifton Gilley, David Yockelson

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An organization's cultural approach to products and services, be it technology-, sales- or market-led, impacts the responsibilities within the product team. Product leaders must define who leads or supports activities across the product life cycle by assessing the effects of organizational culture.

Overview

Key Findings

- Different cultural approaches for bringing products to market lead to significant differences in the operational model of the product team across the entire product life cycle.
- Failure to appreciate the impact of these cultural differences leads to misaligned or unclear responsibilities, especially between product management and product marketing, impacting overall effectiveness.
- While collaboration between product management, product marketing and other internal stakeholders is key to mutual success, where activities are shared, ownership cannot simply be assigned without considering the underlying culture toward products.

Recommendations

To excel at product leadership, product leaders working to improve collaboration within the product team should:

- Identify the organizational culture that most closely fits your company by assessing how your organization approaches the product life cycle and go-to-market activities.

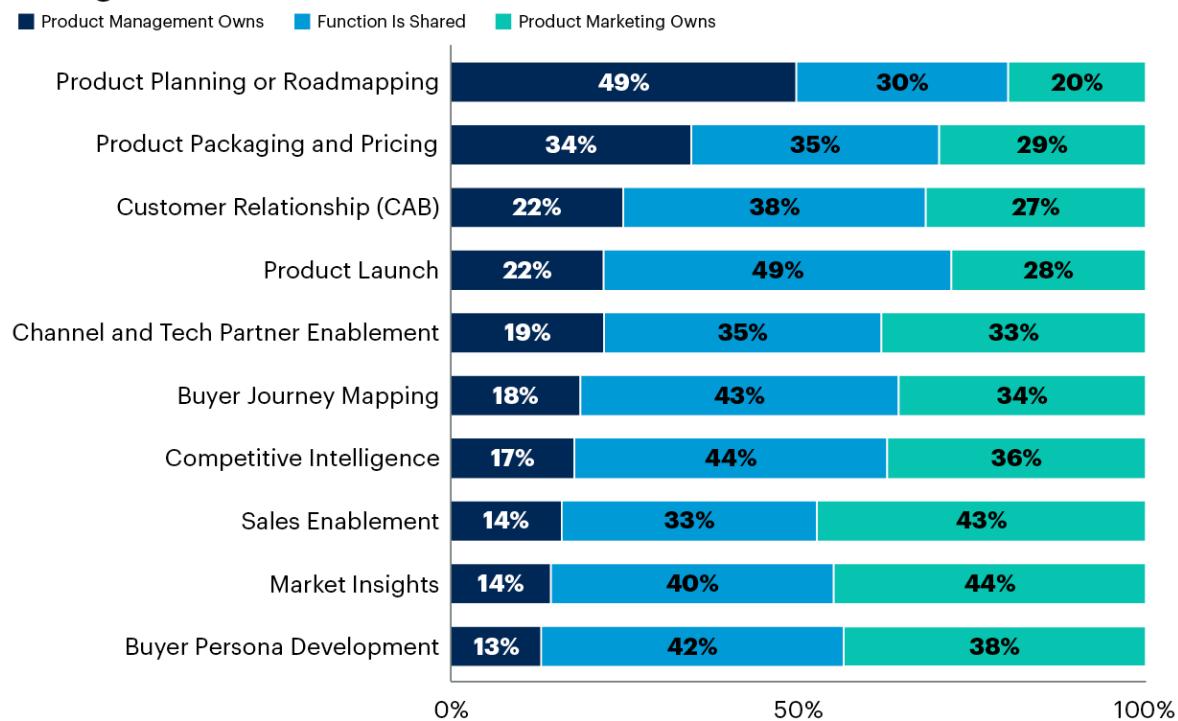
- Evaluate how the organizational culture maps to the skill sets and capabilities of the product team by reviewing the indicative responsibilities matrix most aligned to your organization.
- Institutionalize the use of a responsibility matrix to clarify the ownership of activities and build closer collaboration between product management and product marketing teams.

Analysis

There is no “one size fits all” approach to the allocation of roles and responsibilities across the product life cycle. Ownership of key activities varies across different organizations, with these responsibilities often being shared between product management and product marketing. Figure 1 shows the views of over 170 product marketing survey respondents who were asked which option best describes the team that leads/owns agendas and activities within their organization.

Figure 1: Ownership of Shared Function Between Product Marketing and Product Management

Ownership of Shared Function Between Product Marketing and Product Management



n = Ranges between 173 and 190

Q: Please select the option that best describes the team who leads/owns the below mentioned agendas/activities.

Source: Gartner 2020 Annual Product Marketing Study

Note: Percentages may not add to 100% because "Don't know" responses are not shown.

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Because the roles and responsibilities of product management frequently overlap with other groups within an organization, not recognizing the dynamics associated with organizational culture can easily result in product organizations that are misaligned and poorly defined. This leads to both suboptimal results and unnecessary double handling, coupled with increased friction, especially between product management, product marketing and the sales organization, including the broader marketing functions supporting demand generation and digital marketing.

To address this, product leaders must first recognize the type of organizational culture prevalent within their organization and consider how this impacts the ability of their team to achieve strategic goals. Second, they must align the roles and responsibilities of their product teams with the underlying organizational culture in order to meet business objectives.

How Technology/Engineering-, Revenue/Sales- or Market/Customer-Led Cultures Impact Product Teams

All of these cultures can be valid for a particular organization or at a particular time in their maturity development. Such cultures can be the cause of success and, equally, a contributing factor to failure. Product teams have a degree of influence on organizational culture, but in the majority of instances, they are unable to exert enough influence to drive change. Instead, product leaders must organize their teams to optimize performance within the underlying culture.

Technology and service provider (TSP) organizations can generally be grouped into three types of organizations based on their cultural approach to products (see Table 1). All three cultural models can be suitable approaches, especially at specific stages of an organization's, market's or product's maturity. However, while a particular organizational culture may be successful in the short term, it does not mean it is not without potential longer-term issues or pitfalls.

Table 1: Types of Organizations Based on Their Cultural Approach to Products

Cultural Approach	Description	Where This Approach Is Often Seen and Successfully Used	Potential Pitfalls
Technology/engineering-led	Product strategy is based on technology and capabilities, often with little or no direct customer feedback gathered.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Organizations in the startup phases of their maturity ■ Organizations in emerging technology markets or selling predominantly to IT divisions, particularly hardware/infrastructure 	Expansion and growth in many markets frequently requires less focus on novel technology and more focus on solving valuable business problems for prospective customers.
Revenue/sales-led	Product strategy is driven by internal metrics and KPIs focused primarily on revenue, churn or sales-funnel statistics.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Organizations whose products are in the growth phases of maturity or in emerging technology markets ■ Can also be used when the product can be preconfigured rather than requiring customized development, or where the life expectancy of the product is short, negating a degree of technical debt 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ This approach can lead to scaling issues due to the number of variations of the core product deployed or the number of requests from existing customers, reducing development capacity available to address market-oriented demands. ■ Technical debt is often ignored in favor of "satisfying" the individual or a few big customers, especially if the customers are prepared to pay for the additional functionality.
Market/customer-led	Product strategy and roadmaps start with discovery and validation, driven by a detailed knowledge of customer and market business needs from both user and market research.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mature markets or where organizations are looking to scale their product offering to address high volumes of customers with similar business needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ If insufficient rigor is applied to customer experience and discovering, validating and solving for valuable customer business problems, sales performance and customer satisfaction are at risk. ■ Many organizations start with this culture but pivot to achieve short-term goals or because the technology/engineering team is dominant.

KPI = key performance indicator

Source: Gartner (May 2021)

Is a Product-Led Cultural Approach an Option?

Many organizations that fall under the definition of “customer/market-led” or “technology/engineering-led” may refer to their processes and approaches as being “product-led” (see [Can Software Products Generate and Qualify Their Own Leads to Drive Growth?](#)). Unfortunately, the use of this term often creates confusion with the go-to-market strategies described as “product-led growth.” In order to minimize confusion between these terms, we have chosen to use the term “customer/market-led.”

Organizations that take a customer/market-led approach may also be adopting product-led-growth strategies, leveraging their deep customer insights and data. However, they may also be using other approaches to drive growth, as the approach to product management may vary from the approach used by product marketing and sales.

How to Optimize Your Product Team Within an Organizational Culture

Success, in whatever approach your organization exhibits, requires an appreciation of the organization’s underlying culture and a clear understanding of the target market’s drivers and objectives. Success also needs best practices, processes and tools, with the right skills and experience across the product team and wider organization, coupled with the right allocation for ownership and responsibilities across key activities.

Using the example descriptions of product team dynamics and behaviors listed in Table 2, product leaders should assess their own organization to determine which of these three organizational cultures best describes their specific situation and how this impacts their team.

Table 2: Typical Product Team Dynamics and Behaviors Exhibited

Core Product-Related Functions	Typical Product Team Dynamics and Behaviors Exhibited		
	Technology/Engineering Led Organizations	Revenue/Sales Led Organizations	Market/Customer-Led Organizations
Product Strategy and Life Cycle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Product strategy is based on technology and capabilities rather than customer/market validation. Go-to-market strategy is aligned to the product. Product life cycle management is driven by technical evolution. Product evolution is launched into the market as “fire-and-forget” with focus shifting to the next product. Ongoing evolution is based more on technical issues than maintaining product/market fit. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Product strategy is driven by internal sales metrics and KPIs. Go-to-market strategy is often strongly sales-driven and intended to create a large funnel of leads. Product life cycle management is a balance of strategic direction and tactical activities. Ongoing evolution is focused on addressing specific customers' need, often as a pre-sale commitment, as a way to counter threats to renewals and upside. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Product strategy and roadmaps are based on discovery and validation, driven by a detailed knowledge of both customers and market/business needs. Go-to-market strategy is well-defined in advance and iterated against during design, development and launch. Product planning is led by product management with input from across the organization. Product life cycle focuses on addressing valid business problems, delivering a compelling customer experience throughout the entire life of the product.
Marketing Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Marketing activities are tactical rather than strategic and focused on finding product/market fit as the product nears launch. Product marketing is often merged with brand marketing or those doing demand generation or digital marketing. Product marketing may not exist as a stand-alone function or reports to sales, but supports product management, focusing on collateral and sales tools. Positioning is based on technical superiority, such as volume of features and capabilities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Product marketing is highly tactical and responsive to the changing needs of the organization to drive revenue growth. Content is created primarily toward building a large funnel of leads and providing collateral to close business. Individual needs of prospects result in a large range of customization, together with additional use cases and a large number of buyer personas to satisfy. Positioning is based on meeting the customer's specific business needs and/or overcoming competitive threats. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Product marketing activities support the product strategy and go-to-market plans. Appropriate positioning and messaging is in place for the product launch, as well as creating sales enablement collateral and training. Positioning is often based on business outcomes.
Market Segmentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focused on “which customers will want this technology/solution” rather than “which markets have a business need that this solution addresses.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Primarily driven by sales success rather than market analysis. A deal won in a new segment may make that market a priority. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Joint exercise undertaken during product planning, focuses on identifying segments with common business needs. Clear buyer and user personas are defined to drive the process.
Sales Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The sales organization focuses on identifying the customer's business issues during the sales cycle and tailors messaging to align the product to these issues. Sales enablement and support is a shared task between product marketing and product management, with sales choosing which to involve and when. Product managers provide much of the sales support, engage with prospects during the sales cycle and support sales enablement. Product marketers often are relegated to creating collateral, presentation and sales tools. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Product management provides the link between technology, innovation and feedback or requests from sales and marketing. Individual customers with pending large sales or existing large contracts influence product decisions. Short-term, tactical goals drive decisions, which may lead to changes in strategic product direction and sales strategy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The sales cycle, together with creating collateral and support, is a collaborative effort between product management, product marketing and sales. The focus is on communicating the business benefits delivered by the product, aligned to address market and customer needs. Sales enablement is based around storytelling linked to business outcomes, addressing the competitive strengths and weaknesses of the organizations and competitors' products.

Source: Gartner (May 2021)

Align Responsibilities Across the Product Team to Support the Organization's Culture

Each of the three cultural approaches result in differences in the activities undertaken across the product team. In all three approaches, many tasks are often shared between the various constituents, for example, market segmentation. Collaboration through shared activities is a hallmark of many successful product teams and organizations; however, it is all too easy to regard collaboration as alignment. Equally, without a leader or owner, shared activities often translate into multiple siloed activities that share a name or element of scope only.

To optimize the product team's activities and achieve strategic goals, product leaders can use the associated indicative responsibility matrices in Tables 3 through 5 to assign who should lead, support, contribute and be informed, accordingly. Product leaders should ensure there is only one lead per activity (see Critical Steps for Product Managers: Innovate Product Management Approaches).

These matrices are provided for guidance only and are based on the consolidated input of Gartner analysts and clients. Product leaders should consider the appropriate matrix in conjunction with an assessment of their own teams' capabilities before proposing owners of specific activities (see note 1).

Table 3: Example Technology/Engineering-Led Responsibility Matrix

Activity	Product Management	Product Marketing	Engineering	Sales
Size the Market Opportunity	Lead	Support	Contribute	Informed
Product Strategy/Roadmap	Support	Support	Lead	Informed
Competitive Intelligence	Lead	Support	Contribute	Contribute
Identify Market Need	Support	Contribute	Lead	Contribute
Develop the Product	Support	Informed	Lead	Informed
Quality Assurance and Testing	Support	Informed	Lead	Informed
Product Design/UX	Support	Contribute	Lead	Informed
Prioritize Roadmap Items	Support	Informed	Lead	Informed
Win/Loss Analysis	Contribute	Lead	Informed	Support
Sales Enablement	Contribute	Lead	Informed	Support
Product Launch	Support	Lead	Informed	Support
Pricing and Packaging	Lead	Contribute	Informed	Support
Marketing Collateral	Contribute	Lead	Informed	Support
Influencer Marketing (AR/PR)	Contribute	Lead	Informed	Informed
Manage Customer Feedback	Contribute	Lead	Informed	Support
Measure Customer Satisfaction/CX	Contribute	Lead	Informed	Support
Manage Product Financial/Sales Performance	Contribute	Support	Contribute	Lead
Identify and Promote New Product Ideas	Support	Contribute	Lead	Contribute
Lead = The group that is the owner and leads the activity. Support = The group(s) heavily involved in completing the activity. Contribute = The group(s) providing input to the activity. Informed = The group(s) that need to be told what is happening. AR = analyst relations				

Source: Gartner (May 2021)

Table 4: Example Revenue/Sales-Led Responsibility Matrix

Activity	Product Management	Product Marketing	Engineering	Sales
Size the Market Opportunity	Contribute	Lead	Informed	Support
Product Strategy/Roadmap	Support	Lead	Informed	Contribute
Competitive Intelligence	Contribute	Support	Informed	Lead
Identify Market Need	Support	Support	Informed	Lead
Develop the Product	Support	Informed	Lead	Informed
Quality Assurance and Testing	Support	Informed	Lead	Informed
Product Design/UX	Lead	Contribute	Support	Contribute
Prioritize Roadmap Items	Support	Contribute	Support	Lead
Win/Loss Analysis	Contribute	Support	Informed	Lead
Sales Enablement	Contribute	Support	Informed	Lead
Product Launch	Contribute	Lead	Informed	Support
Pricing and Packaging	Informed	Support	Informed	Lead
Marketing Collateral	Contribute	Lead	Informed	Support
Influencer Marketing (AR/PR)	Informed	Lead	Informed	Support
Manage Customer Feedback	Lead	Informed	Informed	Support
Measure Customer Satisfaction/CX	Contribute	Lead	Informed	Support
Manage Product Financial/Sales Performance	Contribute	Informed	Informed	Lead
Identify and Promote New Product Ideas	Support	Contribute	Informed	Lead

Note: In this organizational culture, sales has a strong influence, or even control, over many product-related activities. As such, sales is effectively the "lead." However, for many activities, sales is not the one actually responsible for doing the work. Instead, such activities are undertaken by those taking the "support" role, who, in effect, "own" the responsibility to complete or manage those activities.

Lead = The group that is the owner and leads the activity.

Support = The group(s) heavily involved in completing the activity.

Contribute = The group(s) providing input to the activity.

Informed = The group(s) that need to be told what is happening.

AR = analyst relations

Source: Gartner (May 2021)

Table 5: Example Market/Customer-Led Responsibilities Matrix

Activity	Product Management	Product Marketing	Engineering	Sales
Size the Market Opportunity	Lead	Support	Informed	Informed
Product Strategy/Roadmap	Lead	Support	Informed	Informed
Competitive Intelligence	Support	Lead	Contribute	Contribute
Identify Market Need	Lead	Support	Informed	Contribute
Develop the Product	Support	Contribute	Lead	Informed
Quality Assurance and Testing	Support	Contribute	Lead	Informed
Product Design/UX	Lead	Contribute	Support	Informed
Prioritize Roadmap Items	Lead	Contribute	Support	Informed
Win/Loss Analysis	Contribute	Lead	Informed	Support
Sales Enablement	Contribute	Lead	Informed	Informed
Product Launch	Support	Lead	Informed	Contribute
Pricing and Packaging	Support	Lead	Informed	Contribute
Marketing Collateral	Contribute	Lead	Informed	Contribute
Influencer Marketing (AR/PR)	Contribute	Lead	Informed	Contribute
Manage Customer Feedback	Lead	Support	Contribute	Support
Measure Customer Satisfaction/CX	Support	Lead	Informed	Contribute
Manage Product Financial/Sales Performance	Contribute	Lead	Informed	Support
Identify and Promote New Product Ideas	Lead	Contribute	Contribute	Contribute
Lead = The group that is the owner and leads the activity. Support = The group(s) heavily involved in completing the activity. Contribute = The group(s) providing input to the activity. Informed = The group(s) that need to be told what is happening. AR = analyst relations				

Source: Gartner (May 2021)

Conclusion

Collaboration across the product management and product marketing roles is key to both their success and that of the organization. By using the responsibility matrices provided in this research note as guidance, coupled with an assessment of their team members' capabilities, product leaders should ensure all relevant activities have owners identified. Once agreed and implemented, the responsibility matrix should be reviewed by the product team, together with sales and engineering leaders, at least annually or when there is a change in corporate strategy or cultural approach. Any updates must be communicated across the organization rather than simply within the product team and immediate stakeholders to ensure alignment.

Evidence

Gartner's 2020 Annual Product Marketing Study was conducted to gather a market landscape for the product marketing role. Topics focused on this year include organizational structure, KPIs, metrics, agility and personalization.

The research was conducted online from March through 8 June 2020 among 190 respondents from midsize and larger (at least \$50 million in revenue) technology organizations in the U.S., Canada, the U.K., Germany and France.

Respondents were screened for product marketing responsibility, with focus placed on being within the product marketing function, demand generation and a small sample from marketing leadership. Respondents were required to have knowledge of the product marketing function within their organization and have decision-making authority for a brand/product line or more. B2C organizations were excluded.

The study was developed collaboratively by Gartner analysts and the Research Data and Analytics team.

Disclaimer: Results of this study do not represent global findings or the market as a whole but reflect the sentiment of the respondents and companies surveyed.

Note 1: Shared Responsibility Matrices

Other tools, such as a responsible, accountable, consulted and informed (RACI) model, can also be useful for this task; however, it can be difficult to get agreement as to who is the person ultimately accountable. This is especially true when all parties feel the activity is "shared" due to the different connotations attached to the definition of "accountable." Often, it is easier to get groups to agree to who leads rather than who is accountable, despite these terms effectively sharing the same context. Note, there should be only one lead per activity.

Recommended by the Authors

Some documents may not be available as part of your current Gartner subscription.

[Critical Steps for Product Managers to Improve Cross-Departmental Collaborations](#)

[Critical Steps for Tech Product Managers: Collaborate to Drive Business](#)

[Influence: The Key to Product Management Success](#)

[Product Marketing and Product Management: Collaboration Is the First Step](#)

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