

Help! My Engineers Don't Care About Our Users or Our Business – why this happens & how to fix it

5 MIN · YOUTUBE · <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BI6RV03FUB4&list=PLZFyJRxoAG05A81PSDCW7EMyMoSJ1cLAI&index=13>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bigRVo3fUb4&list=PLzfYJRxoAG05A81psDcw7emyMoSJ1cLAI&index=13>

SUMMARY

The discussion focuses on the cultural dynamics between Product Managers (PMs) and engineers, particularly in PM-dominated environments where precision and detail in product requirements are emphasized. The speaker shares personal experiences from Yahoo, highlighting the challenges of such cultures and advocating for a shift towards a PM-guided approach that fosters collaboration and flexibility.

- *PM-dominated cultures often prioritize strict adherence to detailed Product Requirement Documents (PRDs).*
- *Engineers may feel justified in blaming PMs for market failures if they strictly follow PRDs without considering user experience.*
- *A shift from PM-dominated to PM-guided cultures can reduce friction and improve product outcomes.*
- *Encouraging engineers to participate in the PRD writing process can foster empathy and collaboration.*
- *Establishing a PM-guided culture involves recognizing the ambiguity in product development and adapting to it incrementally.*
- *The speaker suggests using empathy-building tactics, such as role-swapping, to enhance understanding between PMs and engineers.*
- *Long-term cultural change is necessary for sustainable improvement in product development processes.*

[Music] in what types of cultures are Engineers typically looking for a lot of precision and a lot of details like oh everything needs to be spelled out in the PRD I'll tell you I had worked at an extreme version of this culture at Yahoo where I was a newb PM there in 2006 and so I didn't know what PM was and what the right way to PM was so I let my peers including my engineering counterparts

guide me what I found intuitively a bit odd in the part of yah who I was in it was common for engineering managers to basically say that if it's not in the PRD it's not going to get built and I used to be an engineer before so that's not how I operated so I would say even if that makes sense there's so many detail level decisions that every engineer makes as part of building a product experience you can't expect me

as a PM to spell out every single detail because at some point it's indistinguishable from code because in some ways the code is the spec for the product it's just a very detailed executable spec of the product so where do we draw the line and unabashedly the engineers that I worked with not all of them but many of them said yeah if it's not in the PRD it's not going to build don't blame us so that's one example of

precision another example of precision is when it comes to scheduling an estimation when does this happen this usually happens in PM dominated cultures and Yahoo was PM dominated at the time already so what happens in PM dominated cultures is the engineers and engineering managers are basically evaluated on did you ship on time or as committed and did you ship at approximately the quality level that is expected that's it they're not evaluated on factors like is it a good product to

use is it a good experience for customers is it solving actual problems for customers in the way we expect is it having any business impact in PM dominated cultures engineers and Engineering managers rightly so basically say well that's the job of the PM our job is to build and this is literally something I heard even engineering directors and VPS say if it doesn't work in the market don't blame us because we built what the PMS asked

us to build first you have to understand most likely the reason this is happening is because it's a PM dominated culture so now if you are a leader or even if you're an individual contributor pm and you want to fix this within your organization I can give you some tactics but the tactics are not going to work or the short-term stuff is only going to work on the shortterm the right long-term change to make which I have

made multiple times when I've encountered the situation where I inherited an org which is PM dominant or dominated is to nudge it over time to PM guided within my team remember within my inner world within that world create an environment where it's actually PM guided and that means more tension between pm and Engineering on what to build that means more push back on the features that I want to build but it's actually good when you do that most of

this problem will disappear because then Engineers will say of course we understand that you can't specify all the details on day one and we have to build the PRD incrementally we have to build the spec incrementally we have to build out the marks incrementally they'll also say of course we understand that this is an ambiguous initiative so we cannot predict this well in advance and exactly the date when we're going to launch that is the main thing I will

suggest nudge your team from being PM dominated to PM guided now a couple of tactics to use when you get this kind of request for Deion what I want you to do is to basically convey to the engineer or the engineering manager that look it is going to be hard to have this degree of precision and so what I want to ask you is what is driving this request for extremely high degree of precision this will require the engineering manager

Tech lead or senior engineer have empathy with you and the way to build empathy this is actually a fabulous technique from the hard thing about hard things the book by Ben Horowitz basically he made I think the VP of operations and the VP of marketing were constantly fighting switch jobs literally like one took the other person's job they swapped and then pretty much all the conflict was gone in a few months time why because empathy right so in this case the tactic and

this is like a master tactic to employ is essentially to say I'm not quite sure from my past experiences how to create such a detailed spec that you have Clarity on everything and that you can precisely determine dates and

scope and everything else that you want to determine so can I ask you to just this one time partner with me to write the PRD I'm glad that you're the engineering manager for this team but you could be a PM I wouldn't even mind

if you actually took ownership and lead of doing this this is an advanced tactic you should only do it if you have the communication skills and The credibility you shouldn't do it on a new team where you haven't yet established credibility but assuming you established some cred you've been on the team for 6 months and the engineering manager thinks you are competent try this technique all your problems will be solved so this is a tactic you can try right away and it's

actually along the lines of moving your team to being a PM guided culture that is actually the solution what I just described with this one tactic is more like a Band-Aid you can apply and it'll work it'll heal the wound but the main thing is just move your organization to PM guided culture and you won't have these problems a [Music]