



Speaker 3 ([01:38](#)):

Hey Lisa. So welcome to Women in Product and really excited to talk to you and understand a little more about your product management teams and your org and the decision-making process, everything around AI and ML today. Welcome.

Speaker 2 ([01:59](#)):

Thank you so much. I'm really happy to be here.

Speaker 3 ([02:01](#)):

Absolutely. So we'd love to get started with really the PM teams and how product management is affected by the use of ai. I think to begin with, there's a common terminology that's kind of floating around the idea of AI pm Is this something that you and your team use at Google as well and what's your definition of it?

Speaker 2 ([02:26](#)):

It's funny, I feel like the PM discipline has changed so drastically over the last 10 to 15 years. It's hard to keep up with what's included in a PM role and now I think honestly for most PMs, particularly PMs in technology, everybody will need to be an AI PM to some degree, some maybe more so than others. Then there are teams like mine that work purely within the AI environment and so I think of them as PMs opposed to AI PMs and they have to have all of the core PM skills, but maybe the additional areas would be an understanding of how AI and machine learning works. And this doesn't mean that you need to do a degree or a PhD in ai. It means that you probably do need to spend some time educating yourself and there are lots of great foundational resources on the internet to do so.

Speaker 2 ([03:25](#)):

Coursera has some great ones with Andrew Ang, there's good videos on YouTube. MIT has some great materials and so I do think if you're going to work in AI and if you're going to apply AI to your current suite of products, you should have an understanding of what it is. The other really important skill that we look for is do you understand the data? Do you understand what data is available, how reliable it is, how it can be safely used, and are you able to access it freely? And then I think the other skill or last skill that I'll touch on is the idea and the understanding of responsible AI or ethical ai. Understand that AI is super powerful and can be harnessed for great, good and huge changes to how the world works, but it also has some opportunity for misuse and we should go in eyes wide open in how you apply ai.

Speaker 3 ([04:34](#)):

That's an amazing set of I think very distinct qualities you brought out with respect to what does it take for someone to thrive building AI products. And a deeper question into that is now we think about when we build product teams, we think about diversity in terms of background, in terms of skill sets. Just staying there for a



second. So how do we think about building such diversity from a team perspective with respect to the backgrounds and skills here when you're working with AI products,

Speaker 2 ([05:11](#)):

Diversity comes in all shapes and forms in women and product. We think a lot about diversity from a gender perspective, but also number of years of experience can be diversity. Your location in the world can be diversity, your upbringing, how you think about problems. There's so many different ways to bring diverse people to the team. I think many studies have showed us over the years that the more diverse your team is, the more like your user group and customers they are, the better you're going to solve the problems for these customers and their ultimate users. And so I think you have to be willing to take a chance sometimes on people who maybe don't look perfect on paper, but show the right aptitude in terms of wanting to learn, being continuously curious and really bringing the right attitude and passion to doing a great job for our customers.

Speaker 3 ([06:18](#)):

That's a great one. So basically I think where you're leading is to really say when you're working on AI products, it's the combination of the three that you did mention with respect to understanding the technology itself, understanding the data and understanding about the ethical and the responsibility from an AI standpoint. That's kind of the table stakes is what I'm hearing from you. It doesn't matter with the other aspects of diversity, but that's kind of the table stakes.

Speaker 2 ([06:48](#)):

Yeah, you're absolutely correct and the ability of people to bring diverse perspectives will make those three table stakes much more rich and diverse in understanding. And the more perspectives you have, then the better the ultimate answer will be.

Speaker 3 ([07:08](#)):

That's very well put. And taking one step further, I know there are many product leaders both at the mid-career level and at the executive level who've done really well from a product leadership perspective, but who might not have directly worked on building AI products per se. So what's your opinion or take or suggestion for them to actually break into leading some of the successful AI products given at that level of their expertise?

Speaker 2 ([07:42](#)):

Yeah, I mean I think it comes down to the same thing a little bit maybe at an elevated level, which is a curiosity and a passion to learn. The field of AI is moving so quickly that what I knew a month ago is somewhat relevant, but it has changed quite a bit in the last month. Similarly, if you go back six months or nine months or a year, the world has changed dramatically. So as a leader you need to be conversant and educated on the areas of change. You also need to be thoughtful in terms of how you think about applying ai. There can be a rush with the excitement to build AI



products or to say you are doing ai, but really it comes down to real core product management fundamentals. What is the customer? What is the problem that you're trying to solve?

Speaker 2 ([08:34](#)):

Let's not jump to AI as the solution, but let's think about it as a tool that we may be able to use. The other thing at a leadership level that I think is super important is communication skills. Because if you are in the situation where you are leading a product management team who are considering applying AI or are in depth using ai, you need to be able to manage the expectations and the concerns and questions that all of the other executive leaders around the organization will have for you. How are you able to set a clear vision and not knowing exactly how you're going to achieve it? Because as we said, AI is changing so quickly. How are you able to address your customer's concerns about how their data might be used? How are you able to address the chief legal officer's concerns or the chief risk officer's concerns? How are you able to harness the excitement likely of your marketing teams and how they might use it? And so I think that ability to communicate well and manage stakeholders becomes even more important as you move into a new field that's moving so dynamically like ai.

Speaker 3 ([09:47](#)):

No, that's perfectly well said. I think especially when you said AI is a means to solving a problem and it's not the solution by itself. So I think very well said. I do have a question in there and we'll get to that lots to unpack in what you mentioned. So to your point, Google has been involved with AI and machine learning for quite some time now, being one of the pioneers there. How did you initially think about organizing your product management team per se, and do you think it's changed now or any changes in there that you did mention saying what you learned a month ago, some might be applicable, but some might have changed. So how has that impacted the structure of the PM organization itself?

Speaker 2 ([10:36](#)):

So this might not be answering your question holistically because obviously Google has 20 years of really expansive AI experience. I joined Google about three years ago and I and have been leading our industry solutions as well as our search capabilities on the AI side. So I work in the cloud AI team. So how I thought about building the team originally was I needed a mix of business and domain expertise. So just because you have AI expertise does not make you a great manager, does not make a great product manager, and it does not mean that you understand the domain, the customers, the industry vertical that you're in. So typically I'm looking for a unicorn, A unicorn that has some AI understanding and experience that has some industry understanding and experience, but also has really strong core PM fundamentals. When you think about setting up an AI product team, if you are building a new AI discipline within your organization, some things that I would suggest that people think about is your first hires are likely to be critical. And so there's always a lot of excitement within an organization to get started on AI and people want to learn, but



I think it's very important that you bring in a couple of people both on the product side and the engineering side and the data side that really have core expertise and know how the basics and fundamentals work and should be set up and then that can help you get off the ground and bring other people along on the journey.

Speaker 3 ([12:28](#)):

Oh, that's awesome there. And in this journey, you talked about a very good point of how do someone think about how does someone think about building the AI teams and the initial core team? What do they consist of now? Have there been situations for you, especially when you have both AI PMs like PMs working with AI solutions, but the team also consisted of other generic PMs who might not necessarily be working on AI as a technology per se?

Speaker 2 ([13:01](#)):

So in my team specifically, no, because we are the cloud AI group, so all of the teams work on core AI products, but I imagine that this will be the case and will continue to be the case. I think I mentioned a little bit earlier, I think all PMs eventually will need an understanding of how AI might be a tool that they can use, but obviously there will be some PMs that have more expertise in how you build an AI product. And some of the things that are different is for AI products, typically you need to have data and so you need to understand the life cycle of how you bring data in, how you normalize it and rationalize it, how you use it to build the model, how you test that the models are effective and how do you continuously improve it as you deploy it and have it in production. Models need to be continuously maintained. I think what's really interesting in the last six or nine months is with generative ai

Speaker 3 ([14:00](#)):

That

Speaker 2 ([14:01](#)):

Need for large scale data is much less than it was before. The models themselves have so much data that you can build much more easily on them, but they did bring a new set of skills that are needed in order to be successful in that area. You need to understand how prompting works. You need to understand how model tuning works. You need to be able to understand concepts like grounding and factuality with relation to the models. And so I think each iteration of product management and now AI product management brings new opportunities for learning and new opportunities for building products that really delight customers and end users.

Speaker 3 ([14:53](#)):

That is so inspiring with what you just said there, Elisa, honestly, and taking one step further away there, do you see any new challenges with respect to developing and retaining product teams in this era of really building products using ai? Is there anything different there that you see?

Speaker 2 ([15:16](#)):



So I don't think it's hugely different, but I do think that there is competition for great ai, PMs and PMs. I think PMs broadly in general,

Speaker 2 ([15:30](#)):

I think it's similar on the engineering side. So I do believe that people, it is important for everybody within the PM discipline to understand ai, to get themselves familiar with the concepts and make themselves relevant in this market. And those with great expertise are going to be in great demand. So we should make sure that we're hiring great people, that we have a pipeline of contacts and people who we want to hire, that we build relationships with academic institutions that we continuously up train RPMs that we have in the organization. And I'm a big believer in a mixture of up training of ways to up train. A lot of people think about going to a class or attending a specific in-house training, and that typically is about 10% of your learning. Most of your learning comes from a combination of doing and being mentored. And so when I hire leaders in AI teams, I look for someone not only who's really good at the job, but who's really good at mentoring and coaching others to be great at the job and to understand how things are evolving and how they might use AI to really solve customer problems.

Speaker 3 ([16:53](#)):

Wow, that's such a unique way of thinking about just up training and upscaling your team. Thank you for sharing that. That is so unique. And from a recruiting standpoint, say now who are building AI who are looking to build AI products, do you think anything needs to change from how the recruiting needs to happen per se? I know you called out some of the critical skills even for product leaders, but from a recruiting standpoint, any thoughts around that? Lisa?

Speaker 2 ([17:29](#)):

I think I've touched on quite a few of the areas in terms of what skills you're looking for,

Speaker 2 ([17:34](#)):

What soft skills you're looking for as well as knowledge. I think that all aspects of the organization, and that includes our recruiting teams need to understand the opportunities that AI provides and they need to be able to dig in a little and see do our candidates understand the opportunities? Are they humble in order to understand how users and how enterprise customers think about AI and want to be able to solve problems? Are they continuously curious? Are they open to, have they demonstrated learning? Have they built a little AI app? Have they used AI in the market? Are they using Bard? Are they using chat G P T? Are they using image models? Are they playing around with things? And that shows an interest in the product, but also the beginnings of understanding on how to think about it.

Speaker 3 ([18:40](#)):

No, that's great. And I know we touched upon the recruiting, kind of expanding that to other cross-functional organizations as a product executive, how have your



conversations changed or evolved when you're actually discussing with let's say the marketing or the leader, the engineering leader, or even the data scientist leadership per se? How have those conversations started? I know you touched upon really having to think about the responsibility, the ethical part of the AI and things, but curious to understand how your conversations have actually evolved now.

Speaker 2 ([19:19](#)):

Yeah, so let me answer that question from the point of view of the conversations that I have with our enterprise customers because I think Google is in the lucky situation where we have a lot of AI expertise. And so all of the disciplines are used that I work with are used to dealing with ai. But what I think has changed dramatically over the last year is the conversations that I have with C-suite and executive leaders in our customers and by our customers, I mean large retailers, large healthcare providers, financial services providers, communications companies, and many others, media companies. So what has happened now is AI has gone from being something that the C T O and C I O talked about and we're doing proofs of concept in and ideally moving things to production, but that was a pretty slow pipeline to AI now being a top conversation starter with every C E O, every C P O, every C O O, every C F O, wanting to know how they can use AI to drive their top line revenue, but also AI is extremely powerful in reducing operational overhead and increasing operational effectiveness.

Speaker 2 ([20:43](#)):

And so every conversation that we have now is really deeply rooted in use cases and how the business of how AI can bring benefit. I think what's also interesting is suddenly many more people are AI experts. If I compare the conversations that I had with customers maybe nine months ago where we were explaining what is generative ai, what is a large language model, now everybody knows what it is. A lot of people have really a long list of use cases that they want to address and they're ready to get started. And so we see customers moving into proof of concept very quickly. We see them moving into production quickly as well. Having said that, your question is very insightful, what are the other considerations that they bring up? And they do bring up what about the data? Is my data private? Is my customer's data private? Will it be used to train the models?

Speaker 2 ([21:49](#)):

And at Google, we are very upfront that we will never use your data and your customer's data to train any models. So that's a commitment from Google Cloud. People also want to know a little bit about how do I use AI ethically, what are the downsides? And we offer a service whereby our big customer integrations and implementations are always accompanied with a responsible AI review where we help our customers understand what are the potential downsides, what are the uses that might not be optimal, and show them where to be careful and how to put guardrails in place.

Speaker 3 ([22:37](#)):



No, that's amazing. That leads me to the next question with respect to what are the pitfalls and considerations that really one has to make while building some of these AI products? I know you touched upon a few of them, especially from a data standpoint. Anything else you want to add there, Lisa?

Speaker 2 ([22:56](#)):

Yeah, it does bring new questions. So I think we talked about data, we talked about responsible ai, we talked about an understanding of how prompting and tuning works and how you can leverage your own data within your corpus of information to improve the models. Other considerations are the size of the model that you want to use because with size, these models are very compute intensive, and so if you're running models that are in-house or if you're running models in the cloud, you need to know how big is that model and how much capacity will it use, and that's a direct trade off with the quality of the results that you expect. The larger the model, typically the higher the quality of results, but in many use cases, you don't need 99.9% accuracy. Maybe 70 or 80% accuracy is good enough when you're talking about generating various versions of marketing materials. And so I think understanding the trade off between the size and complexity of the model versus the quality that you want to provide to your users is super important consideration.

Speaker 3 ([24:14](#)):

That's awesome. That actually leads me to, I think a very important aspect of building AI products, which is about the whole decisionmaking process, right? So how does your team approach the process of deciding, Hey, these are the right use cases that we need to build, and what's your role in that whole process from a decision making standpoint?

Speaker 2 ([24:37](#)):

Sure. Honestly, I think it's product management. It's the same product management job just using different tools. You need to make sure that you understand the opportunity, you understand who the customers are, you understand the problems that you're trying to solve within, you understand what is the value of solving those problems, and I think there are many product management decision-making frameworks out there in terms of how do you compare opportunities, and ultimately it comes down to a trade-off between effort and reward. And so how are you making sure that you are evaluating the effort carefully and that you're understanding the reward? One of the things that I think is really important as we go to market with our customers at Google Cloud is we engage with our cloud value advisor team who actually help our customers understand the value. This technology is so new so that it's important that we really dive deep into what is the root problem that we're solving and how are we delivering value, which may be in different flavors. It might be top line revenue, it might also be customer satisfaction, it might also be operational efficiency. And so how do you combine the value of those things to come up with the savings or the revenue increase, and then you need to compare the opportunities and you might do ones that are less valuable but have higher strategic input. And so a general product management framework is what we use.



Speaker 3 ([26:46](#)):

Personally, where do you think the market opportunities are from an AI standpoint? I wouldn't say in the future because really every day I think the future is changing, but what is it that you think personally and you believe personally?

Speaker 2 ([27:22](#)):

Yeah, I think there's a number of ones that are really emerging as clear leaders. So one of them is this idea of assisting people in their work and two big groups of people are marketing people and actually software engineers.

Speaker 3 ([27:44](#)):

And

Speaker 2 ([27:44](#)):

So there are a number of models out there now that really provide great services in terms of generating content for end users, and that could be marketing content that could also educational content that could be F A Q content and as well as providing assistance and a starting point for coding for software engineers across a range of programming languages. Some other areas that are sort of well-known and being investigated quite deeply are things like call center and customer service optimization. How do you make sure that your call center advisors or agents are assisting the highest value, most complex problems that customers have as opposed to 15 times a day helping somebody to reset their password?

Speaker 2 ([28:43](#)):

How can AI help build these call center questions and trees, decision-making trees really, really quickly and easily and take humans out of the loop for the easy questions and then assist your agents with information at the tip of their fingers when they're dealing with really complex situations. And so this area of agent assistance is also super important. I think those are the top ones that I think maybe the other one that I'll touch on is information seeking. We now, every organization has a lot of data over the last 10 years they've been told data is key to success. What is really also true is that data exists in many different places, in many different formats all over the organization, and it's hard to put it together. And so when you think about using AI to understand and harmonize the data and to gain insights and see patterns within the data and then surface these in a proactive way to your employees and provide them the data and the tools to make decisions more quickly, that's super powerful.

Speaker 3 ([30:06](#)):

I agree with that. I think that's a very interesting problem I think to solve a huge problem to solve just from a data standpoint. And there are many advantages from a Google standpoint when it comes to building AI products, the technology, the kind of people, the amount of data accessibility that you have and resources and things. But just curious, where do you see some of the startups getting ahead?





Speaker 2 ([30:35](#)):

So startups always have an advantage that they're very close to the customer and can move very quickly.

Speaker 2 ([30:43](#)):

They can use a lot of different tools, a combination of tools. They build themselves open source tools, and they have very in-depth typically they have very in-depth knowledge of a particular domain or a particular problem set. And so focus I think is really important from a startup perspective. I think the other thing is flexibility and adaptability. If you're a startup, the key to your success in an area that's moving as quickly as AI is really responsiveness to not just your customers but the technology and the tools that are available. And so I see really successful startups using tools that large enterprises like Google Cloud and others make available to them, but using them in highly innovative, highly focused ways that solve real customer problems and making changes rapidly as things evolve.

Speaker 3 ([31:44](#)):

That's very well said. That's amazing. And what kind of opportunities do you specifically see for the product management function going ahead? I know we talked about how pretty much every PM is almost going to be an AI PM in the future. Any other thoughts around how the team is going to evolve or the function is going to evolve?

Speaker 2 ([32:10](#)):

Well, a little bit lightweight way. I think that all PMs should be using AI tools. No matter what systems and processes your organization uses, you can use open source tools that are available. You can use it in Google Docs, Google Slides, you can use duet to start to build your slides to draft an email.

Speaker 2 ([32:38](#)):

I think there are many, I'm not going to call them shortcuts, but starting points that can make sure that you're not left looking at a blank page. And so I think there's a lot to be said for just using these tools yourself, and that will help to inspire you to think about how they could be used to solve your customer problems. I think also just making sure that you're staying up to date, there's a number of great resources on the web. T L D R is a great one where you get a daily newsletter, what's happening in AI and making sure that you are being inspired by what other customers or other companies are doing. I think that's super important as well.

Speaker 3 ([33:26](#)):

I think there are so many valuable resources. You've pointed to folks out there, I'm sure as, and I've followed so many of the things that you mentioned, so thank you for those resources. Any last thoughts, Lisa, for our listeners who are building AI products or who want to build AI products at different levels of product leadership? Any final thoughts?



Speaker 2 ([33:53](#)):

I'll reiterate the importance of thinking about responsible ai. I think it's one of the first things that people both end users and enterprises think about, but they don't always know where to start. And so I think making sure that you are thinking about where there may be bias because AI is very powerful and you don't want it to create bias or to reinforce bias. You want to think about how are you testing and evaluating AI models for safety, making sure that AI is accountable to people. We think about it, the term human in the loop is thrown around a lot, but making sure that as your company or your enterprise is using ai, are there checks and balances, both from a technical perspective but also from a human perspective. And then making sure that you're building your products with privacy in mind from the ground up and that you're using high standards of scientific excellence.

Speaker 2 ([35:03](#)):

Those are some of the things on the responsible side. I think the other things that I think about are really just an openness to change and making sure that you don't think the answer. I think this goes without saying for product management in general, but even more so now. The answer's changing so quickly that as a product manager, as a product leader, your core strength is still in understanding your customers and in understanding your problems and working with your data sciences teams, your engineering teams, your UX teams, to allow the collective wisdom of the group to bring together solutions that may or may not include ai, but certainly it's a valuable tool going forward.

Speaker 3 ([35:52](#)):

Awesome. Openness to change. I think that is such a powerful statement over there, which is so applicable I think to all levels of career progression. Really love talking to you, Lisa, and this was so insightful. Thank you so much for your time.

Speaker 2 ([36:09](#)):

Of course. I was really happy to be here and it was a lot of fun.