



Where are Product Managers Spending Their *Time*?

What



In early 2021, we conducted an online survey of product managers across geographies, product types, and industries to gauge how product managers are spending their time. Which parties are they interacting with the most? Which tasks are they most often undertaking?

Why



Through our twenty years of working with product managers around the world, we've seen one key issue troubling organizations – product managers being pulled into tasks that take them away from many of customer-centered, strategic, long-term activities that they should be prioritizing. This research sought to disprove or bolster the hypothesis that product managers generally are not spending enough time with customers and on strategic tasks.

Demographics of Survey Participants

85

TOTAL PARTICIPANTS

20+

INDUSTRIES



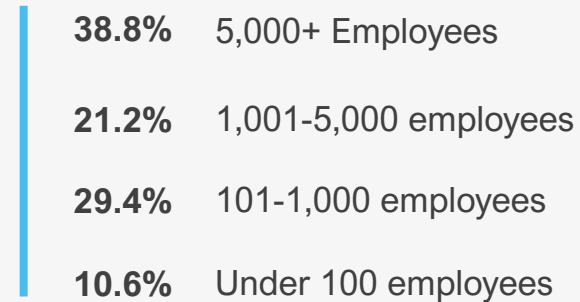
13

COUNTRIES REPRESENTED

Job Level



Size of Company



Thinking of your work, what percentage of your time is spent with the following parties?

Product Managers spend an average of 68% of their time with internal stakeholders such as engineering, marketing, sales, and operations; 18% of their time with customers; and 14% of their time with external partners, such as vendors of product parts/components or third-party researchers.

Internal Stakeholders / Cross-Functional Partners

68.0%

External Partners / Vendors

14%

Customers

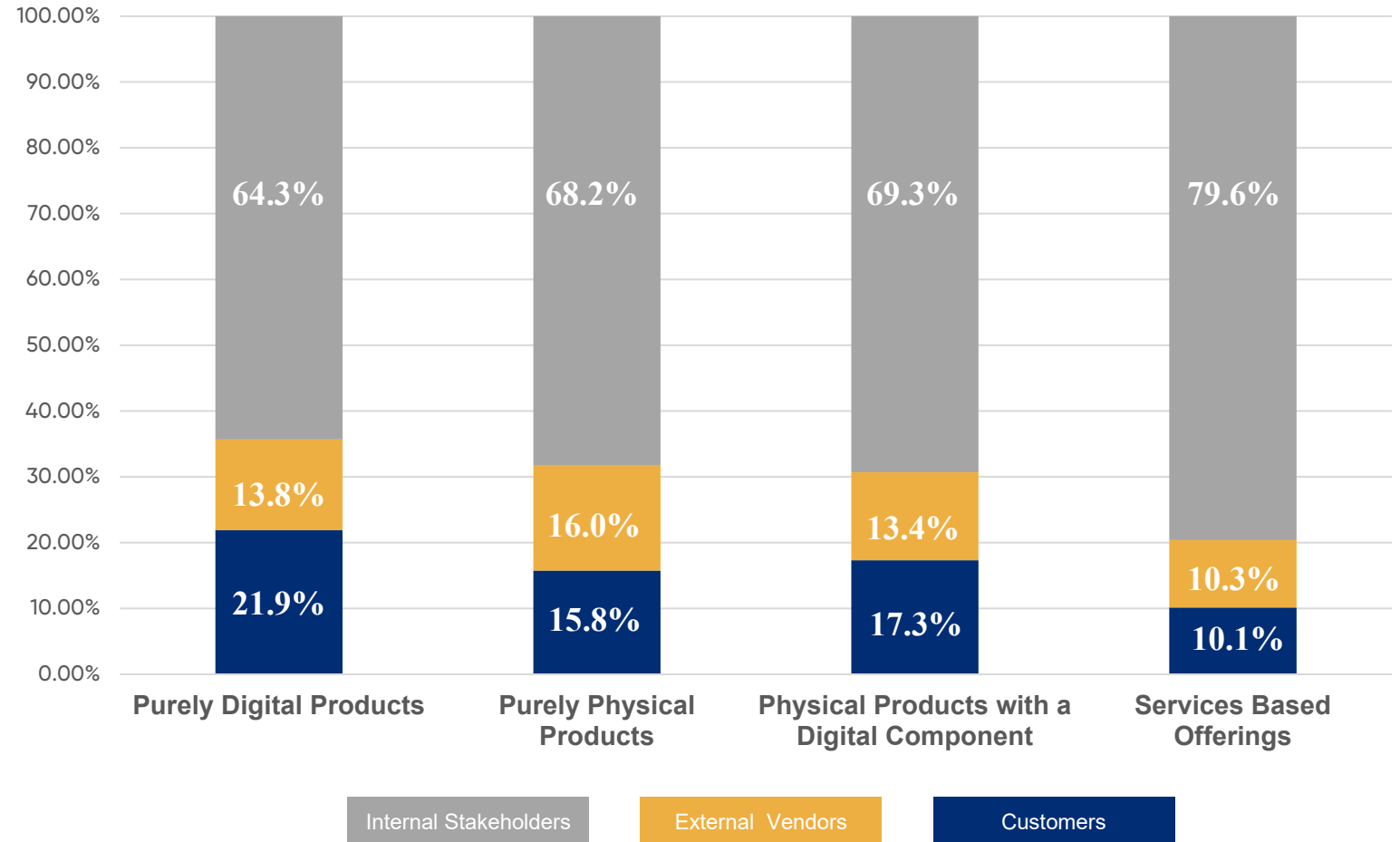
18%

Depending on which type of product a Product Manager owns, their time spent with important parties may vary.

Product managers who work on purely software / digital products spend an average of 21.9% of their time with customers. Whereas product managers for purely physical goods spend only 15.8% of their time with customers.

Those who own product with both physical and digital components spend 17.3% of their time with customers.

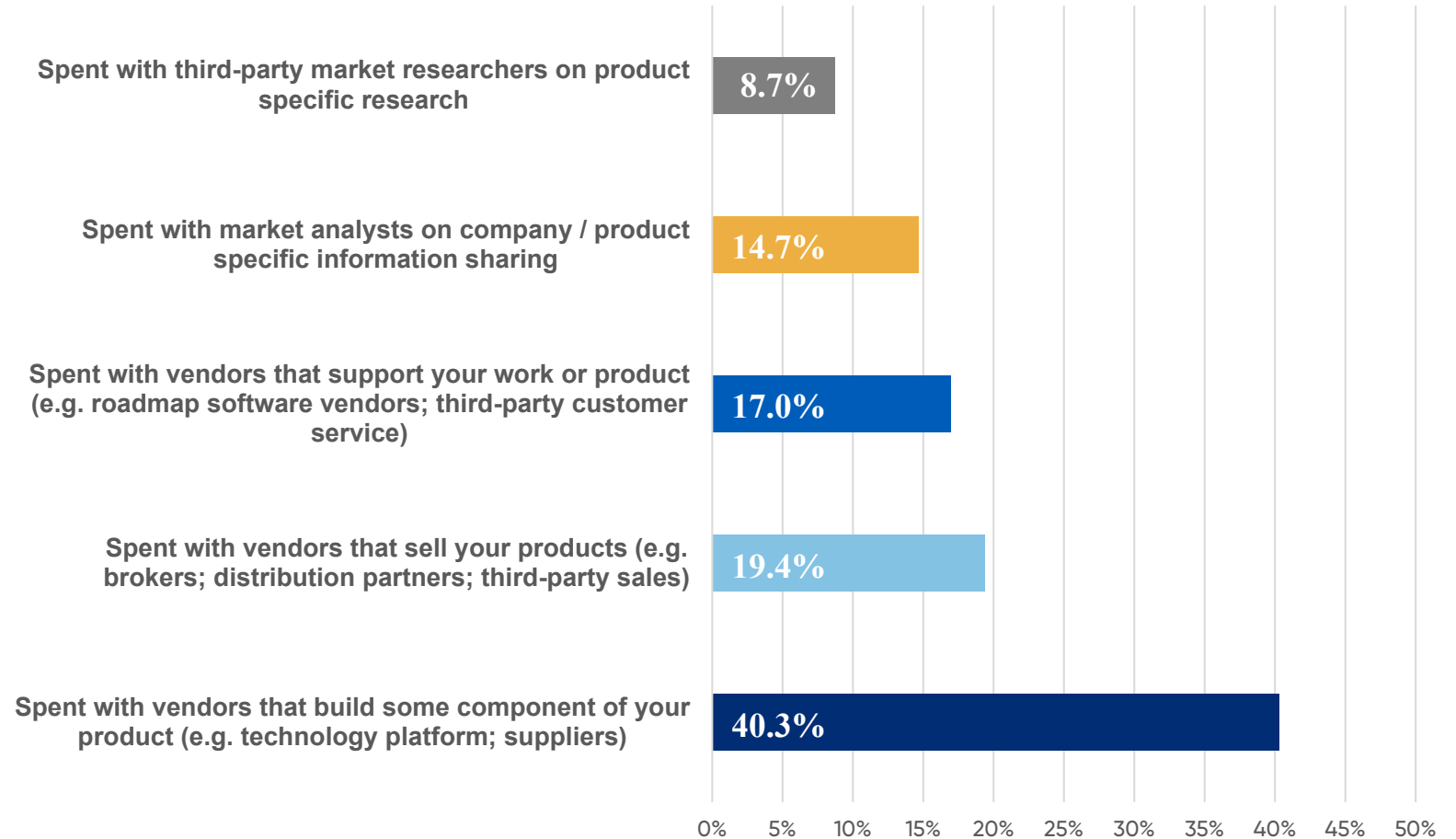
Product managers on services-based offerings spend the least amount of time with customers – on average 10.1% of their time.



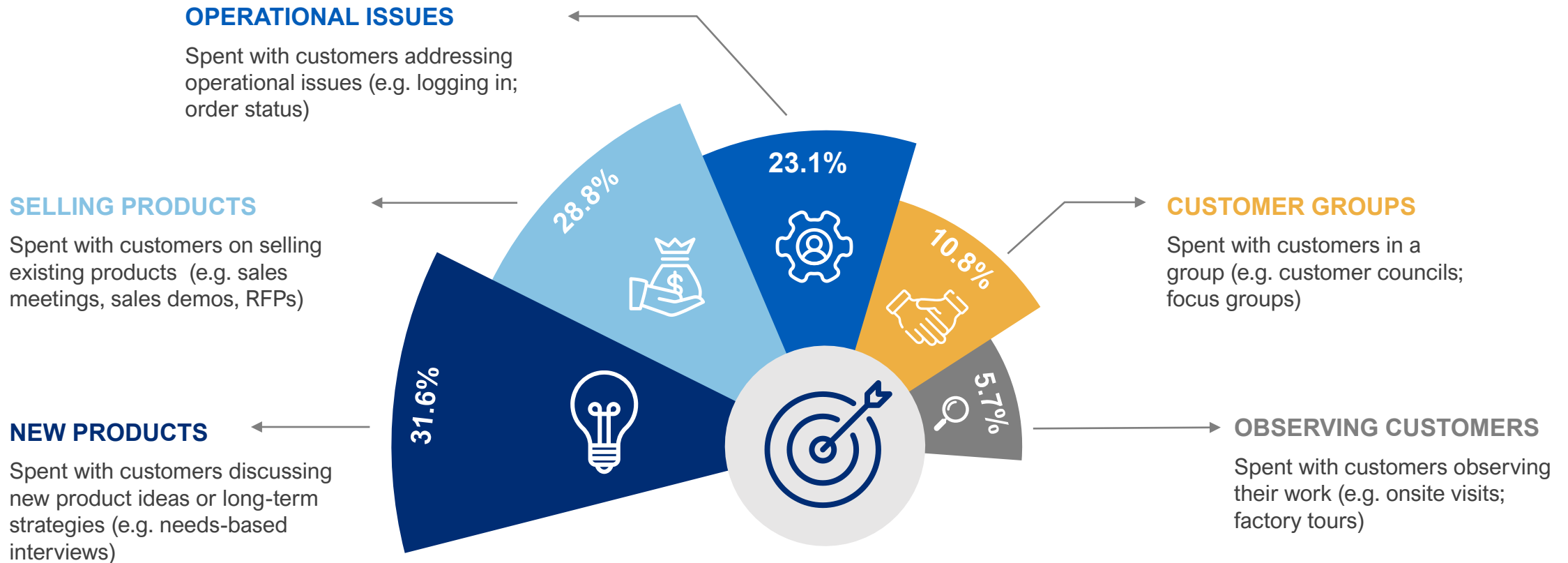
Thinking of your time **spent with external partners / vendors**, what percentage of your time is spent on the following activities?

Most of time that product managers spend with external partners are with those who build or supply some component of the product (40.3%), who help sell the product (19.4%), or who help support the product in some way (17.0%).

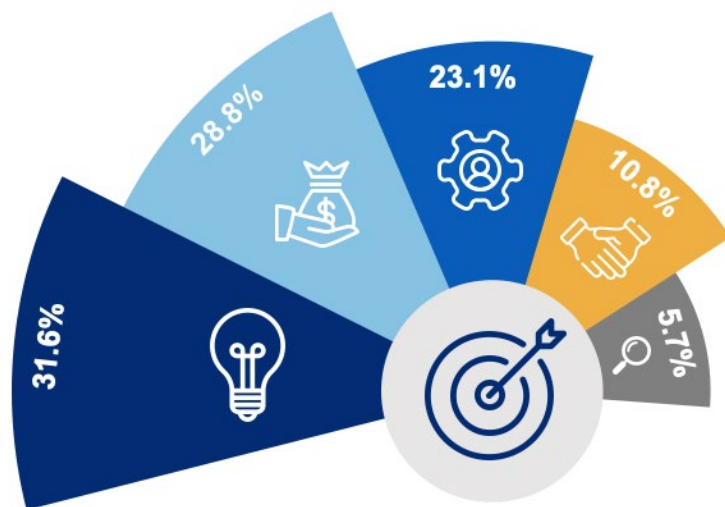
Other activities with external partners or vendors include interacting with market analysts (8.7%) or market researchers (8.7%) for product specific discussions.



Thinking of your time **spent with customers**, what percentage of your time is spent on the following activities?



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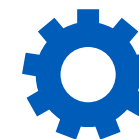
Of the total time spent with customers, roughly 48% of that time is spent on **strategic activities** – those that focus on longer-term insights (new product ideas, observing customers, time with groups of customers).



Almost 29% of time with customers is spent on **sales-related activities** – primarily tasks involving selling existing products. This can be an important vehicle for product insights, but often leads to too much time in sales meetings and demos. Ideally, a product manager participating in sales meetings is the exception rather than the rule.



Over 23% of a product manager's time with customers is spent on activities focused on **operational issues**. This is a time-consuming activity best taken on by others in the organization.

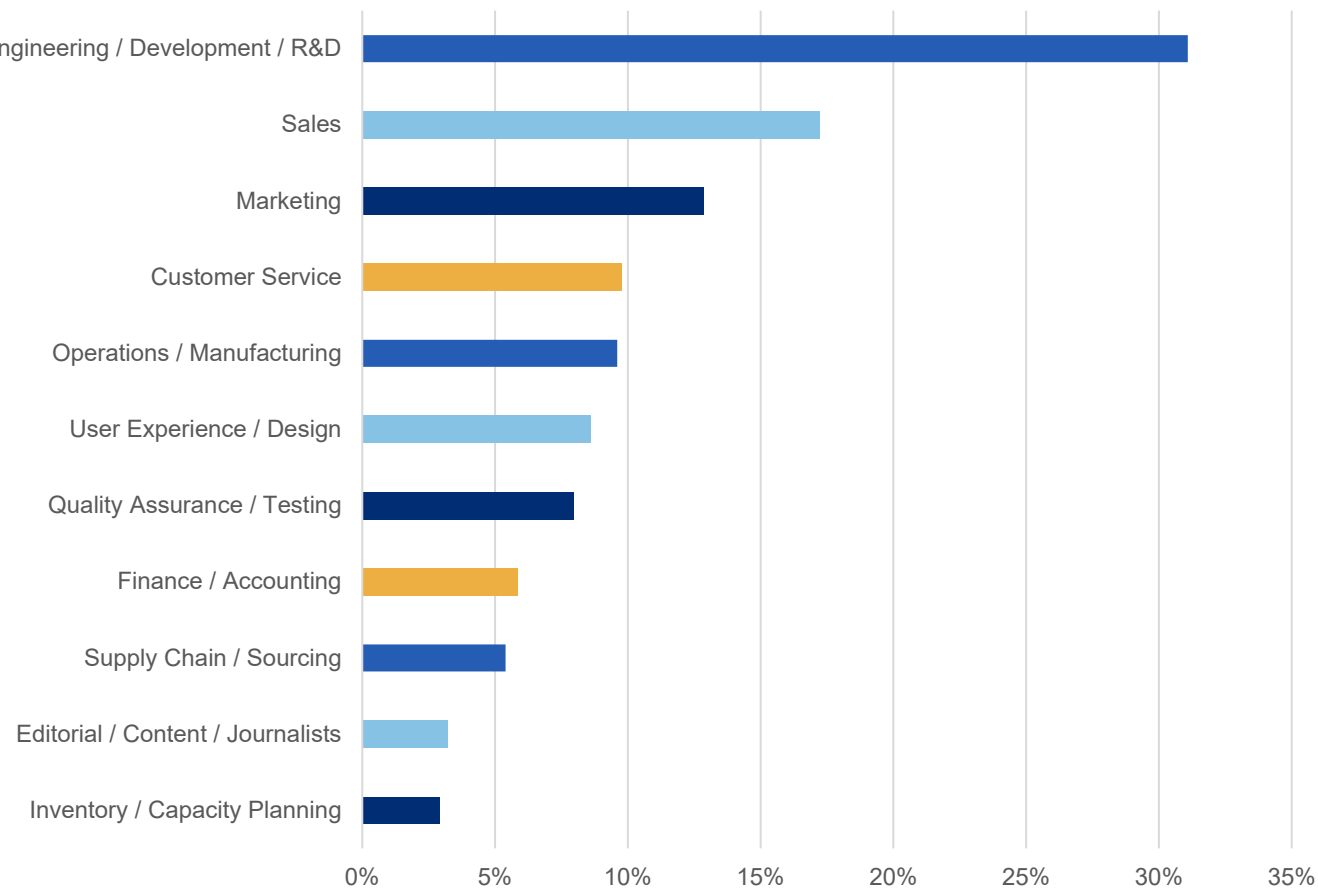


Thinking of your time **spent with internal stakeholders**, what percentage of your time is spent with the following groups?

On average, 31.1% of the time product managers spend with internal partners is spent with the technology / engineering / development / research and development group.

The sales group is the next most common internal partner at 17.2% of a product manager's time, followed by marketing (12.8%), customer service (9.8%), and quality assurance / testing (7.9%)

Other groups with which product managers spend time include finance and accounting (5.9%), editorial / content / journalists (3.2%), and inventory / capacity planning (2.9%).

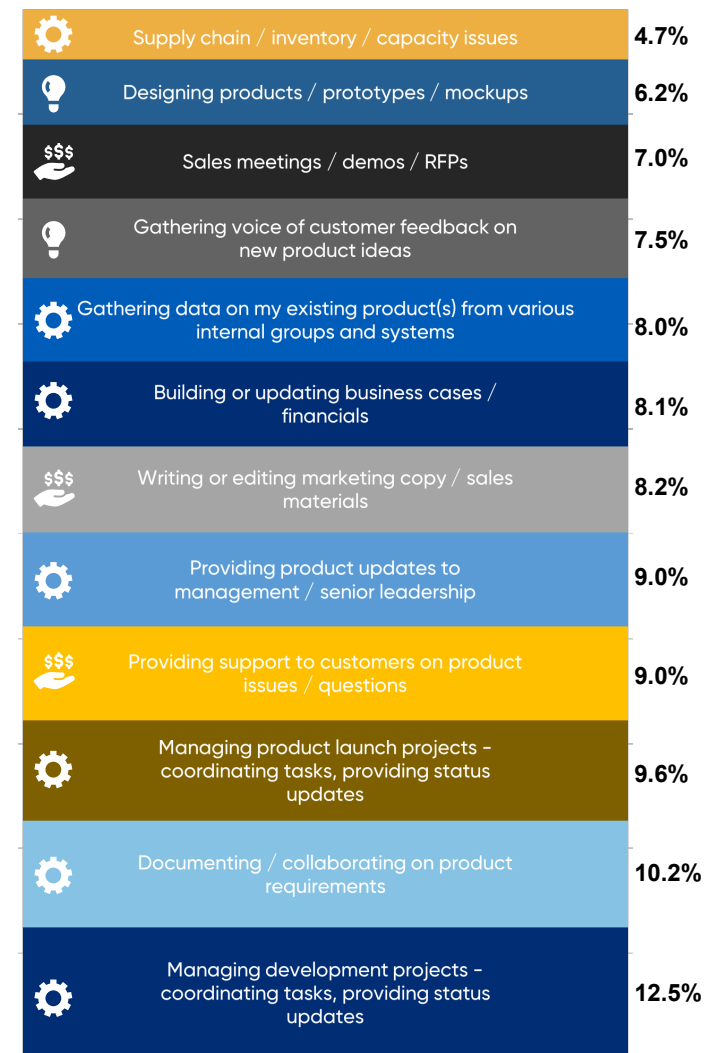


Thinking of your time **spent with internal stakeholders**, what percentage of your time is spent on the following activities?

There are many cross-functional tasks on which product managers are spending their time. The chart to the right shows the most common tasks, from managing development projects to dealing with supply chain or inventory issues.

Much of this data raises red flags on roles and responsibility clarity. We have categorized these activities into three buckets: strategic, sales-related, and operational (*illustrated by icons next to each task in the graphic*).

The sales-related and operational, while important for the organization, are often those that other functions should be responsible for, leaving product managers to focus more on the strategic activities that will drive long-term product and business success.



Contact us to speak further and
to share your stories.

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