

# Product Leadership Systems, Platform AI, and Zepto's PMF Pivot

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This brief covers Petra Wille's leadership framework, the shift from model intelligence to AI platforms and workflows, and the customer-experience pivot that helped Zepto find product-market fit. It also includes practical guidance on executive framing, AI skill development, and handling blunt feedback.

### Big Ideas

#### Product leadership needs a system, not just experience

Petra Wille's Product Leadership Wheel breaks product leadership into 12 responsibilities and a performance scale, and she positions it as a reflection and feedback tool rather than a rigid benchmark [1]. The deeper point: leadership is "shipyard work"—creating directional clarity, team structures, coaching, feedback systems, role clarity, and the connective tissue from vision to strategy to quarterly goals to backlog—rather than jumping into day-to-day product work [1]. - **Why it matters:** many leaders are promoted without leadership training or clear role definitions, which creates gaps for both managers and ICs [1]. - **How to apply:** map how you spend time across the 12 areas, get 360 input from peers, reports, and stakeholders, then choose 1-2 learning headlines and turn them into calendar commitments or a "future self" action plan [1].

#### In AI products, the platform layer is becoming the battleground

Ravi Mehta argues Anthropic overtook OpenAI in enterprise spending by competing at the platform layer, not just the model layer [2]. The pattern is "mind and hands": model intelligence plus tools and integrations such as MCP, Claude Code in the terminal, skills, file access, and HTML rendering [2]. As models mature, the question shifts from "which model is smartest?" to "which model

best orchestrates the tools, workflows, and processes that run the business?” [2]. - **Why it matters:** benchmark wins are no longer enough if the product cannot act inside real workflows [2]. - **How to apply:** evaluate AI roadmaps on interfaces, integrations, workflow coverage, and openness—not just benchmark deltas [2].

“Good product decisions don’t actually take more time, they take more skill.” [3]

Shreyas Doshi’s broader point is that PMs should stop assuming they must choose between speed and decision quality; the real constraint is often skill, not clock time [3].

## Tactical Playbook

### Reframe work for the audience in the room

PM framing changes with seniority: ICs optimize feature clarity and customer value; managers look for team alignment and craft; executives care about business impact, cross-team coordination, and whether you’re building a platform rather than a pile of features [4]. Before an executive review: 1. Explain the customer and feature value. 2. Tie it to business impact and declared strategy. 3. Show how it supports quarterly targets, CEO messaging, or competitive positioning. 4. Ask a senior PM to critique the narrative before you present [5, 4].

### Treat strategy as a living decision framework

A useful execution audit: pick a random backlog item and ask the team to trace it back to quarterly goals, strategy, and product vision [1]. If that chain breaks, the issue may be communication and role clarity, not effort: a once-a-year strategy deck is not enough if teams cannot use it in sprint decisions [1].

## Case Studies & Lessons

### Zepto found product-market fit by controlling the customer experience

Zepto began with WhatsApp-based grocery delivery from neighborhood stores, but doorstep conversations revealed customers were dissatisfied with selection, pricing, and delivery times [6]. The team pivoted to mini warehouses and dark stores so it could control speed, quality, selection, and price; one neighborhood using the new model produced **3-4x** the volume of the rest of the city [6]. They still waited for proof before fully committing: early PMF showed up after about 8-9 months, and they pushed on only once retention was visible and the business reached roughly **10,000 orders/day** and a **60-70 Cr GMV run rate** [6]. - **Lesson:** start from the most extreme customer experience you can imagine,

then work backward to scale [6]. - **How to apply:** stay close enough to users to hear dissatisfaction directly, focus on getting a small set of customers to really love the product, and delay major scaling bets until retention and usage prove the model [6].

## Career Corner

### AI engineering is becoming an adjacent PM skill—but not a mandatory identity

Teresa Torres says she now spends **60%** of her time on AI engineering work, and argues discovery skills transfer well into AI engineering; the bigger requirement is willingness to learn, not a strong engineering background [7]. Petra Wille adds that product people should experiment broadly with AI tools to stay relevant, while also asking whether this kind of work is enjoyable and aligned with role purpose [1, 7]. - **How to apply:** treat AI engineering as one tool in the team toolbox, let interested people lean in, and use AI itself as a patient teacher for unfamiliar techniques [7].

### Be selective with blunt feedback once your craft matures

Shreyas Doshi's test for blunt feedback is simple: does it come with the right intent and strong judgment in the relevant domain? [8] If not, especially in toxic environments, blunt feedback can become backchannel labeling rather than genuine help [8]. At higher proficiency levels, it may take confidence to ignore or heavily adapt feedback that reflects the giver's lower skill ceiling [8].

## Tools & Resources

- **Product Leadership Wheel + “future self” exercise:** useful if you need a structured leadership self-review or a way to give your manager clearer feedback; rate your coverage across the 12 areas, then turn 1-2 gaps into concrete actions [1].
- **Weekly company-analysis drill:** useful for sharpening business cases and competitive analysis; each week, analyze one recent move by a respected company and validate your assumptions with public materials or earnings reports [9].

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## Sources

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