

A Masterclass on Execution: What Skills Make Product Managers OK, Very Good, and Great at Execution

9 MIN · YOUTUBE · [HTTPS://WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/WATCH?V=FMATLE4BNU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fMyATLE4BNU)
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SUMMARY

The discussion emphasizes the importance of execution for product managers, outlining a framework that categorizes execution into three levels: basic, very good, and great. It highlights that while execution is a fundamental skill, it can be developed through practice and a focus on structured communication, contextual expertise, and creativity.

- Execution is essential for product managers and is a prerequisite for competitive leadership roles.*
- The framework for execution consists of three levels: basic (project management, process orientation, communication), very good (problem-solving, contextual expertise, goal-setting), and great (creativity, foresight, persuasion).*
- Structured communication is crucial; product managers should be able to express ideas clearly in various forms (verbal, written, public speaking).*
- Contextual expertise involves understanding organizational dynamics, decision-making processes, and the strengths of team members.*
- Creativity is necessary for overcoming obstacles in product development, requiring innovative solutions beyond logical approaches.*
- Resilience and discipline are key traits that support execution at all levels.*
- Mastery of execution allows flexibility in processes, enabling effective operation regardless of specific methodologies like Agile.*
- Thoughtfulness and craftsmanship in execution lead to impactful outcomes beyond mere organizational alignment.*

[Music] the way I think about execution is there are levels at which you can execute there is a basic level at which I would expect every product manager to be able to execute then what does really good execution look like so that's the next level after basic and then the last one is what is great execution over time I think every product manager regardless of their core strengths needs to work towards getting to great execution and

it's certainly a prerequisite for most competitive product leadership role to be really great at execution the last thing I'll say before I move to the framework itself is it is always a good idea for you as a product manager to focus on getting better at execution maybe your strength is not execution maybe it's something else but execution is just such a core job of the PM that you will always benefit your team your product your customers and your own

career if you focus on getting much better at execution and frankly it is also the easiest of the skills to acquire there are certain product skills that are high leverage and that will differentiate you a lot that are much harder to acquire than execution is now this is not to say execution is easy to get good at it is not the point is it is among the easiest skills of all the skills that you could think about as a

product leader particularly so the framework is simple at the basic level if you want to get good at execution you need project management process orientation and communication so those are the basics of execution and of this execution framework how do you get good at these things it's practice and I think a lot of people just get good at these things through just on the job experience I think the most important one of these three although each is

quite important the structure communication if you want to again establish the basics you need to be able to express what is going on in a very structured way you need to be able to express what needs to happen in a very structured way as well so in that sense that is very very vital for you to think about and focus on how do you get good at structured communication again this is where the oh this is one of the

easier skills to acquire Point comes in which is you can get quite good at structured communication just by observing what other people do there are some people who either were naturally good at structured communication or they made themselves really good at it just watch what they do and I bet you will learn a lot about structured communication last note about communication before moving to the next level which is the very good execution level is that you will need to get good

at structured Communication in all forms of communication so verbal for sure but also written and public speaking which is a little separate from verbal which may happen in meetings and whatnot you'll just have to get good at all of those and also reading and listening is another key part of it here's an important point and this relates to the antithesis principle which is you should try your best to get good at structured communication but you should make

yourself to be a person that can extract structure even from unstructured communication so make yourself good at structured communication but don't expect that everybody else you work with is going to be great at structured communication you need to turn yourself into the kind of person who can extract structure from what seems like fairly unstructured communication okay so those are the basics then to get good at uh execution very good at it you need to develop problem solving skills

contextual expertise and goal setting skills among these three the one I'll spend a little bit of time on is contextual expertise because it's not a very common term and what I mean by contextual expertise is you need to become an expert in how things work in your organizational context so how does this organization make decisions what is the documented approach and what is the real approach they use sometimes there's differences between what is documented what is the real approach so you cannot

get good at execution if you keep going through the documented approach and keep telling people people well

but this is what's documented you need to understand what is actually being used in practice you can make changes and improvements to What's Done in practice but you need to understand that first that's one example of what I mean by contextual expertise another example of contextual expertise is to understand people the people you work with how do they operate what are

their strength what resonates with them what resonates with Alice versus what resonates with Bob you really need to deeply understand that in order to be good at execution another thing you need to understand again it's all part of contextual expertise is what is your company trying to do do you understand that broader context because it's really important to get to this very good level that you understand that because then you'll be able to use that information

to influence others you'll be able to use that information to craft better plans so that's what I mean by contextual expertise it's highly highly highly important one tangent I will uh go on is sometimes when companies have a lot of churn within their Workforce people are leaving and new people joining all the time is that contextual expertise gets lost you have new people coming in who are trying to figure out oh how does all of this work

and therefore then execution suffers because not enough people have this contextual expertise okay so that's the really good level to get to the Great levels regards to execution the core things are creativity foresight and persuasion now each of these creativity foresight and persuasion Builds on top of the other skills let's take problem solving you can solve problems in a very analytical and structured Manner and that's great that will get you to really good execution but it will not get you

to gr execution to get to Great execution you need to practice creative execution we run into problems all the time when building a product we had conceived something we had agreed on something some roadblock came out oh the operating system doesn't support this thing that we wanted to do or oh we got some input from a partner that we are not allowed to do this thing we thought we wanted to do what should we do these

kinds of problems come up all the time during execution it is important for us to not just look at the space of solutions that are logical and rational and obvious but to also get quite creative what is creative depends on the context but creative execution is really important for you to be able to get great at it and that's a consistent quality I've seen in many people uh for those of you who have read my uh writing

on high agency you know that creative execution is a very core part of high agency as well there are many traits for good execution and great execution but the one trait that applies at all these levels is resilience you absolutely need to be a res resilient disciplined person to get good at execution you can apply that resilience at each of these levels once again the framework is Basics really good and great and then each of

these has a certain set of component skills or traits uh that you need to focus on what I wanted to share is how you personally can sort of think about augmenting your skills developing your skills uh and building traits that will make you really great at execution once you're really great at execution the process like do you follow agile this or agile that it is immaterial now it does matter in the sense that oh your team

will probably work better with one process or the other but the point is once you get good at these component skills you will be able to operate at your best regardless of the detailed process used there are a lot of steps between a plan okrs a kickoff of a project and actual success EX execution is merely or nothing but a translation of those steps into action that's cohesive that's intentional it's really important to remember sometimes when

people talk about execution they talk about oh what's the process who are the stakeholders and are we all aligned and where's the Matrix all of that is good stuff and it's vital for good execution but to get to Great execution you have to remember that there is a lot more than just organization you have to be thoughtful at each step of the way you have to apply craftsmanship and you have to apply rigorous thinking to really

make something that is great and has a profound impact [Music]