Combining **HANDS-ON EXPERIMENTATION** with expert input: Our week 6 learnings in REMODEL

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The 10 companies in the REMODEL design-sprint are continuing their soliciting of feedback in order to challenge the emerging open source-based business strategy that they are exploring for their product. In this 6th phase that feedback comes from two sources: The global REMODEL Expert Panel and from actual stakeholders in the companies' potential co-creator community. Here is what we learned from this part of the process.

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As mentioned in our most recent article, REMODEL has design principles baked into the very fabric of the sprint. This means we have dedicated no less than 3 phases out of the total number of 7 phases to actual outreach: Soliciting feedback from actual users, making tests of the emerging prototype and, most importantly, challenging assumptions.

Phase 6: Mentor feedback community testing round two
In this phase, the companies received invaluable input from the two international expert mentors from the REMODEL Expert Panel, whom they sent their materials to in the last phase. The mentors were a dream team of global thought leaders and cutting-edge experimenters from across the open source global arena: Benjamin Tincq from Good Tech Lab (Brazil/France), Diderik van Wingerden from Open Innovation (Netherlands), Jaime Arredondo from Bold & Open (France), Lars Zimmermann from Open It Agency (Germany), Peter Troxler from Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences, Paul Stacey from Open Education Consortium and Vasilis Niaros from P2P Foundation.

Each REMODEL company received detailed written feedback from two mentors each, who made a complete review of the materials and then, as part of this 6th phase, engaged in a discussion with the companies in a Skype session to challenge them and their business strategies as well as helped them incorporate the open source principles in the right way.

Following this call, the companies updated your system map

and pitch according to the feedback and then continued to solicit more feedback: Namely from their potential community of co-creators by interviewing a key stakeholder in their ecosystem.

What did we learn? Start small and experiment your way forward

Tons of learnings have poured in from this phase, and we will focus specifically on the great feedback we received from our mentors. Moreover, for article brevity, we will limit ourselves to present you with three of the best ones here, while stressing that all the other learnings will be included in our grand documentation at the end of the REMODEL program:

Avoid getting overwhelmed, start out small:
The first dominant pattern in much of the great work being done in the companies is that it is really easy to get overwhelmed by where to start when transitioning towards an open business model for a product, mainly because (as we learned earlier on) it is not necessarily ideal to open

source it all; instead it can make sense to open source certain elements in which co-creation lends particular opportunity.

Then there is also the community establishment (and maintenance) work pile (how to do it properly? We'll get more into that in Phase 7) and there is the whole communication issues in terms of telling the work about it - and finally, and most importantly, who in the organisation will lead this effort and handle as well as grow the community? Do we have the resources and skills or do we need to hire?

The list of questions goes on. All of a sudden this seems to add up to a gigantic task. But it does not have to be, as pointed out by one of the mentors, Diderik van Wingerden: Instead, a much better approach is to start small, really small, and see what works by trial-and-error. Start with one product or just one element in that product. Find a user group among your customers, test it out with them. Then later scale up when a certain approach goes well. Note: As we write up business cases on the IO companies over the coming months, you will see some concrete examples of this approach.

"You need someone in the company who understands open source, the value of it, and is keen on making it successful."

Make sure you have the right project lead on board:
The manpower/skillset issue mentioned above leads to the next point: It is starting to be quite clear that in order to go from theory to practice and to see the open source-based business strategy/model get implemented requires some very specific rootsetting to actually become realized, noted mentor Diderik van Wingerden in another comment.

In order for a company to step into the open economy, they will need an anchor person who is dedicated to the mission.

That passionate person who is keen to face challenges head-on, conquer obstacles and be the guiding light for everyone on the team in order to succeed and ensure the desired yield. Building and implementing new business models is always somewhat of a struggle but becomes even a little more demanding when you are pioneering new innovation, for instance by using open source principles.

But with greater risk often comes greater reward. And for that, you need the right person in the organisation. As mentor Diderik additionally pointed out: "You need someone in the company who understands open source, the value of it, and is keen on making it successful. It is a bit like working according to Scrum: the theory is easily learned in a course, but to really get the value means you do need to have an experienced Scrum Master by your side day today."

The need for digital adeptness:
And this leads us to another related learning, as presented by another one of the mentors, Jaime Arredondo: Digital aptness in the organization in general, at least in the team that leads the open sourcing efforts. You cannot simply expect that taking a physical product, open sourcing its design (or parts thereof) and expecting your stakeholders (as well as other potential co-creators) to understand that or, on top of that, engage themselves in it in a new way. Your organization needs a digital presence, adeptness in communicating and acting online and moreover be able to lead projects in the digital realm.

Otherwise, the key interaction with your users will either not happen or, if it does, might not lead to the kind of interaction you imagine or desire. This digital adeptness is something that many small to medium-sized manufacturing companies may not have, since their key expertise in the pre-digital age was to manufacture. This is changed with the advent of the Internet and the digital era; companies large and small needs at least a basic foundation (skill-wise, mindset-wise, and leadership-wise) of digital proficiency. This is hardly news to anyone, but - as we learn now in REMODEL - quite crucial for the successful business implementation of open source principles.

As mentioned we have stockpiled loads of more insights and learnings from this work phase and will publish everything over the coming months in the toolkit. In the meantime, we want to use this opportunity to recommend anyone looking for qualified expert business input in open sourcing innovation to get in touch with the REMODEL experts and mentors. You will find an overview of their competencies and other data here.

More learnings to be shared from the next (and also final) 7th phase. Stay tuned.

REMODEL

This article is part of a series about the REMODEL programme

Want to learn more about what the REMODEL programme is? Go here: About REMODEL

Or curious to know which IO innovative manufacturing companies are taking part? Go here: IO manufacturing companies are ready to experiment with open source

To get the grand overview of all writings about the REMODEL business experiments in open source manufacturing, go here: REMODEL