

“Great Product Owner is someone who is obsessed with the problem not the solution”



# WHO IS A PRODUCT OWNER?

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PlayScrum Short Book Series  
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# What is a Product?

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Products are useless unless they help humankind. Products help people do their job easily and willingly. Products make this world a better place to live.

# What is a Product?

## What is a Product really?

Yes, what's it really? I have seen two camps. One camp says consider everything as a Product and approach problem solving from that perspective. The other says consider everything a Service and serve users from that perspective. Well, both of them have good points.

## Why do we build products?

We build products to solve some problems or help people do their job better than they do today using alternatives. At the core of every product, there are people like you and me. We have jobs to do. When I say job, I don't mean the job that you work for making a living. I mean all that we do in life like dropping kids to school, staying fit, connecting with friends, etc. We can even call them activities.

## Product contexts

We also do these activities in specific contexts, a circumstance or setting or situation in which the product is used. If I'm tired and I want to watch a movie, I would prefer an easy way to do that. So I would appreciate a mobile app connected to my TV which learns about my preferences and automatically play a movie based on my mood and time.

However, if I'm out of shape and I'm trying to stay active and get back to my shape, I may not appreciate anything that makes things easy for me. I prefer getting up and moving around.

## Pains and Gains

People may find doing their jobs or activities bit painful in specific contexts and may need a solution to solve those problems. For example, when there is a tiny space to park between two cars and I'm not a great driver, I might need some automated guidance to park my car. That would relieve my pain of parking in such contexts. In some contexts, we may want to do a better job. For example, I would benefit a lot if there was a way for me to know what my daughter would learn in the upcoming week in the school so that I can prepare myself to have better post-

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school conversation that week. That's a gain that a product can create for me. These pains and gains give raise to needs.

## What are the needs?

When there are pains to be relieved in doing a job, or we want to do a better job, we require tools, help or service to that; those requirements are the needs.

At times it's difficult to differentiate between needs. Needs are needs. However, needs can be distinguished at times.

## Functional needs

For example, I do conduct product management workshops using the wall as a board. I need walls to be plain to stick white flip charts and draw as and when I need to make a point. I generally use a known 4-star hotel always. Recently due to schedule conflicts, I had to run around a few other hotels for the last couple of workshops. One of the hotels fulfilled my needs of sticking the charts and get my job of teaching done. That's my functional need.

## Social Needs

However, at times I felt that ambiance could have been better. I kept saying sorry for the ambiance throughout the workshop. Participants had no complaints. I wanted my organization to look better in front of our delegates. That particular need was more like what some people call as Social need. When we look for venues, we generally ask them about functional needs but not social needs.

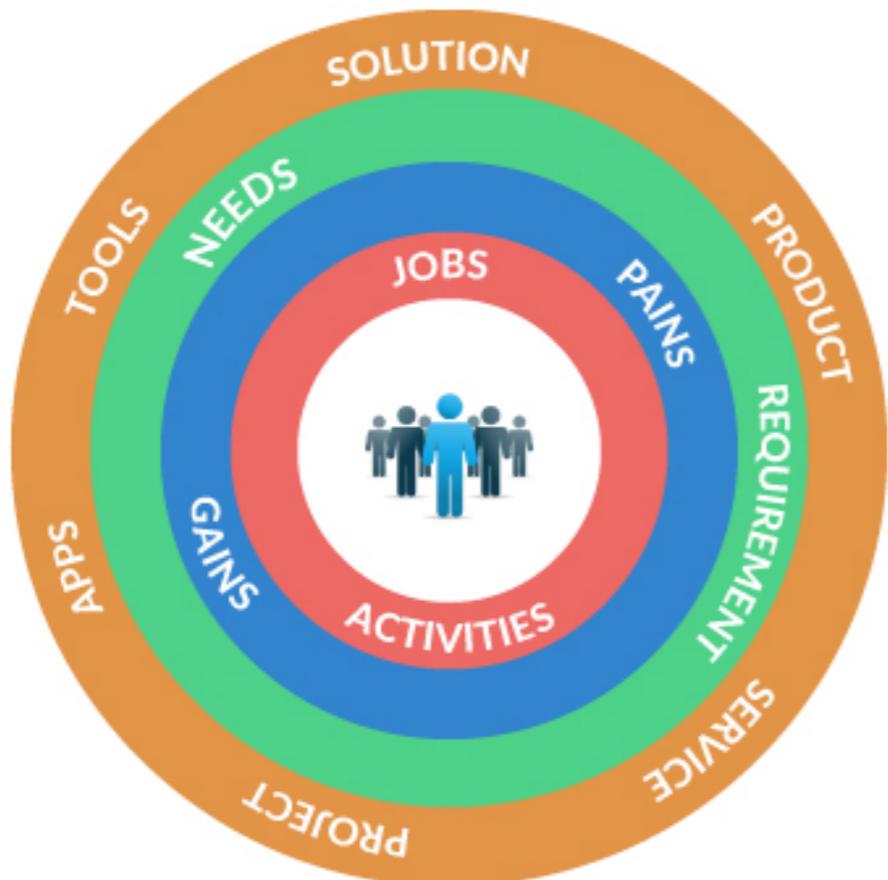
## Emotional needs

Next time onwards, I asked my team to take care of the ambiance as well. The next venue had the right walls, good food, and great ambiance. Participants were still happy. I felt I missed something. I missed the people I worked with at my regular venue. There was some connection that I was missing. I was still not satisfied with the beautiful and fully functional, and I wanted the old venue back. There goes my emotional need.

Well, can we differentiate needs as such? No, I could feel this way in a few contexts but not always. Like, when I travel, I don't look for a connection with people or ambiance. I don't feel a difference. I'm not saying we have to differentiate between needs, but I think understanding the context in which the people struggle can give insight on what products to build and differentiate from existing alternate solutions they use.

# So, what's a product again?

## WHAT IS A PRODUCT ?



Products are useless unless they help human kind. Products help people do their jobs easily and willingly. Products make this world a better place to live.

A product is a solution that helps people solve problems in the contexts they struggle to get a job done or create gains in the contexts where they long for doing a job better. Some call them products; some call them projects, some service, and some others tools. Well, for the users it doesn't matter what you call it as long as it fulfills their needs.

## Can we build products even if the needs are already fulfilled?

Well, people are getting their job done in one or the other way. The job of sending messages has evolved from using pigeons to letters to pagers to SMS to WhatsApp. If you are thinking of building a product, start looking around and see what kind of pains people face in doing their jobs or what they need to do their job better, you will undoubtedly find an unmet need.

# What is Product Management?

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Product Management is a profession of creatively solving users problem while strategically helping business succeed. A product manager is someone who is responsible for product management. Let's explore a bit in detail.

## Different sides of Product Management

When we develop products, there are four different types of people to consider: End Users, Buyers, Sponsors, and Developers.

### End Users:

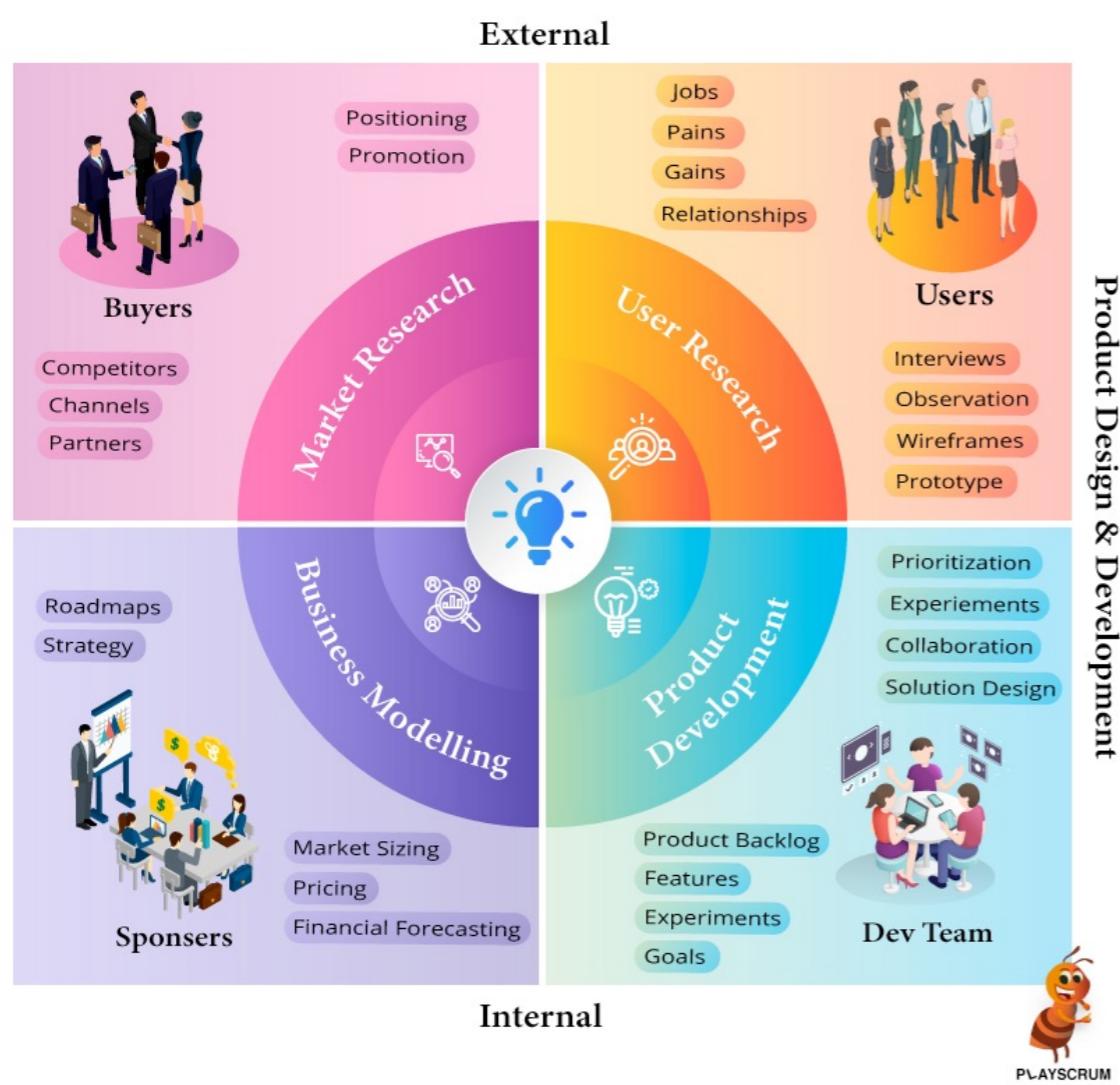
These are the people who use the product to get some job done. Sometimes people refer to them as Consumers. They are the main reasons why we build the product. When we try to an-

swer the question "why are we building this product?", they are the people who come to our mind. The businesses are built around solving end users problem. The users look for a solution to get their job done( the functional needs) and generally have a preference for a specific solution based on how they want to feel about using it(emotional needs).preference for a specific solution based on how they want to feel about using it(emotional needs).

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### User Research:

Many times users don't understand what they need(something that will help them get their job done) while they clearly express their wants(something that they perceive will help them get their job done). For example, I used to feel I need Apple Watch to motivate me to stay fit. Once I bought an Apple Watch, I realized that all I need visibility to my fitness and the work I'm doing towards staying fit, which could be easily achieved using any fitness tracker including Whiteboard. We need to uncover user needs either by interviewing them, observing them in their native environment or building a bare minimum solution and letting them use and collecting data.



This process of uncovering user needs called User Research, helps the product developers understand:

- What jobs or activities the users are doing in their life in the context of the product they are trying to build?
- What tools do they use today to get their job done?

- What pains do they have today in doing their job?
- What would enable them to do their job better and make their lives easy?
- What kind of relationship needs to be established with users to support them when needed?

## Buyers:

Buyers are the people who buy the product for their users to be productive. Sometimes people refer to them as Customers. The user and buyer could be the same person at times but not necessarily. For example, if I'm buying a phone for myself, I'm both the buyer and the user. However, if I'm buying a toy for my daughter, she is the user, and I'm the buyer. Users want the best possible tool to do their job, but buyers look at all viable alternatives and choose an economically appropriate one for them. While users look for fulfilling their functional needs and emotional needs, the buyers look to fulfill their economic and social needs.

# About The Author



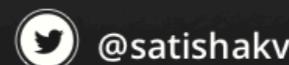
Certified Scrum Trainer

## Satisha Venkataramaiah

“A Product that doesn’t make this world a better place for everyone even by a bit is useless”

Satisha is a passionate Product Owner who spends most of his time building Products for Startups and Product Managers. He shares his experience of working 4 days week in his CSM, CSPO and Product Management Workshops.

*Know More : [www.leanpitch.com/trainer/Satisha Venkataramaiah](http://www.leanpitch.com/trainer/Satisha Venkataramaiah)*



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