

# 2019

## Product Planning Report

Product planning insights from the world's leading companies



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# Introduction

Four years ago, we published our first annual Product Planning Report based on a survey of product managers from around the world. We did so in part due to our own curiosity, but mostly because we wanted to shed more light on the product planning process and give product teams ways to benchmark themselves against their peers. Since then, we've watched several trends in the product management space evolve and have shared our findings each year.

Our 2019 Planning Report is our largest yet. More than 1,300 product management professionals from around the world shared insights into their processes with us. Many of those who participated opened up to us and spoke candidly about what tactics are working and which could use improvement. We've distilled those insights into this report along with our advice on how the industry can continue to iteratively improve their processes.

We hope our report helps your team not only understand how others approach product planning, but also to identify actionable ways to adjust and adapt the process in 2019 and beyond.

**Jim Semick**

*Co-Founder and Chief Strategist*

# 1

## **Report** Highlights



# 1 Report Highlights

## The Product Planning Process



### Plan

Most product teams update the product roadmap monthly or weekly.



### Build

The vast majority of product managers spend between 1 and 5 hours per week managing the product roadmap.



### Communicate

More than half of product teams make different versions of their product roadmaps for different audiences.

## How satisfied are product managers with their processes?



Planning and Prioritization – (2.88/5)



Roadmap Communication – (2.92/5)



# 2

## **Strategic Planning** and Prioritization



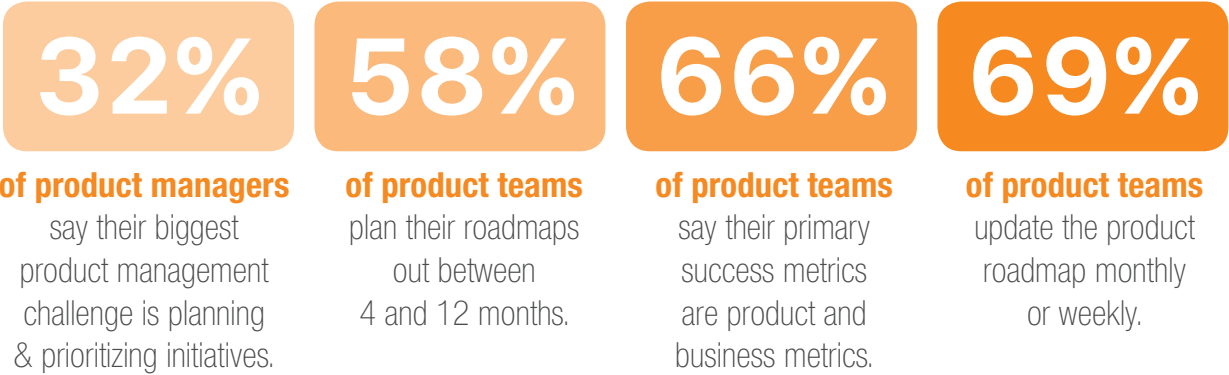
# 2

## Strategic Planning & Prioritization

Strategic planning is a key part of the product management role. Product teams are expected to craft strategies that support broad, organization-wide objectives while also making the most productive use of finite time and development resources.

While working with thousands of product management professionals over the years, we've heard time and time again that strategic planning is one of the most difficult aspects of the job. In this section, we'll look at how product teams approach this critical, but challenging part of the job.

### Key Insights:



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The product planning process takes a hit when stakeholders have different views of priorities. A sound product roadmap can make a difference.

”

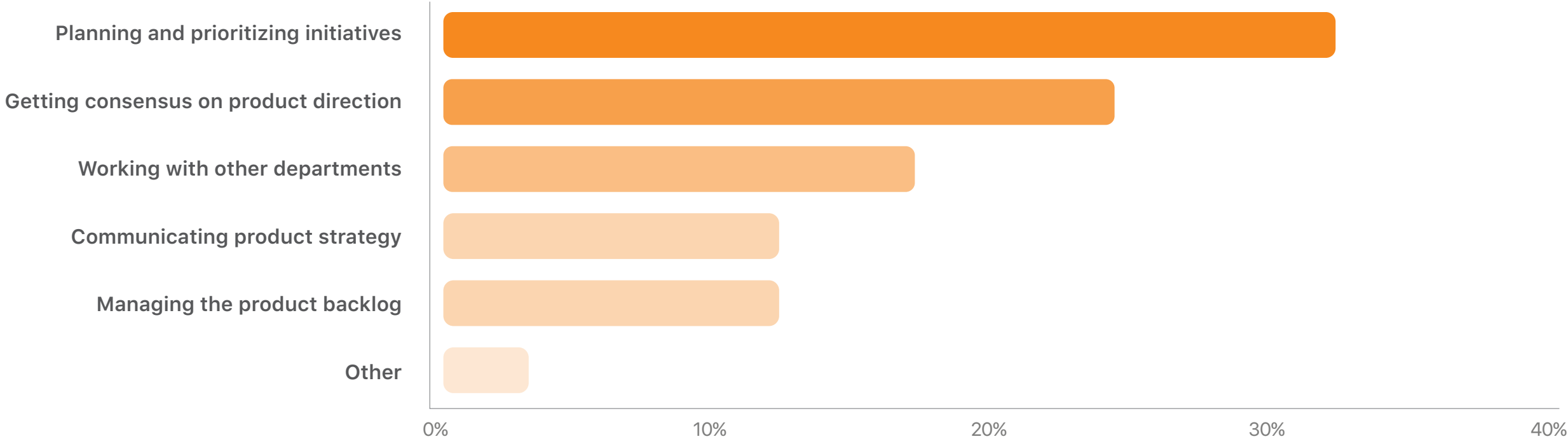
Product Manager at an organization with 1000+ employees

# Product Success Metrics

Well-defined success metrics are an important starting point for enabling strategic planning. We found that the majority of product teams have defined success metrics for their products. Product metrics (such as product usage, product adoption, etc.) and business-oriented metrics (such as customer acquisition cost, average revenue per user, etc.) are the most common success metrics for product teams of all sizes, experience levels, and industries.

However, approximately 13% of product managers don't have defined success metrics for their product team or don't know what they are. On average, product management teams without primary success metrics are the least satisfied with their process for planning and prioritizing initiatives.

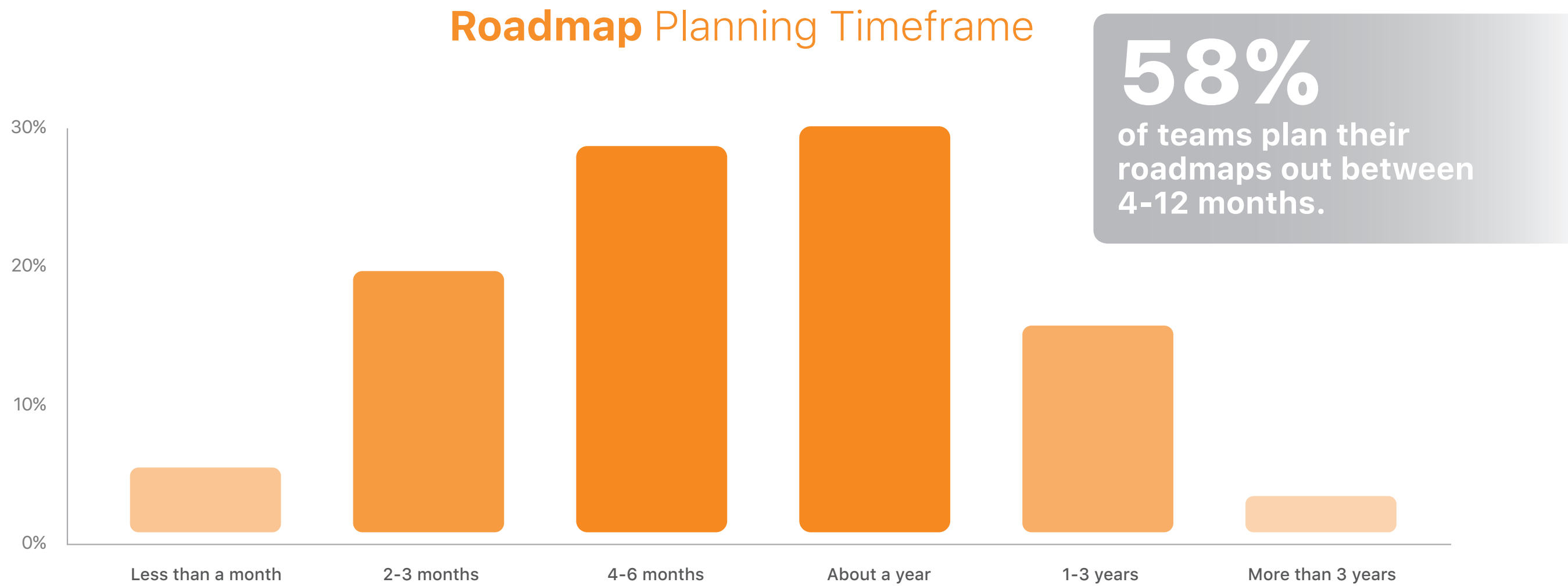
## What is your biggest product management challenge?





# Timeframe for Strategic Planning

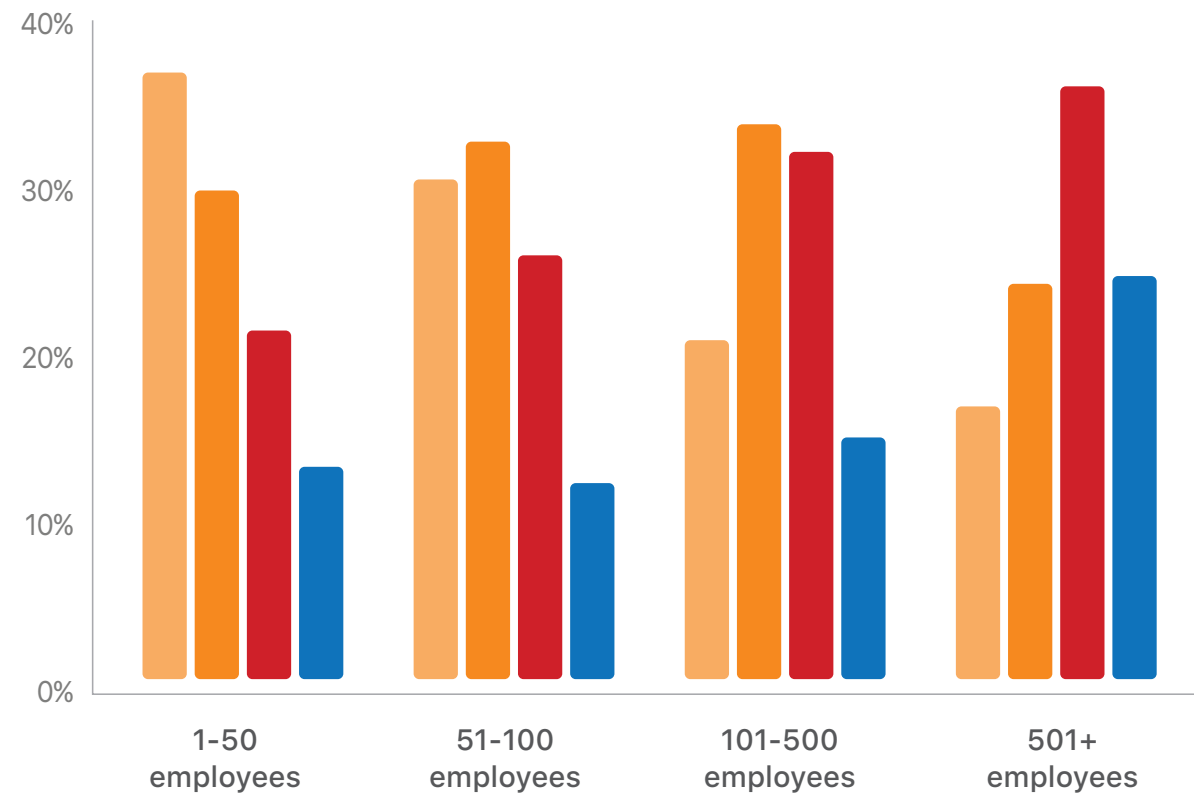
Determining how far out to plan can be a tricky balancing act between uncertainty and the need for a plan. The vast majority of product management teams choose to plan their roadmaps out for between 4 and 12 months. Over the past few years, we've watched roadmap timeframes trend shorter and shorter. This year's results mirror those we found in 2018, suggesting the trend is beginning to level out.



On average, larger organizations plan their roadmaps out for longer timeframes than smaller organizations.

## Roadmap Planning Timeframe vs. Company Size

■ One quarter or less ■ 4-6 months ■ About one year ■ Longer than one year



## Timeframes and Industry

- Industries with longest timeframes: **nonprofit and manufacturing**
- Industry with shortest timeframes: **software**

“

Our roadmaps  
are prepared for a year:  
We have 100% clarity on the  
next quarter, 75% clarity on  
items for the second quarter,  
50% clarity for items of the  
third quarter, and 25% clarity  
on items of the 4th quarter.

”

Product Manager in software industry at organization  
with between 101 and 500 employees

## Updating the Strategy

The only constant in our world is change, and product managers must effectively adapt their strategies to the changes around them. Treating the product roadmap as a living document rather than a plan carved into stone is one way product teams adapt to change.

**69% of product teams update the product roadmap monthly or weekly.**

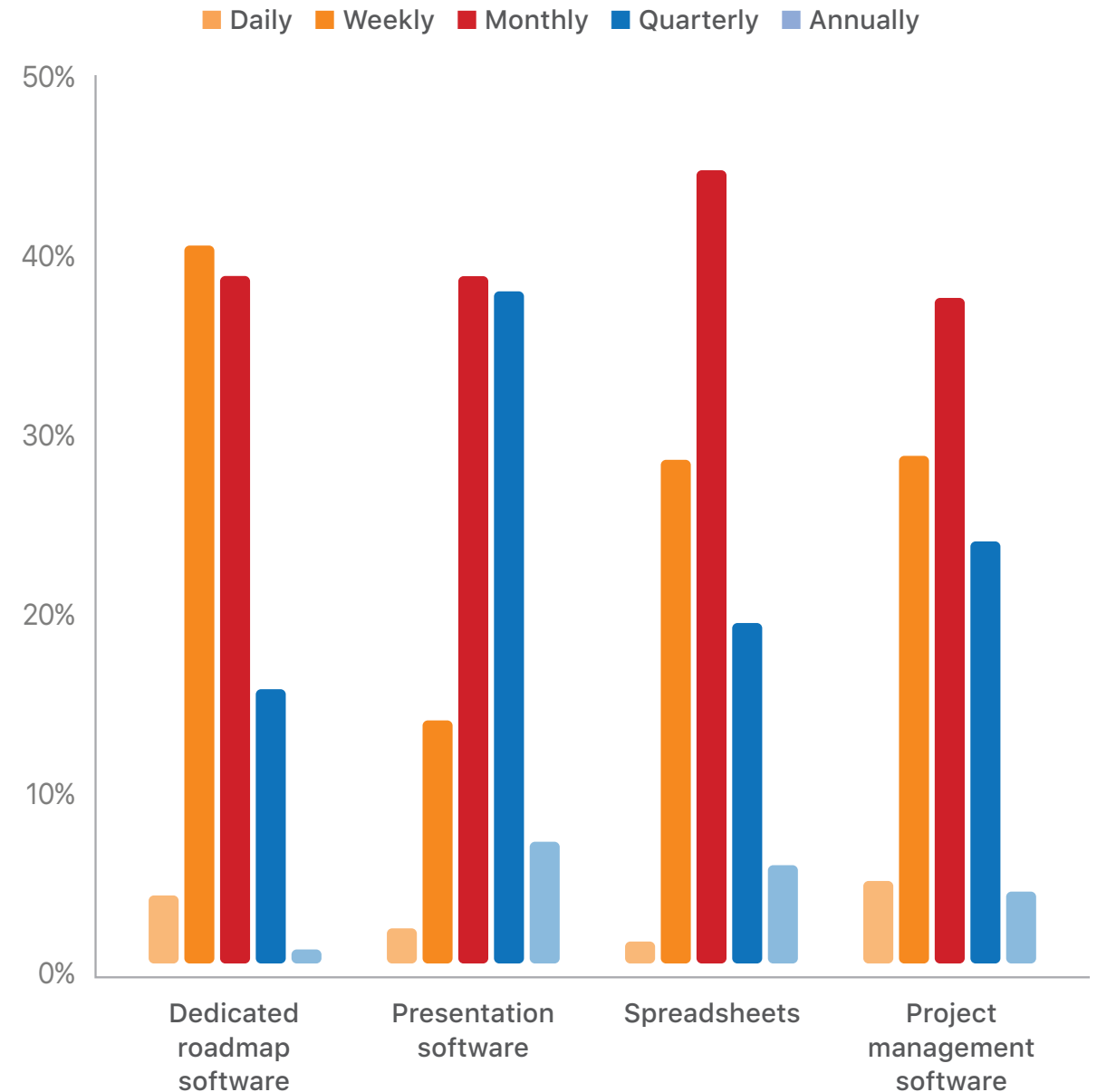
Our high-level results are similar to those we saw in 2018. The majority of product teams choose to update their product roadmaps monthly or weekly while just less than a third of product teams elect for quarterly or annual roadmap updates.

### Roadmapping Tools vs. Roadmap Update Frequency

We see some variation in update frequency as it relates to the roadmapping tool being used.

- Product managers using presentation software tend to update their roadmaps less frequently than those who use other roadmapping tools.
- Product managers who use dedicated roadmap software update their product roadmaps most frequently.

## Roadmap Update Frequency vs. Roadmap Tool



# Satisfaction with Planning and Prioritization Process

Our survey data suggests this challenging area of the product management role, much like the world around us, is still evolving. On average, satisfaction with the planning and prioritization process is only 2.87 out of 5.

## Secrets to Success

We uncovered a few common themes across the product teams most satisfied with their planning and prioritization processes.

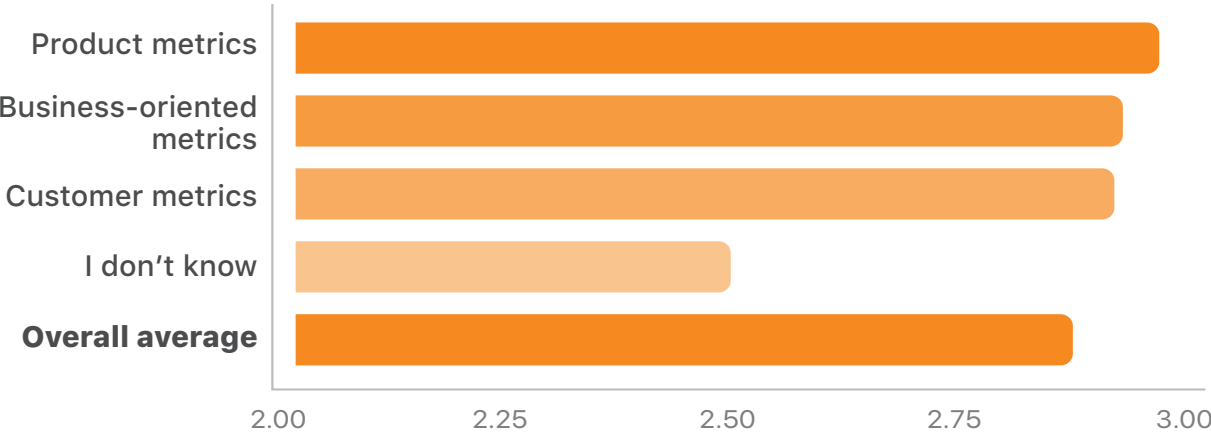
### Start with metrics.

Identify the product, business, or customer metrics that matter most. The teams who have no metrics or who don't know what those metrics are were the least satisfied with their process for planning and prioritization. Having metrics in place before you attempt to build your strategy will give you focus and guidance in the planning and prioritization process.

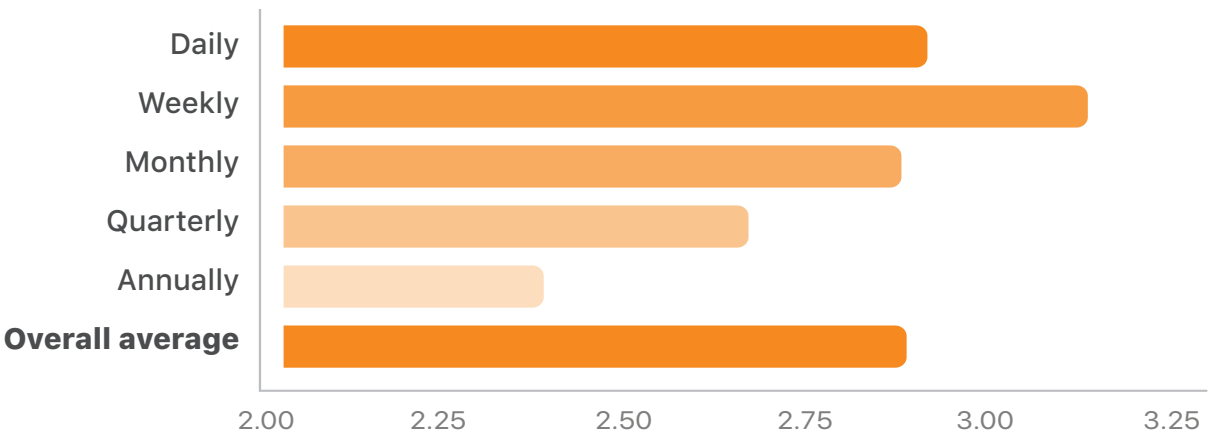
### Update your roadmap frequently.

The product teams who update their product roadmaps daily and weekly reported the highest levels of satisfaction with their processes for planning and prioritizing product initiatives.

Average satisfaction by metrics

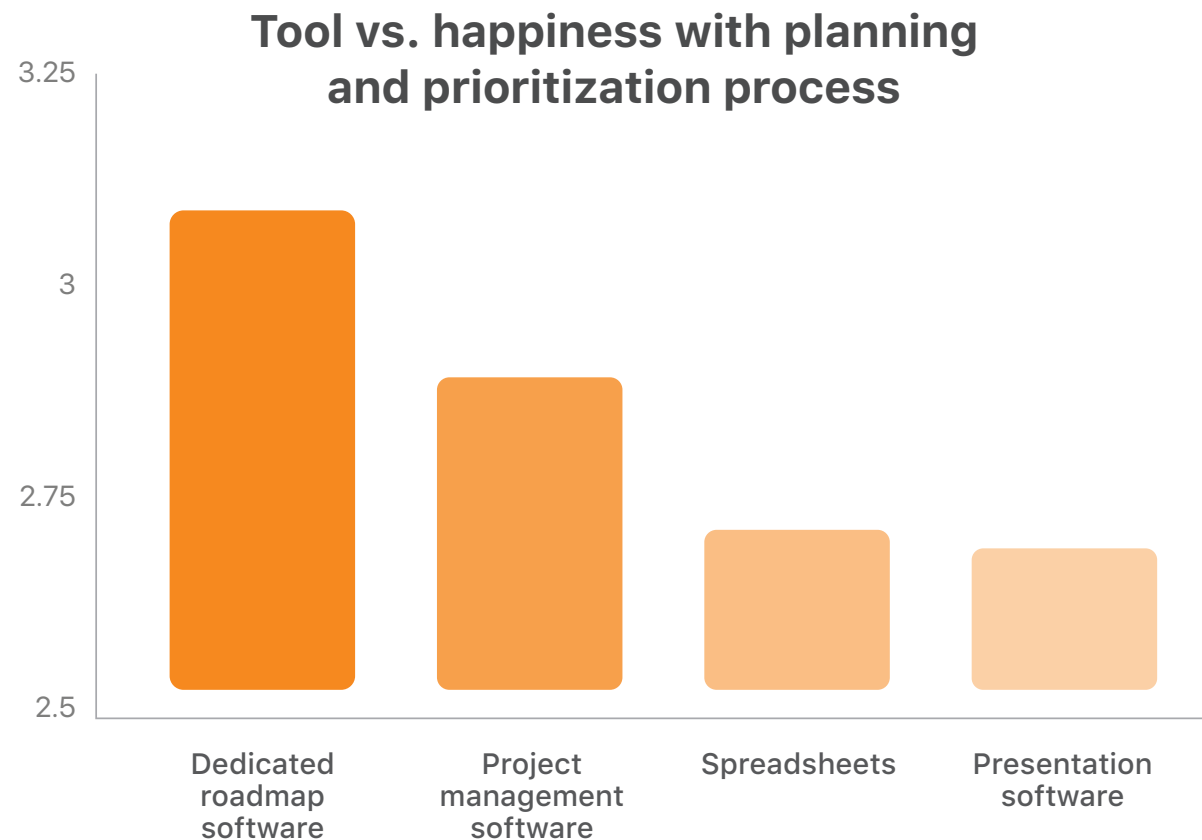


Average satisfaction by update frequency



## Use the right tool for the job.

A simple prioritization tool that allows you to weigh what is important to your team and align initiatives with key metrics and business objectives can help take the stress out of planning and prioritization. Product managers using dedicated roadmap software were more satisfied with their planning and prioritization process than those who used other tools. Many dedicated roadmapping solutions on the market today come equipped with planning tools to help simplify this process.



“

**ProductPlan is a key piece of us building better products at a faster pace, because we can see long term effects from short term decisions.**

”

Jason Randall, President and CEO at AppFolio



# 3

## **Crafting** the Plan



# 3

## Crafting the Plan

Once high-level strategic plans are in place, it's time to think more about tactics. While strategic thinking, market validation, and communication account for a significant portion of a product manager's workweek, where does managing the roadmap fit in?

### Key Stats:

The majority of product managers spend between **1 and 5 hours per week** managing the product roadmap.



**33% of product teams** trust dedicated roadmap software for building and maintaining their product roadmaps.



**26% of product managers** say the most time consuming aspect of roadmapping is scoping and ordering initiatives.



**71% of product teams** update their product backlogs either weekly or monthly.

“

**I work with a mix of internal and external stakeholders for product development, planning, and prioritization of our backlog. This is why it is time consuming to prioritize, plan, and execute.**

”

Product Manager in technology sector at organization with 1000+ employees

## Weekly Time Spent

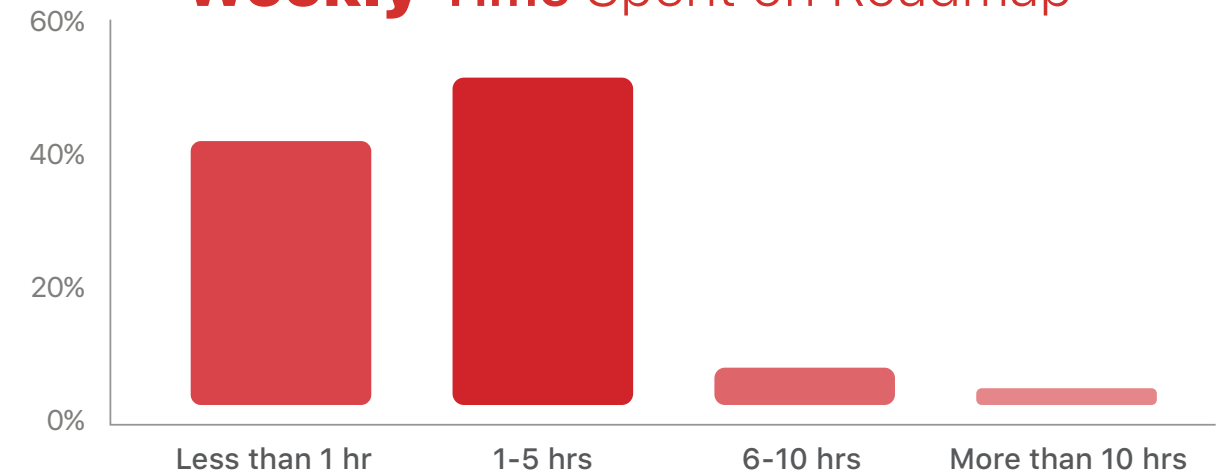
The vast majority of product managers spend less than 5 hours a week managing the product roadmap. This may indicate that product managers are too focused on execution-oriented tasks and struggling to set aside time for strategic projects.

## Most Time-Consuming Aspect

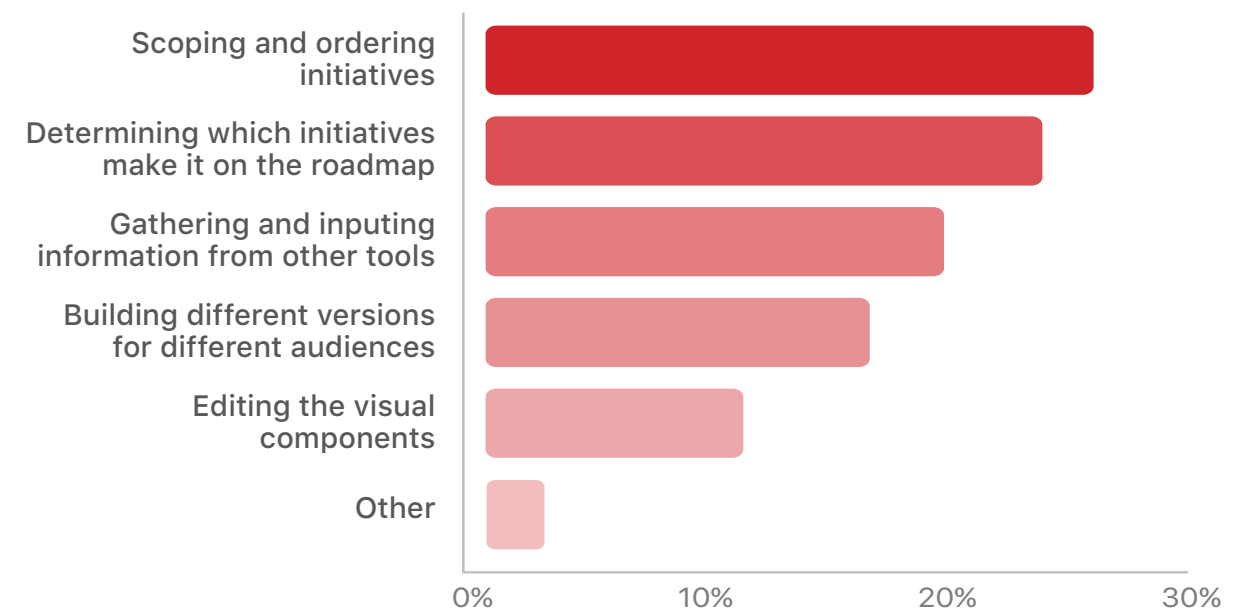
Successful products are not built in a vacuum, and neither are the roadmaps leading those products to success. Product managers work with cross-functional teams to develop winning product strategies. Collaborative roadmapping and planning is a demanding, but worthwhile process. As our survey found, product managers say scoping and ordering initiatives, followed closely by determining which initiatives make it on the roadmap, are the most time-consuming parts of the roadmapping process.

1. Scoping and ordering initiatives
2. Determining which initiatives make it on the roadmap
3. Gathering and inputting information from other tools
4. Building different versions for different audiences
5. Editing the visual components of the roadmap

## Weekly Time Spent on Roadmap



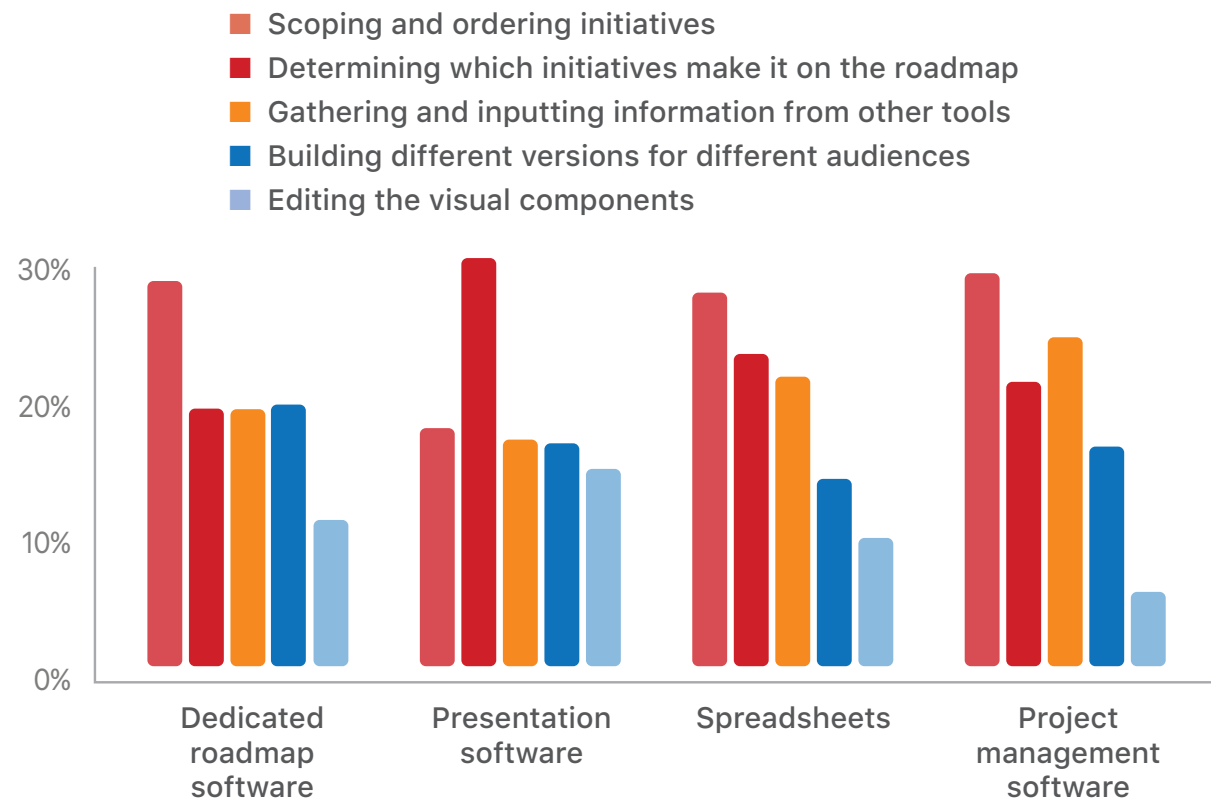
## What is the most time-consuming aspect of roadmapping?



## Tools Influence Where Time is Spent

Teams that use presentation software or drawing software to make their product roadmaps are more likely to say “determining which initiatives make it on the roadmap” is the most time-consuming aspect of roadmapping. Neither presentation nor drawing software provide functionality for collaborative prioritization.

### Most Time-Consuming Aspect of Roadmapping vs. Tool Used



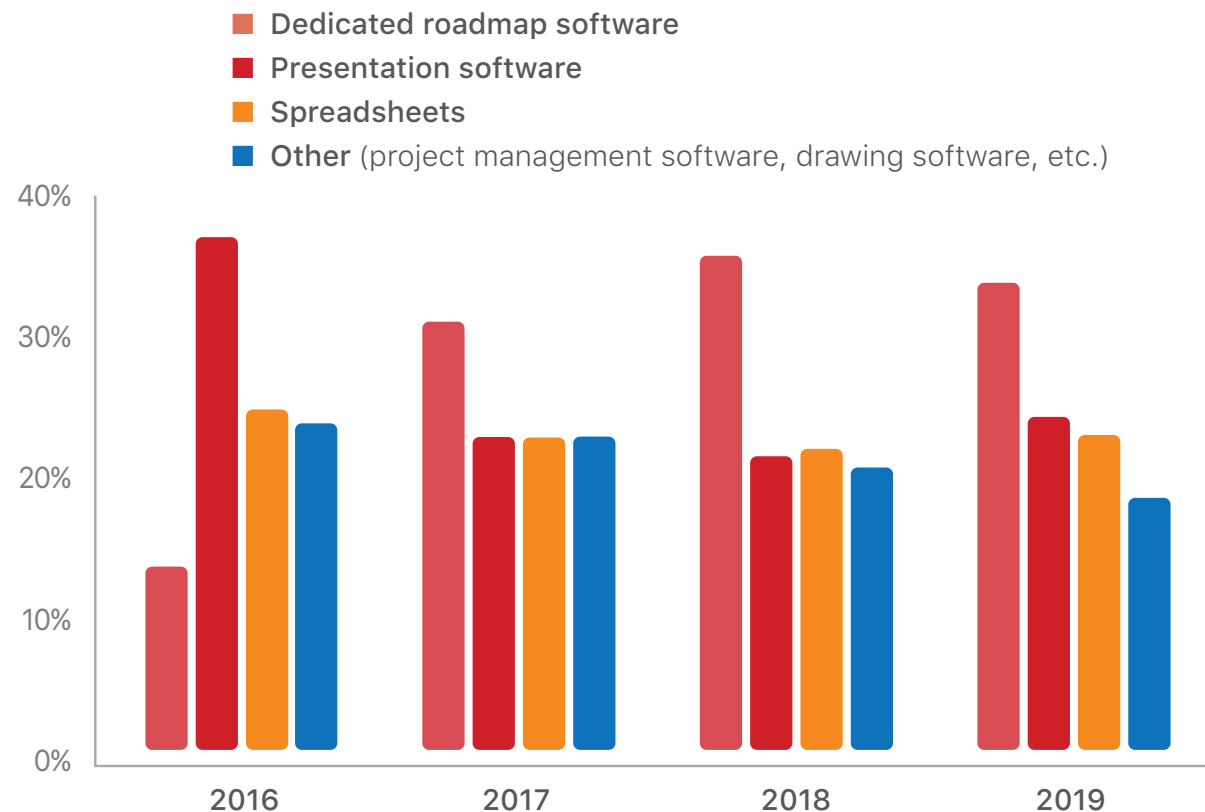
“  
**I’m doubling as Product Manager and Product Owner for both Product and Tech Support. I find it difficult to strategize and execute at the same time.**  
”

Product Manager in technology sector at organization with 1000+ employees

## The Right Tool for the Job

Since our first Product Planning Report in 2016, dedicated roadmap software has taken the lead as the roadmapping tool of choice for product teams across the board. This year, dedicated roadmap software maintained its position while presentation software (such as powerpoint) surpassed spreadsheets as the second most popular tool for roadmapping.

### Roadmapping Tools Over Time



“

**Without a tool,  
I really struggle to keep  
my goals, initiatives,  
roadmap, product  
backlog, and sprint  
backlog in sync.**

”

Product Manager at an enterprise automotive  
company with 6-10 years of experience

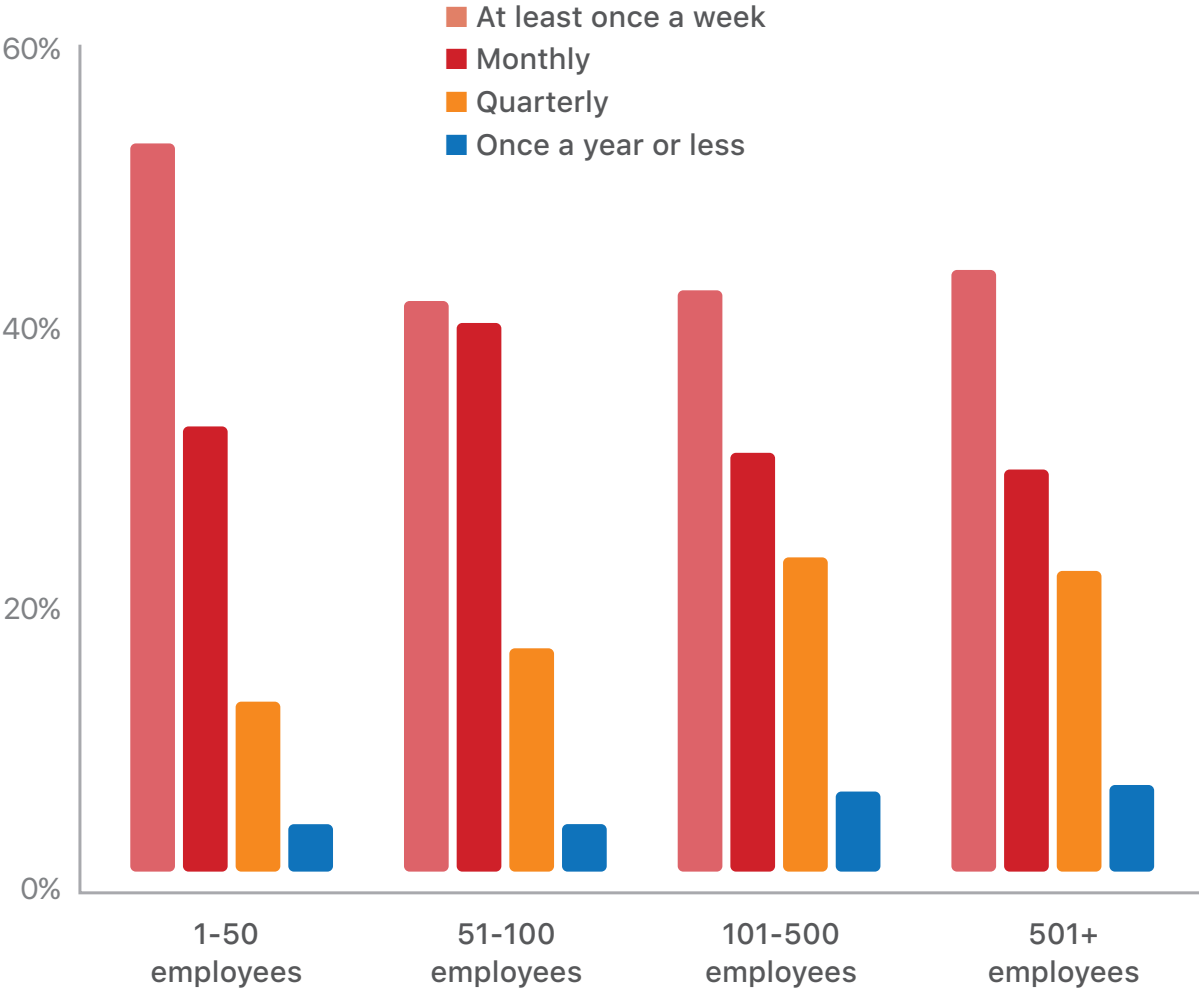


# Backlog Reprioritization Frequency

Much like the roadmap, the product backlog is dynamic. As such, it must be reprioritized often to reflect feedback, new findings, and changing objectives. 71% of product teams re-prioritize initiatives in the backlog either weekly or monthly.



## Backlog Reprioritization Frequency vs. Company Size



As companies grow, so does the likelihood that the company chooses to re-prioritize the backlog on a less frequent basis.

# 4

## **Communicating** the Plan



# 4 Communicating the Plan

Getting consensus on product direction is yet another important responsibility of the product management team. The product roadmap plays a significant role in the communication process, with 50% of product managers saying communication is the primary objective of the product roadmap.

## Key Stats:

- **50% of product teams** say the primary objective of the product roadmap is communication.
- More than **40% of respondents** said executives are the primary audience for product roadmaps.
- **58% of product teams** make different versions of their product roadmaps for different audiences.
- Less than **50% of product teams** surveyed share a version of their product roadmap with customers or prospects.
- Nearly **33% of product teams** share a live version of their roadmap with their team.

“

**Because we use our roadmaps to communicate product strategy and priority, having the product vision, objectives, and goals also part of that communication is becoming increasingly important.**

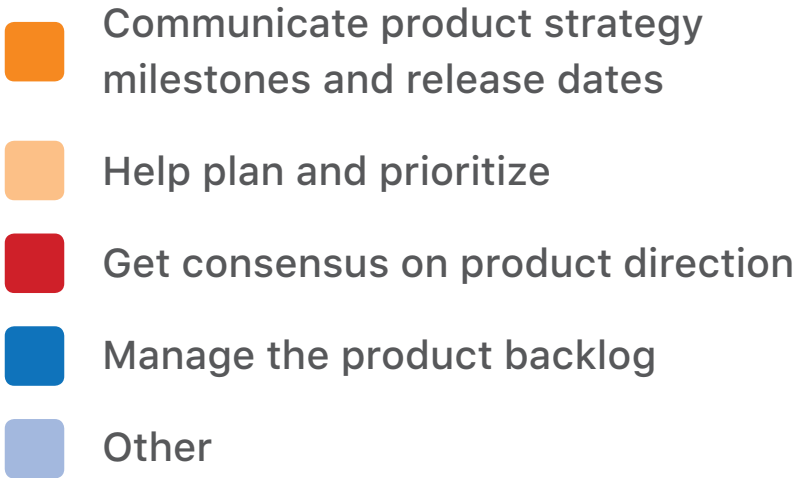
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Product Manager in healthcare industry at organization with 1000+ employees

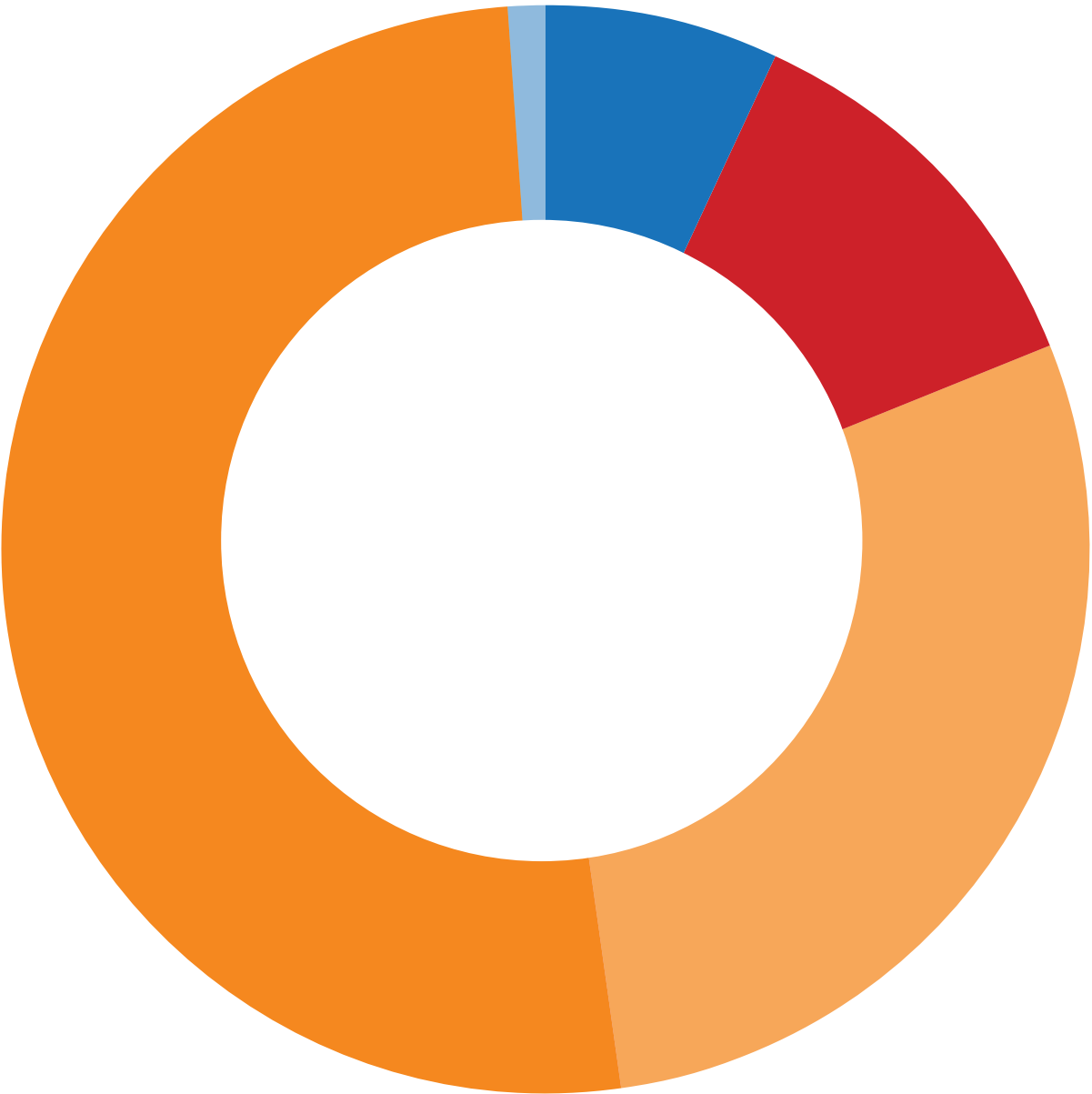
# Objective of the Roadmap

The top 3 objectives of product roadmaps are:

- 1. **Communicate product strategy, milestones, and release dates.**
- 2. **Help plan and prioritize.**
- 3. **Get consensus on product direction.**



# Primary Roadmap Objectives



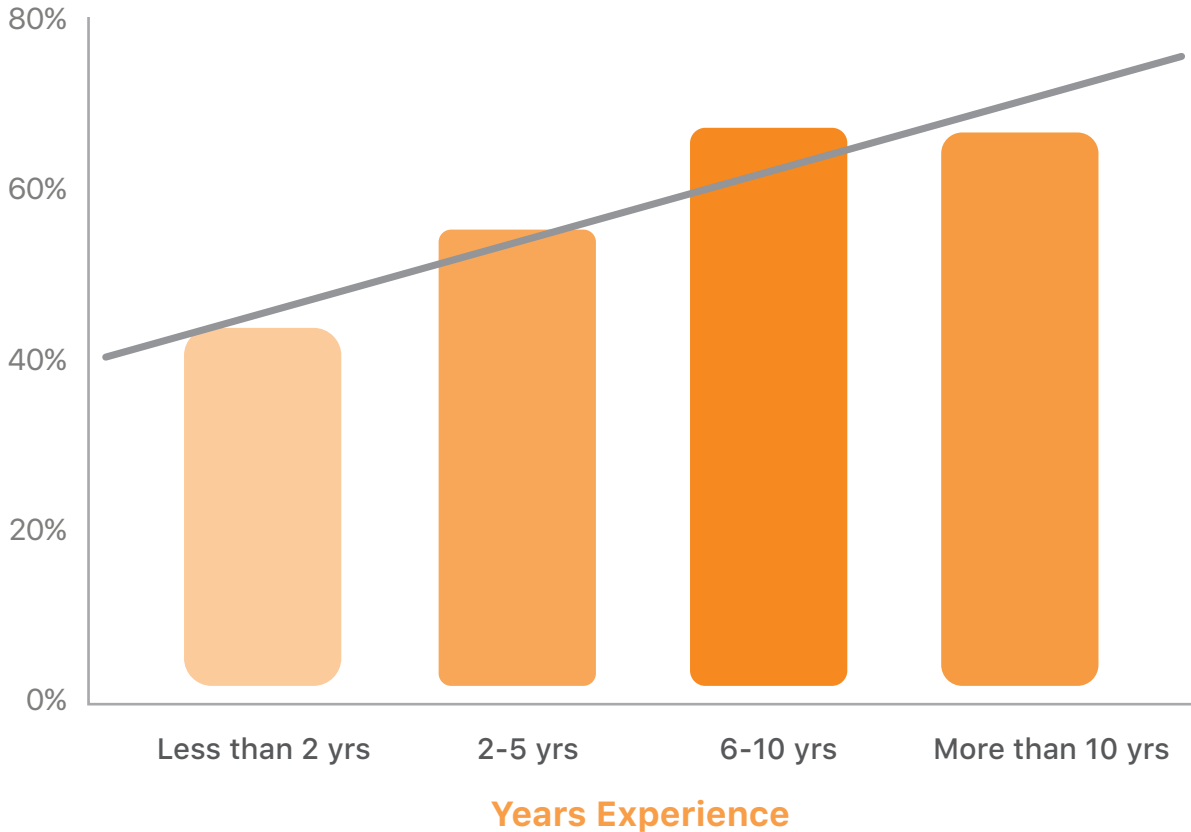
# Know your Audience

Ask any communication expert and they'll tell you knowing your audience is a prerequisite for effective communication. When communicating product strategy, product managers are wise to embrace this by tailoring their message to their audience. Over time, we've noticed an increasing percentage of product managers putting this into practice by creating audience-specific versions of their product roadmaps.

Overall, **58% of product teams** say they create different versions of their product roadmap for different audiences.

Furthermore, this technique is most popular with highly-experienced product management practitioners. We see a trend that suggests those product managers with more experience may be more likely to create different versions of the roadmap for different audiences.

## Product Managers Who Make Multiple Roadmap Versions vs. Years Experience



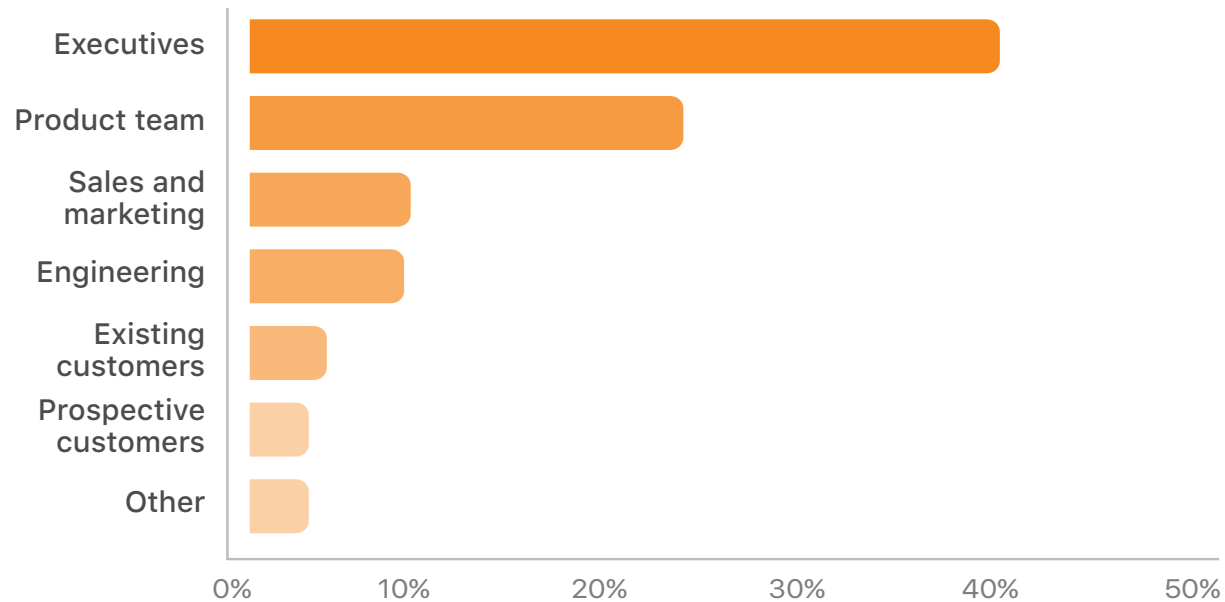
*"Aligning stakeholders is a massive pain point. Showing different roadmaps to each department helps tremendously."*

Product Manager in software industry at organization with between 101 and 500 employees



## Primary Roadmap Audience

41% of product teams say Executives are the primary audience of the product roadmap, followed by the product team (25%). This finding has remained consistent across all our Product Planning Reports since 2016.



## A Public Product Roadmap?

Less than half of the product teams we surveyed share their product roadmap (or versions of it) with customers or prospects. However, we found that about 55% of small organizations (1-5 employees) share their strategies with customers or prospects, further indicating how critical validation and customer feedback is for smaller organizations who presumably are still seeking product-market fit.

“

**The most challenging part of the process is creating a roadmap that is useful to both executive leadership and the product development team.**

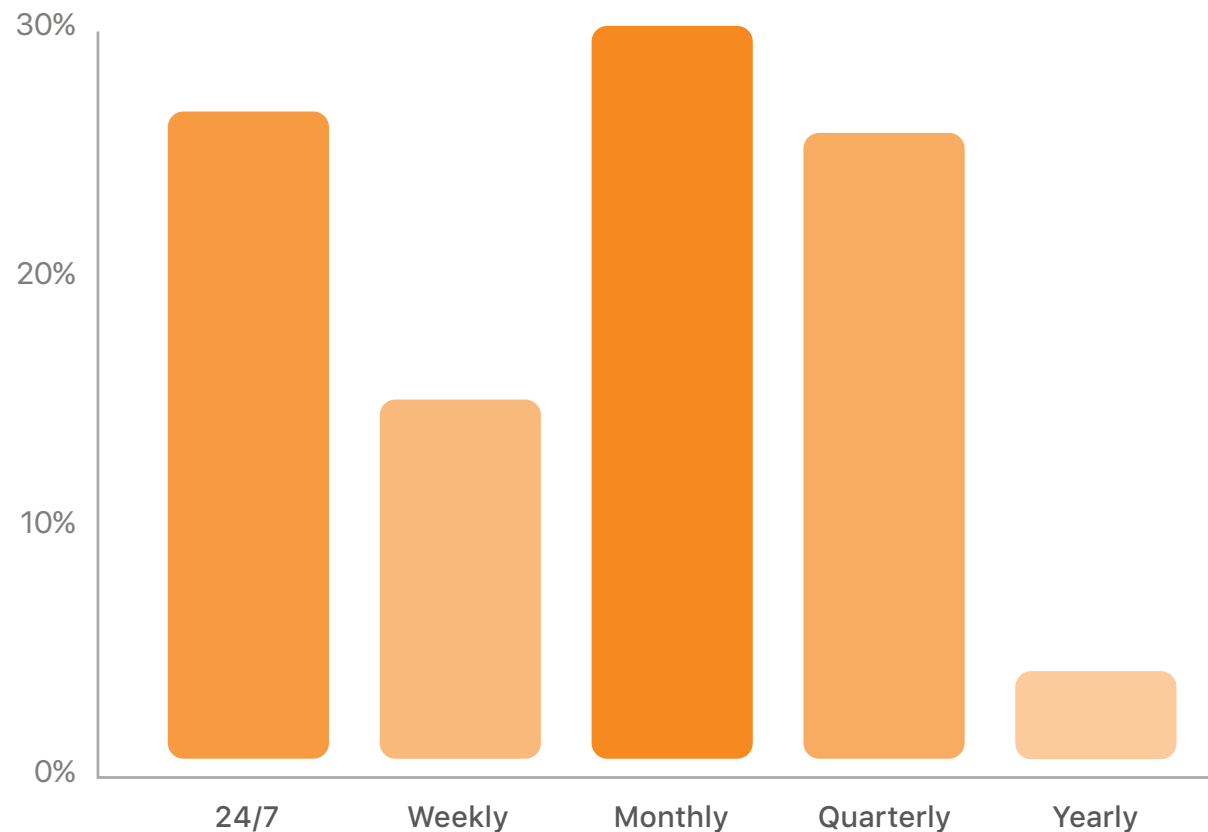
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Product Manager in healthcare industry at organization with 1000+ employees

## Sharing Cadence

How frequently are product teams sharing their roadmaps? This year we set out to identify how frequently product managers are sharing their product roadmaps. We discovered that there is not a one-size-fits-all cadence for sharing the product roadmap. The most common share cadence is monthly, followed closely by 24/7 and quarterly.

### How often do you share your roadmap?



“

**The most difficult part of managing the roadmap is having up-to-date roadmaps for all departments of the company.**

”

Product Manager in software industry at organization with between 26 and 50 employees

# Satisfaction with Communication Process

Overall, product managers' satisfaction with their communication process suggests room for improvement. On average, product managers rated their happiness with their communication process 2.92 out of 5.

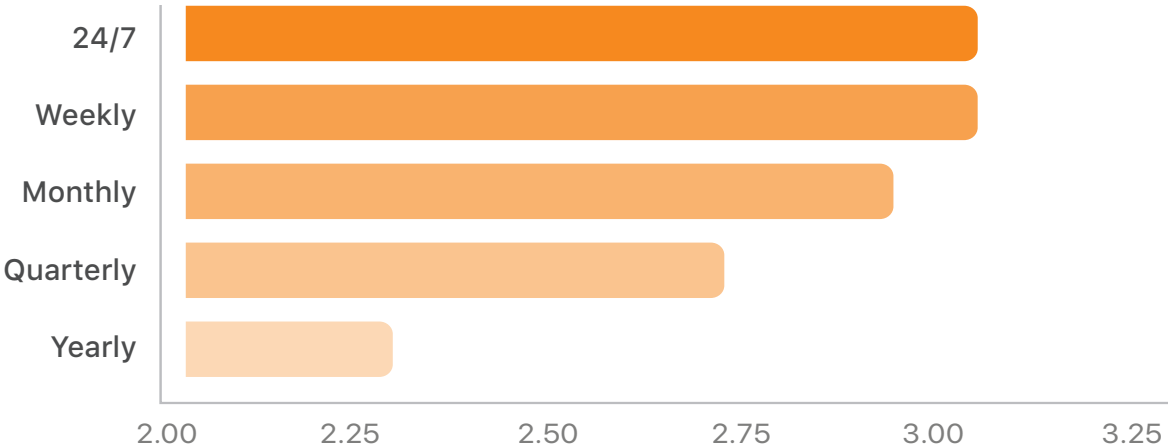
## Secrets to Success

We found a few trends amongst the most satisfied product managers that may highlight some secrets to success for communicating product strategy.

### Share your roadmap as frequently as possible.

Our survey found that those who share the roadmap 24/7 or on a weekly basis are the most satisfied with their communication process. The easiest way to increase your sharing cadence is to create a live, dynamic roadmap that is available around the clock.

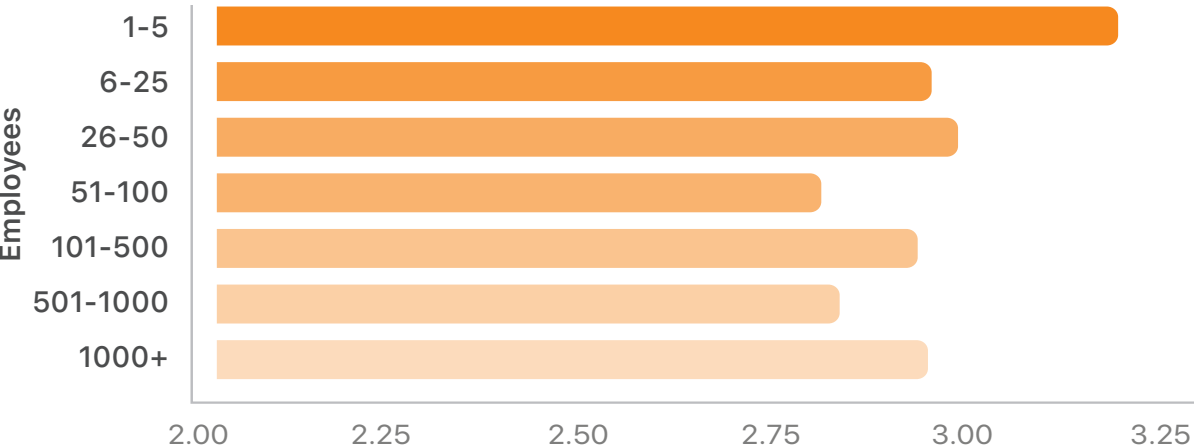
Satisfaction with communication process vs. share cadence



### Employ scalable communication practices.

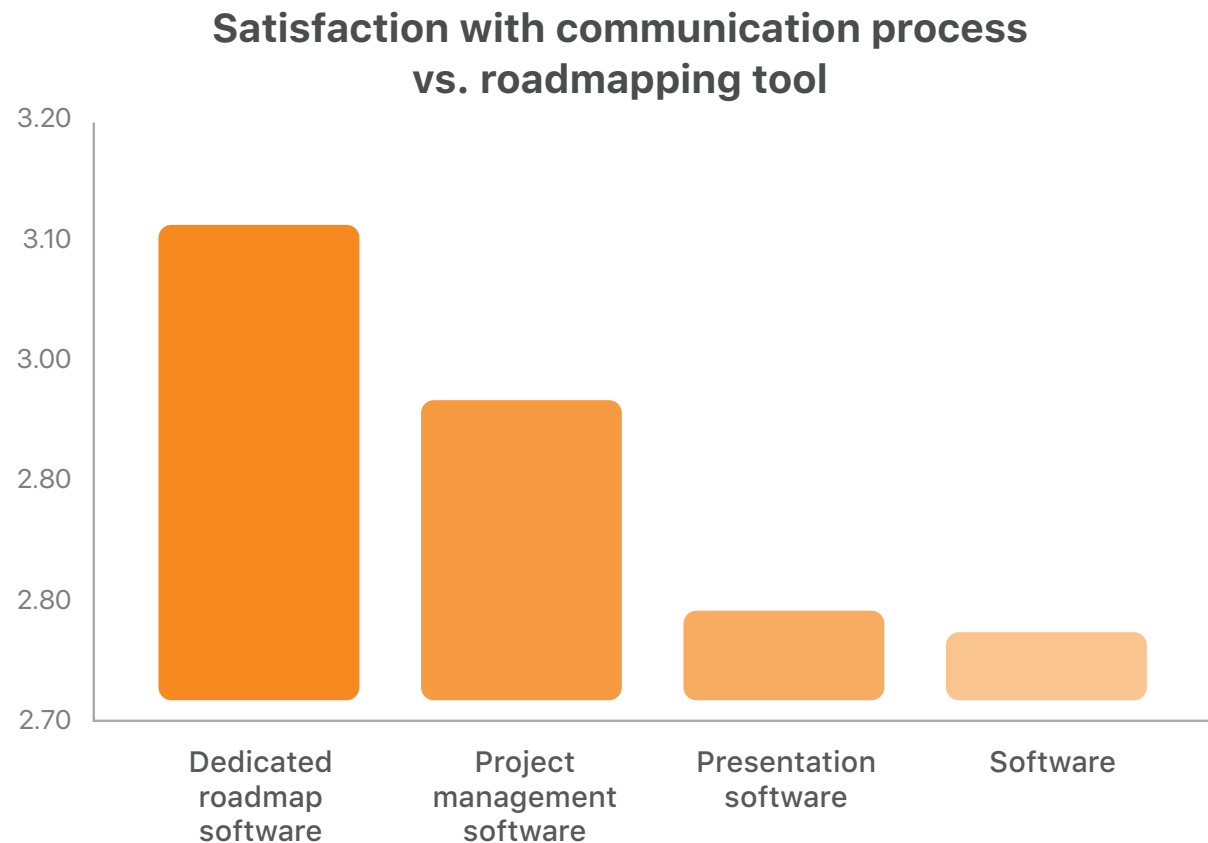
In general, smaller teams ranked their satisfaction with the communication process higher than larger teams. Companies with 1-5 employees averaged 3.2 out of 5, while mid-sized companies (51-100 employees) ranked their satisfaction the lowest, suggesting there are challenges scaling communication at these stages.

Satisfaction with communication process vs. company size



## Use dedicated roadmap software.

People who use dedicated roadmap software are by far the most satisfied with their communication process. (3.10/5) This is unsurprising, as dedicated roadmap software, such as ProductPlan, makes it easy for teams to update and share their roadmap. Creating custom views, filtering the roadmap, and having teams built-in to your roadmapping software facilitates intracompany communication of your product strategy.



“

**The most frustrating part of roadmap planning is constantly re-formatting for different audiences and constantly-changing corporate roadmap standards.**

”

Product Manager in software industry at organization with 1000+ employees

# 5

## Conclusion







# Conclusion

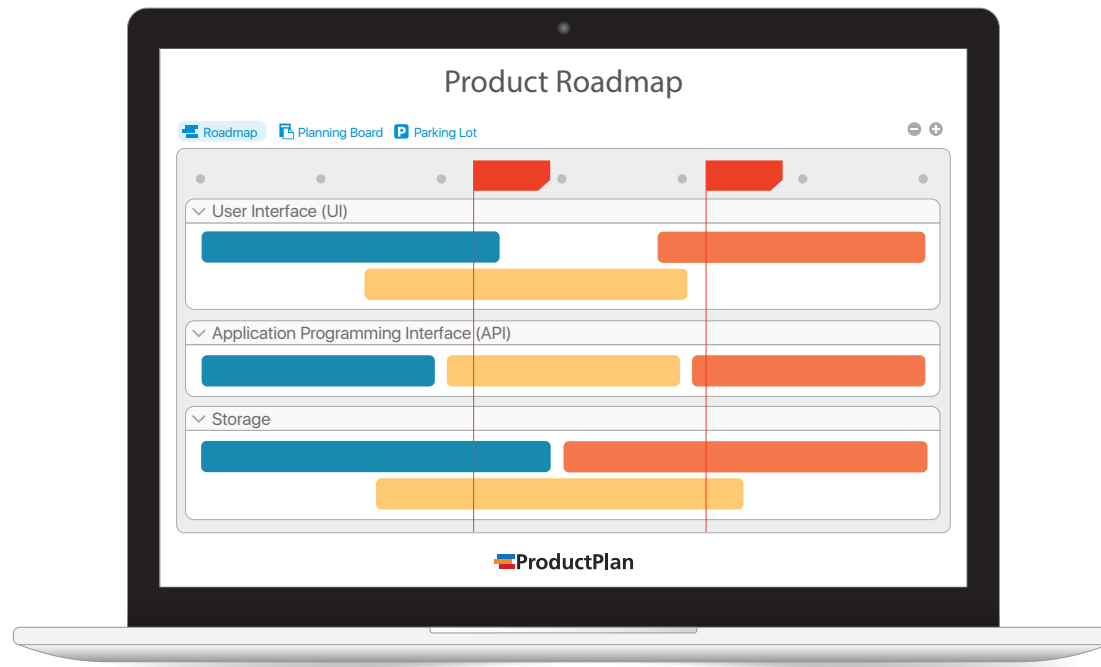
I co-founded ProductPlan in 2013 after spending a large portion of my career working in product management. At the time, spreadsheets and Post-It Notes were the status quo for roadmapping. I couldn't help but think there had to be a better way. So, my co-founder and I started ProductPlan to transform the way product teams plan, visualize, and communicate their product roadmaps.

I believe our industry has an important responsibility: **helping teams improve their processes**. Our annual Product Planning Report has followed the evolution in awareness, availability, and use of new tools available to product managers. Today, use of dedicated roadmapping software is at an all-time high.

I'm thrilled to see the increase in the use of dedicated tools for product planning. But, I think it's important for us to remember that there are countless opportunities for improvement. As we found in this year's report, current processes for planning, prioritizing, and communicating product plans still leave something to be desired. We've shared our suggestions for improving satisfaction with these processes but we don't want the conversation to stop here. By adding our report and findings to the growing pool of resources, best practices, and thought leadership in the product management space, we hope to encourage more discourse on the subject and explore more ways to improve.

**Jim Semick**

*Co-Founder and Chief Strategist*



**TRY IT FREE →**

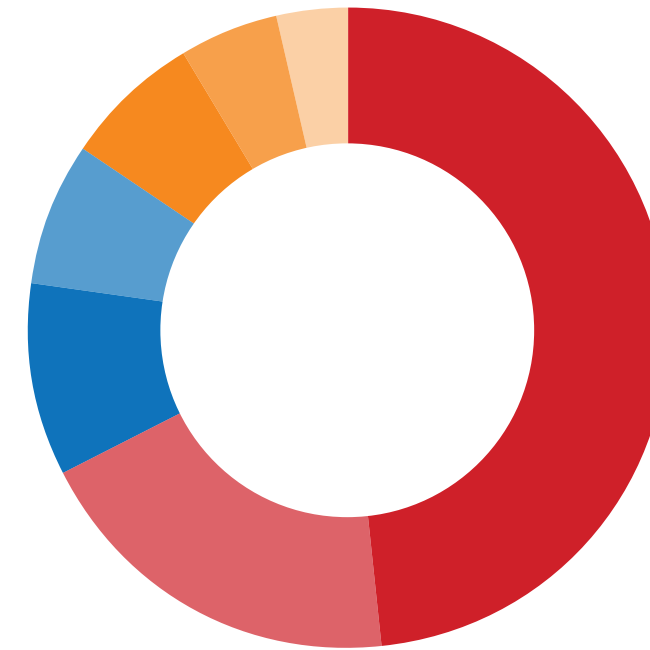
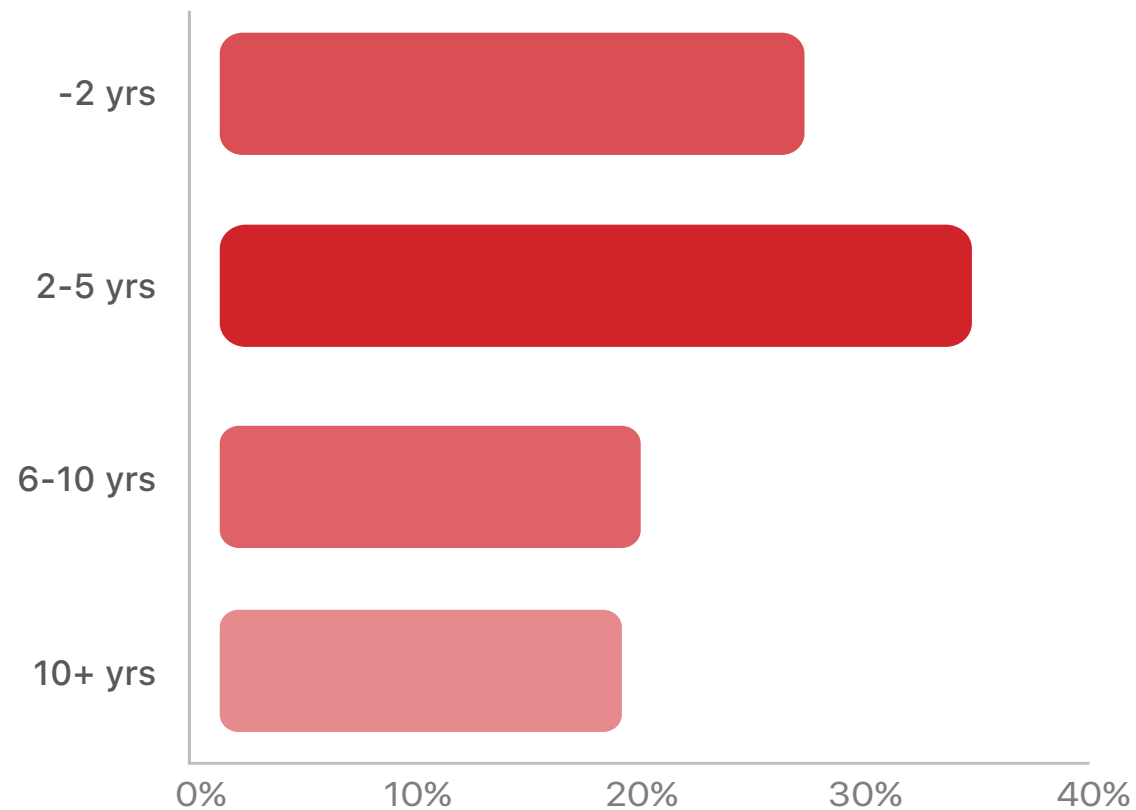
ProductPlan is the easiest way to plan, visualize, and communicate your product strategy. We believe roadmaps are essential to create organizational alignment and ship successful products. Our intuitive features for building, managing, and sharing roadmaps help teams across the globe convey the big picture in one place.

**Quickly plan  
and share your  
strategy to  
get alignment  
across  
your entire  
organization.**

# Report Methodology

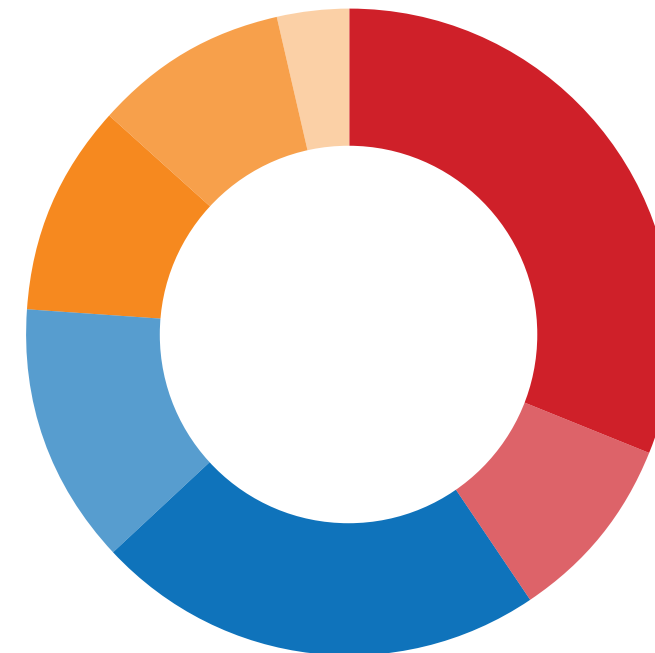
The 2019 Product Planning Survey ran through the month of October. It was sent out to ProductPlan users and shared across social media and other product management communities. We received more than 1,300 responses.

## Experience Level of Respondents



## Industry

Software	48.5%
Other	19.2%
Financial Serv.	9.7%
Healthcare	7.3%
Manufacturing	6.9%
Media & Ent.	5.0%
Nonprofit	3.5%



## Company Size

1000+	31.3%
501-1000	9.4%
101-500	22.4%
51-100	13.0%
26-50	10.6%
6-25	9.9%
1-5	3.4%