Shadow PMs, behavioral evidence, and AI prototyping workflows reshaping product work

PM Daily Digest

2026-02-28

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By PM Daily Digest • February 28, 2026

This edition connects a set of fast-moving PM shifts: AI systems as "Shadow PMs" shaping expectations and acquisition, behavioral data as the grounding layer for better decisions, and agentic execution pushing teams to redesign discovery and decision-making. You'll also get a concrete AI prototyping workflow, several recent case studies (JLR, The Economist, Ramp/Alloy, Just Eat, Perk), and career resources for building AI-native skills and interview leverage.

Big Ideas

1) Your product is being "decided" before users ever land on it (the Shadow PM)

AI systems increasingly act as the *first* product manager your users interact with—setting expectations, framing capabilities, and influencing which brand gets chosen [1][2]. This coincides with a funnel shift where AI can pick a brand and drive a purchase in hours, compressing the traditional multi-week comparison journey [3].

Why it matters: - AI search traffic is described as growing **5x YoY**, with **80% of B2B tech buyers** using AI as much as traditional search during vendor research—often showing up as "unexplained" direct traffic [4].

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[1] SVP of Product at Semrush | Your Product is Being Decided Without You: The Post-SEO AI Moat

[2] SVP of Product at Semrush | Your Product is Being Decided Without You: The Post-SEO AI Moat

[3] SVP of Product at Semrush | Your Product is Being Decided Without You: The Post-SEO AI Moat

[4] SVP of Product at Semrush | Your Product is Being Decided Without You: The Post-SEO AI Moat

How to apply: - Treat AI visibility and accuracy as a product + growth surface you manage explicitly (see Tactical Playbook). [5]

"AI is now your first product manager your users talk to." [6]

SVP of Product at Semrush | Your Product is Being Decided Without You: The Post-SEO AI Moat (7:09)

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2) AI doesn't create value by itself; it amplifies the systems (and signals) you already have

Jaguar Land Rover's Jim Kennedy argues that AI "amplifies the systems that you've built," so weak signals and fragmented systems get amplified too [7]. His practical shift: leaders move from managing backlogs to **designing systems** and asking **better questions** grounded in behavioral context and intent [8].

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[6]SVP of Product at Semrush | Your Product is Being Decided Without You: The Post-SEO AI Moat

[7]VP at Fullstory & GPL at Jaguar Land Rover | From Cars to Code: Behavioral Analytics at JLR

[8]VP at Fullstory & GPL at Jaguar Land Rover | From Cars to Code: Behavioral Analytics at JLR

Why it matters: - "Behavioral context" is positioned as what makes AI useful—grounding predictions in real intent rather than averages [9].

How to apply: - Invest in instrumentation and behavioral insight that removes debate and drives prioritization from evidence, not opinion [10].

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3) When execution accelerates, decision-making and discovery become the bottleneck

Multiple threads converge on the same operational shift: - Teams can ship far faster with agents (e.g., smaller project teams, rapid shipping cycles), making **decision-making** the constraint rather than execution speed [11]. - In this environment, craft and "taste" still matter: knowing what "excellent" looks like, and whether what you built is important and will resonate with users [12].

Why it matters: - If you don't redesign how decisions get made (and how discovery stays continuous), faster build cycles can just produce more churn, rework, or misaligned output.

How to apply: - Shift PM time from coordination toward user understanding, prioritization, and experiment design [13].

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4) Advancing as a product leader increasingly means thinking like a GM (P&L + distribution + outcomes)

Mastercard's CPO frames why CPOs rarely become CEOs: only **1%** make it, in part because PMs often lack P&L ownership and are seen as a delivery function [14]. Her prescription is to adopt GM behaviors inside the product role: - Put **revenue** in OKRs, and treat pricing and costs as design inputs (not afterthoughts) [15][16][17]. - Design for **distribution channels**, not "the product" in isolation (e.g., tailoring to platform channels vs. SME portals) [18]. - Translate roadmaps into **outcome narratives** for senior leadership [19][20].

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[9]VP at Fullstory & GPL at Jaguar Land Rover | From Cars to Code: Behavioral Analytics at JLR

[10]VP at Fullstory & GPL at Jaguar Land Rover | From Cars to Code: Behavioral Analytics at JLR

[11]Preserving Craft when Ai Handles Execution

[12]Preserving Craft when Ai Handles Execution

[13]Preserving Craft when Ai Handles Execution

[14]CPO at Mastercard | CPOs are the New GMs

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[18]CPO at Mastercard | CPOs are the New GMs

[19]CPO at Mastercard | CPOs are the New GMs

[20]CPO at Mastercard | CPOs are the New GMs

Why it matters: - It's a concrete path to "boardroom language" without waiting for a formal title change.

How to apply: - Reframe initiatives as outcome narratives with numbers (e.g., "improve authorization rates, reduce fraud, +3% transactions volume") [21].

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5) AI ROI is constrained less by tooling and more by organizational "debt" (process, data, and access)

Just Eat Takeaway's CPO describes AI as an "HD mirror" that exposes technical debt, data silos, and "human glue" workarounds—plus avoidance of root-cause fixes [22]. Their stance: without **structured and accessible data**, strategy and ROI are "permanently limited" [23].

Why it matters: - They cite having **104 petabytes** of data and **570M daily events**, but still not being able to use it effectively until they restructured it around intent and business logic [24].

How to apply: - Audit where tribal knowledge substitutes for organizational intelligence, then codify and make context available to machines [25].

Tactical Playbook

1) "Manage the Shadow PM": a practical AI visibility loop

A Semrush product leader outlines a three-part approach—**prompts, sources, processes**—to shape how AI describes and recommends your product [26].

Step-by-step 1. **Audit per model (not "AI" as one thing).** Pick 4–5 platforms and track ~50 queries; check if you're mentioned, whether it's accurate, and who wins instead [27]. 2. **Make your product crawlable and extractable.** The talk claims most AI crawlers don't render JavaScript; "JS walls" can drop AI visibility to zero [28]. 3. **Fix docs like they're churn drivers.** Users may screenshot UI issues and ask ChatGPT for help; if docs are clear/crawlable, the user stays—if not, they may blame your product and

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leave [29]. 4. **Structure content for AI consumption.** "Short answer first" chunks + schema markup; the talk cites up to **30% higher citation rates** for sites with structured data [30]. 5. **Invest in earned media and third-party sources.** The talk claims **77% of brand citations** come from third parties (Reddit, G2, LinkedIn, YouTube, industry reviews) [31]. 6. **Close the loop with product outcomes.** The proposed flywheel: shape AI perception → accurate recommendations → better activation/retention → customer advocacy → stronger AI signal [32].

Metrics to watch: - AI-referred visits are cited as having **27% lower bounce**, **12% more engagement**, and **5% higher conversion** (attributed to arriving with the right expectations) [33].

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2) AI prototyping workflow (from "idea" to handoff with fewer open questions)

Nadav Abrahami (Wix co-founder, Dazl CEO) lays out an end-to-end workflow for AI prototyping [34].

Prerequisites (don't skip): - Lock down the problem, user story, and rough shape of the solution in one paragraph before prototyping [35].

Workflow 1. **Start from your design system.** Recreate an existing page from a screenshot as the template [36]. 2. **Generate 3–4 divergent variants.** Don't move forward with only one option [37]. 3. **Prompt for structure; visually edit for fine-tuning.** Use manual edits for the last-mile polish [38]. 4. **Build the full end-to-end flow.** Connecting pages surfaces edge cases earlier [39]. 5. **Test with your actual users (on video).** Prefer users who requested the feature, not a testing platform [40].

PRD + prototype (new standard): - Prototype holds the core 90% flows; PRD covers edge cases, errors, tracking, rollout plan—and can live inside the

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prototype project for AI context [41].

Engineering handoff tactic: - Share the published prototype link (claimed to answer ~90% of questions), then use Cursor/Claude Code to port interactions into the production codebase [42].

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3) Prevent AI-speed execution from outrunning planning (without "more meetings")

A startup thread describes a common failure mode: implementation moves ~10x faster with tools like Cursor/Claude Code, but teams still miss edge cases, permissions, and "the thing discussed in Slack" because context capture didn't speed up too [43].

Step-by-step 1. Identify recurring "missed detail" categories (edge cases, permissions, workflow steps) [44]. 2. Don't solve it by defaulting to extra meetings (noted as a common but slowing response) [45]. 3. Embed **structured context capture at decision points** (where decisions happen), rather than making documentation a separate ritual [46].

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4) Use behavioral analytics to remove debate and ship what users actually complete

Jim Kennedy's JLR examples emphasize behavioral insights (hesitations, retries, abandonments) that dashboards often don't show [47]. The claim: behavior data removed debate about intent and changed prioritization quickly [48].

Step-by-step 1. Instrument journeys to see "moments" (not just outcomes) [49]. 2. Use real behavior to decide what ships and what scales—require completion/engagement/value before scaling [50]. 3. Reframe design from pages to

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[43] r/startups comment by u/Founder-Awesome

[44] r/startups post by u/oscarnyc1

[45] r/startups comment by u/Founder-Awesome

[46] r/startups comment by u/Founder-Awesome

[47] VP at Fullstory & GPL at Jaguar Land Rover | From Cars to Code: Behavioral Analytics at JLR

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journeys and "joined-up moments" [51][52].

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5) Make surveys behave like product funnels (so they stop bleeding completions)

A PM describes treating surveys like static forms, with poor completion despite good open rates [53]. The fix was to analyze surveys like funnels.

Step-by-step 1. Add **per-question drop-off tracking** to see where users abandon [54]. 2. Remove high-friction questions (e.g., make a demographic question optional) once you confirm it's the main abandonment driver [55]. 3. Avoid grids/matrices on mobile; break into single-focus, tap-friendly steps [56].

Case Studies & Lessons

1) Jaguar Land Rover: from 58 apps to a unified experience system (and behavior-led shipping)

Starting point: when Kennedy joined, JLR had **58 disconnected apps**, little analytics signal, and a **1.2** average store rating [57].

What changed - The program was framed less as tech consolidation and more as reducing customer cognitive load and decision friction [58]. - They reframed work around customer experience, platform capability, and value creation—and moved from journeys to "joined-up moments" [59][60].

Homepage carousel lesson - A "conversational carousel" that looked great in design reviews failed in behavior: users scrolled to only **one tile** in beta testing [61]. - They reprioritized what users saw first, personalized from prior sessions,

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[53]r/ProductManagement post by u/Ambitious-Hope3868

[54]r/ProductManagement post by u/Ambitious-Hope3868

[55]r/ProductManagement post by u/Ambitious-Hope3868

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simplified flow, and only scaled after behavior improved (deeper scrolls, higher completion) [62].

Platform non-negotiables - Design systems over one-off designs [63] - Configuration over code (release toggles for brands/services) [64] - Platform services as modular backbone (brands express via theming/content) [65]

Key takeaway: fragmentation was described as an operating model problem more than a tech problem [66].

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2) The Economist: building trusted AI voice as an additive bridge (not a replacement)

Problem: Digital content is published Mon–Wed, but the narrated audio edition is created on Thursdays, creating a gap for audio-first users [67].

Solution: Use text-to-speech (TTS) to bridge the gap [68].

Outcome: Quantitative results indicated people listened earlier and consumed more audio (not less) [69].

Trust lesson: Loyal subscribers complained about TTS mistakes (example: "6m" read as "6 meters"), reinforcing that TTS worked as a bridge/additive but wasn't yet ready to replace human connection [70].

Design principle: Build an "audio identity" that is distinct and authoritative, anchored in trust (reliable, credible, intimate/relevant) [71].

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3) Vibe coding + cloud playgrounds: from prototype to pull request (and why visibility matters)

Alloy's CEO describes a 2026 inflection where non-technical PMs prototype directly on real codebases, share prototypes broadly, and sometimes produce

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[68]CPO at The Economist | Building Trusted AI-Powered Voice Products
[69]CPO at The Economist | Building Trusted AI-Powered Voice Products
[70]CPO at The Economist | Building Trusted AI-Powered Voice Products
[71]CPO at The Economist | Building Trusted AI-Powered Voice Products

pull requests for engineering review [72].

Ramp example: Ramp built an internal "background agent" system; they reportedly went from **0%** of PRs merged via that system to **70%** in **2–3 months** [73].

Key takeaway: unlocking collaboration is partly about moving beyond "local-host prototypes" so the rest of the company (and customers) can see and react to work in progress [74].

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4) Perk: "radical urgency" requires explicit trade-offs and tight scope

Perk accelerated a spend product launch from January to November via tight scope and cross-company effort [75]. Trade-offs included shipping with fewer features and concentrating specific team expertise on the milestone [76].

Their broader principle: speed to learning comes from getting to real users quickly for feedback [77].

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5) Just Eat Takeaway: internal data agent to eliminate handoffs

They developed an internal conversational agent that allows PMs and others to query much of their data, reducing analysis handoffs from hours/calls into seconds/minutes and enabling rapid follow-up questioning cycles [78].

Key takeaway: data access and transparency were positioned as foundational to ROI and decision speed [79].

Career Corner

1) Strategy execution often fails in the middle: teach middle managers how their job changes

Melissa Perri argues that companies get stuck when middle management isn't coached on how their role shifts: setting local strategy that ties back to global strategy (instead of pushing down solutions) [80][81]. She also emphasizes success

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[72] CEO at Alloy | Vibe Coding for Product Leaders
[73] CEO at Alloy | Vibe Coding for Product Leaders
[74] CEO at Alloy | Vibe Coding for Product Leaders
[75] CPO at Perk | Driving Radical Urgency: How to Ship Better Products, Faster with AI
[76] CPO at Perk | Driving Radical Urgency: How to Ship Better Products, Faster with AI
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[78] CPO at Just Eat Takeaway | Building an AI Product Strategy for Meaningful ROI
[79] CPO at Just Eat Takeaway | Building an AI Product Strategy for Meaningful ROI
[80] Escaping the AI Built Trap with Melissa Perri
[81] Escaping the AI Built Trap with Melissa Perri

needs leadership teams to operate as "one team," not fiefdoms [82].

How to apply: - Define 1–3 strategic intents (concrete outcomes) and force solution proposals to ladder up to them [83].

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2) "Builder" skills are becoming a PM differentiator—but ship safely

Community posts describe PMs being asked to build AI-generated features and test directly with customers, gaining deeper engineering understanding and first-hand user feedback [84]. A key caution: for complex systems, changes shouldn't hit production without senior engineer review [85].

How to apply: - Use prototypes to learn and validate quickly, but formalize review gates for production codepaths [86].

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3) Use AI to close the engineering communication gap (without pretending to be an engineer)

Aakash Gupta's guidance: open the actual project, ask AI to explain architecture and components, and do this for weeks to close the communication gap faster than most alternatives [87].

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4) Job search leverage: AI-native PM skills and interview systems are getting packaged

- Lenny Rachitsky promoted free live workshops on "The AI-Native PM" across **AI workflows**, **becoming more technical**, and **product sense & influence**—with **75,000+ registrations** [88][89]. Sign-up link: http://bit.ly/ai-native-pm [90].
- A free Claude Code–based interview coach (built from interviews with 30 job seekers) offers response scoring, mock interviews with pushback, company-specific prep, and negotiation scripts; v2 adds

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[82] Escaping the AI Built Trap with Melissa Perri
[83] Escaping the AI Built Trap with Melissa Perri
[84] r/ProductManagement post by u/ak49_shh
[85] r/ProductManagement comment by u/SillyVermicelli7169
[86] r/ProductManagement comment by u/SillyVermicelli7169
[87] How to AI Prototype Well | Masterclass from $5.5B Founder, Nadav Abrahami (Wix)
[88] post by @lennysan
[89] post by @lennysan
[90] post by @lennysan

memory, higher challenge, and clearer next steps [91][92][93][94]. Download:
https://github.com/noamseg/interview-coach-skill [95].

Tools & Resources

- **Shadow PM / Post-SEO moat (Semrush, YouTube):** https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8LlYrA [96]
- **Shadow PM + AI for non-AI-native products (#product-con London'26, YouTube):** https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-cPruy0tHg0 [97]
- **Behavioral analytics at JLR (FullStory + platforming, YouTube):** https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P8LLZJZIEI8 [98]
- **AI prototyping masterclass (Substack podcast episode):** https://www.news.aakashg.com/p/nadav-abrahami-podcast [99]
- **Vibe coding for product leaders (Alloy, YouTube):** https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nFDgBEE [100]
- **AI interview coach (GitHub):** https://github.com/noamseg/interview-coach-skill [101]
- **Guide on using AI in job interviews (Lenny's Newsletter):** https://www.lennysnewsletter.com/p/how-to-use-ai-in-your-next-job-interview [102]
- **AI-Native PM workshops:** http://bit.ly/ai-native-pm [103]

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