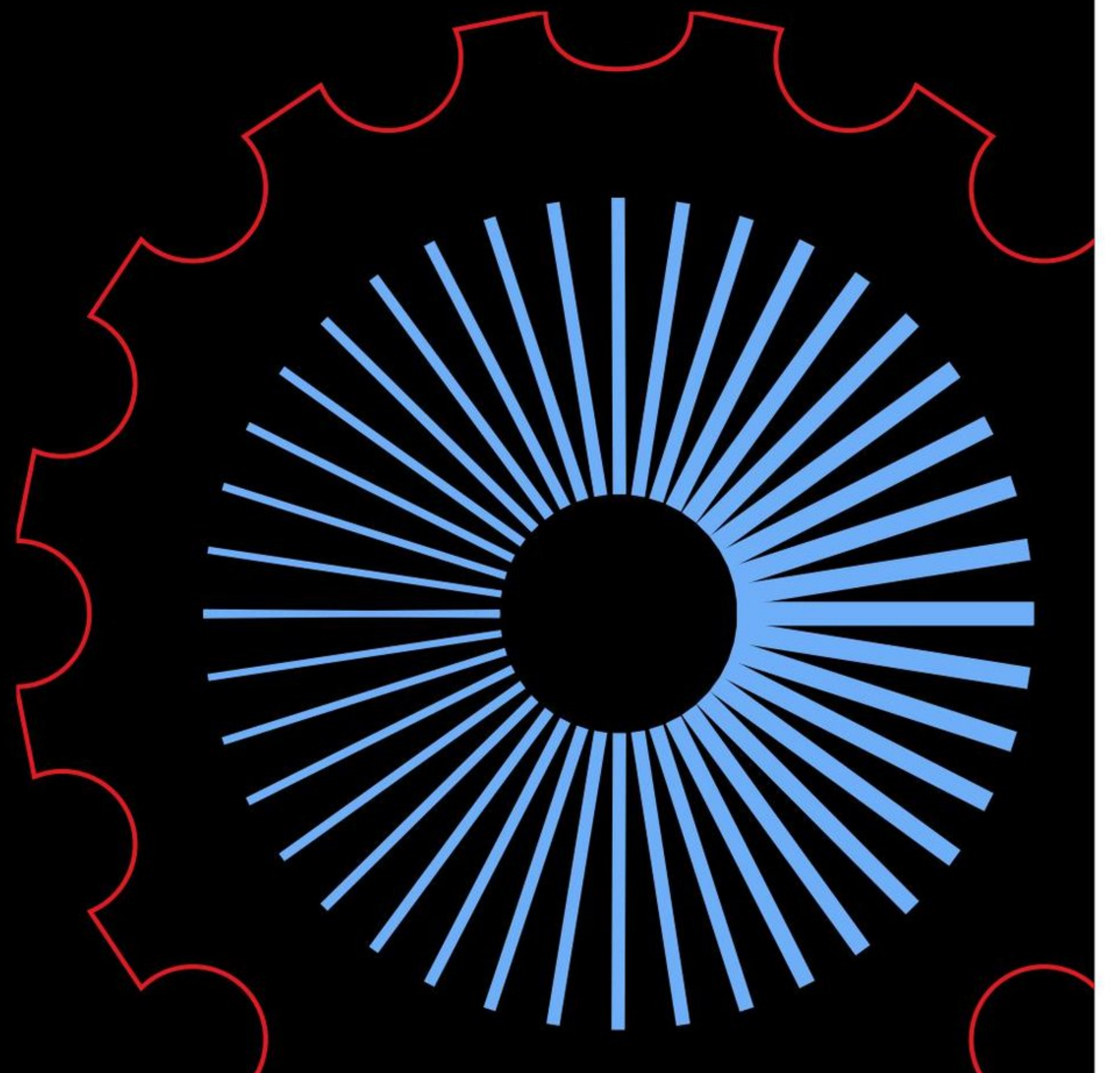
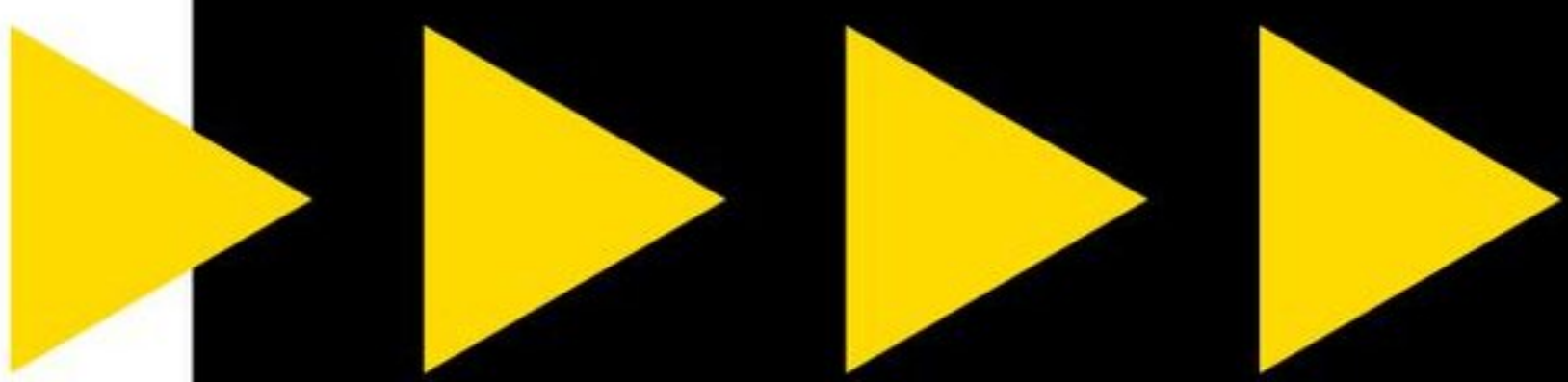


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GA GENERAL ASSEMBLY

The Role of Product in Your Organization



Introduction

Our Product Management standards board has provided the below vital insights, pragmatic action items, and on-the-pulse thought leadership centered around creating — and maintaining — product-driven, customer-centric business cultures. These cultures create a symbiosis between the people you're reaching and the products you're offering, making them essential for sustainable growth and longevity.

Why be product-centric?

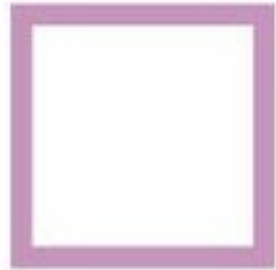

A product-centric organization keeps you customer-first. These days, customer-first isn't a platitude — it's a vital mindset that bridges the gap between your business's current offerings and the ever-evolving needs of your customers.

As more traditional organizations have transitioned to product-centricity in the last five years, they've defaulted to behaviors that may have started with good intent, but have morphed into cumbersome routines that block driving results for customers.

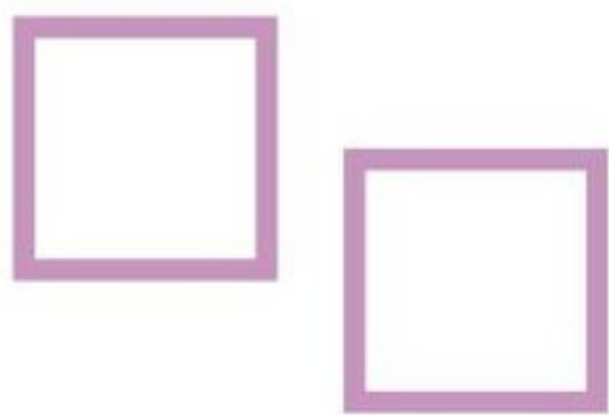
Most of the behaviors and routines are useful at some point, but the key is to use them each in the right context. As a group of product leaders across many different types of organizations — media, tech, finance, and eCommerce — we want to help you draw a clear line between the behaviors and questions that continually drive customer outcomes and the behaviors that sustain your product team's efficiency. This will help diverse leaders apply the right type of coaching and leadership — in the right moments — for product teams to drive outcomes for customers.



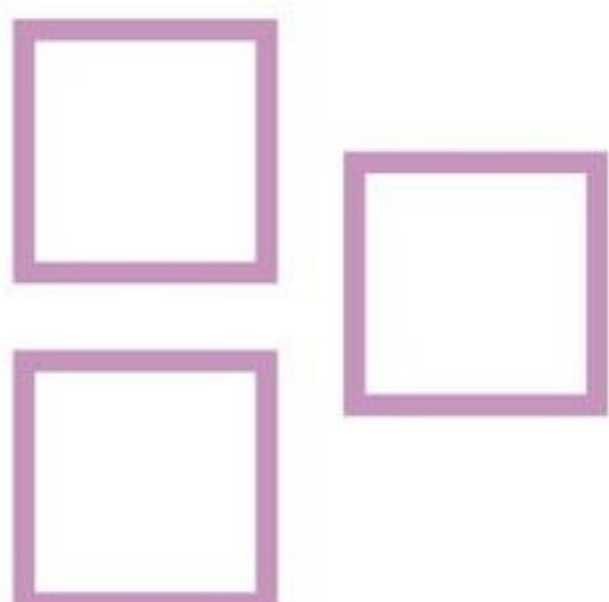
What 4 product-centric behaviors are needed?



First, a product-driven culture is oriented around clear **business goals** that translate to a product strategy with **hypotheses and KPIs** that drive more effective solutions for customers. You should be aiming to drive these hypotheses forward to either validate and build the solution or pivot to a new hypothesis.

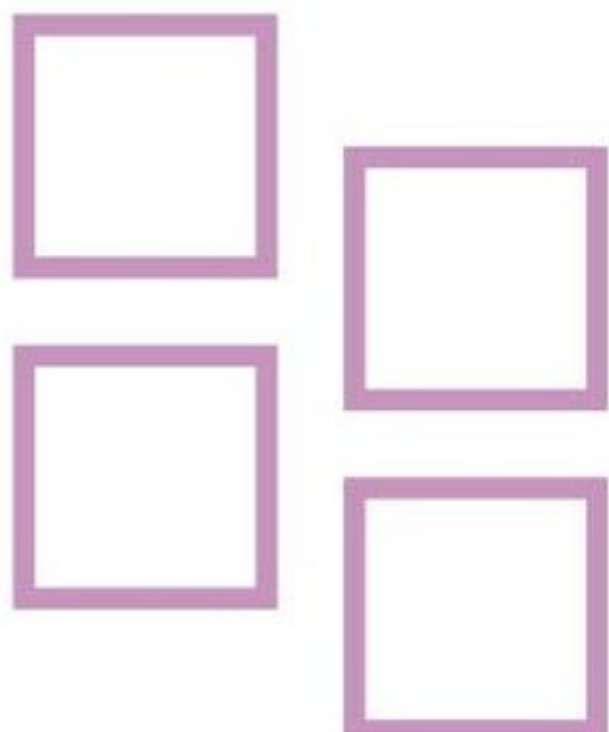


To drive alignment around possible solutions against these hypotheses and KPIs, a culture needs to be **centered on the customer**, and constantly reviewing metrics and progress toward customer impact. Customer understanding must extend beyond the sales team. As products become focused more on the human <> product interaction in a digital space, everyone needs to understand their customer better (and why their products fit their needs best.) This is the key of product managers: to provide the best value for customers in a digital space, not driving to deliver software at a certain rate.



To test the efficiency of possible solutions, you need a very strong culture of **ownership, accountability, and autonomy** for the product managers leading the hypotheses, so they can truly innovate. The testing and development of solutions must be collaborative. If product managers are not equipped with clear KPIs, reasonable testing budgets, accountability for hitting an ultimate goal (not just a vanity metric), and the leadership acceptance that productive failure is ok, they will struggle to succeed. This inherently requires a top-down comfort with taking risks in order to learn.

There's a side-benefit to instilling this level of autonomy and ownership for product managers: When people are at a company where they think they can do great work (and then actually do it and account for it), they'll stay longer and continue to improve the business.



Finally, to really make new ideas come to life, the objectives and metrics need to be **socialized to cross-functional** teams for accountability. Instead of an assembly line where a leader gives a team something to execute on with marketing generating the messaging and campaign, and product developing the goods, it's about saying to a cross-functional group: "Here's the problem we're trying to solve. Help us solve it." This is more of a hub and spoke model that requires cross-functional teams to be aligned around goals vs. aligned around outputs.

What to ask, when to ask.

How do you know whether you're cultivating a product-driven culture as a leader? The questions you ask and statements you make inform the way your teams think about their work — the below offers useful questions to model after:

Business & Growth

Leaders should ask these questions to evaluate **strategy or idea efficacy** for driving customer or business results. These also ensure that product managers are driving towards the right business outcomes.

ASK ✓

How is the business doing?

What are current customer pain points?
When is the last time you sunset a feature?

What is the main customer-centric problem you are trying to solve?

NOT ✗

What did you release last month?

What features are you going to launch in your backlog?

Why isn't this working? (You invested a lot of money in this.)

Innovation & Analytics

These measure the **efficiency of the product team**. When leaders ask these questions in forums intentionally set to improve the team's operating efficiency, they can help drive process improvements.

ASK ✓

How have we made the customer experience better — exponentially?

How many true experiments are running + how many of these have failed?

What has been learned from these experiments; how are learnings informing future ideas?

Are negative KPIs being tracked?

NOT ✗

What was the last business model copied?

When can we implement this idea?

Did the test prove my point?

What's the conversion rate (without the "ask" question)?

ALWAYS ASK: What data backs up the hypothesis solution?



Cross-Functional Culture

ASK ✓

Who are the right stakeholders for this feature decision?

Do you mean them or all of us (when asked an accountability question)?

Does everyone understand the goal?

What parameters are being used to make product scaling decisions?

Are we using the right amount of engineering in this feature — tech debt and all?

NOT ✗

Has Marketing, Sales, or [Department] signed off?

Why didn't [Department] deliver as promised?

Did you raise the dependency, etc.? (Do not go into checklist mode.)

How much time is being allocated to tech debt?

Has Engineering signed off, can it be done faster, can't it just be hard-coded, etc.?

ALWAYS ASK: Are we investing in our systems and processes?

Strategy

ASK ✓

Did we hit our KPIs?

What's the problem you're trying to solve?

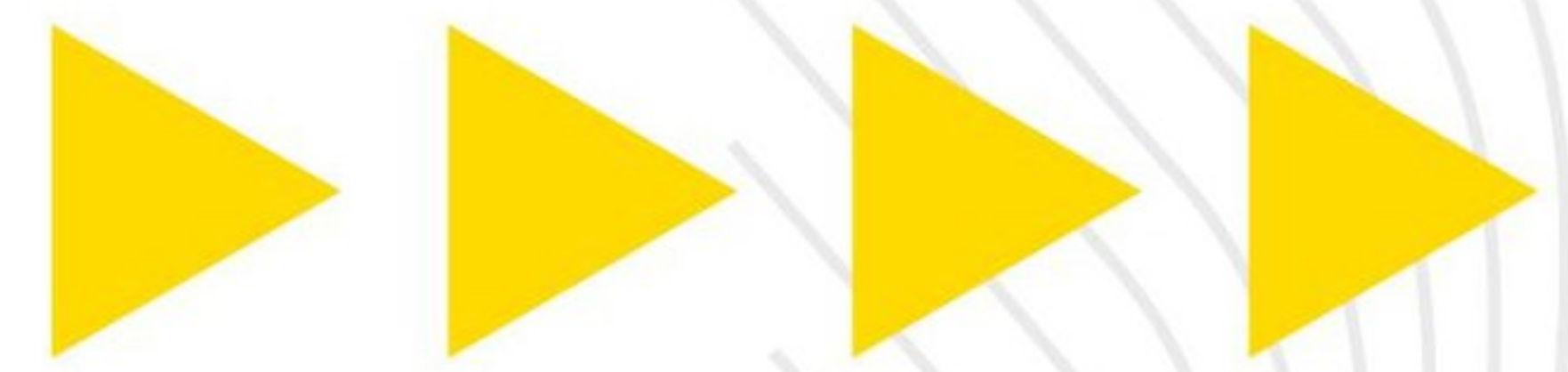
NOT ✗

Did we hit that gate?

Can you relocate that button elsewhere?



Next steps:



Getting real with how product-centric your business is, is an important first step. But what do you do if you realize that the questions you're asking aren't as sharp as they could be, or are being delivered in the wrong forums? Check out our recommendations for what to do in each category below:

Developing Solutions & Strategy

If you and your leadership peers are far from being product-driven in this area, the first thing required is a mindset shift. You might think your feature idea will win, or is the best thing ever, but if that's how you're thinking, you need to change. Get used to the idea that asking the right questions and knowing your KPIs is the best starting point.

Collaboration

Many teams need to work on collaboration with clear KPIs, but there also needs to be separate and distinct business units and functions to allow teams to flourish at what they do best. Ensure that all teams have a clear sense of what functional and business stakeholders need to be a part of every project (**consider product, technology, design, and marketing as a baseline team for most product endeavors**), and the KPIs that each function owns for the project. Cultivate a sense of teamwork with cross-functional groups: don't point fingers and create an ethos of winning — and losing — together.

Business & Growth

If this is an area you're struggling with, start by checking that you have tangible measures underneath your business metrics that aren't just about the balance sheet or P&L. Ensure that teams have tools, rhythms, and clear accountability around being attuned with customers' pain points and the way improvements to them are measured. Alignment across leadership can also be a stumbling block. Be an active participant in helping cross-functional teams focus on top current pain points to solve.

Innovation

Build and hire your teams to be leaders. Look for people who bring creativity vs. just expediency. Give people the time and resources to prove they are the best hiring decisions. Help them test out solutions that get them closer to answers on the big questions you have for your business, and focus on driving experimentation. While a great CTO or CPO can answer some of your biggest questions, these big questions are often increasingly complex, and require many other people to test and figure out a complete answer.

Now that you have a sense of where you can continue evolving as a leadership team, try out some of these discussed questions in your meetings. Socialize them with your peers, and see how product managers and other line managers in the organization respond. If you find some PMs are struggling to answer the questions, check out our [Product Management Career Map](#) to help clarify their development paths, so you can continue to be led by your customers to success.



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