

CROSS-FUNCTIONAL ALIGNMENT



THE PROBLEM WE CHOSE

PMs who work across multiple contexts struggle with cross-functional alignment because different teams interpret the same language differently, making communication and approvals difficult.

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We found three problems worth considering

1

Cross-functional alignment: same words, different meanings; approvals are hard to get.

8/11 PMs raised this concern

"Even when we hear the same thing from the same leaders, we may interpret it differently."

2

Hidden dependencies & unknowns in regards to legal challenges & implications

4/11 PMs raised this concern

"Usually it's the unknown unknowns that pop up, and those often involve compliance or legal issues."

3

AI pulls teams into solution mode and away from customer discovery

3/11 PMs raised this concern

"Why even talk to customers if this already has all the answers?"

We picked Problem 1

WHY IT WON

1. Strongest evidence

8 PMs raised it, across company types

2. Real pain, weak fixes

PMs already spend meetings and follow-ups on it, and it still isn't solved

3. Clear gap

Lots of tools exist, but rarely focus on synthesis and collective understanding across platforms

4. Buildable, AI-native

Good fit for LLMs (interpretation check, cross-platform comment synthesis) where inherently useful

5. Market potential

\$3.8M fintech SAM starting wedge, with a much higher ceiling across several industries

WHY WE CUT THE OTHER TWO

Problem 2 (legal dependencies)

The ICP is compelling, but it's hard to build. A wrong "AI lawyer" carries a lot of liability and seems infeasible.

Problem 3 (AI vs. discovery)

Weakest evidence and vaguest ICP. AI is also the cause here, so adding more AI risks making it worse.

Our Biggest Weakness

Our ICP is broad and the space is crowded with visibility tools. We will most likely still need to narrow.

8 of 11 PMs raised this problem

Different Interpretations

“**Making sure everybody is on the same page is a lot of work**, especially because even when we hear the same thing from the same leaders, we may **interpret it differently.**”

Senior Staff Design Researcher · Large Fintech/SaaS Company

Conflicting Team Dependencies

“My teams are **typically sandwiched in between**: we have to work very closely with the infrastructure people, but at the same time, we also have to work very closely with the teams that actually build the applications.”

Product Manager & Manager · Large Enterprise Software Company

Fragmented Context

“Some things are in **docs**. Some things are in **meeting notes**. Some things are in **Slack**. Some things are in **research reports**. Some things you just remember because someone **told you in a meeting.**”

Product Manager · Large Technology Company

What PMs do today, and where it falls short

CURRENT WORKAROUNDS & TOOLS

1. Cross-Functional Communication

Slack • Google Docs / Notion • Jira / Productboard

2. Hidden Dependencies & Compliance

Jira • Compliance tools

3. AI-Assisted Customer Discovery

Dovetail • Maze • Sprig

WHAT FALLS SHORT

What They Do Today

- Switch between Slack, Docs, Jira, and meetings.
- Manually follow up to clarify decisions and approvals.

Where It Falls Short

- Information is fragmented across platforms.
- Shared documents ≠ shared understanding.
- Hidden dependencies surface too late.

\$38K in Annual Recurring Revenue in Year 1

TAM

\$22.5M+

12,500+* North American
fintech companies × 5
seats × \$30/month × 12

SAM

\$3.84M

10,681 U.S. fintech
companies* × 20% ICP fit ×
5 seats × \$30/month × 12

SOM

\$38.4K

1% of SAM in Year 1 ≈ 21
companies / 107 paid
seats

Sources:

<https://www.statista.com/statistics/893954/number-fintech-startups-by-region/>(<https://www.statista.com/topics/2404/fintech/>](<https://www.statista.com/topics/2404/fintech/>)

Rubric: Market size

Three solutions we are considering

AI Cross-Functional Summarizer

WHAT IT DOES

Summarizes all the knowledge across internal work platforms

WHERE AI DOES THE WORK

Provides summarization of all the information contained in the different workspaces across the company

AI Semantic Conflict Detector

WHAT IT DOES

AI notetaker that flags points of contention during meetings to be received

WHERE AI DOES THE WORK

Completes input and analysis of the meeting content and reports the points of contention

Internal Communication Platform

WHAT IT DOES

Direct platform that centralizes all company workflows

WHERE AI DOES THE WORK

AI provides the AI features that currently exist in competitors (Slackbot, NotionAI, Gemini in Docs)

First Prototype: For our first prototype we would make a tool that combines our first two solutions (**AI Cross-Functional Summarizer** and **AI Semantic Conflict Detector**).

Appendix

For Q&A and for readers who were not in the room

A1. Week 3 comparison table

	PROBLEM 1 · LEANING TOWARD Cross-functional alignment Same words, different meanings; approvals are hard to get	PROBLEM 2 Hidden legal dependencies Unknown unknowns around legal and compliance implications	PROBLEM 3 AI pulls teams from discovery AI pushes teams into solution mode, away from customers
Evidence	STRONG Raised by 8 PMs across company types, so it isn't industry-specific.	MODERATE Raised by 4 PMs. Vivid, but mostly in regulated or public-company contexts.	WEAK 3 PMs plus 2 soft mentions. More a concern than a daily pain point.
Current workarounds	Slack and Doc comments, concept reviews, "this meeting succeeds if X" agendas, written proposals. In practice: the alignment meeting plus PM follow-ups.	Looping in legal early, roadmap reviews, compliance gates added after getting burned (e.g., small-business lending). Mostly reactive.	Discipline only: staying in the problem space and insisting on real user contact. No interviewee named a tool.
Competitive gap	Crowded on visibility (Productboard, Jira PD, Notion, Slack), which scatters context even further. Gap: no tool checks whether people <i>interpret</i> shared artifacts the same way.	Jira tracks dependencies only once they're known. Compliance tools live outside the PM workflow. Nothing flags legal implications during planning.	Saturated (Dovetail, HeyMarvin, Maze, Sprig), but these speed up synthesis. None push teams back to customers. Little direct whitespace.
ICP	PMs coordinating across eng, design, legal, and research, each with different vocabulary and styles. Broad; needs narrowing.	Fintech and regulated-industry PMs, especially at public companies. Narrow and sharp.	Discovery-heavy PMs on teams adopting AI quickly. A vague segment.
Market size	Fintech SAM (\$7.5M) as a starting point. True ceiling is much larger since the problem isn't fintech-specific.	Fintech \$7.5M SAM / \$225K SOM maps directly onto this ICP.	Small and hard to monetize: teams rarely pay to slow themselves down. No estimate yet.
Buildability	MEDIUM Clear entry points: an "interpretation check" where AI flags diverging restatements, cross-platform comment synthesis, approval scope. Needs Slack + Docs integrations.	HARD Needs regulatory and company-specific context. Liability risk: a wrong "AI lawyer" is worse than none.	MEDIUM Prompts and nudges are simple to build, but the fix is behavioral, so impact is hard to measure.
AI fit	STRONG Comparing language, spotting ambiguity, and synthesizing sources are core LLM strengths. Keep a human in the loop (5 of 9 PMs re-verify AI output).	MODERATE Regulatory flagging is plausible, but hallucination stakes are highest here and PMs already distrust AI.	WEAK AI is the cause, so more AI risks deepening it. At best, a guardrail.

PM's who function across multiple teams (software engineers, design, etc.)

Role and seniority

Role: Managerial Role

Seniority: High Seniority

Company size and type

Company Size: Enterprise Company

Type: Technology Company

When the problem hits

When PMs attempt to bridge cross-functional teams to guide product development

What it costs them

Valuable time, money spent on enterprise software (Slack, Google meets, etc.), internal team friction

A3. Competitive landscape

From the two rounds of interviews we conducted, we found varying answers when it came to the tools PMs use. The reason for these vast differences between tools used actually come from mainly cross-functional alignment between different teams and company standards.

The problems mentioned when using slack was the volume of messages received by a PM. They are being communicated from more than one team at a time in different channels, which can sometimes be overwhelming to look across all of them. Along with tasks, emails, and meetings that a PM already has to keep track of, Slack adds an extra app they also need to be attentive of. Due to the nature of slack being less formal than an email, the amount of messages a person may receive is larger than they would in an email as people in different teams/channels have full conversations throughout the day.

With Google docs, PM's noted that it is difficult to reference back as sometimes a standstill document may not capture the entire context of a situation. The example from one of the interviews is that they mentioned that sometimes a document can have a lot of decisions a team made but may not include the why it happened. The why is the type of reasoning that lives in people's conversations that does not always make it into an ai's meeting summary. If they add more commentary to the documents, it then clutters the information and can make the document lose its original focus.

Our ICP's really value efficiency. Their time is limited due to the fact that they are spread out across different teams and have many meetings, therefore they appreciate tools (internal and other) that help them be more efficient with the time. Additionally, they value a tool to be comprehensive, they appreciate when they do not have to be dependent on multiple tools for similar tasks and can use a tool for more than one team or task. This helps information not get lost or not be spread across different platforms.

A4. Quote bank

1. Senior Staff Design Researcher · Large Fintech/SaaS Company

Misalignment & Different Interpretations

- "Making sure everybody is on the same page is a lot of work, especially because even when we hear the same thing from the same leaders, we may interpret it differently."
- "We each have our own view of the world, so we're trying to make sure we're actually reaching agreement. We also have different levels of expertise and different incentives or responsibilities, so we need to be respectful of that."
- "We want to make sure that when we use the same terms, we're actually talking about the same things and don't have different expectations."
- "I think it's really helpful to be aligned on our goals and needs individually, to understand our incentives, and to be clear about our assumptions, expectations, or hypotheses."

Cross-functional Coordination

- "PMs sit at the intersection of many different things, so I think being a PM is really challenging. You're orchestrating and collaborating across a lot of work."
- "Then I can understand what's important to the PMs: What do they need to know? What do they need to get done? Who do they need to satisfy? What's at stake for them?"
- "As a researcher, I feel it's my responsibility to bring some of that context into the conversation."

Fragmented Context & Tools

- "There's a proliferation of different tools. Designers are in Figma, so sometimes PMs are leaving comments in Figma, and there are many different surfaces to troubleshoot and keep up with."
- "As we're vibing-coding more things, we're also running into the fact that not every tool supports the same level of commenting or narrative context. There are a lot of surfaces to keep up with."
- "There still needs to be some kind of shared layer because different groups will continue to use their preferred tools for a while."

Communication Overhead

- "So there's a lot of back-and-forth communication—making sure we're speaking the same language and anchoring on what we think the customer problem is, even if we don't fully know it yet."
- "There are many Slack messages back and forth, saying, 'Okay, this is what we think it is.' We also use shared Google Docs where we add comments and questions and collaborate. And sometimes we simply need to be in the same room or on the same Zoom call."
- "Since then, there have been many conversations clarifying constraints and proposing solutions: 'Okay, this is a constraint; here's what we're proposing instead; here's what I understand your intention to be.'"
- "Sometimes it's simply faster to resolve something in a live conversation than asynchronously in Slack or through comments in documents."

Unexpected Blockers & Missing Stakeholders

- "Sometimes we get partway through a project and realize there's a legal, compliance, or data-protection implication we hadn't anticipated, and that can create friction."
- "It can slow us down, but over time people learn to factor those issues in earlier."
- "When you've encountered that kind of issue, the first step is understanding who your partners are. Then, the next time around, you factor those stakeholders into planning earlier and recognize

- that they may be key stakeholders or even approvers in the process—roles you may not have realized you needed."
- "Sometimes there are also technical limitations we weren't expecting."

2. Product Manager & Manager · Large Enterprise Software Company

Cross-team Dependencies

- "My teams are typically sandwiched in between: we have to work very closely with the infrastructure people, but at the same time, we also have to work very closely with the teams that actually build the applications."
- "If any payroll changes come in, we have to work with the payroll team to make those changes while also working with the infrastructure team. It's like changing the engine of the plane while we're flying it, if that makes sense."
- "Our AI-first strategy is clear from leadership, but translating that strategy into actual execution requires a lot of moving pieces."

Misalignment & Stakeholder Understanding

- "Even now, I'll show up to meetings where the other party is saying something, and I have to ask myself: Am I actually understanding where they're coming from? It's a classic challenge."
- "Sometimes the simplest things are the hardest. Building that human connection, understanding what the other side is trying to accomplish, and recognizing that it doesn't have to be a zero-sum game all matter."
- "That's where human connection, collaboration, and really understanding what the other side is looking for—while also advocating for what you need—go a long way."

Communication Overhead & Time Costs

- "The challenge is that I still need to put in some time at night to read and write. I typically find myself working an hour or two at night, which I'm not very proud of, but if I don't do that, it's very hard to keep up."
- "Unfortunately, that leaves no time for reading during the day, so I end up doing that at night."

3. Product Manager · Large Technology Company

Conflicting Stakeholder Priorities

- "Like one customer is asking for something urgently. Sales says it's important because it could help close a deal. Engineering says it will take three months. Research says most users don't care about it. Leadership says there's a strategic reason to do it."
- "There's no objectively correct answer there."

Fragmented Information & Decision Context

- "Some things are in docs. Some things are in meeting notes. Some things are in Slack. Some things are in research reports. Some things you just remember because someone told you in a meeting."
- "And then when you're making a decision, you kind of reconstruct the story."
- "That takes a lot of mental energy."
- "Because right now, a lot of that history lives in people's heads. And when a new PM joins or someone switches teams, you lose a lot of it."
- "They can read documents, but documents don't always capture why a decision happened."

Meetings & Information Overload

- "Before, maybe I forgot what happened in the meeting. Now I have a perfect transcript of what happened, but I still don't know what is actually important three weeks later."

4. Associate Product Builder · Large Technology Company

From interview notes; only the quoted phrases are recorded as verbatim.

Difficulty Getting Alignment

- "actually so difficult"

Clarifying Meeting Goals

- "this meeting will be a success if X"

5. Product Manager Intern · Large Gaming Platform

From interview notes; quoted statements have not been independently verified against a full transcript.

Communication & Alignment

- "Unless you're constantly bogging people down with meetings, I don't think you can really over-communicate."

Communicating Product Requirements

- "nobody is going to read all of that."

6. Program Manager · Company Type Not Specified

From interview notes; quoted statement has not been independently verified against a full transcript.

Cross-functional Leadership Without Formal Authority

- "a whole team of maybe 100 people but not a single person reports to you."

A5. Market sizing sources and math

Our market sizing uses a bottom-up approach based on the number of fintech companies and a subscription price of **\$30** per user per month. According to Statista, North America had over 12,500 fintech companies in 2025, while the U.S. had approximately 10,681. Assuming an average of **5 potential paid users per company**, our **TAM** is \$22.5M annually ($12,500 \times 5 \times \$30 \times 12$). For our **SAM**, we focus on U.S. fintech companies and estimate that 20% fit our ideal customer profile (ICP), resulting in approximately \$3.84M annually ($10,681 \times 20\% \times 5 \times \$30 \times 12$). For our **SOM**, we assume capturing 1% of SAM in the first year, equivalent to approximately 21 paying companies and \$38.4K in annualized recurring revenue (ARR). The 20% ICP fit, 5 users per company, \$30 pricing, and 1% market penetration are preliminary team assumptions that require further validation.

Sources:

- Statista, Number of fintech startups worldwide by region:

<https://www.statista.com/statistics/893954/number-fintech-startups-by-region/>

- Statista, Fintech – Statistics & Facts: <https://www.statista.com/topics/2404/fintech/>

A6. How we used AI, and the reading

AI Usage: We used AI to organize and synthesize interview transcripts, compare insights across participants, and support evidence-based decision-making and calculations.

Reading Connection: Inspired by *How to Identify Your Ideal Customer Profile*, we recognized the need to narrow our ICP from PMs broadly to a specific segment with acute cross-functional alignment challenges, and identify the particular communication problem they struggle with most.