STRATEGIC ROLES OF PRODUCT MANAGERS IN AGILE TEAMS: A KEY TO ITERATIVE PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

ISSN No: 2349-5677

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Abstract

The agile approach has become a new trend given its inclination for ensuring flexibility, quick responsiveness, and collaboration & communication, and hence, e many organizations practice agile in ways for their product development processes. These teams have diverse roles, including developers, designers, and product managers (PMs). The latter is often responsible for orchestrating how the product development process behaves, what kind of vision enters into it from the customer side, and how successive iterations are triggered to improve on top of each other. However, PMs' main job in most Agile teams is not simply prioritizing features. They are essential as connectors for stakeholder communication, describing the product roadmap and backlog management, and ensuring all associates understand and contribute towards the goals of the product. Abstract—This paper delves into the various strategic roles that product managers play as part of Agile teams and how significantly they impact several critical aspects around the iterative development cycle, product-market fit, and overall success in the market-focusing the product manager role to align its efforts with organizational goals through fast iteration cycles and enhanced customer satisfaction while accelerating time-tomarket and improving innovation. It also explores how the role of PMs was impacted in Agile teams over the successful introduction of more Scrum and Kanban frameworks, as well as the increasing use of data-driven decision-making tools. Conclusion The paper wraps up with advice on things product managers can do to adapt and make the most of their changing roles in Agile teams. It will also cover what role PMs play in ensuring that the team collaborates well, continues to learn what works, and adapts to changes in the market. It includes the importance of a timely feedback loop to adapt products, which further helps in catering to user needs while keeping an eye on priority goals towards the product's existence, which results in successful launches and prolonged market growth.

Keywords: Product Management, Agile Teams, Iterative Development, Scrum, Product Development, Agile Methodology, Stakeholder Management, Continuous Improvement, Product-Market Fit, Time-to-Market, Collaboration, Leadership.

I. INTRODUCTION

Because organizations are required to be agile and respond quickly to evolving market conditions, customer needs, and technological advances, the Agile approach has been widely adopted in product development. Agile's iterative, collaborative, and continuously improving

nature fits well in environments requiring a high degree of flexibility and speed. With this framework, the PM role has become strategic and more diverse, bridging different stakeholders across an organization, prioritizing the work, and ensuring product delivery meets customer needs while aligning with the overall business strategy.

ISSN No: 2349-5677

In an Agile team, the PM's role is to articulate the product vision, drive the product roadmap, and manage the product backlog, plus collaborate with other teams efficiently. The PM is key to the iterative process in Agile but guides it all with the dual lens of customer first and balance with business goals & technical feasibility. They are crucial in carrying the baton of continuous product improvement, where every iteration represents a step closer to market expectations and customer needs [4].

In addition, product managers are expected to serve as the bridge from business strategy to development execution while ensuring that their work closely aligns with bigger company goals. They adapt the product strategy in real-time as per the feedback from customers, stakeholders, and development teams, which is essential to advance by leaps & bounds in Agile environments where priorities could change within no time. Cross-functional Collaboration Management: Finally, PMs are also a prerequisite for managing cross-functional collaboration. This means ensuring that diverse stakeholders from marketing, design, engineering, and sales are on the same page.

This article discusses the changing and strategic nature of product managers on Agile teams. The article explores the role of product managers in steering the iterative development process, facilitating cross-functional collaboration, encouraging customer feedback, generating insights, and keeping the Agile teams funneled toward business goals. Also, The Paper navigates the challenges of the product manager in an Agile environment and how they can adopt unique strategies to ensure their team is successful. We aim to answer this question by comprehensively understanding how product managers enable Agile teams to succeed and deliver quality products in a fast-paced market.

II. STRATEGIC ROLES OF PRODUCT MANAGERS IN AGILE TEAMS

The role of the product manager in an Agile team is strategic and operational, spanning multiple functions and involving a variety of responsibilities. This section outlines the core responsibilities of product managers and the impact of their roles on the iterative development process.

2.1 Defining and Communicating the Product Vision

The product vision is arguably the most strategic role of the product manager (PM) in Agile teams. The product vision is a basis for the entire product development process that helps bring together the team effort and aligns it with customer needs and business goals. The product vision aligns with Agile environments in which development takes place in iterative cycles; team members have different expertise and priorities. With this long-term view, teams are able to find their way through market cycles, technology trade-offs, and customer response.

You go about creating your product vision by understanding the market landscape, customer pain points, and business objectives your product needs to solve. It takes a lot of different

stakeholders to provide input, from executives and customers to sales marketing and development teams. The user & the business goals play a vital role in balancing departments and resources, thus involving the product manager to align the appropriate vision with both individual wants/needs as well as Company strategies [8].

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2.1.1 Role of Product Managers in Defining the Vision

The product manager creates the outline of a product vision and ensures that vision is communicated throughout his company. This means that the product manager should create a vision that clearly articulates the value proposition of the product from the customer's perspective [2]. This includes:

- Know Your Customers: To identify key pain points, wants, and needs, the product
 manager must research her market space, interview customers, and analyze customer
 behavior. This understanding cues the vision, ensuring that the product will actually
 solve customer problems.
- Balancing Customer Needs with the Needs of the Business: A product manager should prioritize customer needs and key functionalities, but they also have to make sure that their product vision aligns with organizational strategic objectives. A product needs to create business value, be it revenue, market share growth, customer retention, or other KPIs.
- Explaining the Unique Selling Point of Product: The vision of the product should explain in a few words how this product is different from similar products. Finally, communicating a distinct value proposition to the customers helps guide all of the team's efforts to create features that provide a real competitive advantage as opposed to differentiability.

Your product vision is not cemented in stone; it will change as market dynamics shift. The vision can not be set in stone; PMs have to be agile and adapt the vision with new insights or changes in customer needs, technology, or business priorities. Its iterative nature resonates well with Agile's focus on continuous improvement, ensuring that the product continues to be useful in time [3].

2.1.2 Communicating the Product Vision Across the Organization

After the product vision is laid out, it is upon PMs to accommodate the communication route for every stakeholder involved. This goes beyond the development team to include marketing, sales, customer support, executives, and external stakeholders, including partners or investors. Effective messaging clarifies the product's goals, audience, and value: it allows everyone else in the organization to get on board.

Communicating the product vision successfully helps remind everyone of why they are working on a particular product in the first place. [2] state that the project manager has been essential in making sure the development team's efforts were in alignment with the product vision and that all shared a common goal. And so, product managers employ a variety of tools and tactics to communicate the vision:

• **Product Vision Document** — A product vision document is a short written statement describing what the product will be, who it's for, its high-level features, and the expected business impact. It will help everybody on your team and all the stakeholders

stay on the same path with respect to the goals of the product.

• Stakeholder Engagement - Product managers hold regular stakeholder meetings to reiterate the product vision, gather feedback, and make sure everyone has aligned expectations. Frequent stakeholder reviews shape the vision in response to new learnings and provide a setting for resolving concerns before they grow.

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- Customer Persona & Journey Map: They allow discussing the vision in a more digestible way for internal teams or stakeholders. Focusing on authentic personas and journeys enables PMs to illustrate how that future state directly solves the highest priority customer pain points & desires thus sustaining its strategic relevance.
- **Product Vision Presentation & Roadmaps:** Product managers usually put together visual presentations like roadmaps or slides to present the product vision in a visually appealing way that is simple to understand. A proper product roadmap captures what and where of a product over time while keeping team efforts aligned with wider company objectives.

Apart from communicating the vision to stakeholders, product managers also ensure that the development team understands the vision as well and makes use of it when making decisions during sprint planning. Scrum ceremonies — backlog grooming sprint planning meetings — are prime opportunities for PMs to communicate the visions of the product and keep development in alignment with it [4].

2.1.3 The Role of the Product Vision in Iterative Development

In the process of iterative development through Agile teams, product vision is a key aspect to keep in mind. Agile has crept in, craving for iterations and faster feedback and improvements in almost every direction — it will be upon the vision to serve as a northern star to trace along its ever-changing journey towards this region of all changes. Regardless of the fact that priorities keep changing sprint by sprint, product teams will not deviate from their overall vision with the help of a product vision.

Both Scrum and Kanban are very continuous feedback loops to refine the process; you will need to change the product vision according to what each iteration teaches you (which happens more often than not). Meetings like sprint reviews and retrospectives allow the product manager to learn from internal stakeholders, as well as end users, which feeds into a vision of the overall product that then redefines its roadmap for future iterations. This feedback helps to ensure that each iteration drives the product closer to meeting user expectations and business objectives[3].

Feature Prioritization — Product managers must prioritize the features that are most aligned and contribute to the ultimate goal of enhancing a product vision while simultaneously managing some of the technical constraints & resource allocation challenges. Development occurs in short cycles, called sprints, where the product manager reviews the backlog, prioritizes it, and ensures that people are working on features that deliver maximum value that is aligned with the vision.

2.1.4 Challenges in Defining and Communicating the Product Vision

Over the Fortune 5000 companies, as well as startups, defining and communicating a

product vision may seem to be an easier CSR (Corporate Social responsibility) activity, but it is one of the dreaded areas in which a Product manager can go wrong at home garden level.

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- Common Goals Among Stakeholders: Different stakeholders may have varying interests that need a common vision. So, features that can help you acquire customers might be prioritized by your marketing team as compared to sales, which may prioritize the feature that converts deals. These are the sorts of conflicting interests that product managers inevitably find themselves trying to balance recognizing compromise while not straying too far from what furthers overarching business goals.
- **Dynamic Market Scene:** The market environment is making a transition, and the needs of the customers are not static. There is a need to adapt and adjust the product vision from the product manager's standpoint. That means you have to keep your finger on the pulse of market trends, customer feedback, and the competitive landscape all of the time.
- **Communication Gaps** The product vision does not easily travel through the different layers of an organization. Unclear communication leads to confusion, misalignment, and opportunity cost. There are abundant types of communication to leverage as a product manager, and getting stakeholders to share your vision should be inspiring.
- **Vision Dilution:** Abstraction introduces a lot of noise into the product vision, which often results in team members not being able to align. A product vision can be framed, e.g., not an intro version but as simple and crystal clear as what it is trying to solve at the core level. The tagline summarizes much of the vision into a single sentence, and it is up to the PMs to ensure that if anyone whether an internal team member or stakeholder, customer (in most cases), or even just a casual observer comes across that sentence, they can process and relate to it.

2.1.5 Best Practices for Defining and Communicating the Product Vision

Below are a few practices product managers can adopt to counteract this challenge:

- **Iterative Refinement:** Continuously improve the product vision through feedback from customers, stakeholders & the development team. Product vision will always be relevant in the face of market trends, and customer needs as long as it is fluid and adaptive.
- **Vision Statements in a Nutshell:** 1-3 sentences where you define who your product will benefit, how it will do so, and follow up with its strategic goals. It should be clear that it has to have the potential to be relatable internally and externally.
- Unlock All Key On Vision Early: Build consensus and buy-in around the vision by involving key stakeholders early in the process when this is defined. There will not be a type of misalignment like this that can be avoided if the product managers also get executives, sales, marketing, and other key departments involved from the onset to ensure that the product vision matches with overall business goals.

Visualize the vision better using Product roadmaps, User journey maps, and Customer personas. It enables stakeholders to visualize potential product changes and links the product directly to customer needs.

Volume-7, Issue-8, 2023 ISSN No: 2349-5677

2.2 Managing the Product Backlog

The product backlog defines the heartbeat of Agile product development and is a key part of strategic management concerns for the products if not the most important one — especially for managers who manage other stakeholders in the Agile process but manage product backlogs. It is effectively a sorted list of features, functions, and over to be constructed, tested, and delivered. The product backlog is the single source of truth for the team regarding what work they will be doing in iteration (or sprint) ordered by priority and business value. Having a well-organized product backlog ensures that the Agile teams will always be able to focus on delivering high-value work that aligns with customer needs and business goals.

- Prioritize the Product Backlog: Effective Product Backlog Priority One of the major challenges to be fought when managing a product backlog is that one has to prioritize it among many stakeholders. The product manager should keep the backlog constantly groomed/adjusted externally to market forces or internally to business goals. Prioritization frameworks: Helping you understand which features or tasks should take priority. Common frameworks include:
- MoSCoW Method (Must have, Should have, Could have, and Won't have): It also
 enables the delivery of fundamental features first while offering some bounce to not-soimportant tasks.
- Kano Model This approach allows the PMs to prioritize features based on how well they correspond to customer satisfaction from basic expectations to delight features. Product managers rank features based on their expected value to the customer and business, compared with the effort that will go into implementing them. This ensures that you are prioritizing high-impact items. When PMs are prioritizing the backlog, they have to balance different points of view. It is important for the team to build features that satisfy users, but it should be equally feasible from a technical standpoint and set toward business objectives. However, in Agile-based frameworks such as Scrum, the product manager also works with the product owner, and they keep refining the backlog to include changes due to customer feedback, market trends, and competitive pressures.
 - [3] even pointed out that one of the most critical drivers for an Agile project's success is how well you can prioritize. An agile PM constantly has to reassess the backlog and priorities so that every sprint ends up delivering customer value by giving out features in order of importance, thus increasing customer satisfaction and ensuring the deliverables are also aligned with business aims.
- Backlog Refinement (Grooming): Backlog management is not a one-off thing; it is a continuous process that needs to be refined. In order to ensure that the backlog is in line with changing market conditions, customer input, and product roadmap, product managers will have to work closely with cross-functional teams such as developers, designers, marketing, and sales. They add new user stories, remove outdated ones, and re-prioritize things as needed a process often referred to as backlog grooming. Grooming the backlog keeps it updated, actionable, and in line with the desired broader product vision.
 - [2] states that the backlog should represent both customer voice and business speak, and



this is only possible through proper stack grooming, which includes multiple stakeholders. Feedback from other departments (customer insights from marketing, market needs from sales, and technical constraints from development) would need to be recognized and extracted by product managers. The product manager, in making sure the backlog continually gets refined, enables the Agile team to be responsive to change but focused on high-value things.

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In addition, user stories are an important component of the product backlog in Agile teams and must be properly drawn up and testable. Each of these user stories should capture the requirements for a new feature or change so that developers can understand what we are trying to achieve and implement accordingly. The product manager ensures that user stories are written to spec and acceptance criteria are clear so the team has the information needed to deliver a quality output [4].

- Constant Adaptation and Feedback in Real-Time: The other most important thing to keep track of in the product backlog is that it should be able to adapt and integrate immediate feedback from your customers, stakeholders, and team members. Agile methods stress iterative development and feedback from clients. Product managers are tasked with constantly feeding this feedback into the product backlog so that products continue to evolve according by reacting to new market conditions.
 - For example, the Product Manager may solicit stakeholder feedback after a sprint review or analyze user tests to see what does and doesn't work. It could have new features, tweaking existing ones, or changes to backlog priorities based on this feedback. Since Agile development is iterative in nature, the backlog itself is constantly being updated so that the dev team always knows what needs to be done and in what order to maximize the impact on the market success for your product.
- How Data Influences Your Backlog Making: With the maturity of Agile practices, more product managers are using data-driven insights to help with backlog management. With the help of tools like analytics platforms, user feedback, and A/B testing outcomes, PMs can decide which feature or change will create the highest return for users. Product managers, for instance, can analyze the usage of their product via Google Analytics, Mixpanel, or Hotjar to identify which feature(s) are most used and which area needs to be improved upon in a product. This information may then be applied to reordering elements in the product backlog, allocating funds to what makes the better impact on the product [2].
- Balancing Scope and Resources: As a product manager, one also needs to master scope management for the product backlog as well so that the team is not inundated with a continuous list of things to do. Avoiding scope creep and making sure that the backlog fits within the time it takes to develop and the resources available are important parts of how product managers help keep a team focused on getting things done. Resource allocation, or more correctly how to "tame" the workload with a limited amount of resources available, is also an important element in backlog management; PMs need to work hand-in-hand with development teams and need to assess what activities can be realistically delivered within each sprint while at the same time keep making sure that all critical features are served by the backlog.

ISSN No: 2349-5677

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2.3 Stakeholder Management and Communication

Managing stakeholders is a key product manager's job. Agile teams need to work continuously in alignment with different stakeholders (executives, customers, marketing, sales, and the development team). Product managers, wherever they are placed inside a company, are always the bridge between these groups and have to ensure that clear communication is strung out when it comes to product goals, features, and timelines.

PMs listen to the customers and voice their needs, understand where the market is heading & make sure that the development team is building features that are going to be most valuable to these users. PMs will also collaborate with other departments, including marketing and sales, to make sure that the product messaging is consistent across all platforms and that the launch is successful.

The product manager must manage expectations over stakeholders as well, communicating the trade-offs between scope, time,e and resources. Effective expectation management minimizes the chance of scope creep, missing deadlines, and other side effects that can derail the team's work [8].

2.4 Driving Iterative Improvement and Adaptation

Continuous improvement of the product and the development process is one of the chief principles behind Agile methodologies. The product managers are the heart of the team and guarantee that each iteration makes the product a better fit to serve customers and achieve business goals. At the end of each sprint, PMs look at feedback from customers, stakeholders, or even team members to see what can be improved and how the next iteration can be done better with new learning incorporated within it.

The PM can always pivot and iterate the product roadmap in response to user insights, which is extremely important for achieving & maintaining product-market fit. When a product feature does not resonate with users or when market conditions change, the product manager should quickly pivot the product direction and reprioritize new features [2]. This means that the product can adapt in real-time based on user feedback and changes in the market.

The product manager also helps establish a culture of continuous improvement within the team, using lessons from every sprint to inform how subsequent sprints are executed. Not only does this iterative process ensure a better quality of product/service, but it also reduces time-to-market, which fuels the Q&A team to stay one step ahead of its competitors [3].

2.5 Fostering Collaboration Across Teams

Cross-team collaboration is one of the foundational aspects of Agile, which inherently emphasizes cross-functional teams and cross-team commitment to deliver high-quality products. One of the most essential and defining elements of Agile product management is the way that product managers build a strong, collaborative spirit within Agile teams–making sure all involved (devs, designers, marketers, salespeople) will contribute toward an end goal: success for their products. Collaboration is not simply about the interaction between its members but also about creating an atmosphere that knows the value of individual contribution, as every piece matters in collective problem-solving.

2.5.1 The Role of the Product Manager in Cross-Functional Collaboration

At the same time, different perspectives, skills, and priorities of each team member should be allowed to come together, providing an efficient working system, which the product manager must ensure within The agile development team. Collaboration extends beyond scheduling daily catchups in Agile contexts, where alignment of objectives, shared understanding, and a synergized approach to product development are crucial to somewhat produce collectively what an individual otherwise cannot attain [4].

ISSN No: 2349-5677

Product managers are the glue that holds every department together, ensuring team members have a clear flow of information. Everyone on the team should know how what they are working on fits into the product strategy and what overall road it is traveling down, which is one of their key jobs. These may include hosting regular meetings, like daily standups, sprint reviews, and retros, where team members give updates on the obstacles they face and provide feedback to each other. They also ensure that communication lines are unlocked and transparent, resolving problems if any occur between team members or departments.

Apart from this, product managers need to act as a bridge between technical and non-technical teams. Developers and engineers look at the technical complexities of the product, while sales and marketing might be concerned with customer-facing features or business outcomes. The role of the product manager is to translate these two sets of requirements so that the development team builds a technically viable product that meets market needs. Thus, strong negotiation skills and active listening are essential, as well as working with creative solutions to both the business goals and technical limits that impact such changes [3].

2.5.2 Building Trust and Psychological Safety

If you want to foster collaboration across teams, the most critical thing is trust and psychological safety. Teams need to feel safe taking risks, trying new approaches, and pushing back against the status quo in Agilist. Individuals can air concerns, ask questions, and offer innovative solutions without danger of ridicule or retribution thanks to psychological safety. Studies have found that teams scoring high on the psychological safety scale are more innovative and perform better as they feel empowered to make decisions and take ownership [9]

It is the responsibility of product managers to foster this atmosphere filled with trust and psychological safety by engaging empathetically, promoting open conversations, and facilitating any conflicts or issues within the team. [2] explains that when product managers create an environment where team members feel free to voice ideas and concerns, collaboration is enhanced, and the quality of the product is improved. A product manager also needs to identify and influence team dynamics — keeping in mind that every member, no matter their background (or domain expertise), should have equal opportunity to contribute wished/needed toward the product making or breaking.

2.5.3 Facilitating Interdisciplinary Knowledge Sharing

The cross-functional team is known for the strongest benefit of bringing together skills that can be effectively utilized to overcome indecision. That is, marketers will comment on

customer preferences, engineers will voice what is technically feasible, and designers will say how it impacts user experience. When these disciplines share their knowledge, the teams are able to build more holistic and unique solutions. Part of what product managers need to be responsible for to enable this exchanging of ideas between disciplines is to make sure all team members have access to the right documentation, game plans & actionable insights, and resources needed.

ISSN No: 2349-5677

Facilitating knowledge transfer arrangements with fellow team members: The product manager will hold sessions where a member can present their work and talk about challenges they have faced and how they overcame them, best practices, etc. Commonly called knowledge-sharing meetings, these sessions encourage the team to learn from each other and adopt new approaches to problem-solving. The product manager also makes sure that lessons learned in these sessions are documented and fed back into the product creation cycle. Platforms such as Confluence or Jira can help teams store and share ideas so knowledge is not lost throughout the product life cycle [2].

Additionally, product managers should foster an environment with a culture of learning where team members not only come prepared with their knowledge but learn new skills as well. Product managers create an environment of continuous learning that enables the team to adapt, innovate, and tackle new problems as they come.

2.5.4 Aligning Teams with Business Objectives

For successful collaboration across functions, it is essential to ensure all the team members share the same idea of larger business goals and customer requirements. This alignment ensures that the entire team focuses on a common goal instead of individual interests or departmental priorities. Product managers create that alignment through the regular repetition of how each team's activities feed toward a larger product strategy and organization objectives.

Part of a product manager's job is to keep in contact with various important stakeholders—executives, sales, marketing, and customer support—to ensure that the product strategy aligns with business goals. Communication and alignment: Sharing updates about business objectives, product metrics, and how our work contributes to the larger picture helps bring all teammates to the same page to focus on delivering value for customers and driving success for the business. According to [2], teams that know how their individual work affects the larger business goals become more motivated and productive and deliver better results.

Like the older style of product management, an Agile product manager must also make trade-offs between competing demands, between customer requests on one hand and business priorities on the other, or management of technical debt versus new feature development. Through transparent trade-offs that match the stakeholders to the product vision, product managers allow team members to remain focused and productive by focusing on the things that matter most.

2.5.5 Overcoming Collaboration Barriers

Even though we tend to talk a lot about collaboration in Agile teams, there are various barriers that can obstruct team collaboration. Such barriers could be cultural, communication, and goal misfits. As an example, many teams work remotely or across time

zones; they may struggle to stay in sync with each other, creating issues of delays/miscommunication. In addition, functional silos can lead to tension between departments,s and each functiopursuingng its own objectives without consideration for the overall product strategy.

ISSN No: 2349-5677

Gaps like these can only be closed when product managers proactively engage in cross-team interaction, build infrastructure (i.e., tools and processes) for asynchronous communications, and ensure mutual respect and understanding of each other first—most gaps we see also stems from a lack of empathy towards others' craft. They must also be very good at mediating conflicts created by different priorities or views from teams. If product managers can meet these challenges head-on while maintaining an open and inclusive culture, they will ensure that collaboration continues to flourish in the most adverse of conditions [6].

2.5.6 Leveraging Collaborative Tools

To collaborate, you need tools to facilitate communication, track progress, and document decisions. Every team or process needs a collaborative tool, and it is upon the product manager to make sure all necessary collaborative tools are available for the team. Agile workflows incorporate tools like Jira, Trello, Slack, and Confluence to improve communication, add structure around development tasks, and serve as a documentation repository.

Not only do these tools help keep team members organized, but they also provide a single place you can go to share information, feedback, and insights. These are the tools product managers make sure everyone on their team is using to promote cross-discipline collaboration and provide stakeholders with up-to-date insights into progress. Providing the best collaborative tools for the team enables product managers to foster a more efficient and effective collaboration that will speed up product development.

III. CONCLUSION

In Agile, the product managers serve a more strategic purpose on the team and guide the iterative process of building the right product while ensuring that it is closely aligned with customer needs as well as organizational objectives. Through establishing the product vision, prioritizing and managing the backlog, interacting with stakeholders, and supporting continuous improvement or iterative development, product managers are responsible for delivering high-quality products that meet market needs.

They are important because they ensure Agile teams remain focused, learn by adapting to feedback, and prioritize what delivers the best value. With what seems like a never-ending evolution of Agile methodologies and their integration with adjacent practices like Scrum and Kanban, product managers will only gain responsibility. Strategic vision aside, product managers need to enlist support, cut through a lot of processes, and be effective facilitators in iterations or cycles to achieve the right product-market fit and go-to-market success.

The importance of product managers in Agile teams has become even more critical – their strategic role is paramount within a world focused on customer satisfaction and innovation. They are essential to achieving the product goals, shortening time-to-market, and ensuring that

the product can develop as required by market conditions and customers' expectations.

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ISSN No: 2349-5677

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