

Democratizing Innovation

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Someone out in the Twitter world just recently typed out in frustration: "Not all products have to be social!". Well, that is an assertion that is requiring support more and more of the time. What once was an EXCITEMENT requirement, is now rapidly becoming a BASIC requirement. I don't think the majority of product manager's would agree with his notion.

In Eric Von Hippel's book "[Democratizing Innovation](#)" (2006), a great case is made for social products, of one degree or another. Now this book was written at a time when Twitter was in its infancy, in fact, most social media was. I'm guessing that he would make an even stronger case today. Check out his [webpage](#), and you can even download an earlier version of his book.

A quick review of the Table of Contents helps explain what it means to "Democratize Innovation". After a short introduction in Chapter 1, the rest follows as shown:

Chapter 2 Development of Products by Lead Users

Chapter 3 Why Many Users Want Custom Products

Chapter 4 Users' Innovate-or-Buy Decisions

Chapter 5 Users' Low-Cost Innovation Niches

Chapter 6 Why Users Often Freely Reveal Their Innovations

Chapter 7 Innovation Communities

Chapter 8 Adapting Policy to User Innovation

Chapter 9 Democratizing Innovation

Chapter 10 Application: Searching For Lead User Innovations

Chapter 11 Application: Toolkits for User Innovation and Custom Design

Chapter 12 Linking User Innovation to Other Phenomena and Fields

It's a short book and reads very well. Many concepts that he first proposes in this book are currently beginning to blossom through the use of social media applications. Today it's hard to imagine a product management team with the goal of producing a market-driven product, not embracing most of these principles. However, I've found through bitter experience that the devil is in the details.

Because of the breadth of the innovation process, there is an incredible amount of information processing that is required. In the January 16th, 2012 issue of Fortune magazine, @jessiwrites about the need for a data scientist, and suggests that "By the end of the decade, 50 billion devices will be emitting information nonstop. Data scientists will help manage it." I've seen market sensing methods change radically over the last 10 years. Just imagine what market sensing is going to be like moving forward.

I doubt that democratized products are possible without using something very close to the Seven Pillars of Product Management. Where most teams get hung up is failure to realize the need for a common language and knowledge management system with the ability to guide

decisions across the innovation value chain. In a democracy, folks not only express their desires, but others comprehend the meaning of that expression. If they don't believe that their voice is understood, then they quit voting.

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