Product-Led Alliance

State of Product Management *Report*

2026

Created in partnership with:

ProductPlan

Contents

Key *findings*

Half (49%) of respondents cite resource and capacity constraints as the top cause of roadmap misalignment.

When it comes to AI, most teams are still in the very early stages: only **37%** use AI for limited workflows, while **32%** are experimenting.

40% of teams say their strategy, discovery, roadmap, and launch plans live across multiple tools with limited or no integration.

Nearly **three quarters of PMs (73%)** expect the role to become more hybrid, blending responsibilities across product, design, and engineering.

Confidence that non-product teams understand product strategy averages just **3 out of 5**, highlighting a gap between communication and shared understanding.

Over 60% of teams cite leadership escalations or new directives as the main reason priorities change frequently.

Thanks to *our contributors*

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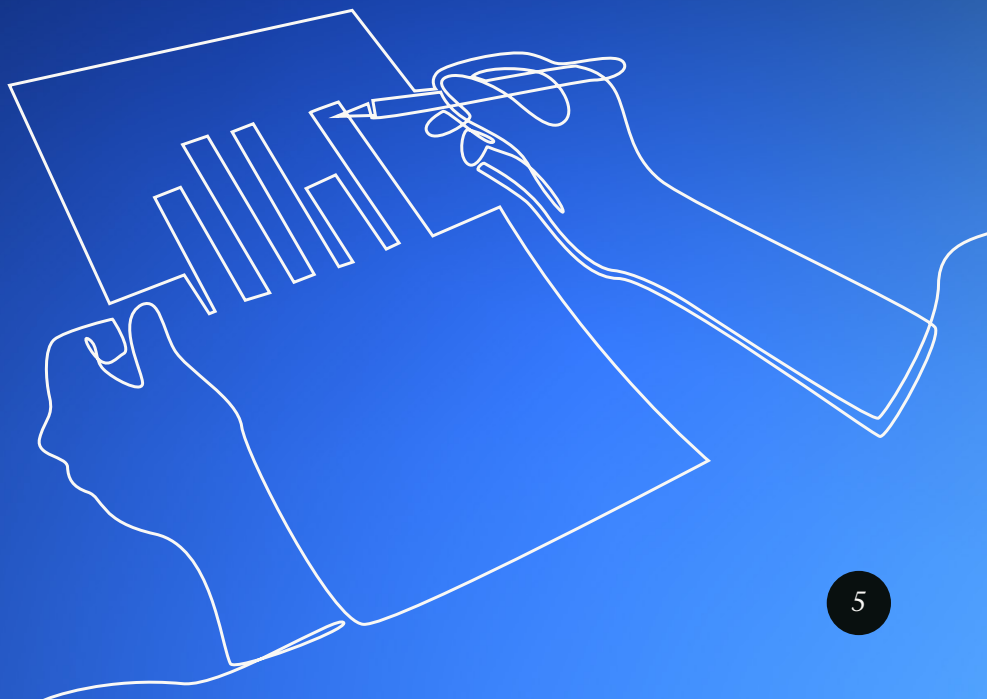
ProductPlan Executive *summary*



Introduction:
Product at an inflection point

This year marks the eleventh edition of ProductPlan's State of Product Management report. Over the past decade, this study has traced how product organizations have matured – from project coordination to strategic leadership, from roadmap transparency to outcome accountability. Each year has surfaced incremental shifts in practice. The 2026 findings suggest something more structural.

In Q4 2025, we surveyed nearly 250 product professionals across industries, company sizes, and organizational maturity stages to understand how the discipline is operating under current conditions. **56%** of respondents identified as individual contributors and **43%** as product leaders. The majority work in hybrid environments, reflecting the distributed nature of modern product teams.

What emerges from this year's data is not a portrait of dysfunction, nor one of unqualified progress. It's a portrait of a discipline operating inside intensifying pressure and unprecedented innovation. Growth expectations remain ambitious, yet capital markets have become more demanding about return and efficiency. AI adoption has accelerated across enterprises. Boards increasingly evaluate product organizations not simply by delivery cadence but by their ability to translate innovation investment into measurable economic impact.

In that context, product leadership has assumed a more explicitly financial character. Roadmap decisions are interpreted as capital allocation choices, just as engineering bandwidth represents investment capacity. Prioritization debates resemble portfolio strategy conversations, **and product leaders are expected to articulate not only what will be built, but how and when those initiatives will move retention curves, margin profiles, and competitive position.**

Our survey results reveal that product organizations are navigating this environment with only moderate confidence: Alignment to company goals averages **3.5 out of 5**. Confidence in measuring business impact averages **3 out of 5**. Priorities shift with regularity after agreement, and leadership escalations are cited as the most common reason for those shifts.

These findings suggest that strategy exists and that teams are directionally aligned. They also suggest that conviction under scrutiny remains uneven. When economic accountability intensifies, moderate clarity is often insufficient, and the stakes have never been higher, or more costly, for teams who get it wrong.

Introduction: Product at an inflection point

That cost is not theoretical. In environments where software investment represents one of the largest discretionary capital allocations in the enterprise, misaligned product decisions accumulate downstream consequences. They affect customer retention curves, sales cycle length, margin expansion, and competitive positioning. Boards experience these consequences not as roadmap shifts but as missed revenue targets, compressed multiples, or stalled innovation narratives.

McKinsey's 2025 innovation research reinforces how consequential disciplined allocation has become. Organizations that embed transparency into innovation investment processes are more than twice as likely to outperform peers in launching innovations on time and scaling them effectively. The differentiator is not creativity. It is allocation clarity.

Bain's long-running research on software R&D performance underscores the same dynamic from a financial perspective. Only roughly a quarter of CTOs report that their R&D investments meet board-level expectations for return. In most cases, the gap traces back to unclear prioritization logic and weak linkage between engineering work and economic outcomes.

The implication for product leaders is direct. In 2026, product management is inseparable from capital discipline. When judgment lacks structure, traceability weakens. When traceability weakens, communication becomes persuasion rather than proof.

Three structural conditions recur across both quantitative data and qualitative voices in this year's report:

Prioritization

- Understood as the disciplined practice of selecting among competing initiatives in ways that reflect strategic and financial priorities.

Impact

- Defined as the explicit linkage between product decisions and measurable business outcomes.

Communication

- The mechanisms through which the reasoning behind those decisions travels intact across teams, executives, and boards.

The sections that follow examine how these conditions interact in modern product organizations. We will explore how acceleration through AI expands the field of possibility without automatically strengthening decision architecture. We will examine why organizations in transition toward product-led models often experience instability before coherence. We will analyze how fragmentation across systems erodes narrative continuity and weakens executive trust. Finally, we will describe the structural evolution toward a Product Intelligence Platform – an integrated environment designed to embed judgment, traceability, and communication directly into product workflows.

For product leaders, the question in 2026 and beyond is no longer whether teams can build and build with velocity thanks to AI coding tools. It is whether they can build with economic certainty and customer centrality. For executives and boards, the question is whether product organizations can demonstrate that innovation investment is being allocated with discipline.

Our eleventh annual report suggests that the competitive advantage in 2026 lies in the architecture that supports conviction.

An expanding field *of possibility*

Every product organization operates within constraints. There are always more ideas than capacity, more signals than time, more ambitions than capital. What has changed in recent years is the density of possibilities within an organization's constraints.

Advances in AI-assisted workflows have lowered the cost of generating and refining ideas, enabling teams to synthesize customer feedback more rapidly, draft product requirement documents in minutes rather than hours, and prototype concepts with unprecedented speed. External research reflects this acceleration. In a December 2025 survey of 1,750 product leaders, Noam Segal, AI Insights Manager at Figma and former UXR leader at Zapier, Airbnb, Meta, Twitter, Intercom, and Wealthfront, and Lenny Rachitsky, co-founder of Localmind, former product leader for Airbnb's supply growth, angel investor, and creator of Lenny's Newsletter on Substack, considered the #1 business newsletter for product, growth, and career advice, conducted a survey on AI productivity to explore what AI is doing for people, which AI tools have product-market fit, where the biggest opportunities are, and implications for the future.

The team found that **62%** of respondents reported saving at least four hours per week through AI use, and nearly **70%** reported improvements in the quality of their output

The tools that have emerged over the last 18 months are real, and their effects are astounding.

Our survey reflects similar patterns: respondents most frequently cite AI's value in summarizing customer feedback, drafting research briefs, and structuring qualitative input into usable insight. These gains are meaningful and return time to product managers and increase the volume of considered options.

Yet acceleration at the execution layer of the individual contributors and junior product managers we spoke to does not automatically translate into strategic coherence. Fewer respondents report that AI has increased their confidence in prioritization decisions–perhaps one of the most challenging aspects of a PM's role. The difference between generating options and selecting among them remains substantial.

An expanding field of possibility

Setu Shah, Senior Director of Global Product Strategy at Oracle, articulated the inflection point with precision when he observed that execution has become faster, but thinking has become the differentiator:

"Execution got faster, but thinking became the real differentiator. The teams that win aren't the ones that ship the most – they're the ones that choose deliberately."

His remark captures the structural shift underway. Acceleration reduces the cost of building, but it doesn't reduce the cost of being wrong.

In a denser field of possibility, judgment becomes more consequential. The act of selection determines not only what is built, but how capital is deployed. When selection is disciplined and traceable, alignment strengthens. When it is implicit or inconsistent, escalation becomes more likely.

This dynamic brings the first structural theme into sharper focus. Prioritization in 2026 is less about instinct and more about architecture. It requires systems that make tradeoffs explicit and connect them to strategic and financial priorities.

Alignment and the *economics of conviction*

Our 2026 survey data suggests that alignment exists, but with moderate confidence. Respondents rate alignment between product outcomes and company goals at an average of **3.5 out of 5**. Alignment between roadmaps and product strategy scores slightly higher, at **3.6**. These figures indicate directional agreement exists, but they don't guarantee teams are experiencing resilience under pressure, when we consider that confidence in measuring business impact averages **3 out of 5**.

When product leaders cannot confidently articulate how initiatives influence revenue, retention, or margin, they enter executive conversations at a structural disadvantage. **In capital-aware environments, ambiguity invites intervention.**

Bain's research provides context for this dynamic. When only roughly a quarter of CTOs believe their R&D investments meet board expectations, the issue is rarely effort – it's economic clarity. Boards evaluate innovation through the lens of return on invested capital, and roadmaps that cannot demonstrate disciplined allocation are exposed to skepticism and redirects.

Ashay Satav, Director of Product Managmeent at eBay, observed that teams often struggle not with understanding strategy, but with understanding what is rewarded, speaks directly to this misalignment: **"Most teams aren't confused by what the strategy says; they're confused by what actually gets rewarded, prioritized, and reviewed. When OKRs, roadmaps, funding decisions, and exec narratives drift even slightly, teams default to their local goals."**

Reward systems mirror capital incentives. When product decisions are not consistently framed in terms of enterprise metrics, executives experience a visibility gap. Leadership escalations, cited by **60.2%** of respondents as the most frequent override factor in prioritization, should be interpreted in that context. They represent moments when executive accountability intersects with incomplete traceability. In this environment, escalation becomes a mechanism for reasserting economic alignment.

Alignment and the economics of conviction

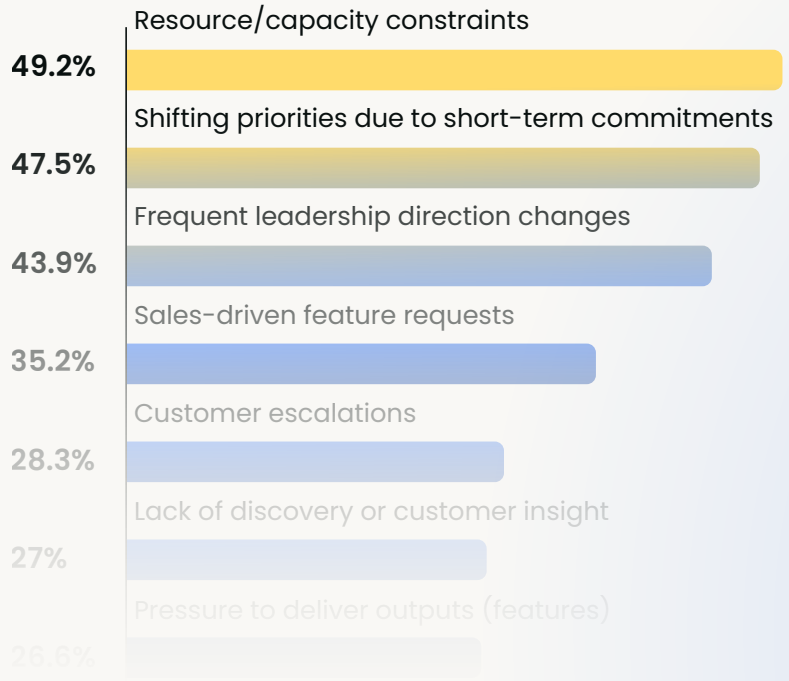
Prioritization and traceability are inseparable in this context. Prioritization determines the selection of initiatives. Impact ensures that the rationale behind those selections is legible across the organization. Communication enables that rationale to travel intact between product, finance, sales, and executive leadership.

Without this triad functioning cohesively, alignment becomes conditional. It holds in stable environments and weakens under scrutiny.

The data reinforces this fragility. When asked about the primary drivers of roadmap misalignment, nearly half of respondents cited resource constraints and shifting short-term commitments. These pressures are consistent with environments where tradeoffs are being made, but not always within a shared economic framework.

Ashay Satav adds a layer of precision to that observation: **"Better decisions with less alignment overhead comes from making the economic tradeoffs visible early."**

Visibility reduces overhead, but structured visibility reduces escalation.



The turbulence *of transition*

Our survey's maturity analysis reveals a pattern that merits close attention. Fully product-led organizations report stronger alignment scores, while organizations transitioning from project-based to product-led models report greater instability. This turbulence reflects structural evolution rather than failure.

As organizations adopt product-led operating models, expectations expand. Teams are asked to own outcomes rather than outputs. Decision rights shift closer to product, and accountability increases. Yet the systems that support disciplined judgment and traceability often lag behind the rhetoric of transformation.

Fûgel Huisman, Head of Product at Tietoevry, described the translation challenge inherent in balancing short-term revenue pressures with longer-term growth and margin objectives: **"In our strategy, we aim to balance short-term revenue, growth, and margin; as a consequence, product teams find it sometimes difficult to translate the strategy to concrete product roadmap decisions."**

Translation, in this sense, is not linguistic; it's architectural. Strategic intent must be decomposed into prioritization criteria that are explicit and consistently applied.

McKinsey's innovation research reinforces this necessity. Organizations that embed transparent allocation frameworks are significantly more likely to bring innovations to market on time and scale them successfully. The differentiator lies in governance and accountability structures rather than in idea generation.

During transition phases, judgment is exercised within evolving systems. Without robust traceability and communication mechanisms, product leaders may find themselves navigating competing narratives about value. The instability observed in the survey reflects that dynamic.

Prioritization architecture matures over time. In organizations where it remains underdeveloped, volatility persists.

Fragmentation and *narrative continuity*

Our survey also highlights another structural challenge. **40%** of respondents report that product strategy, discovery, roadmaps, and launch plans live across multiple tools with limited integration, and only **22.5%** report that these activities live within one primary system

Fragmentation of this nature has implications beyond efficiency. It disrupts narrative continuity when the reasoning behind a discovery insight may not be visible when reviewing roadmap decisions months later. The economic hypothesis supporting a feature may not be easily retrievable during quarterly performance discussions.

Raouf Carmi, VP of Product Management at Wolters Kluwer, reinforced this in pointing to **"competing priorities and misalignment in how information flows through teams"** when asked what most often prevents product strategy from being communicated clearly and consistently across teams.

When reasoning is distributed across disconnected systems, traceability weakens. When traceability weakens, judgment appears episodic rather than cumulative.

Communication in this context isn't presentation; it's continuity, and it preserves the economic logic of decisions across time and organizational layers.

Steven Cohn, CEO of ProductPlan and four-time founder's reminder that a roadmap is fundamentally a communication tool remains central: **"In discovery and prioritization, the big risk is that too much is lost in translation. The old game of telephone where pains and needs get passed down creates a lot of misunderstanding along the way. This impacts prioritization as well, where the loudest voice often shapes what is placed on the roadmap."**

Yet roadmaps embedded within fragmented ecosystems cannot fully sustain the economic reasoning required under capital scrutiny.

Prioritization architecture requires integrated systems. Without them, even well-intentioned decisions struggle to maintain coherence.

Diagnostic: *How to tell if your prioritization architecture is weak*

Many product leaders sense instability without being able to name it. The following signals, drawn from this year's data, often indicate structural weakness in judgment architecture:

- Priorities frequently change after executive review.
- Leadership escalations override structured prioritization processes.
- Teams report moderate confidence in measuring business impact.
- Strategy, discovery, roadmap, and launch live across disconnected systems.
- Formal scoring frameworks are used inconsistently or not at all.

Individually, each signal may appear manageable. Collectively, they suggest that judgment is being exercised without consistent traceability and communication reinforcement.

Organizations that address these signals deliberately tend to see volatility decrease and executive trust increase.

AI, signal, *and selection*

AI's role in modern product organizations illustrates the distinction between signal generation and signal selection. Our survey indicates that teams use AI most frequently for summarizing customer feedback and drafting research outputs. Lenny's survey reinforces this pattern, noting that PMs most often apply AI to drafting PRDs, creating mockups, and improving communication

Ashay Satav's insight that AI can surface patterns humans might miss highlights its contribution to signal processing and looks to it to help **"teams define leading indicators, design clean experiments, and interpret noisy results. This is where outcome-focus often breaks down due to weak measurement literacy."**

Signal processing enhances traceability by structuring insight more efficiently.

However, signal processing doesn't replace selection. Determining which pattern merits investment requires structured judgment, economic framing, and alignment with strategic objectives.

IBM's 2025 research underscores the broader enterprise challenge we're describing. While a majority of executives expect AI to drive innovation, relatively few organizations have integrated AI into new business models that materially shift economic outcomes. Adoption without architectural redesign does not guarantee impact.

AI expands the field of possible moves. Prioritization architecture determines which moves become commitments.

Practical architecture: *Structured feature scoring*

In capital-aware environments, structured scoring transforms prioritization from negotiation into discipline. Several models are widely used across high-performing product organizations:

Model	Best used when	How it strengthens prioritization
RICE (Reach, Impact, Confidence, Effort)	Comparing multiple feature ideas	Forces explicit impact assumptions and confidence weighting
WSJF (Weighted Shortest Job First)	Portfolio-level backlog prioritization	Connects prioritization to economic cost of delay
Economic Hypothesis Statement	Executive-facing decisions	Ties initiative directly to revenue, retention, or margin movement
70/20/10 Allocation Model	Strategic portfolio planning	Balances incremental, adjacent, and transformational investment

Organizations that consistently apply structured models reduce escalation because tradeoffs are documented and economically framed from the outset.

Lenny Rachitsky's research adds another dimension. In his large-scale AI productivity survey, PMs reported that AI helps them draft PRDs (**21.5%**), create mockups (**19.8%**), and improve communication (**18.5%**). Far fewer reported using AI for upstream discovery or roadmap ideation.

The pattern suggests that AI is accelerating production tasks more rapidly than it's strengthening strategic selection.

As tools reduce friction in building, the relative importance of disciplined judgment increases rather than decreases.

Only 13.5% report consistent use of formal scoring frameworks.

AI accelerates production tasks;
selection remains human.

The growth *architect*

As expectations expand, the PM role increasingly resembles that of a portfolio architect. Nearly three-quarters of our respondents expect product roles to become more hybrid and technically fluent. Product leaders are being asked to operate across strategy, customer insight, technical literacy, and economic accountability.

At the same time, **72%** report spending a quarter or less of their time on strategy, and alarmingly, a meaningful portion report spending closer to **10%** or less.

The implication is structural: Organizations expect product leaders to think like growth architects while allocating them only a fraction of their time to architectural thinking.

The majority of their effort remains absorbed by coordination, documentation, tactical prioritization, and the ongoing negotiation of competing requests. The surface area of the role expands while the time reserved for deliberate strategic reasoning contracts.

In capital-aware environments, this imbalance becomes consequential.

Boards do not evaluate product functions on backlog hygiene. They evaluate them on durable growth, capital efficiency, and defensible differentiation. Executives expect product leaders to weigh tradeoffs across risk profiles, time horizons, and margin implications and to operate with portfolio discipline.

When most product professionals spend only a small percentage of their time on strategy, judgment becomes reactive rather than architectural. Decisions are made under constraint, not within a designed framework. Prioritization becomes a response to pressure rather than an expression of long-term capital logic.

This is where judgment architecture becomes indispensable.

Without explicit structures that embed strategic reasoning into daily workflows – structured scoring models, economic hypothesis framing, integrated signal synthesis, and persistent traceability – product leaders are left to exercise judgment episodically, often under scrutiny rather than ahead of it.

The paradox is stark: the role is expanding into one that resembles capital stewardship, even as the time available for strategic design shrinks.

Growth architecture cannot be improvised between meetings. It must be embedded in systems that preserve reasoning, surface tradeoffs, and connect initiatives to measurable economic impact.

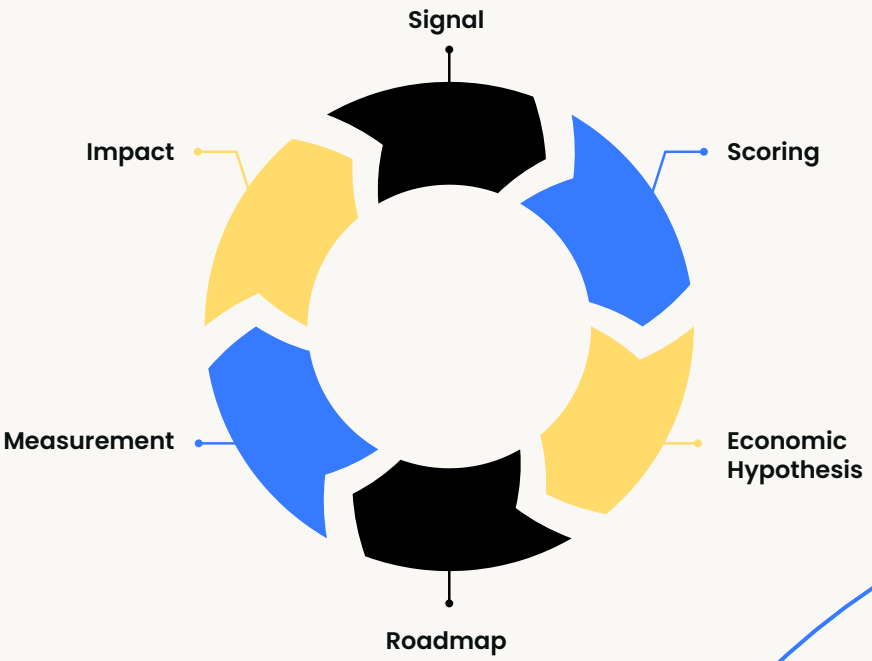
Where those systems exist, product leaders earn conviction. Where they don't, escalation fills the gap.

The future of the discipline does not depend on whether product managers are capable of strategic thinking. It depends on whether organizations create the conditions in which strategic thinking is structurally sustained.

The product intelligence *platform*

Steven Cohn often describes the core challenge of modern product leadership as identifying the signal in a field crowded with noise. That framing reflects a broader architectural need.

Roadmaps remain essential communication tools: they clarify commitments and create shared understanding. Yet in capital-intensive environments, roadmaps must sit within a larger system that integrates signal, scoring, economic hypotheses, and measurement continuity. The Product Intelligence Platform represents that evolution.



Rather than functioning as a static planning layer, it integrates:

- Continuous customer and market signal ingestion
- Structured prioritization criteria tied to economic outcomes
- Explicit documentation of tradeoffs and assumptions
- Roadmap communication that preserves reasoning
- Closed-loop measurement that links outcomes back to hypotheses

In such an architecture, judgment is not episodic. It's embedded. Impact is not reconstructed during quarterly reviews; it's present from the outset. Communication carries economic logic rather than summaries of activity.

In environments where capital scrutiny is constant, and velocity continues to increase, this architecture produces something scarce: certainty.

Conclusion:
Coherence under scrutiny

ProductPlan's eleventh annual State of Product Management report captures a discipline operating at a structural inflection point. Acceleration has expanded what's possible. AI has reduced the cost of producing artifacts, synthesizing signals, and shipping new capabilities. At the same time, capital scrutiny has intensified: growth expectations remain high, while tolerance for misallocation has narrowed.

In this environment, product organizations are evaluated not on motion, but on discipline.

The field of possibility will continue to grow denser as tools become more powerful and prototyping cycles compress further. What will not compress is the responsibility of selecting among competing initiatives in ways that align with enterprise objectives and withstand financial scrutiny.

The differentiator, therefore, is not velocity alone. It's coherence.

Prioritization structures the act of selection. It determines which initiative merits commitment in a crowded landscape of alternatives.

Impact connects that commitment to measurable economic consequence, allowing product leaders to demonstrate how resource allocation translates into revenue, retention, margin, or competitive advantage.

Communication ensures that the reasoning behind those commitments travels intact across teams, executives, and boards, preserving conviction rather than resetting it at each review cycle.

Organizations that design for judgment architecture experience fewer escalations because their decisions are legible. They achieve stronger alignment because tradeoffs are explicit. Their product systems compound clarity over time, rather than eroding it.

As possibility expands in the era of rapid AI development, certainty becomes scarce. In capital-aware markets, scarcity commands value.

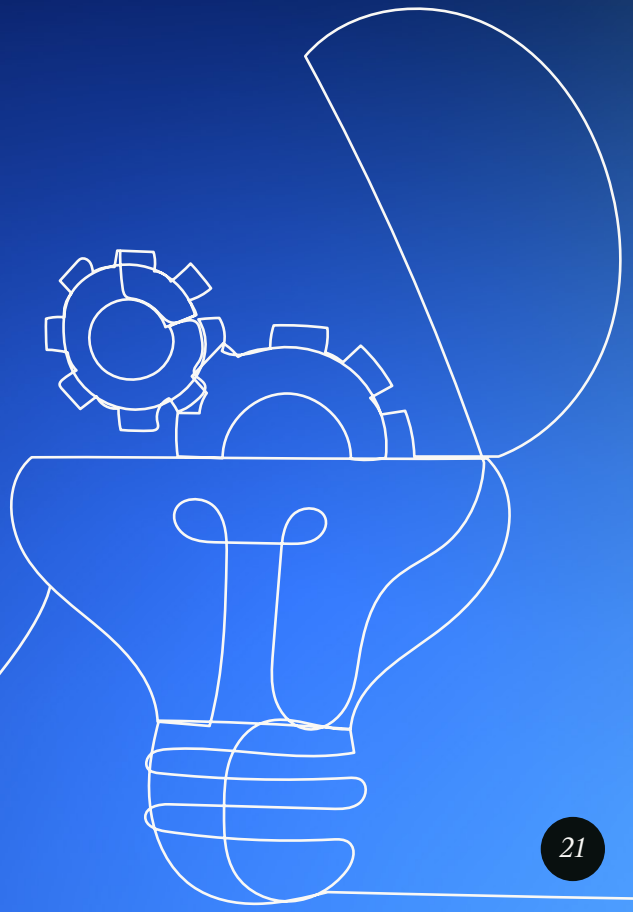
The organizations that cultivate certainty through disciplined judgment, embedded traceability, durable communication, and decision architecture will shape not only what is built, but how capital and enterprise value compounds.

Part 1

Who *took part*

Before we dive into the key data surrounding product management in 2026, it's useful to understand the context behind our data to know how similar (or different) your situation is to those in our dataset.

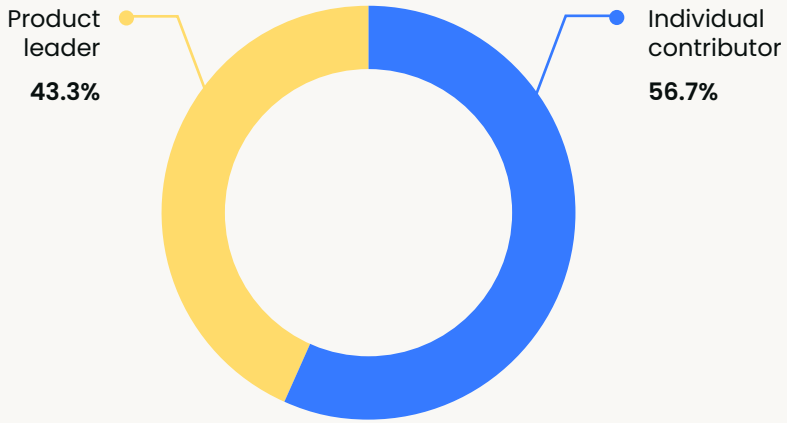
This section outlines key demographic information, including seniority, industry, and org size.

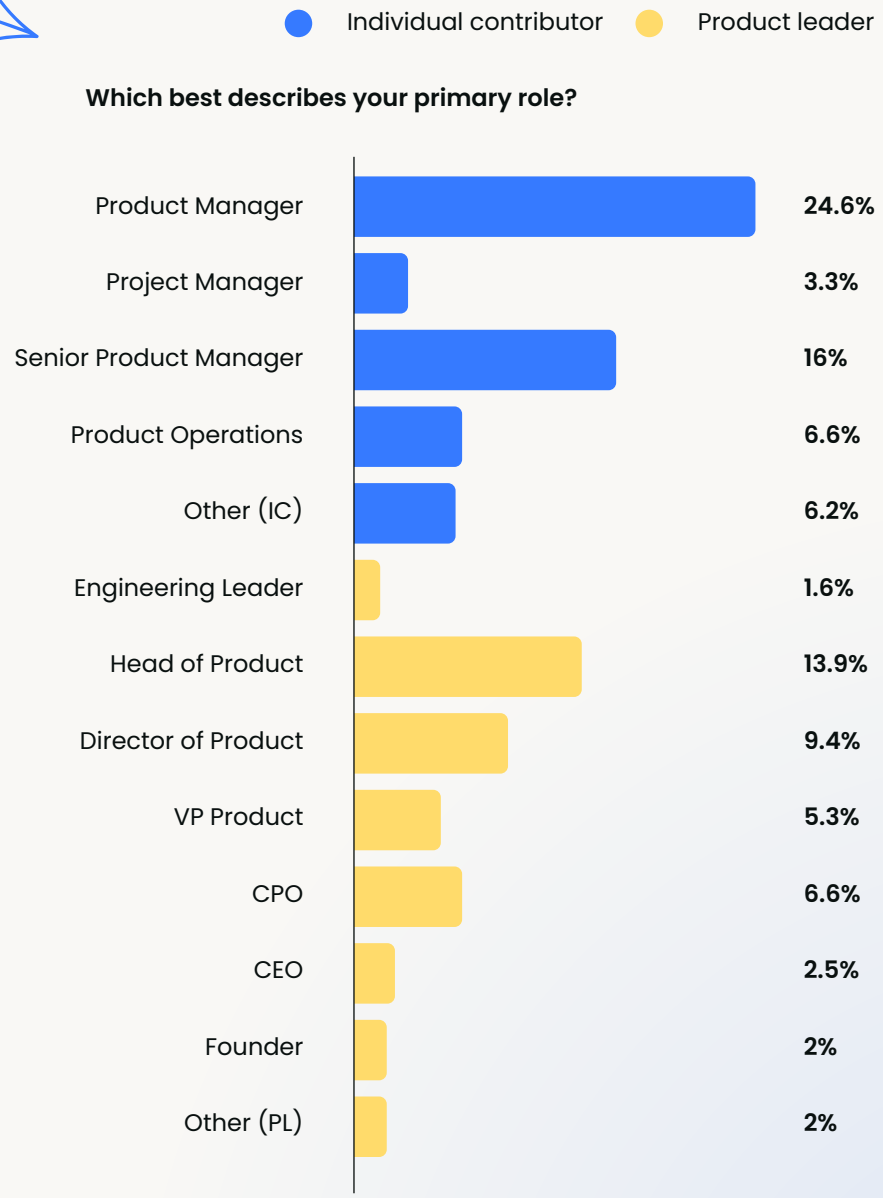


Seniority

First, we looked at the seniority split of our respondents. A quarter of respondents (**24.6%**) are Product Managers, followed by **16%** who are Senior Product Managers.

We also identified each title as an individual contributor (IC) or product leader (PL), as seen below. Just over half of the respondents (**56.7%**) are individual contributors, while **43.3%** are product leaders. Respondents who selected "other" were individually coded.



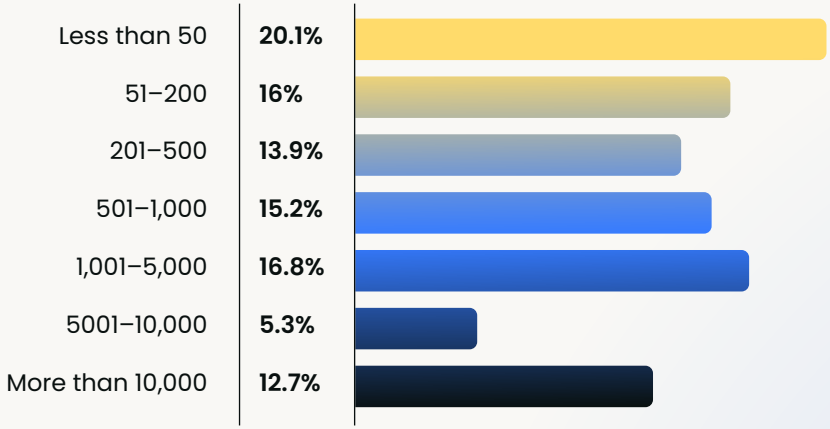


Who took part

Company *headcount*

Next, we were interested in company size, as larger orgs will have differing priorities than smaller ones. One in five respondents (**20.1%**) works at a small company with fewer than 50 employees. Overall, the split between each category is fairly balanced.

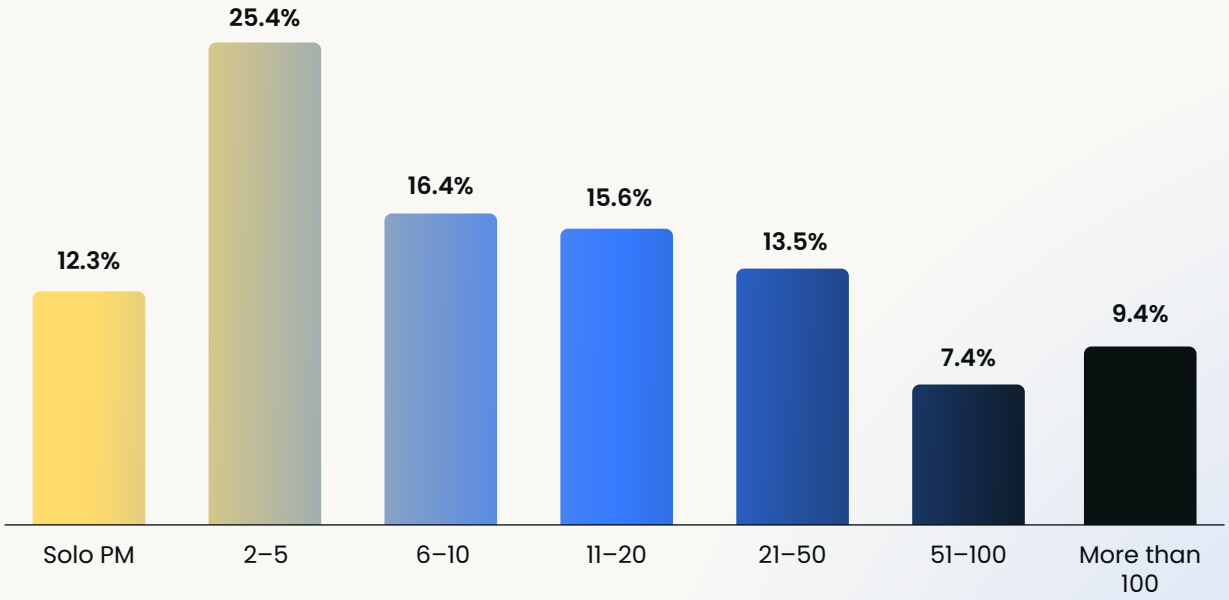
How many employees are at your current company?



Who took part

Product *headcount*

The size of product teams can also influence product strategy and impact, so we asked respondents how many people work within their product organization. Over half of respondents (**54.1%**) work in teams of 10 or fewer, while only **16.8%** work in teams larger than 51.



How many people work in your product function?

Who took part

Company vs product *headcount*

We compared company and product headcount to explore whether there's a 'magic number' for product team size as organizations scale.

As expected, larger organizations tend to have larger product teams, while smaller companies cluster around solo PMs or very small product groups. That said, a few things stand out:

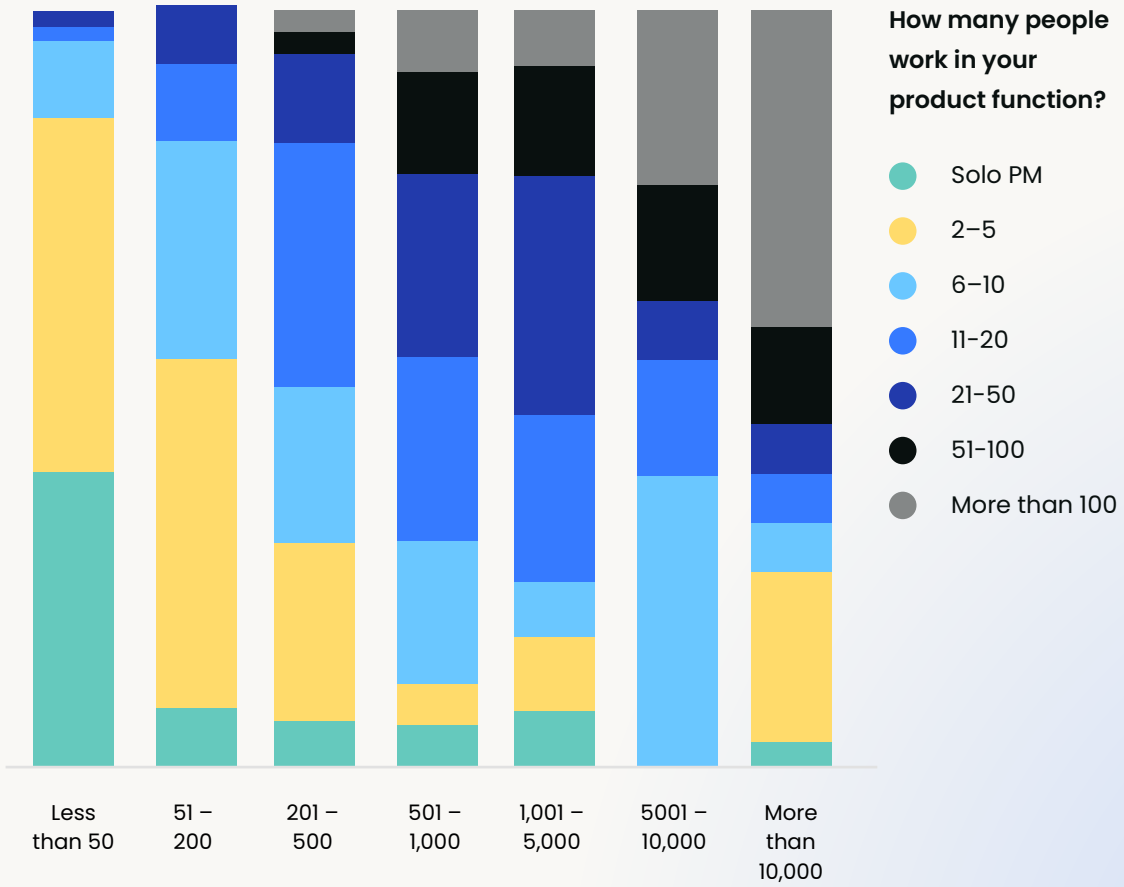
Solo PM roles persist longer than expected, appearing even in mid-sized organizations, suggesting product maturity often lags behind company growth.

There's no single 'right' product org size for mid-to-large companies. Organizations with 200–1,000 employees span almost every product team size bracket.

Very large companies don't always have very large product teams; many still operate with relatively modest product orgs, indicating that product scale is often a strategic choice rather than a simple function of headcount.

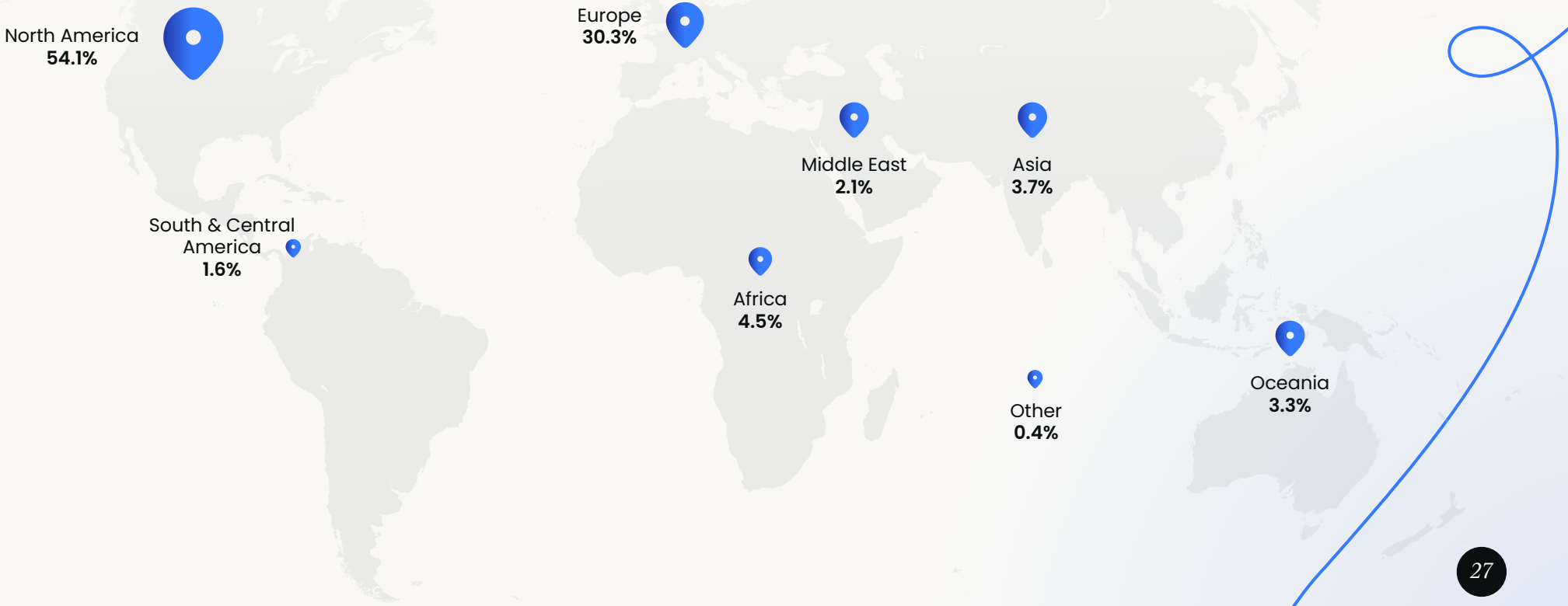
Who took part

Overall, the data suggests that while product teams do grow with company size, they scale in steps, rather than proportionally, and organizational philosophy plays a bigger role than rules of thumb.



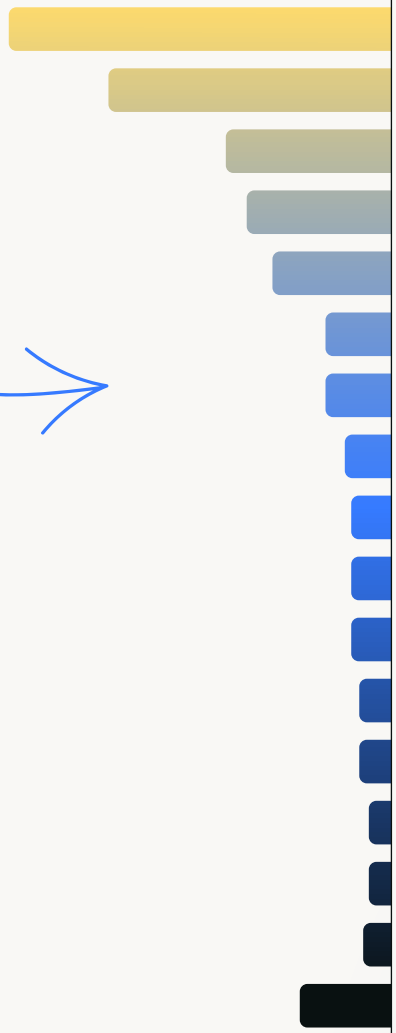
Company *headquarters region*

Next, we examined the global distribution of our respondents' organizations via their headquarters location. Later, we'll use this data to uncover differences in product maturity levels around the globe. **54.1%** of respondents hail from North America, closely followed by those located in Europe (**30.3%**).



Industry

We also examined which industries our respondents currently work within. The most common industries our respondents work in are: information technology and services (**23.8%**), computer software (**17.6%**), and financial services (**10.3%**).



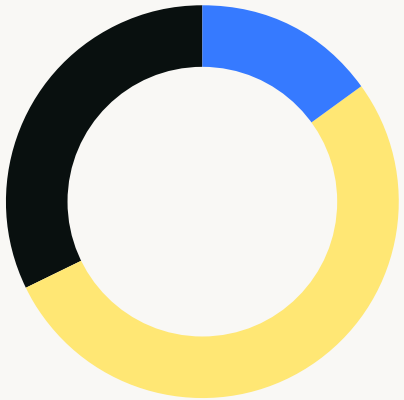
Which industry do you primarily work in?

Information Technology and Services	**23.8%**
Computer Software	**17.6%**
Financial Services	**10.3%**
Manufacturing	**9%**
Healthcare	**7.4%**
Education	**4.1%**
Retail	**4.1%**
Leisure, Travel, and Tourism	**2.9%**
Government and Legal	**2.5%**
Insurance	**2.5%**
Nonprofit	**2.5%**
Marketing and Advertising	**2%**
Media and Entertainment	**2%**
Banking	**1.2%**
Energy	**1.2%**
Marketplace	**1.2%**
Other	**5.7%**

Who took part

Working *environment*

The majority of respondents (**52.9%**) work hybridly, splitting their time between working from the office and home. **32%** work fully remote, while only **15.1%** works in their company office full-time.



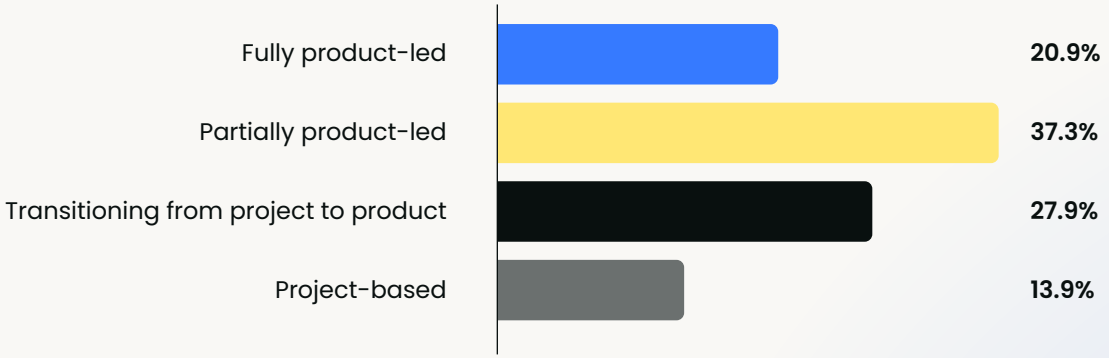
I work in my company's office full time	**15.1%**
I work hybridly – between the office and home	**52.9%**
I work from home full time	**32%**

Who took part

Product *maturity*

Product maturity can impact the strategy, scope, and autonomy of product teams, so we wanted to understand how our respondents described their organization's maturity. **65.2%** are in the middle stages of maturity, either transitioning to product-led or already partially product-led.

How would you describe your organization's product maturity?



Who took part

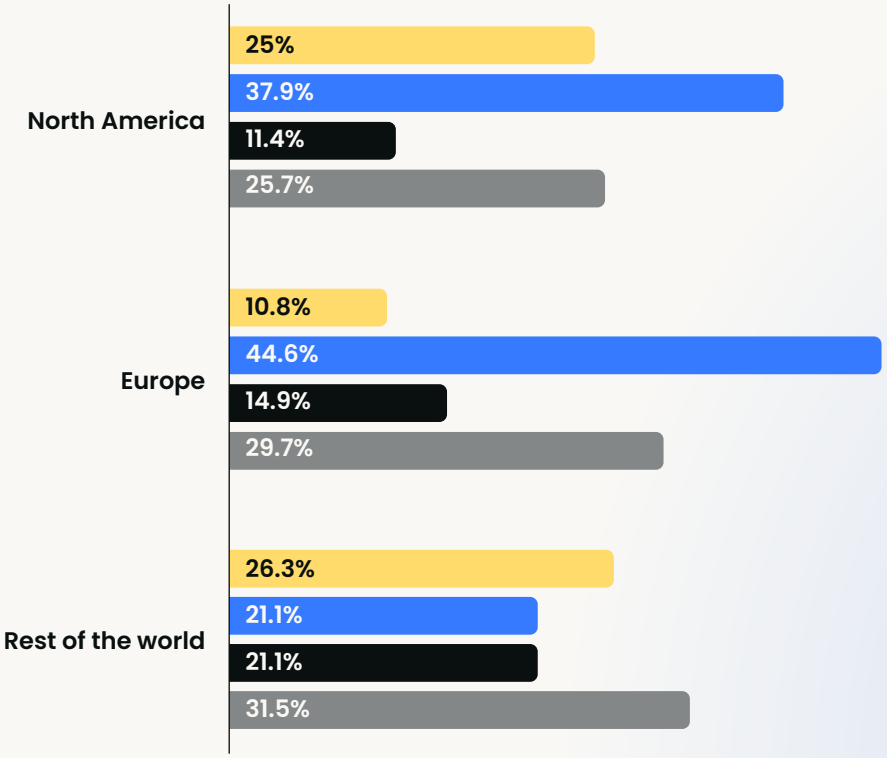
- Fully product-led
- Partially product-led
- Transitioning from project to product
- Project-based

Maturity *by HQ region*

Looking at product maturity by company HQ location, the differences are relatively subtle. North America shows a higher share of fully product-led organizations, while Europe has a greater concentration of teams in transitional or partially product-led stages.

Companies headquartered outside North America and Europe are more commonly found in earlier maturity stages, with fewer fully product-led organizations.

Overall, the differences are modest, suggesting geography alone is not a strong predictor of product maturity.



Part 2

Product *strategy*

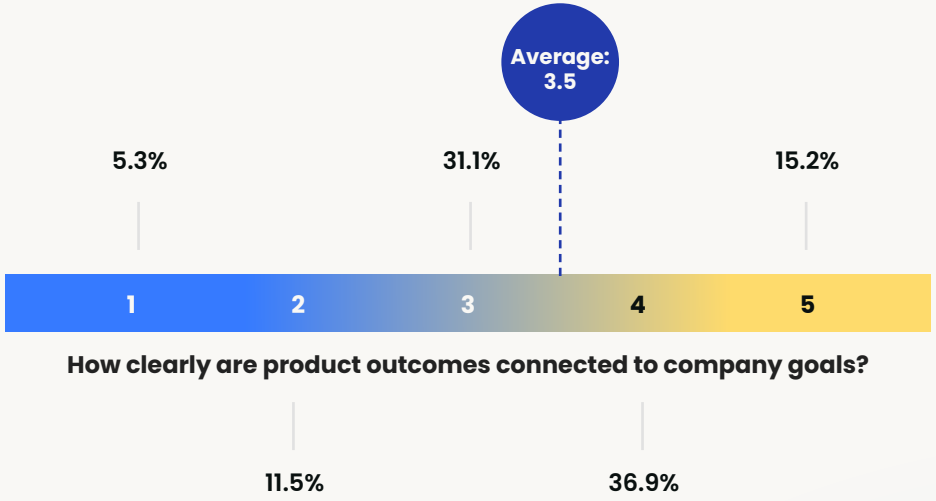
In this section, we explore the factors most impacting product strategy and roadmapping. Including, how maturity impacts strategy alignment, the most common reasons for misalignment, and how the strategy is communicated cross-functionally.

Strategy and *roadmap alignment*

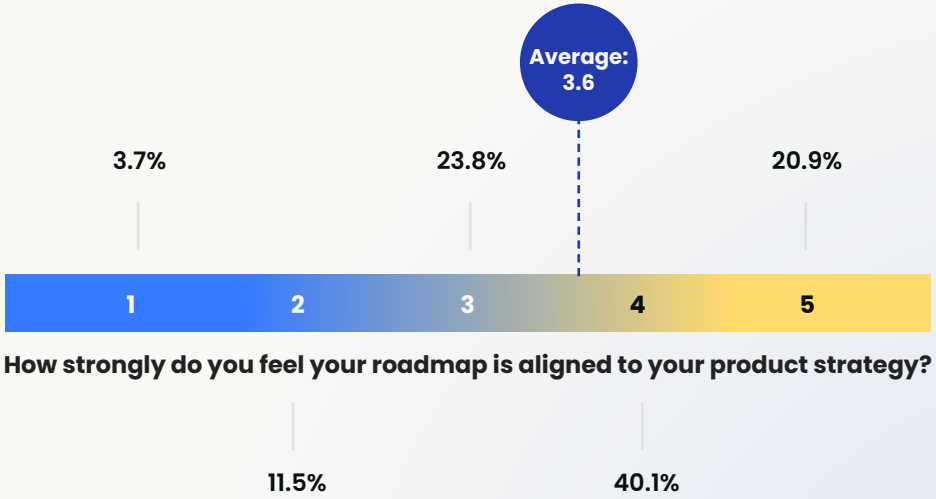
First, we asked respondents about their team's alignment with company goals and their roadmap's alignment with product strategy. The results indicate a generally positive trend toward alignment, though teams appear slightly more confident in their internal roadmap execution.

While the average score for connecting product outcomes to company goals was **3.5** (with **52.1%** of respondents giving a 4 or 5), the alignment between roadmaps and product strategy scored slightly higher at **3.6**, with **61%** of participants rating it 4 or higher.

This suggests that while most teams have a clear sense of their specific product direction, many still face a strategic gap when attempting to translate those efforts into broader organizational impact.



How clearly are product outcomes connected to company goals?



How strongly do you feel your roadmap is aligned to your product strategy?

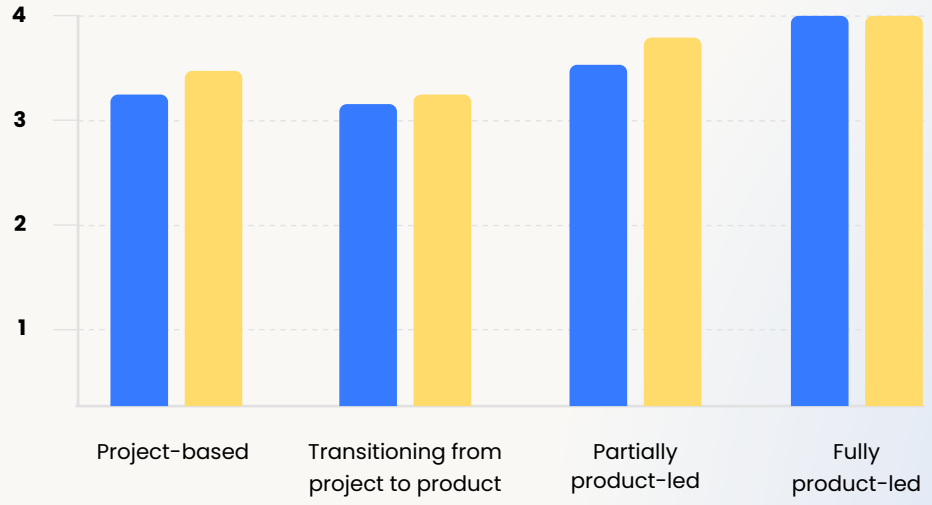
Product strategy

Company maturity *vs strategy alignment*

As expected, higher product maturity is strongly associated with better alignment. Fully product-led organizations score highest on both measures (averaging **4/5**), reinforcing the idea that product maturity brings clarity, focus, and alignment.

What's more interesting is what happens before that point. Organizations transitioning from project-based to product-led models show a **noticeable dip** in alignment compared to fully project-based teams. Outcome alignment drops from **3.2/5** in project-based orgs to **3.1** during transition, while roadmap alignment falls from **3.4** to **3.2**, rather than improving immediately.

This suggests the shift to a product-led ethos often introduces short-term disruption: new processes, roles, and decision-making models may temporarily reduce clarity before alignment strengthens again at higher maturity levels.



How would you describe your organization's product maturity?

- **How clearly are product outcomes connected to company goals? (Average)**
- **How strongly do you feel your roadmap is aligned to your product strategy? (Average)**

Product strategy

Reasons *for misalignment*

The most common reason cited for misalignment between product strategy and the roadmap was resource and capacity constraints with half (**49.2%**) of respondents in agreement. This was closely followed by shifting priorities due to short-term commitments with **47.5%** of respondents selecting this reason.

Together, these responses point to misalignment being driven less by weak strategy and more by execution pressure, where limited capacity and short-term demands consistently override longer-term product intent.

What most often causes misalignment between your product strategy and your roadmap?

"Other" answers include:

- Changing product owners all the time and onboarding
- Unclear corporate strategy/goals
- Technical leadership
- Awareness of competing initiatives
- Missing a clear strategy
- Lack of leadership decision-making
- Lack of a clear corporate strategy
- Investor misalignment

N.B. Respondents could select multiple options.

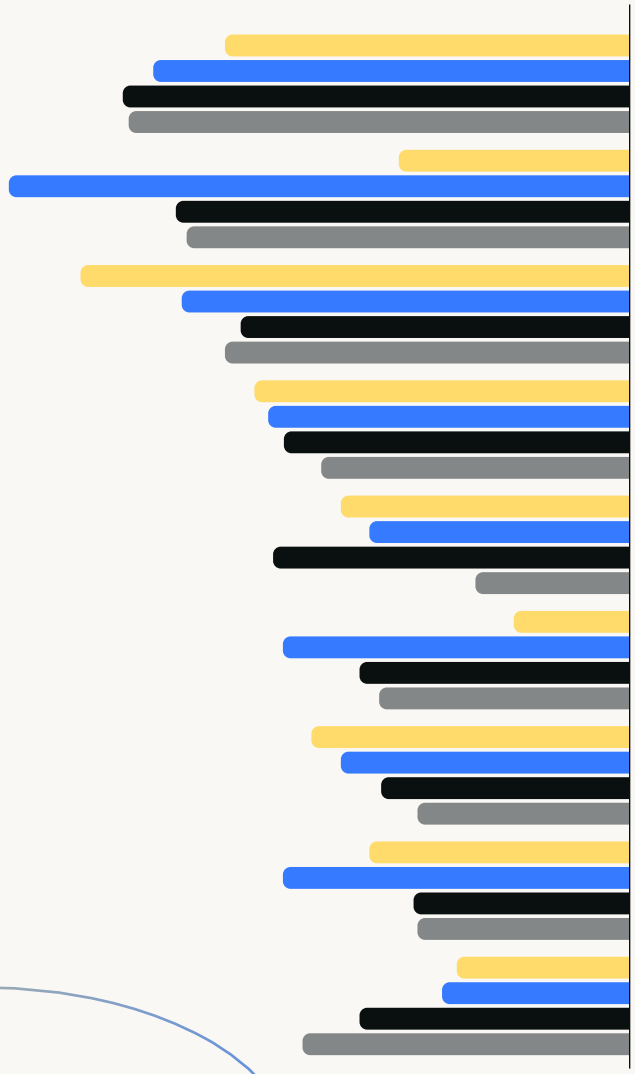
Product strategy

Strategy-roadmap *misalignment by maturity*

Looking at misalignment by product maturity highlights how the underlying causes shift as organizations evolve. In project-based teams, misalignment is most often driven by frequent leadership direction changes and sales-led requests, reflecting a more reactive operating model.

During the transition to product-led ways of working, misalignment intensifies and becomes more fragmented, with short-term priority shifts and resource constraints emerging as the dominant pressures.

As organizations become more product-led, these issues begin to stabilize, though capacity limits and competing demands are still present, stressing that while maturity reduces disruption, it doesn't eliminate the need for trade-offs.



	Project-based	Transitioning from project to product	Partially product-led	Fully product-led
Resource/capacity constraints	41.2%	48.5%	51.6%	51%
Shifting priorities due to short-term commitments	23.5%	63.2%	46.2%	45.1%
Frequent leadership direction changes	55.9%	45.6%	39.6%	41.2%
Sales-driven feature requests	38.2%	36.8%	35.2%	31.4%
Customer escalations	29.4%	26.5%	36.3%	15.7%
Lack of discovery or customer insight	11.8%	35.3%	27.5%	25.5%
Pressure to deliver outputs (features)	32.4%	29.4%	25.3%	21.6%
Strategy not clearly translated into roadmap criteria	26.5%	35.3%	22%	21.6%
Technical constraints	17.6%	19.1%	27.5%	33.3%

N.B. Respondents could select multiple options.

Product strategy

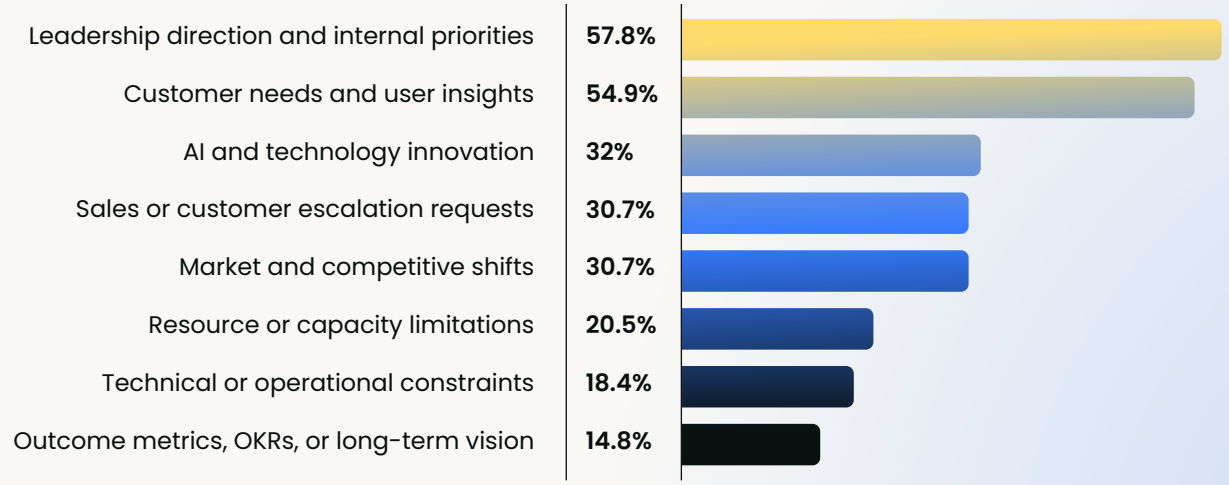
Factors influencing *product strategy*

The factors with the greatest impact on our respondents' product strategy include leadership direction and internal priorities (**57.8%**), customer needs and user insights (**54.9%**), and AI and technology innovation (**32%**).

Notably, the biggest influences on product strategy tend to be immediate organizational and customer pressures, while longer-term anchors like outcome metrics and vision rank much lower.

This echoes earlier findings on roadmap misalignment, where short-term priorities and capacity constraints most often take precedence over strategic intent.

Which factors most influence your product strategy today?



N.B. Respondents could select multiple options.

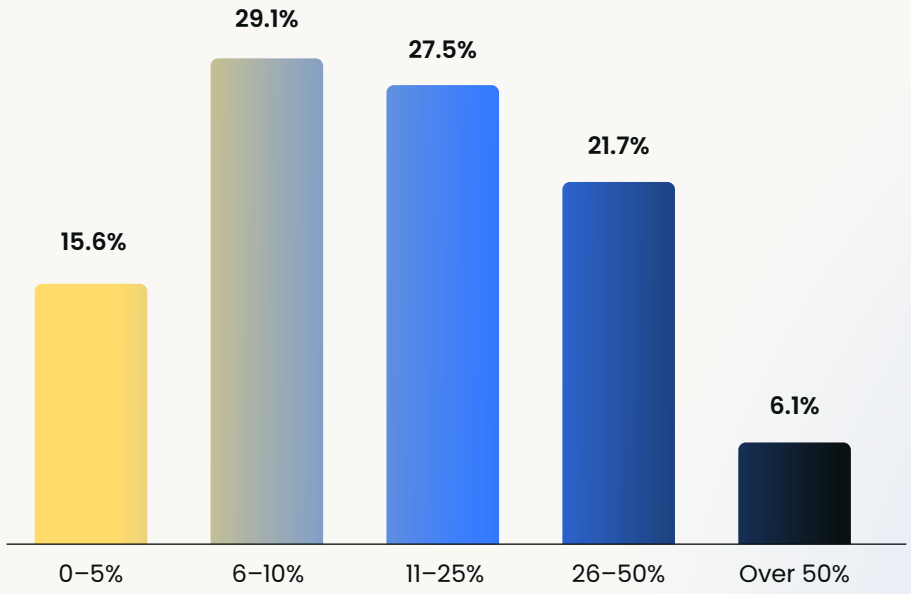
Product strategy

Time spent *on product strategy*

As expected, most respondents report spending a relatively small share of their time on product strategy, with **72.2%** spending **25%** or less on this activity.

This likely reflects the reality that for many product roles, strategy is just one part of a broader mix that includes discovery, delivery, and stakeholder management.

What stands out is how few respondents (**6.1%**) say they spend more than half their time on strategy. This suggests that spending a large chunk of time on strategy is more the exception than the rule, and likely depends a lot on role, team setup, or where the company is in its journey.



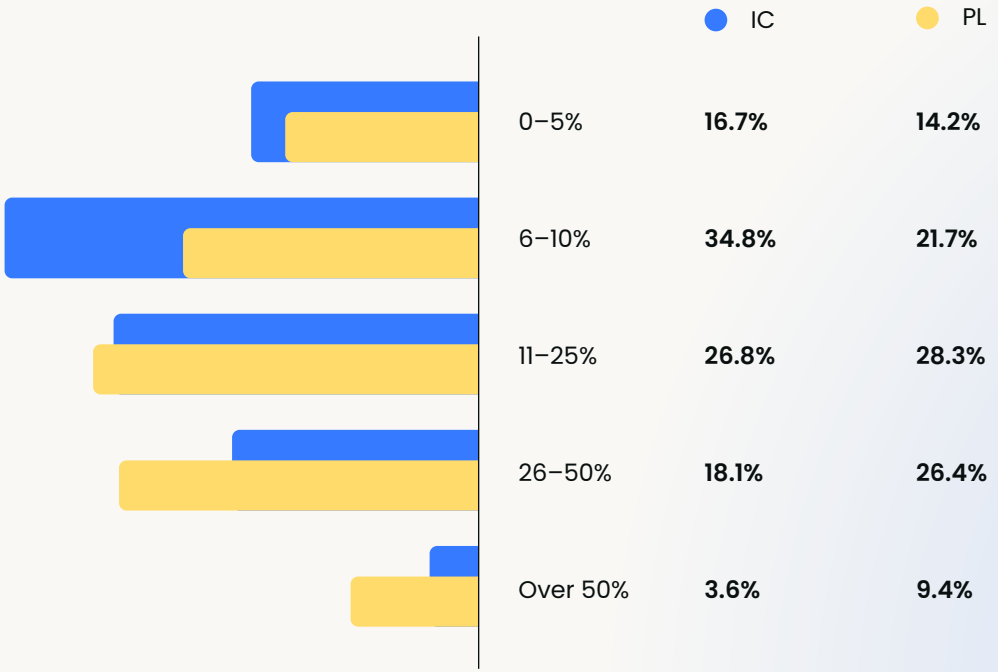
What percentage of your time is spent determining product strategy?

Product strategy

We decided to compare this metric against seniority (IC vs PL) to explore the role time allocation plays in shaping strategic focus. As expected, product leaders spend a larger share of their time on product strategy, with higher representation in the 26–50% and over 50% ranges, while individual contributors are more concentrated in the lower bands.

What's more surprising is how similar the middle of the distribution looks: a substantial share of both ICs and product leaders report spending between 11–25% of their time on strategy. This suggests that while seniority increases strategic ownership, strategy work remains a shared responsibility in product teams.

What percentage of your time is spent determining product strategy?



Communicating *the product vision*

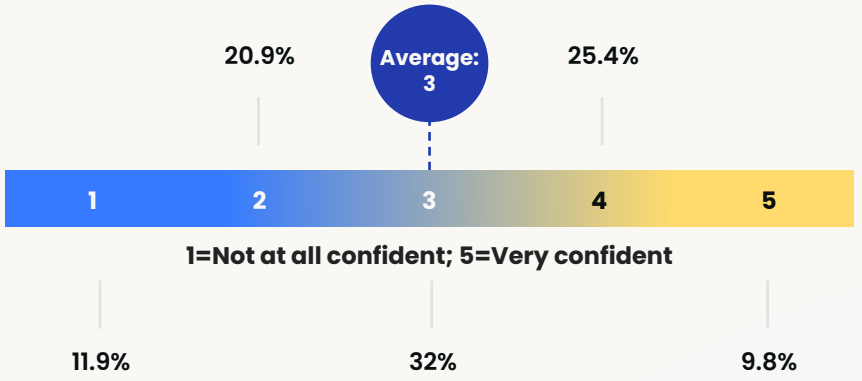
We asked respondents two related questions: how confident they are that teams outside of product understand the product vision and strategy, and how effective product is at communicating that strategy across the organization.

Confidence in understanding is moderate, with responses clustering around the midpoint of the scale and an average score of **3/5**, suggesting that while the product strategy is visible, it isn't consistently well understood across teams.

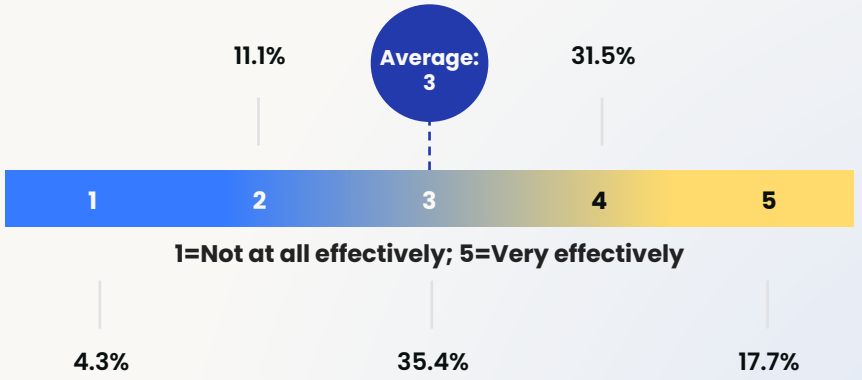
Perceptions of communication effectiveness follow a similar pattern. While slightly more respondents rate communication positively, scores again center on **3/5**, indicating that strategy is being shared, but not always convincingly.

Taken together, this suggests a gap: product teams may be communicating strategy, but that communication doesn't always translate into shared understanding beyond the product org.

How confident are you that people in your organization (sales, customer success, etc) understand the product vision and strategy?



How effective is your product organization at communicating strategy across different departments (sales, customer success, etc)?



Product strategy

What most often prevents your product strategy from being communicated clearly and consistently across teams?

Ramana Kaza Venkata,
Senior VP of Product Operations at Kongsberg Digital

The operational focus of teams and a lack of alignment between different departments.

Fûgel Huisman,
Head of Product at Tietoevry

In our strategy, we aim to balance short-term revenue, growth, and margin; as a consequence, product teams find it sometimes difficult to translate the strategy to concrete product roadmap decisions.

Setu Shah,
Senior Director of Global Product Strategy at Oracle

The ability to simplify complex concepts and messages, pre-seeded objections/misconceptions, and keeping up with the ever-increasing pace of change all impact our clarity.

Raouf Carmi,
VP of Product Management at Wolters Kluwer

Competing priorities and misalignment in how information flows through teams.

Product strategy

What most often prevents your product strategy from being communicated clearly and consistently across teams?

Ashay Satav,
Director of Product Management at eBay

Misaligned incentives and operating cadences: most teams aren't confused by what the strategy says; they're confused by what actually gets rewarded, prioritized, and reviewed. When OKRs, roadmaps, funding decisions, and exec narratives drift even slightly, teams default to their local goals.

Steven Cohn,
CEO at ProductPlan

Firstly, ensuring that the product strategy is communicated in a way that people can understand it. We often get too into the weeds and struggle to communicate it to people outside of the details.

Second, ensuring that they consumed the information and were able to ask clarifying questions. When non-product stakeholders are left to fill the gaps, they often make assumptions that don't align with what product is actually planning. This is a particularly hard challenge for organizations with scale.

Product strategy

Biggest time sink *for product strategy*

To better understand what slows teams down when defining product strategy, we asked respondents to share – in their own words – the biggest time sink they experience.

We then grouped responses into themes based on recurring patterns. While answers varied, three themes consistently stood out as the most common sources of friction.

1. Stakeholder alignment and decision-making

Teams spend a lot of time trying to get everyone aligned, juggling different stakeholder opinions, and responding to leadership input without a clear final decision-maker.

- "I can create a strategy, but the executives only see product and viability/profitability, and not all the other aspects that a product can impact. There's no check on executive decision-making. So we end up doing what we are told."
- "Getting buy-in and alignment from stakeholders with different priorities."
- "Too many opinions from leadership without a clear decision owner."
- "Aligning stakeholders across departments who all have different goals."

Product strategy

2. Data, research, and insight synthesis

Many respondents point to the time required to gather, reconcile, and translate fragmented data and research into clear, actionable strategic direction.

- "The biggest time sink in determining product strategy is gathering and aligning on the right data and insights, market research, customer feedback, competitive analysis, and internal stakeholder input."
- "Not having reliable data and needing to pull it together from multiple sources."
- "Synthesising research into something actionable."
- "Trying to get enough evidence to feel confident in the direction."

3. Prioritization and shifting scope

Frequent changes in priorities and scope force teams to revisit decisions and rework strategy before it can fully take shape.

- "Constantly changing priorities make it hard to settle on a strategy."
- "Reworking strategy because priorities shift before anything is finished."
- "Trying to balance too many initiatives at once."

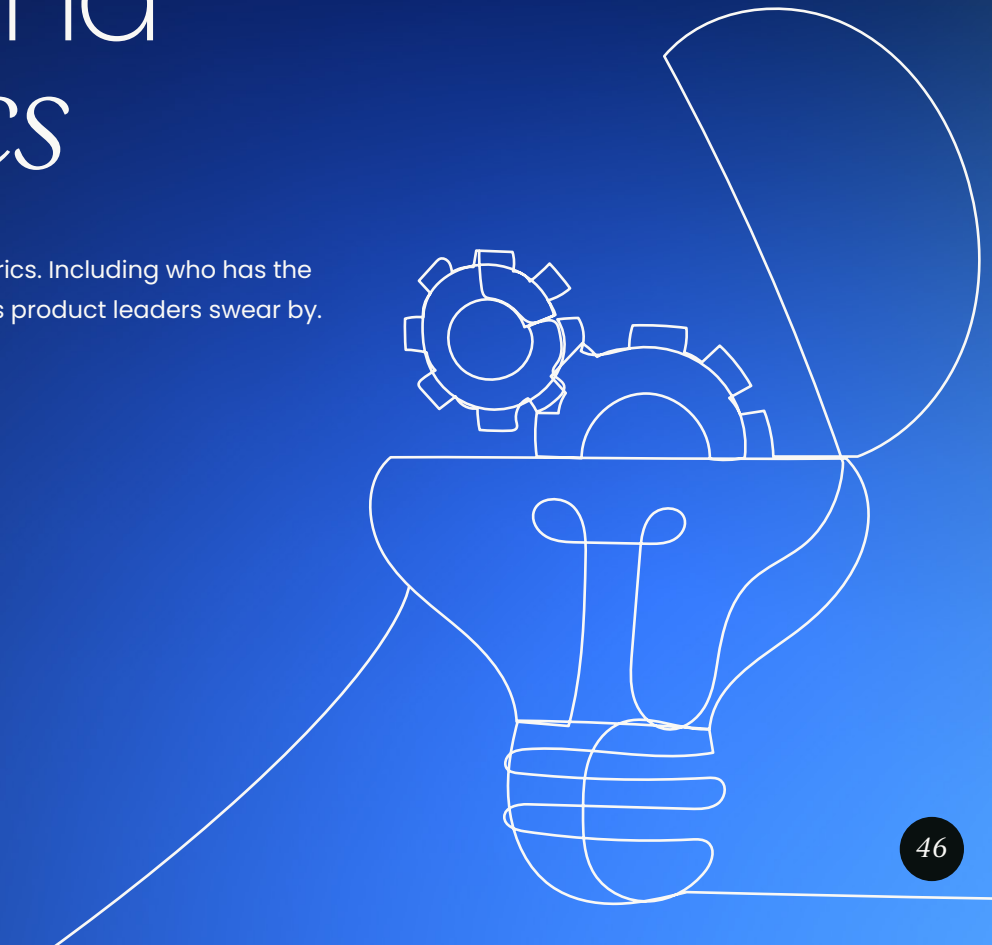
Across responses, the biggest challenges in shaping product strategy are less about deciding what to do and more about making it stick.

Stakeholder alignment, synthesizing inputs into a clear direction, and coping with shifting priorities repeatedly surface as the main time sinks, reinforcing the idea that execution pressure and coordination friction are what most often get in the way.

Part 3

Prioritization and *success metrics*

In this section, we cover prioritization processes and success metrics. Including who has the final say, key metrics of success, and the prioritization frameworks product leaders swear by.



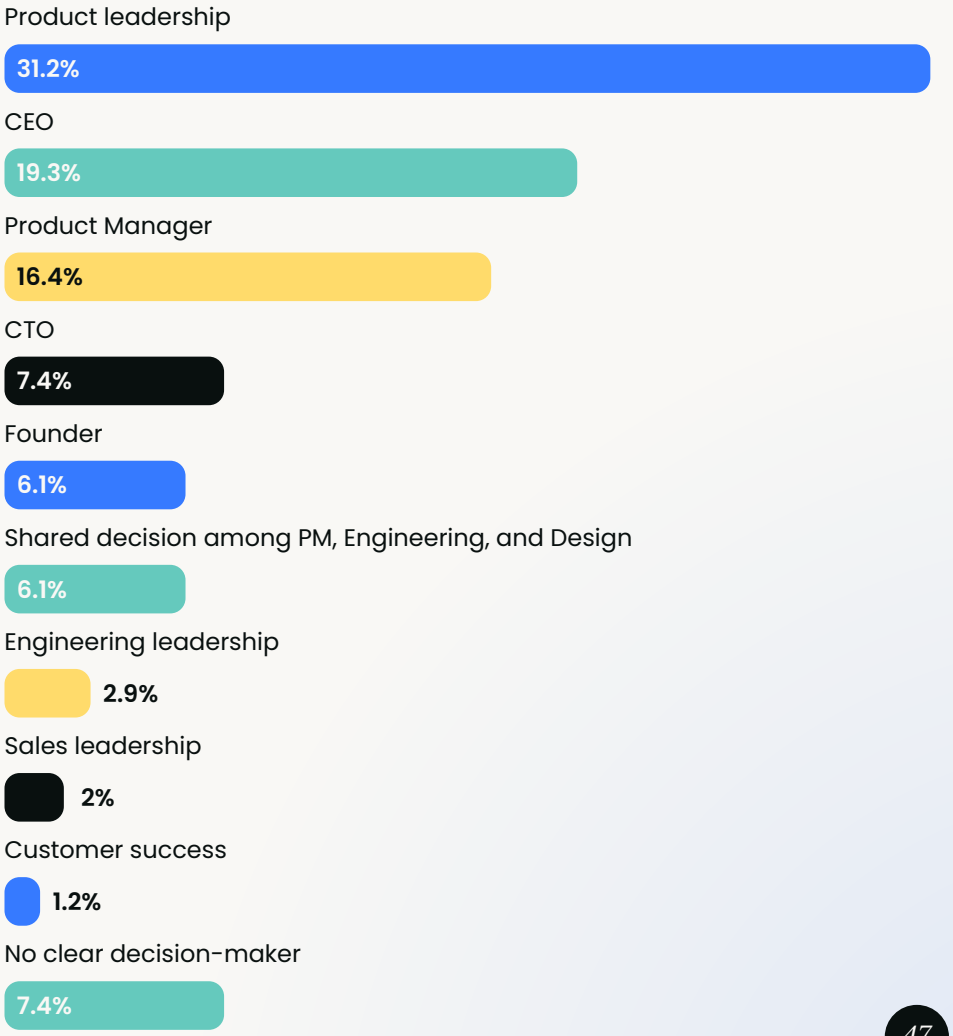
Who has *the final say*

Final approval for product prioritization most often sits with product leadership (**31.2%**), suggesting that ownership typically resides within the product function.

However, decision-making is far from centralized, with CEOs and founders accounting for over a quarter of final approval, and relatively few organizations relying on either individual PM ownership or truly shared decision models.

The presence of no clear decision-maker (**7.4%**) also stands out, pointing to prioritization processes that remain informal or unclear in a meaningful minority of teams.

Who has final approval on product prioritization decisions?

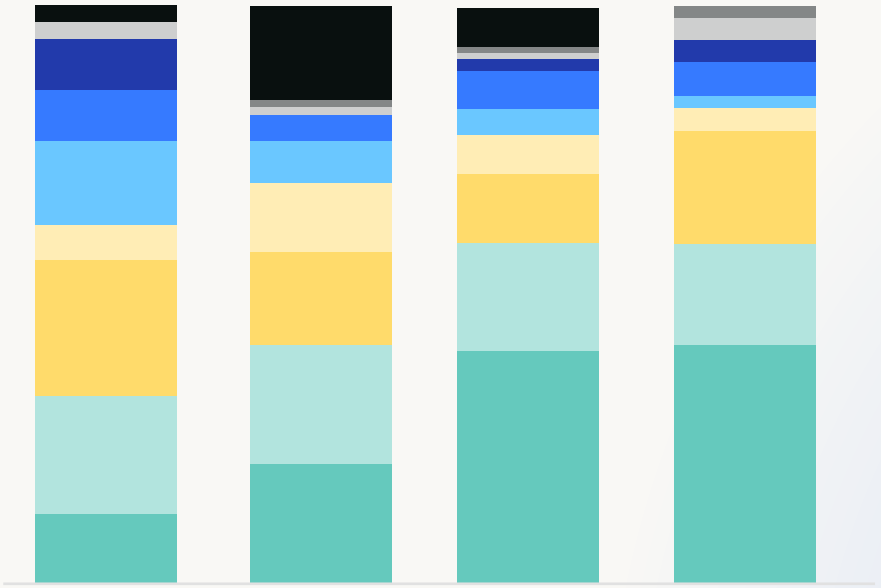


Prioritization and success metrics

Decision makert *vs maturity stage*

As expected, final approval for prioritization moves into product leadership as organizations mature, peaking in fully product-led teams where **41.2%** report product leadership as the final decision-maker. At the same time, founder- and CEO-led prioritization declines, reflecting clearer ownership as product practices take hold.

What stands out is the transition stage, which shows the highest incidence of no clear decision-maker. This reinforces earlier findings that the shift from project-based to product-led ways of working is often the most unsettled, with decision rights lagging behind structural change.



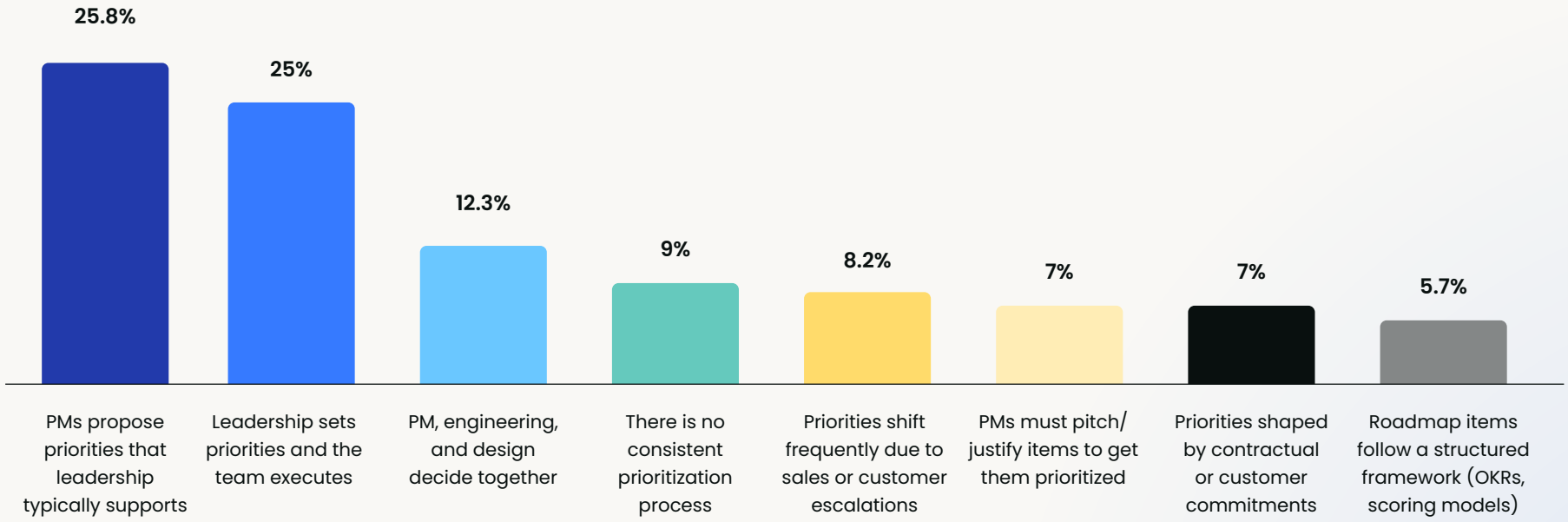
Who has final approval on product prioritization decisions?

Prioritization *process*

A quarter of organizations report that PMs propose priorities with leadership support, while a similar share says priorities are set by leadership and executed by teams. Taken together, this suggests prioritization is most often shaped through product–leadership interaction, with a lean toward top-down decision-making.

What's more notable is how few teams rely on structured approaches to prioritization, with only **5.7%** using frameworks like OKRs or scoring models.

Instead, many teams describe processes shaped by shifting priorities, escalations, or ad-hoc justification, suggesting that prioritization is often reactive rather than consistent – a pattern that echoes earlier findings around misalignment and short-term pressure.



How would you describe your organization's prioritization process?

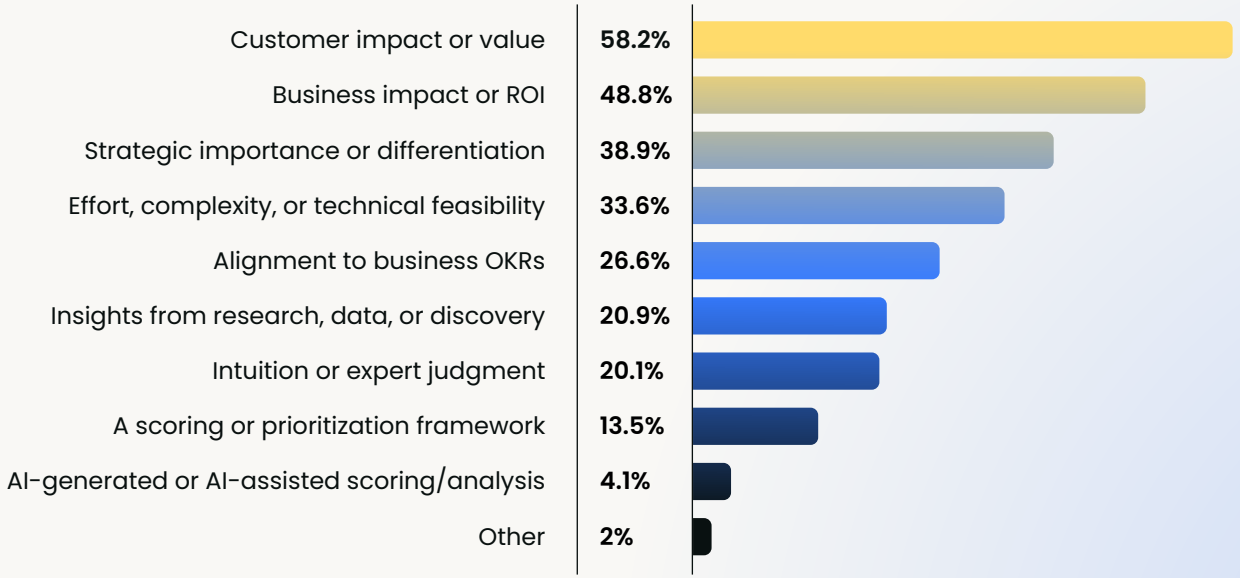
Prioritization and success metrics

Prioritization *criteria*

Most teams say they prioritize product work based on customer impact (**58.2%**) and business value (**48.8%**), with strategic importance also playing a role. This suggests that, in principle, teams are trying to make thoughtful, value-led trade-offs.

That said, fewer teams rely on clear structures to guide those decisions. Only **26.6%** prioritize based on alignment to business OKRs, and just **13.5%** use a formal scoring framework – echoing the earlier finding that prioritization is often shaped by judgment and shifting context rather than a consistent, shared system.

What criteria does your team primarily use to prioritize product work?



"Other" criteria include:

- CEO/C-suite decisions/wishlist
- Resource constraints
- Timeline of the sales cycle, to avoid disruption

N.B. Respondents could select multiple options.

Prioritization and success metrics

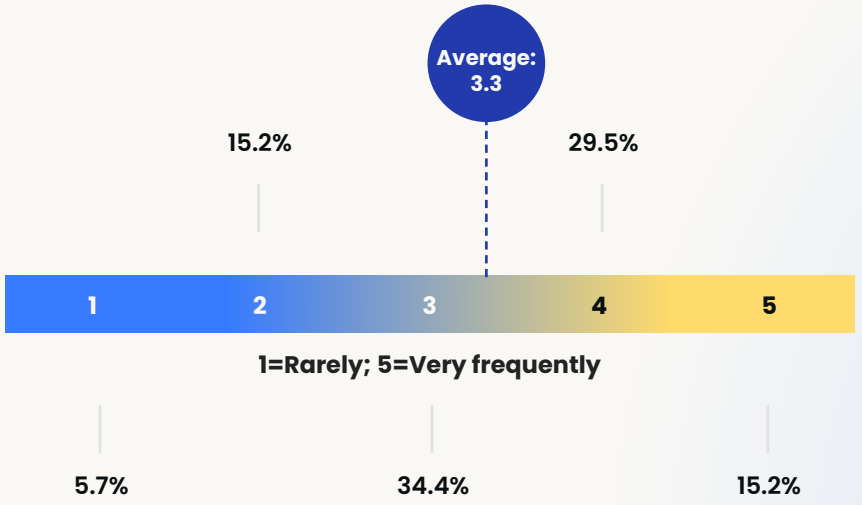
Changing *priorities*

Priority changes are fairly common, with responses clustering toward the higher end of the scale and an average score of **3.3/5**, suggesting that agreed priorities are often revisited rather than remaining fixed.

When priorities do change, the most common triggers are top-down or external pressures, particularly leadership escalations (**60.2%**) and sales or customer-driven demands (**38.5%**), alongside revenue and capacity constraints (**38.1%**).

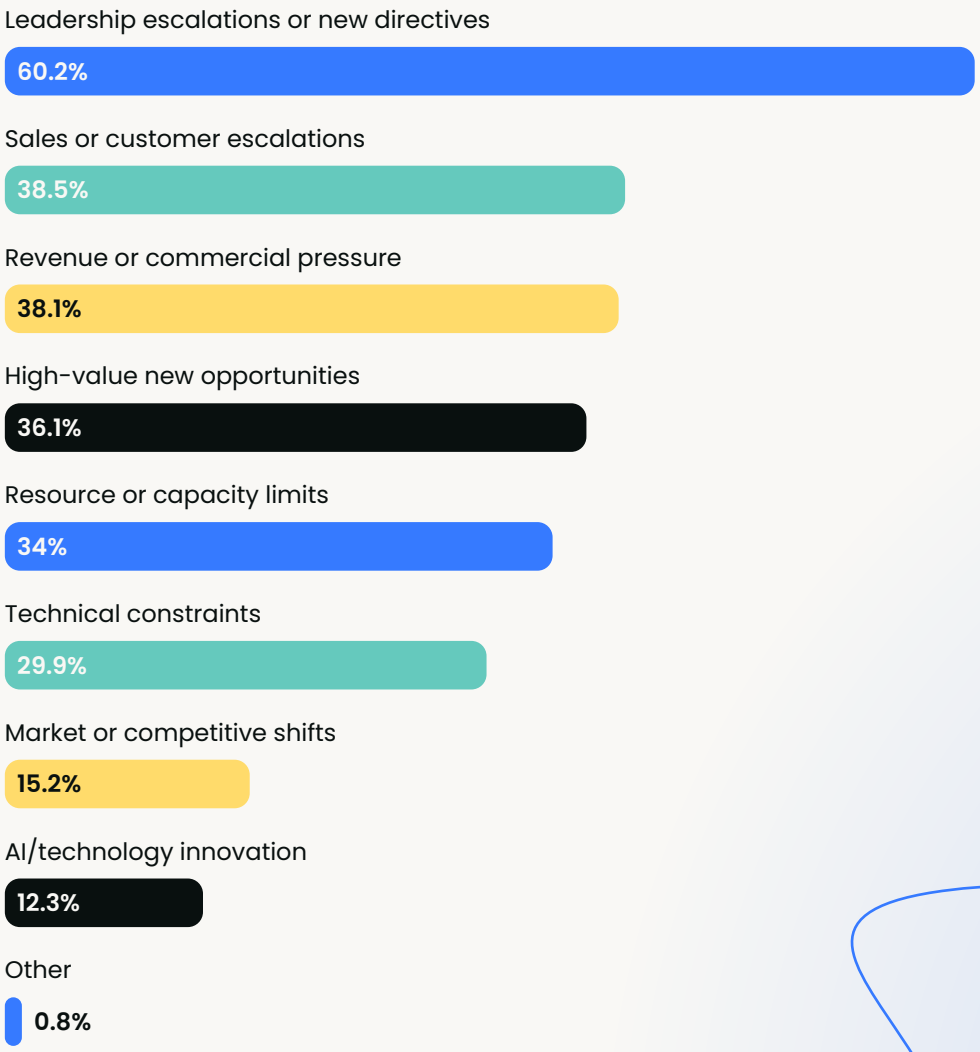
This reinforces a consistent pattern from earlier sections: while teams may agree on priorities upfront, short-term pressures and new directives frequently override those decisions, making prioritization an ongoing negotiation.

How often do priorities change after being agreed upon?



Prioritization and success metrics

What factors most often override your prioritization framework?



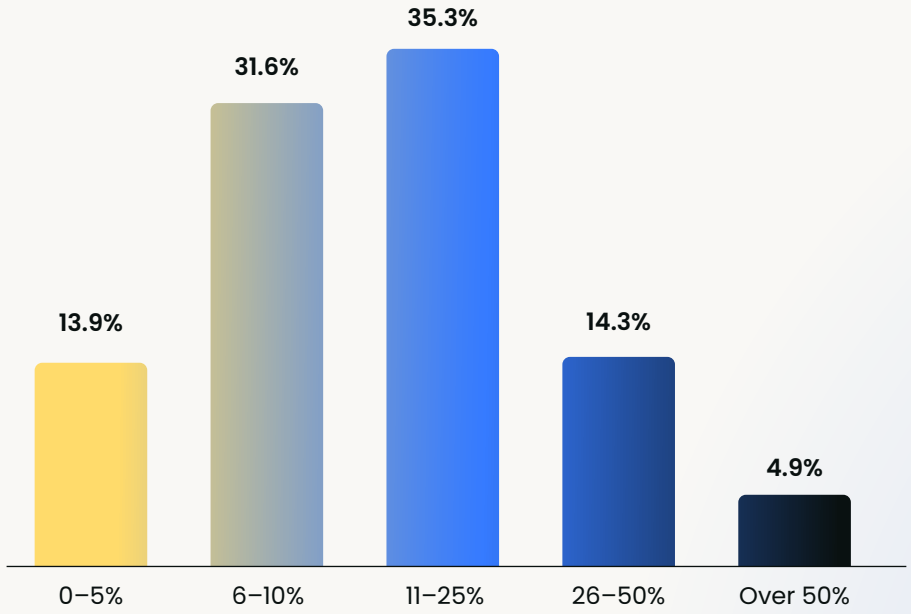
N.B. Respondents could select multiple options.

Prioritization and success metrics

Time spent *on prioritization*

Most respondents spend a moderate portion of their time on feature prioritization, with the majority (**66.9%**) reporting that it takes 6–25% of their time.

This cluster may indicate that prioritization work is spread across many teams rather than concentrated in a small number of roles. Only a small minority (**4.9%**) spends more than half their time on feature prioritization, reinforcing the idea that while prioritization is important, it rarely becomes a full-time focus.



What percentage of your time is spent determining feature prioritization?
(e.g., What ideas make it to the roadmap.)

Prioritization and success metrics

Biggest time sink *for prioritization*

To understand what slows teams down when deciding what makes it onto the roadmap, we asked respondents to describe the biggest time sink in feature prioritization. We grouped responses into themes based on recurring patterns, with three themes clearly standing out as the most common sources of friction.

1. Data, evidence, and validation

Teams spend significant time trying to validate prioritization decisions due to missing, fragmented, or unreliable customer and product data.

- “Technical debt and support for existing customers”
- “Basing it on assumptions instead of data.”
- “Understanding the core needs of the customers.”
- “Defining the real voice of the customer.”

Prioritization and success metrics

2. Stakeholder influence and approvals

Many respondents point to the effort required to align stakeholders and navigate top-down input as a major drag on prioritization decisions.

- "The biggest time sink in feature prioritization is aligning stakeholders on what matters most; balancing customer needs, business goals, technical feasibility, and resource constraints. Most time is spent resolving conflicting priorities and clarifying requirements before a clear decision can be made."
- "Top-down priorities from leadership that disrupt product strategy"
- "Leadership makes all prioritization decisions and invests resources and money in enhancements that don't provide the maximum ROI."

3. Prioritization trade-offs

Frequent changes, unclear strategy, and difficulty managing trade-offs force teams to repeatedly revisit prioritization decisions.

- "Lack of concise strategy to manage trade-offs"
- "Changing priorities and reactive requests that force change in priority."
- "Scope creep."

Overall, the biggest time sinks for prioritization are less about generating ideas and more about making decisions under uncertainty. Respondents point to the effort of gathering evidence, navigating stakeholder influence, and repeatedly revisiting priorities as inputs and requests change.

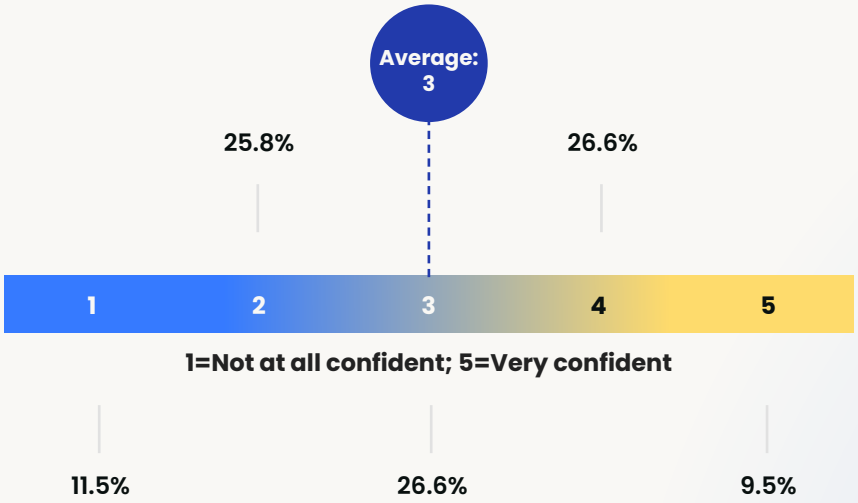
Prioritization and success metrics

Measuring *impact*

Confidence in measuring the business impact of product work sits in the middle, with responses spread fairly evenly across the scale and an average score of **3/5**.

This suggests that while many teams feel they have some ability to link product work to business outcomes, that confidence isn't particularly strong or consistent.

How confident are you that your team can measure the business impact of your product work?



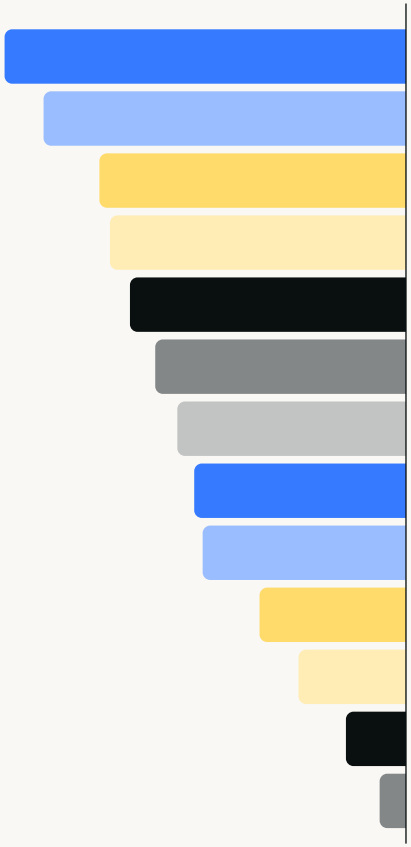
Prioritization and success metrics

Metrics *for success*

When asked how they measure product success, teams most often point to customer satisfaction (**38.1%**), usage (**34.4%**), and revenue influenced by product improvements (**29.1%**).

While these metrics can be effective indicators of success, they vary in how directly they connect product activity to business outcomes. The lower adoption of measures like outcome attainment or time-to-value suggests many teams rely on a combination of signals, rather than a single impact measure.

What are the top 3 metrics your team uses to measure product success?



Customer satisfaction (CSAT/NPS)	**38.1%**
Active usage	**34.4%**
Revenue influenced by product improvements	**29.1%**
Workflow or feature adoption	**28.7%**
Retention/churn	**26.2%**
Expansion revenue	**23.8%**
Reduction in customer pain points	**21.7%**
Outcome attainment (customer achieved intended result)	**20.1%**
Time-to-value	**19.3%**
Customer task success/completion	**13.9%**
Cycle time or delivery efficiency	**10.2%**
AI-driven efficiency gains	**5.7%**
Other	**2.5%**

N.B. Respondents could select up to three options.

Prioritization and success metrics

What are the biggest obstacles preventing your organization from becoming more outcome-focused?

Ramana Kaza Venkata,
Senior VP of Product Operations at Kongsberg Digital

A lack of common goals and operational focus.

Fûgel Huisman,
Head of Product at Tietoevry

Siloed product thinking instead of portfolio thinking. A limited awareness of the market, competition, and customer makes it difficult to predict outcomes.

Setu Shah,
Senior Director of Global Product Strategy at Oracle

Data-driven decision making is essential to be outcome-focused, and we understand that it is a journey.

Raouf Carmi,
VP of Product Management at Wolters Kluwer

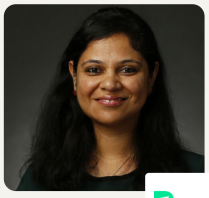
A lack of shared, measurable outcomes across teams, competing priorities and shifting direction, and insufficient visibility into customer impact

Steven Cohn,
CEO at ProductPlan

Measurement of what's delivered and a clear connection to impact in a scalable way.

Prioritization and success metrics

When your team successfully focuses on outcomes, *what benefits do you see?*



Passport

"An outcome focus turns product from a feature factory into a value engine – driving measurable customer impact, tighter prioritization, and higher team autonomy with better business results.

"When my team truly focuses on outcomes (not outputs), the benefits show up fast and compound over time:

- Measurable customer + business impact: We can clearly show movement in the metrics that matter (conversion, retention, revenue, CSAT) – not just features shipped.
- Sharper prioritization, less thrash: Fewer pet projects and distractions because decisions are anchored to outcomes and tradeoffs are obvious.
- Faster learning and empowered teams: Teams have autonomy on how to win, run smaller experiments, iterate quicker, and get to the right solution sooner."

– Preeti Kashyap, Senior Director of Product at Passport Global

Prioritization and success metrics

"Better decisions with less alignment overhead: When outcomes are clear, teams don't need constant approvals. Trade-offs are resolved locally because the success criteria are explicit, reducing meetings and escalation.

"Higher ROI per unit of effort: Teams stop treating all work as equal. Low-impact initiatives get killed earlier, and resources concentrate on the few levers that actually move customer or business metrics.

"Faster learning, even when results disappoint: Outcome-focused teams frame work as hypotheses. A missed outcome produces insight (not blame) because the learning loop is explicit and measurable."

- Ashay Satav, Director of Product Management at eBay

"Transitioning from output focus (story points) to outcome focus (change in behavior tied to business results) creates a sense of ownership, empowerment and motivation amongst the team. It also improves the speed of innovation because teams work more collaboratively with engineers to find the most efficient approach. It's a game changer for building product."

- Steven Cohn, CEO of ProductPlan

Product-Led Alliance + ProductPlan

Part 4

Customer *insights*

In this section, we take a quick look at how product teams gather and utilize customer feedback to inform decision-making.

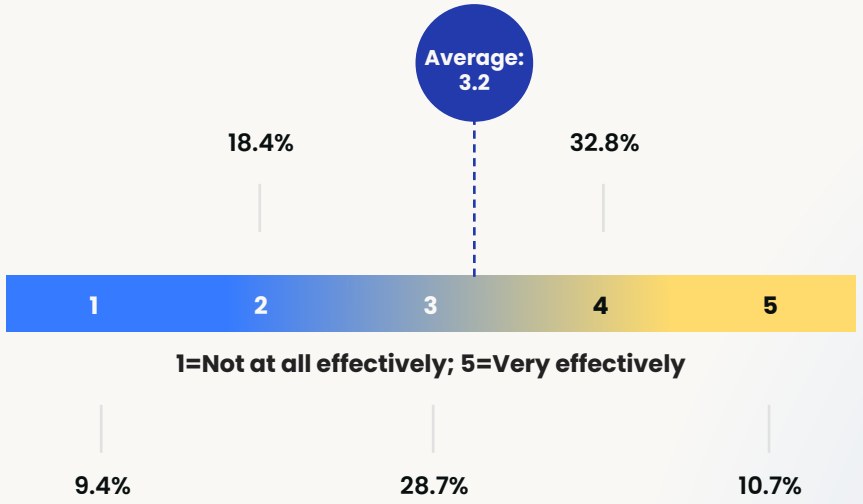
Customer insights

Gathering customer *feedback*

First, we asked respondents how effectively their organization gathers and uses customer insights to inform product decisions. Overall, responses point to moderate effectiveness, with an average score of **3.2/5** and most ratings clustering around the middle of the scale.

While a meaningful share reports positive experiences, relatively few express strong confidence, suggesting that customer insight is present in many teams but not always consistently applied.

How effectively does your organization gather and use customer insights to inform product decisions?



Customer insights

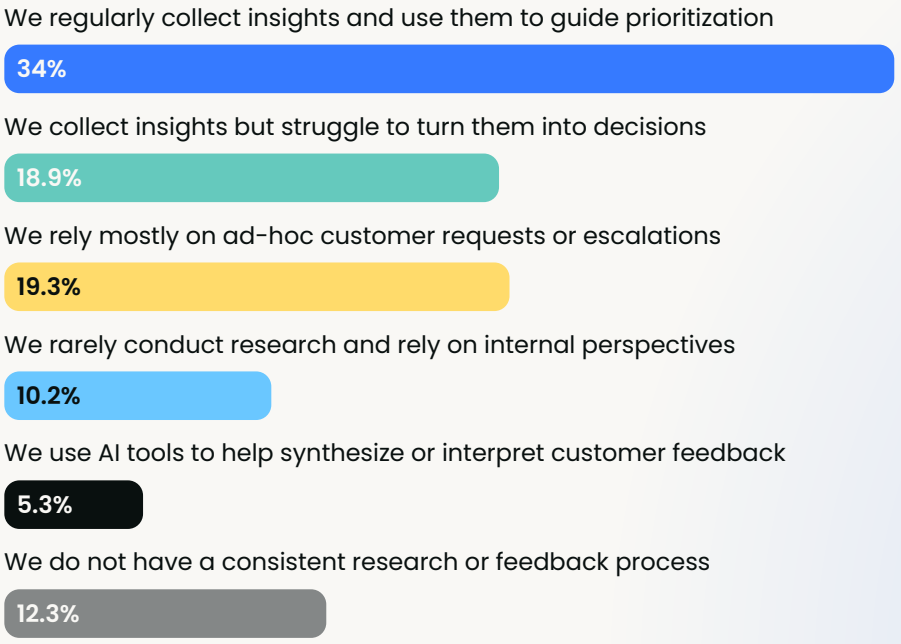
Approach to *feedback*

When asked how they gather and interpret customer feedback, a third of respondents (**34%**) say they regularly collect insights and use them to guide prioritization.

A larger share describes less consistent practices, including struggling to turn insights into decisions (**18.9%**), relying on ad-hoc customer requests or escalations (**19.3%**), or lacking a consistent research process altogether (**12.3%**).

Taken together, this suggests that while many teams recognize the value of customer insight, turning research into action remains a common challenge, which may help to explain the moderate confidence in insight use and ongoing prioritization pressure noted earlier.

What best describes your team's approach to gathering and interpreting customer feedback and research?

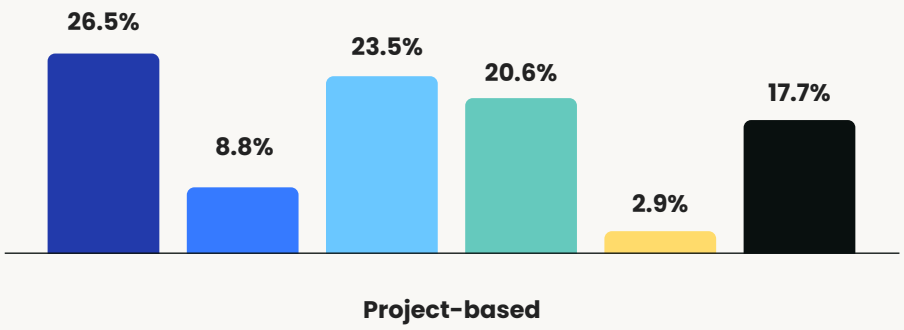


Customer insights

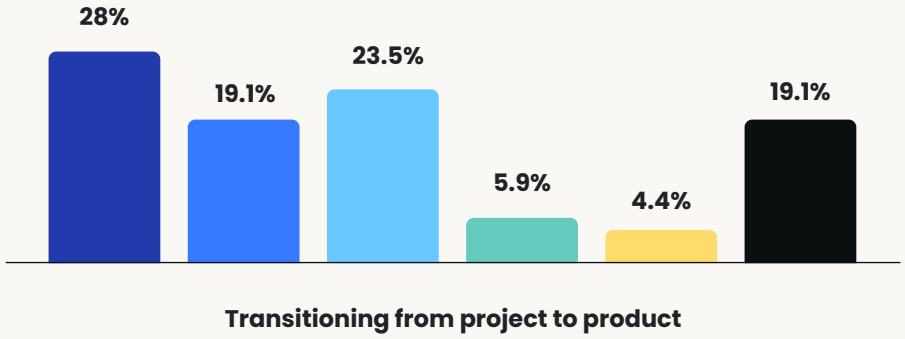
Feedback approach *by maturity stage*

As expected, teams' approach to customer feedback becomes more structured and intentional as product maturity increases, with product-led organizations far more likely to regularly use insights to guide prioritization. By contrast, project-based teams rely more heavily on ad-hoc requests and internal perspectives.

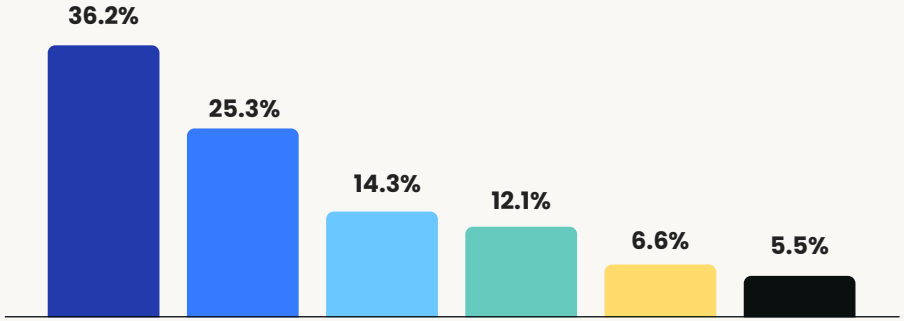
Teams transitioning from project- to product-led are most likely to collect insights but struggle to turn them into decisions, highlighting a gap between research effort and decision-making capability during this unsteady period of growth.



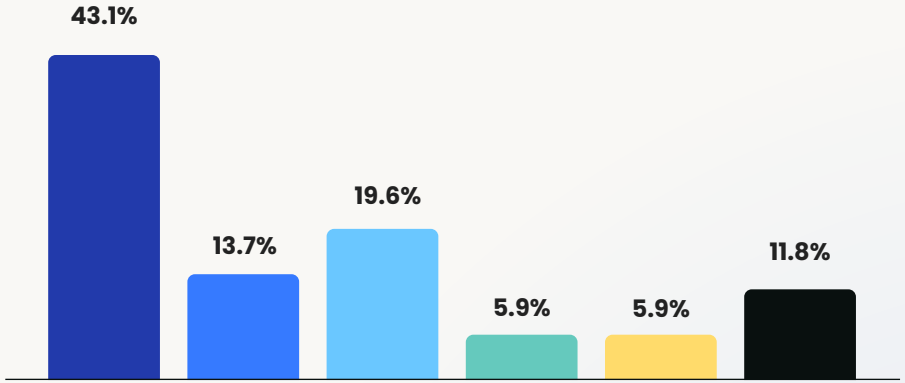
Project-based



Transitioning from project to product



Partially product-led



Fully product-led

- We regularly collect insights and use them to guide prioritization
- We collect insights but struggle to turn them into decisions
- We rely mostly on ad-hoc customer requests or escalations
- We rarely conduct research and rely on internal perspectives
- We use AI tools to help synthesize or interpret customer feedback
- We do not have a consistent research or feedback process

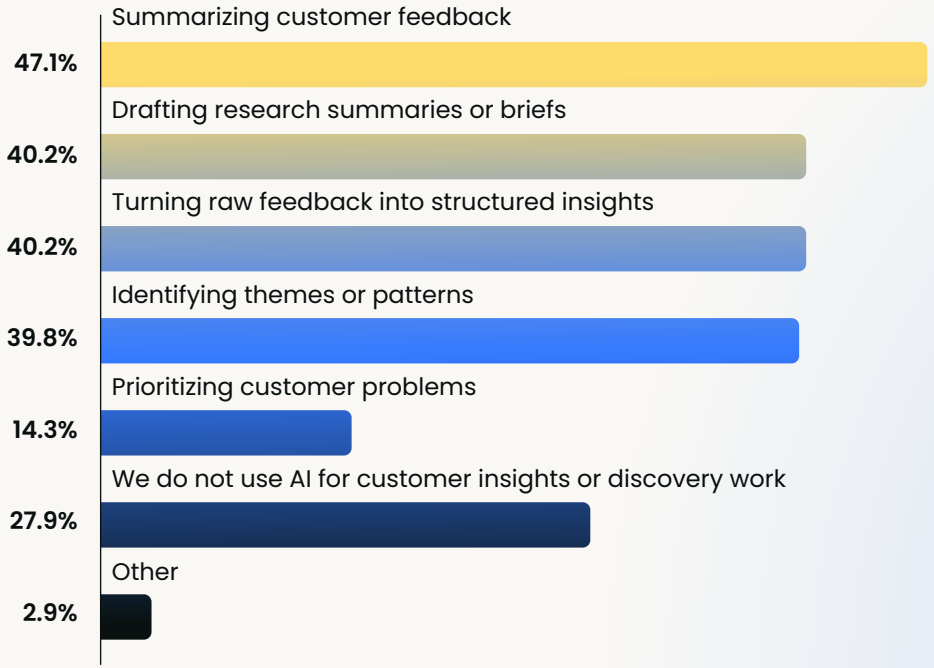
Customer insights

AI usage for customer *insight and discovery*

Teams that use AI for customer insights tend to apply it earlier in the discovery workflow, most commonly for summarizing customer feedback (**47.1%**), drafting research outputs (**40.2%**), and turning raw input into more structured insights (**40.2%**). These use cases suggest AI is primarily helping teams process and synthesize information faster.

Far fewer teams use AI to directly support prioritization or problem selection (**14.3%**), and more than a quarter (**27.9%**) report not using AI for customer insights at all. Suggesting AI is currently seen as a supporting tool for sense-making, rather than a driver of product decisions.

How does your team currently use AI to support customer insights or discovery work?



"Other" answers include:

- Just starting with AI
- Synthesizing users for preliminary discovery work
- Turning consolidated insights into feature concepts
- Created simulations and synthetic data sets from them
- Another team does this work

N.B. Respondents could select multiple options.

Part 5

Wider AI usage *and adoption*

Now that we've teased the usage of AI, let's dive deeper and explore how product teams are using and adopting AI in their day-to-day, what their biggest concerns are, and what value they're gaining from the technology.

Wider AI usage and adoption

AI *adoption*

When it comes to AI adoption within product teams, our data shows the majority of respondents are in the middle stages of adoption. **36.9%** are using AI for limited workflows, and **32%** are still in early experimentation with the tool.

Interestingly, there are very few teams at the extreme ends of the spectrum, making it clear that teams not using AI are lagging behind, while teams where AI usage is a core capability are miles ahead of their peers.

Where is your organization in its adoption of AI for product management work?

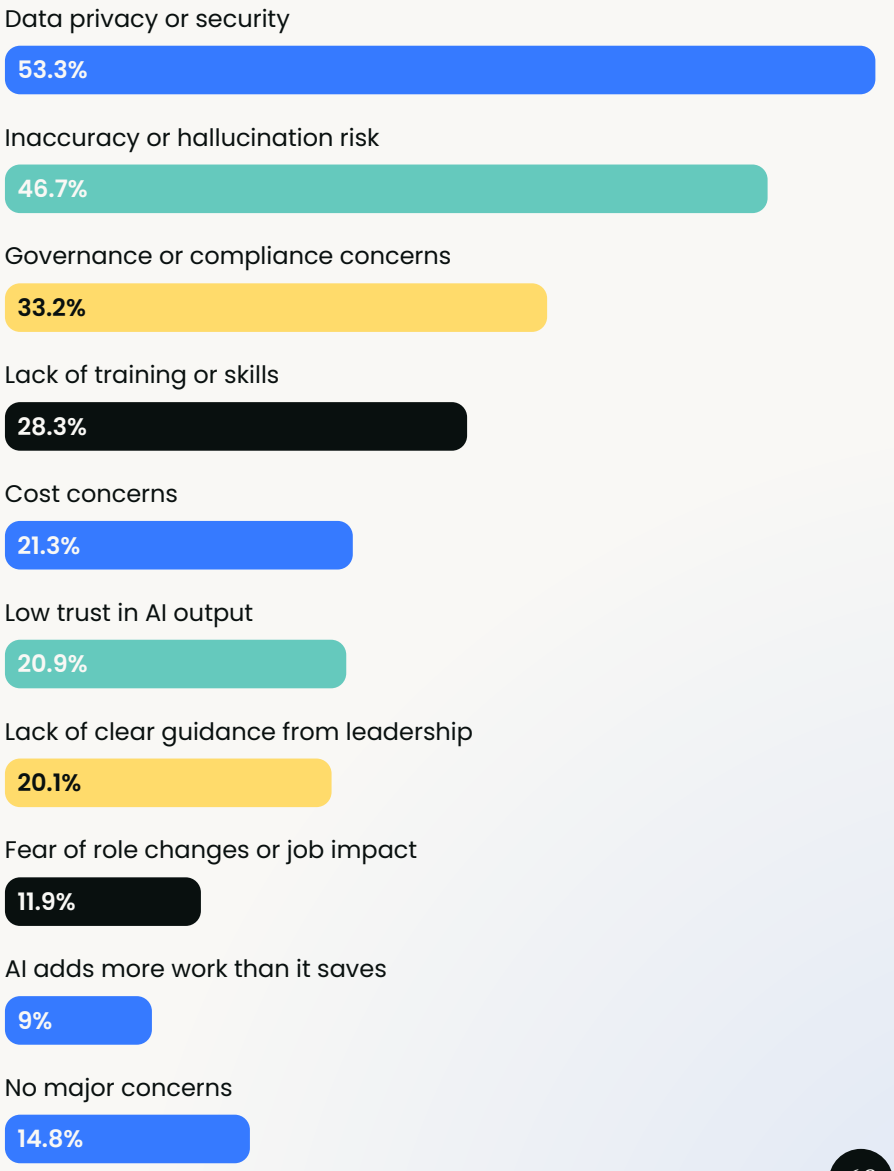
AI hesitations *and concerns*

The biggest concerns about AI usage include data privacy or security (**53.3%**), inaccuracy or hallucination risk (**46.7%**), and governance or compliance concerns (**33.2%**). This paints a picture that user trust and compliance are at the centre of the AI hesitation.

These concerns are less about whether AI is useful and more about whether it can be trusted and governed safely. This helps explain why many teams are experimenting with AI, but are still cautious about rolling it out more broadly.

N.B. Respondents could select multiple options.

What hesitations or concerns does your organization have about AI?



Wider AI usage and adoption

What tasks PMs *want AI to handle*

To understand where PMs see the most immediate value from AI, we asked respondents which product management task they would most want AI to handle for them. We grouped responses into themes based on recurring patterns, with four clear areas emerging as the most common targets for AI support.

1. Insight synthesis and analysis

By far the most common request is for AI to help make sense of large volumes of information, turning scattered data, research, and feedback into clear, actionable insights.

- "I'd like a way to tie information systems together in order to generate insights."
- "Gathering and analysing customer feedback."
- "Turning raw data into actionable insights."
- "Market and user research synthesis."
- "Synthesizing qualitative and quantitative research."

Wider AI usage and adoption

2. Documentation and writing

Many respondents want AI to reduce the time spent writing and maintaining product artefacts, from requirements and user stories to broader product documentation.

- "User story writing and roadmapping."
- "Writing requirements and documentation."
- "Documentation and specs."
- "Keeping product documentation up to date."

3. Admin and coordination

PMs also see value in AI taking on coordination-heavy work, such as meetings, reporting, and general administrative overhead that pulls time away from higher-value activities.

- "Meeting notes and summaries."
- "Status updates and reporting."
- "Chasing actions and follow-ups."
- "General admin and coordination work."

Wider AI usage and adoption

4. Prioritization and decision support

While mentioned less frequently, some respondents are interested in AI supporting prioritization by helping evaluate trade-offs, rank options, or sense-check decisions.

- “Ranking initiatives based on impact.”
- “Prioritization of backlog.”
- “Decision support for roadmap trade-offs.”
- “Help prioritize features.”

Overall, PMs most want AI to reduce sense-making, documentation, and coordination overhead, with decision support emerging as a secondary, more exploratory use case.

This suggests that AI is seen primarily as a way to save time and reduce cognitive load, rather than to replace core product judgment.

Wider AI usage and adoption

Which areas of your product development workflow would benefit *most from additional AI support?*

"Product design, discovery, automation, and market research."

- Ramana Kaza Venkata, Senior VP of Product Operations at Kongsberg Digital AS

"Productivity: Anywhere we're spending human intelligence on repeatable work – AI belongs there so people can do the thinking only humans can.

"Creativity: User/market research, functional story writing, user process flows, marketing content strategy, and other areas of creativity became more cohesive and intuitive.

"Newer paradigms: Work was reimagined in most areas for better agility, interconnectedness, and cross-functional alignment with additional AI support."

- Setu Shah, Senior Director of Global Product Strategy at Oracle

Wider AI usage and adoption

"The biggest leverage points are the places where we burn time synthesizing information, coordinating decisions, or repeating knowledge work across teams:

- Prioritization and decision support: Turns noisy inputs into crisp tradeoffs and decision memos.
- Discovery synthesis into a live 'customer truth': Continuously distills interviews, tickets, sales calls, and reviews into themes by segment.
- Measurement and narrative readouts: Auto-generates instrumentation plans and, "what moved/why/what next," insights."

- Preeti Kashyap, Senior Director of Product at Passport Global

"Market and competitor research; analyzing customer support tickets, customer surveys, and user tracking; and building prototypes faster to get better feedback and create confidence with customers."

- Fûgel Huisman, Head of Product at Tietoevry

"Requirements definition and refinement; roadmapping and prioritization; technical documentation and specification drafting; QA, test planning and E2E scenario generation; cross-functional communication; and customer insights and behavioral analytics."

- Raouf Carmi, VP of Product Management at Wolters Kluwer

Wider AI usage and adoption

"Problem discovery and signal synthesis: Synthesizing customer feedback, support tickets, sales calls, usage data, and experiments into coherent insights. Most teams are data-rich but insight-poor; AI can surface patterns humans miss or see too late.

"Hypothesis generation and prioritization: Turning vague problems into testable bets, pressure-testing assumptions, and simulating impact scenarios. This reduces roadmap bias and improves decision quality before teams commit capacity.

"Experiment design and evaluation: Helping teams define leading indicators, design clean experiments, and interpret noisy results. This is where outcome-focus often breaks down due to weak measurement literacy."

- Ashay Satav, Director of Product Management at eBay

"Discovery and prioritization. For discovery, I think that the big risk is that too much is lost in translation. The old game of telephone where pains and needs get passed down creates a lot of misunderstanding along the way. This impacts prioritization as well, whereas the loudest voice often shapes prioritization. The ability to have more directly sourced evidence to back prioritization will better align our customer's pains and needs to our roadmap."

- Steven Cohn, CEO at ProductPlan

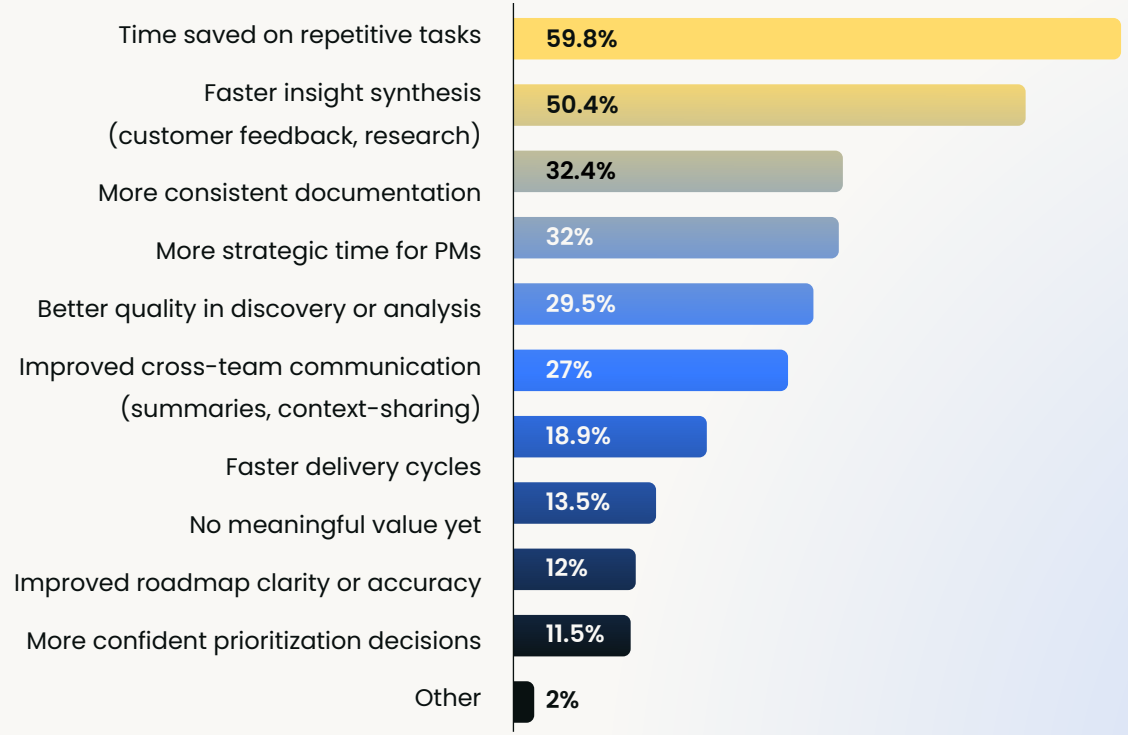
Wider AI usage and adoption

Value *from AI*

The majority of respondents cite time saved on repetitive tasks (**59.8%**) and faster insight synthesis (**50.4%**) as the biggest value they've realized from AI adoption.

Beyond efficiency gains, around a third of teams also report downstream benefits such as more consistent documentation and more time for strategic work, suggesting that AI's impact is beginning to extend beyond simple automation.

What value has your team actually realized from adopting AI?



N.B. Respondents could select multiple options.

How AI adoption *impacts value creation*

Looking at AI adoption alongside the value teams report helps clarify how this impact develops over time. In the earlier stages of adoption, value is concentrated around efficiency gains, particularly time saved on repetitive tasks and faster synthesis of customer insights.

These benefits appear consistently once teams move beyond experimentation and begin using AI in limited workflows.

More strategic benefits emerge later and less universally. Gains like increased strategic time for PMs, improved discovery quality, and more confident prioritization are reported far less often, even among teams with deeper AI adoption.

Suggesting AI value tends to broaden gradually – starting with productivity and sense-making, before translating into more meaningful influence on product decisions.

Time saved on repetitive tasks	Faster insight synthesis	More consistent documentation	More strategic time for PMs	Better quality in discovery or analysis	Faster delivery cycles	No meaningful value yet	Improved roadmap clarity or accuracy	More confident prioritization decisions	
66.7%	53.3%	26.7%	40%	33.3%	40%	0%	26.7%	20%	AI is a core, strategic capability
67.4%	71.7%	45.7%	41.3%	39.1%	21.7%	4.3%	15.2%	23.9%	AI embedded in many workflows
67.8%	54.4%	40%	31.1%	31.1%	17.8%	5.6%	11.1%	11.1%	Using AI for limited workflows
53.8%	39.7%	19.2%	30.8%	26.9%	17.9%	21.8%	11.5%	5.1%	Early experimentation
13.3%	13.3%	20%	6.7%	0%	0%	60%	0%	0%	Not using AI

N.B. Respondents could select multiple options.

Wider AI usage and adoption

Some "other" answers include:

- Using the free version
- Privacy concerns
- We are still a small team, we don't need it yet
- Some team members are slower to experiment with/use AI
- Poor quality outputs or wrong answers
- We address industries that don't promote or value AI at a PM level
- None, we're crushing it with AI

N.B. Respondents could select multiple options.

Value *blockers*

When it comes to the factors holding PMs back from getting more value out of AI, limited integration with existing tools (**47.1%**) and a lack of AI training (**42.6%**) stand out as the biggest barriers.

Rather than a lack of interest, the data points to practical friction – teams struggle to fit AI into their day-to-day workflows or feel confident using it effectively.

Taken together with earlier findings, this suggests that unlocking more value from AI is less about new tools and more about making AI easier to adopt, govern, and apply in product work.

What prevents your team from getting more value out of AI?

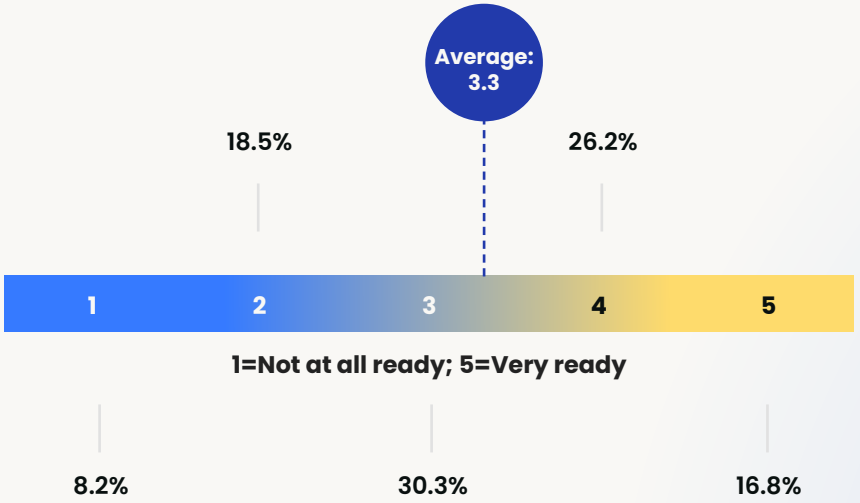
Wider AI usage and adoption

AI *readiness*

When it comes to AI readiness, responses point to a moderate level of confidence, with an average score of **3.3/5** and most ratings clustering around the middle of the scale.

While a meaningful share of respondents feel positively about their organization's readiness, relatively few express full confidence, suggesting that many teams are still in the process of translating interest and experimentation into repeatable practice.

How ready do you feel your organization is to adopt AI within your internal product management workflows and processes?



Part 6

How will the product management *role evolve?*

As AI becomes more embedded in product work, questions about how the PM role will evolve are becoming more common. This section examines how leaders anticipate those changes and the implications for day-to-day product work.

How will the *PM role evolve*

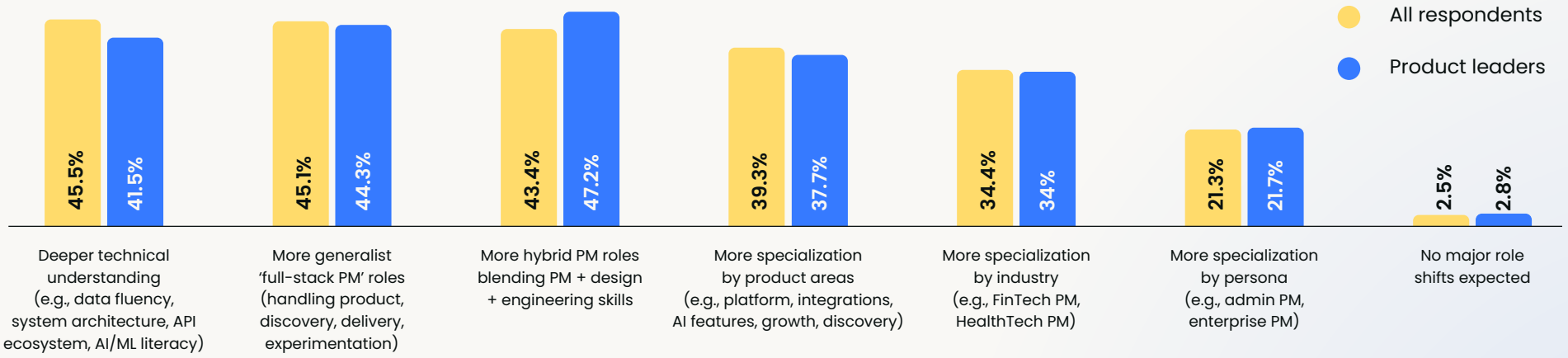
To get started, we asked our respondents how they expect the PM role to evolve in the coming years. The most common answers were requiring a deeper technical understanding (**45.5%**), more generalist full-stack roles (**45.1%**), and more hybrid roles blending PM with design and engineering (**43.4%**).

The results suggest that many PMs expect their roles to become broader and more technical, rather than more narrowly specialized. While some anticipate increased specialization by product area or industry, these paths are less commonly cited.

What's clear is that very few PMs expect the role to remain unchanged – indicating widespread expectation of an evolution in how product work is done.

Product leaders largely align with the wider product community in expecting the PM role to change, with very few anticipating no major shifts. Like the broader group, they most often point to more generalist and hybrid roles, reinforcing the idea that breadth will matter more than narrow specialization.

Leaders are slightly more likely to expect PMs to take on hybrid, cross-disciplinary responsibilities, suggesting that those shaping teams may be leaning further into integrated roles than PMs experience today.



How do you expect product management roles to evolve in the next few years?

N.B. Respondents could select multiple options.

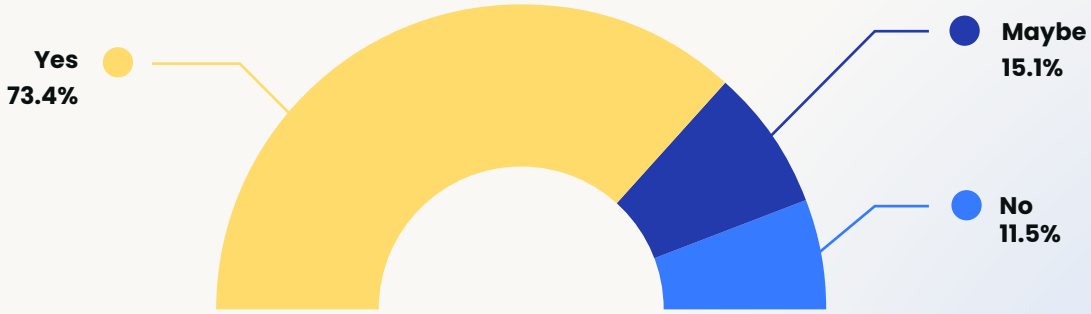
How will the product management role evolve?

Increase in *hybrid roles*

Given that most respondents expect PM roles to broaden rather than narrow, we looked more closely at how hybrid roles are being perceived.

Nearly three-quarters of respondents (**73.4%**) expect product roles to become more hybrid, combining responsibilities across product, design, and engineering. This suggests that hybridization is widely seen as a likely evolution of the role.

Views on this shift are mixed. Many respondents are excited by the prospect of greater ownership and faster decision-making, while concerns around unrealistic expectations, unclear role boundaries, and skill gaps are almost as prominent. This points to cautious optimism: PMs are open to broader responsibility, but only if it's accompanied by clearer expectations and stronger support.



Do you expect product management roles to become more hybrid, combining responsibilities traditionally owned by multiple functions (e.g., product, design, engineering)?

How will the product management role evolve?

What excites or concerns you most about hybrid (PM + design + engineering) roles?

Excites:

Increased ownership or autonomy

47.5%

Faster decision-making

43.9%

Reduced dependency on other teams

32.8%

Concerns:

Unrealistic expectations for PMs

46.7%

Unclear role boundaries

37.3%

Skill gaps or training needs

33.6%

Loss of craft or deep expertise

31.6%

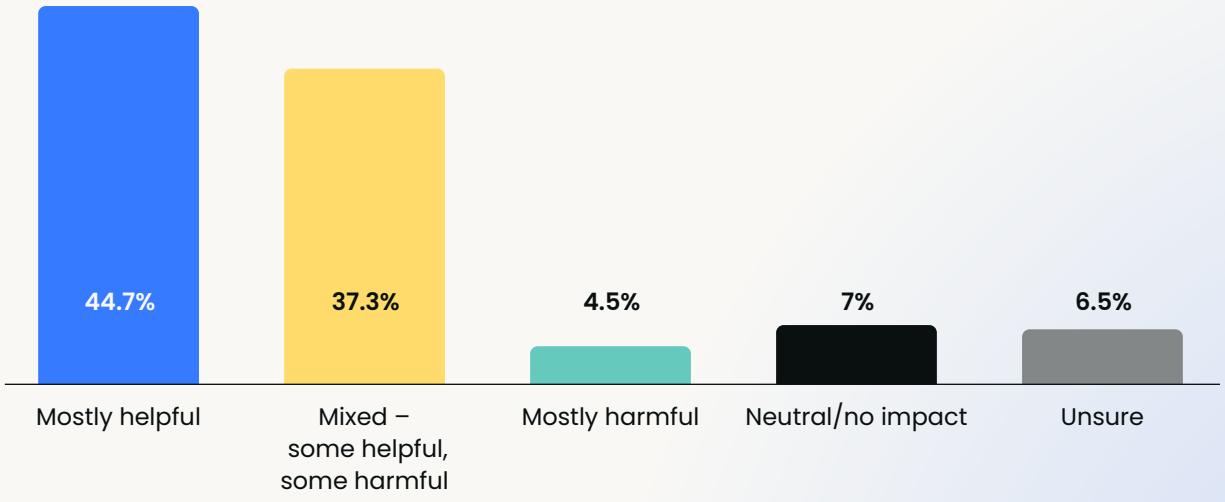
N.B. Respondents could select multiple options.

How will the product management role evolve?

Impact *of specialization*

While fewer PMs expect specialization to define the role on its own, perceptions of increased specialization are still largely positive. **44.7%** of respondents view it as mostly helpful, with a further **37.3%** expecting a mix of benefits and trade-offs, suggesting that specialization is broadly seen as valuable.

Few respondents see specialization as clearly negative; this positions specialization as a complementary path to broader or hybrid roles – useful in certain contexts, rather than an industry-wide shift in how PM roles are structured.



How do you believe increased specialization will impact your organization?

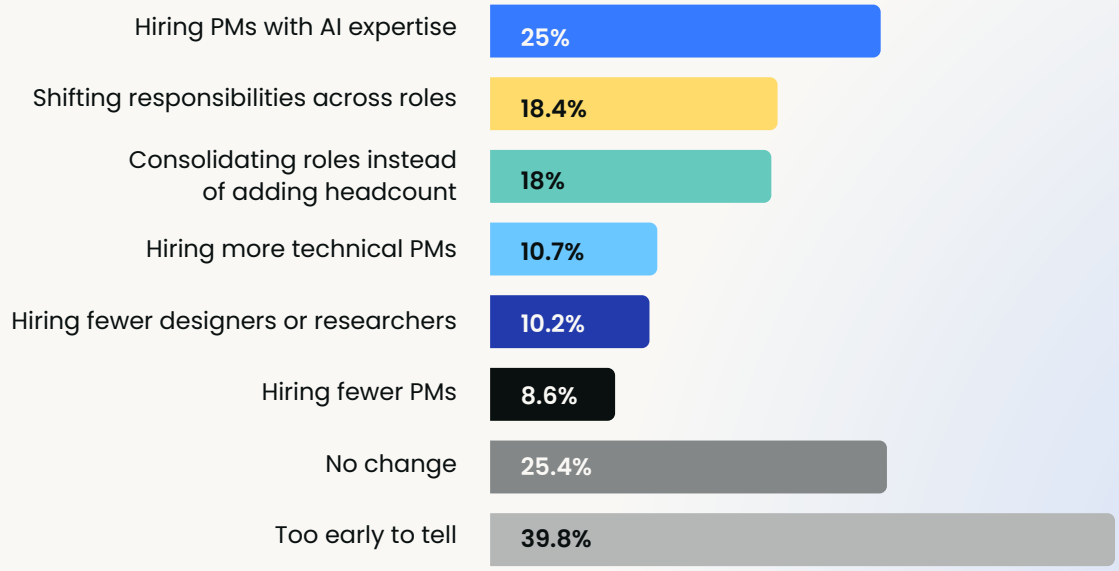
How will the product management role evolve?

Impact of AI on hiring *and team structure*

When it comes to hiring and team structure, AI's influence appears to be still emerging. While a quarter of respondents report hiring PMs with AI expertise, and others point to shifts in responsibilities or role consolidation, these changes are far from universal.

Our data shows a level of uncertainty: nearly **40%** say it's still too early to tell, and a further **25.4%** report no change at all. Taken together, this suggests that while AI is beginning to shape hiring conversations, most organizations are still testing its impact before making significant structural decisions.

How has AI influenced your hiring or team structure decisions?



N.B. Respondents could select multiple options.

How will the product management role evolve?

How has AI adoption changed expectations, roles, or ways of working within your product organization?

Ramana Kaza Venkata,
Senior VP of Product Operations at Kongsberg Digital

We're still only using AI for coding; we're focusing on increasing areas for AI usage.

Fûgel Huisman,
Head of Product at Tietoevry

Front-running product managers have become better at analyzing the market, competition, and customer needs, allowing for faster and clearer decision-making. Faster prototyping leads to higher quality customer feedback without the need for developers or designers at every step.

Setu Shah,
Senior Director of Global Product Strategy at Oracle

AI didn't replace roles; it augmented them and raised the bar. Execution got faster, but thinking became the real differentiator.

Raouf Carmi,
VP of Product Management at Wolters Kluwer

Clearer alignment and prioritization, and faster, more confident decision making.

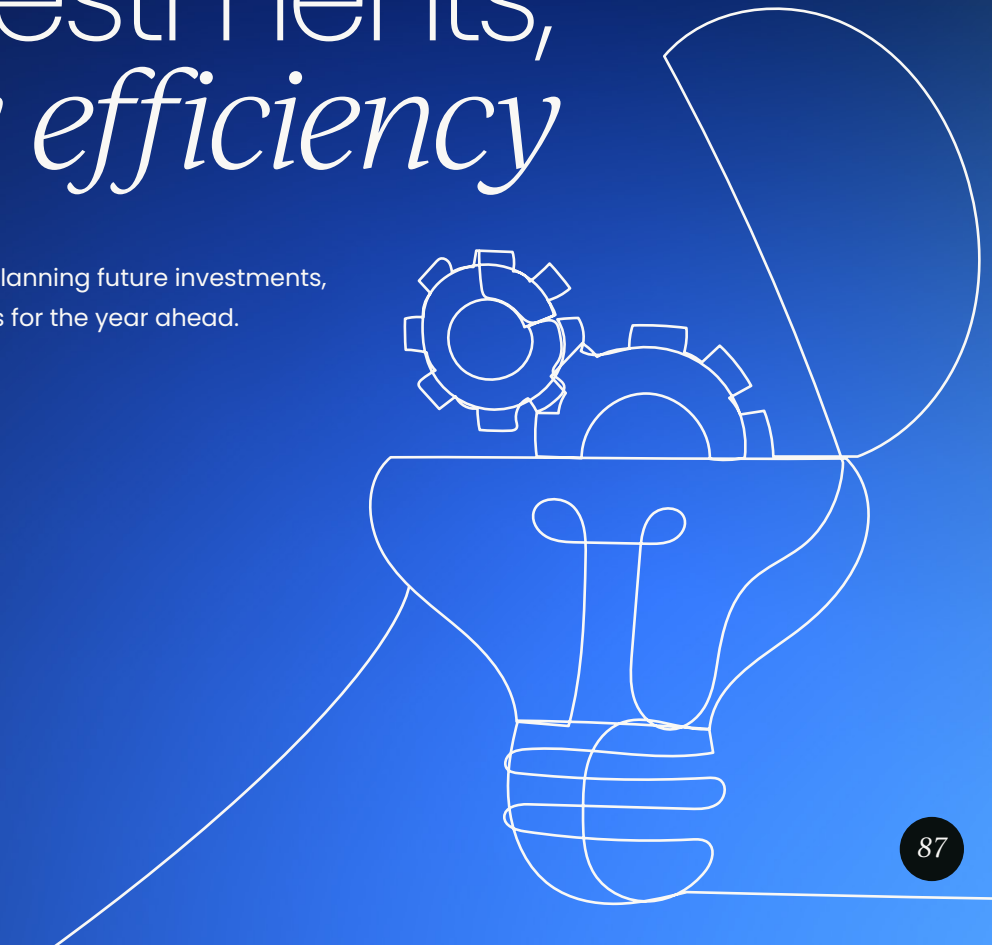
Steven Cohn,
CEO at ProductPlan

AI hasn't made many changes yet, but we expect it to in 2026.

Part 7

Tool stack, investments, *and workflow efficiency*

This section explores how product teams are streamlining tools, planning future investments, and improving workflow efficiency as they shape their tech stacks for the year ahead.

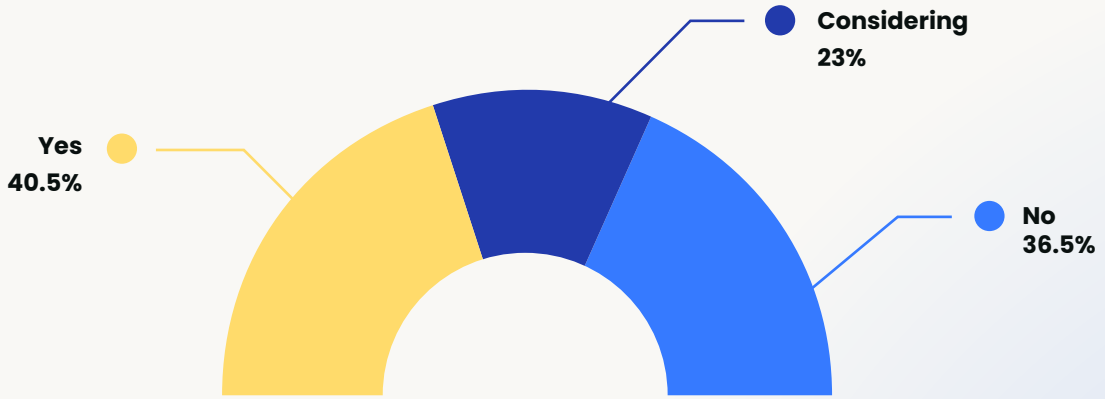


Tool stack, investments, and workflow efficiency

Tool *consolidation*

We first asked whether organizations are actively consolidating their product tools. Just over **40%** say they are already doing so, with a further **23%** considering it, suggesting that tool consolidation is on the radar for a majority of teams.

At the same time, a sizable minority (**36.5%**) report no current plans to reduce their toolset, indicating that consolidation is becoming common, but is far from universal.



Is your organization currently consolidating or reducing the number of product tools it uses?

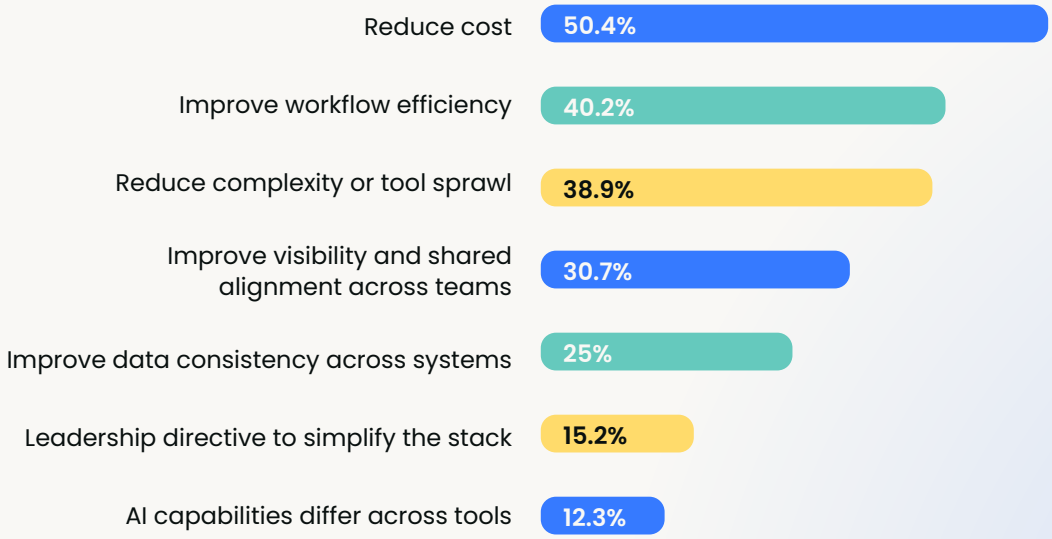
Tool stack, investments, and workflow efficiency

Reasons for *tool consolidation*

For teams that are consolidating, the motivation is largely practical rather than strategic. Cost reduction (**50.4%**) and workflow efficiency (**40.2%**) top the list, closely followed by efforts to reduce tool sprawl and complexity (**38.9%**).

Fewer teams cite top-down mandates or AI capability differences as drivers, suggesting that consolidation is more often driven by day-to-day friction and usability concerns than by leadership directives or emerging technology shifts.

What are the main reasons your organization is consolidating tools?



The remaining 8.2% note that they aren't consolidating tools at all, with many planning to expand their product stack in the coming year.

N.B. Respondents could select multiple options.

Tool stack, investments, and workflow efficiency

High-priority *investments*

When it comes to future investments, customer research and insight synthesis (**39.3%**), strategy definition and alignment (**36.5%**), and outcome and impact measurement (**32.4%**) emerge as the highest priorities for 2026.

Close behind are investments in prioritization frameworks and decision-making, reinforcing a broader focus on clarity and effectiveness rather than speed alone.

Which areas of the product development process are your highest priority for investment in the next year?

N.B. Respondents could select multiple options.

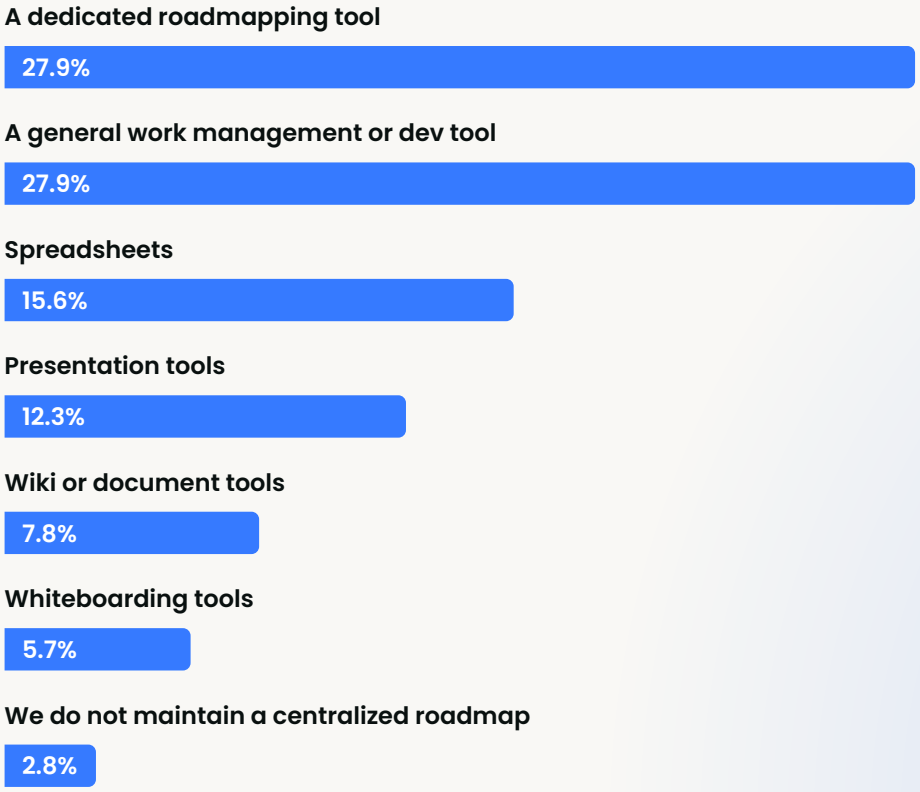
Tool stack, investments, and workflow efficiency

Where the *roadmap lives*

Finally, we looked at where teams are building and maintaining their product roadmaps today. Responses are split almost evenly between dedicated roadmapping tools (**27.9%**) and general work management or development tools (**27.9%**), suggesting there's no single dominant approach.

A meaningful share still relies on spreadsheets or presentation tools, pointing to roadmapping practices that are often shaped by convenience and existing workflows rather than purpose-built tooling.

Where do you primarily build and maintain your product roadmap today?



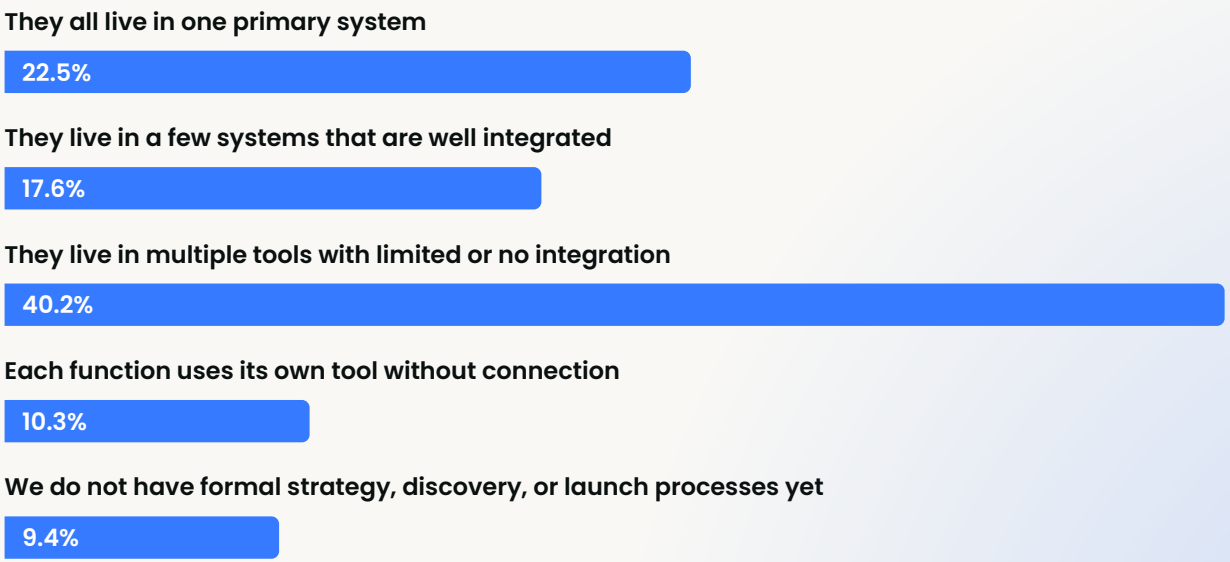
Tool stack, investments, and workflow efficiency

We then explored how well product strategy, discovery, roadmaps, and launch plans are connected across those tools.

Here, the picture becomes clearer: **40.2%** of respondents say these activities live across multiple tools with limited or no integration, while only one in five (**22.5%**) report having everything in a single system.

This suggests that connection and continuity across the product lifecycle often lag, reinforcing why workflow efficiency and tool consolidation have emerged as key priorities.

How connected are your product strategy, discovery/ideas, roadmaps, and launch plans across your tools?



Part 8

Upcoming *challenges*

Our final section explores the challenges product managers expect to face within the next year.

Upcoming challenges

Challenges

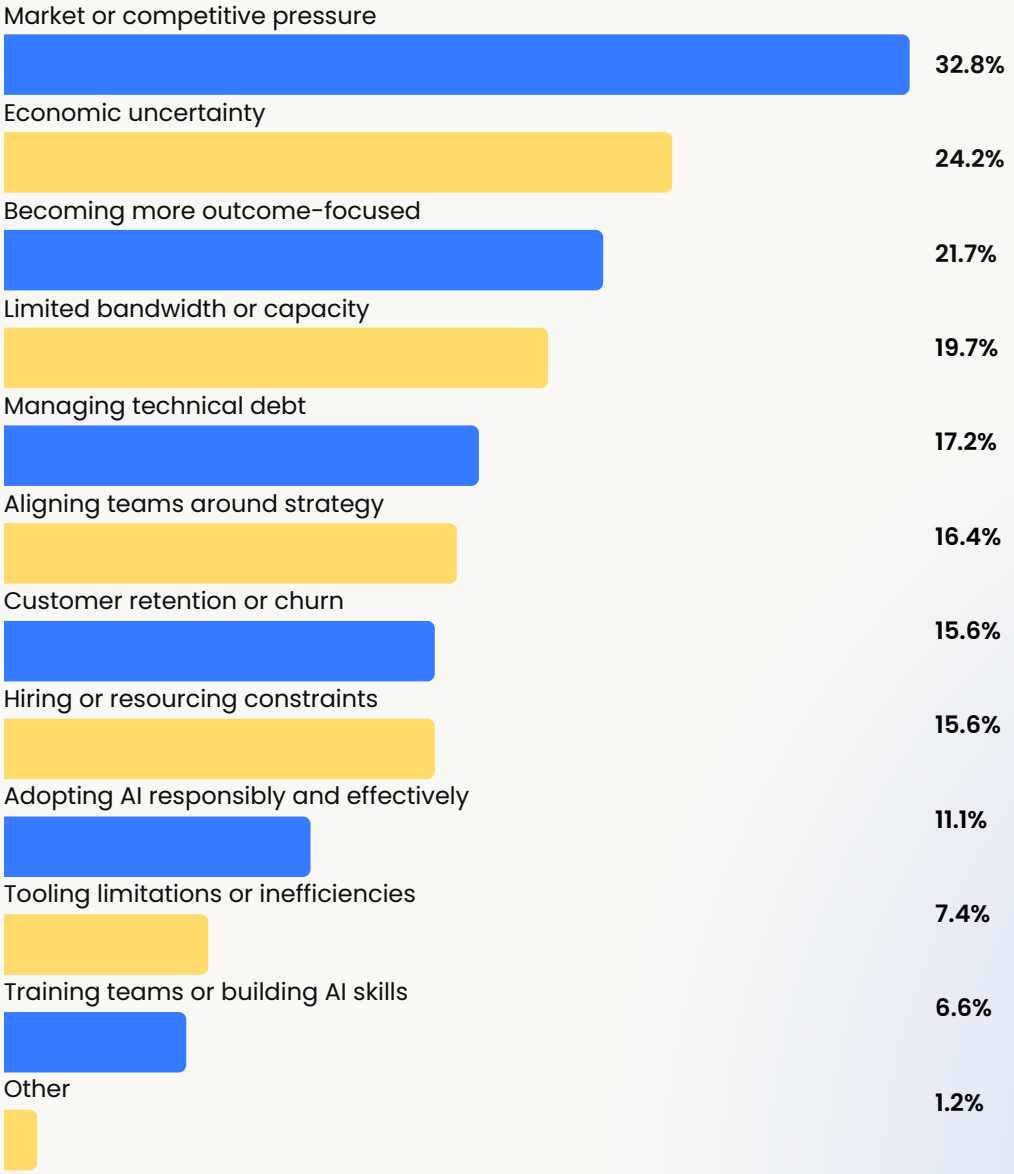
Looking ahead, respondents expect their biggest challenges next year to be driven largely by external pressure and internal execution constraints. Market or competitive pressure tops the list (**32.8%**), followed by economic uncertainty (**24.2%**), reflecting a backdrop of volatility.

Alongside these external factors, a significant share point to organizational and operational challenges, including becoming more outcome-focused (**21.7%**), limited bandwidth or capacity (**19.7%**), and managing technical debt (**17.2%**). These responses suggest that while teams are clear on the direction they want to move in, execution friction remains a persistent concern.

What stands out is that AI-related challenges sit lower on the list. While adopting AI responsibly and building skills are present, they are not yet seen as top-tier risks, indicating that many teams are still grappling with more immediate pressures around focus, capacity, and alignment as they plan for the year ahead.

Upcoming challenges

What do you expect to be your biggest challenges next year?



N.B. Respondents could select multiple options.

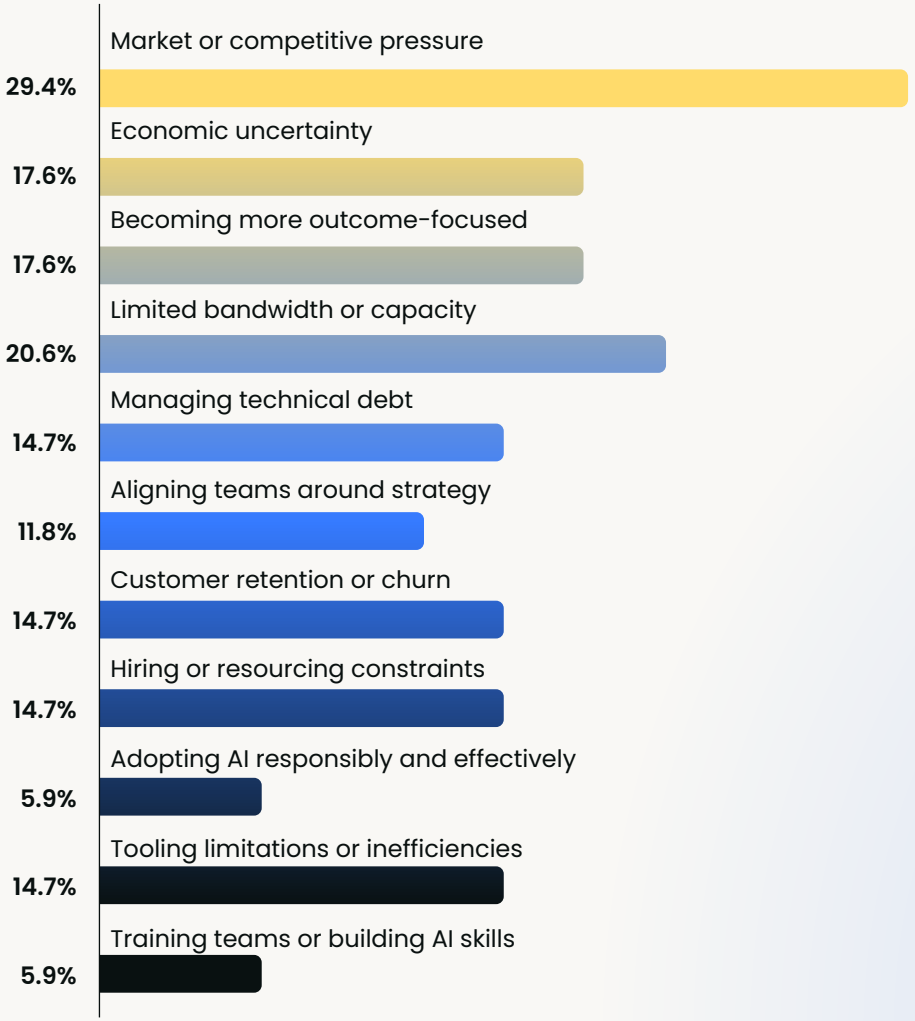
Upcoming challenges

In project-based organizations, challenges are spread across a mix of market pressure, limited capacity, and foundational execution issues, reflecting teams still working to establish stable ways of operating.

Challenges *by maturity stage*

Looking at expected challenges through the lens of product maturity reveals a clear shift in what teams are up against as they evolve.

Project-based

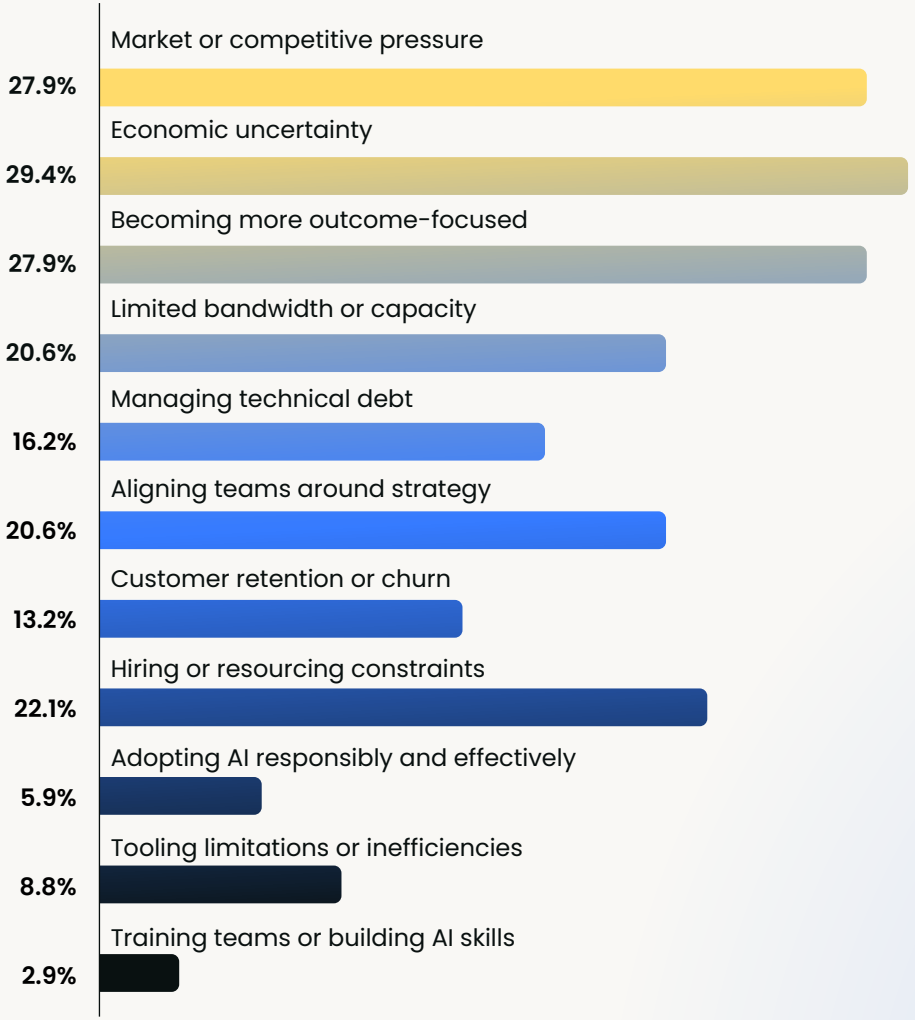


Upcoming challenges

The transitioning stage stands out as the most demanding. Teams here are significantly more likely to cite economic uncertainty, becoming more outcome-focused, and aligning teams around strategy as major challenges.

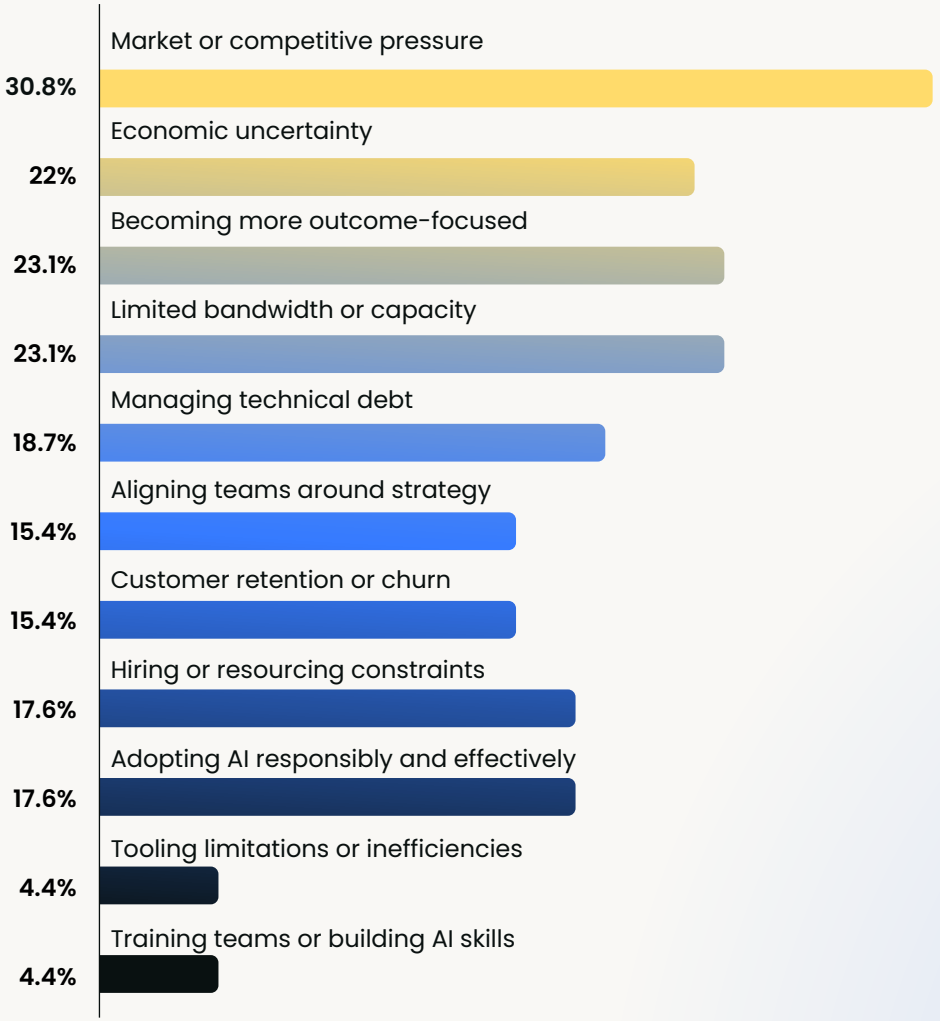
This reinforces a recurring theme throughout the report: the move from project-based to product-led ways of working introduces short-term strain, as new expectations emerge faster than processes and structures can fully support them.

Transitioning from project-based to product-led



Upcoming challenges

Partially product-led



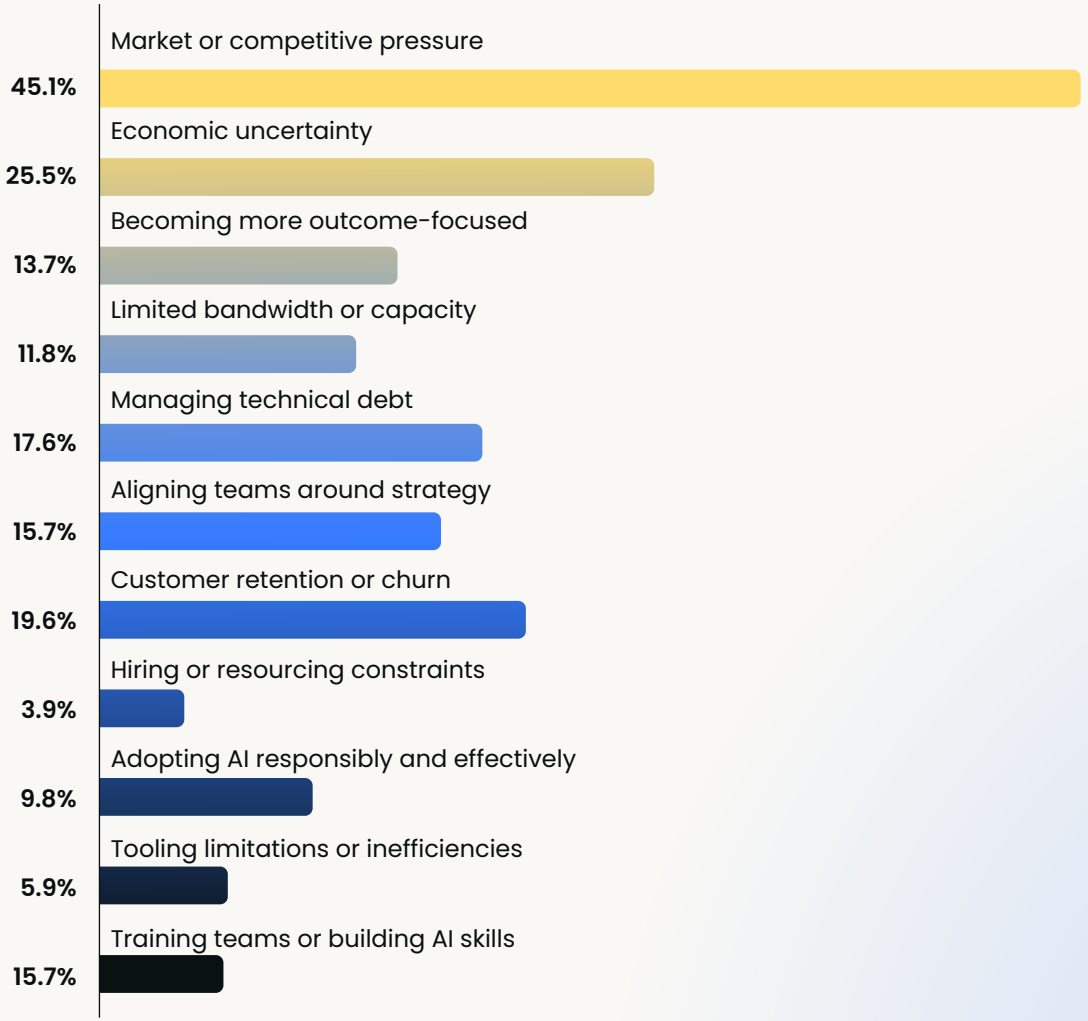
As organizations become partially product-led, challenges begin to rebalance. Capacity constraints, technical debt, and AI adoption rise in prominence, suggesting teams are starting to optimize and scale, while still managing the consequences of earlier decisions.

Upcoming challenges

By the time organizations are fully product-led, the nature of challenges shifts decisively outward. Market and competitive pressure dominate, cited by 45.1% of respondents, far outweighing internal concerns like capacity, alignment, or outcome focus.

While internal challenges haven't disappeared entirely, they no longer define the day-to-day struggle, suggesting that maturity brings greater internal stability – even as external pressure intensifies.

Fully product-led



This shows challenges don't disappear with maturity – they simply change. Teams move from struggling with internal clarity and execution, through a turbulent transition phase, and ultimately toward competing effectively in the market.

Upcoming challenges

What do you expect to be your *biggest challenges next year?*

"Offering value from AI both in our workflows and in our products while balancing between hype, disillusionment, and maintaining consistent quality."

- Fûgel Huisman, Head of Product at Tietoevry

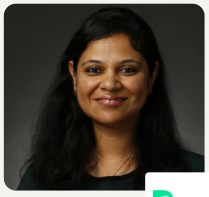
"Speed without strategy: Not adopting AI fast enough is a risk – but adopting it without clarity is an even bigger one.

"Cost vs. benefits: AI will be easy to buy. Judgment will be hard to scale.

"Continue experimentation: Newer tools, models, and frameworks will emerge, and the experimentation continues to choose relevance and context over flashy features."

- Setu Shah, Senior Director of Global Product Strategy at Oracle

Upcoming challenges



Passport

"Next year, the challenge isn't 'AI sprawl' – it's building an intentional AI operating model. Here's what we should be doing instead:

- Set a clear AI strategy tied to outcomes: Pick 3–5 priority workflows (e.g., discovery synthesis, decision memos, measurement/ readouts) and define what 'better' means (cycle time, quality, adoption, cost).
- Standardize the core toolchain: Establish an approved set of tools by category, with ownership, budgets, and integration expectations – so teams aren't constantly context switching.
- Create shared standards and guardrails: Data handling rules, permissioning, human review requirements, and an evaluation rubric so outputs are trustworthy and consistent.
- Build reusable assets, not one-off prompts: Prompt libraries, templates, and 'playbooks' embedded in how we work.
- Run a governed experimentation loop: Time-boxed pilots, clear success metrics, and a path to scale or sunset – so experimentation produces learning, not permanent clutter.
- Invest in enablement: Training, office hours, and champions – so adoption is equitable and actually improves craft, not just speed."

– Preeti Kashyap, Senior Director of Product at Passport Global

Upcoming challenges

"Sustaining focus amid strategy shifts, specifically around the adoption of AI into our workflows."

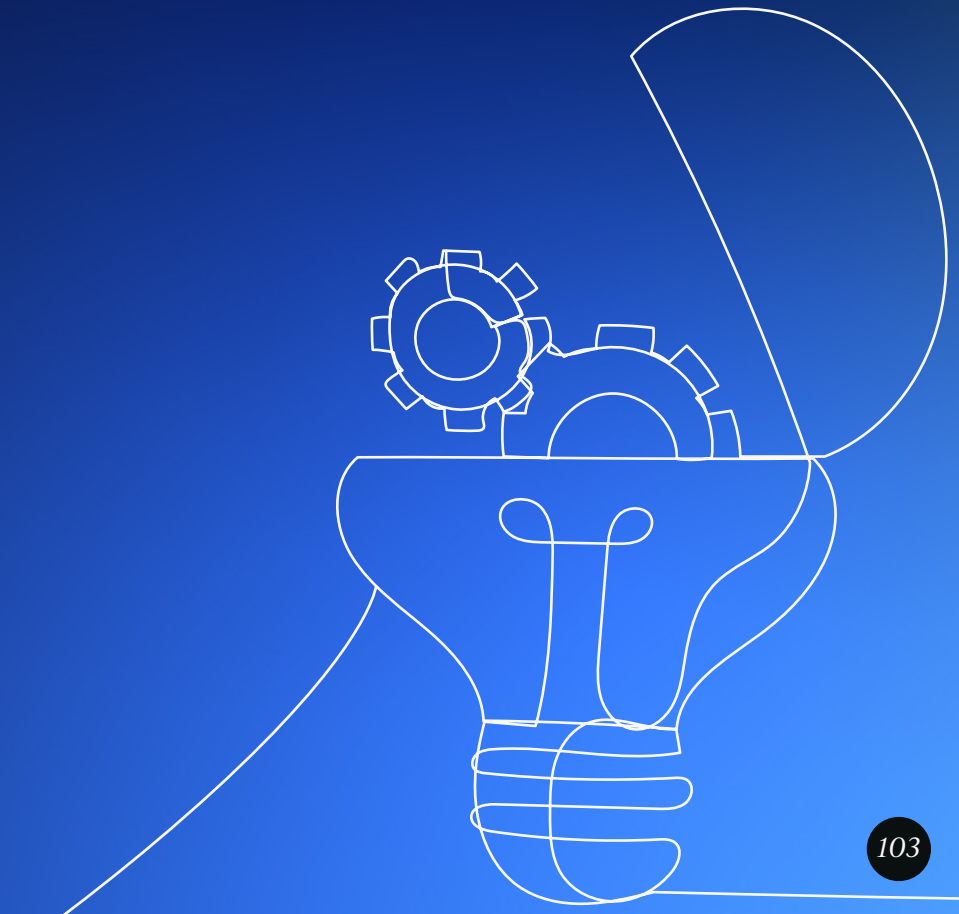
- Raouf Carmi, VP of Product Management at Wolters Kluwer

"The biggest challenges are less technical and more systemic:

- Maintaining strategic clarity as execution speed increases. AI will accelerate output across teams, making it harder to keep everyone aligned on why work is happening. Without strong decision frameworks, speed amplifies fragmentation.
- Avoiding outcome dilution at scale. As more teams adopt outcome language, the risk is performative OKRs – metrics that look good but don't reflect real customer or business impact.
- Evolving talent without breaking morale. AI raises the bar for product judgment, systems thinking, and data literacy. Upskilling is necessary, but uneven adoption can create fear, defensiveness, or role confusion if not handled deliberately.
- Integrating AI safely into core workflows. Governance, trust, and explainability will lag behind capability. Leaders will need to balance speed with risk – especially in customer-facing or revenue-critical surfaces."

- Ashay Satav, Director of Product Management at eBay

Conclusion



Conclusion

Product management in 2026 will be defined by teams' ability to effectively execute product strategy. Across strategy, prioritization, customer insight, and AI adoption, the same pattern shows up: most teams have a clear sense of direction, but execution friction, short-term pressure, and limited capacity often get in the way.

At the same time, the role itself is shifting. PMs are spending more time aligning stakeholders, making decisions with imperfect information, and reducing cognitive and coordination overhead. AI is starting to support this work as a practical way to save time and sharpen focus – with the most value coming from teams that use it to support better judgment, not replace it.

So what does this mean in practice?

1. Investing in clarity around strategy, decision ownership, and prioritization criteria pays dividends at every stage of maturity.
2. The biggest gains often come from removing friction, not adding more process or tools.
3. Whether it's adopting AI, evolving the PM role, or rethinking team structures, progress tends to be incremental rather than instant.

Our hope is that this report provides you with more than benchmarks. It's designed to help you reflect on where your team sits today, understand the trade-offs others are grappling with, and spot a few threads worth pulling in your own context.

As always, big thanks to our respondents and contributors, without whom this report simply wouldn't exist.

Conclusion

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Conclusion

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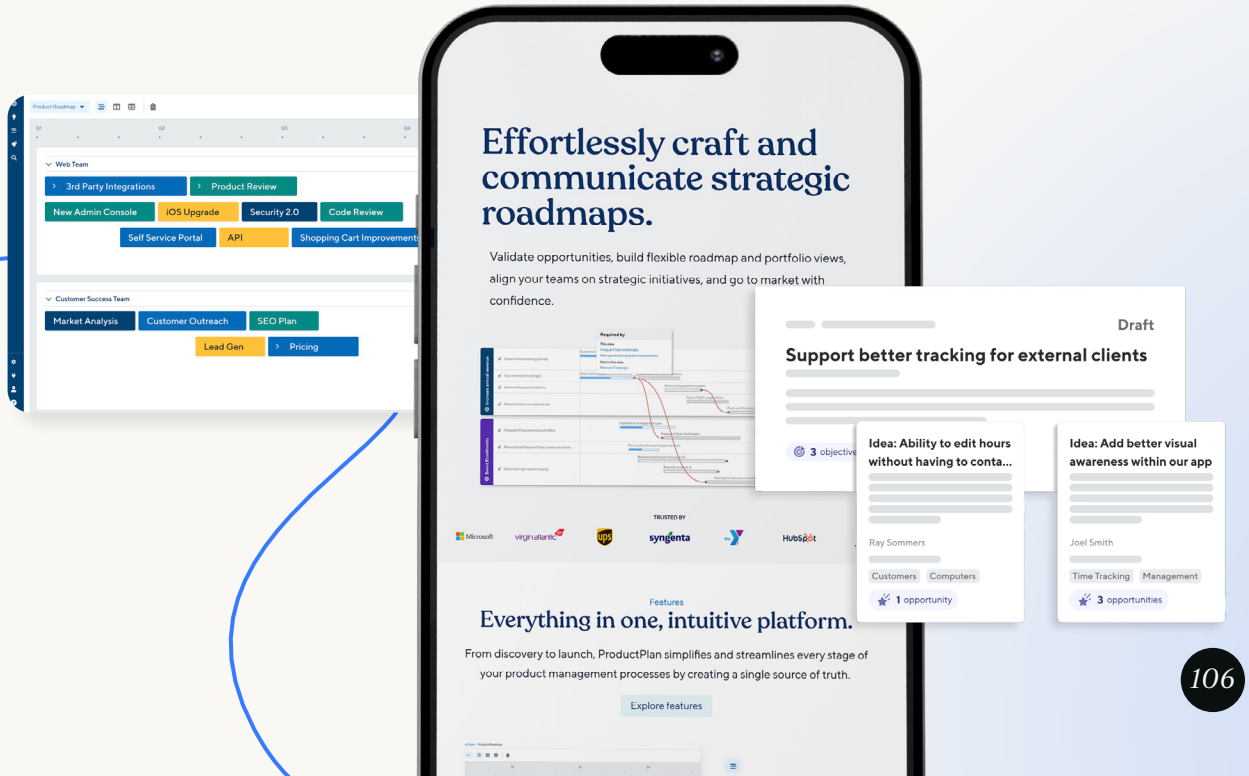

Meet *the team*

Rebecca Stewart
Midweight Copywriter

Rebecca leads the content strategy at PLA, producing high-quality content through blogs, reports, social posts, and videos with a community-first mindset. She's passionate about fostering relationships with our community members and spotlighting their insights through our blog.

LinkedIn

Richard King
Founder & CEO

Rich is the Founder of Product-Led Alliance. He's responsible for what happens next with the community, so if you'd like to have your say, don't hesitate to get in touch – Rich is always open to invaluable feedback and ideas.

LinkedIn

Ivana Pusceddu
Senior Creative Artworker at The Alliance

Ivana is our talented Artworker who specializes in fulfilling all our design needs. She's in charge of creating the layout and incorporating visual elements in this report and is always eager to hear your thoughts on his designs!

LinkedIn

Product-Led Alliance

Thank you for *reading*