How Will You Create a Social Innovation Culture?

by Amy Kenly

Like any new business initiative, incorporating social product innovation strategy and technology into existing innovation and product development processes is likely to encounter resistance and lack of support. At the PDMA Conference on Social Product Development and Co-Creation, I'm looking forward to learning more about how companies are addressing these issues, especially as they relate to these 5 key areas: strategy, people & culture, business processes, technology, and sustaining practices.

- **Strategy** – Recent Kalypso research showed that while 70% of companies we surveyed are experimenting with the use of social media for product development and innovation, only one a third of those had a plan in place. So there is action despite lack of strategy. The action itself isn’t really the problem, but the lack of an overall strategy can be. While you don’t need to plan out every action and step you’ll take, you should develop an overall social product innovation strategy that aligns with your company’s business and innovation goals. This alignment can go a long way towards justifying the business value of the initiative.

- **People & Culture** – In a lot of ways, this is the toughest to tackle. There are a lot of “myths” about the use of social networks in the enterprise. Here’s a particularly good break down of some of the more common myths (busted) - [http://www.informationweek.com/news/global-cio/interviews/231000395](http://www.informationweek.com/news/global-cio/interviews/231000395). There’s clearly a huge lack of understanding, so it’s important to do some internal education to be sure people and teams understand that social media can be used in business for more than just branding and marketing products. It’s time to expand this definition to other areas of the business. Clearly defining and communicating the ways that social concepts and technologies can be used to enhance product development and innovation processes can really help open people’s minds.

- **Business Processes** - Many people we talk to about this assume that implementing social product innovation processes and software will add yet another “to-do” to the plates of very busy people. In reality, the processes people are using will largely stay the same -- social product innovation can augment processes already in place and actually make them faster and easier. But don’t try to do everything at once -- select a starting point based on business needs and focus on demonstrating added value. After an initial success, you can then move on to the next process.

- **Technology** - Social product innovation technologies are used to support the processes you’ve defined as the most important to your company. Whether you decide to start with open innovation, voice-of-customer, social product development, or sentiment analysis for in-market products, when it comes to technology, remember that it’s an enabler for the strategy you’ve defined and the process you’ve selected as your starting point

- **Sustaining Practices** – Think of social product innovation as evolutionary, not revolutionary. Even when you’ve got your strategy, people, processes and technology in place, it’s important not to overwhelm your organization. Build incrementally by connecting social product innovation results to business results and hyping the successes to build a sustainable, profitable strategy that will bring value for years to come.

So what have you experienced? How are companies addressing resistance and achieving value? If you’ve incorporated social media into your innovation or product development processes, what did you struggle with most and how did you overcome? I’m looking forward to speaking with you at the conference to learn more.


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