Product Launch Team
Leader’s Guide
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INTRODUCTION
The purpose of this document is to provide those who are new to the role of Product Launch Team leadership a set of ground rules and techniques to help understand the role of the team, how to organize the team, and how to manage the team effectively.

THE PRODUCT LAUNCH TEAM MEMBER’S GUIDE
The Product Launch Team Leader’s Toolkit includes a Product Launch Team Member’s Guide that provides individual team members the “rules of the road” for what is expected of them and how to conduct themselves at team meetings.

SETTING THE SUCCESS CRITERIA FOR YOUR TEAM
It is important to establish the success criteria for your Product Launch Team. This will become the measurement by which you can determine whether the team effort is having an impact on the project. For example, if you expect your team efforts to result in better operational readiness for a product launch, you need to establish the measurement by which this can be evaluated. In some areas the measurements will be tangible and quantifiable. In other areas it may be intangible but just as valuable.
ORGANIZING YOUR PRODUCT LAUNCH TEAM

Once you understand the role of your Product Launch Team and have a way to measure its impact, it is time to organize the team.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF TEAM MEMBERS

Your Product Launch Team members will come from all functional areas of the organization including product management, development, customer support, sales, accounting, legal, consulting, professional services, marketing, and other areas as needed to support your product launch. What makes cross-functional teams so challenging is those individuals have an obligation to the team in a matrix management environment, yet don’t report directly to the team leader.

In some cases the Product Launch Team members may have more senior roles within the organization than the team leader.

Team members must understand their importance to the Product Launch Team and how their knowledge and skill adds to the success of the project. Team members will be given assignments that are expected to be completed in the timeframe agreed upon, just as they would any other assignment from within their department.

IDENTIFYING AND INVITING TEAM MEMBERS

Your Product Launch Team will only be as good as your leadership and the participation of your team members. In some cases you will be able to identify and invite the people you prefer. In other cases you won’t and will have to make do with who you have on your team. Before you invite members, understand the ground rules (also included in the Member’s Guide).

1. One representative from each applicable functional area will be chosen.

Keep the number of Product Launch Team members to a minimum. More than one representative from a functional area unnecessarily increases the complexity of the team and makes it less efficient to manage.

Your team members should represent every functional area that is affected by a product launch. For technology products, consider the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Functional Area</th>
<th>Impact on the Product Launch</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Product Management</td>
<td>Responsible for running the product as a business. Expert on market problems, how the product solves them, who in the market is being targeted, how the company will make money.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Functional Area</td>
<td>Impact on the Product Launch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Product Marketing</td>
<td>Responsible for sales readiness. Often the Launch Owner.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development</td>
<td>Designs and builds the product. Insight into what is coming and when it is coming is essential to the launch team.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality Assurance</td>
<td>Assures product quality based on release criteria identified at the beginning of the project.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>Creates the finished physical products.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing Communications</td>
<td>Builds the marketing collateral.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Media</td>
<td>Responsible for marketing via large scale, highly accessible channels such as the internet and mobile devices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Relations</td>
<td>Gets the word out to the press and the market.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyst Relations</td>
<td>Shapes the opinions of industry analysts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct Sales</td>
<td>Accountable for achieving revenue targets.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales Engineering</td>
<td>Provides technical expertise during the sales process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Channel Management</td>
<td>Recruits and manages channel partners (reseller, distributors, VARs, etc.). Accountable for achieving revenue targets for indirect channels.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer Support</td>
<td>Answers customer questions and addresses issues after the product is purchased.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Services</td>
<td>Provides integration and customization services for customers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Functional Area</td>
<td>Impact on the Product Launch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Technology</td>
<td>Provides information technology infrastructure for the organization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operations</td>
<td>Provides operational support (such as order processing and fulfillment).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal</td>
<td>Responsible for licensing agreements, protection of intellectual property, implications of pricing decisions, copyright, partner agreements, supplier agreements, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accounting</td>
<td>Responsible for revenue recognition, cost of goods sold, commissions, profit, and other business metrics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Management</td>
<td>Provides project or program management services to the organization.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An invitation template is provided in the Leader's Toolkit. Make the modifications that are appropriate for your organization and be sure to attach the Product Launch Team Member's Guide.

2. **Representatives should be capable of making decisions on behalf of their functional areas.**

   This rule supports the first rule. A representative cannot be expected to make every decision on behalf of his functional area. Some decisions would commit the company in a way that the team member is not authorized to make. Product Launch Team members should act as ambassadors for their functional areas, and should be able to make most decisions.

3. **No observers. Everyone must participate.**

   Again, supports the first rule and reinforces the Product Launch Team members’ requirement to add value. If someone is observing, he is not participating. If he is not participating he is not adding value.

**Conducting Product Launch Team Meetings**

Product Launch status meetings are a requirement if you expect your cross-functional team to function. No one wants to attend yet another meeting, but you can do some things to keep your team engaged.

4. **Status meeting will be held on a standing time and day-of-the-week.**
In order for a Product Launch status meeting to be effective it needs to have a consistent meeting time and location. A set time and day ensures consistency and avoids excuses about missing the meeting. Generally speaking, Tuesdays through Thursdays are better than Monday or Friday.

Avoid the tendency to schedule status meetings on an "as required" basis. It may seem logical to assemble the team when there are more things to discuss. The problem with this approach is that it becomes more difficult to schedule a time when all members can join the meeting. It is better to schedule weekly meetings, even if the meeting is very short.

5. **Status meetings are not problem-solving meetings.**

The purpose of a Product Launch status meeting is to determine the current status of the project. It is not a problem-solving meeting.

Members are apprised of project progress (or lack of progress) so they can contribute their insight and expertise. Problem solving should be taken offline with appropriate participants only.

In cross-functional meetings like your Product Launch status meetings, you want a balanced discussion about the overall status of the project. If left unchecked, it is easy for one functional area to dominate the meeting discussion and focus on details that are better handled in a separate meeting for that functional area prior to the overall status meeting. Otherwise, the result is some members will find ways to avoid attending Product Launch status meetings because they perceive they are a waste of time.

For example, a software development manager could easily review development/testing status by reviewing every feature/bug. Conduct a separate meeting to talk specifically about software development progress.

6. **Members are categorized into Required and Optional for each meeting.**

To keep members engaged in the process it is helpful to invite only those who are necessary for each status meeting. It’s okay for Product Launch Team members who are Optional at that status meeting to attend, but they are not expected to participate. If an Optional attendee begins to steer the discussion toward a topic that is not on the agenda, you need to table the discussion and address it offline.

7. **Status meetings should be no longer than one hour.**

Product Launch status meetings should be limited to no longer than an hour. If the discussion pushes the meeting over one hour, reschedule a follow-up meeting.

8. **Meetings always start on time.**

Punctuality is important. Consistently starting late will give members justification to arrive late.

Keep track of time and make it obvious to everyone. Position yourself so that you can see a clock, if there is one in the meeting room. Another technique is to place your watch on the table or to use the timer function of your mobile phone.

9. **Meetings always have an agenda.**
An agenda sets the expectation of what is to be covered in the status meeting and enables members to prepare for the meeting.

10. Team members are expected to complete assignments within the timeframe agreed upon.

   The success of the launch depends on the work getting done. While members don’t report to the Team Leader, they are expected to contribute (rule 3). Later, we discuss tactics to deal with underperformers.

**PRODUCT LAUNCH STATUS MEETING STRUCTURE AND CONDUCT**

**AGENDA**

The Leader’s Toolkit includes a standard Meeting Agenda that has two important areas. The first is the list of Required and Optional members. The second area contains the topics to be covered.

The status meeting agenda should cover four topics:

1. Review of Action Items
2. Identification of new Action Items
3. Review of Issues
4. Identification of new Issues

By using the Product Launch Team Tracker you can document Action Items, assign them and get a commitment for a completion date.

As each Action Item is covered, you need to quickly determine if the Action Item is completed, is held up due to some external factor, or is not getting appropriate attention.

**CONSIDERATIONS FOR MEMBERS WHO ARE OUT OF THE OFFICE**

Ideally you should conduct Product Launch Team meetings face-to-face. But that isn’t always practical and you may have members who participate virtually. When this occurs be considerate to those who are not physically in the room. They won’t be able to see the body language of participants in the room and may get very annoyed with any non-related discussion.

**UTILIZING WEB CONFERENCING**

Web conferencing can be a very effective tool when conducting Product Launch Team meetings. It helps to visualize what is happening in the meeting and it gives an opportunity for remote members to participate more actively.

**USING A NOTE TAKER FOR EFFICIENCY**

Having a note taker in the meeting will help you keep the meeting moving. When you have to stop to write down a key point or update, you run the risk of losing your train of thought and slowing the momentum of the meeting. With a note taker you can direct what information to capture and continue with the meeting.
In a Product Launch status meeting, a note taker is not capturing everything said or discussed. Just capture status information as it relates to Action Items and Issues (see Product Launch Team Tracker).

**PREPARING FOR THE PRODUCT LAUNCH STATUS MEETING**

Effective status meetings require preparation. You need to be clear on what you want to cover and your members need to be prepared to address agenda topics that affect their functional area.

The Meeting Agenda should be sent to members at least 2 days prior to the status meeting. The agenda should be clearly marked with who is required to attend and who is optional.

Any special requirements that Product Launch Team members need to bring or prepare for should be noted on the agenda.

**THE PRODUCT LAUNCH TEAM KICK-OFF MEETING**

The purpose of the Kick-off Meeting is to put your Product Launch Team on the right foundation. Use the Kick-off meeting to introduce team members, define roles, set expectations, explain meeting protocols, and establish a meeting time.

**WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS**

Each member should introduce himself, which functional area he represents, and provide a brief background of experience/skills.

**ROLES, RESPONSIBILITIES AND EXPECTATIONS OF TEAM MEMBERS**

Review the general roles, responsibilities, and expectations of team members as defined in the Member’s Guide. Add to that list specific expectations and obligations that are unique to your Product Launch Team. For example, there may be a need for strict confidentiality.

Team members will be matrix-managed by the Team Leader for the duration of the Product Launch Team. It is important to acknowledge to your members that they will be accountable for their assignments. Other team members and the project will be directly affected by their actions (or inaction).

**ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITY OF THE TEAM LEADER**

Communicate to the team what your role and responsibilities are as the Team Leader. As Team Leader you have the responsibility and accountability for completing the project. You will facilitate the status meetings, expect assignments to be completed according to schedule and ensure the Product Launch Team is apprised of project changes.

**REVIEW OF THE AGENDA AND MEETING FORMAT**

Pass out a sample agenda and a sample Product Launch Team Tracker. Walk through what will be covered in each meeting.

Remind everyone meetings will start and finish on time. Discussion will be focused on the agenda. Any discussion outside the scope of the status meeting agenda will be tabled during the meeting.
COMMUNICATION PROTOCOLS

Describe how Product Launch status information will be communicated. You may already have the ability to set up an online collaboration hub. This is much better than email, especially as the size and complexity of your Product Launch Team grows. Collaboration tools also provide automatic notification of changes to documents and tasks to subscribed members.

Ideally you should provide an agenda at least 2 days prior to the status meeting and provide an updated Product Launch Team Tracker by the start of the next business day.

ESTABLISH THE REGULAR PRODUCT LAUNCH STATUS MEETING TIME

Use this time to establish a regularly scheduled status meeting time and day. It may require a little negotiation to find a time everyone can commit to. In some cases members may need to move around normal schedules to accommodate the agreed upon time.

DEALING WITH CONFLICT

When you have people from different functional areas, conflict is inevitable. In many cases conflict can be a productive way of breaking through a problem. Unproductive conflict can have negative impact on the team and you will need to find a way to resolve it.

It is more effective to address conflict offline with the individuals. If the problem continues you will need to escalate it to management. If it still persists you may have no choice but to “fire” disruptive members before it negatively impacts the Product Launch Team.

DEALING WITH CHALLENGING PERSONALITIES

Cross-functional teams have four types of challenging personalities: Hogs, Whiners, Slackers, and Spectators.

HOGS

Hogs are easy to identify from the very beginning. They like to dominate the discussion and get into every topic whether they have expertise in the topic or not. Left unchecked a Hog will happily consume every available minute of a meeting and feel a profound sense of accomplishment whether they added value or not.

Advice: Shutdown Hogs fast. Be polite but firm in the meeting. Discuss the situation with the Hog offline and if it persists, fire him from the Product Launch Team.

WHINERS

Whiners are also easy to identify. They complain about everything and only seem to be happy when they are complaining and making others miserable. They find fault in everything. Left unchecked, whiners can wreak havoc in a Product Launch Team, especially when there are more than one. Whiners like to whine with other whiners. Often whiners are people who don’t want to be on a cross-functional team and see it as a complete waste of their time.

Advice: Shutdown Whiners fast. Be polite but firm in the meeting. Discuss the situation with the Whiner offline and if it persists, fire him from the Product Launch Team.
SLACKERS

Slackers may be hard to identify in the beginning. Some are very charming and outgoing, others are very quiet. You can identify them because of their lack of participation, poor preparation, and constant excuses for not getting their assignments completed.

Advice: Public accountability is the best method for dealing with Slackers. If you are keeping track of Action Item assignments, you will have documented the pattern of the Slackers. When faced with overwhelming evidence of their lack of participation they either drop out or get with the program.

SPECTATORS

Spectators just love to hang out. They add absolutely no value but want to be a part of the action. Even if they have no idea what the action is about. They eagerly come to meetings. Usually they invite themselves.

Advice: Ask Spectators not to return. They weren’t invited and you have that area of expertise addressed. If Spectators continue to invite themselves to the Product Launch meetings, escalate the issue with management. If you don’t address the Spectator situation quickly, you run the risk of others inviting themselves and then you have a potentially larger problem.

DEALING WITH UNDERPERFORMING TEAM MEMBERS

Your team members will be matrixed from other areas of your company, most likely with a full workload already. Consideration needs to be given from time to time when assignment deadlines are not met. An example would be quarter-end/year-end for Accounting and Sales. You should learn as much as you can about each team member’s responsibilities so you can adjust accordingly. That said, you still are accountable for getting the product launched and you depend on others to make that possible.

Consistently underperforming team members need your attention to understand the cause of their poor performance. Are they in over their heads? Do they have external demands that are competing with their Product Launch Team assignments? Do they treat their Product Launch Team assignments with a low priority?

Your other team members will quickly identify the poor performers by seeing the delays caused by the missing assignments. It will be evident in the Product Launch Team Tracker. Address the performance issue with the team member directly. If that does not change the behavior, address it with management. Don’t be surprised if the low priority is a result of the team member’s boss. If the manager doesn’t think it’s important, the member may also believe it isn’t important.

As the Team Leader, try to identify the roadblocks and provide a way to help the underperformer. Ask:

1. When can you commit to getting the assignment completed?
2. Is there anything on your schedule that could prevent you from completing the assignment?
3. Is there anything I can do to make sure the assignment gets completed?
If problems continue to persist you have no choice but to fire the team member from the team, even when that person's expertise is important.

**DRIVING THE PROCESS**

Organizing your Product Launch Team is the first step. Managing the team is the second. The final step is to drive the team to achieve better results. Part of that will come from the expectations you set. If you set the bar too low, you will see lower results. If you set the bar too high, results may not be achievable. You also have a responsibility for setting the example you want others to follow (and they are watching).

An example of setting low expectations is allowing team members to miss deadlines and accepting sloppy or incomplete deliverables. There are times to be accommodating but don’t make it a regular occurrence or performance will suffer.

Expectations should be high but not so high they can’t be attained. If the typical cycle of launching a product is 6 months, it might be too much to expect the team to cut it by 50%.

**COMMUNICATION**

Don’t leave anything to chance and don’t invite surprises. Call people by phone. Confirm their attendance at the next team meeting. Ask them about their progress on their assignments. Stop by their offices for face-to-face discussions. Invite them for coffee or lunch.

Everyone should live up to commitments. But keep in mind, your role as the Team Leader is at the top of your priorities where it may not be the case for your team members. Keeping Product Launch Team responsibilities in the forefront and keeping team members accountable for assignments will go a long way toward driving results.