Product Management for a Cause: Helping Non-Profits

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I recently had the pleasure to meet with members of ProductCamp Austin's Board. What a great group of people. We're talking about an initiative I suggested at the end of ProductCamp this February of doing some real product management at ProductCamp, instead of just talking theory. Turns out there are a lot of issues to be worked out, but if anyone can do it, I believe this board can.

We're currently looking at non-profits that participants of ProductCamp Austin can donate some of their time to help out. Not in the usual way, but on product management projects aimed at helping local organizations do a better job in the productization of their offerings. This produces a wide variety of applications to product management principles; from the productization of products, services, training, volunteer recruiting and training, packages aimed at target markets for the solicitation of financial donations, and even the productization of fundraising events.

As an example, one of the non-profit organizations looking into this proposal is the Council of At-Risk Youth (CARY) here in Austin. There Board is also reviewing the concept and trying to figure out the best way CARY could utilize the kinds of transformations that would take place internally at CARY if they participated.

The current vision is to identify revenue channels that have market potential. For each of these revenue channels, there would be a volunteer product owner, who would work with a team of volunteers to perform various activities of the Seven Pillars to productize those things that could enable the generation of revenue within that channel.

This would include activities like market analysis and segmentation, pricing, competitive analysis, client endorsement programs, market evidence gathering activities like customer visits, enhancement requests, and win/loss reports. Problem definition and validation, feature

refinement and validation, roadmapping, requirement definition and validation and offering release and launch planning. Participants looking for some practical experience, access to role models, mentors, and career coaches would participate where they were most interested.

In this manner, people who are complete strangers, can pitch in and move the initiative forward. They would work with the product owner of a channel who orchestrates the activities of the Seven Pillars to build asset pools of the different Pillars. It wouldn't matter what method you wanted to use, at the end of the day, it's the existing or missing assets that count.

Granted there's a lot more to be defined and worked through, but things are moving forward, and I would expect to start seeing some workable concepts soon. Of course there is risk, and we may not be able to pull this sort of thing off. But what a great group of people these folks are for even trying.

If you know any of these people, give them a shout out and encourage them. We all benefit if they're successful. Yes, participants of ProductCamp Austin will, and members of the Austin Community who could volunteer and be more productive in their volunteer efforts, but also other ProductCamps interested in these types of ongoing projects could leverage the experiences of the Austin Product Managers.

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