

PRODUCT OWNER VS PRODUCT MANAGER VS SCRUM MASTER: WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?



As with all project and product methodologies and frameworks, [Agile and Scrum](#) are creating new roles within organizations. Three of the more prominent roles are

- Product Owner (PO)
- Product Manager (PM)
- Scrum Master

All three roles are higher-level jobs and come with an attractive salary.

People are frequently confused about the differences between Product Owner, Project Manager, and Scrum Master in an Agile environment. This article aims to answer that question.



Product Managers,

Product Owners, and Scrum Masters are separate roles on an Agile team, and in the Product Manager's case, outside the Agile team. Each role has its own part to play and can generally be distinguished by these characteristics:

Product Manager

Management role focused on identifying customer needs and the business objectives that a feature or product will fulfill

Focuses on strategic vision, product strategy, customers, markets, and company objectives

Product Owner

Management role focused on building and refining the product

Focuses on tactics and operations. Supports internal teams, especially product engineering

Scrum Master

Also referred to as Team Lead, focused on helping the scrum team perform at their highest level

Focuses on facilitating team coordination, supporting project processes, protecting the team, coaching team members, and communication with Product Owners and the organization

High-level vision and product management, including positioning, marketing, sales support, customer care, and supporting product delivery

Translates high-level vision into actionable tasks, creates detailed requirements and user stories, manages product backlog, and determines what should be built next

Facilitates team coordination, ensures actionable tasks are performed accordingly

Oversees entire product lifecycle, works with business case and product roadmap

Manages sprints and participates in retrospectives

Responsible for the team following Agile practices and processes, and supporting project processes

We'll go into more specific job, skill, and salary information later.

Product Managers can exist anywhere, anytime. Product Owners and Scrum Masters, however, are specific roles in the Scrum Framework.

Product Owners & Scrum Masters are specifically tied to Scrum

Scrum is an [Agile Development system](#) that:

- Focuses on goals, small and large
- Takes place in 1- or 2-week-long product development periods, known as [sprints](#)
- Often uses [Kanban boards](#) to create and organize tasks

Because Scrum is a specific system, it has particular roles. The roles on the team are:

- Product Owners
- Scrum Masters
- Developers

In the Agile mindset, the [Scrum team](#) is meant to be self-organized, and all team members are responsible for getting the work done. The Product Owner and Scrum Master are critical parts of developing product capability through using Scrum.

When Scrum teams do not exist, the Product Owner and Scrum Master identities fade away. Many of the tasks performed by these roles may be absorbed in over-arching Product Management roles or by Assistant PMs.

Product Manager: jobs, skills, salary

The scope of a [Product Management role](#) varies depending on the stage of the company, the maturity of the Product Management team, and other factors including job location. At its most mature, the PM is primarily responsible for:

- Talking to users
- Organizing strategic path of product
- Creating product development timelines
- Communicating between engineering and business teams

When a product is in its initial stages, or the team is in its infancy, the Product Management team can be found wearing mile-high hats, participating in everything from UX Designing, backend

engineering, and design budgeting, along with all the customer communications that are required. PMs tend to make good money. In the U.S., the average annual salary for a Product Manager is about \$107,000 estimated base pay, [according to Glassdoor](#). However, Glassdoor reports an extremely wide salary range for PMs of between \$52K and \$276K, with possible salary ranges up to \$600K.

Specific PM salaries are dependent on what industry the PM works in (tech PMs seem to average in the \$130K range and up) and other factors such as company and location. Your mileage may vary, so research the average pay in the industries and companies you would like to work for.

Product Owner: jobs, skills, salary

Where a Product Manager might wear several hats, Product Owner responsibilities in Scrum become very narrow. Like a second basemen on a baseball field, the Product Owner has an extremely specific piece of land to cover with specific people to speak to.

Scrum utilizes a system of tasks and keeps score, often with the help of a product management tool like the Kanban chart or even a simple Excel file. Throughout the sprint, engineers will claim tasks. The role of the Product Owner is to organize and prioritize the tasks for the engineers.

- If there are no tasks, the engineers wait around for the ball to get hit to them.
- If the tasks aren't prioritized, the engineers develop features that aren't crucial to the product's mission.

Generally, the engineers, like the computer systems humankind develops, will build whatever task is on that task list, regardless of its direct impact on the end-product. Thus, it is especially important for the PO to maintain a good list, or those engineers might end up building a whole different product than what the company claims to sell.

Product Owners must do several things to maintain the Scrum backlog. The PO's primary responsibilities are:

- Translate PMs' vision to actionable tasks
- Determine day-to-day tasks
- Write user stories for development team
- Prioritize work in the Scrum backlog

Like PMs, Product Owners earn a solid salary. [Glassdoor's research](#) indicates an average U.S. salary of just under \$101,000 estimated total base pay for POs. Like PMs, POs have an extremely wide salary range of between \$38K and \$389K on Glassdoor. Also, like PMs, your PO salary mileage may vary so be sure to compare salaries for target industries and locations.

Scrum Master: jobs, skills, salary

Per [ScrumAlliance.org](#), a Scrum Master helps the Scrum team perform at their highest levels. They protect the team from internal and external distractions so that all project members—especially the development team—can focus on their work.

Scrum Masters facilitate team coordination and support project processes by performing the following roles:

- Ensuring actionable tasks designated by the Product Owner are performed accordingly

- Communicating between team members about evolving planning and requirements
- Facilitating daily Scrum and Sprint Initiatives and other Scrum events
- Conducting meetings
- Managing administrative tasks
- Eliminating external and internal project hurdles
- Other items to help the team perform at their highest level

Scrum Masters also coach team members on delivering results. They are responsible for ensuring that team members understand, execute, and follow Agile principles, processes, and practices throughout the project.

Finally, a Scrum Master communicates with the Product Owner and others within the organization for effectively implementing the Scrum Framework during the project.

Scrum Masters also earn a solid salary. [Glassdoor Research](#) specifies an average U.S. salary around \$111,000 total base pay for a Scrum Master, with the most likely pay range between \$27K and \$537K. But like PMs and POs, this is an average that may vary significantly by industry, company, and locations.

PM, PO, and Scrum Master certifications

There are ways to set yourself apart from the crowd by getting a certification in one of these areas. These certifications indicate your specialty and experience, so you can often expect to command a higher salary.

- The Product Manager can take [one of a number of tests](#) for certification
- The larger umbrella of [Agile Development certifications](#) will teach both PM and PO roles and responsibilities. Among them, the PMI-ACP is the top certification that acts as a catch-all for agile development roles. You may also want to consider obtaining the Scrum Alliance Certified Product Owner (CSPO).
- [ScrumAlliance.org offers several certifications](#) on both a Scrum Master track and on a Product Owner track. Each track offers Certified, Advanced Certified, and Certified Professional certificates.

Product Managers, Product Owners, & Scrum Masters: The outlook is good

With companies across all sectors and geographies adopting agile product development or blending it with traditional project management—such as the predictive, agile, and hybrid approaches now included with Project Management Institute (PMI) Project Management Professional certification—it's likely that Product Managers, Product Owners and Scrum Masters will be around for a long while.

As technology continues its expansion, more people will be needed to explain innovative concepts and applications to the business. Great PMs, POs, and Scrum Masters will continue to contribute to companies' ongoing [innovation efforts](#) in order to stay ahead of competition.

Related reading

- [BMC Business of IT Blog](#)
- [BMC DevOps Blog](#)
- [What's An App Owner? Application Owner Roles & Responsibilities](#)
- [IT Project Management: Concepts, Solutions & Best Practices](#)
- [Today's Best IT/Tech Certifications: A Complete Guide](#)