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OPTIMIZATION OF COMMUNICATIONS IN SOFTWARE PRODUCT MANAGEMENT

Summary. *For a product manager who performs primarily coordinating and consolidating functions in the process of software product development, high efficiency is extremely important. However, factors that are not directly related to the professional or personal characteristics of the product manager may adversely affect its effectiveness.*

As part of the study, which was based on the processing of a large array of factual data, we identified the most typical factors that characterize the work of a product manager - from the complexity of communication with stakeholders to the lack of direct leverage over the team. We also made a number of recommendations designed to compensate and eliminate the negative impact of the above factors. In particular, such recommendations included the implementation of a goal monitoring system and communication support, both inside and outside the team.

Key words: *product manager, software development, development process optimization, stakeholders, product management.*

Today, the product manager (PM - further) is a key role in the development of the vast majority of software products. Due to differences in the structures, goals and principles of operation of different companies, the

functional responsibilities and powers of the product manager may differ - but the coordinating and consolidating functions are almost always inherent [2].

In the course of our research, the task was set to identify a list of factors that complicate the work of a product manager and negatively affect its effectiveness. Also, the objectives of the study included the development of recommendations that can significantly compensate for the impact of negative factors or level them to optimize the work of the product manager.

Regardless of the direction of development and structure of the company, the work of the product manager is complicated by a large number of factors. However, based on the analysis of a large data set [6] and our own expertise, we can form a list of those challenges that:

- First, they are the most typical – found in the work of most PMs.
- Secondly, they have the most noticeable negative impact, significantly reducing the productivity of the specialist and the efficiency of his work.

Fig. 1. Most significant PM challenges

The list of such factors includes:

1. Complex and overloaded communications with stakeholders. Despite the fact that the actual communicative function is key for the product manager, the complexity of communications, enhanced by political processes in the company [2], significantly reduces the efficiency of the specialist, even with high qualifications.

2. The need to balance the interests of users and stakeholders. Nominally, these interests should coincide or complement each other, but in practice much of the efforts of the product manager is spent on finding compromises between these two groups.

3. The need for cross-product interaction. After a product company reaches a certain scale, the level of interdependence between its individual structural units and products begins to grow exponentially. The higher the rate of such dependence, the more of the product manager's resources will be spent on resolving current and potential conflicts.

4. Lack of direct leverage over the team. Despite the formal affiliation to the managerial part of the staff, the product manager does not have the manager's tools to directly influence the members of his subordinate team. That is why in the absence of leadership qualities or the appropriate level of expertise, the product manager actually loses influence over the end result, and its functions are reduced to the actual statement of the existing state of development.

5. The need for constant denials and restrictions. In the absence of direct leverage described in the previous paragraph, the product manager is forced to systematically limit the interests of key participants in the development process - from end users to stakeholders and team members. In the absence of a well-established decision-making process or a clear hierarchy, this leads either to a significant increase in time or to loss of control over the software development process due to ignoring the decisions made by the PM.

1. This list is not exhaustive and complete - however, these factors can be considered as those that cause the most negative impact on the work of the product manager.

2. In order to compensate and eliminate the negative impact of the above factors, the product manager may follow the following recommendations:

3. Implementation of the system of goal setting and monitoring. Formalization and hierarchization of goal-setting processes - both at the level of the product company as a whole and at the level of individual products - allows to reduce the negative impact of the human factor on business processes. At the same time, the current system of monitoring the implementation of the set goals allows you to review priorities in a timely manner without spending extra effort by the product manager and other team members [3; 4].

4. Management of expectations. The formation of an objective "expectations map" by the product manager of the main participants in the development process is impossible without constant communication with stakeholders. At the same time, the two-way nature of communication allows the product manager not only to obtain the information necessary for the successful implementation of coordination functions, but also to convey to the participants of the development process their own information aimed at forming realistic expectations. Creating a list of rules for communications at this level avoids conflict situations associated with unreasonably high expectations.

5. Support for communications and collaborations. The product manager acts both as a source of information and as a consumer of information, and the first functional role is often key. The construction and formalization of the communication system allows the specialist to promptly and motivatedly notify all participants in the development process of any changes. A similar scheme can be used to build cross-product interaction - relatively small resource costs for the formation of a communication system [7] will prevent the conflicts mentioned above.
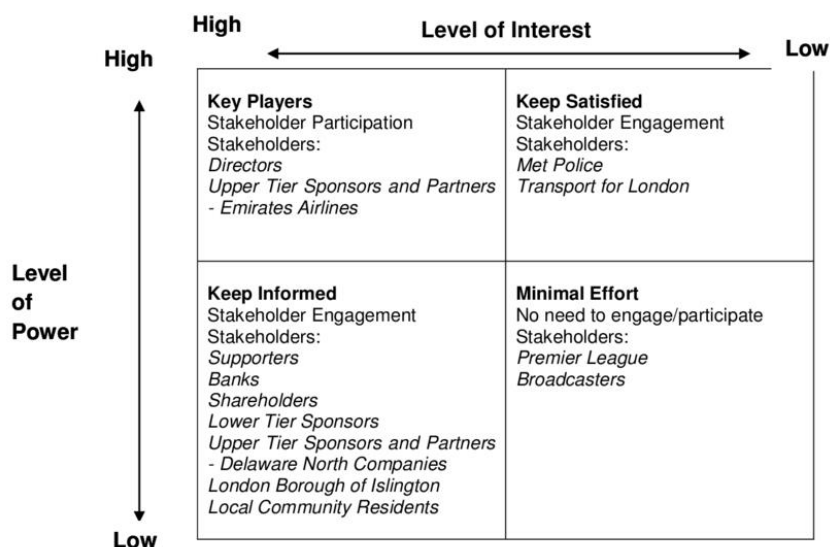
Fig. 2. Stakeholders' communication matrix

Optimization of interaction with the team. The key function of the product manager in this aspect is the filtering and adaptation of information that comes to the team from other participants in the development process - especially management and customers. Optimized crisis management affects the intensity of the impact of these negative factors only indirectly - but due to the growth of team loyalty solves the problem of lack of direct leverage.

As in the case of negative factors, the above list of recommendations is not exhaustive - it only outlines the areas in which the product manager should move to optimize the development process. In conclusion, it should be noted that all these recommendations can be effective only if a high level of motivation and qualification of the specialist, as well as a conscious minimization of internal political processes by the company's management [5]. Thus, we can say that the product manager can overcome or compensate for the influence of negative factors - but to maximize efficiency requires the optimization of business processes or a radical restructuring of communications in the product company.

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