Successful Product Management Teams

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It's fun to say, "Product Management Teams should be ranked by producing successful products -The
more successful the product, the higher ranked the team." In reality, there's more to the success of a
product than the Product Management Team. So how do you rank the Product Management Team?
Maybe more importantly, "How do you nurture and grow your team?"

I've identified eight elements that all successful Product Management teams have in common. It's the
work of every team member to ensure the existence of, and nurture these elements within the team. I
call this teamwork, and its hard.

"Teamwork is the work required to maintain the team,
as opposed to the work the team does, which is product management."

The eight elements needed for successful Product Management Teams are:

1. A clear and elevating goal
2. Competent members
3. Collaborative environment
4. Standards of excellence
5. Unified commitment
6. Results driven structure
7. Principled leadership
8. External recognition

Each member of the Product Management team, needs to address these elements every day. Identify
what you need to do to maintain these elements. It's difficult to confront your peers. Risky to bring up
issues to management. It's all the personal drama, that destroys the team. If you want to be a member
of a successful team, then you have to do the work, and it's hard.

Entire books and fields of study have been and still can be developed on each of these eight elements.
I'll briefly mention them here to provide a little insight.

A clear and elevating goal - Most Product Management teams don't have a clear goal. Yes, they may
all be working to get the next release out, but this isn't the same thing. The goal I'm talking about
comes from the team's charter. It spans multiple periods in your product roadmap. The goal has
personal meaning to you. It's a challenge that you find ennobling. It provides a sense of purpose for the
individual, the team, and the sponsoring organization.

Competent members - This is the least difficult to justify, and can be the hardest to address. Training,
mentoring, and coaching all help maintain the competency of the team. The challenge comes when
someone is placed on the team who is so far out of line that it becomes disruptive. The team normally
helps each other expand and grow at a healthy rate, but there are times when someone makes the

team, but just doesn't have the background to do the tasks they need to. The longer this person is there,
the more painful it is for everyone. The most humane thing to do in this case is to let them go, or put
them in another role.

Collaborative environment - Each team member must feel they'll have their chance to voice their
opinion, and other team members will hear and respond to that opinion. This principle of collaboration
is fundamental to the Product Management Team. There must be an open environment where
members have equal access to the attention of the rest of the team, where decisions are based on
published criteria and not political agendas.

Standards of excellence - It really isn't that important where the team is at the moment in terms

of standards, its where the team ends up that counts. Formalize the teams standards in the form of
acceptance criteria, and then incrementally increase those standards. They must be the same for
everyone, but not necessarily the same standards for every task.

Unified commitment - It is that everyone has to work the same hours, but the same level of
commitment to the team's goals need to be there in each member.

Results driven structure - The Product Management Team is about producing a set of deliverables, yes,
there is a lot of problem solving, and innovation, but the primary concern in execution of process to
produce results. Therefore there will be some autonomy, and there needs to be a foundation of trust
between members. But, at the end of the day the overriding character of the team needs to be clarity of
roles and responsibilities; clarity of process and commitments.

Principled leadership - The leadership the team responds to needs to based on well understood
principles. Yes, there will be a transition of leadership styles as the team matures, but the principles of
that transition needs to be well understood. The team needs to anticipate leadership decisions, which
can only happen when leadership makes known the principles on which those decisions are being made.

External recognition - Does anyone know what success your team is having? What contribution are
individual members making. If the answer is 'who cares?', then there is a problem. At least the executive
sponsors and stakeholders should. A communication channel needs to exist. But what about the
general membership of the enterprise, do they know the product management team? What about the
customers? I long for the day when the knowledge that Team X was placed responsible for product Y,
and that information alone, made public, drives stock prices through the roof!

Good luck, and work hard nurturing the eight elements in your Product Management Team.

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