

# One Knight in Product - E32 - Marty Cagan

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## SPEAKERS

Marty Cagan, Jason Knight

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Jason Knight 00:00

Hello, and welcome to the show. I'm your host, Jason Knight, and on each episode of this podcast, I'll be having inspiring conversations with passionate product people. So let's not beat around the bush when it comes to being inspired; our guest tonight literally wrote the book on it, and he wrote it twice. If before or after this episode you fancy popping across to the podcast app of your choice and clicking subscribe or leaving a review, or sharing it with friends and colleagues on social media or wherever else you talk to your friends and colleagues that will be a big help and, hopefully a massive boost to some of the other inspiring product people that I've had the privilege of speaking to. On tonight's episode, we speak about how a journey through some of the finest tech companies in Silicon Valley led to writing a foundational book for product managers around the world, how 10 years later, it was time to basically rip that up and start again, what that taught our author and why he was then inspired to write a third book, aiming to empower product teams and set up companies for product success. So yeah, it's a big one. And without further ado, please join us on One Knight in Product. So my guest tonight is Marty Cagan. Marty's a renowned author, blogger, speaker, advocate for and champion of effective product management and founder of the Silicon Valley Product Group. Marty earned his place on the Mount Rushmore of product management by writing Inspired, the product managers' equivalent of the White Album, a guide book to help teams build products that customers love. Now he's back of his new book, Empowered, aiming to build companies who build teams who build products that customers love. Hi, Marty, how are you tonight?



Marty Cagan 01:43

I'm good. Jason, thanks very much.



Jason Knight 01:45

No problem. Thank you. So there's a lot to cover. But first up, Empowered, has been out for a couple of months now, I think it came out in December last year. I've read it myself, obviously thought it was great. Lots of other people given it loads of glowing reviews as well. But now it's

done. How long do you get to bask in the afterglow of a book well released? Do you get any glow out of that? Or is it straight back to work? Back to the grindstone?

 Marty Cagan 02:09

Well, they are big projects. This one was two years. And, and you know, the my, my real effort on that finished about four or five months, six months ago, it takes the publisher about six months to take a completed manuscript and get it on, you know, in warehouses for Amazon, stuff like that. So I've been looking forward to it actually hitting the shelves and getting out to people for a while. So no, it's good. And I, I have, you know, it's such an intense project, writing a book that you kind of put everything else on hold. And to be honest, I took advantage of the pandemic, it wasn't even supposed to be done for several more months. But when you have nothing else to do, you can write a lot.

 Jason Knight 02:59

So there you go, if we can thank COVID for anything, it's for freeing your schedule up so that you can you can get your writing done.

 Marty Cagan 03:05

Yes.

 Jason Knight 03:06

Did you have to set like a word target per day? I've definitely spoken to some authors in the past that they find the writing kind of tough, and they have to set really tough targets themselves. Are you like that? Or did it just kind of flow out of the pen or the typewriter or the keyboard?

 Marty Cagan 03:20

No, I.. you have to work at it. I've been, even before the books, I've been writing pretty consistently, trying to make myself publish short articles, at least every week or two. And I've been doing that for, like 16-17 years. So that helps develop the muscle. But in fact, almost all my articles are hoped to be chapters in a book one day, if, you know, I kind of use the tools of the trade. So I publish these articles. And if the article resonates with people, and I get good feedback, then it's a candidate for the book. If not, it's either iterated on or I just like "Well, that didn't work". And I discard that.

 Jason Knight 04:05

So you're such a product manager that you even, you're even testing and learning chapters of your book. I think that's a fantastic example.

M**Marty Cagan 04:13**

And actually, I think it's about as purest form of MVP as you can do when you you have a concept and you publish an article, it's... it really does help you get a sense of whether people consider it's valuable, whether they can follow the argument, you know, what areas did you not cover, you get that feedback, and then you can incorporate into, you know, more of a real draft, a real chapter draft, everything you've learned. So that's, that's a good way to go.

**Jason Knight 04:42**

That's really cool. Well, we'll talk a bit more about the book in a minute. But before that you you've, for want of a better phase, you've been around the block a few times in product management terms. To paraphrase Blade Runner, you've probably seen things we wouldn't believe. You started out as an engineer at HP, you founded a startup that was acquired by IBM. You were VP of platform and tools at Netscape, you were SVP of product and design at eBay. So, you know, that in itself is a pretty solid resume that people could look back on with pride but, but then in 2002, you decide, ah, scratch that. I'm going to start a product consultancy, and I'm gonna start telling people how to do product properly. What made you do that?

M**Marty Cagan 05:20**

Yeah, it was more. I wanted to write after eBay. And I... so I did start writing and I started getting phone calls. Honestly, like within a week, I started getting calls from friends. Because in the early you know, this is really early in the internet. Netscape was the original Internet company. And so I had friends that were either at Netscape or eBay, and they would go join a company early Google, early Amazon, well, a few years later, early Facebook, early Salesforce, and they were... they would call and say, hey, you know, remember what we did? Remember how you, you know, shared all this stuff with the team? Do you think you could just come on by just informally. And I was doing this just well, for I love startups, I have a lot of friends that I really admire. And so I, I started doing that. And so it's more that I got backed into this idea of, oh, maybe there's a need to share some of this with, with more people.

**Jason Knight 06:24**

Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. And I was gonna ask why you, after blogging for a bit decided to actually write a book. But I think that pretty much answers that question. Was it very much that you just felt the need to get as much down in one place as possible and share it with as many people... was that really the motivation behind version one of Inspired?

M**Marty Cagan 06:44**

Yeah, it was the the, the book, the desire for a book is actually what got me into blogging. I made the classic mistake on the first... this is the first book I did, I've published three, the first book was the first edition of Inspired and it's, I made the mistake of just writing it like I thought

people write books. And you know, and the result was, it was terrible. And I had a trusted product person who agreed with me, it was terrible. I knew it was even when I asked him to read it. And so I'm like, "Okay, well, this was a dumb way to write a book". And so I said, "Well, okay, let's, let's break it down. What are the individual topics that I want to talk about?" And then I created the blog. And in early on, really, you know, 17-18 years ago, there was like, 20 people reading the newsletter, it was just people, a few people I knew... I didn't market it ever. But it didn't take long before it spread. And, you know, pretty soon I had 1000s of people reading the article, which isn't that many really, it's not that hard to get. And, and I was getting real feedback in it. Like, usually within 24 hours, I was getting great feedback from a range of product people. So I felt like now I had the mechanism in place that would let me work out these ideas and get them to the point where they are solid.



Jason Knight 08:06

Yeah, so you said obviously, you were getting quite good traction on the post, but obviously Inspired... version one of Inspired, took off and blew up quite a lot. It was a very popular book. It feels like that was something that you probably expected at the time based on the feedback of from the blog, or is that something that surpassed your expectations?



Marty Cagan 08:28

Well, I mean, in truth, all three books have surpassed my expectations, partly because I didn't really know there were that many people in the world that cared about this stuff. But that said, I do feel like you know, I've always believed in argued that if you do your homework, as a product person, you can make sure your product is at least a solid product, you don't know it's gonna be a huge success, but you could make sure it's a solid product. And I felt like I knew how to do that. I would make sure... so the first thing I do is, you know, I send each article out into a pretty broad group of people and I get feedback that way. But then I go further to if it's a... once you actually weave these narratives, together into a coherent, you know, arc, something like a book, then I have a set of people that I have learned to trust over the years that I think are super smart people that are not... they've never hesitated to tell me when an idea's bad. You know, you'll learn over time, which ones are just, you know, too nice to tell you the truth, what they really think, and which ones could care less what I think they're just gonna tell me the truth. And I've got a set of those people that I just know, will tell me the truth and that I really respect what they think. And when I can finally get a draft of a book to the point where they say like, this is solid, this is a good book, you know that then I know it's going to be a certain level of, you know, success. You still have to see how it really resonates with people in the broader world. But I feel like that is the... that's a... these are just the good techniques that any good product team I think would use.



Jason Knight 10:15

Nowadays. Again, it just goes back to that point about you, being such a dyed in the wool product guy that everything you do is something that you almost like you could use it as a case study for product, which which is in itself really interesting. You walk the walk right, you don't just talk the talk.



Marty Cagan 10:32

Yeah, I think so even though a book is a little different. There's it doesn't have that technology layer that...



Jason Knight 10:38

Not yet!



Marty Cagan 10:38

Tech products. Yeah, not yet. But I'm with you. The Kindle especially does some really cool things.



Jason Knight 10:47

But you then came out with a second edition. That was pretty recent, I think like 2017. In the intro to that you said that you plan to do a little bit, a little bit of housekeeping, a bit of an update, but it seems like you ended up half rewriting the book in the end.



Marty Cagan 11:01

No, 100%, 100%, there wasn't a single page from the original edition.



Jason Knight 11:06

So I was gonna say, because I did a little bit bit of digging, and I found the contents of v1, and was gonna say how different it looked and even if I remember rightly had a chapter called Succeeding with Waterfall. Did you consider calling the book something different? Or did you feel that the central message was similar enough, even if the execution was different, that it was still basically the same book?



Marty Cagan 11:27

Well, technically there is there's a little story, the subtitle has one word different. It was actually the publisher that convinced me it's time, it's 10 years, it's time to do another edition. And so I, that's just kind of, if you have a book that's done pretty well, doing a new edition, at least once every 10 years is pretty normal. But the publisher suggested adding in Tech, so the word... it used to be creating, "how to create products customers love" and he argued it should be "how to create tech products customers love". So that is the one little difference in there. And, and yeah, in fairness, his argument was, there were a few people that read the original edition of

Inspired and didn't somehow know it was for tech people. And so they were like, I have no idea what this guy was talking about. So there were a few people like that. So his idea was, well, this will be much more clear. It's all about tech products.



Jason Knight 12:31

This feels a little bit like the Google A/B experiments where you know, the classic oh, yeah, we changed the colour to blue of the button. And now everyone's clicking it more or something like that is again, just yeah, that input form. But is there anything in book one that you would actually still recommend people look at? Or does book two completely supersede book one?



Marty Cagan 12:48

Well, the first edition, honestly, it's still... a lot of people still have, that's the one they read. It's not printed anymore, but I find they're still copies and people read it. And actually, there's nothing in the first edition that I wouldn't say is still relevant. It's just old. And I think there are better ways to describe it. And interest, there's one technique I talked about in the first edition, that I don't recommend it unless a company is really dysfunctional. And then I think it's helpful is and that's it was a technique called the product council. So I didn't talk about that in the second edition. But really the second edition, it still talks about how to product teams solve hard problems in ways customers love that works for the business. It's just that, you know, realise that the first edition was written it was before Lean Startup was a thing. It was before Agile was very common. And so I had to describe those concepts before but you know, after that when the second edition was written, those things were common knowledge, there was no reason to describe those. I could go further and talk about what's beyond Lean and Agile.



Jason Knight 14:03

Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. And certainly I've read over the second one and sounds like I probably won't read the first one. No offence, but you know.



Marty Cagan 14:11

No, there's no reason to for sure. The second one is meant to subsume the first... so... It's just that it's still true. You. If you read the first one, I think you'd be a little surprised at how little is changed in our industry really.



Jason Knight 14:25

So one thing I am curious about actually given Inspired's place, you know, in a product manager's bookshelf is, of course, when you started out doing all this stuff there wasn't an Inspired because you hadn't written it yet. So what inspired you and how did you start to get good at product? Was it just trial and error? Or did you have any sort of sources of truth you went to or mentors or how did that pan out?

M**Marty Cagan 14:48**

Well, I mean, I was... to be honest, though, the one word answer is luck. Because I was at... a lot of the techniques that we call Lean Startup today were born at Netscape. Not that like, I mean, there were brilliant people at Netscape like Ben Horowitz was there and he was one I learned a lot from around product, but several others too. But we were, we were right on the leading edge of this change to this internet based way of working. And so a lot of the techniques were born there, and I was able to learn as we went. And so that was luck. But even before I really learned product at HP, there was a guy who taught me the principles of product. And this is where, you know, this is the truth, I think, is that the techniques have changed radically. But the principles haven't changed much at all. And so, and honestly, I don't anticipate the principles changing much. So I was lucky that I learned those principles from somebody who had a really impressive track record of consistent innovation. And he taught me those principles. So whenever a new techniques comes out, I learned the technique and I'm interested, like, is that something I think is relevant? When would it be relevant? When wouldn't it be relevant? And, you know, I love trying techniques. And when they work, which is not, you know, that's once in a while they've worked well, then I like to share them with people.

**Jason Knight 16:18**

So we should be very glad that you didn't, for example, start working at Kodak or something like that, because it could have been a very different book.

M**Marty Cagan 16:24**

That's right. That's where the luck comes in, man, right? Totally Netscape, right place, right time, it was an amazing place to be.

**Jason Knight 16:33**

Now you spent all that time rewriting Inspired, comes out, inspires a new generation of PMs . Empowered then comes out, as you say, a couple of years later, took some time to write. Did you get any break at all? Or did you just go straight into into that book after you did the rewrite of Inspired?

M**Marty Cagan 16:53**

What actually happened was I finished the rewrite of Inspired, and it came out. And actually it was great. Because the publisher, the one I went with, with the second edition, Wiley, has really a global reach. And they brought the book in the parts of the world I'd never talked to teams in. And that was great seeing it spread. But what happened was it many teams in parts of the world, but I want to be clear, this was also true in San Francisco, many teams found Inspired. And they said, this is absolutely how they want to work. But what I started hearing from these teams, is their management wasn't letting them work this way. And that took about a year for me to sort of see this, it exposed, what it really did. And the second edition of Inspired exposed

when you had leaders that really didn't understand modern product companies. And so I knew right away, we had a problem, I started writing a lot more articles aimed at leaders. And then I realised, okay, this is... it's not just a little, this is a bigger challenge is ... Inspired was aimed at teams, product teams, but Empowered was aimed at leaders, leaders of engineering, design and product management. And I realised that was at least as big a problem. And in fact, it turned out to be an even bigger book. There's that much to talk about.



Jason Knight 18:23

Yeah, I was gonna say so my gut feeling would be that any quote unquote, proper product leader, to some extent, maybe less so depending on the company, engineering leaders and, and design leaders, but you'd imagine that a product leader, someone who's actually a product leader would probably already think most of the things that that you're saying in this book are, what they want to do, and to your point that that they can't do them because of something wrong with the organisation. So do you think that an ideal audience for this book isn't so much the product leaders, although they will obviously find a lot of love in it, but also the product leaders' bosses?



Marty Cagan 18:56

Well, it's intended for both. But you know, the thing is, there are actually a lot of good books for the product leaders' bosses, the CEO, there are a lot of them and the amazing well of course, there's 1000s of books aimed at CEOs... but even if you're just talking about books that argue for empowered teams, there are many books... Turn the Ship Around is one of my favourite... Start with Why from Simon Sinek and also the servant based leadership, I forget what it's called.. Leaders Eat Last. And then recent, the most recent book I love on that is by Reed Hastings called No Rules Rules. There are... and to be honest, I've got a list of my favourites which are a dozen of them. And I encourage CEOs to read those books. I have read and really enjoy those books. They make the argument for why empowered organisations are consistently higher performing. What they don't try to tackle is how do you actually do that, how do you actually do that? And I think the reason it's hard for them to tackle that is because there's, you know, an infinite number of kinds of organisations out there. A manufacturing company is going to be different than, you know, a retailer is going to be different than a tech company. And so what I wanted to do was say, alright, if you're... if a CEO is sold on the benefits of empowerment, and they genuinely want to understand how to pull this off, how do they actually, if they're gonna compete with Amazon one day, how do they develop those muscles, I wanted to provide them everything they needed to know, to build that environment. So that's really specifically what that is. And of course, that starts by them getting some strong, at least a Head of Product and a Head of Technology that knows what they're doing, and then letting them put that environment into place.



Jason Knight 20:55

Yeah, and I think it's interesting, because I mean, there are a few different topics on that in the book. And I definitely don't want to take them all on because, you know, it'll take all day. And also, I don't want to ruin people's experience of the book, but we just kind of go through a handful of them. I mean, one thing that goes across both books, really is the importance of



refocusing companies on being very, very product centric, and therefore very customer centric, removing your own biases, focusing on all the classic stuff, focusing on the problem solution, and to the title of the book, empowering teams to find problems and solve them. But as you've touched upon, you don't have to look far to see that this isn't really the norm at all. Still, you've spoken to loads of companies about this. What Why do you think in 2021, this is still controversial and up for debate?

M

Marty Cagan 21:44

Yeah, I mean, really, what you're talking about is... we've been talking about product culture, but you're also getting into company culture. And for example, do they genuinely care about customers? Or are they like everybody that just says, you know, we love customers, and then they don't really mean that when it comes down to a test. Like, when the choice between doing the right thing for the customer and doing the right thing, let's say for themselves, there are many different, it's one of those things you prove every day. So it's not hard to... once you're inside a company, it's not hard to tell whether they're serious about their customers or not. And as far as why they're not, this... You know, this is tough. Like, Jeff Bezos is a CEO that genuinely cares about customers. I mean, it oozes out of him. Why is he that way? That's a really hard question. I.. you know, you probably need to be a psychologist to be able to answer, but for no other reason, at least a smart enough to realise he should be that way. But honestly, a lot of leaders are not. So it shows, doesn't always show right away, they can put on a good front, they can have a great, great marketing, but there's inevitably you're tested, it might be an outage that tests you, it might be an ethical issue, your product is now doing something that's being used in a way that is not good. Certainly, it wasn't the way you intended, what are you going to do about it? You know, we're seeing a lot of companies right now, failing that ethical test.



Jason Knight 23:19

Absolutely, I can, I can think of a few that I won't name just in case, you know, but yeah, I absolutely agree. And also another really toxic thing with regards to this kind of lack of customer centricity that I've seen is, quote, unquote, "oh I was the customer". And just assuming that that means that they don't have to speak to a single customer again.

M

Marty Cagan 23:39

Yeah, that's a common, that's really, like, that's been a problem in product in the tech world for like, literally 40 years. So it's, uh, you know, we it's not hard to understand where that comes from. This is just, there are things good product teams learn, and that's one of them.



Jason Knight 23:58

Yeah, so I see a lot of stories about people who can't get in front of customers. And by people, I mean, specifically product teams, they can't get in front of customers, either because of that "I was the customer" problem, or because their sales team or CS want to control the conversation and won't let them get anywhere close. I mean, I guess I'm specifically talking B2B in this case,


or in some cases, because they feel that product managers don't really have enough industry expertise or domain knowledge to speak to these people. Now, that's obviously a bit of a chicken and egg situation because, you know, you can't get one ... you can't get this expertise unless you do the talking. But do you think that without this that there's any way for a product team to succeed?

 Marty Cagan 24:41

I really don't. There... in fact, there's been very few times that I actually have recommended to somebody that they need to find a different company to work for. But, and I will say though, I should have said this up front. I have very rarely run into that. There are often salespeople that say "I don't want you in front of customers", that's not a surprise. They feel real protective over their accounts. But a quick conversation with the CEO almost always fixes that immediately. Or even with the head of sales, it's not that hard to understand. But occasionally you get a CEO that doesn't believe that this is important. And when I say occasionally, I'm talking like literally, in my experience, maybe one in 1000, one in several thousand. And so very rare. And in which case, I think that's where it's, I don't know how you're going to succeed, I don't think they're going to succeed. So I have encouraged people to go to a company that actually cares about customers.

 Jason Knight 25:47

I saw a tweet recently that said, life's too short to work for a company that doesn't get product. How long do you think a good ambitious product manager or product leader should stay at a company that that just doesn't get it?

 Marty Cagan 25:58

Well, you know, there's different levels. if you have personally confirmed that the CEO is anti customer, then I would leave. If you have personally believed that your company is not an ethical company, I would leave. I have been encouraging friends at Facebook to leave Facebook for several years now. Fortunately, many have. I wish all the rest of them would go too. So if you think, you know, a company is not doing good for the world or even let me just say even lower bar that they are doing bad on the world, then then I don't ... yeah, I don't. Why? Why would you want to help them? And so there's plenty ... many, many places that are genuinely trying to do good. And then certainly there's countless numbers that are just trying to make a living, not necessarily trying to make the world a better place. But they are certainly not trying to make the world a worse place.

 Jason Knight 26:55

Yeah, so making sure your moral compass is aligned. And I know that's something you talk about in Empowered as well. So definitely agree with that. I also remember reading a quote once, not from you, but I think maybe it was about Bell Labs or something similar about how you need to take risks in, say baseball or something like that. You have to, you have to take loads of swings, and you might miss a bunch of them. But when you hit it, you could hit a home

run. Obviously, some companies are just completely anti this and they to switch sports, they kind of expect the bull's eye every time. There's no appetite for risk, and there's no appetite for experimentation. Every single thing has to be a slam dunk. So they've ever got to play it massively safe. Or they or they're going to not play safe, and then they're going to miss anyway. And then they're going to have the repercussions are missing. Do you think there's any way these companies can scale and have a big future? Or are they just going to kind of limp along?



Marty Cagan 27:49

Well, this is not unusual. It is especially for older companies, especially successful older companies, the classic would be like a bank, that's been there 100 years, and they're scared, frankly, that what you have to realise is that, to them, their main goal is to preserve their wealth, to preserve their success. So change is something they're very scared of. And one of the things we often have to explain to them is the riskiest thing is to not take risks. And so now of course, a good product organisation knows how to take risks in ways that are intelligent, we mitigate those risks, we protect the company, we actually have for... every time we take risks in a product organisation, every time we try new things, we have to protect our revenue, we have to protect our reputation, we have to protect our customers, and we have to protect our own colleagues or co- employees. Because if we are irresponsible in how we try out ideas then we'll hurt one or more of those four important constituencies. And so that's why, for example, so many companies, they did not understand the nuance of, for example, minimum viable product. And they would, you know, and this is what they were doing. They were pushing things live that they had no business doing, they were bad for customers, they were definitely bad for the company's reputation. They were often bad for revenue. And boy, you'd hate to be in sales or customer service when your favourite client has to interact with that piece of garbage. So these were classic problems of a team not understanding how to do product well. That's why there was.. there still is a backlash against, in a lot of the world, against Lean Startup because of that.



Jason Knight 29:49

Yeah, I think MVP these days seems to be getting a bit of a bad reputation. Everyone's trying to find different ways to say it. I mean, I think the concept is still sound but you see so many people skirting around the actual word or letters MVP, because, well, no two people seem to have the same opinion about what an MVP actually is. So I guess that's just an interesting one for the second edition of The Lean Startup.



Marty Cagan 30:11

Yeah, I mean, it was, unfortunately, it confused a lot of people. But the concept is a very important concept... it's just that, you know, this is the thing about, we've always had problems in our industry of people understanding the concepts.



Jason Knight 30:27

So I'm now thinking back to a time and a real conversation I had with an actual person, a real

So I'm now thinking back to a time and a real conversation I had with an actual person, a real leader of a real company, company on a journey from being more of a professional services firm, very sales lead and creaking under the weight of doing specials all the time and struggling to make real product progress. And I was speaking to this person, I tried to persuade them of some of the benefits of basically, product thinking and some of the stuff that will be very familiar from your book, some of the stuff that will be familiar from other people's books, and every single blog post you see on Medium these days. And to paraphrase the answer, it was more or less, "ahhh that's just idealistic book stuff, that wouldn't work for our business". Now, I'm just some guy, but you're Marty Cagan. If that person was here, right now, what would you say to them?

M

Marty Cagan 31:15

Well, I mean, I would say you don't have to take anybody's word for it. Just look at the most successful companies in the world. Whether you're talking Netflix, like we were saying, or Amazon, or Apple, or Google, or Spotify, or Slack, or Salesforce.com, or Airbnb, just click it, and then look at their valuation. Look at their valuation. I mean, literally, we're talking about the most valuable companies in the world, Tesla, and then say, do you think it makes sense to consider how they are working, and if it might be different than how you're working? And my view is, you either learn to work like that, or you will be disrupted by a company that works like that.



Jason Knight 32:00

I guess the follow on question from that would be, do we feel that there are any kinds of companies, any industries that just aren't going to be able to change to the degree that they would have to to be successful product companies? Or can anyone do it, they just need to try and put the effort in?

M

Marty Cagan 32:19

That'd be hard to say. I do say, even in the best of situations, the change we're talking about is really hard. So, for example, if a major branch of the government or a major branch of the military genuinely wanted to change, could they? I don't know. That... I mean, that is really hard. There are so many things built in institutionally that would need to change. And so, you know, I said, until I could say, I've seen it done. Here's a good example. You know, I would be hesitant, so I don't know the answer. It's hard to say could anybody change? I do think most companies could absolutely change. And the main key is the CEO. They have to be, they have to get religion. If they do, most of the time, it is absolutely doable, even though it's still hard, it's doable. And there are plenty of success stories, and especially nice to see, those CEOs have been very well rewarded by the financial markets when they do succeed and changing. So it's, it's not impossible for most companies, but would that apply to every company, I don't know. I'm not even convinced it's appropriate for every kind of company, like manufacturing companies are fundamentally very different than innovation based companies. And you're in my world, the innovation based world. So I'm not even sure if it's right for that world. And I've seen what happens when things from one world try to apply to other there was a, there were processes around... from the manufacturing world called Six Sigma, many, many people have heard of that. And, and Six Sigma was actually very, very helpful in the manufacturing world,

but it was unbelievably destructive in the tech innovation world. So you know, I'd be very hesitant. This is the same reason you know, a lot of agile religious fanatics like to say, well, you know, all your teams in your company should be using agile, your HR people, your marketing people, your exec teams, and I'm like, Oh, my God, just go away and stop. They do not have the same problems you do. You don't even understand their problems. And so you don't need to be telling them to do Agile you need to start delivering results yourself.



Jason Knight 34:49

Yeah, I do remember listening to Jeff Sutherland's audio book about Scrum. And he was talking about how basically scrum could be used for everything so I'm assuming he disagree with you, but maybe we'll get him on to...



Marty Cagan 35:01

Well, there's two questions there. Can it be used for everything? Of course, it's a very simple project management process. And I think it's very appropriate in fact for our world. But should it be used for those other areas? That's a much more difficult question. And in my opinion, no, most of the time not.



Jason Knight 35:23

But that leads on to another thing that I saw that you wrote recently, I think it's actually a couple of years old, but it popped up in my feed recently, which was around Scaled Agile, which seems to be the revenge of big companies trying to pretend that they're agile, but still maintaining many of those command and control and waterfall processes. Do you think that it's actually possible for these big companies to do Agile correctly? Or are they always gonna need this kind of faux agile safety net to to kind of keep them feeling comfortable?



Marty Cagan 35:57

Well, I mean, any company using something like SAFe is really just avoiding the change. So they're, you know, because there's nothing agile in it at all. I'm pretty sure Sutherland would agree with that. Nothing agile in it, and there should be but... so those are companies that don't want to change. That's what makes it so appealing to them, they can keep their command and control style and culture. But if a company does want to change, then it means leaving stuff like that.



Jason Knight 36:29

Absolutely. Yeah. To be honest, I I very rarely get past the diagram before ... the Master Plan SAFe diagram with without wanting to just kind of a quiet lay down, because I just can't understand it. One thing I noticed in version two of Inspired and also Empowered as well was you obviously have a bunch of leader profiles of different inspiring, and I guess empowering product leaders, and they're all women. Now that wouldn't have stuck out if they were all men.

And that, of course, makes me feel bad about my own latent misogyny, but also something that's very clearly still a problem in the product and tech industry as a whole is the number of barriers around women in the workplace. I take it that was a conscious decision to amplify the voices of women leaders.

M

Marty Cagan 37:19

Oh yeah, of course, it was, although I didn't have to work very hard to do it. I did, you know, I see those biases in organisations all the time. And I, you know, and I'm an example they look at, you know, these people look at me, and they think, you know, white male, went to this college, you know, studied computer science, okay, I get the, I get the template. So let me go to this, you know, look for more people in this template. And of course, in companies that I work with, I see the counter examples to this, I see that, that it's not this way, and it's not only doesn't need to be this way, but many of the best companies in the world are explicitly not this way. So I wanted to try to change when people read, either Inspired or Empowered, and they have this image in their mind of, with Inspired an awesome product manager, with Empowered an awesome product leader, I wanted to try to break the image that's in their mind, of the white guy to somebody that's different. And I didn't want to, like do that. fictionally I wanted to do it for real... and these are, you know, these are amazing people that... they should be well known. They really have deserved, they have done amazing things, they should be well known. You know, the the fanfare usually goes to the CEOs and the founders and stuff. And, you know, most people couldn't even name one of the leaders behind a company, they could maybe name the CEO.



Jason Knight 38:57

Yeah I think they'll maybe to get to like Marissa Meyer or something like that. And then they run out. So yeah completely, completely agree. But do you think that companies are doing enough to promote diversity and inclusion? That from from the companies you've seen, or do you think there's, I mean, there's obviously said a long way to go, but do you? Do you feel that at least moving in the right direction?

M

Marty Cagan 39:14

Most companies, no, not even close. And, you know, and really there's two arguments here. One is the ethical argument that is total, you know, white privilege is baked into the system. And so there's an ethical argument that getting more people getting a fair shot. But then also the other argument I like to make is the just the total self serving argument. If you care about innovation, which is that's my world that I work in and your world. We are in innovation based economy and technologies, then we know and there's plenty of data on this. It's not just anecdotal anymore. We know that getting diversity of perspective on a product team, different educations, different cultures, different life experiences significantly increases your chance of solving the hard problems that you need to solve. So just selfishly, it is a good thing for us to do. And so, with a lot of teams, I know that's, that's really their bigger motivation. They don't have any laws making them try to, you know, get better balance, but they do have the profit motive. And so they, they see the value of it in teams. And so the... I mean, I think those are the two two big arguments for it. And I've, I've been a convert for many years, because I was

lucky enough to work on some. This is one of the things I think that people don't talk about enough about one of the natural advantages of Silicon Valley is essentially nobody's from Silicon Valley. We are we are all imports from somewhere. And it's so common to sit down with a product team in Silicon Valley and they're to be like somebody from China, somebody from Russia, somebody from Japan, somebody else from India, somebody from you know, and they're, they're just like, everything, and that people don't even think twice other than the what they all had in common is they all wanted to get involved in tech, and came to sort of Mecca to do that. But they don't... not everybody realises that it's that diversity of life experience that often is what we need to crack the code on the problems we're working on. So I've just been dialling that up to me, it used to be, you should look out for... you should keep an eye out for that diversity. It's really helpful. Now it's like, to the hiring managers, get off your ass and go get the people who have these different perspectives, and recruit them onto your team. Now that does happen in the best leader hiring managers, I know, but it doesn't happen generally. And so that's where I think we really need to change as an industry, we need hiring managers to step it up. The common problem, and hiring managers think HR is supposed to do this somehow, which they can't do and won't do. The way this is fixed is the hiring manager, taking this responsibility of building the right team, personally.



Jason Knight 42:19

absolutely. And also stepping away from the kind of nice sounding but actually fairly toxic if you think about it, idea of cultural fit. Because this whole idea that, Oh, yeah, they've got to fit into our culture. And so yeah, you all have to be able to exist together at work. That in itself is clear. But so often, you see what cultural fit being used as a proxy for people that look just like me.



Marty Cagan 42:41

Yeah. And I know, that's not the intention, of course of the people. But that's how I actually see it used. It is used to set you know, they mean, well, they even not only in many companies, they're like these are the four schools we recruit out of, these are the programmes they have to go to, these are the classes we want them to have taken. And they somehow expect these people are going to be thinking differently when they join the team or a company. It's like, that makes no sense. So this idea of cultural fit, I think, has been misused, mostly unintentionally. But in any case, misused, and I tell people stop the whole cultural fit thing. And instead, all you really need to do is make sure that the person is not toxic, because they will break. That's what you mean, really, by cultural fit, not toxic, and instead say what diverse contribution do they bring to the team? Maybe this person came from a completely different educational background? That's potentially very interesting. I want to know how they think about solving hard problems. And that's what we're looking for is difference. We don't need yet more of the same.



Jason Knight 43:55

No, absolutely. What's one trend in product management that you're either watching positively in 2021? Or keeping an eye on to make sure it doesn't get any worse?





M**Marty Cagan** 44:06

Oh, there's a lot. I mean, there's always this bunch of stuff going on. The trend that's caused the most damage is honestly Agile. And it's not because Agile is bad. It's just because so many product people, they think that once they're trained as a product owner, that makes them a product manager, and that has just caused untold damage. So that's one. Another one that I'm following and trying to decide what to try to do about it is Product Ops. Product Ops has. I mean, the real issue is that there are several different definitions of it. And some of them I think, are very helpful as long as you're a decent sized company. And other ones are just another excuse for bad product. And so I, you know, it's such a mess out there. right now. And it's also being heavily influenced by a lot of the tool vendors, which I don't blame them for this, but they're trying to, they're trying to kind of hijack the concepts so that they can make it so that, "Oh, you want to do Product Ops, that means you have to buy our products", which, of course, is not really what we're talking about. But all of these things tend to muddy the whole thing right now. And in fact, when people ask me about it, I have to ask them what they're even talking about to see which bucket they're really in. So I don't know whether to strongly encourage them or strongly discourage them, depending on what they're thinking. So, you know, I don't know how that's gonna play out. We'll have to see.

**Jason Knight** 45:45

This is probably the wrong time to say that my next episode is going to be about Product Ops. Again, maybe we can get a throwdown going on at some point. And what's next for you? What's next for the the Martin Cagan machine? Is there a book three in the offing? I guess, technically book four?

M**Marty Cagan** 46:04

Well, I have two partners that are working on books right now. One on product marketing, and one on corporate transformation, digital transformation. So those are two popular topics. And you know, but as we've talked about, those are big projects. I don't know when they'll actually be done. But I think those will hopefully fill some needs. I just keep, you know, writing is not the major thing I do. It is something I do that helps me think through these things. But mostly I work with product organisations, and I'll continue doing that.


**Jason Knight** 46:38

So you're keeping yourself busy. That's the most important thing. I did see Transformed is the book about the business transformation. And I think Loved is the marketing one as well. So I'm definitely looking forward to seeing both of those. I feel almost silly for asking this. But I asked most of my guests this, and it feels like if we if we're gonna have this chance to speak to you, then we should probably hear what the master says. The way the way that I that I usually frame this question. And it's not that appropriate in COVID times, if you're a barbecue, and some random person somehow who, for some reason has never heard of Marty Cagan asks you what you do. And you say ah, I work for consultancy helping companies with their product management. And they say, but what the heck is product management? What's the Marty Cagan answer to that barbecue question?



 Marty Cagan 47:26


Yeah, that's a good question. And I, you know, I maybe it gives me a chance because I usually do. I, I am known for a lot of opinions about product management. But really what I care about is not product management, I care about product teams. Everything to me is about product teams, I have never seen a great product come from a product manager. I see them come from product teams. And I. And you know, I in fact, I think if I had to say the most important ingredient to a successful product team is the engineers. However, there's a lot that has been written about good engineering, and a lot that's been written about good product design. But in my opinion, very little that's been written about good product management. So I end up spending a disproportionate amount of time on that product management part of the equation, because it usually is the weakest link. In most product teams. In most product companies. The weakest link is product management. So it's not like by design, I want to focus on product management. I just feel like we have to spend more time shoring that part up to be at the level of product design and engineering in good companies. So yeah, that's pretty much where I'm coming from.

 Jason Knight 48:47

So this guy the barbecue is now looking at you with his with his mouth agape, have you?

 Marty Cagan 48:52


Well, he's he's, if it's a barbecue I've been to he's probably an engineer, and he's got... and he probably says to me, I've always wondered what the heck these product managers are supposed to be doing? Because I can't tell. So that would be the start of a good conversation

 Jason Knight 49:10

Get some of those little little barbecue beers going, then you'll be fine. I guess also, you could just turn to buy your book. And where can where can people find you if they want to drink from the fountain of wisdom and find out more about how to make products properly?

 Marty Cagan 49:26

Well, SVPG.com, Silicon Valley Product Group.com. I have six partners. We ... this is we're just a small boutique. And we all are longtime product leaders that like to help other companies. So yeah, there's blogs, there's workshops, there's everything on the site is free. We just trying to help as many as we can.

 Jason Knight 49:52

There you go, sounds like a fair offer. Well, it's been a really interesting and fascinating chat. So obviously really grateful that you spend the time. I wish you all the best for the book and hope that it goes on to exceed all expectations, although it sounds like maybe it already did, but

and it goes on to exceed all expectations, although it sounds like maybe it already did, but exceed the second round of expectations. And yeah, hopefully we can keep in touch. But for now, thanks for spending the time.



**Marty Cagan** 50:13

Thanks very much, Jason. I appreciate it.



**Jason Knight** 50:17

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