

## Could the EU use a Roadmap, or am I just Dreaming?

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The other day I had the weirdest day dream.

Angela Merkel and I were having a tea in my favorite café, and she kept talking to me about how angry she is at Greece for managing their economy so poorly. She kept going on about how something should have been done earlier before they got into the crisis they were in now.

I was eating a chocolate chip cookie, and the entire café was just sitting there staring at us.

“Who do they think they are? They completely went off plan, and now they’ve completely compromised the entire EU because of their selfishness,” said Angela. “Don’t they realize that when you’re part of the EU, you are just a smaller piece of a bigger picture? Why can’t everyone just be like us Germans!”

I passed her a butter tart and replied: “Look Angie, I hear your pains, I really do. And while I can’t really relate given I am just a product management consultant and have never really been involved in politics past fulfilling my civil voting duties, I do have one question for you, which has me curious...”

Taking a bite of her butter tart, crumbs falling onto her brightly colored blouse, Angela gave me a stern look followed by a simple “And what is that?”.

“Well, in product management we always talk about roadmaps, and how they are so important

as a tool used in strategy planning – and how they work to keep a company’s vision aligned across the entire organization no matter how large it is. And the way I see it, the EU is really like one very large company, albeit a complicated and politically charged very large company, but nonetheless comprised of many different countries – which I compare to products – each with their own charters and strategy, but also part of a larger picture and strategy...which would be the EU.” I said.

“Yes, go on...I am following you.” she said.

“Well, when we talk about roadmaps, we talk about the features that a company wants to deliver to the market, the timing of that delivery, and what the vision is for it. If the EU had a roadmap, and the EU countries were its products, I imagine the features being things like the implementation of a universal EU dollar, health care, languages, social and economic unity, diversity, and then each country having it’s features unique to themselves – such as Germany with Oktoberfest, bratwurst, beer, or Spain with their flamenco dancers and beautiful landscape. And then there is Greece who alongside their beautiful landscape also seemed to have plotted features such as unreasonably high wages, a low retirement age, generous benefits, and lackadaisical tax collection.”

“Well we all have our issues, or I guess what you would call bad features.” replied Angie, her butter tart now just a small pile of crumbs on her plate.

“Absolutely – but what I’m wondering is, if the EU had a roadmap with a unified vision from the beginning, one which acts as a single point of truth for enrollment in the EU, with a process in place to enable, track and communicate change – would Greece have gotten away with implementing such bad features into the marketplace? Because to me it would seem that somewhere along the way, Greece and a few other EU countries became misaligned with the overall vision of the EU, and well – now everything is a mess!” I said.

“Well you do have a point – the EU crisis is far more complicated than just features on a roadmap, but the thinking and concept is a good one. We need to do a better job at making sure that all EU countries stay aligned with the EU vision and strategy – otherwise we end up in the position we are in now, which is largely firefighting. Tell me, how do you keep your different products aligned to an overall vision when roadmapping in product management?”

Sipping my latte, I smiled at Angie and explained “Well, the way we see it in product management is that while each product may have its own product roadmap, there needs to be one over-arching product line roadmap that represents each product and is aligned to the overall vision of the company. And the way we determine that roadmap is by involving everyone in the decision making process, after all we need to hear the ins and outs from all affected parties to really determine what is best for the overall product line, and to keep everyone on the same page. We find that by involving everyone in that decision making process also makes them more accountable to staying aligned with the vision they helped create. Sure there are lots of disagreements about what is important and not important, but there are also lots of facilitation strategies available to help us through those phases – the way we see it, at least they care enough to argue about it! “

“Well, I know a lot about disagreement! Nicolas and I have at times felt it was us versus the rest of the EU. But you’re right, disagreement is not always bad. I like your thinking.”

And it was at this point I woke up and snapped out of my day dream.

“Did I just have a conversation with Angela Merkel?” I asked myself.

Turns out I didn’t, it was all just in my overly active imagination. But I’m still glad I got to at least tell her about roadmaps, because I can’t help but think that despite my dreamy oversimplification of the problems with Greece and the EU, that a roadmap could have helped them at least a little bit. Because with a properly developed roadmap, vision and strategy are easier to maintain across an organization.

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