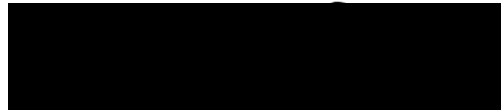


Trust, What Makes it or Breaks it for a Product Manager?

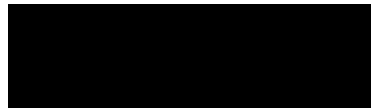
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Abstract

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Title: Trust, What Makes it or Breaks it for a Product Manager?

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Product managers work with a wide array of roles, including software engineers, designers, and business stakeholders. Together they create product improvements, features, and new innovations. As a product manager, you are responsible for prioritizing the work so that the right thing gets done at the right time, and you must watch over the product or feature through launch and support it afterward. You are essentially an individual contributor who has to lead with no authority. So if you must lead others in the right direction, you must have trust with those around you to be successful, but what does that mean and look like? Julia will tell you all about it in her thesis: Trust, what makes or breaks it for a product manager?

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Chapter 1: Trust and Technology

I. Background

A. What is product management?

Product managers work with a wide array of roles, including software engineers, designers, and business stakeholders. Together they create product improvements, features, and innovations. As a product manager, you are responsible for prioritizing the work so that the right thing gets done at the right time, and you must watch over the product or feature through launch and support the product or feature afterward. You are essentially an individual contributor who has to lead with no authority. So if you must lead others in the right direction, you must trust those around you to be successful, but what does that mean and look like? What makes or breaks trust for a product manager?

When deciding what I would write my thesis on, I knew that I wanted to write about something I was passionate about and curious about. With that in mind, I had always been passionate about my career journey and, in particular, product management. So far, I have been interested in product management for about two years. My first role in technology was in high school as a software engineer intern. During that experience, I got to work with different teams and help build the best product for our consumers. After that summer, I wanted to continue exploring technology by learning about the other groups I had worked with. Then I tried project management, and from that experience, I realized that I wanted to be more involved in the vision and strategy of the product and helping users' needs. My sophomore year, I took a course called innovation and entrepreneurship, which I loved. When describing my favorite

aspects of this course to others, they connected me to how similar it was to product management as it focused on ideation, vision, and building products that help address opportunities for your customers. So after this course, I started to seek out opportunities in product management. I had an internship focussed on mobile and web product management and learned so much. After my sophomore year working in the digital grocery space, I officially got the feeling that I like this area of technology and want to continue growing my knowledge across various products. So as I began my junior year, I knew that I wanted to write about something I was passionate and curious to learn more about, and product management just happened to be that.

For this paper, I will be using the following definition of a product manager from Professor Austin at the Harvard Business School which is, "Beyond shipping new features on a regular cadence and keeping the peace between engineering and the design team, the best [product managers] create products with strong user adoption that have exponential revenue growth and perhaps even disrupt an industry" (Austin, 2017). There are many definitions for a product manager, and each one can mean a different thing wherever you go. Sometimes the function of a product manager may even be called by a different title. A product manager can have all or some of the following responsibilities:

- Conducting customer interviews and user testing
- Running design sprints
- Feature prioritization and roadmap planning
- Negotiating resource allocation
- Performing market assessments

- Translating business-to-technical requirements
- Pricing and revenue modeling
- Defining and tracking success metrics

These core competencies are learned by defining, shipping, and iterating products (Austin, 2017). The reason why the role of a product manager is so important is that they heavily influence the success of a product; however, they are not necessarily the one's building or coding the product, so they must work with others to get the job done. Austin describes relationship management as one of the essential characteristics of a product manager, and she breaks it down into authenticity and trustworthiness with internal and external stakeholders. She explains that product managers inspire others to reach their full potential. That is why without the engineers, designers, and many other vital stakeholders, a product manager would never have a final output to point at (Austin, 2017).

B. History of technology and what classifies as a technology

1. How technology evolved over time

As I began to explore this relatively new role, I was curious how the role came about. This question leads us to step back and ask a broader question of how did technology evolve? Within the last 300 years, technology has had many innovations that fall into several categories, such as music systems since the 19th century starting with the jukebox, the superheterodyne tuner for the radio, and then the iPod. When looking at automobiles in the 19th century, we began with the first crude electric-powered carriage operated by non-rechargeable primary cells. Then in the 20th

century, we expanded our technologies to offer affordable transportation with the Ford Model T1908. Then we can see how in the 21st century, cars have rapidly changed as we have electric and hybrid vehicles. For computers, we begin in the 19th century with the first general mechanical computer called the Analytical Engine. Then in the 20th century, the Programma 101 was the first commercial desktop computer. In the 21st century, computers were compatible with the SmartCloud framework and built this surge for cloud computing. The telephone in the 19th century is another excellent example of technology evolving. Then in the 20th century, the first portable handset compatible with the telephone was available. In the 21st century, touch screens on portable cell phones became existent and have transformed our way of life by making humans dependent on them. The last area of technology that I want to highlight is transportation. In the 19th century, horse carriage was a primary mode of transport. In the 20th century, the steam car company began. In the 21st century, we have created high-speed rail and hybrid vehicles (Webrevolve, 2021). Within all these technologies, we can see how individuals have created innovations that have led to new jobs and one of those being a product manager.

2. Communication technologies: what is it and why is it important?

Communication has been previously defined as, “There are two elements always [to] present-the material to be communicated and the medium (usually language) by which it is transmitted” (Pooley, 1945). This definition shows that communication requires a medium that can be language, but it leaves room for interpretation of what

language can look like. That being stated, I will be looking at how the top characteristics of trust revolve around feelings and actions that incorporate communication.

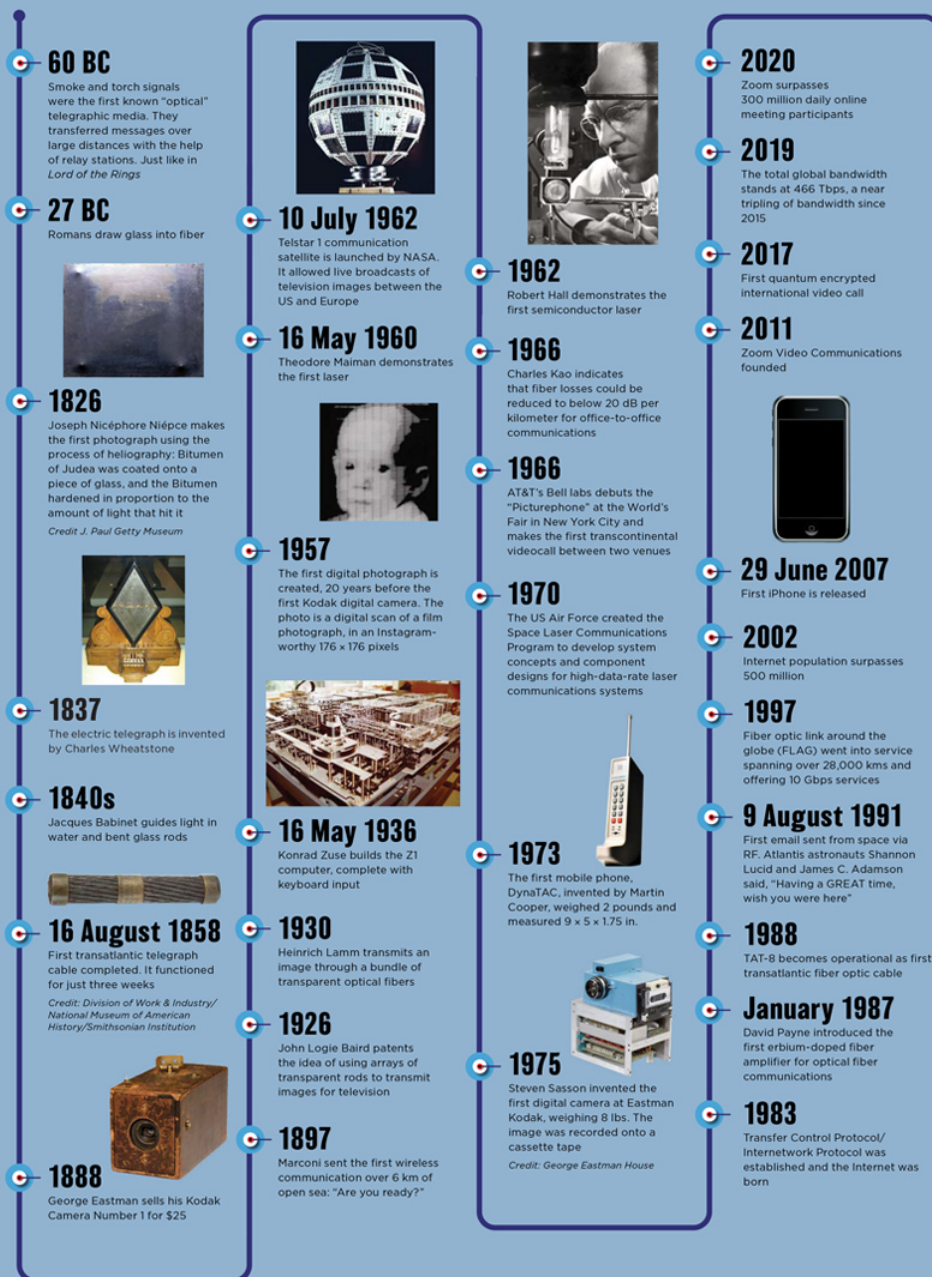
a) How has communication evolved

To begin, we must have an appreciation for how technological communication has evolved. For written electronic communication, our world has developed many new technologies that enable us to communicate. Back in 1970, the primary communication tools were broken up into networks and new technologies. For networks, there were the radio, tree networks, and switch networks. Radio was primarily used to communicate news to wider audiences. Tree networks included cable tv and typewriter news networks. Switch networks have a multitude of examples, but the most prominent one was the telephone. For new technologies, there were improvements in broadcasts from satellites which also helped to communicate information (Pierce, 1960). Charles Babbage developed the first mechanical computer in 1822 (JavaTpoint, 2021). The launch of the Internet then occurred in 1983 technically as before this computer networks did not have a way to communicate with each other (University System of Georgia, 2021). However, if we look at a wider lens of communication, we can consider the invention of things such as photographs as they communicate information visually. Cameras have adapted a lot since the 19th century as we started with a sliding wooden box to take photographs. Then the Polaroid instant camera in the 20th century. Now in the 21st century, the first DSLR took photos and video (Webrevolve, 2021). More of this evolution of communication technologies can be seen in Figure 1 (Binchus, 2021).

Figure 1

A Timeline of COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Since early history, humans have relied on technology to increase the speed and ease of communication.



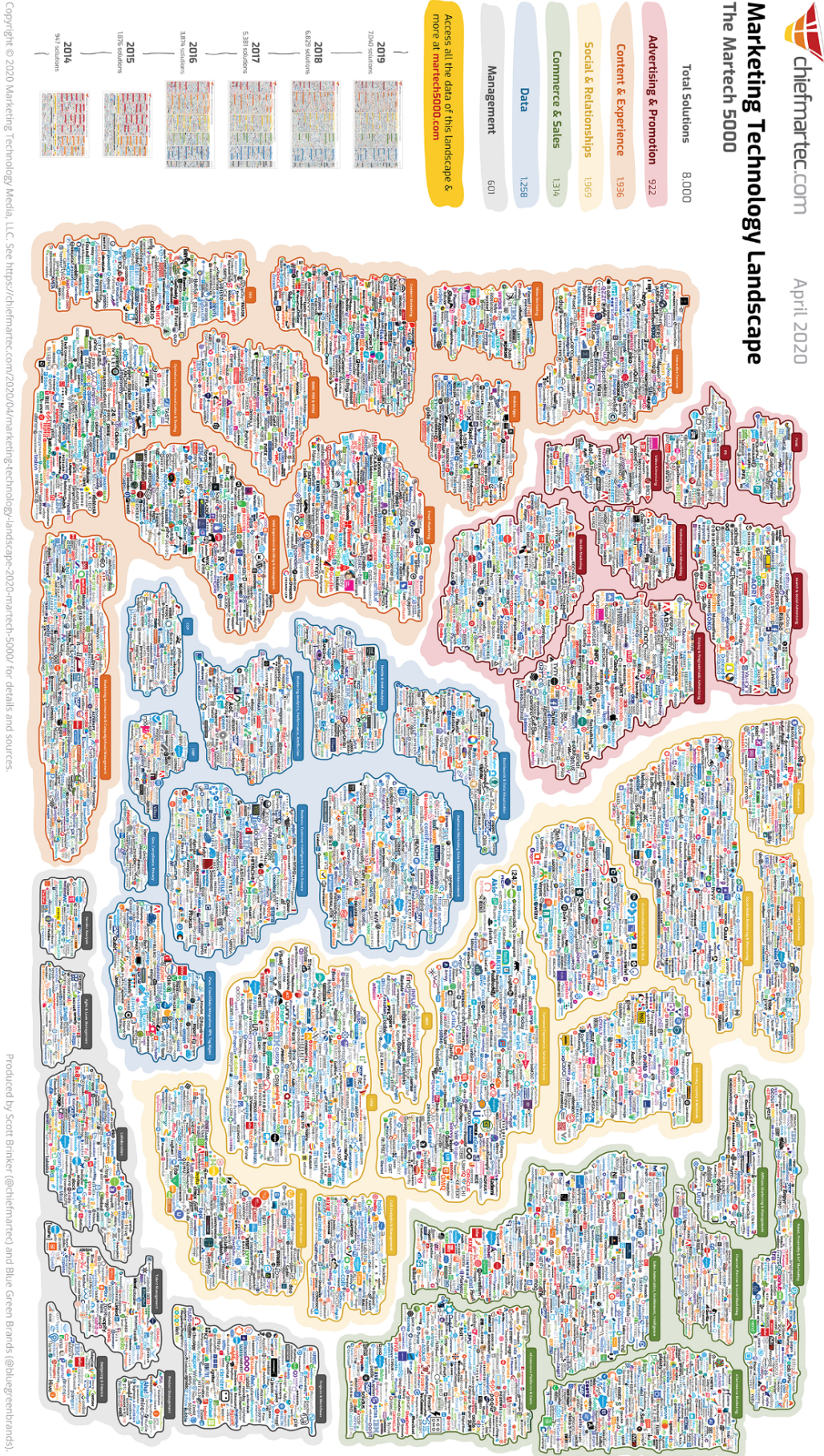
b) Innovation of communication technologies

What all of these innovations have in common is that they went through the process of diffusion. This process can be defined by “The use of an innovation whether a product, service, or process spreads throughout a market group over time and across various categories of adopters” (Grewal & Levy, 2015). It is because of this process that innovators first invent these products. Then with early adopters, consumers decide whether or not these innovations will enter the market and become technologies, then pass on to the early majority and then the late majority (Grewal & Levy, 2015). When there is competition in the market, other companies try to build better alternatives than the existing product. Through this, society, throughout time, has created lots of new products.

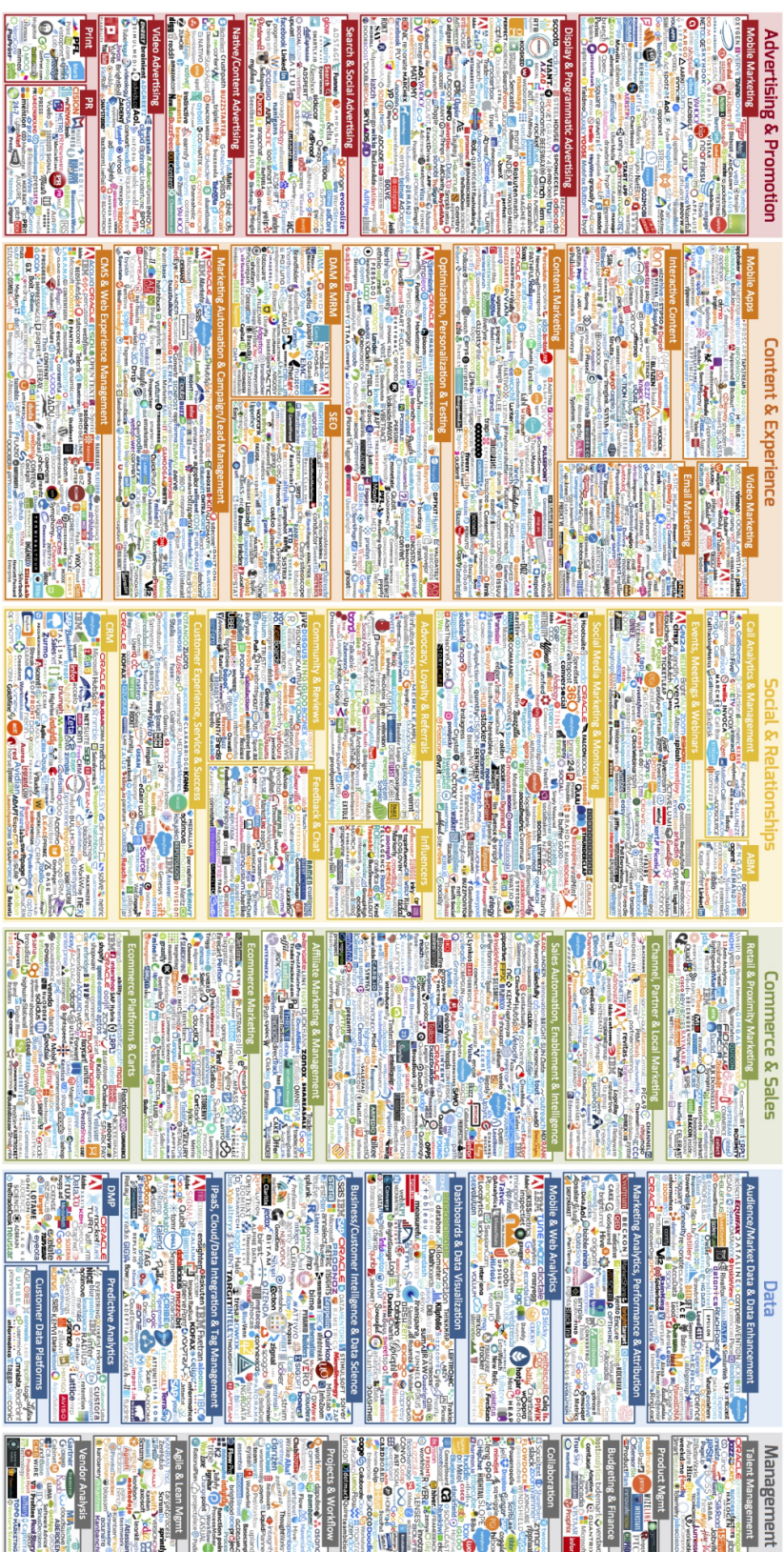
Building upon this idea of diffusion of innovation, let's look at the explosion of technology in 2020. Figure2 shows all the things we use that relate to digital technologies that help us accomplish different tasks in the workplace. You can see in the figure there are 8000 software technologies for marketing and communication—600 for management tools which include product management, agile and lean, and collaboration tools. Looking at the product management section, I recognize that I have used specific software such as Miro or Atlassian, and even cited in this paper such as ProductPlan. In the agile and lean category, I recognize Atlassian again, most likely for the tools Jira and Trello. Under the collaboration category, there are many businesses such as Salesforce, Box, Airtable, Cisco, Google, Slack, Microsoft, and Dropbox, to name a few. These companies and many others help us grow, innovate, and communicate in a verbal or nonverbal way. Most are nonverbal as they are means of

documenting decisions and content online that other team members can read or collaborate on. Some tools have video features such as Microsoft Teams, which allows for verbal communication but still is different compared to talking in the office and passing by someone's desk. My primary point is that the vast number and types of these communication tools demonstrate how important communication is to the success of product teams.

Figure 2



Another point I would like to mention is that this infographic was created in 2020, and so many companies have been created during the pandemic as people were at home, switching jobs, or starting new things. Some companies also did not make it through the pandemic and filed for bankruptcy. The shift that the remote world has had not only on our lives but also on the digital communication scene is fascinating to examine. Looking at the same analysis from 2016 in figure 3, you can see how much smaller product management, agile and lean were and how much progress and the need for managers has increased in the past four years.



Sources: Gartner® (<http://gartner.com>), Capgemini, G2 Crowd, Google, Gartnerwise, LUMA Partners, Salsify, TrustRadius, VAP Profiles — see <http://chiefmartec.com/2016/03/marketing-technology-supergraphic-2016/> for details.

Created by Scott Brinker (@chiefmartec).

Figure 3

3. How product managers came to be

However, as innovation has been occurring for a long time, there has not always been a team of engineers, designers, and product managers breaking down and solving customer problems. Neil H. McElroy created a memo that pushed companies to form themselves around products instead of functions and to lead decision-making closer to customers. This memo then led to brand management, then to product marketing, and then to product management (Norton, 2021). The main ideas conveyed in this memo are similar to product management as Ken Norton breaks the ideas down to “talk to customers and uncover their problems, develop a product that solves the problem, create a channel strategy and sales collateral to sell the product, and track the right metrics, iterate, and drive profitability” (Norton, 2021). Most of the work done started in manufacturing, but then these ideas trickled down to technology businesses.

4. What is Agile, and how did it emerge?

The Agile methodology originated in manufacturing and moved its way down to product managers inside tech organizations. “Agile is an approach to project management that centers around incremental and iterative steps to completing projects. The incremental parts of a project are carried out in short-term development cycles. The approach prioritizes quick delivery, adapting to change, and collaboration rather than top-down management and following a set plan” (Coursera, 2021). Some of the critical aspects of Agile include constant feedback, which involves lots of communication. With this feedback, some advantages and disadvantages arise. Some benefits of Agile include project visibility, risk reduction, and alignment across the business. The

drawbacks of implementing this methodology are that there can be a chance that people will resist change and not participate in giving and receiving feedback of the product. Also, the company culture may not follow Agile values. There are many different kinds of Agile methodologies. Some of the most popular ones are Scrum, Kanban, and Lean (Coursera, 2021).

Agile emerged from manufacturing in the 1930s by Walter Shewhart as he focused on improving products and processes. This information was taught to his mentee named W. Edwards Deming, who applied that knowledge in Japan after World War II. Then Toyota hired Deming to learn this concept and train other employees to use it in their work. This soon led to the Toyota Production System, which today serves as lean thinking. Later, this tactic was applied to “copiers at Fuji-Xerox, engines at Honda, and cameras at Canon” (Rigby & Sutherland & Takeuchi, 2016).

This idea was applied to digital products and teams around 1993 when Jeff Sutherland, who worked at Easel Corporation, created a brand new product in six months to replace existing products. When the company was developing its plan to accomplish this, they came across the rugby approach. They decided to apply the rugby approach to software even though it was created around manufacturing and called it Scrum. This method he developed helped him finish building a new product on time, helped him stay below his budget, and reduced the number of bugs in his product. After this, Sutherland partnered with Ken Schwaber to improve this idea and presented the Scrum methodology we knew today in 1995. In 2001, there was a meeting for the organizational anarchists where they shared their ideas of Scrum, Crystal, Adaptive Software Development (ASD), Feature-Driven Development (FDD), and the

Dynamic-Systems-Development method (DSDM). Since they noticed that the frameworks were similar, they decided to create an umbrella for all of them called Agile. This led that group to make the Manifesto for Agile Software Development, The Principles Behind the Agile Manifesto, and the Agile Alliance non-profit (Rigby & Sutherland & Takeuchi, 2016). The other forms of Agile such as Lean and Kanban, formed around the 2000s, are more commonly used today.

In Agile, there are Scrum roles such as the Scrum master, product owner, and development team (The Scrum team roles and accountabilities, 2017). These roles helped to spread out the roles and responsibilities when creating a product. Through this idea of product development, product managers began to play one or more than one of these roles.

C. Increase in desire for product managers

Product management eight years ago was not a field that many people knew of. In fact, when I spoke with people from my research, many of them realized they were doing the responsibilities of a product manager without the official title as it did not really exist within the companies they were at. Now there has begun a shift where recent graduates want to enter the product management space; however, there is no degree or certification within colleges that provide courses around product management. As a result, those who are hearing about product management and have already begun their career or are in the middle of their careers are jumping into product management through industry and/or roles. Productboard says that the reason why there is an increased need for product managers is that there has been an accelerated pace of the

technology market: many companies are going through a digital transformation, businesses are facing lots of competition, there are rising customer expectations, and we are becoming more data-driven (Schrock, 2019). With all of this in mind, companies need product managers to help address these issues. Now more people are switching into product management or want to intern and then become associate product managers after school.

D. What I know about trust

My foundational ideas around trust are based on my learnings from the Organizational Behavior course I took my junior year. In that course, we look at the Five Dysfunctions of a Team by Patrick Lencioni. This model identifies trust or the absence of trust as trust is foundational to a team's effectiveness, and it explains why building trust requires vulnerability. It has impacted the quality of interactions you have with others around you. There are three elements of trust: positive, supportive relationships, good judgments and or expertise, reliability, consistency. These areas help to build and sustain trust (Lencioni, 2000).

On the other hand, trust can easily be broken by acting and speaking inconsistently, withholding information, keeping secrets or telling lies, putting one's personal gain over the team's success, or simply not following through commitments made to others. When this happens, a person must work to repair their trust. Some of the ways this can happen is by admitting mistakes, apologizing sincerely, taking accountability for your actions, and doing all of this over time. At the end of the day, people want to hire and work with those they share common values with and can trust.

1. Current work around this topic of trust

The current work regarding trust and its correlation to product management is limited. It is interesting to note that there is no universal definition accepted for trust. Covey, the New York Times Bestseller of *The Speed of Trust*, does not even truly define trust; instead, he quotes Jack Welch, the former CEO of General Electric which states, “You know it when you feel it” (Covey 5). That is great and all, but what is that feeling composed of? What does that mean? Is it an obvious feeling that occurs in the moment or is delayed? Covey goes on to state, “Trust means confidence. The opposite of trust--distrust-- is suspicion. When you trust people, you have confidence in them--in their integrity and in their abilities. When you distrust people, you are suspicious of them--of their integrity, their agenda, their capabilities, or their track record” (Covey 5). He argues that trusting feelings correspond to the confidence you have in people to do something that they say they will do. Suspicion is when you have doubts that they will not follow through with what they promised. Covey also points out to establish and sustain trust, a person must have credibility. There are four cores to credibility that he mentions, which include integrity, intent, capabilities, and results. These four areas are described as essential in order to have trust with others (Covey 5).

Another definition of trust that I want to use for this paper comes from *Psychology Today*, which states, “Trust is a set of behaviors, such as acting in ways that depend on another. Trust is a belief in a probability that a person will behave in certain ways. Trust is an abstract mental attitude toward a proposition that someone is dependable. Trust is a feeling of confidence and security that a partner cares. Trust is a complex neural process that binds diverse representations into a semantic pointer that

includes emotions” (Fyre, 2018). This definition of trust also emphasizes confidence similar to Covey. This shows that many people have their own meaning for trust, which is why it is important that we are talking about what it really means. In my research, later on, you will see how there were commonalities, but no one really viewed trust the same exact way.

These definitions correspond to product management as you must have confidence in those you work with, such as engineers and designers, and other team members, to do their job so that the whole picture comes together, in the end, to help create that new feature or product. This must also be the same in the opposite direction as everyone else must have confidence in the product manager. As trust is built over time, it can be broken in a second. This idea relates to what Covey said in that “Nothing is as fast as the speed of trust” (Covey 23). There are myths that it is slow, but it is quick because the time it takes to break it happens much sooner than you would think, which is why trust can be restored and why small installments of trust built up over time are best.

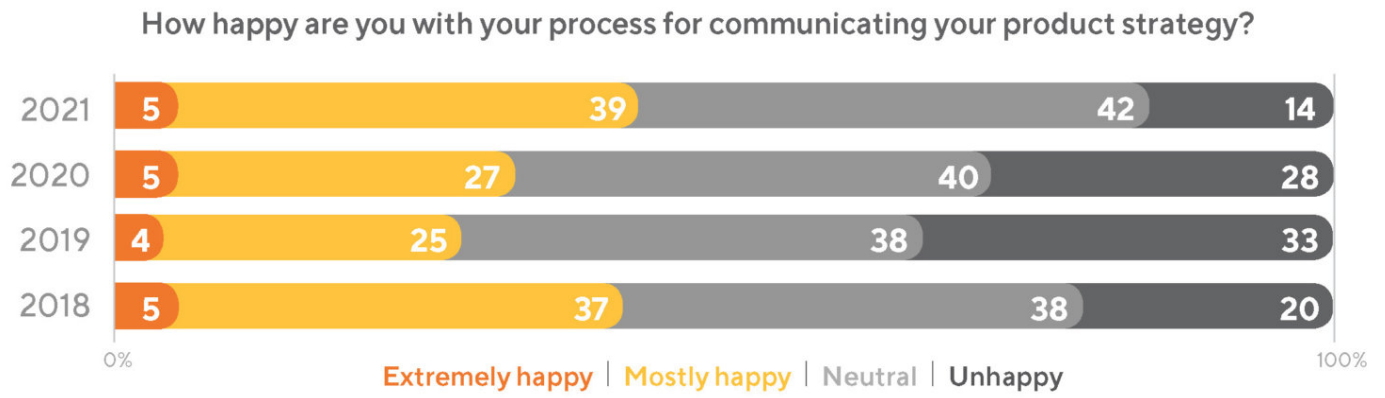
E. Question I am attempting to answer

The initial question I attempted to answer was how and why do product managers build trust with their team and stakeholders? This question guided my interviews, and after evaluating people's responses, it has led me to understand further that building face-to-face trust is very different from building trust online. For example, during the Covid 19 pandemic, many people took new jobs as they wanted to try something else or were laid off. Due to these reasons and many others, new people

were constantly joining companies, and teams had to adapt in order for things to work and products to survive. After speaking to my interviewees, many of them had switched companies in the middle of the pandemic. Several of them were the legacies on the team. These people were responsible for welcoming new people and building and sustaining culture and trust with others.

My hypothesis around this question is that communication must play a role in building and breaking trust. I believe this because many people I have had the opportunity to work with have mentioned that communication makes a product manager successful. Without it, there are lots of problems that occur within your team. When communication is not happening, then assumptions and secrets are created, which means that not everyone is on the same page about the product and work that is being done. This can cause more significant problems later on down the road as misalignment of purpose and goals can be construed, and in the end, time is wasted. ProductPlan states that communication is needed for a product manager; however, in their yearly report, shown in figure 4, their data shows room for improvement (The 2021 State of Product Management Annual Report, 2021). Communication falls into the category of soft skill and is an essential leadership skill listed frequently in leadership competency models (Center for Creative Leadership, 2021). Since product management is a leadership role without formal authority, I decided to explore the overall competencies of product management and hypothesize that communication would be on the list, and so would integrity.

Figure 4



Chapter 2: Research Process

I. Why Trust

A. Narrowing the idea down

In my junior fall semester, I took an Organizational Behavior course. I fell in love with the content of the course as it made me reflect on the relationship components within a business. Throughout the course I thought about the implications and value relationships have on a product manager. After that course, I was thinking about creating a leadership model around product management for my thesis, but then after focusing more intensely on it, I had to decide what that really meant. So one evening, I decided to do a brainstorming session and write down everything I had learned about product management from past mentors and experiences. After creating a laundry list of over 15 sticky notes, I went back and crossed out everything that could be told to me, "You will learn this on the job." Once I had eliminated those ideas, I was left with many soft skills and abstract concepts. It was then that I found the word trust on my list. When I saw this word, it made me think about all the relationship-building a product manager has to do in their role for the team to be successful. I further thought about how hard trust is to earn but so easy to lose. When this occurred to me, I felt that this was an area that, when asked to an experienced product manager, they would not have an immediate response as they would have to think about what it takes to build and sustain trust before answering. I also recognized that trust is something that everyone can improve on, so noticing this was a challenge, I decided that it would be something to start looking into. After doing some research around this topic, I saw that there was not

a lot of published literature in this area, so it would be the perfect opportunity to take the road less traveled for my thesis.

II. Preparation

A. Establishing goals and objectives

Once I knew I wanted to focus on trust as a product manager, I had to think about what I wanted to gain out of my research. I started writing down goals for myself which then turned into objectives. As I said before, the first objective I set for myself was that I wanted to write my thesis about something I was passionate and curious to learn more about. The second objective I set for myself was that I wanted an opportunity to engage with others in the product space to learn more about what it's like to be a product manager. The third objective I set for myself was that I wanted to learn from people's past experiences. The fourth objective I set for myself was to know how product management came to be and why it has become so popular and necessary for a team.

B. Drafting and revising questions

After establishing high-level objectives for myself, I started drafting questions about things that piqued my curiosity. After multiple revisions, I realized that I wanted to go with an inductive approach. This meant that I was not setting any standards or definitions for the topics discussed during the interviews; instead, I left the discussion open for their interpretation of trust within their role as a product manager. I felt that this was crucial because everyone has their own interpretation of trust. Every product

manager operates differently based on the company they are at and their past experiences. For these reasons, I realized it was best to start the interview by having them answer how they describe a high and low level of trust. From there, I asked open-ended questions about positive and negative experiences with trust, and I also asked them to reflect on what they learned in these relationships and as a product manager or leader. I felt that these questions were important to ask as they would give me more insight into why the participant viewed a high level and low level of trust in how they previously defined those concepts. In addition, I asked them to reflect on how their relationships have changed with their team members over time in regards to trust because I wanted to compare how relationships are different for various people in regards to time. I also knew that people move around to several companies in the technology field, and I thought it would be interesting to see how it affected people's responses. I included a section about how influence corresponds with trust and what impact that has as a product manager. I added this question to the interview to better understand if there is a relationship between influence and trust and how that affects different levels of individual contributors. In addition, I asked people what advice they would give new product managers for building trusting relationships because I wanted to collect information that will help me currently as an intern and once I begin as a full-time employee. At the end of our discussion, I asked how they approached this interview in terms of how they defined trust and whether that was from the lens of how people gain trust from that participant versus how a participant would gain someone else's trust. This question was essential to my research because it enabled me to understand people's priorities when building relationships and working in teams.

After multiple drafts and revisions, I started to take out bias from my questions as I did not want to prime the respondents. One tactic that I used to avoid bias was that when people asked me what I meant by a question, I responded by saying, "whatever you interpreted the question as" or "your first thought would be the best direction to go when thinking about the question." This may have frustrated some people, but it was best to provide this response so that I genuinely got the raw interpretation of what people thought around trust as a product manager.

C. International Review Board approval

After drafting questions and revising them with my thesis committee, I submitted them for the International Review Board approval. In the approval process, I submitted my questions for the interview, my recruitment process, which included a snowball effect, my measurements, recruitment email, follow-up email, and other applicable paperwork. After submitting my work, I received an exempt status for my study and began research interviews. I then had less than a month to complete 25 interviews at a one-hour duration each.

D. Testing questions out with others

Once I was approved to begin my study, I tested my questions with past mentors who provided excellent advice. During these test interviews, I spoke with both men and women and was able to receive feedback around the way I conducted the interview and gain insight into how long the interviews could take. During these test interviews, I also

practiced my process for signing up participants, organizing the event, using technology, and note-taking strategies.

III. Informational Interviews

A. How I recruited people

For my research, I took an inductive approach and decided that a snowballing effect would be best. I did this by asking people within my network of second-degree connections or third-degree connections. Many past mentors were very kind to help me spread the word and recruit participants for the study. This included posting on LinkedIn and having various people reshare my post. I also was able to gain participants after I interviewed someone, and then they would reach out to their connections and reshare the recruitment post. I posted about my project in The Product Management LinkedIn Group which helped me gain outside perspectives across different industries. When I first launched my recruitment post, I received messages on LinkedIn and emails from respondents that expressed interest. I then verified their background in that they had relevant product experience. After this step, I sent them a sign-up form to schedule a time for the interview. At first, I had a higher percentage of males expressing interest, but as I started conducting interviews, more people helped me recruit diverse perspectives, and I was able to even out the ratio of men to women that I spoke to.

B. Steps I took during the interview

When conducting the interviews, I started by providing background information and the goal of the study. Then I asked permission to record the interview for my use

only to refer back to it when writing the thesis. I collected some background information about each individual regarding the gender of the person, how long they had been in a product manager role, how long they've been at their current company, what were the different types of roles of people they worked with daily, how many people they interacted on average with daily, and how many people were in the organization overall. I determined these questions as most important so that I could classify and understand the differences between male and female product managers when it comes to their interpretation of trust and examine how product managers and teams differ based on industry and responsibilities.

Another step I took during the interview process was that I made sure to ask the same questions to every person. Although many participants addressed some of my questions before they were asked, I wanted to ensure that each person had an opportunity to add more information if they would like. All participants got the same questions to ensure uniformity across all participants when evaluating results. At times asking specific questions was challenging as a person may not have agreed with the concept that was being tested. However, since I set expectations upfront in that there was no correct or incorrect answer, participants were able to answer all the questions as they responded how they best interpreted the question that was asked.

Another step that I took during the interviews was that I tried not to show bias when the participants answered. I did not respond with anecdotes or congratulate them on their response. I tried just to thank them for every response.

C. Steps after the interview

Once the interview concluded, I informed the participant that there were no more questions and provided the opportunity for them to ask questions if they had any. Many people asked about how I came to this topic or my background and interest in product management. After the interview concluded, I followed up with a thank you note to each participant via email and informed them that they would be welcomed to the thesis symposium later in the year and would reach out at that time.

I also wrote the main highlights from each person at the top of each document that I recorded so that when going back to these interviews, I understood what the main takeaways were for each individual.

D. Demographics of Interviewees

I spoke to 13 women and 12 men who were all either product managers or founders playing the product role. The industry breakdown of the interviewees can be seen below, but most of them worked in software companies. The majority of people were just product managers, and several of them were senior product managers, as can be seen in the other chart below.

Figure 5

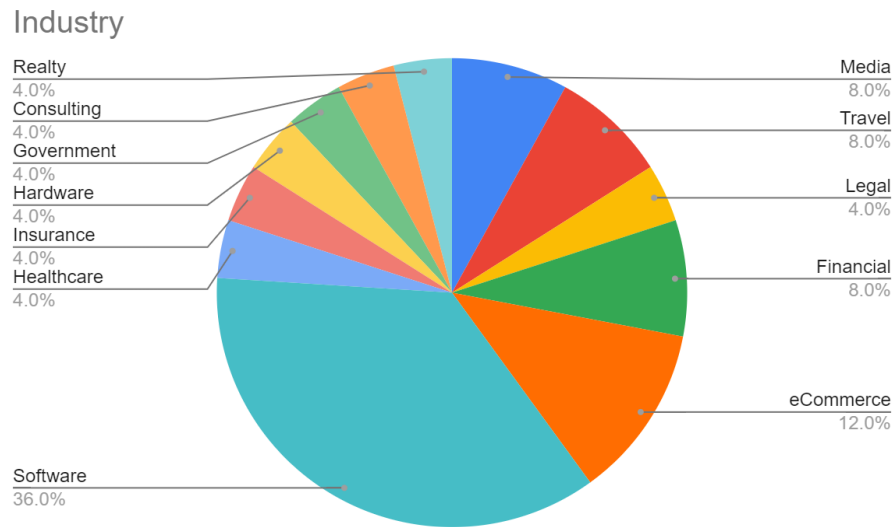
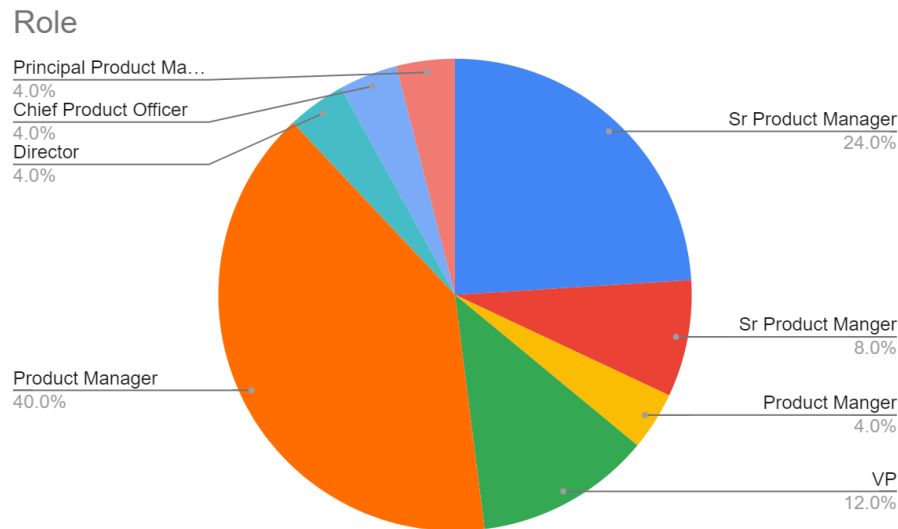


Figure 6



Chapter 3: Synthesis of Findings

I. Synthesizing notes from interviews

After I completed all the interviews, I reviewed each participant's document of notes recorded. When looking at the document, I used MIRO, an online whiteboard tool, to write out the main findings from each participant.

A. Categorized themes

After pulling out the main highlights and themes from each participant's interview, I went back and started moving around the virtual sticky notes on the board into categories where themes or similar ideas emerged. This process took 48 hours but helped reinforce the main findings across all the interviews. Once I had the sticky notes in different piles, I labeled themes. The themes I came up with were for high trust and low trust characteristics. Overall, I had seven themes, four for high trust and three for low trust.

B. Creating sub categories for each bucket

The next step I took with the seven themes, which can be seen below in the table, included breaking down these ideas into smaller themes and defining what each theme meant. Then I summarized a story shared from each of my interviews to connect to that theme.

Figure 7

High Trust	Low Trust
Feelings: Vulnerability	Feelings: Fear Insecurity
Actions: Respect Transparency	Actions: Avoidance Micromanagement

II. Analyses and Trends

The following section reveals my top findings from my research broken out into four questions. In subsequent areas, I will break out the main themes I saw and share further questions. My hypothesis was proven that communication is important to high and low trust and was included in 48% of respondents' answers. From this, I learned that communication is something that people realize that they must do but often forget when in the day-to-day work. I noticed that sometimes it is harder for people to embrace the fact that actions speak louder than words. In that, you must communicate, but the ways you do so must be followed up with actions, and if this does not happen, you may break trust.

A. Part a: Define and state characteristics for high and low trust

One of the most important questions to me, to begin with, was how the participants viewed and interpreted the concept of high trust and low trust. I asked them to define and state characteristics for each of these. Some popular themes for high trust included transparency, vulnerability, and respect. After respondents

answered about high trust, I asked them to define low trust, and the common answers included avoidance, fear, insecurity, and micromanagement.

High Trust

One of the most memorable stories around high trust was from a product manager in the travel industry. The product manager worked on a large-scale project to build a mobile app from scratch and led a squad to create a certain part of the app. Everyone who was working on the project did not understand what the top-level management was looking for and why they wanted this mobile app built. To align everyone, the product manager guided others through prototyping and iterating, and together they built something that they were proud of. Through this experience, they collaboratively found areas of ownership and features worth building and impactful for both their users and the business. Trust was evident because each person had faith that each other would do their work at each level, and they all understood the goals and what they were building. As they all had a shared understanding of the goals, they also had a high level of ownership in the results, which helped with alignment and involvement across all team members. This project helped to reduce product churn and changes because everyone was so trusting of each other, and leadership did not come in and affect the direction of the product. This person explained that working on this project taught them that it is essential for the entire team to be bought into the user problems and the goals of the work that was being done. When the team is aligned, it helps to avoid friction, and we can only control where we are at.

Transparency

Looking deeper at high trust, one theme that was seen was transparency. Transparency can be described as “The open disclosure of information that needs to be known in order to prevent a violation of trust” (Kantowski, 2017). An example of transparency came from a product manager who worked in the software industry. At the beginning of the pandemic, this product manager and their team created a data insights tracking solution. During the process, they pivoted from their original roadmap, and in order to do this, they explained the why behind their decision to their stakeholders. They also made sure to use JIRA software to document the product requirements and updates. Another step they took included making sure there was customer visibility throughout the process. It was evident that this transparency of sharing information helped them build trust as everyone knew that the work they were doing was meaningful, and as a team, they were easily able to solve roadblocks. During the process, they also identified which parts of the product were required versus nice to have and were able to have those conversations openly. With the right direction, vision, and transparency, people are able to work together to make things happen.

Vulnerability

Another theme that was seen for high trust was vulnerability. Vulnerability can be described as "A place where leaders comfortably and quickly acknowledge, without provocation, their mistakes, weaknesses, failures, and need for help. These leaders also recognize the strengths of others, even when those strengths exceed

their own" (The Daily Coach, 2020). An example of vulnerability came from a product manager who worked in the media industry. In a previous role in the eCommerce industry, this product manager reported to a director level. That relationship was not going well as it seemed there was no trust established between them and their leader. To resolve this issue, the product manager made sure to regularly communicate risks and be open about where the weaknesses were. They also made sure to set expectations and be vulnerable about everything going on with the project. Eventually, they earned and established trust with their leader. This product manager looks at their work as a servant leader, and as a product manager, they serve as a resource for their team. The product manager determines their success by the team's success, and it is their responsibility to be an advocate. "It is normal for teams to go through storming, norming, and performing stages when building a product. But it truly is trust and being a servant leader which is what gets you through that three step process to your final goal."

Respect

The last theme for high trust was respect. Respect can be described as "Acting in a way that shows care for how your actions may impact others" (LoveWell Press, 2020). An example of respect came from a product manager who worked in the software industry. When this product manager started at the company, they began working with one engineer at a time and first built a formal relationship. This included understanding what motivates these engineers and excites them. Through this process of getting to know each other, they developed a

stronger collaboration in their work. Through these foundations, they respected each other, making it easier to openly communicate on projects and not be afraid to say something they disagreed on as they both knew it was best for the project and not personal. They could ask the hard questions and challenge each other to think through the other side and bring in new perspectives to the discussion. From this experience, the product manager continued to build relationships and respect other engineers they worked with, which helped with everyone's comfort in bringing up concerns to the team as needed.

Low trust

On the other side of trust, one of the most impactful stories around low trust was from a product manager in the travel industry. The product manager led a team to build a new feature for an app that was very backend heavy. The team did not want to work together as there was a lack of trust, and members from the engineering side were suspicious of what they were building and whether or not it was worth it. In a meeting, the engineering members brought up the question of why they were building this feature and added in the question of who even wants this feature? This was a challenging environment for the product manager as they had to navigate differing viewpoints. To get people aligned, the product manager leaned into over communication. This included talking with the team more and listening to them. Before this, there was no space for disagreements to be shared. So the product manager decided to create a space for disagreements, which helped establish a relationship with specific engineers on the team. This anecdote

stood out to me as the person was able to fix their low trust environment with communication. When the project began, there was no open dialogue regarding their differences in opinions.

An extreme example of low level of trust came from a product manager in the legal industry. This product manager encountered a lack of trust at their previous company when they were tasked with building a product and getting approval for three different areas of leadership. The hardest part was that all stakeholders thought that their team was right. Since these stakeholders were located both in the US and India, the product manager realized that they had no choice but to travel to India in order to get them on the same page as this was not happening via telecommunications. Eventually, after visiting India, the product manager was able to get everyone aligned and get the product prioritized. Also, they were able to help all stakeholders realize that everyone is a part of one team and that they must come together, communicate, and acknowledge the differences they share. When people recognize that we are all human, it is so much easier to maintain collaboration and push forward.

Avoidance

Looking deeper at low trust, one theme that was seen was avoidance. Avoidance can be described as "The action of keeping away from or not doing something" (Lexico, 2021). An example of avoidance came from a product manager who worked in the realty industry. The product manager's team was told to get a product out the door quickly and then learn from the product once it was in

the user's hands. They had approval from leadership, and all their ducks aligned. When the pandemic hit, the company was cautious of spending money and wanted them to focus their energy on other priorities. They handed this off to another team and said, we did everything for you; all you have to do is go and build it. They trusted this other team as other people validated that this new team would execute the project and do good work. Then when this new team took the project, they did not listen or use any of the work previously done. They also never checked in and redid the whole product behind the old team's back. This process took eight months more than needed, and the new team never even launched the product. As the new team avoided everyone and did their own thing, this sense of trust from the old team and leaders disappeared. The old team avoided pushing back and realized that they should have pushed back harder on the executive who seconded that this team would do good work as they witnessed this team was not capable of building the product.

Fear

Another theme of low trust was fear. Fear can be described as “An unpleasant emotion ... a feeling of being afraid” (Merriam- Webster, 2021). An example of fear came from a product manager who worked in the software industry. This product manager saw a trend in the behavior of their team not meeting deadlines based on what was set during the sprint planning process. Whether it was a proof of concept, research, or activity on accelerating the roadmap, there was no trust within the team. Everyone just seemed to be ok with this as they were

worried about the consequences if they decided to speak up and suggest a change in the current work process. This process included doing the sprint planning sizing very quickly without any time for the engineers to vocalize their opinions on the work and the duration it would take to complete the work. The product manager noticed that the engineers did not realize that the sizing you do upfront is not set and stone. Due to this, the engineers were worried about what would happen if they did not meet the goals set perfectly; however, they were too afraid to speak up during the sprint planning or retrospective. The product manager realized that they were scared of speaking up because they wanted to prove themselves. Looking back at that experience, the product manager admitted that they needed to create an environment where people are comfortable speaking up when work changes and things are ok to be renegotiated. In addition, they needed to be transparent on what the changes are and the why behind the estimations of each story point.

Insecurity

Insecurity was also a component of low trust and can be seen as a subcomponent of fear, as many interviewees shared fear and insecurity across multiple questions. Insecurity can be described as a “Lack of confidence or assurance; self-doubt” (Lewis, 2012). An example of insecurity came from a product manager who worked in the financial industry. The product manager had some ideas to change the current proposal and roadmap as they did not favor the current plan. They noticed that this plan was a bad user experience, and in order to convey this idea to the CEO, they tried going to other departments and talking to

leaders about the idea, convincing them not to like it, in hopes that these other leaders would tell the CEO that this proposal was a bad idea. After convincing many other leaders, no one was willing to say to the CEO that no one favored this idea. Since the product manager did not have the confidence to tell the CEO in the first place that this was a poor choice, this launch ended up happening, and customers were mad, and it resulted in churn for the company. This product manager learned that influence with trust comes down to a lot of politics, and since they had self-doubt in approaching the CEO themselves, they tried to go the influence route, and it failed.

Micromanagement

The last theme for low trust was micromanagement. Micromanagement can be described as "A behavior marked by excessive supervision and control of employees' work and processes, as well as limited delegation of tasks or decisions to staff" (Petrova, 2021). "Today's micromanager is likely someone who wants it done exactly their way but provides little context, support, help or advice" (Wigert & Pendell, 2020). "It often comes from a lack of trust or feeling that 'they know best'" (Dickmann, 2021). An example of micromanagement came from a product manager who worked in the eCommerce industry. A product manager was working on a feature that included a lot of content. As they tried to help the team run fast, the progress got slowed down by the CEO needing to review every line of copy before it was released. The CEO insisted that her approval and review must occur on the material even though everyone else knew the CEO was not a subject matter

expert in the content. This micromanagement had a significant effect on the team as it slowed down their progress, and it was disempowering. The product manager realized that the culture and flow of processes were ineffective, and this lack of trust was not leading to the best output possible.

B. Part b: Define and state characteristics for high and low trust

The top characteristic was communication which came up 12 out of 25 times. For high trust, it was communication, and for low trust, the top answer was lack of communication. A great example of good communication came from a product manager who worked in the healthcare industry. The product manager was tasked to be in charge of a new product. The product manager needed to make sure that they were successful but needed to be realistic with what the company was comfortable with. In order to be on the same page as the stakeholders, they checked in with people regularly. They communicated the pressure that they were receiving about the target deadlines for this work to be completed. The product manager also vocalized their concerns about the risks with the timeline set by the stakeholders and asked for feedback. In order to meet some of the deadlines, the product manager cushioned some of the dates and was able to get the stakeholders to agree to some timeline changes as concerns were communicated. Overall, the product manager learned and established a set of fundamental questions they ask the people in the room when something new comes up. Asking questions helps them know that everyone is on the same page, and this clarity is needed to be successful when the product launches. When the product manager

asks questions, they allow others to agree or disagree and act as a facilitator during the discussion. The end goal of these questions is to land on an agreed-upon set of criteria across all stakeholders.

An anecdote of a lack of communication came from a product manager who worked in the media industry. The product manager was approached by someone to take on a new feature of an app, and this product manager immediately agreed to it without talking to her team of engineers and designers first. When the team found out about this new work, they were outraged as they were already overloaded with work. This caused trust to be broken as there was a lack of communication and agreement around the work decided for that sprint. It also led to backlash and heated moments from engineers towards the product manager. This experience of agreeing to something without consulting others who would be doing the actual work is something that the product manager never does anymore. Instead, they show interest and say they will get back to that opportunity after speaking with their team.

C. How have your relationships changed with your designers, engineers, and stakeholders over time in regards to trust? Or if you recently joined a company how do you go about building trust and relationships with others?

Another question I asked was how your relationships have changed with your designers, engineers, and stakeholders over time in regards to trust? Or if you recently joined a company, how do you go about building trust and relationships

with others? This question was interesting to hear the responses from every person as it varied based on when they most recently joined the company they were at. Some of the top answers for this question included that time is key to building trust, group decision-making helps, one-on-ones help get to know people and what they care about, giving recognition to others matters, support others you work with, be flexible, ask questions, and be open to receiving feedback.

A great example of how relationships had changed for a product manager working for a company for two years in the software industry was when a product manager was able to lower skepticism. The product manager started sharing customer emails regarding the product with the engineers. They would also share segments from the calls with customers, which gave the engineers a new perspective for what work should be prioritized, and the product manager asked, “What can I do to help remove blockers?” This helped to build credibility and trust with the engineers as well.

Another example is from an experienced leader in the eCommerce industry. The product leader built relationships with new employees by throwing them in the deep end and building psychological safety. This helped employees with skill training. The leader also made sure that the new employees were acknowledged and understood the company vision. The leader assumes trust and leads with vulnerability, and has non-defensive feedback. What is most important and stood out is that this leader said, “People want to be known as human at the end of the day.”

An additional example was from a director of product in the financial space.

They had seen relationships grow and form over time as people understand the importance of getting to know one another outside of the bounds of the project they are a part of. Understanding where people come from is very important, especially with new teams, as they tend to have low trust. What helps to create these relationships is having a reactive environment. So this director makes sure to talk to people before the meeting and provide context and education to ensure a productive group conversation instead of a lecture from one person. Before this was the norm, people at this company felt like they needed to have the answer, and this director helped to normalize not having the answer to a question being asked in the room, which helped strengthen relationships as well.

Another example of a product manager who built strong relationships was a product manager who worked in the travel industry for three years. This person spoke about setting up coffee chats with those you work with to understand their dreams and what they want to get out of their work and experience at the company. As a veteran of the company, they offer themselves as a resource to others and recognize team members when they do something good. This helps people feel acknowledged and appreciated and strengthens relationships between newer and older employees.

The last example of how a product manager built trust and relationships when joining a new team in the media industry was when they entered a new company in the middle of the pandemic. What they noticed at first was that getting to know others and building trusting relationships was hard remotely. So, in order to break the wall that others put up, they started to share part of their life with others

around them. As they began doing this, they noticed others around them started to listen and share about their lives as well. Over time this product manager built rapport as they were vulnerable with others and asked for help. What this experience taught this product manager was that trust is something that happens over time, and you must work for it.

D. Do you see influence playing a role with trust as a product manager?

When writing the questions, I was interested to see if people thought of influence when thinking about trust. So I asked every participant whether they see influence playing a role with trust as a product manager. I observed that most people see a connection between the two ideas and that it breaks down to knowing others' motivations and making them part of the discussion. The aspect of just being human is also crucial when it comes to influence, and that is why people say that the human elements are key to building trust and using influence.

An excellent description of influence and how it corresponds to trust came from a product manager in the legal industry. "Influence and trust are very tightly coupled. Influence comes with trust as you will use influence in a good way; the team should listen and trust the product manager as they have a big impact on the bottom line and revenue. Influence is very different from authority as it is a soft nudge. The product manager uses data and listens to engineering, and then influences others to align with them. However, there are times when you may try to use influence, and your team members will convince you of something else as you missed a piece of information."

On the other hand, I had some interviews that made me rethink my question and

my perception around it. A product manager who worked as a consultant stated, "Too many people interpret influence in a sneaky way, but it is not. I think about it as the lens of understanding and listening to people. Take the time, power, and energy to understand someone else's goals and work with them to figure out a way forward. Influence suggests you know what the outcome is, but that's not always the case. What are the goals you are working toward? Are there any non-negotiables? Then you realize you are working to solve a problem together. The lens of influence itself suggests a lack of trust as you come in with an outcome, and you present stuff to achieve that."

Both of these views show that influence can be used; however, there are different kinds of influence. A product manager should not overuse their power and keep in mind that listening is sometimes just as helpful and important.

E. When you defined what trust is to you, were you answering from the lens of how do people gain my trust versus how do I gain your trust?

The last main question I want to highlight was the final question asked to everyone: when you defined what trust is to you, were you answering from the lens of how people gain my trust versus how do I gain your trust? This question was not meant to stump people but to understand what mode they were thinking in when answering all the previous questions. I thought very hard about where to place this question in terms of timing. I then realized that if it had been asked any earlier, it could have contributed to bias as people could think twice and possibly change their answers based on this question instead of answering what they truly thought at first when any questions were asked. I decided to analyze this question by male or female-identifying participants, and

what I noticed was that most females answered both to this question, but many people would say one side or the other at first and then take time to think about what they said and change their answer to both. There were also a couple of female respondents who were spread out between how people gain my trust and how I gain your trust. For the men, most people also said both, and no one said how people gain my trust. This question and the findings were also interesting to me as at the beginning of my paper, when I defined trust, I saw that there was really no consensus around a definition. There were many different interpretations and use cases for trust that made the definition change. Just as there is no consistency there, I feel like, within the definition, people should think about who is doing the act of building trust to whom. Who should be first when it comes to the priority of trust? Is it yourself or the other person? These ideas go beyond this paper but it would be interesting to look at the psychological inputs of trust on a deeper level and how they could impact the definition of trust.

III. Limitations of the research

A. Limited amount of variability in types of people I spoke to

Looking back at the research, I realize that there were limitations to the study. One of the limitations was that I only spoke with mainly product managers and got their perspective on trust and how they worked with their teams and did not have enough time to talk to multiple engineers and designers. If I had more time to do this thesis, I would've spoken to these additional roles. Their perspective is also valuable to see if they agree with the product manager's definition of trust, which is part of the interview questions. Another group I would've spoken to would have

been sales because it was mentioned that their business objectives are very different, and comparing what trust meant to them would have been interesting.

B. Sample size and randomization.

Building upon that idea, I would've also interviewed more people so that I could have a larger sample size. I also noticed that the snowballing technique is not entirely randomized, and possibly taking the people who expressed interest and then randomizing a select group of that would've been helpful. This technique also helped me to be connected to like-minded individuals.

C. Limited geographic representation (Texas area)

The last limitation was that I used a snowballing technique. Many of my connections of a second degree were also in Texas, so in the future, I would want to interview more participants around the world.

IV. Risks and Assumptions

A. Product managers are used to listening or conducting user interviews

One risk with my work is that product managers conduct customer interviews for a living or observe them and so they know how the setup works for an informational interview. This could cause some potential problems as they know the best way to answer a question or gauge the topic being assessed. On the other hand, they also were more empathic and willing to be good interviewees as they understood the process of interviewing and taking notes.

B. A product managers role varies across different industries

Another risk regarding the interviews completed is that a product manager's roles and responsibilities can vary across industry and company. This means that some people may have been technical product managers and have taken on more engineering responsibilities, and some could have worked on hardware such as physical products instead of digital products. This effect may have varied the results and synthesis section of the research.

Chapter 4: Discussion

I. Trust as a feeling or an action involves communication

The top characteristics of trust are easily defined as either feelings or actions to be expressed. The medium for that is either internal (feelings) or external (actions). The content being spread through your mind or your behaviors is the material to be communicated.

For high trust, vulnerability is a feeling that someone possesses. A common behavior of vulnerability is owning up to your mistakes. If you do not acknowledge and grow from the mistakes, then you will have lots of problems with trust. Another behavior within vulnerability is opening up and building relationships with others. By all means, relationships are not a one-step process as you must meet with others one-on-one multiple times. This process can be guided by technology tools. As trust is established, it helps people to be more vulnerable and open up. Communication plays a major role here as you must speak up and talk to others around you to build relationships.

For high trust, transparency is an essential act. . A common behavior of transparency is communicating openly and often. Over-communication is not something a person should be worried about in the workplace unless you are dealing with private information. When you are working with a team of people, it is important to talk with them and provide updates regularly. This form of communication can also look like asking to help others and remove barriers. Another behavior of transparency is fully

disclosing what is known. Again, this applies to nonconfidential work as you are collaborating with others. You must make sure everyone is on the same page. If some information is left out, then everyone may not be as helpful and productive to the team's overall success. The last behavior is not excluding people. First of all, you want to be a nice person as we are all human. Maybe there are different communication styles used amongst your team, but that is not a reason to disclude people. When you leave someone out of the conversation, you are breaking trust, and being transparent is making sure all voices are present at the table. Communication plays a role in transparency and trust as you must communicate with others around you and invite everyone to the table.

For high trust, respect is an important action. A common behavior of respect is acknowledging others' presence in the room. This behavior also falls in the line of just being a nice person. It is one thing to acknowledge someone when they walk in, but the problem is that they do not recognize them or their ideas once the meeting or discussion has begun. Another behavior of respect is listening. Although this may seem obvious, sometimes product managers spend more time talking and providing updates instead of letting other people on their team speak. Providing a space where you allow others to share is essential and helps to build trust. The last behavior of respect is considering other perspectives. So as you create that space for others to share, make sure you consider differing viewpoints. This is very important as you want to build a product that empathizes with the user and solves the customer's problem.

Communication is present in all of these behaviors as you actively involve your team from the moment people step in the room to the end of the meeting. When

everyone uses communication to voice ideas and collaborate, this leads to respect.

When there is a lack of respect, there is a lack of trust. This negativity between people can start to cause other behaviors, as mentioned below.

For low trust, fear is a feeling that someone possesses. A common behavior of fear is not speaking up. When a person is scared, their response is to stay quiet. This can impede a person's and companies' performance if there is no trust; then people are scared to share what they really think about the product and the company's direction. Communication plays a role in this behavior as one must communicate to resolve the problem created by fear. For a person to feel empowered to talk, a safe space of trust must be built.

For low trust, insecurity is a feeling related to fear. A common behavior of insecurity is never saying 'no.' Sometimes product managers will tend to say yes to everything as they do not want to let others down. However, by saying yes, they may be taking on more work than what is feasible for the team, which can lead to more significant mistakes and even more disappointment. Another behavior is a lack of confidence. If a product manager does not have the confidence, their team might not listen to them and their ideas about the roadmap, which can have a big effect on the company. The last behavior is a need for reassurance. If a product manager needs reassurance, this notion of approval shows that they lack autonomy and the knowledge to make their own decisions and stick to them. This can cause problems within the team as a lack of credibility can be associated with this behavior which diminishes trust. Communication plays a role in all these behaviors as you must speak up when you

cannot take on any more responsibility and when you speak up, you display your confidence which helps reduce your need for approval.

For low trust, avoidance is present. A common behavior of avoidance is avoiding conflict. When a product manager avoids conflict, that conflict will continue to occur and can cause bigger problems as trust is broken and team efficiency and cohesion are lost. Another behavior is not saying what needs to be said. This means that if you have an idea that is different from the idea proposed and choose not to share it, you could be skipping out on an opportunity to strengthen the business as you avoid sharing your true thoughts. The last behavior is not following through. This is a problem as you are keeping others accountable, and so if you cannot be accountable yourself, then people will start not to trust you about deadlines and do their own thing. Communication plays a role in all of these behaviors associated with avoidance as it helps resolve some problems and create new opportunities.

For low trust, micromanagement is an action that someone does or is the victim of that action. A common behavior of micromanagement is monitoring others excessively. When a person is being watched like a hawk, they start to feel less empowered in their work. The person who is watching them already assumes a lack of trust in the other person. Another behavior is someone controlling all decisions. This means that the employee has no autonomy. This can cause an employee to care less about the quality of work they produce as they know someone else will have a say or change in it. This also reduces someone's growth within their career path and organization as they never get the opportunity to try things on their own and be thrown into the deep end. Communication can help reduce micromanagement as the victim can

use communication to show what work they did and why they chose to do it that way.

The party who is the micromanager can also communicate why they need to review and control everything. This can help resolve areas of concern that were maybe not known to the other party.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

I. What is the significance of what I learned?

A. Main highlights of research

From all of this work and research, I summarize my main takeaways below. The first takeaway regarding trust and communication involves the importance of asking why. When someone presents information to you or asks you to do something, do not just say yes and move on; use your voice and ask why a specific feature needs to be built. This is especially helpful when requests come in from stakeholders. They may think that this new feature will resolve the complaint they received from a customer; however, if you ask why, you can dig deeper to understand the customer's problem. You can also help to identify if there is a more straightforward or easier solution to the problem. It is also beneficial to ask why as it helps you express your curiosity about the work, which helps you gain a greater understanding of it if someone forgets to include context to a decision or an important piece of information.

The second takeaway is to make sure that you put all decisions and updates in writing, so everyone is on the same page. This communication step may take some additional time to your work or processes, but it reduces the chance of problems later on down the line if work is documented. Through this transparency of information, you are also building trust with others on your team.

The third takeaway is to amplify all voices in the room, including your own. This one is especially important for me when I enter the workforce. I need to remember to share my ideas because if I do not, then no one will know what I was thinking. I just

might have a great idea that helps improve or change the company's direction. This is also important to amplify other voices in the room of those who tend to be quieter as they also probably have some excellent ideas but will not speak up unless someone gives them the space in the conversation to do so.

The fourth takeaway is to build meaningful relationships with others on your team. This means being curious and listening to others' backstory. Getting to know them outside of work and caring about who they are as a person. When people spend time doing this through coffee chats, one on one's, or other events, they notice that their work seems more fluid and relaxed, which leads them to be more productive as they have a relationship with one another, and trust is a component of that.

The last takeaway is that communication builds trust and applies to any team or role. Although this paper was written about the importance of product managers trusting their team, this idea is important for all groups as you must work together to solve life's challenges and be innovative. The characteristics shared in this paper also apply to all human beings and can be shown from the interviews as many participants moved into product management from vastly different careers and industries. The feelings and actions invoked when you have trust with someone involve communication.

B. Next steps for my research

My research had points where I went so wide and then so deep as I would get invested in learning about something new as I was fascinated by a finding. This became hard as I really wanted to dive into these other areas, but then realized in doing so, I would end up writing a book. The following ideas have been prioritized for the next

steps I would take.

The first is If I had more time to complete the research and the paper, I would have changed the design of the informational interviews to be random. Also, I would have added a component where I spoke to a product manager, engineer, designer, and one stakeholder per company to see how the product managers view trust within their team compared to the people they work with. One of the questions I asked the participants in the interview was if they thought that the people they work with agreed with how they defined a high and low level of trust. Seeing their response measured up against what their team thought of trust would also provide another interesting lens to the study.

The second is to look at how trust is affected through different types of verbal and non-verbal communication. This concept is extremely interesting to me as I have witnessed it internally remotely for three companies. Without body language, it is hard to understand the other person and if you are on the same page.

The third step would be to look into how racial disparities inhibit trust and communication in product management. I did not get into much depth with the background questions as I wanted to keep the interviewer engaged and maximize the time spent on the questions around trust. I focused on high-level background questions instead, but this could have been very interesting to look at.

The last thing I would like to further research is the impact of trust exercises. When people deliberately try to improve trust and relationships within a team, it works. During the interviews, I asked participants what factors or steps have worked to build trust with others. Two participants mentioned that they are currently implementing or

very soon to implement team-building exercises into their agendas. An example of what people do with their teams to build trust and communication included using metaphors to communicate ideas clearly to people so that they were able to get a better grasp of the concept being conveyed. Another example included creating and sharing personal maps which highlight information about each person and their story. This concept would be reviewed every time a new person joined the team. Some questions on the personal map include scenarios that affect your mood, such as you are (doing what) when you are at your best. Another fun example is skills and hobbies: list some skills you have that you do not use in your current job. These ideas help the team to get to know each other outside of the restrictions of the task at hand, and sometimes it leads to new connections and findings inside and outside of the workplace.

Being able to look deeper into other examples would have been interesting as well as trust should be built on the individual level first and then the group level. Also, shared experiences are a significant factor in building trusting relationships and so evaluating how this worked through research would be interesting to observe.

C. Advice for New Product Managers

One question I asked all my interviewees towards the end of our discussion was: What advice would you give new product managers to build trusting relationships? Some of the advice that stood out to me I wanted to share.

1. General Advice for Getting to Know Your Team

- Know your audience, understand their different personality types, share common ground, and relate on those things.
- Be proactive in creating relationships with not just people at your level but also above and below (ex: coffee, lunch, happy hours).
- Connect early and often.
- Ask a lot of questions.
- Put in the time to understand engineers: their goals and vocabulary.
 - Come prepared with questions during these coffee chats.
 - Take time to prepare for informal meetings by figuring out the most important questions you have beforehand.
 - Take on new tasks: What would be helpful for you?
- Make sure everything you do has a business impact.
- Spend a lot of time listening and learning in the first couple of weeks on a new job.
- Be open to feedback.
- Normalize not knowing the answer: "I do not know that but I will get back to you."
- Have humility and be vulnerable. Admit mistakes and make things right, if possible.
- Let your curiosity shine!
- Always share the "why" of what you are doing.
- Have empathy for the customers.
- Product management is a team sport and its collaborative, you have to create

the environment for that collaboration to occur by building trusting relationships with the people you work with.

- Visualize your work and be a storyteller.
- Meet people where they are at based on their preferred working and communication style.
- Think about it from a lens of service: “How can I serve you?”
- If you provide value to one person then you will provide value to the entire organization.

2. Big Advice Takeaways

- Find ways to build relationships. It will be different for every person.
- People don't remember what you say but, remember how they make you feel.
- If something happens to affect trust that you can rebuild, you should.

D. Why is trust so important after all?

Trust is important because if you do not have trust with others, then people will go their own way and follow their own agendas. This means that time, money, and energy are wasted by all parties, and this can impact a business, the economy, and the world. A product manager must have trust with others they work with to build successful technological innovations. As a product manager, communication is a great tool that one should utilize to build and sustain trust with others around them. One quote that sums up the process of trust from my interviews came from a product manager who worked in

the eCommerce industry and said, “Trust is built in layers and should be thought of as a continuum. We do this ‘thing’ as humans, which is deemed correct, and then we establish a piece of trust, and when we do something wrong, we take a step back and diminish our jar of trust.” This product manager thinks that trust is always improving and deepening. Through our behaviors, product managers can build trust with others and move forward most of the time. Occasionally when we unintentionally break trust during times of crisis, it is possible to rebuild and strengthen trust for the benefit of the relationship, the team, and the organization.

Interview Guide

Thesis Question: How and why do product managers build trust with their team and stakeholders?

Introduction

- Hi, my name is Julia, and to begin, I want to provide you with the opportunity to ask questions, stop for a break, or end the session anytime.
- I am doing this project for my thesis in the Plan II Honors Program, and for the project, I will be interviewing 20-30 people for 30 minutes each.
- First, I wanted to ask if you can record the session for my own use to refer back to; however, it will not be shared with anyone else.
- This session aims to understand how important trust is as a product manager.
- Confidentiality and privacy questions to ask for information purposes (gender, how long have you been in a product manager role, how long have they been with their company, tell me about who you work with day to day: how big is their team, what types of people are involved, what roles are played)

Questions

1. What characteristics would you use to describe a high level of trust and a low level of trust?
2. Tell me about a time when you had trust on a team for a new product/project/feature? Describe the situation.
 - a. How did you know there was trust?
 - b. What did the team do to build trust with one another or not?
 - c. How did it turn out?
 - d. What did you learn from that experience?
3. Tell me about a time when you did not have trust on a team for a new product/project/feature? Describe the situation.
 - a. How did you know there was not as much trust?
 - b. What did the team do to build trust with one another or not?

- c. How did it turn out?
 - d. What did you learn from that experience?
- 4. How have your relationships changed with your designers, engineers, and stakeholders over time in regards to trust? Or if you recently joined a company, how do you go about building trust and relationships with others?
 - a. What factors do you believe played a role?
- 5. Do you happen to have equal trust with all your team members, or are there certain groups where the level of trust is not as strong?
 - a. What steps worked to build trust with ____ group?
 - b. What steps did not work to build trust with ____ group?
- 6. How do you see influence playing a role with trust as a product manager?

(Or if engineer) ask: How do you see a product manager use influence with trust

 - a. Can you tell me about a time when you used influence, and it worked because you had trust with others?
 - b. Can you tell me about a time when you used influence and it did not work because you did not have trust with others?
- 7. The characteristics you shared for high and low level trust earlier in our discussion, do you think others you work with share your perspective?
- 8. What value does trust play in your organization and or your team?
- 9. What advice would you give new product managers for building trusting relationships going forward?
- 10. When you defined what trust is to you, were you answering from the lens of how do people gain my trust versus how do I gain your trust?

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Figure 1

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Figure 2

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Figure 3

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Figure 4

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Biography

Julia is a Canfield Business Honors and Plan II Major and an Entrepreneurship Minor. After graduating, she plans to work as a product manager. Julia chose this topic for her thesis as she is very passionate and curious about the role of a product manager and how humans interact with each other to build innovations. In addition, after taking organizational behavior, she realized that trust is critical to have as a product manager, and she wanted to explore that idea further.