

## TEI 108: Communicating design in product management

Host: Chad McAllister, PhD

Guest: Latif Nanji

CHAD: Hi, this is Chad, and this is the podcast for helping product managers and innovators become product masters. I also created the IDEA Framework eCourse. The eCourse is how product managers build their base and knowledge, that enables them to become product leaders, doubling their success and their product success without feeling overwhelmed. I hope this is you—someone who wants to be a product leader. If you're listening to this on January 23, the day that I publish this episode, this is also the last day the IDEA Framework eCourse is open. I haven't opened this eCourse since February of last year and it closes again today, January 23. If you have any interest, check it out before it closes, just by going to [www.theeverydayinnovator.com/IDEA](http://www.theeverydayinnovator.com/IDEA). The eCourse covers the entire spectrum of product management—Ideation, Develop, Evolve and Accelerate. It includes online lessons and resources, interactive live webinars and a discussion community for networking and collaborating with other product managers. The eCourse is designed to be self-paced, to accommodate any schedule. Check it out for yourself before the eCourse closes by going to [www.theeverydayinnovator.com/IDEA](http://www.theeverydayinnovator.com/IDEA).

I've discussed product roadmaps with a few guests and I was curious to also get a perspective from the CEO of Roadmunk, which creates roadmapping software for the enterprise. Roadmunk was built out of my guest's frustration to create well-designed roadmaps quickly for stakeholders. However, when I asked Latif Nanji about this, he was eager to discuss another important topic, a topic that has really driven his work in product management. That's how design is becoming a benchmark for new products. So, we pursued that topic together instead. If you want to find out more about roadmapping, there are resources on the Roadmunk website. Latif shares that designers are now becoming integrated into product teams and product managers' ever-changing roles now encompasses understanding and leveraging UX and UI. The challenge is how product managers properly align design principles into their work and what values product management needs to champion. Get a summary of the discussion, along with the links to the resources discussed, at [www.theeverydayinnovator.com/108](http://www.theeverydayinnovator.com/108). Enjoy the interview!

[2:34]

CHAD: Hi Latif, thanks so much for joining the Everyday Innovator podcast.

LATIF: Thanks so much for having me.

CHAD: I'm glad you're here and I want to hear more about your company and your influence there, but I'm curious that our actual topic for discussing is the impact of design on product management. But I came across your work in an indirect way. Several months ago, you had published this article I found in Business Insider, on taking your entire team to Costa Rica for a month. What caught my attention about this was I just thought it was cool in the first place, the thought of a company taking their team to Costa Rica for a month. But what a great way to help create a culture. I was curious what came out of that for you, and if you would do it again. Would you recommend other start up founders to maybe think about something like this.

LATIF: Yeah, absolutely. I'll give a quick background, I guess, in terms of our motivation for the trip. When we started this company as multiple-time founders, we had realized that we kind of wanted to stretch what was possible and we realized that we wanted to build a remote culture so people could work in different cities. So far we've been really successful at that, as we work out of Toronto, Waterloo, as well as London, England. Costa Rica was a way to really bring the team together and build along those early relationships so people could understand the motivations of each other, they could build social

## TEI 108: Communicating design in product management

Host: Chad McAllister, PhD

Guest: Latif Nanji

connections and friendships that we could talk about for years to come and obviously the entire experience of Costa Rica. Sort of the highlight for us was actually something we didn't expect and that was the cooking of dinners, as we had everyone pair up with someone that they don't necessarily work with too often, to cook dinner for the rest of the team. It was sort of that bonding that came out to really build and highlight what Roadmunk I think today is. It's really about building friendships within the organization as well as working together to understand how we can be more effective. Of course, looking back almost 9 months, 10 months later, what we've seen as the company has almost tripled in size since then, is that we've seen everyone talk about that story to the new employees, kind of off-hand. They've always said, hey, I was on that trip and I'd love to tell you more. I think people really saw that as something unique we did, something where we really cared about the culture, and it really built into the whole story of Roadmunk and infected the culture in a way I'd never seen possible. Of course, the next obvious thing is, are we doing it again in the subsequent year, even though we're +25 people now? The answer is actually, yes we are. I think we're doing a little bit of a smaller version of it but something quite similar. That's because we realize that at every step along the way, we can't just stop thinking about culture because there's more people. In fact, we have to invest more in terms of that. Would I recommend this to another company? Of course. I'm biased. I think everyone has to have something they do that's unique, that's different. The founders really have to think about what that is. But given the way that we structured our company in a couple different offices early on, for us it was really important for people to be able to get to know one another and this was such a great mechanism to do that. People can then talk about it for years to come. I would highly recommend it for people that are thinking about doing this. There's obviously going to be some friction and optics, but honestly, we had people reach out to us both from a hiring perspective, an investor perspective, and it actually felt like those people really got what we were doing. Obviously our metrics and traction spoke for themselves as well, but I think they realized at the leadership level they wanted to build something really special for the long-term and this was really a by-product of a trip like that.

[6:27]

CHAD: And it wasn't just a month-long boondoggle down in Costa Rica. It was a time to build experiences but also, you were working there, together. I appreciate the background you gave that you're trying to build this remote culture, but this was an opportunity to get everyone together and have these shared experiences just in life but also work together.

LATIF: A hundred percent. We, especially give such short time frame, we basically said everyone had to be working during this time. Otherwise, it would kind of take away from the whole point of it, because if people were vacationing away for a week, it would take away from the experience of working together, so there were some policies around doing that, because we wanted everyone to sit there and actually go through the design sessions, go through the product strategy, go through our market strategy, and I think going to a place like that to really have that open time to think and collaborate with others was truly a great experience.

CHAD: That's great. The opportunity for developing culture in a startup or a small business is in the beginning time. It gets away on you later if you try to build it later, and I really give you credit for getting that done. There's the occasional article that will come out in Fast Company or someplace else, one I've seen is Strategy Eats Culture for Breakfast and then there was another version of that which is, Culture

## TEI 108: Communicating design in product management

Host: Chad McAllister, PhD

Guest: Latif Nanji

Eats Strategy for Breakfast, there's always this ongoing debate between the two. Culture is an element that sometimes gets not enough attention, and I see cultures being so powerful as really the enabler that can make a company differentiate itself in the marketplace.

LATIF: Absolutely. I think cultural values are in a sense the company's values and those companies values then inform the strategic values, whether it's from the product side, the marketing side or the sales side. So, you have to have a balance between them but I think in some sense the causation factor really there is culture for me.

CHAD: Yep. I'm on the same page with you. Thanks for sharing that a little bit. For listeners, I will put in the show notes for this, a link to that article. I know you have an article on your blog that talks about that, so I'll make sure that's easy if anyone wants to get the full story on this Costa Rica trip with the team to develop culture. Let's move on to the topic that I tracked you down to talk about, which was, you call this communicating design and product management and I think the perspective here in design and product management is kind of coming from the UX and UI space. Obviously, your focus here is software product management but there's probably some elements we could take to other kinds of products, too. Can you just talk about that relationship a little bit, before we get into kind of the framework for doing this?

LATIF: Absolutely. Communication design product management has really been at the forefront of my mind for the last five years. The reason that is because traditionally, product management has sort of sat in between sales and customer success, engineering, marketing and to obviously a fairly large extent, executives. The problem is that design has now become its own major element. There is a new spoke on the wheel that needs to be captured. So the idea is that since product management ultimately is a language translation, a function as well as all the other amazing things they have to do, but one of their core capabilities is their ability to translate between these different divisions that often struggle to get information across. This new concept of design is the new thing that product managers need to learn. They need to learn this language and they need to be able to translate it across all these teams so that everybody understands its value. That's really what I'm trying to aim to, to influence and talk about and when I mean communicating design and product management.

[9:55]

CHAD: Thanks for sharing that background. Let's get into the details of the elements of that, of communicating design. You shared previously with me that you have a framework of five elements. I think the first one you call empathy—empathy in product management and design?

LATIF: Yeah, empathy is really a crucial component because it gets everyone as a starting point to understand how to think about design. Empathy obviously is your ability to put yourself in one's shoes and view it from their perspective. Even though empathy is one of our core values in our company, it actually trickles down really nicely into design. So one actionable way that really enables product managers, other people in the organization to understand why design is important, is actually getting them on support. So what we usually do, and this was a model inspired by Tony Hsieh over at Zappos, is that everyone works for two weeks, or a minimum of a hundred cases in our support and CS teams. This means that they have to learn the product inside-out. They have to understand the issues and the challenges that prospect customers as well as existing customers have an issue with. What this really

## TEI 108: Communicating design in product management

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Guest: Latif Nanji

gets them to do is understand, wow, that design actually has a huge impact on the emotional ease of someone's journey within the beginning of an application. That emotional ease can really buy you a lot of credibility, it can buy you a lot of forgiveness as well. So that's the number one way that I think both product managers or new employees can really make their mark and to understand where to start with respect to design.

CHAD: Just to follow up with you on that notion of having people involved with customer service, I think that is such a great idea. To take this out of the product space just for a moment, there is this wonderful 4-star resort near me, it's in Colorado Springs, Colorado, called the Broadmoor, and it's kind of this magical place to go to, that, when you're on the property, you feel like you're in a different place. It's a great treat to go and walk around, even if you're not a guest there. It's just a good destination. I had talked with one of the managers that was working there. They said everyone they hire spends two weeks in the hotel service. I don't know what their technical name is for this, but actually cleaning the rooms. So their first two weeks on the job, whether you are hired to be working in the sales department or working in the gift shop or wherever, you are cleaning rooms for the first two weeks. It's to help you have that appreciation of what is it like to be a customer there and what would you expect in the room, or how the room should be set up and everything. I thought, what a great way to make that kind of connection. The idea you have of making sure everyone goes through customer service cases, that has to actually work in customer service for a couple weeks, helps also with that grounding of what is it like to have that customer experience and what's important to them.

[12:53]

LATIF: Totally great. That's fantastic that it's translated over to the hotel industry and other areas, because ultimately, if you're all serving the same user, the last thing you want to do is sit in marketing and create product marketing campaigns and not even really understand the psychology of the user. That to me is you can get a second degree knowledge by basically asking people or reading certain histories in terms of feedback, but actually going through and jumping on a screen share and helping them go through an issue, there's nothing more visceral than that. That's really a critical part, just like a jump-off point for people joining the organization. Obviously, there's nothing more exciting for me personally than watching an engineer who really just loves their code and then have to solve a problem and go, wow, I can really see how what I'm doing actually translates very directly towards this user. So I think that's a really big bonus in terms of how we built our team here.

CHAD: It's a very good step. So that's the empathy piece. What's the next element in the framework?

LATIF: Sure. So not to jump too far ahead, but there is a couple of things on the empathy side as well that I think product managers can do. One is do demos of your own products. One of the first things I love to have designers and product people do is actually sit in and do demos of their own product and go through every single step of the application, use the language, the nomenclature, so they understand when they start to name things in the application, that they have a sense of how the market actually thinks and names things. That's been really interesting, because we've had design discussions about naming and nomenclature, which may seem obvious to me, but very unobvious to someone who just started who hasn't had all those interactions with the customer. And the last thing as a manager, per se, I want to do is impose some sort of "here's how things are going to get done." I want them to learn

## TEI 108: Communicating design in product management

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ground-up and the best way to do that is to say well, talk to the users, they'll tell you exactly how they feel about that name. You'll get to see sort of the balance between the two. Of course, and this is a very more traditional example, customer visits. It sounds so obvious, but a lot of organizations don't mandate customer visits, especially in startups. It's really hard to say I'm going to go take three or four days and go visit five or six customers in a different city. It's a lot of time, it takes away from some of the product, but ultimately I think it's pennywise and pound foolish, where you really do need to invest that time because you're thinking in ROI is just going to translate to be a lot greater. So we have a mandate every quarter that our product team and designers go and visit a city, because usually in a city we have dozens of customers, so we pick one of them and we go in and visit a handful of them to really get some of the feedback on some of the larger stuff we're working on as well.

[15:41]

CHAD: Good. So sorry I cut you off on the empathy there. So we have three elements, now, of empathy, which was the customer service experience, demo-ing the products to users, certainly, and then doing those customer visits. I think product managers listening pretty universally agree, at least in the surveys we've seen, that we all want more time with customers. We need those insights. Okay, so that takes us now through empathy. I think the next element of your framework, you call language? Language of design?

LATIF: Yes, absolutely. So the language of design is vast. There is tons of great resources out there, for anyone who has seen materials.google.com, I think they've kind of got one of the more premier frameworks. I kind of try to pick a few things that are helpful to communicate. So when I said communication of design, you know developers have JQuery and Javascript and they've got all these different verbs that they use and design has affordance, making the news or nothing, cognitive load, reversible design, softness on the eyes. So we have a whole handful of terms. I won't speak about all of them but I'll speak about a couple that I think, specifically two, that I think have the greatest impression on the teams. So number one is telling the user what to think. There's been this concept in constant design, it's the user shouldn't have to think. Well, if the user doesn't have to think, then it's kind of a really ambiguous way of saying tell the user what to think. I think that's little bit more apparent. One great example I like to use for this is Google flights. They came out not necessarily with the sexiest UI but what they did was they just put the pieces in place with respect to search. They said here are the flights you're going to actually book in terms of the top three, versus something like Expedia or Flight Hub or any of the major ones out there, like Kayak their UIs are incredibly slick. But you have to really still sift through and scroll and find what you're looking for. Making the user tell them what to think really requires you understanding the use cases. It really requires you understanding their north star action. Their north star action is what is the one core action you want someone to do that's a set of successful steps. If you're able to find that out, then get them through that and tell them what to think to get there. Don't make it ambiguous, don't have too many options, just get them there. If you're able to get them there in the simplest way possible, you'll really be able to express this information to engineering when trying to communicate why this is the use case. Obviously from a product marketing perspective, you'll be able to talk about what the north star is and write content around that, and from a CS and sales perspective it just becomes so obvious as to what the value proposition of your app is. So

## TEI 108: Communicating design in product management

Host: Chad McAllister, PhD

Guest: Latif Nanji

that's one major piece that I think is super-useful for people starting out and thinking about design if they're in product management.

[18:40]

CHAD: I like how you link that to the elements of your copy, too, the key marketing message and what that north star, what that one core action is to take. In doing that, I'm curious, especially for software, we live in such a data-drive environment, often as product managers and sometimes that core action leads the users down a path and we can have decision about well, do we want to capture their email address early in that path or late in the path, and there's these different decisions that come up. How have you run into that in your business? Are you guys doing AB testing? Do you do some kind of user experience testing with users first? I'm just curious what's come up.

LATIF: Yeah, I think of course, the way to find your core action north star, it's actually, especially for a startup, it really is the fundamental problem you're solving. For us, at Roadmunk, we're solving the problem of creating visual roadmaps that can build a transparency across organizations and teams. Obviously the best way to do that is if we see them sharing or presenting, we can obviously put a check mark next to that as sort of our core action north star. So how do we get them along that way? In the journey through onboarding how do we make sure that they get their data in? How do we make sure they create the visualization they need to make and once they get to that moment of realization, all of a sudden it's boom, we know that we've hit the north star. Now all of a sudden it's going to permeate all throughout your organization. So I think one is, especially as a startup, you really have to know what that is. It doesn't necessarily come naturally, but over time if you look at your engagement data, and yes sometimes this requires some statistical modeling, you'll be able to take all of your successful customers, look at how they engage with the data on a meta level and then translate that and see where prospects are not getting there and be able to map over where people may fall off. Once you do that kind of modeling, it's definitely rigorous, there's no doubt about it, you'll be able to say, oh look, at x number of shares, we see a conversion rate of y. Of course the very notable one that's popularized right now is that Slack is able to convert 90% of customers that get over 10,000 messages so they push everyone to 10,000 messages as sort of their north star action. That's because they've got that premium model. So that's just an example and I think everyone fundamentally needs to just sit down and think about what that is and then how to map it out from a successful perspective looking at their successful customers and then generating that against their prospects.

CHAD: Right. Identify those tipping points, like in the Slack example. Good. Are there any other elements of language of design that you've found really helpful?

[21:18]

LATIF: Yeah. So the ones I did talk about were reversible design, trying to keep everything within three clicks, but affordance is another one if you read the Design of Everyday Things. One of the common terms that comes up is cognitive load. Cognitive load is effectively is, is your brain being overwhelmed by looking at the screen. Now, what's funny about design, just like marketing, to a certain extent, it's a lot of qualitative stuff. None of this is mathematical formulas. You just have to be able to understand wow, this is a lot of information on the screen. Some applications, some designers are really good at being able to explain why certain things have a lot of cognitive load. If you go in to an email app like

## TEI 108: Communicating design in product management

Host: Chad McAllister, PhD

Guest: Latif Nanji

Outlook, just as a broad example, there's a lot of information that's coming at you. In the same example with Kayak, there's a lot of information in toggles. So cognitive load just really just says what is the maximum information I can show you on this screen without you being overwhelmed? With respect to being the product manager, you get a sense of where people are overwhelmed. The really good way to kind of figure this out is to build some wire frames if you have a particular idea or show people your app and watch their reaction to it. If they feel overwhelmed, you'll see them kind of push their chest back a little. You'll see their eyes kind of go all over the place. But if you see them already moving their hands, their fingers in a certain direction, you can kind of get a sense they know what they're doing. Another aspect of that is colors, and this is kind of a little more technical, but people that have certain colors in their applications can invoke certain emotions. If there's too much color, it's a little bit overwhelming to the eyes, which is why we're seeing a lot of applications go through that transition to lighter palettes, to lighter greys, and the colors are in certain areas to kind of block off your visual cues that are actually being used in inverse ways. So there is some intelligence around this and it's really important, fundamentally, to have a designer on your team that can help educate the team. Therefore, the product manager can have that knowledge and be able to explain to the engineers this is why design is important and this is why we have to invest in this direction as part of the business and culture.

CHAD: There are some real subtleties involved. There's the psychology of colors that I've looked at just a little bit, about how different colors actually relate to different emotions and why some colors are more appealing to women versus men in different situations and tying into that can make some differences in the user experience just through the interface. You mentioned Don Norman's book *The Design of Everyday Things*. The classical example in there of cognitive overload that you probably run into too many times living in the big city, which happens to me, too, is just doors. We go to an office building and why is it that the door handle, the door plate, looks like something I should push on when they really want me to pull or vice versa?

[24:10]

LATIF: It's the best example and it's also a comical example because it's so universal. They still haven't solved this problem. I mean, obviously, I'm looking at the door that we have to this meeting room, and it's lovely, because you can swing it both ways. Okay, so now I am actually working against that bias so I don't ever have to think. It'll just work for me in both directions. Whereas obviously you'll find that this is just never the case. Revolving doors have seemed to have solved this to a reason extent, but now there's a little bit of hesitation because you're like you're timing has to be perfect. So there's all these little subtleties in design that have to kick in when I see these solutions and I have this lens now in the world for better or worse. Probably a little bit worse, where I see all these things, and I'm like, I want to tweak the world just a little this way so it's a little bit more user friendly.

CHAD: Things could generally be made more simple, for sure. Okay. Does that take us to the third element of the framework then? We've got empathy talked about, and then language of design. Now on to the third one?

LATIF: Yeah, it's data around design.

CHAD: Okay. Data.

## TEI 108: Communicating design in product management

Host: Chad McAllister, PhD

Guest: Latif Nanji

LATIF: I guess there's two ways to look at this right now. So there's a macro perspective and a micro perspective. The macro perspective is just so evidently clear. Fifty percent of all design companies that have been sold in the last 10 years happened in the last 12 months. It's not even the Facebooks, the Apple or the Googles of the world that were doing those acquisitions, now you're seeing Capital One. Now you're seeing Fidelity Investments. Now you're seeing big banks, laggards on the chasm, making a massive step forward. When you see laggards like those banks and older industries investing in design, it's now time, you'd better be there, because we have to, as technology entrepreneurs, we've got to be ahead of those guys. I think it's just so clear from a macro perspective that this is going to be a huge part of all products and services of the future. So that's one perspective. Obviously from a much lower and tactical perspective, engagement data is probably the biggest and most important and I think there's so many great softwares out there that really handle this mixed panel that are really trying to tackle this space of making sure that you can see users using your features, being able to track their engagement over time, asking yourself the questions of why or why not are people using this and really holding and taking that information to not just say, oh we're successful in this feature, but actually say hey did we design this correctly? Were our initial assumptions right? So it's not just this binary perspective, but it's an evolution of a feature. Obviously I can personally say we've experienced this with certain features in our app where we realize we hit to one point, we've got a ton of engagement and then we realize we have to build it to the next step. That happens in every company. But I think having that data to really manage that process and manage the actual expectations is something that we've integrated into our culture and I'm really happy about.

[27:08]

CHAD: Yeah, and even if you're outside the software space, there's oftentimes that we can build in milestones into our physical product delivery and physical product use and some of those products again even I'm thinking of Caterpillar, large equipment, some of them have telemetrics built in that give us data on their use, too, so there's lot of opportunities for incorporating data and then being able to take that back and have it reflect what we do as product managers in improving our products.

LATIF: Absolutely.

CHAD: Good. So, fourth element I think you said was the executive buy-in and this is near and dear to every product manager because we know we have to convince senior management to support our ideas. So tell us more about executive buy-in.

LATIF: This is the hard one. I think this is the one that out of all the things I talk about and sort of this area seems to crop up the most and really gives product managers trouble. I will say that there's no real great answer. This is a process and it's a tough one. If you have this problem the first thing is that competence around design is really kind of the prerequisite. It's really hard to go in emotionally and intuitively and say this is exactly why we need to do it because it's awesome and our market needs it. That's not really going to build a strong ROI statement and a lot of executives that are resistant I think we could categorize and say their probably a little more revenue driven, maybe they're more inclined to believe that their sales and numbers need to be more optimized and that this will be just such a burden and there's no way to really quantitatively look at design. So that's kind of a big challenge to get through. So the only second way I really see is one, if you kind of understand some of the fundamentals

## TEI 108: Communicating design in product management

Host: Chad McAllister, PhD

Guest: Latif Nanji

and mechanics of the language of design, this is really going to enable you to do a couple of things. One thing that I think is really helpful is finding out applications that the executive that you need to convince is really interested in. So if they really love a particular app, whether it's Slack or Invision or whatnot, that they use on a day to day basis, or Evernote, as an executive, the idea is to be like you know why you really love this application? Tell me why. They'll say, oh I can keep notes, I can access it from the cloud, I can do all these things. Well, there's 50 other applications that do that, what was it that attracted you to this one? They may get stuck there. If you're able to fill in those gaps and say one, it was this experience, two it was this element of design, and three, the reason that the retention is there is because they figured out this data. Now, going through that exercise obviously sounds rather arduous, but building an emotional case for that executive is hard and I think doing that kind of work and persisting on it is actually going to pay dividends. One of the things we had to push for in my previous company when we tried to change the design is that they wanted us to do an ROI calculation on it. Just that being a starting point is a deal breaker for me. So I went through this exercise trying to find the applications in the background, like, hey, what do you like? And then why do you like it? And then two days later, I do all my research and then I come back and then I have that conversation with him. Then all of a sudden his eyebrows started getting raised and then I'd come back a week later and say hey, we're going to do some of the things that your applications really love. Oh that's interesting. Well, we're going to do those things because you really like them, so we're going to integrate them into our design. So just kind of nibble away at things that the executive likes about apps that they enjoy and then kind of lull them into the principles of design that I'm pushing for. I don't want to call it...it's a little bit of psychology that you're playing there, but I think it's a worthwhile tactic to try if you really need to get this through in terms of your audience and your market that really demand it.

[31:00]

CHAD: That is so smart and frankly, lots of good information on the interview, but for Everyday Innovators listening, that's just gold because I'm sure you can find other ways to adapt this too. It's kind of sneaky in a purposeful way, right? It's not deceptive at all. Whenever we're trying to influence decision makers, senior managers, it's always important for us to think in terms of what is important to them and try to put things in their context and this is a way to kind of take a back door approach to a design element. I just love what you shared. Ask them what applications they use today and then go do your analysis on what makes those work well for them and make some translations between that and what you're doing in terms of design. Really, really smart, and I appreciate you sharing that with us.

LATIF: You can even take it one step further. This is something that, if you've got a few extra hundred bucks in the budget, you take exactly the elements that they like, you look at your application, you introduce it and then you go spend a couple hundred bucks on a really good designer on Dribbble or any of those services, get them to wire it up for you in that principle, in that light and then take it back to them and say, based on the things you like, and just show it to them what it looks like. It doesn't cost much, it's a little bit of time, yes, but it'll show that you thought about the whole circle and what it means to your market end users and taking what motivates them. That whole loop right there, if that doesn't convince them I really don't know what will.

CHAD: Very smart. Thank you so much for sharing that. The final element—you talk about design and the MVP. I think you have a different take on that. Tell us about that.

## TEI 108: Communicating design in product management

Host: Chad McAllister, PhD

Guest: Latif Nanji

[32:37]

LATIF: Yeah, so we actually call it, not the MVP, we call it the MSP, which is the minimum saleable product. Traditionally MVP is obviously something that is viable that gets out there. The challenge with the word viable, especially as a product manager communicating to multiple spokes along the wheel is that people have different definitions. For an engineer it's the functionality. For a designer it could be just the emotional look. For the end user it could be something to do with reliability. You have this challenge of what really is a much more specific word? And we came up with saleable. That just means to say I could demo it confidently and it's something I can talk about as a feature that has value in which it could convert a customer over. To be able to actually know this, I think product managers need to be in the driver's seat. They need to be on the demos, they need to be able to demo the product without a salesperson and sell it. If they can look through that lens confidently and intelligently, they'll be able to tell how far a feature needs to go. So there's this pyramid scheme and I'll try to describe it so that people can get a visualization of it. If you think of a pyramid and there's four levels, and at the top it has the smallest surface area would be sort of the emotional hook and then it's usability is the second point across and then reliability and at the base of it all is functionality. Traditionally, the MVP has been thought of taking just that functional slice at the bottom and doing a subset of that. With the MSP, you're actually doing a little bit of each of the four blocks. So if you think of a line being drawn right from the top of the pyramid, perhaps to 20% on the bottom left. So it cuts a little bit of the functionality, it cuts a little bit of the usability and reliability as well as the emotional design. If you package that all up nicely and you're able to get on the phone with a customer and show them and they get hooked in emotionally, they see that it's useful, it's not too buggy, and it shows that you can get a step of the way there to functionality. There's a confidence builder there. I know, yes, you can look at black and white mocks and wire frames, but showing something that's pretty and useable right from the get-go has a sellable component to it. It has a direct ROI and it includes design. So to me, when we look at certain features, we look at them from the sellability. Can this help the company grow, while still maintaining our design and product and engineering principles. That's the word that we chose that's worked incredibly successful for us.

[35:15]

CHAD: The MSP, the minimum sellable product.

LATIF: That's correct.

CHAD: I like that. It connects well with the design elements—your emotional hook, your usability, the reliability itself and the functionality. All of those need to be working together and then we can't leave out that emotional hook. People love Slack because they love Slack. They'll have specifics about why they enjoy Slack, but there is an emotional connection to such products that needs to be incorporated into what we're doing, too. Good. Well, thank you so much for running through that framework, incorporating design into product management with us. The 5 elements, again, just to make sure we're on the same page: empathy, we started with, then we talked about the language of design, the data around the design, that executive buy-in that many of us certainly struggle with and you gave us such a good tip about looking at the design of applications of systems executives use and then we wrapped up with the design and the MSP, the minimal sellable product. Those are very good. As listeners know, as

TEI 108: Communicating design in product management

Host: Chad McAllister, PhD

Guest: Latif Nanji

we get toward the end of interviews, I always like to ask for an innovation quote. Do you have one you can share with us and share why you chose that one?

LATIF: The quote that I chose is from Bill Gates. "Most people overestimate what they can do in one year, and underestimate what they can do in ten years." It's one of my favorite quotes. I think the reason the quote is so important is because people have this tendency, especially in our generation today, to have immediate gratification and that instant gratification. This really becomes really difficult when you're trying to think of a project or a company you want to build and how much you want to get in one year. If we start thinking in cycles that are 3 and 5 and 10 years, and I feel like just the expectation and the stress and anxiety kind of go downhill. Because all of a sudden, you're like, oh, I've got two years to do this, as opposed to six months, or four years to do this as opposed to one year. You actually can get so much further along the way. There's a little bit of cognitive dissonance, but that psychological trick really becomes useful. For us, we've been around just under four years, and obviously at the end of year one, we wanted to be 10 times further, but I look at it today and I think about the journey we've been on and how awesome the team has evolved into and what we've built here. I realize that you just have to think in a longer term scale, just for whatever purpose in your life and you can get so much further along the way in the long term. But it does take years to kind of build that up because you have to see a full ten-year cycle to really fully appreciate the concept.

[37:56]

CHAD: Thanks for sharing that with us. There is this scale issue as time goes along, that I find. Like you shared, I often don't get done what I expected in one year, so for my personal planning with my business I have the 90-day view, the 1-year view and the 3-year view. I almost always blow the 90-day view, but there is a bit of a snowball that does happen, that once you get past that year, or whatever the right time frame is, things start happening more quickly and you build up momentum.

LATIF: Absolutely. And then when you look over things over two years and you look back, you realize if you forget all that 90-day and six-month planning, you just realize, you go, wow, that was really a great accomplishment. I'm really glad I got the snowball started. It gives us cause to celebrate and that's always very exciting, so I'm happy to hear you do all that kind of planning. That's great.

CHAD: Definitely I want to hear a little bit about your company, too, Roadmunk. Certainly listeners we all have this issue of roadmapping and collaborating with colleagues and leaders. I'm curious about specifics of Roadmunk that you can share with us and how people can find out more about the company. Tell us about the history of the name, too. I find the name great.

LATIF: Yeah. I'll start with the name. Roadmunk was actually a name...it sounds so it's going to undersell it here, but we were just me and a couple friends were sitting in my living room and we had a glass of scotch and we had a spreadsheet, and we just went through simply word combinations and that was really it. I can't say that there was much more inspiration than that. It's really just pretty straightforward.

CHAD: Maybe the scotch helped out a little bit.

## TEI 108: Communicating design in product management

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LATIF: Yeah, I think there were some creative juices flowing back then. With respect to, obviously what we do and you probably, the audience might be familiar with us. Roadmunk's sort of, it's a SAS platform that allows users to create visual roadmaps to promote organizational transparency across teams. So we work with customers like Nike, Coca Cola, Slack, Rolls Royce, Citibank, to really get through their strategy and enable them to create plans across their product teams, so that they can roll them up and create a holistic view of what's going on in the organization. We've got a whole new module coming out in the next couple of months that's currently in beta and it allows users from different departments to share what we call fields, and that nomenclature about all the programs that are going on, or projects or product lines, and be able to roll them up into this master view. We're really excited for that, obviously you can find us at Roadmunk.com and on Twitter it's RoadmunkApp. If your audience is interested in checking us out, we're more than happy to provide any information that can get to the next step.

[40:34]

CHAD: Excellent. I so appreciate your time, Latif. Thanks for sharing some insights into design and product management and also make sure people know how to find out about the roadmapping solutions for building that collaboration across the organization. I like your reference you made a couple times to the wheel and product management often sits at that hub in the middle, we're being pulled on and we need tools to help collaborate and get insights and keep everyone on the same page and Roadmunk is a good one for us to check out. Thanks so much.

LATIF: Thank you so much, Chad.

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