

CAREER

What it takes to get into product management in Bangladesh

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Building a product requires more than just having up-to-date features and aesthetically pleasing interfaces. Successful products are not just functional but also create great experiences for their users. This is where product managers (PMs) come in. They facilitate the research, drive the design and execution, and see through the launch of the product, while balancing both the business and user side of things.

Maheen Neha, a PM at Optimizely, says, "Product managers brainstorm ideas and design new features. They collect and analyse user data and feedback to identify problems and pain points. They also collaborate and communicate with stakeholders across the company, like those in engineering, design, sales, operations, and marketing to ensure that the right problems are identified and prioritised."

A typical work day in product management is usually packed and includes the completion of several tasks. Rifat Bin Alam, a PM at Shikho, shared what his work day looks like.

"My day starts with meetings where I connect

for some time now, there is a growing popularity for the role in Bangladesh in recent years. This can be attributed to the proliferation of tech based startups, particularly software as a service (SaaS) companies.

"Tech companies with SaaS products for both B2B and B2C industries are leaning towards hiring good PMs. Companies like ShopUp, Pathao, bKash, Optimizely, and various startups are also keen on hiring PMs, and people can have a good headstart to gain product management experiences at these organisations," explained Maheen.

Although the job requires understanding the ins and outs of digital products, a Computer Science degree is not the only ticket to product management. People from non-technical backgrounds bring a diverse perspective and fare very well in the role. S. M. Zarib Zayed, associate product manager at Pathao, who studied Microbiology, spoke about his pathway.

"During my undergraduate studies, I developed a strong foundation in data analysis through Biostatistics and Bioinformatics courses, which led me to learn the R programming language," he says. "This exposure sparked my interest in data science and I embarked on a self-guided learning journey. Afterwards, my experience as a data analyst in three companies combined with my experience in project

alternative solutions".

The path to becoming a PM requires an interest in technology and an understanding of how software is made, as well as knowledge of the different software development methodologies like Agile, Lean, etc. Familiarity with different project management tools like Jira, Trello, or Asana, and data analytics tools like Google BigQuery and Tableau are also required.

PMs also craft product requirement documents, roadmaps, and more. To do this effectively, they must be able to tell a compelling story about their products,

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one that clearly identifies the customer's pain point and how the product solves it. Therefore, empathy for user needs, strategic thinking, and long-term planning are at vital for the role.

"The cornerstone to succeeding in this domain is mastering communication and critical thinking. My personal journey through debating competitions during my university years significantly nurtured these competencies. Being adaptable and willing to learn on the go are also valuable traits," elaborated Rifat.

For students interested in pursuing a career in this field, honing these skills in university years will definitely give you a headstart. Reading case studies and industry publications about different companies and digital products is a great way to build product sense and business acumen, and it will also help you understand the strategies behind successes. Additionally, watching mock interviews of top tech companies will give you a deep understanding of the skills employers are usually looking for.

Zarib added, "For non-engineering students, I recommend developing a strong foundation in data analysis and interpretation. Stay updated on industry trends and technological advancements, as these can impact your product decisions. Network with professionals in the field and seek guidance from experienced PMs. Consider obtaining relevant certifications or doing online courses to enhance your knowledge and credentials. Product management is a multidisciplinary field, and your unique background and skills can be a valuable asset in this role."

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ILLUSTRATION: ABIR HOSSAIN

with various team members to ensure alignment on priorities and tasks for the day," he says. "Since much of our development team works remotely, clear communication becomes paramount. It's common for me to hop onto multiple calls throughout the day to clarify project specifications and resolve any confusion. Balancing between strategising for future product enhancements and addressing immediate project needs keeps my day exciting and challenging."

Although PMs have existed in the global tech scene

management proved valuable when I transitioned into a role as an APM."

Rifat, who studied Mechanical Engineering, also recalls his journey.

"I began my career in the supply chain department of a multinational corporation," he says. "However, shifting roles led me to a specialist position at ShopUp, and then to a PM at REDX. Though my bachelor's degree may seem unrelated at a glance, it has provided me with invaluable skills that I apply daily in my role, like ability to break down problems methodically, comprehend complex systems, and brainstorm