

TEI 034: 6 Processes for Generating Ideas for Radical Innovations

Speakers:

Host: Chad McAllister, PhD

Guest: Michal Herzenstein, PhD

Chad: Hi Everyday Innovators. I am continuing our series on Design Thinking and talking with Michal Herzenstein, who contributed to writing "Optimal Design for Radically New Products" in the PDMA Essentials book titled, "Design and Design Thinking." Michal is an associate professor of marketing at the University of Delaware and she earned her PhD in marketing from the University of Rochester. Michal, thank you so much for being with us and talking about design thinking today.

Michal: Thank you for having me.

Chad: I know you didn't write this chapter by yourself, so let's talk about who your co-authors are.

Michal: I wrote this chapter with Steve Hoeffler. He is a professor of marketing at Vanderbilt University and his former MBA student, Tamar Ginzburg. Steve and I collaborate on several projects. He is the most pleasant person I have ever known.

Chad: Very good. It's always nice to be writing with people you actually like.

Michal: Yes, that's true.

Chad: Or working with them in any way. Great. I'd like to ask, what do we mean by radically new products, and do you have any examples of that?

Michal: Yes. We define radically new products as products that allow us to do something that we couldn't have done before. They usually require a change in consumption. Consumers need to learn something new and they need to understand how the products work and what their benefits are. A recent product that I really like is Coravin. I have yet to buy one of my own but I most likely will at some point. It is a device that allows people to pour wine from an uncorked bottle. The way it works is by inserting a long and very thin needle through the cork in order to pour the wine. To fill in the space left in the bottle, the needle injects argon. Argon is a gas that does not interact with the wine. Therefore, the wine essentially maintains the same taste. The cork has a property that allows it to expand and refill the hole left behind by the needle. That's how you drink wine from an uncorked bottle.

Chad: So it helps to keep the wine fresh for a longer period of time.

Michal: Yes, yes.

Chad: Okay. You mentioned that radical new products require a change in consumption, a change in how the user interacts with the product. In this case, that is taking the corkscrew and removing the cork. Is that the type of change in consumption that qualifies in this example?

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Michal: Yes. You also need to understand how to use the product. This is not an easy thing to use because of the needle and so on.

Chad: Yes. Because it is something new, it requires new behaviors from the consumer as well.

Michal: Right.

Chad: Okay. In the chapter you talk through 6 processes that groups can use to improve their abilities to create new ideas for these radically new products. I want to walk through each of those in just a minute. But first, can you give me some background on how these processes were developed? What are they based on and where did they come from?

Michal: The research that Steve and I engaged in is independently about radical new products. That was what my dissertation was about and he wrote about that too when he was in Grad school. We met at a conference and from there we began to write together. As we were writing research for the journals, we were reading a lot and talking to different people. As the chapter evolved, we wrote a proposal for it. At this point, we had learned so much from all the research we had done on the topic and all the stories we heard from other people. We tried to generalize the stories and the research. That is how we came up with those 6 ideas.

Chad: Okay, so the chapter evolved- from the body of knowledge that you gained and the practical experiences that you heard from others.

Michal: Yes. They weren't really defined well to begin with. I think we started with 4 processes and then split 2 of those processes into two because they were a bit more intricate and not something that happens very easily.

Chad: Okay. Let's talk through the 6 you have now. The first process you have for helping groups increase their capacity for creating these radical new products is called, "Communicate the Challenge Goal Toward Radically New Products". What does that really mean? What is involved with "Communicating the Challenge Goal?"

Michal: Upper management in large organizations always want to see innovation. In small organizations it's easier to see that happening but in large organizations it tends to be more difficult. Innovation will happen in the regular course of business. Improvements are always happening. The 10X takes time. The 10X is a team that comes up with a product that is ten times better than existing products. Those are the radical innovations—the product that has never been defined before. The iPod, iPad, and the Coravin are great examples of that. Therefore, we suggest that while management always communicates that they want innovation, making sure that the team understand that they as managers are looking for 10X has to be communicated clearly. From time to time, the new product development team will be

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instructed to shoot for the 10X. This is why we say you have to communicate that. One way to really facilitate that is to create a culture within the team that failure is acceptable because striving for the 10X is hard. If the team doesn't take risks and fail, the 10X is not likely to happen. If the team is measured on outcomes, it is usually less likely to take risks. This culture of trying and being measured based on how hard you try and what you learn in the process helps the team achieve the 10X in the long-run.

Chad: Okay. That sounds like a key point. Experimenting within the team helps teams move toward that 10X breakthrough. The steps that you're taking to try to embrace that should have more focus than the actual outcomes.

Michal: Right.

Chad: Because, as you said, there aren't that many 10X ideas that come along.

Michal: Right.

Chad: So we're communicating that goal and putting that challenge out there to work on the 10X, which probably helps us better understand what you mean by "radically new product". It certainly not the incremental innovations that take place to existing products that we just evolve overtime and make them better for customers. This is the brand new 10X idea.

Michal: Right. Two things that we have been hearing about what companies are doing is assigning some time for people to work on whatever they want. Google has done this - it can be 1 day a week or 1 day a month. On the group level we talk about being more autonomous. If I need a resource that is very expensive, I need to learn some new technology, or I need to include people from different backgrounds in my team, that should be allowed in order to come out with a 10X.

Chad: Okay. A lot of that has to do with the collaboration and making new connections that exposes you to new information and expands your philosophy as well.

Michal: Right.

Chad: Okay. Let's move on to your second process, which is called, "Shift Time Frames to Future and Past". When I first read that, I thought, "I don't think they've come up with some kind of cool time travel machine." What do you mean by shifting times to future and past?

Michal: Yes, time travel. My kid would like to invent that machine.

Chad: I think a lot of us would love that.

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Michal: We would have to wait a few years because he is only seven. What we are suggesting here is a way to free people from the boundaries of what is possible today. If I asked you think about something that will be possible or relevant 20 years from now, then you don't have to think about what we know today. You're not constrained. You're not constrained by what is normal or possible. We ask questions like, "Think about something you want or something you need that is not possible today." I'm sure every one of us has ideas. As you mentioned before, I did my PhD in Rochester. Rochester is really cold and I used to stay in school really late because that is what PhD students do. My dream was to obtain an electric blanket that I could turn on before leaving school and heading back home so that once I got to my bed, it would be nice and warm for me. That was 12 years ago. Today that is possible. Today, there are such devices. You can turn it on from an app on your phone. This is something I was dreaming of 12 years ago, which was not possible. But it is possible today. A slightly more famous example is when President Kennedy committed to put a man on the moon. This is the idea. Under this process of shifting timeframes, you're not only looking at the future but also looking at the past. The idea here is to be able to see how the category has progressed over the years. One of the things we were thinking about is an exercise that we personally tried. The exercise is to put pictures up of items from the category and how they have evolved. An easy example here is computers. We think about the invention of the personal computer category. Overtime, they became smaller, they became stronger, they portrayed more colors and pixels, they are not wearable, etc. Where are we heading? If you look at the past and the sequence of things, it becomes pretty clear what people want and where we are heading. This exercise helps a lot in figuring this out.

Chad: There are some really good points there that I would like to emphasize. As you are talking about shifting the timeframe, the focus of setting this BHAG—big hairy audacious goal—like President Kennedy setting the moon shot is also about the attempts on achieving the goal. Google also focuses on this with their programs like Google X where they try to set those moonshot goals and they fail many times but if they get one moonshot out of the many attempts in a decade, I think they will consider that a success for themselves.

Michal: Right. That goes back to the point that failure is okay.

Chad: Right. Often, as I've talked with guests on the show, a topic of trends has been continuously emphasized. You did that too by recognizing where things are moving. You used the example of computers and looking at their development from the time they were invented to now, you recognize that they are getting smaller. Therefore, what does that mean for future possibilities? I'm personally a fan of science fiction. I grew up watching Star Trek. It's amazing to me to see how many things I saw on Star Trek as a kid that are now real life devices in today's world. I remember feeling so excited when I got my own flip phone that looked just like the communicator on Star Trek. It is possible to envision the future. It is definitely helpful.

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Let's move on to the third process. The next one is called, "Promote an Emerging Technology Focus across the Consumption Chain". I am a bit unclear on the specifics of this "consumption" idea. Talk about that consumption chain and how the technology focus helps.

Michal: The consumption chain is a sequence of steps that consumers take. The chain begins with awareness. We always say that consumers don't buy products that they are not aware of, therefore, awareness has to be the first step. Awareness leads to acquiring information, buying, using, and it ends with the consumer disposing the product. Truthfully, you can make these steps as big or as small as you'd like, depending on what you are interested in.

Chad: Okay, so it's all those customer experience sequences. All those opportunities that customers have in order to engage with the product concept and learn about the product.

Michal: Exactly. Also, how you buy the product, how you use the product, and how you dispose the product is part of that. We can think about infusing each one of those steps with emerging technologies and how that will change the process altogether. Steve and I went through this exercise ourselves. We suggested that one person or one team comes up with a step. The other person or team can brainstorm crazy new technologies and then we can work together to see if they can hack them together. We thought about how a lot of companies are getting involved in the new same-day delivery space. This is a huge deal now. A lot of people are talking about how they would still like to buy online and would like the item within 30 minutes to an hour. The other thing that we talked about is 3D printers, which are becoming more common.

Chad: They are common enough for me to have one in my office.

Michal: There you go. Then we have to figure out how we can combine those two things. In the middle of an installment, Steve really needed a tool. He was pretty upset to stop what he was doing in order to go to the store and buy the tool that he needed. I mentioned how I was pretty forgetful of getting things in advance for my kid's upcoming events. I usually have to rush to the store the night before the event. We do find ourselves in those situations. But what if I could buy something online and the retailer could send me a file which I could print on my 3D printer at home and get the item through same-day delivery that way. This is just an idea. It does not involve any drones or scary things like that.

Chad: Drones falling out of the sky on us.

Michal: Right. Carrying boxes from Amazon. Pizza delivery via drones is another idea.

Chad: I'm sure everyone listening has heard of these examples. Amazon has put out an expectation that they will be delivering boxes of 5 pounds or less by helicopter drones in the next few years. I like that idea of printing our own products instead.

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Michal: Right! This was just an idea that we came up with through the simple exercise of combining a step with an emerging technology. Just think about different steps in the consumption sequence. Think about different technologies and try to hack them together in order to find something new. That is the idea behind this process.

Chad: Yeah. I see how these are building. It's that integration of technologies from different domains and that timeframe shifting of what might be possible in the future, given a few more revolutions of technology emerging in new way, such as the 3D printer and how that will evolve in a few years.

Michal: Yes. People are talking about printing organs during surgery and things like that.

Chad: Sure. I continue to read about new advancements that are being made by medical teams who are printing customized devices for specific cases to keep someone alive. It's pretty amazing.

Michal: Yes.

Chad: Okay. One thing that came to mind when you were describing this third process was Geoffrey Moore's concept of the whole product which does not only consist of the physical item that was created, but rather every step of its creation and customer interaction that comes with it. That is part of the consumption chain as well. Very interesting ideas.

The fourth process here is "Promote the Use of Analogical Thinking". What types of analogies are useful and how might groups use them to do a better job at coming up with ideas for breakthrough products?

Michal: The idea behind that is if you find 2 things that are similar in 1 aspect, perhaps we can find other aspects that we can import from 1 idea to another. Remember the Coravin I mentioned earlier?

Chad: Yes.

Michal: What is its coolest feature? It is hard to understand if I just explain how it works. But what if I tell you that the Coravin is like Spotify. Now we have to figure out what the analogy is all about. To Spotify is a service that lets you sample songs. It refines your taste in music and you don't have to commit to buying the song. You can listen to it several times, you can choose different channels of the same type of music, so on and so forth. In a similar way, the Coravin can help you develop your palate. You can try different wines with the same food because you do not need to uncork the bottle. You can try different years of the same wine and learn how to identify differences. It can really improve your palate and refine your taste. It is hard, however,

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to capture all of that from a simple product description. But I simply compare it to another product, like Spotify, that makes the true function and goal behind the product easier to understand.

Chad: Well at a minimum, you have my curiosity peaked. Because now I am trying to think about how wine can possibly relate to Spotify.

Michal: Right. One example that we absolutely love is from Sun Gard, which is a cyber-security crown computing company. They found a bit of resistance to crowd computing ten years ago. They did a really nice campaign that equated moving through the clouds to surviving a zombie attack. Now you're curious, right?

Chad: That also gets your attention.

Michal: Right. Similar to my example with Spotify, it is not a very straightforward analogy for people to understand. Therefore, they gave a lot of information on how moving through the clouds is similar to surviving a zombie attack. They mentioned that both of those experiences are right around the corner. That makes people laugh. They also mentioned that in both cases, the attacker wishes they could eat your brain.

Chad: Or take you data.

Michal: Right, or take your data. Then, they sealed the deal by saying that the only way to survive it is by being prepared. That helps us understand what the product is about. This is just an example on how to think up new ideas and how to solve current problems. It helps us think about how we can import superior qualities from an existing product or service to the problem at hand.

Chad: Good.

Michal: That's the idea behind analogical thinking.

Chad: Also, capitalizing on trends of pop culture craze of zombies in all the TV shows and book about zombies.

Michal: Right.

Chad: Startups are particularly good at this. I think when you go to startup schools and you learn about the mechanics of creating a startup, you often hear these formulas about how you need to compare yourself to some category and explain how you will be better than that. For

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everyday innovators who have listened to the other podcast called Startup by Gimlet Media—Michal, I don't know if you've ever listened to this podcast but it's about how this gentleman left MPR to create a media company around podcasting. The Startup series is about his adventures starting this company. In the second season of Startup, they founded another startup, which was a dating service. They followed the starting of that company. They are really interesting stories. What stood out for me was the pitch of the day for their second startup, which was that they 'are going to be the Uber of online dating'. It takes on the same concepts of crossing categories and it really makes you think about the problem and solution space in a different way.

Michal: Right.

Chad: I appreciate you giving us the examples of Spotify with wine tasting and SunGard with clouds and zombies. Next process is called, "Looking for Novel Ways to Solve Simple Problems". An example here would really help us understand what you mean by novel ways to solve simple problems.

Michal: I'd like to bring up the Coravin once again—I'll give you some other examples as well. The guy who invented the Coravin had a big article printed about him on BusinessWeek. In the article he shared a story about how his wife was pregnant and if he wanted to drink wine, she couldn't drink with him. He would be stuck drinking the whole bottle on his own. From that he realized that he cannot do that on a daily basis and his wine would go bad. He said he really wanted to drink good wine but he didn't want to spend money on good wine only to throw most of it to the trash. This is a really simple problem that a bunch of people face.

Chad: If you're a wine drinker, you know that once you pop that cork, the wine is good for 2 or 3 days.

Michel: Not even that long. If you're uncorking a 200 dollar bottle—

Chad: Okay, if you're a serious wine drinker perhaps. I might still drink it up to a week.

Michal: Well, that is one example. Another example that we thought was really nice was the story of Cisco. You have 2 IT managers at Stanford from different departments who wanted their computers to be able to talk to each other. That is how they came up with the first router. Those are really simple nuisances—if you want to call them that—that we encounter every day. We just need to find solutions to them. I think that the reason why we included this process is because people sometimes want to change the world or they want to make everything better. But sometimes solving 1 simple problem can help a lot of people.

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Chad: Right. Maybe this one was just helping you but it goes back to your own personal example of wanting to go back home to a warm blanket on those late cold nights. It was a simple problem that we could have figured out in different ways but now there is available technology that makes it easy for us to do it from our smart phones.

Michal: Right.

Chad: Very good. Sometimes we can find answers in interesting places. I just want to share with you an episode I did a few weeks ago on our Future Innovation Leaders. This was a class of 8 to 12 year olds. These students met for 3 hours once a week. One thing they were doing was 3D designs. Another company came to us and had this problem of having 2 plastic strips be able to slide by each other by coupling them together in some way. We said we would help and we tuned the kids lose. It was amazing how in 1 hour, they came up with 4 distinct prototypes for how to solve this problem. One of them was chosen, refined, and is in production today.

Michal: Wow.

Chad: It was just neat to see that kind of creativity. They solved a simple problem in a simple way. And it was done by kids, which is so great.

Michal: Because kids are less constrained. We, as adults, are more constrained by our knowledge. We know so many things and we think we know what is and is not possible. They are almost clueless about that.

Chad: Yeah. It was interesting that there were a couple of solutions the kids created that myself and the owner with the problem never even conceived. It never crossed our minds at all. We are constrained by our own experiences sometimes. Okay, our final process is “Leveraging More Ideators Via Crowdsourcing”. Getting ideas from people that are external to the organization is how you define ‘crowdsourcing’. Crowdsourcing has grown a lot in innovation. We are seeing this open-sourcing or crowdsourcing idea used in different organizations. How are you suggesting this be leveraged for breakthrough products?

Michal: It is not simple. Crowdsourcing is generally huge. Quirky is a good example of that. We were thinking that it is all about the motivation. The difference between designing something that is new versus something that is radically new lies in the motivation. We have to communicate that goal very clearly. We have to run completion, challenges, perhaps even promise to hire people. The outcome that we expect here are ideas that would be half baked—sort of like what the kids in your situation did. The product development team can then run

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with those ideas. Sometimes you need someone from the outside to tell you something that might not have occurred to you otherwise.

Chad: Yeah, the basic numbers come into play here. Any organization believes they have hired the best people available. But if every organization believes they have hired the best people available, then we realize that some organizations have not. The best ideas can then possibly come from outside your group.

Michal: Right. It is like saying all of my students are above average.

Chad: Right, exactly. In the last episode I did, I spoke with a serial innovator at Caterpillar. It is a huge global organization that makes big equipment. I'm curious what your thoughts are on this. One thing that he is doing is helping to connect the dots inside the organization more by doing Friday morning innovation sessions—a webinar that people can join from across the organization. It is rapidly growing. He has all kinds of people participating in the webinar. It isn't just engineers, product managers, and developers. People from all different levels of the organization are tuning in to learn more about how innovation happens. I think there are these untapped capabilities in large organizations that go unnoticed because people have not connected the dots. This is an external crowdsourcing in an internal way of helping to connect those dots. Have you come across this type of need as well?

Michal: Yes, absolutely. Even in our little academia pool, once we branch out the world will amaze you. Even within my school or university I find the same benefits as would a company. We always talk about how there is not enough communication within companies. Everyone is so busy in what they do for the company.

Chad: Right. They are busy being productive at what they have at hand.

Michal: Right.

Chad: Trying to free up time to be creative and think about the next thing.

Michal: But this is probably what he does. I actually listened to that podcast. He is amazing and really impressive. That is especially important with large organizations. It comes back to the first process we describe. It has to come from the top down. We are going to allocate time and resource to that. Otherwise, it is not going to happen.

Chad: Yeah. That is a message that you've shown throughout these processes. A focus on communication and communicating the clear goal that is needed. In this case of crowdsourcing,

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tying in a motivation for being part of the activity and communicating that we're not looking at the incremental innovations that could be done to the existing products but rather at radical breakthrough or 10X innovations. One of the topics I'm interested in pursuing some time is how companies buying startups play a role in this. Because it is clear that that is one way established companies are going about bringing innovation into their organization—pursuing startups that have something that is a 10X type of capability. That is not a crowdsourcing approach but it is another way of getting external ideas and capabilities into the organization.

Michal: Right. Using acquisitions have repeatedly shown to be an excellent way to branch out into a totally different world that a company could not have been able to achieve on its own.

Chad: Yes, very good. So we went through the 6 processes. I notice that these aren't necessarily steps by any means. We could jump in and pick any one of them to help a group do a better job at thinking up radical new ideas for breakthrough products. What are your thoughts on where a group might start if they wanted to improve their capability in this area of creating 10X ideas? Where would you suggest they start?

Michal: I think that large organizations should start with the first process. If there is no commitment or communication, it is not going to happen. But beyond that, I think everyone is different. I really enjoy analogical thinking. I really enjoy coming up with analogies like the one I mentioned earlier with Coravin and Spotify. I would gravitate towards that. My husband, for example, is a big technology guy. He will probably try to hack together different technologies to come up with something new. It's really about where you feel more comfortable.

Chad: This suggests that you could create small groups that are each focused on one of these 6 process and are built around their temperaments. We can have the group run with the process to see where that ends up.

Michal: Right.

Chad: That way, they can tackle the problem in parallel. Very good. As the everyday innovators know, I always wrap up my interviews by asking for an innovation or success quote. I asked you to bring us one. Which quote did you pick?

Michal: I chose one by Thomas Edison that I really like. Thomas Edison is a larger-than-life incredible inventor. You don't become that person by not trying and trying and giving up easily. The quote that I chose says, "I haven't failed. I've just found 10,000 ways it won't work." I totally see it in my own research and in innovators that I have gotten the opportunity to speak with. We cannot give up. There is always a worry that if we give up eventually, we could have

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possibly been so close to figuring it out. He points out that if one way doesn't work, he would continue on to the next thing. He was relentless. He was amazing.

Chad: Right. And this is actually a quote I've done a little bit of research in because it is disputed whether he actually said this or not.

Michal: Yeah.

Chad: I don't have it in front of me but it came from an interview that he did with a journalist from some publication that I cannot remember off the top of my head. I'll try to find it and put it in the show notes. It's not clear if he said those numbers or not, but the idea behind the quote definitely came up in that interview with the journalist. This stemmed from the journalists question of how he had tried an x number of times to create a lightbulb and how does it feel to fail x number of times. I love how Edison was able to turn that around and say that he learned an x number of ways on how not to create a lightbulb.

Michal: Right.

Chad: There was no failure in that. To Edison, they were all learning opportunities.

Michal: Right. I think I really like it because it connects to the first process that we discussed about how failure is okay. I really like that because it keeps me motivated. For us deal with journals and we deal with reviewers. Sometimes I think my work is brilliant and when it goes under review, the reviewers think differently. How do we deal with that? We need to look at it constructively and learn from it.

Chad: Yes. One of my favorite Japanese proverbs I often share is, "Fall down seven times. Get up eight." That's portrays the same idea that it doesn't matter how many times you fall, the important part is getting back up. Very good. I appreciate you walking through the 6 processes that you and your co-authors put together in the chapter, "Optimal Design for Radically New Products". That chapter lives in PDMA's "Essentials" book. Just to wrap up, what would you like to leave listeners with? Also, if you are a marketing professor involved in research, how can listeners follow the work that you're doing?

Michal: I wanted to say that we in academia do really good work that I think businesses can learn from. I think one of the things that we don't do well is communicate that. This is why my co-authors and I decided to participate in this book. We go to conferences where companies attend and we can learn from them while they learn from us. I would really like to see more of this collaboration. There is this fantastic website called Google Scholar where you can find any

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paper that was ever posted anywhere. Sometimes you need permission to see the paper, but that can sometimes be cleared by emailing the author to request a copy. I've emailed my papers to many people that wanted them and I think it is a great way to get a hold of the research you need. There are also university websites that you can use. The reason why I like Google Scholar is because sometimes I will type in something I am looking for and without knowing who is the author that works in this field, I can learn a lot about who the authors are, where they were published, so on.

Chad: Yes, absolutely. I have a foot in each world here. The practitioner world and the academic world with my university professor hat on as well. The unfortunate thing as practitioners is we never really read journal articles. It's very rare. The reality is that we don't write journal articles for a business audience. We tend to write them for other academics. There are nuggets that do need to be pulled out, which we can probably make into a whole separate interview. But the point is that a book like "The PDMA Essentials" book that is written for practitioners, does provide a way to bridge that and it gave you and your co-authors the opportunity to write a chapter that is more approachably geared towards practitioners rather than academics. There is definitely a lot of value baked into that chapter to help us, in this case, come up with more ideas on creating breakthrough products.

Michal: Exactly.

Chad: I appreciate you doing that for us. And how can we follow you on the work that you and your colleagues do?

Michal: It is on our own websites. In terms of unpublished manuscript, we can still share those with people who are interested. Conference papers are posted as well. Everything is on the website. The world has changed.

Chad: Yeah.

Michal: It's easy to get research now.

Chad: I will post the links to your websites in the show notes. These are your university websites, correct?

Michal: Yes.

Chad: Very good. I will add that in. I thank you very much for spending time with us. I also want to thank the everyday innovators listening. One again, these episodes are all about adding value

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to you as a product manager, developer, and innovator. If you have suggestions for topics please let me know. If you listen to us through iTunes, I would love to see a rating or a review. It would mean a lot. I ask this only because the more ratings we get, the easier it becomes for others to find this podcast. I appreciate you doing that and helping other product managers too. Thanks everyone!