

Digital workplace product management.

Roles, structures and practices

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The most effective digital workplaces are deeply rooted in continuous and comprehensive employee engagement, with organizations viewing employees not just as end-users but rather as indispensable partners. In this report we explore best practices and guidance for incorporating employee engagement throughout the digital workplace lifecycle. As well as looking at various methodologies and frameworks for engaging employees, we highlight best practice case studies from Campbell's and Fidelity Investments.

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Employees are often confused and frustrated about what digital tool to use for the task at hand. In this report, we support digital workplace teams to think through the various aspects that will help employees to know what tool to use when. It covers aspects such as strategic clarity, appropriate governance, digital dexterity, guidance and tool catalogues. It also curates an array of examples from the field to demonstrate best practice approaches.

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Microsoft 365 and related tools like the Viva Suite provide exciting opportunities to deliver integrated digital workplaces that support a strong employee experience. But planning the detail of a 365-powered digital workplace is not straightforward. In this report, we unpack the factors to consider when deploying Microsoft tools to deliver a fit-for-purpose digital workplace. We look at case studies from Avanade, BCD Travel, Duke Energy and Play'n GO. This is the January 2024 update of this paper.

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Executive summary.

Digital workplace teams work with products. This might involve owning or managing an application, tool or channel, or even a service that is regarded as a product within the organization.

It could be a mobile app, an intranet, or even an entire platform such as Microsoft 365. You might also work with external digital and software products that are provided by vendors but owned or managed internally. And, finally, collaboration with other internal product owners or managers over standards or integrations related to the products may be required.

Because these products span across so many different contexts, product management has become an extremely important concept within the digital workplace.

In some respects, digital workplace management *is* product management. In our 2020 DWG research on *Digital workplace management: Teams, structures and methods*¹, report author and DWG Lead Consultant Chris Tubb wrote: “*Managing a digital workplace comes down, in part, to: controlling how products enter usage; offering encouragement around how they are to be used; and planning for each product’s eventual replacement.*”

Today, many technology functions and digital workplace teams in organizations such as **Nestlé** have incorporated product management into their operations, structures and processes. It’s also common for digital workplace professionals to have ‘product owner’ or ‘product manager’ in their job title. Even digital workplace teams and individual professionals who don’t explicitly practice product management per se are very likely to be doing this in one form or another.

Product management can be challenging. Maturity varies from organization to organization and even from function to function within an organization, and adopting a fuller product management approach will involve change. There may also be some confusion around what being a product manager actually entails, and managing digital products can be a learning curve, encompassing a wide range of skills and approaches.

In this report we take a deep dive into managing products in the digital workplace and build on the findings from the 2020 report. Product management is simply too wide a topic to cover everything in detail, but we aim to provide an overview of what teams need to think about in moving to more of a product management approach, or in considering their existing operations.

First, we explore what product management encompasses. We then look at the different roles, structures and skills involved in product management, as well as the associated challenges.

We then look at some of the important practices digital workplace product managers undertake, starting with how to manage relationships, and moving on to different product management tactics and approaches throughout the product lifecycle.

Finally, we end with three in-depth and extremely varied case studies about digital workplace product management in leading organizations – **Aviva**, **Nestlé** and **BCD Travel**.



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What is product management?

What are products?

In the broadest sense, products can be defined as items or goods that are made and then sold to customers. They have certain characteristics, including:

- there being consumers who buy and use that product
- normally being scalable, with stable and repeatable management processes in place that are efficient and support that scalability
- a lifecycle that passes through different stages from introduction and launch, through growth and maturity, then decline, and finally end of life
- having owners and managers who provide the relative stewardship, overseeing strategy, development and a roadmap.

Product management in the digital workplace is often about attempting to make the digital products we own and manage resemble various aspects of consumer products. This might entail being:

- attractive, useful and successful for consumers (in this case employees)
- stable, efficient and scalable through the right management processes
- managed appropriately through different stages of the product lifecycle
- owned and managed by those in appropriate roles to support an overall strategy and roadmap.

Services are usually considered to be distinct from products, as they are not tangible and usually satisfy a particular need. However, in the digital workplace, the distinction between what is a service and what is a product can get fuzzy, and in this report some of the products mentioned could arguably be deemed to be a service.

What is product management?

There are various definitions of product management, which can vary slightly, each offering their own individual nuances. The term itself can be defined both as a practice but also as a function, and can take on more meaning when viewed through an Agile lens. It can also be regarded as a set of principles, techniques and skills, or even a mindset.

Atlassian provides a good working definition of 'product management' as: "*an organizational function that guides every step of a product's lifecycle – from development to positioning and pricing*".²

As a management discipline, the modern view of product management is still relatively new. Some attribute its origins to brand management, dating back to the 1930s with practices at **Procter & Gamble**.³ Product management then evolved via various different systems, including influential techniques carried out at **Toyota**, such as *Kaizen*.³

Current approaches to product management are influenced by Agile development, both through the ethos of the original *Agile Manifesto* from 2001⁴, which advocates principles such as collaborating closely with customers, and subsequent Agile methodologies, such as Scrum, which have specific definitions for product-related roles.

The term product management can be defined both as a practice and as a function, and can take on more meaning when viewed through an Agile lens. It can also be regarded as a set of principles, techniques and skills, or even a mindset.

In looking at the development of product management across the digital workplace over the last few years, we might also view it through the following lenses:

- a job title trend, popular within technology functions
- the restructuring of technology teams so individual roles and teams are aligned to specific tools and products, moving away from a more project-oriented approach
- the process of having more focused ownership and accountability relating to different digital workplace products
- formalizing digital workplace product-related processes so they are less ad hoc and more standardized and repeatable
- the upskilling of digital workplace teams so they can successfully manage a wider group of activities inherent in managing a product
- a move from larger digital workplace projects to more iterative, incremental and regular patterns of development
- what you need to do to deal with the increase in the number of vendor-led products that are mainly hosted in the cloud.

What's involved in product management in the digital workplace?

Managing products in the digital workplace is wide in scope and takes in the following:

- establishing clear roles and structures to support managing products
- encompassing the right skills and mindset
- having a strategy and vision for your product, based on the right principles
- operating a product roadmap, often orientated around continual improvement
- managing relationships with users, vendors, business stakeholders, and more
- managing the product through its lifecycle, with the appropriate processes for each stage.

A good example of a product management approach is that taken by Felipe Archila, Director, Digital Workplace Analytics at **The Coca-Cola Company**. Felipe has introduced product management to digital workplace analytics, an area that was previously ad hoc and underperforming, but has now produced exciting outputs around collaboration metrics and is set up to scale and meet further needs.

Felipe wanted to reimagine and reengineer the entire approach to analytics so that data and reporting would be treated as if they were a product – with data outputs more actionable, and the whole system both sustainable and scalable. He also wanted to drive more value by ensuring that reporting was tied back to the outcomes The Coca-Cola Company was trying to achieve.

Today, the digital workplace analytics managed by Felipe has owners, stakeholders, a product backlog, a product roadmap, and more. Felipe also has a compelling future vision for digital workplace analytics that sees it focusing on value and scaling across the enterprise, even ending up as a self-service model for analysts scattered through different lines of business. He's entirely changed the back-end approach to analytics so it can be managed through its lifecycle. Much of this has been achieved through strong relationships with other stakeholders, but also principally because Felipe has the right mindset and skillset to make it all happen.⁵

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Roles and structures.

Most roles in a digital workplace team encompass managing digital products in one way or another, from driving adoption through to managing the backlog or improving the user experience.

Product roles

Most roles in a digital workplace team encompass managing digital products in one way or another, from driving adoption through to managing the backlog or improving the user experience. Again, most of the activities we associate with digital workplace management can also be related to product management.

In digital workplace product management, there is usually a main role that is responsible for executing or coordinating multiple aspects of managing a product, sometimes by leading a product team, or maybe on their own. Most commonly this role is named ‘product manager’ or ‘product owner’.

In the world of Agile scrum methodology, these two roles have quite specific duties that are differentiated. A product owner is the person who is more the ‘doer’ in terms of managing a product backlog and working closely with the business and a development team to understand what to deliver next.⁶ Meanwhile, the product manager is the person who identifies needs, defines strategic and business objectives, articulates a vision, sets parameters for success, and drives stakeholders and a team towards product success.⁷

In the world of the digital workplace though, ‘product owner’ and ‘product manager’ are generally used interchangeably and usually take in a wider scope of activities than the Agile definitions. Sometimes ‘product leader’ is used, and other job titles include ‘service owner’, or mention the name of the product in the title. Some job titles that don’t mention products at all may effectively be a product owner or product manager role.

Note that in this report we talk about ‘product managers’ rather than ‘product owners’, unless we are referring to a specific example of a job title from an organization.

Scope of control

Any digital workplace will consist of a number of products of various different types. These will include:

- custom products either built in-house or commissioned with the help of a third party
- vendor products that have been acquired or subscribed to
- vendor products with some customization, that have either been built in-house or commissioned through a third party.

Each of these products will usually be associated with some kind of role or roles, which are officially or de facto product managers and recognized as being responsible or accountable for managing that product, plus, potentially, a related relationship with a vendor too.

However, some teams also apply product management roles that oversee and coordinate a group of products, either because:

- there is a group of similar tools and it makes sense to consider them together, such as at **Nestlé**, where the Workforce 360 team have product group managers for areas such as 'Collaboration, Content and Portals'
- they are all part of one platform, such as at **Aviva**, where Luke Mepham is the product owner for Microsoft 365
- the team are trying to deliver a coordinated and consistent employee experience across more than one product, for example at **BCD Travel**, where Beth Gleba is responsible for BCD's SharePoint intranet, Viva Engage and Viva Connections.

Generally, it's hard to classify the digital workplace as a 'product' in its own right, but product management principles are sometimes applied through team structures and roles to deliver experiences that are a sum of more than one product.

- In these cases, there can sometimes be product roles for individual tools and also product roles for groups of the same tools. For example, at **Aviva**, Luke Mepham works with service owners who are responsible for individual products within Microsoft 365, while at **Nestlé**, different product groups have a product group manager and individual product managers within that same group.

Key activities

Product management brings multiple aspects of managing a product across its lifecycle into one role or team. This means that product managers in a digital workplace context can cover many activities and require the requisite skills and experience. At a high level, digital workplace product managers can cover all or some of the following:

Product strategy and planning

- Defining and articulating a product strategy and vision.
- Making the business case for investment.
- Defining a product roadmap and related release schedule.
- Managing your product backlog to support your roadmap.

Management through the lifecycle

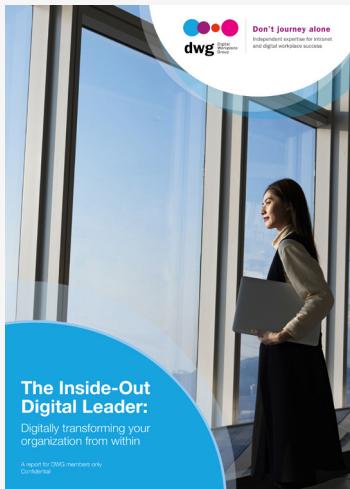
- Selecting a product vendor or implementation partner.
- Being involved in product design.
- Undertaking business analysis and documenting product requirements.
- Being involved in project management and Agile development, depending on your organization's approach.
- Developing specific technical and product knowledge.
- Retiring a product when it reaches end of life.

Stakeholder engagement and communication

- Managing stakeholders across multiple business functions and groups.
- Undertaking user research and improving the user experience.
- Undertaking product launch and ongoing communications.
- Change management.
- Driving user adoption and support.

Measurement

- Undertaking measurement, reporting and value assessment for a product across its lifecycle.
- Carrying out cost analysis and budgeting as appropriate.



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The 7 digital workplace leader success factors are:

1. Pioneering visionary strategies
2. Influencing across the organization
3. Championing the digital workplace
4. Sharing knowledge and expertise
5. Understanding employees
6. Making things happen
7. Building high-performing teams

Mindset and skills

All of the above activities require specific skills, expertise and knowledge. Some fields, such as change management, are well defined, while others, such as launching digital projects, have long-established good practices like leveraging digital champions.

Softer skills and having the right mindset are also important, particularly when it comes to managing relationships and navigating a product through the complexities and challenges inherent in large, modern organizations.

In the DWG research report *The Inside-Out Digital Leader*, we explore further the skills and principles it takes to succeed as a digital leader, such as having digital vision, cultural awareness, developing a digital mindset and being data-driven.⁸ All of these are relevant to product management. Over the years, DWG's Digital Workplace of the Year Awards have celebrated the qualities of excellent digital workplace leaders and teams. Some of the winners provide real inspiration for product management, for example the Digital Knowledge Platforms team at EY, who were recognized as DWG's Digital Workplace Team of the Year in 2023.⁹

Towards a product manager role description

Because product manager roles can be wide but also vary, it is difficult to come up with a generic job description of a product manager. However, we have tried to create a composite digital workplace product manager job description.

In February 2024, we sourced eight publicly available descriptions from job advertisements, all for roles that had 'digital workplace' and either 'product owner' or 'product manager' in the title. We used ChatGPT (version 3.5) to create a composite description from all eight, based on key activities, experience required and skills. We then asked ChatGPT to clean up the output by summarizing it, removing any duplication and any references to specific products. This has further gone through a light (human) edit, to remove duplication and tidy up some of the phrases, with some groupings then applied through ChatGPT.

While the results aren't a perfect job description, they do confirm the wide range of activities and skills required and can provide a useful reference for anyone considering their own role and how it relates to product management, or for constructing a job description for a new role.

Activities

1. Product strategy and leadership:

- Evolving and driving the product vision, strategy, and roadmaps for workplace technology.
- Partnering with stakeholders to align the product direction with the business strategy.
- Understanding user needs and addressing pain points effectively.
- Being accountable for product performance and adoption, working towards achieving outcomes and key results.
- Prioritizing work and resolving trade-offs with peers and leaders.

2. Product development and management:

- Documenting requirements and breaking down complex work into smaller, deliverable chunks.
- Planning sprints/releases to deliver maximum business value.
- Driving acceptance and adoption of ideas and improvements.
- Taking ownership of resolving live product issues and providing leadership to cross-functional teams.
- Identifying and removing impediments faced by the team.
- Establishing and fostering Lean Product Management principles and practices.

3. Technology vision and collaboration:

- Defining, driving, and delivering the technology vision, strategy, and roadmaps.
- Leading the design, development, and implementation of solutions.
- Managing and delivering medium- to high-complexity initiatives.
- Working closely with business colleagues on workplace-related initiatives, prioritizing and refining requirements.
- Owning vendor development roadmaps and ensuring end-user needs are articulated.
- Managing dependencies and deliverables, owning the strategic roadmap and portfolio.
- Championing the use of and driving adoption of digital workplace tools and services.

Skills

1. Product strategy and leadership:

- Ability to set the vision, strategy, and outcomes for a product area.
- Engagement in market research and leveraging insights to shape the product's direction.
- Confidence in managing ambiguity and simplifying complex concepts.
- Outstanding subject matter expert (SME) in digital product management and user experience design.
- Customer-centric with a focus on end-user experience and outcomes.
- Familiarity with C-level engagement and support.

2. Product development and management:

- Familiarity with the product management lifecycle and an Agile mindset.
- Proficiency in using data for prioritization and a consistent approach.
- Expertise in Lean and Agile practices.
- Experience in the end-to-end lifecycle of product development.
- Strong leadership skills, including coaching and development.
- Knowledge and experience in specific workplace technologies.

3. Communication and stakeholder management:

- Effective stakeholder management and communication skills.
- Excellent written and verbal communication skills.
- Strong data analysis and presentation skills.

4. Industry knowledge and market trends:

- Broad understanding of workplace technologies, including end-user products, identity, collaboration, voice, and video.
- Good knowledge of the industry and market trends.

Experience

- Previous experience in product management or a related role.
- Track record of understanding user needs and translating them into requirements.
- Experience in driving product adoption and delivering business value.
- Resolving live product issues and providing direction to cross-functional teams.
- Managing and building teams of product managers (if applicable).
- Influence and partnership without direct authority.
- Relevant higher education and professional certifications.
- Experience in the tech-focused scale-up sector.
- Estimating the value of software features and cost-benefit analysis.
- Managing a product/portfolio backlog.
- Solid understanding of cost models.
- Experience in working with workplace technologies.
- Strong awareness of the digital ecosystem and market trends.

Team structures

There are no hard-and-fast rules about structuring digital workplace teams according to product management principles, but generally they will have roles orientated around product ownership, with structures that support working closely with users, continual improvement, Agile development, processes across the product lifecycle and so on.

For example, at **Fidelity Investments**, the digital workplace team is divided into four main chapters or areas:

- **Strategy and Planning:** developing, executing and measuring the digital workplace strategy in partnership with leaders across the company.
- **Digital Workplace Experience:** creating associate-centric digital experiences through user research, design and business analysis.
- **Digital Workplace Capabilities:** driving tool decisions to enhance the associate experience.
- **Service Design and Delivery:** designing end-to-end digital experiences through the lifecycle, also covering change management aspects.

The 'Digital Workplace Capabilities' area specifically focuses on tools and products. It consists of a number of cross-functional 'Product Area Squads', each of which will be assigned to a specific product area, but then move on to another product area once that work has been completed. In late 2022, there were nine product areas, covering areas such as Executive Decision Support, Digital Adoption Platforms, Mobile Apps & Experience, Personalization & Productivity, Hybrid Meetings, Work from Anywhere and Collaboration Tools Optimization. These groups are subject to change as work is completed or new priorities emerge.¹⁰

Sometimes a smaller team take aspects of product management and then serve the wider technology organization. For example, **PNC**'s five-person Digital Workplace IT Product Management Team have a unique position, sitting at the 'intersection' of engineering and delivery teams, and the end users.¹¹

PNC's Digital Workplace IT Product Management Team



Figure 1: Structure of PNC's digital workplace IT product management team.

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Core challenges.

Product management in the digital workplace has some particular challenges.

Most digital workplace products are vendor-led

In the past few years, communication and collaboration solutions, such as intranets, have tended to move away from being custom-built to embracing vendor products that work out of the box and don't require customization. This is partly caused by the domination of cloud-based solutions.

Avoiding customization makes products easier to manage, avoids additional costs and provides a better basis for continual improvement. However, it does mean that most digital workplaces are vendor-led, with Microsoft often having the most influence.

This usually results in organizations having to make compromises, as products may not work exactly as they want. Digital workplace teams will also not have full control over a product roadmap, which can lead to governance and operational issues. Sometimes products can be unexpectedly withdrawn – for example, Microsoft's announcement of the retiring of Viva Topics in 2025 even though it had only been launched in 2021.¹²

Every digital workplace has too many products

Most digital workplaces have become complex, with a multitude of tools and applications. Recent research suggests that an average company with over 10,000 employees will have a portfolio of 664 applications in its digital workplace¹³, while in late 2022, on average, each knowledge worker needed to access 11 different applications, up from 6 in 2019.¹⁴ This can lead to users feeling overwhelmed by the number of apps, reduced productivity caused by context switching, and a fragmented and frustrating digital employee experience. On top of this, there can be duplicated costs, additional management effort, inefficient processes and poor findability.

Employees use shadow technology products

Employees often rely on unsupported, unauthorized and risky products – sometimes known as shadow IT – to get things done at work. Commonly these are consumer-grade apps, such as WhatsApp, that have potential security, privacy or safeguarding risks. Invariably, employees turn to shadow IT products because the 'official' products are missing or don't work exactly as desired.

Product management is not always mature or uniform within organizations

Product management is a popular concept within organizations, but maturity can vary across organizations and within different teams. For example, the IT function may have quite a mature approach to product management, but the HR team may not have any product managers. When the approaches of different product teams are not aligned it can make it harder to create and coordinate a coherent digital workplace experience.

Product lifecycles are moving quickly

Products move quickly, with new versions of each product delivered through ambitious roadmaps. Meanwhile, faster technology trends and employee expectations can lead to shorter product lifecycles, with tools being replaced by newer, shinier models.

An average company with over 10,000 employees will have a portfolio of 664 applications in its digital workplace, while in late 2022, on average, each knowledge worker needed to access 11 different applications, up from 6 in 2019.

Product management in the digital workplace encompasses many activities and skills

Product managers and owners often undertake a wide range of activities, covering everything from defining strategies to driving adoption to working on the specifics of the roadmap. This means a product manager needs to take on a wide variety of different activities and skills; while this potentially makes for an exciting and rewarding role, it can also be demanding and involve a learning curve.

Product management is dependent on managing relationships

Product management in the digital workplace involves interacting with multiple internal stakeholders as well as external vendors. Success sometimes relies on a dependency on successful relationship management to manage a range of different opinions and expectations, as well as achieving coordination and collaboration.

Digital workplace product managers are usually under-resourced

Digital workplace product managers are often responsible for products that are used by tens of thousands of employees, but are expected to work within tight resources and budgets. In 2024, anecdotally, resources remain constrained across many organizations. Digital workplace product teams are traditionally less well-resourced compared to teams responsible for external-facing products.

Successful product management involves making compromises

Managing products inevitably involves compromise relating to costs, the flexibility of vendor-led solutions, the integration and dependency with other products, user needs, stakeholder demands, security and compliance issues, and more. Taking all these factors into account means product management can be a balancing act.

Some organizations work around projects

Some organizations work around larger projects with budgets, development and roles. Product management tends to take a wider approach in that it works more on the basis of smaller development and continual improvement.



5

Managing relationships.

Stakeholder management, vendor management and relationship management are all extremely important to managing products in the digital workplace.

Product owners and managers represent their products across the business and this involves interacting with a wide range of different stakeholders, both internally and often externally too. Stakeholder management, vendor management and relationship management are all extremely important to managing products in the digital workplace.

Working with internal stakeholders

Digital workplaces, and even humble intranets, touch all areas of a business. Practitioners often find themselves connecting the dots. For example, **PNC**'s five-person Digital Workplace IT Product Management Team consider themselves as sitting at the 'intersection' of engineering and delivery teams with the end users.¹¹

Managing digital workplace products involves working with a huge range of internal stakeholders, including:

- senior business stakeholders from business functions and lines of business
- operational teams from business functions, such as HR, legal and compliance, and more
- technology teams responsible for everything from development to support and security
- other product managers
- groups of users.

Successful approaches for managing relationships with internal stakeholders

Soft skills

As you would expect, successful stakeholder management involves a number of soft skills and techniques, such as good communication, strong networking, being empathetic, being persistent, applying a consistent message, and more.

But being a product owner in the digital workplace often takes more than just the skills associated with normal stakeholder management. It often requires being an internal changemaker, influencing hearts and minds, and introducing new ideas. Again, the DWG research report *The Inside-Out Digital Leader* provides additional detail about these necessary skills.⁸

Mindset and compromise

Stakeholder management also requires the right mindset. While this kind of work undoubtedly needs persistence, often a spirit of compromise can be expedient too, particularly when dealing with other product owners who may have different ideas about what is best for their respective products. For example, digital workplace product owners are often looking to deliver a more consistent and improved user experience through integrations, while individual product owners may prefer that users visit their applications directly. In the **BCD Travel** case study later in the report, Beth Gleba, product owner of BCD's MySource intranet, admits she has been "*working on letting go of some of my own perceptions and ownership*" when it comes to dealing with other product owners.

Relationships between stakeholders are usually strengthened through governance structures and processes that recognize their contribution, and provide a regular, diarized opportunity for communication and collaboration.

Knowing your product

Knowing your product inside out at the strategic, tactical and technical levels helps to establish credibility and to enable meaningful conversations with a range of stakeholders. For example, **Aviva**'s Microsoft 365 product owner has both technical and business discussions with leaders and operational teams. Understanding the product is critical; at Aviva, product managers are encouraged to spend at least a day a week getting to know the product for which they are responsible and learning thoroughly how it can be used.

Having a shared vision

Having a shared vision for the digital workplace that everyone buys into also helps to ensure everyone is on the same page, providing a strong base for relationships and valuable conversations.

Strengthening relationships through governance structures

Relationships between stakeholders are usually strengthened through governance structures and processes that recognize their contribution, and provide a regular, diarized opportunity for communication and collaboration. Governance structures that are regularly applied to specific digital products, and sometimes wider concepts, such as the digital workplace and digital employee experience, include cross-functional senior steering committees that focus on strategic alignment and guaranteeing resources, and then a more operationally focused working group.

Cross-functional committees of this nature are often founded during a project but then disbanded after the product launches. At other times they are formed with good intentions as part of a post-launch activity, but can be hard to maintain and sometimes fizzle out.

At **BCD Travel**, there is a successful regular meeting of relevant stakeholders, including product owners around the concept of digital employee experience, which has helped to steer discussions and provide opportunities for coordination.

At **SAP**, there is advanced governance in place for the SAP One employee experience platform that has a number of structures and defined roles, taking into account everyone from senior stakeholders to content coordinators. One innovative approach is a series of 'app coordinators' throughout the business, who help to ensure that different apps in use across divisions are included in the app launcher section of SAP One. They provide an indirect link to ensure that different product owners have their apps covered in the SAP One experience.¹⁵

Establishing clarity over responsibilities

Providing clarity over the roles and responsibilities for different stakeholders across the digital workplace is essential to many product-related processes. Ideally, everyone will know what they should be doing and when they should be doing it. Providing clarity also helps to smooth relationships and prevent any misunderstandings.

A well-known and very useful framework is the RACI matrix, which defines who should be Responsible, Accountable, Consulted and Informed for any product (and sometimes a more granular aspect of a product). More details on this are provided in the DWG *Digital workplace management* research report.¹⁶



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Having a strong, healthy and honest relationship with your vendor can make a difference to the success of your product.

Working with vendors

Product managers also often own the relationship with individual vendors and related third parties. This might include not only the product vendor, but also an implementation partner who may have helped bring the product to market or carried out custom work.

Vendor management is an important aspect of product management. Having a strong, healthy and honest relationship with your vendor can make a difference to the success of your product. Below are some points to consider.

Managing vendor relationships occurs across different touchpoints

Successful vendor relationships tend to thrive or die across different touchpoints:

- at an overall account management and relationship level
- at a commercial and contractual level
- during implementation and any other related projects
- during ongoing support both from a business and technical level
- on discussing and influencing the product roadmap
- on the personal relationship between different individuals.

Clear communication is at the centre of any vendor relationship. If there is a problem on one level, then ideally a strong relationship with clear communication can help solve issues at another level.

Relationships change over time

It's always worth remembering that relationships with vendors can change over time. At the beginning the relationship is new and fresh, the work is exciting, and of course you may have just signed a rather large contract with some hefty implementation fees. There may be a tantalizing 'Phase 2' that might result in even more work or an extension of the product. With all this in mind, you are likely to be prioritized.

But vendor relationships mature, just like products. When a product moves through its phases, the commercial opportunities reduce, sometimes to just support and maintenance, in particular with implementation partners. You may no longer be the priority you felt you once were, particularly if you're not on the latest version of a product.

Fishes and ponds

It's always worth considering vendor size and maturity. These can impact the capacity either to adequately support you or to give you more tailored, special attention. Do you want to be a bigger fish in a small pond or a smaller fish in a big pond?

Most organizations reading this report are going to be large enterprises. Some may want to go with a large established vendor who will be able to support with the scale and stability required – and, for many, Microsoft falls into this category. On the other hand, others might opt for a smaller vendor who will provide a more tailored service and where it might be possible to influence the product roadmap. In particular, when a vendor is a start-up, there can be opportunities to collaborate on custom features that turn out to be cheaper as they are then rolled into the main platform.



Vendor-led change

When you're managing a product, vendor-led change is inevitable and you aren't going to be fully in control. This can be challenging in terms of which features get launched and when this happens. It can also be frustrating as some changes can undermine your existing product management approach or plans.

Ideally, product management takes a process-led approach to dealing with vendor-led change. Microsoft 365 is probably the most complex platform to deal with, having a very ambitious roadmap across all the different tools and services. At **Aviva**, there is a clear set of triage and evaluation processes that take in both business and risk considerations when deciding the most appropriate responses to changes coming down the line. Separately, there are evaluation processes to deal with products that Aviva might want to purchase, such as Copilot.

In our 2020 report on *Digital workplace management*, we also cover processes where power users or groups of volunteers are automatically part of any initial vendor product evaluation process.¹

Using your own software

Very occasionally there can be some unique circumstances that heavily influence product management approaches. Some DWG members are also tech providers and their digital workplace leverages their own product. In most examples, this has proved to be an advantage; for example, both **Adobe**, who tend to lead with Adobe technology such as Adobe Experience Manager and Adobe Analytics¹⁶, and **SAP**, whose intranet SAP One is based on the SAP Business Technology Platform¹⁷ have award-winning platforms.

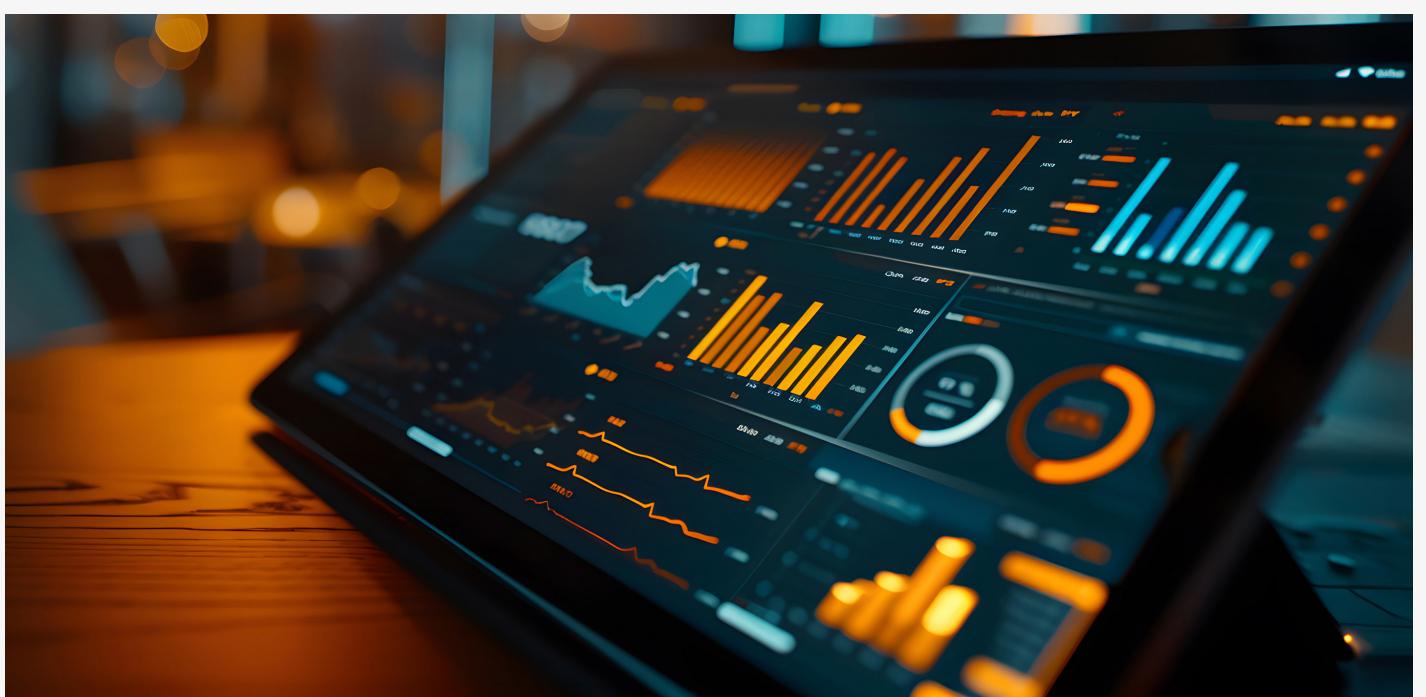
Leveraging software used for the customer-facing digital environment

Sometimes digital workplace teams have the opportunity to use the software being leveraged for customer-facing environments for the digital workplace. This could be a whole content management system or something more specific, such as an analytics package. For example, at **Walmart**, both the internal and external-facing digital environment are based on Adobe Experience Manager.¹⁸

This again has advantages, such as being able to access software which would be unlikely to be deployed solely for internal purposes, but also some potential disadvantages, including having less influence over vendor management and strategic decisions involving the product if your customer-facing team are the de facto product managers.

Using software that wasn't your choice

A similar situation can happen for users of Microsoft 365 and SharePoint when non-IT teams may have had little or no influence over using Microsoft tools for their core digital workplace.



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Product lifecycle and related processes.

Ultimately, every product has a lifecycle that starts with an idea and ends with it being retired. The various stages of the lifecycle require different product management approaches and activities. The product lifecycle is also a useful framework to consider the strategy and roadmap for a product.

In this section we cover the aspects of product management that are involved at each stage of the lifecycle.

What are the different stages of a digital workplace product?

The product lifecycle concept was developed by German economist Theodore Levitt, who published his classic Product Life Cycle model in the Harvard Business Review in 1965.¹⁹ Levitt established four stages of a product:

- **Market development:** first bringing the product to market with low adoption and sales.
- **Market growth:** accelerating growth – also known as the 'Takeoff stage'.
- **Market maturity:** there is still growth but demand levels off.
- **Market decline:** product loses market appeal and sales decline.

Levitt urges those involved in products to use the lifecycle concept so that a *"more rational approach is brought to product planning and merchandising; ...it can help create valuable lead time for important strategic and tactical moves after the product is bought to market. Specifically, it can be a great help in developing an orderly series of competitive moves, in expanding or stretching the life of a product, in maintaining a clean product line, and in purposely phasing out dying and costly old products."*¹⁹

Most digital workplace professionals instinctively think about the product lifecycle through their likely involvement in rolling out different tools which in turn replace other tools, or interacting with digital workplace vendors.

Although Levitt was writing about the lifecycle of consumer products, the different stages can be applied to thinking about digital workplace products. In practice, most digital workplace professionals instinctively think about the product lifecycle through their likely involvement in rolling out different tools which in turn replace other tools, or interacting with digital workplace vendors. They are also involved in trying to grow the value and adoption of tools through various efforts.

But planning activities around digital workplace products, evaluating the use of external products and making key product decisions are all heavily influenced by the different stages of the product lifecycle.

When talking about product lifecycles, many product managers choose to distinguish between a development stage and an introduction stage, after a product has been fully launched. With the digital workplace, distinguishing between when a product has been fully introduced is sometimes hard to ascertain, particularly as many products are delivered on a minimum viable product (MVP) basis with deliberately phased launches and a pattern of iterative development. Because of this, in this report, we stick to Levitt's original four stages of growth.

The development stage of digital workplace product management is usually the most intense but can be the most exciting. Bringing a product to market that draws on your creative input and hard work and seeing it succeed is a hugely satisfying experience.

Development

The development stage of digital workplace product management is usually the most intense but can be the most exciting. Bringing a product to market that draws on your creative input and hard work and seeing it succeed is a hugely satisfying experience. This author remembers launching an internal custom-built collaboration tool where I was effectively the product manager – it was really ‘my baby’. Launching it was nerve-wracking but then seeing successful levels of adoption within the first 24 hours from a global population of users was a source of pride.

The ‘development’ stage of a product can span from the idea and concept to after the launch. Levitt’s market development stage leads up to the market growth stage, so encapsulates after launch.

User research and discovery

Carrying out user research for digital workplace products is critical to inform the strategy, design, business case, engagement strategy, requirements, and more. Initial research will also inform the backbone of your backlog, usually up to launch and beyond.

Research for your product also provides an opportunity to interact with a group of users that can create advocates and champions. Some digital workplace teams have formalized a group who give feedback on new products; for example, at **PNC Bank**, there is a Workplace Technology Ambassadors programme that includes specific ‘pilot adopters’ who provide formal feedback to inform the roll-out of digital workplace products.¹¹

After launch, ongoing user research forms a critical part of product management activity, particularly to ensure a product remains user-centric. At **Nestlé**, since product management approaches have been introduced, ‘user experience’ is one of the areas where product managers have upskilled and expanded their activities.

The digital workplace team at **Fidelity Investments** have a set approach to new product design that always has a ‘scan’ phase aimed at defining the needs of associates. This takes in a range of research methods including surveys, ethnographic/diary studies, focus groups, baseline current experience, persona identification & development, journey mapping and competitive analysis.²⁰

Horizon scanning

R&D activity also needs to look to wider trends. Horizon scanning refers to a series of activities that enable teams to anticipate upcoming trends that can inform product development and spot opportunities. These can range from taking a wider lens view of economic, social and demographic trends, to covering technology trends and even specific product developments from vendors, for example with generative AI features now being introduced in many vendor product roadmaps.²¹ Member organizations like DWG and this research programme can help with horizon scanning, as well as through our annual digital workplace predictions.²²

Monitoring shadow IT

Shadow IT is a term that describes the use of unauthorized apps and tools within organizations for work purposes, which ultimately presents a risk to the organization and employees, usually in relation to data privacy, security and employee safety. We covered the use of shadow IT products in our previous research into *Digital workplace management*¹, and distinguished between shadow products, shadow solutions and shadow systems. The use of the consumer version of WhatsApp is a common example of a shadow product that represents real risks.

While shadow IT undoubtedly represents a risk, it can also bring opportunities. The use of shadow IT usually indicates a business need that is not being met by current solutions, or highlights a product from the consumer world that is very popular with users. Shadow IT therefore presents a valuable data input around the need for new products and solutions that will avoid employees needing to turn to unauthorized tools. It can also be a powerful part of a business case where introducing a new tool may be a priority in order to eliminate the risks caused by shadow applications. At **Aviva**, the team are emphasizing the importance of user experience to stop employees turning to risky non-supported solutions.



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Setting a strategy and vision

Setting a strategy and vision for a product is a common output from user research and other discovery phases, which defines the future direction of the product, unites stakeholders around a common goal, and is an essential part of any business case, effort to drive adoption, and more.

When **Adobe** designed a campus app to support both employees on site throughout their different global locations, as well as employees working from home, they established a vision and guiding principles for the product based on user and stakeholder research. This not only provides a strong and clear vision for the product, but also has specific points to guide the scope, features, design and build process.²³

Vision and Guiding Principles

A unified employee experience mobile platform that fosters productivity, connection, and engagement through a scalable adaptive architecture.

					
Valuable Provide daily utility and enrichment based on human-centered design	Unified Connected and streamlined workflows to increase productivity	Easy Simplify frequent tasks and content experiences	Personalized Use behavioral data and machine learning to drive made-for-you experiences	Optimized Reduce cost of ownership and enable scale	Adobe Powered Lead with Adobe tech and brand

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Figure 2: The Adobe team's vision and guiding principles for the campus app.

At financial services company **Northwestern Mutual**, the team responsible for the Linknet portal that supports 30,000 sales advisors established a new vision for the product, taking it from something 'stuck in the nineties' to being 'world class'. Although they know it will take several iterations to achieve this, the vision helps the team to focus on achieving that goal. There is also a relevant set of guiding principles.²⁴

The Opportunity

Create a world class Advisor content portal through an iterative process

From	To
90s Intranet <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fragmented, unreliable, difficult Content driven Static content Abandoned, out of date pages Content author focused architecture Stop and find 	Workplace Portal <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trusty worthy, relevant, easy to use Experience driven Engagement plus dynamic content Sustainable processes and governance Field & Client Journey architecture Contextual in-the-moment

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Figure 3: The product vision for Linknet, Northwestern Mutual's content portal for advisors.

Making the business case for investing in digital workplace products is not always straightforward, particularly as the initial outlay is regarded as capital expenditure ('Capex') rather than operational expenditure ('Opex'), and the benefits are sometimes intangible and hard to put a dollar value on.

Making the business case

Often it will be necessary to make a business case for investing in a product. The process, format and timing for making that business case are usually dictated by an established approach within an organization. Data from user research will often make up part of a business case.

Making the business case for investing in digital workplace products is not always straightforward, particularly as the initial outlay is regarded as capital expenditure ('Capex') rather than operational expenditure ('Opex'), and the benefits are sometimes intangible and hard to put a dollar value on.

The team at **IAG** took an imaginative approach to supporting the case for investment by undertaking research to show the specific value of investing in people experience across different elements such as customer experience, growth and profit. They also put a value on the risks of *not* investing in people experience.²⁵

At other times it is necessary to be quite tactical. At healthcare specialist **Banner Health** the process for funding capital projects is very stringent. The digital workplace team successfully made the case for investing in a new intranet by demonstrating that it could also be used as a physician directory mobile app, effectively showing that the Akumina software could fulfil two product requirements rather than just one and therefore lead to real cost savings.²⁶

Selecting a vendor product or implementation partner

The methodology for selecting a vendor product or implementation partner (or both) is often dictated by a standard tender and procurement process that is likely already set within the organization and will meet various risk, compliance and cost parameters. Because of this we do not cover this in much detail, but do note:

- A tender or request for proposal (RFP) process often takes much longer than expected.
- It is usually resource-heavy and involves a lot of time and effort from a wide variety of stakeholders.
- Depending on your process, having good product and market knowledge can help you to alert or invite vendors and partners who might be interested in taking part in a tender.
- Sometimes an initial request for information (RFI) process can save time for everyone involved.
- It is very helpful to unsuccessful parties to let them know why they did not succeed.

Design and development

The process for the actual design and development of a product is likely to be dictated by existing methodologies, some of which may follow Agile principles.

Those that remain close to a group of users and continuously gather and act on their input during the process have an advantage in designing a product that remains close to user needs. Taking a data-driven approach to product design and development, rather than one built on stakeholder assumptions, lessens the risk of low value and low adoption. You can also develop a valuable relationship with users who can continue to provide input throughout the product lifecycle, although this may have even started during the user research phase.

The digital workplace team at **Prudential Financial** were early adopters of this approach, developing their own '3D' process (Discover, Design, Deliver) that brought design thinking, fast prototyping, storyboarding, Agile development and more together, ensuring that end-user co-creation was at the heart of the products deployed in their digital workplace.²⁷

More recently, **EY**'s award-winning Discover knowledge and search platform has been built and iterated through design sprints based on a continuous feedback loop with users, helping to underpin user-centric design and a series of continual, iterative improvements that involves user feedback from a defined user group called 'The Sounding Board'. The EY team have nailed a set process based around:

- coming up with a hypothesis or design idea and seeing if this is feasible with IT partners
- creating prototypes to present these to The Sounding Board to gather feedback
- iterating these and gaining further feedback.²⁸

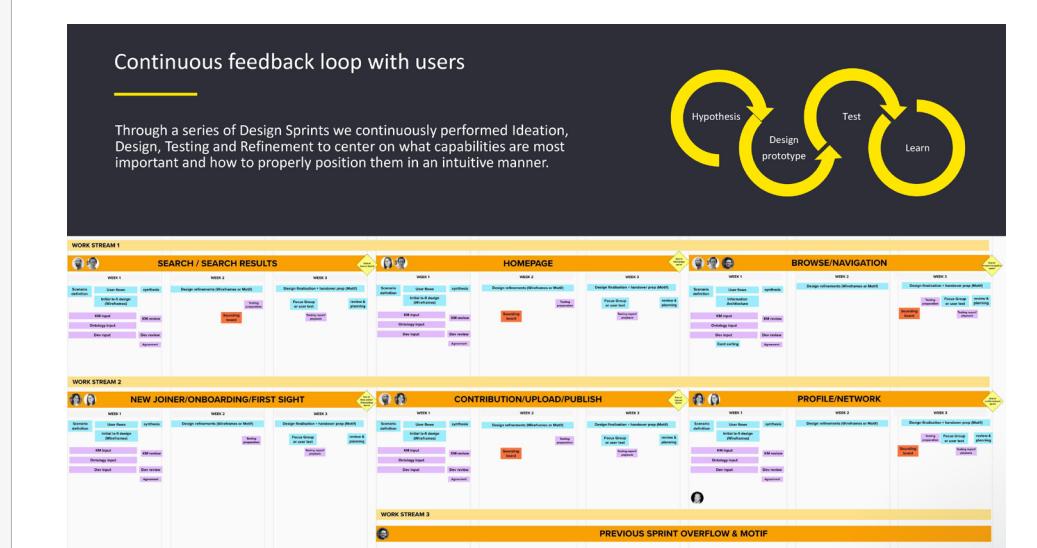


Figure 4: EY uses a continuous feedback loop with users to design and improve its Discover platform.

The topic of gathering employee feedback to inform the development of the digital workplace and its products is covered in more detail in the DWG research report *Employee engagement: Harnessing insights that shape the digital workplace*.²⁹



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Product launch

Many product launches now focus on an MVP approach, which envisages a first release with more limited functionality. Real-world feedback from users and any learnings can then help build and prioritize the next phase of development and also build up a backlog of requested features.

The advantages of an MVP approach are:

- the feedback and learnings will ultimately help deliver a better product
- employees can get quicker access to core features
- issues can be fixed before the product scales
- it can help drive senior stakeholder buy-in as they can see evidence that a product is working
- user and adoption efforts can be supported as an employee picks up advocates and others see successful use cases.

The disadvantages occur when the MVP approach is not followed through with the delivery of actual improvements, so the released product remains in its MVP state and a long way off its vision. This can happen if budget runs out, investment or strategic plans change, or senior stakeholders move on and their replacements take a different view of the priority for the roadmap for your product.

The combination of an MVP approach and the reality of launching digital products in very large organizations with small digital workplace teams (and the related resourcing challenges) means that a phased approach to launch is often preferable. This pattern may follow something along these lines, with iterations and improvements at each stage:

- launch to a formal group of users (either those in a pilot or a voluntary earlier adopter group), such as is in operation at **PNC**
- launch to a wider group of users, perhaps in one country or location – this can happen several times
- soft or 'beta' launch to all users
- full launch to all users
- new roadmap items added to the MVP.

At **Duke Energy**, the team ran a pilot for Viva Connections with 300 people before rolling it out more widely. This pilot was successful as it helped to make several adjustments to the product based on user feedback and also identified some technical and user experience issues which could then be dealt with.³⁰

At **ZEISS**, the team launched a global intranet in phases over a year, starting with an MVP and focusing on sites in Germany, USA and China. This both allowed for improvements, but also provided a more manageable workload. A 'big bang' approach was never considered to be realistic.³¹

At **Estée Lauder Companies**, the team positioned the myELC intranet as being in 'beta' for a number of months as they continued to migrate content and introduce news features. The intranet even had 'Beta' in the header. This helped to manage customer expectations but also position the new intranet as being more technically sophisticated than previous iterations.³²

Growth

In the growth phase, digital workplace products do not stand still; they continue to evolve and gain adoption. The product will likely be considered fully launched and will have moved on from MVP. Many organizations consider this to be 'business as usual' and sometimes relax both product development but also levels of user support. While, inevitably, activity may not be as frenetic as during the development stage of the product lifecycle, a product management approach means never taking your foot off the gas.

Driving continuous improvement

Taking a product management approach ideally means establishing processes that enable regular incremental changes that ensure:

- there is continuous improvement in the product and it moves towards the established vision
- changes align with user needs and business objectives
- resources are guaranteed as far as possible
- everyone involved is aware of the process and their part in it
- teams can learn as they go and see what works and what doesn't.

At the heart of continuous improvement is a cycle based on 'test–learn–iterate–deploy' that envisages testing something, learning from the test, making iterations based on feedback, then deploying it. This is enabled by:

- a backlog of features derived from user research and user feedback
- measurement and feedback
- an established roadmap and regular release schedule
- development cycles that are iterative and potentially lean on Agile methodologies.

Product teams that succeed in driving continuous improvement are those that are able to successfully operationalize all the above.

At **Northwestern Mutual**, the team responsible for envisaging a new version of the Linknet portal for 30,000 sales staff set a number of guiding principles that include a focus on continuous improvement and human-centred design.²⁴





Figure 5: Guiding principles for the Linknet portal at Northwestern Mutual.

Other product teams then have test–learn–iterate–deploy or a similar process at the centre of their operating model or development approach. We have already covered EY’s use of feedback loops and prototyping for the development of its Discover platform, but the process is equally relevant for any product at the ‘Growth’ stage.

At **Campbell’s**, the digital workplace team take a comprehensive view of listening and gathering employee feedback that is not only embedded into processes, but includes a wider group of channels and is embedded into the team’s behaviours through a defined approach to empathetic listening.²⁹

Managing the product backlog

An essential part of product management is managing the backlog. In Agile terms this is a list of work or requests related to a digital product that are still to be completed, and provides an important reference point for the product manager and development team. However, with a digital workplace product it is possible that a ‘backlog’ can extend to non-development areas too, such as a new content site or areas, or elements which are configured in a product rather than built by the development team.

Managing a backlog involves:

- a process to capture feedback, requests and ideas
- translating these into requested changes or requirements
- logging them in a system or repository where items are also kept up to date with their associated status
- a process to prioritize backlog items, which then progress to development and release.

Feedback and requests can come from multiple different channels. In an initial product development – particularly when an MVP approach is being taken – many requirements will fall out of scope and into your backlog.

After any phase of a launch you’ll get more feedback – also arriving into your backlog. And then, through iterative design processes, further ideas and thoughts will inevitably surface – providing yet more fuel for the backlog. Ongoing opportunities to provide feedback for a product as well as regular analytics are all going to suggest backlog items too.

At **BCD Travel** the intranet team have a focused intake process, which ensures all feedback and other ideas are captured to inform the backlog.³³ They then use a series of area-specific project boards and a Kanban approach to help prioritize, track and manage the backlog.

Aviva also uses a Kanban approach to manage the backlog, with a set of processes around security, compliance and general 'service fundamentals' to assess and prioritize items.

Managing an internal product backlog takes on a different meaning when it involves an external vendor product as it will be partly dependent on the vendor's product roadmap. Depending on the level of control and options available, you may not even have your own internal backlog, or it may be confined to items that can be configured. You will have a loss of control and it can be unpredictable. Microsoft, for example, publishes many roadmap items but isn't very forthcoming about dates. Here, having a strong relationship with the product vendor, so that you are aware what's coming down the line, is helpful. It's also important to check in regularly with a vendor's published roadmap and product updates.

Roadmaps and release schedules

Roadmaps and an accompanying release schedule are an important part of product management. A roadmap is not just a list of 'stuff' coming out in the future, it's also:

- a plan to stick to, and which all stakeholders and teams involved can use as a reference point
- a way to communicate with and engage stakeholders and users, and to provide confidence in the future direction of a product
- an influence on, but also a reflection of, the release schedule, which should be true at any time when the roadmap is viewed
- a critical reference point for the core team to plan and prioritize product strategy.

Roadmaps come with different levels of granularity, time span and intention. Some with a longer time span, and in the early stages of product development, are more aspirational and don't even always have a timeline. These are more a statement about how to get to the future vision of a product or even to align a number of products.

For example, **Michelin Group** defined a digital workplace roadmap that was designed to show a viable way forward and align a group of stakeholders behind a more united digital workplace vision. While this has helped to move the vision forward, to date the roadmap has proved more aspirational than concrete.³⁴

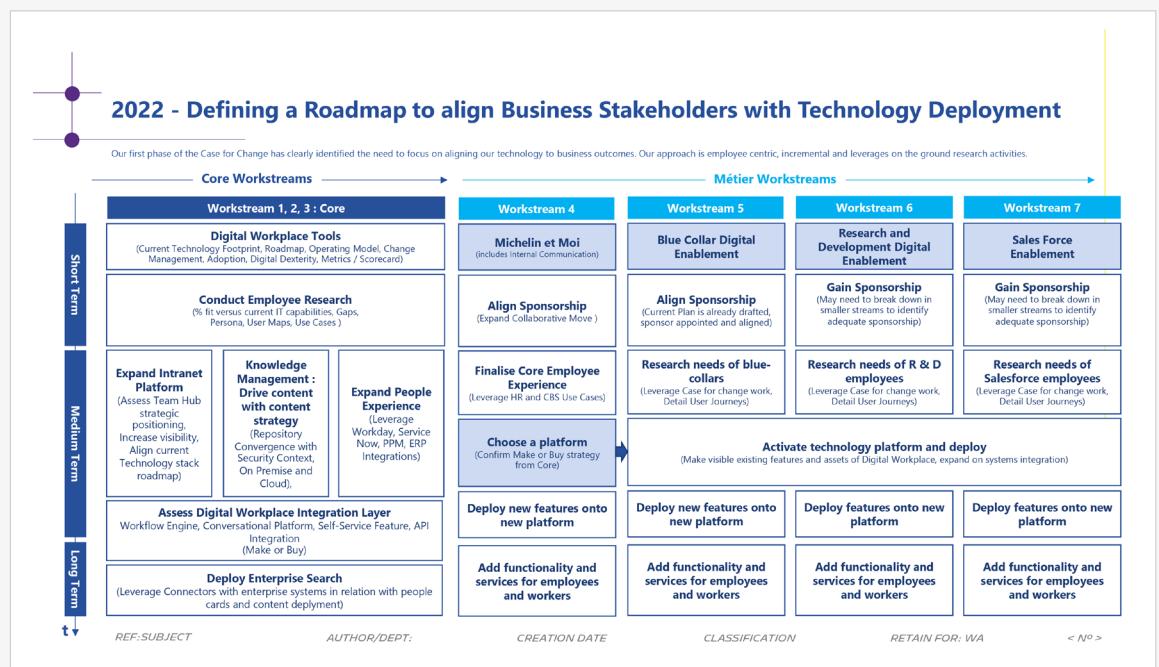


Figure 6: Michelin Group's potential digital workplace roadmap.

At the other end of the scale are detailed product roadmaps which also reflect what is about to happen. Ideally, these are grouped around a regular release cadence to help planning, resource management and aligning all the teams involved. For example, **BCD Travel** has moved to three major releases per year and publishes a roadmap with items scheduled for each release.

Good practices for a product roadmap include:

- making it viewable so that both stakeholders and users can access it if necessary
- keeping it accurate and up to date
- keeping it achievable so it has credibility and is trusted
- ensuring operational alignment with any other roadmaps
- working to a regular release cadence if possible
- keeping it flexible so there is room to add urgent or priority features and requests
- always keeping your roadmap and backlog synchronized.

Measurement and gathering user feedback

Continuous improvement and product growth is also underpinned by ongoing measurement and feedback.

At **Nestlé**, measurement focuses on experience research, experience design and change management aspects, with specific metrics covering user satisfaction and analytics that indicate adoption and user behaviour. Qualitative insights are also gathered to reveal the 'why' behind the numbers. At **Aviva**, a wide range of metrics relating to Microsoft 365 and the tools within it are employed, covering everything from user adoption to support and cost value, plus user feedback is captured as well.

Ongoing user feedback that covers aspects of the user experience can also be gathered, usually through a group of users who have volunteered for this. These set-ups have already been mentioned elsewhere in this report, including **EY**'s user community called 'The Sounding Board' and **PNC**'s Workplace Technology ambassador programme where some employees volunteer specifically to participate in pilots and ongoing product evaluations. These groups are just as important in the growth stage as they are in the development stage of the product lifecycle.

Both measurement and user feedback have been covered recently in DWG's research programme, as well as guidance on how best to present these insights to stakeholders:

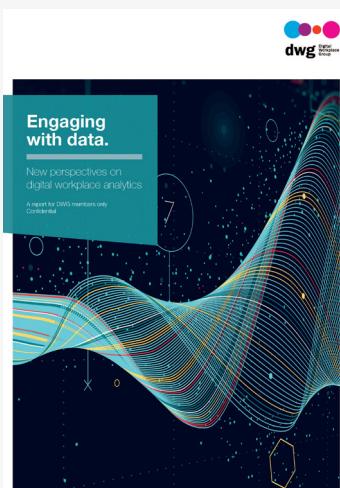
- Employee engagement: Harnessing insights that shape the digital workplace.²⁹
- Engaging with data: New perspectives on digital workplace analytics.³⁵
- How to demonstrate digital workplace impact: Crafting a story from the data.³⁶

Driving adoption

All the way through the growth stage of the product lifecycle, efforts to drive adoption of digital products continues, building on launch efforts and continuing the use of:

- communications, campaigns and events
- networks of digital champions and ambassadors
- user support and guidance
- continuous improvement with new features that employees that will continue to want to use and adopt.

Driving adoption has been covered extensively in DWG's research programme. The latest report that is particularly pertinent for digital workplace product management, focuses on how to provide guidance on 'what tool to use when'.³⁷



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Maturity

Some digital workplace products reach the 'maturity' stage reasonably quickly, with high levels of use and good levels of adoption, although others will take longer to get there. The kind of product management processes that take place during this stage are likely to be the same as during the growth phase, but there can be a tendency to 'take your eye off the ball'.

Resources get focused elsewhere with a product in steady state and 'business as usual' – this is particularly true in times of constrained budgets and resources. Vendors you partner with may sense there are no longer additional commercial opportunities to be had and, while still maintaining a warm relationship with you, may start to focus more of their time and effort on new relationships offering opportunities with higher margins.

At some stage your product will go into a decline phase when you may be forced into action. Anticipating this before it happens and pre-empting it by executing product extension strategies before you are forced to, can help extend the value and life of your product or trigger you to start considering a replacement product. Product extension strategies are covered in the next section.

During the maturity stage it can help to assess the value and impact of your product in terms of its short-, medium- and long-term future and related outcomes. DWG research, *How to demonstrate digital workplace impact: Crafting a story from the data*, covers how the Theory of Change framework (which has been widely used since the 1990s) can be adapted to think about the digital workplace and digital workplace products.³⁶

Decline

Every product has a decline stage. This is where the product might be considered to be reducing in value or adoption; may have been partly replaced; and is now prompting plans for its full retirement or replacement.

For external products that are managed by a vendor it might be that the product is 'end of life' and no longer supported. Sometimes this relates to different versions of a product, but the change required to upgrade is effectively a new product. However, with more cloud-based products, this is now less likely to happen, with more products driven by incremental changes and easier upgrade paths.

When a product enters its 'decline' stage there is a range of options:

- keep it for the time being even though it is in decline and it will eventually be considered a legacy product
- consider a product extension strategy to extend the life of the product and either slow or reverse its decline
- retire the product altogether.

Legacy technologies

Sometimes digital workplace products are not able to be retired. There are various reasons for this including:

- a group of users or a process is dependent on the system and there is currently no viable replacement – sometimes the dependency may be a relatively minor feature
- some users refuse to give up using the product, making it difficult to retire
- it's a custom or in-house solution, or has customization, and there is no product that does what it does straight out of the box, or it is too expensive to repeat the customization
- there are security features that mean it cannot currently be replaced
- sometimes the product owner actively doesn't want to retire it, especially if their role is dependent on its still operating.

As 31% of an organization's technology stack is made up of legacy solutions, and that it can swallow up as much as 80% of an IT budget to maintain them.

When a digital workplace product cannot be retired, it can end up as a legacy technology.

Legacy technologies are rife in organizations. Some estimates suggest that as much as 31% of an organization's technology stack is made up of legacy solutions, and that it can swallow up as much as 80% of an IT budget to maintain them.³⁸

Ultimately, legacy systems are damaging in many ways:

- there is a significant cost in maintaining them, which can drain funds away from other projects
- there can be additional security vulnerabilities and compliance issues with using older technologies
- they frequently have user experience or performance issues, and may also not be fully accessible or optimized for mobile
- they can undermine the coherence of the digital workplace experience in terms of a consistent look and feel, or not being able to be integrated
- they can contribute to application overload.

Ultimately, avoiding legacy technology is usually the preferable option.

Product extension strategies

When a digital workplace product is in decline, there is often a tendency to want to replace it, usually because it is considered to be a technology issue. But that might not be the best option because:

- the reason for decline is nothing to do with the technology and more to do with aspects of the product, such as its features, content or user experience
- there is no budget, resource or stakeholder support to replace the product.

If either of these are the case, then considering a product extension strategy to extend the life of the product, or slow its decline, is usually the best option. There is a plethora of different product extension strategies that can breathe new life into a product, increase adoption and value, or simply extend use, including:

- an upgrade of a version which might improve performance, resolve issues or add new features
- a rebranding, redesign or improved user interface, which can often change perceptions of features and functionality, even if these haven't changed
- an adoption, support or training campaign that aims to get users to try a product, view it differently, or which increases digital skills to enable more people to get more out of it
- adding new features or functionality that are likely to have wide appeal
- reducing, improving or even replacing content – relevant for content-centric products, such as intranets
- arranging extended support with a vendor, which can sometimes be available at a price, although general support might no longer be available
- repivoting the product so it has a different reduced focus or additional use.

Another product extension strategy is to follow a path of continuous improvement so that the product gets better over time with regular, incremental improvements and ideally changes perceptions of the value of the tool. In truth, a combination of two or more of the above may be necessary to extend the life of a product if it has entered the decline phase.



Retiring a product

Retiring a digital workplace product is that moment when a product in the decline stage is finally decommissioned. Usually the trigger for this is:

- the product has been replaced by another product and is longer needed
- the continuing existence of the product and its technology represents a risk – for example, a security issue – so it needs to go
- it is a legacy system but the levels of adoption or usage are so low that it can now be retired
- the product is no longer supported by a vendor
- the business has decided to no longer pay for a product – sometimes a licensing renewal date can trigger the moment for retiring a product.

The process for retiring a product needs to be carefully planned and is often done in tandem with the phasing in of the new system, although sometimes systems are just quietly retired. This may need to include:

- a staged plan – for example, it may be that no new content is added to a particular product, or that it remains accessible only to a limited number of users who rely upon it; if it is a browser-based product, its URL may be switched to a new product; finally, the product may be completely redrawn
- a change management and communication plan involving all necessary stakeholders
- a cutover plan when an old and new product are both accessible and in use – this can last anywhere between hours and years! Often, when products are first launched, they are MVPs and not all functionality or features may be live, so the old product needs to be kept up and running – this is common with intranets where some content may still need to be migrated. Other approaches take a ‘big bang’ approach and immediately retire a product at the same time as launching the new one
- a data plan to be able to keep and access data from the old product based on compliance, business and user requirements
- coordination with the vendor if it is an external product.

Some teams even choose to celebrate the retirement of a product. For example, **Tallahassee Memorial Healthcare (TMH)** organized an imaginative ‘retirement party’ for its 20-year-old intranet where users could drop in and at the same time learn about its replacement.³⁹



7

Thinking points.

What does product management mean to you?

Is it a team and a role? A set of principles? A set of skills? A mindset?

How mature is product management in your organization or function?

How is product management carried out in your organization? Is there a defined approach? How often is the term used? And are some functions practising product management more than others?

How would you reshape your role, so it is better aligned to managing digital products?

What would you change in your role so it is better suited to product management? How would you rewrite your job description?

What are the gaps in skills and knowledge that would help your team take a more product management approach?

Are there opportunities for professional growth or a need to reskill?

Are there any processes which are currently ad hoc, informal or inefficient which could be improved?

Which processes could do with a product management makeover? Which processes are inefficient and don't scale?

What could you do to improve relationships with internal stakeholders and product vendors?

Are there ways in which you could improve relationships, both informally or formally, for example through governance or processes?

Are there any product management approaches you can borrow from peers or others in your organization?

Is anyone you know doing anything inspiring? Was there anything in this report that particularly resonated with you?

Are there any structures which could better support digital workplace product management?

Is there anything you could set up, such as a group of users who regularly get involved in product launches?

How can the product lifecycle help you?

What are your processes and tactics across the different stages of the product lifecycle? Are there any that are missing?

What are some easy wins in moving towards a more product management approach?

Are there things you can do tomorrow that will make a difference?

8

Case studies.

Using product management to manage BCD Travel's digital workplace

BCD Travel is one of the world's leading business travel management companies. Working with some of the largest global brands, the company employs over 13,000 employees, with wholly owned operations in more than 30 countries and partner operations in dozens more.

Beth Gleba, BCD Travel's Senior Global Director of Digital Workplace, is the product owner for BCD's MySource intranet and Viva Engage. In the past year she has introduced more product management approaches to improve processes, achieve more with less resources and ultimately drive a better employee experience.

Introducing product management and Agile practices to the digital workplace

When BCD Travel's new CEO challenged the business to focus on long-term thinking and driving value, Beth Gleba and her team decided to take a fresh look at how they were carrying out their operations and to make any necessary improvements. As with most digital workplace teams, there is always pressure to achieve more and continue to improve the digital workplace – with the same resources.

One particularly successful avenue for Gleba has been to apply more product management approaches to the digital workplace, a move which has been influenced by Agile methodologies. A catalyst for this has been Gleba becoming a Certified Scrum Product Owner (CSPO).

"One of our stakeholders was talking about our work and told me I was a 'stellar example of a product owner.' And I was like, 'Wait a minute, what's this?' And after doing some more research, I realized 'Oh, I am a product owner!' It was an aha moment. That put me on the road to having a Product Management perspective supported by Agile training and certification."

Gaining certification confirmed Gleba's realization that she'd been carrying out product management practices for years but helped by giving her a new language and some additional techniques.

"The way that product management was being defined felt comfortable for me and came at a time when I needed the language and the tools. For example, using Kanban boards all came out of the first day of training. I was able to bring the technique back to my team and say, 'Hey, this could help us gain clarity for what we're doing right now, and let stakeholders help us prioritize what's next.' It was important to recognize that we are not a fully Agile shop; for example, we don't have Scrum Masters. But we can take some of the principles and begin using them."

Since then, Agile and product management philosophies have influenced how Gleba and her team operate. *"My governance documents are lighter and faster!"* is one example cited by Gleba. *"Instead of producing long documents defining requirements spelling out each requirement, we use high-level 'lookbooks' that call out what is important, like purpose and templates, but take care not to go into too much detail."*

Agile project management approaches have significantly influenced her thinking at a broader level: *"It's a sea change for us; it has touched everything we will deliver. The philosophy, roles and working methods from Agile – as best as we can apply them within our resources – have completely reshaped how we think about intranet management. For example, we began applying User Stories and Acceptance Criteria to help us agree up front with stakeholders for what they wanted MySource to do for them and then followed through by using these same statements during our pre-launch testing."* (P.S. if you haven't tried it yet, ChatGPT can give you a start if you prompt: *"Thinking like an intranet manager, write a user story for a company Learning and Development site."*

As with most digital workplace teams, there is always pressure to achieve more and continue to improve the digital workplace – with the same resources.

MySource User Story for L&D content

As a BCD Travel employee
I want a well-organized
 and informative "L&D" site
so that I can easily discover,
 enroll in learning events on
 Knowledge Hub, enhancing my skills
 and knowledge to excel in my
 current role and contribute more
 effectively to the organization.

At the L&D site, I should be able to:

- ✓ Easily get into to **Knowledge Hub**
- ✓ Find the link to the L&D **Courses and Workshops catalog**
- ✓ See published MySource **news that promotes:**
 1. Posts Insights monthly **newsletters**
 2. Drives registration for **Workshops and LEX sessions** on Knowledge Hub
 3. Promotes **Listen and Be Inspired** audio series (hosted on Stream)
 4. Posts monthly **LinkedIn Learning Challenges**
 5. Promotes **Skills Flash** videos
- ✓ See how I can use **LinkedIn Learning**
 1. How I can request a LIL license
 2. View promoted courses
 3. Access the latest "LI Challenges"
 4. Access documentation for all courses
- ✓ Find **link out to "My Career" content**

BCD

Figure 7: MySource's User Story & requirements for new Learning & Development site, launched in fall 2023.

Roadmaps and release schedules

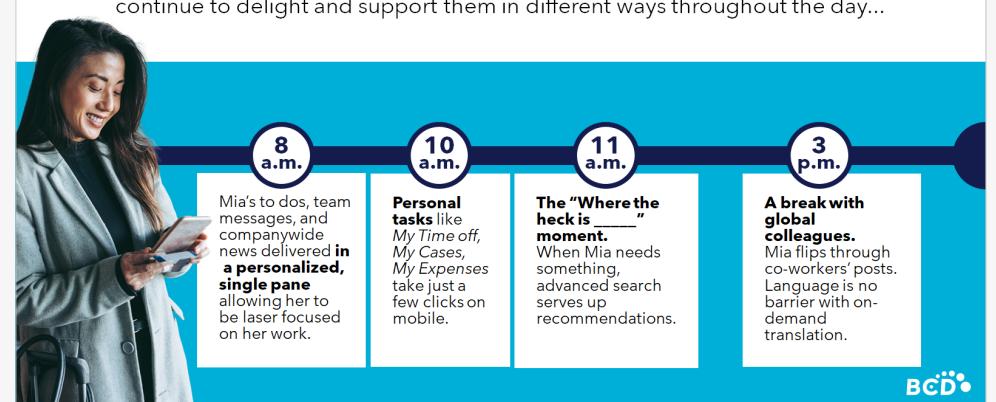
One product management and Agile approach the team implemented to change how they are working: Taking a more comprehensive approach to their roadmap and establishing a more predictable release schedule.

Gleba explains: "Working with roadmaps is another Agile principle that we're bringing in. We're not doing it perfectly but we're making progress. What we've first said is that we need a shared longer-term direction, so we developed a 'Day with MySource in 2026' and then we asked ourselves, how will we focus in 2024? Next, we divided 2024 into three 'release' – April, July and November. We've grouped improvements, based on what we've heard our employees say they want. The releases have themes, and they let us stay focused, but the details of what's in the release get clearer as we move towards them."

Kelly

Mia's day with MySource in 2026

As employees focus on **productivity, speed and customer service**, MySource will continue to delight and support them in different ways throughout the day...



8 a.m.
 Mia's to dos, team messages, and companywide news delivered **in a personalized, single pane** allowing her to be laser focused on her work.

10 a.m.
Personal tasks like My Time off, My Cases, My Expenses take just a few clicks on mobile.

11 a.m.
The "Where the heck is _____" moment. When Mia needs something, advanced search serves up recommendations.

3 p.m.
A break with global colleagues. Mia flips through co-workers' posts. Language is no barrier with on-demand translation.

BCD

Figure 8: MySource's vision for MySource in 2026.

MySource Product Roadmap 2024			
	By April 2024	By July 2024	By Nov 2024
Release name	Sandy	Duet	Mosaic
Focus	Take some sand out of the gears to streamline the employee communication landscape.	Close some of the gaps between our global and country layers by better harmonizing the experience across them.	Untangle complicated global/country processes and piece together better solutions .
Features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o MySource mobile (Viva Connections) includes dashboard cards for key tasks o Welcome Mexico o Improved Teams landing page o Improved MySource home page o Launch new Viva Engage communities o Improve Townhall templates o New Operations department site o Rollout of (CSS) news templates to all department sites 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Draft Budget and ROI (by August) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 2025 Roadmap - ROI: Employee benchmark survey and MySource in Action o Roll out of country People & Culture 3.0 (24 countries) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Findability improvements o Digital education: BCD's digital ecosystem, MySource's role as front door 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Improved Discounts o Improved Policies o Improved Staff Travel
Metrics	Employee traffic Desktop vs Mobile use Points of entry - Brower vs Teams Community engagement News engagement	Before / after site visits OneTouch request tracking Search reports # of employees through the new training	Time savings (before / after) User testing score increases



Figure 9: MySource's product roadmap at the start of 2024.

A core part of Gleba's role is ensuring that the roadmap has strategic alignment, a process that also informs budgeting, business case creation, project planning and even vendor management.

“As a product manager, it’s my job to hold the long-term vision and align it with this year’s work. Having that clear understanding is critical. Our Governance Group is made up of heads of IT, HR, Sales and Communications. They have been very supportive of MySource and these new methods for the three-year plan and roadmap. These helped us secure a larger budget for 2024.

“Once we’re clear about what we want to do then we’re able to align our budget and resources. Our roadmap has made it easier to group projects for maximum efficiency. Then I can go to each of our vendors and say ‘Can we do it within the budget that I’ve estimated? Can I give you a clear thesis, which is a problem statement, so that we can get traction, and you can move quickly into your work?’”

Product management and using Agile principles have also inspired the team to improve how it manages its backlog. Gleba comments: *“Each time a stakeholder comes to my small team of two with a new request to improve MySource, we add it to one of our project boards. Using a Kanban approach lets us see what’s in progress, what’s completed, what’s coming next and what’s in the backlog. This helps us stay focused on what we are doing now and gather the resources for what’s coming next. These boards have also been very useful in bringing in stakeholders to ask for their input on our priorities. For example, we have a ‘People & Culture Projects on MySource’ board, which in 2023 let us work smarter with our colleagues in the Human Resources team.*

People & Culture Projects on MySource

Backlog	Prioritized next	Now in progress	Completed
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Enhancements to New to BCD page <input type="checkbox"/> Setup LU country PnC site (Q2-3) <input type="checkbox"/> Setup CZ country PnC site <input type="checkbox"/> New content for managers <input type="checkbox"/> Improved publishing for regional PnC content <input type="checkbox"/> Better integration of global & country Wellbeing content <input type="checkbox"/> Additional translations for Canada FR of regional and global PnC content <input type="checkbox"/> Language cleanups for Nordics and CH <input type="checkbox"/> Access to new starters / “Public” area on MySource 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Setup MX country PnC site <input type="checkbox"/> These other projects will impact on country PnC Sites: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improved Policies (July- Sept) - Improved Discounts (Oct- Nov) - Viva Connections pilot (April- Aug) - Improved staff travel dept site (Aug- Sept) <input type="checkbox"/> Retesting PnC tasks on MySource (Oct) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Country PnC sites “3.0” improvements AU, BE, BR, CR, CA, FR, DE, HK, IN Ops, IN SSC, NL, PL, SG, APAC HQ, US 	Country PnC sites “3.0” improvements <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ DK, FI, NO, ES, SE, LK, UK, IE Be You <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ 2024 committee transitions and training ✓ Neurodiversity topic page Career <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Refer a friend ✓ Updated Find Jobs page and SF changes

**Projects are in addition to the ongoing care and support of established country PnC sites*



Figure 10: The MySource team's Project Board for People & Culture content.

Working with other product managers

Another opportunity at BCD is working with other product teams. MySource provides an entry point into other applications in use throughout BCD Travel: *“Our digital ecosystem also includes Microsoft products owned by other teams; several HR platforms including SuccessFactors, and our commercial teams’ customer relationship management platform.”*

Gleba says: *“Sometimes, when I talk about MySource as the front door to other applications, other product managers aren’t sure what that means for their platforms. Betsy Codding, Head of Digital Communications & Multimedia at MassMutual recently said in a DWG event that everybody wants a great digital workplace, but they draw it with a circle and their application is in the middle. That’s stuck with me because it’s so true.”*

Gleba is now more sensitive than ever to this reality and has begun using more nuanced terminology to drive a more coordinated approach in delivering the BCD digital employee experience.

“We’re now trying different language and talking more about the constellation of tools that need to work together. We’re developing a new way for leaders, product owners and employees to imagine how these different products complement each other. We’re trying to nurture a way of thinking that says the right tools are needed to do different things. But there’s still a lot of maturity to come.”

Working in this way can involve making concessions to your own vision for the product you own. It’s also reliant on strong relationships.

Gleba explains: *“I’ve been working on letting go of some of my own perceptions and ownership and I’m asking all the other product managers to start to do that too. It can be hard, but this is where a shared vision is crucial to bring platform owners and leaders together. So, we’ve spent several years nurturing the relationship of our DEX product managers. With that strong relationship as our base, it’s easier to say, ‘What do we want to create together and what are you willing to let go of?’”*

The role of a product manager

Gleba celebrates that her 2023 Certified Scrum Product Owner (CSPO) certification has had a significant influence on her view of her work and the approaches she takes as a manager and leader.

“Being a product manager involves so many things. It starts with having a vision, building use cases, defining backlogs and getting things done through others. It includes what we ask others to do and how we ask them to do it, especially our intranet publishers. And it very much includes managing our resources and being able to present a case for investment each year as part of our budgeting process in front of our executive leadership team. Each year, we have to show clearly: here’s what we have done, and this is what is next.”



Managing Microsoft 365 as a product at Aviva

Aviva is a UK-based global financial services company with approximately 27,000 employees and an additional 7,000 contractors and outsourced staff. The company has a long-standing relationship with Microsoft; all 34,000 users have Microsoft 365 accounts and the company's digital workplace leans heavily on tools like SharePoint and Microsoft Teams.

The role of Microsoft 365 product owner

Luke Mepham is Aviva's Product Owner for Microsoft 365. This role involves taking a strategic view of Microsoft 365, coordinating the different products across the suite, and ensuring there is value in the relationship with Microsoft.

"My role has a kind of dotted line over the top of all the different Microsoft 365 service offerings, coordinating all the services and the individual product roadmaps. I work closely with our architectural team who make big roadmap decisions, as well as with Microsoft in terms of understanding what their strategy and roadmap are. It's my job to ensure that we have a plan to drive the maximum value out of each individual service and get good value for money from what we're purchasing from Microsoft."

Day to day, Mepham works closely with service owners within Aviva who are responsible for different parts of the Microsoft 365 suite.

"The individual service owners look after each Microsoft 365 tool, such as Teams or Viva Engage. They're understanding security or privacy risks, and managing those at a detailed level. I sit between them and the overall architectural team, looking for where the logical joins are between the various products, or where we need to focus some attention and deliver extra capabilities."

The discussions that Mepham gets involved in touch areas such as privacy, the user experience (UX), and more.

"A lot of focus is on security and compliance. For example, I might be talking to our service teams and legal & compliance teams about AI capabilities. What are the risks and how do we mitigate them? What are the business opportunities that people are identifying? What is Microsoft delivering in terms of a product suite that meets user requirements? How do we coordinate all these things to make sure we're not duplicating effort or running into problems when it's too late?"

Managing a SaaS product

Managing a complex product like Microsoft 365 has its challenges. Mepham believes some of these come with the territory.

"There's a lot of difficulties in being a product owner for a SaaS service, where your backlog is driven by very little control over when things drop, or whether you adopt them or not. So, it's less about necessarily prioritizing a feature backlog as a traditional product owner might and more about being as proactive as you can rather than completely reactive. You need to be looking at what's coming, where it fills the gaps and understanding what it is doing."

Mepham also believes that Microsoft 365 is a unique case when it comes to product management.

"Being a product owner for Microsoft 365 means coming to terms with the pros and cons of dealing with a SaaS product that runs at the kind of scale Microsoft 365 does. A big chunk of the world uses it every day so the use cases and scenarios it meets have to be pretty generic. This means Microsoft tools sometimes don't do exactly what you want them to. To compensate, Microsoft has enough configuration options and capabilities to bend the tool to work in your particular way. It also has a big partner network which helps to do that – but this does mean that people complain if a tool doesn't quite do what they want, or it's too expensive or complicated to set up. These kinds of complaints arise because Microsoft 365 is designed so broadly rather than because it's been designed badly."

There's a lot of difficulties in being a product owner for a SaaS service, where your backlog is driven by very little control over when things drop, or whether you adopt them or not.

Microsoft 365 and triage

The sheer complexity of the number of tools within Microsoft 365, plus the depth of functionality and features as well as speed with which the changes arrive, means there are multiple decisions to make. Mepham also distinguishes between those services that Aviva decides to adopt electively and perhaps purchase, and the pipeline changes that happen as part of the existing licence and require the team to be more reactive.

"There's a lot of triage we do with our Microsoft 365 backlog, saying: 'This one isn't going to have any impact; we can leave it alone', or perhaps, 'This one we'll highlight with this particular team', 'This one we'll need to do some end-user adoption on because it meets a specific need' or 'This is one we just need to tell the helpdesk about'."

The initial triage involves a mature process that makes a holistic and comprehensive assessment of upcoming changes.

"We follow a Kanban-style approach to managing our backlog. At the first level of triage, we make decisions based on a rigorous set of controls to look at change that's coming. We have a separate process that we call 'Service Fundamentals', which is basically for anything that's a major service, where we seek to understand areas such as cost management, capacity planning, licence management, as well as the security, data privacy and service model. We also ask if and who should support it. What do we need to cover for break/fix, a communication plan, an adoption plan? So, whenever anything new comes in, we fully understand its significance to take the appropriate action."

Making balanced decisions

Being a product owner for Microsoft 365 inevitably means balancing competing factors, for example between risk and the user experience. Unsurprisingly, for a large financial services company, there are extremely robust processes around ensuring security, compliance and data privacy relating to the digital workplace. However, ensuring a high-quality UX for the digital workplace is still a work in progress.

"The approach to managing the user experience is not as formal as our approach to something like security. It's been relationship-driven and involves speaking to business partners and CIOs. Sometimes the business might say that a part of the Microsoft toolset doesn't work – but actually it does work, we've just chosen not to turn on a feature for a security or compliance reason."

One way in which Mepham and his team can demonstrate to stakeholders that user experience is critical is to emphasize how a strong UX reduces risk by minimizing the use of shadow IT. Mepham is also hoping to formalize an approach that will take into account the user experience for assessing the value and readiness of tools.

"Next year we hope to offer a quantified assessment from a user experience, security, legal and compliance perspective, so that the decision-makers can look at things across the board and say, 'Okay, we're willing to sign off that much risk, because it's that much of a better experience.'"

Decision-making is also informed by measurement. The broad range of measures deployed reflects the wide remit of being a product owner in the digital workplace.

"A lot of our reporting focuses on usage and anomalies, such as big spikes or drops relating to different tools, and trying to understand what causes these. One of my key measures is adoption of the overall suite. There are some specific product owner measures focused around simplifying the estate and cost value. Plus there is a set of end-user metrics, including adoption and user feedback, as well as helpdesk measures, such as issues raised and tickets escalated to Microsoft. There's a big dashboard of stuff! We also have some long-term objectives around being able to demonstrate both a better risk position and cost position."

Relationship management and product knowledge

Two areas Mepham identifies as being critical to successful product management are managing relationships and attaining product knowledge. Mepham's role requires constant communication with different service owners, senior business stakeholders, security and compliance teams, as well as adoption, user experience and support desk teams.

"There's a lot of people where there's a relationship to maintain – both directly with individuals, but also the teams to make sure they are able to cover off our standardized practices, for example around risk management."

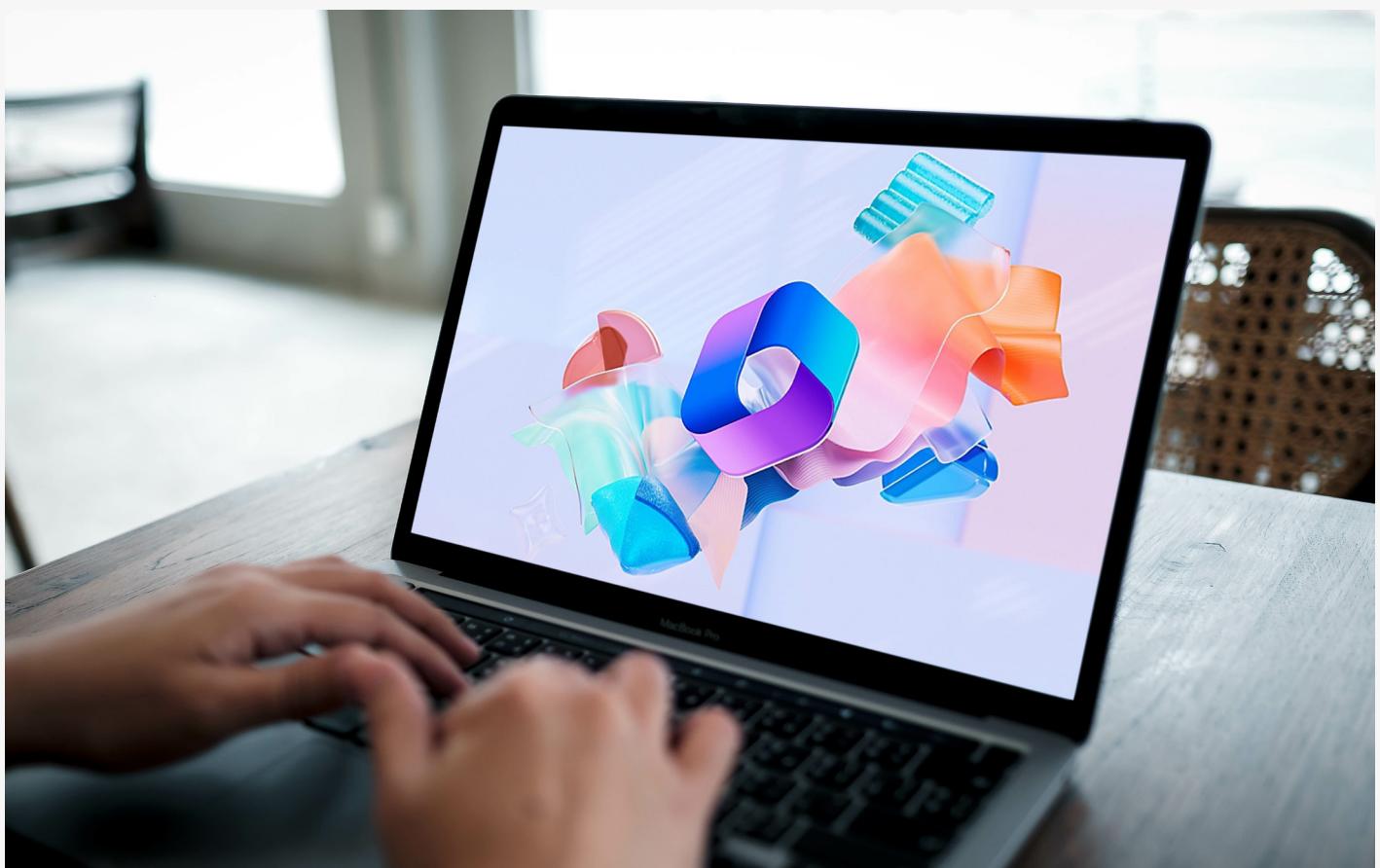
The relationship with Microsoft is also key: *"I'm also deeply involved in the Microsoft relationship and what we get out of our enterprise agreement as well as how we use training credits and service credits."*

Interacting with so many stakeholders at different levels and roles requires an in-depth understanding of the Microsoft 365 product from both a technical and a business perspective.

"I can have a product technical discussion about what the Microsoft toolset offers, but I can also tell management about how our end users are getting value out of a particular feature. Having a good understanding of the strategic direction of a product and how things work at a high level is important. It also helps to be able to know the right person at Microsoft to answer a specific question."

This need for in-depth knowledge means product owners within Aviva are expected to dedicate time to learning.

"Product ownership in Aviva is relatively new. There isn't an official product owner for everything, but we are trying to agree commonality in this role. One thing we tell our product managers is that at least one day a week should be spent learning and getting to know the product, the methodologies around it and how it is being used. Product owners are the focal point to understand what a product can and can't do, and we need to be able to answer questions from both technical and business stakeholders."



Introducing product management to Nestlé's Workforce 360 team

Nestlé is one of the world's leading producers of food and drink products and owns some of the world's leading brands including Perrier, Nescafé, Nespresso, Rowntree's and Nestlé itself. Around one billion Nestlé products are sold every day. The company employs 270,000 employees across multiple countries and locations, with 350 factories based across 77 countries.

Product management is at the core of how the Workforce 360 team at Nestlé work and interact with and support business partners.

Restructuring to support product management

In 2019, Nestlé's global IT structure was reorganized along 'product management' lines to focus more on business value as part of a wider transformation of the organization.

André Oliveira, Senior Content & Services Product Manager, explains: *"We adopted product management [in IT] when Nestlé looked at changing the way it was operating. We previously didn't have product managers or product owners. We were organized into projects, and our structure was more driven by the org chart. Often that's not the best way to operate because the same capabilities were spread around different teams. So, we created roles for product managers and reorganized based on that. Now product management is at the core of how we work and interact with and support our business partners."*

Since the reorganization of IT, Oliveira has worked as a product manager within the Workforce 360 stream. He expands on this: *"The IT organization is organized into streams including Workforce 360. Within each stream there are product groups, and then within those are the products which are the capabilities and services we provide to the business."*

The Workforce 360 stream has a mission to *"bring together a 360-degree view of our Nestlé workforce's journey, working across products, services and solutions that drive productivity, connectivity and collaboration."* Within this are five product groups, each with its own dedicated team:

- Collaboration, Content and Portals
- Engagement Services
- Workforce Devices
- IT Service Management
- Common Tools and Services.

Within each team there are associated product roles, sometimes a product group manager and also individual product managers.

Some of the 'products' within Workforce 360 might be considered more as services. For example, Engagement Services has a mission to *"enrich employees' digital experiences"*. Within it, there is an Adoption & Change team, which mainly deals with change management to drive adoption, as well as a User Experience & Innovation team, which helps other product teams to design user-centric products so they become relevant and easy to use.

Oliveira himself works within the 'Collaboration, Content and Portals' product group, which focuses on collaboration tools, portals and content platforms, including the Nestlé intranet.

New mindset, new skills

Moving to this product management structure has not only involved new roles but a different mindset that is driven by a focus on business value.

Oliveira comments: *"For me, product management is really about focusing on what we deliver and understanding the value we bring to the business. And then applying all of these practices and the mindset to make sure we are doing the right thing, the right way."*

In practice, this has meant the assimilation of a range of new activities and skills over the past three years.

"There are certain elements that came with the adoption of product management, which meant the internalization of this expertise that we didn't have before. User experience is certainly one of the game-changing ones."

Other areas mentioned by Oliveira include change management, adoption, prioritization, coordinating roadmaps and measuring value.

He also feels that the product management-based structure has brought focus and accountability, resulting in a more coordinated approach that has reduced issues such as application sprawl.

"The fact that you have one person who is managing a specific area really allows you to drive it, which in the past was not the case. That's one of the biggest benefits. For example, you may have different chat apps being rolled out by different teams. But if you are organized around a product, you then have someone that owns chat apps who will not allow that to happen as 10 internal chat or collaboration tools simply doesn't make any sense."

Measuring value

One of the most challenging aspects of product management has been around measurement.

Oliviera remarks: *"How do you measure the value of a product? It's very important and one of the hardest to get right. It's easier to determine if you are more directly linked to a business process, but it harder to say what the value of collaboration or the value of the intranet is."*

Although this is challenging, the Workforce 360 team has made huge progress in taking a comprehensive measurement approach, drawing on multiple different metrics, ranging from adoption levels to service tickets issued, usability testing and user satisfaction ratings.

At a high level, there is a focus on three different types of measurement that are helping to deliver a better digital employee experience:

- **Experience research and Journey mapping:** Metrics that go beyond individual products and support the completion of tasks and goals across different employee journeys.
- **Experience design:** Metrics at the product level that show what is working well and less well.
- **Change management:** Metrics that reflect whether employees are embracing change, how people feel about the change and the effectiveness of the change, for example in adopting new tools.

At the product level and across different product teams, metrics and data tend to be gathered in three main ways:

- **A wide-spread satisfaction score,** like the Net Promotor Score (NPS) or Customer Satisfaction Score (CSAT).
- **Analytics** that take a deeper dive into how users are experiencing and using tools, and identify when problems occur.
- **Qualitative insights** that explore a user's motivation, goals and pain points – effectively the 'why' behind the other metrics.

Applications to support product management

A number of tools have also helped support the product management approach within Global IT. When product management was introduced, Nestlé invested in ServiceNow to launch a cross-functional service portal to better support users.

Nestlé also uses WalkMe to underpin adoption and change management. WalkMe is a digital adoption platform that sits as an overlay across multiple different tools and platforms, providing consistent in-app guidance across tools, user-focused communications, and broad analytics. Recently, it also helped users to get accustomed to Nestlé's new intranet, pointing out and explaining the new features, as well as offering key guidance on the use of ChatGPT.

Overall, WalkMe is regarded as a great success, with consumption of supporting content eight times that previously achieved using email.

Working with other product managers and the business

Another vital ingredient of product management has been around coordinating plans between different product owners.

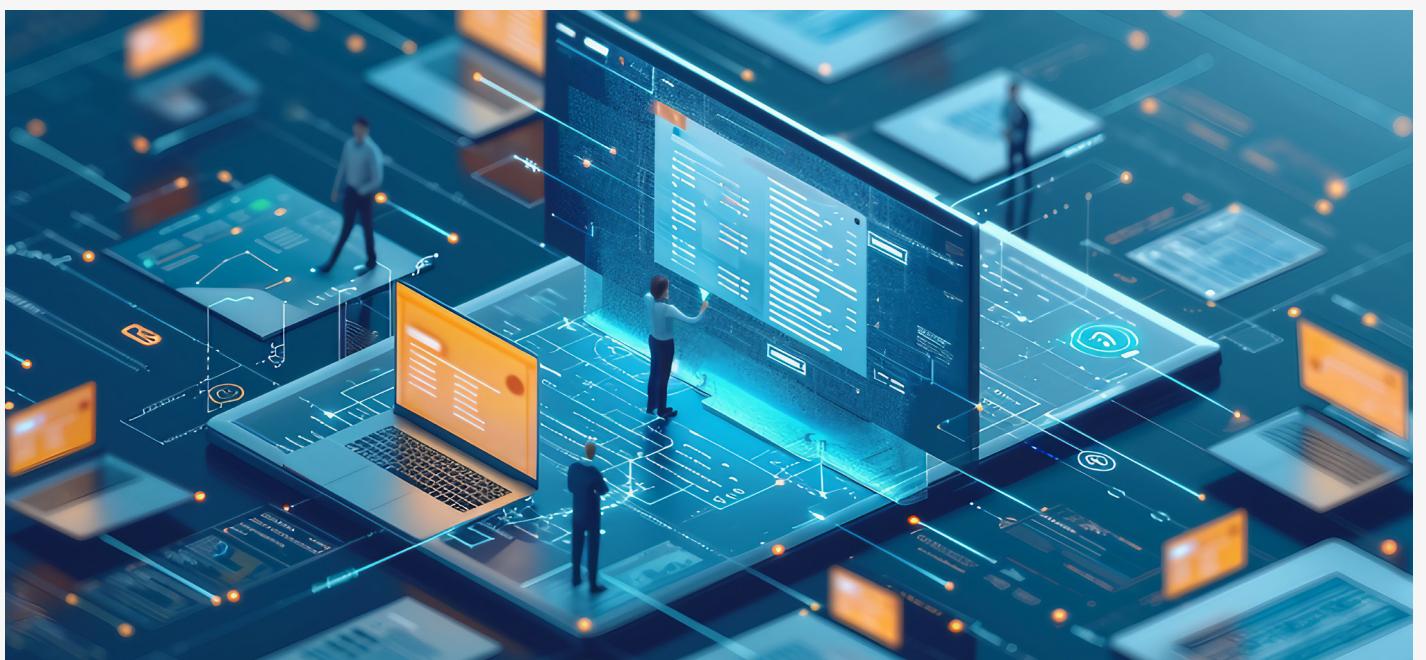
Oliveira explains: *"Since introducing product management we actually know much better the applications we have across the organization. Each individual product group and product manager has a very good understanding of what's there and is already starting to drive the roadmaps. The next step is to bring an additional level of integration so that the way we're actually working with other product groups and product managers results in combining our roadmaps and creating the synergies to deliver something even better."*

Product management also involves working more closely with senior business stakeholders.

"In each product there is an element of governance with the business. We always have some sort of business sponsor or counterpart in the business that helps us to drive the strategy and roadmap of the product."

Overall, introducing product management has proved to be a significant success, but challenges still persist.

Oliveira sums this up: *"The biggest challenge comes from the fact that Nestlé is such a big and complex organization. I think there's still some work to be done. The stakeholders we work more closely with embarked in the journey with us. Now, overall, we still need to keep doing this. On this journey, we have different speeds and understandings within the organization. There could also be more synergies created between the business side that manages our great products. In the end in we are a product organization, but there's more work to do to become a digital product organization."*



9

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10

Acknowledgements.



About the author

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Steve is also an independent digital workplace consultant and writer, working with a number of other organizations, including Step Two, ClearBox and CMSWire. He co-founded Spark Trajectory, a consulting company helping intranet and digital workplace teams. Steve is based in London, UK.

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In **Nature of Work: The New story of work for a living age**, Paul Miller, CEO and Founder of Digital Workplace Group (DWG), and Shimrit Janes, DWG's Director of Knowledge, draw on patterns from forests and the natural world to illustrate a dynamic, vital and more beautiful world of work that our hearts and minds know is possible.

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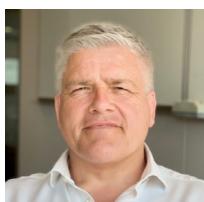
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