Career Switch: UX to Product Management

5月 25, 2023

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This post is the first in a series we're calling "Career Switch," in which we spotlight Cerence team members who have made the switch from one team or function to another to fuel their professional and personal growth. Enjoy!

I'm writing this on a Friday after a long, exceptionally demanding work week with lots of big decisions. As I'm reflecting, I realize it's been almost two years since my move from the user experience (UX) team to product management.

I suspect this impression might evolve the longer I'm in product management, but currently, my advice for prospective product managers who might want to make the switch would be this: If you are a people person with good organizational skills, lots of creativity, and a good vision for the long-term impacts of your day-to-day decisions, and if you're not afraid of multitasking…this is the job for you.

In your first years in product management, I can enthusiastically say that you will learn something new every day. This can be the case for any role and position, sure, but this one especially (more than any other role in my career) pushed me to learn – and learn fast – to keep up. Coming from an academic research background in Media and Information, I had skills like communication, data-supported decision making, and abstract thinking, but I had no background in software, the very core of Cerence. Concepts and terms such as cloud and embedded, APIs and SDKs that were once beyond my comprehension are things I now work with every day. I now have the benefit of understanding how the features I was proposing based on my user research two years ago come to life and improve the in-car experience. Every day, I grow more fascinated by how much can be achieved by those little snippets called code.

One of my big career goals was to break out of my shell and expand my network within Cerence beyond my admittedly terrific UX colleagues. I wanted to work with Sales and Business Development, and most importantly R&D, who speak an entirely different language than a UXer. I wanted to interact with as many coworkers of different disciplines as possible to learn all sides of this business. Product management gives exactly that… It enables you to understand the business as a whole.

It's not all sunshine and rainbows, of course. Product management is challenging; it means more items on your daily to-do list, many more meetings, sometimes conflicts and disagreements, understanding competitors and customers, and overall more pressure as one in this field has to make decisions that have impact not just on others' workloads, but also on the revenue stream of the organization. It is more freedom in steering the product, and much more responsibility.

One thing I want to be sure to highlight is the importance of UX, as no matter how advanced the technology you're developing, if it doesn't resonate with the user – if it is not usable and valuable to the end-customer – it is not going to succeed. That's why I think product management by those with a UX mindset, those who place user experience at the very core of their product, is a recipe for success.

UX research is more independent, a little more individual at times. If you're lucky and in a good team like I was, you get to come up with your own research questions and study design, seek answers through users' feedback, analyze this feedback, and report meaningful outcomes that will eventually translate into a successful product. It also means you get to work on your own schedule, and of course, that of your participant pool. Conversely, product management in a global company means having to start your days much earlier, sometimes taking meetings at night, which can mean less sleep and irregular hours. A big part of my R&D team, which is wonderfully productive and efficient, is in Pune, India, while I am in the US. My first meeting of the day, which is around 7 am, is one of their last meetings, so everyone compromises a little. But what is great is the ability to make it work across time zones and feel that team spirit across thousands of miles. Product management with such a team brings little joys like waking up to a brand-new release with the exciting new features I've been looking forward to seeing in action. It brings the joy of seeing the product you shaped reaching the hands of real users in their vehicles.

Working across different teams, shuffling work, learning how to prioritize tasks, having to familiarize with a different new thing every day, from contract building to agile processes to business models, has undoubtedly helped me grow as an individual, too. I've had to manage my time better, to learn to step out of my comfort zone, and have been able to experience the "real" tech world. I sense that these skills have translated into how I handle things in my personal life, too – an unintended yet wonderful benefit, I'd say.

To best summarize the role of product management, I'll borrow the words of one of my fellow Cerence product managers: It is one of the more stressful roles, yes, but in the end, "there is never a boring moment."

[DK](#)

Check out this video to hear more from Duygu!

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