

# SOmag

THE VOICE OF SOFTWARE QUALITY



## GETTING STARTED WITH USABILITY AND USER EXPERIENCE

*The managing director of ProContext in Cologne Germany Thomas Geis shows how to start this movement in your organisation*

## KEY EXPERIENCE INDICATORS

*As the founder and CEO of User Vision, one of the UK's leading independent UX and service design consultancies Chris Rourke focus on quality in user experiences*



## CREATING GREAT EXPERIENCES IN EVERYTHING YOU DO

*User experience designer, educator and author Jennifer Smith explains the process of creating a human-centered system*



## USABILITY FROM A PRODUCT MANAGER'S PERSPECTIVE

*HansBernd Kittlaus chairman of ISMPA® and an internationally renowned expert on Software Product Management (SPM)*

#10  
OCT 2021

# USABILITY FROM A PRODUCT MANAGER'S PERSPECTIVE

In the last 20 years, usability has turned into a key success factor for software-intensive products. Successful product companies like Apple have demonstrated the power of excellent user experience design (UX design). Today any software product manager needs to focus on the usability of her/his product, certainly for consumer products, but more and more also for enterprise products.

A software product manager is responsible for managing software with the objective to achieve sustainable success over the life cycle of a software product or software parts of software-intensive products, i.e. systems or services. This generally refers to economic success, which is ultimately reflected by the profits generated. Software product managers have the business responsibility across different versions, variants and associated services of a product. They have to manage a broad set of product-related activities as shown in the ISPMA® SPM Framework (Figure 1). They have to act proactively and be the responsible and engaged driver of their products. It has become quite obvious that good usability has a direct impact on product success. Purdue University's

Kyungdoh Kim e.a. proved this for cell phones in 2012 already ([Kim, Proctor & Salvendy 2012]).

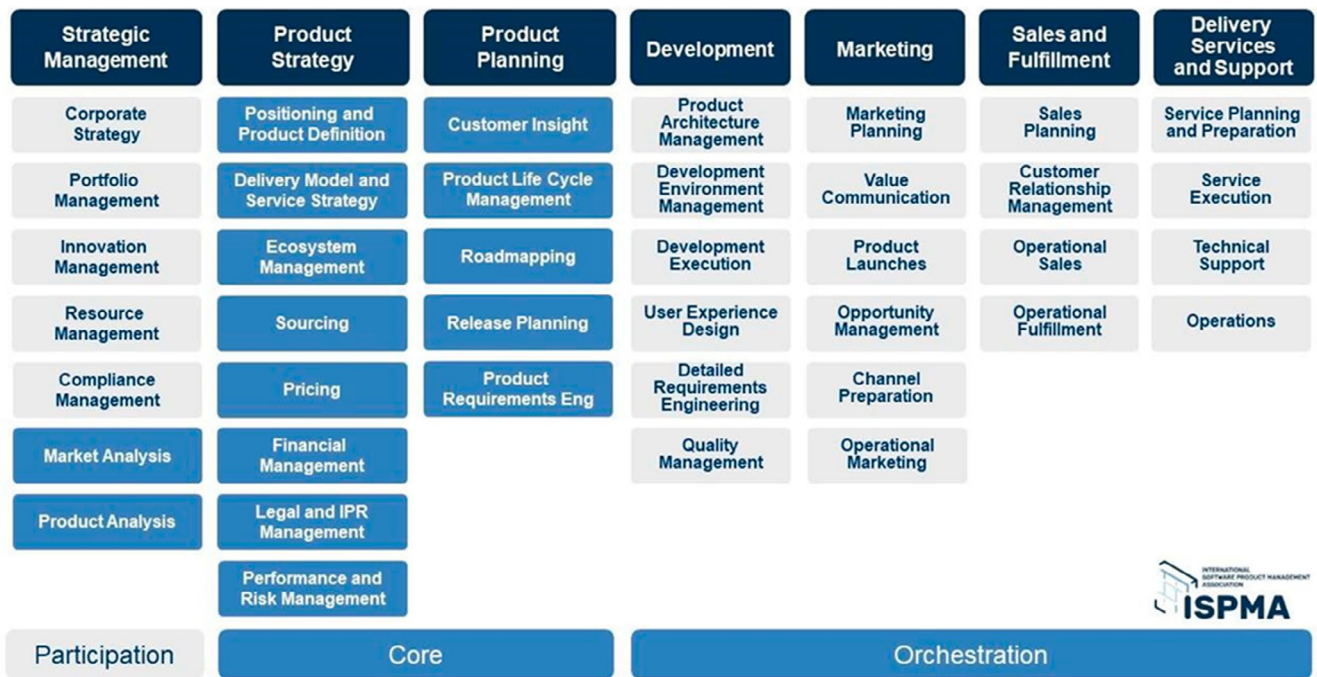
The SPM framework provides a holistic view on the activities of software product management. It is structured horizontally (columns) based on the functional areas of a software organization. There is an additional overlay structure with "Core SPM", "Participation" and "Orchestration". Activities under Orchestration are under the responsibility of the respective functions. However, the activity of Orchestration itself is a core responsibility of SPM.

UX Design is functionally placed in the Development column which does not necessarily mean that it needs to be

part of a software development unit. Often UX Design is organized as a shared-resource department that works on products that belong to different product units. Some companies focus more on the requirements perspective and put UX Design close to Product Management, some focus on the implementation aspect and keep it closer to Development. In any case, tight cooperation of UX Design and Product Management must be ensured.

"User Experience (UX) design can be a key factor for differentiation and competitive strength. It addresses every aspect of the users' interactions with a software product or component with the purpose of shaping the user's behaviors, attitudes, and emotions about





Activity under SPM responsibility    Activity under other function's responsibility

Figure 1: ISPMA® SPM Framework V.2.0

ISPMA reference architecture v.2

that product or component.” It is much broader than just usability, as it is “... covering or interacting with disciplines like graphic design, information architecture, Human-Computer-Interface (HCI) design, interaction design and usability engineering.” (ISPMA® FL (2021))

M. Cagan (2013) distinguishes four design-related activities that are critical to the success of software products: interaction design, visual design, rapid prototyping and usability testing. These four roles need to “... work closely with the (software) product manager to discover the blend of requirements and design that meet the needs of the user.” (M. Cagan (2013)).

“Due to the objectives of UX Design, there is a significant overlap with the product manager role, especially in the following areas:

- Developing a deep understanding of customers’ real needs
- Understanding intended product usage
- Developing product scope and product definition
- Eliciting high-level product requirements

In these areas, software product managers may find that UX designers are

powerful allies that help them define a product that serves customers and users even better - or they might be in stark conflict, quarreling over decisions and accountabilities.” (ISPMA® EL (2021))

Recently, there have been attempts to combine the roles of product manager and UX Designer into one. While this may be conceptually attractive, we consider it as wishful thinking since it is difficult enough to be an excellent UX designer or an excellent product manager. How unlikely is it to find that super(wo)man who manages to be excellent in both?

“A software product manager is well advised to canalize the creativity of UX designers into the refinement of early product concepts and utilize their experimentation skills to get evidence that the product concept works for the intended users. If the UX designers discover significant problems in user acceptance and product effectiveness, the product manager may have to pivot the product concept.” (H.-B. Kittlaus & S. Fricker (2017)).

The better the cooperation between Product Management and UX Design works, the higher the chances for product success.



### Hans-Bernd Kittlaus

is an internationally renowned expert on SPM and a highly experienced SPM trainer and consultant. He has been working for software organizations of all sizes, and runs his own company InnoTivum ([www.innotivum.com](http://www.innotivum.com)). Before he was head of SPM and development units of IBM. He is the chairman of ISPMA®, and has published numerous articles and books, the latest being “Software Product Management” (see Literature).

